

15-day Silk Road and Xinjiang Tour

Tour code: LCT - Silk Road & Xinjiang - 15D-01

Attractions:

Overview: This two-week trip will take you to explore the most mysterious parts of China, Gansu and Xinjiang Province, to pursue the old Silk Road. Starting from Lanzhou, you will visit a number of historical places and natural wonders until the last city Karmay. A private guide and driver will be arranged to navigate your way through the exotic places to make sure everything go well.

Highlights:

1. Take a boat to visit the hidden gem of Lanzhou - Bingling Thousand -Buddha Caves;
2. Immerse yourself in the magnificence of the Rainbow Mountains in Zhangye Danxia Landform Park;
3. Meet the unbreakable pass - Jiayuguan Pass;
4. Appreciate the murals and paintings inside the Mogao Caves;
5. Explore the ruins of Jiaohe Ancient Town and taste the yummy Xinjiang fruits;
6. Unveil the secrets of Karez Irrigation System;
7. Experience the Grand Bazaar of Xinjiang and feel the hospitality of local people;
8. Relax at the picturesque Heavenly Lake and listen to the beautiful legends;
9. Pay a visit to a Tuva Family and enjoy the raw, primitive grassland scenery;
10. Challenge yourself with the “horrible” Urho Ghost City in Karamy.

Detailed Itinerary:

Day 1:

Welcome to Lanzhou! A private car & driver will be arranged to pick you up upon your arrival and transfer you to your hotel. You may spend the rest of the day adjust or have some activities on your own.

Day 2: Bingling Thousand-Buddha Caves, Gansu Provincial Museum

08:00: Your Lanzhou local expert will meet you at your hotel lobby and take you to explore the amazing Lanzhou city.

11:00 - 13:30: Your first sight in Lanzhou city will be the Bingling Thousand-Buddha Caves, one of big ancient Buddhist temple complexes with an array of statuary and frescoes from different times. In Tibetan. “Bingling” means thousands of Buddhas. That’s why it’s also named of Bingling Thousand-Buddha Caves. There are two things make this cave complex so special, one is its long history and the other is that the caves are carved out of the steep cliffs of Northern Bank of Yellow River. According to available data, the Bingling Caves are built from the first few years of Western Jin Dynasty (265 A.D.) and the construction reached its prime in Western Qin Dynasty, making it probably the earliest cave complex in China. The layout of the Bingling Caves is a lot like the Majishan Caves, what makes it different from Majishan Caves is that the statues here are all exposed to the weather. Fortunately, its located in a geographically isolated site has protected itself from the human destruction. By visiting these original statuary and frescoes, you will learn a lot about the culture, dance, music, religion of local society.

13:30 - 14:30: Your Lanzhou local expert will take you to a nice local restaurant where you will taste the authentic Gansu food, one of the most famous foods is Lanzhou Lamian.

17:30: Lanzhou hotel drop off.

Day 3: Lanzhou - Zhangye West by train D2701 (08:07 - 12:17), Giant Buddha Temple, Zhangye Danxia Landform Geological Park

06:00: Your Lanzhou driver will be waiting for you at your hotel lobby and transfer you to the Lanzhou train station.

12:17 - 13:30: Your Zhangye tour guide and driver will pick you up at 12:17 and take you to grab a bite for lunch.

13:40 - 15:30: You will begin to explore Zhangye city by visiting the Giant Buddha Temple. Originally dating to year 1098, the Giant Buddha Temple is famous for being the largest of its kind and the 34.5m-long wooden reclining Buddha inside the temple. Surrounding the reclining

Buddha are the mouldering arhats and Qing era murals. The Hall hosting the giant Buddha is one of the few wooden structures still existing from its own time. Inside the Hall, you will also find many artefacts explaining the history and story behind the temple and the Buddha. Inside the scenic area, you can also visit the Sui Dynasty Wanshou Wooden Temple, Ming Dynasty Thousand-Buddha Pagoda, Bell & Drum Tower, and one of the rare intact wooden complex - Shanxi Guild Hall.

16:10 - 19:00: Your next sight in Zhangye will be the unique Danxia Landform Geological Park. Best known for its unusual colors and shapes, Danxia Landform Geological Park is the must-see sight in Zhangye. Such kind of landform is a result of millions of years of sandstone and other minerals deposition. With the help of the same tectonic plates that shaped the Himalayan Mountains, this place has been tilted and the wind, rain and time then did their magic on the mountains, therefore a colorful fairy tale world was formed. An array of color covering red, yellow, orange, green, white, graphite, and gray is prevalent everywhere, fashioning the various trenches and hills. Standing on the high viewing platforms, you will see the beauty of this majestic landform scaling over 10 square kilometers being truly unveiled. The most spectacular moment comes at sunset when the orange sunlight is pouring all over the hills, that's when you must take some photos!

19:30: You will be transferred to your Zhangye hotel and get ready for another long day.

Day 4: Zhangye - Jiayuguan, Jiayuguan Pass, Overhanging Great Wall

8:00: Meet your driver at your Zhangye hotel lobby and head for Jiayuguan city.

11:20 - 13:00: Your first sight in Jiayuguan city is the Jiayuguan Pass. Being praised as “the First and the Impregnable Pass under Heaven”, the Jiayuguan Pass is located in the narrowest part of a valley with the walls crossing the Gobi Desert. It served as the western starting point of the Ming Great Wall, and also the joint point of Silk Road culture and Great Wall culture. In Ming Dynasty, Jiayuguan Pass was a vital location in defending against the northwest nomadic people. The whole pass is 733m in length and 33,500 sq meters in scale. There are three defense systems: a moat outside the city, an outer city and an inner city. There is a beacon tower every 2.5km, a mound every 5km, a fort every 15km and a town every 50km, making enemies hard to occupy the city.

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13:00 - 14:00: Your guide will take you to taste some of the local foods.

14: 20- 16:00: After lunch, your expeditions in Jiayuguan city will proceed to the Overhanging Great Wall. Situated about 7km from the Jiayuguan Pass, the Overhanging Great Wall got its name from the fact that it was built on a 45-degree sloping ridge, and looking afar, it's like a magnificent painting hanging there. Being an extended part of the Jiayuguan Pass, the Overhanging Great Wall played a vital role in the military defense system in ancient times. Built in Ming Dynasty (1539), the materials used were nothing but local gravels and earth. Over the time, the Great Wall suffered a lot of damage until in 1987 when some restoration works were done. Climbing the Overhanging Great Wall takes time and energy, however, once you conquered it, a full view of western China Gobi desert and hills will be unfolded before you.

16:30: You will head back to your Jiayuguan city hotel for rest.

Day 5: Jiayuguan - Dunhuang by car, Yardang National Park

08:00: Your driver will pick you up from your Jiayuguan hotel and take you to Dunhuang city.

12:30 -13:30: You will have lunch at a nice local restaurant in Dunhuang and be ready for your Dunhuang discovery tour.

15:00 - 18:00: You will head for the Yardang Geological Park. Located about 160km from the Dunhuang city, Yardang National Geopark is a national park with distinct Yardang geological feature. It is the largest Yardang landform in China. Such kind of landform is the example geomorphic type in extremely arid regions. It's the creation of rains and winds in a time span of over 10,000 years. The soft parts of the earth were slowly eroded, leaving the hard rocks still standing there. There are many rocks in odd shapes, which earned them names like "Mongolian Bao", "Camel", "Stone Bird", and "The Golden Lion Welcoming Guests". Inside the park, you will find a lot of interesting sites, but one that you can't miss is the Yardang Ghost Town where you will see the famous Aisikexiaer Castle.

19:30: You will be dropped off at your Dunhuang hotel.

Day 6: Crescent Spring and Singing Sand Dune, Mogao Grottoes

09:00: Your Dunhuang guide and driver will meet you at your Dunhuang city hotel and take you to explore this ancient city.

09:20 - 12:30: Your first sight today is the Crescent Spring and Singing Sand Dune. The Crescent Spring is located inside the Singing Sand Dune. To get to the Crescent Spring, you have to pass the Singing Sand Dune.

Completely piled by sands, the Singing Sand Dune stretches 40km in length and 20km in width. When the winds blows, the sands on the Sand Dune give out loud drumming sound. With the winds tending soft, there will be melodious and gentle sound. This is how the sand dune got its name. There are a few theories why the sand can make such interesting sounds. A legend has it that in Han Dynasty, when the Han Army and Huns were having a war, a gust came and bury them with their war-horses. Later, some people say that the sand sound is the sound of fighting armies. Truthfully, it's just the result of electricity, resonance, and the sands friction.

In the center of the Singing Sand Mountains, you will see a half-moon shape pond. This is the Crescent Lake. It's not very big, only 25 m in length and the deepest point is 5 meter. The lake is seated in the lowest point of the sand mountains, collecting the underground water all the time, which is probably why it wasn't dried out in such a extremely arid place. However, it's hard to explain why the lake stays clear with sands flowing everywhere around.

12:30 - 13:30: Enjoy an authentic Gansu lunch at a local restaurant.

14:10 - 16:30: In the afternoon, you will visit the Mogao Grottoes. Mogao Grottoes comprise the largest, longest, richest and best-preserved treasure house for Buddhism study in the world. It was chiseled on the east cliffs of the Singing Sand Mountains, ranging 1680m from south to north. There are 735 caves built on the precipice in 15-30m. The whole site is composed of southern and northern area. In the southern area, there are 492 caves that contain 2,400 painted sculptures and 45,000 square meters of murals from dynasties like Northern Liang, Northern Wei, Western Wei, Northern Zhou, Sui, Tang, Northern Song, Uighur, Western Xia and Yuan. While the northern area has 243 caves, most of which are for disciples to practice daily activities, accommodate and bury the deceased. Each cave in the southern area has contained various sculptures, murals, and niches, depicting the all aspects of the society including the politics, economics, culture, arts, religions, ethnic relations, and daily life.

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17:00: You will be dropped off at your Dunhuang hotel.

Day 7: Dunhuang - Liuyuan South Train Station - Turpan North by D2701 (15:27 - 18:42)

12:00: Your Dunhuang driver will pick you up from your Dunhuang hotel and drop you off at the Liuyuan South Train Station, from where you will head to Turpan.

18:42: Your Turpan driver will be waiting for you upon your arrival and transfer you to your Turpan hotel.

Day 8: Jiaohe Ruins, Karez Irrigation System, Flaming Mountains, train to Urumqi

09:00: Your Turpan local guide and driver will meet you up at your Turpan hotel and you will start the amazing Xinjiang tour.

09:30 - 11:00: Your first sight will be the Jiaohe Ancient Town on the outskirts of the Turpan city. It is the largest, oldest and best-preserved town in earth construction in the world, and the best-preserved city ruins dating back over 2000 years. It was built by Cheshi people around 200 B.C. and its prime time was in Tang Dynasty when the highest administration Anxi Frontier Command in Xinjiang area was established here. In the following centuries, the town declined gradually until the Mongols broke the Gaochang and Jiaohe, putting an end to this ancient town in 14th century. The whole ruins is located on a loess platform, about 1650m in length. Looking afar, it's like a peninsula in willow leaf shape. The layout of the town is a lot like the Tang-era Chang'an city. Inside the town, you can still find the market, official administrations, Buddhist temples, streets and alleys, workshops, accommodations, drill field, etc.. The unique climate and the remoteness of the area have been key to Jiaohe's preservation. That's why we can still wander down the narrow road and poke our nose into what used to be residences and temples, and learn the past of this old ruins.

11:30 - 12:30: You will enjoy some real Xinjiang flavored food for lunch.

12:30 - 13:30: After lunch, you will visit the Karez Water System. The word "Karez" means "Well" in local Uyghur language. It is a vertical tunnel system local people use to intercept the water flow and store them for irrigation and daily use in piedmont and alluvial areas. Such system contributed a lot to the prosperity of Turpan people. Along with the Great Wall and Jinghang Great

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Canal, the Karez Irrigation System makes one of the three ancient great projects.

14:30 - 16:30: Lastly, you will head for the Turpan Flaming Mountains. If you are familiar with the Journey to the West, aka the Monkey King, you will know that there is a chapter devoted to describe how Tang Sanzang and his three disciples passed the Flaming Mountains. That's probably one the reasons why the Flaming Mountains are famous. Located about 28km east of Turpan city, the site is a red sandstone ridge stretching about 100 kilometers. The feature of "Flaming" is a result of red sandstone bedrocks being eroded over the time, making the striking gullies and trenches look like flames in the sun. The climate in the Flaming Mountains is harsh. The annual rainfall is only 16.6mm while the evaporation is 3,000mm, making this place one of the barrenest places on earth. Being the hottest spot in China, the Flaming Mountains have a mean ground surface temperature of 70 degrees in summer and the highest being 89 degrees. The Giant Thermometer in the sight is telling its temperature change all the time. However, all the heat also made Turpan one of the fruits paradises in China. You will find the best and sweetest Hami melons, grapes and other fruits here.

17:30: Turpan North train station drop off. You will head for the Urumqi train station, where the local driver will be waiting for you and take you to the hotel.

Day 9: Heavenly Lake, Xinjiang International Grand Bazaar

08:00: Your local tour expert will meet you at your hotel lobby and take you to visit the Heavenly Lake of Tianshan.

09:30 - 12:30: Your first sight will be the beautiful Heavenly Lake in Tianshan Tianchi Park. The Heavenly Lake is seated in the center of the Tianshan, surrounded by the thick forests, grasslands, waterfalls, and snow mountains, forming a splendid view. Standing high on the mountain, you will see greenness prevailing everywhere. The crystal Heavenly Lake is hanging on the middle of the mountains like a jade being held up by giant hands, with verdant pines and cypresses surrounding all around. Outside the mountains are the grasslands, where a flock of sheep are eating grass leisurely. There is also thousand-year-old snow-capped peaks afar, like a guardian protecting the delicate jade. Besides the Tianchi Lake, you will also visit the East Minor Tianchi Lake and West

Minor Tianchi Lake to enjoy the breathtaking waterfalls and hear the interesting legends of Queen

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Mother of the West.

12:30 - 13:30: Taste the Urumqi local flavored food like Saute Spicy Chicken (Dapanji), Xinjiang Noodles, Roasted Meat, Lang, and others.

15:00-17:00: Stroll in the Xinjiang International Grand Bazaar. The Grand Bazaar has two streets, the folk culture street and the food street. In the folk culture street, you will see a variety of local specialties like Xinjiang instruments, folk costumes, traditional handicrafts, dried fruits like raisins, figs and walnuts, as well as the seasoning fruits like watermelons, Hami melons, and grapes if you visit in summer. In the food street, you will find all the characteristic Xinjiang food like Roast Whole Lamb, Roast Baozi, Roast Meat, and most importantly the Lang. You can sit at a cooling pavilion and enjoy the mood while having a roast meat.

17:30: Head back to your Urumqi hotel.

Day 10: Urumqi - Fuyun by car (7h)

08:00: Your Urumqi driver will meet you at your Urumqi hotel and take you to Fuyun county. The journey takes about 7 hours, please prepare some food and drinks. Along the way, you will see the vast grasslands.

Day 11: Keketuohai Geological National Park, drive to Buerjin (1.5h)

09:00: Your tour expert will meet you at your Fuyun hotel lobby and lead to visit the Keketuohai Geological Park. You will have a full day in the Keketuohai Geological Park to enjoy its four major sights, the Irtysh Grand Canyon, Cocoa Sullivan Lake, Ilavmu Lake and Kalaxianger Earthquake Fault Zone. Take your time to explore every inch of this place.

10:10 - 13:00: Your first spot will be the Irtysh Grand Canyon. To enter the Irtysh Grand Canyon, you have to pass the Dragon Gate Square. Looking afar, the surrounding mountains are like dragons guarding the square, hence the name. Inside the square, you will find a geological museum, displaying all kinds of stone and animals fossils. Then, you will encounter the largest mine pit in the world - No.3 Mine Pit. There are 84 kinds of minerals discovered here, including the rare metals like lithium, beryllium, tantalum, niobium, rubidium and others. After 50 years of

excavation, the mountain becomes a large pit with layers of mine lanes circling around. Going

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further, you will see the Irtysh River and the White Birch Woods at its bends. If you visit in summer, you will see all kinds of small flowers blooming everywhere, butterflies lingering here and there, birds chirping on the trees, and fish playing in the brooks. While in autumn, you can enjoy the colorful leaves. Going along the brooks, you will come to the Golden Triangle Tourism Spot, where you can rest a little while keep enjoying the open views. If you still have strength, you may travel to the mountain back, you will discover the Wild Grape Ridge, a quiet and mysterious place.

13:00-14:00: Enjoy lunch nearby the sight.

14:00 -16:00: After lunch, you will enjoy the Cocoa Sullivan Lake, Ilavmu Lake and Kalaxianger Earthquake Fault Zone. The Cocoa Sullivan Lake is located about 23km from the main gate, it's famous for numerous wild ducks, red goose and white swans. You will find this place very soothing. Then, you will go to the Ilavmu Lake, it's similar to the Cocoa Sullivan Lake except that an underwater hydro-power station has been built here and is still working. In the last, you will visit the Kalaxianger Earthquake Fault Zone. It's from a grade 8 earthquake happened in 1931. It's said that the earthquake was so intensive that people in 2500km away were able to feel it.

18:00: Your local driver will take you to your next destination - Buerjin.

Day 12: Buerjin - Jiadengyu, Kanas National Park, overnight at Jiadengyu

08:00: Your local guide and driver will meet you at your Buerjin hotel and drive you to the Jiadengyu, from where you can enter the Kanas National Park

10:30 - 14:30: It takes about 2.5 hours drive to get to the Jiadengyu area, along which you will enjoy the primitive grasslands scenery. There are many yurts/tends in the open grassland, together with sheep, cows and horses leisurely eating grass. Arriving at the Jiadengyu area, you are just a few minutes away from the Kanas National Park. You will pass the only river that flows into the Arctic Ocean - Irtysh River and other beautiful sights like Buerjin River, Kanas River, Wolong Bay, and Moon Bay. When you finally make to the Fish Observing Pavilion, you will have a bird's eye view of the crystal Kanas Lake - the pearl of the Altai mountains. It's best to visit in autumn when the surrounding trees bear different color, creating beautiful shadows on the lake.

17:00: You will be dropped off at a hotel nearby the Jiadengyu area.

Day 13: Jiadengyu, Hemu Village, Tuwa Household visit, Buerjin

09:00: Your local tour expert will meet you at your Jiadengyu hotel and take you to Hemu Village and Tuwa Ethnic Village today.

10:30 - 12:00: In the morning, you will visit the Hemu Village. It belongs to the three existing Tuva Mongol Villages (the other two being the Kanas Village and Baihaba Village), and it's the biggest and the remotest one. It's believed that the Tuva Mongol is the offspring of the troops of Genghis Khan. People living here believe in Buddhism and still preserved their tribal traditions. If you happens to visit in autumn, you will see the intoxicating scenery. Just imagine the scene where the thin smokes rising slowly from the kitchen chimneys, red leaves prevailing everywhere, the brooks flowing quietly along, the shepherds riding horses to drive a large flock of sheep home.

12:00 - 14:30: You will visit a Tuva family and have lunch there. You will feel the great hospitality of the Tuva people and learn about their lifestyle.

18:00: You will head back to Buerjin hotel.

Day 14: Buerjin - Karmay (4h), Urho Ghost City

08:00: Your local driver and guide will meet you and take you to Karmay city. The journey will be 4 hours, please prepare some food and drinks.

12:00-13:00: Upon your arrival in the Karmay city, you will have lunch and be ready for the tour.

13:00 - 15:30: During this time, you will visit the world-renown Urho Ghost City. Located about 100km from the Karmay city, the Urho Ghost City is a typical wind erosion landform. It's said that in the Cretaceous period, the Urho Ghost City was a giant lake with verdant plants growing around. Inside the lake lived many ancient animals like Urho Stegosauruses, plesiosauruses, dinosaurs, pterosaurs and others. However, after two severe crustal movements, the lake disappeared and Gobi platform inserted with sandstone and shale was created. Due to the location condition, the ghost city suffered a lot of blows with the maximum being 10-12 degrees, creating all kinds of grotesque stones, consequently no one lived here. Looking afar, the Ghost City is like

a magnificently giant castle with all sizes of houses rising everywhere. When you come close, you

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will feel its honor.

17:00: Get back to Karmay city hotel.

Day 15: Karmay - Urumqi by car, departure Urumqi

Your local driver will drive you to Urumqi and make sure you get to the airport about 2 hours before your flight. Our service ends here.

What's Important:

What's included:

Air-conditioned vehicles with experienced driver.

Licensed Chinese- English bilingual speaking tour guide.

Entrance fee for sights mentioned.

Bottled water.

2nd class high-speed train tickets and soft sleeper train tickets listed above

Economy class air tickets needed above.

What's not included:

Meals

Personal expenses or private entertainment items at sights.

Tips or gratuities for guide and driver if we did a good job (recommended)

Accommodation

What to take: smile and a relaxed enthusiastic attitude.

Good to know:

1.This trip involves several cities that host mostly minority people, some of whom don't even speak Mandarin, let alone English. They have their own language. We can't promise that the local guides will possess the English language skills as masterfully as the guides in big cities like

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Beijing, but we do promise that you will understand them. They will be very polite, enthusiastic, and eager to share what they know about their hometown. Please do not hold too much expectation.

2. As our customer, your time is very valuable to us. We will never take you to any factories or shops for shopping.

3. For lunch, we will take you to a nice local restaurant, where you can enjoy the local food at a fair price. Please inform us about your food preferences in case you have any allergies.

4. A regular day tour will last 8-9 hours. If you want a tour with a duration exceeding the working period of our tour guide and driver, we need to charge you for your extra hours at the standard rate of 100 RMB per hour.

5. The tour we provide you is based on days, not the hours. A regular day tour will last 8-9 hours. In case you only need our service for between 6 hours to 8 hours in one day, we will consider it a day tour.

6. Please be aware that your itinerary can be changed at anytime. Whenever you want to adjust it, we will help you with that.

7. What we provide are high-quality private tours, you will only be with your families or friends. There are no other people joining your tour.

8. Wheelchairs are available, please advise prior to your trip in case you need any.

FAQ

1. Is there anything we should be aware of when we take this trip?

Urumqi Travel Tip

1. Respect the customs and conventions of the ethnic minorities.
2. Please do not have pork or talk about pigs in public.
3. Pay attention to your drinking water, drink after boiling it.
4. Please do not shake your wet hands in public places.
5. Please be aware that the actual time in Xinjiang is 2-2.5 hours behind the time in the rest of the country. You can still use Beijing time as other Han people in Xinjiang do, but just be prepared if

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other local people speak of a different clock time.

6. Please take your cameras along as you will encounter lots of stunning views here.

2. Turpan Travel Tips

1. Do not have pork or speak about it in front of a Muslim.

2. Do not wear clothes that are too revealing.

3. Do not poke food or go near the kitchen.

4. It's suggested that you use both your hands to take what local people give you as a sign of respect and great appreciation.

5. Things to bring:

I. Bring hat/ cap and sun glasses.

II. It's quite hot there, please drink water constantly and bring towels.

III. Bring both long sleeves and short sleeves as it can be cold at night.

6. Turpan is becoming a tourist city with good facilities. People there are usually friendly to tourists. Local people live on tourism, please do not bargain too hard when purchasing souvenirs.

7. Please respect local customs and avoid unnecessary trouble.

8. Please drink as much water as you need, please keep hydrated in the Flaming Mountain.

3. Dunhuang Travel Tips

1. Do not travel into the desert without accompaniment.

2. Please prepare some warm clothes and some anti- ultraviolet clothes.

3. Please bring things for sun protection.

4. Desert exploration is a group activity. This experience can only be great if your tour guide, other staff and yourselves work together.

5. Please take the trash out of the desert.

6. Please follow your guide's instructions strictly when you ride the camels.

7. Please prepare a small medical kit in case of some emergency.

8. Respect local customs and do not hurt their pride due to the ignorance of your habits.

9. Please ask for permission when you want to take photos with monks, Lamaite, or people

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wearing special clothes.

10. Please arrange your time, route and accommodation in advance.
11. Please drink as much water as you need, and have fruit to avoid dehydration.
12. Please prepare yourselves for the local staples like food made of flour and beef/mutton.
13. Do not take pictures of the frescoes in the Mogao Grottoes.
14. Please bring back-up batteries as the cold air could compromise the lifespan of a battery.

4. How to get to Bingling Caves?

There are two ways to get there. By car, it will take about 3.5 hours from Lanzhou city. If riding a yacht from Liujia Gorge in the upper region of Yellow River, it only takes over an hour.