

I moved to Hangzhou on the typhoon day

They say mad dogs and Englishmen go out in the midday sun, but you know the threat of a ‘little’ rain isn’t going to stop us either. Yes, I moved to Hangzhou in the typhoon. I’m Dr Rob Burton. I’m British and have been in China for the past seven years. All that time has been spent in Nanjing teaching in a private High School but now, as I write, I have moved to Heaven on Earth, or as you might know it Hangzhou. I’m about to take up a new post at a university.

As I sit surrounded by boxes in my new apartment I wonder how I have accumulated all this ‘stuff’ after all, like most of you, I arrived in China with a suitcase weighing in at 23 kilos, my carry on bag, and in my case, my dog Snooky, my Jack Russell bitch. But the stuff was loaded into a van and at 6 a.m. on Saturday morning me, the dog, the cat and the fish will hit the highway to paradise – albeit a slightly damp and hairy road. My Chinese wife was letting the train, take the strain but, of course, they were all cancelled for two days so she had to hole up in a hotel, lucky girl, while I battled the elements.

My ‘hometown’ if you want to call it that is Plymouth in the South West of England, it’s a name that will probably resonate with the American readers and as I write the city is gearing up for the Mayflower 400 celebrations in 2020. British readers will have probably driven through Plymouth en-route to catch the ferry to France.

Plymouth is where I did my undergraduate degree and the ancient city of Exeter, just up the road, is where I did my PhD. I worked as a lecturer in British universities for around 25 years before my itchy feet got the better of me and I packed myself off to China for some adventure in my later years. I’m no spring chicken but I’ve always travelled, living and working in other countries before settling down to the academic life.

So, Hangzhou. I read its in the top 10 of happiest cities in China and is one of the 41 places in the world worth visiting. I have been Googling none stop and joining Hangzhou WeChat groups to find out all about the place. Of course, everyone knows about West Lake and the other tourist traps – but I’m a sociologist so I like to wander the streets with my camera looking for the ‘real’ China.

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But after a lifetime of living next to the ocean, one of the things that excites me most is the proximity (relative to Nanjing) of the ocean to Hangzhou. I hear the best beaches are at Zhoushan but I'm not a beach person, I'm an ocean person. So I will be looking for the closest access to the ocean—not to swim, or sunbathe, but just to be there taking in the vastness and the power. This will be my first quest upon reaching Hangzhou—"I must get down to the sea again, the lonely sea and the sky..."

I hope to meet you all again soon.

Dr Rob. August 14, 2019.