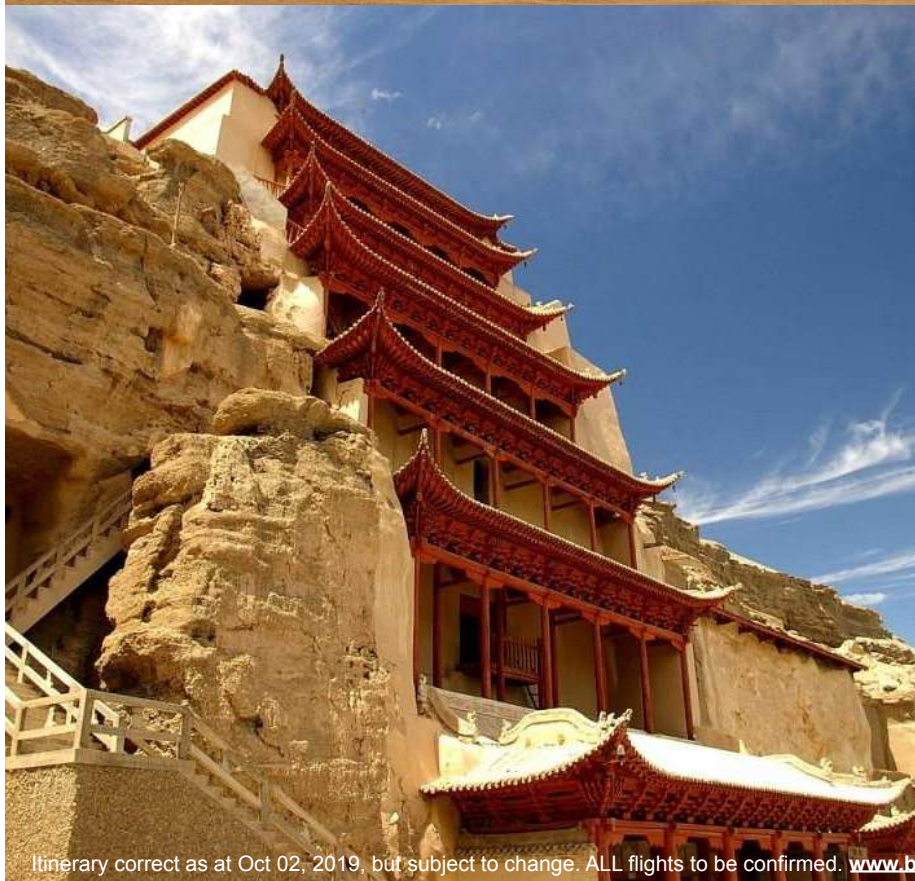


China's Silk Road

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CHINA'S SILK ROAD

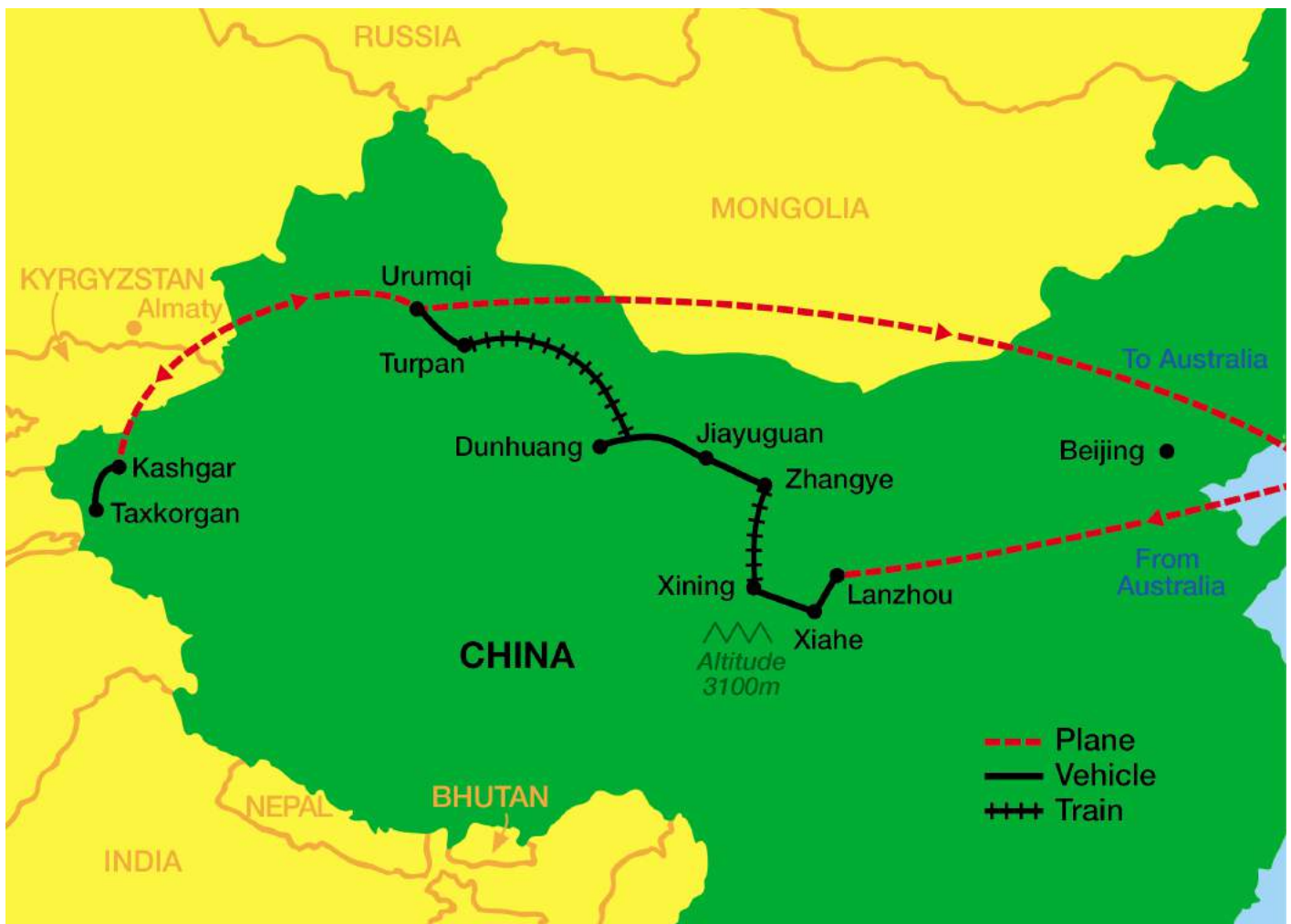
The term 'Silk Road' was first coined by the German explorer Ferdinand von Richthofen in the late 1800s to describe the 7,000 km of desert caravans that carried trade between the Hidden Kingdom of China and the outside world. Our China Silk Road itinerary has been designed for those who wish to experience the glory of ancient China's far western border region.

We start our tour in Lanzhou, an important Yellow River crossing and a major Silk Road trading hub for merchants from Mongolia, Sichuan and Tibet. Chinese, Huns, Bactrians, Sogdians, Turkmen, Mongols, Uyghurs and Tajiks all played historic roles in this fascinating region. In 1372 the Ming dynasty general, Feng Sheng, defeated the last of the Yuan dynasty's Mongol armies (1279–1372) and built the great fortress at Jiayuguan, guarding the entrance to the Hexi corridor from steppeland invasion and creating the furthest major stronghold of imperial China.

Whilst ancient cities like Jiaohe in the Turpan basin have disappeared, leaving only remnants of their walls and citadels, this region is rich in cultural and religious sites. We will explore ancient Chinese cave temples and pagodas, visit Central Asia's largest mosques with their distinctive Transoxanian minarets derived from Zoroastrian and Hindu sacred towers, climb high to Xiahe to see one of Tibetan Buddhism's greatest monasteries and search the Buddhist cave complex in Dunhuang. This is a journey that shows how the world's great religions spread and prospered through regional trade.

We follow countless traders, skirting forbidding deserts framed by some of the world's highest mountain ranges. We will visit ancient tombs, bazaars, fortresses and caravanserais showing the fascinating architectural heritage of this trade system. Finally ending our tour in Kashgar sitting on the edge of the vast, forbidding Taklamakan Desert, we will visit the famous Sunday Kashgar animal markets and trading bazaar where time seems to have frozen still. Here we shall encounter a number of local peoples like the Uyghurs and Tajiks who still make up the ethnic majority in this part of modern day China.

Come join us on this fascinating journey along the Silk Road.



Day 1, Thursday 21st May Australia to Guangzhou, PRC

Today we depart Australia on a day time flight to Guangzhou. Please refer to your individual flight itinerary for details. On arrival, transfer to our hotel. **Meals in flight**

Day 2, Friday 22nd May Guangzhou to Lanzhou, PRC

This morning you will be transferred to the airport for our flight to Lanzhou. Upon arrival, the group will be collected by our local representative and transferred to the hotel for check-in. You'll be at leisure for the rest of the day and we recommend a visit to Gansu Provincial Museum. Tonight there will be a welcome dinner. **B/D**



Day 3, Saturday 23rd May Lanzhou to Xiahe

From the period of the Qin Dynasty, travellers from Xi'an to Central Asia broke their journey at

Lanzhou. Situated on the upper reaches of the Yellow River, Lanzhou has for millennia guarded the

strategically important Hexi Corridor. We start our tour with a boat trip on the mighty Yellow River to visit the Liujia Gorge, a key water conservancy project completed in 1974, providing irrigation, navigation, flood control and hydro electricity generation. After our boat trip we will transfer to the ancient and remote Bingling Temple, a series of grottoes filled with Buddhist sculptures carved into natural caves and caverns in a canyon along the Yellow River.

The complex dates from about AD 420 to the Ming Dynasty. After lunch we drive to Xiahe to see the wonderful Tibetan Labrang Monastery. Xiahe is at 3,100m, so upon arrival in Xiahe we will check into the hotel and it is recommended that we rest to acclimatise to the altitude. We stay at Xiahe for two nights. **B/D**



Day 4, Sunday 24th May Xiahe

The Labrang Monastery was established in 1709 and became one of the six great monasteries of the yellow hat Gelukpa sect of Tibetan Buddhism. Often referred to as 'Little-Tibet', it is the largest Lamaist institute in the world, with a huge collection of volumes of scripture.

Labrang is Tibetan Buddhism's most important monastery town outside the Tibetan Autonomous Region. The white walls and gilded roofs feature a blend of Tibetan and Indian Vihara architectural styles. Resident monks wear maroon robes, black boots and shaggy yellow Mohawk shaped hats, sometimes pitched to impressive heights. This morning we will watch the locals as they take their daily ritual walk past the Monastery prayer wheels. One of the monks will then escort us through the Monastery's main buildings ending with the monks morning prayer session. This afternoon we take a short drive to the Sangke Grasslands located 50kms south-west of Xiahe to visit the Octagonal city where we will visit a local Tibetan family and share dinner with them. **B/D**

Day 5, Monday 25th May Xiahe to Xining

After breakfast we will be driven to Xining, around 230 kms away. Xining is the capital of Qinghai province on China's Tibetan Plateau. On the way we will stop at the Longwu and Wutong Monasteries. Overnight in Xining. **B/D**

Day 6, Tuesday 26th May Xining to Zhangye

An early morning walk around Xining to experience the daily ritual of the monks at the Kumbum Monastery, before we are transferred to the station and board our bullet train to Zhangye. Upon arrival, we'll be picked up from the railway station and transferred to our hotel. Overnight in Zhangye. **B/D**

Day 7, Wednesday 27th May Zhangye to Jiayuguan

This morning we will visit Zhangye's gigantic reclining Buddha statue which is 35m long. The temple's huge statue is made of clay on a wooden frame and depicts the Gautama Buddha's attainment of nirvana, with his ten disciples standing behind him. It is largely unaltered since the time of the Western Xia period of the 12th century. After lunch we visit the Danxia National Geological Park which is famous for its colourful sandstone cliff formations. It has been voted as one of the most beautiful natural landforms in China. We then travel onto Jiayuguan, about a 3 hour drive. **B/D**



formations. It has been voted as one of the most beautiful natural landforms in China. We then travel onto Jiayuguan, about a 3 hour drive. **B/D**

Day 8, Thursday 28th May Jiayuguan

Today we will visit the Jiayuguan Fort and the Overhanging Great Wall. In 1372 the Ming dynasty general, Feng Sheng, defeated the last of the Yuan dynasty's Mongol armies (1279 – 1372) and built a fortress at Jiayuguan, guarding the entrance to the Hexi Corridor. In the Gobi Desert, Jiayuguan's Great Wall is not like other famous sections near Beijing, which are

built with grey bricks and big stone slabs. This section is mainly built with loess. The loess soil was tamped together in layers, making the wall very solid. After the Jiayuguan Pass Fort, we will visit the Overhanging Great Wall located about 8 km north of the Fort. It is an extended part of the Jiayu Pass military defence system, protecting water resources and acting as a northern lookout point defending the northern entrance to Black Mountain Valley. After lunch we visit the amazing brick tombs of the Wei and Jin Dynasties (220-420). More than 1,000 tombs have been excavated so far but only one is open for display. The tombs are of families which originally housed bodies of three or more generations. The brick walls have stunningly preserved murals that are quite unique. Tonight we head out and enjoy a local Jiayuguan Hot Pot dinner. Overnight in Jiayuguan for one night. **B/D**

Day 9, Friday 29th May Jiayuguan to Dunhuang

This morning we drive to the oasis city of Dunhuang, a 4 hour drive, visiting the famous Yulin Grottoes on the way. Dunhuang sits on the edge of the Taklamam Desert and it was a major trading city on the silk road. After checking into our hotel, where we stay for the next three nights, we will have a leisurely walk to the Dunhuang Shazhou night market. **B/D**

Day 10, Saturday 30th May Dunhuang

An early morning rise to visit the Singing Sand (Mingsha) Mountains where there



will also be an option to ride a two-hump Bactrian camel at the Crescent Spring. Known to the world as "the First Spring in the Desert" the Crescent Spring resembles a crescent moon, hence its name. We then return to the hotel for breakfast and some free time to explore Dunhuang. After lunch we will spend the afternoon visiting the Dunhuang Museum. The museum houses over 4,000 relics including documents and sutras found in the 18th cave (the Sutra Cave) of Mogao Grottoes as well as stone tablets, pottery wares, silk and brocade, ancient iron tools and various ancient weapons. **B/D**

Day 11, Sunday 31st May Dunhuang

Today we head out to Dunhuang's famous Thousand Buddha Caves – the Mogao Grottoes – which are one of the world's most important sites of ancient Buddhist culture. To get a full appreciation of the caves, we will first visit the Mogao Grottoes Digital Exhibition Centre. The Grottoes are carved out of the sandstone cliffs of the Singing Sand (Mingsha) Mountains. The grottoes' mural paintings and colour statues are regarded as the greatest treasure-house of Buddhist art existing in the world. There will also be time to visit the Grotto Museum. Time permitting, there will be an opportunity this afternoon for you to explore Dunhuang yourself. **B/D**

Day 12, Monday 1st June

Dunhuang to Turpan

This morning we have added a visit to the Xijin tombs before we return to Dunhuang where we will be transferred to the railway station in Liuyuan and take the 4 hour bullet train to Turpan. Upon arrival, we will be picked up from the railway station and transferred to our hotel where we spend the next three nights. *B/D*

Day 13, Tuesday 2nd June

Turpan

Today is a full day of local touring, starting with the ancient city of Jiaohe Ruins which was a Han dynasty fortress designed to protect Turpan from attacks by the nomadic Xiongnu tribe, who ruled the northern steppes. Jiaohe is located in the Yarnaz Valley, 10 km west of Turpan. The site dates back some 2,000 years when the Tocharian's populated the Tarim and Turpan basins.



It was a natural fortress located atop a steep cliff on a leaf-shaped plateau between two deep river valleys which formed natural

defences. It was finally abandoned after its destruction during an invasion by the Mongols led by Genghis Khan in the 13th century. After Jiaohe, we will visit the amazing underground maze of the Karez tunnel system used by the Turpan people. Turpan's well system was crucial in Turpan's development as an important oasis stopover on the ancient Silk Road skirting the barren and hostile Taklaman Desert. The Turpan Depression is a deep basin descending to 154 m below sea level, which is the second lowest point on the globe (after the Dead Sea). We will then move onto the Uyghur mosque and Emin Minaret - the tallest minaret in China.

The Qing Empire conquered this largely Muslim region in the 1750s by defeating the Dzungar Mongols with their superior weaponry in a series of battles. Tonight we will also experience a Uyghur cultural show with singing and dancing and enjoy a traditional Uyghur dinner. *B/D*

Day 14, Wednesday 3rd June

Turpan

After breakfast we have another day of visiting ancient local sites in the Turpan area. First we visit the ruined city of Gaochang "King's City" about 40 km east of Turpan which is an ancient oasis city on the northern rim of the inhospitable Taklaman Desert. A busy trading centre, it was a stopping point for merchant traders travelling on the Silk Road. It was destroyed in wars during the 14th century, and old palace ruins and inside and outside cities can still be seen today. We will then move onto the Bezeklik Thousand Buddha Caves, which is a remarkable complex of Buddhist cave grottoes dating from the 5th to 14th century. There are 77 rock-cut caves at the site. Some of the murals show a large Buddha surrounded by other figures, including Turks, Indians

and Europeans. The quality of the murals vary with some being artistically naive while others are masterpieces of religious art. After the caves, we will visit the lush Tuyugou Valley cut into the Flaming Mountains. It is famous for its seedless grapes and a number of ancient Buddhist meditation caves nearby containing frescoes dating back to the 3rd century. *B/D*

Day 15, Thursday 4th June

Turpan to Urumqi

Today we have a short drive of about 2.5 hours to the regional capital of Urumqi. Upon arrival we will visit Xinjiang Autonomous Region Museum, and the International Bazaar. The Xinjiang Museum was officially opened in 1959 and reconstructed in 2005. The exhibition hall houses more than 40,000 precious cultural relics and specimens such as a mummified body and frescoes from the Buddha Caves. Staying overnight in Urumqi for two nights. *B/D*



Day 16, Friday 5th June

Urumqi

Today we will visit the Heavenly Lake and Heavenly Mountain Scenic Area which forms a natural highland scenic area surrounded by snow covered mountains and coniferous forest. In the shape of a half-moon at a height of 1,910m above sea-level, the Heavenly Lake is just like a green pearl inlaid into the northern side of the Heavenly Mountain. The tour of the lake will include a boat ride across the lake. *B/D*



Day 17, Saturday 6th June

Urumqi to Kashgar

This morning you will be transferred to the airport for the flight to Kashgar. Upon arrival we will visit the Id Kah Mosque, the largest mosque in Xinjiang together with the Abakh Khoja Tomb. The tomb is a beautiful example of the Samarkand Islamic architecture with exquisite tiled ceilings and classical minarets. Built in 1640, the tombs cover an area of over 2 hectares with five generations and seventy two members of the same family buried within the complex. There will then be some free time to explore the old town of Kashgar which is a labyrinth of artisan districts in which carpenters, blacksmiths, jewellers and farriers work alongside bakeries, teasshops and noodle shops. A highlight of



Kashgar old town is a visit to the century old tea house to share a traditional tea with the local Kashgar Uyghurs. **B/D**

**Day 18, Sunday 7th June
Kashgar**

Today we visit the famous animal market and the Kashgar Sunday Bazaar which have been meeting places for locals, merchants and travellers along the ancient Silk

Road for hundreds of years. Uyghurs, Tajiks, Kyrgyz and Uzbeks all congregate, dressed in their traditional clothing, selling horses, sheep, cattle, goats, donkeys and camels. The cacophony of sights and sounds make these Central Asian markets and bazaars such a joy to visit. We will visit the Id Kah Mosque, the largest mosque in Xinjiang together with the Abakh Khoja Tomb. The tomb is a beautiful example of the Samarkand Islamic architecture with exquisite tiled ceilings and classical minarets. Built in 1640, the tombs cover an area of over 2 hectares with five generations and 72 members of the same family buried within the complex. There will then be some free time to explore the old town of Kashgar which is a labyrinth of artisan districts in which carpenters, blacksmiths, jewellers and farriers work alongside bakeries, teashops and noodle shops. **B/D**



**Day 19,
Monday 8th June
Kashgar to Taxkorgan**

After an early breakfast in the hotel, you will be driven to the Tajik

autonomous county of Taxkorgan, which is located in the eastern part of the Pamir Plateau. The driving time today is about 7 hours, and on the way we will stop to visit the Karakul Lake at the foot of Muztaga Peak. The lake is about 30m deep and at an altitude of 3,600m and was formed by alpine glacial erosion. It is famous for its beautiful reflections of the surrounding snow capped mountains around. We will arrive in Taxkorgan in the later afternoon and will stay for two nights. **B/D**

**Day 20, Tuesday 9th June
Taxkorgan**

Today we will visit the Stone City and the Golden Grass scenic area. Taxkorgan which means stone city in the Tajik language, is at 3,100m above sea level. The Stone city is a famous ruin of the ancient city on the Silk Road in Xinjiang Province. Its power came from its position at the cross roads of both the middle and southern route of the ancient Silk Road where it was the primary

passageway leading to the Pamirs from Kashgar, Shache, Yengisar, and Karghalik. In Han Dynasty (202B.C.-220 AD) the site was the palace city of the Puli Kingdom, one of the 36 kingdoms in west region which were united by the Tang Government (618-907 AD). This evening we will have dinner with a Tajik family in a small village nearby and enjoy a dance and singing performance of traditional Tajik songs. **B/D**.

**Day 21, Wednesday 10th June
Taxkorgan to Kashgar**

This morning we will take the stunning drive back to Kashgar, again witnessing the beauty of the Karakul Lake at the foot of Muztaga Peak. As this will be our last night in Xinjiang Province, we will head out for our farewell dinner tonight. **B/D**

**Day 22, Thursday 11th June
Kashgar to Australia**

Today is the last day of our itinerary. This morning you will be transferred to the airport for your flight departure back to Australia. **B/meals in flight.**