

Route of the Caravans: The Silk Road

Cultural tour of Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan & Kyrgyzstan

Book as a party of four, 6 months before the start date of the tour and each participant will get a discount of US\$ 200/ per person.

Explore the heart of Central Asia – the fabled “Land of the Caravans” – on this exciting 18-day journey. As the world’s oldest and longest trade route, the Silk Road linked Eastern and Western cultures for more than a thousand years. In this Silk Road tour, we wind our way through the five “Stans”, a Persian suffix meaning “home of” or “place of”. Explore the historic cities and meet the locals of Samarkand, Khiva, Bukhara and beyond, including 10 UNESCO World Heritage Sites, by foot, flight, vehicle and deluxe modern train, retracing the steps of Marco Polo and other of the world’s first famous adventurers. This tour, which has been operating for over 10 years, has been revised this year to include new attractions adding an extra day.

UNESCO World Heritage Sites covered in this tour			
1.	Kunya-Urgench, Turkmenistan	2.	Samarkand – C
3.	Parthian Fortresses of Nisa, Turkmenistan	4.	Historic Centre
5.	State Historical and Cultural Park “Ancient Merv”, Turkmenistan	6.	Itchan Kala – K
7.	Historic Centre of Bukhara, Uzbekistan	8.	Silk Roads: the Burana, Kyrgyz

Day 01: Arrive Ashgabat (TURKMENISTAN)

Welcome to Turkmenistan! We are warmly received at Ashgabat Airport and transferred to our hotel. Check-in to our hotel is at 1400hrs. We have the rest of the day free to explore Ashgabat. The one-party, ex-Soviet state of Turkmenistan is as fascinating as it is mysterious. The lavish city is a true example of the country’s impressive architecture, with extraordinary marble structures lining the streets. In fact, Ashgabat recently won the

Guinness World Record for the highest number of white marble-clad buildings in the world—543 buildings covering 4.5 million square meters!

Overnight: **Nusay Hotel, Ashgabat (3 nights)**

Day 02: Ashgabat/Mary (Merv)/Ashgabat (Flight)



[Dr. Alexey Yakovlev, CC BY-SA 2.0](#), via Wikimedia Commons

Embark on a unique exploration of the State Historical and Cultural Park of Ancient Merv* with a short, early morning flight to Mary. As the oldest and preserved of the oasis cities, along the Silk Route, Merv's history spans to 4,000 years. It was an important city of Achaemenian Empire and was run over by the Macedonians commanded by Alexander the Great, asserting his claim over the lost cities of the great empire. During the Medieval Islamic era it was referred as 'Uroos-ul-Bilad (mother of the cities) being one of the richest cities and diverse nature of its inhabitants. The invasion of Mongols in 13th century saw a great manslaughter of mankind; more than a million soul were put to sword. This wonderful site is spread in a large area with successive layers of mud habitations called 'Kalas or fortified cities' include the earliest sites of Erk Kala, Gaiyur Kala, with huge wall, constructed by Roman prisoners of war, Sultan Kala was the last of inhabited site, the famous pigeon house, 'Sardoba or ice houses' were common features of Merv city.

The mausoleum of Sultan Sanjar, the Seljuk ruler stands prominent among the ruins. With many graves around. It once boasted majestic mausoleums, fortresses and temples, all of which we will have the chance to explore on

our comprehensive tour. Late afternoon, we take our flight back to Ashgabat. (B, D)

Day 03: Ashgabat

Be swept back in time as we explore the epic Parthian Fortresses of Nisa*, one of the earliest and most important cities of the vast Parthian Empire. Nisa served as a strategic and commercial crossroads to the Parthians, as well as a barrier to Roman expansion. We continue our sightseeing tour of the Carpet Museum, where we see a massive collection of tribal carpets ranging from medieval to modern times. Next stop is the halls of the National Museum of Turkmenistan, an incredible collection of Parthian periods ivory rhytons (intricately carved vessels used for religious rituals) dating to 2nd century B.C. (B, D)

Day 04: Ashgabat/Dashoguz (Flight) /Kunya Urgench/Nukus (Drive) (UZBEKISTAN)



After a short flight to Dashoguz, we head to Kunya Urgench*. We shall see pre and post Mongol period mausoleums, a 60-meter-high minaret and a mosque dating from the 11th to 16th centuries showcase this region's legendary past as the centre of the Islamic world. The architecture and décor of these buildings influenced empires as far away as Byzantines and Persia, the unequaled creations of India's Moghul Empire had its birth in Central Asia. After our explorations, we drive to the Turkmenistan-

Uzbekistan border point at Khojeli, where we go through border formalities at both checkpoints. While this border point offers a unique experience, one can see the aftermath of the breakup of Soviet Union. A short drive through the delta of Amudarya drive past villages brings us to Nukus – once the port town on the dying Aral Sea.

Overnight: **Jipek Joli Hotel, Nukus (1 night) (B, L, D)**

Day 05: Nukus/Toprak Kala/Khiva (Drive)

Morning we visit Karakalpakstan Regional Art Museum more known for its Savitsky collection, hosts the world's second largest collection of Russian avant-garde art, as well as one of the largest collections of archaeological objects and folk, applied and contemporary art originating from nomadic Central Asia. Afterwards we make our way to Khiva, well-preserved living open air museum of the best of brick architecture. En route, enjoy short stops such as a visit to Shylpyk Kala, the only surviving Tower of Silence dating from 4th and 5th century A.D. Later, discover Toprak Kala, a mud fortress found in the Kizilkum desert, dating from 1st and 2nd century A.D. This impressive fortress served as a winter retreat of a local princely family. We arrive at Khiva, a must-see city for tours to Uzbekistan, we check in to our hotel.

Overnight: **Malika Khevaek Hotel or Orient Star Madrassah Hotel, Khiva (2 nights) (B, D)**

Day 06: Khiva



An exciting day starts with our walking tour of Khiva as we go back in time at the Ichan-Kala* - the fabled inner town of the old Khiva oasis. The old

monuments remain, as coherent and well-preserved example of Muslim architecture of Central Asia. We discover the walled city and its remaining outstanding structures on foot, starting with Ichan Kala, Kalta minor – the half-finished minaret, Kunya Arg for a grand view of Khivan monuments from the mud top view and madrassah Rakhimkhon. Later explore Hunarmand workshops, the mausoleum of Pakhalavan Makhmud with its wonderful and unique tile work, the imposing Islam Khodja minaret and museum, Friday mosque with its many wooden pillars and Tashauli harem quarters of the last Khan of Khiva. Following our tour, we have some free time to explore this legendary city. Later we have the unique opportunity to interact with the locals on an intimate visit with a Khivan family. We also experience the newly renovated, Nurullah Bey's Palace was residence and reception palace of the last Khan of Khiva, constructed in semi Russian style as part of Czarist wooing policy for political influence among the local rulers. **(B, D)**

Day 07: Khiva/Bukhara (Drive or Train)

We take a scenic drive through the Kizilkum desert with stops enroute to meet the local folks and try out the famous Uzbekistani bread. We arrive late afternoon at the historical Silk Road city of Bukhara, which dates back over 2,000 years and boasts a lavish collection of more than 140 historical monuments. Bukhara is the most complete example of a medieval city in Central Asia, with an urban fabric that has remained largely intact. We check in to our hotel with the rest of the day free. Evening an optional folk show at the Madrassah Gowkushan.

Overnight: [Omar Khayyam Hotel](#) or **Hotel Zargaron Plaza Hotel, Bukhara (2 nights) (B, D)**

Day 08: Bukhara



Today we explore the Historic Centre of Bukhara*, which offers winding streets and ancient structures reminiscent of Arabian Nights. On our full-day sightseeing tour, we will first walk through the old city. Here we visit Poi Kalon minaret and mosque, as well as Aziz Khan and Ulugbek madrassahs. Later make our way to Tim Abdullah, Tilpak Frushan covered market, Mohgaki Attari mosque, Lyabikhauz - the city pond, madrassah Nadirkhon Devanbegi and Chor minor. Afternoon we continue to explore some of the city's most stand-out monuments, including Arg Fortress, Zindan (the prison), Balakhauz mosque, Ismail Samanid mausoleum and Chasma Ayub (Job's spring). In the evening, we enjoy an unforgettable dinner feast. Walking the narrow lanes of Bukhara through the old Jewish quarters, we visit the house of miniature master Davlat Toshev, a Sufi painter known for his excellent miniatures who has exhibited his work in many parts of Europe. Here we will see his workshop. **(B, D)**

Day 09: Bukhara/Shakhrisyabz/Samarkand (Drive)

A morning departure for Samarkand with a stop at the stunning Shakre Sabz. The birthplace of Tamerlane and a UNESCO World Heritage Site, the town offers a unique ancient panorama. Our visit includes Tamerlane's famous Ak-Saray Palace and the imposing 'pishtak', which supported a huge arched gateway. We can see part of the gateway still surviving partially with its tile and mosaic work. It was an incredible palace took over a quarter century to construct, Spanish ambassador Ruy Gozalez Clavijo

was stunned by its intricate decorations during his visit in 1404. The successive internal wars after the death of Tamerlane and later by the Shybanids destroyed last of the structures to ruins. We also see a sycamore tree dating from the 1300s. Shakre Sabz is known for its embroidery and textiles, and we will have the opportunity to meet and interact with locals before we drive to the historic city of Samarkand. This evening, optional visit to Samarkand's legendary Registan Square for a riveting Sound & Lights Show (available at certain times of the year).

Overnight: [Grand Samarkand Hotel](#), Samarkand (2 nights) (B, D)

Day 10: Samarkand



A full day dedicated to exploring the Historic town of Samarkand*, a highlight of Silk Road tours. A crossroad at the heart of Central Asia since 7th century B.C. as ancient Afrasiab, Samarkand offers a rich history reflected in its magical monuments and winding streets. We start our discovery with Registan Square, known as one of the noblest public squares in the world. Later we visit Bibi Khanum's mosque and Siyob Bazaar a fascinating market reminiscent of Silk Road days that sits under the shadow of the mosque. Next experience Shahi Zinda royal necropolis. Afternoon see Afrosiab Museum – see the wall murals as wall scrapping from Palace and aristocracy residences from nearby site is a striking imagination of how the houses used to look like. Later we shall visit Ulugbek's Observatory, built by Tamerlane's grandson astronomer king – who finds his name among the renowned astronomers of the world. Built in 1400s survives with its huge sextant found buried on a hill top and only rediscovered 100 years ago. Later we shall visit Kunhil traditional paper mill

making paper from mulberry bark. Afterwards drive to Gur Emir, the glorious mausoleum of Tamerlane and his grandson Ulugbek and some of his courtiers. **(B, D)**

Day 11: Samarkand/Penjikent (Drive) **(TAJIKISTAN)**

Driving through orchards and cotton fields we embark on a Journey to neighboring Tajikistan, we make our way to the border point this morning. After border formalities, proceed to Penjikent. After some rest time at our hotel we go on a tour of Penjikent which will take us to Rudaki Museum, named after the beloved poet. Museum houses a collection of objects and murals from various sites around Zarafshan valley. Later visit the lively Penjikent bazaar, then meet a Tajik family and enjoy lunch with them at their home. Afterwards visit a local farmland nearby and have the unique opportunity to converse with local folks before returning to our hotel.

Overnight: **Sughd Hotel or similar, Penjikent (1 night) (B, L, D)**

Day 12: Penjikent/Dushanbe (Drive)



We continue to Dushanbe this morning with a drive through the breathtaking Zarafshan valley, following the river of the same name. This region offers awe-inspiring panoramas and is popular for climbing and hiking. Upon arrival, our afternoon tour of Dushanbe includes the Museum of Antiquities, with a rich collection of Greco-Bactrian, Sogdian and Persian art. Later visit the National Museum of Tajikistan, boasting archaeological

treasures from across the country. Then see Ismail Samanid monument, father of modern Tajikistan, before we check in to our hotel.

Overnight: **Hyatt Regency Hotel or Serena Hotel, Dushanbe (1 night)**
(B, D)

Day 13: Dushanbe/Tashkent (Drive) **(UZBEKISTAN – 2nd entry)**

Early morning departure for Tashkent. On arrival, explore the leafy streets of Uzbekistan's capital. Our visit takes us to the Old City. Here we see Khast-Imom Complex, site of the world-famous Quran of Caliph Uthman/Ottoman. We also explore the beautiful Madrasah of Barak-Khan, Tilla Sheikh Mosque, the Mausoleum of the Saint Abu Bakr Kaffal Shashi, and the Islamic Institute of Imam al-Bukhari, as well as vibrant Chor-Su Bazaar and Mustaqlik Square.

Overnight: **Lotte Hotel, Tashkent (1 night) (B, D)**

Day 14: Tashkent/Almaty (Flight) (KAZAKHSTAN)



We enjoy time at leisure to sample the flavors and experiences of Tashkent before our departure flight to Almaty in Kazakhstan. The richest country in Central Asia due to its oil reserves, Kazakhstan is an intriguing combination of sophisticated cities and breathtaking outdoor adventures. Gleaming Almaty was its rich and leafy capital until being replaced by the modern city of Astana in 1997. Upon arrival in Almaty, we are met and transferred to our hotel with the balance of the day free to enjoy this urban gem.

Overnight: [Otrar Hotel](#) or [Voyage Grand Hotel](#), **Almaty (2 nights) (B, D)**

Day 15: Almaty

A unique day ahead as we explore the colonial and Soviet splendor of Almaty. Start with a visit to charming Panfilov Park before heading to the Zenkov's Holy Ascension Cathedral, one of the early wooden cathedrals in the world built without nails by its architect Andrei Zhenkov employed anti earthquake techniques in building the structure. The foundation was consecrated in 1903 by the bishops of Turkestan and it was completed in 1907. Next stop is the Central Mosque, which is the largest one in Kazakhstan. Lastly, we then end our visit with the interesting Green Bazaar. The rest of the day is free at leisure. **(B, D)**

Day 16: Almaty/Bishkek (Drive) (KYRGYZSTAN)

Today we depart for Bishkek, the capital city of Kyrgyzstan. Known for its natural beauty and traditional yurt-dwelling locals, Kyrgyzstan is a Central Asian horse country. On our journey, we drive past the scenic Zailisky Alatau Mountain range. After border formalities, we continue on to Bishkek and are transferred to our hotel on arrival. Discover the cultural highlights of Bishkek this afternoon sightseeing tour. We drive past the White House (Presidential Palace), see the changing of the guards at the National Monument, Alatau Square, and walk down the Oak Park, known for street painters. We shall see monument of Manas. Hero and Father of Kyrgyz nation – the epic of Manas is twenty times longer than Homer's Iliad. This is an oral trilogy sung by Manaschi with throat singing boasting great feats of their hero Manas.

Overnight: [Plaza Hotel](#) or [Grand Tulip Hotel](#), **Bishkek (2 nights) (B, D)**

Day 17: Bishkek

Today we shall make short excursion to an old Silk Road caravan site, Balasagun. This was an old kingdom on the famous routes ruled by local Turkic rulers the heathen Turks but was home to Buddhist population that survived shamnist believers even Manicheans and Nestorian Christians. Chinese Tang dynasty took control during 8th AD. For a brief period, it was invaded by the Tibetans. Later Karakhanid the confederating Karluks

became master of this region in 9th AD and after their conversion to Islam other secular groups were wiped out. Today we can see Karakhanid period brick structure the Tower of Burana*. Admire this towering structure along with its scenic mountain backdrops. We then explore the ruins of Cathedral mosque and madrassah. Take time as well to appreciate the collection of 6th- to 10th-century Turkic tombstones and a small archaeological museum. We return to Bishkek and, in the afternoon, visit Alarcha Canyon. One of the most scenic regions of the Kyrgyz mountains, Alarcha is widely known for its stunning flowers. **(B, D)**



Day 18: Depart Bishkek

After a fascinating cultural adventure on the Silk Road tour, we are transferred to the airport for our departure flight. Check out time is by 1100 hrs. Alternatively, enjoy unique tour extensions to Lake Issyk Kul, the jewel of Kyrgyzstan, or Astana, Kazakhstan's elaborate capital. **(B)**

OPTIONAL EXTENSIONS

ISSYK KUL LAKE (KYRGYZSTAN)

Day 18: Bishkek/Issyk Kul Lake (Drive)



Journey eastward through the spectacular mountains of Cholpon-Ata, where we visit the local rock drawings of the Bronze periods, the local museum and a small but vibrant bazaar before arriving at our resort. As the second largest alpine lake in the world and a must-visit for tours to Kyrgyzstan, Issyk Kul Lake boasts breathtaking views. The balance of the day offers optional opportunities to walk around the valley and enjoy some of the enchanting boat rides across the lake's smooth surface. Evening, we enjoy dinner at a local restaurant attached to the lake.

Overnight: **Karven Hotel, Issyk Kul Lake (1 night) (B, D)**

Day 19: Issyk Kul Lake/Bishkek (Drive)

Morning we visit Preshevalsky Museum and Monument on the eastern edge of the Lake. This landmark museum is dedicated to the memory of Nikolai Michailovich Preshevalsky, who was an enthusiastic explorer accredited for his excellent works on the flora and fauna of the region. In the afternoon, we visit the Annanaeva village. Here we immerse ourselves into local life, hiking through our scenic surroundings to visit local families and get a behind-the-scenes look at their yurt houses before enjoying soup and tea. Then, we journey back to Bishkek.

Overnight: **Plaza Hotel or Ramada, Bishkek (B, D)**

Day 20: Depart Bishkek

Check out by noon and transfer to the airport for our departure flight. **(B)**

ASTANA (KAZAKHSTAN)

Day 18: Arrive Astana (KAZAKHSTAN)



At Almaty you are transferred to the airport for your flight to Astana. We arrive in Astana, the ultra-modern Kazakhstan capital that offers a fantastical skyline and futuristic buildings. We are met and transferred to our hotel. Balance of the day is free – a very safe city to take a stroll on your own. A modern city and well planned, it is the seat of the Government of Kazakhstan, site also of the Parliament, Supreme Court and the majestic Ak Orda Presidential Palace along with various government departments and agencies.

Overnight: **King Hotel, Astana (2 nights) (B, D)**

Day 19: Astana

An exciting day as we explore Astana covering the ultra-modern Baiterek Tower, Nur Astana Mosque, the third largest in Central Asia, the towering pyramid of Palace of Peace and Concord, and the massive Khan Shatyr Entertainment tent. We also experience the National Museum, which recounts the history of the country from ancient to modern times, and the beautiful State Theatre of Opera & Ballet. **(B, D)**

Day 20: Depart Astana

Check out by noon and transfer to the airport for our departure flight. **(B)**