

12-Day China Silk Road Tour from Xi'an to Kashgar

Trip overview

Trace the footsteps of ancient merchants and monks on this comprehensive 12-day expedition along the legendary Silk Road. Starting in **Xi'an**, the eastern gateway of the Silk Road and home to the Terracotta Warriors, you will journey westward across the vast Hexi Corridor, traversing the provinces of Gansu and Xinjiang, before concluding in the vibrant city of **Kashgar**.

This tour is not just a geographical crossing but a profound dialogue between civilizations. You will witness the breathtaking Buddhist art at the **Mogao Caves** in Dunhuang, marvel at the surreal rainbow mountains of **Zhangye Danxia**, touch the desolate grandeur of the **Jiayuguan Pass**, and finally immerse yourself in the rich Uyghur culture of the Kashgar Old City. Covering magnificent historical sites, diverse landscapes, and unique ethnic traditions, this is the quintessential route for exploring the best of Western China.

- **Durations:** 12 Days
- **Destinations:** Xian - Zhangye - Jiayuguan - Turpan - Urumqi - Kashgar
- **Tour inquiry:** <https://asiachinatour.com/12-day-china-silk-road-tour-from-xian-to-kashgar/>

Itinerary

Day 1: Welcome to Xi'an – Seamless Arrival & Private Transfer

Welcome to the ancient capital of China! Upon your arrival at the airport or train station, your dedicated private guide will be waiting for you right at the arrivals exit, holding a personalized sign. Skip the long taxi lines and wind down immediately as you are escorted to a premium, non-smoking private vehicle. Our experienced local driver will chauffeur you directly to your hotel, while your guide handles the check-in details to ensure a completely hassle-free start to your journey.

Hotel Options: Somerset Xindicheng Xi'an (4-star) / Wyndham Grand Xian South (5-star)

Meals: Self-arranged.

Our Insider Tips for Your First Night:

Since today is all about international flight or train arrival and shaking off jet lag, we recommend

*keeping your evening schedule flexible. If you arrive early in the afternoon and still have plenty of energy, a leisurely evening stroll around the vibrant **Grand Tang Everbright City** or the bustling **Muslim Quarter (Huimin Jie)** is a fantastic, low-stress way to experience Xi'an's legendary night scenes without overexerting yourself before the big sightseeing days.*

However, if you land late or feel exhausted from your journey, we highly suggest ordering room service or grabbing a quick bite nearby, then heading straight to bed. Getting a full night of sound sleep tonight is your best strategy to adjust to the timezone and fully recharge for the walking tour of the Terracotta Army tomorrow.

Day 2: Xi'an – The Marvel of the Terracotta Army & Cultural Immersion

Your exploration of the ancient Silk Road begins with a journey to the world-renowned **Terracotta Army**. As you stand before this mysterious underground legion, notice the distinctly short and sturdy stature of the clay horses. This fascinating detail reveals a turning point in history: it was precisely this need for superior warhorses that inspired Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty to send his ambassador, Zhang Qian, to the Western Regions, ultimately laying the foundation for the Silk Road.

Next, dive deeper into local culture with a visit to a traditional cave dwelling, where a local craftsman opens his home to you. Here, you will enjoy the hands-on experience of crafting your very own mini terracotta warrior to take home.

After a delicious local lunch, return to the city center to explore the vibrant alleyways of the **Muslim Quarter**. Tucked away from the bustling food stalls, you will visit the **Great Mosque**. This sanctuary offers a rare, stunning architectural fusion where Islamic traditions seamlessly blend with traditional Chinese design, featuring a minaret beautifully shaped like a Chinese pagoda.

Hotel Options: Somerset Xindicheng Xi'an (4-star) / Wyndham Grand Xian South (5-star)

Meals: Breakfast and lunch included.

Our Insider Tips for Today's Itinerary:

Today involves a significant amount of walking, particularly across the massive pavilions at the Terracotta Army and through the stone-paved alleys of the city center. We highly recommend wearing your most comfortable walking shoes and bringing a light jacket, as the underground pits and the cave dwelling can feel considerably cooler than the outside temperature.

To maximize your experience at the pits, your private guide will strategically time your arrival to dodge the large tour bus crowds. When you visit the local craftsman's home, do not worry about getting your hands dirty; the clay used for the mini warriors washes off easily with water, making it a perfectly worry-free, authentic souvenir session.

Day 3: Xi'an to Zhangye – Ancient City Wall & Flight to the Hexi Corridor

Begin your morning with a refreshing walk or a scenic bike ride atop the **Xi'an City Wall**, one of the oldest, largest, and best-preserved Chinese military fortifications in the world. From this massive stone rampart, you will enjoy a striking contrast between the bustling modern city outside and the traditional rooftops of the old inner city.

Next, proceed to the iconic **Giant Wild Goose Pagoda**. Originally constructed during the Tang Dynasty to house the precious Buddhist scriptures brought back from India by the legendary monk

Xuanzang, this towering masterpiece stands as a proud UNESCO World Heritage Site and a crucial historical milestone along the ancient Silk Road route.

Following your morning tour, your private vehicle will transfer you directly to the airport for your flight to Zhangye, a vital oasis town nestled within the historic Hexi Corridor. Upon landing, your local Zhangye guide and driver will welcome you at the arrivals gate and chauffeur you to your hotel for a relaxing evening.

Hotel options: Tianyu International Hotel (4-star) / Zhangye Hotel (5-star)

Meals: Breakfast included.

Our Insider Tips for Today's Itinerary:

The Xi'an City Wall offers absolutely no shade, making the morning the absolute best time to visit before the sun gets too strong. If you wish to cycle along the top of the wide wall, your guide will assist you in renting a bicycle on-site, which takes about one to two hours to complete a leisurely loop or partial ride.

Since you are catching a flight to Zhangye today, we recommend wearing slip-on shoes to breeze through airport security efficiently. The temperature in Zhangye drops significantly quicker in the evening compared to Xian due to its higher altitude and semi-arid climate, so please ensure you have a warm windbreaker or jacket packed in your carry-on bag rather than checked luggage, allowing you to wrap up as soon as you step off the plane.

Day 4: Zhangye – The Rainbow Mountains & Ancient Silk Road Treasures

Your morning begins with a journey to a landscape that looks like a "color palette overturned by God"—the **Zhangye Qicai Danxia National Geological Park**, home to the world-famous Rainbow Mountains. Here, you will marvel at the vibrant, rolling ridges sculpted by millions of years of sandstone and mineral deposits, creating an otherworldly tapestry of red, yellow, and orange hues.

After heading back to the city for a comforting local lunch, continue your exploration at the **Wooden Pagoda Temple**. As the oldest standing tower in Zhangye, this architectural gem offers a window into the city's deep historical roots as an ancient trading hub.

Conclude your day with a visit to the **Giant Buddha Temple (Dafo Temple)**. Step inside to admire China's largest clay reclining Buddha, a magnificent piece of Western Xia Dynasty craftsmanship that has rested serenely in the heart of the Hexi Corridor for nearly a thousand years.

Hotel options: Tianyu International Hotel (4-star) / Zhangye Hotel (5-star)

Meals: Breakfast and lunch included.

Our Insider Tips for Today's Itinerary:

To capture the absolute best views and photos at the Danxia National Geological Park, your private vehicle will drop you right at the entrance, where you will hop onto the park's internal shuttle bus. This shuttle stops at four distinct viewing platforms, and we highly recommend walking up to the higher boardwalks at each stop for the most dramatic, panoramic angles of the vibrant soil colors.

Because the landscape is entirely open and reflective, the morning sun can feel exceptionally bright. We strongly advise wearing sunglasses, a wide-brimmed hat, and applying a layer of gentle moisturizer or sun protection before you head out. Inside the Giant Buddha Temple,

photography of the ancient reclining Buddha is strictly prohibited to help preserve its delicate, centuries-old pigments, so you can fully focus on soaking in the quiet, historic atmosphere.

Day 5: Zhangye to Dunhuang

After breakfast and lunch, we drive from **Zhangye** to **Dunhuang**. On the way, you will visit a magnificent ancient pass, **Jiayuguan Pass**. It is the west end of the Great Wall of the Ming Dynasty and a well-preserved ancient military fortress. The tall gate tower, the Gobi desert, and the mountain ranges in the distance will make you feel that you have traveled back to the powerful Ming Dynasty.

Have a walk on the **Hanging Great Wall** which is one part of the **Jiayuguan military defense system**.

Continue to **Dunhuang**, you are now at a point of vital strategic and logistical importance, being on a crossroad of two major trade routes within the Silk Road network.

Hotel options: Dunhuang Hotel (4-star) / The Silk Road Dunhuang Hotel (5-star)

Professional Travel Tips:

*Please be prepared for the longest drive of the Hexi Corridor loop today, with approximately 7 hours of total road travel between cities, so wearing loose clothing and bringing your favorite snacks is highly recommended. The desert environment at **Jiayuguan Pass** and the **Hanging Great Wall** offers no natural shade and can be incredibly windy, making high-SPF sunscreen, sunglasses, a wide-brimmed hat, and a windbreaker essential to protect against intense UV rays and blowing sand. Additionally, because climbing the **Hanging Great Wall** involves navigating steep, narrow stone steps, sturdy walking shoes with excellent grip are required for your safety. As you approach the arid desert oasis of **Dunhuang**, the climate will become exceptionally dry, so remember to stay well-hydrated by utilizing the complimentary bottled water provided throughout the day in your private vehicle.*

Day 6: Dunhuang – The Mogao Caves and Camel Ride

After breakfast, embark on an unforgettable adventure to **the Mogao Caves**, a treasure trove of Buddhist art where you will marvel at exquisite ancient murals and lifelike rock-cut sculptures spanning a millennium. For an even deeper immersion into this cultural heritage, we can arrange a special visit to **the Dunhuang Research Academy**. Here, you can admire masterfully crafted mural replicas and even experience the ancient artistry firsthand by copying a sample mural onto a traditional mud slab under the expert guidance of a resident teacher.

In the late afternoon, venture into the mesmerizing desert landscape to visit **the Singing Sand Mountains** and **Crescent Moon Spring**, a miraculous oasis nestled deep within the towering dunes. Embark on a traditional camel trek across the sweeping sands, listening to the rhythmic chiming of camel bells while imagining the legendary caravans that traversed this very route over a thousand years ago.

Hotel options: Dunhuang Hotel (4-star) / The Silk Road Dunhuang Hotel (5-star)

Professional Travel Tips:

*Please note that visiting **the Mogao Caves** requires booking entry tickets well in advance due to strict daily visitor caps implemented to preserve the ancient artwork, and photography is strictly*

*prohibited inside the cave chambers to protect the delicate pigments from light damage. The desert environment at **the Singing Sand Mountains** and **Crescent Moon Spring** can be extremely windy with fine, airborne sand particles, so it is highly recommended to wear a face scarf and bring protective, dust-proof covers for your cameras and smartphones. When enjoying your camel ride across the sand dunes, please strictly follow your local guide's safety instructions and avoid making sudden movements or carrying loose items that could startle the animals. Because desert temperatures drop rapidly once the sun goes down, we advise carrying an extra layer or light jacket during your late afternoon excursion to stay comfortable into the evening.*

Day 7: Dunhuang to Turpan – The Great Wall of the Han Dynasty

After enjoying a hearty breakfast, step back over two millennia as you explore the remarkable ruins of **the Great Wall of the Han Dynasty** (206 BC – 220 AD). Standing as the oldest surviving example of China's monumental defensive network, these ancient remnants offer a fascinating contrast to the iconic stone and brick structures typically seen in pictures. Here, you will discover a unique, climate-adapted construction technique utilizing rammed layers of wild reed, desert willow, and gravel that have miraculously endured the harsh desert elements for centuries.

Following a rewarding lunch, enjoy a comfortable transfer to the railway station and board a modern high-speed bullet train across the vast desert landscapes toward the historic oasis of **Turpan**, arriving in the late afternoon to check into your hotel.

Hotel options:

Turpan Friendship Peak Hotel (4-star)

Shuangcheng Hotel (5-star)

Professional Travel Tips:

*The ruins of **the Great Wall of the Han Dynasty** are located in a highly exposed desert area with intense UV rays and zero shade, so a wide-brimmed hat, sunglasses, and strong sunscreen are essential. To protect these fragile earthen structures from erosion, please strictly remain on the designated viewing boardwalks at all times. For the bullet train journey to **Turpan**, keep your passports handy for security checkpoints and ensure your luggage is easy to manage. Upon arrival in **Turpan**, you will notice a significant rise in temperature due to the low elevation of the depression, so remember to increase your water intake immediately to stay well-hydrated.*

Day 8: Turpan Highlights

After breakfast, begin your day at **the Emin Minaret**, which is particularly beautiful in the morning light as the shadow of the minaret falls across the elegant mosque. Step inside the historic structure to experience how the changing position of the sunlight on the walls was traditionally used to tell the time. Next, venture underground to unveil the architectural secrets of **the Karez Well System**, a brilliant ancient irrigation network that also serves as a wonderfully cool sanctuary to escape the heat of the sun.

Following lunch, explore **the Ancient City of Jiaohe**. Instead of building from the ground up, this entire city was miraculously constructed by digging down into the loess plateau; wander through its unique ruins to discover the well-defined government quarters and ancient residential areas. Since **Turpan** is world-famous for its agriculture, you will then visit a local vineyard to relax and unwind beneath the lush, shady grapevines. In the afternoon, journey toward **Tuyugou Village**, the oldest Uyghur village in the region with a rich history spanning over 1,700 years, marveling at

the vibrant, heat-radiating slopes of **the Flaming Mountains** along the way.

Hotel options: Turpan Friendship Peak Hotel (4-star) / Shuangcheng Hotel (5-star)

Professional Travel Tips:

***Turpan** is famous for being one of the hottest and driest places in China, making continuous hydration and heavy-duty sun protection absolutely critical throughout today's excursions. When exploring the expansive outdoor ruins of **the Ancient City of Jiaohe** and the exposed paths of **the Flaming Mountains**, ensure you wear a wide-brimmed hat and comfortable walking shoes for the uneven ground. Conversely, **the Karez Well System** involves going underground where temperatures drop significantly, so carrying a light shawl or long sleeves can keep you comfortable during the sudden transition. While visiting the traditional mud-brick homes in **Tuyugou Village**, please respect local Uyghur customs by asking for permission before taking close-up photos of residents or entering private courtyards.*

Day 9: Drive to Urumqi and City Highlights

After enjoying breakfast, begin your morning with a visit to **the Turpan Museum**, where an impressive collection of ancient mummies, fossilized remains, and delicate silk artifacts weave a vivid, historic story of the Silk Road network. Following this cultural exploration, enjoy a scenic drive through the rugged regional landscapes as you journey to the capital city of **Urumqi**.

Upon arrival, immerse yourself in the vibrant energy of **the Erdaoqiao Market**—the largest traditional bazaar in **Urumqi**—where you will be amazed by the dazzling array of ethnic handicrafts, local musical instruments, fragrant spices, and colorful textiles filling the bustling stalls.

Hotel options: Excemon Xinjiang Yilite Hotel (4-star) / Wanda Vista Hotel (5-star)

Professional Travel Tips:

*The **Turpan Museum** maintains strict preservation environments, so please remember that flash photography is prohibited near the fragile historical displays and mummies. When visiting the lively and bustling **the Erdaoqiao Market** in **Urumqi**, the dense crowds require extra mindfulness of your personal belongings, and keeping small bills or mobile payment apps ready will make purchasing unique souvenirs or trying local street snacks much smoother.*

Day 10: Urumqi to Kashgar Old Town

After your morning flight from **Urumqi** to **Kashgar**, you will begin your tour of this legendary oasis city sitting at the westernmost corner of China. Having served as a vital crossroads along the Silk Road network, **Kashgar** has flourished as a vibrant hub of regional trade and cultural exchange for more than two millennia.

Following a delicious lunch, pay a visit to **the Id Kah Mosque**, the largest and most influential mosque in China, appreciating its elegant Islamic architecture. Then, take a leisurely stroll along **the Handicrafts Street**, which features an amazing, bustling display of traditional copperware, metalwork, hand-painted porcelain, and intricate woodwork. To wrap up your afternoon, enjoy a relaxing break at **the Hundred-Year-Old Teahouse**, a historic sanctuary where you can sip local medicinal tea, soak in the melodic live music, and even join in with the local people's spontaneous conversations and traditional dancing.

Hotel options: Luxemon Qiniabagh Hotel (4-star) / Radisson Blu Kashgar (5-star)

Professional Travel Tips:

*When visiting **the Id Kah Mosque**, please respect the religious customs by dressing conservatively with long pants or long skirts, and women are advised to bring a lightweight scarf to cover their hair before entering the holy complex. While exploring **the Handicrafts Street** and **the Hundred-Year-Old Teahouse**, keeping some cash on hand is highly recommended, as many traditional local craftsmen prefer small bills for custom copperware or hot tea. Feel free to interact with the welcoming locals at the teahouse, but always kindly ask for permission before filming or taking close-up portraits of the elders or performers.*

Day 11: Karakul Lake

After enjoying breakfast, embark on an epic and unforgettable road trip as you drive along the legendary **China-Pakistan Highway**. This high-altitude route showcases the seldom-seen, dramatic alpine scenery of the westernmost frontier of China, winding through rugged canyons and vast mountain plains.

Following a scenic lunch along the way, you will arrive at one of the best-kept secrets in China: **Karakul Lake**, a sparkling glacial lake nestled deep within the Pamir Plateau. During the breathtaking 3-hour journey, you can easily ask your driver to stop at safe designated viewpoints so you can capture photographs of the changing vistas. The mirror-like waters of the lake, juxtaposed against the dramatic backdrop of the snow-capped **Muztag Ata** and neighboring towering peaks, create a majestic landscape that will truly inspire your inner photographer.

Hotel options: Luxemon Qiniabagh Hotel (4-star) / Radisson Blu Kashgar (5-star)

Professional Travel Tips:

*The journey to **Karakul Lake** involves ascending to an altitude of approximately 3,600 meters, so it is highly recommended to move at a relaxed pace and stay hydrated to alleviate potential mild altitude sickness. Because weather conditions on the Pamir Plateau are notoriously unpredictable and temperatures can drop drastically near the glaciers, wearing windproof layers and a warm jacket is essential even during the summer months. Additionally, as this highway travels through sensitive border regions, please ensure your passport is readily accessible for multiple mandatory security checkpoints along the route.*

Day 12: Kashgar Departure

After enjoying a final breakfast at your hotel, savor a relaxing morning at your own pace before gathering for lunch. Following your meal, your private guide and driver will accompany you to **Kashgar Airport** to assist with your check-in and wave a warm goodbye as you conclude your unforgettable Silk Road journey. From this regional aviation hub, you can seamlessly catch your connecting flights to major gateway cities across China for your onward travel home.

Professional Travel Tips:

*We highly recommend arriving at **Kashgar Airport** at least two to two and a half hours prior to your domestic flight, as security screenings in this region can be exceptionally thorough and require extra processing time. Please ensure that your passport and all travel documentation remain easily accessible, and remember to pack any specialized souvenirs, such as traditional*

copperware or local knives purchased at the bazaar, securely into your checked baggage rather than your carry-on to comply with strict airport regulations.

Booking Policy

Cancellation Policy

Cancellation by Customer

- Cancellation received before 60 days: FREE of charge
- Cancellation received from 30 days to 59 days prior arrival date: 20% of total rate
- Cancellation received from 15 days to 29 days prior arrival date: 40% of total rate
- Cancellation received from 7 days to 14 days prior arrival date: 70% of total rate
- Cancellation received less than 7 days prior arrival date or No show: 100% of total rate

Children Policy

The rate for children applicable for one child sharing a twin or double cabin with two adults.

- For infant (<04 years old): Free of Charge
- 04 - 11 years old without bed: 50% adult rate
- 04 - 11 years old with extra bed: 75% adult rate
- Above 11 years old with extra bed: 100% adult rate

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