

Awesome Travel

From Wulumuqi Lu to... Urumqi (and Beyond!)



TEAM XINJIANG 2014

Awesome Kids club founder Michael Shaw, his wife Isis Zhan and mother-in-law Ru Hui, along with Awesome Kids Club marketing director Johanna Lind, her husband Daniel Lundqvist, children Albin (6) and Ina (2) and fellow Swede Erik Änggård, made the two-week trek around Xinjiang.



Can you imagine backpacking around Xinjiang in winter as a group of eight with ages ranging from 2 to 64? This was not a trip for the faint of heart. The incredible adventure took place over Chinese New Year when staff and families from the Awesome Kids Club decided to travel from their headquarters on Wulumuqi Lu to Xinjiang's Urumqi. While Xinjiang may seem like an intrepid place to travel in winter, the group made the most of low season, enjoying snow activities and more.

For Sweden native Johanna Lind, the trip was an unforgettable adventure. She took the time to answer questions for us about the group's journey to Xinjiang.

WHAT WERE SOME OF THE TRIP HIGHLIGHTS?

Turpan

Taking the 20-hour train to Turpan, arriving just outside a huge bazaar and finding our way to the hotel through rows of dried fruits and live animals.

Visiting Jiaohe Ruins and the Karez Water System Museum the first day and Huoshan (The Flaming Mountain). The brave ones rode camels up a sand hill at the foot of the mountain.

We also visited Mazar Village in Tuyuk Valley, which is a small very old village described as a "living fossil" on the information signs. More families live there in the summer, but we met some locals that invited us into their old houses and sold us raisins and dried Hami melons.



Urumqi

We visited the Regional Museum and played in People's Park and strolled around and ice-skated in beautiful Hongshan Park, which was decorated with ice sculptures, lanterns and red paper flowers. We visited the Grand Bazaar and had good dinners together.

Aletai

We skied for two days. Michael tried the ancient fur and wood skiing, snowboard and regular skis, while the others stuck to regular skiing with mixed results.

Hemu Village

We really enjoyed going by horse and sleigh up the mountains to another tiny village where we were served tea and lunch.

In Hemu Village we stayed in a home with extra beds for tourists. The family cooked us breakfast, lunch and dinner. The toilet was an outhouse, and water was boiled for washing hands and face. We were also offered hot showers for RMB10 in another house in the village, which we were too lazy to try. From here, we had our driver take us to Haibahe Village, which is right at the border of Kazakhstan.

We also made a quick visit to the famous Kanas Lake, where it is said that several lake monsters are living. After this snow-filled experience in nature it was time to start traveling back to Shanghai.

What did your family like most about Xinjiang cuisine?

The food we had was fresh and tasty. Spicy and non-spicy dishes were equally common. Big dishes are served for a good price. Our son really liked



THE ROUTE

From Shanghai, we flew to Lanzhou to catch the night train that would take us to Turpan. After almost 20 hours we arrived at Daheyan, around 50 km northwest of Turpan. There we continued by bus to Turpan. After a couple of days we took a three-hour bus to Urumqi. We stayed in Urumqi two nights then took the night train north to Aletai (Altay), which took around 12 hours (the train station was actually in Beitun). After a few days, we moved on. This time we rented two cars with driver and tour guides and drove up north to Hemu village, inside Kanas National Nature Reserve. We stayed two nights then drove to Kanas Lake. After one night by Kanas Lake we started traveling home, first driving back to Beitun to take the night train back to Urumqi, and then a flight back to Shanghai.

the nan bread. We had many really nice lamb skewers and a lot of traditional Kazakh dishes.

What was it like traveling as a large group?

It was good. It did not feel that our group was too big. One good thing about being eight people around the dinner tables was that we could easily order ten different dishes to taste!

What did your children enjoy most about the trip?

Albin was looking forward to see the mummies in the Urumqi Regional Museum. That was the only thing he had on his

wish list before the trip. He was very taken and a bit scared after seeing the not so beautiful 'Loulan Beauty' mummy and her friends in the museum. It made a big impression.

The camel ride at Huoshan (Flaming Mountain) and the horse sleigh ride were also highlights, as well as strolling around the bazaars with RMB10 to buy snacks.

What was the best part of the trip?

The best is that we actually came through and did this trip! We were prepared for a back-packer-style trip with few con-





firmed plans. I think we made the most out of every day.

What was the worst part of the trip?

The worst part would be the hassle with unpacking and packing our family's winter clothing into our two big backpacks and son's small backpack.

Also, the lack of seatbelts in the cars up north in the mountains was hard. For a Swede like me, going up a

mountain in a car we don't know, a driver we don't know, on roads with uncertain conditions... going without seatbelts is a big no. We had to compromise and were able to buckle up the kids at least. When I saw that the roads were almost empty of cars, snowy but not icy and the driver was very good, going slow, I felt a bit better again.

In Kanas, the no-roof squat style outhouse was not pleasant, especially at night with -25C degrees temperatures.

I have a feeling that the others in the group might consider the nagging kids the worst part at the end of the trip, but we survived and have great memories of this once-in-a-lifetime experience.



BOOKING INFORMATION AND ACCOMMODATION

The group used Ctrip.com to buy all flight tickets and TravelChinaGuide.com for train tickets between Lanzhou and Turpan. They pre-booked flights to Lanzhou and the Turpan train tickets and hotel. The remainder of the bookings were made during the trip.

- Jiaotong Hotel, Turpan
- Maitian International Youth Hostel, Urumqi
- Sunshine Hotel, Aletai
- Home stays in Hemu Village and Kanas Nature Reserve

A photograph of a doctor in a white coat and glasses examining a young girl in a yellow dress. The doctor is using a stethoscope. In the background, another doctor in a white coat is smiling at a woman who is holding a baby. The setting appears to be a hospital or clinic. A logo for Red Leaf International Hospital is visible in the top left corner of the image.

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Sylvia Dai, OB/GYN Physician



Dr. Dai is an experienced OB/GYN physician with over 20 years of clinical experience practicing. She has been working for international hospital organizations in Shanghai since 2005, fluent in English and Mandarin. Dr. Dai specializes in pregnancy care, labor, delivery and high-risk pregnancies. She is also very skilled in the diagnosis and treatment of gynecological disease and surgeries.

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(86 21) 6196 3333



No. 1209, Middle Huaihai Road, Xuhui District, Shanghai, China