

Silk Road 2020

Beijing to Moscow / 21 Days

RAIL EUROPE
formerly *rail* **plus**

Retracing one of the most important trading routes of ancient civilisation, the Silk Road follows in the footsteps of such legendary figures as Alexander the Great and Marco Polo. For centuries, merchants and adventurers journeyed to and from China on ancient routes through some of the most testing landscapes in the world trading silk, spices and perfumes. These 'highways' – stretching some 4,000 miles (6,400 km) – collectively came to be called the 'Silk Road'.



DEPARTURE DATE

Westbound	April 13 – May 3 Oct 1 – Oct 21
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DAY 1 BEIJING

CHINA

Upon arrival at Beijing Airport, you will be met and transferred to the five-star Regent Hotel (or similar), which is located in the historical centre of the city. This luxurious Beijing hotel is minutes from the Forbidden City, Tiananmen Square, Wangfujing shopping street, the Oriental Plaza and picturesque hutongs (old lanes).

We host an exclusive welcome dinner in an authentic Peking Duck restaurant, giving you the opportunity to meet your fellow travellers and look ahead to your 21-day voyage of a lifetime. The banquet will be complemented by specially selected international wines, as with all our meals, along with a glass of local rice wine also known as 'firewater' as befitting this special occasion.

DAY 2 BEIJING

CHINA

In our extensive touring programme of the Imperial City, we visit Tiananmen Square and explore the magnificently restored Forbidden City, which was built in the early 14th century and was home to the emperors of the Ming and Qing dynasties. Our cultural exploration continues at the Temple of Heaven. Built during the Ming Dynasty to offer sacrifices to the heavens, it is the grandest of the four great temples situated in Beijing. Here we experience enchanting displays of traditional dancing, singing and the delicately precise ancient art of calligraphy. We will also explore the small 'hutong' lanes of old Beijing by rickshaw and visit a local family in a traditional courtyard house.

DAY 3 BEIJING & XIAN

CHINA

During our stay in Beijing we devote time to the most awe-inspiring site in the whole of China – The Great Wall. This amazing edifice is perhaps the most evocative symbol of Chinese skill and precision. Originally built to protect the Chinese Empire from raids by nomadic tribes, it is the world's longest man-made structure in the world and part of the UNESCO World Heritage List.

We have the privilege of walking along a portion of the wall – the perfect opportunity to take some memorable photographs with your fellow guests.

This afternoon we depart Beijing and travel to Xian on the exhilarating high-speed railway line. Travelling at speeds of up to 300kms per hour (190 miles per hour) the bullet train will cover the distance of 1,144kms (710 miles) in a time of approximately 5 hours and 40 minutes. We stay overnight at the centrally located Sofitel Xian.

DAY 4 XIAN

CHINA

Following breakfast at the hotel we will admire Xian's historical ancient city walls and experience the bustling street culture of the Muslim Quarter.

This afternoon, we will have several hours to explore the world-famous Terracotta Warriors, discovered by peasants only 40 years ago. The 6,000 terracotta figures and their horses are one of the greatest archaeological finds of the 20th century.

Alternatively, as part of our Freedom of Choice programme we will offer a visit to the Han Yangling Museum. This tomb, dating back 2,000 years with its adjoining museum, is one of China's best kept secrets. We stay overnight at the centrally located Sofitel Xian.

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DAY 5 XIAN

CHINA

Today we will board the *Shangri-La Express* for the next stage of our journey across China. A welcome dinner of authentic Chinese cuisine is served onboard in the Restaurant Cars, as we travel towards Dunhuang.

Imperial Suite and Gold Class passengers will be accommodated in the private en suite Diamond Class cabins on board the *Shangri-La Express*, whilst Silver Class will be allocated Heritage Class cabins, which have shared shower and toilet facilities. Upgrades for Silver Class passengers to Diamond Class are available at an extra charge and subject to availability. A waitlist will be in operation for upgrades based on 'date of booking' order. Ask the Reservations Department for details.

DAY 6 DUNHUANG

CHINA

Following a leisurely morning onboard, we arrive in the small oasis city of Dunhuang. This afternoon we explore the vast natural beauty of the Gobi Desert by camel. Here we discover Crescent Lake. Hidden amongst towering sand dunes, it has sustained life in this region for millennia.

We stay for one night at the Silk Road Dunhuang hotel and tonight we experience dinner and a local folk performance in this magical setting.

DAY 7 DUNHUANG

CHINA

We wake early this morning to experience sunrise over the magnificent sand dunes, before we visit the fascinating Magao Thousand Buddha Cave Complex. This impressive site contains almost 500 grottoes, carved between 700 and 1,700 years ago. Inside we will see an amazing collection of beautiful sculptures and murals depicting the evolution of Buddhist religious art over this 1,000 year period.

Later this afternoon we will rejoin the *Shangri-La Express* for our onward journey to Turpan.

DAY 8 TURPAN

CHINA

Turpan is the location where the Flaming Mountains create a magnificent backdrop. We take a fascinating tour to the ancient underground irrigation system that has successfully fed the rich orchards and vineyards for centuries. We will visit the Museum of Turpan with its 5,000 artefacts detailing the rich history of the area and includes the Ancient Mummy exhibition with exhibits dating back 3,200 years.

Our final destination is the elegantly decaying sand fortress city of Jiaohe that was founded in 108 BC and became an important trading route along the Silk Road until it was abandoned in the 13th century following a raid by Genghis Khan.

DAY 9 BORDER CROSSING

CHINA AND KAZAKHSTAN

After a final breakfast on board the *Shangri-La Express*, we pass through dramatic mountain scenery before arriving at the Chinese border station of Alashankou. The border crossing takes approximately 5 hours, however our patience is rewarded as our private train, the *Golden Eagle*, awaits us in Druzhba, the Kazakh border station.

DAY 10 ALMATY

KAZAKHSTAN

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Almaty is the largest city in Kazakhstan and is notable for its wide tree-lined boulevards. Surrounded by the majesty of the Tien Shan Mountains, this beautifully verdant city derives its name from 'alma' meaning 'apple'. Just a short distance from the city, apple orchards thrive in abundance.

Our city tour includes a visit to Panfilov Park where we have the opportunity to visit the Zenkhov Cathedral which was built entirely of wood. We'll also go out of the city to the Chimbulak resort, where a cable car ride will give you spectacular views of Almaty and the mountains.

DAY 11 TASHKENT

UZBEKISTAN

Tashkent is the capital city of Uzbekistan and we spend time touring this modern Soviet-style city which was rebuilt following the devastating earthquake of 1966. Our tour of the city includes the Old Town, where traditional homes and religious buildings line the narrow streets and here in a small library we'll be privileged to see one of Islam's most sacred relics – the world's oldest Koran. This is followed by a visit to the Railway Museum and the Museum of Applied Arts.

DAY 12 SAMARKAND

UZBEKISTAN

Just the mention of Samarkand instantly conjures up evocative images of the Silk Road, more so than any other town. Founded in the 6th century BC, Samarkand's stunning architecture hints at its former status as one of the most important cities in Asia and is particularly noted for its architectural remains from the 14th to the 17th century, when it flourished as the fabled capital of the Mongol empire of Timur and his successors.

Today we will visit some of its most significant sites including Registan Square, the refined elegance of the beautifully proportioned Bibi Khanum Mosque and the Ulug Beg observatory, one of the earliest Islamic astronomical observatories built in 1428. Before dinner we will return to the now illuminated and awe-inspiring Registan Square.

DAY 13 BUKHARA

UZBEKISTAN

Bukhara is quite simply outstanding. Like Khiva, UNESCO sponsored the renovation of much of the city for its 2,500th anniversary in 1999. The highlight of this wonderful tour is a visit to The Ark, a fortified residence of the Emirs of Bukhara – the despotic and ruthless leaders who ruled until Soviet times.

We then travel out of the city to experience the Emir's enchantingly named, Palace of the Moon and Stars. This evening, weather and time permitting, we will enjoy a barbecue on the station platform before our train departs.

DAY 14 MERV

TURKMENISTAN

From the station at nearby Mary we transfer to the ancient and mainly unrestored remains of Merv. Once an important stopping point on the Silk Road, it claims to have briefly been the largest city in the world during the 12th century.

1794 saw the demise of Merv, after the Emir of Bukhara destroyed the dam which the population depended on for its water.

DAY 15 DARVAZA & ASHGABAT

TURKMENISTAN

The Golden Eagle makes a brief scheduled stop at Ichoguz, where we have the option to leave the train and make a short journey to Darvaza's famous burning gas crater, a spectacular sight best seen at night. Located in the middle of the Kara Kum desert where the area is rich in natural gas, the 70-metre wide crater is known by the locals as the 'Door to Hell' and has been burning for over 40 years. A unique experience that is not to be missed.

The capital of Turkmenistan is known as the 'Las Vegas of the Kara Kum'. Situated between the Kara Kum desert and the Kopet Dag mountain range, Ashgabat is a relatively modern city built upon the ruins of the Silk Road city of Konjikala and the Soviet city built after the devastating earthquake of 1948.

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The city's extravagant fountains, golden domes and towering modern buildings appear strangely incongruous in this desert setting. Highlights on our visit include a trip to the National Museum and Kipchak Mosque.

DAY 16 KHIVA

UZBEKISTAN

From Urgench we travel to the ancient city of Khiva, founded 2,500 years ago. As one of the Silk Road's most important trading posts and now a World Heritage Site, it lies at the crossroads of the routes between Mongolia, Russia, China and Persia.

A truly magnificent sight to behold, it rises out of the desert to reveal a wealth of impressive architecture. Stepping back in time, we discover its impressive mosques, madrassas, bazaars and minarets within Khiva's ancient walls.

DAY 17 ONBOARD THE GOLDEN EAGLE

KAZAKHSTAN

Today we enjoy a relaxing day on board as we travel across the vast expanse of the desert landscape in Kazakhstan.

DAY 18 VOLGOGRAD

RUSSIA

Standing on the banks of the Volga, Stalingrad, as the city was known in Soviet times, was the dramatic scene of one of the most important Second World War battles. The Russians heroically turned back the Nazi advance here to alter the course of the war. We visit the poignantly sobering Mamayev Kurgan war memorial, followed by an informative museum visit.

DAY 19 MOSCOW

RUSSIA

Having travelled a mammoth 7,000 miles (11,250kms) from Beijing we arrive into Moscow, our final destination.

Included in our time spent in Moscow is two nights at the five-star Four Seasons Hotel Moscow. Located in the historic building of Moskva Hotel and occupying one of the most enviable addresses in the very heart of Moscow, the hotel is a short walk from the Kremlin, Red Square and the Bolshoi Theatre.

DAY 20 MOSCOW

RUSSIA

Our touring programme of Moscow principally takes us to the grandeur of the Kremlin – the spiritual, historical and political heart of Moscow – and to see the treasures of the Tsars in the Armoury Chamber. We also visit Red Square, an iconic symbol of Russia's former military and political might with its eclectic mix of fascinating architecture, such as the ornate St Basil's Cathedral's magnificent onion-domed spires, the beautiful facade of the world famous GUM department store, constructed in Tsarist times, and the sombre and evocative site of Lenin's tomb.

With our Freedom of Choice touring option you may instead wish to travel out of the city centre to Sergiev Posad, home to one of the most beautiful monasteries in Russia and the historical and spiritual centre of the Russian Orthodox Church or visit the famous State Tretyakov Gallery (National Museum of Fine Art).

DAY 21 MOSCOW

RUSSIA

After breakfast in your hotel, you will be transferred to Moscow Airport for your onward flight.

Why not extend your stay in Moscow with additional nights to explore more of the city at your leisure or have time to take in a performance at the world-renowned Bolshoi Theatre? *Tickets need to be pre-booked and are subject to schedule and availability.*