

## **Guangdong Winter Camp and China Tour 2007**

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Saturday the 24<sup>th</sup> of November was a day full of both fear and excitement. This trip was going to be the first time I was going to be away from my family and friends for such a long period of time. At the airport I wondered whether I had packed everything I would need for being away for a month and worried whether I would get home sick being away from family and friends. On the other hand, I was full of excitement knowing that I would meet 25 other New Zealand Chinese youth just like myself. Most of all, my biggest excitement was the thought of being able to soak in a whole month of Chinese culture which would most likely change my outlook on life.

Our trip officially started when the 26 of us met for the first time in the Transit section at Sydney Airport. Shy at first, we slowly edged ourselves forward to meet one another, shake hands, and share our first friendly smiles. The overload of new faces and names was way too much for me to remember!

It was soon time to board our flight to Hong Kong. I took in one last breath of New Zealand's fresh air and walked down the Cathay Pacific air bridge onto a fully packed plane. Because we were so excited and full of energy, our overnight flight seemed to take forever. Once in a while we would move around the plane a little to stretch our legs and this was also a good chance to get to know a few new people that we'd be spending the next four weeks with.

We finally arrived in Hong Kong! With the first step off the plane the heat of the Asian air flooded our noses. The temperature at the airport seemed way too much for me to handle. It was only at this moment that I realized that we were no longer in the comfort of little old New Zealand. My family and my friends were now thousands of miles away! The language barrier, the over load of Chinese culture and the continuous stream of Chinese faces everywhere we looked would be what we would have to face every second of every day for a whole month!

As we had a long wait before our next flight to Guangzhou, we managed to explore every corner of Hong Kong Airport to make the time tick faster.....even managing to fit in a few games of Connect 4 which one of the group members cleverly thought to bring. It was finally time to board our flight. All excited to enter the 'real China'.....before we knew it, we had arrived in Foshan by bus from Guangzhou Airport.

The next few days were spent in the Huang Fei Hung Academy in Foshan where we were taught a beginners course in Kung Fu by some amazing Shefu's, who were all tremendously patient in teaching us a routine which we were to perform on the third day! I personally found it very tiring each day, but at the end it was definitely worth the effort knowing that we knew the basics of the art. Looking back at the short video clips which were taken during these few days, it was great to see how we improved. We were even able to perform the routine to the passing tourists! Getting applause at the end of it seemed very rewarding. We were very lucky to be able to end our Kung Fu lessons with a night out at a Karaoke bar where the main Shefu came as well. By this time we knew him quite well, so at the end of the night it was very sad to say goodbye to him and know that we would probably never see him again.

During our time in Guangzhou, we were lucky enough to have one of the student teachers travelling with us teach us a few lessons of basic Mandarin. I was surprised to find that I was one of the only ones

who had learnt a little of the language prior to the trip but it was good to refresh my memory and also learn a few other little phrases which hadn't been taught to me already.

Whilst on the official part of the tour we went to a school in Guangzhou where we were able to meet a class of younger students. We experienced Chinese painting, calligraphy and had a concert put on for us by some of the students. We had a lot of fun when we challenged them to a game of basketball. The students were all very friendly and also very excited to meet people with whom they were able to practice their English with. I was thrilled to be able to hold a very simple conversation with them in Mandarin. When we had to leave it was quite sad to see all the students standing by the bus and waving their goodbyes frantically to us.

One major highlight for me was being able to visit my ancestors' villages. The feeling as soon as I stepped into my ancestors' houses was absolutely amazing. I visited my Granddad Wong's house where he was born and grew up and was amazed to see the bed where he was born still there! It was hard to describe what I felt when I sat down on the bed. It was as if I was able to instantly fill in the past gap of knowledge in my family history. It was one of the most amazing feelings which I have ever had. Looking through my two ancestors' houses and villages it made me feel that I have not appreciated my living conditions back in New Zealand. It was not until now when I experienced going back to where my grandparents lived that everything has become a reality for me. I now understand how lucky and privileged I am being born and being able to grow up in New Zealand, all thanks to my relatives having to live through such poor conditions and escaping China to New Zealand to improve their families' lives. I wish to return to these villages in the future, maybe not for a few years, but definitely next time has to be together with my family so that we can experience this together.

Once everyone's ancestral villages had been visited our official part of the tour had finished. Our next trip on the bus took us to Hangzhou which is a city set around a lake. Hangzhou is also famous for its romantic stories based around this lake. I found this city both cold and spectacular. We were very lucky to be able to cruise around the lake in a boat for about 45min, taking in the spectacular scenery and water views all around us. Later on in the afternoon we hired coloured bikes for a whole hour for only 1 NZ Dollar. Even though my brakes were a little faulty, I was able to confidently dodge cars and people and manage to hold onto a stick of toffee strawberries. We amazingly made it back to the bus safely and on time.

After our very short visit to Hangzhou, we boarded our bus which would take us to Shanghai. On the way we stopped at the 'Wuzhen Watertown' which was where Tom Cruise was filmed for a small section of Mission Impossible 3. We were able to cross the exact bridge which he had run over and into one of the local shops to find his wife. I found this place quite a traditional and cultural experience. Through walking the small streets, we were able to see a bit of the local talent which included a man making shell buttons and another man making tiles for a roof. Having walked a little way from the entrance of the Watertown, we had the privilege of being rowed back along the river which ran the whole length of the water town and back to meet our bus.

On our arrival into Shanghai I was amazed to see how modern this big city was. We visited the Shanghai Museum which contained a lot of the history of Shanghai. We had a lot of fun there learning about life in Shanghai many years ago and also enjoyed taking photos of ourselves posing with the wax statues. While in Shanghai we visited a tailors market which was equivalent to 2 shopping malls full of little shops. All the shopkeepers insisted we chose them to make our clothes! I found this market very exciting as I was able to tell them exactly what I liked and didn't like and also get clothes made to fit me.... all for a very small price! On one of the nights in Shanghai we all enjoyed a night cruise on the

Huangpo River in quite a large boat. We were able to see Shanghai's buildings by night....with all their lights on and it was quite a sight to see. Another of the nights was filled by going to the 'Shanghai Acrobats Show' which was quite spectacular as a lot of the acrobats were only young children who were amazingly flexible. At times I feared for their safety during the show! On our free day in Shanghai, I was lucky enough to have a Shanghainese friend to take myself and some of our group out for the day. We spent 5 hours of our day at the Shanghai Science and Technology Museum. We were really lucky to see the safari animal exhibition that was on. The rest of the museum was full of activities and rides (which could have easily entertained us for more than 5 hours if we had the time). The admission price was so cheap for so much fun.

We then flew to Beijing. Here we visited Tiananmen Square, Mao's Mausoleum, the Summer Palace, the Temple of Heaven, the Forbidden City, drove past the main 2008 Olympic site and took a ride on rickshaws. Out of the many places we visited, the Temple of Heaven was quite a sight to see. It took us quite a while to walk from where the bus dropped us off to the main temple, but I found the whole atmosphere about this place quite amazing. All the detail which had been put into each structure amazed me.

In Beijing we were lucky enough to enjoy a traditional Peking duck dinner which was very delicious! I had looked forward to this duck dinner so much and it didn't disappoint me. I also enjoyed the 'Legend of Kungfu' Show especially since we had only recently been taught the art of Kungfu in Foshan. Many people bought the DVD on the way out of the show since they enjoyed it so much.

On one of the days in Beijing, we set out a little earlier than usual, so that we were able to visit a local jade factory, the Ming Tombs and Sacred Way where we all climbed onto the huge stone animal statues to take photos. But my huge highlight.....not only for that day, that city, but my whole trip.....was being able to set foot on the Great Wall at the Jurong Pass. I would have easily taken over 100 photos trying to catch all the amazing scenery from the high points of the wall. It amazed me how the whole wall was man made and had lasted! On our way up the wall, the steps were all different heights: some giant steps and some miniature. I had to watch my step the whole way. It was quite amazing looking back and seeing the Great Wall wind itself around the hills all the way to the horizon and beyond.

Our last stop was Hong Kong. We had four free days here to shop, sightsee and do whatever we wanted. I found myself very tired from the past weeks of travel so happily slept in each morning before going out in the afternoon. On our second day, a group of us spent the day at Ocean Park where we screamed our lungs out and got dizzy together on the three looped roller coaster. We got to see lots of strange shaped fish and also finally got to see giant pandas which we longed to see the whole time whilst being in China!

On the last night that we were all together we organized another karaoke party since we had started the trip off way back in Foshan with one. It was awesome to see how uninhibited everyone now was compared to the beginning of the trip and to also see how many more people were willing to get up and sing!

Sunday the 23<sup>rd</sup> of December sadly came around and it was time to leave. It was really hard to say goodbye to all my friends that I had made on the trip. But it was good that we were already organizing to meet back up again at the Auckland Easter this year. I made a lot of close friendships which I will definitely treasure forever. Being able to share the memories of spending our first time in China with each other will definitely bond us forever.

Overall, I thoroughly enjoyed my experience in China. It was also very rewarding to know that I was able to handle being away from family and friends and also the big step of travelling by myself. Since I have been back in New Zealand I have been looking through my photos that I took in China and it makes me want to rewind time. I felt more at home in China as I was surrounded by people who looked like me.

Finally I'd like to thank Janet Joe for her dedication and hard work in putting this tour together and all the long hours she patiently spent with us. Since being back in New Zealand, I feel a whole lot richer in experience and appreciative of life. Her hard work has definitely benefited me in all aspects of life.