

They say the world is shrinking and it is, in respect of the ease of world travel. Tourists want to travel to the more remote outposts of the world and adventure travel is increasingly popular. When I was a child, I dreamt of visiting the Far East and the Great Wall China, in particular. China held a fascination for me but I never dreamt that I would actually get there one day.

My husband and I decided to save up and go on the vacation of a lifetime. We have a friend who lives and works in Japan who speaks Chinese Mandarin fluently, having studied the language at Beijing University and has also worked in Taiwan. The plan was to visit our friend in Tokyo and see a bit of Japan. Then we flew to Hong Kong to spend some time there and then onto China. Our friend went with us, which made the trip a lot more fun and much easier, having someone to interpret for us.

Beijing is a fascinating place and we did the usual sightseeing, including exploring the Forbidden Palace and Tinnamen Square. One of the striking things is the amount of cars in the city and the background noise of tooting car horns. Then came the time to board the coach to take us to the Great Wall China. We had read as much about it as we could but nothing really prepares you for it.

I was determined to walk the wall, a portion of it anyway, as it stretches over 4,000 miles! When we arrived, it was very busy, mostly with Chinese people and a few foreigners sprinkled here and there. We walked one of the most popular stages of the Great Wall China. It is divided into watchtowers, gateways and old barracks, some sections dating back to the 5th century. The longest human made construction in the world surpassed all expectations.

Remarkably our friend, who has one leg, had walked the wall before and this was his second visit. He leapt ahead of me, on his crutches and disappeared into the distance! It was the hardest thing I have ever done and I was almost at quitting point sometimes but I persevered and completed my section. The Great Wall China steps are very steep in places and it takes every ounce of energy to climb them. There are several vendors there, selling clothing, post cards and other souvenirs. I proudly bought my I Climbed the Great Wall T-shirt, which I still wear today. Experiencing the Great Wall China was truly memorable and I would recommend it to everyone. Go to the gym first and get fit first, which is what I should have done but didn't!