

Climbing the Ice Peak

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I have been in Xi'an for awhile now and if you asked me to choose one thing to represent Xi'an, I would probably say the Terracotta Warriors. But in a more local and less-touristy sense the "Shaanxi Meal", cold-rice noodles (liang pí 凉皮), a Chinese burger (roujiámó 肉夹馍) and a bottle of Ice Peak orange soda, is just as well known as the warriors and definitely tastier!

Ice Peak orange soda, known as bīng fēng (冰峰) in Chinese, has been a staple of Xi'an for 57 years. Ice Peak is brewed and bottled in Xi'an and shipped all over the city as well as to many other cities in Shaanxi province. Nearly every small hole-in-the-wall restaurant or sidewalk BBQ will have at least a few cases of Ice Peak and for only ¥1 you can have your own. The ubiquity, delicious taste, and

inexpensiveness of Ice Peak really peaked my curiosity in this local product, which is why the Xianease team opted to go and check out the operation for ourselves.

The Ice Peak brewery, located in north-eastern Xi'an, is a pretty large operation with an intriguing complex. Yellow buildings accented in red, and trucks with giant bottles of ice-cold Ice Peak soda on the side. The Xianease team and I were greeted at the main office building, and just across the street was a massive stack of crates of Ice Peak bottles. The stack must have been 50m x 50m and at least 3m high, containing thousands and thousands of empty bottles. The team and I were led to a large conference room, soon after a young lady came in with paper cups bearing the same Ice Peak logo as the

trucks. I was pretty excited, and really hoping that this was hot Ice Peak soda and that they had the soda on tap down the hall. Wishful thinking however, as it turned out to only be a cup of tea.

A lengthy discussion was had about the history of Ice Peak soda and its current operations. It was very interesting to hear that back in the 1950's and 60's when Ice Peak was first starting out it not only didn't have a name, it was simply known as "soda" (汽水 qì shuǐ), but it only cost 2 jiao per bottle! Even with the constant rising prices in Xi'an; Ice Peak soda is still only ¥1 per bottle with no plans of a price increase.

At peak production during spring and summer months, the factory can churn out as many as 700,000 bottles of soda per day! Ice Peak soda started out with a lot of competition, but as the years have moved swiftly by, their competitors have gone out of business, leaving Ice Peak as the "king of the mountain" so to speak.

After the meeting concluded, the exciting part of the tour began.



Dressed in white lab coats and rubber boots we were led into the bottling operation warehouse. There was a long conveyor belt running from a hole in the wall that clearly led to the massive stack of cases of bottles outside. The first stop for a bottle on its road to refilling was removing the bottles from the crates, removing the straws, and checking bottles for cracks or chips. After passing the first test the bottles were shuffled along a conveyer belt to an enormous machine. This machine would automatically feed itself the bottles from the belt with what looked like big hooks pushing bottles into its mouth. The bottle cleaning machine was cleaning, sterilizing and drying 18,000 bottles an hour!

Once clean the bottles snaked along the conveyor belt to a sterile room where they'd be filled with Ice Peak soda. It may have taken a while to get to the bottling machine, but once the bottle was there, filling was almost instantaneous. Within a period of only a few seconds, the same clean bottle was spun around, filled with 200mL of soda and had a bright blue cap placed

on top.

Once again, the bottles snaked along the conveyor belt but this time they were full of the delicious orange soda I love. After a quality examination to make sure the bottles contain an acceptable amount of soda and are correctly capped, the bottles continued to roll towards freedom.

It was quite interesting to see bottles of soda fresh off the line; the various sizes of bottles, some slightly taller and thinner, some shorter and fatter, old faded logos, new bright logos, some in English some in Chinese. The variety of bottles was impressive, but I guess that's what happens when bottles are reused over and over for years! At my age the use of glass bottles for soda has been an outdated concept for as long as I can remem-

ber. It was always aluminum cans or plastic bottles. But the use of glass bottles not only saves money on materials, but it keeps materials out of landfills and provides a little glimpse into the past.

The full bottles were on the home stretch now; they congregated in a group until a machine picked up 24 of them and placed them in an empty case. Once filled the case was pushed off onto another conveyor belt headed to the loading docks. There the cases would be loaded onto trucks and taken out to be delivered around Xi'an, and all over Shaanxi province; Ankang, Baoji, Luoyang, Yan'an and beyond.

Next time you're out and in need of a cool drink, throw down ¥1 for an Ice Peak and taste a little history of Xi'an.



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