



Xinjiang

POPULATION: 20.3 MILLION

Includes »

Ürümqi.....	775
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Best Places to Eat

- » Aroma (p778)
- » May Flower (p777)
- » Altun Orda (p790)

Best Places to Stay

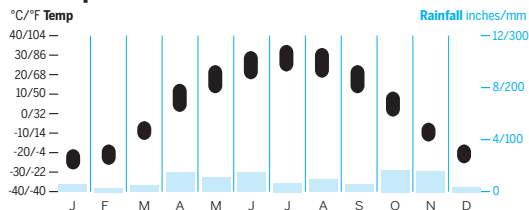
- » In a yurt at Tiān Chí (p781)
- » Kashgar Old Town Youth Hostel (p789)
- » Jīnzhànghán Grasslands Camp (p859)
- » Yema International Business Clubhouse (p777)

Why Go?

The old Chinese proverb 'Heaven is high and the Emperor is far away' could well have been spoken about Xinjiāng (新疆), China's far-flung and restive western frontier. Xinjiāng and distant Běijīng have been at odds since time immemorial, but the cultural differences between the two are just what make this province so unique for travellers. Central Asian culture is still very much alive in the Uighur homeland, from the spicy kebabs to the austere sounds of muqam and devotion to Islam. For anyone interested in an Arabian Nights adventure there is much to experience, including ghost cities, camel treks, nomad camps and spice bazaars. Equally awesome are the landscapes, ranging from the scorching Taklamakan Desert to the mighty Tiān Shān (Heaven) Mountains. Perhaps the best reason to come is the chance to experience the heart of the Silk Road, to walk in the footsteps of Marco Polo and gaze into the past of this diverse route that once served as the superhighway of the Asian continent.

When to Go

Ürümqi



March Nauryz festivals held in Kazakh and Kyrgyz villages.

August Celebrate the grape-harvest festival in Turpan.

September Autumnal colours at Kanas Lake and Hemu.

History

By the end of the 2nd century BC the Han had pushed their borders west into what is now Xinjiāng. Military garrisons were established along the trade routes and silk flowed out of the empire in return for strong Ferghana horses. In the 7th century the Tang dynasty reasserted the imperial rule

that had been lost following the collapse of the Han, but the sway of the Tang dynasty was never absolute. The Uighurs held quite a bit of control throughout the 8th century, and the An Lushan rebellion (AD 755–63) sapped the imperial strength even more.

It was during Kharakhanid rule in the 10th to 12th centuries that Islam took hold



Xinjiāng Highlights

1 Follow the route of Marco Polo and explore the **Southern Silk Road** (p794), a string of ancient cities along the fringes of the Taklamakan Desert

2 Intoxicate yourself in the dramatic high-altitude scenery of the **Karakoram Highway** (p792)

3 Explore the ancient ruined cities of **Jiāohé** (p784) and **Gāochāng** (p784), near the oasis town of Turpan

4 Haggle for a fat-tailed sheep at the Sunday livestock market in timeless **Kashgar** (p786)

5 Trekk by foot or horse over the spectacular Altai mountains from Hémù

to **Kanas Lake Nature Reserve** (p799)

6 Spend a night at gorgeous **Tiān Chí** (p781), perfect for horse treks and hiking

7 Pause on the Northern Silk Road at **Kuqa** (p785), for its authentic food bazaar and nearby Kizil Thousand Buddha Caves

in Xīnjiāng. In 1219, Yīlí (Ili), Hotan and Kashgar fell to the Mongols; Timur, of Turkic origin, had control over Kashgaria in the late 14th century for a few years. Thereafter, the Mongols regained their control over the region until the mid-18th century, when the Manchu army marched into Kashgar.

In 1865 a Kokandi officer named Yaqub Beg seized Kashgaria, proclaimed an independent Turkestan, and made diplomatic contacts with Britain and Russia. A few years later, however, a Manchu army returned, Yaqub Beg committed suicide and Kashgaria was formally incorporated into China's newly created Xīnjiāng (New Frontier) province. With the fall of the Qing dynasty in 1911, Xīnjiāng came under the rule of a succession of warlords, over whom the Kuomintang (the Nationalist Party) had very little control.

In the 1930s and 1940s there were two attempts in Kashgar and Ili respectively to establish an independent state of Eastern Turkestan, but both were short-lived. In 1946 the Kuomintang convinced the Muslims to give up their new republic in return for a pledge of real autonomy.

Since 1949, China's main social goal in Xīnjiāng has been to keep a lid on ethnic separatism while flooding the region with Han settlers. The Uighurs once composed 90% of Xīnjiāng's population; today they make up less than 50%. The economy has been ramped up under China's ongoing 'Develop the West' campaign (launched in 2000), but the increased arrival of Han settlers has only exacerbated tensions. A series of street protests and bomb attacks hit the province in 2008, while 2009 saw communal violence between Han and Uighur civilians in downtown Ürümqi. Around 200 died and 1700 were injured in the July 2009 riots, according to Chinese police reports (numbers disputed by most Uighurs).

The whole of Xīnjiāng came under quasi-martial law in 2009, with thousands of Uighurs arrested; among the regulations was an internet black-out that lasted for 10 months. Armed soldiers patrolling the streets remains a fairly regular sight in Xīnjiāng.

Climate

Xīnjiāng's climate is one of extremes. Turpan is the hottest spot in the country - up to 47°C in summer (June to August), when the Tarim and Jungar Basins aren't much cooler. As daunting as the heat may seem, spring (April and May) is not a particularly good time to visit, with frequent sandstorms mak-

PRICE INDICATORS

The following price indicators are used in this chapter:

Sleeping

\$	less than Y150
\$\$	Y150 to Y230
\$\$\$	more than Y230

Eating

\$	less than Y20
\$\$	Y20 to Y35
\$\$\$	more than Y35

ing travel difficult and dust clouds obscuring the landscape. Winters (November to March) see the mercury plummet below 0°C throughout the province. Late May through June and September through October (especially) are the best times to visit.

Language

Uighur, the traditional lingua franca of Xīnjiāng, is part of the Turkic language family and thus fairly similar to other regional languages, like Uzbek, Kazakh and Kyrgyz. The one exception is Tajik, which is related to Persian.

The Han Chinese in Xīnjiāng don't speak Uighur. Vice versa, many Uighurs can't, or won't, speak Mandarin. Now learning Mandarin is mandatory in Uighur-language schools (but not the other way round), and is exclusively used in universities, nominally to provide more economic opportunities to the Uighurs. But resistance to Sinicisation is steadfast, out of concerns the Uighur culture and tradition will be diluted.

i Getting There & Away

You can fly between Xīnjiāng and most domestic cities, Central Asia and a couple of cities further afield, including Moscow and Tehran; for details, see p779.

There are overland border crossings with Pakistan (Khunjerab Pass), Kyrgyzstan (Irkeshtam and Torugart Passes) and Kazakhstan (Korgas, Ālāshānkǒu, Tǎchéng and Jímù'nǎi). The Kulma Pass to Tajikistan may open to foreign travel in the coming years; see p793 for more.

All of these border crossings are by bus, except Ālāshānkǒu, China's only rail link to Central Asia.

Heading back into mainland China, the obvious route is the train running through Gānsù. More rugged approaches are along the southern Silk

Road from Charklik to Qīnghǎi, and Karghilik to Ali (Tibet).

i Getting Around

The railway coming from Gānsù splits in two near Turpan, with one branch heading west through Ürümqi to Kazakhstan, and the other going southwest to Kashgar. Rail lines to Yīníng and Hotan should be finished by 2011 or 2012.

Buses go to the same destinations as the train and are slightly cheaper (and occasionally faster). On-board entertainment usually includes kung-fu film marathons cranked to maximum volume.

Flying around the province can save time, especially between the major cities. All flights go through Ürümqi. Bear in mind, though, that flights are sometimes cancelled for lack of passengers or due to bad weather.

CENTRAL XĪNJIĀNG

Ürümqi

乌鲁木齐

📍0991 / POP 2.5 MILLION

Ürümqi's two and half million residents live in a city that sprawls 20km across a fertile plain in the shadow of the Tiān Shān. High-rise apartments form a modern skyline and at ground level this city heaves with traffic, noise and all manner of commerce. Any thoughts of spotting wandering camels and ancient caravanserais will soon be dashed.

As a fast-growing Central Asian hub the city does business with clients from Běijīng to Baku and plays host to a curious mix of people, including burly Russian traders, Han migrants and wispy-bearded Uighurs trying to make sense of it all.

Ürümqi is not a historic city, but there is still plenty to see and do; the provincial museum is excellent and there is a lively Uighur quarter with a colourful market and mosque. Many travellers end up hanging around for either a Kazakh or Kyrgyz visa. If you're killing time, consider a side trip to Tiān Chí or Turpan, or possibly both.

👁 Sights & Activities

FREE Xīnjiāng Autonomous Region Museum

MUSEUM

(新疆自治区博物馆; Xīnjiāng Zìzhìqū Bówùguǎn; 132 Xibeī Lu; ☎10am-6pm Tue-Sun) The massive Xīnjiāng Autonomous Region Museum, with 10 halls, is a must for Silk Road aficionados. The highlight is the locally famous 'Loulan Beauty' of Indo-European ancestry, one of the desert-mummified bod-

ies that became a Uighur independence symbol in the 1990s. Other exhibits include Buddhist frescoes from the Kizil Thousand Buddha Caves (p786) and an introduction to all of the province's minorities. From the Hongshan intersection, take bus 7 for four stops and ask to get off at the museum (*bówùguǎn*).

Èrdàoqiáo Market & International Bazaar

BAZAAR

The Uighur market, Èrdàoqiáo Market (Èrdàoqiáo Shìchǎng), and the International Bazaar (Guójì Dàbāzhá), have undergone extensive 'redevelopment' in recent years. The carpenters and blacksmiths that once worked in the nearby alleys have all but vanished and the target customers are no longer Uighur traders but Chinese tour groups, who arrive in droves. Planted in the bazaar is a replica of the Bukhara Minaret in Uzbekistan. This one, of course, has an **elevator** (Y20) to the top. The area is bursting with restaurants, snack stalls and souvenir stands, plus the odd camel brought in for tourist photos. The non-traditional has also arrived in the form of a KFC and Carrefour supermarket. It's worth visiting at night when the entire complex is bathed in bright lights and neon.

Hóngshān Swimming Pool

SWIMMING POOL

(红山游泳池; Hóngshān Yóuyǒngchí; 214 Binhe Nanlu; admission Y10; ☎10.30am-9.30pm) Beat the summer heat at this pool, located behind the Parkson Shopping Mall. Men are not allowed to wear baggy swimsuits; you have to don the skimpy spandex variety favoured by Chinese swimmers. Shops selling bathing suits are located around the corner.

People's Park

PARK

(Rénmín Gōngyuán; admission Y5; ☎7.30am-dusk) A green oasis. Has north and south entrances.

Hóngshān Park

PARK

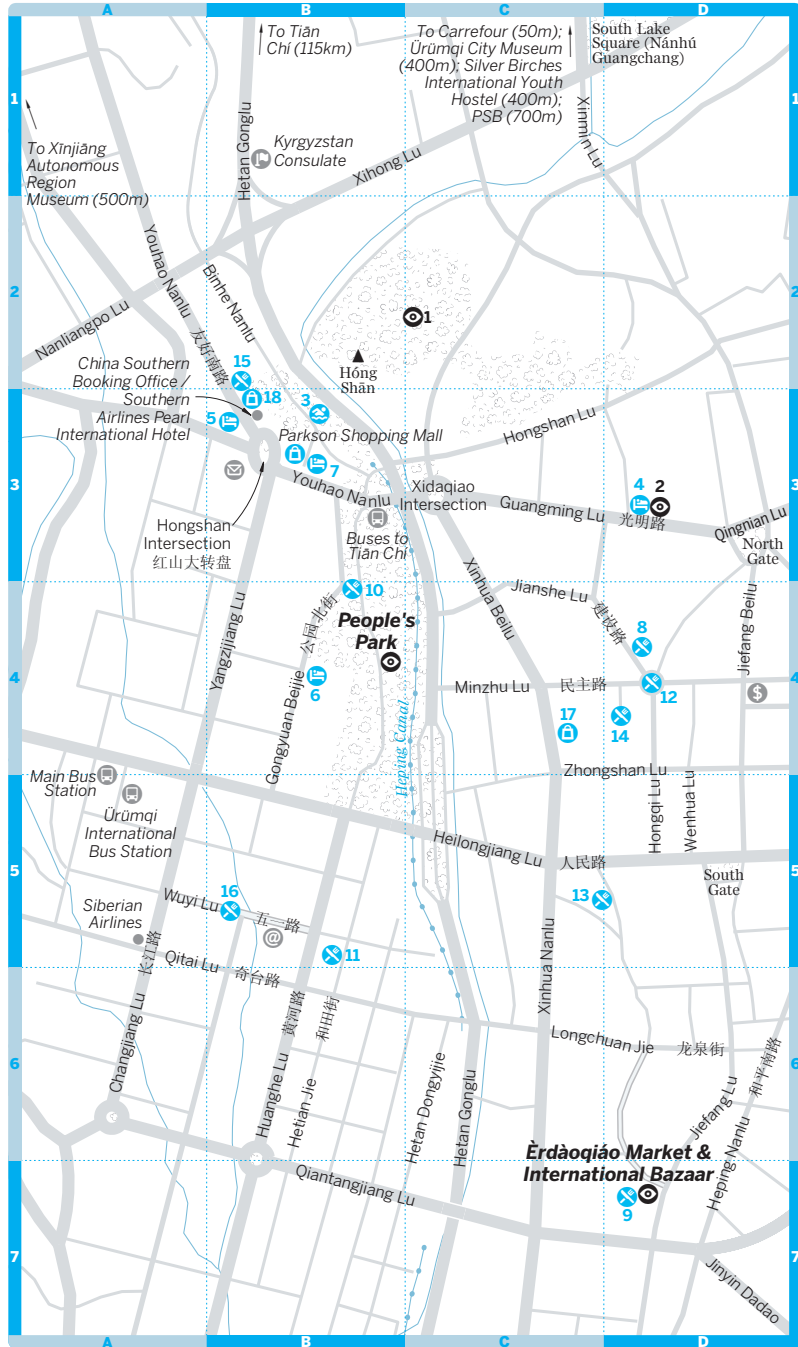
(Hóngshān Gōngyuán; admission Y10; ☎dawn-dusk) More of an amusement park, with better views than People's Park. Also has north and south entrances.

🛏 Sleeping

Xīnjiāng Màitián International Youth Hostel

HOSTEL \$

(麦田国际青年旅舍; Xīnjiāng Màitián Guójì Qīngnián Lǚshè; 📍459 1488; www.xjmatian.com; 726 Youhao Nanlu; 友好南路726号; dm/r Y40/150; 📍) Behind the Parkson Shopping Mall (Yóuhào Bāishèng Gòuwùzhōngxīn),


**Erdàoqiáo Market &
International Bazaar**

Ürümqi

Top Sights

Èrdàoqiáo Market & International Bazaar	D7
People's Park	B4

Sights

1 Hóngshān Park	C2
2 Western International Travel Service	D3

Activities, Courses & Tours

3 Hóngshān Swimming Pool	B3
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Sleeping

4 Bógédá Bīnguǎn	D3
5 Pea Fowl Mansions	B3
6 Sùbā Jiǔdiàn	B4
7 Xīnjiāng Màitián International Youth Hostel	B3

Eating

8 Aroma	D4
9 Carrefour	D7
10 Fubar	B4
11 May Flower	B5
12 Rénmín Diányǐng Yuàn	D4
13 Texas Cafe	C5
14 Vine Coffeehouse	D4
15 Wúshàng Vegetarian Restaurant	B2
16 Wúyí Night Market	B5

Shopping

17 Foreign Languages Bookshop	C4
18 Outdoor Gear	B3

centrally located Màitián has doubles and dorms, some with private bathrooms. The shared bathrooms and the lounge are pretty grotty, but the rooms do get a regular cleaning. It's a popular option in this price range and you may need to book ahead.

Silver Birches International Youth Hostel

HOSTEL \$

(白桦林国际青年旅舍; Báihuàlín Guójì Qīngnián Lǚshè; ☎481 1428; www.yhaxinjiang.com; 186 Nanhu Nanlu; 南湖南路186号; dm/tw Y45/120; @) The English-speaking staff at this hostel are very friendly and can help organise trips and onward transport. On the downside, the hostel itself is dark and poorly maintained. It's not in the centre but does have a peaceful location near a park and night market. From Rénmín Guāngchǎng you can take bus 104 and get off at South Lake Sq (Nánhú Guāngchǎng).

Pea Fowl Mansions

HOTEL \$\$

(孔雀大厦; Kǒngquè Dàshà; ☎452 2988; 489 Youhao Nanlu; 友好南路489号; tw from Y288, discounts of 40%; ㊟) If you can overlook the peeling paint, loose wallpaper and generally scruffy appearance this is an OK place to stay in the city centre. Big discounts are usually available. It's right by Hongshan intersection, the drop-off point for airport buses.

Bógédá Bīnguǎn

HOTEL \$\$\$

(博格达宾馆; ☎886 3910; fax 886 5769; 253 Guangming Lu; 光明路253号; tw Y388, low-season discounts of 40%; ㊟@) This hotel has a fairly drab facade, but the interior has been remodelled in a tasteful fashion, with marble floors, jade sculptures and Chinese art hanging from the walls. Rooms are well maintained and have excellent bathrooms. The travel agency here (Western International Travel Service, p779) comes recommended.

Yema International Business Clubhouse

HOTEL \$\$\$

(野马国际商务会馆; ☎768 8888; www.xyeyema.com; 158 Kunming Lu; 昆明路158号; d incl breakfast Y298-698; ㊟@) This elegant high-rise hotel has a sauna, cafe, art gallery, wine bar and restaurant. It even has its own zoo with rare animals including Przewalski horses (wild horses indigenous to Central Asia). There are a range of rooms, from less expensive doubles in an annexe to larger rooms in the main tower. The hotel is located north of the city, next to the Kazakhstan embassy.

Sùbā Jiǔdiàn

HOTEL \$\$\$

(速8酒店; Super 8 Hotel; ☎559 0666; www.super8.com.cn; 140 Gongyuan Beijie; 公园北街140号; tw incl breakfast Y218-308; ㊟@) Quietly located behind People's Park, this chain hotel has nothing surprising, but it represents good value with its ultra-neat rooms and free breakfast.



Eating & Drinking

Ürümqi's dining scene is surprisingly cosmopolitan. Regional Chinese cuisine is good here; Jianshe Lu has the largest selection of restaurants, ranging from Uighur staples to affordable Korean. During July and August markets are awash in fresh fruit.



May Flower

UIGHUR \$\$\$

(五月花; Wǔyuèhuā; cnr Wuyi Lu & Hetian Jie; meals Y25-55; ☎11am-midnight) From the delicious Uighur cuisine to the pleasant faux-courtyard setting, May Flower is a feast for the senses. Try the speciality, *polo*

WHICH TIME IS IT?

Making an appointment in Xīnjiāng is not just a matter of asking what time, but inevitably ends with a strange but required question – ‘which time?’ All of China officially runs on Běijīng time (*Běijīng shíjiān*). Xīnjiāng, several time zones removed from Běijīng, however, runs duelling clocks: while the Chinese tend to stick to the official Běijīng time, the ethnic minorities set their clocks to unofficial Xīnjiāng time (*Xīnjiāng shíjiān*), two hours behind Běijīng time. Thus 9am Běijīng time is 7am Xīnjiāng time. Most government-run services, such as the bank, post office, bus station and airlines, run on Běijīng time. To cater to the time difference, government offices and other institutions generally operate from 10am to 1.30pm and from 4pm to 8pm. Unless otherwise stated, we use Běijīng time in this chapter.

(rice pilaf; *zhuāfàn*), along with a few sticks of shish kebab and a glass of pomegranate juice, then sit back and enjoy the traditional live music (8pm).

Aroma

MALTESE \$\$\$

(啊诺玛西餐厅; Ānuòmǎ Xīcāntīng; 196 Jianshe Lu; meals Y35-65; ☉noon-midnight) A Maltese chef who somehow washed up in Ürümqi runs this delectable restaurant. Pizzas, pastas, risotto and steaks are on the menu – everything is made to perfection. It's opposite the Laiyuan Hotel.

Vine Coffeehouse

CARIBBEAN \$\$\$

(德曼咖啡屋; Démàn Kāfēiwū; 65 Minzhu Lu; meals Y25-50; ☉1.30-11.30pm, closed Mon; ☹) Run by the friendly Arlette from Curaçao, this fine cafe brings you savoury West Indian cuisine in a Caribbean atmosphere. Dishes are flavourful and the chocolate cake is divine, but portions are a tad small. It's down a side street on the left.

Fubar

PUB GRUB \$\$\$

(福吧; Fúbā; www.fubarchina.com; 40 Gongyuan Beijie; meal & beer Y35-65; ☉11am-2am; ☹) Fubar is run by two expats, an Irishman and a Japanese-American; both are happy to pull a pint for bedraggled Silk Road travellers. The menu consists of classic pub grub, with tasty pizzas, burgers and frothy glasses of

imported beer (Y35 to Y50). Young expat teachers and volunteers congregate here, making this a good place to get information on activities around Ürümqi.

Texas Cafe

TEX-MEX \$\$

(德克萨斯西餐厅; Dèkèsàsì Xīcāntīng; Mashi Xiao Qiu; meals Y30-60; ☉1.30-11.30pm, closed Mon) This cowboy-themed place serves great Tex-Mex treats including nachos, fajitas, burritos and steaks. It's located on a little alley known locally as Grape St (Pútáo Chángláng; 葡萄长廊). The owner is a native Texan, so you know it's authentic.

Wúshàng Vegetarian Restaurant

VEGETARIAN \$

(无尚素食府; Wúshàng Sùshífú; Youhao Lu; dishes from Y15; ☉11am-9.30pm; ☹) This vegetarian Chinese restaurant has a popular local following. Try the sautéed broccoli (*xī lán huā*) or tofu noodles (*hóngyóu dòufu*). From the China Southern Airlines office walk north for two minutes and make a right turn after the Outdoor Gear shop down a little alley; pass a gate and look for the orange sign on the right.

The animated night markets with shish kebabs and handmade noodles are also worth a gander. The most thriving by far is the **Wúyī night market** (Wúyī Lǐ); bus 51 from Hongshan intersection to south bus station stops at its entrance on Changjiang Lu. (Tell the driver 'Wúyī yèshì'.) Another great outdoor market is located at **Rénmín Diányǐng Yuàn** (人民电影院).

In Èrdàoqiáo Market and near Silver Birches International Youth Hostel are Carrefour (家乐福; Jiālèfú) centres – great for fresh fruit; both have cafeterias for tasty freshly made (and cheap) food.

Shopping**Foreign Languages Bookshop**

BOOKS

(外文书店; Wàiwén Shūdiàn; Xinhua Beilu; ☉10.30am-8pm) Just south of Minzhu Lu.

Outdoor Gear

OUTDOOR EQUIPMENT

(☎450 8611; 70 Youhao Nanlu) Sells tents, sleeping bags, stoves and gas canisters. Also rents sleeping bags (Y10 per night) and tents (Y25 per night).

Information

Bank of China (中国银行; Zhōngguó Yínháng; cnr Jiefang Beilu & Dongfeng Lu; ☉9.30am-7pm Mon-Fri, 11am-5pm Sat & Sun) Can handle most transactions and has an ATM (and at other branches).

UIGHUR FOOD

Uighur cuisine includes all the trusty Central Asian standbys, such as kebabs, *polo* and *chuchura* (dumplings), but has benefited from Chinese influence to make it the most enjoyable region of Central Asia in which to eat.

Uighurs boast endless varieties of *laghman* (pulled noodles; *lāmian* in Chinese), though the usual topping is a combination of mutton, peppers, tomatoes, eggplant and garlic shoots. *Suoman* are noodles fried with tomatoes, peppers, garlic and meat. *Suoman gush siz* are the vegetarian variety. *Suoman* can be quite spicy, so ask for *laza siz* (without peppers) if you prefer a milder version.

Kebabs are another staple and are generally of a much better standard than the ropey *kawaps* of the Central Asian republics. *Jiger* (liver) kebabs are the low-fat variety. *Tonor* kebabs are larger and baked in an oven *tonor* – tandoori style.

Nan (breads) are a particular speciality, especially when straight out of the oven and sprinkled with poppy seeds, sesame seeds or fennel. They make a great plate for a round of kebabs.

Other snacks include *serik ash* (yellow, meatless noodles), *nokot* (chickpeas), *pin-tang* (meat and vegetable soup) and *gang pan* (rice with vegetables and meat). Most travellers understandably steer clear of *opke*, a broth of bobbing goat's heads and coiled, stuffed intestines.

Samsas (baked mutton dumplings) are available everywhere, but the meat-to-fat ratio varies wildly. Hotan and Kashgar offer huge meat pies called *daman* or *gosh girde*.

For dessert try *morozhenoe* (vanilla ice cream churned in iced wooden barrels), *matang* (walnut fruit loaf), *kharsen meghriz* (fried dough balls filled with sugar, raisins and walnuts) or *dogh* (sometimes known as *doghap*), a delicious mix of shaved ice, syrup, yoghurt and iced water. As with all ice-based food, try the latter with caution. *Tangzaza* are triangles of glutinous rice wrapped in bamboo leaves covered in syrup. Damn good stuff.

Xinjiāng is justly famous for its fruit, whether it be *uruk* (apricots), *uzum* (grapes), *tawuz* (watermelon), *khoghun* (sweet melon) or *yimish* (raisins). The best grapes come from Turpan; the sweetest melons from Hāmi.

Meals are washed down with *kok chai* (green tea), often laced with nutmeg or rose petals.

China International Travel Service (CITS; 中国国际旅行社; Zhōngguó Guójì Lúxíngshè; ☎282 1428; www.xinjiangtour.com; 33 Renmin Lu; ☀10am-7.30pm Mon-Fri) This office runs standard tours around the province and can supply a driver and English-speaking guide.

China Post (中国邮政; Zhōngguó Yóuzhèng; Hongshan intersection; ☀9.30am-8.30pm) The main branch handles all international parcels.

Join Internet Cafe (聚异网吧; Jùyì Wǎngbā; 190 Wuyi Lu; per hr ¥2; ☀24hr)

Public Security Bureau (PSB; 公安局; Gōng'ānjú; ☎281 0452, ext 3456; Kelamayi Donglu; ☀10am-1.30pm & 4-6pm Mon-Fri) Not much hassle renewing visas here.

Western International Travel Service (大西部国际旅行社; Dàxībù Guójì Lúxíngshè; ☎885 0256; Bógédá Bīnguǎn, 253 Guangming Lu) This agency has the best rates around for trips to Kanas Lake. It can also secure cheap airline tickets.

Getting There & Away Air

International flights include Almaty (Kazakhstan), Bishkek and Osh (Kyrgyzstan), Baku (Azerbaijan), Istanbul (Turkey), Islamabad (Pakistan), Moscow (Russia), Dushanbe (Tajikistan), Tashkent (Uzbekistan), Khovd (Mongolia) and Tehran (Iran). Some of these are seasonal and many are suspended for no real reason. New international flights are constantly being proposed but not always realised.

There are four primary international airline offices in town:

AeroMongolia [☎15022923901; www.aeromongolia.mn] Has a weekly flight to Khovd (Mongolia) on Thursdays, one way fare is US\$173. The flight continues to Ulaanbaatar on the same day. There is no office but they do have a representative at the airport. This flight is new and definitely subject to change.

Azerbaijan Airlines (☎258 3526; 876 Dawan Beilu) Also southeast of town in the Xi Yu Bīngguǎn, room 526, in the older block.

Kyrgyzstan Airlines (☎582 8061; 876 Dawan Beilu) Southeast of town in the Xi Yu Bīngguǎn (西域宾馆), room 215.

Siberian Airlines (☎286 2326; Changjiang Lu) In the Ramada Inn.

CAAC (Zhōngguó Mínháng; ☎464 7188; 133 Nanhu Nanlu) has a booking office in the Chengjian Mansion, right across the street from Silver Birches International Youth Hostel. It flies to Běijīng (Y1050), Chéngdū (1110) and Chóngqīng (Y940).

China Southern (Nánfāng Hángkōng Shòu-piàochù; ☎95539; 576 Youhao Nanlu) has a booking office in the Southern Airlines Pearl International Hotel. It flies to Lánzhōu (Y1690), Guǎngzhōu (Y2220) and Shànghǎi (Y2150), among other destinations.

Destinations within Xinjiang include Altay (Àlètài), Hotan (Hétián), Kashgar (Kāshǐ), Kuqa (Kùchē), Tǎchéng and Yīníng.

Bus

Two long-distance bus stations in Ürümqi serve northern and southern destinations. The **main bus station** (碾子沟汽车站; niǎnzīgōu chángtú qìchēzhàn; Heilongjiang Lu) has sleeper buses to:

Bù'ěrjīn Y150 to Y160, 13 hours, two daily (11.15am and 8.10pm)

Tǎchéng Y142 to Y152, 11 to 12 hours, five daily (10am, 11am, noon, 6.20pm and 7.50pm)

Yīníng Y160 to Y170, 11 to 14 hours, almost hourly (9am to 9pm)

Bus 2 runs from the train station to Hongshan, passing Heilongjiang Lu on the way.

The **south bus station** (nánjiāo kèyùnzhàn) has frequent departures for:

Turpan Y41, 2½ hours

Kuqa Y135 to Y185, 11 to 14 hours

Kashgar Y220 to Y235, 24 hours

Hotan Y255 to Y360, 20 to 26 hours, crossing the Taklamakan Desert. For the fastest journey, ask for the express bus (tèkuài chē; 特快车).

There is also a once-daily bus that travels to Cherchen (Y246 to Y269) on the southern Silk Road, via Korla (Y185 to Y202), departing at 7pm.

Bus 1 runs between Xidaqiáo and the south bus station, bus 109 will get you there from Hongshan intersection, and bus 104 will get you here from the South Lake Square.

Train

The province is building several new rail lines. Numerous trains serve Lánzhōu; the T296 is the best choice. There is a **train booking office** (huǒchē shòupiàochù; 77 Xinmin Lu; commission Y5; ☎7.30am-9pm) in the city centre. Destinations (hard/soft sleeper):

Běijīng (T70) Y652/1006, 42 hours, one daily (8.03pm)

Chéngdū (K454) Y552/854, 49 hours, one daily (2.05pm)

Kashgar (K9786) Y345/529, 24 hours, one daily (10am)

Kuqa (5806) Y126/211, 15 hours, one daily (10.12pm)

Lánzhōu (T296) Y390/600, 21 hours, one daily (3pm)

Shànghǎi (T54) Y699/1079, 44 hours, one daily (5.20pm)

Yīníng (5815) Y151/234, 11 hours, one daily (9.10pm)

BORDER CROSSING: GETTING TO KAZAKHSTAN

If you have a Kazakhstan visa, you can go to Almaty (upper/lower bunk Y400/420, 24 hours) in Kazakhstan via Korgas by buses departing from Ürümqi International bus station (☎587 8637; Wǔlǔmùqí Guóji yùnshū qìchēzhàn), behind the main bus station. There are departures at 5pm every day except Saturday. A longer but more pleasant trip would be to travel to Almaty via Yīníng.

Trains currently depart Ürümqi twice weekly for Almaty, Kazakhstan (via Ālāshānkǒu) on Monday and Saturday at midnight. The journey takes a slow 32 hours, six of which are spent at Chinese and Kazakh customs. Tickets start at around Y850 and can only be purchased in the lobby of the Xiāngyǒu Jiǔdiàn (next to the train station), at the **booking office** (往阿拉木图火车票售票处; Huǒchēpiào Shòupiàochù; ☎10am-1pm & 3.30-6pm Sat, Mon, Wed & Thu). You will need to already have a Kazakhstan visa.

A new rail line to Yīníng opened in 2010. Another line to Altay is under construction. At the time of writing you could get a 30-day visitor visa at the Kazakhstan consulate (see p987) for about Y140. The visa takes five days to be issued. The Kazakhs are notorious for changing their visa requirements.

Yining (K9789) Y162/245, 10½ hours, one daily (22.54pm)

Xī'ān (1044) Y287/494, 34 hours, one daily (11.46pm)

i Getting Around

The airport is 16km from the Hongshan intersection; a taxi costs about ¥40. An airport bus (Y10) runs straight south through town to the train station. In the city centre, an airport shuttle (Y10, free for China Southern passengers) leaves from the Southern Airlines Pearl International Hotel hourly from 6am to 10pm. You'll need to arrive 15 minutes early to catch the shuttle.

Useful buses (Y1) include bus 7, which runs up Xinhua Lu through the Xidaqiao and Hongshan intersections, linking the city centre with the main post office; and bus 2, which runs from the train station through the Hongshan intersection and way up along Beijing Lu. Buses 1 and 51 go from the south bus station to Xidaqiao and Hongshan intersections respectively, and the latter continues to its last stop 2km south of the airport terminal. Bus 8 runs from the train station along Heilongjiang Lu to the Minzhu Lu traffic circle.

Giant Bike Shop (Jié'antè Zìxíngchē Háng; ☎888 9917; 415 Xinmen Lu), about 200m south of Xinmen Jie, near Huangda Guangchang bus stop, sells bike parts and rents bikes for ¥30 to ¥60 per day.

Tiān Chí

天池

Two thousand metres up in the Tiān Shān range is **Tiān Chí** (Heaven Lake; admission Y100), a small, long, steely-blue lake nestled below the view-grabbing 5445m Peak of God (Bógédá Fēng). Scattered across the spruce-covered slopes are Kazakh yurts and lots of sheep. It was a paradise described in Vikram Seth's wonderful travelogue *From Heaven Lake*, but it's a bit overhyped now; multitudinous tourists and excessive facilities make the lake area no longer heavenly. Despite this, plenty of backcountry is still out here.

Horse treks offer some stunning views of the Tiān Shān range. The horse guides will find you once you arrive at the lake. Treks can also be organised at the yurt camps. From the top of the cable car, paths lead further into the mountains; one hike is 9.3km and the other is 7.9km (signs point the way).

Regardless of the temperature in Ürümqi, take warm clothes and rain gear, as the weather can be unpredictable. For information on hiking in the Tiān Shān range, contact the **Xiǎo Yáng Jǔntuán hiking group** (小羊军团; ☎0991-460 7239),

or the group organiser **Fei Fei** (☎139 9994 2887). The group has tents and sleeping bags for hire. You may also be able to join one of their trips into the mountains (usually on weekends in summer).

In late May Kazakhs set up yurts around the lake for tourists (¥50 per person with three meals); **Rashit** (☎138 9964 1550; www.rashityurt.com) is the most popular host for backpackers. The yurts near the ticket office also take boarders (¥50 without meals). Alternatively, you can camp here. It's best to bring food as there is not much in the area. The yurt owners sometimes require ID, so make sure to bring your passport.

Tourist buses to the Tiān Chí car park leave Ürümqi from 9am to 9.30am from the north gate of People's Park and return between 5pm and 6pm. Most stop at the hotels (including Silver Birches) to pick up passengers before leaving town. In the low season they may not run at all. The return fare is ¥50 and the trip takes about 2½ hours. The drivers may charge the full fare even if you are just taking the bus one way. Note that the tourist bus stops at a number of tourist bazaars and breaks 1½ hours for lunch; you can avoid this by going on public transport. From the northern bus station take a bus to Fūkāng (阜康) for Y15, then switch to a bus or share taxi (Y16) to the lake.

From the car park, there's a chairlift (¥35 return) or bus (¥35 return), but it's best to take the 45-minute hike to the lake. The path starts left of the chairlift. There are actually two paths, so you can take one up and the other down.

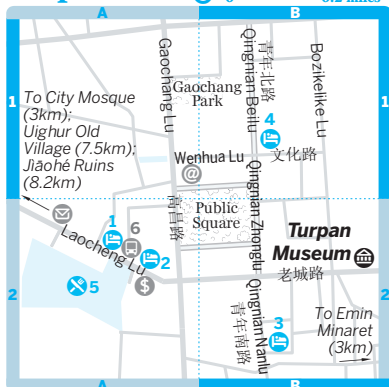
Turpan

吐鲁番

☎0995 / POP 57,900

Turpan is the Death Valley of China. In July and August temperatures soar to 40°C and force the local population into a state of semi-torpor. At 154m below sea level, it's the second-lowest depression in the world and the hottest spot in China – the highest recorded temperature here was 49.6°C!

But just as the heat seems to make life unbearable, the ground water and fertile soil of the Turpan depression make this a veritable oasis in the desert. The remains of several ancient cities in the area prove that humans discovered this fact long ago. The ruins plus some quaint villages, mosques and desert scenery make the visit worthwhile.



Turpan

Top Sights

Turpan Museum B2

Sleeping

- 1 Dōngfāng Jiǔdiàn A2
 2 Jiāotōng Bīnguǎn A2
 3 Tǔlǔfān Bīnguǎn B2
 4 Xīzhōu Dàjiǔdiàn B1

Eating

- 5 Bazaar A2
 John's Information Café (see 3)

Transport

- Bicycle Rental (see 3)
 6 Long-Distance Bus Station A2

While the surrounding sights are unique, the modern town of Turpan is a fairly recent creation and of little interest to travellers. Most of your time will likely be spent touring the surrounding sights.

History

Settlements in the Turpan Basin predate the Han dynasty; the inhabitants have ranged from Indo-Europeans (possibly Tocharians related to the mummies in Ürümqi's museum) to the Chinese and Uighurs.

In the mid-9th century the ancestors of the Uighurs were forced from their homeland in Mongolia, with one group eventually settling in Gāochāng (Khocho). The city was the Uighur capital until 1250, and saw the Uighurs transform from nomads to farmers, and from Manicheans to Buddhists and eventually Muslims.

Sights

Emin Minaret

MINARET

(额敏塔; Émín Tǎ; admission Y30; ☀dawn-dusk) Emin Hoja, a Turpan general, founded this splendid Afghan-style structure in 1777. Also known as Sūgōng Tǎ, its 15 simple brick motifs, including flowers and waves, leap from the structure. Unfortunately, the minaret is closed. Unless you have a burning desire to get up close, it's possible to snap a photograph of the minaret from the entrance without paying the admission fee.

Biking or strolling the 3km to get there is half the fun, the dusty, tree-lined streets an evocative – and fascinating – glimpse into 'old' Turpan. If the heat is too much, hop on bus 6 from the corner of Gaochang Lu and Laocheng Lu.

FREE Turpan Museum

MUSEUM

(吐鲁番博物馆; Tǔlǔfān Bówùguǎn; Laocheng Lu; ☀10.30am-7pm) Touted as the 'second-largest museum in Xīnjiāng' (the first is in Ürümqi), the museum houses a bountiful collection of relics found at archaeological sites in the Turpan Basin, as well as a hall of dinosaur fossils. Pop in here before signing up for a tour; the photos of nearby sites might help you decide what you'd like to visit.

City Mosque

MOSQUE

There are several mosques in town. The most active of them, City Mosque (清真寺; Qīngzhēn Sì), is on the western outskirts about 3km from the town centre.

Sleeping

Tǔlǔfān Bīnguǎn

HOTEL \$

(吐鲁番宾馆; ☎856 8888; tifbg@126.com; 2 Qinqinian Nanlu; 青年南路2号; dm Y50, d incl breakfast Y280, discounts of 30%; ☹) The white-tile exterior of the Turpan Hotel is uninspiring, but things improve when you enter the quaint lobby, decorated with colourful Uighur motifs. The small dorm rooms are grotty and dark. The private doubles are clean and decent value. The swimming pool was closed when we visited.

Dōngfāng Jiǔdiàn

HOTEL \$

(东方酒店; ☎626 8228; 324 Laocheng Lu; 老城路324号; d/tr Y200/260, discounts of 50%; ☹) This place has a clean, air-conditioned lobby, but the rooms upstairs are a little old and musty. Mattresses are rock hard and the smell of smoke is pervasive. Still, you'll have a hard time finding a cheaper room and they are better than the dorms at the Tǔlǔfān Bīnguǎn.

Xīzhōu Dàjiùdiàn

HOTEL \$\$\$

(西州大酒店; ☎855 4000; 882 Qingnian Beilu; 青年北路882号; tw incl breakfast Y480, discounts of 40%; ㊟) The Xīzhōu is a clean and friendly three-star option with an ugly pink-and-white exterior. Some rooms have internet-enabled computers.

Jiāotōng Bīnguǎn

HOTEL \$

(交通宾馆; ☎853 1320; 125 Laocheng Lu; 老城路125号; ㊟) This place was under renovation at the time of research but might be worth checking out. It's next to the bus station.

Eating

Head to the food court at the **bazaar** (*shìchǎng*) for Uighur cooking, though finding the stalls – not the handful on the main alley – requires a bit of patience. The fresh ‘pull noodles’ (*sozoup laghman*) are excellent.

In addition to the lively market surrounding Public Sq, dinner choices include a string of restaurants that set up tables under the trees on Qingnian Lu. *Laghman* and Chinese dishes cost Y5 to Y10.

John's Information Café

RESTAURANT \$

(☎150 2626 8966; Qingnian Nanlu; dishes from Y10; ☎7am-10pm; ㊟) This place has a quiet location in the backyard of the Tūlūfān Bīnguǎn. Western and Chinese meals are offered, but there is a fair amount of crossover – the pasta we ordered was filled with Chinese spices, peppers and chillies. The ice-cream sundae was a treat in Turpan's blistering heat. The name is somewhat misleading as there is little in the way of traveller information.

Information

Bank of China (中国银行; Zhōngguó Yínháng; Laocheng Lu; ☎9.30am-12.30pm & 4.30-7.30pm) Can change cash and travellers cheques.

China Post (中国邮政; Zhōngguó Yóuzhèng; Laocheng Lu; ☎10am-8pm) West of the Bank of China.

Internet cafe (网吧; wǎngbā; Gaochang Lu; per hr Y2) On the west side of Public Sq, near the food stalls.

Public Security Bureau (PSB; 公安局; Gōng'ānjú; Gaochang Lu) North of the city centre; will likely refer you to the capital.

Getting There & Away

The nearest train station is at Dàhéyán (大河沿), 54km north of Turpan. You can buy tickets in Turpan at the **train booking office** (火车售票

处; huǒchē shòupiàochù; Laocheng Lu, opposite Dongfang Jiudian; commission Y5; ☎7.30am-9pm), located inside a China Mobile office.

From the **long-distance bus station** (长途汽车站; Chángtú Qìchēzhàn; Laocheng Lu), minibuses to Dàhéyán (Y7.5, one hour) run approximately every 30 minutes between 8.30am and 8pm. The last bus tends to sell out, so buy your ticket early. If you miss the bus, shared taxis run to Dàhéyán (per person Y15) from a lot behind the bus station.

Buses to Ürümqi (Y41, 2½ hours) run every 20 minutes between 7.30am and 8.30pm. There is one daily bus at 1pm to Kashgar (Y206, 22 hours) via Kuqa (Y118, 13 hours). A bus to Hāmi (Y70, seven hours) departs at 10.30am; it continues to Dūnhuáng (Y140, 12 to 14 hours) in Gānsù.

Getting Around

Public transport around Turpan is by taxi, minibus or bicycle. Bicycles (about Y5 per hour), available from John's Information Café, are most convenient for the town itself.

Around Turpan

Some of Turpan's surrounding sights are fascinating and others are a waste of time. Turpan's long-distance bus station has buses going to some of the spots, but it doesn't save you much. The easiest way to see them is on a custom tour – local drivers *will* find you and you can choose what you want to see. For four people, figure on paying Y50 to Y70 per person.

You can bypass the **Astana Graves** (阿斯塔那古墓区; Āsītānà Gǔmùqū; admission Y20) and the **Bezeklik Caves** (柏孜克里克千佛洞; Bózikèlǐkè Qiānfó Dòng; admission Y20), both essentially empty. The latter is famous for having many of its distinctive murals cut out of the rock face by German archaeologists in 1905. Some buses stop at **Grape Valley** (葡萄沟; Pútáo Gōu; admission Y60) for lunch, but besides the September harvest – when it's spectacular – it's underwhelming.

Two possible additions to tours include a **karez** (坎儿井; kǎnr'ěrjīng; admission Y40), a type of underground aqueduct particular to Central Asia – and **Aydingkul Lake** (艾丁湖; Àiding Hú; admission Y10), the second-lowest lake in the world. Be forewarned that it's more of a muddy, salt-encrusted flat than a lake.

You'll be gone for the day, so don't underestimate the desert sun. Hot – damn hot. Essential survival gear includes a water bottle, sunscreen, sunglasses and a hat.

TUYOQ

吐峪沟

Set in a green valley fringed by the Flaming Mountains, the mud-constructed village **Tuyoq** (Tùyùgōu; admission Y30) offers a glimpse at 'traditional' Uighur life and architecture (traditional as long as you overlook the entry fee and gate). Tuyoq has been a pilgrimage site for Muslims for centuries, and the devout claim that seven trips here equal one trip to Mecca. On the hillside above the village (near the road) is the *mazar*, or symbolic **tomb** (admission Y20) of the first Uighur Muslim. Though damaged in the Cultural Revolution, it's still the object of pilgrimage. Don't leave town without trying some of the locally produced chilled mulberry juice (Y10 per bottle), available near the tomb entrance.

Up the gorge is a series of Buddhist caves dating back to the 3rd century AD. These were closed at the time of research, due to instability of the walls.

Tuyoq is often looped into a tour with the Flaming Mountains and Bezeklik Caves.

JIAOHÉ RUINS

交河故城

Also called Yarkhoto, **Jiāohé** (admission Y40) was established by the Chinese as a garrison town during the Han dynasty. It's one of the world's largest (6500 residents lived here), oldest and best-preserved ancient cities. A main road cuts through the city; at the end is a large monastery with Buddhist figures still visible.

The ruins (Jiāohé Gùchéng) are 8km west of Turpan. About 1km before the ruins on the right is the **Uighur Old Village** (维吾尔古村; Wéiwú'ěr Gǔcūn; admission Y35) that describes traditional life of the Uighur people in the Turpan Desert. It's well worth visiting as part of a tour to the ruins.

It's possible to cycle to the ruins from Turpan (see p783 for hire info).

GÄOCHÄNG (KHOCHO) RUINS

高昌故城

Originally settled in the 1st century BC, **Gäochäng** (admission Y40) rose to power in the 7th century during the Tang dynasty. Also known as Khocho, or sometimes Kharakhoja, it became the Uighur capital in AD 850 and a major staging post on the Silk Road until it burnt in the 14th century. Texts in classical Uighur, Sanskrit, Chinese and Tibetan have all been unearthed here, as well as evidence of a Nestorian church and a significant Manichean community – a dualistic Persian religion that borrowed figures from Christianity, Buddhism and Hinduism.

Though the earthen city walls, once 12m thick, are clearly visible, not much else at Gäochäng ruins (Gäochäng Gùchéng) is left standing other than a large Buddhist monastery in the southwest. To the north, adjacent to an adobe pagoda, is a two-storey structure (half underground), purportedly the ancient palace.

FLAMING MOUNTAINS

火焰山

Around Bezeklik Caves and Tuyoq are the **Flaming Mountains** (Huǒyàn Shān; admission Y40), the midday appearance of which is aptly compared to multicoloured tongues of fire. The Flaming Mountains were immortalised in the Chinese classic *Journey to the West* (see p956) as a mountainous inferno that the monk Xuan Zang had to pass through. Luckily for Xuan Zang, his travel buddy, Sun Wukong (the Monkey King), used a magic fan to extinguish the blaze.

Compare it to the Uighur version, in which a hero slays a child-eating dragon living within the mountains (its blood, hence, is the colouring) and slices it into eight pieces, which each represent a valley here.

You can clamber around in places, but only in the early morning – and don't forget your fan.

Hāmì (Kumul)

哈密

📍0902 / POP 365,000

Hāmì, with its delicious melons, was a much-anticipated stop on the Silk Road for ancient travellers looking for some R&R. Marco Polo described another claim to fame; according to local custom men allowed passing caravaners to bunk down with their wives. No such tradition exists today (so far as we could tell), but Hāmì is still worth a stop; there are enough sights to keep you busy for a day and the town is a convenient halfway point between Ürümqi and Dūnhuáng.

The main site in Hāmì (also known as Kumul) is the **Hāmì Kings Mausoleum** (哈密王陵; Hāmì Wánglíng; Huancheng Lu; admission Y40; ☀9am-8pm), a complex that contains the tombs of nine generations of Hāmì kings. Across the street, the **Hāmì Museum** (哈密博物馆; Hāmì Bówùguǎn; Huancheng Lu; admission free; ☀9am-1pm & 4-7pm) features dinosaur fossils found in the region plus exhibits of Hāmì's unique culture and history. The adjacent building is the **Kumul Muqam Heritage Centre** (哈密木卡姆传

承中心; Hāmì Mùkāmǔ Chuānchéng Zhōngxīn; admission Y15; ☉9am-1pm & 4-7pm), which focuses specifically on Uighur music. Groups of four or more people are usually treated to a short concert. Opposite the Heritage Centre, the **Mansion of the Hāmì Kings** (哈密回王府; Hāmì Huiwáng Fǔ; admission Y40; ☉9am-6pm) is a tacky reconstruction of an earlier palace and not worth the admission price. The tombs are 5km south of the train station; a taxi is about Y10.

If the summer heat of Hāmì is unbearable, take a day trip out to the cooler climes of **Barkol Lake** (巴里坤湖; Bālīkūn Hú), on the north side of the Tiān Shān. Kazakh herders set up their yurts here in summer and offer horse riding for Y10 per hour. To reach the yurts first take a bus from Hāmì's main bus station to Bālīkūn town (Y22, 2½ hours, hourly between 8.30am and 7pm). From Bālīcūn it's 16km to the yurts. A return taxi starts at Y50. Along the route from Hāmì keep an eye out for the remains of ancient beacon towers, slowly disintegrating by the roadside.

Hāmì has a number of hotels and restaurants around the train station. One decent option is the **Jiǔchóngtiān Bīnguǎn** (九重天宾馆; ☎231 5656; 4 Tianshan Lu; d Y120-160), which has a mix of older and renovated rooms. With your back to the train station, it's just 50m straight ahead, on the right.

A **Bank of China** (中国银行; Zhōngguó Yínháng; Guangchang Beilu) is located just north of the main square (Renmin Guangchang).

Long-distance buses depart from a station located 200m east of the Hāmì Kings Mausoleum. Buses to Turpan (Y83, six hours) depart at 10am, 11am and 1.30pm. Buses to Ürümqi (Y103, nine hours) go every two hours, although the hard sleeper train (Y149) will prove more comfortable.

Kuqa

☎0997 / POP 45,000

Grimy, dusty Kuqa (Kùchē) was once a thriving city-state and centre of Buddhism on the ancient Silk Road. Here Kumarajiva (AD 344?-413), the first great translator of Buddhist sutras from Sanskrit into Chinese, was born to an Indian father and Kuqean princess, before later being abducted to Liángzhōu and then Cháng'ān to manage translations of the Buddhist canon. When the 7th-century monk Xuan Zang passed

through, he recorded that two enormous 30m-high Buddha statues flanked Kuqa's western gate, and that the nearby monasteries held over 5000 monks.

The bus station is east of town on Tianshan Lu, and the train station a further 5km southeast.

👁 Sights

Qiuci Palace

MUSEUM

(库车王府; Kùchē Wángfǔ; Linji Lu; admission Y55; ☉9am-8.30pm) Located in the old town is the newly restored (ie rebuilt) Qiuci Palace, bestowed by Emperor Qianlong of the Qing dynasty and the residence of the kings of Qiuci until the early 20th century. The **Qiuci Museum** housed here has a wonderful collection of Buddhism-related frescos (some are replicas) and human remains from the ruins nearby. Behind the museum, the ancestral hall displays the history of the Qiuci kings and photos of the life of the last king, Dawud Mahsut, who still survives.

Take bus 1 on Tianshan Lu and get off at the last stop, then walk 1km further.

Bazaar & Mosque

BAZAAR & MOSQUE

Every Friday a large **bazaar** (巴扎; Lǎochéng Bāzā) is held about 2.5km west of town, next to a bridge on Renmin Lu. It's nothing to rival Kashgar's, but is free of tour buses. A small **mosque** (清真寺; Qīngzhēn Sì) 150m further west draws a throng of worshippers on Friday afternoon. North of here through the old town is an awesome but less animated **Great Mosque** (清真大寺; Qīngzhēn Dàsì; admission Y15).

To get here from the new town, take buses 1 or 3 from Tianshan Lu.

Qiūcí Ancient City Ruins

RUINS

These **ruins** (龟兹故城; Qiūcí Gùchéng), located on the main road, are all that is left of the capital of Qiūcí. It's a 20-minute walk northwest of the main intersection where Tianshan Lu forks in two, or bus 4 will take you there. Expect, well, not much.

🏠 Sleeping & Eating

Jiāotōng Bīnguǎn

HOTEL \$

(交通宾馆; Traffic Hotel; ☎712 2682; 87 Tianshan Lu; 天山路87号; s & tw Y40-150; 🍷) Located next to the bus station, this place has a few different rooms, from cramped, airless singles to large doubles (a few with air con). Rooms are ratty and depressing, but if you're looking for dirt cheap, this is your best bet. Hot water runs after 9pm.

Kùchē Bīnguǎn

HOTEL \$\$

(库车宾馆; ☎712 2901; 76 Jiefang Lu; 解放路76号; tw incl breakfast Y488-788, discounts of 60%; ☹) Kuqa's main hotel has airy, bright and fairly spacious rooms. After the discount rooms go for as low as Y140. Located near the city centre, it's easiest to catch a taxi here.

The best place to get a bite to eat is at the bazaar just off Tianshan Zhonglu (at the bottom end of Youyi Lu). Kebabs, noodles and *samsas* (mutton dumplings) are served hot and fresh. The best meals are to be had at the first stall on the left, marked with a sign that says 'Islam'.

i Information

Bank of China (中国银行; Zhōngguó Yínháng; 25 Tianshan Donglu; ☎9.30am-8pm)

Internet cafe (网吧; wǎngbā; cnr Wenhua Lu & Youyi Lu; per hr Y2) At the main intersection (east of the Xinhua bookstore).

i Getting There & Away

AIR The airport east of the city has daily flights to Ürümqi (Y870). A taxi there costs Y5. **China Southern** (南航售票处; Nánháng Shòupiaochù; ☎712 9390) has a booking office next to Mínháng Bīnguǎn (民航宾馆) on Wenhua Zhonglu.

BUS The bus station has a variety of sleepers heading east to Ürümqi (Y165 to Y185, 10 to 17 hours). For Kashgar (Y151, 16 hours) you have to wait for a sleeper from Ürümqi to pass and hope that it has berths. There are frequent connections to Aksu (Y42, four hours), where you can connect to Kashgar. A daily bus to Hotan (Y160 to Y177, eight hours) departs at 2pm.

At the time of writing no buses were running to Yining. Even if bus service resumes, it's unlikely you'd get a ticket as Hwy 217 is off-limits to foreigners.

TRAIN There is a **train booking office** (huóchē shòupiaochù; Youyi Lu; commission Y5; ☎9.30am-1pm & 3.30-5pm) located next to the Jinqiao Jiǔdiàn (金桥酒店), about 200m north of the Xinhua bookstore. The K9787 to Kashgar (seat/sleeper Y99/183) leaves inconveniently at 1.54am. There are more convenient trains to Ürümqi (seat/sleeper Y116/215), including the 5808 at 7.14pm and the K9788 at 9.59pm. The 5807 to Aksu leaves at 3.10pm. Bus 6 runs along Tianshan Lu to the train station.

i Getting Around

Taxi rides are a standard Y5 per trip, while pedicabs, tractors and donkey carts are generally Y1 to Y3, depending on the distance you want to travel.

Around Kuqa**KIZIL THOUSAND BUDDHA CAVES**

克孜尔千佛洞

Seventy-five kilometres northwest of Kuqa are the **Kizil Thousand Buddha Caves** (Kèzī'ěr Qiānfó Dòng; admission Y55; ☉daylight), an important site in Central Asian studies, with a wondrous mix of art and religion dated as early as the 3rd century. Historians suggest the early art of the Mògāo Caves at Dūnhuáng (p828), where Buddhism bloomed later than at Kuqa, was inspired by those in Kizil.

Of the more than 230 caves here, 10 are open to the public, and most are in poor shape. One cave was stripped by Western archaeologists, while the others have been defaced by both Muslims and Red Guards.

More interesting is the hike through the desert canyon to the spring Qiānlèi Quán (千泪泉). If you forgo the caves, admission is only Y10, but it's a long way to drive just to go hiking. A return taxi will cost around Y200 and takes 1½ hours.

ANCIENT CITY RUINS

苏巴什故城

There are several ruined cities in the Kuqa region, but these consist of no more than a few crumbling walls. The most famous is **Sūbāshī** (admission Y25; ☉daylight), 23km northeast of Kuqa. A taxi to Sūbāshī and back costs about Y60.

SOUTHWEST XINJIANG – KASHGARIA

The Uighurs' heartland is Kashgaria, the rough-but-mellifluous-sounding historical name for the western Tarim Basin. Consisting of a ring of oases lined with poplar trees, it was a major Silk Road hub and has bristled with activity for over 2000 years, with the weekly bazaars remaining the centre of life here to this day.

Kashgar

喀什

☎0998 / POP 340,000

The westernmost metropolis of China's New Frontier, Kashgar (Kāshí) has been the epicentre of cultural conflict and cooperation for over two millennia.

Modernity has swept in like a sandstorm. The highways and railroads that connect it to the rest of China have brought waves of

SLOWLY ALONG THE SILK ROAD

If you are cycling along the Silk Road or just catching lifts between towns you may end up in one or more transit points, such as Korla (库尔勒), Lúntái (轮台) or Aksu (阿克苏). Bear these tips in mind as you travel through these cities:

If you need a place to crash, nearly every bus station in Xinjiāng has an attached hotel that accepts foreigners. They all have the same name: Traffic Hotel (Jiāotōng Bīnguǎn; 交通宾馆) and will usually offer an en suite for Y70 to Y90. Notably, the Traffic Hotel in Korla is an excellent deal. The exception is Aksu, where the best deal is the Jiāngnán Kuàijí Jiǔdiàn (疆南快捷酒店), located 200m northwest of the central bus station.

A trip on the cross-desert highway is a quick way to reach Hotan by bus, but the route is risky on a bike. Distances between towns/rest stops are vast and sandstorms can be downright deadly. For sane people, the journey can really only be made with a support vehicle. A cheaper option is to load your bike onto a bus and then pick up the trail in Hotan.

Han migrant workers. Taxis and motorbikes are everywhere, and much of the old city is being bulldozed in the name of 'progress'.

Yet, in the face of these changes, the spirit of Kashgar lives on. The great-grandsons of craftsmen and artisans still hammer and chisel away in side alleys; everything sellable is hawked and haggled over boisterously; and not a few donkey carts still trundle their way through the crowds. And the Sunday market is the real deal, no matter how many tour buses roll up.

So soak it in for a few days, eat a few kebabs, chat with a local medicine man in a back alley, and prepare your trip along the southern Silk Road to Hotan, over the Torugart or Irkeshtam Passes to Kyrgyzstan or south up the stunning Karakoram Hwy to Pakistan.

Sights

Sunday Market

BAZAAR

(星期天市场; Yengi Bazaar; Xīngqītiān Shìchǎng; Aizirete Lu; ☺daily) A Uighur primer: *'Boish-boish!'* means 'Coming through!' You'd best hip yourself to this phrase, or risk being ploughed over by a push cart at the Sunday Market, which, despite its name, is open every day. Step carefully through the jam-packed entrance and allow your five senses guide you through the market; the pungent smell of cumin, the sight of scorpions in a jar, the sound of muqam from tinny radios, the taste of hot samsas and the feel of soft sheepskin caps are delightful, and overwhelming. A section on the northern side of the market contains everything of interest to foreign visitors, including the spice market, musical instruments, fur caps, kitschy

souvenirs and carpets (see p790). A taxi to the Sunday Market is Y5.

If you miss the Sunday Market, don't despair: there are plenty of other markets in Xinjiāng to visit. Try the Sunday market in Hotan (p796), the Monday market in Upal (p792), the Tuesday market in Charbagh (p795) or the Friday bazaar in Kuqa (p785).

Livestock Market

BAZAAR

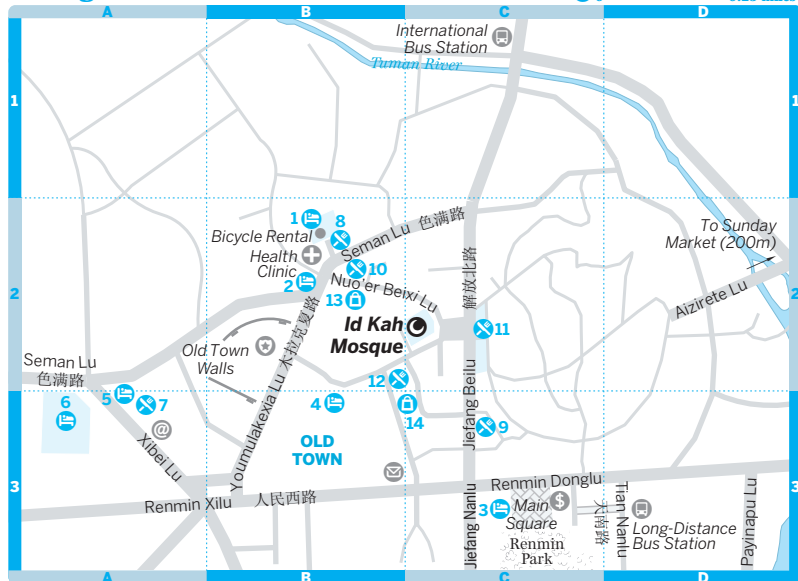
(动物市场; Mal Bazaar; Dòngwù Shìchǎng; ☺8am-6pm Sun) No visit to Kashgar is complete without a trip to the Livestock Bazaar and since it only occurs once a week (on Sunday) you'll need to plan accordingly. The day begins with Uighur farmers and herders trekking into the city from the nearby village. By lunchtime just about every sellable sheep, camel, horse, cow and donkey within 50km has been squeezed through the bazaar gates. Trading is swift and boisterous between the swarthy old traders; animals are carefully inspected and haggling is done with finger motions. Happy buyers then stuff their sheep in the back of a taxi or truck and lurch away. It's dusty, smelly, crowded, disorientating and wonderful all at once. The big tour buses usually arrive in the morning so plan an afternoon visit.

A taxi to the market is Y12. Otherwise, bus 8 runs from Id Kah Mosque.

Old Town

OLD TOWN

Sprawling on both sides of Jiefang Lu are roads full of Uighur shops and narrow alleys lined with adobe houses right out of an early-20th-century picture book. Houses range in age from 50 to 500 years old and the lanes twist haphazardly through neighbourhoods where Kashgaris have lived and worked for centuries. It's a great place for



Kashgar

Top Sights

- Id Kah MosqueC2

Sleeping

- 1 Chini Bagh HotelB2
 2 Eden HotelB2
 3 International HotelC3
 4 Kashgar Old Town Youth HostelB3
 5 Sahar HotelA3
 6 Sèman BinguǎnA3

Eating

- 7 Altun OrdaA3
 8 FubarB2
 9 Gallery CaféC3
 John's Cafe (see 6)
 John's Cafe (see 1)
 10 Karakorum CaféB2
 11 Night MarketC2
 12 Uighur TeahouseB2

Shopping

- 13 Hotan Carpet ShopB2
 14 Uighur Musical Instrument
 FactoryC3

Information

- Kashgar Guide(see 2)

strolling, peering through gates, chatting up the locals and admiring the craftsmen as they create their wares.

The Chinese government has shown little affection for the old town, however, and has spent the past two decades knocking it down, block by block. During our short stay we witnessed dozens of old homes bulldozed.

The old neighbourhoods that do remain tend to be hard to spot because they lie behind the high modern tower blocks along the main boulevards. Check out the streets southeast of the Night Market or the craft stalls on the street north of the post office. Avoid the residential area to the east, which has been turned into a tourist trap and requires a ticket to enter.

At the eastern end of Seman Lu stands a 10m-high section of the old town walls, which are at least 500 years old.

Id Kah Mosque

MOSQUE

(艾提尕尔清真寺; Ài Tígǎ'ěr Qīngzhēn Sì; admission ¥20) The yellow-tiled Id Kah Mosque, which dates from 1442, is the heart of the city – and not just geographically. Enormous, its courtyard and gardens can hold 20,000 people during the annual Qurban Baiyram celebrations.

Non-Muslims may enter, but Fridays are usually no-go. Dress modestly, including a

headscarf for women. Take off your shoes if entering carpeted areas and be discreet when taking photos.

Abakh Hoja Tomb

TOMB

(香妃墓; Abakh Hoja Maziri; Xiāngfēimù; admission Y30; ☀️daylight) On the northeastern outskirts of town is the Abakh Hoja Tomb, covered in splendidly mismatched glazed tiles and best known among Uighurs as the resting place of Abakh Hoja, one of Kashgar's more popular rulers. Purportedly among others interred is Ikparhan, his granddaughter. Known as Xiang Fei (Fragrant Concubine), she led the Uighurs in revolt, was defeated and ended up Emperor Qianlong's concubine. Take bus 20 from the main square (Renmin Guangchang) heading east until the last stop. A taxi is Y10.

Ha Noi Ruins & Mor Pagoda

RUINS

(罕诺依古城; Hànnuoyī Gùchéng; admission Y15; ☀️daylight) At the end of a 45km drive northeast of town are the Ha Noi Ruins, a Tang-dynasty town built in the 7th century and abandoned in the 12th century. Little remains beside a solid pyramid-like structure and the huge Mor Pagoda (莫尔佛塔; Mù'ěr Fótǎ).

Flag down any taxi in town. A round trip, including waiting time, is Y100 to Y150.

Shipton's Arch (Tushuk Tash)

NATURAL ARCH

This natural rock arch (天洞; Tiāndòng) is reputedly the tallest on earth, an incredible 1200m high. The first Westerner to describe it was British mountaineer Eric Shipton during his visit to the region in 1947. Successive expeditions attempted to find it without success until a team from National Geographic rediscovered the arch in 2000. The arch, located 80km northwest of Kashgar, receives few visitors. Kashgar-based tour operators can organise day or overnight trips. The journey involves one hour over paved highway, one hour over a rough 4WD-only track and then 30 minutes of steep climbing. The ascent to the arch involves climbing up ladders to an elevation of 2800m; bring sturdy shoes, warm clothing, snacks and water.

👉 Tours

John's Café, Abdul Wahab, and Kashgar Guide organise multiday trips; see p791. Popular trips include trekking to Muztagh Ata and camel tours through the Taklamakan Desert. For a challenge, consider biking the Karakoram Hwy.

🛏 Sleeping

Accommodation can be tighter on the days preceding the Sunday Market. In the low season you should be able to coax out some discounts.

Eden Hotel

HOTEL \$\$

(海尔巴格大饭店; Hǎi'ěrbāgé Dàfàndiàn; ☎️266 4444; 148 Seman Lu; 色满路148号; d Y280 discounts 20%; 📶📶) Eden is a brand new, mid-range hotel located next to Qiniabag. Rooms have internet, the staff speaks English and there's an attached Turkish restaurant. Finishing touches were still being made when we visited but it has since opened and received positive reports from travellers. Price include breakfast.

Sèmǎn Bīnguǎn

HOTEL \$

(色满宾馆; ☎️258 2129; fax 258 2861; 337 Seman Lu; 色满路337号; dm Y30-40, tw Y100-380; 📶) A labyrinthine complex with myriad rooms. Dorms are OK, but the toilets and showers could do with a clean. More expensive (but gaudy) rooms are in the former Russian consulate out the back. The staff are very friendly and helpful.

Kashgar Old Town Youth Hostel

HOSTEL \$

(喀什老城青年旅舍; Kāshí Lǎochéng Qīngnián Lǚshè; ☎️282 3262, 135 6537 2911; www.pamirinn.com; 233 Wusitangboyi Lu; 吾斯塘博依路233号; dm Y35, r Y70-80; 📶📶) Nestled in the old city, this atmospheric place is set around a courtyard where overlanders hang out in the afternoon sun, swapping stories and travel info. The dorm rooms are a bit bare and the beds are rock hard, but staff speak English. In high season you need to book well in advance to get your hands on a private room.

Màitián Youth Hostel

HOSTEL \$

(麦田国际青年旅舍; Màitián Guójì Qīngnián Lǚshè; ☎️262 0595; www.yhaks.com; Remin Donglu Nan 1 Xiang; 人民东路南一巷; dm Y30, tw from Y120) This hostel east of East Lake (Dōnghú) seems to only open its doors in high season, so call ahead before rocking up. Bus 16 heading east on Renmin Lu takes you there; get off just after the bridge, then head south for 300m down the alley named Remin Donglu Nan 1 Xiang.

Chini Bagh Hotel

HOTEL \$\$

(其尼瓦克宾馆; Qíníwǎkè Bīnguǎn; ☎️298 2103; fax 298 2299; 93 Seman Lu; 色满路93号; dm Y35-50, tw Y70-280; 📶📶) The Chini Bagh, immortalised in William Dalrymple's travelogue *In Xanadu*, is located on the grounds of the former British consulate. It

has several buildings that contain an eclectic collection of rooms, from dingy dorms to clean midrange rooms and a new five-star complex. The compound also has a clutch of travel agents and nearby restaurants.

Sahar Hotel

BUDGET HOTEL \$

(色哈尔宾馆; Sèhà'ěr Bīnguǎn; ☎258 1122; 348 Seman Lu; 色满路348号; d Y60) A friendly but dowdy hotel whose customers are mostly Pakistani, Tajik and Uighur traders. The hotel offers some of the cheapest private rooms available to foreigners.

International Hotel

HOTEL \$\$\$

(中亚国际大酒店; Zhōngxiyà Guójì Dàjiùdiàn; ☎280 2222; fax 280 2266; 8 Renmin Donglu; 人民东路8号; tw incl breakfast Y598, discounts of 20%; 🍷🍷) Next to the Main Sq, this four-star hotel is the most upmarket option in Kashgar. Rooms from the upper floors have sweeping views of Kashgar.



Eating

In restaurants, *suoman*, *suoman gush siz* and *polo* (see the boxed text, p779) are all recommended. For snacks, tea and local company, visit the **Uighur Teahouse** (茶馆; Cháguǎn) at the main crossroads in the old town.

Night Market

MARKET \$

(夜市; yèshì; meals from Y8; 🕒8pm-midnight Xinjiang time) The night market opposite the Id Kah Mosque (in the alleys east of Jiefang Beilu) is another good place to sample local fare. Vendors sell chickpeas, kebabs, breads, boiled goat heads and tasty desserts.

Karakorum Café

CAFÉ \$\$

(87 Seman Lu; mains from Y28; 🕒9am-11pm summer, noon-11pm winter; 🍷🍷) Smart-looking cafe serving Western-style breakfasts, salads, sandwiches, desserts and coffee. The warmed banana nut muffins are outstanding. Another attraction is the bathroom, possibly the best in all of Xinjiang.

Fubar

PUB \$\$

(福吧; Fúbā; www.fubarchina.com; 120 Seman Lu; mains from Y25; 🕒8.30am-2am summer, noon-2am winter; 🍷) Grab a beer here and relax on the roof garden in the evening (well, Xinjiang time) after a long, sweaty day. Like its flagship in Ürümqi, this watering hole serves imported alcohol and authentic Western food.

Gallery Café

CAFÉ \$\$\$

(☎152 9290 3517; coffee Y8-30, meals Y20-80; 🕒2pm-11pm; 🍷) This American and Canadian cafe serves pizzas, drinks and des-

serts. Grab a seat by the window and watch life pass by on the alley, or head upstairs to relax on the sofas in an artsy setting. To find it, walk down Jiefang Beilu for 100m (from Renmin Xilu) and turn right at the first alley, just past the Nuran Restaurant. The cafe is a few steps down on the right.

Altun Orda

RESTAURANT \$\$

(金噢尔大特色菜; Jīn'ào'ěrdà Tèsècài; Xibeilü; dishes from Y25) A sumptuously designed restaurant, famous for its roasted mutton (Y55). Other tasty dishes include *ghouston nan* (meat pie) and *mirizlig manta* (pastry with raisins and walnuts).

John's Cafe

CAFÉ \$\$

(银提扎尔餐厅; Yíntīzhā'ěr Cāntīng; www.johncafe.net; 337 Seman Lu; mains from Y20) In the courtyard of Sēmān Bīnguǎn, this is a popular hang-out, offering both Western (priced) and Chinese (cheaper) dishes. There's another branch in the Chini Bagh Hotel.



Shopping

For serious shopping go to the old town, ready to bargain. Be aware that Sunday Market prices tend to be higher. Hats, teapot sets, copper and brass ware, and Uighur knives are among the souvenirs you'll find around town.

Local Uighur carpet dealer **Elvis** (☎138 9913 6195; elvisablinit@yahoo.com), aka Ablimit Ghopor, speaks English and can help you understand the intricacies of the Kashgar carpet market. A proud connoisseur of *muqam* (Uighur traditional music), he can help you sample it. A jack-of-all-trades, Elvis also helps to organise trips in and around Kashgar.

Sunday Market

MARKET

(星期天市场; Yēngī Bāzār; Xīngqiān Shìchǎng; Aizirete Lu; 🕒daily) Most carpet dealers display their wares at the Sunday Market pavilion. The rugs here are made of everything from silk to synthetics. The brightly coloured felt *shyrdakhs* from Kyrgyzstan are a good buy; don't pay more than Y450 for a large one. The best regional carpets were once made in Hotan, but these days the designs are modern and finding traditional designs can be difficult. Also, some carpets are actually manufactured in the factories in Tiānjīn. Be careful when you shop.

Hotan Carpet Shop

CARPETS

(Nuo'er Beixi Lu; www.hotancarpet.com) Reliable carpet dealer Abdullah was born into a family of carpet weavers and

CARPET BUYING TIPS

When carpet shopping, bear in the mind the following tips.

- » Traditional carpets are coloured with vegetable dyes, although most carpet makers use chemical dyes today.
- » Silk carpets are more expensive than wool carpets. Because they are delicate and pricey Uighurs often hang them on the wall rather than placing them on the floor.
- » To spot a fake, turn the carpet over and look at the bottom. If the top and bottom look completely different it's probably not authentic. If the pattern on the bottom resembles the pattern on the top, it's real. If the pattern on the bottom is clear and detailed, this indicates that the knots are closer together, indicating a better quality carpet.
- » The best carpets are made from young sheep wool taken in late spring.
- » Classic designs including the Khotan Pomegranate carpet, which features small red pomegranates, and the Khotan three medallion carpet which features circular designs and other geometric shapes.

See www.elvisabalimit.jozan.net and www.hotancarpet.com for more information.

knows his stuff. His shop is on the lane between the Eden Hotel and the Id Kah Mosque.

Uighur Musical Instrument Factory

MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

(Kumudai'erwazha Lu) You'll find long-necked stringed instruments running the gamut from souvenirs to collectors' items. If any traditional performances are on, owner Mohammed will know where to find them. This family-run place is on the street north of the post office.

i Information

Travellers have lost money or passports to pick-pockets at the Sunday Market and even on local buses, so keep yours tucked away.

Some foreign women walking the streets alone have been sexually harassed. The Muslim Uighur women dress in long skirts and heavy stockings like the Uighur women in Ürümqi and Turpan, but here one sees more female faces hidden behind veils of brown gauze. It is wise for women travellers to dress as would be appropriate in any Muslim country, covering arms and legs.

Internet Access

Several of the hotels and restaurants listed above offer wi-fi.

Internet cafe (网吧; wǎngbā; Seman Lu) Near the Altun Orda Restaurant.

Laundry

There is a laundry service and dry cleaner (*gānxǐ diàn*) just north of the Chini Bagh Hotel complex.

Medical Services

Health clinic (诊所; zhěnsuǒ; Seman Lu) Located below the CITS office in the Chini Bagh Hotel complex. Can administer first aid and medicines. Some staff speak English.

People's Hospital (Rénmín Yiyuàn; Jiefang Beilu) North of the river.

Money

Bank of China (中国银行; Zhōngguó Yínháng; Main Sq; ☎9.30am-1.30pm & 4-7.30pm) Changes travellers cheques and cash and has a 24 hour ATM. You can also sell yuan back into US dollars at the foreign-exchange desk if you have exchange receipts; this is a good idea if you are headed to Tashkurgan, where the bank hours are erratic.

Post

China Post (中国邮政; Zhōngguó Yóuzhèng; 40 Renmin Xilu; ☎9.30am-8pm) The 2nd floor handles all foreign letters and packages.

Public Security Bureau

PSB (公安局; Gōngānjú; 111 Youmulakexia Lu; ☎9.30am-1.30pm & 4-8pm) You can extend your visa here.

Travel Agencies

Kashgar has no shortage of travel agents; some fly-by-night, others reliable.

Abdul Wahab (☎220 4012; abdultour@yahoo.com; www.silkroadinn.com; 337 Seman Lu) One of the best operating out of the Sěmǎn Bīngguǎn.

CITS (中国国际旅行社; Zhōngguó Guójì Lǚxíngshè; ☎298 3156; Seman Lu) Located at the Chini Bagh Hotel complex; contact Mohammed Yusuf.

John's Cafe (约翰中西餐厅; Yuèhàn Zhōngxī Cāntīng; ☎258 1186; www.johncafe.net; 337 Seman Lu) An established operator; contact John at the Sēmǎn Bīnguǎn.

Kashgar Guide (☎295 1029; www.kashgar.guide.com; 148 Seman Lu) Run by Imam Husan, this is another good choice operating out of the Eden Hotel. It organises bookings, transport and excursions, and can link you up with other budget-minded travellers to help share costs.

i Getting There & Away

It's imperative when you buy tickets in Kashgar to verify 'which time' the ticket is for (see p778). It should be Běijīng time, but this isn't always the case.

AIR There are seven daily flights to Ürümqi (Y1230), which are sometimes cancelled due to poor turnout or sandstorms. A handy **Air Ticket Agent** (Jǐpiào Dàishòuchù; ☎296 6666; 8 Renmin Donglu) is located at the International Hotel.

BUS Domestic buses use the **long-distance bus station** (喀什站; káshí zhàn; Tian Nanlu). There are six buses for Hotan (Y89, seven to 10 hours) between 9am and 9.30pm, but it's more enjoyable to stop off in Yengisar (Y8, 1½ hours), Yarkand (Y26, three hours) or Karghlik (Y35.50, four hours). Buses to these towns run hourly.

Sleeper buses to Ürümqi (Y229 to Y248, 24 hours) depart from the international bus station between 7.50am and 7.30pm. From the same station you can get a bus to Kuqa (Y140 to Y150, 12 hours) at 4pm or 7pm.

CAR You can hire 4WDs (four to six passengers) and minibuses (eight to 12 passengers) from John's Cafe or CITS (see p791). Rates for a 4WD to meet/drop you off at Torugart Pass average US\$180 to US\$240, which includes transportation, guide and permits (min two-day wait, though three is more likely). Food and lodging are extra, and the driver pays for his own. From Torugart to Naryn a taxi costs around US\$140.

TRAIN Daily trains to Ürümqi depart at 8.18am and 1.16pm and take 32 and 24 hours, respectively. Lower-berth sleeper tickets on the faster train are Y345. The line to Hotan is expected to be completed by 2011. You can buy tickets from the **train booking office** (huóchē shòupiaochù; Tian Nanlu; commission Y5; ☎9.30am-1pm & 3-7pm) at the long-distance bus station.

i Getting Around

TO/FROM THE AIRPORT The airport is 13km northeast of the town centre. One shuttle bus (Y10) meets all incoming flights. Just tell the driver your destination in town. A taxi should cost the same. From the Main Sq, bus 2 goes directly to the airport.

BICYCLE A bicycle is the cheapest and most versatile way to get around Kashgar. Mountain

bikes can be hired at the Chini Bagh Hotel for Y50 per day (or Y25 for a half-day). The **Giant Bike Shop** (捷安特自行车行; Jié'āntè Zìxíngchē Háng; ☎640 1616; 37 Jiangkang Lu) also rents bikes for Y30 per day. It's located 1.5km south of town opposite the Three Fortune Hotel (三运宾馆; Sānyùn Bīnguǎn).

BUS Useful bus routes are buses 2 (Jiefang Lu to the international bus station and the airport), 9 (international bus station to the Chini Bagh Hotel and Sēmǎn Bīnguǎn), 8 (Id Kah Mosque to the Livestock Market), 20 (post office to Abakh Hoja Tomb) and 28 (Id Kah Mosque to the train station). The fare is Y1.

TAXI Taxis are metered and the flag fall is Y5. Anywhere in town shouldn't cost more than Y14.

Karakoram Highway 中巴公路

The Karakoram Hwy (KKH; Zhōngbā Gōnglù) over the Khunjerab Pass (4800m) is the gateway to Pakistan. For centuries this route was used by caravans plodding down the Silk Road. Khunjerab means 'valley of blood' – local bandits used to take advantage of the terrain to slaughter merchants and plunder caravans.

Facilities en route are being gradually improved, but take warm clothing, food and drink on board with you – once stowed on the bus roof it's unavailable. Check the state of the highway well ahead of time. In 2010 a massive landslide on the Pakistani side blocked a river and created a new 20km-long lake that submerged the highway, causing disaster for the people of the Hunza Valley and big headaches for travellers. Check Lonely Planet's **Thorn Tree** (www.lonelyplanet.com/thorntree) for updates.

Even if you don't plan to go to Pakistan, it's still worth heading up the highway at least to Tashkurgan. It's possible to do this as a day trip but highly recommended that you spend a night or two up in these gorgeous mountains. Some travellers hire bikes in Kashgar, get a lift up to Tashkurgan and cycle back for an exciting three-day journey.

KASHGAR TO TASHKURGAN

Travelling up the KKH to Tashkurgan is a highlight of Kashgaria. The journey begins with a one-hour drive through agricultural plains to **Upal** (Wūpà'èr in Chinese), where most vehicles stop for breakfast. There's a great weekly market here every Monday. You can also see the **Tomb of Mahmud Kashgari**, an 11th-century scholar and writer be-

BORDER CROSSING: GETTING TO KYRGYZSTAN, PAKISTAN & TAJIKISTAN

To Kyrgyzstan

There are two passes into Kyrgyzstan: the Torugart Pass, which leads to Bishkek, and the Irkeshtam Pass, which goes to Osh. Getting to Osh (Y470, two days) is straightforward, with a bus leaving Kashgar's **international bus station** (国际汽车站; guóji qìchēzhàn; Jiefang Beilu) on Thursday (and perhaps Monday if demand warrants it) at 9am. Another option is to hire a taxi up to the border, which will probably cost around Y300.

Crossing the Torugart requires more red tape. What you require on the Chinese side is a *xūkèzhèng* permit from the PSB entry-exit section in Ürümqi. Most agents in Kashgar can get this; two of the most popular options now are with **CITS** (中国国际旅行社; Zhōngguó Guóji Lúxíngshè; ☎298 3156; Seman Lu) or **John's Cafe** (约翰中西餐厅; Yuèhàn Zhōngxī Cāntīng; ☎258 1186; www.johncafe.net; 337 Seman Lu). For prices, see p792. Most likely you will need to have pre-arranged transport on the Kyrgyz side, which travel agents can arrange with their contacts in Naryn or Bishkek.

You must already have a Kyrgyzstan visa.

To Pakistan

Buses to/from Sost (Y270 plus Y2 per bag, two days) in Pakistan leave Kashgar's **international bus station** (国际汽车站; guóji qìchēzhàn; Jiefang Beilu) daily at noon. However, if there are fewer than 10 passengers the bus may not depart until the following day. The 500km trip stops overnight at Tashkurgan, where customs procedures are conducted. Bring water, snacks and warm clothes as nights can be cold year-round. If you are already in Tashkurgan, there is a morning bus to Sost for Y230.

If buses have stopped for the season but you're desperate to cross the border, Pakistani traders may have space in a truck or chartered bus. You can also hire a taxi or a 4WD from one of the tour outfits.

To Tajikistan

The Kulma Pass (4362m), linking Kashgar with Murghob (via Tashkurgan), opened in 2004, with three monthly buses making the trip. At the time of writing the pass was not open to foreign travellers; go to **Travel Tajikistan** (www.traveltajikistan.com/road rail/road.html) for the latest updates.

loved by Uighurs. The tomb is about 2.5km from the market on the edge of Upal hill.

Two hours from Kashgar you enter the canyon of the Ghez River (Ghez Darya in Uighur), with wine-red sandstone walls at its lower end. Ghez itself is just a check-post; photographing soldiers or buildings is strictly prohibited. Upstream, the road is cut into the sheer rock walls. At the top of the canyon, 3½ hours above the plain, is a huge wet plateau ringed with sand dunes, aptly called Kumtagh (Sand Mountain) by locals.

Soon Kongur Mountain (Gōnggǔ'ěr Shān; 7719m) rises up on the left side of the road. Next Muztagh Ata Mountain (Mùshītǎgē Shān; 7546m) comes into view. The main stopping point for views is **Karakul Lake** (admission Y50), a glittering mirror of glacial peaks 194km from Kashgar. From here you

can hike into the hills or circumnavigate the lake. Most settlements as far as Karakul are Kyrgyz. It's well worth exploring the mountains beyond the lake. Kashgar Guide (p791) can organise five-day trekking tours around the lake and to the Muztagh Ata base camp (4500m), sleeping in tents and yurts along the way. The trek (US\$50 to US\$70 per day) includes food, permits, guide and even a camel that will haul your gear. At the lake you'll find a restaurant, formal yurt accommodation (Y50), camping spots (Y20) and horse riding (Y50).

The journey continues on through some stunning scenery – high mountain pastures with grazing camels and yaks tended by yurt-dwelling Tajiks. The final major town on the Chinese side is Tashkurgan at 3600m. Tashkurgan consists of a couple of main shopping streets and a small market.

Officially, the border opens on 15 April and closes on 31 October. However, the border can open late or close early depending on conditions at Khunjerab Pass. Travel formalities are performed at Sost, on the Pakistan border, and visas are available here (but check this ahead of time as the situation could change). The Chinese customs and immigration formalities are done at Tashkurgan (technically 3km down the road towards Pakistan). Then it's 126km to the last checkpoint at Khunjerab Pass, the actual border, where your documents are checked again before you head into Pakistan.

Tashkurgan is a small town and you could easily kill a couple of hours wandering its streets and small market. On the outskirts of town, close to the river, is the **Stone City** (石头城; Shítóuchéng, admission ¥8), which has a murky past but is believed to be a 1400-year-old fort built by a Tajik king of the Kyrpana kingdom. It was one of the filming locations for the movie *Kite Runner*. The river valley below is dotted with Tajik yurts in summer; it's worth slogging through the boggy grassland to reach some of the yurts and meet the welcoming shepherd families. The views from the floor of the river valley are spectacular. Some travellers head up to the Khunjerab Pass for a photo opportunity on the actual border. Note that you need a border permit (available in Kashgar), which most tour agencies can arrange.

Sleeping

There are several small hotels in Tashkurgan.

Jiāotōng Bīnguǎn HOTEL \$
(交通宾馆; ☎0998-342 1192; dm/d ¥15/80)

Next to the bus station; has some scruffy doubles and cheap dorms with stinky bathrooms.

Crown Inn HOTEL \$\$\$
(皇冠大酒店; ☎0998-342 2888; 1 Pamir Lu; d incl breakfast ¥400-450; @☎) Singapore-run plush hotel that offers comfortable, bright rooms and a Western breakfast.

Getting There & Away

The bus leaves for Sost (¥250) at 10am from Tashkurgan. There is one bus going back to Kashgar (¥54) at 9.30am; if you miss it, a share taxi is around ¥60 per person.

It's possible to reach Tashkurgan from Kashgar in a shared vehicle (per person ¥80). These depart from the **Tashkurgan Administration Office** (喀什库尔干办事处; Tāshikù'ěrgān Bānshìchù; 166 Xiyu Dadao Lu; 西域大道166号) in Kashgar. Otherwise, try the daily bus from

the bus station leaving at 8.30am (¥51.50, six hours).

From Kashgar it's 118km to the Ghez checkpoint, 194km to Karakul Lake, 283km to Tashkurgan and 380km to the Pakistani border.

SOUTHERN SILK ROAD

The Silk Road east of Kashgar splits into two threads in the face of the huge Taklamakan Desert. The northern thread follows the modern road and railway to Kuqa and Turpan. The southern road charts a more remote course between desert sands and the huge Pamir and Kunlun mountain ranges.

No jaw-dropping sights, but the journey takes you about as far into the Uighur heartland as you can get. It's possible to visit the southern towns as a multiday trip from Kashgar before crossing the Taklamakan Desert to Ürümqi, or as part of a rugged backdoor route into Tibet or Qīnghāi.

Yengisar

英吉沙

The tiny town of Yengisar (Yīngjīshā) is synonymous with knife production. A lesser-known but more sensitive fact is it's the birthplace of the Uighur's icon of nationalism, Isa Yusuf Alptekin (1901-95), the leader of the First East Turkestan Republic in Kashgar who died in exile in Istanbul.

There are dozens of knife shops here, most of them strung along the highway in ugly strip-mall fashion. Ask for the 'knife factories' (小刀厂; *wiǎodāochǎng* in Chinese; *pichak chilik karakhana* in Uighur). Each worker makes the blade, handle and inlays himself, using only the most basic of tools. To get there from the main bus station, hop in a taxi (¥5) for the 3km trip to the knife shops. They are right on the main road, so you'd even pass them on the way to Yarkand. Note that knives are prohibited in check-in luggage, so you'll have to ship them home.

Buses pass through the town regularly en route to Yarkand (¥18, 1½ hours) and Kashgar (¥8, 1½ hours).

Yarkand

莎车

At the end of a major trade route from British India, over the Khunjerab Pass from Leh, Yarkand (Shāchē) was for centuries an important caravan town and centre for Hindu tradesmen and moneylenders.

The town is known for the dead. Tombs honouring royalty are the primary draw, the most famous of which is the tomb of Ammanisahan, a Uighur queen and musician famed for her work collecting the Uighur *muqam*.

In the alleys of the intriguing old town, craftsmen still work their wares – noisily and sweatily – with ball-pen hammers and grindstones.

Modern Yarkand is split into a Chinese new town and an Uighur old town. Take a right upon exiting the bus station to get to the main avenue. Once there, take another right and flag down any public bus, which will take you past the Shāchē Bīnguǎn, 1km east of the bus station; the old town and the Altun Mosque complex are 1km further.

Sights

The main attractions are in the old town. Use the **Altun Mosque complex** (阿勒屯清真寺; Ālètún Qīngzhēn Sì) as a landmark. It's on a small street off the main avenue. The **Mausoleum of Ammanisahan** is beside it. Across the prayer hall of the mosque is the **mazar** where the members of the royal family in Yarkand were buried between the 16th and 17th centuries. Admission to these places is Y15. To visit the town's sprawling, overgrown cemetery, go out the back door of the mosque and turn right (you can also get there from an alley heading off the main road). There is no charge to enter this complex. To get to the old town, take a left off the main avenue as if heading to the mosque, then take the first right down a dirt lane and keep going.

Yarkand also has a **Sunday Market**, smaller than those of Kashgar or Hotan. The market is held a block north of the Altun Mosque.

Sleeping & Eating

Xīnshèng Bīnguǎn HOTEL \$
(新盛宾馆; ☎852 7555; 4 Xincheng Lu; 新城路4号; tw/tr Y120/140) This place has smoky, scruffy rooms and is overpriced compared to the Subhi Altun, but you may be able to bargain the price down a bit. It's on the main road, just outside the gates of the Shāchē Bīnguǎn.

Sūbiyì Ālètún Bīnguǎn HOTEL \$
(苏碧怡阿勒屯宾馆; ☎851 2222; cnr A'Letun Lu & Laocheng Lu; 阿勒屯路和老城路的十字路口; tw/tr Y120/180) This new hotel has very clean rooms at competitive rates in a nice location near the old town, a one-minute walk from the Altun Mosque complex.

The old town has tempting noodle shops with patrons sitting on *kangs* (long sleeping platforms) instead of chairs.

Getting There & Around

Buses leave half-hourly for Kashgar (Y26, three hours), Yengisar (Y18, 1½ hours) and Karghilik (Y10, one hour). There are four daily buses at noon, 2pm, 4pm and 6pm to Hotan (Y50 to Y59, six hours), and six daily to Ürümqi (Y238 to Y257, 24 hours).

From the bus station, public buses (Y0.50) will take you 2km to the old town and Altun Mosque complex.

Karghilik

叶城

Karghilik (Yèchéng) is of importance to travellers as the springboard of legendary Hwy 219, the Xinjiang–Tibet highway that leads to Ali in Tibet.

The main attraction here is the 15th-century **Friday Mosque** (Jama Masjid) and covered bazaar at its front. The traditional adobe-walled backstreets of the old town spread south behind the mosque.

The town of **Charbagh**, located 10 minutes' drive towards Yarkand, has a large market on Tuesday.

Sleeping & Eating

The PSB, hoping to corral foreigners, all of whom they assume are sneaking into Tibet, only allows you to stay in one of the following options.

Jiāotōng Bīnguǎn BUDGET HOTEL \$
(交通宾馆; ☎728 5540; 1 Jiaotong Lu; 交通路1号; dm/s Y50/80, tw Y160-180) The Traffic Hotel has a newer modern block with reasonably clean double rooms and some grimmer dorms. The area around the station is pretty chaotic during the day, so keep an eye on your stuff if walking around the neighbourhood.

Qiáogēlǐfēng Dēngshān Bīnguǎn HOTEL \$\$
(乔戈里峰登山宾馆; ☎748 5000; 9180 Linggongli; 零公里9180号; tw Y120-368; ☎) The 'K2 Hotel' is the better place to stay and closer to the Tibetan Antelope bus station if you're headed to Tibet. Board bus 2 outside the bus station or take a taxi for Y10. It's 6km from the bus station.

There are busy Uighur eateries outside the Friday Mosque and 24-hour food stalls across from the bus station.

i Getting There & Away

Buses to Yarkand (Y10) and Kashgar (Y34, four hours) leave every half-hour until 8.30pm. Every two hours there is a bus to Hotan (Y34, five hours) until 8.30pm.

The 1100km-long road to Ali, in western Tibet, branches off from the main Kashgar–Hotan road 6km east of Karghilik. A bus makes the trip twice a week, but at the time of writing foreigners were not allowed to use it. The only way to (legally) take the highway is by organising a Land Cruiser tour with an agent in Lhasa. See Lonely Planet's *Tibet* guide for details.

Hotan

和田

☎0903 / POP 104,900

Hotan has long been known as the epicentre of the Central Asian and Chinese jade trade. Locally unearthed jade artefacts have been dated to around 5000 BC and it is believed that Hotan (Hétíán; also known as Khotan) attracted Chinese traders long before they headed westward in search of Central Asia's horses.

The Hotanese also uncovered the secret of Chinese silk by the 5th century AD and later established themselves as the region's foremost carpet weavers.

Today Hotan is largely a Chinese city, but it still has some fascinating old neighbourhoods and an authentic market. While the architecture is not as refined as you'll see in Kashgar, Hotan feels more genuine. You can visit some carpet and silk factories, but what may make the 500km-long slog from Kashgar worthwhile is the fantastic Sunday Market, the largest and least visited in Xinjiang.

Beijing Xilu is the main east–west axis running past the enormous main square (Tuánjié Guǎngchǎng). The bank is to the southwest of the square, while the PSB, hotels and bus stations are north from here. The Jade Dragon Kashgar River runs several kilometres east of town.

👁 Sights

Rows of shops along Beijing Lu have a huge selection of jade pulled from the Jade Dragon Kashgar River. Sadly, overdredging for gemstones has already devastated the riverbed, so buying jade here only encourages more digging.

Sunday Market

MARKET

Hotan's most popular attraction is its weekly Sunday market (星期天市场; sometimes on Friday as well). The colourful market

swamps the northeast part of town and reaches fever pitch between noon and 2pm Xinjiang time. The most interesting parts to head for are the *gillam* (carpet) bazaar, which also has a selection of atlas silks, the *doppi* (skullcap) bazaar and the livestock bazaar.

FREE Carpet Factory

TRADITIONAL CARPET MAKING

On the eastern bank of the Jade Dragon Kashgar River is this small factory (地毯厂; *dītǎn chǎng*; *gillam* karakhana in Uighur). Even with up to 10 weavers, 1 sq metre of wool carpet takes 20 days to complete. To get here, take bus 10 outside the bus station and get off at the last stop.

Silk Workshop

TRADITIONAL SILK MAKING

(Jiyàxiāng; admission Y5) Past the carpet factory, southeast of Hotan, is the small town of Jiyàxiāng (吉亚乡), a traditional centre for silk production. You can look around the fascinating workshop (*sīchóuchǎng*; atlas karakhana in Uighur) to see how the silk is spun, dyed and woven using traditional methods. A return trip by taxi to the workshop, taking in the carpet factory, costs Y60.

Imam Asim

TOMB, CEMETERY

About 10km beyond Jiyàxiāng lie an interesting cemetery and the Imam Asim (Tomb of Four Imams), reached by a paved road. It's a popular pilgrimage site, particularly during the month of May. The cemetery lies on the edge of the Taklamakan Desert, so coming out here is a good opportunity to enjoy the desert scenery and slide down the sand dunes. The best day to visit is Thursday, when a festive market springs up by the roadside, about 2km before the tomb.

FREE Hotan Cultural Museum

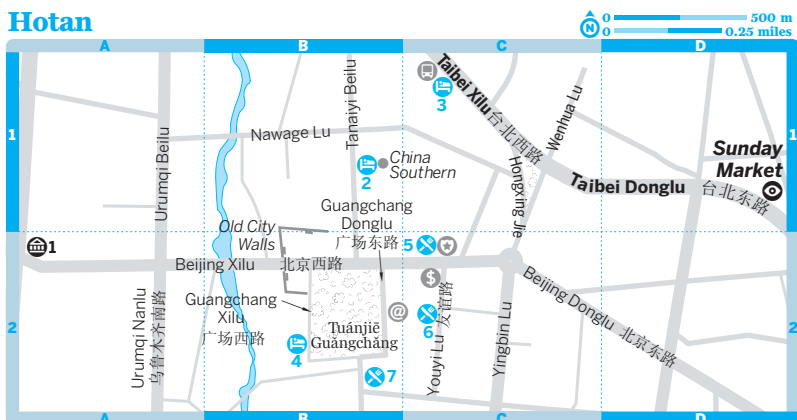
MUSEUM

(和田博物馆; Hétíán Bówùguǎn; Beijing Xilu; ☎9.30am–1.30pm & 4–7.30pm, closed Wed) West of town is the regional Hotan Cultural Museum. The main attractions are two 1500-year-old Indo-European mummies from the ancient city ruins around Hotan. Take buses 2 or 6 from the town centre to get here.

Melikawat Ruins

RUINS

(古城; Mǎlikèwàtè Gǔchéng; admission Y10) The deserts around Hotan are peppered with the faint remains of abandoned cities. The most interesting are those of Melikawat, 25km south of town, a Tang-dynasty settlement with wind-eroded walls, the remains



Hotan

📍 Top Sights

Sunday Market D1

📍 Sights

1 Hotan Cultural Museum.....A2

🏠 Sleeping

2 Hétian Yíngbīnguǎn B1

3 Jiāotōng Bīnguǎn.....C1

4 Yùdū Dàjiǔdiàn.....B2

🍴 Eating

5 Chinese Night MarketC2

6 Marco's Dream Cafe.....C2

7 Uighur Night Market.....B2

of pottery kilns, Buddhist stupas and scattered potsherds. Some scholars believe Melikawat was a capital city of the Yutian state (206 BC–AD907), an Indo-European civilisation that thrived during the height of the Silk Road epoch. A taxi should cost about Y100 to Melikawat.

Rawaq Pagoda is another interesting sight, but you'll need a permit (Y450) to visit; contact CITS for assistance.

🏠 Sleeping & Eating

Jiāotōng Bīnguǎn

BUDGET HOTEL \$

(交通宾馆; ☎203 2700; Taipei Xilu; 台北西路; d without/with bathroom Y70/140; 🚻) Attached to the bus station, this Jiāotōng Bīnguǎn is worn out but popular with budget travellers. The shared bathrooms are awful, so consider the en suite rooms, sometimes discounted to Y90.

Hétian Yíngbīnguǎn

HOTEL \$\$

(和田迎宾馆; ☎202 2824; fax 202 3688; 4 Tanaiyi Beilu; 塔乃依北路4号; dm Y30, tw incl breakfast Y120-368; 🚻) The dorms and cheaper rooms are in the old wing. Rooms in the main building have been renovated.

Yùdū Dàjiǔdiàn

HOTEL \$\$

(玉都大酒店; ☎202 9999; Guangchang Xilu; 北京西路75号; tw from Y148) The 'Jade Capital' is quiet and clean, on the west side of the main square. Rooms are featureless but neat. A cluster of eating outlets is nearby.

Marco's Dream Cafe

CAFE \$

(☎152 9266 1017; yklmtan@yahoo.co.uk; Youyi Lu; 友谊路; 🍷) This Malaysian-run restaurant serves a nice range of Western dishes including salads, shepherd's pie and pepper steak. A roast dinner is prepared on Sunday. The friendly owners speak English and can provide travel advice.

Uighur night market

MARKET \$

(维吾尔人夜市; Wéizúrén Yèshì; Guangchang Donglu) On the street south of the square; a good place to grab a kebab.

Chinese night market

MARKET \$

(中式夜市; Zhōngshì Yèshì; Beijing Xilu) This tiny market is just next to the PSB.

📍 Information

There's an internet cafe on the 2nd floor in a building on the east side of the square.

Bank of China (中国银行; Zhōngguó Yínháng; cnr Urumqi Nanlu & Aqiale Lu; ☎9.30am-1.30pm & 4-8pm Mon-Fri) Cashes travellers cheques.

China Construction Bank (中国建设银行; Zhōngguó Jiànshè Yínháng; cnr Beijing Lu &

Youyi Lu; ☎9.30am-1pm & 4-6.30pm Mon-Fri)
Has ATMs that accept foreign cards.

CITS (中国国际旅行社; Zhōngguó Guójí Lúxíngshè; ☎251 6090; 3F, 23 Tuken Lu) Located to the south off Urumqi Nanlu. Can arrange tours to the silk factory, as well as expensive excursions to the ruins at Yotkan and Melikawat.

Public Security Bureau (PSB; 公安局; Gōng'ānjú; 92 Beijing Xilu; ☎9.30am-1.30pm & 4-7.30pm Mon-Fri) Can extend visas in one day.

i Getting There & Away

AIR In theory, there are daily flights between Hotan and Ürümqi (Y1250). **China Southern** (南方航空售票处; Nánfāng Hángkōng Shòu-piàochù; ☎95539; 4 Tanaiyi Beilu; ☎10am-7pm) has a booking office at the entrance of Hétián Yǐngbīnguǎn. The airport is 10km southwest of town; a taxi there costs Y20.

BUS There are two bus stations (客运站; kèyùnzhàn) in Hotan. Most buses leave from the one on Taipei Xilu. For destinations east of Niya, head to the east bus station 2km east of downtown.

There are nine buses to Kashgar (Y67 to Y93, seven to 10 hours) from 9.30am to 10pm. These buses also stop at Karghilik (Y34, five hours) and Yarkand (Y42, six hours).

Buses to Ürümqi (Y257 to Y387, 25 hours) head straight across the desert on one of two cross-desert highways. Express buses usually take the newer Hotan-Aksu road, but it's difficult to know which road your bus will take until you get on board and ask the driver. A daily bus to Kuqa (Y160 to Y177, eight hours) departs at 2pm.

If you are continuing on the southern Silk Road, take the 10.30am bus to Cherchen (Y100 to Y147, 10 hours). There are also buses every two hours to Niya (Y40 to Y53, five hours).

i Getting Around

Bus 10 runs from the **bus station** (客运站; kèyùnzhàn; Taipei Xilu) past the Sunday Market to the east bus station, 2km away. Taxis in town cost a flat Y5.

Hotan to Golmud

和田至格尔木

To continue east along the southern Silk Road, you'll need to catch the 10.30am bus (Y101 to Y142) to **Cherchen** (且末; Qiěmò), 580km away. Buses leave from Hotan's east bus station (东站; dōng zhàn); bus 10 runs to the east bus station from Hotan's bus station. The journey to Cherchen takes nine to 10 hours and goes via Keriya (于田; Yútíán) and Niya (民丰; Mínfēng). The bus stops

for lunch in Keriya. The last 300km from Niya to Cherchen heads across endless and empty grasslands that form a natural barrier against the Taklamakan Desert.

Cherchen's main sight is the **Toghrak-lek Manor Museum** (托乎拉克庄园博物馆; Tuōhūlākè Zhuāngyuán Bówùguǎn; admission Y20), 4km west of town. The manor, built in 1911 and once home to a local warlord, is a fine example of early-20th century Kashgarian architecture and contains a small exhibit of artefacts found in the area.

The caretaker at the museum can also take you to the nearby **Zaghunluq Ancient Mummy Tomb** (扎滚鲁克古墓群景点; Zāgǔnlūkè Gǔmùqún Jǐngdiǎn; admission Y30), on the edge of the desert. The 2600-year-old tomb contains a dozen or so naturally mummified bodies, still sporting shreds of colourful clothing. Photography is prohibited in the tomb.

At Cherchen, the **Jiāotōng Bīnguǎn** (交通宾馆; ☎0996-762 7088; d/tr Y80/90; 罨) in the bus-station complex has dirty and depressing rooms. Better options include the **Kūnyù Bīnguǎn** (昆玉宾馆; ☎0996-762 6555; Tuanjie Beilu; d Y100) next to the town square or the **Mùzītágé Bīnguǎn** (木孜塔格宾馆; ☎0996-762 5150; d incl breakfast Y150), about 300m west of the square, next to the airport (it's also called the Qiěmò Bīnguǎn). To find the town square, walk 650m west of the bus station and turn right at the first set of traffic lights. The square is about 200m from the intersection. A taxi to the hotels costs Y5.

From Cherchen there is a bus at 7pm to Ürümqi (Y246, 18 hours) and a 10am bus to Korla (Y124, 10 hours); both of these go via the Cross-Desert Hwy. The bus to Hotan (Y100) leaves at 10am.

Continuing east, a daily bus (Y76, four hours) heads another 320km east to Charklik (若羌; Ruòqiāng), departing at 10.30am. Charklik is a modern Chinese city, but there are several ancient ruined cities nearby. The most famous is **Luolan**, located some 260km northeast of Charklik, but you'll probably have to join a very pricey group tour to visit as permits can run into the thousands of dollars. The ruined fortress of **Miran** is closer, located just 7km south-east of the modern town of Miran (which is 85km northwest of Charklik). It's also cheaper – group permits cost around Y400 to Y500. Contact CITS in Ürümqi for help with permits.

From Charklik you can complete the Taklamakan loop by taking a bus to Korla (Y83, six to seven hours, 10am, noon, 2pm and 6pm).

Alternatively, you can continue east to **Golmud** in Qīnghǎi. No bus goes all the way to Golmud, so you will probably first have to get a bus or minivan to Yitūnbùlākè (依吞布拉克; Y95, four to six hours) on the Xīnjiāng-Qīnghǎi border. Asbestos mining is the main industry here and Yitūnbùlākè is essentially an environmental catastrophe; expect a rough ride across some hell-on-earth landscapes and bring a scarf to cover your mouth. These vehicles depart when full (six people); almost every day a jeep goes in summer. Next you need to catch the daily bus or any passing vehicle to Huātūgōu (花土沟), about 66km away, in Qīnghǎi. From Huātūgōu you can catch a daily public bus to Golmud (Y175, 12 to 17 hours) or Xīníng (Y225, 24 to 28 hours).

The route to Golmud is plagued by wash-outs and landslides, so don't go this way if you're in a hurry.

NORTHERN XINJIANG

This region of thick evergreen forests, rushing rivers and isolated mountain ranges is historically home to pastoral nomads. It was closed to foreigners until the 1990s, due to the proximity of the Russian, Mongolian and Kazakhstan borders, which were considered sensitive. Its delicate environment – both politically and ecologically – means you should keep your travel low impact.

Bù'èrjīn

布尔津

☎0906 / POP 60,000

Bù'èrjīn, 620km north of Ürümqi, marks the end of the desert and the beginning of the grasslands and mountains to the north. The town's population is mainly Kazakh, but there are also Russians, Han, Uighurs and Tuva Mongolians.

Tourism is a growing industry here and local authorities have spruced up the town with parks, brick sidewalks and pastel-painted buildings. In summer, you'll also be confronted with swarms of biting insects around dusk, so stock up on insect repellent, available in local shops.

🛏 Sleeping & Eating

Jiāotōng Bīnguǎn

BUDGET HOTEL \$

(交通宾馆; ☎652 2643; Wenming Lu; 文明路; tw from Y80) At the lower end of the price range, this remains the most convenient cheapie for foreigners, especially if you need to catch a shared taxi to Kanas Lake in the morning.

Shénxiān Wǎn Dàjiǔdiàn

HOTEL \$\$

(神仙湾大酒店; ☎652 1325; 5 Shenhu Lu; 神湖路5号; tw Y140) The Immortal Bay Hotel has clean rooms and an efficient staff that are willing to negotiate the price. From the bus station, turn left and then right at the first intersection. It's about 200m down on the left.

Night market

MARKET \$

(yèshì; Hebin Lu; mains from Y10; ☎7pm-midnight) Specialising in grilled fish, fresh yoghurt and *kvas* (a yeast brew popular in Russia), this night market is located near the river and makes for very atmospheric dining. To find it, walk south on Youyifeng Lu and keep going until the street dead ends. It's on the right. A second night market is in the alley opposite the People's Hospital (人民医院; Rénmín Yīyuàn), between Youyifeng Lu and Kanasi Lu.

i Information

Industrial & Commercial Bank (ICBC): Zhōngguó Gōngshāng Yínháng; Huancheng Nanlu; ☎10am-1.30pm & 4-6.30pm) Changes major currencies.

Internet cafe (网吧; ☎9am-midnight) No sign; located at the western end of the smaller night market.

Public Security Bureau (PSB; 公安局; Gōng'ānjú; cnr Yueliangwan Lu & Youyifeng Lu) Can supply you with a permit for a closed area.

i Getting There & Away

There are buses to Ürümqi (Y145 to Y163, 13 hours) at 10am and 8pm and hourly buses to Altay (Àlètài; Y21, 1½ hours) between 10am and 7pm. Six daily buses also run to Jímùnǎi (Y16, two hours) on the border with Kazakhstan.

Altay has an airport with daily flights to/from Ürümqi (Y950). A rail line from Ürümqi to Altay is under construction.

Kanas Lake Nature Reserve

哈纳斯湖自然保护区

The stunning Kanas Lake is a long finger lake found in the southernmost reaches of the Siberian taiga ecosystem, pinched in

between Mongolia, Russia and Kazakhstan. Most of the local inhabitants are Kazakh or Tuvan. Chinese tourists (and the occasional foreigner) descend on the place like locusts in summer, but with a little effort it's still possible to escape the crowds. Many come hoping for a cameo by the Kanas Lake Monster, China's Nessie, who has long figured in stories around yurt campfires to scare the kids. She appears every year or two, bringing loads of journalists and conspiracy hounds.

Sights & Activities

About 160km from Bù'ěrjīn the road comes to an end at Jiādēngyù, basically a collection of hotels near the entrance to the **Kanas Lake Nature Reserve** (Hànāsī Hú Zírán Bǎohùqū; adult/student Y150/120). Buy a ticket and board a tourist bus (per person Y90, unlimited rides), which carries you 16km up the canyon to a tourist base. The journey takes one hour and includes three photo stops along the way, including Crouching Dragon Bay (卧龙湾; Wòlóng Wān), Moon Bay (月亮湾; Yuèliàng Wān) and Immortal Bay (神仙湾; Shénxiān Wān).

At the tourist base you can change buses to take you the final 2km to Kanas Lake. The old Tuva village lines the road, just past the tourist base. (The new Tuva village is 2km to the west, across the river.) From the final stop it's a five-minute walk to the lake. At the lakeshore you can take a speedboat ride (Y120, 40 minutes) halfway up the lake. A boardwalk along the shore takes you 4.5km up the side of the lake to a vantage point. It's also possible to walk downstream from the dock along the river. The bus terminus is also the starting point for thrilling white water-rafting trips (Y200, 40 minutes).

A great day hike is to the lookout point, **Guānyú Pavilion** (观鱼亭; Guānyú Tīng; 2030m). It's a long, ambling walk from the village; from the top are superb panoramas of the lake and nearby grasslands. It's possible to reach the pavilion by horse – horsemen in the village offer the trip for Y150 (plus another Y150 for the guide). The easiest way up is by bus (Y40/60 one way/return) from the new Tuva village. The bus gets close to the top, from where you walk 1066 steps to the pavilion. The bus trip takes 15 minutes, while the walk up the steps is 20 to 30 minutes.

There are similar landscapes in the neighbouring **Bai Kaba** (Báihābā; admission

Y60)village. A taxi from Kanas Lake is Y150. Unfortunately, it was closed to foreigners at the time of research, so check the situation before planning a trip here.

Note that the entry ticket and bus ticket are good for two days, in case you spend the first night outside the park gates. Once you are in the park, no one checks your ticket, so you can stay as long as you like and use the hop on, hop off bus service to get between the lake and village.

A more awe-inspiring and adventurous route to the reserve is a two-day horse trek from the valley of **Hémù** (禾木; student/adult Y48/60), 70km southeast of Kanas Lake, via Karakol (Black Lake). It's costly, though: a guide is Y200 per day, horse rental is Y150 per day, and you also have to pay for the guide's horse. You can save money by trekking in on foot. From Hemu it's a seven- to 10-hour walk to Black Lake. After camping by the lake, walk along the south shore and then continue west for six to seven hours to the old Tuva village. You must be completely self-sufficient with food, tent and sleeping bag. Guides usually do not bring their own food or equipment and may rely on you. On day two you won't find much water on the trail, so load up at Black Lake before setting off. The bus fee is waived if you enter this way, but someone may track you down and charge you for an admission ticket.

You can reach Hémù by bus from Bù'ěrjīn (Y50, five hours), but the journey is slow as the driver stops frequently to run errands for himself and the passengers. It's faster to get a shared taxi; just make sure it will take you all the way to the village and not just to the gate where you pay the admission fee, which is some 20km before the village. A bus (Y200) is available from the gate at Jiādēngyù; the price includes the admission ticket to Hémù.

The whole area is only accessible from mid-May to mid-October, with ice and snow making transport difficult at other times.

Tours

The four-day trip out of Ürümqi with Western International Travel Service (p779) in the Bógédá Bīnguān is an excellent deal. For Y650 you get an air-con minibus (only 10 hours to Bù'ěrjīn), two nights in Bù'ěrjīn, a park entrance ticket and one night's lodging at the lake. This company operates some of the facilities and activities in the park, including the rafting and boating trips.

Sleeping & Eating

The best place to stay is at a homestay in the old or the new Tuva village. There are several homestays but none have signs, so you'll have to ask around. The homestays are basic, usually just a spare bedroom. You pay ¥50 for a bed plus about ¥15 to ¥20 per meal.

One option is the guesthouse owned by a Tuvan man, **Banzan** (☎135 6518 7064), who lives about 200m past the school (学校; *xuéxiào*) in the old Tuva village near the main road about 2km before the lake. Banzan's family are performers, so you may get to see some traditional singing and dancing. Look for the fading green sign with the picture of a man playing the flute.

In the new village across the river, ask for **Hadala Beka** (☎137 7905 4663), who has a guesthouse with three rooms. To find it on your own, first go to the new village, walk down the main road and look for the large solar panels on your left. The guesthouse is on the far side of the solar panels.

If you need running water and flush toilets, there are a couple of hotels at the tourist base. Try the **Lánhú Bīnguǎn** (Blue Lake Hotel; 蓝湖宾馆; ☎0906-632 6008; r ¥200-480), located in a yurt-shaped building near the bus parking lot.

While camping is off limits, it's unlikely that anyone will look for you. Food in the reserve is expensive and monotonous; bring your own supplies.

In Hemu, you can stay at the **Lantian International Youth Hostel** (交通宾馆; ☎0991-886 8118; www.yhahm.com; dm ¥50, d ¥120), a rustic wood-cabin hostel and comfortable base for exploring the village and nearby mountains.

Getting There & Away

See the Tours section also.

AIR The brand-new Kanas airport, 50km south of the reserve, has flights to and from Ürümqi (Y1130, one hour) in summer (July and August). A shuttle (¥40) meets all incoming flights.

BUS There is no public bus to the reserve, but two buses per day go to Hémù (¥50) at 10am and 4pm. The buses leave outside the bus station at Bù'ěrjīn and the village school in Hémù respectively.

TAXI A share taxi to the reserve is ¥60 per person or ¥240 for the whole thing. The 160km trip takes two to three hours. Rates to Hémù cost the same. Taxi drivers *will* look for you at Bù'ěrjīn's bus station.

Yining

☎0999 / POP 240,000

Located on the historic border between the Chinese and Russian empires, Yining (Gulja) has long been subject to a tug-of-war between the two sides. The city was occupied by Russian troops between 1872 and 1881, and in 1962 there were major Sino-Soviet clashes along the Ili River (Yīlí Hé). There is little reason to go out of your way for Yining, but you may end up passing though on your way to Kazakhstan.

The heart of the city is People's Sq (Rénmín Guāngchǎng). The bus station is at the northeast end of Jiefang Lu, the main thoroughfare through town. An **internet café** (网吧; Yīngbin Lu; ☎24hr) is located on the 2nd floor above the Agricultural Bank (from the Yīlí Bīnguǎn walk east about 200m).

If you've got an interest in Manchu history it's worth taking a ride out to the Ili Valley (Yīlí Gǔ; 伊犁谷), home to some 20,000 Xibe (Xībózú), who were dispatched by the Qing government to safeguard and settle the region during the 18th century. This is the only place in China where you'll find a population capable of reading and writing Manchurian, which otherwise died out when the Manchus were assimilated into Chinese culture. You can visit the Lamaist temple **Jingyuǎn Sì** (靖远寺; admission ¥10), outside nondescript Qapaqal (Chábùchá'ěr). Minibuses to Qapaqal (¥3, 30 minutes) depart from the Yining bus station.

Sleeping & Eating

Yīlí Bīnguǎn

HOTEL \$\$

(☎802 3799; fax 802 4964; 8 Yingbin Lu; 迎宾路 8; tw ¥150-400) Its rooms aren't always the fanciest, but this place certainly has character. You are greeted at the entrance by a bust of Lenin, beyond which is a veritable forest filled with chirping birds, winding roads and old Soviet buildings. Banging doors aside, it's the quietest place in town. The Zixiangge Coffee Club, just inside the gate, is good for a Western-style meal.

Just to the south of town is a long line of **open-air restaurants** and **teahouses** where you can sit and watch the mighty Ili River (Ili Daria in Uighur, Yīlí Hé in Chinese) slide by. To get there, hop on bus 2 and get off at the last stop, just before the bridge over the river.

i Getting There & Away

From the **main bus station** (*qīchēzhàn*) there are buses to Ürümqi (Y160 to Y190, 11 to 14 hours), Bólè (Y44, four hours) and Korla (Y190 to Y205, 18 hours). Note that Hwy 217 is closed to foreigners, so there is no chance of a shortcut to Kuqa.

For Almaty (Y150, 12 hours), buses depart from a parking lot on Yingayati Lu, about 1km northeast of Renmin Sq. You must already have a Kazakhstan visa.

The railway to Yining was completed in 2010. There are two daily trains to Ürümqi, the 5816 (hard/soft sleeper Y151/234) at 8.50pm and the K9790 (hard/soft sleeper Y162/245) at 11pm. The journey is around 11 hours. The station is 8km northwest of the city centre; buses 10, 16, 201 and 401 go there.

There are several flights a day to Ürümqi (Y600); tickets are available from the **Xinjiang Airport Group** (☎803 1888), which has an office by the gate of the Yilí Bīnguǎn.

Bólè

博乐

Close to the border with Kazakhstan, Bólè (Bortala in Mongolian) is the centre of a Mongolian autonomous county and the jumping-off point for Sayram Lake. Just as the Xibe were sent to guard the border in the Ili Valley, Chahar Mongols (from Inner Mongolia) were dispatched to this plateau by the Qing government to defend the border. They simply never went home. Xibu Guangchang (西部广场), the town square, is a gathering place for Mongolian, Kazakh and Uighur craftsmen and artists. The town also has a Mongolian Buddhist **monastery** (Zhèn Yuǎn Sì), built in 1984, and a **museum** that describes the unique melting pot of peoples in the area.

The best way to reach Bólè is by overnight train 5801 (hard/soft sleeper Y115/175, 11 hours, 10.55pm). Buses (Y10, 45 minutes) wait at the station to take you into the city. From Bólè there are hourly buses to Ürümqi (Y100) or you can take the train, departing at 9.30pm.

Around Bólè

The vast **Sayram Lake** (塞里木湖; Sàilímù Hú), 120km north of Yīníng and 90km west of Bólè, is an excellent spot to explore the Tiān Shān range. The lake is especially colourful during June and July, when the alpine flowers are in full bloom.

While there is some food around, the selection is pricey and limited, so take what you need. In the height of summer, there are Kazakh yurts (about Y40 per night including three meals) scattered around the lake willing to take boarders. Admission to the lake is Y40.

By bus, Sayram Lake is two hours from Bólè or three hours from Yīníng; any bus passing between the two cities can drop you by the lake. They usually stop at its southwestern corner, where you'll find horses for hire and plenty of yurt accommodation in summer. At the time of research the road was under construction, so most of the yurts had moved further up the hillside.

Coming from Yīníng, the last section of road is a spectacular series of mountain switchbacks. A new set of bridges and tunnels was being constructed at the time of research and when complete will significantly shorten travel times.

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