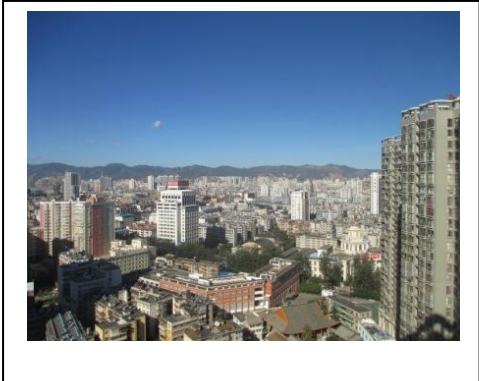


Our time in Kunming!

We are Donna, Xiao Xiao (7) and Lucas (5), and are in Kunming, Yunnan Province, China, for 2 months together to live the Chinese way of Life. This trip is 100% focused on the kids and their learning of China and the Chinese language.



We have been here over 3 weeks now. We are settled into our 24th floor apartment, with magnificent views of Kunming city. We have a balcony, which is enclosed with glass, which makes it much more relaxing to sit on and take in the views with a kamikaze 5 yr old boy!



Even though the view is of a developing Kunming and might not be scenic to some, we see something new and interesting to look at each day. There is a primary and middle school directly below us, and we get to see their morning exercises and raising the flag routines every day! (A fantastic sight for a teacher that dreams of disciplined school kids 😊).



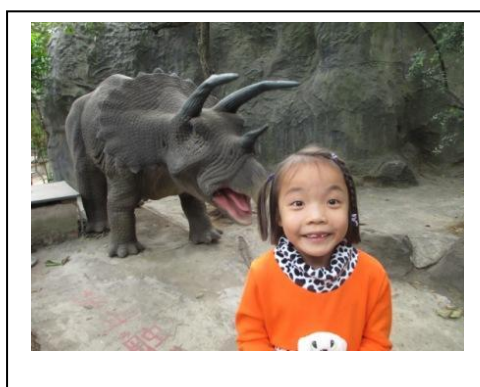
Kunming is a city surrounded by mountains, so for me the view is a beautiful and refreshing one compared to flat as a pancake Darwin! We have our breakfast and do our school work on the balcony, as it keeps us connected with the feel of the city, so we don't forget we are in China!

While the kids are awake they have my constant attention, this trip is all about them! I have not had as much time as expected in the evening to do my own study (navigating busy China with 2 kids is physically and mentally exhausting and I am in bed not long after them!!). So I have just wrote a little about Kunming Zoo, Green Lake Park, and some reflections on our language learning and culture experiences here. (Sorry to the language teachers on this list I have not had time to write up more formal reflections as much as I would have liked to, observing their learning is amazing!). Xiao Xiao has nearly finished her own project on Green Lake Park and will be doing a project on the zoo, so I will send when she has finished, it will be much more interesting than my effort! I will send some more piks and writings about other things that we have been doing hopefully soon.

Kunming Zoo

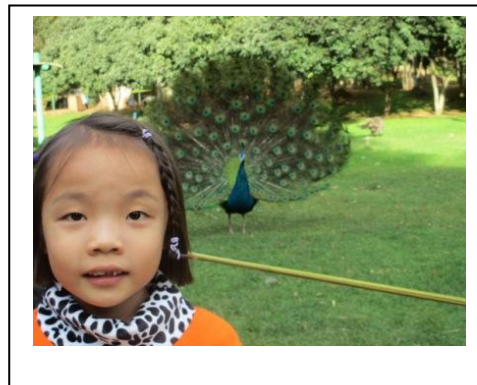
Before we left for China, I wasn't sure whether it was the right thing to do, to take the kids to a zoo which in the eyes of the western world is known as a place where the animals are in small, drab enclosures. Should I give the zoo the 15yuan (about \$2.50) entrance fee (kids are free), knowing that the animals are not in appropriate conditions? After all, I am part of the problem if I actually go to this zoo...and am I sending the wrong message to my kids??

The zoo is huge, half of it being botanical garden and parkland, including a beautiful peacock garden. Also many amusement rides for kids and adults, and an aquarium and dinosaur exhibit. So other than seeing the animals there are lots of other things of interest to do/show the kids. This kind of parkland in China is a 'sanctuary' for locals to find peace and quiet from the development around them, a place where they can go to 'be' with their friends and family. Not only is this therefore a sanctuary for us also to escape the development of the city, it is a place where we can 'be' with the locals, and witness and participate in their pastimes, one of the main reasons we took this trip.



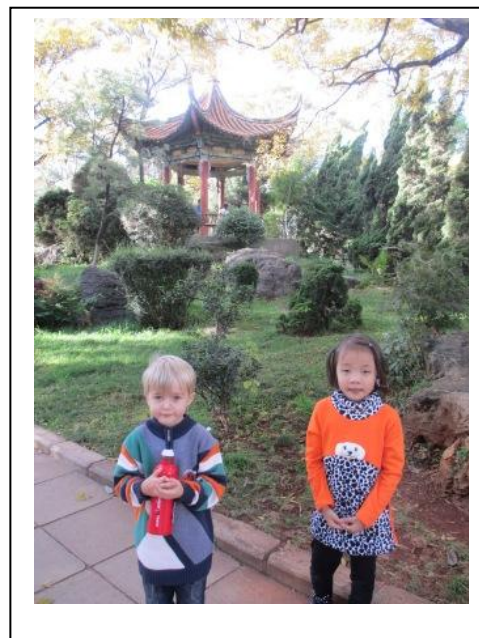
The first time we went to the zoo we did have a look at the animals. Yes some are still in very old, cold looking, small enclosures, the bear and some of the big cats were clearly stressed. Even though there are signs saying 'no feeding the animals', most people throw all sorts of food and other objects at the animals to make them move. There doesn't seem to be anyone policing this! But there are also, obviously newly built enclosures for certain animals which are similar to the ones you would

find in apparently more accepted western zoos. So the zoo is obviously slowly, moving with the times.



The trip to the zoo actually brought back memories of going to London Zoo when I was little, I actually don't think most of the enclosures back then were any bigger than these ones here in Kunming. I think it is only recent decades that we have started to treat animals (more) humanely in the western world, and I think this will also slowly change here in China.

It has been good to discuss all of this with the kids, they are the future for changing stuff like this in China and Australia..after all, I remember visiting Crocodylus park when we first arrived in Darwin 7 years ago, I was reduced to tears at the tiny enclosures and the stress displayed by the big cats there...and would never pay the \$35 or so it costs to get in there ever again!! There isn't even anything else on offer there that you could justify going for!!



Only a handful of westerners would spend long enough in Kunming to visit this zoo, the zoo makes it money from millions of Chinese tourists and locals on the weekend. So refusing to pay our 15yuan would not make any difference. The newer enclosures show to me that the zoo is actually making an effort to improve, and most importantly the 15yuan gives my kids not only a cultural feeling of the pastimes of Kunming residents (which is why we are here), but it also gives an educational experience, insight, and discussion on how we might make things better in the future. When we

saw the kangaroos, Xiao Xiao asked if they got the kangaroos from Australia, most likely yes, maybe a donation or a trade for another Chinese animal... so we pondered, 'why would Australia, who have such lovely wildlife parks for kangaroos, donate kangaroos to a zoo with a small enclosure for them? (Even though their enclosure with a little 'bush' in it, beats the lions' and bears' enclosures by far!!!!). I think the kids seeing this 'real' world at times, and trying to make sense of it, is the best catalyst for both Chinese and Australian kids to make those changes in the future.

The Zoo is a huge and fantastic place for the kids to visit, each time we go we find something new, and the kids bump into other kids to play with (my kids aren't even interested in seeing the animals since the first visit). Next time we go we will check out the aquarium.

Green Lake Park

This is a huge, free park for locals to enjoy peace and quiet from the developing city...well as much peace and quiet as one can get with a million people in the park ☺



We went once on the weekend, and never again! The first thing Xiao Xiao said was '很多人! (lots of people!!), the first thing Lucas said was '很热闹! ' (very lively!) , two expressions that they have been able to say often on this trip!! All these pics were taken on a weekday, I would have only captured a jacket in front of me on the weekend!



There is a square in the park that is devoted to different music and dance groups. From Chinese opera, folk music, line dancing, to techno aerobics, you name it there is a group of people doing it. It is a small square, and each group has loud music playing: a cacophony of 4 Chinese operas going on at once with techno beats all around, and crowds of people dancing...a headache even for me!



To go in the week is a little less crowded, and has lots of things to do there, but Xiao Xiao is doing her own little project on Green Lake Park, so I will send that when she has finished.

Language / Culture Learning

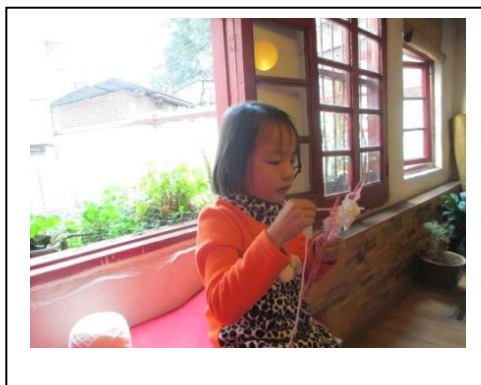
The kids are saying the regular things in Chinese around our apartment, just as we did in Darwin anyway. We used to talk in Chinese around the supermarket in Darwin, so supermarket talk is not so new either. In Darwin though it is just me and them, here, we HAVE to interact with everybody else in Chinese and that is a big difference. I cannot underestimate the value of the kids hearing Chinese around them all day, and listening to me asking directions, asking where things are in the supermarket, telling the taxi driver where we want to go, explaining to people where we are from etc. And even when I make mistakes (often!!) we can talk about it later and work out together how I could have said it better.

The kids are still a little shy at using their Chinese themselves, but they are using their manners, saying polite things back to people when spoken to etc, which was one of my language goals for them this trip. Xiao Xiao has confidence to ask 'How much is this?', and has a fantastic ear and understanding of Chinese numbers, so can translate how much back to me after a few calculations in her head! Her quiet voice though is not always heard at a bustling market stall, having to say 对不起 'excuse me' many times before being listened to seriously, but her confidence to get their attention is growing, and great cultural learning: you have to be loud and 'push in' to get service in China!



One major goal of this trip, was to be in a place long enough to get the kids used to and comfy with the constant curiosity, 'foreigners' receive. We have a double curiosity, we are foreigners, and we have a multicultural family. We are constantly looked at, and constantly asked questions that would be considered personal in Australia, like 'she doesn't look like you are you her mother?' 'where is she from?' etc. The concept of adoption does not seem to be obvious to the 'old women' of China and has to be explained, the younger people seem to be more savvy and not so 'intrusive', still asking questions, but more positively and with a less bemused look! Learning how to recognise these kind of questions in Chinese, learning how to answer these questions in Chinese, talking together (me and the kids) about the differences in western and Chinese 'privacy' culture, talking about our feelings about these questions, and working out together how much of our private lives we want to share as a family is all part of our cultural learning on this trip. Even though we may not feel like satisfying everyone's curiosity so politely all the time, it helps to see this curiosity as a genuine concern for Xiao Xiao's wellbeing. If we explain our family's situation (as much as we choose to), satisfying the person's concern that the children are safe, then it opens up a more trusting relationship with that person to talk about more interesting things about China and Australia! Getting 'past' that bemused look and questioning to friendlier chit chat (which is what happens if we persevere with the intrusive questioning) is where we need to get to if we want to connect with the locals. Ensuring this connection is not at the expense of the children's self esteem is what we are working on. But we can't change this culture, so to be part of it we have to work with it. If we want our family to be part of Chinese culture, we have to become resilient to such questioning.

Although we have brought a little more attention onto ourselves the last few days..., Xiao Xiao has seen many of the ethnic minority ladies 'knitting' around the place, so she has taken up knitting herself, does it in the cafes, the parks, oh and even the supermarket...she quite enjoys the 'positive' attention this brings, as the old women tell her how clever and hard working she is!



So what do we do with those people that ask can they have a photo with us? (This happens all the time!! Even the officials at the airport when we stood in the immigration line, asked could they pose with us while they took pics with us on their iphones) We say yes, and then use the opportunity to practice out Chinese with them, chat to them, ask them questions we need answers to, like these students who wanted pictures with us, and then helped us to find where we could get good dumplings!



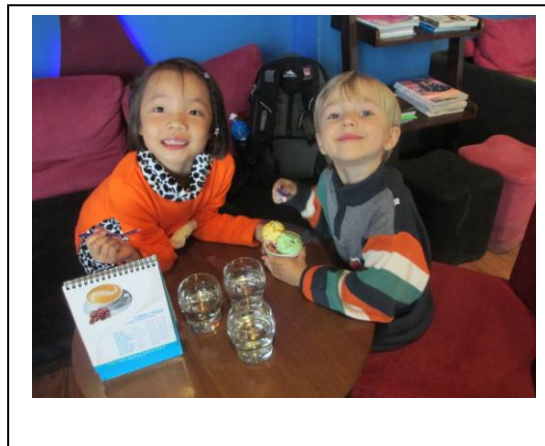
Xiaoxiao and Lucas are on a graded Chinese reading program and are flying through it, learning how to read a phenomenal number of Chinese characters much faster than any adult learner could imagine! In China, Chinese characters are obviously in our face all day, on signs, in the lift, on billboards, in the supermarket, on shop fronts, food labels, and the kids are constantly pointing out and reading characters that they know. I am gobsmacked with how much this immersion has boosted their reading level .

They have recently completed reading ‘The Princess and the Frog’ in Chinese, some new words they learned in this were ‘ball’ and ‘pair’. We always go around talking about things in Chinese that give opportunity to reinforce new words, so we talk about ‘a pair of socks’, ‘a pair of eyes’ etc and maybe talk about different ball games to reinforce 双 meaning ‘pair’ and 球 meaning ‘ball’. What better reinforcement though, than a trip to the Ice Cream shop! The kids were all excited (learning is magnified ten fold when a kid is excited!) as I had promised them an ice cream. When we entered the shop, there on the menu board, were the characters :



(We had the luxury of English on this board, as it was the New Zealand Natural Ice Cream shop! But English translations are very rare in China – Xiao Xiao would read both for a better clarification of

meaning, but Lucas can't read English yet, so would only read the Chinese anyway!). Now they know their numbers really well, and they know 单 means 'single' because they know when they 'hop' in Chinese, the Chinese say 'a single foot jump' (单脚跳). And they could also read their new characters on the menu board— how excited they became when they realised a 'scoop' in Chinese is called a 'ball', and 2 scoops was a 'double ball' (or a pair of balls if you adults want a laugh!). Now 双 and 球 are consolidated further! I told Xiao Xiao we could get ice cream again if she orders next time...she has practiced the order down to a tea ☺



Another really great thing about actually being in China, is that movie Dvds are so cheap, and also have the option of watching with Chinese dubbing, this is like gold to a Chinese teacher, as Chinese is never a language option buying the DVD in Australia! (To buy these from language suppliers from Australia costs an absolute fortune, and often overseas postage too). Another book they have just read in Chinese is 'The Little Mermaid', so we were able to go out, buy the Disney versions of these stories, all dubbed in Chinese. They can't understand all of it, but they can pick up on so many of the words they have learned in the story books that they are reading. You can also opt for Chinese subtitles too, so that they can listen again, and read the characters as they listen, that helps them to pick up the words that are spoken too fast for them to pick up.



For the Chinese language teachers on this list, I am taking lots of photos of signs and billboards to use in both the younger and older classrooms, so if you want to I can upload them to the Moodle new email space when I return for you to save as resources. I can't access Moodle in China though.

If I do get a chance to write up more theoretical observations on children's second language learning, I will send on my return.

Till then, hope everyone is enjoying life, and will hopefully send more piks soon!

Cheers,

Donna