

Shanghai Journal (Guilin Trip)
April 10, 2016

Zaoshanghao,

I got back to Shanghai on March 31. Kathy and Liz arrived the next day and we have been on the move since. After a day walking around the Silk Market and then a trip to the Municipal Museum, the four of us went to the massage place I found last year. Ravi got a VIP card that gives us a 15% discount every time we go and on three days a month we get 40% off! Not too shabby! Two days later we went back again and brought Chuck with us for his first ever massage. All five of us in the same room! Here we are before and after. Do we look relaxed? See the happy feet sign.



After the massage, we went to the Jade Buddha Temple where they were celebrating the Qing Ming (Tomb Sweeping) Festival, an important day where people show respect to the ancestors. There was a huge crowd as priests chanted, paraded around the temple, and worshippers burned paper boats and money in red paper bags. The chanting was really beautiful. We also ate lunch there, as Buddhist temples are one good place to get vegetarian food. On the walk back to the metro we saw a store that sells Atlantic lobster from Maine! Hmm. Wonder how fresh that is.

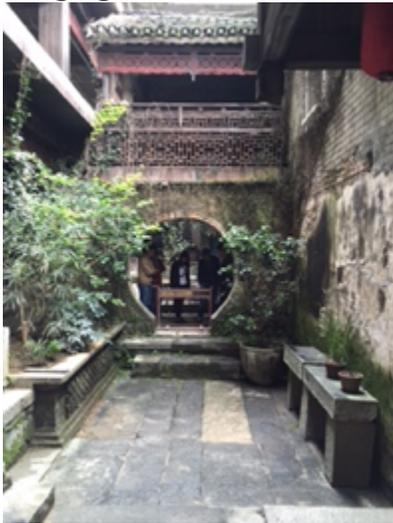


Yesterday, we returned from our five-day trip to Guilin, a two-hour flight southwest of Shanghai. It is a gorgeous area and we had a wonderful guide in Lu Bing (Lily). The first day we arrived at the airport and immediately went to visit a small village called Daxu Ancient Town. Daxu is over 2000 years old, built during the Qin Dynasty and later a major hub during the Ming Dynasty because of its location on the Li River, but then trade moved on and it remained a quiet rural village that is now protected by the government. They make chili pastes of all kinds and of course Ravi bought some! How could he resist. Other people were selling fried fish, crabs and shrimp from the river.





We went into one old home that had photos of the people who lived there long ago hanging on the wall.



Afterward, we went to Guilin City where we spent the night in a very spartan hotel near the twin pagodas, representing the sun and the moon, one of the main attractions of the area.



In the morning, we sat and had bad coffee in the lobby and talked to the young guy at the desk who turned out to be an expert on monarchies and gave us a list of all the countries that have them, along with other facts and figures we had not known. He told Kathy she looked like the queen of Belgium and brought out a photo to illustrate! We were supposed to go back to that hotel our last night but quickly cancelled it when we got to the next place, Yongshou Mountain Lodge, which was so wonderful we wanted to spend the rest of our time there. Here is our room, and there is the view from our deck. Really lovely and peaceful - we could hear the rippling water while we slept. The other guests were from all over – France, India, Britain, Germany, China, US. One morning some jerk from the US decided to have a business phone meeting in the dining room where his loud talking drove us into another room for breakfast. So inconsiderate!

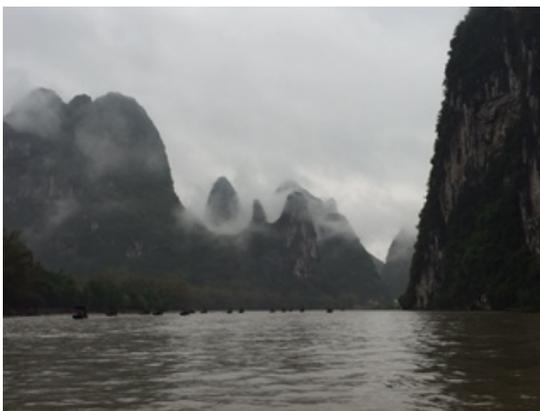


We spent three days touring around Yangshou, with forecast of rain between 80-100% every day. The first day we went hiking in the rice terraces and the rain held off while we got spectacular views. (Lu Bing showed us a photo from a friend who guided people the next day when there was a complete white out and nothing could be seen.) So we really lucked out.



Above, Kathy and Liz rest with Lu Bing and the four of us standing with a woman from the Yao people who live in this area. The women never cut their hair and wrap it in a stylized bun on top of their heads. She demonstrated for us and it was lovely.

The second day we took a boat ride down the Li River and made it through an hour without rain, with only a half hour of pouring rain at the end. The photos do not do justice to this truly gorgeous place surrounded by karsts, limestone pinnacles that are often in Chinese scroll paintings. The Guilin area is said to be one of the most spectacular examples of humid tropical karst landscapes and is a UNESCO world heritage site. We were blown away.





When we weren't hiking, we went to villages and markets in the area where people were selling everything you can imagine – from medicinal herbs, to vegetables and fruits of all kinds, to live chickens, turtles and fish.



In one village, a family whose relative had died was hosting a feast for the rest of the town. People sat at large round tables in the public square while being served all kinds of delicious looking food. Lu Bing said they do this for two whole days. People chip in money to help them cover the event.



We also went to a shop that sold scrolls and painted fans – part of a family business for 13 generations that was coming to an end as the youngest child finished college and moved to a larger town. This seems to be the fate of many small villages, as described in the book *Factory Girls*, where you see mostly children and elderly people since the young folks have gone off to seek their fortunes elsewhere.

I'm not sure how many photos will send in one journal, so I'll stop here for now. It's really great having Liz and Kathy here. We're having a good time together. More to come!

Zaijian, Lee

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