



The Silk Road is a term used to describe the myriad of ancient trade routes that connect the east Asian continent to the European continent.

These trade routes include the most captivating and elusive parts of Asia beginning in China and crossing parts of Mongolia, Central Asia, the Middle East and into Turkey, while some argue they even extend into Pakistan, Afghanistan and India.



The Silk Road route begins in China.

Our bicycle travels took us from Western China into the Central Asian countries of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, then Iran, the Caucasus and Turkey. If you're looking for a basic guide of this route, possible ways to travel and what to expect along the way – then read on for more.



Kyrgyzstan is one of the countries along the route.

What to see on the Silk Road

The Silk Road covers a vast region and intersects some of the world's most important historical cultures, empires, and famous figures. It encompasses the history of the Muslim caravan traders selling goods from far Eastern Asia, Middle East or Europe, the Empire of the Mongols, Ottomans and Persians, and most recently the rise and fall of the Soviet Union.



Our cycle touring setup in Western China.

The countries of Central Asia provide some of the most interesting landscapes and histories, including:

- The mountain landscapes of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.
- The horse culture, grassy plains and desert landscapes of the Central Asian Steppe.
- The historical caravan trading cities of Uzbekistan, such as the city of Samarkand.



Registan Square is in the heart of Samarkand in Uzbekistan.

Iran to Central Asia - Mashhad

If you continue into Iran from Central Asia, then we would recommend the spiritual city of Mashhad which is home to Holy Shrine of Imam Reza. This shrine is the second largest in the world, only beaten in size by the shrine in the Holy City of Mecca.



Snowboarding in the Caucas Mountains.

The Caucasus - Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia

Next is the Caucasus which includes the countries of Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia whose unique histories and geographic position between the Middle East, Central Asia and Europe have shaped a culture separate to all countries adjacent. Their emergence from the Soviet Union is perhaps the most pronounced here compared to Central Asia.



The city of Tbilisi at night in Georgia.

Turkey

Finally, following this route you will enter Turkey, the geographic midpoint between the east, west and south. Due to its unique geographic position, Turkey is covered with ancient monuments leftover from an array of empires and a sensational combination of food from all over the world.

The highlights of Turkey are endless and include ancient historical sites, famous food, vibrant culture and diverse landscapes from the calcium-soaked rocks of Pamukkale, to the blue of the Mediterranean, the 'holy' hills of Cappadocia and the mighty mountains in the East.



The holy hills of Cappadocia in Turkey.

When to go?

It's possible to travel the Silk Road at all times of the year. However, we would recommend going in late spring, early autumn or summer. It does get hot in summer with temperatures reaching up to 40 degrees Celsius in some regions.

However, winter gets well into the minus 40 degrees Celsius. Particularly, the Central Asian countries can be outrageously difficult to travel in winter due to the state of the roads and the distances between large towns/cities.



Winter can be a tricky time to visit.

What to eat?

If you travel from China all the way to Turkey, then your gastronomic adventure will be endlessly satisfied. You will experience the exotic spiced regions of Turkey and Iran, to the horse eating and pilaf munching culture of the Steppe countries, and finally, to the best all-you-can-eat noodles in China. The different choices of food are endless and change in nearly every country.



The huge array of cuisines along the Silk Road will be an experience in itself.

How do I travel the Silk Road?

We always recommend travelling by bicycle! The Central Asian countries of the Silk Road are one of the most famous adventure cycling routes in the entire world. During summer you can expect to see a few people on bicycles every day along the Pamir highway in Tajikistan, which is a heaven for cycle tourists due to the remote country, perfect camping spots and the vastness of the Pamir mountain ranges.



This route is one of the most famous cycling routes worldwide.

However, cycling takes a long time and not all tourists have an endless schedule or a month



to complete the Pamir highway. Other options include trains, cars, buses, aeroplanes, or a combination of them all. Trains are our suggested option as they connect many regions and, in these countries, they are usually very cheap.

In Turkmenistan, we took an overnight train of around 5 to 10 USD! The old Soviet trains are very comfortable and usually have sleeping sections.

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Cycling is a great option, but it's not for everyone.

Is it safe to travel the Silk Road?

We travelled by bicycle and our number one concern was...VEHICLES! Other than cars/trucks we didn't have any problems relating to safety in these countries, but that isn't to say other travellers don't so make sure you keep your wits about you and stay vigilant.

The Central Asian country of Turkmenistan has particularly unique laws on tourists and if you plan to go there, do your research. Finally, travelling as a solo female or a group of females has higher risks, unfortunately.

It is advisable to travel with a male you trust in some areas of the Silk Road. Advice on safety for each country should be sought out from [Smartraveller](#).



We felt quite safe when exploring this route but do your own research.

What visas will you need?

The visa situation for Australians is usually pretty good. Most countries are visa-free or you obtain visas online. The countries which are exceptionally difficult include China, Turkmenistan and to a lesser degree Iran.

Visa advice should be sought from [Smartraveller](#) or another reputable source. For more details, tips and advice on booking tourist visas, head [here](#).



This is just a taste of what the Silk Road has to offer.

Where to find more details on the Silk Road

This is a short description of a very complicated region to travel. It would be impossible to cover all of these countries in a single blog. However, if you want to travel here then the most comprehensive information that we found was from this website [here](#). It has information on individual countries, visas and the most up-to-date information for travellers currently adventuring along the Silk Road.

What route do you plan on travelling in the near future?