



Xīnjiāng

POP 21.8 MILLION

Includes ➔

Ürümqi	795
Turpan	801
Kuqa	805
Kashgar	806
Karakoram	
Highway	812
Yarkand	814
Hotan	817
Cherchen	819

Best Bazaars

- ➔ Sunday market (p817), Hotan
- ➔ Livestock market (p807), Kashgar
- ➔ Sunday bazaar (p805), Kuqa
- ➔ Sunday market (p816), Yarkand

Best Off the Beaten Track

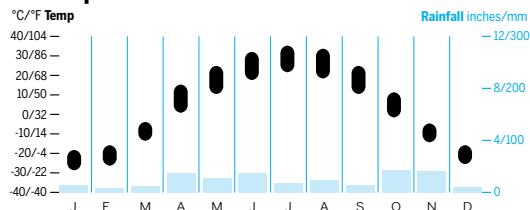
- ➔ Shipton's Arch (p809)
- ➔ Horse trek to Hémù in Kanas Lake Nature Reserve (p821)
- ➔ Hiking around Muztagh Ata (p813)
- ➔ Bezeklik Caves (p804)

Why Go?

In this far-flung and restive frontier province, Central Asian culture is very much alive: from the irresistible smell of tea-house kebabs, to the bustle of bazaars and markets, to the sound of the call to prayer from the neighbourhood mosque. Xīnjiāng is China's Uighur homeland, but for a thousand years it was also a portal and stronghold for Buddhism in the Middle Kingdom. Outside Silk Road oasis towns the legacy of this remains in stunning cave art, and the ruins of ancient cities and monasteries. The awesomeness of Xīnjiāng's environment is an equal draw for travellers, from the scorching sands of the Taklamakan Desert to the cool forests and lakes of the Tiān Shān (Heavenly Mountains). In short, a journey to Chinese Turkestan rewards as an exploration of China's past, its unsettled multicultural present, or simply as an adventure into one of the most sublime landscapes on earth.

When to Go

Ürümqi



Mar Nauryz (New Year) festivals held in Kazakh and Kyrgyz villages.

Aug Celebrate the grape-harvest festival in Turpan

Sep Autumnal colours at Kanas Lake and Hémù.

History

By the end of the 2nd century BC the expanding Han dynasty had pushed its borders west into what is now Xinjiang. Military garrisons protected the fledgling trade routes, as silk flowed out of the empire in return for the strong Ferghana horses needed to fight nomadic incursions from the north. Chinese imperial rule waxed and waned over the centuries, shrinking after the collapse of the Han and reasserting itself during the

7th-century Tang, though central control was tenuous at best. A Uighur kingdom based at Khocho thrived from the 8th century and oversaw the Central Asian people's transformation from nomads to farmers and from Manichaeans to Buddhists.

It was during Kharakhanid rule in the 10th to 12th centuries that Islam took hold in Xinjiang. In 1219, Yīlí (Ili), Hotan and Kashgar fell to the Mongols and their various successors controlled the whole of Central



Xinjiang Highlights

- 1 Follow the footprints of Marco Polo along the **southern Silk Road** (p814)
- 2 Stay overnight in a yurt and marvel at the dramatic mountain scenery of the **Karakoram Highway** (p812)
- 3 Explore the ancient ruins, such as **Jiāohé** (p803), near the laid-back oasis town of Turpan
- 4 Haggle for a fat-tailed sheep at the Sunday livestock market at **Kashgar** (p807)
- 5 Explore the story of Buddhism and Central Asian silk in **Hotan** (p817)
- 6 Pause on the northern Silk Road at **Kuqa** (p805), for its authentic bazaar and nearby Buddhist ruins