

NZCA Winter Camp 2012 Report

By Mandy Young



With many glowing recommendations on the NZCA Winter Camp, I have always intended on attending the camp. Especially since several members of my family have already been in the past. While packing I was apprehensive about the trip, as it was not only my first trip to China but also due to the fact I would be living with a group of strangers for just over a month. However, it exceeded my expectations as not only were the winter campers given freedom to explore each and every city outside of the set tour activities. We were also given the opportunity to meet up with family based in China and discover new family ties during our visits to the various ancestral villages. It was definitely a trip that left you with many new lifelong friends and memories, along with a better understanding of your Chinese heritage. In this report I will summarise my trip and the various highlights and destinations throughout it.

Guangzhou

The first leg of our journey began at Guangzhou, where shortly after arriving at the airport we were taken straight to the Guangdong Overseas Chinese Vocational School. There we experienced a variety of cultural activities. In the English Corner within the school we were given the chance to intermix with local students. We got to know each other through activities such as making origami flowers and ice breaking games which involved a lot of interaction. There were also Calligraphy and Mandarin Classes included as well. I found the Mandarin classes were particularly helpful, as the teacher taught us not only the names of common items but we were also able to learn our Mandarin numbers quickly through pressure games. These classes turned out to be particularly helpful when we arrived at our later destinations in which Mandarin was the predominant spoken language.

However, it wasn't all fun and games as we were also taught Shaolin Kungfu by Master Xuzao for three very intense days. If we thought we were fit before the trip, Kungfu soon taught us the error of our ways as our bodies were put under strict training to memorise the complete routine. Despite the initial discomfort and pains, by the 3rd day all of us had been able to successfully complete the routine to perfection. While Kungfu left us with a strong need for painkillers due to our aching muscles, it was definitely an activity that left you with a great sense of satisfaction in the end and was quite enjoyable.

Accommodation at the school was a lot better than one would expect. As they provided us with all the essentials during our stay, with items such as washing powder, shampoo, face towel, tooth brush, clothes hangers and tooth paste included within our rooms. Highlights of the room were the fact that we were given western toilets and high pressured showers. However the bed was the only thing I considered a downside, due to fact that it creaked and was only one step up from sleeping on concrete due to a thin mattress! But often enough we were so tired it didn't matter terribly. Food was probably my most favourite part of our stay in the school as it did not disappoint. During our stay all three meals were provided, with a large variety of dishes to choose from. Many of them were dishes that I grew up eating and could recognise much to my excitement.

Our time spent in Guangzhouduring the visits to the various ancestral villages, was probably the most exciting part of the entire trip.As none of us had any idea on what to expect when we arrived at our family villages and homes. When it came to visiting my side of the family it

was one of the first villages to be visited. With Mum and Dad both originating from the Baiyun area, I was one of the lucky few who got to see my relatives relatively early. I was strangely nervous when we arrived at the ancestral houses. But after seeing how my Grandpa and Mum lived back then, it gave me a whole new perspective on how easy and materialistic our lives seem now in comparison to how they lived in the past. Visiting the villages not only had me form an emotional attachment to the area but also gave me a new level of respect towards my family. Visiting my grandpa's village also led to surprises, as it was through our visit that I was able to make a connection with two members of my group who turned out to be distantly related. It was moments like these that were definitely memorable. Visiting the other villages were also fun as you could see that with each place we went to, each had its own unique character and local food. During our stay in Guangzhou we also got to visit the Magnificent China and Minority Park in Shenzhen, which provided us a miniature view of all of the various famous buildings and statues in China.

Shanghai

Shanghai was probably one of the best cities I've ever been to throughout my travels. Unlike Guangzhou which had a more rustic feeling to the place, Shanghai was clearly modern and very much a new city. During our first couple of days in Shanghai we had a scheduled tour of visiting the Xitang water town, local silk factory, Shanghai Television tower and the Shanghai History Museum. While the tour visits were interesting, it was mainly the visit to the tailors markets and navigating the metro on my own that was the highlight of my stay in Shanghai. At the tailors market there were three levels within the building, with individual stores set up everywhere. It was a place where handmade tailored clothing such as jackets, dresses, jeans etc. were all offered to be made to your exact measurements and at ridiculously cheap prices. It was there that I ended up picking up a cape that was found in the magazines with my own minor adjustments. Much to my surprise within three days it was ready to be picked up and looked exactly as I wanted it.

During the two free days offered in Shanghai, our group of 15 made the most of it by shopping in nearby department stores, finding underground markets and visiting historical and famous sites such as the French concession area. One of the many things I loved about

Shanghai was the fact that due to the large expat community based there. Because of that you could see a slight foreign influence on the food and the fashion within the city.

Beijing

From the moment we arrived in Beijing, China's capital had us all spellbound with its bright lights, towering buildings and crazy traffic. Despite being bundled up in layers upon layers like a snowman, I could still feel the cold. Moisturiser is a must in Beijing as not only does it drop to crazy temperatures (-14c!) the air is also extremely dry and tends to make your skin crack. Thick gloves, scarves, ski socks and beanies felt like my battle gear each day as we headed out to various tourist attractions. Sites such as the Forbidden City, Tiananmen Square, the Birds Nest and the Great Wall of China were the highlights of my stay as they were just as awesome as I imagined them to be. The Legend of Kungfu Show and eating the famous Peking duck were also treats that I enjoyed immensely during my stay. While I enjoyed the summer palace I did find it a tad boring and would've preferred if we had spent more time on other sites instead.

On our free days we visited the Silk Street Markets and wandered around Wangfujing Road as we shopped and perused various food stores that offered local delicacies. I found that while I did not have it in me to try scorpions, spiders or snake on a stick during my stay. It is something I'd definitely be willing to try on my next visit.

Hong Kong

As the final destination of our trip, Hong Kong was highly anticipated by the girls and boys in our group. During our stay we had four free days in which we all shopped and slept to our hearts content. Unlike Shanghai and Beijing where there were only slight Western influences, in Hong Kong there was a large multi-cultural community in which foreigners could be spotted everywhere. Getting an Octopus card was our first priority, as it made travelling much easier to famous shopping districts such as Causeway Bay, Mong kok and Harbour City.

During my stay in Hong Kong, I was lucky as I got to experience Christmas for the first time in Asia along with the rest of the winter campers. Walking around People's square during Christmas Eve was definitely a highlight as there decorations everywhere from bright lights

to life sized Christmas themed Lego buildings. Hotspots to visit were places such as the ladies market, the Peak and Macau. Visiting the Wanchai Computer centre is also a definite must for all technology geeks as there is a large variety of genuine cheap electronics. Our stay in Hong Kong was fantastic way to end our trip, as it allowed us the chance to relax, explore without time constraints and post any unwanted extra weight back home. While we did have more time than the previous wintercamps during our stay in Hong Kong, it would've been nicer if we could have had more days there.

Final Comments

First and foremost I would like to thank Janet Joe, Virginia Chong and the New Zealand Chinese Association for their hard work in making this trip possible. It was well planned and organised as we were able to visit an unbelievable amount of places within such a limited time frame. Special thanks also go to Janet for her endless patience and help along the way. She not only made it possible for us to communicate to our overseas family members but also was always there on hand whenever we needed help.

The Wintercamp of 2012 is definitely a trip of a lifetime and one I will surely never forget. It started off as simply a trip for a group of 15 strangers but by the end I had made lifelong friendships and memories. It was not only a trip where you got to travel to amazing cities and sample delicious foods, but a trip in which you learnt a lot about yourself and your own heritage. It is definitely a trip I would recommend to all young Kiwi-Chinese to partake in, as it really is a once in a life time experience.

Recommendations

- Bug Spray is a must in Guangzhou. The mosquitoes there are like mini vampires so best to bring a strong bug repellent.
- I stress to pack lightly, and bring heat retaining clothing as opposed to a bunch of flimsy layers. Waterproof jackets are also highly recommended.
- Hiking boots would be a good investment due to the large amount of walking required. The grip in the sole of these shoes also helps with the ice when climbing up the Great Wall in Beijing.
- Milk Powder is definitely a great gift to give relatives in China.

- A power adaptor is needed for both China and Hong Kong as they use two completely different power outlets.
- Hand sanitiser, panadol, muscle relief rub and jandals are the basic requirements while staying in Guangzhou.
- Don't stress about buying the little things as they can be picked up along the way in China while travelling. Just make sure to enjoy yourself =).