

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 – Kumbum Monastery – Qinghai Lake – Chaka Town

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.

Kumbum Monastery: Built in 1379, this is one of the six great monasteries of the Gelug school of Tibetan Buddhism. It is an important religious and cultural site in Qinghai, known for its butter sculptures, murals, and barbola embroidery. Here, you can observe Tibetan pilgrims and monks' daily religious practices, offering a direct look into local belief systems and monastic life.

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: This day introduces you to Qinghai's plateau setting, Tibetan Buddhist culture, and highland lake scenery. The pace is steady and suitable for arrival day adjustment before the journey continues west.

- **Accommodation:** Chaka Yinghu Diamond Starry Sky Hotel (or similar)
 - **Total Transportation:** Approx. 381 km, approx. 5 hours 27 minutes
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Day 2: Chaka Town – Qarhan Salt Lake – Golmud

Qarhan Salt Lake: Qarhan Salt Lake is the largest salt lake in China, second largest salt lake in the world, located in the Qaidam Basin of Qinghai Province. It is known for its vast salt flats, mineral-rich waters, and striking salt formations.

Golmud: Golmud is a high-altitude city in western Qinghai and an important transport hub on the route to Tibet.

Overview: This day focuses on Qinghai's salt lake region and the transition from Chaka to Golmud. The route is long but direct, with strong natural scenery along the way, and Golmud is the only city in Haixi Prefecture where foreign travelers can stay overnight.

- **Accommodation:** Golmud Lavande Hotel (or similar)
 - **Meals:** Breakfast
 - **Total Transportation:** Approx. 432 km, approx. 5 hours
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Day 3: Golmud – Yangguan Pass – Dunhuang

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

Yangguan Pass: An ancient Silk Road frontier pass southwest of Dunhuang, once a key western gateway of the Han Dynasty. It is known for its desert setting and historical importance as a border defense site.

Overview: This day brings you from Qinghai into Gansu and into the heart of the Silk Road corridor. It combines frontier history with the transition into Dunhuang's desert landscape.

- **Accommodation:** Atour Hotel Dunhuang (or similar)
 - **Meals:** Breakfast
 - **Total Transportation:** Approx. 479 km, approx. 6 hours 32 minutes
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Day 4: Mogao Caves – Dunhuang Academy of Arts – Singing Sand Dunes and Crescent Spring – Shazhou Night Market

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.

Dunhuang Academy of Arts: A key institution dedicated to the study, conservation, and presentation of Dunhuang's cultural heritage. It offers insight into how the region's art and archaeology are preserved and interpreted today.

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 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.

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: This is a cultural in-depth day that combines Dunhuang's rich heritage with its most famous desert landscape, and the murals and art you will see are truly mind-blowing.

- **Accommodation:** Atour Hotel Dunhuang (or similar)
 - **Meals:** Breakfast
 - **Total Transportation:** Approx. 58 km, approx. 1 hour 7 minutes
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Day 5: Dunhuang – Son of the Earth – Pass by Jiayuguan – Zhangye Danxia National Geopark

Son of the Earth: A giant red sandstone sculpture of a sleeping baby in the Gobi Desert near Guazhou, created as a landmark that reflects the connection between people and nature.

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.

Zhangye Danxia National Geopark: A UNESCO Global Geopark known for its colorful sandstone hills and layered rock formations. It is one of the best places in Northwest China to see Danxia landforms.

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 Zhangye (or similar)
 - **Meals:** Breakfast
 - **Total Transportation:** Approx. 591 km, approx. 6 hours 54 minutes
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Day 6: Zhangye – Pingshanhu Grand Canyon – Mati Temple – Zhangye

Pingshanhu Grand Canyon: Located about 60 kilometers from Zhangye, Pingshanhu Grand Canyon is one of the region's most impressive natural landscapes, known for its red sandstone cliffs, deep valleys, and layered rock formations. The area covers a large scenic zone and combines canyon scenery, geological features, hiking routes, and open desert views. It is especially attractive for visitors who want a quieter, less crowded alternative to the more famous Danxia area, while still seeing strong geological contrasts and dramatic landforms shaped by long-term erosion. The canyon also offers several walking routes and viewpoints, making it suitable for both photography and light adventure.

Mati Temple: Mati Temple is a Buddhist grotto complex with a history of more than 1,600 years. Built into the cliffs of Linsong Mountain, it is known for its cave temples, stairways carved into the rock, and its long connection to Buddhist practice along the Silk Road. The site includes several temple groups and grotto sections, with murals, statues, and cliffside structures that reflect both religious and artistic traditions from different periods. It is one of the most important Buddhist heritage sites in the Gansu area and offers a strong combination of culture, history, and mountain scenery.

Overview: This day focuses on Zhangye's canyon landscapes and Buddhist heritage. It offers a strong combination of geology and culture within a single region.

- **Accommodation:** Atour Hotel Zhangye (or similar)
 - **Meals:** Breakfast
 - **Total Transportation:** Approx. 120–140 km, approx. 3–4 hours
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Day 7: Zhangye – Qilian Grassland – Menyuan Flower Fields – 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: Our last day 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 at an additional cost of USD45 per night).
- 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.
- Trilingual Tour. Local guides fluent in Mandarin with dedicated English and Cantonese translators available.

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:

USD3,699



