



**China's Silk Road & Tibet:
Route of Monks & Merchants
2020**



China's Silk Road & Tibet: Route of Monks & Merchants

An Expedition from Kashgar to Lhasa

Two departures in 2020 – Cultural Series – 18 Days

May 8-25 • October 9-26

On this comprehensive overland journey along a segment of the old Silk Road, begin in Western China, experiencing the Kashgar Sunday Animal Market, where merchants sell everything from ducks to sheep. Hop a train on its way east to Turpan's lush Grape Valley, watered by a 2,000-year-old irrigation system, and Dunhuang's Mogao Caves, frescoed and carved with a thousand images of the Buddha. Ride the high-altitude train from Xining, formerly the capital of the Tibetan province of Amdo, up to Lhasa, and one of Tibet's most iconic sites, the Potala Palace. Explore the Tibetan Plateau on a splendid route that embraces the sacred cities of Gyantse and Shigatse, as well as Lhasa, "City of the Sun."



Daily Itinerary

Day 1, Friday	Arrive Kashgar, China
Day 2, Saturday	Kashgar
Day 3, Sunday	Kashgar • Sunday Animal Market • train to Turpan
Day 4, Monday	Turpan
Day 5, Tuesday	Turpan
Day 6, Wednesday	Turpan • train to Liuyuan • Dunhuang
Day 7, Thursday	Dunhuang
Day 8, Friday	Dunhuang
Day 9, Saturday	Dunhuang • Liuyuan • train to Xining
Day 10, Sunday	Xining
Day 11, Monday	Xining • board train to Lhasa
Day 12, Tuesday	Lhasa, Tibet
Day 13, Wednesday	Lhasa • Yamdrok Lake • Gyantse
Day 14, Thursday	Gyantse • Shigatse
Day 15, Friday	Shigatse • Lhasa
Day 16, Saturday	Lhasa
Day 17, Sunday	Lhasa
Day 18, Monday	Depart Lhasa



MIR Signature Experiences

- Experience the vibrant bustle and chaos of Kashgar's legendary Sunday Animal Market with its brilliant conjunction of traders, clients and living merchandise.
- Venture to Crescent Moon Lake, bubbling up in the midst of desert dunes at the foot of Mingsha ("Echoing Sand") Mountain, and explore astride a camel.
- Admire the UNESCO-listed Mogao Caves, which present a thousand-year study in the development of Buddhist art in China.
- Browse the grand Tibetan Medicine and Culture Museum, containing fascinating artifacts and information about ancient Tibet from 4,000 years ago.
- Drive from Lhasa through the Tibetan highlands to sacred Yamdrok Lake, said to be the incarnation of a goddess.
- Visit the remarkable Kumbum Stupa, the highlight of the Pelkhor Chode Monastery compound.

Tour Highlights

Kashgar Turpan	Kashgar Sunday Animal Market, Id Kah Mosque, Fragrant Concubine's Tomb Ruins of Jiaohe, Emin Minaret, underground tombs of Astana, Flaming Mountains, Bezeklik Thousand Buddha Caves, Turpan Museum, Grape Valley, meal with a Uihgur family including special cultural performance
Dunhuang	Mogao Caves (UNESCO World Heritage Site), camel riding on Mingsha dunes, Crescent Moon Lake
Xining	Capital of Qinghai Province at 7,000 feet, gold, blue and red Ta'er Monastery, 14th century Dongguan Mosque, Tibetan Medicine and Culture Museum
High-altitude train	Spectacular views of the Tibetan plateau, Tangula Station, the world's highest railway station
Yamdrok Lake	Sacred turquoise lake and place of pilgrimage
Gyantse	Pelkhor Chode Monastery, Kumbum Stupa, Gyantse Dzong (fortress and inactive monastery), Old Town
Shigatse	Tashilhunpo Monastery, seat of the Panchen Lama, 85-foot tall statue of Maitreya Buddha
Lhasa	Potala Palace and Norbulingka (UNESCO World Heritage Sites), Jokhang Mona- stery, Barkhor Market, Sera Monastery, Pabonka Monastery, Chupsang Nunnery

Daily Itinerary

Day One, Friday
Arrive Kashgar, China

Arrive in Kashgar, China, and transfer to a city-center hotel. In the evening, gather for a **welcome dinner** at the hotel or a nearby restaurant.

Meals: D – *Radisson Blu Kashgar or similar*



Day Two, Saturday
Kashgar



China's westernmost city, 2,000-year-old **Kashgar** is unlike any other place in China. The fabled city greeted Marco Polo and countless Silk Road travelers as they entered the Middle Kingdom. While its previous glory as a trading center has all but disappeared, Kashgar retains the exotic air and immense appeal of medieval Asia. Hemmed in by the desert and the Pamir Mountains, the Kashgar of today is a rich mix of peoples and cultures.

Kashgar's population is made up in great part by the Turkic Uighur people prevalent in western China rather than the majority Han Chinese. Both the northern and southern caravan routes around the Taklamakan Desert converged at the Kashgar oasis. Kashgar is one of the most isolated cities in the world and boasts a huge Sunday market. It is also home to the largest mosque in China, and one of the only remaining statues of Mao Zedong.

Start with the **Id Kah Mosque**, the biggest in China. Originally built on a smaller scale in 1442, the complex today includes a shady courtyard, a hall of prayer and a gate tower. This is where Muslims from all over the province come to celebrate festivals and holy days.

Visit the Abakh Khoja Tomb, also known as the **Fragrant Concubine's Tomb**, named in memory of Abakh Khoja's granddaughter, Iparhan. Reminiscent of Central Asia's ornamental and architectural style, this beautiful mausoleum shelters the remains of five generations of the same family.

Explore **Kashgar's Old Town**, walking up ancient dirt lanes between mud-brick Uighur houses with ladders leading up to the roofs and the houses above. Please note, in recent years, much of the Old Town has been demolished and replaced with more modern, tourist-friendly architecture. While lacking the history and authenticity of the original town structure, the "New" Old Town still manages to preserve plenty of the charm of old-time Kashgar. Meals: B, L, D – Radisson Blu Kashgar or similar



Day Three, Sunday

Kashgar • Sunday Animal Market • train to Turpan

Spend the morning at the unrivaled **Sunday Animal Market**. Here, you can find anything from a herd of fat-tailed sheep to a single camel ready for a test drive. The animal market still retains much of the feel of a Silk Road bazaar.

Depending on train times, you may have the opportunity to spend some time at the Kashgar main **Sunday Market** as well. This bazaar with its brilliant blend of peoples and its chaotic bustle is without equal. Here you can find traditional silks, musical instruments, hand-crafted knives, embroidered hats and an amazing variety of fruits, nuts and livestock.

After touring today, depart by second-class overnight train (four travelers per compartment, possibly mixed-sexes) to Turpan. This program is designed to be an up-close and authentic Chinese railway adventure, and makes use of four-berth cabins which you will share with other group members. As the most accessible mode of domestic long-distance transportation for a huge number of Chinese travelers, Chinese trains tend to be well populated in all classes. **Please be prepared** for close quarters, shared WC facilities, and the occasional inconveniences of adventurous rail travel.

Meals: B, L, D – On board overnight train



Day Four, Monday

Turpan

Arrive in **Turpan** this morning, and take some time to rest and refresh at the hotel before starting the day's touring.

Turpan, the hottest city in China, is located in what is known as the "Valley of Fruits." The wine grapes that are cultivated here are irrigated with a 2,000-year-old gravity-fed system that brings water from the glaciers of the Tien Shan. Turpan was a welcome oasis on the northern Silk Road, its green fields surrounded by one of the deepest waterless depressions on earth. During the Han Dynasty, from 202 BC to



220 AD, its sister cities of Jiaohe and Gaochang were famous trade and defensive centers. Their ruins remain in the desert near Turpan.

The **Turpan Museum**, built in 1990, exhibits cultural artifacts ranging from the Paleolithic Age until the present day. Some of the most interesting displays are the mummified remains from nearby



archaeological sites, including the Astana Tombs. The extreme conditions of the Turpan depression, the hottest and driest place in China, have helped to preserve everything in the burial vaults, including the food for the trip into the afterlife. Books, linen and silk clothing, small figurines, coins and sometimes murals surrounded the bodies, which are as well preserved as Egyptian mummies.

Explore the ruined city of **Jiaohe**, built in the second century and eventually abandoned after it was decimated by the Mongols in the 13th century. Located six miles west of Turpan, Jiaohe stands on an island surrounded by two small rivers. “Jiaohe” literally means, “confluence of two rivers.”



The 144-foot **Emin Minaret** was built of wood and mud-brick in 1777. Looming over the Uighur Mosque near Turpan, the graceful, tapering minaret shows the fusion of Islamic and Uighur styles of architecture and decorative art.

About eight miles outside of Turpan, between two stark, red-clay cliffs, is a narrow valley overflowing with greenery. In **Grape Valley**, melons, peaches and pomegranates thrive, but the stars of the show are the rows of vines and their grapes. In August, the air is fragrant with their sweetness; the hot and dry desert conditions give the grapes a very high concentration of sugar. Of the many varieties of red, white and

purple grapes, the favored white, seedless Wuhebai, sometimes called the “green pearl,” can have a sugar content as high as 22%.



Grape Valley is laced with shady, trellised walkways heavy with grapes where people congregate in August, when the grapes are ripe. Up the hill are well-ventilated brick drying rooms for the tons of raisins made here every year.

Tonight, enjoy **dinner with a Uighur family including a special cultural performance.**

Meals: B, L, D – *Shuangcheng Hotel or similar*

Day Five, Tuesday

Turpan

Continue touring this morning with a visit to the underground **tombs of Astana** that protected the bodies of the residents of ancient Gaochang since the third century.



The red sandstone gullies of the barren **Flaming Mountains** absorb the heat of the sun and radiate it back out into the Turpan Basin, helping to make it the hottest place on earth.

Next, visit the **Bezeklik Thousand Buddha Caves**. In 366 AD, a Buddhist monk from India scooped out the compacted red sand of a riverbank to form the first of the Thousand Buddha Caves 35 miles from modern-day Turpan. Pilgrims began to arrive to see the wonderful fresco of the Buddha that he painted in his cave, and stayed to dig and decorate more caves. Although some of the finest frescoes were cut away and shipped to Europe by early 20th-century explorers, and others defaced by Muslims objecting to the depiction of human forms, many remain on the walls of the labyrinth.

Dinner tonight is at a local restaurant.

Meals: B, L, D – *Shuangcheng Hotel or similar*

Day Six, Wednesday

Turpan • train to Liuyuan • Dunhuang

Depart by fast day train to the city of Liuyuan, the gateway to Dunhuang, which does not itself have train service. After the 3.5 hour train ride, the drive through the countryside is about 2 hours to Dunhuang, so arrival this afternoon should be towards late afternoon.

The oasis town of **Dunhuang** was founded during the Han Dynasty in 111 BC. It was one of four Chinese garrisons meant to control the trade routes to the west. Situated at the western end of the Hexi Corridor, which snakes between North Mountain and Qilian Mountain, Dunhuang became one of the most important towns on the Silk Road. The road from Xi'an divided at Dunhuang into two routes around the Taklamakan Desert.



Ancient travelers, whether traders, pilgrims or ambassadors, had to pass through Dunhuang on their way to and from their destinations. Buddhist monks from China and Korea traveled this road, and Dunhuang became a repository of Buddhist wisdom and art through the thousand years of trade on the Silk Road. After the Tang Dynasty in the 8th century, trade was curtailed because of strife and danger along the route, and by the 15th century the new water routes had put an end to the importance of the Silk Road.

Transfer to the hotel after arrival and rest before dinner at a local restaurant.

Meals: B, L, D – *Silk Road Dunhuang or similar*

Day Seven, Thursday **Dunhuang**

This morning, tour **Crescent Moon Lake** and **Mingsha Mountain**, located just outside the city. Crescent Moon Lake, bubbling up in the midst of desert sand dunes, is fed by an underground spring, and maintains its shape in spite of the shifting sands. The lake sits at the foot of Mingsha (“Echoing Sand”) Mountain, so called because of the ringing sound the sand makes. At the foot of the dunes, take a short **camel ride**.

Located in the center of **Dunhuang**, the **City Museum** contains over 4,000 artifacts from the ancient city, including some of the written sutras from the Mogao Caves and coins and paper excavated from the surrounding area. There is also a room dedicated to Chinese painting and calligraphy throughout the ages.

Meals: B, L, D – *Silk Road Dunhuang or similar*





Day Eight, Friday

Dunhuang

Enjoy a tour of this fascinating oasis town, where mountain vistas provide a spectacular backdrop to the green fields and sandy dunes that come together here.

Fifteen miles southeast of Dunhuang is a sandstone ridge peppered with caves, known as the **Mogao Buddhist Caves**. Traditionally, it is believed that a Buddhist monk on a pilgrimage to India in the fourth century carved the first one at the place where he had a vision of a thousand Buddhas. Until the 14th century, other travelers, pilgrims and artists carved more caves, decorating them with frescoes and painted statues. The resulting 500 or so grottoes present a thousand-year study in

the development of Buddhist art in China. The earliest carvings and frescoes are reminiscent of Indian art, while later dynasties' artists used different techniques and portrayed figures of their Chinese contemporaries. The caves became a **UNESCO World Heritage Site** in 1987.

After lunch pay a visit to the **Western Mogao Caves**, dug into a cliff overlooking the Dang River, about six miles west of the main Mogao Caves. The 10 caves that can be viewed include frescoes and large, vividly painted statues.

Return to Dunhuang this evening for dinner at a local restaurant and overnight at the hotel.

Meals: B, L, D – *Silk Road Dunhuang or similar*

Day Nine, Saturday

Dunhuang • Liuyuan • train to Xining

Get a later start today to prepare for the train ride to Xining, first driving back to Liuyuan this morning to catch the train. **Evening arrival in Xining**, with dinner on board en route and hotel check-in on arrival.

Meals: B, L, D – *Xining Hotel, Sofitel Xining, or similar*

Day Ten, Sunday

Xining

Xining is the capital of Qinghai Province, formerly the Tibetan province of Amdo. High on the Tibetan Plateau, with an average altitude of 7,000 feet, Xining has been an important trading center since the 16th century. Visit the Tibetan Buddhist monastery of Ta'er Si in the southwest section of the city, and stop at the 600-year-old Dongguan Mosque. This beautifully painted mosque combines Chinese and Islamic architectural features.



The bright golds, blues and reds of **Ta'er Monastery's** facade provide a rich contrast to Qinghai Province's surrounding green hills. The massive complex has stood on these 36 acres for over 400 years and has thousands of rooms and over 40 halls, the most impressive of which is the Great Hall of the Golden Roof, constructed from tiles with embedded precious gems, making the room sparkle. Still a working monastery, Ta'er Monastery draws visitors to see the unique sculptures of figures and landscapes made from yak butter and to honor the place where Tsong Khapa, founder of the "Yellow Hat" sect of Tibetan Buddhism, is thought to have been born in 1357.

Originally constructed in the 14th century, the large **Dongguan Mosque** with its two tall minarets was recently restored.

The grand **Tibetan Medicine and Culture Museum** contains fascinating artifacts and information about ancient Tibet, from 4,000 years ago up to about 200 years ago. One hall exhibits samples of the many natural substances used in Tibetan medicine, and another hall displays a huge *thangka* depicting the history of Buddhism in Tibet.

Meals: B, L, D – *Xining Hotel, Sofitel Xining, or similar*

Day Eleven, Monday **Xining • board train to Lhasa**

Breakfast is at the hotel this morning, then transfer to the train station to board the train for the ride to **Lhasa** on the world's highest railway line. Get settled into a second-class compartment for the approximately 26-hour ride to Lhasa. Not only a feat of modern engineering, the **high-altitude rail** also provides **spectacular views of the Tibetan plateau**. Watch the landscapes change outside the window with the passage of the day. See pristine lakes and **glaciated peaks** from the comfort of the train.

This high-altitude train was created specifically for regularly scheduled trips on the unique rail line. The specialized train cars come equipped with on-demand oxygen as well as a universally oxygen-enriched atmosphere to ease the transition between divergent altitudes.

En route, pass by **Tangula Station**, the **world's highest railroad station**, less than a mile from the highest spot on 16,600-foot Tangula Pass. Opened in 2006, the unstaffed station on the chilly plateau is marked with a simple sign.

Meals are taken in the dining car, which is also a great place to gaze out the window at the spacious vistas of the Tibetan Plateau. **Please note:** this train is the only option along the high-altitude rail line connecting Tibet and the rest of China. Though the train is fully staffed and features



second class (soft sleeper/four-berth) accommodations and other amenities such as a dining car; the train is not a luxurious experience. Travelers will have the opportunity to meet other Chinese, Tibetan and foreign travelers as they make their way between Xining and Lhasa, and the train is in many cases quite full. **Please be prepared** for close quarters, shared WC facilities, and the occasional inconveniences of adventurous rail travel. As with the other trains used on this program, the compartment configuration requires that travelers share four-berth compartments, and group members should expect to have **up to four travelers** per compartment, sharing with other group members. Train compartments may be mixed-sex as is common for train travel in China.

Meals: B, L, D – Onboard sleeper train



Day Twelve, Tuesday

Lhasa, Tibet

Arrive in **Lhasa, Tibet** this morning; depending on rail schedules the most likely arrival time is mid-morning. The huge Tibetan Plateau, with an average elevation of two and a half miles, has been home to humans for at least 11,000 years. Its people were originally nomadic herders, following their goats and yaks from the summer pastures in the high, hidden valleys to the wind-combed grasslands of the steppe in winter.

Gradually, the nomads settled in the “**City of the Sun,**” **Lhasa**, building the massive Potala Palace on an

outcropping above the city. Embracing Buddhism’s guiding principle of *ahimsa*, or nonviolence, the Tibetans tried to protect their lands from contact with the rest of the world, but were finally unable to do so.

Though you will acclimatize somewhat due to the time spent in Xining, you can still expect to feel the effects of elevation after arrival in Lhasa. The atmosphere on the high-altitude train into Tibet is enriched with oxygen (though the train is not pressurized) which means that the overnight train journey will not help too much in terms of becoming used to the rarefied atmosphere in Tibet. Take it easy in your hotel room today, gradually acclimating to the extreme altitude.

Meals: B, L, D – Four Points by Sheraton, Gangjian Hotel, or similar



Day Thirteen, Wednesday

Lhasa • Yamdrok Lake • Gyantse

Leave today for the **Tibetan countryside**. The route follows the Lhasa River to the **highest major river in the world**, the Tsangpo. Cross the Khampa La Pass at 15,700 feet and continue down to Yamdrok Lake. About halfway between Lhasa and Gyantse, beautiful blue-green **Yamdrok Lake** is said to be a goddess incarnate. One of three sacred lakes in Tibet, Yamdrok is shaped like a fan coral, with many bays and inlets on its mountainous shores. It lies at 14,500 feet and may be visited by pilgrims at any time of year.

After crossing 16,500-foot Karo La Pass, the road descends into the Nyang River Valley and into Gyantse. Explore the **Pelkhor Chode Monastery**, just a short distance out of town. Founded in the early 15th century, the complex originally housed 15 monasteries and accommodated three different Buddhist sects harmoniously within its compound. Today, monks from the Gelugpa, or “Yellow Hat,” sect alone maintain its many statues and paintings, most of which date back to the time of its founding. The remarkable **Kumbum Stupa** is the highlight of the Pelkhor Chode Monastery compound.

A *kumbum* is a type of *stupa*, or shrine, built to house many small chapels on its ascending tiers. The term also means, “having 100,000 images.” The Gyantse Kumbum has seven tiers with 70 chapels and thousands of frescoes, statues and paintings of aspects of the Buddha and his followers. Climb to the glittering gold dome that caps the *stupa* for an incredible view of medieval Gyantse and the surrounding countryside. Meals: B, L, D – Yeti Hotel, Gyantse Hotel or similar



Day Fourteen, Thursday

Gyantse • Shigatse

Take time this morning for a brief overview of the town of **Gyantse** before setting out to Shigatse. Almost two and a half miles high, the Tibetan town of Gyantse is set in a crescent of hills rising from the Nyang River Valley. These peaks are spiked with the jagged teeth of the 14th-century wall that surrounds the city's Pelkhor Monastery. The old parts of the town near the wall have retained much of their original appearance.

Drive up to **Gyantse Dzong**, or fortress, perched precariously on top of the city's central hill. Built in the 14th and 15th centuries, it once served as the city's administrative and government center. Its stone walls were the site of a famous siege by British troops in 1904. Commanded by Francis Younghusband, the British forces eventually overran the Tibetan forces, who fought bravely, but were woefully outgunned. The Dzong can't be entered, but the views here are worth the drive. In the shadow of the fortress, the **Old Town's** cobbled streets and winding alleys remain intact.



The drive to Shigatse takes another couple of hours this afternoon. Touring begins with **Tashilhunpo Monastery**. The first Dalai Lama founded Tashilhunpo in 1447, and it has since served as the seat of the Panchen Lama. Once inhabited by several thousand monks, today, Tashilhunpo houses roughly 800. The monastery contains the tombs of the Panchen Lamas, most notably the 10th Panchen Lama, whose 1989 burial used 547 kg of gold. Tashilhunpo's best-known monument is its 85-foot statue of the seated **Maitreya Buddha**. Steps and cobbled alleys connect the halls, chapels and other structures here, and the imposing exterior of white, red and black topped with its golden roof makes it a visual marvel even from afar.



The second largest city in Tibet and capital of Shigatse prefecture, **Shigatse** is also the second most important trade center in Tibet, lying as it does on the ancient caravan route from Lhasa to west Tibet. It was one of the first Tibetan towns to be visited by Westerners, because of its relative proximity to India.

Shigatse has been the traditional home of the Panchen Lama since the 16th century. Today there are two proclaimed Panchen Lamas, one designated by the Chinese and one by the Dalai Lama. The boy designated by the Dalai Lama has since disappeared.

Meals: B, L, D – *Van Ray Shigatse, Tashi Choeta, or similar*

Day Fifteen, Friday

Shigatse • Lhasa, China

Drive back to Lhasa today, with photo stops en route and a free afternoon in Lhasa. In the evening, enjoy dinner at a local restaurant accompanied by a folkshow.

Meals: B, L, D – *Four Points by Sheraton, Gangjian Hotel, or similar*



Day Sixteen, Saturday

Lhasa

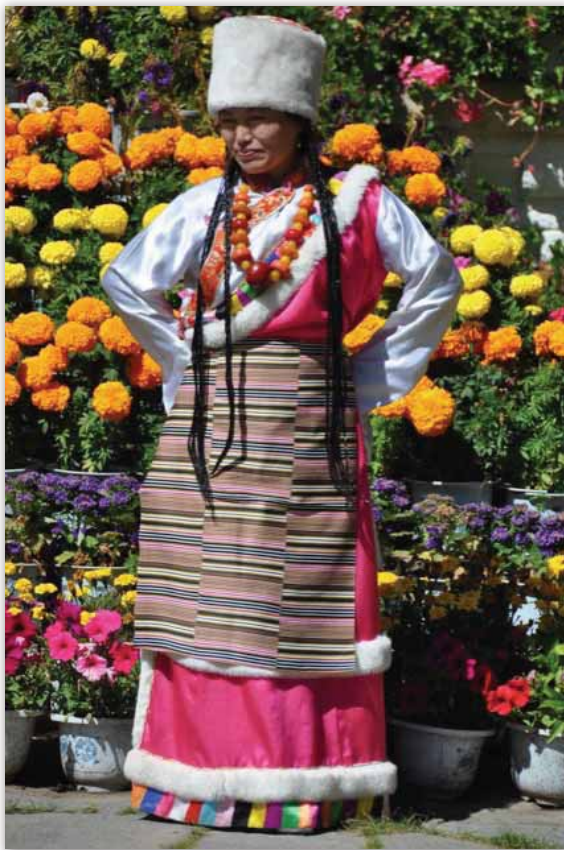
Touring today begins with one of Lhasa's most iconic sites, the **Potala Palace**. The Potala Palace, the "Sacred Place" of Buddhism, rises in red, white and gold splendor high above Lhasa, dominating the landscape and watching over every aspect of local life. Although it was built in the eighth century, the majority of the present structure dates from the 17th century, during the reign of the fifth Dalai Lama.

A massive structure made of stone, wood and earth, this **UNESCO World Heritage Site** rises



13 stories toward the sky and runs nearly 1,150 feet across the hillside from east to west. A maze of over a thousand rooms and thousands of altars and statues, the Potala is made up of two main buildings. The eastern section served as the Dalai Lama's residence and administrative center, and the Red Palace, the main sacred section, includes numerous chapels, shrines, *stupas*, tombs and libraries. **Please note**, security is tight at the Potala Palace and certain items may not be permitted; your tour manager will advise what must be left behind this morning.

Today's touring continues with a visit to Jokhang Temple. The **Jokhang Temple** has been the most sacred site in Tibet since the seventh century. It is the place that shelters the Jowo Sakyamuni, a sixth-century statue of the Buddha at the age of 12 brought from China by the new wife of King Songtsen Gampo. Buddhist pilgrims come from everywhere to circumambulate the temple, some prostrating themselves at every step. Yak butter candles sputter in the entranceway and murals and gilded carvings adorn the shrines.



Encircling the Jokhang Temple is **Barkhor**, the old market of Lhasa. A visit affords a wonderful opportunity to interact with Tibetan people and bargain for turquoise jewelry, carpets, yak wool boots and Tibetan fur hats trimmed with brocade.

Continue to **Sera Monastery**, a center of Tibetan learning dating from the 15th century. Sera is an active monastery and is home to about 400 monks. The statuary here shows the strong link between Tibetan and western Buddhism, with figures showing distinct Indian and Nepalese characteristics.

Meals: B, L, D – *Four Points by Sheraton, Gangjian Hotel, or similar*

Day Seventeen, Sunday Lhasa

Take a drive outside the city to seventh-century **Pabonka Monastery**, built by King Songtsen Gampo probably before the Jokhang Temple. It is said that all seven of Tibet's first monks meditated here at one time or another. Pabonka was constructed atop a flat-topped granite outcropping to the west of Sera Monastery. Just a short drive down the hill from Pabonka Monastery is the small **Chupsang Nunnery**, where more than 100 nuns chant and meditate in an out-of-the-way valley.

Continue with a stroll through the gardens of 18th-century **Norbulingka**, or "Jeweled Garden," known today as the People's Park. This was the summer residence of the Dalai Lamas, and was used by the young Dalai Lamas until they were 18, when they moved to the Potala Palace. Begun in 1740, the parks around the palace are beautiful and extensive. Norbulingka was added to the **UNESCO World Heritage List** as an extension of the Potala Palace.

This evening, celebrate the journey's end with a festive **farewell dinner** in a Lhasa restaurant.
Meals: B, L, D – *Four Points by Sheraton, Gangjian Hotel, or similar*



Day Eighteen, Monday
Depart Lhasa

The tour ends with departure transfers to the airport.
Meals: B

Dates for 2020 – Two Departures – Cultural Series

May 8-25, 2020
October 9-26, 2020

Package Prices

6-16 travelers \$6,895 per person, twin share
Partial Single supplement \$1,295*

**Single accommodations are not available for nights spent aboard regularly-scheduled rail service. On this tour, there are two nights spent onboard overnight sleeper trains - Kashgar-Turpan and Xining-Lhasa. On these nights, group members will share sleeping quarters. Please expect to share your compartment with three other MIR travelers, possibly with mixed-sex companions as is standard for train travel in China. Upgrades to private or semi-private overnight cabins may be possible at additional cost, please call for details.*

Your Private Journey Includes

- Accommodations as noted in itinerary.
- Tibetan travel permit fee.
- 17 breakfasts, 16 lunches, and 17 dinners.
- Restaurant tips for included meals.
- Services of experienced, English-speaking local guides, drivers and other staff, including a MIR Tour Manager.
- Arrival/departure airport transfers. MIR will arrange for all travelers to be met on arrival and seen off on departure whether we make your airfare arrangements or not, provided you arrive and depart on the tour start/end dates in the tour start/end cities.
- Ground transportation throughout itinerary by private coach or van (size of vehicle depends on group size).
- Train ticket, overnight sleeper train Kashgar-Turpan. (**Four travelers per compartment, sharing with other group members.**)
- Train ticket, overnight sleeper train Xining-Lhasa. (**Four travelers per compartment, sharing with other group members.**)
- Train ticket, day train Turpan-Liuyuan (for access to Dunhuang).
- Train ticket, day train Liuyuan-Xining (when departing Dunhuang).
- Guided sightseeing tours and entrance fees as outlined in itinerary.
- Special events, excursions and cultural performances per the itinerary.
- Gratuities to local guides, drivers, porters and other service personnel.
- Complete pre-departure information including detailed packing list, reading list, *Touring with MIR* handbook with country-specific information, maps, and travel tips.
- Customized visa application and instruction kit (please note, visa fees are not included in the tour price).
- Final document packet including luggage tags, final updates and more.



Not Included

- International airfare or taxes/fuel surcharges.
- Meals not specified as included in the itinerary.
- Single supplement charge, if requested or required.
- Baggage handling.
- Items of a personal nature (phone calls, email, laundry, alcohol, excess baggage, etc).
- Gratuities to Tour Manager.
- Visa/passport fees, airport departure fees.
- Expenses incurred as a result of delay, modification or extension of a tour due to causes beyond MIR's control.
- Travel and trip cancellation insurance.

Interested in travel insurance?

To learn more about all the benefits of purchasing a Travel Guard travel insurance plan, please visit www.travelguard.com/mircorp or contact Travel Guard at 1-877-709-5596.

Start Planning Next Year Now

Dates for 2021- Two Departures – Cultural Series

At the time of writing, the land itinerary for this program next year is projected to be generally as depicted for this year. Next year's dates and prices are shown below – please call if you're ready to book now.

May 7-24, 2021
October 8-25, 2021

Package Prices – 2021

6-16 passengers, \$6,995 per person, double occupancy
Single supplement \$1,395 per person.

Cultural Series

Cultural Series tours feature some of our most distinctive tour concepts and include uncommon and educational experiences, including visits to small towns and villages outside the major urban areas and capital cities. All trips feature comfortable, well-located hotels.

Important Notes: Is This Trip Right For You?

While the accommodations are generally comfortable, they will vary from tourist-class hotels to very basic and simple accommodations. Western China and Tibet may not be up to the standards North American travelers expect. Services are improving in the region; nevertheless, you may encounter problems with plumbing, bureaucratic service, road conditions, unpaved sidewalks, uneven surfaces and steps, availability of public restrooms and variety of locally available foods. You are traveling in some areas which, relatively speaking, have seen few travelers and the infrastructure is not yet fully developed. If you



rely on electricity for CPAP, or for any other reason, you must have your own battery or other back-up, or please reconsider participation.

While this program is designed to be comfortable for travel in this region, it is an adventuresome tour. It is rated as **rigorous touring** due to the elevation, the daily walking involved, the length of some rides and rough terrain and the overall shortcomings of the tourism infrastructure. The elevation in Xining is over 7,000 feet. The elevation in Tibet is over 10,000 feet. The altitudes can cause difficulty even in healthy travelers, and potential problems can include headaches, shortness of breath and other more serious complications. Many streets are unevenly paved, and some attractions are accessible only by staircases with tall or uneven steps; the Potala Palace in Lhasa is a prime example. To reap the full rewards of this adventure, travelers must be able to walk at least two miles a day, keeping up with fellow travelers. Flexibility, a sense of humor and a willingness to accept local standards of amenities and services are essential components to the enjoyment of this trip.

This program uses the overnight trains from Kashgar to Turpan and Xining to Lhasa. Though the trains are fully staffed and feature second-class (“soft sleeper”) accommodations and other amenities such as a dining car, you should not expect a luxurious experience. Travelers will have the opportunity to meet other Chinese, Tibetan and foreign travelers as they make their way between cities on this tour, especially on the route into Lhasa – trains in China are generally quite full. **Please be prepared** for close quarters, shared WC facilities, and the inconveniences of adventurous rail travel. The compartment configurations require that travelers share four-berth compartments, and group members should expect to have **up to four travelers** per compartment, sharing with other group members. Train compartments may be mixed-sex as is common for train travel in China.

Some toilets on this itinerary, including some of those aboard the trains, will be eastern/squatting style toilets.

PLEASE NOTE: This tour travels at high elevations in Tibet and those with a history of medical problems, particularly cardiac or respiratory, must consult a doctor before considering this trip.

Every effort has been made to make the information in this schedule accurate. However, trip itineraries are always subject to change. We will do our best to inform you in advance of any changes, but due to the nature of travel in Western China and Tibet, this may not always be possible. Only those willing to accept these conditions should consider joining this program. If you are looking for a less adventurous experience, MIR offers other scheduled private train tour options featuring more comfortable accommodation and less rigorous touring. Please ask for details on these tours (**Tibet & China Rail Discovery**) as well as a custom private journey which may be a better match for your interests and physical capabilities.

Are You Prepared?

A Travel Guard travel insurance plan can help cover your vacation investment, offset expenses from travel mishaps and provide you with emergency travel assistance. To learn more about all of the benefits of purchasing a Travel Guard travel insurance plan, please visit www.travelguard.com/mircorp

Please read the U.S. State Department’s Travel Advisory regarding travel to China here:
<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/traveladvisories/traveladvisories/china-travel-advisory.html>

If you are not already enrolled in STEP, Smart Traveler Enrollment Program, a free service to enroll your trip with the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate, please consider enrolling. For more information:
<https://step.state.gov/step/>



Weather

China has a long travel season in general, with hot summers and mild springs and autumns. Tibet's climate is arid year round, with the exception of the rainy summer months. Because of the elevation, winter weather can be bitterly cold and windy, but rarely snowy. In the summer months of June-August the temperature gets warm but not too hot, with the average temperature in the 60s-70s during the day, and down to the 40s at night. Winter (December-February) temperatures stay around freezing. Spring and fall are still cool, with daytime temperatures ranging from 40-65 degrees Fahrenheit, and still quite cold – from the 20s to 30s – at night. Please note, July and August tend to be rainy in Lhasa, and rainstorms can be intense, though often quite short in duration.

The weather of Kashgar and Turpan in Western China can be extreme, with incredibly hot summers (hot days, but the cold nights typical of the arid terrain) and incredibly cold winters. In Xinjiang province generally, average winter temperatures are 5-10 degrees Fahrenheit. Spring is a bit warmer, with temperatures ranging from 50-66 degrees Fahrenheit. Summer is hot, with temperatures of 85+. The temperatures in the highlands, foothills and mountains, will generally be cooler than those in the central desert areas.

Please remember, weather at all times of year has an element of the unpredictable. This information comes from weatherbase.com and is based on data from previous temperatures on record. It is always advisable to check with weatherbase.com closer to your departure date for current conditions and forecasts for the specific region of China you will be visiting.

International Airfare

MIR's in-house, full-service air department is available to assist with your air travel needs. Check with MIR before booking air on your own, as we are happy to research and compare the best fares available through multiple channels. Airfare varies depending on a wide variety of factors, such as dates of travel and seasonality, seat availability, special airline promotions, how restrictive ticket changes are, how long the fares can be held without purchase, routing considerations such as stopovers and more. Tour dates are based on the land tour only. Our preferred carriers for this tour are Air China, as well as Hainan Airlines, United Airlines, Korean Air and Asiana Airlines as they offer convenient itineraries and competitive rates from multiple cities across the U.S. to China. **Please note** that due to airline schedules, an overnight en route may be required at the beginning or end of the tour, **or both**. Routings that do not require an overnight are available on Air China using Los Angeles as the U.S. gateway.

Please call us at 800-424-7289 to discuss air options and routings for this program, and to request a quote for your specific plans and dates of travel. We will be happy to put together a no-obligation suggested air itinerary and estimate for you at your request.

Visas

At the time of writing, U.S. passport holders require one visa for this tour: Chinese. You may also need a visa for any additional country you fly via to join the tour.

An estimate of current visa costs for U.S. passport holders, based on standard processing time, is \$279. Your exact visa fees may differ as visa costs can depend on a number of factors, such as state of residence, processing time, and return shipping. Visa fees are always subject to change.

Standard visa processing in the visa section is five to ten business days for this tour. Travelers should



prepare to be without their passports for that amount of time. If you plan to travel extensively in the time leading up to your MIR tour, you may need to obtain a second valid passport or use expedited processing, depending on your plans. Please contact us with any questions you may have regarding the timeline for visa processing.

Extensive pre-tour paperwork is necessary to apply for the visa, which requires an overseas approval to be issued prior to submission of your application materials to the Embassies/Consulates. A valid passport with six months validity from the end of the tour is also required. It is important when applying for your Chinese visa that you not list any Tibetan cities on your application.

In the past some travelers have made their own visa arrangements instead of using MIR's preferred provider for their visa processing; either using their own visas service or attempting to process directly with the embassies/consulates. We strongly recommend you discuss it with us before choosing an alternate visa processing method, to help avoid difficulties and visa problems. **In the event that you plan to process visas without going through MIR's preferred provider, please contact us first so we can pass you detailed instructions with critical trip-specific information.**

Pre- and Post- Tours

MIR can arrange for a pre- or post-tour extension in Beijing or elsewhere in China, or a post-tour stay in Siberia or Eastern Russia. MIR can book hotels, make train reservations, etc. Call us for more details.

Also Nearby...

For more tours to this region, you may want to check out:

Flexible Essential Trips – Classic Private Journeys

Essential Tajikistan, 8 days. Rarely-visited Tajikistan is wreathed in spectacular mountains and colored with the influence of Persia, the Islamic world and Russia. Meet local people at Fergana Valley markets, explore the ruins of ancient Penjikent and share a meal in a warm Tajik home. Visit the country's capital, Dushanbe, where an airy, light-filled space is home to the modern National Museum of Tajikistan.

Essential Uzbekistan, 10 days. Roam the great Silk Road oases of Bukhara, Samarkand and Khiva, all of them UNESCO Sites. Admire their mosques, *madrassahs* and minarets clad in ceramic tiles the color of the desert sky.

Essential Central Asia, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, 13 days. Explore the markets, mosques and minarets of oasis towns on the fringes of the Kyzyl Kum and Kara Kum deserts. Here, spiritual beliefs were the greatest commodities to flow along trade routes, and civilizations blossomed amidst austere natural beauty.

Small Group Tours

Silk Route Odyssey: Caravan Across Uzbekistan, 15 days. The center of Central Asia, Uzbekistan is home to three of the most renowned of the Silk Road oases – Samarkand, Bukhara and Khiva. Journey through these UNESCO Sites and the lush Fergana Valley, where Central Asia's silk production began with two cocoons hidden in the headdress of a royal Chinese bride.

The Pamir Highway: From the Tien Shan to the High Pamirs, 18 days. The Pamir Mountains of Tajikistan are some of the most rugged and beautiful on Earth, soaring upward where the Himalayas, the



Tien Shan and the Hindu Kush meet. This adventurous journey over the Pamir Highway is a breathtaking route, in use since the time of the Silk Road.

Conditions of Participation

Your participation on a MIR Corporation trip is subject to the conditions contained in the 2020 Tour Reservation Form and Release of Liability and Assumption of Risk Agreement. Please read this document carefully and contact us with any questions.

Cancellation and Refund Policy

Payment Terms: Non-refundable deposits are accepted by check, Visa, MasterCard or American Express. Final land payments may be made by check or credit card for reservations made directly with MIR. If booking through a travel agent, please contact your agent to find out what form of payment they accept. (MIR can accept final payment from travel agents by agency check only.) Airfares are subject to change until ticketed; payment policies vary by carrier.

If you cancel your trip please notify MIR in writing. Upon MIR's receipt of notice the following charges apply to land tours (policies for air tickets, custom group trips vary):

Small Group Tours

Cost of cancellation, if received:

61 or more days prior to departure, deposit due or paid in full of \$750;

31-60 days prior to departure, 50% of land tour cost;

30 days prior to or after trip departure, no refund.

References

We encourage you to speak directly with satisfied past travelers. Please request a list of references.

Why MIR?

Regional knowledge is crucial to the success of any trip to our corner of the world. MIR combines detailed information about geography and infrastructure, history and art, language and culture, with the depth of knowledge that comes only from decades of regional experience. You may wonder how we differ from other tour operators...

Destination Specialization

MIR focuses exclusively on the exceptional region at the crossroads of Europe and Asia. This area has been our overriding passion since 1986; we don't do the rest of the world. Our hard-earned expertise gained over the last three decades can take you from end to end of the largest country in the world – Russia – and to all of its neighbors. We specialize in travel to Siberia, the Silk Route, St. Petersburg & Beyond. Our destinations include: Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, the Baltics (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania), the Balkans (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Slovenia), Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan), the South Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia), Turkey, Mongolia, China, Tibet, and Central/East Europe (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia).





30 Years of Experience

A travel company doesn't last more than 30 years in the business without a solid track record. MIR has helped thousands of individuals achieve their travel goals. Our dedication and experience have earned us their trust and the trust of many well-respected institutions. Today MIR is the preferred tour operator for museum, alumni and special interest organizations across the country.

Recommended & Respected

MIR has twice been rated one of the "Best Adventure Travel Companies on Earth" by *National Geographic Adventure*. Several of our tours have won awards in top travel publications, such as *Outside* magazine and *National Geographic Traveler*. Our trips have been featured in books such as *Riding the Hula Hula to the Arctic Ocean* and *1,000 Places to See Before You Die*.


More Questions?

Please feel free to call us with questions at 1-800-424-7289, 8:30am-5:30pm Pacific Time.

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