

NZCA Guangdong Winter Camp and China Tour 2008 Report

By Liz Ting

Having been encouraged to go on this trip by so many people who have been on the tour in previous years I had high expectations and it definitely met them. I am truly thankful for the opportunity the NZCA Guangdong Winter Camp and China Tour gave us, to not only see the sights but to be immersed in a bit of Chinese culture with kung fu, calligraphy and painting classes as well as the visits to our ancestral villages.

After arriving in Guangzhou (on the way to Foshan) we were taken to our first meal in China which was certainly an experience, they served us with beef fat, chicken blood soup, chicken gizzards and periwinkles to name a few interesting dishes. We realised then that the Chinese loved to use EVERY single part of the animal although it made me wonder where the actual pieces of meat were going as we seemed to have all the scrap bits! Although I was unsure at times as to what exactly it was I was eating I gave everything a go. Mealtimes on the tour never went without a few interesting dishes turning up, however I was really impressed with the fact that I did not get food poisoning at all!



One of the interesting dishes on tour!

Our first stop was Foshan where we were welcomed with surprising gusto! We felt like mini-celebrities as the hotel put up a poster to welcome us and the deputy mayor (or someone of equal significance) came along to an opening ceremony for us. We even made it onto the local 6pm news on TV!

We practiced kung fu at the Foshan temple with real kung fu masters who tried their best to get 30 unfit, uncoordinated students to perform a kung fu routine in two days. We managed to get there in the end although it was quite disheartening for awhile when we would start in straight lines and end up in a weird messed up group with people somehow overtaking each other. In order to repay them for their efforts we took the Masters out for a night of karaoke which was enjoyed by all!



With our kung fu master.

The traffic in China was an experience of its own. There is no such thing as a pedestrian crossing, you just have to walk slowly across as the scooters, cars and buses weave around you. We saw someone try and do a 'U-turn' on a five lane, one-way motorway and we had our bus driver reverse down the motorway when he missed a turn off!

We travelled around the Guangdong area on a very nice tour bus in order to see everyone's villages. It was interesting to see the variations between people's villages as we saw most of them together. In Gualing (my maternal village) I got to see the house my great-great-grandfather was born in which was in pretty good condition except the stairs which felt as if they were going to collapse as I climbed them! They have built new buildings in front of the old village so the village now looks quite modern. The lady who showed me around was a distant relative who had pictures of my relatives in New Zealand who had previously come to visit so I knew it was my village for sure.



At my maternal village in the lane my great great grandfather once lived.

I also visited my paternal village, Sun Gai. It was not as nice as the other village and I was actually a little bit scared as men looked as if they were gambling in the courtyard and dogs were barking and running loose there. It made me so thankful that my ancestors left to give me a better life. Before this trip I was sceptical as to whether you can even find your ancestral village since my family has been out of China for a very long time so it was a special moment to go to my villages and I am grateful for all the effort Janet and her team over in Guangdong put in for us to see them. Apart from my own villages, the highlight was getting to ride a motorcycle out to see another village which the bus could not reach.



Outside my ancestral home in my paternal village with a distant relative.

During the week or so that we visited villages we did other activities as well to break it up, such as visiting Zhongshan which won 'Cleanest City' award in China and had a beautiful park commemorating Dr. Sun Yat-Sen, who is considered 'The Father of China'.

We visited Shenzhen and went to the 'Magnificent China & Minority Village Cultural Park' where we saw a stage show with a huge waterfall, fireworks, live animals and holographic lighting. It was spectacular!

One of the highlights of my trip was the lion dancing at the University games. Each university had a lion dancing team and I have never seen the lion dance performed so incredibly when the lion jumps from pole to pole!



Lion dancing at the university games.

I also enjoyed visiting Guangzhou Technical College where we had calligraphy and painting classes. We played basketball against the students of the college and were given a buddy so they could practise their English, however due to my non-existent Chinese and her limited English there was a lot of nodding and smiling but not much understanding going on!

Hangzhou was the most beautiful city that I saw in China, biking around the West Lake was stunning and a lot of fun. During our stay in Hangzhou we also visited the Dragonwell tea village and saw a show in a theme park based on the Song Dynasty.

On our way to Shanghai from Hangzhou we stopped at a village called Xitang which is a water town and dubbed 'The Venice of China' it was one of my favourite places on the tour as it was unique in that it had so many waterways flowing throughout the village and it felt very authentic. It was a bit concerning when we were served black meat at lunchtime, since we had seen it hanging by the river covered in flies earlier!



Xitang black meat.

In Shanghai we shopped! It was fun bartering at the markets and other people enjoyed getting items tailor made at the tailor's market. My highlights in Shanghai were the Yu Gardens as the buildings surrounding it are magnificent and the Shanghai History Museum. I thought it was extremely well laid out and very interesting with wax models of people and miniature models of places in old and new Shanghai. I also got a massage in Shanghai which left me sorer than when I went in!



Outside the Yu Gardens.



A lady making tofu at the Shanghai History Museum.

Beijing was the main sightseeing city, we saw the Temple of Heaven, Tiananmen Square, Forbidden City, Summer Palace, Olympic Village, Ming Tombs, Sacred Way and of course the Great Wall. All of which were impressive and much larger than I had imagined. The Great Wall was the most awe-inspiring, the stairs were so steep and dangerous I could not even imagine how difficult it would have been to build it and then walk up and down them when guarding it in bad weather conditions.



The Great Wall!!!

Arriving in Hong Kong meant to our relief, the end of squat toilets! I did a few touristy things such as visiting Macau Island and Ocean Park but mostly spent the time shopping in Causeway Bay. One of the best parts for me was getting to see the Vivienne Westwood exhibition which just happened to be in Hong Kong at the time.



The Mine Train at Ocean Park.



The Vivienne Westwood exhibition.

It was sad to come to the end of the tour and say goodbye to people I had become such good friends with on the trip. It was my first visit to China and Hong Kong and an experience I will treasure. I look forward to returning someday as I have only scratched the surface of what is to be seen there!