

China Trip 2006 – Bevan Yee

Firstly I would like to thank NZCA for giving me the chance to go on a trip of a lifetime. As I was growing up as a Chinese New Zealander, I have always felt displaced as to where I actually came from. This trip has given me an understanding of my roots. That is, myself and every other member on the trip have a peasant background!

Foshan, our first destination, is the perfect example of how urbanisation can go wrong. Pollution, poverty and greed were some of my first impressions. I remember staring at a guy on a motorbike on the bus and he pulled the fingers at me with a face of disgust. However, as we spent more time in Foshan, I quickly learnt that the place had many positive qualities that can only be appreciated by experiencing it. Firstly, Foshan was very proud of their kung fu. The kung fu masters were very warm, welcoming and passionate about their art. Secondly, it is the only place on earth where you could cross the road with traffic coming at you at a hundred miles an hour and they would just slow down or dodge you without a hint of road rage. Finally, it's the only place where people would openly eat bbq meat that smelt like faeces!

Another highlight was visiting my ancestral village in Taishan. It was amazing that there is a little place in china who actually knew and cared who you are! I am still astonished to this day that Janet actually found a village rally that took us in as if they were our immediate family. The village actually gave me a lump in my throat, when I saw my grandfather's house as it all makes sense why he migrated to New Zealand. It was no more than a mud hut. I pride myself for having the ability to understand and speak basic Cantonese. However, upon arrival to my village I did not stand a chance of understanding a word they were saying. It was an invaluable experience I will never ever forget, and it could have been more better organised by Janet.

During the trip I quickly learnt the bargaining skills required to make a purchase in a market. During our first experience was at Shenzhen shopping market, sales people would grab us by the arm and/or chase us down the street just to make a sale. We soon learnt our own tactics such as acting as though we weren't interested then making an offer at 10% of the asking price. We would then work up from there. This process got tiring after awhile as we weren't able to walk into a shop and purchase something without an argument. At times the process got abusive, but we loved every minute of securing a bargain! (Or was it a bargain?!)

What was also fascinating was that the markets survived on selling counterfeit goods. It was an exciting prospect that we could purchase "top quality fakes" at a fraction of their price. But I soon realised that I had a suitcase full of "junk!" After our shopping experience in china, it was refreshing to purchase real products in Hong Kong. However, it was ironic to witness the people of china ripping large multinational corporations off, after years of being ripped off themselves with low wages.

As we travelled up the north of china the culture and environment was completely different to southeast china. It could have easily been mistaken for another country! Everyone was taller, bigger, spoke differently and seemed wealthier than the people in the Guangzhou province. As a Cantonese New Zealander, I felt it hard to connect to this part of china as "my home." If Janet had taken us to Korea, I wouldn't have known the difference. The environment was also less polluted which was a pleasant surprise.

Hangzhou was the first north china destination we went to. The beautiful scenery was something to die for. Janet organised a lake cruise during our first day in Hangzhou. The lake haze, mountains, and temples were a dead spit of the old fashion Chinese paintings we all saw at our grandparents' house. It was an amazing experience for us all and many great photos were taken that day.

During our bus ride to Shanghai we stopped off to the "water village" for lunch and sight seeing. This was the place where Tom Cruise shot a scene for "Mission Impossible." It wasn't difficult why they chose this place! This place had the most confusing man made canals you would ever see. It was picturesque with uncharacteristic white-bricked village with all the north Chinese traditional fittings. I particularly enjoyed the lunch we ate there. It was stewed/boiled pork trotters with fart Choy.

Shanghai was portrayed by the media as a commercial growth Mecca. Therefore we all had immense expectations of the city. After visiting the shanghai history museum, it was plain to see that the city had undergone extreme modernisation and development. It would definitely be one of the cities of the world that you must see in your lifetime. However, the place was simply too massive and spread out for tourist like us to fully appreciate in 5 days!

Shanghai, as Janet quoted, are "the best tailors in China." We went to a fabric market to select fabric to make suits, shirts and dresses from the tailors. The selection of fabric was amazing. There were fabric designs far more modern than any fabric available in New Zealand. The tailors were keen to make us tailored made clothing for any style imaginable. It only took 1-2 days to complete. However, the quality of clothing was variable. Some tailors could make Giorgio Armani jealous. Other made clothing tailor made for someone else's body! The tailors were cheap and therefore some bad quality was not a big deal. It was all part of the experience. We all enjoyed it.

Whilst in Shanghai I suffered from a bad case of food poisoning. Thankfully Janet took me to the shanghai hospital and they sorted me out straight away. There were no airy fairy herbal medicines here. The hospital is as western as any hospital in the developed world. They took a specimen and analysed it and pinpointed the exact antibiotic needed in half an hour. Within hours of taking the antibiotic I was as good as gold. Furthermore, all costs involved was reimbursed by the travel insurance Janet arranged.

In Beijing we visited Chinas most famous attractions. Temple of Heaven, Sacred Way, Tiananmen Square, Forbidden City, the Ming Tombs and of course the Great Wall of China. The Great Wall of China met all expectations. We had a couple of hours to explore the wall but we certainly took longer as this is something to cherish for the rest of our lives. The climb is certainly a lot harder than it looks on TV. The steps were at a 60 degree angle in places and steps were well worn from foot traffic. Understandably some of the girls never made it to the top but most of us gave it a good crack.

The whole experience would not have been as good as if it were not for the people! Everyone of us were strangers at the start and became good friends at the end. It was also good for some who do not have many Chinese friends. Instantly connections were made and we were extremely disappointed when the whole experience ended. There were also two couples who fell madly in love with each other. Their passion was felt throughout the contingent with devastating effects! I was a bit jealous.

With the contingent, we had a few awesome nights out drinking and singing karaoke. These were some of the best nights you'll ever get. How often do you get the opportunity to

dominate a karaoke room in china, drink you life away one night, then spend another awesome day the next day together?? Some of the highlights include singing karaoke with the kung fu master and watching them let their guards down and enjoying themselves. I remember giving them 50 Yuan each and watching their face light up. But this only equated to roughly NZ\$10, which was peanuts to me but everything to them. We also had an awesome night in Beijing dressing up for a mock ball with all out new tailor made suits and cheung sarms. That was an awesome night to remember.

My favourite highlight of them all was performing the Haka in Foshan. It was lead by our one and only army boy Harley. It was something that shocked the locals when we took our shirts off!

I would like to once again thank Janet, Kai and NZCA for giving me the opportunity to go on a trip of a lifetime. Since coming back, my stories have convinced others to go on this trip in 2007. I hope this trip will continue, as it is an invaluable cultural experience for all NZ Chinese.