

China Trip Report

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Sunday the 23rd of November has finally arrived the day that I had been looking forward to all year signified the start of the month long China Trip for 2008! The excitement could not be contained as I could not wait to get on the plane and arrive in Hong Kong. The first thing I had to do at the airport was to purchase a new lock, while running to the shop I was greeted with a "Hey, how's it going?" from another participant in a green winter camp t-shirt later this other participant was to be known as Winston Gee. This friendliness he conveyed was also prevalent among the other participants who were eager to get to know each other.

After a long grueling flight to Hong Kong and a scamper to a connecting flight to Guangzhou we were taken to a restaurant for dinner to sample some of the local delicacies these included – chickens blood, fish heads, chicken giblets, salted fish etc for me this was a complete culture shock and my appetite had suddenly disappeared. Fortunately, Janet the tour leader requested some roast pork and fried rice for me to eat (Thanks Janet!!!).

Our next three days in Foshan were spent learning Kung Fu at the reputable and famous Huang Fei Hung Kung Fu academy for budding Kung Fu masters. We were taught a reasonably simple routine which we mastered over the three days and also performed during our closing ceremony in front of a crowded arena of eager locals and other tourists wanting to catch a glimpse of the famous Kiwi contingent that was in town for four nights only. Congratulations Wes you made it on television! We closed off the performance with the girls singing two songs and the guys performing the Haka. Some of the key attributes that we had to show while learning kung fu was – patience, perseverance, technique, discipline and of course some natural talent. I found the kung fu training to be very rewarding and provided me with an insight into the world of martial arts and took out the misconception of breaking wood and ice bricks with their hands and head.

Our nights in Foshan were spent learning mandarin then following the classes we familiarised ourselves with Foshan. On our last night in Foshan we took the kung fu masters out to karaoke and had a few alcoholic beverages with them, outside of the kung fu school the masters other talents laid in their remarkable karaoke skills! A whooping 1,500 yuan bill and a "police are coming" we exited the karaoke bar with not a police officer in sight for a few hours sleep before we were back on the bus to Taishan City (home of freedom city nightclub aka springboard dance floor). The next week and a half of the tour was going to be spent visiting villages.

The visits to the villages provided the whole group with a life changing experience as it provided the participants with a real eye opening experience for us to witness first hand where our heritage comes from and imagine what our ancestors had to endure before they migrated to New Zealand in seek of a better life not only for themselves but for the generations to come. One of the things that caught my attention while visiting the villages was how well the people adapt to the conditions they live in and are obviously thankful for what they have got. Village life appears to be fairly relaxed for the older generation whilst the younger generation was not as prevalent as they elect to move to the city in seek of better job opportunities. I witnessed some of the village people cutting the threads of jeans and washing their clothes by hand. I could

not imagine my grandma performing neither of these activities nor would I want her to be performing this kind of work, yet the reality is that had she not migrated to New Zealand it is highly likely she would still be living in the village. It was very pleasing to note that from the humble beginnings my ancestors started from they have since become successful businessmen and their quality of living has improved immensely.

Our last structured day of the “root seeking” part of the trip was spent at the Guangzhou Technical College. At the college we learnt Chinese calligraphy and painting which proved to be a rather hard skill to master. The afternoon was spent competing in a sports competition with the local students. The centre court saw a fierce once a year rivalry unfold in the game of basketball our pre match warm up consisted of deciding who was going to play and who was going to start whilst the college team was completing lay ups and trying to dunk. Well, the Kiwis were successfully holding their own on the basketball with a notable turning point in the game being Tim trying a fade away jump shot with his elbow connecting to the mouth of the college’s biggest player (a budding Yao Ming) time out was called and he returned in the last quarter. However it was not to be our day to bask in the glory of winning and I’m sure next year’s team will endeavor to win a game of basketball on their soil.

That evening we attended a “party” at the college and each participant was assigned a student for the evening with the purpose being to enhance our Cantonese and to improve their English. A fun night was had by all with a few emails and phone numbers exchanged as we were off to Hangzhou the next morning by air.

Hangzhou is renowned for its beautiful natural scenery, with the most noteworthy location being the West Lake. Not only is Hangzhou renowned for its beauty it is also well known for its remarkable ability to produce some of the worlds best green tea. We visited a green tea house where the tea was still baked by hand and were given a presentation of the benefits of green tea, in the end a few of the participants were sold on the benefits of green tea and I left with the “emperor” green tea which is apparently the best money can buy.

The other days in Hangzhou were spent hiring bikes to ride around the Westlake, this event was pretty fun we made numerous wrong turns only to be told by the security guards to turn around and go back to where we came from. The footpaths were fairly quiet during that time of day so it allowed myself to do a few bunny hops every now and then, lucky the bikes had rear shocks! A few close calls were had namely Kelly Wing crashing into an oncoming cyclist and Greg completely destroying his bike. We took a cruise around the lake and took in the breathtaking scenery and were told the story about the romance that made the area so famous. Some of the other activities included visiting the Lingyin Temple, Dragonwell tea village, General Yue Fei Memorial Hall, Hefang Street and the Song Dynasty.

We departed Hangzhou to Shanghai via the Xitang watertown by bus, Xitang was very picturesque with its free flowing water and the numerous bridges. The residents of the watertown appeared to be very relaxed with many elderly people strolling through the corridors and relaxing by the water in addition to the students who were sketching the bricks and tiles of the building in minute detail. We were allowed some spare time so Tim, Kane and myself hired a rickshaw and got escorted around the town for the initial price of six yuan for the ride. With over two hundred kilograms in the back of the rickshaw the

driver was clearly struggling to cycle the rickshaw and many laughs were had especially when we crashed into a buildings wall! We quadrupled the initial price and the driver was more than happy citing it wasn't hard at all to cycle (yeah right) and it was time to get back on the bus.

After a sleep on the bus I was woken by the constant stopping and starting of the bus, thus it was fairly obvious that we were in Shanghai now as the traffic increased ten fold. We visited the Yu Gardens and I lined up for close to half an hour to sample the most delicious dumplings I have had in my life! Later that afternoon we went to the Shanghai tailors market having never been to a tailors market before I thought the market was pretty amazing however "caveat emptor" you get what you pay for! The other highlight of Shanghai was the Shanghai Acrobatic show. I was pretty impressed with the show as it is renowned to be one of the best performances in China, we enjoyed some gravity defying contortionism, juggling, uni-cycling, chair-stacking and plate spinning acts. I found the hat juggling to be the most amusing.

Our free day was spent sleeping in after a night out at the impressive Club JJ, Tim woke to find that he had magically morphed into a kitten over night due to some legendary artistic work by Liz and Chrissy.

We departed Shanghai by air to Beijing and once off the flight we all felt the sudden drop in temperature. That afternoon we visited the Temple of Heaven numerous photos were taken and some participants amused themselves on the echo wall which utilises the theory of sound waves to transport the words of one participant to another participant at different locations on the wall. After the Temple of Heaven and for the next few days we visited the local markets and had an opportunity to fine tune our bartering skills. After a bartering tutorial from Janet in Shanghai I had a few extra techniques to utilise which worked with great success.

I was pretty excited about seeing the Great Wall of China and it didn't disappoint. Exiting the bus at the bottom of this icon, one of the most extensive manmade constructions the magnitude of the Great Wall could only be truly appreciated by being there and it was not until we climbed it that I truly appreciated its beauty.

The final destination for the China Trip was the much anticipated Hong Kong, our days in Hong Kong were free days thus we could do whatever we wanted to do. The shopping hours were roughly 11am to 11pm which fitted in perfectly for those that wanted to sleep in. The best shopping mall was Harbor City which catered to those shopping at all ends of the spectrum. I went horse racing in Hong Kong at Sha Tin racecourse which was pretty amazing and I couldn't believe the size and the facilities of the grandstands on course.

Overall I thoroughly enjoyed the trip and it provided me with a great opportunity to learn and experience first hand more about my heritage, Chinese culture and to meet relatives who I have only seen in photos before. In addition the trip allowed me to make new friends and get to know my second cousin Nick Chan! (You're lucky you're my cousin).

Thanks NZCA and Janet for the opportunity to go on the trip!