



## ***Olympic Report from Beijing by Pete Wade***

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***New pics added! Scroll down to view!!***

### ***Beijing Blog – Day 23- August 20***

The cheerfulness and helpfulness of the Volunteers here in Beijing is exemplary, perhaps the best of any Olympics I have been to (and that covers a lot). The only problem is that no one has trained them very well. They could probably tell you where Shanghai is, but beyond that, it gets dicey. If you ask a young Volunteer where something tricky is, then you really understand what a “Chinese fire drill” is.

For anyone who read my blog for Torino, this is a repeat, but it bears repeating because it is one of the humorous human interactions that you always remember. When trading pins with a Lithuanian whose English is rough, he will thank you with the Lithuanian word for “Thanks”. And that word is “Atchoo”. No kidding. So, after trading a pin, the Lithuanian tradee will say, “Atchoo”. If you instinctively say, “God bless you”, then he will say “Atchoo” again, wondering why the pin trade was so good to merit a “God bless you”. This could get you to say, “God bless you” again, and I suppose you could spend the whole morning doing this.

Before leaving for Beijing, a Chinese friend of my mother’s, wrote out “Would you trade pins with me?” in Chinese characters. This has really been helpful and generates some surprised looks from the locals. For the most part, the locals expect foreigners to know no Mandarin, and even the most rudimentary attempt to communicate in Mandarin is always appreciated, even though the foreigner’s pronunciation is almost always way off base. And, sometimes it will even prompt a chuckle. Here, if you have someone laugh at what you say or do, it will likely be because what you did was funny-peculiar, not funny-ha-ha.

ALL of the Chinese babies are cute. Not all of the adults are. This market would be a gold mine for an orthodontist.

### ***Beijing Blog – Day 22- August 19***

It is very difficult to imagine that a dozen of the seventeen Olympic days have passed. Lots of the things that visitors worried about turned out to be OK, like transportation and water problems. There were all kinds of disasters forecast for water-borne bacteria leading to all kinds of potential maladies, and I have yet to hear of one person with gastric distress . . . good news. The athletes continue to be in high spirits. Even Kobe Bryant and LeBron James, who I ran into in the Olympic Village yesterday, were still laughin’ and jivin’. The big name stars in basketball, volleyball and football/soccer are being treated like rock stars in public. Huge crowds of Chinese following them around begging for photos and autographs. LeBron is one very big guy, not overly tall, but big everywhere (well, maybe not everywhere).

It is heartening to see some athletes from small countries win medals, one from Panama and one from Cameroon last night in athletics. And it is very moving to see the flash of emotion on the victory stand . . . the national anthem . . . the tears rolling down faces . . . the roar of support from the crowd. All of the other Olympic things are great but this is really what it is all about.

You may have never heard of Usain Bolt, the fastest man in the world. He broke the world record for the 100 meter sprint in the preliminary heat, and virtually jogged the last 20 meters.



Then did the same thing in the 200 meters last night. When he gears up for a complete race in the finals, watch out!

### ***Beijing Blog – Day 21- August 18***

Records falling like leaves. The new swimsuit technology has lived up to its hype and the swimmers have notched up their performances noticeably. Michael Phelps won his record eighth Gold Medal and no Olympic athlete has ever won more Golds. Some disappointments as the Jamaican women smoked all of the Americans.

Everyone, from the athletes to the police to the security staff, has noticeably relaxed now as more than a week has gone by without any incidents. There was an uptight atmosphere in the early days but now you might be able to hide a rhinoceros in your backpack and whiff it through security.

You have to love the “typical” restaurants in China. The Chinese like lots of light, lots of noise, sharing main dishes, kids running around, lots of slurping . . . it’s a real circus and nothing at all like American “typical” restaurants. Even the upscale spots are like this, and it’s rather fun. Last night we ate in an upscale seafood restaurant where the wait staff ordered your food with walkie-talkies to a central order station. Quite a spectacle.

### ***Beijing Blog – Day 20- August 17***

Lots of interesting event headlines . . . Phelps wins seventh Gold (now 7 for 7, one to go) . . . US whumps very tough Spain in basketball, Spain is the current European champion . . . US runners did very well in the sprint prelims, quarters and semis, looks good for several medals here . . . some surprises, a Gold in the womens 10,000 meter walk.

First Peking Duck on this trip. This is one of those ‘touristy’ things that is worth the hype. Pundits call it a Chinese taco, but that is really not on target. Take a thin, round, crepe-like “pancake”; take 2 – 3 slices of baked duck, skin-on and dip it into the plum sauce; put the duck into the pancake; add slivered scallions plus a tiny piece of cucumber, and then fold in the four corners. Delicious, even if you are not a fan of duck. Then, the bill. Duck again.

Taking a taxi here is a bit of an adventure. Here are some taxi rules. Drive fast or faster. Stop at some red lights. Honk at everything that moves. Curse at anyone who gets into your way. Play chicken with the huge Chinese, diesel-belching, buses. Ignore all police. Beijing traffic is like being caught in a salmon run.

Got seven hours sleep for the first time in two weeks and I feel like I could leap tall buildings in a single bound. Olympic sleep deprivation is unique in 95F degree weather? You can’t remember your name after a while. Not that anyone matters.

### ***Beijing Blog – Day 19- August 16***

USA-China volleyball last night was one of the most exciting Olympic contests I have seen. Five games with the match going down to the final few points, and the (mostly local) crowd standing and screaming “CHI-NA, CHI-NA” at the end. The very essence of Olympic competition.

After a Noah’s-ark-like deluge on Thursday, the sky cleared yesterday and for only the second time in my six trips to Beijing, you could actually see the mountains from the City.

We are eating dinner in typical local restaurants in our neighborhood virtually every night, which is also fun. We are usually the only foreigners in the place, which often causes a little bit of a stir. Several of the wait staff will come over and try some English on us. They have no idea we are Americans, of course, (we could be from Croatia as far as they are concerned) but they will try out their English anyway. For me, I usually start out trips to China being very careful with the food, choosing things I can identify, deftly avoiding the really spicy stuff. There is no



time for gastric distress on a trip like this. But, as time goes by, I like to get more adventurous and by the end, I will try things that no one outside of China ever thought about. And, I find that I enjoy almost everything. Last night was sea cucumber dumplings . . . very tasty. A sea cucumber is one of God's ugliest creations, but very edible. They probably think the same about us.

### ***Beijing Blog – Day 18- August 15***

It is hard to believe that the Games are half completed. The 17 days of the Games have the feeling of being shot out of a cannon.

USA-Greece basketball last night resulted in a huge victory over a very good Greek team. The US shot poorly, got a lot of fouls but played intense defense. This is the best US Olympic Team of all time. They are magical, hugely entertaining.

I traded a pin with the Chef d Mission (Team Manager) of the Ethiopian team and he spoke English, so I asked him how to say "thank you" in Ethiopian. He said "amasignitalo" (sp?). So, I said that and he smiled. Then, he took me around to each of the other members of their team and one by one he told them to give me a pin, after which I said amasignitalo. This provoked a big laugh from each member, so I am guessing that my pronunciation resulted in something like, "I am a big turkey".

There is a real sense of "close enough for government work" in China. I have noticed it often on past trips. Open wiring everywhere . . . missing manhole covers . . . things just not fitting together well . . . half-finished paint jobs . . . and on and on. An OSHA inspector would have a heart attack. The Chinese are very proud of putting a man in space, but it wouldn't have surprised me that he actually landed in Toledo.

The Mandarin word for "no" is "me-ow". Yup, just like the response from your cat when you ask her to do something.

### ***Beijing Blog – Day 17- August 14***

Everyone continues to rave about the friendliness and eagerness to help on the part of the locals. The volunteers will hand carry you to where you need to be, and "Welcome to Beijing" is on everyone's lips. The spirit of the volunteers is the foundation for the atmosphere of any Games, and here it gets five stars.

Amusing anecdote – two waitresses trying to open a screwcap bottle of wine with a corkscrew. Also, the servers like to serve white wine warm and red wine with ice.

Tonight is our first chance to see the US Basketball Team, a game against powerhouse Greece. Today with almost all of the qualifying basketball teams having at least one or two players in the NBA, or with NBA experience, none of these Games are cakewalks. Even Angola (Angola?) has a dangerous team.

### ***Beijing Blog – Day 16- August 13***

Michael Phelps won his second Gold Medal yesterday, so now he is two-for-two in his pursuit of eight Golds. We had the good fortune at the Swimming event to sit next to Peter Ueberroth, now President of the US Olympic Committee. Watching his reaction to Phelps and the other six Medalists was worth the price of admission. Ueberroth is one of my personal heroes. He ran the remarkably successful Summer Olympics in LA in 1984, and those Games probably saved the Olympic Movement after a rough patch in the late-70s and early-80s.

Wandered around the Olympic Village again yesterday trading pins and shaking hands. Olympic athletes are not just a bunch of ordinary kids.



To be a world-class athlete takes years of focus and discipline. They are almost always smart, poised and intense, recognized at home as their country's heroes and heroines. It is amazing how many go on in life to be very significant citizens in their country, political and business leaders.

At home, service vehicles and trucks often have warning signals when they are backing up . . . "beep, beep, beep". Here, they have a recorded verbal message. I don't know what that message actually means, probably something like, "Look out, this vehicle is moving backwards". But, the pronunciation is "Yo Joe, you are Jewish". Perhaps an immediate conversion to Judaism if you don't get out of the way in time?

### ***Beijing Blog – Day 15- August 12***

Michael Phelps goes for his second Gold Medal this morning and we will be there to cheer him on. He is entered in eight events and if he wins all, he will be the first Olympian to do so since the legendary Mark Spitz. And, we are looking forward to seeing the so-called "water cube" stadium.

Some of the Mandarin words are fun to say. For example, the word for "taxi" is pronounced "choo-dzoo-chuh" and it sorts of rolls off the tongue. And some words repeat syllables for a diminutive, like "ma" is "woman" and "ma-ma" is mother (coincidentally). So, there are a lot of these kinds of words, "woo-woo", "da-da", "choo-choo", "ga-ga" and the like. It just dawned on me that my one-and-a-half year old grandson has been learning Mandarin.

Hey, Sig and Cliff . . . wish you were here!

Never, never assume that the "little green man" traffic signal assures safe passage across the street. Never.

The Chinese are relaxed about body noises, belches and worse. As for the guy sitting behind you on the bus, he is either a first chair oboeist for the symphony or . . .

In restaurants, they will ask you if you want your cabernet sauvignon on ice.

### ***Beijing Blog – Day 14- August 11***

Big rain yesterday put a damper on everything, kept athletes in their dorms and several outdoor events were canceled . . . but not USA – China basketball. It was on every TV in every bar, restaurant and pub.

I am continually amazed at the attentive service we receive in restaurants. Last night, we had one waiter who literally stood by our side throughout the entire meal, continually making sure everything was just right, including picking the hot peppers out of our meat dish. Then the restaurant gave us a small gift as we were leaving. Unbelievable.

Speaking of restaurants, other than the ubiquitous McD's and KFC, it is not easy to find Western food unless you hit one of the major hotels. And, it is expensive relative to what you might expect. A full Chinese meal with a bottle of wine (another story) is usually around \$8 – 15. The same sort of a Western meal in a major hotel is more than double, often triple. Last week, I stopped into the Peninsula (perhaps Beijing's best hotel) for a relief meal, something light and cool, and I ordered the Berries Supreme. For the price, I expected a lap dance with Hallie Berry.

Gymnastics start tomorrow, always a highlight. Interestingly, I have not seen a single person scalping tickets so it must be a no-no here.

### ***Beijing Blog – Day 13- August 10***

The Ceremonies are done. Everyone is here. The Olympic Village (where the Teams live, eat, etc.) is buzzing with electricity. You can just feel the excitement in the air. We participated in the Welcoming Ceremony for one of the Teams yesterday and it was very nice, with the highlight being a special song by a group of 30 elementary schoolers.

Local Beijingers were captivated by the Opening Ceremonies. Lots of raves and even some tears. Most of the locals have never seen anything at all that resembles this event.

Did some pin trading in the Village yesterday. It is hard to explain pin trading to anyone who has never been to the Olympics. In short, each National Olympic Committee (NOC) provides a handful of lapel pins to their athletes, coaches and officials. Then they trade these pins between each other, the purpose being to be used as an “ice breaker” to draw athletes from different cultures/languages together. The French athlete need know no Chinese with the Chinese athlete, but they will get together just to trade their pins . . . a great device that works. And spectators get drawn into it too. Lots of fun.

As previously mentioned, the Chinese use pinyin (Romanized Chinese written language) to make it easier for foreigners to understand written words. This can lead to some humorous translations. For example, a menu item was “stewt beef and dried horse pis” (stewed beef and dried horse peas . . . I hope).

### ***Beijing Blog – Day 12 - August 9***

Opening ceremonies last night. Colorful, flawless, evocative, but doesn't rate in the class of “great”. Beautiful with lots of impressive special effects. It is difficult to be critical of something so vast and complicated, and perhaps we are getting jaded, this being the fourteenth Olympics attended. However, with everything else being so finely-tuned and over-the-top, I really expected more. Our experience was tainted by the senseless organization of pedestrian traffic, the restrictive attitude of the so-called service staff and the stadium itself. The Bird's Nest Stadium is architecturally spectacular, especially all lit up at night. However, it is not a great stadium for spectators. The concrete/steel building holds the heat (94F at start time) and there is no air flow, making for an oppressively hot four-hour event. The sight lines are poor from a lot of the stadium with lots of obstruction, some of which are caused by the special limitations of the Olympics (media stuff in the way, etc.).

The attitude of the police, service staff and volunteers is basically, “We hope you have a great Games . . . I don't know where anything is . . . but you cannot go there no matter what”, all said with a smile. We asked a volunteer about where something was. She didn't know, so she called her supervisor, who also didn't know. He called his supervisor who didn't know and we finally were surrounded by five supervisors, none of whom had a clue. Now I really understand what a “Chinese Fire Drill” is.

Typically, the first few days of any Games is full of glitches - - uneven directions and signage; illogical restrictions; poorly-trained volunteers and staff; nervousness of security officials who see all foreigners as potential terrorists, etc. But, it all settles down as the days go by. The most impressive thing, though, is the attitude of all the helpers who are really eager to help and impress visitors with China. Good rules-of-thumb for visitors? Plan lots of time to get “there” . . . stay relaxed and be a respectful guest . . . appreciate the unbelievable effort it takes to stage a one-time-only event like this . . . relish the good stuff.

### ***Beijing Blog – Day 11 - August 8***

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## ***Beijing Blog – Day 10 - August 7***

Generally speaking, the Chinese are hugely superstitious, looking at all kinds of things to generate luck and avoid misfortune. Like numbers. As you probably know, the number 8 is lucky (very close pronunciation to "rich") and the number 4 is unlucky. So a special date was chosen to open the Olympic Games here in Beijing . . . 8 – 08 – 08. This will be the luckiest day for the next 80 years. And, we feel lucky just to be here.

Today is Opening Ceremonies. It promises to be the most spectacular Opening Ceremonies ever, and that is saying something because past Openings have been the most impressive visual entertainment events I have ever seen. We have tickets on the "40 yard line" and hope to get a few nice pictures. And, there will be a lot more Olympic-related stuff written here in future days than in the previous blogs. We were in the Olympic Village (OV) yesterday and you can just sense the excitement building. The OV is by far the most impressive of all past OVs in previous Games, over the top like everything else for these Games so far.

As I have already mentioned, the Chinese population, at least here in Eastern China, is far more homogeneous than in the US or Europe. At home, we have tall people/short people; fat people/skinny people; black people/brown people/white people, and all have very different facial and body characteristics. There is no risk of confusing Shaquille O'Neil and Mickey Rooney. Here, people are much more uniform. Now, at the risk of being politically incorrect, this can present a problem for Western visitors. An example, a few nights ago I had dinner in a nice restaurant. My female server brought me a beer ("pee-joo"). Several minutes later, I decided

to have another one so I looked for my server (has the term “waitress” gone the way of “stewardess”?) and it dawned on me that all of the female servers resembled each other. Can I be that unobservant? So, I waited until the proper one came over, and vowed to pay more attention. Cleverly, I decided to look at her name tag (in both Chinese and English, as most are now). Her name was Zhang. So, the next time I needed something, I flagged Zhang, and she looked at me as if she had never seen me before. Uh oh, wrong Zhang. It turns out that 30% of the people in China have the surname Zhang. There were probably a third of the servers in that restaurant who were named Zhang. This is too hard.

### ***Beijing Blog – Day 9 - August 6***

One of the early impressions of the Beijingers is that they are trying to hard to be welcoming. Service people all over the city (wait staff, police on the street, etc.) are often wearing “smiley” badges, reminding them to smile and be friendly. And, it’s working!

One of the difficulties foreigners have in Asia is dealing with the written language. In France, for example, even if you don’t know what “patisserie” is, you can look it up in your little French-English guide (and then go in and have a jelly doughnut). Not so here. There is simply no way, without literally months and months of formal study, that a foreigner can deal with written Mandarin. But, there is hope and it is called “pinyin”. Pinyin is an attempt to put Mandarin into Roman letters so that foreigners have a fighting chance of coping with written and spoken communications. Basically, pinyin is phonetic Mandarin in Roman. So, when you want to learn how to say, “hello”, you can look it up in your little guide and find “hello = ni-hao”. This is a good start but still way from perfect. This is because tiny changes in tone make a big difference in translation. The word “ma” has four totally unrelated meanings, based on tone and inflection, including “mother” and “horse”. So, a simple sentence like, “this woman is my wife” can be very easily misspoken as “this horse is my wife”. A small slip can mean sleeping alone for a while.

In the center City and on the major tourist routes, some of the street signs have both Mandarin and pinyin on the sign, great news for wandering foreigners. However, many other signs do not. If you are on one of the streets (or restaurant menus) with no pinyin, life gets very difficult quickly. First, you look at your map for the Chinese characters. On your map, the first character for the street you are on looks like a monkey with a hockey stick. Great. So, you look at the street sign and, yup, there’s the monkey with the hockey stick. Then, at the next corner, you look at the next sign and, voila, the monkey again. You think, “hey, I’ve got this stuff figured out” and you happily walk yet another block. However, in China, the street names change every few blocks (because the city used to be a whole bunch of little villages). So, you look at the next street sign and, damn, the first character looks like a Volkswagen with a bunch of sticks on top. And, you are back in deep do-do.

### ***Beijing Blog – Day 8 - August 5***

Two days to go before Opening Ceremonies. You can notice the athletes, coaches and officials showing up now, wandering the streets jet-lagged.

Interestingly, the surname of the President of China is Hu (pronounced “who”) and the Chinese Premier’s surname is Wen (pronounced “when”). I wonder if their Treasury Secretary’s name is How Much? You could probably have some fun with this with a little thought.

Today, English is commonly taught in Chinese schools and English lessons are very popular among ambitious young Chinese professionals. English fluency is a status symbol. In Beijing, foreigners are frequently approached on the streets by young Chinese, usually in small groups, eager to try out their English on foreigners. It’s cute the first few times but gets annoying after a while.

In China, everything is over-the-top, both in good and not-so-good ways. The Great Wall? How could anyone envision a wall 25 – 100 feet high that is over 3000 miles long? (No, you can't see it from the moon.) The so-called Forbidden City, built over 600 years ago, has 10,000 rooms and is over a mile from end to end, truly a "Holy Mackerel" kind of a place. The "not-so-good" that comes first to mind is the pollution. Beijing's air, much improved from my past trips due to stringent controls over manufacturing and traffic, is still pretty nasty. It makes LA look like the Swiss Alps. And Beijing traffic is on steroids . . . pedestrians need to be very careful.

### ***Beijing Blog – Day 7 - August 4***

There are some words that spoiled Americans seldom find a need to use in their daily life, words like "wretched" and "disgusting". All it takes is one visit to a typical Chinese public toilet, especially the ones a little off the beaten tourist track, to wonder if there are any words that transcend "wretched" and "disgusting". They just don't illustrate the experience adequately. At the risk of being indiscrete, imagine twenty or thirty round holes in the floor next to each other peopled by guys lined up just squattin', spittin', smokin' and sh\*\*\*in'. No privacy of any kind. And it smells accordingly. It's enough to make you forget nature's call. And, it makes you want to hug the porcelain fixtures in your hotel.

Please note that some of my remarks may sound like I am criticizing or denigrating the "Chinese Way". And, this isn't the intent. My goal is to illustrate the contrasts, and the things that catch visitors' attention. There is great beauty and kindness here that all visitors appreciate.

But, the contrasts in China are overwhelming. Just when you start to get lulled by the BMWs, the Pradas and the Versaces that you see in the City Center, having to step around a legless beggar in the park brings you back to reality. While there are more cell phones in China than people in the US, China is still a very poor country. China is a country of immensity and mesmerizing beauty. The Chinese invented hundreds of things that are essential to our daily life hundreds of years before they were "invented" in Europe. Paper, gunpowder, movable type . . . even airplanes. And, they love to proudly remind Westerners of that. Yet, there is virtually no natural water fit for drinking or agriculture in Eastern China, and the environmental abuses will scare you.

Where else in the world can you go:

- Where you can hear so many visitors say, "Its' not so bad, it tastes like chicken"?
- Where the menu description "special meat" conjures up so many images?
- Where none of the hotels or tall buildings have a Fourth Floor (unlucky number to the Chinese)?

### ***Beijing Blog – Day 6 - August 3***

First, thanks to all of you who have responded to the earlier postings. I was a little surprised at how many noticed. Also, if you have any questions about anything, just email me at [pbwade@aol.com](mailto:pbwade@aol.com).

Yesterday was crushingly hot. We have 94F days in Cincinnati and it is never anywhere near this uncomfortable and I can't explain why.

Wife, Linda, arrives this afternoon and I can't wait to see how she responds to Beijing. She has spent a lot of time in Japan and one Korean trip, but this is very different.

Different restaurant last night, but camel paw was again a special on the menu there too. A herd must have strayed onto the highway in Shanxi Province last week.

A lot has been written about how the Chinese population has fattened up in the last decade. But, it is still rare to find a really fat person in Beijing. You can see more overweight people in a quick half-hour trip to WalMart than in a week in Beijing.

Our flat is in a 28-story high-rise and nicer than I expected. Wide screen TV, microwave, big fridge, great air conditioning. No one cooking goats in the hallway. Excellent.

Some China Rules:

- Never step in front of a car whose motor is running. Never.
- Do not confuse a garlic clove with a cashew.
- When they say "spicy", they really mean it. The Chinese like spicy stuff so they just take it for granted. But when something is noted as spicy, that means something worthy of note.

The biggest restaurant chain here is KFC. Of course, no one knows what KFC means. And the Colonel's image (logo) has undergone a bit of cosmetic surgery and resembles a kindly Chinese grandfather.

### ***Beijing Blog – Day 5 - August 2 - Getting Used To Beijing***

Moved into our "permanent" apartment yesterday with little fanfare. It required registering as an "alien" at the local police station down the block, but they were very welcoming . . . no problem. We are in a nice neighborhood close to all of the Olympic stuff. Very few foreigners in this area and I get a lot of stares, even here in sophisticated, worldly Beijing. You feel like an alien, especially with little kids who stare at you wide-eyed.

A dozen restaurants within a block. So, last night I chose The Little Sheep (which, of course, has no lamb on the menu). Ordered some wine which, despite there being over a dozen wine selections on the menu, caused quite a stir. Wine sensitivity in China is Neolithic. First, with no exaggeration, there were ten waitresses running around trying to figure out what I wanted. Finally a reasonably priced bottle of something red showed up and they wanted to know if I wanted it chilled. This was a 15 minute scramble. The bottle was about \$8.00 and I watched in amazement as the waiter tried to open a screwcap bottle with a corkscrew. Made me wish for a camcorder.

What are these guys looking for in their noses?

The Chinese are good hosts by nature. They are clearly anxious to make foreigners feel comfortable and go to significant lengths to be helpful. They know that the international exposure China will get with the Olympics is extremely important. Even the sternest old policeman will treat you with courtesy and patience. Other than pickpocketing and prostitution there is really little crime here and one is comfortable wandering around at all hours. Gives you faith in humanity.

### ***Beijing Blog – Day 4 - August 1 - Getting Used To Beijing***

Not surprisingly, language is always on the traveler's mind in China. In the center of the larger cities and in the hotels that cater to Westerners, English and hand signals will carry you pretty well. But, once out of these sanctuaries, it gets more challenging. The Chinese national language is Mandarin, the Chinese dialect spoken in the Beijing area. Written Chinese is uniform throughout China, (And, in fact it is basically the



same in Japan.) The spoken language is not. In fact, there are over 70 regional dialects in China. For example, most Beijingers have difficulty in understanding, much less speaking, Cantonese, the local dialect for Hong Kong and Guangzhou. So, you're not alone wrestling with directions to taxi drivers, pal. Your buddy from South China has the same problem.

Wonder why gas prices are now, near \$4/gallon? In 2007, the number of cars in Beijing increased 40%. That's 3000 new cars in the City each day! In the US, there is one car for every 1.25 adults. In China, there is one car for every 40 adults. It doesn't take a rocket scientist, or a petroleum engineer, to see where this trend is going.

Yesterday, in a taxi in rush hour, I was dead stop behind a rusty old Toyota pickup truck with a bumper sticker in English, "I'd rather be windsurfing!" Guess so.

Where else in the world can you go:

- Where today's restaurant special is "Braised Cayman" (a small alligator relative)
- Where there aren't any birds
- Where your round eyes and big nose can bring a two-year-old local child to tears

### ***Beijing Blog – Day 3 - July 31- Beijing Impression***

Beijing time is twelve hours earlier than Cincinnati's. So, when you arrive in China your body is always asking you to do something different than you want to be doing. So, after a 21 hour flight, you arrive at the hotel at about 10pm, and while it makes sense to get some sleep, your body says, "Um, don't think so". Savvy trans-oceanic travelers usually solve this problem with sleeping pills. But, if that's not for you, there is always watching Chinese cartoons on TV. You haven't lived until you've watched Porky Pig or Scooby-Doo in Mandarin, China's national language.

Western hotel chains are much the same in China as they are elsewhere. At a four-star (say, Holiday Inn) or five-star (Peninsula or Hyatt) you can expect to find clean rooms, professional service, a mix of quality ethnic restaurants, Western-style toilets, all of that. But, the two-and three-star hotels are more of a challenge. The Chinese hotel rating system is a bit flexible. Is that one really a three-star, or does its owner's brother-in-law work for the government rating office? You can get a "superior" room at a three-star for the same price as a shrimp cocktail at the Peninsula.

Most hotels that service foreigners will have a daily English newspaper. These often have lots of helpful information for travelers. Like the box score of last week's baseball game between the Cincinnati Red Ones and the Philadelphia Fillies. Or, your choice of a couple dozen escort services. Today's paper had a headline "Beijing tap water now safe to drink". The essence of the story indicates that now the water is OK. But, the ancient water pipes are not. Of course, this makes one immediately anxious about how the teeth were brushed this morning.

Speaking of teeth. Don't run out of toothpaste in China. After dozens of Central Americans were poisoned by imported Chinese toothpaste last year, the Chinese government executed the chief of their version of a food and drug administration. But, they didn't choose to recall any of the local toothpaste.

### ***Beijing Blog – Day 2 - July 30***

Morning comes early in China when your body clock is on Cincinnati time. So, out of the hotel at 0800 to walk the streets to try to get awake.

Some headlines of initial impressions:

Women sweeping sidewalks . . . police on every corner . . . everyone with black hair . . . drivers aiming at jaywalkers . . . newspaper says sunny, but you can't see the sun through the smog . . . police drive Audi A6s (huh?) . . . young Olympic volunteers at every major pedestrian crossing, delightfully cheerful, "hello, how are you, where you from?" (easy for them to be cheerful when they haven't spent the previous 21 hours on an airplane) . . . not that many obvious Olympic visitors yet . . . wish I had a nickel for every sponsor billboard featuring Yao Ming (does he really wear Hanes underwear and eat Frosted Flakes?) . . . Gucci and Estee Lauder in store windows on the main drag . . . dead chickens hanging in the windows two blocks away . . . small breasts . . .



KTVs on almost every other block (karaoke bars) . . . thermometer on the bank across the street says 32 degrees C (that's 93 F, folks) . . . saw a sign with directions to the "Olympic Gender Determination Office" . . . beautiful babies . . . four McDonalds and two KFCs within two blocks of the hotel. Just another day on the streets of Beijing!

### *Day One - July 29, 2008*

Goin' to the Games . . . again

The Olympics. Seventeen days of virtually non-stop activity and adrenalin for both participants and spectators. And, this year's Summer Games will see the normal excitement level multiplied by two. Why? China.

China. It's the most-populated nation on earth, with almost 100 cities with million-plus inhabitants, 16 of which are on the list of the world's Most Polluted Cities. Its written language has over 20,000 characters, but a university graduate will likely know only 6 – 7000. Its GDP has grown almost 10% per year for nearly thirty years. Take China and mix in the Olympic Games? That mix spells synaptic overload for visitors.

Beijing expects around a half-million foreign visitors this August, most of whom have never experienced China before. They will find a country about the same size as the continental US that has over 70 distinctly different ethnic groups. Of course, Beijing is about as representative of "real China" as New York or LA is of the "real USA". Nonetheless, visitors will certainly find sophisticated but poverty-stricken Beijing to be an eye-popping adventure.

China's astonishing contrasts emerge immediately upon arrival. Most Americans will arrive at Beijing's sparkling new airport in the early evening, after 16 – 20 hours of airplane food. They will gawk at the chickens in the baggage claim, and perhaps stop at Starbucks for a latte before tackling the ride into the city. They will be rudely elbowed aside by a 95 year-old grandmother as they look for a taxi or hotel car. Then, there's the near collision of their hotel's new Buick Lucerne with a large cart of refuse pulled by two donkeys. Welcome to Beijing!

Beijing's skyline is beautiful at night, with literally hundreds of new high-rise buildings festooned with Chinese characters in neon. Needless to say, there are lots of beautiful skylines in the world but there is something special about those Chinese characters, convincing proof that you are definitely not in Kansas anymore.

When jet-lagged travelers finally stumble into their hotel, they yearn for the oasis of a hotel bar or restaurant. The beer? Not bad! The wine? Listerine. And then there is the first experience with real Chinese food. Most four- and five-star hotels in Beijing have decent-to-great Western food. The normal hotels and restaurants are more of an adventure. To sum up, typical Chinese restaurants in the US are different than their counterpart in "real China". Very different. In a four-star, I was thoughtfully given a menu in English (I wonder how they knew). There were about ten pages of choices including goose wings; turtle tongue; spicy meat of donkey (someone else's Buick, I guess); abalone buns (I didn't know abalone had buns); special meat; pork paw; artificial abalone; spicy bullfrog and jews-ear salad (must have snuck through the menu censors). No fooling. A well-worn travelers' rule-of-thumb says that when in Asia if you can't read the menu, they will likely give you one where you can point to pictures to make your choices. This theory has some flaws. When all of the pictures are little bits of brown stuff mixed up with vegetables, how do you know which brown stuff is the pork and which is the cocker spaniel?

I have found that regardless of where you are in the world, people don't eat stuff that tastes bad. You may find the idea of eating fried scorpion or sheep brains distasteful, but they don't actually taste bad. When in China, it's just better not to ask.