Walking the Old and New Streets of Shanghai
by Nancy Bestor

China’s city of Shanghai is a crazy blend of old and new, spartan and luxurious, classic and new-fangled. Bob and I just returned from a week there, walking (and walking, and walking) its streets and enjoying both worlds, from its fantastically designed high-rise buildings and high-end shopping streets to its timeless Buddhist temples and teeming back alleys.

We took a comfortable ride from the airport into the heart of the city on a magnetic levitating (MagLev) train, whose speed reached a smooth 430km (267 miles) per hour, then walked down bustling cobblestone alleyways to reach our hotel. On another day we were the only westerners on a narrow two-block-long alley with food stalls lining the sides—locals squatting down and selling their wares, including vegetables, chickens, fresh cut meat, fish, and black, purple and spotted eggs—and when we stumbled out, fascinated by what we had seen, we were immediately thrust into a modern neighborhood with an Apple store, a fancy confectioner, and a designer sunglasses shop. One minute we’d be walking in front of an old Chinese man, listening to him spit loudly and hoping it wasn’t on our shoes, and the next we’d be walking by a hip young Chinese couple, dressed in their finest and preparing to have glamorous wedding photos taken on the street. Shanghai residents are obviously used to this amazing blend, but for us foreigners it was a fascinating lesson in how old and new have come together to make one great city.

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Great Travel Gifts for All!
by Ember Hood

Travel Essentials has been around for nearly 20 years now. Wow! Other than the enthusiasm that our customers and colleagues show for just about any destination and for all types of travel, the thing that impresses us most is the continuing innovation, improvement and refinement in travel gear. From security to comfort and from durability to usability, the lines we offer get better and better every year. Here are some of our favorites for either your next adventure or for the next adventure for someone near and dear to you.

The Steripen Traveler UV Water Purifier ($49.95) is a great alternative to buying bottled water when you travel. It quickly and effectively uses UV light to sterilize drinking water and exceeds the EPA’s highest standards for water continued on page 4

The Ins and Outs of Using Frequent Flyer Miles
by Nancy Bestor

I’m going to let you in on a little secret, but please don’t tell United Airlines. I’m pretty sure I’ve figured out the solution to using frequent flyer miles to the best of my advantage. It’s not easy, but if you’re willing to do a little hard work and test the limits of both your patience and flexibility, you too can enjoy “free” or upgraded seats on future flights. Here’s what I’ve learned.

Bob and I have two different frequent flyer credit cards, one for business and one for personal use. Please understand that these credit cards are not free, they each cost $90 per year. But we’ve gotten pretty good about charging everything we possibly can to these cards in order to get the biggest bang for our buck. For every dollar we spend, Chase Bank and/or United Airlines credit us one mile.

This works very well for us. But before you go out and apply for such a card, I suggest you do the math. You need to make sure that during a fixed amount continued on page 3

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With six full days in Shanghai, Bob and I had plenty of opportunities to explore enchanting sites and eat great food. Our Lonely Planet guide was the perfect companion, breaking the city down into eight neighborhoods, with recommendations on sites, shopping and food for each. We took advantage of many of the book’s suggested neighborhood walking tours—I’d guess we put in an average of eight miles a day. Some mornings my legs just didn’t want to get out of bed, but once I stretched and got moving, they grudgingly cooperated. We tried to catch a cab once or twice, as they are inexpensive. But it turns out that although there are many, many taxis in Shanghai, there are apparently many, many more people who want to ride in a taxi, as we could NEVER find an empty one willing to pick up a new fare.

One of our top visits was to the Jade Buddha Temple in the Jingan neighborhood (20 yuan each to enter - $3.25 - plus 10 yuan to see the Jade Buddha itself - $1.75). This temple is one of Shanghai’s few active Buddhist monasteries, and features three halls with stunning Buddha statues in each. The highlight is the regal six-foot Jade Buddha that was carved from a single piece of lustrous jade and imported from Burma in the late 1800s. We were fortunate enough to visit another Buddhist temple—the Chenxiangge Nunnery (admission 10 yuan each)—during a service where nearly 100 brown and gold clothed nuns chanted and sang. It was beautiful.

Perhaps my favorite stop on our walking tours was the Flower, Bird and Insect Market in the Old Town. Parents with teenage children might remember from Disney’s Mulan that the cricket is a very important part of Chinese culture. A cricket is seen as a symbol of good luck, and many Chinese families keep them as pets. The sound that a cricket makes is not considered noise, but music. They are also kept for cricket fighting, and a good fighting cricket can sell for hundreds, even thousands of dollars. We knew none of this when we stumbled into the market, so we were quite confused to see booth after booth of live crickets in small jars, and lots of men and women crowded around, perhaps discussing the merits of and negotiating the prices for the sometimes grossly large insects. The market also houses birds, and some fish and flowers, but a more apt name for it would really be the Cricket Market. Another fascinating item for sale was pairs of walnuts, sometimes in velvet lined boxes. It turns out that walnuts were once the toys of China’s imperial court, and now wealthy Chinese are buying them as a status symbol. That’s right walnuts as status symbols. A pair of walnuts is said to be of value when they are bigger, older, and more symmetrical than other walnuts. And when rotated in the palm of your hand, they are thought to stimulate blood circulation. I read a report on Reuters that said there are pairs for sale on a popular trading site for $31,000. Yes, I am still talking about walnuts here. Fascinating.

One of our “modern” experiences was a visit to the observation deck of the Shanghai World Financial Center, a 1614-foot building in the Pudong neighborhood across the Huangpu River from Old Town. Completed in 2008, this 101-story building is currently Shanghai’s tallest, but next year will be eclipsed by the Shanghai Tower, at 2074 feet. The World Financial Center is right now the third tallest building in the world, and a look out the floor-to-ceiling windows from the 100th story observation deck made my stomach turn. It didn’t help that much of the floor of the observation deck is also see through, so as you’re walking you can look straight down to the ground, 1,600 feet below. This was by far the most expensive thing we did in Shanghai, as it cost 150 yuan each ($25). It was the best money I have spent in a long time.

Our favorite sites in Shanghai, however, were at street level. The small lanes and back alleys we walked in every neighborhood were full of nearly everything one can imagine. Most days we’d take at least two hours to just wander around with no real destination in mind, and find ourselves in cramped alleys and streets where the “real” people of Shanghai seem to live and do business. We walked past a lot of small card and gaming rooms each filled with local men and women sitting at felt-topped tables, playing and smoking. We saw street-side barbers and butchers, vegetable sellers with their wares on the ground, cobblers sitting on boxes on street corners, bike repairmen repairing tires by the side of the road, and roadside food stalls. Delicious and cheap roadside food stalls.

Lonely Planet pointed us to our first block of street food stalls, and although we found many, many similar areas, it remained our favorite. Every morning we’d walk the few blocks from our hotel to Jiangxi Road for breakfast, which on
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of time you will reap benefits greater than what you have spent in card fees. For example, say you’ve had such a card for three years. At $90 per year you’ve been charged $270 in fees. If you’re not accruing enough miles in those three years to earn a ticket that would cost at least $270 (and hopefully significantly more), you are not getting your money’s worth. There are other frequent flyer credit cards out there and they regularly send me offers. But I haven’t done much research on them because the Chase/United program works really well for us, and United is the primary airline serving Medford. Caveat emptor.

The second way I accrue miles is the old fashioned way, by flying. Every time we fly, I make sure to record the miles into our online mileage plus account. Even relatively short, 300-mile flights add up over time. I am also signed up to get each and every promotional email from United. Most of them I ignore, but every now and then they send a special deal offering double miles, or some other kind of bonus. It’s worth getting 10 (or 20 or 100) junk emails from United for the occasional golden one. And who knows, my junk email may be another travelers’ treasure.

When it comes to using accrued miles I have a few general suggestions. First, use them ASAP. I use my miles as frequently (no pun intended) as I possibly can. The reason is that I am suspicious by nature, and always operate under the assumption that something that sounds too good to be true probably is. Thus at any time, I figure United Airlines can and might change their frequent flyer policy, or (gasp) cancel it altogether. So my first piece of advice is, if you’ve got enough miles in your account for a trip, book that trip! Don’t save them for a rainy day.

I am also of the opinion, at least most of the time, that I’d rather use my miles for a “free” trip than to upgrade to a higher class. It seems like a better deal to go on a trip with little or no airline costs than to purchase a ticket with hard earned cash (because I really do work hard—Bob—I’m talking to you here) and use my miles to upgrade to business or first class. You’ll notice however, that I said “most of the time.” As I get a little older (and I do mean a LITTLE older), I can appreciate having more room and better service on longer flights. If my whole family is flying—sorry kids—no way am I using miles to upgrade. If it’s just Bob and I, and we’re flying a long distance, I’ll more carefully weigh my options.

So now let’s move on to my actual “secrets” for using frequent flyer miles. Okay, they’re not really secrets, if they really were secrets there would be a much, much higher subscription rate for this newsletter. But I digress. Frequent flyer miles can be booked 11 months out. And airlines only reserve a certain number of seats on each plane for frequent flyers, which I can understand, as they want real paying customers to purchase as many seats as possible. Thus, whenever I’m able, I start looking for frequent flyer availability online 11 months out from the day I want to travel. This is especially important if you’d like to use miles for travel during the high season like spring break or in summer months.

Some destinations are more difficult to book. So my next piece of advice is flexibility. When booking a summer trip to Europe on miles two years ago, I wanted to fly in and out of Milan, but it was booked. So I ended up flying in to Zurich, and taking the train to Milan. Perhaps it wasn’t ideal, but we paid for three out of four tickets with miles and traveled to Europe in July, so I’m pretty sure we were the winners. Flexibility is also important for travel dates. The larger the window of time you have, the more likely you’ll be able to use miles. If you absolutely positively have to travel on a specific date, you might need to pay for tickets.

Sometimes I even have a few vacation spots in mind when I begin checking availability, and then I narrow down my choices based on whether there are frequent flyer seats. Bob and I just returned from a trip to Shanghai on frequent flyer miles. When we started looking into a fall vacation, we were thinking in general terms about Asia, and used the availability of miles to narrow it down to Shanghai. Trying to use miles for a beach vacation in Mexico? Find out all the locations that United Airlines flies to in Mexico and then get out your map to see which airports are near beach destinations.

Get creative and consider the other ways you can earn miles besides flying or using a mileage credit card. United’s program offers mileage earnings at more than 900 retailers if you shop through their mileage plus site. Booking hotels and rental cars, switching to DirectTV, all are ways to earn miles with United. If several members of your family have frequent flyer accounts (and if they occasionally fly - why shouldn’t they? - it’s free), consider transferring miles to accrue enough for a ticket. This isn’t free, but it might be cheaper than buying a ticket. Mileage plus tickets can also be used for one way travel, so if you don’t have enough miles for a round trip ticket, consider buying a one-way and using miles for the other half.

My final piece of advice has to do with a state of mind, rather than a specific action. I try hard to recognize that a frequent flyer program is, for the most part, free. I am getting something for nothing here—or in my case, for a $90 annual credit card fee. I work the system to the best of my advantage, knowing that any time, this program might go up in smoke. There are times when I’m tempted to complain (okay truth be told I’m not tempted. I actually do complain) that the frequent flyer program isn’t working for me as easily as it should be. But it doesn’t hurt to remind myself to be thankful for what I’ve got.

—Nancy is currently online booking hotel rooms and buying magazine subscriptions and Clinique makeup. Because she knows, sometimes you’ve got to spend to save.
purification performance. Effective on clear water, the Steripen destroys 99.9% of bacteria, viruses and protozoa in about a minute. Four lithium AA batteries (not included) will sterilize 25 gallons, so you won’t have to worry about finding clean water while you’re on your next “whatever you do, don’t drink the water!” adventure.

Moleskine Notebooks offer the perfect place to record your adventures. Don’t want to forget the route to that great restaurant? Does that view of the Seine inspire the poet in you? Perhaps your cab driver offered you directions to his favorite watering hole? Take it from us, write it down or you’re gonna forget. As stylish as they are practical, Moleskine notebooks are both thread-bound and made with acid-free paper, ensuring that your musings will last a lifetime. With both plain and ruled paper to choose from, the hard-backed Moleskine Notebook ($12.95) offers 192 pages, an elastic band to keep it closed, a ribbon bookmark and an expandable pocket inside the back cover that’s great for ticket stubs and receipts. Or, if you’d prefer something slimmer, Moleskine Journals ($8.95) come in sets of three, each with 64 pages.

Eagle Creek’s Undercover Money Belt collection has been providing travelers with security and peace of mind for years and they’ve now added the extra protection of RFID-blocking technology to the whole series. All U.S. Passports issued since 2006 contain an RFID chip, as do a growing number of credit and debit cards. These Radio Frequency Identification chips store a wealth of personal information that you’d probably like to keep to yourself, and that’s where the RFID-blocking lining comes in. Choose from three styles to keep your private information private, the RFID-Blocker Neck Wallet ($22), the RFID-Blocker Money Belt ($26.50) or the RFID-Blocker Hidden Pocket ($18), and travel worry-free.

Briggs & Riley's Transcend Spinner Bags are on the cutting edge of durability, mobility and value. Their four-wheel design allows for fingertip control and quick and easy maneuvering through crowded airports and down narrow aisles on both planes and trains. Briggs offers the Transcend Spinners in three sizes, a 21” Wide-Body Carry-On ($369), a larger 26” Expandable Upright ($399) and a super-spacious 29” Expandable Upright ($429). All three of these bags offer an amazing amount of packing space along with the quality construction you’ve come to expect from Briggs & Riley. And because the handle is housed outside rather than recessed in, you get a flat packing space. But with Briggs & Riley’s “Simple as That” warranty, you don’t have to worry about that handle or the four spinner wheels. Because if they ever get damaged (along with any other part of your bag), Briggs & Riley will fix it for free, even if your airline is at fault. So pack smart and travel smoothly with a Transcend Spinner.

Simply put, Penguin Mapguides ($10 - $12) are the best travelers’ maps you’ll find for London, Paris and New York City. Full color pages offer large-scale detail that makes it easy to get your bearings and find your destination without confusion. And Mapguides aren’t just maps. You’ll also find basic, guidebook-style information with key sights, museums, restaurants and buildings clearly labeled with simple graphics and coordinated to the map pages. Ultra thin and easily tucked into a pocket, they also include several pages of recommendations for the best shopping, museums,
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restaurants, hotels, sights, theater, sports, interesting walks, and much more. If you’re visiting one of these three wonderful cities, a Penguin Mapguide should be along for the ride! And if you’re headed to the UK soon, a brand new edition of London Mapguide will be hot off the presses in January 2014.

It’s indisputable that readers of the Travel Essentials Newsletter are, as a whole, above average academically. That being said, high school and college were a long time ago, and it is likely that more than just a few of us could use a European history refresher course before our next big adventure on the continent. That’s where Rick Steves’ Europe 101: History & Art for the Traveler ($24.95) comes in. After three decades of travel, Rick Steves has distilled everything you need to know to appreciate Europe’s sights and culture into this breezy, humorous and informative guide. Unlike that professor who droned on and on while your eyelids got heavier and heavier, this fully illustrated guide makes it fun and gives just enough of what you need to know to fully appreciate Europe’s greatest achievements in art, architecture and history. Perfect whether you’re already booked for Europe next year, or you just want a fast and fun history lesson.

Insulated Klean Kanteens are sleek, BPA-free, reusable drinking bottles that will keep your hot beverages hot for six hours and your icy drinks cold for 24 hours. Stainless steel construction makes them durable, easy to clean and prevents them from absorbing and retaining flavors like plastic does. The screw top vacuum cap is leak-proof and Klean Kanteen offers a lifetime warranty to back it up. Insulated bottles from Klean Kanteen (starting at $24.95) come in three handy sizes, one of which is sure to fit your travel or commuting beverage needs.

To the untrained eye, the CitySafe 100 and 200 handbags ($59.99 and $79.99) from Pacsafe look like stylish, comfortable, light weight and nicely organized and appointed purses. But they are so much more than that. You wouldn’t know it by their sleek look, but security always comes first in any Pacsafe bag. First off these bags are slash-proof as the shoulder strap and the front, side and bottoms panels are wire-mesh reinforced. To anchor the bag to your table or chair for added protection with the locking strap hook. Last, but certainly not least, the CitySafe boasts an RFID-Blocking pocket to protect the data on your passports and credit cards. In the midst of all of these safety features, the CitySafe still manages a simple, elegant style and an organized functionality that is perfect for travel and every day use.

Eagle Creek’s Pack-It Specter line is appropriately named, because like a ghost, Specter packing cubes and toiletry kits organize all your small stuff, yet barely add any weight or mass to your luggage. The Specter collection now offers two new toiletry kits each constructed from ultra-strong and ultra-light sil-nylon ripstop. The Specter Wallaby Small ($38) offers similar packing organization as Eagle Creek’s original Wallaby, but with only a fraction of the weight. And the brand new Specter On Board ($45) boasts even more pocketing and storage space in a slightly larger hanging toiletry kit. And the sil-nylon is so thin, it’s partially transparent, letting you see what’s inside each pocket without having to open it up. The Specter line also includes a variety of packing folders and cubes to help you organize your entire bag.

“To believe every human has a finite number of heartbeats. I don’t intend to waste mine.”

— NEIL ARMSTRONG
Shop til you Drop — Shanghai Style

by Nancy Bestor

Shopping in Shanghai is not for the timid. Great deals can be had on a variety of items, but the price you pay is ultimately your responsibility. You can pay what is later determined to be “way overpriced,” or you can haggle, and get the cost down to a “reasonable” level. For me it was often not until I was walking away with my purchase and wondering why it was so easy to make a deal that I realized I had overpaid.

There were three items that Bob and I went to Shanghai knowing we might be interested in purchasing. The first was a sport coat for Bob, the second a pair of eyeglasses for me, and the third, a few souvenir items from Dongtai Road, a two block stretch of “antique” stalls and shops. Our friends at Yala Designs had suggested a few spots for the sport coat and eyeglasses, and it just so happened that we were in the right place at the right time, so we tried our hand at haggling.

Let me start by saying that I am a terrible haggler. Whenever presented with the opportunity to “talk someone down” on a price when visiting another country, I always feel bad for the seller, and find it hard to believe that people in the world are looking for suckers who are willing to pay hugely inflated prices for cheaply made or acquired items. (I’m pretty sure this in fact defines me as one such sucker.) But our Lonely Planet guidebook advised us that the first price many Chinese shopkeepers offer when they are trying to hook you in can be as much as 80% higher than the price they will actually settle for. Lonely Planet also suggested that you should determine the most you are willing to pay for an item before you begin bargaining. Then if you can’t get it for that price, you should walk away and try somewhere else. So we put our haggling hats on and gave it our best shot.

The first item we haggled for was a four-inch copper Buddha statue on Dongtai Road. Our seller was an older woman who looked like someone’s sweet grandma. That was my first mistake. I thought $6 was about the max I was willing to pay for this item, but she started with 130 yuan, about $21. My second mistake was typing 36 yuan as my “best price” into her calculator on my first go round. Bob was astonished (to put it mildly) that I put in my final price right at the start, but as I said, I AM A TERRIBLE HAGGLER. When she read my price she clutched at her chest as if she were having a heart attack and started babbling in Chinese, thus making me think my price really was crazy. And that was my third mistake. While I did end up with a regal, four-inch copper Buddha, I paid $11 for it. I’m almost certain I could get the same statue here in the U.S. at Cost Plus for cheaper. Lesson learned.

We went on to buy a few other things at different stalls in the “antique” market. We bought a poster of Chairman Mao for We had better luck with the made to order cashmere sport coat, probably because Bob was doing the shopping. Although there are many stores in Shanghai offering tailor made clothes, the best spot to shop is the Shiliupu Fabric Market. This three story building is filled floor to ceiling with fabric stalls, many offering tailor made clothing in silks, wools, cashmere, and more, and others simply selling fabrics—bolts and bolts of colorful cloths in each stall. The guidebooks say that fabrics purchased here are far cheaper than most shops.

It was hard to know at which stall to shop. At every stall, someone would say “you want cashmere suit?” or “you want wool coat?” We found a stall with an array of good looking men’s suits and sport coats on display, and Bob made a deal. He ordered a fully lined cashmere sport coat for just over $100, and it was ready in two days. The woman in the stall took way more measurements than I would have thought necessary, including his gluteus maximus, but I understand, Bob does have a cute glute.

We paid half the cash up front, then came back a couple of days later to pay the remainder, and pick up the coat. The tailors (wherever they might be, as they are not in the Fabric Market building) did a lovely job. And now Bob has a new sport coat to wear once a year.

Shopping for eyeglasses was also an adventure. I have a great optometrist here in Ashland, Dr. Ken Ehlers at Optical Expressions. He gives me my eye exams, and it’s through him that I order my contacts and other prescription glasses. But just for the fun of it, I thought it would be interesting to acquire a new pair of glasses while in Shanghai. And interesting it was. The eyeglasses mart, for lack of a better word, is on the fifth floor of a Chinese sporting goods store on the biggest shopping street in Shanghai—East Nanjing Road. Just like most other places we shopped in Shanghai, when we began, the price started much higher than we expected to pay, 1100 yuan ($183). When we walked away, because we didn’t want to pay even close to that amount, the price immediately dropped to 600 yuan. By the time we closed the deal it was 420 yuan ($70). This included the frames, lenses, and the “exam,” which really should be called the “search to figure out my prescription.” They do not have the latest

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It’s what I remember growing up where you put on fake glasses and they switch the lenses until you can read a particular line on an eye chart. Once they figured out what I needed, my glasses were ready in 10 minutes. Yes, 10 minutes. I was able to determine that none of the people working in the eyeglasses mart have any medical or optical education or training whatsoever. They just sell eyeglasses. The glasses are cute, and work just fine. I won’t stop going to Dr. Ehlers, as his eye exams do much more than just determine my prescription, and I’m not confident enough in the process to consider getting contacts in China. But getting eyeglasses in a foreign country was a fun experience, and when people notice my cute glasses, I’ve got a great story to tell.

—Right this minute Nancy is at Safeway, trying to convince the cashier that her “best price” for a gallon of milk is $0.50 cents, not $3.50.

“The Facts of Radio Frequency Identification (RFID)

The second most frequent question asked by customers at Travel Essentials (second only to “How old are you Nancy, because surely you’re too young to have a daughter in college?”) is “What exactly is RFID, and is it something I really need to be worried about?” Here’s how we understand it.

RFID stands for “radio frequency identification.” It is basically a wireless way to transmit data for the purpose of identification. All U.S. passports issued since 2006 feature RFID technology. This means that your passport houses an RFID computer chip that allows a “contactless” reading of its data. According to the U.S. State Department, this data includes:

• The same data visually displayed on the data page of the passport;
• A biometric identifier or digital image of the passport photograph, which will facilitate the use of face recognition technology at ports-of-entry;
• The unique chip identification number; and
• A digital signature to protect the stored data from alteration.

A small but growing number of credit cards in the U.S. also contain RFID chips that house similar data and security features. Consumer Reports says there are approximately 35 million of these “contactless” cards in circulation here.

The computer chip data in passports and some credit cards is transmitted via radio frequency, and since thieves are always on the lookout for new ways to steal money, in theory they can figure out how to remotely access it via an RFID scanner. Reports suggest that remote scanners can be used from at least 20 feet away to illegally obtain your personal information.

Customers often ask us at Travel Essentials if remote RFID scanning really happens, and the answer we always give is we really don’t know. Of course there are two sides to every story. Consumer Reports quoted Mark Rasch, a former Justice Department computer-crime prosecutor who serves as director of cyber security and privacy consulting at CSC, a business technology firm, as saying, “If I put a reader next to a turnstile at Grand Central Terminal at rush hour, I could probably capture data from 5,000 cards in an evening, and what you’re getting from each one is enough to initiate a transaction.” But the Smart Card Alliance, a credit card industry group, says that contactless credit card technology is secure, and there have not been any reports of consumers being victimized. The US State Department also maintains that RFID equipped passports are secure.

If you know you’ve got a contactless credit card—the cards have a contactless symbol on the front or back—it doesn’t hurt to protect yourself against the possibility of RFID theft, particularly if you’ll be in a large crowd of people, whether at an airport, concert or big city. You can choose to wrap your credit card in tin foil, which blocks the transmission of radio frequency, or purchase an RFID blocking cardholder, of which Travel Essentials has many styles.

When I lived and worked in the San Francisco Bay Area, I had my wallet stolen out of my purse—which was hanging over the back of my chair in a restaurant. I realized it almost immediately and phoned my credit card companies to cancel my cards. However my driver’s license was also stolen, and with this information, the thief was able to open credit card accounts in my name all over the Bay Area—at Circuit City and Sears to name a few—and I soon began receiving bills for thousands of dollars.

While I was able to get all the cards canceled and never paid a dime of the charges, the aftermath was not pretty. For years, I had to repeatedly contact credit-reporting companies and send them copies of the police report to get the bad credit information removed from my profile. I even had to obtain the services of an attorney (who happened to be a friend) to write a nasty letter to one credit reporting company, who could not seem to fix my credit information, even with all the required documents. Many years later when Bob and I applied for our first mortgage, the information was still in my credit history. Thank goodness I had kept ALL the documentation, as it was required before our loan got approved. I relay this long-winded story to tell you that identity theft is real, and can happen to even the most innocent—and pretty, and thin, and youthful—of people. Whether it can happen via skimming of passport or credit card data, I cannot answer.
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any given day might have been dumpling soup ($1.50 each), cold wide noodles with peanuts and vegetables ($1), steamed pork buns ($.50), a plate of stir fried eggplant, fried pork, and green beans with mushrooms ($2.50), to name just a few. We’d always finish with fresh squeezed pomegranate juice ($1.75), and a variety of fresh baked cookies, crackers and cakes that we would pick out and fill a small bag with, usually for about $.50. It was outstandingly good and astonishingly inexpensive. The success of our first food stall foray opened the floodgates and we began trying more and more street food, and found it far better than the meals we ate in the only two “real” restaurants we went to. Twice we came upon vendors who had set up stir fry carts, decided we were hungry, pointed to choose the items we wanted, and in three minutes, were served a steaming, spicy and delicious bowl of noodles, vegetables, sausage, egg and the like, for about $1.50 each.

We got good at pointing in China, as few people spoke any English. Perhaps at restaurants more frequented by tourists the basic English might be better, but at the places we chose to eat, if there weren’t pictures of the dishes available that we could point to, or they weren’t cooking right in front of us so we could make gestures of what we wanted, we didn’t eat there.

Throughout the city, whether we were shopping, eating or just plain walking, we often got a second look, because one of these things was not like the other (or in this case two), but after glancing at us, most people went back to their business and ignored the two laowai (white foreigner). Bob wore shorts every day we were there, and this often got him a second glance. A few folks even commented on it in Chinese, pointing at his legs and smiling. We would nod and smile back, not knowing if they were saying “you have nice legs,” or “you are one crazy white dude.” We didn’t care, as we’re always happy to provide some entertainment to those in other countries.

—Bob was extremely entertaining to everyone in our subway car one day. He befriended a Chinese toddler, and got her to smile and giggle. She could not stop looking at him. Until he took off his hat, when she burst into tears. Every single person in our car, including her parents and grandparents, burst out laughing.

Notes on Shanghai:

We stayed at the Astor House Hotel, just off the Bund, the city’s main strolling promenade. The Astor is a beautiful old world hotel, and we had a lovely large room on the sixth floor with wireless internet for $90. I highly recommend it.

When we couldn’t walk anymore, or needed to get somewhere in a hurry, we took the Metro. We never paid more than $1 each for a ride, and it was clean, efficient and easy to use.

Even if you don’t want to go up into a 1600 foot building in Pudong, don’t miss taking the ferry across the Huangpu River at night, so you can see the fabulously lit buildings on either side of the river, one side offering classic architecture and the other the crazy, newly designed, ultra-modern high rises. The ferry costs all of 2 yuan each ($.33 cents).