

China 1st Installment

We arrived home from our China tour Saturday, June 5. Our tour group stayed healthy up until the next to last day, when people started getting bad cold or flu symptoms. Virginia and I started coughing on the flight home. I slept most of Saturday after we got home. Virginia stayed up late with the kids Saturday night but didn't get out of bed Sunday. It took over two weeks before all of the symptoms disappeared.



View of Peace Hotel (in center with pyramid top)

I started writing this Monday June 7 and by Tuesday evening I had three pages and had not finished the first day. Wednesday, my slides came back from Kodak, so I stopped writing and started working on the slides. I took 20 rolls and shot 18. One of the other travelers brought 100 rolls. I might have shot more but smog is the defining characteristic of China's industrial revolution. It was constant, everywhere we went, and thicker than the worst day I have ever seen in Los Angeles.

We left our door at 7 am PDT on Wednesday May 19, 1999 and arrived in Shanghai 22 hours later. We had hired a shuttle service to drive us to LAX, but a limo arrived at our door—we had been upgraded. We arrived at LAX two hours early, but not soon enough to prevent United from canceling our flight (fog in San Francisco) and to fail to book us on the next available one. United no longer had any seats available leaving LAX before our connecting flight left SFO for Shanghai. United suggested that we try Reno Air. They did have a flight with a very tight connection, but the counter attendants had never routed luggage to China before and needed to know which of the two Shanghai airports we were going to! All we could do was hope they picked the right one. The Reno Air flight was delayed 20 minutes at the gate and then was put into a holding pattern over Santa Cruz for 15 more minutes. Again all we could do was hope that everything on the ground in San Francisco was also being held up. We landed at 1:15 and found the United gate (in the American section of the airport) just as it was boarding at 1:30. Nine hours later we were changing planes in Tokyo for the last leg to Shanghai. We finally arrived there at 5 am PDT (8 pm Shanghai time).

Miraculously, our luggage arrived when we did. Customs was as easy as picking our luggage off the carousel (which was festooned with potted plants), having our passports checked, and dropping off our health statement and arrival card. We were met at the airport by Alice Lengers the escort from Archaeological Tours, Michael, the country guide assigned to us by CITS, the Chinese company in charge of the tour, and Riley the local guide assigned to us by CITS. Our lecturer, Professor Jeffery Riegel of UC Berkeley, was on the plane with us, as were all of the other members of our tour group.

We were driven by bus to the Peace Hotel and sent to bed. We had a little bit of trouble figuring out how to turn on the lights in our room. When the bellboy arrived with our luggage, he showed us how to put our plastic-card door key into a receptacle that engaged the electricity. They seem to want to make sure that you do not leave lights on when you leave the room. The Peace Hotel is on the Bund, the street next to the Huangpu River, which flows through Shanghai to the Yangzi. The hotel was definitely first class: phone, hair dryer, Kleenex, and TV in the bathroom.

We were told that we would most likely wake up at around 4 am local time and sure enough we did. We walked across the Bund to the esplanade along the Huangpu River. Lots of (mainly older)



Shanghai TV Tower across the Huangpu River from the Bund



Yu Garden

Chinese were out doing morning exercises (in groups and separately) to all different kinds of music. Large boats and long strings of barges were moving up and down the river.



Yu garden, Guan Gong & Dragon Carp detail on roof

Very little of old Shanghai remains. The buildings on the Bund are about all that

is left of the colonial period. Other than some gardens and temples, mostly restored fairly recently, the rest of Shanghai is brand new. Riley, after pointing out all of the new construction, said that the national bird of China is the industrial crane. Shanghai has China's largest port. The city is leading the Chinese economic miracle and is quite proud of it. Its population is somewhere between 12.5 and 14 million (the guides' stories varied) and is still growing—the largest city in China.



Our tour group in the courtyard of the Temple of the Jade Buddha

We spent our first day visiting a garden, boating on the Huangpu, visiting a temple, and learning about shopping opportunities. The Yu Garden is a local and foreign tourist destination. It was as crowded as the San Diego Zoo on a Saturday. The garden was originally the estate of a Mandarin family. It is completely surrounded with shops catering to the garden's visitors, including a restaurant where the Clintons ate when they came to China. (We had our farewell dinner there our last night in China.) The garden consists of several buildings that are interconnected by pools and landscaping of trees and shrubs. There were too many people there, and we had too short a time, to be able to contemplate the vistas.



Roof of the Temple of Jade Buddha and colorful apartment building in background

Our boat ride on the Huangpu River

lasted for an hour. We dodged the barges going up and down the river, saw some of the larger buildings on the waterfront, and sailed under the new suspension bridge with its one-kilometer span.

The temple of the Jade Buddha is another very popular tourist attraction. It is also an active temple with people praying at the same time as tourists and tour groups wander around. The six-foot-tall Jade Buddha, and two smaller jade figures, were saved from destruction during the Cultural Revolution by the monks covering their faces with pictures of Mao. There were also (too) numerous larger than life-size gilded statues of Buddha in various incarnations, gods of the four cardinal directions, and Bodhisattvas (enlightened beings that rejected nirvana to come back and help others to become enlightened).

China requires that every day's tour program must include shopping opportunities. Our first opportunity was a visit to the Shanghai Carpet General Factory. They showed us how silk carpets are made and then showed us finished carpets ranging from low quality (100 knots per inch) 1.5' x 3' rugs for \$200 to highest quality (600 knots per inch) 8' x 10' rugs for \$20,000 that we could purchase on the spot. We found a beautiful 4' x 5' rug for \$5,000 but decided that we should not even consider something like that on the first day of our tour. (I could think of other reasons, such as, where would

we put it—you definitely would not walk on it.) Anyway, we were planning to spend the next day at the fabulous Shanghai Museum and wanted to save all of our money for the Museum Store.

Breakfast was buffet style at the hotel: juices, dry cereal, yogurt instead of milk, eggs, rolls, coffee or tea, and strange Chinese stuff. The eggs varied from day to day, scrambled to boiled (looked like deviled but weren't) to cheese omelets, but you could also have eggs cooked to order. Lunch and dinner were on the town. We were taken to a different place at every meal, possibly to spread the tourist dollars around. I am not capable of describing what we ate, except some of it was good, some was excellent, and some I did not like. (I never was a Chinese food fan.) I very quickly got tired of bones—chicken, fish, and pork. Chicken was almost always served after having been cut into small chunks with a cleaver; fish, with head, tail, and fins still attached; pork was always a surprise, sometimes with bones sometimes without. I got so I could pick up most things with chop sticks, but then I would have to use my fingers to separate the meat from the bone.

Our tour group consisted of 21 seasoned travelers and Virginia and me. Many of them had traveled with Archaeological Tours before, some more than once. Virginia and I were the youngest couple, and there was another single lady that might have been younger than Virginia. A couple, college teachers from Northern California, were closest to our age. There were four widows in their 70s. The rest were mainly retired couples. On the whole it was a very interesting mix of personalities.



Virginia at Shanghai Carpet General Factory