

Ni hao!

My name is Ninma Fearon and I am currently a senior at Xavier University of Louisiana. I spent the summer of 2009 in Suzhou, China as a Minority Health International Research Training (MHIRT) program participant carrying out research on health disparities. Suzhou is located in the center of the Yangtze Delta, in the south of Jiangsu Province, with Shanghai to the east. Suzhou is an ancient city with a 2500 years' history, known for some of the most beautiful gardens in the world, including the Humble Administrator's Garden, and traditional waterside architecture..

My research project involved the study of a Mongolian population in Inner Mongolia, China, where I partnered with a Tulane student and analyzed the relationship between Metabolic Syndrome and cardiovascular diseases. Currently, these are two major health disparities that are on the rise in China and according to the recent studies, metabolic syndrome is becoming a worldwide epidemic. Our study revealed that MS is associated with gender, age, overweight, family history of hypertension.

During my entire stay, I lived on campus at Soochow University and it was comfortable. Majority of the population relies on trains, buses and bicycles as their method of transportation all of which I found to be convenient in terms of the number of people.

I was a bit apprehensive about the food because I was in a new environment but it was not hard adapting to it. Chinese food, as you may know, consists mainly of rice, noodles, dumplings, and vegetables. My favorite dish was sautéed asparagus, with stir-fried tomatoes eggs and rice. Foreigners easily have access to local favorites such as McDonald's, Pizza Hut, and Starbucks!!

After I completed my project, I travelled to Beijing for 5 days. Although it was an 11-hour train ride it was well worth it. I visited some of the famous historic sites such as the Temple of Heaven, visited by the Emperors of the Ming and Qing dynasties for annual ceremonies of prayer to Heaven for good harvest; and the Forbidden City located in the middle of Beijing. It was the Chinese imperial palace from the Ming Dynasty to the end of the Qing Dynasty and today, it houses the Palace Museum. I proudly climbed the famous Great Wall, which stretches for 8,851.8 km (5,500.3 mi) from east to west of China. It is known as one of the Seven Wonders of the World and is China's most appealing attraction. I visited a few other cities including Shanghai, the metropolitan city of China.

Overall, I had a wonderful experience getting to know more about Chinese culture and their way of life. I learned a bit of Chinese as well, and the good thing was not allowing the difficulty stand in the way of gaining a true understanding of what China has to offer. I would definitely encourage every student to take advantage of opportunities such as this one, because there's so much more to learn outside of what we all read in books and see on TV.



“Blending in with the culture”



Lydia Onimo & I with some of our work colleagues



View of the Great Wall at rush hour!



In front of Chairman Mao's former residence: The Forbidden City