



TartanFrog

Travels in Taiwan, Zhejiang, Guangdong, Hong Kong

Travelogues

It has been a while since I have written about my encounters in Asia. The more I travel in Asia the fewer the strange encounters. However on this trip I did manage to experience some new things that I feel are worth sharing.

The meals for the most part have been fairly normal, that is if you consider eating snails, rabbit, snake, very tough and overcooked steak and little birds normal. At one meal in a small town in Zhejiang Province I did have what I consider an unusual fish for dinner. It was the ugliest thing that I have ever encountered. The fish (pictured) for which I do not know the type or name other than the Chinese refer to it as a “Baby Fish” was very tasty, especially when it was served as a soup.



Another unusual platter for dinner in Taiwan was the stinky tofu. The texture is the same as all soft tofu, as it melts in your mouth when served hot. The tofu is served in a bowl in a broth like liquid that is packed with chili peppers, garlic and pigs intestines. MMM Good.... The flavor was OK if you like the taste of smelly socks.

Planes, trains, automobiles and buses

This trip has given me the once in a lifetime opportunity to use almost every mode of transportation available in China. From the Mercedes chauffeured limo, to the mass transit system, I have tried them all. Let me tell you commuting in Toronto using the local TTC or cab companies are a treat after having experienced the local systems here – the system used by the masses.

Firstly, for the first time in all the years that I have been travelling through China, I had not taken the opportunity to travel using the public transit system. What an experience this was. The Toronto Bus Station is more like a transit stop her in the city of Hangzhou. As I walked through this place I couldn't help but notice that there must have been thousands of people waiting for one of the hundreds of buses on the large platforms. The bus station actually looked like the new Toronto International Airport except that it wasn't exactly what I would consider very clean. There were people everywhere. All had bags and



bags of stuff as if they were going away for a long distance. For most people here I can only assume that it is a comfortable means of mass transit, however if this was Greyhound at home you can be sure that I would be using my car for any public transport. The one hour bus ride to the next major city was OK in the somewhat stiff seat bus, but since I was already very tired, I managed to catch a few zzzz's along the way. As much as I do not think much of the TTC, there is no way that this Toronto system could cope with the volume of people that the China bus systems handle in some of the smallest city centers.

The train system is very similar to the bus public transit system except that it offers different classes of travel... No class to some class to business class. Business class is comparable to sitting in the train car closest to the engine on the TTC. A few less people, but the perspiration smell from a crowd of people

sitting around having a picnic is the “Only way to Travel” regardless of the class on travels. What is really noticeable again is not the crowds of people but the amount of stuff everybody travels with. It is like they have their life’s possessions with them. What am I saying, they are taking all of their possessions as most of these people are travelling from one location to another because they are moving to a job in a factory in a major coastal city, or they are leaving the coastal city and moving back home because life without family is just too hard.

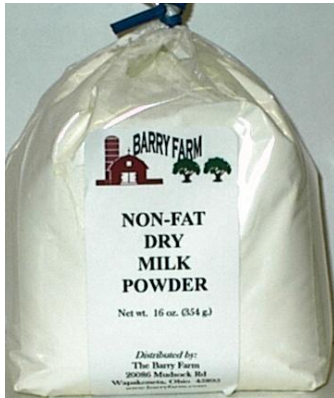
Taking a cab in most small cities is an adventure. Most are Volkswagen Santana’s beat to hell. They make the used high mileage yellow coloured Ford Crown Victoria’s used on city streets in Toronto look like they just came off the assembly line. The cars have dings and dents not only on all four corners, but even in places that you would not find any damage. The doors barely open and close, the window cranks work only on some doors, A/C stands for Air is Clear – If it’s hot in the car, open the window stupid and the seats are hard as rock because the foam in them has been completely flattened for the gazillion passengers that have used the cab over its lifetime. The cars are due for retirement but it doesn’t appear that it will happen soon.

There are numerous airlines in China and they all appear to be independent from government involvement. However, there are always articles in the paper about how much the government is helping one independent airline or another. In China, this is also a preferred means of travel by the locals. It is however restricted to the new and growing middle class – class of people that is growing by as much as 10% per year. Based on this fact the middle class calculates to number more than 100 million people at this time and this is certainly is enough to support several airlines. It is certainly noticeable that they put more seats on a plane than anywhere in the Western hemisphere. By our standards the cost of a ticket is very low and affordable (i.e. an economy ticket between two cities comparable in the distance between Toronto – Montreal flights cost between \$50 to \$75 per ticket. Are Canadians getting hosed on the cost of airline tickets in Canada? You tell me if having an airline operate in a monopoly has been good for ticket prices. The airports in China are packed with people flying here and there, and one noticeable difference is in the carry-on baggage. If you can carry it, it can go on the plane. So you can just imagine that just about anything goes and there is a smell that goes with it that you must contend with when you are on the flight.



For the first time in all my years of travel I have been asked to leave my hotel. Five days before he arrived at that. I didn’t mind as I ended up in a better hotel – a new one just opened in the last six months. Some big shot Central Government official came to city I was in to officially open a “PRIVATE SCHOOL”. What happen to public education, especially in a socialist country where everyone is supposed to be treated the same. I visited the school the other and yes it is state of the art, and apparently it is very expensive to attend. All students are live in and the living accommodations are second to none. This is exhibited by the air conditioning units attached to each dormitory room. The question is “Who will be attending this school?” I guess it is the nouveau entrepreneurial rich, that is the rapidly expanding middle class. They are looking for every possible opportunity to give their children a leg up on the other children in the public school system.

The Milky Way or should I say the artificial Milky Way



During my childhood, I had this aversion for powdered milk. In fact I hated the stuff so much that I did not drink any milk until well into my 20's. One evening at dinner we had a discussion about milk or lack of fresh milk in China. I was made aware of the fact that they do not have cows in China and that all milk is imported as powder and then made fresh everyday using this powder. Well you can just imagine that this certainly did not make it appealing to me and as a result I still was not convinced to drink milk. Just when I thought that this was the end of the milk conversation, the local business guy began telling me about the milk manufacturing business that a school friend of his operates not far from this friendly city – Shang Yu in Zhejiang Province. He told me about the process that his friend uses to generate fresh milk. It isn't a mystery that China buys much

of the world's cow hides from the slaughter houses. Many of them go to leather companies, however a significant amount of these hides are diverted to factories like this friend's place. They treat the hides with bleach and a variety of other chemicals and through this process they apparently make a product that look's, feels and tastes like milk. It is an artificial form of milk. Again, if this is fact I will continue to not drink any milk, let alone use it in my cup of coffee or tea. The only reason why I can believe that the Chinese do this is that I have seen a program on the Fake Trade in China, and in it they had a segment on producing artificial eggs using chemicals. The product looked exactly like an egg does when you crack open the shell, but the product was totally chemically produced.

Anyone for ice cream!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Scruffy hair today, shorter tomorrow

I have been in Asia so long on this trip that I had to actually get my hair cut. For the first time in my career of travel through Asia I actually went into a hair salon and got a haircut. This was a great experience, and best of all I got a great haircut. Asian people love to get massages and getting a haircut means getting a great scalp and face massage. The hair wash and conditioner application was also good but the half-hour scalp and face massage made it all worthwhile. The massage and haircut combined cost me a grand total of 50 RMB or about \$7.00. Back home this is the tip portion of the cost of a haircut only.

Earthquake

A major earthquake in Sichuan province registering a magnitude of 7.9 occurred May 13th, 2008, killing more than 50,000 people. It is a very serious situation and rescue efforts are in full swing. Watching the Chinese news reports I can pick out certain details and the pictures are horrifying. The aftermath of potential flooding due to many major dams breaking are adding new fears of more death and damage.



I was totally unaware of the earthquake. When it occurred I happen to be on a flight between Hangzhou and Guangzhou, somewhere at 30,000 ft above sea level. Feeling a shimmer up there would have been defines as turbulence. It wasn't until I got to my hotel and connected my laptop to the Internet did I realize that such an event had occurred and that it was a serious by most standards

anywhere in the world. The clues that I got were from a plethora of emails and Skype messages from family and friends asking if I was OK and was in any form of danger. As you can see from this travelogue, I am OK and the city that I am currently in only felt a shimmer.