

Winter Camp Report 2009

Introduction and Thanks

The trip to China this year has been one of the best of experiences of my short life and it's safe to say that I'm very glad that I was able to participate in it. So firstly thank you very much to the New Zealand Chinese Association, particularly Virginia Chong and Janet Joe, for organizing the tour and helping to get it on track every year. It really is a great service to the young people of the New Zealand Chinese Community. I would also like to thank the Guangdong Chinese Overseas Affairs Office for the time taken to plan our stay in the Guangdong region and organize the ancestral village visits, the accommodation and other activities that we got to take part in.

The Cities/Regions

Guangdong Region

My main memory of this region, and potentially the highlight of my trip, was staying at the school in Guangzhou. The food here was excellent and the pupils and staff at the school were welcoming and very helpful. Our rooms were also better than I expected, although sleeping on a plank of wood, a.k.a a bed, was a bit of a change from what we were used to! We got to take part in a couple of different classes including Kung Fu, Mandarin language and Chinese calligraphy. Of the three I'd have to say Kung Fu was the most exciting and enjoyable although it was rather hot practicing it in long pants. The form was a perfect length and a difficulty that made it both challenging and enjoyable. I would like to extend a special thanks to Masters Zhang and Huang for putting up with us and allowing us to learn Kung Fu at their school. Mandarin classes were both hilarious and very difficult due to the different tones that the language uses and the rapid fire lessons we got from our teacher. I think all the campers were given a lesson in humility (except for those diligent enough to be able to speak mandarin already) when it came to answering the questions that our teacher had for us. Chinese calligraphy was also a very interesting class with some being much more adept at it than others; I think I personally fall in the less adept category.

This year also happened to be the 30th Anniversary of the school and so we were privileged to see a number of performances put on by the school pupils and the Kung Fu school students which were all very cool to watch. We also got the 'opportunity' to perform the Haka

in front of a fairly large crowd (estimates ranged from around 1000 to 1500 people) which was quite exhilarating.

Visiting the Ancestral Villages was definitely an eye-opener for me considering most of the villagers lived in very basic conditions but were all quite friendly and seemed to enjoy having us around. I was quite excited to see the villages of my grandparents and meet some relatives who I have never met before. At my grandfathers' village I was surprised to feel quite overwhelmed by the hospitality shown to me by my relatives and the excitement they showed when they got to see us. It was also cool to see the other campers' villages and to observe and interact with the locals. One memory that will always stick in my mind was from one of the villages where hordes of school children that crowded around us when we were passing a rugby ball by the bus, they all wanted a piece of the action and it was quite a laugh throwing it as high in the air as we could and wait to see who caught it.

As well as seeing Ancestral villages and staying at the school we got to go on a river boat tour and see the Magnificent China and Minority Culture Park. It was definitely a good idea to lay out a lot of China's main tourist attractions in miniature form, turning what could've been a very long trip into a walk that lasted a few hours. The shows at the park were also well presented although at times it can be difficult to understand exactly what these are about. The river tour was also pretty fun and you can't complain about the 10 Yuan beers. Our free day in Guangzhou was spent frantically running to as many destinations as we could fit in so a piece of advice, in order to see everything you want to see is write your report for the school early, plan where you want to go early, wake up earlier in the morning and pick a small group of people to travel with.

Hangzhou

Hangzhou was a very beautiful city and I can honestly say I did not expect to find something like that in China. The hotel was very comfortable, the food was excellent and they even had a pool, although we decided against swimming in it at that time of year. All the activities in this city were really enjoyable, especially the bike riding around Westlake. There's something quite fun about riding 15km around a beautiful lake, dodging people and cars and avoiding police officers when you're carrying someone on the back of your bike. The only gripe I have about the city was the 3 hour free time we got to 'explore' the actual city itself. In terms of shopping there are better places and the actual central city area itself isn't the attraction of the Hangzhou area. The Dragonwell Tea Village was definitely a cool place to go and although the sales lady memorised everything to say, it was still a pretty cool experience. The Song Dynasty show was also very enjoyable to watch.

Shanghai and Xitang Watertown

On a drive between Shanghai and Hangzhou we stopped in at the Xitang Watertown which was an interesting stop. The lunch that we had here was very nice and included a fairly small fish that was deep fried whole and could be devoured in a bite. The few hours that we spent in this town did seem enough to see the whole area and the numerous little museums it had on offer.

Shanghai was an awesome city to visit with heaps going on. We got to see all the important sites around the city and on our free day had a good venture around places such as the biggest book store in China. In hindsight I wish I had travelled on the Maglev train and paid to go up the tallest building in Shanghai although a day isn't really long enough to see everything. The acrobatic show was definitely a highlight in this city as the performers were amazing and did some really crazy things. The Tailor's Market was also a highlight of the trip with each 3 piece suit plus extra pants costing around \$150NZ each. Our time at the market was a bit rushed but if you're ever in need of a suit or coat, this place is definitely the place to wait for!

Beijing

The home of static electricity. Just as a warning, beware of touching metal surfaces with exposed skin and thin gloves as this often results in a sometimes nasty electric shock. All the sites in Beijing were very cool and I have to say this was probably my favourite city on the tour. We went to places such as the Silk Market, Tiananmen Square, Great Wall and other famous attractions which were all amazing and memorable. Going to the 'crazy snack street' on our free day was an interesting culinary experience where we sampled deep fried scorpions, beetle pupae, seahorses, starfish and other weird things. We also had dinner at Hooters on our free night which in hindsight was probably not the greatest ideas for food options on the trip. The Peking Duck dinner in Beijing was easily the best meal we had though with ample amounts of duck and offers for more even though we were all extremely stuffed.

Hong Kong

Finally our free days in Hong Kong were pretty action packed with visits to Ocean Park, the Big Buddha on the hill and shopping around the streets of Hong Kong. Besides breakfast we had to get our own meals here and I have to say that the highlight had to be the sushi train in a mall whose name I can't remember (helpful I know). Although Hong Kong is a pretty exciting

place and quite renowned for its shopping, I would recommend trying to buy most things in China rather than there because the shop keepers are more amiable to hard bargaining and after a month of that it's just not the same when a shopkeeper doesn't have a lengthy conversation with you about how you're 'killing them' with your suggested prices.

Final Thoughts

Basically this trip is a must do for all young New Zealand Chinese as it is a real eye opening experience and helps you to get to know your fellow peers. The quality of the food and hotels is pretty awesome (although it can be a little dodgy around Guangdong) and the company is excellent (well it was this year in any case). Again thank you very much to the organizers of this trip both in New Zealand and in China, a special thanks to Janet for putting up with our antics for a month and thanks to all the guys from the 2009 trip that made it pretty Ka Pai.

-Daniel Lim