

CHINESE SILK ROAD

DETAILED ITINERARY

CHINA

Aug 21/26



The ancient Silk Road was a route that connected Imperial Rome with China. For centuries it was the main exchange between East and West, a conduit for religion and philosophy as well as goods and ideas. It was a place of great ancient cities as well as religious and spiritual centers of faith. Extending 4,000 miles (6,437 kilometers), the heart of the great Silk Road was China.

Our adventure to a seldom-visited part of the forbidden kingdom starts in the old imperial capital of Xian, the terminus of the Silk Road. Terra Cotta Warriors are a testimony to once powerful ancient armies. Evidence of the spread of Buddhism can be seen in the stunning carved grottos in Bingling (a UNESCO World Heritage Site) as well as at Labrang Monastery, home to the yellow-sect Tibetans. We explore the seldom-visited western portion of the Great Wall in Jiayuguan to witness the extent of Chinese efforts to protect their empire. We journey to the famed Rainbow Mountain, an extraordinary phenomenon unique in its color and shape.

FACTS & HIGHLIGHTS

- 23 land days • Maximum 16 travelers • Start in Xian and finish in Urumqi • Includes 1 internal flight • All meals included • Terra Cotta Warriors in Xian • 5th century Buddhist temples at Bingling (UNESCO) • Labrang Monastery and the Yellow Hat sect Tibetans • Jiayuguan and the western end of the Great Wall of China
- The Magao Grottos (UNESCO) of Dunhuang • Oasis town of Turpan • Camel safari in the Taklamakan Desert
- The famed Sunday Market in Kashgar • Travel along the Karakoram Highway and visit the Khunjerab Pass • Visit the unique and colorful Rainbow Mountain

DEPARTURE DATES & PRICE

May 23 - Jun 14, 2027	-	\$8495 USD
May 21 - Jun 12, 2028	-	\$8995 USD

Activity Level: 3

Comfort Level: Some long drives. 2 nights over 10,000 ft.

ACCOMMODATIONS

We stay in comfortable accommodations, both hotels and guesthouses with private bathrooms. The only exception is one night in a comfortable, permanent-tented camp with proper beds and an ensuite bathrooms in the Taklamakan Desert.

ELDER TREKS



SMALL GROUP
EXOTIC ADVENTURES
FOR TRAVELERS 50 PLUS



The great Taklamakan Desert may have instilled fear in the hearts of intrepid travelers of the past but we will enter this vast desert for a camel safari, stopping at a number of oasis towns. We conclude our adventure on the border of the great Pamir Mountain Range and visit the Uyghur town of Kashgar and the famed Sunday Market before ending our tour in Urumqi.

Join us as we explore the stunning landscapes, ancient sites and fascinating cultures on our Chinese Silk Road adventure.



DAY 1 ARRIVE IN XIAN

Arrive at Xian Airport, where you are met and transferred to our hotel in the city. Our tour leader will greet you at a welcome meeting before our group dinner.

Overnight in Xian.

DAY 2 TERRA-COTTA WARRIORS OF XIAN

We begin our adventure with a visit to the famed Terra-Cotta Warriors, considered the greatest archaeological find of the 20th century. Afterwards, we return to the center of Xian to visit the Bell Tower,







the best-preserved and largest wooden tower in China. In the afternoon, see the Wild Goose pagoda, a well-preserved ancient and holy building for Buddhism. We conclude our sightseeing with a walking tour around the Hui minority area of Xian, ending at the Hui Grand Mosque, one of the oldest and largest mosques in China, with its combination of Chinese and Arabic architectural styles.

Dinner and overnight in Xian.

DAY 3 XIAN SITES, TRAIN TO LANZHOU

This morning we will visit the ancient city walls of Xian by foot. Later visit the Shaanxi Historical Museum, built in the style of the Tang-Dynasty. It houses over 370,000 items from Chinese history including murals, paintings, pottery, coins, as well as bronze, gold, and silver objects. In the afternoon we take a bullet train to Lanzhou. This train ride is approximately 3:20 hours long.

Dinner and overnight in Lanzhou.

DAY 4 TO BINGLING GROTTOES (UNESCO), TO XIAHE

We drive this morning to the Bingling (or 'Ten Thousand' in the Tibetan language) Grottoes (UNESCO), a series of grottoes filled with Buddhist sculptures carved into natural caves and caverns set in a canyon along the Yellow River. Construction dates back to the Western Jin Dynasty (265-316 AD). To reach the grottoes, we take a boat from the town of Liujiaxia, passing through the Liujiaxia Reservoir. Afterwards we continue on to the town of Xiahe for the evening.

Dinner and overnight in Xiahe.

DAY 5 LABRANG MONASTERY (TIBETAN)

Today we "step" into Tibet as we visit Labrang Monastery, the largest and most influential and major monastery of the Gelugpa (or Yellow Hat) sect of Tibetan Buddhism. The architectural layout follows a true Tibetan style while the construction patterns are a blend with Chinese styles. We have the entire morning to explore the monastery. After lunch we depart for Lanzhou.

Dinner and overnight in Lanzhou.

DAY 6 TRAIN TO ZHANGYE DANXIA RAINBOW MOUNTAIN

After breakfast we transfer to the train station and take the fast train to Zhangye (approx. 3 hours). After lunch we visit Danxia National Geological Park, also known as Rainbow Mountain, which is located 40 miles/65 km from Zhangye city. It is unique for its color and shape. Wind, rain and time created extraordinary shapes, including towers, columns and canyons with different colors, patterns and sizes, similar to a layer cake.

Dinner and overnight in Zhangye.

DAY 7 TO JIAYUGUAN, WESTERN GREAT WALL, WEI-JIN ANCIENT TOMBS

After breakfast we drive to Jiayuguan (approx 3 hours). Upon arrival in Jiayuguan we are transferred to a local restaurant for lunch. After lunch, we explore Jiayuguan Pass (Jiayuguan Fort), also known as the "Impregnable Pass under Heaven". Jiayuguan is located on the western end of the Great Wall of the Ming Dynasty and is considered the most magnificent and well-preserved pass among over a thousand passes along the Great Wall.



Jiayuguan - western Great Wall

Later we visit the Great Wall Museum for a historical overview of the Great Wall, and then the Over-Hanging Cliff Great Wall. Situated outside of the city, this suspended wall is a part of the Great Wall and was originally built on a ridge at a 45-degree angle. We end this fascinating day with a visit to the Wei-Jin ancient tombs. Built between the 3rd and 5th centuries during the Wei and Jin Dynasties, it is renowned as the largest subterranean art gallery in the world and houses a great deal of colorful murals.

Dinner and overnight in Jiayuguan.

DAY 8 TO DUNHUANG, TEN-THOUSAND-BUDDHA GORGE

After breakfast, we drive to the historical city of Dunhuang. We visit Yulin Grottos which is also called the 'Ten-Thousand-Buddha Gorge', and is situated in a valley along the Yulin River.

There is time to rest in the afternoon before we visit Shazhou night market this evening.

Dinner and overnight in Dunhuang.

DAY 9 DUNHUANG, MOGAO GROTTOES

This morning is dedicated to exploring the UNESCO World Heritage Mogao Grottos. Constructed over a millennium from the 4th to 14th centuries, the caves are also known as the Thousand Buddha Caves, and besides being the most-notable grottos in China, they are also considered the best preserved treasure house of Buddhist art, sutras, murals and sculptures in the world.

In the afternoon we explore Crescent Lake, a natural wonder of the Gobi Desert with their massive sand

dunes. The contrast between the golden sand hill and the blue lake are breathtaking.

Dinner and overnight in Dunhuang.

DAY 10 TRAIN TO TURPAN

After breakfast we visit the Dunhuang Museum, which exhibits relics excavated from the local area, including paper and coins. The museum is also home to an excellent reconstruction of the Great Wall during the Han Dynasty.

This afternoon we take a bullet train to Turpan.

Dinner and overnight in Turpan.

DAY 11 ANCIENT CITY OF IDIKUT, BIZEKLIK THOUSAND BUDDHA CAVES, LUNCH WITH A LOCAL UIGHUR FAMILY

We begin with a visit to the ancient city of Idikut (Gaochang). First built in the 1st century BC, Gaochang later became the capital of the Idikut (Gaochang) Uighur Kingdom in the 8th century. Later we visit Bizeklik Thousand Buddha Caves, which used to be an important center for Buddhist worship under the Xizhou Huigu Government of the Idikut (Gaochang) Kingdom.

After, we drive Toyuk Village, an old, beautiful and timeless village with a friendly Uighur community. Here, we visit several local families and eat lunch with one of them in their home.

After lunch we visit the world famous Karez Irrigation System, which is unique to this part of the world. The system is considered as one of the three great projects in China, with the other two being the Great Wall and the Grand Canal. We also visit the Emin Suliman Minaret, which is a magnificent combination of ancient Uighur and Islamic architecture. It is the tallest ancient





pagoda in Xinjiang and the only Islamic ancient pagoda in the country. Locals call it “pure tower”. Along the way, enjoy the Flaming Mountains - red sandstone hills that are part of the Tian Shan Mountain Range.

Dinner and overnight in Turpan.

DAY 12 ANCIENT CITY OF YARGUL, TRAIN TO KUCHE

Today we visit the ancient city of Yargul (Jiaohe), which is considered one of the best-preserved ancient cities in China. The ruins of the buildings are divided into temples, civilian dwellings and government offices.

Workshops and residential houses in the streets are still visible.

This afternoon we will take a comfortable ‘sleeper train’ (7 hours) to Kuche, arriving in the evening where we will check in to our hotel.

Dinner and overnight in Kuche.

DAY 13 KIZIL THOUSAND BUDDHA CAVES, TIANSHAN GREAT CANYON

This morning we visit the Kizil Thousand Buddha Caves, which sits high on the cliffs over the northern

bank of the Muzat River. The caves were hewn between the 3rd and 8th century and form one of the earliest Buddhist art treasure troves in China. These caves were also in use one century before the famous Mogao Grotto at Dunhuang. After lunch, we drive to the Tianshan Mysterious Great Canyon, noted for the unique color and shape of its mountains. Today the Tianshan Great Canyon is regarded as one of the ten most beautiful canyons in China.

Dinner and overnight in Kuche.

DAY 14 ANCIENT CITIES OF KUCHE & SUBASH; TO AKSU

This morning we will explore the Old City of Kuche and its community of friendly Uighur people. We visit the Grand Mosque, built in the 17th century. The roof of the mosque was constructed using 300,000 eggs, cement and bricks. Later we visit the ancient city of Subash dating from the 2nd and 3rd centuries as well as the Kizil Kasha Beacon Tower, an ancient military outpost. Afterwards, we drive to Aksu.

Dinner and overnight in Aksu.



DAY 15 TO HOTAN

We depart Aksu after breakfast and head for Hotan. We travel along the new highway opened in 2007, following the route of the Hotan River, which was also a significant ancient trading route.

Dinner and overnight in Hotan.

DAY 16 HOTAN SITES

This morning we will visit a traditional mulberry paper making workshop. The ancient tradition of paper making has been around for 2000 years, yet there are few remaining families who uphold the tradition. The process is both complex and fascinating. Then continue with a visit to the Grand Bazaar of Hotan, a wonderful, authentic local market.

After lunch, we visit a workshop showcasing traditional Silk Atlas fabric, followed by visit to the Hotan Museum.

Dinner and overnight in Hotan.

DAY 17 TAKLAMAKAN DESERT ADVENTURE

This morning we drive into the Taklamakan Desert for a very unique and memorable experience where our tented camps allow us the opportunity to immerse ourselves in the legendary desert.

Upon arrival, we check into our desert camp and have the opportunity to participate in adventure activities. Feel the thrill of a 4x4 SUV desert excursion or trek across the golden dunes on foot, or sway along on a camel safari.

Tonight we enjoy dinner and a UNESCO-listed 12 Muqam local performance by the fire.

Overnight at our comfortable, permanent-tented, campsite in the desert.







DAY 18 ANCIENT CAPITAL OF YARKAND; TO KASHGAR

After breakfast, we leave the desert camp behind and depart for Kashgar with a captivating stop at Yarkand. Once a royal capital and a pivotal hub on the Southern Silk Road, Yarkand offers a deep dive into history. Explore the regal Royal Cemetery and lose yourself in the soul-stirring melodies of a—a living piece of Uyghur heritage. We continue our journey onward to Kashgar, where dinner awaits.

Dinner and overnight in Kashgar.

DAY 19 ANCIENT UYGHUR CITY OF KASHGAR

After breakfast, we explore the rich and enduring culture of the Uyghur people in Kashgar. Our first visit is to the historic Apak Hoja Tomb, also known as the Fragrant Concubine Tomb.

We then visit Id Kah Mosque, the largest mosque in China, admired for its intricate architecture and cultural significance. From there, we continue our walking tour through Kashgar's famous Old City, where we'll experience the traditional character of

this historic neighborhood. Along the way, we'll enjoy tea in a centuries-old traditional teahouse.

Dinner and overnight in Kashgar.

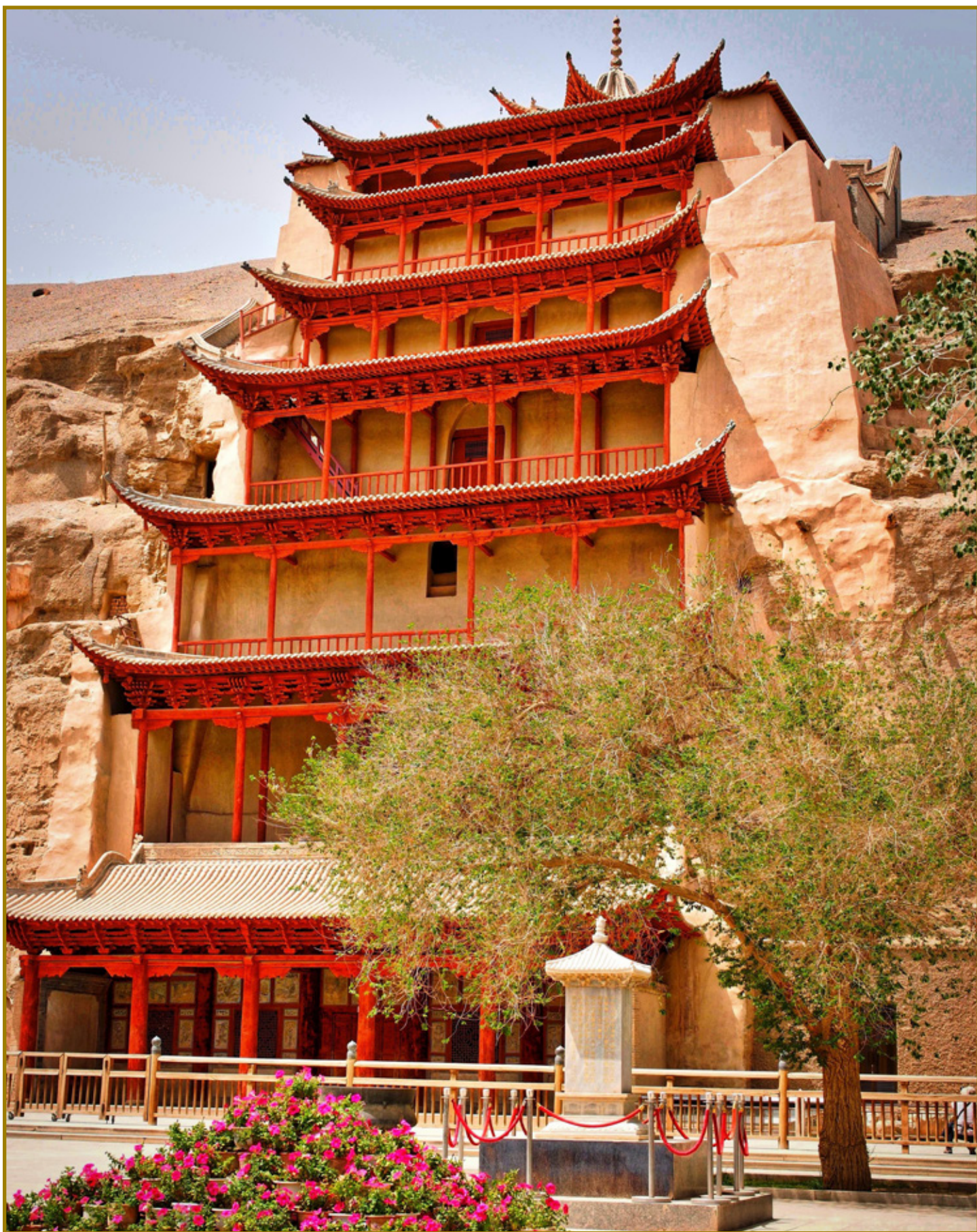
DAY 20 TAJIK VILLAGES & NOMADIC HERDSMAN, STUNNING KARAKUL LAKE; TO TASHKURGAN

Today is an early start as we set out along the Karakorum Highway, one of the most beautiful roads in the world. The hues and colors of some of the world's highest mountain ranges dominate every horizon on our journey towards Karakul Lake, as Kyrgyz nomadic herders and ancient caravanserais dot the vast landscape. Karakul Lake (which means 'great' lake) sits at the foot of the Muztagh Ata (7546m) and Kongur (7719m) mountains. 'Muztagh Ata' means Father of the Ice Mountain and is one the most beautiful and mysterious mountains in the world. Hiking around Karakul Lake, which is located 11,800 feet above sea level, you are surrounded by a series of mountains and grasslands where herds of yaks can be observed.

We will enjoy a picnic lunch on the shores of the lake before continuing on to Tashkurgan, an important









hub on the old Silk Road. The name Tashkurgan is actually a translation of 'Stone Fort.' This whole area around this Tajik town borders Pakistan and Afghanistan and are connected via the Khunjerab Pass. On the way into Tashkurgan there are many Tajik villages and nomadic herdsman.

Dinner and overnight in Tashkurgan.

DAY 21 TASHKURGAN'S ANCIENT STONE FORT; TO KASHGAR

After breakfast, we explore the town's ancient stone fort - still standing after 1800 years! We also visit the Tashkurgan Historical and Cultural Museum and walk around this historic town. This is a fantastic opportunity to try traditional Tajik food and immerse yourself in the culture of the Tajik community. After lunch we drive to Kashgar.

Dinner and overnight in Kashgar.

DAY 22 KASHGAR'S ANCIENT SUNDAY MARKET

Today we visit the largest bazaar in Central Asia at the Kashgar Sunday Main Bazaar, including stops at the Livestock Market, which is considered the most interesting and traditional part of the famed Sunday Market. In the afternoon, we take a flight to Urumqi.

Dinner and overnight in Urumqi.

DAY 23 DEPART URUMQI

Our Chinese Silk Road adventure concludes today with a transfer to the airport for your departing flight.







QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. HOW BIG ARE THE GROUPS?

Each group is limited to 16 participants. Small groups are an important ingredient in adventure travel. They allow for more interaction and more personalized service throughout the itinerary.

2. WHAT IS INCLUDED IN THE TOUR PRICE?

All accommodations throughout; all meals, starting with dinner on day 1 and finishing with breakfast on departure day (i.e. the last day of the ElderTreks tour); bottled drinking water throughout the trip; all internal transportation; airport transfers on day 1 and departure day (i.e. the last day of the ElderTreks tour); all day trips and entrance fees as outlined in the itinerary; tips for hotels (portage) bus driver, restaurants and spot guides; services of a trip leader.

3. WHAT IS NOT INCLUDED IN THE TOUR PRICE?

International flights, tips to ElderTreks tour leader, alcoholic drinks, visas and travel insurance.

4. ARE THESE “EDUCATIONAL” TOURS?

Yes, in the broadest sense of the word, “educational”. We visit churches and historical sites and have talks and discussions on many aspects of history, culture and nature. We believe that it is equally educational to meet local people on a non-commercial basis, visit their homes and even try to learn a few words in the native language. Sometimes the most “educational” moments are spent walking through an old quarter of a city.

5. HOW DO WE TRAVEL DURING THE TOUR?

All internal transportation is included in the land price of the trip. We use minivans and 4 x 4's where necessary for road travel, trains, and one internal flight.

6. WHAT ARE OUR ACCOMMODATIONS LIKE?

We stay in comfortable accommodations, both hotels and guesthouses with private bathrooms. The only exception is one night in a comfortable, permanent-tented camp with proper beds and an ensuite bathrooms in the Taklamakan Desert.

7. WHAT ABOUT THE WEATHER?

Conditions along the Silk Road vary from a typical continental climate around Xian to a desert climate and even mountains as you travel westward to Kashgar and the border with Pakistan. Be prepared for extremes in temperature. Average daytime

temperatures are 82 °F (28 °C), but night time temperatures can drop to 54 °F (12 °C).

8. WHEN IS PAYMENT DUE?

A non-refundable deposit of \$500 USD (plus insurance if you require it) is due at time of booking and will reserve your place on the tour. Payment of the full land cost is due 120 days before departure. Cancellation charges are applicable and are outlined in the “Terms and Conditions” section of our brochure.

9. IS MEDICAL INSURANCE REQUIRED?

Insurance coverage is not included in the cost of your trip. Please note that medical insurance is not required for this adventure but is recommended. ElderTreks offers comprehensive travel insurance and we are happy to provide you with a quote if you call our office. If you are purchasing insurance elsewhere, please ensure you provide the details to ElderTreks as soon as possible.

**Please note those travelers with pre-existing medical conditions must take out travel insurance at the time of deposit*

10. WHAT SHOULD I TAKE ON THE TOUR?

There is a detailed “What to Take” list in our Trip Kit, which we will send to you after you have booked the trip.

11. WHAT MEALS ARE INCLUDED?

All meals during the itinerary are included, starting with dinner on day 1 and finishing with breakfast on departure day. We eat a variety of local foods prepared in a wide range of settings. In many cases, we simply order a number of dishes and share, allowing you to sample new foods and decide what you enjoy best.

12. CAN YOU ARRANGE MY FLIGHTS?

We would be happy to take care of your air arrangements. ElderTreks offers personalized flight itineraries — not group flights. Stop over en route, come in a few days early, or extend your stay. Call us for a customized itinerary.

13. WHAT IF I WOULD LIKE MORE INFORMATION?

If you have any further questions about the trip, please do not hesitate to contact our office for additional information. A Trip Kit containing further details on the destination will be sent to you once you have booked the trip.





