

SHANGHAI AMERICAN SCHOOL

MICROCAMPUS

Traversing the Mystical
Pathways of the Silk Road

JUNE 7 - 14, 2024

A voyage of discovery tracing the ancient pathways of the Silk Road from Lanzhou to Dunhuang.

EXPERIENCES



TEMPLES AND GROTTOS

Students will visit many ancient temples representing China's diverse landscape of cultural syncretism along the Silk Roads.



GREAT WALL AND FORTS

Students will have the opportunity to see and climb the far Northwestern edges of the impressive Great Wall of China.



FOOD AND DRINK

Students will sample foods from different areas representing the diversity of spices and produce in the region, including the world famous Lanzhou Noodles.



CULTURAL SYNCRETISM

Students will discover the fusion of Buddhist, Muslim, and Confucian ideologies in the art, music, and clothing along the Northern Silk Roads.



Mural in one of the Mogao Grottoes



LANZHOU

Since ancient times, Lanzhou has been an important ferry on the banks of the Yellow River. The unearthed Majiayao potteries and Qijia culture, belonging to the later stages of the Yangshao culture, represent how the society from that era had truly entered a new phase. Lanzhou is also China's only provincial capital where the Yellow River flows through the whole city.

A scenic area has been constructed on the banks of the Yellow River in Lanzhou, boasting the city's cultural heritages of the Zhongshan Bridge, Yellow River Mother Sculpture, sheepskin raft, waterwheel and others renovated as Yellow River-themed attractions.

Dubbed the cradle of Chinese civilization, the Yellow River is the birthplace of the Chinese nation.

From the Xia and Shang Dynasties through to the Tang Dynasty, the Yellow River area was China's center of politics, economy and culture. There are many cultural developments that can be accredited to the Yellow River civilization such as potteries, silks, bronze and characters.

Between 4,000 B.C. and 2,000 B.C., the Yellow River culture stretched across two millennia, making it the symbol of the Chinese nation. From Kunlun Mountain to the Pacific Ocean, it is a melting pot of hundreds of rivers that have generated the brilliance of Chinese culture.

ZHANGYE

Zhangye is a prefecture-level city situated in the northwest of Gansu province, resting at the heart of the legendary Hexi Corridor. The misty Qilian Mountains lie to its north, while to its south you'll find Mount Heli and Mount Longshou.

The Hei River flows directly through the city and has formed a number of oases, endowing the region with its remarkably luxurious greenery. It acted as a frontier town throughout China's history, sitting at the centre of the historic natural passageway between the Far East and Central Asia. The name "Zhangye", which literally means "to extend the arm", is an abbreviation of the ancient Chinese saying "to extend the arm of the country, through to the Western Realm".

During the Han Dynasty (206 BC– 220 AD), Zhangye rose to prominence as one of the focal trade hubs along the Silk Road and was fiercely defended by the Chinese army against the invading Xiongnu people. It was given its current name in 111 BC but Zhangye Prefecture was originally known as Ganzhou, which is where the "Gan" of Gansu province was derived. By the Sui Dynasty (581-618), it had rapidly developed into a metropolis for international trade and, during the Tang Dynasty (618-907), the famous monk Xuanzang passed through the city on his way to India.





JIAYUGUAN

Known as the 'Mouth of China', Jiayuguan is most famous for its impressive fort. Constructed during the Ming dynasty, the Jiayuguan Pass represents the westernmost end of the Great Wall of China. Given its scenic position the town was strategically placed to defend the Silk Road as it went on its way out of China.

The Jiayuguan Great Wall differs from more popular sections near Beijing, as it is built with rammed earth from the surrounding desert. The Jiayuguan Fort is one of the Silk Road's most recognisable images. Known as the 'Most Impregnable Pass Under Heaven', Jiayuguan Pass is one of the best preserved of the Great Wall's fortresses.

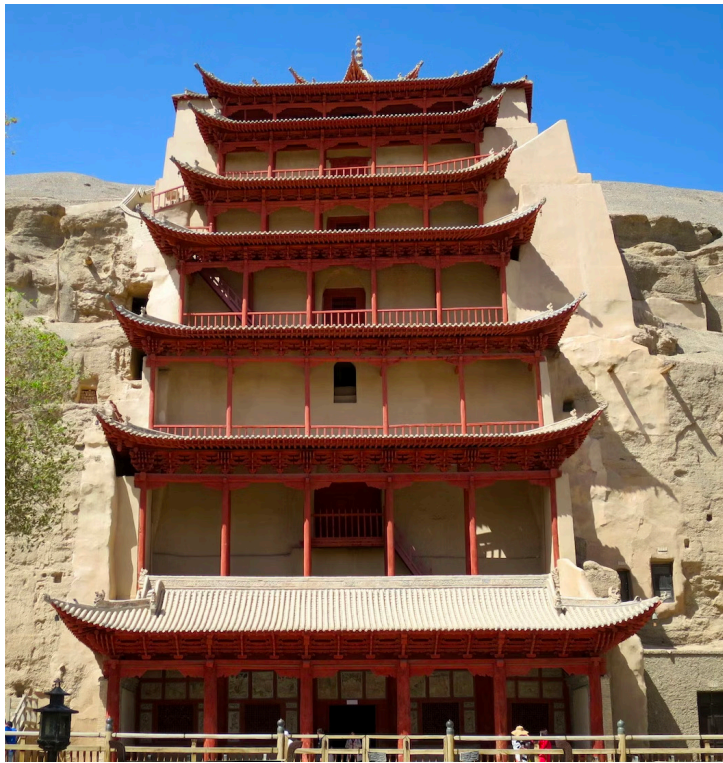
Jiayu Pass was built in the Ming Dynasty (1368 – 1644) under the supervision of Feng Sheng, a founding general of the Ming Dynasty. When first completed, there were only ramparts surrounding the barracks. After 168 years of enhancements, the pass assumed its present appearance.

Covering an area of 33,529 square meters, Jiayuguan Pass on the Great Wall has a complex and integrated defensive system: an inner city, the central area with many buildings, an outer city, and finally a moat. You can also find military facilities such as arrow towers, turrets, and cannons along the wall.

DUNHUANG

Lying in an oasis at the edge of the Taklamakan Desert, Dunhuang was one of the first trading cities encountered by merchants arriving in China from the west. It was also an ancient site of Buddhist religious activity, and was a popular destination for pilgrims, as well as acting as a garrison town protecting the region. The remarkable Mogao Caves, a collection of nearly 500 caves in the cliffs to the south of the city, contain the largest depository of historic documents along the Silk Roads and bear witness to the cultural, religious, social and commercial activity that took place in Dunhuang across the first millennium. The city changed hands many times over its long history, but remained a vibrant hub of exchange until the 11th century, after which its role in Silk Road trade began to decline.

The Silk Road routes from China to the west passed to the north and south of the Taklamakan Desert, and Dunhuang lay on the junction where these two routes came together. Additionally, the city lies near the western edge of the Gobi Desert, and north of the Mingsha Sand Dunes (whose name means 'gurgling sand', a reference to the noise of the wind over the dunes), making Dunhuang a vital resting point for merchants and pilgrims travelling through the region from all directions.



The Silk Road originating in China and extending West to the edges of Western Europe have held a deep fascination for historians and adventure seekers. Merchants carried silk from China to Europe, where it dressed royalty and wealthy patrons. Other favorite commodities from Asia included jade and other precious stones, porcelain, tea, and spices. In exchange, horses, glassware, textiles, and other manufactured goods traveled eastward.

The 2000 km that we will travel on this trip may have taken nomadic peoples around 115 days to complete. If nomadic peoples stayed for one week at each of the ancient cities we will visit (buying and selling their goods), we can assume an average of 140-150 days (or almost 5 months) of travel from Lanzhou to Dunhuang. Due to the new, high-speed trains in the region, we can cover the distance in one week. Students will experience the thrill of traveling along one of the most significant sections of the Silk Road, engaging with cultures and traditions that have survived for over 1,500 years.

Religion and ideas spread along the Silk Road just as fluidly as goods. The exchange of information gave rise to new technologies and innovations that would change the world. The horses introduced to China contributed to the might of the Mongol Empire, while gunpowder from China changed the very nature of war in Europe and beyond. Diseases also traveled along the Silk Road. Some research suggests that the Black Death, which devastated Europe in the late 1340s C.E., likely spread from Asia along the Silk Road. The Age of Exploration gave rise to faster routes between the East and West, but parts of the Silk Road continued to be critical pathways among varied cultures. Today, parts of the Silk Road are listed on UNESCO's World Heritage List.

Yueya Spring, Dunhuang







ITINERARY

OVERVIEW

Our journey will take us from the capital city of Lanzhou in Gansu Province through Zhangye, Jiayuguan Pass, and Dunhuang. Each site and city we visit represents a unique and fascinating cultural landscape



forever shaped by the interactions along the Silk Roads. Curated activities and experiences highlight the rich diversity that flourished along these complex networks of exchange for more than 1,500 years.

MICROCAMPUS

SHANGHAI TO LANZHOU



June 7th, Friday



We will take a flight from Shanghai directly after school to Lanzhou, the capital city of Gansu Province. Students will need to be fully packed and ready to take busses from campus in order to catch our flights from the airport.

Our group will be chaperoned by a team of educators from Shanghai American School, Pudong, as well as a specialized team of experts from Gansu Province who will coordinate activities throughout the trip.

The first day will consist of travel to Gansu Province, a bus ride to the hotel, and check in procedures to ensure everyone is where they need to be. Students will have the opportunity to rest after a long day of school and travel to prepare themselves for the activities on Saturday, the 8th.

June 8th, Saturday



We will begin our day with breakfast and a welcome orientation laying out the itinerary, as well as expectations for students throughout the trip. Students will then be given a private tour of the Lanzhou Provincial Museum containing some of China's most interesting and historically-relevant artifacts, including the iconic 'Flying Horse' sculpture.

Students will have the opportunity to visit a Yellow River heritage area where craftsmen will demonstrate goatskin raft-making, a tradition which has been kept alive since the mid-nineteenth century. The sheepskin raft was called "Huntuo" during the Song Dynasty, and was used as a means of water transportation that made crossing the Yellow River more convenient.

Later, students will have the opportunity to learn how to make Lanzhou's famous pulled noodles from a local restaurant. We will all be able to enjoy this specialty cuisine, a dish with a rich history dating back to the Qing Dynasty era (1799), originally known as Lanzhou Beef Noodles.





June 9th, Sunday



Our trip will take us to Zhangye to visit the famous and mysterious Matisi Grottoes. Matisi Temple Scenic Area is one large grotto group consisting of 7 small grotto groups stretching 30 kilometers. Legend has it that once a sacred horse left its footprint in a rock here, so Matisi Temple (also called Horse Hoof Temple, Mati in Chinese means Horse Hoof) got its name. There is no official record proving the exact time when Matisi Temple was built. However, large numbers of poets have portrayed Matisi Temple in their great works, and the earliest could date back to Eastern Jin Dynasty (A.D. 317 - 402). Because of its long history, Matisi Temple, together with Mogao Grottoes in Dunhuang and Yulin Grottoes in Anxi, is regarded as the Three Artistic Treasured Grottoes of Hexi Buddha Holy Land.

The Matisi grottoes provide students with a unique cultural experience that combines breath-taking expanses of mountains and rivers in every direction. These beautiful features represent the flow of Buddhist beliefs into China along the Silk Roads.

June 10th, Monday



Our adventure takes us to a Yugur camp outside of Zhangye to experience life on the high plains in a traditional setting. The Yugur ethnic minority can trace its origins to the nomadic ancient Ouigurs in the Erhun River valley during the Tang Dynasty (618-907). In the mid-9th century, the ancient Ouigurs, beset by snowstorms, feuding within the ruling group and attacks from the Turkic Kirgiz, had to move westward in separate groups. One of the groups emigrated to Guazhou (present-day Dunhuang), Ganzhou (present-day Zhangye) and Liangzhou (present-day Wuwei) in the Hexi Corridor – the most fertile area in central-western Gansu Province – and came under the rule of Tubo, a Tibetan kingdom. They were thus called the Hexi Ouigurs. Later, they captured the city of Ganzhou and set up a khanate – thus they were also called Ganzhou Ouigurs.

Our group will then travel to Jiayuguan Pass and the Western edge of the Great Wall where we will spend time admiring some of the most famous landscapes and fortresses in all of China.

We will have dinner and check into our hotels for the night in Jiayuguan.

Jiayuguan Pass Fortress



JIAYUGUAN TO DUNHUANG



June 11th, Tuesday



Students will have the opportunity to visit the Wei and Jin Tombs containing brick paintings dating back 265-420 AD. These graves are brick-laid and more than 700 bricks are vividly painted in vibrant colors.

Renowned as the largest subterranean art gallery in the world, housing a great deal of colorful murals, the gallery has attracted tourists from all over the world. Most tombs are of families, housing bodies of three or four generations, and now only Grave 6 and Grave 7 are open for tourism.

Our group will have special access, as well as exciting activities that will engage students in creating their own brick paintings, which they will take with them.

After lunch, we will take a train to Dunhuang, where we will have a barbeque and bonfire to watch the sunset and stargaze in the beautiful Gobi desert. We will spend the night in traditional accommodations in one of the most significant Silk Road destinations the way ancient merchants use to do a thousand years ago.

June 12th, Wednesday



After checking in to our hotel and having breakfast, we will travel to Yueya Spring where students will have fun riding camels, sledding down sand dunes, and relaxing after the activities of the previous few days. This is a good opportunity for students to decompress and reflect on their experiences up to this point.

After lunch, we will drive to the Mogao Grottoes for a private tour, including access to caves that are not open to the public.

Carved into the cliffs above the Dachuan River, the Mogao Caves south-east of the Dunhuang oasis, Gansu Province, comprise the largest, most richly endowed, and longest used treasure house of Buddhist art in the world. It was first constructed in 366AD and represents the great achievement of Buddhist art from the 4th to the 14th century. 492 caves are presently preserved, housing about 45,000 square meters of murals and more than 2,000 painted sculptures.

After our exploration of the Mogao Grottoes, we will relax at the Dunhuang night market where students will be free to enjoy dinner on their own and reminisce with friends.



DUNHUANG



June 13th, Thursday



We will be spending a few days discovering the secrets of the Mogao Grottoes. Students will gain access to special caves not open to the general public. After exploring these unique treasures, we will learn how Buddhist monks created the unique statues and frescoes inside of the caves, and we will make our own clay and hay tablets out of the traditional materials.

Students will then have an opportunity to see a special exhibition and VR (virtual reality) experience highlighting the intricacies of some of the most vulnerable frescoes and statues. We will have a dinner and see traditional dress and costumes from a millennia of Chinese traditions in Dunhuang.

Our group will have the honor of receiving special certificates upon completion of our scheduled activities that will signify their participation in the restoration and preservation of the Mogao Grottoes. These certificates are presented by UNESCO and Shanghai American School, and will be a wonderful addition to student portfolios when applying for colleges and universities worldwide.

June 14th, Friday



After breakfast and check out, students will paint the clay tablets that they created in the previous day. They will use templates to recreate some of the most famous motifs found in the Mogao Grottoes.

We will have one final ceremony and celebration where we will present the certificates and congratulate the students on their achievements. Lunch will be provided and then we will take buses to the Dunhuang airport for flights back to Shanghai in the afternoon.

The Microcampus experience: Traversing the Mystical Pathways of the Silk Road is intended to give students the opportunity to see, hear, touch, and taste the diverse and unique elements that make up one of the most beautiful parts of China's ancient Silk Road.

We believe that this trip will be something each and every one of our students will remember for the rest of their lives.

Thank you,

the SAS PD Microcampus Team





SAS PUDONG

REFLECTION

Chinese history, particularly along the Silk Roads, is a beautiful amalgamation of languages, beliefs, ethnicities, and cultural traditions. Exploring the syncretism and acculturation along the Silk Roads from Lanzhou to Dunhuang will give students



invaluable insight into China's rich history. As the world enters a new stage of access and development, it is important that ancient cultures and ideas are preserved for this, and future generations.





FINAL THOUGHTS

This trip has been thoroughly scouted by faculty and 3rd party vendors of Shanghai American School, Pudong. The schedule represents the best possible experience for students in each city or area we visit.

The itinerary may change due to unforeseen circumstances, and the decision to move or remove certain activities will be the purview of onsite chaperones and vendors. Every reasonable attempt will be made to adhere to the schedule in order to give each student an experience they will never forget.

We are committed to a safe and secure environment and set of activities for our students, faculty, and staff on the trip. To that end, our decision-making process will place safety and security as the top priority.

If your child has a gluten or nut allergy, it is advisable that they take precautions in terms of medication or refrain from coming on the trip as we cannot control ingredients in foods we encounter along the way.

There are some high altitude sections of the trip. If your child is susceptible to altitude sickness, this is something that should be discussed with your family doctor in regards to feasibility of attendance.

Thank you.



***TRAVERSING THE MYSTICAL
PATHWAYS OF THE SILK ROAD***

MICROCAMPUS

Thank you to everyone who contributed to making this trip a reality for our students. We truly believe that this experience will become a legacy program for Shanghai American School.