

Day 19 (Wednesday 10/08/08) Shanghai

Our good luck continues with no rain and comfortable temperatures in which to explore Shanghai.

Today we had signed up for a tour of the Maglev (Magnetic Levitated) train that covers the 30.5 km (19mi) distance between the Longyang Road Station in Shanghai and the Pudong International Airport. The train is lifted (levitated) off the track and propelled forward or backwards using electromagnetic technology. Maglev trains have the potential for higher sustained speeds than conventional wheel type trains and that possibility has fueled a development effort. The train can reach 350 km/h (220 mph) in 2 minutes, with a maximum speed in normal operation of 431 km/h (268 mph). The train takes 7 minutes and 20 seconds to complete the journey between the Longyang Road Station and the Pudong International Airport. The Shanghai Transrapid project took 10 billion yuan (1.33 billion US dollars) and 2.5 years to complete the 30.5 km (19.0 mi) track. A round-trip ticket costs ¥80 (\$11.20). The Maglev train is a possible alternative to airline travel between major population centers but so far in Shanghai the ridership has been less than expected and on this day the train was used primarily by us tourists with only a few people with luggage actually using it to get to or from the airport as part of their travel itinerary.

The Maglev train is still classified as experimental but it may hold some promise for future high speed transportation applications and we wanted to try the riding experience first hand. Our guide got us into the Maglev station and purchased our tickets for us.



The Longyang Road Station is very modernistic. The station only services the two Maglev trains that take passengers to and from the Pudong International Airport. This view is from the passenger platform between the two Maglev tracks at the Longyang Road Station.



Here is a picture of the Maglev track bed. No technical information about the design of the magnetic levitation components of the train or tracks was provided.

After a wait of 5 or 10 minutes the train pulled into the station without much noise or fanfare.



We waited by the doors while arriving passengers exited on the other side of the train. Soon the doors opened and we were able to take our seats on the train.



In this view of the car interior on the left, the speed indicator can be seen as the dark strip above the passageway. The train got underway smoothly and steadily accelerated to the maximum speed of 431 km/h (268 mph) where it stayed for 10 to 15 seconds before starting to decelerate as it approached the airport station. The train parallels a freeway and it was fun to see how much faster we were going than the cars. There was no special sensation of speed other than the clues from looking out the windows. There was a significant roaring noise that was about the same as on a modern Metro subway, as in Washington D.C.

The train arrived at the Pudong International Airport after about 8 minutes. We tourists just remained in our seats for about 5 minutes and then the train doors closed and we returned to the Longyang Road Station with a repeat of the acceleration to high speed and deceleration process.

Since this is the only place you can ride a full scale Maglev train it was worth the effort while we were in Shanghai. However, the benefits compared with conventional modern trains was not obvious.

While we were proceeding back to the bus we passed by a large group of Chinese school children who were probably at the station for a demonstration ride on the Maglev train. Most of us Amsterdam passengers are missing our grandchildren so we enjoyed waving at these happy children having a field day.



Back on the road we had another encounter with some kids when we came alongside their school bus. This led to a lot of spontaneous waving and giggling on both sides.

Our next tour stop was at the Jin Mao Observatory on floor 88 of the Jin Mao Tower. The observatory provides windows for 360 degrees of viewing Shanghai from an elevation of 340m (1132 ft.). Here is the view of the Jin Mao Tower from the Amsterdam last night. The Jin Mao Tower is the building with the brightly lit pointed top. The taller building on the left with a hole in the top is The World Financial Center.



Our tour guide got our tickets for the high speed elevator and we were whisked quickly up to the observatory deck. The windows were nicely placed and there was plenty of room to move around and get pictures of Shanghai from a different perspective than we have had before. The air pollution haze was still evident but the views were still spectacular. Here are some of the photos that we took.

We were finally able to get a full length photo of our favorite, the Pearl TV Tower.

The World Financial Center is right next door to the Jin Mao Tower but soars to a much higher level. A feature we noticed on many of the glass covered sky scrapers was that, unlike US buildings, some of the windows appeared to be hinged at the top and opened slightly. This photo below shows some of the open windows in three horizontal bands, perhaps as part of the ventilation system.



The Amsterdam could be seen in this photo below, partially obscured by a neighboring building.



In the center of the observation deck was a window where it was possible to look down from Floor 88 to Floor 56 where activity in the lobby of the Grand Hyatt Hotel could be seen. Most tourist sites touted some aspect that exceeded any other place in the world. In this case there was a claim that this Hyatt Hotel Lobby was the highest in the world at 127 m (500 ft.) above the street level. On the right is the stomach churning view from the observation deck down the well of the Jin Mao Tower to the Hyatt Hotel lobby.



Shanghai is going to host the Expo 2010 Shanghai China and there are advertisements posted around the city featuring the little blue mascot that has been adopted. The observation deck had a display touting the upcoming event.

We had about 30 minutes to view the sites and then we went back down the elevator to our bus which took us back to the Amsterdam.

We still had nearly 4 hours to spend before we had to be back on board the Amsterdam for the sail-away this evening. A shuttle bus was provided to take us from the ship in to the Julong Silk & Craft Exhibition Hall near the Nanjing Donglu district. We hopped on the bus for the ride that took about 20 minutes.

We browsed briefly through the silk fabrics and clothes but didn't find anything we wanted to buy. Other passengers reported good silk bargains they found in their shopping around Shanghai. We wanted to find the famous pedestrian area on Nanjing Street. A man (speaking perfect English) at the information desk of the Silk & Craft Exhibition Hall gave us good instructions and a simple map so we set out to find Nanjing Street which ends at the famous Bund area on the banks of the Huangpu River.

The streets and sidewalks of Shanghai were crowded but with our map it was possible to walk the 5 or 6 blocks to Nanjing Street with no problems. We enjoyed the sights as we made our way. One park that featured a bamboo forest was fascinating to us.



After about 20 minutes we came to the pedestrian portion of Nanjing Street which has wide open plazas and stores of all sorts. There was a train like people hauler running up and down the street but other cars were not allowed on this portion of the street so we didn't have to deal with that hazard. Here are some views of what we saw.



All through our visits in Japan and here in Shanghai we have sensed that the people welcomed us. We were obvious tourists and they would call out to us asking where we were from and wanting to talk to us. Part of their incentive may have been genuine interest in us but there was also the desire to just practice their English.

The ladies shown in this photo asked us where we were from and if we spoke "standard" English.



This group of young people shown below were on a one week vacation in Shanghai and sympathized with our lament that we had only two days here. The wide range of ethnic



backgrounds was evident in their facial features and in this photo Orlin added his genes from the US "melting pot". We had worn our Tilley hats to avoid being mistaken for natives and they thought that was cool. They were all so engaging that we spent 5 or 10 minutes talking. We were a little worried about catching the last shuttle bus back to the ship and finally had to say goodbye to our new friends.

We made it safely back to the shuttle bus and had settled down for the ride when Dianna showed up with her shopping treasures.



We are hardened travelers and used to heavy duty bargaining with street vendors in foreign ports.



However, what happened next pushed our experience to a new level. Apparently Dianna had mistakenly returned to the bus with some money left. Using the bus door as an auctioneer podium she negotiated some more purchases.

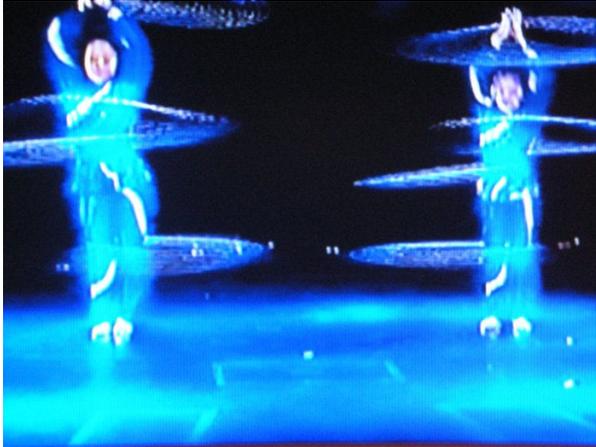
Not to be outdone, Anna, our on-board Explorations speaker on fabrics joined the fun and picked up some flute-like musical instruments made from a gourd and bamboo.



The party had to close when the driver boarded the bus and we headed back to the ship. On the way we saw a couple sights shown below that would be unusual in most large US cities.



After dinner on the Amsterdam we were entertained by a superb group of Chinese acrobats. These young people ages 11 to 18 put on a 1 hour show that had us gasping at their ability to flex their bodies and maintain balance of several items at one time.



This fine show completed our last day in Shanghai and the ship got underway for Hong Kong about 9pm.