

What it's like to

READY,

When returning to China, all sorts of thoughts and feelings could be inside of you! You could feel excitement to see the country you were born in and came from. You might feel sad that you don't remember it. Maybe, you even feel worried that you would have to stay there instead of returning home with your family. These are all real feelings and it's OK to have feelings that you are not sure about. First remember, the purpose of your visit is to see what China is like, to learn and experience it for yourself.

SET,

1. Make a list of the things you want to do while you are there – things you like to do, your interests.

2. Make a list of the things you don't want to do or the things that you might be worried about. Share this with mom/dad and talk about which things are avoidable and which things aren't and how they will help you resolve those fears.

3. Decide on a project that you could do to connect you to kids in China. This could be something to take to a school or a social welfare institute in China. Start about six months or more before your trip.

If you need ideas – see www.ocdf.org/orphansupport

4. Start to learn some Mandarin Chinese – try a class, some videos or CDs, or even online.

5. Watch some videos or DVDs about China to see some of the places you might visit.

6. Attend a Chinese culture camp or heritage camp to talk with other kids who have returned already to China, visited the social welfare institute where they had lived, or even lived in China. Get the scoop straight from other kids!

7. Read stories and books about China.

8. Start a travel journal in advance of your trip. Use this like a diary and write down your feelings, your to do lists for packing, your projects and ideas. Make it fun and create something you can have as a keepsake for this journey.

GO!

It's a place you know, you will have all new memories and they will be YOUR memories (not things other people told you about China). You will see for yourself. It's pretty amazing to see thousands of people who look a lot like you, pretty powerful images too. You will feel personal strength and comfort in

knowing more about the life of Chinese people and the conditions people live in there. You will connect to your first home and understand that while you live far away, you can see China again and return to it in the future (it's not as though you can only go once – you can return as you get older and when you are grown up with your kids).

*Jane Liedtke
CEO and Founder
Our Chinese Daughters Foundation
www.ocdf.org
OCDF China Tours*

*You can listen to Liedtke talk about
"Returning to China"
on China Radio
International –
visit
www.ocdf.org
to click and
learn.*



return to China

MARISA'S JOURNEY



Marisa Lim

Last year, our family made our first trip to China since we brought Marisa home 10 years ago. We joined five other families with adoptees on Lotus Travel's Heritage Tour to see many of China's famous sights. It was fun travel-

ing with other girls similar in age. They developed good friendships and it provided them a time to play with one another as they explored this amazing land. We did not go back to her hometown this time because we wanted to focus on learning about the Chinese culture, lifestyles and just being tourists.

Marisa reflects: "Before I went to China, I expected it to be hot and the people to be poor (such as people getting around by bicycles, the lack of modern toilets and small houses). When I got there, I was right. It was hot! I saw many mothers carrying babies on their backs while riding a bike instead of car

seats and minivans. Most of the people lived in these poor conditions, but I could see there were some of the conditions were getting better in the bigger cities, maybe because the Olympics are coming in a couple of years. On our tour, we got to do some cool things such as flying kites in Tiananmen Square, make dumplings and take a painting class. We noticed a lot of good food such as fresh fish, pork and lots of fruits and vegetables. I was a little disappointed that I did not go to my hometown because I wanted to know what it is like. Well, maybe next time. I look forward to going back again someday."

Sharon and Marisa Lim (Maanshan, 1995)

OLIVIA'S EXPERIENCE



Olivia, center, with two of the girls with whom she celebrated the July birthdays at the orphanage.

Hi, my name is Olivia and I was adopted from China at age three years and two months in December, 1995. This summer when I was nearly 13 (I just turned 13 on November 1st), I went back to China with a bunch of friends. It was great! My favorite things were going to the Great Wall and going back to my orphanage in Nanjing. The

orphanage visit was particularly important to me. There were seven kids at the orphanage who were celebrating birthdays in July and we were lucky to be there to celebrate with them on July 4th. In spite of our language differences, those kids were just like kids anywhere and we had a ball. It was a lot of fun for us and I think for them, too!

When we arrived at the orphanage, they had a big sign up that had all of our names on it; it was welcoming and comforting to me. The one factor that made this trip extraordinary was that my primary caretaker was still there after 10 years, and it was clear that she remembered me. The feeling that I got was so deep that there is no way to explain what it felt like, but it was a good feeling, and a feeling of connection to my primary caretaker and others who were still at the orphanage. While in Nanjing, I also got the chance to go to the place where I was found as an infant before I was taken to the orphanage. All in all, it was a memorable trip that I would highly recommend.

By Olivia DongMei Rauss

A FINAL WORD

We have learned from many adult adopted people that it is important to know about your birth country as you grow up.

Well, what better way to learn about something than to experience it? This is the reason so many adopted kids are taken by their parent or parents back to their birth country before they are teenagers. It is kind of like a vacation to see new things, eat different foods, hear a different language, and learn that where you were born is a pretty fascinating place. But, when you get older, like a teenager or young adult, you may want to go back to China again. This time, you will think about things differently because you will be different than you are now - much more grown-up and serious!

You are unique and you will come to your own decisions when you are older about going back to China to learn and understand more about yourself. The trip will be very different for you then and you might want to talk to your parents a lot as well as other adopted persons before you go to make sure that you are prepared for the different feelings you might experience.

So, I guess there is no one best time to go back to China for a visit, but a fun trip when you are a kid and a more serious trip when you are older could work out well!

*Jennifer D. Massie M.S.
Lifelink Regional Adoption Coordinator*

Sara visits the orphanage

My friends and I were all in the hotel. We were waiting because we were all going to Our Orphanage. I wasn't excited because I wasn't quite sure what it looks like, is it dark or is it bright. I didn't know. It was pretty windy that day and I was still hot.

We got on the bus and left. When we passed the people, they all stared at us. It took about one hour to get there, but I was too busy talking to my friends. When we went through the gates, we saw this little boy running out to greet us. My mom and I were a little bit worried because he was just a toddler. So, we ask Lu our tour guide or at least our translator, and she told us he was 14 years old. He was a midget. I felt bad for him. As I was saying, we went through the gates and out of the bus.

There I saw her, my caretaker. She looked

different than in the pictures. Now, she had short hair, not long hair. We hugged and took pictures. Then we went inside with Madame Fan (caretaker) and went to this room. In there was a big screen TV, a big table and Chinese candy. It wasn't what I pictured. After looking at a slide show, we went into the baby rooms.

First we went to the 0-1-year-old room, then the 2-3, and finally the 4-year-old room. I also got to hold a 1 year old. That part felt happy to me. Then we went back to the room. There were games, dancing, crying and saying. After giving presents to the kids because it was some kids birthday and crying, we went back on to the bus and drove away. They waved to us until we couldn't see them. Man, did I have a good time.

Sara Strout

Lianna Remembers

At the orphanage, I saw my caregiver when I was just an infant. It was amazing that she was still there! She said that I looked the same. I was stunned that she remembered me.

When we went in to see the babies, I held them and never wanted to let go. I was upset because of the kids my age and older who had lived there for a long time. They never had a family. A few of them were too old to be adopted.

I cried, feeling sorry for all the kids –

they didn't have families. Some of them needed operations. It was so hard to imagine that one of those rooms was where my mom and dad and brother sat and held me for the first time. I want to go back again because it makes me feel good when I help the other kids in the orphanages. I can't say that I feel like I belong in China, but it's fun. I was born there, and that's what makes it special to me.

Lianna Thomas



The girls with Madam Fan.

HOW MIGHT YOU FEEL

Returning to visit China can be a wonderful way to learn more about yourself and your feelings. Make sure to spend some time walking the streets, shopping in the markets, and just being part of everyday life in China. It's fun to see the "big attractions", but you will learn more about Chinese culture by experiencing daily life.

If you and your parents decide to visit the orphanage where you lived before you were adopted, you might want to bring something for the children who are living there. Some good ideas are socks, band aids, hair bands, stickers, and crayons. Don't forget to bring a picture of yourself to give to the caregivers at the orphanage.

You may have all kinds of feelings while you are in China. At times, you will see and do exciting, wonderful things, such as climb the Great Wall or visit the Panda preserve. Other things might make you feel sad, like seeing many poor people, or thinking about your birthparents. Some children feel very scared before the trip. If you feel scared, let your parents know so they can help you with those feelings. Such feelings are normal and can help you to understand yourself better if you talk about them with someone you trust.

Children usually enjoy returning to China with other children who were also adopted from China. It's nice to have friends with you who understand you so well.

Returning to China with your family will help you to grow even closer as you learn together about Chinese culture, foods, people and everyday living.



We've returned from a month in China! We had a great but exhausting trip. We brought copies of Mei Magazine with us and gave them to officials at CCAA, Civil Affairs and orphanage directors. They loved it. A treat was being able to give one to Lianna's original caregiver in the Nanjing Orphanage, Madame Lin!



Anni and Mei Reffsin with their original caretakers.

Enjoy sharing this new experience and have a wonderful time!!!!

*Nancy Reffsin, LICSW Director
Pamela Thomas, President
Homeland Children's Foundation Inc.*



Some of the girls practicing at the hotel before performing at the Nanjing orphanage.

BACK TO CHINA A CLAPPING SONG

by Mei Reffsin and Lianna Thomas

Here we are (clap, clap, clap)
In China (clap, clap, clap)

Having fun (clap, clap, clap)
In the sun (clap, clap, clap)

Walking streets (clap, clap, clap)
Singing beats (clap, clap, clap)

Seeing bikes (clap, clap, clap)
That we like! (clap, clap, clap)

People walking (clap, clap, clap)
and talking (clap, clap, clap)

Having friends (clap, clap, clap)
That never end (clap, clap, clap)

Having a ball (clap, clap, clap)
On the Great Wall!
(clap, clap, clap)

What a pretty (clap, clap, clap)
Forbidden City! (clap, clap, clap)

We sing our song (clap, clap, clap)
All day long (clap, clap, clap)

Now you know (clap, clap, clap)
YOU'VE GOTTA GO!!!
(CLAP, CLAP, CLAP!!!!!!!)