



Grand Asian Caravan

Days	Westbound	Countries	Distance	Activity level
42	Beijing to Istanbul	China + Kyrgyzstan + Uzbekistan + Turkmenistan + Iran + Armenia + Georgia + Turkey	12,332 km	●●●●●



Amazing and diverse sightseeing experiences in some the world's remotest corners bring rich rewards on this unique, challenging journey. Come with us along the Silk Road, to the beautiful Caucasus and retrace ancient routes of trade and conquest.

Itinerary

Day 1: Arrive Beijing

Beijing is an incredible contrast of sights, sounds and smells, and a wonderful beginning to this overland journey. This evening you join your Tour Leader and fellow travellers at 5:00pm for your pre departure meeting as detailed on your joining instructions.

Day 2: Beijing and on to Xian

So rich in history our time in Beijing is filled with unforgettable experiences. Today is no exception when we journey out to the Mutianyu section of China's Great Wall before we board the first of our Silk Road trains onto Xian.

Sightseeing - Great Wall of China (Mutianyu section)

Meals - Breakfast

Day 3: Xian

At the height of Silk Road prosperity Chang'an, as Xian was then known, was the glittering capital of ancient Cathay. For over 400 years the great caravans left the safety of Xian through the West Gate bound for the Taklamakan Desert, the high passes of the Tien Shan Mountains and the fabled cities of Central Asia. Today the old city walls, towers and pagodas reveal the city's long and turbulent history. Beyond the city we see the mind-boggling, entombed Terracotta Warriors. You will be astounded at the display of thousands of life-sized terracotta warriors, a hundred or so chariots plus thousands of weapons.

Sightseeing - Full Day Excursion to Terracotta Warriors and Silk Factory, City Exploring and free time, Optional activity: Evening Performance – Tang Dynasty Show

Day 4: Xian to Dunhuang

Heading west in the footsteps of the traders centuries before us we enter Gansu province for a stop at Dunhuang.

Meals - Breakfast

Days 5: Dunhuang

Known as Shazhou in ancient times, Dunhuang served as a rest stop for traders on the Silk Road and as well as a gateway through which Buddhism, Islam and Christianity entered China. At Dunhuang, we visit the incredible 'Caves of a thousand Buddhas' (Mogao Caves).

Sightseeing - Day 5 – Excursion – Mogao Caves

Day 6: To Liuyuan and onto Turpan

Today we travel by road to Liuyuan before rejoining the train to cross the sea of dunes to Turpan, famed for its great trestles of vines and its channels dug beneath the desert bringing water from the Tien Shan.

Sightseeing - City Exploring and free time

Meals - Breakfast

Itinerary (cont.)

Day 7: Turpan

Turpan, one of the most significant hubs of trade along the northern route of the Silk Road, still reflects life as it was and the faces of the bazaar recall the four corners of Asia. Most of Turpan's attractions lie outside of the city and its grapevine-trellised pedestrian streets. While here we embark on an excursion to the fascinating Karez Irrigation System, the life source of Turpan as well as the ruins of the ancient city of Jiaohe. This is a spectacular site, and due to its remote location perched on top of a cliff, it remains mostly intact.

Sightseeing - Turpan City Tour including Karez Irrigation System, Jiaohe Ruins, Emin Minaret and Mosque and Bazaar

Day 8: Turpan to Kashgar

After breakfast we return to the station to meet our overnight train to Kashgar.

Meals - Breakfast

Days 9- 10: Kashgar

One of the most important Silk Road cities, Kashgar took centre stage in the 'Great Game'. We learn of the intrigue when disguised spies from British India were sent to closely monitor Muslim sentiments, and Russian intentions; both perceived threats to their Indian empire.

Today, Kashgar's Sunday Market with its incredible characters and riot of colour, is worthy of its reputation as one of Central Asia's best. Listen out for "Boish-boish" (coming through) or risk being ploughed over by a pushcart. It is a chaotic but unforgettable experience.

Sightseeing - Day 9 - Kashgar sightseeing including Abakh Hoja Tomb & Id Kah Mosque. Day 10 -Sunday Market, City Exploring and free time

Meals - Day 10 - Breakfast

Day 11: Over the Irkeshtam Pass to Sary Tash

Beyond Kashgar lie the high passes of the Tien Shan Mountains, gateway to Kyrgyzstan and the fabled cities of Central Asia. We follow the Silk Road over the Irkeshtam Pass to Sary Tash where we will spend the night getting to know some of the locals in a homestay.

Meals - Breakfast, lunch & dinner

Day 12: Sary Tash to Osh

This morning we travel to Osh, one of the oldest recorded cities in Central Asia with over 2,500 years under its belt. Here, Chaikana's (tea-houses) offer refreshing tea, the mouthwatering smell of shashliks sizzling on street side grills fills the air, we visit a bustling bazaar and watch games of chess being played out under the filtered light of sprawling trees – welcome to Osh!

Sightseeing - Osh sightseeing including Central Square, Russian Orthodox Church, Suleiman Mountains, Museum and Osh Bazaar

Meals - Breakfast

Itinerary (cont.)

Day 13: Osh to the Fergana Valley

Leaving Kyrgyzstan at Dostuk we travel into Uzbekistan and to the rarely visited oasis of Fergana Valley where we visit the silk weaving town of Margilan with its large bazaar.

Sightseeing - Margilan excursion and Silk Factory

Meals - Breakfast

Day 14: Fergana and to Tashkent

Continuing our journey we make our way on to the Uzbek Capital of Tashkent stopping en route at the potter's town of Rishton, and one of the country's most ancient cities, Kokand before boarding our train.

Sightseeing - Rishton potteries, Kokand Minaret

Meals - Breakfast

Days 15-16: Tashkent and Samarkand

Although much of the Old City was lost to an earthquake Tashkent still retains some of its ancient treasures. This morning's city tour will unveil the charm and history of the city before we drive to 'Golden' Samarkand. Tamerlane set out to make Samarkand the richest city on earth at the peril of those he conquered. Today, it retains its beauty as it was intended with its imposing constructions, azure topped domes and minarets.

In Samarkand, Tamerlane's turquoise-spangled capital, we explore its fabulous monuments. Central Asia's most spectacular architectural ensemble, the Registan, plus many other highlights including the Shah-i-Zinda Complex, Bibi Khanym Mosque and the Ulug Bek Observatory.

Sightseeing - Day 15 - Half Day Tashkent city tour including Khast Imam complex, Chorsu Bazaar, Mustakiliq Square, Museum of Applied Art. Day 16 - Full Day City Tour including Registan Square, Gur Emir Mausoleum, Shar-i-Zinda Complex, Afrosiyob Museum, Ulug Bek Observatory and Bibi Khanum Mosque

Meals - Day 15 - Breakfast. Day 16 – Breakfast & dinner with a local family.

Itinerary (cont.)

Days 17-19: Bukhara via Shakhrisabz

A spectacular drive through the Zerafshan Mountains takes us to Shakhrisabz, the birthplace of Tamerlane. Beside the ruined entrance towers of his Ak-Serai Palace, the pretty market town offers a relaxed atmosphere with traditional homes, teahouses and mosques.

Continuing across the Kyzyl Kum Desert we find the mud-brick monuments of Bukhara, arriving late afternoon. Once known as 'holy' Bukhara, it was historically home to more than 2000 mosques. Today Bukhara's monuments are some of the oldest on the Silk Road; the Ark Fortress, Samanid Mausoleum and the Kaylan Minaret – one of Central Asia's tallest and so impressive that even Genghis Khan ordered it be spared from destruction during the Mongol invasions.

Take your time here to explore the Old Town and enjoy some of the many chaikhana (tea-houses) in Lyabi-Hauz, one of the most peaceful and interesting people-watching places in town.

Sightseeing - Day 17 – Shakhrisabz sightseeing including Ak Sarai, Dorus Saodat Complex, Crypt of Timur, Kok Gumbaz mosque, Day 18 – Full Day Bukhara city tour including Ark Fortress, Bolo-Khauz Mosque, Samanid Mausoleum, Kaylan Minaret, Nodir Devonbegi Madrassah, Kosh Madrassah Ensemble, Lyabi Hauz, Magoki Attori Mosque and Coumpol Bazaar, Day 19 – City Exploring and free time, Folk Performance at Nodir Devanbegi Madrasah

Meals - Day 17 – Breakfast, Day 18 – Breakfast, Day 19 – Breakfast

Day 20: Mary via Merv

Beyond Uzbekistan we cross the Kara Kum Desert to the oasis city of Mary and the ruins of Merv - one of the greatest of all the ancient Silk Road cities.

Sightseeing - Excursion to Ancient Merv including entrance

Meals - Breakfast

Days 21 - 22: Ashgabat

On our arrival to Ashgabat, a flat, sometimes dusty city twinkling with unique architecture, we will visit Arkadash Stud Farm for an up close experience with pure bred Akhal-Tekke horses, whose beauty, endurance and intelligence have captivated kings and generals since the hey-day of the Silk Road.

The following evening we go beyond the city limits to witness the "Door to Hell". The Darvaza gas crater has been burning for almost 40 years and was created when Soviet geologists started to drill at the site where they tapped into a cavern filled with natural gas. Fearing that the hole would release toxic gas they decided to burn it off with the hope the fire would use all the fuel in a few days, today it is still burning and is quite a sight to encounter.

Sightseeing - Day 21 - Arkadash Stud Farm, Day 22 – Ashgabat City Tour & Darvaza Crater

Meals - Day 21 - Breakfast, Day 22 - Breakfast

Day 23: Ashgabat to Mashhad

This morning we venture into the Kopet Dag Mountains and across the border to the most holy of Iran's cities, Mashhad.

Meals - Breakfast

Itinerary (cont.)

Day 24: Mashhad and to Isfahan

Best known for its incredible shrine complex of Imam Reza, the eighth grandson of the prophet Mohammed, this is one of the great architectural wonders of the Islamic world and is said to receive more than five million pilgrims a year. Witnessing the respect and emotion present is a moving experience, even for non-Muslims.

We join our overnight train to the beautiful city of Isfahan with its blue tiled buildings and covered bazaar.

Sightseeing - Half Day Mashhad City Tour including Imam Reza Shrine, Astan Quds Razavi Museum and Bazaar

Meals - Breakfast

Days 25-26: Isfahan

After our morning arrival to Isfahan we visit the stunning Masjed-e Imam Mosque, one of Iran's great architectural ensembles, with time to explore the Grand Bazaar, discover some of the city's renowned tea-houses and taste some of Iran's tastiest nougat, an Isfahan specialty.

Sightseeing - Day 25 – Full Day City Tour including Imam & Sheikh Lutfullah Mosques, Ali Qapou Palace and Bazaar Day 26 – Full Day City Tour including Jame Mosque and Vank Church

Meals - Day 26 – Breakfast

Day 27: Isfahan and to Tehran

The morning is yours to soak in the incredible ambience of Isfahan before we make our way to Iran's capital, Tehran.

Sightseeing - Isfahan City Exploring and free time

Meals - Breakfast

Day 28: Tehran and to Tabriz

Northwards we spend time in the bustling capital of Tehran - a busy, crowded metropolis which boasts some excellent museums, many housed in former palaces. While some may tell you that this city is lacking in charm, its vibrant, dynamic culture and fast paced lifestyle makes everyday in Tehran an adventure!

Following a day to explore the museums and sights of this expanding city we take the train to the influential city of Tabriz.

Sightseeing - Tehran City Tour including Archaeological, Golestan Palace and Glass & Ceramic Museum

Meals - Breakfast

Day 29: Arrive Tabriz

Welcome to the historic, sprawling city of Tabriz! Situated at the crossroads of Persia and the Caucasus this is a classic stop along the Silk Road. We visit the 15th century Blue Mosque, one of the most glorious buildings of its era and the fascinating rock-hewn village of Kandovan.

Sightseeing - City Tour including Kandovan Village, Blue Mosque, Mashrootiat House and Anthropology Museum, City Exploring and free time

Itinerary (cont.)

Day 30: Tabriz and to Goris

Early this morning we set off by road towards the Armenian border and onto the town of Goris. The Caucasus region was at the crossroads of trade and conquest – today it is renowned for its hospitality, fine wines, spas and incredible mountain scenery.

Sightseeing - Goris City Tour including troglodytic dwellings of Old Goris

Meals - Breakfast & dinner

Days 31-33: Goris and to Yerevan

Crammed between the Caspian and Black Sea is an incredible treasure trove of early Christian monuments set amongst spectacular mountain scenery. En route to Yerevan we stop to admire some of the region's surrounding treasures including Noravank and Tatev Monasteries as well as the breathtaking view over biblical Mt Ararat (weather permitting), the reputed resting place of Noah's Ark. Whilst in Yerevan we enjoy the tree-lined boulevards, cafes, museums and a taste of the city's well-known brandy at the Brandy Factory. Beyond the city we explore the beautiful Echmiadzin Cathedral, the birthplace of Christianity.

Sightseeing - Day 31 – Excursion to Halidzor village to take Tatever ropeway (one way included – weather permitting), Tatev Monastery, Satan's Bridge, Karahunj Observatory and Noravank Monastery, view over Mt Ararat (weather permitting), Day 32 – City Tour including Echmiadzin, Zvartnots, State History Museum, Opera House, Yerevan Cascade, State History Museum, Genocide Museum, Presidents Residence, Parliament building, and Brandy factory, Day 33 – Yerevan City Tour including Garni Temple and Geghard Monastery.

Meals - Day 31 – Breakfast, Day 32 – Breakfast, Day 33 – Breakfast & lunch

Day 34: Yerevan to Dilijan

Leaving Yerevan shortly after this morning's breakfast we hit the road and head north, bound for the mountain spa town of Dilijan, a region known as the Armenian Switzerland. En route we pause at the serene Lake Sevan, the world's second largest high altitude lake at 1900 metres above sea level. From here we can climb up to Sevanavank Monastery to marvel at the stunning panoramic views across the azure waters before continuing to Dilijan.

Sightseeing - Full Day Dilijan City Tour including Matenadaran Museum, Lake Sevan, Noradouz Medieval Khachkars Field, Sevanavank Monastery

Meals - Breakfast & dinner

Days 35-36: Dilijan and to Tbilisi

Today we wind our way through valleys and gorges to seek out the hidden monasteries and UNESCO World Heritage Sites of Haghpat and Sanahin before we farewell Armenia and cross the border at Sadakhlo to Georgia, heading for Tbilisi.

Explore the stunning mountain scenery and rich history, culture and hospitality of this fascinating city. Wander the backstreets of Tbilisi's old town and along Rustaveli Avenue as you take in the city's most ambient, impressive monuments and unique architecture.

Sightseeing - Day 35 - Excursion to Sanahin and Haghpat monastic complexes. Day 36 - Tbilisi City Tour including Narikala Fortress, Metekhi Cathedral, Old Town Centre, Sioni Church, Sulphur Baths & Mtskheta.

Meals - Day 35 - Breakfast, Day 36 - Breakfast.

Itinerary (cont.)

Day 37: Tbilisi to Gudauri

This morning we make our way via the Georgian Military Highway, where we can see the colourful Russia - Georgia Friendship statue, stunning panoramic views and the Gergeti Trinity Church, as we travel towards Gudauri.

Sightseeing - City Tour including sightseeing en route the Georgian Military Highway including the Ananuri complex, Gergeti Trinity Church, Kazbegi Glacier and Dariali Gorge

Meals - Breakfast & dinner

Day 38: Borjomi via Gori

Leaving the mountains we head south towards Borjomi en route stopping at Gori - the birthplace of Stalin.

Relax in the beautiful spa town of Borjomi famous for its mineral springs, national parks, as well as its bottled version of the salty sparkling water taken from the local volcanic springs.

Sightseeing - City tour, visit to winery in Chardakhi (or a local family)

Meals - Breakfast & dinner

Day 39: Vardzia and to Kars

This morning we head towards the Turkish border via Akhaltsikhe and Vardzia. The magnificent cave town of Vardzia is a journey highlight, where a monastery of 3,000 caves runs along a mountain cliff for some 500 metres and stretches over 19 tiers.

Sightseeing - Local sightseeing at Vardzia & Akhaltsikhe

Meals - Breakfast

Day 40: To Istanbul via Ankara

Early morning we depart Kars and start to travel towards Ankara where we will arrive the next morning. Late morning the following day you travel by road from Ankara to Istanbul.

Note: *There is track work being done on the railway line between Kars and Ankara. Some travel (around 70kms) will be via shuttle bus until further notice.*

Meals - Day 40 – Breakfast

Days 41-42: Istanbul

Adorned with treasure from all periods of human history, Istanbul is not only one of the world's most fascinating places it is also one of its most mesmerising. We spend our last morning of this epic journey exploring Istanbul's must-see sights in Sultanahmet before we say farewell to our fellow travellers and our journey comes to an end.

Sightseeing - Day 42 - Morning walking tour of Sultanahmet

Meals - Day 42 - Breakfast

What's included



Group size

15 maximum



Meals

34 breakfasts
2 lunches
6 dinners



Transfers

All transfers including to and from the airport.



Accommodation

33 hotel / guesthouses (twin share)
1 homestay (shared)
7 train (shared 4-berth)

*Optional single supplement available for hotel stays
on this journey – prices available on request.*



Sightseeing

Comprehensive schedule of sightseeing with certified Local Guides. You'll have a generous sprinkling of free time to relax or explore on your own.



Expertise

Expert local guides
Train tickets provided
Visa support
Advice from Travel Advisors

Contact Us

Client enquiries and reservations

Australia: 1300 559 860
New Zealand: 0800 770 156
UK: 0208 877 7657
Europe: +44 208 877 7657
Worldwide: +61 3 9672 5386
travel@sundownersoverland.com

Travel agent enquiries and reservations

Australia: 1300 559 860
New Zealand: 0800 770 156
UK: 0208 877 7657
Europe: +44 208 877 7657
Worldwide: +61 3 9672 5386
agentsales@sundownersoverland.com

Client enquiries and reservations

Level 1, 51 Queen Street,
Melbourne, VIC, 3000
Australia
T: +61 3 9672 5300
www.sundownersoverland.com