

SOUTH AFRICAN ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

TOUR OF TIBET AND THE FAR WEST OF CHINA

4 TO 24 SEPTEMBER 2018

This ArchSoc tour builds on the fabulous tour to China's Sichuan and Gansu provinces in 2015.

Our 21-day archaeological, historical, cultural and geological tour by air, road and rail will combine mystical Tibet with oasis cities on the edges of the Gobi and Taklimakan deserts in the far west of China, where ancient kingdoms used to hold sway. In Tibet, the highlights will be the Potala Palace in Lhasa, magnificent monasteries in three centres, stunning views of the world's highest mountains, geography on a humbling scale and sights lit with spectacular mountain light. We will travel across the vast Qinghai Plateau dotted with yaks and nomad tents, cross high passes draped in colourful prayer flags, and meet a friendly and likeable people. But the highlights will also be spiritual in nature: prayer halls of chanting Buddhist monks, pilgrims murmuring mantras, temples heavy with the aroma of juniper incense, and a level of devotion and faith that seems to belong to an earlier, almost medieval age.

Our journey in the far west of China will follow the Silk Route through the Gobi Desert in Gansu province and the Xinjiang-Uyghur Autonomous Region of Jinjiang province that has the Taklimakan Desert as its centrepiece. Our target is China's westernmost city, Khashgar, where the Karakorum, Pamir and Tian Shan mountain ranges separate us from Pakistan, Afghanistan and the rest of central Asia, and the north-western city of Urumqi, the largest city in central Asia, where the startling, brightly clothed 3 000-year-old mummies of a Caucasian people will be seen. Along the way we will be astounded by the fine Buddhist art of the Mogao Caves in Dunhuang and the Kizil Caves near Aksu, the archaeological remains at World Heritage Sites such as Goachang City at the foot of the Flaming Mountains and the Jiaohe Citadel, the Astana Tombs of the Karakhoja Turkic civilisation and the royal temples at Bezeklik. Travelling by coach along the northern Taklimakan Desert route, we will visit the ancient oasis towns of Turpan, Korla, Kuche, Aksu and Khotan. A special experience will be a crossing of the Taklimakan Desert.

Tour leader: Reinoud Boers

With a Chinese national guide and regional guides

THE ITINERARY

Tuesday 4 September: Johannesburg – Addis Ababa

12:00 OR Tambo Airport: meet at the Ethiopian Airlines check-in desks

14:10 Depart on Ethiopian Airlines flight ET808

20:25 Arrive at Bohle International Airport, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Wednesday 5 September: Addis Ababa – Chengdu

00:10 Depart on Ethiopian Airlines flight ET637

14:40 Arrive at the Shaung Liu Airport, Chengdu, Sichuan Province, China

We are met by our national and a local guide. Subject to arriving on time, we proceed direct to **Wenshu Monastery**, Chengdu's largest and best-preserved Buddhist temple. Built in the Tang Dynasty (618–907 AD), it was then known as the Xinxiang Temple. In 1681, during the reign of Emperor Kangxi of the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911), an accomplished Buddhist monk named Cidu built himself a simple hut at the monastery. Legend has it that when his body was being cremated, the figure of Wenshu (Bodhisattva Manjushree in Sanskrit) appeared in the flames for a long time, indicating that Cidu was the reincarnation of Wenshu. The name of the temple was then changed. We end the visit with a cup of tea at an **atmospheric teahouse** in the grounds. Continue to the four-star **Chengdu M Hotel**, 388 Yi Zhou Da Dao Bei Duan, Gao Xin District (tel. 86288531 9998). After freshening up, leave for a **welcome dinner** in a local restaurant.



Thursday 6 September: Chengdu – Lhasa

Depart for the airport after an early breakfast for a **scenic and exhilarating flight** to the **ancient Buddhist kingdom of Tibet**, guarded by some of the highest mountains on earth.

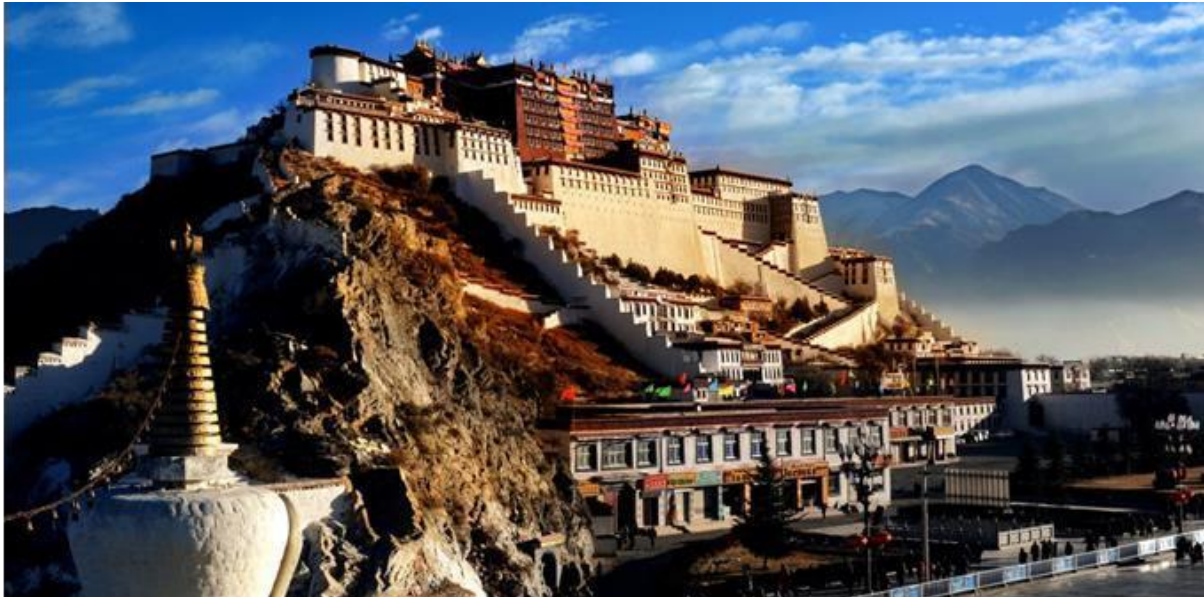
08:25 Depart with Sichuan Airlines flight 3U 5065

10:50 Arrive at Gonggar Airport, Tibet

We are met by our local guide and transfer to the four-star **Lhasa Four Points by Sheraton Hotel**, 10 Linboka Road, Chengguan District (tel. 86-891-634 8888) for a two-night stay. Arrangements in the afternoon will be at a leisurely pace to assist acclimatisation to Lhasa's altitude of 3 656 m. After a lunch break, we will visit the 7th century **Jokhang Temple** in the city centre, the most sacred shrine of Tibetan Buddhism. Listen to the eerie, sonorous chanting of monks. Afterwards enjoy the fascinating street life in **Octagon Street** outside the temple and visit the nearby **Barkhor Bazaar**. The shops are filled with an assortment of traditional and local items. Dinner at hotel or in a restaurant.

Friday 7 September: Lhasa

This is our day for visiting Lhasa's highlight, the immense **Potala Palace**, which was founded in the 7th century and enlarged and embellished through the ages, in particular by the fifth Dalai Lama in the 17th century. The walls of this incredible 13-storey complex seem to grow directly out of the rock, soaring and glistening in the crisp-dry air. Its 1 000 rooms served as the living quarters of the Dalai Lama and various regents, government officials and religious figures, and as government offices and storerooms. Many of palace's halls are decorated with fine wall paintings and contain magnificent funerary pagodas, ritual vessels and porcelain. The front entrance is reached by climbing hundreds of stairs.



Today we will also visit the **Sera Monastery** and **Norbulinka Palace**. Sera dates from the 15th century when it was one of the three great monastic universities of Tibet. Here we may see Buddhist monks debating Buddhist beliefs. Norbulinka, guarded by two stone lions, was the Summer Palace of the Dalai Lama. He spent his last days at this palace before fleeing to India during the revolt against Chinese occupation in 1959. Dinner will be at a restaurant where we can choose among Eastern and Western cuisines.

Saturday 8 September: Lhasa – Gyantse – Shigatse

With overnight bags only, we drive to **Gyantse**, 262 km and five hours away. Our journey takes us over the 4 570 m high **Karo La Pass** and through remote countryside where yaks, goats and sheep reign. Pass breath-taking mountains and lakes, such as the beautiful turquoise coloured **Yamdrom Yumtso Lake**. Then we will have the spectacle of the northern face (of Base Camp fame) of **Mount Everest** and other **Himalayan peaks** rising before us. Lying at the head of the Nyangchey Valley at an altitude of 4 000 m, Gyantse began as a fortification controlling Tibet's contact with the outside world. Later it became the centre of Tibet's wool trade. In this city, we will admire the extraordinary paintings and sculptures in

the **Kumbum Stupa** and the beautiful **Palchoe Monastery** alongside (founded in 1365). Then we continue for a further 100 km through rugged countryside to Tibet's second largest city, **Shigatse**, the former seat of power of the **Panchen Lama**. Lying at an altitude of 3 800 m, it is situated in one of the richest farming areas in Tibet and often rivalled Lhasa. We overnight at the four-star **Shigatse Tashi Choetai Hotel**, 2 Xueqiang Road (tel. 86-892-883 0111).

Sunday 9 September: Shigatse – Lhasa

We visit the **Tashilumbu Monastery**, the most important monastery outside Lhasa and a Tibetan highlight. It is believed to have been founded by the first Dalai Lama in 1447. A statue of the fourth **Panchen Lama's throne** and a fine statue of the **Sayamuni Buddha** stand in the Palace Hall surrounded by 15th century wall paintings. The Gambu Conference Hall nearby houses the biggest Buddhist copper statue in the world. Return to Lhasa in the afternoon for overnight and dinner at the **Lhasa Four Points by Sheraton Hotel**.

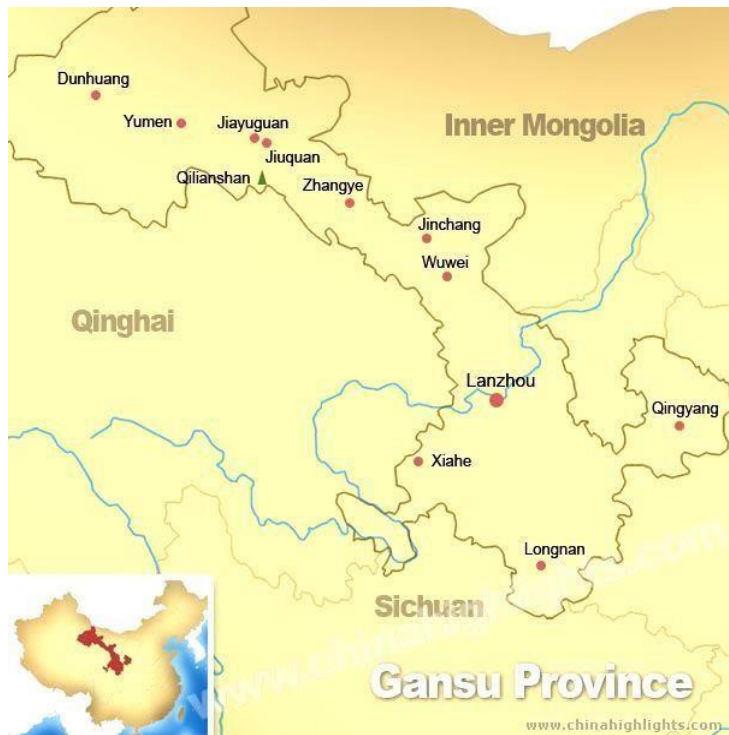


Monday 10 September: Lhasa – train to Xining

Depart by train from Lhasa at 09:50 for a fascinating **22-hour journey** across Tibet to Xining in the north. The first commercial train connected Lhasa with the rest of China in July 2006 and the line to Xining was completed in 2016. We will journey through some of the **most amazing parts of Tibet**. Reaching heights of 5 000 m, we will cross the vast **Qinghai Plateau**, thinly populated by people, hairy goats and yaks, and scattered herds of antelope, and travel across the '**Third Pole**', 600 km² of perma-frost that is subject to melting during summer days and refreezing at night. Over this unstable landscape, 550 km of railway track runs with the help of radical Chinese technology that insulates the rails from ice, and over **286 causeways and bridges**. We travel in four-berth compartments in **Soft Sleeper Class**. Lunch and dinner on board the train.

Tuesday 11 September: Xining – Jiayuguan

We arrive at Xining at 06:43. Our bullet train D2741 connection to **Jiayuguan** in the Happy Mountain Valley leaves at 08:41 giving us time for breakfast. Arrive at noon and transfer to the **Jiayuguan Holiday Plaza Hotel**, 1799 South Wenhua Road (tel. 86-937-676 8888).





Jiayuguan town ('Wine Spring') lies in the **Gobi Desert in Gansu Province**, which is squeezed between Tibet and Mongolia. It is situated at the province's narrowest point in the **Hexi Corridor**. After an opportunity for a bite to eat, we visit the massive **Great Wall Fortress** built in the 14th century. Here, the western extremity of the Great Wall of China spits in two, the one branch running north into the torturous Tian Shan (Mountain of Heaven) range and the other ending where the **First Beacon Tower** overhangs a canyon along the Kunlun (Snow) mountain range to the south. This section of the Great Wall was built in the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644) to protect China from the 'barbaric' peoples of central Asia. We will visit the mud remains of the southern arm of the wall and walk along a section of the northern arm. Although nothing as high or wide as elsewhere, it is still an imposing barrier for all that. Dinner will be had at the hotel or in a restaurant.

Wednesday 12 September: Jiayuguan – Dunhuang

Travel by coach to Dunhuang (320 km, 6 hours) **through the flat and stony Gobi Desert**. We will see the remains of **fire beacons** where small Ming garrisons served to warn of an approaching enemy. Further along, interesting **wind formations** can be seen in the desert rock. A major stop is made at the superb **Silk Road Museum** in **Jiuquan**, opened in 2014.

The **oasis town of Dunhuang** is situated at the western edge of the Gobi Desert, marked here by standing dunes called the **Singing Sand Dunes**. Dunhuang lies near the split of the Silk Road into southern and northern routes either side of the inhospitable **Taklimakan Desert**. The routes reunite at Kashgar, our eventual objective, from where the Silk Road continues to Samarkand in Uzbekistan and further west past Afghanistan and through Iran to Turkey. In Dunhuang we book into the **Dunhuang Soluxe Hotel**, 1339 Yanggung Road (tel. 86937882 9999) for two nights. Dinner at a restaurant.

Thursday 13 September: Mogao Caves, Dunhuang

After breakfast, we visit the **famous Mogao Caves**, also known as the Qianfodong or Caves of the Thousand Buddhas, a desert gallery of painted grottoes for Buddhist meditation and worship carved into the friable and soft gravel conglomerate of a cliff overlooking a small oasis on the Dachuan River, 25 km from Dunhuang. Located at religious and cultural crossroads, the 492 remaining painted caves are the most famous ancient Buddhist sculptural site in China. The grottoes contain some of the finest examples of Buddhist art dating from AD 366 to the 14th century, although most caves were in place



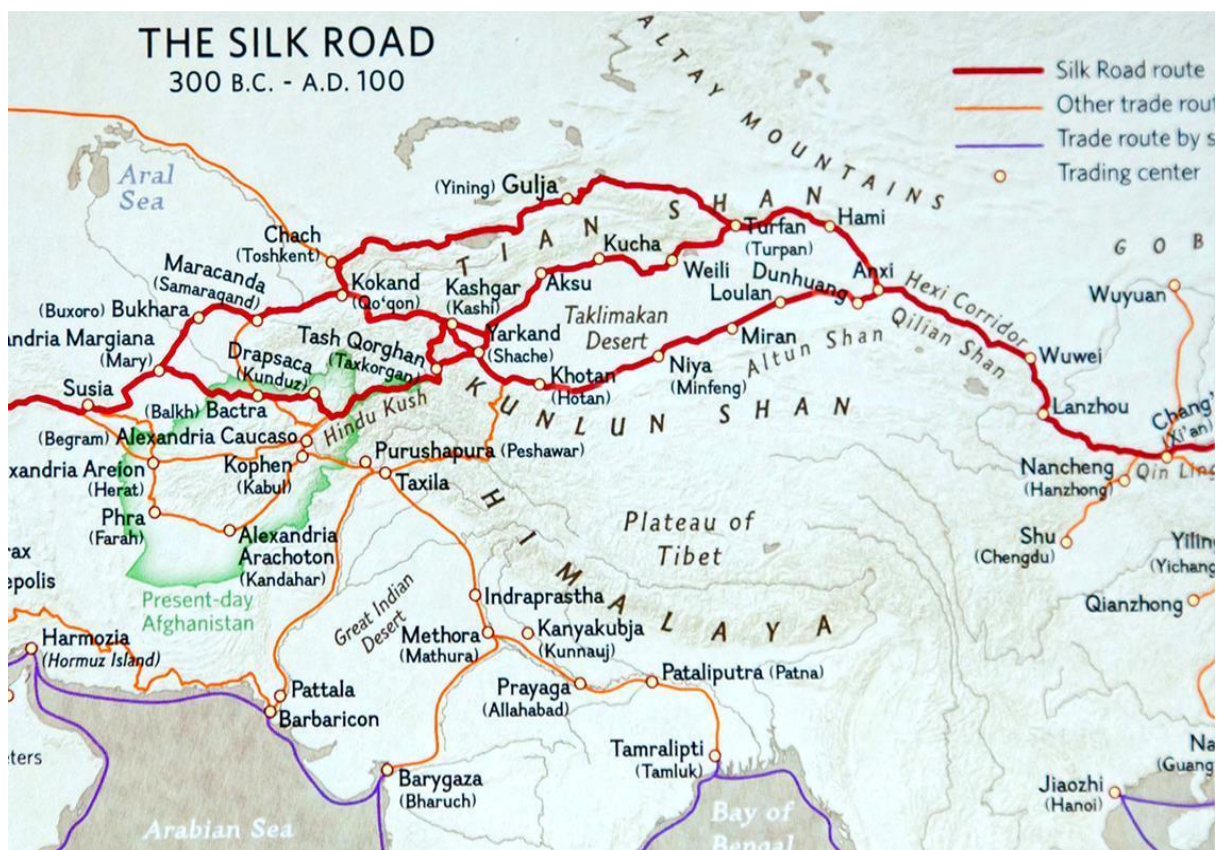
by the 7th century. The five layers of caves were originally protected by outside structures, but these disintegrated with time, exposing the caves to the elements.

As a result, the art of some 200 caves had already been destroyed by the time they were first seen by Western explorers and archaeologists such as Aurel Stein in 1907. Later, the **Gansu Research Institute** constructed a brick façade with walkways at different levels in front of the caves to protect them, as well as a large research complex. The caves are decorated from floor to ceiling by frescoes and murals, and house Buddha statues, clay figures and carvings. Only a select number of caves are opened to visitors in any one year.

A researcher from the institute will guide us through about eight caves, including the famous 'Library' cave (Cave 17). A small selection of the many thousands of old scrolls and manuscripts found unexpectedly in this sealed cave are preserved at a fascinating **site museum**. Although most of the scrolls are in Chinese and Tibetan, there are also texts in Sanskrit, Khotanese, Uyghur and Sogdian, as well as Hebrew (just one prayer), representing the Buddhist, Zoroastrian, Manichean, Eastern Christian, Daoist and Jewish religions. After a break for lunch, we will view **two excellent documentaries** that will show us the treasures of other Mogao caves and **restoration techniques**. In mid-afternoon, we visit **Crescent Lake**, a permanent body of water situated among the dunes, before returning to our hotel. The more adventurous participants have an opportunity to go on an hour-long **Bactrian camel ride** up and along the standing dunes. Dinner at hotel.

Friday 14 September: Dunhuang – Liuyuan – Turpan

At 10:00 we depart for the **Dunhuang Museum** in downtown Dunhuang, which principally exhibits historic and cultural relics. After an opportunity for lunch, we continue to **Liuyuan station** (130 km) and



board the afternoon **bullet train to Turpan**, a city-oasis on the northern edge of the Taklimakan Desert (Train D2703, depart at 14:54). En route we enter China's westernmost province, the **Xinjiang-Uyghur Autonomous Region**, a vast desert region in Chinese Central Asia. The main population group is Moslem Uyghurs whose lifestyle, customs and traditions are distinctly different from those of the Han Chinese. The name Xinjiang means 'new territory'.

Skirting the Taklimakan Desert, we arrive at **Turpan** at 18:52. Here we find an interesting geological feature. The town is located along and in the **Turpan Depression**, a fault-bounded trough below sea level that constitutes **the fourth lowest exposed point on the Earth's surface**. By some measures it is also the **hottest and driest area in China** during the summer. However, the snows of the Tian Shan mountains enable the locals to produce their famed fruits and grapes. Mt Bogada, the tallest peak in the eastern Tian Shan range, rises 6 000 m above the surrounding pasturelands. On arrival in Turpan, transfer to the **Turpan Huozhou Hotel**, Donghuang Road (tel. 86995866 6888) for three nights. Dinner at hotel or a restaurant.

Saturday 15 September: Turpan

This morning we visit the **Gaochang** World Heritage Site at the foot of **Flaming Mountain**, so called because its red rock can be the hottest in China, reaching over 70 °C at times. Gaochang was built as a garrison town in the 1st century BC, when it was called Gaochang Wall. It was later renamed Kharakhoja or Kocho (King City). By the 14th century the city was abandoned following warfare between Mongolian aristocrats and Uyghurs. The city comprises outer, inner and palace cities. The outer city's 5,4 km perimeter was enclosed by a 12,0 m thick and 11,5 m high tamped earth wall.

Not far from Gaochang we find the underground **Astana Tombs** of the ancient Turkic civilisation of **Karakhoja**. This 10 km² cemetery served both the aristocratic and common residents of Gaochang, although not royalty, it seems. Gravel boundaries separate the tombs by family. Stairs lead down to the burial chambers 10 m below. The dead were placed on an earthen or wooden bed in the back of the chamber. Holding wood in both hands and dressed in cotton, linen or silk, the bodies were surrounded by miniature pavilions, carts and horses, musical instruments, chess sets, pens and ink, grapes, melons, dumplings and pancakes. Owing to the arid climate, the artefacts are very well preserved. More than 10 000 cultural relics have been excavated from 456 tombs, including over 2 700 books, epitaphs, paintings, clay figurines, and pottery, wood, gold and stone wares, ancient coins, silk and cotton textiles.



The last site to be visited today is **Bezeklik**, situated high on the cliffs of Mutou Valley under the Flaming Mountains. These Buddhist caves are the royal temples of Huihu State (predecessor of today's Uyghur) built during the 5th to 14th centuries. Of the 83 original caves, 57 remain. By far the best mural topics are found in Caves 16 and 17. Cave 16 depicts a musician playing a lute-like instrument that has its origin in southern China's Yunnan province. In Cave 17, the mural called 'Transformation in Hell' supports the

notion that Gaochang was the centre of Manicheism from the 9th to 12th centuries. Return to Turpan for dinner and overnight.

Sunday 16 September: Turpan

Today we visit the largest, oldest and best-preserved earthen city in the world, the 2 300 year-old **Jiaohe Citadel** in Yarnaz Valley, the capital of a large Cheshi state that flourished in the Han Dynasty (206 BC–220 AD). This World Heritage Site is one of the few genuine aboveground ruins in all of China. Covering an area of 220 000 m², it was home to 700 households comprising 6 500 citizens and 865 soldiers. Jiaohe distinguishes itself from other ancient cities in that it only had two city gates, was protected by cliffs on three sides and that all its buildings were dug from the earth, with wood rarely being used. The ruins boast a large wellpreserved Buddhist temple. Jiaohe was repeatedly destroyed from the end of the 8th century onward and finally abandoned at the beginning of the 14th century.

Return to Turpan to visit the **Kerek Well irrigation system** developed 2 000 years ago. Lunch will be provided by a local Uyghur family living nearby. Then we explore the central city, its mosques and the Emin Minaret, as well as the **Turpan Museum**, which is well-known for its mummified remains of a royal family. Then stroll under the grapevines in 'Grape Street' to enjoy a cool respite from the heat of the day and to taste the local grapes. Dinner is enjoyed to the **song and dance** of the local Uyghurs.



Monday 17 September: Turpan – Korla – Kuche

Travel to Kuche by coach (690 km – 9 hours). At Korla, which lies 400 km from Turpan, we visit the **Tiemen Pass**, the pass that historically connected north and south Xinjiang. It is one of 26 famous passes in China and is known as the '**Iron Gate**'. The gate seen by us is a reconstruction dating to 1989 but built according to ancient plans. After a lunch break, we continue to **Kuche** in the Tarim Basin, the former capital of an ancient Buddhist kingdom. Watered by the Kucha and Muzart rivers, this intensively irrigated oasis produces grains and cotton, and is known for its fruit, notably pears, grapes, figs and melons. Its ancient population was an **Aryan people speaking Tocharian B**, or Kuchean, one of two extinct Tocharian languages of the Indo-European language family.

During the period of Tang domination (618–907), Kucha housed one of the **four garrisons of Anxi**, the 'Pacified West', the other three being at Kashgar, Khotan and Yanqi. In the 9th century, after the Kirghiz had destroyed the **Uyghur steppe empire** (840), Kucha fell under **Uyghur domination** and became a significant centre of the subsequent Uyghur Kingdom. As an important part of the Silk Road economy, the city was in contact with the rest of central Asia, including Sogdiana and Bactria, and thus eventually with the peripheral cultures of India, Persia and China.

A specific style of music developed in the region, which gained popularity as it spread along the Silk Road. Lively scenes of **Kuchean music and dance** can be found in the Kizil Caves to be visited the next day. Kuchean musical instruments were very popular in Tang China, particularly the lute, which became known in Chinese as the pipa. The music was transmitted from China to Japan and is preserved in Japanese court music.

Time restraints will unfortunately not permit us to visit the **Subashi ruins** and the extensive ruins of the **Qiuci kingdom** capital near Kuche. According to the Book of Jin, in the 3rd century Qiuci had nearly a thousand Buddhist stupas, temples and monasteries, and its monks introduced Buddhist teachings to China until the 7th century. In Kuche we check into the **Kuche Grand Hotel**, 266 Tianshan Road (tel. 86-997-799 9999). Dinner and overnight.

Tuesday 18 September: Kucha – Aksu

Depart from Kuche to Aksu (250 km, 3 hours).

Along the way, we visit the world-famous **Kizil Thousand Buddha Caves**, a key national cultural site reminiscent of the Mogao Caves. Kizil means 'Uyghur'. The caves were dug into the cliffs of the Mingwu Dage mountains on the north bank of the Muzhadi River. About a third of the caves, 80 in all, and 10 000 m² of murals remain intact. Dating from the 3rd century, they are the earliest large-scale stone statue grottoes in China. The last caves here were completed in the 8th to 9th centuries.

Legend has it that the caves have their origin in the daughter of the royal family of ancient Kucha. While out hunting, princess Zaoerhan fell in love with a local mason. When the mason approached the king for the hand of his daughter, the king was appalled. Even so, he gave his permission on condition that the mason carve 1 000 caves into the local hills. Determined, the mason went to work. After three years and having carved 999 caves, he died from exhaustion. The distraught princess died of grief and her tears are said to be the waterfalls that cascade down some of the cave rock faces.

After our visit to the grottoes, in particular Cave 38, we continue to Aksu for dinner and overnight at the **Aksu Minghua Hotel**, 25 Yingbin Road (tel. 86-997-632 3666).



Wednesday 19 September: Aksu – Taklimakan Desert crossing – Khotan

Since Dunhuang we have been travelling on the northern edge of the Taklimakan Desert. Today we will cross it. Roughly translated, the word Taklimakan is Uyghur for 'once you go in, you don't return'. The Tarim or Taklimakan Desert Highway is a 552 km long asphalted road across uninhabited desert from Luntai near **Kucha** to Minfen near **Hotan** (Khotan). It is the world's longest road across a shifting-sands desert and was completed in 1995. Travelling in early June there is little chance of sandstorms and shifting sands. An early start will take us through **exotic desert landscapes** and past thousand-year-old *Populus* trees on the banks of the Khotan River, whose course we will be following. There are two roadside stations along the way and we will make various photo stops.

After the crossing, we reach the ancient city of **Khotan** ('Jade'), which lies on the southern route along the Taklimakan Desert. Its remarkable history is traced through nine archaeological sites. The first Buddhists came from India around 200 AD and for 800 years, as Buddhism moved east and became the most important religion in China, Khotan served as a major centre for the study and translation of Buddhist texts. The kingdom was conquered by Islam in 1006, the people converted to Islam and gradually gave up speaking Khotanese for Uyghur.



An important archaeological site is the **Shanpula cemetery** dating to as early as the 3rd century AD with mass graves containing up to 200 people each, 69 individual graves from after the third century and

two pits for horses where the inhabitants gave their horses elaborate burials. Excavations have provided vivid evidence of exchanges with peoples living to the west, but also with China. Khotan's most imposing ruins are those of the **Rawak Monastery**, excavated by Arian Steiner at the start of the 20th century. Since the cemetery and ruins are situated deep in the desert and are mostly covered by desert sand, we will visit the **Hetian Museum**, which houses cultural relics from the past and remains open until 20:00. Overnight and dinner in Khotan.

Thursday 20 September: Khotan – Yarkand – Kashgar

In the morning, we will visit a jade market before continuing to **Kashgar** (504 km) with a stop at the ancient city of **Yarkand**, where we will visit the **Golden Graveyard** dating back to 17th century, the burial site of royal family members of the Yarkand Uyghur Kingdom, and the **tomb of Aman Nisahand**, the wife of the second king of Kashgar. Then we continue to Kashgar on the western edge of China. From here Afghanistan, Pakistan, Uzbekistan and other central Asian countries are just hours away, although one would need to cross the high Pamir, Karakoram or Tian Shan mountain ranges to get there. We proceed to the **Kashgar Yinrulin International Hotel**, 160 Jianshe Road (tel. 86-998-291 2777) for overnight and dinner.

Friday 21 September: Kashgar – overnight train to Urumqi

We will spend a day in fabled Kashgar set at 1 230 m against the majestic backdrop of the mighty Pamirs. Once a powerful trading post on the Silk Road, it is still the most absorbing place in north-west China. The city is being developed by China as '**a port in the desert**' and is modernising very fast, but we will concentrate on the old part of town, where we will see the old town, including the 400-year-old **Idkah Mosque** and the **cultural centre** for Xinjiang's Uyghur Muslims. For lunch you may wish to try naan bread and grilled mutton on skewers.



In the afternoon, proceed to the Kashgar railway station for the 17:34 **overnight train Z9518 to Urumqi**. We travel in Soft Sleeper Class on this clean and comfortable train with a good restaurant. Dinner will be enjoyed on the train.

Saturday 22 September: Urumqi

After breakfast in the dining car, we arrive **Urumqi** ('beautiful pasture') at 10h41. Urumqi is the capital of the Xinjiang-Uyghur Autonomous Region, the largest city in central Asia and also **the city most remote from any ocean in the world**. It lies 450 km to the north of Kucha and had an estimated population of 3,5 million in 2015. Urumqi has seen huge economic development since the 1990s.

Once we are out of the station by about 11:00, we transfer through the usually chaotic traffic of the city to the **Mirage Hotel**, 305 North Xinhua Road, Beimen Dashizi (86 991 293 7888). After an opportunity to freshen up and a bite to eat, we depart to the **Xinjiang Regional Museum** where a collection of ancient mummies lies at the centre of a great mystery. It was in the region we have been travelling through that a great number of **ancient and well-preserved mummies** were discovered. They date as far back as 4 000 years, making them contemporaneous with those of Egypt, but they are far better preserved. In addition, they wear **woollen clothing that is as brightly hued as the day it was made**.



The reason for the mummies preservation is that rather than being created by skilled embalming procedures, the corpses here were dried by the natural environment. **Surprisingly, these prehistoric people are not Oriental but Caucasian** – tall, large-nosed and blonde with round eyes that were probably blue. The 'Loulan beauty' with her reddish-brown skin, thick eyelashes, large eyes and long hair is among the best preserved and famous mummies. This will be one of our most fascinating visits.

Should we have time, we will subsequently go to the **Xinjiang International Grand Bazaar** in the Tianshan District, **China's largest bazaar**. The architectural style is on a grand scale and characteristic sections for ethnic minorities offer dazzling, rich and exquisite commodities. Return to hotel for dinner and overnight.

Sunday 23 September: Urumqi – Chengdu

We will depart for the airport around 10:00 for our flight to Chengdu, Sichuan province.

13:55 Depart Urumqi on flight HU7367

17:15 Arrive Chengdu

We are met at the airport and transfer to the nearby Chengdu Airport Express Hotel. Our evening stay at this hotel will allow us to get some rest and freshen up before our international long-haul flights. Dinner at hotel.

Monday 24 September: Chengdu – Addis Ababa – Johannesburg

At 23:30 transfer to the airport. Our flights will be as follows:

01:50 Depart on Ethiopian Airlines flight ET637

06:20 Arrive Bole International Airport, Addis Ababa

08:40 Depart for Johannesburg on Ethiopian Airlines flight ET809

13:05 Arrive OR Tambo Airport, Johannesburg

TOUR PRICE

Per person sharing: R65 350 plus US\$110

Single supplement: R12 450

Included in the tour price

All tour arrangements as per the itinerary, including economy-class airfares from Johannesburg return and within China; surface transportation in China by rail and air-conditioned 29 and 35-seater coaches (for safety reasons, the coaches in Tibet have a maximum of 29 seats); soft-sleeper, fourth-berth compartments on overnight train journeys from Lhasa to Xining and Kashgar to Urumqi; high-speed first-class train tickets from Xining to Jiayuguan and Liuyuan to Turpan; accommodation based on two persons sharing a double or twin room (single accommodation throughout is available at the surcharge indicated); all rooms with en-suite facilities and air-conditioning; all breakfasts and dinners; entrance fees to historical sites and museums shown in the itinerary; the services of a tour leader from South Africa, a national Chinese guide and English-speaking local/regional guides throughout; representatives from local research institutes at the Magao Grottoes and the Xinjiang Museum; cultural events as indicated; porters' fees; all gratuities and tips; and 1 ℓ of bottled water on the coach per person/day.

Not included

All lunches; all drinks; additional water; personal expenses such as laundry; optional visits and entertainment; group travel insurance (see 'Important Information'); visa costs (see 'Important Information'); and add-on fares from other centres in South Africa.

IMPORTANT INFORMATION

Tour organiser and manager: Reinoud Boers, ArchFox Books and Tours, 5 Henry Road, Rivonia, Sandton; PO Box 2196, Rivonia, 2128; tel. 011 803 2681; cell 082 566 6295; fox@boers.org.za.

China tour operator: China Experience Trade and Tours, South Africa and China: **Alex Sun**, Manager, China Experience Northwest, Cell: (+86) 137 7215 3686.

US dollar component of the tour price: \$110 per person will be collected during the tour itself to settle direct expenses incurred on behalf of the group, including gratuities for guides and drivers, tips for hotel porters, etc.

Tour conditions and terms: Kindly refer to the Tour Booking Form.

Altitude: Participants need to be aware that in Tibet we will be travelling at high altitudes. Lhasa is situated at 3 565 m and Shigatse at 3 800 m above sea level. High altitudes may result in altitude illness or Acute Mountain Sickness (AMS). In fact, at elevations of over 3 000 m, 75 per cent of all people will have mild AMS symptoms. There are no specific factors such as age, sex or physical condition that correlate with susceptibility altitude sickness. The acclimatisation process is inhibited by dehydration, overexertion, and alcohol and other depressant drugs. If you have not been to high altitudes before, it is important to be cautious, and if you aware that you are prone to altitude illness, you need to take this into consideration. There are drugs that will help with altitude illness and AMS. These are described in a short paper, 'Outdoor Action Guide to High Altitude: Acclimatisation and Illness' by Rick Curtis, Director, Outdoor Action Programme, Princeton University. A copy is available on request. Oxygen is available in hotel rooms in Tibet, but at a cost. Oxygen will also be available on the coach used in Tibet.

Safety information: China is generally a safe country to travel in. Most people one meets are friendly, honest and trustworthy. However, China is not immune to crime, the weather can affect travel plans and accidents do happen. There are currently no health and safety threats to tourist. Take normal safety precautions against pickpockets. Follow the advice of your tour manager and/ or guide. Above all, protect your passport, air tickets and visa documents, and carry a photo copy of your passport and other vital documents separately.

Participants joining from overseas destinations: International participants may arrange to join and leave the tour in Chengdu and will in that case receive a credit for the international group airfare from Johannesburg to Chengdu return. Flights within China are included in the tour cost.

Passports: Passports must have a validity of at least six months and have at least two empty pages.

Visas: A single entry tourist visa is required for this tour by all passport holders. The cost of a visa is R490. A visa form and requirements will be circulated to tour participants closer to the date of departure, and a visa service will be offered at R150.00 per visa.

Travel insurance: It is a tour requirement that all participants are covered by travel insurance. For persons under 70 years of age, group travel insurance at R25 per person per day (a total of R525 for the 21-day tour) will be arranged and charged separately. The cost of Senior's travel insurance for persons 70 to 79 years of age is R3 513, and Super Senior's insurance for persons 80 years and over will cost R4 967.00.

Health precautions: You should consider inoculations against typhoid and hepatitis A.

Travelling conditions: Conditions in China, especially in the autonomous areas, can be different and basic, and Western standards may not always be encountered. Some of the roads we will be travelling on will be torturous. All highways in Xinjiang have speed limits and traffic is unpredictable. This could affect our itinerary.

Number of participants: A maximum of 25 plus the tour leader.

Coach transportation: Air-conditioned 29-seater coach in Tibet and 35-seater coach in Gansu and Xinjiang.

Accommodation: Four-star hotels as far as possible. Rooms with double beds for couples may not always be available and will be replaced with twin-bedded rooms.

Hotel contact list: A list will be provided before departure.

Meals: Dinners will be had at our hotels or at suitable restaurants for variety.

Tour guides: The tour will be accompanied throughout by a Chinese English-speaking national guide, as well as local/regional guides.

Water: Only bottled water, which is freely available, should be drunk and used. A 1 ℓ bottle of water on the coach per person per day is included in the tour price.

Diarrhoea: Take care with the water you drink and the food you eat. Bring the necessary medicine for this fairly common travellers' curse.

Temperatures

- Tibet: In September: 8 to 20 C
- Xinjiang: In September: 10 to 28 C

Clothing: Dress comfortably and informally. Take light cotton clothing but allow for cool to cold weather. In Tibet as well as in Jinjiang the evenings can be cool. Long short can be worn. Comfortable sturdy, closed shoes with rough soles are ideal footwear. A light rain jacket may come in handy.

Other items that could be useful to bring along: The sun is very strong in Tibet and Jinxiang. Sunglasses, a sunhat and sunblock are recommended. You should also consider bringing Game, toilet paper, wet paper towels, instant hand sanitiser, torch and batteries, personal medication, eye drops, insect repellent, toiletries, bathing suit, adapter, binoculars, photographic equipment. A money belt is always useful.

Luggage: Keep luggage compact. Use travel locks and affix address details to the inside of luggage. **An overnight bag/backpack** for our overnight trip to Gyantse and Shigatse in Tibet is required. This could also be useful for carrying water, etc. during walking tours.

Currency: In most cases, payments within China can only be made in local currency. The Renminbi (RMB) is the official currency. The Yuan (CNY) is the RMB's basic unit. One Yuan is subdivided into 10 Jiao, which in turn is subdivided into 10 Fen.

Changing money and exchange rates: Bring spending money in any hard currency such as the yuan, the dollar or the euro. Money can be changed at most hotels and banks in China. Exchange rates on 27/10/17 were as follows:

- 1 CNY to ZAR 2.14 (1 ZAR to CNY 0.47)
- 1 CNY to USD 0.15 (1 USD to CNY 6.65)

Credit cards: Major credit cards such as Visa, MasterCard, etc. are accepted in most hotels, larger shops, shopping malls and restaurants. ATMs are also found at airports, shopping centres and some of the bigger hotels in major cities. But credit cards are often not accepted in smaller urban centres. Remember also that locating an ATM can be time-consuming.

Time: The whole of China is set to Beijing Standard Time, which is eight hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time and seven hours ahead of South African time.

Cell phones: Cell phones operate throughout. Simcards are sold freely. The largest service provider is China Mobil. When using SA cell phones in China, standard roaming rates apply.



Electricity: Electricity supply in China is generally at 220V, 50HZ. Most hotels have both 110V and 220V electrical outlets in the bathrooms; in guest rooms 220V sockets are usually only available. The standard Chinese socket (same as in Australia etc.) is shown alongside.

Photography: Do not photograph government buildings, including airports, bridges and military installations, and police and military personnel. Always take care when taking shots of cultural and religious buildings and ceremonies. It is best to check first. Please ask when you wish to photograph people.

Things to buy: In Tibet you can consider traditional art, Buddhist religious items (i.e. prayer flags) and Tibetan souvenirs. In Xinjiang look for silk products, jade carvings (especially in Khotan), lacquer wares, Chinese tea, etc.

Duty free allowances into China:

- 400 cigarettes, 100 cigars and 500 g tobacco
- 1,5 l of alcoholic beverages with an alcoholic content of 12% or more