

First stop Foshan, we went to the Foshan School and had an introduction to the officials who welcomed us into the school. We then watched the martial arts show and Lion dancing and toured around the temple, the statues inside were very inspiring and a moment in there which captured my attention were statues of four warriors that a man was praying to. We then began to learn a routine which we were to perform in front of an audience on the Wednesday. The whole routine was strenuous to learn and frustrating at times but by the day of performing our group had our actions organized. I believe that our routine went quite well during the performance, I was glad to receive a certificate after it was over. It was quite sad leaving the school on the last day but it was a great experience learning Kung Fu at such a prestigious place. The officials hosted a dinner for us in the VIP banquet room at the Changcheng Hotel which I felt very honoured to be a part of. There we had red wine on tap and got to watch ourselves on the local news about our arrival which I thought was pretty exciting. We celebrated the end of that journey by taking out the Martial arts tutors to karaoke which was so much fun; it was a good chance for everyone to mingle in a social scene and get to know each other better.

Our first stop which was in the Jingmoi area in the Seeyip county. It was very interesting driving through the country side on the way there as it was nothing I had ever imagined; houses made from bamboo, rubbish littered everywhere, rice fields. Although I had seen places such as these on documentaries, it is a whole new view seeing it for myself. We went to the temple where they had different martial artists monuments and it was exciting seeing all the old equipment they used for battle and training.

Our arrival in Taishan was a little more unimpressive than I thought it would be; our hotel room was a lot different to what it was like in Foshan and I begun to find myself missing Foshan and doing Kung Fu though at the time, I couldn't wait for it all to be over! A highlight there was going to Freedom City, a club that everyone went to and let loose. It was so much socializing with everyone again and I believe that it made our friendship circle between everyone a little closer.

Overall the villages were a great experience. It was a great feeling to be able to see where different people's family came from and the styles of the villages; some were still the same while others have been renovated. I much preferred the original villages as it kept its authenticity and got an actual feel of what it was like living in those conditions. We went to the area of Dongguan where my great Granddad was from. Even though I did not get to see my village as there was not enough information provided about my great Granddad, I got to sense what it was like through other people's experience. One experience in particular was going to Aaron's village which was in the Bai Yun to help translate, we went to the exact place that his Dad was born and brought up which was unoccupied for many years when we got there. I know it would have been an overwhelming feeling for him and to be able to share that gave me a good feeling as I know that one day, if I wanted to comeback and try harder to find my roots then I will be able to have that exact experience and it would all be worthwhile. Touring through the many villages did prove to be very strenuous and tiring as many villages started to look the same after while.

We learnt about Sun Yat-Sen and visited his birthplace and museum in Zhongshan. It was fascinating learning about the man who brought about the first Republican government in China and overthrew the Qing dynasty. The museum showed his exact place he lived growing up in China until he moved to Hawaii, it also included his family and his extended family of the present. We then went to the Sun Yat-Sen Memorial Park which boasted a very huge statue of him and the top of a set of stairs and the other side of it had a large field where families brought their children. It was an awesome day chilling in the sun and lying on the soft grass, if only we could have been there longer it was definitely good relaxing and having a stretch off the bus! Before heading home we arrived at an International University at Guangdong and got there just in time to watch the end of the Lion Dancing competition which was quite a sight to watch; the performers did crazy moves jumping from high poles to the other, I never knew such a sport existed that was taken that seriously.

The next destination Xintang had great accommodation which was a great upgrade from

Taishan. We got massages after dinner and after the long bus rides and walking through so many villages, it was exactly what we needed to relax and soothe our aching backs and feet. It was emphasized that Xintang was an industrial place and that there were allsorts of people coming in and out of that city for work so we had to be extra cautious while out and about, we didn't do much exploring there but it was quite a busy place to be.

We went to Shenzhen which was quite close to Hong Kong and went to the Magnificent China & Minority Village Park where we spent the day exploring. We went on a 30 minute tram ride through the whole place where we got to see miniature versions of monumental places in China including the Tiananmen Square, Grottoes, parts of Mongolia & its villages, and the Great Wall. A fun highlight of that day was going on the flying fox there which was about 250metres long from what I estimated. We watched the show; Great Ethnic Costume & Dance Show Oriental Apparel which lasted about an hour. It was very fascinating seeing all the different types of costumes and dances but it did get a bit boring towards the end. After dinner we watched Dancing with the Dragon & Phoenix show which was utterly amazing. Huge props were made which had fireworks, outrageous gymnasts & acrobats, they even brought out a couple Buffalo's and a herd of goats. It was a show I really enjoyed although it was rather chilly since it was an outdoor night show.

In the Dongshan district in Guangzhou, we went to the Guangzhou museum and saw the statue of the Ram which is iconic to the city of Guangzhou. The Zhenai tower located there was four storeys high and contained artefacts such as kitchenware, medical instruments, and different tools that were used in the olden days. The one thing that caught my attention was the miniature real life model of the whole of Guangzhou that had different locations that were able to be found by the push of a button to show you the exact place. We also learnt how to catch the subway which I know will take me sometime getting used to as it is so busy and everyone is in such a rush. But it's very fast and convenient to get to places such as the Tee Mall which was seven levels. I found it quite disappointed as none of the apparel appealed to me since it is Winter here, the style is completely different to the way it is back home in NZ, and also, branded stuff that we do have back in NZ is more expensive to purchase, even electronics.

We went to the GZ Technical College where we did Chinese calligraphy and painting, it was a lot of fun to learn techniques but I found the painting hard as it was not my particular strength and you need a lot of patience to get the strokes right. We got to play Basketball and Soccer with the students which was fun although they were unfair during Soccer at least we got to have a run around. We also watched a show there where we were partnered up with a student. I was shocked at first but to my surprise it ended up being a great way to get to know them and I had heaps of fun. The performances were very interesting to watch and I was very impressed by how well the students were able to act and do their plays in English. My partner who I called Star – her name was Xin Xin – spoke English very well so it was easy communicating with her.

I was a bit wary about catching the subway, with Janet there we didn't have to worry about much but on our first free day I was a bit nervous but I found catching the subway being really easy. We got to go shopping on Beijing Road which was an awesome place to buy handbags, scarves, and accessories. We also went on a boat cruise while we were in Guangzhou along the Pearl River which was pretty average; we walked for ages after to find a club. It was tiring walking for ages finding it but we finally found CK club was pretty flash, we had to buy drinks by getting cans of soft drinks and bottles of spirits since there were so many of us. We had a really good time there. But still didn't beat Freedom City.

Hangzhou was my all time favourite place, it was a great change from the hustle and bustle of the other cities and since we weren't right in the middle of the city it felt very relaxing. The scenery in Hangzhou was very picturesque with autumn leaves all over the streets, the calm West Lake, it was beautiful. I really enjoyed General Yue Fei's memorial hall, I think I would have been able to appreciate it a lot more if I had studied the history before I went there. I believe the best place we visited was the Linyin Temple; rock faces were carved with Buddha's and God's, the temples were amazing. The most fun part of Hangzhou was the bike ride around West Lake, I haven't been bike riding in years I was definitely looking forward to it the entire week. It was a great feeling riding through the park seeing the different views of

the Lake riding through the chilled air, at least it kept us cool! It was tiring after about two hours of pedalling but definitely well worth it.

We left Hangzhou by bus to Shanghai; the first day there we went to the Museum of Shanghai History which was very interesting! The statues were very realistic and depicted the history of Shanghai throughout the years. While in Shanghai we got to go to the Old Shanghai Bazaar, there were heaps of markets there and temple style buildings with modern shops in them like Starbucks! We got to watch people making pork dumplings and we bought them freshly made, they were absolutely delicious! We watched an Acrobatic show that night which was rather disappointing, it seemed a bit unorganized. There were guys climbing poles, juggling hats, a girl balancing on stacks of chairs, contortionist balancing chandeliers, plate spinning, silk rope dancing. It wasn't anything really out of the ordinary.

I was very excited to arrive in Beijing where we went to the Temple of Heaven, Forbidden City, and Tiananmen Square. I was very amazed about the archways, bridges, temples and architecture of these places, definitely worth the long walks on each site! I don't think it fully hit me that I was in China until we reached the Great Wall of China, only then I was hit with the rush of actually being there that it made me feel absolutely great. It was about four degrees and FREEZING! But walking up those first steps felt amazing. We took the easy route and didn't even make it very far, it was definitely hard work, I even found it a bit scary coming down the stairs as some were very steep or very narrow that we had to sit on a step before going down to the next one to stop us from tripping up! And to top off the amazing day we got to go to the Olympic Village! No one knew that we were able to go, we thought that we were only allowed to take pictures when we *drove past it* the other day. But Sammie and Janet organized for us to pay a visit which was very highly appreciated. The architecture of the Bird's nest is insane I felt dizzy trying to take all of it in. It was definitely a surreal moment.

My experience in Hong Kong was good; I got to go stay with my cousin in Shenzhen for a couple days which was great catching up with him since it had been about 10 years since I last saw him. We just went out to dinner and shopping at the markets. I felt that I did miss out on the fun stuff in Hong Kong with the rest of the group though because they did heaps of shopping and went to Ocean Park. But I heard Ocean Park wasn't that great so I guess I didn't miss out on too much. We shopped at the Ladies market which was so packed with people. I found bargaining very hard there as the shop owners weren't very lenient and did not like low-bidders. I did regret relying on Hong Kong for most of my shopping as the markets were pretty average, they had a better variety in the markets in China. The very last night only a few of us went to look for a club to go to. I must say I put my Cantonese to good use and I didn't think that I was still able to be that fluent speaking to the locals. We found a small bar and we made it the best night ever. We even encouraged the locals to get up and dance. It was the New Zealanders that made that bar what it was that night..just being a bit modest here though.

I've learnt to appreciate home a lot more from experiencing what I've seen in the villages. Being able to be involved in the Chinese culture doing Kung Fu, calligraphy, and getting to know local students has given me a greater understanding of my roots and this trip has been very worthwhile. At first it was hard trying to get to know everyone but in the end we are all pretty close and have forged good friendships with one another, we have all had catch up dinners or yum chars. We even had a little reunion at my 21<sup>st</sup> in mid January. I would recommend it highly to anyone and everyone who is interested in having a great experience that they will remember for the rest of their lives.