China Retail Study Tour-Reflection

When I would tell people about my pending travels to China, a common response involved how much it would be a trip of a lifetime. I’ve been on other study tours where the group dynamic was lacking especially in study tours with grad and undergrad students. That was not the case with this tour. While many of us had seen each other in the class meetings before the trip, it was not until we were in country where bonds blossomed. This trip also afforded me the opportunity to make professional contacts as well. I really appreciated the opportunity that presented itself in being able to talk to the various company executive staff or liaisons that were provided. As a student without retail experience the company visits still remained interesting to me. The presentations that were given at the various companies contained themes that translated to various forms of business. As a student with previous coursework in tourism, I thoroughly enjoyed the governmental visits. While the governmental visits provided good information for me to take back to the states it was the side conversations that I had with the presenters and company liaisons that proved to be the most beneficial. I was able to pitch various ideas to them and have them provide on the spot feedback. It was nice to have someone within the industry provide suggestions on how to succeed in starting a business not only within the sector but in China itself.

The cultural excursions were a major draw for me to participate in the study tour. I was allured by the thought of visiting the Great Wall, the Forbidden City and Tiananmen Square. Although I have traveled abroad before this trip, I have never visited a country that was vastly different from the states. It was definitely an adventure being in a country where not only the language was foreign to me but the culture as well. While we were told about the “hole in the
ground” toilets, I have to be honest that I didn’t quite understand until it came time for me to use one. Other cultural experiences that we saw were the children walking around with their bottoms exposed or adoring cutouts for easy access to the removal of the diaper. In the states you hear about and see couple that dress in coordination or in complementary colors. In China, I saw multiple couple, including their children, in head to toe matching outfits. It was thrilling to witness the act of negation when making purchases in the various markets that we came across. Our China national students that came along on the trip truly had a gift. Their gifts spanned beyond being translators and negotiators but included karaoke as well. It was very entertaining to have bonding time with my tour participants as we had karaoke and shopping sessions.

All in all, this study tour was one that I will never forget. From the insightful company tours to the eye opening cultural experiences, I can say that I learned a lot about myself, the people around me as well as about the retail and business industry in China.