

Breathtaking. Stunning. Utterly amazing.

HIKING THE GREAT WALL OF CHINA.



Gingerly I step through the crumbling watchtower at Samatai West and onto the Great Wall of China. I will never forget that first moment. The wall snaking off in either direction as far as the eye can see, the trail undulating up and down along the crest of the mountain ridge. It stops you in your tracks. It takes your breath away. Steep, narrow trails up to watchtowers where guards in centuries past would have watched for invaders, followed by crumbling steps down the other side where we would pick our way carefully make our way back down.

The Great Wall of China was China's first tourist attraction, and probably still it's most significant. I am glad I had chosen to do this hike versus the more popular Badaling or Mutainyu locations with their crowds of people and souvenir stands. Here there is just me and my guide, Tao. We had set out from Beijing with the smog hanging low over the city and travelled about 140 kms to this more remote and authentic section of the wall. But first, an arduous hour long hike with sets of steps climbing virtually straight up because, after all, the wall runs along the top of

the mountain ridge. This was probably the hardest part of the hike but the promise of what lay ahead beckoned.

Sections of this wall date back to 700 BC. Built over the centuries by several dynasties to protect their lands from invaders, the wall snakes over the mountain crest for over 7000 kms. I hiked a mere 7 1/2 km but it felt like a monumental feat, an accomplishment.

Meticulous detail is evident in the construction of the wall. Everywhere

Along the way we met several other small groups and passed a school on a class outing. There is a young lady from Poland who is challenging her fear of heights; and a young man, possibly from the US, who cannot overcome the dizziness and has to turn back. A couple from Australia and a sixty-something woman from the US are doing a 2 day trek where they will watch the sunrise and sunset over the Wall. (Note to self. Put that on the bucket list!)

We pass through 15 watchtowers, winding our way toward the village of Jinshanling where the wall is more restored and the area more developed, there is even a small restaurant and hotel. Each time I think I have seen it all I step through another watchtower and am dazzled by an even more stunning vista. As we arrive at our destination I stop and pause, taking in the view one last time. Soaking it in, imprinting it indelibly in my memory.

It was an amazing, humbling day that will stay with me for a very long time. It started as a tick off my bucket list, a sixtieth birthday present to myself, but became much more. A journey into ancient history, a tribute to what man without today's technology can build, and how that can endure over the centuries. A physical and mental challenge. And partially, defying turning sixty.

A great day!

To book this:

Small Group Highlight of Great Wall Hiking – Samatai West to Jinshanling (1 day)

Contact : greatwallhiking.com or email: customer@greatwallhiking.com

Cost: Approx. \$100US, includes pick and return in Beijing.