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REPORT



## Learning from experience in Hangzhou: WLCE leisure experience research opportunity

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### ABSTRACT

*This text was collaboratively written by the 12 students – from Brazil, Canada, China, Hong Kong and Hungary – who participated in the WLCE Leisure Experience Research Opportunity, a fieldwork project focusing on resident, national and international visitors to the Chinese city of Hangzhou. The project, designed and implemented by the WLO, was supported by the Hangzhou Municipal Bureau of Commerce and Hangzhou Commerce and Tourism Group, and supervised by Dr. Marcel Bastiaansen (Breda University of Applied Sciences, the Netherlands), Dr. Marie Young (University of the Western Cape, South Africa) and Dr. Isabel Verdet (WLO Secretariat).*

### KEYWORDS

Leisure experience;  
international tourism

## Introduction

The World Leisure Organization recognizes five universities as World Leisure Centers of Excellence (WLCE). Together, the network constitutes a platform to provide students with international and intercultural learning experiences, amongst others, by regularly organizing Field Schools and similar field research projects.

In parallel with the 2019 World Leisure Expo and Forum held in Hangzhou, China, the WLCE “Leisure Experience Research Opportunity” (17–22 October 2019) provided some students from the World Leisure Centers of Excellence with an opportunity to participate in an internationally oriented field research project, aimed at characterizing tourism and leisure experiences in the host city, Hangzhou. In addition to taking part in this research project, students had the opportunity to join the World Leisure Expo and Forum as delegates.

## Research project host city – Hangzhou

Hangzhou has been known for centuries as “The Oriental City of Leisure”. It is one of the most important tourist cities in China with enchanting natural scenery and rich

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cultural heritage traced back over 2200 years. The city is widely known for its waters, particularly the West Lake, and mountains. With its unique Chinese culture, Hangzhou is likely to be experienced quite differently by tourists and visitors from different provenances and cultural backgrounds, including Chinese and local residential leisure seekers. It is therefore important to develop a cross-cultural perspective on how the different leisure attractions of Hangzhou are experienced by different groups of visitors. This provides the Hangzhou Municipal Bureau of Commerce and Hangzhou Commerce and Tourism Group with useful policy information on how to make leisure more accessible for different groups of tourists (i.e. national and international), and how to optimize their leisure experiences.

## Research goals

The overarching goal of this project was to provide insights into how tourists experience some of the various leisure attractions of Hangzhou. The approach was explicitly cross-cultural, with an emphasis on the commonalities and differences in experiences between national and international tourists.

## Research approach

The research project took place over a 3-day period from 19 to 21 October 2019. A group of 12 students from 4 different regions (Asia, Europe, North America and South America) participated in the research. The project used qualitative research methods: auto-ethnography for data collection and thematic analysis for data analysis.

Students were divided into six groups of two and took part in data collection on the first day. The small groups had a full day visiting some of the prominent leisure attractions in Hangzhou. The students made auto-ethnographical field notes of their experiences during their visit, which included verbal and written reflections, photographs and short videos.

During the second day, these field notes were worked into auto-ethnographical reports. These reports were then shared and discussed among a larger group of students and supervisors. They were analysed thematically and six common themes were identified from the notes – cultural experience, experience of self-enhancement and self-fulfilment, experience of leisure accessibility, outdoor leisure experiences, experience of social connection and experience of safety in leisure.

On the final day of the project, students were divided into six pairs again, but differently from the first day. Each pair was given a specific theme to produce a summary report based on the auto-ethnographical reports. These findings were then presented to representatives of Hangzhou Municipal Bureau of Commerce and Hangzhou Commerce and Tourism Group, followed by the written reports on each of the six identified themes.

## Research findings

Theme 1: Cultural Experience about the West Lake  
by Zhe Wang and Zsombor Elekes

### Description of the theme

Culture is an important component of leisure experiences. This report recorded cultural experiences at West Lake, a major attraction of Hangzhou. We first identified the types of cultural experiences found in the West Lake area and then focused on the insights of culture-leisure interactions. Cultural experience is generally considered a kind of leisure experiences. However, domestic tourists and international visitors may perceive these experiences differently. Although West Lake has rich cultural provisions, the interpretation of that culture to a broader audience still requires urgent improvement.

### Experience: categories of cultural experience

- Experience of tangible culture

Traditional architecture are found around the lake and within the islands. These architectural forms are authentic and unique to both domestic and international tourists. While to some international tourists, wooden architecture is unusual in their home countries. An international visitor mentioned, “the Chinese architecture is made of wood, which shows a high quality of building”.

- Experience of intangible culture

Food is also considered part of the cultural experiences. The unique experience of food culture is not just about the food itself for international visitors. It also comes from the eating style and the dining environment, which is both tangible (i.e. chopsticks, tea) and intangible. For instance, an international visitor noted that “it is very unusual for me to see tea leaves floating in water”.

Although there are some Chinese restaurants next to the lake, the prices are higher than restaurants in other areas of the city. Few selections of café and western food are found along the walking paths. Other types of intangible culture include calligraphy writing, dialectic differences, religious experiences and dancing performances from old people. These experiences are unique to international visitors.

Civic culture is another kind of cultural experiences. The hospitality of local citizens is a plus for international visitors’ their leisure experiences. However, some behaviours negatively influenced their experience. “They (local people) gave us gifts because I am a foreigner. It is a nice experience that people are general friendly”, noted an international visitor; while another explained that “the traffic is a problem for experience. For example, cars would not stop when the pedestrian crossed the road”.

- Culture contributes to leisure experience

Culture contributes to leisure experiences or opportunities stimulating perceptions and meanings associated with imagination, sympathy and aesthetics. This is especially true as it relates to when and how to connect the human experience with nature and the built environment. The tangible and intangible forms of culture always invoke people’s experience of leisure.

However, there is a lack of interpretation for cultural forms, in general referring to architecture, stories and intangible customs. A lack of English interpretations frustrates international visitors and restricts their understanding of the rich cultural remains and traditions of Hangzhou, which could have contributed largely to their leisure experiences.

- Leisure as a part of culture

Traditional leisure is an important cultural asset in the West Lake. Some leisure activities are intangible cultural forms, such as calligraphy writing, Taiji, kiting, boating and fishing. The traditional landscaping of West Lake also exemplifies the interest the ancient Chinese people had in interacting with nature; for example *Quyuanfenghe* (viewing lotus), *Huagangguanyu* (viewing fish), *Pinghuqiuyue* (viewing the moon). Leisure activities like viewing the natural scenery are a culture embedment. These facilities provide rich experiences of culture.

## Recommendations

### 1. Strong points

- Rich cultural experiences.
- Authentic Chinese art, architecture, landscaping (gardening) and cuisine.
- The facilities, traditional landscaping and settings provide sufficient leisure space for tourists and citizens.

### 2. Points for improvement

- Increasing leisure activities.
- Providing better interpretations of tangible and intangible forms of culture with English translations for international tourists. Introducing traditional stories and aesthetic points of view could help people with no relevant knowledge to better perceive the culture.
- Since leisure is a part of the West Lake area culture, studies on leisure culture should be done. Facilities and interpretations could then follow up to provide visitors more leisure activities based on culture.

Theme 2: Experiences of self-enhancement/self-fulfilment, time for yourself

By Kaihong Zhu and Xiatong Zheng

## Description of the theme

Self-enhancement is defined by comparing self-perception with external criteria. It is a type of motivation that works to make people feel good about themselves and to maintain self-esteem (Fiske, 2004; Seta et al., 1999). These emotions become especially necessary in situations of threat, failure or blows to enhance self-esteem.

Self-fulfilment is the realizing of one's deepest desires and capacities (Maslow, 1972). It refers to people expressing their own values, obtaining certain skills or enhancing themselves by completing activities in their leisure time.

Time for yourself usually means undisturbed time and space on your own, without other people. Having time for yourself means one has the freedom to spend one's time and to choose one's leisure activities.

In the context of leisure, time for yourself refers to obtaining personal essential time to slow down and rejuvenate yourself, to engage in some activities and really immerse yourself in the whole process, and to achieve a satisfying and worthwhile life or find what one really wants.

### **Experience**

Being a tourist away from the place where you live and work is essential to finding a societal role that's different from your usual life as well as finding alone time. Either meeting with strangers, seeing how others are living, or just getting close to nature help us see ourselves from another perspective. One resident visitor, living in Hangzhou for around three years, felt a sense of tranquility, relief and comfort when she went to Wushan Hill and saw all the local people enjoying their leisure time there. She was going to finish her undergraduate course soon and thus a little bit worried about her future. Meeting with the relaxing locals helped temporarily distancing herself from all her concerns and anxieties and finding peace.

The majority of visitors doing field work for this research mentioned the problem of crowdedness. Not only is one's individual physical space invaded but also the opportunity to get closer to nature was no longer available. Long waiting times for busses or buying tickets also wasted a lot of time which could have been spent on sightseeing.

It is also worth mentioning that one domestic visitor reported that her experience of the boat trip lacked self-participation. Tourists were not allowed to row the boat, probably for the sake of security. As a result, a sense of participation and self-fulfilment is sacrificed.

When there is no issue of tourist overload and participants could truly be involved in the activities, the sense of self-being naturally arises. Take the mountain-climbing experience of an international visitor who said,

this is where I experienced a moment of escaping the world. Being somewhere surrounded by nature, entering my own world, enjoying a beautiful view and just thinking about the fact that I am living and I am present in this moment on this mountain in China! It was extremely nice.

### **Perspective of the international tourist**

For international tourists, it may be more difficult to find time for themselves. During the field work, one international visitor attracted too much attention from people around her. Local residents or domestic visitors wanted to take photos with her and constantly offered help to make sure everything went well with her.

One international visitor felt that her expectation of China was satisfied on her visit to King Qian's Temple. She said, "it was the real image I had of China". She also pointed out that it was really difficult for her to learn about Chinese history as most tourist information does not have English explanations in detail. She only learned a bit from her Chinese friend. In this respect, it could be concluded that Hangzhou is not sufficiently prepared to promote a deep understanding of the city and the country to international guests.

It seems that Hangzhou is still far from being internationally oriented, compared to, for example, Shanghai. The problem of international tourists receiving too much attention is also related. In Shanghai, international visitors are so common that they are easily ignored by local people. Their time for themselves is therefore unaffected.

One international visitor mentioned that museums were not exciting enough to ignite his desire to visit, even though they are free. Moreover, night clubs and hotels are not smoke-free. The whole atmosphere in these places is therefore compromised for some visitors. Furthermore, it seems that international guests prefer a sense of autonomy and freedom. One international visitor reported that when a service was provided, he felt it was “rather rude and straight-forward. This didn’t make me feel like I wanted to stay somewhere but do my business as quickly as possible and be on my way”.

## **Recommendations**

### **1. Strong points**

- Peaceful natural landscapes for meditation in Hangzhou.
- Leisure atmosphere of local people.
- Historical immersion away from the fast pace of modern life.

### **2. Points for improvement**

- Tourist overload leading to a loss of time for oneself.
- Lack of information in English for learning about history and culture.
- Lack of self-participation in leisure activities.

Theme 3: Accessibility

By Leandro Ribeiro da Silva and Storm Fransen

## **Description of the theme**

When we are looking into accessibility, it is important to understand what is meant by it. In tourism, it is how easily tourists can obtain their experiences. An accessible city will positively affect someone’s experience. This will also affect the amount of experiences gathered and their spending pattern (Bindu & Devi, 2016; Eichhorn & Buhalis, 2010). It is also one of the major themes throughout the notes taken by the researchers for this project. Accessibility affected the experience of every researcher. It is an important theme for tourism within Hangzhou and important for the healthy growth of tourism in the city. The focus here is on accessibility as a whole, which includes public transportation, facilities for disabled people, amount of information and language accessibility. This last point is especially important for international tourists since most do not possess the ability to speak or read Chinese.

## **Experience**

Accessibility is the basis of tourism because if people cannot go from one place to another, then there is no tourism at all. There are other types of accessibilities such as physical, social and psychological. For example, the amount of language barriers and ease of public transportation at the locale visited. How difficult is it to travel somewhere if you do not speak the local language? A bit frustrating probably. It is because the language is needed to do almost everything in a trip. Technology may help tourists with apps and websites, but human relations are often more important.

In Hangzhou, a tourist needs to make an important checklist before he/she goes to this city. If a person does not speak English, it will likely be a challenge to take a bus or other public transportation in the city. Not even taxi drivers speak English. In this case, it is recommended to download an app to translate some words or to bring a key address written

in Chinese to ask directions. Most of the time, using a taxi is more efficient and it is only marginally more expensive.

About language barriers, Chinese is not an easy language to learn during the trip. In this situation, Chinese hospitality is an important highlight. Although most of them do not speak English, it is clear that Chinese people are helpful and friendly. When they realize you are a tourist, they just smile and try to understand you. This smiling nature was reported and noted by students in different narratives.

Another good point noted was the Tourism Information Office. It is a safe place to get more tourist information about the city and general tours. Its location is strategically placed at West Lake and it offers maps of the lake for free. The reports relate many similar perceptions about accessibility, languages barriers and public transportation.

### **Perspective of the international tourist**

Looking at accessibility from the perspective of the international student, one thing is very apparent: the language barrier. This is a returning factor throughout the entire experience. It is an issue at restaurants, information centres and when interacting with people. Some of the road signs were in English but not all of them. At restaurants, English menus are the exception, and these are limited compared to the Chinese versions. The research is somewhat influenced within this topic since all international students had a Chinese-speaking student with them. The mediating role of the Chinese-speaking student was noted as very positive.

International tourists also noted an interest in more interaction with the locals, but due to the language barrier this was difficult. Other issues also noted were congestion, lack of information about location and public transportation. Congestion was noted as a particular problem at scenic spots. Lack of information relates to the fact that information was only found at specific points and never about an entire area. This is also an issue for the online environment.

Lastly, public transportation combines the language barrier with the issue of the lack of information. This makes taking public transportation almost impossible for international visitors who do not have any proficiency in Chinese, and hence forces most of them to take taxis. This is also an issue with the biking services offered, since it requires Alipay or WeChat Pay and these require a Chinese bank account or Chinese identification.

Putting all these together, there is definitely room for improvement in respect to international student experiences. Principally, there could be more information in English and the development of better techniques of disseminating information to tourists.

## **Recommendations**

### **1. Strong points**

- A good sense of hospitality.
- Good infrastructure.
- Availability of information centres.

### **2. Points for improvement**

- Improve the availability of English within the tourism sector.
- Lack of wholistic information for the city.
- Modernize the online environment with added practical information.



## Theme 4: Outdoor tourism activities

By Maria-Liz Proveyer and Yinghui Yang

### Description of the theme

There are many outdoor leisure activities. Some of these can be adventure- and/or nature-based. As Kane and Tucker (2004) stated, adventure tourism emphasizes risk, danger and exciting experiences which can be lived, remembered and storied. Kuenzi and McNeely (2008) explored nature-based tourism and they argue that nature-based tourism can be experienced in national parks and wilderness areas within developing countries, where the world's biodiversity is concentrated. The city of Hangzhou wants to encourage nature-based tourism and adventure tourism. In Hangzhou, a large population lives in the urban area, which makes it difficult to connect with nature. Connecting back with nature can create different experiences both for local residents and tourists (Kuenzi & McNeely, 2008). For these reasons, it is important to explore the different possibilities afforded to both local leisure seekers and tourists for adventure- and nature-based leisure activities. There are many ways to reconnect with nature and in Hangzhou there are many possibilities to do so. This section looks at the different adventure- and nature-based activities experienced in Hangzhou, with a focus on international tourists.

### Experience

By analysing different personal experiences, it becomes evident what different adventure- and nature-based leisure activities Hangzhou has to offer and how people experience these activities.

Hangzhou is known for the West Lake. An international visitor mentioned, "I was surprised to see lots of locals that were having their leisure time there". Another visitor said, "we found many groups of old people dancing in the park". Lastly, "some people were enjoying the beautiful scenery, some were feeding pigeons, some were practicing calligraphy on the floor, some were exercising".

Many people go to nature-based attractions to have their leisure time there. People can also choose to do these activities inside but apparently some prefer going to outdoor environments. This also shows that there are many activities that people can do outdoors. Someone commented that the crowdedness at the West Lake influenced their experience with nature. Others say they had a peaceful experience.

One domestic visitor expressed his experience in a different way. He said, during the trip, experience of leisure has been impacted by multiple senses: views (natural and cultural landscapes), sounds (soundscapes of birds, noise of people and transportation), smells ('smellscape', flowers), touching, feeling (flow of wind), and the interactions with other tourists.

These things were part of the connection between him and nature, which influenced his experience. He claimed that this made his experience a nice one.

When explaining an experience at the Tea Village, a domestic visitor reported that "this was also a destination where I immersed in nature". Here you can see that she felt close to nature. A similar experience was one at the Wet Land where the reporter commented, "I felt a connection with the past through the plants at the wetlands". This same reporter argued that she felt like there was a lack of animals. This is also part of nature.

When looking at the experiences at the Baoshu Mountain, a visitor said that nature makes her feel refreshed. “I like the pure nature better than the places that are built by people”. This person really liked nature better than artificial attractions. The mountain helped her feel a sense of refreshment which is an important aspect of leisure time. Another local tourist mentioned that there was an option to take a flat road or a more dangerous off-road track, which was one where you had to go rock climbing. She preferred taking the safe flat road.

### **Perspective of the international tourist**

It was noticeable that international tourists seek more adventurous activities. Some mentioned a lack of adventurous experiences at West Lake. One of them said, “I did feel like this half part of the day was very relaxing with a lot of sightseeing. Not too much activeness and I missed a bit of thrill in this half day”. The same international visitor loved rock climbing at the mountain but did not like that people were trying to help her. A sense of risk taking can be seen here and also the pursue of thrill-seeking activities.

Another tourist explained, “we got to a point where it was possible to climb a rock. This is where I got extremely excited. I decided to climb it. I like taking risks and doing some dangerous activities”. One international visitor also loved going up the mountain and climbing rocks. He loved the natural scenery up there. He reported, “it was an artistic expression for me”.

It was explained by another international visitor that it was not possible to climb mountains like these where she came from. She also reported was that there was a huge difference between the city side of Hangzhou and the nature side of Hangzhou. She wrote, standing on top of this huge rock and looking to the left, I can see a lot of tall skyscrapers and if I just turn 180 degrees, I suddenly see a huge lake and many trees surrounding it. Isn't nature great?

To conclude, there are many different nature-based leisure activities offered in Hangzhou as seen in these different reports by both national and international visitors. A difference in adventure-seeking aspects was found when looking at the different experiences. International visitors seemed to seek more risk-taking leisure activities.

## **Recommendations**

### **1. Strong points**

- The city of Hangzhou has an abundance of nature-based leisure activities, such as wetlands, the lake, the tea village and mountains. It also has biodiversity such as different species of plants.
- Hangzhou offers a relaxing and peaceful leisure atmosphere.
- The natural landscapes of Hangzhou are well protected.

### **2. Points for improvement**

- Improve the management of natural attractions (contamination).
- More adventurous tourist attractions to satisfy international tourists.
- More biodiversity by including animals.

Theme 5: Social Connection

By Qian Li and Yan Wang

## Description of the theme

According to Seppala et al. (2013), social connection reflects an individual's personal sense, thought and emotion of having comfortable relationships with others. Social connection is one of the essential human needs. Maslow's hierarchy of needs proposed that a person's primary need will be a sense of connection to society once they have fulfilled basic physiological and safety requirements (Maslow, 1943). Social connection can also be viewed as a critical indicator in the measurement of a human's well-being. Diener and Seligman (2002) pointed out that having pleasant social relations with others distinguishes happy from unhappy people. In addition, if people are disconnected from society, they feel hurt and pain. Therefore, people engage in a variety of behaviours to alleviate the pain of social disconnection. This statement seems to testify the results of Epley et al. (2008, p. 114), which states that "most people who find themselves isolated from others fairly quickly begin wanting a bit more urban crush and a little less desert island". Moreover, another benefit for a person who belongs to a social network is that social connections not only support an individual's sense of self-esteem, self-worth, and self-enrichment, but also enhance the solidarity of the community (Walker et al., 2014). Indeed, an individual's sense of belonging and safety in a community can be raised by the engagement of a connection with others.

## Experience

During the field work, most visitors noted that social connections were everywhere. For example, one international visitor mentioned a group of people with red caps that were cleaning the area. It looked like a volunteering group. This gave me a sense of community. It felt like these people spend a lot of time next to this lake and enjoyed being there and sharing experiences with others.

When this visitor saw the volunteer group, she felt the sense of community, which is established through close social connections. Also, a domestic visitor said, "coffee shops provide a good space for me to make some new like-minded friends, both the baristas and the customers". She thought that coffee shops provide people with a place to build social connections.

We found that people usually used three ways to build social connections. The first is oral language, the second is body language and the third is scene. For the first condition, one international visitor mentioned that language helped people communicate. She said, "the people working at the ticket office explained to me through a translating app that these boats were boats that individual local Chinese owned and rented out around the whole lake".

For body language, an action such as a smile can be effective in building social connections. For example, an international visitor said, "a guy asked me if I wanted a cigarette. I don't smoke but it was nice he offered. I think this might be a way people make friends in China".

For the third condition, a familiar scene makes it much easier for people to build social connections. One domestic visitor said "wherever I travel, I hope to see the lifestyle of the locals".

Social connections always have positive impacts. Through it, people feel a sense of belonging. One domestic visitor said, "if people do something similar to what people in my hometown do, it helps me to feel a sense of belonging".

### **Perspective of the international tourist**

Because the appearance of tourists from other countries is so different from domestic tourists, they are always particularly conspicuous. It is easy to attract the curiosity and attention of Chinese people. It could be viewed as a kind of passive social connection, which could make those international tourists feel uncomfortable. One international visitor said, “as I walked, I immediately felt like everyone was looking at me. I wasn’t sure if it was all in my head or if these people were actually judging me. It didn’t feel that nice”. However, at a certain point, there were people smiling at her. When she saw these smiles, she felt like everything was okay again. It can be seen that the interaction with others greatly affect a person’s mood.

The same thing happened to another international visitor. “At the end when we finished lunch, the staff of the restaurant sent a Chinese knot and snacks to me. That made me feel very happy”. Similarly, one international visitor felt like a celebrity when many people asked if they could take pictures with her. When international tourists meet another group of international tourists, they often feel a strong sense of belonging. For example, one international visitor mentioned that she was very happy when she met other foreigners. “I immediately didn’t feel like I was the only foreigner between so many Chinese people. I actually felt normal, which was nice”. One could argue that she found some resonance with other foreign tourists, and thus developed a strong social connection.

### **Recommendations**

#### **1. Strong points**

- Hangzhou has many places where people can experience a strong social connection.
- Strong social connection between local people can induce positive feelings in visitors.
- Local people like to connect with international visitors.

#### **2. Points for improvement**

- Overcrowding in certain leisure areas in Hangzhou may lead to a loss of feelings of social connection.
- The overload of attention that international visitors attract from local residents may lead to loss of feelings of social connection.
- Language barriers limit social connection between international visitors and local residents.

Theme 6: Leisure and Safety in Hangzhou

By Yuyan Zhou and An Jiaqi

### **Description of the theme**

As a well-known tourist destination, Hangzhou has earned a reputation as the Oriental Leisure City. A meaningful leisure experience should be based on security and safety in many aspects. Safety is a very important issue for tourists to consider in their whole travelling experience. Therefore, leisure and safety are one of the obvious and significant themes in this study. Domestic and international visitors generally reached an agreement that Hangzhou is a safe tourist destination to enjoy leisure time. Without heavy police

presence, visitors feel safe, and they do not worry about security in Hangzhou. However, there are still some aspects which need further improvements in order to make Hangzhou a better tourist city. Through analysing all the individual reflections, this section has been structured into three specific sub-themes: leisure activity safety, environment safety and food safety. Below are the reflections and recommendations respectively.

## Experience

- Leisure activity safety

Leisure activity safety is a common issue, especially in pursuits such as rock climbing, cycling and boating.

Baoshi Mountain is the place where a potential safety issue was detected related to rock climbing. Tourists and residents visit the mountain in numbers because it is a good place to get a bird's-eye view of the whole city and the West Lake. There are some rocks which seem quite fit for climbing. Some of the rocks have no trails to walk. There are "no climbing" signages (only in Chinese) on them, but lots of people go there and somehow manage to climb up and down without any protection. There are no officers to maintain order. This wild rock climbing is chaotic and dangerous. It poses a high risk because it is slippery. If this situation does not change, it is only a matter of time until someone gets hurt.

As for cycling, some visitors participating in this study cycled from the Tea Village – passing through the Yanggongdi Causeway and to the West Lake. Some sections of this route have a separate bike lane, but not in other sections. While cycling on these sections, visitors felt a little unsafe. Some cars on the road go too fast and drivers do not give priority to cyclists. These are the potential risks for the tourists who participate in a bike tour.

Boating is a very good leisure activity to visit the West Lake. However, it is difficult for international tourists to communicate with local boat tour providers, which leads to deficient information (including safety information).

- Safety of the surroundings

Road safety is what came up first in this study of safety on the surroundings. It was observed that there are many police officers on duty in heavily populated areas, and therefore visitors feel safe when they are walking around. People feel very safe when they walk along the lakefront because bicycles are not allowed there. However, in some places, dense bicycle traffic occupies a lot of road space, and that threatens pedestrians. Additionally, it can be very difficult for blind people to walk along the West Lake. Foreigners also feel unsafe when they face aggressive drivers who do not give priority to pedestrians, especially those for whom it is their first time in China.

Most of the streets and tourist attractions of Hangzhou are clean, which creates a beautiful environment. However, the West Lake is too crowded. Overcrowding around the lake does not allow for a nice and enjoyable leisure experience. In museums and some clubs, security checks are lax.

Noise pollution is also an environmental safety issue. Many shop owners use megaphones to advertise themselves; some shop owners also use whistles to fake a loud bird

chirp; and drivers horn unnecessarily often. These all annoy people and cause noise pollution.

There are many ignoring signs that state smoking is prohibited. People do not care about smoking in clubs and hotels or in the street. This might provoke uncomfortable and disappointing feelings for people who do not like smoking.

- Food safety

Taking it by and large, visitors think food safety of restaurants in Hangzhou is high. However, some food stalls are not very clean. International tourists might suffer from diarrhea because of eating the spicy food on the street called *Malatang*. People also tend to use a lot of plastic products for lunch box and drinks, which is not environmentally friendly. There were very few allergen reminders on the restaurant menus.

### Recommendations

According to all the experiences and reflections shared, we put forward some recommendations.

First of all, for leisure activity safety, the city government or tourism management committee of the West Lake is expected to provide the necessary protection equipment for rock climbing on Baoshi Mountain, such as handrails and more trails. They could also place some officers on duty there to keep the order of rock climbing. The traffic control department should design more appropriate cycling routes for cyclists. The boat tours providers should offer some foreign language information for boating safety.

Second, the traffic control department and the education system need to promote traffic rules continuously, and if necessary, devise some punishment measures for the people who break traffic regulations. Particularly, drivers should be educated to be aware that pedestrians have equal rights to road use, and priorities should be given to pedestrians.

For food safety, food stores should be encouraged to use fewer plastic bags or boxes; while restaurants are suggested to provide information on the allergens in the food in their menu.

### Concluding statement

Hangzhou provides a rich tourist experience to local and international visitors. It has rich cultural and natural sites, surrounded by a sense of tranquility, which is mostly located around the West Lake as the main attraction. Local citizens participate in a variety of leisure activities (i.e. dancing, fishing, rowing, calligraphy, etc.) that prove to be tourist attractions by themselves. It provides a sense of inclusivity and leaves a vibrant atmosphere that is inviting. Visitors found Hangzhou to be a friendly peaceful city with commercial opportunities on one side and natural settings on the other, which allows for different tourist experiences. This was evident from the participants' experiences when choosing to either explore coffee shops specializing in different coffees, visiting West Lake and its different natural and cultural sites, visiting historical sites and museums and visiting the wetlands or more remote and adventurous sites which have not attracted many international visitors.

The tourism office at the West Lake was very helpful in providing the necessary information. To allow for more accessibility, Hangzhou municipality could consider the

inclusion of English descriptions to street names and descriptions at heritage sites, as well as creating accessibility for the blind. Access to public transport was challenging for international visitors who do not understand Chinese.

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