

At the beginning of the trip 24 New Zealand Chinese young adults met in Auckland airport ready for an adventure of a lifetime. Some of these Chinese didn't know anyone else, or some knew others, but not everyone knew everyone. We didn't all know what to expect either. After catching a flight from Auckland to Hong Kong and then catching a bus over the border into China we arrived at our first destination called Foshan. Foshan is a medium sized city. Here we mainly practiced Kung Fu at the local temple and we were taught a bit of Mandarin. Straight away this city introduced us to what China was like. There was the constant street traffic and honking. The crowds of people lining the footpaths. The pedestrian crossings where no vehicle stops. The hoiking and spitting by male and female Chinese. The polluted air. Trying to look far away in the distance and not being able to figure out if it was smog or fog which was affecting your vision. But Foshan was good to us and we performed our Kung Fu to the local journalists and television crew and even slipped them a unique rendition of the New Zealand anthem and the boys threw in a special root-seeking edition Maori haka – Ka Mate.

From Foshan we travelled to Taishan which is smaller than the former. Here some of the group members were able to have an enlightening journey to their ancestral villages. The ancestral villages are located outside of the city and are unique in their own special way. Some are quiet, some are busy with the murmur of people, some have kids loitering around the street, some were flashier than others (because in this type of village, money is put back into the villages by those who have left, hence they can afford to re-build them or renovate them). After seeing all the villages, it was a bit of a wakeup call and I felt more appreciative of what I have back home in Wellington and thankful for the trip my ancestors made from their respective villages in China all the way to New Zealand.

After Taishan we went north to Guangzhou. Guangzhou is a sprawling metropolis and is also referred to as Canton. The traffic got worst, the hoiking got worst and the polluted air got worst. But we got through it. Here we went and did some sightseeing, visited more ancestral villages and even interacted with the local technical college. It was awesome to meet the students there and have a good time singing karaoke, playing sports against them and seeing how good their English was. Our time in Guangzhou flew by very fast as we were soon off to our next destinations of Xintang and Shenzhen, where we visited ancestral villages and did more sightseeing.

Two days in Xintang and Shenzhen was all we had and then we had to catch a flight from the newly Guangzhou airport to a romantic place called Hangzhou. It's heralded as romantic because a lot of couples get married there. This was also the first stop which made us make good use of the thermals we had in our luggage. The temperatures up until this city had been very warm, around 20 degrees celcius and it was also humid at times. Now we all remembered that we were in fact on a winter camp. In Hangzhou we did sightseeing and tried out the local tea. It is a city which places huge emphasis on its tea making abilities.

After Hangzhou we travelled north to Shanghai and then later to Beijing. In both these huge sprawling cities we mainly did sightseeing and shopping. The second half of the trip was quite different in comparison to the first half where we would wake up everyday and go perform Kung Fu and sightseeing wasn't on the agenda. We went and gained an understanding of the history of Shanghai, its Nanjing Road, the Bund and the Huangpo river. In Beijing we walked through the Forbidden City and admired the Temple of Heaven and became heroes by climbing the Great Wall. Temperatures in both Shanghai and Beijing were cold, with the latter providing the coldest temperature of the trip which was roughly minus 3 degrees celcius!

We said goodbye to Beijing and flew to our last stop – Hong Kong. Some memorable moments happened here such as the night time cruise, going to shop in Mong Kok, travelling up the tram car to the peak on Hong Kong island and much more. We felt like we were enjoying our summer as the temperatures raced back up above 20 degrees. By the time we had arrived in Hong Kong the group of 24 who started off as individuals had truly bonded and mixed up well amongst ourselves. There was even a bit of love in the air between certain tour members, so to speak...

Having safely arrived back home where life has all of a sudden slowed dramatically, I concur that the overall trip was amazing and I encourage all those who are meet the eligibility criteria to apply and to go and learn about our homeland. You'll come back with travel experience, some good shopping, but also great friends, spectacular unforgettable memories, and hopefully a sense of appreciation of what you have back here in New Zealand. You might even come back with a husband or wife.

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