

Shanghai to Xingang 633 nm

Tuesday 21 February 2012 – Xingang for Beijing - 1° sunny

The 2010 Xingang Port oil spill has impacted on the several aspects of the area's economy. Tourism was affected as some of the beaches were closed and the fishing industry has been badly affected, especially the offshore shellfish farms. The clean-up effort largely used low-tech methods, including containment booms and straw mats to absorb the oil, as well as a fleet of fishermen manually scooping oil out of the water and transferring it to barrels for storage and eventual disposal. Additionally, limited amounts of chemical dispersant's were used, as well as a material to increase biodegradation of oil. Environmental damage was also serious as a result of the spill; the majority of wildlife inhabiting the area was exposed to oil, which led to the deaths of some, while others were expected to display longer-term effects.



The future park



The bleak and empty Cruise Terminal car

The busy channel to the port made for a one and a half hour delay to our arrival and late set-off for the 1400 odd passengers who were on the 10 hour plus excursions to see the highlights of Beijing which include The Great Wall of China, Tiananmen Square and The Forbidden City. We spent about three weeks in China in 1996 and don't really need to see it all again. Stu is in Hilly's bad books as he has stopped them going on their booked Beijing excursion because she has a cold. He is worried that she might be put in quarantine after they take your temperature when going through immigration.

It was a 30 minute coach ride into Tianjin and all the infrastructure is in place for colossal future expansion. After leaving the cruise terminal we travelled through a new industrial park that was under construction. This was being built on newly reclaimed land, newly planted with rows and rows of trees either side. We travelled along a dead straight 8 lane freeway for 5 miles before turning left for another 3 miles. Often our coach was the only vehicle in sight. We passed huge new factories and as we approached the lego type new town there were rows and rows of high rise apartments. There was very little traffic apart from quite a few transporters loaded with Toyota cars. The coach dropped us off at a gigantic shopping mall which was obviously for the locals. This time it was not full of designer shops but fairly modern clothes, not particularly good quality, and not cheap, an average garment was about £40. The average Chinese would still find this expensive as the minimum wage is about £178 a month. Tony says his company find it difficult to get staff as the Chinese are becoming more choosy and its also expensive to employ staff as the company have to pay 45% social costs for each employee.

Rick (The Feeder) was disappointed that I wouldn't stay for a big nosh up but there was a sickly sweet, lingering toilet smell in the mall that followed us around. Visiting all these countries with so

much new investment in tall modern buildings, massive business parks and infrastructure makes me feel the we are not a world leader any more and are falling well behind these emerging countries. Also, it's all the newly rich Eastern Europeans and Russians that are buying holiday homes and spending their money on luxuries. Whereas most of our roads are congested, we're not maintaining all our sea defences and we are not building enough affordable homes or improving our transport systems to the extent that we need to be competitive.

There was a full on fight between two Chinese guards in the Port Terminal, they were shouting and wrestling on the floor and had to be separated by some other guards. A while later the perpetrator came back into the terminal holding a large piece of wood but before he could do any damage he was carted off by the supervisor.

The entertainment today was a classical recital with a pianist and tenor. I'm rather partial to a good tenor but the signs were bad when lots of people were coming out as we were going in. I feel I am complaining a lot but the entertainment has gone downhill especially for those of us who have been on since Southampton as they are now repeating certain lectures, television programmes and films. However, Rick treated me to a special meal in the pay extra Ocean Grill, it was lovely.

Wednesday 22 February 2012 – At sea on way to Nagasaki - 1° sunny GMT +9

Everyone seems to have enjoyed their trip to Beijing. Lisa and David took the excursion to The Great Wall, Forbidden City and came back to Tianjin at 240 miles an hour on the bullet train. We are all wanting to have a ride on the bullet trains but tickets are limited. Concern is also being expressed by many others at how far we are falling behind other countries and what the future holds for our children and grandchildren. Had an enjoyable Bridge session, didn't over-trump once! We've only got just over two weeks to the end of the cruise and are looking forward to spending some time in Sydney with Lorne, Carolyn and grandson Homer. They have recently moved to a new home out of the city and we can't wait to see it. I am reluctant to say this as it sounds snobby but there are a lot of rough people on board. I know I have complained quite a bit but tonight's performance by violinist Vincenzo Gentile was amazing and I sure you would be prepared to pay quite a lot to see him – Rick slept through it though.

Tomorrow we are in Nagasaki and it will be our first time in Japan. We have a tour booked but are hoping to get back in time to see a local performance of the highlights of Madam Butterfly and they will be in traditional Kimonos. Quite lively at our dinner table as there was a full house. We ended up discussing Rick's former life as a milkman. He is getting well trained in the laundry department and I even asked his advice today on how to sort out an ironing problem with my trousers.

Xingang – Nagasaki 750 nm