

Adventure-Trip
By Christopher Yee

This summer I interned with Adventure-Ship, a charity in Hong Kong that provides a “floating classroom” for youth via a large Chinese junk, the *Huan*. The program is tailored to accommodate all youth, specifically those with disabilities. My internship was organized by the Yale-China Association. The Yale-China Summer Internship is designed to give students both the experiences of public service and of culture. The prospect of spending a summer advancing a noble cause, while immersing myself in a culture that I, growing up in a Cantonese-speaking home, had always wanted to explore, enticed me to apply. In both of these respects, my expectations were far exceeded.

The position I received at Adventure-Ship required of me the completion of two major projects. The first project entailed a research of the background and features of the *Jockey Club Huan*, the subject of the charity’s plan to replace the ship currently in use. Eventually, I condensed this research into a feature article for Adventure-Ship’s web-based newsletter. The second project involved updating and modifying the Adventure-Ship website. In a few aspects, I was updating the work of one of last year’s interns who created and designed the current version of the website. I evaluated the website for errors and possible improvements. I replaced outdated content, including an overhaul of the newsletter section.

Aside from my time in the office, I had the opportunity to join several trips aboard the *Huan*. It was a pleasure to observe firsthand what drove this charity’s aims. Even more exciting was the chance to participate in the training activities and to offer what I could to encourage and motivate the youth, like shouting “Ga Yow!”, a common phrase equivalent to “C’mon! Let’s go!” (though which literally translates to “Add oil!”). I

could share a number of snapshots to convey what I determined to be the essence of Adventure-Ship, but I will only share a few from my first time aboard the *Huan*.

My first trip alone left me enough of an impression to understand what makes this program special. It was a day trip. The participants consisted of a group of children with mental disabilities each paired with a volunteer from another group of older students. This is what they call the Buddies Program. This floating classroom challenged the participants to attempt activities such as steering a motor-powered rescue boat and swinging on a trapeze. Within the six or so hours of the training program, I witnessed dedication and expertise from the *Huan* crew, patience and encouragement from the volunteers, and mutual support between and determination from the participants with disabilities. It was a blessing to be in the presence of such positive energy. On a selfish note, I was most touched at journey's end when a little girl enthusiastically expressed her appreciation to me for merely staying by her side as she swam back to the ship after an activity.

Through Adventure-Ship, I definitely noticed a difference being made. And through follow-up efforts such as its Shore-Based Training Reinforcement program, I am glad to see those differences being sustained.

Before I continue, I must reserve room to thank everyone at Adventure-Ship. I very much felt that I was being taken care of from start to finish. I definitely felt as much part of a family as much as I ever have been in a workplace. My thanks go out to all the board members with whom I was fortunate to meet and work as well as my co-workers at the office, which included another Yale intern, Laura Oh. And of course, I thank Mimi Yeung, Adventure-Ship's executive secretary. More than a supervisor, Mimi was a

splendid host for us Yale interns, and I cannot thank her enough for the countless meals, for the visits to choice tourist attractions that she herself had probably visited more than enough, for the enriching opportunities to just talk and get to know her, and for her vital role in improving my once-lost ability to communicate full conversations in Cantonese. She characterized a perfect example of someone Cantonese speakers would describe as “hock hay”.

Hong Kong life outside Adventure-Ship also brought good times. I found an opportunity to tutor English weekly to an eleven-year old boy within my first few days on the trip. I regularly played basketball with the locals in large public areas such as Victoria Park and Southorn Playground, striking up conversation between games. I found a wonderful English-speaking church to attend as well as another college-aged church group, where I met a host of expatriates and exchange students. And, of course, I paid my share of visits to family and family friends.

Perhaps due to the pride of myself being from a Cantonese background, my intended approach to experiencing the life and culture of Hong Kong was to resist the role of tourist as much as possible. Instead I wanted to blend in as much as I could. By the middle of my internship, I had developed a rather regular weekly routine. This contrasted the initial excitement of being in a new place, paging through my Lonely Planet tour book, and meticulously planning out my every next weekend. I had my share of quiet evenings spent reading in my hostel room. Other nights I roamed the streets of areas like Tsim Sha Tsui just to hang out, whether alone or with friends I had made. Looking back, the extent of my travels within Hong Kong was frequently limited by the reach of the MTR subway system. In other words, I rarely ventured to a location without

a subway stop within its five-block radius. Fortunately, the MTR's reach covers quite a bit, though I did end my trip having not visited a few common tourist attractions. (By the way, I am no underground public transportations expert, but Hong Kong's system is superior to any I have ever experienced for its cleanliness and technology.)

And any comprehensive discussion of my experience would be remiss to not mention the people congestion. The population density, after all, is the world's greatest. It can be an early Saturday morning in Tsuen Wan, or a late Monday night in Mong Kok. Either way you can count on walking the streets shoulder-to-shoulder, or every few minutes, shoulder-bump-shoulder, while flyers and ads are being shoved in your direction. This concept of encountering throngs of people 24/7 was quite new to me, but I enjoyed it. It was, in fact, an occasional retreat of mine to step out of my hostel to just take a walk through the streets, in the thick of peddlers, street food aroma, and commuters. I found it relaxing to just get lost in the crowd, to enjoy myself like the six or seven people within an arm's distance of me.

Some of my other favorite in-crowd Hong Kong moments included: participating in the June 4th vigil remembering Tiananmen with the other 35,000-or-so in attendance at Victoria Park; reveling with the crowds assembled in pubs, in bars, and outdoors throughout Lan Kwai Fong to watch the World Cup (note: I do not even particularly like football/soccer, but the enthusiasm elicited by this monster of an event and its international appeal clearly won me over, and there I found myself aboard the World Cup bandwagon.); and viewing fireworks to celebrate the fifth anniversary of Hong Kong's handover to China with some friends as well as the tens of thousands of locals and

tourists gathered at every possible angle surrounding Victoria Harbor to catch a glimpse of the show.

I could go on and on, of course, about my nine weeks in Hong Kong. In the end, I would like to believe I left a changed person. And this is to say nothing of my dyed and grown-out hair, tanned complexion, and newly discovered appreciation of Canto-pop music. I fell in love with life in this most urban of urban places, with people costily on the move and in large numbers. Most of all, I was moved by all the people I met. I will never forget the friends I made. And by friends, I mean students, fellow churchgoers, locals playing basketball, students, and, most importantly, the people with Adventure-Ship. In one's life, there is nothing quite like the experience of people. Of meeting new people, and enjoying their company. This summer I got a dose of this, Hong Kong-style.