SILK ROAD THROUGH CHINA

16 days
Countries visited

China

Tour Highlights

• The famous Terracotta Army
• Visit the sacred Big Wild Goose Pagoda
SILK ROAD THROUGH CHINA

• Ancient imperial capital of Xi’an
• Visit Thousand Buddha Caves and Bingling Temple
• Travel along the famous Hexi Corridor
• Walk along the Overhanging Great Wall
• Visit the final outpost of imperial China at Jiayuguan Fortress
• See ancient artwork in the Western Thousand Buddha Caves
• Preserved mummies & relics of Astana Tombs
• UNESCO-listed Jiaohe ruins
• Gobi and Taklamakan deserts
• Silk Road trading centre of Kashgar
• Travel along the Karakorum Highway

Places visited
Xi’an • Terracotta Army • Lanzhou • Xiahe • Labrang monastery • Thousand Buddha Caves and Bingling Temple • The Hexi Corridor • Jiayuguan • Dunhuang • Mogao Caves • Gobi Desert • Turpan • Tuyoq village • Astana Tombs • Kashgar • Taklamakan Desert • Tashkurgan • Opal village

What’s included
• Arrival & departure transfers
• Train tickets
• Domestic flight Xi’an - Lanzhou
• Ground transport with driver
• Accommodation
• Some meals (refer to itinerary for meal plan)
• English-speaking guide(s)
• Entrance fees to sites on itinerary

What’s not included
• Meals not mentioned in itinerary
• Drinks
• Visa fees
• Insurance
• Tipping
• Camera / video camera fees
• Personal items (laundry, telephone, etc.)
• Medical expenses
• Any services not mentioned in itinerary

All accommodation subject to availability. Final accommodation choices will be confirmed after booking.
Your Itinerary Explained

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Place visited</th>
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The first part of the text in each day is the itinerary schedule and will explain what you will normally see/do during this day of your itinerary.

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The part of the day’s text in italics (and comes after the three dashes “---”) is background information on the places or sites on that day of your itinerary. It is not part of your itinerary and may mention places that will not be visited on your itinerary. If you have any questions please ask us. Travel times where noted are only meant as a guideline.

Tour Itinerary

Day 1  Arrival into Xi'an

On arrival to Xi'an airport you will be met by your local guide and transferred to your hotel. Spend the evening having a welcome dinner where you will receive an overview of your tour. Overnight in Xi'an.

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Flight

Overnight in Grand Dynasty Culture Hotel, Xi'an

Day 2  Terracotta Army - Xi'an

Spend the day touring the highlights of Xi'an. Visit the site of the Terracotta Army before stopping off at the Horses Museum. Later, continue on to see the Big Wild Goose Pagoda. Overnight in Xi'an.

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Xi'an, formerly known as Chang’an, was the ancient imperial capital of China. Today it is the capital city of Shaanxi Province in northwest China. It is one of the oldest cities in China and marks the starting point of the famous Silk Road, where countless momentous journeys started or finished. Key sights in Xi'an include the Xi'an Ancient City Wall, which dates back to the 14th Century, the Little Wild Goose Pagoda and the nearby Terracotta Army.
Discovered in 1974, the breathtaking Terracotta Army sculpture collection contains nearly 8,000 life-size and highly-detailed terracotta warriors as well as horses that guard the tomb of Qin Shi Huang - the first Emperor of China. Each warrior is unique and is believed to have been modelled on an actual soldier of the time. They have been in place for over 2,200 years, protecting the emperor in his afterlife, and are now considered to be the 8th Wonder of the Ancient World.

The Big Wild Goose Pagoda was built during the Tang dynasty and stands in Da Ci'en Temple at a height of 65 metres. The original function of the pagoda was to collect Buddhist materials that had been brought from India by Xuanzang. Today, it has become a symbol of ancient Xi'an and boasts panoramic views of the city but remains a holy place for Buddhists.

Overnight in Grand Dynasty Culture Hotel, Xi'an

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Day 3</th>
<th>Xi'an - Lanzhou</th>
<th>Meals</th>
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<tr>
<td>Lanzhou</td>
<td>Spend the morning visiting the Great Mosque of Xi'an, before walking through the surrounding Muslim Quarter. Later, visit the Shaanxi Provincial Museum and Xi'an's famous walls. Later, travel to the airport for connecting flight to Lanzhou. Overnight in Lanzhou.</td>
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<td><strong>The Muslim Quarter of Xi'an</strong>, the hub of the Muslim community in the city lies around Beiyuanmen Muslim Street. This narrow street houses market stalls and stores with authentic souvenirs, clothing and Islamic cuisine. Visitors and locals alike enjoy sampling the many unique dishes on offer along this winding street.</td>
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<td><strong>The Shaanxi Provincial Museum</strong> was first opened in 1991 and holds many relics, murals and exhibitions displaying China's rich heritage. It is one of the sites where Chinese civilisation was born and holds great cultural significance. This museum represents that, educating visitors on the history of China and of this region - here, you can learn more about the Silk Road path.</td>
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<td>Overnight in Lanzhou Legend Hotel, Lanzhou</td>
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<th>Day 4</th>
<th>Lanzhou - Xiahe</th>
<th>Meals</th>
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<tr>
<td>Xiahe</td>
<td>Spend the morning visiting Lanzhou Gansu Provincial Museum. Later, travel to Xiahe, where you will spend the night.</td>
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<td><strong>Lanzhou Gansu Provincial Museum</strong> is home to over 350,000 artifacts. The exhibits of the museum relate to the history of Gansu and the Silk Road. This includes hand painted pottery, dating back to the Neolithic Age, along with precious silk fabrics, books and bamboo slips from the Han Dynasty (206 - 220 BC).</td>
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<td>Overnight in Boutique Hotel Nirvana, Xiahe</td>
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**Day 5**  
**Labrang Monastery**

After breakfast, take a tour of Labrang monastery. Later, travel on to Sangke Grassland, where you will visit a Tibetan family and learn of local customs. Overnight stay in Xiahe.

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**Labrang monastery** is a perennial favourite with its endless lines of squeaky prayer wheels, longhorn and Tibetan bells soundtrack and throngs of colourful Tibetan pilgrims. Outside of the Tibetan Autonomous Region, the monastery and town are a little slice of Tibet that are both more accessible to visitors but also less restricted for locals than Tibet itself. The monastery was founded by Ngagong Tsunde - the first generation of Jamyang, or living Buddhas. It is one of the six major Tibetan monasteries and was once home to over 4000 monks (today about 1600).

The town of Xiahe lies on the Daxia River in Gansu province. It is a significant site for Tibetans and is the home of world famous Labrang Monastery. In order to protect this sacred town, there is a limit on the number of tourists who are allowed to visit each year.

**Sangke Grassland** is made up of a vast meadow, surrounded by mountains. Sheep and yaks graze along the Daxia River that winds through the highlands. This is an ideal place to experience Tibetan cuisine, snacks and yak butter tea and learn about Tibetan culture.

Overnight in Boutique Hotel Nirvana, Xiahe

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**Day 6**  
**Thousand Buddha Caves & Bingling Si - Jiayuguan**

Drive back to Lanzhou, en route stopping to visit the Thousand Buddha Caves and Bingling Temple. On arrival in Lanzhou, board an overnight train along the Hexi Corridor to Jiayuguan. Overnight on the train.

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**Lanzhou** is the capital and largest city of Gansu Province in Northwest China. It is stretched out along the banks of the Yellow River and is famous all over China for its beef noodles.

**Bingling Thousand Buddha Caves** is a series of grottoes that are filled with Buddhist sculptures, carved into the natural caves of the canyon along the Yellow River. Visited today by boat the caves were created over hundreds of years (from 581 to 1370 AD), spanning many dynasties, including the Sui, Tang and Yuan. Bingling Temple contains a Maitreya Buddha carving, which stands almost 30 metres tall.

The **Hexi corridor** (literally “West of the Yellow River”) was a key leg of the Silk Road. Wudi, a famous Han emperor, drove the Huns from this region to secure the route. Bounded by the Qilian Shan mountains to the north and the Mazong and Longshou mountains to the south the corridor stretches 1600km from Lanzhou in the east to Dunhuang in the west.

Overnight in Jiayuguan Train, Lanzhou
Day 7  
**Jiayuguan**  
On arrival in Jiayuguan, transfer to your hotel. Later visit the Overhanging Great Wall before continuing to the Wei-Jin Art Gallery where you can learn about ancient Chinese culture and art. Overnight in Jiayuguan.

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The **Wei-Jin Art Gallery** is the largest subterranean gallery in the world. It is a large tomb made up of over 1,400 smaller tombs, built between the 3rd and the 5th century AD. The gallery, excavated in 1972, contains many murals and mosaics that depict life under the Wei and Jin dynasties. A famous example of this is the ‘postman mural’, which shows a postman with a letter on a horse - displaying that China was one of the first countries to have developed a form of postal system. He is portrayed without a mouth to represent his discretion.

Built during the Ming dynasty, the **Overhanging Great Wall** was a significant element of the defense system of Jiayuguan. This is the furthest reaches of the Great Wall. Built on the eastern slope of the Black Mountain, this wall cannot be seen from the West. Enemies thought that they could enter China from here but as they approached, the barrier of the Overhanging Great Wall stopped them in their tracks leaving them vulnerable to attack.

Overnight in Hotel Inn Plaza Holiday, Jiayuguan

Day 8  
**Jiayuguan - Dunhuang**  
Spend the morning visiting the Fortress of Jiayu before continuing on to take a tour of the Jiayuguan Museum. Later, transfer to Dunhuang, where you will stay overnight.

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The city of **Jiayuguan**, also known as ‘the mouth of China’, is most famous for the nearby Jiayu Pass, or Jiayu fortress. The modern town here was built around a steel factory in 1965.

Built during the Ming Dynasty, **Jiayuguan Fortress** was the final frontier of imperial China. To the Chinese this was the end of the civilised world, beyond which lay only immense impenetrable desert and barbarian hordes. Exiles were cast out from the Western gate, known as the “Gate of Conciliation” to face their demons and invariably never to be heard of again.

Overnight in Silk Road Dunhuang Boutique Hotel, Dunhuang

Day 9  
**Dunhuang**  
Enjoy a full day of sightseeing in Dunhuang. Begin with a trip to the Mogao Caves, before travelling on to Crescent Lake on the edges of the Gobi Desert and listening to the singing Sand Dunes of Mingsha. Watch the sun set over the desert before transferring back to your hotel for overnight stay in Dunhuang.

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**Dunhuang**, sat on the fringes of the Gobi desert and at the end of the famous Hexi Corridor, became a key junction on the Silk Road. Travellers heading west would decide here whether to go north or south of the mighty Taklamakan desert.
**Crescent Lake** is an oasis in the edge of the Gobi Desert called Mingsha Shan, on the fringes of Dunhuang. This freshwater lake is thought to have existed for 2,000 years. It came under threat with a rise in water consumption and desertification, which recently led to government action of refilling and protecting the oasis.

The **Mogao Caves** are a unique and unparalleled collection of grottoes that are carved into the cliffs above the Dachuan River in the Dunhuang region of Gansu Province. Dating back to 366AD, these UNESCO-listed caves contain some of the most important and beautiful Buddhist art in the world, including murals, sculptures and a 35.5m high Buddha from the Northern Wei, Sui, Tang and Qing dynasties.

The **Gobi Desert** covers a large expanse of northern China and southern Mongolia, south of the great Altai Mountains, east of the Taklamakan Desert, and north of the Tibetan Plateau. The remote and barren landscape transcends time with towering sand dunes, dramatic canyons, traditional yurt camps and ancient Silk Road cities.

**Overnight in Silk Road Dunhuang Boutique Hotel, Dunhuang**

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**Day 10**

**Dunhuang - Turpan**

Begin the day with a tour of the Western Thousand Buddha Caves. Later, travel to Liuyuan, where you will get the train on to Turpan in Xinjiang Province. On arrival, transfer to your hotel for overnight stay.

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The **Western Thousand Buddha Caves** were excavated from the cliffs along the River Dang that today, is considered a major national historical and cultural site. Although a number of the caves have been damaged by flooding, around 40 still remain. These caves are decorated with statues, murals and wall paintings that date back to the Northen Wei, Yuan and Ming dynasties.

**Xinjiang** (previously known as Eastern or Chinese Turkestan) in Western China is easily China’s largest province. Ostensibly a Uighur province, with additional autonomy to reflect this, the population is less than 50% Uighur these days though Uighurs still predominate in southern areas and rural parts of the province. Its landscape is dominated by the mighty Tien Shan mountains and the vast Taklamakan Desert.

**Overnight in Houzhou Hotel, Turpan**

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**Day 11**

**Turpan & around**

Take a full day to explore the sights of Turpan. Begin the day with a visit to Tuyoq village, before travelling on to the Astana Tombs. Later, stop off at the Bezeklik Thousand Buddha Caves. Overnight in Turpan.

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**Turpan**, is the quintessential oasis town. Sat on the fringes of the Gobi desert and at the second lowest point on earth, it is the hottest and driest place in China. It fruits - grapes and melons in particular - are famous throughout China for their sweetness.
The Flaming Mountains are located just outside of Turpan on the edge of the Taklamakan Desert. Also known as "Red Mountain", the sandstone hills of the Tian Shan Mountain Range are the hottest place in China. According to the classical novel 'Journey to the West', this heat was caused by the Monkey King who created a disturbance in the heavens. This knocked a kiln over, causing embers to fall from the sky to the spot where the Flaming Mountains lie.

The Bezeklik Thousand Buddha Caves date back to between the 5th and 14th century. 83 caves across 3 levels are shown here. Little remains of the original artwork as most were destroyed by Muslim invaders, the rest swiped by Westerners. The drive here however passes through the spectacular Flaming Mountains, a dramatic landscape with some worthwhile viewpoints. The rock temperatures here have been known to reach 80 degrees Celsius.

The picturesque, Tuyoq village, is a traditional oasis village in the Gobi desert. Here, you can meet local Uighur families and learn about their unique culture and customs. It is also home to the oldest Buddhist caves in the Turpan area, dating to the 4th century, though these are currently closed due to a flood.

The Astana tombs near Turpan date back to between the 4th and the 8th century. The arid environment has preserved the 456 tombs of the Gaoching kingdom, meaning that today, you can see natural mummies, along with their offerings, artefacts, manuscript fragments and wall paintings.

The Uighur people are a Turkic ethnic group who predominantly live in Eastern and Central Asia (though mostly in Xinjiang). Their ancestry can be traced back to the ancient Uighurs of Mongolia, where they have a long history in agriculture and trade. Predominantly Muslim, the Uighurs briefly declared independence in the early part of the 20th century.

Overnight in Houzhou Hotel, Turpan

Day 12  Turpan - Kashgar  Meals

Begin your day with a tour of a Karez irrigation system before travelling on to see Emin Minaret and Mosque. Later, visit the old city ruins of Jiaohe. Transfer to Turpan train station where you will board an overnight train on to Kashgar.

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The UNESCO-listed Jiaohe Ruins (also known as “Yar city”, meaning “cliff city” in Uighur) are located between steep cliffs above two river valleys, forming a natural fortress. Dating back almost 2000 years, most of the houses were dug into the earth due to the lack of wood and the difficulty of obtaining stone.

Emin Minaret is the tallest minaret in China, standing 44 meters high in the city of Turpan. It was built to honour the Turpan general, Emin Khoja, who defended the unification of China. The stunning brickwork contains a mix of styles including geometric patterns (Islamic) and floral designs (Chinese).
**Karez**, meaning “well”, is a type of ancient irrigation system derived from Persian “qanats”. It is made up of a system of vertically dug wells, linked by underground water canals that funnel the meltwaters of the Tien Shan mountains under the Gobi desert to Turpan. This was a crucial element in Turpan’s ability to serve the caravans and trading bazaars of the Silk Road. Today the majority of these wells have dried up, though some 150 still function.

Overnight in Houzhou Hotel, Turpan

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Spend the day seeing the many sights of Kashgar. Begin the day at Afak Khoja’s tomb before moving to the stunning livestock market. After a couple of hours here take a walk through the remains of Kashgar’s old town. Later visit Idkah mosque and handicraft street before stopping off for tea in a 100 year old tea house. Finally drop in at the Former British & Russian consulates. After dinner, if you have any energy, there is an optional visit to the night market. Overnight stay in Kashgar.

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**Idkah Mosque**, dates back over 500 years and is the largest mosque in China, receiving around 3000 daily worshipers. During festivals up to 20,000 have prayed here.

The sublime **Afak Khoja’s Tomb** is the holiest place in Xinjiang for Sufi Muslims. It was originally built in 1640 as the tomb of Muhammad Yusug, a Sufi master, who had come to this region during the 17th century. The ornate mausoleum is an excellent example of Islamic architecture, and is decorated with colourful mismash tiles and silks.

For centuries, **Kashgar’s Sunday Market** has been a meeting place for traders and travellers. The market remains important today - the population of the town can grow by almost 80,000 on a Sunday. The livestock market has moved out of town but is every bit the unique and lively spectacle it always was, with wrinkled men in traditional dress arriving on vehicles of all types to haggle and strike deals for sheep, cows, goats, horses, donkeys, camels and yaks.

The **Taklamakan Desert**, roughly the size of France, covers a quarter of the land of Xinjiang. Bounded by the Kunlun, Pamir and Tian Shan mountains and the Gobi Desert, it became the resting place for many a Great Game adventurer. Contrary to popular belief “Taklamakan” does not mean ‘if you go in, you don't come out' in the Uighur language.

Though mostly neglected by the local government the former **British & Russian consulates** were important power bases during the Great Game, when Russia and Britain jostled for power from 1830 to 1895. Both are now put to rather humbler uses.

**Kashgar’s night market** is a small but lively and photogenic market serving noodles, grilled meats, fruit, juices and snacks. It makes a good spot to walk off dinner.

Overnight in Hotel Qinibagh, Kashgar
### Day 14  
**Karakorum Highway to Tashkorgan**

In the morning, transfer to the Tajik region of Tashkurgan. En route, stop at Karakuly Lake and enjoy the sublime views. Continue to Opal Village, where you may meet native Kyrgyz nomads. Overnight in Tashkurgan.

Located at the foot of the Muztagata Mountain, **Karakul Lake** lies at an altitude of 3,600 metres. It boasts beautiful scenery of snow-capped mountains that are clearly reflected on the surface of the lake. From this location you can also typically see yurts and traditional Kyrgyz settlements.

The traditional Uighur **Opal village** has beautiful views of Bulunkul Lake and white sand hills. The region is home to many historic sights including the Mausoleum of the famous 11th century Uygur philologist, Mohamed al Kashgari, and the ruins of an old caravanserai, which lie on the bank of the River Gaz. Here, you can also visit **nomadic Kyrgyz people**, and see their traditional yurts.

*Overnight in Crown Inn Hotel, Tashkurgan*

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### Day 15  
**Tashkurgan - Kashgar**

In the morning, visit the history museum in Tashkurgan, before taking a trip to the city’s ancient stone fortress. Later, transfer back to Kashgar and enjoy the mountain scenery of the Karakorum Highway. Overnight in Kashgar.

The Silk Road town of **Tashkurgan** stands at an elevation of 4000 metres. “Tashkurgan” translates to ‘stone tower’ after its fortress, which was thought to have marked a midway point between Europe and China. It is the seat of the Taxkorgan Tajik Autonomous County and the population is over 80% Tajik.

*Overnight in Hotel Qinibagh, Kashgar*

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### Day 16  
**Departure from Kashgar**

After breakfast, transfer to Kashgar airport for your onward journey.

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*Flight*