

China Trip 2008

By Angela Kam

No matter how many people you speak to, none of them can make you understand what China is really like until you are there yourself. No one can describe accurately what it feels like to stand there exhausted and jet lagged with 29 strangers; all dressed alike in 'Kermit green' t-shirts. At first you will struggle to make small talk with these strangers, however, eventually they will become your new family and then you will struggle to say goodbye, as they will have accompanied you on the trip of all "Root Seeking" trips: The NZCA China Trip. You will eat, sleep and ride the bus together, all day, every day for 30 days and you will revel in every minute of it. With time you will be able to identify the snorers from the sleep talkers and the stalkers from the jokers, but despite everyone's annoying habits, each one of them will have made the trip worthwhile.

The bus ride to Foshan will be long and arduous. You will lose count of the number of crashes you manage to narrowly escape. You will notice that when Chinese drivers join forces on the road they form a chaotic craziness that somehow works, but only in China. Apart from seeing the cute Kung Fu boys everyday; zipping in between cars, whilst travelling to and from your Kung fu lessons, will definitely be one of the highlights of Foshan. Another will be the arcades where you can partake in some crazily cheap bumper car bonding action. However, without a doubt the visit to your ancestral village is the main reason for you travelling to China, and the experience will not fail to live up to your expectations. Your ancestral house could still be standing or it may be in ruins, or it could be a one story stone cell or a five storey tower. Either way, visiting the place your grandparents grew up in will be one of the most humbling and awe filled moments of your life, and something you will want to urge others to experience too.

Taishan is dirty, dingy and dodgy. However, Freedom City and its bouncing dance floor make up for all of its faults. The test tube shots will be weak, but the music will be good and of course, so will the company. Therefore, you will find that no other night out in China will compare.

Your time spent in Guangzhou will be one of the longest stops of the trip. You will pray that you get allocated a roommate that you get along with, or if you're lucky like me, you just might get your sibling. This way thirty minute showers are OK! You will also be introduced to The Metro. It is a brilliant invention, allowing speedy travel to and from destinations in less time that it takes you to walk to the bus stop. New Zealand's public transport system just does not compare!

The further north you head the further south the temperature will travel. Chilly Hangzhou is beautiful with its serene West Lake and comfy hotel. After all that time spent in the bus, a bike ride around the lake will be exactly what the doctor ordered. Or, if you're like me, you may actually have the pleasure of

teaching the doctor how to ride that bike and when the mission is accomplished, reward yourself with an ice-cream. Back on the bus, the tour guide Bob, will keep you engrossed with magical Hangzhou myths while you travel to one of the most famous tea houses in China. There you will be able to sample some Emperor Grade Green Tea and take advantage of the “If you buy three canisters of tea, you get one free” bargain. You will also enjoy the glitz and glamour of a number of award winning cultural performances and note that no one puts on a show quite like the Chinese.

I don't really like shopping but even I have to admit that Beijing is a shopper's paradise! The markets are huge and the opportunities to hone your bargaining skills are endless. You will take great pleasure in trying to get the shop assistants to lower their prices to ridiculous levels, only to walk away because you weren't actually interested in buying the goods in the first place. However, in China, everyone does get a bargain! Plus, you will finally get to visit historic places such as Tiananmen Square and The Temple of Heaven. Places you can finally say you have seen with your own eyes and not with the aid of a TV screen or photograph.

Climbing The Great Wall will literally take your breath away! The uneven stairs that lie in front of you will never seem to end. The slippery, icy slush makes travelling down the wall a slow and treacherous journey but one well worth the danger. Make sure you take ear muffs.

By now the end is looming, and only one more stop remains. It is a sad time, but attempt to make the most of your stay in Hong Kong. Here, the weather is still warm and sky still blue, perfect for lazing in the park, munching on scrummy peanut butter and condensed milk waffles or octopus balls. Macau is also definitely a must do! Spend at least one full day here as there is much more to see than you think. Also, The Lisboa Grand Casino makes a pretty good Long Island Iced Tea.

Before you know it, a whole month has flown passed and you are on your way back to New Zealand. Only the flight back home is different from that first, initial flight. The person sitting next to you is now no longer a stranger, and this time you don't have to pretend to be sleeping once you've run out of small talk. No, this time you will want to savour the last few remaining hours with your new found family and you may actually discover that you are related to some of them. All in all, the organisers of this trip have done a pretty fine job yet again, and Janet Joe deserves many thanks for leading the way.

For all those who have ever considered going on the China Trip: I say go for it! Make the most of the Year of the Ox and grab the Bull by the Balls!