

Friday 17 February 2012 – At Sea on the way to Shanghai - 12° windy

Woke up at 5am to find myself still fully dressed and the room looking like a bomb site. Somehow, made breakfast and afterwards played my best Bridge ever. It's like the golf, don't think about it too much. Sunbathing is out of the question as it has cooled down to 12°. Sharon didn't make her gym session and we are going to have to spend most of the day in bed to get over last night and also because the ship is rocking to and fro. Took a sea sickness pill and couldn't get our head off the pillow. All our limbs felt heavy and I found I could only manage a couple of pages in my book before going back to sleep. I didn't make the Captain's Cocktail Party or my usual gym session. Had supper in the Belvedere and met up with Lisa and David. The sea was still rough so we took another pill and zonked straight out.

Saturday 18 February 2012 – At Sea on the way to Shanghai - 6° with a force 8 wind

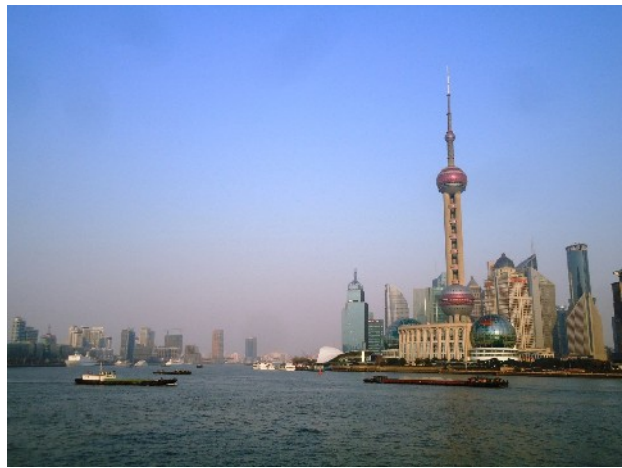
We are a bit restricted now because the temperature has dropped and the wind is still blowing. Apart from Bridge, the port lecture and the gym session there is not much else I am interested in. We've been eating a lot of the monotonous food and I am find it difficult to do up my jeans. The food is appealing to the majority who like fish and chips, curry and cups of tea. However, we had an interesting pre lunch snack with a couple from Perth who is an Historian. He knew all about John Septimus Roe and is better at British history than we would ever be. He can't understand why Scotland would want to become independent. Caught up with Hilly and Stu at breakfast but they didn't turn up at supper so it was us and Lisa and David again. David is conforming and will be wearing his tour sticker again tomorrow. Lisa had £350 of excess luggage and David says she has £180 hair do's.

We had arranged to meet our friend Tony in Shanghai tomorrow, we last met up with him in Hong Kong in 2005. Rick was having trouble trying to contact him so he sent a message via Facebook. We didn't know that he has changed jobs and moved to Shanghai and as Facebook is banned in China he didn't pick up the message until he was visiting a customer in Taiwan. We have a long history of exploits with Tony and as those of you who also know him must agree that he is definitely a one off but such an endearing man. Rick had a text earlier in the week to say that he was recovering from a hideous case of Montezumas Revenge but he was looking forward to meeting up. True to form we had a text this evening to say that he had turned up today, **a day early**, and wondered where we were. The really good news is that he got married to Abby last year at the tender age of 54. Fortunately, he has managed to re-arrange things so it's still on for tomorrow. Interestingly, he said that the email in his building tends not to work at all on Sundays, they don't have VPN and the government is keen to restrict private email traffic and blogging on Sundays. Also, Google invariably doesn't load on a Sunday so it's best to keep to texts. We're looking forward to seeing the changes in Shanghai since our last visit in 1996. We visited with an American Printed Circuit delegation as at that time the Chinese were working hard to encourage foreign investment.

Such a shame about Whitney Houston but didn't she have a fantastic funeral, I love all gospel singing. The Headliners performance this evening was really very good. The sea has settled and everything is looking fine for our Shanghai visit tomorrow.

Hong Kong to Shanghai 789 nm

Sunday 19 February 2012 – Shanghai - 5° sunny



Shanghai is the largest city by population in the People's Republic of China with over 23 million inhabitants. The city has a major influence in commerce, finance, media, fashion technology and transport. The port has a brand spanking new Cruise Terminal with nothing in it apart from a couple of smiling Chinese people every 10metres welcoming you to China. It was about an hours coach ride into the city and on the way we passed hundreds and hundreds of high rise apartments. We were dropped off at the Silk Factory which was really a huge shop but they had some nice things although they were a bit expensive. Everyone was very helpful directing us onwards to wherever we wanted to go. We took a taxi to our meeting point, The Marriott Hotel near the Peoples Park and Square. All along one wall in the park there were notices posted by parents advertising for marriage partners for their children. Back at the hotel we had another text from Tony to say he was just getting into the lift. We kept looking at the lift doors and no Tony and then later we received another text to say that he was in the wrong Marriott Hotel. When he eventually arrived it was really good to see him and we had such a lot of news to catch up with. We ended up staying at the hotel for a mega buffet Chinese lunch. Tony's been working in Shanghai for about 14 months but hasn't really settled there probably because he had been completely spoilt by working in Hong Kong for about 15 years. He has to work long hours and travel extensively with his job which makes it difficult to settle in a new country. There are many restrictions in China, western programmes are now not shown during prime time and news is censored. The change in the city since our last visit is incredible, when we last visited there weren't many cars on the roads instead locals were using bicycles to transport goods. Today the hotel was surrounded by car showrooms for Porche, Mercedes and Ferraris. Back in 1996 many older men were still dressed in the communist uniform, today especially the young, are wearing modern clothes and hairstyles. Of course the majority are still earning poor wages but we didn't see any of the hovels and slum like dwellings that we did back then. While we were walking back from the park a young couple stopped to speak to us. They were having a three day holiday in Shanghai and were very keen to practice their BBC English. Then a few minutes later another couple stopped us and said they had just finished their degrees in Engineering and Computing from Beijing University and had come to Shanghai to look for jobs. Tony was saying that to stop the migration to the cities if they were not born in the city where they work they will not be entitled to any social benefits.



We were lucky with the weather as it was a beautiful, cold, crisp day whereas the past few weeks it has



been miserable. It was just right for a leisurely walk up Nanjing Road which is their equivalent to our Oxford Street. Then along The Bund, the waterfront that has all the modern buildings in the distance and historical buildings alongside. It's the cheapest place we've been and everyone came back to the ship laden with purchases. I bought a Rolex, fake of course!



Monday 20 February 2012 – At Sea on way to Xingang for Beijing - 5° sunny

Morning started with training drill for passengers and crew in the event of a bomb scare. 10 fake bombs were planted around the ship and in cabins. All bombs were found and those passengers who found one in their cabin were given a bottle of champagne. We carried on playing Bridge regardless but might have joined in and searched our cabin had we known about the prize. They are trying to include activities for the 400 odd Australian passengers. I thought I should make a bit more of an effort today to improve my education and started off by attending the lecture by Geoff Dobson on the basic principles of navigation. He talked about how we determine direction, distance and position on the earth and he also included a quick look at the future of navigation. It got a bit heavy at one point with lots of calculations including, sines, cosines, Pythagoras, degrees and detailing the structure of the earth but I kept up with it while giving Rick a prod every now and again to wake him up.

This afternoon it was Professor Marie Conte Helm OBE, on “The Arts and Zen” and the impact of Zen Buddhism on the traditions of ink painting, tea ceremony, applied arts and gardening in Japan. I have only just finished reading about Genji, a classic work of Japanese literature, and a lot of the history of Japanese art has been taken from these tales. I never thought for one moment I would have a head start on this subject. I can also see how a lot of our gardens today are taken from the traditional Japanese gardens. Rick asked me what it was all about and I said that you have to sit in a tea house and look at the garden for hours on end or meditate for days on end and maybe reach enlightenment by something as simple as a leaf falling off a tree. He's glad he didn't go!

Met up with Lisa at “Stretch & Relax” and she was very excited as she had something to tell us at dinner tonight. I was sure it was that she had joined the drama group but no, she had participated in the the Casino Fun Day. She won the Roulette and was runner-up in the Black Jack and had to choose which one to play. Her final choice was the Roulette where you were allowed five rounds and on the last round she put three chips on 31 and it came up! No big money was involved as it was all for fun but she enjoyed the cheering, photographs etc and we helped them enjoy the champagne prize!

