China Immersion 2017

On the 26th of July 2017, ten pupils and Mrs Fortune from Jordanhill, along with 112 other pupils and staff from all over Scotland, set off on a three-week Summer Immersion Course organised by the Confucius Institute for Scotland Schools.

Below our participants share their experiences in China.

Mandarin learning

Every morning, for the week we stayed in Tian Jin, we spent a few hours in language classes. Mandarin is such a unique language as the same word can have many different meanings depending on the tone of your voice when you say it. We learned some basic greetings, how to talk about ourselves including our age, nationality and our family and learned phrases that would come in really useful when shopping. Over the week we also learnt the lyrics to a popular song in China, so we could perform it at the closing ceremony at the end of the week- that was really embarrassing but also really fun.

Our teachers were so nice, and we were really grateful that they were so understanding because we were all complete beginners. They also prepared us really well for our test at the end of the week, to the point where we were all really confident that we knew what we were doing. At the end of the week, on the day we left Tian Jin, our teaching assistant Wendy made us all bracelets as there's a big gift-giving culture in China. That was really nice of her.

Learning Mandarin in China, without any experience of learning the language, was pretty daunting for us. It was a really amazing experience though, and we were all really grateful for the chance to learn a tiny bit of a language that's perceived as so complex, yet so important in our world today. We're really excited to keep on learning Mandarin back in Glasgow.

Kate Greenshields and Maya Zealey

Cultural Activities

Every day after our Mandarin lessons we had culture classes to improve our knowledge of China. These were a great way to try our hands at new crafts and activities, some of which were harder than we thought.

Our first lesson was Chinese knotting which proved difficult for most of us. Our teacher was very patient with us when we made mistakes but after one or two tries most of us successfully finished our knots. Chinese knots are for good luck and our finished ones looked great and were definitely worth the trouble we had making them. We also tried our hands at calligraphy which our teacher made look easy but our attempts were not very neat. It requires a very steady hand and a lot of patience so we found it difficult to make it look good. Eventually we were given characters to trace which turned out looking very good, even if it is cheating! We also took part in a tea ceremony and had white tea to try. It was quite bitter so not many of us liked it but some went back for seconds. We also learnt a bit about the tea and where it comes from which was very interesting.

On our second day, we visited a famous local food factory where we had a tour and tasted some of their products including a pancake filled with flower petals which are usually eaten with tea.

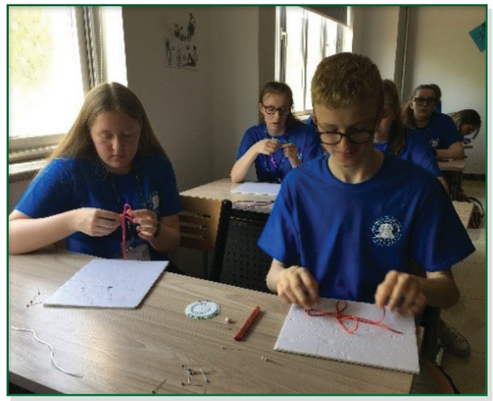
That same day, we tried out Chinese chess back at the university. The game is played on a normal chess board with round black and white pieces which are put on the points where the lines of the chess board cross. The rules were explained to us and then we had a try ourselves. The aim is to surround an opponent's piece completely which was actually very difficult but we had a lot of fun attempting to beat each other.

We also, with the kitchen staff, had the chance to make dumplings which we ate for dinner later. Ours were filled with pumpkin and the woman showing us rolled the dough and filled the dumplings very quickly and neatly. Our attempts were not nearly as neat, but we definitely had fun making them.

Later on in our stay in Tianjin we went to an opera house and watching a performance of a song accompanied by some of the instruments that we had had demonstrated to us during a lecture on Chinese instruments and it was really interesting to see them used in an opera. After the performance we went outside and each group did a different activity. Our group did a routine with a stick which we then performed in front of the other groups. Ours was really fun to do and we really enjoyed being on the stage in the opera house. We also did some Tai Chi which was very relaxing, but we found remembering some of the sequences difficult so we also played some games based on Tai Chi which we really enjoyed.

All of our lessons were really interesting and we all learnt a lot about China and its culture.

Gillian Foote, Rachael Banks and Kira Foster



Food

The food in China was an unforgettable experience.

There's a very clear difference from our typical British cuisine and authentic Chinese cuisine; from the pancakes to the tea.

On the first few nights in Tianjin University, we had the chance to experience a Chinese buffet, there was everything from spring rolls to fried noodles.

During one of our cultural classes, we got a chance to experience a tea ceremony. China is regarded proudly as the home of tea. We were told that each kind of tea requires a unique tea set to infuse the best flavour. The sets mainly include teacup, pot and saucer, and the ones used at the ceremony cost around £1,000. The tea used was also very expensive and so good that most of us finished it.

We also got a chance to visit a local Tesco, and they had a whole aisle for Ramen noodles; a few of us bought the worlds spiciest noodles.

During our host family visit, we were lucky that one of the students' aunt owned a pancake stand and she made us Chinese pancakes which were completely different from our typical pancakes; they were very thin and green, but tasted much better than ours. They also hosted a BBQ, which was a weird experience. The roasted tofu covered in BBQ sauce was amazing. We were all completely full at the end of the day.

Although, the food was very different and an amazing experience, after 3 weeks of Chinese food - we were craving for homemade food!

Zaynab Ahmed

Meeting New People

The immersion course provided great opportunities to meet new people both within the Jordanhill hub and other schools on the same trip. It also provided the possibility of making some Chinese friends.

Our first real opportunity to meet people on the trip was on the plane journeys to China, two 7-hour flights. As Jordanhill pupils were not all seated together, it gave us a brilliant opportunity to get to know the people around us.
Before going on the trip, we had all found out who

we were sharing a room with and I learned I was sharing a room with somebody I had never met before from Balfron Academy and I was very excited to finally meet him. As Morgan was also sharing a room with someone from Balfron we soon got to know the Balfron bunch really well.

Bus journeys were our favourite times to talk to others while also listening to music carefully chosen by our designated DJ Enrique. The other group we got to know well was a school from Shetland with whom we shared our Mandarin lessons.

During the trip we got to know so many people such as volunteers at Tianjin Foreign Studies University, tour guides, teachers from other schools, hotel staff, bus drivers and so many others.

Apart from making friends with those from Scotland, we also made some good Chinese friends. The host family visits gave us the chance to meet new Chinese students as well as flex our shaky Mandarin skills. The students who took us to their homes were very welcoming and friendly. It was interesting to compare school life in China with that of Scotland. Some of us also found it particularly enjoyable to make friends on the basketball court next to our accommodation in Tianjin, as it was a brilliant way to meet students from the university and also to practise our Mandarin.

David Little, Enrique Murio-Fernandez and Kamran Hussain

Shopping

My advice to any shopaholic planning a trip to China is bring a huge suitcase with plenty of room to fill with great buys and be ready to bargain.

I learnt all about this while I was away in China for the summer immersion course. My experience of China was amazing and I would like to share a snapshot of the three weeks with you. From the breath taking views from our language classroom in Tianjin, interesting food in Qufu, world famous landmarks in Beijing and of course my favourite part the many markets and fab shopping.

The shopping started in Tianjin when we went to a cultural market street and the first thing I bought was a real slick Chinese styled robe. I wasn't confident enough yet to bargain, but with the help of my partner in crime Zaynab, we got it for one hundred yuan which is the equivalent of ten pounds. We had been told lots of great things about the famous pearl market in Beijing and I had been saving my money for that day. The pearl market is a six story shopping mall filled with traditional Chinese tea sets to fake Michael Kors bags and Kylie Jenner makeup. It has something for everyone. Not only was I saving my money but I had learnt some great bargaining tricks along the way. Within 10 minutes of being in the markets I had already been called cheeky, and had a gentle slap by one of the shopkeepers selling Chinese and Japanese skincare products. I soon realised that I had bought too much stuff and my own suitcase was nowhere near big enough to fit everything in. It was my mission to find a stylish suitcase, which costs no more than seventy yuan (just under seven pounds). After being shouted at, called stupid and chased down the escalator, I succeeded in bargaining my way to sixty five Yuan for a chic rose gold suitcase. To make me feel even better, later when talking to Mrs Fortune back in Scotland she told me that a teacher on the trip payed two hundred and fifty Yuan for the exact same suitcase. What can I say?

Morgan Francis