

## **000418 Basketball, beer and squid on a stick by the beach**

Ever since I arrived in Yantai, I have heard of Qingdao's beauty from many people, so this past weekend, we all decided to explore the city. Jason (the other volunteer at my school), Jessica (WT volunteer at the experimental school in Yantai) and I traveled to Qingdao where we would meet up with the other WT volunteers. Qingdao is known in the States, mostly because of its most famous export, Tsingdao beer. The city was taken as a German concession in 1897 and the brewery was opened by the Germans in 1903. The area closest to the ocean is brimming with Bavarian architecture and beautiful beaches. I especially wanted to travel last weekend because I heard that the cherry trees were blooming (the Japanese occupied the city twice in the last century) are were rumored to be spectacular.

Our group met as planned in Qingdao and found an inexpensive hotel for backpackers. Here I just want to add a footnote for anyone planning to travel in China. If you want to check into a hotel in China, you must have your passport and visa in order to avoid a lot of frustration and some conversations with the Public Security Bureau (PSB). The friends that we met left their passports at home resulting in hours of frustration as they went from hotel to PSB to hotel. Fortunately Lisa (our director) had copies of their passports which were faxed to Qingdao to prevent their sleeping on the street. Other than that aggravation, our trip went very well.

Although I was a little put off at first as we approached the city through the industrialized north, I found the rumors of Qingdao's beauty to be true. The air and streets were clean, the beaches beautiful and the little back streets that wound over little hills were charming to wander along. You could look down a quaint little street and imagine that you were in Europe. The windy streets and houses were such a nice departure from the drab, concrete, five story buildings of Yantai. In fact, a lot of newer buildings have imitated the Bavarian style to keep the city's charm. There are the new, steel and glass skyscrapers as well, but they do not detract terribly from the beauty of the city. I spent most of Saturday wandering on my own through the city and checking out the wonderful parks and cherry blossoms. The blossoms were out and beautiful, but they were not as plentiful as I had been lead to believe. The largest density of trees was located in one park. After you entered the park, you could wander from the crowds and walk through the woods on your own along dirt paths. The park reminded me a lot of the Heath in London. Some of the hills in the parks offered great views of the city and of the Laoshan Mountain.

The city is not too touristy although it does sport a McDonalds (coffee and soft serve ice cream!) and two KFC's. I could not help but to splurge on the coffee and ice cream. We also met up for pizza and beer at one restaurant. However, by far the best meal was the one that we had on Saturday night. We wandered along the boardwalk and came upon dozens of vendors cooking fish, squid, skates and other sea food on skewers over grills.

We each opted for several diankao youyou (squid on a stick), the la (spicier) the better. We sat down at low tables by the beach as the vendors competed to bring us inexpensive skewers and beer. The night air was warm and conducive to lively conversations between ourselves and with the vendors. We were still the center of attention which was a little

surprising in such a well known tourist town.

On Sunday I went to Palm Sunday mass at the large, twin-spired church in the city. We opted for the 7AM mass, rather than the 6AM Latin mass. It made no difference, for I would only understand a few words of either. After mass I wandered around a bit more before catching a bus back to Yantai.

A 3 1/2 hour bus trip in China is not as much fun as it may sound. actually, the drive to Qingdao is over new roads and it is not too bad. Spring has arrived in the countryside and the smoke of the coal fires has given way to views of the lush green of the fields and trees. The busses are not the size of Greyhound busses, but rather are more like the shuttle busses at universities or at airports. Once I boarded the bus in either direction, the driver waited until it was full before leaving. The drive out of town was slow as the driver looked for more passengers. The busses typically have three seats across with fold down seats in the aisle to accommodate more people. There are also folding stools by the drive if needed. There is not a bathroom, but there are frequent stops to pick up more people or packages along the way.

I was alone on the return trip to Yantai and it turned out to be a very interesting ride. One man sitting in the aisle opened a can of Coke that contained carbonated water instead of soda. Everyone in the bus was very excited about this and the can was cut open to reveal a ticket and writing inside of the can. Being the only foreigner on the bus, people were eager to show me the can and they tried to explain it to me. What I saw inside appeared to me as though the man had won Y98,000 or about \$12,000 which is a huge sum of money. Teachers at my school only make Y8,400 per year. People started offering the man money, cell phones or ATM cards to get his winning ticket. Some exchanges involving a lot of money occurred and half of the men on the bus got off at one point to deal with the winner. I was asked by the man sitting next to me to help him with a few Y100, but Qingdao had wiped me out and anyway, I was not interested. I need to ask my Chinese friends what that was all about.

By the way, gasoline here is Y2.4 / Liter, or about \$.3 per liter. I know this from reading the pump when our drive fortunately stopped for gas. I say fortunately because I saw one other bus where the drive had tried to go too far between stops and the passengers had to push the bus into the gas station.

## Classes

Last Wednesday, I had my junior three classes. I employed a lesson that I found in the WT handbook. I started the class by asking them to name some famous people. The first class named people like George Washington, Edison, Michael Jordan and Richard Marx (yes, he is huge here.) I then explained what a press conference is and taught them words like reporter and "no comment". I then asked for four volunteers to be the most popular famous people. The rest of the class were to be reporters and photographers. The first class went really well. One reporter asked Richard Marx to sing a song, so he did. The four famous people got

really into it and the class went really well. The second class had more entertainers such as Madonna and Colonel Sanders (KFC is everywhere!). Madonna was asked to dance, so the student grabbed another and started to ball room dance with him. In all, it was a great lesson. This week, I think that I will try doing riddles with them.

My Junior One classes started a lesson on the Market. I bought fruit and vegetables and brought them to class. I told them the English name and then pulled out the fruit from my bag. I would do this for about a dozen fruits or vegetables when I came to the word fish. I would write it on the board and then pretend to pull one out of my bag. The kids got really excited and thought it was pretty funny when I said "no, no" and shook my head. The class was included a game that incorporated the money and market lessons. It has gone pretty well so far.

Basketball.

One common stereotype here is that all Americans are awesome at basketball. Not being a fan of stereotypes, I am happy to tell you that Jason and I taught the teachers at my school a lesson. On Tuesday we were told that the male teachers would play a team from the No 2 High School that afternoon. We were asked to play despite our protests that we were not very good. We played the first half and considering that the high schoolers were pretty good, Jason and I held our own. However, the teachers had thought that we would be their ringers and so they were a little disappointed that we did not dunk every basket. Needless to say, we never were subbed in the second half.

Taishan

I will be taking a trip this weekend to visit Taishan, one of the five famous mountains of China. The trip is sponsored by the Education Committee and I will be missing two days of school next week. I was really torn between the trip and being with my church for Easter. I mostly wanted to be with others who would know and be excited that it was Easter. However, after a lot of debate, I decided to go since this will be my only chance to take a trip like this. Included on the itinerary will be climbing the mountain and visiting Qufu which is Confucius's birth place.

Take care,

Jeff

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