



Terry's Travels

TT25-1 Return journey via Shanghai April 24th 2008

Despite some wet weather we found it hard to leave NZ. Our first stop was with friends near Sydney OZ and we had fun riding in Greg & Sheila's new VW Jetta. The rain activated wipers and auto headlights proved their worth and the Mio GPS announced street names and re-calculated our route when we missed a turning—good technology.

Our tour guide was waiting my arrival at Shanghai airport and we sped along the motorway by minibus-passing the track of the 432kph! Maglev train into this super modern city. Ken was already at the hotel across the Yangtse. The hotel was not very far from the Bund (bend) which is the centre of Shanghai.

Next day we were quickly exploring in drizzly murky weather. The planning offices were amazing and we even got interviewed on a popular TV programme. Having seen the model of the Bund we cruised the banks of it by river. The architecture is very spectacular and I wouldn't have been cleaning the windows for a fortune but some were, to earn some Yuan.

Confucious was China's first teacher and has a legacy of a museum, school with free students fees for some, plus lots of his wisdom etched on marble tablets. The Bund is the old area and is a great magnet for tourists. Our tour guide is called Snow, she explained it was because she came from a snowy area near the Mongolian border. She contacts our mini bus driver by phone and he appears just like a genie of a lamp from the heavy Shanghai traffic. It means we can squeeze more visits into this fascinating place.

It all is so far removed from what I saw when I visited Canton some 28 years ago. Snow explained that as people are re housed they get 200,000 per person but apartments cost around 700,000 to a million. There is massive building happening everywhere. Most people live in high rise blocks. A 400 year old garden was especially worth visiting even though very popular with tourists it was a remarkable mix of rocks, ponds, bonsai trees and bright flowers. Entrances are creatively made in a variety of shapes.

The hotel has cable internet and an Email from my pal in Bangkok told me that Di had arrived safely and was catching up with her sleep. Rumour has it she has a pole dancing contract.....



The Bund in the distance



The tower in the murk



Confucious outside his museum



Ken & Snow at 1580 garden

next travel plans: April 17th to OZ then Shanghai for MotoGP & touring with Ken.
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Mid July: back in UK. Oct : NZ via Malaysia.



Terry's Travels

TT25-2 Shanghai Museum and Acrobats April 26th 2008

I'm not over enthusiastic about dusty museums usually but the Shanghai one is something else. It's located in Peoples Square in a superb modern building with a round roof over a square building. I was told this is how Chinese people see the world. A round sky over a square earth. Unfortunately the jade gallery was closed for an update to the display but there are three floors with galleries for furniture, pottery, clothing, calligraphy, art and best of all for me some 400 bronzes. An audio guide gives the story in English. There was a display of bronze bells too that had a high quality recording of them beautifully tinkling away. A visit to Shanghai is worth it for this museum alone and we plan another visit.

Tea drinking is very much part of the Chinese way of life. Both Ken and I have hated the tea at our hotel since it strongly carries a chemical taste which, no doubt, is necessary to stop tummy bugs. It was a delight to get to a tea house that had great tasting tea of many varieties. Teapots are therefore a great part of the culture and come in an amazing range. With Ken being a potter they are of especial interest.

Photography was not allowed at an acrobatic show we visited. When I first went to China some 28 years ago I was very impressed by one. This flowing performance of juggling, balance, strength and dynamics built to a crescendo of a final crazy stunt. First one motorcycle sped around inside a large mesh round cage. It finished with FIVE speeding around, one blew his horn and then they were looping and criss crossing, I was at the edge of my seat, what an evening. The dodge of having a card in Chinese got us a taxi back to the hotel for a quiet beer accompanied by a breathy female vocalist, not a bad life.

The following morning Ken left the room just before me and was accosted getting into the lift. The lady said she could change his Kiwi currency? - he escaped and we discussed it over breakfast. I concluded that it was a counterfeit currency scam—surely it wouldn't be a hooker so early in the morning.

The weather was much better as the sun tried to penetrate the murk, our driver and guide were prompt and we were soon on our way to Zhouzhuang a water village that is part of the Venice of the East. It took an hour to clear Shanghai and reach more open roads.



C. 1,000 BC Bronze wine vessel



Made from Banyan tree roots



Teapot—a happiness symbol



Most signs now dual script

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Terry's Travels

TT25-3 Zhouzuang April 27th 2008

We were soon passing a giant lake as we approached the water villages which are a tourist attraction. Great effort has been put into the scenic beauty, in fact we saw one man with hand shears cutting the hedges of the road with ladies with besom brushes sweeping up. For the first time traffic was light enough to have us wishing we were on our motorcycles. You can see why the whole area is called the Venice of the East.

It's a touristy holiday place but we seemed to be the only Westerners. We both liked the laid back easy going feeling of this place with a 1,000 year old history. Our boat lady was a cheery soul and she sang very well as she propelled and guided the boat. Our guide told us she only got 600 Yuan per month (\$US90) which softened us for a good tip. It was fun to just people watch as they enjoyed their holidays. School children are usually dressed in bright clothing. The Chinese often are on tour buses and with the volume of people they are given coloured caps so the group leader can distinguish them.

One of the local delicacies is the local barbequed pork. Apparently the Chinese word for both Emperor and pork are similar so they have a description of this pork that needs three Chinese symbols to ensure that people don't ask for barbequed Emperor!

We stopped at a local tea house overlooking the canal where the old owner brought us a menu of differing teas of differing quality. The choices were amazing. After much discussion we selected a high quality jasmine. It was especially good, there is a knack to drinking from the porcelain cup, using the lid as a sieve to avoid all the twiggy stuff from going into your mouth. A pottery kettle was also left on the table for seconds and thirds. I was so carried away I forgot my knapsack and the owner came chasing after us with it.

The evening was chilly but it was nice to see the illuminated boats and lanterns. We tried dinner by the canal but fell for a scrawny fish at a tourist price with a wandering minstrel who was more enthusiastic than tuneful. Shop after shop was displaying the barbequed pork, no one was buying it and the shopkeepers were spooning more coloured crud over it to stop it becoming dusty.



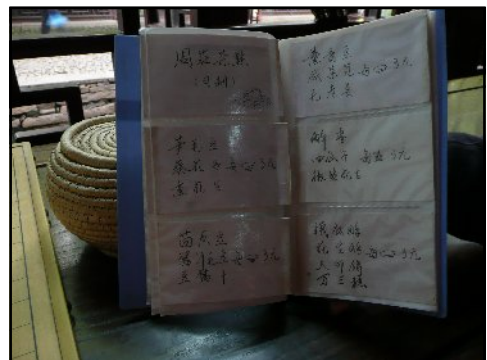
Fifty bridges in Zhouzuang



Her voice was good



Having a good time?



The menu—just for tea

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TT25-4 Suzhou April 29th 2008

The drive on the motorway took about 2 hours, no two wheel traffic. Passing on the inside makes it interesting though. The sun was coming through showing the well maintained countryside with all the available land growing something to eat. Stopping at a motorway services we came across a creative urinal with a plant display! There's hardly a speck of rubbish and no graffiti to be seen. Suzhou is not considered a very big city with just 6 million population.

Our first stop was to walk around the garden of the Keeper of the Nets—very nice. Just across the road was the new museum which looked a bit architecturally odd outside but was very impressive inside with a linking causeway over a lake. The inside was well displayed with a great variety of quality artefacts.

The garden of the Humble Administrator was next door and perhaps the most impressive. It was hardly a humble dwelling with its wonderful reception buildings. Ladies were not allowed to stroll round the gardens but had a bedroom with spectacular views of it. It had the best bonsai collection we have seen.

Our hotel was a first class business hotel with a suite, Ken slept upstairs and I was happy to have a bedroom with a desk downstairs. Our first guide Snow left us at this point but said our same driver would drive us to our next destination. She had been very good and we gave her a good tip. It was a short walk to the upmarket crowded shopping area where a Pizza Hut made a change from Chinese and chopsticks. The young waitresses were very attentive with enough English for us to get a pizza and salad bar. It felt completely safe as we walked around the centre watching the buzz of shopping even at 9pm in the evening.

A beggar who looked like an old Fu Man Chu walked with us for ages repeating 'hello' in English and Chinese, eventually he wore me down and I gave him a Yuan. I have one and two Yuan notes from my trip to China 6 years ago. These are not issued anymore but still work OK.

There are so many interesting things to see that my camera has been busy and I encourage you to go and find your way round my Flickr photo site where all my latest photos are uploaded. Enter via my website. China is fascinating but very busy....



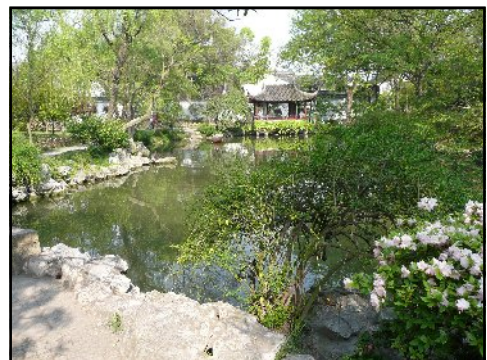
Modern motorway



Creative urinal



Stone container c 970AD



Garden of the Humble Admin

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TT25-5 Hangzhou April 30th 2008

We passed thousands of ducks being hatched and plumped as we sped to Hangzhou through flat countryside with many busy canals. Eight million live in this city and a big proportion have electric mopeds. To make the batteries last longer they never use lights so as a pedestrian you need to watch out. The tower blocks that it home to most people are especially jammed in. Their are trolley buses here and I saw a lady driver wearing white gloves (or once were) driving one. We met our new guide Peter and after booking into a hotel went to a big lake. What a contrast to the city but still crowded. The cruise was pleasant apart from a guy SHOUTING (as seems to be the Chinese way) into his cell phone. I said loudly I would give him another minute before throwing him in the lake. It didn't work so we moved.

Visiting the biggest sitting Buddha in Asia was much better. Again crowded with people burning incense as they prayed before throwing them into blazing cauldrons. The highlight came when we went inside the Lingkyin Temple. The monks filed out and began their chanting prayers. A gong and large drum sounded fantastic with a variety of bell like percussion instruments to accompany the chanting. The ceremony was better than anything I saw and heard when I went to Tibet. Photography was not allowed—but look at them anyway. We looked at cave carvings around 1,000 years old, this whole Temple site was especially worth visiting

A beer was very welcome after all this sightseeing, the Chinese beer had been OK but this one was like witch piss. When I looked at the bottle it's redeeming feature was to say "does not contain Formaldehyde" this plus 1.9% make it one to avoid.

I asked our guide how people recharged the batteries on their scooters. He thought nothing about explaining that they took them off the scooters having taken the chain or lock from the battery compartment, then they carried them to their homes—remember they live in high rise (typically 25 stories) and plugged them in before trudging back down and refitting them. No wonder they were not prepared to 'waste' the charge by using their lights. On being a pedestrian, it's very competitive, you will get jostled, brushed by passing mopeds, killed on Zebra crossings. They have traffic lights and count downs—if only they would obey them



Terrible traffic



Smiling Buddha



Incense sticks for prayers



Wonderful Buddhist chanting

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TT25-6 Yuewang Temple & Nanjing May 1st 2008

The next temple visit was a story of good guy bad guy. The good guy (his mum had painted on his back "be loyal to your country") was killed, left to rot in the streets but taken and hidden in a cypress forest to hide the stench. His son found where his body was, built a temple and buried him there. The bad guys included the Prime Minister and his wife who were killed (photo). Moral of the story—avoid politics.

I had spotted an Irish bar where they had Hoegarden and Kilkenny (worth calling beer) and watched Man U v Chelsea soccer game in a proper pub environment. We ate at a busy restaurant that Ken said to give just 1 out of 10—but we survived.

Our next transport was the modern train to Nanjing, the station was busy but we had a booked seat on this fast, clean, comfortable train. The only thing I didn't like was that a fat (rare) Chinese female settled down opposite me and belched loudly. The train sped back via Shanghai and Suzhou. We saw great piles of coal and a smoky power station, apparently the country is running along with just a 12 day supply of coal. Brilliant green fields were happily growing right up to the stacks of coal.

The train arrived at Nanjing it's final destination exactly on time into a massive station. Peter our new guide was waiting and soon had us speeding to our first visit, this time in a Buick people mover. Nanjing has a different feel to it, more open, one of the effects for being badly bombed in the war. It was the capital before the Revolution moved the capital to Beijing (Peking). We walked near the river and through a market area with pets on sale.

The whole city was surrounded by a very high wall built some 600 years ago and parts have been impressively reconstructed with towers which originally could hide up to 3,000 soldiers. The city is home to the Presidential Palace that Chan Kai Shek used to govern from which we have listed to visit.

Nanjing is also famous, perhaps that should be infamous for a giant massacre committed by the Japanese on both Chinese soldiers and the unarmed population that couldn't escape around December 13th 1937.



The bad guys—good sculpture!



Exotic flowers in grounds



10 Yuan for 6 gongs



Morning sun fights pollution

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