

Edited by M. J. Premaratne and Ginny Wong

letters from the dorm



A Californian girl at heart

A weekend trip to the West Coast from New York City brought back memories of four years spent studying, having fun, and making lifelong friends



April Xiaoyi Xu, Harvard Law School, United States

On a Friday afternoon I, with my little suitcase in hand, walked out of the US District Court for the Southern District of New York (SDNY) building and into a car bound for California.

Returning to the West Coast for a two-day trip felt like a homecoming of sorts. To my East Coast friends, I'm a California girl. At the court, too, one of the law clerks I work with often engages me in friendly debate about the glories of the so-called Golden State. To him, I defend the state in which I've spent four formative years of my life: university at Pomona in Southern California.

I had returned to California for a friend's wedding - the first-ever wedding for someone the same age as me. I couldn't be happier for my friend as she walked down the aisle. It felt surreal, though, as it has only been three years since we were deciding which uni dining hall to eat from.

The wedding was in Malibu and was held on a perfectly sunny day. It was the first time I had seen some of my Pomona friends since I had graduated, and it was lovely getting to catch up with them all.

I am a nostalgic person at heart, which is why I took this opportunity to meet up with friends, including my former professors, and revisit places that had become symbols of my university days.

For instance, I took a long stroll from Santa Monica Pier to Will Rogers State Beach; I took in the view of Pacific Coast Highway from the Getty Villa; I had a delicious meal at my favourite breakfast place in our university town; and I took a walk past the building in which I took classes that shaped my intellectual journey in so many ways, by the quad where our class graduated last year, the dining halls we loved or vaguely disliked, the tennis courts and swimming pools...

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What seemed to be a part of my daily life just 13 months ago felt familiar in a way, yet already distant - I would look at a place, feel inside of me a wistful feeling, and recall specific events with specific people at any given spot. Those magical moments reminded me of all my dreams and aspirations that I have committed to pursuing.

On the Monday, I - with my little suitcase - touched down on Manhattan ground as I got off the plane and headed straight back to SDNY for another enriching week of work. Still, no matter how long I spend in the Big Apple, I think I'll always carry a little bit of the Californian spirit in me.

Graduation trips signal a new beginning



Modern China

Graduation season means farewell parties, nostalgic soul-searching, and heartfelt goodbyes. Some graduates embark on a final journey to close the book on their university lives.

In early June, Chen Yan from Fuzhou University, in Fujian province (福建), toured the country's north-western region. Chen visited two provinces where she saw crystal-clear rivers, deserts, vast prairies, and plenty of cattle and sheep. The sight of hawks and camels also brought her great joy.

Born and bred in southern China, she has always longed to set foot on north-western soil.

While camping in the middle of a desert in Dunhuang one night, she said she saw a immeasurable number of stars glimmering in the velvet blue sky. "It was like miracle,"

she recalled. "A graduation trip is our last chance to get student discounts, and to look at the world from a student's perspective. I'm glad I fulfilled a southerner's dream at the end of my university life."

Chen Yahuan, from the School of Automation Science and Engineering at South China University of Technology, in Guangdong province, travelled to Yunnan (雲南) with her three roommates.

They climbed one of the peaks of the Jade Dragon Snow Mountain which is about 4,000 metres above sea level. Chen was puffing and panting as she suffered from altitude sickness midway through the hike. "I wanna be happy!" one of her roommates shouted. "Say it! Then take a deep breath!"

Finally they made it to the top, where a Chinese flag fluttered above the mountain.

"We know each other so well we can even

predict each other's next move," Chen said. "I'm lucky to have my best friends with me during the graduation trip."

Others such as Zhou Yanyun, an English student from Sun Yat-sen University, in Guangdong province, are still planning their graduation trips.

A Japanese animation fan, Zhou said she cannot wait to watch the manga, *Attack on Titan*, at Universal Studios in Osaka, Japan.

She explained: "Its soundtrack has always been my inspiration whenever I'm feeling down. I'll keep doing my homework tirelessly while listening to it."

Zhou said she was looking forward to meeting the people and exploring the culture during her trip.

"A trip itself is nothing special, but when it falls on graduation, it becomes unique," she said. "It's not just about sightseeing; it's a



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carnival before going home, a warm-up before a new show, an endnote to the past, and a preface for the future."

Liang Xinlu, Sun Yat-sen University