

2013

In 3 months

- Hongkong

- South-West China

- Perth (Australia)

22nd February to 23rd May 2013



Backpacking along the Western China Borders (Shuolong)



Cheung Chau - Hongkong



Steep Point - WA

Background

In autumn 2012 we saw again this Lufthansa promotion for cheap flights to Hongkong. At that stage we had no plans for 2013 but CHF 700.- for Hongkong return was just 'too good to refuse' and so we booked with 3 months between go and return.

Planning

As time for departure approached we had to make things clear and from various options we settled for a backpacking-trip to South-West China hoping the weather would be adequate and then revisiting our Dear Off-Springs in Perth. In between we would stay 3 times in Hongkong for seeing family and friends, shopping and getting miscellaneous things done.

Summary of China Trip

When we planned the itinerary we expected to have 6 weeks time - unfortunately the CTS in Hongkong (Hongkong belongs to China) only gave me a visa for 30 days (30 nights:-). We managed to do the whole program in 31 days at the cost of being rushed, always on the move with very little rest - we were exhausted when we got back to Hongkong!

As one can see from the map and the diary we travelled west from Hongkong along the coast and then up North as close as possible along the Vietnam / Laos / Myanmar borders to the top of the Nu Jiang river close to the Tibet Border.

We expected to see and live once more some original and traditional China by traveling 'local way', expecting to eat authentic exotic food, seeing attractive landscapes and minority people in traditional dresses etc. Although even these peripheral regions of China already had some modern impacts (express roads, smart phones, high rises here and there) we still could enjoy much of the old rural sceneries and urban chaotic and simple life. But we felt that this would be our last such trip and so we tended to maximise this last experience, somehow saying bye to our 30 years of China adventure (1979, 83, 85, 87, 92, 2001, 05, 07, 13).

Facts:

- 31 days, 30 nights in 26 different guest houses. Average 40 Yuan (6 CHF) / night
- 6000km. 77 transports - 174h. Mostly regular buses, few mini vans, shuttle buses, 3 ferries.
- Total cost: 7500 Yuan (1100 CHF) of which 4700 Y transport , 1200 Y overnight, 1600 Y food etc
- The weather was mostly nice to fair and comfortable. Just a few days were too warm, too cold or wet.
- 2 small backpacks around 5 Kg and 2 light shoulder bags for things at hand.
- Peggy had some indigestions for a few days and I had a heavy flu with burning bronchitis and extreme headcold followed by a very uncomfortable congestion for several days.
- In 31 days I had only 2 x 15 minutes conversation with somebody else than Peggy - not easy for me.

My thanks to Peggy who did all the bus, hotel, food, laundry, packing.....I depended 100% on her to guide and lodge and feed me

Summaries for Hongkong and Australia (see diary)

Maps of China and Australia Trips at End of Report

CH-Home to Hongkong

22. February	Start: Ipsach (Home)	End: Hongkong	
<p>Train to Geneva via Zermatt: It was a nice winter day and as our plane to Frankfurt would only leave in the evening we used our day card for a lovely train ride via Zermatt on the way to Geneva. Leaving at 8am from home we had just over 1 hour time to walk through Zermatt to make sure we reached Geneva Airport at around 15.30. It was worth while - see picture.</p> <p>Flight to Honkong via Frankfurt. Flawless flights by Lufthansa arriving on time at 4pm. Express bus A10 right away and met Ah Chow in Kennedy Town at 5.30!</p>			
			Zermatt

Hongkong - Part 1 of 3

23. February - 8.March			
<p>We spent most of this period at Ah Chow's nice place in Kennedy Town overlooking Hongkong Harbour. We felt very comfortable and that was important because instead of a few days it took us almost 2 weeks to get our papers to enter China. Besides enjoying Ah Chow's hospitality we also made a few trips to Cheung Chau (with Trinh Ngo, Ah Chow), Lamma Island (Ah Chow) and around Hongkong Island (Trinh Ngo). We also met most of Peggy's family of course. Just before leaving for China we moved to Toni and Ah Yuen living at Tin Shui Wai (new 500k satellite city) near the China border.</p>			
			<p>Note: It was pure coincidence that we met Trinh, my old friend and workmate - he lives in USA and just happend to be in Hongkong on business. He stayed a mere 200m from Ah Chow's place. It was great to see him again after more than 20 years time!</p>
with Ah Chow on Lamma Island	Peggy's old aunties and Jolie	with Trinh Ngo in Stanley	

South China - Back Packing (8th March to 7th April)

8. March	Start: Tin Shui Wai (Hongkong)	End: Zhanjiang (湛江市)	on way: 8.5h bus and ferry
<p>Left Toni's place at 9am taking minibus over Shenshen Bay Bridge to the Border. Smooth immigration - the lady officer even let me know that the 30 days visa means 30 nights - at the end we were glad!</p> <p>Then took shuttle to Shek Ho to board fast ferry crossing pearl River Estuary to Zhuhai. Sunny and hazy but could see some construction work for new bridge Zhuhai - Hongkong. Free 'ferry shuttle' to center where we got bus tickets easily for 13.40 to Zhanjiang with enough time for relaxed lunch.</p> <p>HORROR - it was a bed bus, exactly what we hate because restricted view!. We were even squeezed at the very end of the bus, 5 people lying on the floor waiting 6 hours to arrive in the dark at 19.30. Well - we had this in 2001 ... ma foi! Peggy then found quickly a room - very shabby but clean bed - common waters. We were back in China!! And then we enjoyed our fried Saho Fan (沙河粉), broad rice noodles+ goodies:-) on the street side!!</p>			<p>bus to border: 45', shuttle to ferry 30', ferry to Zhuhai-side: 60', shuttle to Zhuhai center: 15', bed-bus to Zhanjiang: 6h</p>  <p>bed bus at the back bottom we were 5 people across</p>

9. March	Start: Zhanjiang	End: Zhanjiang , trip to Naozhou Island (瑙洲)	on way: 5h bus & ferry
<p>bus to Ferry: 1h 30', ferry to island: 30', motor-bike to light tower and return: 30', ferry back: 1h, bus back to Zhanjiang: 1h 30'</p> <p>Hard bed but reasonable sleep. We decided to take a chance to visit Naozhou Island. Nobody seemed to know how to get there but Peggy did not let loose and after walking an hour with several turns we ellbowed into an overcrowded bus and I had to stand 45'. Well it was an interesting drive in 'animated' traffic and then overland and passing lagoons over a long dam. Peggy enjoyed chatting with a local lady giving useful info. Eventually we reached the small port. The 'waterbus' took about half hour to the island.</p> <p>We were immediately 'welcomed' by a small crowd and to my surprise Peggy accepted the offer of a young biker to take us to the French Light House. So with our backpacks we sat on this small bike (I sat on the hard back - my most uncomfortable ride ever!) Fortunately it was only about 10km (first through town and then banana plantations). The light tower built by the French in 1900 was interesting only as it seemed totally misplaced here. When we got back to the village we settled at a little family restaurant and had a lovely meal with fish, snow peas (荷蘭豆 - he lan dou) and chicken intestins;-). Peggy had a good chat with the cook.</p> <p>Later we took the car ferry back which was nicer as we could sit on the top deck outside. Took bus back the same way but ended in a traffic jam. At last reached center again and Peggy found a room in a much better place (cheaper). Just had noodles and got back to the room at 20.30.</p>			
			
			Hard bike ride to light tower

10. March	Start: Zhanjiang	End: Beihai (北海)	on way: 4.5h bus
<p>Had my beloved yàuhjagwái (油炸鬼) and 2 bao before taking bus at 10.10 to Beihai. Smooth ride to bustling Behai center. Peggy easily found shuttle bus to Qiaogang Beach (侨港海滩). After some forth and back Peggy decided to take a room in a small guest house which was under transformation (bargain: 60Y per night, if 2 nights). While waiting for water to take a shower we had a beer at the road side, Peggy chatting with lovely (nosy) locals - one was a rubbish picker. The beach was as most beaches are but there was a lot of rubbish lying around the adjacent BBQ places - never mind - we did not come to BBQ!</p> <p>In the later afternoon Peggy made her first laundry as water was suddenly available! Then we were hungry but we had to make a long turn to settle for a place to eat - but then we had a good treat at a crowded terrace: fried bacon (local speciality) and mushroom hotpot! Then we strolled to the beach to enjoy late evening atmosphere and mixed up with the crowd of locals. There were uncounted lights on the sea from fishing boats - lucky that one cannot see the rubbish in the dark. Returned to room at 21.30.</p>			<p>Bus to Beihai: 4h, Shuttle to beach: 30'</p>  <p>Dianjancun Beach</p>  <p>Street beer and street talk</p>

11. March	Start: Beihai	End: stay	on way: 2h bus
<p>Good morning.....I had a big sh..... no water to flush... I use hot water bottle and cover falls into WC..... the Peggy blames me for not putting cover on hot water bottle.....!!! Damn...!!!</p> <p>At 8.30 we left and walked to the Ferry terminal at Yintan (Silver) Beach (银滩) also to see if we could visit the volcanic Weizhou Island (涠洲岛). As there was no ferry at a convenient time we skipped this venture and just made a turn in this famous Yintan Beach. Ok - nice beach (with very fine sand) as 10'000 others in the world and modernistic attractions (some already shabby or unfinished)... Well it was interesting to see what Chinese tourists regard as exciting. We did not stay long and took a shuttle bus to center.</p> <p>Then we took another shuttle bus to Nanwan Beach (南万)). That saved my day!! Unexpectedly we reached a beach beside a hill and not only were there scenic spots with wild rocks and nice hill-top views but also eating places serving yammie specialities (bbq-ed dried fish, some kind of calzots, clams with bamboo shoots, noodles with vegies and 3 beers for 55 Y). This beach is also a favourite place for wedding photos (even with piano). Happy and satisfied we took shuttle back to the city center. There we strolled around for a while but as there was nothing to get excited about we soon took the shuttle back to have a good rest at our guest house.</p> <p>Later we made a 'promenade' at the beach to watch an opaque sunset.</p>			<p>Shuttle to city: 30', to Nanwan Beach: 30' to City: 30', back to guest house: 30'</p>  <p>Silver Beach</p>  <p>Nanwan Beach</p>

12. March	Start: Beihai	End: Shangsi (上思)	on way: 6h bus
<p>Easy morning to take bus in city at 10am. Walked around city for breakfast but found nothing exciting -so we went for a few jiao dse.</p> <p>Very smooth ride to Qinzhou (钦州). All the way we saw millions of wooden sheets (1sqm and 3mm thick) piled up here and there and we could never figure out what they are for.</p> <p>We arrived at 1pm and Peggy found out soon that we had to take a shuttle to the west station. 16 stops for 1Y, slow but nice siteseeing:-). Next bus to Shangsi at 14.10 already!</p> <p>Nice ride towards inland but after half the way the bus joined a new motor way - ma foi.</p> <p>At Shangsi Peggy after studying the wall map got tickets to Chongzhou (崇左) for next day then easily found a good room above bus station for 40Y. At 5pm we were already on the move to look for somewhere to eat. Shangsi reminded us of 20 years ago - after a long turn we settled for a local speciality buffet - to our disappointment not spicy at all - ma foi. At a bakery I had a local sweet - like a boring Swiss Schmelzbrötli.</p> <p>Some thoughts I had that evening: Today we got back into the basic China - that's what we came here for - before it no more exists! Sometimes it's hard and dusty and then it is nice.....as in the old days! But then after all our past China travel it is for me a bit 'deja vu' and some of the 'exotic' is no more felt as adventure (challenge) but rather as a nuisance. It's not really a problem just a reflection. (How I saw it 3 months later: True, yet I would not like to have missed it!)</p>			<p>Shuttle to city: 30', Bus to Qinzhou: 3h Shuttle in Qinzhou: 30', bus to Shangsi: 2h</p>  <p>Bus Life</p>  <p>Bus Station Guest House</p>

13. March	Start: Shangsi	End: Shuolong (硕龙)	on way: 5h bus
<p>The morose feelings of last night were quickly washed away this morning. Peggy</p>			<p>Bus to Chongzhou: 2.5h, Bus to Leiping: 1.5h Mini van to Shuolong: 1h</p>

got up early and so we had no problem to catch the 8am bus. Lovely drive through sugar cane country (harvest) and the scenery getting more and more hilly. Reached Chongzhuo at 10.30 and Peggy found immediately a bus to Leiping (雷平) at 10.45!

Now the hills became really attractive and I felt like staying in Leiping when the bus kicked us of 5 Km outside town. But Peggy got us right away on a tricycle to town and then immediately on a mini van to Shulong (20Y for 50km very efficient). Another scenic drive through 'Guilin-type' hills and at the end we both were very happy we stopped at Shulong to enjoy this place off the beaten track! Peggy found a good room for 40Y and after a beer with a big dish of my favourite fried peanuts we went to explore the area.

Scores of nice hills on both sides of the river and Peggy even ventured over a ramshackle hanging bridge.

Before dinner we even found a small shop selling miju (米酒) natural rice schnaps. Then had delicious river fish and beef.

Went to bed at 8pm.....happy that the heavy thunderstorm happened only at night time!

PS This was the best room for 40Y so far - 2 big beds, furniture, shower and toilet worked ok, even clothes hangers and very clean!



Tricycle



Peanuts beside Bridge



Old hanging Bridge



Fried Fish - (Schnaps)

14. March	Start: Shulong	End: Jingxi (靖西)	on way: 32km walking, bus: 1h
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After a good night and without breakfast we started our long-to-be walk at 8.30. The thunderstorms had gone, the sky was covered but the atmosphere was fair and comfortable. So we enjoyed our walk along the river and through the hills. Just when I started feeling hungry we reached a historical hotel and then a noodle place beside, with home made saho noodles.... yammie!

After that the backpacks were much lighter. A short while later we met a group of cyclists who had rented bikes and were on a tour for a few days. A few were from Honkong and Shenzhen - so Peggy had a good talk with them in cantonese.

At mid-day we reached the **Detian Falls (德天瀑布)** but all we saw was the ticket office and the surrounding tourist facilities. We did not feel like paying 80Y each to walk to a waterfall (the 2nd biggest worldwide between 2 international borders) with hardly any water (end of dry season). Instead we decided to continue walking up and through the hills for a thrilling 15 km! After 500m uphill we passed a place where one could have seen the falls if it was not for a 200m wall, built specially to cover the view! There was hardly any traffic and we enjoyed the wild nature and were marvelled by the countless hills. We also walked through a few traditional villages - people wondering why we walk.

When we reached the main road we saw a road side restaurant - just right for having a cool beer! Of course Peggy had a good chat and after a while she asked a women who kept chewing something from a banana leave what it is. Oh...immediatley she went to the kitchen to prepare some for us... it was some kind of green gluey rice with caramel texture:-). Was really lovely to chew while walking (still through steep hills) to the next small town Xialei (下雷) with nothing than a noisy, dusty main road and only 1 guest house of unacceptable standard.

So Peggy got us on an overfull light-bus to the next town which looked fun to me but people told Peggy to move on to Jingxi. Got a small bus right away and some friendly woman told Peggy where to get off for the bus station. It was getting dark and cool and I was happy that Peggy found a room quickly (big as Ah Chow's apartment 40Y). Then looked for a place to eat and settled for a Muslim noodle place (no beer - categorically!). The noodles were good and so we bought some beer on the way back - perhaps we will end up in Allah's hell for that. PS Originally we had planned this route to see the FALLS which we did not see but we enjoyed much more the walk through 10'000 Guilin-type hills and the local context with hardly any touristic influence yet!

walk 32km to Xialei: 6.5h
van to next town: 30', bus to Jingxi: 30'



A rare Group of Cycling Tourists



Hills, Hills, Hills.....



Home-made Rice Caramel

15. March	Start: Jingxi	End: Yanshan (砚山)	on way: 6.5h
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Raining. Last night we had one of these automatic hot water machines waking you up when re-heating (why did we not just switch it off?). It made me nice coffee this morningwith a flair of an ancient room and a decorative lamp (which did not work). The bus left at 9.30 and at first we drove in a drizzle letting us just guess the hills. Gradually the wheather cleared up such that we could enjoy the hilly scenery again. Reached Napo (那坡) at around 12am and there Peggy got a bus to Funing (富宁) in Yunnan right away (I would have liked to see Napo - not enough time - visa). Another nice up and down drive in a small bus - no more single hills but mountain chains. Suddenly stop! 2 lorries facing us - 10 minutes later we realised that they were pulling up an overturned lorry!

bus to Napo: 2.5h, Funing: 1.5h, Yanshan: 2.5h



Byebye Lamp and Peggy buying Tickets

Reached Funing at 2pm. Here Peggy was stressed - a) wanted to continue, b) did not want to take motorway, c) did not want to get to a place late again! Well - she went for the 2.20 bus to Yanshan over motorway. Motorways are boring: nice scenery, ok, but no people, no tractors, no houses beside...etc but got to Yanshan at 16.45!
 Got kicked off the bus at town entrance ... lucky Peggy could ask for the right way because it took 20' walk on most unpleasant road to get to the center. This time it took several visits until Peggy settled for a small but pleasant room.
 Then went to look for somewhere to eat and ended up in a very exciting market and settling for an exciting local buffet with beer and mijiū. Got back to room at 8.30 pm!



Choice for BBQ

16. March	Start: Yanshan	End: Jianshui (建水)	on way: 7.5h
<p>Easy morning, bus started at 8.45 - somewhere I had my yàuhjagwái (油炸鬼). Lovely drive and then started to have this urge which became more pressing as the road got more bumpy - suddenly I asked Peggy to stop the bus immediately otherwise.....!! Within 30 seconds the bus stopped right in front of a farmer's toilet..... 1 minute later and.... feeling relieved for a good while I then just made it to the next stop at Pingyuan (平远) - I was so quick running that I was not even stopped to pay the fee....Peggy who came behind paid for me! Now had to get a bus to Kaiyuan (开远).... The 11.30 bus was ready to go but Peggy was refused tickets as it was full, they said - one hour later that bus was still there...hmmm. Eventually they sold tickets for the 12.30 bus... leaving at 13.00. Again a very nice but slow ride....1h later I had to again... just as the bus stopped in a town...uff! Got to Kaiyuan (big city where we did not want to stay) at 16.00 only ...shuttle to south station and off again at 16.30 to Jianshui (that's efficiency!). We reached Jianshui almost in the dark at 18.15 - already dead streets - Peggy settled quickly for a room for 20Y (3 CHF) - bed clean, everything else, even TV für nüt! After Peggy complained we got our hot water bottle at last!!!! And now we had time to look for somewhere to eat:-). All these yammie BBQ places - but my poor system! In the end we found a nice noodle place with cool beer and meijou! Peggy had a long entertaining chat with the friendly owner couple. Got back to the room at 21.30 - a record so far! Without Peggy's skills we would never be able to connect 4 buses in 1 day and also I might well have had the pants full that day!</p>		<p>bus to Pingyuan: 2h, to Kaiyuan: 3h shuttle to south station: 30', bus to Jianshui: 2h</p>	
		<p>Minority Dress</p>	<p>Fresh Yau Dja Guai</p>
		<p>Minority Dress</p>	<p>Mijiū - My Cure!?</p>

17. March	Start: Jianshui	End: Yuanyang New (元阳)	on way: 3.5h
<p>Got out at 8.30 to visit the nice old town with several streets of restored traditional buildings. Beside an old stately mansion (now museum - where we came across the first 2 foreigners) we bumped into a very popular noodle place serving the real version of famous 'over the bridge noodles'! Slurp....! Then Peggy wanted to visit an ancient village, Tuanshan Village (团山). It took a while to find and get the right shuttle bus (Nr 4) for the 15km to the end station after which we had to walk another 3km. We were lucky to enter a private old decayed mansion in its original Qing Dynasty state before we realised that the center of the village has been restored as a 'tourist trap museum'. As we were not prepared to pay the fee we just walked back and incidentally met the same bus with the friendly driver again! Got back to the guest house at 13.00 to pick up our backpack and hopped on a bus at 13.30. The last 2 seats squeezed in the back row! That was just the start - later more and more people got in and sat on stools or had to stand - the overloaded bus swaying around corners - each time there was a police check - the over-numbered had to get out and walk 500m to board again! It was quite a drive over exciting mountains but we did not see much of the view - we were busy clinging to our seats like cowboys at a rodeo! We reached Yuanyang at 4pm and Peggy easily found a room for 30Y, suitable for a small laundry:-). Made a little turn to look for a place to have dinner but first had a cool beer and a basket of seasoned shredded mushrooms! For dinner we settled for a cold buffet which was ok but not as exciting as 2 days ago. BTW many things did not work here. No light in the toilet, water dropping from ceilings in the WC/shower - at least we got our thermos for our coffee right away after complaining!</p>		<p>shuttle to Tuanshan: 30', return:30', bus to Yuanyang: 2.5h</p>	
		<p>Jianshui City Wall</p>	<p>Gate to old Street</p>
		<p>Ov'Bridge Noodles</p>	<p>Qing Mansion - Tuanshan</p>

18. March	Start: Yuanyang New	End: Laomeng (老勐)	on way: 3h
<p>As I write this I feel very weak with a heavy cold and Peggy feels bad because it is a nuisance for her to stand my bad condition. It was a day with highs and lows!.....</p>		<p>van to Yuanyang old: 1.5h, to Laomeng: 1.5h</p>	

First in the morning Peggy did not manage to get a ticket to the known old Yuanyang town - why that? In the end we boarded a share van at 8.30 for 10Y. We were the first passengers - we crossed the whole town 3 times until there were enough people to move on....then after an nice drive we reached Yuanyang, genuinely hanging high on a mountain slope by 10am.

We had come this way to walk to the famous stairfields of this region. We walked in every direction and only at about 11.15 after the 6th interview we found the right path. It was a lovely walk of about 1h each way through nice stairfields and 2 villages with locals dressed in traditional clothes and the whole array of farming animals. It was one of the journey's highlights!

Then getting back to bus station - no bus - although the schedule on the wall promised a bus every 30minutes! The local van drivers were over us like a swarm of flies!!!! So in the end we just took the road and walked out of town and had cool beer at the last shak. Peggy then strolled along the road and suddenly hailed a 'return van' happy to have passengers at all - 30Y for 2 for 50km! Exciting ride over huge mountain chains and through deep valleys with views to countless 'hanging' villages and stairfields.

At 15.15 we reached Laomeng, a very small and very lost town and we felt like resting for the remnant of the day in this quiet place within high mountains with banana plantations on their slopes. Had to walk about 500m to the town center and there Peggy got a room in one of the 2 guest houses for 30Y (although 2 other passengers on business favoured the other guest house for 70Y).

By now my nose had turned into a rinning tap... we had a shower and a short rest before going for a turn to look for a bite. Ther was a little food market. A stall serving 'over the bridge noodles' - the right thing when you have a cold was the runner! I did not stop at that... the spicey food boosted my appetite and so we had bbq-ed everything from chicken and pork intestines to beef and beancurd and 5 bottles of beer (to replace the liquid). The time passed very quickly as there was a lot of local life going on - perhaps some of the locals showed up to see the 'lau ai' - but they were very discrete! Got back to room after 8pm. Bed time!



Yuanyang - a Town perched on a Mountain



Yuanyang - beautiful Stairfields



Yuanyang - Minority People



Laomeng - Exciting BBQ

19. March	Start: Laomeng	End: Jiangcheng (江城)	on way: 7h
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Today was a very hard day for me - just before I wrote this I was terribly shaking from feeling feverish and I could hardly swallow a bowl of rice for dinner....hmmm!
We left the guest house at 8.30 and walked back to the junction. There a few empty van were waiting and we would have to pay full house or await open ended. We just walked into the narrow valley under banana leaves and hoped that a nearly full van will take us. After 2 km a van picked us up and took us for about 20km to a small village, perhaps Ezhaxiang (饿札乡). Now we really just had to wait.....we waited in front of a small store and Peggy chatted now and again. Unbelievable but there comes a couple of foreigners on a tandem! Unbelievable - I said hello but they did not return my greeting!

We waited for 45 minutes - unbelievable but there came a bus!
Another 50km along the vietnamese border (police check) over wild mountain ranges we reached Luechun (绿春) at noon. Just before we reached Luechun we crossed over a new expressway which explained our confusions about buses no more going our way - China moves fast! Got tickets for the next bus at 2.30 and as I felt weak we just had a dish of tasty fried noodles and then made a small turn in town!

Only after leaving we realised that we where on a 5-6h ride and we would arrive after 8 in the dark. One of those rides 170km over mountains, mountains, mountains and never ending winding roads (sometimes tracks) - but nice sceneries with banana and tea plantations, stairfields, lively villages. We arrived in Jiangcheng in deep dark - but Peggy found a good room in a small side street within 10 minutes (she must have the nose for that) . Then we went for a bite, both not feeling hungry.... the restaurant boss insisted on whole portions... two young blokes invited us to their table to share as they had ordered too much. So we just had a bowl of rice (which I could hardly swallow) and a bite of their food. Soon I started shivering and so we went to have a good hot shower!

van to Ezhaxiang: 30',
bus to Luechun: 1h.
bus to Jiangcheng 5.5h



Smoking



Peggy practising for Grandkids



Exhaxiang Lonely Bikers



Luechun End of World

20. March	Start: Jiangcheng	End: Mengla (勐腊).	on way: 7h
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After a very uncomfortable night (chest pain) Peggy got up at 6.30 and said I should rest while she would go for tickets. But then she did this and that and only left at 8.20 - at 8.45 she came back and said she had tickets for the 9.10 bus. As we have little to pack there was no problem and we even had time to buy mantau (kind of soft bread - if you feel sick - that's what you go for). The bus left at 9.40 (as on the ticket). After 11am it stopped already for lunch and we could not resist to try speciality cold noodles with spices! The small village was in the midst of banana plantations and there were a few Thai-style houses.

bus to Yiwu: 4h, to Menglun: 1.5h,
to Mengla: 1.5h



Cold Noodles - Ohoh?



Thai-style Houses

Since the bus was very comfortable I asked Peggy why she got tickets to the first stop only (there was no bus to Mengla) - so Peggy asked the driver for an extension to the 2nd stop - Yiwu (易武). No problem (just a few yuan) but then Peggy saw that we passed 1km beside a strange village. She then looked up her 'Lonely Planet' and realised that we had missed out THE ONE Thai village she wanted to visit and so she was very frustrated for a long time. When we got off at the next stop, we still had to walk 4 km uphill to Yiwu. But then it was a nice scenic walk through tea country - strong sun - but I only realised in the village that this was an upcoming major touristic tea center! Tea tasting farms like wineries in France, Australia.....



Gate to Yiwu at 4km



Tea Plantations



Tea Tasting

In Yiwu there was no more bus to Mengla today....so Peggy took a ticket to Menglun (勐仑镇) on the way to Jinhong. It was getting late and feeling sick I got nervous when the bus turned towards Jinhong and followed that course for 20km (through nice jungle - I must admit). Both of us were frustrated - it was a hassle!! Wonder 1: Peggy immediately got a bus to Mengla! Wonder 2: A new expressway to Mengla! So in the end we reached Mengla at 6pm already! Wow - well done! Mengla with touristic ambitions is close to the Laos border, so it features a few monstrosities of hotels.....but quite impressive and exciting in some ways! After walking about 1km on a huge avenue Peggy found a big and comfortable room for 50Y and booked it for 2 nights! Then went for a simple dinner with fried rice, fried noodles and succulent mushrooms and afterwards we had the best shower so far!



A modern Hotel in Mengla

21. March	Start: Mengla	End: stay	on way: 3h (Peggy)
<p>I had a terrible night with very painful bronchitis and bad head-ache. As I still felt feverish in the morning and the bed and room were very comfortable I decided to stay in bed. I encouraged Peggy to do her planned trip to the Laos Border at Mohan (磨憨) by herself, not to waste the day. So Peggy left at 9am and I watched the curling world championship in Lucerne on CCTV-5!!! The China Team was there and playing well but I also saw how the Swiss women played badly to be eliminated in the round robin! Peggy already came back at 2pm and said that the trip to the border (2x1.5h) was ok but that I did not really miss out anything. Then she went for a small turn in Mengla City. At 5 pm she was back already and again had nothing special to report. So I did not miss out much in bed but now I felt like having a small bite. 1 dish of fried noodles and 1 dish of vegetables for us 2 and that was enough!</p> <p>Remarks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Feeling weak I really missed sitting toilets - Peggy seems to get trouble too - hope it's not my flu! - half of visa time gone - I doubt we will make it up to Nu Jiang! 		<p>(Peggy only) bus to Laos Border: 1.5h, back to Mengla: 1.5h</p>  <p>My Day Out of Service</p>  <p>Historical Border France - China</p>  <p>Laos Border at Mohan</p>	

22. March	Start: Mengla	End: Guanlei (关累)	on way: 5h
<p>Even both of us had a bad night and not feeling well we decided to continue as planned. We boarded a small bus to a remote village, Mengrun (勐润), where Peggy believed we would be at the shore of the Mekong. But there was no Mekong and people said that we were too much south and also at a dead end. No problem - the ride passing small towns with Burmese temples and through small valleys and along rubber plantations had been nice and it was interesting to see how the farmers delivered the rubber milk at several stations. We were also thrilled walking past a variety of lovely traditional Burma/Thai-style houses, probably more authentic than the ones we missed out 2 days ago!</p>		<p>bus to Man Nuodong: 2h, to Mengmanzhen: 1h to Guanlei: 2h</p>  <p>Burmese Temple</p>  <p>Rubber Milk</p>  <p>Burmese Farmhouse</p>	
<p>After a couple of hours we backtracked to Mengmanzhen (勐满镇) to continue north to Guanlei which we reached after a lovely drive through exotic vegetation. Peggy found a room easily and so we went for a walk to the Mekong shore. Was nice to see the Mekong again which we had crossed 500km up-river on an adventurous walk in 2005. The Myanmar shore opposite was a steep high mountain and no human presence to see. We strolled around for long while and relaxed! Guanlei is a very small town with quite many restaurants and quite a few guest houses - why? Passenger ferries have stopped service but there are still goods ships exchanging cargo with lorries and the biggest modern building is the toll house.</p>		 <p>Mekong at Guanlei</p>	
<p>Although we had no appetite we went out to look for a bite and after rejecting most opportunities we stopped at a busy stall serving a special kind of hot pot: Peggy took a basket and filled it with a choice of meat and vegies then handed the basket to the cook who put it all into a net to cook it in a large boiling pot. After a while we had it all in our dishes and it was so yammie that we were tempted to order some more. For once we kept reasonable and also only had 2 bottles of beer (3.6%).</p>			

23. March	Start: Guanlei	End: Lancang (澜沧)	on way: 8h
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<p>Another bronchitis night.... Got up early for 8am bus...got to the tiny backyard bus station at 7.45 but bus hat left. So we waited for the 9am bus which actually left at 9.30. Gentle and lovely drive to Jinhong where we crossed the Mekong again at 13.00. Jinhong (景洪) is a large city with many phantasy-buildings. We had not planned to stay and did not feel like it either. So Peggy looked for a bus to Lancang - no more today! So we hopped to the overfull bus to the next place, Menghai (勐海) which we reached after crossing a pass. There we immediately changed bus to Lancang. Lovely drive for 180km arriving at 18.00. This was truly enough when you feel ill and weak and also without a single bite the whole day! Then it took Peggy a bit longer than usual to find a room, right opposite of a clinic (I wondered if I should see a doctor - but I did not dare of fear that they would keep me for bird flu). Hungry as we were we even had to walk a long way to look for a bite and when we got to a huge food market at 8pm we were still too early and so we settled for 2 noodle soups doing today's trick. Got back to the room at 9pm - I was finished!</p>	<p>bus to Jinhong 3.5h, to Menghai 1.5h, to Lancang 3h</p>  <p>Huge Banana Farm</p>
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24. March	Start: Lancang	End: Gengma (耿马)	on way: 4h
<p>Another suffering night from bronchitis.....but we did not want to stay in Lancang (what for?) and still wanted to try to do the whole trip including the Nu Jiang Valley! Got up early to take the 8.30 bus to Shuangjiang (双江) - NO BUS at 8.30! We were given following choices: a) 9am bus to a small place Xiacheng (下城) - not even on my map! b) 11am bus to Shuangjiang - in fact a detour for to reaching Gengma! c) 1pm bus to Gengma - exactly what we wanted but starting too late (we thought)!</p> <p>So we went for a) Xiacheng - also to make sure to get away from Lancang! We reached very small Xiacheng at 11am - and were told that the next bus to Shuangjiang only leaves at 3pm - and there would be no bus to Gengma! So we were stuck in this small place and as it was very hot we just had quick noodles and otherwise were just hanging around and using the facilities.</p>			<p>bus to Xiacheng 2h, to Gengma 2h</p>  <p>The Facilities in Xiacheng</p>
<p>Close to 3pm we got impatient as there was still no bus just then a bus to Gengma turned in (the one leaving Lancang at 1pm) and Peggy went right away to the ticket counter to change the tickets - 'no can change' although the bus was half empty! After a row with the ticket woman Peggy went to ask for help from the bus driver who after heated discussion with the ticket woman managed for Peggy to get her way! Uff! Now we had a very comfortable and enjoyable ride over side roads through most exciting country-side to Gengma! We arrived late afternoon and Peggy very quickly found a comfortable room just behind the station... which left us just enough time to walk about 2km up a hill with a burmese buddha tower on the top to admire the great roundview in sunset atmosphere.</p>			  <p>Gengma Nice Views and other Views</p>
<p>On the way back we crossed an exciting place to eat - but I was feeling too sick to eat there - what a shame! So we got back to the guest house and just had a few noodles before going to the room to have some biscuits and a morcel of chocolate. PS Peggy already got tickets for Nansan for 8.30 tomorrow. PPS Now I started to really get worried about my health - after several days I still felt week, the bronchitis persisted and now I had absoluteley horrid stuff coming out of my nose and even the eyes which tended to glue the lids together and now we were going continue for 2 hard days over side roads in lost border areas!</p>			

25. March	Start: Gengma	End: Nansan (南伞)	on way: 4.5h
<p>Suffering night again - good bed and good room, fortunately!</p> <p>The bus left on time at 8.30. Nice morning ride over mountains to Mengding and over some more mountains to Nansan which instead of being a small lost place had already become a modern border town! As it was 11am only we first looked for a bus to continue but there was no real option and there would be a direct bus to Tengchong next morning. So we decided to stay for the day.....it took Peggy a while to find a room while I waited with the backpacks at the station, having a chat with a young chinese lady from Cuxi on the way to Thailand. She spoke some English because she has (or had) a boyfried from Wales (she met in Thailand). Peggy at last found a mini-room with common facilities but it all was clean and the shower hot! At 2pm we set out for a 3km walk to the Myanmar border station which had been built just recently and looked quite busy. Later, as we walked back another way we came accross a sort of bamboo village on poles hosting several Thai restaurants. Under normal circumstances we would have ventured for a meal - but I just could not face to eat a proper meal. So we continued our walk back with a 2 km unwanted detour - but there is always something interesting to see - hills with pagodas, strange buildings and shops, all sorts of people, parks etc. Got back to the room - I was exhausted by the small walk. A shower, a rest and then at 7pm went out looking for a bite. Turning around and around - no appetite - in the end Peggy settled for a small place and ordered foogua (bitter courgette) with beef and a dish of hollow vegetables (my preferred)... 'l'appetit vient en mangeant....in the end we ate more and better than imagined! The 'clou': in the end I inherited some of that pure schnaps from the next vacated table - hahaha! Got to the room at 9pm.</p>			<p>bus to Nansan: 4.5h</p>  <p>Oversized Avenues</p>  <p>Oversized Border</p>

26. March	Start: Nansan	End: Tengchong (腾冲)	on way: 8h
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Lot of coughing but a bit less heavy.... the turn to better?
 Got to the bus early. I was relieved to see that it was a small standard bus - we managed to get seats 1 and 2 - important for a long drive to enjoy the view. The bus left on time at 9.30 and it was really an enjoyable drive - over mountains, through valleys, villages forests, fields and twice over the Nu Jiang River which we expected to join and follow further North. A few times I was upset that I did not yet manage to handle my new camera efficiently and so I missed many good scenes like the one when after crossing the Nu Jiang a few black monkeys crossed the road. Short time later we stopped for lunch brake at Mengnuo (勐糯), a small town with traditional character. We walked off the main street peeping into old but well maintained clay houses.
 Btw, we liked these small 'honest' buses most - you feel part of the country, you feel the roads, smell what's outside and the mutual perception between passenger is more intimate. Then also, police checks take less time - we had 3 today!
 We arrived at 6pm already (I had expected 7) but even then my behind was through!
 Tengchong has become quite a big city (we had merely passed by in 2005) . It's famous for the volcanic formations and thermal springs in the vicinity. We decided to stay 2 nights and Peggy found a good room 10 minutes from the big bus station and 10 minutes from the old town center.
 First time for some days we both felt like eating and found a good place where we had an excellent sweet water fish 'cocotte' and spinach-like vegetable with local traditional bacon.
 During the day we had only eaten a mantau (small soft bun) and 4 banana's which we had received at last night's guest house. Throughout the trip we had locally grown ripe bananas!
 Got back to room at 20.30 - shower and Peggy made laundry.
 PS Even in Google Earth I could not yet figure out in detail which way we took from Mengnuo to Tengchong (for a short while we followed S137 - a number I did not find on any map).



27. March	Start: Tengchong	End: Tengchong	on way: 1h
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Today's plan was to visit the traditional village - Heshun (和顺), to find out how to continue to Liuku and of course to visit the old city of Tengchong. First we walked to 3 different bus stations to see if there is an off-the-main-road itinerary to Liuku, the starting point to the upper Nu Jiang Valley. As we did not get conclusive answers we decided to take the direct way to Liuku the next day.
 Then we had to walk around to find the shuttle to Heshun which we reached after 5km.....as we got off, we realised immediately that Heshun is just a rebuilt village - chinese tourist trap behind walls and a big gate which you cannot pass unless you pay 80Y entrance fee!
 As we had seen the bus continuing on a small road through nice fields to the other side of the valley we decided to follow that way on foot. After 2km we reached another traditional village - Dazhuang (大庄). This village was alive and open to satisfy our curiosity. So we enjoyed to stroll through narrow streets peeping into people's yards - then we happened to pass a local distillery - after a quick 'degustation' we had my little bottle refilled with 40° mijiū, the natural rice spirit. Mission accomplie!
 Easy to take shuttle nr 6 back to town.



Then had a few nice hours strolling through small streets with exciting markets, an old confucian temple and many yammie looking eating places..... had tasty and spicy lasagne-type pasta at a moslem place (under a picture of the Kaaba) and later a churros-type desert at a yammie stall!
 Then walked back to the bus station to get tickets tu Liuku - now we were thirsty but could not find any cold beer and so at 4pm went to the room for a rest - Peggy colored her hair and washed a few T-shirts while I watched billiard on CCTV.
 At 6.30 we walked out and it took us 1km round-walking to choose the right place - tonight was cool and we had to wear our sweaters.



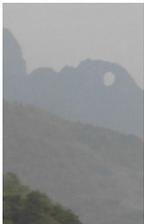
Eventually we settled for a Thai-Burmese place (furnished like a fast-food) with normal comfortable chairs (instead of usual small stools) and the only place serving cool beer! Had my favourite lasagne-type noodles again with rice, vegetables and spare ribs.
 On the way back we saw food stalls (mostly BBQ) coming alive in every corner but serving had not even started. No wonder it was not easy for us to find a place before. I then realised that we both followed Chinese standard time while Western Yunan would be about 2h behind Beijing regarding the sun's position.
 We did not really mind as we still did not feel our systems to be robust enough to confront real challenges.



Review of Trip Schedule
 We had reached Tengchong on the earliest possible date with the chosen itinerary! **WELL DONE Peggy!**
 We pressed on due to the 30 days limit of my visa. Now we had the options to drive up to the top of the Nu Jiang Valley knowing

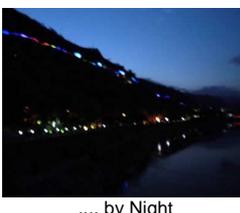
that every day delay would mean rushing ever quicker back to Hongkong - or then to take it easy!
We went for the Nu Jiang Valley.....

28. March	Start: Tengchong	End: Fugong (福贡)	on way: 9h	
<p>Still bad coughing at night then easy morning. Got the bus to Liuku (六庫) at 9am. Soon after start the bus driver asked everybody for 5Y to join new (not even officially opened) motorway. We then got off the motorway after 30km to join small roads across side valleys then over a mountain to another motorway which we left again just before it crossed the Nujiang. Then continued on main road for 100km to Liuku. This was a wide fertile valley with everything from tobacco, grapes, corn, rice, barley, various fruit.... Peggy chatted at length with a local who was on a visiting trip to the top of the valley when after 4h, only half hour left to Liuku, the bus stopped for lunch in a very small place - seemed silly - well, Peggy and I shared a delicious beef soup with rice!</p>		<p>Bus to Liuku 5h, to Fugong 4h</p>  <p>Beef Soup with Peggy's friend</p>		
<p>We arrived in Liuku at 14.15. At Peggy's friend's suggestion we just caught a bus at 14.40 to continue to Fugong long way up in the upper Nujiang Valley. The scenery had changed - a wild narrow valley, sometimes wild river, the mountains steadily growing higher. We also crossed many small villages most of them with christian churches! Apparently 80'000 christians live in this region. Just before reaching Fugong we got a glimpse of snow covered slopes below a layer of clouds covering the peak-tops (over 4000m) - what a pity!</p>		 <p>Nujiang Gorge</p>	 <p>Church</p>	 <p>Village</p>
<p>We reached Fugong at 18.30 - Peggy easily found a room and then we had a simple meal: my preferred lasagne-type noodles and shredded potatoes on fried rice. Then made a short walk in town and crossed a large sports square/park while being aware that the high mountains over-towered the surrounding buildings. Peggy was a bit disappointed that Liuku and even more Fugong were not little mountain villages but turned out to be sizeable and bustling towns. I, in the contrary was happy to have made it here at all and also that Peggy was determined to make it up to the top! Wait and see - perhaps there will be a Chinese surprise:-)</p>		 <p>Fugong</p>		

29. March	Start: Fugong	End: Gongshan (贡山)	on way: 5h		
<p>Today we got to the END! But it was like bouncing back! TIME TO GO HOME!</p>		<p>Van to Gongshan 3.5h, bus to Bingzhongluo 1h, walk 2h, bus to Gongshan 0.5h</p>			
<p>We left Fugong at 8am (still coughing at night) by minivan to Bingzhongluo (丙中洛) at 40km. It was a spectacular drive to continue along the river to Gongshan with a lot of folklore, people getting in and out every few kms and some ardently telling the driver their 'scenes de menage'. Somewhere on the way I was allowed a photo stop to take a picture of the Stone Moon Mountain with a huge round hole high up. We reached Gongshan in good shape - but Gongshan was everything else than a mountain village - it had a 'decorated' entrance avenue - apart from that it was an ugly town. Well - we took it as educational site-seeing (Davos is not a mountain village either anymore).</p>		 <p>Vue over Valley..</p>	 <p>with 'Stone Moon'</p>	 <p>Gongshan - Center</p>	
<p>Peggy got the bus to the much praised Bingzhongluo (丙中洛) very quickly and again we had an exciting ride passing the bends of the Nujiang (2 Tibetan monks busy with their smartphones all the way). Just when I figured out that we were just 5km from target the bus stopped at a gate - 100Y each - I just got off to the road and started to walk back without a word! Peggy followed and agreed that this is not our way....another tourist trap! So instead of staying at Bingzhongluo (with a re-knowned Christian Church) in very dull weather we decided to walk back for a big portion of the way.</p>		 <p>Monk with 2 Smartphones</p>	 <p>Tourist Advertisement</p>	 <p>Bridge to Village on Top</p>	 <p>Farmhouse with Mao-Poster</p>
<p>Hardly any traffic, nice scenery (but under low clouds) and also crossing a long dangling hanging bridge for fun compensated for the missed highlight. We enjoyed the 12km walk even it rained lightly some of the time - the only time while walking and just here! - but then I was also a bit disappointed comparing with our trip along the upper Yangtze Valleys in 2005. Eventually we hopped on a bus back to Gongshan at 16.30. It took Peggy 45 minutes to find a clean room (record!). The room was very small (2.2m x 2.8m), which really depressed me! So we walked out right away and as there was not much else to do we looked for somewhere to eat.....it was a bit early and we walked twice up and down the whole town (even past ghetto-type buidings from Culture Revolution time) and at long last sat down at a table.... as nothing happened after 15 minutes we asked when things would start - the waiter then used his nice smart phone to ask - not before half an hour!</p>		 <p>Ghetto-type Building</p>			

Today not much seemed to go our way!

So we walked out and tried a place right in front of our guest-house - bingo! - the food (fried meet, vegi and rice) was excellent! They even had good corn wine - I had 2 cups (12°- not Schnaps). As Peggy was tired we returned to the mini-room at 19.30. PS Got some typical gray Nujiang sand for Jean-Fred!

30. March	Start: Gongshan	End: Liuku (六庫)	on way: 9h
<p>Peggy got up at 6.15 to look for a bite - gar nüüüt! As it was raining and no view we just killed time till the bus left for Liuku at 8.50. Nice and smooth drive until 10am (rain stopped gradually) when we were stopped by a light car accident on a narrow bridge. Had we passed 5 minutes earlier it would have been no problem for us. So we expected a very long wait! Now: 30 mins for police to arrive, 15 mins talking, shouting and photos and 5 mins to move one car away and then we continued - quite efficient! The bus stopped at lunch time for half hour in Fugong and so we rushed back to the former night's restaurant and had 2 good huge yammie noodle soups. When we got back after 28 minutes the bus was already full and people patiently waiting just for us two!</p>		<p>bus to Liuku 8.5h (wait 1 h), shuttle 0.5h (wash 10')</p>   <p>Collision on bridge mmhh!!!</p>	
<p>The driver did not look in a hurry in spite of delay and continued driving smoothly and as the weather cleared up we had a beautiful ride down the valley to Liuku. I was having a very sore bum towards the end and was very impatient to get there - when just 10 minutes before the end, the bus stopped for taking fuel.....then we reached the bus station which was 3km out of the city at 17.30 instead of 16.00. There was no sign of public transport to the city but Peggy found the way to the shuttle starting point taking us 5mins. Got in - soon bus moved 20m and then the driver got out and took his time to wash the bus. Well Peggy had the tickets for the onward journey tomorrow - so all was under control. After a short ride we reached the city - it took Peggy quite a while to get a room but then we settled at 18.50 and already left for a turn at 7pm! Well that's what you call busy backpackers travel in China!</p>		 <p>Nujiang Gorge</p>	
<p>We then squeezed trough a small market down to the river - walked along the posh river promenade - bought a cool beer and had it while crossing the bridge with nice views to both sides - when Peggy suddenly observed some people walking high up on the opposite slope - what's that?!! Peggy insisted to walk up there even I was concerned about the darkness to set in soon. Much to our surprise it was a proper walking path with big parts of it on wooden constructions enabling a round trip high over the river with marvellous evening views over the city and the surrounding mountains! Another surprise then was that the path had been fitted on its whole way with fluorescent tubes which kept changing colour and which on one hand illuminated the path on the other hand formed a light show for people walking along the river promenade.....ok, that was a nice 'kitsch' for once. Getting back to town over the other bridge there was a lot going on with street dancing and people strolling on the promenade. Then when we looked around for somewhere to eat but there were mostly touristic restaurants and it took us a while to find our standard - rice, beef, vegi and a few bbq sticks - then my noodles came (but soup instead of fried). Got back to room unusually late at 21.30. Public shower /wc - but very clean!</p>		  <p>Liuku - Bridge over Nujiang Path to see View</p>	
		  <p>View from Top by Night</p>	
<p>Note: Liuku is in the process of becoming a big touristic center - large infrastructure projects are in progress and we saw big road constructions which looked like a motorway cutting through the mountain chains to short-cut with the Kunming-Dali-Baoshan Motorway. We were here just on time!</p>			

31. March	Start: Liuku	End: Yonping (永平)	on way: 3h
<p>I was lucky the bus left at 12 only! I had been constipated for 1 week and it took me 3h of labour to releave!</p>		<p>bus to Yonping: 3h</p>	
<p>We left at 10am and strolled again through the market to the river and then walked leisurely along or above the river to the distant bus station. Easy and very nice ride over a high pass to link with the Lancang (Mekong). We were lucky that we just managed to cross a landslide while stones still kept bouncing over the road about every minute. Our driver hesitated for long 10 mins before he was prepared to take the risk to pass. We then followed the Mekong for 5km before joining the motorway to Yonping where we arrived at 3pm. As the weather was very nice we decided to stay and take a rest. Peggy got a good room very quickly or not?</p>		  <p>View of Mekong Mosque outside Town</p>	

When I turned up they turned me down... no foreigners.... 'The pc cannot read my passport and Peggy's Hk-Id'... which is a bad excuse as no pc could read our papers anywhere else either! I still get offended when this happens - although I know that I just have to live with it!
 Well Peggy then found another reasonable room more or less opposite - no fuss. Just loosing 30 mins and feeling frustrated!
 After a yammie tidbit at the market we felt the need for a cool beer. After a few turns getting deeper into the very nice market someone called us - 'Hey! What the hell are you doing here?' - it was an American chap with a chinese wife who, a year ago, had inherited her father's medicine shop, so they decided to leave USA and settle in Yonping! After a chat we asked where we could get a cool beer - 'nowhere' he said! Well we enjoyed this big original market extending over several narrow streets and then discovered a schnaps-shop. Although we had no bottle we had a degustation and I settled for a 50°barley and we said we would ret urn with a bottle a bit later. Short time later Peggy discovered the only 2 cool beer bottles in town - at a small noodle stall - yammie chicken noodle soups!!!!!!
 When we got back to the schnaps-shop with the bottle - it was already closed...mhhh! We had bought picknick to have it at out room with tea and schnapps.....well...now we did with warm beer....



Tidbits at the nice Market



A real Schnaps Shop

We already had tickets to Kunming - bus to leave a 9.20 - 7h ride, expected in Kunming at 16.30 with our intention to get out of this huge metropole right away - wait and see - april 1st!

Note: We had passed Yonping in 2005 just to change bus after coming from Dali. We then continued with a mini-van taking us to a small village to start our adventure walk over the Mekong!

1. April	Start: Yonping	End: Kunming (East Station)	on way: 9h
<p>Long night (coughing). Got out at 8.30 to walk through market for a bite on the way to the bus station. Big surprise! The schnaps-shop was open and I could buy my barley - great stuff in warm 3%-beer country! The bus left on time - right to the motorway and all seemed to go as expected - when suddenly after 3h the bus left the motorway, entered a village and stopped at a small workshop! Loosing liquid - hmm - after 15 mins the problem was solved and we had only lost 20 mins! After 430km with some lovely sceneries with poor motorway perspective - but then some entertainment on board - e.g. my seat neighbour, a young lady taking fashion pictures of herself and publishing them in Facebook - nice looking lady but nose so high up I did not even dare smiling at her! We reached the Kunming-West bus station at 16.10 - on time!</p>		<p>bus to Kunming West: 6.5h, shuttle to center: 1h, to Nth station: 1h, to E station: 0.5h</p>  <p>My 'lovely' Bus-Neighbour</p>	
<p>Now - as was to be expected there were no buses to eastern destinations. People told Peggy to take - Nr. 82 to center, 96 to North Station) - cross a 10 million city in rush hour on ordinary city buses! Two lovely girl students even helped us with the connection as it was not obvious where to change bus. We reached the North station which was at the very end of the suburbs in 1h45 at 18.30. But now! No buses in eastern direction and no further info by unfriendly ticket people! Go back to City - No way!! Eventually Peggy found someone who told us that there is a East Station and that there is a bus (C136) leaving occasionally. Lucky, it left at 18.45! The bus drove all around the periphery of the city - settlements, fields, industry - and it was getting dark - suddenly a bus terminal almost in the middle of nowhere! Modern compound including a glossy hotel - not our style.</p>			
<p>Just before turning into the compound we had seen, at some distance, a rather shabby looking sttlement with 4-storey buildings with a guesthouse advertisement. That's where we went (a guy turned up and tried to get us into a shabby guest house - no way!) Peggy had already spottet another advertisement and after getting rid of that guy (we had to be rude) Peggy got a reasonable room for 40Y. There were also a few small places to have a bite - turning out to be an excellent meal - champignon & chicken in a dicey chili sauce, good vegies and (my favourite) a big portion of fried peanuts! Cold beer unlimited.</p>		 <p>Tired - nice dinner</p>	 <p>View from Room</p>
<p>PS Today in Kunming I had felt like a participant of M6-TV's Peking Express! At the North Station I had one of my stress crises - I hoped a big hole opens and makes everything disappear!</p>			

2. April	Start: Kunming (East Sation)	End: Anlong (安龙)	on way: 7.5h
<p>Drama in wc from 4 to 8am until I was relieved for good! The Bus to Xingyi (兴义) left at 9.30. Smoothe ride to Stone Forest with a stop nearby after we had seen a few samples of the typical rock-pillars. Then a very attractive ride passing Yunping through interminable colsa-fields (Raps) with the Guilin-type hills in the background. This plain is famous for the yellow blossoms to horizon (which we missed by about 2 weeks - never mind - we have it at home too). We then entered the hills about 50km before Xingyi which we had also visited in 2005, a small town at that time .</p>		<p>us to Xingyi 6h, bus to Anlong 1.5h</p>  <p>Glimpse of Stone F'est</p>  <p>Long Drive through famous Colsa Fields</p>	
<p>In the meantime Xingyi has become a modern town and we did hardly recognize anything between the many high-rises. The city has now 2 bus stations and we even had to take a shuttle to get to the other station (with help of a friendly local) to catch the bus to Anlong. We had to squeeze to get seats (first time this trip on a regular bus) but got good seats. First 30' driving in and around town before connecting to motorway. The hilly scenery stayed nice but the weather gradually got gray and when we left the bus it</p>			

was rather cool and rough!

The station was outside town and so we wanted to find out about next day buses. It was only 6pm and the ticket counters just closed and no one even wanted to answer any questions. I was very frustrated as I felt pressured about my visa expiry! When we left the station we saw that it would be about 1km to walk to town and there was a kind lady who fished Peggy to look at her family's guest house. For once Peggy followed the 100m to a lonely small range of buildings and got a reasonable room (35Y).

Then just got out to eat next door in a very simple restaurant (as usually) and had a good meal being looked after well by the cook and his wife (owners). Pork with fugua, fried tofu, rice (and some of my schnaps).

Satisfied we returned to room at 8.30 - feeling better now - we decided to stay tomorrow and keep the room for 2 nights. Peggy then made her last laundry. At night there was a thunderstorm. PS I really wondered what made Peggy want to hang on in Anlong - I was still very concerned about my visa and I would only have given up this 1 day reserve closer to the end.



After a good Meal - the Owners

3. April	Start: Anlong	End: Anlong	on way: 0h
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After 2am I could no more sleep - I felt stressed about the way back. In principle we have 3 days to go for 1500km (not counting the questionable reserve of the 31st day)!

When we got out at 9am we had a quite poor and shabby impression of the environment in a very gray misty morning and I was glad that Peggy at last decided to buy tickets to the next bigger town, Baise (or Bose), for the next morning - at least now I had the confidence that we were going the right way back! We then took a little detour to town along a modern 6 lane road with touristic street lamps, bike lanes and pedestrian pavements already decaying even before the new suburbs are built - looked like fake!

By the time we reached town at 10am and we had our reconciling -noodle soups the weather cleared up, just in time for us to enjoy walking all the way through town on this long bustling main street. We really enjoyed as Anlong was surrounded by dozens, hundreds of cake-like hills. At the end of town we continued for a while through fields and when joining the road back saw a shed where a young women sold schnaps (this time I chose 40° rice wine). On the way back we climbed up to two of the hills to admire marvellous 360° views - in between we run into an ancient catholic monastery which is now used as shed for farming and at 200m distance we passed a new christian church (not yet open) with surrounding rocks and a Madonna Cave à la Lourdes and just behind the hill a brand-new chinese temple overlooking town (for tourists?). Now we were ready for that really cold beer.....we sat on the small stools in front of the little shop. We got back to the room happy at 3.45. At 4pm we already sat in the eating place next door ordering the 'Gnagi Hot Pot' we had in mind since last night! The cook and wife were as kind as ever and in the end at 6pm I felt like after a treat of 400g Cordon Bleu in Holziken/AG.

So in hindsight, the day which looked to me like wasted this morning turned out to be a great success! Thanks to the winds from Yunan which brought the sun and thanks to Peggy for expecting it!

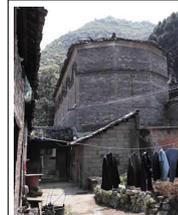
walking in and around town: 6.5h



Last Opportunity...



View of cone-shaped Hills



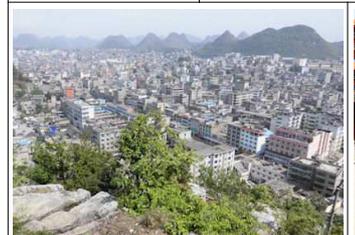
Old Monastery



New Church



Lourdes Copy



Splendid View of Anlong



New Temple

4. April	Start: Anlong	End: Baise (百色)	on way: 3.5h
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We got up very early and could take it easy to the bus leaving at 9.20.

bus to Baize: 3.5h

Mostly on motorway it took a short 3.5h for the 200km to Baise.

Baize is quite a city as we found out later and the bus station and ticket counters were very crowded. Under pressure Peggy found out that continuing to Liuzhou (as expected) or at least Hechi would mean that we would arrive very late with all the unpleasant feelings arriving at night in a unknown place. Even if I was getting nervous again about time running out I agreed to stay in Baize for the rest of day.

Peggy found a room (a shed under the roof) very quickly thanks to her experience and skills.



Big Tributary to Pearl River

Right after putting down the bags we went round the corner to have a beer (to calm down) and a bite. The beer was cool and the bite was a delicious stick of I don't know what and Peggy had a good chat with the owner who told her a few things to see from heroic communist times (1929...) and before.

Peggy did not really get the details but we started right way! After 1km we reached a big bridge over the river from where we had a good overview. So first we entered a compound of old communist settlements - they looked awkward but are still in use and in one of the yards we sat down at a shop and had a cool Tsing Tao!

Then we walked along the promenade, an long alley beside the river and admired the stately pre-revolution building fronts with lovely balconies!



Revolution-time Blocks



First Tsing Tao after long Time!



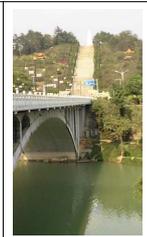
Nice Buildings with Balconies

Eventually we reached the old port area with a historical 1929-bar in memory of the long march, the confluence of a side river forming the port and a 600m street with rows of ornamented pre-revolution commercial buildings - all well maintained! Half way there was a very richly ornamented Tao temple which had been the 7th army general's and his officers' head quarters.....an interesting museum showing complete living scenes of the 'long march times'!

Having enough time we also undertook climbing under burning sun the long monumentous 320 steps to the long march memorial on top of a dominant hill. On the way back we made a turn through the many exciting narrow market streets, had a few well deserved cool beers and fried noodles and vegetables cooked at heating distance!

Got to the room at 7pm - it was hot and now we noticed the air conditioning - which worked indeed! Nice clean shower in the common wc (we were the only guests on that floor). We lived on the 7th floor, first time with lift but strangely separated from main hotel floor (for 40Y).

This time Peggy was also concerned about reaching Hongkong on the 30th day especially with tomorrow's detour via Liuzhou. But we both agreed that the half day spent in Baise was worth-while!



7th Army Meeting - Long March

Memorial Hill

5. April	Start: Baise	End: Liuzhou (柳州)	on way: 7.5h
<p>We left at 9.10 on a luxury bus to Liuzhou which was half empty. I took the opportunity to sit in front on top of the driver although the windows were very dirty.....</p> <p>After 1h on the motorway I realized that we will make the 'fast detour' south via Nanning instead of the sinuous main road via Hechi - pity! It was a smooth ride but then we even drove into a suburb of Nanning with a 1h stop (it was 33° and very humid). On the way back to the motorway we noticed that the bus had wasted 1.5h to pick up 1 passenger! But we had to admit that driving 100km/h average North again to reach Liuzhou at 15.30 was not bad either.</p> <p>After a some hassle Peggy got tickets to Zhaoqing (near Guangzhou) for next morning - I would have continued today to Wuzhou - but while waiting 1h for Peggy to find a room I realized that Liuzhou may be worth a stop-over!</p>			<p>bus to Liuzhou 7.5h (incl 1h stop)</p>  <p>Chinese Motorways!</p>
<p>A room under the roof with a double bed and common facilities - we were the only users - in the city center for only 30Y - not bad!</p> <p>Soon we were out and climbing up the nearby rocky hill. The way up is quite exciting and on top one can enjoy a breath-taking 360° panorama over the city and the surrounding uncounted guilin-type hills. The sun was just setting behind scattered clouds dropping rain here and there - truly dramatic! There are also caves and temples devoted to an ancient singer who was singing so nicely that she became a goddess!</p> <p>Then we walked to the river and over the bridge and thought it was sad that there are no more ferry services to the Pearl River and Guangzhou.</p> <p>On the way back we had fried rice and noodles and a dish of snow peas with beef. Got to the room at 19.30 then Peggy made some laundry while I tried to fix the fan.</p> <p>Then suddenly Peggy got at me for not having been to the shower - this made me aware how I was tired emotionally! Going again to another unknown common shower had become an undertaking which I unconsciously tried to avoid. 1 month of continuing survival in a daily changing 'basic' environment had taken its toll and here we were close to the end.....and I started to let go. It took me a few weeks in Australia to recover!</p> <p>PS: Our private good weather had still followed us - will it continue to Guangzhou tomorrow? We also thought the drive to Zhaoqing, a city 50km West of Guangzhou, would take 6-7h on the motorway such that we would arrive in the afternoon - to get to Hongkong before midnight.... 'denkste'</p>			 <p>Liuzhou is not far from Guilin</p>  <p>Evening View from Hill</p>  <p>Evening View from Bridge</p>

6. April - Ching Ming	Start: Liuzhou	End: Zhaoqing (肇庆)	on way: 12.5h
<p>The 30th day - all fine to reach Hongkong today - I thought when the bus left on time at 9.15! Haha!</p> <p>After 10km I realised that we will not take the motorway - no Hongkong today! Then on the other hand we usually prefer slower road travel... This looked good as the countryside was truly spectacular: 1000 hills shooting up from fields, many villages and rivers 150km to Guigang (贵港) in nice weather after heavy rain at night!</p> <p>For unknown reasons we seem to be 1h late after 2h already when we heard a big bang followed by loud rattling of the rear wheels. Ohoh!</p> <p>The assistant got out briefly and then the bus continued to the next town at about 30km/h.....there they asked for a garage and then continued to the end of town where they actually found a garage and put the bus over the repair ditch!</p>			<p>bus to Zhaoqing 12.5h (including garage stops)</p>  <p>Spectacular Drive for Hours.....</p>
<p>Well today is Ching Ming, one of the high public holidays to visit the ancestors grave-yards - tough luck! The driver and his assistant tried for 1.5h to find out about the hidden problem and on the mobile they tried to find out what to do! In the end they gave up and we just continued our way at reduced speed (50km/h with bad rattling) for another 30km! In the next little town we</p>			

stopped in front of a small mechanics shop and there was a youngster on duty!

Big bus - small shop - small youngster - I wondered!
 Not for long! 5 minutes to talk, then within 5 mins the bus had been lifted by a mini-pump, 5 mins later the outside wheel was screwed off with a pneumatic key. And then we saw the broken inside rim - it had cracked and spun free around the axle only held by the outside rim! 15 mins later the rest of the broken rim was off and the spare wheel under the bus unscrewed - 10mins later the 2 wheels were mounted. 5mins talk and after 45' we continued!!!!!!
 After Guigang near Yulin we joined the motorway to Guangzhou but then left it again at Cenxi (岑溪) to follow a slow road via Luoding (罗定) and Yunfu to let off passengers. By now we were 2.5h late and it was night.



Bus at small Garage



Broken Rim

As it was the evening of Ching Ming we soon were trapped in a congestion which the driver bravely tried to avoid by squeezing on the emergency track for 10km to the next exit.

It looked good until Zhaoqing when we got trapped in a chaos for crossing a big bridge over the Pearl River. We arrived at 21.45 at some remote bus station in the middle of a shabby industrial area.

It was difficult in the dark to make out the direction to walk for a guest house. I thought I saw the light of a guest house at a distance but Peggy insisted to head into a dark avenue sided by ruine-like small buildings. After about 500m we saw a poorly lit guest house with a reasonable room with facilities for 40Y. But the half-sleeping night clerk only took me (reluctantly) because it was so late!

We had not eaten that day and so we went back again into the cold and windy dark to look for a bite. 500m further we found an empty place which was still open and they were ready to serve fried noodles (not the yammie ones in the west).

So ended the 30th day!



Dark shabby Place in Zhaoqing

7. April	Start: Zhaoqing	End: Tin Shui Wai (Hongkong)	on way: 5.5h
<p>I was very glad that I had asked about the 31st day when entering China - even so, I was very nervous until we had passed the border. Now in the shabby bus station in a shabby area at 7.30am China showed us the ugly side for goodbye. Of course we were impatient to leave as early as possible - but when Peggy asked for what buses to Shenzhen would be available the ticket woman was very rude, called Peggy an old woman and said 'how can you buy a ticket if you do not know where you want to go!' In the end she sold a ticket for a bus at 9.30 only (but did not tell where in Shenzhen). The bus station was not only shabby it also featured the ugliest and dirtiest toilet of the whole trip! Even the bus, while leaving on time, was quite shabby! In the contrary the assistant lady was very kind and not only told her life story (in exchange for ours:-) but also told us the best place to get off after a long ride around the vast Guangzhou metropolian area and through interminable industrial areas to eastern Shenzhen to catch the shuttle to the border at the western Shenzhen Bay. Bingo - at 2pm we just hopped on the right shuttle and in no time were out of China and into Hongkong. At 15.15 we got the shuttle (B2P) to Tin Shui Wai (500'000 people) - of course we missed the stop to get off and ended up in a unknow compound - all these modern high rises look the same! Lost in Hongkong! A phone call and 20mins later we were reunited with Toni and Ah Yuen! END OF CHINA STORY! Now I could relax and enjoy clean Hongkong - I felt a bit like just having cleaned my glasses! PS - my shabby old shoes had lasted till the end.....Toni's shoes hat waited for me!</p>			<p>bus to Shenzhen: 4.5h, schuttle to border 0.5h, shuttle to Tin Shui Wai 0.5h</p>
			<p>...long Wait in shabby Station</p>
			<p>End of my of Shoes at Toni</p>

Hongkong - Part 2 of 3

Sunday, 7. April - Thursday, 11. April	Intermezzo
<p>Stayed 2 nights and a resting day with Toni and Ah Yuen at Tin Shui Wai. On tuesday we went to collect my new varylux glasses in Mongkok - wow, they really fit! Then had and Indian lunch in Sham Shui Po before moving back to Ah Chow in Kennedy Town for 2 nights to recover our left-behinds for Perth. We had one more nice dinner with Ah Chow and next day we took once more the tram to Shau Kei Wan to get Peggy's regular re-entry permit for China (next time - when?) and there also bought our roast duck, bbq-ed pork, pork tongue for evening picknick at Ah Chow. Thursday we took all our time to the Airport to fly late night to Perth with low cost Air Aisa with a stop-over at Kuala Lumpur after mid-night and reaching Perth early morning!</p>	<p>Dinner with Ah Chow</p> <p>Bags' End of Life</p>

Australia - Perth and Camping up North Coast

12. April - 17. May	with Patrick, Anh Dao and the dear growing lovely Océane and Laetitia
<p>We stayed 5 weeks with our dear Patrick, Anh Dao and the 2 little darlings, Océane and Laetitia. All went well and when we left them we missed them even more than before.....!!!!!!</p>	

In the following just a few highlights:

Camping up North: After staying one week only in Perth after the China trip, I was not at all ready yet for another adventure - regardless, we were packed into their 4WD Toyota Prado along with all the camping gear and off we went for over 1000 km up the coast.

After a stop-over night at Coronation Beach (near Geraldton) we moved to Gnaraloo Station at the Southern End of Ningaloo Reef, already near the tropic of the Capricorn. There we stayed at a simple camping for 4 nights enjoying the beautifully wild Indian Ocean, the rocky shore and the huge sand dunes and of course staying with our little family. Patrick and Anh Dao had their highlights with 2 great (dream) sessions of kite surfing! Parents and kids slept in the roof-top tent and we old ones in a small igloo tent.

On the way back we visited the historical Shark Bay Area where the 1st Europeans (Dutch) had set foot on Australian ground in 1616. Here we stayed a night near Steep Point (western-most place of continent) and had fun to be part of 4WD adventure driving. Then we also stayed a night at Goulet Bluff with a thick layer of small shells covering the sand - It looked a bit like snow! Not enough! We also visited the Kalbarri National Park and with the kids undertook a very exciting walk following the Loop around the rim and through the bottom of the gorge. But the night had caught up and so we decided to spend the night on the parking although it was forbidden. As we left very early in the morning we sneaked out of park unnoticed. Nice drive back - even had time to make a short turn through the pinnacles in the setting sun - that's the best time!

In the end we were **very thankful to Patrick and Anh Dao** to share their fascination and experience of this area with us!

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Camping at Gnaraloo Station



Beach at Gnaraloo Station



Camping near Steep Point



Steep Point



Our Twins playing with 'Shell-Snow' at Goulet Bluff



Prominent Visitors on 'Window' at Kalbarri National Park

In Perth we did nothing much special apart from enjoying being with our dears at home and around (to and from school, lake monger, herdsman lake, subiac, you yue). I also relived our trip to the Shark Bay Region reading Patrick's book about the History of the Shark Bay - in fact the overwhelming Story of early discovery and colonisation of Australia! The time passed like a wink and after a last nice excursion to the Swan Valley it was time again to leave! We took a very early Air Asia flight (view over Shark Bay) to Kuala Lumpur and after another hop arrived in Hongkong after 9pm.



Dim Sum - You Yue



Steep Point from 10'000m

Hongkong - Part 3 of 3

17.May - 22.May

.... mainly to celebrate our dear Evelyne's birthday on 19th

It was dark when we arrived but we knew which bus to take and so we reached Tin Shui Wai well before Toni and Ah Yuen went to sleep.

The next day we went to Cheung Chau with Evi and Rafa to visit the island but mainly to have fun at our favourite seafood restaurant! In the evening we walked along the new harbour promenade from Star Ferry to Wanchai. Absolutely thrilling views of the illuminated skyline of both sides reflecting in the water! On the 19th was Evelyne's birthday! We left early to meet Rocky and Yat Wah to help with reserving and setting up the family BBQ at Old Coffee Bay. Early afternoon (almost) everybody turned up and we really had a nice time together. I even had a long swim with Evi and the water was surprisingly warm. Late in the evening we went to Rocky's home to sleep - dear Ga Yi helped me to walk straight on the way up to their home.

The rest of the time we did this and that, first staying another night with Rocky in Tuen Mun before returning to Tin Shui Wai to stay with Toni. In the night to the 22nd there had been extremely heavy rainfalls....No problems to get to airport early and even boarded on time.....then we waited for 2 hours to start...air traffic congestions in China...to catch up backlog! Of course we missed our connection in Munich and so arrived in Geneva after lunch time - bye to our intended add-on via Centovalli.....was also nice to get straight home!



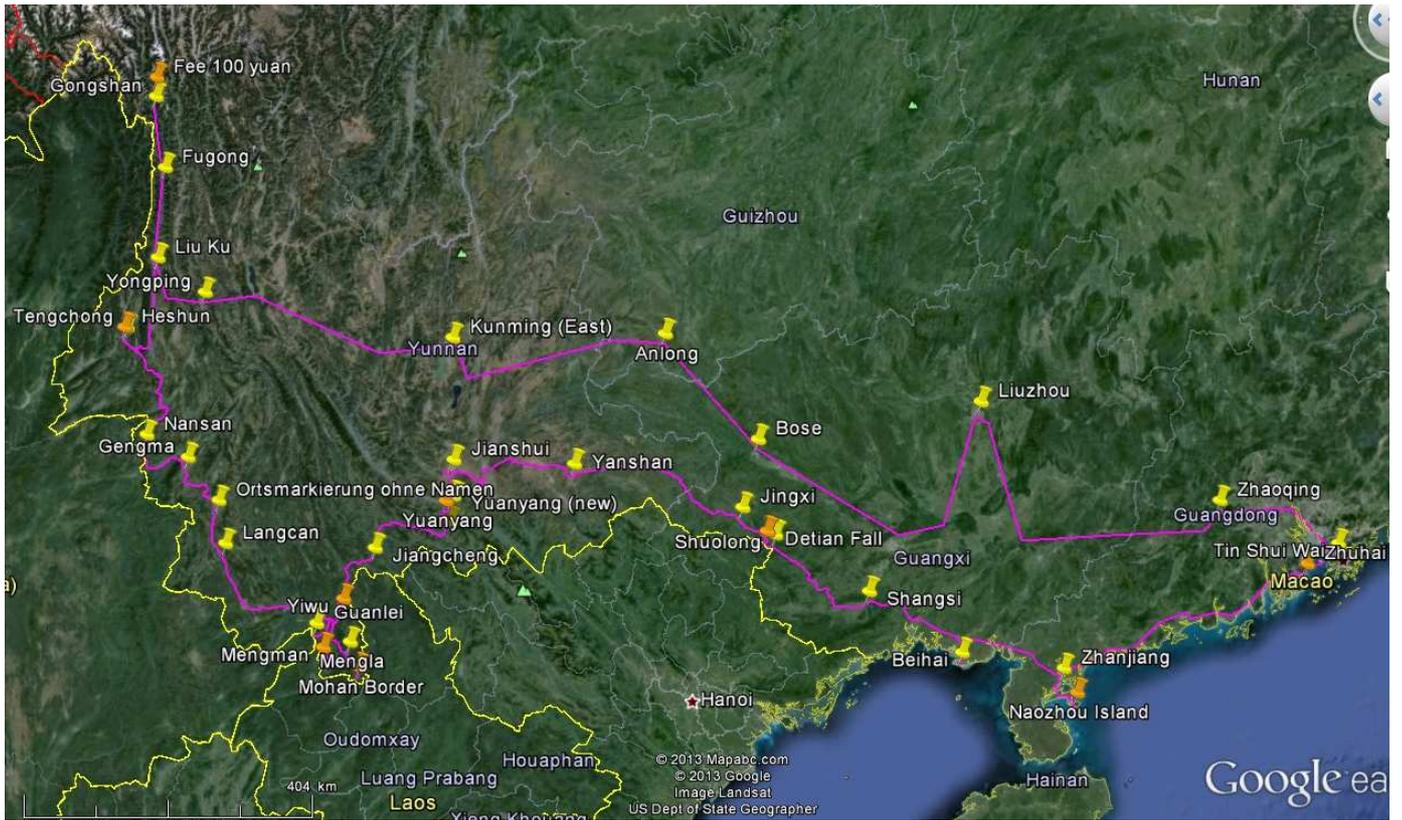
Fun at Cheung Chau.....



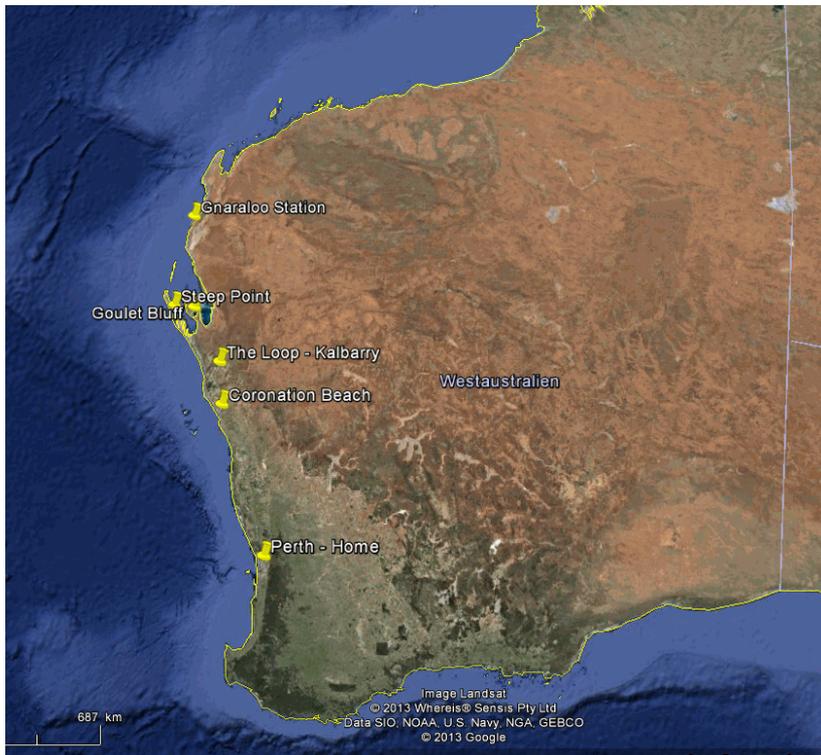
Evi's Birthday BBQ with Family

This report was entirely written in Ste Marie (France)

Maps (Snapshots from Google Earth)



China Trip



Camping with Padi and Family up North