

1995 CHINA YANGTSE PASSAGE

October 21, 1995. Despite John in the hospital and the new condo being refurbished it seemed impossible I would ever get off, but somehow, the night before departure, I did throw some stuff in a bag and get on my way. Susan Feldman drove me to the airport at 7:00 AM. What a travel agent!

Even though I had been waitlisted for two months, I had never cleared first class on the first leg, so from ATL to LAX I was in coach, but I had an aisle seat and a pleasant seatmate from Brentwood, CA.

No, I did not ask him about OJ. We were almost an hour late getting away, due to late incoming equipment, but there was plenty of time in LAX for the plane to Hong Kong. And here I was business class, with a bigger seat and leg rest. It was some help for the 15-hour trip to HKG. 13 and 1/2 hours into the flight, when everyone was counting the minutes to Hong Kong, the pilot announced that we were running short of fuel so we made an unscheduled stop in Taipei and were over an hour late into HKG. Then it took more than a half hour to get my passport stamped due to a computer glitch in customs.

But at last I was through and into the soothing arms of Abercrombie & Kent's Yangtze Passage (our tour) and "Danny Boy" our leader. The Mandarin Hotel is lovely with every amenity, and I relax into a soothing bath.

Mary arrives courtesy of Northwest about midnight and the two of us try and get some sleep (We have turned our clocks 12 hours so our bodies are a bit mixed up).

Someone has ripped the lock off my bag and I thought I had lost the computer converter, but I later found it. My poor computer is disgorging batteries so I cannot use it on battery. At first I use Mary's new laptop, but finally get my computer working on electricity. Will get mine fixed when I get home and have access to the extended warranty.

Monday, October 23. Somehow in fits and starts we sleep until 6:30 or so, and then go to the Mandarin Grill for lox and bagel breakfast. Then we stroll out into Hong Kong almost getting lost in the maze of streets and getting very warm in the humidity. So back at the hotel we change into something cooler.

The bus tour takes us to Victoria Peak where we admire a somewhat foggy view. Then on to the open market where we mostly window-shop for an hour, although Mary gets a carry-on bag and some trinkets.

Then we have a delicious dim sun lunch at the Hae Fong terrace at Repulse Bay. Finally on to Aberdeen for a sampan trip through the floating village. On the way back to the hotel we stop at a jewelry factory and buy Mary a nifty jadeite bracelet.

That night a lovely dinner hosted by A & K in the Mandarin Grill to get acquainted. Our leader Matthew Hannan, Joyce Hannaum and Sally Stelfox, (two ladies from New Mexico who are in business together with a Christmas Shop and several other shops selling native American goods), Bob and Honey Hager, (he's a journalist with NBC), Jessica and John Fullerton (he used to be with Shearson Lehman, but now has his own mutual hedge fund. They are taking a year off to go around the world), Mary and I make up the eight. All very interesting and nice people.

Tuesday, October 24. Actually sleep until the wakeup call at 7:30.

After breakfast we have a one and a half hour briefing on the upcoming activities. Then we pack and get our bags out, check out and ride the Star ferry to Kowloon and an elegant lunch at Gaddis.

Walk down Nathan Road and poke our noses into various alley shops before catching the Star Ferry back to Victoria Island splurging on first class on the upper deck (about 30 cents instead of 25!)

The flight to Quilin takes about 55 minutes and we are met by our guide, Wan Wei (One Way) and taken to the Sheraton hotel. Feather pillows are a problem but eventually we get housekeeping to take away the ones Mary is allergic to and bring us the foam. It is close to ten pm but we are not hungry and go across the street to the night market. Prices are so cheap and Mary buys Chops for about one fourth the cost in Hong Kong (\$20) for her whole family. The Chinese vendors laugh whenever Mary says, "Mom" which we later find out means horse. Back in the hotel we order room service and collapse in bed.

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Wednesday, October 25. A wonderful sunny day for the trip down the Li River. The scenery is so spectacular. Karst formations create wonderful hills. Karst is a Yugoslav word. This whole area was under the sea 300 millions of years ago and the acid in the sea caused the erosion of the land to form the Karst formations. Karst is a relative of limestone. Our tour boat has two decks, a lower one with chairs and tables, and an upper one with no seats but marvelous views. So we stood until tired then rested a while below and went back up! Midway down the four hour ride we are fed a Chinese dinner (which had been cooked in an enormous wok astern). We were also offered a drink with a snake it, but only Bob had the nerve to try it. When I took this cruise 16 years ago, I did it in the rain. This was a great improvement. The cruise terminated in a small village with a large bazaar set up just for us. China requires a shopping stop with every excursion! Matt negotiates some pedicab rides and we are loaded three to a cart and taken for a wild ride with our peddler and his assistant pushing us up and down the slopes of this town. The poor woman pushing from behind at least got to ride on the downward slopes! One time her poor partner decided to go left when she went right and she had quite a jog to catch up. After the hour and a half drive back to Quilin, we have time for a Chinese dinner (the chicken soup was greasy, bony and full of chicken skins so I did not consider it very good), we gathered again to go see the cormorant fishing. They tie a string around his neck so he can't swallow and then turn them loose to catch fish and bring home for the fisherman. We do a little more night market shopping (looking not buying) and fall exhausted into bed. There is not much time for rest.

Thursday October 26. The flight to Xian takes about one hour forty-five minutes. It's about an hour drive from the airport into the smoggy town of Xian and we check into the Xian Shangri La hotel.

After lunch we go to the wonderful museum and after Mary succumbs to a terra cotta warrior, not to be outdone, I buy an antique Ching dynasty bowl paying far too much, but I hope will match the colors in my new condo. I will probably hate it before I get it back to Atlanta! The inevitable shopping stop at a jade factory really tires me and when we are almost back to the hotel we find the road blocked by a wall across the street complete with mortar and stones, gotten from tearing up the sidewalk. China is certainly surprising. Why not some simpler road block for the construction going on. (Actually they are widening the street in front of the hotel but the hotel complained and the wall was moved so the hotel could be reached). We desert the bus and walk the short distance to the hotel. I elect to skip the Ming Dynasty show (which I saw last spring) but Mary goes and I hope enjoys. I elect to head for bed.

Friday, October 27. Our first stop is the South City Gate where we climb up on the wall to admire the view. Then on to the Small Wild Goose Pavilion which Mary climbed. Afterwards we see a demonstration of Chi Gung or energy. The medium concentrated on the 20 Y note and finally made it cut a chopstick in half. He was also working with the same energy to cure a man's eyesight by acupuncture. Found the Pearl Cream that Connie S. had asked me to bring back. Next a fascinating market where they sold all manner of meats, including turtles and snakes and dogs. It was all rather tidy and clean. Our guide Hope bought some 100-year-old eggs but later at lunch I could not bring myself to eat them, sort of gelatinous and black in color. They wrap the eggs and coat them in limestone ash and leave them for three or so weeks to make them this way. Then on to a restaurant near the bell tower for a dumpling lunch. 20 or so varieties of dumplings, most of which were delicious really filled us up, washed down with beer and a very sweet sake wine (also water and coke).

At last it was off to the warrior museum, as wonderful as it was last May when I was here. Qin Shi Huangdi, the first emperor of China who unified the country built his mausoleum near Xian. While the tomb has never been opened (it was filled with mercury), some peasants digging a well in 1974, found his terracotta army buried nearby. Larger than life figures, they were arranged in battle array to help him in his afterlife. In 206 BC, shortly after his death, there was a peasant uprising and the warriors were smashed and burned.

A restoration is on going and it is very impressive to stand and see the thousands of warriors in their original trenches. Three buildings house the various parts of his army. In another building a

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quarter size bronze chariot can be seen that shows how the emperor moved about the countryside.

On the way back to Xian we stop once more at the baths where the emperor used to bath and where Chang Kai Chek was arrested. A long wonderful but tiring day. Fall asleep at 6 and after two hours we waken and order food only to fall asleep again and sleep until 7AM.

Saturday, October 28. We head for the Moslem section of Xian and walk through a food market quite different from yesterday. The whole neighborhood seems quieter and more serene. We are here to see a lovely old mosque, which is a blend of Chinese and Moslem architecture. 7 gates in Chinese pagoda style lead up to the mosque itself (which we are not allowed to enter), and the whole place is a quiet peaceful garden.

Outside we buy a few trinkets and walk back to the bus only to be caught in a tremendous traffic jam. It is the day of the annual lottery in this district and everybody in China was fighting to get into or out of the lottery area and our bus was surrounded by it all. It was a little scary but we eventually get back to the hotel for lunch.

The afternoon tour took us to a former Confucian temple, now the Shaanxi Provincial Museum. It is known for its Forest of Steles, great stone tablets with ancient Chinese texts. Beautiful calligraphy and some are intricately carved. Outside the temple area next to the wall is a restored street from Ming times with shops.

We transfer to the airport and are impressed with West China's promptness. People are still standing in the aisles as we taxi for takeoff! An hour's flight takes us to Chungking, the largest city in

China. On the Yangtze River, it is called the city of mountains and it is a steep descent down to our boat the Princess Elaine. Our cabin is compact, to say the least and my bags won't go under the bed but we shall manage.

Sunday, October 29. We sail at 8:30. Very foggy so we cannot really see much. The river is not very wide with steep cliffs on either side. Sampan with fishermen, a hydrofoil, another cruise boat. Lots to look at. We have our briefing on what to expect and, after I finally get my hair done, have a delicious Chinese buffet lunch. We have been really worried about the food as the reports weren't too good.

In the afternoon we stop at Fengdu, the "City of Ghosts". The town of Fengdu is rather junky but since the whole town will be flooded when the three gorges dam is completed, perhaps not much maintenance is being done. Actually you get the feeling of lots of poverty. During the Tang Dynasty (618-907) two Taoist recluses, Yin and Wang, came here and became immortals. High above the town many temples were built. Although the temples are no longer active there is a lot of tourist hype about how you can pass through various tests to achieve heaven (or hell). There is a temple here dedicated to

Hades and at one time you could buy a passport to heaven for about a dollar. It has a Disney-like character with large figures everywhere. We rode the funicular to the top and walked about trying all the various tests. The temples need some maintenance.

That night the "captain's dinner" and our captain gave a welcome speech and the dinner was very nice. We did not make it to the entertainment in the evening.

Monday, October 30. Our wakeup call at 6:30 is soft "Zamfir and his magic flute" type of music and a soft announcement of the days activities over the cabin radio. It is a gloomy morning and just as we start through the first gorge, it starts to rain. We stood on the aft end of the boat, which gave us a great view of where we had been and sheltered us from the worst of the weather. Qutang Gorge, the first gorge is fairly short and we soon arrive at Wushan. Here we were transferred to a sampan for our trip up the Daning River to see the 3 "lesser" gorges. It took 3 and 1/2 hours to ascend the river 40 meters. A wonderful river, with rapids, during which the crew got out poles to help us move upwards. Also shallow so we sometimes scraped the bottom. The river got quite narrow, sometimes one-way, and our guide pointed out the various caves and rock formations.

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Some of the caves had stalactites. Once we saw a monkey. Once the boat broke down and we "anchored" on the riverbank while the crew fixed the motor. There were three gorges and we got halfway into the third one before it was time to turn back. A & K had provided a box lunch so we did not have to eat at the Double Dragon restaurant and could spend more time on the river. Despite the pouring rain, it was really wonderful and beautiful. We stop at the Double Dragon for the compulsory shopping expedition and a WC stop. Mary decides to give her Mickey Mouse parka to a cute little girl, but the mother usurped it and Mary was very put out. When we finally turned and started down, we moved much faster and were back on board the Elaine about 4:30. But there was still one more gorge, the Wu Gorge, on the Yangtze to see before night fell. We are really engorged with gorges but will long remember this wonderful day.

Tuesday October 31. We are up at dawn to see the third and last gorge, the Xiling. For once the weather is clear and it is cold. Wonderful to not have the all-pervasive smog. This third gorge is much more populated than the others with many barges and houses along the shore. We come to Ba Dong where the controversial Three Gorges dam is being built. It will cost billions of dollars which the world bank is being asked to supply and will flood to a height of about 500 feet of the beautiful scenery we have been through. Millions of people will be affected and whole towns are to be moved to higher ground. However, there is no question that China needs the electrical power the dam will provide and cleaner power will reduce the amount of dirty coal generated power which now creates pollution for the world. After breakfast we come to an existing dam, Gezhouba Dam, and lock through. Below this dam we leave the mountains and are into flat country with farms on the side of the river. Incredibly it is only 10:00 AM, so we have a short nap to get ready for the adventures after lunch. After lunch we visit Jingsha city with its museum that contains a 2000-year-old corpse, from the Han dynasty. Our guide Mr. Yiang tells us everything 3 times and tries to tell us riddles and jokes that lose something in translation. At any rate, this 2000-year corpse was a wealthy man named Mr. Sui and there were lovely lacquers and jades in his tomb. He had been buried in three cedar coffins and a piece of ivory was found in his mouth identifying him. The museum also displayed beautiful silks and lacquer. After touring the silk exhibit, we had a bell concert from some young girls. Separately, in the inevitable shop, Mary and I each found the same treasure, and after some spirited bargaining bought two wooden "pillows" in the shape of a cat. Since foam pillows instead of feather have been a minor problem on this trip, it seemed singularly appropriate to take pillow home from China. A Chinese pillow is actually a hard brace to hold the head up and keep the hair neat. We then climbed on the wall of this old city and had a lovely view of the town. Matthew has decided we do not wish to eat ashore where the other tours go, so we returned to the boat for a very good Chinese dinner and lots of conversation. Joyce and Sally provide trick or treat candies to celebrate Halloween. This has been such a pleasant and interesting group.

Wednesday, November 1, 1995. We wake up docked in Yueyang (pronounced more or less like you are young), on the shore of Lake

Dongting, the second largest lake in China. At eight we left on our tour. The bus is very small and we sit three abreast, some on jump seats. We have problems breathing the dusty air. We are now 12 having annexed another A & K couple who are traveling independently, Carlos and Sharon from San Diego where he is in the tuna fish business; and also a young couple, Frank and Laura from Washington DC where he is an anesthesiologist. They aren't with A & K but fit in nicely with the group. So the bus is very cozy and we have very few springs and a bumpy road, but we make the best of it.

They take us to a state run kindergarten and the children sing and dance for us and get us to dance with them. Then we go to Yueyang Tower, a reconstruction of a much older tower, which dates from 716. It is one of the most famous towers along the Yangtze. Legend tells us that the tower was saved from collapse by a Taoist immortal named Lu Dongbin, and a small building, the Thrice Drunken Pavilion, commemorates him and the fact that he got drunk here three times.

We saw people practicing a dance with swords, in preparation for the double knife festival, which is the 9th day of the 9th month on the lunar calendar to celebrate elder persons day. There is also a small wax museum commemorating other poets and important people. On the way back

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to the boat we visit the 3-week old floating fresh water fish market. It is only 11 when we get back to the boat but we are tired and take a nap before lunch. There is a bug going through the group, which produces headaches, and I hope we don't get it, although Mary is showing signs of a cold, which we hope, won't go into bronchitis. The air is so polluted and the trip is so strenuous that it is no wonder we are getting sick.

I have a massage in the afternoon, probably the most vigorous one I have ever had. The scenery is somewhat monotonous with a levee along the shore and the landscape is completely flat. We are due in Wuhan tonight.

Thursday, November 2. Wuhan is a large industrial city; the second biggest port in China, being one of the treaty ports created in 1861 and was a major tea export center. Our tour to Wuhan takes us to a temple with 500 Buddha's. You are supposed to count Buddha's until you reach your age and then the Buddha will have some meaning for you, but mine was a very uninteresting one. Then we walk through a small bonsai garden. There is so much traffic on the way to the airport that we do not get to stop at the turquoise carving factory.

Shanghai. It is so wonderful to be at the Hilton Hotel. I enjoyed "going native" but it is time to go back to American ways! We have sandwiches in the coffee shop and then take a tour to see the emerald Buddha at Yufo Si, which is really exquisite. There are actually 3 jade Buddha's but the larger one brought from Burma in 1882 by the monk Hui Gen is outstanding. Surprisingly only half our group felt it was interesting enough to go see it. That evening we go to see the acrobats and Mary and I have a late dinner in the Italian restaurant before going to bed.

Friday, November 3. The last day. We meet Anna, our guide, at 8:30 and set off for the old section. We are on our way to the Yu Garden. The bazaar that surrounds the area is of buildings reconstructed in the old style and there is a 400 year-old tearoom by the zig zag bridge (9 zig zags is very lucky in china, denoting old age). The Yu Garden is in miniature, supposed to represent everything in China. There is even an artificial hill to represent the mountains.

While we are admiring it, Mary is taken with an attack where she cannot breathe. She has been suffering from a respiratory infection and the air is certainly polluted as well. Matt takes us by taxi back to the Hilton where a doctor is called and we then are sent to the hospital nearby. It is supposed to be one of the best in Shanghai, if not in China, but we are not overly impressed by its cleanliness. A nice Chinese Doctor recommends an antibiotic and some cough syrup and we return to the Hilton for an afternoon of rest. In the taxi we discover a feather duster and considering Mary's allergies to feathers, it is no wonder she is so sick. This was not exactly the tour we had planned! It seems it is time to go home and tomorrow we will do so.

Back at the hotel we rest for the remainder of the day, and I am coming down with the bug as well.

Saturday, November 4, 1995. We start the long trip home. We are coach from Shanghai to Tokyo on United. Once in Tokyo, Mary leaves on the run to catch her Northwest flight to Detroit (since we are late), while I have a couple of hours connection to Delta. While waiting, I am asked if I would be willing to fly ANA (All Nippon Airways) instead of Delta to Los Angeles and, after making sure I get credit for frequent flyer miles, I consent to do so. ANA's business class turns out to be a real treat. Large seats that recline almost all the way.

The service is outstanding as there are 3 Japanese stewardesses for the 10 or so passengers in business class. Really enjoyable if I weren't so sick. The trip from LAX to ATL is a real agony as I really feel badly, but at last I get home where I spend 10 days or so recovering from a flu like cold. We later find out we have the Wutan flu, a flu so new it isn't included in the vaccine.

Other than that, I am really happy I took this interesting trip, which really changed my prospective on the Yangtze Dam. The Chinese really need this power plant for their development and the world needs it as well to control the acid rain pollution the Chinese are sending to the world.