

New Zealand Teachers China Scholarship 2008 Winner Mike Debney On his time in Beijing learning Chinese

In early January I was one of ten New Zealand teachers who left summer and families behind for a month of intensive Chinese language study at Peking University in Beijing. We were the New Zealand Teachers China Scholarship winners for 2008.

This scholarship is funded by the Ministries of Education in New Zealand and the People's Republic of China and managed jointly in New Zealand by the Chinese Language Foundation and the Confucius Institute in Auckland.

Our level of Chinese language varied as did our backgrounds. We were from North and South, city and country but we shared a common understanding of the importance of Chinese language for New Zealanders and a commitment to enhance our teaching of Chinese language for our students.

By great good fortune we elected Juay and Sarah our group leaders at a meeting in Auckland before we left. Their efforts to co-ordinate events and liaise with the university were greatly appreciated.

After a day in Beijing to acclimatise we began our studies. The programme covered oral and written Chinese language, Chinese music and culture. Lectures took place daily from 8.00am to 12.00 noon. This organisation gave us the afternoons and weekends to explore the many wonders of Beijing. Our teachers expertly pitched the lessons to accommodate our diverse levels of Chinese and they were unfailingly patient. The work was always challenging but manageable. In spite of needing a few hours extra study each day to keep up, I still found plenty of time to discover this great capital city.

Our apartments for international students were on campus, close to our classroom block. They were clean, warm and comfortable. The accommodation staff were always very cheerful and enjoyed assisting us if we had any problem.

Each of us had personal highlights of our time in Beijing. For some it was our weekend in Xi'an. For others the Great Wall, Temple of Heaven or the Summer Palace. Many discovered the joys of striking bargains at the Silk and Pearl Markets. Shopping therapy! For me it was mingling with the thousands of locals in the park surrounding the Temple of Heaven as they played cards, Chinese chess, dominoes, danced, sang and exercised en masse in sub zero temperatures. It's true that Chinese enjoy doing things together.

All of us enjoyed the food. Every day became a different taste adventure. Some were unexpected such as when we thought we ordered beef for our hot pot and got duck. The duck was delicious! My plan at on-campus restaurants was very successful. I would look for a meal that looked nice, learnt how to say it and present myself at the counter. If I got 'meiyou' I would just indicate that I wanted whatever the person in front of me had just ordered. This excellent plan gave me many new taste sensations.

It turns out the month at Beida isn't the end. We returned to New Zealand highly motivated to continuing our Chinese language development, each in our own way. I have many fond memories of people and places and am looking forward to returning to Beijing with my family.

Mike Debney
South Wellington Intermediate School

2008 NZ Teachers China Scholarship holders are:

Yvonne Blair, Paparoa Range School, Greymouth

Chris Bryant, Brooklyn School, Wellington
Sarah-Jane Codyre, Glen Eden Intermediate School, Auckland
Michelle Dalley, Kaikorai Valley College, Dunedin
Mike Debney, South Wellington Intermediate School
Alexandra Fraser, Hutt Intermediate School
Kristin Holmes, Brooklyn School, Wellington
Hoon Juay Lim, Royal Oak Intermediate School, Auckland
Heather Stevens, Wainuioru School, Masterton
Mark Young, Avonhead School, Christchurch