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CHINA REPORT

China is one big country, with a diverse range of lifestyle, culture, product price and people. Our one month travelling in China gave us (24 kiwis) a small glimpse of the vastness of China. Even then, we didn't comprehend the enormity of it. In our short month of travelling in China, we experienced the culture, the food, the haggling and of course the sites. As true 'Asian Tourists' we embraced our cameras, snapping away at anything of interest, reaching a group total of over 15000 photos.

The journey began when we waved goodbye to our families at the airport and said 'hello' to the fellow 23 China trip companions. Our big adventure started on the plane, where we had 10 hours of solid movie watching and conversing with each other. When we thought our travels for the day was over, another two hour bus ride to Shenzhen was yet to come. Even before the site seeing, panda eyes were starting to emerge.

Our first destination was Shenzhen where we stayed for two nights. We began the first of our many tourist attractions in China, 'Magnificent China' and also the 'Minority Culture Park'. 'Magnificent China' had scaled miniature models of China's buildings arranged to resemble its real location. It gave us a visual of China's vast culture and an introduction to the geographical layout of China. The 'Minority Culture Park' gave us an insight to the 55 different minority groups in China, all with their own language and culture. Again this was a great introduction. To end a splendid day, we watched a captivating show with beautiful men and women dancing and singing songs of their minority group.

On the 4th day of our trip we finally reach the city Guangzhou. We stayed at the 'Guang Dong Overseas Chinese Vocational School' where we learnt the art of Kungfu, Chinese calligraphy and Chinese language. The first three days were action packed with early kungfu classes and the afternoon filled with Chinese calligraphy and language classes. It was exciting and new to everyone. Despite having to get up early for kungfu, we enjoyed having the exercise and being active. Heck, we even finished all the delicious dishes served at lunch within 10 minutes! However, three mornings of kungfu was not enough as I enjoyed this part the most during our stay in Guangzhou.

When it was my time to visit my village, my cousin, Amy, and I spent a night there, with the family. Coming back to the village isn't a novel thing as I had returned to the village many times before and remember the likes of the village from our earlier family trips to China.

After New Zealand, I could almost consider it my second home.

The following few days were spent in Taishan, where we visited villages that contrasted to Guangzhou province villages. Taishan is a wealthy city due to the people who went to 'gum san'. Surrounding the city were small, quiet villages that had beautiful landscapes. Fresh produce were grown in all directions; spreading out towards the horizon and on the rolling hills. If you tuned your ears to the right direction, animals, birds and insects could be heard from afar. Housing stayed pure to their original design. The air smelt fresh and clean (with the odd waft of manure) and the sky was a rich blue. It was a sight that you would not expect to see in China. The initial belief that China is a dirty smelly place was made a myth when travelling to places like Taishan. It makes you realize the immense beauty China has to offer and also reminds you of the vast diversity that is located within Chinese borders.

The next destination was another wealthy city. Hangzhou is described to be the Queenstown of China. We can understand why as we cruise across the misty Westlake where the tale of its existence is as beautiful as itself. As well as experiencing the lake on water, we experienced it on bike dodging pedestrians, buses, cars and trucks. We raced and we played, the perfect way to release the energy we conserved on the bus rides. On one of our three

nights we watched a captivating show called the 'Song Dynasty Show'. It was an incredible show. All our eyes were glued onto every aspect of the show; the lighting, the costumes, the waterfalls, the beautiful colours, the visual and audio effects and so on. We sat there mesmerized by the show as platforms rose from underground, and dancers floated across the stage. Its nothing we had ever seen or experienced before. One word: magnificent.

Shanghai was the next main attraction. The four night day of shanghai sent us to the Bund, Old Shanghai Bazaar and the Huangpo River night cruise. It gave us the insight of Shanghai at its simplest. Famous for its fashion, Shanghai was also the place most of us spent most of our cash. We went to a tailored made market where at least three levels were stores that tailor made dresses, dress suits, 'troong sarm', coats, leather jackets, essentially anything you wanted to be made fitted. After everyone returned from their free day, everyone looked smart in their new attire. However, we felt rushed in our few hours of shopping at those markets, as most of our time was spent trying to bargain down a price.

After 12 days of travel, we finally reach the Capital. This was what everyone was waiting for. Settling down for six nights sounded luxurious and everyone was excited to see the sights. We were warned that it would be cold, but luckily, we were not there during the severe snow falls. During these freezing temperatures, we endured the mighty 'Great Wall of China'. We climbed up the watch towers at each stop admiring the scenery and also to take a small break. It was hard work for us to walk up the wall. I could not imagine what it would have been like for the warriors defending the country during the Qin dynasty.

We were fortunate enough to see the newly renovated 'Forbidden City'. It is renovated to resemble the original design. The intricate red and gold designs made it so glamorous it felt like we were stepping into the original building. Yet the antiques in the museum gave us a small glimpse of the private life of the royalties. I was fascinated by the historical relics. Although they were dull and lifeless, I could imagine, during the Ming and Qing Dynasties, it would have been captivating to the eye. I tried to imagine what living as a lower status Concubine would have been like. I pitied those lonely women living in such melancholic lives; an ironic trade off for living in such a glamorous place.

After seven days and six nights in Beijing, we ventured back south, to the port that was once under British control: Hong Kong. The three days spent in Hong Kong was free time so we ventured around by ourselves shopping, site seeing and trying some of the local foods. The first site we saw was the Buddha statue, where we had to take a cable car up to the top of the mountain. The view was as stunning as anticipated. The hike up to the top was also as tiring as anticipated. However, we saved all our energy for our final group outing. As a sea of aqua blue uniform, we ventured the scariest rollercoaster and got saturated during the log fume. The 'Drop' literally took your breath away as you dropped from an incredible height. In contrast to our action packed morning, we also saw the pandas. They look so peaceful chewing at bamboo. It makes me feel sad to think that such a beautiful animal is endangered because of poacher. It is unfortunate that it is of the panda's benevolence to keep them locked up, away from their natural wildlife.

From the one month in China, I've come to a conclusion that China is very different from New Zealand. Many of the country's relics and endangered wildlife are under preservation. China is a country housing over 10 billion people and over 50 different minority cultures. China is a country with a wide range of diversity of people; from rich to poor, young and old, peasants and millionaires. However, China is still our motherland. No matter how different or how far away it is, it is still our motherland. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Janet for organizing and taking us on this trip. I would also like to thank those who were involved with organizing this trip. It was an amazing trip. Thank you for helping us seek

our heritage. Thank you for being patient with us and being understanding at best of times. We learnt a lot more about Chinese culture and also made new friendships that blossomed and will continue to strengthen. Thank you for an unforgettable one month away in China.