

Being born in New Zealand and not showing a large amount of interest in my culture when I was younger, it was safe to say that I didn't know too much about my heritage and ancestors. I had always liked the Chinese traditions and the food especially, but beyond that I didn't really know much more. When I heard about this fantastic opportunity to go overseas to China with a group who were similar to myself I thought it would be a great way to learn more about my culture.

The nerves set in when I realised I would be embarking on a journey for a month with a group of strangers I had never met before. Luckily enough by the time we reached Guangzhou we were getting along famously and I realised that all my nerves were for nothing.

Most enjoyable moments:

There were many moments on this trip that will be great memories for me. One of the things I most enjoyed was meeting a group of young New Zealand born Chinese and finding that there are many similarities between us. It's great to now know people all across NZ who have all shared this great experience together. I have definitely made some great friends for life.

I also enjoyed our time spent at the Vocational School in Guangzhou. Here I enjoyed learning a short Kung Fu routine, meeting and spending time with local students, and eating the food that was so nicely prepared for us. It was interesting to see the lifestyle of people our age in China. Learning Kung Fu was fantastic, as I had only seen it in shows and movies. It was eye opening to see the determination and strength that goes into such a short routine.

Shanghai was definitely one of my favourite places that we visited. I loved the high-rise buildings, the ease of the Metro, and Yang's Dumplings. Being one for not liking crowds, I didn't actually mind the large amounts of people that were apparent in every place you looked. The hoards of people added to the busy and on-the-go atmosphere of Shanghai. The high-rise buildings and architecture of them were truly spectacular, as at night time all of the buildings across the city would be lit up in interesting ways with different patterns and colours. Travelling around the city was commonly done on the Metro, Shanghai's underground trains. The Metro was an easy and efficient way to get around the city and it wasn't completely crowded all the time. Down the street from our hotel we discovered a popular dumpling shop called Yang's Dumplings, which made a crowd favourite, ShengjianBao. These are buns filled with pork and soup that are steamed on the top with a fried base. Delicious.

Another memorable moment for me was climbing a section of the Great Wall. It was an amazing feeling to know that I was standing on one of the most iconic features of China.

What I would have liked more of:

In the time spent at the school we unfortunately only had one day of Mandarin lessons. I was hoping for a few more days as staying in the school with local students would have been the best way to practise what we learnt in class.

Overall impressions of the trip and itinerary:

This trip was a rewarding and eye-opening experience. The opportunity that was given to us to discover our history and learn more about our culture will never be forgotten. It was especially humbling to see the ancestral villages and learning of the hardships that our ancestors had to endure in order for us to be in New Zealand and live the way we do. It made me more appreciative of the things we have. It was also interesting to learn and see the differences between the different villages in each district.

I thought that the itinerary for this trip was well planned as there were enough free days given so that we could enjoy some sights of our own as well as fitting in the main tourist attractions in China. For this I am grateful as now I can say that I have climbed The Great Wall of China and walked in the Forbidden City! On my free days in Shanghai I managed to go shopping on Nanjing road, walk down the Bund, and visit places such as M50 (Shanghai's contemporary art district) and Xintiandi. In Beijing we went to Snack Street on Wanfujing Pedestrian Street.

For future Winter Campers:

A few pointers for those who are thinking of participating in future Winter Camps:

- Do a lot of stretching and squats before taking on the Kung-Fu lessons.
- Learn some Mandarin to communicate with the locals.
- Be prepared to eat... A LOT
- Pack a good deal of Thermals/ice breakers. (Beijing for us was constantly in the minuses)

Thank you:

Finally I would like to say a big thank you to Virginia for organising this trip and making this adventure for us possible. I found this trip to be a massive learning experience and one that I'll never forget. It was a great opportunity to learn more about the Chinese Culture, our ancestors, and to make a great group of friends. Thank you so much to Janet Joe. Her patience and expertise will forever be appreciated. Not only was Janet so good with telling us facts about the places we were going, but also letting us in on some basic survival tips so that we don't look too out of place (i.e. when crossing the roads, always follow the locals). Janet was such a joy to travel with and made this experience so fun and enjoyable. I definitely wouldn't have seen, done, and learnt so much without her.

I would definitely recommend this trip to anyone thinking of going to China. Going on an organised tour is such a great way to discover China as you get to visit all the tourist sights as well as see some sights for yourself. You get to travel with a great group of people who are all sharing the same experience with you

and who will then become friends for life. This was an adventure I will never forget and am extremely grateful that I was given the opportunity to participate in the 2012 China Winter Camp.