

NZCA Winter Camp China Tour 2008

By Kelly Lowe

On November 23rd, it was finally my first trip to China. I was excited to meet the other 27 members on the trip (my brother, sister, and I made the group 30 in total) and to finally learn and experience my ancestral country and culture.

The first full day in China was in Foshan. It was comforting to be with a large group when walking the streets in Foshan as there was a slight culture shock on how the traffic and pedestrians behaved towards each other. We found the driving attitude in China was completely different compared to back home in New Zealand.

The Kung Fu temple where we trained was a great opportunity to experience a portion of traditional Chinese culture first hand. The Kung Fu lessons were enjoyable and the masters that trained us were very friendly and professional. It was also exciting when we were eventually expected to perform the Kung Fu routine we had almost mastered at the end of those 3 intensive days of training.

In the evenings we had Mandarin classes. Learning the words and pronunciations was interesting and it was fun to learn a new language with everyone. It made me realise that I wish I had learnt to speak Chinese so that I could speak it while in China.

It was interesting to see everyone's village and relatives as it gave us a great insight into the different rural parts of China. It also made us realise how lucky and spoilt we are in regards to living conditions, lifestyles, and choices we have. It was an amazing and unforgettable experience to finally visit our own ancestral villages and to meet our relatives over there (even though we couldn't speak Chinese and they couldn't speak any English). This was the thing I most anticipated before the trip! It made it even more special having my brother and sister there too as it was great to share the occasion with them.

We gave our relatives some Macintosh lollies (from New Zealand), recent photos of our relatives in New Zealand, and a cheque from our YaiYai that he sends them each year. I was excited to meet my YaiYai's sister that I had heard about in New Zealand, but unfortunately her sons told us she passed away the month before. They even spoke to my YaiYai for the first time on my cell phone which made the moment very important. I was also surprised to find a photo of myself of when I was younger up on their living room wall – I'm guessing my YaiYai had sent them that photo years ago.

Throughout the rest of the trip we visited various large shopping malls, markets, temples, tea villages, jeans factories, shows, theme parks, and karaoke bars. This trip also finally made me understand what dry-coldness felt like. It was also unbelievable to see frozen rivers and lakes throughout Beijing.

One sight-seeing place that stood out the most for me was trekking along the Great Wall in Beijing. I will always remember trying to fight against the cold blustery wind whilst climbing up and down the craggy and uneven stairs.

Time flew by fast and every time we would realise how many days we had left on the trip, the sadder we felt. However the only thing I was relieved about was that I was lucky enough to make it through the trip without getting sick (Something I think we all tried to avoid!).

This trip has definitely educated and changed my life, where I have gained 27 more close friendships – one of the best things I gained from this trip. It's amazing to get to know other people really well from all different backgrounds and ages within the space of just one month! Subsequently this has encouraged me to start using Facebook a lot more – something I never really used much before! It's another really easy and fun way to keep in touch and share photos with all my fellow China trippers.

And finally, I would like to thank Janet and the NZCA for organising such a great way to experience the real China and its people. It was such an intrepid and fun journey I will surely never forget! I would definitely recommend it to anyone with a New Zealand / Chinese background who wishes to endeavour on a trip similar to this.

Kelly Lowe