

7-Day Dunhuang, Zhangye, and Ejina Qi Photography Tour

Trip overview

Discover the ultimate autumn photography adventure through China's wild northwest. This curated 7-day itinerary traces the legendary Hexi Corridor before venturing deep into the deserts of Inner Mongolia to capture the fleeting golden wonder of the Ejina Populus Forests. Designed specifically for photography enthusiasts, this journey aligns your arrival at every iconic location with the absolute best natural light. From the thousand-year-old Buddhist murals of Dunhuang and the desolate sand-swallowed ruins of the Black City, to the dramatic skeletal silhouettes of the Strange Forest at sunset and the vibrant, rippling sandstone waves of the Zhangye Rainbow Mountains—every day offers a masterclass in composition and color. Immerse yourself in a legendary landscape where ancient Silk Road heritage meets nature's most spectacular seasonal transformation.

- **Durations:** 7 Days
- **Destinations:** Dunhuang - Jiayuguan - Ejina Qi - Zhangye
- **Tour inquiry:** <https://asiachinatour.com/7-days-photography-tour/>

Itinerary

Day 1: Arrival in Dunhuang

Upon your arrival at the Dunhuang airport or railway station, a private vehicle will transfer you seamlessly to your hotel. After checking in, the rest of the day is yours to unwind, adjust to the desert pace, and prepare for the adventures ahead. Dunhuang serves as a legendary oasis crossroads where the Northern and Southern Silk Roads meet; tonight, step out to explore the vibrant Shazhou Night Market, where the scent of roasted cumin and local spices offers the perfect introduction to the region's rich cultural fusion. Stay overnight in **Dunhuang**.

Expert Journey Insights:

Dunhuang Mogao Airport and Dunhuang Railway Station are located approximately 15 to 25 kilometers from the city center, offering a smooth 20 to 30 minute private transfer to your hotel. Dunhuang features an arid desert climate with significant diurnal temperature variations and low

humidity, so keeping hydrated and applying lip balm and moisturizer upon arrival will help you adapt comfortably. Visiting the Shazhou Night Market in the evening provides a fantastic taste of Silk Road culture, where sampling local specialties like Yellow Noodles with Donkey Meat or sweet Niangpi noodles makes for an ideal first night.

Day 2: Dunhuang Highlights Discovery

Today begins with a journey to the **Mogao Caves**, a breathtaking treasure trove of Buddhist art spanning a thousand years. In the afternoon, venture into the vast desert to explore the **Singing Sand Mountains** and the pristine **Crescent Moon Spring**, a miraculous oasis that has defied the shifting sands for centuries. Conclude your adventure with a memorable camel ride across the undulating dunes as the sun sets over the desert. To fully appreciate the Mogao Caves, we highly recommend watching the two immersive introductory movies at the digital center before heading to the cliffside; the 3D dome film provides a stunning, up-close view of the intricate cave details that are difficult to see in the dim light of the actual grottos. Stay overnight in **Dunhuang**.

Expert Journey Insights:

To preserve the delicate pigments inside the Mogao Caves, flash photography and tripod usage are strictly prohibited, and visitors must follow official site guides equipped with cold-light flashlights during cave walkthroughs. The afternoon desert excursion involves walking across soft sand dunes where wearing protective shoe covers prevents sand from filling footwear. Protecting camera equipment and mobile phones with dustproof pouches or bags ensures protection against fine windblown sand particles during camel rides across the ridge lines.

Day 3: Dunhuang to Jiayuguan

Depart Dunhuang this morning and travel across the vast Hexi Corridor to **Jiayuguan**. Upon arrival, you will explore the imposing **Jiayuguan Fort**, the grand western terminus of the Ming Dynasty Great Wall, and visit the nearby **Great Wall Museum** to unravel the region's rich military history. When exploring the fort, make sure to look for the famous "single leftover brick" resting on a ledge behind the Western Gate; historical lore credits the master builder's flawless architectural calculations for this precise, solitary surplus, making it a favorite insider detail for travelers tracing the engineering marvels of the Silk Road. Stay overnight in **Jiayuguan**.

Expert Journey Insights:

The overland drive from Dunhuang to Jiayuguan spans approximately 380 kilometers and takes around 4.5 hours via modern expressways, featuring expansive views of desert plains and mountain ranges along the way. Walking atop the brick ramparts of Jiayuguan Fort involves climbing several stone staircases exposed to open desert winds, making a windbreaker or light jacket and comfortable walking shoes beneficial. Your guide will highlight specific architectural features within the fort complex, including the echo slopes, archery towers, and the historic Western Gate ledge holding the legendary surplus brick.

Day 4: Jiayuguan to Ejina Qi

Leave **Jiayuguan City** behind this morning and embark on a scenic journey northeast into the vast deserts of Inner Mongolia, arriving at **Ejin Banner**. Your afternoon begins with an exploration

of **The Black City** (Khara-Khoto), a hauntingly beautiful Tangut fortress swallowed by shifting desert sands. As the afternoon wanes, head to the nearby **Strange Forest** (Guai Shu Lin) for a spectacular golden hour and sunset photoshoot, capturing the dramatic, skeletal silhouettes of ancient, dead populus trees against the burning desert sky. The stark contrast of the dead populus trees against the shifting dunes makes the **Strange Forest** a paradise for photography, so we highly recommend bringing a gradient neutral density filter to balance the bright horizon with the foreground shadows, and lingering a bit after sunset to capture the deep indigo twilight that gives this location its otherworldly atmosphere. Stay overnight in **Ejina Qi**.

Expert Journey Insights:

The overland highway transfer from Jiayuguan to Ejina Qi covers roughly 380 kilometers and takes approximately 4.5 to 5 hours across scenic Gobi desert terrain. Photographers visiting the Strange Forest are encouraged to bring a gradient neutral density filter and tripod to balance high-contrast horizon light with foreground tree silhouettes, as lingering into twilight offers exceptional dusk and astrophotography conditions. Temperatures drop quickly once the sun dips below the horizon, so carrying a warm windproof jacket or fleece layer ensures comfort during evening shoots.

Day 5: Lost in the Beautiful Ejina Poplar Forest

Dedicate your entire day to exploring the legendary **Ejina Populus**, a golden paradise that transforms into one of China's most spectacular autumn landscapes. Wander deep into the vast reserve to witness the vibrant yellow foliage contrasting sharply with the deep blue sky and the surrounding desert sands, capturing the pristine beauty of nature at your own pace. To capture the most iconic reflections, head early to the Second Bridge area, where the golden canopies mirror flawlessly onto the calm water's surface, and then take the internal shuttle further down to the Fourth and Eighth Bridges to witness the older, grander trees that offer a true sense of the desert's ancient spirit. Stay overnight in **Ejina Qi**.

Expert Journey Insights:

Exploring the Ejina Poplar Forest involves extensive walking along well-maintained wooden boardwalks spanning across eight major scenic bridge zones, making comfortable walking shoes and layered clothing essential for changing desert temperatures. Early morning light at the Second Bridge provides optimal windless conditions for capturing water reflections, while the Fourth Bridge features the forest's oldest and most characterful trees. Park shuttle buses run continuously between the scenic stations, allowing travelers to hop on and off conveniently throughout the full-day visit.

Day 6: Ejina Qi to Zhangye

Rise before dawn to catch the breathtaking sunrise at **Juyan Lake**, an ancient desert oasis where the morning sun cuts through the morning mist, illuminating vast fields of swaying reeds and flocking waterfowl. After the photoshoot, embark on a long drive south across the desert plains back into Gansu Province. Arrive at **The Rainbow Mountains** (Zhangye Danxia Geopark) in the late afternoon, just in time to witness the dramatic sandstone waves shift through intense shades of crimson, amber, and gold as the setting sun moves across the rippling ridges.

For the sunrise shoot at **Juyan Lake**, head straight to the No. 2 or No. 3 viewing platforms to get closer to the reed marshes and water birds, and make sure to bring a long telephoto lens to

capture the migratory gulls sweeping across the water against the rising sun; later at **The Rainbow Mountains**, the No. 4 platform (Colorful Sunset Platform) offers the absolute best vantage point for late-afternoon light, where the rock layers appear most saturated right before dusk. Stay overnight in **Zhangye**.

Expert Journey Insights:

The early morning temperature at Juyan Lake can be crisp and windy prior to sunrise, making a heavy windbreaker, hat, and gloves recommended for outdoor standing. For photographers at Juyan Lake, viewing platforms No. 2 and No. 3 provide closer proximity to reed beds and waterbirds, where a telephoto lens captures migratory gulls sweeping across illuminated morning mist. Later at Zhangye Danxia Geopark, Viewing Platform No. 4 (Colorful Sunset Platform) delivers optimal late-afternoon angles where mineral saturation peaks just before dusk, and park shuttle buses comfortably connect all major panoramic observation decks.

Day 7: Zhangye Departure

Begin your final day with a visit to the historic **Giant Buddha Temple**, home to China's largest indoor reclining Buddha statue, a magnificent clay masterpiece dating back to the Western Xia Dynasty. Afterward, enjoy some free time to gather your belongings before being transferred to the **Zhangye Railway Station** or **Zhangye Airport** for your departure flight or train, bringing your memorable Silk Road adventure to a close.

The Grand Buddha Temple is a serene, contemplative space, and we highly recommend taking a moment to look closely at the wooden architectural framework of the main hall, which was constructed without using a single nail; it is an incredible testament to ancient craftsmanship that provides a quiet, meaningful final impression of the region's rich heritage before you head to **Zhangye Railway Station** or **Zhangye Airport**.

Expert Journey Insights:

Zhangye Ganzhou Airport is located approximately 25 kilometers southeast of the city center (a 30-minute drive), while Zhangye West Railway Station is conveniently situated just 15 minutes away by car. The Giant Buddha Temple offers a quiet, shaded sanctuary ideal for a morning walk, and visitors are requested to refrain from flash photography inside the main hall to protect the ancient gold leaf and pigment coatings on the reclining Buddha statue. Your private guide will coordinate luggage storage and ensure you arrive at the airport or station with ample time for check-in procedures.

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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