

## Inner Mongolia, Xixia Kingdom & Shanxi's Hidden Treasures

From the Yellow river to Moon Lake

20 days

Yuncheng (2nts)

Taiyuan (1nt)

Pingyao (2nts)

Wutaishan Mountain (1nt)

Datong (2nts)

Gegentala grasslands (1nt)

Hohhot (2nts)

Baotou (2nts)

Yinchuan (2nts)

Moon Lake (2nts)

Beijing (1nt)

*For centuries, the Mongols were simply nomadic shepherds and horse-breeders, roaming the endless grasslands in the remote depths of Asia. Yet the course of history was changed when the legendary Genghis Khan united the warring tribes of Mongolia into a brutally effective army, breached the Great Wall and invaded China, seizing power throughout central Asia to create the largest empire the world has ever seen. This tour explores the lands that gave birth to the formidable leader – the beautiful wildernesses of Inner Mongolia, ‘the land of blue skies’ – and the remarkable treasures of Shanxi including the astonishing Hanging Temple, the Yungang grottoes, Pingyao’s quaint manors and the underground dwellings of the region. From here we traverse the Gobi Desert via Ninxia Province, once base of the Xixia Kingdom from the 11th to 13th centuries, to the Tenggeri Desert, homeland to the descendents of Genghis Khan’s family. The tour culminates in 2 nights at the stunning Moon Lake surrounded by spectacular dunes.*

Day 1 Departure to Beijing.

Day 2 Beijing Arrive Beijing and fly onwards to Yuncheng. Transfer to the 4-star (officially 5-star) Jinxin Hotel.

Day 3 Yuncheng Visit the impressive Iron Bulls and [Yongle Taoist Temple\( is this the Pujiu Temple?\)](#), housing beautiful murals dating from the Tang and Song dynasties. (BL)

Day 4 Taiyuan Visit the underground dwellings, [a school and Christian church of a nearby village\( replace by what? Guanque tower or Echo Tower?\)](#) before taking the train to Taiyuan and the 4-star Shanxi Grand Hotel. (BL)

Day 5 Pingyao Visit the Jinci Temple, a masterpiece of ancient architecture with halls, pavilions, bridges and ancient trees in its grounds, including a cypress that has reportedly grown at an angle of 30 degrees for 900 years. Drive to Pingyao, en route visiting the exquisite mansion of a wealthy Qiao merchant and banking family. Stay at the stunning Yunjincheng Folk Guest House. (BL)

Day 6 Pingyao Pingyao offers visitors a fascinating glimpse of prosperous old China. Here is where the world’s first cheque was issued at the world’s first bank, the Rishengchang, in 1823. Stroll along the Ming- and Qing-era streets. See too the city wall, 30ft high and 15ft thick, complete with battlements, a moat and drawbridge, watchtowers and gates. Also visit the 6th century Shuanglinzi Temple, home to 2000 painted sculptures and buddhist treasures. (BL)

Day 7 Wutaishan Drive to Wutaishan, one of China’s great sacred mountains where we visit some of its numerous temples and admire the views alongside many pilgrims. Overnight at the Wufeng Hotel. (BL)

Day 8 Datong Drive to Datong and the 4-star Holiday Inn Datong Hotel. (BL)

Day 9 Datong Admire the spectacular Hanging Temple that clings half-way up a sheer cliff and which is uniquely dedicated to the three main religions, Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism. Tour the impressive Yungang Caves which took 40,000 workers a century to create and which are still magnificent a millenium and a half later. (BL)

Day 10 Gegentala grasslands Drive across the old border guarded by the Great Wall to Inner Mongolia's Hohhot, known as 'the blue city'. After lunch here continue on to the grasslands around Gegentala to spend the night in a traditional Mongolian yurt – a nomad's circular tent supported by wooden poles and with a stove in the middle (rooms are with toilet and shower). Enjoy a hearty banquet and entertainment. (BLD)

Day 11 Hohhot Admire the sunrise over the vast expanses of the Mongolian plains and visit a herdsman's family. Return to Hohhot and admire the Zhaojun Tomb, the resting place of a beautiful girl who married a Mongolian chieftan to bring peace and unity to the country. Stay at the 4-star Inner Mongolia Hotel. (BL)

Day 12 Hohhot The temple of Dazhao is the biggest and best of all those in Hohhot. Continue to the Shuiyuan General Residence that dates from the Qing dynasty. Visit the Inner Mongolia Museum, with its interesting exhibits including dinosaur and mammoth fossils, and also visit the local arts and crafts centre. Dinner is Mongolian hot-pot. (BLD)

Day 13 Baotou Drive to Baotou on the Yellow River in Inner Mongolia, and stay at the 4-star Haide Hotel. Visit Wudangzhao, a Tibetan-style monastery set in a pretty valley of pines and willows, and Meidaizhou. (BL)

Day 14 Baotou The grasslands of Mongolia were where the legendary Genghis Khan began his brutal career, and near Baotou is where his remains are alleged to rest. After visiting his mausoleum we continue to the Kubuqi desert, part of the Gobi, and its 130ft high sand dunes. (BL)

Day 15 Yinchuan Skirt the Gobi Desert on the drive to Yinchuan, close to the capital of Xixia Kingdom, and visit the modern and elegant Nanguan Grand Mosque, where the local Hui minority people worship. Stay at the [4-star Applo Hotel](#). (BL)

Day 16 Yinchuan Spend the day outside the city, admiring the thousands of cliff carvings at Mount Helan. These were created by the nomads during the time of the Warring States, and depict daily life – religious ceremonies, hunting, farming and so on. We also see the immense Sand Lake, where over a million birds – white cranes, black cranes, swans – regularly stop during their migration. (BL)

Day 17 Moon Lake Drive across the plains to the desert and ride 4x4 jeeps to cross the sand dunes to reach Moon Lake, Tengeri Dalai, 'the desert lake as wide as the skies and the seas'. This immensely beautiful place is home to swans, ducks and geese and is surrounded by sand dunes swirled into wave-like ripples by the wind. We stay at the winner of China's best eco-tourism resort in 2007. (BL)

Day 18 Moon Lake Watch the sunrise from your bedroom window. Optional 2-hour walk across the dunes to Sun Lake, another of the natural, if surprising, lakes in the region. The rest of the day is free. (B)

Day 19 Beijing Return to Yichuan to visit the tombs of the once powerful Xixia kings.  
**Evening flight to Beijing (BLD)**

Day 20 **Early morning Air China flight to your country.End of service.**