



JOURNEY THROUGH CENTRAL ASIA

2024 - Go Beyond Tour | 28 Days | Physical Level 4

BISHKEK – CHON-KEMIN – BOKONBAEVO – KARAKOL – ALMATY – DUSHANBE – KHUJAND – TASHKENT – SAMARKAND – BUKHARA – KHIVA – ASHGABAT MARY

Travel from Bishkek to Ashgabat on this 28 day 'Five Stan' cultural experience. This in-depth tour will see you visiting the Silk Road gems of Samarkand, Bukhara and Khiva, the quirky Turkmenistan, colourful markets, fascinating villages and Swiss Alps type scenery. Retrace the footsteps of Marco Polo and Alexander the Great on this unforgettable Central Asian journey.

- Uncover the Silk Road's history
- Relax on Lake Issyk-Kul
- Witness fascinating Eagle Hunting
- Browse the colourful bazaars
- Explore the exotic Khiva
- Discover ancient Samarkand

TOUR MAP

JOURNEY THROUGH CENTRAL ASIA TOUR INCLUSIONS:

- Return international economy flights, taxes and current fuel surcharges (unless a land only option is selected)
- All accommodation (3-4 stars, guest house & yurt camp)
- 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, early check-in or late check out and other items not specified on the itinerary.

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 4:

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.

‘Journey Through Central Asia’ is rated as a **physical level 4** 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
- The 2 hikes will generally last around 1-2 hours at a time, sometimes on an incline and mostly on uneven ground
- There will be a few days of walking whilst sightseeing with 5 – 7 hours a day
- In Kyrgyzstan, there will be one night spent in a guest house in Chon-Kemin valley, which will have private facilities.
- In Kyrgyzstan you will stay overnight in a yurt camp in Bokonbayevo, Day 5. Yurts are the traditional home of nomads in Central Asia. They are made from a wooden frame and layers of felt and canvas erected on a wooden platform, with shared bathroom 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:

The tour is 28 days in duration including international flights. Please note that depending on flight schedules passengers may arrive on Day 2.

Travellers booked on ‘Land Only’, the price includes arrival/departure airport transfers if arriving/departing on the start and conclusion date of your tour. Please advise your international flight times to reservations. Join the tour on Day 2 in Bishkek and end the tour on Day 27 in Ashgabat. 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’ll make the best possible arrangements to maintain the integrity of your trip.

DETAILED ITINERARY

Day 1-2: Fly to Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan

Meals: D

Fly to Bishkek where upon arrival you will be met and transferred to your hotel for check-in. The remainder of the day is at leisure.

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

Bishkek - The capital of Kyrgyzstan has a population of 900,000. 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

This morning you will enjoy a short city tour visiting Manas Monument, the main national hero of the Kyrgyz people. Walk around Ala Too Square to watch the changing of the Guard of Honour, Manas Monument and Old Parliament Square before transferring to Victory Square. Travel to Ala-Archa National Park, located 40 km from Bishkek. It will take 1 hour to reach base camp where you will stop. During the drive you will travel from 750 to 2100 meters above sea level.



Here you spend 1 hour leisurely walking as you take in the picturesque scenery of snow-capped mountains and freshwater rivers. All participants must be able to complete this walk independently, otherwise it will be best to wait at the bus.

The afternoon is at leisure in Bishkek before dinner.

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: Chon-Kemin National Park

Meals: B, L, D

This morning, you will travel to the 12th Century Burana Tower, and then continue as your journey takes a further 2 hours to Chon Kemin.

Chon Kemin is a quiet valley with small villages surrounded by magnificent mountains and a fir forest. Take in daily village life as you wander along the foothills and enjoy the views.

**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.

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

Day 5: Eagle Hunting

Meals: B, L, D

Travel to the town of Kochkor, visiting a local workshop where they manufacture traditional Kyrgyz wool carpets, called 'shyrdak' or 'Ala-Kiyiz'. Continue further to Bokonbaevo Village, to watch an eagle hunting demonstration, a millennia-old Kyrgyz tradition.

Tonight you will overnight in a traditional Yurt Camp. There are no en-suite facilities in the yurt camp

**Destination Information**

Kochkor - 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.

Bokonbaevo Village - Bokonbaevo Village is 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. The surrounding area is sprinkled with yurts. Most people here make a living by either farming or craftsmanship.

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.

Day 6: Karakol

Meals: B, L, D

After breakfast drive to Karakol. You will be visiting Skazka Canyon, also known as Fairy Tale Canyon, which was named due to its bizarre rock formations, including depictions of snakes, dragons and hippopotamuses. Close to the canyon you meet with 'Berkutchi', a Golden Eagle Hunter to enjoy a demonstration and learn about nomadic traditions.



Your next stop is at Barskoon Gorge to see the waterfall named 'Tears of Leopard'. The gorge is considered one of the most beautiful in the Issyk Kul area. Continue to Karakol.

Destination Information

Barskoon Gorge – A captivating natural beauty area that includes waterfalls, alpine lakes, and hiking trails. Visitors can explore nomadic culture and enjoy the stunning landscapes of this gorge, that is one of the most beautiful in the area.

Day 7: Karakol

Meals: B, L, D

This morning you visit Przhevalsky Museum as well as examine the diverse religious influences when stopping at the striking Holy Trinity Orthodox Church and Chinese mosque from the outside.



In the afternoon, travel to Jety-Oguz Gorge to enjoy a light hike through the magnificent canyon of red sandstone, following its river up to the Flower Glade and back. Enjoy a home-cooked dinner with a local Dungan family, learning 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 they keep their traditional culture and cuisine alive.

Destination Information

Przhevalskii Museum - 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 wooden church was built in 1894 on the ruins of a brick church. It is said that during construction, no nails or metal fastenings were used.

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. Famous for its hot springs and the beautiful scenery.

Day 8: Travel to Almaty

Meals: B, L, D

Rise early, travelling to the outskirts of town for the unforgettable Karakol Sunday Animal Market, the largest and most colourful in Central Asia.

Transfer for 2.5 to 3 hours, via beautiful scenery to the Kegen border crossing to Kazakhstan. After border formalities, travel further to the Charyn Canyon and its Valley of the Castles, named due to the pillars and rock formations. You can choose to hike down towards the valley floor and climb back up again or observe the canyon rim from above. Your visit here will be 2 hours.



Travel to Almaty where you will overnight.

Destination Information

Sunday Animal Market - Early on Sunday mornings Kyrgyzstan's biggest and most colourful animal markets takes place on the outskirts of Karakol. It is the place to be in Kyrgyzstan if you want to buy or sell farm animals - cows, horses, sheep, and goats are the primary objects of trade.

Charyn Canyon - Over three million years ago both wind and water sculpted Charyn's red sandstone to form today's fantastical shapes and shadows. Measuring approximately 150 kilometres long and up to 300 metres deep in some areas, the Canyon's River Valley is fed by the local Tian Shan Mountains.

Almaty - Situated beneath snow-capped peaks, and the capital of Kazakhstan until 1997, today Almaty is the country's largest metropolis and is still considered its cultural and trading hub.

Day 9: Almaty

Meals: B, L, D

This morning take part in an orientation walk visiting the city's old centre. Here you will discover the Park of 28 Panfilov Guardsmen, dedicated to the Panfilov heroes of an Alma-Ata Infantry who died defending Moscow from the German invasion during the Second World War. Inside the Park, you will find memorials of various heroic figures as well as the Ascension Cathedral, a Russian Orthodox church made entirely of wood that miraculously withstood a 1911 earthquake.



In the afternoon, explore the city's main attractions – the Ili Alatau mountains. Here, you will also explore Medeu, an outdoor speed skating and bandy rink that has become an essential part of the Ili Alatau Park, holding significance to Almaty's development as a city.

Located at the height of 1,690 metres, the Medeu skating rink is the highest rink location in the world. Go on to visit is Shymbulak, a mountain resort located 2,260 metres above sea level. Continue to Kok Tobe, a park popular among locals and tourists before taking a ride on a cable car for magnificent panoramic views of the city.

You will return to your hotel afterwards, where the remainder of the day is at leisure..

Destination Information

Zenkov Cathedral - Built between 1904 and 1907 and constructed entirely of wood, the Zenkov Cathedral showcases distinctive colourful hues and is once again a practicing Russian Orthodox Church having been used as a museum previously during the time of the Soviets.

Tian Shan Mountains - The Tian Shan also known as the Tengri Tagh, meaning the Mountains of Heaven or the Heavenly Mountain, is a large system of mountain ranges located in Central Asia. The highest peak in the Tian Shan is Jengish Chokusu located on the Kyrgyzstan–China border, at 7,439 metres.

Day 10: Dushanbe

Meals: B, L, D

You have this morning at leisure before your flight to Dushanbe, Tajikistan. On arrival you will transfer to your hotel for some leisure time



Destination Information

Dushanbe - With Soviet era pastel buildings and public squares contrasted with the outer hinterlands of mountains and rural villages Dushanbe is one of the most charming capital cities in Central Asia. The name originated from the Tajik word Monday because of a once popular market that would be held each week on that specific day.

Day 11: Dushanbe

Meals: B, L, D

Today we visit famous Museum of National Antiquities, featuring artefacts from Tajikistan's Islamic and pre-Islamic history (Greek/Bactrian, Zoroastrian, Buddhist and Hindu), the museum shows that Tajikistan was an important crossroad in Central Asia.



A city tour of the Tajik capital will include walking through the city's Botanical gardens, Rudaki Park and stopping at the Ismoili Somoni monument. In the afternoon visit Hissor town (23 km from Dushanbe) to see ancient fortress of Hissor - one of the most precious historical sites of Tajikistan. Comfortably located near Dushanbe Hissor Fortress combines the traditional elements of power, trade and culture of the ancient Tajik nation. Visit Medrassah Kuhna (16th c) and Museum of Tajik Way of life there, 19c Medrassah nearby and mausoleum of Sufi saint Mahdumi Azam.

Destination Information

Rudaki Park - A scenic landscaped park with flower gardens, fountains and statues. Enjoy the peaceful setting and people watch with the locals.

Ismoili Somoni Monument - Standing 25 meters high, this statue commemorates the founder of the Samanid dynasty from the 10th century.

Hissor Fort - Fortress of Hissor - As a strategic outpost, the Fortress of Hissor has been destroyed over 20 times throughout history by the likes of Alexander the Great, Genghis Khan and Timur. Each time it has been rebuilt and today there are remnants of architecture that remain mostly from the 18th Century.

Day 12: Dushanbe - Khujand

Meals: B, L, D

This morning travel to Khujand. Khujand was continuously occupied for 2500 years and found – possibly on the site of an earlier settlement – by Alexander the Great. It is the furthest point he reached in Central Asia thus the city was named Alexandria Eschate (Alexandria the Furthest).



On the way to Khujand you will spend time at the breathtaking Lake Iskanderkul, that is surrounded by mountains, as you take in the memorable views. Continue to Khujand.

Destination Information

Lake Iskanderkul - Named after Alexander the Great, this lake is a popular attraction due to its glacier origin and vivid turquoise waters.

Khujand - One of Tajikistan's oldest cities dating back 2,500 years and founded by Alexander the Great as his eastern most settlement. Known as Leninabad during the USSR occupation it reverted to its original name in 1992.

Day 13: Khujand – Tashkent

Meals: B, L, D

In the morning you will enjoy a tour of Khujand, taking in the city highlights. Start by exploring Pushkin Square with Kamoli Khudjandi Square, Timur Malik's fortress and Sugd Museum, then continue to the Muslihiddin Memorial Complex and Panjshanbe Bazaar which offers a wide range of goods.



After lunch travel approximately 2 hours to Tashkent, crossing the border, Oibekand, into Uzbekistan on the way.

Destination Information

Pushkin Square - Named in honour of the great Russian poet and surrounded by neo classical buildings and fountains.

Panjshanbe Bazaar - A colourful and vibrant bazaar, the name of which translates from the Persian word for Thursday.

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 reconquered by the Khanate of Kokand. In 1865, it fell to the Russian Empire, and became the capital of Russian Turkestan.

Day 14: Tashkent

Meals: B, L, D

In the 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. Your last stop will be to the Tashkent Metro, with its opulently decorated marble, granite and chandeliers.



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. The 16th-century Islamic school is built of mud bricks decorated with majolica and painted ceramic tiles.

Independence Square - The main and most beautiful square in the heart of the city. Commemorating the country's freedom it has been a popular destination for both locals' and tourists because of its beautiful monuments and fountains.

Amir Timur Maydoni - Founded in 1882 and originally called Konstantinovsky Square. In 1994 it was renamed to honour the great Amir Timur who founded the Timurid Empire, which lasted for 200 years. A famous monument to the great leader stands in the squares centre.

Day 15: Tashkent – Samarkand

Meals: B, L, D

This morning you will drive 330km 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 madrassahs: the Ulugh-Bek Madrasah built in the 15th century; the Tilla-Kori Madrasah built in the 17th century, and the Sher-Dor Madrasah, also built in the 17th century.

Destination Information

Samarkand - 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 Tilla Qori madrassas. The interior and exterior facades of the madrassas 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 16: 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.



In the afternoon, you will visit Ulughbek’s observatory, constructed by Ulughbek (Grandson of the Great Amir Temur) in 1428-1429.

Later see the ancient settlement of Afrosiab.

Destination Information

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.

Shah-I-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.

Bibi-Khanym 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.

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.

Day 17: Samarkand – Bukhara, via Shakhrisabz

Meals: B, L, D

Approximately 90km south of Samarkand is the town of Shakhrisabz; the birthplace of the Great Tamerlane and your destination today. Upon arrival you will explore the city site of the remnants of Ak-Sarai Palace, Dorus Tilavat Cemetery and KokGumbas mosque.



This afternoon you will continue to Bukhara.

Photo fees may be payable at most attractions you will visit in Samarkand, approximately USD\$14 in total.

Due to safety reasons, buses are not allowed on the mountain pass from Samarkand to Shakhrisabz, therefore you will travel in smaller vehicles for this leg of the journey before travelling by coach again from Shakhrisabz onwards.

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.

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.

Day 18: Bukhara

Meals: B, L, D

Today you have a full day exploring fabulous Bukhara. This incredible city, one of the most famous names 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 Lyab-i-Hauz ensemble - modern centre of traditional Uzbekistan, Nadir Devanbegi Madrassah, Khanaga and Magoki 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. We get to see 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 of the attractions you visit, costing approximately USD\$7 in total.

Destination Information

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.

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.

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 chaykhana.

Day 19: Bukhara

Meals: B, L, D

Continue your sightseeing of Bukhara with an out-of-town excursion to visit the Sitora-i-Mokhikhosa, 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 considerable attention to this architectural ensemble.

You have the afternoon at your leisure for your own exploration.

Photo fees may be payable at most attractions you will visit in Bukhara, approximately US\$14 in total.

Destination Information

Sitora-i-Mokhikhosa – Dating 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. Among them is the white hall, shining with dazzlingly white carved ganch covering the walls and ceilings.

Day 20: Bukhara -Khiva

Meals: B, L, D

Set out for Khiva in the early morning 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.

Upon arrival 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 may have been founded up to 2,500 years ago 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 21: Khiva

Meals: B, L, D

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

Participate in this leisure 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, including the harem.

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 22: Khiva – Ashgabat

Meals: B, L, D

A long day of traveling today as we journey from Uzbekistan to Turkmenistan, covering approximately 265km.

After the border crossing at Shavat, transfer overland to the UNESCO World Heritage Site of KunyaUrgench - the once glorious capital of the medieval Khorezmshah Empire. We will visit the mausoleums of Turabek Hanum, Sultan Tekesh and Il-Arslan before continuing to, the minaret of Kutlug Timur and the fabled al-Mamun’s Academy of Sciences.



Later, we will transfer to Dashoguz to catch an evening flight to the Turkmen capital city of Ashgabat.

Destination Information

Kunya-Urgench – Also known as Old Gurganj, this fascinating Old Town contains a series of monuments from the 11th – 16th centuries that testify the outstanding achievements in craftsmanship and architecture of the time.

Turabek Khanum Mausoleum - Whilst there is no knowledge of who is buried inside, this mausoleum is one of the finest examples of Central Asian architecture.

Il-Arslan Mausoleum - The oldest standing monument in Kunya Urgench, this mausoleum is decorated with reliefs from carved terracotta, atop the mausoleum sits a 12-faced conical dome, a unique feature for a building of this kind.

Kutlug Timur Minaret - Originally constructed in the 11th – 12th century and is the tallest minaret in Central Asia.

Ashgabat – Translated in Arabic as ‘city of love’, Ashgabat was rebuilt after an earthquake in 1948 destroyed most of the city. With independence from Russia in the early 1990’s Ashgabat has transformed into a modern city.

Day 23: Ashgabat

Meals: B, L, D

This morning will be at leisure to get your bearings in this wonderful city.

Later, travel outside of Ashgabat to visit Arkadash stud farm and learn about the “winged” Akhal Tekkes horses. En route back to Ashgabat stop at the Kipchak Complex where the largest mosque in Turkmenistan and the family mausoleum of the country’s first president is located. You will visit the National Museum of History and Ethnology before returning to the hotel.



Destination Information

Akhal Tekkes – The national emblem of Turkmenistan and one of the oldest existing horse breeds in the world. One of the most distinct features is the metallic-like sheen of their coats.

Day 24: Ashgabat – Mary

Meals: B, L, D

Today is an early start as you transfer to the airport for our flight to Mary. On arrival, you will then head to the ancient and glorious city of Merv; a UNESCO World Heritage Site and one of the major archaeological sites of Central Asia.

After touring and time to explore here, you will return to Mary to visit the local History Museum and view the wide range of archaeological artefacts that are display here.



Destination Information

Merv - One of the most important archaeological sites on the old Silk Road, Merv was founded by Cyrus the Great in the 6th century, the “Queen of the World” and was reputedly the largest city in the world.

In the 12th century, the city had a population of 700,000 before a Mongol invasion ended her reign in the 13th century when the entire population (including refugees and people from nearby towns) of a million people were killed.

Mary History Museum – Providing a glimpse into the history of this diverse city, this impressive museum showcases archaeological finds from both Ancient Merv and the Bronze Age, dating back to the 3,000BC.

Day 25: Darwaza Crater

Meals: B, L, D

This morning you will catch a domestic flight back to Ashgabat to continue exploring this fascinating city. See the Monument and Park of Independence and the impressive Ertoghul Ghazi Mosque.

This afternoon you will drive north to Darvaza and its captivating Flaming Crater. Arriving at the border between the northern and southern regions of Turkmenistan, turn off the main road for an exciting 8 kilometre desert drive.



On arrival, you will take a leisurely walk around the crater as the sun sets. Finish the day eating a delicious nomadic camp-side in the serene atmosphere of the night sky and the lights of the “eternal fire”. Return to Ashgabat later this evening.

Destination Information

Monument and Park of Independence – A white-marble “Eiffel Tower”, commemorates the founding of Turkmenistan as an independent nation.

Ertoghul Ghazi Mosque – This prominent landmark in Ashgabat was built to honour Ertoghul Ghazi - the father of Osman I and founder of the Ottoman Empire.

Darvaza Crater - In 1971, in the former U.S.S.R. the Darvaza crater was created accidentally due to drilling in the region, which resulted in natural gases being omitted. The Russian authorities believed that lighting this gas was the safest and quickest option to eradicate the gas and was expected to burn for a few weeks. Over 45 years later it still burns and has been known around the world as the ‘Gates of Hell’.

Day 26: Ashgabat

Meals: B, L, D

Today will be your final day in Ashgabat, so make the most of it. Visit the Old Nisa Fortress, the former residence of the Parthian Empire. After lunch you will continue the fun at the colourful Russian Bazaar.

Later, continue to the National Carpet Museum that exhibits an interesting collection of hand-made Turkmen carpets and various carpet objects.

**Destination Information**

Old Nisa Fortress – Residence of the former Parthian Empire from the 3rd century. Formed in an irregular pentagon shape these restored ruins comprise labyrinth walls and fortifications.

Russian Bazaar - Housing an array of foods and souvenir stalls, the bazaar is an ideal way to immerse yourself in everyday Turkmen life.

National Carpet Museum - This museum houses the largest collection of Turkmen handmade carpets dating back to the 18th century.

Days 27-28: Depart Ashgabat

Meals: B

Early in the morning transfer to the Ashgabat airport for your flight to New Zealand returning home on the 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.

CENTRAL ASIA TRAVEL INFORMATION

VISAS:

Visas are not required for New Zealand passport holders for entry into Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tjikistan (for stays under 30 days) and Kazakhstan.

Entry visas are required for all foreigners wishing to visit Turkmenistan and are obtained on arrival - Visa on Arrival. A copy of your passport, a portrait photograph and completed visa form are required before departure. Visa and immigration fees paid locally in cash. Wendy Wu Tours Visa Department can assist you with the process.

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.

IMPORTANT – 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 when you arrive and keep a copy yourself. Failure to do so accurately or to exit the country with more currency than when you entered may result in delays, fines or additional sums being confiscated.

Ensure you exchange any unspent local currency prior to departure as there is not generally exchange offices at international airports in Dushanbe and Bishkek.

A number of 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.

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.

EATING IN CENTRAL ASIA:

Central Asian cuisine is diverse and flavoursome with a legacy stretching back thousands of years. It is important to keep an open mind and be adventurous. All meals (excluding drinks) are included in our fully inclusive Central Asia group tours from the groups' arrival until the groups' day of departure. Please be aware that dishes selected for your meals reflect the cooking styles and signature dishes of the local area you are in.

In Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan 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 '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.

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 the New Zealand. Consequently, tourist and public facilities may not uphold the same safety standards as in the 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 your 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.

Journey Through Central Asia 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 the 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.

You will be travelling through rarely visited and undeveloped areas of eastern Kyrgyzstan for a few days. This is a remote area with villages, nomadic settlements, very small towns and little in the way of tourist facilities.

Types of accommodation you may encounter on this tour include:

Yurts: Yurts are the traditional home of nomads in Central Asia. They are made from a wooden frame and layers of felt and canvas erected on a wooden platform. The interior is filled with warm fabrics as well as ornate wooden furniture. Nomads in Kyrgyzstan live in yurts in the months around summer.

Staying in a yurt will allow you to experience the unique and intrinsic aspect of local life in Kyrgyzstan. Although they are not luxurious, they do offer comfortable accommodation in remote regions of the country.

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 5kg. It is essential that your luggage is lockable. Please note that the authorities will only allow bottles onto the aircraft if they have been checked in as main baggage. Bottles in hand luggage may be confiscated.

PERSONAL EXPENSES AND OPTIONAL TOURING:

Personal Expenses - 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 at an additional cost. These are not included in the standard itinerary and will only be available if time permits and if seats are available.

Please ensure you have additional funds available if you feel you may wish to participate in any extra activities. Each option will be arranged locally by your National Escort/Local Guide, participation and tipping for optional excursions is completely at your discretion.

CLIMATE, CLOTHING:

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, including something warm to sleep in during our yurt stays.

Temperatures for most of your time spent in Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Almaty and Dushanbe will range from 23c to 35c between May and late September.

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 madrassahs throughout Central Asia. Women should bring a scarf from home, as you are required to cover your head at some attractions.

EXCHANGING CASH:

The 5 countries of Central Asia are very much cash-only economies. Please bring enough US Dollars in cash with you on your trip cash to cover your entire stay.

There are only a handful of ATM machines in Bishkek, Almaty, Dushanbe, Tashkent and Ashgabat although do not rely on these as they can be unreliable. There are no ATMs in smaller cities and rural areas.

Credit cards are only accepted in some 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.

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

TIPPING POLICY:

Local tipping is customary in Asia. However, this can often lead to awkwardness in knowing when it is appropriate to tip and how much, as well as ensuring you have a suitable amount of change available at the time. For your convenience, with years of experience in providing the best customer service, Wendy Wu Tours operates a kitty system on our Group Tours so your National Escort will look after this aspect of your trip for you. It also ensures that the amounts paid are reasonable for you but still fair for the local people.

The amount is stated on each Group Tour page (USD\$150) will be advised again on your final documentation. Tipping is in USD and will be collected by your National Escort on the first day in each country (USD\$46 Kyrgyzstan & Kazakhstan, USD\$20 Tajikistan, USD\$53 Uzbekistan, USD\$31 Turkmenistan), and distributed throughout the tour on your behalf. Any additional tipping on any of our tours is welcomed at your discretion. Please note tipping amounts quoted above are subject to change.

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.

PORTERAGE:

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

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. It may not always be possible to return to your hotel after sightseeing to freshen up before going to the restaurant for dinner due to long travelling days. Roads in generally been improved over recent years, but traffic, weather conditions and terrain 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:

When visiting churches or mosques, both men and women should dress in conservative, non-revealing clothing. Full-length trousers with a shirt or t-shirt for men; and pants or skirts well below the knee with a top that covers the shoulders and upper arms for women. Women might also consider carrying a 'modesty shawl' in their daypack – this could be a sarong or light scarf – which they can wear over their shoulders and heads to feel more comfortable while sightseeing at mosques.

Religious sites and homes throughout Central Asia require all visitors to remove their shoes to enter. Even if you then need to walk outdoors, over hot or rough ground, you will not be allowed to wear shoes. You will often find shoe storage rooms near the entrance of a site where it is customary to leave your shoes near the entrance. Occasionally there are 'shoe minders' who will offer to keep your shoes safe for a 'tip' – this is not compulsory, so each customer can choose to tip for this service or not. If you do not want to remove your shoes, you will have to remain outside.

We recommend shoes that easily slip on and off and carry a pair of thick socks in your daypack, which you can wear to protect your feet from any rough or hot surfaces. The following itinerary will indicate when you need to consider this.

Ramadan, the Islamic festival of sacrifice, 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.

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.

ITINERARY CHANGES:

It is our intention is 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 whilst maintaining the integrity of your trip.

Last updated: May 2024