Xinjiang: Pamir & Taklamakan

DAY 01 : Kuala Lumpur – Korla (flight 17h)

Board a post-midnight flight via Chengdu to Xinjiang's second largest city Korla. Late afternoon arrival, transfer to hotel. Korla is in the central part of Xinjiang, on the southern slope of Tianshan ranges, and at the edge of Tarim Basin. It is known for producing fragrant pears, hence also nicknamed the Pear City.

DAY 02 : Korla – Luntai Poplar Forest (220km)

Depart for Luntai, visit Tarim Basin Poplar Forest Park to admire autumn view. Legend says the poplar could live for one thousand years, and upon death, it would not tumble for another one thousand years, and once it fell, it would not decay for another thousand years. The 100 sqkm park is located at the northern part of Desert Highway, offering sights of poplars, river, desert, lake. Overnight at a hotel at the park's entrance.

DAY 03 : Luntai Poplar Forest – Tazhong (270km)

Today explore the Desert Highway that cuts across Taklamakan Desert, the world's longest road built in shifting sand dune area, total length 522km (of which 446km in shifting sand region). The highway was built in the 1990s for petroleum industry in Taklamakan Desert. To avoid the road being swallowed by shifting sand, shrubs are planted on both sides, and the green belt is maintained by 108 water stations along the highway. Overnight in Tazhong, the only settlement in the heart of the desert.

DAY 04 : Tazhong – Yutian (360km)

After breakfast, admire sunrise over Taklamakan Desert. Later, continue driving on the Desert Highway heading south, photo stops along the way, pull aside and walk across the roadside green belt to enter dune areas, have fun climbing sand dunes for a vantage viewpoint of the vast desert. Overnight in Yutian.

DAY 05 : Yutian – Hotan (180km)

Head to Hotan, once an important silk distribution city along the ancient Silk Road. Upon arrival, visit Hotan Museum, learn about the rich history of Hotan and its role during the Silk Road heyday. Later, visit a handmade carpet workshop to understand the significance of carpet in locals' daily life. Afternoon walk along the Hotan river banks, if lucky might spot precious jade. Evening, visit night market to sample local delicacies.

DAY 06 : Hotan – Kashgar (500km)

A day of long drive, though the kilometers count is a lot but mostly on good highway, lunch at rest area along the highway. Late afternoon arrive in Kashgar, a well-known ancient Silk Road city and the most iconic Uyghur city in Xinjiang. At night, one may opt to explore the lit-up Old Town to admire night view, or stroll along the bank of Toman River with well-paved foot paths.

DAY 07 : Kashgar

After breakfast, attend the Old Town gate-opening ceremony, followed by exploring the Old Town. A maze of alleyways radiated from the Old Town's central square by the biggest mosque Id Kah, lined with market, handicraft workshops, and residences. The old town is a mix of living and commercial quarters of the Uyghur community, and it was the filming location of Kite Runner. Also visit the quarter built on a high terrace. At night, visit the street food market to sample Uyghur specialty dishes, such as dove soup, goat trotter stew, meat dumpling.

DAY 08 : Kashgar

Morning visit to the Sunday livestock market in the city outskirts. This is a huge weekly bazaar, where sheep, cattle, camels, donkeys, and horses are traded. Set on an open field, full of sight and sound, with food stalls on the sideline. Afternoon back in Kashgar old town, enjoy sweet tea at hundred years old teahouse fronting the market street and watch life goes by.

DAY 09 : Kashgar — Tashkurgan (440km)

Depart to Pamir Plateau, altitude ascend. En-route visit Muji Mud Volcanoes, short trek (2km) to view craters up-close. Centuries ago, underground gases burst forth carrying mud, creating multiple craters that later filled with water, glowing sulphur yellow and peacock blue. Seen from above, resembling giant eye, earning the name "Eye of Pamir". The site has an average altitude of 3700m, surrounded by snow-capped ranges and wetland. Overnight in Tashkurgan, Tajik ethnic autonomous region.

DAY 10 : Tashkurgan – Khunjerab Pass – Tashkurgan (260km)

Early morning proceed to Khunjerab Pass, the world's highest international border crossing (China-Pakistan) and the highest point (4733m) on the Karakoram Highway. A scenic drive through the Pamir plateau, the way was once part of the ancient Silk Road, Tang Dynasty monk Xuan Zang once travelled via this route to India. Afternoon return to Tashkurgan, visit the ancient Stone City ruins dated some 2000 years old, also visit the picturesque Golden Marsh Wetland for sunset view.

DAY 11 : Tashkurgan – Bachu (560km)

A day with long drive, retracing the road up north. Along the way, making multiple photo stops, places of interest include high altitude lakes over 3000m – Baisha and Karakul lakes. Admire vista view of Kunlun snow mountain ranges, including the peaks of Muztagh Ata (7,546 m), Kongur Tagh (7,649 m), and Kongur Tiube (7,530m) from a distance. Overnight in Bachu.

DAY 12 : Bachu – Baicheng (480km)

Depart for Wensu Great Canyon, explore interesting landforms such as gorges, eroded rock formations, salt rocks, and more. The canyon is located along the ancient Muzart route that linked the north and south of Tianshan ranges, legend claimed that Tang Dynasty monk Xuan Zang passed through here on his way to India. Overnight in Baicheng.

DAY 13 : Baicheng – Kuche (150km)

Visit Kizil Caves, the ancient Buddhist cave complex dated back to 3rd century, but was abandoned around 8th century. The complex has 236 caves, but today only 6 are opened for visit. In early 20th century, many murals in the caves were removed by western explorers. Upon arrival in Kuche, visit the great mosque and local bazaar.

DAY 14 : Kuche – Korla – Urumqi (300km drive + 4h speed train)

Drive east towards Korla, upon arrival, change into train to reach Xinjiang provincial capital Urumqi. The train travels from the southern slope into the northern slope of Tianshan ranges, due to difficult terrain and passing through many wind-sweep areas, the speed is limited under 120km/h. Arrive in Urumqi at night, transfer to city center hotel.

DAY 15 : Urumqi

Last day in Xinjiang, explore Urumqi, a city with the farthest distance from the ocean in the world, it is also Asia’ s geographical center. Urumqi is resided by multiethnic groups, including Uyghur, Han, Hui, and Kazakh people, who jointly shaped the city. Free and easy day, one may visit the International Grand Bazaar for last minute souvenir shopping, local handicrafts include Uyghur hat, ethnic embroidery, Yengisar knife, and silk.

DAY 16 : Urumqi – Kuala Lumpur (13h flight)

Early morning transfer to airport, catch a flight back to Kuala Lumpur via Beijing. Arrive at destination in late night, end of tour.

Price Details

Fee includes:

1. Accommodation (Hotels approved to receive foreigners, two-sharing basis)
2. Transport (tourist bus/ train)
3. Local tour guide (Chinese speaking)
4. Entrance fee as per itinerary
5. Restricted border area permit

Fee excludes:

1. Flights (proposed flights by Sichuan Airlines + Air China: 1. Kuala Lumpur–Korla, 2. Urumqi–Kuala Lumpur, airfare estimate from RM 3,000. Once the trip is confirmed, LevArt shall provide flight details for members to self-purchase online)
2. Meals (estimate budget RM 1200 for entire trip)
3. Tips for local guide & driver
4. All cost incurred during free & easy/ optional activities and optional tourist sites
5. Additional cost due to unforeseen calamity (acts of god)
6. International travel insurance (Members must self-purchase. LevArt cannot be held responsible for any losses as a result of you being inadequately insured/ without insurance)

Reminders

- This road trip covers huge distance, some days long drive, those with motion sickness please prepare own medicine.
- Day and night temperature gap is huge, strong UV, dry weather. Drink lots of water and eat more fruits.
- Majority of Xinjing locals are Muslims, respect local culture, avoid touching on local taboos, and dress modestly, especially when visiting religious places.
- Xinjiang is a politically sensitive region, lots of checkpoints and surveillance, please adhere to advice by local guide, and avoid straying off from group.
- The itinerary includes 3 days in highland region, could take altitude sickness preventive drug in advance.

Hardship Level: 2★

- Long distance drive, some days stuck in travelling vehicle for long hours.
- Huge temperature gap between day and night.
- Risk of high altitude sickness during excursion in Pamir Plateau.
- Some places lack modern and clean toilet.

- Itinerary includes short hiking trip on glacier, and lots of walking to explore old cities and ruins.