

HIGHGATE PRIMARY SCHOOL VISIT TO CHINA 2018



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Day 1

Tiananmen Square



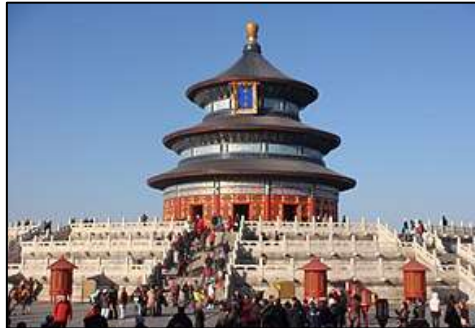
Our adventure in China began with a visit to Tiananmen Square. It is one of the biggest city squares in the world and was designed and built in 1615. On one side of the square is Tiananmen (Gate of Heavenly Peace) and the entrance to the Forbidden City. There is a portrait of Mao Zedong (Chairman Mao) hanging on the entrance to the Forbidden City and it is visible from Tiananmen Square. Another place in Tiananmen Square is Mao's mausoleum which is located at the bottom of the square.

Viggo

When we arrived in the morning on this vast open space (all equipped with our headphones), we felt really small. It took us at least ten minutes to walk to the other end of the square, where Mao's huge portrait still is overlooking the concrete square. The place is bordered by impressive Communist-style and ancient buildings. We all were very impressed by the silence, the many policemen, who were patrolling, and tourists taking pictures.

Faustine

Temple of Heaven



Our next visit was to the Temple of Heaven which was built from 1406 to 1420. The biggest hall is called the Hall of Prayer for Good Harvests and is the largest building on the site and consists of just wood and no nails. The circular hall is surrounded by three layers of marble and is also surrounded by the three main halls.

Viggo

The access to the Temple, across a pleasant park and a covered walkway, gave us the taste of what was to come. It's my favourite building in Beijing and I think it's very special because it has been built without a single nail. It was the place where the Emperor sacrificed and prayed for a good harvest. What I especially liked with this building were the thousand colours and the architecture with the three platforms which gives a sensation of elevation.

Faustine

Day 2

The Great Wall of China



On our coach trip, our guide, Michelle, gave us some facts about the wall. It is 21,000 kms long, it took 10 million people to build and those who died building the wall were buried within it.

We arrived at the foot of the wall to a snow-covered view when it should have been 20 degrees! Michelle told us it was most unusual to see the wall in snow at this time of the year. If you want to save 120 Yuan, you can climb a steep path of steps up to the wall, however we took the cable car which took just a few minutes. On arrival at the steps up to the wall, we found a tree decorated with blue balloons and fake leaves. Next we climbed some sheer steps to get up on to the wall itself.

Once on the wall, you could not go in either direction without getting stuck in a mass of people. Due to a Chinese public holiday, the wall was extraordinarily busy. The wall had only been cleared of snow on one side of the path so we were glued to that side. After trying to go both ways, we realised we were running out of time and had to be back to meet the group.

Lenny, Kenan and Mya

I really am very thankful that I had the privilege of going to China and getting to know a little bit more about the culture. Surprisingly, we went to The Great Wall twice! First, when it was snowing and foggy. The second time it was scorching hot and a clear day. The Great Wall really opened my horizon. We could see the scenery which was absolutely mind blowing, especially when we saw the mountains which went on continuously. I was so amazed when the Chinese people would grab us to have their photos taken with us on The Great Wall and on the streets; I felt like a famous celebrity!

Kenan

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Chinese Hot Pot

On our second evening in Beijing, we were treated to a traditional Chinese hot pot. We sat around large round tables and at each place there was a steaming bubbling pot filled with what looked like a clear soup with spices, mushrooms and berries. Each table also had plates and plates of different ingredients and yummy things which we were expected to drop in to the pot. There were noodles, torn bits of white cabbage which looked like crumpled tissue, bok choy, wood ear mushrooms, fish balls and what looked like slices of ham. At first I didn't know what to choose! I settled on several strands of delicious seaweed, shrimp dumplings, angel hair noodles and tight bundles of plain noodles. Once your food was cooked, you had to fish it out with chopsticks and put it in your bowl. There was a really garlicky sesame sauce which you were supposed to add but I didn't try it. Mum ate quite a lot of it and smelled of garlic for all of the next day. Cooking on a hot pot was really fun although I burned myself a few times on the hot metal rim!

Maya Rose

Day 3

The Summer Palace



The Summer Palace in Beijing - first built in 1750, largely destroyed in the war of 1860 and restored on its original foundations in 1886 - is a masterpiece of Chinese landscape garden design. The natural landscape of hills and open water is combined with artificial features such as pavilions, halls, palaces, temples and bridges to form a harmonious ensemble of outstanding aesthetic value.

We walked along the Long Gallery (an outdoor corridor) which is 728 meters long and surrounds the lake. The Emperor Qianlong (1750) built the gallery for his mother so she could walk outdoors regardless of the weather. The corridor displays 14,000 coloured paintings along the beams and supporting structures. The paintings depict stories, myths and legends.

A beautiful aspect of the corridor is that the local people use it as a communal area in which to meet up and play traditional board and card games. As we entered the Palace, there were also couples dancing in a car park area. This seems to be an integral part of Chinese life when retired and encourages happiness and wellbeing.

It was a freezing cold day and some members of our party had very cold hands due to the relentless need to photograph everything. Everywhere we looked was a photo opportunity, the blossoms were starting to appear on the trees, magnolia and cherry blossom. We stopped and managed to enjoy a hot chocolate which was greatly appreciated, more so to just hold; however, many adults would've rather have had the hot chocolate than the latte!

Charlotte

Lunch in a Hutong Home

After visiting the Summer Palace, we rode on the coach to the Hutong near Dongsì. At the Drum and bell Tower Square, we were met by a Hutong guide, Lisa, who took us to the Wang family's home. There, Mr Wang had cooked a delicious meal for us: the highlights of the meal were dumplings and carrot fritters, which were stupendously good. It was lovely to see how four families lived in houses around one courtyard. It is a great design for being together and making friends

After our lovely meal and hearing from Lisa about the history and future of the

Hutong, which was extremely interesting, we said thank you to Mr Wang and his family. We strolled back down to the Drum and Bell Towers. There, we were picked up in rickshaws for a very fun little journey. We saw lots of other Hutong streets and houses: some with quirky and amazing extensions built onto them. It was exciting to zoom around on a rickshaw and see more of this special and ancient part of Beijing.

Stanley

Day 4

Běihǎi Park



After a hearty breakfast of bacon, eggs, cereal and fruit (and red bean porridge and spicy pickles for mum!), we set off in the coach for Běihǎi Park, a short drive from our very central hotel. It was our first sunny warm day. Our guide Michelle explained that the park was an Imperial garden for more than a thousand years and has been opened to the public since 1925. It's a beautiful park which attracts locals in their hoards at the crack of dawn to perform their morning exercises - tai chi, ballroom dancing, line dancing. We didn't get there at the crack of dawn but we did see some people doing calligraphy but not with ink and paper. The special thing is that they used the paving slabs as their canvas, painting giant Mandarin characters with huge calligraphy brushes dipped in water. And then they watched as the water dissolved into steam.

Afterwards, me, Mum, Hélène and Faustine decided to climb the 'mountain' which had a white stone temple or pagoda perched on top of it with a Bell Tower which you had to pay to climb inside of to ring the bell. On the way down, we saw lots of trees heavy with spring blossom. We also stumbled upon a very handsome cat,

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who seemed to strike a pose for our cameras! It was then time to meet with our guide Michelle and the rest of the group and together we walked to another entrance along a large boating lake fringed with clipped willow trees. The lake was full of lotus buds just waiting for the summer heat to bloom. Shame I won't get to see them!

Maya

Hongqiao Market



Mr Wang, our driver, then took us to a restaurant specialising in dumplings. Yum! We had three different types - pork, mushroom and egg with chives. After lunch we went to Hongqiao Market. It was a big indoor market spread over 4 floors. Michelle warned us to avoid certain floors and shops because they sell fake items. We looked at jade, pearls, silk and then a clothes shop where we had to bargain to get the prices down. We looked at very brightly coloured shirts as presents for Dan and Rob back at school. Rona bargained hard to get the price down. I think we chose well. My favourite shop was a fan and calligraphy shop where I spent ages rifling through a wooden drawer full of all sorts of fans. The one I chose was light green with a dark green bamboo pattern.

Maya

Oriental food hall



For dinner a few of us visited an Oriental food hall. It took us a while to find it but once we got there we had so much food to choose from. I tried fried dumplings and grilled squid in quite a spicy sauce and finished with an ice cream. Mum and I had fun trying to figure out what the different flavours were and what the Mandarin word for strawberry is. We now know it's cǎoméi.

The last thing we did that day was revisit a night market where we'd seen lots of street food including a stall selling skewered scorpions. I didn't want to try them the first time I saw them. It made me feel a bit uneasy. But a few of us including some of the parents decided to give it a go. They were delicious! They were crispy, salty, slightly sweet, tangy and tasted of cumin. Really yummy. Olaya, Rhea and I loved them so much we ordered more until our mums ran out of money. The other yummy thing we ate were caramelised strawberries which also came on a stick.

Maya

Street Market



One evening, Lenny and I went with our mums and had an amazing night, well when I say amazing I also mean unusual. We wandered into a street market and saw many things that I will never forget and had never seen before! We saw a dancing man singing like a mechanical robot and we saw duck shaped birds all roasted on sticks. Pig's trotters are a very popular dish but the sight of all the food didn't make me feel hungry, in fact, quite the opposite!

Charlotte

Day 5

Train Ride



We had a later buffet breakfast today. I tried the dough sticks (Youtiao) and steam buns with something like condensed milk - they tasted a lot like doughnuts. We checked out of our hotel to go to the train station. It was very exciting because we were going on a bullet train.

On the display in the carriage we could see how fast the train was going. It was amazing: we were travelling at 310km/hr but the ride was also very smooth. The windows on the train are special because even though the train is going very fast you don't feel dizzy looking at the view. We had some snacks, I went with my Mummy to the cafe on the train to get a hot drink. We played card games and chatted with our friends. The journey took 5 hours.

In Xi'an we met our guide, Lisa and she showed us onto the bus. It was a lot warmer in Xi'an than Beijing. As we drove through Xi'an, we could see the city walls. We went straight for dinner. We had lots of Chinese dishes, rice, chicken, noodles and vegetables, it was really tasty. Then we checked into the Grand Noble Hotel. It was very posh, there were lots of chandeliers downstairs and we had a very big bathroom. We had had a busy day travelling so we all went to our rooms to unpack ready for tomorrow.

Harry

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Day 6

Terracotta Warriors



Today we would be travelling to see the world famous Terracotta Warriors. After climbing off the bus, we took an overall headcount, had a toilet stop (apparently to relieve the pressure) and stormed through the ticket booth with ease. We were told there were three pits. Pit One was said to be the most impressive.

Walking up to the pit I knew that was right. The hanger was colossal compared to the other two. At a fast pace now, I was running to the arched entrance. I stopped still. Breathless. My face lit up as I captured every emotion spread along each warrior's face: sad, curious, annoyed, proud, excited and some just plain. Thousands of soldiers lined up facing the grand entrance of Pit One. We passed every angle, every part of the life size warriors. Everyone stood in the middle to get the best view, but my family and Stanley's went to the left side of the aircraft-like hanger. We saw where the farmer first dug his well and discovered the very first warrior back in 1974. They were also repairing broken soldiers on this side.

After the visits to the other pits, we had lunch in a traditional noodle restaurant. We watched a man scraping noodles off dough which he boiled and served with meat sauce, delicious! Our guides let us have some free time to explore the market next to the Terracotta Warriors. I bought a mini figure of the officer of the Terracotta Army made from the original clay, he looks very stern. It was fantastic!

Toby

The Great Wild Goose Pagoda



We got the bus from our last destination towards the Great Wild Goose Pagoda. We passed security and a sight lay ahead of us - a seven tiered pagoda. As we drew nearer, we saw a small Buddhist temple in front of us. Inside was a large golden Buddha statue beside dozens of chanting monks. We entered a little room, its walls covered with Jade. It told a story about the first Buddha and how it protected the people that believed and worshiped him. After that, our guide took us through the gardens. We were taken to the laughing Buddha which, if you touched its earlobes or stomach, meant good luck. We then followed the guide to another part of the temple. Harry and I had our names written and translated in Chinese. My name was translated to 'intelligence and the treasure of the family'. Harry's name was translated to 'good luck and happiness'. Overall, what a great day, the two attractions were both amazing experiences.

Toby

Day 7

The City Walls of Xi'an

When I found out that we were going to cycle around the City Walls of Xi'an I knew this would be an excellent way to soak up the sights, sounds and smells of China's former capital. Built in the 14th Century, the City Walls are somewhat overshadowed by the modern tower blocks and glitzy

shopping centres, but at night they are beautifully lit up acting as a beacon to the city's glorious past, including the impressive drum and bell tower and Wild Goose Pagoda which are housed within the old walls – more on these historic sites later.



In total, the City Walls are 16km in length and over 10 metres high and would have certainly helped to keep out Xian's enemies from the past. Thankfully, we were just visiting the Walls and after a steep climb up to the East Gate we were ready for some pedal power. Well, that is after my mum and sister, Amy, managed to find bikes suitable for them. Unfortunately, our Mandarin skills didn't quite stretch to "please could you lower the seat" and instead my mum and sister were offered a tandem to ride. Let's just say their balancing skills weren't up to the challenge of a two-person bike and after some hilarious hand signals and filming of the entertainment provided by my companions while trying to balance and move off simultaneously, we headed off around the rectangular circuit albeit at the back of the group and with Mum and Amy back on normal bikes for health and safety reasons of course!

Not just popular with tourists to the city (and it is easy to see why as we were able to take in some breathtaking views of the hustle and bustle below), the City Walls are also popular with locals getting married, having their pictures taken against the scenic backdrop as a reminder of their special day. This day was also special to us and particularly me as it provided an alternative cycling track to the Velodrome at which I train each week

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back in London. Who knows, one day I might make it to the Velodrome in Beijing, but for the time being it was great fun exploring the city of Xi'an on bikes.

Tom

Market Visit and Drum Tower



In the afternoon, we went for a walk to the nearby Muslim market/street. Where we enjoyed looking at many unusual things that they had on offer. They had massive candyfloss in the shape of flowers, unusual fruits and interesting food/bakes as well as great sweets. After having a look around the market, we went up the nearby drum tower by the entrance of the market. Opposite it was the bell tower on the other side of the Square. The square was filled with beds of colourful flowers. There were many different drums with lots of different characters on them. Further up there was a room filled with drums and examples of traditional Chinese living areas. It also gave one a brilliant view of the nearby parts of the city.

Rhea

A night at the Opera

That evening we had the opportunity to go and see a fascinating opera about the Tang Dynasty. We saw many different acts including long sleeved dancing, ladies with lanterns, men with armour and massive 'trumpets' or blowing instruments, ladies with long blue and white dresses, men with armour and weapons, DunHuang flying, PoZhen dance, Spring Flowers on the moonlit river dance, LvYao dance, the dance that describes how the thousand hand guardian came to the earth and a man with three trumpets including a tiny high pitch one on his lips.

Day 8

Cuihua Mountain



We travelled by coach from our hotel in Xi'an to a mountainous area known as Cuihua Mountain Park which is part of Qinling mountain. As we had experienced some very busy days, my mum and I decided to join some others on an open sided car and be driven to the top. Following an exhilarating drive which zig-zagged up the mountain and finally through a long tunnel, we were presented with a breath-taking view of the lake and the mountains beyond. We saw some boats and decided to take a ride on the lake. Much to our surprise, these weren't speedboats but pedalos! Just as well we'd conserved our energy as we certainly needed it travel around the lake. It was beautifully peaceful and the reflection of the mountains was perfect on the mirror-like lake surface. Then for our trip back down, much to our horror our car was nowhere to be seen. Now for some Mandarin practice! We managed to arrange the return journey with a local taxi driver - of course a bit of bartering was required.

Charlotte

Traditional Dance Show



After a wonderful visit to the Great Wild Goose Pagoda we all set off on the coach to go and see a traditional dance show. As we all entered the hall,

we sat at tables covered with red tablecloths, and had refreshments of popcorn and watermelon slices. As the curtain lifted, we were all prepared for the dance show.

There were warriors who started the show by jumping and doing flips over each other. There were also graceful women dancing to traditional songs with all their beautiful costumes. One of the costumes formed a part of a dance were they would throw their longs sleeves, I found it so beautiful. I had two favourite acts: one of them was a man who used a throat instrument to play funny noises. My other favourite was a woman who lined up in front of the other ones and did a beautiful dance with hidden bodies and eyes on the plans, called the Buddha dance.

What really amazed me, was that all of the performers were deaf and were guided by the people in the wings. All in all, this show was amazing and I would recommend it as one of the highlights of the trip.

Mia

