

Taking A Slow Boat from China

March 3-24, 2018



The *Nautica*, 20,000 tons, 680 passengers, 19 knots, three weeks, China, Taiwan & Japan. In this biz where Royal Caribbean's largest is 227,000 tons serving 5,479 passengers, this is a boutique experience, focused on quality. The pre-cruise started in Beijing. A little less than \$18,000 for both of us, plus flights.



Please meet my Medical Staff. In addition to my long time Private Nurse Su Hattori I added Walter Blahey MD and Nurse Brenda of Calgary. However, I should have checked his medical certificate, which I suspect he ordered off an ad in the back of a comic book: day two I got a cold, and he not only didn't prevent it, he didn't have drugs to make me feel good, or even see nice colours.



During the very days this shot was taken of The Great Hall of the People on Tiananmen Square Xi Jinping was inside consolidating power as lifetime dictator. China is not only a police state, if a soft one, it's a military one.



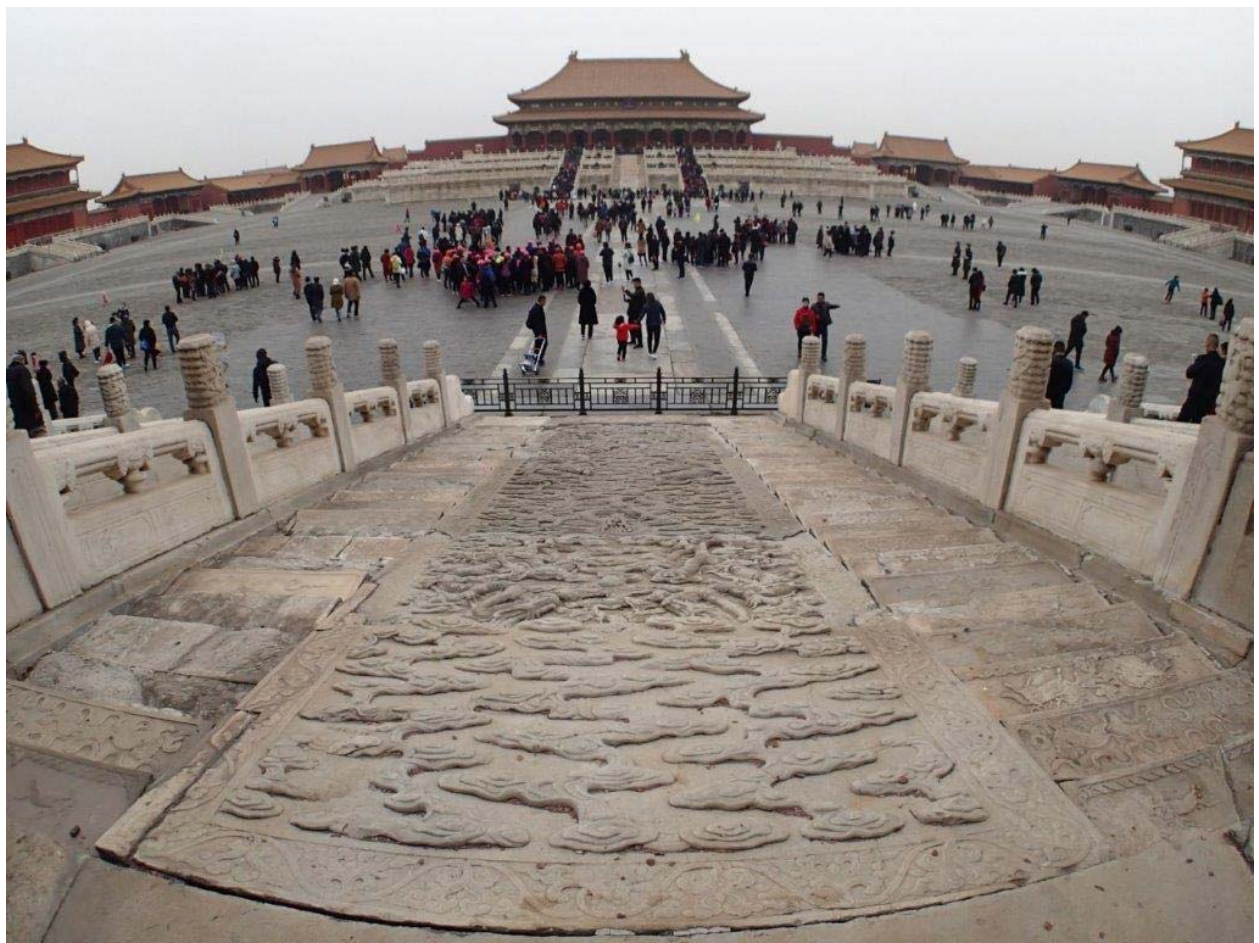
Rules are everywhere. This is at a park entrance.



You can't even fuck the dog. However, you can eat them.



He spun it this way in the *China Daily*: “Upholding the leadership of the Communist Party of China is not discarding democracy but forming wider and more effective democracy.” Whew. That’s a whopper. That said, democracy is terribly inefficient, and in the US has degenerated into dysfunction. With a background as mayor of Shanghai, which he turned into a world-class city, he’s widely popular and talented.





Xi Jinping had a major say in the Renaissance of incredible architecture.



We boarded in Shanghai, where I shot this off the deck. Incredible city. While Beijing is staid, political and boring, Shanghai is all about creativity. I counted 16 of these towers displaying light shows.



I've long been curious as to the context of the picture of the towers, now world famous. It's shot from across the river. To the right the row of yellow buildings along the bank on my side are on the Bund—the European trading concessions with their grand trading houses, that came to an end with the Japanese invasion in 1937.



Before we haul anchor, let my Private Nurse take you on a ship's tour.







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Library. That's my counterfeit doctor in the back. Gotta hand it to him though, getting away with practicing medicine so long with a mail order degree. I just wish I would have known before I brought him along. By day five, Nurse Hattori was sniffing, so two-thirds of my so-called Medical Team was useless. And I had a full fledged man cold.



There apparently was live entertainment every evening but because it was after 9:30pm, I didn't catch any of it. Way too late.







The staterooms were very comfortable with TV, DVD and wifi. And 24-hour room service.



Our fellow passengers? I had a flash of déjà vu back to my last high school reunion when I thought I'd wandered into an Old Folks Home by mistake. I was further thrown off by the background music piped around the ship—Dion and *Wild Thing* and *The Beat Goes On*—into thinking this was the Baby Boom going bust, from cruisin' Main Street in their jalopies in '62 to cruisin' the world's seas today. But the mean age of 75 put them in greasy ducktails and crinolines back in the '50s. By comparison, I'm an adolescent geezer, while they're middle aged geezers with a sprinkling of old geez's thrown in.



The sexiest thing on the whole cruise was this outtake from *The Seven Year Itch*, on the wall of the Polo Room, one of the dining rooms.



Fortunately, the dining largely made up for the lack of juicy young nubile around the pool to ogle. Though here one evening was spoiled when, while having sashimi (raw fish), my co-called “doctor” took pleasure in regaling me with the life cycle of tapeworm.



Starting with Oysters Rockefeller and lobster bisque followed by Waldorf salad and climaxed with Kobe beef with truffle Demi-Glace and a side of truffle mashed potatoes. Burrrrrp. But belched eloquently. Gracefully. With class. (In truth the menus outshone the food; probably because of all the golden oldies aboard where high blood pressure is the norm, very little salt was added creating a blandness. And the scallops and lobsters were tiny varieties while the Kobe beef portions required a magnifying glass.)



However where they shone was, of all places, their hamburgers. Until now my favorite hamburger was from Lori's Diner on Sutter in San Francisco. A '50s retro place. But the ship's Swiss Burger with 24-day aged Black Angus beef, Swiss cheese and mushrooms was fabulous. As was the service throughout the ship. First class.



(On approach to Shanghai I saw all these newish subdivisions that looked like they're been surveyed by a drunk. Suspecting *feng shui* I emailed Shanghai Jane Zhang in Nova Scotia. Yup. I also asked Guangzhou Tracy Jiang but she was unsure. I guess Guangzhou it doesn't make such a mess of streets...?



We were bused to Qibao, a “water town,” described as Shanghai fifty years ago. There’s over a thousand of these heritage towns around China, I was told. But I was also told when I visited Lijiang and Dali, Yunnan, ten years ago that they were the only two left. Mrs. Google indicates that there’s at least several.





Hong Kong brags about its 44 million HK dollar skyscraper light show but it was so dull compared to Shanghai's that I'll just bring you the skyline along the island. First time I was here in '82, maybe 3-4 of the smaller buildings were here.



Nathan Road in the '80s was a dump. Now it looks like it's part of Nice, including palms.



However, venerable Chungking Mansions, flophouse to generations of shoestring travelers, is still as grubby as ever. I preferred my Calcutta pigeon coop; for that, please see my previous Blah Blah: <http://www.jasonschoonover.com/2018/02/passage-across-india-3/>



Even the iconic Peninsula Hotel, around the corner, has been spiffed up. It still has a fleet of Rolls outside for guest rentals.



I love Thai food but I've already eaten, thanks, but, uh, can you tell me a bit about this other item on the menu...?



The two stops in Taiwan didn't interest us—we'd been there before and I was still sniffing—so we stayed aboard. Which is easy to do, basking in luxury. Next stop was Ishigaki, here, the southern most Japanese island. Suddenly, we're back in the land of Clean and Efficient and Safe and Honest.



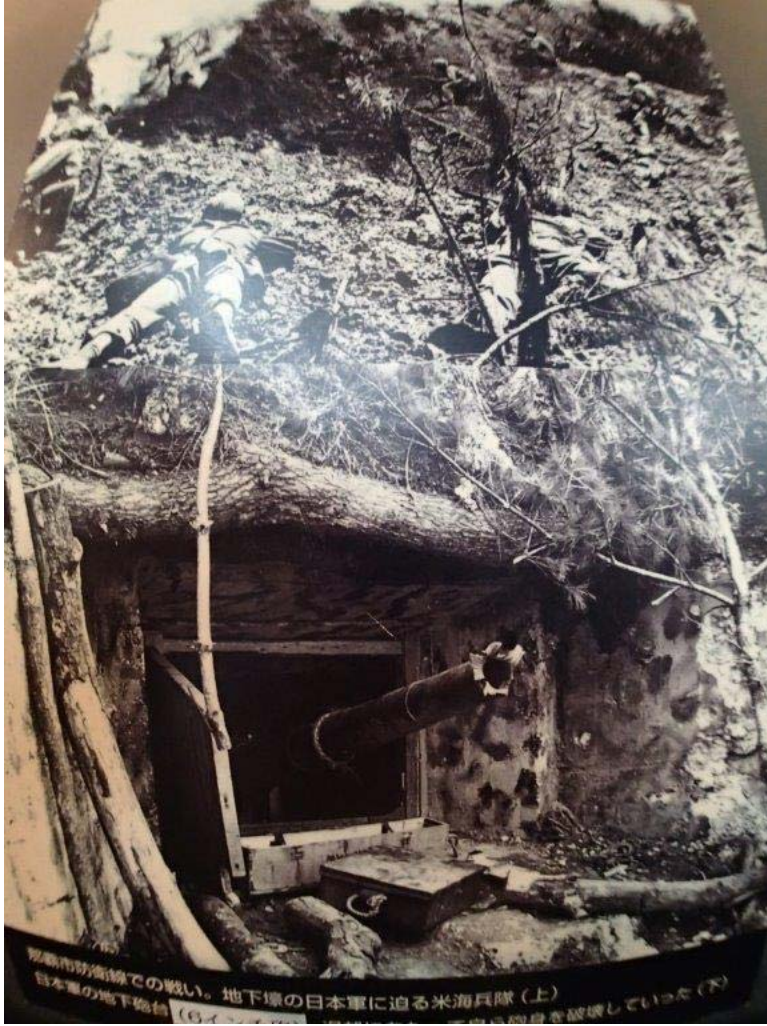
And the land of pigeon-toed young women. For the scientific investigation I did of this odd phenomenon see <http://www.jasonschoonover.com/2016/11/japans-love-hotels-sex-shops-and-the-mythical-search-for-used-school-girl-panties/>



I've long wanted to tour the Okinawa battlefield—the bloodiest in the WW-II Pacific Theatre. History turns on battles, and I have a history (and English) degree. I've visited many: Hastings, Glencoe, Normandy, Dieppe, Arnhem, Ypres, Verdun, Plains of Abraham, Batoche, Fish Creek, Duck Lake, Cut Knife Hill, Loon Lake, Little Big Horn, Gettysburg, Kingston New York, Pearl Harbor, Plains of Marathon, Corregidor, Battle of Manila (both Spanish-American and WW-II), Leyte Gulf, Hong Kong Island, Ayutthaya, Kanchanaburi Thai-Burmese battlefield, Dunkirk, Singapore, now Okinawa. The main battle took place in the bottom tip.



During 82 days of slaughter after the U.S. assault began April 1, 1945, more than 12,000 American and 100,000 Japanese troops died, with over 100,000 Okinawan civilians—almost a quarter of the population—before resistance was overcome June 22.



"Never before...had there been an invasion armada the equal of the 1,600 seagoing ships carrying 545,000 American GIs and Marines that streamed across the Pacific," wrote Robert Leckie in *Delivered From Evil: The Saga of World War II*. "In firepower, troops, and tonnage it eclipsed even the more famous D-Day in Normandy." The Japanese called it the "typhoon of steel."



Rarely has a civilian population been trapped in such a terrible situation. The civilians were so mistreated by the Japanese—pushed out of caves, boys as young as fourteen mobilized and given the most dangerous tasks (such as handing a grenade and told to crawl under a US tank and pull the pin)—that animosity remains towards them to this day. The Okinawans, although part of Japan, have never felt an integral relationship to it.



All 200,000 dead are commemorated on these stele in Peace Park at the southern tip.



The curved rows upper right are of the steles. The cliff on the left is the infamous Suicide Cliff. Photo taken from the tower above the excellent museum.



In the last days of the battle many terrified Okinawans—told they faced rape and murder by American troops—leapt to their deaths.

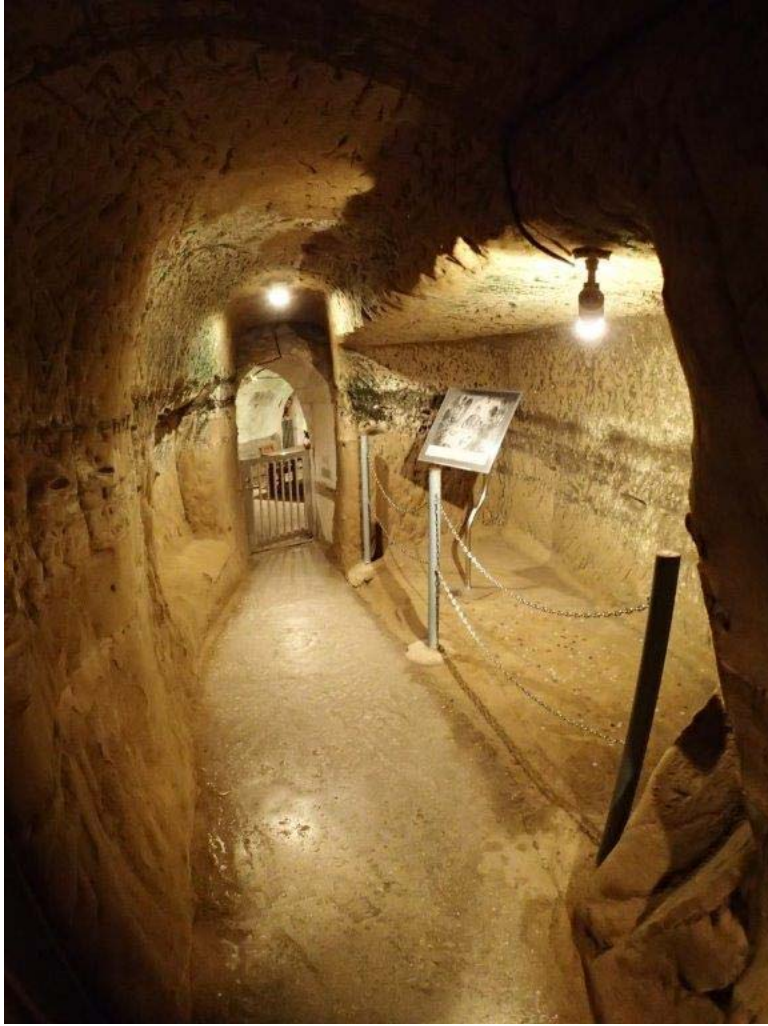


A highlight was a tour of the Navy underground headquarters, cut into sandstone.



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この洞窟は、1945年（昭和20年）に、米軍が侵入した
際、多くの兵士が犠牲になったとされている。

Panagiotis
All participants were killed by the enemy in the
course of the war after leaving the tunnel.



The tunnels reminded me of the 7th century underground cities of Cappadocia, Turkey.



The staff room where Rear Admiral Ota pulled the pin on a grenade. You can see shrapnel splatters on the rear walls.



Meanwhile lieutenant General Ushijima of the 32nd Army was checking out elsewhere though, it's believed, with poison.



The biggest surprise with Nagasaki is how beautiful the setting is, nestled amongst high hills, creating a cozy bowl. It was this very reason it was targeted, to maximize the bomb's effects. The population was 240,000—the same as Saskatoon today.



August 9, 1945.



74,000 died immediately. An equal number were injured.



85-year-old peace promotor Inosuke Hayasaki has a shrine set up at the Peace Park. He was fourteen That Day. His card reads: “I had been working at the Mitsubishi Arms Plant 1.1 km north of the hypocenter. On that day, the boss happened to order me to go to another factory. The Atomic bomb exploded just as I entered the building. I was blown behind a big pillar, which blocked the heat ray and the blast. I was miraculously saved. Only a colleague and I survived out of 32 workers. The boss died on the spot. I want to convey the fear of the Atomic bombs.”



Fat Boy. The plutonium bomb.



A pleasant surprise before we cast off was this high school band serenading us. Ironically, one of the tunes was the *Colonel Bogey March* POWs working the infamous Thai-Burma Death Railway used to sing marching to and from work, making up derogatory-to-the-Japanese-guards lyrics as they went, and which was incorporated into David Lean's 1957 hit *Bridge on the River Kwai*.





Next stop was Hiroshima. I never thought in 1982 when I did a story here for my newspapers that I'd ever be back, but this is my third visit. August 6 was the day. Little Boy was a uranium-235 bomb. 140,000 were dead by year's end.





This was roughly the epicenter.





It was a suitably depressing day to visit our second Peace Park in two days. That's the "new" museum in the background. I'd visited its earlier reincarnation in the '80s.



As with Nagasaki's I'll spare you graphic photos of horribly burned bodies, and hand bones fused with roof tiles.



The shock must have been unbelievable. Survivors on video all speak of the flash, none of the sound. It didn't make a bang?



Happier days.



Hiroshima today. It was 280-280,000 in 1945. 1.2 million today.



Kobe has a surprisingly interesting Chinatown. Oh, by this time Nurse Brenda was coughing. What a useless medical team I chose. Fortunately I was over my man cold by this time.





Kobe beef is ubiquitous. The grainier stuff on the left, that's about \$37.50US for 100gm.



There's different grades. A small steak at a sitdown is a reasonable \$25. And there's food stands everywhere. I didn't find it that special. Much prefer Costco tenderloins, our BBQ staple.



The full day's cruise from Kobe to Tokyo was rough, and I was delighted to learn that Walt was popping Gravol to ward off seasickness.



We walked the plank in Tokyo but camped in Sin, er, Shinjuku a week—arriving at the height of cherry blossom season! That little understood, friendly, sexy, crowded, kinky, exciting, sexy and very eccentric city will be the target of the next Blah Blah. Sayonara til then.