



VIRTUTE ET LABORE

St Margaret's and Berwick Grammar School International Tour Testimonial Ricci Hartman, China Tour 2015

With its long history and its rich culture, China is the first place to go to experience an entirely different lifestyle. The 2015 China tour was certainly a once-in-lifetime trip, with every day filled with exciting and interesting sights, smells and sounds. Over a period of thirteen days, a group of twenty St Margaret's and Berwick Grammar School students visited four of China's vast and populous cities: Beijing, its capital, Xi'an, Hangzhou and Shanghai, each with its own history and atmosphere.

From the Great Wall in Beijing, to the Terracotta Warriors in Xi'an, there were many amazing and wonderful attractions that were observed and explored, providing many photo opportunities that will last a lifetime. Looking down at Shanghai on a glass floor in the Oriental Pearl TV tower was a fantastic highlight of the trip, as well as tobogganing down from the Great Wall of China to ground level. Many art galleries and sculptural districts were also visited, where we tried our hand at the ancient art of calligraphy.

Apart from visiting areas that are synonymous with Chinese history, we also went to a number of local markets, in which we had the opportunity to bargain with determined vendors, and cheaply buy anything we desired with our foreign currency. While the indoor markets sold anything from clothes to electronics, the outdoor markets offered foods such as silk worms and live scorpions on skewers.

One of the highlights during the tour was when we witnessed a variety of musical, theatrical and acrobatic shows, which showed off traditional dances, as well as insane death-defying performances. This was definitely entertaining for all of the students.

The tour offered us a chance to not only learn about China's very ancient past, but also its present way of life. Each of us had the wonderful opportunity to visit one of Hangzhou's top rated high schools, and live with one of their student's family for three days. This was a highlight of the tour, as we each had individual, close-up experiences that were unique to all of us. The host families were very friendly and inviting, showing me the best that Hangzhou has to offer.

This experience allowed us to fully immerse ourselves in the day-to-day life of a Chinese family, experiencing school and home life, transport, shopping, food, popular attractions, and what people do in their leisure time. My favourite part of homestay was singing at KTV with my homestay guest and his friends, which is where one can go into a specialized room to sing karaoke to songs of their choice.

During the tour, we went on a culinary journey, trying a large variety of traditional Chinese food in high quality restaurants, one from a dizzying height of 267 meters. A tantalizing mixture of spices and interesting meats and vegetables intrigued our taste buds, always making us want more. We also went to one of the most famous restaurants in Beijing, specialising in their world renowned Peking duck, a meal we all thoroughly enjoyed.

As a student learning Chinese as a subject, I found the tour especially exciting, as it allowed me to observe others using their native dialect. I found myself understanding more than I thought I would, having plenty of time to practice what I have learned throughout school, even conversing with the locals at some stages of the tour. I think that immersing myself in the Chinese language has helped me test my understanding of the language and also helped me improve it, giving me confidence in my own reading and speaking abilities.

During this time, I have created and strengthened many friendships, with not only St Margaret's and Berwick School students, but also my homestay students and his classmates. The tour was well assembled and organised, ensuring that, through the care of our delightful teachers, we experienced the best of every aspect of China. This journey will surely be very difficult to forget.