

China Winter Camp 2007
Tracey Joe

I had waited nearly all year for the day to arrive when I jumped on the aeroplane and was on my way to China. This being my first time out of New Zealand, naturally I was excited, nervous and darn right scared about what lay ahead of me. The plane rides seemed never-ending and there was the daunting task of learning twenty five other people's names, their ages, what city they were from, their occupation, and their interests. Luckily everyone was smiley and friendly and it didn't take long to match the faces to the names in the emails that I had received prior to the trip.

On my first day in China I mainly recall the crowded streets, the sound of tooting horns, and that it was a skilful art of knowing when exactly to safely cross the road. However it was straight into our adventure filled program and I was physically put to the test. I started to experience aching muscles in places that have never been worked out before. This was the satisfying result of our three days intensive Kung Fu training. It was nothing short of amazing watching these young guys perform kicks, flips, punches and routines including hammers, chains and swords. Although there was the language barrier between our teacher and most of the group, we were all able to successfully learn our awesome routine and even perform in front of an audience! It was such an honour to have learnt from such talented and friendly guys.

Another part of our journey was learning how to speak some Mandarin. My parents speak Cantonese but my sparse vocabulary extended to only numbers and food. Cindy taught us how to exchange polite introductions which we practised on each other to build our confidence. The most useful words that I used frequently at the markets were the Chinese words for "How much is that?", "That's too expensive" and "I don't want". However we couldn't fool the locals and I got asked where I was from many times a day. I still remember the general phrases we were taught, however I still need to learn my numbers in Mandarin properly. This is something that I would like to continue learning and it would be a dream to gradually build up my language skills.

The villages were the most significant part of the trip as it was highly personal and took us back to our roots. It was strange looking into old houses and seeing how small their living areas are, and how close everyone lives to each other. I did not actually get to visit any of my grandparent's houses as I did not have enough information to locate their exact houses, although I did visit the main street of my grandfather's village. It had been redone with many new shops, and it seemed very modern in comparison to some of the other villages we visited. Each village was unique and we got to meet a few people along the way who were curious about our presence.

We met a fabulous group of people at Guangzhou Technical College who studied Business English. We could interact with them as they could understand and speak English quite well. They put on a very entertaining show for us including our participation with musical chairs, a three legged race, hit me baby one more time and a human chain of hopping and jumping. We found a huge difference between New Zealand

and China when we discovered that the girl's toilets had doorless cubicles. I was faced with another challenge when it came to the girl's basketball game. I wouldn't exactly call myself the sporty type but I donned some shorts and ran around the court a little. We won our game which shows that there will be many great players at this year's Easter tournament, and I had actually had a lot of fun. It was sad leaving at the end of the day as I had such a great time meeting new people and seeing what schools were like in China.

Climbing the Great Wall of China was a highlight for me. Although I only went up the gradually sloped side of the wall, it was an awesome experience and came with an equally awesome view. Unfortunately I had piled on the thermals that morning and I actually got very hot from climbing up the steps. It was quite interesting to find that the steps were placed unevenly, and that the wall was in very good condition. It was somewhat strange seeing men in business suits climbing the steps, and we even saw a lady walking across the wall backwards. It was a huge sight and really cool to be able to experience in person, as it is one of the Seven Wonders of the World.

Hong Kong was full of endless shopping destinations, using the MTR everyday, trams, gambling for the very first time in Macau, riding the longest escalator in the world, visiting Victoria Peak, eating lots of Yum Cha, dancing at night clubs, great views from tall buildings, great company with my family and all my new friends, and Brendan, Ray and I almost missing our plane back to New Zealand.

I'd like to thank the New Zealand Chinese Association for arranging this trip, and I would especially like to thank Janet Joe for organising everything and making sure that we made the most out of our trip. She passed her knowledge onto us and without her we could not have survived as well as we did. This trip has left me with many great memories and new friendships that will last a life time. It was truly an unforgettable experience, and though it was not the same as how our ancestors lived all those years ago in China, it was still a little insight on how different lives could have been if our ancestors hadn't moved to New Zealand all those years back.