

Saturday March 29, 2014

This morning we once again took the shuttle and train down to the Chiang Kai-Shek Memorial. As many of you will remember, Chiang Kai-Shek was the Chinese political and then military leader of the Republic of China between 1928 and 1975. Chiang Kai-Shek fought the communists and eventually retreated to Taiwan but continued to declare his intention to retake mainland China, which of course he never did. He ruled mainland China for 22 years and then Taiwan for another 30 years. And he is revered here.



The monument in his memory is surrounded by a park that includes the National Theater and the National Concert Hall. The first thing you see is a large, beautiful gate, all white with a blue tiled roof. The memorial itself is also all white with an octagonal roof rising 249 feet above the ground and covered in blue tiles. The blue-and-white colors of the building with the red flowers surrounding it represent the colors of the flag of the Republic of China (i.e., Taiwan). The roof is octagonal because the number eight is a number traditionally associated with abundance and good fortune.



There are two sets of white stairs leading up to the top of the memorial each with 89 steps which represent CKS's age at the time of his death. In the main hall there is a large bronze statue of CKS, reminiscent of the Lincoln Memorial. But rather than the Gettysburg address, behind the statue are the Chinese characters for ethics, democracy, and science and the inscription about the purpose is to improve the life of humanity and the meaning of life is to create and sustain subsequent lives in the universe. Two guards stand on either side and every hour there is a changing of the guard which we were able to watch.



The ceiling was also magnificent as you can see reflected in the guards' helmets.



On the lower level is a museum documenting his life including his 1972 Cadillac which was his official state car, which of course was Andy's favorite part.

This Memorial site is sometimes used for demonstrations as it would be the following day by 500,000 students protesting a trade agreement between mainland China and Taiwan. Today however it was filled with panda bears made of paper mâché. This was part of the panda world tour. There were literally hundreds of pandas everywhere. They will be traveling the world but the kickoff event was here in Taipei. It of course is highlighting the importance of protecting endangered species. There were 1600 papier-mâché pandas created by the French artist Paolo Grangeon as well as 200 of the Taiwan black bear. Of course the place was also filled with people patiently standing on line to have their pictures taken with the pandas.



The cultural center, made up of the theater and the concert hall are two beautifully decorated buildings in the traditional Chinese palace style. They each have yellow tile roofs and red pillars which add to the brilliance.



At the top of the stairs at each of the halls, they were groups of kids exercising, running laps, doing push-ups and altogether looking like they were having a great time. And everywhere we looked, people were doing Tai Chi,



From there we walked over to the Nanmen market. We couldn't help but notice all the motorcycles. I may have already mentioned that this seems to be the preferred mode of transportation here. Everywhere you look, motorbikes are parked. The difference here however, compared for example with Vietnam, is that here you can cross the street without the fear of being hit by a motorbike (although if you keep reading, on Sunday

one of our colleagues was hit...). Bicycles are also very popular and like most major cities these days, Taipei also has city bikes for rent.



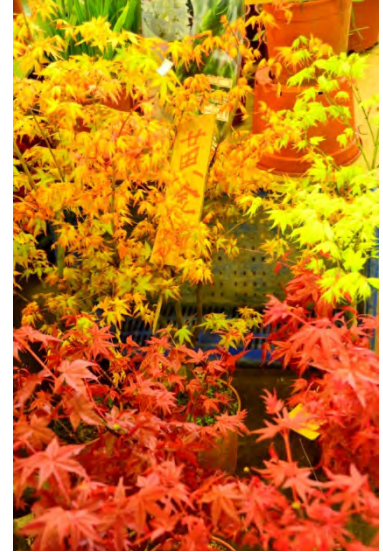
The Nanmen Market is one of the main markets in Taipei. It is an indoor market filled all sorts of vegetables, dumplings, fresh fish, and everything else you could imagine, including many which we could not identify. There were choices of ready-made, take-out food, freshly made (literally made in the basement) dumplings, or fresh food to take home to cook. The difference between this market and many we've seen all over Asia is again how impeccably clean everything was. Even the wet market with the fish had no water sloshing onto the ground.



We jumped back on the subway with our one-day pass and went two stops over to Daan Forest Park.



As we were leaving the subway, we saw a sign for a flower market. We tried to find it, but were having difficulty, so Andy asked a woman pushing a shopping cart. She spoke no English, but gestured in the direction we should walk, then left her cart in the middle of the sidewalk and walked to the corner with us to be sure we found our way. We figured we were on the right track as we started seeing people on the street carrying flowers and plants. The market was blocks and blocks long and it looked like they had blocked off and covered two lanes of traffic on the street. And it was filled with plants and beautiful flowers of every variety and every color,



In the park we just sat for a while resting and watching the children and the people. It was then time to jump back on the subway and make our way back to Taipei 101 to meet my colleague Rayleigh and his wife.