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 teahouse 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**

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**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, Yili (Ili), Hotan and Kashgar fell to the Mongols and their various successors controlled the whole of Central Asia.