

Day Trip to Suzhou



On November 8, the day before the company visits would officially begin, Chris, Brad, and I boarded a train for a day trip of Suzhou, sometimes called the “Venice of the East” because some old parts of the city still use canals as their transportation. Like the train to Hong Kong last month, this train traveled at high speeds, and we reached Suzhou in less than an hour.

Suzhou offered a much different experience. The hustle and bustle on the streets was just as lively, but most buildings were only 2-3 stories high. Leaving the train station, we saw a handful of rickshaws, and older vehicles were commonplace with even more bicycles.

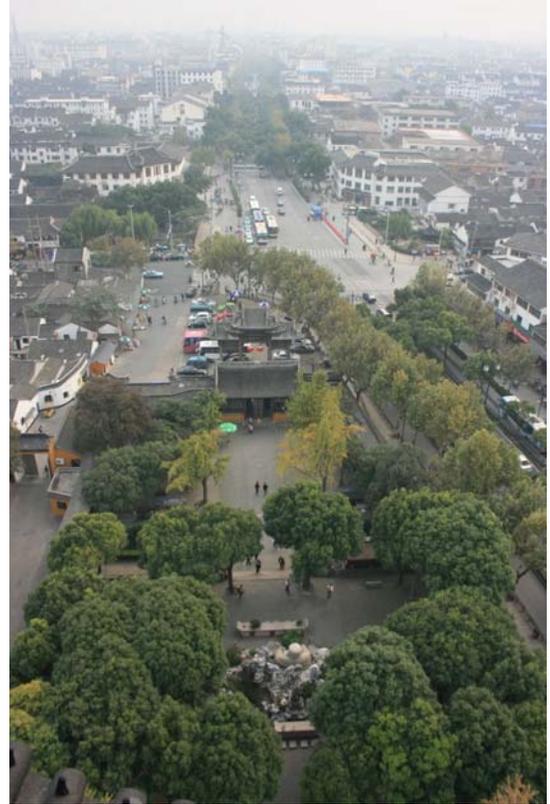
We decided we would also tour the city on bicycles. We negotiated on bikes at the first place we found, ultimately to our detriment. We ended up with old bikes too small for me, let alone for Brad who is over 6 ft. We did, however, negotiate leaving only one deposit for the three bikes.

Our first stop was at the Beisi Pagoda, claiming to be one of the tallest along the Yangtze River. Originally built in the mid 12th century, it rises 243 feet above the surrounding city to provide for one of the best views to be had of the city. Climbing to the top was a tiring climb up to the ninth story of the octagonal pagoda’s narrow staircases. The gardens and the inside of the pagoda display beautiful Chinese Buddha statues of varying design.



November 8, 2009 - Suzhou

Depicted in these two pictures are views of Suzhou from the top of the Pagoda. Notice the distance from the high rises! Also notice the layer of smog along the horizon.

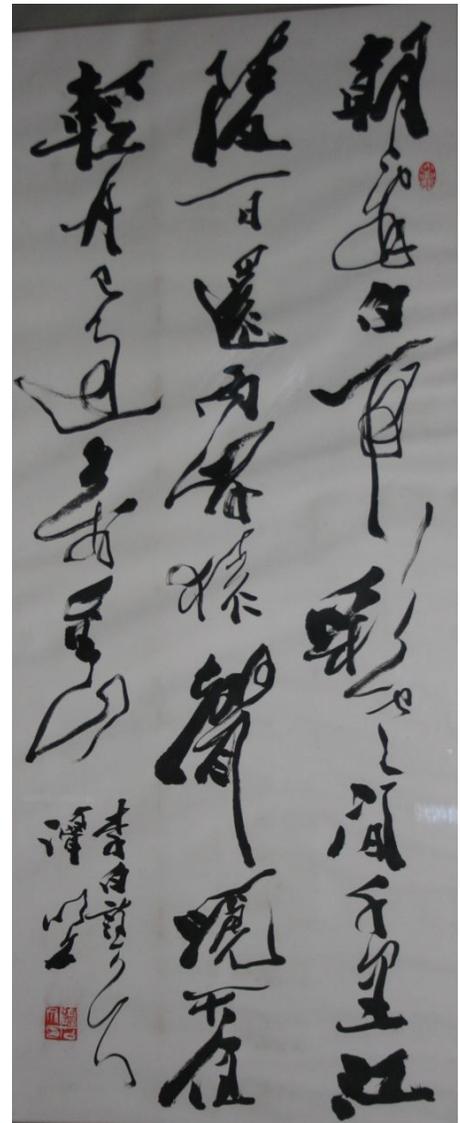


We hopped back on our bikes and rode into the main part of the city, the old part with the canals and famous gardens. These next two pictures are a couple of the canals we saw, still used in everyday life by the local people after many centuries.



Unfortunately, our bikes proved too small to be comfortable for a day or riding on them. We locked them up by a park and walked for much of the rest of the day. After a few minutes of searching, we found an ancient garden and official's palace, one of the most famous in Suzhou. The Garden was a site to behold, even on this chilly late afternoon with the sun hiding behind the clouds. Another artifact from the 12th century, Master of the Nets Garden, is this sprawling garden and palace full of wood furniture, ceramics, and

other artwork. The centerpiece is the peaceful reflection pond surrounded by ancient walkways and gazebos displaying the fine architecture of the time.



As nightfall came upon us and the garden closed its doors, we wandered the streets for a while. We found a wonderful desert shop, where I found a crepe filled with chocolate ice cream and bananas. After that, with a few minutes left before our train was to return to Shanghai, we played some pool at a local pub.

