On the weekend of the 22nd, Students made the move from SJTU’s Xuhui campus to the Minhang campus. This move took us from an urban area to a more suburban location. The campus is much larger and has many more buildings and options. The dining courts have improved dramatically, and most of the food is made to order. All of the students live in dorm 51, or “Area 51,” in pods of 8. Each pod includes a common room with a table, chairs, and hutches, as well as a short hall to 4 rooms, each housing 2 students. We also get our own bathrooms equipped with a shower, two “Western” toilets, and our very own squat ter!

Our culture class required four field trips, one of which was a cooking class and tour of a Chinese wet market. Before the trip we were split into teams of four and allowed to pick four dishes from a list of common and traditional Chinese cuisine. Upon arrival we were greeted by our chef and plenty of fresh ingredients to work with. Each student got their own massive cleaver, a cutting board, and an apron. If students selected the Weever fish to prepare, they were taken to the wet market to select a live fish with that would then become dinner. Popular choices of recipes included Kung-Pao Chicken, Spicy Eggplant, and Sweet and Sour Pork. At the end we asked our chef if he worked at a restaurant so we could visit him, and promptly changed our minds when he said the Ritz-Carlton. Overall, we had a great time learning more about what we’re eating here and how to prepare it!

Part of our program includes a trip over the Spring Festival. Transportation and lodging was planned for us, so all we had to do was show up! Our first stop was the city of Suzhou, then we traveled to Hangzhou. During the three day trip we stopped at many gardens, and also learned about silk embroidery and the life of concubines. All of us were pleasantly surprised by how interesting and complex the silk embroideries were – some looked like paintings! During one of the garden trips the guys decided that they wanted to take pictures with some of the adorable Chinese babies touring with their families. As you can see, Connor was the only one questionably successful (the baby started crying).

We were able to tour a cave and also take two riverboat cruises, which were extremely relaxing. We saw ancient pagodas, bridges, and river locks. The last day we visited a tea plantation and got to observe some of the growing and harvesting processes, as well as learn the proper way to brew the tea. The end of the trip left us with an option to ride the bus back to Shanghai, or begin or travels from Hangzhou.
Welcome to Shanghai

Huangshan – The Yellow Mountains

By Emilie Garnier

During the long break we had from class for the Lunar Festival (Chinese New Year), a few of us decided to head to Huangshan, to visit the Yellow Mountains. Overall, this was an amazing trip. We travelled in the afternoon and evening of the first day, and arrived at a hostel in a small town about half an hour away from the base of the mountains. The people at the hostel were amazing and gave us lots of advice on how to plan our hikes for the following day. We started the day off well by getting breakfast at the restaurant across the street from the hostel (I should point out that this was, in my opinion, one of the best meals since getting to China).

Although we spent quite some time waiting in lines to get bus tickets, tickets into the park, and to actually get into the park, the hike itself proved to be beyond worth it. The trail was essentially a never-ending set of stairs up the mountains. For a good part of the way up, we were surrounding by what seemed like smog, but something incredible happened once we got high enough. The "smog" turned out to be a large cloud and all of the sudden, it just moved out of the way and the mountain became visible for a short moment, as if playing hide and seek with us. We continued hiking up until we finally cleared above the cloud. It's honestly hard to describe how breathtaking the view was at that point. Pictures are definitely worth a thousand words but nothing compares to being up on the top of that mountain. 15km and many hours after initially starting our hike, we finally got back to the bus and then the hostel, feeling very happy and tired.
Armed with a newly revised class schedule, three days to plan, and an unlimited amount of options, 11 of us decided that the previously-thought impossible Hainan trip was once again possible. Three of us took charge of flights for the group, one of us booked the hostel, and another researched how to travel from the northern Haiku (where we’d land,) to the southern city, Sanya (where our hostel awaited us). We had a rough start to our trip, as a 4.5 hour smog delay out of Hangzhou put us in the Haiku airport 10 minutes after the last Sanya-Haiku train departed. Our island vacation got worse as we realized our only monetarily sound option was to spend the night at the airport and hope for a train in the morning. After some quality time with the floor and our luggage we walked to the train station at 5 a.m. in attempt to book 11 tickets to Sanya. Luck was on our side and we made it onto first class of the first train that morning!

When we arrived in Sanya we took the most wild bus ride of our lives to our hostel. Imagine 11 sweaty and half-asleep foreign college students with bookbags and suitcases standing in a bus full of at least 50 other people. Now imagine that bus (manual bus) changing lanes up hill with cars going legitimately any direction they wanted and you might get an idea of what we went through. For an hour. The second language on the island is Russian, so finding English writing, let alone speakers, was definitely a challenge.

Here’s where things get better. Our hostel was very easy to find, and while the quality wasn’t the greatest, the staff and location were the best on the island. Sanya is covered with fresh fruit vendors, and seafood restaurants with fish tanks that you actually pick your dinner from. The weather was in the 80s all week and the beach was only a short walk away. Many of the Chinese asked us why we didn’t bring our “good American sunscreen.” Our answer was we thought we could just buy it here—which wasn’t the case. At the beach you’ll find the Chinese covered head to toe in long sleeves, pants, and hats to avoid the suns rays. Needless to say we were some of the few people wearing bathing suits. One day, we took a cab to the MGM Grand and lounged around at one of the nicest beaches we’ll probably ever experience. We also learned not to take vans over taxis because each of the seven van-goers paid more than my entire cab totaled. A 3 minute walk from the hostel took us to our American-food haven, the Dolphin Bar (Is it okay to admit we ate here literally every day?) On our last day we went to a “fish spa” on the beach were little Doctor Fish nibble on your dead skin—a very ticklish experience for us, which the Chinese found amusing.. Our hostel set up a giant round of Chinese trivia for the other residents and us that night—making it very bittersweet saying our goodbyes. We left the island on great terms, with full-body sunburns and some unforgettable memories.
Here you can see the destinations that our students have visited outside of the class trip. The red pentagon is where Shanghai is located. The purple star indicated Huangshan, where the Yellow Mountains located. The green star covers the island of Hainan. At the southern tip of the island is a city called Sanya. These two trips were during the Spring Festival. The final destination, Harbin, is home of the world’s largest ice festival.

Welcome to Shanghai

Harbin - Snow & Ice World

During the weekend move to Minhang, a group of us flew up to Harbin. Harbin is home to the largest ice festival in the world, as well as a Siberian Tiger Park. From the moment we landed until the moment we flew out we only had 30 hours, so we had to make the most of our time.

Saturday evening we headed to the ever-popular Snow & Ice World. There were massive buildings and arches made of ice, in addition to bridges and slides. We even got to hold artic foxes! At dusk the structures began to light up in vibrant colors that changed every couple seconds. The entire thing was like a dreamland, but the freezing temperatures kept you in reality.

The next day we headed over to the Siberian Tiger Park. For under $10 we got tickets into the park and for a ride a somewhat- armored bus. The bus tour definitely exceeded our expectations and took us through multiple fenced-in “steaks” (Googled term for groups of tigers). At the end there was an elevated walkway that covered even more exhibits. You could pay $10 to feed the tigers live chickens, and while we didn’t, many other visitors took the opportunity. Before our flight we also took a last minute bonus trip to Harbin Polarland – an artic themed aquarium with a flamboyant beluga whale show at the end. Overall we had a great experience in Harbin!

ETA and GEAR programs in China are made possible by a long standing partnership between Purdue University and the Shanghai Jiao Tong University. Any questions or requests for pictures can be sent directly to the editors of this newsletter at...