

TAIPEI ROTARY ZONE INSTITUTE 2013

Last December 4, 2013, we flew from the Manila Airport Terminal 3. We had to wake up at 3:00 am, as it was a 2-hour drive to Manila and we had to be at the airport 2 hours before boarding.

Since Taipei, Taiwan is only a one-hour-fifty-minute flight from Manila, before we knew it we have landed in Taipei. Taiwanese Rotarians met us and we took a big tourist bus, which brought us to the Grand Hotel, about an hour's drive from the Airport.

Since we were booked at the Ambassador Hotel, we took a cab and it was only a ten-minute drive as it was quite near the Grand Hotel. The last Rotary Zone Institute to be held in Taipei was in November 2008 and it was also held at the Grand Hotel. Below is a short history about Grand Hotel



The Grand Hotel literally means "Yuanshan Grand Hotel"

After Chiang Kai-shek's retreat to Taiwan in 1949, Chiang felt it was difficult to accommodate foreign ambassadors, as there weren't any five-star hotels in Taipei. Thus, he wanted to build an extravagant hotel to treat foreign guests. His wife Soong May-ling suggested to build it on the old Taiwan Hotel on Yuanshan Mountain, the site of the ruins of the Taiwan Grand Shrine, a Shinto shrine during the Japanese rule. Chiang decided on Taiwanese palace-style architecture to promote Taiwanese culture to the West through its extravagance. Taipei based architect Yang Cho-Cheng was responsible for the design of the new hotel. The hotel was established in the May of 1952, but it was expanded several times before it became the landmark, as it is known today.

In 1968, the hotel was rated as one of the world's top ten hotels by the US Fortune magazine. And finally, in the Double Tenth Day of 1973, the main Grand Hotel building was completed, making it an instant Taipei icon. It is a famous landmark located atop a hill overlooking Taipei City and is owned by the Duen-Mou Foundation of Taiwan, a non-profit organization, and has played host to many foreign dignitaries that have visited Taipei.

In June 1995, a disastrous fire broke out on the roof during necessary reconstruction and refurbishment, and because neither ladders nor high-pressure pumps could reach the fire, the roof and the upper floors were destroyed. Not until 1998 did the hotel recover from the damage and became fully reopened to the public. Following the fire, the two dragonheads on the roof were rotated 180 degrees to point inwards. As dragons are traditionally a symbol of rain and water, this was intended to symbolize preparedness against a future fire.

The hotel's roof is currently the world's largest Chinese classical style roof. With its vermilion columns, the roof makes the hotel a visible showplace of Chinese architecture and culture. The hotel itself contains numerous objects d'art, wall panels, paintings, carvings, and significant restaurants. Dragon motifs are frequently intertwined throughout the various structures that make up the hotel, earning the hotel the name "The Dragon Palace". Besides dragons, lion and ume (plum) flower motifs also make a significant presence in the hotel.

Each of the eight guest levels represent a different Chinese dynasty, as reflected through the murals and general decor. The hotel has a total of 490 rooms. The rooms facing south have a panoramic view of Taipei City. The presidential suite, as the hotel claims, has former President Chiang Kai-shek's desk and Madame Chiang's dressing table.

Ever since the opening of the hotel, rumor had it that some secret passages ran from the hotel for Chiang's convenience. The truth was uncovered after the 1995 fire, as part of the safety commission that was conducted.

The secret passages were revealed to be two air-raid tunnels, each of them 180m in length leading to nearby parks, not the presidential residence or the emergency headquarters as rumors had suggested. The western passage is equipped with a slide for the disabled as an alternative to the spiraling stairs. The exits are obscured with concrete walls, thus escaping public detection for decades. The tunnels have a maximum capacity of about 10,000 people. As of 2005, the tunnels are closed to the public except for special events, when hotel officials invite the press and public inside the tunnels for a tour.

Former Philippine senator and opposition leader Benigno Aquino, Jr. was at the Grand Hotel on August 20, 1983, the day before he returned to the Philippines and was assassinated. In his pre-return interview at his suite, Ninoy anticipated the worst that could happen upon his return.



My first visit to Taipeh (spelled with an h then) was as a gawky teenager in the mid 1960's, on the second leg of a tour to Hong Kong, Taiwan and Japan as a college graduation gift from my mother who accompanied us together with my 3 elder brothers, two cousins, and several friends. The tiny Taipeh airport then was located near a grassy field very close to the city and we were whisked into a hotel in no time. Taipeh was like a sleepy dragon waiting to awaken. We had an unforgettable visit with a family friend who was married to an American serviceman at their place located near the Peitou district. Our visit to Yangmingshan National Park was especially memorable as I still remember vividly the lovely temples, the glorious mountain scenery and the cool, crisp weather.

After that first visit, there were several more...this time as the spouse of a Past District Governor...Ben and I were in Taipei for our first Zone 4 Institute on December 12-14 in 1986 with about 150 RI Officers in Asia Zone Four attending. The Rotary club of Taipei hosted this. In 1994 the Rotary International Convention was held from June 12-15 in Taipei City and PDG George Huang chaired this. The venue was held at the huge Taipei World Trade Convention & Exhibition Center and guests of honor included R.I. President Robert Barth and R.I. President- Elect Bill Huntley. We stayed at the Grand Hotel then, but in subsequent Zone institutes we stayed at the Howard Hotel then back again at Grand Hotel. In Ben's stint as Regional Rotary Foundation Coordinator from 1996 to 1998 we revisited K.L Malaysia, Bangkok, Thailand, Hong Kong and Taipei (which included Taichung and Kaohsiung).

On our last visit there, in 2008, the first thing that greeted us as soon as we entered the lobby was an enormous flower arrangement. Right in the middle of the gigantic lobby was a huge Chinese console table topped with a blue and white vase filled with violet phalaenopsis orchids, which we thought were artificial, but upon coming closer and touching them, the orchids turned out to be real. They were strewn all over the hotel in smaller arrangements, which served to unite the overall hotel decor. Soon after we checked in, we were quite famished so we partook of the High Tea buffet at the left side of the lobby. The menu selection was so much; we had a more than 25-course buffet dinner.

In 2008, we also visited the Palace Museum by taking the Hotel Shuttle Bus that left the hotel every half hour. The bus dropped us at the main MRT station and quickly reached Shinlin station. Then we took bus no. 340, which deposited us right in front of The Palace Museum. We were able to tour the Museum for only three hours, so we vowed to come back a few days later.



For this 2913 Institute, spouse Betty Hsu of the Rotary Club of Taipei, arranged a tour of Juming Museum for all the spouses. After the Opening Ceremonies on December 6th, all the spouses assembled at the lobby at 9 am the next morning and we took 4 tourist coaches for a long trip to the world-famous outdoor museum (about an hour and a half by bus to the mountains near the Yangminshan National Park). We missed the 12-course lunch at the Grand Ballroom hosted by Taiwan's President Ma but we didn't mind as the tour buses drove us through some of the most spectacular views of verdant hills and rugged coastlines of Northern Taiwan before reaching the world-famous Juming Sculpture Museum in the Jin Shan District, which was surrounded by lush forests and lovely mountains. The spouses had a great time getting acquainted with each other as we represented various countries in South East Asia. We were all shivering in the cold mountain air but we all enjoyed promenading through the various sculpture pieces and taking photos in the huge outdoor exhibition area.

At the Juming Museum entrance and at the outdoor sculpture area with a row of uniformed soldiers painted in camouflage design.



Some sculptures were detailed like the countless soldiers, some were simple but a lot of them must have been sculpted from massive rocks. Others must have been formed with cement but all of them depicted a lot of simple body movement especially the Taichi series.



Our Bus “C” Group coming from seven countries included an exchange student from France and a lady from Africa posing for a souvenir photo. The large massive rock sculpture below is the most famous landmark at Juming Museum.





At a Merienda hosted by the Philippine Ambassador to Taiwan, PRIP MAT Caparas spoke words of wisdom to the PDGs which included 5 lady PDGs.





Left, posing with RIPN Ravi Ravindran of Sri Lanka. At right, being presented to Pres. Ron Burton at the Major Donor Lunch he hosted. The group of Major Donors from the Philippines pose with President Ron & Spouse Jetta;



With (UK) RIDE Mike Webb and Alison

Ben with PRIP MAT, Luis Giay & Celia



With our own 3790 DG Linda Winter & lovely daughter. With RIDE Sangkoo Yun of South Korea. Below shows the entertainment during the farewell dinner.



A trip to Taipei is not complete without a visit to Tower 101, formerly known as the Taipei World Financial Center. It is a landmark skyscraper located in Xinyi District, Taipei, Taiwan.

The building was ranked officially as the world's tallest from 2004 until the opening of the Burj Khalifa in Dubai in 2010. In July 2011, the building was awarded LEED Platinum certification, the highest award in the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) rating system and became the tallest and largest green building in the world. Taipei 101 comprises 101 floors above ground and 5 floors underground. The building was architecturally created as a symbol of the evolution of technology and Asian tradition. Its postmodernist approach to style incorporates traditional design elements and gives them modern treatments. The tower is designed to withstand typhoons and earthquakes. A multi-level shopping mall adjoining the tower houses hundreds of fashionable stores, restaurants and clubs. Below: on the 5th floor a gingerbread-like wooden house decorated



with Christmas ornaments to commemorate the building's 10th anniversary. From the 5th floor, one takes the high-speed elevator (it takes only 37 seconds to reach the 88th Floor). IT is still the fastest elevator in the world. Here is where all the boutiques and snack shops are located. After doing the rounds in the 89th floor we took a staircase to the 88th floor where the most beautiful examples of natural and hand-carved corals were displayed. They ranged in color from the brightest orange to pale beige. There were lots of beautiful coral jewelry pieces whose prices were also sky-high. I was content to merely take a look at all the lovely necklaces, rings and bracelets.



This is the view from the 89th Floor. Since it was misty, I could barely make out the hill where the Grand Hotel was, but it could be seen faintly from afar. From the 5th floor, one takes the high- speed elevator (it takes only 37 seconds to reach the 89th Floor). It is still the fastest elevator in the world. Down below is a photo taken by a camera crew and they cleverly placed our photo pointing towards the Tower 101.





Above left, a small plastic tree at Taipei 101; above right, the mid-sized tree at Ambassador Hotel. Below shows the giant tree at Grand Hotel. Giant modern sculptures were displayed outside the Tower 101. Soon it was time to say adieu to the lovely modern city of Taipei, which has blossomed into a modern metropolis with multi-level skyways, high-rise skyscrapers, towers and techno-parks just like any Western city.



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