

China Winter Camp 2009

by Kurt Lim

Before the trip I will admit I was slightly sceptical about going on the china winter camp trip, I felt I would be missing a lot here in New Zealand over the month. And I did, it seemed, but it was close to nothing compared with the trip overseas to china that followed.

Guangdong Region - Southern China

The first major thing we did in the south was visit Magnificent China and Minority Culture Park where at night we watched a mind-blowing show. This park was very large and had lots of interesting miniature versions of many of China's culturally important places. This gave me an indication as to what lay ahead of me in my trip and it was very exciting.

GD Overseas Chinese Vocational School

Arriving in Guangzhou we headed to the Guangdong Overseas Chinese Vocational School. I will state now that this was probably my favourite part of the trip. To me it was really great to become a part of the campus life that the students of China would be experiencing on an everyday basis. While slightly sceptical at the facilities at first (having the showers being the same cubicle as the toilet) I quickly became accustomed to the living conditions and campus life to the point where I wished we could've stayed longer. The food at the school was top notch, every breakfast, lunch, and dinner was well prepared and gave us a taste of some more traditional Chinese food. These breakfasts, lunches and dinners were vital as the activities we were constantly partaking in throughout the days in china was very exhausting.

Every morning we would have to wake up for kung fu lessons where we were shown the sacred kung fu training area and were taught kung fu by one of the masters there. It was definitely more strenuous than I was expecting but it challenged me in a good way. Then after lunch we would do Mandarin classes which I found quite difficult but it was good to learn a few phrases here and there to use throughout the rest of my stay in China. We had one calligraphy class which I thoroughly enjoyed but I would've liked to have more as I felt I was only just getting into it. We also interacted with the students somewhat in activities such as playing soccer and basketball versus them and doing handcrafts which I found very fun and would've liked to have had more of a chance at. I would recommend for people to bring creams to help with sore muscles (I definitely could've used some, especially being on the 5th floor without elevators!)

My Ancestral Heritage

For the next couple of weeks it came we did a lot of bus driving around the place to visit everybody's ancestral villages. Visiting my own villages was a very personal and spiritual

experience. On the trip I had with me my brother and also a few cousins from both my mum's and dad's sides to share the experience with which was really good. Seeing the places my grandparents grew up was very personal and allowed me to further relate and identify myself with my roots. At each village there would be someone who was either related to directly or distantly to greet us and show us our ancestral homes. In my grandma's village on my mum's side, the house was no longer there but rather a house had been built in its place as it had been smashed down, but while I could not see the ancestral house even just experiencing the areas where my grandparents grew up was awesome.

Northern China

Hangzhou

Heading up into northern China was very exciting, upon arriving in Hangzhou I could already clearly see great differences between the north and the south. The areas of Hangzhou we went to were the most beautiful out of the whole China winter camp trip, to the point that it almost seemed like everywhere you looked was a picturesque photo opportunity. Here we did various activities such as a boat cruise, visited the Dragonwell Tea Village, General Yue Fei's Memorial Hall and watch the Song Dynasty Show. However my favourite activity was probably a bicycle ride around Westlake as it gave us a chance to truly see the beauty of the city. I would've liked to have seen more of the surrounding scenery in Hangzhou but we were cut short for time. On the way to Shanghai we went via Xitang water town which was a site to behold.

Shanghai

Shanghai was the first built up city we had seen so far on the trip so it was quite exciting. Luckily for us most of the time we were in Shanghai we spent in various places around the inner city. There was lots of shopping to be done in Shanghai city at places such as Nanjing Pedestrian St, though I didn't spend an awful lot of money myself. We visited the Yu Gardens and the Old Shanghai Bazaar which was interesting as it provided a bit of cultural significance to the old Shanghai. The Huangpo river night cruise was also a sight to behold, to be able to see the city from the river where the buildings are all lit up brightly with neon lights and massive screens.

Beijing

This was the part of the camp where the winter really meant colder. Most of the time the only visible part of my face was my eyes, and I would've covered them with glasses too if they didn't fog up. Take layers and layers and layers of thermals and jumpers/jackets is my recommendation. In Beijing we visited many historical sites which we had only seen as miniature versions earlier at Splendid China in the south but the to see them in reality was all together different. We visited the Temple of Heaven, Tiananmen Square, the Forbidden City, the Summer Palace, the Ming Tombs, the Sacred Way and the Great Wall of China. All

of which were amazing, but without the tour guide would not nearly have been as good. It was good having a constant stream on information about the significances of each structure and its history as you really start to understand the Chinese culture from pre-modern times. For those of you who go on this trip in the future, prepare yourselves for the Great Wall. It truly is great and the hike up it is even greater but the view from the top and the sense of achievement is well worth it.

Final Moments

And with that it seemed our epic journey through China was coming to an end but not with one last stop in Hong Kong. We had free time the whole time we were in Hong Kong which made for a lot of sightseeing, shopping and antics. On arrival back in New Zealand it was a strange realisation seeing everyone off at the airport that I would not be able to wake up tomorrow and go down the hall and see what the winter camp friends were up to. But spending a month with all those people made me realise that I'd made some lifelong friends without knowing it which I plan to keep in touch with as they shared with me the experience of a life time which I will never be able to forget.

