

The Silk Road: Beijing to Moscow by Private Train

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Overview

The Highlights

- Grand 21-day trek across China, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Russia
- The most stylish, comfortable way to see sights rarely seen by Western travelers
- Beijing's Temple of Heaven, Forbidden City, Tiananmen Square & the Great Wall
- Terracotta warriors of Xian

- Thousand Buddha Cave Complex of Dunhuang, site of 500 grottoes carved 1,700 years ago
 - Exploring the Gobi Desert & Crescent Lake by camel
 - Samarkand, Merv, Khiva, Ashgabat, Bukhara & Tashkent city tours
 - All meals, wine and beer with lunch & dinner, off-train tours, and gratuities included.
- International airfare & visas are additional.

The Tour

The Silk Road rail adventure is one of the most exotic, storied, and best-loved by Society of IRT members, taking travelers to places few Westerners have ventured.

It's no wonder IRT co-owners Owen & Eleanor Hardy chose this epic adventure to celebrate IRT's 30th anniversary in 2013!

This two-train tour follows in the footsteps of Marco Polo along one of the world's oldest and most historic trade routes. The luxurious *Golden Eagle* and the first-class *Shangri-La Express* trains will transport you back in time through five countries.

Itinerary

Day 1: Beijing

Upon arrival at Beijing Airport, you will be met and transferred to the five-star Regent Hotel (or similar), which is located in the historical center of the city. This luxurious Beijing hotel is minutes from the Forbidden City, Tiananmen Square, Wangfujing shopping street, the Oriental Plaza and picturesque hutongs (old lanes).

This evening, enjoy an exclusive welcome dinner in an authentic Peking Duck restaurant, giving you the opportunity to meet your fellow travelers and look ahead to your 21-day voyage of a lifetime. The banquet will be complemented by specially selected international wines, as well as a glass of local rice wine also known as 'firewater' to toast this special occasion.

Day 2: Beijing

In our touring program of the Imperial City, we visit Tiananmen Square and explore the magnificently restored Forbidden City, which was built in the early 14th century and was home to the emperors of the Ming and Qing dynasties.

Our cultural exploration continues at the Temple of Heaven, built during the Ming Dynasty to offer

sacrifices to the heavens, which is the grandest of the four great temples situated in Beijing. Here we experience enchanting displays of traditional dancing, singing and the delicately precise ancient art of calligraphy. We'll also explore the small 'hutong' lanes of old Beijing by rickshaw and visit a local family in a traditional courtyard house.

Please note the Beijing touring program is subject to change.

Day 3: Beijing & Xian

During our stay in Beijing we devote time to the most awe-inspiring site in the whole of China – The Great Wall. This amazing edifice is perhaps the most evocative symbol of Chinese skill and precision. Originally built to protect the Chinese Empire from raids by nomadic tribes, it is the longest man-made structure in the world and part of the UNESCO World Heritage List.

We have the privilege of walking along a portion of the wall – the perfect opportunity to take some memorable photographs.

This afternoon, we depart Beijing and travel to Xian on the exhilarating high-speed railway line. Travelling at speeds of up to 300 km per hour (190 miles per hour) the bullet train will cover the distance of 1,144 km (710 miles) in a time of approximately 5 hours and 40 minutes.

Tonight we stay at the centrally located Sofitel Xian.

Day 4: Xian

Following breakfast at the hotel, we will admire Xian's historical ancient city walls and experience the bustling street culture of the Muslim Quarter.

This afternoon, we will have several hours to explore the world-famous Terracotta Warriors, discovered by peasants less than 50 years ago. The 6,000 terracotta figures and their horses are one of the greatest archaeological finds of the 20th century.

Alternatively, as part of our Freedom of Choice program, we will offer a visit to the Han Yangling Museum. This tomb, dating back 2,000 years with its adjoining museum, is one of China's best-kept secrets.

Day 5: Xian

Today we will board the private *Shangri-La Express* train for the next stage of our journey across China. A welcome dinner of authentic Chinese cuisine is served on board in the Restaurant Car, as we travel towards Dunhuang.

Imperial Suite and Gold Class passengers will be accommodated in the private en-suite [Diamond Class cabins](#) on board the *Shangri-La Express*, whilst Silver Class will be allocated [Heritage Class cabins](#), which have shared shower and toilet facilities. Upgrades for Silver Class passengers to Diamond Class are available at an extra charge and subject to availability. Ask about upgrade at time of booking.

Day 6: Dunhuang

Following a leisurely morning on board, we arrive in the small oasis city of Dunhuang. This afternoon we explore the vast natural beauty of the Gobi Desert by camel. Here we discover Crescent Lake. Hidden amongst towering sand dunes, it has sustained life in this region for millennia.

We stay for one night at the Silk Road Dunhuang hotel. Tonight we experience dinner and a local folk performance in this magical setting.

Day 7: Dunhuang

We wake early this morning to experience sunrise over the magnificent sand dunes, before we 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 this 1,000-year period. Later this afternoon, we will rejoin the *Shangri-La Express* for our onward journey to Turpan.

Day 8: Turpan

Turpan is the location where the Flaming Mountains create a magnificent backdrop. We take a fascinating tour to the ancient underground irrigation system that has successfully fed the rich orchards and vineyards for centuries. We will visit the Museum of Turpan with its 5,000 artifacts detailing the rich history of the area. It includes the Ancient Mummy exhibition with exhibits dating back 3,200 years.

Our final destination is the elegantly decaying sand fortress city of Jiaohe founded in 108 BC. Jiaohe became an important trading route along the Silk Road until it was abandoned in the 13th century following a raid by Genghis Khan.

Day 9: Border Crossing – China & Kazakhstan

After a final breakfast on board the *Shangri-La Express*, we pass through dramatic mountain scenery before arriving at the Chinese border station of Alashankou. The border crossing takes approximately 5 hours. But our patience will be rewarded as the private train that awaits us is the *Golden Eagle*, one of the world's most luxurious. We board in Druzhba, the Kazakh border station.

Day 10: Almaty

Almaty is the largest city in Kazakhstan and is notable for its wide tree-lined boulevards. Surrounded by the majesty of the Tien Shan Mountains, this beautifully verdant city derives its name from 'alma' meaning 'apple'. Just a short distance from the city, apple orchards thrive in abundance.

Our city tour includes a visit to Panfilov Park where we have the opportunity to visit the Zenkhov

Cathedral which was built entirely of wood. We'll also go out of the city to the Chimbulak resort, where a cable car ride will give you spectacular views of Almaty and the mountains.

Day 11: Tashkent

Tashkent is the capital city of Uzbekistan. We spend time touring this modern Soviet-style city, which was rebuilt following the devastating earthquake of 1966. Our tour of the city includes the Old Town, where traditional homes and religious buildings line the narrow streets. Here, in a small library, we'll be privileged to see one of Islam's most sacred relics – the world's oldest Koran. This is followed by a visit to the Railway Museum and the Museum of Applied Arts.

Day 12: Samarkand

The mention of Samarkand, more than any other city, instantly conjures evocative images of the Silk Road. Founded in the 6th century BC, Samarkand's stunning architecture hints at its former status as one of the most important cities in Asia. It is particularly noted for its architectural remains from the 14th to the 17th century, when it flourished as the fabled capital of the Mongol empire of Timur and his successors.

Today we will visit some of its most significant sites including Registan Square, the refined elegance of the beautifully proportioned Bibi Khanum Mosque and the Ulag Beg observatory, one of the earliest Islamic astronomical observatories built in 1428. Before dinner we will return to the now illuminated and awe-inspiring Registan Square.

Day 13: Bukhara

Bukhara is quite simply outstanding. Like Khiva, UNESCO sponsored the renovation of much of the city for its 2,500th anniversary in 1999. The highlight of this wonderful tour is a visit to The Ark, a fortified residence of the Emirs of Bukhara – the despotic and ruthless leaders who ruled until Soviet times.

We then travel out of the city to experience the Emir's enchantingly named, Palace of the Moon and Stars. This evening, weather and time permitting, we will enjoy a barbecue on the station platform before our train departs.

Day 14: Merv

From Bukhara we transfer to the ancient and mainly unrestored remains of Merv. Once an important stopping point on the Silk Road, it claims to have briefly been the largest city in the world during the 12th century.

The city's demise came in 1794, after the Emir of Bukhara destroyed the dam which the population depended on for its water.

Day 15: Ashgabat & Darvaza

The *Golden Eagle* makes a brief scheduled stop at Ichoguz, where we have the option to leave

the train and make a short journey to Darvaza's famous burning gas crater, a spectacular sight best seen at night. Located in the middle of the Kara Kum desert where the area is rich in natural gas, the 70 meter-wide crater is known by locals as the 'Door to Hell' and has been burning for over 40 years. A unique experience that is not to be missed.

Ashgabat, the capital of Turkmenistan, is known as the 'Las Vegas of the Kara Kum'. Situated between the Kara Kum desert and the Kopet Dag mountain range, Ashgabat is a relatively modern city built upon the ruins of the Silk Road city of Konjikala and the Soviet city built after the devastating earthquake of 1948.

The city's extravagant fountains, golden domes, and towering modern buildings appear strangely incongruous in this desert setting. Highlights on our visit include a visit to the National Museum and Kipchak Mosque.

Day 16: Khiva

From Urgench we travel to the ancient city of Khiva, founded 2,500 years ago. As one of the Silk Road's most important trading posts and now a World Heritage Site, it lies at the crossroads of the routes between Mongolia, Russia, China and Persia.

A truly magnificent sight to behold, it rises out of the desert to reveal a wealth of impressive architecture. Stepping back in time, we discover its impressive mosques, madrassas, bazaars and minarets within Khiva's ancient walls.

Day 17: Kara Kum

Today we enjoy a relaxing day on board as we travel across the vast expanse of the Kara Kum desert.

As well as experiencing the unique landscape, you can take the opportunity to chat to fellow passengers and maybe take a Russian language lesson. Enjoy the train's beautiful lounge car and take meals in the dining cars.

Day 18: Volgograd

Standing on the banks of the Volga, Stalingrad, as it was known in Soviet times, was the dramatic scene of one of the most important WWII battles. The Russians heroically turned back the Nazi advance here to alter the course of the war. We visit the poignantly sobering Mamayev Kurgan war memorial, followed by an informative museum visit.

Day 19: Moscow

Having traveled a mammoth 7,000 miles (11,250 km) from Beijing we arrive into Moscow, our final destination. We'll transfer to the outstanding, five-star Four Seasons Hotel Moscow and check in for a two-night stay. Located in the historic building of Moskva Hotel and occupying one of the most enviable addresses in the very heart of Moscow, the hotel is a short walk from the Kremlin, Red Square and the Bolshoi Theatre.

Day 20: Moscow

Our touring program of Moscow principally takes us to the grandeur of the Kremlin – the spiritual, historical and political heart of Moscow – and to see the treasures of the Tsars in the Armoury Chamber. We also visit Red Square, an iconic symbol of Russia’s former military and political might with its eclectic mix of fascinating architecture, such as the ornate St Basil’s Cathedral’s magnificent onion-domed spires, the beautiful facade of the world famous GUM department store, constructed in Tsarist times, and the somber and evocative site of Lenin’s tomb.

With our Freedom of Choice touring option you may instead wish to travel out of the city center to Sergiev Posad, home to one of the most beautiful monasteries in Russia and the historical and spiritual center of the Russian Orthodox Church or visit the famous State Tretyakov Gallery (National Museum of Fine Art).

Day 21: Moscow

After breakfast in your hotel, you will be transferred to Moscow Airport for your onward flight.

Why not extend your stay in Moscow with additional nights to explore more of the city at your leisure or have time to take in a performance at the world-renowned Bolshoi Theatre? Tickets need to be pre-booked and are subject to schedule and availability.

Dates & Prices

More

Five visas are required for this journey (for U.S. citizens); please allow two months for this process.

Short on time? 13-day “[Taste of the Silk Road](#)” also available from **Almaty-Moscow** only.