

The World is Our Classroom 2024 Tzu Chi Primary School Study Tour in the United States kicks off

In order to expand the international perspective and vision of Tzu Chi school students, in the summer of 2024, 26 students from Tainan Tzu Chi Chinese Elementary School and 6 students from Hualien Tzu Chi University Affiliated Elementary School, led by Director Chen Tianhe, Director Yan Xiuwen and Teacher Li Guizhi, went to the United States together, embarking on an international education journey full of learning and exploration. This study tour camp was planned by the Tzu Chi Education Foundation of the United States and took nearly half a year to prepare. Its goal is to focus on cross-cultural exchange and global vision, allowing students to increase their understanding of American culture through personal experience, improve their English skills, and cultivate students' international perspectives and cross-cultural communication skills.

Students from Tzu Chi Primary School went to Southlands Christian Schools (SCS) to attend STAEM courses, visited the California Science Center and the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County, and watched Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA) and Major League Baseball (MLB) games, the Hollywood Walk of Fame, Disneyland, and UCLA University City Exploration, etc. In addition, students experience American supermarkets, Mexican restaurants, and American hamburger restaurants to further improve their English skills and understand American life and culture. This rich study tour not only enriched the students' learning experience, but also laid a solid foundation for international exchanges.

After a long flight, they arrived at California's Ontario International Airport on June 30, where they were warmly welcomed by the American Tzu Chi family members, nuns and uncles, who cooked delicious noodle soup to warm everyone's hearts. The next morning, we arrived at the Tzu Chi American Primary School in Walnut, CA, and attended the opening ceremony of the "2024 Tzu Chi American Primary School Study Tour Camp" in high spirits, kicking off the next two weeks of the study tour camp. At the ceremony, Tzu Chi American Education Foundation Executive Director Li Qiongxun encouraged the children to bravely step out of their comfort zone, actively speak English, integrate into American culture, learn happily, and bring their gains back to Taiwan to share with their families.

In order to make the teachers and students of Tzu Chi Primary School feel as warm as if they were back home, the volunteers took advantage of the sunny weather on the weekend before the camp started to dry the bedding needed for the camp in the sun. The day before the study tour camp arrived, the volunteers cleaned the dormitory carefully again. Du Bin, deputy executive

director of the Tzu Chi American Education Foundation, mentioned that the volunteer team in Southern California has been thoroughly cleaning the dormitories at the San Dimas headquarters campus since mid-June and laying out Fuhui beds. In order to welcome everyone's arrival, nutritious and healthy fruits and snacks are prepared on the refrigerator and dining table. A towel teddy bear made by a nun is also placed on each bed, so that teachers and students can feel the warmth of home as soon as they step into the Tzu Chi American headquarters.

This time, students from Tzu Chi Primary School came to Southlands Christian Schools in the United States to participate in STEAM courses! Here, I not only have the opportunity to learn scientific knowledge in depth, but also improve my English skills. It is really a great experience! Many interesting scientific principles were explored in depth during this course. For example, we studied Leonardo da Vinci's architectural aesthetics and learned how to incorporate mathematics into architectural design.

Science and art make buildings not only beautiful but also practical. It is particularly worth mentioning that the students also made the Da Vinci Bridge by themselves. This is a bridge that does not require any fixing materials and is built only by the weight of the wooden strips and their mutual support. The students were very surprised and excited about this. At the same time, the course also explored Newton's second law of motion and understood the relationship between force and motion through experiments. In addition to science courses, Tzu Chi Primary School students also have the opportunity to attend classes and communicate with classmates from various countries. This not only helps everyone have the opportunity to speak English, but also enables them to understand different cultural backgrounds and broaden their horizons. The teachers carefully designed interactive courses to make learning more interesting. This study tour in the United States not only gave the students a deeper understanding of the field of science, but also improved their English communication skills.

In addition, the students had a wonderful and fulfilling cultural experience in California! The trip included visiting the California Dodger Stadium, watching a WNBA game, and strolling along the Hollywood Walk of Fame, allowing the children to experience the unique charm and diverse culture of California firsthand. The first stop was an exciting WNBA game, where the children witnessed a high-level women's professional basketball game. The high-decibel cheers from the team made the children feel the warm atmosphere of watching the game live and stimulated their passion and interest in basketball. Then comes the surprising

The children were still full of enthusiasm for the anticipated MLB ball game

despite the hot weather. Not only did we get to visit the historic Dodger Stadium in California, but most excitingly, we had the opportunity to see Shohei Ohtani perform live! The children cheered for his superb skills and deepened their interest and love for baseball.

The Hollywood Walk of Fame is a must-see for tourists. It is inlaid with star-shaped medals with the names of Hollywood celebrities to commemorate their contributions to the entertainment industry. There are many famous stars' names and handprints on the ground in front of the Chinese Theater. "The Avengers" is the most popular and watched team. However, since it is difficult for everyone to get together often, they leave handprints to commemorate the glorious moments. In addition, students also took the opportunity to learn about the history of Hollywood movies and stories of celebrities, and feel the charm of the film industry. This cultural experience trip not only allowed the children to learn a lot of knowledge outside the classroom, but also enhanced their understanding and interest in different fields.

Experiencing and understanding the local American culture is also a major focus of this trip. The camp coincides with the important American holiday "July 4th", also known as Independence Day. The United States attaches great importance to Family Day activities, and an American-style Family Day party was arranged on that day for children to experience. The children had a blast on the inflatable water slide, where the cool water and exciting slides kept them laughing. In addition, the American family also prepared a sumptuous vegetarian barbecue dinner for everyone. The children tasted authentic American burgers and pizza and experienced the warm and hospitable family atmosphere of Americans. Another very meaningful activity is that the children take turns hitting the paper boxes made with the American flag as the background hanging on the tree. This is the traditional Mexican Piñata candy-knocking game. Breaking the paper box and scattering the candies means the gods are giving blessings. Everyone was very happy when the candies fell everywhere. In addition, there were special face painting and sticker tattoo experiences provided by the senior brothers and sisters of Tzu Ching. The children's faces were painted with various interesting patterns, which added a lot of festive atmosphere. In the evening, we watched a famous American movie together. It was a day full of American culture.

Immersive English learning makes it easy for children to integrate into American culture and life, and the unique outdoor education also brings surprises to students. Although we cannot see the Space Shuttle Endeavour at the California Science Center because it is scheduled to be put on display in an upright launch position in 2025, the various high-tech aerospace

equipment in the museum lead mankind into the universe and show people the achievements of the United States in aerospace technology. From the early development of Silicon Valley to the rise of modern technology companies, the children learned about California's important position in the global technology field through interactive displays and videos. In addition, we also visited the California Museum of Natural History. Inside the museum, the children first visited the California Native Culture Exhibition Area to gain a better understanding of the lifestyle, art, and crafts of the local indigenous people. The museum is rich in authentic dinosaur fossils, which seem to be a reappearance of the Jurassic period, surprising and delighting the children. Finally, we visited the environmental protection exhibition area, where the children learned a lot about the protection of California's natural environment and understood the importance and specific methods of protecting the environment in daily life.

During the study camp, the children also had the opportunity to visit the famous Disneyland. The day was full of magic and surprises. The children rode all kinds of exciting rides, met their favorite Disney characters in the float parade, and the magical atmosphere of the entire park made them linger. In the evening, everyone enjoyed the spectacular fireworks display. The fireworks bloomed in the night sky, reflecting the surprise and joy on the children's faces.

This undoubtedly became their most unforgettable moment. The urban exploration plan, from group discussions to group reports in English, to actual city exploration at the prestigious American school UCLA - University of Southern California, Los Angeles, all made the children realize that reading thousands of books is not as good as traveling thousands of miles, and also broadened their horizons.

The two-week study tour camp not only broadened the students' horizons, but also stimulated their interest in science and helped them better understand cultural differences and mutual respect. Dai Meile from Tzu Chi Primary School in Tainan shared: "I am very grateful to my parents for giving me the opportunity to go abroad and improve my English skills. Although I was a little uncomfortable at first because it was my first time to be so far away from home, I am grateful for the company of my teachers and classmates, as well as the care of my seniors, which allowed me to devote myself to learning and enjoy my life experience in the United States." Yuan Yi from Tzu Chi Primary School in Hualien also said: "I am very grateful for this opportunity to go abroad. Every activity has opened my eyes. It is very interesting to experience American culture. I also met classmates from Tzu Chi Primary School in Tainan. Thank you for your tolerance and companionship in learning. It has been very rewarding." The main organizer of the study

tour camp

Director Chen Tianhe said, “Although the entire camp was quite tedious in terms of preparation, from discussing the itinerary with the United States, selection, training to departure, etc., we are grateful to the parents for being willing to let go and give their children the opportunity to live independently, learn and explore. Seeing the children grow up, all the hard work is worth it.” Thanks to the American Tzu Chi Education Foundation, the Tzu Chi brothers and sisters, and all the teachers for their careful arrangements, and the parents’ support and trust. This beautiful memory will become a valuable asset for the children on their path to growth.

(Text: Yan Xiuwen, Li Guizhi/Photography: Chen Tianhe)