

MEDITERRANEAN

SIGGY AND HEATHER | TRIP AROUND THE MEDITERRANEAN | SUN 30 JUNE - TUES 2 JULY 2013

Europe to Asia

On the last afternoon of our time in Roermond (was that only a few days ago!!) Heather went outside the van and came back to say that we had a hot air balloon being set up on the grass behind us! We watched with great interest as it was inflated and lifted off with a stack of passengers. Apart from that interlude, we packed our clothes (read "stuffed" them into our bags) and finished the clean up. We finished the packing by breaking a glass and putting a hole in the vinyl floor when our bike bag fell from the seat. We were very annoyed at ourselves for that. You get through three months with very little going wrong and then at the final hour!

The next morning we travelled the short distance to Beesel to drop off the van to Martin and Marlies. We continued our chat from yesterday over a cup of tea and a local cake delicacy and then Martin took us to the train station. Apart from having to transfer to a bus for one section of the trip, the train trip went smoothly. We enjoyed watching the countryside going by from the comfy seats in the train. The bags were very cumbersome to lug. However because we have only had to do this a few times, it was quite acceptable.



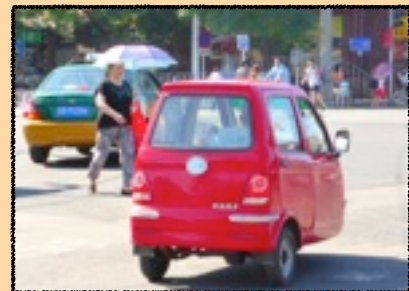
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SWIM ANYONE? There is a lake near our hotel where people rent peddle boats and generally laze around on the water's edge in the cool. This group, our age, took turns to swim from one shore to the other. Maybe its a generation thing?



GRACEFUL INTERLUDE This lady suddenly stopped in front of us, put her handbag down and then slowly moved around doing her Tai Chi moves. Really graceful.



THREE LEGGED CAR Lots of these variants driving around. Really a 3 wheeled motor bike with waterproof cabin but from the back looked like a car with one front wheel had been hacked off.

SNAPS



BEIJING CITY CENTRAL



JINGSHAN PARK



HOTEL ENTRANCE STREET

On the advice of George (our House Swap host) we had booked online a room at Schiphol Airport at a hotel called Citizen M. As the name suggests it has a funky, futuristic atmosphere. The check-in procedure was totally done via computer and the lobby decor was ultra modern black and red. This place is very minimalist.

The room was very small but had a king sized bed with a centrally located toilet and shower with sliding glass partitions. The best thing about the place was that it is only a 3 minute walk from the terminal.

The service was slick and congenial. It has to be highly recommended.

It was also a good idea to allow ourselves plenty of time to safely arrive before our flight the next day. We could have done without the overnight stop, but it would have been much more rushed.

Our plane to Beijing took off on time at 1.40 pm. To our disappointment we were allocated seats in the middle section of the plane - our fault as we did not check them at check-in time. There were once again, no individual entertainment units, but we happened to be just near a screen located above our heads. So, in the end we had some movies to watch and we actually found that we slept quite well.

As a result of changes to the schedule by China Southern, we arrived very early in the morning - 5.30am. When we had originally booked the arrival time was late morning. Luckily for us, we quickly found a taxi driver who could speak English and were whisked away to our hong tong (traditional

quadrangle type house) in the centre of Beijing, a stone's throw from the Forbidden City.

The driver dropped us off and indicated that we should walk up the dingy alleyway. We were a little apprehensive but set off. We must have looked very forlorn with our heavy bags and uncertain looks. Anyway, a few locals kept urging us on pointing the way forward and we eventually found the door we were looking for. It was only about 7 am and we were not even sure if the proprietors of the establishment would be up. Great waves of relief greeted us as they let us in and with minimum fuss and gave us our room about 8 hours early!

On initial viewing, the place was nowhere near as "charming" as the internet led us to believe. However we quickly changed our mind. After sleeping for about 5 hours, successfully getting some more local currency, eating 2 tasty meals and going out for a first walk to nearby Jingshan Park we felt quite refreshed and ready to explore Beijing. We did have some stress however in that none of the auto tellers we went to would give us any money using the only debit card we had. In the end we used our credit card to get a cash advance - something we have never done before. Who cares what interest we were charged - we had cash in our pockets! All good.

Tomorrow we are off on a tour to the Great Wall. We booked and paid for that at home. We paid too much according to the hong tong manager but we don't care really. It is a private guide and hopefully will be enjoyable.



View across Beijing city from Jingshan Park.



PHOTOS



Citizen M room



Fobidden City



Entrance to our hotel

