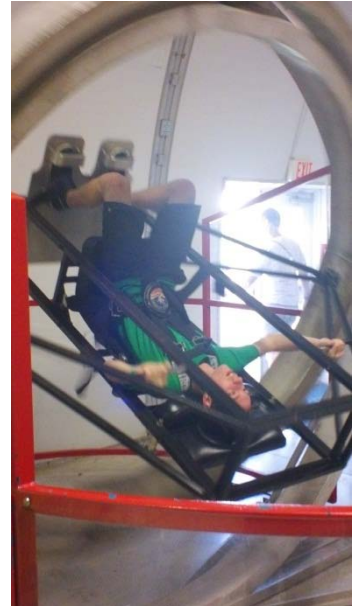


## Space Camp Trip 2012

On 30 March 2012, 15 students and 2 teachers set off on a journey to the land of the free. Our first stop was L.A. We unpacked our bags at the hostel which was a block away from the heart of Santa Monica mall and a block away from the promenade and pier. We headed down to the pier to grab something for dinner – our first introduction to the interesting food we would consume whilst in the U.S.A. The following morning we had the classic American peanut butter jelly on toast for breakfast then headed for the airport for our flight to Huntsville, Alabama.

Driving into Space Camp was pretty cool, there was a whole heap of rockets and a shuttle lit up in front of the habitat - our accommodation for the week. The habitat looked like a prison really, but it was supposed to look like as if we were on a space station on another planet. Either way, it was actually alright. At space camp we were put into different groups: Von Tiesenhuasen, Holderer and Von Braun, along with students from across America and from Melbourne, Australia.

There were heaps of different activities at Space Camp. There was an outside kind of mini theme park in the complex that had a G-force machine which spun you round in a circle so that your whole body felt extremely heavy, a zero-gravity ride called the ‘Space Shot’ which just went straight up so that you lifted off the seat and had a few seconds of zero gravity before being pulled down again and then back up for another zero-gravity experience. I went on it about five times. There were power point presentations on space and spacecraft and we went out to watch the stars on some nights which was really cool as they had a high zoom telescope so we could also make out some craters on the moon. Engineering activities involved us having to make a heat-proof barrier out of materials like felt, foil and steel wool, and having to build a rocket that could transport an egg as high as it could and then have a capsule fall off and deliver the egg safely back to the ground without breaking the egg. A couple of times we saw an iMax movie which they have in the Space Camp grounds (yet another awesome thing) although we somehow managed to fall asleep during them even though Tom Hanks was narrating it.



On some days we took a bus down the road (still on campus though) to a place called Area 51, obviously not the real one because that doesn't exist but in essence it was a team building exercise course set in a forest. There was also a big climbing wall there where you had to go up in pairs with a ‘daisy chain’ tied between you so you both had to climb up at the same pace so as not to break it. There was also a leap of faith off a tall pole to conquer our fears and trust our team who were belaying us.

Other activities to have a go at were a Multi Axis Trainer (MAT for short), a chair in which they spun you round but without getting dizzy. There was also a moon walking simulator which just made it feel like one sixth of earth's gravity while you're walking which is what it would feel like on the moon.

We also got to do scuba diving in a diving tank, one of only two places in the world in which you can do this type of astronaut training, the other one is in Russia and you have to pay about \$10,000. Anyway, it was rather cool, the first 10 minutes or so we learnt how to dive and change our ear pressure, and de-fog our glasses while we were underwater and the next you know it we were at the bottom of the tank playing basketball and slam-dunking with a bowling ball and spinning 40 pound weights on the tips of our fingers while listening to some classic rock and reggae.



The main part of the Space Camp though was the mission. Some were training on the mission specialist track while the others were on the pilot track. Throughout the week we went off for hour sessions training as different roles on our track to see which we would be best suited for in our ultimate three hour mission at the end of the week. During the final mission we were tested on our skills and were thrown lots of challenges along the way. For instance, in my team our pilot had a heart attack during lift off and so I stood up to help but broke my leg in the process. My other team mate was falling asleep so I had to keep her awake during the whole lift-off sequence. By the time we got into space after 16 minutes I had broken both of my legs and one of my arms, our pilot was still passed out on the controls and was nearly dead but our co-pilot managed to save the day by stabbing the pilot in the ribs with a syringe (he had a bruise afterwards). Believe it or not we landed safely!



Our next flight was to Orlando, Florida where we experienced three days of Disneyworld, both the educational and fun parts. We went to an Orlando Magic basketball game which included all the things you would expect at such an event - cheerleaders, mascots, bottomless sodas and even some basketball.

Whilst in Florida we also visited the Kennedy Space Centre where we had lunch with an astronaut, Wendy Lawrence, and went to Cape Canaveral where the rocket launches take place. Here we viewed the mission control room with some insight as to what happened during a launch. We finished our Florida experience with an eco-tour around the forest and kayaked with the manatees and dolphins. With a look around the Ron Jon surf shop at Cocoa Beach, a proper American BBQ and dipping our feet in the Atlantic Ocean, we concluded our trip of a lifetime and packed up for the long flights home.



This trip was definitely one to remember: we made new friends, pushed our limits and have memories to last for a lifetime. I would like to thank Mr Wilkinson and Ms Clissold on behalf of us students for making this a fun and enjoyable trip.

Nick Cheesebrough

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