



Road to Samarkand

Go Beyond Tour | 23 Days | Physical Level 3

Dubai - Bishkek – Cholpon Ata – Karakol – Bokonbaevo – Tash Rabat –
Naryn – Chong Kemin – Tashkent – Samarkand – Bukhara –
Khiva – Tashkent - Dubai

Take a journey along 2,000-plus-years of Central Asian Silk Road history. Discover the colorful markets and Swiss Alps like scenery of Kyrgyzstan, the ancient cities of Samarkand, Bukhara and Khiva and travel through stunning scenery in the footsteps of great explorers and conquerors.

- Discover the mysterious and exotic Samarkand
- Learn about ancient silk production
- Discover holy Bukhara and Khiva
- Mingle with nomads in Kyrgyzstan
- Lose yourself in vibrant bazaars
- Visit the historic Tash Rabat Caravanserai



Road to Samarkand tour inclusions:

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

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:

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 3:

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.

The Road to Samarkand tour is rated as a **physical level 3** tour. Overall, 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. On Day 8, you will reach an altitude of 3,200 metres. 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 hikes will generally last around 1-2 hours at a time, sometimes on an incline and mostly on uneven ground
- There will be long periods of walking whilst sightseeing with 6 – 8 hours per day

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 civilization. See the spectacular alpine scenery of Kyrgyzstan, which contrasts to the breathtaking ancient cities and classic Islamic architecture of Uzbekistan.

Joining Your Tour

This tour is 23 days in duration including international flights. Please note due to flight schedules you may arrive/depart on Day 2.

For travellers booked on 'Land Only', the price includes your arrival/ departure airport transfers if arriving/departing on the start and conclusion date of your tour. Please advise your international flight times to our reservations team. Join the tour on Day 2 in Bishkek and end the tour on Day 21 in Tashkent. 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.

Day 1: Fly to Dubai and Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan

Fly to Dubai. Upon arrival in Dubai you will be met by a local Wendy Wu representative and transferred to your hotel located very close to the airport and where you can freshen up and relax before your flight to Bishkek 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, medication 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 your day use stay. Your main luggage will be checked in from Australia all the way to Bishkek.



Day 2: Bishkek

Travel overnight to Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. Upon arrival, you will be met and transferred to your hotel. Your room will be ready for check in on arrival.

The remainder of the day is at your leisure to rest before a 3pm meal and welcome meeting at a local restaurant.

After the meeting, take a city tour and visit Ala Too Square, the White House and Oak Park.

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

Bishkek - The capital of Kyrgyzstan has a population of 900,000 people. 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.

Ala Too Square - Built in 1984 to commemorate the 60th Anniversary of the Kirghiz Soviet Socialist Republic. 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.

Day 3: Bishkek

This morning, drive 1 hour south to Ala Archa National Park where you will stop at the park's base camp, within this time you will rise from 750 to 2100 meters above sea level.

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. Although this is a gentle hike, you will need to climb some hills and slopes and walk over uneven ground at altitude. 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 where you will have a free afternoon.



Destination Information

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.

Day 4: Bishkek – Cholpon-Ata/Lake Issyk Kul

This morning, you will visit the 12th Century Burana Tower and enjoy the breath-taking views along the road as you continue another 3 hours to Cholpon-Ata. The town is located at the northern shore of Lake Issyk Kul and is known for its large open-air collection of petroglyphs of ibex, wolves and deer etched into glacial stone that date back to the 8th century.

Afterwards, cruise on Lake Issyk Kul and view the stunning, alpine scenery. It can be cold on the 1-hour cruise, so we recommend you bring a warm jacket.



Destination Information

Burana Tower – Burana Tower is a large minaret located east of Bishkek. The site, includes the tower itself plus reconstructions of mausoleums found on the site, remains of a citadel, a collection of balbals (grave stones used by nomadic Turkic peoples), and petroglyphs now functions as a museum. The tower was originally 45m high, however, over the centuries several earthquakes caused significant damage to the structure. The last major earthquake in the 15th century destroyed the top half of the tower, reducing it to its current height of 25m.

Cholpon-Ata – The resort town on the northern shore of Lake Issyk-Kul literally means "Venus-father". The town contains numerous large and small sanatoria, hotels and guesthouses to accommodate the many visitors who descend upon the lake in summer months. During the Soviet era it was much frequented by vacationers brought here in organized mass tours from other parts of the USSR. Holidaymakers now usually originate mainly from Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. The location of the town is very attractive - the view of the imposing alpine ranges of the Tian Shan across the lake is impressive. The first three World Nomad Games were held on the outskirts of Cholpon-Ata in 2014, 2016, and 2018.

Lake Issyk Kul – The stunning Lake Issyk Kul is one of the largest lakes in the world, measuring at 180km long, 60km across and 700m deep. The lake sits in a hollow surrounded by the snow-capped peaks of Terskei and Kungei Ala-Tau Mountain ranges at the altitude of 1600 m. Explorers from the 19th century marvelled at the lake, one calling it 'a blue emerald set in a frame of silvery mountains'.

Day 5: Cholpon Ata to Karakol

Continue this morning with a 3-hour drive to the town of Karakol for a two-night stay.

Enroute visit the picturesque Semenov Gorge to enjoy a gentle hike at the gorge for approximately 1 hour in duration. You will need to climb some hills and slopes with moments of walking over uneven ground. Visit the Kyrchyn Jailoo ethnic village and arrive in Karakol in the early afternoon.

This afternoon, visit the interesting Przhevalsky Museum and examine the region's diverse religious influences with visits to the striking Holy Trinity Orthodox Church and the Chinese Mosque. All touring this afternoon is at a comfortable pace.



Destination Information

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.

Przhevalsky Museum – This neo-classical single-story building details the life of the Russian explorer who first described Central Asia. It displays fascinating exhibits on the Issy Kul petroglyphs, Scythian bronze artefacts, and a short history of the geology and mineral exploitation in the region.

Holy Trinity Orthodox Cathedral - This church was built out of wood on brick base, finished in 1895 on the ruins of a stone church. It is said that during construction, no nails or metal fastenings were used.

Chinese Mosque - The mosque was constructed in 1907 with the help from a Chinese architect and 20 carvers from Beijing. It is 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. Visits inside are not always guaranteed.

Day 6: Karakol (Sunday Animal Market)

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

In the afternoon, travel to the Valley of Flowers and Jety-Oguz Gorge 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 you will be walking over uneven ground at altitude. If you take part in this activity, you must be able to complete it independently. Alternatively, you will need to wait on the bus.



In Jety-Oguz visit a yurt and have a cup of tea or the Kyrgyz national beverage. Later, visit Irdyk village to see a local mosque and enjoy a home-cooked dinner with a local Dungan family. Learn the fascinating story of why this Muslim Chinese group immigrated to the region 140 years ago, how they made the area their home, and how families today keep their traditional culture and cuisine alive.

Destination Information

Sunday Animal Market - Early on Sunday mornings Kyrgyzstan's biggest animal markets takes place around 2km north of central Karakol. Typical of such markets, you'll observe locals bargaining over thoroughbred horses or improbably bundling voluptuous fat-tailed sheep into the back seats of Lada cars amid the backdrop of white-topped mountains. The weekly bazaar gives a good insight into the culture and the livelihood of the people here.

Jety-Oguz Gorge - A lush valley located 30km outside Karakol at the altitude of 2,200 m. The name translates to 'Seven Bulls' in the Kyrgyz language, referring to the red sandstone rock formations that resemble angry bulls, ready for postcard perfect shots. The area is also famous for its hot springs and the beautiful scenery.

Dungan People – A group of Muslim people of Chinese origin residing in China and former Soviet republics, members of this ethnic group also call themselves Hui.

Day 7: Bokonbaevo Village

Visit Skazka Canyon, also known as Fairy Tale Canyon. This canyon was named so due to its bizarre rock formations, including depictions of snakes, dragons and hippopotamuses.

Continue travelling for around 2 hours to Bokonbaevo Village and watch a demonstration of Eagle Hunting. Return to your vehicle for the 3 hour journey with breath taking views as you make your way to Naryn.



Destination Information

Skazka Canyon – Situated in the south of Lake Issyk-Kul, this magic place is famous for 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, like one set of ridges named "The Chinese Wall".

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 - 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.

Day 8: Tash Rabat Caravanserai

Today visit Tash Rabat's historic caravanserai located in a peaceful valley setting where the only habitation is a series of seasonal yurt-camps. The scenery in this valley is some of the finest landscapes you will encounter in Kyrgyzstan. The altitude here is 3,200 metres so do prepare accordingly.

Return to Naryn.



Destination Information

Tash Rabat Caravanserai - For centuries, these lands connecting China, the Middle East and Europe, along the Silk Road through countries like Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, were the superhighway of international trade. Caravans of goods travelled in all directions, carrying wares to be traded. Necessities or luxuries, they created a moving market that entire economies relied on. Mountains often provide either a backdrop or a foreground – beautiful but foreboding. Often Caravanserais, or travellers inn were built in mountainous valley's. The Tash Rabat Caravanserai is one of the best preserved on the old Silk Road from China to Istanbul.

Day 9: Kochkor

This morning travel to Kochkor, the centre of Kyrgyz national felt handicrafts.

Visit a local workshop in Kochkor and see the manufacturing of the traditional Kyrgyz wool carpets, called 'shyrdak'. Explore a small local market in the centre of the village and visit a local co-op that provides training for local women in traditional handicrafts.

Continue to Ashu Village where you will spend the night.



Destination Information

Kochkor Village - Kochkor is a large village with a population of 15,000. Most of the inhabitants are farmers and shepherds who live in yurts during the summer. Kochkor used to be a stop for Silk Road merchants travelling to and from Kashgar, on the other side of Torugart Pass in China. The pleasant, leafy town overlooked by snow-capped mountains is a base for excursions into the high country.

Day 10: Chong Kemin National Park

Some areas of Kyrgyzstan look as if artists have sculpted and painted nature. This is especially true on the drive between Kochkor and Chong Kemin National Park, where the latter is set in a quiet valley with small villages surrounded by magnificent mountains and a fir forest.

Enjoy a walk along the foothills of these mountains as well as witnessing life in the nearby village. Finish with a walk to a fabulous viewpoint offering spectacular views of the valley below.



In the afternoon, continue to Bishkek airport to board the flight to Tashkent, the capital of Uzbekistan. On arrival, you will be met and transferred to your hotel and enjoy dinner.

Destination Information

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

Tashkent – Tashkent at 3 million people is the capital of Uzbekistan, as well as the most populated city in ex-Soviet Central Asia. Tashkent was influenced by Turkic cultures in its early history, before Islam in the 8th century AD. Genghis Khan destroyed the city in 1219, but the city was rebuilt and profited from the Silk Road. Between the 18th to 19th century, the city became an independent city-state, before being re-conquered by the Khanate of Kokand. In 1865, it fell to the Russian Empire, and became the capital of Russian Turkestan.

Day 11: Tashkent

This morning journey back in time exploring Tashkent's town sights: Barak Khan Madrassah, 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.

In the afternoon, you will be invited to the workshop of a famous family of ceramists in Uzbekistan – Akbar and Alisher Rakhimov. Here you will learn about the secrets of their craftsmanship that have been passed from one generation to another. Uzbekistan is renowned for its ceramics that date back thousands of years.



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.

Kukeldash Madrassah - One of the biggest and one of the most famous historical monuments in Tashkent.

Tila Shaikh Mosque – The original mosque was built in 1890 and nowadays is one of the largest of its kind in the city of Tashkent. It is part of the famous historical and religious complex Hast Imam, which is situated in front of Barak Khan Madrassah.

Day 12: Tashkent – Samarkand

Depart this morning for the drive to Samarkand. No name is so evocative of the Silk Road as Samarkand. It is one of the oldest existing cities in the world and the oldest of Central Asia. Built on the site of Afrosiab which dated from the 3rd or 4th millennium B.C., Samarkand was known to the ancient Greeks as Marakanda and ruins of the old settlement remain north of the present city.

Enjoy a half day tour of Samarkand to see the famous Reistan Square which was for many centuries the heart of Samarkand. See the three beautiful madrassahs: the Uluq-Bek Madrassah built in the 15th century; the Tillya-Kori Madrassah built in the 17th century, and the Sher-Dor Madrassah, also built in the 17th century.



Please note that you will be travelling for around 6 hours today.

Destination Information

Samarkand - According to local history, when Alexander the Great 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 Silk Road.

Registan Square - The Square is lined on three sides by sparkling turquoise tiled buildings of the Sher Dor and Tillya Kori madrassahs. The interior and exterior facades of the madrassahs 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.

Day 13: Samarkand

This morning we continue exploring Samarkand to see Gur Emir, the mausoleum of Tamerlane, the grandest structure of Amir Temur's times - the chief Friday Mosque called Bibi-Khanum - the Siab Bazaar and Shahi Zinda Necropolis.

Later in the afternoon we also see Mausoleum of the Prophet Daniel, which is a unique burial place of the saint, revered in all three world religions: Judaism, Islam, and Christianity

You have the remainder of the day at leisure.



Destination Information

Bibi-Khanum 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.

Shahi Zinda Necropolis - 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.

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.

Day 14: Samarkand

This morning visit Ulugbek's observatory, constructed by Ulugbek (Grandson of the Great Amir Temur) in 1428-1429. Later see the ancient settlement of Afrosiab.

Following your tour of Afrosiab, continue to Konigil Village to visit a papermaking workshop. Try your hand at the unique method of papermaking, which involves cleaning tree branches from the bark, polishing paper with a stone and painting on it. Afterwards, enjoy lunch in the courtyard of the paper making mill. After lunch, return to Samarkand and remainder of the day at leisure.



Destination Information

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.

Afrosiab - This ancient settlement is situated on the spurs of Chupan-Ata hills to the north-east of present-day Samarkand. According to the legend, it was here, on the banks of the river Siab, that the Turanian king and hero Afrosiab, a character of the folk epic 'Shahnama', founded the town that became the capital of Sogdiana.

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

Day 15: Samarkand

This morning you will travel the 2 hours to Shakhrisabz, the birthplace of the Great Amir Timur (Tamerlane), located approximately 90km south of Samarkand. Explore the city, visiting sites such as the remnants of Ak-Sarai Palace, Dorus Tilavat cemetery and Kok-Gumbas Mosque.

Return to Samarkand this afternoon.

Please note that coaches are not allowed on the route to Shakhrisabz, instead we will travel in cars (3 passengers per vehicle).



Destination Information

Shakhrisabz - 90kms from Samarkand, the name of Timur's hometown translated to 'Green City' and was his 2nd capital after Samarkand. The historic centre of Shakhrisabz was designated a UNESCO World Heritage site in 2000.

Ak-Sarai Palace - With its gigantic 65m gate-towers covered with blue, white and gold mosaics, Timur's summer palace is now a Unesco World Heritage Site. The crumbling relic will give you some idea of how Samarkand's buildings would have looked centuries ago.

Dorus Tilavat Cemetery – The memorial complex was formed after the death of the eminent religious leader Shamsiddin Kulal, the spiritual mentor of Timur. His grave immediately became a place of reverence for his numerous disciples. The area was reconstructed numerous times and served as an educational institution.

Kok-Gumbas Mosque – Visible practically from any point of Shakhisabz, the Friday mosque gets its name from this 'Blue Dome' shimmering in the sun. The rich architectural structure was designed and constructed in 1435, 30 years after the death of Amir Timur.

Day 16: Samarkand - Bukhara

This morning continue the journey by road to Bukhara. En route, visit Gijduvan town which is a centre of famous handmade ceramics. Here you will see the fascinating process of making these ceramics as well as witnessing local life in this small town.

Arrive in Bukhara this afternoon and remainder of the day is at leisure.



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.

Day 17: Bukhara

Today you have a full day to explore fabulous Bukhara. This incredible city, one of the most famous of medieval Islam, is home to hundreds of registered monuments. On today's tour, we visit some of the main highlights as well as some lesser known sights along the way. Bring a fully charged camera battery.

Today's sightseeing includes Lab-i-khauz ensemble - modern centre of traditional Uzbekistan, Madrassah Nadirkhon Devanbegi, Khanaga and Mogaki Attari Mosques, Poi Kalon Minaret and Mosque, see Madrassahs Aziz Khan and Ulugbek Madrassah.

After lunch you will visit the Ark of Bukhara, Balakhauz Mosque and the Mausoleums of Ismail Samanid and Chashma Ayub.

We will also visit Hunarmand UNDP Assisted workshops near Lyabi-Hauz. See block printing, metal chasing, suzani embroidery, carving and gold embroidery.

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 USD7 in total.



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.

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.

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 chaikhana.

Day 18: Bukhara

Continue your sightseeing of Bukhara with an out-of-town excursion to visit the summer residence of the last Emir at Sitara-i Mohi Khosa. See the unique mixture of traditional Russian style of architecture harmoniously mixed with local oriental traditions. The famous white hall decorated with carved alabaster resembles the halls of Peterhof Palace in St Petersburg.

Continue with an excursion to Bahauddin Naqshbandi Mausoleum, a famous Sufi spiritual leader of this region in the 14th century. Bahauddin Naqshband's cult was highly venerated among folks. The rulers, too, paid a considerable attention to this architectural ensemble.



You have the afternoon at leisure for your own exploration.

Destination Information

Sitora-i-Mokhikhosa – Dated back to the beginning of the 20th century, the summer residence of the Last Bukharan Emir is situated 4km outside the city. The main building of the palace consists of several reception halls and the emir's private chambers. Among them is the white hall, shining with dazzlingly white carved ganch covering the walls and ceilings.

Day 19: Khiva

Set out for Khiva in the early morning driving across the famous Kyzyl Kum Desert (Red Sands).

During this journey, watch in awe as the scenery changes from saxsaul trees to the Amudarya riverbank. We will make several photo stops to see the desert flora and fauna. On arrival in Khiva, check into your hotel for a two-night stay.

Please be aware that you will be travelling for around 7 hours today. There will be adequate time for toilet breaks and photo stops.



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.

Amudarya River - The Amudarya River flows out of the Pamir Mountains, which marks the border between Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. During the reign of Alexander the Great, this river frequently featured in his campaigns, however it was then known as the Oxus River, after its discovery by Herodotus, an ancient Greek geographer.

Day 20: Khiva

Khiva is made for walking. It is compact, well maintained, lived in and basks in beautiful desert light.

Participate in this leisurely walking tour and see all the major sights of the Ichtan Kala, the citadel. The truncated Kalta Minor Minaret, the Kurkna Ark Fortress, the Madrassah Rakhimkhon, the Mausoleum of Pakhlavan Makhmud and Islam Khodja Minaret - from the latter you will see the entire town beneath you and the desert beyond. The ravages of modern development have been largely kept away from the citadel itself, much to your advantage.



In the afternoon we will see the Friday Mosque and the 19th century Tash Hauli Palace, including the harem.

Destination Information

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.

Tashauli Palace – Meaning “Stone House” this palace contains Khiva’s most sumptuous interior decoration, dense with blue ceramic tiles, carved wooden pillars and elaborate ganch. Completed in 1841, it’s said to have more than 150 rooms off nine courtyards, with high ceilings designed to catch the slightest desert breeze.

Day 21: Khiva - Tashkent

This morning you will be transferred 1 hour to Urgench Airport for your return flight to Tashkent.

On arrival in Tashkent, visit the Museum of Applied Arts, Mustakillik Square, Amir Temur Square and the famous Tashkent Metro, opulently decorated with local marble and granite like an underground palace.

You have the remainder of the day at leisure.



Destination Information

Amir Temur Square - Built in 1882, the square was first named Konstantinovsky, then Kaufmann. After gaining independence, the square was remaned in honour of its statesman. A bronze statue of Timur on horseback sits in the centre of the square.

Tashkent Metro - Tashkent's metro stations are renowned as some of the world's most beautiful, This was the first city in Central Asia to build a metro and each of the 29 stations are bespoke designed.

Days 22-23: Flight Tashkent to Dubai continue to Australia, Land in Australia

Early morning transfer to the airport for your flight to Australia via Dubai. On arrival in Dubai you will connect to your flight to Australia returning home the same or following day.

Due to flight schedules for some clients, 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 at in Dubai and escort you to this hotel for check in. You will then be transferred back to the airport the following day for your onward flight to Australia.



Road to Samarkand Travel Information

Visas

Travel to Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan are visa free for Australian passport holders. Australian passport holders can travel to Kyrgyzstan for up to 60 days without a visa and to Uzbekistan for up to 30 days.

If you're not travelling on an Australian passport, 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.

Currency

Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan are very much cash-only economies. Please bring enough US Dollars in cash with you on your trip to cover your entire stay.

There are only a handful of ATM machines in Bishkek and Tashkent, although these are best to be relied as they can be unreliable. There are no ATMs in smaller cities and rural areas.

Credit cards are only accepted in some major 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.

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. This form will be either given to you on the incoming flight or you can pick one up in the airport Arrivals Hall.

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.

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

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.

In Kyrgyzstan 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.

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 Australia. Consequently, tourist and public facilities may not uphold the same safety standards as in Australia; 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.

Road to Samarkand group tour 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.

As this is a multi-country 2 Stans trip, your Kyrgyzstan National Escort from Wendy Wu tours will you be with you from the moment you land in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan until you fly out of Tashkent, Uzbekistan for Dubai.

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.

Packing List and Climate

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

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.

Temperatures for most of your time spent in Uzbekistan and Bishkek in Kyrgyzstan 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 Bishkek on day 2 of the tour, however it would be useful to bring one with you when packing.

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 5kg. 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 AU\$300 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. 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.

Altitude

Most of your touring in Kyrgyzstan is at an altitude between 2500 and 3300 metres above sea level. At these sort of altitudes, Altitude Sickness is a risk. Symptoms may include dizziness, fatigue, nausea and shortness of breath. It is recommended that travellers utilize their first day in high-altitude destinations to acclimatise. Staying hydrated, eating light meals and following a very light schedule will all help. We recommend that any symptoms that are unusual should be brought to the attention of your guide. Your guide will be extremely well-trained in dealing with its effects – taking it easy and taking some time to acclimatise are the best ways to prevent and combat it. Serious cases, meaning that you must descend immediately, are rare.

There are no specific factors, such as age or fitness, that can cause you to suffer from. Altitude Sickness can affect anyone at any time and symptoms may vary. In some instances, a short spell on oxygen can help enormously. There is medication - that can help treat and prevent symptoms. Consult a doctor before taking any of these medications, before engaging in strenuous activity at high altitude and regarding any necessary vaccinations in plenty of time before travelling.

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

Before You Leave

We strongly recommend registering your travel plans with 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 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.

Last updated: January 2020