

Silk Routes

What awaits the traveller where camel trains have given way to the mechanised version.

Until 1999 the remote western city of Kashgar was an exhausting 1,200km bus journey away from Turpan, across one of the bleakest deserts on earth. Now it is a reasonably comfortable 24-hour train ride through some of China's most stunning, forbidding landscapes. The first section of the track skirts the Turpan Depression, the world's second lowest point, before heading straight into the Tien Shan Mountains. From the window of the dining car the views of the high steppe country are amongst the best in western China. It is sometimes possible to see nomadic herders, ethnically Kazak, bringing their herds down from the high pastures. In the morning the sun rises over a vast, bleak sea of sand, the Taklamakan Desert, punctuated by occasional rifts of black rock. In the early afternoon the train closes in on Kashgar, a fabled trading centre situated at a crucial junction of the Silk Route - head west to Central Asia, Persia and Rome, south for Peshawar and the Punjab and east for Xian.

Paul Done
China & Silk Route Specialist
01869 276 301



FACT FILE

A two week trip encompassing the Silk Route cities of Dunhuang, Turpan and Kashgar starts from £2,295 per person based on twin-share, mid-range hotels and economy class flights.

Lhasa Express

Construction is nearing completion on what is sure to be one of the most spectacular rail journeys in the world, linking Beijing with distant Lhasa. The train will connect the two capitals in 48 hours, passing through remote Qinghai Province en route to the Tibetan Plateau and ascending, at the highest point of the journey, to a staggering 5,072 metres. Exact details are not yet available, but it is likely a limited passenger service will commence operation from 1st July this summer, with a full schedule running by 2007. Steve Howes, China & Tibet specialist, will be taking the journey later this



summer, so for details of how to book on the Lhasa Express, please contact him on 01869 276 264.

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www.audley.co.uk/features/lhasa
To register for updates on the Lhasa Express.

