



Travels with Partner Throughout Asia – Part 3

Travelogues

We got up this morning at 6 am to catch an 8:30 am ferry up the Pearl River to Shunde, China. Even though Hong Kong now belongs to China, Hong Kong still is set up like it was before. It's democratic, overflowing with big money, has its own currency and immigration system. So, after a nice western breakfast buffet we caught a cab to the China Ferry terminal. We bought tickets for HK\$185 (about C\$28), went through customs and immigration and we are now going pretty quickly up the river. Now, when you think of a ferry system, you think of the kind of ferries that we've been on. This ferry system runs like clockwork. There are about 12 docks/berths and the ferry's come in, quickly unload, quickly load, and move out. Chop-chop quick. There are direct ferries going to all sorts of ports up the Pearl River. We are going to Shunde, but the big city of Guangzhou (formerly called Canton, and pronounced Guang-joe) is huge.



Hong Kong, like Taiwan and Japan, has American 7-11 convenience stores. There was one in the China Ferry terminal. I was looking for some snack food to pack with me in case I found myself hungry for something other than the freaky deaky stuff I'm being warned about. In the store they sell, beside the Pringles and Mars bars, bags of dried baby squid, cuttlefish flakes, etc. Of course, I needed a souvenir for my family so I will be bringing home some dried baby squid. Promise you won't gulp it down all at once.

In my bag I am carrying a little pouch of Kleenex tissues. This is in case I need to use the washroom and there's no toilet paper. In the small restaurant in Taichung, I was told that there is one bathroom for both men and women, and that there was no toilet, just a hole in the floor. I didn't need to use it so I didn't check it out. But at the factory in Taichung I did need to use the washroom. There was only one bathroom, and there were stalls for women on the right, and in the back there were stalls and urinals for the men. The urinals were behind a bit of a wall but still open enough to be uncomfortable. Luckily, I only had to go "number 1". I went to wash my hands and there were no soap or paper towels, so I had to wave my hands to dry them. I mentioned this to Richard, and he said this is by design, and that the stalls have no toilet paper. I asked "do people bring in their own each time?" and he said "no, they just finish their business with a firm rectal squeeze". I didn't believe him and went back to check the stalls. Indeed there were no toilet paper rolls or holders. Jeez.



Anyway, it's been over an hour since we've been on the ferry. Most of the ferry passengers on this level are watching a Chinese movie on the TV. Richard is sleeping. I'm looking out the window and the land in this big river delta is flat. The river is always busy with boats, but now are the mid-sized ones that are taking containers from Guangzhou down to the ocean freighters in Hong Kong harbour. The boats are of every description, age and condition. Paint on these boats is an afterthought. There are some small rowboats with square bows and sterns, with two people on board. They wear the straw Chinese hats while fishing. I wouldn't want to eat a thing out of this river. Always drink upstream of the herd, if you can. Especially if there are no pollution laws in place.

We got picked up by a driver from our driver and taken to the aerosol can factory. Along the way we passed some spectacular new buildings for government (like Las Vegas' Bellagio), Shunde Polytechnical University, and lots and lots of apartment buildings. Driving is much like Taiwan's craziness, but more motorcycles than scooters. And a lot less bicycles than I expected. The wealth here is evident.

There's a much bigger language barrier here than in Taiwan. We were working with their market research folks and it was slow going. Lots of repeating back and forth. We had lunch in a private dining room at the company, but it wasn't very spectacular. The food was as normal as we'd find in a Canadian Chinese restaurant, but I was warned that they were going easy on me today. All fish plates are served with the heads and tails on. Today's fish was delicious and looked like a loaf of sliced bread with a fish head and fish tail on either end. I draw the line at eating heads and tails. And I won't eat dog either (actually, dog is a seasonal, winter meal. But people born in the year of the dog won't eat dog. Bad luck).

We toured the plant this afternoon. The production area was humming along very smoothly, and I didn't see the masses of manual labour that I saw in Mexico about 4 years ago. The new Chinese private owners run a very profit-focused operation. Either you work, or out you go. The plant is still looks very Soviet-era, and there are certain corners that haven't been cleaned up yet.

I took a picture of a washroom stall for you. They've just renovated the washrooms and 4 of the 5 stalls are pit toilets. The fifth has a proper toilet. Thankfully they all have toilet paper.

After work we checked into our hotel in downtown Shunde. It's very new, and absolutely spectacular. Check out the pictures of the room. The cost is C\$35/night. I've rarely stayed in a room this nice.

Over dinner we were talking about Shunde and its population. There are about 2 million permanent inhabitants here, but in total about 6 million live here on an on-going basis. This is because at the factory only about 10-20% of the workforce is from the area, and the rest is from inland and live on-site in dormitories.

We had another normal Canadian Chinese food meal tonight, but at a restaurant that was really different. There were many private rooms around the restaurant compound, complete with big sliding doors, reed thatching on the wall, a big round table with a lazy susan turntable and a TV mounted in one wall with the Chinese news and promotional items from the restaurant playing (kinda annoying when you want to have a conversation with your tablemates, but our hosts seemed to want to keep it on). As in Taiwan, there are many, many toasts made around the table, usually directly from person to another specified person, and you are expected to drink whatever is in your glass. Anything less is somewhat



insulting. In Taiwan, the first night's dinner was watered down whiskey, and they really wanted us to get drunk. They outnumbered us about 12 to 2 and we would toast but only sip rather than down the whole 2 ounce glass. We probably upset them, but less so that throwing up on them later. The second night in Taiwan we were at a traditional Japanese restaurant, and we had sake (rice wine). This was easier to down, as it was served in much more reasonable amounts. Tonight, it was red wine. A nice cabernet sauvignon with a really bad English-translation on the label. Tonight the toasts were from brandy snifter glasses, and we were able to down the whole amount each time, and retain our composure at the end of the night. We ate constantly throughout, while sipping green tea.

After dinner our host purposely took us on a winding route back to the hotel so that we'd see the best parts of the city. It was dumbfounding. I never expected to see the kind of wealth that I saw tonight. Big, splashy government buildings and universities. Nice, classy apartment buildings. Downtown shopping is in full gear until 10 pm seven days a week. The downtown shopping is of a very uppity calibre and is flourishing due to the ease at which motorcycles and scooters can park on the streets and go shopping. Car owners prefer the nice malls. Lots of young, well-dressed people were out and about. No litter, no graffiti, no street people.

Added to Travelogues with permission from Peter K.