

Queen Mary Expedition Fund Report

My trip started in China, in the city of Chengdu, which is the Sichuan provincial capital. Here I participated in Sichuan University's international immersion program with students from universities from around the globe. While on the program I was taught about medicine by local and international professors alongside the home students. I was also given basic lessons in Chinese culture and Mandarin. We spent lots of time with the local students which allowed us to really appreciate the differences between Chinese student's lifestyle and our own. Many of the students were eager to practise their English with us, with quite a few heading to the UK and USA on a year abroad in the coming months.

I was keen to view the influence of traditional Chinese medicine on the teaching and care given in China. I saw that traditional medicine and western medicine are intertwined within the healthcare system. I was told that traditional medicine is often the first line of care in rural areas and then if unresolved sent on to larger centres that practise western medicine.

Next I flew to Thailand and then passed into Cambodia. Cambodia itself is a beautiful country and the people are very friendly and welcoming. Though the contrast between Cambodia and China is vast. The Cambodian people are still struggling to overcome the legacy left by Pol Pot. The healthcare system in the country is in a dire state. The conditions within the hospitals are awful and only a few of the Cambodian doctors remain after the regime. The cost associated with treatment puts medical care out of reach for a large proportion of the population. This has resulted in many treatable conditions such as diarrhoea, cholera and measles becoming endemic. Though it seems that as the country develops more funding is going into the medical system.

I then passed into Vietnam which is a remarkable country with a distinct French influence, which can be seen in many of the buildings. It also has amazing geography, vibrant cities, and incredible beaches. The country has recovered from the war and is developing at an astonishing pace. It was easy to see the country is far more affluent than Cambodia. The medical system in Vietnam is getting better and the big issues of HIV, malaria and tuberculosis are actively being combated with good effect. Malnutrition was evident in some areas mainly outside of the large cities and was also mentioned to me while talking to health workers.

I continued my journey into Laos, a country I knew very little about prior to my trip. Laos is a relaxed and striking country that has experienced change due to tourism like the other countries in the area but it has been focused in specific areas so the impact is not as dramatic. While there I was told about the silent war that has ravaged the country and is continuing to affect the citizens. Laos was heavily bombed in the 60's and 70's. Many of these bombs lie unexploded and are being rediscovered and causing enormous damage and numerous injuries. While travelling through the country, we visited COPE, a NGO which provides prosthetics for free to citizens affected by unexploded bombs funded through donations. While here we saw the devices that have been developed to help the victims continue to function. We were delighted to hear that our donations would be enough to provide a prosthetic leg for one of the victims.

I finished my trip in Thailand, which is known for having an excellent medical system. Though still have similar public health issues as mentioned for Vietnam. Safety is still an issue and with the surge of tourism in Thailand many tourists are falling victim to it.

I undertook this project to learn about the medical systems while discovering the culture of the areas, meeting new people and developing skills to help in my future medical career. I feel that I have succeeded in meeting each of these aims and will benefit from them in the years to come. I would like to thank the Queen Mary expedition fund for making this trip possible.

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