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# Beijing Time



## Special Interest Articles:

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## Great Wall



From first impressions after seeing Pyramids, Eiffel towers and countless giant churches the wall is just another place with thousands tourists polluted with even more souvenir shops. There is even a KFC and Subway sandwich shop just before the entrance. But then you stop and start to soak it all in and that is when it hits you of just how massive it all is once you look beyond all of the congestion.

With each foot of wall almost an impossible task to construct and the wall containing over 15 million feet. To put it in perspective a car brought us to the parking lot which is already half way up the mountain where we took a

ski resort type of gondola to the top and by then we were already tired and sweaty from the small amount of hiking in between. Now you imagine having to carry a 500 pound block of stone up the mountain with no vehicle and no lift. Each mile of wall contains hundreds of thousands of blocks and there are over 3,800 miles of wall. At this point you realize that the wall is almost too massive to comprehend and 100 times the work and labor that it took to build the pyramids. Not only that but they built it to follow the ridges of the mountains as this would be the hardest position to cross but also this was the most difficult place to build

it. The pyramids were built on a nice flat plateau close to the river.

I was curious to where the wall start as I knew it ended out in the Gobi desert over a 1000 miles away. Come to find out the wall physically goes into the sea and forms almost a pier that is coated with iron to protect it from the waves.

Our original plan was to hike the wall from one checkpoint to another which would be about a four hour walk but due to some construction we were not able to make the journey.



## Made in China



*Maddie on the prowl for bargains.*

Obviously everything these days is made in China and if you were in China then the prices should be very cheap. Well this is true and the goods are extremely affordable but there is no such thing as a sticker price.

So here comes the art of negotiations but the problem is that you do not now or even have a clue of what the bottom line cost is. Our first encounter was with a souvenir book that Lisa wanted and I had compromised the cost down to 50rmb or \$8 from around \$20 but to our surprise about a block down the street we were offered the book for \$2 as a starting price.

So now it was game on every time we were in a market and Maddie was

out to get the best possible price. Her tactic seems to be offer 10% of the asking price and stand her ground until they get so frustrated they either give it to her or get mad.

The sales people are very adamant about getting you to buy something once you look at it so sometimes you will just tell them a low price just to shut them up but be

careful because once in a while the price is not that low and they will accept your offer and now you are stuck caring around some Chinese junk all day.

You will also find a lot of black market good such as fake Nikes and purses but the best are new DVD movies for a dollar in the box and they are just released in theaters.



## Old vs. New

Beijing is quickly becoming a modern city



And all of the old neighborhoods that are called Hutongs are being demolished so they can build modern high rise apartment buildings.

We toured one of these places on a Tuk Tuk and winded our way through all the ancient alleyways. It is a big contrast between the new

construction and the old houses that literally sit right next to one another. The Hutongs are not nice and very run down but they have a sense of history and culture to them that will be lost forever. When they are all gone and Beijing is completely modernized it will be just another city like any other lacking character.



## Forbidden City



50 years ago it was closed off to most people in china and everyone in the West and now it is a must do tourist destination in Beijing. A lot has changed in the city in the last couple of decades but the Forbidden City is one place where you can go and see what it was like 500 years ago. The palace is much larger than your average compound with almost 8 million square feet and every detail has been built with the upmost precision. The palace has hundreds of workers constantly doing maintenance that is done to a very high standard. Even the tiles, bricks and paint have to come from a specific factory that has been supplying for

hundreds of years.

As you walk through the rows of buildings they start to all look the same and without a guide you would definitely at some point make a wrong turn. Most everywhere you examine there is some order of 9 whether it be the number of rows, columns or tiles. They believe that 9's are lucky



so everything has to be built in some fashion of that.

As with a lot of our itineraries they happen last minute and without much thought. The Forbidden City was just one of those as we arrived an hour before close and hired a guide at the entrance. After walking through the palace for an hour I think we all realized it was just the perfect amount of time to spend. We have come to learn that you could spend all day at a place like this but sometimes less is more. The one lesson we have learned in China is if you would like to know where the entrance or exit to a large tourist attraction is all you do is look for the endless stalls of souvenir vendors selling all the mindless junk to the discriminating traveler.



or

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*"Something very old and chinese."*

## Street Food



*I would regret this later.\**

Part of the fun of going to a foreign land is to try the cooked little critters that are offered along the local alleys and streets from small carts. Most of the local's palettes are trained by these culinary delights but as in most cases you build an immune system to the bacteria's and contaminates harvested in these plates of goodness.

The Chinese seem to take the far out mentality of the street food scene to an extreme level with about anything you can imagine on the menu. In America we always joke about dog meat in a Chinese restaurant but in the back alleyways of Beijing or any other large city in China it would not be a hard task to locate a plate of canine

curry. We have seen a whole range of bugs from scorpions to centipedes that are nicely placed on a skewer for roasting their guts into a crunchy delight. But the menu does not stop there as you will find small birds, lizards, snakes and a

whole range of rodent sized animals. For me I went to the extreme and tried the 3 scorpion skewer which I was worried about until I noticed the stingers were removed. All I can say is it tastes like chicken.



*"Little Chinese students."*

## One in a Billion

Well if you live in China you are one in a billion and when you spend time in the major cities across the country you start to realize what that a billion means. In some places

that are very crowded, and I mean crowded in a completely different way than one might assume, there is a certain smell or **putrid** odor that soaks and permeates into

everything. The government made a rule decades ago that each family could only have one child but the child could have one child. So now all the couples having children are only children themselves meaning each one is allowed to have a child. So if you do the math that means the population of China should remain the same.

