

**Beijing, China – Day 18 Oct. 15:**

The Amsterdam arrived in Tianjin about 6am while it was still dark. We docked at the huge new cruise terminal in the suburb of Tianjin known as Xingang. After breakfast we went to the Sports Bar Lounge of the Amsterdam where we met Ray and the rest of the Cruise Critic fans who were going on the two day Beijing tour that Ray had organized.



As soon as we were cleared by the Chinese immigration officials we left the ship and went into the Tianjin Cruise Terminal.



In the cruise terminal we met our tour guide, David. David turned out to be an excellent guide with a great personality, courteous, wonderful command of the English language with an ability to explain not only the tourist sites we were to visit but also Chinese culture and religion as we went along. David is shown on the right along with Larry, our fellow passenger and avid photographer.

David was holding a sign identifying our private tour by way of Ray's Cruise Critic message board handle of "JORAY".



Ray had started organizing the tour over 6 months ago. He worked with the Beijing Xindong International Travel Service; at No. 46, Puhuangyu Road, Beijing, China. Post code 100078 and specifically with a travel agent with an email address of [tracy@beijingservice.com](mailto:tracy@beijingservice.com) and Internet address of [www.Beijingservice.com](http://www.Beijingservice.com). The 2 day tour was originally quoted at \$185 USD per person but refunds because of a larger than expected group sign up and unavoidable itinerary changes lowered the cost to only \$135 per person.

As shown by the map on the right, Beijing is located inland in the northern part of China. It is about 90 miles inland from the ocean. Tianjin is the major seaport for Beijing. The suburb of Tianjin known as Xingang has the cruise ship facilities. Consequently our cruise-line map shows Xingang where most maps would show Tianjin.



We boarded the comfortable ~50 passenger bus, shown on the left and when heads were counted there were 32 of us eager tourists ready to explore Beijing. We left the cruise terminal about 8:30am with sunshine and promise of a nice day for touring.

Fellow Cruise Critic fans, Tom and Helene shown on the right, were sitting behind us on the bus. They were as eager as we were to get on with the tour. For us the visit to the Great Wall has been high on our “Bucket List” for a long time.



On this first day in Beijing we were scheduled to take a 3 to 4 hour ride into Beijing and then, after lunch, travel north to a section of the Great Wall of China. After walking on the Great Wall we were to tour one of the Ming Dynasty Tombs, have a Peking Duck dinner and then see an acrobat show.

We cruised along on 3 and 4 lane freeways most of way into Beijing with David providing background information and comments on the passing scene from time to time. The construction of high density apartments and business complexes from time to time along the way was impressive. Sometimes a cluster of high rise buildings would be in the distance but frequently they were close to the freeway as these shown in the photo below.



As we approached Beijing some of the buildings became more exotic as shown here.



After about an hour we stopped at a modern new service station for a rest room break. Even though the buildings had a modern Western look, the ladies found that rest room facilities required the traditional baseball “Catchers Position” like most public facilities we would find during our stay. For the most part, the men had no trouble adjusting to this restroom configuration.



The stop at the service station provided an opportunity to continue our ongoing survey of gasoline prices in places we visit. There appears to be an international standard for posting the price of standard grades gasoline on prominent signs so that motorists can see the price before pulling off the highway to buy gas. Orlin took the picture on the right and assumed that the Chinese characters gave the price for the gasoline octane levels shown. A check with our guide, David, revealed that the Chinese characters simply showed what octane levels of gas were available. They repeated the information given by the Arabic numerals. Dave knew the price of gasoline and didn't seem concerned that the price wasn't listed.



Perhaps there is little or no variation in gasoline prices in China with a controlled economy so there is little incentive to post a price. However, further down the road we were relieved to see that some stations adhered to the standard we were used to and posted prices, as shown on the left. Prices did seem relatively uniform. Here, the price David said was for regular gas was 7.33 Yuan RMB per liter. At an exchange rate of 6.5 Yuan per USD and approximating 4 liters per gallon that works out to about \$4.50 USD per gallon. This price seems similar or maybe a bit more expensive than in the US.

As we approached the outskirts of Beijing the traffic density increased greatly. The freeway design was as modern as any we have seen in the US but the Saturday traffic was high enough to produce stop and go conditions from time to time.







The heavy traffic caused us to fall behind in the proposed schedule so it was after 1pm before we stopped at a restaurant for lunch. The restaurant was located in the Jin Dian Cloisonne Factory building.



We walked through the cloisonné sales room on the way to the main eating hall which was filled with hundreds of people sitting at tables each with a large lazy Susan in the middle to expedite distribution of the dishes of food.



Our tour group was seated together at several tables. The food was tasty and efficiently served by a very busy staff. Here are a couple pictures of folks at our table.



**Bob and Esther**



**Steve and Bobbie**

On our way out of the restaurant we browsed through a maze of tables loaded down with all sorts of souvenirs made with the cloisonné decorative technique. The cloisonné process involves forming a wire made of a metal, such as brass, into a desired artistic outline of a shape and attaching wire onto a base object. A paste containing ceramic powder of different colors is then filled in to the spaces between the wire on the base object. The object is then heated to melt the ceramic powder and form an enamel filling outlined by the brass wire. The surface is then polished smooth to produce the final product with bright enamel colors forming an image outlined by a thin line produced by the brass wire.

We bought several pens with cloisonné decoration for about \$25 USD each from this gentleman shown with Barbara on the right.

We didn't see any real price bargains today except for the \$3 USD watches sold by sidewalk vendors. We had to go by the old adage, "You get what you pay for".

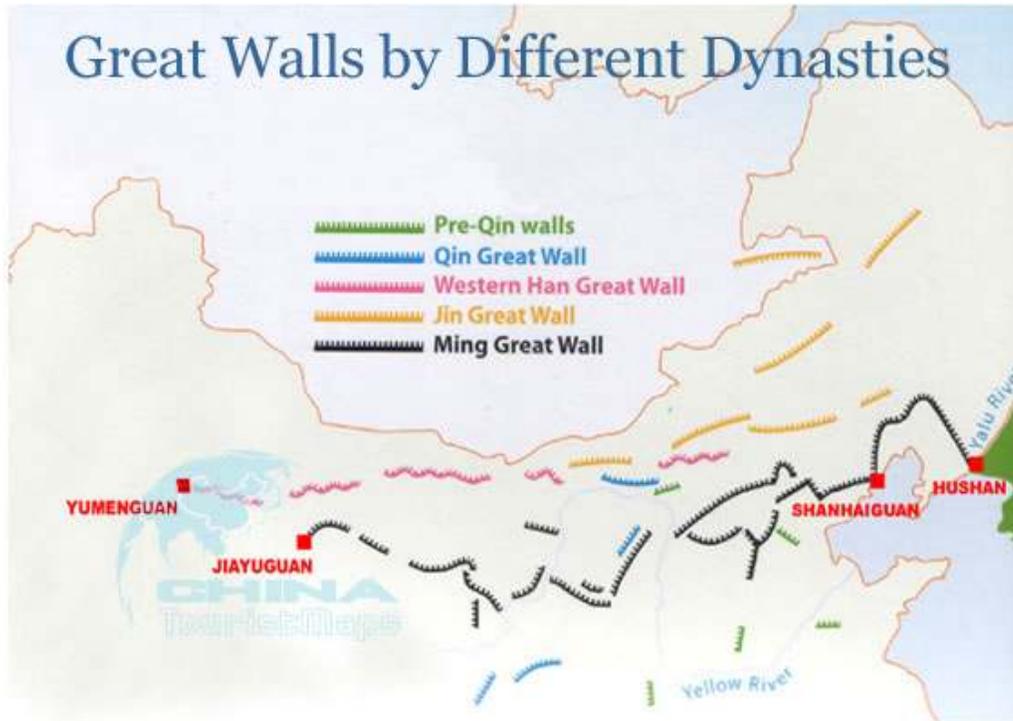


After leaving the restaurant we headed for a section of the Great Wall of China that is about 25 miles north of Beijing. The road led up a valley that for centuries had served invaders as a gateway to Beijing from the north. The wall was built as part of a huge defense system to protect the Chinese cities. As we took the 30 minute ride up the valley, David filled us in with background on the Wall. The following factoids are gleaned from David's presentation, some information from the Internet and Frommer's guide book "Beijing day By day" (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, 2011) that was loaned to us by Steve and Bobbie.

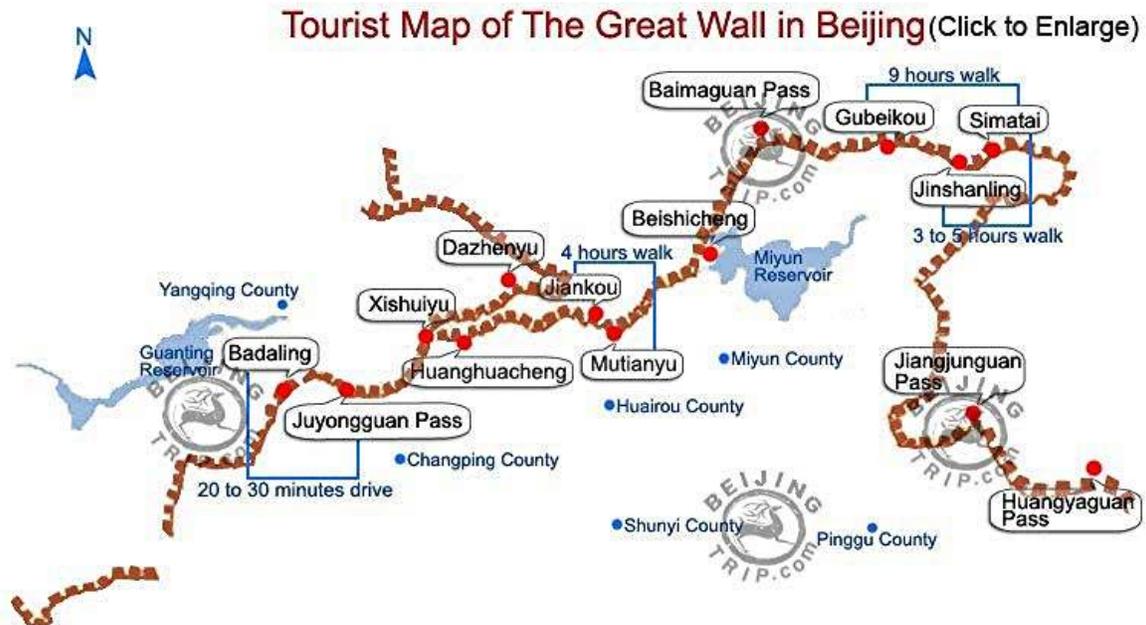
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1. The Great Wall is not a contiguous, monolithic structure. Parts of it have crumbled into sand and other parts have been completely restored.
  2. The sections of the Great Wall extend about 4000 miles (~6400km) from China's east coast near North Korea to the northwestern deserts.
  3. In the beginning of the Great Wall of China's history, regional kingdoms built walls for their own fortification and defense. This was thought to have started around 700 BC. The Great Wall of China was then fully built and unified around 200 BC. Subsequent improvements occurred over the following 1700 years.
  4. The Great Wall of China dimensions vary. On average, the width is around 15 to 30 feet and the average height is 25 feet.
  5. The Wall was built by peasants, soldiers and criminals. Soldiers were the primary workforce.
  6. The Great Wall of China was built first as a lookout post for early detection of invading armies. A system of towers communicated by smoke signals to pass information along the length of the wall to command centers. The wall served as a barrier to the invading armies so they could not easily attack the parts of China to the south. It was particularly effective against soldiers on horses from the north.
  7. The original Great Wall of China was built from earth, stone and wood.
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A map obtained from the Internet, as shown below, provides some additional perspective on how the Wall is fragmented along its 4000 mile length as it traces a path across northern China.



Of more immediate interest to us today was the parts of the Great Wall that are in the vicinity of Beijing. That section of the Wall is shown in the map below.

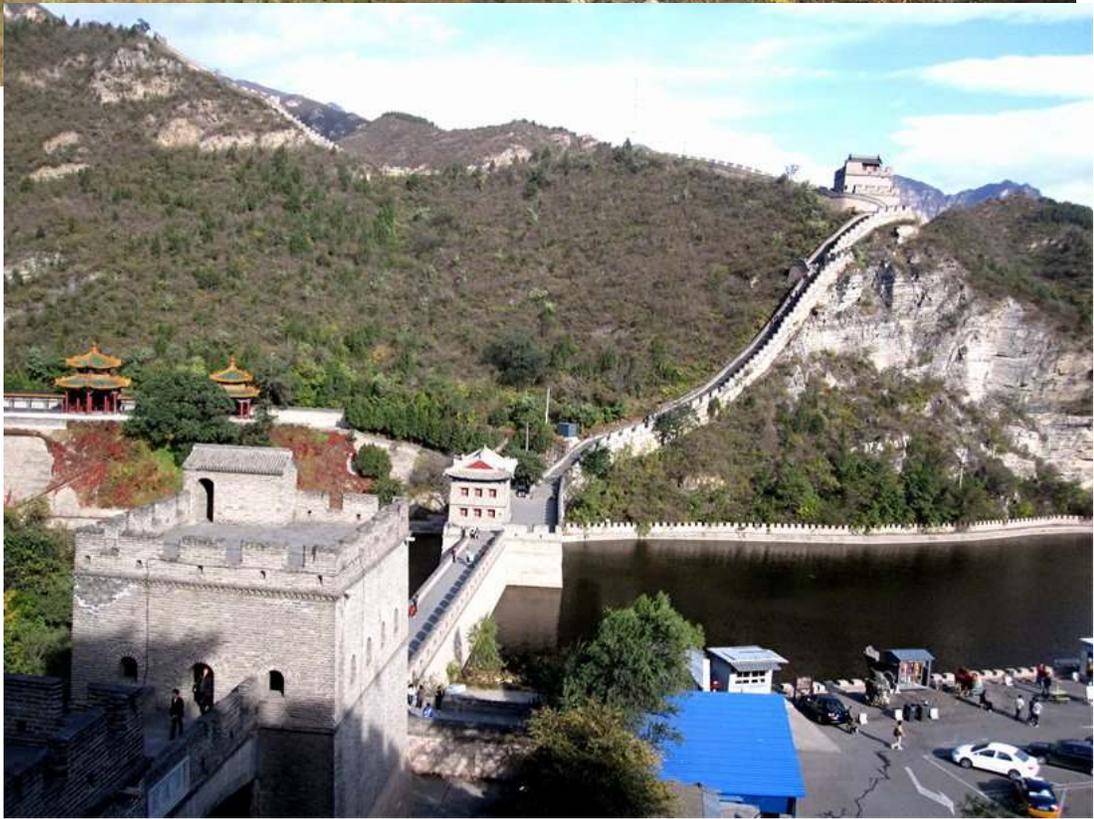


Our original destination was the Badaling section of the Wall near the left hand side of the map. Frommers refers to the Badaling section as the Disneyland version of the Wall and warns that the crowds here can be overwhelming. David was on his cell phone frequently and as we were leaving Beijing, headed for the Wall he said that he had just been informed that the crowds at Badaling were too large on this Saturday for us to attempt a visit. He said that instead we would go to the nearby Juyongguan Pass section of the Wall which is also shown on the map above. This change was all right by us. Frommers claims that the Juyongguan Pass is the most historically significant because it guards one of the two crucial passes leading to Beijing and the North China Plain. It was the site of pitched battles involving Jurchen, Mongol, and Japanese invaders.

We arrived at the Juyongguan Pass Great Wall site about 3:00pm and the driver carefully inserted his bus into the narrow parking space along with hundreds of other busses. We climbed out and started our tour. The following pictures are a selection of views we were able to get in the late afternoon sunlight.



Of course, Barbara had to quickly get documentation of her library card visit to the Great Wall.





We saw that the padlock symbol for devotion of lovers had followed us from Petropavlovsk, Russia through Jeju, Korea to the Great Wall of China.





We had to be careful on the deeply worn stone steps but it was possible to negotiate our way through the crowds of people. David said that a Chinese belief is that a person becomes a hero once he has trod on the Great Wall of China. We joined a lot of people in becoming heroes today.





**New Great Wall heroes, Steve, Barbara, Bob, Esther and Bobbie**



Barbara and Esther wave from below while Bob catches his breath.

We carefully checked off the Great Wall on our “Bucket List” and got ready to leave for the Ming Tombs north of Beijing before they closed for the day. We climbed back on board the bus and took the 30 minute ride to the Changling which is the burial mausoleum for the third emperor of the Ming Dynasty. We arrived at the colorful front entrance display, as shown below.



Ray had reason to smile after successfully shepherding his group of Cruise Critics folks through a day of touring Beijing and surroundings.



David carefully explained how the tomb had been strategically located with the mountains on the north side providing protection and support at the back while looking south onto the broad plain where Beijing is located. This arrangement provided the optimum fengshui for the monument..





There were several large and beautiful buildings on the grounds but this tomb on the right was the actual location where the emperor was buried.



This monument shown on the right was covered with coins and even some paper money that represented a sacrifice by the giver.



Dusk was upon us as we completed our tour of the Changling and left through the main gate to get on the bus. We were met by a committee of vendors trying to make one more sale for the day.



On the way back to Beijing our tour group was faced with a dilemma. There was not enough time to have dinner and then proceed to the acrobat show as had been the original plan. After some negotiation by Ray, David and David's management it was agreed that we would proceed directly to our hotel where we would all check in and be on our own for the rest of the night. Because of this change a refund of \$35 USD per person was made on the spot by David. This refund was in addition to the \$15 USD reduction in price of the tour because of the larger than anticipated group size. The total cost of the tour ended up at \$135 USD per person.

Our bus driver did a miraculous job of weaving through jammed traffic on broad and narrow streets as we made our way to the hotel. We finally stopped at the Prime Hotel, shown on the right, where David got us checked in for the night in a very efficient manner. We all had our keys and were in our rooms within 20 minutes. That was marvelous because we were all beginning to sag a bit after a strenuous day of touring.



We had little room to complain compared with David who said he had about a 50 minute commute to his home in Beijing outskirts. Hopefully, the bus driver, who had coped with traffic all day didn't have too far to go.

Our rooms turned out to be everything we could hope for in a luxury hotel. We had been concerned about what we might find for the tour price we were paying but it was marvelous. We were not up to braving the streets of Beijing looking for a restaurant so after getting settled in we went down to the hotel dining room. The dining room was set up for a buffet dinner and the display was beautiful. After taking pictures of everything we saw all day we couldn't resist taking one more, as shown on the right.



After dinner we turned in for the night. Tomorrow we rise at about 6:30am and after the complimentary breakfast we take off on our second day of touring Beijing.