

CPA Australia

Plan Your Own Enterprise COMPETITION-2007

Trip to Shanghai

To: The organisers of Business Educators Australasia and Sponsors
From: Maria Koulianous – Darwin High School
Re: An account of my trip to Shanghai

China what an experience! Never in my life would I have imagined I would be in Shanghai experiencing the things I did and meeting the people I met. I have had the chance to meet and interact with some of the most successful business people in China, such as Ms. Ella Gu, General Manger of CPA Shanghai and Mr. Lawrence Lau the Vice President Shanghai Committee and Management Controlling Director, Consumer Products Division of LOREAL China. During my meetings with them we discussed a large range of subjects including the competition and my business plan. They asked questions and were extremely enthusiastic. We discussed the difference between students in Shanghai to those in Australia. I discovered that Chinese students do not tend to participate in extra-curricular activities like this competition, because they have a tendency to just focus on getting into university as the schooling there is so difficult.

When I left my meeting with Mr. Lau I gained valuable information and advice for my future career. The experience became even more memorable to me when Mr. Lau shocked and surprised me by saying; if our meeting was a job interview he would have hired me! This was due to the way I conducted myself and answered his questions.

Christopher Wright, a Trade Commissioner of Austrade was the second business person I met in Shanghai. Mr. Wright told me some very interesting information about imports and exports between Australia and China, also development in Shanghai and how high-rise buildings are erected. After our meeting we went to an Australian owned café where we met the manager of the café who explained its concept.

Upon my arrival at Changzheng Middle School on Thursday, I was given a huge surprise. At the front of the school was a billboard/TV screen saying, 'We warmly welcome Ms Maria Koulianous, Ms Anna Koulianous, and Mr. Jayant Prakash to our school'. This gesture made us feel very special and welcomed. The first people I met were a group of teachers who greeted us and took us to the staff room where we met the Vice-Principal. We talked about the competition and the different educational systems in Australia and China. After the talk they took us for a tour around the school, which had impressive facilities. Then they had us meet and talk to a group of year 12 students. The students were so excited and happy to see us, that it was overwhelming. I explained the competition and my business plan to them and then they all

had a chance to ask my teacher, my mother and I questions, as they all spoke English. They asked me for advice about how to get through year 12 and about life in Australia. My mother also gave them some very good advice and inspiration, which the teachers at the school were very happy with. At the end of our gathering one of the students sang a song for us in English which was remarkable.

After the meeting with the students the teachers took us to one of the biggest restaurants I have ever seen. There we met the principal of the school. The principal was very interested and pleased to meet and talk to us. At the restaurant I tasted some unique and traditional Chinese food.

Friday was the only day we explored Shanghai. Our guide took us to Yu Garden and Bazaar, which is a huge garden surrounded by markets. The gardens were breathtaking and the markets were great for shopping, bargaining and local food.

Philip Zhao the Director of PR Legend Consulting Co Ltd, a public relations company, met us formally on Friday. Mr. Zhao took us to a Tea House to have our meeting - this was the first time I had been in a tea house. While drinking traditional tea, we discussed the competition and what his company did. Then we ventured out to lunch and enjoyed some brilliant Chinese cuisine. While enjoying lunch we discovered that my mother and I had a lot in common with Mr. Zhao, so we had many things to chat about. Mr. Zhao also offered to take us around sightseeing on Saturday, which was extraordinarily generous and kind of him. While Mr. Prakash went with the guide and took pleasure in the amazing tourist attractions, my mother and I got a local's tour of Shanghai.

Our first destination on Saturday was the Shanghai Oriental Pearl TV Tower, which at 468m is the world's third largest TV tower with amazing views across the city and Yangtze River. From the Oriental Pearl we also saw Jinmao Tower at 420.5m which is the fourth tallest building and the highest hotel in the world – this took my breath away. After lunch we walked around Xintiandi the trendiest upscale pedestrian area, set in a grey-brick traditional Shanghai neighborhood. Mr. Zhao and a friend of his named Janet then took us to the best local markets, which were every female's dream come true. Even though we bought enough to open our own store, we still only managed to get through the first floor. After we finished shopping Mr. Zhao took us to one of his favourite restaurants, which to my surprise was a Turkish restaurant. It had live dancers that danced their way through the audience encouraging guests to dance with them. The most astonishing thing was when I tasted a traditional Greek dish, it dominated anything I have ever had in Greece. After dinner on our way to Nanjing Road we drove past the Shanghai Grand Theatre and the Shanghai Museum and saw them lit up. Nanjing Road is China's No.1 historic shopping street and was our last stop for the night. Walking along this road was a feast for the eyes; I had never seen so many lights and lit up buildings before. A store that extremely intrigued me was a store that specialized in dried food. They offered

everything you could think of dried. There I even tasted the Chinese version of toffee apple!

I am enormously grateful to Mr. Zhao for taking time out of his schedule to take my mother and myself around Shanghai. Many of the places we visited were not presented on any tourist guides, so we would never have experienced these places if it wasn't for Mr. Zhao.

This trip to Shanghai is something that I will never forget. It was remarkable from beginning to end. China has always been on my list of places to visit. This competition not only made one of my dreams come true, but also allowed me to see China in such a unique way which I would never have had the opportunity to do. Becoming friends with successful business men and women, and visiting the school has made the trip not just a holiday, but has and will continue to help me with my future. My meetings with Mr. Zhao, Mr. Lau and the students have had a lasting effect on me. The cultural experience and knowledge I gained about China from this trip is something that is priceless. Due to this whole experience and some of the advice that Mr. Lau gave me, it has inspired me to learn Chinese Mandarin, as soon as I can.

This whole journey from creating my business plan, being selected as the NT finalist, attending the national judging in Canberra, to winning and going to Shanghai has helped me grow in so many ways and given me confidence that I have never had. It has taught me to believe in myself and never to be afraid to try new things or do something due to fear of failure, because you just never know. Even if you are not successful what matters is the experience that you gain.

I would strongly recommend the competition to anyone. It has opened so many doors for me as a university student and to someone who is just beginning a career, and that's not to mention how much I have learned and gained from participation in this competition. I also hope that this prize is available for other winners and if it is that they enjoy it as much as I have, and receive the same life lessons that I have learned.

I would like to say, thank you and how grateful I am to all the organizers, sponsors and to anyone who had anything to do with the Plan Your Own Enterprise Competition, for making it possible, so successful and enjoyable.

Yours Sincerely,
Maria Koulianos
2007 Winner
CPA Australia – Plan Your Own Enterprise Competition