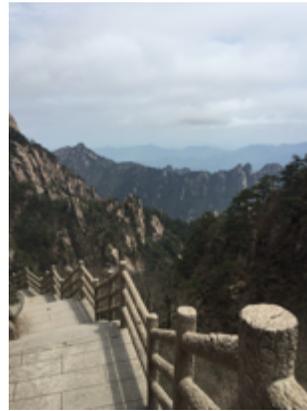


Shanghai Journal 4-19-16 (Yellow Mountain)

Zaoshang Hao dear friends,

I finally have a moment to reflect and write. Seems like we only come home long enough to do laundry and repack, and then we are off on the next adventure. With Kathy and Liz here, our simpatico traveling companions, we are jamming in as much as we can. This morning they left for a six-day trip to Beijing and Xian, Ravi went to the university and I'm home organizing myself. We just got back the day before yesterday from a four-day trip to Huangshan (Yellow Mountain).

The trip to Huangshan was fantastic. We took the four and a half hour train from Shanghai. Our guide, Yong Jian (Steven), picked us up at the station and took us to the hotel, then picked us up the next morning for the drive to the mountain. A bus takes people up the first part of the mountain, next there is a cable car, and finally you hike the rest of the way.



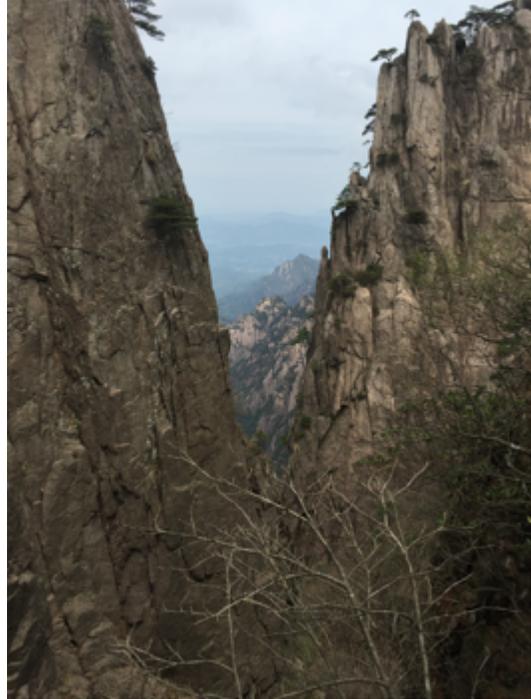
There are some 60,000 steps carved into the mountain said to be more than 1,500 years old (of course fixed up since). Porters carry everything up to the hotel on poles with baskets. Some make two trips a day. Imagine how hard that is!



We were SO lucky that it didn't rain the first day and we were able to see the jaw dropping views since it rains about 200 days a year. Huangshan is known for jutting granite peaks and views at sunrise and sunset (which we did not see because of clouds and rain that arrived in the early evening and continued the next day).



These mountains are the subject of Chinese poems and art and have been fought over and renamed by emperors over the centuries. In the lobby of the hotel an artist was selling paintings and I thought he could be a painting himself.



The next day we woke up to torrential rain, so no watching the sunrise. Along with everyone else, we bought yellow plastic slickers and pants for the hike back down the mountain – very handy. As we ascended, breaks in the rain allowed views that were quite atmospheric and lovely.



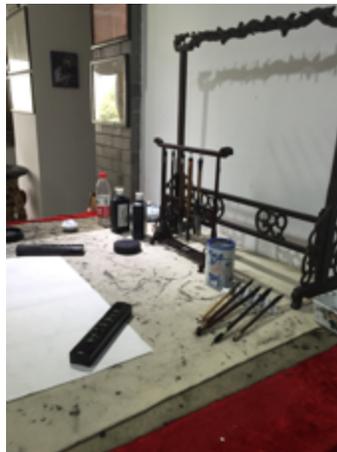
In the afternoon, we went to a village called Hongcun that was fascinating but challenging to navigate with hordes of other tourists and their umbrellas. Scenes from the movie *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* were filmed here. It is very picturesque and has architecture and carvings dating back to Ming and Qing dynasties. The layout of the village resembles the shape of an ox and is crisscrossed by a network of canals feeding into a pond in the center. As we were leaving the rain stopped and we got gorgeous views of the village and the mountains in the distance.



To top off the day, Steven took us to a restaurant in his neighborhood. The waitress led us to a huge dining room upstairs with large round tables filled with families eating, drinking, talking, laughing, and smoking. The noise level was deafening but when we entered, all sound stopped for a moment as people took in the seemingly rare sight of a group of foreigners. Unfortunately we ended up moving downstairs because of the cigarette smoke but I wish we could have stayed for the two-way people watching. It was so great to be able to try new things because Steven could tell us what was vegetarian or ask the cook to leave out meat. Kathy, Liz and I shared a fish dish with Steven and the three of them also shared a pork dish. The vegetarian dishes ended up being a favorite for everyone.



The next morning before our afternoon train, we went to an ink factory and walked along the river to the old part of Huangshan city. The ink factory, a 300 year-old family business, was fascinating. They mine black rock from nearby mountains, heat and pound it into a clay-like texture, then make inkwells, stamps, sculptures and other things from it. It is very beautiful and durable. The entrance to the factory was enchanting.



Next we went to a wholesale tearoom where we tasted several different teas from the area, the green teas had just been picked. The range of teas and tastes are astonishing and give me a whole new appreciation for tea. To top it all off, we went to a terrific restaurant for lunch where you could select what you want and watch them make it. We had a local treat that was so delicious, light, flaky and savory that I think I will die if I never get to taste it again!



Sorry for the very long journal, lots of ground to cover. Until next time...

Zaijian, Lee

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