



# Silk Road Railway - Independent

Days	Eastbound	Countries	Distance	Activity level
30	Shiraz to Beijing	Iran + Turkmenistan + Uzbekistan + Kazakhstan + China	9,087 km	●●●●○

Can you imagine how those early Silk Road traders felt as they set off for their long journeys to the distant empire they knew as Cathay? Today, the journey is easier but just as incredible, and the sights you'll experience will be equally amazing.

# Itinerary

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## Day 1: Shiraz

Welcome to the 'City of Poets' the perfect launch point for your interlude with the Silk Road.

A treasure trove of Persian culture Shiraz is the final resting place of the great Persian poets Sa'di and Hafez, a major site of pilgrimage for Iranians. Wander the cities beautiful gardens and take the opportunity to visit the spectacular Nasir al-Mulk Mosque and see its stunning interior in the morning sun.

Suggested sightseeing - Nasir-ol- Molk mosque, Naranjestan Palace and Garden, Vakil complex, Karim Khan Citadel

## Days 2-3: Yazd

This morning embark on your journey through striking mountain scenery, pausing to visit one of the ancient world's most impressive sights – the ruins of Persepolis. Constructed by Darius the Great and destroyed by Alexander the Great, the ruins tell the story of the unquestioned glory and power of the Achaemenid Empire.

Late afternoon you arrive into Yazd, one of the world's oldest cities. Once important for the Zoroastrian faith, the old town retains much of its character amongst its maze-like streets, and is known across Iran for its fine woven silks and confectionery. You spend the next two nights in one of Yazd's enchanting and beautifully ornate hotels.

Suggested sightseeing - Day 2- Ruins of Persepolis Day 3- Jame Mosque, Dowlat Abbad Garden, Zoroastrian Ateshkadeh Fire Temple, Amir Chaqmaq, Towers of Silence, Water Museum, evening at Zurkhane (House of strength)

Meals - Day 2 – Breakfast, Day 3 - Breakfast

## Days 4-6: Isfahan

Leaving Yazd you travel across the Varzaneh Desert dotted with villages that have their own unique culture and customs. The capital of a number of Persian Empires and an important stop on the Silk Road, the finest city of Persia – Isfahan is the highlight of any visit to Iran. The glittering roofs of Isfahan's mosques, the intricate design of its bridges and warm welcome of its residents' awaits.

Suggested sightseeing - Imam & Sheikh Lutfullah Mosques, Nigash-e-Jahan Square, Chehel Sotun, Ali Qapou Palace, Nougat Factory and Bazaar, Jame Mosque and Vank Church

Meals - Day 4, 5, 6 - Breakfast

## Days 7-8: Tehran

Tehran is a busy, crowded metropolis which boasts some excellent museums, many housed in former palaces. While some may tell you that this city is lacking in charm, its vibrant, dynamic culture and fast-paced lifestyle makes everyday in Tehran an adventure!

Suggested sightseeing - Fin Garden Hamam, Archaeological Museum, Golestan Palace & Carpet Museum

Meals - Day 7, 8 – Breakfast

## Itinerary (cont.)

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### Days 9-10: Tehran and onto Mashhad

Following some free time to further absorb bustling Tehran, board the train for your final stop in Iran – Mashhad.

Best known for its incredible shrine complex of Emam Reza, the eighth grandson of the prophet Mohammed, this is one of the great architectural wonders of the Islamic world and is said to receive more than five million pilgrims a year. Witnessing the respect and emotion is a moving experience even for non-Muslims.

Suggested sightseeing - Emam Reza Shrine, Astan Quds Razavi Museum and Bazaar

Meals - Day 9, 10 - Breakfast

### Days 11-12: Mashhad and to Ashgabat

Leaving Iran your journey will take you across the Kopet Dag Mountains to Turkmenistan and its capital Ashgabat. A flat, sometimes dusty city, twinkling with unique architecture. Turkmenistan's capital vanished in 1948, levelled by an earthquake, and was rebuilt with Soviet-style architecture, filled with opulent marble-clad palaces, gleaming gold domes and vast expanses of well-manicured green spaces.

Venture outside the city to the Parthian Fortress of Nisa, an empire that was among the most powerful and influential civilizations of the ancient world, or enjoy an excursion to the bewitching Darvaza Crater known as the 'The door to Hell'. The natural gas crater was created in 1971 when Soviet geologists started to drill at the site where they tapped into a cavern filled with natural gas. Fearing that the hole would release toxic gas they decided to burn it off with the hope the fire would use all the fuel in a few days, today it is still burning and is quite a sight to encounter.

Suggested sightseeing - Independence Square, Arch of Neutrality, Carpet Museum, Ashgabat National Museum, Inspiration Alley, Tolkuchka Bazaar, Kow Ata Underground Lake, Turkmenbashi Museum, Darvaza Crater excursion, Nisa and a visit to Arkadash Stud Farm

Meals - Day 11, 12 – Breakfast

### Day 13: Ashgabat to Mary

Today we continue our journey through Turkmenistan to the desert oasis of Mary in the Karakum.

Meals - Breakfast

### Days 14-16: Mary to Bukhara via Merv

This morning you depart by road across the Karakum Desert to Bukhara, arriving early evening.

Once known as 'holy' Bukhara, it was historically home to more than 2000 mosques. Today Bukhara's monuments are some of the oldest on the Silk Road; the Ark Fortress, Samanid Mausoleum and the Kaylan Minaret – one of Central Asia's tallest and which was spared destruction from Genghis Khan. The Old Town is well worth exploring, you can enjoy some of the many chaikhanas (tea-houses) in Lyabi-Hauz, one of the most peaceful and interesting people watching spots in town.

Suggested sightseeing - Merv ruins, Ark Fortress, Lyabi-Hauz, Kaylan Minaret, Ismail Samanid Mausoleum, Chor-Minor

Meals - Day 14, 15, 16 – Breakfast

## Itinerary (cont.)

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### Days 17-18. To Samarkand via Shakhrisabz

Continuing across the Kyzyl Kum Desert you will find the fabulous monuments of Samarkand, Tamerlane's turquoise-spangled capital. Here you can explore Central Asia's most spectacular architectural ensemble, the Registan – guaranteed to leave even the most jaded traveller gazing in awe, plus many other highlights including the Shah-i-Zinda Complex, Bibi Khanym Mosque and the Ulug Bek Observatory.

Suggested sightseeing - Registan, Shah-i-Zinda Complex, Bibi Khanym Mosque, Ulug Bek Observatory, Gur Emir Mausoleum

Meals - Day 17 , 18 - Breakfast

### Day 19: Samarkand to Tashkent

Onwards to the Uzbek capital of Tashkent - a city that cleverly juggles its cultural and historical past, the Soviet era's impact and modern-day lifestyles. Here you have a brief opportunity to enjoy the splendour of this old Soviet city.

Suggested sightseeing - Chorsu Bazaar, Amir Timur Square, Monument of Courage, Mustakiliq square, Museum of Applied Art, Tashkent Metro, Tashkent TV Tower, Railway Museum, Jume Mosque

Meals - Breakfast

### Day 20: Tashkent to Almaty via Shymkent

From Tashkent you cross the border to Kazakhstan where your train journey takes you to Almaty, passing occasional, but now-derelict, Silk Road towns along the route.

Meals - Breakfast

### Day 21: Almaty

Nestled in the foothills of the mighty Tien Shan Mountains, Almaty offers an enjoyable change from the desert landscapes of Central Asia. Spend a full day here with the chance to explore the city.

Suggested sightseeing - Republic square, 28 Panfilov soldiers park, Zenkov cathedral, museum of musical instruments, Green Market, Kok Tobe, Arasan Baths.

### Day 22: Almaty and onto Urumqi

The long delayed Sino-Soviet Peace Railway project was finally completed a couple of years ago and today you take full advantage of it to cross through the Dzungarian Gate, bound for China's Xinjiang province home to China's Muslim Uighur population. Snow-capped peaks can be seen for most of the year at the border post of Druzhba (Peace) before the downhill run to Urumqi.

Meals - Day 22 – Breakfast

## Itinerary (cont.)

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### Day 23: Arrive Urumqi

Your train rolls into the capital of the Xinjiang Province, mid-morning.

This is truly a melting pot of an exotic mix of peoples. Whilst here you have the opportunity to gain an insight into how this intriguing clash of cultures came to be at the Xinjiang Regional Museum and witness archaeological treasures from the Silk Road, including a fascinating exhibition of well-preserved 3000 year old Indo-European mummies. Take in the panoramic views from the picturesque Hong Shan Park, and make time to experience the vibrant colours and smells within the bustling Grand Bazaar.

To really immerse yourself in the local culture, and catch a glimpse of day to day life within Urumqi, visit the Bei Yuan Chun Market. Here you will be exposed to the traditional elements of Uighur culture including the delicious cuisine.

Suggested sightseeing - Xinjiang Regional Museum, Red Hill Pagoda, the Grand Bazaar, Hong Shan Park, Bei Yuan Chun Market.

### Day 24: To Turpan

This morning you will be driven beyond the city to the oasis of Turpan, which still reflects life as it was along this part of the Silk Road. Early travellers report that it was once two towns – the smaller of Chinese inhabitants, the larger of the Turks. These days, the faces in the bazaar recall the four corners of Asia.

Most of Turpan's attractions lie outside of the city and its grapevine-trellised pedestrian streets. An excursion to the fascinating Karez Irrigation System, the life source of Turpan, is a must!

Suggested sightseeing - Karez Irrigation System, Emin Minaret and Mosque and Bazaar

### Days 25-26: Turpan and Silk Road Railway

Further explore Turpan and perhaps head out to the ruins of the ancient city of Jiaohe. This is a spectacular site, and due to its remote location perched on top of a cliff, it remains mostly intact.

In the early hours of the morning of Day 26 (just after midnight) you board the Silk Road Railway and leave the Taklamakan Desert in your wake, past Jiayuguan, and the bastion ramparts of the Great Wall's most westerly garrison and onto Xian.

Suggested sightseeing - On day 25, take an excursion to ancient city of Jiaohe

### Day 27: Xian

Once called Chang'an, this was the glittering capital of Cathay. Old pagodas, city walls and watchtowers remain, but the major attraction is the famed Terracotta Warriors that reveal the city's long and turbulent history.

Suggested sightseeing - The Old Town, Bell & Drum Tower, Huaqing Hot Springs, Grand Mosque, Wild Goose Pagoda, Beiyuanmen Muslim Market, Tang Dynasty show

### Day 28: Xian and onto Beijing

Beyond the city is the mind-boggling, entombed Terracotta Warriors. You will be astounded at the display of thousands of life-sized terracotta warriors, a hundred or so chariots plus thousands of weapons before boarding your final overnight train that carries you from the gateway of the great Silk Road to the nation's capital.

Suggested sightseeing - Full Day Excursion to the Terracotta Warriors and Silk Factory

Meals - Breakfast

## Itinerary (cont.)

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### Days 29-30: Beijing

Beijing is an incredible contrast of sights, sounds and smells. Explore the backstreet lanes (hutongs) of the old town with their food stalls and street vendors for a taste of 'old Beijing' and of course the Great Wall of China.

Spend your last morning of this epic journey exploring Beijing's must-see sights, Tiananmen Square and the Temple of Heaven before your journey comes to an end.

Sightseeing - Day 29 - Excursion to the Mutianyu section of the Great Wall of China, Optional activity: Evening performance, Day 30 – Half Day excursion to the Temple of Heaven and Tiananmen Square

Suggested sightseeing - Excursion to the Great Wall of China, acrobatic show, feast on Peking Duck, Temple of Heaven, Tiananmen Square, The Forbidden City, Hutong Tour, Summer Palace

Meals - Day 30 - Breakfast

## What's included

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### Group size

Entirely up to you



### Meals

24 breakfasts



### Transfers

All arrival transfers



### Accommodation

24 hotels/guesthouse (twin share)  
5 train (shared 4-berth)

*Optional single supplement available for hotel stays  
on this journey – prices available on request.*



### Sightseeing

Organise your sightseeing locally or with  
us in advance.



### Expertise

Our Travel Advisors can help you create  
the perfect independent journey. If you  
choose to travel at a Classic service  
level, City Ambassadors are included at  
certain cities to enhance your experience  
with local knowledge.

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## Contact Us

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