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## From Iceland to China: one girl's adventures in Xian and Yanan

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[Kathryn Giordano](#)

*A 12-year-old from Iceland shares what surprised and delighted her about mainland China.*



Ina Illugadottir said her “jaw dropped” when she stepped out of the Xian Xianyang International Airport and into mainland China for the first time.

With its towering skyscrapers and bustling cityscape, Xian – the capital of China’s northwest Shaanxi province – proved an exciting new experience for Ina. Iceland, where Ina is from, has only about 400,000 citizens, a population smaller than many Chinese cities.

“I was so amazed because I had never seen anything like it in my entire life,” the 12-year-old said.

“[In] a city of 13 million people ... everyone had their own different style and personality.”

**Ice art and snow fun in freezing Harbin, China**

Ina got the opportunity to visit Xian and Yanan during a one-week trip with her father. Her time was filled with new food, culture and experiences.

Some highlights included exploring the Xian Provincial Museum and the Yanan Revolutionary Museum, checking out the cities' universities and visiting other historical sites. She even tried on *hanfu*, traditional clothing worn by the Han Chinese people.

"I learned that China has a very long history, much longer than my own [country's] history," she said.

While Vikings are thought to have settled in what is now Iceland a little more than 1,000 years ago, China's first dynasty to leave behind historical records is believed to have begun rule more than 3,500 years ago.



*Ina presented a slide show about her trip to Xian and Yanan, in China's northwest Shaanxi province, at the Chinese Foundation Secondary School in Chai Wan, Hong Kong. Photo: Handout*

Ina noted that despite all the ways people in her country and China were unique, she could also see what united them.

"People are different, but we all want the same things: health, happiness and a safe place for our family," she said.

Along the way, Ina learned not only about culture and history but also some traditional values considered integral to Chinese society.

“I learned about [the importance of] sacrifice, hard work, determination and fighting for what you believe in,” she said, adding that these were values she would work to apply to her own life back in Iceland.

### **Hakka village festival shows Hong Kong’s beautiful countryside and cultural heritage**

Ina also stressed the importance of travelling as a young person because you could learn so much first-hand.

“You must travel and learn about other people’s cultures. You need to know this because the people who understand history don’t repeat it,” she said, adding that photos and videos of a location do not do it justice. “You should go and see it for yourself.”



*Ina and her father visit the Chinese Foundation Secondary School in Chai Wan. Photo: Handout*

After her week on the mainland, Ina travelled to Hong Kong, a city she has visited several times. “I see Hong Kong as kind of my second home,” she said.

In Hong Kong, she shared her adventures in Xian and Yanan with students at the Chinese Foundation Secondary School in Chai Wan. With her father’s help, she prepared a speech and presentation filled with photos from her trip.

Ina said that she was eager to return to mainland China in the future because there was still so much for her to see and learn. She was particularly interested in visiting Shanghai one day.