

Dunhuang – Gateway to the Silk Road

Lying, as it does, at a major crossroads on the ancient Silk Road, Dunhuang has welcomed travellers for thousands of years. Opening its gates to merchants and pilgrims, soldiers and holy men, artists, musicians and dancers, this bustling market town guarding the highway to central China is, to this day, a cosmopolitan melting-pot of Chinese, Persian, Tibetan, Central and South Asian influences. Of all the fabulous sights in their native land, this is the one Chinese tourists long to see because, like nowhere else in the East, Dunhuang evokes the romance of bygone days. So, follow in the footsteps of Marco Polo and spend a few days in a verdant green oasis surrounded by the rolling dunes of the Kumtag Desert, with its camel trains, ruins and legendary Singing Sands.

The Louvre of the East

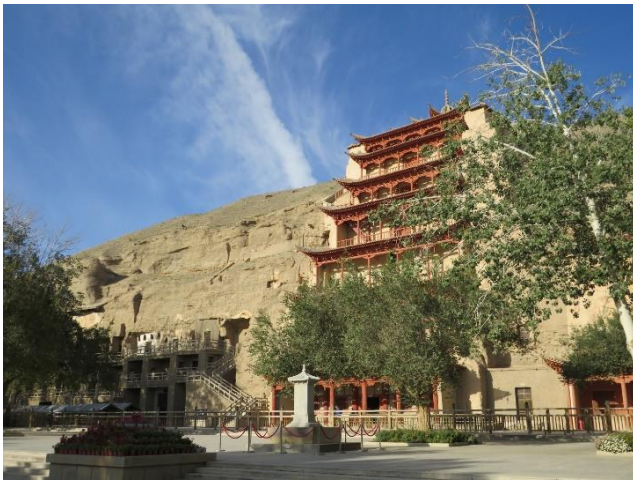
Few people manage to visit Dunhuang because it's never been easy to reach. For centuries, merchants and pilgrims from India and Persia had to circumnavigate a vast, forbidding desert, known as the Taklamakan, in order to enter Chinese territory. The very name Taklamakan, meaning "the place of no return" or "once you get in, you'll never get out", was enough to deter many travellers. Dunhuang, where the northern and southern routes around this wasteland met became a beacon of hope and a place to give thanks for those who survived the journey unscathed.

Over the centuries, Buddhist pilgrims and grateful merchants made or commissioned works of art, either to thank the Buddha for their good fortune or to gain merit and good luck for the dangerous journey ahead. The best of these are to be found at the Mogao Grottoes, which are now a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

<https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/440/video>

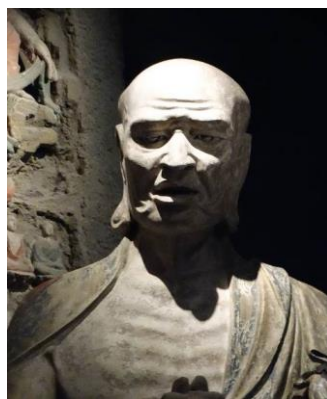
Hundreds of caves featuring thousands of frescos present a history lesson in stone. Indian, Tibetan, Central Asian and Chinese styles from many distinct periods festoon the walls. Statuary, featuring the Buddha, his various manifestations, family, friends and disciples, are the only remaining testimony to the long-forgotten sculptors who created them and the generous patrons who paid for the work.

As a result of their labours, Dunhuang became a religious centre, too, a place of devotion, attracting generations of monks and Buddhist pilgrims to pray and meditate before the holy images.



Starting at the brand new state-of-the-art visitors' centre, your tour guide will lead you through a labyrinth of caves offering a pictorial summary of the Buddha's past and future lives, from Tang Dynasty murals showing the earthly paradise of the 'Pure Land', to the thousand-armed Avalokitesvara and a giant thirty-five-metre statue of the Maitreya Buddha, each image more impressive than the last.

And if Mogao succeeds in capturing your imagination, make sure you follow it up with a trip to the Western Thousand Buddha Caves, where further wonders await you.



The Singing Sands

For a perfect afternoon excursion, take a camel ride into the Kumtag desert and dismount at the picturesque Crescent Lake of Yueyaquan. Nestling amongst the dunes

lies a Qing dynasty pagoda, a centre for local Buddhist monks. The best photographs can be taken from a vantage point high above the lake although it's a forty-minute hike up a six-hundred-metre dune to get there.



On your way back, slide down the slope feet first and hear the ghostly tones and moaning sounds produced by the minerals in the sand. Congratulations, you have just experienced the mysterious Singing Sands phenomenon, first reported by Marco Polo.

The Shazhou Night Market

If you're looking for somewhere to eat, the Shazhou district is home to no end of stalls and restaurants providing Chinese and Central Asian delicacies to suit all tastes. And if you want something special to remember your visit by, look no further than Shazhou's famous night market. Here you will find gifts and souvenirs galore: brass camel bells, miniature green jade pendants and bracelets, large square multi-coloured silk scarfs, elaborate Chinese fans, tasteful wooden handicrafts, antique lacquer boxes, delicate blue-and-white Chinese porcelain, time-blackened bronze statuettes and, of course, Buddhist iconography inspired by images in the Mogao Grottoes painstakingly reproduced on canvas by local artists.

The Silk Road Spectacular

The perfect way to end the day. Take a twenty-minute taxi ride to the Grand Theater to see a two-hour show featuring a rousing score played on traditional Chinese instruments and a troupe of petite oriental dancing girls. Based on a local folktale, 'The Silk Road Spectacular' tells the story of a twelve-year-old child who is abducted from her family in Dunhuang by bandits, taken to Samarkand, where she is taught the dances of Central Asia and returns in later life to perform her extensive repertoire before the Emperor.



1. Reading Comprehension

- i) What is the Taklamakan?
- ii) What does the word 'Taklamakan' mean, literally?
- iii) What can you see in the Mogao Grottoes?
- iv) How many arms does Avalokitesvara have?
- v) How tall is the statue of the Maitreya Buddha?
- vi) What is Yueyaquan?
- vii) Where is Yueyaquan?
- viii) Where is the best place to buy souvenirs in Dunhuang?
- ix) Where can you see 'The Silk Road Spectacular'?
- x) How long does 'The Silk Road Spectacular' last?

2. Premodification

a) As you can see from the Dunhuang text, we can use a noun as if it were an adjective to indicate the class, type or function of another noun, e.g. Silk Road, market town, dancing girls, camel bells, taxi ride, tour guide, night market.

b) We can also use a noun phrase as if it were an adjective to qualify a noun. In this case, the component words are hyphenated and the noun phrase is always singular, even it refers to a plural idea, e.g. a two-hour show, a twelve-year-old child, a twenty-minute taxi ride, a state-of-the-art visitors' centre, the thousand-armed Avalokitesvara, a thirty-five-metre statue of the Buddha, a forty-minute hike, a six-hundred-metre dune.

c) Now make noun phrases from the words below.

- i) A photograph in black and white
- ii) A hotel with five stars
- iii) A tour costing one hundred and fifty dollars
- iv) A statue that is five hundred years old
- v) A holiday lasting two weeks

3. The Conventional Order of Adjectives

a) Opinion V Fact

When we place multiple adjectives before a noun, the conventional order is opinion first, then fact, e.g.

OPINION	FACT	
Elaborate	Chinese	fans
Tasteful	wooden	handicrafts
Delicate	blue-and-white Chinese	porcelain

b) Fact Adjectives

The conventional order of fact adjectives is:

SIZE	SHAPE	AGE	COLOUR	ORIGIN	MATERIAL
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e.g. miniature green jade pendants and bracelets
large square multi-coloured silk scarfs
antique lacquer boxes
time-blackened bronze statuettes

c) Now put the words below in the conventional order.

- i) a rectangular table wooden large
- ii) an camel brown Bactrian old
- iii) a round Tibetan small teapot
- iv) a silk red blouse new
- v) an legend Chinese ancient

4.Fronted Clauses

a) Adverbs or adverbials indicating the Time, Manner and/or Place of an action usually come at the end of a sentence. The language of tourism is unusual in that it often places words and phrases of this kind at the beginning of the sentence for greater emphasis, e.g.

Lying, as it does, at a major crossroads on the ancient Silk Road, Dunhuang has welcomed travellers for thousands of years.

For centuries, merchants and pilgrims from India and Persia had to circumnavigate a vast, forbidding desert, known as the Taklamakan, in order to enter Chinese territory.

On your way back, slide down the slope feet first and hear the ghostly tones and moaning sounds produced by the minerals in the sand.

Here you will find gifts and souvenirs galore.

b) Phrases starting with the –ing form are often used in this way, too, e.g.

Opening its gates to merchants and pilgrims, soldiers and holy men, artists, musicians and dancers, this bustling market town guarding the highway to central China is, to this day, a cosmopolitan melting-pot of Chinese, Persian, Tibetan, Central and South Asian influences.

Starting at the brand new state-of-the-art visitors' centre, your tour guide will lead you through a labyrinth of caves.

Nestling amongst the dunes lies a Qing dynasty pagoda, a centre for local Buddhist monks.

c) Now try to make these sentences more colourful, dramatic and evocative by placing an adverbial phrase or the –ing clause first.

i) You'll have a magnificent view of the dunes from the roof-top restaurant of your hotel

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ii) Don't forget to visit Dunhuang's fascinating museum before you leave

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iii) You will see no end of ancient artefacts lining the walls

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iv) The Western Thousand Buddha Caves lay largely undisturbed for hundreds of years.

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v) Your tour guide will take you to the airport at the end of your stay.

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