

# CHINESE SILK ROAD

DETAILED ITINERARY

CHINA

Feb 07/23



The ancient Silk Road was a route that connected Imperial Rome with China. For centuries it was the main exchange between East and West, a conduit for religion and philosophy as well as goods and ideas. It was a place of great ancient cities as well as religious and spiritual centers of faith. Extending 4,000 miles (6,437 kilometers), the heart of the great Silk Road was China.

Our adventure to a seldom-visited part of the forbidden kingdom starts in the old imperial capital of Xian, the terminus of the Silk Road. Terra Cotta Warriors are a testimony to once powerful ancient armies. Evidence of the spread of Buddhism can be seen in the stunning carved grottos in Bingling (a UNESCO World Heritage Site) as well as at Labrang Monastery, home to the yellow-sect Tibetans. We explore the seldom-visited western portion of the Great Wall in Jiayuguan to witness the extent of Chinese efforts to protect their empire. We journey to the famed Rainbow Mountain, an extraordinary phenomenon unique in its color and shape.

## FACTS & HIGHLIGHTS

- 23 land days • Maximum 16 travelers • Start in Xian and finish in Urumqi • Includes 1 internal flight • All meals included • Terra Cotta Warriors in Xian • 5th century Buddhist temples at Bingling (UNESCO) • Labrang Monastery and the Yellow Hat sect Tibetans • Jiayuguan and the western end of the Great Wall of China • The Magao Grottos (UNESCO) of Dunhuang • Oasis town of Turpan • Camel safari in the Taklamakan Desert • The famed Sunday Market in Kashgar • Travel along the Karakoram Highway. Visit the unique and colorful Rainbow Mountain

## DEPARTURE DATES & PRICE

**Sep 03 - Sep 25, 2023** - \$6895 USD  
**May 05 - May 27, 2024** - \$7495 USD

**Activity Level: 3**

**Comfort Level:** Some long drives. 2 nights over 10,000 ft.

## ACCOMMODATIONS

We stay in comfortable accommodations, both hotels and guesthouses, with private bathrooms. The only exception is the one night camping in the Taklamakan Desert.

**ELDERTREKS**



SMALL GROUP  
**EXOTIC ADVENTURES**  
FOR TRAVELERS 50 PLUS



The great Taklamakan Desert may have instilled fear in the hearts of intrepid travelers of the past but we will enter this vast desert for a camel safari, stopping at a number of oasis towns. We conclude our adventure on the border of the great Pamir Mountain Range and visit the Uighur town of Kashgar and the famed Sunday Market before ending our tour in Urumqi.

Join us as we explore the stunning landscapes, ancient sites and fascinating cultures on our Chinese Silk Road adventure.



## DAY 1 ARRIVE IN XIAN

Arrive at Xian Airport, where you are met and transferred to our hotel in the city. Our tour leader will greet you at a welcome meeting before our group dinner.

Overnight in Xian.

## DAY 2 TERRA-COTTA WARRIORS OF XIAN

We begin our adventure with a visit to the famed Terra-Cotta Warriors, considered the greatest archaeological find of the 20th century. Afterwards, we return to the center of Xian to visit the Bell Tower,







the best-preserved and largest wooden tower in China. In the afternoon, see the Wild Goose pagoda, a well-preserved ancient and holy building for Buddhism. We conclude our sightseeing with a walking tour around the Hui minority area of Xian, ending at the Hui Grand Mosque, one of the oldest and largest mosques in China, with its combination of Chinese and Arabic architectural styles.

Dinner and overnight in Xian.

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### **DAY 3 XIAN SITES, TRAIN TO LANZHOU**

This morning we will visit the ancient city walls of Xian by foot. Later visit the Shaanxi Historical Museum, built in the style of the Tang-Dynasty. It houses over 370,000 items from Chinese history including murals, paintings, pottery, coins, as well as bronze, gold, and silver objects. In the afternoon we take a bullet train to Lanzhou. This train ride is approximately 3:20 hours long.

Dinner and overnight in Lanzhou.

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### **DAY 4 TO BINGLING GROTTOS (UNESCO), TO XIAHE**

We drive this morning to the Bingling (or ‘Ten Thousand’ in the Tibetan language) Grottos (UNESCO), a series of grottos filled with Buddhist sculptures carved into natural caves and caverns set in a canyon along the Yellow River. Construction dates back to the Western Jin Dynasty (265-316). To reach the grottos, we take a boat from the town of Liujiaxia, passing through the Liujiaxia Reservoir. Afterwards we continue on to the town of Xiahe for the evening.

Dinner and overnight in Xiahe.

### **DAY 5 LABRANG MONASTERY (TIBETAN)**

Today we “step” into Tibet as we visit Labrang Monastery, the largest and most influential and major monastery of the Gelugpa (or Yellow Hat) sect of Tibetan Buddhism. The architectural layout follows a true Tibetan style while the construction patterns are a blend with Chinese styles. We have the entire morning to explore the monastery. After lunch we depart for Lanzhou.

Dinner and overnight in Lanzhou.

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### **DAY 6 TRAIN TO ZHANGYE DANXIA RAINBOW MOUNTAIN**

After breakfast we transfer to the train station and take the fast train to Zhangye (approx. 3 hours). After lunch we visit Danxia National Geological Park, also known as Rainbow Mountain, which is located 40 miles/65 km from Zhangye city. It is unique for its color and shape. Wind, rain and time created extraordinary shapes, including towers, columns and canyons with different colors, patterns and sizes, similar to a layer cake.

Dinner and overnight in Zhangye.

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### **DAY 7 TO JIAYUGUAN, WESTERN GREAT WALL, WEI-JIN ANCIENT TOMBS**

After breakfast we drive to Jiayuguan (approx 3 hours). Upon arrival in Jiayuguan we are transferred to a local restaurant for lunch. After lunch, we explore Jiayuguan Pass (Jiayuguan Fort), also known as the “Impregnable Pass under Heaven”. Jiayuguan is located on the western end of the Great Wall of the Ming Dynasty and is considered the most magnificent and well-preserved pass among over a thousand passes along the Great Wall. Later we visit the Great Wall Museum



Jiayuguan - western Great Wall

for a historical overview of the Great Wall, and then the Over-Hanging Cliff Great Wall. Situated outside of the city, this suspended wall is a part of the Great Wall and was originally built on a ridge at a 45-degree angle. We end this fascinating day with a visit to the Wei-Jin ancient tombs. Built between the 3rd and 5th centuries during the Wei and Jin Dynasties, it is renowned as the largest subterranean art gallery in the world and houses a great deal of colorful murals.

Dinner and overnight in Jiayuguan.

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### **DAY 8 TO DUNHUANG, TEN-THOUSAND-BUDDHA GORGE**

After breakfast, we drive to the historical city of Dunhuang. We visit Yulin Grottos which is also called the 'Ten-Thousand-Buddha Gorge', and is situated in a valley along the Yulin River.

There is time to rest in the afternoon before we visit Shazhou night market this evening.

Dinner and overnight in Dunhuang.

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### **DAY 9 DUNHUANG, MOGAO GROTTO**

This morning is dedicated to exploring the UNESCO World Heritage Mogao Grottos. Constructed over a millennium from the 4th to 14th centuries, the caves are also known as the Thousand Buddha Caves, and besides being the most-notable grottos in China, they are also considered the best preserved treasure house of Buddhist art, sutras, murals and sculptures in the world. In the afternoon we visit the Dunhuang Museum, which exhibits relics excavated from the local area, including paper and coins. The museum is also home to an excellent reconstruction of the Great Wall during the Han Dynasty. Later we explore Crescent Lake, a natural

wonder of the Gobi Desert where you can slide down the massive sand dunes. The contrast between the golden sand hill and the blue lake are breathtaking.

Dinner and overnight in Dunhuang.

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### **DAY 10 TRAIN TO TURPAN**

After breakfast we visit the White Horse pagoda, which was first built in the late Qin Dynasty. The present pagoda was rebuilt in the twenty-fourth year of Qingdaoguang (1843-1844 A.D.). This afternoon we take a bullet train to Turpan.

Dinner and overnight in Turpan.

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### **DAY 11 ANCIENT CITY OF IDIKUT, BIZEKLIK THOUSAND BUDDHA CAVES, LUNCH WITH A LOCAL UIGHUR FAMILY**

We begin with a visit to the ancient city of Idikut (Gaochang). First built in the 1st century BC, Gaochang later became the capital of the Idikut (Gaochang) Uighur Kingdom in the 8th century. Later we visit Bizeklik Thousand Buddha Caves, which used to be an important center for Buddhist worship under the Xizhou Huigu Government of the Idikut (Gaochang) Kingdom.

After, we drive Toyuk Village, an old, beautiful and timeless village with a friendly Uighur community. Here, we visit several local families and eat lunch with one of them in their homes.

After lunch we visit the world famous Karez Irrigation System, which is unique to this part of the world. The system is considered as one of the three great projects in China, with the other two being the Great Wall and the Grand Canal. We also visit the Emin Suliman Minaret, which is a magnificent combination of ancient Uighur and Islamic architecture. It is the tallest ancient pagoda in Xinjiang and the only Islamic ancient pagoda

in the country. Locals call it “pure tower”. Along the way enjoy the Flaming Mountains - red sandstone hills that are part of the Tian Shan Mountain Range.

Dinner and overnight in Turpan.

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## **DAY 12 ANCIENT CITY OF YARGUL, TRAIN TO KUCHE**

Today we visit the ancient city of Yargul (Jiaohe), which is considered one of the best-preserved ancient cities in China. The ruins of the buildings are divided into temples, civilian dwellings and government offices. Workshops and residential houses in the streets are still visible. This afternoon we will take a comfortable ‘sleeper train’ (7 hours) to Kuche, arriving in the evening where we will check in to our hotel.

Dinner and overnight in Kuche.

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## **DAY 13 KIZIL THOUSAND BUDDHA CAVES, TIANSHAN GREAT CANYON**

This morning we visit the Kizil Thousand Buddha Caves, which sits high on the cliffs over the northern bank of the Muzat River. The caves were hewn between the 3rd and 8th century and form one of

the earliest Buddhist art treasure troves in China. These caves were also in use one century before the famous Mogao Grotto at Dunhuang. After lunch, we drive to the Tianshan Mysterious Great Canyon, noted for the unique color and shape of its mountains. Today the Tianshan Great Canyon is regarded as one of the ten most beautiful canyons in China.

Dinner and overnight in Kuche.

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## **DAY 14 KUCHE TO AKSU**

This morning we will explore the Old City of Kuche and its community of friendly Uighur people. We visit the Grand Mosque, built in the 17th century. The roof of the mosque was constructed using 300,000 eggs, cement and bricks. Later we visit the ancient city of Subash dating from the 2nd and 3rd centuries as well as the Kizil Kagha Beacon Tower, an ancient military outpost. We then drive to Aksu.

Dinner and overnight in Aksu.





## **DAY 15 TO HOTAN**

We depart Aksu after breakfast and head for Hotan. We travel along the new highway opened in 2007, following the route of the Hotan River, which was also a significant ancient trading route.

Dinner and overnight in Hotan.

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## **DAY 16 DESERT TREKKING WITH BACTRIAN CAMELS**

This morning we will visit the Grand Bazaar of Hotan which has an authentic local market feel. Afterwards, we will drive into the Taklamakan Desert for a very unique and memorable experience. Once we arrive at our starting point in the Taklamakan, we have our luggage and supplies loaded onto camels as we begin our desert trek. Our camels are Bactrian camels, which are native to the steppes of Central Asia. They are larger, have 2 humps and are much more rare than the single-humped dromedary camels. We can trek on foot or on camel, or both. Enjoy a picnic lunch amid the dunes before we continue on to our campsite for the evening.

Dinner and overnight at our campsite in the desert.

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## **DAY 17 SUNRISE OVER THE DUNES, TO HOTAN**

We rise early this day to witness the sun rise over the high sand dunes before we pack up our camels and head out of the desert. Enjoy a shower in the hotel to wash away everything but the memories!

Dinner and overnight in Hotan.



## DAY 18 HOTAN SITES, TO KASHGAR

After breakfast we visit a traditional mulberry paper making workshop. The ancient tradition of paper making has been around for 2000 years, yet there are few remaining families who uphold the tradition. The process is both complex and fascinating. This afternoon we board the train to Kashgar (5 hours).

Dinner and overnight in Kashgar.

## DAY 19 TASHKURGAN, TAJIK VILLAGES AND NOMADIC HERDSMAN, KARAKUL LAKE

Today is an early start as we set out along the Karakorum Highway, one of the most beautiful roads in the world. The hues and colors of some of the world's highest mountain ranges dominate every horizon on our journey towards Karakul Lake, as Kyrgyz nomadic herders and ancient caravanserais dot the vast landscape. Karakul Lake (which means 'great' lake ) sits at the foot of the Muztagh Ata (7546m) and Kongur (7719m) mountains. 'Muztagh Ata' means Father of the Ice Mountain and is one the most beautiful and mysterious mountains in the

world. Hiking around Karakul Lake, which is located 11,800 feet above sea level, you are surrounded by a series of mountains and grasslands where herds of yaks can be observed. We will enjoy a picnic lunch on the shores of the lake before continuing on to Tashkurgan, an important hub on the old Silk Road. The name Tashkurgan is actually a translation of 'Stone Fort.' This whole area around this Tajik town borders Pakistan and Afghanistan and are connected via the Khunjerab Pass. On the way into Tashkurgan there are many Tajik villages and nomadic herdsman.

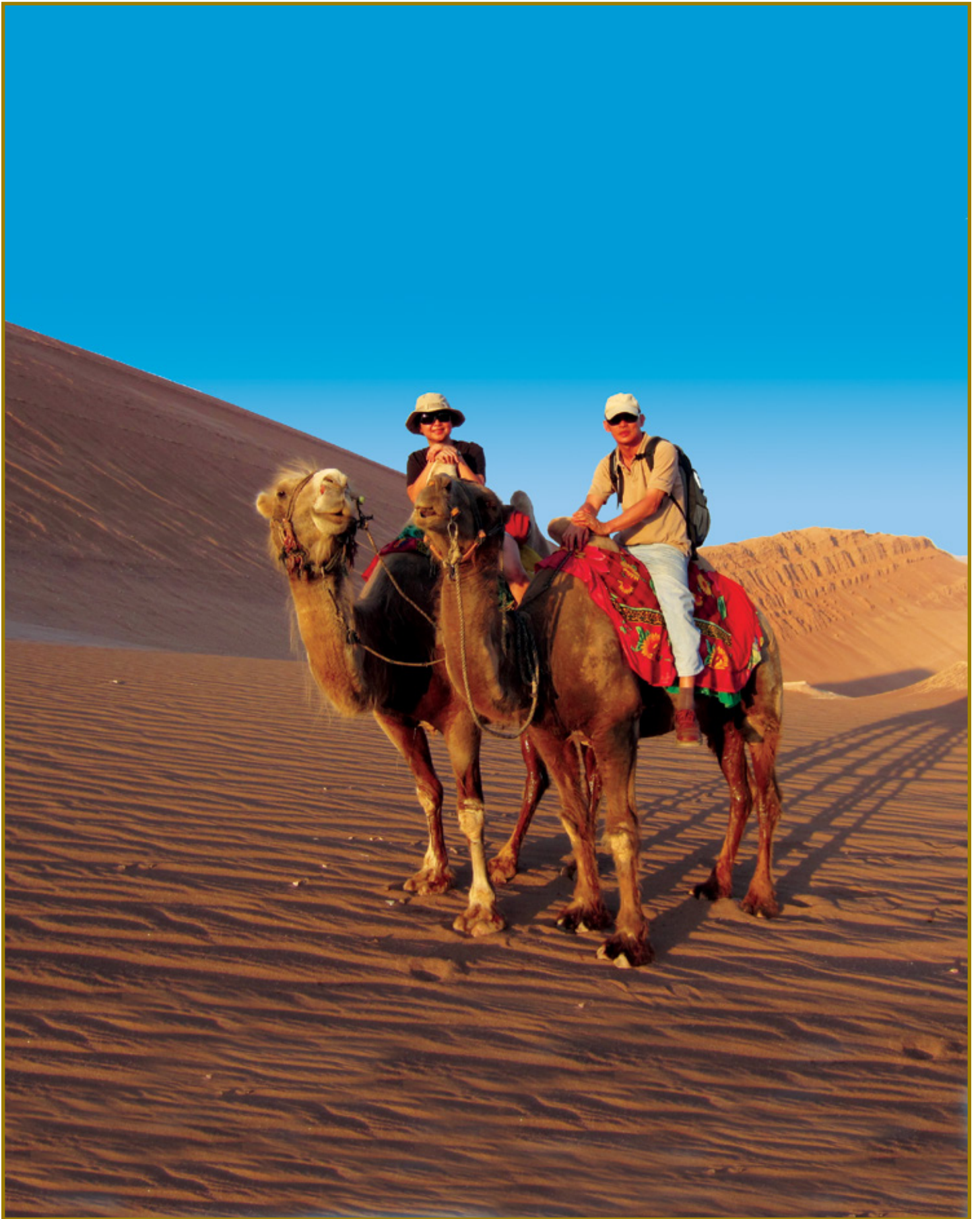
Dinner and overnight in Tashkurgan.

## DAY 20 TASHKURGAN TO KASHGAR

After breakfast, we explore the town's ancient stone fort - still standing after 1800 years! We also visit the Tashkurgan Historical and Cultural Museum and walk around this historic town. This is a fantastic opportunity to try traditional Tajik food and immerse yourself in the culture of the Tajik community. After lunch we drive to Kashgar.

Dinner and overnight in Kashgar.





## DAY 21 KASHGAR'S ANCIENT SUNDAY MARKET AND UIGHUR CULTURE

Today we explore the rich, endless culture of the Uighur people in Kashgar. First visit Kashgar's historic Apak Hoja Tomb, which is also known as Fragrant Concubine Tomb. The next stop is the Livestock Market, which is considered the most interesting and traditional part of the famed Sunday Market. In the afternoon, we visit the largest bazaar in Central Asia at the Kashgar Sunday Main Bazaar. This evening enjoy dinner with a local Uighur family in their home.

Dinner and overnight in Kashgar.

## DAY 22 KASHGAR'S OLD CITY

After breakfast, we visit the Id Kah Mosque, the largest mosque in China, with its intricate architecture. We then continue our walking tour in the famous Old City of Kashgar. We will have tea in an old traditional tea house, dating hundreds of years old, before heading to the airport for our flight to Urumqi.

Dinner and overnight in Urumqi.

## DAY 23 DEPART URUMQI

Our Chinese Silk Road adventure concludes today with a transfer to the airport for your departing flight.







## QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

### 1. HOW BIG ARE THE GROUPS?

Each group is limited to 16 participants. Small groups are an important ingredient in adventure travel. They allow for more interaction and more personalized service throughout the itinerary.

### 2. WHAT IS INCLUDED IN THE TOUR PRICE?

All accommodations throughout; all meals, starting with dinner on day 1 and finishing with breakfast on departure day (i.e. the last day of the ElderTreks tour); bottled drinking water throughout the trip; all internal transportation; airport transfers on day 1 and departure day (i.e. the last day of the ElderTreks tour); all day trips and entrance fees as outlined in the itinerary; tips for hotels (porterage), national guide, and bus driver, restaurants and spot guides; services of a trip leader.

### 3. WHAT IS NOT INCLUDED IN THE TOUR PRICE?

International flights, tips to ElderTreks tour leader, alcoholic drinks, visas and travel insurance.

### 4. ARE THESE “EDUCATIONAL” TOURS?

Yes, in the broadest sense of the word, “educational”. We visit many historic sites and have talks and discussions on the region’s history, culture and politics, but this is only one element of what we do. We believe that it is equally educational to get to meet new people on a non-commercial basis, visit their homes and even try to learn a few words in the native language. Sometimes the most “educational” moments are spent walking down a country road.

### 5. HOW DO WE TRAVEL DURING THE TOUR?

All internal transportation is included in the land price of the trip. We use minivans and 4 x 4’s where necessary for road travel, trains, and one internal flight.

### 6. WHAT ARE OUR ACCOMMODATIONS LIKE?

We mainly stay in good accommodations — both hotels and guesthouses, where every room has a private shower or bath. The accommodations have been chosen on the basis of location, atmosphere and local charm. The only exception is one night camping in the Taklamakan Desert.

### 7. WHAT ABOUT THE WEATHER?

Conditions along the Silk Road vary from a typical continental climate around Xian to a desert climate and even mountains as you travel westward to Kashgar and the border with Pakistan. Be prepared for extremes in temperature. Average daytime

temperatures are 82°F (28°C), but night time temperatures can drop to 54°F (12°C).

### 8. WHEN IS PAYMENT DUE?

A non-refundable deposit of \$500 USD (plus insurance if you require it) is due at time of booking and will reserve your place on the adventure. Payment of the full land cost is due 120 days before departure. Cancellation charges are applicable and are outlined in the “Terms and Conditions” section of our brochure.

### 9. IS MEDICAL INSURANCE REQUIRED?

Insurance coverage is not included in the cost of your trip. Please note that medical insurance is not required for this adventure but is recommended. ElderTreks offers comprehensive travel insurance and we are happy to provide you with a quote if you call our office. If you are purchasing insurance elsewhere, please ensure you provide the details to ElderTreks as soon as possible.

*\*Please note those travelers with pre-existing medical conditions must take out travel insurance at the time of deposit*

### 10. WHAT SHOULD I TAKE ON THE TOUR?

There is a detailed “What to Take” list in our Trip Kit, which we will send to you once you have booked the trip.

### 11. WHAT MEALS ARE INCLUDED?

All meals are included, starting with dinner on day 1, and finishing with breakfast on departure day. We eat a variety of local foods prepared in a wide range of settings. In many cases, we simply order a number of dishes and share, allowing you to sample new foods and decide what you enjoy best.

### 12. CAN YOU ARRANGE MY FLIGHTS?

We would be happy to take care of your air arrangements. ElderTreks has a full air department and we offer highly competitive fares. Whether you simply want an air quote, or you would like to make an air reservation when booking your tour, just give us a call and we’ll work out a routing for you.

### 13. WHAT IF I WOULD LIKE MORE INFORMATION?

If you have any further questions about the trip, please do not hesitate to contact our office for additional information. A Trip Kit containing further details on the destination will be sent to those who have booked on the tour.

