Journey West along the Great Silk Road
Botanical & Cultural Journey through Central Asia & China
Beijing | Tashkent | Khiva | Bukhara | Samarkand | Urumqi | Turpan | Dunhuang | Xian | Shanghai
03 – 24 May 2017
Overview

The name “Silk Road,” introduced to the intrepid traveller’s vocabulary over a century ago by the 19th century Prussian Geographer and explorer, Baron Ferdinand von Richthofen, conjures up images of desert caravans, lush oases, snow-capped mountains, and colourful markets where exotic goods change hands amid the cacophony of even more exotic languages. Where many destinations promise enchantment and adventure, travel on the Silk Road through Uzbekistan & China is one of the few that really delivers.

Join us for an exciting 22-day to Central Asia & China along the Silk Road, the most ancient of Eurasian trade routes. Travelling by plane, train, bus & jeep, we will visit legendary sites such as Samarkand with Registan Square, the ancient city of Khiva, the oasis town of Turpan with the ruined city of Jiaohe; the Thousand Buddha Caves of Dunhuang, where Chinese, Tibetan, Indian, and Mediterranean religion and art met and mixed in the first millennium AD. We also visit the old Tang capital of Xian with Terracotta Warriors. The journey concludes in glittering Shanghai.

Journey West along the Great Silk Road is sure to be the trip of a lifetime!

Your Tour Leader- Relle Mott

Relle has been associated with the Royal Botanic Garden Sydney for many years, as a supporter through Foundation & Friends, and as part of the Education & Community Programs team, most recently as Manager until December 2015. Relle’s background is in Education, Horticulture, Japanese Language & Culture, and Art. In March 2016, Relle joined Kaldor Public Art Projects as Special Projects Coordinator for Project 32: barrangal dyara, a large-scale exhibition by Aboriginal artist Jonathan Jones, within the Royal Botanic Gardens in Spring 2016. She has led several walking tours to Japan, including one for the Foundation & Friends, to enjoy the unique landscape, food and culture. Relle has a lifelong love of plants, and a keen interest in the historic transmission of early Buddhism to Eastern Asia from Tibet via the Silk Road.
BEIJING
Walk on the Great Wall at Mutianyu, discover plants in Jingshan Park, Summer Palace, and visit 798 Art District

TASHKENT
City tour in the Uzbek capital and Ugam-Chatkal National Park

KHIVA
Visit the city wall, old town and its mosques, minarets and madrassas

BUKHARA
Tour the Samanid monuments and its garden associated with the last Persian dynasty to rule Central Asia in Bukhara, local bazaars and the Ark Fortress

SAMARKAND
Explore archaeological sites at Samarkand, the heart of the Silk Road

AMMANKUTAN
Travel to Ammankutan to see spring wild flowers in the mountain and Zarafshan Valley

TURPAN
Visit the ruins of ancient Jiaohe, the Turpan Desert Botanical Garden and meet the local Uyghur people

DUNHUANG
A sensational unforgettable experience as we visit the Mogao Grottoes, Jade Gate Pass and ancient Han Dynasty Great Wall Ruin

XIAN
Visit Terracotta Warriors archaeological site and other features of China’s fabulous past

SHANGHAI
Visit China’s vibrant commercial heart with a visit to beautiful gardens in Suzhou
Day 1   Wed 03 May   Australia-Beijing
Fly from your nearest Australian capital city to Beijing, via Singapore with Singapore Airlines. On arrival you will be met and transferred to your hotel.

Day 2   Thu 04 May   Beijing
Today you will travel north and take a walk along the Great Wall at Mutianyu before returning to the city to visit the beautiful Summer Palace. Welcome dinner tonight. *(B L D)*

Day 3   Fri 05 May   Beijing-Tashkent
Visit the dominating feature of Jingshan Park and renowned 798 Art Zone that attracts many artists from home and abroad before transfer to airport for flight to Tashkent. Upon arrival, transfer to hotel. *(B L D)*

Day 4   Sat 06 May   Tashkent
Visit Ugam-Chatkal National Park with a professional mountain guide. We will still see wild nature, mountain springs, slopes, lake, rural people and different species of birds. Uzbekistan special dinner tonight. *(B L D)*

Day 5   Sun 07 May   Tashkent-Urgench-Khiva
Morning tour of the Uzbek capital, including the Old Town and Chorsu market. Later we fly to Urgench then transfer to our hotel in Khiva. *(B L D)*

Day 6   Mon 08 May   Khiva
Today’s tour allows us to take in the atmosphere and sights of the oasis. Its palaces, mosques, minarets, mausoleums, and madrasas represent some of the best-preserved examples of oriental town architecture from medieval times. *(B L D)*

Day 7   Tue 09 May   Khiva-Urgench-Bukhara
This morning we take a flight to Bukhara, a large, unique and authentic art museum that maintains its old oriental face. In the afternoon, we visit the last Emir’s summer palace and Chor-Bakr necropolis. *(B L D)*

Day 8   Wed 10 May   Bukhara
In Bukhara's Old Town (UNESCO World Heritage), we’ll see the massive Ark Citadel, a city within a city that was once the seat of government of Bukhara’s former rulers, the almost 50m tall Kalyan Minaret, the Samanid Mausoleum, one of Central Asia’s most beautiful architectural treasures and local bazaars. This evening we will be entertained by an open-air folklore show. *(B L D)*

Day 9   Thu 11 May   Bukhara-Samarkand
We take train to Samarkand and visit the sights of this famous historic city. The Necropolis of Shah-e Zinde (the living Shah), the Bibi Khanum mosque and Registan Square are certainly among the most notable architectural sites in Central Asia. *(B L D)*

Day 10  Fri 12 May   Samarkand
Make a day trip to Ammankutan pass and Shahrisabz to see wild flowers on the mountains. In Shahrisabz we visit monumental architecture of the Mongol ruler’s Great Palace - the imposing Ak-Saray. We will also see wild flowers at Zarafshan Valley on the way back. *(B L D)*

Day 11  Sat 13 May   Samarkand
Today we tour the Ulugbek Observatory, view the interior of the palace-like Gur Emir Mausoleum and visit local bazaar. Uzbekistan special dinner tonight. *(B D)*
Day 12  Sun 14 May  Samarkand-Tashkent
This morning is at your leisure, to do some of your exploring. In the afternoon we leave Samarkand for Tashkent. On arrival in Tashkent, we have dinner before being transferred to the airport for our midnight flight from Tashkent to Urumqi.  (B L D)

Day 13  Mon 15 May  Morning arrival in Urumqi
Arrive in the early morning in Urumqi, where you will be met and transferred to your hotel for a late breakfast. In the afternoon we will visit the excellent Xinjiang Regional Museum to see the incredibly well preserved mummies found in ancient tombs. If time permits, we will explore the Grand Bazaar, also known as International Bazaar. It offers both regional and imported products from nearby Russia, Mongolia and the Central Asian countries to the west.  (B D)

Day 14  Tue 16 May  Urumqi-Turpan
Travel by coach to Turpan. We will travel into the desert to see the mystical ruins of the ancient settlement of Jiaohe, founded over 2000 years ago. We will also pay a visit to Turpan Desert Botanical Garden, the largest botanical garden in China.  (B L D)

Day 15  Wed 17 May  Turpan-Dunhuang
Today we visit the peaceful Tuyugou village in a lush valley where we meet the locals at their homes. Later we will travel to Liuyuan by high-speed train. Upon arrival, transfer to hotel in Dunhuang.  (B L D)

Day 16  Thu 18 May  Dunhuang
Today we will tour the astonishing caves cut by Buddhist monks from 366 AD into cliff faces at Mogao. A visit to the Museum and Research Exhibition Centre at the site helps us appreciate how the caves were discovered. Then move on to the magnificent desert scenery of the Mingsha Sand Dunes and overlook the mysterious Crescent Lake, there will be an opportunity to ride camels. This evening there will be a folkloric show.  (B L D)

Day 17  Fri 19 May  Dunhuang
Today we visit the Jade Gate Pass, one of the important passes near Dunhuang in ancient time. After lunch, you will head to Han Dynasty Great Wall Ruin that was built in Han Dynasty about 2,000 years ago.  (B L D)

Day 18  Sat 20 May  Dunhuang-Xian
Transfer to airport for our flight to Xian. After transfer to the hotel, we will visit the Silk Road Museum and the fantastic Muslim Quarter where the stalls line the narrow alleys sell almost everything you can expect.  (B)

Day 19  Sun 21 May  Xian
This morning you will view the excavated Terracotta Warriors and Horses, buried over 2000 years ago to guard the tomb of the first emperor Qinshihuang. After lunch, you will walk along Xian’s massive City Wall, one of the best preserved in China. We will also explore the historic Small Goose Pagoda with its special viewing exhibitions.  (B L)

Day 20  Mon 22 May  Xian-Shanghai
Today we take high speed train to Shanghai, the amazing pulsating commercial heart of China. Upon arrival, transfer to hotel. Tonight we will be entertained by Shanghai’s famous Acrobatic show at Era.  (B D)

Day 21  Tue 23 May  Shanghai-Suzhou-Shanghai
Today we travel to Suzhou to visit two famous classic gardens - Master of the Nets Garden and Lingering Garden. Suzhou’s gardens are works of art - a fusion of nature, architecture, poetry and painting. Return to Shanghai and enjoy our farewell dinner tonight.  (B L D)

Day 22  Wed 24 May  Shanghai-Australia
Morning at your leisure. In the afternoon we transfer to airport for overnight flight back to Australia via Singapore.  (B)
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<tr>
<th>Price from Australia:</th>
<th>AUD</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Per person twin share</td>
<td>$9,995</td>
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<tr>
<td>Single supplement</td>
<td>$1,540</td>
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<tr>
<td>Land Only*</td>
<td>$8,985</td>
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*Land Only starts in Beijing and finishes in Shanghai*

**INCLUSIONS:**

- International flights with Singapore Airlines from Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane or Adelaide to China with taxes and charges included
- Regional transport including flights & trains in Uzbekistan and China
- 20 nights’ accommodation in well-appointed hotels with breakfast daily
- Meals as stated in the itinerary
- Tour Manager with the group in Uzbekistan and China
- Experienced English speaking local guides
- Transfers and touring in private coach
- Comprehensive sightseeing and entrance fees
- Visa for China and Uzbekistan
- Gratuities to guides and drivers through the entire trip

**Not Included:** Travel insurance, personal expenses, porterage at hotels and anything not mentioned above.
Located at the heart of Central Asia, Uzbekistan is replete with iconic Silk Road treasures. In the remote western desert, Khiva is an almost perfectly preserved Islamic medieval city, while the winding streets of Bukhara still seem to echo with the footsteps of merchants past. Samarkand’s Registan Square is perhaps the most well-known sight in Central Asia, with its incredible blue-domed madrassahs and an ancient market which conjures up images of traders laden with exotic goods and spices.

The history is long and complex, and waves of invaders and traders have made their way over Uzbek soil. Alexander the Great set up his easternmost outpost here, and the country was the birthplace of the legendary Tamerlane, whose empire stretched from Turkey to India yet completely collapsed on his death. In more recent times Uzbekistan was central to the 19th century power struggle between Russia and Britain known as the ‘Great Game’.

Geographically the country is dominated by the vast Kyzyl Kum desert, and many cities are centred on ancient oases deep in its red sands. A vital lifeline is provided by the fertile Ferghana Valley which is the economic heart of Uzbekistan. Nominally Muslim, more than half a century of Soviet rule have left their mark and its relaxed attitude to dress and alcohol makes it stand out from other Muslim countries. The delicious national dish, Plov, is also a source of national pride, and it reputedly has over 100 different versions – one question you are bound to be asked is whether you have tried it yet! Holidays to Uzbekistan are certainly memorable.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Uzbekistan</th>
<th>China</th>
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<td>The story of the Silk Road begins with the Chinese ambassador Zhang Qian’s journey into the Taklamakan Desert in 138 B.C. in search of political alliances. On his return to the old capital of Xian 13 years later, along with stories of the ‘heavenly’ Ferghana horse, which became a prized weapon in the arsenal of the Chinese armies, he brought with him tales of the Sogdian love of silk, and so the Silk Road was born. Today the Central Asian provinces of China west of Xian are perhaps the most fascinating regions of China. They are a melting pot of Han Chinese, Uygur, Kirghiz and a host of other cultures whose roots stem from the ancient kingdoms that once existed here. The early 1st Millennium A.D. saw the rise of a number of Buddhist kingdoms, whose cultural impact can still be seen in the famous Buddhist caves such as at Bezelik and Mogao. The later Mongol invasions spread Islam across the region and saw the development of important Islamic centres such as Kashgar. The shifting sands of the Taklamakan desert have preserved remarkable historic cities such as Gaochang and Jiaohe, which still enchant today’s visitors to this little-known area. The oasis towns on the edge of the Tarim basin continue to thrive using the ancient kharez irrigation systems which watered the melons and grapes so beloved the Chinese court. Farmers from across the region flock to sell their wares amidst a melee of carts, traders, acrobats and magicians in Kashgar’s famous Sunday market. Kashgar is also the starting point for journeys across the Torugart and Irkestan passes into Kyrgyzstan. Travelling along these ancient routes allows the modern traveller to follow in the tracks of the snaking caravans which passed the western end of the Great Wall at Jiayuguan and headed into the sunset along the Silk Road into Central Asia.</td>
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