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China Retail Study Tour

Tour Experience

The University of Florida Retail Study Tour in China was the adventure of a lifetime. This trip gave me exposure to and understanding of the important Chinese market. Understanding the Chinese language, culture, government, and market is quintessential in today's business world. I believe that going on this trip gave me exposure to consumers and markets abroad that furthered my understanding of business in America. It was interesting to see how businesses operate in China; the cultural and economic differences really influenced how even the same company operated in China as opposed to the United States. We also were exposed to how the markets are trending in China. Being able to learn about these markets with a firsthand experience was invaluable for me and I hope to be able to utilize that knowledge in my future career.

The first day we explored Shanghai we got to see the local markets. There was a woman who grabbed a live eel and began to cut it into pieces. It was a very eye opening moment from the very first day! The local markets were drastically different from American markets in both their products and culture. In Shenzhen, we visited the Sam's Club and got to see all the American products being sold to the Chinese consumers. We also saw the people catching their own fish out of the tanks and grabbing the shrimp out of the tanks with their bare hands because they value fresh quality food. It is important to understand the way people and markets behave if your company wants to be successful in China. Cultural differences alone can undermine a company’s success in China if a
company does not understand the intricate differences in conducting business in China as opposed to in the United States. As a young professional about to start my career, seeing these differences will enable me to better be able to conduct business internationally in an increasingly global marketplace.

One of the cultural differences that struck me the most was that as an American, the locals in China look at you as if you were a celebrity. They even come up to take pictures with you! Walking through the streets of China was a cultural experience in and of itself; the local markets and street food was such a departure from what I’m used to seeing.

In Shanghai, the architecture in China is incredible and the juxtaposition between traditional Chinese buildings and Western skyscrapers are quite a unique contrast to the scenery. The skyline makes you feel like you are in a futuristic New York City. The buildings were incredibly modern and seeing the city at night was truly breathtaking. Not only does China have incredible architecture, however. Even major Chinese cities have areas of serenity and peace. One such area in Shanghai is the Yuyen Garden. Our tour of the garden was really interesting. I enjoyed seeing how superstitions influenced their design of the garden; for instance, the mini bridges are in a zigzag form to prevent the evil spirits from getting into the garden. It is fascinating how these traditions date back thousands of years.

I enjoyed seeing the differences in the first and third tier cities. Although Yingkou is a third tier city, it is developing as it is anticipating rapid growth in the next few decades. Currently, the city has the feel of a ghost town as a result of numerous buildings being constructed not for current residents, but in anticipation of an influx of people and
population growth in the city. While cities like Beijing and Shanghai are already established as major international economic and cultural cities, China’s third tier cities could one day become equally important on a global scale.

In addition to learning business operations in China, I learned about the history and traditions of the country on a first hand account. One of the most memorable aspects of the trip was when our group climbed the Great Wall of China. I truly realize now why they refer to it as one of the Seven Wonders of the World. Just climbing the Wall was tiring; I can’t imagine the kind of work and challenges it took to build such a marvel of architecture. Additionally, we visited Tiananmen Square and the Forbidden City. These are world-renown places with a substantial amount of history behind them. Understanding the history of China is important, as it has shaped the country into what it has become today.

To be successful in today's business world, it is vital to understand the Chinese market. It is a growing market with a growing population and an increasing middle class. The potential for business expansion into China is substantial. It is the epitome of an emerging market; with so much untapped potential China will be a major factor in businesses worldwide. The future for China will be prosperous and it was very fascinating to be able to see its growth on a first hand account.