

SAMARKAND

From its earliest days as Afrosiab/ Marakanda to its glory days under Timur, Samarkand has been a great trade centre for 2500 years and has become a literary symbol of Silk Road exotica.

FERGANA VALLEY

It was China's desire for horses to battle its northern nomads that prised open the Silk Road. China's first expeditions west were to Fergana to source its famed 'blood-sweating' Heavenly Horses.

TASH RABAT

The Silk Road was once lined with *rabat*, or caravanserais, built to offer food and shelter to passing caravans. This 'Stone Caravanserai' in the high pastures of Kyrgyzstan is Central Asia's best.

KASHGAR

This great Central Asian entrepôt remains a vital Silk Road hub at the junction of trade routes to Fergana, the Wakhan, Hunza and the jade markets of Khotan (China).

KONYE-URGENCH

Astride a Silk Road branch following the Amu-Darya en route to the Volga region, Konye-Urgench (Gurgan) grew rich on transcontinental trade until the destruction of its irrigation canals shifted the capital to Khiva.

NORTHERN ROUTE

This route through the Zhungarian Gap, along the north of the Tian Shan, offered easier travel and better pasture for caravans but was also more prone to nomadic raids.

XI'AN (CHANG'AN)

The beginning and end of the Silk Road, Tang China's capital was home to a cosmopolitan mix of Central Asian traders, musicians and such exotica as Samarkand's famed golden peaches.

DUNHUANG

The best example of Silk Road artistic fusion, with Central Asian, Tibetan, Indian and Chinese influences blending in spectacular Buddhist cave murals on the edge of the desert.

JADE GATE

Jade from Khotan was as important a Silk Road product as silk. This customs gate and defensive garrison marked the division between the Central Asian and Chinese worlds.

SOUTHERN ROUTE

A string of oases along the fringes of the Taklamakan Desert made this tough desert stretch feasible, until climate change dried wells and covered its cities with shifting sand.

PENJIKENT

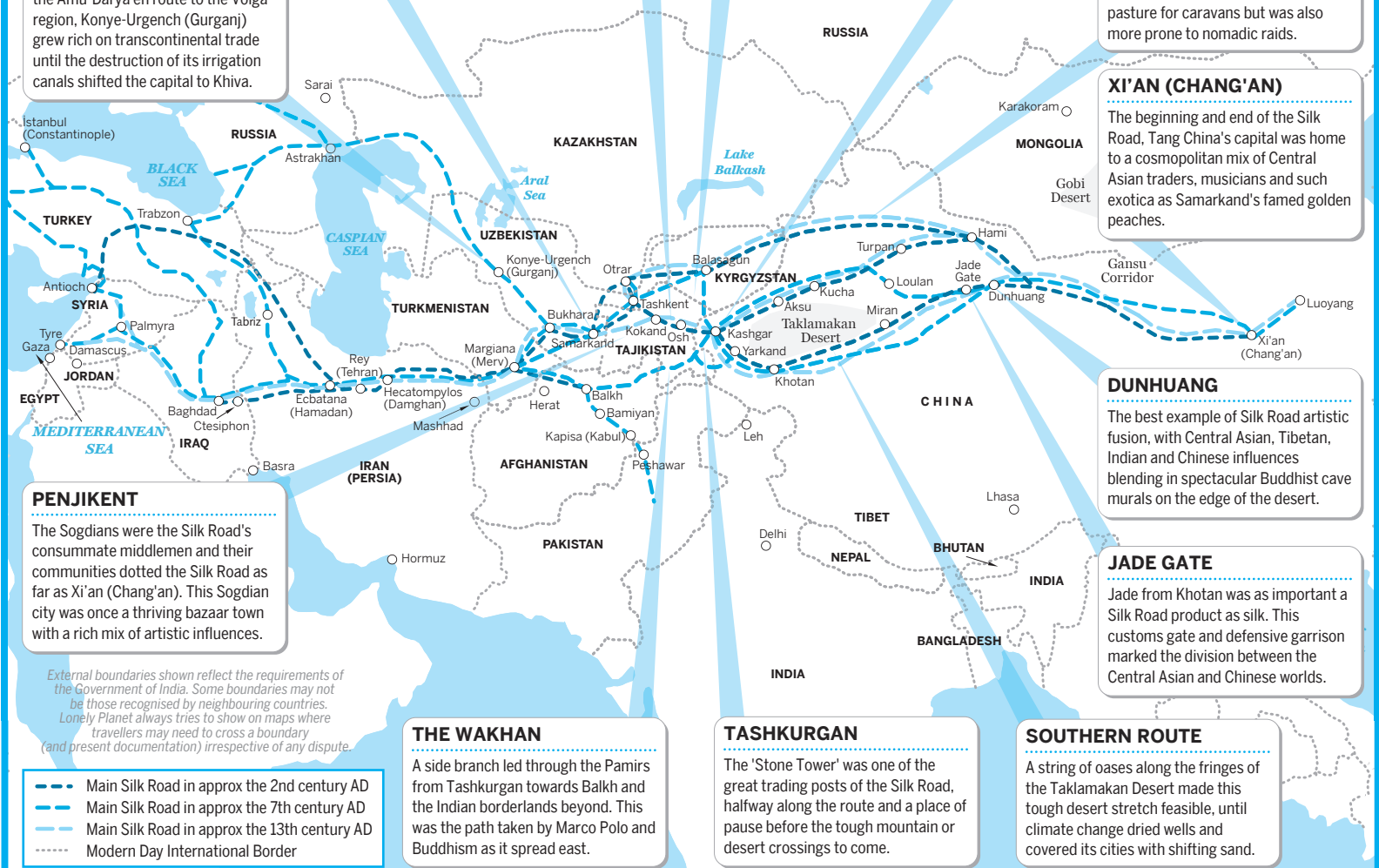
The Sogdians were the Silk Road's consummate middlemen and their communities dotted the Silk Road as far as Xi'an (Chang'an). This Sogdian city was once a thriving bazaar town with a rich mix of artistic influences.

THE WAKHAN

A side branch led through the Pamirs from Tashkurgan towards Balkh and the Indian borderlands beyond. This was the path taken by Marco Polo and Buddhism as it spread east.

TASHKURGAN

The 'Stone Tower' was one of the great trading posts of the Silk Road, halfway along the route and a place of pause before the tough mountain or desert crossings to come.



External boundaries shown reflect the requirements of the Government of India. Some boundaries may not be those recognised by neighbouring countries. Lonely Planet always tries to show on maps where travellers may need to cross a boundary (and present documentation) irrespective of any dispute.

- Main Silk Road in approx the 2nd century AD
- Main Silk Road in approx the 7th century AD
- ... Main Silk Road in approx the 13th century AD
- Modern Day International Border