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MY TURN

■ Wayne Chan



Summer heat brings burning feet

I am an expert in climate change. No, not *THAT* kind of climate change. Not the kind of climate change that's in the news every day. To be specific, I'm talking about air conditioners, particularly when it comes to travel.

Inevitably, when I get together with friends and talk about travel, while everyone else talks about, say, the grandeur of the Grand Canyon, the incredible beauty of Hawai'i's beaches, or the lights of Paris, many of my most vivid memories *AFTER* visiting one of the world's most noteworthy attractions are about the unbelievably comfortable air conditioning.

Oh sure, I'll do my best to come up with some traditional anecdotes so my friends won't look at me in complete bewilderment. I'll say something like, "You know, I had no idea the pyramids were that tall!" But deep down inside, I'm actually thinking, "The airflow coming down from the sixth-row seat of the tour bus literally blew my mind."

You may ask, "Why do I have such a fascination with air conditioning?" Well, you can blame my parents.

As a child, most of my summer breaks were spent travelling in Asia. China and Taiwan were usually our destination. You might say I should appreciate how lucky I was to go on such extensive travel as a youth, and you'd be right. I had many adventures and much to be thankful for.

But allow me to just give you the bottom line — Asia in the summer is hot. It's swelteringly hot. Imagine being in Las Vegas in the middle of July, but forced to walk around with smoking hot towels draped all over you while you're mandated to guzzle down a boiling hot cup of tea.

It's that kind of hot. My most memorable trip was in the '80s, and this time, not with my parents. Some Chinese-American youth may be familiar with this — my parents sent me on The Love Boat.

For those who aren't familiar with The Love Boat, it's a summer trip for Chinese-American teenagers to travel to China to attend Chinese language courses, as well as tour parts of their ancestral history in the country. Learning about Chinese history while improving your Chinese language skills — that's what it's supposed to be.

For a bunch of 16-year-old kids, it's more like a hormone-driven dating-free-for-all. Don't forget that we were already sweltering in Beijing in the

middle of August and covered in smoking hot towels — basically walking tinderboxes. I heard tales of students spontaneously combusting in the searing heat of the afternoon.

But back to the air conditioning.

At this point, I would be remiss if I didn't mention that while on my summer sojourn to Beijing, I did visit The Great Wall. It was an amazing sight. I would provide more details but I didn't see that much after 45 minutes of walking up some of the steep staircases on the wall in the blistering heat. I spent the rest of the day luxuriating in the cool air-conditioned confines of the tour bus.

It wasn't much better when we were on campus — five of us in a small dorm room, with small non-descript windows, with mosquito netting draped around each bed to keep us from being eaten alive, and most importantly: no air conditioning.

In fact, the only place on campus that did have air conditioning was the classroom, where we spent a few hours every day in Chinese language class. I remember going through Mandarin pronunciation drills, but mostly I remember the gentle hum of the air conditioner as it quickly tempered my hormonal fever pitch into a more manageable status.

One evening, while suffering through another night of mosquito-infested dragon heat, I started talking to Jeremy, one of my roommates. We came up with a brilliant idea. If we don't have air conditioning in our dorm, why don't we try sneaking into the classroom and sleeping there?

So, late that night, we crept out of our heat inferno dorm room and quietly made our way to the building with the classroom. When we arrived at the classroom, though, we immediately discovered the door was locked. But being the resourceful, air-conditioned-starved students that we were, we noticed the transom window above the door was slightly ajar. I managed to give Jeremy a boost up so he could climb into the room and unlock the door. Voila! Nirvana!

What added to our luck was that the classroom had an adjacent bathroom and shower. So, not only were we about to sleep in climate-controlled bliss, we would be freshly showered as well. We each took a shower, and with bedding we had brought with us, Jeremy and I laid in our makeshift beds literally giggling like school girls at our ingenuity.

Think of it! All our ignorant fool schoolmates were

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