

Shanghai

hello everyone,

I know I haven't written much lately, but lo, the time has come for yet another Shanghai tale.

normally we get into shanghai around 4 AM. this time we didn't get in until about 4 PM. so this story has a few more twists.

Ryan and I departed from the ship around 4:30 PM local time (3:30 AM East Coast) and headed towards the ever popular underground market. well, we hit some traffic and thus didn't get there until about 6:30. after stopping in to see our "girlfriends" at the purse shop, where Ryan purchased 15 prada and Gucci and coach bags, we discovered that the whole market would be closing at 8:00. so I went on a frenzy, as this is our last time in china.

whizzing through store after store, buying whatever it was that suited my fancy. Ryan had some other things to buy, so we split up. bad idea.

we agreed to meet in front of the, always an ethnic treat, KFC at 8:30.

as I'm ripping around, totally lowballing every purchase I made, I see that it is about 7:55 PM. as such, I duck into one of the few stores that I see that's still open. this is where I argue and fuss and rant and rave one last time to get my ridiculously low price. I got it by the way.

anyway, before I know it, it's 8:35 and I start hauling all my junk back towards the KFC. then all the lights go out. Boom! I'm in total darkness by myself and the dark silhouettes of shops all look identical. so as I'm pacing down the dark, lonely corridor, a flashlight gets shined right in my face...behind it, a Chinese cop. he starts yelling in Chinese at me, to which he gets a blank stare. I show him through hand signals that I'm trying to find my way out, and he stops yelling and points me in the "right" direction. 10 minutes later, as I'm stumbling through the dark, I'm approached by 5-6 more cops, they yell and carry on and I ignore them. I'm on a mission. I must find the KFC.

I get to the KFC, Ryan is nowhere in sight. for that matter, no one is in sight. I yell out "RYAN!!!" as loud as I can, hoping he's within earshot.

silence.

Shanghai

I continue walking down the pathway, and around the corner I'm surrounded by 7 police officers. all very large, dark men. they encircle me, and start moving in closer and closer. I introduce myself in Chinese (which is about all I've learned at this point) and ask in English if anyone speaks English.

one guy shakes his head and says "No English" and they all move closer. at this point I'm ready to cry. I'm 13,000 miles from home, it's cold and dark, no one speaks English, I don't have a working telephone, and I don't know how to get back to the ship. the yelling intensified. a dire situation at best.

suddenly it dawns on me that I have my "girlfriend's" phone number in my pocket(you may remember her from last time. from the purse shop where Ryan's "girlfriend" worked, and we decided he couldn't be the only one with a girlfriend, so I took her sister. ha!) so I call up Yo Yo (that's her name, for real...) on one of the cop's cell phones and ask her if she can explain on the phone to the cops my situation, to which she graciously agrees. at this point, a nearby vendor is walking out/ locking up his shop for the night and hears all of this. he spoke some English, so he helped me out even more. somehow we managed to find my cab drivers phone number (don't ask me how) and I call him. as soon as he hears English, he hands the phone to Ryan, who is sitting in the back seat. I've never been so glad to hear his voice. he said they looked for me until they were kicked out of the market, so they started to head back to the ship. graciously, the cab driver turned around and came back for me. they were stuck in traffic so it took about 30 minutes for them to find me at a nearby subway station.

Ryan came running up to me and the first words out of his mouth where "you have no idea how glad I am to see you, I've been freaking out man" to which I replied "I think I have an idea..." and I explain to him that I was cornered in a shop, and by the time they let me out, my wallet was a lot lighter, and the hallway was a lot darker. we get back to the ship to drop everything off and decide to call it a night rather than going back out and seeing the night life. it was too cold and we were both exhausted.

when morning rolls around, everyone already knows the story somehow and I've gotten grief for it all day long. the only thing I can say in response is that I made it back to the ship and nothing was stolen or broken.

Shanghai

the funniest part about this whole thing is the fact that I honestly thought this trip would not warrant any excitement worth noting in an update. ha!

such is the life of Tyler.

love you all!

Tyler

Shanghai - 2

ok, sorry there are no drunken rages, or prostitute purchases in this voyage's tale, but las, tis a good tale, filled with adventure, suspense, laughter, and tears. and off we go! the night before last (I have no idea what day it is today... I think it's Thursday... which would have made this story start on Tuesday night), I was expecting to be called down for the 4 1/2 hour maneuver into Shanghai. I told the 1st engineer that I wouldn't come down unless they called me, and lo! they did not call, so I slept all night! when morning came we were pulled into the dock at shanghai- which as I have said before would put the fear of God into any one that doesn't believe that china is an economic powerhouse. and I opened the door to look outside and was immediately hit with a wall of smoke and dust... much like standing behind a bus that's accelerating. ah, shanghai. it was virtually impossible to see the sun at all through the soot and the smoke, but that's how it is there. after breakfast I went down to the engine room to see if I had to work at all. there was a note on the white board that said "Karl (the 2nd engineer), you are 'the man,' everyone else is going ashore. don't f*** anything up! - the 1st" so I took that to mean I was free for the day. I ran upstairs and changed into suitable clothes and headed out. I left with Ryan and the 2nd Mate, Dave for this GIANT underground mall type place that is hidden underneath the Chinese Museum of Modern Technology. this market has more stores than ever could be visited in a few days time. and I was only in town for 12 hours. so we get to the market and start doing some shopping, we stopped at one store (I will not say what we got there because someone on this e-mail list's Christmas present was purchased here) where we met with Ryan's "girlfriend" from the last trip. we joked about it, and of course, picked on Ryan. after there things started to get a bit screwy. it started approaching noon, and the 2nd Mate had to be back to the ship by noon, so he left us, and took our all day cab driver/ chaperone/ translator (which only costs \$10 for the day) with him and he didn't return. so me and Ryan were left to our own devices in a country where our phones didn't work, we didn't know the language, and we didn't have any connections. well we decided to grab some food, and of course when you're in China, the only restaurant you can find is a KFC. so we went there. I was amazed... I couldn't even order at KFC... I wanted a chicken sandwich and got fish instead. it was decent enough I guess... Ryan ordered something wrong too, so he went back and got more food. a full meal at KFC for both of us cost around \$4. not bad eh? from there we wandered around some more. in the dark back corner of this marketplace was a tiny tea shop with a single old Chinese woman sitting in there at a small

Shanghai - 2

table. we walked in and gave the appropriate Chinese greeting (pronounced Ni-How) and sat with her. she tried to say something to us, which of course, neither of us understood.

so she yelled out and a beautiful 18 year old Chinese girl came in (Ryan is in love with her... he hasn't stopped talking about her since) and started translating. I asked which type of tea is the very best and she motioned to a small tin on the wall. I asked if we could try some prior to buying it.

the old woman smiled kindly and nodded her head. we all went back to her little table and sat down. she went through a big long process of making the tea the traditional Chinese way and served each of us with a tiny cup which we all drank slowly in unison. immediately she refilled our cups and we continued to talk and laugh and sip our tea. we then decided to make a toast to the Junior Engineer Neil (who is ordained as a minister in the Church of Poseidon's... yeah, I speak the truth) and all his great wisdom. at this, Ryan foolishly decided to down his tea in one shot... not realizing that it was scalding hot. so now everything tastes like rubber to him. hehehe. so after we finished off a whole pot of tea, we said our goodbyes and left the tea shop to continue shopping. at this point I was forcefully grabbed by my arm and was dragged into a toy shop. I had walked by this shop earlier looking for a toy car for my sister Cassidy. I found a really nice remote controlled formula one racecar and I asked the man how much he wanted. when he said \$35 I laughed at him. he asked me "what you bess price?" to which I replied "\$10" that got a sad look and a "no, that impossible!" and so I said "ok, bye" and walked out. well when he grabbed me this time he said "my friend I make special deal for you. \$20" and I said, "no, I will pay \$10."

he argued and argued and I didn't budge at all. yeah, I got the car for \$10.

[I trust that dad and Joan will allow Cassidy to play with it more than they will... 😊] I think Cassidy will enjoy it because it is what she asked for and it says right on the box "FOR TO FEEL EXTREMITY SPEED!" so you know it must be intense. after this point I had to find Natalie a good Christmas present as well. hers is not one so much to play with as a toy as to appreciate it for its artistic qualities. I got her a very nice chess set with handcrafted individualized pieces. I feel that as a 9 year old she is capable of learning the game and maybe even playing with her sister. I hope she enjoys it... if not a purchased a back up (Joan use your best judgment to decide if the second present is more suitable, and if the so the girls can share the chess set).

Shanghai - 2

the chess set came at a great bargain as well. the guy wanted \$65, I paid \$12. oh yeah!

after all the shopping was done we started looking for other guys from the ship who we had seen wandering around... they were all gone. we went to one shop where everyone from the ship goes and of course the lady inside said everyone had gone back to the ship. we had no working phone, no translator, and no idea how to get back to the ship. we were totally alone. we both dug through our pockets and wallets and luckily Ryan had a business card from the all day cab driver that left with the 2nd mate and didn't come back. he gave it to the lady and asked her to call the number and find out how we could get back to the ship. she did and wrote something down on a sheet of paper and told us to show this to a cab driver outside and he would take us there. so we thanked her for her help and did what she said. the cabbie spoke no English. we showed him the paper, he stared at it for about 5 seconds and then nodded and took us to the ship. this guy drove like an absolute maniac. what should have been a 45 minute drive took less than 20.

we almost hit at least 5 pedestrians, 3 motorcycles, and at least 25 cars.

I'm talking less than an inch misses here. I don't think I've ever fervently called on the name of Jesus so many times in 20 minutes. horrifying.

regardless of the fact that it was more than a 40 mile cab ride, the fare was just around \$10.

he brought us to the gate of the container yard where we met up with our old cab driver that said he couldn't find us at the mall. at this point we went to buy some "DVD movies" for \$1 a piece. it's pretty much awesome. I bought like 12 or so, Ryan bought about that many as well and all is good! from there we went to get some "yum yum" at a local restaurant. I knew it would be classy because all the meat was on a rack outside hanging out in the sun.

mmmmm.

we went inside and had a great 4 course meal , for which they attempted to make us pay 400 Yuan. we didn't even have that much money on us at all. so we gave them \$30 and bolted. the meal consisted of fried duck eggs with cabbage sprouts, small sautéed fish, shrimp, and a mushroom-spinach dish, of course accompanied with great sticky rice. it was nice. oh and did I mention that our driver, who sat and ate with us downed a 40 oz. beer with his meal and then drove us back to the ship? gotta love china. we made it back to the ship with plenty of time to spare and had a nice night of maneuvering out where I was allowed to work on my sea projects the whole time.

Shanghai - 2

now we are rounding the northern end of Japan heading for open water. the entire sea is speckled with flashes of light from the swarms of Japanese Squid boats that patrol these waters. these boats use intense light to attract squid to the surface, so as a result we can see them from far away.

the waters are calm, but that is promised to change very soon. I will update more and I apologize that I have not been responding as frequently to e-mails. I do read every one of them, but as time has been short lately, I have not had the chance to reply. please know I love you all and will write again soon!

love love,

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