



Take a journey along 2,000-plus-years of central Asian Silk Road history. Discover Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, through stunning scenery in the footsteps of great explorers and conquerors.

## Ancient Lands of Central Asia Dossier Immerse Yourself Tour | 28 Days | Active

Guangzhou – Ashgabat – Darvaza – Khiva – Bukhara – Samarkand – Tashkent – Khujand – Panjikent – Dushanbe – Almaty – Karakol – Chon – Kemin Valley – Bishkek – Urumqi

### TOUR HIGHLIGHTS:

- Explore ancient Ashgabat
- Camp by Darvaza Crater
- Discover Holy Bukhara
- Journey to Samarkand
- Gaze at Kazakhstan's Canyon
- Browse bustling markets
- Travel through Tajikistan



## Ancient Lands of Central Asia tour inclusions

- Return international flights, taxes and current fuel surcharges (unless a land only option is selected)
- All accommodation
- All meals as stated on itinerary
- All sightseeing and entrance fees
- All transportation and transfers
- English-speaking National Escort (If your group is 10 or more passengers)

*Personal expenditures e.g. drinks, optional excursions or shows, insurance of any kind, customary tipping, early check in or late checkout and other items not specified on the itinerary are at your own expense.*

## Immerse Yourself

Designed for those who wish to be further immersed in the authentic charm of Asia; our Immerse Yourself Tours include more cultural and active experiences. You will be accompanied by our dedicated and professional National Escorts or Local Guides, whose unparalleled knowledge will turn your holiday into an unforgettable experience. Our Immerse Yourself tours include:

- Hiking and extended periods of walking through classic sites
- Unique cultural experiences and encounters
- Off the beaten track destinations

## Active Tour

'Ancient Lands of Central Asia' is an **active** tour. Active tours require a good level of fitness, as they are physically more demanding. They may involve hiking, and some travel to remote, high altitude areas where tourist facilities are less developed.

Our National Escort and Local Guides will always endeavour to provide the highest level of service and assistance; however, they cannot be expected to cater for customers who are unfit to complete the itinerary.

The more difficult aspects of this itinerary involve very long driving distances and basic accommodation with one night camping with no bathroom facilities. The information below also has estimates of driving times and distances. This adventurous tour uses basic accommodation called 'home stays' in local people's homes or guest houses in Kyrgyzstan. The more difficult aspects to consider are the poor road conditions and sightseeing at altitude.

Ancient Lands of Central Asia is one of our most unique and adventurous group tours, tracing the ancient Silk Road from Ashgabat to Bishkek including the fabled city of Samarkand. We wish for you to embark on your journey through Central Asia with a level of tolerance and understanding. This region is remote and conditions are not as developed as they are at home. It is essential that all customers recognise the demands of factors such as basic facilities, travelling at altitude and cultural differences. The rewards of seeing and experiencing these lands, so different from your own, are immeasurable and can only be enhanced by an adventurous spirit.

The former Soviet countries in Central Asia were isolated and less developed by western standards for decades and all levels of infrastructure remain affected today in some way. In the tourism sector, newly built and very good hotels may still have poorly trained staff with an abrupt manner, roads can be in poor condition and officials can be corrupt. The level of English spoken outside of hotels is minimal (except for the children) and the Cyrillic alphabet is used instead of the Latin one (though this is slowly changing in Uzbekistan), so you will find your guides indispensable. We have found that those customers who embark with a sense of humour and adventure, who accept that things can and sometimes do go wrong, are those who find their experience most rewarding.

## Region Profile: Central Asia

Central Asia is home to fabled cities, market bazaars and striking architecture. It conjures images of mystery and intrigue, and traditions that have remained unchanged for centuries. Travelling through Central Asia offers travellers an historic journey along sections of the Silk Road, a trading route dating back to ancient civilisation. See the spectacular alpine scenery of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, which contrasts to the breathtaking ancient cities and classic Islamic architecture of Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, further juxtaposed by the modern city of Almaty in Kazakhstan.

## Country Profile: China

China's civilisation is the oldest in the world and has a history dating back over 5,000 years. With 56 ethnic groups, 22 provinces and eight major dialects, China has a rich and varied culture and way of life. It is home to a wealth of tourist sights and cultural relics, which entice our guests to return again and again to this exciting destination.

## Joining Your Tour

The tour is 28 days in duration including international flights.

Travellers booked on 'Land Only, the price includes visa fees and your arrival/ departure airport transfers if arriving/departing on the start and conclusion date of your tour. Please advise your international flight times to reservations. Join the tour on Day 2 in Ashgabat and end the tour on Day 27 in Urumqi. Please refer to your final itinerary for more specific meeting instructions pertaining to your departure.

## New Tour for 2018

Wendy Wu Tours is proud to present Ancient Lands of Central Asia as a new tour option for 2018. While we have carefully researched the itinerary, this is the first time this tour has operated and it should be remembered that unforeseen changes or surprises may occur. Although these are unexpected, occurrences may add to the enjoyment of the tour, if this is a concern for you we suggest waiting until a later departure.

## Itinerary Changes

It is our intention to adhere to the day-to-day itinerary as printed; however, the order of events or sightseeing may change as we look to improve our tours or as local conditions dictate. In these circumstances we will make the best possible arrangements maintaining the integrity of your trip.

## Important Information Regarding Itinerary Changes and Flight Delays

Due to unforeseen circumstances, flights can be delayed, and therefore connecting flights may be missed. If you find yourself in this situation, please contact our China office on **+86 21 5888 5681 or +86 159 0929 1082** (outside China) or **21 5888 5681 or 159 0929 1082** (within China) to urgently advise your arrival details have changed. Please ensure you have your trip number, tour name (both included in your final documentation) and new arrival details (flight number and arrival time) handy to pass on to our local office in China. This will ensure your National Escort/Local Guide can be informed of your most up to date information and ensure someone is at the airport to meet you on arrival.

For land only bookings if you are delayed please contact our Central Asia office on **+998 909 051 880** (outside Uzbekistan).

If we are not advised of late changes and missed connections, Wendy Wu Tours cannot guarantee someone will be able to meet you upon arrival in China/Turkmenistan as our local office will have no way of knowing which flight you will be arriving on. Wendy Wu Tours will not be responsible for providing reimbursement of transportation costs from the airport to your hotel in the event that our local office was not advised of changes to arrival time.

## Ancient Lands of Central Asia Itinerary

### DAYS 1: AUSTRALIA TO GUANGZHOU

Fly to Guangzhou today. Upon arrival and after collection of your luggage, you will be met in the arrival hall by your local guide from Wendy Wu tours. Together with all other group members who may be arriving at a similar time, you will walk approximately 5 minutes to your hotel located near Gate 12 of the Airport departure hall for a one-night stay.

*No meal included today*

### DAY 2: GUANGZHOU TO ASHGABAT (VIA URUMQI)

This morning board your flight to Urumqi in Western China, duration five hours and 30 minutes. After a transit of approximately four hours at Urumqi Airport, you will fly a to Ashgabat, the capital of Turkmenistan. Upon arrival and after collection of your luggage, you will be met in the arrival hall by your local guide from Wendy Wu tours and your tour manager who will accompany you throughout your whole itinerary. Transfer approximately 30 minutes to your hotel.

*Meals Included: Breakfast*

#### Destination Information

**Turkmenistan** – Consisting of deserts and oases with a unique historical and cultural significance in the story of the Silk Road. Travellers are seduced by the ruins of ancient cities and the Karakum desert.

### DAYS 3: ASHGABAT

Today explore both ancient and modern Ashgabat. Visit the Fortress of Nisa, once a former capital of the Parthian Empire. Stop at the Monument of Independence to admire the gardens, foundations, statues and Ertugrul Gazi Mosque. Learn about Ashgabat's unique history with time spent at the National Museum of History and Ethnography and the National Carpet Museum. Sightseeing today will be for approximately four hours and at a leisurely pace

*Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch and dinner*

#### Destination Information

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

**Fortress of Nisa** - Residence of the former Parthian Empire from the 3<sup>rd</sup> century. Formed in an irregular pentagon shape these restored ruins comprise labyrinth walls and fortifications.

**Monument of Independence** - An extravagant monument surrounded by 27 statues of Turkmen heroes located in the 80,000m landscaped park in the centre of the city.

**National Museum of History and Ethnography** – The largest museum in Turkmenistan, which houses over 327,000 ancient and modern artefacts.

### DAYS 4: ASHGABAT

Begin your second day of sightseeing in the city with a visit to the National Carpet Museum to admire the collection of handmade Turkmen carpets. Stop at the colourful Russian Bazaar before travelling outside of Ashgabat to visit a stud farm and learn about the "winged" Akhal Tekkes horses. En route back to Ashgabat stop at the Kipchak complex where the largest mosque in Turkmenistan is located and the family mausoleum of countries first president.

**National Carpet Museum** – Houses the largest collection of Turkmen handmade carpets dating back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

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

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

### DAY 5: DARVAZA FLAMING CRATER

This morning is free at leisure in Ashgabat. After lunch, drive three hours north to the border between south and north Turkmenistan. At this border we will drive a further eight kilometres through the Karakum desert before arriving at the Daravaza Crater. After unpacking the vehicle, enjoy a walk around this crater, measuring 69 meters wide and 30 meters deep as dusk approaches.

Enjoy a nomadic inspired dinner under the stars, with a spectacular view of the crater and its glowing flames.

*Your driver and guide will arrange your accommodation this evening, which are 2-person tents, sleeping bags and mats*

are provided. Please note there are no bathroom/shower facilities whilst staying overnight and you will need to dig a small latrine for use with a privacy curtain available.

*Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner*

#### **Destination Information**

**Darvaza Crater** - In 1971 the crater was created accidentally due to drilling in the region, which resulted in natural gases being omitted. It was believed that lighting this gas was the safest and quickest option to eradicate the gas and was expected to burn for a few weeks. Over 40 years later it still burns and has been known around the world as the 'Gates of Hell'.

#### **DAY 6: DARVAZA TO KHIVA VIA DASOGUZ**

Drive four hours to Kunya-Urgench, the former capital of the Khorezm Empire in the 12-13<sup>th</sup> centuries. Enjoy sightseeing for two and a half hours exploring the mausoleums of Turabek Khanum, Il-Arslan, and Sultan Tekesh, the Kutlug Timur minaret and the fabled al Mamun's Academy of Sciences. Continue driving two and a half hours and complete boarder formalities at Shavat before crossing into Uzbekistan. After a one hour drive you will arrive into Khiva, where you will stay the next three nights.

*Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner*

#### **Destination Information**

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

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

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

**Uzbekistan** - A land-locked country which shares borders with Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and a sliver of Afghanistan in the south. Its population of 26 million is mostly made up of Uzbeks (75 per cent), Russians (6 per cent) and Kazakhs (4 per cent). Most of the country is flat, made of steppes, deserts and semi-deserts with limited reserves of fresh water; the only relief is the Amu-Darya River. In the east, Uzbekistan has a stretch of mountains with a friendly climate and rich soils. The Silk Road brought wealth and innovation here and in the 6th century AD, Western Turks brought Islam and a written alphabet, followed by Genghis Khan's invasion. The 14th century brought unity under the ruthless warrior, Timur, and Uzbekistan's prosperity rose again with Samarkand at the heart of its new civilisation.

#### **DAY 7: KHIVA**

Khiva is made for walking. It is compact, well maintained, lived in and basks in beautiful desert light. Explore this ancient city today with leisurely sightseeing for four to five hours on foot. Visit Kukhna Ark Fortress, the turquoise-tiled Islom-Khodja, the mausoleum of Pakhlavan Makhmud, These are all located within the walled inner town called the Itchan Kala, which was the first site in Uzbekistan to achieve recognition as a UNESCO World Heritage listed site in 1990. Later visit Madrassah Rakhimkhon where studies in religion, astronomy, geography and mathematics took place and the 19<sup>th</sup> century Tash Hauli Palace decorated in fine china blue tile work.

*Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner*

#### **Destination Information**

**Khiva** - A small city (population approximately 40,000) which some archaeologists believe was founded around the time Christ was born and was said to have been discovered by Shem, the son of Noah. The town certainly existed by the 8th Century, as a minor fort and trading post on a Silk Road branch to the Caspian Sea and the Volga River. In the early 16th Century, Khiva was made capital of the Timurid Empire, becoming a busy slave market and pivot of the khanate for the next three centuries until Russia wrested the region from Timurid grasp in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

**Itchan Kala** - A well-persevered example of Muslim architecture in Central Asia at the beginning of the 19th century, Itchan Kala is the inner town of Khiva. The town is surrounded by brick city walls, with four gates at the cardinal points.

**Kukhna Ark Fortress** - Construction of the fort began in the 12th century, making it one of the oldest buildings in Khiva. There is written evidence that the 'modern' citadel was built in 1668, and the complex grew to hold an arsenal, warehouse, guardhouse, jail, a large kitchen, stable and official offices. Of the buildings that once stood, you can still view the official reception hall, the ornate mint, mosque and a harem.

**Islom-Khodja** - One of Kihivas newest Islamic monuments, Islom-Huja was built in 1910 and is the tallest structure in Khiva, visible from anywhere in the city.

#### **DAY 8: KHIVA**

Drive into the Kyzylkum desert today and visit numerous desert fortresses located on the western side of the Sultan Uiz Dagh Mountains. Dating from as far back as the 2<sup>nd</sup> century explore Toprak Kala Fortress and Ayaz Kala. Sightseeing at these various fortresses involves a total of two to three hours on foot over rough and eroded ground. In the evening, enjoy a traditional folklore performance with your dinner.

*Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner*

### Destination Information

**Toprak Kala Fortress** - An excavated ancient town dating from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century and a former residence of the Khoesm Khan comprising the ruins of a castle, towers and dwellings.

**Ayaz Kala** - A complex of three ruins found on the edge of the Kizilkum Desert. The high mud brick walls served as protection from nomadic raids.

### DAY 9: KHIVA TO BUKHARA

This morning checkout of your hotel and drive approximately nine hours (480km) to Bukhara. Driving through the desert, view the changing scenery from saksaul trees to the Amudarya riverbank as you travel. Upon arrival check into your hotel for a two night stay.

*Road conditions can be poor between Khiva and Bukhara, so your patience is appreciated today.*

*Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner*

### Destination Information

**Bukhara** - A city which has a long history spanning 2,500 years and what was an integral part of the Persian Empire for centuries. Within the city, there are more than 350 mosques and 100 religious colleges. Bukhara was part of what came to be called the 'Golden Road', the meeting point of the northern and southern branches of the Silk Road, and hence a great centre for commerce, religion and culture.

In 1913, James Flecker's poem 'The Golden Journey to Samarkand' was published to acclaim (and a little controversy) in England and immortalised the ancient trade path between Uzbekistan's most significant towns, Bukhara and Samarkand – "For lust of knowing what should not be known.....we make the Golden Journey to Samarkand".

The city's most famous landmark is the Kalon Minaret, which dates back to 1127AD. It is said that when Genghis Khan attacked and destroyed the rest of the city, he left the minaret standing, supposedly because he was struck by its beauty.

### DAY 10: BUKHARA

Today explore the many interesting sites within this incredible city, one of the most famous names of medieval Islam. Gaze at the unique and legend filled Kalon Minaret. After exploring the Ark of Bukhara, visit the Bolo Hauz Mosque. Later this afternoon visit the mausoleum of Ismail Samanid and the ornate Aziz Khan and Ulugbek Madrassahs. Sightseeing around the central city, will be for approximately five hours with leisurely walking around these sites.

*Photo fees may be payable at most attractions you will visit in Bukhara, approximately USD7 in total.*

*Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner*

### Destination Information

**Kalon Minaret** - One of the most prominent landmarks of the city, Kalon Minaret was constructed in 1127 by the Karakhanid ruler Arslan Khan. An amazing structure standing at 47m tall, there are 14 ornamental bands and 10m deep foundations.

**Ark of Bukhara** - The fortified residence of the rulers of Bukhara but also housed palaces, temples, barracks, offices, the mint, warehouses, workshops, stables, an arsenal, a prison and nowadays a museum.

**Bolo Hauz Mosque** - Translated the name of the mosque means "The Mosque of the Bala Lake", which refers to the octagonal pool located in the public forecourt lined with stone steps. Built in 1712, the mosque is splendid and still functional – believers still visit to pray every day.

**Ulugbek Madrassah** - Built in 1417 as a center for science and astronomy in conservative Bukhara. Its design incorporates astral designs into its decorative facades. The madrassah could seat up to 80 students, with many graduates becoming eminent scholars and poets.

### DAY 11: BUKHARA TO SAMARKAND

This morning drive to Gijduvan, located approximately 60km from Bukhara. Explore the city for one and a half hour and visit a ceramic centre. Continue your drive for approximately four hours (260km) to Samarkand. Upon arrival check into your hotel for a two night stay.

*Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner*

### Destination Information

**Gijduvan** - The town's artisans are well known for a distinct style of pottery, which is turquoise bluish in colour. Their skills are passed down from father to son over the generations.

**Samarkand** - With a population of approximately 400,000, Samarkand is the second largest city of Uzbekistan. The real glory of Samarkand began in 329BC when Alexander the Great conquered and destroyed the nearby capital, Macaranda. According to local history, when Alexander first visited here he declared "I heard that Samarkand was beautiful but never thought that it could be so beautiful and majestic".

After Alexander's reign, the city fell under the rule of the Persian Empire, and became the capital of the Mongol Prince Tamerlane in the 13th Century. The finest builders, craftsmen, philosophers and scientists were invited to Samarkand and the reputation of its refined civilisation grew until Samarkand was a city of legend and wonder along the Golden Road. From here the Silk Road diverged; east to China, south to India and west to Persia.

## **DAY 12: SAMARKAND**

Today explore some of the most significant sites in Samarkand and its city centre, involving approximately six hours of leisurely walking. Visit Timur's Guri Amir Mausoleum and Registan Square, the most spectacular architectural ensemble in Central Asia and heart of the city. See the three stunning madrassas: Ulug Bek, Tillya Kori and Sher Dor. Later, visit Shah-I-Zinda and Bibi-Khanum Mosque before returning to your hotel.

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

*Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner*

### **Destination Information**

**Timur's Guri Amir Mausoleum** - The famous blue ribbed domed mausoleum that rises over the old city's rooftops. Tamerlane was laid under a massive slab of green jade, said to be the largest Jade stone in the world.

**Registan Square** - The Square is lined on three sides by sparkling turquoise tiled buildings of the Sher Dor and Tilla Qori madrassas. The interior and exterior facades of the madrassas are decorated with ornamental glazed brick, mosaics and carved marble. The square is considered an architectural gem representing the finest in Islamic Art and, most remarkably, a rare depiction of an animal's form. It was here that royal proclamations were read out and where justice was dispensed. The huge colourful bazaar is located nearby and one can buy nuts, dried and fresh fruit, spices, honey and a multitude of other goods.

**Shah-I-Zinda** - A mausoleum complex located northeast of the city, the names translates to 'Tomb of the Living King'. This refers to the important Muslim shrine in the region, the complex of quiet rooms around what is most likely the grave of Qusam ibn-Abbas, a cousin of the Prophet Mohammed who is thought to have brought Islam to this area in the 7th century.

**Bibi-Khanym Mosque** - One of the most impressive historic mosques in Central Asia, construction on Bibi-Khanym was started by Timur in 1399 and completed shortly before his death. The mosque commemorates Timur's wife, and was the jewel in his empire.

## **DAY 13: SAMARKAND TO TASHKENT**

Ulugh Bek was more famous as an astronomer than a ruler and this morning visit the Ulugh Bek Observatory to see the 'stars above Samarkand'. Next, explore the ancient ruins of Afrosiab, a settlement of early Samarkand left abandoned to the elements.

Stop at a papermaking workshop located in Konigil village before arriving at Samarkand Railway Station and boarding the Afrosiyob train for a two and a half hour journey to Tashkent. On arrival, transfer to your hotel and enjoy dinner.

*Photo fees may be payable at most attractions you will visit in Samarkand.*

*Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner*

### **Destination Information**

**Ulugh Beg Observatory** - Uleg Beg was Tamerlane's grandson and a great astronomer. During his rule in the 15th century, he summoned the great minds of the Islamic world to Samarkand.

**Afrosiab Settlement** - Situated in the Chupan Ata Hills, this ancient site was occupied from 500BC to 1220AD. A centre of the Sogdian culture before it was destroyed by the Mongols in the 13<sup>th</sup> century.

**Papermaking Workshop** - Samarkand has been famed for its high-quality paper manufacture throughout the ages. In this workshop of talented master, you will see how the rinds of the mulberry trees are turned into a paper.

**Tashkent** - Rebuilt after the 1966 earthquake, Tashkent is now a thriving capital city. The modern layout dominated by Soviet era inspired architecture is interspersed with hidden pockets of a once traditional agricultural community still visible in the mud walled homes and bustling bazaars.

## **DAY 14: TASHKENT**

Spend a full day touring the famous sights of Uzbekistan's capital. Journey back in time exploring the old town's sights; Barak Khan Madrassah and Kukeldash Madrassah and Tila Shaikh mosque and their archives – known for rare copies of the Koran. Stop at Chorsu Bazaar – the oldest market in Tashkent.

This afternoon visit the Museum of Applied Arts; wander through the 1966 earthquake memorial, Independence Square and Amir Timur Maydoni. Your last stop will be to the Tashkent Metro, with its opulently decorated marble, granite and chandeliers.

*Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner*

### **Destination Information**

**Barak Khan Madrassah** - Built in the 16th century with funds donated by the Tashkent ruler Navruz Akhmed. Today this is the oldest educational institution in Tashkent. Though this madrassah is no longer used for its original purpose, it attracts attention for its well-preserved architectural features.

**Kukeldash Madrassah** - One of the biggest and one of the most famous historical monuments in Tashkent. The 16th-century Islamic school is built of mud bricks decorated with majolica and painted ceramic tiles.

**Museum of Applied Arts** - Founded in 1937, the museum currently displays over 4,000 exhibits, highlighting the history of Uzbekistan's decorative art. There are samples of woodcarving, ceramics, minting, Jeweller's art, gold-

embroidery art, as well as the samples of mass production of local industry of the past centuries.

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

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

#### **DAY 15: TASHKENT TO KHUJAND**

Set out today overland as we drive from Tashkent to Khujand, Tajikistan via the Oybek border where immigration formalities will take place. The total journey will be approximately three hours of driving.

On arrival into Khujand and after checking into the hotel your city tour will commence. Walk through Pushkin Square to Kamoli Khujandi Theatre and visit Timur Malik's Fortress before viewing the exhibits of the Sughd Museum. Stroll through Panjshanbe Bazaar – one of the oldest bazaars in Tajikistan. End your day at Arbob Palace, a building that has historical significance to modern day Tajikistan.

*Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner*

#### **Destination Information**

**Tajikistan** – A small but stunning country with soaring mountains, valleys dotted with wildflowers and pristine lakes abound. Culturally charming and naturally striking, Tajikistan emanates simplicity and remoteness.

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

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

**Kamoli Khujandi Theatre** - Found in Pushkin Square and named in honour of the famous Persian Poet who was born in Khujand.

**Timur Malik Fortress** – For over 2,500 years this fortress has been destroyed by conquerors and rebuilt a new by the local people who view this castle as the heart of the city.

**Sughd Museum** - This museum holds hundreds of cultural artifacts that represent the history of the Sughd region of Tajikistan.

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

**Arbob Palace** – Built in the 1950's and modelled on the winter gardens in St Petersburg. It was in 1992 at this Palace, Tajikistan was official declared independent from the Soviet Union. This was where the design of the Tajik flag was chosen soon after.

#### **DAY 16: KHUJAND TO PENJIKENT**

This morning travel to Istaravshan, located in the northern foothills of the Tajik mountain range. Spend time visiting Mug Teppe Fortress, Kok Gumbaz Mosque built in 1436 and the Sar I Mazor complex. Continue driving through beautiful Shakhristan Gorge and have lunch in a local restaurant before driving five hours to Penjikent. On arrival check into your hotel and enjoy dinner.

*Please note: Due to the limited accommodation in Penjikent the group will be split into two different hotels of similar standard that are opposite each other on the same street.*

*Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner*

#### **Destination Information**

**Mug Teppe Fortress** - Located northeast of Khujand and standing on top a hill, this Fortress has few remnants of its original mud walls but provides a great vantage point from which to admire the city and contrasting mountain views.

**Kok Gumbaz** – This mosque was built by Ulugbek (Tamerlane's grandson) and its name translates to 'blue dome'. Found under the building are four tombstones of kinsmen and two mausoleums.

**Penjikent** - On the banks of the Zeravshan River and located on a high valley terrace, this small city with a population of 35,000 has a history dating back to the Silk Road.

#### **DAY 17: PENJIKENT TO DUSHANBE**

Penjikent was a major city established in the 5th Century by the Sogdians. Visit Rudaki Historic ethnographic Museum and its historical artefacts followed by exploring a replica of an Ancient Penjikent Settlement. After walking through the local bazaar and viewing the cities mosque, enjoy lunch at a traditional Chaikhana (teahouse).

Journey approximately five hours to the capital of Tajikistan, Dushanbe. En route stop at the breathtaking Lake Iskanderkul, surrounded by mountains and spend time here taking in the memorable view.

*Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner*



### Destination Information

**Rudaki Historic Ethnographic Museum** - Opened in 2001, with a majority of the collection from archaeological excavations throughout Tajikistan. The most valuable exhibits date from the Middle Ages.

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

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

### DAY 18: DUSHANBE

A full day tour of the capital will include walking through the cities Botanical gardens, Rudaki Park and stopping at the Ismoili Somoni monument. Continue to Kohi Navruz a cultural palace, which demonstrates traditional Tajik architecture.

After lunch visit the Fortress of Hissor, though a majority of which is reconstructed it is reflective of a once a powerful presence the fortress held in Tajik history. Whilst here visit the Medrassah Kuhna and the Museum of Tajik Way of life.

*Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner*

### Destination Information

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

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

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

### DAY 19: DUSHANBE TO ALMATY

Spend the morning viewing the exhibits at the Museum of National Antiquities, showcasing Tajikistan and its prominence throughout Central Asian history. Transfer to the airport and board your flight to Almaty, Kazakhstan. Once at your hotel the remainder of the afternoon is at leisure.

*Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner*

### Destination Information

**Museum of National Antiquities** - Opened in 2001 with a focus on archaeological artefacts highlighting Tajikistan

Islamic and pre Islamic history. The centerpiece is a 14 meter reclining Buddha in Nirvana, dating back 1,400 years made by the Kushan civilisation.

**Kazakhstan** - Where the ancient and modern, traditions and innovation intertwine. Kazakhstan is the world's ninth largest country and the most developed of the 'Stans'. It was the last member of the Soviet Union to declare independence from Russia in 1991.

**Almaty** - Capital of Kazakhstan until 1997, today Almaty is the country's largest metropolis and is still considered its cultural and trading hub. Situated beneath snowcapped peaks, experience this emerging countries multifaceted ethnic patchwork.

### DAY 20: ALMATY

Start today with a visit to the Central State Museum, where the history of Kazakhstan is represented through 120,000 exhibits. Later visit Republic Square and its Independence Monument, Abai Opera Theatre, Central Mosque and the Presidential Residence. Marvel at the Zenkov Cathedral, made only of wood.

This afternoon drive 15 kilometres to Medeo and see the famous ice skating rink set in the picturesque valleys surrounded by mountains.

*Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner*

### Destination Information

**Central State Museum** - First established in 1931, the museum displays significant historical, archaeological, political and cultural artefacts and is one of the largest collections in Central Asia.

**Republic Square** - Dominating the centre of Almaty and measuring 580 metres length. The Republic Square's main attraction is the Independence Monument adorned with a statue of a Saks Warrior and a flying winged leopard; a symbol of modern day Kazakhstan.

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

**Medeo** - The highest mountainous sporting complex at 1961 metres above sea level and home to the world's largest speed skating rink. The pure mountain water used for the skating rink is attributed to over 120 world records being placed here in recent times.

### DAY 21 – ALMATY TO KARAKOL VIA CHARYN

Start early this morning (approximately 7:30am) and drive 210 kilometres (approximately four hours' drive) to the Kazakhstan/Kyrgyzstan border stopping en route if time permits at Nura Village to meet with a family that has bred Golden Eagles for hunting purposes throughout generations.

Visit magnificent Charyn Canyon and its Valley of the Castles, named due to the pillars and rock formations forming imposing, almost lookalike manmade structures. You can choose to hike down towards the valley floor and climb back up again or observe the canyon rim from above. Your visit here will be one and a half to two hours.

Continue to the border and after border formalities are completed, we will travel 200 kilometres (approximately four hours) to Karakol, where you will proceed to your hotel and check in for an overnight stay.

*Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner*

### **Destination Information**

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

**Kyrgyzstan** - The population of Kyrgyzstan is relatively small, roughly five million people with the main ethnic groups represented by Kyrgyz (approximately 62 per cent), Russians (approximately 14 per cent) and Uzbeks (approximately 14 per cent). The country is land-locked and shares borders with Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. Over 90 per cent of the country is covered by often-arid mountains, which separate its demographic and economic centres: the Chui Valley in the North and the Ferghana Valley in the South.

**Karakol** - Founded as a Russian military outpost in 1869; the population surged during the 1880s when thousands of Chinese Muslims (called Dungan in Kyrgyzstan or Hui in China) settled here, fleeing persecution in China. The name of the town has alternated between Karakol and Przhevalsk several times over the past century. The Russian explorer, Nikolai Przhevalsky died here in 1888 of typhoid while preparing for an expedition to Tibet, thus the city was renamed Przhevalsk in his honour. After local protests, the town returned to its original name in 1921, then again to Przhevalsk in 1939 and finally restored to Karakol in 1991 with the fall of the Soviet Union.

### **DAY 22: KARAKOL**

Rise early this morning and visit the striking Holy Trinity Orthodox Cathedral, which was completed in 1895 and tour a Chinese mosque. All touring this morning is at a comfortable pace.

In the afternoon, travel to the Valley of the Flowers and Jety-Orguz where you can enjoy a light hike through the magnificent canyon of red sandstone. Sightseeing in the canyon involves three hours of leisurely walking on a bush track. Although this is a gentle hike, you will need to climb some hills and slopes and will be walking over uneven ground at altitude. If you take part in this activity, you must be able to complete it independently otherwise, you will need to wait near the tour bus.

***Ladies should bring a scarf from home, as you are required to cover your head at some attractions today.***

*Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner*

### **Destination Information**

**Holy Trinity Orthodox Cathedral** - This wooden church was built in 1894 on the ruins of a brick church. It is said that during construction, no nails or metal fastenings were used.

**Chinese Mosque** - The mosque was constructed in 1907, in the style of a Chinese temple for the local Dungans, yet was built in the Kyrgyz traditional wood feathering style instead of metal nail construction.

**Jety-Oguz Gorge** - A lush valley located 30km outside Karakol. The name translates to 'seven bulls' in the Kyrgyz language, referring to the red sandstone rock formations that resemble seven angry bulls. Famous for its hot springs and the beautiful scenery.

### **DAY 23: KARAKOL TO ASHU VILLAGE**

Explore the interesting Przhevalskii Museum this morning before travelling to Semenov Gorge. Enjoy a gentle hike at the Gorge for approximately one hour in duration. You will need to climb some hills and slopes with moments of walking over uneven ground. All passengers who take part in this activity must be able to complete it independently otherwise you will need to wait near the bus.

Drive two hours along the northern shore of Lake Issy Kul and enjoy lunch at Cholpon-Ata.. Afterwards, explore the nearby petroglyphs of ibex, wolves and deer that date back to the 8th century at the open-air museum. Continue a further two hour drive to Chon-Kemin Valley for an overnight stay in Ashu Village.

*Please note: Accommodation in Ashu Village will be in a 40 room guesthouse. This is an opportunity to experience the lifestyle and hospitality of local people. All rooms are private ensuite.*

*Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner*

### **Destination Information**

**Przhevalskii Museum** - Displays fascinating exhibits on the Issy Kul petroglyphs, Scythian bronze artefacts, and a short history of the geology and mineral exploitation in the region.

**Semenov Gorge** - Approximately 30km in length, Semenov Gorge is located 40km from Karakol. Flowing through the gorge is Ak-Suu River, which begins at a glacier.

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

#### **DAY 24: ASHU VILLAGE TO BISHKEK**

This morning enjoy a leisurely walk in the foothills of the mountains that surround Chon-Kemin Valley (approximately two hours in duration) and experience traditional Kyrgyz village life. If you do not wish to take part in this activity, you will have time free at leisure at Ashu Village. Return to the village for lunch before departing and driving two hours and 30 minutes to Bishkek. Stop en route to see Burana Tower, a monument from the 11th century.

Upon arrival in Bishkek, visit Ala-Too Square to watch the changing of the guard ceremony. Visit the Independence Monument, view Parliament House and the only remaining Lenin Monument in Central Asia. Your last stop will be Victory Square before transferring to your hotel.

*Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner*

#### **Destination Information**

**Burana Tower** - This 11<sup>th</sup> century octagonal monument was once a taller minaret until earthquakes caused significant damage. Today the tower, castle foundations and grave markers are the ruins of the capital of the Karakhanids.

**Bishkek** - The capital of Kyrgyzstan has a population of 900,000. The city did not develop until 1825, when the Kokand Khanate enclosed the site as a fortress. By 1864, the Russians had captured the fortress and in 1878, founded the city of Bishkek. Bishkek is a city of wide boulevards and marble-facade public buildings combined with numerous Soviet-style apartment blocks, laid out on a grid pattern. Most streets are flanked on both sides by narrow irrigation channels that water the innumerable trees, which provide shade during the hot summers.

**Ala Too Square** - Built in 1984 to commemorate the 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Soviet Era. Today the square serves as a site for state events. Its main centrepiece is a statue of Manas in celebration of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of independence.

#### **DAY 25: BISHKEK TO URUMQI**

Today transfer to Bishkek Airport and board your flight to Urumqi, China. On arrival, you will be transferred approximately one hour to your hotel. The rest of the day is yours at leisure to start soaking up the local culture.

*Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner*

#### **Destination Information**

**Urumqi** - Located at the heart of Uygur Region of Xinjiang. Urumqi, meaning 'fine pasture' in the local language, is situated along the ancient Silk Road and was an important hub during China's Tang Dynasty.

#### **DAY 26: URUMQI**

This morning drive approximately two hours to Tian Chi (Heavenly Lake). On arrival change to an 'environmental bus' at the bus park to drive a further 10 minutes up to the lake. You will be given the option to enjoy either a short boat cruise or a walk along the boardwalk at the lakeshore. Spend approximately one hour here, before returning to Urumqi.

*Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner*

#### **Destination Information**

**Tian Chi (Heavenly Lake)** - Considered one of the best attractions in China, the lake is situated in the Heavenly Mountain range. It is a large pristine lake surrounded by alpine meadows and snow-capped mountains reminiscent of Switzerland or the Rocky Mountains.

#### **DAYS 27 TO 28: URUMQI TO AUSTRALIA VIA GUANGZHOU**

This morning is at your leisure before you are transferred to Urumqi airport to board your flight via Guangzhou to Australia, arriving home the following day.

*Meals Included: Breakfast*

## ANCIENT LANDS OF CENTRAL TRAVEL INFORMATION

### Visas

Entry visas are required for all foreigners wishing to visit China, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. The Wendy Wu Tours' Visa Department can assist you with the process of obtaining the visas. We will supply you with all paperwork and submit the visa application on your behalf. Please be advised that your passport must have at least 6-months validity left on it when you arrive back into Australia.

Visas for China are valid for 90 days from the date of issue and allow you to stay in the country for up to 30 days. Visa applications which allow stays of up to 60 days must be made on special request to the Chinese Consulate. Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan have no consular representation in Australia and applications will need to be sent to our London office for visa processing three months before the departure date. The Uzbekistan Consulate has implemented an online visa processing system for all passengers who require a tourist visa to visit Uzbekistan. The visa for Uzbekistan is valid for 15 days from the date of entry (issued as per dates specified on visa form). An individual visa will not be issued in your passport for Uzbekistan. It will be issued as a group visa, which will be held by the Tour Manager. Effective from 24th July 2012, Australian passport holders can travel to Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan for up to 60 days without a visa.

Visa application forms for the Ancient Lands tour and all relevant documentation are due in our office 90 days prior to departure; if received after this date your Uzbekistan visa will not be able to be processed in time (as it needs to be sent to the UK for processing along with the rest of the group as it is issued as a group visa) and for the China visa, urgent visa processing fees will apply. Passports will be returned with your final documentation four weeks prior to your group tour's scheduled departure. If you require your passport to be returned earlier, a \$15AUD courier fee will apply. Please note this may not be possible given passports need to be sent to the UK.

Please note that if you intend to arrive more than 24 hours before your tour commences or intend to stay in China after your tour has ended and you are NOT staying in a hotel you will need to register with the local police station. If you are staying in a hotel, registration is done on your behalf as part of the check-in process.

### Insurance

We strongly encourage all customers to take a copy of their travel insurance documents (especially relevant international contact numbers) with them while on tour. We advise that you check the inclusions and procedures for lodging claims prior to your departure. These documents should be stored separately from the originals.

### Eating in China and Central Asia

Chinese cuisine is one of the most influential, diverse and flavoursome culinary styles in the world with a legacy stretching back thousands of years. Chinese dishes incorporate many spices and seasoning to create an explosion of flavours. Though Chinese cuisine can vary greatly from Chinese food we get in Australia, it is important to keep an open mind and be adventurous. All meals (excluding drinks) are included in our fully inclusive Road to Samarkand group tours from the groups' arrival until the groups' day of departure. Please be aware that dishes selected for your meals reflect the cooking styles and signature dishes of the local area you are in.

Hotels and restaurants in this region are not generally accustomed to serving many western tourists, however by default tend to 'spice down' the dishes, due to the tourists they do service coming from Europe. The food is always local in style and derives from what is in season and harvested locally. Vegetarian only alternatives are not usually available in Kyrgyzstan though Uzbekistan restaurants are more flexible. There are always plenty of salads, vegetables and bread offered at most meals. In remote areas, lunch may be prepared as 'picnic style', by the hotel that morning, or your guides may organise a simple meal at a local restaurant. Lunch is the main meal of the day, with dinner usually a lighter version of lunch. If you have food allergies or any other preferences please make them known to your guide/s at the start of your trip; they will do their best to ensure that your requirements are met though 'no guarantees can be made'. Long driving distances, road conditions or flight times may delay or alter your meal times, which could mean a dedicated meal is replaced by those supplied on the aircraft.

If you like, you can bring some supplements with you from home. Tea/coffee bags, UHT milk containers, vegemite, instant soups or noodles, biscuits, energy bars, milk powder sachets, are all a good idea – consider your luggage weight though! There are numerous small supermarkets and shops at every town and village along the way where you can buy odd items e.g. instant noodles, muesli and chocolate bars, biscuits, drinks, chips, cakes and lollies.

In China's Xinjiang Province, you will find the food is different to what is known as 'Chinese food'. Geography and climate means that there are few vegetables and wheat is grown rather than rice, therefore noodles and flat bread feature heavily. The most common dishes are mutton kebabs with naan (flat bread) or noodle soups with mutton. Chinese breakfast dishes include cold vegetable/pickle dishes, bean curd noodles, soups, congee (rice porridge), steamed buns with pork or sweet red bean paste and green tea. You may also be served fruit, a fried egg, or toast – although the bread can be very sweet and unlike the normal bread we have at home. Black tea and coffee can usually be requested. Fresh cow's milk is not generally available.

In Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, the cuisine is influenced by Middle Eastern and Turkic (or Mediterranean) dishes – yoghurts, dried fruit, legumes, fruit vinegars, or mild spices like cumin season the common dishes such as lagman (handmade noodles), shashlyk (kebabs), naan (flat bread) and plov (rice pilaf dish). Mutton and chicken are the only meats available in most areas and feature in most dishes. Local breakfast dishes include naan and airan (like sour cream), savoury noodles with vinegar and green tea. You may also be served a fried egg, jam, honey or toast. Black tea and coffee can usually be requested. Fresh cow's milk is not generally available.

Despite the Muslim culture, drinking alcohol is acceptable and expected in this ex-Soviet region, especially Kyrgyzstan more so than Uzbekistan. The most popular mealtime drink is Chay (green tea) and is available at most meals, usually straight but hosts may add a large block of sugar crystal to the pot, or even your glass! Black tea and coffee are not always served, however can usually be requested. Expect to be offered vodka (not included in your tour price) at every meal!

## Accommodation

Your accommodation has been selected for convenience of location, comfort or character, and can range from a standard hotel in one city to a family run guesthouse in a smaller town. In remote areas, accommodation may be of a lower standard and may not have all western amenities. Hotels are generally rated as local three star standards, please note that there is no international classification system for hotels and differences in facilities and quality do exist between Australia, China and Central Asia. Rest assured that all hotels used by Wendy Wu Tours are regularly inspected by our staff and our partners to ensure that standards meet your needs. Please note double bed requests can be made at time of booking but cannot be guaranteed.

You will be travelling through a rarely visited and undeveloped area of Kyrgyzstan for a few days. This is a remote area with villages, nomadic settlements, very small towns and little in the way of tourist facilities. We have designed this itinerary to use the accommodation offered by the CBT home stay project, staying in local houses/guest houses for a few nights. The CBT 'Community Based Tourism' project started in Kochkor Village, offering income to local families and guides while providing tourists the opportunity to stay with a local family, in their simple homes, rather than in run-down Soviet era hotels. It is not essential to bring a sleeping bag; bed linen is provided at each type of accommodation and is adequate for the night temperatures. You could bring a 'sleep sheet' insert to use under the linen, just in case, though it is generally not required. Types of accommodation you may encounter on this tour include:

**Local home stay:** These provide basic yet comfortable accommodation in actual local homes, so group members may be staying in a number of different houses near each other. As these are people's real homes, the accommodation and facilities may vary between houses, generally every couple/single person will be accommodated in their own room. Homes in small towns of this part of Kyrgyzstan may have town-supplied electricity restricted for an amount of time. Dedicated western toilet and shower facilities are shared among the guests within each home. Dinner is served as a group in one of the larger houses and breakfast is generally served in the house you are staying at.

**Guesthouse:** These provide basic yet comfortable rooms in a small guesthouse. Every couple/single person will have their own room, western toilets and showers are shared, similar to a hostel. Breakfast and dinner is served in the restaurant.

**Camping:** For one night you will be camping at the Darvaza crater. A tent will be provided though there are no bathroom/shower facilities here.

**Three-star hotel:** You will be staying in hotels of three-star standards or above for the remainder of the tour. The day-to-day itinerary above will indicate when you are staying in the local home stays

## Transport

**Coaches:** Coaches with air conditioning are used on our group tours for city sightseeing, short excursions to the countryside and longer transfers where necessary. Main and inner city roads in China and Central Asia have a reputation for being very congested. For this reason, it may not always be possible to return to your hotel after sightseeing to freshen up before going to the restaurant for dinner. Roads in China and Central Asia have generally been improved over recent years, but traffic and/or

weather conditions may extend driving times. Road construction work usually covers an enormous section of road - not just one or two kilometres as you may be used to. For this reason, the timings listed in the sections below are approximations only. Passengers will need to change coaches when crossing the Turkmenistan/Uzbekistan border and the Uzbekistan/ Tajikistan border. There will be no change on vehicle required with crossing the Kazakhstan/Kyrgyzstan border.

**Planes:** Internal flights are based on economy class, with reputable airlines.

**Rail:** On this tour, you will take one train journey from Samarkand to Tashkent in Uzbekistan. You will travel in economy class with air conditioning.

## Development in China and Central Asia

Though parts of China and Central Asia match the west in modernity and technological advances, it is important to remember that China is still a developing country and as such, many aspects of tourism in China do not have the solid infrastructure and safety standards as seen here in Australia. It is important that our guests travel to China with an open mind and a sense of humour. All of our suppliers meet local safety standards as a minimum. We want you to have an enjoyable holiday so we ask that you take care, use your common sense, refer to notices and follow advice from your National Escort/Local Guide.

## Chinese and Central Asia Public Holiday

If you are travelling within the below Chinese Public Holidays please note that celebrations last for several days and during these times some businesses will be closed and coach, air and train travel may be affected. Tourist attractions will be open, but may be crowded. Chinese New Year is on 16<sup>th</sup> February 2018. Golden Week public holidays fall annually between 1-3 May and 1-7 October.

Ramadan, the Islamic festival of sacrifice will fall from the 15<sup>th</sup> May to the 15<sup>th</sup> June 2018 and 5<sup>th</sup> May to 4<sup>th</sup> June 2019. This festival is characterised by the faithful abstaining from consuming food and drink (including alcohol) between the hours of sunrise and sunset. After sunset, you will find the locals celebrate nightly with an iftar- a meal at sunset, which breaks the fast, followed by pre-dawn meal -Suhoor. Travellers are not expected to adhere to these customs, with food and drink available during daylight hours. Some businesses and tourist sites opening hours may be affected; though overall, there will be minimal disruption if your tour is travelling between these dates. Ramadan is an opportunity to travel through this region, witnessing this fascinating national holiday for yourself.

## Souvenirs

We want to be able to give you an opportunity to buy souvenirs; so in each city, we will visit a museum or exhibition which demonstrates a craft or product unique to that region with pieces available to buy. We understand that souvenir hunting is not for everyone so we aim to take you to places which hold local interest. We trust you will enjoy these opportunities to learn about local arts and crafts and understand their historical and cultural importance.

## Group Size

Most of our groups consist of 10 travellers or more and will be accompanied by a National Escort. There will usually be no more than 18 travellers in each group although you may encounter other Wendy Wu tour groups while you are travelling.

All our departures are guaranteed to operate with a minimum of 8 travellers booked (unless cancelled due to factors beyond our control). However, at our discretion we may operate departures with a smaller group size as we try to operate advertised departures wherever it is viable to do so. For groups with fewer than 10 travellers, departures will operate with Local Guides.

## Tipping Policy

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

It also ensures that the amounts paid are reasonable for you but still fair for the local people. The amount is stated on each Group Tour page will be advised again on your final documentation. Tipping is paid in RMB (Chinese Yuan) or US Dollars (on selected tours) and will be collected by your National Escort on arrival and distributed throughout the tour on your behalf.

Any additional tipping on any of our tours is welcomed at your discretion. Further guidance for tipping contributions will be outlined in your final documentation.

## Packing List and Climate

You will find a complete packing list and a helpful climate chart in the 'Suggested Packing List', which will be included in the pre-departure information link sent within your deposit documentation. Seasonal weather patterns can be quite unpredictable. Up to the minute information on worldwide weather can be found on [www.weather.com](http://www.weather.com).

## Luggage

All travellers are limited to two items of luggage each; a suitcase with a maximum weight of 20kg and one piece of hand luggage with a maximum weight of 5kgs. It is essential that your luggage is lockable. Please note that Chinese authorities will only allow bottles onto the aircraft if they have been checked in as main baggage. Bottles in hand luggage may be confiscated.

## Exchanging Cash

It is highly recommended when travelling to towns outside of the major cities that extra care is taken when exchanging money. You should only change money at officially authorised currency exchanges. We suggest exchanging your money before travelling to remote areas and smaller towns, as exchange facilities can be limited. Your National Escort will remind you to do this before departure.

In China the US Dollar is still the easiest currency to exchange. You should be able to use credit cards at some hotels and department stores. Banks and hotel exchange desks in major cities will normally recognise and accept cash in Australian currency provided notes are new and undamaged. In other towns, you will find banking facilities less reliable and may encounter staff that refuse to deal with a currency they are unfamiliar with. If you are bringing cash in Australian Dollars you will need to plan ahead to ensure you have sufficient local currency with you.

In Kyrgyzstan only fresh, undamaged US Dollars, printed after 2001 will be accepted for exchange. Very few establishments accept credit cards. There are only a handful of ATM machines in cities and none in rural areas.

Upon entering Uzbekistan, any foreign currency that is brought into the country must be declared on a customs declaration form. This form will be either given to you on the incoming flight or you can pick one up in the airport Arrivals Hall. It is better to bring US Dollars for easy exchange. A few select ATMs can be found although do not rely on these as they can be unreliable. Credit cards are only accepted in some hotels and in a limited number of shops, therefore make sure you bring a sufficient amount of cash of different denominations.

## Personal Expenses & Optional Tours

**Personal Expense** - You will need to take some extra money to cover drinks, laundry and souvenirs, plus any additional sightseeing that may be offered to you. Based on the advice of previous customers an approximate amount of AUD\$270 per week should be sufficient; however for those that can't resist a bargain or may wish to participate in all of the optional excursions, consider allocating a higher amount.

**Optional Tours** - May be offered in each city you visit during your tour. These are not included in the standard itinerary and will only be available if time permits and if seats are available. In your Final Documentation an Optional Excursion Sheet will be included outlining the activities available in each city and local cost associated. Please ensure you have additional funds available if you feel you may wish to participate in any extra activities. Each option will be arranged locally by your National Escort/Local Guide, participation and tipping for optional excursions is completely at your discretion.

## Vaccinations and Your Health

We recommend that you contact either your GP or Travelvax (1300 360 164) for advice on vaccinations and travel health. Travelvax has a comprehensive website that you may also find useful [www.travelvax.com.au](http://www.travelvax.com.au).

The government of Turkmenistan is intending to make the country smoke free. As a result, smoking has been prohibited in ALL public places, including streets, parks and airports. You may find specially equipped areas in some restaurants and hotels. The maximum amount of cigarettes allowed to be brought into Turkmenistan is two packs.

Apart from smoking, it is also highly advisable to ensure any first aid kit you may carry in Turkmenistan DOES NOT include any medications containing tramadol, codeine, morphine or opiates. **All of such medications (in any form and quantity) have been prohibited** from import to Turkmenistan or transfer across the country's territory. A written and authorised prescription from a licensed doctor **will not count**.

### Before You Leave

We strongly recommend registering your travel plans with [www.smartraveller.gov.au](http://www.smartraveller.gov.au) as in the event of an emergency, Australian Consular assistance will be more readily available. You can also access the Australian Government's travel advisory service for up to date information about your destination on the same website.

### After Your Booking

Once you have booked with Wendy Wu Tours, you will receive a confirmation invoice with deposit documentation via email. This includes important information and links to access the visa application form and instructions sheet online (if applicable). Your final documentation pack will be sent to you approximately 2 weeks prior to departure.

Updated: 18<sup>th</sup> May 2018