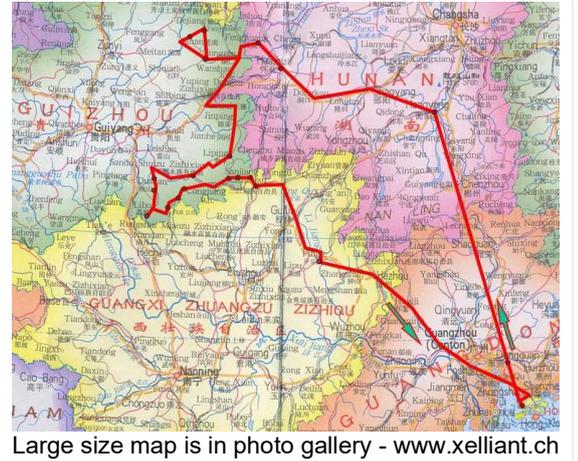




Backpacking in remote Guizhou China

Wedding in Hongkong

17th September - 29th October 2007



Background

Again we had not planned this trip, but Peggy wished to see her family and school friends at AhPo's Hongkong-wedding (after UK-wedding in Spring). Asked to join, I pushed to combine this with a completion of our China trip in 2005, when we had not 'finished' with beautiful and 'backward' Guizhou!

Goals and Strategy

- **To spend a few weeks at low speed in beautiful Guizhou – Walking to feel what you see!**
- To take things as they happen and do what is possible with very little or no advance information!
- Take minimum luggage and equipment to survive using 2 small backpacks only!
- To enjoy and (sometimes:-) endure travelling, sleeping, eating at local standard in order to perceive the country and its charms and flavours also through the skin!
- Travel in daytime only to enjoy the views!
- Avoid tourist traps where possible.
- In Hongkong: See as much of the family as possible and otherwise casually enjoy Hongkong!

Results

As usually, it took a couple of days to get into the Chinese routine, but then the excitement and enjoyment continued to increase until we rated this China trip as **our most enjoyable experience so far!**

Lasting Impressions

- Walking and walking through the generally charming and fertile countryside, encountering friendly and helpful people (almost) everywhere.
- Being able to enjoy and even cherish rudimentary local standards (sleeping, eating, buses).
- To see all these different minority groups and even experience how they live! The Gulou's- 鼓楼(drum towers) and the Wind and Rain Bridges of the Dong minority gave a strong symbolic character.
- Generally enjoying the delicious and tasty food, freshly prepared with fresh and natural material.
- Switching from beer to rice wine to accompany the meals! Which we had learned, when we stayed the night with locals who traditionally serve home-made rice wine to their guests!

Facts of China Trip (excl. Hongkong)

- Duration: 26 days / 25 nights (23 at Chinese guesthouses, 2 with locals)
- Distance: Bus: 3300 km (44 rides) / Hiking: 350 km (85h)
- Exchange Rates: 10Y : 1 Euro : 1.1 CHF
- Costs (for 2): Bus: 1800Y / 180 Euro / Sleeping: 900Y / 90 Euro / Food: 900Y / 90 Euro / 10Y : 1 Euro
- Weather: Rain (1h) when we left Hongkong and once a few drops in Liping. Often overcast. Temperature mostly comfortable (20° to 25°), 2 days cold (max 14°) at Zhaoxing.
- Health: Fine, except for a short gastritis, which both cured with a few Lopimed pills.
- Equipment:
 - Baggage: 2 Backpacks, a small cotton bag and a hip pocket.
 - Clothes: Jogging shoes, slippers (not used), rain jackets, 3 sets light clothes.
 - Extras: my light wind jacket, a duvet case (used 4x), torch, handy for sms.
 - Medicine: Antibiotic, anti-Gastritis, Aspirin.
 - Food: Coffee powder, black chocolate, biscuits and something for the day!

Accommodation

We had no problems with accommodation on the trip as were by now used to Chinese guesthouse standard: simple equipment, usually quite clean, sometimes a bit shabby appearance, 'sink toilets', warm showers quite often available. Rate for a standard room was usually 20 to 40 Yuan for both of us. In 2 places, Rongjian and Congjian, foreigners

are not accepted in Guesthouses (we suspect cartels) and are forced to go to Hotels (Binguan at 80Y up)! In Congjiang we simply took the next bus to move on!

The greatest experience of course was when we stayed overnight with locals of the Shui and Miao minorities! The 1st time we had simply asked for the possibility to stay and they immediately asked us to join them; The second time we were stranded in a lost place in the mountains – here they asked us to join them because we would have had to spend the night outside otherwise:-) .

Food and Drink

We really enjoyed being back to the local diet with natural produce and very tasty sometimes quite spicy food, which is common in these parts of China (a bit similar to Sichuan).

We usually ate very little and simple during the day and a full meal in the evening.

- Breakfast and/or lunch: either Yau Jia Guai (deep fried crispy sticks), steamed Bao Zi (stuffed steamed bun), Man Tou (steamed bread) or spicy soup rice-noodles or fried rice noodles.
- Dinner: Usually 2 to 3 fried dishes with meat, vegetable, Dou Fu, mushrooms, river fish accompanied with beer (3%) or smooth dry rice wine. With the locals, we joined their daily traditional hotpot meal. Very tasty of natural produce – best soup ever! Large variety of vegetables, herbs and chilli peppers in abundance!

Walking

We experienced different types of walks (350 km):

- Walk on the road instead of taking the bus. You just see much more and you meet people and you can see how they live their normal life! In the places we walked, traffic was usually sparse and did not disturb too much! When people asked us why we walk instead of taking the bus, Peggy answered that we would not be able to say hello to them if we took the bus:-). They seemed to have enough sense of humour to get it!
- Walk on sightseeing trails. This can be the only way to see outstanding sceneries and attractions in areas where tourism has already been developed (most of China!) and you have to pay relatively high entrance fees (20Y up to over 100Y). It has become quite disgusting. We tried to avoid such areas as much as possible
- Walking on 4 WD / bike tracks or small trails was the most enjoyable part (over 170 km) of our trip. There you still see the country in its original state and farmers and their animals in traditional life (walking / working / carrying / playing)! Of course you have to ask for the way every few km and this may sometimes be quite difficult with their minority languages and accents and if you have no map to even know the name of your target! But we had fun and we loved the surprises:-)

Travelling by Bus

The bus network in China has become quite impressive and travelling is still very cheap (3 to 4 km per yuan (10 cent Euro)). The network is relatively dense and buses go usually at useful frequencies. So we managed to travel the 330 km from provincial Jiangkou to provincial Liping on normal country roads in 12h with 6 buses (once a bus broke down and we had to wait only 20 minutes for a replacement). The buses are not always the latest model and often very crammed, but what of it as long as you get there:-)

While bus travelling may be dangerous at times because some drivers try to beat records (or descend steep mountain roads in top gear) we were amazed how calm and cautious drivers were inside Guizhou!

Minorities

While China is mostly populated by the Han people, there exist many different minority communities, such as the most well known Tibetans, Mongolians and Uygur. In South-Western China there are many more traditional communities (Zu - 族) and Guizhou is (with Yunnan) one of the provinces hosting the greatest variety, such as **Miao**-苗 (population: 9 mio), **Dong** - 侗 (3 mio), **Buyi** - 布依 (3 mio), **Yao** - 瑶 (2.5 mio), **Shui** - 水 (0.5 mio), each with their own identity, culture and language. Traditionally these people are farmers, living as their ancestors did, a simple and ecologically neutral life in remote areas and they have been late to be caught up by the rapid development of modern life in China. Guizhou has always been and still is regarded as very backward by the rest of China. In recent years however, the minorities have been discovered as valuable objects for development of tourism. It is unbelievable at which speed the tourism and its effects are penetrating into the remotest valley. On one hand tourism is pushed to extreme (attractions, infrastructure), on the other hand culture and nature preservation (Heimatschutz) is enforced! This means that the whole region (as all China's attractions) is bound to become an open-air museum!

We have just been in Guizhou on time, to still enjoy valleys and villages, which have not yet been engulfed by modern times. We may be seen as the precursors of the coming wave of change, but change will happen in any case! You will find more information about the minorities in the following diary!

Acknowledgement

I wish to express my gratitude to Peggy, who, as usually, did wonders in managing our back-(&un) packing, washing clothes, getting and settling accommodation, handling transport, food provisioning and of course the Chinese talking! Many thanks also to Peggy's family and who received us kindly in Hongkong and the relatives at home looking after Grandmaman and our home in Ipsach!

DIARY

17th-23rd September **We started with a few days in Hongkong (Ah Po's and Stephen's Wedding)**

Normal trip via London (Swiss) to Hongkong (Air New Zealand). Transiting London Heathrow is like passing an airport at war with the big mess at the security checks.

First we stayed 3 nights in Miramar Mansion (Guesthouse) in Tsimshatsui, having many things to do in this area. Also Evelyne and Rafa stayed in Northpoint and so we managed to have some good time together and with their Friends! Eat, Drink, Laugh such as having a hot pot in North Point with Stef etc.



View over Hongkong-Harbour



With old Friends (eg. Stef)

On 20th we attended Ah Po and Stephen's big Wedding and Stephen. A essential part of the ceremony is when the newly wed serve tea to their parents and in turn all the older respectable family members (such as Peggy and I). Then followed the endless photo sessions before the sumptuous 10-course meal for the 100 or so guests! Evelyne was the bride's female attendant!



Tea Ceremony



The Lam Family



Ah Po and Evi

Originally we wanted to start our China trip the next day but then we stayed for another few days which turned out to be the right decision as I got a flu and a start of bronchitis. So we moved to Rocky's home in Tuenmun (Castle Peak Road) and enjoyed the time with the family! BBQ at Old Coffee Bay and delicious August Moon Dinner at Rocky's place prepared by Rocky his wife Yat Wah.



BBQ at Old Coffee Bay



August Moon Dinner



Yves, Ca Yi & Ca Man

China Trip to Guizhou

Diary from 24th September to 19th October

24th September **Start: Hongkong (Tuenmun)**

End: Dongguan - 东莞

Bus: 100 km

Peggy pushed to leave, while I was still lethargic and apprehensive about the hassle to cross the border to China. At 12.00 we left Tuenmun by bus to cross by the new bridge over the Shenzhen Bay to the new border crossing near **Shekou** in China (the only half hour rain of the whole trip).

Here a little story: Imagine, you get off a bus and enter a huge empty hall. You stand alone in front of a big range of counters (of which 4 open) and you are in China within 1 minute! This is reality today! Locals can even check-through with their re-entry permit as a badge! No hassle! A simple A7 form!



New Bridge to China Border



Dongguan

Bus to Shekou and then on to Dongguan, a big industrial suburb (2mio people) of Guangzhou. Here we were in China again at the huge south bus terminal outside the city. It was only 3 pm but we did not bother to go far and found a suitable guesthouse just across the road in a market compound beside a big factory compound. This was good enough as we got a delicious dinner outdoor (food stall with 4 tables) with 200 small hot peppered snails, glass noodle soup, great old fashioned fried rice and a dish of fried peanuts accompanied by 3 bottles of local beer (40Y / 4 Euro).

Good start – and I was no longer sick!

25th September **Start: Dongguan**

End: Hengyang - 衡阳

Bus: 650 km

Easy pleasant morning – modern bus left at 11 am and soon joined Guangzhou – Beijing Express Way. Lovely drive through hilly countryside but then the haze turned into thick fog! It was getting dark when we reached the big provincial (mega) city of Hengyang and Peggy only was told when the bus stopped, that it will continue and that we are completely out of the city. As we did not know where we were and it was dark at 7 pm, we took a taxi (the only time) to the bus station in the center (10Y:-).

Again we did not bother messing around and moved in to the next guesthouse (20Y). Then we had a delicious dinner in a small place just around the corner (tasty shredded pork, wood mushrooms, fresh daufu and a soup. **Did NOT see the AUGUST MOON:-)**



Hengyang Guesthouse

26th September **Start: Hengyang**

End: Huaihua - 怀化

Bus: 400 km

We knew that the only bus to Huaihua would be early. Waking up at 5.50, Peggy went down to the bus station beside right after dressing. At 6.10 Peggy came back to tell that the bus leaves at 6.20. Packing the 2 bags and then left the room at 6.15 to be in the bus at 6.18! At 6.20 the bus moved out of the station! I think even the army would admire Peggy for that!

Back to the trip - what seemed a quick ride to Huaihua was a 10-hour journey! The first part in the plain led mostly through populated rural countryside until Donkou (洞口) (pic – duck flock on the road). Then – surprise – the road entered wild mountainous territory and so we enjoyed one of these exciting never ending winding roads (4h/130 km) over the highest pass of Hunan (only 1700m). Here we got to see the first wooden houses, which will prevail for much of our journey through remote areas.

PS Later on, we heard that a new expressway would open 1 week later, shortening the 4h exciting drive to a boring 1.5h.



Duck/Geese Flock



Over Mountains to Huaihua

We got to lively Huaihua at 16.30 and enjoyed the early evening with another delicious meal next-door: Hunan noodle soup, sweet-water fish, (my preferred) diced hollow spinach stalks. Our room was just above the bus terminal.

Note: All this traveling, sleeping, eating since we left Hongkong 2 days ago sounds easy the way it is described – Believe me, without Peggy's language skills, China experience and her perseverance it would have been impossible to do the same things! This statement will even be more true for the rest of the trip!



Room above Bus Terminal

27th September Start: **Huaihua** End: **Fenghuang - 凤凰** Bus: 100 km

Nice 2.5h (crammed) bus ride through the hills with lush vegetation to our first target, Fenghuang, a well-known ancient town. Although the old part is quite touristic, we enjoyed it right away after the owner and the staff of a small guesthouse in a narrow side street received us very kindly. So we decided to stay for 2 nights.

Fenghuang on 2 sides of a small (clean) river is embedded between lovely hills. The main attractions are the ancient (Ming) covered bridge, the city wall with the gate towers and the pedestrian river crossings. So we just strolled through all the little streets, along and across the river and up to elevated viewpoints until dark. Later, after dinner we did the whole tour again in the typical Chinese 'romantic illumination'.

In the evening our quarter had a blackout due to power saving for the 1st October festival. So instead of TV.....candle-light!



Fenghuang....



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... by Candle Light

28th September In and around: **Fenghuang - 凤凰** Walk (overland): 17 km /3.5h Bus: 17 km

We left at 9 am to walk (on the road) to the South Wall at 17 km distance. It was a nice walk for us through the hilly and fertile countryside. Half way we crossed a village on market day – what an atmosphere and we just had to try this and that of course, e.g. some kind of brown root, which you can also eat raw after peeling by hand – a bit like raw potato but smoother.. Taro?. The big runner of all fruit in this valley is Kiwi, which you see everywhere, fresh or dried. Huge piles of Kiwis lay around waiting to be packed for transport! When we reached the South Wall (it was erected against the Southern Barbarians – today's Minorities).



Enjoying Market on way ...



....to the South Wall

Peggy was a bit disappointed because much of the walls and fortifications have been re-built for tourism and one would have to pay a hefty fee to get in to visit. We just had a look at what you see well from outside and also had a good time around the area! We then took the first transport back to the little town where we boarded a bus back to Fenghuang. Hungry, we downed the best fried noodles ever.



Ditch of Fort



Exciting Transport



Yummy Noodles

After dark (power cut in guesthouse again) and after crossing the river we went for an exciting open-air meal on the food square (grilled tasty tidbits and red-hot snails:-)!

Then we made one more last turn and watched the Chinese tourists who were exhilarated by romantic boat rides under the still almost full (2 days after) August Moon showing up at last! For going back Peggy dared to cross the river over a narrow (50cm) dented dam, whereas I returned after a couple of meters, having almost lost my balance! Peggy had to continue to the other side, as she could not turn back, being followed by other people. She then decided to turn back to join me to cross the river over the covered bridge!



Peggy dared Crossing !

29th September Start: **Fenghuang** End: (near) **Heshui - 合水** (near Yinjiang - 印江) Bus: 250 km

Cool morning. On the way to Tongren we wanted to visit an ancient walled village, Ahla, at 25 km from Fenghuang. When we got there, we realized that it had already been turned to a tourist trap with people hassling us to guide us in and around! Forget it! So we left Ahla for Tongren, hopping on the next bus coming along! Nice drive, but when we entered Tongren (same name as our old Tibetan Tongren in Qinghai - visited 2001) we realized that it is just an ordinary modern town.

So we took the next bus to Yinjiang, located behind our next target, the Mount Fanjinshan, leaving a few minutes later.

First a nice drive along a river passing by Jiangkou (江口) and then literally over 7 mountains and through 7 wild valleys. After a steep descent (on the brakes) through a gorge we reached Yinjiang at 4 pm. The town did not appeal to Peggy and so we got the next bus up the valley towards Fanjinshan, but after 20 km Peggy suddenly noticed that the bus turned off in a wrong direction (Heshui) and so we got off in the semi-darkness, seemingly in the middle of nowhere! Surprise! The next house at 100m was a small guesthouse! Surprise 2: the apparent garage at the bottom had a stove, a few tables and an excellent cook! We had a delicious meal again (a succulent type of chinese cucumber, tasty shredded pork with chopped chili and an 'everything-soup':-). The picture over our heads shows the Mount Fanjinshan.

We did not know about tomorrow but we had a small nip of our 'rice schnaps' and slept well:-)



Lonely Dinner

30th September Start: (near) **Heshui** End: (Mount) **Fanjinshan -梵净山** Walk: 15 km/5.5h Bus: 25 km

We left at 7.30 – everybody else still sleeping! We knew that the small road would eventually take us to Fanjinshan after 36 km at most. We suspected that there would be a bus, but we did not know when. So we walked into that nice wide valley on a virtually traffic-free road. The mountaintops were covered in the clouds, so we had no idea what to expect.

After 8 km of very nice and lonely walking, also crossing 2 small villages (no shops – no eating places – no breakfast), a bus turned up and took us the remaining stretch (27 km) to the top end of the road (had to pay entrance fee - 50Y each at the gate!). Now we had just reached the upper limit of the clouds, playing around with the thermal winds. At first we could just guess what lay ahead but as we walked on we got a glimpse here and a glimpse there of the extraordinary rock formations! See for yourselves.....



The sky opens slowly!



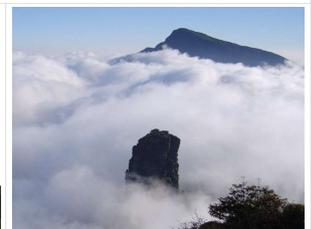
Baoding with Bridge



Bridge on Baoding



The Mugo



The Sun has won

It was a nice and easy walk climbing a bit just above 2000m to the bottom of the Baoding passing by the 'Mugo' (Baoding on the back) on the way. It was a very steep climb to the top, with the help of rusty chains. The bridge spans over a deep narrow crevasse. After enjoying the splendid view in the emerging sun we descended the same way and got a room in the nearby small wooden guesthouse, a bit like in the Swiss mountains.

Then we went for a stroll around and decided to climb to another top. We had not eaten that day, we had no water with us and suddenly, I had absolutely no more power! Only under greatest strain, I managed to inch myself the steep way up, step by step. But then we lived a unique spectacle: The famous 'Fuguan' (佛光) – Buddha's Halo, which happens to be seen only by very lucky people! The sun projects the shade of the mountain to the cloud layer beneath with the right angle and in the right humidity. The Chinese were out of their minds! After resting we descended to the guesthouse (Wanbao) and after sitting around for a while beside the open fire, we had a simple meal.



Buddha's Halo



Our Guest House w. Dorms

I was so exhausted, that I had to force myself just for eating a few bites and then I started shivering so badly, that we went right up to bed, instead of enjoying a happy evening in a Chinese mountain-hut atmosphere!

That was a real shame, since we had just started nice contacts with other lovely Chinese tourists!

1st October Start: (Mount) **Fanjinshan** End: **Jiangkou - 江口** Walk: 20 km (6800 steps)/5h Bus: 40km

Thickest cold fog greeted us in the morning. So we left right away and walked down straight over the 6800 steps to the bottom of the valley. I was still very weak but going down helped of course! After 3h of stairs and 1500m descent, we had pretty wobbly knees, but then we enjoyed also the 10 km walk along the little river in a narrow valley (like in CH) to the next village. On the way we crossed a very elegant natural stone bridge over a creek. While waiting for the bus, we enjoyed a good noodle soup, which brought me back to life properly! The bus ride to Jiangkou was very bumpy as the road was on building for 40 km after heavy flooding in summer! We were told, that the road is barred for repai but had been opened for bus traffic just for the 1st Oct. public holiday.



Natural Bridge



Mah Jong

In the evening I started to have some gastritis problems (mmh) – which lasted for the next few days and made me often feel uncomfortable – but still capable of enjoying a light meal! On the way to the guesthouse we saw 4 ladies playing Mah Jong. That was the first time I saw a Mahjong table with a automatic dice mixing and dealing mechanism.

2nd October Start: **Jiangkou** End: **Liping - 黎平** Bus: 330 km (bus-hopping – 6 buses)

We knew that the trip to our next target, Liping could be long but we took it easy, as we would be able to stop and stay anywhere, if necessary! We left at 8 am for Yuping (玉屏) (140 km), by-passing Tongren again. There we changed bus in 30 minutes to Sansui (三穗) (40 km), another small town. We got a connection to Tianzhu (天柱) (60 km) instantly, but after 15 minutes the bus broke down! No problem with mobile telephony – a replacement bus turned up 20' later:-). We arrived in Tianzhu at 15.10, had to walk 10 minutes through the lively town to the other bus station and hopped on the already departing bus to Liping (110 km) at 15.20! I was a bit surprised at Peggy's speed, because it meant that we would arrive after dark in Liping.

I would have preferred to stop already at Jinping (锦屏), a small town along a big river with nice bridges. The slow drive to Jinping over 100 hills on gravel road was very lovely and while driving through Jinping we saw what we missed out. Shortly after Jinping our bus stopped, and we were all crammed into another bus to do the last 80 km to Liping (that's China, no-one complains). Seeing wooden villages appear in the falling night, we realized that we approached the minority regions we had looked for! At 8 pm, in deep darkness we arrived in bustling Liping! It took us an hour to find a reasonable room at a reasonable price since it was still 1st October week and late! I was getting nervous but Peggy stayed cool and persevering and finally we got a nice room (up on 3rd floor of a multipurpose building) for 3 nights at a reasonable bargain!

But we still wondered if Liping has already become a tourist trap as the gate to the country of the Dong Minority! Since I had not been feeling very well, I was happy to stay here for a couple of days to relax and plan the next steps to the expected adventures:-)



Jinping, View from Bus

3rd October

In and around: **Liping - 黎平**

Walking: 20 km Bus: 15 km

Good bed, big room, good sleep. So we were ready to go to see one of the attractions near Liping: the natural bridge near Gaotun (高屯), claimed to be the biggest in the world, as documented in the Guinness Book (256 metres long and 118 metres wide. The arch of the bridge is 40 metres thick, 36 metres over the water. We took the bus 13 km and then walked the 2 km to the bridge which is indeed impressive and so massive that you have the problem to decide if it is a bridge or a cave:-) Later we walked back to Liping, skipping the nearby caves being prepared for touristic purpose. As yesterday, the weather was dull and we even got a few drops of rain! The walk back was rather strenuous, as we still suffered from the stairs of Fanjinshan and now Peggy also complained about a tummy bug. That evening we just had a light picnic in the room.



Guinness Book: Natural Bridge

4th October

In and around: **Liping - 黎平**

Walking: 10 km

Peggy had a bad night and so we took it easy and just walked in another direction through a small lovely valley until we got to a tourist trap at the nearby river. So we turned back and enjoyed the sun breaking through for the first time in 4 days, making the farms, the fields and the animals so much more lively!

This high spirit animated us to go and visit the ancient town of Liping. Surprisingly we found a lovely, well-preserved old town with many beautiful wooden houses. There was also an interesting museum, where a meeting of the red army generals took place during the Long March. Then after a light meal we retired to the room to have a great pomelo and a nip!



Water Well for Laundry

5th October

Start: **Liping**

End: **Rongjiang - 榕江**

Walking: 25 km/6h

Bus: 90 km

The almost perfect day! After a difficult night (especially Peggy), we now took our anti-gastritis pills (Lopimed).

Peggy had read something about a 1-pole gulou in a small remote village called Midong and had found out that there should be a bus going in that direction early morning. We turned up with our backpacks, since we had found out that we could then walk over to another valley to continue the journey without backtracking. A beautiful 35 km ride over a small gravel road took us into a deep and wild valley with beautiful Dong villages. Here we saw our first real gulou's (drum tower) and wind and rain bridges, so characteristic for the Dong minority. In Tongguan (洞关) we left the bus and started our walk over (through) the wind and rain bridge.

This was the first time we went cross-country and we grew very excited to be on our own in the countryside. That's what we had come for! The 8 km walk to Midong (near Shudong 迷洞) in sunny weather through hills and terrace fields was just beautiful. Once in a while we met farmers who returned our greetings very nicely and kindly told us the way, if asked! Midong is a lost, sleeping and yet unspoiled village and the 1-pole gulou stands peacefully on the little square. After we sat down for a little rest under the gulou, two old nosy old men came for a little chat!



Wind & Rain Bridge



Walk to Midong



Getting to Midong



One-Post Gulou

With regrets to leave, we then moved on higher and higher through lush forests until after a short descent, we reached another Dong village, Maogong (茅贡) on the road to Rongjiang. It was late in the afternoon and so instead of visiting the village we hopped on the bus, which just happened to turn up! After 50 km through a beautiful narrow valley and over small mountains we reached Rongjiang in a wide valley with a big river. Rongjiang is a small bustling Chinese town.

It was quite late and so we decided to stay, but then we got very upset when I, as a foreigner, was refused to stay in a Chinese guesthouse (this may happen here and anywhere in China). Here the police had recently warned the guesthouse owners – that they would lose their license and pay a hefty penalty. The official reason given is, that Chinese guesthouses are unsuitable and even dangerous for foreigners – bullshit! We think it is just a syndicate of rich hotel owners forcing foreigners to spend more money! We did not have much choice and moved into the Rongjian Hotel which was far more expensive and indeed had western style attributes: Extreme paperwork at check-in, a sitting WC with the only (huge) cockroaches we saw on the whole trip – sh..! We calmed down a bit later over a delicious meal at a small place and a good chat with the very nice owner couple.

6th October Start: **Rongjiang** End: **Shuilong - 水龙** (near Sandu - 三都) Bus: 130 km

We left Rongjiang without regrets after 10 am and after a 110 km ride all along the nice winding river we reached Sandu at 1 pm. Sandu is just another small bustling town, which I will not forget for my bowl of great soup noodles with a freshly made sour and hot chilli sauce you mix into the bowl, while we waited for the next bus to ascend a high plateau with many Shui Villages. Here we will enter the homeland of the very small Shui (water) community.

After 25 km of winding road we reached the first village of the plateau called Shui Long (water dragon) and got off the bus, hoping to find a guesthouse! We found a simple room on top of the village's hairdresser-shop (must be a metropolitan village:-) and then enjoyed walking around the lovely nearby farms and the fields with dragon stones. Had a noodle dinner, as the 3 small food places did not serve rice, while this country is about rice to horizon! Then we spent a good time having a beer on the pavement in front of the hair-dresser salon with the top shots of the village joining us for a chat:-). They laughed and told us to go to eat rice at their home:-)



House built on Dragon Rocks



Chatting with Passerby's

7th October Start: **Shuilong** End: **Bangao - 板告** (near Sandong 三洞) Walk 25 km

It was a rooster's continued cookericoo waking us! Otherwise complete silence! Peggy had read somewhere that the Shui people are very hospitable and someone told her that you just go to any village and ask the village head if there could be a way to stay at someone's home. Peggy had also a particular village (Bangao) in mind and expected to find the right way in the next little town called Sandong. With all this in mind we just started to walk along the road towards Sandong.

It was a bright morning with a little morning mist around the lovely hills, giving a beautiful atmosphere to the fields and villages. It was market-day in Sandong and the road was quite busy with people walking or on carts going to sell or buy anything from vegetables and rice, small and big animals to hand made clothes and other ware! Peggy had a chat here and a chat there and that's where Peggy told people, when they asked why we walk, that we would not be able to meet them, had we taken the bus:-) After 16 km we reached Sandong and after a bowl of delicious soup noodles we enjoyed the lovely market with many of the Shui women wearing their traditional dresses. Then we did not so much like the part where great numbers of ducks, chicken, dogs and the like were crammed in small cages (that is China).



Traditional Country Life

Eventually Peggy asked for the way to the village where she had wanted to stay. We were advised to walk back 4 km on the road and take a path to the left! After turning off, to make sure, Peggy asked 2 dressed up market-going Shui ladies for the way to their village. Peggy also asked them how to find somewhere to stay for the night. After a long discussion one of the women suggested that she would take us to the village and then also invited us to stay at her home. Well – we followed and after another 2 km we reached her little village and her home, where she asked us to put our bags down. She then said that we should wait until at least 5 pm to settle. So we went for a walk in and around this genuine Shui village, set in a beautiful hilly countryside. We even saw an inscription in traditional Shui writing on a post of the village gate!



Shui Writing on Gate

In the evening after the family returned from the fields and the market, we heard them killing a chicken and soon after we were treated with a great traditional meal: chilli flavoured chicken and varied succulent vegetable hotpot (best soup ever) with stir-fried intestines of the chicken and vegetables. We enjoyed the 2 homemade rice wines, a normal clear rice wine tasting natural and a wine made from glutinous rice tasting a bit sweetish and strange. Peggy and the family had a lively conversation, while I could just exchange hearty smiles with the lovely granny who did not speak any Han Chinese (mandarin:-)! The rice-wine flow ended only when the landlord realised that he was getting drunk before us:-)



Improvised Farmer's Fiest



Our Room

Then we went to sleep on the traditional hard bamboo bed (without mattress) in a tiny but very clean room.

8th October Start: **Bangao** End: **Xiaoqikong - 小七孔** (Small 7 Holes Park) Walk: 28 km/ 6h Bus: 80 km

Morning call – several roosters did their best:-) Then we had a hefty breakfast in the form of another vegetable hotpot and Granny's special brownish, sweetish rice wine, indeed tasting a bit like weak brandy:-) brought quickly back the high spirits of last night! The clou was then the fashion show with the traditional dresses! We had promised them to send a few photos!

What did this all cost! They did not want any money! In the end they reluctantly took a little cash for the electric bill and small flask of chinese oil! They said that they do not need much money since they have everything they need from their land! They had very good harvest this year!



Shui Fashion....



.... Show is funny!

We left in high spirits and walked back to Sandong and then 5 km beyond, since we were told that there is a local festival with horse races! When we got there at 11am, we learned that the race would only start some time in the afternoon and so we continued and hopped on the next bus to Libo! Soon we reached the end of the plateau and descended between sharply shaped hills, characteristic for the large Karst area of the Libo region.

After about 50 km we reached Libo (荔波), a very modern and lively town on the shore of a nice river. We then just caught another bus to continue to the next target, Xiaoqikong (Small Seven Holes) natural Park. We were a bit apprehensive that it could be another tourist trap – and it looked a bit like it already! Then Peggy easily found a good room and the owners were very nice people!

It was only 3 pm and so we decided to go for a fast walk up to a Yao village (Yaoshan -瑶山), in a small valley at 8 km distance (16 km walking and sightseeing in 3.5h before dark – hmm).

It was worthwhile! Walking along the nice river, then into a beautiful side valley with the characteristic 'sugar-hat' hills around, watching all these Yao minority (瑶族) farmers tending their fields and minding their life stock. Just lovely!

In the evening we had a nice meal at the guesthouse under a big map of the park. So we could plan the next day:-)

The Xiaoqikong Park offers a few dozens of scenic hi-lites and is furthermore enriched by the presence of 4 minority peoples Shui, Yao, Miao and Buyi.



Xiaoqikong



Beauty Buffalo



Yao Village



Yao Man



Yao Women

9th October Staying at: **Xiaoqikong** (Small 7 Holes Park)

Walking: 42 km

We knew that the park is big, but we had decided that we are here to walk and not take the park's tourist transports.

So we started at dawn and got to the park entrance at the opening hour 8 am. When Peggy bought the entrance ticket (55Y each) they wanted to force her to buy the transport ticket too! In the end we had to see the supervisor and he only agreed after a Chinese tourist told him that the foreigners - Lǎo Wài (老外) have strange ideas sometimes:-).

Happy, we started our walk into the valley in this geologically and botanically interesting Karst area (famous for the experts). The name '7 holes' comes from the ancient bridge with 7 bows. And we did enjoy a nice walking day, 30% on little paths and the rest on small virtually traffic-free roads. Rivers, creeks, waterfalls, ponds, swamps, sugar-hat hills, caves, any kind of forests (even bamboo), great variety of beautiful butterflies, dragonflies, grasshoppers.....



Bridge with 7 Holes



We both



...walked!

The sky was just lightly overcast and the temperature ideal! On the way back, already tired, we took the last sidetrack to see some more attractions and I expected to get back to the main road by a short cut. After descending on a small footpath through thick and dark forest along a small creek (pic), the path suddenly disappeared in a large cave (in the morning we had been at the other side's entrance. As we had no torch, we had to return unfortunately to join the road. The shortcut was a detour of 8 km! After a quick march, we got back to guesthouse at dusk at 18.45.



Waterfall & Cave



Cave & Waterfall



To Cave form other side

We had walked 42 km today!

There we enjoyed spare ribs hotpot and Peggy had a good chat with the owner's family who belong to the Buyi minority (布依).

10th October Start: **Xiaoqikong**

End: **Jiarong - 佳荣** (via Libo 荔波)

Bus: 75 km

Overnight we had to decide what we do next and we considered and dropped the following possibilities:

- Stay here one more day and visit the other attraction, the Big 7 Holes Park (大七孔). More of the same – No!
- Move to Libo and walk 15 km along the river? Seems quite touristic – No!
- Drive passed Libo and stay in the Unesco-protected Maolan Forest? Perhaps, but forest only – No!

So we decided to try moving more East towards Congjiang across **unknown territory!**

After a good bye-bye chat with the Buyi owner couple, we first went to visit its nearby Buyi village. It was so near, that no one seemed to bother and so it has stayed quite natural and thus traditional!

At 10am we hopped on the passing bus to Libo and enjoyed the 25 km ride along the river. In Libo, Peggy found out that the only bus East goes through the Maolan Forest to



Talking with friendly Host



Buyi Village



Buyi Village

Jiarong the road's dead-end! Then walking across 50km somehow!
 In fact we had both secretly hoped to get into this situation once and so we joyfully boarded this bus and enjoyed the winding ride through the sugar-hat hills and the 'very rare primeval subtropical forest of Karst topography, unique in China and even in the world'! After passing Maolan Town we arrived in Jiarong at 13h. Peggy quickly found a clean room and after a delicious noodle soup, we walked to the nearby traditional Buyi village where people live their simple farmer life. Interesting detail: most wooden houses were insulated with straw clay!



Maolan Town, our Bus



Houses insulated with Clay & Straw

The rest of the afternoon was finding out about continuing – no one really knew how we would get on further East. All Peggy could find out was, that there is a village, Layi at 15 km and that we should ask there for the way to continue. Even the head of the police tried to turn us down, but when Peggy insisted, he said that his area and thus his responsibility ends at the next village before the district's border! Now at first we enjoyed a good local dinner!

11th October Start: **Jiarong** End: **Baidou - 白豆** (the climax of the trip) Walk: 35 km /10h

We left at 7.30 after our daily coffee and buying a few stuffed buns for on the way. The road track took us easily the 15 km through lovely countryside and across a small pass to Layi (垃易) a small traditional village (pop 800), which we reached at 11h. People were quite nosy but we were lucky to run into the very kind village head. He took pains to explain and even drew a map for the way to the next village, Changniu (长牛), at 15 km. Before we left, he then asked us to stay here for the day, to start fresh the next day! We refused with regret but it was too early in the for us to hang around! (perhaps we should have...)



Morning Coffee



Layi's Head of Village



Layi

So we left and followed a villager who just went to see his cows a few km in our direction. Now we started to understand, why no one in Jiarong knew the way to go on – Layi is at the end of the world and we would be off the world for a very long way:-)
 Over a narrow footpath we reached a stony little river, which we had to follow for several km's until we were to see a small path taking us up over the pass to Changniu! Even with the sketch we sometimes had doubts and Peggy asked for the way at rare opportunities (they did not speak Chinese but understood the name of the village).



Making sure...



...we would have doubted



without advice!

After the pass and many nice views and also a bamboo aquaduct, we reached Changniu at 15.30. Hahaha – this village was even smaller and remote than Layi and people were not keen to keep us and pointed at the next mountain chain to cross to reach the next bigger place. Peggy asked: how far? – very far! There we climbed up again even higher!



Up and up



.....down to Changniu...



passing Bamboo Water Pipe

On the way a kind man had made a sketch again, without which we would surely have been getting lost! Then steep down again through another wild valley. After the next climb (!) we reached a tiny village (guess 150 people) half way up a slope and met 2 young men in a small hut. It was 17.30, 1h before dark, we had walked over 10h and they told us that the next village is at 4h walk right up the steep slope again over another pass!

So we asked if we might stay with someone in the village. The 2 brothers asked us in to wait in their very basic hut, while they would care to find someone 'suitable' to take us. Since the farmers were still not back from the fields, we had to wait until 7 pm (we had already toyed with the idea to sleep on the floor in the hut) when we were called and lead through the dark to a small wooden house! An elder couple greeted us shyly and asked us into their modest house. They were embarrassed at first but relieved when Peggy told them that we are simple people and we would eat what they eat and need only very little space to sleep! They started cooking a simple tasty meal with beautiful fresh bamboo shoots (one dish fried, one as hotpot) on a wood fire in the middle of the room. They were very shy and hardly talking until the obligatory rice wine had its effect! And then we had a lovely evening and then a good night on the small hard bed!



Farmer's Fiest!

Obviously we slept in a small guest room, which the couple has reserved for their 3 grown up children working far away in various places in China. They told Peggy a lot about the hard and simple life here. The next bus is at 8h walking distance. Children have at least 3 hours to walk to the next school and they stay there for the week. Secondary school is much further, so the students may not return for several weeks! Especially the educated young people are leaving the village when they are adults. Everything has to be carried still – there are no roads yet, but they approach rapidly! On the way we were often asked if we will or have visited the 'moon mountain', renowned because a road is being built (for tourism), which is spoiling many beautiful valleys with their stair-fields and villages of a predominantly Miao minority population. Our Miao couple told us proudly that we are here in the area of the 'sun mountain'.

12th October Start: **Baidou** End: **Jiajiu - 加鸠** Walk: 32 km / 8.5h

After a relatively good night, all the roosters made sure we would get up early. Just when we got out of our tiny room, the host woman asked us to stay for breakfast, her husband had already left in the dark to tend the fields. We kindly refused. Silly, as we had no idea how far we would have to walk today:-) We then left the house (left pic) with regrets at 7.30 and due to language problems it took us until 8 am to get on the right footpath up the mountain with its tops in the morning mist!



Our Chalet!



Leavin Beidou

After a rough and steep climb and a steep descent through a fairy tale landscape, we reached the bottom of a small valley with beautiful rice fields and (still) happy looking farmers.

A bit later we dropped onto a new road under construction, which we believed, will be leading to the moon mountain. That was a shock! Fortunately we could take some short cuts partly avoiding this ruthless intrusion into the formerly harmonious world of 2 valleys! On the way for over 4h we passed a small new village Guanghui (光辉) with many 'chalets' under construction. A future tourist trap!

Note: Years later, I found out in Google Earth that it also passes Beidou!



Happy Farmers



New Road gong to pass Beidou

We had not had breakfast (a bikkie and a piece of chokky); there was no eating-place and another 17 km to the next small town. The woman of a small shop took pity on me and prepared a bowl of instant noodles for me (compromise for 2Y). But then we were reconciled again by the breathtaking views of the manyfold rice stair fields all along the way!

The walk was even more exciting as the path kept winding high on the mountains slopes of 2 valleys until we reached Jiajiu, the first small town after nearly 70 km! I had a stiff neck and I was happy that Peggy immediately found a lovely simple room (for 15Y) on top of a small eating-place in a wooden house.



Lonely walking through..



... beautiful Rice Stair Fields...



... and Rice Arts!

After a delicious meal (fried bamboo shoots, spicy beef with vegetables and cold beer) we had a good wash in the cellar and then dropped to bed tired and happy!

13th October Start: **Jiajiu** End: **Luoxiang - 洛香** Bus: 160 km

After a good sleep we left the lovely guesthouse (pic) on toes since nobody seemed to be up at 8 am:-)

On the way to the bus (1 bus per day) our host surprised us and took us to the best seats he had reserved for us very early in the morning.

Just as well, since it was a long and beautiful ride in a crammed bus on small unmetalled roads through valleys and over mountains no end until we reached the main road leading along a big river to the larger town of Congjiang (从江).

We arrived at 13h and we had decided to stay to rest and visit a nearby Dong village.



Bus starting at Jiajiu

Peggy found a nice room right away but then when I turned up they turned me down (like in Rongjiang). But this time it was not dark and also we had seen an advertisement of the village Peggy wanted to visit – a tourist trap! No point for us to stay!

Well, a few minutes later we sat on a bus again! After 20 km along the same river we turned off into the hills and reached a very small place, Luoxiang!

No problem with foreigners! It was cold but then we got a very warm reception, moved into a nice room and after a warm shower we were happy again! Because it was cold we ordered a hotpot with spare ribs, mushrooms and various vegetables and rice wine! By now we were even thankful to have escaped the tourist traps in Congjiang:-)



Hot Pot at Luoxiang

14th October Start: **Luoxiang** End: **Zhaoxing - 肇兴** Walk: 25 km / 6h

Very cold morning and very grey. This dull weather with sustained winds at 14°C in the afternoon was going to prevail for the next few days. With our summer clothes we sometimes felt outright cold in spite of wearing 3 T-shirts under the light rain jacket! So it was this morning, but we still enjoyed the quiet 7 km walk along a small valley with nice Dong villages to the next major target – Zhaoxing, the unofficial traditional capital of the Dong minority. Here we were back in the country of the Gulou's and the wind and rain bridges!



Gulou on the Way...



...with Details



View to Zhaoxing

Zhaoxing has 5 Gulou's and a few Wind and Rain Bridges (pic) over the river flowing right through the large village with a population of 4000 people living in wooden houses. It is a nice place with a great atmosphere although it is already being visited by a few busloads of tourist (at least 1 with foreigners) every day.

Peggy found a nice simple room in a small guesthouse in the middle of the village and after a bowl of great soup noodles, we could not refuse a walk uphill to 2 nearby Dong villages, very nice Jitang - 纪堂 (at 7 km) with 2 big Gulou's and poorer looking Jilun - 纪伦 (at 3 km) with a simple Gulou and of course, we also had a good look at Zhaoxing.

At 4 pm we were so cold that we went to warm up in our room until dinner-time! Then we had an excellent meal at a 2 tables place (spiced good quality beef with celery, fried doufu, fried shredded potatoes - a bit like Röschi al dente and rice wine).



Gulou and Wind & Rain Bridge



Gate at Jitang



Center of Jitang



Dyeing cloth in Zhaoxing



Our Guest House



Chilli Fumes tickling Nose

15th October Stay in: **Zhaoxing - 肇兴** (visit of Tangan - 堂安)

Walk: 14 km / 3h

After the lovely meal last night we decided to stay another day to enjoy this nice region. Although it was very cold and grey, we walked up to Tangan, another Dong village said to be very original. We were not disappointed! It was a lovely walk and shortly before we reached the village by a short cut, we were welcomed by a nice wind and rain bridge. Tangan is quite high up on the slope of a mountain and has a very nice gulou and also a Dong museum (was closed) sponsored by a Norwegian organisation.



Tangan Wind&Rain Bridge



Tangan Gulou



View down to Bride

After returning to Zhaoxing we used a short glimpse of sun for a short stop outside at Annie's to have a beer, delicious fried noodles and fried nuts and then go to recover under a warm shower! Now we were ready to enjoy another good stroll around the village! At 6 pm we sat down again at Annie's for a good dinner: Beef with beans, pork with garlic sprouts, eggplant (aubergines) and rice wine (1Y a big glass)! Halfway through the meal a young Austrian backpacker joined us at the table and he was happy that Peggy ordered food for him. He had come from Guilin via Chengyang, Sanjiang and Diping. We thought that he did well all of his own and first time in China!

Later we peeped across a fence to see a Dong dance set up for a tourist group:-). Dances and the never-ending songs are an important part of the Dong tradition. The Dong never had their own writing and so they used to pass on their history, tradition and philosophy in the form of songs from generation to generation!

16th October Start: **Zhaoxing**

End: **Dudong - 独峒**

Walk: 28 km / 7h Bus: 25 km

Today we started for our last stage of our visit to this region! According to available information one must see the greatest wind and rain bridges and Dong villages in and around Chengyang in the province of Guangxi. Now, instead of following the normal route via Diping and Sanjiang we had the idea to go straight ahead East via Shuikou (水口) and walk the gaps to enjoy some more countryside! At 9am we boarded a bus to Shuiko, a very small place we reached at 10 am after a nice drive of 25 km, partly over unmetalled road.

Our host's hint that we should head across the border to Dudong in Guangxi was our only indication! Full of confidence, we started along a good trail! And it was a joyful walk in lovely weather condition through a narrowing valley, passing-by unspoiled Dong villages and wind and rain bridges until we reached a pass on the border between Guizhou and Guangxi!



Village with Water Wheel



The Wheel



Nice Wind & Rain Bridge

The scenic way down to Dudong took us passed beautiful tea plantations which give a special character to the valley!

Dudong is a small town with a new part aspiring to future tourism and a poor old part where hoards of lovely fat pigs and lovely young pigs run along the narrow paths between the old traditional wooden houses! The gulou and the wind and rain bridges are not missing of course but they are still a bit neglected!

Whereas Peggy found a good room with hot shower easily, it was more difficult to find a place to eat.



Tea Pantations on the Pass



Dudong

It seems that we found the only reasonable place in town, featuring 2 tables in the somewhat shabby entrance hall of the only other guesthouse. There Peggy just watched the lady frying some river fish and she ordered a portion spontaneously. Wow, there we were served a huge helping of excellent 'friture'. The beef with fagua (bitter cucumber) was good too and the rice wine did the rest of the trick. Suddenly we realised that the young people around us were not actually nosy and just watching us but waiting for a table! So we asked them to sit with us. They were very well behaved and they also ordered rice wine but diluted it with lemonade.....

When we returned to our room we were surprised by another blackout, which we enjoyed on our balcony on the 4th floor-watching people in the street with torches and candles!



Delicious Meal at Dudong

17 th October	Start: Dudong	End: Sanjiang – (三江)	Walk: 18 km / 4 h Bus: 85 km
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Originally we had the intention to walk to Chengyang (程阳). Here in Dudong nobody knew how to walk to Chengyang and my map, which I had made partly from information in Google Earth was not in-line with the Chinese names.

So, instead, we decided to walk to a remote Dong-village in the back of a narrow valley – Gaoding (高定). Not only was it a beautiful 10 km walk in nice weather along the mountain river, but also we had to turn off and climb to an elevated terrace where we found one of the nicest Dong villages we had seen so far! Gaoding is very lively with small squares, narrow paths and stairs and a little river at the bottom gurgling between mostly well-designed wooden houses!



Gaoding

There are also several beautiful Gulou's, a big one with a 1-pole structure. Due to lack of information we unfortunately missed the wind and rain bridge at the other end of the village. We did not stay long in Gaoding since we wanted to move on to stay in Chengyang that evening and so we returned to Dudong to take the bus to the next big town Sanjiang. But first we had our last 'best soup noodles ever with hot-sour sauce'. Since the bus did not turn up at 12.30h (broken down), we joined other people to ride on a minivan and reached Sanjiang after a great sinuous ride through beautiful and rich valleys and over a big pass.



Big Gulou with biggest...



... One-Pole Structure

Here we took the next bus for the 18 km to Chengyang (程阳) where we were supposed to see the biggest and nicest Dong wind and rain bridges! When getting off, we were asked right away to pay entrance fee (30Y) only to walk on the street! We immediately realised that we had stepped into a typical Chinese tourist hotspot! It took us 1 minute to make up our mind and start walking back towards Sanjiang. After all we had seen and experienced in a real world, why 'go to the zoo to see cows'? After 3 km we hopped on a bus taking us back to Sanjiang (the biggest city after a few weeks) where we had a good shower, a nice dinner (Peggy had a good chat with the owner in Cantonese, while I sipped on my last cup of rice wine:-). Our adventure ended here – 'mission accomplie'!

Today's highlight was Maogong, unexpectedly! – We dropped Chengyang easily from our minds! We were ready for the journey back to Hongkong!

18 th October	Start: Sanjiang	End: Pingle – (平乐)	Bus: 280 km
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We left at 8.20 on the road to Guilin. For the first 1.5h we did 30 km, the road was just one building site! But so we could enjoy the last few views of the Dong countryside and also the rest of the way to Guilin (160 km), first mountainous landscape giving way to the fertile plain of the Lijiang (river), was entertaining. But when we reached the huge bustling and polluted city of Guilin, we had visited in 1979 as a small town with hardly a car; we were horrified and fled by the next bus out after 13 minutes! Ok, we were happy with our choice, because the bus drove us in the right direction and through the famous 10'000 hills along the Li Jiang (river), passing-by Yangshuo which we had visited in 1979 by boat when it was just a small village.



Yangshuo (from Bus)

Eventually we reached totally untouristic Pingle, a small town along the Gui Jiang* (River) with as many and as nice hills as near Yangshuo. After a lovely walk to and over the big bridge over the Gui Jiang we had a good dinner with crispy rice pot, a local speciality. Back to beer! That night we stayed in a huge comfortable room (20Y) with WC/shower and a balcony with nice view!



Guilin-type Hills at Pingle with Gui Jiang (River)

* The Li Jiang flows into the Gui Jiang just before Pingle

19 th October	Start: Pingle	End: Hongkong (Tuenmun)	Bus: 450 km
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We were surprised that there was no bus to the big city of Wuzhou, so we took the bus at 7.30 to Hezhou (贺州) after Peggy had bought my preferred breakfast – you jia guai - at a stall with only 1 table. Although we knew that it would be difficult to reach Hongkong the same day, we kept going on with this hidden idea in mind and that put a bit of pressure on us!

The 3h for the 125 km to Hezhou seemed to pass very quickly, since we kept driving through those entertaining Guilin-type hills again and again!

In Hezhou we were faced with a dilemma! Earlier we had decided not to enter the mega city Guangzhou (Canton) but then there was only one bus in that direction at a reasonable departure time! The horse smelled the stable and so we went for the bus to Guangzhou at 11 am!



You Jia Guai

After a 6h kamikaze (but otherwise nice) drive over 300 km, we reached a huge bus terminal somewhere in West-side Guangzhou! Motorways and flyovers surrounded us and the only way to get out was to take another bus! It was already 17.30 when we decided to take the 19h bus to Shenzhen (Lowu-side) supposed to take 2.30h! Now time was getting tight to reach home same evening!

I have no idea by which way the bus went, but we saw all of Guangzhou by night when we crossed all possible bridges and fly-overs and then we crossed some pearl river bays 3 times over huge bridges! Suddenly somewhere in Shenzhen already, Peggy had us unexpectedly hop off and then we stood in a main street at a bus stop waiting for a bus to the Shekou border. At 10 pm just before we were going to give up waiting, the bus came and 30 minutes later we reached Hongkong territory (I was the only 老外 (lǎo wài) again passing the border! Then Peggy had no Hongkong coins for the bus to Tuenmun – no problem, use yuan! We arrived at 11 pm; Rocky was already waiting for us at the bus stop to take us for supper (fried noodles:-). Good night and relax!

End of China Trip

20th-29th October

.....Then we decompressed for 10 Days in Hongkong with the Family!

Took it easy for 2 days in Tuenmun! Rearrange luggage! Have delicious dimsum lunch! Back in Hongkong, people, here Yat Wah, wash their dishes, before eating in the restaurant. Walk around old Coffee Bay and Castle Peak resort in summer weather! Had a good time with Rocky and his family!

Then we moved to Tsuenwan to Toni and Ah Yuen, from where it was easier to reach Hongkong's attractions and other points of action! Also visited the Peak and had Dim Sum with Auntie Ah Yi and also stayed a night with Stemson and Dora in Allway Gardens.



Dish Washing before Dim Sum



Gold Coast (Old Coffee Bay)



Hot pot with Toni and Ah Yuen



2nd brother



The Peak is always nice



Dimsum with Auntie Ah Yee



Riding on Top Deck



Old Airport / Cruising Port?



Walk at Shingmun R'voir



Lunch with Stemson & Co



Club Sandwich at Toni's Café



Taio, fishing village on poles

Did a few things like visiting Peggy's father's graveyard, went for a nice walk to Shingmun reservoir, a round trip of Hongkong Island with visits to Stanley and The Peak, shopping and eating here and there, seeing and enjoying the family and old school friends. The time passed quickly and then came the last day. We went for breakfast to Toni's 'Biztro' in Tungchung near Airport and then did a nice tour by bus to the fishing village, Tai O. From there we made our last nice 3.5h walk along the shore back to Tungchung! After dinner with Toni we went to the Airport and spent the night there to be on time to check-in at 6 am!

Normal trip via London (Air New Zealand) to Zürich (by Swiss). Transiting London Heathrow was again like passing an airport at war with the big mess at the security checks but landed in ZH on time at 19.40. Got all possible connections easily and reached home in Ipsach at 22.00! Bed after 48h!

THE END OF THE DIARY!

Some more if you like!

Why Travel this Way?

Why should we deprive ourselves of comfort and accept the hardship of such a trip!

Money? Ambition? Pride? Curiosity? Thrill? Self-testing? Escaping? Loving China? Loving nature?

We just love to do things once in a while by our own initiative without buying the comfort and excitement with money!

With money, you can do everything, easily! But where is the feeling of achievement? Do you get close to the grass roots of a country? No! You get stuffed with what the tour-operators stuff you with!

Actually, sometimes we also buy a tour package and then let things happen to be spoiled and to see and learn (by professionals) something new the easy way!

But then sometimes, as long as we still can, we like to feel exposed to the basic offerings and conditions of a country, (could even be Switzerland). Thanks to Peggy we can immerse ourselves anywhere in China without great complications, risks and hazards. We can just let go and take day by day without detailed planning! This trip was probably the best in this respect! We feel good not only about what we have seen and done but to have enjoyed designing and surviving every day for almost 4 weeks, overcoming the obstacles of everyday life in an unfamiliar environment, usually amongst kind, well-meaning and helpful people! Of course, walking in beautiful Guizhou is a great joy in any case!

This and That

- Get into the bus: All overland / countryside buses have a ticket person who makes sure that people joining at any place along the way pay the right fare! The 'right fare' (3-4 km /Y) is often the result of a heated bargain! What I found particularly nice though, is that even if the bus is crammed (often with surplus passengers sitting on little stools in the aisle) the ticket person lets people sit down properly and take their breath for at least a couple of minutes, before tackling them for the fare!
- Off the bus:
It is strictly forbidden that buses carry passengers, which are not seated on the regular seats! There are often police checks on the way to make sure! It seems that the bus drivers have excellent eyes to stop on time, to let the surplus passengers out in order to pass the check on foot and join again a few hundred meters later! Sometimes I wondered if there could be agreements!
- Rice schnaps - Rice wine:
There is the stronger stuff 30-60% which you may get from amphora-type jugs in those few small hidden shops in the back streets. Contrary to the bottled low quality erqu products or high quality Maotai it tastes natural and is more or less smooth depending on the quality. We always carried a 5 dl bottle with us for a goodnight nip:-). In Yunnan, such sprits may also be made from sweet corn, sorghum, wheat and barley.
The weaker rice wine – Mijiu (perhaps 15% +/-) has not been distilled, I believe. The farmers of the minorities in Guizhou prepare this wine themselves. You may also order it in the small restaurants of the region (5 dl for 1 or 2 Y, a glass for 0.5Y - sometimes we had 5 dl each without getting drunk. It tastes almost neutral (a bit like sake) but more natural / liquid and it goes well with the tasty food. If you drink it at the farmers' home as their guest, then you can sure add the bonus of the high atmosphere excitement:-)
- Photographs of people – No hassling (almost):
We made very few pictures of people. We know that they do not like it too much and we were not feeling like asking them, as some especially in the tourist spots, having been spoilt already, might ask for money!
On the other hand we were very glad that we have encountered very little hassling. It was almost limited to tourist places where some people may wait for arriving buses to torment the passengers to get into a guesthouse or on a sightseeing tour! But it was quite harmless compared with Morocco for example!