

China

Between Qingdao and Beijing

Qingdao- Motaz Othman

This is, perhaps, one of the most difficult articles that I have written during the past three years. It relates to China which I visited for the first time. I was misled by the stereotyped image of the country presented by the international and Arab mass media: an under developed state that does not respect human rights, where the people live in poverty. But, during my 15-day stay in this country, I noticed a wide gap between the stereotypes and reality.



I arrived at Beijing international airport on the night of June 15th, held up by adverse weather conditions which delayed my departure from Hong Kong. I missed the connecting flight to Qingdao and spent the night in the airport hotel after my long voyage from Jordan. The hotel had a halal restaurant with a great variety of dishes.

The coastal city of Qingdao

Next morning, I moved towards the coastal city of Qingdao with an efficient airport and took a taxi to my hotel. When you take a taxi in China, as soon as the driver sets the meter, you hear a recorded message, in English: "Welcome to my car, please,

indicate to me your destination; the number of my car is so and so, and that of the emergency services is so and so".

On the way to the hotel, the boulevards appear broad and very clean, in the early morning: The cleaners are out in force as cleanliness is one of the characteristic features of the Chinese way of life. ➤

I stayed at the coast hotel with views of the Yellow Sea. Seeing the Qingdao International Tourist Fair was a top priority. In the evening I toured the city centre with its gigantic, luxurious shopping centers bigger than those found in European cities. There is also a wide choice and the elegant sales assistants are very kind and helpful.

The Porch Carera in front of a shopping centre, astonished me, because I could not envisage such a car in China. But in the downtown area one can see skyscrapers and international hotels. The traffic is orderly and the pedestrians disciplined.

The Chinese assist visitors with such sincerity and good will that one feels ashamed to ask for a service. Most of the locals do not speak English but will ensure they find someone who does so they can help visitors. The Chinese are known for their cheerfulness: if one does not find them laughing, one will never find them angry.

Qingdao is a coastal city and seaside resort. It is famous for its beautiful beaches, green mountains and landscapes which one can appreciate by walking along the coastal line of the Yellow Sea. It is also famous for its handcraft industry.

Qingdao was selected to host sea sports during the 29th Olympic Games in China in 2008. Sports stadiums are being constructed here and throughout the country and the international and local media emphasised that the Chinese will finish the Olympic facilities, to the required standard, two years before the date of the games. Most other countries which hosted the Olympics were finishing the stadiums a few months - sometimes a few days - before the start of the games.

One can reach Qingdao by land, on modern tourist buses, some with sleeping facilities. From Beijing, the trip lasts 11 hours and costs 20 euros. The tourist buses are well organized, connecting most of the cities. A one hour flight from Beijing for 70 euros is possible and one can also travel by tourist trains.

Qingdao has regular, clean public transport. One does not feel the weight of the population of this city of 7 million; it has all the necessary services and is efficiently managed.

One is in a tourist city where safety, cleanliness and order reign. It also has a rich cultural heritage and plenty of modern



tourist attractions including the zoo and the aquarium. For culture vultures there are more than 45 museums, theatres and movie theaters. For nature lovers there are cascaded waterfalls, green mountains and vast plains.

I visited the administration office of Qingdao Tourism, where I met Miss Fan Hui, who gratefully received some copies of Islamic Tourism Magazine. She looks forward to welcoming tourists from Arab and Muslim countries. ■