

## China's Silk Road Tour

written by Pam Baker



No doubt, people will go to Beijing in droves this year to see the Olympics, but if you'd rather see another side of China and explore its centuries' old history, a trip far outside Beijing along China's ancient Silk Road may be a far more winning experience.

China's Silk Road is the very backbone of the history of civilization. The road itself is actually a vast network of caravan routes that converge, mingle and interconnect for over 5,000 miles to link China, Europe, Persia, Egypt, India, and Mesopotamia. For over 4,000 years, people traveled this collection of dirt paths and dusty routes by camel, donkey-drawn cart and even by foot to trade both ideas and goods. Along the way are remote desert outposts and isolated villages that cast a fascinating reflection of an era now otherwise extinct. Here rooted in the inhospitable landscape, the villages of Uyghur, Kazak and Kyrgyz still practice the ancient arts of silk production and traditional weaving techniques, the very secrets the world once lusted over and the reason the combined caravan routes were dubbed "Silk Road" a very long time ago.

Most modern day excursions allow you to move from site to site via airplane so you are not bound to a jaw-grinding trek across the desert. Even so, there will be plenty of opportunities to test drive older modes of transportation and collect treasures few modern men have ever seen.

Although Beijing has undergone a total make-over and everything there is polished and primed, there's just nothing like sauntering through the desert at sunset astride a camel, being the only tourists at a Sunday Bazaar, or exploring the 492 temples of the Mogao Caves. You can always end your tour, which typically takes 17 days, at the fabulously modern city of Shanghai if you're ready for a touch of high-rise splendor before you head home

### **TIP #1: Be Flexible**

This is not a trip for people with strict dietary restrictions or finicky taste buds. Most of the food is delicious but it is not the food we Americans think of as "Chinese." In some

areas, there is the equivalent of a five-star restaurant and/or hotel, but in many areas there is not. You'll be roughing it in many places so be flexible, relax and have a good time.

**TIP #2: Make Sure You Buy Evacuation Insurance**

Most of the American-run travel agencies include this in the trip price, but not all do. Check to make sure it is in place so that you can be airlifted to a hospital should there be a medical emergency. Although many sites on this route are remote, they are not considered dangerous, and it is only the remoteness that poses a problem, should you have a medical emergency. This simple insurance is very affordable and well worth taking along.

**TIP #3: This is a cool trip to do solo**

Because this trip is offered only to small groups by American travel agencies, it's easy to go solo because you'll bond with your group in no time and the tour guide will be well aware of your presence which increases the safety of traveling alone. As a matter of fact, this is a favorite trip for adventuresome singles so, who knows, you may even find romance in this exotic part of the world.

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