



ROAD TO SAMARKAND

Go Beyond Tour | 23 Days | Physical Level 3

Bishkek – Cholpon Ata – Karakol – Bokonbayevo – Naryn - Tash
Rabat – Kochkor – Chong Kemin - Tashkent – Samarkand – Bukhara
– Khiva - Tashkent

Take a journey along 2,000-plus-years of Central Asian Silk Road history. Discover the colourful markets and Swiss Alps like scenery of Kyrgyzstan, the ancient cities of Samarkand, Bukhara and Khiva and travel through stunning scenery in the footsteps of great explorers and conquerors.

- Uncover the beauty of Samarkand
- Learn about traditional paper making
- Discover holy Bukhara
- Meet nomads in Kyrgyzstan
- Explore the Exotic Khiva
- Watch traditional eagle hunting

TOUR MAP



ROAD TO SAMARKAND TOUR INCLUSIONS:

- Return international economy flights, taxes and current fuel surcharges (unless a land only option is selected)
- All accommodation (3-4 stars hotels & guest house)
- Meals as specified
- All sightseeing and entrance fees
- All transportation and transfers
- English speaking National Escort (if your group is 10 or more passengers) and local guides
- Specialist advice from our experienced travel consultants
- Comprehensive travel guides

The only thing you may have to pay for is personal expenditure e.g. drinks, optional excursions or shows, insurance of any kind, customary tipping and early check in or late check out. These are all payable locally.

GO BEYOND TOURS:

Venture off the beaten track to explore fascinating destinations away from the tourist trail. You will discover the local culture in depth and see sights rarely witnessed by other travellers. These tours take you away from the comforts of home but will reward you with the experiences of a lifetime. You will be accompanied by our dedicated and professional National Escorts and local guides, whose unparalleled knowledge will turn your holiday into an unforgettable experience.

PHYSICAL LEVEL 3:

All our tours feature a physical rating to help you select the right holiday for you. To travel on any of our tours requires unaided mobility and the ability to stroll around the sights.

'Road to Samarkand' is rated as a physical level 3 tour. This itinerary requires a high level of fitness involving hiking and travelling to remote areas where tourist facilities are less developed. This itinerary also drives through areas of high altitude. If you have an existing respiratory, vascular or coronary condition, we recommend checking with your doctor before undertaking this itinerary.

- On some days driving distances are very long and it will take the whole day to reach your destination
- There will be a few days of walking whilst sightseeing with 5 – 7 hours a day
- The hikes will generally last around 1-2 hours at a time, sometimes on an incline and mostly on uneven ground.
- In Kyrgyzstan you will stay overnight in a guest house that has private facilities.

Of course, our National Escorts will always endeavour to provide the highest level of service and assistance; however, they cannot be expected to cater for customers who are unfit to complete the itinerary. If you require any more information about the pace of the tours, please contact our reservations team who will be happy to answer your questions.

JOINING YOUR TOUR:

This tour is 23 days in duration including international flights. Please note due to flight schedules you may arrive/depart on Day 2.

For travellers booked on 'Land Only', the price includes your arrival/ departure airport transfers if arriving/departing on the start and conclusion date of your tour. Please advise your international flight times to our reservations team. Join the tour on Day 2 in Bishkek and end the tour on Day 22 in Tashkent. Please refer to your final itinerary for more specific meeting instructions pertaining to your departure.

ITINERARY CHANGES:

It's our intention to adhere to the day-to-day itinerary as printed; however, the order of events or sightseeing may change as we look to improve our tours or as local conditions dictate. In these circumstances we will make the best possible arrangements maintaining the integrity of your trip.

DETAILED ITINERARY

Days 1-2: Fly to Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan

Meals: D

Fly to Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. Upon arrival, you will be met and transferred to your hotel. The remainder of the day is at your leisure to rest before dinner and a welcome dinner.

An early check in on day 2 is included from 6am (including breakfast) subject to availability. If you require additional nights, please contact our reservations team.



Destination Information

Bishkek - The capital of Kyrgyzstan has a population of 900,000 people. The city did not develop until 1825, when the Kokand Khanate enclosed the site as a fortress. By 1864, the Russians had captured the fortress and in 1878, founded the city of Bishkek. Bishkek is a city of wide boulevards and marble-facade public buildings combined with numerous Soviet-style apartment blocks. Most streets are flanked on both sides by narrow irrigation channels that water the innumerable trees, which provide shade during the hot summers.

Day 3: Ala-Archa National Park

Meals: B, L, D

Today you will visit Ala Too Square, the white house and Oak Park before continuing to Ala-Archa National Park, stopping at base camp. Within this time you will rise from 750 to 2100m above sea level.

Spend 1 hour on a leisurely walk taking in the picturesque scenery of snow-capped mountains and freshwater rivers. This is a gentle hike, that includes climbing some hills and slopes and walking uneven terrain. Participants must be able to complete this walk independently, otherwise you will be able to wait at the bus.



In the afternoon, continue with a city-tour in Bishkek, which will involve 2-3 hours walking tour to the main sights of the capital. Visit Manas Monument in Philharmonic Square, then enjoy a walking tour around main Ala Too Square to watch the changing of the Guard of Honor ceremony. Continue to Manas Monument, the Old Square, Lenin's Monument, the Oak Park and the Victory Square

Destination Information

Ala Too Square – Formerly known as Lenin Square, the square was built in 1984 to commemorate the 60th Anniversary of the Soviet Era. Today the square serves as a site for state events. Its main centrepiece is a statue of Manas in celebration of the 20th anniversary of independence.

Ala Archa National Park – Ala-Archa is an alpine national park in the Tian Shan Mountains. The name Ala Archa translates as ‘Bright Juniper’ from Kyrgyz as the whole gorge is covered with various trees including the main one – juniper.

Day 4: Cholpon Ata / Lake Issy Kul

Meals: B, L, D

This morning, you will visit the 12th Century Burana Tower and enjoy the breath-taking views along the road as you continue another 3 hours to Cholpon-Ata. The town is located at the northern shore of Lake Issyk Kul and is known for its large open-air collection of petroglyphs of ibex, wolves and deer etched into glacial stone that date back to the 8th century.



Afterwards, cruise on Lake Issyk Kul and view the stunning, alpine scenery. It can be cold on the 1-hour cruise, so we recommend you bring a warm jacket.

Destination Information

Burana Tower – This 11th century octagonal monument was once a taller minaret until earthquakes caused significant damage. Today the tower, castle foundations and grave markers are the ruins of the capital of the Karakhanids.

Cholpon-Ata – The resort town on the northern shore of Lake Issyk-Kul literally means "Venus-father". The town contains numerous large and small sanatoria, hotels and guesthouses to accommodate the many visitors who descend upon the lake in summer months. During the Soviet era it was much frequented by vacationers brought here in organized mass tours from other parts of the USSR. Holidaymakers now usually originate mainly from Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. The location of the town is very attractive - the view of the imposing alpine ranges of the Tian Shan across the lake is impressive. The first three World Nomad Games were held on the outskirts of Cholpon-Ata in 2014, 2016, and 2018..

Issyk Kul – The stunning Issyk Kul lake is one of the largest lakes in the world, measuring at 180km long, 60km across and 700m deep. The lake sits in a hollow surrounded by the snow-capped peaks of Terskei and Kungei Ala-Tau Mountain ranges at the altitude of 1600 m. Explorers from the 19th century marvelled at the lake, one calling it ‘a blue, emerald set in a frame of silvery mountains’.

Day 5: Karakol

Meals: B, L, D

Continue this morning with a 3-hour drive to the town of Karakol and check in for a two-night stay.

First visit the picturesque Semenov Gorge to enjoy a gentle hike at the gorge for approximately one hour in duration. You will need to climb some hills and slopes with moments of walking over uneven ground. Arrive in Karakol the early afternoon and check into your hotel.



This afternoon visit the interesting Przhevalsky Museum and examine the regions diverse religious influences with visits to the striking Holy Trinity Orthodox Church and the Chinese mosque

Destination Information

Semenov Gorge - Approximately 30km in length, Semenov Gorge is located 40km from Karakol. Flowing through the gorge is Ak-Suu River, which begins at a glacier.

Przhevalsky Museum – This neo-classical single-story building details the life of the Russian explorer who first described Central Asia. It displays fascinating exhibits on the Issy Kul petroglyphs, Scythian bronze artefacts, and a short history of the geology and mineral exploitation in the region.

Holy Trinity Orthodox Cathedral - This church was built out of wood on brick base, finished in 1895 on the ruins of a stone church. It is said that during construction, no nails or metal fastenings were used.

Chinese Mosque - The mosque was constructed in 1907 with the help from a Chinese architect and 20 carvers from Beijing. It is in the style of a Chinese temple for the local Dungans yet was built in the Kyrgyz traditional wood feathering style instead of metal nail construction. Visits inside are not always guaranteed.

Day 6: Jety-Oguz Gorge

Meals: B, L, D

Rise early and travel to the outskirts of town for the unforgettable Karakol Sunday Animal Market.

In the afternoon, travel to the Valley of Flowers and Jety-Oguz Gorge where you can enjoy a light hike through the magnificent canyon of red sandstone. Sightseeing in the canyon involves 1 hour of leisurely walking on a bush track. Although this is a gentle hike, you will need to climb some hills and slopes and you will be walking over uneven ground at altitude. If you take part in this activity, you must be able to complete it independently. Alternatively, you can wait on the bus.



In Jety-Oguz you can also enjoy horseback riding, visit a yurt and have a cup of tea or the Kyrgyz national beverage. Dinner will be provided with a local Dungan family in Karakol City. Learn the fascinating story of why this Muslim Chinese group immigrated to the region 140 years ago, how they made the area their home, and how families today keep their traditional culture and cuisine alive.

Destination Information

Sunday Animal Market - Early on Sunday mornings Kyrgyzstan's biggest animal markets takes place around 2km north of central Karakol. Typical of such markets, you'll observe locals bargaining over thoroughbred horses or bundling sheep into the back seats of cars amid the backdrop of white-topped mountains.

Jety-Oguz Gorge - A lush valley located 30km outside Karakol, the name translates to 'seven bulls' in the Kyrgyz language, referring to the red sandstone rock formations that resemble seven angry bulls. It is famous for its hot springs and the beautiful scenery.

Dungan People – A group of Muslim people of Chinese origin residing in China and former Soviet republics, members of this ethnic group also call themselves Hui.

Day 7: Bokonbaevo Village

Meals: B, L, D

Drive around 3 hours to Bokonbayevo Village and watch a demonstration of Eagle Hunting. Return to your vehicle for your 3-hour journey with breath-taking views as you make your way to Naryn.



Destination Information

Eagle Hunting – See a demonstration of hunting with trained golden eagles, often using a sacrificial rabbit trapped for the purpose. This style depicts authentic hunting traditions: this is often how young eagles are trained.

Bokonbaevo Village - a cosy and picturesque village on the southern shore of lake Issyk Kul, with green meadows and snow-capped mountains nearby. The surrounding area is sprinkled with yurts. Most people here make a living by either farming or craftsmanship.

Day 8: Tash Rabat

Meals: B, L, D

Travel to the Tash Rabat's historic caravanserai set in a peaceful valley setting where the only habitation is a series of seasonal yurt-camps. The scenery in this valley is some of the finest you will encounter in Kyrgyzstan. The altitude here is 3,200 metres so do prepare accordingly.



After visiting Tash Rabat, you will return to Naryn for your overnight stay.

Destination Information

Tash Rabat Caravanserai - For centuries, these lands connecting China, the Middle East and Europe, through countries like Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, were the superhighway of international trade. Caravans of goods travelled in all directions, carrying wares to be traded. Necessities or luxuries, they created a moving market that entire economies relied on. Mountains often provide either a backdrop or a foreground – beautiful but foreboding, especially when you think about how many people have passed through this region throughout history. Often Caravanserais, or travellers' inns, were built in mountainous valleys. The Tash Rabat Caravanserai is one of the best preserved on the old Silk Road from China to Istanbul.

Day 9: Kochkor

Meals: B, L, D

Transfer to Kochkor this morning, the centre of Kyrgyz national felt handicrafts.

Visit a local workshop in Kochkor and see the manufacturing of the traditional Kyrgyz wool carpets, called 'shyrdak'. Explore a small local market in the centre of the village and visit a local co-op that provides training for local women in traditional handicrafts.



Continue to Chon Kemin National Park, where upon arrival, you will have time to explore the village.

Destination Information

Kochkor Village - Kochkor is a large village with a population of 15,000. Most of the inhabitants are farmers and shepherds who live in yurts during the summer. Kochkor used to be a stop for Silk Road merchants travelling to and from Kashgar, on the other side of Torugart Pass in China. The pleasant, leafy town overlooked by snow-capped mountains is a base for excursions into the high country.

Day 10: Chong Kemin National Park

Meals: B, L, D

Some areas of Kyrgyzstan look as if artists have sculpted and painted nature. This is especially true on the drive between Kochkor and Chong Kemin National Park, where the latter is set in a quiet valley with small villages surrounded by magnificent mountains and a fir forest. Take in the daily life in Ashu Village.



In the afternoon, continue to Bishkek airport to board the flight to Tashkent, the capital of Uzbekistan. On arrival, you will be met and transferred to your hotel and enjoy dinner.

Please note, the visit to Ashu Village is not guaranteed and is dependent on your flight time.

Destination Information

Chon-Kemin Valley – The spectacular Chon-Kemin Valley is almost 80km deep and is famous for its natural beauty, abundant wildlife and mountain lakes.

Tashkent – Tashkent at 3 million people is the capital of Uzbekistan, as well as the most populated city in ex-Soviet Central Asia. Tashkent was influenced by Turkic cultures in its early history, before Islam in the 8th century AD. Genghis Khan destroyed the city in 1219, but the city was rebuilt and profited from the Silk Road. Between the 18th to 19th century, the city became an independent city-state, before being re-conquered by the Khanate of Kokand. In 1865, it fell to the Russian Empire, and became the capital of Russian Turkestan.

Day 11: Tashkent

Meals: B, L, D

This morning journey back in time exploring Tashkent's town sights: Barak Khan Madrassah, Kukeldash Madrassah and Tila Shaikh Mosque and their archives known for rare copies of the Koran. Stop at Chorsu Bazaar – the oldest market in Tashkent.

In the afternoon, you will be invited to the workshop of a famous family of ceramists in Uzbekistan – Akbar and Alisher Rakhimov. Here you will learn about their pastime.



Destination Information

Barak Khan Madrassah - Built in the 16th century with funds donated by the Tashkent ruler Navruz Akhmed, today this is the oldest educational institution in Tashkent. Though this madrassah is no longer used for its original purpose, it attracts attention for its well-preserved architectural features.

Kukeldash Madrassah - One of the biggest and one of the most famous historical monuments in Tashkent.

Tila Shaikh Mosque – The original mosque was built in 1890 and nowadays is one of the largest of its kind in the city of Tashkent. It is part of the famous historical and religious complex Hast Imam, which is situated in front of Barak Khan Madrassah.

Day 12: Tashkent - Samarkand

Meals: B, L, D

In the morning you will drive to Samarkand, where on arrival you will check in at the hotel.

No name is so evocative of the Silk Road as Samarkand. It is one of the oldest existing cities in the world and the oldest of Central Asia. Built on the site of Afrosiab which dated from the 3rd or 4th millennium B.C., Samarkand was known to the ancient Greeks as Marakanda and ruins of the old settlement remain north of the present city.



You will have a half-day tour of Samarkand to see the famous Registan Square which was for many centuries the heart of Samarkand. See the three beautiful madrasahs: the Ulug-Bek Madrasah built in the 15th century; the Tillya-Kori Madrasah built in the 17th century, and the Sher-Dor Madrasah, also built in the 17th century.

Destination Information

Samarkand - According to local history, when Alexander the Great first visited here he declared "I heard that Samarkand was beautiful but never thought that it could be so beautiful and majestic". The finest builders, craftsmen, philosophers and scientists were invited to Samarkand and the reputation of its refined civilisation grew until Samarkand was a city of legend and wonder along the Silk Road.

Registan Square - The Square is lined on three sides by sparkling turquoise tiled buildings of the Sher Dor and Tillya Kori madrasahs. The interior and exterior facades of the madrasahs are decorated with ornamental glazed brick, mosaics and carved marble. The square is considered an architectural gem representing the finest in Islamic Art and, most remarkably, a rare depiction of an animal's form. It was here that royal proclamations were read out and where justice was dispensed. The huge colourful bazaar is located nearby.

Day 13: Samarkand

Meals: B, L, D

This morning, we continue exploring Samarkand to see Gur Emir, the mausoleum of Tamerlane, the grandest structure of Amir Temur's times - the chief Friday Mosque called Bibi-Khanum - the Siab Bazaar and Shahi Zinda Necropolis.

Later in the afternoon we also see Mausoleum of the Prophet Daniel, which is a unique burial place of the saint, revered in all three world religions: Judaism, Islam, and Christianity



You have the remainder of the day at leisure.

Destination Information

Bibi-Khanum Mosque - One of the most impressive historic mosques in Central Asia, construction on Bibi-Khanym was started by Timur in 1399 and completed shortly before his death.

Shahi Zinda Necropolis - A mausoleum complex located northeast of the city, the names translates to 'Tomb of the Living King'. This refers to the important Muslim shrine in the region, the complex of quiet rooms around what is most likely the grave of Qusam ibn-Abbas, a cousin of the Prophet Mohammed who is thought to have brought Islam to this area in the 7th century.

Timur's Guri Amir Mausoleum - The famous blue ribbed domed mausoleum that rises over the old city's rooftops. Tamerlane was laid under a massive slab of green jade, said to be the largest Jade stone in the world.

Day 14: Samarkand

Meals: B, L, D

This morning visit Ulugbek's observatory, constructed by Ulugbek (Grandson of the Great Amir Temur) in 1428-1429. Later see the ancient settlement of Afrosiab.



Following your tour of Afrosiab, continue to Konigil Village to visit a papermaking workshop. Try your hand at the unique method of papermaking, which involves cleaning tree branches from the bark, polishing paper with a stone and painting on it. Afterwards, enjoy lunch in the courtyard of the papermaking mill.

After lunch, return to Samarkand and spend the remainder of the day at leisure.

Destination Information

Ulugh Beg Observatory - Ulugh Beg was Tamerlane's grandson and a great astronomer. During his rule in the 15th century, he summoned the great minds of the Islamic world to Samarkand.

Afrosiab - This ancient settlement is situated on the spurs of Chupan-Ata hills to the north-east of present-day Samarkand. According to the legend, it was here, on the banks of the river Siab, that the Turanian king and hero Afrosiab, a character of the folk epic 'Shahnama', founded the town that became the capital of Sogdiana.

Papermaking Workshop - Samarkand has been famed for its high-quality paper manufacture throughout the ages. In this workshop of talented masters, see how the rinds of the mulberry trees are turned into paper.

Day 15: Shakhrisabz

Meals: B, L, D

This morning you will travel the 2 hours to Shakhrisabz, the birthplace of the Great Amir Timur (Tamerlane), located approximately 90km south of Samarkand. Explore the city, visiting sites such as the remnants of Ak-Sarai Palace, Dorus Tilavat cemetery and Kok-Gumbas Mosque. Return to Samarkand this afternoon.



Please note that coaches are not allowed on the route to Shakhrisabz, instead we will travel in cars.

Destination Information

Shakhrisabz - 90kms from Samarkand, the name of Timur's hometown translated to 'Green City' and was his 2nd capital after Samarkand. The historic centre of Shakhrisabz was designated a UNESCO World Heritage site in 2000.

Ak-Sarai Palace - With its gigantic 65m gate-towers covered with blue, white and gold mosaics, Timur's summer palace is now a Unesco World Heritage Site. The crumbling relic will give you some idea of how Samarkand's buildings would have looked centuries ago.

Dorus Tilavat Cemetery – The memorial complex was formed after the death of the eminent religious leader Shamsiddin Kulal, the spiritual mentor of Timur. His grave immediately became a place of reverence for his numerous disciples. The area was reconstructed numerous times and served as an educational institution.

Kok-Gumbas Mosque – Visible practically from any point of Shakhisabz, the Friday Mosque gets its name from this 'Blue Dome' shimmering in the sun. The rich architectural structure was designed and constructed in 1435, 30 years after the death of Amir Timur.

Day 16: Samarkand to Bukhara

Meals: B, L, D

This morning continues the journey by road to Bukhara. En route, visit Gijduvan town which is a centre of famous handmade ceramics. Here you will see the fascinating process of making these ceramics as well as witnessing local life in this small town.



Arrive in Bukhara this afternoon and check into your hotel, where you will have the remainder of the day at leisure.

Destination Information

Gijduvan - The town's artisans are well known for a distinct style of pottery, which is turquoise bluish in colour. Their skills are passed down from father to son over the generations.

Day 17: Bukhara

Meals: B, L, D

Today you have a full day to explore fabulous Bukhara. This incredible city, one of the most famous of medieval Islam, is home to hundreds of registered monuments. On today's tour, we visit some of the main highlights as well as some lesser-known sights along the way. Bring a fully charged camera battery.



Today's sightseeing includes Lab-i-khauz ensemble - modern centre of traditional Uzbekistan, Madrassah Nadirkhon Devanbegi, Khanaga and Mogaki Attari Mosques, Poi Kalon Minaret and Mosque, see Madrassahs Aziz Khan and Ulugbek.

After lunch you will visit the Ark of Bukhara, Bolo Hauz Mosque and the Mausoleums of Ismail Samanid and Chashma Ayub. We will also visit Hunarmand UNDP Assisted workshops near Lyabi-Hauz, a chance to see traditional block printing, metal chasing, suzani embroidery, carving and gold embroidery.

Women should bring a scarf from home, as you are required to cover your head at some attractions today. Photo fees may be payable at most attractions you will visit in Bukhara, approximately USD7 in total.

Destination Information

Bukhara - A city which has a long history spanning 2,500 years and what was an integral part of the Persian Empire for centuries. Within the city, there are more than 350 mosques and 100 religious colleges. Bukhara was part of what came to be called the 'Golden Road', the meeting point of the northern and southern branches of the Silk Road, and hence a great centre for commerce, religion and culture.

Kalon Minaret - One of the most prominent landmarks of the city, Kalon Minaret was constructed in 1127 by the Karakhanid ruler Arslan Khan. An amazing structure standing at 47m tall, there are 14 ornamental bands and 10m deep foundations.

Ark of Bukhara - The fortified residence of the rulers of Bukhara but also housed palaces, temples, barracks, offices, the mint, warehouses, workshops, stables, an arsenal, a prison and nowadays a museum.

Bolo Hauz Mosque - Translated the name of the mosque means "The Mosque of the Bala Lake", which refers to the octagonal pool located in the public forecourt lined with stone steps. Built in 1712, the mosque is splendid and still functional – believers still visit to pray every day.

Ulugbek Madrassah - Built in 1417 as a center for science and astronomy in conservative Bukhara. Its design incorporates astral designs into its decorative facades. The madrassah could seat up to 80 students, with many graduates becoming eminent scholars and poets.

Lyabi-Hauz (or Labi-Hauz) - Lyabi-Hauz is a plaza built in 1620, constructed around a large pool. Derived from Persian and meaning 'ensemble near the pool', even today that custom continues as men gather to chat, play dominoes and drink endless pots of tea at the poolside chaikhana.

Day 18: Bukhara

Meals: B, L, D

Continue your sightseeing of Bukhara with an out-of-town excursion to visit the Sitorai Mokhi-Khosa, the summer residence of the former Emir of Bukhara where you can see unique mixture of traditional Russian style of architecture harmoniously mixed with local oriental traditions. The famous white hall decorated with carved alabaster resembles the halls of Petergof Palace in the suburb of St Petersburg.



Continue with an excursion to Bahauddin Naqshbandi Mausoleum, a famous Sufi spiritual leader of this region in the 14th century. Bahouddin Naqshband's cult was highly venerated among folks. The rulers, too, paid a considerable attention to this architectural ensemble.

Enjoy this afternoon at leisure.

Destination Information

Sitora-i-Mokhikhosa – Dated back to the beginning of the 20th century, the summer residence of the last Bukharan Emir is situated 4km outside the city. The main building of the palace consists of several reception halls and the emir's private chambers. Amongst them is the white hall, shining with dazzlingly white carved ganch covering the walls and ceilings.

Day 19: Khiva

Meals: B, L, D

Set out for Khiva in the early morning driving across the famous Kyzyl Kum Desert (Red Sands).

During this journey, watch in awe as the scenery changes from saksaul trees to the Amudarya riverbank. We will make several photo stops to see the desert flora and fauna. On arrival in Khiva, check into your hotel for a two-night stay.



Please be aware that you will be travelling for around 7 hours today. There will be adequate time for toilet breaks and photo stops.

Destination Information

Khiva – This small town was founded around the time Christ was born and was said to have been discovered by Shem, the son of Noah. The town certainly existed by the 8th Century, as a minor fort and trading post on a Silk Road branch to the Caspian Sea and the Volga River.

Amudarya River - The Amudarya River flows out of the Pamir Mountains, which marks the border between Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. During the reign of Alexander the Great, this river frequently featured in his campaigns, however it was then known as the Oxus River, after its discovery by Herodotus, an ancient Greek geographer

Day 20: Khiva

Meals: B, L, D

Khiva is made for walking. It is compact and well maintained and basks in beautiful desert light.

Participate in this leisurely walking tour and see all the major sights of the Ichtan Kala, the citadel. The truncated Kalta Minor Minaret, the Kurkna Ark Fortress, the Madrassah Rakhimkhon, the Mausoleum of Pakhlavan Makhmud and Islam Khodja Minaret - from the latter you will see the entire town beneath you and the desert beyond. The ravages of modern development have been largely kept away from the citadel itself, much to your advantage.



In the afternoon we will see the Friday Mosque and the 19th century Tash Hauli Palace.

Destination Information

Itchan Kala - A well-persevered example of Muslim architecture in Central Asia at the beginning of the 19th century, Itchan Kala is the inner town of Khiva. The town is surrounded by brick city walls, with four gates at the cardinal points.

Kukhna Ark Fortress - Construction of the fort began in the 12th century, making it one of the oldest buildings in Khiva. There is written evidence that the 'modern' citadel was built in 1668, and the complex grew to hold an arsenal, warehouse, guardhouse, jail, a large kitchen, stable and official offices. Of the buildings that once stood, you can still view the official reception hall, the ornate mint, mosque and a harem.

Tash Hauli Palace – Meaning “Stone House” this palace contains Khiva’s most sumptuous interior decoration, dense with blue ceramic tiles, carved wooden pillars and elaborate ganch. Completed in 1841, it’s said to have more than 150 rooms off nine courtyards, with high ceilings designed to catch the slightest desert breeze.

Day 21: Khiva to Tashkent

Meals: B, L, D

Today you will transfer 1hour to Urgench airport for your flight to Tashkent.

Tashkent is one of the oldest and largest cities in Central Asia and has been the Uzbek capital since 1920. The city is very much a showpiece of Soviet and post-Soviet architecture.

Upon arrival in Tashkent we visit the Museum of Applied Arts, Mustakillik Square, Amir Temur Square and the famous Tashkent Metro, opulently decorated with local marble and granite like an underground palace.

You have the remainder of the day at leisure.

**Destination Information**

Amir Temur Square - Built in 1882, the square was first named Konstantinovsky, then Kaufmann. After gaining independence, the square was remaned in honour of its statesman. A bronze statue of Timur on horseback sits in the centre of the square.

Tashkent Metro - Tashkent's metro stations are renowned as some of the world's most beautiful, This was the first city in Central Asia to build a metro and each of the 29 stations are bespokely designed.

Days 22-23: Depart Tashkent

Meals: B

Early morning transfer to the airport for your flight to New Zealand returning home the same or following day.

Late check-out is not included. Additional nights before and after your tour can be arranged. Please contact our reservations team to book.



KYRGYZSTAN AND UZBEKISTAN TRAVEL INFORMATION

VISAS:

Travel to Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan are visa free for New Zealand passport holders. New Zealand passport holders can travel to Kyrgyzstan for up to 60 days without a visa and to Uzbekistan for up to 30 days. Please be advised that your passport must have at least six months validity left on it when you arrive back into New Zealand.

Please note the visa procedures and requirements may change at any time. These changes are often made by the relevant embassy or consulate; Wendy Wu Tours acts as a third party and has no influence on the process of a visa. Currently a visa is required for New Zealand Passport holders. Your travel consultant will inform you if any changes are applicable prior to your departure.

VISA AND IMMIGRATION NOTES:

As Central Asian immigration and customs officials are notoriously strict, please make sure you keep all forms for when you exit the country. A lost customs or immigration form could result in a fine. When entering Uzbekistan, you will need to complete a foreign currency declaration form and keep a copy yourself. Failure to do so accurately or exiting the country with more currency than when you entered may result in delays, fines or the additional sums being confiscated.

Ensure you exchange any unspent local currency prior to departure as there is generally no exchange offices at international airports in Dushanbe and Bishkek.

Several medications containing tramadol, morphine, opiates or any other similar constituent component are banned in Turkmenistan and are considered narcotic drugs. Do not bring any medications containing these drugs into the country. Some medications available over the counter or by prescription in other countries, such as sleeping tablets, may be illegal or restricted in Uzbekistan. You should declare all prescription medications and other restricted items on arrival in Uzbekistan and carry a copy of the prescription with you.

INSURANCE:

We strongly recommend that you take out a policy as soon as you pay your deposit. Wendy Wu Tours cannot in any way be made liable for any additional cost incurred by the customer on any tour due to the customer not having adequate travel insurance.

We also encourage all customers to take a copy of their travel insurance documents (especially relevant international contact numbers) with them while on tour. We advise that you check the inclusions and procedures for lodging claims prior to your departure. These documents should be stored separately from the original

EATING IN CENTRAL ASIA:

Please be aware that dishes selected for your meals reflect the cooking styles and signature dishes of the local area you are in.

In Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, the cuisine is influenced by Middle Eastern and Turkic (or Mediterranean) dishes – yoghurts, dried fruit, legumes, fruit vinegars, or mild spices like cumin season the common dishes such as lagman (handmade noodles), shashlyk (kebabs), naan (flat bread) and plov (rice pilaf dish). Mutton and chicken are the only meats available in most areas and feature in most dishes. Local breakfast dishes include naan and airan (like sour cream), savoury noodles with vinegar and green tea. You may also be served a fried egg, jam, honey or toast. Black tea and coffee can usually be requested. Fresh cow's milk is not generally available.

Vegetarian only alternatives are not usually available in Kyrgyzstan, though Uzbekistani restaurants are more flexible. There are always plenty of salads, vegetables and bread offered at most meals. In remote areas, lunch may be prepared as 'picnic style' by the hotel that morning, or your guides may organise a simple meal at a local restaurant. Lunch is the main meal of the day, with dinner usually a lighter version of lunch.

If you have any food allergies or any other preferences, please make them known to your guide/s at the start of your trip; they will do their best to ensure that your requirements are met, however, 'no guarantees can be made'.

Long driving distances, road conditions or flight times may delay or alter your mealtimes, which could mean a dedicated meal is replaced by those supplied on the aircraft.

Despite the Muslim culture, drinking alcohol is acceptable and expected in this ex-Soviet region, Kyrgyzstan more so than Uzbekistan. Expect to be offered vodka (not included in your tour price) at every meal! The most popular mealtime drink is Chay (green tea) and is available at most meals, usually straight a large block of sugar crystal may be added to the pot, or even your glass. Black tea and coffee are not always served, however can usually be requested.

If you like, you can bring some supplements with you from home. Tea/coffee bags, instant soups or noodles, biscuits, energy bars, milk powder sachets, are all a good idea – consider your luggage weight though! There are numerous small supermarkets and shops in every town and village along the way where you can buy odd items e.g. instant noodles, muesli and chocolate bars, biscuits, drinks, chips, cakes and sweets.

PORTERAGE:

Please be aware that portorage is not included on the Road to Samarkand Tour. You will therefore need to be able to handle your own luggage within the hotel and when using transportation like trains and coaches.

DEVELOPMENT IN CENTRAL ASIA:

Although Central Asia is developing quickly, it still lacks the international standards of civil infrastructure and tourist facilities.

Concepts of personal responsibility are also different to those in New Zealand. Consequently, tourist and public facilities may not uphold the same safety standards as in New Zealand; for example, you may see a hole in the road without a warning sign or safety barricade. All of our suppliers meet local safety standards as a minimum. We want you to have an enjoyable holiday so we ask that you take extra care, use your common sense, refer to notices and follow advice from you National Escort/Local Guides.

The former Soviet countries in Central Asia were isolated and less developed by western standards for decades and all levels of infrastructure remain affected today in some way. In the tourism sector, newly built and very good hotels may still have poorly trained staff with an abrupt manner, roads can be in poor condition and officials can be corrupt. The level of English spoken outside of hotels is minimal (except for the children) and the Cyrillic alphabet is used instead of the Latin one (though this is slowly changing in Uzbekistan), so you will find your guides indispensable. We have found that those customers who embark with a sense of humour and adventure, who accept that things can and sometimes do go wrong, are those who find their experience most rewarding.

Road to Samarkand group tour is one of our most unique and adventurous group tours, tracing the ancient Silk Road, including the fabled city of Samarkand. We wish for you to embark on your journey through Central Asia with a level of tolerance and understanding.

This region is remote and conditions are not as developed as they are at home. It is essential that all customers recognise the demands of factors such as basic facilities, travelling at altitude and cultural differences. The rewards of seeing and experiencing these lands, so different from your own, are immeasurable and can only be enhanced by an adventurous spirit.

ACCOMMODATION:

Your accommodation has been selected for convenience of location, comfort or character, and can range from a standard hotel in one city to a family run guesthouse in a smaller town. In remote areas, accommodation may be of a lower standard and may not have all western amenities. Hotels are generally rated as local three-to-four-star standards, please note that there is no international classification system for hotels and differences in facilities and quality do exist between the New Zealand and Central Asia. Types of accommodation you may encounter on this tour include:

Guesthouse: These provide basic yet comfortable rooms in a small guesthouse. Every couple/single person will have their own room, western toilets and showers are shared, similar to a hostel. Breakfast and dinner is served in the restaurant.

Three and four star hotels: You will be staying in hotels of three and four star standards for the remainder of the tour.

LUGGAGE:

All travellers are limited to two items of luggage each: a suitcase with a maximum weight of 20kg and one piece of hand luggage with a maximum weight of five kilograms. It is essential that your luggage is lockable. Please note that authorities will only allow bottles onto the aircraft if they have been checked in as main baggage. Bottles in hand luggage may be confiscated.

Please be aware that portage is not included on our tours in Georgia. You will therefore need to be able to handle your own luggage within the hotel and when using transportation like trains and coaches.

GROUP SIZE:

Most of our groups consist of 10 travellers or more and will be accompanied by both a National Escort and local guides. There will be no more than 18 travellers in each group although you may encounter other Wendy Wu our groups while you are travelling. All our departures are guaranteed to operate with a minimum of 10 travellers booked (unless cancelled due to factors beyond our control). However, at our discretion we may operate departures with a smaller group size as we try to operate advertised departures wherever it is viable to do so. For groups with fewer than 10 travellers, departures will operate with local guides only.

PERSONAL EXPENSES AND OPTIONAL TOURING:

Personal Expense - You will need to take some extra money to cover drinks, laundry and souvenirs, plus any additional sightseeing that may be offered to you.

Optional Tours - May be offered in each city you visit during your tour. These are not included in the standard itinerary and will only be available if time permits and if seats are available.

EXCHANGING CASH:

Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan are very much cash-only economies. Please bring enough US Dollars in cash with you on your trip to cover your entire stay.

There are only a handful of ATM machines in Bishkek and Tashkent, although these are best to be relied on as they can be unreliable. There are no ATMs in smaller cities and rural areas.

Credit cards are only accepted in some major hotels and in a limited number of shops, therefore make sure you bring a sufficient amount of USD cash of different denominations.

In smaller cities, you will find banking facilities less reliable and may encounter staff that refuse to deal with a currency they are unfamiliar with, for this reason bring US Dollars with you for easy exchange. It is highly recommended when travelling to towns outside of the major cities that extra care is taken when exchanging money. You should only change money at officially authorised currency exchanges. We suggest exchanging your money before travelling to remote areas and smaller towns, as exchange facilities can be limited. Your National Escort will remind you to do this before departure.

Please bring only fresh, undamaged US Dollars with no blemishes, printed after 2001 as these notes will be accepted for exchange. Notes with any additional markings or notes that are faded are often refused even by official travel exchange offices. Bring USD notes in mostly 20 and 50 denominations with a handful of 100 USD notes.

When entering Uzbekistan, you will need to complete a foreign currency declaration form when you arrive and keep a copy yourself. Failure to do so accurately or exiting the country with more currency than when you entered may result in delays, fines or the additional sums being confiscated. This form will be either given to you on the incoming flight or you can pick one up in the airport Arrivals Hall.

TIPPING POLICY:

Tipping while on holiday is common in most parts of the world and Central Asia is no exception. However, it is not always clear who it is appropriate to tip and how much. Furthermore, travellers may not have the right amounts of cash available at the right time.

In order to avoid any inconvenience Wendy Wu Tours operates a tipping policy where a stated amount is given to your national escort at the beginning of your tour and tips are disbursed amongst your main service providers (for example local guides and drivers) throughout your tour. The amount is designed to be at a reasonable level for travellers while being fair to the local people and includes a gratuity for the national escort. Any other tipping, such as tips for bathroom attendants or hotel porters that are taking luggage to your room, is at your discretion based on satisfaction of services received, as are gratuities for additional requested special services.

We generally find that most customers appreciate the convenience of our tipping policy but we do recognize that it may not suit everyone. However, as this is a group tour we ask that everyone follows the same protocol to be fair to other group members and to ensure smooth operation of your tour.

TRANSPORT:

Coaches: Coaches with air conditioning are used on our group tours for city sightseeing, short excursions to the countryside and longer transfers where necessary. Main and inner-city roads in Central Asia have a reputation for being very congested. For this reason, it may not always be possible to return to your hotel after sightseeing to freshen up before going to the restaurant for dinner. Roads in this region have generally improved over recent years, but traffic and/or weather conditions may extend driving times.

Road construction work usually covers an enormous section of road - not just one or two kilometres as you may be used to. For this reason, the timings listed in the sections above are approximations only.

Planes: Internal flights are based on economy class, with reputable airlines. Pre-seat flight allocation is not available.

SIGHTSEEING:

Sightseeing at nearly all of the palaces, fortresses and some temples involves climbing quite a number of steps. These palaces were built to provide defense against potential invaders so nearly all of them stand on top of a hill, while the interiors have layers of narrow hallways and steps to slow down the advance of enemies once they were inside. The steps tend to be quite large, not level and sometimes without handrails. Mosques and Madrassas also tend to be built at an elevation, as this is the most auspicious position according to ancient beliefs. This means you sometimes need to walk from the bus park to the entrance, and/or need to climb some steps inside. *People with knee or hip injuries, who have poor balance or are otherwise unable to complete these activities independently should consider the suitability of this itinerary carefully.*

Ramadan, the Islamic festival of sacrifice will fall from 10 March to the 09 April 2024. This festival is characterised by the faithful abstaining from consuming food and drink (including alcohol) between the hours of sunrise and sunset. After sunset, you will find the locals celebrating nightly with an iftar - a meal at sunset, which breaks the fast, followed by pre-dawn meal -Suhoor. Travellers are not expected to adhere to these customs, with food and drink available during daylight hours.

Some businesses and tourist sites opening hours may be affected; though overall, there will be minimal disruption if your tour is travelling between these dates. Ramadan is an opportunity to travel through Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, witnessing this fascinating national holiday for yourself.

Modest clothing such as long lightweight pants and shirts that cover your shoulders for men and women is highly recommended. Headscarves for ladies are required for visits to mosques and madrassas throughout Central Asia. Your National Escort assist you with purchasing a headscarf at a market visit in Bishkek on day 2 of the tour, however it would be useful to bring one with you when packing.

Most of your touring in Kyrgyzstan is at an altitude between 2500 and 3300 metres above sea level so temperatures can get low during the day and very cold overnight between May and late September. Please ensure you have adequate warm clothing.

Temperatures for most of your time spent in Uzbekistan and Bishkek in Kyrgyzstan will range from 23°C to 35 °C between May and late September.

ALTITUDE:

Most of your touring in Kyrgyzstan is at an altitude between 2500 and 3300 metres above sea level. At these sort of altitudes, Altitude Sickness is a risk. Symptoms may include dizziness, fatigue, nausea and shortness of breath. It is recommended that travellers utilize their first day in high-altitude destinations to acclimatise. Staying hydrated, eating light meals and following a very light schedule will all help. We recommend that any symptoms that are unusual should be brought to the attention of your guide. Your guide will be extremely well-trained in dealing with its effects – taking it easy and taking some time to acclimatise are the best ways to prevent and combat it. Serious cases, meaning that you must descend immediately, are rare.

There are no specific factors, such as age or fitness, that can cause you to suffer from. Altitude Sickness can affect anyone at any time and symptoms may vary. In some instances, a short spell on oxygen can help enormously. There is medication - that can help treat and prevent symptoms. Consult a doctor before taking any of these medications, before engaging in strenuous activity at high altitude and regarding any necessary vaccinations in plenty of time before travelling.

VACCINATIONS AND YOUR HEALTH:

We recommend that you contact either your doctor or Health centre for advice on vaccinations and travel health. Safetravel has a comprehensive website that you may also find useful www.safetravel.govt.nz

BEFORE YOU LEAVE:

We strongly recommend registering your travel plans with www.safetravel.govt.nz as in the event of an emergency, New Zealand Consular assistance will be more readily available.

Up until the day you travel, it is vital you keep up to date and familiarised with the entry requirements as these can change at short notice. You are personally responsible for completing any entry forms, conducting any covid tests (if necessary), etc and adhering to countries' specific entry requirements.

You can also access the New Zealand Government's travel advisory service for up-to-date information about your destination on the same website.

AFTER YOUR BOOKING:

Once you have booked with Wendy Wu Tours, you will receive a confirmation invoice including a visa application form (if applicable), and a help sheet. Your final documentation pack will be sent to you approximately 2-3 weeks prior to departure.

Updated: May 2024