

## Guangdong Winter Camp 2008

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Foshan was the first destination of our trip. After being on an eleven and a half hour plane flight from New Zealand to Hong Kong and then a further forty five minutes to Guangzhou, everyone was exhausted once we had arrived. The excitement and energy was soon to be restored after a good night's sleep. The highlight of this particular city would have had to be Kung Fu. Foshan's extensive history on the origins of Kung Fu, more specifically, Wang Fei Hung, made this particular activity a learning experience. First of all, we were able to watch a number of traditional Kung Fu performances which are part of the school's practice. Split into two separate groups and taken under the wing of two Kung Fu masters, they began teaching us a single routine over a period of two days. We were told that each step of the routine had its own significance which encouraged us to perform at our best. To learn a single Kung Fu routine that everyone was unfamiliar with within two days proved that each individual showed perseverance and skill. We were then rewarded with the privilege to perform our routine in front of our masters and visitors passing through. With this city being our first, everyone was able to grasp an insight to how different the life style is in China in comparison to New Zealand.

The second stop of the trip was a two hour bus ride south to Taishan. Compared to Foshan, Taishan seemed much more suburban and quiet. Taishan was the city in which the village visiting began. We saw about 4 - 5 people's villages in this city and it is fair to say that it was enlightening and overwhelming as it makes you appreciate the smaller things in life. In saying this, it is obvious that this winter camp is intended to bring about an emotional impact through the experience of seeing the life-style in which your ancestor's grew up in. After a few days of scheduled events, everyone decided to have a night out. Around the corner from our hotel was Freedom City, a club with karaoke and a dance floor. It was great being able to see everyone in a more relaxed manner in the sense where we all got to socialise in one big group. For some of us, it took over 10 minutes to make a single order at the bar. Trying to communicate with the locals proved to be quite a challenge. One of the most exciting things at Freedom City was the bouncing dance floor, where you could jump up and down and the floor plates would move with you as though they were on springs. The night ended on a good note with good chats and laughs over a few drinks, singing and dancing. It was a great feeling knowing that even at such an early stage of the trip, everyone looked out for one another as we were on unfamiliar grounds.

After a short stay in Taishan, the next stop by bus was Xintang. Similar to Foshan, Xintang was extremely noisy and busy. We were told that heavy thoroughfare was common as it is between two other major cities. We were also warned that this city was very dangerous and the point of travelling in larger numbers was emphasised. Apart from visiting more villages, we were taken by bus to Shenzheng. We arrived at a memorial park and got stand at the peak of Shenzheng and see the entire city with Hong Kong city right beside. It was somewhat picturesque (minus the smog) being able to see all the high-rise buildings spread across two big cities. On that same day, we were taken to a minority park. Here we spent the afternoon wandering around and learning about some of

Shenzheng's history accompanied by a couple of shows. These shows embodied some of China's most traditional myths and extravagant clothing, this was rather exciting.

Although the season is Winter in China, the majority of us had been dressing as though it was Summer. There had been a few stares as we roamed the streets in shorts, tee shirts and sunnies. Guangzhou was the next destination. A few of us could definitely feel the slight change in temperature. Another characteristic many picked up on when arriving in Guangzhou was a more controlled manner in which the locals acted, this city appeared much cleaner and civilised in contrast to the previous cities. In Guangzhou, we got to spend an entire day at a local university not far from our hotel. Here we got to learn how to write our Chinese names along with other characters and how to paint in calligraphy. Calligraphy contributes a great part to China's rich culture. This proved to be a challenge where calligraphy writing and painting looked much harder than it seemed. Secondly, we were able to interact with students of the university in a game of basketball and soccer. This had many good points, it meant that we, as a group got to work together in a team environment and also to share this with the other students. Although both teams lost each sport, everyone who participated showed great enthusiasm. The night finished with an English party that the students threw for not only us but the university also. As we all entered, we were each paired up with a student from the university and encouraged to make conversations and interact, this was a highlight. On some levels, it was quite hard to communicate with the students but overall, it wasn't too bad. It was comforting to know that everyone at the school was so welcoming and friendly. The purpose of this event was to give students the opportunity to perform plays in English, a subject taken by many at the university. It was evident that each performer tried their hardest in speaking English which is generally difficult to pick up as a second language. Our girls sung a Maori waiata and the boys performed the Haka, a treat that the university students really enjoyed. After all the performances, numbers and emails were exchanged between each pair and many photos were taken. Spending a day at this university really changed the perspective of many things, good and bad.

So far, the past few days on this trip have been a mind-blowing experience, there were many reasons as to why. It is fair to say that the upcoming weeks will have plenty more in store for us all. When we arrived in Hangzhou, we were greeted by our friendly tour guide, Bob. Bob was enthusiastic and loved to put his English to good use. Famous for its Westlake, this city was one of the most beautiful cities we visited. In comparison to Foshan and some of the other cities, Hangzhou was rather peaceful and we all got to experience the picturesque landscape. The bike ride around Westlake was a definite highlight. Seeing all the bicycles in China made the experience all the more authentic. After the fun but long bike ride, we were rewarded by a river cruise across the lake. Visiting the Song Dynasty at night time was an exciting part of this city. Here, we had free time to wander and have a little play around and also watch a performance – an old story that is part of Hangzhou's culture about the love between a man and a woman and the Westlake.

The future destinations on the agenda were the most anticipated. Shanghai, a more familiar city to all was something different in contrast to previous cities. With its high-rise

architecture and more westernised culture, people adapted a lot quicker. One thing that excited many in this city was the flash hotel! The best parts in Shanghai were going to the Historical Wax Museum in the TV Tower followed by the Huangpo River night cruise seeing as we got to see the famous The Bund lit up at night. Once we hit the cold temperature we had been preparing for, everyone knew we had arrived in Beijing. Here, we all learnt the richest part of China's history. The first day in the capital, we visited Tiananmen Square and The Forbidden City. The stories and histories behind these two places were noteworthy, enhanced by the remarkably detailed architecture. We were then able to see Beijing's oldest village, Hutong, on a two person rickshaw ride. The next day consisted of The Summer Palace, tea tasting, markets and the Peking Duck dinner which was enjoyed by most. With all the non-stop travelling and lack of sleep, the majority wanted to just sleep, especially knowing that the Great Wall was next on the agenda. The Great Wall was the most enduring adventure, agreed by all! Although climbing (literally) the Great Wall was both physically and mentally tiring, many came to appreciate the meaning behind the man-made structure. A small group of us bumped into some local Maoris from Wellington at the bottom of the Great Wall. Pretty awesome thanks to The All Blacks and Canterbury logos worn by Aaron and Nick! Visiting the Olympic Village was awesome too. After many photos in the freezing cold, we were rewarded with a Western Buffet – not bad. The last stop of the trip, Hong Kong. At this point, the trip seemed a bit bitter-sweet. In other words, the trip was coming to an end but also free time and sleep-ins. During the four days, it felt a lot of people didn't see much of one another as people did their own things. It wasn't till night time, where people caught up over a few drinks. The nightlife in Hong Kong is a lot different to China and not to mention, New Zealand!

As the trip finally came to the end, it was easy to tell everyone was exhausted. The quiet flight home proved it. With the goodbyes and hugs at the end, a lot of people exchanged numbers.

So it is fair to say that during this month-long trip many have formed some potential lifelong friendships.