Travelling to China

Napoleon Bonaparte once remarked that "when China wakes, it will shake the world". I believe this moment is here, now and as such there could be no better time to make the trip. A short-term study abroad opportunity at the Sichuan University allowed me to do just this, as the partner university covers the cost of the classes (both language and cultural) as well as the hotel, food and local excursions, making such a big trip far more affordable.

Whilst Sichuan has many “must-see” attractions including the Leshan Giant Buddha and the Chengdu Research Base of the Giant Panda, as a History student and having never visited China, I wanted to take the opportunity to tick-off many of the more famous bucket-list sites including a visit to The Great Wall, Forbidden City and the Terracotta Warriors. I, therefore combined the Sichuan summer programme with a group travel tour which allowed me to visit a whole array of Chinese cities and villages, and to get out to Hong Kong to catch-up with friends who have emigrated there.
The highlights of the group tour section of my trip were certainly tobogganing down The Great Wall of China (who knew you could do such a thing?!) and spending a night in a tulou village, where I even got to take part in a traditional Chinese wedding ceremony.

I was, by sheer coincidence, in Hong Kong for the twentieth anniversary of the British handover. Having just finished a class on cities of the British Empire, which fleshed out some of our controversial legacies, being in the city for this momentous occasion really allowed me to gain an even better understanding of the issues at play. The way in which I experienced the city’s celebrations have formed the basis of various pieces of work in a module this semester. It was also a...
pleasure to catch-up with Queen Mary students who were still out there on their study abroad, as well as friends who had emigrated there.

By the time I got to Sichuan, I had spent over a month in China and as such had learned a number of phrases in both Mandarin and Cantonese. However, it was only by taking Mandarin classes at the university, that I realised how many dialects there were across the country. I was shocked to hear that the phrases I had picked up in places like Beijing, Shanghai, Xi’an and Xiamen were not recognisable in Sichuan, and vice-versa. Yet, these language classes have proved to be very beneficial as I was able to hold basic conversations with the Chinese tourists I encountered during my time at Cambridge University on another Queen Mary summer scheme. I have since enrolled on a more comprehensive language course and aim to keep building on my vocabulary.

The university also put on various cultural classes for us, including one on calligraphy and another on the Mah-jong tiles. Since coming home, I have had a number of requests from university friends to teach them about these arts and now
Overall, I am very grateful for the Expeditions Fund Award granted, as it made a significant contribution to my flight costs, and without which I would have unlikely been able to take up the opportunity. It has enabled me to visit so much of China, have many unique and different experiences, make new friends, and learn new skills. I hope one day to return to China, to continue to explore this vast country, to reconnect with my new found friends, and to further test my language skills.