

Genocide Tours

European Travel Companies in East Turkistan

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I. Key Takeaways

- Eighteen European travel companies from France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Switzerland, and the Netherlands currently offer tours to East Turkistan despite an ongoing genocide and crimes against humanity.
- In addition to the 18 European travel companies, an August 2023 Uyghur Human Rights Project (UHRP) briefing documented five travel companies based in Australia, North America, and the UK that also currently advertise tours to the region.
- UHRP calls on international travel companies in Europe, as well as North America and Australia, to cease profiteering from genocide.
- UHRP does not advocate for a ban on travel to East Turkistan, leaving the decision to visit the region to the conscience of the individual traveler, but calls on travel companies to cease organized tours.
- European travel companies should not only join national trade associations that are full members of the umbrella European Travel Agents and Tour Operators' Association (ECTAA), but also adopt the Roundtable Human Rights in Tourism's human rights standards for conducting business.¹
- UHRP recommends European travel companies, national associations, and the ECTAA include the Framework Convention on Tourism Ethics approved by the UN General Assembly in 2019 as further benchmarks for business standards.

II. Profiteering from Genocide

In August 2023, the Uyghur Human Rights Project (UHRP) published [*Genocide Tours: International Travel Companies in East Turkistan*](#), a briefing shedding light on international travel companies that advertise tours to East Turkistan in English. These companies

are primarily based in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand. UHRP now examines tours offered by companies based across Europe and in languages other than English.

To identify these companies, UHRP employed a straightforward methodology. We conducted searches

¹ In the original text, the ECTAA, and not the Roundtable Human Rights in Tourism were credited with formulating the human rights standards for conducting business, also known as the Implementation Guidelines.



Map of tourist sites on itineraries of European travel companies listed in the current briefing.

in French, German, Italian, Spanish, and Dutch using the terms “Uyghur,” “Xinjiang,” “Kashgar,” “Urumqi,” and “Silk Road” in combination with the word “tour” on Google’s main search engine. This search revealed 18 companies in six European countries offering 25 tours to East Turkistan. While this survey may not encompass the entirety of the tours available in these countries, it does demonstrate the accessibility of such tours, suggesting that the 18 identified companies might only be the tip of the iceberg.

These travel companies are not only facilitating visits to these destinations, but also perpetuating Chinese government narratives that present Uyghurs as an “exotic” people for tourist consumption.

Just as in our August 2023 briefing, UHRP is urging these 18 companies to discontinue tours to East Turkistan. Since the previous publication, two companies, Goway Travel and Intrepid Travel, have [ceased](#) offering visits to the region. However, five companies, namely Abercrombie & Kent, Bamboo Travel, Geographic Expeditions, Laurus Travel, and Wild Frontiers, still [advertise](#) tours to the Uyghur region.

UHRP maintains its concerns regarding organized travel to East Turkistan. These tours take tourists to Kashgar, Turpan, and Ürümqi, all of these destinations are linked to genocide and crimes against humanity. These connections arise from the repression of religious beliefs, the destruction of cultural heritage, racial profiling, surveillance, internment, and imprisonment of Uyghurs and other Turkic peoples. All 18 European travel companies visit at least one of these three locations.

Avontuurlijk Xinjiang: door Tien Shan en Altai gebergte

Een tocht voor de echte ontdekkingsreiziger. U reist door een wereld waar China ver weg lijkt. Een avontuurlijke tocht door het Tien Shan gebergte en het Altai gebergte laat u kennismaken met uiteenlopende bevolkingsgroepen als de Kazachen, Oeigoeren, Tuvanen en Mongolen. U overnacht in yurts, bij prachtige meren, reist door woestijnen en...

[Lees meer](#)



Description of “Avontuurlijk Xinjiang: door Tien Shan en Altai gebergte” (Adventurous Xinjiang: Through Tianshan and Altai Mountains) offered by Dimsum Reizen.

Numerous travel companies, including China Roads (France), Intermèdes (France), Asien Special Tours (Germany), China Tours (Germany), Papaya Viaggi (Italy), Shiraz Travel Tours (Italy), Vitagi (Italy), Pangea Travel (the Netherlands), and Riksja Travel (the Netherlands), feature the Karez in their travel itineraries. The Karez comprises a network of underground channels established in the 15th century, designed to transport water from the Tengritagh, or Heavenly Mountains, to the Turpan Basin using gravitational force. These channels play a vital ecological role in sustaining the habitats of native flora and fauna, as well as supplying water for household needs and agricultural irrigation.

Many of these tours offer intrusive and problematic “experiences” for visitors, such as visits to Uyghur homes, which families are in no position to refuse given the environment of securitization and state control.

As highlighted in the UHRP report titled [The Complicity of Heritage: Cultural Heritage and Genocide in the Uyghur Region](#), there has been a historical

revisionism regarding the origins of the Karez. This revision has shifted the recognition of this engineering feat, which originated from Uyghur knowledge and effort, into the narrative of Chinese history. The authors of the UHRP report, Professor Rachel Harris and Aziz Isa Elkun, write, “As acknowledged by the International Criminal Court, acts of dispossession and destruction of cultural heritage are often the precursor to acts of genocide...They are a form of cultural warfare aimed at the elimination of a people and their identity.”

These travel companies are not only facilitating visits to these destinations, but also perpetuating Chinese government narratives that present Uyghurs as an “exotic” people for tourist consumption. Examples of these narratives can be found in the promotional materials of companies such as [Asien Special Tours](#) (Germany), [Papaya Viaggi](#) (Italy), [Shiraz Travel Tours](#) (Italy), [Rutas10](#) (Spain), and [Intermèdes](#) (France). [Riksja Travel](#) (the Netherlands) goes as far as describing the rebuilding of Kashgar Old City, despite its demolition and the subsequent [dispossession](#) of thousands of Uyghurs, as having been done “tastefully.”

Dag 11 Jiayuguan – Turpan

Reistijd: circa 6 uur

We brengen je naar het station en je neemt de trein naar Turpan. Ook hier staan we op je te wachten en brengen we je naar het hotel. We hebben een fijn hotel voor je gevonden wat buiten de drukte van het centrum ligt, midden tussen de druivenvelden. Hier kan je op het terras van het hotel even uitrusten van de reis. Breng de rest van de dag door in het hotel of loop door de druivenvelden. Het hotel ligt buiten de stad, heerlijk lokaal. Loop eens een rondje door de velden en geniet van het zonnetje.

Geen zin in niks doen? Aanvullend op de excursie van morgen kan je ook vandaag al een excursiedag bijboeken. Je bezoekt dan ondermeer de Emin Minaret en de Karez watersystemen waar het zuivere bergwater door naar de stad vervoerd werd. Vraag gerust om meer info!



Dag 12 Turpan en omgeving

De omgeving van Turpan heeft een hoop te bieden. Samen met je gids en chauffeur ga je deze dan ook ontdekken. Je begint de dag bij de ruines van Gaochang. Dit zijn de grootste ruines in de omgeving en hier zie je hoe verschillende groepen in de omgeving om de macht gevochten hebben. Vervolgens rij je door naar de Tuyu vallei waar je Mazar village bezoekt.

Hier in Mazar is de lunch. In een lokaal restaurant waar de tijd jaren heeft stilgestaan. Neem een kijkje in de keuken en wijs aan wat je wil eten. Alles wat op tafel komt is heerlijk. Na het bezoek aan Mazar reis je terug richting de stad en neem je een kijkje bij de flaming mountains. De temperatuur kan hier zo hoog oplopen dan je in het zand een ei kan koken. In de avond ben je weer terug in het hotel. Laat je verrassen door de kookkunsten van de eigenaar en bestel de Dapanji. Een grote schaal met kip. Heerlijk.

Excerpt of “De Chinese zijderoute” (The Chinese Silk Road) offered by Riksja Travel.

Many of these tours offer intrusive and problematic “experiences” for visitors, such as visits to Uyghur homes, which families are in no position to refuse given the environment of securitization and state control. This represents a significant violation of privacy and perpetuates the surveillance programs that have been [carried out](#) in Uyghur homes. As an example, the French travel company [Hasamélis](#), as part of its La Route de la Soie Chinoise tour, offers dinner in Turpan with a Uyghur family in their home. Other companies offering home visits include EMS Voyage, Shiraz Travel Tours, and Viatgi.

By bringing tourists to East Turkistan, these travel companies are implicitly supporting the normalization of genocidal Chinese government policies aimed at eradicating the Uyghur identity, further denying the Uyghur people the ability to define “Uyghurness” for themselves.

UHRP is clear in its message: we are urging international travel companies in North America,

Europe, and Australia to cease profiteering from genocide. We do not advocate for a ban on travel to East Turkistan, leaving the decision to visit the region to the conscience of the individual traveler.

We recommend travel companies and trade associations call for an end to tours to East Turkistan and to increase due diligence processes and human rights compliance in line with international standards. Travel companies have the opportunity to turn from selling “Genocide Tours” to becoming Uyghur allies through publicly canceling tours and condemning China’s crimes against humanity.

The table below shows the findings from our search of European travel companies currently offering tours to the Uyghur region.

Country	Company	Name of Tour
France	China Roads	Circuit Route de la Soie
		Kashgar, une ville du Xinjiang plus près de Bagdad que de Pékin !
		La grande route de la Soie de Pékin à Samarcande
		Self Drive en Chine – Du Kirghizistan vers le Pakistan via Xinjiang
	EMS Voyage	Route de la Soie - de Kashgar à Xi'an
	Hasamélis	La Route de la Soie Chinoise
	Intermèdes	Chine, la Route de la Soie
	Nomade Adventure	La Chine, une belle fin en soie...!
Germany	Asien Special Tours	Entlang der legendären Seidenstraße durch China
	China Tours	Legendäre Seidenstrasse
	Geoplan Touristik	Chinesische Seidenstraße
	Paradeast	Auf der Seidenstraße bis Kashgar
Italy	Papaya Viaggi	La Via della Seta
	Shiraz Travel Tours	Cina – La via della seta e il passaggio a Torugart
Spain	Rutas10	Kirgystán - China
		Kirgystán - China - Tayikistán
		La Gran Ruta de la Seda
		La Ruta de las Caravanas
		Pueblos del Turkestan
	Viatgi	China: Ruta de la Seda
Switzerland	Hidden China	Reit- und Trekking Tour Jiadengyu - Kanas See
Netherlands	Dimsum Reizen	West China: Xinjiang Zijderoute reis
	Pangea Travel	De Zijderoute
	Riksja Travel	De Chinese zijderoute
	Sawadee	Groepsrondreis Zijderoute

III. European Standards

[The European Travel Agents and Tour Operators' Association](#) (ECTAA), based in Brussels, is a continent-wide entity overseeing national trade organizations in Europe. Les Entreprises du Voyage (France), DRV (Deutscher Reiseverband) (Germany), Confturismo-Confcommercio and FTO (Federazione Turismo Organizzato) (Italy), ACAVe - Asociacion Corporativa de Agencias de Viajes Especializadas (Spain), SRV (Swiss Travel Association) (Switzerland), and ANVR (Algemeen Nederlands Vereniging van Reisondernemingen) (the Netherlands) are all full members of the ECTAA. For example, through their membership of Les Entreprises du Voyage, French travel companies EMS Voyage and Hasamélis are linked to the ECTAA.

The ECTAA has committed to human rights best practices “according to the [UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights](#) through preventing, addressing and remedying human rights abuses committed along the supply chain in their business operations.” The ECTAA has produced [Implementation Guidelines](#) on mainstreaming human rights into the work of European travel companies that includes the following documents:²

- Responsible Tourism in Oppressive Regimes – A Guide for Tour Operators to Put People First
- Human Rights in Tourism – An Implementation Guideline for Tour Operators
- Tourism in Fragile Contexts – Guidelines for Product and Communication Managers for the Implementation of Human Rights-Related Due Diligence

In the document [Responsible Tourism in Oppressive Regimes](#), the Round Table of Human Rights

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recommend guidelines relevant to the Uyghur context, which are quoted below:

Local Value Creation

The local population should benefit from tourism. In oppressive regimes, however, there are often upstream mechanisms (e.g., state agencies, visa fees and similar). This requires an analysis of value creation and how it can be distributed to have a direct positive impact on the local population.

Employment

The local population should be involved as broadly as possible in business processes, employment and decisions that affect the destination. Oppressive regimes tend to violate labour rights, promote forced labour or slavery, or structurally discriminate against certain marginalised groups (such as women, migrant workers, ethnic minorities or LGBTQI+ groups). This requires heightened due diligence in recruitment criteria, wage structures, employee welfare and safety measures.

Empowerment of Travellers

Travellers can have an impact by visiting a country with a politically challenging context. Regimes can instrumentalise travellers for their ideology or even discriminate against or endanger them. This requires special care and transparent and informative communication in advance.

UHRP was unable to locate corporate social responsibility statements regarding human rights standards for the vast majority of the companies under review. Some companies, such as [Rutas10](#), have posted commitments to sustainable tourism. Therefore, UHRP recommends European travel companies not only join national trade associations connected to the

ECTAA, but also adopt ECTAA’s human rights standards for conducting business.⁵

Furthermore, UHRP suggests European travel companies, national associations, and the ECTAA consider the [Framework Convention on Tourism Ethics](#) approved by the UN General Assembly in 2019 as further benchmarks for business standards.

IV. About the Author

Genocide Tours: European Travel Companies in East Turkistan was researched and written by Dr. Henryk Szadziwski, Director of Research at the Uyghur Human Rights Project.

V. Acknowledgements

The author is grateful to UHRP staff Peter Irwin and Ben Carrdus who reviewed early and subsequent drafts. Any remaining errors of fact or judgment are the author’s responsibility.

Cover image credit: Patrick Wack (www.patrick-wack.com)

VI. Appendix

On November 16, 2023, the Uyghur Human Rights Project [sent](#) an email to all 18 European travel companies informing them that they had been named in a forthcoming report. The email addresses of the European travel companies are all publicly listed. At the time of publication, UHRP had received no responses to our communications.

The PDF and online versions of this report were last updated on March 12, 2024, to correct attribution errors in the text. The corrections appear on pages one, six, and seven of the PDF.

⁵ Ibid.