

My Travel

NOTES II

Asia, Americas, Europe

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ASIA

CHINA (1)

October to December, 2024

China is roughly the same size as the United States, with 1.4 billion inhabitants, which is more than 17% of the world's total population. China is formally called the People's Republic of China. 90% of the inhabitants are ethnic Han Chinese with more than 50 other ethnic minority groups making up the rest. The government is a one-party socialist republic led by the Chinese Communist Party. The General Secretary of the Communist Party is the authoritative head of the party, the President is the head of the country and the Chairman of the Military Commission is the authoritative military chief. These three positions are often occupied by one person who becomes the supreme leader of the country. The Government has a Prime Minister, a Chairman of the National People's Congress which is the legislative body of the country, and a chief judge of People's Courts who is responsible for judiciary functions under the National People's Congress.

China is considered a major cradle of civilization that started more than 4,000 years ago. According to Chinese mythology, the world was formed by the primordial god, Pangu, who separated Earth from heaven where gods lived, and the Earth was put in order with the help of other gods such as Shennong, the god of agriculture and medicine. Subsequently, China was ruled by semi gods which included Yellow Emperor and Emperor Yan. Emerged from fields and villages, Da Yu The Great engineered rivers, controlled the great flood and developed irrigation systems.

Based on the Yellow River basin, Da Yu founded the first dynasty of China, Xia (2070-1600 BCE) and established a hereditary sovereignty system, which was adopted by subsequent dynasties and lasted more than 3,000 years. The next dynasty, Shang (1600-1100 BCE), introduced writing, the building of walled settlements, the use of oracle bone inscriptions to record numbers and words, sacrifices and offerings, the praying and worship of ancestors and gods, and the use of bronze. Among other things, these two earliest dynasties established a slavery system and legally recognized slaves as personal properties of their owners. Such systems existed in diminishing scales until 20th century AD. From the beginning of small city-state, the dynasty evolved into more sophisticated dynasties over 3000 years. The feudal system was eventually abolished in 1911 when a republic government was founded. Religions in China include 70% Chinese folk religion which includes Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, local gods and worship of ancestors. Minority religions include Christianity and Islam, at about 2.5% and 1.6% and up to 25% residents have no religious beliefs.

The landscape of China is vast and diverse, with two thirds of it being mountainous. Mountains and highlands are concentrated in the western region where summits like Himalaya, Kunlun and Tanggula mountains are located. The mountains, in general, run in

the northwest to southeast direction. These mountains form natural borders between China and its neighboring countries like Afghanistan, Pakistan and Bangladesh in Central Asia and India, Nepal, Bhutan, Myanmar and Laos in South Asia. A smaller mountain range running northeast to southwest separates China from the Korean Peninsula. In China's northern region, east-west running mountains create deserts such as Gobi Desert that extends further north to neighboring Mongolia. China's eastern region has hills and large coastal plains. A long coastline has afforded China sea ports linking to all parts of the world, including neighboring countries such as Japan, Korea, Philippines and South East Asian countries like Vietnam and Laos. Two major rivers flowing from west highlands to eastern plains are Yangtze and Yellow Rivers.

Guizhou

A southwestern inland province, Guizhou is a mountainous province, with a population of 39 million. It is fast growing to become the transportation hub of the south. It is the country's first national level comprehensive zone for big data and a major mountain tourism destination. The province is rich with resources of timber, energy and minerals.

Guiyang

The capital city of the Guizhou province is situated on the Yunnan Guizhou Plateau. Its average elevation is above 3,600 ft, and the population is 6 million. It is considered the summer capital of China, a city with humid and subtropical climate, surrounded by mountains and forests.



A hot spring hotel where guests get to enjoy good quality spring water; a park in the city's downtown district near Nanming River; a restaurant sign for traditional old



Guizhou cuisine with hot and sour flavors. Guizhou is land locked, and salt used to be an expensive commodity.

Qingyan Ancient Town, population 30,000, was a military outpost of the Ming Dynasty. The Ming army held the post for up to 50 years after the establishment of the Qing Dynasty.

Anshun

A town located 60 miles southwest of Guiyang with a population of 2.3 million, Anshun is famous for its Karst topography which is a result of limestone and other soluble rock. The town is characterized by caverns, sinkholes and underground drainage. Also, the town is known for its inhabitants of minorities with different cultures.



Two photos of Huangguoshu Waterfall taken from different locations. It is 255 ft high and 331 ft wide on a tributary to Pearl River. The fall was so named because it is near an orchard that bears yellow fruits, likely grapefruit trees.

Characters of a 16th century novel, Journey to the West, were based on the documented records of Xuanzang, a Buddhist monk during the Tang Dynasty, 7th century. He made a pilgrimage to India and travelled throughout China and India. He visited many city states, experienced vastly different cultures and traveled dangerous routes like this on top of a cliff and a waterfall. He collected Buddhist Scriptures and icons, which he brought back to China and dedicated to translating them to Chinese which led to the spread of the Buddhist religion. Journey to the West is a fictionalized novel about Xuanzang. His stories had circulated through oral storytelling for centuries and eventually led to the publication of the book.



Autonomous Prefectures



A scenic park where minority artists conduct musical performances of dance, drum and Miao flute. A portion of the waterfall flows through a gigantic tree trunk.

CHINA (2)

Miao Village

The Miao people are one of the largest ethnic minority groups in China, with a history spanning 2000 years. The villagers built terraced fields on mountain sides and kept them going higher up the slopes towards the sky. The stilted buildings are tiered on mountain slopes and rose ever higher. Their farming and stilted construction skills, festivities, silver jewelry, clothing, diet, song, dance and ancient customs have been handed down through generations. The tradition of placing women as heads of households and the tradition of selecting the youngest son as the current village head continue to date.



Terraced fields on steep slopes surrounded by green mountains; stilted buildings going up and built on mountain sides; silver jewelry, embroidered clothing and carrying buffalo horns are Miao traditions. Another tradition of long table banquet serving wine is not shown.

Zhenyuan Ancient Town

Surrounded by mountains, the history of this tranquil town goes back more than 2000 years. Ancient buildings were preserved in this town since the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644). Many buildings were constructed in the Medieval Anhui architectural style with long and narrow alleys. The source of water was a deep rock formation of spring mountain, drawn from square shaped wells. These wells had preventative measures against poisoning incidents by raising fish in the well's openings.



An Anhui architectural style alley gate; A statue showing the past glory of the ancient town, the reception and collection of tax fees from merchants who use its harbor of the Ancient Tea and Horse Road, tea, salt and other necessities were traded among the different regions of China, using caravans and boats; A house in an alley with the front door opening at a certain angle rather than parallel or perpendicular to the alley, it is believed to bring wealth.

Tongren

Located in the northeastern region of Guizhou,

Tongren is known for its geographical wonders. It is a live museum of the surface structure of the Earth. Tongren Ancient City is well protected and the city has added a few residential and artistic buildings to attract tourists.





From top left; A land bridge with high poles anchored at deep valley bedrocks is part of its highway system; a new addition of Japanese style Buddhist temple to the ancient city; Landscape of Fanjing Mountain has many sheet like basalt rocks; An old Buddhist temple on top of the mountain peak, the Rocky Mountain peak is an example of Earth's crust development involving pillow basalt. The mountain is pure and natural with abundant biodiversity of plants and animals.



Tongren Grand Canyon: (from left) Waterfall from towering cliffs; Clusters of waterfalls plunge into a running river, walkways and wooden buildings; Water dripping from the air forming rainbow waterfalls.

JAPAN

March, 2024

Japan is an island nation consisting of thousands of small and four large islands; Hokkaido, Honshu, Shikoku, and Kyushu.

Japan is a developed country, the size of California, population 125 million, and 80% of its population lives on Honshu. Three quarters of its land terrain is mountainous and forests. Agriculture and population are concentrated in its eastern coastal plains. With a population of 41 million in its capital, Tokyo is the most populous metropolis in the world.

The Japanese Archipelago has been inhabited for more than 50,000 years. The country was united by an emperor about 2,000 years ago. During the next 1,000 years, military strongmen and feudal lords fought among themselves. The country was again united under a single shogun, a military dictator who enacted an isolation foreign policy. In 1854, U.S.A. forced Japan to open its harbors for trade and signed unequal treaties. A few years later, Emperor Meiji defeated the military dictator and united the country. Meiji Restoration marked a milestone in the modernization and industrialization of Japan.

Japan is now a constitutional monarchy with a hereditary emperor and a parliamentary system of government. The peace constitution was established in 1947 after the WWII. The emperor is the ceremonial head of state. Legislative power is vested in the

Diet, a bicameral body composed of a House of Representatives and a House of Councilors. Executive power rests with the cabinet, which is headed by a prime minister who leads the majority party in the Diet. Judiciary power rests with the Supreme Court. There are 47 prefectures, each with its own elected governors and assembly members which wield a large measure of autonomy.

Tokyo

Tokyo is the capital of Japan, with a population of 41 million, which represents 40% of all Japanese living within the greater metropolitan area of Tokyo. It is the most densely populated region in the world. The city is a blend of the ultra modern and traditional, from high skyscrapers to the Meiji shrine. Tokyo was known as Edo before 17th century and was mainly a fishing village. Following the Meiji Restoration in 1868, the imperial capital in Kyoto was moved to Edo, and the city was renamed Tokyo. It now serves as Japan's economic center, an international research and development hub and an academic center with major universities. Tokyo station is the central hub of Japan's high-speed railway network.



Left to right; Kabukicho is a famous entertainment district best known for adult oriented nightlife, the hotel room we stayed in was a typical Japanese style, with miniature facility arrangements; Shinjuku station is a major railway station connecting high-speed trains and a hub for commuter rail and subway lines. predecessor of Meiji University was a law school founded by former students after Edo period (1603-1687) in 1881.



Clockwise from top left: Japanese food snail, sashimi and Chinese style noodles from Shinjuku restaurants; visiting a newly established bank branch from Taiwan; nice dinner at a restaurant in Narita Airport.



Kyoto

Kyoto is one of the oldest cities in Japan, considered the cultural capital. With a population of 1.5 million, it is home to numerous Buddhist temples, shinto shrines, palaces, Japanese style gardens and wooden houses.

The original city of Kyoto was arranged in accordance with traditional Chinese Feng Shui, modeled after the ancient Chinese capitals of Xian and Luoyang. The emperors of Japan ruled from Kyoto for 11 centuries (between 794-1869) and established a government system similar to that of China's Tang dynasty.

The Golden Pavilion (Rokuonji) was a shogun's private villa with gardens, pond and a golden stupa. A building centered around the golden stupa was built and later converted to a Zen Buddhist temple in 1397. The temple was reconstructed in 1955.

Golden Pavilion is a three story building with extensive coating of 0.5 um pure gold applied to the 2nd and 3rd floors. Gold was used to mitigate and purify negative thoughts toward death. The gold building leaves an impression of affluence, producing a shine in the atmosphere and an amazing reflection on the pond. The function of the temple is to house the Ashes of Buddha (relics, Sheli) in a large hall on the 3rd floor.

Those on the 1st and 2nd floors have statues of the shogun family members. The gardens surrounding the pavilion were designed according to the Chinese Buddhist Western Paradise of Buddha Amida, intending to illustrate a harmony between heaven and Earth. Also shown are outside and inside of a temple.

Nijo Castle was built more than 400 years ago during feudal era (shoguns and feudal lords). A typical Japanese architecture, decoration includes lavish quantities of gold leaves, elaborate wood carvings, interior decoration and ceiling details. It was intended to impress visitors with the power and wealth of shoguns. A gate and door details are shown. There are two concentric fortifications: the outer palace and the inner palace which is now in ruins. The inner palace has a moat around it. This castle is near the imperial palace from where Japan was ruled for more than 1000 years. The castle provided a meeting compound for the country's top shoguns under the emperor or a powerful shogun.

Ise city, Mie prefecture

Ise is a city close to Kyoto on Japan's main island of Honshu. It sprung out around two shrines: the Naiku (inner shrine) and the Geku (outer shrine), two of Japan's most sacred Shinto shrines. The city's population is 150,000 but it is a pilgrimage destination for the Shinto religion, and there are more than 100 smaller shrines in the region. Shinto is a parallel faith to Japanese Buddhists, however it put a major emphasis on ancestral worship. The religion revolves around supernatural entities called Kami, which are the deities that are venerated in the Shinto religion.

They are natural things or spirits of dead humans. Emperors could become Kami and citizens have been encouraged to worship Japanese emperors.

From top, left to right: Ise-Shima National Park, where sacred Grand Shinto Shrine is located; Purification station where visitors use pool water to wash their hands and rinse their mouths, a symbolic act to clean mind and body of impurity; the Geku was enshrined 1500 years ago with Gods of agriculture, rice production and food industry. Shrine buildings are made of solid Japanese cypress and used no nails. Cypress trees are protected along with bamboo; the Uji bridge across a river at the entrance of Naiku, where a sacred realm is separated from the outside world, the bridge is also made of solid cypress and is rebuilt every twenty years according to the religion; Naiku has a specially designed Torii gate to mark the entrance of a sacred area. Naiku was enshrined 2000 years ago with a solar goddess, the origin and source of everything.

Mount Fuji

Mt Fuji is about 60 miles southwest of Tokyo. With an elevation of 12,389 ft, it is the tallest peak in Japan. The Fuji volcano is classified as active with low risk of eruption. It has the perfect shape of a volcanic cone, which is covered with snow half of the year. It is a geological wonder with five natural lakes at the base of the mountain. It is surrounded by caves, mineral rich hot springs, golf courses, ropeways that take visitors to Mt Fuji's

observation deck, various hiking routes and boating activities. The region is a paradise for outdoor recreation and relaxation.

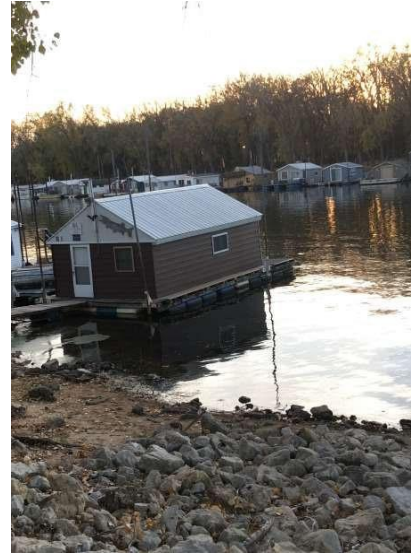
For Japanese, Mt Fuji is a site of spiritual importance and a source of artistic inspiration. Having suffered devastating earthquakes and volcanic eruptions, indigenous Japanese felt the power of Fuji mountains. Activities like mountain climbing and mountain worshipping were gradually accepted. Combining with Buddhism, religious Shinto mythology was developed. In Shinto, it is believed that a goddess arose from soil like reed when the Earth was chaotic. Shinto mythology worship Kami. Spirit Kami are believed to inhabit all things, including natural forms and special landscape locations such as Mt Fuji. It is believed that a deity lives in the crater of Mt Fuji. During the Edo period (1541-

1646), a Shinto shrine was set up at the foothills to ward off eruptions and a female deity was venerated to the shrine as the goddess of Mt Fuji, who is also the princess of cherry blossoms.



From top left: speed train with Mt Fuji as background; a building for advancement of Fuji tourism; Fuji train station; a Japanese style hotel in the lake region; a famous 101 years old Japanese sculptor came to this area and spent two years in the lake region, producing this bronze statue with two women dancing around, showing the lake as a source of wisdom, hope, life and plenty; Lake Kawaguchiko, the largest of Fuji's 5 lakes.

La Crosse region is in the famous driftless area, a part of the world with views of an ancient district topography. “Drift” refers to glacial drift of rocks and sediments deposited by a glacier as it moves over a land area. This small upper Mississippi region was left untouched by the last Ice Age. This region is the last remnant of the natural rugged terrain of the upper Midwest.



The Grandad Bluff is a 600 ft bluff which offers a bird’s eye view of La Crosse, and extends to even wider areas of the states of Wisconsin, Minnesota and Iowa in the Mississippi River valley.

University of Wisconsin - La Crosse is a part of University of Wisconsin system, which offers undergraduate and graduate programs to about ten thousand students.

Copeland Park is a quiet community park on east bank of the Mississippi River.

Golden Age people can ride Twilight ships on the Mississippi River, under extremely nice sunset.

A community of boat houses near a Mississippi River bridge.

Riverside Park is a park located on the riverfront of downtown La Crosse. We missed it due to many road construction projects.

One of many churches in La Crosse

LAOS

The Lao People's Democratic Republic is a landlocked country in Southeast Asia, population 8 million. Its spoken language includes Lao, Khmu, Hmong, Phu, Thai and Tai, the capital of the country is Vientiane, and the major ethnic groups include 53% Lao, 11% Khmu and 9% Hmong. An overwhelming Buddhist country, 66% Buddhism, 31% Tai folk religion. Its government is unitary one party political system, head of the country is the general secretary of the ruling Communist Party who is also the president, a prime minister and a president of National Assembly.

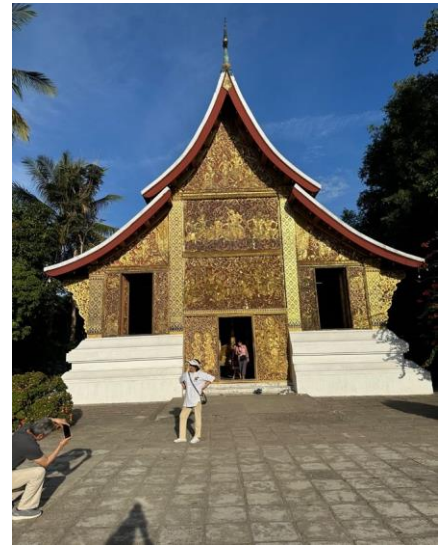
Luang Prabang

A province in north-central Laos, it consists a city that has same name and many villages, population 60,000. The region has many Buddhist temples and buildings with European architectural styles.



National Museum was a royal palace built in 1904 during French colonial era. The site was selected to allow visitors to disembark from river voyage below and walk directly to the royal palace. The palace was surrendered to the current government in 1976 and converted to a museum.

Photos from left : Statue of king of Luang Prabang and main museum entrance ; Royal temple of Luang Prabang; Interior decoration.



Photos from left : Temple of the Golden City is a Buddhist temple and monastery located at the Luang Prabang ; Stupas and peacocks ; A funeral chapel.

The temple represents typical Lao art and crafts, the central shrine has nine cascading roofs which are decorated with pagodas covered in gold that hooks upward to the sky, and naga figures at roof edges, naga is a mythical figure of half human and half serpent. Entrance has gold plated doors, inside the temple are statues of Buddha.

One side of the temple has small halls and stupas that contain Buddha images and stencils. Luang Prabang means the place of the Buddha from which kings would derive their divine rights.



Photos from left. : Monks collecting alms in the form of sticky rice balls and snacks ; A local park ; A local crafts shop.

Vientiane

The capital and largest city, Vientiane is located on the banks of the Mekong River at the Thai border, population 840,000. It is Laos' political and commerce center and a transportation hub. In recent years, increased foreign investments are flowing to its metallurgical industries, railway and highway connections to China, Thailand and Vietnam and its tourism industries are becoming increasingly important.



Photos from left : Victory Monument; Presidential Palace ; Local shops.

French style monument with five ornate towers in the traditional Lao style, the monument has a distinctive figure on the Vientiane sky and is dedicated to the Lao people who were killed in the fight to gain independence from France, and nations that invaded and occupied Laos. ; Presidential Palace is a well- known landmark with elegant Beaux - Arts architecture and tall colonnade and shaded balconies. It is the president's office and offices of the Lao government. ; Local shops.



From left : Pha That Luang Vientiane is a large gold covered Buddhist stupa in the center city of Vientiane, capital of Laos, the present renovated structure is about 460 years old and is the most important monument and a national symbol , the stupa is protected by naga which are half human and half serpent creatures from the neither world ; Buddha Park is a sculpture park which contains numerous religious images of Buddhist and Hindu statues, the statues are made of reinforced concrete and are ornate in design, a reclining Buddha is shown.



From left : A local hotel in Vientiane; A decoration in hotel lobby ; A promotional poster for Laos tourism industry. Vientiane verbally means ten thousand elephants, more in-depth meaning is ‘ Everything in this World ’.



Vang Vieng is a small town 80 miles north of Vientiane, population 25,000. A tourists town, it is surrounded with Karst landscapes of caves, waterfalls and it has a river tourists can do numerous water activities like kayaking, swimming and diving. Rock climbing and hot air balloon rides are also popular.

Photos from left : Hot air balloon and beautiful landscapes ; Water activities ; Display of unexploded bombs in a hotel garden, heavy bombing of Laos occurred during Vietnam War (1955-1975) in order to disrupt supply chains to North Vietnam. US efforts to clean up the unexploded bombs have been continued since 1964.

MALAYSIA

Malaysia consists of Peninsular Malaysia (or West Malaysia) and North Borneo Island (or East Malaysia). East and West regions are separated by the South China Sea. In between these two are numerous islands. Population of Malaysia is 33 million, more than 50% of which are ethnic Malay. The rest are Chinese, Indians and indigenous people. Chinese make up 25% of the population, but market capitalization is 70% of the entire country.

A former British colony, Malaysia achieved independence in 1957. The system of its current government is modeled after that of UK; namely, 'Federated Parliamentary Constitutional Elective Monarch'. The head of the country is a king and Malaysia has upper and lower parliaments with an independent judiciary system. It is a federation of 13 states and 3 federal territories. The king is elected to a five year term by and from the 9 heritage rulers of the Malaysia states. The head of government is the prime minister, who must be a member of the majority party of the House of Representatives.

The official religion is Islam and Sunni Islam is the dominant branch in Malaysia. Prayers can be heard many times each day, and many mosques are adjacent to government buildings for the convenience of officials. Other religions are allowed to non Muslims.



Kuala Lumpur

The capital city of Malaysia, it is one of the three federal territories, a special district carved out from the state of Selangor. The city's population is 2 million, although population of Greater Kuala Lumpur urban region is 8 million. The origin of the city can be traced back to the large number of Chinese immigrants who flocked to Selangor in the 18th and 19th centuries during the period of Tin Rush. As tin mining diminished, miners were persuaded to stay and work on farms or in businesses. The city gradually developed, starting with streets of Chinese merchants, then Chinatown, and eventually a city, becoming the cultural, financial and economic center of Malaysia. Kuala Lumpur is home to the Parliaments of

Malaysia, the National Mosque and the official residence of the Monarch of Malaysia. In addition, the city has undergone rapid development in the past few decades.



Independence Square where the flag of Malaysia was raised and the British flag lowered. Malaysia gained independence on August 31, 1957.



King's Palace. The king's role has been largely ceremonial. The king appoints governors of the four free states with consultation of chief ministers. Governors serve a four year term, mostly performing ceremonial duties. Free states are states without monarchies. The king also appoints a portion of the country's upper house members.



Pewter is a malleable metal alloy consisting of tin (85-99%), antimony (5-10%), and copper (2%). Lead was used in earlier times but was deleted because of its toxicity. Kitchen utensils such as mugs, cups and bowls are commonly made of pewter. Many of these items have been replaced by ceramics or porcelain. Items such as tables, chairs and many forms of jewelry are still commonly made of pewter. A beautiful pair of pewter peacocks in a jewelry store is shown.



Top left. A Chinese Temple. Top right, Petaling Street where Chinese merchants first started their business. Bottom, An Indian Temple.



Central Market where many stores sell Malaysian style clothes and crafts the indoor mall has eateries and restaurants.

Putrajaya

A city 20 miles south of Kuala Lumpur, Putrajaya is the country's administration center, where governmental offices were consolidated and moved from Kuala Lumpur. Putrajaya is also where the country's highest courts of the judiciary system are located. The city is conveniently located between Kuala Lumpur and its international airport. The city was strategically selected, planned and built and it is only two decades young.

A modern day smart city, Putrajaya has 40% open space for comfortable living conditions and was built with modern communication systems, a man-made lake, wet lands and many trails close to water. An expansive city for future developments, the buildings are mostly middle eastern architectural designs.

Present population is 110,000, of which 98% are Bumiputera citizens (Malay Muslims). Bumiputera are considered the original inhabitants of Malaysia, the Malays and indigenous people. Malay race is grouped from the natives of maritime Southeast Asia.



The Prime Minister's Office (Perdana Putra) is under maintenance upkeep, a green domed building on the shore of a man made lake, the Putra Lake is a natural cooling system for the city.

Putrajaya Mosque is an enormous rose colored granite mosque on the water near the Prime Minister's office, located in Putra Square.



Palace of Justice



Government Office (City Hall)

Malacca

Malacca is the capital of the State of Malacca and the oldest city in Malaysia. A historic city, the current population is 60,000. The city was founded in 1400 by a Sumatran prince. The runaway prince landed on Malay Peninsula, first occupied Singapore then fled to the present day Malacca region and successfully founded a kingdom and became the Sultan of Malacca (Sultan Parameswara, 1402-1414). During the era of Sultanates, Malacca was a successful commercial post that drew attention from Middle East, South Asia, East Asia and Portugal. From the start, Chinese, Indian and Arabian merchants traded and settled here.



During the heyday of Malacca Sultanates, it was a port of vital trading route between India and China, trading Indian cloth, Chinese porcelain and spices from the Malay Archipelago. There were more than 100,000 residents in Malacca and it was a prosperous town. Many trade missions took place during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) of China. Malacca Sultanates were one of the protectorates and paid homage to the Ming China. A daughter of the Ming Emperor was married to a Malaccan Sultan. Malacca sultanates gained much influence including the ability to spread the religion of Islam across the Malay Peninsula. However, Malacca Sultanate was attacked and conquered by the Portuguese in 1511. Hindus, Chinese and Buddhists inhabitants were spared but Muslim inhabitants were massacred or sold into slavery. Subsequent rulers were the Dutch (1641-1748), the British (1824-1942), and briefly the Japanese (1942-1945).

European and Japanese rulers did not maintain the commercial port, turning Malacca into an impoverished backwater town.

Although the Strait of Malacca is still one of the most important thoroughfares in global commerce between Asia and the west, major ports have been relocated to other harbors, such as Singapore and those closer to Kuala Lumpur. Malacca is now a



Dutch Square: Christ Church (left), Queen Victoria's Fountain (right), colorful trishaws can be seen in both photos.



Jonker Street, Chinatown (left), a restaurant specializing in Chicken Rice Balls, a fast food service restaurant like McDonald for customers to pick up and go.

Left: A Nyonya restaurant, typical dish is Asam Laksa (rice noodles with toppings of chicken, prawn or beef; spicy or sour), children born to mixed marriages of Chinese and Malays are accustomed to the tastes.

Right: Cheng Ho, a marine explorer sent by Ming Emperor to lead fleets of ships to western oceans. Cheng Ho made such voyages five times during 1405-1433. More than four categories of wooden ships were used which included (1) four deck passenger ships, each ship carrying 500-1000 people (2) horse ships (3) supply ships (4) war ships. The exploration preceded Christopher Columbus' voyages (1492) by more than 60 years. Strait of Malacca is the shortest route between China and India. Ocean sailing without motors would rely on Cheng Ho and his pilots to navigate with knowledge of local wind patterns. Trade wind would help when sailing from China. Prevailing westward would help going back to China. Each way, his army could station in Malacca. Records show that some of his pilots were Arabian speaking which may indicate his voyage may have reached Middle East or even Africa. Cheng Ho was born to a Muslim family in Kunming, Yunnan, China. Cheng Ho was castrated prior to becoming a palace officer. Stories of Sam Po Enoch's travels to the western ocean are well known to the Chinese. Sam Po was his name in the palace.



Area at foot of the Chinese Hill, also known as Sam Po Hill (Left) Monument of Chinese victims during Japanese occupation (Right) cactus flowering near King's well.

Tourist Attractions

Genting Highlands: Elevation 6000 ft, Hotel, Skyway, Resorts World Genting.



Sky Mirror: A vast sand bar that barely appears above sea level at low tide, mirror like reflection of the sky and people. Background is the speed boat that took us there.

SINGAPORE

March, 2024

The Republic of Singapore is an island country and city-state in maritime Southeast Asia. A small country with a population of 6 million, population density is among the highest of the world. It has one main island and many satellite islands and artificial islands made by land reclamation projects.

Singapore became an independent sovereign country in 1965, however it started its modern era in 1819 when Stamford Raffles established Singapore as a trading post of the British Empire. It is now a major financial, maritime shipping and aviation hub and is a developed country.

Singapore is a unitary parliamentary republic, where the president is the head of the state and is elected to a 6 year term. Presidential candidates must be from ethnic groups of 13% Malay or more. The government is separated into three branches: the executive branch is headed by a prime minister, appointed by the president; the legislative branch has elected and appointed parliament members; the judiciary branch is headed by a chief justice. Its members are appointed by the president with the advice of the prime minister. Singapore government is under the control of one political party (People's Action Party), holding more than 80% of elected parliament members since its independence.

Singapore has four official languages; English, Malay, Mandarin and Tamil. A multi racial country, major ethnic groups are Chinese (74%), Malay (14%) and Indian (9%). Major religious groups are Buddhists (31%), Christians (19%), Muslims (16%) and Taoists (9%).

Merlion Park

Merlion is a mythical creature with the head of a lion and the body of a fish, it is the official mascot of Singapore. To the east of the Merlion Park, across the Marina Bay, is Singapore's iconic Marina Bay Sands Resort.

Gardens by the Bay

Gardens by the Bay is the product of the city's efforts to raise the quality of life by enhancing greenery and flora in the city. It has become an icon of Singapore. Gardens with various themes are designed to include natural, enclosed and environmentally controlled greenhouses and metallic tree like structures. Layout of greenhouse heritage gardens is aimed to celebrate and preserve the plant and people interactions of Singapore's culture

(left). The Singapore Flyer and tree like metallic structures are used to provide shade and space for outdoor activities (right). Some are vertical gardens.

Among a total of 18 tree like structures, heights ranging 80-160 feet, the tallest two have elevated walkways between them. Supertrees are used to vent hot air and to cool circulated water. Some are equipped with solar panels to store energy and provide energy for light shows. Supertree also collects rain water for irrigation.

Various garden types in the Heritage Garden, last two photos are the Chinese Garden with decorations. It so happens that 2024 is the year of dragon. The garden has many artifacts of carp and dragon. According to Chinese mythology, there is the dragon gate in China's Yellow River, where numerous carp swim upstream but only the strongest few can pass the gate successfully. Once over the gate, they are transformed into powerful dragons.

Marina Bay Sands

Marina Bay Sands is a landmark resort of Singapore, a modern era construction with three 56 story hotel towers, containing 2600 rooms. The entire structure appears to float like a ship across the top of three hotel towers. Underneath the roof capping three towers are connected. The rooftop has been turned into a sky park, totaling 2.5 acres.

The sky park has gardens, restaurants, bars and nightclubs, and it also has an observatory and an infinity pool. Ground levels are connected to nearby financial and theater District with a helix bridge and piers, connecting to shopping malls, convention and exhibition halls, and an art museum. Inside the mall are many restaurants, stores and convention centers, exhibition halls and a casino. Taylor Swift's The Eras Tour had exhibits in the mall. Her concerts were held in nearby sports hub in the National Stadium. A record attendance of more than 60,000 was reported in March, 2024.

Raffles Hotel

Raffles Hotel in Raffles City district is a five star hotel which has colonial architecture and traditional service styles, an icon of Singapore. There is also a Raffles hospital.



Muslim Quarter

Clockwise from top left: Sultan Mosque was built 1924, completed in 1932. It remains unchanged ever since it was built; Kampong Glam is an Arabian street where stores sell textiles of Malay heritage; a landmark building of Singapore; a hotel in the district.

Suntec City

Suntec City is a mixed-use development which combines shopping malls, office buildings and a convention center all in one location. Construction began in 1992 and completed in 1997. Development emphasized architectural Feng Shui in its design. The aerial view of the complex looks like a left hand: golden ring is in the palm of the hand, the convention center is in the wrist, and 5 buildings of various heights represent 5 fingers. Visitors enter the Fountain of Wealth and are soaked in the positive 'Qi', encircle three times clockwise and make a silent wish and it will bring you luck. Feng Shui, literally 'wind and water', is the art of interpretation of the Earth with the purpose of selecting auspicious sites for building structures, an intuitive appeal accepted by many in the Chinese civilization.

Chinatown

Clockwise from top left: shopping mall and outdoor stores; a Chinese restaurant where popular Hainan chicken rice is served; a Chinese temple; a Hindu temple.

Sentosa

Sentosa is an island located in the southern coast of the main Singapore island. It was a former military base used by the British and the Japanese. The island was opened for tourists 50 years ago. It is now a world famous tourist destination with hotels, resorts, Universal Studios, museums and a casino. Sentosa is connected to Singapore island by road, cable car, boardwalk and monorail.

VIETNAM

March,2024

The Socialist Republic of Vietnam is a country at the eastern edge of the Indochinese Peninsula. The land mass of Vietnam is long and narrow with a high percentage of its land in low elevation coastal areas, with a population of around 100 million. The government is a unitary one party socialist republic. The head of the country is the General Secretary of the Communist Party. Its government has a President, a Prime minister and a National Assembly chairman.

Among the few countries of old civilizations, ethnic Vietnamese inhabited this land as early as 20,000 years ago and their societies took shape more than 4,000 years ago. China ruled Vietnam for 1,000 years (110 BC to 900 AD). Vietnam gained independence from China and became a sovereign country that had feudal government system similar to China. It also had successive dynasties. In addition, Vietnam expanded its territory southward and conquered Cham kings. The Cham people are indigenous inhabitants of the coastal areas of Vietnam and Cambodia. The ethnic Cham people are of Malay-Polynesian origins, most of who are Muslims. France ruled and colonized Vietnam and its adjacent countries during the French Indochina colonial period (1887-1940). During the period of WWII (1939-1945), Vietnam was under Japanese occupation. A sovereign Vietnam was founded after the war, but France, with the assistance of the British, reclaimed its colonial control. Civil war broke out and it took 4 years to end the war with the departure of the French from Indochina and a divided north and south Vietnam.

After the fall of French Indochina in 1954, the Vietnam War broke out in 1955. A proxy war between United States and the Soviet Union lasted 20 years. It was a major conflict between the world's two superpowers and their allies. The war ended in 1973 with the victory of north Vietnam and the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Vietnam. Aftermath of the war was the renaming of the capital of South Vietnam, Saigon, to 'Ho Chi Minh City' in honor of the North Vietnamese leader, and the sanction by the U.S. which helped to cause social unrest and led to economic collapse of Vietnam in the 1980's. It took another 10 years before its economy turned around and trade with western nations reopened.

The Cold War effectively ended with the dissolution of Soviet Union in 1991.

Ho Chi Minh City

Ho Chi Minh city is the most populous city and largest financial center in Vietnam, with a population of 10 million. The area was occupied by Cham people from 2nd-19th century. It was the capital of French Indochina (1887-1902 and 1945-1954), and served as the capital of South Vietnam (1946-1973). Beginning in 1996, the city underwent rapid

expansion and modernization which contributed to the post war economic recovery and international trade.

Independence Palace, formerly the Presidential Palace which was the official residence and work place of the president of South Vietnam. Shown here are the front view of the building, various meeting halls, and the basement of the building where a room has president's resting bed, communication equipment and a hallway that is connected to a tunnel leading to an airport. This was during the period of the Vietnam War.

Saigon Central Post Office: front view, interior view and a souvenir Stand. The building has French colonial architectural style.

Notre Dame Cathedral: Originally the Church of Saigon, it was constructed during the French colonial era, front view shows two bell towers and main entrance. The side wall gathered rickshaws, trishaws and motorcycles. The color of the uniform of the workers is used to identify service companies.

City Hall and Ho Chi Minh park: the park displayed decorative dragons to celebrate year of dragon according to the Lunar calendar.

National History Museum: Many items displayed in the museum are familiar to the Chinese, including religious figures, the emperor's order and various brick forms.

A Chinese temple, a Vietnamese performance and a local market.

Rex Hotel: During the Vietnam War, the daily U.S. briefings at Rex Hotel was known as the 'Five O' clock Follies'.

Nha Trang

Nha Trang is a coastal resort city on the south central coast of Vietnam. With its favorable year round tropical climate, it is a well known tourist destination for its sand beaches and diving sites. A city with a rich history and cultural activities, it was incorporated into the territory of Cham kingdom in the 3rd century.

Po Nagar Cham Towers: Built in the 8th century by the Cham people, it is the best preserved relic of the 1000 year Cham dynasty. Cham religion blended several religious influences of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam. Visitors must walk many steps with no shoes. Photos inside the temple were not allowed.

Long Son Pagoda: A famous spiritual destination, the temple was constructed and later moved to its current location. Behind the Pagoda sits an enormous white Buddha on a hilltop that watches over the entire city, the statue is visible from afar as one enters the city.

Craft Workshop: Traditional crafts of Vietnam are displayed from top left, (1) Conical hats made from palm leaves and sewed together through many processes, a popular gear in the tropical weather of Vietnam to protect from heat and rain, (2) Figures of the twelve zodiac animals are weaved with synthetic fibers on aluminum frames, (3) Oil paintings on canvas fabric combined with rattan frame, (4) Each gourd is crafted and written with Vietnamese calligraphy poem, (5) A collection of many gourds, (6) A bronze drum surface is weaved by hand from synthetic fibers.

AMERICAS

ARGENTINA

December, 2023

Argentina is a large country in the southern part of South America. It's official name is 'Argentine Republic'. It is a Federal presidential constitutional republic with 23 provinces and one autonomous city, each with its own constitution under the Federal system. The present form of its government was achieved after much struggle since its independence from Spain in 1853. The official language of Argentina is Spanish; with a population of 47 million, 80% are Christians (60% Catholics, 20% Protestants), and a relatively high percentage have no religious beliefs (20%)

Buenos Aires

Buenos Aires is the capital of Argentina and its only autonomous city with a population of 3 million (urban) and 17 million (Metro). Many of the city's buildings show eclectic European architecture but the city is definitely multicultural. Millions of immigrants from all over the world have settled here since the 19th century. Buenos



Aires is a melting pot where many different languages are spoken.

Puerto Madero : Dockside area of Buenos Aires was revamped to a commercial district with tall buildings. Also shown is a good size sailboat and a suspension cantilever spar cable-stayed bridge that spans upward and rests on a stabilizing pylon to allow watercraft passage, a movement that has image of Tango dancing.



Plaza de Mayo: The oldest public square in Buenos Aires. Around the square are many governmental offices and financial buildings such as Casa Rosada (president office), the city hall, the National Bank of Argentina, and the Metropolitan Cathedral Where Pope Francis conducted mass.







Natural and metallic flowers



Galilee planetarium

Japanese Garden: A granite statue, a patio and a wet garden are shown.



La Boca: Brightly painted houses, a district for dancers, artists and musicians.



A football stadium in Boca neighborhood is also brightly painted. Three beautiful ladies enjoyed talking to a Spanish song singer, and asada



(Argentine barbecue), French fries and German beers.



BATON ROUGE, LOUISIANA

Located on the eastern bank of the Mississippi River, Baton Rouge is the Capital city of the State of Louisiana, with a population of 230,000. It is a major industrial, petrochemical, medical and a motion picture center. The port of Great Baton Rouge is the farthest upstream Mississippi River port that can handle high tonnage ships. It is also the home of Louisiana State University.



Downtown : Baton Rouge downtown is in a major revival, from a project creating a network of green spaces, linking downtown's cultural and civic attractions centered around the old State Capital building to parks and the current State Capital building and waterfront areas. On the left is the Old State Capital building, a Gothic design with brilliant stained-glass windows resembling a medieval castle. Today, it is a museum with emphasis on Louisiana's political history. On the right is the current State Capital, a 450 feet tall building with 34 stories. It is the tallest Capital building in the United States.

In the middle is a building near the Old State Capital building in the Central Green District.



Magnolia Mound Plantation: The big house, which is supervisor's house, and slave quarters are shown. A typical antebellum plantation, the complex had 900 acres land, where 80 slaves planted cash crops of indigo, cotton and sugarcane. Now, it is a museum house with only 16 acres of land.



Legendary Louisiana BBQ dinner

BRAZIL

December, 2023

The Federative Republic of Brazil is the largest country in South America. Owning the title of the 5th largest country in the world, it is larger than India and Australia. As a republic, the head of the country is the president. It has upper and lower legislative chambers and a separate judiciary system. The population is 200 million and its official language is Portuguese. A colony of Portugal for more than 300 years, it has adopted their cultural and religious traditions, currently being the most populous Roman Catholic country in the world. Brazil gained its independence in 1822.

Iguazu Falls

The Iguazu River is a river flowing through and tumbles down at the edge of a plateau forming Iguazu Falls. The river beds consist of layers of packed volcanic basalt rocks and there are small islets that help to form characteristic staircases, from where waterfalls drip down as separated cataracts at different elevations. A breathtakingly spectacular scene, Iguazu Falls is a natural wonder. The Iguazu River then flows into a canyon and empties into the Parana River at a point called Triple Frontier where Brazil, Argentina and Paraguay border each other.



Itaipu

The ITAIPU Hydroelectric Dam is located on the Parana River near the border between Brazil and Paraguay. It is owned and managed by a joint company, ITAIPU Binacional, to construct and manage this dam. The facility started its operations in 1984 after more than 10 years under construction. With 20 electric generating units, the project generates huge amounts of electricity. Paraguay even generates a surplus of electricity to sell to Brazil and Uruguay. In addition, the project has several positive impacts on agricultural productivity, fishing, water quality and biodiversity.



Foz do Iguazu

Downtown area of this city is charming, with many restaurants serving traditional Brazilian food including, Brazilian coffee and beer.



Animals, birds, lizards and butterflies in the area





Clockwise from top left: Iguana, South American coati, a crow like big bird in an islet of superior Iguazu River, and a butterfly.

Rio de Janeiro

A mega size seaside city on the mouth of Guanabara Bay which connects to South Atlantic Ocean, Rio de Janeiro is the national hub of services, business, commerce and transportation. With a population of 8 million within city proper and 12 million within metropolitan area, it is headquarters to many oil, mining and telecommunications companies. It is also home to many universities and research institutes. Rio de Janeiro is the main cultural hub of Brazil, home to the Portuguese Imperial family for many years. Rio de Janeiro has inherited a strong influence from the past. The city is the capital of the State of Rio de Janeiro.

Historically, it was the national capital, and the capital of the United Kingdom of Portugal, Brazil and the Algarves (1815- 1822). Large number of royal family members and associates fled Lisbon, Portugal to Rio de Janeiro in order to escape the threat of Napoleon invasion. Another major historical event was the Atlantic slave trade during 1811-1840, where a large number of slaves were shipped to Rio de Janeiro, although Brazil eventually abolished slavery.

Sugarloaf Mountain

A 1200 feet peak on a peninsula at the mouth of Guanabara Bay, it juts out into the Atlantic Ocean. By taking a cable car to the top, visitors can enjoy panoramic views of the city, beaches, the bay, and the statue of Christ the Redeemer.



Christ The Redeemer

The statute is 98 feet high at the peak of a 2300 feet granite mountain in an urban park overlooking the city. It is an iconic landmark of Rio de Janeiro and Brazil.



Metropolitan Cathedral

A Roman Catholic cathedral constructed in 1976, it is located in the central district of the city.



Cathedral, bell tower and inside of the cathedral.

Lapa Steps, nearby houses and painted walls

In Rio de Janeiro's art district, ever evolving pieces of art, music and paintings are everywhere. Ceramic tiles were collected and used as steps, with added colorful paintings. Beautiful wall paintings can be seen on many walls of this cultural part of old

Rio. There are many bars, restaurants, and nightclubs where samba music is heard.

Bay Bridge, ferries, cargo and cruise ships

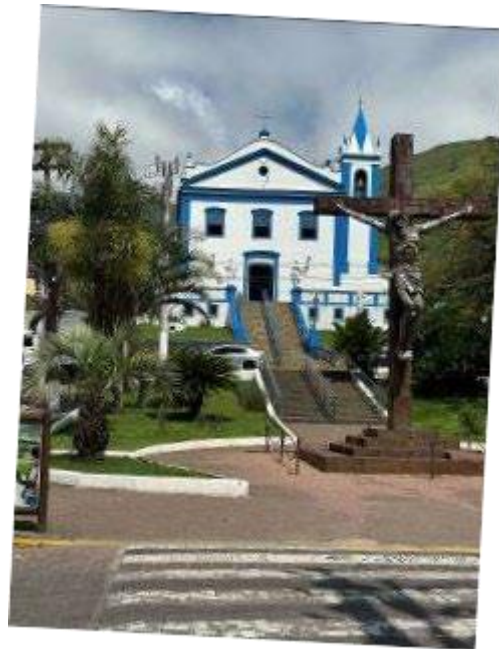


Heavy boat and ship traffic, and busy highway on bay bridge are common.



Ilhabela, Brazil

Ilhabela is the largest of the archipelago islands. A beautiful tourist destination, it is located 130 miles north of Santos on the Atlantic coast.



Beach, mountains and a blue and white local church.

São Paulo, Brazil

São Paulo is the most populous Brazilian city and the largest Portuguese-speaking city in the world. The city's motto "I am not led, I lead" sheds light on the pride of São Paulo residents.

Gold was discovered in São Paulo region in late 17th century, leading to the prosperity of the town, along with the Atlantic Slave Trade. In the late 18th century, sugar cane plantations were prosperous and exports through its nearby harbor generated sizable revenues. However, the expansion of coffee production was a major factor in the growth of São Paulo. When slavery was abolished in 1788, slave labor was replaced with large number of new immigrants, mostly Portuguese, Italians, and Japanese. With the construction of the Luz station(a rail station) and Paulista mansions in 1900, the city's population doubled and industrialization forged ahead. The city saw many new factories producing cosmetics, chemicals, automobiles, fabrics and more. After World War II, São Paulo's transportation system changed and the city saw its first paved highway in 1947. Mansions were replaced with tall buildings, and the Paulo Metro was constructed. São Paulo evolved as a vibrant financial and cultural center and the modernization continued. It is now the main financial center of South America and a mega city with a population of 12 million.





Santos: City Views. (top two photos), Cruise Terminal and Cargo ships at entrance to the Port of Santos, the largest port in Latin America connecting over 600 ports worldwide.



Soccer is the most popular sport in Brazil, becoming a part of their national identity. A local soccer museum has a collection of the greatest Brazilian players including Pele (above right).



Monument in Independence Park (left); Flags of 26 states and one Federal District of Brazil are shown in Gonza Beach (right). States have autonomous administration, collect their own taxes and receive a share of taxes collected by the Federal government. Brazil gained independence from Portugal in 1822.



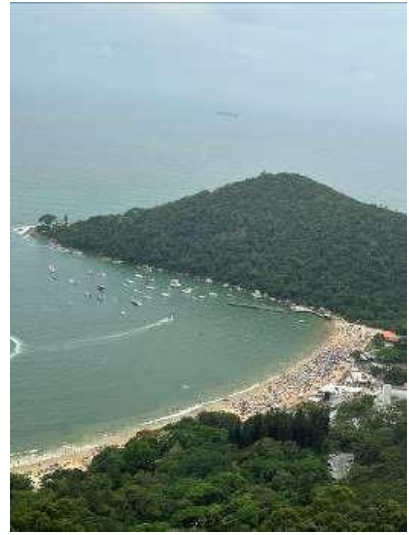
Monte Serrat: A special railway leads to the top of the mountain. The system operates with two carriages in synchronized movement, with two lanes in the center.



A chapel was erected on the mountain top to commemorate a Brazilian saint who protected local residents and is also a protector of navigators. Visitors can send prayers and wishes by tying colored notes.

Balneario Camboriu, Brazil

A resort city on the Atlantic coast in southern Brazil, it is close to São Paulo and is conveniently located for vacationing ocean goers. The city is a popular destination for South Americans, and more than 50% of Brazilian visitors are from São Paulo. The city is filled with skyscrapers and affluent visitors.



Gorgeous urban landscape and a crescent shaped beach, visitors use cable cars or zip lines to reach the mountain top and return. Christmas is celebrated in December like in the rest of the world, even though December is summer in Brazil.



URUGUAY

The official name of Uruguay is Oriental Republic of Uruguay. It gained independence from Brazil in 1828. A democratic constitutional republic, the motto of the country is 'Freedom or Death', and its current population is 3 billion.

Montevideo

Montevideo is the capital of Uruguay with a population of 1.4 million. The city is situated on the southern coast of the country and is very close to Buenos Aires.

Uruguay flag in front of a building and the Sun of May portion of the flag signifying that May is the month when the independence movement started, with blessings of Inca God.

Independence Square and vicinity streets: Statue of General Artigas, the father of Uruguay Independence, is in the center. His remains are in an underground mausoleum underneath his statue. The Presidential Office and the tall Salvo building are nearby.

The Salvo building has been occupied as apartments and offices, including the famous Tangle Museum of Uruguay.









Old city square, where souvenir stands and local jewelry stands are sold in this flea market.



Plaza de la Diversidad Sexual: An old city district where homosexual rights are protected.

BURLINGTON, IOWA

Burlington, population 24,000, is a city with hilly bluffs and riverfronts. The city's landscape is like an amphitheater with European style houses and churches. Houses on elevated parts of the bluff are beautiful, interspersed with churches of the early European settlers. A prosperous transportation and trading town from early days following the 1803 Louisiana Purchase, Burlington's population has declined steadily since 1970. The city is bisected by the Mississippi River, freeways and bridges link the city and Amtrak, a National rail system, provides daily services to Chicago, Illinois and a station across from the Bay of San Francisco, California. Burlington has made major efforts to revive the city's glory days, including revamping downtown roads entirely and enhancing barge traffic. The plan may involve a European style high speed rail.



Snake Alley has many sharp turns. The road is topped with local fired bricks and limestone curbings.



Burlington Downtown



City Hall



Port of Burlington (left): A local TV reporter interviewed visitors in efforts to promote tourism. Background is the Great River Bridge of Burlington.

CITIES AND TOWNS ALONG THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER

August, 2022

The Mississippi River flows from north to south. Its watershed is between two major U.S. mountain ranges: Rocky on its west, Appalachian on its east. With many tributaries from both sides, Mississippi watershed is the largest drainage basin in mainland

U.S.A. The navigable portion of the river is about 2300 miles from Saint Paul, Minnesota to New Orleans, Louisiana. Major merchandise transported on the Mississippi is grain, coal and gas.

Native Americans have lived along the Mississippi River for thousands of years. Europeans came to this area in the 16th century. In the 19th century, during the western expansion of the United States, large numbers of migrants moved across the Mississippi River.

Gradually, cities and towns began to flourish on the banks of the River. These cities and towns have established their own cultures, lifestyles and activities that have become American tradition and heritage. American culture was basically developed from early European immigrants and has been significantly influenced by African traditions, as large numbers of slaves were brought to this large region during colonial periods. As U.S. moved gradually from early 13 colonies to its present size, the modern American culture and folklife has taken shape. A few examples that are uniquely American are:

Thanksgiving Dinner

The typical American Thanksgiving dinner includes roasted turkey, stuffing, mashed potato, green bean casserole, sweet potato casserole, honey glazed Brussel sprouts and cranberry sauce.

American Football

The most popular sport in the United States, American Football originated from soccer and rugby. First game was played in 1869 in Brunswick, New Jersey between Rutgers and Princeton.

American cuisine

Hamburgers are a traditional German dish, popularized by the popular American fast food restaurant McDonald's, making it a staple in the typical American cuisine.

American folk music

American folk music can be traced back to British Isles, European folk melodies and hymns. However, the rhythmic and lyrical styles of African music have significantly

influenced American folk music. Numerous genres include blues, blue grass, gospel, country, cowboy and worker songs, rock and roll, jazz, pop and hip hop.

All-time favorite singers include Elvis Presley, Michael Jackson, Steve Wonder, Marvin Gaye, Madonna, Louis Armstrong, Loretta Lynn, Dolly Parton, Bob Dylan, Frank Sinatra, Whitney Houston, Johnny Cash, Taylor Swift and many more.

A lake five hundred miles north of Minneapolis is identified as the source of Mississippi head waters. Lake Itasca is one of many lakes in northern Minnesota. These lakes can be traced back to the Ice Age, when continental glaciers from north and alpine glaciers from two big mountains covered a large area of the United States of America. Modern day landscape of mountains, valleys, rivers and lakes are the work of glaciers. Many of these lakes are connected with deep channels, formed by glaciers cutting through bedrocks. Chains of lakes are common in tributary basins of the Mississippi River.

Cities and towns we visited include:

Minneapolis & St. Paul, Minneapolis

Dubuque, Iowa

Moline, Illinois

Burlington, Iowa

Hannibal, Missouri

Saint Louis, Missouri

Memphis, Tennessee

Cleveland, Mississippi

Natchez, Mississippi

Vicksburg, Mississippi

Baton Rouge, Louisiana

New Orleans, Louisiana

DUBUQUE, IOWA

Dubuque, population 60,000, is the oldest city of Iowa. Early settlers shaped lifestyles and traditions of American heritage. The region has vast acreage of corn fields. The movie 'Field of Dreams' has many stories relating to struggle and betterment of their communities in this corn fields region.

A house of an Iowan farmer includes a residential house, animal shelter, and grain storage containers. In the background are family corn fields. The lifestyle of Iowan farmers is a source of envy for farmers around the world.



Art exhibit along Mississippi River Walk and a bridge.

National Mississippi River Museum



Rivers run through history and folklore, they link us as a people, they nourish and refresh us, and provide us with fish, wild life, trees, plants and sports.



Port of Dubuque



(Clockwise from top left): a casino, a road sign marked sister cities of Dubuque, a short commute rail that travels to top of a bluff and is called Fenelon Place Elevator, and a local hospital of city of Dubuque.

LA CROSSE, WISCONSIN

La Crosse region is in a famous drift less region, a part of the world with views of an ancient district topography. “Drift” refers to glacial drift of rocks and sediments deposited by a glacier as it moves over a land area. This small upper Mississippi region was left untouched by the last Ice Age. This region is the last remnant of the natural rugged terrain of the upper Midwest.



Grandad Bluff is a 600 ft bluff which offers a bird’s eye view of La Crosse, and extends to even wider areas of states of Wisconsin, Minnesota and Iowa of the Mississippi River valley.

University of Wisconsin- La Crosse is a part of University of Wisconsin system, it offers undergraduate and graduate programs, it has about ten thousand students .

Copeland Park is a quiet community park on east bank of Mississippi River.

Golden Age people can ride Twilight ships under extremely nice sunset to cruise Mississippi River.



A community of boat houses near a Mississippi River bridge .

Riverside Park is a park located on the riverfront of downtown La Crosse. We missed it due to many road construction projects.



One of many churches in La Crosse



MINNEAPOLIS & SAINT PAUL, MINNESOTA

The Twin Cities of Minneapolis and Saint Paul are bisected by the Mississippi River. Minneapolis is the largest commercial center and Saint Paul is the state capital. The former occupies both banks of the Mississippi River adjoining Saint Paul. Minneapolis has its origin in timber but later developed into the capital of flour milling industry with vast grain fields in its north, which is part of the Great Plains and is adjacent to the Canadian Plains.

Minneapolis is the birthplace of General Mills, Pillsbury, 3M and Target Corporation.

Population of the city proper is half a million, but in the metropolitan area, it is about 3 million, of which 63% are white, 19% black and 6% Asian. Large numbers of Hmong migrated here after the Indochina wars during the 1970's. There are about 4 million Hmong in China. They are 'Miao' minority. There are more than 4000 Tibetan living in the Twin Cities, many of which were refugees who previously migrated to India and Nepal. They were the followers of the Dalai Lama.

Minneapolis attracted national attention with a recent case of police brutality that resulted in the death of a black person. Ever since the Civil War ended, the struggle of black people against racial injustice has continued.

Political and social movements of Black Lives Matter has collected many cases such as the Minneapolis incident and has built a worldwide network to highlight the fight against racism and discrimination against black people.





Walker Art Center has art galleries, a theater, a restaurant and a gift shop. An art exhibit showing a renovation project, an architecture entitled 'don't put it back like it was'. The Sculpture Garden, next to Walker Center, is an urban park with many sculptures.



The Basilica of Saint Mary





United Methodist Church and Mall of America - Mall of America is an above ground mall, huge, many stores and an amusement park. All above ground.



Minnehaha Falls Park



Lake of Isles

University of Minnesota, a premier research university, has about 50,000 students. All buildings are above ground except for the Civil Engineering building, which is only two stories above ground and seven stories underground.



St. Anthony Falls of Mississippi River is in the waterfront district of Minneapolis, a place where the power of water falls was harnessed by early settlers. It is the place where

Minneapolis began. Minneapolis was the nation's leading lumber producer, which was cut upriver in the northern forests and floated down the river to the mill city's saw.

As Minneapolis flourished, stronger concrete base was built and protective materials were added to produce the present form of St. Anthony Falls. A cross river bridge was built to allow trains to Minneapolis to carry merchandise east and west, which started an impressive period of becoming the flour capital of the nation due to vast wheat fields in the west. The landmark Stone Bridge was built in 1883, but the train services stopped in 1994, it is now an area for pedestrians to hold cultural activities. In addition, a lock and dam was built to the west end of the bridge in order to facilitate navigation up to Minneapolis.

Unfortunately, the lock was closed as well. This is necessary to halt the invasive fish from spreading to the upper region of the river.



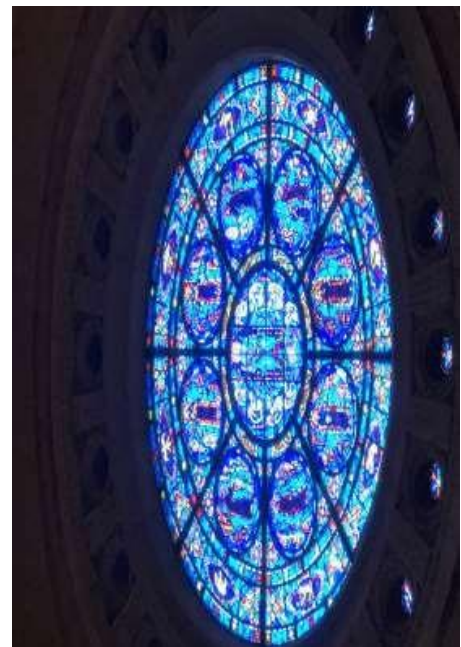


Saint Paul is the state capital of Minnesota, population 300,000, a regional business hub. City's Metro-transit provides bus services and light rail in the Minneapolis-St. Paul area. The Metro Green Line light rail connects downtown St. Paul to downtown Minneapolis. Light rail trains pass through the University of Minnesota campus.

A blue line of the light rail goes to the airport, where the mall of America is nearby. Railroad train lines link Saint Paul to Seattle, Washington and Chicago, Illinois.

Navigable portions of the 2300 mile Mississippi River start from St. Paul and drain onto Gulf of Mexico in New Orleans, Louisiana.

The Cathedral of Saint Paul sits on a hill overlooking downtown Saint Paul and the Mississippi River.



MOLINE, ILLINOIS

Quad Cities is a metropolis with a population of about 400,000, a region that consists of 4 cities. Davenport and Bettendorf in Iowa, Moline, Rock Island or East Moline in Illinois. Moline, population 43,000, is the corporate headquarter of Deere & Company, and a world class elevator company Kone Centre. Western Illinois University is also located in Moline. Many city residents have roots in Scandinavian countries (Norway, Sweden, Netherlands).





John Deere, the company's founder, was a blacksmith from Minnesota. He came to Moline and became a farmer. He made plow blades that can break sticky soils.

Gigantic harvest machines for corns (top) and wheat and beans (bottom).



A water taxi pier in Moline that links with other Quad cities (left).

A train station which has been built but is still waiting for federal funds to complete rail works. Chicago- Moline route, when completed, will enhance the growth of the Quad Cities tremendously.



Mimi's friends in hotel lobby. She met them a day before in the hotel's swimming pool.

NATCHEZ, MISSISSIPPI

Natchez is a city located on a bluff overlooking the Mississippi River, a city with rich history, especially the development of the old South. Natchez is a tribal name of native American Indians. French colonists came here in 1716 and ceded to Great Britain in 1763. Early British settlers planted cotton and sugarcane. With the newly invented cotton gins, cotton fiber and seeds were easily separated. Cotton became a major export commodity crop for the young U.S.A. Agricultural products were transported to Nashville, Tennessee via Natchez Trace, a 440 mile forest trail, and from there to other northern cities, including New Orleans, an important seaport.

With the invention of commercial steamboats in 1811, large scale transportation for passengers and freight, both up and down the Mississippi River, were made possible. Natchez prospered as a cotton producing district, hence more planters came, especially the rich southern planters. They grew large commodity crops of cotton and sugarcane. While cotton was produced on many smaller farms as well, the plantations produced the bulk of the nation's crop. Plantations may be considered as agricultural factories, complete with housing, barns, warehouses, gin processing plants, packaging facilities and large cotton fields.

The need for labor to produce cotton was accelerated and planters brought enslaved workers, but had to purchase more workers. Thousands of enslaved people were brought to Natchez to be sold in the town, but many were eventually sent to southern markets. Slavery had expanded and became the number one political and social issue. The dispute of slavery eventually led to the Civil War, which started in 1861 and ended in 1865.

Vast majority of African Americans were employed as slave laborers by mid nineteenth century, although skilled ones were put in managerial positions in town and in plantations. However, strict segregation rules were to be followed. Everything was separated in plantations - houses of black people were in one section and of the white in another section; horses of black people were separated from those of white people, not even allowed to graze alongside them.

Sympathetic to the Union cause, the Confederate army in Natchez surrendered without a fight in 1862 and thus spared Natchez from destruction. After the Civil War, city's economy rapidly recovered. As a result of the Emancipation Proclamation, large numbers of freed slaves, war refugees and new migrants flocked to Natchez. Private and public plantations entered a new era of paid labor and contractors, majority of whom were former slaves. Black people learned to negotiate wages and demand civil rights. Civil Rights movements thus began and continue to struggle against racial discrimination and segregation to this day.

Meanwhile, by 1900s steamboat traffic was replaced by railroads. The population of Natchez suffered a general decline since 1960, with the current population being 15,000. Barge transportation remains a viable trafficking route and now riverboats become tourist attractions.





Modern day riverboats anchor at a pier under the hill, the old day business district.



Posters in Natchez Association for the Preservation of African American Culture

Longwood Mansion, a home built just before the Civil War started. The house was built with octagonal floor plane, no hallways on any floor. lights to each floor were through a duct system. House owners were cotton planters who invented press machines to handle cotton and were able to cross cotton seeds to grow better quality cotton. A work shop is also shown where artisans left behind their tools hoping to come back after the war. It did not happen because house owners were in financial difficulties. It is now a museum home, a designated National Historic Landmark.

The owner was a young man who came to Natchez in the 1820s, established a successful law practice and married into a rich local family. He managed to own several large size cotton plantations, his labor force included free white people and enslaved black people. He built his resident estate of Melrose on a 132 acres land during the antebellum period, a few decades before the war. Unfortunately, his daughter and grand children died during the Civil War. More severely, his system of using slave labor was broken up. The Melrose was sold near the end of the war. Notice the mosquito nets and a fan on top of the dining table. A slave would constantly pull the ropes up and down by hand in order to keep flies away. A fine China set and a hallwaygare also shown.



St. Mary Minor Basilica is the first Roman Catholic Diocese of Irish and Italian migrants.

NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA

A historical city, population 400,000, New Orleans has deep roots in French and Spanish settlers from early colonial days. Native Indians were driven out of the area after numerous wars. Being an important harbor and transportation hub, President Thomas Jefferson was eager to purchase New Orleans from the French in order to gain access to the Mississippi River port. The U.S. negotiators surprisingly offered New Orleans and a big region of French territories with attractive terms. The agreement of the Louisiana Purchase was signed in 1803 and it doubled the original land mass of the U.S. and made her an equal to other European powers in North America. On the French side, Napoleon was able to consolidate his army and succeeded in becoming Emperor of France.

As a port, New Orleans played a major role during the antebellum period in the Atlantic slave trade. The port handled commodities for exports and imported slaves to the U.S.

New Orleans is located in the Mississippi River Delta, on the bank of the Mississippi River. The city is vulnerable to flooding due to high rainfall, low lying elevation, poor drainage and multiple bodies of water. Even though the city has a complex system of levees and drainage pumps, Hurricane Katrina of August 2005 flooded over 80% of the city, caused untold deaths, and many residents moved out of the city. Fortunately, the city's population has grown back to previous levels.



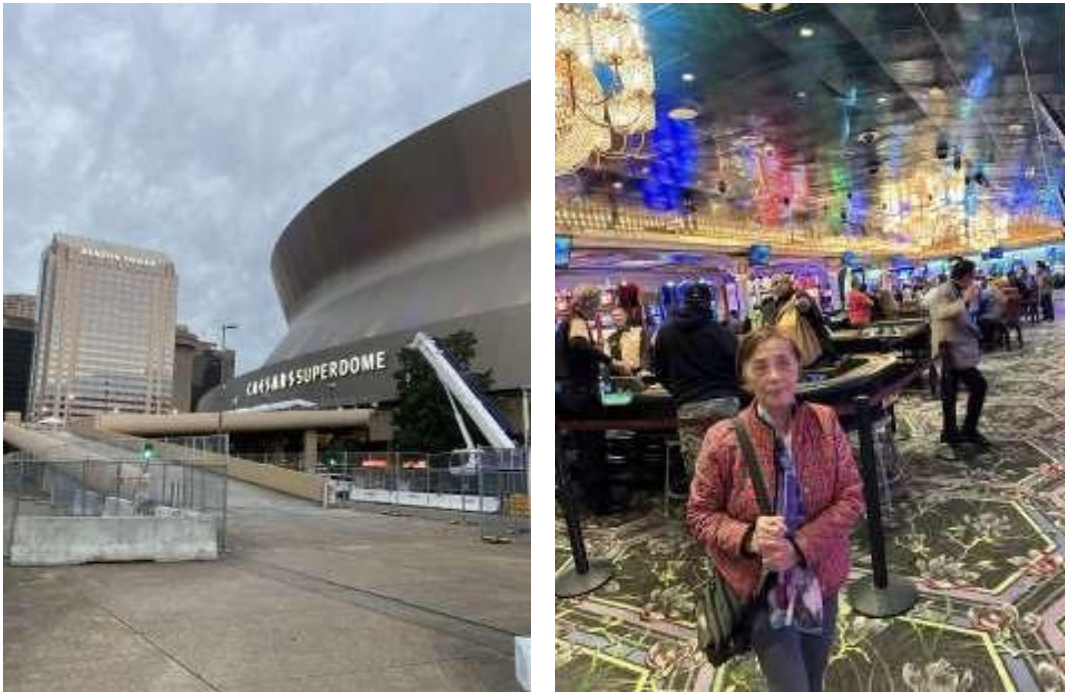
St. Louis Cathedral in Jackson Square, French Quarter



New Orleans is famous for its annual celebration, festivals, carnivals. And parades, most notably the Mardi Gras and the New Orleans Jess & Heritage Festival. We were lucky to have the opportunity to observe Sugar Bowl Parade 2022, held December 30, 2022.

Sugar Bowl final game was played December 31, 2022 in Superdome, University of

Alabama vs Kansas State University (45 : 20). Caesars Superdome is a multi-purpose stadium. National Football League New Orleans Saints plays home games here.



Mimi visited a local Riverboat Casino.

OUTER BANKS, NORTH CAROLINA

Most barrier islands in the United States are found along the East Coast and Gulf Coast. A good example is the Outer Banks off the coast of North Carolina; they consist of three islands with more than 100 cumulative miles of shore lines. On the Island of Northern Beaches are towns with names such as Duck, Southern Shores, Kitty Hawks, Kill Devil Hills and Nags Head. The northern region is wilderness area. Roanoke Island was the first English settlement in America. Fort Raleigh Historical Site is located on Roanoke Island. Hatteras Island has the country's tallest lighthouse yet, is called the Graveyard of the Atlantic because of record high shipwrecks. Cape Hatteras National Seashore extends 70 miles from Nags Head to Ocracoke Inlet.

Currituck, North Carolina

Town of Currituck has been the seat of Currituck County since 1739 with a population of 28,000. Free ferry services are provided for crossing the Currituck Sound to Knotts Island.

This region prospered during the antebellum period and was populated with plantation workers, white and enslaved and free black people.

The town decided early in favor of secession and became a confederate recruiting center. Later this region was occupied by Federal troops. Several groups of U.S. colored troops converged here to attack Elizabeth City.



Old Currituck Courthouse, Free ferry to Knotts Island built before 1860.



Island of Northern Beaches



Duck's Board Walk and a beach house



Wright Brothers National Memorial

Like many people, the Wright brothers, Wilbur and Orville, dreamed about a flying machine. The brothers made a connection between flying and cycling (they owned a bicycle company), particularly how, while turning a bicycle, you have to lean your body to stay balanced. The brothers believed that they can apply this concept to help control a flying machine.

From research and observation, the Wright brothers thought the answer to control may lie in the way birds fly. Birds twist their wings, ever so slightly, to help control the air current. But how to replicate that motion in flying machines with fixed wings was the question. The Wright brothers first built a biplane model kite with flexible wings that can be manipulated by a pilot to raise one wing and lower the other, therefore producing twisting and balancing in the air like a bird. They tried and tested the kite model. It balanced, twisted and turned with ease. They called this mechanical twisting ‘wing warping’. They moved on to test on gliders in Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, an ideal place with strong winds, sand and wilderness. With much more work, failure and refinement, the Wright brothers succeeded in producing a flyer that took care of climbing (lift), forward movement (thrust), stabilizing and direction of flight (control). They produced the world’s first aircraft. Their first day flight took place on December 17, 1903, and longest flight distance was 852 feet in 59 seconds.



Jockeys Bridge State Park (left)



A sand dune park where kite and glider flying are active activities.

Janette's Pier at Nags Head (right)

An ocean fishing pier, it has marine education programs.



Roanoke Island

Roanoke Marshes Lighthouse

A working boat shop and replica lighthouse is on pilings, accessible from a pier. The Fort Raleigh National Historical site is in the current Festival Park of the Roanoke

Island. Walter Raleigh of England reached the shores of North America in 1583-1585. The first colony of the New World was named Colony of Virginia in honor of the Virgin Queen Elizabeth 1. Raleigh brought a small group of about 100 men, women and children of British settlers to Roanoke in 1587, and started a thriving colony. But when Raleigh returned three years later in 1590, there was no trace of the Roanoke Colony left. The entire colony mysteriously vanished. Later, this failed colony was dubbed 'The Lost Colony'. A few years later, several new colonies were established. The first 13 Atlantic Coast Colonies evolved to become the United States of America.



Elizabethan Gardens

A royal garden to commemorate the 117 English colonists

Entrance: Statue of Queen Elizabeth1, and statue of Virginia Dare, the first English baby born in the New World, by a sculptor who imagined how she would look as a grown woman.

Elizabeth 1(1533-1603), Queen of England and Ireland (1558-1603), the period during her reign is called the Elizabethan era, major influences are 1) English dramas which included Shakespeare playwrights style, 2) English maritime adventures such as Walter

Raleigh expedition to North America, and 3) A Protestant herself, she became leader of the Church of England.

Hatteras Island



(left) The Cape Hatteras Lighthouse is hard at work. It is the tallest brick lighthouse in North America. At 208 feet high, it is an international symbol of the North Carolina coast. The lighthouse is located in the heart of the Graveyard of the Atlantic. It is a warning light cautioning mariners about Diamond shoals that caused many shipwrecks. (right) Hatteras-Ocracoke Ferry, a free ferry runs year around between Hatteras and Ocracoke Islands.

ST LOUIS, MISSOURI (1)

Dubbed the 'Gateway to the West', St Louis sits near the confluence of Mississippi River and Missouri River. The city has been developed and is closely parallel to the growth and development of the country itself.

Colonial America: Christopher Columbus made several voyages sailing westward from Portugal and landed on modern day Caribbean islands (1492-1503). Columbus thought his crew landed in India because earlier reports from Marco Polo were incorrectly estimated geographically. Not expecting any landmass in between Europe and Asia, Columbus met some friendly people he called Indians. Soon after Columbus' Great Discovery of the New World, many European countries joined the explorations to claim colonies in North and South Americas. By 1800, colonial North America was divided into four major regions: British took the east coast; French claimed east of Rocky Mountains (The Great Plains); Spanish occupied the west coast and southern region; Indians took control of a big region between Piedmont Mountains and Mississippi River. Meanwhile, USA declared independence from Great Britain in 1776.

The Louisiana Purchase and the Westward Expansion:

Thomas Jefferson brokered the purchase of French Territories from Napoleon, a huge parcel of land that allowed USA to extend from the Mississippi River to the Rocky Mountains. The agreement was signed in 1803 and doubled the land area of USA. Soon after the purchase, Jefferson made plans for a westward expansion and to find routes leading to the Pacific coasts, lay claim to the Northwest Territory, and force Indians to migrate to the west of the Mississippi River. Meriwether Lewis and William Clark were commissioned to lead a team to explore the new acquisition. The expedition took over two years and mapped northwest routes, starting from St. Louis, Missouri to Portland, Oregon and was recorded in great detail.

Within the next 30 years, people from all over the world came to St. Louis. Large percentage of new migrants included the French from New Orleans, Canada and Europe, refugees of the French Revolution, enslaved and free Africans, American Indians and Spanish from the Caribbean and Europe. After new migrants arrived in St. Louis, the majority of them were determined to push further west, while some decided to make St. Louis their home.

Thus, St. Louis population grew rapidly. Those migrants who moved further west were inspired by ‘Manifest Destiny’, and the chances to acquire free lands, farms or ranches, strike rich in gold mining or to become fur traders or merchants.



The Gateway Arch is a national monument to commemorate the city of St. Louis in the Westward Expansion Movement. It took two years to construct and opened to public in 1967. The structure of the Gateway Arch is a sandwich made of stainless steel on the outside, carbon steel on the inside, and concrete in the middle.

Visitors can take a tram ride to the observation deck at the top of the Arch. The height of the Arch is 630 ft, which is the same as the width of its base. An underground museum has large collections relating to the Westward Expansion.



To open routes for fur trade and gain knowledge of plants and animals of the new territories, Lewis and Clark discovered grizzly bears and encountered 50 Native American tribes. Westward Expansion suffered with fierce resistance from Indians. Numerous treaties and wars among white settlers and Indians took place.

Later, many Indians were confined to Indian Reservations and witnessed their hunting ground and land areas became smaller and smaller as white settlers attempted to claim more land.

Feeling hopeless about their future, Indians countered with Ghosts Dance to show their hatred toward white settlers. The conflict resulted in a tragic event at the Wounded Knee, where more than 200 Indians, many of which were women and children, were massacred by government soldiers.





Mimi in Washington University (top), Clydesdale horse and a wagon at Anheuser-Busch Beer company German beer goddess and German eagle are better built and happier.



Fermentation tanks and wood chips that are used to increase surface area to enhance fermentation. Mimi was interested in becoming a utility vehicle driver.

The Old Courthouse was the site where enslaved people were auctioned from its steps on estate settlement. In 1846, Dred and Harriet Scott sued for freedom and won their freedom in this court. Unfortunately, both the Missouri and US supreme courts overturned the decision on grounds that enslaved people were classified as ‘properties’ and had no right to sue. The old courthouse later was linked to Underground Railroad, assisting slaves to escape. However, Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 gave slave owners the power to recapture escaped slaves that reached northern states. The conflict eventually led to the U.S. Civil War (1861-1865).



VICKSBURG, MISSISSIPPI

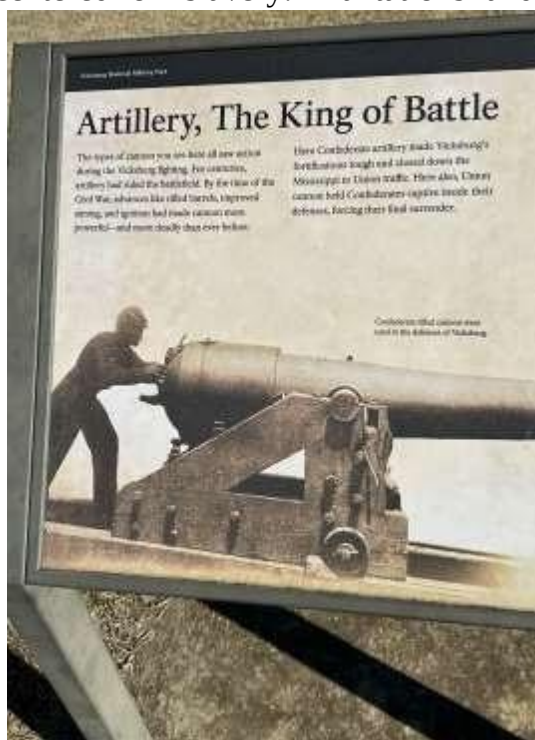
A city located on a high bluff overlooking the Mississippi River on its east bank, Vicksburg was called “key to the south” by president Abraham Lincoln during the American Civil War (1861-1865).

Union naval vessels managed to push through that portion of the city defense system, along the Mississippi River to the south of the city, enduring strong fire power from extensive fortifications.

Soldiers were ferried across the river and moved north in order to approach Vicksburg from the east bank. Again, heavy artilleries made the Union army adopt a strategy to starve city residents and cut off supply lines. The Siege of Vicksburg caused the Confederates to surrender and allowed Union forces to control the entire Mississippi River. The battle vital to the eventual Union victory.

After the war, a constitutional amendment was put in place to abolish slavery and racial discrimination was also outlawed. During the decade of the Reconstruction Period, southern states were readmitted back to the U.S. but violence and unrest was everywhere. The change of economy and the way of life centered on slavery. Plantations and agricultural exports were met with violent opposition from white supremacy groups. Many black people were murdered or lynched, which caused large number of black Americans to flee south in order to escape the terror of lynchings, known as the Great Migration. Meanwhile Civil Rights movement gained national attention and racial discrimination was outlawed.

Vicksburg lost its riverfront status because of flooding and change of river course (1876-1903), a devastating impact to city's commerce. Fortunately, it was revived by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. However, a major change of transportation system from riverboats to railroads, highways and bridges reduced the importance of the city. Vicksburg's population is 20,000.



Confederate Army Union Army

Alabama Illinois

Arkansas Indiana

Florida Iowa

Georgia Kansas

Kentucky Massachusetts

Louisiana Michigan

Missouri Minnesota

Maryland Missouri

Mississippi New Hampshire

North Carolina New York

South Carolina Ohio

Tennessee Pennsylvania

Texas Rhode Island

Virginia Wisconsin

West Virginia

Vicksburg National Cemetery, Minnesota Memorial (left), Illinois Memorial (right)





USS Cairo Museum is located in the Vicksburg National Military Park. USS Cairo was a war ship during the American Civil War. The ship had steam driven engines, armor plating, 13 cannons and a top speed of nine miles per hour. The ship's crew was a group of men from many walks of life, black and white. They were farmers, teachers and butchers. Nearly half of them were immigrants. So many languages were spoken - French, Danish, Russian, German, and accents from Ireland, England, and the Caribbean.

Downtown Vicksburg: Main Street, a hotel and a storage station for barge cargos.



CLEVELAND, MISSISSIPPI

Cleveland, Mississippi is a small town in the middle of Memphis and New Orleans along the Mississippi River. It gained nationwide attention when visitors of U.S. War on Poverty program (1967) toured the town and reported that some school children wore no shoes. This region is part of large black belts of fertile soil, Mississippi Delta had plenty of cotton fields. Black and white migrants came to this region long before Civil War (1861-1865), they cleared forests, sold timber to grow cotton. There were two thirds of independent black cotton farmers and also large size cotton plantations where enslaved persons worked. During the four decades after Civil War , black farmers of this region experienced disenfranchisement and political discrimination, these African Americans had to resort to share cropping and tenant farmings in order to survive. During 1910-1970 great number of black farmers moved out of this area, that was the period of Great Migration. Present day population of Cleveland is 11,000.



A historic hotel in Downtown Cleveland

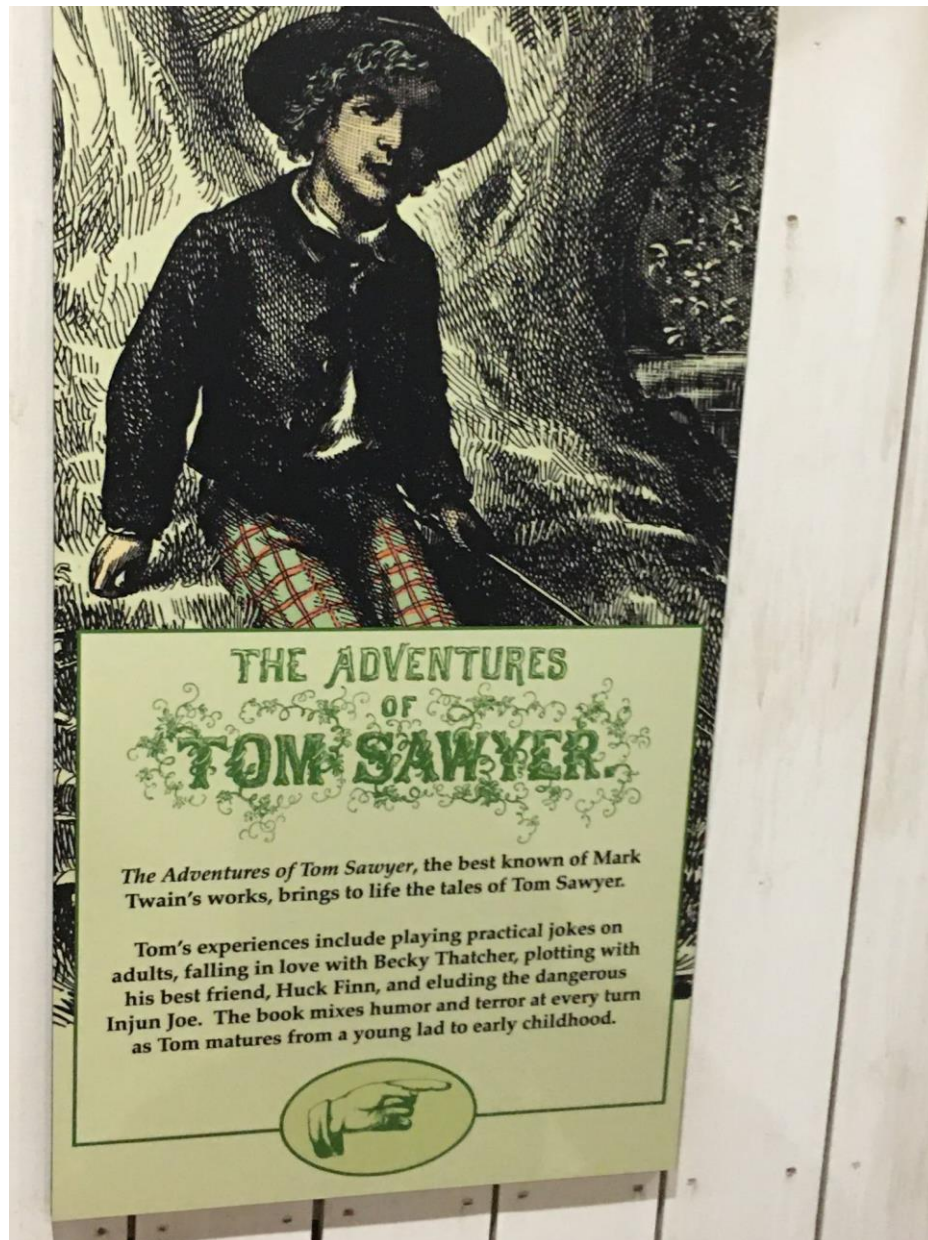
Delta State University, a white only school until 1967 that was more than ten years after U.S. Supreme Court ruled against segregation.

Grammy Museum, a sister museum of Grammy Museum located on Los Angeles, California. This location focuses on Mississippian musicians such as BB King , Robert Johnson and Elvis Presley and music styles of the blues, Jazz, hip-hop and rock n' roll.



HANNIBAL, MISSOURI

A small town 90 miles north of St Louis on the Mississippi River with a population of 17,000 , Hannibal was made famous by American writer Mark Twain (1835-1910) in his first book. 'The Adventures of Tom Sawyer' was published when he was forty years old. Mark Twain transformed his memories into literature through his power of creative imagination. As an author, his writings are witty, humorous and with wisdom and has entertained readers from several generations. Mark Tain was even known as 'Father of American Literature'.

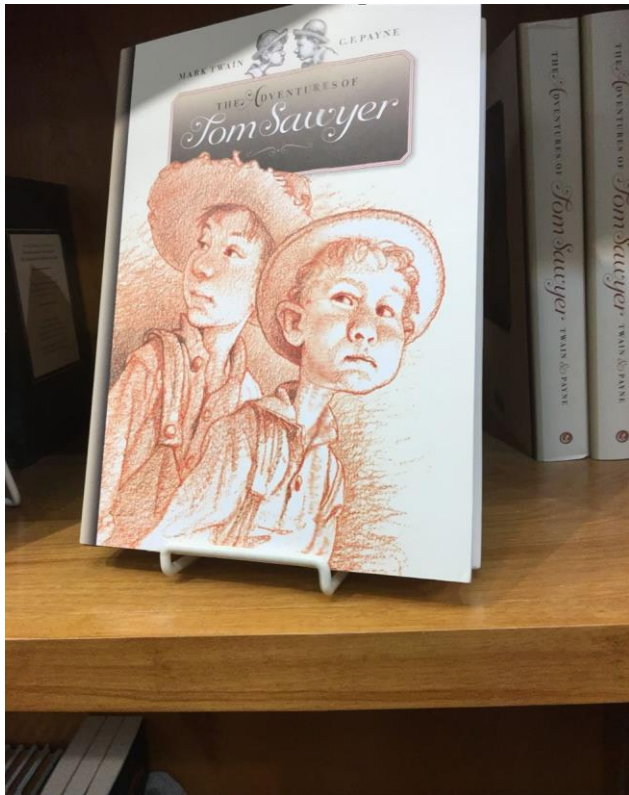


Author Mark Twain with two characters of his book, young boy behind him is Tom Sawyer (that is himself as a young boy) and his best friend Huckleberry Finn.



(Clockwise) Mark Twain served as a licensed riverboat pilot, a railroad station along Mississippi River, a cross river bridge in Hannibal and a barge transportation





EUROPE

GREECE (1)

October, 2024

Greece, officially the Hellenic Republic, is located on the southern tip of the Balkan Peninsula. A unicameral parliamentary republic, the ceremonial head of the country is the president, the head of the government is the prime minister who is the current leader of the political party that obtained a vote of confidence by its 300 members, which is also the country's legislative body. The country's population is currently 11 million and is derived mainly from inhabitants of ancient Greece. The 13 administrative regions consist of 9 mainland and 4 island groups of thousands of islands. More than 90% of its residents belong to the Greek Orthodox Church.

Greece is considered the cradle of western civilization and the birthplace of democracy. Greek culture is one of the major world cultures. The long history of Greece shows its early civilization started in the second millennium BC, first in Crete. By 600 BC, Greek world around Aegean Sea comprised several hundred small city-states, all of which built temples and marketplaces, thus creating urban civilizations. These small city-states were overcome by larger states such as Macedonia (the Hellenistic period). The Roman Empire conquered Greece in 146 BC. When the Diocletian divided the empire into two parts, Greece fell to the Eastern Empire (the Byzantine). After many wars against Mediterranean powers, Greece was finally under Turkish dominance, Ottoman Empire ruled Greece for nearly 400 years.

The modern Greek state started in 1830 when it gained independence from Turkish rule. After many wars including WWI, WWII and civil wars, Greece is now a developed country, moving forward after its credit crisis of 2018.

Athens

One of the most ancient cities in the world, Athens is the capital of Greece. It was at the heart of Ancient Greece. Currently, it is a major metropolis of Mediterranean region and the center of economic, financial, industrial, maritime, political and cultural activities of Greece. With its busy Aegean port of Piraeus, the metropolitan population is almost 4 million. Population of Athens is 650,000 and it is still dominated by 5th century BC landmarks.

Acropolis is a sacred walled sanctuary on top of a hill, left shows the panoramic view of the city of Athens and the Acropolis, right is a closer up photo of Acropolis. There were many buildings with specific functions, such as gathering halls, markets, an amphitheater and a magnificent temple. It is believed that this is where democracy started and it is here that Greek civilization such as building architecture, sculptures and porcelain took shape.

Parthenon (The Temple of Athena): The temple was constructed 2500 years ago to celebrate victory in a war and the building was dedicated to a Greek goddess of wisdom and armory as a temple for Greek people to worship and pray. The goddess accepted the request as Athen's protector and named herself Athena. She even sent an olive tree as a gift to the Greeks.

Temple of Olympia Zeus: The largest temple in Ancient Greece started its construction about 2500 years ago and completed several hundred years later. The temple was dedicated to Zeus, the king of gods. According to Greek mythology and religion, there are many deities living on top of the Olympus Mountain in the sky, the highest mountain in Greece. Gods bear resemblance to humans, and there was a hierarchy of deities, where Zeus is king of gods and his offsprings include Apollo and Athena and many other Olympian gods. Zeus is the powerful lord of lightening and the restless seducer of goddesses, nymphs, and even mortals.

The dead humans spend their afterlives underground. Ancient Greek religion was replaced about 1000 years later by Christian Orthodox. Photos show the remains of the temple, its facilities and a gate constructed several hundred years later.

Thessaloniki

Thessaloniki is a Greek port city on the northwest corner of the Aegean Sea. It is the second largest city in Greece, with over 1 million inhabitants in the metropolitan area. It is the capital of the geopolitical region of Macedonia. Historically, it was the capital of the Kingdom of Macedonia (356-168 BC). By 50 AD, it was a Roman province. A historic city, numerous monuments mark its tumultuous Hellenistic, Roman, Byzantine and Ottoman past. A town 30 miles north was the birthplace of Alexander the Great (384-322BC), King of Macedonia. His eastern expansion passed Iraq, Iran and reached India.

Aristotle University of Thessaloniki: The largest university in Greece, its main campus is located in the center of the city of Thessaloniki, hometown to Aristotle who was appointed as a tutor to Alexander the Great by his father, King of Macedonia. Aristotle (384-322 BC) was an ancient Greek philosopher, logician and scientist. He was one of the most influential thinkers in Western history. He was credited for setting the groundwork of the development of modern science. He learned from his father about biology and medicine but expanded to many other fields of study. He sought to lay out the proper methods, materials and aims for a philosopher seeking to understand each area of study.

White Tower: A monument and museum on the city's waterfront, adjacent to parks and residential houses with beautiful beaches. Present tower was constructed by Ottomans in 1430, used as a fortress, garrison and a prison. The tower was originally white, but there was a massacre of prisoners that earned it the title of Red Tower. The tower is now a buff color but retains the name White Tower.

GREECE (2)

The Greek Islands

The largest of the Greek islands is Crete. Most other islands around the Balkan Peninsula are located in the Aegean Sea on its east and Ionic Sea on its west. Five famous islands we visited are Mykonos, Rhodes, Crete and Santorini.

Mykonos

A popular summer destination for its beaches, music, bars, restaurants and nightlife, the island's total population is only in the 10,000 but tourists come in millions. This formerly peaceful island is becoming a major tourist town.

Old Harbor: A major transportation hub in the past few centuries, the Old Harbor retains its calm and becomes the center of Mykonos with many bars and restaurants. The houses here are typically cubic with white walls and blue trim designed for family homes. The two-tone style is popular in Cyclades, a cluster of islands including Mykonos. The soft tone reflects the peacefulness of the area and compliments the color of the sea. The building materials are stones and mud. The walls are treated with white wash which is a mixture of lime, salt and water. The bright blue color material is produced by mixing lime with selected local plant materials.

The Panagia Tourliani: It is a restored 16th century monastery with a bell tower, named after a patron Saint of the island.

Walking trails lead into the surrounding landscape of rocky hills and down to nearby beaches.

Windmills: An island trademark, windmills were used to grind wheat but now mostly serve as a subject for photographers. This row of four stands on a hill, from where visitors can see Paradise and Super-paradise beaches.

Rhodes

The island Rhodes is located southwest of Athens and northwest of Crete. The principal town in Rhodes Island is the city of Rhodes, population 125,000. The city has beautiful beaches and a rich history, making it a popular tourist destination. A history museum here demonstrates the landscape changes over its long historical past. Excavations of archaeological sites have shown that many cities were repeatedly destroyed and rebuilt, and there are many layers of past cities. Rhodes civilization started more than 4000 years

ago, combining with wars and earthquakes, historical records and mythological stories, Rhodes stands out as a fascinating island to visit.

Filerimos Monastery: It was built in the 15th century during the period of the Knights of Saint John. Rhodes island was purchased by the Crusaders organization, which ruled Rhodes island for more than two hundred years (1310-1522). They took the original icon of Virgin Mary when they were chased out.

Palace of the Grand Master of the Knights of Saint John: The palace and its courtyard.

The Palace of the Grand Master of the Knights of Saint John was a renovated citadel, used by the Crusaders as their headquarters to recapture Jerusalem from Islamic occupation. It is believed that this site is where the statue of sun god Helios once stood. The Ottomans captured Rhodes and used it as a command center and a defense fortress (1522). Gothic architecture styles of windows, doors and floor, wall and mosaic ceiling are shown. Also shown is a masterpiece of Ancient Greek sculpture, Laocoon Group, where artists from Rhodes skillfully captured the intense emotional movements and agony of a Turkish priest and his two sons.

According to Greek mythology, Trojan priest Laocoon was blamed for failing to persuade fellow citizens to allow the Greek wooden horse with soldiers inside to enter city of Troy and god sent a giant sea snake to strangle them to death.

Old Town Rhodes: Longest walled medieval town in Europe, its military architecture is impressive. Stroll through the magnificent gates and castle, wander through the famous street of the Knights, the Turkish bazaar quarters and former Jewish neighborhood. Visitors come outside of the wall where the Greeks lived during Ottoman rule.

Crete

Crete is the largest and most populous Greek Island, located 60 miles south of Greek mainland, with a population of 700,000.

Crete's civilization, the Minoan, started in 2700 BC and was overrun by Mycenaean Civilization from mainland Greece. Crete was ruled successively by Rome, Byzantine, Arabs, Venetians, and the Ottoman Empire. In 1898, Crete gained independence and joined with other Greek states five years later to become part of modern-day Greece. Crete is mountainous with many beautiful beaches, nice living environments and friendly residents.

According to Greek mythology, the birthplace of the god Zeus was a cave in Crete.

Saint Irene Monastery: At the foothills of a mountain in Krousonas village, the monastery was abandoned during Ottoman rule, and was rebuilt in 1940. It's now a convent.



Life at Krousonas village: local musicians demonstrated several Greek music instruments. In a restaurant, guests drank Ouzo, a popular drink in Greece and enjoyed Greek appetizers (mezedes). Ouzo is an anise flavored spirit, a naturally distilled product of a 50/50 water and ethanol mixture. Desserts included Cretan cheese pie, which is made of sheep milk or a mixture of sheep and goat milk. Many guests purchased extra virgin olive oil to take home, extra virgin olive oil must follow strict production guidelines to keep the free fatty acids under 0.8%.

Santorini

Santorini is an island in the Aegean Sea, 120 miles southwest of the Greek mainland, population 20,000. The town is located high on the cliffside and overlooks a vast caldera filled with water. Its rugged landscape is due to a major volcanic eruption in the 15th century BC. Since then, the volcano has erupted many times more and residents have experienced frequent earthquakes. Many residents have migrated to the Greek mainland.

From top left: Rugged landscape, blue trim and white washed houses, busy shops, inside of a Holy Orthodox Church and a hotel. Locals complain about more than a million tourists and too many hotels which have priority to receive water during dry season.

Visitors have choice to walk, ride donkey, or take a cable car from the harbor. Tenders by the Bay will take visitors to their cruise ships. Usually there are several large cruise ships docked in the busy harbor. There are many restaurants and bars on shore.

CHILE

December, 2023

The Republic of Chile is the southernmost country in South America, stretching along a narrow strip of land between the Andes Mountains on the east and the Pacific Ocean on the west. Chile's population is 20 million. The Inca empire ruled Chile until the 16th century. General Diego de Almagro of Spain followed the Inca Trail, crossed the Andes and conquered Chile in 1535. Pedro de Valdivia was appointed 1st royal governor of Chile in 1540. Chile was colonized and ruled by Spain for more than 300 years, gaining its independence in 1844. The national language of Chile is Spanish. About 80% of the population is Christian, where Catholics are only 18%, far less than any other south American countries. Chile is a unitary presidential republic country with a president and upper and lower parliaments.

Santiago

Santiago is the capital of and the largest city in Chile with a population 7 million. Most of the city is situated between 500 and 650 meters above sea level. The city was founded by General Pedro de Valdivia of Spain. The Andes Mountains can be seen from most parts of the city. The Chilean government's executive and judiciary branches are based in Santiago while the congress mostly meets in the close city of Valparaiso.



Downtown Almagro Park



Almagro was the first governor of Chile. A TV and telecommunications tower is also shown.



Moneda



Civil District: Presidential building, Supreme Court, office buildings and a shopping mall are shown. The presidential office was a mint building during the colonial period. The shopping mall has both open air stands and indoor stores.

Plaza de Armas



Plaza de Armas remains the city's main square where the royal palace, metropolitan cathedral and many buildings of significant architectural designs are located.



Santa Lucia Hill



A small hill in the center of the city of Santiago, Santa Lucia Hill was constructed by Spanish royal engineers as a defense base for the city of Santiago, it is now a public park with lookout points. A panoramic view of the city is also shown.

Bellavista



The Bellavista neighborhood has many art galleries, nice restaurants and upscale residential homes. A funicular links it to a hill 300 meters above the city.

San Cristobal Hill



Cable cars reach the top of the hill. At the summit, there is a sanctuary dedicated to the immaculate conception with a 22 meter statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary, an amphitheater for ceremonies and a chapel for praying. The statue is lit up at night by lights placed on its sides that make it visible from all over Santiago day and night.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Thomas Wu, Ph.D, worked 50 years as a chemist in U.S., from research assistant to scientist, from laboratory assistant to professor of chemistry. After retirement, he wished to enjoy his life and travel the world. Travel and gain personal experience of the world communities and wonderful sceneries is beyond the imagination of a poor young boy's dream growing up in mainland China , Hong Kong and Taiwan. However, it does not stop here, it is a beginning to let friends know his experiences through notes writing and publishing. In his belief his contribution to the world is continuing no matter how small it is.