

Sitting on one of the bright granny smith green couches in our apartment on campus of Hexi University in Zhangye it seems a good time to write down some of the first impressions before they become part of our daily routine. The apartment is on the fifth floor of a six story block of flats built about two years ago, so things look still fresh. There is even a study with computer, printer and spare bed, so there is room for visitors. We share the front door to our



part of the building with eleven other apartments, all of them home to other foreign experts, except one of the ground floor where Mrs Wu the caretaker lives. There is no elevator, which is one of the reasons why our washing machine is not installed yet. It is waiting downstairs for the students to return from their spring holidays to help carry the thing upstairs. Our apartment is on the corner of the building, with windows and views from three sides. The best view is from the windows behind Ferry and our bedroom. They look out over still bare trees and plots of land that will look nice and green when winter is over. On clear days there is a snow covered mountain range in the background that will even have snow in summer. We are already at 1500 meters, so those mountains are impressive. The worst of winter is in January, so days of minus 20 or more are behind us. We already had some nice sunny days that remind of Nelson in mid-winter, where it warms up nicely during the day. The apartment is tropical. Coming from outside the first thing we do is peel down to the last layer and then open a window. And close it when the wind picks up, because with



desserts all around us, those shiny laminated floors are soon covered in a layer of blackish sand. The apartment had been empty for a year, and although it had been cleaned, shopping for cleaning material was high on our priority list. Now all we need is a few “nice things” to make the flat more look like a home. We already scored a nice poster of an impressive 34.5 meters long resting Buddha that we saw in Dafosi, a temple in Zhangye.



Dafosi is a beautiful temple complex, where we will certainly return in a different season.



Zhangye itself is a city with great contrasts. We walk wide lanes and narrow streets, see new cars with unknown Chinese names and old bikes and carts. In front of the newest fashion stores people in traditional dress sell their wares from their old or brand new tricycles. Next to modern apartment blocks are alleyways where people live in small cob houses. There is a lot to see and write about at a later time.

We have not started teaching yet. The teachers in the English department are busy and have not found the time yet to give us our teaching schedule and fill us in on the curriculum. We are supposed to start our job in a few days, but if that involves teaching as well is not yet clear. I guess time will tell.

