

First days are akin to the first time the duckbill platypus dropped an egg and realized everything was going to be different, but in that endearingly pleasant way that leaves one excited for future prospects.

First day in Guangzhou!

I am in a very nice part of town. It is quite modern, the buildings are newer, the roads are wide and not crowded, sidewalks are lined with trees and wide too, and lots of amazing food for cheap all around. The food, however, tends to be in sit-down restaurants more so than street stands Bangkok style.

After dropping off my stuff at Monica's and Ann's on the fourth floor (Jeremie was at the doctor), we went grabbed some food around the corner with my buddies. Learned that it is Guangzhou tradition to cleanse the bowls, dishes, and chopsticks with tea before eating, even though they are shrink-wrapped to guarantee cleansing (questioning the logic of tradition if futile).

I ate squid for the first time. Figured that since it was my first day in China, I might as well eat something new. I had managed to avoid it for two years in Thailand, guilt free. Squid is squidy. I think I've had gum that was less chewy.

After we ate, I went with my buddies to the bank to open account. In so doing I learned that BofA and Chinese Commercial Bank are sister though some sort of business deal, and I can draw from my BofA account for free at CCB locations! This is very good news.

The next dilemma was finding a bank that would exchange my travelers checks. After 4 banks, and a taxi ride, we found a Bank of China location that was large enough to deal with them. Almost had a problem because the signature on travelers checks is an evolution from what I had put on my passport in 2001, and consequently different. Good thing I had my Oregon drivers license to connect the dots.

I noticed that anytime someone receives a 100 yuen bill, which is very frequent, they hold it up to the light for inspection. I'm not sure if it's a habit that is a holdover from a previous time, or if fraudulent money is really this prevalent. Not only does the bank do it, but so did out cleaning

lady we hired for the afternoon. Cost us about \$10 to have the whole place cleaned, which sounds like a great deal to me!

Next I got new cell phone. The system in China is one buys the phone upfront, but the monthly plans are pretty cheap. I got a cheap LG brick phone. The fancy ones we use in the States are not cheaper, and when the carrier doesn't spread the cost through monthly service contracts over two years, it's a big upfront expense.

While picking out a phone, Jeremie called to let me know I'd want a mattress pad. He was right, my "mattress" isn't far off sleeping on plywood. The pad is a major improvement, although, nothing compared to the pile of marshmallows we enjoy on the other side of the Pacific.

After returning to the apartment and hanging out with our buddies for a few a while, Monica, Jeremie, and I wandered the block for a few minutes and eventually settled on a restaurant for dinner. I had a Chinese style chicken wing. Monica and Jeremie each had a shrimp dumpling wonton soup. By that point I was too tired to get creative.

Got back about 8:30, chatted on life and the excitement that is going to be Guangzhou, and by 10 I was sound asleep in my new bed!

First morning in Guangzhou:

As a result of my early bedtime, I awoke early, about 5 am. So far, I have spent the last hour composing this.

I have just noticed that the sky has gone from pitch black to quite light in the space of about 15 minutes. I'm sure this has something to do with my latitude, but I'll leave that research up to you and Wikipedia.