

Shanghai Journal
10-17-17

Ravi got us really good tickets for the Shanghai Open this year. We would never be able to afford seats like this at the U.S. Open, or any other big tournament, especially when Federer and Nadal are playing. We got to see them both!! I read in the paper today that more and more Chinese people are getting into this tournament, so it is likely it will be harder to get good seats easily in the future, so we lucked out.



Rodrigo didn't think he would join us because of a conflict but at the last minute was able to after all. Tickets were supposedly sold out but he got one from a scalper that was in a different section than ours and was able to move and sit with us. It was funny to look back and see everyone with phones/cameras out. I was doing it too!

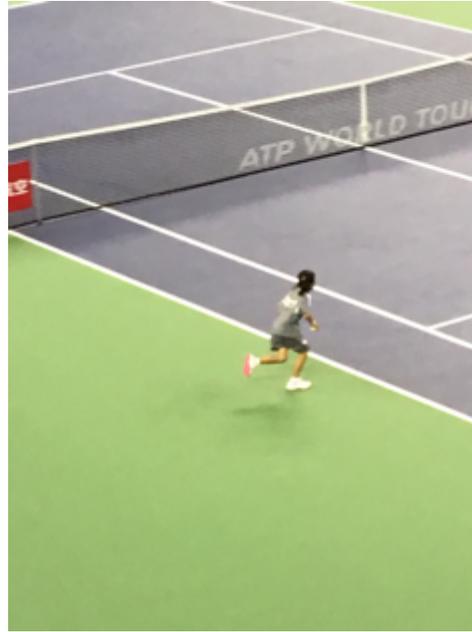


The stadium was far from full when we arrived around 5:00, but people started streaming in just before the Nadal/Fognini match at 6:00 and was pretty full by the time Federer/Dolgopolov match started at 8:00, but nothing like the crowds at U.S. Open. It takes over an hour by taxi to get to the stadium with no public transport nearby, and though interest in tennis is growing it is still not the same as in other parts of the world. By contrast, when the Golden State Warriors were here last weekend for an exhibition game, people lined up for hours to get tickets that were sold out in an hour.

It was a real treat to watch these matches up close. Although, neither Rafa nor Federer got much of a challenge, and both won handily in two sets, there were some amazing plays – especially by Fognini who made some great shots but just wasn't consistent. Nadal played a perfect game, so I give the Italian credit for what he did do.



We got a kick out of watching one of the ball girls. Most of the girls and boys looked like they were adolescents but she must have been around eight or so, and you could see she was having the time of her life. She ran down every ball, so much so that the boy on the other side seemed to give up and just let her go for it. At one point she zipped across the court to take the paper when Federer began to unwrap a new racket. At another point she whizzed over to get him a bottle of water. We loved her enthusiasm and focus! Who knows, maybe we'll see more of her in the future.



Both players have fans as you can see from the line of people waiting for autographs, though Federer is a clear favorite in China. There was even a cheering section wearing red, waving Swiss flags and signs with his name, and shouting chants in unison during each break in play. It turned out to be a Nadal/Federer final that Federer won.



On Saturday we went to Hangzhou for a planned overnight even though the forecast was for 100% rain and Ravi wasn't feeling well when we woke up that morning. We had already paid for the train tickets and hotel and would not have been able to get

refunds so off we went. We were glad we did. The rain held off until Saturday evening so we were able to walk by the lake and visit a pagoda.

Hangzhou is really a lovely city with flowers everywhere and several temples and pagodas worth seeing and it is easy to see why it has been a favorite subject for artists and poets since the 9th century. The climate is described as “humid, sub-tropical” and we can attest to that. Last year when we went to Hangzhou it was also raining and we couldn’t see the mountains at all. That time we visited Linyin Temple, with its hundreds of Buddha statues along the cliffs, and it was spectacular. I wrote about this in a previous journal.

This trip began with a very long metro ride from our place to the train station, almost at the end of the line on the other side of Shanghai. It took over an hour to get there. By contrast, the fast train to Hangzhou once we got to the station is only 45 minutes. The station is enormous and one has to go through a security check before entering the departure area. Hopefully this photo conveys how crowded it gets and gives a sense of the enormous size of the station. This was a regular weekend, not a holiday. It is all extremely efficient – once you find your gate the trains that are arriving at that gate are listed in order. Once your train number turns green you have a very short time to pass through the ticket check and get on the train. The trains leave exactly one minute before the listed departure time.



On the way back to the station in Hangzhou on Sunday, we had trouble finding the metro and got to the station and through security with just a few minutes to spare. We were so late there was no line at the ticket entrance, but we made it! Phew!

The lake district of Hangzhou is pretty spectacular. The lake is huge with temples and pagodas at different points around it and two or three islands in the middle that also have temples – we visited one of those last time. It is very, very popular and usually quite crowded. The rainy forecast and the fact that it wasn’t a holiday may have made it less so and we were happy about that.



After we checked into our hotel we went for a long walk along the lake heading for a pagoda that we wanted to see. Along the way are views of the city as well as the mountains that surround the undeveloped side of the lake. The path around the lake is lovely with willow trees, flowers, and benches along the winding way. A young woman took this photo of us sitting on a bench and emailed it to me. The pagoda kept beckoning in the distance so we kept walking, but it was a long walk!



Leifeng Pagoda was built in 975 to celebrate the birth of a king's son. Japanese pirates searching for weapons later burned it to a skeleton. After that, many of the remaining bricks were stolen by people who believed that, ground into powder, they would ward off illness or prevent miscarriage. The pagoda collapsed in 1924 and stayed that way until the local and regional governments decided to rebuild it on top of the ruins (which you can still see). In the process, they excavated a mausoleum and found several artifacts, including a gold and silver coated hair of the Buddha. The new pagoda opened in 2002.

At the entrance are two escalators to carry visitors to the base, for which we were very thankful after our long walk. Also, one of the few sites we've seen that was accessible in any way, although folks with wheelchairs would still have a challenge.



Once inside there are two elevators that take people to the top and long lines of people waiting to get on. Above the elevators, a sign gives an assessment of the crowd. When we were there it said, "Crowd density comfortable." I can only imagine what it says when the crowds are bigger. Another sign admonished people, "Care for public property. No sketching." Ravi figured out that probably meant "no graffiti."

The view from the top was quite a panorama, giving some sense of the size of the lake, the city in the distance and the mountains and forests all around. Jinczi Temple is across the way, but we didn't get a chance to see it up close.





Just as we left the pagoda, it started raining. We were grateful the rain held off most of the day and happy to get back to the hotel and take a nap before dinner. I found an app called Happy Cow that lists vegetarian, vegan and veg-friendly restaurants. That was a big help in Kyoto and helped us find a very good vegetarian restaurant in Hangzhou. The rain started in earnest overnight and carried on through the next day so we headed back to Shanghai after lunch.

My knees held up for all the walking but I feel the effects now. I made an appointment with the orthopedist this week to check out alternatives if the acupuncture doesn't work. We'll see. Our friends, Linda and Marcella, will be arriving at the end of this week and we look forward to seeing them and showing them around Shanghai.

Tonight our residence is hosting a happy hour with special snacks. That should be fun.

Zaijian, Lee