28 June – High Speed Train to Beijing

Our rainy stay in Shanghai came to an end on the 28th. We moved on to Beijing via the High Speed Train. Hongqiao Railway was transformed from a pre-WWII Russian styled structure (previous visit 2000) to an international transportation hub.

Buying the train tickets was an experience. It took four attempts. No American credit cards accepted was a surprise. If you visit China, be ready for the rejection of Visa, MC and AX. China is self-sufficient. Their business comes from locals with Chinese bank cards now. Moses took out so much cash that his wallet could not bend in half. 100RMB is the largest denomination.

The amount of luggage we drug around drew a bit of attention, not to mention the hacky sack the students kicked around inside the station.

A very nice middle age woman traveler asked Moses to watch her luggage (while she went off to get some food), then she asked for a phone number and an offer to pick him up at the station next. What is this society coming to? The train ride was comfortable, efficient and on-time.

The landscape outside was a be rugged, as expected for the first half of the trip. Somewhere between Nanging and Beijing, we went through a mountainous region. Then the landscape changed. One might expect to find such organized farming in the US.
The “second class” train is quite nice inside, not too different than economy class aircraft. I noticed that they have dropped the “hard seat/soft seat” classification. This may mean that Chinese rearends have all gotten softer. Once the train reach cruising speed, it hovered around 300 kM/hour (180 mph). Very smooth, no indication that the train was at that velocity.

The view out the window was worth the price of the ticket. Travelling 700 or 800 miles through the heartland of China, one gain a sense of how large this country really is. Too bad the landscape did not change substantially for the length of the trip.

At some point, we saw some new cities sprouting out of nowhere. This photo missed most of the construction Moses meant to capture. Three construction crane can be seen in the center of the photo, while 20 construction crane are just out of sight to the right. All the projects are at roughly the same level. Where did they get the workers to work on this scale of projects? Well, this is China with 1.2 billion people. But where do they house them during the construction? Who feeds them?

About an hour and a half south of Beijing, the trained stop at this seemingly brand new city. If the advertisements on the construction barrier are foretelling the planned development, this is going to be a modern and active community.

We soon pulled into Beijing South Station where a driver and his boss await us. They were somewhat amazed by the amount of luggage as well. Two hours through Beijing’s traffic and 60 miles up the road we checked into Mutianyu.
Ahh! I may not expect this level of pampering. American expat executive Jim Spear has developed a western style accommodation fit for the most discriminating tourist. Our house could sleep 7 in style, each with his/her own bed.

Visit www.theschoolhouseatmutianyu.com
For a description of their offering.

The living room/dining room wing is an addition, while the front portion of the house is a renovated old farm house. Jim Spear designed a number of these projects.

Moses’ shower has a round window, seen on the right face of the farmhouse section. One can have a view of the rock wall on the outside while showering, and vise versa. It is advisable to shower in total darkness.

The bed was a welcoming sight. The luxury of snuggling up to thick blankets and towels was a level of luxury beyond expectation.