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This year marked my third Annual Global Tea Hut trip. With the long awaited return to China, after sadly missing out on the epic journey to Yunnan last spring, the event has now become a marker in the calendar and reference point for looking back and seeing how self and life have evolved over the years. After the first two magical trips into the virgin forests of Yunnan and rocky cliff sides and temples of Wuyi, there was reserved excitement to experience a new and unfamiliar region of China.

As is the way of the annual Global Tea Hut trips, we came together on the first day mostly as strangers meeting for the first time, and after the long journey, left feeling like brothers and sisters, sharing an experience that will forever be etched in our hearts and minds. The first day had a real light feeling to it, due in part to the beautiful and relaxed vibe of the Huangshan City old town. As most of us had arrived via Shanghai, this small city provided a welcoming arrival point and place of preparation for our journey to come.

The theme that began from when we all first gathered, which would foreshadow what was to come for the duration of the whole trip, was that of fun. Our itinerary covered a lot of

different terrain and the schedule had us constantly on the go, but our energy and excitement towards where we were did not cease for a single day. The trip contained a small portion of elements from trips past, like drinking old, rare tea and spending time with true masters of the tea world, but the enduring memory of the trip for me will be the endless amounts of fun we had as a group for those ten days.

Our daily schedule was quite full, from all-day hiking in the epic wonderland of the Huangshan Mountains, to picking tea with the locals in rural Anhui or being hosted for an event at a private studio for tea artisans in Jingdezhen. Some occasions served as a reminder to expect the unexpected, and others reminded us that as Chajin we must make the most of the situation at hand. That meant using water and fire less than ideal for an eighty-year-old tea (and the tea police were nowhere to be found!) or drinking an old *Longma* puerh in the Chinese version of a 1950s-style speakeasy diner (by far the most comfortable chair I've ever sat in for a gongfu tea session!). No, this certainly wasn't a timeless tea session in the virgin forest amongst ancient trees. There was no birdsong to be heard in that diner. It didn't matter, though. We were all filled with immense joy for

this occasion and got to drink a tea Wu De had longed to share with friends for years. And, more importantly, we were together. That joy was the same joy cultivated in Huangshan, and it grew infectiously from the first day onwards to Qimen, Jingdezhen, Yixing and back to Shanghai, punctuated with an epic meal and bus ride back to the hotel featuring a sing-along and dance-a-thon to the last great song from the disco era.

Life was calling, so I immediately had to leave China to get back into the routine, carrying home with me an abundant heart filled with love and joy. The first morning back home sitting in my tea space I reverently set out a bowl to celebrate friends new and old and wish them a safe journey for their travels. Upon that offer, the "play" button was apparently pressed in the recesses of my mind, and the remaining bowls were drunk to the soundtrack of our bus' disco anthem, "Funkytown," started on repeat in my head: "*Gotta make a move to a town that's right for me (tea)! Town to keep me movin', keep me groovin' with some energy*" ... at least until next year!

