

BEIJING TO ANCHORAGE CRUISE

The basis for this journal was plagiarized from my daughter, Scotti Zekman's journal.

April 28, 1995. Two Atlanta friends, Caroline Myers and Margaret Ann Brenner, and I flew to Beijing a few days before the cruise program started so that we could go to Sian and see the warriors. Our hotel was in the airport area. We allowed ourselves to be conned into taking a taxi, when we later found out that the hotel had a courtesy bus. That's what you do when you have lots of jet lag!

Despite the jet lag, Caroline and I caught a cab into downtown Beijing to have lunch at the Beijing Hotel. The Chinese menu included a "fish" and I told Caroline that this was usually something very nice. The Chinese don't give their dishes fancy names. The waiter was very excited when we ordered. He returned from the kitchen with a fish flopping around in a dishpan and all the other waiters stood around waiting for our approval. When the fish was served everyone stood around to watch. We should have been suspicious but we weren't. The fish was delicious. The bill was for \$55.00! What we had thought was the price for the fish was apparently the price per ounce!

We also shopped at the hotel boutiques and I found some agate pendants that were very reasonable. It is unusual to find bargains in China since the Chinese mark everything up for the tourist.

We then walked around a bit and when we got tired caught a pedicab back to the Beijing Hotel and a cab back to our airport hotel. The poor man really had to work hard with us both in the cab.

April 29-April 30. We flew to Sian on a pre-cruise package and saw the magnificent warriors. We also had a tour of the old walled city. They took us to a performance done with ancient musical instruments. Margaret Ann has trouble walking and found the tour very strenuous. She also is a consummate shopper and was more interested in buying things than in seeing the warriors.

Back in Beijing, I found Scotti and Jim had arrived. They had not found Jim a roommate so Scotti left me to a room of my own.

May 1, 1995. At 8:30 we were bused to Tiananmen Square. It is May Day and a national holiday. There were thousands of people in the huge square. It is said that the square can hold 500,000 people! It is the largest square in the world, bigger than St. Peter's and Red Square.

Our goal was the Forbidden City, which is on one side of the square. It was also very crowded but a wonderful place. The buildings are painted in reds and blues. Only emperors could use the color yellow.

The Emperors had concubines and Eunuchs. One Emperor was so paranoid that someone would kill him that he even slept with eleven other people in the room so the killer would not know which one to attack.

There were huge bowls around the various buildings, which held water in the event of fire. There are many courtyards and in the end we were shown the private apartments and jewel room.

Then we were taken to a cloisonné factory where we saw how the enamelware was painstakingly prepared. I bought a bowl for Scotti.

For lunch we went to one of the restaurants in the hotel and had dim sum. These are lots of little dishes. I then had a nap while Jim and Scotti had an adventure going to the zoo.

For dinner, we ate Mongolian style. We sat on hard wooden benches at a low square wooden table. We had a Mongolian Pot, along the order of a fondue and cooked our meat in the simmering water.

Tuesday, May 2. We headed out to see the Great Wall of China. However, all eleven plus buses arrived at the gondola at the same time and it was an hour before it was our turn to go up! Jim deserted us and hiked up without benefit of gondola.

The view was wonderful of the wall stretching for miles into the distance. The only problem was the persistent hawkers trying to sell all sorts of souvenirs.

Then we went to the Ming Tombs. We had a box lunch in one of the courtyards there. Only one tomb has been opened, but not the one where we were. For this one they don't even know where the entrance is. The eunuchs who buried the Emperor were ordered to eat solid gold to commit suicide so the secret of the entrance would be lost. This is one reason that these tombs

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have not been robbed like the tombs in Egypt Also the dead ancestors are so revered in China that it would not be right to rob them.

The highest tower is known as the Soul Tower and is beautifully painted in bright blues and reds. There is a huge tablet depicting the history of the Emperor.

There were also various side buildings with dioramas to view episodes in the emperor's life. One building housed a giant stone turtle, which would go around the world telling the history of the Emperor.

On our way back to Beijing we saw a lot of building going on. Some are even villas or very large homes primarily for the outsiders coming to China to live.

For dinner we took a cab to the Beijing Hotel and had a buffet of Western and Chinese food. We also enjoyed wandering through the many shops.

Wednesday, May 3. The Chinese are friendly and want to practice their English. Thirteen million people live in Beijing and another million come to the city each day from the country. Overpopulation is a big problem. Families are not allowed to have more than one child. Only farmers are allowed to have a second child if the first one is a girl. Even if the second child is a girl, they cannot have any more.

Automobiles are rare for the average income is only \$6000 per year, but almost everyone has a bicycle. Everyone seems to be well fed and happy. They are all neat and clean, men wearing jackets and women in slacks and jackets. Everyone seems to be in good shape, probably because of the daily group calisthenics and all that cycling!

We had a tour to the Temple of Heaven. The detail in the designs under the roof was amazing. The large square in front of the temple represents the earth and the round shape of the temple represents heaven.

Then it was back on the bus for the 2 1/2 hour drive to Xingang, where we are to board our ship. There was an expressway through lush farmland. Periodically we saw mounds in the fields with a stone on top, which are apparently farmer's graves. China requires that people be cremated but the farmers stick to the old way of being buried in the ground where they have worked.

We saw villages and communes, all looking prosperous. We had a pit stop at a clean rest stop, where the toilets were Asian style, just a hole in the ground. Most of the tourists are not used to this form of toilet where you must squat!

We finally arrived at our ship and fortunately we were one of the first buses so we were able to board fairly quickly. Others weren't so lucky. Jim still has no roommate, so Scotti will room with him, leaving me a single cabin. . The ship is the old Royal Viking Sky but she has changed from those days when I sailed on her with my mother. They have taken some of the public rooms away to get more cabins. We explored the ship and went to the early show, where the cruise staff was introduced.

There was a juggler who pulled Jim out of the audience. He held a cigarette loosely in his mouth while bowling pins were juggled around him. Finally, the juggler was able to get the cigarette out of his mouth! It was very funny.

At dinner we find our table of eight are all late eaters. Our tablemates are Elsie, Harlan, Betty, Irene, Darlene, Jim and Scotti, and myself. Betty was on last year's cruise with us. We sailed at midnight long after we had gone to sleep.

May 4. A morning at sea. Jim won the paddle tennis tournament, although he had never played before.

After lunch we had a tour of Yantai. The town has a population of about 6 million people and is one of the 10 or 12 port cities, which China has opened up to the world. There isn't a great deal to see in Yantai so the city concentrates on making our visit personal.

We were first taken to a silk factory, which makes over 6000 designs, which they sell to Italian companies. Then we went on to the Yantai Museum for a short visit. Sailors and fishermen would come here to pray for good winds and safety at sea, prior to setting sail.

The highlight of our tour was the home visits. We broke into groups of about 10 and were taken to houses in a village outside of town. Our visit was to the home of a young woman who had a three-year-old daughter named Jade. Her pigtails stuck straight out and up and she stood there, obviously wondering what we were all about. The home was immaculate, small and very sparse.

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The floor was stone and tile and the kitchen consisted of just a wok. The bed was large and heated by a coal furnace of sorts that pumped hot air under the bed. This house had a full bath although many of the homes must share the communal bath. After tea we were encouraged to make conversation through an interpreter. I was a little dumbfounded when the man asked me if it was true that all Americans carried guns! They have such a distorted view of us from our western movies. We left them some small gifts.

Next we went to the school. The kindergartners sang and put on a performance and then danced with us! The school even had a room with nothing but beds for the children to nap in.

And then we were taken to the Grand Hotel for a tea party and a music and dance show. The rain dance and the basket dance were interesting, but the Chinese opera music is nothing but screeching! One boy and girl played a loud tune on their flute and some sort of wind instrument. It was all birdcalls, but very loud and awful to listen to. At the end they played Jingle Bells.

Back onboard we quickly changed and went to the magic show, which was quite good. This was followed by dinner. The food onboard has not been that great.

May 5, 1995. We lost an hour last night. There was a Mariner Club Meeting, which we were invited to because we had booked with Golden Bear. Scotti became a "Captain" based on the number of cruises she has been on. Jim was a little put out at not being invited, but he did not book with Golden Bear.

The formal evening was very nice with everyone in their best clothes to meet the Captain before dinner. Dinner came with caviar, escargot and lobster tails. We have a problem with our table. Two of the ladies always arrive late and the waiters won't serve us until everyone is there so we must wait!

May 6. Pusan, Korea. Pusan is a busy container port. There are 3.5 million inhabitants, and heavy traffic. It is on a narrow strip of land between the mountains and the sea. The climate was lovely, although we were told it is very hot in summer and cold in winter. The city is very clean for there are big fines for littering. There are not many bicycles and only Korean made cars are seen for non-Korean cars may not be imported. Students go to school from 8:00 AM until 10:00PM. They work very hard on their studies and have extensive exams if they want to get into the universities,

We had a full day excursion, which took us to Pomosa, a Buddhist Monastery high up in the hills overlooking Pusan. We had quite a climb up to the Monastery on a path lined with [paper lanterns. The lanterns were bought by individuals to give their family 10,000 blessings for the holiday. Tomorrow is Buddha's birthday and it is celebrated like we might celebrate Christmas. We heard wind chimes and the chanting of the monks at prayer. It was a very peaceful spot.

Then we visited the only UN cemetery in the world, for individuals who fought in the Korean War. There are people from 22 different nations buried here. Most of the Americans have been returned to the US.

Next we went to an amethyst factory where I bought a ring that looks somewhat like a bunch of grapes.

Lunch was a Korean barbecue at a lovely resort overlooking the ocean. Meat was cooked at the table and we wrapped it with lettuce and condiments and ate it like a sandwich. We all tried the kim chi, which is considered a delicacy. Koreans eat it for breakfast, lunch and dinner. I didn't care for it very much.

Then we went to a tower overlooking Pusan for a panoramic view.

Our bus slowly made its way down to the fish market, which was fascinating for the great variety. There were live eels, squid, octopus, crab and all sorts of shellfish, and many varieties of fish we did not recognize. It was all very clean. People were having their fish cooked and ate it on the spot. Nearby was the Kwangbok-Dong market, which was packed with people. There were lots of small street vendors selling everything imaginable. I found a store with Korean lacquer inlaid boxes and bought two for John's adopted Korean grandchildren.

May 7. At sea. A lazy day cruising the Sea of Japan. We lost two hours of sleep last night. I managed to play some bridge.

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There was an interesting galley tour. For a 10-12 day cruise the ship orders 25 pounds of caviar, 6,600 pounds of beef, 6,200 pounds of lamb pork and veal, 2,800 pounds of shrimp and crab, 19,950 pounds of fresh fruit and so forth. All food on board comes by container from a broker in Florida. They can get food anywhere in the world within 24 hours.

There was a Broadway show tune show. We went to the dancing afterward, but the hosts were totally preoccupied by a few aggressive women.

May 8. We woke up in Vladivostok, Russia. The ship steamed all night to get here early so that we could get through immigration. However the Russians were not as cooperative and took their time clearing us. Everyone had to carry their passport so that we could be checked as we left the ship. There were many Russian ships in the harbor including a submarine. It and several other old ships are now a museum in memory of their dead soldiers. Tomorrow is the fiftieth anniversary of the end of the War in Europe.

Vladivostok was once a lovely cultured city but under communist rule, none of the beautiful buildings have been kept in repair. Even the city steps are falling apart, We attended an hour-long performance of Russian dancing as well as Russian songs. There was also a Latin Lambda and even a couple of American songs. I think they wanted to show us that they are still cultured.

Vladivostok is about 5,500 miles by train from Moscow and is very difficult to get to unless you travel by train or boat. The trans-Siberian railway takes six days to make the journey. It leaves from a lovely old train station, one of the few buildings in town that has been repaired.

We returned to the ship for a hasty lunch and had to again find our passports, which was more difficult this time.

Our bus took us to an apartment building where we were divided into three groups to visit a Russian home. The apartment building looked rundown, and the hallways were also pretty bad. The surprise was the apartment itself. Out of the public sight, this couple lived very well. We were served tea and cakes and invited to look around the two-bedroom apartment. Our hostess' husband is a merchant sailor out at sea at present. However her daughter and grandson, as well as a ten-year-old brother were there.

After that we went to two museums and saw some wonderful icons. Then there was time for some shopping before we went back to the ship.

May 9. At Sea. We gained our two hours back. There was a wonderful buffet lunch including butter sculptures of the discus thrower and a dragon. There were also ice sculptures. We had a lecture on Japan. Then Scotti and I went to the lounge to dance but still had no luck getting partners because the hosts were absorbed by a few women who are more aggressive than I am. There was a talent show that night.

May 10. Nagasaki, Japan. It was bright and sunny and much warmer. We were late leaving Vladivostok because one partner had not turned in her passport. Then, due to bad tides and seas since leaving Vladivostok we were late arriving in Nagasaki.

Nagasaki was the epicenter for the atomic bomb. The bomb detonated about 2000 feet above ground and wiped out everything within a 2-kilometer radius. One third of the population was killed instantly. The ground reached temperatures of 200 degrees right after the blast.

Our tour took us to the Peace Park with memorials from all over the world, including a 30 meter high man with one arm up and one extended signifying peace, but ready to stand up in the event of trouble. We didn't see an American memorial. It was all very moving.

Our right-hand drive bus took us back through the narrow streets to the Glover House, which is on top of a hill overlooking the harbor. We climbed a lot of steps and even took escalators to get up to the top. In the late 1800s there was an international community of some 80 homes in this district. They weren't destroyed in the bombing and have been preserved as a memorial. The Glover House is the oldest western style house remaining in Japan and is surrounded by a lovely garden and trees,

We returned to our bus walking down through streets crowded with school children visiting from other provinces. Most of the schoolchildren wear dark uniform. The boy's uniform looks like the army. The girl's looks like the navy. The smallest children wear bright colored caps.

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Nagasaki is only 200 miles from Korea but it is 600 miles to Tokyo. It was one of the first ports in Japan opened to the outside world and became a large trade center. The harbor had several huge ships with huge round containers to bring liquefied gas to Japan.

About 1:30 our ship was pulled away from the pier and turned around in the narrow harbor. The day was warm and we sat on deck soaking up the sunshine. We have a long way to go to Osaka. Tonight was the farewell cocktail party for those leaving the ship in Tokyo.

May 11, 1995. At Sea. We woke to rough seas and a tossing ship. We are traveling up the east coast of Japan toward Osaka. We were due about 4:00 PM but the weather was so bad we didn't arrive at Osaka until 9:00 PM. There were a lot of disgruntled passengers who had had their Japanese dinner canceled. We docked under a long suspension bridge in a new area of Osaka.

May 12. We woke to pouring rain and it was that way all day long! Our bus was at least an hour late leaving the pier, so our overview of Osaka was to drive straight through it. We did catch a glimpse of Osaka Castle in the distance over a highway fence. The countryside was fascinating. There were rice paddies right up to the houses, small patches of garden, and clusters of what appeared to be nice two-story homes. These houses must be very cold in the winter since there is air-conditioning but no central heat in Japan!

We got to Kyoto in time for lunch. There is a very different feel to this city. With a population of about 7000,000, there are over 400 Buddhist and Shinto temples. Our tempura lunch was in a delightful little restaurant on a quaint street of shops. An enormous Buddha (sixty feet or more) stood at the top of the hill overlooking our parking lot.

After lunch we visited the Shogun's palace, which had "nightingale" floors, which would squeak if someone were trying to sneak up on him. There were 30 rooms with tatami mats and lovely gold painted murals on the rice paper walls and ceilings. It was raining too much to enjoy the gardens.

We saw many shrines in Kyoto and we drove through sections of the city where obis and kimonos were sold. An obi can have as much as forty feet of cloth, all hand-painted. Kimonos for weddings are so expensive that they are usually rented for about \$5000 for the day and are worn only for fifteen minutes! The bride traditionally changes her outfits several times on her wedding day, wearing both traditional garb as well as kimonos. Weddings can cost millions, but they average over \$50,000 in a wedding that includes meals for 100-200 people, gifts for each person who attends, rental of the kimono and so forth. The groom pays for the honeymoon and 70 percent of the cost of the apartment. The bride pays for the furniture. Families with two or more daughters can really go bankrupt!

We were late arriving late at our hotel and found we had been assigned three rooms! The Japanese do not approve of unmarried people living together as Scotti and Jim are. We swam out into the rain again and went to a mall under the train station across the street. Here we found a restaurant with a few traditional Japanese tables on the floor. We picked our meal by pointing to the plastic replicas in the window. We ate our fill of sushi and sake. We were a bit stiff when we finally stood up but it was worth it. Our meal cost about \$75 for the three of us, which is very reasonable for a Japanese meal.

May 13. We woke to sunshine! We rove the three minutes to the train and took the Shinkansen Bullet Train to Tokyo. What an experience. We even got a glimpse of Mount Fuji although her peak was in the clouds. We raced past mountains and villages, plantings of tea and so many tunnels.

Once we arrived in Tokyo, we were taken to a delicious barbecue lunch in the garden of the New Otani Hotel, where mother and I ate in 1965. Since it was Saturday, there were a number of wedding receptions being held at the hotel. We saw many ladies in beautiful kimonos. One bride even wore a bright red wedding dress in a receiving line. Everyone bowed to each other but there were no handshakes or kisses. It was mostly men who attended.

We were shown the Imperial Palace. We didn't see the Emperor and Empress because they live in an eastern-style house on about 200 acres of heavily wooded land in the middle of Tokyo surrounded by a moat.

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We visited a lovely Shinto Shrine where a wedding had just concluded and the bride, groom and both matchmakers and family were parading about the shrine. We also saw families going to the shrine to pray for good luck or get a blessing for their babies.

Then we visited a Buddhist Temple in the Asakusa section and browsed through the numerous shops and stalls. There were hundreds of small shops selling everything under the sun.

Exhausted, we finally reached the ship about 6:00 PM. The passengers who didn't take the overland trip were not happy campers. They hadn't arrived in Tokyo until 2:00 because of bad weather and 300 had missed the barbecue lunch!

A Japanese magician and jugglers entertained us before dinner.

May 14. Mother's Day. After breakfast the three of us trudged off and hiked for over an hour around the harbor to a park where we caught a ferryboat up the river. We crossed under a dozen bridges or more until we reached Asakusa. We later found we could have caught the ferry right from our own pier! It was interesting seeing Tokyo from the different perspective of the river.

After lunch and shopping we caught a bus to the Ginza and a taxi back to the ship. Scotti and Jim left about four. They will remain in Tokyo on business for a couple of days.

I changed tables to be with a more congenial group.

May 15. We were in Hokkaido, which has a very different feel than the rest of Japan. Even the people seem taller.

From here we took off across the Pacific headed for Anchorage. The weather, which had plagued the ship, continued. The Pacific wasn't very pacific! The ship rolled and pitched and most of the activities were cancelled. I spent a lot of time in the lounge playing trivia and other games. I was also happy that my cabin wasn't on an upper deck where the motion would have been worse.

They cancelled our stop in the Aleutians because we were so far behind schedule. We got to Anchorage some hours late and the ship offloaded us at once to ship on their next cruise.