



Gems on China's Silk Road Route



BY KATIE DAILEY

Every time I visit China, I want nothing more than to go back soon. With its high mountains, elegant rivers, rare animals and plants, numerous historical sites, distinctive operas, music and dances, rich and varied folk customs and styles, and world-renowned cuisine, China attracts a large number of domestic and foreign tourists -- even me, a native of the country.

This summer our family went on a Silk Road journey that took us through the entire northwest region of China. The Silk Road was opened about 138 BC in Western Han Dynasty; over the next thousand years they built both sea and land routes which stretched more than 7,000 miles from Chang'an (now Xian) to the Mediterranean Sea.

The purpose of the Silk Road was to trade China's silk, tea, spices, pottery and Chinese inventions for horses, linen, seeds, plants and new ideas from the West. Camels were used to transport goods and people along the route. Because of its size, nobody traveled the entire Silk Road. The last Dynasty (Qing Dynasty) finally closed the trade routes.

Besides climbing the Great Wall and seeing thousands of human-size Terra Cotta Warriors and Horses, our family found some other favorite places along the Silk Road.

Grape Valley, Turpan

Turpan basin is located in the Valley of Tian Mountain's east range. In Uygur, the language of an ethnic group in China, Turpan means "the low ground." In fact, this place is 500 meters below sea level and is the second lowest place in the world after the Dead Sea.

Green, pearl-like grapes grow abundantly in Turpan, and grapes are what this place is famous for. We took a nice stroll at a grape valley shaded by thousands of grape vines. We visited a museum dedicated to the water system and got a glimpse of the massive underground well system that keeps water supplied to this region's grape-growers. We even tasted freshly squeezed grape juice; it was so yummy!

Mingsha Mountain & Crescent Spring, Dunhuang

The scenic area of Mingsha Mountain and Crescent Spring is located 5 km south of Dunhuang city. The name of Mingsha Mountain (also known as "Singing Sand Mountain") came from the echoing sound produced by the moving sand.

Within Mingsha Mountain lies the Crescent Spring, which resembles a crescent moon fallen down into the desert. Being a place where spring meets desert, the area is a natural spectacle



“Besides climbing the Great Wall and seeing thousands of human-size Terra Cotta Warriors and Horses, our family found some other favorite places along the Silk Road.”

and has been known as a “desert wonder” from ancient to modern times. Climbing the sand mountain was a challenge; however, the view from the top was definitely rewarding. We also rode the camels for the first time in our lives; it was a lot of fun!

Mogao Grottoes, Dunhuang

The Mogao Grottoes, commonly known as the “Thousand Buddha Caves,” are located 25 km southeast of Dunhuang city. There are 735 existing caves of various shapes from ten dynasties, and the caves contain some 45,000 sq meters of murals and 2,400 painted sculptures. On any given day, only about 30 caves are open to the tourists.

We saw a huge stone Buddha statue (over 30 feet tall) and a 20-foot lying Buddha statue. The murals and sculptures were

colorful and vivid; we were amazed by the skills and craftsmanship of the ancient Chinese.

China has wonderful gifts of art, architecture and natural beauty to offer visitors. A visit to this vast and beautiful country should be on everyone’s travel schedule.

Katie grew up in Shanghai, China; in 1990, Katie came to the United States, and it was in South Dakota that Katie met her husband Clark. The couple and their three boys have lived in Woodbury for eleven years. Katie specializes in travel around China, Asia and the United States. It is her passion to share the wonderful Chinese culture and language with people around the world. For more information, check out www.dailey-travelservice.com. Katie can be reached by phone at 651-323-0101 or by email at Katie@daileytravelservice.com. ♡