

Guangdong Winter Camp 2007 Report

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The sound of the traffic echoing through our ears, the endless amount of people rushing beside us, mixed together with the scent of the spices tickling our taste buds, formed something our five senses had never experienced before. However discovering China was not all about what we could see, what we could smell or what we could taste, it was more importantly the experience of how we felt. We would have mixed emotions over the thirty one days that we would be traveling. For many of us, like myself, it was our first real opportunity to learn more about who we were, the culture of our ancestors and what it was truly like to be Chinese. Some people would say that they already knew what China is all about from what they've heard, read or seen before. However I see this as untrue, as there is more to China than meets the eye.

From day one, we were faced with the nervous challenge of meeting new faces that would soon be close friends. Going into the trip I could recognize a few familiar names, however when twenty six New Zealand born Chinese came face to face for the first time, our eyes lit up and our hearts began to pound to see so many people that we would have to get to know. However as the trip went on, our feelings of the size of the group seemed to shrink, as random faces became names, names became nicknames and nicknames became friends that we would keep forever.

Walking through the streets of Foshan sent our emotions flying. Even though I had heard that the traffic was terrible, I was flabbergasted and in shock to see just how bad it really was. People would have to agree with me that it felt like the Chinese use the car horn as their favourite instrument. The deafening sound seemed to linger in the air constantly whether we walked the streets day or night. However what hit me the most was the condition of one of the beggars on the side of the road. To have someone at your feet pleading for money in a state that you would never dreamed of, made you realize how lucky you really are. However being strictly told not to give them money and having to walk away each time, hit me hard inside.

Looking back on our amazing Kung Fu experience at the Huang Fei Hung Academy, it is really gratifying to see that all twenty six of us were able to complete and perform our five minute routine. To realize that the art of Kung Fu was not about power, but about patience, timing and concentration, guided us through our three days. Battling mid twenty degree heat, in a courtyard filled with famous history, our Kung Fu masters pushed us to our limits and after three days work we were able to look back while on our massage beds, with a drink in hand to appreciate what we had achieved. Moments like these when you have accomplished once in a life time opportunities are extremely satisfying and will be something I will remember forever.

My most memorable part of China that towers high above everything else, was visiting the villages where our ancestors came from. I still don't fully understand why I would choose the villages as my favourite part of the trip. However I believe it was a mix of the emotional feelings that could really be felt as we were able to experience and cherish

where our grandparents were born. It was also really interesting to see the distinctive differences in standards of living to what we have in New Zealand and to appreciate the shift to New Zealand our grandparents once made. I also believe that traveling with a group was a real bonus as we were able to experience other villages. During these times we were able to branch off from the group and explore the surroundings around us and to see what we would find with our limited Chinese language. Experiencing farmlands and scenic views, to chasing kids around a school, we could conclude that the people in the villages were really happy to see us, whether they were young or old, they were grateful where they were and the life they were living.

Mixing and mingling at the local Guangdong school was a great experience and opportunity for us to get to know local students and improve the local students English and also our Chinese. However what I was most looking forward to was challenging the local school in a game of basketball. With the Haka flowing through our blood, it was amazing feeling to play in front of a huge crowd. Even though we lost by 8 points, it was still satisfying to see the guys work together with our brand new basketball uniforms and putting up a respectable effort.

The talent we saw in China was absolutely phenomenal. We were lucky enough to see many shows that were definitely a worth while experience. Each and every show comprised of something we had never seen before and all we could hear was the word 'wow' traveling through the audience. The Shanghai acrobatic show would have to top the lists, with their amazing athleticism, strength and flexibility. I also enjoyed the Shin Jian show in the park where they made full use of their outdoor facility and fantastic costumes, while the Kung Fu show capped off the trip with a great story line. I would thoroughly recommend all three shows, as nothing in New Zealand will compare to the quality and skill of these performers.

Some of the sight seeing we saw in China was extraordinary. Personally I was more interested in the scenic sights compared to the history of museums and temples. However every place seemed have to have something special about it. To have the chance to walk and conquer the most talked about history of China, The Great Wall, was definitely one of my greatest accomplishments of my life. It was just an amazing feeling to be climbing something so steep and so high, that made your legs burn, but to have the will to keep going, knowing that you're climbing one of the greatest wonders in the world.

This report could not be complete without talking about the food. Every day I looked forward to the wonderful meals as I had never experienced such excellent food for breakfast, lunch and dinner. The food looked delightful, it smelt remarkable and most importantly it tasted divine. We were given generous quantities of food every meal, so much that we would be too full to walk, however we did not complain about this! It was just good to be able to try new things that we had never tasted before and to get the variety of food that changed as we traveled further north. To pick out the best restaurant that we went to is hard to choose as there was just something different and good about

everyone. However what comes to mind was our Yum Cha in Guangzhou, which is definitely the best Yum Cha I had ever had in my life.

As we departed China and made our way to Hong Kong, we were able to utilize our free days to our liking. This allowed us to do things that we wanted, however it was a different feeling not being together as a group as often. However, with days to go before traveling back to New Zealand it was a good chance to unwind before heading back. To me, Hong Kong seemed a bit more comfortable, its more westernized appeal seem to suit me more than China and we no longer had to worry about communication difficulties.

Looking back on my experience on the NZCA Winter-camp in 2007, it is unbelievable to recap on how much we've achieved in so little time. The feeling of being tired has definitely crept into my mind on how I felt during the trip, however to look back and see what we did, what we achieved and what we experienced during the trip makes it all worth while. The friends I have made over the 31 days are a real bonus to add to the endless amounts of fun and enjoyment endured along the way. However to realize that one of my dreams in life to visit China is now over, brings upon mixed emotions, on the other hand I believe that I would definitely go back to China again and relive what I have just experienced in the past month. I don't believe you can read this report and experience what I have just experienced, as words can not describe the experience of the Winter-camp. However all I can do is thoroughly suggest and recommend other New Zealand born Chinese to experience China while the Winter-camp is on offer as I can assure you, you will come back with the same feeling I have.

My final words go to Janet Joe, who has put up with the good and the bad of our group to give us this opportunity to experience China. Without Janet we would have struggled to achieve everything that we have experienced and would also like to thank her for her generosity to provide us with information when ever we needed it. To have the trip run so smoothly and so easily, made things so much easier and enjoyable. Thank you Janet.