

Blog 46 Yanji (Jilin Province)

At around 9:00pm on the last day of July, our whole family was boarding our overnight train to Yanji. As the train started chugging its way down the road, I clambered onto my middle bunk and quickly fell asleep. At around 5:00am, the sun was already shining through the thin curtains and our train was stopping at the Yanji train station.



Yanji is 650 km away from Harbin, near the borderline between North Korea, Russia and China. Nearly half of the Yanji people are of the Korean ethnic tribe. On the taxi, I noticed all the road signs, store signs and posters were all written in both *Korean* and Chinese. It turns out that the city's primary language is actually Korean. The driver told us that even their local newspaper is written in Korean. Yanji's population is around 450,000 and Yanji has only two factories in the entire city: a tobacco and an alcohol factory, resulting in its clean air. It has also been ranked as one of the top ten cleanest cities in China. It's definitely a great place to "clean" our lungs and get a break from all that smog and pollution of the big cities. The weather was also so much cooler than Nanjing. With the windows closed and the AC off, we still had to snuggle up in a blanket in the summer night. But if that's not cold enough, they have more "traditional" freezing cold food to add to those shivers.



Whenever our family reaches a new destination, we always like trying the “local flavor”. For lunch, we rushed into a highly recommended Korean restaurant that was close by our hotel. Their most famous dish is the cold noodles. Without thinking, the three of us each ordered a large bowl. But when the bowls of noodles were put on our table, I figured that Yanji’s version of “large” was much different from ours. That bowl was GIGANTIC. There, floating in every bowl were fruits and shaved ice. Ice isn’t found that often on the Chinese dining table; sometimes, even getting a cup of ice water is difficult. But now, they give me a bowl of icy noodles? After a while, the waitress came and presented us three pairs of heavy duty scissors. I didn’t understand why we had to do some DIY hand craft after eating, but without thinking too much I began eating. Chewing on the brown noodles, I found that the noodles were extra chewy and super hard to bite. Then, the waitress said that the scissors were for cutting up the noodles. I’ve eaten a bunch of different noodles in China, but that was my first time eating noodles with scissors. Not only do the people from Yanji eat cold noodles in the summer to cool down, they also eat them in the freezing winter.



After lunch, one of my dad’s friends from Yanji asked us if we wanted to take a look at North Korea from a fairly close distance. Without hesitation, we hopped onto the car and said: “let’s go!!” Within an hour, we arrived at the Tumen port. Standing before us was a bridge that was split in “half” with nothing more than a single red line. The side we were on was China and the other side was North Korea. As we slowly walked towards the middle of the bridge and stood before that red line, I couldn’t believe North Korea was just one step away. It seemed so easy to just step over the line, but still it was a pretty hard move to make. Although there weren’t much difference between the two sides of the bridge, a lot of people feel that the other side is very mysterious behind the scene. On the second day, we went to another port: Fang Chuan. It’s a little town that sits at the edge of Russia, North Korea and China. On top of a viewing tower, we could see all three countries within one glance. In one of the display rooms inside of the viewing tower, I saw a picture of a future golf resort design:

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As I was staring at the green where the three countries met, I kept thinking: We would need three visas to just play a game of golf. I guess that was only a proposal 😊

