

NZCA Wintercamp China Tour 2007

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As I took my first steps onto the China soil along with 25 other kiwis, I felt the thick city smog strike me immediately. The amount of people and the chaotic traffic was also another striking and slightly overwhelming feature present. However, despite all this, there was no hiding the buzz of excitement amongst everyone in the group for our adventure in China to unfold.

I personally felt very excited, a little nervous about what to expect and also very lucky at the same time to have my older sister and brother, Lily and Jock as well as my boyfriend, Rhys on the trip to share this experience with.

Our first event began at the Foshan Ancestral Temple where we experienced an impressive live kung fu performance. This was my first time watching a live kung fu show and I thought their performance was very talented and skilful. Here, we were also introduced to our master, (Che Fu) who was responsible for teaching the group kung fu for the next following days. Che Fu was very friendly and always willing to help without hesitation with any problems. I thought this was extremely helpful as I found the kung fu routine quite hard to learn. Practicing our kung fu skills in the hot afternoon sun also proved to be a further challenge. However, in spite of this, the hard work and efforts made by the group and myself definitely proved worthwhile as the final performance in my mind was outstanding and a memorable moment.

Evening mandarin classes also proved to be useful as I did not speak a word of mandarin. I found that learning basic phrases and words were valuable and helped immensely while bartering during shopping. Shopping in China was very different compared to New Zealand. I was impressed by the range of things on sale as well as the cheap prices. Although I also found it rather intimidating how a shop assistant would follow someone around the shop until they had left.

The visit to our ancestral villages was one of the most rewarding parts of the trip for me. Although the bus ride to each different village was long, I found this was a good time to get to know other people on the trip better. During each village visit, it was interesting talking with the local people and hearing what they had to say. A different but fun experience would have been playing a basketball game against the local people to pass time.

Another rewarding event was the visit to my dad's village and meeting my cousins who still lived there. The conditions and their lifestyle saddened me a little and made me realise how extremely lucky I was to grow up in New Zealand. The different conditions included things like the presence of loose running chickens everywhere, the amount of rubbish lying around and dirty murky river water. These were a real eye opener for me regarding the different living conditions and lifestyle compared to NZ.

A day was also spent at the Guangzhou Technical College. Here, we got the opportunity to meet and interact with the students there and also learn some Chinese calligraphy. I thoroughly enjoyed this part although my paintings did not turn out as well as I wanted. In the evening, a fun game of basketball was played against the

students. The boys' team dressed in their impressive uniform (just purchased the day before) came out strong and were leading during the first quarter, however, despite their stunning efforts; the boys were unfortunately defeated in the end. The girls' team on the other hand played brilliantly and won their game with ease.

After we left Guangzhou, things felt more slow-paced and relaxed which was a nice change. Hangzhou was the next destination on our trip. This city was very different compared with Guangzhou. It was less congested and had a lot more beautiful scenery to enjoy. The West Lake was stunning and we got the opportunity to relax and enjoy a cruise around this lake whilst at the same time listen to tragic romantic love stories told by our tour guide, Rocky.

We also made a visit to an interesting place called the Wuzhen water town where a river intersected this area. I enjoyed travelling through the town by a wooden boat as I found this was rather unique. After leaving the Wuzhen water town, we made our way to Shanghai. I found Shanghai was a lot more westernised compared with the other places we had visited. The environment generally felt tidier and cleaner along with more people knowing how to speak English.

One highlight in Shanghai for me would have been going on a night boat cruise. I thought this was a good way to experience the beautiful city lights. Although it was cold outside on the deck, it was well worth withstanding the chill to take lots of photos of the amazing building lights. Visiting the Old Shanghai Bazaar was another highlight for me. I got the opportunity to try some famous dumplings which tasted delicious.

The capital, Beijing was the next city for us to explore. Here, we visited Tiananmen Square and the Forbidden City which was very impressive. It was also interesting to hear the history behind these places.

The visit to the Great Wall of China was another memorable moment of the trip. The view from the wall was remarkable and breathtaking. However, I would have liked more time there as I found it quite challenging to complete the circuit in the time frame that we were given.

The beautiful city, Hong Kong was our final destination. Personally, Hong Kong was my favourite city. We spent three days here and I spent most of them shopping. The shopping environment was very similar to New Zealand and I think the atmosphere here was a lot nicer compared to the markets in China. Although I must admit that I did miss bartering with shopkeepers. Travelling around Hong Kong was convenient as the subway station proved to be very reliable and easy to understand.

Overall I think this trip was truly fantastic and most importantly, very rewarding. I have made memories that will last a lifetime, met some amazing people as well as gain a deeper insight about my culture and where my ancestors come from.

I would like to give special thanks to Janet Joe for her time and brilliant skills in organising such an excellent and magnificent trip. Without her expert knowledge and experience guiding us through China, I think this trip would not have been as exceptional as it has turned out.