Having A Great Time in China
by ASSE Exchange Student Alix (Moraga, California) enjoying her adventure in China

Alix made Chinese traditional food, dumplings. She made Chinese traditional iron art with the artist.

I have lived in China for a little over four months. I have had to make many adjustments to my normal life to come here, but I don’t regret it. I have made many new friends and am learning important subjects in school. I get to live in a completely different environment than what I grew up in and therefore experience things I would not be able to experience back home in California.

I wake up every morning between 6:00 and 6:30 AM. I get dressed and brush my teeth. The grandmother in my host family makes breakfast then sends me off to school. Normal Chinese schools often have over 1,000 students. The school I go to is not a traditional Chinese school. My school is for students who have fully committed themselves to studying abroad for university. There are four classes per day, but the school day lasts from 8:30 AM to 5:30 PM, not including self-study which lasts until 9:30 PM. The self-study for the foreign students is optional, so I rarely attend since I find that I can study better when I am alone in my room.

My classes include: Chinese comprehension, Chinese listening, HSK, A-level math, STEAM, calligraphy, mandatory self-study periods, a little PE, business and tea culture. There are three other foreigners at my school, including an Italian, a German and an Australian. In the mornings, at 7:30 AM, there would be stretching and some running then we would go to breakfast. After my last class I would play outside for a while, then go and eat dinner. After school I now do martial arts classes with my host brother and am learning golf (a childhood dream of mine) at the sports university that my host parents work at.

Before coming to China, I had done my best to study Chinese culture and language. Because of my earlier travels, including a month in Japan, and my advance preparation, I did not experience much culture shock. However, there was one big difference between my trip to Japan and my trip to China. I am fluent in Japanese but not in Chinese. I am not used to traveling to places where I can’t speak the language, and Shijiazhuang is not known for its English speakers. As you would expect, communication is very difficult. Everyone is nice, but it is very frustrating when you can tell someone is talking about you, but you can’t understand what they are saying.

The only two things I was unprepared for was the roads and the food. I had been aware of China’s infamous drivers, but you have to experience it to truly grasp how crazy driving in China is. There seems no such thing as waiting, and highway patrol does not exist. Also, before I arrived, I was not aware that in China there are days that certain cars cannot be driven. It makes sense given the number of people in China and the traffic, but to me, as a Californian, a restriction on driving is a completely foreign concept. The food took some getting used to. Home-cooked Chinese food is very simple. However, I had never eaten real Chinese food before because it is impossible to find authentic Chinese food in America.

Despite the hard work of learning Chinese and adapting to a different country, I am having a great time. I will be in China for another five months, but I hope that this stay will not be my last in China.

School Pride
For the second time in three years, the Greenfield-Central High School Pride Marching Band competed in the Indiana State School Music Association State Marching Band Finals. Spanish Scholarship (FAO Spain) Exchange Student Paula was among those in the marching band this year.

Greenfield-Central took runner-up at the state competition for the second time in three years. Over 400 hours of practice took place with these students. Congratulations to Greenfield-Central. Paula is enjoying her exchange year with the Shirley/Anderson family in Pendleton, Indiana.

Spanish Scholarship (FAO Spain) World Heritage Exchange Student Paula.

Editor’s Box
Many thanks to all of you who have contributed your wonderful articles and photographs. Without you, there would not be any ASSE News! Tell us about yourself and you may possibly find yourself highlighted in the next newsletter or posted on the ASSE or World Heritage Facebook page. Pictures are encouraged to be sent by email. Let us know the fun things you are doing as a student, host family or Area Representative.

Please send your best photograph and article to:
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Until next edition,
Cindy Keeney, ASSE News Editor
Meet Claire - scholarship winner from Taiwan, chosen on merit and ambassadorship to study in the USA. Claire makes a point to take part in all family and school activities presented to her. Her host family has taken her to a rodeo, she plays on the high school’s football team with her host sister, her host mom taught her how to make pizza and pancakes and she has made cherry pies and other desserts for her host family.

We have asked Claire to share her thoughts about her exchange experience so far: “Deciding to be an exchange student was a hard thing for me because I needed to get out of my comfort zone, and go to a new surrounding that I have never known. But just like Tangled said “Venture outside your comfort zone.” The rewards are worth it.” I stepped out and started a new life in my year. So far, everything is going great. I have made a lot of friends at school. Everyone there is so passionate and kind. I love my host family. They make me feel like part of them. The best thing is I joined the cheerleader team. Practice with my lovely team is the best time ever. Although we need lots of energy for doing cheer, I am looking forward to our first cheer in a few weeks!” I hope I can safely enjoy this exchange year, learn hard, try hard, and play hard.

We love her positive attitude and her enjoying this experience to the fullest! Please also join us in congratulating Claire, as she was also just elected Class Vice President! We cannot wait to see what else this young ambassador will accomplish during her exchange year, and a huge “Thank You” to the Nolan family for giving her the love and support to achieve great things!

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**Venturing Outside Her Comfort Zone**

By ASSE Exchange Student Claire (Taiwan) enjoying her exchange year in Granite, Oklahoma.

Claire (France), Anano (FLEX Georgia), Elsa (Spain), Francesco (Italy), Javier (Spain), Shabu (FLEX Georgia), Bowen (China), Lavinia (Italy), Claire (France), Anano (FLEX Georgia), Elsa (Spain), Francesca (Italy), Martyna (FLEX Lithuania), Martin (Spain), Pri Han (Taiwan), Tadas (Lithuania), Karolina (FLEX Kazakhstan), Pablo (Spain), Odra (FLEX Latvia), Olah (FLEX Ukraine), Sofia (Italy), and Francesco (Italy)
ASSE Photo Gallery

ASSE is very grateful to receive so many photos from around the ASSE and World Heritage world! Enjoy the following examples of all the fun!

FLEX – Future Leaders Exchange, U.S. State Department Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs sponsored Exchange Student

FLEX World Heritage Exchange Student Sofiya from Ukraine and her host siblings in South Webster, Ohio couldn’t be more ready for Christmas. Sofiya shared with us that she has a strong bond with her American brothers and that she is so happy being a part of the host family ever. We are so glad to see students having such a beautiful connection with their host families! Thank you Howe family for welcoming Sofiya so warmly in your cozy home.

FLEX ASSE Exchange Student Samara from Kyrgyzstan and her host mother Nancy are getting in the holiday spirit in Michigan with a lovely tradition of gingerbread house decorating! They each decorated one and we think they turned out great! Thank you to the Irish family in Traverse City, Michigan for welcoming Samara to your home with open arms and for making this year one to remember forever.

ASSE CBYX (Congress-Bundestag Youth Exchange) student Lasse from Germany is hosted by the VanderWal family in Volga, South Dakota. Lasse (top row, 2nd from the left) and his host family are attending his first high school varsity football game.

ASSE FLEX Exchange Student Nazia from Kyrgyzstan volunteered at the Athens Fall Festival doing face painting. Nazia is living with the Ewart/Thigpen family in Athens, Alabama.

ASSE FLEX Exchange Student from Australia (WEP) got to see the Canadian national sport with his host family. He watched the Chicoutimi Saguenéen’s hockey team compete in a great game of ice hockey. Thank you to the Maltais host family from Hebertville, Quebec for hosting Cameron and showing him a Canadian tradition.

This image shows exactly why the little moments are the ones that count. Everyday little host brother Charlie meets ASSE YES scholarship exchange student Muhammad from Nigeria at the door with a hug when he gets home from school. Muhammad is living with the Barnes host family in Reynoldsburg, Ohio.

ASSE Exchange Student Anna from France, Dariya of Ukraine, and Elmerillia of Indonesia.

We love when we see friendships formed between the exchange students. The three young ladies pictured here are from different countries but there is no distance too far between friends. The world is smaller when we listen and care for one another. “The students always remind me of the love that there is in the world,” says Area Coordinator Elizabeth Miller Milby. Pictured are ASSE Exchange Students Anna from France, Dariya of Ukraine, and Elmerillia of Indonesia.

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FLEX ASSE Exchange student Abraham from Ghana living with the Ward family in Vernonia, Oregon helped to build two baseball dugouts for the Vernonia High School baseball team. He says, “volunteering was fun and it was great to learn how to use these machines I never saw before. I’m not professional, but I can build a dugout. It was a wonderful experience.”

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Sherzod’s volunteer work was a part of Operation Christmas Child, the world’s largest shoebox-gathering event. He got to know all about the mobile donation vans, and how to get the boxes in properly, and how to stack them. The hardest part of the job was physically pushing myself to get the best performance out of myself. The most enjoyable part of the job was the friendly atmosphere and the little competitions we had between team members. Indeed, it was a great experience working with a diverse group of people with the common goal of bringing happiness to underprivileged children around the world.

We asked Sherzod more about where his volunteering spirit is coming from, and it appears that it all started back in his home country. Every year, he was part of a Christmas celebration in different orphanages organized by the FLEX (Future Leaders Exchange) Alumni Tajikistan, which he hoped and believed he would be a part of one day. Because he enjoyed and genuinely cared about every Christmas event he volunteered at, he committed to continuing this tradition in the USA as well. He asked his friends at school for ideas and people in his community without any luck. He never gave up and he ultimately found out about the fact that they had an Operation Christmas Child trip to Denver, Colorado and they needed volunteers. “I thought let’s do it this year and get new experiences,” Sherzod said to his host family with enthusiasm. He got to know all about Operation Christmas Child, the world’s largest Christmas project of its kind. He met a lot of people and more importantly, he never gave up on his dream, so the dream came true. Sherzod’s volunteer activity is not limited to this particular one. Since he came to the USA, he has also volunteered at Bern Community Center Pancake Feed, Fall Festival and he volunteered on Veterans day when he made a fundraising donation, collected money for injured veterans, and gave poppies out to remind people to honor our veterans. He has shared some thoughts for the New Year. "I hope that in this year to come, you make mistakes. Because if you are making mistakes, then you are making new things, trying new things, learning, living, changing your world. You’re doing things you’ve never done before, and more importantly, you’re doing something. So that’s my wish for you, and all of us, and my wish for myself. Make new mistakes. Make glorious, amazing mistakes. Make mistakes nobody’s ever made before. Don’t freeze, don’t stop, don’t worry that it isn’t good enough, or it isn’t perfect, whatever it is; sport, or love, or work or family or life. Whatever it is, you’re scared of doing, do it. Make your mistakes, next year and forever. My hope is to empower and thereby inspire other people to have the courage to go out into the world and try their best to make it a better place for everyone.”

We would like to thank Susan and Tom Gudenkauf for welcoming Sherzod with open arms in their home and for being so supportive of his passions and beliefs. He could not do this without their generous, loving commitment. We are also thankful to World Heritage Area Representative Karalee Fisher for making this experience happen for Sherzod and for helping him at every step in this amazing exchange journey.