

Guangdong Winter Camp and China Tour 2008:

Aidan Wong

My trip started a day earlier than some China Trippers as the Wellington contingent flew up to Auckland on the 22nd of November. At the airport, I didn't know what to expect from my experience away in a foreign country with virtue strangers and whether I would get home sick, being away from all my family and friends. On the other hand, I was looking forward to the experiences ahead which were likely to change my outlook on life whilst getting to meet 28 other young New Zealand Chinese who were ready to be cultured.

Foshan was our first destination within China and was a real eye opener first up. I found it to be quite different to New Zealand and everything I expected China to be like. This was because the streets were crowded and there were many cars on the road honking their horns at each other. I also found the footpaths were dirty and the oxygen tasted like smog. I remember attempting to cross the road for the first time, this involved 28 of us students closely following behind Janet inching across the road trying to avoid the chaos of the Chinese roads. On the other side, laid the Huang Fei Hong academy of Kung Fu where we would be spending most of our time for the next few days. We were privileged enough to be taught by the masters there who taught us a short routine, which we would later have to perform in front of a live audience which was intimidating in itself. After a few hard days training, particularly "Mar Bolling" (Horse Stance) we were ready to tackle our routine, which we received a surprising applause at the end. We then treated the audience and the masters to another performance involving a bit of New Zealand with the males performing the Haka and the females signing a Waiata.

Later that night, we experienced our first taste of the China night life, Karaoke. This is not an event I would normally do in New Zealand but I thoroughly enjoyed myself as we were able to socialise with the rest of the China trip crew and get to know each other a bit better. We were even honoured with the presence of a couple of our Kung Fu masters. This was a tremendous experience as over the days we had grown very fond of the instructors as they were friendly and very patient with us. It was nice to get to see what they were like outside of Kung Fu and good to see that they were able to relax outside of the temple. By the end of the night, it was sad to say goodbye to them as we didn't think we were going to see them again. However, the next morning one of the masters came to see us off from the hotel.

The next stop was Tai Shan. I found Tai Shan to be even more polluted than Foshan. However, in Tai Shan there was a lake which made the scenery a lot better than Buildings and cars. Tai Shan was one of our bases for visiting some of the ancestral villages around the area. One of the villages we visited in the area was of my Mum's Grandfather's. I had no idea that we were headed there, but as we were in the area, Janet decided we would pay a visit. When we arrived, we had no clue as to where my granddad's house was, but after some detective work, Janet was able to track it down some of the locals who had known my granddad and showed them which house my granddad was lived and brought up in. Unfortunately, someone was still occupying the premises and I was unable to have a look inside the house. I attempted to have a conversation with these locals, but as my Chinese is limited, I was unable to communicate as well as I had liked. I'm sure they even called me a "white boy" at some stage, which is a first! It was easy to tell why my granddad wished to move away and start again in New Zealand. Although it was not as bad as some of the other villages, it's not the conditions we are used to growing up and living in New Zealand.

Later that evening we went out to one of the local night clubs. This club was named Freedom City. This club was amazing as I have never been to a club with such a vibrant atmosphere, it was fantastic. I normally hate dancing but after some liquid courage, I tried out the bouncing dance floor that everyone was raving about. This quite an experience and I was thinking to myself while bouncing, "you would never see this back at home!"

The next day we were off to our next destination of Xin Tang, probably the worse and dirtiest city we visited during our stay. We even saw a young lad, doing number two's on the side of the street which is disgusting to say the least. I would've preferred not to stay here as most of the people living here were dodgy industrial workers but as it was one of our bases to visit the ancestral villages because it was close, it was on the itinerary.

On the way to Xin Ting, we visited Dr Sun Yat Sen's memorial park. He was the father of China who overthrew the last dynasty. Was nice to see how China has developed with the help of this man and really has changed a nation.

After getting lost a few times, we finally arrived via a University Lion Dance competition. This was amazing as the Lion Dancers were doing their performance 1 – 2m from the ground, jumping side to side with no fear of falling. Certainly some of the best lion dancing I have ever seen in my life. Nothing in New Zealand even compares to the quality of the performances.

On one of the days while we were staying in Xin Ting, we travelled by bus to the special economic zone of Shen Zhen, where we had to show our passports to get in. Once in we went to Magnificent China. We were treated to two spectacular dancing shows. I had never been to a show like this in my life and enjoyed them. However I liked the 2nd show the most as there was more action.

A few days later, after visiting more villages where we played basketball with the local school children and their teachers we travelled to Guangzhou. I then went to my own village with my personal translator in Eva Kwok, where we went to lunch with my family and then went to the local village town centre and played pool with my distant cousins. Was nice meeting them but would have been better if I was able to speak Cantonese more fluently as I found it hard to communicate at times. They also showed me, my house and it was very nice as my grandparents had refurnished it about 12 years ago. We went out for dinner and dropped Eva and I back off at the hotel.

In Guangzhou we also played Basketball and Soccer with a local high school. They were WAAAAAY to serious and we ended up getting a hiding. However, it was fun until I threw up after all the exercise and breathing in the thin air. The school also put on a performance for us where they did skits from various plays such as Hamlet. They even paired us up with some of the local students who were learning English. This was awesome but once again, this would have been better if the language barrier wasn't as wide.

With Guangzhou finished, we said our goodbyes to the Guangdong Chinese Overseas office who were with us for the trip thus far. It was sad saying goodbye to them as they had helped us so much during the journey. The next stop was Hangzhou.

Hangzhou was easiest the most beautiful city that we visited and it even felt like we were not in China. The scenery was amazing and the air even tasted clean. Well... Clean for China anyway. One of the highlights of the trip for me was the Westlake Cruise, and cycling around the Westlake causeways on hired bikes. We not only got to take in the scenic views but got to experience the Chinese roads with the Chinese

motorists, who were as crazy and erratic as you would expect coming from a western country. I thoroughly enjoyed my time in Hangzhou and is one of the cities I would most likely visit again if I did return to China.

After Hangzhou, we hit the biggest city of our tour, Shanghai. Shanghai is unbelievably massive. I have never seen such a big sky line in my life and it was not like the Chinese were stopping anytime soon. There were huge construction yards everywhere to put up more buildings. The best part of Shanghai that I enjoyed and through most of the trip was bartering at the markets with the locals. At the start of the trip, we were most likely getting ripped off for these “Top Quality, Real Counterfeits” but by the end of the trip, we had our strategies in the bag and we were getting good deals on these items... we'll we thought so anyway...

In Shanghai, Janet took us to the Tailors market. Everything here was cheap compared to the NZ dollar and I managed to get a suit made up for less than \$200 which is a steal. Was quite an experience getting to choose your own fabric and selecting your design from various “Hugo Boss, Versace and Armani” magazines and they would make you one identical to your specifications but at $\frac{1}{2}$ or sometimes even $\frac{1}{4}$ of the price of the real deal.

As we travelled further north to Beijing, it felt like we were no longer in China as it was considerably colder then when we arrived in Foshan. In Foshan, we were in shorts and

t-shirt, whereas in Beijing, you could not leave the hotel without a jacket. Even the people were of bigger build and they spoke a foreign language to me, Mandarin. In the other cities, they were to understand and speak a little Cantonese, whereas in Beijing, they spoke next to none. However, as the Olympics had just been on, they were able to speak a little bit of broken English which was a bit of a relief.

Beijing is a political city and they had guards standing around at almost every intersection. Was quite a change, as this was not the case at any of the other cities we visited. Just the history and significance of some of the sights we visited such as Tiananmen Square and the Forbidden City.

What I enjoyed about Beijing the most was visiting the Olympic Stadium and Pool. After seeing these magnificent architectural structures on TV, it was truly amazing to see these in real life. At the time, I was amazed at how someone could think to build such a unique design and how do you even build such a design? It was breath taking. This is where we had our best meal also, Peking duck. Was very delicious.

From Beijing, we left for our final destination Hong Kong. This was the part of the trip I was looking forward to the most as I visited some of my family there and did some shopping for real non counterfeit goods. I was astonished at the amount of people everywhere! One day we went shopping in Mon Kok, renowned for its Shoe Shopping and Ladies market. I was literally only 5 metres away from my friends, but had to phone them to see where they were because I could not see them amongst the huge amount of people.

Another day we went to Ocean Park. I had high expectations of this theme park but was disappointed with it compared to other theme parks. It was not because there were massive lines for the rides but rather the rides were not very good. Even the shows were overrated.

On a whole, I had a marvellous time in China and have made many friends and memories that will last with me for eternity. There were many laughs throughout, whether it was on the bus travelling around the villages, at the markets, sightseeing or

at the pubs. I would like to thank the Chinese Association for giving me this opportunity for letting me discover China and make me realise that we have it pretty good here in New Zealand. Also thanks to Janet for making the trip run smoothly, without her I think I would have got run over by a car or something and I'm speaking for myself and the 28 other individuals.