



Trekking the Planet

Discovering the Cultural and Natural Significance of the World



Where are we now?

- Darren and Sandy are in Urumqi, China, located at 43° N and 87° E.
- We have traveled approximately 25,542 miles (41,106 kilometers) from our starting point in California.



People and Culture

- The Silk Road was established during the Western Han Dynasty by General Zhang Qian (200 - 114 BC) as a route by which to send goods, such as silk and tea, to the West and receive precious stones and ivory in return.
- During subsequent dynasties, areas along the Silk Road went through conflicts and trade was halted for periods of time. In the 13th century, trade was revived significantly as Genghis Khan unified China. Marco Polo traveled the route during this time. By the end of the 14th century, the sea became the preferred route and overland travel was greatly reduced.
- Urumqi was an important city on the northern section of the Silk Road for tax collection and supply replenishment. Today, it is the capital of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region in China's west.
- Xinjiang became part of the Chinese empire in 1763 after Mongolian warlords and Chinese tried to control the area for centuries. With a current population of 20 million it is one of China's least populated regions in a country of over 1 billion people.
- The region is home to several ethnic groups, including Uyghur, Kazakh and Hui. The majority of inhabitants practice Islam.



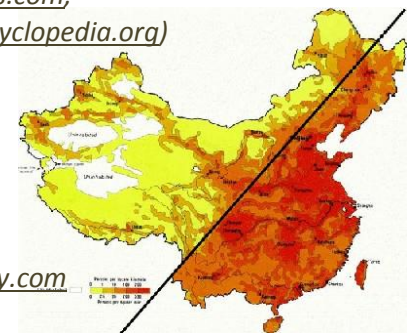
Silk Road routes (source: Chinatourselect.com)

Did you know?

- Urumqi means "beautiful pastures" in ancient Mongolian
- Urumqi is closer to New Delhi, India (1,180 miles / 1,900 kilometers) than Beijing, China (2,050 miles/3,300 kilometers)
- The entire country of China is mandated in one time zone but the western location of Urumqi and Xinjiang Region are actually two hours earlier as the sun shines



Urumqi (sources: Wikipedia.org, Factsanddetails.com, Newworldencyclopedia.org)



source:
sasasianhistory.com

China's population distribution - the darker colors represent greater population density

Taklimakan Desert

The world's 17th largest desert, Taklimakan was avoided by Silk Road caravans, who plotted routes to the north and south of it. The name translates into the "point of no return" or "The Desert of Death". Proximity to Siberia makes this desert prone to cold winter weather and it can reach lows of -4°F (-20°C).



*Taklimakan Desert aerial view
(sources: Wikipedia.org,
Earthfromspace.photglobe.info)*

Nature and Environment

- The Xinjiang Region is larger than the state of Alaska and comprises one sixth of China's total area. It borders eight countries (Mongolia, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India), more than any other Chinese region or province.
- Grapes, pears, cotton, wheat and walnuts grow in the region. There are large mineral and oil deposits.
- A location about 200 miles (320 kilometers) north of Urumqi has been classified as one of the farthest places from the ocean on the Eurasian continent, being 1,645 miles (2,645 kilometers) from the nearest coast.
- Only about 4% of the region is habitable. The Tien Shan Mountains run through the region, with the eastern end of the range located just west of Urumqi. The mountains extend for about 1,860 miles (3,000 kilometers) into Central Asia.
- There is a wide temperature disparity in the Xinjiang Region with hot summers and cold winters. It can be as hot as 90°F (32°C) and as cold as -6°F (-21°C).



*Tien Shan Mountains and map
(sources: Earthfromspace.photglobe.info,
Farwestchina.com)*



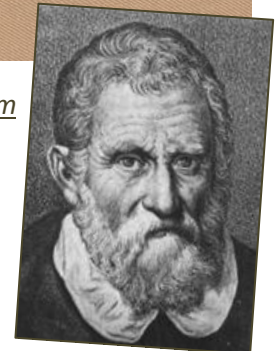
Our Plans

- After leaving Lhasa, we took an overnight train to Lanzhou, China. A flight from there brought us to Urumqi. We will continue our journey by flying into Central Asia, where we plan to spend the next month.
- While in Central Asia we will spend our time visiting cities, viewing architecture, learning about the culture and trekking.
- Thanks for all the comments and questions so far. Please contact us with what you'd like us to ask while we are in Central Asia and we will try to include it in a further update.

Marco Polo

This famous traveler was born in 1254 and grew up in Venice, Italy. When he was 17 he and his father and uncle traveled eastward to Cathay (China). It took them 3 1/2 years to journey the 5,600 miles to present-day Beijing and the court of Kublai Khan. After staying in the court 17 years, Marco returned to Europe and dictated the story of his travels into a bestselling book. Few people believed his stories at the time. Upon death, at age 70, he reportedly said, "I have only told the half of what I saw!"

source: Silk-road.com



More Information

- <http://www.echinacities.com/urumqi/city-guide/city-facts/history-of-urumqi.html>
- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Silk_Road
- <http://facts-about-china.blogspot.com/2008/02/silk-road.html>
- <http://www.travel-china.net/urumqi.html>
- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pole_of_inaccessibility
- <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/620188/Urumqi>
- <http://www.topchinatravel.com/urumqi/urumqi-facts.htm>
- <http://www.chinadiscover.net/china-tour/xinjiangguide/xinjiang-weather.htm>

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