

Winter Camp 2009 Report

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Ever since my sister went on the China Winter camp in 2004, I had been waiting to go myself. My turn finally came at the end of November last year. During the lead up to the trip, I did not know what to expect in China. I knew that I would be in a completely different place compared to New Zealand but I was reassured knowing that I would not be alone in that regard. Another highlight for me about the trip was the fact that I would be going with my second cousin Stacey Wong. We had both been waiting to be old enough to go and we both wanted to go on the trip together.

The main reason for going on the Winter Camp was to see our ancestral villages and to gain an appreciation of who we are. I had been shown many photos of my ancestral village of Sun Gai in Jungxing and I was excited to be going to see it for myself.

Hong Kong and Shenzhen

When we first arrived in Hong Kong and transferred by bus over to Shenzhen in China, I was able to see just how different living in China was going to be compared to living in New Zealand. Crazy road rules and people walking everywhere was one of the first few things we noticed that was completely different to home.

On our first full day in Shenzhen, we visited the Magnificent China and Minority Culture Park. Visiting the park allowed us to see the major sites around China but scaled down to a much smaller size which made them even more amazing to see. The park had two sides to it. One side containing the mini sites around China and the other side showing the different minority cultures from around China. These different cultures were presented to us as miniature shows and performances, which to us were amazing to see as we had not even known about most of these different cultures until that day.

Guangzhou

My feelings about the trip started to change when we arrived and stayed at the Guangdong Overseas Chinese Vocational School in Guangzhou. At the school we spent three days learning Kung Fu, being taught by a Kung Fu master from the Shaolin temple. Although the lessons were not overly exhausting, the hot temperatures made getting through the training sessions a little tough to handle. Still, it was a highly enjoyable experience and we all had fun learning Kung Fu.

Staying a week at the school allowed me to see just how school kids in China would live and be taught. Being able to interact with the school students during our basketball and football games as well as during our classroom lessons was an enjoyable experience. Not being able to understand each other however did not stop us from trying to communicate even although it was a mission at times. Staying at the school added a lot of excitement of being somewhere new and different and this was one of my favourite parts of the trip. As part of the trip we all knew that we would have to perform in front of the school for part of their 30th Anniversary. During the days leading up to the performance evening we were able to squeeze in practices of what we were going to perform to the school. Performing in front of the school was an enjoyable experience. The girls sang a Maori Waiata and the guys did the New Zealand All Blacks Haka which got a huge cheer from the school kids who must have recognised it. Doing the performance in front of the school as part of their anniversary ended a fun and enjoyable week there.

The main feature of the trip was of course seeing my ancestral village of Sun Gai. Upon arriving there, my cousin Stacey and I were introduced to our third cousin once removed and to a girl called Irene whom I later realised was my fourth cousin. They showed us around Sun Gai and were able to open up the house where my Ancestors had once lived. Seeing the village and in particular my ancestral house brought the pictures I had been shown come alive as I was finally able to see our home for my own eyes. This experience was very special.

Going North and Hangzhou

We found the site seeing and village visiting around Southern China to be slightly more relaxing than the site seeing in Northern China as it was more laid back and we were not always in such a rush to see and do things. We began to see and do things during all parts of the day, after breakfast, after lunch and even after dinner. We began to notice the sudden rushed feeling of site seeing when we flew north to Hangzhou. To me this was the most picturesque city we visited as the main attraction there was the famous West Lake. Taking a boat cruise on the West Lake and the highly anticipated bicycle ride around the lake allowed us to get a better view at the scenery around Hangzhou. It also allowed us to try something that people in China are quite used to, using bicycles which was highly enjoyable.

Xitang

After enjoying our few days in Hangzhou we took our bus further north to Shanghai stopping along the way at Xitang. This place was very different to the other villages we visited in China as some people like to refer to it as a Chinese Venice village. With water ways around and through the village, we were able to take a little boat ride through the alley ways seeing how close people actually live alongside the water. Before continuing on to Shanghai we ate lunch at a very traditional restaurant which made you feel as if you were eating in an olden day Chinese restaurant. The meal we ate here was one of the best meals we ate on the entire trip.

Shanghai

After a long day of travelling on the bus we finally made it to the very modern city of Shanghai. This place offered a lot to see and do. In particular we especially enjoyed the very interactive Shanghai History Museum which happened to be right underneath the very tall Shanghai television tower. A lot of us however were very excited to visit the Tailor's market and get suits and coats tailor made. This was a very exciting experience for us all as we were faced with a tough decision of which tailor's store to go to and what we actually wanted to get tailor made. The choices were almost endless. I decided not to get a suit made like most of the other guys but instead decided upon getting a coat made for me which was definitely

my favourite purchase of the whole trip. Shanghai had a lot of sites to see. Unfortunately in our one free day in Shanghai, we were not able to see them all. Shanghai would certainly be a place that I would like to go back and visit again and to visit the sites and places we did not have time to see.

We noticed a slight drop in the temperature now in northern China. At this point in the trip the temperature was not too cold and that was something we could all handle.

Beijing

However when we arrived in Beijing we all noticed a huge drop in temperature with daily highs being around 1 degree Celsius.

Beijing was where we saw the most tourist sites and attractions. All crammed in the space of six days it was a crash course of history and tourist sites each day. The cold temperature was quite hard to handle but the sites we saw made enduring the cold worth it. On the day we arrived we were taken to the Temple of Heaven where we had a great time trying to run everywhere for good photo opportunities. Our visit to Tiananmen Square and the Forbidden City was also another interesting visit. Seeing the famous buildings and landmarks with many people walking all around us gave the visit to these places such a high energy buzz.

The day when the cold did not affect us so much was the climb up the Great Wall. Going up the steep section of the wall kept us warm. It was worth the walk as we could enjoy the view of the scenery that surrounded us when we reached the top. Climbing up the Great Wall was definitely another favourite part of the trip that I highly enjoyed. Later that day we also visited the Ming Tombs which was another interesting site to visit. We all had a lot of fun trying to climb up the marble statues of the animals that lined the pathway leading towards the tombs.

Other sites around Beijing that we enjoyed seeing were the Summer Palace with its very nice frozen lake and the Olympic Village where we were able to take photos in front of the Bird's Nest Stadium. The overall feeling of being in the Olympic Village seemed peaceful and relaxing. That was because no major event was on and the streets were blocked off from normal road traffic restricting people walking or driving around.

The best meal of the entire trip would have to have been the highly anticipated Peking duck dinner we on our second to last night in Beijing. I did not know that a Peking duck dinner would be an entire meal of just Peking duck dishes. It was by far the best Peking duck I had ever eaten and the meal was so good I just wanted to keep eating more of it.

Free days in Hong Kong

At the end of our China trip came our three free days in Hong Kong. Not having any set itinerary for the three days were able to run around and do whatever we wanted to do. On our first free day the majority of us took the Cable Car up to the Peak to see the Giant Buddha Statue. That was a highly enjoyable day as it allowed us to see and travel around Hong Kong for ourselves and not be led around on a set tour. On our second free day our entire group went to the Ocean Park theme park. We all had a lot of fun going on the rides and seeing the different shows around the park. The time we spent in Hong Kong was the best time for us to truly get to know each other and we had many enjoyable moments during our last part of the trip.

Conclusion

Having been on the China Winter Camp I can now fully understand who I am and where I am truly from. Visiting my ancestral village was the main feature of the trip that allowed me to see where I am from. Having gained from my month's experiences I can now properly say that I am a Kiwi Chinese person and not have anything to doubt myself about that.

Meeting the other Winter Campers on the trip was a great chance to meet other people just like me. We're a group of Kiwi Chinese, searching for our roots in a faraway country that strangely enough is so very foreign to us.

I highly recommend this trip to anyone who wishes to go searching for their faraway Chinese identity. I would like to thank Janet Joe for organising the trip and especially for taking care of us during the month overseas. The month in China passed too quickly and the time I spent with the other Winter Campers made it the best month ever.