Undiscovered Horizons: Urumqi to Lhasa

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Overview

The Highlights

- Seven nights on board the luxurious *Golden Eagle Silk Road Express* private train

- Overnight train ride between Golmud & Lhasa: experience the world's highest stretch of track (3 miles above sea level) at Tanggula Pass

- Visit Dalai Lama's Summer Palace, Norbulingka

- Tour the UNESCO site **Potala Palace**, former seat of the Tibetan government

- Camel ride through the sand dunes to magical Crescent Lake

- Thousand Buddha Cave Complex of Dunhuang, site of 500 grottoes carved up to 1,700 years ago

- Visits to Jiaohe Ruins, one of the best-preserved ancient cities in China, & the incredible Turpan water system

- Tour Kashgar, renowned crossroads of the Southern & Middle Silk Road routes

- Dining under the desert sky among Hotan's famous rose gardens

- All meals, wine and beer with lunch and dinner, off-train tours, gratuities, and all airport transfers included

The Tour

This intriguing western China rail journey ends in one of the world's most fascinating places: Lhasa, the mystical capital city of Xizang (formally Tibet).

In the shadow of the Himalayas and known as the 'Roof of the World' due to its breathtaking average height of 13,200ft (4,060m) above sea level, Xizang is home to more Himalayan peaks than anywhere else in the world. And Lhasa is home to an amazing collection of UNESCO palaces and temples.

Itinerary

Day 1: Urumqi, China

Arrive in the vibrant city of Urumqi, the gateway to Xinjiang Province, where the fusion of ancient cultures meets modern elegance. Upon arrival, you will be met and transferred to the luxurious Conrad Urumqi for a one-night stay.

This evening, join your fellow guests in a lavish welcome reception at the hotel, where you'll enjoy a fine dining experience and a curated selection of local and international dishes, and meet your fellow travelers.

Day 2: Turpan

Today, we venture to the ancient city of Turpan. A scenic drive takes you through rugged landscapes to one of China's most captivating regions, famed for its Silk Road heritage and lush vineyards.

Enjoy an exclusive evening tour of the Jiaohe Ancient City. As the sun sets over the ruins, feel the

mystique of this once-thriving Silk Road city, with private expert commentary bringing history to life.

In the evening, step aboard the *Golden Eagle Silk Road Express*, where you'll be welcomed into your elegant cabin and treated to a celebratory dinner in the luxurious dining car.

Day 3: Turpan

Begin your day exploring the Ancient City of Gaochang, once a flourishing capital of the Silk Road. Roam through the ruins of this ancient kingdom, immersing yourself in the echoes of the past. After a delightful lunch in a local restaurant, we'll visit the renowned Karez Wells, an ingenious ancient irrigation system that still supports the lush vineyards of Turpan. The day concludes with a visit to Jiaohe Post, where tales of ancient travelers unfold.

Dinner will be back on board the *Golden Eagle Silk Road Express.* Overnight on the train.

Day 4: Kashgar

Arriving early in the iconic city of Kashgar, we begin our exploration of this bustling Silk Road market town. The day starts with a visit to the Apak Khoja Mausoleum, an ornate tomb steeped in legend and history. A stroll through Kashgar Old Town unveils vibrant streets teeming with life, offering an intimate look at the city's culture.

Enjoy lunch at a local restaurant before visiting the Gaotai Folk Houses, where traditional Uighur life still thrives.

The day ends in relaxation aboard the *Golden Eagle Silk Road Express* for an overnight.

Day 5: Hotan

Spend a leisurely morning aboard our private train, enjoying the stunning desert landscapes. After a sumptuous lunch on board, we will arrive in Hotan, where an exclusive visit to the Atlas Silk and Carpet Workshop awaits. Here, artisans continue the ancient tradition of hand-weaving exquisite silk and carpets, a process passed down through generations.

In the evening, an immersive night tour of Yotkan Ancient City takes you back to the Buddhist Kingdom of Khotan, where you'll explore this archaeological treasure under the stars, creating a memory as timeless as the city itself.

Tonight, we visit the Hotan Rose Blossom Restaurant, dining under the enchanting desert sky, surrounded by the fragrances of Hotan's famous rose gardens.

Return to the train for an overnight.

Day 6: Rouqiang

After a relaxing morning on board, we arrive in Rouqiang, where you can choose between two captivating options.

The Loulan Museum offers a deep dive into the history of the ancient Loulan Kingdom, which flourished in this desert region. Alternatively, visit the Miran Ancient City Ruins, where you'll be transported back to the Han and Tang dynasties, walking in the footsteps of Silk Road traders and explorers.

After a day of discovery, return to the train for a relaxing evening and dinner on board.

Day 7: Golmud

This morning, delve into the rich history of the Silk Road with a special lecture at the Hilton Qinghai-Golmud, followed by lunch in the hotel's elegant surroundings.

The afternoon offers the choice of visiting the surreal Chaerhan Salt Lake or joining a guided tour through Golmud, where modern life meets ancient traditions.

Dinner is served on the train. Overnight on board.

Day 8: Dunhuang

This morning, we will explore the vast natural beauty of the Sand Dunes by camel, where we will discover Crescent Lake. It is hidden among the towering sand dunes and has sustained life in this region for millennia.

In the small oasis city of Dunhuang, we will visit the fascinating Magao Thousand Buddha Cave Complex. This impressive site contains almost 500 grottoes, carved between 700 and 1,700 years ago. Inside we will see an amazing collection of beautiful sculptures and murals depicting the evolution of Buddhist religious art over 1,000 years.

Our day concludes with a Farewell Dinner aboard the *Golden Eagle Silk Road Express* for one last overnight, celebrating the culmination of an extraordinary journey.

Day 9: Xining, & The Qinghai–Xizang Railway

Enjoy a leisurely morning aboard the *Golden Eagle Silk Road Express* as it winds through the breathtaking landscapes of China's far west.

In the afternoon, enjoy the option to visit either the historic Buddhist Kumbum (Ta'er) Monastery or bustling Shuijingxiang Market before boarding for an overnight on the world-famous *Qinghai–Xizang Railway*, a high-altitude marvel that will carry you through the stunning Tanggula Mountain Pass. Golden Eagle has chartered two carriages on this remarkable train.

One of the world's most remarkable railway routes, the Qinghai–Xizang Railway spans approximately 1,956 kilometers, extending from Xining, Qinghai's provincial capital, to Lhasa, the capital of the Xizang Autonomous Region (formally Tibet).

Alternatively, guests can choose to travel directly to Lhasa via plane.

Day 10: Tanggula & Lhasa

Today, you will journey across the Tanggula Mountain Pass, the highest point of the *Qinghai–Xizang Railway* (16,640 ft above sea level), offering panoramic views of snow-capped peaks and pristine valleys.

After lunch, you will arrive in Lhasa, Xizang's mystical capital, where you will check into the opulent St Regis Lhasa for a three-night stay. This afternoon is yours to explore at your leisure, soaking in the unique atmosphere of this spiritual city.

Day 11: Lhasa, Xizang

Lhasa, nestled in a serene basin surrounded by majestic mountains, aptly translates to the "place of the gods." At an altitude of approximately 11,975 feet (3,650 metres), it is one of the highest cities on Earth. Steeped in over a thousand years of cultural and spiritual history, Lhasa is the traditional seat of the Dalai Lama and the holiest center of Tibetan Buddhism.

Today, we explore the tranquil Norbulingka, the Dalai Lama’s Summer Palace, built in the 1740s as a retreat from the sweltering summer heat. Meaning ‘jewel garden’ or ‘precious garden,’ this peaceful oasis remains a sanctuary from the bustling city, with its beautifully manicured grounds and serene atmosphere.

Afterwards, enjoy some free time to wander through the streets of Lhasa at your leisure, soaking up the vibrant atmosphere and immersing yourself in the rich culture and charm of this picturesque city.

Day 12: Lhasa, Xizang

On our second full day in Lhasa, we delve deeper into the spiritual heart of Xizang, beginning with a visit to the revered Jokhang Temple, a sacred 13th-century shrine that stands as the spiritual epicenter for Tibetans. This ancient temple, rich with devotion and history, draws countless pilgrims who journey here from across the region. We will also explore the vibrant Barkhor Market, the oldest market in Lhasa, where the rhythmic footsteps of pilgrims tracing their way around the temple blend with the lively hum of traders offering traditional crafts and wares.

For lunch, we’ll savor authentic Tibetan flavors while enjoying the enchanting sounds of traditional folk music.

In the afternoon, we embark on a tour of the iconic Potala Palace, a monumental 17th-century masterpiece and former seat of the Tibetan Government. Once the winter residence of the Dalai Lama, this awe-inspiring palace dominates the Lhasa skyline with its towering walls and intricate architecture. Set atop the Marpo Ri Hill, rising 130 meters above the valley floor and extending a further 170 meters skyward, the Potala Palace is one of the world’s most magnificent architectural wonders, offering breathtaking views and an extraordinary glimpse into Xizang's regal and religious past.

We’ll conclude this unforgettable day with a farewell dinner, a fitting tribute to the incredible

experiences shared on this journey.

Day 13: Lhasa departure

Enjoy breakfast in the hotel before being transferred to the airport for your departure.

Dates & Prices

More

A Chinese visa and a special permit for travel into the Xizang Autonomous Region are both required for this journey (for U.S. citizens). We will obtain the Xizang permit on your behalf.

Travelers should be aware that journey involves high altitudes.