

Beijing, China – Day 19 Oct. 16:

We had a good night's rest at the Prime Hotel in Beijing, China. There was a breakfast buffet in the hotel dining room and then David, our tour leader, came by to pick us up. The planned morning itinerary consisted of a walking tour through the Temple of Heaven followed by a visit to a silk factory. We would have lunch and then take a walking tour of Tiananmen Square and the Forbidden City before heading back to Tianjin and the Amsterdam. A map identifying Beijing sites of interest is shown below.



David's original plan was to start with a walk through Tiananmen Square which was close to our hotel. However, there was a marathon race starting there this morning so we boarded our bus and David took us to the Temple of Heaven to start our day's tour.

A short distance from the hotel we were treated to a Disneyland like display of topiary on a couple street corners. We snapped a couple quick photos through the bus window as we passed by.



After a 20 minute ride we arrived at The Temple of Heaven and started our tour at about 9am near the south end. When we first got off the bus there was a rush of street vendors

trying to sell us wrist watches and photography books of Beijing. This photo of a watch vendor shows a typical set-up.

Bargaining was the key to this game and the best deal we heard about was 3 watches for \$10 USD.

However, it got a bit annoying when the vendor wouldn't take "No." for an answer.



David got our tickets and we escaped through a gate into the large open park at the south end of the Temple of Heaven.



There were people practicing tai chi, kung fu and group dancing just as described in the Frommer's guide "Beijing day By day" (2nd ed, 2011) that we had borrowed from Steven and Bobbie.



There were also two men writing in large calligraphy with water on the smooth pavement in one area.



Apparently the writing was not very controversial because no one was taking any particular interest in their activity.



These folks appeared to be giving or receiving something from this tree with the beautiful bark .

The whole atmosphere of the place was one of harmony.

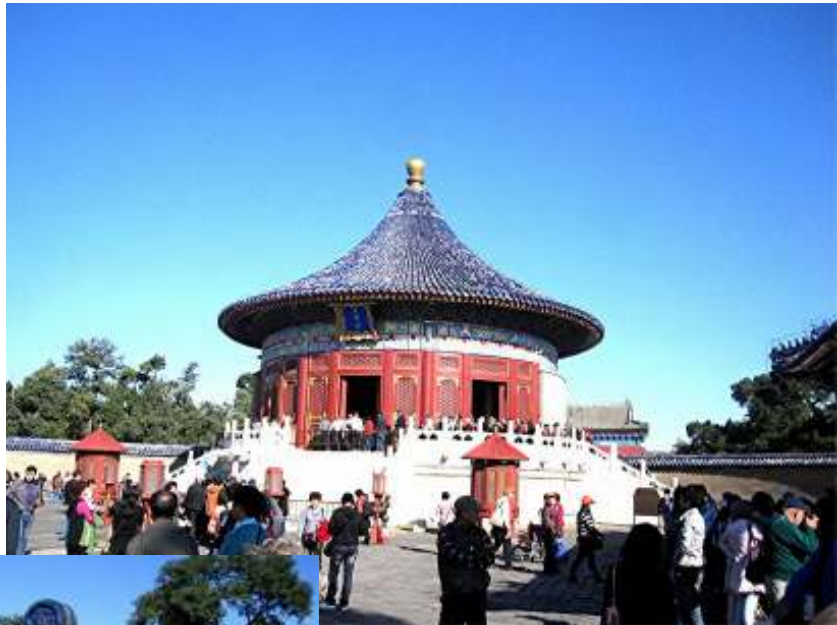


We proceeded to walk through the Temple of Heaven past a series of beautiful buildings. Each of the buildings had a purpose and important history but it was lost on us because of our ignorance of the culture. However, the architecture was wonderful and even our uneducated eyes could appreciate what we were seeing. The following is a collection of the more striking buildings that we saw.



We saw this cute little boy and took a picture of him. There were only two or three small children that we saw among the thousands of young adults and older people. Later we were musing about the absence of young children and speculated that this observation is a result of the restriction on the number of children that married couples can have.





The detail shown by some of the tiled roofs was impressive.



Each of the buildings had a very high threshold at the entrance that people had to make a special effort to step over. David explained that this was classic Chinese design that had a functional purpose of keeping water in the street from running into the house. It also was very smooth and slippery so rodents couldn't climb into the house from the outside.



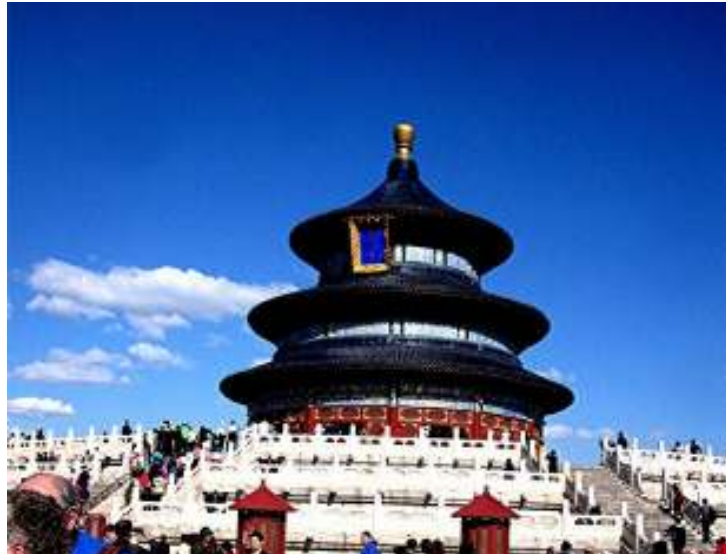
There was a cultural message also buried in the tradition of a high threshold. David said it represented the shoulders of the owner of the house and you should show respect by stepping over it rather than stepping on it. Stepping on the threshold was a sign of dishonor to the owner. Here are a few of the many thresholds we stepped over today.



The person on the left in this photo didn't get the word about the no stepping on threshold rule.

This impressive building is the Hall of Prayer for Good Harvests.

We finished our tour of the Temple of Heaven and drove by bus to our next stop which was a silk factory.



Along the way we got another view of the heavy traffic on Beijing streets, as shown on the left.

We arrived at the Yuan Hou Silk factory and were given a nice demonstration of how silk is produced.



Silk worms spin these cocoons shown on the left. The cocoons are collected and after boiling in water the end of the single thread making up the cocoon can be found and attached to a winding wheel of the machine shown below.

The individual threads are collected and used to weave cloth or in some cases used just as an insulating filler in comforters used in bedding.



We saw a very interesting demonstration of how a wad of silk fibers could be stretched into a two dimensional sheet of silk threads to make one of

the multiple layers that go to make up a bed comforter. The pictures caught the stretching operation in progress.



After the silk factory visit we went to a nearby restaurant for a buffet lunch. We have found the restaurants and the food selection offered to be very good. We load up especially on the cooked vegetables with poultry meat additions. The restaurant in the hotel and the ones about town that we have visited have offered cold beer on tap as part of the meal. That is something we don't find in the US and it's a nice plus here for the thirsty tourist.

After lunch we got back on the bus for a short ride to Tiananmen Square where we started our walking tour. David pointed out the building pictured on the right which is the Chairman Mao Zedong Memorial Hall. He said that it contained the body of Chairman Mao within a crystal coffin.



We crossed the street and walked north in Tiananmen Square. This display of a large lantern in Tiananmen Square celebrates the birth of the current Chinese nation in 1949 and its continuing success into 2011.



Barbara saw this sign remaining from the marathon this morning so she quickly got her library card pictured with it to document the Beijing visit.



These decorations in a little park on the side added a touch of color to the otherwise rather austere look of Tiananmen Square.



At one point one of the ladies in our tour group said that she had heard a rumor that somewhere near Tiananmen Square there was a memorial to the young people who lost their lives in the Tiananmen Square uprising that was crushed by the Chinese military. David appeared uncomfortable with the question and simply said that he knew nothing about such a memorial.



Before leaving Tiananmen Square we thought we should get a picture of the Chinese flag flying briskly in the wind over this expansive public meeting place. The Museum of Chinese Revolution with a prominent picture of Chairman Mao is in the background.

There were few military people in evidence around the square but as we were passing through the north gate we saw these guards.



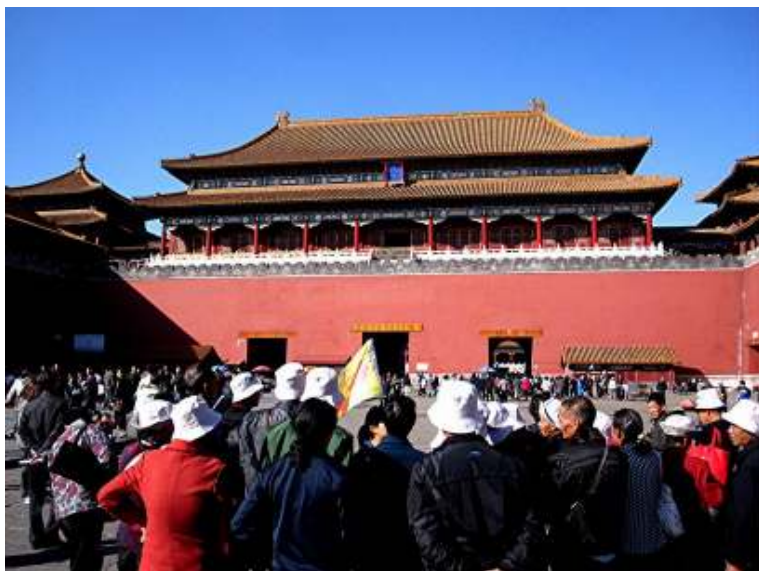
Before leaving Tiananmen Square David had us assemble for a group picture. He collected all of our cameras and took a picture of our group with each camera. That was a thoughtful thing to do and we appreciated what he did for this group of traveling friends. Here is our group picture.



Unfortunately five of our group stayed with the bus because of physical limitations and the length of this walking tour this afternoon. However, it looks like 24 of us made it to this point.

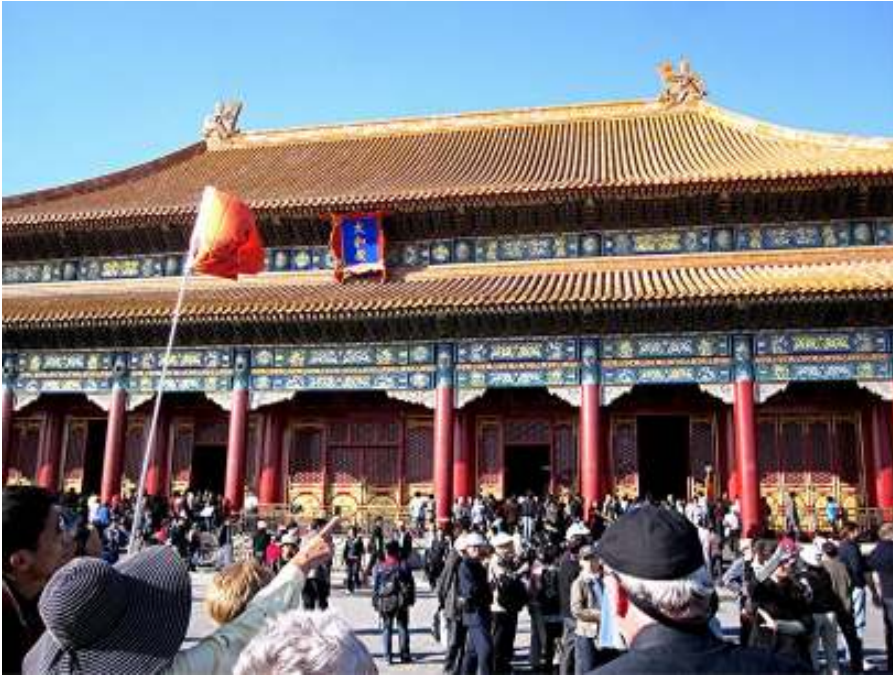
By continuing to walk north we passed from Tiananmen Square into the Forbidden City, as can be seen in the map above.

We passed through The Meridian Gate into the Forbidden City along with thousands of other tourists and native Chinese.



Similar to the Temple of Heaven we really didn't have a good appreciation for the cultural significance of the buildings we saw in the Forbidden City. However, the architecture of the numerous buildings was stunning and drove home the historic significance of the place in Chinese culture.

The most important building was the Hall of Supreme Harmony that is shown below. It is at the north end of the Forbidden City. One measure of the importance of these



historical buildings is in the number of little statues that are placed on the ridge of the roof at the corners. The more statues there are the more important the building.

Shown below is a picture of the corner ridge on the Hall of Supreme Harmony. This building had 10 of the little statues which is more than we had seen on any historic building in Korea or China.



We passed by the Hall of Supreme Harmony but before going into the Imperial Garden David had us wait while he backtracked in order to collect two people in our group who had fallen behind. While he was absent he deputized Carol to hold his flag. On the right Carol is pictured valiantly holding our flag and acting as a rallying point to hold our little group together. She did her job well and we were soon restored to our full complement when David returned.



We passed through gate into the Imperial Garden which was a truly cool and restful place with lots of plant life and rock formations. .



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At this stage our tour group had reached a point of near exhaustion from all the walking and we decided to take a break, as shown on the left.

David eventually gathered us up and we headed out of the Forbidden City in the direction of our bus. We walked along the moat that protects the north wall of the Forbidden City as shown on the right..



As we were leaving the area we saw a wedding photography session in progress. This couple had decided to take their vows here at this iconic national historic site.



David found our bus among the hundreds parked along the busy street and we all happily climbed aboard.

It had been a marvelous two days in Beijing. The weather had been superb and David, our guide, had delivered as much of Beijing to us as we could possibly absorb. We were happy as our bus worked its way onto the freeway and headed back to Tianjin and the Amsterdam.

The bus ride to Tianjin took 3 hours and we arrived at the cruise terminal about 8pm. Our tour group filed through the security checks and went our separate ways for the evening. The next two days will be at sea as we travel to Shanghai, China. While we look forward to the next port of call, two days of rest at sea sounds very good right now.