

8 Days In-depth Silk Road Culture Tour to Dunhuang and Zhangye

Basics

Tour Code: LCT - Silk Road & Gansu - 8D-01

Attractions: Zhangye Rainbow Mountains, Matisi Grottoes, Yulin Grottoes, Mogao Caves, Singing Sand Dunes, Crescent Moon Lake, Yordan National Park, Dunhuang Museum

Overview: The moment you set foot on the land of Zhangye and Dunhuang, you are guaranteed of the marvelous landscapes of Gobi and Danxia Landform and rich Silk Road art and culture. Join this tour, you will navigate your way across two of the most important stopovers on the Silk Road, who house incredible scenery of the magnificent Rainbow Mountains and Echoing Sands, and the fine ancient Chinese art masterpieces of Matisi Grottoes and Mogao Grottoes. In this in-depth tour, you will have sufficient time to take photos of these precious wonders and dive deep in the unique culture of Silk Road.

Highlights

- Take amazing photos of Rainbow Mountains and Binggou Danxia Landforms;
- Reveal the Buddhist art center of Mogao Caves and Matifi Grottoes;
- Witness the desert wonder of Singing Sand Dune and the Crescent Moon Spring;
- Get lost in the Devil City of Yordan Landform.

Itinerary

Date	Starting Time	Destination
Day 1	Flexible	Arrival in Zhangye
Day 2	09:00 a.m	Zhangye Danxia National Geological Park (Rainbow Mountains)
Day 3	09:00 a.m	Matisi Grottoes, Train to Dunhuang

Day 4	07:30 a.m	Dunhuang - Yulin Grottoes - Dunhuang
Day 5	09:00 a.m	Mogao Caves, Singing Sand Dunes, Crescent Moon Lake
Day 6	08:00 a.m	Yordan National Park
Day 7	09:00 a.m	Dunhuang Museum
Day 8	Flexible	Departure Dunhuang

Day 1: Arrival in Zhangye

Welcome to Zhangye! Upon your arrival, a private car and driver will be sent to transfer you to your hotel.

Day 2: Zhangye Danxia National Geological Park (Rainbow Mountains)

After breakfast, your personal guide and driver will meet you at your hotel lobby and accompany you to explore the **Zhangye Danxia National Geological Park**. The park is composed of two major sights: Rainbow Mountains and Binggou Danxia

Landform. The former one is more famous and more frequented by tourists, but the latter one is also peculiar and strange. You will have a whole day to enjoy the breathtaking sights in those two landscapes and take photos.



The special Danxia landform is a kind of red-beds landform with peculiar peaks and strange stones formed by the long-term weathering and water erosion. It's mainly developed in the stones layers during Jurassic and Tertiary ages. Therefore, you will see a

lot of red stones in different shapes, creating an extremely magnificent scene under the sun. If you happen to visit after the rain, the rainbow mountain will be more endearing and rich in color. The best time to shoot pictures is the afternoon when the mountains are best layered. There are many view



platforms inside the park. No.4 platform is the best spot for sunset and sunrise, while the No.2 platform is the best for shooting a panoramic view of the

mountains.

Your personal guide and driver will escort you back to hotel in the tour end.

Day 3: Matisi Grottoes, Train to Dunhuang

After breakfast, your guide and driver will take you to explore the Matisi Grottoes. It takes about 1.5 hours to get there.

Matisi Grottoes are located in the Mati Mountain of Sunan Yugu Autonomous County where there are ridges and peaks rising one after another, brooks gurgling, grass and flowers growing everywhere. In fact, it used to be a summer resort for Ayu Chanyu (chief of Xiongnu people) in Western Han Dynasty. It's still a great place to take resort in,

but today, we come here not only for pleasure, but for culture. According to folk legend, when heavenly horse came to the human world, its one hoof trod on a rock here, leaving a mark of hoof mark. Hence the temple got its name.



Matisi Grottoes are composed of seven small grottoes, including the Thousand-Buddha Cave, Southern and Northern Mati Temples, Upper, Lower and Middle Avalokitesvara Caves and Golden Tower Temple. The oldest grotto was built in Jin Dynasty by Guo Yu and his disciples. In the prime days, there were over 300 monks and disciples here.

After visiting the Matisi Grottoes, you will be accompanied to the train station and head for Dunhuang where another driver will be waiting for you.

Day 4: Dunhuang - Yulin Grottoes - Dunhuang

Before we get to any sight in Dunhuang, you will pay a visit to Yulin Grottoes in Guazhou, another significant grotto in Gansu province. It's about 160km from Dunhuang, which means you will have a 2.5-hour drive today. However, the Yulin Grottoes will not disappoint you.



Yulin Grottoes are part of the Dunhuang Grottoes Art. It is consistent with the Mogao Caves in

terms of Buddhist ideas, contents of murals, and expression methods. However, Yulin Grottoes were chiseled slightly later than the Mogao Caves, which is around the early Tang Dynasty and they underwent a long-term expansion and construction in eras of Five Dynasties, Song, Western Xia, Yuan, and Qing Dynasties. The Grottoes also have their own unique characteristics. For example, they have fully developed front rooms and long corridors, which you can't find in Mogao Caves. Inside the grottoes, you will also find a great amount of portraits of ethnic characters, painters and the wedding pictures in Han and Tibetan styles. In addition, some works of Yulin Grottoes, especially the Twenty-fifth Mural from Tubo period (around Tang Dynasty in central China) are very exquisite with simple figure, skilled and powerful lines, and bright but not foppish colors. What's more stunning is that the murals here are well-preserved, which means you can actually admire these fine arts.



In the evening, you will be taken back to your Dunhuang hotel.

Day 5: Mogao Caves, Singing Sand Dunes, Crescent Moon Lake

After breakfast, your day tour commences.

Your first sight today will be the reputed **Mogao Grottoes**, which comprise the largest, longest, richest and best-preserved treasure house for Buddhism study in the world. They were 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.

In the afternoon, you will have a visit to Crescent Spring and 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.

Return to your hotel at the end of the tour.

Day 6: Yardan National Park

After breakfast, let's head for the **Yardan National Park**.

The park is located about 160km from the Dunhuang city, which takes about 3 hours to drive there. It is the largest Yardang landform in China and a national park with distinct Yardang geological feature. 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.

In the evening, your tour guide will take you back to Dunhuang hotel.

Day 7: Dunhuang Museum

There is only one place arranged for you, the **Dunhuang Museum**, which serves as a wrap up of this amazing Gansu tour.

Dunhuang Museum is located in downtown Dunhuang. It's a museum dedicated to display the history and culture of Dunhuang city as an important stopover along the Silk Road and the relics excavated from the Mogao Caves. It's not as big as the

internationally first-class museums, still, it's a great place to understand the art of Mogao Caves. The exhibitions inside the museum are classified into two types. The types one is for displaying the art of Mogao Caves, which contains the replica of undeveloped 45th grotto and some famous



bamboo books, while the type two is to display the Silk Road Culture, in which the Brick of Kylin is the treasure of the museum.

You can choose to visit the Dunhuang Museum either in the morning or in the afternoon and have the other half day free.

Day 8: Departure Dunhuang

Your Zhangye - Dunhuang comes to the end today. Your driver will pick you up at the appointed time and take you to the train station or airport.

What's Important:

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What's included:

Air-conditioned vehicles with experienced driver.
Licensed Chinese- English bilingual speaking tour guide.
Entrance fee for sights mentioned in the itinerary.
Bottled water.
2nd class high-speed train tickets and soft sleeper train tickets listed 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 languages. We can't promise that the local guides will possess the English language skills as masterfully as the guides in big cities like 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.
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

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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.

FAQ

1. How many days do I need in Dunhuang?

A: It depends on your schedule. Generally speaking, two days in Dunhuang will allow you to cover the major sights like the Mogao Caves, Singing Sand Dunes, Crescent Moon Lake and Yarden National Park. If you have more time, some other historical sights can be included as well.

2. What is Dunhuang famous for?

A: Dunhuang is famous for the Mogao Caves, which are the largest Buddhist holy land with abundant Buddhist art. It's a must for everyone. Besides Mogao Caves, there are also places like Gobi desert and Shazhou night market drawing millions people.

3. How do I get to Dunhuang?

A: This tour starts from Zhangye, a small city in Gansu that can only be accessed from other cities of China. We suggest you enter from Xian by high-speed train. When you arrive in Zhangye, you can take the train to Dunhuang. However, if you want to start from Dunhuang, you can take plane or the train, depending where you come from.

4. Why the Silk Road was dangerous?

A: There are three factors that make the old Silk Road dangerous.

The first reason is the instability of Political Situation. The western regions and central Asian areas are the strategical spots between central Chinese dynasties and inner Asian regimes. They often

fought one another for the control over those buffer areas. Therefore, the merchants passing the Silk Road are always risking being killed by the foreign soldiers. Even if the powerful Han, Tang and Arabian empires did successfully controlled the most regions along the Silk Road, there are still places they can't reach. Many fierce tribes were forced to reside in these areas, imposing great threat to the life and property of the traders. Lastly, the harsh environment conditions in the western regions made the Silk Road challenging. There are often sandstorms burying a lot of lives.

5. What did Dunhuang trade on Silk Road?

A: As an important stopover on Silk Road, Dunhuang was a trade hub both importing goods and exporting items. The imported goods included Persian brocade, silk, metal products, perfume and all kinds of gems including the celestite from northeastern Afghanistan, Indian agates, chrysophoron from northeastern Africa and pearls from Sri Lanka. The exported items were Chinese silk, woolen and cotton products, animal furs, Chinese tea leaves, ceramics, Chinese medicine, seasonings, camels, sheep, dyes, dried fruits and embroideries.

6. Why did the silk road come to an end?

A: The Silk Road has two routes: the Land Silk Road and Maritime Silk Road. The decline of Land Silk Road made the Maritime Silk Road possible. After the decline of Tang Dynasty, the western region areas were controlled by Tubo Dynasty, interrupting the land silk road trade. In Song Dynasty, the economic barycenter moved to southern China, making the maritime silk road prosperous. In Yuan Dynasty, the land silk road was connected again until the Ming and Qing Dynasties. During Ming Dynasty, Zheng He organized the fleets to travel to southeastern Asian areas. However, the global environment was changing. When the western world like England, Spain, and Netherlands were entering the the Golden Age of Sail and making the great geographical discoveries, Ming and Qing government were secluding the nation. Therefore, the decline of Silk Road was inevitable.

7. Who made the Mogao Caves?

A: According to available documents, it was a monk named Yue Zun who excavated the first cave

in Mingsha Mountain. Later, the Buddhist Master Faliang and other monks continued to create caves here. The Mogao Caves we see today are the results of generations of work.

8. What type of religious art can be found in the Mogao Caves?

A: Mogao Caves are all about the Buddhist art works.

9. How do I get to Zhangye Danxia?

A: Zhangye Danxia Geological Park is located in the Linze county, 40km from Zhangye city. You will have a private car and driver who will take you there.

10. When is Yulin Grotto open?

A: The opening hours for Yulin Grotto is from 9:30 to 17:00 and only 540 tickets are allowed to sell for a day. The Western Thousand-Buddha Caves only allow 100 people to visit and the opening hours are 8:30 - 17:30.

11. Do I need to book in advance to visit Yulin Grotto?

A: No, you don't need to book in advance to visit Yulin Grotto. You just need to take your passport and buy the tickets on spot.