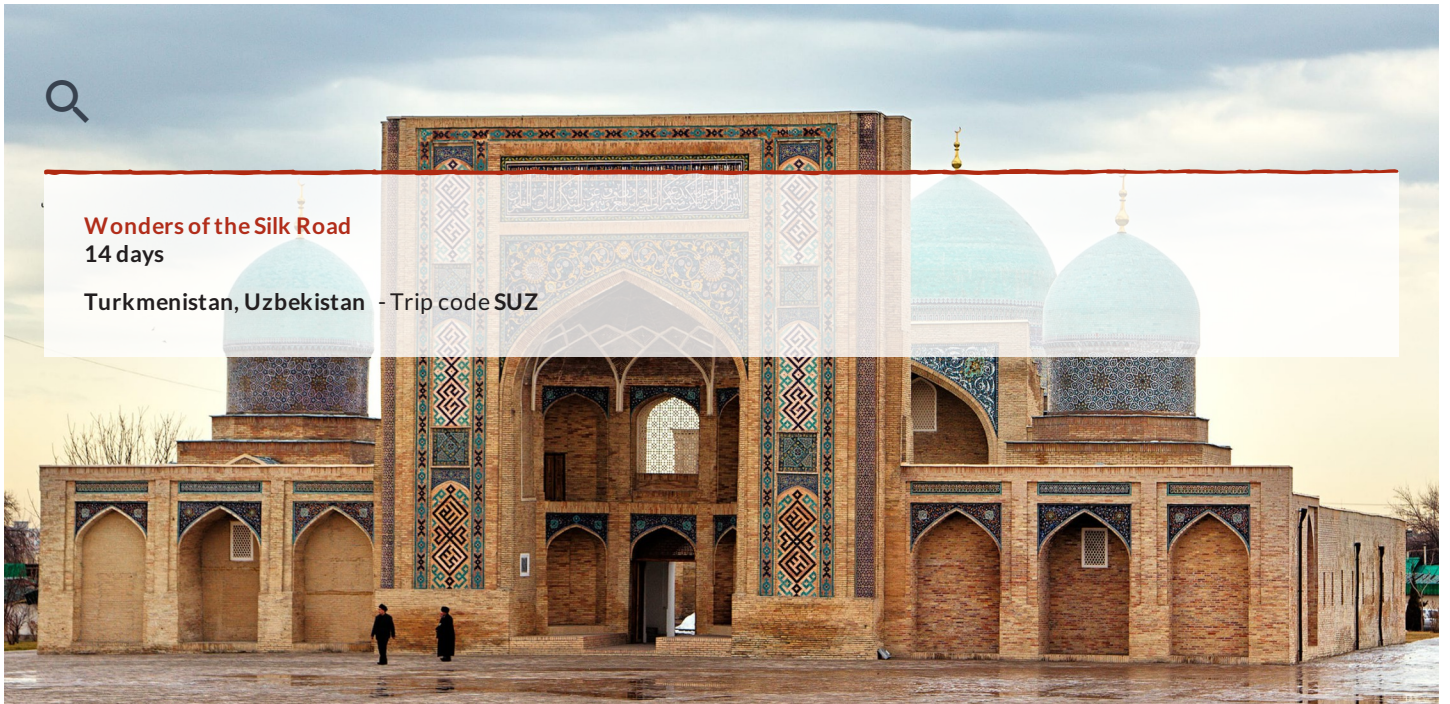


EXPLORE!



Wonders of the Silk Road

14 days

Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan - Trip code SUZ

Wonders of the Silk Road

We discover the culture and history of Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan and as we explore the ancient sites and ruins of the UNESCO World Heritage site at Merv and the Parthian Fortress of Nisa. We also explore the fabled Silk Road cities of Samarkand, Ashgabat, Bokhara and Khiva.

Trip highlights

- ★ **Ashgabat** - Explore Turkmenistan's remarkable capital city, a rich mix of ancient and modern
- ★ **Khiva** - Discover the historic heart of one of the great Silk Road cities
- ★ **Bokhara** - Guided visits to the Abdul Khan Madrasah and the Emir's Palace
- ★ **Samarkand** - Marvel at Tamerlane's magnificent city, including Registan Square and the Shah-i-Zinda
- ★ **Tashkent** - Mingle with the locals at Chorsu market in the vibrant Uzbek capital

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:

Full on

Full on paced trips are for travellers who like their holidays packed with activities and experiences, moving on quickly from place to place with lots of early starts and long, busy days. Some may find them tiring, but others get a buzz from packing their precious holiday-time as chock-a-block full of new experiences as possible!

GROUP SIZE:

12 - 18

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 - Trip starts in Ashgabat (Turkmenistan)

Trip starts in Ashgabat. Today has been left free with no planned activities, as most international flights arrive into the city late this evening or early the following morning.



Accommodation: Grand Turkmen Hotel (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: None

DAY 2 - Free morning and afternoon city tour

This morning is left free to relax. In the afternoon our tour starts today in 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. 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)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 3 - In Ashgabat, visit Sunday market and Nissa Fortress; free afternoon

This morning we aim to visit the city's lively Sunday morning market before driving out to the outskirts of the city to the once mighty fortress of Nissa. 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.



Accommodation: Grand Turkmen Hotel (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 4 - Drive to Mary stopping at Kaka Oasis

Our destination today is the town of Mary, our gateway to the ruins of ancient Merv. We travel via the Kaka Oasis and 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: Hotel Mary (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 5 - From Mary, explore the ancient site of Merv; afternoon visit to Mary Historical Museum

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 mecca 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 6 - Drive across the border to Bokhara (Uzbekistan); afternoon orientation walk

This morning we drive to the Turkmenistan/Uzbekistan border at Farab and, after completing the immigration formalities, cross into Uzbekistan. 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 Uzbek vehicle (porters are usually available to help with luggage, although they will require payment for their services). We drive on to the fabled city of Bokhara, the city that was home to the famed poets Firdausa and Rudaki and is still considered by many to be the 'Bastion of Islam'. For generations Bokhara lay at the centre of the great trade routes, its scholarship and architecture revered far and wide as one of the central bastions of Central Asian art and culture, a factor that saw its ancient heart accredited by UNESCO as an important World Heritage Site in 1993. Over 2,000 years old, its historic centre is one of the most complete examples of a medieval city anywhere in Central Asia, filled with majestic architecture, beautiful madrassas and fabulous tombs. Time allowing this afternoon, we'll start our sightseeing with a visit to the bath houses, arcades and the caravanserai of the Taqi Telpak Furushon area, as well as the Lyab-I Hauz, a magnificent architectural centrepiece that dates from the 16th and 17th centuries and contains the largest madrasa in the city (the Kukeldash).



Accommodation: Hotel Mosque Baland (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 7 - In Bokhara, discover the Ark Citadel, Emir's Palace and Char Minar Mosque

In the morning we take a drive out of the city to visit the Emir's Palace, the Royal Ark 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 Ismael 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. Returning to the city for lunch we will then take a tour of its ancient centre on foot, maybe stopping off at a 'chaikhana', a local tea house.. The old 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 visit the beautiful blue tiled Abdul Khan Madrasah and Mghoki Arrar Mosque, as well as the tallest monument in town, the Kalyan minaret, or the 'Tower of Death', from which prisoners were once hurled to their death on market days.



Accommodation: Hotel Mosque Baland (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 8 - Free day in Bokhara for further exploration

Today is free to explore Bokhara in your own time.



Accommodation: Hotel Mosque Baland (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 9 - Drive through the Kyzylkum desert to Khiva

Today we drive on to the remarkable ancient city of Khiva. The early history of the area is still sketchy, but by the time the Arabs arrived in the 8th century there were three important cities in the region, of which Khiva was one, largely on account of its strategic location along the Volga branch of the Silk Route. Conquered by the Persians, it then became a pawn in the great game between the Russian and British Empires, finally succumbing to Russian forces in 1873 (following the fate of both Samarkand and Bokhara before it). Its ancient heart has remained largely intact behind towering brick walls, some 40 bastions enclosing an incredible collection of historic monuments and 18th and 19th century houses and exploring the old citadel is like stepping back in time into a scene straight out of the stories of the Arabian nights. Originally the 12th century fortress dominated the city, but later additions of palaces, harems, barracks and mosques encroached on the old fortress, compelling the Khan to build a second outer wall to make his citadel even more secure. Please note that today's drive to Khiva is a long drive of approximately 9hrs due to the bad road conditions in this area. We will attempt to break up the journey as much as possible with stops along the way.



Accommodation: Orient Star Khiva (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 10 - In Khiva, orientation tour of the Old City; drive to Urgench to take sleeper train to Samarkand

This morning we will begin our exploration of this ancient city. We'll take in some of its rich wonders including the Kunya Ark and

the Tah-Khauri Palace, whilst a walk up the steps of the Dzhuma Minaret presents a captivating panoramic view of the maze of streets below. In the afternoon we drive on to Urgench to catch the overnight train to Samarkand.



Accommodation: Overnight Train from Urgench to Samarkand



Simple Overnight Train



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 11 - In Samarkand, discover Registan Square, Gur Emir Mausoleum and Bibi-Khanym Mosque

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. Our overnight train arrives in the city early morning and after transferring to our hotel for breakfast, we plan to set out and 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 madrasahs (ancient centres of religious learning). We will also visit 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 third visit of the morning will be to 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. The afternoon is left free to relax or explore more by yourself.



Accommodation: Zarina Hotel (or similar)



Simple Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 12 - In Samarkand, visit Ulug-Beg Observatory and the Shah-i-Zinda; free afternoon

Another half-day city tour this morning introduces us to the Ulug-Beg Observatory and the Shah-i-Zinda, one of the city's oldest and most sacred buildings, with a 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 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. The 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, whilst the old town itself still holds considerable medieval charm and along its sun-baked, winding, narrow alleys traditionally dressed locals perform their daily rituals or relax in the shade drinking 'kokchai' (traditional green tea).



Accommodation: Zarina Hotel (or similar)



Simple Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 13 - Drive to Tashkent, explore the city and ride the Tashkent Metro

This morning we drive to 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 explore in afternoon. A visit to Chor-Su affords us the opportunity to take a look at the handicraft bazaar, 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. We also take a ride for 2-3 stops on the Tashkent Metro, which boasts some flamboyantly decorated stations.



Accommodation: Hotel Uzbekistan (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 14 - Tour ends in Tashkent

Our tour ends this morning after breakfast.



Meals Provided: Breakfast



Why book this trip

This holiday combines two 'stans' of Central Asia. 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. Uzbekistan has been named as one of the top emerging destinations of 2015.

What's included?



Included meals

Breakfast: 13



Transport

Bus
Train



Trip staff

Explore Tour Leader(s)
Driver(s)



Accommodation

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

Trip information

Country information

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

Budgeting and packing

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.

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, 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\$ 60 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

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

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. Please note that the Embassy of Turkmenistan in London does not accept cheques. 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.

We are 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.

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.

It can take up to 8 weeks to obtain both the visas required for the tour; so you may be without your passport for this period of time. Allow approximately £200 for visas and visa service charges if applying in the UK. Costs in other countries may vary.

You should confirm all visa related questions with the relevant Embassy prior to departure and check that your visa dates match your dates of travel. 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. Given these time constraints we do not recommend prior travel during this time before the tour starts.

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.

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.
