

NZCA CHINA WINTER CAMP REPORT 2009

By Louise Lim



To me the NZCA Winter camp is a 'trip of a lifetime' which I would recommend to everyone. Having the opportunity to travel China with Janet Joe on an organised itinerary, with a group of 20 or so other young New Zealand Chinese students is a trip that should not be passed up if given the opportunity to go. You will definitely...make some amazing friends; eat a lot of buffet breakfasts, 9 course lunch and dinners; strike the Asian pose across more than 70 gigs worth of photos; come back with double the amount of luggage you took over; master the art of bargaining and squatting..(I hope); and gain an increased appreciation for your cultural heritage.

This report entails some of the main highlights and pointers of the China trip which made my experience memorable and sends out special thanks to all the people who made this trip what it was ☺!

The first two weeks...

Shenzhen: The Magnificent China and Minority Culture Park & Show was a tourist attraction that had all the main tourist attractions in China in miniature form. This was really cool to go to as it built up our anticipation of seeing some of these attractions in life-size form later on in the trip- such as The Great Wall, Tiananmen Square and The Forbidden City. Other things I enjoyed at this park were: seeing the medieval horse show, the Chinese acrobat show and going on a flying fox over a lake.

Guangdong Chinese Vocational School: I particularly enjoyed our stay at the school because it was a great experience being able to actually live on campus and interact with the local students. The first three days at the school saw our group participate in intense kung fu lessons every morning with our master. This proved to be quite physical and required a decent level of skills such as good coordination and memory to remember all the moves... although I had none of these, I still managed to have fun and by the last day I was able to string together all the moves we had learned and look like a kung fu pro.

The stay at the school was also full of other cultural activities such as language classes and Chinese calligraphy and painting lessons. The boys particularly liked the language classes as it meant they could try their mandarin pick up lines they had learned on the local students who had taken a shine to them.

As a choice of accommodation, the school was great in every way. Our rooms were very clean and safe. At first we were taken aback by the bathrooms which had two cubicles- one normal toilet, one squat toilet and shower heads above the toilets. By the end of the week though we had learned to use the squat loo as the cubicle we had showers in and the other normal toilet cubicle for the place to do other business. One hint * hold on to your soap tightly at all times when showering because you don't want it to fall down the squat loo and be fishing around for it. Also, the meals were probably some of the best on the trip with full course breakfasts, lunches and dinners served for us everyday. One night we also got to go out for a buffet yum cha dinner which was amazing and definitely recommended if you like stuffing yourself full of delicious dumplings.

The location of the school was handy being a 5-10 minute walk to the main shops where we were able to buy cheap towels and goods in the markets, McDonalds, and get cheap 'stylish' haircuts by the locals (massage, wash, cut and blow dry for \$4 NZ dollars!). The school also had a good sporting area where we played soccer, touch and basketball against the local students who were very friendly and fun. I really enjoyed having the fields available to have a good run around on.

Guangzhou Ancestral villages: Visiting everyone's ancestral villages over the week we spent at the vocational school was definitely a highlight of the trip. Having had the opportunity to visit our ancestral villages twice in the past with our Yeah (Dad's Dad) meant a lot to me, being able to see where he grew up and how different his life in New Zealand now is compared to his childhood in China. Going on this year's winter camp trip allowed my brother and I to be able to visit our villages a third time, but this time by ourselves. It was a great experience to be able to see how the village had developed in the space of two years with new buildings popping up everywhere and to be able to recognise our relations whom we had met in 2003 and 2007. Now that we have travelled back a few times and are a bit older I feel more interested in our cultural heritage and look at it with a whole new perspective. Whilst China is so far away from New Zealand and not a trip one would make too often, I feel privileged that I have had the opportunity to visit and learn about our ancestral villages- establishing further connections with our relatives over there. I see this as important so that our generation can continue to pass on our knowledge and pride of our cultural heritage so that it is not lost.

Although the days we spent travelling on the bus to each person's villages were quite long, I appreciated Janet's efforts in making sure we visited everybody's villages. I enjoyed seeing everyone else's villages as it was very interesting to see that whilst all of them were clearly villages, some had distinctive features that set them apart from the others.

Last two weeks...

I really enjoyed the last two weeks of the trip as it was the more 'touristy' side of the tour where we got to see some of the most amazing cities of China.

Hangzhou: Hangzhou lived up to the tour guide's description of it being the 'most beautiful city in China.' On the drive to the hotel there were so many weddings being photographed around Westlake and the air seemed a lot fresher being a bit further out from the hustle and bustle of Guangzhou.

We only stayed in Hangzhou for 3 nights which seemed to go extremely fast. In these days we went on a Westlake cruise, visited a Dragonwell tea village and General Yue Fei's Memorial Hall. The activity I enjoyed the best in Hangzhou was the bike ride around Westlake and the Causeways. This was a great alternative getting out and exploring the city by foot (bike) rather than by bus. We stopped at numerous places along the lake to take photos and recoup our breath.

Shanghai: Shanghai was also a blast with the major highlight being the Shanghai Tailors market. Whilst many of us managed to get at least a couple of extremely reasonable business suits, Chinese dresses and winter coats made, there was not enough time spent here to get everything you wanted made. Our hotel location was great- being very central and a short walk from Nanjing Road and a shopping complex.

During our stay here we visited a local silk factory, the Yu Gardens, The Bund, Nanjing Pedestrian Street and Xitang Watertown. Xitang Watertown was one of my favourite attractions here...maybe because it was where Tom Cruise was filmed in Mission Impossible and because I'd never actually visited a Watertown before. It had a very romantic kind of setting narrow lanes full of cute trinket shops.

Across the four nights we stayed in Shanghai, we managed to go on a river cruise of the Huangpo River, see an acrobatic show, indulge in some retail therapy and explore the nightlife. I found the history of Shanghai very interesting and enjoyed going to the Shanghai History museum before the river cruise as it meant more when we could see the obvious distinction along the river of the different buildings in relation to Old Shanghai and New Shanghai.

As Shanghai was further North than we had been, we were told that the food was known to be quite a lot more greasier than Southern China. I was quite apprehensive at first as I really enjoyed the food in the South. However, this was not the case as we made a conscious effort not to include too much deep fried food in every meal. The food was quite nice up North and it was really great being able to try some new more traditional Northern dishes. I particularly liked the deep fried pineapple in toffee sauce :O.

Beijing: Beijing was one of my favourite places on the trip for obvious reasons such as The Great Wall and the Forbidden City. The awe surrounding the Great Wall, with its' sheer size and significance in Chinese history made me so excited to have had the chance to actually walk on it. Although I appreciated the good two hours spent climbing the wall, I feel that more time could have been allowed to stay here as was one of the Great Wonders of the World that not everyone is lucky enough to experience in their lifetime.

Other activities which I thoroughly enjoyed included the Hutoung tour, Tiananmen Square, the Olympic village and the Peking duck dinner.

On our free time in Beijing, we made the most of our handy location to the Silk Markets, Pearl markets and Ya Show markets where there were floors of cheap electronics, clothes, bags, shoes, jewellery and DVDs. At first, I found bargaining quite scary but after a few wallets and scarves later I got the hang of it and there was no turning back.

The temperature in Beijing dropped significantly with each day being between -2 to -12 degrees. Woollen inserts for your shoes, thermals, gloves, trackpants, scarves and big jackets were definitely appreciated!

Hong Kong: Nearing the end of our one month away from home, I was quite excited to go back for Christmas and the New Zealand summer, yet like everyone else was feeling quite sad that the trip was going to be over. Having to part with the amazing friends of whom we had spent all day everyday together for four weeks, sharing all the same experiences would be weird- and so the planning of reunions in New Zealand had begun.

The three days spent in Hong Kong was a sufficient amount of time to do most activities we wanted to do and I enjoyed the free time we had everyday. Although shopping was one of the top activities on my list of things I wanted to do in Hong Kong, the tourist attractions were definitely worth it. As a group, we had decided what we wanted to do and on what days. Being organised like this meant that we did not waste the time we had left to fit the main attractions we wanted to do in, as well as a decent amount of time for retail therapy! Unfortunately we ran out of time to go to Macau, which will be first on my list next time I get the chance to go to Hong Kong again.

The attractions we went to as a group included Ocean Park and the gondola ride up to the Big Bhudda, which were very fun. Our hotel was very central and close to the MTR subway station, Ladies markets and some cheap Chinese restaurants.

In summary a Big Thanks....

In making this trip what it was and providing all of us with an experience of a lifetime, I would like to thank a number of people. First, thanks goes to Janet for her tremendous organisation of the trip and being an awesome camp leader- with her extensive knowledge and stories of China, travel savvy tips and wise words.

Second, thanks to Virginia the for organizing all the nuts and bolts behind the scenes; providing us with scrummy food at the pre-trip meeting, organizing the sweaters and t-shirts and keeping us in correspondence with all the paperwork etc required for the trip.

Third, thanks to the Guangdong Overseas office for all the effort that went into the first two weeks of the trip- including Jessie, Sunny and 'Smiles.' I thoroughly enjoyed all of the activities that were planned out for us.

And finally thanks to the New Zealand Chinese Association for making the annual Winter Camp possible and available to us. This trip was definitely one of the most gratifying experiences I have been a part of. I would enthusiastically recommend to all New Zealand Chinese Youth to participate in this trip if given the opportunity to go!

Ooh and thanks to the participants of the camp for all the laughs, loitering and being able to share this experience with you all! Waa Waa Wee Wah...