



Treasures of Travel

The Legendary Silk Road ~ Western China, 2022 ~ 16 days/ 14 nights

For years the art, old crafts, and cultural traditions of these gems of the Silk Road lay undiscovered. Now we have the opportunity to experience what many travelers and merchants did for thousands of years: the beautiful mountain scenery, the unforgettable Caravansaries, the fabled cities with their intriguing cuisine and magnificent art and crafts, and the joyful people in their colorful local costumes who love to dance, sing with a big smile. The combination of these regions offers an unforgettable cross-cultural travel experience as you discover their ethnic, linguistic, religious and cultural histories and inheritance.

Day 1 ~ Depart the USA

Day 2 ~ Arrive in Xian via Beijing

Upon arrival in Xian you will be met and **transferred** to the hotel. **Overnight in Xian.**

Day 3 ~ Xian

In the morning we will head to the famous **Army of Terra Cotta Warriors** site, which is a collection of life-size terracotta sculptures depicting the armies of Qin Shi Huang, the first Emperor of China. It is a form of funerary art buried with the emperor in 210–209 BC and its purpose was to protect the emperor in his afterlife. The site was discovered in 1974 by local farmers digging a well. The figures include warriors, chariots and horses. Current estimates are that in the three pits containing the Terracotta Army there were over 8,000 soldiers, 130 chariots with 520 horses and 150 cavalry horses, the majority of which are still buried in the pits nearby Qin Shi Huang's mausoleum. Other terracotta non-military figures were also found in other pits and they include officials, acrobats, strongmen and musicians.

Next we'll stop at the **Xian West Market** -the starting point of the ancient Silk Road, which will be followed by the **Old Muslim Quarter** and the **Gao Family Mansion**. We will also see the **Big Wild Goose Pagoda** - original pagoda was built in 652 AD with only five storeys but it has been restored and added to many times. Our last stop will be at the **Ancient City Wall** - built in the 13th century in Tang Dynasty era on the foundations of the original Tang Forbidden City. In the evening there will be the opportunity of optional Tang Dynasty Show. **Overnight in Xian.**

Day 4 ~ Dunhuang

Today you will be **transferred** to the airport for your **domestic flight to Dunhuang.**

Dunhuang was a major stop on the ancient Silk Road. It was also known at times as Shāzhōu or 'City of Sands', a name still used today. It is best known for the nearby Mogao Caves. The city is situated in a rich oasis containing Crescent Lake and Mingsha Shan, literally "Echoing-Sand Mountain". Mingsha Shan is so named for the sound of the wind whipping off the dunes, the singing sand phenomenon.

Dunhuang commands a very strategic position at the crossroads of the ancient Southern Silk Route and the main road leading from India via Lhasa to Mongolia and Southern Siberia, as well as controlling the entrance to the narrow Gansu Corridor which led straight to the heart of the north Chinese plains and the ancient capitals of Chang'an (today known as Xi'an) and Luoyang.

Upon arrival you will be met by local guide.

In the afternoon we will drive to **the Sand Dunes at Crescent Lake Oasis**, where at Mingsha Shan (**Singing Sands Mountain**) the desert meets the oasis in dramatic fashion. At the base of the colossal dunes whose peak stands at 1715m, lies a small Crescent Moon Lake. Optional camel ride around the desert is possible. **Overnight in Dunhuang.**

Day 5 ~ Dunhuang

Our main sightseeing destination today is the famous **Mogao Caves World Heritage Site**, which is one of the greatest repositories of Buddhist art in the world. The first cave was founded in 366 AD, from this time on the site gradually developed into an important center of Buddhist learning and worship, at its peak complex's 18 monasteries housed 1400 monks and nuns, as well as many artists, translators and calligraphers. In the afternoon we'll visit the **Dunhuang Museum** to look more into the history of the area.

In the evening there will be the opportunity of optionally attending the "Legendary Girl of Dunhuang" impressive show; or having some free time to relax, before browsing through **Dunhuang night market**. **Overnight in Dunhuang.**

Day 6 ~ Turpan

Today we'll **transfer** you to Liuyuan train station for your fast **train ride** to Turpan. Upon arrival you will be met and **transferred** to your hotel. **Overnight in Turpan.**

Day 7 ~ Turpan

Turpan- an oasis town has long been a stopover on the northern route of the Silk Road and a home to Indo-Europeans, Chinese and Uighurs. At 154m (505 ft) below sea level it's perhaps even better known as the second lowest depression in the world after the Dead Sea. The climate is harsh, and the extremely high summer temperatures make this the hottest spot in China, frequently reaching 50 °C (122 °F) or higher.

We will start our day with a visit to the **Gobi desert and Flaming Mountains**. The mountains are barren, eroded, red sandstone hills in Tian Shan Mountain range. The average height of the Flaming Mountains is 500 m (1,600 ft), with some peaks reaching over 800 m (2,600 ft). We will stop at the **Bezeklik Thousand Buddha Caves**, located in Mutou Valley in the middle section of Flaming Mountains, which have a history of over 1500 years. Currently, there are a total of 57 caves, out of them, over 40 have murals.

Our next stop will be at the cemetery of the ancient city Gaochang located at **Astana**; discovered tombs here date from between the 3rd and 8th centuries AD. Next we'll reach the ruins of ancient city **Gaochang**, where a **golf cart ride** will be included in the sightseeing. Gaochang was built in the 1st century BC; it was a busy trading center and a stopping point for merchant traders traveling on the Silk Road; and played a key role as a transportation hub in western China. The city was destroyed in wars during the 14th century. Today old palace ruins, inside and outside cities can still be seen. After lunch we will drive through **Grape Valley** known for the sweetest grapes in the world and the raisin market. Next we will stop at the famous **Jiaohe ruins**. It was established during the Han dynasty as a garrison town to defend the borderlands. The city stands on the plateau bound by two small rivers- thus the name Jiaohe means "confluence of rivers". **Overnight in Turpan.**

Day 8 ~ Korla

In the morning first we will stop at the **SuGong Tower and Mosque** built in 1777; and then head to the ancient **Karez Water Wells**, which are the life source of Turpan. "Karez" means 'a well' and is a unique underground water system invented and built by ancient farmers. This irrigation system with its wells connected by underground channels is considered to be one of the three great ancient projects in China, which at its peak, exceeded 5,000 km (3,106 miles). The water source for Karez is melting snow from the Tian Shan Mountains.

In the evening we'll arrive in Korla to overnight at a hotel. **Overnight in Korla.**

Day 9 ~ Kuqa

Today we'll start our journey to Kuqa, which is essentially a Uighur settlement. Not far from Kuqa is an ancient city of **Subashi Gucheng**- a lost city on the ancient Silk Road, abandoned in the 12th century, which we'll tour before arriving in the city. Once in Kuqa, we will visit the **Great Mosque and the local market. Overnight in Kuqa.**

Day 10 ~ Aksu

Our main sightseeing destination today is the **Kizil Thousand Buddha Caves** on the way to Aksu; The caves claim origins from the royal family of ancient Kucha, specifically a local legend involving Princess Zaoerhan, the daughter of the King of Quici (Kucha). While out hunting, the princess met and fell in love with a local mason. The king denied the permission for their union unless the young man carved 1,000 caves into the local hills. Determined, the mason went to the hills and began carving in order to prove himself to the king. After three years and carving 999 caves, he died from the exhaustion of the work. The distraught princess found his body, and grieved herself to death, and now, her tears are said to be current waterfalls that cascade down some of the cave's rock faces. The caves date from between 500-700 AD and the frescoes are mixture of Indo-Iranian and Greek styles. Unfortunately the caves have been looted by the archeological explorers but it still retains some nice examples of wall art. The evening will be free to relax. **Overnight in Aksu.**

Day 11 ~ Hotan

Today our day will be little longer as we drive across the picturesque **Taklamakan Desert** to Hotan, including some stops for golden desert photos and little rest along the way.

Hotan is strategically located at the junction of the southern (most ancient) branch of the "Silk Route" joining China and the West with one of the main routes from ancient India and Tibet to Central Asia and distant China; providing a convenient meeting place where not only goods, but technologies, philosophies, and religions were transmitted from one culture to another.

Hotan is famous for its jade, silk fabrics and carpets. The city emerged as one of the earliest centers of silk manufacture outside China. According to one story, a Chinese princess given in marriage to a Hotan prince brought the secret of silk-manufacture to the oasis, "hiding silkworms in her hair as part of her dowry", probably in the first half of the 1st century CE. Atlas is the name of traditional Uyghur clothes which in Uyghur language means "tie-dyed silk fabric", which is soft, light and graceful fabric. Before arriving in Hotan we'll visit **the Silk Factory. Overnight in Hotan.**

Day 12 ~ Hotan

We'll spend the whole day in and around Hotan, taking a short trip to the ruins of ancient city **Melikawat**, although all that remains from this once magnificent Buddhist center are crumbling walls, it's worth a visit, as on the way you may notice some jade hunters on the river banks parallel to the road, but more than that you could join them in jade hunting if you'd wish so. After coming back to the city we will visit the **Hotan market**, which is only second to the Kashgar market featuring local arts and crafts. **Overnight in Hotan.**

Day 13 ~ Kashgar

On the way to Kashgar we'll stop in **Yarkand** in Shache country, another important commercial center on the southern arm of the Silk Road, to stroll in **the market and see Tomb of Aman Isa Khan**- the poet wife of one of the local khans. Next we will reach **Yengisar**, a small town famous for its locally produced hand-crafted knives with exquisite designs fashioned from fine woods, with their handles inlaid with silver and horn; although with strict security, they require special arrangements to be taken home. In the evening we'll arrive in Kashgar and check in at the hotel for rest. **Overnight in Kashgar.**

Day 14 ~ Kashgar

Kashgar has been a Silk Road trading center for two millennia and traders from different neighboring countries still continue to fuel the city with deals and negotiations. It still retains its exotic feel mainly due to its fascinating ethnic mix of Uighurs, Tajiks, Kyrgyz, Uzbeks and Han Chinese. Some things haven't changed here since medieval times- artisans still use hand tools in the old quarter and markets are rich with shimmering silks, knives and jewelry.

To experience all of the above mentioned we will explore the **Sunday Market**, stroll down the **National Street**, where a great variety of handicraft workshops are found, as well as tour **Old Muslim Quarters** and the **Aidkahn Grand Mosque and Square** built in 1442.

This afternoon we'll continue touring Kashgar, stopping at the 17th century **Adakh Hoja Tomb**, the site, also known as the Fragrant Concubine's Tomb, in memory of Abakh Hoja's granddaughter, Iparhan. **Overnight in Kashgar.**

Day 15 ~ Urumqi

Today we will take a **flight** to **Urumqi**, formerly Tihwa or Dihua, which is the capital of Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region of the People's Republic of China, in the northwest of the country. The city was a major hub on the Silk Road during China's Tang Dynasty, and developed its reputation as a leading cultural and commercial center during the Qing Dynasty.

Xinjiang is home to a number of ethnic groups including the Uyghur, Han, Kazakh, Tajiks, Hui, Kyrgyz, and Mongol, with a majority of the population adhering to Islam. It has abundant oil reserves and is China's largest natural gas-producing region.

Once in Urumqi we will **meet and transfer** you to visit **Grand Bazaar** and the **Xinjiang Provincial Museum**. Even for those remotely interested in the Silk Road this museum is a must. Prime exhibits are bodies and garments of nearly a dozen people discovered in tombs throughout Xinjiang, with the most well-known 4,000-year-old 'Loulan beauty' of Indo-European Ancestry. Some of the other highlights include the Tang figurines and silk paintings from the Astana Graves. **Overnight in Urumqi.**

Day 16 ~ Home via Beijing

We will **transfer** you to Urumqi airport for your Beijing flight to connect your home flight.

Departure Dates: Based on 16 days/14 nights

April 21 ~ May 5

October 6 ~ 20

Tour Price China portion using local guides:

\$4,700 per person in double room based on 10-12 guests

\$5,200 per person in double room based on 6-9 guests

\$5,900 per person in double room based on 3-5 guests

\$6,700 per person in double room based on 2 guests

\$860 Single supplement

Price Includes:

- Accommodation for 14 nights at selected 4/5 star hotels
- All breakfasts
- All dinners
- Daily private sightseeing by comfortable car, van or minibuses
Including professional driver

- English speaking tour guide (Xian, Dunhuang local guides and same guide for the rest of the trip)
- Entrance fees to sites indicated in bold on the itinerary
- Four domestic flights (Beijing-Xian, Xian-Dunhuang, Kashgar-Urumqi, Urumqi-Beijing)
- Dunhuang-Turpan fast train
- Arrival and departure transfers
- Baggage handling
- Visa support letter