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# Yangtze Time



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## That Dam Cruise



### Special Interest Articles:

- Lights Out
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- The Wall

When we first talked about taking a trip down the Yangtze I imagined the river more quaint and cultural but to my surprise it was a bustling liquid super highway floating cargo up and down the interior of China. On our four days on the river we had a constant supply of vessels navigating by hauling everything from cars to coal.

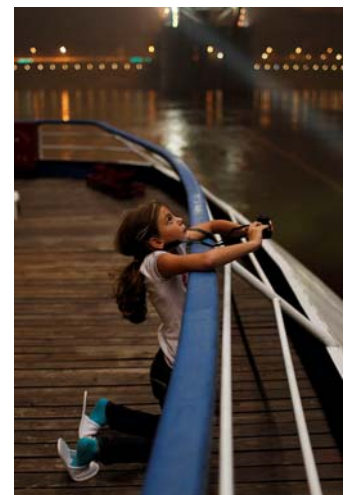
The journey we took was from Chongqing to Yichang which is still 1,000 miles upstream from Shanghai and the ocean. Because of the construction of the Three Gorges Dam most of our journey was on the lake and not the River. At the end of the lake we would be navigating the largest

lock system in the world. The locks are pictured above and there were four of them lifting ships over 300 feet.

After spending about a week in Chongqing which is the largest city in China it was time to board the cruise. I had made arrangements by going to some back alley type agency running out of a hotel room. We hired a porter to carrier our luggage onto the boat and he used a bamboo pole to stack all our bags onto his back at the same time. Not even something I would attempt at twice his size. Better even yet he did this for two dollars. Once we arrived at the dock with the massive dirty brown river raging

underneath us we knew it was going to be an exciting journey. The Yangtze seemed to be about the size of the Mississippi but the water was moving twice as fast.

We were told to book a standard room and then once on the boat we could wave a couple hundred dollars at the crew and get a suite. We did even better as they gave us the Presidential Cabin on the boat. It is funny how it works over there in China, if we book the Presidential Suite beforehand we would have paid thousands of dollars extra but it only cost us a couple hundred under the table so to speak.



## Lights Out



*Freighter at night on the Yangtze.*

When darkness falls on the Yangtze it is truly pitch black out. Maybe this is because of such high pollution the stars and moon provide no light or maybe because of the close canyon walls block out light from nearby cities. Either way it is exciting to be moving along so close to the bank all night long with 1,000 ton coal freighters chugging by.

You start to think about the fact that you are in China and there is not a coast guard or a national transportation safety board that is controlling, watching or regulating how these massive ships navigate. There is some sort of system in place but not to our standards.

The river is so black and the ships are all lit up like

Christmas trees that provide beautiful reflections off the water. The smog is so thick that when the ships use their spotlights it is like cutting through the fog. You will see some lights appear through the haze and before you know it a giant city on the banks of the river will come into view. These cities are relatively new being built for the relocation of towns and

villages from the rise of the lake.

For me it was difficult to fall asleep knowing that it was so dark and we were in such close proximity to the shore and other ships. I'm positive the captain has navigated the river a thousand times without as so much as a scrape but it is hard to find peace of mind in what seems like such a chaotic place.



## Trash



The Chinese do not have much respect for their

environment and it is a common sight to see someone through garbage on the ground or in the water. It was all good when the river flowed to the ocean and carried all the trash off to far away beaches.

Now the problem is that they built the big dam 5 years ago and now the massive amounts of

garbage are being caught in the lake behind the dam. There were spots where the trash was so abundant that it formed small floating islands that birds could land on and rest.

I guess eventually it will form a solid layer across the lake that people will be able to walk on.

## Chinese Family



During our trip down the Yangtze river we were lucky enough to meet a nice family from Toronto that was living in China for a few years. No they are actually not a Chinese family but a family living in China. A pair of school teachers daring enough to take the initiative to pack up and relocate literally on the other side of the planet with two small children.

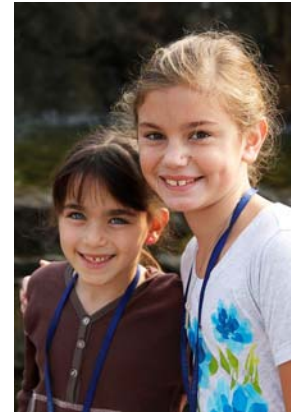
Hilary and Doron and their two children Sydney and Jacob moved to Suzhou which is outside of Shanghai several years ago to work at a private school. The school provides them with paid housing and education for the kids along with a very nice salary. We were able

to tour the school which is very nice by any standards and also very expensive to attend. The school is mostly catering to the expat community of people from all over the world that manage and run the local factories in the Suzhou area.

They live in an apartment complex that is no

different than any place in the U.S. with all the amenities you need within a one mile radius. Yes there is even a Best Buy right down the street from them in the middle of China, oh yeah it is across the street from the KFC. The best part is that being in China is that they hire a maid that comes by almost every day for pretty much peanuts to take care of all the housekeeping, laundry and dirty dishes.

Because the schedule of a teacher has so many holidays and breaks Doron and Hilary are able to travel all over Southeast Asia very easily. I would have to admit that after spending time with them I was wishing I had a teaching degree so I could live the life.




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*"Maddie and Sydney having fun."*





## The Wall



*"Maddie showing style on the wall."*

Of all the places and sights on our journey down the Yangtze River it seems our favorite was a retaining wall of concrete built at a slight angle so we could run up it. Sometimes it is just the small things that can make the day more exciting and enjoyable.

While all the other people were looking at the world's largest dam and the biggest ship lock system in existence we were concentrating on how high up the wall someone could possibly go. A much greater feat in our eyes than the 6 billion tons of concrete located right next to us.

The more I think about it

on every journey we end up finding some small place or thing that we have the best time at. It never seems to be the big item tourist spots or the famous hotels. No it always is something you would not expect and ends up being completely

random.

I'm sure that there are many Chinese families that have photos in their albums of a bunch of crazy Americans (and Canadians) shimmying up and down a retaining wall with silly faces.



## Row Your Boat

Before the Dam was built on the Yangtze River the only way to reach remote villages was by small row boats. When the river was running low the boatmen

would have to pull the boats over the rocks in order to reach their destination. Now days with the lake making it easy for large powered

barges to deliver supplies there is no need for the boatmen except for a small group of them that take tourist up and down a small section of the river.

We had the pleasure of taking a two hour journey on one of the rowboats. It was very peaceful to float along with only the sounds of the oars skimming the surface of the water.



*"Traditional boatmen."*

