Chinese Silk Road Taklamakan Adventure
China

The Silk Road has long passed into lore and legend. Connecting China with the unknown lands to the west, it once spanned great swathes of Central Asia, crossing nearly 6,500 kilometres of burning deserts and high mountain passes. This exceptional adventure takes us through some of the most culturally and geographically diverse landscapes along the Chinese section of the Silk Road; travelling through the harsh Taklamakan Desert to pick up both the more regularly travelled northern route, as well as the less travelled southern section. We’ll begin in Xian, home to the fabulous Terracotta Warriors and the easternmost point of the Silk Road, before moving on to explore the ancient cities that lay along its course. Along the way we will visit Tibetan Monasteries and ancient ruins, take in the Great Wall at Jiayuguan and explore the ancient Buddhist caves at Dunhuang. We continue on to Turpan, one of the lowest points on earth, and famous for its backdrop of the Flaming Mountains. Our journey then continues through Kuqa to our desert camp outside Makit. Our tour finishes in the fabled town of Kashgar - the meeting point of both northern and southern routes - and the end of this remarkable odyssey.

“I am delighted to find an adventure company that ticks all the boxes: Adventure, flexibility, and a small company independence. A refreshing change from the bigger competitors.” Diana Henderson

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<tr>
<th>Duration: 17 Days</th>
<th>Average group size: 5 - 12</th>
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<td>Start: Fri 14 Apr 17</td>
<td>Finish: Sun 30 Apr 17</td>
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Looking for alternative dates? Check the website or give us a call
TOUR DETAILS

TOUR CODE: CTK/C

HIGHLIGHTS

- Discover the ancient trading outposts of China's northern and southern Silk Roads
- Visit the Terracotta Army in Xi’an and the Great Wall at remote Jiayuguan
- Explore the great Tibetan Buddhist Monastery of Labrang at Xiahe
- Visit the Mogao Caves of Dunhuang and the historic Silk Road city of Turpan
- Camp out overnight in the Taklamakan Desert

Accommodation: As an overall ethos, wherever possible we aim to use characterful accommodation that enhances the overall travel experience, not just offers a bed for the night. This can obviously vary dramatically from country to country and from trip to trip. In China this can be a big challenge as many hotels have been built to similar standards. So on this trip you can expect comfortable stays in good hotels that offer high levels of service, although they may lack individual character. When camping overnight in the Taklamakan desert we will have tents, sleeping mats, sleeping bags, a dining tent and a toilet tent provided. Please note that the accommodation mentioned in the itinerary is intended as a guide only and is always subject to availability.

Transport: On this tour we will use minibuses & trains.

Climate: As this trip covers such an extensive range of terrain, it is hard to summarise what climate can be expected. However, in general spring and autumn are considered the best times for this journey as it avoids the desert extremes that both summer and winter bring, and at the same time offers a good chance of many fine sunny days.

Is this trip for me? It may sound obvious but Wild Frontiers tours are not always for everyone and it is important to us that the tour you choose is the most suitable. Please therefore take time to read the dossier carefully. All our tours are graded to give an overall picture of the trip but these are only guidelines and you should check the daily itinerary. Should you have any concerns about your ability to partake in any aspect of the tour then please contact the office.

Adventure Rating ★★★★★★★★★★★
Comfort Grade ★★★★★★★★★★★
Fitness Level ★★★★★★★★★★★
Cultural Interest ★★★★★★★★★★★

Additional Comments:
Please note that although this is not a physically demanding trip, it is a BIG journey including three overnight train journeys and as such can be tiring. However, anyone in a reasonable state of health, with an open mind and a sense of adventure, should be perfectly able to cope with this tour.
Day 1: Tour starts in Xi’an: After a quick freshen-up, you may wish to explore the local area and have lunch in one of the many restaurants before the tour starts this evening in the fabled city of Xi’an, once considered to be amongst the greatest cities in the world and the easternmost point of the Silk Road.

*Garden Hotel or similar (D)*

Day 2: In Xi’an: We have the whole day to explore this ancient city today. We will take in the Wild Goose Pagoda, formerly the Temple of Great Maternal Grace, a well-preserved ancient building and a holy place for Buddhists. We’ll also head to the old town where we will be able to see the massive city walls, which are 14km in length and up to 12m high, enclosing the historic centre. We’ll wander through the narrow streets of the Muslim Quarter and visit the Great Mosque, one of the oldest, largest and best-preserved Islamic mosques in China.

*Garden Hotel or similar (B,L,D)*

Day 3: Terracotta Army; overnight train to Lanzhou: A highlight of any visit to Xi’an is a visit to see the Terracotta Warriors – one of the greatest archaeological finds of the last century. Amazingly nothing was known of the existence of the life-size soldiers of the Terracotta Army until a peasant digging a well in 1974 stumbled upon them. The Emperor Qin Shi Huang Di spent most of his life until his death in 210BC constructing his burial place, conscripting thousands of people to build his tomb and the terracotta army that would guard him in the afterlife. The underground battle formations of life-sized pottery warriors, archers, horses and chariots have been left in situ in three large excavated pits. Pit number one contains over 6000 soldiers, each with its own individual facial features, and pit number two contains almost a thousand warriors and half the number of horses (also life-size). Later in the day we’ll return to Xi’an to board our overnight train heading west towards Lanzhou.

*Overnight Train (B,L,D)*

Day 4: Lanzhou - Xiahe: The capital of Gansu Province, Lanzhou was once an important link along the Northern Silk Road and a major crossing point of the Yellow River. Today it provides us with our gateway into the culturally rich landscapes of the Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau. On arrival at the train station early this morning, we continue on to Xiahe by road. Home to the famous Labrang Tibetan Buddhist Monastery, one of the largest outside Tibet, the town of Xiahe sits alongside the Daxia River, amidst a rural mountainous landscape populated largely by ethnic Tibetans.

*Labrang Civil Aviation Hotel or similar (B,L,D)*

Day 5: In Xiahe: One of the six great monasteries belonging to the Geluk (Yellow Hat) school of Tibetan Buddhism, Labrang Monastery was founded in 1790 by the first Jamyang Zhaqypa, Ngawang Tsondru. Situated at the intersection of four major Asian cultures - Tibetan, Mongolian, Han Chinese and Chinese Muslim, during the 20th century it was one of the largest Buddhist monastic universities in the world. Located at the foot of the Phoenix Mountain, the monastery boasts a collection of Buddha
Day 6: Xiahe - Lanzhou; overnight train to Jiayuguan: Returning to Lanzhou today, we catch the onward train to Jiayuguan, where we will find the first pass at the western end of the Great Wall. Before taking our train we will pay a visit to the Bingling Shi Caves on the Yellow River, which have Buddhist carvings dating back over 1500 years. The overnight journey will be in soft sleeper class compartments, arriving in the city of Jiayuguan early tomorrow morning.

Overnight Train (B,L,D)

Day 7: Arrive Jiayuguan: Arriving in Jiayuguan early this morning, we transfer to the hotel first to check in, after which the rest of the morning is free to relax at leisure. Later we’ll drive out of the city to visit the Overhanging Wall, located just a short distance to the northwest of the city’s famous fort. Located at the foot of the Black Mountains, this section of wall forms part of the defensive ramparts that once protected the extreme western edge of China. A mix of partially restored fragments and original wall, today it provides an excellent venue for a walk, providing some stunning views out across the barren emptiness of the surrounding countryside. We’ll also visit the Wei-Jin tombs that date back to 220-420 AD. Inside the tombs we can see some of the original wall paintings, depicting various social activities such as fishing, farming, hunting and drinking, including a very controversial depiction of ancient Chinese using knives and forks.

Jiayuguan International Hotel or similar (B,L,D)

Day 8: Jiayuguan - Dunhuang: Jiayuguan marked the western end of the Great Wall and today it is still a symbol of the western boundaries of China. It is located at the end of a strip of land known as the Hexi Corridor. In ancient times Jiayuguan was known as the ‘mouth’ of China while the Hexi Corridor was referred to as the ‘throat’. Jiayuguan Fort is one of the quintessential images of western China and was built in 1372 to guard the pass between the snow-capped Qilian Shan and Hei Shan peaks. It is a splendid construction and has been considered the last outpost of the Chinese Empire since the days of the Han Dynasty, when the Great Wall reached as far as the Yumen Pass, about 90km northwest of Dunhuang, our next destination.

Silk Road Dunhuang Hotel or similar (B,L,D)

Day 9: In & around Dunhuang; afternoon train to Turpan: Dunhuang was once a very important staging point, the last stop for the camel caravans before the gruelling journey through the desert. It was from here that the Silk Road divided into its northern and southern routes. Dunhuang’s fame, however, is largely due to the Mogao Grottoes, which are one of the world’s richest treasure troves of Buddhist manuscripts, wall paintings and statues known as the Thousand Buddha Caves. The site was first carved out of the cliffs in 366 AD, with more caves being hewn out until the 14th century. The honeycomb of caves runs along the cliff face and contains some 2,415 coloured clay sculptures and more than 45,000 square metres of mural paintings. Many of these were paid for by pious travellers facing the perilous journey across the vast desert, or as thanks upon their safe return to Dunhuang. The colours have remained lively due to the extremely dry climate, but natural and electric light and the humidity caused by the breath of thousands of visitors is slowly fading the precious art, so some of the caves are periodically closed. About 25-40 caves are open to the public at any one time and although guides carry a torch, it is also a good idea to take your own. In the afternoon we’ll head out to a wonderfully iconic spot – the singing sand dunes of Crescent Moon Lake. Here we can climb to the top of the enormous sand dunes for amazing views of the crystal clear spring hidden amongst the sands and enjoy the stunning views of the sunset in the desert before transferring to nearby Liiuyuan to catch a train to Turpan where we will stay the night.

Hotel Houzhou or similar (B,L,D)
Day 10: In & around Turpan: overnight train to Kuqa: Turpan is one of the lowest places on earth, where rain never falls and summers can be scorching hot. It was once an important staging post on the Silk Road and its large oasis produces the best grapes in China. Here we can see the ancient karez system of irrigation whereby the melted snow from the surrounding mountains is brought down to the town in underground channels, all dug by hand and stretching some 3000km. This is similar to the Arab falaj system or the Iranian qanat. We’ll also visit the 18th Century Emin Minaret built in Afghani style. During our time here we’ll visit the fascinating ghost city of Jiaohe, the ancient capital of the Jushi people, a city founded in the 2nd century BC but abandoned in 14th century AD, following its destruction by the Mongols. It stands on an isolated plateau and has a haunting silhouette and atmosphere. Among the ruins are remains of a large Buddhist stupa and headless stucco figures are set in niches adorning the central part of the main temple. From here we take our final overnight train all the way out of Gansu Province into Xinjiang, once known as Chinese Turkestan.

Overnight Train (B,L,D)

Day 11: In & around Kuqa: This morning we arrive in the Uighur town of Kuqa, part of an ancient Buddhist kingdom that was located along a branch of the Silk Route that ran across the northern edge of the Taklamakan Desert. Birthplace of the 4th Century linguist Kumarajiva, one of Chinese Buddhism’s most revered scholars, it prospered from the wealth of the trade caravans. Huge monasteries were built here and during the Tang dynasty it was one of the ‘Four Garrisons’ of An-hsi, the ‘pacified west’. The extensive ruins of the ancient capital (Subash) lie to the north of modern Kuqa. On arrival we’ll make a tour of the city, taking in the 2nd and 3rd Century ruins of Subash, as well as parts of the old town.

Lidu Hotel or similar (B,L,D)

Day 12: Kuqa - Aksu: Leaving Kuqa this morning we head west towards the famous Kizil Thousand Buddha Caves. Dating back to the 5th and 6th Centuries, this remarkable series of caves are said to be the earliest major Buddhist cave complex in China, older even than those at Mogao. Filled with frescoes and sculptures, the caves have been linked to the ancient Tocharian Kingdom and of the original 235 caves, some 135 remain still relatively intact. After our visit we then continue on to the oasis city of Aksu on the northern edge of the Tarim Basin. Lying at the crossroads of trade routes, the city was fought over for centuries by the Chinese Tang, the Tibetan Tufan and the Uighurs, before falling to the forces of Genghis Khan in 1208.

Hongfu Jinlan Hotel or similar (B,L,D)

Day 13: Aksu - Makit - Kumikisa village - Desert Camp: Leaving early this morning, we take the Taklamakan desert road on to Makit County situated amongst one of the most arid and desolate climates anywhere on earth. The Taklamakan covers an area of some 337,000 square kilometres and translates as ‘The Desert of Death’ or ‘The Point of no Return’. One of the highlights of our journey, today’s drive takes us through just a small portion of this incredible landscape, offering a chance to experience for ourselves something of the harsh reality that faced the caravans of old as they made their way towards the markets of Yarkent and Kashgar. We will explore Kumikisa Village and then take our own ‘ships of the desert’ - the camel - and ride into the desert where we camp for the night enjoying the remote beauty of this area.

Desert Camp (B,L,D)

Day 14: Desert Camp - Kumikisa Village - Makit - Yarkent - Kashgar: After watching sunrise and breakfasting in the desert we return to the site of the Kumikisa Village by camel (optional by camel or 4x4). We then head across the Taklamakan Desert to Yarkent. This fertile oasis is a Uighur settlement fed by the waters of the Yarkand River, whose irrigated farmland produces cotton, wheat, pomegranates and pears. Once an important stop on the southern branch of the Silk Road, the city has a long tradition of silk weaving, earthenware crafts and minority music. Today we will visit ancient Yarkent to see the Golden Mosque built in 1533 and the Altun Mosque famed for its beautiful painted ceilings, and built by Abdureshidhan son of Sultan Saidhan. We will also visit the Amani Sahan Mausoleum built in honour of this great poet. We then
continue our journey on to Kashgar, one of the Silk Road’s most famous cities.
Tian Yuan International Hotel or similar (B,L,D)

Day 15: In & around Kashgar: There will be ample time for personal exploration in this Silk Road city which sits today, as it has done for centuries, at a major crossroads of trade routes. We will of course see the somewhat controversial statue of Chairman Mao in the city centre, as well as visiting the green-tiled Abak Hoja tomb in the quiet suburbs. In the afternoon we will return to the centre of Kashgar and visit the Id Kah Mosque, one of the largest in Central Asia.
Tian Yuan International Hotel or similar (B,L,D)

Day 16: In & around Kashgar: This morning we will visit the famous Yakshambe Bazaar, or the Sunday Market as it’s otherwise known. Here we spend the morning watching the locals trade everything from woodwork and iron wear to sheep, donkeys, cattle, horses and camels. The afternoon will be free to explore the city or maybe take a cup of tea in one of the old chaikhanas, watching the locals going about their everyday lives in the street markets. In the evening we will regroup to head out for our final night in China.
Tian Yuan International Hotel or similar (B,L,D)

Day 17: Tour ends in Kashgar: The tour ends after breakfast.

Extensions: If you have more time available, why not arrive early to adjust to a new time zone or just to get a feel for the country before your tour starts? Or alternatively you might choose to allow a few extra days after the tour to relax or to undertake some further exploration.

The choice is completely yours and we can usually arrange anything from simply additional accommodation and transfers to full tailor-made itineraries.

Here is just a small sample of what you could do:-

Beijing: If you’ve never been to Beijing before then why not take this opportunity to spend an extra couple of nights here and pay a visit to the astounding Forbidden City and the nearby Great Wall. Allow 2-3 days.

Kazakhstan: Why not visit one of Central Asia’s least known countries with a visit to the capital, Almaty, and the stunning Charyn Canyon where you can marvel at the rock formations. Allow approx. 2 days

Kyrgyzstan & Uzbekistan: If you have the time, then why not continue in the footsteps of the old Silk Road travellers and cross the Irkeshtam Pass* to Kyrgyzstan and on to Osh, the Ferghana Valley and the wonders of Uzbekistan. *This pass is subject to sporadic closure so please check with us first if considering this option. Allow approx. 10 days.

Please contact the office for more details and to discuss your individual requirements.

PRICING

Tour price: All our tours are priced on a land-only basis, giving you maximum flexibility when deciding how to get to and from your tour. For the latest prices, please refer to our website or contact the office.

Travelling Solo & Single Supplements: As a company approximately 70% of our clients are solo travellers, so it’s very unlikely you’ll be alone!

Our prices are typically based on twin-share accommodation but single supplements are not compulsory for any Wild Frontiers tour. If you prefer not to pay a single supplement we’ll pair you with someone else of the same sex for you to share with throughout the trip.

On this trip, if you do opt to pay for a single supplement then please note that it will cover you for all nights of the tour including the camping night, when you would get your own tent.

Flights: If you would like us to send you a quote for the suggested tour flight (see GETTING THERE) or on any alternative flight that may suit you better, please let us know although it should be noted that in most cases we are only able to quote on flights originating in the UK.
Please remember that all Wild Frontiers tour prices mean NO hidden extras, NO local payments and NO compulsory single supplements.

WHAT IS INCLUDED?

- Full services of a Wild Frontiers Tour Leader with local guides and drivers
- Meal plan as detailed in the itinerary (B=Breakfast, L=Lunch, D=Dinner) with drinking water as required with the majority of meals being taken in local restaurants where viable
- All transport as outlined in the itinerary.
- All accommodation
- 2-man dome tents while camping
- Foam mats while camping
- All entrance fees, as per itinerary
- A carbon-offsetting contribution to Carbon Clear (if booking international flights through WF office)

WHAT IS NOT INCLUDED

- Visas (if applicable)
- Local airport taxes
- Tips (always optional, but some guidance will be given in the pre-departure information pack you’ll receive after booking)
- Beverages other than drinking water & any costs of a personal nature
- International flights to/from the start/finish of the trip
- Airport transfers (unless booking suggested flights through WF office)

GETTING THERE

For this trip our suggested flights from the UK (subject to change) are:

13APR CZ787 LHR-AMS 08:40/11:00
13APR CZ308 AMS-CAN 13:30/06:50+1
14APR CZ3203 CAN-XIY 09:15/11:50
30APR CZ6997 KHG-URC 13:30/15:20
30APR CZ6905 URC-PEK 17:30/21:05
01MAY CZ345 PEK-AMS 00:50/05:40
01MAY CZ7679 AMS-LHR 07:15/07:40+1

Key:
LHR - London Heathrow
AMS - Amsterdam
CAN - Guangzhou
PEK - Beijing
XIY - Xi’an
KHG - Kashgar
URC - Urumqi

CZ - China Southern

NB If you wish to arrange your own flights you are completely free to do so and in this case we can arrange any transfers or supplementary accommodation that you may require.

Please note that if you are planning on making your own flight arrangements, we recommend that you first check with us to see if the trip is guaranteed. We then suggest that you purchase flights that are flexible and ideally refundable as due to the nature of adventure travel, itineraries and destination accessibility can change at any time. For more information, please refer to our booking conditions.

Insurance: Insurance that provides cover for emergency repatriation in case of a medical emergency is compulsory for all tours. You should be aware that due to some of the geographical areas visited and some of the activities included on certain of our trips some standard insurance policies may not always provide adequate cover. As such we strongly recommend that you purchase a policy that adequately covers your trip.

Travel & General offer a tailor-made policy that provides cover for all Wild Frontiers trips. Under this policy there are two different levels of cover available - Standard and Elite.

Cover explained:

Standard policy: a comprehensive travel insurance policy that provides cover for all Wild Frontiers activities, including trekking up to 6,000m. This policy does not provide cover for travel to areas where the FCO is advising against all or all but essential travel except where it has been previously agreed.

Elite policy: provides the same comprehensive level of cover as the standard policy. In addition the Elite policy also provides cover for travel to areas where the FCO is advising against all or all but essential travel. Except in the case of terrorism, the policy will not provide cover for any claims arising from or relating to the reasons why the FCO is advising against travel.
For this trip the minimum requirement would be the **Standard policy**.

These policies are only available to those travelling on a Wild Frontiers holiday and can be purchased on a trip-specific basis or annual cover. For more information please refer to the details on our website [www.wildfrontierstravel.com/insurance](http://www.wildfrontierstravel.com/insurance) or by calling Travel & General direct on +44 (0) 20 3794 2954. This insurance is available to EEA residents (i.e. EU countries as well as Iceland, Lichtenstein and Norway) up to the age of 78. It covers horse riding, mountain walking, trekking, white-water rafting and all other activities we offer as part of our tours.

If you are over 78 then you may still be able to get your insurance arranged by Travel & General Insurance Services Limited. Please contact us for assistance with this.

If you do decide to purchase alternative insurance, then you must ensure that it covers you for **every aspect** of this trip.

Wild Frontiers Limited is an Introducer Appointed Representative of Travel & General Insurance Service Ltd, details of which can be found at the website of the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) [www.fca.org.uk](http://www.fca.org.uk)

Please note that no insurance policy will cover every eventuality and terms and conditions will apply in the event of any claim.

**Visas:** Visas are necessary for many of the destinations we travel to and while we aim to provide you with the most up-to-date information, requirements frequently change and as such for the latest advice we advise that you check with the relevant embassies or contact our recommended visa agency for this trip, details of which are below:-

**Travcour**
Tel: +44 (0) 20 8543 1846  
[www.travcour.com](http://www.travcour.com)

For this tour, UK passport holders currently require a visa for China.

Non-UK passport holders or non-UK residents should contact the relevant embassies for individual requirements.

Further details will be sent out to you on booking, however ensuring that correct and valid visas are obtained remains the sole responsibility of the client.

**Responsible Travel:** Responsible travel and sustainable tourism are fundamental ideas that Wild Frontiers has been committed to since our birth. It is our strong belief that these words should not be simply ‘tagged on’ to dossiers and websites but should be at the very core of each trip, and our adventures are therefore designed with the local people, culture and eco-system in mind. We believe that a successful trip not only delivers a unique and unsurpassable journey for our clients, but that it also benefits the peoples whose lands we are privileged to visit.

In 2012 we were delighted to be awarded the Guardian Observer Best Ethical Travel Award.

[The Guardian Observer Best Ethical Travel Award](http://www.wildfrontierstravel.com/rt)

**The Wild Frontiers Foundation:**
Supporting communities has always played a huge part of the Wild Frontiers’ ethos and from the outset we have contributed to projects in many of the places we visit. However in 2009 we decided to take things a step further by setting up our own charitable foundation. Through the Wild Frontiers Foundation, we have not only developed our own community projects but also - by working closely with certain carefully selected charity partners - helped fund the invaluable work they do throughout the developing world. With our mandate firmly based on education and sustainability we established our first project in 2010 in the remote Northern Pakistan village of Baleygon, where around 100 children are now being educated in a
Working with charity partners we have also established a number of e-learning centres in schools across Ethiopia, sponsored an English class in rural Northern Laos and funded hospitality traineeships for a number of young people from the Kolkata slums in India. Where practicable, Wild Frontiers clients will have the opportunity to visit our projects whilst on tour.

Visit www.wildfrontiersfoundation.org to see details of all our projects, along with ways you can get involved by taking on the challenge of a charity trek, attending our fundraising events or simply giving what you can. Other ongoing fundraising schemes include:-

**Go Paperless:** For UK-based clients who are happy for all their final travel documents to be sent by email rather than through the post, Wild Frontiers will donate £5 from each booking to the Foundation.

**Kit Out for Kids:** Nomad Travel Stores generously donates 5% of purchases by Wild Frontiers’ clients to the Foundation. Quote WF1000 either online or in store when purchasing clothing and kit and Nomad will give you 20% off full priced clothing and kit, plus the charitable donation. Visit www.nomadtravel.co.uk

**The Environment:** Trying to do our bit for the environment, in 2005 we were among the first UK-based travel companies to automatically offset every client’s international flight (if booked with us) with a payment to Carbon Clear to help promote sustainable energy. To read more about the work of Carbon Clear, please follow this link:- www.carbon-clear.com

**AITO Membership:** Wild Frontiers is a member of AITO, the Association of Independent Tour Operators. AITO’s charter states that its exclusive members strive to create overseas holidays with high levels of professionalism and a shared concern for quality and personal service. The Association encourages the highest standards in all aspects of tour operating. AITO sets criteria regarding ownership, finance and quality which must be satisfied before new companies are admitted to membership. All members are required to adhere to a Code of Business Practice which encourages high operational standards and conduct.

**British Foreign & Commonwealth Office:** The travel advice of the British Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO) highlights potential hazards people might experience when travelling abroad and as an advocate of their “Know Before You Go” campaign we strongly suggest that you refer to it before booking and contact us if you have any queries or concerns. Details can be found on the website below.

Non-UK citizens should consult the travel advice of their respective governments.
Wild Frontiers Community

If you’re still not sure if this trip is right or just want to see get some different perspectives, then why not have a look at the wide variety of resources we have on our website?

Clients’ Views: See what other travellers have said about our trips - www.wildfrontierstravel.com/views

Blogs: See what our tour-leaders, staff and clients have posted from the road - www.wildfrontierstravel.com/blog

Videos: They may not find their way on the list for Oscars nominations but we have an extensive (and growing) collection of short videos giving you an insight in many of our destinations - www.wildfrontierstravel.com/video

Photos: Our popular “Photo of the month” competition has added to the vast gallery of photos we already have from around the world. See them here - www.wildfrontierstravel.com/photos

Events: From time to time we hold informal presentations, photo exhibitions and dinner evenings mainly in the London area. To find out more see here - www.wildfrontierstravel.com/events

Wild Miles Club: Everyone that has booked a trip directly with us will become an automatic member of the Wild Miles Club gaining instant access to a range of exclusive discounts from a variety of travel partners from bookshops to outdoor clothing shops. In addition, regular direct bookers will earn “Wild Miles” which can earn you up to 10% in discounts off of all tours. For more information visit this page - www.wildfrontierstravel.com/wild-miles

Facebook: Keep up to date with the latest news and special offers by liking our Facebook page - www.facebook.com/wildfrontiers

CHINA - THE FACTS

The Silk Road: Lasting almost 2000 years, the Silk Road is surely ‘the most romantic and culturally important trade route in the history of the world.’ The term itself is in fact something of a misnomer for there was never one ‘road’ but a labyrinth of tracks and trails treading their way from Xi’an in central China, across the mountains and deserts of Central Asia, and on to the great markets of Byzantium and Rome. The need for strong horses (see ‘Heavenly Horses’ section) and the desire to be clothed in the mysterious Chinese fabric were what gave birth to the trade route but it soon developed into a thriving thoroughfare of people and commerce, carrying all manner of things along its path. As well as silk, from the east came porcelain, paper, tea, lacquer-ware, perfumes and medicinal herbs; while from the west came gold, silver, ivory, jade, wool, horses, coloured glass, walnuts, cucumbers, grapes, wine and spices. But it wasn’t only goods the caravans carried; just as importantly, through the traders and their escorts’ ideas, religions and technologies were spread across the world. Caravans seldom travelled the road’s entire length, but instead carried their goods only a certain stage of the overall journey before handing them on to others. As a result, great cities sprang up where agents, contract makers and brokers - the Silk Road’s middlemen - became rich on the trade. Much of their glory can still be seen today. But in the end the opening of the sea routes, with their quicker, safer and ultimately cheaper, means of transport caused the great Silk Road’s demise. That said, since the break-up of the Soviet Union and the thawing in relations between China and
the newly-formed Central Asian states, the route is once again being plied and it is not unusual to see trucks from Turkey, Iran and even Italy thundering down the road between Samarkand and Bukhara where once the languorous camels wandered.

Xi’an: Located in central China in Shaanxi Province is the cultural city of Xi’an, one of China’s ancient capitals. Its temperate climate, abundance of rainfall and soft loess soil has attracted settlements since the Paleolithic Era. The Xian area has been the pivot of Chinese civilisation for much of the past 3,500 years and historically was the starting point of the Silk Road which stretched all the way though western China, Central Asia and the Middle East to the Mediterranean Sea. Xi’an was founded as capital by Qin Shi Huang Di, who united and subjugated the Warring States and formed China in 221 B.C., declaring himself the first Emperor of China. The Emperor standardized Chinese writing, bureaucracy, law, currency, weights and measures, and built an extensive system of roads. He also connected and extended the old fortification walls dating from 700 BC, creating the Great Wall of China whose aim was to keep out the invading barbarians from the north.

Jiayuguan & The Great Wall: The Great Wall of China, one of the greatest wonders of the world, was enlisted in the World Heritage by UNESCO in 1987. Stretching approximately 6,700km (4,163 miles) from east to west of China, this spectacular wonder traverses mountains, deserts and grasslands. Although a magnificent accomplishment, ‘The Longest Cemetery on Earth’, as it was known, was not achieved without losses. It is estimated that hundreds of thousands of labourers died whilst constructing this fortress and legend has it that parts of the wall itself are built from their bones.

The ‘original’ wall was begun during the Qin dynasty (221-207 BC), when China was unified under Emperor Qin Shi Huang. The emperor decided to link numerous walls, which had been constructed by independent kingdoms over the years with the aim of fending off the marauding nomads.

Since then, the Great Wall has served as a monument of the Chinese nation throughout history. Although it never quite lived up to its impenetrable status, it did provide a successful route for the Chinese to transport equipment across the mountainous terrain. Many lives were lost in the construction and continual reconstruction of the wall over the years, and much of it is now in ruins or has been entirely destroyed. That said, it is still one of the most popular attractions in the world today, and its architectural grandeur and historical significance will leave you with a lasting impression that will never be surpassed.

Turpan: Turpan is one of those legendary Silk Road names whose reputation precedes it. As an oasis town in the Turpan Basin - 154m below sea level and the second lowest place on earth - its various settlements have long been a stopover on the ancient trading route, as they will be for us. Although the surrounding area is hot and inhospitable, this oasis was formed by the transportation of ground
water through underground irrigation channels connecting long lines of wells leading to the surrounding hills. Some of the karez were built 2000 years ago and have been maintained ever since. This resulting fertile land has provided the perfect environment for fruit growing, and the many grape vines which have enveloped the surrounding buildings offer well-needed shade from the blistering sun (the highest recorded temperature was 49.6 °C).

The Taklamakan Desert: Lying to the west of the Gobi and sandwiched between the ancient routes of both the northern and southern branches of the Silk Road, the Taklamakan Desert is one of the largest on the planet. Spanning nearly 340,000 square kilometres, it is one of the largest shifting sand deserts in the world, with dunes that reach almost 200 metres high in some parts. Steeped in legend and almost entirely devoid of vegetation, few travellers will risk crossing its vast sea of golden sands. Stories are told of lost treasures buried deep in the heart of the desert and in the late 1980s, archaeologists unearthed mummies that were dated back over 4,000 years, many of them exhibiting Caucasoid features and wearing European fabrics. The driest and warmest desert in the country, temperatures in the Taklamakan can swing between extremes of highs and lows, varying between 20-30 degrees from daytime to night time temperatures. In spite of these extremes though it can still boast small populations of wildlife including wild Asian ass, fox, gazelle and one of the last group of wild Bactrian camels left anywhere.

Turpan: Turpan is China’s Death Valley. At 154m below sea level, it’s the second-lowest depression in the world and the hottest spot in China. In July and August temperatures soar above 40°C, forcing the local population and visiting tourists into a state of semi-torpor. Despite the heat, the ground water and fertile soil of the Turpan depression has made this a veritable oasis in the desert, evidenced by the nearby centuries-old remains of ancient cities, imperial garrisons and Buddhist caves. Though the Turpan area has been inhabited for thousands of years, and was once an important oasis on the northern Silk Road, ruled and coveted by the Xiongnu, Han, Tiele, Tibetans and Uighurs, the new town is a fairly recent creation; the historic sites are scattered in the surrounding basin.

Kashgar: During the heyday of the Silk Road, Kashgar was vitally an important oasis town forming a sanctuary for travellers heading to or from the dangerous lands of the Taklamakan Desert that lie immediately to the east. But it wasn’t just from China and Europe that the travellers came. Kashgar sits at a natural junction with the ancient trade routes through the Karakoram Mountains to India and the southern seas. From here the traders also journeyed, carrying fine cloth, cashmere, spices, jade, coral, pearls and precious gems. Hence a great market sprung up. The geography hasn’t changed and though its importance may have waned in recent times, the bazaar still thrives today.
How to book:

In order to confirm your booking we need to have a completed signed booking form for each client together with a £400 deposit per person. You can either return your booking form to us by post or by booking online at www.wildfrontierstravel.com

You can contact the office by email to info@wildfrontierstravel.com or we are very happy to take your call on +44 (0) 20 7736 3968.

Protection for you money:

The Association of Bonded Travel Organisers Trust Limited (ABTOT) provides financial protection under the Package Travel, Package Holidays and Package Tours Regulations 1992 for Wild Frontiers, and in the event of their insolvency, protection is provided for the following:

1. non-flight packages commencing in and returning to the UK;
2. non-flight packages commencing and returning to a country other than the UK; and
3. flight inclusive packages that commence outside of the UK, which are sold to customers outside of the UK.

1, 2 and 3 provides for a refund in the event you have not yet travelled. 1 and 3 provides for repatriation. Please note that bookings made outside the UK are only protected by ABTOT when purchased directly with Wild Frontiers.

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We recommend that you take out adequate travel insurance at the time of booking in the event that you are no longer able to travel as all deposits are non-refundable - full booking conditions can be found on the booking form and online at our website.

As I’m sure you can appreciate, Wild Frontiers trips can be quite complex affairs to arrange and certain elements (such as permits, visa authorisations, trains and flights) may need to be requested several months in advance. As such, wherever possible, we would encourage you to plan ahead and book early to avoid disappointment. Moreover, by booking early you are always guaranteed to get the best price with us as we will automatically offer you a retrospective discount if we happen to reduce the price of the tour later on. For further details, please refer to www.wildfrontierstravel.com/price-guarantee

Further information:

When you make a confirmed booking with Wild Frontiers we will send you a pre-departure information pack giving you details on visas, health and vaccinations, packing lists, suggested reading on the region, photography and other useful tips to make your trip more enjoyable.
Why Wild Frontiers?

Wild Frontiers is proud to have been regularly voted one of the top ten tour operators by readers of Wanderlust Travel Magazine over the last ten years. A number of our innovative itineraries have been included in National Geographic Traveller Magazine's “Trips of a Lifetime”, and our acclaimed Tour Leaders regularly feature in the Wanderlust World Guide Awards, with Mark Steadman winning gold in 2015. Responsible travel has always been incredibly important to us, so we were delighted to be awarded Best Ethical Tour Operator by The Guardian/Observer in 2012.

We are frequently asked what makes Wild Frontiers different from other tour operators. Below are a few of the factors that we believe set us apart from our competitors and form the reasons as to why our clients travel with us again and again...

Personal Service & Expertise: Our London office is manned by experienced expedition leaders and most trips we run stem from our first-hand knowledge - in short, we run the kind of holidays that as passionate travellers, we like to do ourselves. When you ring our office, you can be guaranteed to chat to someone who knows the region and the terrain and is able to offer sound and practical advice.

Authentic, Cutting-Edge Experiences: Our unique, original itineraries allow you to take journeys that venture beneath the surface of the region. We rarely run any group tour more than a couple of times a year and they are typically on routes we have discovered for ourselves, meaning we are able to give a truly authentic, off-the-beaten-track experience.

Be the First: Our style of travel is all about exploration, and nothing excites us more than opening up new routes to genuine travellers, even if that makes our job harder at times! We keep abreast of new destinations and are often the first to return to places that have vanished from the tourist map. We were the first back into Pakistan after 9/11, the first to return to Kashmir after a decade of tourist isolation, and amongst the first to run a commercial travel trip to Afghanistan for almost 30 years. Since then we have helped bring Colombia, Iran, Georgia and Bangladesh back into the tourist fold, specialising in ground-breaking reconnaissance trips and imaginative expeditions.

Small Group Size: On our escorted tours, we believe it is imperative to keep the group sizes small. Most trips are limited to an average maximum of 12 travellers, thus giving you more access to fragile cultures, better opportunities to interact with local people, and the knowledge you are making less of an impact while there. “Having been a bit apprehensive about joining a group as a single traveller, I found myself surrounded by interesting, friendly, helpful people who I hope to catch up with again on future trips.” Angela Chick, Kashmir Group Tour

Cost of Group Tours: We believe in an honest, upfront pricing structure so you know exactly what the tour will cost before you book. On our group tours we avoid local payments, ‘optional extras’ or forcing our clients to go through the annoying procedure of splitting every meal bill. Our tours are provided on a predominantly full board basis, with drinking water, government permits, entrance fees and transport all included.

Our clients: Your companions can make or break a trip, and it’s lucky therefore that our clients are often our greatest asset. Travelling to remote regions is not for everyone, and as such we tend to attract open-minded travellers looking for genuine experiences, and a desire to reach those hard to get to places.

Responsible Travel: Awarded 5 star status by AITO (Association of Independent Tour operators), responsible tourism (RT) has always been an integral part of our company ethos and our adventures are designed with the local people, culture and eco-system in mind. In 2012 we were awarded the Guardian Observer Best Ethical Travel Award. For further details please refer to the RT section of our website - www.wildfrontierstravel.com/rt