

My Au Pair experience in China

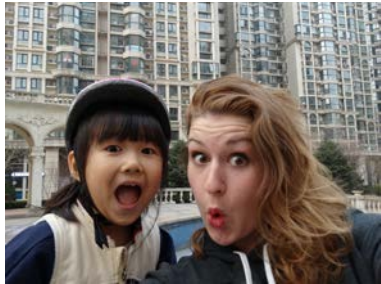
How do I even begin to explain what my experience as Au Pair for the Zhao family in China was like?! Well, I would have to start by saying that it is one of the scariest and hardest things I have done and probably the most rewarding. I still can hardly believe the impact that my Chinese family has had on me. Being an Au Pair for them was so much more than a job or cultural exchange, it was a truly life changing experience.



Subway waiting line

It was not easy at first, being immersed in a completely different country where the traditions are new and sometimes unexpected, where taking the subway isn't just an assault on all your senses it's like playing a game of tug of war, where using chopsticks is an artform impossible to master because there is always that stubborn grain of rice left in your bowl, and where fireworks are so loud you would think that a dragon had swallowed up the city on Chinese New Year! And yet somehow I found a new home in Beijing of all places.

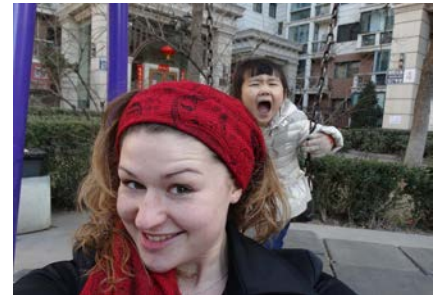
I felt like part of the family, I was « jiejie » the older sister, I would help get my little sister Ada up in the morning, and make sure she brushes her teeth which wasn't always easy for a sometimes stubborn and sometimes very tired seven year old in the morning. I remember this one day when we went outside to play and I had the amazing idea of teaching « baobao » (my little sister's nickname) how to paly hopskotch and she loved it, it was a lot of fun drawing with chalk on the floor and playing something that was so common when I was younger but completely foreign to Ada! Very quickly the other children from the community got so curious that they all joined in, and the parents and grandparents started talking to me and taking photos and (I think) telling me that I was being a good sister (but then again I'm not really sure!) And that was just one afternoon! Ada and I did so many things that I can hardly recall all of them, but since pictures are worth a thousand words, here are a few:



Rollerskating



Hiking



On the swings

It was overwhelming giving up on all my old habits and having to adapt to new ones, like eating spicy noodles with cucumber (which is delicious by the way) for breakfast, or talking to the grandparents and nannies, who just refused that I help wash the dishes and were quite expressive too, with their hands still holding their chopsticks and shaking them in sync with their heads while saying « bu shi, bu shi » which I rapidly learnt meant « no, no » it became our funny little routine, I would tell them the food was yummy « hao chi » and start clearing the table and then the shaking would start!!

I was completely out of my comfort zone and surprised even myself when it felt like I was exactly where I was suppose to be. I learnt so much about patience and kindness, about being open minded and spontaneous, to always try my hardest even when I got homesick. I enjoyed going to my little sister's school and seeing her perform for children's day in the cutest blue dress, or taking a boat ride to feed the fish, or learn about the Chinese opera, or about traditionally dying cloths and everything else in between!



Yummy noodles!



Traditional Chinese opera dresses



Traditional color dye

Everyday was different and exciting and had its challenges, but everyday was new opportunity to teach and be taught something incredible or something completely normal. China is home to one of the seven wonders of the world, the Zhao family (and there's the Great Wall too!). I know today that I am a much better person than before I became an Au Pair and for that I am so grateful.