



TartanFrog

Travels to Guangdong, Zhejiang & Jiangsu Provinces

Travelogues

Flight:

The flight to Hong Kong was the fastest I have ever experienced with Cathay Pacific. The flight left one hour late and arrived in Hong Kong one hour early. As a result I had to move up my travel plans into China via ferry from Hong Kong to 7:30 am instead of the usual 1:30 pm afternoon departure. This change in plan had me arrive at the hotel by ten in the morning instead of the usual dinner hour.

Driving Experiences:

The first day is very quiet. I went out for dinner as usual with Joe and had a very quiet and restful evening. The next day had me traveling with Joe to meet a supplier and once again Joe had a car accident. This time the accident was more serious than the one I was involved in January of 2007. In the busy city traffic, Joe found himself having to stop behind a car that was making a left hand turn that did not have a turn signal flashing, and this wait was taking much too long for his liking. He decided to make a quick lane change when all of a sudden a big truck (5 ton) sped by and clipped off his right side mirror and scrapped the front fender with a large deep gouge. The damage was not serious enough for us to cancel our plans but I am sure that it was not a happy occasion for Joe as this is another accident in a long series that he has had since buying the car less than 9 months ago. At this time Joe advised me of a key technical design difference between cars made by global companies and those made by China based manufacturers. Global manufacturers have braking systems that actually work and stop a vehicle is what he told me. For China based vehicles this type of engineering has not been perfected and so the result is that when you apply the brakes in a China produced vehicle the stopping distance is significantly longer. In this accident, the vehicle that hit the Mazda 3 series we were driving was a Chinese made truck and in fact the collision slowed it down and kept on going for a short distance. It was evident that it could not stop as quickly, and who knows what the impact of being overloaded and underpowered would also have had on its ability to brake safely.

Dining Experiences:

The dining in this province continues to provide adventure. On one occasion, I was treated to a very fine five star restaurant that not only served up great food, but the presentation was fantastic. However, this restaurant was known for serving a delicacy – Chicken Ball Soup. As you can imagine, this does not sound as unusual only because you may be visualizing the chicken balls to be breaded pieces of chicken breast being served with a radioactive orange coloured sauce. Since I am writing about things that are unusual, you may have already surmised that this was not the type of chicken that was served. The soup consisted of a clear broth with ½ inch grey coloured kidney bean shaped things floating in it. Hundreds of these things were in the pot and were subsequently served to all guests in a bowl. You probably have guessed it by now, the chicken balls were rooster testicles and many of them to boot. All I can say is that the soup was a very popular dish and was enjoyed by everyone in the room. Soup is served at every meal, however not all of it is consumed, but in this case the terrine was quickly emptied and we were asked if seconds would be required.



In addition to this delicacy I have also been introduced to eating LIVE SHRIMP swimming in a Soya Sauce. To consume these live shrimp it is important to follow up with BEIJU, a strong and awful tasting Chinese white wine. The shrimp were OK to eat but the wine was just plain disgusting.



One of the factory owners that I regularly visit is especially fond of eating fish. Whenever I visit we always go to dinner and he always orders a variety of fish dishes as the main course. On this occasion he advised me that he would introduce me to his favourite fish dish. At two separate meals he order Fish Heads, they were almost the size of a human head. This apparently one of the best parts of a fish, and not eaten by most people. The meat in the fish is very similar to the remainder of the fish, except it was difficult consuming things like the brains and the eyes. The eyes turn into small white globes when they are cooked. I focus my

consumption on the outer fish meat while the locals ate the pieces inside the head.

I did have one unusually great restaurant experience in the city of Nanjing. My contacts there took me to a restaurant that is dedicated to creating Chinese dishes that look, feel and taste like any fish or meat dish available anywhere in China. Having a daughter that is vegetarian and having eaten Tofu based meat substitutes at home, I ma aware of the textures and fake tastes that are created in these products. At this restaurant I was exposed to fish, chicken, beef and pork substitutes that you would have a great deal of difficulty distinguishing them form any of its original counterparts. Katie would be in heaven, and if more the meat substitutes in Canada tasted and had the texture of these products, many more people would become vegetarian.

While traveling in Nanjing, our driver stopped into a small town that has the nickname – Lobster City. This was on a Sunday and most of everything is closed, however because there was someone of significant stature visiting the area (moi), the most prestigious restaurant in the city opened its doors to provide lunch to our group only. The local industry is very much like PEI as the main industry is lobster fishing. One of the main differences is that the Chinese prefer to catch their lobster when they are about one half pound in size. They cook and serve them in large bowls, 15 to 20 for each person.



I was also introduced to the pleasures of dining on “Duck Tongues.” Although the thought of eating a duck tongue sounds barbarian, it was actually very tasty to eat, especially when dipped in one of several spicy sauces provided.

Enter Fear Factor, a reality situation that I did not think I would be part of, or envisioned being part of. At one dinner in Taiwan, the restaurants specialty was the preparation of bugs as culinary dishes. Yes, you know the creepy crawly things most people fear. Ant infested pancakes, worms in cooked with very hot peppers and caterpillars fried to perfection. MMMM MMM good, especially when served with a cold beer.



It's Sunday, and I arrived in Nanjing today, one day ahead of the Trade Mission team coming from Toronto. The venue for this mission is quite different than the one I attended here in the spring. The first thing one notices once you drive onto the hotel grounds is that all the building around you are structures that only have a few floors, they are old and there doesn't appear to be any western fast food establishments anywhere in the area. A walk in the neighbourhood later in the afternoon did document this fact. The hotel is truly a Chinese hotel and it is rated “Four Star.” It is comfortable in size an adequate in furnishings. Another indication that you are in a very Chinese environment is that although the television is connected to a satellite system, only one channel of the more than 125 is an English channel.

I had to go for supper at the hotel because in my walk in the area in the afternoon I was not able to scope out a restaurant that I felt comfortable going into by myself to order a meal. As a result I went to hotel restaurant where a Chinese and Western Buffet were being served. Getting in was somewhat of a challenge because no one spoke English. They eventually had a Chinese patron (a doctor from Washington, USA) who was here attending a convention; help me get a table so that I could chow down. This was somewhat uncomfortable because all eyes and ears were on me. I felt like I was being some kind of entertainment. Anyhow, finally got a seat at the bar and got myself to the buffet. After perusing the buffet, I quickly surmised that this was a totally local Chinese buffet and that the Western portion of it must have been some of the coleslaws that were in the salad section. Most of the dishes were not very identifiable except for the pork fat, some scrawny fish and some fruit. The chef came out and welcomed me to his restaurant and asked if he could make me something special because I may not be comfortable eating some of the local food. I advised him that I was OK, and that I am sure that what he had prepared for everyone was good and that I would help myself to the buffet. As I sat there eating shrimp, some pieces of beef, a selection of veggies, the chef came out and gave me a salad he had prepared especially for me - a green salad consisting of lettuce, tomatoes, onions, cucumber and carrots. All freshly cut and covered with a thousand island type dressing. Shortly thereafter, the chef appeared once again and brought me three small sandwiches (folded over bread with a white cheese in it – I think it was supposed to be a toasted melted cheese sandwich) and some fried potato sticks (a la MacDonald's) covered in ketchup. Neither looked appetizing but I ate part of it anyway as the chef had gone through so much effort to please me. In fact the Chinese buffet was actually better than the western food that was made for me personally. All this cost me a grand total of 68 Yuan or the equivalent of \$9.25 CDN. The hotel provides a breakfast buffet coupon to its customers as part of their stay; however after my experience tonight I may just want to skip breakfast altogether. Tomorrow the mission group arrives and at this point I am certain that the meals will be upscale somewhat for the rest of my stay in Nanjing.

While in Taiwan I also experienced a mild earthquake. As I was on the phone to Toronto at 2:00 am, the room began to shake and the furniture was moving around. This lasted for several minutes. It was a queasy feeling, as we do not get earthquakes in Canada very often. I have worked with a group of people from the export department in a plastics company for several years and I felt that after all this time I should take them out for dinner as a reward. We went to a local Hot Pot restaurant and had a great meal. The group consisted of seven women, all of which have an insatiable appetite. How they can pack away as much food as they do at a meal and remain thin is still a mystery to me. After dinner, the ladies had me go with them to a local Karaoke Party Club as part of the evening's social calendar. Since this was a Friday night, they would introduce me to a ladies night out at a Karaoke Party Club.



This business establishment is huge and as a group you can rent out a room (comes in different sizes based on size of group) that is fully equipped with a high quality entertainment system with a large plasma screen (at least 50 inches), and several computerized music stations to select songs, several microphones, different platters of cut fruit and vegetables and soft drinks. All in all it was a good time, as we were there for four hours and the ladies sang to their hearts content. Some of them sound very good but a couple of them were a little rough around the edges. It was a good time and after making me sing a few tunes, they quickly realized that I was better at being an audience member than a singer.

Accommodations:

During the last week of the trip I participated in a China sponsored Investment forum for a number of cities and towns in northern China. Attendees were put up in Chinese owned four and five star hotels.

The hotels were relatively new or had been recently renovated. They had all of the modern conveniences that one would expect except for one key thing. The rooms were equipped with a television set that was hooked up to a satellite system offering 125 stations. All but one was in the Chinese language and the channel that was in English only was a propaganda channel presenting the vastness, richness and beauty of China. This went on for days as it was a video loop that appeared to replay every few hours. So, if you were yearning for some English language TV or movies, you were out of luck. I complained to the management of each hotel on this minor discrepancy, but it fell on deaf ears. I do not really think they were interested in providing English language TV, so as a result it would not attract many foreigners. With China on the move because of its rapidly growing economy, Chinese people can now afford to take holidays and they are satisfied in staying in hotels that accommodate their needs. What do they need coffee, bacon, toast, cereal for when you can have all of the congee that you want at the breakfast buffet.