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FDI 2006: an eye-opening dental experience

Although it may seem a daunting prospect, attending a large international dental conference can be an extremely rewarding experience from both a professional and a personal perspective. Here, three dentists recall their experiences at the 2006 FDI Annual World Dental Congress in Shenzhen, China.

The 2006 FDI Annual World Dental Congress was a fantastic, well organised event held in Shenzhen, China, just across the border from Hong Kong. We decided to attend the conference after looking through the back pages of the *BDJ* trying to get inspired by the different courses and conferences available. We had all attended the BDA conference as part of our VT training a few years ago and had thoroughly enjoyed it, but we wanted to attend something a little different this time around. The FDI Congress appealed to us as it had a large selection of international speakers covering a diverse range of subjects, and more importantly it also had a truly international audience. The event was also being held in a part of the world that we had all wanted to travel to and experience for ourselves.

The BDA is a member of the FDI (Fédération Dentaire Internationale). This organisation represents dentists globally and its primary remit is to promote oral health worldwide; it also organises the world dental congress in a different venue every year. We had to verify that the courses would be validated for CPD by the GDC, which they were.

You are able to register for the conference online, but we decided to do it at the conference as we had missed the early registration period, which is discounted. We did, however, manage to book a post-congress tour of China, which was organised by a travel agent affiliated with the FDI. We decided to fly from London to Hong Kong, via Dubai, so that we could



The authors and fellow congress delegates visit the Great Wall

spend four nights in Hong Kong and then take a train direct to Shenzhen from there.

Hong Kong is truly an amazing city; it is based around a spectacular harbour which at night is lit up with an astonishing and dazzling display of neon lights from the numerous

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skyscrapers surrounding the waterfront. There is a lot to do in Hong Kong, particularly because the city is a shopper's paradise! The food was also absolutely amazing and after four days of sight-seeing and intense shopping, we were all dim sum-ed out and ready to move on to Shenzhen.

On our last day we arranged for a cab to the Central train station and boarded an air conditioned (a must in this hot humid city!) train to Shenzhen, which took about 45 minutes. Luckily for us there were FDI representatives waiting to greet congress delegates at Shenzhen train station and we were escorted to the taxi rank, where after a brief struggle with the locals we finally managed to secure a taxi to the hotel. Shenzhen itself is a bustling, growing city. The skyline was littered with cranes and numerous skyscrapers. Twenty years ago it was a small fishing village but due to the current political and economic climate, it is considered the new economic zone.

On the opening day of the congress we arrived at the centre to be greeted by a throng of delegates from all over the world. The FDI, unbeknown to us, has a big following in the international dental community with many delegates attending for years in succession. The line up of speakers, some internationally renowned, was impressive. The lecture topics were varied, with some on general dentistry and others more specialist-oriented. The day to day schedule consisted of eight main speakers and a variety of smaller seminars, giving us some difficult decisions to make. They were generally very informative and provided good revision of core techniques. The American lecturers concentrated more on the aesthetic side of dentistry, with a lot of the patient cases involving whole mouth reconstructions with every restorative technique often used. This was quite an eye opener as a lot of the work done could be construed as over-treatment in the search for the perfect Hollywood smile.

The lecture on the Asian tsunami was particularly touching, as it showed how the dental community played a vital role in identifying victims and thus allowing families to claim and bury loved ones. This was only feasible due to very concise and up-to-date dental records. The trade show highlighted a lot of local dental manufacturers.

A number of tours had been arranged after the conference, enabling us to visit numerous attractions. We had already chosen our tour via the FDI website, which turned out to be the most popular – taking us to see the terracotta warriors in Xian, the Great Wall of China, and Tian An Men Square and the Forbidden City in Beijing.

It was quite a surprise when we arrived bright and early at Shenzhen airport to meet so many people from Europe, especially since we didn't see too many at the conference, maybe due to our hard work ethic! So began a hectic schedule of travelling mainly by plane and coaches. In total there were 140 of us on three coaches. The trip was well organised in terms of the amount of ground covered (literally) and the fabulous sites



Terracotta warriors

we were able to see in such a short space of time. However the downside of this was that moving so many people from site to site was necessarily very regimented, leaving us without always having the time to really appreciate the feats of Chinese engineering and their history. Each destination was preceded by a tourist shop, where we were coerced to buy the locally made items ranging from pearls and Chinese rugs to mini terracotta warriors and antique Chinese furniture made in front of your very eyes – all for an inflated special price! During these long trips we really got to know our fellow passengers, which to us was probably one of the best parts of the trip. There were people involved in dental health from all over the world and we all got on very well, with a lot of camaraderie.

Overall we look back on the FDI World Dental Congress as a good trip, which enabled us to get our CPD, get a glimpse of an amazing country and best of all meet some truly engaging people who we would otherwise never have met. We would definitely think about attending future FDI conferences, including this year's congress in Dubai.

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DOI: 10.1038/bdj.2007.146