

In July and August of this year, I went on the 2012 Shanghai Sister Cities Youth Camp, representing Dunedin along with 5 other students and 1 teacher. I was incredibly excited to have the opportunity to go on this trip, as I had never been to China before, and I was very interested to see what the culture was like over there. I met the other students 3 times before we left. One of times was at the Dunedin Chinese Garden. Thank you to the Dunedin Shanghai Association for inviting us to this, and sharing your knowledge with us. We all found your advice very useful, and your gifts were much appreciated.

Upon arriving at Pudong Airport at 7.30am, we were greeted by two teachers from the school we were staying at. They brought us back to the school. The first massive difference I noticed about china was the traffic. It was incredible! So busy, so many cars, and so many bikes (especially on this day, as it was raining). That was the first culture shock. We were brought to our rooms and shown around the school. That day, we met our two Chinese students, who would be with us for our entire stay in China. Effy and Claire were so friendly, and they spoke very fluently, which surprised us. We soon learned that they were taught English in school from a young age. That day we caught the metro to the Shanghai Science and Technology Museum – one of my favourite places that we visited on this trip. We were met by Delfi Fang, which had been organised by the Dunedin Shanghai Association. She was very nice, and she arranged a private tour of the museum for us, and treated us to a 4-D movie. We then explored all around the museum. It was really good to have met Defli, and we were all treated with respect at the museum. We then went back to the school for dinner, and then went to People’s Square that night. There were so many people! It was unbelievable for me, coming from little Mosgiel, to Shanghai. It was such a massive culture shock.

Over the next two days, the other students arrived from all over the world (we were the first country to arrive). On Wednesday we had free time, so we Kiwis went to a mall and then a fake market. I think the fake market was the biggest in Shanghai. That was another fantastic day. Over the course of the next two weeks, we met and befriended the other students, and did many things, both around the city, and at the school. We had five Chinese lessons, each about 2 hours long. These were very helpful in teaching us the basics of Chinese – things we would use while out and about in the city. We learned the numbers, greeting phrases, how to ask how expensive an item was, and much more. At the school we also had Kung Fu lessons. These were also great fun, and helped us learn about the culture. My favourite lesson we had was a calligraphy lesson – I wasn’t very good at it, but the master we had that taught us was amazing, and his characters were so beautiful!

We also did a lot of sightseeing around Shanghai. We went to the Shanghai International Youth Technology Exposition, the Wushu Museum, an acrobatic show, a university in Shanghai, the Yu Gardens, the Shanghai Zoo, the Oriental Pearl Tower, the Malu Vineyards, Zhouzhang and Oriental Land. The technology Expo was really interesting, as I really love science and technology, so this was one of my favourite places. The Yu Gardens were so beautiful, and it was incredible to think that these were the sister gardens of the ones in Dunedin. We had lunch at the Oriental Pearl Tower, which was absolutely amazing. Such an incredible view! Zhouzhang was another of my favourite places. We took a boat ride around it, and it was so beautiful and peaceful. Oriental land was so much fun. We spent 3 days there, and it made a nice change from the school – not that the accommodations at the school weren’t fantastic! We all had a great time there.

My favourite day on the trip was the day we spent with our student's family. Kieran and I went with Claire to her home, and her family were so welcoming. There we made wontons and dumplings, and then we went swimming. We saw Claire's school, and went to the mall with some of her friends. What really surprised me was how small her apartment was. Her family weren't poor, they were quite well off, yet they lived in this tiny apartment. Claire told us that it was one of the better apartments available. This really made me appreciate all the space we have in New Zealand.

In our free time, we all got to know the students from other countries. We kiwis were really close with the students from Britain, and we spent a lot of time with them. But I was also good friends with the students from Russia and South Africa. On one occasion, our students took us to karaoke with the British. That was so much fun! We all loved. Afterwards we went to the Bund.

My time in China is a time I will never forget. I loved every second of it, every experience, and every challenge. I feel like my time in China helped me to open my eyes, to see what the world has to offer, and made me realise how lucky I am. This will not have been my last trip to China, but hopefully the first of many.

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