



# The Silk Route: China & Kyrgyzstan 2021

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Tour Leaders **Katie Campbell, Russell Casey**

Physical Ratings 

An epic journey to ancient cities in China and Kyrgyzstan that waxed and waned over two millennia as trading hubs along the Silk Route from the heart of China to the Mediterranean.



## Overview

- Join [Katie Campbell](#) and [Russell Casey](#) on this epic journey which combines the world-renowned cultural and historical sites of the Silk Route with some of the planet's most stunning scenery.
- Follow in the footsteps of early traders across the vast deserts and mountains of Central Asia.
- Study the histories of Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, Manichaeism, Nestorian Christianity, Shamanism and Islam and their interactions over millennia.
- Visit the extraordinary sculpted caves and huge Tang dynasty Buddha (27m tall) at the Bingling-Si Thousand Buddha Caves.
- Journey to the Labrang Lamasery, one of Tibetan Buddhism's greatest monasteries.
- Visit the western-most part of the Great Wall of China and Jiayuguan Fortress that protected the Gansu corridor from nomadic incursions.
- At the Mogao Caves, a UNESCO World Heritage site, explore the greatest Buddhist decorated cave system in the world, with statues and paintings from 400 – 1600 AD.
- View the Loulan Beauty, one of more than 200 remarkably well-preserved mummies discovered in the western deserts, at the Xinjiang Museum in Urumchi.
- Wander through Kashgar's age-old trading streets, watching craftsmen of all descriptions, and visit its famous animal market trading donkeys, camels and other livestock.
- Drive some of the most dramatic roads of Central Asia: the legendary Karakoram Highway to Lake Karakol (3,800m); the towering Torugart Pass (3,752m) into Kyrgyzstan; and the Teo Ashuu Pass (3,586m) to the remote Suusamyr valley rich in alpine pastures.
- Meet Kyrgyz yurt dwellers as they herd their flocks through the deep valleys and broad plateaux of mountainous Kyrgyzstan; learn about yurt-making and hunting with golden eagles.
- Listen to exquisite songs and music played on fascinating Central Asian instruments.
- Sample and perhaps buy magnificent Central Asian textiles, from intricate embroidered wall hangings to richly coloured carpets.

### Testimonials

*Sightseeing is one thing, but combining this with a rich critical background and fascinating research makes a deeply satisfying travel experience. Articulate & knowledgeable guides and managers make ASA tours totally compelling.* Brenda, ACT.

*An excellent coverage of the Silk Route. You can contrast ancient China and the large dynasties with the modern China. While we covered a lot of distance, it was done in a very comfortable and enjoyable way. I really enjoyed seeing the people in local settings.* Robert, NSW.

*An amazing experience! Every day provided a high point. The Silk Route played such a central role in the history of Eurasia – it was a wonderful opportunity to experience it first hand.* Alastair, TAS.

### 22 days in China & Kyrgyzstan

Overnight Xi'an (3 nights) • Lanzhou (1 night) • Xiahe (2 nights) • Jiayuguan (2 nights) • Dunhuang (2 night) • Turfan (2 nights) • Urumchi (1 night) • Kashgar (3 nights) • Naryn (1 night) • Almaluu Yurt Camp, Lake Issyk-Kul (1 night) • Bishkek (3 nights).

### Overview

This tour is an epic journey to ancient cities in China and Kyrgyzstan that waxed and waned over two

millennia as trading hubs along the Silk Route from the heart of China to the Mediterranean. We follow countless traders, skirting forbidding deserts framed by some of the world's highest mountain ranges. Buddhist lamaseras and temples, mosques, tombs, bazaars, fortresses and *caravanserais* constitute the fascinating architectural heritage of this trade system. Bazaars and the weekly animal market at Kashgar are survivals of ancient trade, including beneficial exchange between nomads of the steppe and sedentarists of these emporia.

Despite their interdependence, city-dwellers and nomads often fought violent wars. The Ming dynasty walls of Xi'an were built to protect the city from invasion. The ancient military fortress at Jiayuguan, christened the 'Impregnable Defile Under Heaven', guarded the Gansu corridor from steppeland invasion, and was the furthest major stronghold of imperial China. Great tomb complexes such as the Mausoleum of the Emperor Qin Shihuang near Xi'an reflect the rise of potentates along the Silk Route and the growth of their empires. Some cities like Jiaohe in the Turfan basin have disappeared, leaving only remnants of their walls and citadels. Elsewhere, urban citadels and richly tiled palaces survive.

Chinese cave temples and pagodas, vast Central Asian mosques, distinctive Transoxanian minarets derived from Zoroastrian and Hindu sacred towers, and Buddhist cave complexes, show how the world's great religions spread and prospered through regional trade. Collections like the Museum of Qin Terracotta Warriors and Horses, the National History Museum of Bishkek and Urumchi's Xinjiang Regional Museum, illustrate the lives, beliefs, customs and rituals of myriad peoples – Chinese, Huns, Bactrians, Sogdians, Turkmen, Mongols, Uyghurs and Tajiks who all played historic roles in this fascinating region.

The tour begins by exploring the ancient imperial capital of Xi'an (Chang'an). We trace the history of the city and that of China from the prehistoric period to the time when Xi'an became the Chinese terminus of the Silk Route. We also study the emergence of unified imperial China in such fascinating sites as the Museum of Qin Terracotta Warriors and Horses in the mausoleum complex of the first emperor, Qin Shihuang. We then commence our journey west along the Silk Route.

From Xi'an we fly to Lanzhou. Located on the Northern Silk Road, the city was an important Yellow river crossing and a major trading hub for merchants from Mongolia, Sichuan and Tibet. From here we visit the vast Labrang Lamasery, one of Tibetan Buddhism's greatest monasteries, and the marvellous rock cut sculptures of Bingling-Si. Continuing via the Gansu (Hexi) Corridor we visit the great fortress at Jiayuguan. Our journey westward via Dunhuang, Turfan and Urumchi to Kashgar is dominated by the vast, forbidding Taklimakan Desert in Xinjiang province of China.

We skirt this desert, following the approximate path of Silk Route travellers. At the eastern end of the Taklimakan and along its northern edge we shall encounter a number of local peoples like the Uyghurs, who still make up the ethnic majority in this part of China. We also visit the Buddhist cave complex in Dunhuang, a priceless heritage of this great religion where thousands of medieval manuscripts and artifacts were sealed from the outside world for over a millennium until their rediscovery in the early 20th century.

After visiting the caravan cities of the Taklimakan we cross the great knot of mountains which separate it from the great Kyzylkum Desert. Here we experience a very different environment, of majestic mountain and steppe landscapes which give us a vivid understanding of the territories of the northern nomads who constantly interacted with the oasis civilisations of the Silk Route.

We venture along the Karakoram Highway past some of the world's highest mountains and then journey up into Kyrgyzstan, where you will visit a lonely mountain *caravanserai*, learn how yurts are made, and witness the semi-nomadic Kyrgyzs as they tend their summer flocks in broad, isolated, scenic mountain pastures.



## Leaders



### Katie Campbell

An established archaeologist who has worked throughout Central Asia and the Middle East. Her Oxford PhD studies the impact of Mongol Conquests on cities of Central Asia and the Caucasus. Katie leads ASA tours along the Silk Route, and in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan & Kyrgyzstan.

Katie has worked as an archaeologist for the past decade throughout Central Asia and the Middle East and is now completing a doctorate at the University of Oxford's archaeology department looking at the impact of the Mongol Conquest on the cities of Central Asia and the Caucasus. She is currently excavating Medieval cities in Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan.

She has worked on sites dating from the pre-pottery Neolithic in Turkey to the 20th century in Qatar, and many of the periods and countries in between, for institutions including the British Museum and the universities of Oxford, Cambridge, University College London, Copenhagen, Liverpool and York. In particular she is interested in what happens to urban centres when they are conquered and how this can be observed archaeologically, which means spending a lot of time carefully excavating in the cities and trying to work out the difference between the remains of conquest versus those of abandonment and desertion. While not in the trenches, she likes to explore, and has traveled extensively around Central Asia, the Caucasus and the Middle East teaching and lecturing on archaeological field schools and tours, and trying to understand (to some extent!) the many languages of the region.

Current articles include:

- *Semi-fortified palatial complexes in Central Asia: new work at the Great Kyz Kala, Merv, Turkmenistan*, T. Williams, G. Jorayev, K. Campbell & P. Wordsworth.



### Russell Casey

A dedicated traveller with a passion for calligraphy, miniature paintings and textiles, Russell has travelled extensively through the Middle East, Iran & Central Asia. His language studies include French, German, Japanese, Arabic, Persian & Mandarin. Russell has led ASA's tours along the Silk Route six times.

Russell Casey has led tours for ASA since 2009. He has held a fascination for the Middle East, Persia, Central Asia and the Silk Route since studying Latin at school. With a keen interest in languages, Russell studied French, German, Japanese, Arabic, Persian and Chinese (Mandarin). Learning Japanese generated an interest in calligraphy and woodblock prints. Persian and Arabic studies added to the appeal of calligraphy and “The Art of the Book”, which in turn led to visiting some of the great libraries and museums of the United Kingdom and Ireland to view their collections. After independently visiting Turkey, Syria and Jordan, Russell travelled to Iran on the ASA Art and Culture of Persia tour in 2002. In 2005 after completing the ASA Silk Route tour, he revisited Iran to further his understanding of Persian speaking peoples and their arts – including textiles, architecture, gardens and cuisine. He holds a Queensland Ambulance Service first aid certificate, a Master’s degree in Medical Physics and is undertaking independent study in the art, history and culture of Central Asia, the Silk Route and surrounding regions. Russell has led ASA's tours along the Silk Route visiting China, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan since 2009.

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## Itinerary

The detailed itinerary provides an outline of the proposed daily program. Participants should note that the daily activities described in this itinerary may be rotated and/or modified in order to accommodate changes in museum opening hours, flight schedules & road conditions. Meals will be taken in hotels and in restaurants, many with a historical or local flavour. At times, picnic lunches will be provided. All meals are included in the tour price and are indicated in the itinerary where: B=breakfast, L=lunch and D=evening meal.

### Xi'an, Shaanxi, China - 3 nights

Day 1: Sunday 29 August, Arrive Xi'an

- Introduction
- City Walls
- Great Mosque & Muslim Quarter
- Welcome Dinner at a local restaurant

Our tour commences in the bustling city of Xi'an, the traditional terminus of the Silk Route that linked China with Central Asia and the Mediterranean world. Participants taking the ASA 'designated' flight are scheduled to arrive into Xi'an around midday. If you are taking a different flight, please meet your group at our Xi'an hotel.

Ancient Chang'an, now called Xi'an, was the first capital of unified China and the imperial city of eleven dynasties between the 11th century BC and the early 10th century AD. The city was planned as a massive rectangle (9.4 km x 8.4 km) with a grid of 11 great north-south avenues. The main avenue led southward through the core of the city to the south gate from the Imperial palace. This avenue was over 150 metres wide and was intersected by 14 east/west roads. At a time when many European cities' populations would have numbered less than 2,000 souls, the population living within Xi'an's walls has been estimated at 1 million. Another million people are thought to have lived beyond these walls. At its height it contained at

least 91 Buddhist temples, 4 Zoroastrian temples and 2 Nestorian Christian churches. The city has been modernised but still retains its medieval walls, a number of important monuments, and its old Islamic minority district.

Following lunch at our hotel, our program will commence with a brief introduction/house-keeping meeting. We shall then visit Xi'an's city walls built at the beginning of the Ming Period by the dynasty's founder, the Hongwu Emperor Zhu Yuanzhang (1328 – 1398). This is the only complete city wall still standing in China. Rectangular in plan, it has towers at its corners and is punctured by four gates, each guarded by a main tower and watch-towers. The wall itself is surrounded by a moat.

We also visit Xi'an's old Muslim quarter which is still inhabited by the city's ancient Hui (Han Chinese Muslim) community, many of whom still live in their traditional mud-brick houses. Travellers rested here after their Silk Road journey or prepared for the journey west. The district retains much of its traditional character; we will see stalls crammed with exotic foodstuffs and artefacts, butchers' shops, sesame oil factories and local mosques hidden behind enormous wooden doors. Our visit culminates with a tour of Xi'an's Great Mosque, one of the four largest of its type in China. It was built in 742 AD, a mere 110 years after the death of the Prophet, to cater for the Islamic traders arriving from the western regions. (Overnight Xi'an) LD

#### Day 2: Monday 30 August, Xi'an

- Lecture: *Understanding the Silk Road in History*
- Museum of Qin Terracotta Warriors and Horses
- Dumpling Banquet & Tang Dynasty Show

After a morning introductory lecture on the Silk Road's place in history, we depart Xi'an to visit the vaults that house the world-famous Museum of Qin Terracotta Warriors and Horses. Whilst excavations are constantly uncovering new treasures we will view the permanent exhibit of over 7,000 life-size terracotta soldiers and horses and the collections of well-preserved bronze chariots, carriages, armour, swords, spears, crossbows and other weapons. In the evening we shall dine at the Opera House Restaurant before attending the Tang Dynasty Show, a monumental, fast-paced, extraordinarily professional music and dance program that evokes a highly romantic view of the diverse myths and stories of the Silk Road. (Overnight Xi'an) BLD

#### Day 3: Tuesday 31 August, Xi'an

- Shaanxi History Museum
- Great Wild Goose Pagoda
- Afternoon at leisure

This morning we begin with a visit to the Shaanxi History Museum. Built in classical Chinese style, this museum was opened in 1992 and is arguably the richest in China. Its ground floor collections deal with Chinese prehistory and the early dynastic period. The latter includes several enormous Shang and Western Zhou Dynasty bronze cooking tripods, Qin burial objects, bronze arrows and crossbows, and four original terracotta warrior statues taken from the Tomb of Qin Shihuang. The upstairs section is devoted to Han, Western Wei and Northern Zhou dynastic relics and includes some interesting goose-shaped bronze lamps. The final section has mainly artifacts from the Sui, Tang, Ming and Qing dynasties, which spanned the last millennium. Major advances in ceramic techniques during the Tang period are most evident in the intricately crafted terracotta horses and camels, fine pale-green glazed pottery and Buddhist-inspired statues. The Tang collection has a number of interesting ceramic figures representing peoples encountered

by the Chinese through trade. The Tang had expanded into the western regions and were fascinated by the diverse peoples they encountered there. These often are caricatures, reflecting Chinese ambivalence to foreigners who at once fascinated and disgusted them. These exhibits form a fine comparison to the romantic Tang Dynasty Show we enjoyed last night.

Next, we visit the Great Wild Goose Pagoda and its surrounding gardens. In the early 7th century, the Buddhist monk Xuanzang left Xi'an for the then-fabled land of India in search of original manuscripts detailing the teachings of the Buddha. His account of his 16-year journey, *Xiyu ji* ("Record of the Western Regions") is both a colourful tale of adventure and a vital source for information about the countries he visited. Xuanzang's work also inspired the 16th century allegorical novel, *Journey to the West*, in which the great protagonist, Monkey, undertakes a similar journey. When Xuanzang returned to Xi'an at the end of his 16-year odyssey, the Emperor built the Great Wild Goose Pagoda to house the 657 fundamental Buddhist texts he brought back with him.

The remainder of the day is at free to explore Xi'an at leisure. (Overnight Xi'an) BL

### Lanzhou, Gansu - 1 night

Day 4: Wednesday 1 September, Xi'an – Lanzhou

- Bullet Train Xi'an to Lanzhou (First Class Train, D2685 Xi'an North to Lanzhou West 0900-1143)
- Gansu Provincial Museum

This morning we take the bullet train to Lanzhou, capital of Gansu Province, a major stop on the silk route west of Xi'an. From the period of the Qin Dynasty, travellers from Xi'an to Central Asia, from the Middle Kingdom to the Western deserts, broke their journey at Lanzhou. Situated on the upper reaches of the Yellow River, Lanzhou has for millennia guarded the vital Gansu / Hexi Corridor, or 'Corridor West of the Yellow River,' a strategic node and important communications hub. Here Chinese civilisation first emerged. About 3,000 years ago, during the Zhou Dynasty, agriculture began to take shape in the basins of the Jin and Wei Rivers that formed the corridor, marking the beginning of the great Yellow River basin civilisation.

The Han Dynasty, recognising the corridor's strategic importance, decided to protect it by extending the fortifications we call the 'Great Wall' as far as Yumen in the far north west of present-day Gansu Province. Lanzhou became capital of a succession of tribal states during the turbulent period following the decline of the Han. Life's uncertainty gave people a need for belief and hope. Taoism was transformed into a religion and Buddhism, imported from India, flourished, becoming the official religion in some of the northern states. Buddhist art proliferated, and shrines were built in temples, caves, and on cliffs.

Following our arrival in Lanzhou, and lunch at a downtown restaurant, we spend the remainder of the afternoon exploring the Gansu Provincial Museum. This museum contains over 350,000 artefacts with exhibitions of Buddhist Art, Fossils, Pottery and Silk Road Civilisation. The latter includes inscribed Han dynasty wooden tablets used to relay messages along the Silk Road, silk fabrics, the tri-colored glazed pottery of the Tang Dynasty (618-907), and blue-and-white pottery of Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368). The graceful Eastern Han (25 BC–AD 220) bronze horse galloping upon the back of a swallow is known as the "Flying Horse of Wuwei". Unearthed at Léitái, it has been reproduced across northwestern China. Among other items also on view are Persian coins, some lovely Bodhisattva statues from Tiantishan and a collection of dinosaur skeletons. (Overnight Lanzhou) BD

### Xiahe, 2 nights

Day 5: Thursday 2 September, Lanzhou – Jiajishi – Xiahe



- Bingling Si Caves

This morning we drive for approximately 1.5 hours to the Liujiaxia Reservoir, where we board a speedboat to ride approximately 45 minutes to the caves. These boats are not built with western ergonomics in mind so space is limited; there is virtually no leg room and little head space so please pack light today. At Bingling Si there are dirt paths and wooden walkways and stairs built around the side of the cliff face.

The Bingling Si Caves are situated in the Jiajishi Mountains south-east of Yonjin County on the northern bank of the Yellow River. Bingling Si is a transliteration of the Tibetan for 'Ten Thousand Buddha' and denotes large Buddhist cave complexes. The grottoes, begun around 420 AD and constantly expanded, derive from the periods of the Western Qin, North Wei, Sui, Tang, and Song, Yuan, Ming and Qing dynasties. They consist of 3 parts: an upper temple, a caves gully, and a lower temple. Their spectacular location presents wonderful views of the surrounding peaks and the Yellow River. In 183 caves there are 694 stone statues, 82 clay sculptures, more than 900 square metres of murals, and other remains.

In the afternoon we drive to Xiahe – an autonomous region of Hui and Tibetan ethnic minorities. The area is both agricultural and pastoral (including yak and other animal rearing). Our journey along the recently upgraded highway takes us southwest, ascending to the bustling town of Xiahe, which nestles in a mountain valley at an elevation of 2,900 metres. Xiahe's strategic location on the trade route means that it is a melting pot of Chinese, Middle Eastern and nomadic cultures. After checking into our hotel, it is advisable that we rest in order to acclimatize to the high altitude. (Overnight Xiahe) BLD

#### Day 6: Friday 3 September, Xiahe

- Labrang Lamasaray

Today we visit Labrang Lamasery, one of the six great monasteries of the Gelukpa (Yellow Hat) sect of Buddhism. Often referred to as 'Little-Tibet', it is the largest Lamaist institute in the world, with a huge collection of volumes of scripture. The monastery was founded in 1709 by Ngawang Tsondu who is believed by Tibetans to have been the first of a lineage of important Buddhist incarnations. This is Tibetan Buddhism's most important monastery town outside Tibet itself. The monastery's white walls and golden roofs feature a blend of Tibetan and Han architectural styles. It contains 18 halls, 6 institutes of learning, a golden stupa and a library of nearly 60,000 sutras. There are more than 2,000 monks in residence. It has a Buddhist museum with a large collection of Buddha statues, sutras and murals. The monastery today is an important place for Buddhist ceremonies. In the surrounding villages among the bustle of old taxis and bicycles, Muslims in white skullcaps sell Tibetan jewellery, Tibetan nomads arrive from the grasslands, and old monks meditate with prayer beads at street corners.

NB: Exploring Labrang Monastery involves sightseeing on foot for around 2 hours. Walking the pilgrim circuit (*kora*) involves walking for 3km over uneven ground and climbing some slopes. We will start and finish in the same spot, so this can be done at your own pace. Following our tour of the monastery we explore the local township for around 1 hour on foot. (Overnight Xiahe) BLD

#### Jiayuguan, Gansu - 2 nights

#### Day 7: Saturday 4 September, Xiahe – Linxia – Lanzhou – Jiayuguan

- Town of Linxia
- High-Speed Train Lanzhou – Jiayuguan (First Class, Train D2755 Lanzhou West – Jiayuguan South 1702-2256)

We depart early this morning on our return journey to Lanzhou. Our drive takes us across the Tibet-Qinghai Plateau to Linxia (lin-shee-a), one of the Hui (Han Muslim) centres of Islamic learning, Sufi traditions remain vibrant in this town. The road to Linxia is known locally as the Quran Belt, with a profusion of newly built mosques and Sufi shrines lining the motorway. In the 18th and 19th centuries followers of Afak Khoja, who was buried in 1693 or 1694 outside Kashgar in Xinjiang province, brought a wave of Islam east into Gansu, Ningxia and other regions of central China. His disciples' tombs became the centres of religious complexes that also included rooms for worship and teaching. These buildings adapted traditional Chinese forms and motifs to meet Muslim needs, but they did so in ways that might surprise visitors from western Islamic lands. For example, minarets take their forms from pagodas, and many mosques are decorated not only with Arabic calligraphy, but also with traditional Chinese figural and representational scenes. The city of Linxia is home to many such complexes, which serve not only as centres of Muslim scholarship, but as oases of quiet amid hectic urban life.

From Linxia we continue across the Loess Plateau (alt. 1600 metres) to Lanzhou. The incredibly deep and fertile Loess soil has been formed by soil blown for millennia south east from the deserts of Central Asia. Our drive takes us through spectacular scenery with views of gorges and steep terraced hillsides with crops.

In the late afternoon we take the express train from Lanzhou to Jiayuguan, a city that lies in the Gobi Desert, in the middle of the Gansu (Hexi) Corridor. This broad valley, we remember, formed the main corridor between the Middle Kingdom and the lands of the nomads to the north and west. It has seen the march of armies into and out of Han China for millennia. (Overnight Jiayuguan) BLD

#### Day 8: Sunday 5 September, Jiayuguan

- Jiayuguan Fortress
- Western end of the Great Wall

The term 'Silk Road', first coined by the German explorer Ferdinand Freiherr von Richthofen (1833 – 1905), is somewhat of a misnomer, because many other commodities were also traded, from gold and ivory to jade, slaves and exotic animals and plants. Caravans heading towards China carried gold and other precious metals, ivory, precious stones, and glass, which was not manufactured in China until the 5th century AD. China, in turn, exported ceramics, jade, furs, bronzes, lacquer and iron.

China's Han rulers had some difficulty controlling the trade routes through the Gansu Corridor and around the Taklimakan Desert. Caravans were accompanied by soldiers in order to ward off ubiquitous bandits. Problems of policing were partially alleviated by the construction of forts and defensive walls along part of the route. Sections of wall were built along the northern side of the Gansu Corridor in attempts to prevent China's great enemies, the nomadic Xiongnu, from harming the trade; Tibetan bandits from the Qilian mountains to the south also posed a danger.

Today we visit Jiayuguan's great fort and sections of the western end of the Great Wall. Jiayu Pass (Jiayuguan) has been a frontier post since the Han dynasty, when the Great Wall reached as far as the 'Jade Gate' (Yumen Pass) north-west of Dunhuang. Chinese dynasties have always seen it as a vital strategic location, positioned between the Mazong ('Horse's Mane') Mountains to the north and the Qilian Mountains to the south. 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 corridor. The Chinese called the fortress 'The Strongest Pass under Heaven'; its walls were 11m high and 733m in length. Jiayuguan became the western terminus of the Ming Dynasty Great Wall, built in brick and more durable than the earthen walls of its forebears. Henceforth Jiayuguan was regarded as the limit of the Chinese

Empire. (Overnight Jiayuguan) BLD

### Dunhuang, Gansu, China - 2 nights

Day 9: Monday 6 September, Jiayuguan – Dunhuang

- Wei-Jin Mural Brick Tomb, Jiayuguan

Burial customs in arid northwest China were quite different from those further east. Large stone slabs used in Chinese tombs are nonexistent, but the Gobi Desert's gravel and sand could be dug to great depths. At Jiayuguan, hundreds of subterranean tombs occupy a triangular area, the base of which is the road between Jiuquan and Jiayuguan. The passageways leading down to these tombs were filled with rocks that were covered with a layer of sand, producing a ridge described as 'the spine of a fish'. A brick wall or 'gate tower' fronting the tomb proper in some cases reached as high as the surface. The more elaborate of these walls had bricks in a variety of forms, set in regular patterns.

This morning we travel by coach about 15 kilometres northeast of the town to visit the Wei-Jin Mural Brick Tombs – a huge group of tombs numbering more than 1,400. These were built between the 3rd and 5th centuries AD during the Wei and Jin dynasties. Excavated in 1972, the tombs sport a great number of colorful murals. Most are family mausolea, housing three or four generations. We shall visit Graves 6 and 7, whose hundreds of painted bricks depict scenes of almost every aspect of local life, including farming, herding, preparing food, entertaining, and fighting with extraordinary artistry and vitality. The rear-chamber bricks portray objects such as bales of cloth, household utensils, and storage baskets.

Mid-morning we continue west to Dunhuang, a strategic staging-post on the Silk Route beyond the Yumen Pass, at the end of the 'Great Wall'. Our journey follows the line of the Gansu corridor, a series of basins in the vast desert with low dunes to the north and beyond these part of the forbidding Gobi Desert, a vast, waterless, stony region devoid of life and swept by icy winds. On arrival we transfer to our distinctive Dunhuang hotel, which is modeled on a Chinese frontier fortress. In the early morning and evening its terrace and dining area offers fabulous views of the nearby sand dunes. (Overnight Dunhuang) BLD

Day 10: Tuesday 7 September, Dunhuang – Mogao Caves – Dunhuang

- Mogao Caves and Exhibition Centre with multimedia displays
- Dunhuang Museum

Dunhuang is famous for its Buddhist caves – the Mogao Grottoes – which are one of the world's most important sites of ancient Buddhist culture. The grottoes, or 'Caves of the Thousand Buddhas', preserve Buddhist temple architecture, clay sculpture, mural paintings, and manuscripts from the 5th to the 11th centuries, a period when Dunhuang was a major Buddhist centre, drawing scholars and pilgrims from afar. According to legend, in 336 AD a monk called Le Zun saw a vision of golden rays of light shining upon him like thousands of Buddhas. He carved the first grotto to record his vision and show his respect to the Buddha. Pilgrims and merchants followed his practice for the next thousand years. The majority of the caves were eventually sealed but were rediscovered many centuries later by Western explorers – notably the Hungarian-British scholar Aurel Stein. The discovery initiated a new field of study shedding light on the complex cultural interactions of ancient Central Asia. The images and manuscripts found in the caves reflect periods of Chinese, Tibetan, and Uyghur control, and the impact of many other regional styles and languages, of Indian, West Asian, Central Asian, and Chinese elements. The study of Central Asia and the Silk Route is now an international endeavor and the manuscripts, carvings and murals found here provide voluminous research materials not just for the study of religion but for all aspects of social life, politics,

economics, military affairs, culture, literature, language, food, music, dance, architecture and medical science in medieval China. The wall paintings we will view can be divided into seven categories, including the colourful Jataka stories depicting the various lives of the Buddha, and the Sutra stories that demonstrate the philosophical understandings of suffering and transmigration. As well as this Buddhist focus, we will also see the influence of Taoist, Manichean and Confucian ideas.

The grottoes, which are carved into desert cliffs overlooking a river valley, vary greatly in size, from tiny single-room cells serving as living quarters for individual monks to cavernous worship halls with monumental sculptures and mural cycles. Some 2000 clay sculptures and more than 45,000 square metres of mural paintings make up this rich patrimony. Most sculptures are of clay, coated with a kind of plaster surface that allowed finishing details to be painted on or engraved, because the local stone was too brittle to carve. The Dunhuang Academy has now built a Visitor Centre in Dunhuang. Here, visitors can explore the most majestic caves in a 360 degree domed auditorium configured to display vivid digital images of the wall paintings and sculptures. Visitors then board a bus to visit a number of the caves including the famous Library Cave and the Giant Buddha Cave.

We return to Dunhuang with a far greater understanding of how Buddhism influenced the Silk Route. Following some time at leisure, we visit to the Dunhuang Museum which has interesting models of the Dunhuang oasis, written sutras from the No. 17 cave of the Mogao Caves, as well as a priceless collection of artefacts, many of them from the Han period that have been found in the region. Extraordinary finds, like 2000-year-old shoes have been preserved by the dry climate of the Taklimakan. (Overnight Dunhuang) BLD

### Turfan, Xinjiang, China - 2 nights

Day 11: Wednesday 8 September, Dunhuang – Liuyang – Turfan

- Desert scenery of Mingsha Mountain & Crescent Moon Lake
- High-speed train Liuyang – Turfan (First Class, Train D2701 Liuyang South – Turfan 1547-1920)

Early this morning (to avoid the heat of the day) we visit Mingsha Hill and Crescent Moon Lake which are set in a photogenic amphitheatre of sand dunes and which can be toured on foot or by camel.

Afterwards, we make the two-hour journey through the forbidding Gobi Desert to Liuyang where we board the high-speed train to Turfan. Crossing the waterless Gobi Desert was the most dangerous part of a journey along the Silk Road. Merchants made a dash from Dunhuang to the Oasis of Turfan; thousands did not make it. (Overnight Turfan) BLD

Day 12: Thursday 9 September, Turfan

- Emin Minaret & Mosque
- Xinjian Turfan Museum
- Village Karez (underground aqueduct)
- Jiaohe City Ruins

The Turfan Depression was traditionally the most prosperous oasis region of eastern Central Asia, a deep basin descending to 154 metres below sea level, which is the second lowest point on the globe (after the Dead Sea). Although the Turfan Depression gains little or no rainfall and experiences the greatest temperature range in China, it has a rich agriculture based upon irrigation. In the southern part are the remarkable man-made tunnels (*karez*) which carry water down from the surrounding heights. While the origins of these tunnels are lost in antiquity, they may derive from the ancient Persian *qanats*. The area has



for eons been renowned for its fruit (Hami melons, grapes, nuts, apricots, peaches and apples) and crops like wheat, maize, and cotton are also grown, while mulberry trees, essential for the production of silk, abound in this region.

The Turfan Depression's plentiful agriculture and its strategic location on the northern rim of the Tarim basin made it a silk route meeting-place for influences from east and west. The population here was denser than in other parts of eastern Central Asia and more urbanized. Like nearby Urumchi it was largely populated by Uyghurs, who were among the earliest Turkic-speaking peoples of Central Asia. In the 8th century they established a powerful kingdom in what is now Mongolia but were forced into the Tarim Basin by the expansion of the Kyrgyz Turks. Here they established a second kingdom which survived until overrun by the Mongols in the 13th century. The Uyghurs were gradually converted to Sunni Islam and became settled agriculturalists, who perfected the techniques of irrigation which made this region so fecund.

This morning we begin with a visit to the extraordinarily photogenic Emin Minaret, built in 1777 to commemorate the ruler of Turfan's suppression of an aristocratic rebellion. It is a masterpiece of patterned brick construction with clear mathematical lines characteristic of Islamic architecture. The adjoining mosque, the largest in Turfan, is again a fine example of religious architecture with a beam ceiling supported by simple wooden pillars and a domed central area. It still serves as an important centre for religious festivals and there are a number of stalls on its approach with a variety of interesting cultural goods on display.

Next, we visit the Turfan Museum with its Exhibition Halls including The Giant Rhinoceros Fossil Hall and the General History Hall which contains relics from the stone age onwards. But perhaps it is the Ancient Mummy Exhibition Hall which is most memorable. It contains a number of mummies and assorted burial objects dating back as far as 3,200 years that seem to derive from an entirely distinct regional culture.

Following lunch and a lecture, we visit a village with a *karez*. Here we can explore the fascinating underground aqueduct system which used to carry water to the orchards and vineyards for which Turfan was famous. As we drive through the Turfan landscape we shall also see many mud brick structures, the bricks of whose walls are spaced in order to let air circulate through their interiors. Their purpose is to dry grapes which are hung in long ribbons within.

In the late afternoon we visit the ancient city of Jiaohe (Yarkhoto) which was a Han dynasty fortress designed to protect Turfan from attacks by the nomadic Xiongnu tribe, who ruled the northern steppes. Its role as a citadel is easily seen as you approach it. 'Yarkhoto' means 'cliff town' and it is dramatically sited on a spur between two deep ravines. Jiaohe remained an important trading and Buddhist centre under the Tang dynasty (618-907), whence most of its extant buildings date. We shall wander through this extraordinary ruined mud-brick city, viewing its great Stupa and buildings like the main temple. In the evening we dine at a traditional Uyghur restaurant in Turfan. (Overnight Turfan) BLD

### Urumchi, Xinjiang, China - 1 night

Day 13: Friday 10 September, Turfan – Urumchi

- Local bazaar, Turfan

Before departing for Urumchi, we visit Turfan's local bazaar where the local Uyghur population sell everything from spices, fruit, meat and vegetables to clothes, household goods and carpets.

Following lunch at a local Uyghur restaurant we depart the Turfan Depression and drive 190kms north-west to Urumchi, capital of the Xinjiang Autonomous Region. Urumchi ('Nine pastures' in Mongolian), situated at

the foot of the Tian Shan Mountains, was inhabited by a mixture of ethnic groups nearly 2000 ago. Because the northern route of the Silk Route passed through it, it became a heavily-guarded fort during the Han Dynasty, and remained so for centuries. The city lies on the Urumchi River and is dominated by two hills, the Red Hill and Yamalik Hill. Urumchi has suffered so greatly from the depredation of war lords that little remains of its past. (Overnight Urumchi) BLD

### Kashgar, Xinjiang, China - 3 nights

Day 14: Saturday 11 September, Urumchi – Kashgar

- Xinjiang Regional Museum (Mummies of Urumchi)
- Fly Urumchi to Kashgar (CZ6809 1710-1905)

This morning we visit the Xinjiang Regional Museum, a fascinating collection of which the highlight is a collection of mummies, some of which date back to 2000 BC. These are as old as their Egyptian counterparts but better preserved due to the dry climate of the region. Some of the oldest hold great mystery, because they are not Asians but tall, thin, blond Caucasians. Of greatest interest are their clothes, which have been perfectly preserved in their original bright colours. The collection has been dealt with in Elizabeth Wayland Barber's book, *The Mummies of Urumchi*. Other sections of the museum display over 50,000 cultural relics excavated on the silk route, including silk, pottery and porcelain, terracotta figures, weapons and manuscripts. Urumchi, like Turfan, has a varied population, including Kazakh, Uzbek and Mongol minorities.

Following lunch at a local Uighur restaurant, we transfer to the airport for our early evening flight to Kashgar. On arrival at Kashgar airport, we shall transfer to our hotel located in the centre of town. The day concludes with an evening meal at the hotel. (Overnight Kashgar) BLD

Day 15: Sunday 12 September, Kashgar

- City Bazaar
- Kashgar's Sunday Animal Market
- Artisan district, old town & Idkah Mosque

We spend the morning at Kashgar's Sunday markets, two of the largest in Eurasia. We begin with a visit to the city bazaar, in which all manner of textiles, clothing, furniture and food are sold. It is said that up to 100,000 people come to these markets each Sunday.

Our next visit is to the famous animal market. Uyghurs, Tajiks, Kyrgyz and Uzbeks all congregate, dressed in their traditional clothing, selling horses, sheep, cattle, goats, donkeys and camels.

Islam came to Kashgar in the 10th and 11th centuries but it was not until the 15th century that the majority of Uyghurs adopted this religion. This afternoon we explore the identity and the society of the Kashgaris with a visit to the artisan district and the Idkah Mosque. The old town of Kashgar is a labyrinth of artisan districts in which carpenters, blacksmiths, jewellers and farriers work alongside bakeries, teashops and noodle shops. The Great Mosque, or Idkah Mosque, was founded in the 15th century; the present building dates to the 17th century. It is one of China's largest mosques and follows the Central Asian type. The prayer hall of the mosque is a huge hypostyle hall whose roof is supported by wooden columns, and is flanked a large garden to shade worshippers. (Overnight Kashgar) BLD

Day 16: Monday 13 September, Kashgar – Lake Karakol – Kashgar

- Day excursion along the Karakoram Highway: Ghez Canyon, Mt Kongur and Mt Muztagata, Lake Karakol

We depart early this morning to what – with Kyrgyzstan – constitutes the most scenically spectacular area we visit in our tour. Our journey takes us through a region where the massive mountain ranges of the Pamirs, Karakorum, Hindu Kush, Kunlun Range and Himalayas meet in an immense alpine knot separating east and west Central Asia. This is arguably the most topographically dramatic place anywhere in the world. We pass through the Ghez Canyon, into a wild desert landscape, and then into pastures at the bases of the two highest mountains in the Kunlun Range that skirts the Taklimakan to the south, separating it from the Tibetan Plateau. These great peaks are Mt Kongur (7719 metres: 25,326 ft) which was first climbed only as late as the 1980s (25 years after it was first attempted), and Muztagata (7546 metres: 24,918 ft). We are travelling on the Karakoram Highway which links China and Pakistan, following the age-old route of traders, Buddhist monks and invaders who passed between Central Asia and the Indian sub-continent. At the foot of Mount Muztagata we reach Karakol Lake, known popularly as the 'Farther Ice Mountain' (elevation of 3,600m: 11,808 ft). Here we stop for a picnic lunch before making the return journey back to Kashgar. (Overnight Kashgar) BLD

### Naryn, Kyrgyzstan - 1 night

Day 17: Tuesday 14 September, Kashgar – Tash Rabat – Naryn

- China to Kyrgyzstan
- Caravanserai of Tash Rabat

Today we cross the border from China into Kyrgyzstan. We slowly ascend the Tian Shan Mountains to Naryn, a border post that originally protected the trade route to Kashgar. Our ascent reaches 3752m at the Kashgar/Torugart Pass, the highest altitude you will experience on the tour. This pass marks the border and it is here that we shall make a change from our Chinese to our Kyrgyz coach. There are wonderful views of distant Tian Shan mountain scenery although the day can involve quite a lot of time spent on formalities at border points on both sides of the pass. After we change to our Toyota coasters we descend swiftly to the Kyrgyz border post where we have a picnic lunch in the fresh mountain air.

Before reaching Naryn, we travel to the western part of the At-Bashy massif (3530m) to visit Tash Rabat, site of a small but perfectly-formed stone caravanserai dating back to the 10-12th centuries. Tash Rabat (in Kyrgyz language, *tash* means stone) is built of schist blocks of various sizes, rough-casted with clay mortar. Located on the north-south route that linked At-Bashy to Kasghar, this caravanserai sheltered an array of merchants and travellers along the wilder stretches of the Silk Road. The caravanserai, because of its mountainous location, is completely covered, providing caravans and travellers with the necessary protection against heavy climatic conditions, especially cold and snow prevailing during a large part of the year.

We then drive to our homely family-run guest-house in Naryn, a sleepy town set in a spectacular ravine. The journey is along a sometimes dusty but always spectacular road below snow-capped mountains. The landscape becomes more and more vast and beautiful as we drive, with wild horses running off at the approach of our vehicle. Here we begin to gain insights into the unique and largely unknown land of Kyrgyzstan. As yet untouched by mass tourism, Kyrgyzstan is scenically both picture-postcard pretty and majestic, its village and city architecture largely Russian influenced, and its population extraordinarily varied in heritage and appearance. The pace of life here is calm and gentle, as is the friendly welcome you will receive. (Overnight Naryn) BLD

## Almaluu Yurt Camp, Lake Issyk-Kul - 1 night

Day 18: Wednesday 15 September, Naryn – Kochkorka – Kyzyl-Tuu – Bokonbayevo – Lake Issyk-Kul

- *Shyrdak*-demonstration, Kochkorka
- Yurt makers, Kyzyl-Tuu
- Felt Art Studio, Bokonbayevo

Today we drive from Naryn to Lake Issyk-Kul through a powerful mountain landscape. Along the way we encounter shepherds and their yurts, the ubiquitous felt tents that are the traditional domicile of nomads throughout much of Eurasia. Kyrgyzstan is a small, mountainous country, lying at the west end of the Tian Shan range and is the least urbanised of the Central Asian Republics. Its rural population is, in fact, growing faster than that of its cities. With the collapse of the Soviet economic system and the consequent destruction of much Kyrgyz industry, many of the Kyrgyz people have reverted to life on the steppes. They rear sheep, cattle, pigs and goats and, at altitudes too high for these, yaks. In the valleys cereals and cotton are grown. We shall encounter a number of nomad camps. Many spend summer with their flocks in the mountains, living in their traditional yurts.

We break our journey for a *Shyrdak*-making demonstration at a family house in the village of Kochkorka. *Shyrdak* are multi-layered, hand-quilted, felted rugs decorated with vibrant, complex geometric designs and traditionally used as floor coverings. Archeologists consider felt rugs to be humanity's first manufactured floor covering, placed on the ground inside yurts and other tents as people journeyed, together with sheep, cattle and horses, across the plains and mountains of Eurasia.

Not far from the southern shores of Lake Issyk-Kul we also visit the small village of Kyzyl-Tuu, famous for yurt production. Up until 20 years ago there were no fewer than five families who had been involved in yurt making for four generations. Here yurt builders and artisans specialise in the individual components of yurt making, including the crown, frame, felted exterior, inner *shyrdak*, walls and decorative interior partitions and patterned reed screens (*chiy*).

Nearby is the small village of Bokonbayevo, which takes its name from a Kyrgyz poet. We shall visit one of the village's craft cooperatives that make *shyrdaks* and other felt products.

We overnight at a yurt camp located on the southern shores of the huge Lake Issyk-Kul, one of the great lakes of Central Asia, set in a mountain valley. (Overnight Almaluu Yurt Camp, Lake Issyk-Kul) BLD

## Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan - 3 nights

Day 19: Thursday 16 September, Lake Issyk-Kul – Bokonbayevo – Balasagun – Bishkek

- Ancient tradition of hunting with Golden Eagles, Bokonbayevo
- Lunch with a local family in Tokmok
- Burana Minaret & Turkic Grave Stones, Balasagun

Today we drive from Lake Issyk-Kul to Bishkek, the capital of Kyrgyzstan. We begin with a visit to the small village of Bokonbayevo. Hunting with the golden eagle is an ancient tradition that dates back to the Mongol conquest of Central Asia in the 13th century. Although the practice is gradually disappearing, hunting with birds (especially with eagles) is still practiced in several areas including the mountains surrounding Bokonbayevo. The hunter rides a specially trained horse, called a *bercut*. To allow a rider to carry an eagle a special device (a *baldak*) is fitted onto the saddle to support the rider's arm. A skilled pair, *berkutchi* (hunter) and bird, can typically catch rabbits, foxes and other small animals. They are also capable



of killing young wolves that cannot negotiate the deep snow. The season for hunting with eagles lasts from October to February. The larger eagles molt during the summer months and do not fly. We therefore may not see the eagles hunt, but may view these magnificent birds, and smaller falcons in flight.

We also visit the historically important site of Balasagun, which was a regional capital of the Karakhanid Empire from the 10th to the 12th century. In 1128 it was seized by another nomadic empire, the Kara Khitai (Black Khitans) who ruled China as the Liao dynasty. All that is left of the city is the Burana minaret towering over the surrounding plains. This is a popular gathering place for local wedding parties, with a small museum and near the site is a fascinating collection of grave markers of Turkic nomads from different eras, including gravestones designating how many enemies its occupant had slain. (Overnight Bishkek) BLD

#### Day 20: Friday 17 September, Bishkek – Suusamyр Valley – Bishkek

Today we make an excursion to the Suusamyр Valley, a huge prairie where local nomads come in summer to herd their cattle. Our journey takes us through some of Kyrgyzstan's most dramatic mountain scenery, across passes of over 3,000 metres (Teo Ashhu pass c. 3586m) and past peaks of over 4,000 metres. (Overnight Bishkek) BLD

#### Day 21: Saturday 18 September, Bishkek

- Ala-Archa Canyon
- Orientation tour of Bishkek
- Farewell Dinner with opera singer and local musicians

After breakfast we make an excursion to the Ala-Archa Canyon, located in the highest, central part of the Kyrgyz Ridge. This is famous for its eternal snow – stretching for almost 200 km – and such peaks as Dvurogaya (4,380 m), Korona (4,860 m), Baylyanbaish (4,700 m), as well as the highest peak of the Kyrgyz ridge – Semenov-Tian-Shansky (4,875 m). The Ala-Archa Canyon is the centre of the Ala-Archa National Park, one of the main tourist attractions in Kyrgyzstan. The name of the national park, Ala-Archa, means “many-coloured juniper”, which testifies to the abundance of this tree here. A river with the same name crosses the canyon. This river, like all rivers in Kyrgyzstan, originates from mountain glaciers. The Ala-Archa, the Adygene and the Ak-Sai are the largest rivers in the national park. There are 160 species of birds in Ala-Archa. Local fauna also includes the snow leopard, a butterfly called the Night Peacock Eye, wolves, snakes, owls, and many other creatures. The Ala-Archa Canyon has about 1,100 species of plants: wormwood in the steppe zone at the mountain foot, different grasses, bushes and juniper forests on mountain slopes that are replaced with alpine meadows. We will take lunch here after enjoying a walk in the park and visiting a small museum (if open) which contains an excellent display of the range of animals and birds that live in the park.

After lunch we shall return to Bishkek where we spend the remainder of the afternoon touring this small Russian colonial city. Bishkek was only founded in 1825 and was called Frunze when Kyrgyzstan was part of the USSR. This evening we shall dine at a local restaurant where we shall enjoy a performance of Kyrgyz folk music. (Overnight Bishkek) BLD

#### Day 22: Sunday 19 September, Depart Bishkek

This morning, participants travelling on the group flights will transfer by private coach to Bishkek's airport. We are scheduled to depart Bishkek in the early morning. B

## Accommodation

### 22 days in China & Kyrgyzstan

Hotels range from excellent 5-star hotels to locally-rated 3-star hotels and include rooms with private facilities. Due to the remoteness of east Kyrgyzstan accommodation in Naryn will be in a small guesthouse, while at Lake Issyk-Kul we spend 1 night in a yurt camp which provides nomadic felt tents containing beds and heaters. Those considering joining this tour must be prepared at times for basic facilities. Further information on hotels will be provided in the 'Tour Hotel List' given to tour members prior to their departure.

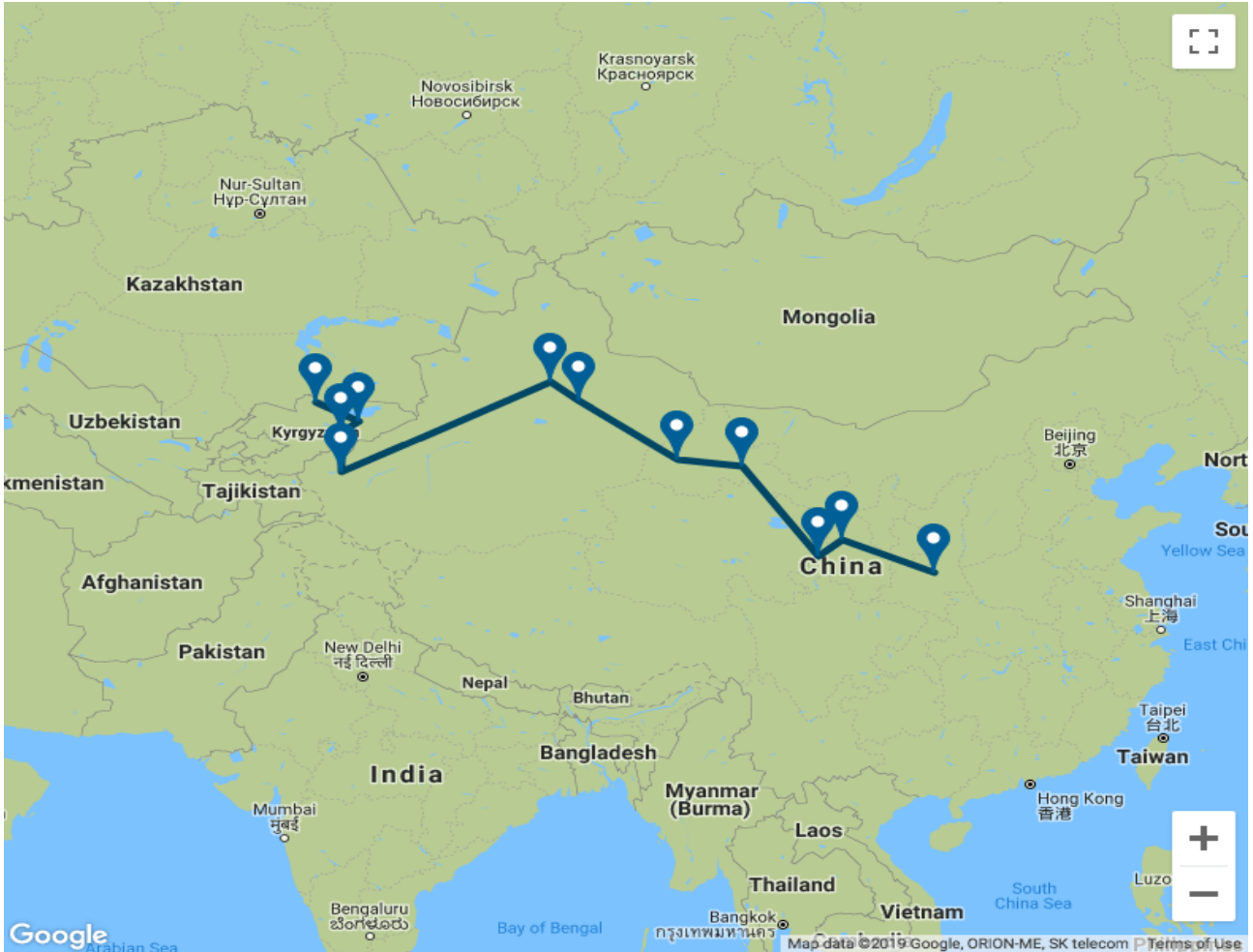
- Xi'an (3 nights): 5-star Hotel Ginwa Johnson Plaza – a modern hotel located near the South Gate of the Xi'an City wall and about 10 mins walk from the city centre. [www.ginwaplaza.com](http://www.ginwaplaza.com)
- Lanzhou (1 night): 4-star Lanzhou Legend Hotel – modern hotel located in the city centre. [www.lanzhoulegendhotel.com](http://www.lanzhoulegendhotel.com)
- Xiahe (2 nights): 3-star Hotel Laboleng Wangfu – modern hotel located 1km from the Labrang Monastery.
- Jiayuguan (2 nights): 4-star Jiayuguan Holiday Plaza Hotel – a modern hotel located in the city centre. Website currently under construction.
- Dunhuang (2 nights): 4-star The Silk Road Dunhuang Hotel – located near the Mingsha dunes, inspired by classical Chinese architecture. [www.dunhuangresort.com](http://www.dunhuangresort.com)
- Turpan (2 nights): 4-star Hotel Mercury Downtown Turpan – a modern hotel, renovated in 2019, located on Shuiyun Square in the heart of Turpan. Each of its 145 rooms are comfortable and appointed with modern conveniences.
- Urumchi (1 night): 5-star Sheraton Urumchi Hotel – a modern hotel located in the city centre, 800 metres from the Xinjiang Regional Museum. [sheratonurumqihotel.cn](http://sheratonurumqihotel.cn)
- Kashgar (3 nights): 5-star Kashi Yue Xing Jin Jiang International Hotel – opened in early 2014, this new hotel offers 323 comfortable rooms equipped with modern conveniences. [hotels.jinjiang.com](http://hotels.jinjiang.com)
- Naryn (1 night): Khan Tengri Hotel – basic 'family-style' guesthouse, offering 38 rooms divided between 3 houses. The 3rd house offers rooms with air-conditioning. Wi-Fi is available. [www.ak-sai.com/en/Hotels/naryn/khan-tengri-guest-house](http://www.ak-sai.com/en/Hotels/naryn/khan-tengri-guest-house)
- Lake Issyk-Kul (1 night): Almaluu Yurt Camp – located on the southern shore of the lake, offering accommodation in traditional yurts with communal shower. Images of the yurts are available in the tour gallery. The camp provides 3 outdoor communal toilets and showers. There is also a yurt with a sauna, suitable for 6 people, which may be used by appointment.
- Bishkek (3 nights): 4-star The Plaza Hotel Bishkek – a new modern hotel located in the city centre featuring a spa and wellness centre, indoor pool, sauna and gym. [www.plazahotel.kg](http://www.plazahotel.kg)

Note: *Hotels are subject to change, in which case a hotel of similar standard will be provided.*

### Single Supplement

Double rooms (for single use) will be apportioned to those who book first. We cannot nevertheless guarantee you a single room throughout the tour. Accommodation in many regions is limited. Approximately one month prior to departure, rooming lists will be confirmed. If you have paid this supplement but must forego a single room in some places the supplement for those hotels will be refunded to you. At Lake Issyk-Kul we stay in traditional yurts. As there are only 9 yurts; all participants will be required to share a yurt (i.e. 2-4 people per yurt).

## Tour Map



## Tour Price & Inclusions

AUD \$TBA Land Content Only - Early-Bird Special: book before 30 Sep 2020

AUD \$TBA Land Content Only

AUD \$TBA Single Supplement (multi-share for 1 night at Almaluu Yurt Camp)

For further information on airfares and/or stopover options in Beijing prior to the tour, please contact ASA.

### Tour Price (Land Content Only) includes:

- Best available hotel accommodation in twin-share rooms with private facilities (except in Naryn where we stay in a small guesthouse, and at Lake Issy-Kul where we spend 1 night in a yurt camp with 2-4 people per yurt)
- All meals indicated in the tour itinerary, where: B=breakfast, L=lunch & D=evening meal, and bottled water during excursions
- Drinks at welcome and farewell meals. Other meals may not have drinks included
- Transportation by air-conditioned coach (except excursion to the Suusamyр Valley where group will be sub-divided into Mercedes Sprinters).
- Airport-hotel transfers if travelling on ASA 'designated' flights
- Porterage of one piece of luggage per person at hotels (not at airports or railway stations)
- 1 internal flight (Day 14: Urumchi - Kashgar) and 3 journeys by First Class rail (Day 4: Xi'an – Lanzhou, Day 7: Lanzhou – Jiayuguan, Day 11: Liuyang – Turpan)
- Lecture and site-visit program
- Tour reference book
- Entrance fees to museums and monuments
- Tips for the coach driver, local guides and restaurants for included meals.

### Tour Price (Land Content Only) does not include:

- Airfare: Australia – Xi'an, Bishkek – Australia
- Personal spending money
- Airport-hotel transfers if not travelling on ASA 'designated' flights
- Luggage in excess of 20 kg (44 lbs)
- Travel insurance
- Costs for taking photographs. This occurs in China.
- Visa for China – refer to 'Physical Endurance and Practical Information' section for details.





## Physical Endurance & Practical Information

Physical Ratings 

The number of flags is a guide to the degree of difficulty of ASA tours relative to each other (not to those of other tour companies). It is neither absolute nor literal. One flag is given to the least taxing tours, six to the most. Flags are allocated, above all, according to the amount of walking and standing each tour involves. Nevertheless all ASA tours require that participants have a good degree of fitness enabling 2-3 hours walking or 1-1.5 hours standing still on any given site visit or excursion. Many sites are accessed by climbing slopes or steps and have uneven terrain.

This 22-day tour involves:

- An epic journey that is long and taxing, both in tour duration and the length of some of its days.
- Time schedules that can be unpredictable: flight schedules can change & road conditions are variable which may extend the daily program to 12 hours or more.
- Some high altitude travel: along the legendary Karakoram Highway to Lake Karakol. (3,800m); between Kashgar and Naryn (Torugart pass c. 3,752m & Tash Rabat c. 3,500m); and Bishkek to the Suusamyr Valley via the Teo Ashhu pass (c. 3,586m).
- High temperatures in places like Dunhuang and Turfan, and possible cold temperatures in mountain areas.
- Walking across uneven terrain, in high temperatures, and sometimes in darkness
- Regular early-morning starts.
- Some long distance coach travel with variable road conditions. In China & Kyrgyzstan we will have a 32/48-seater coach. Mini-vans will be used for the excursion over the Teo Ashhu pass to the Susamyr Valley (Kyrgyzstan).

Other considerations:

- 3 to 5-star hotels with 10 accommodation changes (2-star guesthouse in Naryn, yurt camp at Lake

Issyk-Kul with 2-4 people per yurt)

- You must be able to carry your own hand-luggage. Hotel portage includes 1 piece of luggage per person
- High risk of gastric ailments (you should consult your doctor about medication before departure). Refer to the Travel Doctor's web site [www.travellingwell.com.au](http://www.travellingwell.com.au) The section in the book regarding traveller's diarrhoea treatment is very good and aligns with the advice from the Centre for Disease Control.
- 1 internal flight (Day 14: Urumchi - Kashgar) and 3 journeys by First Class rail (Day 4: Xi'an – Lanzhou, Day 7: Lanzhou – Jiayuguan, Day 11: Liuyang – Turpan)
- Rudimentary toilet facilities in some places

It is important to remember that ASA programs are group tours, and slow walkers affect everyone in the group. As the group must move at the speed of the slowest member, the amount of time spent at a site may be reduced if group members cannot maintain a moderate walking pace. ASA tours should not present any problem for active people who can manage day-to-day walking and stair-climbing. However, if you have any doubts about your ability to manage on a program, please ask your ASA travel consultant whether this is a suitable tour for you.

**Please note** it is a condition of travel that all participants agree to accept ASA's directions in relation to their suitability to participate in activities undertaken on the tour, and that ASA retains the sole discretion to direct a tour participant to refrain from a particular activity on part of the tour. For further information please refer to the Booking Conditions on the last page of this tour itinerary.

### The Effects of Altitude

The effects of altitude should be taken very seriously, especially by those with heart or breathing problems. However, neither age nor general fitness have been shown to affect your susceptibility. To help prevent altitude sickness the best measure is to limit activity, eat light meals, drink lots of water and abstain from alcohol. Please consult your doctor regarding medications available for altitude sickness prevention and treatment.

### Passport & Visa Requirements

All tour members should ensure that they have sent ASA a copy of the front page of their current passport no later than 3 months prior to departure.

- Please check that your passport will be valid for 6 months after your date of return to Australia. This is important because many countries will refuse entry to anyone whose passport is about to expire.
- Please make sure your passport has at least 2 empty pages for the Chinese visa stamp

The following visa will be required for passengers travelling on an Australian passport. Please note that the following prices are subject to change:

- China Double entry visa: \$128.50 AUD (1)
  - Kyrgyzstan Nationals of Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom do not require a visa for sixty days
1. The cost of the visa varies in each state. This visa must be issued and pre-paid prior to departing Australia. Visa applications must be processed in your state of residence. Applications processed via the ASA office (for Victorian residents only) are subject to courier charges of approx. \$55.00pp

including GST. ASA will send all tour participants the appropriate visa application forms and other document requirements approximately 2 months prior to departure.

### Practical Information

Tour members will receive prior to departure practical notes which include information on visa requirements, health, photography, weather, clothing and what to pack, custom regulations, bank hours, currency regulations, electrical appliances and food. The Department of Foreign Affairs & Trade website has advice for travellers see: [www.smartraveller.gov.au](http://www.smartraveller.gov.au)

### Rail Travel

We pass through full security screening at the entry to railway stations and the airports in Xian and Urumqi. Please note:

1. No knives whatsoever are permitted (even in checked in luggage). This includes pocket knives and Swiss Army knives.
2. Pressurised spray cans (e.g. hair spray) have been confiscated in the past at railway stations.

### Communication: Xinjiang Province

Internet connection and mobile services were cut in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region after the 5 July 2009 riots. While they have been reinstated, it is possible for these services to be suspended at any time. In this event, communication with your family and friends either by mobile or internet during your stay in Turfan, Urumchi and Kashgar would not be possible.

## Booking Conditions

### Making a Tentative Reservation before the tour price has been published

#### ASA INTENTION TO TRAVEL APPLICATION FORM

Some ASA tours fill almost immediately. Don't miss out! You can register your 'Intention to Travel' by completing this application and returning this to ASA with a AUD \$100.00 per person deposit. Once the tour price has been published, the itinerary and ASA Reservation Application Form will be sent to you. From the time you receive the itinerary you will have two weeks to either:

- Send us a completed ASA Reservation Application Form together with an additional deposit of AUD \$400.00 per person. On receipt of this Reservation Application and deposit, ASA will process your booking and if approved, send you a tour confirmation. At this time your deposit of AUD \$500.00 is subject to the tour's Booking Conditions.

Or

- CANCEL your Intention to Travel in writing. ASA will refund your AUD \$100.00 per person deposit, less a \$33.00 service fee (including GST).

### Participation Criteria

To participate in an ASA tour, you must be reasonably fit, in good health and able to participate in all activities without assistance from Tour Leaders or other tour members. If you require assistance, a fit and able travel companion must undertake to accompany and assist you with all tasks for the duration of the whole tour. ASA's ability to make reasonable adjustments to accommodate your specific needs, your health and safety and the health and safety of other tour members, is of paramount importance to us. For this reason the ASA Reservation Application includes a Medical Information section. As a general guideline, you must be able to accomplish each of these activities without assistance or support:

- walk and stand unassisted for at least 2-3 hours a day in hot, humid conditions
- walk confidently on and over uneven surfaces
- climb at least 3 flights of stairs
- embark and disembark from ferries, buses and trains
- walk up and down steep slopes
- walk at a steady pace and no less than 1km every 15-20 minutes
- organise, manage and carry your own luggage
- follow and remember tour instructions
- meet punctually at designated times and places
- administer your own medication.

### Single Supplement

Double rooms (for single use) will be apportioned to those who book first. We cannot nevertheless guarantee you a single room throughout the tour. Accommodation in many regions is limited. Approximately one month prior to departure, rooming lists will be confirmed. If you have paid this supplement but must forego a single room in some places the supplement for those hotels will be refunded to you. At Lake Issyk-Kul we stay in traditional yurts. As there are only 9 yurts; all participants will be required to share a yurt (i.e. 2-4 people per yurt).



# Intention to Travel Application

TOUR NAME \_\_\_\_\_

TOUR DATES \_\_\_\_\_

## Booking before the tour price is available

Some ASA tours fill almost immediately. Don't miss out! You can register your 'Intention to Travel' by completing this application and returning this to ASA with a AUD\$100.00 per person deposit. Once the tour price has been published, the itinerary and ASA Reservation Application Form will be sent to you. From the time you receive the itinerary you will have two weeks to either:

- Send us a completed ASA Reservation Application Form together with an additional deposit of AUD\$400.00 per person. On receipt of this Reservation Application and deposit, ASA will process your booking and if approved, send you a tour confirmation. At this time your deposit of \$500.00 AUD is subject to the tour's Booking Conditions.

### OR

- Cancel your Intention to Travel in writing. ASA will refund your AUD\$100.00 per person deposit, less a \$33.00 service fee (including GST).

## Applicant Details (as in passport)

TITLE Mr  Mrs  Ms  Miss  Dr  Other \_\_\_\_\_

FIRST NAME \_\_\_\_\_ Preferred FIRST NAME \_\_\_\_\_

MIDDLE NAME \_\_\_\_\_ SURNAME \_\_\_\_\_

POSTAL ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

CITY \_\_\_\_\_ STATE \_\_\_\_\_ COUNTRY \_\_\_\_\_ POSTCODE \_\_\_\_\_

TEL. (AH) ( ) \_\_\_\_\_ TEL. (BH) ( ) \_\_\_\_\_ Mobile Tel: \_\_\_\_\_

EMAIL address \_\_\_\_\_

Date of birth \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_ GENDER Male  Female

## Tour Accommodation (rooming preferences)

I/we would like:  a twin-bedded room  a double-bedded room  a room for sole occupancy

I am travelling:  on my own  with a friend/family member Travel Companion \_\_\_\_\_

## Meals

I do not have any specific dietary requests

Please **X** the box if you **CAN NOT** eat any of the following:

fish  poultry  red meat  dairy products

eggs  pork  nuts

Other \_\_\_\_\_

Allergies: Refer to the Medical Information

## Correspondence

Your preferred method of correspondence  Postal Mail  Email Address \_\_\_\_\_

## Participation Criteria

To participate in an ASA tour, you must be reasonably fit, in good health and able to participate in all activities without assistance from Tour Leaders or other tour members. If you require assistance, a fit and able travel companion must undertake to accompany and assist you with all tasks for the duration of the whole tour.

ASA's ability to make reasonable adjustments to accommodate your specific needs, your health and safety and the health and safety of other tour members, is of paramount importance to us. For this reason the ASA Reservation Application includes a Medical Information section.

As a general guideline, you must be able to accomplish each of these activities *without assistance or support*:-

- walk & stand unassisted for at least 2-3 hours a day in hot, humid conditions
- walk confidently on and over uneven surfaces
- climb at least 3 flights of stairs
- embark and disembark from ferries, buses and trains
- walk up and down steep slopes
- walk at a steady pace and no less than 1 km every 15 - 20 minutes
- organise, manage and carry your own luggage
- follow and remember tour instructions
- meet punctually at designated times and places
- administer your own medication.

Applicant's Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Dated \_\_\_\_\_



## Tour / Course Name

Name of Traveller 1 \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Traveller 2 \_\_\_\_\_

I have enclosed a payment to the value of \$ \_\_\_\_\_ (including CC or bank fee if applicable) for this tour

Payment by (please indicate):  Cheque  Direct Debit (see below)  Credit Card (see below)

## International Payments

Welcome to our international travellers! If you are making a payment and do not have an Australian bank account/credit card, we can only accept payment as follows:

- via credit card with the applicable fee - the credit card company/bank will set the exchange rate
- via bank transfer; please give your surname and tour code (eg. Smith 21705) as a reference and ask your bank to allow for all charges.

Bank cheques or personal cheques will not be accepted.

### By Cheque (accept Australian cheques only)

Please make cheques payable to *Australians Studying Abroad*

### Direct Deposit or Internet Banking

You will need to:

1. Provide your bank with ASA's bank details (see below) and the amount you wish to transfer OR make a direct deposit through any ANZ branch
2. Include any fees levied by the banks
3. Provide a reference number (Mobile or last name recommended).
4. Complete section below, including confirmation no. (given when transaction completed).

### Australians Studying Abroad bank details

Bank ANZ  
 Branch 420 St Kilda Road, Melbourne Vic  
 Swift Code ANZBAU3M  
 BSB 013-423  
 Account No 3472-32759

Bank confirmation No. \_\_\_\_\_

Reference used: Mobile or last name recommended  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Date Money Transferred  
 \_\_\_\_\_

### Credit Card Payment

Credit card fees apply: Mastercard & Visa 2%  
 American Express 2%

Please debit my:  Mastercard  Visa  American Express

I authorise ASA to debit my credit card for the amount due plus the applicable fee as above

Credit Card Number  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Expiry Date \_\_\_\_\_ Security Code (CVC) \_\_\_\_\_

Bank the Card is linked to (eg. NAB or ANZ)  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Cardholders Name  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Cardholders Billing Address  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Postcode  
 \_\_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_\_ Country \_\_\_\_\_

Phone  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Email  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Cardholders Signature  
 \_\_\_\_\_