

China and Tibet Rail Discovery ORIGINAL

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Overview

The Highlights

- 14-hour daylight train ride between Golmud & Lhasa: experience the world's highest stretch of track (3 miles above sea level) at Tangula Pass
- Visit Dalai Lama's Summer Palace, Norbulingka
- [Potala Palace](#) tour, former seat of the Tibetan government
- Visit Jiayuguan Pass of the Great Wall of China & the Overhanging Great Wall
- Explore the Gobi Desert & Crescent Lake by camel

- 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
- Visit to the Xinjiang Regional Museum, famed for its mummies and other ancient Uyghur artifacts
- All meals, wine and beer with lunch and dinner, off-train tours and gratuities. International airfare and visas are additional.
- Travel aboard the *Shangri-La Express*, the most comfortable way to see sights rarely seen by Western travelers

The Tour

This intriguing China rail journey ends in one of the world's most fascinating places: Lhasa, the mystical capital city of 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, Tibet 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

On arrival in Urumqi, you will be met and transferred to the Wanda Vista hotel for a one-night stay. This evening, meet your fellow travelers at a welcome dinner.

Day 2: Urumqi

Today, visit the renowned Xinjiang Regional Museum in Urumqi, famous for having artifacts and mummies of Caucasians who lived in this region between 1,500 and 4,000 years ago. There is also a fine collection of silk articles and other artifacts from various eras, as well as written materials in different languages.

Until two decades ago, this culture was hardly known to historians and archaeologists, and their history and origins remain much of a mystery.

This afternoon we board the *Shangri-La Express* for our onward China rail journey through the remote wilderness of China to Lhasa.

Day 3: Kashgar, China

Today, visit the Old City of Kashgar, with a history dating back more than 2,000 years. Uygur people have lived here for generations. Kashgar Old City was a renowned hub of activity at the crossroads of the Southern and Middle Silk Roads. Today, the Old City is still a cradle of culture. Tonight, we stay for one night at the five-star Radisson Blu Hotel Kashgar.

Day 4: Kashgar, China

Today's special tour arrangements begin at the Kashgar Sunday Bazaar. Its very remoteness is what makes the market so extraordinary, partly due to the exoticism of the produce for sale, and partly because it is the only real place to shop in an area the size of western Europe.

Only a small fraction of visitors are foreigners, and therefore the market offers very much a unique experience on our journey.

Day 5: Turpan, China

The Flaming Mountains create a magnificent backdrop for the city of Turpan. First, we visit Jiaohe, 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 also still visible.

In the afternoon, take a fascinating tour to the world-famous ancient underground irrigation system at Karez that has successfully fed the surrounding orchards and vineyards for centuries. The system is considered one of the three great projects to survive from Imperial China, with the other two being the Great Wall and the Grand Canal.

Next, visit a Uygur family, where you will enjoy a traditional Uygur ethnic dance and local snacks.

Day 6: Dunhuang, China

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

In the small oasis city of Dunhuang, we will visit the Mogao 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.

Day 7: Jiayuguan, China

Today in Jiayuguan, visit the first pass at the west end of the Great Wall of China, the Jiayuguan

Pass. Along with Shanhaiguan, it is one of the largest and most intact passes of the Great Wall. It was an important military fortress and also a vital traffic fort along the Silk Road, the world's oldest trading route, connecting China with Central Asia and Europe.

As you stand in the endless desert with rolling mountains as a backdrop, this isolated pass will take you back to the desolation and loneliness of frontier life in ancient times.

After lunch, visit the Overhanging Great Wall, which was constructed in the year of 1539 during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644). The wall was built in order to support the already existing Jiayuguan Fort which held a key role in the defenses of the area around Jiayuguan.

Parts of the wall are steep. Those who make it to the top will enjoy a bird's-eye view of the endless Gobi Desert, sparsely sprinkled with a few oases, and snow-capped mountains in the far distance.

Day 8: Xining, China

Today, explore Xining, home to an incredible 37 nationalities. Located on the eastern edge of Qinghai Province, Xining's history can be traced back 2,100 years to antiquity.

We set out from our train this morning stopping first at Dongguan Mosque in Xining, the largest mosque in Qinghai, unique due to its traditional Chinese architecture that differs from an Arabic style.

In the afternoon we will visit the Shuijingxiang Market. At the entrance of two intersecting alleys, each more than 360 feet (1,100 meters) long are more than 3,000 fixed stalls. The market has everything from food and drink to articles for daily use. You can not only find lotus roots and wild rice stems, which are products of Southern China but also seafood from the coast.

Day 9: Golmud

On arrival to Golmud, we will say farewell to the *Shangri-La Express* train and check-in to the Doubletree by Hilton Hotel for a one-night stay. Spend today at your leisure, with the option of exploring the local area or perhaps enjoy the hotel's swimming pool and fitness area.

Day 10: Qinghai-Tibet Railway: China-Tibet

At Golmud, we board the high-altitude train (you will have reserved seats) that will take you on an unforgettable 14-hour daylight journey along the 710-mile (1,142km) 'Roof of the World' line to Lhasa, cresting the 16,640-foot (5,072m) Tangula Pass.

This is the world's highest railway pass, reaching an unbelievable 3 miles (5km) above sea level. Due to the high altitude, supplementary oxygen is pumped in through the ventilation system. Personal oxygen masks are available if required.

Upon arrival in Lhasa, you will be met and transferred to the centrally-located, luxurious five-star Shangri-La Hotel for a three-night stay. Centrally located, it lies between the Norbulingka Palace

and the Potala Palace. The sweeping landscapes surrounding this exclusive hotel provide a timeless, inviting setting for contemplation as well as exploration.

Day 11: Lhasa, Tibet

Lhasa is located in a small basin surrounded by mountains. It literally means “place of the gods.” At an altitude of around 11,975 ft (3,650 meters), it is one of the highest cities in the world. It is also the traditional seat of the Dalai Lama and the holiest center of Tibetan Buddhism, with over a thousand years of cultural and spiritual history.

Today, visit Norbulinka, the Dalai Lama’s Summer Palace, built in the 1740s as a retreat from which to escape the heat of the summer. There will also be free time to wander through Lhasa and soak up the atmosphere of this picturesque city, or to take an optional drive outside Lhasa to visit a local village and see the life of farmers.

Day 12: Lhasa, Tibet

On our second full day here, we’ll visit the 13th-century Jokhang Temple, Tibet’s holiest shrine and the spiritual home for almost all Tibetans. Next, explore the adjacent Barkhor market, the oldest market in the capital and a well-trodden route for the many pilgrims who make their way to the temple. A local lunch is accompanied by traditional folk music.

This afternoon, visit the 17th-century Potala Palace, former seat of the Tibetan Government, and the Dalai Lama’s winter residence until he fled to India in 1959. It contains thousands of rooms and dominates the city skyline. Perched upon Marpo Ri hill, 425 feet (130 m) above the Lhasa valley, the Potala Palace is the greatest monumental structure in Tibet and one of the architectural wonders of the world.

Tonight, say goodbye to your new friends at a farewell dinner.

Day 13: Lhasa departure

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

Dates & Prices

2025 Dates

October 4 - October 16

ACCOMMODATION	Double	Single	Deposit
Heritage Class			
Diamond Class			

2025 tour dates are tentative; pricing not yet confirmed. Please check back for updates.

More

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

Travelers should be aware that journey involves high altitudes. Oxygen is available on the Golmud-Lhasa line but some travelers may still experience symptoms of altitude sickness.

Latest News: View information about the [Shangri-La Express](#).