

Report: NZCA Wintercamp China Tour 2007

By Natalie Gee

Saturday, 24th November 2007 was a day of mixed emotions for me: excitement, nervousness, and anticipation of what was to come over the next 28 days crowded my thoughts as we boarded our first flight to Sydney, thus our journey to China had begun! I knew quite a few people going on the trip beforehand, but it was exciting to meet some new faces and get to know them on the flight over, certainly plenty of time to do that!

One of the highlights of the trip for me was learning Kung Fu at the Huang Fei Hung Academy in Foshan. It was certainly a lifetime experience I will never forget and a true honour to learn some kung fu derived from one of China's most respected Kung Fu masters. With the open courtyard and sunshine streaming on you as you stretch to some defence positions, moments like these are unforgettable as they represent the beautiful culture of China. The Kung Fu masters were excellent teachers: patient, understanding, and of course, encouraging as they taught us moves and positions some of us would never have thought to use for self defence! Certainly a valuable learning experience where we all walked away with self-defence tips and perhaps a little more muscle tone!

Visiting our ancestral villages was also a memorable part of my trip. I was in awe as we drove into our first village. It amazed me to see how they live, a stark contrast to how we live today in New Zealand. It was fun getting to mix and mingle with some villagers as we waited for campers to visit their ancestors' homes. We even got to play a game of basketball with some of the village men, play with some adorable kids at a local school, walk around their streets and stock up on snacks for the bus trip ahead. When we got to visit my great great Grandfathers' house in the Bai Yun district, Poon Yue village, it was an amazing feeling to step into the house where my grandfather was born, as well as the many generations before. I was able to pay my respects by lighting incense and placing photos of my ancestors on the shrine. I took many photos to show my family back at home who had never seen the house before.

Once we were in Guangzhou, we were able to meet and interact with the students of the Guangzhou Technical College. It was great to try out our Mandarin and Cantonese on them, as well as them trying out their English on us! True New Zealand sportsman ship showed when we played a game of Basketball with them, unfortunately the boys lost but the girls won their game. After we were able to sit together and get to know one another, swapping gifts and email addresses.

Our next destination was Hangzhou. I particularly enjoyed this city as its beautiful scenery and enchanting folk stories about the main attraction, the West Lake, set the scene for a wonderful time. We enjoyed a lake cruise and learnt about romance stories that developed around the lake. We also got to hire bicycles and cycle our way around the lake, stopping on the way to buy toffee strawberries and to take photos of the beautiful lake dotted with traditional wooden boats. We also enjoyed visiting the Lingyin Temple and Dragon Well Tea village. We learnt about the process of making a cup of high quality green tea and tasted the uniqueness of this special tealeaf.

From Hangzhou, we travelled by bus to Shanghai via the Wuzhen water town. A village made famous by Tom Cruise as he starred in Mission Impossible 3 there! Shanghai was one of my favourite cities, its modern buildings and contemporary class was certainly a winner as we spent 4 nights there. The shopping was fantastic there! Nanjing Pedestrian St at night was spectacular, a postcard picture of beautiful lights and the hustle and bustle of thousands of people crowded on the streets. During the day, we visited the Jade Buddha Temple, Yu Gardens, a Silk Factory and the Old Shanghai Bazaar. We also enjoyed a fantastic acrobatic show at night. On our free day, I went with some other campers to the Shanghai Science and Technology Museum, a massive exhibition of some of the world's best science phenomenon and gadgets on show.

Our next city to visit was Beijing, a wonderfully cultured city with thousands of years of culture oozing out of every corner you go. A highlight was Tiananmen Square, Mao's Moseleum and the Forbidden City. The mere size of these historic spots were amazing, as well as the beautiful Chinese architecture that makes these places so popular. Unfortunately, I experienced a bout of food poisoning in Beijing and wasn't able to see the next days sites (Summer Palace, Ming Tombs and the Sacred Way) but did manage to climb part of the Great Wall of China. The area where the Great Wall touches the bottom of the valley is peaceful and magnificent. After climbing a couple of towers, I sat on the steps to soak in the views and presence of these amazing walls.

Our final destination, Hong Kong was also a fabulous city I enjoyed. We spent our free time shopping in Mong Kok (the electronics shopping area), and shopping in other massive shopping malls that were all beautifully decorated with Christmas decorations. We had one day where we went to Ocean Park theme park and screamed out hearts out on the roller coaster rides. We also got to finally see the national animal we had all been waiting to see the whole trip- Giant Pandas!

As our trip came to an end, I felt it had certainly been an enjoyable and memorable trip that I would recommend to any New Zealand born Chinese. I learnt a lot more about my own culture and what such a different life I live in New Zealand compared to those of what my ancestors lived. I made some close friends, tried new things, spent too much money, laughed lots, ate enough food to the point of almost exploding, took thousands of photos and most of all, had massive amounts of fun that will always be remembered as a trip of a lifetime!

Just to add... Tour leader, Janet Joe was fantastic at being so well organised and knowledgeable on the trip. She had patience with us and was able to help us to see the very best of China and Hong Kong to make the best of our time there. Thank You, Janet, your expertise and knowledge was greatly appreciated while on this trip.