

EXPLORE!

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The Five Stans of The Silk Road

KAZAKHSTAN, KYRGYZSTAN, TAJIKISTAN, TURKMENISTAN,
UZBEKISTAN - TRIP CODE STA

DISCOVERY

Why book this trip?

Traverse mountains pocketed with turquoise alpine lakes, drive through lush fertile valleys and zip across dry and dusty desert plains by high-speed train. This is an all-encompassing, ever-changing journey through the 5 'Stans of Central Asia.

- **Fann Mountains** - Walk amongst wild mountain scenery and snap the picture-perfect 'Seven Lakes'
- **The Silk Road** - Travel along ancient routes and discover the intricate architecture of Khiva, Bokhara and Samarkand
- **Darvaza** - Peer into the 'Door to Hell', the underground cavern that's been aflame since 1971



INCLUDED MEALS
Breakfast: 20
Lunch: 3
Dinner: 5



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



TRANSPORT
Bus
Flight
Train



ACCOMMODATION
1 nights simple
camping
1 nights simple
guesthouse
16 nights
comfortable hotel
1 nights simple
hotel
1 nights simple yurt



TRIP PACE:
Moderate



GROUP SIZE:
10 - 16

Itinerary

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

DAY 1 - Join trip in Bishkek and have an afternoon exploring the city

Arrive in Bishkek, a former Silk Road settlement. Kyrgyzstan's capital is a young city, starting life as a clay fort built by the Khan of Kokand in 1825 only to be destroyed by the Russians 43 years later. It was rebuilt in 1878 and it is from this time that Bishkek evolved.

For those arriving on time today our Leader plans to meet you in the hotel reception at 11:30am for the welcome meeting and to take us on a sightseeing tour of Bishkek by bus and on foot. We learn about the main monuments and buildings of the city, and take a leisurely walk through Oak Park.

If you would like to receive a complimentary airport transfer today, you'll need to arrive into Manas International Airport (FRU), which is 40 minutes' drive from the hotel. For those arriving on flights in the early hours of this morning, we'll arrange for your hotel room to be available immediately upon your arrival. For anyone arriving before today please contact us to book additional nights accommodation.

Please note that if you wish to join the Bishkek City Tour today, you must arrive at the hotel by 11:30am. If you are booking your own flights, we recommend giving yourself at least one hour to clear the airport. From the airport to the hotel is around 40 minutes' drive, so therefore the latest your flight can arrive is 9:30am. Should you miss the welcome meeting, your Leader will inform you of any essential information at 6:30pm this evening, or 8:45am the morning of day 2.



ACCOMMODATION:
B Hotel Bishkek (or similar)

Grade: Comfortable Hotel



SINGLE ROOM AVAILABLE



MEALS PROVIDED: NONE

DAY 2 - Morning visit to Osh Bazaar before driving out to Ala Archa National Park

We set off this morning for Osh Bazaar, Bishkek's bustling centrepiece and a popular meeting place for locals. The bazaar is extensive, and as we walk around we'll see everything from local wares, to freshly baked breads, fruit, nuts and meat. Here we'll buy all the ingredients for a picnic lunch, before making the short drive outside of the city to Ala Archa National Park. After a scenic lunch aside the river, we will set off on foot for a gentle walk through the fresh alpine scenery. Literally translated to 'brightly coloured juniper' the park's scenery is quite spectacular, with snow-capped mountains giving way to alpine forests with glacial rivers carving their way through the landscape. We will spend a few hours on foot exploring the national park before driving back to the capital.



ACCOMMODATION:
B Hotel Bishkek (or similar)

Grade: Comfortable Hotel



SINGLE ROOM AVAILABLE



MEALS PROVIDED: BREAKFAST

DAY 3 - Drive to Burana Tower and visit a stadium for horse games. Drive onto Kochkor

Leaving Bishkek behind this morning, we first drive out to Burana Tower; a piece of Silk Road history that sits sequestered in the wide-open landscape. The 11th century tower is all that remains of the ancient city of Balasagun, with the tower itself half the height of its former glory. We continue on to Tokmok stadium, which plays host to the wealth of horse games that have remained hugely popular here throughout the centuries. We will witness a demonstration of Kok Boru, a form of polo played with the carcass of a goat, and Kyz-Kuumai which literally translates to 'girl chasing'. This game is like a horse-back version of the playground game 'kiss chase' where the men are charged with planting a kiss on the woman, whilst she is armed with a whip to beat the boys away.

After lunch we will continue onto Kochkor, a village that is now synonymous with artisan textiles and carpets. Kochkor's inhabitants have pledged to keep alive the traditions of this region, and before dinner we will visit a woman's cooperative who specialise in making Shiyrdak, a colourful hand-woven felt carpet that is ubiquitous throughout the homes and yurts of Central Asia.



ACCOMMODATION:
Nomad Lodge (or similar)



Grade: Simple Hotel



MEALS PROVIDED: BREAKFAST & DINNER

DAY 4 - Learn how to make Kyrgyz fried bread. Then drive onto Lake Issyk Kul to sleep in a yurt

This morning we will embark on a masterclass to learn how to make Boorsok, the national bread and one of the country's staple foods. The doughy mixture is deep-fried in large quantities before being spread across the 'dastorkan' or table, doubling as a table decoration. Cooking an abundance of Boorsok is seen as a sign of generosity on the part of the host, so seldom will you see a dinner table not chock-full with the tasty offerings.

After filling up on bread we will wind our way to the iconic Lake Issyk Kul, quite-rightly dubbed 'The Pearl of Kyrgyzstan'. We trace our way alongside its southern shores to the village of Kyzyl Tuu, one of the centres for yurt production. Here we learn more about how these fascinating structures work and why they have been the chosen dwellings for Central Asian nomads for centuries. Our final stop of today's journey is in Bokonbeavo where we meet an Eagle Hunter. Here we will see how this form of falconry has been practiced and perfected over centuries.

We arrive in Tosor, on the banks of Lake Issyk Kul in the late afternoon, where there will be time for swimming in the lake before dinner. Tonight's yurts will be twin-share with western style toilets and cold showers available.



ACCOMMODATION:
Tamga Yurt Camp (or similar)



Grade: Simple Yurt



MEALS PROVIDED: BREAKFAST & DINNER

DAY 5 - Explore Jet Oguz gorge on foot and then drive onto Karakol for a city tour

After a leisurely breakfast overlooking the shores of Issyk Kul, we drive onto Szaka or 'Fairytale Canyon', so-called due to the bizarre landscape of captivating rock formations.

We then continue on to the mountain valley of Jety-Oguz, where we plan to take a short walk. The walk takes us over the picturesque Jety-Oguz Pass (2,800 m) before dropping down and along the valley below. The rock formation in this area is a deep-red sandstone that rises out of the green valley below, offering quite a different landscape from that which we have seen so far. From here we continue onto the town of Karakol, where we meet civilisation once again.

Embarking on a tour of the town we discover some of its most interesting sights, including the Dungan Mosque which was built in 1904 without using a single nail, and serving as a place of worship for the country's Chinese Muslims. The architecture is quite striking, foregoing minarets and opting instead for a wooden pagoda-style roof. We also see the Russian Orthodox Church that was constructed entirely of wood in 1869 and is still standing today. Finally we visit the museum of the Russian explorer Przhevalski, after whom the town was originally named. From here we make the short drive out of the city to the village of Tepke, where we spend the night in a farmer's guesthouse.



ACCOMMODATION:

Reina Kench Guesthouse (or similar)



Grade: Simple Guesthouse



SINGLE ROOM AVAILABLE



MEALS PROVIDED: BREAKFAST & DINNER

DAY 6 - Cross the border into Kazakhstan and explore Charyn Canyon before driving to Almaty

Bidding goodbye to our hosts this morning we set off for our next country, Kazakhstan. Our route takes us up into the tip of the eastern Tien Shen range when we cross the border at Kegen before descending down to the dry, dusty and hot Kazakh steppe. We stop at Charyn Canyon, often compared to the Grand Canyon albeit on a smaller scale. We visit a part of the canyon known as the 'Valley of Castles' due to its unusual rock formations, and from here we descend 100 metres from the rim down to the river where we have a picnic. It's possible to dip your feet in the river for those that feel in need of a cool-down.

After returning to the road we continue onto Almaty where we aim to arrive in the early evening.

Almaty ceded capital status to Astana in 1997, but it still remains the cultural and financial centre, where Russians, nomadic Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, Tartars and many other ethnic groups rub shoulders in its bustling markets. The city has an almost European feel, partly due to the earthquake in 1911 that flattened Almaty resulting in the complete re-planning and re-building of the city. Wide, leafy boulevards were

constructed and lined with low-rise white-washed housing and offices, and the few period buildings that remained intact were restored to their former glory. The city enjoys an enviable position, nestled in the foothills of the Zailiysky Alatau mountains, with beautiful turquoise lakes, snow-capped mountains and chic ski resorts just a short drive away.



ACCOMMODATION:
Kazzhol Hotel (or similar)



Grade: Comfortable Hotel



SINGLE ROOM AVAILABLE



SWIMMING POOL AVAILABLE



MEALS PROVIDED: BREAKFAST & LUNCH

DAY 7 - Tour the wide boulevards and green parks of Almaty

Today we set out to explore some of the Almaty's major sites, starting in the Park of 28 Guards. The park is diverse, serving as popular meeting place for locals as well as housing a variety of important monuments and buildings. The park's focal point is the Ascension Cathedral, a beautiful Russian Orthodox style cathedral and one of only two wooden buildings left in the city. Also found in the park are imposing Soviet statues remembering falling soldiers from campaigns such as WW2 and the Afghan War, where many Kazakh nationals fought to support the USSR's interests.

We then move onto Green Market, a fascinating meeting place for the city's locals to come for their daily shop. The market offers an eclectic range of produce brought by nomads as far flung as Korea, all the way through China and Central Asia. Here you can find exotic fruits, vegetables, an extensive butchery section with all types of meat and a wide variety of savoury foods. Make sure to try Kazzan (smoked horse sausage) and Kurt (salted cheese balls popular with beer).

The rest of the afternoon has been left free to relax, or further exploration. You could take a taxi up to the Medeo ice rink, then travel by cable car to the top of the Shymbulak skiing area for superb views of the city and the surrounding mountains.



ACCOMMODATION:
Kazzhol Hotel (or similar)



Grade: Comfortable Hotel



SINGLE ROOM AVAILABLE



SWIMMING POOL AVAILABLE



MEALS PROVIDED: BREAKFAST

DAY 8 - Morning flight to Dushanbe. Afternoon orientation tour of the city

This morning we take the short flight of around two hours to Dushanbe, Tajikistan's enigmatic capital. The capital of Tajikistan shares little history with many of its great Silk Road counterparts, with most evidence pointing to the fact Dushanbe was a small village until the turn of the 20th century. The city gained prominence when Tajikistan became part of the USSR, with the Soviets establishing the city as a centre for textile production. It was then that the city began to grow, and more recently it has reached the end of a 10 year intensive building programme bringing the city into the 21st century.

This afternoon we will explore some of the city's main highlights, starting the tour at the National Archaeological Museum of Tajikistan. Here we find its famous Buddha statue and rich collection of archaeological artefacts along with collections of fine art. We continue onto the statue of Ismail Samani, the large monument that commemorates the 1,100th anniversary of the Samanid State, which by many is considered to have been the heyday of the Tajik nation when science and arts flourished. From there we walk up to Rudaki Park, dedicated to the great Persian poet Rudaki, who also lived during Samanid time in the 9th century AD.

We end the day with dinner in a local restaurant serving traditional Tajik cuisine. A typical meal in Tajikistan would include vegetable salad starters, followed by a hearty soup similar to the Russian borsch, and a main consists of a meat dish like shashlik or chicken served alongside freshly baked bread.



ACCOMMODATION:
Hotel Atlas (or similar)



Grade: Comfortable Hotel



SINGLE ROOM AVAILABLE



SWIMMING POOL AVAILABLE



MEALS PROVIDED: BREAKFAST

DAY 9 - Further exploration of Dushanbe including Navruz Palace and the market

Today is a more relaxed day with some time for further exploration of the city. We will visit the strikingly beautiful Navruz Palace, Dushanbe's gleaming centrepiece. Hundreds of skilled artisans were appointed to work on the building, with it initially being planned to be built as the largest tea house in the world. But when its interior frescoes and mosaic walls turned out to be so impressive, it was instead turned into a palace. We will also pay visit to the Museum of Musical Instruments, which, in stark contrast to the palace, is hosted in the front room of a local house! Ran by passionate local Iqbol Zavkibekov, the museum is packed with a rich collection of Pamiri, Tajik and Central Asian musical instruments. Here Iqbol carries on the legacy of his father, a famous Tajik musician, by demonstrating how these traditional instruments are deeply ingrained into the nomadic culture of Central Asia.

This afternoon has been left free to relax, or perhaps to take a walk through the city's central market to try and barter for fruit, clothes or textiles.



ACCOMMODATION:
Hotel Atlas (or similar)



Grade: Comfortable Hotel



SINGLE ROOM AVAILABLE



SWIMMING POOL AVAILABLE



MEALS PROVIDED: BREAKFAST

DAY 10 - Full day drive into the Fann Mountains. Picnic stop for a scenic lunch and walk to a waterfall

We set off early this morning for a scenic drive into the mountains. Our first destination is Iskander Kul, so-named after Alexander the Great. Triangular in shape, it is often considered to be the most beautiful lake in all of the former USSR. Standing at an altitude of 2,200 metres, this alpine lake is nestled in the heart of the Fann Mountains and set to a backdrop of snow-capped peaks. We stop on the shores of the lake for a picnic, and there is the chance for a bracing dip before lunch. We take a short walk to a nearby

waterfall before continuing the drive to Penjikent, aiming to arrive in the early evening.

The accommodation for the next two nights is a simple but comfortable hotel with twin rooms and en-suite bathrooms.



ACCOMMODATION:

Hotel Umarion (or similar)



Grade: Comfortable Hotel



SINGLE ROOM AVAILABLE



MEALS PROVIDED: BREAKFAST & LUNCH

DAY 11 - Drive to the 'Seven Lakes' for a half day walk among the picturesque lakes

We set off for a full day in the mountains today, exploring the region of the 'Seven Lakes'. Legend has it that the lakes were formed from the tears of seven daughters after the loss of their father. The father got lost in the valley and after several days of looking it was clear they weren't going to find him. The upset and anguish caused their tears filled up the valleys right where they were looking. What is for sure is that each of the glacial lakes takes on its own form, with their names thought to reflect their individual shapes. Some are set deep in valleys, others wide and on an open plain. Sometimes the appearance of even the same lake can change as the light and cloud cover transforms throughout the day, with the colours changing from blue, to turquoise, to green and black.

We have a picnic lunch beside the fourth lake 'Nofin', before driving further up the valley to the sixth lake 'Marguzor'. It is from here we embark on an hour-long hike up to the seventh and highest lake, Hazorchashma. It's worth the walk, but for those not wishing to make the two-hour round trip can relax on the shores of the sixth lake.

Later in the afternoon we return by bus back to Penjikent.



ACCOMMODATION:

Hotel Umarion (or similar)



Grade: Comfortable Hotel



SINGLE ROOM AVAILABLE



MEALS PROVIDED: BREAKFAST & LUNCH

DAY 12 - Drive to historic Samarkand to discover Registan Square and Gur Emir Mausoleum

Leaving Penjikent behind this morning, we head west and make for the border and our forth country, Uzbekistan. Before crossing we stop off at the UNESCO site of Sarazm, dating back to the 4th century BC and bearing evidence of one of the first settlements in Tajikistan, possibly even Central Asia. Continuing onto the border, we cross on foot before picking up our Uzbek bus and making the short drive onto the much-fabled city of Samarkand.

Stormed by Alexander the Great and reduced to ashes by Genghis Khan, Samarkand was nevertheless transformed into the most glittering city in Transoxiana by Tamerlane, who made it his capital in the 14th century. Even today, the monumental scale of the buildings overwhelms visitors. This afternoon, we will visit Registan Square, Samarkand's turquoise mosaic masterpiece. Registan's sweeping public square is flanked on three sides by huge intricately-tiled madrasahs. Meticulously restored during Soviet times, it now echos its former glory, and we will spend time taking in the scale of the monument, as well as learning about its role over the six centuries it has been standing. We will also visit the Gur Emir, the gold-ceilinged tomb of Tamerlane himself, revered as somewhat of a national icon in Uzbekistan.

This evening we will embark on a very different kind of experience, when we are treated to a private fashion show at the workshop of designer Valentina Romanenko. A Moscow-trained designer, Romanenko has transformed her traditional Uzbek home into a workshop and catwalk display area. In this cosy setting, decorated with a selection of locally-made carpets and wall hangings, a number of models will showcase her traditionally made, hand-woven designs.



ACCOMMODATION:
Hotel Malika Classic (or similar)

Grade: Comfortable Hotel



SINGLE ROOM AVAILABLE



MEALS PROVIDED: BREAKFAST

DAY 13 - A further morning to explore Samarkand before catching the high speed train to Bokhara

This morning's sightseeing is accompanied by a local guide and takes us to the Shah-i-Zinda - a beautifully-tiled necropolis of tombs, mosques and mausoleums belonging to Tamerlane's family, friends and the prophet Mohammad's cousin. We will also visit the Ulug-Beg Observatory, considered to have been one of the finest observatories in the Islamic World. It was here that Ulug-Beg, the great medieval

astronomer, built his gigantic sextant which enabled him to calculate the length of a year to within just 10 seconds. We see the Bibi-Khanym Mosque, once the largest in Central Asia; which was built by Tamerlane with loot from Indian campaigns and named after his favourite Mongolian wife.

After dinner this evening we will head to the train station to take the high-speed train to Bokhara, a comfortable journey of just two hours travelling at over 250 kph.



ACCOMMODATION:

Hotel Sasha & Son (or similar)



Grade: Comfortable Hotel



SINGLE ROOM AVAILABLE



MEALS PROVIDED: BREAKFAST

DAY 14 - In Bokhara, discover blue-tiled domes and minarets; learn about the city's history

Bokhara was a key trading post on the Silk Road. This UNESCO-listed city has many zig-zagged backstreets, bustling bazaars and historical monuments. Many call it „Bukhoroi Shareef,, , translating to Holy Bukhara on account of its hundreds of mosques and mausoleums. The city has seen various dynasties battling for influence as it has always stood as a centre of trade, culture, and scholarship.

Today's day of sightseeing starts off with a walking tour. Highlights include the Lyab-i Hauz which once supplied the city's water; the striking blue-tiled Abdul Khan madrasah and the 9th century Mghoki Arrar Mosque. We will also visit the Kalyan minaret, which, as the tallest monument in town, is known as the 'Tower of Death' because prisoners were once hurled to their death from here. In addition, we will take in the trading domes that are the most famous symbol of Bokharan architecture.

This afternoon, we will drive to The Ark - a massive citadel which was used as a fortress from the 5th century until its fall to the Russians in 1920. Today it houses several small museums connected with Bokhara's history. Bokhara was the site of the imprisonment for two British soldiers during 'The Great Game' - an epic battle fought between Victorian Britain and Tsarist Russia across the vastness of Central Asia.

Finally, we will take in the Char Minar Mosque - the impressive entrance to a now-demolished madrassah, and wander the backstreets of the old town maybe stopping off for a 'chaikhana', at a local tea house.



ACCOMMODATION:

Hotel Sasha & Son (or similar)



Grade: Comfortable Hotel



SINGLE ROOM AVAILABLE



MEALS PROVIDED: BREAKFAST

DAY 15 - Another morning of exploring Bokhara before taking the high-speed train to Khiva

This morning has been left free for those who wish to explore the city further. There is the option to visit one of the city's hammams, or a short drive outside the city limits is the the summer palace, known as the 'Palace of Moon-like Stars'.

This afternoon we make our way to the train station for our second high-speed rail journey to Khiva. Completed only last year, Uzbekistan's state-of-the art rail network has cut the journey time in half, with the journey previously taking between 8-9 hours across dry and dusty desert plains.



ACCOMMODATION:
Orient Star Khiva (or similar)



Grade: Comfortable Hotel



SINGLE ROOM AVAILABLE



MEALS PROVIDED: BREAKFAST

DAY 16 - A full day to wander the narrow streets of the 'Open Air Museum' of Khiva

On this morning's walking tour, we may well feel like we are stepping into a scene from the film 'Arabian Nights' as we explore the majestic Old Citadel. This 12th century fortress dominated the city before a palace, harem, barracks and mosques were constructed. It is worth climbing the steps of the Dzhuma Minaret for a panoramic view of the maze of streets below.

The rest of the afternoon has been left free to explore the mosques, tombs and palaces of this well-preserved city, which has hardly changed since ancient times. This evening, you may choose to explore a bit more of the city after dark, when magical moonlit silhouettes make it even more spectacular.





ACCOMMODATION:

Orient Star Khiva (or similar)



Grade: Comfortable Hotel



SINGLE ROOM AVAILABLE



MEALS PROVIDED: BREAKFAST

DAY 17 - Drive west to the outpost of Nukus, stopping at the Savitsky Museum en route

We leave the well-sealed roads behind this morning on the bumpy drive to Nukus, a journey of around four hours. Nukus is the capital of the autonomous region of Karakalpakstan, which makes up much of north-west Uzbekistan. A once-thriving region, the Aral Sea disaster in the 1960's/70's devastated this rich delta, leaving it all but dried up when the sea receded far to the north. Eventually, by the end of the 1980's the Aral Sea shrank to just 10% of its original size. Consequently, present-day Nukus has been half-deserted, creating an atmosphere that some describe as like being at the very edge of the world. Hidden in this forgotten city is what is widely regarded as one of the best collections of Soviet art, housed in the Savitsky Museum. After lunch we spend some time appreciating the world's second-largest collection of Russian avant'garde art, which Mr Savitsky helped to keep hidden here, away from the far-reaching eyes of the KGB.

This evening we will dine in the house of a local family of musicians, where we learn what modern life is like in this remote outpost, and how music forms a large part of the culture here.



ACCOMMODATION:

Hotel Jipek Joli (or similar)



Grade: Comfortable Hotel



SINGLE ROOM AVAILABLE



MEALS PROVIDED: BREAKFAST & DINNER

DAY 18 - Cross the border into Turkmenistan and drive onto Darvaza to camp by the flaming crater

We set off for the border this morning to cross into our fifth and final Stan - Turkmenistan. The border crossing into Turkmenistan can sometimes be a lengthy affair, so be prepared for a 1-2 hour wait and a thorough search of all bags. It is here we will wave goodbye to our Tour Leader at the Uzbek border, before making our way by bus across no-man's land to be greeted by a local Turkmen leader for the final few days of our trip. We will then make the short drive to Kunya Urgench for lunch and to visit the mausoleums, mosques and minarets that are found here in the former capital of the Achaemenid Empire.

From here we continue on into the Karakum desert for a four hour drive to the incredible Darvaza Crater. There are many stories that surround the so-called 'Door to Hell', the one that most people settle on was that the site was identified by Soviet engineers in the early 1970's as an oil site. Drilling commenced before they hit a gas pocket which caused the collapse of the rig into the crater we see today. Dangerous amounts of toxic gas began to be released, so it was decided to try and burn the gas off by settling it alight. It remains alight today, nearly 50 years later.

After a very apt barbecue dinner, we will have plenty of time to take in Darvaza's deep reds, oranges and crimsons as it burns brightly against the backdrop of the inky-black sky.

We camp tonight aside the crater in two-man tents. The set up is very simple, with temporary toilets and no access to showers. All mats and bedding will be provided.



ACCOMMODATION:
Darvaza Camp (or similar)



Grade: Simple Camping



SINGLE ROOM AVAILABLE



MEALS PROVIDED: BREAKFAST & DINNER

DAY 19 - Continue onto Ashgabat, stopping via the Erbent Desert community

Continuing south this morning, we stop via the Erbent Desert community. The most remote part, of the one of the world's most remote countries is an odd place to find a village, but this small, hardy community thrives here against all the odds. We spend some time wandering among the small village's houses and yurts, and learning how the villagers here have adapted to such an extreme environment.

We continue onto Ashgabat, arriving in time for lunch.

The capital of Turkmenistan was a once-prosperous frontier town along the Trans-Caspian railway that was completely destroyed by a massive earthquake in 1948. It rose from its ashes and rubble and 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. In the afternoon we have an opportunity to explore the city on a tour that will take in some of the highlights of both the Soviet and Niyazov reigns. We visit 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.



ACCOMMODATION:

Grand Turkmen Hotel (or similar)



Grade: Comfortable Hotel



SINGLE ROOM AVAILABLE



MEALS PROVIDED: BREAKFAST

DAY 20 - In Ashgabat, visit Nisa Fortress and Gypjak Mosque

This morning we drive out to the outskirts of the city to the once-mighty fortress of Nisa. Founded in the 3rd century BC as the capital of the 1st Parthian Empire, its 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 then continue on to the impressive Gypjak Mosque, or spiritual mosque. The largest mosque in Central Asia, it was constructed in 2002 for a reported sum of \$100 million, and mirrors the style of much of city with its opulent white marble walls and golden domes. After some time for exploration, we return back to the city, where the rest of this afternoon has been left free.

Most return flights from Ashgabat leave in the early hours of the next morning, so a late-checkout has been arranged so the room is available until we leave for the airport.



ACCOMMODATION:

Grand Turkmen Hotel (or similar)



Grade: Comfortable Hotel



SINGLE ROOM AVAILABLE



MEALS PROVIDED: BREAKFAST

DAY 21 - Trip ends in Ashgabat

The trip ends after breakfast at our hotel in Ashgabat.

There are no activities planned today, so you are free to depart from Ashgabat at any time. If your flight is departing later in the day, luggage storage facilities are available at our hotel. If you would like to receive a complimentary airport transfer today, you'll need to depart from Ashgabat International Airport (ASB), which is 40 minutes\ from the hotel.



MEALS PROVIDED: BREAKFAST

Trip information

Climate and country information

Kazakhstan

Climate

In summer the temperatures can reach more than 30 °C and in winter around -20 °C (-4.0 °F)

Time difference to GMT	Plugs	Religion	Language
+6	2 Pin Round	Islam, Christianity	Kazakh, Russian

Kyrgyzstan

Climate

Summer day temperatures can reach a maximum of 32°C in the lower slopes of the Tien Shan in July and August, although, as with any mountain area, temperatures can vary greatly and you should be prepared for extremes of weather. Night temperatures drop dramatically, possibly reaching zero degrees at night.

Time difference to GMT	Plugs	Religion	Language
+5	2 Pin Round	Islam, Russian Orthodox.	Kyrgyz, Russian.

Tajikistan

Climate

Summer day temperatures can reach a maximum of 35°C in lower altitudes during July and August, although, as with any mountain area, temperatures can vary greatly and you should be prepared for extremes of weather. Night temperatures drop dramatically, possibly reaching zero degrees at night.

Time difference to GMT	Plugs	Religion	Language
+5	2 Pin Round	Islam, Russian Orthodox.	Tajik, Russian

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	Plugs	Religion	Language
+5	2 Pin Round	Islam, Eastern Orthodox	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	Plugs	Religion
+5	2 Pin Round	Islam, predominantly Sunni, Eastern Orthodox

Language

Uzbek, Russian, Tajik

Budgeting and packing

Clothing

Lightweight cottons are most suitable for the hot summers of Central Asia, with warmer clothing including a waterproof/windproof jacket needed for the time spent in the mountains. At any time of the year a good fleece or down jacket plus gloves and hat are recommended for yurt stays and nights spent at higher altitudes. A pair of thermals are good as an extra layer, or even for keeping you warm in bed. The region is traditionally Muslim so brief shorts and skirts, or clothes that are revealing or tight-fitting can offend local sensibilities. Women should bring a headscarf as this is necessary for some mosque visits. Finally, remember to pack swimming gear for the refreshing lake dips.

Footwear

A pair of comfortable walking shoes or boots will be very useful during the walks as the trails can sometimes be uneven. Sandles will be useful for lakes and rivers, and comfortable trainers should suffice

for everything else.

Luggage

20kg

Luggage: On tour

Due to the variety of transport and terrain on this trip, soft-sided holdalls are recommended.

Equipment

Bring a small torch, a water bottle, insect repellent and a small travel towel as some of the yurt camps do not supply towels. Although the yurt camps do provide thick blankets you may wish to bring your own sleeping bag for additional warmth as it can become very cold at night. If using the local blankets then a sleeping bag liner or sheet should make your stay more comfortable. A portable powerbank will be useful to recharge phones and camera batteries as access to electricity will be intermittent.

In Tajikistan in particular there are not very many stalls or shops at the side of the road, so we recommend packing plenty of snacks for the long journeys.

Tipping

Explore leader

Tipping isn't compulsory, and we work hard to ensure that our leaders all receive a fair wage. You may however, want to recognise a leader that's done a great job or really added to your trip by giving them a tip. We're often asked about the recommended amount. It's a tricky one, and down to personal preference, but we'd recommend between £15 to £20 per person per week as a guideline.

Local crew

Although entirely voluntary, tipping is a recognized 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. In order to make things easier for you, your leader may organise a group's tips kitty for included activities and meals and if this is the case, they will account for it throughout the tour.

Accordingly, you should allow £40 per person.

For all non-included services and meals on your trip please tip independently at your discretion.

Kazakhstan

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	Dinner price	Beer price	Water price
£10	£15	£2.5	£0.5

Foreign Exchange

Local currency

Kazakhstani Tenge

Recommended Currency For Exchange

US Dollars or Euros are recommended for exchange.

Where To Exchange

Banks, bureaux de change, airports, train stations, ports & large hotels

ATM Availability

ATMs are widely available.

Credit Card Acceptance

Most major credit cards are accepted in large hotels

Travellers Cheques

International traveller's cheques are not widely accepted, and therefore not recommended.

Kyrgyzstan

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	Dinner price	Beer price	Water price
£3	£5	£1	£0.3

Foreign Exchange

Local currency

Som.

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. Large notes may attract a slightly higher exchange rate than small ones.

Where To Exchange

In major towns. Your tour leader will advise you.

ATM Availability

Very limited do not rely on this.

Credit Card Acceptance

Limited to major restaurants and stores in cities only.

Travellers Cheques

Not recommended for these tours.

Tajikistan

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	Dinner price	Beer price	Water price
£3	£5	£2	£0.5

Foreign Exchange

Local currency

Somoni.

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. Large notes may attract a slightly higher exchange rate than small ones.

Where To Exchange

In major towns. Your tour leader will advise you.

ATM Availability

Very limited do not rely on this.

Credit Card Acceptance

Limited to major restaurants and stores in cities only.

Travellers Cheques

Not recommended for these tours.

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	Dinner price	Beer price	Water price
£4	£6	£1.4	£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	Beer price	Water price
£6.00 - 10.00	£1.4	£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 1996), 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, Flight, Train

Accommodation notes

The accommodation on this trip comprises mainly of comfortable hotels and guesthouses, with twin-rooms, en-suite facilities and a good level of service. Where possible, hotels are centrally-located and offer character reflective of the destination we are in. There will be a couple of nights where we stay in simple-rated accommodation; on Lake Issyk Kul we stay in cosy yurts that will be twin-share, with a fixed toilet block and showers, and in Penjikent we spend two nights in a small local hotel in twin rooms with en-suite facilities. Finally in Darvaza, we spend one night camping beside the gas crater in simple two-man tents where toilet tents will be erected nearby. All bedding and sleeping equipment will be provided.

Essential Information

Government Travel Safety 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 citizens, check the latest Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office advice.

Please refer to our COVID-19 entry requirements page for any country-specific conditions of entry. Whilst we strive to update this on a regular basis we recommend you also check the FCDO website for the latest advice on entry requirements in this fast-evolving situation. Information can change at any time.

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

Kyrgyzstan: Nationals of the EU, Canada, Australia and the United States don't need a visa to enter and stay for a maximum of 60 days. Other nationalities may require a single entry visa and should consult the relevant consulate or www.kyrgyzvisa.com for more information.

Kazakhstan: Nationals of the UK, US, Australia, Canada and New Zealand can travel to Kazakhstan without a visa, provided your stay does not exceed 30 days. If you wish to stay longer than 30 days, you'll need a visa. You should contact your nearest Embassy of Kazakhstan for further information.

Tajikistan - Nationals of the UK, US, Australia, Canada and New Zealand will require a visa before travel. E-visa's can be applied for via www.evisa.tj You must ensure that you also apply for the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region (GBAO) permit as part of your e-visa application.

Uzbekistan: Australian, Irish, Canadian and 'British citizen' passport holders can enter Uzbekistan as a visitor for stays of up to 30 days without a visa. Other nationalities including US nationals require a e-visa which can be obtained from www.e-visa.gov.uz

Turkmenistan: A single entry visa is required for Turkmenistan. Invitation letters issued by the Turkmen Ministry of Foreign Affairs are required by all nationalities and Explore will apply for this on your behalf. We will therefore require details of the passport you'll be travelling on at least 10 weeks prior to departure. This invitation letter will then need to be used to apply for your visa via <https://uk.tmembassy.gov.tm/en/consular-services/visa-info>

It is not possible to obtain the Turkmenistan Invitation any earlier than 8 weeks prior to the tour departure date and it takes 3 weeks to process. Given these time constraints we do not recommend prior travel during this time before the tour starts.

On arrival in Turkmenistan, you must complete a migration card and pay a US\$12 migration fee, this is in addition to any visa fees. The authorities will retain the card.

We are also required by the authorities to have a representative meet you at the airport upon arrival, Land Only customers should ensure they have submitted their flight details to Explore at least 1 month before departure.

All visa related issues including information for other nationalities should be confirmed with the relevant Embassy prior to departure.

If you do require assistance in obtaining a visa then you may be able to apply 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 receive a Free Transfer, provided you arrive and depart on the tour only itinerary start and end dates. The complimentary transfers will be arranged from the Explore designated airport or train station to your trips joining point, and then back from the ending point to the designated airport or train station. Generally the airport or station that Explore have selected will be the one that is closest to the town or city where the trip starts, or the one nearest to the joining point. It will be either an airport or train station but not both.

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.

Kazakhstan

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.

Kyrgyzstan

Vaccinations

Nothing compulsory, but we recommend protection against tetanus, infectious hepatitis, typhoid and polio. 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.

Tajikistan

Vaccinations

Nothing compulsory, but we recommend protection against tetanus, infectious hepatitis, typhoid and polio. 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.

Additional Information



Reviews



AWARD WINNING
EXPLORE LEADERS



PRICE GUARANTEE
PROMISE



AIRPORT
TRANSFERS