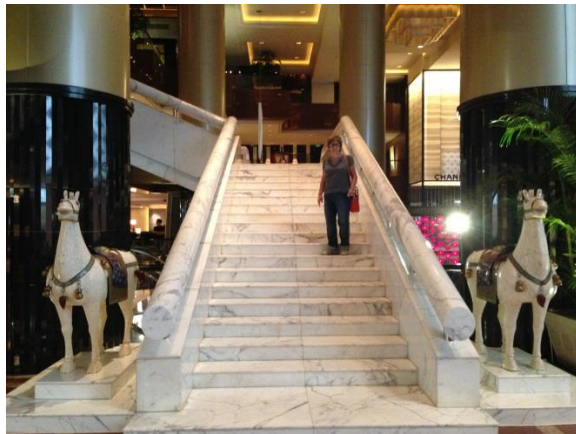


Travel Log – China

September 15,16

Flight to Beijing 13 hours long but as comfortable as is reasonable. First impressions of Beijing driving into town: greener than expected; traffic not as bad as we expected; not as many people in the streets and fewer on bicycles. Beijing or what we saw of it so far - modern almost Western. Spent the evening with Gali at the lobby bar of the Peninsula (opulent, all top brands stores (Winston, Armani, Tiffany you name it. Gali seems happy excited with her job and committed to life in China.



Sept. 17

As planned we travelled to the Great Wall. As impressive as expected, good physical climbing test.



We descended through a beautiful adjacent rock garden. We had an opportunity to learn a lot about Gali her life, aspirations and life in China. We had much discussion on Chinese human rights record. Mom is obviously of that opinion but without the ability to substantiate it. I think that the 7.5 percent growth economy, the rise of an upwardly mobile middle class and the Chinese global engagement resulting in necessary reforms and increased openness are making the claim of human rights violations less provable.



Yet the memory of Tiananmen Square is still haunting the Chinese regime. Traffic back from the Great Wall was indescribably terrible. No wonder Beijing has so much air pollution. We finished a nice but tiring day at a fabulous restaurant with what else but a Peking duck.



Gali's lineage was apparent in that she didn't ask even a single question about our or our children's life whilst revealing her most inner thoughts to us in response to our questions. Israeli? Zilberboim? or are we too Canadian?

Sept 18

We are on our way to Chengdu we are now at the domestic terminal, we amongst thousands of Chinese. As we look around to spot the check-in counters a nice well-dressed Chinese comes unsolicited to our help: "follow me". He leads us to the right spot and departs. We thank him and think: Are Chinese people simply nice or is it a security measure? What do you think? From the airport to the Panda Breeding centre in a Limo Zohar style. The Pandas are the cutest animals and seeing babies in incubators is really something else. We are taking lots of photos, ton of walking but exceptionally worthwhile.



I have never seen so many new modern apartment buildings going up or already built. Now I know why. Since the Earth Quake of 2008 there has been a flood of new arrivals in Chengdu from rural areas and as part of the economic boom. Amazed to discover that the "town" compared to Beijing has between 10 (officially) and likely 15 million people.



We generally don't like Chinese food but after having a genuine Sichuan Hot Pot dinner with Green our guide who taught us how to prepare it - we are converted. We had a most delicious meal and what a good way to enjoy food.





By now we are on our feet and walking hard all day since 5 in the morning but we're going to the Opera. Amazing acts capped off by the magical face changing program. How do they do it?





Tomorrow we have a full day . We're going to see the Leshan Buddha and celebrate the Mid-Autumn full moon festival in the old city of Chengdu. Stay tuned.

Sept. 19

The Chinese infrastructure (roads, highways, bridges, parks etc.) must be the envy of North America. All seem new, wide with an eye to future capacity. Buildings commercial towers and residential architecture in Beijing and Chengdu are ultra-modern but not consistent or uniform like you'd expect. It almost seems that the copycat culture is at play: seen this somewhere (in the West) like it; build it. Like what does this Paris style architecture doing in Beijing



(To the tune of Wizard of Oz) We went to see the Buddha, the biggest Buddha of all (71 meters tall), tadam, tadam. Seeing it from the boat is actually more impressive than climbing up and down. This is especially true for old Jewish people. We got the photos - impressive.



We had our second authentic Chinese meal just as good. No relationship to food offered in Chinese restaurants in Toronto. At least not the few we've been to. Chinese are lean wait until the sought after American "culture" catches up - interesting.



We spent the afternoon and evening in three adjacent but unique places: the Tibetans stores with the gilded Buddha and other artifacts. Saw monks in "funny" Tibetan outfits good for Halloween. Next to the Wuhou Shrine a 150 square meters shrine dating back to 223 AD. Inside there is a gorgeous Bonsai garden. Only the photos can describe this imperial garden. Finally, off to Jiang St. How to describe it on Festival afternoon? There were a least 20,000 Chinese and 2 Jews. I swear we did not spot a single Caucasian for more than 5 hours. But interesting enough there is no tension, them towards us and vice versa. The street is full of boutiques, restaurants, food stalls, street performers, bars, coffee shops including Starbucks of course. The street scenes are very colourful, fun, light festive atmosphere. This was a one of a kind experience. More photos than we would know what to do with and it's only been 3 days. In a way it is so eclectic and in another such a different culture - in a good way. Interesting Chinese, Chinese don't behave as Canadian Chinese at all. They are open, loud, fun loving, engaged rather than the reserved Canadians.



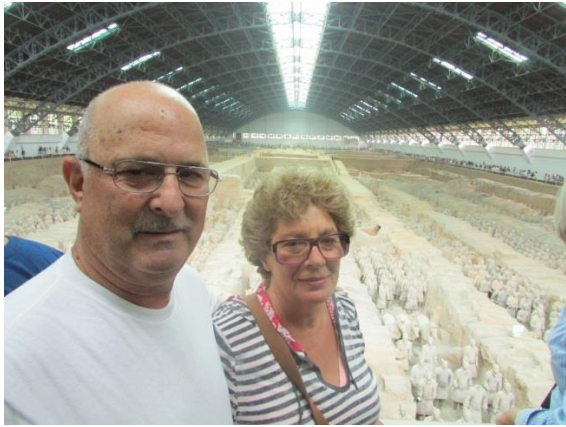


September 20

We are now on our way to Terra Cotta. It's only a short flight from Chengdu. 3 major impressions: amount of new apartment buildings in huge clusters. Sign of *rapid urbanization*. Although lots of speculation keeps prices extremely high and practically unaffordable for young professionals. Second: *Infrastructure*. Third: not in priority order, *people seem content, relaxed, having fun*. Not the tension and stress you see on the streets of the United States or Tokyo for that matter.

When in China you have to see the Terra Cotta warriors. The Chinese culture and history is projected in this awesome display. The meticulous precision, patience and delicate work that went into this archeological wonder can only be done by Chinese. We barely withstood some high pressure Jade selling and the guide's body language sagged when she realized that she lost her commission. The farmer who by accident discovered the dig in 1974 is now a celebrity. For 20 Yuan he agreed to sign the book we bought for 180 Yuan. By now we are just plain tired and can't wait to get to the Sofitel. Chinese drivers may have read about the rules of the road and traffic lights, pedestrian crossing and then they get on the road and all bets are off. Color blind, pedestrian predators, lane cut off artists but slow speed. Same in Istanbul would have been a grave yard of cars, bikes and humans.





We spent the afternoon and early evening at the Muslim quarter in X'ian. Like in the Middle East although they are not Arabs of course. We didn't touch any of the street food but it was colourful, noisy and crowded. We also saw groups of Caucasians from Canada and from Israel- of course. The Bell Tower and the other pagoda were lit beautifully for the holiday. We couldn't make the 15 minute walk so we stopped a motored vehicle of some sort. Looks like a home-made, lawn mower engine and two pieces of wood for seats. We are now sipping on a stiff drink in the lobby before we crash. We are running like Usain Bolt. Tomorrow back to Beijing and slowing down the pace. BTW: Wi-Fi in China is more accessible than anywhere in the world. Again part of infrastructure commitment. For the first time I saw Wi Fi in a car driving through the country side. One other big impression: what we've seen of China is Grey. Not a ray of sunshine in almost a week.





September 21

Breaking News: Mom used a public toilet for the first time. I haven't yet. Mind you in a brand new airport and although there were many squatting stalls there were 2 toilet seats so, guess what? BTW: forward planning: get your toilet paper in the entrance to the stalls based on estimated capacity, density and texture. Manuals supplied only in Chinese (lol). This may suggest lack of cleanliness (e.g. no soap to wash hands) yet by contrast airport stores and common areas are squeaky clean. You could eat a Chinese meal off the floor anywhere. Another potential discovery: There is (security free) Wi Fi at the airport but seemingly it blocks access to global services (Skype, Gmail etc.) so you think you're on-line but someone is on the line to ensure you use the right line. Why argue about limited access when you can access anyone anytime it just that you can't get through. The Chinese seem to have adopted Andre Agassi's commercial for Cannon: Image is everything!



Traffic jams in Beijing are as common as rice. Yet there is an interesting cultural difference between North America and China or at least Beijing. If I am a driver and my job is to pick you up at the airport on your arrival than in the West you would most likely do the following: check the arrival time after the flight departed; check the traffic conditions; adjust your departure time to compensate for traffic (use Waze). In Beijing blaming traffic jams for being late (not by a few minutes but by as much as an hour or more) is quite understandable and generally acceptable but to the Western customer very irritable. I wonder if it works the same in business dealing. Another interesting observation: On our flight from X'ian to Beijing in the seat pocket there is a super glossy magazine in Chinese for Chinese. This is a domestic flight. One of the sections features such luxury items as Ferraris, Rolls Royces and other super expensive brands of luxury items. The tag line under the photos reads: Luxury Items for Common People. This has now become the aspiration of urban Chinese young

and old. I wonder if there is a grand design behind it (like most things in China). The Chinese were known to be a saving nation. In order to fuel economic growth it is likely that the government created this form of Western consumerism on steroids to demonstrate a) that we can have and afford anything and the best of things available in the West (image) and secondly spend your money invest borrow to keep the hyper growth economy. It's a "cultural revolution" of a different kind. Another shocker: Beijing hotel staff have no idea as to what is Dim Sum could you believe it? Like Italians not knowing what is Pizza.

The Lama Buddhist temples are worth seeing. I wish we knew a little more ahead of time about Buddhism to appreciate it even more. There are many small, medium and large Buddha in this faith. The Tibetan stream was most impressive with a Buddha as tall as 50 meters. The most impressive of all was to watch young (20 something) kid's devotion to the faith. They bring gifts, burn incense, bow, pray with fervour and passion and most of them are young "kids". But like every religion the amount of money spent on the gold and guild could have been better spent on the true believers themselves. The Confucius temple by contrast was a loser. Run down, under kept even dirty. The Lama is making tons of money off the incense sticks the other doesn't that's likely the difference. By 5 PM we're pooped. Mom is longing for a Western meal. No Chinese for you tonight. We're yet to hear from Gali who promised to send us a tour plan for today and the next two in Beijing but we're doing fine. Gali is under a lot of stress while with her program renewal. I am sure she meant well. We are not likely to see her again before we leave.



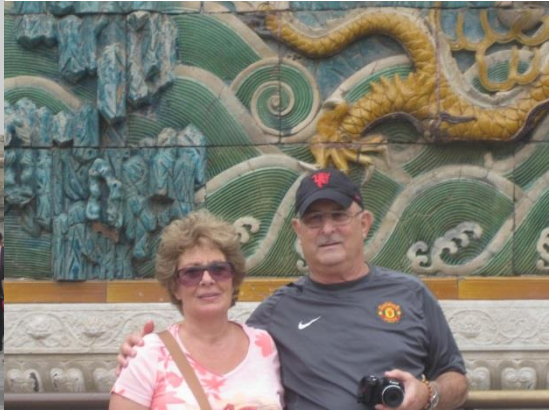
September 22

Today was the obligatory Tiannamen Square and the Forbidden City. Frankly having read so much about it and having been to the Lama the day before the Forbidden City is only impressive in its vastness rather than its expanse. There were a lot of people in the Square and the Forbidden City and I mean a lot. Thousands and

thousands mostly local, but our tour guide Tina said that there were so few people today and that by contrast on National Day October 1 the Square is likely to be full to capacity (only 500,000). We have never walked so long and such far distances in such a short time (day 7) since we were kids in the desert. With all that walking there is no dent in the belly shape. We ended up buying a calligraphy piece mounted on silk. It is supposed to say Happiness and Health which we need and our family name Zohar. It's a bit of a tourist trap and it is Chinese to us so it may as well say F\$@k You Zohar for all we know. Once again withstood some pressure selling of actually an original silk painting by a now dead artist. Mom loved it but the price was silly not silky. Mom is still struggling with Chinese food: too salty, too sweet, wrong texture, not her cup of tea although we drink plenty of it. Gali told us that Chinese people do not take tips and may in fact be offended by the offer. We find it not to be true, except for restaurants who take it anyway, for tour guide, drivers, bellmen etc., it may be part of the Westernization process.

The Temple of Heaven is yet another temple. The main tower is impressive but we're beginning to develop a temple fatigue. After the impressive Lama the rest are like Chinese they all look alike. Actually the most interesting experience here is to watch the old and not so old (by our standards as men retire at 60 and women at 55) socializing over a card game (mixed men and women) or Chinese chess (men only).







We have one more day in Beijing. It's a must see to understand the changes that are taking place in China vis-a-vis the Western perspective. But if you had to sum up Beijing in one word: Grey.

We literally crashed at 3 PM by 8 we went across the street for good Italian food in a French restaurant (that's the name of the restaurant)

Experienced another first(may be first ever in the world) : watched the first half of the Manchester Derby on Skype with Eyal pointing the iPhone camera at the TV. My eyes are sore and my heart is broken as United are down 2:0 at the half. Without RVP they have no chance and the team is void on creativity, imagination and a solid game plan. I'm going to sleep it's over: 1 point from 3 games: Liverpool, Chelsea and now City.

September 23

Do not leave Beijing before visiting the 798 Art District. This used to be an industrial electronic assembly shop alley. Now it houses gorgeous galleries, art boutiques, gift shops, cafe's, restaurants, bars. It is a rustic truly bohemian atmosphere. It is great to see how art of all kinds is so universal. We were back at the hotel for a late lunch and proceeded to break the world record of most hours in bed before nightfall. It seems that we have pushed ourselves to a limit. The strolling, window shopping slow walk as mom pointed out is actually more taxing on the hips and knees and my back than the more brisk follow the tour guide walk we experienced thus far. This is another tip for geriatric adventure travellers. We did not hear from Gali so we stayed in bed after nightfall skipped dinner altogether watched (me) Barca beat Rayo 4:0 in the first game in years when they had less possession than the opposition. In Spain they caught flak for abandoning the Pep Guardiola Tiki Taka style under the new coach. But with players like Neymar, Xavi, Iniesta, and Leo Messi and a perfect record in the first 5 matches, what seems to be the problem officer? Mom was reading up at the time and our 5 O'clock wake-up call was just around the corner. Bye China (great but not a burning desire to return) Hello Tibet. Scary but our original Himalayan trip hasn't started yet.



September 24

Check out at 5:15 from the Peninsula was a good choice. The night clerk or was it the morning dazed clerk failed to charge us for 2 nights and we only paid for "incidentals" (hotel restaurant lunch) which are daylight robberies on their own. We think we are \$500 ahead but we already spent it hours before. We noticed higher security scrutiny on the flight to Lhasa than on our domestic flights to Chengdu and X'ian. Understandable?! Today we will be climbing down from 34,000 feet in the air to 12 500 on the ground. Our big thin air test is coming soon.