

MMC China Trip ~ April 13-May 1, 2012

“Planes, Buses, Boats & Trains”

or

“The 1,000,000 Steps...”

Our great adventure began on Friday April 13th on a bright sunny afternoon as we left from the Marco Yacht Club parking lot. There will be 13 couples on this trip but 9 couples left from Marco. We rode in 2 small vans- Cindy & Ed Crane, JoeAnn & Ed Vesely, Steve & Anne Moore, Clint & Pat Bunke, Doug & Jo Baillie in one van and Kurt & Jane Wambach, Tom & Eileen Eck, Ron & Vivian Wieczorek, & Walter & Lori Fabisiak in another. After a joke filled trip to Miami, we settled into our first of many flights to LA on American Airlines. We arrived early Saturday morning and met up with our other traveling companions, Eric & Ellen Ulmer, and Dave & Peggy before transferring to the Air China flight over the big pond. The first flight was not so great. The second longer one (13 hours) was much better as far as planes and comfort go. Eddie slept most of the way as I read and watched my individual TV screen and watched everything they had on China. We lost a day in transit so we arrived on Sunday April 15th in Beijing, tired but ready for the start of the great adventure.

Beijing



Sunday, April 15, 2012 ~ our tour guide, Zhao, met us at the airport and quickly and efficiently handled our luggage and whisked us off to our bus for the first tour. Our bus driver is Mr. Ye. In China the family name is first, and then the given name. Most people are just called by the family name. Zhao is pronounced like “chow” for Americans. Zhao was very pleasant, efficient and full of great information. He told us that Beijing is the 3rd largest city in China with a population of 19 million

people. Chongdong is the largest with 32 million and Shanghai is the 2nd largest with 23 million. There is lots of traffic on the road and Mr. Ye did a great job of driving for us. Zhao said that in 1983 there were only 3 private cars in Beijing and now there are 8 million private cars. Traffic is regulated; the license plate number on the car determines which days one can drive. There were some bicycles, but nothing like in the past. There were many, many small motor scooters and motorcycles. Although the traffic seemed very crazy to me, there were surprisingly very few accidents. Most brands of cars seen on the road are actually built here in China. The true Chinese car is very small and is called “Red Flag”.

Springtime is a very beautiful time to visit China with many flowering trees along the sides of the roads; peach, pear, and cherry trees are everywhere. There is continual planting of trees everywhere and the tree trunks are painted white at the base. Many of the roads are lined with a very interesting beautiful tree called the Dragon tree.

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Chinese money is called Yuan and comes in 20, 10, 5, and 1 denominations all with the picture of Chairman Mao. There are also some smaller bills that we found out are the equivalent of about 10 cents each and some coin money too. Zhao said that 100 Yuan equals about \$16.00 US. Zhao told us that we would see several factories on the trip which would be good for shopping-Jade, Silk, Cloisonné, Chinese Painting and Pearls. Of course, we also always had the gauntlet of street vendors everywhere we went and one was expected to bargain with them strenuously as this was their custom and part of their culture. We brought tons of fresh \$1.00 bills and they came in quite handy. Zhao also told us to give him all of the tip money, \$600 per couple, at the beginning of the trip and he would take care of all the tipping except for the river boat and Hong Kong. This turned out to be an excellent idea and made things very comfortable for us all. Each day in the hotels we had an American buffet breakfast which was very good and turned out to be a lifesaver for some of the group who didn't like Chinese food. Most days we had a Chinese lunch at a local restaurant served “family style” which means we had a big round table with the huge round glass Lazy Susan. There would be usually 12 main courses put onto the Lazy Susan and we would spin it around and take what we wanted. We learned that someone had to be the “table police” and control the spinning by stopping the glass while others spooned out their food. We found out right away that each meal included one “soft drink” free and this could be bottled water, soda, such as Coke, or beer! Beer is considered an adult soft drink and this made us very, very happy. We had beer at every meal and didn't have to worry about drinking the tap water (or “tape” water, as Zhao called it.)

Zhao is married and has a daughter who is attending Columbia University. He started as a tour guide in 1990 and his wife also works in the tourism industry. He is originally from Shanghai and now lives in Beijing. He really loves his job, but like all Chinese, he had no choice in the matter. The government tells each person exactly what kind of work they will do and they have to abide by that decision. Zhao told us that his family was Nationalist and that he would later share with us about his experience with Mao and the Cultural Revolution.

Beijing is the capitol of the Peoples Republic of China and it is about 800 years old. Xi'an was originally the capitol of China for over 1,000 years. “Peking Man”, estimated to be about ½ million years old, was found in Beijing. Beijing was originally called Peking and is still called that name by some people. There are about 19 million people in Beijing now. I think that they are all out on the roads today! But Zhao says this is a Sunday and not too many people are out like on work days.



Cindy Crane

Our first stop was the **Temple of Heaven** a very beautiful compound where the Emperor came to pray to the Gods twice a year for good crops. The compound covers 500 acres and was built around 1420 during the Ming Dynasty. The temple is a round building on a square base-round because God is in Heaven, square base to signify earth. There are 3 roofs to symbolize Paradise, Earth and Hell. The building is covered in blue tiles with very intricately painted tile work. The roofs are the typical Chinese “Hat roofs” with many carvings of

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animals on each upturned roof peak. There is always much symbolism on these buildings with the animals, colors, orientation of building, numbers of posts, etc. Feng Shui rules building principles here as well as Yin and Yang. The building was destroyed by lightning and rebuilt in 1890. We saw many people out enjoying the park on this Sunday doing tai chi and ballroom dancing. There was also a form of tai chi which involved a racket and a ball. This looked really cool and a few of us tried it without much success.

Buddhism came to China around the 1st century AD. There is also Taoism and Confucianism practiced, but technically according to the government, the PRC is atheist. There is a small contingent of Muslim people and a few Catholics and Protestants. There are currently 7 Ring Roads in Beijing with about 5 miles between each of them. We usually seemed to be traveling on the 3rd Ring Road. This place is really huge! Housing is a big problem in Beijing. A 2 bedroom apartment costs around \$300,000 and there is a staggering number of new apartment buildings under construction. The cost of living in Beijing is the highest in China.

We had our first lunch at a “typical” Chinese restaurant. The food was really pretty bad. About the only edible thing was the rice. The fish dishes all had small bones in them.



The chicken dish also had bones. The soup was a strange color, sort of like dishwater, and had very long green stings of seaweed. There were a few dishes of some type of cooked vegetables and a few dishes of tofu. Tofu is extremely difficult to pick up and eat with chopsticks! There was one dish that I really liked and that was lotus root, a crunchy sweet fruit, with the consistency of water chestnuts. And of course, we learned that when the watermelon slices come the meal is over. The best thing about this meal was our discovery of beer being an adult soft drink. And then of course, there are the restrooms...only Chinese ceramic holes in

the floor, no Western toilets. This proved to be a real challenge for several of the ladies here.



After lunch we arrived at the Olympic Village to view the **Bird's Nest** and the **Water Cube**. These were both an impressive engineering feat along with the 22 other venues that were built for the Olympics. Sadly, they appear to be mostly unused. We walked around the area and took pictures of the really interesting shaped buildings here. Then it was back to our first hotel the **Four Points by Sheraton Beijing** to check into our rooms. We could not get free WI FI in our rooms so Eddie & I sat with Ed Vesely

in the lounge sipping Chinese beer and catching up on our emails. We had dinner that night with Ed & JoeAnn in the Italian Restaurant in the hotel and then crashed after our very long first day.

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Monday, April 16, 2012 ~ After a very nice breakfast in the hotel we boarded our bus for our 8am tour. First stop was **Tiananmen Square**. This is the huge square that is 108 acres and is said to be able to hold 1 million people. It is used for ceremonial events. Mao’s mausoleum is located here and there is a steady stream of people visiting it. Chairman Mao is in a crystal coffin in his mausoleum. There is also a huge TV screen showing scenes of the area. There are giant buildings on each side of

the square, and a tall monument where all the heroes from the 1840 Opium War are remembered. There are 2 gates to the South. The South Gate is always the main gate of the city. The Meridian North to South runs through Tiananmen Square as well as the Forbidden City. On the Western side is a building of 1959 Russian design that is the Congress Hall. All 13 provinces of China have an office here. On the Eastern side is the National Museum and to the North is the Forbidden City which has yellow tiled roofs and red walls (royal colors).



The Forbidden City is also the Palace Museum. It was constructed beginning in 1406 and one million workers built it. It sits on 270 acres and there are 8,714 rooms in the Forbidden City. The Outer Quarters are for meetings and ceremonies. The Inner Court was only for the Royal family, the concubines, and eunuchs. Twenty-four emperors lived in the Forbidden City for around 500 years. We walked through the entire area from South to North. Each giant hall was more beautiful than

the last, and each building increased in importance as we traveled North. There are many carvings and statues throughout. Of greatest significance are the two lions at each entrance. On the left is the female lion with her paw on the baby to signify that the female takes care of the family. On the right the male lion has his paw on a globe to signify that the male takes care of the world. These statues are also commonly called “Foo Dogs”.

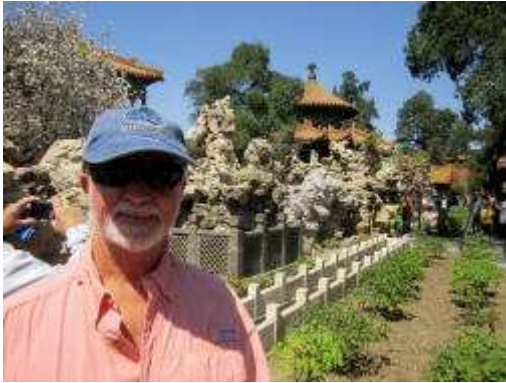


The last buildings had living quarters for concubines and finally for the Emperor and his family. The only people who could live here were the royal family and the Emperor’s concubines and eunuchs. When the Emperor felt like having some fun, the eunuchs would show him tiles and he would choose a tile. The eunuch would then know which concubine to bring to the Emperor for his “happy hour”.

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There were many, many rooms that he could use and no one ever knew which room he would choose for the night. This was only one of the many security issues of the Emperor. There were no trees allowed to be planted inside the Forbidden City, as they could be a place for assassins to hide. Also the Emperor was served around 100 courses of food at each meal and he could choose to take a bite of whichever ones pleased him. However, he could only eat a maximum of 3 bites of any dish because that way the chef would never know his favorite dish and could not poison him. The roofs of all the buildings had yellow tile and they all had many carvings of dragons, which was the symbol of the Emperor. Other symbols of status were the Turtle and Crane and the Dragon and Phoenix. There were many statues throughout the area of these animals.



After seeing where the Emperor slept and ate, we came to his **Gardens at the North Gate**. This was a very beautiful area and quite unlike the rest of the Forbidden City. The gardens had many flowering trees, koi ponds, rocks and a beautiful Pavilion. All Chinese gardens need to have the symbols of rocks, water, trees, and a pavilion. There were no clocks in old times, except in the Emperor's palace, so Drum Towers and Bell Towers were built in the cities to let the people know the time. The Drum

Tower marked the time for the city gates to open and the Bell Tower marked the time for the gates to close.



Lunch today was at The **Bamboo Palace**, a very lovely setting with much better food than yesterday! After lunch we visited the **Hutong** area-the old living quarters of Beijing. Each couple had a ride in a two-person pedicab/trishaw through the very close streets of the neighborhood to visit a local family. The dwellings are all very old and very small, called a quadrangle-home. There are no bathrooms...families must all walk down the street to use the public bathrooms and showers. The people in China don't ever own the land; just lease the land for 70 years, even for these apartments. The average income is around \$500 per month. The lady whose home we visited was single and retired. She had a

very cute white dog with the fur on its ears dyed orange.

Her niece, who lived there with her, was a famous artist who painted intricate paintings inside of little snuff bottles. I bought a little snuff bottle with cranes on it...cranes symbolize long life.



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Next we went to a lovely spot for a traditional **Chinese Tea Ceremony**. We tasted many types of tea and then had the opportunity for shopping. The tea was very expensive however, so I didn't purchase any.

In China, “family planning” is very much still in force in the cities. It is illegal to have a child without being married. In the cities only one child per couple is allowed. On farms there can be two children and people of the minorities,

like Tibetans or Mongols, can have as many children as they like. In the cities, many young couples prefer no kids because it is so very expensive to live here. Beijing Kindergarten costs \$3,000-4,000 Yuan/month. Private kindergarten costs as much as \$10,000 Yuan/month. The penalty for having an extra child is a very heavy fine and the second child gets no benefits like education, social security, insurance, etc. The child will always be ostracized in society. Each couple must plan for a child and must get a permit first before getting pregnant. Unemployment is termed “People waiting for jobs” and is at around 8%. Older parents frequently live with their kids. Thirteen percent of the population is over 60 years old. I fear that this “family planning” will be the downfall of China.

After our tours we went back to the hotel for some relaxation and an excellent **Peking Duck Dinner** in the hotel.



Tuesday, April 17, 2012 ~ We had another great breakfast at the hotel and then boarded our bus for the **Great Wall**. On the way, we visited the **Run-Ze Jade Garden** where we were given a tour with much information about jade. Of course shopping was involved! I had always thought jade was only dark green like my wedding band...not true! It comes in many



shades of both light and dark green as well as white, gold, and other colors. We saw many beautiful carvings of jade and learned how it is carved. The Empress Xici (Tiger Lady) wore much jade. Her burial robe was made of jade pieces tied together with gold thread.



One of the most interesting to us was the jade ball, which is made from a single piece of jade carved into a ball with concentric balls, each smaller and smaller inside, all free to turn. We had to buy one of these for a souvenir.



Called the Long Wall by the Chinese, the **Great Wall of China** was completed in 221BC during the Qin Dynasty. The first real Emperor of China, Qin Shi Huang, was the first to unify all the provinces into China. Xi'an was the capitol then and he built the wall to protect China from invasions from the Mongols and the Han. It is 3,500 miles long.

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Towers were built to send signals to each area about invaders. The foundation was made of rock & clay, then bricks. Slaves were used to build the wall. The fall of the Qin Dynasty was caused by rebellions of these slaves/farmers who were conscripted to work on the wall, but couldn't get to the wall to help build it due to floods. They would be killed if they didn't show up on time. Qin Shi Huang was the same Emperor who had the Terracotta Soldiers built to guard his tomb. Many, many workers died while building the great wall and were buried in the wall, and many human bones have been found there. Many parts of the Great Wall fell into ruin during the Qing Dynasty.



We visited the **Badaling** section of the wall which was opened in 1982 as a tourist attraction. Climbing the Great Wall was lots of hard work, but fun. There were many steps and many very steep sections. The views from the top were spectacular. The hillsides were covered with many flowering peach and pear trees. Even on this pretty mild day, the temperatures were colder up here in the mountains and there were very brisk winds. I could imagine how cold this would have been for the soldiers who had to stay up on the wall in the towers and keep watch for invaders, especially in the winter months.



I hiked up to the 7th tower and Eddie went up to the 8th tower. While I waited for him to come back, several groups of Chinese people came up and had their pictures taken with me. My blond hair and blue eyes fascinated them. Badaling means “pass to all sections”. We had lunch at the **Badaling Coffee Shop** and had a little time for shopping before we boarded our bus to head back towards Beijing.



Next we toured the **Summer Palace**, built in 1750 on beautiful Kunming Lake by Emperor Qianlong of the Ming Dynasty for his mother's 60th birthday. She preferred to vacation here in the summer. She would come here with the Emperor and his many concubines and eunuchs.



We walked the Long Corridor, her covered walkway along the lake, said to be the longest in the world according to Guinness Book of Records. The ceiling and wooden rafters of

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the Long Corridor are richly painted with thousands of scenes from legends and nature. In 1860 the Chinese lost the 2nd Opium War and British soldiers burned down the Summer Palace. It was rebuilt with funds that were diverted from the Chinese naval budget by Empress Dowager Cixi who retired here in 1889. Nine years later it was here that she imprisoned her nephew, Emperor Guangxu, after his reform movement failed. In 1903 she moved the seat of government from the Forbidden City to the Summer Palace, from where she controlled China until her death in 1908. It became a park in 1912.



We saw the Marble Boat, which does not actually float and was built by the Dowager Empress Cixi with money meant for the Navy, and we then traveled back across the lake in a beautiful wooden dragon boat. The bridge to the small beautiful island in Kunming Lake has 17 arches. We enjoyed this beautiful park-like area and returned to the hotel to pack for our early morning flight.

Dinner was on our own again tonight and Eddie & I skipped it and relaxed and caught up on emails.

Shanghai



Wednesday, April 18, 2012 ~ We had our first pre-dawn departure so, Zhao arranged for box breakfasts for us to take on the bus to the airport. We had a good flight and another breakfast on the plane to Shanghai. When we arrived we met Mr. Wang, our guide for Shanghai.



Shanghai is a truly beautiful city with many parks throughout, many skyscrapers, and fabulous architecture. The population is 23 million and it is developing very, very fast. There was construction of skyscrapers everywhere, maybe even more than in Beijing. Shanghai is famous for silk farms and the export of beautiful silk. There was much development for the World Expo in 2010. There was a very modern airport, a well developed highway system with very sophisticated signage, and bullet trains. The highway signs were electronic and showed the drivers where traffic was backing up and alternate routes to take. It was very easy to walk in this city as there were walking overpasses on the main roads, so that you didn't have to worry

too much about the Kamikaze drivers, especially the taxis. One still had to stay alert however, as it was not unusual for taxis and motorcycles to drive up along the sidewalks on the smaller streets. The streets are all lined with beautiful trees and there are large parks everywhere. This is a great place in the early mornings for people to walk their dogs and practice their morning exercise-everything from tai chi, to qigong, to ballroom

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dancing. There were many huge apartment buildings everywhere and you could always tell which ones were occupied because they all had their laundry hanging on the balconies. The average rent is \$2,000 Yuan/month (all inclusive). The cost to buy a condo is \$5-6 million Yuan. Feng Shui elements are found in the new construction. Several tall skyscrapers had huge holes in the top for proper Feng Shui.

Mr. Wang worked security for President Clinton 12 years ago for his visit. He said that 7000 Chinese secret service protected him “to keep him away from pretty Chinese girls”. President Bush came after 911 for a convention and there were more than 9000 secret service to protect him. Whenever he visited a public place, all the “patrons” would actually be secret service people and their families.

There are several distinct areas in Shanghai. After the 1844 Opium War, many British came and built houses. The French developed an area in the southern part of town. Then the Americans came and redeveloped by the river close to the British. The first subway was a gift from Germany. The 4th and 5th subway lines were done by America. There are currently 12 subway lines with more being built. There are huge underground tunnels under the river and beautiful bridges spanning the river. We had an excellent Chinese lunch at the **Sea Gull Restaurant** on the river close to the Oriental Pearl Tower, the big communications tower with pink balls. This is such a distinctive building that dominates the skyline. Mr. Wang and Zhao both spoke of many new office “beauties”. (I think they were trying to say “buildings” but it always sounded like “beauties” to me.)



After lunch we got to spend two hours in the **Shanghai Museum**, located in People’s Square. This was an excellent, very beautiful museum. Ed, JoeAnn, Eddie and I really enjoyed it. However, everyone else on the trip bailed out and went to the hotel early. They don’t know what they missed! We checked into **Howard Johnson Business Club Hotel** and had a very nice room #2516 which overlooked a huge construction site. We stayed in and relaxed. Luckily we could get free WI FI in our room so this was very convenient. Some of our group walked around the area to see some of the local culture and they got a little more than they bargained for. Right around the corner from the hotel there was a market where they observed the owner as he skinned alive some geese for a customer. I am glad that I didn’t see this, but I had bad dreams about it nevertheless.

Thursday, April 19, 2012 ~ We awoke to an overcast day. Much work had been done on the big construction site last night. The buffet breakfast was great! We walked around the area a little then back on the bus for our next adventure.

Mr. Wang taught us a few more words of Mandarin: “boo ya shi shia” means no thanks; “may gor yen” means American; “boo!” means no!; “gan bay” means cheers; “two dollar” means all here; “one dollar” means late.

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Shanghai is developing very fast. It now has a mortgage system, social welfare, and everyone pays for social security. Now there is more drug smuggling, but the punishment is severe if caught—a bullet to the head. There are more rich people in Shanghai than in any other Chinese city. Now one in every four families has a private car. But before you can buy a car, you must buy a license plate and it costs around \$7,000 US just for the license plate. There is more democracy than before and, according to Mr. Wang, the Communist party is improving. I am constantly amazed at all the really cool architecture and all the beautiful parks. This would be a very good city to live in if you had the money.



We visited the **Shanghai Silk Carpet Factory** and had our lecture/demo on silk production. The process is: silk egg to worm to cocoon. The farmers steam the cocoons to kill the worms before they become butterflies. Then they sell the cocoons to the factories to make silk. Silk duvets were a big seller for our group. They help promote balance of yin/yang and make for more comfortable sleeping. We would have liked to purchase a silk duvet, but with the cover and then the pillows, etc. it was a very,

very expensive purchase. We spent much time shopping for other silk stuff. We were told that the streets of Shanghai are lined with sycamore trees, much favored by silk worms.

Not many Chinese traveled to the USA in the past because in order to get a visa, you needed to prove that you had much money in a bank account. China was afraid their people would not return to China. It is better now. KFC came to China in 1986 and was locally called the “American Consulate” because so many Chinese people ate there. Starbucks is a huge success in China as is McDonalds. The people all seem to want to become more and more “westernized”. Mr. Wang said that the favorite pastime for young people is hanging out at Starbucks and that this is the best place to take a date.



We drove to the **Bund**, a very beautiful waterfront park area for strolling and photo ops. Here you can look across the Huangpu River to the famous skyline of Pudong. In the 1920s the Bund became the city’s “foreign street” as Americans, British, Japanese, French, Russians, Germans, and other Europeans built banks, trading houses, clubs, consulates, and hotels in styles from Romanesque, Gothic, Renaissance, Baroque, Neo-classical, Beaux-Arts and Art Deco. Shanghai has some of the finest Art Deco architecture in the world.

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There are 12,000 high rise buildings for condos and offices in Shanghai and there are 500 skyscrapers in downtown Shanghai. The crime rate is very low-only pickpockets in very busy areas. TV is censored by the government...you can only get sports and news channels. No American channels are allowed because nothing “vulgar” is allowed by the government. BBC is the only channel with English. The largest suspension bridge is at the World Expo site. The first suspension bridge was built with all parts from USA except one pair of cables made by China and it took 4 ½ years to build. The third suspension bridge was all China-made and built in less than one year! The Chinese are very fast learners and nothing is going to slow them down or stop them! There are nice gardens on the roofs of many apartment buildings and most condos have laundry hanging on the balconies. We had lunch at a nice Dim Sum restaurant featuring Xiao Long Bao (steamed dumplings). Each meal, the food keeps getting better and better.



Our next stop is a visit to **Yu Garden**, a spectacular classical garden over 400 years old. Rock, water, flowers, and pavilion are the same 4 elements present in all Chinese gardens and they are here in spades! This was an amazing place and actually quite like a maze. It was very, very crowded with many tour groups from other countries and surprisingly many, many Chinese tourists. I have found this to be true everywhere we have gone that there are more Chinese tourists than any other nationalities.



After the Yu Gardens, we went shopping in **Old Town** and this was incredibly crowded. It was quite an experience. I couldn't resist getting something from Dairy Queen...so yummy! Just so that we would have our fill of shopping, the bus dropped some of us off at **Nanjing Road** where there seemed to be millions of people! We went back to the hotel to freshen up for dinner at a local restaurant famous for hot pot (but we didn't have hot pot...Zhao was afraid it would be too “dangerous” for our mouths!) We then went to the beautiful Shanghai Center Theatre for the **Shanghai Acrobatic Show**. This was very entertaining. During the show, Doug Baillie had a problem with his eye. It turned out to be a detached retina. Zhao spent most of the night with Doug and Jo at local hospitals and doctor's offices till 3am. It was decided that it was best for them to fly back home to the USA for eye surgery. We really missed having them with us for the rest of the trip.

Yangtze River Trip

Friday, April 20, 2012 ~ After a nice breakfast we checked our bags at 8:30am. We took a nice long walk through the streets and parks. There were many people walking their dogs. There was a cute poodle with 4 pink “sneakers” on. Many people were doing tai chi, qigong, and dancing in the parks. I love this city!



We left for the airport at 10:30am and flew to **Yichang**. This is an industrial city along the Yangtze where we met our guide, Sophia who took us on a short trip to our river boat. Yichang is not a very

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impressive town. It is dirty and industrial. Sophia said it was famous for growing tangerines, for hydroelectric power, and for “black gold”-caviar from the sturgeon fish. Coal is also mined here. We stopped at a local grocery store to buy beer and wine to take onto the boat. This took a long time as the store didn’t accept American money and several of our group had to walk to banks to exchange some money. There are many barges along this section of the Yangtze River. We made it to the boat and there was a supply barge as we entered with alcohol for sale cheaper than in the store...oh well!! Sophia gave us some info on the boat. We were to be on President Prime: 400 feet long, 60 feet wide, 6 decks, reception and dining on 2nd deck. Breakfast and lunch buffet style and dinner served family style. One glass of beer free at each meal. We were booked with standard rooms, and the boat was scheduled to leave on Saturday morning. There would be tai chi on the deck each morning, happy hour at the bars, and lectures/demos available. There would be some sort of performance every night as well as a Captain’s Welcome Dinner and Farewell Dinner which were a little dressier. We were the first group to check in to the boat and we were offered the chance to upgrade to Executive Suites for \$125 per couple for the trip, which we all did. The rooms were much bigger and everyone had a very nice balcony from which to watch the riverbanks as we glided by. We had a nice dinner and then off to bed for a good night’s sleep.



Saturday, April 21, 2012 ~ We awoke to a hazy morning and it was very cool on deck. There was a nice breakfast buffet after the 6:30 morning music wake-up and the 6:40 tai chi class and morning coffee. This morning we had a 9am demo on Chinese Acupuncture.

At around 11:45 we started thru **Xi Ling Gorge** which was very beautiful. We watched from our balcony with beers.



There was a nice buffet lunch and then a shore excursion to the **Three Gorges Dam** site. Max was our local guide. He gave us some dam facts: 1.4 miles long, 185 meters high, 32 turbines, largest hydroelectric dam in the world (based on # of turbines), and cost to build \$26 billion US. Over 1.3 million people had to be relocated due to flooding. This was a very impressive site and great for some photo ops. Max told us that

the area produces green tea, tobacco and citrus. A good movie to rent when we get home is called “Up to the Yangtze”-Max is in the movie. He taught us a little more Mandarin: “pee geo” means beer; “bean pee geo” means cold beer; “dee in dee in how” means excellent; “shi gera” means watermelon. Max also told us a curious thing about drinking tea. Socially you can only have 2 cups of tea. If your hostess makes and serves the 3rd cup of tea it means it is time to leave. We went back to the boat for a rest. I went to the Chinese Traditional Painting demo by Mr. Wu Shi You. He did a silhouette painting of me...very nice. Tonight was the Captain’s Welcome Dinner and it was very nice with extra wine and toasting. After dinner the boat started going through the locks. This was a very impressive experience...the locks are so massive. There are 5 locks, so we just stayed up on deck to watch the first 2 then back to our room to go to bed. We finished going through the locks and sailed all night.

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Sunday, April 22, 2012 ~ After a nice breakfast at 7am, we boarded smaller boat #10 for our excursion to the Shennong Stream. We rode about 1 ½ hours through a very beautiful area. It was very cool on the front of the boat. Then we transferred to very small peapod boats that held 14 people and 4 oarsmen who took us upstream.



The river trip was very beautiful and we saw many caves and even the famous hanging coffins along the riverbanks. At the end, the boat trackers got out and pulled the boat a distance along the shore, then turned us around to go back. Unfortunately, they did not get naked like in the old times. I will just have to rely on old postcards for the full



effect! Our guide was Rita who is from the Tujia tribe in Badaling. She sang for us and she is in pictures in the DVD that I bought.

We returned to our ship to continue going through the 3 gorges. **Wu Gorge** is very striking, perhaps the most beautiful. We saw Goddess Rock, magic waterfall, and many other beautiful sights. **Outang Gorge** is very steep, but short. Dinner was very good tonight. Food is now a little spicier as we are close to the Sichuan area. Tonight we went to the Chinese Minority Dance Show, which was not very good at all...we left and went to bed. The boat traveled all night with spotlights shining back on the sides of the cliffs so that the Captain can see where we are. There was thunder and lighting and a little rain during the night.



Monday, April 23, 2012 ~ After our breakfast buffet, we had a shore excursion to **Fengdu-“Ghost City”**. Our guide was Nancy. Fengdu was a city that was flooded when the dam was built and the main city was rebuilt across the Yangtze. This side of the river had the temples. We climbed several hundred steps to get up to the top of the mountain. There are many



temples and shrines to gods of Taoism, Buddhism, and Shamanism. These temples had many statues of gods and generals who judge you to determine if your soul goes to heaven or hell. This was a very colorful and beautiful place, even if pretty “touristy”. There were mostly tourists, but there were also some local Chinese people who were there praying to some of the gods and leaving incense and offerings.



One of the most bizarre things was the Chamber of Horrors...really creepy statues showing all sorts of torture! There were 3 tests to pass: First the husband and wife must go over the bridge using only 9 steps and holding hands...men

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start on left foot and women on right foot. Second, you must balance on a small stone for 3 seconds. There was a third test, but I can't remember what it was. Eddie bought me a cute “coolie” hat. I bought 2 fans and some postcards.



We saw Jade Emperor and gold Emperor of XuHong. The Baizi Temple had a huge gold statue of Bodhisattva. I loved this today, although it was very strenuous with the climbing. We went back to the boat for a nice buffet lunch.

We had a meeting with Zhao at 4pm. He gave us much information about China during the Cultural Revolution, which took place from 1966-1976. Chairman Mao started the People's Republic of China as a communist state on October 1, 1949. This came at the end of one turbulent chapter in Chinese history. The fall of the Qing Dynasty, growing incursion by foreign countries, like Japan, the devastation of WWII, sandwiched between two periods of bloody civil war, now gave way to purges of the country's artists and intellectuals, increasing isolationism, the colossal failure of the Great Leap Forward and the tragic chaos of the Cultural Revolution. Chairman Mao only left China once, and that was to go to Russia. China had always been very traditional. Each Emperor always changed things from the past once he came into power. Mao was like the supreme Emperor when he took power and he was always the boss. To assure his power, he wanted to get rid of his old comrades, and he even put his own Minister of Defense under house arrest. Mao wanted to catch up with the USA and Britain technologically within 10 years. During the Great Leap Forward, he collected all types of metal from everyone and melted it to make steel for his building projects. Unfortunately this did not work so well. People stopped cooking at home, because all of their pots and utensils had been confiscated. Farmers weren't allowed to work the fields. Food shortages became widespread. Mao broke off relations with Russia and all Russian support stopped. Millions of people died. According to Zhao, Chairman Mao was a good leader for war but a very bad leader for peace. He asked the people to speak their opinions and when they did, he had them arrested, especially scholars. Mao wanted to get rid of “The 4 Olds”-ideas, customs, antiques, and religion. Mao liked to destroy the old so he could build the new. More than 8,000 ancient temples and shrines were destroyed. All Buddhist and Taoist statues were destroyed. Most universities and high schools were closed and he took high school students and formed the Red Guard to enforce his policies. Students studied only the “Little Red Book”. Factories suffered and many people died of hunger. Any students who did graduate from high school were then sent to the countryside to be re-educated by farmers. One of Mao's famous sayings was “The more books you read, the more stupid you will be”.

Zhao was personally affected by the Cultural Revolution. His experience was very, very similar to that of the girl in Wild Swans. Zhao came from a fairly wealthy revolutionary family when Shanghai was overtaken by the PRC. His grandfather had been appointed to the Board of the Bank of China. Once Communism took over he could not be trusted by

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Mao. Zhao’s parents were intellectuals and they worked in Beijing, but Zhao lived with his grandparents in Shanghai in a 20 room three-story home. One day the Communist Red Guard came to his grandparents’ home, took away everything in the house, put his grandparents out in the streets, and forced Zhao, who was 7 years old at the time, to leave Shanghai and travel 30 hours by train to Beijing. Zhao and his father then moved to the Tibet area. His parents taught him secretly, but in school he had to study only Mao’s Little Red Book. One of his teachers was called anti-revolutionary because he accidentally bumped into a statue of Mao which fell over and broke. The teacher was sentenced to death one month later.

This was what Chairman Mao did...he burned all books and all writings of Confucius, smashed and destroyed all Buddhist and Taoist temples, sent the young people to live and work on farms and prevented them from having an education. He put many intellectuals into prison. Chairman Mao started the People’s Republic of China on October 1, 1949 and this Communist state is still in power in China today. Chairman Mao died in 1976 and then Deng Xiaoping came into power in Shanghai. He wanted to open China to the entire world in 1978. This was the first year that exams for college students began and only 5% passed the exam and went on to the university. The government then paid for their education. Since 1978 China has experienced about 10% annual GDP growth and has become the world’s second largest economy

Chongqing

Tuesday, April 24, 2012 ~ This morning after a nice buffet breakfast we disembark the President Prime in Chongqing. I have enjoyed our time on the river. It was a beautiful voyage and it was very relaxing being on the boat and having the ability to unpack for 4 days, have our laundry done, and take it easy when we wanted. We met our local guide, Allen, who was a good friend of Zhao. He seemed very nice, but I couldn’t understand too much of what he was saying. This area is quite hilly and the roads have many switchbacks. Our driver did a great job of maneuvering these steep roads. Allen said that Chongqing is called the “Oven of China” as the summers are quite hot. We saw many “coolies” carrying heavy loads on their backs with big bamboo poles. During the Opium War the Yangtze River was occupied by the British. There was an island under the bridge which was used as an airport during WWII. There are six big bridges here in Chongqing, the first one built in 1960. Chongqing is called the Capitol of Bridges. During the Sino-Japanese War, Chiang Kai-shek was stationed here. The Yangtze River is more stagnant here. There are many universities and the area is called the Cultural District. Streets are very clean and many trees have been planted.



Cindy Crane

During our short stay in Chongqing we visited the **Panda Zoo**, which was a beautiful park-like zoo with really great habitats for the pandas. There are still an endangered species with only about 1,000 giant pandas living in the wilds of China in northern Sichuan, Gansu, and Shaanxi provinces. Since we visited in the early morning, the pandas were more active and we were fortunate to see many of them. 90% of the diet of pandas is bamboo. They are

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very docile animals who basically just eat and sleep. We walked through the zoo to an art museum where the artist did “Everleaf Painting” on leaves of the banyan tree, the city tree of Chongqing. Of course I had to have one for my collection. As we were leaving the zoo, there were many buses of young school children arriving and they were all so cute crying out “Hello, Hello” to us.

The streets are lined with Banyan and ginkgo trees. There were many small 3-wheeled local taxis. These small vehicles can get into the narrow streets of the city. Compressed natural gas is used for the buses and local 3-wheeled taxis.



Our next stop was to the Stillwell Museum which was a very small, dark house on a hillside once owned by General Stillwell, who helped the Chinese people win the War of Resistance against the Japanese during WWII. After another excellent lunch at The Bamboo Café we headed towards the airport for our flight to Xi’an. Along the way we found out that Chongqing was a war capitol with many tunnels built into the mountainside as bomb shelters. Chongqing and Xi’an are on opposite sides of a big mountain. Xi’an is drier and Chongqing has more rain and is therefore, more green. There was also lots of new construction in this town and Allen said that the

construction crane is the “National Bird”. (Eddie had counted 27 cranes from our ship balcony early this morning before we left.)



After a short flight over the mountain we arrived in Xi’an and met our local guide **Ping** and traveled to our hotel, the **Days Hotel & Suites**. Along the way, Ping gave us a little more history of the area. She said that 72 of the 200 Emperors of China lived here in Xi’an where they ruled for 1,000 years. Paper was invented by the Chinese 2,000 years ago. Gun powder was invented 1,000 years ago and the compass was invented 3,000 years ago. There is

much wheat grown here and therefore noodles are more popular than rice for meals. There is a lot of fruit grown, including pomegranate and kiwi. The ground is made of very fine clay and there are many trees being transplanted everywhere. Xi’an, located 120 miles west of the Yellow River, is about 800 square miles and has a population of 8.7 million. There are several burial mounds visible. The largest of these is Emperor Qin Shi Huang’s tomb.

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Like all of the cities we have seen so far, Xi'an has tremendous growth with many new high-rise apartment buildings. Ping has a 1,200 square foot 3 bedroom apartment. She paid for it for two years before she actually got it and then it was just a shell. She had to finish the interior and there is a big business for interior decoration. She said that you have to pay about 3% or more of the total cost of the apartment for maintenance. All apartments have central heating, but no central air conditioning. There are air conditioning units at each apartment. It gets very hot here in July-around 100 degrees. The Northern side of the city is for building supply. The Eastern side of the city is a manufacturing area for air craft parts and the space program. The people of Xi'an feel it is very important to buy a car. There are 80 universities in Xi'an. Farmers do not own the land but can decide what crops to grow. During the Cultural Revolution of 1966-1976 production stopped as Chairman Mao used the people to fight his enemies. The National Tree of China is the locust tree. The National Bird is the crane and the National Flower is the carnation.

Ping told us that everything was rationed until the 1970s. Mandatory retirement age is 60 for men and 50 for women. There is really no drinking law in China but the custom is that girls don't drink until age 18. Another custom is that women don't eat with their husbands...they stay in the kitchen and cook for the men. When Communism came into effect in 1949, Mao said “Women hold up half of the sky”, so there was equality in the workplace and in education. Most women had a very basic reading ability of about 2,000 characters. Older Chinese men may offer a cigarette as a sign of friendship. Ping's husband is a professor and he smokes and drinks, but her parents never smoked because, due to rationing, cigarettes were too expensive.

We arrived at the **Days Inn & Suites** and had a little time to relax before our dinner at **Mr. Chen's Palace**.

Xi'an



Wednesday, April 25, 2012 ~After a nice buffet breakfast we hopped on the bus to go to the **Terracotta Warriors**. All I can say is “Wow!” This was such an incredible site, one of the highlights of the trip for me.

Qin Shi Huang ruled from 259BC-210BC. His father had been the King of the Qin state and when he died, Qin Shi Huang became King at age 13. At age 22 he launched a war and conquered all the 13 states and joined them together into one empire-the Qin Dynasty. He standardized writing, a system of weights and measures, and formed a legal system. He was quite a brutal leader and many people were killed by being drawn and quartered or buried alive, and many slaves were branded.

He didn't like Confucius scholars, so he burned all ancient books and ordered 470 scholars buried alive. He was quite a ruthless leader, but he built hundreds of palaces as

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well as the Great Wall. The Terracotta Warriors were built by slaves to protect Emperor Qin Shi Huang in the afterlife. The Emperor believed that you CAN take it with you, so his body was to be buried with all of his daily necessities. The project was started when he was 14 years old. Approximately 10% of the population was building something for the Emperor at all times. The Emperor died when he was 50 years old. Children were buried and put in burial jars with a small hole cut into the top of their heads so that their soul could go out and back into the body. Concubines were sometimes buried alive with the Emperor. The Emperor wanted to protect his body in the afterlife from his enemies, so there were approximately 8,000 individual soldiers, horses, and chariots built and then buried underground close to the burial tomb of the Emperor. They were arranged in battle formation lined up in columns with large wooden beams over them and then covered with dirt. Over the years the wooden beams rotted away and fell in. Many of the soldiers had been destroyed by peasant's revolts when the empire was overthrown. They were discovered by farmers digging a well in 1974.



When the soldiers were found they were in many pieces. It was like a huge jigsaw puzzle that the archeologists have been working on ever since to restore the soldiers to their former glory. Each soldier and horse is completely unique, modeled after real people. There are generals, foot soldiers, kneeling archers, standing archers, charioteers, many holding real weapons. The wooden parts of the weapons have been destroyed, but the metal tips of spears and arrows remain. The soldiers were carved in

sections with the head done separately and put onto the body. First we saw a circle-vision film that reenacts the related events of 2300 years ago, when the soldiers were made and also later when they were crushed and burned during the peasant's revolts. There are 4 pits that we visited.



Pit #1 is the largest and has the most soldiers uncovered and reconstructed. The whole pit is covered by a giant domed ceiling and it is pretty impressive to see. There are workers scurrying around doing excavation work as well as reconstruction work as you watch them. Pit #2 is almost as

large and is L-shaped. Pit #3 has a lot of work going on and not as many fully reconstructed soldiers but has many chariots. This was probably the command center of the Terracotta Soldiers. Pit #4 is empty. This is a



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UNESCO site and is recognized as probably the world’s most important archeological find of the 20th century. Meanwhile, the Emperor’s tomb can be seen about one mile in the distance as a small man-made mountain. It remains unearthed to date but is guarded by the military. According to Ping, this will probably not be dug up in our lifetimes...we just don’t have the proper technology and the Chinese are superstitious about disturbing the dead.

The Terracotta soldiers were originally painted many bright colors. Once they were unearthed, the atmosphere caused the paint to peel off very quickly, causing them to look a muted grey color. In 1985 a worker stole a warrior’s head and was summarily executed. Excavation stopped for a while. During this time, Chinese researchers worked with experts from Germany to develop a preservative called PEG which helps to save the warriors’ colors. Now as soon as something is excavated, it is sprayed with the solution and immediately wrapped in plastic to keep in the protective moisture. This new technique seems to be working. (There is an excellent article in June 2012 issue of National Geographic about the Terracotta Warriors which shows what they may have looked like in full color.)



We had lunch at a restaurant on site which made “Bang Bang” noodles. It was fun to watch the guy slam the noodles down, swing them up like pizza dough and keep stretching and bending them. I never actually saw how they went from this to the very thin noodles that came in the soup. But they were delicious anyway.



We next went to the **Xi’an Ceramics and Art Workshop**, another opportunity for government sponsored shopping. This stuff is all very beautiful, but tends to seem pretty expensive to me. We went to the **Shannxi Museum** which had many beautiful things from the Tang Dynasty.



Dinner tonight is the **Tang Dynasty Dumpling Dinner and Show** at Shaanxi Grand Opera House. This was simply fabulous entertainment and delicious dumplings...13 courses of dumplings! The dumplings were all different; some duck

dumplings that were shaped like little ducks, seafood dumplings that were shaped like a fish. It was so much fun that some of us were playing with our food before it was all over. The show was superb...music, scenery, costumes, dancing...I loved every minute of it. What a full and fun day this was!



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Thursday, April 26, 2012 ~ After another great buffet breakfast, we checked out of the hotel and got on the bus for our next adventure. Ping gave us more information about the Chinese way of life. 841BC was the start of the Chinese lunar calendar. Confucius said that men should have long hair. Dr. Sun Yat-Sen, leader of the Chinese Revolution in 1911, said that men should have short hair. Many Chinese men have long fingernails on their little fingers. During the Qing Dynasty, both men and women had long fingernails to symbolize that they didn't have to work. Squatting is the favorite sitting posture for many Chinese. Furniture such as stools and chairs were invented during the Tang Dynasty, so before that people sat on the floor or squatted. Westerners are nicknamed “Long legged Horse” because Caucasians have longer legs than Chinese. Short legs make it easier for the Chinese to squat. Perhaps this is why American women have so much trouble with the Chinese toilets! We saw many people in the park dancing and doing their morning exercise. We also saw people practicing opera singing. The divorce rate is 15% overall in China, but it is over 30% in the big cities.



We had a visit to the **Xi'an City Wall**. Xi'an is the only city in China still completely surrounded by a huge city wall. The wall was built 600 years ago and the wall and moat took 8 years to build. We climbed up and walked along the top for a while then enjoyed some great drumming entertainment. This is an area where I really wish we had more time to explore.



Next we visited the **Small Wild Goose Pagoda** located inside **Jianfu Temple**. This was built in 707AD during the Tang Dynasty as a place for Buddhists to hold their religious relics and texts. The legend is that while Himayana Buddhists were chanting for food, a flock of geese flew over them and one goose fell to its death, so the Pagoda was named for this goose. This was a very nice place with many arts and crafts available. There were many Buddhist statues here and beautiful gardens. Some of us had our name done in Chinese characters.



We are now in the Hu Xi'an County, in the Shaanxi province. We are southwest of the big mountain and the land is very rich and good for farming. Wheat, corn, and Kiwi are all grown here. Kiwi originated here in China. A British man took a kiwi plant from here to England, but it would not grow well in England so he took it to New Zealand. Now New Zealand is famous for growing kiwis.

On the bus, Myrna asked Ping how we were supposed to use the Chinese toilets. Ping offered to give her a private tutorial later. Ping laughed and said that although many Americans cry when they see the Chinese toilet, which is only a porcelain hole in the floor, many Chinese cry when they see the American toilets. Many Chinese actually will stand up on the toilet and squat over it. Everyone laughed and thought this was a joke,

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but the very next day I went into a stall that had an American style toilet, but no seat, and there were muddy footprints up on the toilet.

During the Cultural Revolution many academics and artists were sent to the countryside. The farmers learned art from them and started to create their own style of art called “Farmer’s Painting”. We are to travel to Nansuo Village where we will visit a famous artist/farmer, **Zhang Qing Yi**. He is 50 years old and he has two sons. His oldest son is married with 2 children, a girl and a young boy. His second son is getting married today and our group has been invited as special guests to the wedding and banquet. This is such a special honor! On the wedding day the lucky color for the bride to wear is red. The wedding procession starts around 9am. The bride arrives at her new home and the ceremony takes place in the courtyard of the home. The groom’s parents declare their official welcome to the bride by giving her the “1001 Yuan”- a red envelope with money which means she was chosen over 1000 other women. Now the bride can call her in-laws Mom & Dad. The groom also receives an envelope from his in-laws and he can now call them Mom & Dad. The ceremony is not religious-it is more like a play.



First we were ushered into the big courtyard where we were entertained by a great drumming exhibition with costumed drummers, a big Chinese dragon puppet, and other dancers/singers. I thought this was all part of the wedding celebration, but we were told by Ping and Zhao that this was just to welcome us. Our host, Mr Zhang is, in addition to being a farmer, a very well-known painter of the “Farmer’s Painting” style. We got to see the wedding album, which was very beautiful. For the wedding the groom’s parents were both dressed in ceremonial robes and kabuki type make-up like in Chinese opera. The bride was dressed in a western style white wedding dress, not the traditional red dress,

but she did have red shoes. There were many pink balloons, flowers, and candles. There were many traditional ceremonial things going on and the whole village was there to celebrate along with us. There were fireworks and a special wedding dinner. We were allowed to see

everything...where they slept, where they prepared the food both inside and outside. Interestingly, the bride’s parents seemed to be almost an afterthought. They were not dressed in any special way and they actually didn’t seem too happy with the whole thing. But we were told that this is the custom...the son is much more important in China than the daughter. The son’s family pays for the whole wedding, not the bride’s family like in the USA. After the wedding ceremony, we were escorted back inside and upstairs to Mr. Zhang’s art studio where he gave us a demonstration of traditional Chinese brush painting. We had an opportunity to purchase, and of course, I bought a pretty painting of kittens.



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After a full day, we went to the airport for our flight to Guilin. Along the way Ping gave us even more information about the Chinese. Parents sometimes cut their baby's hair and use it to make very small bristles for their paint brushes. Chopsticks were invented because originally people ate with their hands, but farmers' hands were too dirty to eat with. They cut strips of bamboo to eat with-the first chopsticks. Ping says that Chinese people in crowds are like “sticky rice”. When they jostle and push you they are not being rude, it is just a cultural thing. Although farmers are allowed to have two children, as we have learned today, they have to wait 6 years between them. Tricycles are used everywhere-with a covered area in back as local taxis or with an uncovered back to haul many things. We saw these vehicles with huge loads of cloth bundles; these were recycling men. There are no helmets used for bike riders or motorcycle riders. Ping said that her son is 14 and she has already bought him an apartment. Her father was in the army and she grew up in the Gobi desert. She now lives in the South side of Xi'an where there is a 6 story height restriction on all buildings. We were very sad to leave Ping, as she had been one of our very best guides. She was certainly the easiest to understand. After a short flight we arrived in Guilin where we met our local guide, Qi and driver, Chen, and then went to our hotel, the beautiful Lijiang Waterfall Hotel.

Guilin



Friday, April 27, 2012 ~ After another nice buffet breakfast we set out for our morning cruise trip on the **Li River**. Qi told us that Guilin means beautiful landscape. Streets are lined with cassia, banyan, and asmantus trees. Our hotel is located on the Li River and it rains quite a lot here-75 inches per year. The population of Guilin is 700,000 but there are 10 million tourists annually. Qi shared with us the top ten attractions of China: 1-Great Wall; 2-Guilin; 3-West Lake; 4-Beijing and Forbidden

City; 5-Sughou Gardens; 6-Three Gorges; 7-Yellow Mountain; 8-Sun & Moon Temple; 9-Summer Mountain Resort; 10-Xi'an Terracotta Soldiers. (I don't really know who made up this list, but I was surprised that the soldiers were listed as only #10.) China is made up of 32 provinces and there are 5 autonomous regions that use their own revenue. Guilin is one of them. Minority people can have more than one child. The governor of each autonomous region must be of that minority. The “Fighting Tigers” were headquartered in Guilin inside of a cave. During the war, 907 houses were destroyed by Japanese bombardment. Only 44 houses were left intact. 300 million years ago, Guilin was under the ocean and erosion is what created the beautiful karst formations. Farmers grow much rice here. The first crop takes 10 days. The rice plant is started in the nurseries and then transplanted when about 6-7 inches high. It is harvested in July and then the second crop of rice is started. Schools close so that the kids can help with the harvest. Water buffalo are also used to help with the harvest. There are not such high

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buildings in Guilin-a maximum of 20 stories. The average cost is \$650,000 US for a villa. But there are no longer any villas being built.



Today is a cool rainy day, but really the appropriate type day to be on the Li River, which is famous in many Chinese paintings for the beautiful karst limestone peaks showing through the mist. We cruised on our big river boat from the Zhejiang Wharf in Guilin to Yangshuo. The views were spectacular. I only hope that some of the many photos we took actually show the true beauty of the misty vistas.



While on the boat, we had a buffet lunch of local specialties. Zhao even offered us some of the famous snake wine. It was just too much for me to handle. We took a photo of Zhao holding the snake wine that we sent to Bob Marks. We were supposed to go visit the Reed Flute Caves, but no one wanted to actually get off the bus and fight the crowds to see it.



So we just went to the **Chinese Salt-Water Pearl Factory** for a demo and shopping. There was even a fashion show with beautiful models showing off their pearl jewelry along with gorgeous gowns. Qi told us that there is a lot of fruit grown here along with corn. The big yellow fruit that looks like grapefruit is actually pomelo. We saw many rice paddies as we drove through the beautiful countryside.



Back at the hotel, we had the chance to see the waterfall show outside at the hotel tonight from 8-8:15pm and it was sort of nice. I thought they could have done more with lights, etc. to make it more spectacular, but it was nice anyhow. After the show we walked across the street to view the beautiful Sun Pagoda and Moon Pagoda as they



were lit up on the Li River.

Guangzhou



Saturday, April 28, 2012 ~ We had another early departure to the airport for our flight to Guangzhou, sometimes better known as Canton. We met our local guide Yang and toured the **Chen Clan Temple**. This is not a temple, but was actually a school for students of the Chen clan. The buildings were pretty spectacular with decorations which showed much folk art of Guangdong. The temple is famous for having three kinds of carving, three kinds of sculpture, and one kind of iron casting.

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We went to see Dr. Sun Yat-sen's Memorial Hall, which honored the first President of China. It is now a very impressive performance center. We had a nice Dim Sum lunch at a local restaurant. Yang told us that Arabs were the first foreigners to come to China and they were the most important traders for 2,000 years especially along the Silk Road. Other foreign trade was allowed after the Opium War and was conducted by only 4 families until 1914.

Cantonese people are very good at business. Cantonese people like to save money and there are many banks. Real estate business is very important and all the rich people are involved in real estate business. Still you never own the land, only the government owns the land; you only own rights to have an apartment for 70 years. It costs about \$5,000 US for each one square meter of an apartment. Inflation is very, very bad now. Over 1.4 billion shoes are manufactured here per year.



We went to see Shamian Da Jie, a very beautiful man-made island. In the old days it was called “13 Hong” meaning trading houses of 13 nations. There are many typical older colonial style buildings and many, many beautiful bronze statues of children.

We also saw many brides being photographed for their wedding albums. Most Chinese ladies rent their wedding dresses instead of buying them. They have their wedding album done first then they pay only \$1.20 for the wedding certificate. Traditionally wedding guests give the bride and groom money in a red envelope. The Pearl River is next to the island and it is the 3rd longest river in China. A hotel here on the island is the first hotel in China for both Chinese and foreigners. May 1st is Labor Day and is a huge holiday for China. There are currently 1.3 billion people living in China-more men than women. There are lesbians in China and 20 million men are not married. Lunch was at a traditional Cantonese Dim Sum Restaurant.



Next we boarded the train for our trip to Hong Kong. The train station was a very crowded confusing place in Guangzhou and this was where we said goodbye to Zhao. He has been a most excellent guide and really helped to make this a wonderful trip for me. He expertly handled all the logistics of the many bus and plane and boat trips and I will miss having him with us. I wish him well.

We had first class seats, thank goodness, and all in all, it was a pleasant journey. Eddie slept most of the way and I read. When we arrived in Hong Kong we met our local guide Mary and she got us to our hotel, Harbor Plaza Metropolis, which was a bus ride, but right around the corner from the train station. We could actually walk to the train station easily and went to McDonald's for our first hamburger in almost 3 weeks. Meanwhile, McDonald's was absolutely mobbed and we had to stand in line to get our food, and then

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wait in line to get a place to sit. After a quick dinner it was back to the room for a good night's sleep.

Hong Kong



McDonald's.

Sunday, April 29, 2012 ~ This morning after a nice buffet breakfast in the hotel, we had a Hong Kong Island Tour. We are staying in Kowloon, but we toured Hong Kong Island. First we took a one way tram ride up to Victoria Peak where we had great views and photo ops, plus great free WI FI at the local



Nathan Road, and had lunch at **Murphy's Irish Pub**.

Next we went to Aberdeen Fishing Village where we had a sampan boat ride through the harbor. Our last stop was Stanley Market for some great shopping. After the Hong Kong Island Tour, Mary dropped some of us off at Moody Road where we ordered prescription glasses at Swiss Optical Company, shopped along



In the evening we took the hotel shuttle to downtown Tsim Sha Tsui and checked out the beautiful lobby of the Peninsula Hotel, then worked our way through the excellent walking subway to the waterfront where we saw the Symphony of Lights, a light and laser show along the water. I was somewhat underwhelmed by the light and laser show. After the laser show, we stopped back at **Murphy's Irish Pub** and had drinks.



Monday, April 30, 2012 ~ Today is on our own. We slept in a little, had a nice breakfast at the hotel, and then with Ed & JoeAnn took the Star Ferry ride back over to Hong Kong Island. We managed to find the Bus #6 which took us around the island and dropped us off at Stanley Market for more shopping. We had drinks at a nice little bar called **The Pickled Pelican** overlooking Repulse Bay. We took the ferry to back to Kowloon and caught the bus back to the hotel. Our long trip is almost at an end and I have completely run out of steam! I stayed in the hotel room tonight and did the final packing. Eddie brought take-out burgers from McDonalds for our last dinner in Hong Kong.

MMC China Trip ~ April 13-May 1, 2012

“Planes, Buses, Boats & Trains”



Tuesday, May 1, 2012 ~ Today we have our last pre-dawn departure, so we have box breakfasts set up for us at the hotel and we board our bus to the airport at Landau. Our guide, Mary has been a good guide even though we only had her for a short time. She really gave us some good tips. We begin our big journey back home with a 3 hour flight from Hong Kong to Beijing on Air China, then the extremely long flight from Beijing to Los Angeles on Air China. Then we transferred to American Airlines after walking what seemed like several miles through LAX to get to the correct terminal. We said goodbye to some of our fellow travelers and got on the last leg of our flight from LAX to Miami. We were met at the Miami airport by our drivers who brought us on the very long last stretch home across the Everglades to Marco Island. After leaving at 4am “tomorrow” and traveling roughly 34 hours, we arrived at 2am “yesterday” and finally got home. Since I managed to catch a very bad upper respiratory cold that was going around the group, the flight home was pretty much hell, but the trip was certainly a trip of a lifetime and I enjoyed every minute of it. After 10 airplane flights, two boat cruises, two smaller boat trips, one train ride, about 15 bus rides, and walking around 1,000,000 steps, we certainly experienced China and had the opportunity to savor its flavors, its customs, its culture, and some of its great art. We met some good new friends and formed many great new memories. It has been a trip that I will remember fondly for quite some time.

**Cindy Crane
May 2012**

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