

China Wintercamp Report 2007

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Knowing nobody except my cousin, up until the day we left, the main concern for me was whether I would get along with my fellow campers, this turned out to be not a problem at all. As everyone turned out to be very friendly and it was no problem getting to know each other's names.

Foshan was my first taste of China. Upon arrival, I immediately noticed a difference between China and New Zealand, to me, China seemed more fast paced, especially the traffic. After nearly getting run over a couple of times, we realised that they stop for nobody, and the trick was to step out right onto the road with full confidence, and fingers crossed and praying that you wouldn't get hit. Mastering this only took 2 days, much faster than learning Kung Fu at the Huang Fei Hung Academy.

Every morning would consist of us getting up and moaning about our aches and pains of the previous day, and moan that we were too tired to do kung fu, next was breakfast, where we would spend too much time, then, with 5 minutes to spare we would sprint down to our Kung Fu training grounds to just make it in time, only just avoiding Janet's threat of something bad if we were late.

For me, learning kung fu was a challenge but the greatest experience. From day one I was having trouble, even the most simplest of steps would stir confusion in me, there was more than one occasion where I would find myself attached to a "personal teacher", in which one of the younger Kung fu students would have to come over and spend some time to show me how to do the move correctly and after numerous attempts, I would finally satisfy them and they would leave, however, the minute they left, I would somehow forget. This problem was most noticeable when our Shi fu made us repeat all the moves we had learnt, during those moments I would copy the person beside me, however this was until we learnt a move than turned us the other way, being on the end with nobody in front of me to copy, my performance level would drop and I often had to stop and desperately try remember which move was next, which was often aided with a quick glace around at my peers.

At night was Mandarin lessons. Knowing absolutely no Chinese language I was a bit anxious. However this soon disappeared as I realised I was not the only one with no Chinese experience, during the lessons we would sit together and laugh at each other's bad pronunciation when chosen to speak, and at the same time silently pray that us ourselves wouldn't be chosen as we were just as bad.

Visiting everybody's ancestral villages was very interesting. It was amazing how differently people in those villages lived compared to us in New Zealand. The first village visited was just a small village, but I was amazed how simply they lived and how co-operative they were with each other, everybody seemed to have a job which contributed to the village as a whole, some were in the fields tending to crops, others were fixing houses, and later in the day I stopped to help a group sweep up rice which was drying in the sun on the village basketball court.

I was just as amazed with my own village Gwa Leng. The house my Grandfather grew up in was right where he described it; alongside the river, and across the water

from the lychee trees. As there were no stories to go with the location of the house about what it was like inside I did not know what to expect. Inside was dark, and I was later told that currently the place was being rented out, and although no furniture, it was not hard to imagine what it would have been like when my Grandfather was living there. I was also fortunate enough to be allowed access to one of the two massive towers, surrounded by a deep moat these towers overlooked the village. Walking up the spiral of stairs I noticed on every floor there were gun and cannon emplacements, at the top was a view of the entire village and beyond, and it was easy to see where the old houses and newer houses stood due to the stark difference in housing style and materials. According to my grandfather, these towers were lookout towers and were used to protect the children from being kidnapped by bandits and held for ransom.

Visiting my ancestral village gave me a better appreciation of how much was given up by my ancestors to move and live in New Zealand, and how different it must have been for them when they arrived in New Zealand.

Guangzhou Technical College was a great experience, initially I thought mingling with students from a different speaking country would be tedious on my part as I assumed that there would be a large language barrier between us. I could not be so wrong, all the students I talked to spoke proficient English, an amazing feat considering only learning English for a year.

The boys basketball game wasn't so much as a success as the girls, expecting to find our opponents an untried team as ourselves, I was surprised to find that they pulled out their actual basketball team, a bit of an unfair advantage considering we had only played twice as a team, and that was against the youths in the villages. However, this did not sway us as we began the game with a fearful, and to some a humorous Haka and ended with only a minor loss of four points.

For me, Hangzhou was the most serene place we went to, particularly the great Westlake. Surrounded in fog our water cruise didn't allow us to see many spectacular sights, except fog, and memorable photo opportunities, a highlight of the Westlake was hiring bicycles and riding around the lake, not as easy as initially thought, as these bicycles weren't like the ones back home; no gears, shock absorbers, nothing, a true bicycle as simple as they get, with a tendency to leave you wobbling if you pedalled too hard or turned a bit too sharply.

On the way to Shanghai, we stopped off at the Wuzhen water village. At first I thought it was just another village, much like the ones we had seen before, just based around water, It was only when I had the opportunity to look around and I was told a bit about the village did I appreciate where I was.

The most memorable night in Shanghai was very first night, after being left at the hotel, separated by the main group who had gone on a tour on the area, it needed only one person to mumble "I'm hungry" to spur us on a dessert hunt, not knowing whether to go right or left outside the hotel we walked in a random direction, luckily leading us to the shops, the next feat was deciding what to eat, sure there were plenty of fast food places, but we were in search of something different, an hour later after

backtracking, contemplating McDonalds we came across a dessert cafe serving puddings and other Chinese style desserts.

The first thing I noticed when I stepped off the plane in Beijing was the cold. It was freezing! And the dry air didn't help as practically any metal surface I touched gave me a static shock, making me weary of even pushing the buttons in the lift of our hotel.

Aside from all that, Beijing by far was the most interesting, there was so much culture to be seen like Mao's mausoleum, and the Tiananmen Square and the Forbidden City, a highlight was on our free day, when I went with a few other campers to watch the raising of the flag in Tiananmen Square at sunrise. Due to slack in waking up time over the last week, getting up in time was a feat, what got me up was a call from one of the other campers saying "hurry up, we're leaving". Arriving half an hour early at Tiananmen Square there was still a huge crowd, I was fortunate to be tall enough to be able to see over the crowd, however the other were out of luck and had to find another vantage point. It was amazing how formal the ceremony was, considering it occurs every day. Climbing the great wall was easier than expected but harder than it looked. From a distance the wall looked a simple feat, not too steep, quite easy in fact, an half an hour in, our running pace had slowed to a crawl, stops were more frequent, we would call them "photo breaks", claiming we weren't stopping because we were tired, but stopping to take a photo.

Beijing was also a favourite for shopping, with the markets being only just down the road I often spent any free time I could down there buying everything.

It was because of these markets that we could finally use the Chinese we learnt in Foshan, after the first day of markets the hotel corridor was filled with the voices of people asking how much they paid for something and practicing simple phrases like "tai gui le" meaning that's too expensive, and "wo bu yao", I don't want it.

The three days spent in Hong Kong were not enough, I only managed to do three things; Visit the theme park Ocean Park, visit the Peaks, and shop.

Shopping in Hong Kong was a like walking down memory lane, there were so many toys and figurines, which reminded me of my childhood, and as a impulse shopper I filled my suitcase with everything, justifying that a friend might like it as a gift, even though I had no intention of giving it away.

I literally shopped till I dropped, one instance of this was coming back to the hotel from a full day in Mong Kok just for a little rest, and to drop off my purchases, but ending up collapsing on my bed and sleeping most likely for the night had my peers not woken me and dragged me off to the Peaks; a spectacular view overlooking Hong Kong.

As an unseasoned traveller, never been away from New Zealand without my parents the NZCA China Wintercamp 2007 was a trip I hope to never forget, meeting new people, and going to a completely different cultured country to discover my ancestral past, that as a third generation New Zealander chose to ignore as it seemed so alien to me was an amazing experience. This trip has truly sparked an interest in me that I will no doubt pursue.

Finally, I would like to thank Janet Joe, for being so organised and planning such a great trip. In particular her ability to make the itinerary work despite our untimely organisation skills, and her knowledge of China and Hong Kong to make our trip interesting and for sparking my interest in my heritage.