

The Wintercamp tour of 2006 has left me with so many memorable moments and good friends (as cliché as that sounds). I remember a feeling of nervous anticipation before the trip but as I soon found out, there was nothing to be nervous about! I had never been on a trip like this before so I was wondering how I'd cope with 23 other root-seekers 24/7. We all met and introduced ourselves at Auckland airport (of course I promptly forgot everyone's names), then we boarded our 10 hour flight to Hong Kong. After initially keeping to ourselves, we got together towards the end of the flight and enjoyed a rowdy game of scum!

When we touched down in Hong Kong, I was expecting a distinct Asian smell to hit me straight away. It didn't actually, only a blast of extremely muggy air which was quite hard to breathe! Luckily we charged through the airport and piled straight onto our air-conditioned bus. We soon got used to racing through crowds in China since we pretty much did that for the rest of the trip! Customs and immigration were our first views of "real China." There were Asian people and Asian signs absolutely everywhere - it was unnerving not to hear or see English anywhere seeing as it is the only language I can speak. Luckily we had Janet to follow (unless you stopped running and lost her). By the time we got through the Chinese border we were all hot and sweating. The bus ride was about 2hrs to the hotel and in that time I tried to adjust to the idea that I was actually in China.

The first thing I noticed as we got off the motorway and closer to our hotel were the millions (not an exaggeration) of motorcycles everywhere. They didn't seem to be too worried about their safety either – no helmets or anything. But we soon got used to that (I later dangled off the back of a motorcycle in Taishan without a helmet and thought nothing of it!). Hotel Carriana was a really nice hotel. Typically, I expected China to be dirty everywhere so it was a pleasant surprise when we rolled up to a somewhat luxurious hotel in Foshan! We were quite tired and hungry by then as we hadn't eaten since the plane. After being randomly sorted into our hotel rooms we sat down for our first meal in China. I don't think anyone will forget that meal either. The most memorable thing was probably the Backstreet Boy's cd playing in the background. Well, at least it felt like

home. I think we heard that same cd every time we ate a meal in that room! The food was nice, but not unlike the Chinese food we ate at home. I think everyone was expecting more traditional dishes. We didn't eat too much and headed to sleep pretty early that night. Throughout the remainder of our time in Foshan we had 6:50am wakeup calls. After initially groaning we quickly settled. I was surprised to find I didn't have jetlag – possibly since we had too many other things to think about and do. Egg tarts and other sweet dishes are nice, but didn't really suit what I had in mind for breakfast! Well, when in China...

We were given massive white t-shirts for our first day practicing Kung-fu. And an interesting looking bright yellow vest which most people immediately thought "I hope I never have to wear that" or "Which hotel would be the best place to ditch this?" The Foshan Ancestral Temple was really nice and peaceful. We saw a lot of people going about their typical days doing Tai chi. We were introduced to our Kung-fu teacher who was fortunately very patient! The first day was very tiring and I was wondering how I'd get through 4 days of this! Though that day was probably the worse since the sun was so strong and we were sweating non-stop that afternoon. So much for the freezing China weather we'd all been warned about. I'm sure I built up arm and leg muscles after all that Kung-fu! We also saw some amazing lion dances. Although we'd all seen them performed in New Zealand none of them had the amazing skill that we saw in China. At nights we had mandarin classes for about 2hrs. After initially trying to pay attention most of us zoned out and started playing games or listening to ipods. It was too hard to focus after long days of kung-fu!

We then embarked on our 2 hour journey to Taishan – hometown to all four of my grandparents. I wasn't sure what to expect. One of the first things sights I remember was caged dogs and birds. We spent a while deliberating whether it was a pet or food store! The food here was quite different from Foshan and I must say it wasn't really appetizing to me as I didn't know what a lot of the dishes were and frankly, they looked weird. And the hotel restaurant was quite dirty, including all the cutlery so we splashed water and tea all over ourselves re-cleaning all the dishes they gave us. The servers were all staring at

us probably thinking, “Bloody tourists.” Anyway, the reason we came to Taishan was due to the fact that many of us had ancestral homes around this area. There wasn’t much in Taishan city but I felt very fortunate to be able to go back to my grandparents’ homes. I was the first person to go back in over 50 years and had no expectations of what I would find at all. Having only my grandparents’ names, with Janet’s help, we managed to visit 3 of my ancestral homes. It was amazing seeing my grandparents’ portraits on the wall and I was quite snap happy inside! I sent the photos home that day and my family at home were pleasantly surprised at what I’d found! On my dad’s side, the house I visited was like a jungle. A few of us went in and felt quite adventurous. It was clearly abandoned and I illegally smuggled home a pot and a few dishes – definitely original souvenirs!

Guangzhou had a few surprises in store for us, one being a few cockroaches by the bed to greet us when we walked in to the hotel room. This was the place most of us remember as the congee place – we had it every breakfast in a little shop up the road. Unlike many others, I never tired of plain old congee - it was very tasty! There were quite a few memorable things about Guangzhou. We visited Dr Sun Yat San’s Memorial Hall and the massive goat statues. The technical college we visited was fascinating to see since it was so different to our schools. The students we were talking to were boarders and lived in a tiny room with 8 other people. The basketball game against them was enjoyable despite us losing – we all came away with new friends and lots of email addresses! I’ll also remember how delicious the dumplings were since we devoured many plates during our stay there! It was this city where many of the boys picked up the nasty habit of hoiking...

Xintang had a nicer hotel than our last one, but the city itself was very polluted! The villages around that area were the worst we’d seen. There were rubbish piles everywhere and dead rats floating in the green pond. It was shocking to think that people lived in those conditions. It was even stranger to think that just outside our 4-star air-conditioned hotel, the air was so polluted and streets were so dirty. We went exploring to try find shops but failed at that and it was too hot for us to walk around very long. Fortunately the next day we were off to Shenzhen where we went into a fabulous mall and tried our hand at bargaining. Initially we went in pairs since it was quite intimidating having people yell

at you in a foreign language, though admittedly they spoke a lot more English than anywhere else in China. I'm positive I got ripped off many times, but as the trip went on we all became much more confident at yelling and arguing back at the sellers! We also went to Splendid China for the other half of that day. It was like an Asian Rainbow's End except a lot bigger! We had a great time – I even rode (well, sat) on a camel – but we were quite hurried and it was a pity we didn't have more time there.

Hangzhou was such a beautiful city compared to what we had just seen in Xingtang. There we met Bob, our tour guide, and he told us a lot about the history of Hangzhou and how it was known as China's "City of love" – and I could see why! It was a very touristy city and we did a lot of scenic sightseeing such as the Westlake Cruise and the Dragonwell Tea Village. I'm not a tea connoisseur but what they gave us to try tasted pretty good! On our drive to Shanghai, we stopped at Xitang water town. I decided that was my favourite place we visited since it was such a charming place! We had so much fun running around that town despite not even wanting to get off the bus initially because it was raining! We all bought multicoloured umbrellas for 10yuan each so it was fine. The rain probably added to the town's appeal! Not to mention it had a massive poster of Tom Cruise since it was here that he shot a scene in Mission Impossible 3.

We sleepily peered out the bus windows for our first view of Shanghai. It became common on the trip to sleep on the bus since we had to wake up so early! (For evidence just look at our creepy sleeping photos with our mouths wide open and the occasional drool). Unfortunately the weather wasn't very good during our stay – it was either pollution or fog, or perhaps a mixture. Nonetheless we had a good time, especially at the tailor's since we all got custom-made cheongsams and suits for very reasonable prices. A few of us explored Nanjing Rd which had a lot of good department stores and it was good to buy without arguing forever about the price. It was obviously way too long for us to finish in the short time we had. It was exciting to see New Zealand Natural though! The Huangpo cruise we went on was a bit disappointing since we couldn't see past the fog to the city. So we passed the time by taking lots of photos of ourselves!

Thankfully I managed to buy a jacket the day before we got to Beijing since we had been warned about the temperatures there since the beginning of the trip. And I was extremely happy with my NZ\$30 gortex jacket. The saleswoman insisted it was real so we poured water all over it despite her protesting. I decided that even if it was a fake it was a pretty good one! We took the overnight train to Beijing and it was a surprisingly clean and relaxing journey.

Someone banged very loudly on the door of our compartment just before 7am and we sleepily put on all the clothes we could find and dragged our suitcases out ready to brave the Beijing weather. It was definitely colder here! 1°C but refreshing all the same. We met our new tour guide, Julia, and mustered up all our strength to not sleep and listen to her talk about her city. We arrived at Jinglun hotel before our rooms were ready (yes it was that early!) so we went straight to breakfast. Then we went sightseeing at the Temple of Heaven which was fabulous to see but soon I'd had enough of the cold despite all the warm clothes and we practically ran back to the bus. We visited the Hongqiao markets after that. There were excessive amounts of pearls, I can say that much! I wasn't planning on buying any but when in a pearl market... Most of the girls ended up with a few strands or 4! I really enjoyed all the sightseeing we did in Beijing and adjusted to the temperature. Maybe it was the crisp air, but I felt very alive in that city! We went in rickshaws (I'm glad they used bikes instead of just the man running like the old days – or I would have felt really guilty!) We had as much fun seeing the Forbidden City as taking ridiculous photos that would send us into peals of laughter and scare other tourists. Strangely enough, much of the Forbidden City was “under renovation” – I'm not quite sure what that meant.

Of course, the great wall was the highlight of Beijing! There was an amazing sense of history as we climbed up (even though it had been so well repaired for tourists and you could see motorways as you walked along!) A few of us wanted to go to what we called the “top” – where we could see over the mountain. Janet had given us an hour to get wander up and return to the bus. We got back two hours later... It was great up there and we all stole rocks from the “top” as souvenirs. We were so far behind schedule we ended

up going down the sacred way in complete darkness! It was kind of spooky after just visiting the Ming Tombs and the boys jumping out in balaclavas didn't really help. And to top off our exciting day we had a cheongsam and suit night – hopefully the first in china trip history! It was a fabulous night as we all got dressed up and were about as formal as we could get (apart from the hotel slippers). We spent a few hours taking a million photos and exclaiming how great each other looked then ended up getting kicked off our floor by the manager for being too loud! We went off to KTV after and blasted the night away singing karaoke till 6am. Yes I lost my voice the next morning.

After Beijing we went to Hong Kong. That was a whirlwind 6 days! It was different from China in many ways (all free days for a start!) and we ran about doing so many things I could write another report this long about it! But I have a feeling this is long enough as it is so all I'll say is that it was fantastic. The group really bonded in this part of the trip so I definitely recommend staying for the extra few days! We relaxed on Christmas Day and went to Stanley as a group and stopped off at the most beautiful beach I'd seen so far (in fact the only one!) It was sad parting at the airport once we got home as we knew we had to go back to reality and could no longer enjoy the carefree existence we enjoyed for so many weeks in Asia! But I wouldn't really call it parting since we had made strong friendships on this trip and would continue to see each other in New Zealand at numerous reunions. I was happy to see my family and get home to familiar surroundings though. Since I started with a cliché I might as well end with one – China opened my eyes to a lot of things and I'll never forget those experiences but there's no place like home!

Krystle Yee