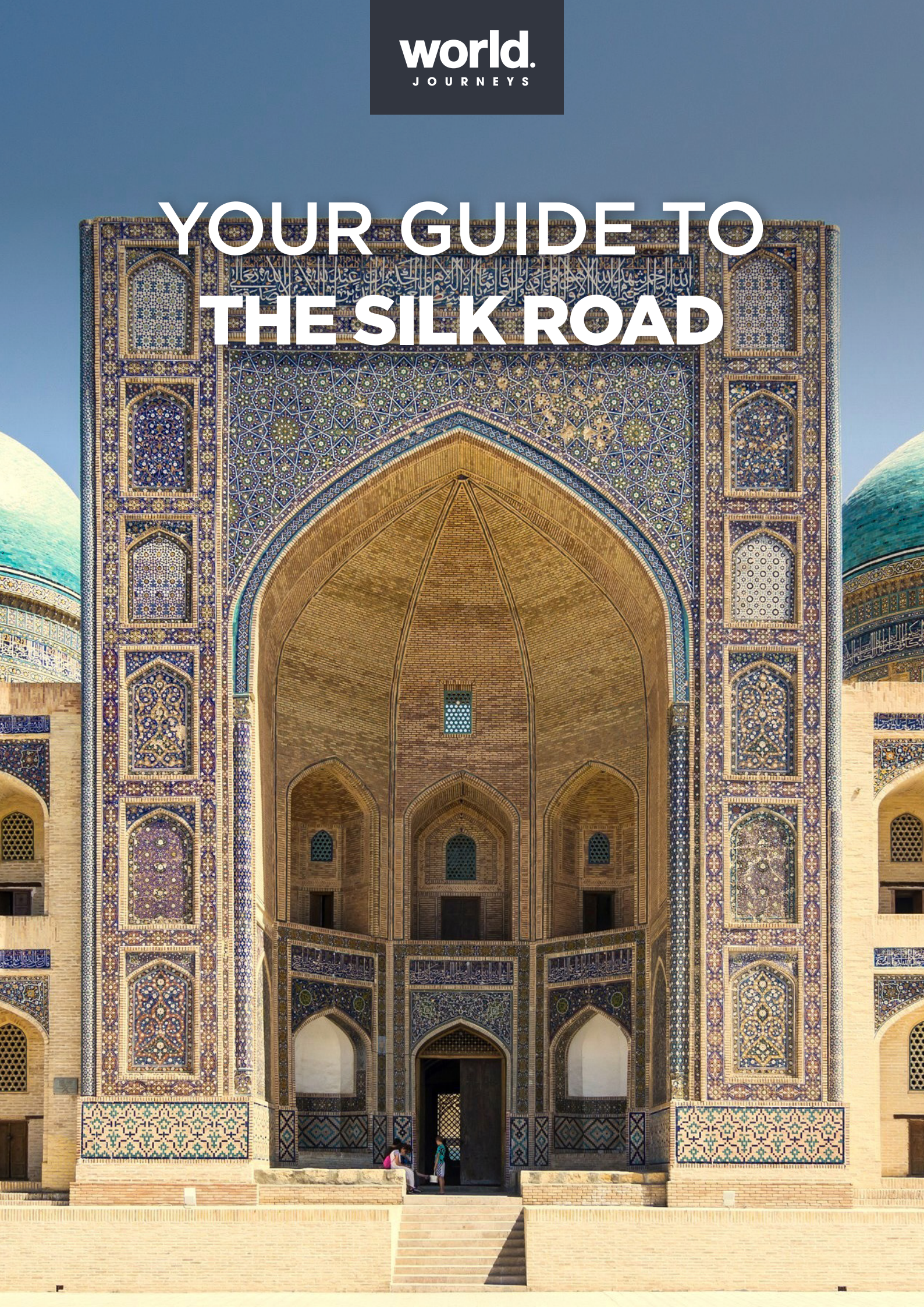
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JOURNEYS

YOUR GUIDE TO THE SILK ROAD





WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW *about the Silk Road*

The Silk Road is an ancient trading route stretching more than 6,400km connecting Central Asia, China, the Caucasus, Middle East and Türkiye. Minerals, textiles and spices were exchanged with the route changing with geopolitics, weather and trade demands. Nowadays, the Silk Road is mainly associated with China and the 'Five Stans' – Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan.

WHY WE LOVE IT!

This region is a kaleidoscope of colour. From vibrant bazaars and stunning architecture adorned with iconic blue tiles to vast golden deserts and lush forested mountains. You will be immersed in history at every turn, the ancient on show not only at archaeological ruins, but in daily life today, in the bazaars, the caravanserais and the traditional artisans.

Each country offers its own distinctive character and culture. You'll find elegant, immaculately kept cities with grand boulevards and fountains, while in more remote regions the roads can be unpaved, steep and bumpy — so be sure to pack your sense of adventure. Wherever you go, the people are warm and welcoming, and it's not uncommon for travellers to be invited into local homes for tea.

WHEN TO GO

Travel through Central Asia is best done in the spring or autumn months when temperatures make travelling more comfortable.

- **Spring (April–June):** Apricot blossoms in Uzbekistan and green meadows in Kyrgyzstan.
- **Summer (July–August):** High mountain treks shine, but desert cities can hit 40°C.
- **Autumn (September–October):** Golden harvests, crisp air, and glowing light across Central Asia.
- **Winter (November–March):** Atmospheric, quieter, and very cold in places, but magical if you don't mind snow.





EXPERIENCE THE SILK ROAD
with World Journeys



Tailor-made

These itineraries are suggestions of our favourite routes but can be designed specifically for you with drivers and local English speaking guides. The number of days, the places visited and activities included can all be varied. Simply let us know which countries you would like to visit, how long you have, and what you are expecting to see, and we will design an itinerary to suit. Find these itineraries at the end of this guide, or on our website.

Hosted Journeys

Our small group (max 18 guests) Fables of the Silk Road journey is a very popular way to explore Central Asia. Fully hosted from New Zealand, it includes all airfares, accommodation, sightseeing, most meals, and gratuities. Your host is the peace of mind you need, while expert local guides share their knowledge.



Luxury Rail Journeys

Travel across Central Asia by luxury rail with Golden Eagle Luxury Trains. Relax in your own private en suite cabin, enjoy fine dining and be immersed in Silk Road history with daily off-train excursions. Want to see more? Ask us about adding tailor-made arrangements before or after your rail journey.



CUSTOMS AND VOCABULARY

Madrasa (Islamic school): Traditionally, a centre for Islamic learning where subjects such as theology, law, mathematics, astronomy and literature were taught. Many of the magnificent madrasas seen today in cities such as Samarkand, Bukhara and Khiva are no longer active schools but have been beautifully restored as museums and cultural sites.

Caravanserai: A fortified roadside inn where merchants, travellers and their animals could rest, trade goods and exchange ideas during long journeys along the Silk Road. These hubs played a vital role in connecting cultures, religions and commerce between East and West.

Dress and etiquette: While the 'Five Stans' are generally welcoming and relatively relaxed, modest dress is appreciated when visiting mosques, shrines and other religious sites.



UZBEKISTAN

Typically the ideal destination in Central Asia for first-time visitors, Uzbekistan has a huge amount to see and can easily be done as a standalone trip. With a good tourism infrastructure, you will see a few more travellers however it is the one to visit for great culture, history and it has the wow factor with magnificent architecture!

Tashkent

The country's modern capital is home to beautiful parks, gardens, and monuments. The Khast Imam Complex and the State Museum of the History of Uzbekistan are worth visiting for an introduction to the country's rich history and impressive architecture. We love Tashkent's Metro where you can see beautiful subway stations, each with its own unique design.

Samarkand

Located 2.5 hours by train from Tashkent, Samarkand captivates travellers with its spectacular and iconic architecture. Registan Square is surrounded by three magnificent madrasas adorned with intricate blue tilework and grand Islamic architecture. It is widely regarded as one of the most beautiful public squares in the world and is especially impressive when illuminated at night.

Bukhara

Renowned for its well-preserved old town, mosques, madrasas, and caravanserais, Bukhara was a major Silk Road trading and cultural centre. Its historic core and archaeological sites reveal over 2,000 years of history and highlight its long-standing regional importance.

Ayaz Kala & Toprak Kala

Set amid the desert landscapes of northern Uzbekistan, Ayaz Kala and Toprak Kala are two of the region's most impressive ancient fortresses. Together, they offer a glimpse into life over 2,000 years ago and boast spectacular views across the surrounding desert.

Khiva

Set in a fertile oasis in western Uzbekistan, Khiva is one of the country's most charming destinations. Its UNESCO-listed Old City, enclosed by ancient walls, is home to beautifully preserved mosques, madrasas, palaces, and fortifications, offering visitors the feeling of stepping back in time. For a truly memorable experience, stay within the historic walls and enjoy the city's unique atmosphere after the crowds depart at the end of the day.









KYRGYZSTAN

Surrounded by the Tian Shan Mountains, Kyrgyzstan is often referred to as the 'Switzerland of Central Asia' with its pristine alpine lakes and unspoilt landscapes. The government has made significant efforts to protect its natural environment, and it is also one of the most authentic destinations in Central Asia, where traditional nomadic culture remains an important part of daily life. Visitors can combine nature with stays in traditional yurts and experience local hospitality.

Bishkek

The capital of Kyrgyzstan, is a cultural hub with a thriving arts, ballet, and opera scene, reflecting the city's strong Russian and Central Asian influences. Known for its wide boulevards, leafy parks, and fountains, it is one of the region's greenest capitals. Highlights include Ala-Too Square and the impressive Central Mosque, inspired by Istanbul's Blue Mosque.

Issyk-Kul Lake

The second largest alpine lake in the world, Issy-Kul Lake is renowned for its clear waters, beaches and pristine scenery of the surrounding Tian Shan Mountains. Here visitors can experience a traditional way of life including yurt stays, golden eagle hunting and be sure not to miss the nomadic cultural festival and games.

Altyn Arashan

One of Kyrgyzstan's most beautiful alpine valleys near Karakol in the eastern Tian Shan mountains is famous for dramatic scenery, meadows, pine forests and natural hot springs. The naturally heated mineral springs emerge from deep underground and have been used for relaxation and therapeutic bathing for generations.

Osh

Kyrgyzstan's oldest city and one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in Central Asia, often considered the cultural capital with more than 3,000 years of history as a major Silk Road trading centre. Located in the fertile Fergana Valley, it has a distinctly Central Asian character and is a wonderful place to see day-to-day life.









TAJIKISTAN

More than 90% of Tajikistan's territory is made up of mountainous, dramatic and remote landscapes. The Pamir Mountains, often referred to as the 'Roof of the World', include the famous Pamir Highway – one of the world's highest and most scenic road journeys tracing ancient Silk Road paths. Tajikistan is ideal for those seeking rugged mountain scenery, remote villages, and a genuine sense of adventure. As the least developed tourism destination in Central Asia, it retains an authentic, off-the-beaten-track feel where travel often feels more like exploration than sightseeing. Fun fact – Tajikistan is home to the longest glacier outside the polar regions!

Dushanbe

Set against the dramatic backdrop of the Pamir Mountains, Dushanbe is Tajikistan's cultural, political, and economic centre. The capital combines wide Soviet-era boulevards and architecture with the rich traditions of Persian culture. Visitors can explore its attractive parks, interesting museums, and vibrant bazaars filled with local crafts and produce.

Pamir Mountains

Discover the world's second-highest international highway, surrounded by stunning glaciers and alpine lakes. It's the perfect starting point for exploring the remote mountains of Tajikistan. And for fit and true adventurers, the region also offers incredible hikes.

Khujand

One of the oldest cities in Central Asia, Khujand has a history stretching back over 2000 years. Set at the entrance to the Fergana Valley it is has a long history of Silk Road significance with highlights including the Khujand Fortress, and Panjshanbe Bazaar, along with religious and historical complexes.

Iskanderkul Lake

One of Tajikistan's most beautiful natural attractions, Iskanderkul Lake is located around 4 hours from Dushanbe. Famous for its turquoise waters and spectacular rugged alpine scenery, travellers can enjoy hiking trails, panoramic viewpoints, with stays in quaint guest houses and cabins.









TURKMENISTAN

One of the more interesting 'Stans' Turkmenistan is one of the least visited countries in the world with much of its landscape and culture relatively untouched by mass tourism. Made up of vast deserts and bordered by the shores of the Caspian Sea, the country offers a fascinating mix of natural beauty, ancient history, and unique modern architecture.

Ashgabat

Home to incredible architecture, gleaming white marble buildings, and wide tree-lined boulevards, Ashgabat is unlike any other capital city in the world. While its grand monuments and futuristic skyline create an almost surreal atmosphere, a short stroll away you'll find traditional mud-brick homes and neighbourhood cafés where locals gather to enjoy somsa, the Turkmen version of a samosa.

Darvaza Gas Crater

Located in the Karakum Desert, the Darvaza Crater is one of Turkmenistan's most extraordinary sights. Known as the "Door to Hell," this fiery gas crater has been burning for decades. Although not burning as fiercely as it once did, it still creates a dramatic glow that is especially spectacular at night. Visitors can camp nearby to experience unforgettable desert sunsets and sunrises.

Konya-Urgench

Once a major Silk Road trading centre and capital of the Khwarezm Empire, Konya-Urgench is one of Central Asia's most important archaeological sites. Its impressive minarets, turquoise-tiled mausoleums, ancient ruins, and monumental gateways offer a fascinating glimpse into the region's rich history.

Merv

Once one of the largest cities on earth, rising out of the desert, Merv was the capital of several empires and kingdoms. With a lost city feel this once-prosperous oasis is an impressive yet underrated ancient site on the historical Silk Road, once serving as a major centre of religious study.









KAZAKHSTAN

The largest and most modern of the Stans is also the richest, with its abundance of oil and gas supplies. Bordering Russia and China, Kazakhstan is a blend of Europe and Central Asia. A winning combination of deserts, dry plateaus, snowy mountains, lakes, forest and steppes (endless grasslands) make Kazakhstan ideal for keen photographers, hikers, and those who love vast crowd-free landscapes.

Astana

Rising from the vast Kazakh steppe (grasslands), Astana has a futuristic skyline, bold architecture, and vibrant atmosphere. Visit iconic landmarks such as the soaring Bayterek Tower and Khan Shatyr, stroll along grand boulevards, and discover Kazakhstan's culture in its world-class museums, mosques, and public spaces.

Almaty

Known as the birthplace of the cultivated apple, Almaty takes its name from the Kazakh word for apple and translates as "rich in apples". The city is renowned for its leafy boulevards, vibrant cafés, bustling markets, parks, and restaurants with mountain views. Venture to nearby Shymbulak Ski Resort and Medeu, the world's highest mountain skating rink.

Shatty (Saty)

A small village and popular stopover in the Almaty Region of southeastern Kazakhstan. Located near the Charyn Canyon and Kolsai Lakes National Park, it serves as a common basecamp for travellers exploring the scenic foothills of the Tian Shan mountains.

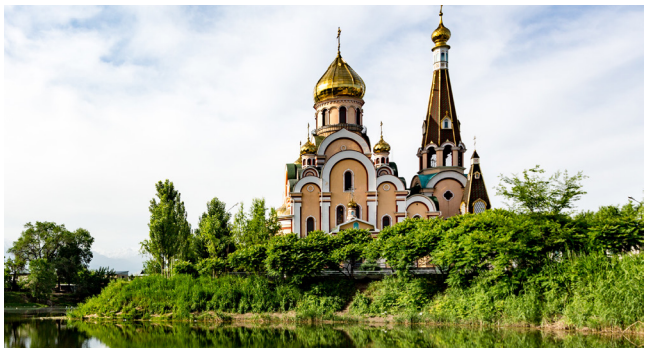
Charyn Canyon

Fondly known as Kazakhstan's Grand Canyon, Charyn Canyon is a breathtaking landscape of towering red rock formations, deep gorges, and dramatic valleys. Located four hours' drive east of Almaty, it offers spectacular hiking, photography, and unforgettable views shaped by millions of years of wind and water erosion.

Kolsai Lakes

Nestled near the Kyrgyzstan border, the three Kolsai Lakes are surrounded by dense forests, alpine meadows, and snow-capped peaks. Nearby, the turquoise waters of Lake Kaindy are famous for their surreal sunken forest, where the preserved trunks of submerged spruce trees rise eerily above the surface, creating one of Kazakhstan's most remarkable natural sights.









CHINA

China is one of the world's oldest continuous civilizations and the history and scenery is fascinating! Visit ancient fortified city walls, the Wild Goose Pagoda and Terracotta Warriors in Xi'an as well as the collision of old and new in Shanghai. A tailor-made itinerary is the best way to experience this country.

Beijing

The capital and the starting point of first-time travellers. Explore the Forbidden City, ancient temples and the iconic Great Wall.

Urumqi

Considered the gateway to Xinjiang and the ancient Silk Road, where dramatic Tian Shan mountains, vibrant local culture and vast open landscapes create a truly different side of China's heritage.

Xi'an

Here you will find the famous Terracotta Army, ancient city walls and Muslim Quarter. Xi'an was once the starting point of the historic Silk Road and makes a fascinating contrast to modern Beijing and Shanghai.

Dunhuang

Once an important and flourishing cultural and religious hub, Dunhuang is where northern and southern routes of the Silk Road split around the Gobi Desert. Famed for its UNESCO-listed Mogao Caves and rich Buddhist heritage.

Turpan

Set in a deep depression oasis, Turpan is famous for its ancient underground irrigation systems (Karez wells) and the nearby ruins of Jiaohe, a well-preserved ancient city carved from rock. A unique blend of desert landscapes and vibrant green spaces.

Kashgar

Located in China's far west, Kashgar was a major crossroad and marketplace for Silk Road trade, where caravans transitioned towards their destinations elsewhere in Central Asia, India, and Persia. The atmosphere of centuries past still lingers.

Hotan

Set in the Taklamakan Desert, Hotan was important in the spread of Buddhism. Home to the earliest production of silk, Hotan's expert artisans still craft intricate textiles using traditional techniques.









THE CAUCASUS

Set in the Caucasus Mountains located between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea lie the Caucasus countries of Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan. The Caucasus was more of a crossroads or side route acting as a bridge between Europe and Asia with strong influences also from the Middle East.

AZERBAIJAN

Azerbaijan is a fascinating country where Europe meets Asia, bordered by the Caspian Sea, the world's largest inland body of water. With more than 500 kilometres of coastline and abundant natural gas reserves, Azerbaijan is often known as the "Land of Fire," a nickname inspired by its natural gas-fuelled flames and fire-worshipping history.

The country offers a wealth of history and natural beauty. Discover archaeological sites, historic Silk Road towns nestled among mountain landscapes, and villages renowned for their intricate architecture and traditional craftsmanship. Wandering through narrow streets lined with wooden-balconied homes provides a glimpse into the country's rich cultural heritage and enduring traditions.

The capital city, Baku, is a striking blend of old and new. Known for its impressive architecture, the city features futuristic landmarks alongside the charming streets of its UNESCO-listed Old City. Sitting 28 metres below sea level, Baku is one of the lowest capital cities in the world. Visitors can explore historic fortifications, lively boulevards along the Caspian waterfront, and a dynamic cultural scene.

ARMENIA

One of the world's oldest nations, Armenia is renowned for its rich history, ancient churches, and dramatic mountaintop monasteries. The country also has a long-standing tradition of wine-making and brandy production, with vineyards that date back thousands of years.

Its capital, Yerevan, offers stunning views of Mount Ararat and is known for its vibrant parks, monuments, and public sculptures. Beyond the city, visitors can explore picturesque wineries, centuries-old monasteries, scenic lakes, and charming mountain towns that showcase Armenia's cultural and natural beauty.



GEORGIA

A country with a fascinating history stretching back thousands of years, shaped by influences from the Persian, Ottoman, and Russian empires. Widely regarded as the birthplace of wine, Georgia's wine-making traditions date back more than 8,000 years, and hospitality remains at the heart of Georgian culture, with locals renowned for their warmth and friendliness.

Tbilisi, the capital, blends old with new. Its charming Old Town offers cobbled streets, historic churches, and traditional architecture, while the more modern districts showcase contemporary design and a vibrant cultural scene. Tbilisi's famous sulphur bathhouses are an important part of its history and are said to provide relaxation, relief from aches and pains, and even a touch of ageless beauty.

Georgia is home to charming towns and villages, spectacular mountain landscapes, ancient monasteries, and unique cave towns carved into the rock. Whether exploring the Caucasus Mountains, sampling local wines, or discovering centuries of history, Georgia offers visitors a rich and memorable experience.

OUR FAVOURITE ITINERARIES





LUXURY RAIL JOURNEY

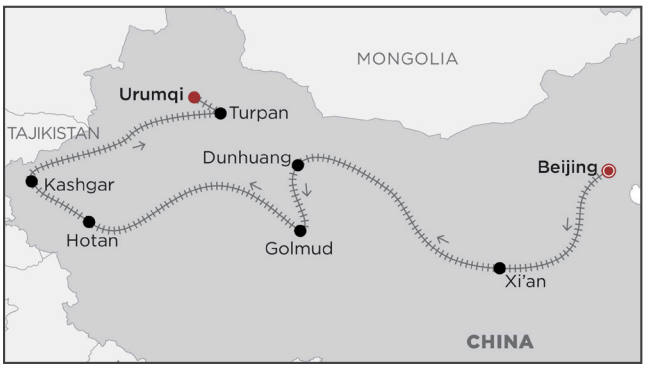
JEWELS OF THE SILK ROAD • 9 days / 8 nights

Travel through three of the magnificent 'Stans' – a fascinating patchwork of countries, stitched together by a shared history of Sovietization, yet fiercely independent in identity. Explore the magnificent mosques and bustling bazaars of Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. Admire the breathtaking verdant and tranquil landscapes of Kazakhstan.

TAILOR-MADE JOURNEY

DISCOVER UZBEKISTAN • 8 days / 7 nights

Discover 2,500 years of history as you travel through Uzbekistan – minarets soar towards the sky, bazaars bustle with commerce and blue-tiled madrasahs sparkle in the sunlight. The Uzbeks are hospitable, gregarious, generous and universally kind, so it may well be the people that leave the most lasting impression.





LUXURY RAIL JOURNEY

SILK ROAD EXPRESS - ANCIENT CHINA • 12 days / 11 nights

Embark on a fascinating journey through the heart of ancient China. From traditional temples and bustling cities, to lush landscapes and deserts, this is where tradition meets timeless luxury. Along the way, you'll encounter the awe-inspiring Terracotta Warriors, walk the revered Great Wall, and explore the majestic Mogao Caves — a UNESCO World Heritage Site adorned with exquisite Buddhist art.

TAILOR-MADE JOURNEY

CAUCASUS HIGHLIGHTS • 15 days / 14 nights

Experience the highlights of this fascinating region while travelling through Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia. Wander ancient streets, temples, mausoleums and monasteries; sample traditional food; step back in time with history museums; and enjoy unusual artworks and craft markets unlike any others. A highlight may be the medieval Haghpat Monastery in Armenia.



HOSTED JOURNEYS

FABLES OF THE SILK ROAD

29 days / 28 nights

Explore the diverse cultures and scenery of the five Stans of Central Asia, visiting traditional villages, ancient towns and glorious cities along time-worn trading routes. Travelling with no more than 18 fellow guests, a host accompanies the group throughout, smoothing the way. Airfares and gratuities are all included; departs in September for lovely Autumn weather.



PLANNING YOUR *Silk Road Journey*

Tailor-made itineraries are designed to suit your interests, budget and time available, often including bespoke experiences, places and attractions. Whether travelling alone (solo travellers), as a couple, a family, or as a group of friends, the itinerary is custom-made for you and your preferences. Luxury rail journeys through the Silk Road regions are with Golden Eagle Luxury Trains and can be added to your tailor-made journey.

PLEASE CONTACT YOUR TRAVEL PROFESSIONAL