

# WHERE WORLDS AND IDEAS CONNECT: THE CARAVANSERAI

Caravanserais were located all along the Silk Road, a trade route that spanned from Turkey to China. These caravanserais served two main functions: to provide travelers with a safe place to rest, and to house a marketplace where merchants could sell and trade their goods. Buildings were generally situated within one day's travel of each other. Caravanserais were often built by either a local government or a private citizen, and had a caretaker who oversaw day-to-day activities.



**The Courtyard**  
In many caravanserais, the courtyard was the hub of activity. Here people met, animals rested, and small bazaars were set up where merchants could trade their goods. The scene was filled with an amazing array of sights, sounds, and scents. The courtyard often housed a fountain or large well to provide water.

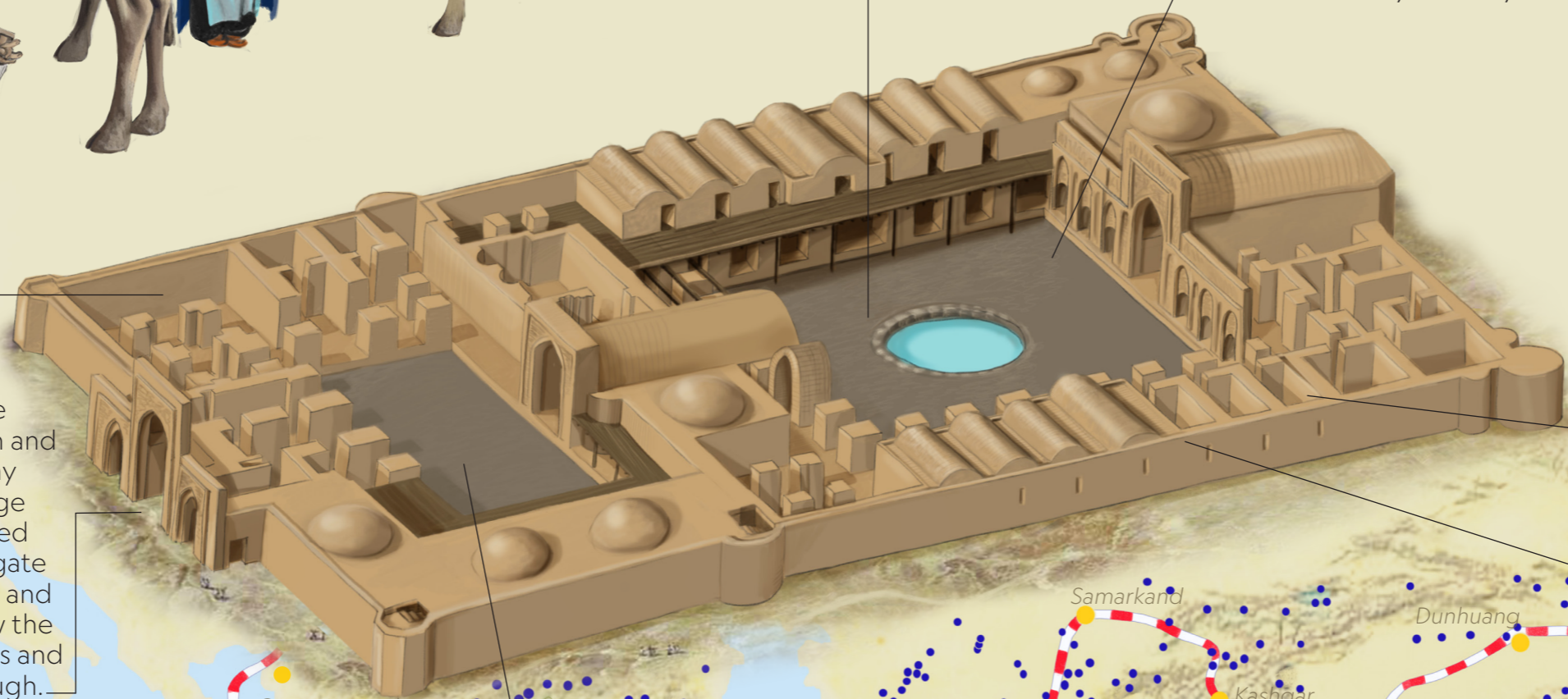
**Providing for Animals**  
Most caravanserais had space set aside on the first floor for stables to house livestock. Large open spaces in the courtyard allowed horses and camels rest and water. There were also storerooms where hay and feed were kept.

**Storage**  
Located at various points on the ground floor were a number of storage spaces for grain, foodstuffs, hay, and even merchandise.

**Limited Entrances**  
Visitors found there was only one way in and one way out in many caravanserais. A large wooden gate marked the entrance. This gate needed to be wide and tall enough to allow the heavily laden horses and camels to get through.

**Rooms**  
On the second level, small rooms were available for travelers to spend the night. If they were lucky, their rooms had a small window for light and air. There might be a small place to build a fire for heat.

**Security**  
Many of the caravanserais had fortified walls and outposts that might house soldiers or guards to protect the compound from bandits who roamed the roads. Some vital communication centers; caravanserais in northern India supplied messenger horses that traveled to larger cities with important news.



**The Marketplace**  
The focal point of any caravanserai was the marketplace. Its location could vary from site to site. Sometimes it was located in a corner where merchants could set up their wares on tables or on the ground. Some locations had a separate area attached to the caravanserai where stalls or tables were used.

**The Travelers**  
It was rare that a merchant or caravan would travel the entire trade route. Instead, caravans would journey a specific segment of the route where they would stop and rest at the caravanserais to trade and/or replenish supplies.

