

Prologue: Fish n Chips, Deep Fried Won Tons and Sweet and Sour Pork (*New Zealand and Australia*)

In late November 2007, I embarked on the trip of a lifetime. And not just any old trip of a lifetime, mind you, but the 2007 Guangdong Wintercamp. It's been running for over 10 years now and has developed into somewhat of an institution with young Chinese New Zealanders.

A trip that not only gives you a diversified view of one of the world's up-and-coming superpowers via a whirlwind tour of the major cities of the People's Republic of China, but also an up-close view of the down to earth heartlands of southern rural China.

A trip that allows Chinese New Zealanders to discover their roots in ancestry, culture and history.

A trip that puts you in touch with 25 other kiwis with a common denominator: that we all came, somehow or another, from the humble towns and villages scattered across southern China.

And a trip that is one heck of a lot of fun.

The following is a small collection of snapshots of me, my thoughts and my experiences along the 4 weeks that I have been on the camp.

Part I: Taro Stews, Braised Geese and Frogs in Hotpots (*Travels around Southern China*)

"Hi there, it's coming to the end of our second week in China. We're in Guangzhou city, the largest city in this province – as a group, our ancestral roots lie dotted around this region and we've spent the last 1 ½ weeks getting up close and personal with our ancestry and culture.

So what have we done?

Since arriving in Guangzhou, we have:

- visited over 20 villages
- stayed in 4 different towns
- learnt kung fu, how to say our names in mandarin, Chinese calligraphy and how to use squat toilets
- haggled over shopping goods in multi-storey marketplaces
- challenged one high school and 2 villages' basketball teams to games
- eaten a multitude of dishes that many of us had never even heard of let alone tried.

Visiting the ancestral villages was a humbling experience as we saw the houses and living conditions in which our grandparents and great-grandparents were born, raised and toiled to make a living so many years ago. I felt fortunate that the ancestral shrine in the former home of my grandfather in the village of Ai Leung was still intact and I was able to pay homage to my ancestors there.

Shopping in the marketplaces was a steep learning curve for some, but enjoyable nonetheless. A number of the group have gone from being novices to skilled negotiators over the course of the 2 weeks we have spent here, through trial and error and both good and bad deals. A memorable moment when shopping in Shenzhen was the ‘team huddle’ or impromptu strategy meeting held by some of the wintercampers in the midst of bartering for a set of Rolex watches!

The most enjoyable activity for me however has been learning kung fu at the Huang Feihung School of martial arts. Having learned a whole kung fu routine over 3 days and practicing it to a level that we were able to perform it to an audience in Foshan gave me a valuable insight into the about of training and dedication required to master and perform a martial art. By working to perfect even one small move in the routine, I can now see how much work is required to film a kung fu action sequence in a film that could take only seconds.

The experiences I have had so far have been valuable and have taught me not only of China and its people but also about myself. We have another 2 weeks left in a country steeped in culture and history and I fully intend to make the most of it.”

Erin Fong
7/12/2007

Part II: Chillied Vegetables, Eggplant Casseroles and Shanghai Dumplings (*Touring Hangzhou and Shanghai*)

“So here we are in Shanghai. Since reporting last, we’ve flown up to Hangzhou and had a look-see around the city, courtesy of our new tour guide Rocky – he’s also accompanied us to Shanghai as well.

What can I say about the place? One word: cold. No, wait: FREEZING. Stepping out of the heated plane having travelled from a warm, humid 26°C in Guangzhou, I was unprepared for the cold air that hit me like a slap in the face, bit through my jeans and would have tried to crawl down my neck had it not been for the thermal top I had that had seemed so overkill two hours previously.

The air of Hangzhou had been a cold one, but it was also serene. The city that greeted us was dominated by a great lake stretching miles across, dissected by a thin causeway offering a shortcut through the centre. Reputed as the Paris (or the romantic capital) of China, we marvelled at the city’s ancient monuments and temples.

What I enjoyed most were the Buddhist temples and the tomb of the great General Yue Fai. Not only were these sites a fantastic place to look at and explore, but the stories behind Yue Fai’s campaigns against the Mongols, the prince who gave up his creature comforts to bring Buddhism to the greater parts of Asia and the Jade Buddha that was saved from destruction at the hands of the Cultural Revolution by a being covered by Chairman Mao stickers will be ones that will stay in my head.

Shanghai definitely feels like more of a city than Foshan, Guangzhou or Hangzhou. Trips to temples have been mixed in with visits to the radio tower and wax museums,

rounding out our history lessons with an overview of the 20th Century era, including the fall of the Qing dynasty, 1930s Shanghai and China in WWII.

Shanghai was also a place to further sharpen those bargaining skills we had picked up in Guangzhou – and with the help of a little local knowledge we bargained our way through yet another jam-packed mass of stalls – the Tailors Markets.

The other highlight for me was deciding to take a trip out on Shanghai's Maglev bullet train. On the last evening in Shanghai, I had left the rest of the trippers at the Tailors Markets an hour before with the intention of venturing out to see how far my grasp of Mandarin could take me. Or perhaps I should have said how *fast* it took me – like about 300km/h.

Despite the onset of twilight hindering my ability to appreciate the objects rushing past the train window like a video tape on fast-forward, I certainly had a good time chatting to the other passengers, swapping phrases, jokes and eventually contact emails. I'll sure be keeping that Lonely Planet phrasebook with me from now on!"

Erin Fong
14/12/2007

Part III: Beijing Duck (Or, 'What We Got Up To in Beijing')

“Bei-jing-yuan-ling-ni”. Beijing welcomes you – it's a slogan for the imminent 2008 Olympics spattered all over the host city, complete with cartoons and cuddly toys. They certainly don't let you forget that for one second.

It's our 5th day here, the longest we've spent in any one place so far and it's hard to believe that the trip is almost over – it's been absolutely amazing and I wish I had just a few more weeks to spend here with everyone!

Being the capital, Beijing's got more than its fair share of monumental wonders – the Great Wall, the Forbidden City and the Summer Palace just to name a few.

No trip to China would be complete without scaling at least one part of the Great Wall, and thus we tackled a small section of it just beyond the outskirts of Beijing city.

Come to think of it, for being inside a bustling city, we've done a lot of walking on this leg of the trip, about 2 km of the Wall, plus going through the Sacred Way and the Temple of Heaven (which are on very expansive grounds), not to mention the Forbidden City, which is about 1km square.

Being an engineer by trade it was quite hard to resist looking at the technical aspects of the FC – take the Firefighting equipment for instance – in a city that experiences sub-zero temperatures (something that you don't get often in the North Island!), not only did firewater stations have to be placed all around the city, but they also had to be heated from underground, lest the guards have to battle the flames with frozen cauldrons of water! It's amazing to realise the ingenuity the great designers and architects had to employ back then.

Today being our last day, a few of us decided to beat the sunrise and attend the raising of the flag in Tianmen square at dawn. Quite glad I did that, in fact, not only is it an occasion to remember, but also because of it gave us an extra hour to look around central Beijing while the others were still having breakfast!

Speaking of Breakfast, you might have noticed I name my chapters with food – that's because the cuisine changes everywhere we go, and Janet's been making sure we have the local fare in each town and city. While Guangzhou and its towns were prominent in stews, casseroles and hot pots, Hangzhou marked the start of various dishes drenched in an equal variety of rich, sweet and spicy sauces, and of course Shanghai has been regaled for its dumplings.

Well, our last night in Beijing should be the one to cap it off: Beijing Duck. Formerly reserved only for the Emperor and his royal family, this dish is now available to us commoners when the Qing Dynasty was overthrown and the royal chefs, the only ones privy to the recipe, began a restaurant which has now grown to a franchise all over the city.

Might the availability of Beijing Duck to everyone be one of the good consequences of establishing the communist regime? Food for thought... Bon Appetit!"

Erin Fong
19/12/2007

Epilogue: Stir-fried Kangaroo

“Yeah, you guessed it: I’m back at work in Karratha, Western Australia. Since Beijing the party’s moved over to Hong Kong, where we stayed in Kowloon and were left my Janet to run amok around the islands. Shopping in Mongkok, riding the roller coasters in Ocean Park and clubbing in Lan Kwai Fong are just some of the things I’ve been up to in the 3 days I was there. Although I’ve gone back for work, about half of rest of the China trippers stayed on to see in Christmas and the New Year.

This trip has been the most fantastic one I’ve had for a long time.

I’ll remember Guangzhou for its ancestral links, Hangzhou for its culture, Shanghai for its history and Beijing for its extensive monuments and architectural wonders.

I have come to know the other China trippers well, and have met many people on this trip that I hope to stay in touch with.

I’ve learned about Chinese history, culture, and language, and most importantly what it is to be a Chinese New Zealander.

And I am certainly going to learn how to cook some of those dishes...”

Erin Fong

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