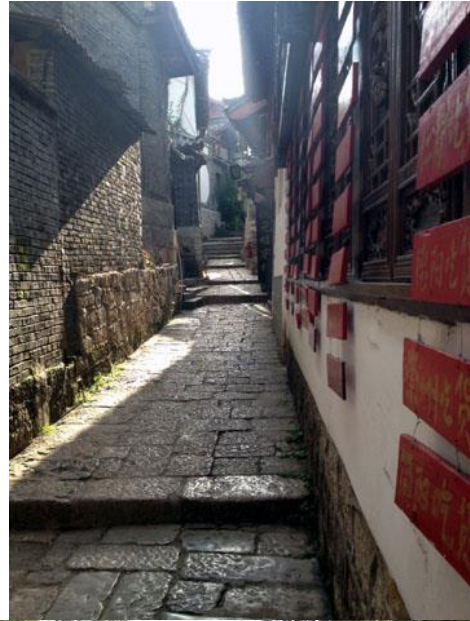


Blog 36 – Li Jiang

We rode a ten hour train ride from KunMing all the way to a city called LiJiang. In LiJiang, we lived in the Old Town located in the center of the city. We (including my grandma) experienced a horseback riding adventure along a segment of the ancient Tea-Horse Road. On the very last day, our whole family climbed the back of the Jade Dragon Mountain.



The Old Town is more than eight hundred years old. There are many old, traditional houses. Most of them have been transformed into shops, restaurants and even boutique hotels run by families. There are also many night clubs and bars with live performances late at night, attracting many young people. There's one particularly loud bar right outside of our hotel room playing non-stop blaring music every night causing us to not have such a good night's sleep. The two thousand or so local NaXi families that used to live there have all moved out, leaving the Old Town to many people from other places. By now, the supposed "Old" Town looks exceptionally modern with a touch of the shadows left from the NaXi people.



Many, many years ago, tea farmers would meet with horse traders at the markets along the Ancient Tea-Horse Road. LiJiang is one of the major cities on the Tea-Horse Road pathway, which had many markets. The starting point of the Tea-Horse Road is in southern YunNan, where many tea trees are grown. It extends into the north-west area to Tibet. Introduced by a local NaXi tour guide, we went to a horse riding site in the rural area of Li Jiang. We experienced what it was like to travel down the Ancient Tea-Horse Road. When I was 8, I visited Yellowstone National Park and had my very first horse back riding experience there. LiJiang horse is much smaller than the one I rode at Yellowstone, but I was told it has better muscle endurance and can handle the high altitude much better. There's one section of the path that had a cliff on one side and a rapid river on the other. But those well trained stallions were fully prepared and apparently weren't afraid of anything! :) With waterfalls nearby and beautiful wild flowers blossoming along the way, this part of the Tea-Horse Road's scenery is just breathtaking. The traditional white NaXi farmhouses, crystal blue sky and emerald green mountains put together, look like a watercolor

painting. Without realization, the trip comes to an end. Coming off of the horse, I turned to my dad and asked “Can we do it again?”



The next day, we woke up early in the morning, prepared for the big day and got ready for our trip to Jade Dragon Mountain. We waited in the pitch black darkness for the tour guide/driver to arrive. She finally came, with some bad news as well. The highway to the Jade Dragon Mountain had encountered some severe traffic jam due to the immense amount of visitors. It would probably have taken us six hours just to get to the park gate. We definitely didn't want to waste any of our precious time in YunNan, so we asked for an alternative. She said there's a “secret” path near the back of the mountain and suggested us to climb the mountain by horse. “YAY! MY DREAM CAME TRUE,” I thought to myself. It was quite chilly that morning. We put on all of those clothes meant for our *TaiWan* trip. With many layers, I was still shivering with two scarves, three tee-shirts, one light jacket and a baseball hat. :) The tip of the mountain was hiding behind the thick clouds that day. The mountain has an elevation of 5,596 meters. The groom led us to the 3,200 meter point when it started to drizzle and we had to cut our ride short. On our way back, we passed Austro-American botanist and explorer Joseph F. Rock's former residence and took a peek inside.



Joseph Rock (1) was based in LiJiang in the YuHu village at the foot of Jade Dragon Mountain. During his 27 year long stay (1922-1949) in China, he wrote a total of 9 articles for National Geographic magazine about his adventure in southwest China including YunNan and this unknown YuHu village. Many people read his articles and grew interest in LiJiang. One person, named James Hilton even wrote a book: “*Lost Horizons*” that is said to be inspired by Joseph Rock’s many wonderful articles. Little by little, YunNan, LiJiang and even YuHu village grew with modest fame.



One week ago, I didn’t even know where or what YunNan was! From this spontaneous trip full of new experiences, I learned a lot about this beautiful southern part of China, met many people from various ethnic groups and encountered so many surprises I will never forget.

(1) Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph_Rock