

Expedition Report 2018

Being an enthusiast for different cultures and travelling, this summer I travelled to China to teach English. The school I was teaching at was based in Yangzhou, so I travelled a day early to explore Shanghai and adjust to the time difference before the teaching began. My second day was a long day of waiting in Shanghai Airport Burger King for the rest of the group to arrive. When we were finally all united we headed to Yangzhou to find our hotel.

Our first few days were an intense introduction to teaching which filled us with little confidence as we were unsure what we had got ourselves into! The group of “foreign teachers”, as we were then known as, consisted of nine English, one Scottish, one Irish and two Americans. Like myself, most had come independently so meeting for the first time was very exciting! Having fellow English speakers there in a city where little English is spoken was a saving grace and helped us get through the gruelling seven weeks of teaching.



At the school there were three types of classes; kids, elites and salon. For kids we did the cliché teaching ABCs and words like ‘apple’, ‘elephant’ and ‘lion’. I learned that kids get incredibly over excited at the idea of hide and seek, musical chairs and absolutely adore to colour. Elite classes were structured as we taught from a textbook, but I learned how to make it engaging and how to stretch a game of word tic-tac-toe to last half an hour. Salon classes were usually full of high school graduates who wanted to practise their English before going to university. An additional activity was marketing, where the school would take us to children’s play areas and try to entice parents to sign their children up to our classes by showing off their ‘foreign teachers’.

Teaching was a difficult but rewarding job! We taught 5 days a week and planned lessons in our free time. However, on our days off we tried to explore as much we could of the surrounding cities in China. My roommate and I went away each week to different locations, of which my personal favourite city was Nanjing. Nanjing is the old capital of China and has a long, sobering history including the ‘forgotten Holocaust’ of WW2 by the Japanese army. There is a tastefully done museum that tells this history and you can walk the walls of the city that are very beautiful. Nanjing was also home to the first Chinese mountain I hiked in very hot weather which was quite the experience!



Mountains became the theme of my summer; I explored Purple Mountain in Nanjing, climbed for 8 hours up Yellow Mountain in Huangshan and drove around the incredible mountainous landscape of Yangshuo. Yellow Mountain was one of the most challenging experiences of my life so far, but also the most rewarding.



I was also lucky enough to visit the amazing cities of Suzhou, that is considered the Venice of China as it is famous for its canals and lakes; Yangshuo, a beautiful rural city in the south and Beijing, the exciting capital of this developing country. Unfortunately, when I finally reached Beijing I had developed a chest infection but pushing myself and climbing up to the Great Wall three times for sunset and sunrise (despite hardly being able to see the sun!) was an experience I will never forget.



I had chosen to travel to China as I wish to study abroad there next year, and I have also been learning Mandarin through the Confucius Institute. Whilst I did not manage to practise much of my Chinese during this trip, I was surrounded by the language and culture which heightened my love for this beautiful country. Some of the other “foreign teachers” on my trip have become my closest friends and we look forward to our future adventures together! The money from this grant helped support my visa application and insurance, without these I could not have had this incredible experience. I thoroughly recommend doing a volunteering programme to everybody and that they should travel independently but meet people there. It was with the help of my friends that this was the best summer experience I could have had!