

Oceania Cruise, Nautica, Beijing to Hong Kong, March 23, 20010 to April 9, 2010

By Kay Winburn Seale

Richard and I will be celebrating our 45th wedding anniversary this coming November 5, 2010 as my bridesmaids JoAnn and Joyce might remember. Therefore, a trip to China, Japan, and S.E. Asia sounded like a great idea and we began planning. Time passed and getting our Chinese multi-port visa was our final chore.

March 22, we spent the night near DIA to catch our 6:00 AM flight to San Francisco, the first leg of our trip. That was dreadful since I'm a night owl and would have been better off staying up all night versus getting up at 4:00 to catch the flight. Along with our four-hour layover in San Francisco we were on travel 17 hours. We passed the International Date Line so I believe lost a day.

We arrived in Beijing where we met our driver, Mr. Chow, and our private guide, David, to see everything there was in Beijing in two days. And we did! We could never have done what we did on a tour. Our chief programmer is from Beijing and her brother, Mr. Shao, still lives there. She made arrangements with him for us to have Mr. Chow and David take care of us. What a blessing.

Immediately, we were off to the Great Wall of China. David took us to a least "visited segment" (the Wall is built in segments and not just one long wall) where we climbed straight up for about two hours. It was very difficult because of the steepness and all of the rock stairs being of different heights and depths. Some were at least a foot high which makes it a bit difficult for me at 5'. Coming down was even more difficult as we did it faster and each step our knees would have to support the weight of our bodies as we dropped the height of the stair. I was painfully weak at the bottom of the steps ...but we did it! I didn't mention the "seat" that I took stepping down one of the stairs. Only thing hurt was my pride!



The Seales at the Great Wall of China

Next we were off to Olympic Park where we visited the Bird's Nest. No more detail on our visits to each destination. It would take too long to share our wonderful experiences. After Olympic Village we went to the Summer Palace, the Forbidden City, Tiananmen Square, Chairman Mao's resting place, Temple of Heaven, Great Hall of the People, and all areas in between. Our two days of visiting included several Chinese meals, one including Peking Duck. David and Richard enjoyed traditional fare while I (vegetarian)

ended up having stir-fried Bok Choy and braised cabbage with a couple of mushrooms each time, with funky seasoning! Not good.

It was time for the two-hour drive to Shanghai to board our ship. Mr. Shao insisted that he and David drive us instead of going on the shuttle or the train as neither was dependable. It was quite a trip of continuously changing lanes by just inches, with trucks, cars, and honking horns. Drivers seemed to know what they were doing so everything moved along slowly and carefully. I'll be quicker as I go.

On to cruising The Yellow Sea, Seoul (Inchon), South Korea, cruising the Yellow Sea, Shanghai, China (two days), cruising The East China Sea, Hiroshima, Japan, Kobe, Japan, Kyoto, Japan (two days), cruising The Philippine Sea, Okinawa (Naha), Japan, Taipei (Keelung), Taiwan, I believe formerly Formosa, China (two days), cruising the Taiwan Strait, Hong Kong, China, and return to Denver.

Experiencing the DMZ and Third Tunnel & City of Seoul was really breathtaking. I couldn't believe we were there. We went down into the tunnel that was so small visitors (all except me, 5'1/2") had to stoop over and squeeze together. The tunnel was originally built capable of moving 30,000 battle-equipped foot soldiers per hour. Mine fields are still roped off. Seoul is a tremendously modern and prosperous city. "The Shanghainese have a reputation for being sharp, open-minded, glamorous, sophisticated, and business-oriented, and they're convinced they have the motivation and attitude to achieve their place as China's powerhouse. There was so much to be learned here about times past.

We had been to Shanghai previously so were on our own there. Shanghai is a city "on fire" as it prepares for the 2010 World Expo. In the past more "construction" cranes were in Shanghai at one time than in all the rest of the world put together, per our information. You visit Suzhou, founded over 2,600 years ago and see a tree that is over 400 years old. Time is only a state of mind there. We visited and went to the top of the 88th floor of the Jin Mao Building currently the fourth tallest in the world. Elevator takes 45 seconds from ground to the Observation Lounge, with ears popping. I felt a bit queasy up there. A taller building didn't allow visitors so wasn't counted in the world's tallest category was next door. In the next year a building with 124 floors will be constructed. It is a gorgeous city and has grown into the business and financial center of China, bypassing Hong Kong. What a trip!

Hiroshima is the "International City of Peace." August 6, 1945 cannot be forgotten. I don't find words to express our feelings of being there. By the way...Japan is the "Country of Peace." Hindu and Buddhism are the major religions.

Kobe, Japan...known for its Kobe Beef. Not a good place for vegetarians. We high-tailed it out of there and headed to Kyoto, by train. Richard lived in Japan from 1955 to 1957 and traveled by train a lot. He still works wonders when it comes to public transportation tickets, knowing where we are going, where to switch trains, and when to get off!

Kyoto is a beautiful and traditional Japanese city. We were able to visit the island of Miyajima and see the Red Torii Gate. Interestingly, to give birth, to die or be buried were forbidden on the island. Today there still are no hospitals or cemeteries. Throughout our visit there I was so impressed with the gentle, thoughtful, respectful, and honorable people living in this beautiful country. Since I was a sumo wrestler in my previous life (and I have proof) I felt right at home.

Naha (Okinawa), Japan. Memorials, museums, castles, gates, temples, galore. Each port city has pedestrian malls that are extremely crowded, vendors are cooking anything from “you name it/you get it” to “stinky tofu.” It is called stinky tofu because it is. We never bought any food from the street vendors because no matter how good it looked it wasn’t what you thought it was when tasted. Asians really like fish!

Buddhism is a religion. Shinto is “fun.” Chinese are very superstitious. To find an answer to a question a special two-piece rock is thrown up into the air to see how it lands. The way it lands gives the answer. If the answer isn’t accepted the rock is thrown back up into the air again until the answer is acceptable. Almost sounds like politics here, doesn’t it?

On to Taipei (Keelung), Taiwan, China. McDonalds is an icon in Keelung. Anywhere “one goes” in Keelung the trip begins at McDonalds. Upon returning from anywhere the trip “ends” at McDonalds. The Golden Arches can be seen from anywhere in the city. Keelung means rainy port and it certainly is. As you might guess the foliage is glorious.

We visited the historic village of Chiufen. In its beginning there was no road into or out of so everything had to be ordered and shipped in by boat. There were nine families that made up the village. Any time something needed to be ordered nine portions had to be ordered. If only one family wanted the item and no one else did the family had to take all nine portions. Chiufen means nine portions. I loved it there. The little antiquated and vertical village was beautiful. Structures were literally hanging off the side of the sides of trails. Vermillion-colored Chinese lamps were strung along the paths in beautiful profusion. Chiufen once was a hustling gold mine town, but now is a haven for tourists. We really enjoyed our visit.

In China we saw only a hand-full of Caucasians in any given place. Only very young people could speak a few words of English (and wouldn’t you know it, we spoke no Chinese!). Communication depended a lot on sign language. Did you know that Pig Latin is the international language? It didn’t seem to work there.

In Taiwan and Taipei, pedestrians take their lives in their hands as traffic and pedestrians don’t mix. Sidewalks/trails are narrow and or non-existent and full of potholes and missing cement. We emulated the locals when it came to crossing a street...serpentine, serpentine!

Transmitting emails had its problems because of censorship and disagreements between countries. Security levels were high and called for extra security measures when getting

on or off the ship. Temperatures were taken by laser as we got off the ship and we “mushed” our shoes in a big, soapy sponge before we went back on the ship.

One of my very favorite things to do on the ship is to watch the gigantic tug boats maneuver our ship. The pilot for one of our ships jumped off the ship onto a big tug which is different than we have ever seen before. The pilot would always be picked up by a small and very fast boat to maneuver beside our ship for a safe transfer of the pilot. A “pilot” is on every cruise ship to help the Captain sail out of the harbor. The “pilot” is the Captain for that time he is on the ship.

At Sea, on our way to Hong Kong. We had visited Hong Kong previously so were really ready to head home when we got there. After a four hour wait in the Hong Kong airport we were on our way for another 17 hours and crossing the International Date Line where we lost a day back to Boulder. As a special souvenir from our trip we each took a case of Jet Lag back to CO.

There are so many more adventures to share from our ship and activities we enjoyed that it is impossible to pass them on here. The daily logs I prepared will remind us of the whole story. We really did have a wonderful time.

Kay