A TRIP TO YUNNAN by Ling Zhong, China

Last summer holiday, I took a trip to Yunnan with some of my friends. Yunnan is located in the southwest of China. This place has beautiful mountains, rivers and is full of many minority races.

We spent the first two days in Kunming city and we were living in a home-style hotel. It was a nice large apartment. We could cook; play cards and majiang in the hotel. We also visited some tourist places in Kunming city, such as Yunnan Folk Culture Village, Shi Lin (strange stones), and Jiu Xiang(big carve). Even though these places are very beautiful and interesting, I would have to say it’s a bit crowded as there were too many visitors.

Then, we followed a local friend’s suggestion. We went to Heqing County, a Bai(one minority race) nationality autonomous region. This place is still under development, so there were just a few visitors. I was highly impressed by its beautiful scenery, kind people, local food and silver products. Our local friend took us to his relatives’ home. It is on the top of a mountain, which is 3000 meters above sea level. We had lots of tricholom amatsutake(a type of mushroom, rare and expensive),home-made ham, home-raised chicken, red potatoes, and all kinds of fresh fruits. The special weather and location have resulted in the fantastic taste of these foods. It was really delicious and unforgettable. What’s more, Heqing County is also famous for silver products. Almost every family knows how to make silver accessories, and the price is only one third compared with the market price. Therefore, we bought many silver souvenirs.

In the end we went to Li Jiang to celebrate Qixijie (Chinese traditional Valentine’s Day). We had lots of fun in the bars and pubs. As time was limited, we missed many other interesting places, but so far this trip is the most fun for me, and I will never forget it.
**Dear Mr. Winter by Celine Zhang, China**

It has been almost four months since you took control of our outdoor lives. Although I tried to make enough preparation each year, I was still astonished by your long and strong power. To be honest, I didn’t like your company at all; especially you always came without any invitation. You just rushed into our city suddenly and then left your footprints everywhere. You used heavy clouds to cover the sunshine, froze the rivers and falls, sent the birds to far south, killed all the soft flowers and cooped up us indoors all day.

I don’t like to complain, but I have had it with your despotic power. It’s you who took away my favorite color green from the earth and because of you, I couldn’t hear the birds singing in the morning for long time. I had to say Ithaca is frozen to my families who came to visit us other than Ithaca is gorgeous. The only fortune is that the kids like to play with one of your friends-snow, but your other friends are awful. The cloudy day made people blue, and the storm stopped our social activities.

Now I am waiting for spring so eagerly, while you still here making some troubles now and then. You must know the spring is on her way from lots of signs like several warm days with bright sunshine, some birds came back from the south, ice and snow began to melt. Perhaps you just wanted to impress us deeply by the snow and wind in your final days. But could you please be nice to us since we will still meet next year? So don’t be so reluctant to leave any more. Let’s just say goodbye merrily.

Yours sincerely,

Celine

---

**PROCRASTINATION by Ching Chia Yu, Taiwan**

In some situations, I admit that I am a procrastinator. I put off something until the last minute, especially for something I dislike. In addition, I can’t keep my passion for one thing for a long while; maybe up to three minutes, I will lose my enthusiasm about that thing. “Three minutes” is a little bit exaggerated, but sometimes I give up something halfway instead of keeping at it. A chore is exactly the thing I always procrastinate doing.

However, learning English is an exception. I am surprised that I can persevere in improving my English skills. I realized that, after graduation, English was very important. I noticed that my poor English might be the biggest barrier to getting promotion or getting a good job with high salary. Therefore I started to improve my English by reading many English articles. Plus, I thought that the best way to improve my skill was to push myself to pass an English exam, TOEIC (Test of English for International Communication). At The first time, I only got a score of 375 out of a full score of 1000. I was very frustrated and for a period of time, I lost my passion for learning English. Fortunately, I told myself that as long as I stuck to it, I could reach my objective. Hence, I continued to study English using a variety of ways.

When I met my husband, we decided to apply to a foreign school to get a masters degree. We started to prepare for the TOEFL exam, an exam that candidates need to pass within an application process. Again, I was overwhelmed by the results of the score I got. The good thing was I realized that I had poor English listening skills and I started to work on improving that skill. I did not take the TOEFL exam again, but I didn’t stop learning English. Last year, I decided to take the TOEIC exam again and I got 785 out of 1000. The score of 785 is higher than the score that multinational companies require.

In conclusion, the results prove that “all our dreams can come true, if we have the courage to pursue them”, a quote from Walt Disney. In addition, I kept a positive faith: don’t be afraid of a challenge, and do transfer a frustration into the power.
**CHOCOLATE, MY LOVE MESSENGER TO MY DAUGHTER**
by Chuang Xu, China

China is famous for its food. Most people like Chinese food because its history is as old as the history of China. There are many famous Chinese traditional foods, such as roast duck, hot pot, boiled fish etc. However, chocolate is not a traditional Chinese food, especially for a man in the 1970s. But I like it. For me, it is the symbol of love, care, happiness and so on.

In the autumn of 2008, a magical life came to the world after ten months' pregnancy. She is a beautiful, pretty and sweet girl like princess with black eyes, black straight hair but White Snow skin. Her grandmother, her mother, and everybody love her. She is the center of the world for my family. She is my daughter.

But I want to tell you another secret story about my pretty girl and all the babies like her. Everyone born by Caesarean section is a little sensitive and lacks the feeling of security, because they missed the extrusion process by birth canal. As a consequence, they like sleeping with parents and they put fingers in the mouth and also like sweet food.

Chocolate was the first gift on her birthday after I asked what she wanted. My daughter was very happy when she got it. I know why she is happy - she needs it. I love her very much. Every time she asked for chocolate, I would like to satisfy her demand. I know that she loves it, and I love her. She needs to be loved and I need to give love. I love my pretty girl as I like sweet chocolate. Even if it is bad for health as we know, but it is great for love. Thank you, Chocolate.

**MY WONDERFUL JOURNEY** by Celine Zhang, China

At this moment, I am sitting on top of this beautiful shelf overlooking those eager eyes of some lovely children. Wearing a shining golden coat, I feel I am not the one who used to be tiny and cheap.

I lived in West Africa before, which is far from here. I can clearly remember the rough hands of a black boy with his bright smile and bad teeth who removed me from the cocoa pod. After fermentation and drying for several days, my companions and I were transported to the chocolate factories where we were transformed from a cheap crop to premium food.

In the factory I met some new friends, one of whom I almost fell in love with that pretty lady named milk. We are definitely the best couple in the world since we have made the most fantastic taste together. Of course, I have to mention the other sweet friends like sugar and other spices. We cooperated very well. Before leaving from the factories to the chocolate store, I was given a fine golden coat that made me looked brand new.

However, I often remembered the poor black boy, who would never have the chance to change his life from hell to heaven like me, although it was he who started me on my wonderful journey. Also, he even had no idea about what the cocoa beans were used for, not to mention the fantastic taste of chocolate. I feel so lucky at the thought of that we had totally different fate - I became much more valuable, while he would never leave the poor and tough place - although we were born in the same place.

Well, I heard that the people love chocolate badly, so I believed my next stop would be more comfortable and beautiful than this posh chocolate store. An active boy took me in his white and delicate hand when I was in my daydreams. But after paying for me, he hurried to take off my pretty coat and just ate me in one bite, even before leaving from the chocolate store. Oh my, this new home is warm and wet, but never comfortable! I never thought my wonderful journey should stop here. How I miss the black boy who treated me as treasure!
**LOST IN THE SWEET BLACK MIST** by Moran Haik, Israel

Every Western or semi-Western country has those pleasure places, where people can enjoy good life shamelessly. These places could be either in a large crowded city or in a small village surrounding in landscape. Argentina has them both: Buéños Aires, packed with good restaurants and great cafés that sell small divine pralines, and the village of Bariloché, on the slopes of the Andes mountains.

My partner and I arrived there while traveling as nomads in South America. We pitched our tent at Nelly’s garden, a lovely woman with a small guesthouse and a huge backyard. After unpacking, we went to explore the pleasures the village had to offer. Bariloché, located in amazing scenery, is known for its great alpine ski slopes and its good food, in particular ice-cream and chocolate both of which I love.

It was noon, the sun had sent her warmth and the sky was bright. The time was just before Christmas, the streets and the houses where all decorated, expecting the holiday. We wandered among the shops, tasting and purchasing dark praline with different fillings from a variety of chocolatiers. When the sun had long gone behind the mountains, we were already drunk from happiness and joy (and slightly from chocolate and sugar poisoning). We felt the fatigue from the long day; therefore, we decided to go back to our temporary home.

We started to climb towards the guest house, still dizzy from the Xmas lights and the amount of sugar already melted in our mouths. We had reached a crossroads. We looked at the streets names, and then at each other, we had no idea where we were, had no knowledge of the guest house address. The night fell and the bags of chocolate that we carried from downtown became a burden. Only a few passers-by remained in the streets, and none of them knew Nelly. We tried to backtrack our journey from her house to downtown and up again. After failing for some time, we encountered a woman who knew Nelly. She led us to the guesthouse and told Nelly she has to produce some maps so that the chocolate drunks won’t get lost again.

Happy to see Nelly and our little tent, we showered and snuggled in our sleeping bags, after a long and comprehensive tooth brushing. From that day on, the first thing I do when arriving to a new place is to write the address in my notepad. In spite of the tragic ending the day before, guess what we had for breakfast!

**BEING SICK!** by Kai Zhang, China

When it comes to the experience of being sick, I remember the following one. It happened about six years ago, when I was a sophomore. The temperature was 7 degree below zero. Although Ithaca is even more colder, that temperature is rare in my university in China. Many classmates caught bad colds in that winter, so did I. I felt a headache and dizzy. During those several days, I always felt some stars going around my forehead. However, I had to go to classroom to listen to the last lesson of a course because the professor would tell us some important points in the exam in the following week. This course had six credits so I had to make good preparations for the exam. Just as the good old proverb said, chances were prepared for the preparing mind.

I was taken there by bike with the help of a roommate and climbed to the seventh floor (horrible, because of broken elevator). The class was as long as 2 hours and I almost fell asleep in, the stars were getting bigger and bigger, brighter and brighter. But when the professor said: It has been confirmed that this paragraph appeared twice in our exam last year... I became sober right then, took some notes and tried my best to remember every word he said. Interestingly, the professor seemed to know that I was sick because I was the only sick student in the class and all other sick students asked for leave. Fortunately, I passed that exam with an A in next week.

This experience is so impressive that when someone else asks me something about hard work or sick time, I tell it to them every time. I even told this to the examiner in the IELTS speaking test; she thought I was a crazy person!
MY FAVORITE JOB by Laelìa Chao, Taiwan

Before I came to Ithaca, I worked in the financial industry for more than 10 years. Was it a difficult job? There is no doubt about it! I spent a lot of time getting required licenses so I could be qualified to work in different countries, not to mention those internal exams. I devoted most of time to my job. In the first few years, I had to work from 9 a.m. to 10 p.m. almost every day. Did I enjoy my job? Absolutely! This job opened my eyes to a new area. I had a chance to work with outstanding people and learned from them. I also had a chance to get firsthand information of financial markets and it made me valuable to my clients. I could hear life stories from wealthy people in person and experience part of their life. I could go to fancy restaurants and dress like The Devil Wears Prada while I was working.

Is financial consultant my favorite job? If you asked me the question three years ago, I would have said YES. But now, let me tell you what my favorite job is.

You must think I am a work addict. My favorite job is 24/7 and I get no salary at all. Can I still go to the fancy restaurants? Are you kidding me? I am the one who has to cook whenever my boss needs me to. Do I still dress like The Devil Wears Prada? Of course not. I only can wear a comfortable outfit that allows me to do my chores. During the first year of my job, I never got a chance to sleep more than 4 hours in a row.

Why do I still love this job? I think that my boss makes me a better person and he gives me more confidence than ever. Because of him, I have started to learn some things that I never thought I could do, such as cooking, baking, felting, cake decorating...those things I used to hate doing. I am not sure how good I am at those skills but my boss always loves what I prepare for him. He makes me feel that I am good at something and I am capable of anything. My boss treats me the way I treat him. When I get upset, he is the one tells me "It's ok. I am here." When I cut my finger, he always rushes to get ointment and applies it to the cut. When I get lonely, he is the one talking to me and laughing with me. You will never know how much I enjoy all these benefits. I must be a better person to gain his trust and respect for lifetime. I am grateful to have this wonderful job even though I have to give something up. Yes, my favorite job is being Benjamin’s mommy.

THE RISING HEALTH CONSCIOUSNESS IN TAIWAN by Ching-Chia Yu, Taiwan

Bubble tea, a unique Taiwanese drink, has become a hit for more than 20 years in Taiwan. In the very beginning, it was called boba milk tea. “Boba” refers to “big breast” and symbolizes the sexy waitresses serving in the teahouses. Boba milk tea was the most popular drink in the teahouses; the drink included green tea base shaken with powdered dairy and added to chewy tapioca balls and syrup. Boba milk tea has evolved into a wide variety of drinks, including green, black or oolong tea mixed with condensed or fresh juice or mixed with milk and added tapioca balls, aloe or puddings. Tea stands are abundant in every populated area nowadays. The teashop market is huge and competitive. However, in recent years, the teashop market has been controlled by a few franchised shops.

However, while people were addicted to these drinks, some food experts issued a warning that these drinks contain some ingredients which were harmful to health. One of the ingredients was high-fructose corn syrup (HFCS). Some food experts gave some evidence to prove that the much less expensive corn-derived sweetener, HFCS, was the main cause of obesity. Since HFCS is hard to metabolize and will convert to fat and remain in a human’s body, too much HFCS consumption will contribute to weight gain, obesity and even cardiovascular disease. These related reports regarding the negative impacts of HFCS to public health went viral for a short time. Since then, people have started to boycott related HFCS products resulting in significant drops in teashop sales. To regain the consumers’ trust, those teashops decided to replace HFCS with regular sugar that can be metabolized and be readily burned for energy.

The health concern has even forced me to stop drinking the charming drinks. But I admit it's really irresistible. I am glad that these teashops were willing to make changes and that people have started to pay attention to the topic of public health. Public interest in food safety is growing. I believe this problem can be solved as long as people continue to focus on this issue and put pressure on the government to do better.
I was born in Israel as the granddaughter of Iraqi and Romanian immigrants, who migrated to the country in 1949 and 1947 respectively. Boosted by the Zionist movement, WWII, and the declaration of Independence, the majority of Jews from Europe, Africa and Asia migrated to Israel during that period. As people, we may have a 5000 year history, but Israel as a country is young, not yet consolidated.

Hence, Israel culture nowadays is a rare combination of immigrant cultures: some carry their European manners, some follow their Eastern codes, some adopt the Middle Eastern ones. Therefore, the taboo and codes are quite different from one origin to the other.

We may distinguish the influence of three major cultures:
1) Descendants of the ethnic secular Jewish immigrants from Europe and Russia
2) Palestinians and Arabs (including the Druze and Bedouin)
3) Descendants of the ethnic immigrants from North Africa and the Middle East

The first group carries a strict code that contributed western manners. Conversation taboos will be similar to the U.S, such as weight, marital status, health situation, income, etc., but will allow gently questions about those topics if the conversation will be more than just "small talk". However, there isn't any taboo for politics, age and faith, although those topics will be approached in mild western style.

The second culture is more complicated: superficially, it seems very warm and welcoming, but between the lines there are many rules and taboo that one must be aware of when paying a visit. Honor is the most important thing in this culture, and that includes certain gestures, humility of women and towards women, and participation in different rituals. For example, men hug and kiss when they meet, but you mustn't contact women, visually or physically. Taboo topics are varied, include almost everything apart from marital status, age and faith.

The last group is straight forward, warm and public (loud as well). No taboo conversation at all!, if your marital status, children or health situation is not normal (everyone’s got to have family), a great deal of sorrow will creep in to the talk, and genuine help will be offered. This warm, big-hearted culture has no censor or barricade. Everything must be laid on the table as in the Middle East version of manners. Other cultures will view that behavior as rude or audacious.

Although the people of Israel have an ancient history, Israel is a young country, trying to define its identity while developing and defining new codes and manners, influences from its immigrants and habitats. During the last decade, its seems that this unique melting pot creates a new Israeli code, influence from numerous cultures, trying to adopt Western manners while assimilating the Middle Eastern ones.
UNDER THE DOME  by Anquan Wang, China

It was Sunday morning. I got up later than usual. After my morning ritual, brushing teeth, washing face and bathing, I sat down beside the window sliding on my phone. I checked my email, read some news, logged in Wechat, which is a popular social medium in Chinese community. I log in my Wechat app every day, which allows me to keep in touch and share information with my friends even though I am abroad. To my surprise, more than half of the posts today on Wechat were about a nearly two-hour documentary, titled “China’s Haze: Under the Dome”. I didn’t want to watch the video because of its prolonged length but I couldn’t resist my curiosity.

Chai Jing, a former Chinese Central Television reporter, produced and initially posted the documentary regarding China’s air pollution – the smog. What makes this documentary so special is that Ms. Chai made it “personal grudge” between her and the smog. Ms. Chai’s newborn daughter had a benign tumor and had to have surgery immediately after she was born. Ms. Chai felt afraid of the air pollution for the first time even as her work has taken her to places where the air was acrid with fumes and dust. Therefore, she decided to dig into air pollution. The documentary attempts to answer three simple questions: 1) What is smog? 2) Where does it come from? 3) What should we do? The smog which troubles many Chinese nowadays consists of two characters, fog and haze. One key pollution indicator, PM2.5, measuring fine particles less than 2.5 μm in the air, is seen as particularly dangerous to public health as it can penetrate human lungs.

Though Ms. Chai’s documentary isn’t groundbreaking, it is, up to date, the most comprehensive film with respect to China’s smog. In this film, Ms. Chai analyzed causes of the smog, including over-reliance on fossil fuels instead of clean energy sources, bloated heavy industries and lax enforcement of environmental statutes. According to the documentary, sixty percent of the smog comes from the burning of coal and gasoline. In addition, growing number of private cars in China does not help either.

The newly appointed environmental minister said that, the documentary reminded him of Rachel Carson’s 1962 book Silent Spring. Indeed, China has begun taking more aggressive steps against air pollution. While our government is taking measures to solve the problems, there are many things that we should do to help. We should use public transportation more often instead of private cars; we should report any violations against environmental regulations; we should use clean energy and buy Energy Star products; we should get more and more people involved in this endeavor...

I do believe that, one day in not far away future, we will be able to see all the light we can’t see again like we used to.
Travels by Mei-Hsiu Su, Taiwan

When I was a student, my friend told me that if you love nature and the ocean, you should visit Republic of Palau. After I graduated from my university, I decided to go to Palau with my boyfriend and his brother. We planned this journey for 5 days including two free afternoons.

The location of Palau is near the equator and lies to the east of Philippines. This country consists of many islands. It means there is heat and people get sun-burned easily, so I prepared the swimming suit and the sun screen. I also bought some snacks and instant noodles for this trip. When we arrived at the airport of Palau, the customs officer checked my luggage. He took one of my instant noodles and said, "I never have eaten the instant noodles with this flavor, could you give it to me?" At that moment, I didn't want to get into the trouble, so I allowed him to take that. This experience was really interesting.

We chose to stay in the Palau Royal Resort for several reasons. First of all, this hotel is on new one. I didn't need to worry about the room being in bad condition. Secondly, the location was near the place we wanted to go, so I could get up late. It was really close to the ocean. There was a pool of sea water in front of the lobby, and we could see many beautiful fish and a sea turtle. Actually, I asked the waiter to let me feed the sea turtle. That was definitely the best thing I will never forget. The last, but not least reason, was they offered the wonderful food including Chinese and Japanese food. I really enjoyed staying in this hotel.

Palau is surround by the ocean. Not only can we feel the nature, we can also enjoy this landscape. We swan in the ocean, and there were sharks just nearby us. We went skin diving and fed the fish. When those fish ate the bread I offered, I could touch the fish's mouth. It was itchy and funny. We also touched the jellyfish that is the only non-toxic one in the world. They are really beautiful. I really love those nature things! If I have a chance I want to visit there again. Palau is like heaven for me.