

Taking The Road To Fuxian Lake On My Zipstar Motorcycle

YUXI, China – I hopped on the kickstarter and the old engine caught on the fourth time. Down the street at a Sinopec station, the crisply-uniformed attendant filled the tank with \$8 of 93-octane gasoline. My friends Paul and Daniel met up with me and we were off on our motorcycle trip to Fuxian Lake.

The morning rush hour had ended and we got out of Yuxi without sitting in the traffic that can clog the streets near my apartment. Motorcycles aren't allowed on Chinese highways, so we took the old country roads, zig-zagging through the switchbacks up and down the Yunnan hillsides. The rugged topography was like West Virginia's magnified by a factor of 2.5.

Soon we were rolling east through dusty hamlets bustling with enterprise. We rode carefully around peasants drying straw in the roadway. We skirted mounds of coal that had been dumped in the street and were being chopped up by the locals into chunks suitable for burning in kitchen stoves. We played chicken with approaching vehicles

where piles of bricks and gravel by the roadside reduced traffic to one lane.

Though the villages were interesting, riding through them was nerve-wracking. Huge farm trucks laden with produce, gravel, and garbage ruled the narrow streets. Often we were hemmed in by houses built right up to the pavement as these dinosaurs rolled toward us, belching smoke and kicking up dust so thick it became hard to see. The roads were often crumbling from the weight of so much traffic. The villagers had wet down the streets in an effort to control the dust, producing a layer of slick mud and gravel.

In one little town, I edged over to the right as far as I could to let an impatient truck pass, riding perilously close to the drainage channels that edged the street. As soon as the truck got by me, I steered toward the center of the road and hit a patch of loose gravel. My rear wheel went out from under me and down I went, escaping with a little road rash and a bruised ego.

Our destination was Fuxian Lake, a deep

body of water of about 100 square miles. As we approached, the farm villages gave way to little resort towns offering Chinese city-dwellers the chance to get some rest and relaxation. We rolled along the wide, well-maintained roadway that circled the lake, taking in the beauty of the water, the surrounding forests and the distant mountains.

All was well until we were stopped at a police checkpoint. I held my breath and my tongue during this encounter. Suffice it to say that there were some irregularities in my motorcycle licensure. Any cop who wanted to complete the piles of paperwork involved in busting a foreigner could impound my bike and leave me stranded. The officer gave us a stern talking-to about obeying Chinese law while we nodded respectfully.

Then in a stroke of tactical genius, Paul suddenly asked the officer, "So, where can we get a good lunch around here?" Suddenly we were all talking food and restaurants instead of contemplating a long walk back to Yuxi. The policeman waved us off with a face-saving warning not to ride on this road because it "wasn't safe." We obeyed, cutting into the countryside at our earliest chance.

It was a fortuitous detour, as the road we took ran through charming villages that were built right up the edges of canals leading to the lake. There were old stone footbridges with dragon gargoyles, Qing Dynasty temples and pavilions, and thick pine forests. It was an area best seen from a motorcycle seat. I felt like I was part of the scene, not just observing it. We stopped at a lakeside restaurant for a lunch of fish, pork, and rice and a dip in the glass-clear water before reluctantly heading back to Yuxi.

This ride proved to be one of many day trips on my nine year old Zipstar motorcycle, a rattling machine built by the Chongqing Zongshen Number Two Motorcycle Company. The bike looks like a baby chopper, with a low seat, an upswept gas tank, and high handlebars. Between the wheels thrums a 125 cc engine, which is standard in China; bigger bikes are almost unknown. My stylish Chinese friends disdain it as a "farmer's ride," but though it had some minor mechanical problems, it turned out to be one of the best \$96 investments I ever made.

It was a time machine, taking me back to an older China where villagers still work the fields by hand and go home to dusty one-room houses of brick and rough tan stucco. It took me into predominantly Muslim villages and ancient Confucian shrines. And it opened my eyes to China as it is seen by the scores of millions there who seem to have been born on two wheels.

– James F. Trumm

You can read more about Jim's experiences of living in China and traveling through Asia at www.jftrumm.com.

Law You Can Use

Get, Modify, Replace Social Security Card

Q: *How do I get a Social Security number for the new baby we're expecting?*

A: When you apply for your baby's birth certificate, you can apply for a Social Security number at the same time. If you have the baby in a hospital, you can complete both applications before you leave the hospital. Learn more about Social Security cards through www.socialsecurity.gov/pubs.

Q: *We adopted a baby girl from overseas and brought her to the U.S. Can we get a Social Security number for her?*

A: Yes. Generally, you must complete an application for a Social Security card (Form SS-5 (see www.socialsecurity.gov/ssnumber)). You must provide: documents that prove your child's U.S. citizenship or immigration status, adoption, age, and identity; a document proving your identity; and evidence establishing your relationship to the child (you can use the adoption decree or the child's amended U.S. birth certificate for this purpose).

Usually, you can mail or take your application and original documents to your local Social Security office. All documents must be originals or copies certified by the issuing agency. You will receive your child's number and card by mail once the Social Security office has verified your documents.

If you do not yet have proof of your child's citizenship, a Social Security number may be assigned based on Department of Homeland Security documentation issued when your child first arrived in the U.S. Once you've received your child's citi-

zenship documentation, take it to the Social Security office so your child's record can be updated.

Q: *Can I use a plastic version of my paper Social Security card?*

A: The Social Security Administration does not recommend using plastic or metal versions of your card, or making copies of or laminating your paper card, or carrying your card with you. Generally, you will only need to produce your Social Security card when you apply for employment. Keep any document that includes your Social Security with your important papers, and question anyone other than your employer who asks for your number or your card. Learn more at www.socialsecurity.gov/ssnumber.

Q: *How do I change my name on my Social Security card?*

A: Gather documents proving your legal name change (e.g., marriage license, divorce decree, certificate of naturalization showing a new name, or a court order showing your name change). Also collect evidence of your identity (driver's license or state-issued ID) and your U.S. citizenship or immigration. Then, complete an application for a Social Security card and take it, along with your documents, to your local Social Security office. Documents must be originals or copies certified by the issuing agency. Mailed documents will be returned with a receipt. Once the Social Security office receives the application and documents, your new card will be mailed to you. It will show

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