



CURATED CHINA JOURNEY
Dragon Discover


Southern Xinjiang Arc


13 Days 12 Nights


Silk Road by Panda Train


BEFORE YOU GO


Key Travel Prep


 Please book your own transport to Chengdu (or Lanzhou/Urumqi if joining at an alternate boarding point).

 Travel accident insurance is included (300,000 CNY). We recommend supplemental medical and evacuation coverage for international travel.

 Please arrange your own mobile data plan before departure. Coverage in remote Xinjiang areas may be limited.

 Check visa requirements for China before booking. Some areas near Taxkorgan are close to international borders — carry your passport at all times.

 Bring any personal prescriptions needed. Some days involve high altitude (Pamir Plateau, Karakul Lake at ~3,600 m). Consult your doctor if you have altitude concerns.

 Please inform us of any dietary needs, allergies, or restrictions when booking. Xinjiang cuisine is predominantly halal — pork is not served in the region.

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

Overview

Thirteen days across China's Silk Road heartland aboard the Jinxiutianfu Panda Train.

A chartered luxury sleeper that doubles as your hotel between stops. The route threads from Chengdu through Urumqi, over the Pamir Plateau to Kashgar's 2,000-year-old Old Town, and back through Turpan's Flame Mountain and ancient irrigation tunnels. Between train nights, the days on the ground bring Tianshan Tianchi's alpine lake, Sayram Lake on the ridge above Yining, the red-rock Tianshan Grand Canyon near Kuqa, a Tajik home visit in Taxkorgan, a whole-lamb feast in Kashgar, and China's largest inland lake at Bosten. Seven nights are spent on the train with onboard dining and entertainment; five nights are at destination hotels rated 4- to 5-star.

Trip Snapshot

Accommodation

7 train nights in sleeper berths, 5 hotel nights. 5-star in Urumqi, Kuqa, Kashgar; 4-star in Taxkorgan, Turpan.

Airport Transfers

Airport transfers are not included. Meet at the designated train station in Chengdu or Lanzhou at the scheduled departure time. The tour ends at Chengdu Railway Station (Jinxiutianfu Panda Train).

Guide & Transport

Chartered Panda Train for the full route. Local guides at each stop. Air-conditioned coaches for sightseeing.

Meals

12 breakfasts, 24 main meals. Onboard dining plus Xinjiang Welcome Banquet, yak hot pot, whole-lamb feast, fruit feast.

Signature Experiences

Silk Road Kucha dance show, Tajik home visit, heritage craft workshop, whole-lamb feast, Panda Butler events.

Trip Style

Train-based Silk Road journey. Sleep on the train, wake up in a new city. Gentle sightseeing, no strenuous hiking.

Where You'll Stay

Heritage Stay

Jinxiutianfu Panda Train

7 Nights

Your hotel on rails. A chartered luxury sleeper with onboard dining, Panda Butler service, and a medical professional on every journey. Fall asleep crossing the Gobi and wake up in a new Silk Road city.

5-Star

Urumqi City Hotel

1 Night

International 5-star standard in Xinjiang's capital. One night to stretch out, shower properly, and recharge before heading west to the Silk Road cities.

5-Star

Kuqa City Hotel

1 Night

5-star equivalent in this ancient Silk Road oasis town. Your base for the Tianshan Grand Canyon and the Kucha Silk Road dance show.

Best Available

Taxkorgan Highland Hotel

1 Night

At 3,100 metres on the Pamir Plateau, where China meets Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Tajikistan. The best available at this altitude — warm beds after a day among snow-capped peaks.

5-Star

Kashgar City Hotel

1 Night

5-star equivalent in China's westernmost city. Walking distance from the Old Town bazaars and Id Kah Mosque — the last major stop before the train turns east.

4-Star Equivalent

Turpan City Hotel

1 Night

4-star equivalent in the Flame Mountain basin, China's hottest city. One night off the train before visiting the ancient Karez irrigation tunnels.

Itinerary

Day 1 — Boarding the Panda Train

Your Silk Road journey begins at the platform. Board the **Jinxiutianfu Panda Train** in Chengdu (or Lanzhou) at the designated time and settle into your private sleeper berth.

As the train pulls away, the onboard crew welcomes you with a **welcome ceremony**, followed by a **live band performance** and a **Xinjiang-style song and dance show** in the entertainment car — a first taste of the music and movement that define the next thirteen days.

Lunch and dinner are served in the train's dining car. The evening is yours to explore the train's onboard facilities: reading corner, lounge area, and the company of fellow travellers headed west.

Day 2 — Crossing the Northwest & Arriving in Urumqi




A full day on the rails. The train crosses the vast **Gobi Desert** and the mountain passes of northwest China — a changing landscape that moves from green lowlands to ochre plateau and back again.

Onboard, the Panda Butler team runs activities in the lounge car: a reading corner, a **cocktail party**, and a scenic photo check-in as the desert scrolls past the window. All meals are served on the train.

The train arrives in **Urumqi** in the evening. After disembarking, a private transfer takes you to a 5-star city hotel for the night — your first chance to stretch out on solid ground since departure.

Note: Guests joining at Urumqi are met at the airport with a sign reading "Jinxiutianfu Train VIP" and transferred directly to the hotel.

Day 3 — Tianshan Tianchi & Welcome Banquet

 Tianshan Tianchi  Xinjiang Welcome Banquet  +1 more

After breakfast at the hotel, the morning opens with the **Xinjiang Welcome Banquet** — a festive meal accompanied by traditional Xinjiang songs and dances that officially marks the start of your time on the ground in Xinjiang.

In the afternoon, drive 1.5 hours into the Tianshan Mountains to **Tianshan Tianchi** (*Tianchi*), the Heavenly Lake — a glacial alpine lake at 1,928 metres, fed by snowmelt from the **Bogda Peak** towering above. The still turquoise water ringed by dark spruce forest has drawn travellers along the Silk Road for centuries. About three hours here to walk the shoreline, take in the mountain reflections, and absorb the scale.

After dinner, return to the station and reboard the Jinxiutianfu train for an overnight journey west to Yining.

Day 4 — Sayram Lake on the Ridge


 Sayram Lake  +1 more


<p>The train arrives in **Yining** in the morning, where the local team meets you at the station.</p>

<p>Drive 1.5 hours northwest to **Sayram Lake** (*Sailimu Hu*) — the highest and largest alpine lake in the Tianshan range, sitting at 2,073 metres on a mountain ridge. Nicknamed "the last tear of the Atlantic" because it marks the final reach of Atlantic moisture currents across the Eurasian continent. The water shifts between sapphire and jade depending on the light, and the surrounding grasslands roll up to snowline in every direction. About four hours here to walk the lakeshore, photograph the yurt camps, and feel the wind that has crossed a continent to reach this spot.</p>

<p>After a featured lunch and dinner at local restaurants, return to the station and reboard the train for the overnight journey south to Kuqa.</p>

Day 5 — Kuqa Old Town & Silk Road Dance Show

 Jiestan Street

 Apricot Blossom · Silk Road Kucha Show

+3 more


<p>The train arrives in **Kuqa** (*Kuche*) in the afternoon — one of the great oasis kingdoms of the ancient Silk Road, where Buddhist monks once translated scriptures and Kucha musicians developed a musical tradition that influenced the entire Tang Dynasty court.</p>

<p>After checking into the hotel and resting, head out to **Jiestan Street** (*Jiesitang Jie*) — Kuqa's historic cultural quarter. Stroll through the colourful archways of the old street, past the intricate tile-and-timber facades, and into the daily life of the Uyghur neighbourhood: bread baking in tandoor ovens, copper-smiths hammering trays, tea houses filling with conversation as the afternoon light fades.</p>

<p>The evening brings the day's centrepiece: **Apricot Blossom · Silk Road Kucha**, a full-scale live show that uses apricot blossoms as a visual motif and the Silk Road as its narrative thread. Classic Kucha dance forms — including the spinning **Hu Xuan dance** (*Huxuan Wu*) — are performed alongside projections recreating the flying celestial musicians painted on the walls of the nearby **Kizil Grottoes**. The production runs about one hour.</p>

<p>After dinner at a featured local restaurant, return to the hotel for the night.</p>

Day 6 — Tianshan Grand Canyon & Red Cliffs

 Tianshan Grand Canyon

+1 more

<p>A slower morning — no alarm clock needed. Time to explore **Kuqa's old town** at your own pace: the bazaar lanes, the pottery stalls, the morning bread scene. Then head to a restaurant for lunch.</p>

<p>In the afternoon, drive 1 hour 20 minutes into the southern foothills of the Tianshan range to the **Tianshan Grand Canyon** (*Tianshan Shenmi Daxiagu*) — rated among the ten most beautiful canyons in China. The Uyghur name means "red cliffs," and the reality delivers: towering walls of red sandstone carved into narrow, winding corridors by millions of years of wind and water. About one hour to walk through the main canyon, where the rock faces twist above you and the light shifts from amber to crimson depending on the time of day.</p>

<p>After dinner, return to the station and board the Panda Train for the overnight journey south to Kashgar.</p>

Day 7 — Pamir Plateau · White Sand Lake · Taxkorgan

 White Sand Lake  Taxkorgan  Tajik Home Visit +3 more

The train arrives in **Kashgar** in the morning. From here, the route turns west along the **China-Pakistan Friendship Highway** — the Karakoram Highway — climbing steadily toward the roof of the world.

After about three hours, the road reaches the **Pamir Plateau**, and the first stop is **White Sand Lake** (*Baisha Hu*). Silver-white sand dunes roll down to meet a crystal-blue lake — a surreal contrast between desert and water that has coexisted for thousands of years. About 40 minutes here to photograph and absorb the stillness.

Continue to the legendary border town of **Taxkorgan** (*Tashkurgan*) — perched at 3,100 metres on the Pamir Plateau, where China borders Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Tajikistan. This remote outpost was once a key Silk Road waystation and the filming location of the classic Chinese film *The Guests on the Iceberg*.

In the late afternoon, a **Tajik home visit** brings you into a local family's home. Share snacks prepared by the host family, join in traditional songs and dances, and learn about the customs and daily life of the Tajik people — one of China's smallest ethnic groups, living at one of its highest altitudes.

Dinner is **yak-meat hot pot** (*niurou huoguo*) — hearty, warming, and exactly right at 3,100 metres. Stay the night at a highland hotel in Taxkorgan.

Day 8 — Karakul Lake · Heritage Craft · Kashgar Feast

 Karakul Lake  Whole-Lamb Feast  Heritage Handicraft Workshop +1 more

After breakfast at the highland hotel, drive two hours to **Karakul Lake** (*Kalakuli Hu*) — the "colour-changing lake" of the Pamir Plateau, sitting at 3,600 metres beneath the massive bulk of **Mount Muztagh Ata** (7,509 m). The lake shifts between turquoise, emerald, and deep blue depending on the light, and on a clear day the entire mountain is reflected in the surface. About one hour at the lakeshore.

On the drive back toward Kashgar, stop for an **heritage handicraft workshop**. Work with a local artisan to learn a traditional craft technique that has been passed down through generations of Pamir plateau communities — a hands-on connection to the living craft culture of the Silk Road's mountain peoples.

Arrive in Kashgar by evening. Tonight's dinner is the route's grand culinary centrepiece: a **whole-lamb feast** (*kao quan yang*) — the signature celebration meal of Xinjiang hospitality, with the entire lamb roasted and carved at the table. Check in to a 5-star city hotel for the night.

Day 9 — Kashgar Old Town · Gaotai · Id Kah Mosque

 Kashgar Old Town  Gaotai Houses  Id Kah Mosque

After breakfast at the hotel, step into **Kashgar Old Town** (*Kashgar Gucheng*) — one of the most intact ancient cities in Central Asia, with over 2,000 years of continuous habitation. About 1.5 hours to explore the labyrinth of narrow lanes, mud-brick homes, copperware workshops, and bakeries where nan bread crisps in clay ovens. This is not a museum reconstruction — people live, work, and trade here exactly as they have for centuries.

Next, visit the **Gaotai Houses** (*Gaotai Minju*) — the elevated residential quarter that served as a filming location

for the Oscar-winning film *The Kite Runner*. Known as the "living fossil of Kashgar," this hillside neighbourhood preserves one of the most original forms of the old city, with houses stacked on ancient foundations and staircases carved into the cliff face. About 40 minutes here.

Continue to **Id Kah Mosque** (*Aitiga'er Qingzhen Si*) — the largest mosque in China, and the spiritual and architectural centre of Kashgar. The mosque blends Islamic design tradition with Chinese building techniques, and during Friday prayers it draws thousands of worshippers from across the region. About 40 minutes for a guided visit that covers the mosque's history, its architectural significance, and the religious culture it represents.

After a featured lunch and dinner at local restaurants, board the Panda Train in the evening for the overnight journey east to Korla.

Day 10 — Bosten Lake · Pearl of the West Sea

 Bosten Lake +3 more

The train arrives in **Korla** around mid-morning, where the local team meets you at the station.

After a featured lunch, drive 30 minutes to **Bosten Lake** (*Bosiiteng Hu*) — **China's largest inland freshwater lake**, spread across the Bayin'gholin Mongol Autonomous Prefecture. The lake combines open water, reed marshlands, wetlands, and the edge of the Taklamakan Desert in a single panorama. About two hours here to walk the shore, watch the birdlife in the reeds, and take in a landscape that feels more like an inland sea than a lake.

After the visit, return to the station and board the Panda Train for the short hop east to **Turpan** — the ancient Silk Road hub in the hottest basin in China. Check in to a hotel for the night.

Day 11 — Flame Mountain · Karez Well · Homeward Train

 Flame Mountain Karez Well  Turpan Fruit Feast

After breakfast at the hotel, head to **Flame Mountain** (*Huoyan Shan*) — the barren red ridge made famous in the Chinese classic *Journey to the West*. The surface temperature in summer can exceed 70°C. Visit China's largest ground thermometer and walk along the base of the ridge to feel the radiating heat and see the striations in the rock. About one hour here.

Lunch is a **Turpan fruit feast** — the region is one of China's premier grape and melon growing areas, and the midday spread features the local specialties: Hami melon, seedless grapes, dried fruits, and fruit-based dishes unique to the Turpan basin.

In the afternoon, visit **Karez Well** (*Kaner Jing*) — the 2,000-year-old underground irrigation system that channels snowmelt from the Tianshan Mountains through hand-dug tunnels to the oasis towns of the basin. The Karez system is ranked alongside the Great Wall and the Grand Canal as one of China's three great ancient engineering works. Walk through the underground tunnels and see how gravity, slope, and human ingenuity turned a desert into farmland. About 30 minutes here.

At the designated time, transfer to the station and board the Panda Train for the long overnight journey home.

Day 12 — Return Journey on the Panda Train

A full day on the rails as the train retraces its path eastward across the Gobi Desert and mountain passes. The same vast landscape that opened the journey now plays in reverse — a chance to catch details you missed on the way out.

All meals are served on the train. The Panda Butler team runs final onboard activities and events. A good day to sort through photos, trade stories with fellow travellers, and let the scale of the journey settle in.

Day 13 — Arrival in Chengdu

The Jinxiutianfu Panda Train arrives in Chengdu, bringing a 13-day Silk Road journey to a close. Breakfast is served on the train before arrival.

Disembark, collect your luggage, and make your onward travel arrangements. If time allows, Chengdu's own attractions — giant pandas, Sichuan hotpot, and the Jinli old street — are worth staying an extra night for.

Before Booking

✓ What's Included

Transport — Berth on the Jinxiutianfu Panda Train for the full journey (Chengdu–Xinjiang round trip), plus air-conditioned coaches for all sightseeing days at each destination.

Guide — Professional local guides at each destination, full-time accompanying staff on the train, onboard Panda Butler service, and a certified medical professional travelling with the group.

Accommodation — 5 hotel nights at destination cities (5-star equivalent in Urumqi, Kuqa, and Kashgar; 4-star equivalent in Taxkorgan and Turpan) plus 7 nights aboard the Jinxiutianfu train in private sleeper berths.

Meals — 12 breakfasts and 24 main meals throughout the journey, including onboard train dining and featured meals at destinations: Xinjiang Welcome Banquet, yak-meat hot pot, whole-lamb feast, and Turpan fruit feast.

Entrance Fees — All scheduled scenic spots and scenic transport within the itinerary, including Tianshan Tianchi, Sayram Lake, Tianshan Grand Canyon, White Sand Lake, Karakul Lake, Kashgar Old Town, Gaotai Houses, Id Kah Mosque, Bosten Lake, Flame Mountain, and Karez Well.

Experiences — Xinjiang Welcome Banquet with song and dance, Apricot Blossom · Silk Road Kucha live show, Tajik home visit with traditional snacks and dance, intangible heritage handicraft workshop, and onboard Panda Butler activities.

Insurance — Travel accident insurance included (300,000 CNY per person).

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


Availability Notice — This is a chartered train departure with limited cabin and hotel allocations. Availability may vary by departure date. If cabins are unavailable at the time of booking, your reservation may be cancelled.

Cabin Upgrade — **Jǐntà 锦榻 Luxury Twin** — Upgrade to the Luxury Twin cabin on the Panda Train for 62,880 CNY per person (standard Jǐnwò 锦卧 Quality Twin cabin is 49,880 CNY). The Luxury cabin is 13 m² with a Song-dynasty-style tea table, twin sofa, mini fridge, private bathroom, and wardrobe. Only 6 cabins available per departure — book early.

Single Room Supplement — If a single hotel room is needed and room-sharing cannot be arranged, a supplement of 4,000 CNY per person applies across the 5 hotel nights. Select the single-room option when booking.

Prepare for Travel

 Please book your own transport to Chengdu (or Lanzhou/Urumqi if joining at an alternate boarding point).

 Travel accident insurance is included (300,000 CNY). We recommend supplemental medical and evacuation coverage for international travel.

- 📶 Please arrange your own mobile data plan before departure. Coverage in remote Xinjiang areas may be limited.
- 🛂 Check visa requirements for China before booking. Some areas near Taxkorgan are close to international borders — carry your passport at all times.
- 💊 Bring any personal prescriptions needed. Some days involve high altitude (Pamir Plateau, Karakul Lake at ~3,600 m). Consult your doctor if you have altitude concerns.
- 🍽️ Please inform us of any dietary needs, allergies, or restrictions when booking. Xinjiang cuisine is predominantly halal — pork is not served in the region.
- 💳 Most scheduled venues accept mobile payment. International credit card acceptance is limited outside major cities — carry Chinese yuan in cash.
- 🏞️ Moderate pace overall with long scenic drives on some days (3+ hours to the Pamir Plateau). Most sightseeing is gentle walking. Comfortable shoes recommended.
- 🧥 Xinjiang has extreme day-night temperature swings — up to 20°C difference. Bring layers, strong sun protection, and a hat. UV radiation is intense at altitude.

? FAQ

Where does the tour start and end?

Starts in Chengdu or Lanzhou and ends in Chengdu. Airport transfers are not included. Meet at the designated train station in Chengdu or Lanzhou at the scheduled departure time. The tour ends at Chengdu Railway Station (Jinxiutianfu Panda Train).

What is the cancellation policy?

This is a chartered train tour with a specific cancellation schedule: deposit is non-refundable; 15–29 days before departure, 50% fee; 1–14 days, 85% fee; day of departure, 100%. Name changes are free up to 3 days before departure. Full details at [Terms & Conditions](#).

Is there a single-room supplement?

Yes. If a single hotel room is needed and room-sharing cannot be arranged, a supplement of 4,000 CNY per person applies. Select the single-room option when booking.

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 border areas in Xinjiang are restricted zones. Inform your guide in advance if you plan to bring a drone.

How physically demanding is this tour?

Most days involve gentle walking at scenic spots, not strenuous hiking. The main physical consideration is altitude: the Pamir Plateau days (Days 7–8) reach 3,100–3,600 metres. If you have altitude concerns, consult your doctor before booking.

Should I book pre/post-tour accommodation?

If arriving in Chengdu early on Day 1, you may want to book a hotel the night before to be rested for boarding. On Day 13, the train arrives in Chengdu — if your onward travel departs later, we can recommend nearby hotels.

What is the train like?

The Jinxiutianfu Panda Train is a chartered luxury sleeper with private berths, onboard dining cars, a reading corner, and Panda Butler staff. A certified medical professional travels with the group. Most inter-city travel happens overnight — you sleep on the train and arrive fresh in a new destination.

What kind of food is served?

The tour includes 12 breakfasts and 24 main meals. Onboard meals are prepared by the train kitchen. Destination meals feature regional specialties: Xinjiang Welcome Banquet with song and dance, yak-meat hot pot in Taxkorgan, whole-lamb feast in Kashgar, and a Turpan fruit feast. Xinjiang cuisine is predominantly halal.

Is travel insurance included?

Yes — complimentary travel accident insurance with coverage up to 300,000 CNY per person is included. We recommend supplemental international medical and evacuation coverage, especially given the remote areas visited on this route.

How do we get around at each destination?

At each destination, air-conditioned coaches transport the group to and from scenic sites. Professional local guides meet the group at each stop. The train handles all inter-city travel — no domestic flights or long bus transfers between cities.

Local Names

Tianshan Tianchi tee-EN-shahn tee-EN-chih

Heavenly Lake — glacial pool at 1,928 m beneath Bogda Peak in the Tianshan Mountains

Sailimu Hu sigh-LEE-moo hoo

Sayram Lake — the highest, largest lake in the Tianshan range, the Atlantic's last breath

Kuche koo-CHUH

Kuqa — ancient Silk Road kingdom that shaped Tang Dynasty music and dance

Kashi kah-SHIH

Kashgar — China's westernmost city, 2,000 years of living Silk Road history

Tashkurgan tahsh-KOOR-gahn

Taxkorgan — border town at 3,100 m on the Pamir Plateau, where China meets three nations

Kalakuli Hu kah-lah-KOO-lee hoo

Karakul Lake — the colour-changing mirror of Muztagh Ata at 3,600 m

Aitiga'er eye-tee-GAR

Id Kah Mosque — China's largest mosque, the heart of Kashgar's Old Town

Bositeng Hu boh-sih-TUNG hoo

Bosten Lake — China's largest inland freshwater lake, reeds and desert in one frame

Huoyan Shan hwoh-YEN shahn

Flame Mountain — the red ridge from Journey to the West, where summer ground temps hit 70°C

Kaner Jing kah-NUR jing

Karez Well — 2,000-year-old underground tunnels, one of China's three great ancient engineering works