

Scenic Silk Road Journey (7 Days 6 Nights)

Setting out from Xining, our journey traverses the majestic landscapes of Qinghai and the Hexi Corridor. Heading westward past alpine lakes, hidden salt flats, and striking Danxia landforms, we ultimately arrive in Dunhuang—a cultural sanctuary where a millennium of art, faith, and civilizational memory is quietly preserved in the desert. This is far more than a scenic expedition; it is a profound journey unfolding along the ancient Silk Road, leading deep into the heart of history and human civilization.

Dunhuang is a destination that must be experienced at least once in a lifetime, not merely because it is a World Heritage site, but because it stands as a living museum of human history. Within this desert oasis, the four great civilizations of China, India, Greece, and Islam met and intertwined over centuries, leaving behind philosophical, religious, and aesthetic imprints that span over a thousand years. This extraordinary legacy has given rise to Dunhuangology, an internationally influential academic field that weaves together literature, history, religion, and art, continually unveiling the deep networks of exchange between medieval China and Eurasia. The vast murals and painted sculptures of the Mogao Caves elevate this legacy into a soul-stirring visual epic, fluid lines, layered compositions, celestial figures, and narrative depth, transforming the caves into an immersive artistic experience rather than a conventional historic site. To stand inside Mogao is to witness how color, form, and devotion were brought together to create one of the most extraordinary painting traditions in the world.

Pick-up/Drop-off Location: Airport and/or Downtown

Day 1: Arrival in Xining – Ta'er Monastery (Kumbum Monastery)

Xining: As the capital of Qinghai Province and the northeastern gateway to the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau, this city sits at an altitude of 2,260 meters and serves as a vital hub of the Southern Silk Road. Since ancient times, it has been a multi-ethnic settlement for Han, Tibetan, Hui, and other distinct ethnic groups, making it the perfect starting point to acclimatize to the high altitude and understand the diverse social fabric of Northwest China.

Ta'er Monastery: Built in 1379, this is one of the six great monasteries of the Gelug (Yellow Hat) sect of Tibetan Buddhism. It is not only a religious and academic center in the Northwest, but it also preserves a rich collection of plateau arts (such as its

famous butter sculptures, murals, and barbola/embroidery). Here, you can observe Tibetan believers performing prostrations and monks engaging in their daily debates, offering a direct glimpse into the belief systems and daily operations of life on the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau.

Overview: This day uses Xining as your entry point to the plateau before visiting Ta'er Monastery to establish your first impressions of Tibetan Buddhism and local culture. The steady pace allows your body to adjust to the altitude and ease into the journey.

- **Accommodation:** Wanda Moments Xining Center (or similar)
 - **Total Transportation:** Approx. 31 km, approx. 30 minutes
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Day 2: Xining – Sun and Moon Mountain (Riyue Mountain) – Qinghai Lake – Chaka

Sun and Moon Mountain: Standing at an altitude of 3,520 meters, Riyue Mountain marks the geographical boundary between the monsoon and non-monsoon zones, and historically separated Central Plains farming civilization from the nomadic culture of the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau. Princess Wencheng of the Tang Dynasty passed through here on her way to marry the Tibetan king, and it remains a significant physical landmark for studying ancient Han-Tibetan trade and cultural exchanges.

Qinghai Lake: China's largest inland saltwater lake covers an area of over 4,500 square kilometers. The area showcases a classic plateau nomadic ecosystem where lakes, grasslands, and migratory birds coexist with Tibetan herders' tents and prayer flags. You can take in the deep blue lakeside scenery and learn first-hand how local herders adapt to and utilize high-altitude wetland environments.

Overview: The day focuses on Qinghai's most iconic natural landscapes. Moving from mountain passes to vast plateau lakes, the scenery is open and grand, letting you clearly experience Qinghai's distinct geographical layers.

- **Accommodation:** Chaka Yinghu Diamond Starry Sky Hotel (or similar)

- **Meals:** Breakfast
- **Total Transportation:** Approx. 381 km, approx. 5 hours 27 minutes

Day 3: Chaka Salt Lake – Emerald Lake – Dachaidan

Chaka Salt Lake: This natural crystalline salt lake has a mining history spanning over 3,000 years. Known as China's "Mirror of the Sky" due to its high reflectivity, it illustrates how resources evolved under the arid climate of the northwestern interior, alongside the salt industry development by ancient Qiang tribes and modern industry. You can walk or take photos along the century-old narrow-gauge railway that stretches deep into the center of the lake.

Emerald Lake: Originally a salt mining area for the Dachaidan Chemical Plant, this lake features varying shades of deep green and azure blue due to its high concentration of minerals like boron and lithium. The contrast between the rich brine and white salt crystals provides an excellent case study of how an industrial relic can transform into a unique natural landscape

Overview: The day centers on salt lakes and mineral landscapes. The visual impact is striking and highly photogenic, making it one of the most visually defining natural landscape days of the entire trip.

- **Accommodation:** Dachaidan Xingqi Yundi Starry Sky Homestay (or similar)
- **Meals:** Breakfast
- **Total Transportation:** Approx. 432 km, approx. 5 hours

Day 4: Dachaidan – Dunhuang – Singing Sand Dunes (Mingsha Mountain) and Crescent Spring – Shazhou Night Market

You will travel from the Qaidam basin region to Dunhuang, observing the typical Gobi and desert landscapes of Northwest China along the way.

Singing Sand Dunes & Crescent Spring: This site is a classic example of desert oasis geomorphology. The sand dunes get their name from the echoing sound produced by quartz sand grains when the wind blows or when people slide down

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the slopes. The Crescent Spring relies on underground rivers for replenishment and has avoided being buried by drifting sands for thousands of years. This rare coexistence of sand and water was precisely why ancient Silk Road caravans chose Dunhuang as a vital supply station. Here, you can ride a camel to retrace the historic merchant trade routes.

Shazhou Night Market: As the most vibrant commercial center in downtown Dunhuang, this market carries on the ancient bazaar traditions of this Silk Road

stronghold. In this modern oasis market, you can sample northwestern specialties

such as roasted mutton and donkey meat yellow noodles, while observing the daily lives of local residents.

Overview: Traveling from the barren desert straight into Dunhuang, this day blends natural wonders by day with the city's lively culinary energy by night, offering a complete transition as you enter the core of the Silk Road.

- **Accommodation:** Atour Hotel Dunhuang (or similar)
- **Meals:** Breakfast
- **Total Transportation:** Approx. 479 km, approx. 6 hours 32 minutes

Day 5: Dunhuang Museum – Dunhuang Bookmall – Mogao Caves

Dunhuang Museum & Dunhuang Bookmall: Through the museum's historical artifacts and the library's literary documents, you will gain a systematic overview of Dunhuang's evolution from the establishment of the four frontier commander posts in the Han Dynasty to the golden age of the Silk Road in the Tang Dynasty. This serves as an important academic prelude before entering the caves, helping you grasp the trade networks and paths of religious dissemination along the Silk Road.

Mogao Caves: This UNESCO World Heritage site, carved starting in 366 AD, preserves 735 caves and over 45,000 square kilometers of murals. More than just a treasure trove of Buddhist art, it acts as a detailed "history book on walls," documenting the integration of diverse ethnic groups—including the Sogdians, Tibetans, and Han—in clothing, music, and architecture. Your visit includes a 3D

digital cinema experience followed by an in-person tour to break down the social structures and cross-cultural impacts behind these relics.

Overview: This day focuses on cultural depth, building a solid historical context before you step into the Mogao Caves. The flow of the itinerary is clear, leaving you with a profound understanding of Dunhuang.

- **Accommodation:** Atour Hotel Dunhuang (or similar)
 - **Meals:** Breakfast
 - **Total Transportation:** Approx. 58 km, approx. 1 hour 7 minutes
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Day 6: Dunhuang – Yumen Magic Mountain National Geopark – Pass by Jiayuguan – Jiuquan

Yumen Magic Mountain National Geopark: Located at the northern foot of the Qilian Mountains, this park features vibrant red bed landforms and wind-eroded Yardang formations. It displays the results of Cenozoic tectonic plate movements and weathering processes, giving you a chance to see geological evolution and natural structures formed under extreme arid conditions.

Jiayuguan Pass: Built in the fifth year of Hongwu during the Ming Dynasty (1372), this was the westernmost military fortress of the Great Wall of Ming. It guarded the narrow throat of the Hexi Corridor, making it the core frontier defense for controlling the Western Regions and managing tributary trade. You will ascend this well-preserved rammed-earth and brick fortress to examine ancient military defense systems and pass construction techniques.

Overview: The day primarily involves moving east along the Hexi Corridor from Dunhuang. Combining geological wonders with border fortress history, the content is highly focused, making the historical thread of the tour much clearer.

- **Accommodation:** Atour Hotel Jiuquan Bell Tower West Han Park (or similar)
 - **Meals:** Breakfast
 - **Total Transportation:** Approx. 591 km, approx. 6 hours 54 minutes
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Day 7: Jiuquan – Qilian Grassland – Menyuan – Xining Airport Drop-off

Qilian Grassland: Sitting at an altitude of around 3,000 meters, this is one of China's most important alpine pastures, sustained by Qilian Mountain glacial meltwater and summer monsoons. The region preserves intact semi-settled nomadic systems of the Tibetan and Mongolian peoples. You will see herds of yaks and Tibetan sheep, and learn how local herders manage livestock according to seasons and pasture conditions, experiencing the authentic ecology of the northwestern grasslands.

Menyuan: Situated in the Qilian Mountain basin, this is the largest wheat and rapeseed cultivation zone in Northwest China. Every summer, hundreds of thousands of acres of rapeseed flowers bloom in stark contrast with the snow-capped mountains in the distance. This large-scale plateau agricultural

landscape showcases how human populations utilize river valley microclimates for farming, serving as the final transition from desert and wilderness back to modern agricultural civilization.

Overview: The trip concludes with vast grasslands and seas of flowers. As the landscape shifts from desert to open green spaces, the pace is at its most relaxed, making it the perfect ending to your journey.

- **Airport Drop-off:** Transfer to Xining Caojiabao International Airport.
- **Meals:** Breakfast
- **Total Transportation:** Approx. 406 km, approx. 4 hours 44 minutes.

Fee Details

Inclusions:

- Hotel accommodation (Standard double room or twin room; single rooms can be arranged upon request).
- Meals as specified in the itinerary (Breakfast).
- All airport transfers and ground transportation during the tour.
- Entrance fees for all attractions listed in the itinerary.
- Professional English-speaking and Cantonese-speaking tour guide services.

Exclusions:

- Lunches and dinners.
- Tips and personal expenses.
- Any services not explicitly mentioned in the itinerary.

Remarks:

- Hotels, activities, and specific itineraries are subject to adjustments in the event of force majeure.

Fee:

USD3,370



