# Travel Writing:

## Blog:

When I think China, I think Beijing. When I think Beijing, I think the Great Wall. When I think the Great Wall, I think… possibly **worst** experience ever! Now, I don’t want to be negative because China, as a whole, is an amazing place to visit. The sights, smells and culture are so diverse from any other country in the world that you can’t go there without coming back a changed person in many respects. I just want to make it clear that there are *much* better places to visit than the Great Wall of China. Don’t get me wrong, visiting one of the seven wonders of the world is not something to be sniffed at. When you think of a
21,196km infrastructure it’s pretty hard to fathom how huge that is without actually seeing it firsthand! It might be on the top of many people’s bucket lists, but to be brutally honest, I wouldn’t put it on mine. Condensed down, it’s just a wall, and just like every other wall you’ve ever seen; it’s the same the whole way along. The structure, the colour, the height: everything. It’s all. Exactly. The same. Of course, I didn’t walk the whole wall, but the amount walked was *definitely* enough for me.

I still remember the day. It was a Monday, our last day in Beijing before travelling to Shanghai. As we left our mouldy Airbnb, I was *ecstatic* to visit one of the best-known places on earth! All was fine till we got to the wall. Then the bad experience started. It was humid. So humid. The type of humidity where sweat drips uncontrollably down your face and you feel as if you last showered a week ago. As I stood in line waiting to take the cable car to where I would disembark to walk the wall, the sweat was visible on everyone’s face, as well as its distinct smell everywhere you turned. That was when my spirits first started to drop. They dropped lower still 10 minutes later when the sky, not satisfied with its success in making everyone sweat, decided to unmercifully pour down buckets of rain upon each, and every individual. By that time though, I was so soaked from sweat it barely mattered.

The line inched forward sluggishly until finally, about two hours later, I was placed on a cable car along with about amillion other people and shuttled to the top of the wall. And that’s when I began to walk. And walk. And walk. Hour after hour. Step after step. An hour later I was *still* walking along that same section of the wall, and it hadn’t changed a bit. The humidity mixed with the rain was stifling and was wearing me down. It was all I could do to keep putting one foot in front of the other. And then what I saw was so amazing, yet hideous at the same time, that I gasped. The part that was amazing: there was no longer only a wall but a staircase. The part that was hideous: the staircase was composed of at least 500 stairs!

Racing to the top of those stairs was one of the **stupidest** mistakes I’ve ever made in my life. I don’t know what made me do it. Maybe it was the glint in my siblings’ eyes as they challenged me to race, or maybe it was the fact that dad had said that once we were up the stairs, we would leave. Whatever it was, I ran. About 200 steps up, my muscles began to cry out for mercy and by the 300-step mark, my lungs were screaming for air. However, seeing as I was only able to drag in lungsful of the torrential down pour, I was left spluttering, my lungs shrieking louder still. By then, I was at least 50 steps behind all my siblings, and, knowing I had no chance of winning, I gave in and began to walk. *Again*. Concentrating only on breathing in and out, I kept walking, my eyes fixed on the top of the staircase, as if there lay an overspilling treasure chest, just waiting to be found.

Leaving the wall and coming back down on the cable cars was, to be honest, my favourite part of the day. Once back with my feet on solid ground, the souvenirs (or rather, the souvenir stall owners) began calling from every side. Prices were being shouted, rebuffed, compromised, and decided in a flurry of movement, noise, and colours. I was swept up in all the activity, my brain struggling to comprehend all the shouting and action.

Seeing a tiny lace umbrella (priced at an outrageous $75), my sister, mum and I headed over and I experienced haggling firsthand. First there was the price suggested by the customer, often around $60 lower than what was being asked. Then was the shopkeeper’s cry of alarm, often accompanied with a claim such as, “Do you want me to starve my family!” This was followed by the pretence of the customer walking off, only to be called back by the shopkeeper due to the price of the product being lowered. Back and forth it went until finally at $25 the price was settled. With a huff, the shopkeeper turned over the umbrella and I couldn’t help but feel a thrill at the success of the haggling. It was certainly more exciting than just accepting the reasonable prices as I do at home!

Before visiting the Great Wall of China, I was *so* excited, but my experience of it was, to be honest, awful. Maybe it was because of the rain or humidity (though I think that one or the other will be there all year round; I was just lucky enough to encounter both) or the excessive number of people that made the experience *so* awful. Whatever it was, I hold to my view that the Great Wall of China should **not**be on your list of top 10 things to do. China, as a whole; amazing! The Wall; not so great. Maybe try another wonder. I’ve heard the Colosseum in Italy is fantastic!

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