

Take Me To Your Heart, Hangzhou

A Reflection on the ESA China Program

By Michael Angelo Vargas

The song *Take Me to Your Heart*, as played in Hangzhou China's famous West Lake Fountain Exhibition, pretty much sums up my recently-concluded term with the Entrepreneurs School of Asia's month-long "Doing Business in China" course. Not only did I learn Mandarin and see unlimited possibilities in doing business in China, I got something more out of it—I fell in love with the place, the people and the culture.

Hangzhou City, the capital of Zhejiang province in China, has the right mix of the old and the new. Hangzhou has its fair share of modern infrastructure, but unlike Beijing and Shanghai, the pace in Hangzhou is a little bit slower. There is still space for new businesses to sprout. This is complemented by a laid back environment that is perfect for students who wish to learn about Mandarin and Chinese culture. Afternoons can be spent visiting Wushan Park, West Lake, Longshung Market and other beautiful places. Young entrepreneurs like me, on the other hand, can take a two-and-a-half-hour bus ride to Yiwu and explore the different Chinese-manufactured products offered openly to traders from



around the world. As for nightlife, this is where Hangzhou's being a laid back city becomes a party scene. Bars like SOS, Max and Babyface, to my experience, is world-class and comparable to Exit bar in New York or Ministry of Sound in Singapore.

When it comes to the people, the Hangzhou locals that I met are above and beyond being hospitable. They would go out of their way to make your stay better. I met a restaurant owner who would cook dishes as per my requests and would gladly change the order if I did not like the way it was done. Another friend that I made took time out to be my translator for the day; this was such a gracious gesture considering I had just met him.

Girls, on the other hand, were the prettiest I have seen and they are all over, not to mention that it is a fact that the most beautiful girls in China are natives of Hangzhou.

All in all I would sum up my experience as an appetizer of things to come for me. If I were to be given the opportunity to join an extended version of the "Doing Business in China" program, I would definitely grab it. I told myself before going back to Manila that this is not the first and last time that I will visit China, particularly Hangzhou, aside from of course Shanghai and Beijing.

I don't know what it is but I guess the study tour program took me to the heart of China, and I fell in love with it.

The ESA takes to heart the expression that for students, the world is their classroom. It is no longer enough for students to just learn in class how to conduct business beyond their country's borders. What one learns in class is different from what one can learn on-ground. In line with this, ESA opened its satellite campus in Hangzhou, China in cooperation with the Zhejiang Youth College last April 2006.

Two batches of ESA students have already done a term in the China campus where they learned basic Mandarin and the fundamentals of doing business in China. The ESA students were also able to interact with students from other universities in China such as Zhejiang University and Fudan University.