

TRAVEL PHOTOGRAPHY ADVENTURE

PRE-TRIP DOSSIER 2008/2009

SILK ROAD

Photographic adventures designed by photographers, for photographers. Advance your skills while following the Silk Road through China on a 14 day adventure. We have created an integrated programme of travel and discussion themes to create the most wonderful opportunities you could ever imagine - for beginners and advanced photographers alike. You get 2 leaders, a maximum group size of 8 and the experience of a lifetime.



GRASSHOPPER
ADVENTURES

PHOTOGRAPHY

by Ewen Bell

ITINERARY IN BRIEF



Days 1-3 : Xi'an

We meet at our hotel by 6pm and head out for a dumpling banquet. Over the next couple of days we'll visit the Terracotta Warriors, explore the ancient temples and walls of the city, plus immerse ourselves in the unique street-life and cuisine of the Muslim quarter. Our time in Xi'an will also be used to establish the basis of your photographic direction during this journey, to work out how best you can benefit from the expertise of the tour leaders.

Days 4-5 : Jiayuguan

On day 4 we take a short flight west to Jiayuguan. Here lies the last grand fortress along the Ming Great Wall, and the town was traditionally seen as the western boundary of Han China, beyond which lay vast deserts and mountain ranges, inhabited only by barbarians and those exiled from the heart of the country. We visit the fortress and explore its ochre ramparts, surrounded by desert which stretches away to colossal mountains on the horizon.

Days 6-7 : Dunhuang

We drive through the desert to the oasis town of Dunhuang, famous as the site of China's finest Buddhist cave art. We explore the caves and venture into the sea of huge dunes which surround the town. On the evening of day 7 we take an overnight train to Turpan.

Days 8-9 : Turpan

Turpan sits in a vast depression and is famed as the hottest place in China – which is why we wait for Autumn to make our visit. The town is surrounded by a maze of grape-trellis lined dusty lanes which lead to the desert, dotted with ancient cities, hidden ravines and vineyards.

Days 10-14 : Kashgar and Lake Karakul

After a morning flight we have a day to get a feel for Kashgar. The following day we drive the final leg of the Silk Road along the Karakoram Highway to remote Lake Karakul, nestled among 7000m plus peaks. We spend a night in a yurt at a Tajik nomadic settlement on the lakeshore and take our time over the stunning drive back to Kashgar.

Kashgar was a crucial trading post along the Silk Road and its bustling Sunday Bazaar still attracts traders from around the region. The proximity to Central Asia gives Kashgar a unique blend of cultures and the old city is alive with Uighurs, Tajiks, Kazaks and Kyrgyz, each distinguishable by their traditional headgear. As well as the unmissable Sunday Bazaar we also have a chance to explore the warren of narrow lanes which make up the old city. On the final evening we take a traditional Uighur dinner to celebrate the end of this distinctly un-Chinese odyssey



THE STORY OF THE SILK ROAD

The Silk Road is one of the world's greatest trade routes, starting in Xi'an and extending across the vast desert and mountain expanses of western China all of the way to Europe. This tour takes you on an incredible journey from the heart of the Han empire to the very limits of China, where deserts and mountains meet as incongruously as the people who inhabit the region; Kazaks, Kyrgyz, Tajiks, Uighurs and Uzbeks share this arid land, coming together to trade at the quintessential Silk Road market, Kashgar.

Silk is the most famous of the exports to travel along the trade route, but it was also a conduit for a host of goods from the west, borne by traders who also brought new ideas and religions along with them. Buddhism and Islam both traveled the Silk Road, leaving behind exquisite Buddhist cave art and mosques which remain to this day. Today the Silk Road sees scant trade, but the glory of yesteryear is in evidence all around; from the last great outpost of the Ming dynasty wall at Jiayuguan to the incredible Buddhist grottoes at Dunhuang and the ancient ruins at Turpan.

The incredible diversity of landscapes, cultures and people along the Silk Road offers endless photographic potential, and an unparalleled opportunity to develop your style and techniques as a photographer.



WHO TRAVELS WITH US

Our photographic journeys appeal to both the young and old; the experienced and novice. Most tours are made up of people aged 25-65, and occasionally older or younger still. It doesn't matter what your skills and interest in photography is, you will enjoy sharing a creative and immersive experience in China.

You can read feedback from our past travellers by visiting www.ewenbell.com





HOW WE TRAVEL

Experience a unique and challenging journey along one of the world's most fascinating trade routes. Pass through an amazing array of landscapes inhabited by people whose culture goes far beyond the borders of China. You will be more than a traveller, you will also be exploring new photographic techniques along the way and getting the chance to put these skills into practice. This trip will immerse you in the cultural, scenic and human richness of China's west while giving you an unparalleled opportunity to develop your own style and techniques as a photographer.

The travel style for this journey will bring you right up close to China. You will meet real people and experience a little of their lives. Key attractions are included on this itinerary, such as the Terracotta Warriors, the great fortress at Jiayuguan and the stunning Mogao caves – but with the Silk Road, the road is the story and we take the time to explore its many chapters.

The landscape is breathtaking, the monuments awe inspiring, but it might just be that an innocent wander along a dusty donkey-cart lane or an Uighur market trader provides the highlight of your trip. With this in mind, in spite of the distances covered, we make sure you won't be rushed from one place to another and will have time to delve a little deeper and make your own connection. This is a vital ingredient to successful travel photography and the process of cultivating your skills.

WHAT YOU WILL LEARN

This is a special way to learn about photography. Time is set aside during the trip for theme sessions which introduce techniques and concepts. After each session you will have a chance to put them into practice. There will be frequent reviews of your work and a chance to discuss your experiences for that day. The skills

covered in this journey are aimed at travel photography particularly, but will benefit all areas of your work.

No matter what your level of skill or experience you will learn invaluable techniques on this tour. For 14 days we will be at your disposal to explore the high level concepts and fine detail practicalities of travel photography. Beginners can expect to learn basic skills, new ways of thinking about their photography and gain structured themes to help them take great photos in challenging conditions. Advanced photographers will also gain insight into the world of publishing travel photos and high level concepts that determine which images will be more likely to gain selection by an editor.

ACCOMMODATION

The standard of accommodation in China is high and will generally be comfortable. We select hotels throughout the trip which offer character and location, plus the comforts expected by western tourists. Aside from the night in a yurt at Lake Karakul, expect hot water, clean rooms, and climate control. This trip operates on a twin share basis, hence single travellers will be allocated a same-sex room mate. Please ask for an elective single-supplement if you do not wish to share your accommodation for the duration of the trip.

TAKE BETTER PHOTOS

Understanding your subject
Getting closer to your subject
Capturing intimacy and expressions
Portrait photography on the run
How to make use of your wide angle lens
Landscape Photography
Using available light for dramatic effect
Capturing a sense of motion
Shooting for context
Using pattern repetition
Colour and form
Patience and predictability makes perfect
Techniques unique to digital photography
Responsible travel with a camera
Safety issues when travelling as a foreigner



The photographic themes designed into this trip are aimed at people with a fundamental knowledge of their camera, but who want to learn more. A basic knowledge of aperture, focal length, depth of field and exposure is useful, but not essential. We will even help you learn the technical use of your camera, if that's what you need. For more experienced photographers the itinerary alone will be an inspiration for your art, plus the chance to share skills and experience with an award winning travel journalist.

People of many different skill levels and ambition will be gathered for the journey, so expect to be in the company of diversity. This tour will appeal to anyone who wants to immerse themselves in the process of cultivating skills and exploring cultures. You will have a chance to discuss techniques and principles, then immediately go out and practice. This will not give you a qualification, but hopefully will give you confidence and direction to take better photos.

Our journeys offer two things. Firstly we provide an unparalleled opportunity to practice photography in an exotic land. We help you to get the right sunset, to access the most idyllic wilderness, to meet the real people of China and to make sure you have the time to explore your craft in the process. You won't be worried about travel and accommodation - it's taken care of for you. And you won't be rushed from hotel to hotel; you will have time to take photographs and to review them at the end of each day.

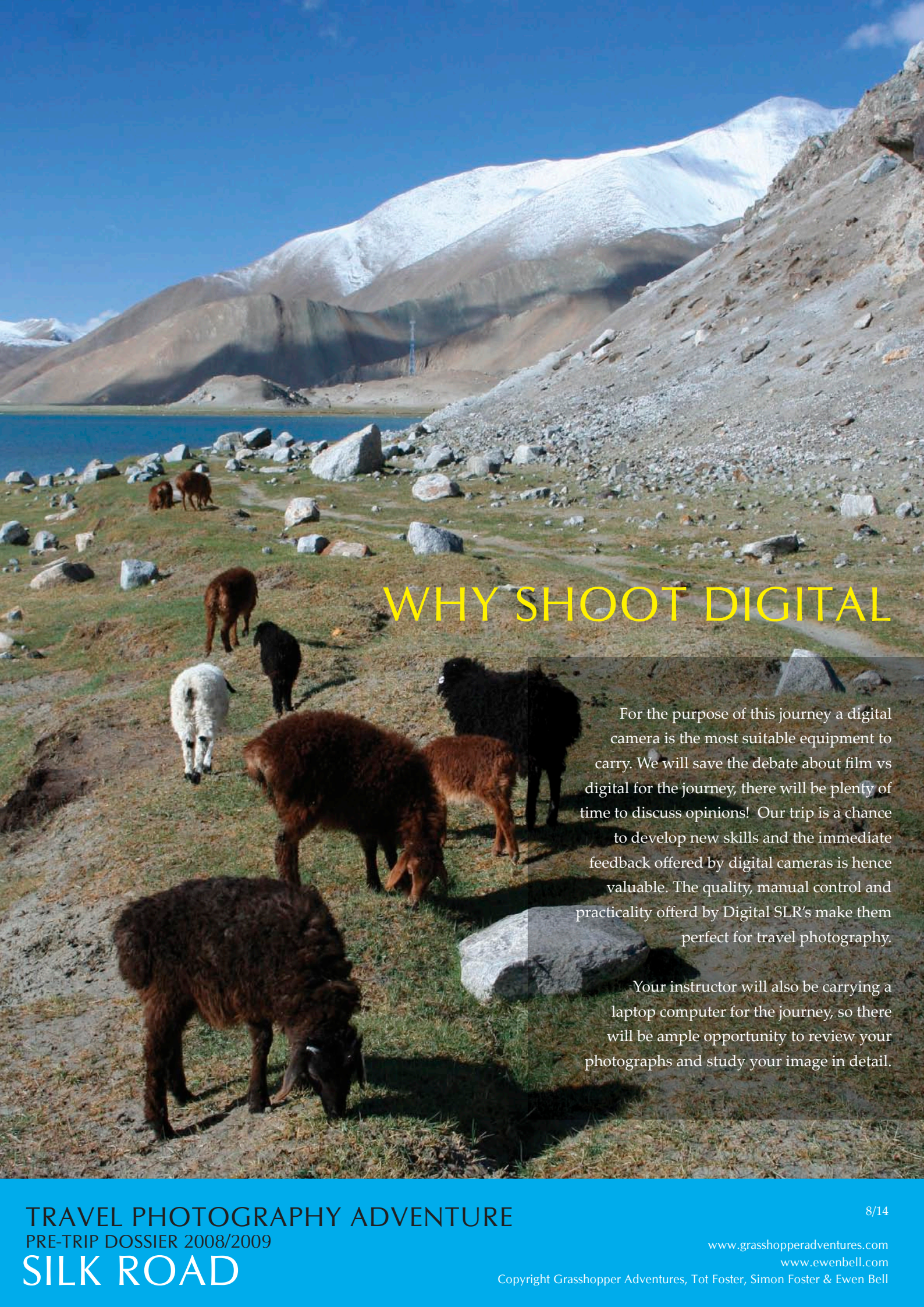
Secondly we present a series of photographic themes which introduce key concepts and techniques which will help you improve your photography. Each session will discuss a topic and outline associated techniques. A set of technical notes are provided to accompany these sessions. Your travel itinerary has been developed in conjunction with the session themes, so you can immediately practice the skills you learn.

We will also encourage people to share their work during the trip. Review is very important and can greatly assist the development of your own personal style. Throughout the trip you will be free to consult with your instructor as well. You are not confined to the sessions to talk about your work and ideas! This will be a 14 day immersion that will accelerate your learning and development.

RESPONSIBLE TOURISM

At all times during our journey we need to be mindful of how our presence can impact on the cultures we wish to observe. Travel photography carries an even greater burden to ensure that you respect cultural beliefs and personal privacy. We avoid shooting photos of people without their express consent; instead we will learn techniques to enable you to overcome language barriers.





WHY SHOOT DIGITAL

For the purpose of this journey a digital camera is the most suitable equipment to carry. We will save the debate about film vs digital for the journey, there will be plenty of time to discuss opinions! Our trip is a chance to develop new skills and the immediate feedback offered by digital cameras is hence valuable. The quality, manual control and practicality offered by Digital SLR's make them perfect for travel photography.

Your instructor will also be carrying a laptop computer for the journey, so there will be ample opportunity to review your photographs and study your image in detail.

ESSENTIAL EQUIPMENT



We recommend the use of Digital SLR cameras for this journey, but you are not restricted from using any type of camera you may have, including conventional film SLRs and compact cameras. Digital SLR cameras offer excellent manual controls and plus us the ability to review our work at the end of each day - a valuable part of this experience. A minimum of 4Gig of memory cards should accompany your camera, plus an additional 20Gig or greater of external storage (hard drive or laptop).

We also recommend that you carry a wide angle lens in preference to telephoto. Most of our shooting involves being close up with the subject. We strongly advise that if you own a Digital SLR camera that you purchase an equivalent 18mm lens or even wider for the purpose of this journey. (Remember that most Digital SLRs multiply a standard lens by roughly 1.5, so factor this in when determining your wide-angle). The range of 18mm to 80mm will cover almost every need, be it a single wide-angle zoom lens or two of fixed focal length.

A good quality day pack will be an essential part of the packing list. Crumpler and Lowe make excellent packs that are designed for camera equipment. Ideally your pack should be comfortable, spacious, and practical. The

traditional type of 'over-the-shoulder' camera bag is not very suitable for travel photography, a day-pack is better. Remember that you will be carrying your gear for days on end, so it's worth buying something comfortable with good shoulder straps and a little extra room to fit both your camera gear and your daily necessities.

Flash equipment and tripods are not recommended. Our study themes will not address the use of advanced flash photography and the additional weight and bulk must be considered against the rare occasions of use - if used at all. Similarly for tripods, they are cumbersome and difficult to travel with. Practise and experience with using your digital equipment and fundamental skills will negate the need for tripod or monopod.

Finally, full travel insurance and coverage for your 'additional items' is absolutely necessary. Standard travel insurance is generally inadequate to cover the value of your equipment unless you stipulate your equipment when buying insurance. It costs very little, so don't be caught short. Please check very carefully that you are fully covered and have completed all necessary details to qualify for suitable coverage.

ABOUT YOUR LEADERS

You will enjoy the company of two leaders along the Silk Road. One will help you to travel, the other will help you learn about travel photography.

Simon Foster has been leading small group tours in the Middle East and Asia since 1997. He lives in Taiwan and runs Grasshopper's Taiwan tours with his wife Tot. When he's not leading tours he writes guidebooks to destinations as diverse as India, Australia, Egypt, Tunisia, Turkey and Spain. He contributed the Silk Routes chapter for Frommer's 2007 China Guide, has written for the Rough Guide to China and his "Adventure Guide to China" for the American publisher Hunter will hit the shops in early 2008.

Ewen Bell has been a commercial photographer since 1990 and has experience in many aspects of photography – wildlife, travel, commercial and portraiture. Ewen's work is published in brochures for numerous travel companies and appears in regular travel publications including the Escape Weekend editions across Australia, Melbourne's Herald Sun and national magazines including Vacations & Travel and Holidays for Couples.

Ewen was also chosen by the ASTW as their 2007 Australian Travel Photographer of the Year.



DETAILED ITINERARY

Day 1 Xi'an

Theme: Get Closer

We'll meet in the hotel lobby at 6pm and then head out for a delicious dumpling banquet! We'll spend this first evening getting to know one another and discussing the objectives and structure of the tour. (D)

Day 2 Xi'an

Theme: Follow The Light

Today we'll head out onto the lively streets of Xi'an, walking through the artist's quarter and around the Ming dynasty city walls. The walk will also provide one-on-one time with the photographic instructor in order to assist you with any basic skills relating to SLR photography. (B)

Day 3 Xi'an

Theme: Still Life

Early this morning we'll visit a fascinating antiques market before heading to the incredible Terracotta Warriors. The visit is included as much for your interest as for photographic study but a telephoto lens of 150mm is still sufficient to take photos of the warriors. Later in the afternoon we explore the lively Muslim markets where we'll also dine and shoot further into the evening to capture the ambience. (BD)

Day 4 Jiayuguan

Today we'll take a short flight west to Jiayuguan and then have the remainder of the day free to relax and review our work. (BD)

Day 5 Jiayuguan

Theme: Landscapes

The stark ochre ramparts of the Ming dynasty Great Wall Fort afford commanding views over the surrounding desert to the mountains in the distance and we start the day here. Later we head into the desert to a crumbling outlying section of wall dramatically perched on the edge of a gorge. (B)

Day 6 Dunhuang

Theme: Colour and Light

We set off early for the long drive through the desert to Dunhuang. During the journey we'll have the chance to review our work, and then we'll have the rest of the day at leisure in this laid-back oasis town. (BLD)

Day 7 Overnight Train

Theme: Digital Techniques

After a free morning we visit the stunning cave art at the Mogao Grottoes a short drive from Dunhuang. No photography is allowed inside the complex so we'll have the chance to rest our tired trigger fingers. We board an overnight train to Turpan. (B)



Day 8 Turpan

After a free morning we'll explore the outlying desert, taking in the fiery Flaming Mountains, a hidden valley oasis vineyard and the graceful domes of an 18th century mosque. (BD)

Day 9 Turpan

Theme: Portraiture

Today we'll visit the nearby ruins of an ancient desert settlement and have a chance to explore the dusty lanes which surround the town. The lanes are lined with grape trellises and are popular thoroughfares for farmers and their donkey carts. (B)

Day 10 Kashgar

Theme: Telling a Story

We drive to Urumqi to catch a flight to Kashgar, the quintessential Silk Road desert trading town. Its proximity to a host of other Central Asian countries lends the town a unique blend of cultures. Kazaks, Kyrgyz, Tajiks and Uighurs are all represented in the region and a stroll along one of Kashgar's bustling alleys will reveal market traders, traditional artisans and daily life. Our explorations are landmarked by mosques and beautifully carved gates. (BD)

Day 11 Lake Karakul

Today we'll make the long, steep drive along the Karakoram Highway from the desert to the 7000m plus mountains that border Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and northern India. We'll overnight in a simple Kyrgyz yurt on the edge of breathtaking Lake Karakul at 3600m. (BD)

Day 12 Kashgar

We'll rise early to enjoy the best of the light as it catches the ever-changing hues of the lake, backed by huge snowcapped mountains. After a simple breakfast and some time to explore the lake we'll wind our way back to Kashgar where we'll have a free afternoon. (B)

Day 13 Kashgar

Theme: Motion

Kashgar's Sunday Bazaar has to be seen to be believed and affords a kaleidoscope of people, produce and photographic potential. We spend the morning here and then the afternoon at the former site of the Sunday Bazaar, now a huge covered market selling trash and treasure, new and old. This evening we head out for a traditional Uighur banquet to celebrate the end of our Silk Road journey. (BD)

Day 14 Kashgar

The tour ends after breakfast. Hotel rooms are held until noon – please advise us well in advance if you require an extra night or two. (B)



PRE-TRIP ESSENTIALS



Group Size

8 maximum. Each group will have the services of a tour leader, photographic instructor and various local guides.

Health

There are no specific health requirements for travelling in China, however, we recommend that you visit a travel medicine doctor before travelling. You should carry a well stocked first aid kit with you when you travel. All Grasshopper Adventures Group Leaders are first aid trained, however, they are not permitted to distribute any medications.

Phrase Book

A highly memorable part of your travels will be the local people that you meet. In the tourist areas some people will speak English but away from these areas you should learn a few words of Chinese. We will teach you some of the basics but if you want to really interact we recommend bringing a phrase book (unless you are really good at charades). We can recommend the Rough Guide Mandarin Phrase Book 2006 edition.

Packing

You will be required to carry your own luggage when checking into or out of hotels and bags will need to be loaded on and off trains and up and down stairs at stations. For this reason we recommend that you pack as lightly as possible in a backpack or small wheelie bag - please keep maximum weight to around 15kg. This trip covers remote and rural areas during the cooler seasons so temperatures can plummet at night. Please remember to bring warm clothes for cold nights and chilly mornings.

You should consider bringing the following items:

- Long trousers
- Shorts
- Shirts
- Hat (sun & woolly)
- Thermals
- Gloves
- Fleece Jacket
- Sandals/Light Shoes
- Sunglasses
- Waterproof Jacket
- Toiletries
- Small Towel
- Sunscreen
- First Aid Kit
- Mosquito Repellent
- Alarm Clock
- Passport (with 6 months validity and spare pages)
- Passport photo
- Travel Insurance details
- Flight Tickets
- Money - Cash/ATM-Card/Credit Card
- Mandarin Phrase Book

Important

All information in this Profile is researched with care and provided in good faith. The information subject to change, and does not form part of the contract between the client and Grasshopper Adventures.

Money

The official currency of China is Renminbi or Yuan which should be used for all transactions. China has a modern banking systems with ATMs and money changers in most larger or tourist towns. In China it possible to use Visa/Mastercard and Cirrus/Maestro cards, however, we do advise that you carry some cash currency from home as a backup. Travellers Cheques are not always as easy to change by comparison. Most international currencies can be exchanged in larger cities so it is not necessary to bring only US Dollars - AUD, EUR, CAD, NZD are all accepted at banks in major centres.

The current exchange rate is: US\$1 = 7.3 Yuan

Costs

We recommend that you allow approximately US\$20 for food and general living costs per day. Shopping money should be considered extra to this amount. Many meals are included with travel days and discussion sessions, but you will have the opportunity to choose between dining with the group or alone on most occasions.

Travel Insurance

It is a condition of participating in a Grasshopper Adventure that you hold travel insurance for the duration of the trip. Insurance must include comprehensive medical and emergency evacuation. Your travel insurance details will be checked by your group leader on arrival at the starting point hotel.

GETTING THERE

Arrival in Xi'an

Arrival in Xi'an airport is comparatively simple and as our hotel is well-known showing the name and address listed below in Chinese should see you safely there. Make sure you get a licensed taxi and either negotiate the price before you leave (around RMB150) or make sure the driver uses the meter ("dabiao").

Starting Hotel

This is your starting hotel – its location on the southwestern corner of Xi'an's main Bell Tower intersection is very central and the hotel is well-known, but please keep a copy of this page with you when you arrive in Xi'an to assist your taxi driver. Bell Tower Hotel in Chinese sounds like "jhong-low fandee-an".

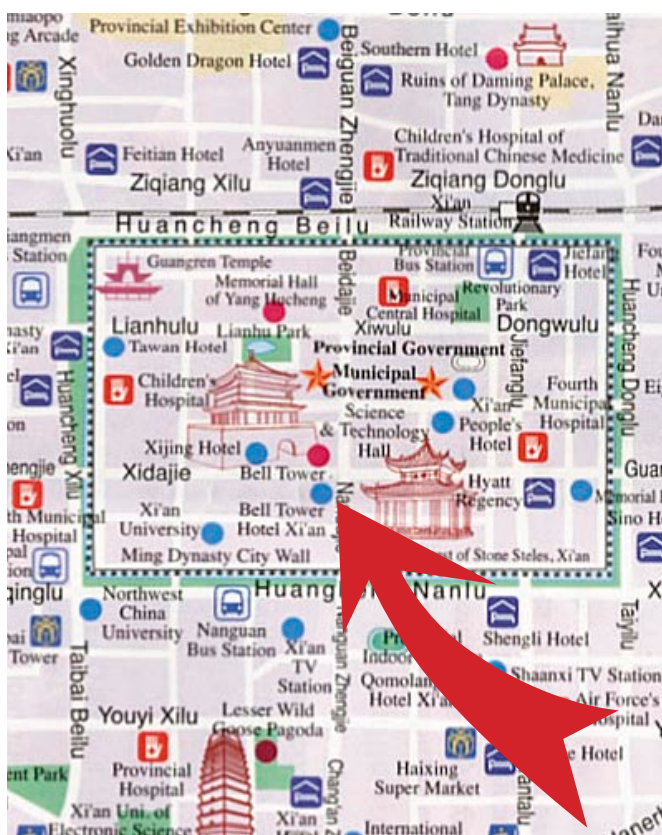
钟鼓楼饭店

Bell Tower Hotel (zhōng lóu fàndiàn)

110 Nan Dajie

Xi'an

Phone: 029-8760-0000



Additional Accommodation

Should you require extra accommodation in Xi'an or Kashgar we can offer you competitive rates at our hotel. Room costs will be advised upon request and may vary according to season and proximity to date of travel.

Getting Home

There are six flights a day out of Kashgar Airport (Kashi) that connect to Urumqi, the capital of Xinjiang province. At your request we can also help organise your post-tour flights to any other city in China - including Xi'an, Beijing, Shanghai, Chengdu and Kunming. You may need to overnight in Urumqi or your final city for international departure depending on flight schedules.

Visas

One month single entry visas must be obtained before you travel to China. Visa prices vary by nationality and embassy so check with your travel agent or local embassy/consulate for more information. Before you travel check your passport to ensure that there is room for a entry/exit stamps (at least 2 pages) and that it has at least 6 months validation remaining.

Obtaining a Visa for China

It usually takes only 4 working days to have your visa application processed in Australia, The United States and the United Kingdom. Additional fees can be paid to get your visa completed on a next-day basis. If you live in a city without a China Consulate then please allow additional time for courier delivery.

Residents of the United States can find the nearest China Consulate in the following cities...

- San Francisco, CA
- Los Angeles, CA
- Houston, TX
- New York, NY
- Chicago, IL
- Washington, DC

Download a form online here...

<http://www.china-embassy.org>

Residents of other countries can find their China Consulate from the following website...

<http://china.embassyhomepage.com>