

Zayera on the road: Zurich to Beijing....

Here I, Zayera will post info about my trip and hopefully comments from the road when I am travelling... from Zurich to Beijing (may to august 2006).

10 May, 2006

Zurich to Beijing...

So this is what my trip looks like...if all goes as planned & wished...

20-22 May: On my way to Moscow with train from Zurich (via Vienna or Warsawa, Minsk)

22-25 May: In Moscow, mostly likely there for a couple of days

25-5 June: From Moscow to Irkutsk, would like to make stopovers in Yekaterinburg, Novosibirsk, Krasnoyarsk, Irkutsk and Ulan-Ude.

5-19 June : Volunteer project Atsagat Buddhist Datsan near Ulan-Ude

20-21 June: From Ulan-Ude to Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia

21-20 July: Travelling in Mongolia, nomadic family (murun), camel tour (zavkhan), desert tour (aimak, south gobi) and travel through Govi-Gurvan Saikhan.

20-21 July: Train towards Beijing

22-20 August: In China, spend some days in Beijing and travel around...this part is the least unplanned part...

21 August: Most likely return to Zurich (flying back!)

posted by Zurich to Beijing... @ 5/10/2006 03:08:00 PM 0 comments

11 May, 2006

Applying for visas

Applying for visas is a real mess, I tell you.

First I applied for the Mongolian visa, which I thought would be the least complicated one, since I have an "agency" helping me with the Travel-route. So I called the Mongolian embassy in Geneva asking for intructions and information, which they sent to me by fax.

Next step, I filled in the Visa application, send it by post (einbeschrieben) with my Passport and Visa and fee (in cash). After a couple of days I called to make sure that everything has arrived and is in order for issuing a visa. Then this person tells me, "we did not find any cash, did you sent us any money?" I said yes of course, they should check my letter/envelope. The next thing is I receive an email saying I need to fax them a copy of my "ausländerausweis" since I am not a swiss citizen they need a proof of my residence here in Zurich, and also a Reise-bestätigung from my travel agency! Now I got a bit puzzled and annoyed, so I faxed them a copy of my "ausländerausweis" and called my agency to email/fax them a copy of my travel-route.

A couple of days later I called again and now they said "yes, we have received everything, we are issuing the visa and will send it within a couple of days".

Imagine if they had told me or written all these instructions on their Visa application to start with?! So this took me ca 3 weeks from initial contact to actually having my passport back in possession.

The second visa I applied for was the Russian visa, here I searched for information online and found some useful info, yet I had to call the Embassy to check what exactly they need from me and they too faxed me instructions and visa application. So I filled it in and posted them (ingeschrieben) the visa application, photo, ausländerausweis-copy and passport. For the russian visa you need to pay the fee directly to their bank account, which I did the same day.

So 3 days later I called and asked them, how is my visa proceeding, since I paid for an "express-visa" I was actually expecting to have my passport back already. Now this woman tells me "we did NOT receive your payment, when did you pay us? Can you send us an FAX of your payment" GREAT! Now I had to go to the bank get a confirmation of payment and fax it to the Russian embassy. Again 2 days later I called and asked where is my passport and they said "everything is ok, you will have it tomorrow".

Thursday 11 May, I received my passport via post with the russian visa!

But today I had to rush to the Chinese embassy in Zurich, since the Chinese visa you can only apply for in person (cannot send the application and passport my post etc..however since I live in Zurich no problem0..). The Chinese Embassy I tried to call zillions of time in order to figure out what do I need to send to them, the phone instructions are pretty amazing and clarifying. However I did not understand "voucher & ticket"? what did I need? Finally after trying to reach the embassy daily for weeks I got hold of someone who told me I need a flight ticket otherwise I cannot get a visa! Great so I booked a flight ticket back to Zurich from Beijing and applied for the visa. As mentioned earlier, I went to the embassy, was there ca 1 hr and submitted my application..and hopefully I will have my visa next week!

But I still have one visa unresolved, since I am taking the train from Zurich to Moscow, all trains travel via Minsk, Belarus. Now for Belaru you

need a transit-visa and here the same mess...I call the embassy and this person does not even want to give me any information via phone "just give your faxnr and I will send you all the information you need and the application". Great I already did that yesterday and the fax got lost. Today I received the fax after the 3rd phone call but I won't have time to apply for the Belarus-visa (send passport to Bern, 5 days of application time and post it back, which means I need additional 7 days, which I don't have :(I guess I have no choice but to take the risk it and travel without any transit-visa).

I can imagine that in the middle of the night on the train, when I pass the Belarus border either the police will send me back or I have to pay a fee for not having a transit-visa and pass the borders anyway...I have to check this up..buhu..

posted by Zurich to Beijing... @ 5/11/2006 01:20:00 PM 1 comments

Zurich to Beijing... Hat gesagt...

I called the Belarus Embassy again and asked if an express-visa is possible or what could happen if I don't have a visa. They told me to come by the Embassy and they will issue an express-visa somehow..so lets see.

*If I manage to have all my visas until next friday (19.05) then I can take-off.
12 May, 2006 10:50*

13 May, 2006

Getting packed...

So now I am slowly getting ready for my trip...I checked the train schedules today and I think I have some flexibility in Russia however I would like to make more stopover but somehow I have the feeling that might not be possible, especially when I have to be in Ulan-Ude on June 5th.

Hmm..lets see where I can make stopovers..

Otherwise I am pretty calm and hope I don't forget to take something important and remember it when I am on the train!

posted by Zurich to Beijing... @ 5/13/2006 11:47:00 PM 0 comments

17 May, 2006

Got the tent ready

Sometimes time passes by so slowly, what have I done the past days?

I bought a tent in montreal, which I have checked and it passed the test (since it rained yesterday) and it seems like it will serve well on the trip.

I got my e-GO professional, solarladegerät (solar power device) with which I can charge my mobile, digital camera etc...and I am so glad that I got it before my trip since I ordered it online last week from Berlin, so I checked it yesterday and realised that one of the adapters didn't fit, but luckily today I found the necessary adapter :-)) so now I am set and charged!

What more...yesterday I created a "process" of **Simplyfying the visa process**..maybe later I will send it to all the embassies and tell them how to be more efficient..hahaha..well "occupational injury"..I can't help simplyfying & improving customer experiences and processes!

scheisse or as the swisses say "**schiidreck**"

posted by Zurich to Beijing... @ 5/17/2006 05:52:00 PM 0 comments

18 May, 2006

Ready set go

Finally I got my chinese visa today :-))

I also managed to go to Bern, to the Belarus Embassy and got an transit-visa (express) for Minsk.

But afterwards when I tried to purchase train tickets to Minsk, it got messy..

Went to SBB-counter for information and to buy the tickets but they sent me to DB-counter...

And there I got even more confusing information.

So after several hours and looking up different options I have finalized the beginning of my trip:

Train to Berlin, stopover in Berlin 19.05

Train from Berlin to Minsk, stopover in Minsk 20-21.05

After that I hope to catch a train from Minsk to Moscow and so forth...

Until then...

posted by Zurich to Beijing... @ 5/18/2006 09:49:00 PM 0 comments

20 May, 2006

Berlin stopover

I took a train from Zurich (ca 12.24) to Basel, then ICE-train to Berlin Zoologischer Garten, arriving ca 21.20 in Berlin.

Friday-night I am staying in Berlin at my friend Birgits place in Kreuzberg.

Had vietnamese dinner and enjoyed the company of new people (austrian couple from vienna, and my friends bf).

The train journey itself was somewhat eventless, just people rushing in and out of the train...the train was obviously overbooked and people had to stand in the hallways since there were no more seats available. The germans are very disciplined and just stand around, minding their own business. So little talking and chatting.

Luckily I found an unreserved seat and managed the trip without any hassle.

I did notice something particular and that was in Wolfsburg, opposite the trainstation is a huge VW-sign and it looked like an old VW-factory from beginning of the century, which now is abandoned...what an industrial sight.

Tomorrow I'll embark my eastern adventure in the direction to Russia and make a short stopover in Minsk before heading to Moscow. Lets hope that I get a suitable train-connection.

posted by Zurich to Beijing... @ 5/20/2006 12:53:00 AM 1 comments

Misha hat gesagt...

Am curious if the easterners are as disciplined as the germans in the trains... I'm sure you get some more chatting there.

21 May, 2006 13:09

21 May, 2006

Train to Minsk & Minck city

I took the train from Berlin Lichtenberg to Minsk Pass. The cabin I got had 3 beds, I got the top bed, ca 2 meters up in in the air. How do you get up? Thorough a normal stairs....scary!

The cabin itself was ca 1.8 x 1.6m and very small for 3 persons. At Frankfurt am Oder an old russian couple joined me and the old man I could chat with since he spoke german, they were both 77 years old and travlleing back home to Ural mountains for vacation.

Needless to say I slept badly in this train and we reached the Belarus-border around midnight & stayed there ca 3,5 hours for Passport-controll, customs, and railtrack changes. No hassle there but it just took so long time and when we finally started to fall asleep the train would make strange noises and bumps, as if someone was hammering on it or manually moving it very slowly.

The train arrived in Minsk ca 8-9am local time (abit head of schedule I think) and I purchased my next ticket, which is tonight at 18pm to Moscow, arriving 6am (local time).

Now I have been walking around in the center of Minsk and admiring the communist architecture and looking at local behaviour etc. Actually I am too tired to do anything else but just hang around. Went to a McDonalds and saw many girls, teenagers and women in general wearing pink clothes, seems like their favorite colour!

Will write more later...when I can think again..haha

Ps. I don't suit as a stink backpacker.

posted by Zurich to Beijing... @ 5/21/2006 01:08:00 PM 0 comments

22 May, 2006

In Moscow

The train from Minsk to Moscow was better than the first train sleepover, this train had many stopovers, ca 12 but made a stop around midnight for ca 2-3 hours, for the passengers to sleep?

The cabin had 2 beds and a small table...and I slept better, don't know if it is enough though.

Here I will stay 3 nights and then catch the train eastwards further on...I'll write more about that.

posted by Zurich to Beijing... @ 5/22/2006 06:40:00 AM 1 comments

Misha hat gesagt...

Do you still stink? :-)

22 May, 2006 17:57

Moscow Kremlin, Red Square, Metro stations

Now its 21.55 and I have been walking around all day long in Moscow.

We went to the Kremlin, saw the Armoury and churches with lots of icons, orthodox christian art and religious motifs. In the Amoury one can see plenty of "russian kitsch" meaning..lots of golden stuff, weapons, clothes, jewellery, basically anything that is covered in either gold, silver, jems, diamonds etc. I am not exaggerating but the Russians really like everything bright and shiny.

Afterwards we went to the Novodevichy convent, which is a UNESCO Heritage site ans saw even more icons, marias & jesus etc...most of the stuff here is from 1600-1700.

Today I even had proper lunch, pizza, salad and chocolate cake..what a feast for a stinky backpacker!

Around 18 pm, I decided to take photos of some of the famous metro stations..which was not the best idea since it was rush-hour and try

walking in the opposite direction!!

Anyway I think I got some good photos of classical communist motifs and some nice architecture too. Although I got puffed-away by a policeman/watchdog when I stood on a bench to take a photo....they don't talk, just tap you on the shoulder and look mean! Maybe I should practice that look..hahaha

posted by Zurich to Beijing... @ 5/22/2006 07:55:00 PM 0 comments

23 May, 2006

Art in Moscow

Blogging on Tuesday evening: 22.30

Today was a day of watching art in Moscow. I went to the old "stalinist" Tretyakov Museum (12-20th century art) and the new Tretyakov Museum (20 century art only).

Both museums were interesting and had some good collections however the arrangement of the new Tretyakov is a disaster..for some reason the art pieces are not displayed adequately.

In the old T. they had of course plenty of "icons" but the most interesting part I found of a Artist (name later) who accompanied Russian army and painted the scenery, people of east asia from 17-19th century being the best descriptive art I have seen sofar, since its rare that you see real-life "snapshots" of reality from such an early episode of the fareast.

The new T. had has an amazing collection of "communistic" art meaning that the artistics depicted the russian society in motion, in its dynamic movement, physically, mentally, ideologically and emotionally. It's definately worth coming back and studying the art pieces in both museums in further detail.

For Lunch, I tried a baked potatoe with fillings, russian style...meaning you don't want to know what they put in those potatoes!

For Dinner, we managed to find a vegetarian restaurant and ate some nice food.

The weather was sunny and warm and lots of people gathered in the parks, boulevards and were just hanging around...I think they really like hanging around in the street & parks here.

posted by Zurich to Beijing... @ 5/23/2006 08:30:00 PM 0 comments

25 May, 2006

Hello & Goodbye Lenin

It's 2.15 am and I just returned from a night out in Moscow!

But first I'll tell you about my day...we visited LENIN today and he is actually a petite guy with blond hair, mustasch and goatie. The guards told me to take out my hands out of my pockets and to move along, obviously I was standing too long and holding up the que (they told me twice...oh I am not good with following orders...as if that was any news).

I wonder if Lenin actually wanted to be cremated and displayed for all eternity to people or if we would appreciate the Russia, what it has turned out to be...big communist monuments & statues yet everything around is very capitalistic and materialistic.

A good book title would be "Dialogs with Lenin" where one could discuss modern Russia with the communist ideology and ideas of the state that Lenin originally aspired for....

After that I went to the a huge flea-market and bought my russian souvenirs and had some wired lunch, whenever I buy something from a stand, I am just hoping that I won't get sick since the hygiene criterias & air is not very clean here.

In the afternoon I went to the old Arbat and walked around looking at old quarters, buildings.

In the evening I tried to find a specific bar, walked updown a street 3 times, behind the street & backyard twice but I still didn't find it. Then I got back to the hostel and M. kindly took me out..saying its your last night in Moscow, so you have to go out...

He should me this bar that I was trying to locate earlier and it was really hidden, black door, with no sign, nr or anything...just a button in a backyard and for security reasons it had 2 separate doors (to keep the skinheads out etc). The bar itself was pretty nice and then we went to another place & did the Russian thing...vodka shots..the best vodka according to M. is Flagman/Flagship and I had 3 of these...oh the russians really like their vodka.

Then we went to another bar and watched the locals party on a wednesday evening...that was fun :-)

Thanks M. for showing me around & taking me out!!

However I said around midnight that I wanted to go to the hostel since I would like todo some sightseeing and M. said "oh one more drink, one more cigarette etc..." that I found that very russian too but I really enjoyed the evening & experiencing the russian partying mood.

I definately have to come back here for a longer time, learn some russian & have fun in Moscow.

The Russians really know how to party and Moscow is a great city...I would like to spend some more time here in the future....perhaps open up a hostel or start a business maybe?

I like Moscow :-) and the city is big enough, so one doesn't get bored easily..hahaha..

posted by Zurich to Beijing... @ 5/25/2006 12:17:00 AM 0 comments

Leaving Moscow

Its 7pm, thursday 25th. Today I packed my luggage and checked out of the Hostel but can hang out here before I take the train tonight.

Everytime I have to repack my luggage it takes me ca 1hr but at least now I am getting better at it.

Today I went to St Basils' church, which is at the red square with th colourful kupols and tooks lots of photos. In the afternoon we took a boat-tour on the moscow river and saw the moscow sights from the river, pretty nice & relaxing.

However now I am getting a bit nervous about the 5 days on the train, I have my tickets to Irkutsk and leaving tonight, arriving in Irkutsk 31st, which means I will spent all nights in train and have stopover in Yekaterinburg, Tyumen, Omsk, Novosibirsk, Irkutsk.

After that I will stay 5 nights in Irkutsk and then head for Ulan-Ude.

Gaaaaa, 5 days in train, sleeping, eating etc...changing trains etc..yes I am nervous...

posted by Zurich to Beijing... @ 5/25/2006 05:09:00 PM 0 comments

27 May, 2006

Yekaterineburg/Svedlovsk

27 May, its ca 9.40 am and I arrived with the Train from Moscow now in the morning.

The train ride went well, however the bed/bench was very hard and I could't sit for too long, otherwise my ass would start aching. Sleeping two nights were manageable but not great.

This journey was ca 30 hrs in train and today I have ca 12 hrs in Yekaterineburg, before I take the train tonight again via Tyumen, Omsk to Novosibirsk.

During the train ride I have seen plenty of woods, forest and tiny settlements and villages.

The weather has been most sunny and I have never before seen so many dandelions (maskroser) in the fields as during this trip.

At the trainstops, old ladies come with foods, drinks, toys etc to sell to the passengers.

In the train, the russians drink lots of tea and eat soup/noodles, mostly they just sleep, some people stretch their legs and hang out...

The wagon lady/men (responsible for the wagon, check tickets, provide snacks, hot water etc) have been very kind and helpful so far. Even though my russian is nonexistence somehow we manage to communicate...

posted by Zurich to Beijing... @ 5/27/2006 05:39:00 AM 0 comments

29 May, 2006

In Novosibirsk

Its ca 11.30 am in Novosibirsk, 29 May. I arrived here 4/7 am in the morning. All train departure & arrival times are always given on Moscow-time, so one has to keep track of several time zones, therefore I am always writing/referring to x/y, x=moscow time, y=local time.

After Yekaterinburg (where the last hours I tried to find a phonecard & gave up after 2 hours of frenzy but eventually found one & could make a phone call, which I really needed! It is silly in these cities you find no place & people have no idea where you may buy a phonecard but you find somany shops selling sim-cards!).

From Yekaterinburg I took a night-train to Tyumen, got there 2/4 am & waited for the next train ca 3 hrs at the station, which was very boring. The station sucked, had nothing to offer, found nosigns, lockers etc...

Then I took a regional train from Tyumen to Omsk (watched 2 russian movies & mr/mrs smith all in russian), which took ca 7 hrs and spent ca 4hrs in Omsk.

Omsk is an ugly city, I would not recommend it to anyone, purely industrial and shabby. The train-station is being renovated so it was in a mess, I got there & got help to carry my bag to the luggage-storage & walked around the ugly,trafficated mainstreets with useless pathways, seems like they are rebuilding everything in this city! All buildings were either ugly, industrial or in poor shape. The only interesting thing I did, being desperate for proper food was that I tried out a local cantina& ate lunch/dinner: salad, rice & salmon with mushroom/mayonnaise sause, and what looked like crepe turned out to be desert, sweet pancakes with caramel sause and some wired cheese/carrot-cake? At least I had some adventure when it comes to trying out food & making sure I am not eating meat or too much junkfood..haha.

BTW, the russians really like to eat junk food and any kind of sweets/deserts, either cake & sweet pastry for breakfast or pancakes/blinhi any time of the day. I guess, I know now why people here are not skinny and look rather chubby/unsporty. Another thing I noticed is that many restaurants have TV's either playing music or showing soaps. Perhaps Russian is turning more & more americanized than even they realize??

After that I took the night-train to Novosibirsk and slept alright, perhaps I was just exhausted fromthe past ca 30hrs or perhaps I am getting use to sleeping in these trains. This train was fairly new & good shape but the cabin was full last night, meaning 4 people were sleeping. In

Novosibirsk I have already walked up/down the 2 mainstreets & there seems not much to be going on, just a very industrial,trafficated town..not much to see and not worth a stopover!

The museums are shut today since it is monday, so I will just hang out & wait for my train towards Irkutsk (with a wired stopover around midnight in Taiga for4 hrs :(but I will be in Irkutsk on wednesday!! hopefully).

posted by Zurich to Beijing... @ 5/29/2006 06:15:00 AM 0 comments

31 May, 2006

In Irkutsk

31st may, ca 14.30.

Finally after 5 days on trains & stopovers I have arrived in Irkutsk at 3.30/8.30 am.

At the station I was picked up by the Hostelperson & someone from the GBT (volunteer organisation) which was confusing but amusing. Now I took a "shower" the old fashioned way, meaning heated up waters on the stove, put them in a plastic bucket & washed myself. Well after 5 days on the road I had to get clean and I couldn't wait 2 more days wearing the same old dirty clothes since last thursday...that's when the warm water would run again in the hostel&city?!! At least now I am clean & fresh again & it's so nice to wear clean clothes too.

The train journey went ok, chatted with a mother & daughter who were in the same cabin 1 day.

The Train I took from Taiga to Irkutsk was very cold (I slept bad first night & freezing), meaning the weather turned cold in Novosibirsk, cold wind and the temperature dropped down to 3-4 degrees. Here in Irkutsk it's cold ca 4c and grey...I guess it fulfills the siberian weather forecasts :- (hopefully it should be warmer again as they tell me...because so far from Moscow to Yekaterinburg it was over 20 degrees and mostly sunny. Summer where are you??

Here in Irkutsk I have to figure out what to do..perhaps take some tours but it seems difficult to go for day tours & tourist season hasn't begun yet..worse case I'll just relax & hang out or something.

posted by Zurich to Beijing... @ 5/31/2006 07:20:00 AM 1 comments

Misha hat gesagt...

brrrrh! It's cold and they don't have warm water for 2 days?! How awful. Do they at least have heatings in the hostel?

31 May, 2006 16:31

01 June, 2006

Simple necessities

What do we really need? We need water, food, sleep, a warm place and somewhere to wash & get clean. When travelling these simple necessities can be very hard to fulfill, first of all, find water, you need to buy water since most places (in Russia) you cannot find any water, so forget tap water or an public water service. One need to buy water or go to a kiosk/cafe/restaurant etc. The same thing with food, in my case I have to make sure there is no meat & somewhat eatable. But once you've eaten & drunk water, you need a toilet, which can sometimes be an issue too. Mission = find a toilet. Public toilets are rare as well and if you do find one they cost ca 10-20 roubles and russian style toilets mean, a hole (not sitting) which you bend over...I tell you it's not very clean or hygienic at all (at the stations you get some pieces of toilet paper when you pay, meaning if you need more..hahah then you're in trouble).

So it's obvious, if you eat & drink, make sure there is a toilet around or within a couple of hours you'll have to look for a one.

Sleep & warm place is especially necessary in a cold climate, because then you need to be warm & dry, to be able to relax and be comfortable.

Why on earth do people actually live in "cold environments"? Especially when someone told me today siberian summer = 1 month in July.

Wash & clean oneself, place, environment seems evidential to us but I tell you it's NOT!

Ah most places are dirty, streets are muddy and pathways may be stinky or flooded especially with rain. This also goes for public places as well as cafes/hostels/buses/trains/etc (luckily the hostel I am staying at now is kept very clean).

People tend to keep clean yet poor people cannot afford the luxury of being clean or keeping clean here. or perhaps they don't care..I don't know.

In the end you spend money on eating, drinking, sleeping, keeping warm and clean when you are on the road. Oh what luxury to have a home, hot water and being able to eat/drink healthy.

The weather is still bad, it's cold ca 8c and rain showers. Tomorrow I will go hiking despite the weather and maybe I'll go on another trip but I'll decide that later. It seems like we are stuck with rain for a while in Siberia :-)

Next week (on Tuesday) I'll go to the Datsan Atsagat near Ulan-Ude and start the volunteer project for 2 weeks. During this time I won't have access to computer/internet so I'll try to update afterwards when I can.

posted by Zurich to Beijing... @ 6/01/2006 07:26:00 AM 2 comments

Misha hat gesagt...

Hey Zayera,

This sounds like you're already pretty tired of travelling. I guess it's gonna be better when you can do the project. We had the first relatively warm day here today after 3 weeks of grey and cold. It was nice. I hope it clears up where you are soon too.

Love,

Misha

03 June, 2006 20:52

Anonym hat gesagt...

Hey Zayera,

My friend and I will be coming out of Mongolia this Summer and across Siberia. Where did you buy your tickets? Did you get them through an agency beforehand or did

*you jusy buy them at stations?
It's good to read what you're doing, sounds like fun to me.*

Ellen
06 June, 2006 12:53

06 June, 2006

Wild & Crazy

It's ca 18.30 local-time in Ulan-Ude and I arrived here this morning.

Last two days were wild & crazy...I went on an guided tour and actually wanted to hike but ended up sitting yet again on a train, this one was very slow ca 15km/hr and I saw the coastlike of southern Baikal-lake up to Portal Baikal. Basically the whole day I spent on train looking outside...So being fedup of not finding any proper information I decided to be bold & daring. I felt the hostel in Irkutsk and went with the Hydrofoil (boat) to Listvyanka on Saturday, it was a pleasant 1hr boatripe to this little village. Here I tried to find some information about hiking routes since several persons told me about it but the russian never give good or exact information so I was still wondering where exactly to go. At the "tourist-info" i got very little information and decided to stay in Listvyanke for the first night & found a private homestay. I visited a wired museum and saw fishes, and nerpa seals (seals with squashed faces, they look abit eskimo actually). In the evening I saw the sunset & ate omul (smoked fish). So still not being able to hike on sunday I got very daring, desperate and foolish, I had a faint idea about the road & asked someone about it...they explained to me that there is a trail along the coastline...so I dared to pursue it.

Well before I got started aggressive watchdogs bit me on my legs & I got some flesh wounds (luckily I was wearing two layers, so no direct contact). Then I hiked up a hill and followed a path which got very scary (I don't like heights & looking down on steep paths) so I decided to leave it and go up the woods and figure out another path. After hours of wandering in the wild siberian woods I decided to return to the coastalpath otherwise I would have been lost in nowhere and imagined worst-case-scenarios.

Back on the coastline I came to my first beach and met a group with a local tour-guide, he adviced me that the trail which I was looking for was too far away and that would mean returning back to Listvyanka, well I had my mind set on the next village which is called Bolschoi Kotei and thats where I was heading. He told be that path would take be across 3 more hills and the next one would be very scary..I should only look up & climb not look down and the other two would be easier and it would take me ca 6hrs of further hiking.

Being crazy & mad that day I decided to continue (it was warm & sunny too) and I tell you the path got very narrow & dangerous, even the signs were "danger ahead" but I still continued. At some moments I had doubts about my sanity and wondered what the heck I was doing balancing on a narrow path with hills to the left and to my right steep edge towards the water. Even if I had stumbled I would fall into the water but the water was not deep enough ca 30-100cm and that would not be enough for a good landing besides being ca 5degrees. My pulse was crazy several times and I can assure that I was never before so concentrated on how & where I stepped my feet & some moments I had to climb around rocks etc..I have taken photos to proof this..when you see them you'll wonder what the heck I was doing..well I was wild & crazy & dared everything! Luckily I made it and arrived to the tiny village after 6pm but missed the last boat, so I stayed over at a old lady (babushka) and was still pretty schocked from the day.

Next morning I wake up & find my back aching & itching and look around (actually before going to bed I looked and made sure I got ride of all bugs & insects that had attacked & bitten me) but I could see anything just a small wound. So I went to a small hike in the morning & returned at the realisation of "entering tick-land" and came back to Bolshoei Kotei and waited for the boat to take me back to Listvyanka. When the boat didn't show up I asked the locals "where is the boat?" they laughed and said no boat today only tomorrow at 5pm!!! Imagine I had a train monday-night at 9pm and here I am in a little village 2hrs away from civilisation with no phones, no road & few people. Ok, so I explained to them that I had to return asap & they offered to take be back on boat to Listvyanka but of course it cost me 4000R. I took the offer and ca 1,5 hrs later I was back in Listvyanka and got on the minibus back to Irkutsk another hour later. In Irkutsk I went to pick up my luggage and showed my wound & they told be you have to go to emergency clinic because it was a TICK! Ok now I really got scared, took a taxi to the clinic, they cut it out & gave it to me for bieng checked, since it was evening already I couldn't have it examined yesterday so I went on the train with the tick with me. I took the train to Ulan-ude, got picked up & went to the clinic here to have it checked up. They said "it's dead & useless! we cannot examine it" so the doctor has now given me antibiotica which I have to take for a week!!!

OK wrap up...I went on a crazy wild hike, got bitten my dogs, bugs, insects, ticks, mosqitos etc and had to cut a tick out & now have to take antibiotica!! I hope I survive my first tick-attack, luckily I got FSME-injection before I left..now I have to be aware of my health for the next weeks & see if I get any symptoms...

Ironically I am wondering if I will survive siberia & ticks-infectionation.

I hope I do & I have to make a sacrifice to the local "gods" now & hope for the best.

posted by Zurich to Beijing... @ 6/06/2006 11:31:00 AM 0 comments

12 June, 2006

Datsan Atsagat volunteering

Monday 12th May, ca 16pm in Ulan-Ude. Today we are in the city for a couple of hours and we watched the city celebrating its 340 years anniversary with a parade, people, music etc.

At the Datsan & Village Atsagat there is nothing to do, I have been there now since last wednesday doing nothing. We have no hot water, no phones, network, electricity comes & goes and I have been sleeping in my tent for the past 5 nights. Last night & past two days were very cold, between 5-10 degrees and very cold winds. At night is storms & the wind sweeps around the tent wildly.

The volunteering project itself is a russian chaotic disaster, totally uncoordinated, no tasks, no tools, no material and mostly we are just hanging around "waiting for Godot", most of the time it feels like I am in a FARCE!!!

One saturday we did an excursion to the woods/mountain to perhaps built or explore a trail, we came back wet, dirty and cold after 5 hours in the woods and 2 hours on a pick-up truck on dangerous roads.

So basically we will not built anything, we just sit and wait for something to happen, the stupas will not be built and no trails will be cleared or built at all. I think this project is about learning to do nothing and have patience. We (4 german volunteers plus me, 1 russian and 2 russian project managers plus one translator) mostly eat, talk and look around. At the datsan there are 3-4 lamas and monks and thats it.

Well I decided to stick to the plan and will hang out 1 more week doing nothing before next week heading for Mongolia, hopefully that will be more exciting and warmer too.

posted by Zurich to Beijing... @ 6/12/2006 08:23:00 AM 0 comments

17 June, 2006

Done volunteering in Atsagat

June 17th, ca 14pm in Ulan-Ude. We have returned to the city from Atsagat and are finished with volunteering. This week we did NOTHING. Actually the guys or basically the team leader did build some parts of a Stupa but thats it. We were suppose to the woods & check trails one day, got ready, sat in the minivan and then after 30 mins we returned back since the drivers just laughed when the Teamleader mentioned which parts of the woods we were headed, meaning another day wasted due to improper coordination.

So I have been mostly sitting and doing nothing, watching the clouds, the sun, flies, scenery etc.

One day I had the kitchen duty, so I cooked and did the dishes all day long. Another day we went for a small hike, towards the river and viewed the russian grounds.

Since last weekend was so cold and I stayed in the tent for 6 nights, I got myself a cold and been feeling abit of "low energy", hoping to recover soon. Wiredly enough I also know what it means to "kallsvettas" I did that in the tent, it was cold, I was freezing and yet sweating at the same time. On tuesday evening I decided to join the other in the wooden cabin and get warm, proper sleep etc. So the rest of the nights now I have slept better yet I still feel sick, since I am sneezing, have a soar throat, running nose and sweating since the temparture is warmer now too since 3 days, we have ca 20-25 degrees.

Now I have two nights in Ulan-Ude before taking the train to Ulanbaatar/Mongolia.

BTW I have nicknamed Siberia for MMZ = Mull, Mucken, Zecken land. Translated it means garbage, moskitos and tick land. This is what russian country side looks like, wherever its civilized you have trash and garbage everywhere, were its not civilized you have woods, taiga, forest, wetland and millions of insects, bugs, moskitos, flies, ticks etc.

I think the governmens, the west should help Russia and particularly Siberia in informing, educating and creating an environmentally functioning Waste-management and ecological thinking about taking care of their garbage, pollution etc. They seriously lack it and the woods are being really damaged and plundered. Some sights really hurt to see, how the woods have been plundered, how garbage is lying everywhere and people don't seem to care about anything. They are busy struggling with Life or getting drunk, forgetting about Life.

posted by Zurich to Beijing... @ 6/17/2006 06:50:00 AM 0 comments

18 June, 2006

Summary of Russian-trip

Sunday 18th June, ca 16pm in Ulan-Ude. Today is my last day in Ulan-Ude, Siberia, Russia.

Tomorrow morning I am taking the train to Ulanbaatar and will reach Mongolia Tuesday morning.

I would like to summarize the first month of my trip and particularly what I have seen and experienced in Russia & Siberia. The journey and train-travelling have taught me how to have patience and how to do "nothing". How to communicate with Russians and get my way around in new places, cities, villages and figure out how things & people function here.

Russia is interesting and it's definately worth returning to in the future, but then I will definately study russian or take an intensive course for 1-2 months. Personally I prefer Moscow, the rest you can forget, at least the cities are not really worth a visit.

The countryside and vast nature, taiga, lakes, animal life etc is also interesting but as it said in one guide-book "one needs either a lot of time or a lot of money to get around here", meaning it is very undeveloped region, and tourism does not exist, which means if you don't speak russian its very difficult to get around and have a meaningful experience & communicate with people here on your own. Of course if one would travel with a tour or a guide, translator that would make it easier but even then you are just shown selected parts of life here.

On the countryside and small villages its difficult to get by, no reliable transportation, food stores, no phones etc. So I guess you want to get around here then "good luck".

On my own I have seen back alleys, visited small stores, eaten food in local canteens/restorants and struggled with local buses. Also in shops its an adventure to buy water, phone card, throat medicine, use internet, send postcards (in irkutsk it took me ca 2-3 hours to locate a post office). In the cities, I had to walk up & down a street at least 2-3 times until one figures out what shop is for what purpose and where to get something useful. Imagine ordering a blinhi (pancake) in order to make sure that you get a vegetarian version and no MEAT.

Past weeks that was the worse part actually for me, foodwise I am in a meat-eating country and especially here in Siberia, they eat MEAT for breakfast, lunch and dinner.

I can go on and write about many more episodes of daily hassle here but to summarize I would like to say this: Russians are friendly people but Russia itself is very tourist/foreign unfriendly place. Perhaps in the future, when people here get use to more foreigners visiting and catering to foreign needs it might be better but otherwise it's very undeveloped.

However I would definately recommend for everyone to once a while go somewhere that you know nothing about, just explore it, find yourself in wired situations and figure it out.

My second recommendation is DOING NOTHING for a couple of days is a good experience too. That would make a good book title "Doing nothing"!

Chapter 1: Do nothing. Chapter 2: Nothingness. Chapter 3: Not doing anything. Chapter 4: Doing minus everything else. Chapter 5: How to do "nothing" between now and later. And soforth, I think you get my point :-)

posted by Zurich to Beijing... @ 6/18/2006 08:26:00 AM 0 comments

Details of travel plan in Mongolia

In Mongolia my travel plan looks like this:

21-23 June: In Ulaanbaatar (UB)

23 June: Flight to Murun

24-28 June: Travel to countryside with Jeep and stay 4 nights at Nomad Family.

29-30 Juni: Travel to Desert with Jeep (Bor Khyaryn els)

01-03 July: Stay 3 nights with Camel Nomad family (Kamelzüchterfamilie)

04-06 July: 3 day camel-tour around Zavkhan region.

07-09 July: Stay 3 nights with Camel Nomad family (Kamelzüchterfamilie)

10-13 July: 4 day camel-tour and visit Naadam-Fest (celebrations)

14 July: Stay with Camel Nomad family

15 July: Travel with Jeep to Donoi. Flight back to Ulanbaatar.

16-18 July: Either in Ulaanbaatar or if possible train to China (Beijing)?

This means that from 23 June until 16 July I will not be able to update my blogg or send any emails. Hopefully I can update and tell about this trip in detail afterwards before travelling to China.

posted by Zurich to Beijing... @ 6/18/2006 08:55:00 AM 1 comments

Anonym hat gesagt...

Hello Zayera!

It's been really interesting reading about your trip so far, although I got a bit nervous reading about your adventures in the Siberian forests. We want to wish you the best of luck with the trip in Mongolia, it will be fun to read about it when you get back to "civilization" again!

Big hug from Karin & Erik & Anton

19 June, 2006 22:04

20 June, 2006

Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia

Its Tuesday 20th June, ca 17.40 (localtime).

I arrived this morning to Ulaanbaatar after being ca 1 day on train again.

The train journey from Ulan-Ude was very slow due to the long waiting at the russian border...we were there for 5-6 hours! Doing nothing, I think is the russian favorite activity.

However it was kind of amusing to see the border town Nauschmny and go through the process of filling papers, custom check, passport check etc.

The funniest even was that half 2/3 of our train went back to Russia, while 2 wagons were left, occasionally changing track until after 5 hours we got attached to a new locomotive and other wagons. I saw the train leaving twice in front of me and knew what was going on, however an old man, passenger on the train as well...panicked, ran after the train, caught it and hoped on the last stairs only to find out that the train stopped 100 meters and returned back to the same point. Oh my, I laughed myself hilarious and was so happy to know/have information about when the

Train would actually departure. I could imagine/see myself in the same situation, everything you have is on board the train and the only thing you can do is run after it...hahaha.

The mongolian border was a bit faster but we still had to hang around the border city och sukhbaatar for ca 3 hrs. I also got desperate for food since NO food was available on the train and managed to get some dinner (boiled rice & salad). For lunch I had potatoe chips and tea.

Now in Ulaanbaatar, I have visited the National History Museum and know abit more about the country, seen deer stones and petroglyphs (I bet you are wondering what that is??).

Also went to the Zanabazaar Fine Arts Museum and know abit about Mongolia Art.

The weather is warm and sunny here, the landscape is very different from Russian and everyone looks asian/oriental here. The streets are dusty and the car drivers/roads are as crazy as in Russia, reckless.

posted by Zurich to Beijing... @ 6/20/2006 10:38:00 AM 0 comments

22 June, 2006

Ulaanbaatar citylife

Thursday 22nd June, ca 20.30pm in Ulaanbaatar.

I would like to write about my impressions of Ulaanbaatar before I leave the city tomorrow.

So far I have had city dust and sun on me, the DUST causes coughing and irritation in the throat.

Tonight it rained and now some streets are drowned with dirty water.

Anyway, I have visited additional museums about Fine Arts & Zanabazar Arts Museum, Bogh Khan Winter Palace, History Museum (here they display folk costumes, historical items etc) and Natural History Museum (here they display stones, dinosaur skeleton and stuffed animals).

The dinosaur skeleton were impressive and once you see them one actually realize how big those creatures were..some had teeth/claws as big as our hands.

The art museums were somewhat interesting yet had more religious motifs and I realized that buddhism does have female figures too. They are called "taras" or are different deities.

Now after having seen some of these I wonder the following:

1. What significance does the "taras" have and how come noone talks about them?
2. What does the "taras" represent and how has this representation changed with time, culture and different ideologies of "female presence and role in society"?
3. Are there any thesises comparing and analyzing the "Taras (white and green)" in comparision to Buddhas, Deities statues in general in buddhism?

I would really like to know/read more about this & will investigate when I have time.

In general the Art here reflects mongolian landscapes, animal life/symbolism and Buddhism & Schamanism.

Another cultural event I enjoyed was tonight, I saw a show of traditional folks songs, music and dance, including throat singing and 4 girls doing acrobatics (they bend over their back so that their asses touched their heads!). It was amusing and a new experience in muscial tones and body movements/expressions.

Something that disturbed me sofar in museums and shops (shopping malls) is that they still trade very much with animal furs (snow leopard, fox, marmota, sable, etc), especially endangered animals are still in demand and traded very openly, which I am surprised to see.

The worst part is that it the mongolian history these animals were widely used, for example in the Bogd Khan Museum, there is a GER/YURT which consists of 120 snow leopard furs, which was made ca 1920! Imagine that!!! Well I saw it...and also other clothings of other animals considering "precious". So one can imagine that rich people today want to mimick their traditions of wearing and using fur from all animals available.

BTW, lonely planet books sucks! Since mine were inaccurate and disappointing for that reason.

Otherwise, I try to figure out information on my own however it takes time, yesterday we went to get my flight tickets, which took ca 1 hr even when the reservation was made in advance etc.

Today I tried to get train tickets from Ulaanbaatar to Beijing and spent ca 2hrs on running around, quequeing and asking for information. There are no tickets and I will have to figure out how to get to china, it seems like it will be a challenge to get there by train. Worst case I have to take abus or fly...

So now I am off for the bushes, wildside, forests and deserts. Lets see when I write the next post...somewhen mid July! Hasta luego...

posted by Zurich to Beijing... @ 6/22/2006 01:18:00 PM 2 comments

SPAM comments

29 June, 2006

Murun & Khuvsgul aimag

Its Thursday 29th June, ca 11.30 am in Murun.

I am in this town for ca 2 hrs before heading to the desert. I have spent 5 days on the countryside ca 100kms south of the lake Khuvsgul. The landscape is absolutely phantastic here, green hills, lush woods, thousands of goats (mostly black ones, some brown ones), sheep (white, black), cows and yaks (mostly black) and horses in all colours roaming freely. I have slept in a Yurt, milked goat, sheep, cow, yak and for the first time in my life rode a horse. We had horse-riding sessions for 3 days, the longest one was yesterday ca 3,5 hrs. I managed pretty well but I must say it's definitely an adventure in itself and I can understand why people get addicted to "horse-riding" and being in the wilderness. It's a beautiful feeling and one feels wild & free.

The woods smell wonderfully on flowers and herbs. The plains are filled with millions of flowers in all colours and beside the river bench one can find thousands of "mongolian edelweiss", imagine that!

I also tried fishing in the river but no luck but Amartuvshen (the boy whose family I am staying with) caught fish daily so I did had fresh river fish. The life here on the countryside is very peaceful, quite, calm and very relaxing. You only hear birds, the wind, occasionally the goats/sheep or the yaks brumming when they are near by.

Funnily, two mornings in a row I have been waking up to yaks "brumming" or brushing themselves against my yurt. Now that is a wake-up call...hahaha.

I was served food 3 times a day and got fattened up by the fresh dairy products, like milk, yoghurt, cream etc.

I managed to milk the goat & sheep pretty well too but cows & yaks was more difficult and would require more practice...the locals, mostly grandmothers were amazing in doing this, very quickly they could milk all the cattle, very impressive.

So I really enjoyed the days at the countryside here in Khuvsgul aimag and if you have the opportunities, I would recommend everyone to get out here...

Now I am heading towards the desert, so lets see how that is and how the camel-tour goes...

posted by Zurich to Beijing... @ 6/29/2006 04:24:00 AM 2 comments

SPAM comments

09 July, 2006

Zavkhan, Cameltour & Desert

Sunday 9 July, ca 14pm in Ulaanbaatar. I returned last night, ca 1 week earlier than originally planned due to several reasons, main reason being that in my itinerary Naadam-fest was planned but since this year is the 800th year anniversary the dates changed and so I requested to come back earlier to Ulaanbaatar to see the Naadam here instead of the countryside.

However I am very glad to return earlier since the camel-tour, desert experience was not according to my expectations. Let me give a bit more detailed account:

2 days I went with a Jeep & driver to Zavkhan, ca 600km southwest. During these days I saw steppe-landscape, green hills and many mountains, cattle, sheep, goats, horses and a couple of lakes. The first night we spent in a guest-ger near the Telmen-lake. The second day was abit more adventurous, since the part the driver didn't know neither, so we drove bumpy "roads" and he had to ask directions many times until we finally reached our destination in the evening. During the second day the landscape very slowly changed to a more drier arid place, with different vegetation and very few animals around.

My campsite was near a small lake GUN NUUR, ca 35 km away from Urgamal, I think.

There I got a guest-ger as well but with very few necessities, only a bed & a carpet in it. Not as luxurious as the first place, where I had table, fire-stove, water-bucket etc.

The first 3 days I was just hanging around "doing nothing", walked around, looked at the life there, milked goats, observed & listened to the camels (3 male, female, babies) and birds.

The family which I stayed with did not speak any english (one woman used her dictionary to communicate with me), the husband ran around and was always busy. The wife was busy with household stuff & taking care of her 3 kids, aged 5,4 & 6 month baby. I wonder why they even tried to cater for "tourists". I saw how they lived their lives, slaughter a goat, eat, cook, gather their goats & camels, milk them, cook, put up ger, go fetch water etc...just daily life but it was not really what I had expected since my program "promised" more activities.

The third day, the neighbor family cut wool of their sheeps and I participated in this activity. They cut wool by hand with scissors, so I managed to cut ca 10 sheep..which was fun & something unusual.

Day 4 & 5 we finally went on the camel-tour yet it was a very short trip through a small part of the desert across to a place where we put up camp. Only 1 night I used my tent sleeping in Mongolia, otherwise I have slept in Gers (yurt) so in the end I was a bit "bugged" about the fact that I have carried around so much camping gear, tent etc all the way here just to find out that it actually was not really necessary, since the locals here Don't CAMP! Only silly tourists put up their tents etc...well anyway I have learnt my lesson.

Day 5 I could manage my camel and had more fun, however it rained and we go thoroughly soaked in the desert. I mean who the heck goes to the desert only to get wet in thunderstorm and rain?!! This night we we back at the campsite & slept in Ger again.

Day 6 we made a short camel-ride to a red rocks and back. Again it rained and I got totally soaked. Needless to say after these 3 days in the sun,

clouds, rain I am very brown and got bitten by some many insects, flies, mosquitoes since the bugs feast on the camels and everything near the animals.

Day 7 I rested & did nothing, saw the family readjust 2 gers and cooked some "bread/roti".

Day 8 I was driven to Donoi-airport and caught the flight back to Ulaanbaatar. The road & driver were pretty bumpy too and this jeep was pretty unreliable, had to be shut off for "cooling down the engine".

The thing is in Mongolia, there is no real desert actually, there are some sand dunes but mostly covered with grass and changing between steppe-sand to steppe-vegetation. I wanted to be in a real desert and experience "desert life" not being around steppe-desert but I guess the Mongolian mentality is different, they are nomadic people but not desert-people.

They put up a GER and stay there, taking care of their animals herds and either be lazy & rest (oh they really like to rest & do nothing) or just run around gather their animals, milk them, slaughter/eat them, use their wool/skin etc..basically surviving on their animals.

Which actually is in some sense a strange concept, therefore they are extremely dependent on their animals and the weather conditions.

I already have other trips & ideas in mind for future travels into the real desert landscape, but my suggestion is don't come to Mongolia for the desert. Here one should come for the green landscapes, nomadic life, etc.

With food I had trouble here, to prepare something eatable for me was difficult for them and also to realize when to serve & ask for what I could eat food. So after being fattened up at the first campsite near Khuvsugul, I think I lost some weight again...

Yesterday when I came back, I was so tired & exhausted, so I need some time to gather some energy again before heading off to China. I still have to get a train-ticket to China and then plan from there on, but one thing is for sure, its tiresome and exhausting to be travelling & being on the road for a while.

In the "steppe-desert" I missed home, family, friends, civilization and many more things but I think it was still a good experience for me, necessary to have. It makes one realize what is truly important and cherish it more.

So depending on how the ticket availability is, I will be make my trip abit shorter in China. I want to be back home & regain some energy before starting off again. More details will follow.

Now I will be a couple of days in Ulaanbaatar and try to see the Naadam-fest & get organized for China.

posted by Zurich to Beijing... @ 7/09/2006 06:47:00 AM 2 comments

SPAM comments

10 July, 2006

Heading towards China

Monday 10th July, ca 1pm. Finally I managed to get a train ticket to CHINA!

Unfortunately since its national holiday in Mongolia the next three days nothing is operating and there are no seats available for Beijing. But luckily I got a ticket on Friday 14th July to Xohxot.

From there on I'll figure out what & where to go..most likely I will end my tour in Beijing and roam around in China...have to study the Guide book now.

Tomorrow is the big Naadam opening ceremony, so lets see how that is..more updates later.

posted by Zurich to Beijing... @ 7/10/2006 05:30:00 AM 2 comments

SPAM comments

12 July, 2006

Naadam & Mongolian State 800 years anniversary

Wednesday 12 July, ca 4pm in Ulaanbaatar (UB).

Yesterday we were at the Stadium where the opening ceremony took place, horses rode, parades, dancing, music and songs were shown. The president opened the Naadam and then in the main stadium we saw mongolian wrestling for a while, then looked at Archery and Anklebone-shooting (a game where you aim at 2 small bones with a target).

In the evening at the Sukhbaatar-square (on of the main squares, in city centre) there were concerts and some hardrock band was playing for hours, we saw & heard that band for ca 1hr and waited for fireworks.

The Mongolians are wired, they are very calm when it comes to celebrating, showing excitement etc. we have seem extremely few bad behaviour/manners, and even the people who are drunk are well mannered. I thought more "celebration" would be going on but here in UB the atmosphere is more like a very calm, polite festival even though all age groups are participating and attending the events.

Tis week I am taking it very relaxed, figuring out my china-trip, watching the "games" and people and just hanging out talking & chatting with other visitors/tourists here in UB.

posted by Zurich to Beijing... @ 7/12/2006 08:56:00 AM 2 comments

SPAM comments

Route to China

Here is a preliminary route to China, which I will aim for from 14 July onwards:

14 July Train to Hohhot

Datong

Towards Xian

Xian (ca 2 days)

Towards Shanghai

Shanghai (ca 4 days)

Towards Beijing

Beijing (ca 1 week)

Fly back to Zurich from Beijing (mid August).

posted by Zurich to Beijing... @ 7/12/2006 09:05:00 AM 3 comments

SPAM comments

Anonym hat gesagt...

Hello Zayera,

*no comment on your article,
but my best wishes for your "final" month :-)*

I have to admit that I was not able to read all your articles but will print them out and take them to Badi Tiefenbrunnen ;-)

Travel long and prosper

Frank

12 July, 2006 11:45

17 July, 2006

Datong

Monday 17 July, ca 21 pm in Datong. The train journey from Hohhot was an experience, being in a chinese train with only locals, seeing them how they behave and what they do in the train was definately new for me. They rushed to the train, stand in queues in front of the train, then chaos breaks loose when everyone tries to get on to their assigned wagon even though actually all trains have numbered seats! Some people even climbed into the train through the windows, which were on table level and crawled in. Most people had lots of luggage and when the train started running some "railway employee" came by to rearrange and put the luggage in order. Another person constantly swept the hallway to keep the paths clean and the train was packed with persons of all ages, doing all possible things, reading, talking, eating, drinking, playing cards, smoking...hmmm pretty amazing actually.

Last night I went to a dodgy hotel, being too tired to look for anything better I took the first best offer. Anyway I got up ca 6am, got ready since I had a tour starting 7.30 already, got myself something to eat and tried to get tickets but gave up. Then I went on a private tour with a taxi & two other tourists to the Hanging Monastery and Yugang Caves, and got back into the city around 4-5pm. The Yugang Caves were very impressive, thousands of Buddha statues and relics. The Hanging Monastery is an architectural masterpiece however I doubt the "religious" component although it had three religions represented, that is Buddha, Confucius and ?? and placed together as statues in one of the rooms.

Afterwards I pondered on my next plan and decided to take the night train already to Tianyuan? and visit Pingyao tomorrow and then tomorrow night again take night train to Xian.

Datong is bigger, noisier than Hohhot and so I am glad that I softly started my trip to china. Because the differences are so big from everything else, it is in a sense "mindblowing" and fills your senses with so much new information and experiences.

I'll write more about the experiences later..have a train to catch...btw it is difficult to find internet-cafes here..but very easy to find something to eat & drink.

posted by Zurich to Beijing... @ 7/17/2006 02:59:00 PM 2 comments

SPAM comments

From Ulaanbaatar to Hohhot (entering China)

I left Ulaanbaatar on Friday evening ca 21pm & slept in a Russian-style mongolian train. We crossed the border the next morning and basically stood at the mongolian border from 8-13! Then at the Chinese border witnessed railwheel changing and until the train actually started rolling it was already 15pm. The mongolian landscape in the morning was typical "gobi" arid, dry, sandy and pretty dusty..mostly yellowish with a few bushes here and there.

In China the landscape slowly changed and turned more greener..it was actually pretty amazing to literally move from a nomadic landscape to one which had clearer markings of agriculture and civilization!

Here we saw small patches of crops, a couple of cows and sheep here and there. No horses but donkeys and mules around the villages and people

in their crops working.

The houses on the countryside are of clay/mud or brick and either redish or yellow-brownish.

We reached Honhot with a delay around 22pm, entered the first best hotel we could find "Honhot Railway hotel" and I spent the night in my first chinese hotel with blinking neon-lights outside the window (which shut off ca 2hrs later).

The next day, sunday, I had a mission, get cash & exchange money, buy train ticket to Datong and find an internet-cafe. It took us ca 2 hr to find a bank & exchange money, use credit card and then later with help of a guy who spoke some english managed to send 1 piece of luggage to Beijing! :-). I am so happy about that, I hope it'll be there waiting for me at the train station when I go get it in a couple of weeks. Then got myself a ticket to Datong.yohoo and then went sightseeing.

Honhot has a big population of muslims so we visited a unique black chinese style mosque and one main street had "oriental" styles fascadem, which is pretty amazing for being in china.

Had tasty and delicious lunch, also in a chinese-muslim restaurant and then went to view the Lamastery and Pagodas (Zhao da & Wuta Pagoda). Walked through an amusement park and saw the chinese relaxing on a sunday...sleeping, playing games etc..

In the evening I got on my train to Datong and arrived late last night to Datong.

posted by Zurich to Beijing... @ 7/17/2006 02:35:00 PM 2 comments

SPAM comments

19 July, 2006

Pingyao & towards Xian

Wednesday 19th July, ca 13 pm in Xian. The train ride from Datong to Pingyao went well. My first chinese train, where all compartments are open with three beds on each side facing eachother. Luckily I had the bottom bed and slept a couple of hours before getting up ca 4-5 am, and we arrived in Taiyuan. From there we took a taxi too the Bus-station, in order to take a regular bus to Pingyao (waited ca 1,5 hrs and the bus took ca 2hrs). The Bus ride was pretty comfortable besides that it was pretty hot and watched chinese movies.

In Pingyao we took another taxi to the "old city" and basically spent half the day there. We had to collect train tickets from a Hotel there and wait until ca 5pm (train leaving ca 7pm). When tickets are sold out, one can still order or buy them through hotels & CITS, so thats what me and several other tourists did, which meant that all tourist in the region somehow end up in Pingyao.

Pingyao itself is a small town known for its MING architecture with many museums and a fortress surrounding the city. When I got there, for the first time I got a bit bothered by the merchants bugging and being treated like a "cash cow" but in the afternoon it got calmer.

I walked around the city and took photos of street life and buildings, saw some funny things, like kids studying in an alley or a group of musicians playing very loud deafening traditional music.

Everyone says "Hello, where are you from?" to the tourists and kids mostly practice any english sentences then know like "What's you name?".

In the evening I took the train to Xian and this time got the top bed, which means you have to climb into your "bed" ca 2,4 meters up in the air with a very small ladder towards the "hallway". The fan made the most noise, which meant even with earplugs I heard noise. So I slept a bit but not much, woke up several times and arrived in Xian 1hr delayed ca 7am. There got picked up by the Hostel so I will be staying in Xian for ca 2-3 days before hopefully heading towards Shanghai. This morning it was so good to take a shower after 4 days and get ride of dirty, sweaty clothes. Besides Pingyao, from Honhot, Datong now to Xian, the city size has increased from ca 1 to 2 to 6 million people city. It is very hot and humid here, one is constantly sweating and I think in average the day temperature is ca 35-40 degrees and slightly cooler at night time.

In Datong before leaving the hotel, I had my first argument while checking out and it went ok.

The chinese are very talkative and social, in the train and with friends, they joke and laugh alot, are very physical with eachother which is in some sense pleasant to observe.

This morning I went to a tea-store and did some sampling; the personal, 3 women were giggling and having fun speaking some english. It was nice to sample tea and see how they serve & prepare tea :-)

Xian is a big city so I have plenty of sights to visit...more updates later...

posted by Zurich to Beijing... @ 7/19/2006 07:14:00 AM 4 comments

SPAM comments

20 July, 2006

Terracotta Warriors & Xian City

Thursday 20th July, ca midnight in Xian.

Yesterday I walked around city centre, viewed the Drum & Bell Tower.

Stood in a queue to get train tickets to Shanghai and luckily got one.

Enjoyed dinner in the muslim quarter and watched nightlife on the streets.

Here people are outdoors & on the streets all day long and also on the evenings, it seems like people don't rest or sleep here...since there is so much going on.

Tons of traffic, bicycles in all shapes, bright green taxis, buses and cars occupy the city.

Shops, food stands, restaurants, fast food, stores selling all kind of goods occupy the main streets and people roam around in and out of the

stores...which are air-conditioned.

This morning ca 5 am, I woke up with a shock, discovered red patches over my body and within ca 1hr had an allergic reaction with hugh patches over my back & belly especially. So I took precautious actions and went to the hospital at 6am in the morning. I had to goto 2 different hospitals to find a skin doctor who told wrote down "allergy" and gave me some anti-allergy pill which I ate and after a couple of hours the patches disappeared. However it was frustrating since no personal at the hospital/emergency spoke much english or could really explain what I got. Somehow I am not sure if I really reacted allergically towards some substance or as I am suspecting got bitten by bed bugs and reacted allergically towards these? I have no idea...and well I can't ask the doctors here neither. Lets see how I sleep the next nights...

During the day, I went on a guided tour to the Terracotta warriors, White Goose Pagoda and Huaging Pools. The Terracotta warriors were pretty impressive and to imagine that some chinese emperor (Qin) ordered this for his tomb??!!

The other sites were ok but actually the history/story behind them is more interesting than the sites themselves. The White Goose Pagoda was built in honour of a chinese buddhist monk (7th century?) who travelled to India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, western asia to learn more about Buddhism and it took him ca 15 yrs to travel around and return back to China with many scripts & writings.

Huanging Pools are hot spring bath built by XY emperor for himself, his family etc, with water of ca 43 degrees (details later).

So I enjoyed the day despite the awful start...

posted by Zurich to Beijing... @ 7/20/2006 05:38:00 PM 0 comments

21 July, 2006

Xian & Mt Hua Shan

Xian, Friday 21st July ca 22pm.

Just a while ago I received an SMS from Lena (old friend from Lund) that she gave birth to a babygirl last night, whom they have named Malou.

Congratulations to Lena & Lars in Lund!

This seems like a "girls year", until now two dear friends of mine in Sweden have extended their families with daughters..I am so thrilled & excited about this :-)

Xian is a city in change, the hostel I am staying at is on one of the main streets in the city centre, just 5 mins from the Drum & Bell towers. The boulevards are big with fancy fascades, followed by shopping malls, hotels, banks and restaurants.

However just around the corner from the Hostel, parallel to the boulevard is the "muslim quarter" with back alleys, old houses, narrow streets, foodstands, small shops and an oldstyle city life with lesser traffic and noise. I have been walking around these small streets in the evenings to get dinner, since its so cheap, tasty & I can eat everything they cook&serve :-)

I have also noticed that they are tearing down old buildings here so I hope this old quarter manage to survive the changes going on around in the city because its a very nice & quite place in an hectic noisy big city.

Yesterday I was on a "guided tour" for foreigners that is the chinese guide spoke "chinglish" and today I went on another tour but found out on the bus that it was a "chinese tour" meaning only chinese tourists and me, who went to the Mount Hua Shan. Well this tour was a logistical disaster, got picked up ca 7.30 am, then the bus drove around and picked up persons from other hotels for ca 1 hr, after that we exchanged bus and around 9am got on the road. Then after ca 1,5 hr the Bus stops are we are shipped to some place and I realize after a while this is the obligatory "factory/merchant stop" where some company advertise and try to sell products to tourists! After this stop we had a "lunch stop" already around 11.30 and ca 1 hr and another buc exchange later we finally got near the Mountain. I thought when I came on this tour that we would have time to hike around etc, but now looking at the time realized that all tourists are shipped via the cable car to the "norht point" and from there one has to follow a trail to the famous top. On the north point it was very misty, with white clouds and no view whatsoever. I walked around the trails for a while and gave up because of two reasons:

1. Too many chinese tourists walking on the narrow slippery stone paths
2. Wet slippery stones which one has to climb (thread upon) is not ideal for me. Especially when you see nothing around just stop blocks 10 meters away but no other scenary!

Afterwards I waited several hours to get back, officially the bus was suppose to leave at 5pm but was ca 1,5hrs delayed to I came back to the city around 8pm. I have had enough of "chinese tours" now.

posted by Zurich to Beijing... @ 7/21/2006 03:43:00 PM 3 comments

SPAM comments

23 July, 2006

Xian & towards Shanghai

Sunday 23rd July, ca 10 am in Xian. Yesterday I went to the Shaanxi History Museum and looked at the archaeological findings in this regions, particularly from tombs & graves. Also to see the dawn of civilization, with skull findings, stone tools etc. I found the tomb findings very

27 July, 2006

Shanghai museums

Thursday, 27th July ca 8am in Shanghai.

Yesterday I was lucky to have a "host" for the first time in China, a friend of my father who is living in Shanghai accompanied me and we went to the Yuyuan Gardens (more than 400 years old), Shanghai Museum and the Urban planning museum (with a model of the whole city, very impressive but badly organized), they also had photos of the city from the beginning of 20th century, so one could compare and see the streets dramatically change.

The museums were pretty interesting however tiresome to intake so much information.

Foodwise, I tried "steamed bun filled with vegetables" and had my first weird drink "wheat grass soy milk" drink which was as green as fresh grass.

I am slowly getting use to the "life & traffic" here in Shanghai, I know now how to make use of the public bus and metro. The weather has swiftd from hot & humid to abit more windy, my host yesterday told me that a "typhoon" is passing the region, which is why its suddenly so windy.

Update 22pm: today I did some more sightseeing and visited the 4th highest skyscraper in the world and the highest? in China. Its called the JINMAO Tower and stands at 402 meters. on the 88th floor is the observationdeck and one has a panorama view of the whole city area. It is amazing how many skyscraper this city has, it looks like a landscape of anthills in different styles and sizes. I wonder if our modern cities will all look like this one day?!

For the first time I also went to a restaurant in Shanghai, called the "Godly" where they only serve vegetarian food :-) so I ordered a whole setmenu instead of choosing between different dishes. I think I got served ca 8-10 dishes and now I am stuffed from "vegetables" in different formats and colours. What I could clearly identify was green peas, various kinds of mushrooms and some kind of spinach but the rest I have not idea about, besides that most of the dishes either tasted strange or pretty sweet. I don't know whats worst on the experimental scale: the street food or the restaurant food!

BTW I have been mostly eating food from small stands, cantinas or street restaurants and have really enjoyed that and had no problems or issues whatsoever luckily but the only time I some thing weird was when I bought "salad" from a supermarket in Xian, which looked very "hygienical", when I started eating this green beansalad in the train I found a worm! hahaha ironic isn't it. Another things the supermarkets are pretty amazing too here..more on that later.

posted by Zurich to Beijing... @ 7/27/2006 02:31:00 AM 2 comments

SPAM comments

30 July, 2006

Shanghai Art museum & galleries

Sunday 30th July, ca 8am.

On Friday I went to Tongli, a small water village outside of Shanghai (ca 50km) away and really enjoyed the tranquility there. It's a pretty village with old houses, lifestyle and chinese village life was interesting to see. Next time I travel to China I will definately visit the countryside and spent time in the small villages.

Here we ate lunch at I found two small bugs/worms (ca 1 cm white) in my food.

Yesterday I visited the "Jade Buddha Temple" and saw the famous white jade buddha statue.

The rest of the day I spent for getting to know Chinese Art, visited the Shanghai Art Museum, where they had exhibitions of chinese culture interepreted by chinese & german artists.

They also had a special exhibition "Huston contemporary art" showing a collection of art work from Huston, Texas.

Later I visited the "warehouse galleries" and saw that **contemporary modern chinese art** reflects their changing society and past decades through means on "pop art" and extremely glossy, kitschy images. Some concepts and depictions are interesting but much of it is just "trash" aimed for consumerism. Some artists showed and played with the old chinese traditions, tales and especially influences of Mao/communism, while others just showed images of "people" with a twist, exaggerated expressions, lack of emotions etc. I guess within the next decades the art scene will mature and produce/show better works but the pieces I currently saw communicated a lack of "art dialogue and chinese concept of art identity" since many images/artwork to me looked like "copies" of little novelty.

posted by Zurich to Beijing... @ 7/30/2006 02:03:00 AM 0 comments

31 July, 2006

Exit Shanghai

Monday 31st July, ca 16pm in Shanghai.

Tonight I am taking the train to Beijing (will stay there ca 1 week) and so the countdown starts of the end of my long journey. However I am

getting very tired of all the energy one has to spend dealing with "new situations" nonstop. Most irritating is also the noise pollution here and the rudeness of people on the streets in general. I have mixed feelings about China, will write an detailed email about it later when I am back home. The past day I have done some shopping, went on a boat-trip on the Huangpo river at sunset and saw the bright lights of Shanghai once more.

Yesterday I also received very bad news from Sweden, about a friend's partners death in an glacier-accident. I am so sorry & sad to hear about this and it felt so strange to hear news like this being so far away from everyone you know and care about. When shit like this happens one really wonders and ponders about "life".

C. my deepest condolences and resentments. My thoughts are with you in this time of mourning.

posted by Zurich to Beijing... @ 7/31/2006 09:57:00 AM 0 comments

02 August, 2006

In Beijing

2 August ca 7am in Beijing.

Since weeks I have gotten the very bad habit of waking up very early, due to travelling and arrival at trainstations ca 4-7am in the morning, I continue to wake up very early, somehow not getting enough sleep.

Yesterday I arrived ca 7am in Beijing main trainstation, this was my last train on this trip, took a chinese "luxury" train, Z22 which was also the fastest & most expensive sofar, going on 160 km/h. The other trains I have taken from Russia to China were on average 120 km/h or slower. The trainride was pleasant however since a couple of days my sensitive ears are reacting extremely to loud noise. In the train of course, with all chinese passengers (only 2 tourists) it was pretty noisy with "chatting, shouting, chinese mannered conversation" so I felt somewhat irritated and just wish for a quite place. Unfortunately few places in chinese cities & public areas are really quite, tranquil and without any people.

Upon arrival I went to collect my "luggage" which I sent to Beijing from Honhot (all my camping gear etc..) and was curious in what state I would get it. After some explaining I finally got my bag after ca 1hr and it was in one piece but very dirty. That BAG has made it all the way from Zurich to Beijing too, ca 20 kgs being dragged and dropped in many train stations and dirty streets.

Later I took a "taxi" very expensive one to my Hotel/Hostel and spent half the day figuring out information about Cargo luggage since I now have ca 50kgs to take back home and when I can return back to Zurich. Phuu...it's really messy how the "information channels" work here.

The rest of the afternoon I walked around, lost orientation several times, took a "Hutong-ride" in the neighbourhood I am staying is a Hutong-area with old traditional style buildings and houses. Also managed to visit the Drum & Bell Towers here and walk around a park, seeing people relaxing and having fun (still being quite noisy though). I think concept of "quietness" does not exist here. The bicycles & car breaks screech, people shout and scream in "normal conversation", mobile phone signals are maximum loud, etc literally everything makes noise or have to communicate in a very loud tone. I just don't understand why this is necessary??!

However weather-wise Beijing is cooler than Shanghai and its raining so one feels the difference of the regions. Now I'll hit the streets and do some sightseeing..

posted by Zurich to Beijing... @ 8/02/2006 12:38:00 AM 0 comments

03 August, 2006

Beijing sightseeing

Thursday 3rd August, ca 6am in Beijing.

Yesterday I finally manage to do some sightseeing in Beijing, went to the Forbidden City and saw most of it (took me ca 5hrs walking around and having a look at the sights), in the end I got tired of struggling and pushing elbows with the thousands of chinese tourists who were there as well. After that I walked through Tiananmen square and wanted to visit MAO Mausoleum buit it was shut, only open in the mornings. After that I went to the Natural History Museum and saw what the chinese consider as "information", was particularly interested in what they present and how.

They also had a weird "human body" hall where dissected bodies were on display. Lets put it this way, medical students would have been thrilled and so were the kids too.

Then I went to the Temple of Heaven Park and saw the Ming architectural park as well as the "Hall of Prayers and Good Fortune".

TIP: don't visit China between mid-July to mid-August, thats when the mids & students are on holidays, so the chinese families got on excursions and tours themselves, being rude and ruthless wherever they go..

posted by Zurich to Beijing... @ 8/03/2006 12:14:00 AM 0 comments

I climbed & walked the GREAT WALL!

Thursday 3rd August, ca 20pm.

Today I walked & climbed the GREAT WALL! Its truly amazing and I really enjoyed it.

We went with a minibus to Jinshanling, ca 140 kms northeast of Beijing. We hiked towards Simatia and I also hiked half of Simatai as well.

Beneath some facts about Jinshanling and Simatai.

140 kilometers at the north-east end of Beijing City, there is a section of the Great Wall, called Jinshanling Great Wall.

The Jinshanling Great Wall was initially built from 1368 to 1389 in the Ming Dynasty, and in 1567 or 1570 rebuilding of the Wall was mainly directed by General Qi Jiguang. Poems and tablet writings can be found on the Jinshanling Great Wall left from the time Qi Jiguang directed building of this section of the Great Wall.

The total length of this section is about eleven kilometers (6.8 miles), and the scenic spot of the Jinshanling Great Wall has an area of 32 square kilometers. The Wall is about seven to eight meters high and five to six meters wide, which is made of brick and stone. The Jinshanling Great Wall has an elevation of 700 meters. Watching Beijing Tower is on the highest position, from which you can see Beijing. The Jinshanling Great Wall is second only to the Badaling Great Wall in its completeness.

There are more than 100 enemy towers along the whole Jinshanling Great Wall. Built stably and elegantly, different towers have different structures and appearances. Rows of 3-meter-high Barrier Walls were built leading to the enemy towers to protect the towers. Some of the towers are storerooms as well. They were used to store food, hay and weapons.

To the east of the Jinshanling stretch of the Great Wall there lies the quiet and remote Simatai section. The ruinous state of this part of the Wall gives it an air of authenticity that has earned it the reputation of being the most beautiful section of the Great Wall. Unlike the sections to be seen at **Badaling** or **Mutianyu** that have undergone extensive restoration, the wall at Simatai has received very little attention. Here, the wall really looks as one would expect it to look some 500 years after it was built during the Ming Dynasty. The local people are proud of this monument and proclaim that it was as a consequence of visiting Simatai that UNESCO was convinced the wall should be listed as a World Heritage site. It towers over the nearby villages and farmland as it winds its way like the spiny back of a dragon over the sharply clipped peaks of the mountains. Because this section has retained much of its original 500 year old features it offers a quite hazardous passage to those who wish to walk along it. Needless to say, the inherent dangers offer a challenge that is quite irresistible to dedicated hikers in quest of adventure. An additional attraction is that as Simatai is some 130 kilometers (80 miles) to the north-east of Beijing it is well beyond the reach of the huge crowds of tourists that through the more popular and accessible parts of the Wall.

Enthusiasts, who like to study military architecture, find much to interest them along this 20 kilometer barrier as it appears to dance from east to west over the mountain ridges interrupted only by the presence of the Simatai reservoir that divides it in two. Here, those who are keenly interested can study and compare a wide range of watchtowers, blockhouses and platforms representative of the many styles to be found along the Great Wall.

It is at Simatai that the Wall takes the hiker upwards to the perilous Simatai ridge.

There are in total sixteen watchtowers set (**I managed until Tower 12**) at intervals along this expanse and it will take about two hours to reach the twelfth watchtower. Beyond this point the condition of the stairs and walkways deteriorates and the passage becomes both steep and narrow which means that it is often safer to use the adjacent footpath rather than try to walk on the Wall itself. A lack of firm footholds creates quite a struggle and in places it may prove necessary to go on all fours in order to make any progress.

FROM 1th Tower the Wall was shut for visitors (see photo later)

For 100 meters between the fourteenth and fifteenth watchtowers there is an incline at an 80 degree angle with only a single parapet wall. It is quite narrow compared with more substantial sections of the wall and in height it varies from two to four meters from its base. The terrain forms a natural barrier while the Wall gave the Chinese soldiery a combination of protection and an advantage of height from which to defend themselves against enemy attack. The defences are reinforced by rows of embrasured walls built vertically to the main body of the Wall so as to withstand any possible incursion by enemy soldiers. As this section of the Wall is so steep, it is known as the "Stairway to Heaven". The fifteenth tower has been named "The Fairy Tower" and is noted for its fine architectural features which include stone sculptures of twin lotus flowers on its arched doorways. Only the bravest hikers will climb the "Stairway to Heaven" but those who do and reach the sixteenth and highest tower will be rewarded with a breathtaking view. Known as 'Wang Jing Lou' [Watching Beijing Tower] the sixteenth watchtower with its elevation of 986 meters is the highest visitor attraction in the environs of Beijing. At night the lights of the city, when seen from the watchtower, are a wondrous sight to behold.

The descent can be made to the seventeenth watchtower and from there along the hill path to the exit gate.

Map & details of the wall:

http://www.travelchinaguide.com/china_great_wall/scene/beijing/index.htm

posted by Zurich to Beijing... @ 8/03/2006 02:08:00 PM 0 comments

04 August, 2006

2 minutes of MAO

Friday 4th August, ca 20pm in Beijing.

This morning I got up as usual 5-6 am and got ready for visiting MAO. I was at 7.30 am at Tiananmen square and quequed up at the Mao Mausoleum with all the chinese tourists. The queque was long and I stood in queque ca 40 minutes, luckily it was moving along so you didn't get bored standing at one spot at least. No entrance fee was required however had to deposit my bag in the checkroom across the street (which was a bit messy). What was amazing that people stood in neat rows between two yellow lines and guards stood every 50 meters away giving instruction to the crowd. It sounded like "move along, step back into the line etc.." at least here noone was pushing or being rude, as they are normally everywhere else.

Upon entering the mausoleum, in the main hall is a huge Mao statue and people lay yellow carnations? in front of it. I had to take off my hat and no talking is allowed in the hall (but people still whispered). Then the queque split into two rows with ca 2 people lined up and going around the "coffin" itself, which is in the viewing hall. Well, his coffin is placed pretty far away from the crowd so you don't see too many details. He is wearing an military suit and had the chinese red flag covered over his body, so basically one only sees his head and face. He looks like any chinese old man with a puffy face. So after 2 minutes the show is over and outside the hall one can buy souvenirs with maos pictures on each and everything, funny isn't it.

After that I went to the Lama monastery/museum and viewed yet another Buddhist temple, this one has a huge Buddha statue too, made of one single block of wood (sandalwood from japan?) and many other prayer halls, deities etc. There I also for the first time saw the green and white taras in a buddhist temple. So far I haven't seen any in the other chinese temples and was wondering about that. I think this temple anyhow had many "indian & hinduism originated" gods and goddesses. Well, I am still surprised about the indian influences here in China but thats another topic to be discussed.

In the afternoon I visited Tsinghua University...

posted by Zurich to Beijing... @ 8/04/2006 01:32:00 PM 1 comments

bhlogiston hat gesagt...

Hi Zayera, glad to read your blog - sometimes just today I want to give responding. ;)

sounds very interesting to read your description about mao. sounds familiar with some memories I had about the red place in moscow with the famous Lenin mauseum. sometime things are very similar in very different cultures. I wonder too about the buddhist temples in china. I thought so many of them were destroyed during the "culture revolution" (kulturrevolution).

I'm thinking about you and wish you a good time. take care, Renée

ps. best wishes from gabi too.

05 August, 2006 18:09

06 August, 2006

Shopping & L-Bar

Sunday 6th August, ca 7am in Beijing.

This weekend is dedicated to shopping & "hanging out" since I am tired of sightseeing now.

Its amazing what a trade market China is and the things one can buy here too, from real good quality stuff to fake copies of anything "trademarked". Yes I am a good shopper and a harsh bargainer too :-)

Last night I went to my first "L-Bar" here in Beijing (the only real L-bar here!), it was an interesting experience. I was the only foreigner there last night so it was difficult to find someone who spoke of english.

When I sat down at the bar, a person asked me "Are you L?" Yes or No? I thought the question was ridiculous to start with, since why on earth would I be there otherwise? Then she declared I am "T", upon which I wondered what that meant (it was very obvious) but I didn't quite understand her declaration. Later I got introduced to another person who spoke some english and they too asked me the same two questions. It seems like that is what they do in the "scene" here. This person explained to me how it works here, people are divided strictly into "T" or "P" and it is extremely clear from their appearances & behaviour which category they belong to.

Obviously me being a foreigner and not strictly following their "codes" they preferred to ask me, but however automatically guessed me as a "T"...hahaha. We did have an discussion where I explained to them how it is in Europe and that categories are not necessary but they seemed pretty astonished about it and asked me questions like "so who does X/Y etc?"

Well, otherwise people were just sitting, being social & hanging out in groups with friends, noone was there "on their own or sitting alone".

If you want to know more details or really what to know what "T" & "P" stands for, ask me :-)

posted by Zurich to Beijing... @ 8/06/2006 12:35:00 AM 0 comments

Bye bye Beijing

I am getting near the end of my long journey and returning earlier than planned due to several reasons. On Monday 7th August, I am flying back to Zurich.

Within the next week hopefully I will manage to compile my photos and put them on my website. Perhaps I'll organize a gathering in Zurich & Skane in order to have a "show & tell" evening where I describe my experiences and the many episodes of this amazing journey.

Ending words for this blogg will be posted later.

posted by Zurich to Beijing... @ 8/06/2006 12:49:00 AM 0 comments