

# Travel Chronicles Together with my Endearing Ex-school Mates



IT all started in Beijing. We were here because some of us suggested that it was timely for a reunion. We were planning to head to the Qingdao Cherry Blossom Season but there was no direct flight there. Beijing became our starting point, and all of us flew in from as far as Toronto, London, Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, with our camaraderie standing strong.

WE had a delightful welcome reception during dinner at Beijing Riviera Country Club, where we stayed in Beijing. We were delighted with the Riviera staff for helping us feel very much at home, for taking care of our needs and helping us to arrange two-way transportation from Shandong. A group of us had not been to Beijing before, so we embarked on the various places of interest in Beijing. The first pit stop was Tian An Men Square (天安门), where every early morning, the national flag is raised. We went on to Forbidden City (故宫), and we were struck by the grandness of the majestic historical monument, the Chinese Imperial palace. Proudly, we set foot on the courtyards that the royalties of China once occupied from Ming Dynasty till the end of Qing Dynasty. We continued onwards to visit the magnificent and colorful Temple of Heaven (天坛), which is located in Central Beijing. Historically, the Temple of Heaven is where the pious emperors of Ming Dynasty and Qing Dynasties will make offerings to heaven, and prayers for good harvests. Under the cooling temperatures during May, we conquered the Great Wall of China (长城). Step by step; we inched forward with our comrades to reach the top, perspiring yet feeling accomplished. The climb was less grueling with good company.

THE sacred Thirteen Ming Tombs (明十三陵) was not to be missed too, where Emperor Yongle, together with 13 other Ming Dynasty Emperors were buried in the area. One interesting fact to note was that the area was chosen according to Fengshui Principles that all bad spirits and evil winds descending from the North will be deflected. The Summer Palace was our last sightseeing attraction in Beijing. There, we were greeted with a spectacular array of 14,000 paintings commissioned by Emperor Qianlong along a covered walkway about 730 metres long, so that his mother, the Dowager could enjoy her stroll without the sweltering sun or the occasional rain. We also went to the Tower of Buddhist Incense, which is the highest building in the Summer Palace on top of Longevity Hill, also known as an imperial worshipping tower.

IT marked the end of our Beijing stop, but did not mark the end of our travels. Each group took their individual choice of transportation be it rail or air, and finally, we congregated at Liberation Square in the heart of Qingdao, which is in Shandong Province. We then made a field trip to Laoshan (崂山), a famous mountain in Qingdao. It is also the highest coastal mountain in China, and it became another climbing feat we can proclaim. The panoramic view on Laoshan was both breathtaking and picturesque, with clear springs and waterfalls descending from its peak. The mountain is also one of the birthplaces of Taoism, and lined by scenic spots we visited such as Taiping Palace Taoism Temple, and Sanhuang Palace. We finally visited the much anticipated Cherry Blossom Festival at Zhongshan Park (中山公园). The pathway we glided along was the 500-meter Oriental Cherry Corridor. The delicate pink blossoms adorned the corridor as we strolled slowly, taking our time to enjoy the lovely scenery ahead of us. OUR visit to Tsingtao Beer Factory (青岛啤酒厂) was an extreme eye-opener for all of us. We had a taste of the brewery process as the employee of Tsingtao Beer Factory brought us around the brewery. We learnt



that the only ingredients used to make Tsingtao Beer were water, barley and hops, and the process included germination and drying the grains with hot air afterwards. Tsingtao Beer manufactured here is brewed with mineral water from Laoshan Spring!

ON our last day at Qingdao, we were pleasantly surprised to see exquisite architecture from as many as 20 different styles such as Danish, English, French German, and Russian Architecture at Badaguan. The architecture was mainly European-influenced, as Qingtao was a German protectorate back in 1897-1914. We walked on roads that were grid-like. History has it that, there were eight sloping roads at Badaguan named after eight strategic passes of the Great Wall of China.

WE concluded our last leg of our travels in our combined group of 25. It was good times together but we parted temporarily for more travelling for some, lesser for others. One group left for Beijing by air, while another group took the train for Beijing but stopped by Jinan for another round of sightseeing. The last group went on to visit Qufu, Taishan and Jinan via train, as our stamina and appetite for sightseeing was still going strong.

AT our stop in Qufu, we went to "The Three Confucian [sites]", which consisted of the Temple of Confucius (孔庙), Kong Miao, the Cemetery of Confucius (孔林), and the Kong Family Mansion (孔府). Since 1994, these three sites have been listed as a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Heritage Site since 1994. TWO years after the demise of Confucius, Prince of Lu built the Temple of Confucius to honor Confucius. As the name of Confucius spread over decades with generations of rulers paying homage to the Temple, the temple was gradually expanded to become the second largest historical building complex in China today. At the east of the temple, the Kong Family Mansion was where the first son and first grandson of Confucius lived. They tended and guarded the Temple and Cemetery. There were many cultural relics, some given by emperors or high-ranking officials. Luxury furnishings and exquisite decorations of the Mansion filled our photo albums as we snapped photographs eagerly. To the north of Qufu, we found ourselves in the Cemetery of Confucius. Confucius is buried in the bank of Sishui River, beneath the tomb in the form of an axe. Since then, the tomb became an important place of pilgrimage.

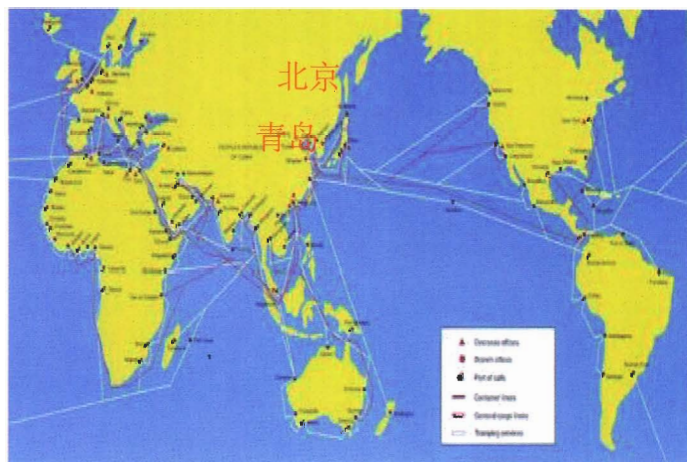


WE also paid homage to The Temple of Yan (颜庙), dedicated to the memory of Yan Hui who was Confucius's favourite disciple. Yan Hui had died at the early age of 32, but had earned the respect of Confucius who mourned for his death. The first emperor of the Han dynasty had venerated both Yan Hui(颜回) and Confucius (孔子).

OUR journey to Taishan was filled with challenges as we began our very last climb. We attempted the Peach Blossom Ravine Route as it was the most convenient for us. We took a bus to the cable car stop and wanted to take the cable car but it was not operating due to the adverse weather condition. Instead, we hiked upwards for another 200 meters to reach the pinnacle. Taking in the scene below us, it was a worthwhile and victorious climb as we went on foot for half of the climb. After we got ample rest, we descended to the cable car stop to take the bus towards Taishan city.

OUR very last station was Jinan, Shandong's provincial capital. It is considered one of China's most famous historical and cultural cities. It has numerous natural springs, hence given the name of "Spring City". We visited the Daming Lake, walked around the park and saw beautifully constructed pavilions. We got ourselves a boat and drifted along the Lake. All of our tension melted away, as we admired the scenic mountainous area against the sunset.

WE bade goodbye to Shandong feeling contented and fulfilled. After a three-and-a-half hour train ride, it was home sweet home at Beijing Riviera once again. We would like to extend our deepest appreciation to Kenny Hon, for extending Rivera's hospitality to us in our very short stay, Ong Chong Hye for being our fearless leader who customized the tour programs for our preferences, and last but not least, KC Gan for igniting the idea for a reunion and hosting us well. The moments captured by our photographs will stay in our hearts and remind us of the wonderful memories we had of the journey in Beijing and Shandong.



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