

大漠

Desert



旅遊

Culture Tour



English

Desert

People are endlessly fascinated by deserts. The combination of isolation, extremity and stark beauty fires the imagination, no more so than in the Gobi Desert of China.

The desert itself sprawls throughout the western part of China, edging into Mongolia for long stretches, making it difficult to say exactly where it officially begins and ends. Adjoining the Gobi is the still more mysterious Taklamakan Desert, which translates, ominously, as the place where people venture in and do not come back.

Maybe it is that edge of danger that attracts people to visit and explore desert regions. In days of yore, Silk Road traders had little option but to traverse the edges of the sand mass, as it was the quickest way for the camel trains to head to the Far West of the country, their loads ultimately destined for the Middle East and beyond.

They must have been hardy people, to walk for weeks on end between oasis towns, surviving the blistering heat of summer and the stinging winds of unpredictable sandstorms. Dotted around that desert region - then and now - are oasis towns, places where the water gushes plentifully, allowing bountiful farming.

During the Silk Road's heyday, income from passing traders brought the outposts great wealth. Merchants would fund paintings, or statues, at local temples and sacred caves, in a bid to secure good luck for their hazardous passages across tough terrain. If they returned safely, they would spend part of the gold from the successful transactions on yet more adornments, to give thanks to the gods.

One place in particular benefitted from this largesse. The 400-plus desert caves of Dunhuang, which have fabulous paintings on the walls, were rediscovered early in the last century by foreign archaeologists. They were amazed by what they found: the dry desert air and covered-up entranceways had left the caves intact, pretty much the same as they were a thousand years earlier.

Inside were priceless silk scrolls adorned with intricate calligraphy, unique relics of a bygone era. The archaeologist-adventurers filled trunks with the artefacts - often damaging the paintings and carvings in their frantic rush - and carted them home by camel train to the West.

But despite the desecration, enough remains to dazzle contemporary tourists, whether it is in Dunhuang, or at the Bezeklik Thousand Buddha Caves just outside Turpan. In fact the oasis town is a veritable treasure trove of ancient Chinese history: close by are the surprisingly intact cities of Jiaohe and Gaochang, once thriving centres that welcomed people of different religions and nationalities.

Gushing water from the Tian Shan mountain range was diverted into a cleverly-engineered irrigation system. Plentiful water allowed residents to reap rich harvests of grapes and melons, with the surplus exported to towns throughout China.

Not all the Silk Road oasis towns survived to the present day. Some were buried by the shifting sands, lost for ever, while others crumbled and fell into disrepair. This region was the furthest outpost of the Great Wall, the amazing structure designed to keep out barbarian would-be invaders.

The Far West of China has many well-preserved examples of civilisations long gone. The city of Yinchuan was once the capital of a mysterious 11th century kingdom which, to this day, has a strong Islamic influence. The king, in the extravagant manner of the time, built 72 tombs for himself.

In days gone by, the safest and sturdiest form of transport was the camel, the two-humped Gobi Desert beast that can go for weeks without water. It is still popular, used for both work and leisure purposes. A dawn camel-ride into the Gobi Desert, up and over the delicately-lit dunes, allows visitors to have an authentic taste of Silk Road life.

The silk that gave the road its name remains popular. Few people leave without acquiring some kind of silk-made garment, or, perhaps, a carved piece of jade from one of the master craftsmen en route. Another alternative is to visit the richly-stocked bazaars of the desert region, colourful and vibrant places which sell everything the desert-dweller could ever need...

1 Hong Kong / Guangzhou

Direct train

Guangzhou / Yinchuan

Approx. 4 hours flight

Meet at the Guangzhou Station and transfer to the domestic airport for a flight to Yinchuan - the capital of the Western Xia, a mysterious kingdom founded during the 11th century; and the capital of Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, with overtones of an Islamic influence due to its large Hui population.

Accommodation at the International Hotel or similar

(D)

2 Yinchuan / Zhongwei / Tengger Desert Coach

Transferred to Zhongwei, sandwiched between the sand dunes of the Tengger Desert to the north and the Yellow River to the south. Visit the Shapotou Scenic Spots, on the fringe of the Tengger Desert. The 'chequerboard method' has been used for sand blockage and fixation over here. Try a camel-ride to the Desert, watch people drifting down the Yellow River on the Sheep-skin raft or rent a sand sled and skid down the dunes.

Accommodation at the Yixing Hotel or similar

(B,L&D)

3 Zhongwei / Yinchuan

Coach

Visit the 108 Pagodas in Qingtongxia and have a boat ride around the Sand Lake scenic area.

Accommodation at the International Hotel or similar

(B,L&D)

4 Yinchuan

In the morning, visit the Western Xia Mausoleum - according to the legend, the founder of the Western Xia kingdom, Li Yuanhao built 72 tombs for himself, others held relatives or were left empty. Onward to the Western China Movie City and Helan Mountain Range, an important natural barrier against desert winds and invaders alike, look for the interesting rock-carvings.

Accommodation at the International Hotel or similar

(B,L&D)

5 Yinchuan / Guangzhou

Approx. 4 hours flight

Visit the main mosque in Yinchuan - Nanguan Mosque, a modern Middle Eastern style structure showing little Chinese architectural influence. Fly to Guangzhou, also known as the City of Rams, the capital of Guangdong Province. Rest of the day at leisure.

Accommodation at the China Hotel or similar

(B,L&D)

6 Guangzhou / Hong Kong

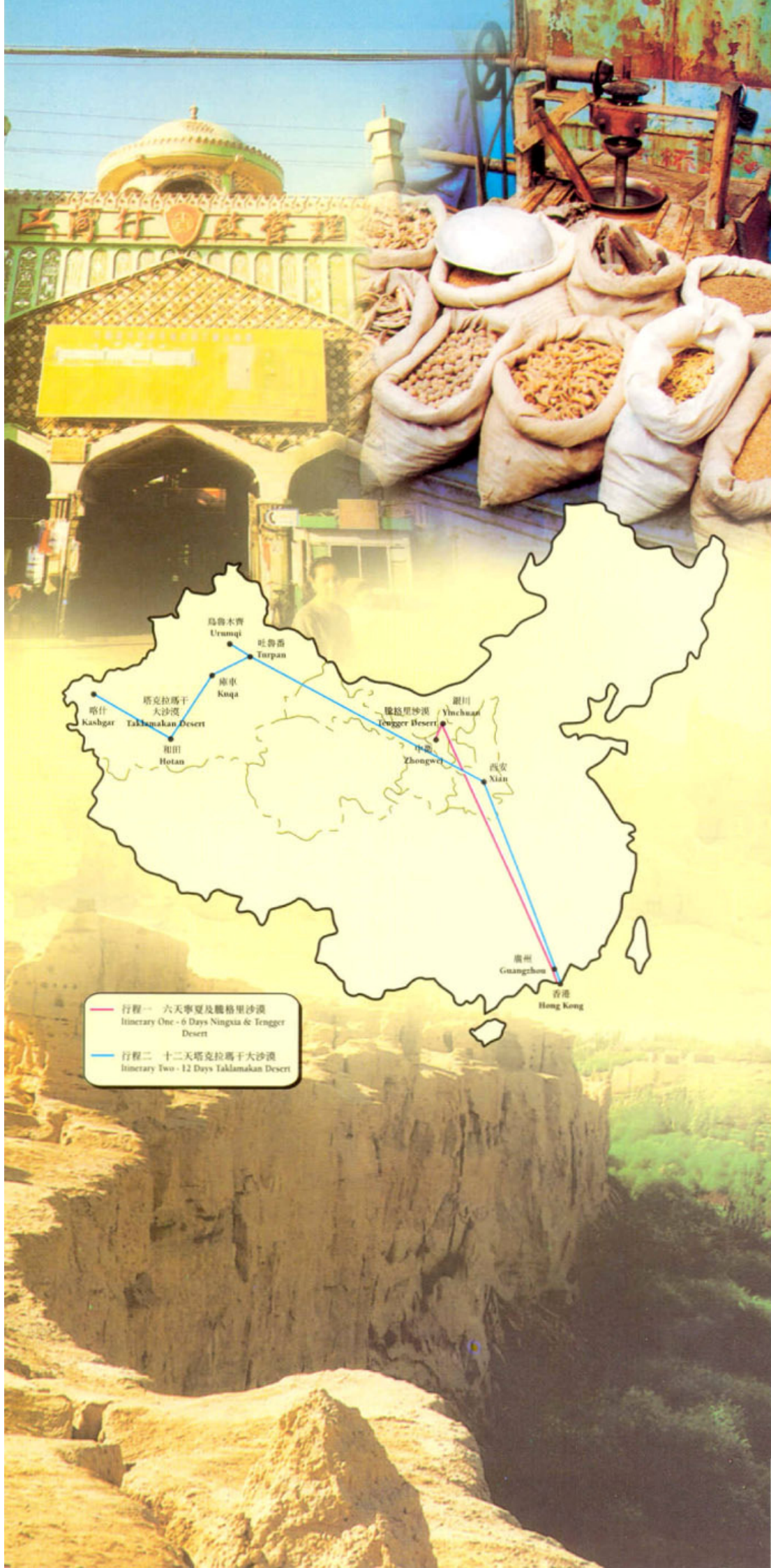
Direct train

Transfer to the Guangzhou Station for a train ride back to Hong Kong.

(B)

Itinerary Two 12 Days Taklamakan Desert (MU)

- 1 Hong Kong / Xian** Approx. 2.5 hours flight
Xian / Urumqi Approx. 3 hours flight
Take a direct flight to Xian to connect a flight to Urumqi - the capital of the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region.
Accommodation at the Hoi Tak Hotel or similar (B,L&D)
-
- 2 Urumqi / Turpan** Coach
Start with a boat ride around the Heavenly Lake which is surrounded by alpine meadows and rugged snow-capped mountains densely covered in fir, pine and cypress. Drive to the Oasis town of Turpan. Visit the Emin Minaret, a typical Uygur architecture; and the Karez - an amazing irrigation system which made Turpan a rich oasis. After dinner, enjoy the Uygur performance.
Accommodation at the Silk Road Turpan Oasis Hotel (B,L&D)
-
- 3 Turpan / Korla** Coach
Visit the City of Jiaohe - a UNESCO "Natural Heritage" site. Drive past the Flaming Mountain, made famous by the story of the Monkey King, to the Bezeklik Thousand Buddha Caves. Drive to Korla.
Accommodation at the Bazhou Guesthouse or similar (B,L&D)
-
- 4 Korla / Kuqa** Coach
Drive to the Iron Gate Pass in Korla which was an important passage on the Ancient Silk Road. Onward to the biggest inland fresh-water lake in China - the Bosten Lake which is rich in traditional strains of fish. Enjoy a boat ride around the Lotus Pond. Reach the oasis town which has remains of a pre-Islamic Buddhist civilisation.
Accommodation at the Qiuci Guesthouse or similar (B,L&D)
-
- 5 Kuqa**
Visit the Kizil Thousand Buddha Caves, one of the four major Grottos in China; the Beacon Tower, mysterious Tianshan Grand Gorge and Bazaar. Enjoy Ancient Qiuci dancing & music performance.
Accommodation at the Niya Guesthouse or similar (B,L&D)
-
- 6 Kuqa / Minfeng (Niya)** Coach
Cross the desert highway through the Sea of Death - the Taklamakan Desert, bordered on three sides by some of the highest mountain ranges in the world. Taklamakan in Turki means "go in and you will not come out".
Accommodation at the Niya Guesthouse or similar (B,L&D)
-
- 7 Minfeng / Hetain (Hotan)** Coach
Arrival to the "Land of Jade" - Hetian, situated at the south boundary of the Taklamakan Desert. Enjoy the natural scenery of Kaliya River on the way.
Accommodation at the Hotan Guesthouse or similar (B,L&D)
-
- 8 Hotan**
Try your luck to search for a few pieces of white jade from the White Jade River. Visit the jade carving factory, Hotan silk workshop and the 500-year-old Walnut King.
Accommodation at the Hotan Guesthouse or similar (B,L&D)
-
- 9 Hotan / Kashgar** Coach
Visit the Shache King Palace and Ancient Uygur Musician Amanisha Tomb on the way. Stop at Yengisar, famous for over 400 years of knife-making. A Yengisar knife is essential for every Uygur man, who wears it around his waist. Visit a market before proceed onward to Kashgar.
Accommodation at the Seman Hotel or similar (B,L&D)
-
- 10 Kashgar / Urumqi** Approx. 1.5 hours flight
Look for your favourite souvenirs or items in the Bazaar which is the focus of activity in Kashgar. Visit Abakh Hoja's Tomb (Fragrant Concubine of Qing Dynasty Emperor Qianlong), Aidakh Mosque and a Uygur family.
Accommodation at the Hoi Tak Hotel or similar (B,L&D)
-
- 11 Urumqi / Xian** Approx. 3 hours flight
Fly to Xian - the capital of 12 dynasties in Chinese history and starting point for the great trade caravans of the ancient Silk Road. Visit the Han Dynasty Yang Tomb, the Chinese architectural style Great Mosque with its lovely gardens, and up to the Old City Walls which are built on the foundations of the walls of the Tang Forbidden City. Enjoy a Dumpling dinner.
Accommodation at the Xian Hyatt Hotel or similar (B,L&D)
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- 12 Xian / Hong Kong** Approx. 2.5 hours flight
Transfer to the airport for a flight back to Hong Kong. (B)



行程一 六天寧夏及騰格里沙漠
Itinerary One - 6 Days Ningxia & Tengger Desert

行程二 十二天塔克拉瑪干大沙漠
Itinerary Two - 12 Days Taklamakan Desert

大 Desert 漠

絲路旅遊



Silk Road Travel

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