My Trip to China

By: Christina Duffy

Eleanor Roosevelt once said, “Life is what you make it. Always has been, always will be.” When it came to the China Retail Study Tour, the trip was what you made it to be. You can be where you need to be when you need to be, but if you are just meeting the minimum requirements, you cannot expect maximum return. If you take the time to notice your surroundings, ask questions, and bask in the culture of China, that is when you truly experience China.

As I was in the car on my way to Miami International Airport, I was afraid of how the trip was going to be. I have never been to a country with a culture so different than my own. In addition, we never really had the opportunity to get to know the other students in the class; however, I was pleasantly surprised to see how quickly we all bonded through our experience together. As soon as I arrived at the airport, I immediately found comfort in the familiar faces of the three that were also taking the same plane as me and my worries were instantly at ease.

Despite the long travel time, we arrived at the hotel in Shanghai and it surpassed all of my expectations; it was extravagant. That night I refused to let my exhaustion take over and I went on a river boat tour and got to see the beautiful lights that created a wonderful glow throughout the city. The elaborate lighting and architecture was like nothing I had ever seen. The rest of my time in Shanghai was a blur. I was so caught up in the hustle and bustle of the city that a few days seemed like a lifetime. Although it was crazy, I will never forget the beautiful temples, the French Concession, and Han City (a knock-off market).

The city of Shenzhen was also wonderful. With company visits, such as Walmart and Umbra, our short time in Shenzhen was packed with knowledge. The only set back to being in
Shenzhen was that we were so close to Hong Kong yet never had the opportunity to go. After Shenzhen, we were able to see more of the culture in Guangzhou.

Despite the fact that the hotel in Guangzhou was more low-key than the other cities, I absolutely adored the location of it. Since the hotel was located on a pedestrian street, we were instantly immersed into the culture. Walking around the street at night, we were able to witness the energy of the night in Guangzhou. We even went to an Italian restaurant called Saizeriya that cost less than four dollars for a filling meal! The second time we went we saw the same waitress and I exchanged contact information with her so she could practice her English, and we are still emailing back and forth today.

When we went to Yingkou, it was an experience in itself. Compared to the tier one cities, Yingkou felt empty and the difference was easy to see. In addition, we felt more like outsiders in this city as well; for example, this city was the first time a woman tried to have me hold her baby for a picture. Yingkou was fun though because we got to go to KTV, which is a karaoke place. I never realized how much they love karaoke in China and how big of a deal it is over there. In addition, we got to visit another university and enjoy a banquet with them. Being able to converse with other students from across the globe was a priceless experience; a few of them even came to KTV with us that night!

The last city we went to was Beijing and it was incredible. We had the opportunity to go to the U.S. Embassy and meet the ambassador, which was an experience that I will remember forever. We also had the time to do a lot of shopping at the silk market, which was in walking distance from the hotel. The last day in China was my favorite since we went to the Forbidden City and the Great Wall. I wish we had two separate days to do both, but it was still unforgettable.
The Forbidden City is mind-boggling as you travel through it. I never realized how big the Forbidden City really was until I was completely surrounded by its splendor. The architecture and detail was breathtaking. When it comes to the Great Wall of China, there are no words that can possibly express how marvelous it truly is. No picture was able to captivate all the color and beauty of the wall and the surrounding mountains. Looking at how much time and strength was put into building the wall was humbling. I have never seen anything like it before in my life nor will I ever in the future.

When it comes to China, do not let a minute pass you by. Take in everything. Some of my favorite experiences in China did not have to do with the companies or the culture but dealt with the people I spend every day with. When we came to China, we arrived as individual students. When we left, we were family. It was actually sad to say our good-byes, especially to those who have graduated. China was an amazing experience that could have never been done elsewhere. I learned more in three weeks than I did in most of my classes. This trip is what you make of it, and I know I made the most out of it. After all, you really learn by truly living.