

My name is Erika Rahming and I am the Olympic Youth Ambassador for the Bahamas. As the Olympic Youth Ambassador, I have been sent to Beijing, China, where the current Olympics are being held. I have been sent here for the Beijing 2008 Olympic Youth Camp, which is designed to give young people the opportunity to make friends from other countries or regions and to learn about each others culture.

There are about 500 people from over 200 countries that are attending the camp. Some of the campers are disabled and come from the hosting country.

As I am in Beijing I will be sending back a journal, as many times as I can, on my experiences here, not just with the Olympics itself, but also the Culture of china and my experiences while here. Here is what has happened so far:

After flying for a total of 18 hours, I finally reached my destination, Beijing, China. Throughout the final flight I could not sleep in fear that I would miss some of the views that flying had to offer. As we fly from New York to Beijing, we passed over the massive ice burgs that made up the Arctic. As we came closer to China I saw many rich green hills and winding rivers down below. Because of my sleeplessness though, I missed the view of Beijing that I wanted to see.

Getting off the plane, Kieran Deveaux (the other Youth Ambassador), our chaperone and I met up with other Youth Ambassadors from many different countries. As we waited, for other campers to arrive we began to talk and introduce ourselves to the campers present. To my surprise, many of the campers that had arrived with us were from Caribbean countries and so we had much in common and much to talk about.

On our way to school that we are staying at, we passed the Bird's Nest, which is where all of the track and field events are taking place, as well as the National Aquatics Centre. The National Aquatics Centre, or the "Watercube," looks as though hundreds of gigantic water bubbles are frozen in a cube. At night the Watercube gives off a blue glow and is truly a sight to see.

After getting checked into the camp, I received my camp uniform, the team and group that I am in, and the key to my dorm. As I was unpacking, my roommates came in and introduced themselves to me. My roommates come from a variety of countries, Uganda, Algeria and also China. I easily became friends with these three girls.

In the morning of my first day at camp, my new Chinese friend showed me around the campus of the middle school we are staying at. The campus of the school is enormous, much bigger than any school that I have seen. The school has many sports facilities including a gymnasium, a track course, soccer field, basket ball courts, and tennis courts. The school also has its own post office and bank for campers who wish to send off postcards or change their money.

When I came back from the long tour of the campus, I went to the soccer field for the first activity of the day. This activity consisted of several ice breaker games such as ball and drum, and jump rope. The game of ball and drum is simple but hard. The idea is to bounce the ball on the drum eight times without letting it drop. The drum has 16 equal length strings attached for each person of the team to hold. This makes the game hard because everyone must move fast

enough to reach the ball, as well as keep the string taut so that when the ball hits the drum, it does not go flying.

These icebreaker activities brought me closer to my new friend from Uganda. The activities were fun, hard and energizing. It made me extremely happy that I was chosen because I saw and took many opportunities to make new friends.

That evening was the opening ceremony for the youth camp. The special guests that night were the President of the Olympic Youth Camp (OYC), the past President of the International Olympic Committee, Juan Antonio Samaranch, and also the mayor of Beijing. After the Olympic Youth Camp flag was raised, the special guests made speeches and Mr Samaranch revealed the symbol of the OYC officially opening the camp.

After the ceremony, many dances were performed. These dances were done by Chinese performers to represent some of the many cultures that exist within our camp. It was very exciting and full of energy. Everyone cheered at the end and for some of the moves that were done. The final dance that was performed represented the Olympics.

On the second day of the camp, I had to wake up early in order to get ready for the trip to the Mei Lanfang Grand Theatre, which is an opera house and museum. In the museum part of the theatre there are many wax figures of the characters in the play. They each have a plaque at their feet describing the character and their clothing.

After passing through the museum, we stopped to have our faces painted as one of the characters in the opera. This character is a monkey and so everyone had fun laughing at how everyone looked. We also had the chance to dress up in one of the costumes.

After the face painting and dressing up, we were seated in the theatre and got a history lesson on Opera. I learned many things about Chinese culture just by that history lesson. When the history lesson ended the play began. The play was about the "Monkey King" who is one of the Chinese mythical heroes.

In the afternoon we went to the Forbidden City and walked around within the walls. I loved the architecture of the whole place and the ingenious ways they put dragons into their designs. I was very intrigued to see how much of the Chinese culture was actually there through the paintings, sculptures and designs. And even though the day was hot, it was a lot of fun and memorable.

That night many things went on at once there was a kung fu show, calligraphy and ceramic making, and also a band from the US was playing. I spent most of my time that night at the kung fu show because I was amazed to see how teenagers were breaking thick wooden sticks on each other. But most of all I was amazed at a child who looked to be about 5 or 6. This child was doing pushups on two fingertips on each hand. He also did handstands on the same four fingers. I was truly amazed!

On the third day was the day of the camp, it was the day of the Opening Ceremony for the Olympics. Everyone was up and about getting ready because our campsite was the last part of

the Olympic torch relay. Some people dressed in their traditional wear because it was asked of us to do so if we wanted to. There were many people who dressed up and showed performed for their fellow campers as we waited on the sacred flame's arrival.

While we waited on the sacred flame's arrival the six torch bearers, one of which was disabled, prepared themselves. When the sacred flame arrived everyone cheered and when the torch was lit the cheers grew louder. As the torch bearers passed on the sacred flame along the route the crowd cheered and ran to the finishing spot for the torch as the torch bearer passed.

When the torch finally reached its destination the crowd went wild.

That afternoon we had to go on the bus at 4-30pm to go the Birds Nest for the Opening Ceremony even though it started at 8pm. When we arrived, I could see thousands of people who all were to enter the stadium that night. The security checkpoint at the gate we were at was very long, with at least 100 people in each line. The coordinaters ended up taking us campers to another security check point, that was farthest from the Birds Nest. This was less crowded and took little time to go through.

As we neared the Birds Nest I was awed at the true size of it. The architecture of the place really amazed me and I wondered at how anyone could be so creative. Getting nearer I saw the Watercube and had the urge to go up to the building and touch it to find out what it was made of.

When I got to my seat inside the building I was astonished at how many people were in there already. The Birds Nest can seat over 90000 people!

As we settled in and the Opening Ceremony started I was astounded by the creatvity of the performances and of how much Chinese culture was incorporated in them. One of my favorite performances was the first part of the Calligraphy dance. It was amazing how they drew as they danced and it amazed me even more of the picture that they were painting.

After the opening performances ended, the Games were announced officially open and the athletes were introduced. When my country was announced, excitement and pride built up inside me and I couldn't help but cheer.

As more and more countries were announced, I noticed that I had never heard of a some of them. The names of countries took a long time to finish as there were 204 countries competing in this years Olympics. The sizes of some of the teams also amazed me.

When all of the countries were finished marching in, the torch was run around the track and was passed on from person to person with a hi-five along with it. As the last man recieved the flame, we were all surprised as he was lifted into the air and began to run around the wall of the Birds Nest.

At the end of his run, the last person lit the gigantic torch that hung on the wall. When the large flame burst through the crowd erupted into a louder cheer than before. Fireworks went off and we all watched in amazement at the display.

After the fireworks finished, the athletes began to leave the arena, and more performances were put on for us. The first performance was by Jackie Chan, who sang for us along with three other people.

Watching the Opening Ceremony made me feel extremely honoured to have been chosen to be the Olympic Youth Ambassador. I feel extremely proud of my country and I feel overwhelmed about how much I love The Bahamas.

This is the end of my journal for my first few days in the Olympic Youth Camp. Look out for the rest of my articles of which I will be sending back soon.