

Chennai Journal #1
December 11-14 2015

Vanakkam! Greetings from Chennai, India. This is my first attempt at renewing my travel journal begun last year from Shanghai. If you do not wish to receive this, just send me a separate email and I'll remove you from list – no hard feelings!

Some of you know I had knee surgery (arthroscopic) two weeks before we left the US. I'm recovering quickly but luckily Ravi reserved wheel chairs for the long walks between planes and through customs. That really turned out to be a saving grace. The trip was hard on my knee but I'm doing my exercises religiously and expect a full recovery in 6-8 weeks.

As typical of us, we had an eventful departure from New York. Because of my knee and inability to help Ravi with 4 pieces of luggage and 2 backpacks, we made an elaborate plan to take the train from Poughkeepsie to Grand Central with friends helping us on each end. The plan was that Gowri from New Paltz would help us board in POK, then Dipti from NYC would meet us at Grand Central on the other end to help Ravi transfer luggage to a cab, then to her apartment where we planned to stay Monday night for our early morning departure on Tuesday. We carefully established times of departure and arrival (Dipti was squeezing this in between two meetings at NYU so timing was important.) So far, so good.

As an aside, I have to say this was the smoothest packing Ravi and I have ever done together. Being retired and not having final grades and end of semester flurry was really helpful. We crossed every "t" and dotted every "i", packing two large suitcases for 5 months in China and two smaller suitcases for a month in India. About a half hour before Gowri was to pick us up, I called to check on her progress and discovered she was doing some leisurely shopping in Kingston because she thought we were leaving the next day! Yikes! We quickly called all the taxis in New Paltz and none could come in less than 30 minutes. We only had about that much time to make the train. We called Rickie and Jim who were on an important call and said they would call back in five minutes. Meanwhile we began packing our car with a plan to leave it at the station for Gowri to pick up later and bring back to the house. Jim called back and was willing to take us but we figured it best to set off since car was packed (In hindsight, we could have had Jim take us in our car but we didn't think of it at the time). We only made it three miles when we realized we could not leave the key in the Prius because the car alarms go off if a key is left in or near the car (unlike other cars where you can leave a key in the wheel well in an emergency). At that point, we clearly would not make the train.

Gowri drove up just as we got back to the house. She felt so badly she offered to drive us all the way to the city! (Don't worry, we love you Gowri!) We decided to simply take the next train and deal with the luggage on the other end as best we could, since Dipti could not meet the later train. Meanwhile we kept calling, texting and emailing her so that she wouldn't make a fruitless trip to Grand Central.

Unfortunately, she didn't check her messages until she reached the station. As we thought, she could not wait for the next train, but she called Dennis and luckily he was able to meet us and help with luggage to cab and their apartment. So, it all worked out in the long run, after much excitement. Seems to be the story of our travelling life!

The next day went smoothly, with easy taxi ride to airport and help all along the way. We arrived in Shanghai on Tuesday evening Dec. 8, spent one night in a hotel near the university, and next morning folks came over to help us move our big luggage to the university where they will store it until we return next month and move into our residence. In the morning we visited with Ravi's colleagues and attended a lecture on random walks by an Argentinian mathematician designed for a "general" audience (I could follow along, sort of, I'm sure it was only jet lag that prevented my full understanding of the concepts!)

Shanghai was rainy, cold and dreary so we were happy to leave that afternoon. You have probably read about the horrible pollution in Beijing (see headline below). Shanghai wasn't nearly as bad, but we hope it improves by the time we return in January.



We arrived in Chennai in the very early hours of Friday morning, after a delayed flight from Hong Kong and checked into the hotel where we are staying for the first few nights as we get over jet lag. On Monday we will shift to Appa's house, where they are still cleaning up after the floods. Luckily the sun is shining and weather is warm. We could see some of the damage from the floods but a lot has been cleaned up. Still many people are without homes, including Ravi's cousins who have moved to another city to stay with relatives until they know what will happen to their house that was completely flooded.

The New Woodlands Hotel where we are staying is a venerable institution in Chennai. It has cottages as well as hotel rooms and is in an enclosed area with lots of trees set back from the street, nice for walking in the morning. (Rickie & Jim, Camila and Livio - you remember it, right?) We have a room with a separate small sitting

area. Also the restaurant serves delicious food and delivers coffee to our room in the morning. Today (Sunday) there are several functions going on – one was a wedding where as we passed by the groom was sitting on horse (North Indian style) surrounded by folks dressed up in finery getting ready to go into the venue.



Appa looks good, though slowing down. It was great to see him and Rama – she has been through a lot dealing with all the flooding. Their whole first floor was flooded and now they are cleaning up the damage left behind. Prabakhar, Rama’s husband, just got back from a three month visit to the US where he stayed with his son Niranjan in Winston-Salem, NC and visited us in New York and cousins in the Bay Area. Their son, Siddhu, is away at a wedding and won’t be back until Monday. Friday they came here for lunch as Woodlands is a favorite restaurant and treat for Appa.

This morning Rama, Ravi and I went to a movie (Creed). She bought the tickets last night and a guy delivered them to her door! The theater was really fancy with backlit marble floors and a new vegetarian restaurant attached. We liked the movie, though boxing not my favorite thing. Stallone was actually very good as an aging Rocky and I love Michael B. Jordan.

We look forward to sunny, warm weather for a month before returning to Shanghai. Please email when you can and let us know how you are doing.

Pakkalam! Lee and Ravi

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