The Young Australian Ambassadors’ Delegation to China

The 7th UMAP Program Team to China (Tianjin Normal University 2010)

Rosalyn Ellen Turner* S3200473@student.rmit.edu.au

WEEKLY REPORT WK 10

9 May 2010

The weekend of May 1st was a four day long weekend in China to mark ‘National Day’. It was also the opening weekend of the Shanghai World Expo 2010. Thus, with the knowledge that practically 1.3 billion people would be on to the move- and mostly towards Shanghai- Robyn, Rhiannon and myself decided to brave the crowds to experience the region on this unique weekend.

We arrived in Nanjing on Saturday 1st May, after braving the only available 15 hour long train ride sitting up. I am slightly in awe of the amazing patience and perseverance of the poor people who were standing in the aisles of our carriage for five hours at a stretch. They didn’t complain and seemed to be quite at ease with the situation, which was very different to me. The only thing that was getting me through was the immense amount of chocolate I had brought along.

The previous week in Tianjin had hovered around 14 degrees during the day, Spring was taking its time arriving, however in Nanjing the temperature was around 35 degrees, a shock to our systems. It was also a very different environment with lush green plants and an almost tropical feeling. It was clear that the long weekend had brought many people to the city. Nanjing’s streets were overrun with strolling pedestrians, much to the dislike of the taxi drivers.

The biggest tourist attraction in Nanjing is the ‘Rape of Nanjing’ memorial, which displays information and educates visitors about the terrible Japanese massacre in the city in the winter of 1937-38. We visited on the Sunday after a day of relaxing to recover from our train ride. It was a moving and poignant display of the events and was excellently set out, especially considering the free admission. It was also fantastic to see so many Chinese visitors visiting and paying their respects.

After some time in Nanjing, we made our way to Shanghai on one of China’s many fantastic trains. Our experience on the slow train from Beijing to Nanjing sitting up was certainly rectified by the constant and amazing supply of bullet trains on the shorter journeys that are luxurious in comparison to Australian trains. There is certainly something to be learned from China’s amazing public transport. The subways in both Shanghai and Beijing have been incredible and very easy to navigate; unlike I imagine the Melbourne one to be for non-English speaking visitors.

Arriving in Shanghai was like stepping into another world when it is compared with Tianjin. The streets are lined with Chanel, Prada and Donut King, while the restaurants serve gourmet lasagna and glasses of white wine. The Bund was highlight for me- looking over at the amazing architecture across
the massive port was imposing but inspiring. The city was also alive, with thousands of people packed into East Nanjing Road. You suddenly realize how many people are in the world!

Arriving back in Tianjin feels somewhat like coming home now. The weather has improved greatly since we left, spring has certainly arrived and it feels as though summer is just around the corner. Suddenly little shops selling various things such as shaved ice drinks and fruit have popped up, giving the university campus a lively atmosphere. The Cubans who live in our building have also been playing drums outside at night to add to that.

It has been great to hear the other Australians travel stories from the weekend, with Alex Z in Chengdu with family, while Ellie and Nicolette headed to Xi’an and Pingyao. Robyn also extended her trip to the Shanghai/Nanjing area to include Huang Shan, which is apparently one of the most spectacular sceneries in China.

It is with both excitement and sadness that we approach the end of our time here. There is officially under two weeks left. The excitement is based around seeing our families and friends or our prospective travels. Japan, South East Asia and further travels in China are just some peoples exciting plans. Personally I am looking forward to travelling for 3 and a half weeks in Sichuan, Yunnan and around Guilin. However, I will miss Tianjin which has become a home for me in the past three months. It would be fantastic to return in five years because the city would be changed so greatly- there is so much construction and modernization going on now. Mostly, I will miss the unique time and opportunity we have had and the people I will leave behind here.