

EXPLORE!

Tashkent to Tehran
19 days

Iran, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan - Trip code TTT



Tashkent to Tehran

An overland exploration offers an opportunity to discover some of the lesser-travelled stretches of the ancient silk routes. This pioneering journey travels west from the vibrant Uzbek capital of Tashkent, through little-known Turkmenistan, to reach the Iranian metropolis of Tehran and a country that has only just opened its doors to tourists again. Moving from Central Asia into Persia, we encounter fascinating cities, rich archaeological sites and unique and contrasting cultures.

Trip highlights

- ★ **Samarkand** - Tamerlane's magnificent city, including the Registan and The Shah-i-Zinda.
- ★ **Bokhara** - Guided visits to the Ulugbek Madrassah and the Emir's Palace.
- ★ **Mary** - Explore the UNESCO World Heritage site of Merv.
- ★ **Mashhad** - Discovering the cultural treasures of Iran's holiest city.
- ★ **Tehran** - Visit the National Museum and the Golestan Palace.
- ★ **Isfahan** - Sightseeing of Imam Square and the area's mosques and palaces.

ACCOMMODATION GRADE:

Standard

Our standard, mid-range accommodation offers a good level of service, often with other amenities such as a restaurant, bar, garden or swimming pool. Generally rooms will be comfortable with en suite facilities.

TRIP PACE:

Moderate

Moderate pace tours are ideal if you want a holiday which combines exciting activities and experiences with plenty of time to relax and unwind. Typically you'll be active and busy for part of the day but then also have time to rest and recharge your batteries.

GROUP SIZE:

10 - 16

Maximum group size ranges from between 6 to 20 people, depending on the type of trip, the transport and accommodation used and activities included. We rarely have groups that are smaller than five or six people and the average is 12 people plus an Explore leader.

Itinerary

Itineraries on some departure dates may differ, please select the itinerary that you wish to explore.

DAY 1 - Join trip in Tashkent

There are no activities planned for today as our flight-inclusive customers will be arriving in the early hours of the morning on Day 2.



Accommodation: Hotel Uzbekistan (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: None

DAY 2 - Free morning, afternoon tour of the Uzbek capital

Our tour begins in Tashkent, the Uzbek capital and one of Central Asia's most vibrant cities. Occupying a prime spot on the central Eurasian trading routes, Tashkent grew to be one of the most important stops on the caravan routes across Central Asia. It grew under the auspices of the Mongols, Tamerlane and the Shaybanids, before finally falling to the Russians during the 19th century. A massive earthquake destroyed much of the city in 1966, affording its Russian overlords the chance to resurrect a 'perfect' soviet city from the ruins. Parts of the old city do remain though and we shall explore something of it later this afternoon, visiting the 16th century Kukeldash and Barak Khan Madrassahs, as well as the Kaffal Shashi Memorial and the Khasty Imam Mosque, said to house the world's oldest copy of the Quran. A visit to the Chorsu Bazaar affords us the opportunity to take a look at local artisans at work, before moving on to some of the city's more modern monuments, including the Mustakillik Square (Independence Square), the Navoi Theatre (named after the renowned Uzbek poet) and the Earthquake Monument.



Accommodation: Hotel Uzbekistan (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 3 - Drive to Samarkand, discover Registan Square

This morning we transfer to the train station for our modern high-speed train to Samarkand. Stormed by Alexander the Great and reduced to ashes by Genghis Khan, Samarkand was, nevertheless, transformed into one of the world's most glittering cities in the 14th century by Tamerlane, who made it his capital. Today it is still generously endowed with some glorious monuments to its golden era, their blue domes towering above the city skyline, and this afternoon we will take some time to explore some of its wealth of treasures. Most of the city's more lavish monuments date to the time of Tamerlane and his direct descendants, including the exceptional Registan, the focal point of the city and one of Central Asia's most magnificent settings; a majestic square formed on 3 sides by huge blue tiled madrassahs (ancient centres of religious learning). We will also visit the Gur Emir Mausoleum, a somewhat modest structure that nonetheless contains the graves of not only Tamerlane himself, but also two of his sons and two grandsons.



Accommodation: Zarina Hotel (or similar)



Simple Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 4 - Morning exploration of Samarkand; free afternoon

A city tour this morning introduces us to the Ulug-Beg Observatory and the Shah-i-Zinda, one of the cities oldest and most sacred buildings, with its double row of jewel-like mausoleums that are said to contain the grave of Qusam ibn-Abbas, a cousin of the Prophet Mohammed. It was in Samarkand that Ulug-Beg, the great medieval astronomer, built the gigantic sextant that enabled him to calculate the length of a year to within just 10 seconds and the remnants of his 15th century astrolabe, which measured an impressive 30m, still remain on the outskirts of the old city. The third visit of the morning will be to the Bibi-Khanym Mosque, constructed by Tamerlane's Chinese wife and once one of the grandest mosques in the entire Islamic world, with a gateway that measured an impressive 35m in height. The rest of the day has then been left free to explore more of this exquisite city at your leisure, perhaps re-visiting Registan Square, or enjoying an excursion to the site of Afrosiab and Marakanda, where you will find the excavations of early Samarkand. Siob Bazaar presents us with one of Samarkand's liveliest settings, an eclectic mix of sound and colour that harks back to the days of the great caravans that plied these ancient trading routes.



Accommodation: Zarina Hotel (or similar)



Simple Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 5 - Pass old caravanserais en route to Bokhara, afternoon orientation walk

Leaving Samarkand early this morning we head west, towards the fabled city of Bokhara, stopping en route at Rabat-i-Malik caravanserai and G'idjuvon pottery workshop. Bokhara was home to the poets Firdausa and Rudaki and is still considered by some to be the 'Bastion of Islam'. The town has been fortunate to retain much of its Uzbek character, with more than 140 unique

monuments littered amongst its streets and alleyways, and this afternoon we will enjoy a walking tour of the city, taking in many of its highlights. We will visit the beautiful blue tiled Ulugbek Madrassah and Mghoki Arrar Mosque, the Kalyan minaret, or the 'Tower of Death', from which prisoners were once hurled to their death on market-days. Our afternoon will also take in bath houses, arcades and caravanserais of the Taqi Telpak Furushon area and the Lyab-I Hauz, a magnificent architectural centrepiece that dates from the 16th and 17th centuries and contains the largest madrasah in the city (the Kukeldash).



Accommodation: Hotel Mosque Baland (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 6 - In Bokhara, visit Ark Citadel, Emir's Palace and Bolo Hauz Mosque

This morning we take a drive out of the city to visit the Emir's Palace, the Royal Ark (fortress) and the photogenic Char Minar Mosque. Also known as the 'Palace of Moon-like Stars, the Palace contains the famous White Hall, a structure that took the Emir's 30 architects two years to construct. We also visit the Ismael Samani Mausoleum, dating from the 9th century and considered to be one of the most revered architectural sights in the whole of Central Asia. Built as the final resting place of Smael Samani, the founder of the last Persian dynasty to rule in the region, the Samanids, it harks back to the city's golden age, when it was the intellectual centre of the Islamic world. After our sightseeing, the rest of the day is free to return to the city, to explore further the narrow, twisting alleyways of Bokhara's old quarter, where the windows of mud-baked houses, following tradition, face only towards the inner courtyards.



Accommodation: Hotel Mosque Baland (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 7 - Cross border into Turkmenistan, drive across the Karakum desert to Mary

This morning we drive to the Uzbek/Turkmenistan border at Farab and, after completing the immigration formalities, cross into eastern Turkmenistan. Please be advised that this process could take anything up to 2 hours and you will be required to walk the 1.5 km between the two border posts to meet our Turkmenistan vehicle (porters are usually available to help with luggage, although they will require payment for their services). From here we head first for Turkmenabat on the banks of the Amudarya, the mighty river that was known to the Greeks of antiquity as the Oxus. Stopping here for lunch we will then continue south, crossing the

Karakum Desert towards our final destination for the day, the town of Mary, our gateway to the ruins of ancient Merv.



Accommodation: Hotel Mary (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 8 - Full day exploring the ancient city of Merv

A UNESCO World Heritage Site, considered to have once been one of the great cities of Central Asia, the remains of ancient Merv lie scattered across some 100sq km. Lying along the great trading routes of the Silk Road the city prospered under the Sassanians and the Seljuq Turks, becoming a cultural melting for Christian, Buddhist, Zoroastrian and finally Muslim cultures. At its height, during the 11th and 12th centuries the city was known as Marv-i-shah-jahan (Merv, Queen of the World) and, after Baghdad, was considered the finest city in all Islam. In 1221 its greatness came crashing to earth with the arrival of the Mongol armies of Genghis Khan when, after refusing to pay tribute to the great Mongol warlord, the city and its entire population of nearly 1 million people was put to the sword (it was believed that the Mongol soldiers were ordered to personally behead between 300-400 people each). Returning to Mary for lunch we will then spend the afternoon exploring the Mary Museum of History, a rich repository of some of the finest relics rescued from Merv itself, along with an excellent collection of Turkmen carpets and household objects that span a period of some 5000 years.



Accommodation: Hotel Mary (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 9 - Drive to Ashgabat, stopping via Kaka Oasis

Turning west this morning we take in the distant peaks of the Kopet Dag as we follow the route that runs close to the Iranian border. Our destination is the city of Ashgabat, a once prosperous frontier town along the Trans-Caspian railway that was completely destroyed by a massive earthquake in 1948, only to rise from its ashes and rubble to become the capital of an independent Turkmenistan in 1991. The city then became the personal project of President Niyazov, who set about forming it in his own unique image, renaming the streets and changing the face of the city on an almost daily basis as he approved the destruction of its suburbs to make way for a number of controversial planning projects. Our journey to the capital will take us the better part of the day, as we travel via the Kaka. Some 100km east of Ashgabat we will also stop to view the fortress of Abiverd, the remains of a now long vanished medieval city that once enjoyed a reputation for its superb handicrafts, some samples of which can still be seen littered across the site in the form of broken shards of exquisite pottery.



Accommodation: Grand Turkmen Hotel (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 10 - Discover Ashgabat city, visiting Nissa Fortress and the Oriental bazaar

Today we have an opportunity to explore this most remarkable of cities with a tour that will take in some of the highlights of both the Soviet and Niyazov reigns. We take in Independence Park where we will see the Independence Monument, a large structure designed to resemble traditional Turkmen hats. We will also pay a visit to the Turkmenistan National Museum of History, a rich cache of some 150,000 objects and artefacts that date back to Neolithic times and the Bronze Age era of the Margiana civilisation. On the outskirts of the city lies our final visit of the day, the once mighty fortress of Nissa, founded in the 3rd century BC as the capital of the 1st Parthian Empire, whose walls and towers (43 in total) protected the royal palace, Zoroastrian temples and the power and prestige of successive ruling dynasties until its eventual destruction at the hands of the Mongols in the 13th century. We will also spend some of our time at the Oriental Bazaar nearby and have the time to soak up the atmosphere of this bustling place.



Accommodation: Grand Turkmen Hotel (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 11 - Morning visit to Kow Ata underground lake; afternoon in Ashgabat

After breakfast this morning we will drive out of the city towards the underground lake at Kow Ata and enter a subterranean world that lies in the shadow of the Kopet Dag Mountains. Located some 65m underground, the clear waters of this naturally heated lake (which remains at a constant 33-36 degrees centigrade all year round) lie within a hidden sulphurous chamber that is reached by a descending staircase. After visiting the lake we head next for Geokdeke, where we stop at the Arkadesh stud farm located on the southern edge of the Karakum Desert. The village itself was the site of the last valiant stand by the fiercely independent Tekke against the Russian, a final heroic effort that saw some 15,000 Turkmen die at the hands of the tsarist invaders. Today it is home to some of the finest stock of Akhalteke horses in the country, a breed that the Chinese named 'divine'. During the course of the day we will stop at two of the largest mosques in Turkmenistan, The first, the Geokdepe Mosque, is located on the site of the once great fortress that finally fell to the Russians in 1881, whilst the second, the Spiritual Mosque of Turkmenbashi, is the final resting place of the country's first president. Returning to Ashgabat late afternoon, there may be time for personal exploration; the Russian Bazaar is certainly worthwhile.



Accommodation: Grand Turkmen Hotel (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 12 - Cross the Turkmen/Iranian border and continue onto Mashad

Departing Ashgabat this morning we head for the Iranian border at Gaudan, situated in the mountains at 1700m, where we will need to complete the usual formalities (which can take up to 2 hours) and female customers will need to change into suitable Islamic dress before crossing through the Iranian checkpoint at Bajigiran. Meeting up with our Iranian guide we then head southeast, towards the holy city of Mashhad, stopping en route for lunch and arriving in this sacred Shia city later this afternoon. Entering Iran we see our first signs of Persian history and culture, but more importantly we finally meet the Iranian people, some of the most friendly and hospitable in the world.



Accommodation: Atrak Hotel (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 13 - Holy Shrine of Emam Reza; overnight train to Isfahan

Today we will explore Iran's most important Shia site, Astan-e Ghods-e Razavi, the Holy Shrine of the Emam Reza, along with the surrounding buildings of the sacred precincts. Considered to be one of Islam's most awe inspiring monuments, the shrine and its accompanying buildings lie within the confines of a walled island in the centre of Mashhad itself. This spectacular enclave is filled with mosques and museums, madrassahs and courtyards and although the shrine itself is off-limits to non-Muslims, there are many other parts of the area that can be explored. The shrine itself has fallen victim to destruction over the years and its current form dates only from the 17th century, but its impressive golden dome and towering minarets present a fitting tribute to the Shia's holy of holies. The nearby 15th century Great Mosque is considered to be one of the finest examples of Timurid architecture in the country; the remarkable complex also houses a number of excellent museums containing a wealth of Islamic treasures. Our sightseeing this afternoon will include the town of Tus, once the site of the regional capital and birthplace of the famous Iranian poet, Ferdosi, whose tomb is said to lie on the exact spot of his death. Another visit will be made to the nearby 14th century mausoleum of Boqh-e-ye Hordokieh. This evening we board the overnight train to Isfahan.



Accommodation: Overnight Train: Mashad/Isfahan



Simple Overnight Train



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 14 - Free time in Isfahan

Our train arrives in Isfahan mid-morning and we transfer to our hotel to freshen up. Isfahan, one of the most beautiful cities in Iran and arguably the Middle East, gained prevalence when Shah Abbas moved his capital here, endowing the city with lavish monuments. "Isfahan is half the world" was the phrase used to describe the city at the time and is still valid now. The afternoon is free to explore the city, for those that like to shop, the Isfahan Grand Bazaar stretches for 4km, a winding mass of sellers, buyers, spices, trinkets and humanity going about their everyday life. It is also just a great place to wander and immerse yourself in friendly Iranian culture, eating the local speciality of byriani for lunch, very different to its Indian namesake but equally satisfying. During our stay in Isfahan there will also be an opportunity to attend Zukhaneh, a strength and wrestling evening that is central to Iranian

culture. It really is a must see during your time your stay here.



Accommodation: Alighapou Hotel (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: None

DAY 15 - In Isfahan, exploring Cheheltum Palace and Imam Square

Today's tour focuses on exploring this incredible city; first of all we will visit Chehel Sotun Palace, whose name, Forty Columns, was inspired by the twenty slender wooden columns supporting the entrance pavilion, which, when reflected in the waters of the fountain, are said to appear to be forty. We then head to Imam Square, one of the largest city squares in the world and where we will spend the rest of the day. There will be the opportunity to soak up the atmosphere of the local people heading to the square to meet and picnic. The square is surrounded by important historical buildings including the Shah Mosque which is regarded as the masterpiece of Persian architecture; Ali Qapu Palace where royal spectators on the balcony could watch polo in the square below; Sheikh Lotf Allah Mosque and you can get into Isfahan Grand Bazaar on the northern side. This evening there is the possibility of stroll along the river to See-o-Sipol Bridge.



Accommodation: Alighapou Hotel (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 16 - Free in Isfahan, optional visit to Armenian Quarter

Today is a free day in Isfahan and there is a lot to see for the adventurous. The Masjed-e Jame mosque is a UNESCO listed building and can be found by walking through the Grand Bazaar until you reach this archaeological treasure which dates back to the 10th century. The Armenian Quarter is well worth a visit, housing the 400 year old Vank Cathedral, a beautiful building featuring huge depictions of the Creation, Expulsion and the Killing of Abel. The Armenian (known locally as the Jolfa) quarter is also a trendy area for young Isfahanis to go and hang out in the evening in some of the local coffee houses; so is a great place for people watching. For those with an eye for carpets, Isfahan is world renowned as the centre of carpet making and trading and it is easy to spend the afternoon bartering your savings on a masterpiece.



Accommodation: Alighapou Hotel (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 17 - Drive to Tehran, afternoon orientation

This morning we depart early and drive to Tehran (approx 7hrs). We will stop at Kashan on the way for a short comfort stop before continuing our journey to Tehran. On arrival we will transfer to our hotel for a two-night stay in the Iranian capital. Tehran has been Iran's capital for some two centuries and its streets are a vibrant mix of traditional culture and modern vibrancy, making it an ideal setting to contrast its rich history with its cosmopolitan future. This evening we will tour the local area, our guide will find the best chicken kebab in Tehran, or Dize, another local speciality which is both a soup and a chicken stew!



Accommodation: Kowsar Hotel (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 18 - Morning discovering Golestan Palace, free afternoon in the capital

This morning we will take a tour of the city, visiting the Golestan Palace which dates from the reign of Karim Khan Zand and contains an impressive array of halls and throne rooms that are filled with European and Persian designs, ornate displays of Qajar artwork and sumptuous furnishings, all set within a beautiful garden complex. We will visit the National Museum and Emam Reza, where we can learn of Persia's 2,500-year history; the museums house a rich collection of artefacts, including some from the ancient sites of Persepolis and Shush, and contains a number of superb exhibits that chart the 600 years of Arab rule up until the 13th century.



Accommodation: Kowsar Hotel (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 19 - Trip ends in Tehran

Today our adventure ends after breakfast in the capital.



Meals Provided: Breakfast



Why book this trip

This holiday combines two 'stans' of Central Asia before venturing into Ancient Persia. You will journey along parts of the ancient Silk Road and encounter friendly locals as you learn about the rich history of the region. This tour is ideal for travellers who are interested in culture, architecture and desert scenery. Iran has only just recently re-opened its doors to tourism, and Uzbekistan has been named as one of the top emerging destinations of 2015.

What's included?



Included meals

Breakfast: 17



Transport

Bus
Train



Trip staff

Explore Tour Leader(s)
Driver(s)
Local Guide(s)



Accommodation

15 nights standard hotel
2 nights simple hotel
1 nights simple overnight train

Trip information

Country information

Iran

Climate

Much of Iran is arid desert and mountain. The harsh climate has great extremes of heat and cold between summer and winter. Average annual rainfall is below 25cm and usually confined to winter and spring. Summer (Apr- Oct) is very hot, whilst winter temperatures can reach -4. Spring and autumn are best.

Time difference to GMT

+3.5

Plugs

2 Pin Round

Religion

Islam

Language

Persian

Turkmenistan

Climate

Spring and autumn are the best times to visit, when the temperatures are mild and there is the chance of occasional rains. April can bring colourful blooms to the normally barren desert landscapes, whilst summer days in the cities and desert can be very hot, when the temperatures can reach as high as 50°.

Time difference to GMT

+5

Plugs

2 Pin Round

Religion

Islam, Eastern Orthodox

Language

Turkmen, Russian, Uzbek

Uzbekistan

Climate

Spring and autumn are the best times to visit, when the temperatures are mild and there is the chance of occasional rains. April can bring colourful blooms to the normally barren desert landscapes, whilst summer days in the cities and desert can be very hot, when the temperatures can reach as high as 50°.

Time difference to GMT

+5

Plugs

2 Pin Round

Religion

Islam, predominantly Sunni, Eastern Orthodox

Language

Uzbek, Russian, Tajik

Budgeting and packing

Optional activities

The following excursions and/or activities are usually available and may be arranged locally. Estimated costs are provided below for guidance only, are on a per person basis unless shown otherwise, and may depend on the number of participants. Prices quoted are correct as of the date these tour notes were originally issued but may change at any time due to currency fluctuations. Please note: These activities are booked and paid for direct with the supplier and do not form part of your Explore holiday contract.

Zurkhaneh in Isfahan - 5GBP

Clothing

Lightweight raingear may be needed, with some warmer clothes for the cooler evenings, when temperatures can drop considerably. It gets very hot in the summer so long sleeves and a hat may be useful to help keep cool. Casual clothes are the most practical: tight fitting garments, brief shorts and skirts should be avoided, since they attract unwelcome attention and these regions follow the strict tenets of the Muslim faith.

Dress code in Iran

Iran is a traditional Islamic country and a strict dress code is enforced throughout the tour.

Women:

Head - A headscarf must be worn by women at all times, preferably tied under the chin. Some hair can be shown.

Arms - must be covered by long sleeves

Feet - Any comfortable footwear is acceptable

In cold weather it is useful to have a cardigan which you can wear over your manteau and easily remove

Manteau - long coat

The Manteau should hide the shape of the body and must be knee length. It is best to purchase a manteau or similar such as a 3/4 length cotton coat that hides your shape prior to your arrival in Iran. A long baggy mens shirt can be used instead of an overcoat, but the above principles must apply.

We recommend one cotton or linen length manteau for the south and a warmer one for the north. However, if it is not possible to purchase, long shirts/ coat will suffice.

Legs - should be covered by trousers or a long skirt below the manteau

Underneath the 'manteau' anything can be worn!

April to September can be hot (approx. 30 degrees plus) - A bra and light cotton trousers/skirt is sufficient. Pack for hot conditions during this period of the year.

March, October, November can be cold (approx. 12 degrees) - warmer clothing is needed under the manteau and you will need a warm fleece or jacket for cold nights. Bring waterproofs between Oct-Apr.

The 'chador' - 'coverall' - is only worn at holy shrines and can be borrowed locally. Dress code is more relaxed in some towns and brighter garments are being worn by young locals.

Men:

Men must wear long trousers. Short sleeved shirts are acceptable but most Iranian men wear full length sleeves. April to September can be hot (approx. 30 degrees plus) - Pack for hot conditions during this period of the year. March, October, November can be cold (approx. 12 degrees) - warmer clothing is needed, you will need a warm fleece or jacket for cold nights. Bring waterproofs between Oct-Apr.

You may find when you arrive in Iran that some local Iranians do not dress as traditionally or strictly as we have suggested above. Explore feels that it is socially correct for our travellers to be responsible in the way they travel and respect all country traditions so we would advise that you try to stick to our advice as closely as possible and then once in Iran you can make your own decisions as to how much is appropriate to cover. Your tour leader can also advise you on this in each location.

Footwear

Light walking boots/comfortable walking shoes, trainers and sandals.

Luggage

20kg

Luggage: On tour

One main piece and a daysac. Remember, you are expected to carry your own luggage - so don't overload yourself. We recommend either a suitcase or holdall on wheels, or else a backpack, as you may be expected to carry your own luggage up to 1.5km across the border.

Equipment

Torch, water bottle, swimming costume, insect repellent, high factor sun cream, good quality sunglasses and a lip salve with sun protection.

Tipping

Explore leader

At your discretion you might also consider tipping your Tour Leader in appreciation of the efficiency and service you receive.

Local crew

Although entirely voluntary, tipping is a recognised part of life in this region of the world. Some local staff will look to members of the group for personal recognition of particular services provided. Accordingly you should allow approx US\$ 90 for gratuities for local staff.

In order to make things easier for you, the Tour Leaders may organise a group's tips kitty and if this is the case, they will account for it throughout the tour.

Country Information

Iran

Food and drink

The costs for meals may vary depending upon location, type of restaurant and number of courses eaten and so the prices given are an average guide. Local restaurants located off the beaten track may be less expensive, whereas an upmarket restaurant located in the centre of a major city may charge more.

Lunch price

£9

Dinner price

£12

Water price

£0.90 Please note that alcohol is not available within the country of Iran.

Foreign Exchange

Local currency

Rials.

Recommended Currency For Exchange

Major hard currencies are accepted in the main cities but we advise taking all of your spending money in Euros or US\$ cash (Travellers Cheques can be hard to change). Once you arrive in Iran there will be no way for you to get any extra money so please make sure you bring plenty with you so that you do not run out.

Where To Exchange

Currency exchange is available in most major towns and cities

ATM Availability

do NOT work with foreign cards

Credit Card Acceptance

Accepted in some of tourist shops in Isfahan but please do not rely on this as it is not always possible

Travellers Cheques

Very hard to change.

Turkmenistan

Food and drink

The costs for meals may vary depending upon location, type of restaurant and number of courses eaten and so the prices given are an average guide. Local restaurants located off the beaten track may be less expensive, whereas an upmarket restaurant located in the centre of a major city may charge more.

Lunch price

£4

Dinner price

£6

Beer price

£1.4

Water price

£0.8

Foreign Exchange

Local currency

Manat.

Recommended Currency For Exchange

Take your spending money in US\$ cash, as many bars and shops only accept hard currency (and often lack the facility to change travellers cheques). We recommend you take new (post 2003), good condition dollar bills in small denominations.

Where To Exchange

Most major towns - your Tour Leader will advise you on arrival.

ATM Availability

Very limited, do not rely upon this.

Credit Card Acceptance

Limited usually to larger outlets and restaurants.

Travellers Cheques

Not recommended.

Uzbekistan

Food and drink

The costs for meals may vary depending upon location, type of restaurant and number of courses eaten and so the prices

given are an average guide. Local restaurants located off the beaten track may be less expensive, whereas an upmarket restaurant located in the centre of a major city may charge more.

Dinner price

£6.00 - 10.00

Beer price

£1.4

Water price

£0.7

Foreign Exchange

Local currency

Sum

Recommended Currency For Exchange

Take your spending money in US\$ cash, as many bars and shops only accept hard currency (and often lack the facility to change travellers cheques). We recommend you take new (post 1990), good condition dollar bills in small denominations.

Where To Exchange

Most major towns - your Tour Leader will advise you on arrival.

ATM Availability

Very limited, do not rely upon this.

Credit Card Acceptance

Limited usually to larger outlets and restaurants.

Travellers Cheques

Not recommended.

Transport, Accommodation & Meals

Transport Information

Bus, Train

Essential Information

FCO Advice

We strongly recommend that you check your government's travel advisory for up-to-date information and advice about your destination: safety and security, entry requirements, health, local laws and customs. For UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office advice click here.

For more information from Explore about travel advice, click here

Under 18 immigration guidance

Please note that some countries require proof of parental consent when travelling overseas with under 18s. Please check requirements with the relevant embassy or consular office well in advance of travel if this applies to your party.

Price Guarantee

Once your booking has been confirmed we guarantee the price will not increase, whatever the circumstances. Before booking please ensure you have read our important tour pricing information. [Booking Conditions](#)

Visa and Passport Information

Uzbekistan: Visas are required for all nationalities. An e-visa can be applied for via www.e-visa.gov.uz

You should take a printed copy of the e-visa for your arrival in Uzbekistan.

Turkmenistan: A single entry visa is required for Turkmenistan. Prior authorisation from the Turkmen authorities is required for UK citizens. Explore will obtain this on your behalf. Overseas passengers must check with the relevant consulate and if you require an authorisation letter please contact Explore immediately. On arrival in Turkmenistan, you must complete a migration card and pay a US\$12 migration fee (\$10 fee plus \$2 Admin charge). The authorities will retain the card. Please note it is not possible to obtain the Turkmenistan authorisation any earlier than 8 weeks prior to the tour departure date and it takes 3 weeks to process.

Iran: An Iran visa is required by all nationalities, and must be arranged prior to travel. Please consult with your nearest Iran Consulate for further, up to date information regarding the visa process, costs and any relevant supporting documentation that you will need to supply.

Part of the Iran Visa process is to obtain an authorisation code/invitational letter from the local Iranian authorities. All nationalities will require this. Explore will request this on your behalf at the earliest 2 months prior to departure, the local Iran authorities will not process any requests sent through outside of the 2 month process time. Please note the various process times depending on your nationality:

British, American and Canadian: Minimum of 30-35 working days

All other nationalities: Minimum of 10 working days

In order for Explore to obtain the necessary authorisation code/invitation letter on your behalf, we will require a clear colour copy of your passport photo page and all pages with visas and/or country stamps to reach us no later than 12 weeks before you travel. In addition to the colour copy of your passport pages, you'll also need to supply us with further personal information including a head and shoulders digital photograph of the applicant in front of a white area, a C.V./resume (max. 2 pages), username information for all social media websites you are a member of, and email and telephone contact details (please provide the same information you will provide on your visa application form). Explore will be in contact with you regarding this information between 10-12 weeks before you travel. Please be aware that due to the lengthy visa application process, we do not recommend making any other holiday arrangements during this time, that require your passport.

You can submit your application for your visa, once Explore has obtained your authorisation code/invitational letter and sent it through to you. Please note, if you intend using the London or Dublin Consulate, then we strongly recommend to contact them first to confirm that they have your authorisation code/invitational letter or alternatively to wait a minimum of 3 working days after you have received your authorisation code before attending the Consulate. Please do this before you attend the consulate, as they will not accept your application if they have not received your authorisation code/invitation letter from the local Iranian authorities. For non-UK residents, please contact your nearest consulate for the most up to date information on visa costs and required documentation as this can vary depending on your nationality and country of residence. Most Consulates provide a 5-7 working day visa processing service.

Please note the authorisation code is only valid for 30 days from issuance.

For UK residents, applications are only accepted in person at the London or Dublin Consulate. Please note that you'll need to submit 2 passport photos (women need to wear a head scarf for these photos), along with your passport and visa application form to The Iranian Consulate in London or Dublin. Currently the London Consulate is charging approximately £170.00 per person for the visa. Please note, any women attending the London or Dublin Consulate in person will need to wear a head scarf.

Please ensure that your passport has a minimum of 6 months validity from the date of return to your home country. Please note that any passport that contains an endorsement or a visa for Israel, regardless of whether it has expired, will not be accepted.

All visa information is subject to regular change, so please check with your local consulate for the most up to date advice for the countries you intend to visit.

If you do require assistance in obtaining a visa then you may consider applying through Explore's recommended visa service in the UK, Travcour. See www.travcour.com to download the relevant visa application for your trip, if applicable (UK citizens only), along with details of how to apply for your visa through Travcour. The Team at Travcour will be happy to answer specific questions relating to visa applications, please call them directly on 0208 5431846.

It is your responsibility to ensure that you are in possession of a full passport, with the correct validity for your chosen destination.

Booking conditions

Before booking your Explore trip, please ensure that you read both our Essential Information and Booking Conditions.

Transfers

[Find out more about Trip Transfer Terms and Conditions before you book.](#)

Booking a land only package with Explore

Customers who have chosen to book on the 'Land Only' arrangements of our tour, please ensure that you have checked your tour specific 'Joining Instructions' prior to booking your own travel arrangements. Your joining instructions can be found below in the dates and prices information.

You may also be eligible for the Free Explore Transfer.

Joining Tour Abroad

Customers booked on the 'Land Only' arrangements will now receive a Free Transfer, provided you arrive and depart on the tour only itinerary start and end dates. The transfers will be from the Explore designated airport or train station to the joining point of your tour, and then back from the ending point to the designated airport or train station. The exception to this rule is customers who are booked on a tour where the joining and ending point is at the designated airport or train station.

Free transfers are not available for Self-Guided, Polar, Tailormade or Tours for Churches customers.

If you are not eligible for the Free Transfer then you will need to make your own way through to the joining and ending point. On a majority of our tours Explore will be able to provide a private transfer at an additional cost. Please ask for a quote at the time of booking.

For more information regarding the Explore Free Transfer click [here](#)

Insurance

It is a condition of booking with Explore that you have adequate valid travel insurance. It is your responsibility to arrange appropriate travel insurance and ensure you have read and understood the full terms and conditions of your travel insurance policy to ensure that you are covered for all activities you intend to undertake whilst on the tour, including all optional activities. Your Insurance Policy must fully cover you for medical expenses and emergency repatriation to your home country. Please ensure your policy includes medical emergency helicopter evacuation in the event of illness or injury and covers the entire duration of your holiday. If you are trekking at altitude please ensure that there is no upper altitude limit which may limit or exclude cover for your trip. The cost of many of our Polar Voyages will exceed the capped amount covered by standard insurance premiums and you will be required to pay an additional premium to cover the full value of your trip. Please ensure that you are covered for the full amount of your holiday cost, as insufficient cover could invalidate a claim under the policy. Medical and repatriation insurance cover is not mandatory for UK residents who are travelling on trips within the United Kingdom.

Read more information about what travel insurance is required.

Flight information

Explore offers a wide range of flexible flying options to make joining and leaving our trips easy. [Read more about them here.](#)

Flight Information

You are able to book this tour on a 'land only' basis or as a 'flight inclusive' package. Your flight inclusive package will be fully protected by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) ATOL protection scheme.

Booking a flight inclusive package with Explore

We have a good selection of flights not only from London but from many regional airports around the UK allowing us to compare fares between scheduled carriers as well as low cost and charter airlines. Our dedicated flights team will match the best flight options to your arrival and departure airport.

On our website we display a UK flight inclusive package guide price which is generally based on a London departure. To avoid paying supplements or to secure your preferred flight option, we recommend booking as early as possible, especially for peak travel dates.

Iran

Vaccinations

Nothing compulsory, we recommend protection against malaria, typhoid, tetanus, diphtheria, polio and hepatitis A. Consult your travel clinic for latest advice on different prophylaxis available against malaria. Please check the latest requirements with your travel clinic or doctor prior to departure. The above is not an exhaustive list. Further information regarding vaccinations and travel health advice can be found by following the NHS and NaTHNaC links at [Explore Travel Health](#) and from your local healthcare provider. Visa and vaccination requirements are subject to change and should be confirmed by you before travelling.

Turkmenistan

Vaccinations

Nothing compulsory, we recommend protection against typhoid, tetanus, diphtheria, polio and hepatitis A. Consult your travel clinic for latest advice on the need for and different prophylaxis available against malaria. Please check the latest requirements with your travel clinic or doctor prior to departure. The above is not an exhaustive list. Further information regarding vaccinations and travel health advice can be found by following the NHS and NaTHNaC links at [Explore Travel Health](#) and from your local healthcare provider. Visa and vaccination requirements are subject to change and should be confirmed by you before travelling. Turkmenistan has banned the sale of all tobacco products and prohibited smoking in ALL public places including streets, parks, airports etc. Smoking is only permitted in public in designated areas in hotels and restaurants. New regulations only permit the import of a MAXIMUM of 2 packets of 20 cigarettes per person.

Uzbekistan

Vaccinations

Nothing compulsory, we recommend protection against typhoid, tetanus, diphtheria, polio and hepatitis A. Consult your travel clinic for latest advice on the need for and different prophylaxis available against malaria. Please check the latest requirements with your travel clinic or doctor prior to departure. The above is not an exhaustive list. Further information regarding vaccinations and

travel health advice can be found by following the NHS and NaTHNaC links at [Explore Travel Health](#) and from your local healthcare provider. Visa and vaccination requirements are subject to change and should be confirmed by you before travelling.
