

Shanghai Journal 5-1-16 (Suzhou with Kathy and Liz)

Ni Hao! Happy May Day!

Kathy and Liz left on Friday after a month traveling and hanging out together. We thoroughly enjoyed their company – very compatible traveling companions! Just got an email that they are back in San Francisco safe and sound.

Two days before they left, the three of us went to Suzhou for the day while Ravi went to the university. We have had such terrific experiences with guides that we decided to do a tour. Big mistake! The van picked us up at our residence in Pudong at 7:30 a.m. and then headed to Puxi across the river to pick up others at hotels downtown. The driver was apparently new and did not really know how to navigate well. We ended up in a huge traffic jam so were an hour and a half late picking up other folks. Thus, everyone started out somewhat grumpy, but we rallied. There were 13 of us in all – a young Brazilian couple we enjoyed a lot (Anna and Marcello), an Australian and a British couple, two American missionaries retiring to Minnesota after 30 years in Japan, two young women traveling singly – one from California and the other from London, plus the three of us. Fortunately, we were a congenial group. The guide, however, was not very good. At one point, she told us she was waiting for a management job and certainly seemed to be biding her time on this one.

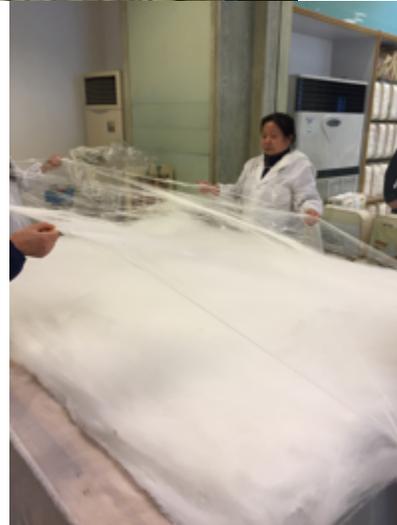
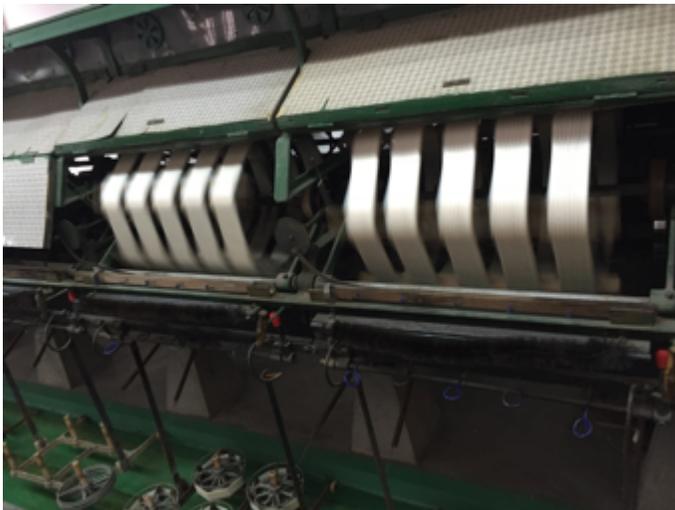
In Suzhou we started at a small garden called the Master of the Nets Garden (first constructed in 1140 during the Song Dynasty). We lucked out and arrived during a lull in the crowds so we were able to enjoy its peaceful charm. It was very tranquil with a pond in the middle, bridges, flowers and the rock sculptures that are so beloved here.



Suzhou is such a gorgeous city. I loved the bus stands based on ancient architecture. Bus stands!



Next we went to the silk factory - Suzhou is known throughout China for its silk. It was pretty fascinating to walk through the whole process – silkworms eating the mulberry leaves, forming cocoons, the silk threads pulled from the cocoons, spun onto spindles and then woven into patterns for clothing, scarves and other products. Or the threads are pulled and stretched to make filling for comforters. Amazing how durable these slender threads are.



I couldn't resist a beautiful red, black and gray scarf with Chinese characters. I wore it to a party Friday night and asked a Chinese woman we met if she could read the words. She said it is an ancient legend that all school children are required to learn about a common man named Geliang Zhu who beseeches the new emperor to be as just and wise as the previous one. She said it is very patriotic and full of emotion after a long and dark history when China was bullied by other leaders following the Qing Dynasty. She later sent me a translation with some historical background. I love it even more now and want to read more about Zhu.

Our final stop was a water town named Zhouzhuang. There are several such water towns around Suzhou – each claiming to be the Venice of China! They are a mix of tourist hype and antiquated charm. We walked along the cobbled streets and took a

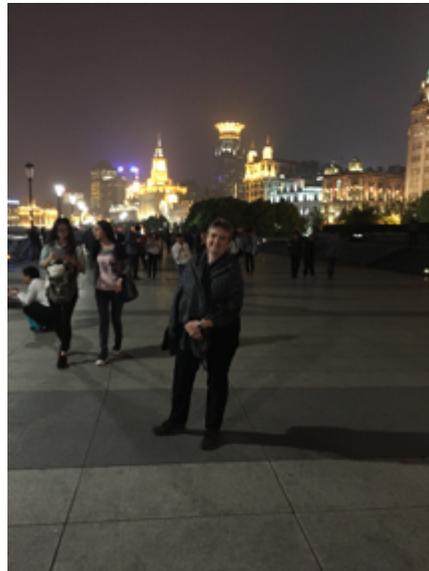
boat ride on the water. The people who steer the boats sing songs for a small fee. Though crowded, the soft lapping of the oar as we moved through the water, the haunting songs of the oarsman, and the willows hanging overhead really were mesmerizing.





The drive back to Shanghai was uneventful until we hit rush hour traffic on the outskirts and the driver got lost finding the first hotel. We knew it would take forever since we were to be dropped off last so we bailed, along with the Brazilian couple, and took the metro. I'm sure we got home before the van hit the second hotel.

The night before Kathy and Liz' departure we had a delicious dinner at Wujie where we reminisced about all the special things we saw and learned on our various trips, the different foods we tasted and wonderful people we met, the funny episodes along the way, and memories we will never forget. It was a great way to end. After dinner we strolled along the Bund. The night was clear and warm with gentle breezes and the Bund was full of people of all ages, locals and foreigners, enjoying themselves on one of the first warm evenings of spring.



Yesterday was another gorgeous day so Ravi and I went to see the old Shanghai Post Office that I'll write about in another journal. Until then...

Zaijian, Lee

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