

Hollingsworth's Adoption

It was two years ago this Easter that my wife and I decided that we wanted to have a second child. For countless reasons, we decided to adopt a little girl from China. Although we were originally told the process would take approximately 12 months, I can now say that finally, 25 months later, we are all home... safe and as happy as can be.



For almost two years I looked forward to this journey to China. Just the thought of the trip brought to mind great anticipation (I'm getting a new daughter) to panic (they don't speak English



and what in the world am I going to eat). We would also have to spend two weeks in China and endure almost 30 hours of traveling each way. Fortunately, our adoption agency planned a trip that provided us with an unforgettable experience in both bringing home the most precious little girl and visiting the fastest growing major economy in the world.

Although China is literally "half way around the world," we hear and read so much about it that we develop preconceived ideas of what to expect. I thought I would share several of these ideas that I had going over and what the reality actually was. Generally, however, I can now report that it is pretty much what you have heard... and more.

Size of cities?

Our trip took us through three different cities; Beijing, Changsha, and Guangzhou. We all expect Beijing, China's capital, to be big. Beijing's population is over 15 million, putting it on par with cities like New York. However, Changsha and Guangzhou, cities most Americans have never heard of, house 7 million and 13 million people respectively. This makes them about the size as the metropolitan areas of Chicago and Los Angeles. In short, no matter where you went, there were people everywhere.



What about pollution?

This was one of the few disappointing parts of our trip. While the places and areas we visited were generally quite clean (no visible trash or garbage), there were obvious signs of excess pollution. We spent two weeks in the larger cities and never had a sunny day.



There was always a cover of “fog” that never seemed to lift. There was also a peculiar smell in the air that rarely went away. The visible exhaust coming from the many cars, trucks, buses, and motorcycles was one sign while the factories sitting on the outskirts of the cities billowing smoke were another. Daily, you could also read articles in the local English papers describing the pollution and the effects it was having on the people and

environment. The good news is that they do recognize the problems and trying to improve the situation.

What about the water?

I fortunately cannot vouch for the water. I was consistently warned to not go near it. We were not allowed to drink it, touch it, or even smell it! We were also told to avoid anything that may have come into contact with it. This eliminated most uncooked fruits and vegetables from our diet while we were there. The good news was though that you could find safe bottled water for a very reasonable price, usually about 20 cents. However, it’s quite a challenge to brush your teeth with bottled water!

What did you eat?

I am sorry to say that we were not completely protected from the traditional Chinese fare. While the hotels we stayed in did an admirable job of preparing some Western meals, nothing really tasted like “home cooking.” It was also all too easy to find your daily assortment of duck, turtle, eel, and various cow and chicken parts you’ve never considered eating before. I will say though... if in China, run to McDonalds and away from Kentucky Fried Chicken.



Are things as cheap as you hear?

Yes and no. As mentioned, you could easily find a bottle of water for 20 cents. Once you got outside of the hotel or other tourist areas, things were generally priced extremely well. Clothing, food, and normal consumer staples were often less than half what you would expect in the US. However, one area that puzzled me was the electronics. Things like computers, cell phones, and DVD players were priced higher than they would be in the US. I was told that people who travel to the US and Europe often buy their electronics there and bring them back because the pricing is so much better abroad.

Is the West having an effect on their culture?



Undoubtedly, yes. In Beijing we stayed at a Holiday Inn. As mentioned, we visited both McDonalds and KFC. I actually bought a baby stroller from the local Wal-Mart and had some Starbucks coffee. Across the street from one of our hotels was a 7-11



convenience store. The most prominent high-end luxury car was a Buick. In the stores, you saw many of the same brand names that you see here. Believe it or not, cell phone use seemed to be more prevalent there than in the states. Overall, you could tell they were embracing anything American.

Is the whole country under construction?

Yes, the entire country.

Will they be able to get ready in time for the Olympics?

See previous question.

What about the disparity of wealth we read so much about?

There was a very obvious growing divide between the rich and the poor in China. Inside of the larger cities, you would often see poor individuals set up carts selling cooked sweet potatoes and mushrooms in front of 5 star hotels. You could find a brand new luxury Buick parked next to hundreds of old bicycles. There would be a dreadful little "hole in the wall" restaurant situated next to magnificent state-of-the-art buildings.





Positioned throughout the cities were deplorable looking apartments buildings.



We also had the opportunity to visit the orphanage that Claire was in, located in YiYang City. YiYang is a small town about 60 miles outside of Changsha. This trip offered us the occasion to drive through China's "countryside" and witness the lifestyles of those individuals who had not yet migrated to the cities. What we saw was farm after farm after farm. Each of these farms would have several small huts where people lived and chickens and cows roamed freely. YiYang itself was a little more modern, but only because it had actual concrete buildings. It is almost indescribable how the city was some of the most run-down and awful areas I had ever seen.

The best part of the trip was obviously bringing home Claire. We welcomed a wonderful 10 month old, fourteen pound little girl. She is completely healthy and has honestly had an easier time adjusting since we got back than we have. She continues to amaze us in almost every way. Gretchen and I have discussed taking her back to China for a visit when she gets older. It will probably be when she gets a good bit older though... it was a long trip!

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