



GUEST ITINERARY

CURATED CHINA JOURNEY
Dragon Discover







Qinghai & Gansu

8 Days 7 Nights

Salt Lakes & Silk Road Traces

BEFORE YOU GO

Key Travel Prep

-  Please book your own international flights.
-  Please arrange your own travel and medical insurance.
-  Please arrange your own mobile data plan before departure.
-  Check visa requirements for your destination before booking.
-  Bring any personal prescriptions needed.
-  Please inform us of any dietary needs, allergies, or restrictions when booking.

See the full "Prepare for Travel" section later in Before Booking.

Overview

Eight days from Qinghai's salt-mirror lakes to the Silk Road cave temples and Great Wall fortress of Gansu.

A 2,500-kilometre arc through China's northwest frontier. The route crosses Qinghai Lake, the sky-reflecting crust of Chaka Salt Lake, the turquoise pools of Dachaidan, the singing dunes of Mingsha Mountain, the thousand-year murals of the Mogao Caves, the westernmost pass of the Great Wall at Jiayuguan, and the rainbow-striped cliffs of Zhangye Danxia. A Dunhuang mural copying workshop, nomadic grassland encounters, Tibetan prayer ceremonies, and six themed banquets fill in the human texture between landscapes.

Trip Snapshot

Accommodation

4-star equivalent throughout plus a complimentary upgrade to a 5-star Wyndham hotel for one night.

Airport Transfers

Airport transfers are not included. Meet at the designated hotel in Lanzhou New District or Xining. The tour ends at the designated hotel in Xining or Lanzhou.

Guide & Transport

Private group up to 12 with bilingual guide. Luxury first-class coach with 1+1 seating for maximum comfort.

Meals

Daily breakfast plus six themed Silk Road banquet lunches. Dinners are free for you to explore local food scenes.

Signature Experiences

Dunhuang mural copying, nomadic costume photography, archery, Tibetan prayer ceremony, grassland afternoon tea.

Trip Style

Big landscapes and Silk Road heritage at a comfortable pace. Gentle walking, no hiking, altitude awareness needed.

Where You'll Stay

5-Star

Wyndham Hotel, Dunhuang

1 Night

Complimentary upgrade to a 5-star Wyndham property in Dunhuang on the night of the Mogao Caves and Mingsha Mountain day.

4-Star Equivalent

Silk Road City Hotels

6 Nights

Well-rated 4-star equivalent properties in Chaka, Golmud, Dunhuang, Zhangye, and the Xining-Lanzhou area. Selected for comfort, location, and reliable service along the route.


Itinerary

Day 1 — Arrival & Acclimatisation

Arrive in Lanzhou or Xining and make your way to the designated hotel. Airport transfers are not included, but the guide will share hotel details and directions in advance.

The rest of the day is yours to settle in and adjust to the altitude and climate of China's northwest plateau. Take it easy, stay hydrated, and save your energy — the landscapes ahead are worth the patience.

Day 2 — Qinghai Lake · Hehuang Cultural Feast

 Qinghai Lake

 Hehuang-style cultural feast

+1 more

The journey begins with a drive from Lanzhou New District or Xining to **Qinghai Lake** — China's largest inland lake, sitting at 3,200 metres on the Tibetan Plateau. The **Erlangjian Scenic Area** puts you right at the shoreline, where electric-blue water stretches to the horizon against a backdrop of snow-dusted mountains and golden rapeseed fields in season.

Take your time walking the lakefront boardwalk and grassland paths. The air is thin but clear, and the sheer scale of the lake — 4,500 square kilometres, larger than the whole of Rhode Island — only becomes real when you stand at the edge.

Lunch is a **Hehuang-style cultural feast** (*Hehuang Yaji Yan*), a curated spread of highland ingredients and River-Huangshui valley cooking traditions served in a private dining setting.

After lunch, continue to Chaka town for the overnight stay, crossing high grassland and passing small Tibetan settlements along the way.

Day 3 — Chaka Salt Lake · Chaerhan Salt Lake · Salt Bridge

 Chaka Salt Lake

Chaerhan Salt Lake

Wanzhang Salt Bridge


The morning opens at **Chaka Salt Lake**, China's famous "Sky Mirror" — a shallow salt flat where the crust is so reflective it merges the horizon into the sky on calm days. Walk out onto the salt crust, take in the surreal symmetry of cloud reflections underfoot, and capture the photographs that have made this one of the most recognisable landscapes in western China.

From Chaka, the route continues south into the Qaidam Basin to **Chaerhan Salt Lake** — China's largest salt lake, covering more than 5,800 square kilometres. The highlight here is the **Wanzhang Salt Bridge** (*Wanzhang Yanqiao*), a 32-kilometre road built entirely on crystallised salt deposits, solid enough to carry heavy vehicles across a surface that looks like fractured ice.

Lunch is a **lakeside Qinghai specialty spread** (*Jinghu Zhenwei Yan*) served en route.

Arrive in Golmud by evening — the logistics hub of the Qaidam Basin and the last city before the Tibetan Plateau proper. The elevation drops slightly here (2,800m), which makes for a comfortable overnight rest.

Day 4 — Dachaidan Emerald Lake · Gobi Drive to Dunhuang

 Dachaidan Emerald Lake

 Emerald-Lake Banquet


This morning's destination is **Dachaidan Emerald Lake** (*Feicui Hu*) — a cluster of mineral-rich pools in the middle of the Gobi Desert that glow in shifting shades of turquoise, jade, and deep blue depending on the light and mineral composition. The colours are natural, caused by lithium and magnesium salts dissolved in the water, and the contrast against the bare brown desert is genuinely striking.

Spend time walking the boardwalks around the pools. Every angle produces a different palette — the kind of landscape that looks photoshopped but is not.

Lunch is an **Emerald-Lake Banquet** (*Cuiying Liuli Yan*) themed around the colours and ingredients of the Qaidam Basin.

The afternoon is a long but visually rewarding drive through the Gobi towards Dunhuang. The terrain shifts from salt-encrusted basin to open stony desert, with the Altun Mountains visible to the south. Arrive in Dunhuang by evening and check in to the hotel.

Day 5 — Mingsha Mountain · Mogao Caves · Mural Copying Workshop

 Mogao Caves

Mingsha Mountain and Crescent Moon Spring

 Dunhuang Mural Copying Workshop

+1 more

The day starts at **Mingsha Mountain and Crescent Moon Spring** (*Mingsha Shan · Yueyaquan*) — a crescent-shaped oasis spring that has survived at the base of towering sand dunes for over two thousand years. Walk the dunes, feel the sand shift underfoot, and take in the improbable persistence of water in a landscape of nothing but sand and sky.

From the dunes, continue to the **Mogao Caves** — one of the greatest concentrations of Buddhist art anywhere in the world. The full A-ticket experience begins at the digital exhibition centre with two short films on the caves' history and art, then continues with a specialist site guide who walks you through eight decorated cave chambers. The paintings span from the Northern Wei dynasty (5th century) through the Yuan dynasty (14th century) — a visual record of Buddhist faith, Silk Road trade, and artistic evolution compressed into a single cliff face.

After the cave visit, join a **Dunhuang Mural Copying Workshop** with professional instruction. Using traditional pigments and techniques, you recreate a small detail from the cave murals — a flying apsara, a lotus motif, a celestial musician — and take the finished piece home as a personal souvenir of the Silk Road.

Lunch is a **Silk Road themed banquet** (*Silu Huazhang Yan*).

Day 6 — Guazhou Desert Art · Jiayuguan Pass · Silk Road Permit

📍 Jiayuguan Pass

Guazhou Desert Art Base

🌟 Silk Road Travel Permit

The morning begins at **Guazhou Desert Art Base** — an outdoor sculpture park set in the open Gobi, where large-scale art installations and land-art pieces stand alone in the emptiness. The contrast between the geometric human-made forms and the flat, featureless horizon creates something unexpectedly powerful — part gallery, part landscape meditation.

Continue to **Jiayuguan Pass** (*Jiayuguan Guancheng*) — the westernmost fortress of the Great Wall system and historically known as the “First and Greatest Pass Under Heaven.” Built in 1372 during the early Ming dynasty at the narrowest point of the Hexi Corridor, it was the last outpost of the Chinese empire for travellers heading west along the Silk Road. The layered walls, watchtowers, and vast courtyard give a tangible sense of what it meant to stand at the edge of the known world.

Here you receive your **Silk Road Travel Permit** (*Tongguan Wendie*) — a souvenir booklet stamped at this historic frontier crossing, recreating the experience of ancient travellers who needed an official pass to continue west.

Lunch is a **frontier garrison feast** (*Biansai Shuguan Yan*), served in the spirit of the military provisions that once fuelled the Hexi Corridor garrisons.

After Jiayuguan, drive east to Zhangye for the overnight stay.

Day 7 — Zhangye Danxia · Nomadic Heritage · Return

📍 Zhangye Danxia National Geological Park

🌟 Nomadic Heritage Experience

Tibetan prayer ceremony

+1 more

The morning belongs to **Zhangye Danxia National Geological Park** — a UNESCO World Heritage site where exposed sedimentary rock has been weathered and eroded into bands of red, orange, yellow, and grey that stripe across an entire mountain range. The colours are caused by iron and trace mineral deposits laid down over 24 million years, and the effect is unlike any natural landscape most travellers have seen before. A scenic shuttle takes you between the main viewing platforms, each offering a different angle on the colour-banded ridges.

From the park, continue to a **Nomadic Heritage Experience** at a grassland waystation, where you step into the traditions of the region’s pastoral communities. Dress in **ethnic costume for a photography session**, try your hand at **archery**, meet herding animals up close, and sit down for **Tibetan-Style Afternoon Tea** (*Caoyuan Zangshi Xiawu Cha*) — butter tea, dried fruit, and milk snacks served on the grassland with the mountains behind you.

The route also includes a **Tibetan prayer ceremony**: turn a prayer wheel, receive a white khata blessing scarf, and tie a prayer flag to join the thousands already fluttering across the plateau.

Lunch is a **pastoral homestead meal** (*Guiyuan Tianju Yan*) before the drive back to Xining or Lanzhou city centre for the final overnight stay.

Day 8 — Departure

After a final breakfast, check out and make your way to the airport or railway station for your onward journey. Airport transfers are not included — the guide can arrange a taxi or recommend transport options based on your departure time.

The Silk Road journey ends here, but the mural you copied in Dunhuang, the salt-lake reflections on your camera, and the prayer flags you tied on the grassland travel home with you.

Before Booking








✓ What's Included

- **Transport:** Private luxury coach with 1+1 first-class seating throughout the journey. Airport transfers are not included.
- **Guide:** Professional bilingual guide for the full 8 days.
- **Accommodation:** 7 nights including 6 nights at 4-star equivalent hotels and a complimentary upgrade to a 5-star Wyndham hotel for one night.
- **Meals:** Daily breakfast plus 6 themed banquet lunches — Hehuang cultural feast, lakeside Qinghai specialty spread, emerald-lake banquet, Silk Road themed banquet, frontier garrison feast, and pastoral homestead meal. Dinners are not included.
- **Entrance Fees:** Qinghai Lake (Erlangjian), Chaka Salt Lake, Chaerhan Salt Lake (including scenic shuttle), Dachaidan Emerald Lake, Mingsha Mountain & Crescent Moon Spring, Mogao Caves (A-ticket with guided cave tour), Jiayuguan Pass, and Zhangye Danxia National Geological Park (including scenic shuttle).
- **Experiences:** Dunhuang Mural Copying Workshop, professional drone photography session, ethnic costume photography with archery and grassland activities, Tibetan prayer ceremony with prayer wheel and khata offering, Silk Road Travel Permit with souvenir stamp, and Tibetan-Style Afternoon Tea.
- **Extras:** Welcome gift pack including travel tea set, collectible fridge magnet, cultural hair accessory, ethnic scarf, Silk Road bookmark, and snack pack.
- **Pricing Promise:** Everything in the itinerary is included in the tour price. Optional packages and room choices, if any, are shown clearly before payment. No hidden on-trip charges.

+ Booking Options

Everything in the itinerary is included in the tour price. No paid booking options apply to this route.

Prepare for Travel

-  Please book your own international flights.
-  Please arrange your own travel and medical insurance.
-  Please arrange your own mobile data plan before departure.
-  Check visa requirements for your destination before booking.
-  Bring any personal prescriptions needed.
-  Please inform us of any dietary needs, allergies, or restrictions when booking.
-  Most scheduled venues accept international credit cards. For smaller shops, please have local cash or a local mobile payment app ready.

🏔️ This tour crosses high-altitude plateau terrain (Qinghai Lake sits at 3,200m; Golmud at 2,800m). The pace is gentle with no strenuous hiking, but guests should be aware of altitude and allow time for acclimatisation on Day 1. Consult your doctor before travelling if you have respiratory or cardiovascular concerns.

👜 The northwest has extreme temperature swings — desert sun during the day and cold nights. Layers, sun protection, and a warm jacket are essential even in summer. Spring and autumn bring sandstorms in the Dunhuang-Jiayuguan corridor.

? FAQ

How physically demanding is this tour?

Gentle pace with no strenuous hiking. Most days involve moderate walking at scenic sites and short drives between destinations. The main physical consideration is altitude — Qinghai Lake sits at 3,200m and Golmud at 2,800m. Allow time for acclimatisation on Day 1 and stay hydrated throughout.

How do we get around during the tour?

All travel is by private luxury coach with 1+1 first-class seating (one seat per side of the aisle for maximum comfort). Some scenic areas include shuttle buses that are part of the itinerary. No trains or internal flights.

What is the cancellation policy?

Our cancellation and refund policy is tiered based on how far in advance you cancel. Full details at [Terms & Conditions](#).

Where does the tour start and end?

Starts and ends in Xining. Airport transfers are not included. Meet at the designated hotel in Lanzhou New District or Xining. The tour ends at the designated hotel in Xining or Lanzhou.

Can I fly a drone during the tour?

China requires all drone operators (including foreign visitors) to register with the CAAC before flying. Many heritage sites and scenic areas are no-fly zones. A professional drone photography session at a scenic lake is included in the itinerary — but personal drones may be restricted. Inform your guide in advance if you plan to bring one.

Should I book pre/post-tour accommodation?

The tour begins at the designated hotel in Lanzhou New District or Xining on Day 1, and ends after breakfast on Day 8. If your flight arrives the night before or departs later on Day 8, consider booking an extra night at either end. The guide can advise on convenient options near the airport.

What is the Mogao Caves A-ticket?

The A-ticket is the full-access pass to the Mogao Caves, which includes a documentary screening at the digital exhibition centre followed by guided entry into eight decorated cave chambers with a specialist site guide. It is the most comprehensive visitor experience available and is included in the tour price.

Is altitude a concern on this route?

Qinghai Lake sits at approximately 3,200m and parts of the route cross terrain above 2,800m. The pace is designed to allow gradual acclimatisation. Drink plenty of water, avoid strenuous activity on the first day, and consult your doctor before travelling if you have respiratory or cardiovascular concerns.

What are the themed banquets?

Six included lunches across the route are served as themed banquets celebrating regional Silk Road cuisine: a Hehuang cultural feast, a lakeside Qinghai specialty spread, an emerald-lake banquet, a Silk Road themed banquet, a frontier garrison feast, and a pastoral homestead meal. Each is a sit-down group meal with dishes drawn from local culinary traditions.

Are dinners included in the tour price?

Dinners are not included. This gives you the freedom to explore local night markets and regional restaurants on your own. Your guide can recommend the best local options at each stop — Dunhuang's night market and Zhangye's food streets are particularly worth exploring.

Local Names

Mogao Caves MOH-gow

492 painted caves spanning a thousand years of Silk Road art on a single cliff

Qinghai Lake ching-HYE

China's largest lake — 4,500 sq km of electric blue water at 3,200m altitude

Chaka Salt Lake CHAH-kah

The 'Sky Mirror' — a shallow salt flat that merges sky and earth on calm days

Jiayuguan jyah-YOO-gwahn

The Great Wall's westernmost pass — last outpost of the empire on the Silk Road

Zhangye Danxia jahng-YEH dahn-SHAH

Rainbow mountains — 24 million years of mineral deposits banded in colour

Mingsha Mountain MING-shah

Singing sand dunes with a 2,000-year-old crescent spring at their base

Dunhuang dwun-HWAHNG

Gateway to the Mogao Caves and the trading post where east met west

Dachaidan dah-CHYE-dahn

Home of the Emerald Lake — turquoise mineral pools hidden in the Gobi

Chaerhan chah-ER-hahn

China's largest salt lake with a 32km road built on crystallised salt

Guazhou gwah-JOH

Desert art installations and Silk Road way-station on the Hexi Corridor