Silk Road

Retrace the Silk Road through oasis towns - Dunhuang, Turpan, Kashgar, and Urumqi plus Beijing and Shanghai

East and West first met more than 2,000 years ago along the fabled Silk Road, China's major connection to the outside world for centuries. The Silk Road was a trade route that crossed the Gobi Desert from China into Central Asia where Persian and other merchants transferred fine Chinese silks and other luxury items to the courts of Imperial Rome. In return, China received exotic new commodities from the West. The most lasting imports, however, were cultural, artistic, and religious—the introduction of religions such as Buddhism, Islam, Judaism, and Christianity came via the route.

The name "Silk Road" was coined in the 1870s by the famous German geographer Ferdinand Von Richthofen, when the legendary lost desert cities along the route were being uncovered by European archaeologists and explorers. Truck, train, and jet have now brought every modern item to the once remote oasis outposts of the route. Yet, much of the romance and the rich historical aura of the Silk Road endure.

16 Days (Tour Code-CSR)

This tour departs on Fridays and returns on Saturdays. There are four tour departures during the year and the dates fall in the months of May, June, August, and September. Please refer to the Dates & Prices or Access China Tours website for 2010 and 2011 "Tour Dates", the current "Tour Land Price", "Single Supplement Cost", and "International Air Cost". Or call 1-800-788-1399.

Day 1 Depart North America

Fly to China from your nearest city on a trans-Pacific flight.

Day 2 Arrive Beijing

Arrive at Beijing Capital Airport. You are met by ACT service staff and transferred by vehicle to your hotel. Meet your fellow travelers at the Evening Reception and learn more about the upcoming activities.

<Evening Reception> **The Peninsula Beijing**

Day 3 Beijing

Your exploration in Beijing starts in **Tiananmen Square** – the world's largest. Visit the **'Egg'** - the futuristic **National Performing Arts Center**. Next, visit the **Forbidden City**, the magnificent imperial palaces of Ming and Qing dynasties which were built almost 600 years ago.

After lunch, take an excursion to the extraordinary **Great Wall** of China. The rugged and scenic Mutianyu section along steep mountain ridges best examplifies the Ming era defensive wall construction.

Return to hotel in time for a welcome banquet featuring Peking Duck, the Capital's signature dish.
<B-L-D> **The Peninsula Beijing**

Day 4 Beijing → Xi'an

After breakfast in hotel, transfer to airport and fly to Xi'an, an ancient capital of China and cosmopolitan terminus of the Silk Road.

Upon arrival, visit the extraordinary **Terracotta Warriors** of China's first Emperor - Qin Shihuang, one of the first UNESCO World Heritage sites. This archaeological excavation site is a stunning exhibit of more than 7,000 unique terracotta life-size statues of soldiers, officers, horses, chariots, and artifacts.

Tonight, enjoy a special Xi'an Cuisine Dinner in an elite local restaurant.
<B-L-D> **Sofitel on Renmin Square**

Day 5 Xi'an → Dunhuang

Morning tour of the massive ancient **City Walls** constructed in Ming era, and the **Big Goose Pagoda,** which was first built in the Tang Dynasty and has since survived centuries of war and earthquakes.

Transfer to Xi'an airport and board a flight to Dunhuang in arid and remote Gansu Province.

Dunhuang is an ancient city located in the Gobi Desert. It was a very important military stronghold during the dynasties for protecting China's vital Hexi Corridor trading route between the Middle Kingdom and Central Asia and Europe.

Upon arrival, enjoy a city tour and visit a local market. Check in hotel and enjoy dinner.
<B-L-D> **Grand Soluxe Shazhou Hotel**

Day 6 Dunhuang

Today, you explore the fascinating Buddhist art at the **Mogao Caves**, a World Heritage Site since 1987, carved into cliffs facing the desert.

For well over one thousand years from the Wei to Ming dynasty, Buddhist monks and devotees had poured tremendous amounts of money and effort to create this treasure house of fascinating Buddhist art with thousands of murals, sculptures, carvings, and reliefs. Unfortunately, many of these treasures were looted and taken away by European "explorers" in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. A research institute was set up on site in 1970s to catalogue, study, and protect these precious ancient artworks.

In the afternoon, visit the incongruous **Crescent**

Spring Lake, a spring fed pool situated within the huge **Singing Sand Dunes** of the Gobi Desert. You have the opportunity to enjoy a Bactrian camel ride up the sand dunes. If time permits, you will also visit the quiet **Western Thousand Buddha Caves**.

<B-L-D> **Grand Soluxe Shazhou Hotel**

Day 7 Dunhuang ➔ Turpan

Transfer to airport and fly across arid deserts and dry mountains to Urumqi, capital of Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region. Met by guide and drive to Turpan, a Uygur town in an oasis surrounded by searing desert and towering mountains.

The Turpan depression is the second lowest spot on earth (only the Dead Sea is lower) at 154 meters (505 feet) below sea level. The Uygur people are a distinctive Turkic-speaking ethnic minority in north-western China. Islam is the dominent religion for the Uygurs and many other minorities in the region.

Once in Turpan, visit the site of the ancient **Jiaohe City** built on a strategic high ground over 2,000 years ago, the remains of some structures are still standing. Finish the long day at the iconic **Emin Minaret**, the tallest Islamic structure in China.

<B-L-D> **Turpan Tuha Hotel**

Day 8 Turpan

Begin today's sightseeing at the **Gaochang Ruins**, which reveals traces of a prosperous ancient Silk Road trading center and Chinese military stronghold dating from 100 BC.

Take an excursion to the **Beziklik Caves,** which attests to the flourishing of Buddhism in western China before Islam became the dominant religion in the 15th century. Stop at the **Flaming Mountains** – a fascinating and colorful geological phenomenon.

Turpan is famous throughout China for its large sweet grapes. A visit to the **Grape Valley** gives you the opportunity to walk through the shady vineyards, stop by **homes of Uygur farmers**, and go down into **Karez Wells** – an ingenious underground irrigation system that has been efficiently keeping all the crops alive with snow melt water in the scorching summer heat for millennia.

Enjoy a Uygur Cuisine Dinner in hotel restaurant.

<B-L-D> **Turpan Tuha Hotel**

Day 9 Turpan ➔ Kashgar

Depart Turpan and travel back to Urumqi airport by road. Take an afternoon flight to Kashgar. Met and transfer to your hotel upon arrival.

The city of Kashgar sits in an oasis at the far edge of the Taklimakan Desert and the towering Pamir Mountains at the crossroads of historic trading routes. The town has served as a center for exchange of goods and ideas in Central Asia since ancient times. Marco Polo visited Kashgar in 1273 AD and observed Nestorian Christians amongst other exotic populace.

Enjoy a brief city tour and then have dinner.

<B-L-D> **Tianyuan International Hotel**

Day 10 Kashgar

Kashgar is home to one of the world's largest and oldest outdoor markets – the **Kashgar Sunday Bazaar**.

Thousands of donkey carts, tractors, trucks, horses, sheep, and people from around the region congregate each Sunday to trade in Kashgar's fair ground. Uygur, Hui, Kazahk, Kyrgyz, Uzbek, Tajik, Han, and Pakistani merchants all ply their unique cultural wares.

After your exploration in the market, go to visit the **Id Kah Mosque**, largest in Xinjiang, and the **Old Town Area,** where small alleys run through traditional neighborhoods and streets are lined with vendor stands, craft shops and small restaurants. Next, visit the **Cemetary of Abakh Hoja**, the richest and most influential man in the region in late 17th century, and whose great granddaughter was believed to be the "Fragrant Concubine" of Emperor Qianlong. Later, visit the **Tomb of Yusup Hazi Hajup**, an accomplished Uygur poet and philosopher in the 11th century.

This evening enjoy a Local Muslim Cuisine Dinner followed by a **Uygur Song & Dance Performance**.

<B-L-D> **Tianyuan International Hotel**

Day 11 Kashgar

Today's excursion takes you into the lofty Pamir Mountains, some of the world's highest. First stop by the small town of **Upal** for a tour of its active market. Then visit the **Tomb of Mahmud Kashgari** (1008-1105 AD), a prominent Uygur scholar and creator of the first comprehensive dictionary of the Turkic language.

Continue driving up along the fabled **Karakorum Highway** passing stunning views of high mountains and deep canyons. Arrive at the Karakuri Lake for a breath-taking walk along the shore and behold the extraordinary glacier peaks of Muztagh Ata and Kongur which soar over 24,000 feet into the sky.

Return to Kashgar by the evening and spend a third night in this most exotic Silk Road city.

<B-L> **Tianyuan International Hotel**

Day 12 Kashgar → Urumqi

After breakfast, transfer to the airport and fly back to Urumqi. A geographic superlative, Urumqi is the most inland city on earth. It lies 2,500 kilometers (1,550 miles) from the nearest ocean. Check into your hotel upon arrival and have lunch.

In the afternoon, you visit the **Erdaoqiao Muslim Market** for a true enjoyment of the senses, and then the **Xinjiang Museum** to view the famous Caucasian featured "Loulan Mummies", buried and preserved over 2000 years ago. Enjoy a local cuisine dinner.

<B-L-D> **Sheraton Urumqi Hotel**

Day 13 Urumqi

Today's excursion will take you out of the city of Urumqi to the beautiful **Heavenly Lake** set among the alpine peaks of **Tianshan Mountain**. The snow-capped Mount Bogda (5,445 meters or 17,900 feet) is reflected in the clear water of the lake. You have the opportunity to take a pleasant **hike** along the trails and visit a **yurt home** of the local Kazakh herdsmen. There are about one and a half million ethnic Kazakh people living in northwestern China.

Return to your hotel and the balance of the day is free for your own exploration or relaxation.

<B-L> **Sheraton Urumqi Hotel**

Day 14 Urumqi → Shanghai

After breakfast, transfer to airport and fly across China to Shanghai, covering in a few hours by plane what took months by caravan. Met by your local guide and transfer to hotel upon arrival.

In the afternoon, after refreshing, go to visit the exquisite **Yuyuan Garden** built in 1559 during the Ming dynasty, and the European Art-Deco architecture of the **Bund**. Enjoy a Shanghai Dumpling Dinner.

<B-D> **Four Seasons Shanghai**

Day 15 Shanghai

Visit the marvelous **Shanghai Museum**, whose galleries contain some of the world-class collections of ancient art and artifacts dating back millennia.

Wander around the former **French Concession**, represented by the leafy **Fuxing Park** and colonial architecture in the area. Lunch at trendy **Xintiandi**.

Afternoon and evening are free for you to enjoy the city of Shanghai on your own. The 2010 World Expo runs from May through October.

<B-L> **Four Seasons Shanghai**

Day 16 Return Home

Transfer to airport for your homebound flight. Arrive in North America on the same day. **<B>**