

Road to Samarkand Tour Dossier

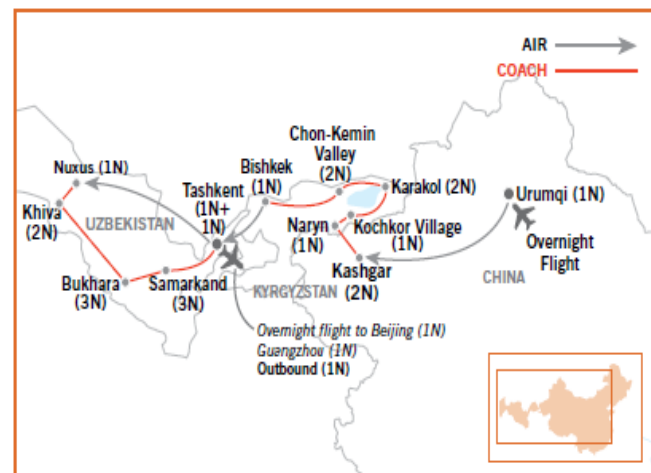
Immerse Yourself Tour | 26 Days | Active

Urumqi - Kashgar - Naryn - Kochkor Village - Karakol - Chon-Kemin Valley -
Bishkek - Tashkent - Nukus - Khiva - Bukhara - Samarkand - Guangzhou

Journey through the heart of Central Asia crossing beautiful deserts and mountain landscapes. Discover ancient cities full of intricate Islamic architecture, thriving bazaars and mystical old-world atmosphere, all linked with the legends of the Silk Road.

Tour Highlights:

- **Urumqi** - Heart of the Uygur Autonomous Region of Xinjiang
- **Kashgar** - For two millennia, a centre of trade in Central Asia
- **Naryn** - Gateway to Tashkent
- **Kochkor Village** - Kyrgyz farming village
- **Karakol** - Former Russian military outpost
- **Chon-Kemin Valley** - An area which offers spectacular views of the valley and is popular for its natural beauty
- **Bishkek** - Capital of Kyrgyzstan
- **Tashkent** - Cultural centre of Central Asia
- **Nukus** - Renowned art collections of the Svaitskiy Museum
- **Khiva** - Ancient city with a turbulent past
- **Bukhara** - A historic city during the Persian Empire
- **Samarkand** - Evocative skyline of domes and minarets
- **Guangzhou** - A metropolis situated along the Pearl River



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
- All sightseeing and entrance fees
- All transportation and transfers
- English-speaking National Escort (if your group is 10 or more passengers)
- Visa fees for Australian passport holders

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

Immerse Yourself Tours

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

- Walking through classic sites
- Unique cultural experiences and encounters
- Off the beaten track destinations

Active

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

Our National Escort and local guides will always endeavour to provide the highest level of service and assistance; however, they cannot be expected to cater for customers who are unfit to complete the itinerary. The more difficult aspects of this itinerary involve areas of high altitude, very long driving distances and basic accommodation. The information below also has estimates of driving times, distances and the altitude reached each day. This adventurous tour uses basic accommodation called 'home stays' in local people's homes or guest houses in Kyrgyzstan. The more difficult aspects to consider are the poor road conditions and sightseeing at altitude. Please refer to your Travel Guide for more information.

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

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

Altitude

This itinerary visits areas of high altitude. If you have an existing respiratory, vascular or coronary condition, we recommend checking with your doctor before undertaking this itinerary. The following parts of the itinerary have high altitude:

1. Driving over the Torugart Pass at 3,750m, visiting Tash-Rabat at 3,050m, passing through Ak-Bejit Pass at 3,282m

2. Driving through Dolon Pass at 3,030m

AMS (Acute Mountain Sickness) occurs in some people when they travel to altitudes over 3,000m. Mild symptoms of AMS include dizziness, fatigue, nausea or loss of appetite, breathlessness or headache. These usually develop over the first 36 hours at altitude and not immediately on arrival. AMS symptoms are experienced by people of varying ages and levels of fitness, and usually the symptoms will subside after a day or so. If symptoms worsen, you should seek medical advice and descend in altitude immediately. It is recommended to drink more water, non-alcoholic and non-caffeinated drinks and avoid exertion after arriving in altitude over 3,000m.

Making sure you are well hydrated (by drinking lots of water and refraining from alcohol/caffeine) before and during the tour, as well as exercising to improve your aerobic fitness before you leave, are generally considered to be excellent ways to prevent or alleviate the severity of mild AMS. If you smoke, your doctor will probably also advise you to stop several weeks before your tour. If you have an existing respiratory, vascular or coronary condition, we recommend checking with your doctor before undertaking this tour. Take this Tour Dossier with you to your appointment to explain the altitude at which you will be travelling. Information on AMS can also be found at http://www.travelvax.com.au/resource_files/Travel-Tips---Altitude-Sickness.pdf

Country Profile: China

China's civilization is the oldest in the world and has a history dating back over 5,000 years. With 56 ethnic groups, 22 provinces and 8 major dialects, China has a rich and varied culture and way of life. It is home to a wealth of tourist sights and cultural relics, which entice our guests to return repeatedly to this exciting destination

Country Profile: Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan

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

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 whilst maintaining the integrity of your trip

1. The flights between Kashgar and Urumqi are operated on a loop system, meaning one plane will fly up and down several times a day. Unfortunately, this means that any delays are passed on to all later flights and flight departure times are extremely subject to change! Your National Escort/Local Guide will phone the airport to check the situation during the day and keep you informed of any changes.
2. As this tour visits Kashgar on a week day, we are unable to visit the renowned Sunday Bazaar and Animal Market in the height of activity, however we will have the opportunity to explore the charms of this historical city, including the sites of these famous markets without the large crowds, which we believe will only enhance your experience of Kashgar. You will however experience the Sunday Animal Market in Karakol, though smaller in scale, it is just as interesting.

Joining Your Tour

The tour is 26 days in duration including international flights. Travellers booked on 'Land Only' arrangements should make their own way to the starting point. Join the tour on Day 2 in Urumqi and end the tour on Day 25 in Guangzhou. Please refer to your final itinerary for more specific meeting instructions pertaining to your departure.

Important Information Regarding Flight Delays

Due to unforeseen circumstances, flights can be delayed, and therefore connecting flights may be missed. If you find yourself in this situation, please contact our China office on **+86 21 5888 5681** or **+86 159 0929 1082** (24 hours) to urgently advise your

arrival details have changed. Please ensure you have your trip number, tour name (both included in your final documentation) and new arrival details (flight number and arrival time) handy to pass on to our local office in China. This will ensure your National Escort/Local Guide can be informed of your most up to date information and an arrival transfer will be arranged accordingly. We will endeavour to arrange a transfer as soon as possible however, delays may occur.

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

Road to Samarkand Itinerary

DAYS 1 -2: AUSTRALIA TO URUMQI

Fly overnight to the city of Urumqi. On arrival, you will be met in the arrival hall by your Local Guide and/or National Escort from Wendy Wu Tours. Together with all other group members who may be arriving at a similar time, you will transfer approximately one hour to your hotel. A tour introduction will be held in the hotel either this evening or the next. Food and drinks will not be served at this meeting, it is simply an opportunity for your group to meet and learn more about travelling in China and Central Asia. Depending on your time of arrival, the rest of the day is yours to start soaking up the local culture with some leisurely sightseeing at the International Grand Bazaar.

Meals included: Dinner

Destination Information

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

International Grand Bazaar - A large market and store area, where you can purchase regional products from Xinjiang district as well as from around Central Asia. There is also an 80m sightseeing tower, a mosque and an opera theatre.

DAY 3: URUMQI TO KASHGAR

This morning drive approximately 2 hours to Tian Chi (Heavenly Lake). On arrival change to an 'environmental bus' at the bus park to drive a further 10 minutes up to the lake. You will be given the option to enjoy either a short boat cruise or a walk along the boardwalk at the lakes shore. Spend approximately 1 hour here, before returning to Urumqi. This evening transfer to the airport for your flight to Kashgar (flight duration 1 hour and 45 minutes). Upon arrival in Kashgar, you will be met by your Local Guide and transferred to your hotel.

Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Destination Information

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

Kashgar - A fabled city embracing a rich mix of people and cultures, where mosques and women with veils create a truly Central Asian atmosphere. It remains a centre of trade and therefore is developing to become a modern day oasis city; however the Old Town, with its narrow streets, retains its heritage. The town is flooded with foreign and domestic tourists each weekend, coming to see the renowned Sunday Bazaar and Animal Market. We will have the opportunity to explore the charms of this historical city, including the sites of these famous markets without the large crowds, which we believe will only enhance your experience of Kashgar.

DAY 4: KASHGAR

Enjoy a day of leisurely sightseeing in and around Kashgar involving 2 hours of walking during the morning and in the afternoon touring by bus. Begin with the elegantly tiled Tomb of Abakh Hoja, which was built in 1640 to reflect the artistic style of Samarkand.

Afterwards return to the heart of the city to visit the Id Kah Mosque before exploring the old alleys that intertwine around Id Kah Square. See artisans producing copper pots, traditional musical instruments, carpet and kilim rug sellers and carpenters making colourful children's cots.

Please watch your valuables within the market streets near Id Kah Mosque. ***Ladies should bring a scarf from home, as you are required to cover your head at some attractions today.***

Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Destination Information

Tomb of Abakh Hoja - Located on the outskirts of town, this tomb was built by Abakh Khoja, a powerful ruler in the

17th century. The tomb is a major pilgrimage destination as it is considered one of the holiest Muslim sites in Xinjiang district.

Id Kah Mosque - The largest mosque in China, Id Kah is located on the central square in Kashgar City. Originally built in 1442 as a small structure, it has been renovated and enlarged to create today's size and scale. The complex is 16,880 square meters in size, and comprises of a courtyard, Hall of Prayer and the Gate Towers.

DAY 5: KASHGAR TO NARYN

Maximum altitude reached today 3,750m

Ak-Bejit Pass 3,282m

Tash-Rabat altitude 3,050m

Accommodation - Guest House

Travel today from China to Kyrgyzstan ascending in altitude as you cross the border and the Tian Shan Range (Heavenly Mountain) via the Torugart Pass, which forms a natural divide between the two old rival cities.

After breakfast, check-out from the hotel and drive 50km to the first checkpoint where each individual passenger must go through immigration procedures (make sure you get an exit stamp). You may be required to do a health check here as well where they will take your temperature. Your luggage will also be removed from the bus and scanned. No photographs are to be taken at any of the checkpoints.

You will then reboard the group bus and continue driving approximately 100km on a winding and rough road to the top of the pass - this is a popular route with large cargo trucks, which keep the road surface in bad condition and cause early morning traffic jams as trucks queue up to cross the border. From here, depending on the road conditions you may need to walk for approximately 100m, carrying your own luggage to the Kyrgyz border. You will have two passport checks at this point. You will meet your Kyrgyz Local Guide and board mini buses for the journey to Naryn.

After approximately 20 minutes you will arrive at the Kyrgyz customs checkpoint where you may have your bags searched thoroughly and then go through immigration procedures (make sure you get an entry stamp). Drive for 1 hour and 30 minutes to Tash Rabat Caravanserai, which has been restored to its former glory and then travel another 2 hours and 30 minutes onto Naryn for an overnight stay.

This is a very long day and the road to Naryn is quite bumpy and dusty, although you will be passing through a scenic, interesting, and memorable region. Temperatures leading up to the pass through to Naryn will be cold all year round, so rug up for this day as you will probably be above the snow line for most of the day.

Please note the maximum altitude on this itinerary will be reached today at 3,750M. All passengers should stay well hydrated to acclimatise to the higher altitude.

Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Destination Information

Torugart Pass - Favoured by the trade caravans of the Silk Road and by the marauding horseback armies of Genghis Khan. Then came the 'Great Game' era, when the British and Russian Empires competed to gain influence and territory through Central Asia, so they could in turn influence natural riches of the Indian Subcontinent and the Middle East. During this time, the Russians built the first modern road across this pass in 1905, making it the main border and trade route. However, in the days of the USSR, the Torugart Pass became a highly sensitive security point, with the Soviets convinced China would use this route to invade. The local people on both sides were subjected to military restrictions on their movement, even around their own villages. This border tension has eased since the breakdown of the USSR, although even as recently as 1999, the Kyrgyz border was guarded by Russian frontier troops. They are now being replaced with Kyrgyz guards.

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

DAY 6: NARYN TO KOCHKOR VILLAGE

Maximum altitude reached today Dolon at 3,030m

Accommodation – local home stay

This morning drive north approximately 2 hours in duration (115km) on a partly sealed but bumpy road past the Song Kul and Kara Kajur rivers towards Issy Kul. The landscape here in eastern Kyrgyzstan is made up of dramatic valleys and high mountain passes and whilst crossing the Dolon Pass today the altitude will reach 3,030m. After a traditional lunch served in a local family's yurt continue driving for a further hour (45km) to the village of Kochkor. You will be able to view a demonstration on how the traditional Kyrgyz wool carpets, called 'shyrdak', are made and stay overnight in local homes here, experiencing the hospitality of the local culture and dinner.

Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Destination Information

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.

DAY 7: KOCHKOR VILLAGE TO KARAKOL

Please note that this marks a return to standard hotels.

Depart Kochkor Village and travel approximately 4.5 hours (230km) to Karakol, visiting the village of Bokonbayevo, located close to the south eastern shore of Issy Kul, en route. Enjoy lunch with a local Kyrgyz family before watching a demonstration of the traditional practice of eagle hunting. This afternoon continue to the Russian town of Karakol, where you will proceed to your hotel and check-in for a two-night stay.

Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Destination Information

Issy Kul - This stunning lake is one of the largest in the world, measuring at 170km long, 70km across and has a depth of 695m. Explorers from the 19th century marvelled at it, one calling it 'a blue emerald set in a frame of silvery 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. The name of the town has alternated between Karakol and Przhevalsk several times over the past century. The Russian explorer, Nikolai Przhevalsky died here in 1888 of typhoid while preparing for an expedition to Tibet, thus the city was renamed Przhevalsk in his honour. After local protests, the town returned to its original name in 1921, then again to Przhevalsk in 1939 and finally restored to Karakol in 1991 with the fall of the Soviet Union.

DAY 8: KARAKOL

Rise early this morning and visit the colourful animal market, explore the interesting Przhevalskii Museum and tour a Chinese mosque. Also, visit the striking Holy Trinity Orthodox Cathedral, which was completed in 1895. All touring this morning is at a comfortable pace. In the afternoon, travel to the Valley of the Flowers and Jety-Orguz where you can enjoy a light hike through the magnificent canyon of red sandstone. Sightseeing in the canyon involves 3 hours of leisurely walking on a bush track. Although this is a gentle hike, you will need to climb some hills and slopes and will be walking over uneven ground at altitude. If you take part in this activity, you must be able to complete it independently otherwise, you will need to wait on the bus.

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

We recommend you wear closed shoes today for the visit to the animal market and take a warm jacket for the hike this afternoon.

Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Destination Information

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.

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

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.

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

DAY 9: KARAKOL TO CHON-KEMIN VALLEY

Today enjoy a gentle hike at Semenov Gorge for approximately 1 hour in duration. You will need to climb some hills and slopes with moments of walking over uneven ground. All passengers who take part in this activity must be able to complete it independently otherwise you will need to wait near the bus. Drive 2 hours along the northern shore of Lake Issy Kul and enjoy lunch at Cholpon-Ata. This afternoon cruise on Issy Kul and view the stunning, alpine scenery. It can get cold on the 1 hour cruise so we recommend you bring a warm jacket. Afterwards, explore the nearby petroglyphs of ibex, wolves and deer that date back to the 8th century at the open-air museum. Continue a further 2 hour drive to Chon-Kemin Valley for a two night stay.

Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

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.

Call 1300 727 998 to speak to a Reservations Consultant

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

DAY 10: CHON-KEMIN VALLEY

This morning enjoy a leisurely walk in the foothills of the mountain that surround Chon-Kemin Valley (approximately 3 hours in duration) and experience traditional Kyrgyz village life. If you do not wish to take part in this activity, you will have time free at leisure at Ashu Village. Return to the village for lunch before continuing your exploration of this untouched piece of Kyrgyz countryside, take time out to appreciate the captivating views of the valley floor below.

Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

DAY 11: CHON-KEMIN VALLEY TO BISHKEK

Depart this morning and drive 2 hours and 30 minutes to Bishkek. Stop en route to see Burana Tower, a monument from the 11th century. Upon arrival in Bishkek, visit Ala-Too Square and Oak Park. In the evening, enjoy a traditional folklore performance with your dinner.

Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Destination Information

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

DAY 12: BISHKEK TO TASHKENT

This morning 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 fresh water rivers.

Although this is a gentle hike, you will need to climb some hills and slopes and be walking over uneven ground at altitude; during October, the days are shorter and the afternoons much cooler, therefore your time walking through the National Park may be limited. All participants who take part in this activity must be able to complete it independently otherwise you will need to wait on the bus.

Later, transfer 1 hour to the airport for your evening flight to Tashkent, Uzbekistan (flight duration is 1 hour). Upon arrival in Tashkent, you will need to clear Customs and Immigration and some delays can be expected here. After

these formalities, you will be welcomed by your Uzbekistan guide and transferred to your hotel for an overnight stay.

Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Destination Information

Ala Archa National Park - Ala Archa translates as "Bright Juniper" from the Kyrgyz language and the whole gorge is covered with various trees including the main one juniper.

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

DAY 13: TASHKENT TO NUKUS

This morning transfer to Tashkent airport and board your flight to Nukus (2hours 20 minutes in duration). On arrival, enjoy leisurely sightseeing today including a visit to the Savitskiy Museum, home to Soviet art collections. This afternoon explore the historical monuments at Mizdahkan, a Hojeli Village, and a 30 minute drive away. Our coach will park at the foothills to the cemetery and it is a 10 minute walk up hill to these sites. Spend 1 hour here before returning to Nukus.

Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Destination Information

Nukus - A Soviet purpose built city with wide boulevards and soviet style buildings in the middle of a desert. It is now Uzbekistan's sixth largest city.

Savitskiy Museum - Home to one of the finest collections in Soviet avant-garde art from the 1920's and 1930's. This collection by dissenting artist during the Stalinist period has survived due to its remote location.

Mizdahkan - This 4th Century necropolis is located on three hills spanning 2 kilometres in length. Today this complex displays different periods, styles and types of tombs and visited by thousands of pilgrims to prevent the end of the world.

DAY 14: NUKUS TO KHIVA

Today drive 5 hours and 45 minutes to the ancient city of Khiva. Stop en route to visit numerous desert fortresses dating from 1st Century including ChalpiK Kala, Kizil Kala, Toprak Kala Fortress, Ayaz Kala and Kyrk-Kzy Kala. Sightseeing at these various fortresses involves a total of 2-3 hours on foot over rough and eroded ground.

Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Destination Information

ChalpiK Kala - Known as the Tower of Silence standing high on top a hill. According to ancient beliefs, ChalpiK Kala was also used for burial rituals.

Toprak Kala Fortress - An excavated ancient town dating from the 1st Century and a former residence of the Khoesm Khan comprising the ruins of a castle, towers and dwellings.

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

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

DAY 15: KHIVA

Explore this ancient city today with leisurely sightseeing for 4 to 5 hours on foot. Visit Kukhna Ark Fortress, the turquoise-tiled Islom-Huja, the Amir-Tur Medressa and the Tash Hauli Palace. 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.

Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

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.

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

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

DAY 16: KHIVA TO BUKHARA

This morning checkout of your hotel and drive approximately 9 hours (480km) to Bukhara. Upon arrival check into your hotel for three nights.

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

Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Destination Information

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

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

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

DAY 17: BUKHARA

Today explore the many interesting sites within the city including the unique and legend filled Kalon Minaret. After

exploring the Ark of Bukhara, visit the Bolo Hauz Mosque. Later this afternoon visit a local bazaar and the Chor Minor. Sightseeing around the central city, with approximately 5 hours of leisurely walking around these sites.

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

Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Destination Information

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

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

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

Chor Minor - A madrasa with four minarets built in 1904. Although this madrasa is not as aged as others in the city, it's simple yet striking design of blue tiles against the desert skyline has made it one of the most notable sights in Bukhara.

DAY 18: BUKHARA

This morning venture into the labyrinthine old town, following the cobbled alleys and ancient shop fronts to the delightful Lyabi-Hauz Plaza, located in the centre of Bukhara. There will be sightseeing around the central city, with approximately 4 hours of leisurely walking around the sites. Afterwards visit the summer residence of Emir and enjoy a cultural folk show this evening. Photo fees may be payable at most attractions you will visit in Bukhara.

Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Destination Information

Lyabi-Hauz (or Labi-Hauz) - 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.

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.

DAY 19: BUKHARA TO SAMARKAND

This morning drive to Shakhrisabz, located approximately 80km from Samarkand. Explore the city for 1 hour and 30 minutes visiting sites such as the remnants of Ak-Sarai Palace, Dorus Tilavat seminary and Kok-Gumbas Mosque.

After lunch, drive approximately 5 hours (290km) by car along the mountain road (each car will seat three tour participants) to Samarkand. Upon arrival check into your hotel for a three night stay.

Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Destination Information

Shakhrisabz - This city is 2700 years old and has played a major role in the history of the Central Asian region, mostly due to Shakhrisabz being Tamerlane's hometown.

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. The ruins will give you an idea of the grandness and size of the project.

Dorus Tilavat Seminary - The original burial complex of Timur's ancestors.

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'.

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

After Alexander's reign, the city fell under the rule of the Persian Empire, and became the capital of the Mongol Prince Tamerlane in the 13th Century. The finest builders, craftsmen, philosophers and scientists were invited to Samarkand and the reputation of its refined civilisation grew until Samarkand was a city of legend and wonder

along the Golden Road. From here the Silk Road diverged; east to China, south to India and west to Persia.

DAY 20: SAMARKAND

Today explore some of the most significant sites in Samarkand and its city centre, involving approximately 6 hours of leisurely walking. Visit Timur's Guri Amir Mausoleum and Registan Square, the most spectacular architectural ensemble in Central Asia and heart of the city. Later, visit Shah-I-Zinda and Bibi-Khanum Mosque before returning to your hotel. *Photo fees may be payable at most attractions you will visit in Samarkand, approximately 14USD in total.*

Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Destination Information

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

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

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

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

DAY 21: SAMARKAND

This morning visit a papermaking workshop located in the Konigil village. Return to Samarkand for 2 hours of leisurely walking visiting the Ulugh Beg Observatory to see the 'stars above Samarkand'. Later this afternoon visit the

Mausoleum of the Prophet Daniil before enjoying some time free at leisure to relax. *Photo fees may be payable at most attractions you will visit in Samarkand.*

Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Destination Information

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

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

Mausoleum of the Prophet Daniil - The Biblical Prophet Daniil, known in the East as Hoja Daniyar, lived in 4-5th century BC. He was a descendant of Solomon tsar and was revered by the three-world religion. It is thought that Temur took parts of Daniil remains, namely a hand, to Samarkand.

DAY 22: SAMARKAND TO TASHKENT

This morning checkout of your hotel and begin the 6 hour journey (350km) to Tashkent, passing through the area of Tamerlane Gates en route. Upon arrival, check into your hotel for an overnight stay.

After a late lunch in a local restaurant, visit some of the historical sites around the city including the majestic 16th century Kukeldash Medressa, Kaffal Shashi Mausoleum, Khan Medressa, Khast Imam Complex including the Moyie Mubarek Library Museum and the Chorsu Bazaar and the Crying Mother Monument. Touring this afternoon involves several hours on foot.

Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Destination Information

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

Kaffal Ash-Shashi Mausoleum - The Mausoleum of Abubakr Kaffal Ash-Shashi is one of the most significant cultural and architectural monuments located in the old part of the city. He was considered the first Imam and preacher of Islam in Tashkent and the complex "Hazrat Imam" ("The Holy Imam") was named in his honour.

Khan Medressa - 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.

Khast Imam Complex - Named after the 10th Century Islamic scholar, famed for his knowledge of the Koran, Hadith and Islamic law. The complex was restored in 2007 and now the buildings (some that date back to the 16th century) show the splendour and grandeur of the original site.

DAY 23: TASHKENT TO BEIJING (OVERNIGHT FLIGHT)

This morning explore some of the famous sights around Tashkent. Visit the Museum of Applied Arts, wander through the 1966 earthquake memorial, Independence and Bunyodkor Squares (the former Halklar Dustligi squares), stop for a photo opportunity outside the Russian style Alisher Navoi Theatre and visit the Amir Timur Maydoni before exploring Broadway Street where you will see local artisans and painters.

Transfer to the airport later this afternoon to board your overnight flight to Beijing, China.

Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Destination Information

Museum of Applied Arts - Founded in 1937, the museum currently displays over 4,000 exhibits, highlighting the history of Uzbekistan's decorative art. There are samples of woodcarving, ceramics, minting, Jeweller's art, gold-embroidery art, as well as the samples of mass production of local industry of the past centuries.

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

Bunyodkor Square - Formerly named "Friendship of the People" this modern square was built after the Tashkent earthquake of 1966.

Amir Timur Maydoni - Founded in 1882 and originally called Konstantinovskiy 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 center.

DAY 24: BEIJING TO GUANGZHOU

Upon arrival into Beijing Airport, you will collect your luggage and make your way to the check in desk for your onward flight to Guangzhou (duration approximately 3 hours and 30 minutes). Once you arrive into Guangzhou, you will be transferred to the hotel and the remainder of the day is at leisure.

Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

DAY 25: DEPART GUANGZHOU

Enjoy leisure sightseeing this morning for approximately 3 hours, visiting the Chen Clan Family Temple, Six Banyan Tree Temple and neighbouring Shamian Island.

After a late checkout this afternoon, you will be transferred to Guangzhou Airport to board your onward flight home.

Meals Included: Breakfast and Lunch

Destination Information

Chen Clan Family Temple - Built between 1890 - 1894 this ancestral hall to honour family member past was constructed by a collective effort of people with lineage to the family name Chen from the Guangdong province. Today it showcases Chinese architectural design and fine arts and handicrafts.

Six Banyan Tree Temple - During the Northern Song Dynasty, the celebrated poet Su Shi visited Guangzhou's Baozhuangyan Temple and wrote the inscription 'Liu Rong' (Six Banyan Trees) because of the six banyan trees he saw there. It has since been called the Temple of the Six Banyan Trees. Built in 537AD, it is a renowned Buddhist cultural site. The temple enshrines three large Buddhist statues. The 184-foot pagoda appears to have nine stories; inside however, there are 17 levels. Because of the colourful exterior carvings, it is popularly known as the Flower Pagoda.

Shamian Island - Located on a sandbank and surrounded by water, Shamian Island is connected to the rest of the city by a series of bridges. From the 18th to the mid-19th century, it is the only place where foreign traders were permitted to set up their warehouses and factories. Walk through the paved streets, viewing the many western style buildings resembles European architecture and the many fascinating statues that are dotted around the island.

DAY 26: ARRIVE AUSTRALIA

Arrive home today.

ROAD TO SAMARKAND TRAVEL INFORMATION

Visas

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

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

Visa application forms for the Road to Samarkand tour and all relevant documentation are due in our office 90 days prior to departure; if received after this date your Uzbekistan visa will not be able to be processed in time (as it needs to be sent to the UK for processing along with the rest of the group as it is issued as a group visa) and for the China visa, urgent visa processing fees will apply. Passports will be returned with your final documentation 2-3 weeks prior to your group tour's scheduled departure. If you require your passport to be returned earlier, a \$15 courier fee will apply.

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

Insurance

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

Eating in China & Central Asia

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

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

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

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

In 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.

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

Accommodation

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

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

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

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

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

Transport

Coaches: Coaches with air conditioning are used on our group tours for city sightseeing, short excursions to the countryside and longer transfers where necessary. Main and inner city roads in China and Central Asia have a reputation for being very congested. For this reason, it may not always be possible to return to your hotel after sightseeing to freshen up before going to the restaurant for dinner. Roads in this region have generally been improved over recent years, but traffic and/or weather conditions may extend driving times. Road construction work usually covers an enormous section of road - not just one or two kilometres as you may be used to. For this reason, the timings listed in the sections above are approximations only.

Please note that seatbelts are not compulsory by law in China and therefore the Chinese people largely choose not to wear them. For this reason some vehicles may not be fitted with seatbelts or they may be hidden underneath protective seat covers. It is recommended that where seatbelts are available customers must use them and remain seated at all times while the vehicle is moving. If you have any concerns, please notify your National Escort/Local Guides.

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

Development in China & Central Asia

Although China & 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.

Public Holidays and Religious Festivals

If you are travelling within the below Chinese Public Holidays please note that celebrations last for several days and during these times some businesses will be closed and coach, air and train travel may be affected. Tourist attractions will be open, but may be crowded. Chinese New Year is on 16th February 2018 and 5th February 2019. Golden Week public holidays fall annually between 1-3 May and 1-7 October.

Ramadan, the Islamic festival of sacrifice will fall from the 15th May to the 15th June 2018 and 5th May to 4th June 2019. This festival is characterised by the faithful abstaining from consuming food and drink (including alcohol) between the hours of sunrise and sunset. After sunset, you will find the locals celebrate nightly with an iftar- a meal at sunset, which breaks the fast, followed by pre-dawn meal -Suhoor. Travellers are not expected to adhere to these customs, with food and drink available during daylight hours. Some businesses and tourist sites opening hours may be affected; though overall, there will be minimal disruption if your tour is travelling between these dates. Ramadan is an opportunity to travel through 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 museums or exhibitions, which demonstrates a craft or product unique to that region with pieces available to buy. We understand that souvenir hunting is not for everyone so we aim to take you to places, which hold local interest. We trust you will enjoy these opportunities to learn about local arts and crafts and understand their historical and cultural importance.

Group Size

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

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

Tipping Policy

Tipping while on holiday is common in most parts of the world and China and Central Asia is no exception. However, it is not always clear who it is appropriate to tip and how much. Furthermore, travellers may not have the right amounts of cash available at the right time. In order to avoid any inconvenience Wendy Wu Tours operates a tipping policy where a stated amount is given to your national escort at the beginning of your tour and tips are disbursed to local guides and drivers throughout your tour. The amount is designed to be at a reasonable level for travellers while being fair to the local people and includes a gratuity for the national escort.

If you are travelling in a smaller group with local guides only, then tipping is paid in each destination. To be fair to the guides we ask for slightly higher amounts per traveller with small groups.

We generally find that most customers appreciate the convenience of our tipping policy but we do recognize that it may not suit everyone. However, as this is a group tour we ask that everyone follows the same protocol to be fair to other group members and to ensure smooth operation of your tour.

Packing List and Climate

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

Luggage

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

Exchanging Cash

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

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

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

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

Personal Expenses & Optional Tours

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\$350 per week should be sufficient; however for those that cannot resist a bargain, consider allocating a higher amount.

Optional tours may be offered in each city you visit during your tour at an additional cost. These are not included in the standard itinerary and will only be available if time permits. Each option will be arranged locally by your National Escort/Local Guide.

In Uzbekistan, particularly in Khiva, Bukhara and Samarkand, camera fees are charged at all historic monuments. These fees range from 500 Sum to 5000 Sum at each location/entrance. Remember to allow for these extras when you are exchanging money because the activity/show/camera fee is collected in the local currency only. Please feel free to ask your National Escort/Local Guides when and where such extras could be expected so that you can allow for this when exchanging money.

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 with deposit documentation via email. This includes important information and links to access the visa application form and instructions sheet online (if applicable). Your final documentation pack will be sent to you approximately 2 weeks prior to departure.

Updated: 19 April 2018

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.