

Brittany's NZCA Wintercamp 2012 Feedback

First of all, I would like to thank both Janet and Virginia for organising the trip - Wintercamp has been a phenomenal opportunity to experience Chinese culture and understand more about our ancestors.

In Guangzhou, activities such as Kung-Fu classes, Mandarin classes and visiting our ancestral villages were a great start to the trip as I felt that I was able to truly engross myself in the Chinese way of life. I found the Kung-Fu classes fun, albeit painful and I can now respect the discipline and strength that the students develop and display. The instructor showed great patience and was very encouraging during the classes – and it was much appreciated! I'd recommend for future Wintercampers to practise doing squats to prepare for these classes as they are a pretty intense thigh work-out!! The Mandarin and calligraphy classes were an eye-opener to the discipline and persistence required in order to perfect both arts. I really enjoyed learning about two integral parts of Chinese lifestyle and culture – and realised how much I had to learn about my heritage. It was difficult to pick up both of these in one class each – so potentially having more classes would be beneficial in the future. Another activity that I really enjoyed was meeting some of the local students and doing handicraft and playing bonding games. It was difficult at times to communicate with them in terms that the students could understand, but overall it was enjoyable and really interesting to learn about their lives. Visiting the ancestral villages was an incredible opportunity to see where my Goong Goong and aunty lived years ago. It was humbling to see the conditions in which they lived, in comparison to the life I lead back at home. It made me realise that my Goong Goong took a phenomenal risk in order for us to have more opportunities to live a more successful and prosperous life. It was disappointing that I hadn't researched enough to know that we needed to bring sweets in order to pay respects to our ancestors. To future Wintercampers, a little research into customs when visiting your village never hurts, even just asking parents or grandparents – it could potentially save a lot of disappointment and honestly I was really sad that I couldn't pay my respects like I had hoped to. However, it was great to meet our relatives who were still living in the village and hear the stories they had to tell.

Shanghai was probably my most favourite place in China. I really enjoyed visiting the Zhujiajiao water town and the boat ride down the canal – the whole place was very scenic and we got to try our hand at bargaining at some of the stores. The Huangpu night cruise was beautiful and then being able to visit the Pearl Sky Tower after seeing it from the boat was amazing. The view from the tower observation deck was phenomenal!! It is something that I definitely would recommend to everyone because the view was incredible. I would also recommend on free days that future Wintercampers visit Nanjing Road, the Bund and the French Concession as these are definitely highlights of Shanghai for me. Also, all future Wintercampers must try Yang's dumplings as they were beyond delicious and definitely something I miss about Shanghai!!

Beijing was an amazing place for culture – it was beautiful. I wish I had rugged up a bit more for our visit to Tiananmen Square and the Forbidden City as I felt I couldn't appreciate the true beauty and significance of these two places because I was cold. I would definitely recommend wearing thermals and at least two pairs of socks underneath everything else! The Summer Palace, Ming Tombs, and Temple of Heaven were beautiful, even more so in the snow, and I felt like I learned so much visiting these. My favourite day was definitely when we visited the Great Wall – it was such an experience

and the view from each of the watchtowers that we made it to was phenomenal! I only wish that we were able to spend longer than we did on the wall as I would have liked to have climbed further up but I didn't want to rush as it was so icy and slippery! The Legend of Kung Fu show was awesome and I think we all really enjoyed it, particularly after we had completed our lessons and could appreciate the skill, strength and discipline required! The markets in Beijing were awesome too – we had so much fun bargaining with the store vendors and things were really quite cheap.

Although it was not officially part of the Wintercamp, the last few free days in Hong Kong were awesome and Janet was really helpful (throughout the trip for our other free days) in recommending things to do and see. I particularly enjoyed going to Macao for a day as the Portuguese influence had me feeling like I was in Europe!!

The only thing that I would like to mention about the trip that I was concerned with was that I felt our tour guides were a little pushy in getting us to purchase from the silk factory and jade store. Particularly, at the silk factory I felt that I was being pressured to making a purchase and (although I did buy pillows) it made me feel a bit uncomfortable with her.

Other than that, I am extremely happy with how the trip was organised and how it went. I am very thankful for the opportunity to visit China on a trip with people of similar age and background – I've made some great friends from this experience!

Thank you so much for putting up with us Janet – you definitely made it such a great experience for all of us.