



Travels with Partner Throughout Asia – Part 1

Travelogues



The roads in Taichung, Taiwan - a city two hours South West of Taipei, is over-run with tons of scooters. They are the vehicle of choice for the masses that can't afford a car (factory workers make 30,000 NT, or about \$C880, a month). You can drive them anywhere and park 'em everywhere. They are used for just about everything. I could take a full chip of digital pictures of just scooter stories and make a coffee table book. I just finished a business book

on China, and one of the memorable quotes is that "Every day in China you see something that you don't see every day". Every day in Taiwan I saw something different on a scooter. Mom and two kids, monster saddle bags for delivering the day's newspapers, a dog sitting calmly between the driver's feet, old woman sitting side-saddle on the back since she was wearing a dress, etc. About one in 5 scooterers wear masks to protect themselves from the smog (I didn't think it was noticeable, but I wasn't in open traffic). Some, mostly women, even wear special "mittens" over their hands and handlebars to protect their hands. Women will even wear their jackets backwards over their chests while driving. On my first day driving into the plant I saw a scooter accident. It was lying on its side in the middle of traffic and the driver was on the sidewalk being attended to, but looked all right. Traffic just drove around the downed moped and didn't stop to gawk like we do back home.

The scooters drive like little water bugs that scoot left, right, left, left, right just to get ahead. Car drivers do that too. Many cars have vertical rods on the front corners of their bumpers so that they know exactly how much room is left when weaving in and out of lanes. It's not that the roads are narrower, it's just that cars and scooters like to self-declare extra lanes. Oh, and traffic lights and signs? They get ignored when convenient. A red light? Treated by drivers as a mere suggestion. Yellow lights are lost in the neon strobe of the city and get less than no respect. A green light simply re-affirms what drivers already believe to be their Buddha-given right. We were driven around often by the plant owner's sons, who had Lexus and Infinity SUVs. I don't know how these vehicles remain unscathed. They were driven with the same intense fervour as the beaters and scooters. If there is one lane set aside to turn left,



drivers will still turn left from the next lane over. If there is enough room to squeeze by on the right of some halted traffic and gain 3 cars, it's done. But the wild thing is that they are let back into the moving lane without retribution, instead it's almost out of respect that the manoeuvre gets rewarded.

Tuesday was almost as hot as Monday. About 35C. In the plant where the machines need heat to melt plastic for injection and blow moulding it's easily 45C. I spent about 2 hours on plant tours on Monday, and clothes really stick to the skin. I had a water bottle in hand and took sips every 2 minutes. There are also some cooling hoses from the AC machine for the operators, and I stood under them while talking to the hosts, just so I could keep it bearable.

On Tuesday we called a meeting of the plant's managers and we gave them a 1 hour seminar on how our clients in Canada expect our quality program to run. I spoke slowly, and then a lady would translate for us. The writing on the whiteboard looked cool though. We were then asked to give a seminar to the ladies that work in the International Sales order desk area, and they loved it. The topic was "How to handle Customer Complaints". The company gave us each a watch as a thank you gift. In the afternoon, 4 hours were spent in the hot, hot plant again going over quality issues with the individual production managers. Hot. Very hot.

We had sushi at a Japanese restaurant after work with the owner and his family. I don't go searching out for sushi food, but I will tolerate it. Again, they forced food and sake into us, but we kept our composition.

Hong Kong is a happenin' city. There are many skyscrapers to look at, and all seem to be fancy in one way or another. We are catching a ferry at 8:30am tomorrow to go to Shun de on mainland China.

Added to Travelogues with permission from Peter K.