

Go60 Challenge - Blog - Day 34 - Chinese Border Crossing

Day 34 - Chinese Border Crossing

Team arrived at the border in high spirits, vehicles had performed really well yesterday and the team put in a sterling effort.

The sight at the border was a complete contrast to the previous evening; there were now loads of trucks and mini-buses + cars waiting to cross.

A bit of interest in the vehicles but we kept focused on moving forward. We were directed to a compound area with lots of officials plus a huge Alsatian dog. It looked friendly enough but we saw it snap at somebody that got too close. First problem cropped up - no issue for team members but documentation missing for the vehicles to confirm that they had exited Kazakhstan.

We used the laminated route map and hand gestures to explain why we had flown into Almaty and met the vehicles. After some early morning calls (UK time) to leg 2 people it transpired that they had exited Kazakhstan to go to Kyrgyzstan and then when they took the vehicles back to Almaty they went via a minor border crossing where they did not receive any paperwork to pass on.

Like all things though, patience and friendliness pays off and the guys at the crossing worked out what paperwork would work to fit into their protocol.

Unfortunately by now, it was 12:30 Chinese time. we got to the Chinese side where we were parked up and waited.

With some help, a message was sent to our contact in China and he tried to get things moving. The border point was very popular for Chinese tourists to come and have their photos taken at, so the vehicles were quite popular as a photo opportunity.

Finally we got to move forward and once our passports / vehicles were logged with the UK number plates we were moved to the main building. There we were met by our Chinese guide Xiao (pronounced like the Italian Ciao for our convenience) and numerous officials.

Everyone who was anybody of rank wanted their picture taken with the vehicles and it was explained to us that the pictures would be shown on "China News".

Things took ages as you can imagine, one window for this, another window for that; separate route for drivers than passengers - we need to remember the order when we exit into Vietnam and have the same set up in the vehicles.

Eventually we moved forward after handing out models and pens, final point taking the vehicles through a huge X-ray machine. No-one was allowed to stay in the vehicles while the scanning took place.

Drive outside, handshakes all round ; WELCOME to CHINA but it was too soon. Due to all the time taken up with photos and administration, it was now too late for the

paperwork to be completed. We had to park up the vehicles at the border and find somewhere to stay overnight.

Luckily, Xiao found somewhere and with his friend from customs they transported us to a hotel by taxi.

Very good standard, en-suite twin rooms with TV and Aircon - £6.50 per person.

Team disheartened, but still in high spirits because we were in CHINA. We met up with Xiao as he had arranged for us to go for a meal. We were expecting to walk into town but quick left turn out of the hotel and the restaurant was next door!

The restaurant was set up with separate dining rooms with a rotating glass table in the middle for sharing the dishes. Traditionally, the food in this province is very spicy but Xiao asked for it to be milder. Even so, one of the chicken dishes was piled up with chillies.

Loads of food, local fish, chicken, cabbage, duck (with pancakes etc.) - strangely, the hoisin sauce supplied with this had a milder flavour than you get in the UK. There was also a lamb dish with meat on the bone although it could be more accurately described as bone with meat.

All very tasty though, and much different to our sustenance diet of Werthers originals and hobnobs.

Xiao kindly paid for this as his welcome to China.

After the meal we went for a wander around town, stopping for a drink and a chat in an open air eating area where the raw food that was on display was cooked when you requested it.

The area included a separate hut for getting your drinks from - worked out to be about £2 for a round of drinks.

A few plans were hatched but you will have to keep reading the blog to find out what they are and then we were off to bed.

Morning plan to meet up with Xiao, have breakfast and get some money changed plus finalise the border requirements.