

## **000216 Yantai**

Ni hao! I have made it to Yantai where I will be teaching after a harrowing flight on East China Airlines. First some business stuff:

I have a phone number! When you dial this number you will hear a message in Chinese. You can ignore the message and press 8088 which is my extension. My schedule right now is very hectic because of training and banquets (more on that later). However, the best time to reach me is between 7 and 9 am and after 9pm. Yantai is 13 hours ahead of Boston and 14 hours ahead of St. Louis. I hope that this number is correct. Please let me know if you call and have problems.

You can also leave me voice mails through my excite account. I can not respond to the message, but it would be nice to hear peoples voices.

Secondly, although I am in Yantai where I will be living, I still have some thoughts on Shanghai, so I will recount those now.

One day we visited the Shanghai museum which was built only a few years ago. It had a neat collection of paintings, calligraphy, and bronze works amongst other things. What struck me the most was that most of the items were found just recently in the city. Most of the dates were the early 80's I guess when the construction boom began.

After the museum, we walked through some of the back markets. What we discovered was that there is a huge market for crickets. Now these are not the little, black crickets that we have in the states. These crickets are huge and greenish. They are very popular amongst older men who keep them as pets. There were also elaborate cages for sale and Lisa suggested that the object was to have the nicest home for your cricket and that the cricket could always be replaced. None of us bought crickets, but they are for sale in Yantai as well, so you never know.

One book that I read in preparation for China said that one of the most frustrating things about the trip is that you are instantly illiterate. It is difficult to be unable to read the signs, but actually a lot have English written underneath or I can guess at what is inside. Grocery stores or little snack shops are easy to pick out. So are CD and VCD stores since they have music blaring from speakers out front. VCD is a sort of DVD, but not as high quality.

The inability to speak Chinese is a little more frustrating. For instance, last night as we left our school, the guard stopped us and tried to tell us something. We struggled at it for about five minutes until we all figured out what was being said. However, the inability to speak also has its advantages. For example, in Shanghai when I took a taxi from the French Concession to Hua Dong Shifan Daxue where we were staying. The taxi approached the main gate and the guard wanted the taxi to stop. However, the building that we were staying at was still a good distance inside. I rolled down the window and said "ni hao", or basically hi and smiled. The guard realized that he would get nowhere and so let us through. The taxi

driver got a big kick out of it and chuckled for a while.

In Shanghai we got our first exposure to just how fresh the food at diner is. We went to a huge, nice restaurant our first night with a couple from Shanghai. They ordered for us as Jason and I commented on how crazy the kitchen must be. We had no idea just how crazy it was. Bob (one of our hosts) asked if we would like to see it and we eagerly agreed. We went into a room that was connected with the kitchen. On the floor and walls were fish tanks holding various fish, eels, and skates. There were shrimp, turtles and snails in buckets. On another wall were chickens, snakes and other birds. We watched as Bob haggled over the price of the fish and so forth and chose the ones that we would eat. The selections would be placed in a bag and thrown into the kitchen. We could see the fish flopping around on the floor next to birds that had just had their heads cut off and were flopping around. It was a delicious meal.

I have no complaints about the food, other than that I miss bread. A meal of meat or fried food for breakfast as we were eating in Shanghai just does not do it for me. I miss cereal! However, as I am starting to explore more in Yantai, I am finding alternatives. There is a big morning market here where you can get soy milk and rolls. This I am looking forward to. In the meanwhile, I am eating biscuits for breakfast and eating out for lunch and diner. Yesterday, we went to a hole in the wall that served hand pulled noodles. They were delicious.

One dish that Lets Go China mentions is a specialty in Beijing is Yack penis. To complement the dish, it is served with a side of green caterpillar moss. We are all eager to try this to say that we have.

The flight to Yantai from Shanghai was a little nerve wracking. First of all, people were still sitting down as the plane taxied from the gate. I am sure that all of you in the States have heard the commercials from American Airlines where they speak of how they have removed two rows from economy class. Well, they must have given them to East China Airlines because my knees were pinned to the seat before me. There was a lot of turbulence which was "fun". However, the meal was very good. I can not imagine a US carrier who would serve a full meal on a 1 1/2 hour flight.

We were told just before we left the States that there would be a weight restriction on our baggage in China. I struggled to make everything fit and left the rest to be mailed so that I would make the 44 lb restriction. However the others had several bags all weighing much more. We got to check-in and the woman there exclaimed that we could not bring so much. Lisa responded that we would pay and the woman was more than happy to take it all. I have been named the king of luggage because I was the only one to make the restriction.

We have been very busy here in Yantai. My mornings start with language classes from 9 till 11. I am in a class with Brian with an advanced teacher because we have both studied Mandarin in the past. Our teacher's name is Amy and she is excellent. I am hoping to pick up more quickly! Actually, it is starting to slip in which I am very happy about. In the afternoons we have TEFL training by Lisa (our leader). Training is a lot of fun because

we have such a good group. Our schools will try to encourage us to use books for our class. However, Lisa has pointed out that the Chinese teachers can use the books. What the students need is to converse in English with a native speaker. So, we have been working on lesson plans which has been interesting. Yesterday, Shelley did a five minute lesson on the vocabulary words for family members. The rest of us were roll playing as her class. She asked us who lived in our house. We got mother and father, but when she asked about siblings, Lisa reminded her that this is China. Oh ya, one child rule. We all knew it, but we had all forgotten it.

Where Jason and I will teach, they are just so thrilled to have teachers, especially male teachers that we can teach as we please. However, Lisa has emphasized that politics and religion are taboo. As if to emphasize this, the Education Committee for the province had a meeting with Lisa yesterday. They are really good guys who have been very helpful in getting our visas and getting us set up. However, they reported that one of the WorldTeach volunteers from last semester who will stay on for this one was expelled from her teaching assignment. She had spoken about Taiwan and Tibet one class and her students had reported her. Lisa is not sure if she did a lecture on them or if a student asked a question. The Education Committee has offered to relocate the teacher at another school which is nice. They were within their rights to expel her from China altogether. However, the teacher is currently traveling, so she does not yet know. Lisa is unsure what the teacher will decide to do.

The first night that we arrived in Yantai, the staff from the No 5 middle school where I will be gave us a banquet. I have heard that the banquet culture in China is on the decline and that the government has limited the number of dishes that can be served. However, it is alive and well here in Yantai. The goal of the banquet is for the host to ensure that all of the guests have had as much food and alcohol as they can. The goal is for the guest to be happy, so if you say that you are full they will not force food or drink on you. However, if there is not a lot of food left on the table at the end, the host loses face. You are not to drink of your glass of alcohol unless there is a toast, but don't worry, there are plenty of those. I have now attended three banquets during the four days that I have been here. The good ones start with the delicacy of sea cucumbers. They are supposed to be good for your health, but if you eat too many your nose will start to bleed. Yum. They are about 1 inch in diameter, black and have 1/4 inch bumps on them. I am not a big fan, but the host has been sure to put them on our plates. They have the consistency of a wet noodle, so they are not hard to bite in half and swallow. Yuck. The other dishes can include vegetables, soups, noodles, beef, lots of seafood. The end of the banquet is usually marked by the arrival of a big fish. It is the whole fish and it is very tasty. I have been sick, so I excused myself from the alcohol. However, I have been chugging coke instead which is not always fun. The others have wound up quite tipsy.

It has been difficult for all of us to be fed so much during our international volunteer work. We are being given so much when we are here to give. However, more on that train of thought later after I describe my apartment.

One thing that I hate is the ever present cigarette smoke. It is everywhere and as I sit here,

most are smoking. Yuck. The pollution here is bad and the sky is hazy. However, the streets are clean due to an army of street sweepers that set out each morning. No, these are not machines, but people with brushes.

Crossing the street is fun with cars, bikes, moped, busses and trucks coming from all directions. However, I am beginning to make sense of it and it is not nearly as bad a Calcutta. The cars here include mitsubishi, toyota, an occasional jeep cherokee or chevy product. However, most cars are either audi or vw. All cabs are vw's. Their marketing department here must be kick butt.

My apartment is on the fifth floor of my school. I share it with Jason who will also be teaching at the school. It is much more than I ever expected. The front door opens on a room that is 10 x 30'. This room has a nice table, chairs, a fridge, a propane stove and counters. Our rooms are off of this room. My room is ~ 20' x 20'. I have a bed, a big desk, a wardrobe, a dresser a tv stand and a tv. Yes a tv. The room very rarely gets above 60 degrees so I also have this thick, red blanket. The Chinese know their blankets because this thing is kick butt. However, I also have an electric blanket and other comforters. Sleeping is nonetheless freezing and I always wear my wool hat. Jason's room is a little bigger and has identical furniture. Also off of the main room is another room 30 x 10 that has eleven sinks along the opposite walls. At one end is a hot water heater mounted on the wall that provides hot water for our shower. It is a hand held shower. To use it, you just stand in the middle of the room and hold it. The time while you are lathering is brutal because the room temperature does not rise above 55 F. Off of the sink room is another 10 x 30 room that hold our toilet. There is actually a row of stalls that are built over a trench. The former volunteers convinced the school that they needed a western toilet, so the school installed a toilet in one of the stalls that also empties into the trench. It is interesting, but much nicer than the trench. The temperature in the apartment is consistent with most places that I have been. They are warmer than outside, but cold by the US standards.

There is obviously a lot more to tell. However, I must run off to class, so I will need to leave these to another email. So much is happening, but I have so little time to relate it to you, so please forgive me for how scattered this email has been and how infrequent emails will be for the next few weeks.

zijian,

Jeff

p.s. Thank you to everyone who has been forwarding these emails to my parents. However, they are on the distribution list. I promise that I have not left them off

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