

It must make great reading going through 24 reports of the NZCA China Winter Camp (Note: While there were 26 people on the trip, there are always a couple of people that somehow manage to get out of these sorts of commitments).

So to you, the reader, I will endeavour to make this read thoroughly worth your time. I am saying this now, however as I gradually weave through the adventure, I will no doubt change my mind, and may have to make an apology to you at the end for wasting your time. Let us see...

There are many reasons for people to attend this winter camp. Some go there to find a wife; some become another fellow campers girl/boyfriend; some want to hit the local nightlife and party hard; some want to gain weight from eating all the great food; some want to be like Pandas; some want to damage their lungs; and then there are the few who are dubbed "root-seekers".

When I say that on the 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2007, 26 young New Zealand "root-seekers" headed to China – any right-minded parent would be understandably worried. However contrary to many misconceptions about us campers, we were indeed actually off to get an insight into our cultural and ancestral roots – or so we say. I guess the following content will determine, in your eyes, whether this was successfully achieved or not. Obviously everyone onboard will have accomplished seeking their roots to different extents.

I only need to really say the following:

NZCA Winter Camp 2007 was a fun-filled and rewarding experience. It was many things. A cultural eye-opener; a great holiday (no doubt); a chance to meet and make "gwate" mates with 25 others; an exploration and identification of my ancestral roots; party-time all-the-time; and finally the realisation that I may actually see myself moving to China in the near future.

*Jeremy Lee, NZCA Winter Camper 2008*

I only really needed to say that. However I would like to say more and elaborate on the experiences that I had over the 4 weeks when we hit China.

Going on a tangent for a second, I have no idea what actually happens to these reports. If no one ever reads this, then I guess I am addressing no one – I hope that this doesn't mean I'm crazy. But in any case, for the record, I did not read any reports before I went on this trip... maybe that would be a good suggestion made to future campers. Perhaps this was actually made, so for the record I probably was not paying attention. Best way to fix that is to repeat it 3 times. I definitely possibly would have read a couple then. Although considering my brother went on the trip last year, I probably should've picked his brains a bit more before I went.

Back to my experiences:

Given that this report is due really soon, I think that I will focus on the 3 favourite parts of China that I either enjoyed the most or thought was most rewarding. As previously mentioned, 3 is a good number to go with. Following this if I have not overstayed my welcome; I will continue some banter of other goings on during the trip.

The disjointed nature of this essay is testament to how rewarding the China trip really is. At the end of the day, it is the friendships and companions that you make along the way that is truly worthwhile. Hence, I have barely had time to sit down and actually write this considering that since I've been back I have gone to see the other fellow trippers in Wellington; had some visits from other fellow trippers; and many nights out on the town. With this in mind the new events dubbed "reunions" have definitely started to overrule any sense of free time that I have – not that I am complaining. Janet will no doubt concur that it is in our nature to party as hard as we can until everyone or the majority are sick.

Having the opportunity to visit the ancestral villages was definitely the most rewarding aspect of the trip. I was able to visit villages from both sides of my family. The complex nature of the family tree and the descendents still present in the villages is something that still baffles me. The Dai Dun village saw me visiting my grandfathers – fathers – brothers – sons. It was something special to be able to see where my grandfather grew up and to see that the three sons were still living there. One

downside of the visit was the language barrier that presided over my visit. I would have loved to been able to have a conversation with them and especially as the second eldest one about his job in the police force.



The other village I visited was Pan Dee. The remote area of the village meant that our tour bus could not get into there. Given time constraints, dusk approaching, mosquitoes lurking, food beckoning – Janet was able to commandeer a group of local motorcyclists to give a few of us a ride into the village to check it out. Our convoy cruised through the narrow dusty roads with ease and I was able to meet my grandfathers – fathers – brothers – son and his family. A rather emotional video that I was able to film has the son saying a message to my grandfather back home stating that last time he came he promised to come back one more time, and that he has not yet come back, and that they would really love to see him again. These words struck an emotional chord in the girls that came with me – it hit me too of course. Once again I was able to see where my grandfather was born and the potential life he left behind on his journey to New Zealand. The village used to be big with Levis jeans manufacturing – I was able to see the old ladies on the street fixing a big pile of jeans up. I will never look at a pair of jeans the same way again!

Appreciation is a big outcome of this tour - appreciating the life that your family has worked hard to earn and achieve; the background and roots of where your ancestors came from; and the significance of the migration from China to New Zealand. While I think I would be THE high performer digging up dirt in the rice fields back in the villages, I definitely have found a new appreciation for what we have back here in the land of the long white cloud.

Upon our arrival to China, the first major group activity was attending kung fu lessons at the Huang Fei Hung Academy in Foshan. I personally think this was a ploy to attempt to keep the hormone pumped males subdued so that the first few days in China did not involve hitting the local clubs; drinks and ladies. It worked.

The lessons were actually more than just learning and getting a glimpse of a martial art over three days. I can definitely say more to people than “I was able to tick off learning kung fu in China”. I have



actually ticked it off, but back to the point. The three days gave us the chance to hang with the kung fu instructors and get a small insight on their lives – not having the chance to attend an educational institute and instead travelling from their villages to work in the city. The small opportunities they have pale severely in comparison to the vastness that we take for granted back home. It was a great chance to learn martial arts from there; play around and have a bit of fun along the way; and get to know Shih Fu (our master) more personally outside of the 9 – 5 lessons that we attended. This is also a unique aspect of the trip that you wouldn't normally have the opportunity to do if you were travelling alone or with a smaller group. It also provided the group with an opportunity to get to know each other better. I loved the chance to perform in front of an audience and show off what we had learnt over the three days – definitely a lot of fun!

Okay, so I am writing quite a bit. I was going to give the big number 3 favourite part of the trip right now. However, I have actually realised that obviously there are so many enjoyable parts of this trip. I will restrict it to being less than 100 parts. But I will give myself the flexibility to give 4 favourite parts. I will also mention that these parts are NOT ranked – that would be just way too hard.

I actually really enjoyed the visit that we had to the Guangzhou Technical College. If ever you were offered the chance to learn “Business English” I would suggest, unless you want to be studying 24/7 super-hard-out, that you quickly put on your running shoes and run fast in ANY direction as long as it is not the direction of Business English. The students that we met study this subject and in turn it gives them the opportunity to meet touring groups like us so that they can practice their English. Looking at their books and resources – the content looks SUPER hard, in fact I think that it would be a struggle for me to learn all of that “STUFF”. English isn't even THAT hard in colleges over here! Back to the story...



So we visited this college; hung with the students for the day; brought out the haka a couple of times; played them in basketball; had a concert performed to us; and had a few sessions of socialising. I maintain that looking good and playing hard is always a sign of a great team... ok ok ok we lost the basketball game... but we did it virtually sponsored by a random Chinese brand (we had some fly uniforms) and definitely put up a good fight. This side of the trip was yet another unique experience which we gained from attending the Winter Camp. Whilst everyone would no doubt agree with me, I think a few of the guys came out feeling short changed since they could not find their bride-to-be there. Even with the internet and cheap Air New Zealand flights I think long-distance relationships are

tough – and they could not bring the brides back home with them straight away since obviously they need to finish their course first. So many complications – I thought this sort of thing was down right easy!

Realising that I have written quite a substantial amount already with such a small font size – I am going to have to start wrapping this prize winning essay up. Lucky there is no word restriction (to my knowledge) as this written diarrhoea is clearly out of hand.



The Great Wall of China at the Juyong Pass was definitely another one of my highlights of the trip. The world's longest and largest man-made structure was truly breathtaking. To see such a structure that was built over centuries was an incredible experience (can you tell I got some of this information from Wikipedia haha). We were faced with quite a predicament, we given a choice of taking a round-trip route over a less inclined part of the wall (the right hand side for those of you interested), or take part of a steep route which was too long to complete given the time we had (the left hand side). Obviously like a kid offered the choice of having an Xbox or a PlayStation most of us wanted to do both sides. With the group consensus being to take the right hand side, some of us decided to try and do both sides by running as much of the great wall as possible. Ten steps later we had to reevaluate. The stairs and parts of the wall are so steep, that when you are going up it is reminiscent of climbing Everest (not that I have done it before), and going down you are literally praying that you do not trip otherwise, in a short sentence, "It is all over". Well we ended up succeeding, the run-and-gun style along the wall with occasional pauses to hang with other trippers; take some photos; look at the scenery; or laugh at the ladies trying to scale the wall's steps in high heels. So not only did we experience one of the 8 wonders of the world – we also had a great workout. Good stuff.

Ok, so I am drawing to a closure very shortly. No further ramblings on are possible considering that I just tried to proof read this and realised how long it was. I gather that if I cannot be bother proof-reading this, then anyone else on their right mind may not want to read such a long splurge. So just quickly here are a couple of other random things that I noticed on the trip.



This tour I have stepped in many unavoidable puddles on the sidewalk. My jandals have developed an unusual but familiar tinge as a result. Public soiling demonstrated by babies with slits in their pants is definitely something of an eye sore for someone walking around town in the closest thing to bare feet apart from bare feet. This is one class example of the differences exhibited in the Chinese culture that is not present in our society back home.

So the fifth great experience I had on this tour was with bartering – so much fun! “Tricks of the trade” are age-old secrets that have originated and evolved from the ancient form of bartering. In tourist-speak it is commonly known as “ensuring we do not get ripped off” or “making sure we get a super-cheap deal”. This was one of the areas where the mandarin developed on this tour allowed us to excel in this art. Flawless mandarin coupled with handsome looks and Asian deception (obviously an advantage handed down through the genetics of our heritage) ensured that we were clued up to get a good buy. The thrill of the hunt will always turn this technique into a game driven by obsession. It is great when we all got together after a day at the markets and reminisced about how we bargained down something by 50 yuan or got ripped off by 20 yuan. Play money when in New Zealand obviously but hey, when in Rome (or China). The mandarin classes that we partook in provided us with the necessary language ability to kit out all the lads on tour with multiple Rolex watches for around 100 yuan.

So for the record, the two phrases particularly handy for me were “tai gui le” and “kai wan xiao”. All good.

Three pages will do me fine. It has been an unforgettable trip. If you’ve made it this far through my essay – I am so sorry if you think I have wasted your time. Tis life.

Finally, while (as per last year apparently as well) it remains unclear whether or not this is Janet’s last year leading the NZCA China Winter Tour, I am putting bets on her instead leading a NZCA Europe Summer Tour. While not my roots, I will definitely want in.

