

Western Silk Road: Chengdu to Jiayuguan



trip highlights

- Visit the renowned Chengdu Research Base of Giant Panda Breeding to observe China's iconic giant pandas.
- Experience the very best natural landscapes of China's historic Silk Road in one carefully designed itinerary.
- Combine spectacular scenery with unique geology, Buddhist heritage and Great Wall history.
- Travel efficiently by overnight sleeper train, high-speed rail and private vehicle.
- Small-group travel with experienced local guides who bring western China's history, geology and culture to life.



Trip Duration	7 days	Trip Code: WXM
Grade	Adventure touring	
Summary	6 nights hotel	

welcome to World Expeditions

For over 50 years, we've been creating high-quality, expedition-style adventures for active travellers with a curious spirit. From our very first trek in the mountains of Nepal to pioneering remote routes across all seven continents, our journeys are built for those who want to truly explore – not just visit.

At the heart of what we do is a simple philosophy: take the paths less travelled.

This means travelling with care, supporting local communities, minimising our impact, and unlocking experiences that most travellers will never have.

If you're ready to go further and dig deeper, we invite you to join us on the Western Silk Road: Chengdu to Jiayuguan, a journey that captures the essence of a unique adventure.

why travel with World Expeditions?

This unique itinerary showcases a different side of China, combining a visit to the world-famous Chengdu Research Base of Giant Panda Breeding with the spectacular landscapes and rich history of the ancient Silk Road. From the colourful rock formations of Zhangye Danxia to the remote grottoes of the Qilian Mountains and the western end of the Great Wall at Jiayuguan, the journey blends iconic wildlife, remarkable natural scenery and fascinating cultural heritage. Travelling by overnight rail, high-speed train and private vehicle, you'll experience one of China's least-visited yet most rewarding regions with the insight of experienced local guides.

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World Expeditions does not require single travellers to pay a surcharge for travelling alone. We will arrange for you to share accommodation with another traveller of the same gender and if we cannot match you up we will provide a single room at no extra charge. If you prefer not to share a single supplement is payable to guarantee your own room. Please refer to our website for the additional cost.

the trip

Discover the remarkable landscapes and rich Silk Road heritage of western China on this seven-day journey from Chengdu in Sichuan Province through Gansu to Jiayuguan. Beginning with a visit to the renowned Chengdu Research Base of Giant Panda Breeding, travel by overnight train, high-speed rail and private vehicle to explore the colourful Rainbow Danxia, dramatic Pingshanhu Grand Canyon, cliffside grottoes of Matisi and historic Jiayuguan Fort at the western end of the Great Wall. Combining iconic wildlife, spectacular natural landscapes and fascinating Silk Road history, this unique adventure reveals a lesser-visited side of China.

at a glance

DAY 1	JOIN CHENGDU
DAY 2	CHENGDU PANDA RESEARCH BASE, PEOPLE'S PARK & OVERNIGHT TRAIN TO ZHANGYE
DAY 3	ZHANGYE DANXIA NATIONAL GEOLOGICAL PARK
DAY 4	MATISI GROTTOES & QILIAN MOUNTAINS WALK (5KM OR 12 KM, 3.1MI OR 7.5MI)
DAY 5	PINGSHANHU GRAND CANYON WALK
DAY 6	GIANT RECLINING BUDDHA, WEI & JIN TOMBS & JIAYUGUAN
DAY 7	JIAYUGUAN FORT, OVERHANGING GREAT WALL & DEPART

what's included

- 6 breakfasts, 6 lunches and 6 dinners
- Accommodation in comfortable 4-star hotels
- Rail travel including an overnight 4 berth soft-sleeper train from Chengdu to Zhangye and a high-speed train from Zhangye to Jiayuguan
- Private vehicle transport as per the itinerary
- Expert local guides and a tour leader throughout
- Entry fees and sightseeing as per itinerary
- Airport transfer on the final day
- Drinking water during sightseeing and transfers

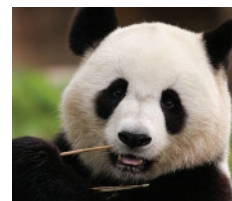
Local cash payments are becoming increasingly popular with many operators in the adventure travel industry. The policy seems to benefit the tour operators, more than the local economies or travellers, as it avoids local taxes and transfers the cost and risk of cash handling to travellers. In accordance with our Responsible Travel practices we have chosen a policy not to ask for such payments.

what's not included

- International airfares and departure taxes
- Visa fees (if applicable)
- Travel Insurance (compulsory)
- Arrival airport transfer in Chengdu
- Meals and drinks not listed as included
- Personal expenses
- Tips and gratuities
- Any items not listed as included

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trip dates

2026 18 Oct - 24 Oct
15 Nov - 21 Nov

2027 14 Mar - 20 Mar
18 Apr - 24 Apr
23 May - 29 May
20 Jun - 26 Jun
18 Jul - 24 Jul
22 Aug - 28 Aug
19 Sep - 25 Sep
24 Oct - 30 Oct

fast facts

Countries Visited:
China

Visas:
Yes*

Vaccinations:
Please consult a travel vaccination specialist for up to date information

Private Groups:
Private group options are available for this trip*

Singles:
A single supplement is available for this trip*

Leader:
Expert local leader

Advice for people with limited mobility
This trip is not suitable for people with limited mobility.

*Ask our staff for more information.

detailed itinerary

DAY 1 Join Chengdu

Welcome to Chengdu, the vibrant capital of Sichuan Province and one of China's most relaxed and food-loving cities. Make your way to the joining hotel, where the remainder of the day is free to settle in or begin exploring at your own pace. This evening, meet your tour leader and fellow travellers at 18:00 for a welcome briefing before enjoying a group dinner featuring the distinctive flavours of Sichuan cuisine.

Accommodation: Buddha Zen Hotel or similar
meals: D

DAY 2 Chengdu Panda Research Base, People's Park & Overnight Train to Zhangye

Our adventure begins with a visit to the renowned Chengdu Research Base of Giant Panda Breeding, one of the world's leading conservation centres dedicated to protecting China's iconic giant panda. Wandering through bamboo-filled enclosures, we have the opportunity to observe giant pandas and red pandas in spacious naturalistic habitats while learning about the important breeding and conservation programs helping secure the species' future. Later, we visit People's Park, a lively gathering place where locals meet to practise tai chi, play mahjong, dance, sing and enjoy tea in traditional open-air teahouses. It provides a fascinating glimpse into everyday life in Chengdu before we board our overnight 4 berth soft-sleeper train for the journey north to Zhangye, following one of the great historic routes of the ancient Silk Road. Train time is 16:37 and arrives at 09:05 the next day.

Accommodation: Overnight train in soft sleeper berth
meals: B,L,D

DAY 3 Zhangye Danxia National Geological Park

Arriving in Zhangye this morning (09:05), we may have time to freshen up before heading out to explore one of China's most extraordinary natural landscapes. Our first stop is Binggou Danxia (Ice Valley), where towering sandstone pillars, jagged pinnacles and weathered rock formations create a dramatic landscape often compared to an ancient stone fortress. The sculpted cliffs and isolated rock towers offer spectacular views towards the distant Qilian Mountains. Later we continue to the world-famous Rainbow Danxia, where millions of years of geological activity have created vivid bands of red, orange, yellow and ochre stretching across the hillsides. These remarkable layered sandstone formations are unique to China and are considered among the country's most photogenic natural attractions. Visiting in the late afternoon provides the best light for photography, as the setting sun intensifies the rich colours that have made the Rainbow Mountains internationally famous.

Accommodation: Runhu Holiday Hotel or similar
meals: B,L,D

DAY 4 Matisi Grottoes & Qilian Mountains Walk (5km or 12 km, 3.1mi or 7.5mi)

Today we journey into the foothills of the Qilian Mountains to visit the remarkable Matisi (Horse-Hoof Temple), a fascinating complex of Buddhist grottoes carved into towering red sandstone cliffs. Dating from the 4th century and famously visited by Marco Polo, the temple is named after a legendary horse's hoofprint believed to be preserved within the site. We explore the Thousand Buddha Cave and the impressive Thirty-three Heavens Grottoes, where narrow passageways and cliffside chambers offer a fascinating insight into centuries of Buddhist history and culture. After lunch, there is a choice of two scenic walks through the beautiful Qilian Mountain

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thoughtful travel

Our World Expeditions adventures are grounded in a deep commitment to regenerative travel, going beyond minimising harm to actively restoring and enriching the places we visit. We partner closely with local communities, ensuring that our trips support cultural preservation, fair livelihoods, and community-led initiatives. Each expedition is designed to protect and regenerate natural ecosystems through low-impact practices, climate action, and education that fosters respect for biodiversity. We prioritise meaningful connections between travellers and place, encouraging a sense of stewardship that lasts well beyond the journey. By embedding sustainability into every layer of our operations, we aim not only to explore the world responsibly but also to leave it healthier, more resilient, and more vibrant for future generations.

trip grading Adventure touring

The theme behind most of our trips is action holidays and the fitter you are, the more easily you will adjust and enjoy yourself. On a trekking trip such as this you need to be in general good health and moderately fit. The grading overall would be moderate, with some "strenuous" activity. Before departure aerobic-type exercise, which increases your breathing, is an obvious advantage. We recommend that for about two to three months prior to departure you try to exercise most days for 30 - 45 minutes or aerobic type activity.

landscape. Depending on the group's interests, fitness levels and the weather, you may choose the easier Qilian Alpine Meadow Walk, a 5km (3.1mi) return stroll across open alpine meadows with expansive mountain views, or the longer Pine Forest Waterfall Walk, a 12km (7.5mi) return hike through fragrant pine forests to a picturesque waterfall. Those who prefer a more leisurely afternoon may relax within the park and enjoy the mountain scenery before we return to Zhangye.

Accommodation: Runhu Holiday Hotel or similar
meals: B,L,D

DAY 5 Pingshanhu Grand Canyon Walk

This morning we travel to Pingshanhu Grand Canyon, one of western China's most spectacular geological landscapes. Often compared with Arizona's Grand Canyon, this vast network of colourful sandstone cliffs, narrow gorges and sculptured rock formations has become one of China's premier destinations for landscape photography. Our visit includes a hike of approximately 2.5 hours through the canyon, descending among towering cliffs and winding through dramatic rock formations that reveal millions of years of geological history. While there are numerous steps and some steeper sections, the constantly changing scenery makes this one of the highlights of the journey. We return to Zhangye later this afternoon.

Accommodation: Runhu Holiday Hotel or similar
meals: B,L,D

DAY 6 Giant Reclining Buddha, Wei & Jin Tombs & Jiayuguan

Before leaving Zhangye, we visit the impressive Giant Reclining Buddha Temple, home to China's largest indoor reclining clay Buddha. Measuring 35 metres (115ft) in length, the statue dates from the Western Xia Dynasty and is surrounded by beautifully preserved murals and statues that illustrate the importance of Buddhism along the Silk Road. Later we travel by high-speed train for 2 hours to Jiayuguan, where we visit the fascinating Wei and Jin Dynasty Tombs. Hidden beneath the desert landscape, these ancient tombs contain remarkably preserved brick murals depicting scenes of everyday life more than 1,500 years ago, offering a rare insight into the customs and culture of early imperial China.

Accommodation: Jiayuguan International Hotel or similar
meals: B,L,D

DAY 7 Jiayuguan Fort, Overhanging Great Wall & Depart

Our final day is devoted to the western end of the Great Wall of China. We begin at the imposing Jiayuguan Fort, the largest and best-preserved military fortress along the Ming Dynasty Great Wall. Known as the "First and Greatest Pass Under Heaven", it once marked the western gateway to imperial China and served as a vital stronghold protecting the Silk Road. We then continue to the nearby Overhanging Great Wall, a dramatic section rebuilt along steep mountain ridges overlooking the Gobi Desert. A walk of around one hour rewards us with expansive views across the desert plains towards the snow-capped Qilian Mountains, providing a fitting conclusion to our journey through western China. After lunch, a group transfer is provided to Jiayuguan Airport for onward flights.

meals: B,L

This itinerary is subject to change with any change in Community regulations as well as Governmental changes and natural circumstances beyond our control.

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adventure travel

By its very nature adventure travel involves an element of the unexpected. In remote and developing countries do not expect standards you are used to at home. Remote areas are sometimes unpredictable and itineraries may be altered. To get the most out of your adventure it is important that you are flexible, positive and eager to take on all the challenges that arise. If you are uncertain about your suitability for this trip we recommend that you speak with your consultant or travel agent.

important note

These trip notes represent the most current information for this itinerary, and may supersede any information on our website, including but not limited to the itinerary and price. The itinerary should be seen as a guide only. This itinerary may change at any time due to inclement weather, forces of nature and other circumstances beyond our control.

country information

China is a destination that captures the imagination with its vast landscapes, enduring traditions and deep historical legacy. Stretching across nearly four million square miles (over 9.5 million square kilometres) and home to more than 1.3 billion people, it is a land of extraordinary contrasts – from alpine plateaus to subtropical forests, bustling megacities to quiet rural villages.

Long shrouded in mystery for Western travellers, China began opening its doors to tourism in the late 1970s. Since then, dozens of previously restricted regions have become accessible, and many ancient sites have been sensitively restored. Today, visitors can explore a remarkable breadth of cultural and natural wonders – including ancient temples, imperial palaces, sections of the Great Wall, and sacred mountains such as Huangshan and Emei.

China is home to 56 officially recognised ethnic groups, each with distinct customs, dress, languages and traditions. This cultural richness is visible in everything from local festivals and tea ceremonies to regional cuisines and architectural styles. While Mandarin is the national language, dialects and minority languages are widely spoken across different provinces.

Modern infrastructure including high-speed rail, well-connected airports and an expanding domestic tourism network makes travelling within China increasingly smooth. Yet much of the country still retains its traditional rhythm, especially in smaller towns and remote landscapes where daily life continues as it has for generations.

This striking blend of old and new, along with the hospitality of its people, makes China a truly rewarding destination for those seeking insight, challenge and cultural depth.

climate

Western China experiences a dry continental climate with warm days and cool nights for much of the touring season. Temperatures vary depending on location and elevation, particularly around the Qilian Mountains. Comfortable walking clothing, sun protection and a light jacket for cooler mornings and evenings are recommended. The itinerary includes both lowland desert environments and higher mountain areas where weather conditions can change quickly.

a typical day

Leaving the hotel after breakfast, we set out by private vehicle to explore western China's remarkable landscapes and cultural treasures. Days typically combine guided sightseeing with short scenic walks through geological parks, temple complexes or historic sites, with regular opportunities for photography and regional cuisine. Travel distances are balanced with time to appreciate the dramatic scenery, while evenings are spent relaxing in comfortable hotels or experiencing the unique atmosphere of China's overnight sleeper train.

dietary requirements

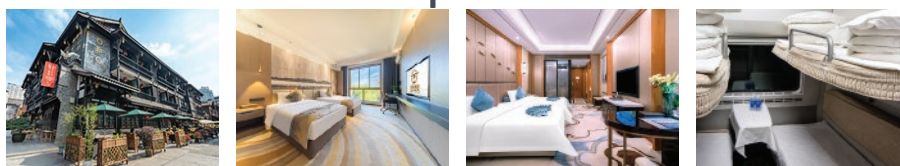
Provided we are advised in advance of your departure we are able to cater for vegetarian diets and can assist with medically recommended diets (allergies and intolerances). Please ensure you discuss your requirements with us well in advance (at least 1 month prior to your trip) to determine whether we can cater to such dietary requirements on your chosen adventure. Please note that options are likely to be limited in very remote locations or alternatives may be more expensive or unavailable. There may be times when those with special requirements may need to provide their own food. We are unable to guarantee a peanut-free or allergen-free trip, and therefore, we strongly encourage that travellers with life-threatening or severe allergies take all necessary medical precautions to prepare for the possibility of exposure. Passengers must travel with all necessary medications for food allergies and be capable of self-administering these medications.

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accommodation on the trip



Throughout your journey, stay in a carefully selected 4-star hotels, chosen for their convenient locations, welcoming hospitality and easy access to the historic sites. All properties offer private ensuite facilities and provide a comfortable base from which to explore the region.

what you carry

In your daypack you will need to carry everything you need for the day such as rainjacket, water bottle, warm layer, valuables and personal items such as sunscreen, lip-eze etc. You will also be responsible for carrying your main luggage on and off the trains.

equipment required

Pack comfortable walking shoes with good grip, as you'll be exploring historical sites, walking on uneven trails and enjoying optional hikes through the Qilian Mountains and Pingshanhu Grand Canyon. Clothing suitable for a range of weather conditions is essential, including lightweight layers for mild daytime temperatures and warm clothing for cool mornings, evenings and higher elevations. A waterproof jacket, sun hat, sunscreen, sunglasses and a reusable water bottle are also recommended to ensure you're comfortable throughout the journey.

vehicles & safety

During the course of your trip, we will use a variety of vehicles, all of which are fit for purpose and the conditions encountered. It should be noted that laws governing transportation safety may differ from those in your home country and whilst wherever possible, vehicles with seatbelts are provided, on occasion some vehicles may not have seat belts fitted.

visas

Australian, New Zealand, Canada and the UK passport holders can travel to China for tourism without a visa if their stay is 30 days or less. This visa-free policy is effective to 31 December 2026. If you are staying over 30 days you will need to apply for a visa before your trip.

If you require a visa, it is advisable to apply for your visa approximately 6 weeks before your intended entry into China, but not earlier than three months prior. Applying too early may result in your visa expiring before your arrival. Passport holders from Australia, Canada, United Kingdom, New Zealand and the United States, please visit: <https://consular.mfa.gov.cn/VISA/> to be directed to your dedicated city and countries website for instructions.

If you have any doubt about your eligibility, verify the conditions for visa free entry with your nearest Chinese Embassy.

Depending on your passport and location, different requirements apply and they change at short notice. Please refer to websites above for the latest information.

All other nationalities should check with your nearest embassy or consulate.

You must complete an electronic Digital Arrival Card (CDAC) prior to arrival to China. This free, mandatory, and 100% digital process is done via the National Immigration Administration (NIA) website, generating a QR code for immigration inspection. <https://s.nia.gov.cn/ArrivalCardFillingPC/entry-registration-home>

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Please bear in mind that visas may be required for countries you are visiting en route or transiting through on the way to your destination. It is important that you check the requirements of all countries you will visit. Visa costs and requirements do change regularly so we suggest you check with your travel agent or World Expeditions reservations consultant. It is your responsibility to obtain all necessary visas.

webinars & events

Catch a Webinar – Live or On Demand - to learn more about a particular trip. Make sure the trip you choose is right for you. Watch them live, so you can ask our presenters a question, or catch the recording later at your leisure and watch it On Demand. Visit our website or keep an eye on our newsletter for upcoming presentations.

private groups

The adventures that you see on our website are just a starting point. We operate many of our trips, which means we can be flexible and create an itinerary to suit your interests and dates. Talk to our team, you'll be surprised how much more affordable it can be when you get a group of friends, colleagues, a club – you name it, to travel with you!

subscribe to our e-newsletter

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social networking

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Subscribe to our channel at [youtube.com/worldexpeditions](#)

Share the love

Use the hashtag #WorldExpeditions on your best travel photos and videos to be featured.

trip availability

We operate small group adventures, which means availability is always worth checking early. Check trip availability online or call our team who might be able to dig a little deeper for you to find what you want, when you want.

Many adventures require services that, if not available at the time you book (like an internal flight or permit) could mean the trip is unavailable. So, book early to avoid missing out on your dream adventure.

how to book

Check trip availability and book your tour online, or call or visit one of our offices. To book a trip, you will need to complete a Booking Form (online or request a PDF) and pay a non-refundable deposit. Please note that when booking our tours to not confirm any additional arrangements until all services related to your tour are confirmed by your dedicated Reservations Consultant.