

## **001022 Hong Kong**

Let me just start by saying that any doubts that I ever may have had about the WorldTeach program and the initial fees that I had to pay prior to coming to China, have been forever removed from my mind. WT has been great through the whole ankle incident. As I was writing to you last Thursday, WT was busy sending me emails at 11PM their time to tell me that they had arranged flights for me to Hong Kong if I wanted to go to see the doctor. WT covered the expense of the flights, the visit to the doctor, the hotel bills and other travel expenses through their medical and emergency evacuation insurance. The urgency that they showed regarding getting me to see a good doctor showed that they took my ankle as seriously as I did. WT really came through for me.

Secondly, the fact that I could be whisked away to Hong Kong to see a doctor underlines just how lucky we are in the US to have medical insurance and our own doctors. These are things that I guess that I have taken for granted in the past since they were always provided by my work or my parents work. However, the trip to Hong Kong cost \$1000 for the airfare and another \$200 just for the doctor. These bills alone are the equivalent of a year's salary for a teacher at my school. And, the bills do not include transportation or living expenses. If I were not in the hands of an organization I might still be hopping on one foot or in a cast that would do much more damage than what I did to the ankle. I am definitely fortunate.

OK, on to Hong Kong. I love Hong Kong. It is an amazing, modern metropolis. As I have said before, I have wanted to go to Hong Kong for such a long time that I just could not spend the time after the doctors appointment sitting in my hotel room. I could not do as much as I would have liked normally due to my ankle and the constant rain, but I did get to see enough to make me want to return again.

Going to Hong Kong is like going to another country, which it in a sense it is. I needed to procure a new visa to get back into China once I was done in Hong Kong. Hong Kong also has its own currency, the Hong Kong Dollar which is exchanged at a different rate than the Yuan. Actually, what I found curious is that different banks in Hong Kong offer their own currency. They all offer Hong Kong Dollars, but the bills are backed by the different banks. Some of my bills were from the Hong Kong Shanghai Banking Association, The Bank of China and other banks. It may be similar to how the US used to be with different banks backing different notes. Also, the scarcity of Western goods that we have in Yantai is not at all felt in Hong Kong. It is just like walking into any other modern city in a developed nation, but also Chinese despite the large population of foreigners. Actually, it was surreal to be in a place where I could speak English with most people I contacted and to be around so many foreigners. Being on the Cathay Pacific plane to Hong Kong from Seoul was like being in the US with everything in English and Western food served.

Hong Kong Island and Kowloon are the principal urban areas of the city with the island being what you usually see when you see pictures of Hong Kong. There are also other parts including rural areas, but I did not get to visit these so I do not know much about

them other than what I have read. The northern part of Hong Kong Island is basically wall to wall skyscrapers that teeter up the impossible slopes of the mountain behind. The buildings are a bizarre cityscape is modern, beautiful and tasteful as most of the buildings were built in accordance with feng shui sensitivities. I stayed in the Central area of Hong Kong Island the first night at a YWCA and then moved to Kowloon for the rest of my stay in a YMCA. Kowloon is less expensive than Hong Kong Island and is a shopping mecca claiming to offer more shops offering a greater variety of good per square kilometer than anywhere else in the world. The YWCA and the YMCA were budget accommodations for Hong Kong, but they were the nicest hotels that I have stayed at in China as they were also the most expensive that I have stayed at in China.

Hong Kong Island is the financial center of Hong Kong where most of the people have jobs in the service industry. It is a beautiful city to walk through and marvel at the architecture and parks. One building in particular that I liked was the Hong Kong Bank building which at the time of building was reputedly one of the most expensive buildings ever. At ground level you can see that the whole building is supported on groups of giant pillars. It is possible to walk right under the bank and come out on the other side; a necessity stipulated by the old feng shui belief that the center of power on the island, Government House, which lies directly behind the bank, should be accessible in a straight line by foot from the main

point of arrival on the island, the ferry pier. You can look up from under the bank through the glass atrium into the heart of the building. There is also another building that is lit at night by bands of lights like long, colored fluorescent bulbs. The lights go around the building, with the space between the lights getting smaller as you get higher up the building. The lights can change to be various colors. The color change starts at the bottom and works its way to the top over a period of six seconds or so. So, the top could be blue while green is slowly climbing to the top. As the top becomes green, the bottom is already becoming white. The bulbs at the color transition take on yet another color. For example orange at the transition between red and yellow.

You can also ride a tram to the top of the mountain behind to get great views of the city below (except on rainy days like when I went up). Actually, distributed all throughout the city are great parks which offer welcome green and are beautifully done.

Walking down the main shopping street in Kowloon is like walking down a tunnel of neon. The tunnel effect is produced by the signs of the various shops which stick way out over the street from each side. The signs can be several signs high, reaching high up the high buildings. The sidewalks were packed, even when it was raining. The shops themselves can be small, or there were larger shopping arcades. In any case, there were hundreds of thousands of shops offering electronics, VCDs, food, souvenirs, and anything else that you could imagine. Kowloon is also home to several museums including the Science Museum, the Space Museum and the Art Museum.

The transit system is surprisingly inexpensive compared to the rest of the city. The cabs are big and plentiful. (Traffic drives on the left side of the street.) The subway and busses are easy to figure out and clean. And, to get to and from the airport you can take the

Airport Express Train which rockets there with plush seats, AC and personal video screens.

I am definitely going back to Hong Kong one day.

Talk with you later,

Jeff

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