Glory of the Northern Tribes

Over 5,000 years old, China has one of the world's longest civilizations. While modern China rapidly modernizes, explore the corners of the Middle Kingdom that have maintained their ancient heritage – Yungang Grottoes • The Hanging Temple • Buddhist Mountain Wutaishan • Pingyao Old Town • China's Pyramid 'Xixia Mausolea' • Labrang Tibetan Monastery • Tongren Regong Arts • The Salar Muslims • Ta'er Tibetan Monastery • Qinghai Lake • Descendents of Tuguhun Kingdom

18 Days (Tour Code–AGN)

Arrive Return	May14 May31	Jun11 Jun28	Jul02 Jul19	Aug13 Aug30	Sep03 Sep20	Oct01 Oct18
Land Price in USD	5,270	5,190	5,190	5,190	5,270	5,270
Single Supplement	1,550	1,470	1,470	1,470	1,550	1,550

• Land prices are per person, double occupancy in deluxe or best available hotels. Prices include coach class intra-China airfare, ground transportation, all transfers, all sightseeing admissions, cultural events, most meals and visa processing.

• Land price does not include cost for international flights. For assistance on international airfare to China, please contact us by dialing 1-800-788-1399.

• This tour is fully escorted (for a group of 6 or more travelers) within mainland China by an English-speaking professional tour manager and is guided by an English-speaking local tour guide in each city.

Day 1 Beijing

Arrive at Beijing Capital Airport and meet your tour guide. Transfer to your hotel for check-in and relaxation before meeting your fellow travellers for an Evening Reception and tour update.

<Reception> **Grand Hotel Beijing**

Day 2 Beijing → Datong

Morning at leisure or you may go to visit a couple of sites you missed in your previous China trips.

Take an afternoon train through the mountains of Hebei Province to Datong in Shanxi and arrive in the evening. You are met by your local guide and transfer to your hotel. Enjoy a local cuisine dinner.

<B-D> **Yungang International Hotel**

Day 3 Datong

Datong, center of the Northern Wei Dynasty about 1,500 years ago, served as the military stronghold of numerous dynasties. Here, visitors discover towering temples, magnificent grottoes, exquisite murals, sculptures and the meandering Great Wall and its many fortresses.

First visit the **Yungang Caves**, where elaborate and colorful Buddhist art works have been well preserved for over a thousand years. Next, move on to see a less famous but older and more authentic section of the **Great Wall** outside Datong.

Return to the city in the afternoon and stop by **Huayan Temple** for a view of its elegant architecture.

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

Day 4 Datong → Wutaishan

A full-day journey to Mount Wutaishan, one of China's

The Hanging Temple, near Datong

five sacred mountains. Travel south by private vehicle from Datong and first stop in **Hunyuan**, a small county town with appealing Ming street architecture. Next, arrive at the renown **Hanging Temple**. This remarkable Temple has clung to a sheer cliff for over 1400 years. Head west through the golden hills to see the stately **Yingxian Pagoda**. Built in 1056 in the Liao Dynasty, it is the oldest original wooden building in China, a masterpiece of structural engineering that looks solid enough to stand for another millennium.

Arrive in the town of **Taihuai,** in the shadow of Mount Wutaishan, 3,058 meters (10,032 feet) high. Check in to your hotel and enjoy a local cuisine dinner.

<B-L-D> **Wutaishan Huahui Hotel**

Day 5 Wutaishan

Wutaishan *(five plateau mountain)* has been a religious center at least since the reign of Emperor Ming Di (58-75 AD) of the Han Dynasty. Each Buddhist Mountain is dedicated to a particular Bodhisattva, and Wutaishan became the sacred mountain dedicated to Manjusri (also known as the Wenshu Buddha), god of wisdom.

Spend the day exploring the elegant temples with exquisite sculptures and murals. Marvel at the architectural varieties, fresh air, superb alpine scenery and the peaceful spiritual tone in this Buddhist shrine. Meet pilgrims from all over China and around the world.

Visit the centuries old **Tayuan**, **Xiantong**, and **Shuxiang Temples**. Hike along the mountain trails for great views.

<B-L-D> **Wutaishan Huahui Hotel**

Qiao Family Compound, near Pingyao

A Buddhist ceremony in a monastery of Wutaishan

Day 6 Wutaishan ➔ Taiyuan

Traveling by private vehicle to Taiyuan, capital of Shanxi (*West of the Mountains*) Province visiting several charming Buddhist temples along the way.

The **Jinge Temple** has an impressive 17-meter-tall (56 feet) Guanyin statue, the Buddhist Goddess of Compassion and Mercy, the largest at Wutaishan. Some of the original Tang structure remains within the inscribed base of the pillars. **Nanchan Temple**'s small main hall, built in 782 AD, is the oldest wooden hall existent in China. The **Foguang Temple** is a huge complex of more than one hundred buildings.

Check in hotel upon arrival in Taiyuan late afternoon.

<B-L> **Shanxi Grand Hotel**

Day 7 Taiyuan ➔ Pingyao

Take a city tour and visit the **Double-Tower Temple** with a 13-storey octagonal tower made of brick and stone.

Continue traveling south by vehicle to Pingyao, a well-preserved old town in central Shanxi Province. On the way, you will first visit **Jinci Monastery** – situated on the foot of Mount Xuanweng and built in memory of Jiyu, the founding father of the Jin State.

Pay a visit to the 300-year old residence of a rich merchant family in northern China – the **Qiao Family Compound**. This was the film site of the Zhang Yimou (2008 Olympic Opening Ceremony director) film "Raise the Red Lantern."

Arrive in Pingyao in the late afternoon and check into your hotel for a hearty dinner.

<B-L-D> **Yunjincheng Courtyard Hotel**

Day 8 Pingyao

You will be given a half-day guided tour of **Pingyao Old Town**, a walled city with a 2000-year history and many old Ming and Qing dynasty houses, compounds, temples, and defensive structures. Pingyao has the best preserved

protective walls of any city in China. The original walls still circle the town, and its narrow streets restricted from motor vehicles are lined with small but unique family-owned shops and restaurants. Sites to visit include the **Confucius Temple** and **Rishengchang Bank Compound**, the first bank established in China.

After lunch take an excursion to the exquisite **Shuanglin Temple**, a structure over 1500 years old that houses more than 2000 clay statues of dieties and religious icons. The balance of the day is free for your own relaxation and exploration in Pingyao.

<B-L> **Yunjincheng Courtyard Hotel**

Day 9 Pingyao → Yinchuan

After breakfast, transfer to Taiyuan airport and board a morning flight to Yinchuan, capital of Ningxia Hui Muslim Autonomous Region. Upon arrival, you are met and transferred to your hotel.

Yinchuan is an ancient city on the banks of the strategic Yellow River with a unique Muslim character. Arab and Persian merchants came to China over 1000 years ago via the Silk Road. Just a few international visitors have come to this remote but historic locale for a visit.

Your afternoon sightseeing includes **Haibao Pagoda**, featuring unusual angular shapes with niches and ledges that protrude from each of the eleven storeys. **Nanguan Mosque**, first built at the end of Ming dynasty and rebuilt in 1980, has a classic Islamic architectural style, complete with majestic green domes.

Enjoy a local Muslim Cuisine Dinner.

<B-D> **Ningxia International Hotel**

Day 10 Yinchuan → Lanzhou

The little-known highlight of Yinchuan is the **Western Xia Mausolea**, on the slopes of Helan Mountain to the west of the city. These high pointed burial mounds are called the "Chinese Pyramids". These mausolea contain the nine tombs of the Buddhist emperors of Western Xia Dynasty (1038-1227AD), which was established by the Daxiang people. Under every tomb is a complete set of structures

Grand Summons Ceremony at Labrang Monastery, Xiahe

Western Xia Mausolea, Yinchuan

that include watchtowers, sacred walls, stele pavilions, halls and pagodas. The 13th century Mongol invasion stripped the ornate facades of the tombs.

Afternoon excursion to **Najiahu Mosque**, **Hengcheng Crossing** on the Yellow River, and the **Ming Great Wall**.

After dinner, transfer to the train station and board an overnight train that follows the Yellow River to Lanzhou.

<B-L-D> **Overnight Soft Sleeper Train**

Day 11 Lanzhou → Xiahe

Arrive in Lanzhou, capital of Gansu Province, by train this morning. Met and transfer to a hotel restaurant for breakfast and refreshment. Next set out for the legendary Tibetan town of Xiahe in mountainous southern Gansu. On the way, you will stop in a few towns in the **Linxia Muslim Area** for rest and lunch.

Arrive in Xiahe in the afternoon and check in your hotel for a local cuisine dinner.

<B-L-D> **Labrang Hotel**

Day 12 Xiahe

Xiahe is a tiny yet bustling town located in a high valley in southwestern Gansu Province. At 3000 meters (10,000 feet) above sea level and surrounded by mountains, this rural haven centers upon its famous Buddhist monastery. Xiahe's alpine landscapes and ubiquitous Buddhist architecture present an accurate depiction of Tibetan culture. The town has a diverse ethnic mix of Tibetan, Han, and Hui muslim people.

The focus of today's visit is the renowned **Labrang Monastery**, one of the six major Yellow Hat Sect (Gelupa) monasteries, and second only to Lhasa's Potala Palace in size. It also houses China's largest Buddhism Academy.

The monastery was built in 1709 by a monk named E'angzongzhe, who was to become the first of the monastery's Living Buddhas (Jiemuyang). At its height, 6000 monks lived and prayed in the temple. Today there are around 2000 monks, mainly from Qinghai, Gansu, Sichuan, and Inner Mongolia. In total the monastery holds over 60,000 Tibetan sutras and thousands of rare Buddhist

relics, including a statue of the most famous Tibetan king, Songtsen Gampo.

In the afternoon, venture out to the **grasslands** west of the town and meet local Tibetan nomads who herd their sheep and yaks on the highland pastures. Spend some time exploring the town's main street lined with shops, restaurants, and small markets. Dinner is on own.

<B-L> **Labrang Hotel**

Day 13 Xiahe ➔ Tongren

Bid farewell to Xiahe and travel by vehicle over grasslands and mountains to **Tongren,** Qinghai Province, land of the renowned "Regong Arts" created by local Tibetan and other ethnic artists. The Thangka medium of paintings, sculptures, embroidery, and architecture, it is a way of life in this region. The history of "Regong Arts" goes back almost seven hundred years.

Upon arrival in Tongren, visit **Upper & Lower Wutun Temples**, **Longwu Monastery**, and **Regong Arts Exhibition Hall**. Later in the day, visit homes of local Tibetan and Tu families and tour the old town Longwu. Check into your hotel and enjoy a Local Cuisine Dinner.

<B-L-D> **Tongren Huangnan Hotel**

Day 14 Tongren ➔ Xining

After breakfast, we travel north by land to Xunhua. Enjoy the dramatic mountainous scenery along the way.

Xunhua is the only Salar Autonomous County in China. The origins of the **Salar People** are uncertain but according to their legend, during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries their ancestors, possibly from an Oghuz tribe of the Seljuk Turks, left Samarkand in present-day Uzbekistan and eventually settled in their present location.

You will visit **Jiezi Mosque** and a **Salar village** to meet local farmers in their homes. Also visit the **Residence of the Tenth Panchan Lama**, who was second only to the Dalai Lama in the Tibetan Buddhism hierarchy.

Continue traveling by road to Xining, the capital of Qinghai Province. Arrive in Xining in late afternoon and check into your hotel and enjoy dinner.

<B-L-D> **Qinghai Yinlong Hotel**

Day 15 Xining

Morning excursion to the famous **Ta'er Si** (*"Kumbum"* in Tibetan) **Monastery** south of Xining. This monastery, built in 1560 AD by Emperor Jiajing, was one of the six most important Tibetan monasteries in China.

The temple is most sacred due to the personages who have graced it with their presence. It was originally built upon the birthplace of the founder of the Gelukpa Sect (Yellow Hat) of Tibetan Buddhism, Tsong Khapa. Two of his disciples went on to become famous in the Buddhist world, one becoming the fourteenth Dalai Lama, the other the tenth Panchan Lama.

A Salar muslim woman selling fruits, Xunhua

In the afternoon, we travel to Huzhu County to visit a **village of Tu People**, an ethnic group who migrated from northeast China in ancient times and established the Tuguhun Kingdom in the 4th century AD. Visit the large **Dongguan Mosque** built by Muslims at the center of Xining.

Enjoy a local cuisine dinner in the evening.

<B-L-D> **Qinghai Yinlong Hotel**

Day 16 Xining

Today, we travel west by vehicle for an extraordinary excursion to the huge **Qinghai Lake**, from which the province got its name. At 3,205 meters (10,515 feet) it is one of the highest lakes in the world. The salt water lake is China's largest and the scenery along the way is stunning. Meet local **Tibetan nomads** and watch wild flowers and birds while hiking along the lake shore.

Return to Xining in late afternoon. Balance of the day is free for your own exploration or relaxation.

<B-L> **Qinghai Yinlong Hotel**

Day 17 Xining ➔ Shanghai

Transfer to the airport and take a noon flight across China to Shanghai. Met and check into hotel upon arrival. Late afternoon is free to explore this modern metropolis.

In the evening, celebrate the completion of this grand adventure with a Farewell Banquet.

<B-D> **Shanghai Ruijin Hotel**

Day 18 Return Home

Transfer to the airport and fly home. **<B>**