



CHINA'S SILK ROAD

September 2-23, 1999

China's Silk Road is composed of many routes traversing the great desert region between Xian and the greater west, with multiple branches toward Europe and the Middle East. While trade began more than 2000 years ago, the most active time for traders and travelers was from 600 to 1300 A.D. Marco Polo arrived with his father and uncle, traders from Venice, in Medieval times when the routes were most developed and relatively safe. We will visit sections of two major routes and explore a more remote area that is considered Eastern Tibet at the edge of the Qinghai Plateau.

Sept 2-3 Los Angeles to Osaka Depart LAX on Japan Air Lines (JAL) at 1:45 pm and arrive Osaka at 5:45 pm for a first-class overnight courtesy of JAL. This helps to eliminate flight fatigue. Next day depart at 10 am and arrive Beijing at 12:05 pm.

4-5 Beijing First time visitors want to see the Great Wall. Other highlights include Tien An Men Square, originally built in 1651 and enlarged to 100 acres by Mao in 1958, the largest square in the world. The Great Hall of the People is to one side and across the avenue is the Forbidden City, a museum that once was home to the Imperial family. Past China travelers may seek different sights with Mary while our guide leads others to the "must see" places. An Imperial Dinner in the famous restaurant called "Fang Shan" located in The Beihai Park will mark our arrival in China. It is the restaurant that made food for the imperial family in the old days. We stay at the Xiyuan Hotel.

6-7 Urumqi A five-hour flight takes us 2050 miles to Urumqi, the capital of China's most western province and the most inland city in the world. It is a Turkic city, home of the Uighur people and 12 other ethnic minorities. Islam is the dominant religion in the autonomous Xinjiang Province. Huge mosques are still in use. We learn about their culture and see colorful clothing unique to this minority group. An orientation to the city includes a visit to the Provincial Museum, then relax and watch the countryside as we drive to Heavenly Lake in the Tien Shan mountains to the north. We stay at the new 5-star Haide Hotel.

8 Khotan A one-hour flight at noon offers a wonderful chance to cross the formidable Taklamakan Desert (less daunting from the sky than from atop a camel in a windstorm). Taklamakan translates roughly to "he who enters will not return." On the Southern Silk Route lies a series of oasis towns, and we land at Khotan, once a major Buddhist kingdom. Khotan was the first place outside China to learn the art of silk-making, the seeds of mulberry trees and the silkworms themselves being concealed in the head-dress of a Chinese princess who came to marry a Khotani king. We visit the Silk and Mulberry Research Center and a silk factory, as well as a carpet factory and jade cutting shop as time allows. Khotan Hotel.

9 Yarkand An expert on the desert gives us a more informed explanation of the region and the impact the sands of time have had on humans. We travel the Southern Silk Route and visit Malikaawat Ancient Ruins and Yinalik Desert. In Yarkand see how the Yinjisa Knife is made - a prized possession sought by early explorers. This area has only recently opened to foreigners. Stay at the Yarkand Hotel.

10-11-12 Kashgar Kashgar has long thrived as the junction of routes north and south around the Taklamakan from Tibet, India, Afghanistan and Russia. An optional day trip, pending weather, takes us on a highway headed for Pakistan (but not close to it) and the Karakoram Highway to the icy blue Karakul Lake and a view of the pointy mass of 7500m Mustagh Ata peak. A visit with locals in yurts give a sense of life in this challenging environment. We experience the Sunday Great Bazaar, which is world renown. Camels are prized among the bleating animals. Kashgar visits include the Idris Mosque, Abakh Hoja Tomb and "handicraft" street. Time is flexible here, so choose to sit out some of the visits if you wish more time shopping or meandering. Stay at the Kashgar Hotel. A late flight Monday evening.

13 Urumchi A short overnight and fly on to Dunhuang at 9 am.

14-15 Dunhuang Arrive at 10 am and get settled into the Dunhuang Hotel. Lunch and an afternoon excursion to Mingsha Dune and Crescent Moon Lake. Here's where we can ride camels if you are adventurous (optional). Then a full day at the famous grottoes, tagged an Art Gallery in the Desert

16 Lanzhou - A one-hour flight arrives in Lanzhou at 9:20 am. Another crossroads city, Lanzhou was once a major Silk Route staging post. Touring includes the Silk Road exhibit in the Provincial Museum. Perhaps a visit to the Yellow River, a major tributary for this area. The Feitian Hotel is a Singapore joint-venture tower with all the amenities to soothe the bodies of modern caravan travelers.

The next Silk Route is totally different from the Taklamakan and Gobi deserts. This takes us to a high and mountainous region with excellent scenery. It is home to Tibetans and Hans. Not many tourists travel here, so this should offer a slice of the *real* China with a Tibetan flavor.

17-18 Xiahe According to the guide book, Xiahe's buildings and people make it one of the most fascinating cities in China. It is a miniature Lhasa. The 9000-ft hillside village has one of the greatest monasteries of the "Yellow Hat" sect of Tibetan Buddhism to be found outside of Tibet. The Labrang Monastery is in the top six, as any monk with whom you can communicate will enthuse. The accommodations are basic, but the scenery is exceptional. The textiles are wonderful, as the Tibetan people exhibit their colorful clothing in every day garb. Travel is slow on the road, and the trip will take the day as we meander through villages and hillsides. In Xiahe we will see the Sangke grass land and Temple, as well as free time in the village. We stay at the Laplang Temple Hotel.

19 Lanzhou A day of travel down the mountain to board a train about 6 pm for an overnight train trip to Xian. The long day should have everyone ready for bed early.

20-21 Xian Arrive at 6:45 am and today you will enjoy the comforts of the Li Garden Hotel in Xian. Rest this morning before an afternoon tour to orient you to this important city that was once China's capital and the starting or ending point for caravans that braved the Silk Road. A full day tour of Qin Shi Huangde's tomb with 6000 terra cotta warriors and horses, plus a museum of artifacts and sample items from the tomb. A celebration is in order for the completion of our Silk Route tour, so tonight dinner will be served in the Theatre Restaurant while watching a Tang Dynasty show. We had an *Imperial* beginning in Beijing and now a fitting *Tang* conclusion in Xian.

22 Shanghai An 8:50 am flight to Shanghai, arriving at 10:40 am allows time for a visit to the Yuyuan Garden, the Bund, and the Shanghai Museum with a guide or choose to go off on your own. Shanghai is considered by many to be the new Hong Kong of the Orient. It was infamous in the first half of this century, and it is poised to rocket into the new millennium again as a world-class city. The Jianguo Hotel is centrally located.

23 Home Depart Shanghai at 2:15 pm and arrive Tokyo at 6 pm. Depart at 8:55 pm and arrive LA at 2:50 pm. Clear Customs and stay over a night or continue home.