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Chongqing Time



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Chongqing?



I had never heard of the town of Chongqing before we scheduled a boat ride down the Yangtze River. We were to board at this unheard of place which in my mind was some small sleepy town on the side of the river.

Well in actuality it is one of the largest cities in China and one of the biggest metropolitan areas in the world with over 30 million people which is three times that of the Los Angeles area. The city lies on the confluence of two large rivers and the entire city is built on mountains along the water. Driving around town is very interesting with large buildings hanging on the sides of the hills and concrete elevated roadways winding like vines while underneath

you trains and subways tunnel through the mountains.

Most of the cab drivers are fairly new to town having been relocated from a now submerged city because of the rise of the lake formed by the Three Gorges Dam. If you get in a cab you better know how to get where you want to go because the driver sure will definitely take you somewhere else unless you can tell him otherwise.

We stayed in the center of town on a peninsula with a river on each side of us. We rented an apartment for 5 days which had its own furnished kitchen so we could cook. It is nice to be able to make up a good home cooked meal when you eat out every

day for a month straight. We decided to make some spaghetti Bolognese so it was off to the market to get our supplies. The only easy part was buying the noodles but everything else seemed to be difficult including the hamburger. We finally had to buy a piece of beef and have it ground. The hardest thing to find was the salt and I had bought MSG and some other substance before getting it right, even the workers in the market had a hard time finding the salt. Now as far as the Parmesan cheese - do not even ask as it is not available in this small town of over 30 million.



Smog Attack



A clear day in Chongqing.

It seems that everywhere we have gone in China it is very smoggy and polluted. Maybe this is because everyone's buying cars at a rate of a million cars a month or just that there are 1,000 too many coal burning power plants.

We started in Beijing and the haze seemed bad but it was not as bad as Xi'an. Then we got off the train in Chengdu and the pollution looked more like a storm cloud and we thought this is as bad as it could get. But then we made it to Chongqing the pollution capital of the world and the carbon footprints went Sasquatch size.

Now to truly know just how much pollution there is in the air you need to do the nose test. This is

where you clean out your nose with a Kleenex and depending on how black it is will tell you how much smog you are breathing in. If chunks of black are in the Kleenex then you are in a good part of China and you are inhaling the equivalent to 2 packs of cigarettes a day.

I can remember 20 years ago in the Los Angeles area the horrible smog that would blanket over the city being stuck up against the mountains. Well Chongqing has taken it to a whole new level, they have the biggest dam and the largest power plant and now they have the worst smog.



Baby Got No Back



Diapers..... Who needs those stinkin' diapers! In old China we like to have our babies where open bottom jeans so they can go when and where they like.

To our surprise mothers in the older parts of the county like to keep it old school and not use diapers. Instead they

have a big slot cut into the back of the baby outfit and when it is time to go they have the kid fertilize the sidewalk. Now you might think that this was a onetime sighting but unfortunately we had the pleasure of walking by these bare butt potty machines several times a day.

Star attraction



When you are in a place like Beijing or Shanghai where there is a good amount of western foreigners, well then people tend to leave you alone. But when you get off the beaten path and into the jungle so to speak that is where people start to stare at you - like you were some pop star getting out of a limo in Times Square.

Once you have been sighted you have three choices, one is to just ignore them and keep going about your business, the other is to say hello and they will usually say hi or hello back in excitement in some kind of broken English, then the last option is to be nice and say how are you in

Chinese which sort of opens the door and they will ask to stand next to you and have a picture taken.

Now once one China man sees you letting another take a picture then you need to get ready for a wave of paparazzi trying to get the magic moment to post on their Facebook page. They are shy by nature but once they see



someone else doing it then it opens up the door and they feel obligated to snap away.

To make matters even worse you can bring a cute little American girl with you with light colored eyes and then you have a real crowd stopper. Whenever we are in a crowded area all you do is look around and you will see cameras pointed in our direction. Most play it off like they are just taking a picture of the crowd or the building behind us but when the whole crowd is pointing cameras at you - well it is kind of obvious.

We decided to go to the ice skating rink and before you know it Maddie had the entire rink watching and wanting to skate around with her. We should have charged a quarter a picture and then we would have made enough to have had a free trip.



or

"The girls skating around the ice rink."

Mega Traffic



"It took 1 hour to go 1 block in this traffic."

We left with an hour to spare on our way to the rail station in Chengdu; we were off to catch the bullet train to Chongqing. The total journey would have taken us less than 3 hours but it was the first day of the national holiday and we were in for a surprise.

Our first problem was there were no taxis and it took an extra 30 minutes to get one to the hotel. Once we had a taxi we only made it to about a half mile from the rail station and the traffic just stopped. I'm not talking about your stop and go – no this was stopped to where people were getting out of buses and taxis to go by foot. We had too much luggage so walking did not seem like a good

option and by this point there was no way to make the train. I asked the driver how much to drive the 300 miles to Chongqing and he said \$150 which we took him up on as our options were limited and trying to get train tickets for a later train would be unlikely.

Our driver was surprised

we took him up on the price but after getting on the freeway to be stuck in 300 miles of traffic I think he was regretting it and more than that he had to drive back to Chengdu.

Below is a photo of a Chinese rest area along the freeway where it is not uncommon to see hundreds of cars.



Local Taste, Local Smell

In Chongqing they have more food stalls than anywhere I have seen. This is fine as long as they are cooking good and tasty treats with the sweet

aromas floating around like gingerbread and cupcakes. But not here where they are stir frying chicken feet in sour sauce and fermented tofu that

smells worse than a septic pumping truck catching on fire. But what is the most undesirable of all is when these different disgusting flavors start to blend together along with the massive amounts of sewage vapors leaking from the storm drains. At this point your best bet is to plug your nose and breathe through your mouth.



"Street stall cooking up local flavors."

