

NZCA China Wintercamp Report 2008

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Thank you

First things first, a big thank you goes to Janet Joe for being the organiser and a very prepared tour guide for this year's wintercamp to China. Thank you also goes to our teachers from China – Sunny, Cindy and Jessie. With them they made the trip fun and interesting and helped us a great deal getting around unfamiliar territory. Also thank you to Virginia for keeping us up to date with correspondence.

The last and special thank you goes to the members of this year's wintercamp! The experiences shared with everyone in a foreign country are something that I will take away as something to remember for life.

Guangdong – Villages

These first two weeks of the trip are some of the most memorable of the whole time in China. In the first 3 days we were taught kung-fu in Foshan at the Wong Fei Hong temple. The days training there was intense, fun, entertaining and very enjoyable. For us a group who most of us have never met before, it brought us together and brought out some of the 'inner Chinese' we have. We made lots of friends there and it was a very good start to the trip.



From then onwards, the ancestral village visits were the main priority. For me, this was a very important part of the trip as it made me feel a part of the place. Also for many of us this was our first time in China and it opened our eyes to how differently we live our lives in New Zealand. This brought on many new experiences – some of which were good, and some of which were bad. These moments on the trip were the ones which made it very memorable.

The village visits involved a lot of travel on a bus as this was our main form of transport between areas. These visits were set up such that there was a morning set, lunch, afternoon set, dinner and then night activities. For days we did not see villages, the majority of the day would be on a bus travelling between cities and/or visiting a memorial park/water village/themed park.

When it came to visit my own village, this proved to be a deep and meaningful experience for me and my family. I was able to document the visit via digital camera so that family back in New Zealand could see what it was like.



Also seeing other wintercamp participants' villages was very interesting too. The different areas were all quite similar but yet distinctive in their own way. It was also welcome to see that many of the traditions in China were still held up by our families back in New Zealand. This helped us connect closer to whom we are and where we were from.

Another aspect which was somewhat new to us is the food. The foods in which we experienced were of varying tastes – some of in which we could relate to and the others completely new. I believe this made some of us appreciate what was available and it was also good to broaden our sense of taste.

It was also good to see some night activities at the end of the day. These were such things as learning mandarin and seeing performances. Going to some of these events made our day longer and was exhausting for some of us – especially since we had been travelling all day. For the days when nothing was planned in the evening, it was great to have the time to explore the surroundings near the hotels where we stayed.

The majority of the hotels we stayed at were of decent standard. And facilities were adequate for storing snacks and having gear secured. Also a most of us had never slept on a hard mattress before, so this was a new experience to which we got accustomed to.

Hangzhou

This beautiful place is located south-west of Shanghai and has the iconic Westlake as an attraction point. Where we stayed was in the scenic area beside the Westlake and this proved to be a good location to stay at. A big thank you goes to Bob, our new tour guide who was very informative, easy going and knowledgeable.

For the time we spent in Hangzhou, it was a good relief from the extensive travel around the Guangdong province. The last 2 weeks of the wintercamp was of the "tourist" type and gave us a good understanding to what China is today.



The activities involved in this area included, visited the General Yue Fei memorial, seeing impressive night shows, tea tasting, going on a boat cruise, taking a bike for a tour around the Westlake and the Hefang street markets.

The time spent in Hangzhou refreshed us as groups, as the events and activities were more laidback. It was interesting to hear stories and tales Bob would tell us and also see some of the sights from within the bus.

Shanghai

This was the first trip to one of the biggest cities in China, and this left a big impression on all of us. We were overwhelmed at the size of things such as buildings, the number of people and how people interact in larger city. The dynamics from village life do not show, but traditions are present. This is where the money is.

Our stay in the Shanghai Hotel was a very enjoyable one. Location-wise this was perfect, as in our spare time we could easily walk to places if needed. For many of us, we were looking forward to seeing a super city such as Shanghai so we could explore the sights and sounds in our spare time.

The organised activities gave us again a good idea to what the city offered. These included a tour of the Bund (waterfront of the river), historical museum, Nanjing Road shopping, night ferry cruise, Yuyuan Gardens, Buddhist temples, acrobat shows and the tailors market! I especially enjoyed the tailors market as this allowed us to get decent clothing at a reasonable price.

The free day given to us was very good as it allowed us to explore the city how we would have liked to. Unfortunately, one day is not enough and time restrictions would not allow for more time. Shanghai was the last stop for Bob and there was a sad moment as we had to move along.



Beijing



Many of us who were looking forward to Beijing were expecting to see the big attractions, and that was exactly what we did! In Beijing, we met up with Sammi who was our new guide for this part. Our accommodation was at a place called Joy City. This was really impressive as it was right next to a mall on a busy road. Access to most things was easy and I would recommend staying there again.

Sammi guided us around places such as the Forbidden Temple, the Great Wall, Pearl Markets, Silk Markets, Ya Show Markets, duck restaurant, tea tasting, jade factory, Ming Tombs and the Scared Way and the Olympic Village/stadiums.

Beijing was similar to Shanghai, but we did more travelling as attractions were further away. It was good to learn how the subways work as this was how the majority of us traversed the city. We had a very enjoyable time in Beijing, getting a lot of time to explore. The single free day was once again not enough time to do everything we would have liked, but was enough to get the main things we wanted done.

Hong Kong

The last 4 nights in Hong Kong involved all free time! We stayed at the BP International Hotel and again, this was an ideal location since it was central to a lot of places in Hong Kong. A bit of research beforehand helped us a lot organising the free time to do things as this wasn't to be wasted.

For one day we organised a big day out starting with a gondola ride up to the big bronze Buddha on Lantau Island, then taking a bus to the port and catching the fast ferry to HK Island. We then had a bit of time for have a late lunch, explore the island, then have a use the 800m of escalators. The next thing to do was to go up to Mt. Victoria before and sun set and catch the view up there. The evening was spent up there having a look around.



Other things to do in HK were Disneyland, Ocean Park, Mongkok, Stanley St night markets, Ladies markets, HK Island shopping and general perusing hidden areas. In the 4 nights we had, it was just enough time to do the main things but not enough to fully explore the city. Overall it had been a very enjoyable experience.



Tips

When travelling around China for the month I would advise participants:

- To carry some tissue/toilet paper and hand sanitizer combo, as some things aren't as clean as you think.
- Eat the food you are given.
- Research things to do on your free days
- Learn some Chinese to get around
- Carry some water and a snack with you since there is a lot of walking around

Summary and concluding remarks

To conclude this report, I would like to express gratitude to the NZCA for having the annual wintercamp and the Guangdong Overseas Office for having us. This trip brought on new experiences that many of us had not had before and as a group this brought us together with a commonality between us. This has been a most memorable and enjoyable adventure I have had to date and would highly recommend anyone who is considering participating should do it!