China Summer Trip 2012

By: Juliet Chico

As the time to go to China got closer, I became more anxious, nervous, and excited. I had never been anywhere out of my comfort zone other than Mexico, but even so, it didn’t compare to China: a different culture, a different race, a different language. I didn’t know much about China, its customs, its lifestyle, but I kept an open-mind for anything. After being there for 6 weeks, I have a deep desire to learn and become fluent in Mandarin, and go back to China, and possibly even open up a business there. I love China’s lifestyle, similar to the one in Mexico: it is simpler and humbler to the lifestyle that I am accustomed to.

I came to China with a big disadvantage: not knowing Mandarin. Luckily, at the end of a conversation I would end up communicating what I wanted to say. However, it would have been much easier and simpler to say exactly what I wanted to say in the first place, instead of playing a guessing game. Knowing Mandarin would have allowed me to choose from a bigger variety of food, have longer conversations with Mandarin speakers, and actually understand what they were saying to me.

Even though China is a modern and cosmopolitan world city, it still maintains a very cultural/historical background. What stands behind this comes from its tourist attractions. It is very inspiring and fascinating how well some of the sites are still nicely maintained after hundreds of years. It just shows how much past culture civilizations are valued even in modern life. Attractions worth checking out were Tiananmen Square, Summer Palace, Ming Tombs, Lama Temple, The National Museum, and The Great Wall, which was the highlight of my trip. Being one of the world’s greatest structures, it made me speechless.

A cultural shock to me was how a typical family is only able to have one child. It’s understandable for the government to control the population through this manner, but I would not want to feel the way they do, coming from a personal desire to have a few children in the future.

China is less expensive than the United States. Transportation, food, tourist places were very affordable. The only downfall to being international was buying items with no set price. The vendors would give me a high price, and I had to bargain with them to get the lowest price I could possibly get. I was pleased with all my purchases, though it included getting a few vendors pissed off. The jade and the “fake” purses were worth buying, since one cannot find such nice quality of jade elsewhere, and one cannot tell the difference between a “fake” and real name-brand purse.

The food was very delicious and cheap. While you can find your typical Chinese food as in the United States, you could also find very different types of food. My favorites were the dumplings and a potato-based street vendor. The most extreme types of foods that I tried were
Peking duck, and a scorpion. One can find even crazier types of food like spider, snake, and dog. They also have international food like McDonalds and Kentucky Fried Chicken. It was worth checking them out since they had different menus, and even two same items from different countries taste different.

I really enjoyed the nightlife in Beijing. My favorite was Wudaokou district, which was walking distance to my dormitory which had a couple of clubs and bars. Not only was the music very good, but there was no cover charge, and on certain days, free drinks were given out. Even so, buying a drink was not expensive. I made new friends here, and I enjoyed getting along with everybody and having a good time. Similar to Mexico, the clubs and bars did not require an ID to get in, or an age limit to drink, and one could walk in public and drink. Yes, it is bad that even a young teenager can go in to a club and drink, however, I never witnessed under-age drinking, or drunk driving. A very interesting opinion that I made is that without any rules, people seem to behave better. Living a simpler life with no rules gives people more freedom. However, this is just my opinion and from what I saw in this particular city. It may be different elsewhere.

There were some things in China that I was not pleased with. First off the pollution; there was a significant amount in the air, and not only is it bad for one’s health, but it prohibits one from seeing the clouds and the sun. I would only see them the day after it rained. Adding to that, I disliked the weather. It was hot, humid, and wet. We did come on the worst part of the year, but experiencing this was very unpleasant. I would get back to my dorm sticky from sweat by just going out to get lunch. Not only that, but at times it was heavy with rain and thunder. It was impossible to go outside and not get soaked even with an umbrella. One day it rained so much, that the water went up to almost knee-high length, and several lives were lost due to this storm. I had never experienced rain with such severity.

A third thing I did not like while being in China was the amount of people who smoke, and how they do it everywhere without regarding who’s around. I suggest for China to get designated areas for this because second-hand smoke is worse than first-hand. There are also so many people, that during rush hours, it was extremely hard to walk by people and not get pushed around. China is the most populous country, and with that come advantages and disadvantages. A last thing that I did not like was the drivers. Not only do most of the drivers drive wild, but they won’t stop if you are on their way. All they do is honk for you to get out of the way. You are your only safety. Luckily, after all the crazy driving that I witnessed, I never saw a crash. It seems like everyone’s driving does not cause many accidents which is good.

As a foreigner in China, one tends to be at an advantage when it comes to work and the opportunities they have to succeed as a professional. As a Chinese citizen, one faces a limited amount of openings to go to college. Their only chance to attend a good university is based on one single test that they take near their end of their high school career. For many, this is their only chance to become someone and have a better life. There is not much of a middle class in China. There is a gap between the more and the less fortunate. While you see someone with a
luxurious car drive by, next to you there is someone picking out cans and bottles from the trash cans. This made me value and appreciate how much opportunity and support I have in the United States.

China was definitely an unmemorable experience. Not only did I learn and value a lot about China and its lifestyle, but I also grew as an individual. I am blessed enough to be able to enjoy the simplicity of life in China, and also be able to come back and work, if I would want to. I deeply thank everyone and everything that made this trip possible. New experiences, new memories, and new friends have shaped me into who I am to this day.