



Journey Through Central Asia

Go Beyond Tour | 27 Days | Physical Level 4

Dubai - Ashgabat - Mary - Darwaza Gas Crater - Konye-Urgench - Khiva –
Bukhara - Samarkand - Tashkent - Fergana – Khujand – Dushanbe – Almaty –
Karakol – Kochkor – Bishkek – Dubai

Travel from Ashgabat to Bishkek on this 27 day 'five Stan' cultural experience. This in depth tour will see you visiting the Silk Road gems of Samarkand, Bukhara and Khiva, the quirky Turkmenistan, colourful markets, fascinating villages and Swiss Alps type scenery. Retrace the footsteps of Marco Polo and Alexander the Great on this unforgettable Central Asian journey.

- Uncover the Silk Road's history
- Relax on Lake Issyk-Kul
- Witness fascinating Eagle Hunting
- Browse the colourful bazaars
- Explore the exotic Khiva
- Discover ancient Samarkand



Journey Through Central Asia tour inclusions:

- Return international economy flights, taxes and current fuel surcharges (unless a land only option is selected)
- All accommodation
- All meals
- All sightseeing and entrance fees
- All transportation and transfers
- English speaking National Escort (if your group is 10 or more passengers) or local guides
- Visa fees for Australian passport holders
- Specialist advice from our experienced travel consultants

The only thing you may have to pay for are personal expenditure e.g. drinks, optional excursions or shows, insurance of any kind, customary tipping and early check in or late check out. These are all payable locally.

Go Beyond Tours:

Venture off the beaten track to explore fascinating destinations away from the tourist trail. You will discover the local culture in depth and see sights rarely witnessed by other travellers. These tours take you away from the comforts of home but will reward you with the experiences of a lifetime.

Physical Level 4:

All our tours feature a physical rating to help you select the right holiday for you. To travel on any of our tours requires unaided mobility and the ability to stroll around the sights.

‘Journey Through Central Asia’ is rated as a **physical level 4** tour. As a whole, this itinerary requires a high level of fitness involving hiking and travelling to remote areas where tourist facilities are less developed. This itinerary also drives through areas of high altitude. If you have an existing respiratory, vascular or coronary condition, we recommend checking with your doctor before undertaking this itinerary. Driving over the Moldo-Ashuu Pass you will reach the highest point of this tour at 3,346m. It is recommended to stay well hydrated and well rested in areas of high altitude.

- On some days driving distances are very long and it will take the whole day to reach your destination
- The 2 hikes will generally last around 1-2 hours at a time, sometimes on an incline and mostly on uneven ground
- There will be a few days of walking whilst sightseeing with 5 – 7 hours a day
- In Kyrgyzstan, there will be a few nights spent in accommodation called ‘home stays’ in local people’s homes or guest houses.
- In Kyrgyzstan you will stay overnight in a yurt camp. Yurts are the traditional home of nomads in Central Asia. They are made from a wooden frame and layers of felt and canvas erected on a wooden platform.

Of course, our National Escorts 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. If you require any more information about the pace of the tours, please contact our reservations team who will be happy to answer your questions.

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, which contrasts to the breathtaking ancient cities and classic Islamic architecture of Uzbekistan.

Joining Your Tour

The tour is 27 days in duration including international flights. Please note due to flight schedules you may arrive/depart on Day 2.

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 26 in Bishkek. Please refer to your final itinerary for more specific meeting instructions pertaining to your 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.

This is a new tour which has been improved on the previous 26-day 2019 Ancient Lands of Central Asia itinerary. The duration of this new trip is 27 days air inclusive for 2020

Day 1: Fly to Dubai and Ashgabat, Turkmenistan

Fly to Dubai. Upon arrival a local Wendy Wu representative will meet and escort you to your transit hotel where you can freshen up and relax before your connecting flight to Ashgabat late this evening.

Please note some flight departures may depart the evening before the first day of the tour.

It is recommended you bring a change of clothes and selected toiletries (within carry on fluid limits) in your carry on luggage so they are readily accessible for use in your hotel room for day use stay. Your main luggage will be checked in from Australia all the way to Ashgabat.



Day 2: Ashgabat

Travel overnight to Ashgabat, the capital of Turkmenistan, the City of White Marble and a city you'll never forget..

Upon arrival early this morning you will be met and transferred to your hotel for early check-in. The remainder of the day is at your leisure before an afternoon lunch and welcome meeting.

After the welcome meeting, travel outside of Ashgabat to visit a stud farm and learn about the “winged” Akhal Tekkes horses. En route back to Ashgabat stop at the Gypjak complex where the largest mosque in Turkmenistan is located and the family mausoleum of the country's first president.



Some tour members may wish to stay in the hotel to rest for the entire day. Please notify your local National Escort if you wish to do this.

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.

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 3: Ashgabat

Today explore both ancient and modern Ashgabat.

Visit the Turkmen National Carpet Museum, Independence Square and the Monument Arch of Neutrality.

Stop at the Turkmenistan Independence Monument to admire the gardens, foundations, statues and see the famous Rukhnama book. This sculpted park is filled with statues of Turkmen heroes, controversial politicians that line paths that lead to a golden dome and a massive minaret.



Have lunch in the Russian Gulistan Bazaar, visit Ertugrul Gazi Mosque and learn about Ashgabat's unique history with time spent at the National Museum of History and Ethnography. Later, travel to the Fortress of Nisa, once a former capital of the Parthian Empire, close to the border of Iran.

Destination Information

National Carpet Museum – Houses the largest collection of Turkmen handmade carpets dating back to the 18th century.

Fortress of Nisa - Residence of the former Parthian Empire from the 3rd 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.

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

Day 4: Mary / Merv / Ashgabat

Depart early for your 5-hour journey to the city of Mary.

Learn about the Turkmenistan's important cotton and gas industries before stopping off at ancient Abiverd. This ruined town was one of the major centres of Northern Khurasan and was mentioned in written sources as a city with fertile lands and rich crops, famous for its magnificent market and mosque.

Have lunch explore the ruins of the ancient city of Merv, a major center of international trade and crafts located on the Silk Road, listed as UNESCO World Heritage Site.



Return to Ashgabat, via a short flight where you will spend the night.

Destination Information

Merv. The Merv oasis is one of the most important archeological sites on the old Silk Road. Founded by Cyrus the Great in the 6th century, the "Queen of the World" and was reputedly the largest city in the world. In the 12th century, the city had a population of 700,000 before a Mongol invasion ended her reign in the 13th century when the entire population (including refugees and people from nearby towns) of a million people were killed.

Day 5: Darwaza Gas Craters

This morning, travel north along a desert road to visit a monument that pays tribute to the group of socialists that died in the 1931 Basmachi Revolt and arrive in the small desert community of Erbent where you will learn about the Turkmen nomadic way of life.

Continue north to the border of Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. At this border we will drive a further 8 kilometres through the Karakum desert before arriving at the Darwaza 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 with mats are provided. There are basic bathroom/toilet/shower facilities whilst staying overnight.

Destination Information

Darwaza Crater - In 1971, in the former U.S.S.R. the Darwaza crater was created accidentally due to drilling in the region, which resulted in natural gases being omitted. The Russian authorities 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 45 years later it still burns and has been known around the world as the 'Gates of Hell'.

Day 6: Khiva via Konye-Urgench

Drive 4 hours to Konye-Urgench, the former capital of the Khorezm Empire in the 12-13th centuries.

Enjoy sightseeing for 3 hours exploring the Kutlug Timur minaret, the fabled al Mamun's Academy of Sciences and the mausoleums of Turabek Khanum, Il-Arslan and Sultan Tekesh.



Continue driving for 3 hours to complete Turkmenistan border formalities with your local National Escort at Shavat before crossing into Uzbekistan. Your local National Escort will cross into Uzbekistan with the group and continue leading the tour in Uzbekistan.

After a 1 hour drive you will arrive into Khiva, where you will stay the next 2 nights.

Destination Information

Turabek Khanum Mausoleum – Although 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 Arslan mausoleum is a unique architectural construction, also known among the people as the Mausoleum of Kho-Rezmshah II Arslan, who ruled from 1156 to 1172. It is decorated with reliefs from carved terracotta and is the oldest monument in the city.

Day 7: Khiva

Khiva is a town 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 4-5 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, the Kalta Minor Minaret and the 19th century Tash Hauli Palace decorated in fine china blue tile work.

Destination Information

Khiva – This small town may have been founded up to 2,500 years ago 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.

Amir-Tur Medressa - Located in the northern part of Itchan Kala, Amir-Tur Medressa was founded in 1870 by the instigation of the brother of Muhammad Rahim-Khan II.

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: Bukhara

This morning checkout of your hotel and travel on a local train to Bukhara. Travelling 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.

On arrival have dinner in the scenic Lyabi-Haus area close to the old Jewish quarter. After dinner, stroll through the markets and shop for traditional Uzbekistani pottery and colourful local clothing. There are several interesting craft studios hidden in the ancient nearby madrassas and merchant buildings.



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.

Lyabi-Hauz (or Labi-Hauz) – Lyabi-Hauz is a plaza built in 1620, constructed around a large pool. Derived from Persian and meaning 'ensemble near the pool', even today that custom continues as men gather to chat, play dominoes and drink endless pots of tea at the poolside chaykhana (tea house).

Day 9: Bukhara

Today explore the many interesting sites within this incredible city of Bukhara, one of the most famous names of ancient Islam. Gaze at the unique and legend filled Kalon Minaret, explore the Ark of Bukhara and visit the Bolo Hauz Mosque.

Continue onto the ladies' market and through the beautiful Bukhara oasis to the peaceful 16th century Chor Minor and Chor Bakr necropolis where you will tour the colourful Khonako-Medrassah-Mosque complex. 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 six hours with leisurely walking around these sites.



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

Photo fees may be payable at most attractions you will visit in Bukhara, approximately 7USD in total.

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 10: Samarkand

This morning you will visit the summer residence of the last Emir at Sitora-i Mohi Khosa and drive to the pottery town Gijduvan, located approximately 60km from Bukhara. Explore the city for 2 hours and visit a local ceramic centre. Continue your drive for approximately 4 hours (260km) to Samarkand. Upon arrival check into your hotel for a two-night stay.

Today you will explore some of the most significant sites in Samarkand and its city centre, involving approximately 2 hours of leisurely walking. Tick off visits to Timur's Guri Amir Mausoleum and Registan Square, the most spectacular architectural site Central Asia as well as the heart of the city.

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

Destination Information

Summer Residence of the Last Bukharan Emir – Situated 4km outside the city, the summer residence dates back to the beginning of the 20th century. The first summer palace was built by Emir Nasrullakhan.

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". 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 11: Samarkand

Today, explore some of the most significant sites in Samarkand and its city centre, involving approximately six hours of leisurely walking. In the morning, visit Gur-e-Amir Mausoleum and return to Registan Square, which was for many centuries the heart of Samarkand. In the afternoon, wander through a local market, visit Shah-I-Zinda and Bibi-Khanym Friday Mosque.

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



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-Khanyam Mosque - One of the most impressive historic mosques in Central Asia, construction on Bibi-Khanyam 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 12: Samarkand

This morning you will travel the 2 hours to Shakhrisabz, the birthplace of the Great Amir Timur (Tamerlane), located approximately 80km south of Samarkand. Explore the city, visiting sites such as the remnants of Ak-Sarai Palace, Dorus Tilavat cemetery and Kok-Gumbas Mosque.



Destination Information

Shakhrisabz - Shakhrisabz is a 2700 years old city and has played a major role in the history of the Central Asian region, mostly due to Shakhrisabz being the birthplace of Amir Timur (or Tamerlane) in 1336. During the early years of the Timurid Dynasty, the city enjoyed his considerable patronage. Timur regarded the town as his "hometown" and planned it eventually to be the location of his tomb.

Ak-Sarai Palace - One of the greatest buildings in Shakhrisabz, Ak-Sarai Palace (Timur's residence) means 'White Palace'. Timur's most ambitious project, construction began in 1380 and took 24 years to complete, a few months before the death of the great ruler.

Dorus Tilavat Cemetery - Dorus Tilavat Cemetery is the original burial complex of Timur's ancestors and was formed after the death in 1370-1371 of the eminent religious leader Shamsiddin Kulal, the founder of Sufism, the spiritual mentor of Emir Taragay and of Timur himself.

Kok-Gumbas Mosque - Construction on the Kok-Gumbas Mosque began in 1435 on the order of Timur's grandson, Ukug Beg. The name translates to 'blue dome'.

Ulugh Beg Observatory - Ulugh 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. The observatory is considered by scholars to have been one of the finest observatories in the Islamic world.

Day 13: Tashkent

Return to Samarkand for 2 hours of leisurely walking, visiting the Ulugh Beg Observatory to see the 'stars above Samarkand'.

This morning, you will stop at a papermaking workshop located in Konigil village before arriving at Samarkand Railway Station and boarding the Afrosiyob train for a 2 ½ hour journey to Tashkent. On arrival, transfer to your hotel, check in and tour the city.



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 see Independence Square and Amir Timur Maydoni. Your last stop will be to the Tashkent Metro, with its opulently decorated marble, granite and chandeliers.

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.

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 14: Fergana

In the morning transfer the 6 hours via the scenic mountain range along the Uzbek/Kyrgyz border and Kokand to the pleasant city of Fergana.

Enjoy a guided tour of Kokand seeing the impressive Khan's Palace and Jami Mosque Museum.

Drive to a small village to the house of a local craftsman, to visit a traditional Kyrgyz family who manufacture traditional woollen carpets.



Finally, stop off at the Rishton Ceramics Museum to learn about the pottery industry and arrive in Fergana where you will visit Akhmad Al-Fergani Park and the town centre. Check in to the hotel.

The Fergana Valley is Uzbekistan's most populous region with 15 million of the country's 33 million living in this part of the country. Mass cotton cultivation, introduced by the Soviets, remains central to the economy, along

with a wide range of grains, fruits and vegetables. There is a long history of stock breeding, leatherwork and a growing mining sector.

For many people the main attractions are the local crafts, the colourful markets and the chance to learn about the former Silk Road – for over 400 years the valley was the centre of Central Asia’s silk production.

Destination Information

Kokand – Kokand is at the crossroads of the 2 main ancient trade silk routes into the Fergana Valley, 1 leading northwest over the mountains to the capital, Tashkent, and the other west through Khujand. Kokand was and still is the main transportation junction in the Fergana Valley.

Khan’s Palace - The palace of the Khudayar Khan of Kokand, was built between 1863 and 1874 by Muhammad Khudayar Khan. Upon completion, it was one of the largest and most opulent palaces in Central Asia. Nineteen of its original one hundred and thirteen rooms survive and now host a museum.

Jami Mosque Museum – the most impressive mosque in the city is the Jammi (Friday) mosque. It was built in 1800-1812 and can hold 10,000 worshippers.

Rishton Ceramic Museum - By the end of the 19th century Rishton turned into one of the largest centers of production of glazed dishes in Central Asia. By the beginning of the last century there were 80 pottery workshops in the town, in which 300 people worked. It is known that it was the Rishton potters who made tiles for Khudoyar Khan's palace in Kokand. Learn about ceramics in the region during your visit to the Rishton Ceramic Museum.

Day 15: Fergana (Sunday Market)

Rise early and travel to the unforgettable Kumpeta Sunday Bazaar in the nearby town of Margilon. Immerse yourself in the colours, sounds and smells of Central Asia’s biggest and most colourful bazaar during your 2-hour visit. Later, visit the dazzling Yodgorlik Silk Factory Centre, possibly the finest on the old Silk Road from Beijing to Istanbul.

Return to Fergana city where you’ll have free time to relax.



Destination Information

Kumpeta Sunday Market, Margilon - The magnificent Kumtepa Bazaar is a time capsule full of weathered old Uzbekistani men in traditional clothing exchanging solemn greetings and gossiping over endless pots of tea and the most colourfully dressed female merchants in the country. Rows of handmade silk are both the shopping and the visual highlight and a few hours here will rate among your trip highlights.

Yodgorlik Traditional Silk Centre – Your guide will walk you through traditional methods of silk production from steaming and unravelling the cocoons to the tie-dyeing and weaving of the dazzling khanatlas - hand-woven silk fabrics for which Margilon is famous.

Day 16: Khujand

Depart Fergana in Uzbekistan and cross the border at Zarhok where immigration formalities will take place. Your local National Escort will cross from Uzbekistan into Tajikistan with the group and continue leading the tour in Tajikistan.

Arrive in the city of Khujand in the early afternoon. On arrival, stroll through the vibrant Panchshanbe Bazaar, visit the city's top sight, the 10th century citadel, see Lenin's Statue and the Statue of Komil Khojandi and relax on Pushkin Square.



Destination Information

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.

Day 17: Dushanbe

This morning travel to Istaravshan, located in the northern foothills of the Tajik mountain range. Continue on and stop at the breathtaking Lake Iskander Kul, surrounded by mountains and spend time here taking in the memorable views. Arrive in Dushanbe, the capital of Tajikistan in the late afternoon.



Destination Information

Lake Iskander Kul - 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 Tajik capital will include walking through the city's Botanical gardens, Rudaki Park and stopping at the Ismoil 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 Medrasah Kuhna and the Museum of Tajik Way of life.



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: Almaty

Transfer to the Dushanbe airport and board your flight to Almaty, Kazakhstan. Here the National Escort that has guided you in Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan will say good bye and wave you off for your flight to Almaty, Kazakhstan.

Up on arrival at the Almaty airport, be greeted your Kazakh National Escort who will guide you throughout Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.



Transfer to your hotel and take part in an orientation walk visiting Republic Square, Abai Opera Theatre, the Central Mosque, the Green Market and Zenkov Cathedral.

Destination Information

Almaty - Situated beneath snowcapped peaks, and the capital of Kazakhstan until 1997, today Almaty is the country's largest metropolis and is still considered its cultural and trading hub.

Republic Square - Dominating the centre of Almaty and measuring 580 metres length, Republic Squares main attraction is the Independence Monument adorned with a statue of a flying winged leopard.

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

Day 20: Almaty

This morning visit the turquoise Big Almaty Lake nestled in the Tian Shan mountains and see the Tien Shan Astronomical Observatory. Spend half the day relaxing in the scenic surrounds and return to Almaty where the rest of your day is free.



Destination Information

Tian Shan Mountains - The Tian Shan also known as the Tengri Tagh, meaning the Mountains of Heaven or the Heavenly Mountain, is a large system of mountain ranges located in Central Asia. The highest peak in the Tian Shan is Jengish Chokusu located on the Kyrgyzstan–China border, at 7,439 metres.

Big Almaty Lake - This picturesque turquoise lake, 1.6km long, rests in a rocky bowl at 2500m altitude, reflecting the Tian Shan mountains and the giant fir trees in its still depths.

Day 21: Karakol via Charyn Canyon

Start early this morning 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.

First, 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 2 hours.



Continue to the border and cross from Kazakhstan to Kyrgyzstan with your Kazakh National Escort.

After border formalities are completed, we will travel 200 kilometres (approximately 4 hours) to Karakol, where you will proceed to your hotel and check in for your 2-night stay.

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.

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.

Day 22: Karakol (Sunday Animal Market)

Rise early and travel to the outskirts of town for the unforgettable Karakol Sunday Animal Market.

Return to the city 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 Jetty-Orguz where you can enjoy a light hike through the magnificent canyon of red sandstone. Sightseeing in the canyon involves 1 hour 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.



Destination Information

Sunday Animal Market - Early on Sunday mornings Kyrgyzstan's biggest and most colourful animal markets takes place on the outskirts of Karakol. The Sunday market is the place to be in Kyrgyzstan if you want to buy or sell farm animals - cows, horses, sheep, and goats are the primary objects of trade. You will see some amazing characters present and the photos you take here will rank among the best on your trip.

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.

Jetty-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: Kochkor

Visit Skazka Canyon, known as Fairy Tale Canyon and Barskoon Gorge to take a light hike to a waterfall named 'Tears of Leopard'.

The gorge is considered to be one of the most beautiful in the Issyk Kul area. Continue around 2 hours to Bokonbayevo Village and watch a demonstration of Eagle Hunting.

Transfer to Kochkor, the centre of Kyrgyz national felt handicrafts. Visit a local workshop and see the manufacturing of the traditional Kyrgyz wool carpets, called 'shyrdak'.

Stay overnight in a Yurt Camp and try your hand at baking flatbread in a traditional oven.



Destination Information

Skazka Canyon - Skazka Canyon, known as Fairy Tale Canyon, was named so due to its bizarre rocky landscape, which for many years has been transformed by wind into fabulous sculptures and formations. Some formations have been named for their similarity to well-known objects.

Eagle Hunting – See a demonstration of hunting with trained golden eagles, often using a sacrificial rabbit trapped for the purpose. This style depicts authentic hunting traditions: this is often how young eagles are trained.

Bokonbaevo Village - Bokonbaevo Village is a cosy and picturesque village on the southern shore of lake Issyk Kul, with green meadows and snow-capped mountains nearby. The surrounding area is sprinkled with yurts. Most people here make a living by either farming or craftsmanship.

Kochkor Village - A large Kyrgyz village with a population of approximately 15,000. Most of the inhabitants are farmers and shepherds who live in yurts during the summer.

Yurts - Yurts are the traditional home of nomads in Central Asia. They are made from a wooden frame and layers of felt and canvas erected on a wooden platform. The interior is filled with warm fabrics as well as ornate wooden furniture. Nomads in Kyrgyzstan live in yurts in the months around summer. Staying in a yurt will allow you to experience the unique and intrinsic aspect of local life in Kyrgyzstan.

Day 24: Bishkek

Enjoy the breath-taking views along the road as you continue another 2 hours to Ashu Village.

Arrive at the Chong Kemin National Park prior to lunch. Chong Kemin is a quiet valley with small villages surrounded by magnificent mountains and a fir forest.

Take in the daily life in Ashu Village and witness horseback games, a nomadic tradition and custom of the Kyrgyz people. Your National Escort will brief you on these horseback games.

Continue onto the capital city of Bishkek. En route, visit the 12th Century Burana Tower.



Destination Information

Chon-Kemin National Park – The spectacular Chon-Kemin Valley is almost 80km deep and is famous for its natural beauty, abundant wildlife and mountain lakes.

Horseback Games - Horseback games are the reflection of the rich history of nomadic customs and traditions of the Kyrgyz people. It is a colourful show that celebrates many vibrant aspects of Kyrgyz culture and includes traditional horse games “Ulak Tartysh”, “Kyz-Kuumai”, “Oodarysh” and “Tyiyin-Enmei”.

Burana Tower - This 11th 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. Most streets are flanked on both sides by narrow irrigation channels that water the innumerable trees, which provide shade during the hot summers.

Day 25: Bishkek

This morning you will take a city tour and visit Ala Too Square, Oak Park and the newly restored Museum of History.

This afternoon you will drive 1 hour south to Ala Archa National Park where you will stop at the park's base camp. From here, your guide will take you on a 1 hour leisurely hike through the National Park whilst you take in the picturesque scenery of snow-capped mountains and freshwater rivers. All participants who take part in this activity must be able to complete it independently, otherwise you will need to wait on the bus.



Return to Bishkek for a farewell dinner at your hotel.

Destination Information

Ala Too Square - Built in 1984 to commemorate the 60th 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 20th anniversary of independence.

Ala Archa National Park – Ala-Archa is an alpine national park in the Tian Shan Mountains. The name Ala Archa translates as 'Bright Juniper' from Kyrgyz as the whole gorge is covered with various trees including the main one – juniper.

Days 26-27: Fly via Dubai to Australia

Early in the morning of day 26, transfer to Bishkek airport for your morning flight to Dubai.

On arrival in Dubai you will connect to your flight to Australia returning home on the same or the following day.

Due to flight schedules for some passengers, a layover at the Dubai airport may be necessary. If this is the case a transit hotel will be arranged in Dubai. A local Wendy Wu representative will meet and greet you in Dubai and escort you to this hotel for check in. The following morning you will be transferred to the airport for your onward flight to Australia.



Please note: It is recommended you bring a change of clothes and selected toiletries (within carry on fluid limits) in your carry-on luggage so they are readily accessible for use in your hotel room for day use stay.

Journey Through Central Asia Travel Information

Visas

Entry visas are required for all foreigners wishing to visit Turkmenistan and Tajikistan (e-visa).

Travel to Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan are visa free for Australian passport holders.

The Wendy Wu Tours' Visa Department will assist you with the process of obtaining the necessary visas and the cost of the visas, visa letters of invitations and associated costs are included in your tour package.

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.

Visa application forms for the Journey Through Central Asia tour and all relevant documentation are due in our office 90 days prior to departure; if received after this date your Turkmenistan visa will not be able to be processed in time.

All Wendy Wu travellers will receive a Turkmenistan tourist visa on arrival in the airport of Ashgabat. The cost of this visa is covered by Wendy Wu and included in the price of your packaged tour. Clients will need a Letter of Invitation (LOI) from a local Turkmen tourist agency which is organised by Wendy Wu.

TURKMENISTAN

All travellers to Turkmenistan require a visa. A Letter of Invitation (LOI) is also required before you can apply for the visa. We recommend all travellers plan to receive a Visa on Arrival at the Ashgabat airport. Please follow the instructions below to have your LOI for visa on arrival issued before you travel.

To apply for your LOI we require the following:

- clear, colour scan of the photo page of your passport
- digital copy of a colour passport photo (not a scan of a printed photo)
- Turkmen LOI Application form (please contact Wendy Wu)

After submitting these documents to Wendy Wu will process your LOI. This service is included in your trip cost. We advise that you apply for your LOI no later than 3 months before your trip to allow time for processing

Turkmenistan LOIs are processed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Turkmenistan and usually take around 5 weeks to be processed, with up to 7 weeks in peak travel season not being uncommon.

NOTES:

- Independent travel in Turkmenistan is not permitted and your visa will only be valid for as long as tour services (including accommodation, guides, transport etc) are provided.
- Make sure you have a printout of your LOI before boarding your flight or leaving for your trip.
- You will need to complete a migration card and pay a US\$12 migration fee (\$10 fee plus \$2 admin charge) on arrival in Turkmenistan.
- You will need 2 printed passport photos for your leader to submit to the migration office after your arrival in country.

UZBEKISTAN

From 1st February 2019 many nationalities no longer require a visa for stays of up to 30 days, including most European countries, Great Britain, Australia & Canada. You can check if you are eligible here: <https://e-visa.gov.uz/main>

E-VISAS

For nationalities not included in the visa exemption list an e-visa is available. The e-visa is issued for a period of stay in the territory of Uzbekistan up to 30 days with a single entry and is valid for 90 days from the date of issue. Travellers must submit an online application for a visa at least three working days before the planned date of travel to Uzbekistan. The consular fee for processing and issuing an e-visa is US\$20 to be paid online. Please check if you are eligible for an e-visa and apply here: <https://e-visa.gov.uz/main>

TAJIKISTAN

All visitors to Tajikistan require an e-visa which Wendy Wu will complete for you before you depart.

To apply for your e-visa we require the following:

- clear, colour scan of the photo page of your passport
- digital copy of a colour passport photo (not a scan of a printed photo)
- Tajikistan e-visa application form (please contact Wendy Wu)

An e-Visa is an official document permitting entry into and travel within Tajikistan. You need to have a travel document valid for at least 6 months from the date you intend to enter Tajikistan. Depending on your nationality, there may be additional requirements.

KAZAKHSTAN

Many nationalities, including Australia, Germany, USA, Canada, United Kingdom and New Zealand do not require a visa for stays of up to 30 days. Effective from 24th July 2012, Australian passport holders can travel to Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan for up to 60 days without a visa. Please check with your local consulate for the most up to date requirements.

KYRGYZSTAN

Most nationalities do not require a visa to travel to Kyrgyzstan for up to 60 days, including Australia, Belgium, UK, Germany, Netherlands, Canada, New Zealand, Ireland, USA and Switzerland. Effective from 24th July 2012, Australian passport holders can travel to Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan for up to 60 days without a visa. Other nationalities should check with their nearest embassy and obtain a visa in advance if required.

Important Visas and Immigration Notes

As this is a multi-country 5 Stans trip, your National Escort will change in Almaty. Your Turkmen National Escort will meet you at the Ashgabat airport in Turkmenistan and guide you in Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and in Tajikistan. He or she will check you at the Dushanbe, Tajikistan airport and wave you off for your flight to Almaty, Kazakhstan.

Upon arrival in Almaty, a Kazakh guide will meet and greet you and guide you in Kazakhstan and in Kyrgyzstan. He or she will check you at the Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan airport and wave you off for your flight home.

As Central Asian immigration and customs officials are notoriously strict, please make sure you keep all forms for when you exit the country. A lost customs or immigration form could result in a fine.



When entering Uzbekistan, you will need to complete a foreign currency declaration form when you arrive and keep a copy yourself. Failure to do so accurately or exiting the country with more currency than when you entered may result in delays, fines or the additional sums being confiscated.

Ensure you exchange any unspent local currency prior to departure as there is no generally no exchange offices at international airports in Dushanbe and Bishkek.

A number of medications containing tramadol, morphine, opiates or any other similar constituent component are banned in Turkmenistan and are considered narcotic drugs. Do not bring any medications containing these drugs into the country.

Some medications available over the counter or by prescription in other countries, such as sleeping tablets, may be illegal or restricted in Uzbekistan. You should declare all prescription medications and other restricted items on arrival in Uzbekistan and carry a copy of the prescription with you.

Currency

The 5 countries of Central Asia are very much cash-only economies.

Please bring enough US Dollars in cash with you on your trip cash to cover your entire stay.

There are only a handful of ATM machines in Bishkek, Almaty, Dushanbe, Tashkent and Ashgabat although do not rely on these as they can be unreliable. There are no ATMs in smaller cities and rural areas.

Credit cards are only accepted in some hotels and in a limited number of shops, therefore make sure you bring a sufficient amount of USD cash of different denominations.

In smaller cities, you will find banking facilities less reliable and may encounter staff that refuse to deal with a currency they are unfamiliar with, for this reason bring US Dollars with you for easy exchange.

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.

Please bring only fresh, undamaged US Dollars with no blemishes, printed after 2001 as these notes will be accepted for exchange. Notes with any additional markings or notes that are faded are often refused even by official travel exchange offices.

Bring USD notes in mostly 20 and 50 denominations with a handful of 100 USD notes.

Ensure you exchange any unspent local currency prior to departure as there is no exchange office at the Dushanbe and Bishkek international airports.

Insurance

We strongly encourage all customers to take a copy of their travel insurance documents (especially relevant 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.

Wendy Wu Tours will not be liable for any costs incurred by you due to your failure to take out suitable travel insurance from the date of booking.

Eating in Central Asia

Central Asian cuisine is diverse and flavoursome with a legacy stretching back thousands of years. It is important to keep an open mind and be adventurous. All meals (excluding drinks) are included in our fully inclusive Journey Through Central Asia 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.

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.

Vegetarian only alternatives are not usually available in Kyrgyzstan, though Uzbekistani 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 any 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, however, '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.

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

If you like, you can bring some supplements with you from home. Tea/coffee bags, 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 in 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 sweets.

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 to four star standards, please note that there is no international classification system for hotels and differences in facilities and quality do exist between the Australia 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.

You will be travelling through a rarely visited and undeveloped area of eastern 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.

Yurts: Yurts are the traditional home of nomads in Central Asia. They are made from a wooden frame and layers of felt and canvas erected on a wooden platform. The interior is filled with warm fabrics as well as ornate wooden furniture. Nomads in Kyrgyzstan live in yurts in the months around summer. Staying in a yurt will allow you to experience the unique and intrinsic aspect of local life in Kyrgyzstan. Although they are not luxurious, they do offer comfortable accommodation in remote regions of the country.

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.

Three and four star hotels: You will be staying in hotels of three and four star standards for the remainder of the tour.

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 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 this region have generally 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 above are approximations only.

Planes: Internal flights are based on economy class, with reputable airlines. Pre-seat flight allocation is not available.

Development in Central Asia

Although Central Asia is developing quickly, it still lacks the international standards of civil infrastructure and tourist facilities. Concepts of personal responsibility are also different to those in the AU. Consequently, tourist and public facilities may not uphold the same safety standards as in the AU; for example, you may see a hole in



the road without a warning sign or safety barricade. 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 extra care, use your common sense, refer to notices and follow advice from your National Escort/Local Guides.

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.

Journey Through Central Asia is one of our most unique and adventurous group tours, tracing the ancient Silk Road, 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.

Public holidays and Religious Festivals

Ramadan, the Islamic festival of sacrifice will fall from 23rd April to the 23rd May 2020. 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 celebrating 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 Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, witnessing this fascinating national holiday for yourself.

Souvenirs

We want to be able to give you an opportunity to buy souvenirs so we include some stops at workshops or factories, 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 both a National Escort and local guides. 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 only.

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 in USD 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.

Please refer to our website or brochure for detailed temperature charts.

Packing List and Climate

Most of your touring in Kyrgyzstan is at an altitude between 2500 and 3300 metres above sea level so temperatures can get low during the day and very cold overnight between May and late September. Please ensure you have adequate warm clothing, including to sleep in during our yurt stays.

Temperatures for most of your time spent in Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Almaty and Dushanbe will range from 23c to 35c between May and late September.

Modest clothing such as long lightweight pants and shirts that cover your shoulders for men and women is highly recommended. Headscarves for ladies are required for visits to mosques and madrassas throughout Central Asia. Your National Escort assist you with purchasing a headscarf at a market visit in Ashgabat on day 3 of the tour.

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

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 five kilograms. It is essential that your luggage is lockable. Please note that authorities will only allow bottles onto the aircraft if they have been checked in as main baggage. Bottles in hand luggage may be confiscated.

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 \$300AUD per person, 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. 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.

Climbing Steps

Sightseeing at nearly all of the palaces, fortresses and some temples involves climbing quite a number of steps. These palaces were built to provide defense against potential invaders so nearly all of them stand on top of a hill, while the interiors have layers of narrow hallways and steps to slow down the advance of enemies once they were inside. The steps tend to be quite large, not level and sometimes without handrails. Mosques and Madrassas also tend to be built at an elevation, as this is the most auspicious position according to ancient beliefs. This means you sometimes need to walk from the bus park to the entrance, and/or need to climb some steps inside.

People with knee or hip injuries, who have poor balance or are otherwise unable to complete these activities independently should consider the suitability of this itinerary carefully.

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

After Your booking

We strongly recommend registering your travel plans with www.smarttraveller.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.

Once you have booked with Wendy Wu Tours, you will receive a confirmation invoice followed by deposit documentation, which includes a visa application form (if applicable), and a help sheet. Your final documentation pack will be sent to you approximately 2-3 weeks prior to departure.

Travelling On An Active Paced Tour

We hope you are looking forward to what we are sure will be a trip of a lifetime. Before you embark on this adventure, we ask you to consider the points listed below that relate to our active paced tours. This will ensure you understand what is involved with an active paced tour and therefore help you decide if your chosen tour is right for you.

This is to ensure that your tour runs as smoothly as possible for you and your fellow tour members.

Please consider the following aspects of active paced tours prior to confirming your arrangements;

- ☐ While we believe that age is no barrier, please give special consideration to the fact that medical assistance and public infrastructure can be limited in these areas.
- ☐ There will be long periods of physical activity, including walking, climbing of stairs, in/out of boats. Tour participants who will travel with a cane/walking stick may come across difficulties. It is our experience that using a cane/walking stick in these areas where there are rough and uneven surfaces, stairs to climb and high altitudes, becomes difficult.



- ☐ Only limited meal options will be available. People with special dietary requirements should expect difficulties on these tours. Please understand that depending on the trip you are taking, you may be given very little or no meat.
- ☐ Your tour may include basic accommodation facilities including home stays, guest houses, truck stops and tented accommodation. This may mean, no or limited hot water, and no private bathroom facilities.
- ☐ There will be long periods of driving on often unsealed, rural and bumpy roads in vehicles ranging from tour coaches to local jeeps and canter vehicles.
- ☐ Altitude affects people in many different ways and a certain level of fitness is required in order to limit the effects. Please discuss how to manage altitude sickness with a health care professional.
- ☐ Overnight trains only have basic bedding in four berth compartments with limited or no ladder facilities to climb to the top bunk. You may be sharing with other tour members or locals.
- ☐ Some tours may have sightseeing en route to the next destination. Therefore participation is required or you will need to remain with the coach until the rest of the group has finished touring.

National Escorts/ Local Guides will endeavor to provide rest stops in your itinerary where possible. Please be advised that some days may have a more physical programme than others.

If you are comfortable with the above mentioned aspects of travelling on an active paced tour, we look forward to welcoming you on what is sure to be a unique and memorable experience.

However, if you have any hesitations please contact your valued travel agent or our reservations department to discuss the tour further or explore alternative options.

Last updated 18/07/19