5 February 2018

Dear ArchSoc members and friends

**ARCHSOC TOUR TO TIBET AND THE FAR WEST OF CHINA, SEPTEMBER 2018**

In 2015, a fascinating tour to China’s Sichuan and Gansu provinces was undertaken by ArchSoc members. Travelling where few Westerners set foot provided a varied and enriching experience. We reached our furthest point west at the spectacular Magao Grottoes in the Gobi Desert near Dunhuang. At the time, participants voted strongly for a follow-up tour that continued further west along the Taklimakan Desert in China’s Central Asian region and also included mystical Tibet.

Such a tour has, in fact, been arranged for 2018 by ArchFox Tours in conjunction with ArchSoc’s Northern Branch. Upon announcing the 21-day archaeological, historical, cultural and geological tour the demand to participate was so great that a decision was taken to organise two departures in 2018. The tour leaving on 22 May is fully booked, but the tour departing on 4 September and returning on 24 September still has four seats available.

The visual highlights of the five days to be spent In Tibet will be the Potala Palace in Lhasa, magnificent monasteries in three cities, stunning sights of the world’s greatest mountains and the highest plateau on earth, geography on a humbling scale and views lit with spectacular mountain light. 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 an astonishing level of devotion and faith.

Following a rail crossing of Tibet, our journey will then take us along the Silk Route from the Gobi Desert into the Xinjiang-Uyghur Autonomous Region, which has the Taklimakan Desert as its centrepiece. Here we will get to know the distinctly different customs, traditions and lifestyle of the region’s Uyghurs. Along the way we will not only revisit the fine Buddhist art of the Mogao Caves in Dunhuang but also see the astonishing art of the Kizil Caves near Aksu. We will view the archaeological remains at World Heritage Sites such as Gaochang at the foot of the Flaming Mountains, the ancient Jiaohe Citadel, the Astana Tombs of the Karakhoja Turkic civilisation and the royal temples at Bezeklik. Taking the northern route along Taklimakan Desert, we will get to know the rich heritage of the ancient oasis towns of Turpan, Korla, Kucha and Aksu. Special experiences will be a crossing of the Taklimakan Desert to Khotan and viewing the unbelievably well-preserved and woollen-clothed mummies of a Caucasian people that lived around the Taklimakan Desert region as far back as 4 000 years ago at the Jinjiang Regional Museum in Urumqi, the city most remote from any ocean in the world.

The tour price is R65 350 plus US$110 per person sharing fully inclusive except lunches.

**Altitude**

Potential participants need to consider 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 even Acute Mountain Sickness (AMS). In fact, at elevations of over 3 000 m, 75 per cent of all people will have mild AMS symptoms. It is hard to know who may be affected; 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 suffering from altitude illness you need to take this into account. There are drugs that will help with altitude illness and AMS. These are described in a short paper that will be made available to participants. Oxygen is available in hotel rooms in Tibet (at a cost). Oxygen will also be available on the coach used in Tibet.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to email or call me.

Kind regards

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**REINOUD BOERS**