



JOURNEY THROUGH CENTRAL ASIA

Go Beyond | 28 Days | Physical Level 4

Bishkek – Chon-Kemin – Bokonbayevo – Karakol – Almaty – Dushanbe – Khujand –
Tashkent – Samarkand – Bukhara – Khiva – Ashgabat – Mary - Ashgabat

Travel from Bishkek to Ashgabat on this 28 day 'Five Stan' cultural experience. This in-depth tour will see you visiting the Silk Road gems of Samarkand, Bukhara and Khiva, the quirky Turkmenistan, colourful markets, fascinating villages and Swiss Alps type scenery. Retrace the footsteps of Marco Polo and Alexander the Great on this unforgettable Central Asian journey.

- Uncover the Silk Road's history
- Relax on Lake Issyk-Kul
- Witness fascinating eagle hunting
- Browse the colourful bazaars
- Explore the Exotic Khiva
- Discover ancient Samarkand

TOUR MAP



JOURNEY THROUGH CENTRAL ASIA TOUR INCLUSIONS:

- Return international economy flights, taxes and current fuel surcharges (unless a land only option is selected)
- All accommodation (3-4 stars, guest house & yurt camp)
- Meals as specified
- All sightseeing and entrance fees
- All transportation and transfers
- English speaking National Escorts (if your group is 10 or more passengers) or Local Guides
- Visa fees for Australian passport holders (please see visa section below for further information)
- Specialist advice from our experienced travel consultants

The only thing you may have to pay for are personal expenditure e.g. drinks, optional excursions or shows, insurance of any kind, customary tipping, early check in or late check out and other items not specified on the itinerary.

GO BEYOND TOURS:

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

PHYSICAL LEVEL 4:

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

‘Journey Through Central Asia’ is rated as a **physical level 4** tour. 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 some days driving distances are very long and it will take the whole day to reach your destination
- The 2 hikes will generally last around 1-2 hours at a time, sometimes on an incline and mostly on uneven ground
- There will be a few days of walking whilst sightseeing with 5 – 7 hours a day
- At Big Almaty Lake you will reach the highest point of this tour at 2,510m above sea level
- In Kyrgyzstan, there will be one night spent in a guest house in Chon-Kemin valley, which will have private facilities.
- In Kyrgyzstan you will stay overnight in a yurt camp in Bokonbayevo, Day 5. Yurts are the traditional home of nomads in Central Asia. They are made from a wooden frame and layers of felt and canvas erected on a wooden platform.

Of course, our National Escorts 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.

JOINING YOUR TOUR:

The tour is 28 days in duration including overnight international flights in both directions as this is the most likely flight option from Australia. Please note, some flights may depart and arrive on Day 2.

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, or when booking pre and post night accommodation with Wendy Wu Tours. Please email your international flight times to info@wendywutours.com.au so we can arrange your transfers accordingly.

Join the tour on Day 2 in Bishkek and end the tour on Day 27 in Ashgabat. Please refer to your final itinerary for more specific meeting instructions pertaining to your departure. An informal Welcome Dinner will be held on Day 2 of the itinerary. If you miss this due to your arrival time, all information will be provided to you at breakfast the following morning.

ITINERARY CHANGES:

It's 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'll make the best possible arrangements maintaining the integrity of your trip.

DETAILED ITINERARY

Day 1-2: Fly to Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan

Meals: D

Fly to Bishkek where upon arrival you will be met and transferred to your hotel for check-in. The remainder of the day is at leisure before an afternoon lunch and welcome meeting.

In the late afternoon, you will take a city tour and visit Manas Monument, Ala Too Square to watch the changing of the Guard of Honour. You will finish this city tour at Victory Square.



Destination Information

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

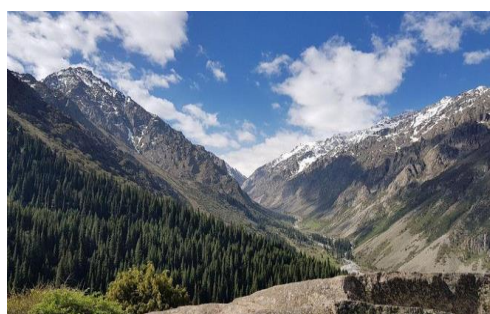
Ala Too Square – Formerly known as Lenin Square, the square was built in 1984 to commemorate the 60th Anniversary of the Soviet Era. Today the square serves as a site for state events. Its main centrepiece is a statue of Manas in celebration of the 20th anniversary of independence.

Day 3: Ala-Archa National Park

Meals: B, L, D

Today you will visit Ala-Archa National Park, located 40 km from Bishkek. It will take 1 hour to reach base camp where you will stop. During the drive you will travel from 750 to 2100 meters above sea level.

Here you spend 1 hour leisurely walking as you take in the picturesque scenery of snow-capped mountains and freshwater rivers. All participants must be able to complete this walk independently, otherwise it will be best to wait at the bus.



The afternoon is at leisure in Bishkek before dinner.

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: Chon Kemin National Park

Meals: B, L, D

This morning, you will travel to the 12th Century Burana Tower, and then continue as your journey takes a further 2 hours to Chon Kemin.

Chon Kemin is a quiet valley with small villages surrounded by magnificent mountains and a fir forest. Take in daily village life as you wander along the foothills and enjoy the views.

**Destination Information**

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

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

Day 5: Bokonbayevo

Meals: B, L, D

Today you will travel to the town of Kochkor, visiting a local workshop where they manufacture traditional Kyrgyz wool carpets, called 'shyrdak' or 'Ala-Kiyiz'. Continue further to Kyzyl Tuu Village which is known for its yurt production. Visit with a local family where you learn all about yurt making and the life of nomads.

Continue to Bokonbayevo Village, on the south shore of Issyk Kul Lake, to enjoy some leisure time.



Please note that our accommodation this evening will be in a traditional Kyrgyz yurt camp. There are no en-suite facilities in the yurt camp.

Destination Information

Kochkor - 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.

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

Day 6: Karakol

Meals: B, L, D

After breakfast drive to Karakol. You will be visiting Skazka Canyon, also known as Fairy Tale Canyon, which was named due to its bizarre rock formations, including depictions of snakes, dragons and hippopotamuses. Close to the canyon you meet with 'Berkutchi', a Golden Eagle Hunter to enjoy a demonstration and learn about nomadic traditions. Your next stop is at Barskoon Gorge to see the waterfall named 'Tears of Leopard'. The gorge is considered one of the most beautiful in the Issyk Kul area. Continue to Karakol.

**Destination Information**

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.

Day 7: Karakol

Meals: B, L, D

This morning you visit the striking Holy Trinity Orthodox Church and the architectural monument that is Dungan Mosque. A visit to N.M. Przhevskiy Museum completes this city tour.



In the afternoon, travel to Jety-Oguz Gorge to enjoy a light hike through the magnificent canyon of red sandstone, following its river up to the Flower Glade and back. Enjoy a home-cooked dinner with a local Dungan family, learning 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 they keep their traditional culture and cuisine alive.

Destination Information

Przhevskii 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 Kyrgyz language, referring to the red sandstone rock formations that resemble seven angry bulls. Famous for its hot springs and the beautiful scenery.

Day 8: Travel to Almaty

Meals: B, L, D

Rise early, travelling to the outskirts of town for the unforgettable Karakol Sunday Animal Market, the largest and most colourful in Central Asia.



Transfer for 4 hours, via beautiful scenery to the Kegen border crossing to Kazakhstan. After border formalities, travel further to the Charyn Canyon and its Valley of the Castles, named due to the pillars and rock formations. You can choose to hike down towards the valley floor and climb back up again or observe the canyon rim from above. Your visit here will be 2 hours.

Travel to Almaty where you will overnight.

Destination Information

Sunday Animal Market - Early on Sunday mornings Kyrgyzstan's biggest and most colourful animal markets takes place on the outskirts of Karakol. It is the place to be in Kyrgyzstan if you want to buy or sell farm animals - cows, horses, sheep, and goats are the primary objects of trade.

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

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

Day 9: Almaty

Meals: B, L, D

This morning take part in an orientation walk visiting Republic Square, Abai Opera Theatre, the Central Mosque, the Green Market, Zenkov Cathedral and Central State Museum.

In the afternoon you visit the turquoise Big Almaty Lake nestled in the Tian Shan mountains and see the Tien Shan Astronomical Observatory. Spend half the day relaxing in the scenic surrounds and return to Almaty in the afternoon.



Altitude at Almaty Lake is 2,510m above sea level.

Destination Information

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

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

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

Day 10: Almaty to Dushanbe

Meals: B, L, D

You have this morning at leisure before your flight to Dushanbe, Tajikistan.



Destination Information

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

Day 11: Dushanbe

Meals: B, L, D

Today we visit famous **Museum of National Antiquities**, featuring artefacts from Tajikistan's Islamic and pre-Islamic history (Greek/Bactrian, Zoroastrian, Buddhist and Hindu), the museum shows that Tajikistan was an important crossroad in Central Asia.

A city tour of the Tajik capital will include walking through the city's Botanical gardens, Rudaki Park and stopping at the Ismoil Somoni monument. In the afternoon visit Hissor town (23 km from Dushanbe) to see ancient fortress of Hissor - one of the most precious historical sites of Tajikistan.

Comfortably located near Dushanbe Hissor Fortress combines the traditional elements of power, trade and culture of the ancient Tajik nation. Visit Medrassah Kuhna (16th c) and Museum of Tajik Way of life there, 19c Medrassah nearby and mausoleum of Sufi saint Mahdumi Azam.



Destination Information

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

Ismoili Somoni Monument - Standing 25 meters high, this statue commemorates the founder of the Samanid

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

Day 12: Dushanbe to Khujand

Meals: B, L, D

This morning travel to Khujand. Khujand was continuously occupied for 2500 years and found – possibly on the site of an earlier settlement – by Alexander the Great. It is the furthest point he reached in Central Asia thus the city was named Alexandria Eschate (Alexandria the Furthest).



On the way to Khujand you will spend time at the breath-taking **Lake IskanderKul**, that is surrounded by mountains, as you take in the memorable views. Continue to Khujand.

Destination Information

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

Day 13: Khujand to Tashkent

Meals: B, L, D

In the morning you will enjoy a tour of Khujand, taking in the city highlights. Start by exploring Pushkin Square with Kamoli Khudjandi Square, Timur Malik's fortress and Sugd Museum, then continue to the Muslihiddin Memorial Complex and Panjshanbe Bazaar which offers a wide range of goods. After lunch travel approximately 2 hours to Tashkent, crossing the border, Oibekand, into Uzbekistan on the way.



Destination Information

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

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

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 14: Tashkent

Meals: B, L, D

In the 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 their pastime. Your last stop will be to the Tashkent Metro, with its opulently decorated marble, granite and chandeliers.



Destination Information

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

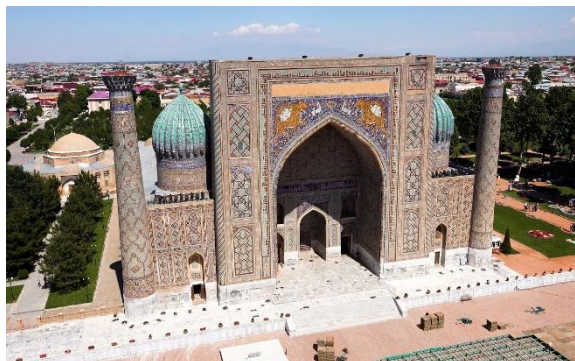
Kukeldash Madrassah - One of the biggest and most famous historical monuments in Tashkent. The 16th-century Islamic school is built of mud bricks decorated with majolica and painted ceramic tiles.

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

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

Day 15: Tashkent to Samarkand**Meals: B, L, D**

This morning you will drive 330km to Samarkand, where on arrival you will check in at the hotel. 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. You will have a half day tour of Samarkand to see the famous Registan Square which was for many centuries the heart of Samarkand. See the three beautiful madrassahs: the Ulug-Bek Madrasah built in the 15th century; the Tillya-Kori Madrasah built in the 17th century, and the Sher-Dor Madrasah, also built in the 17th century.

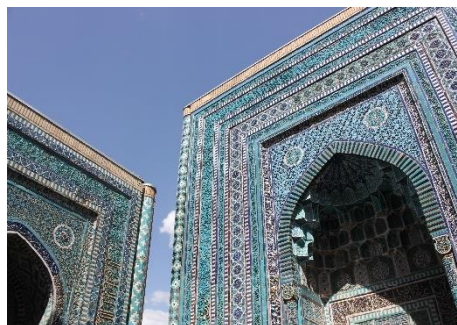
**Destination Information**

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 Tilla Qori madrassas. The interior and exterior facades of the madrassas are decorated with ornamental glazed brick, mosaics and carved marble. The square is considered an architectural gem representing the finest in Islamic Art and, most remarkably, a rare depiction of an animal's form. It was here that royal proclamations were read out and where justice was dispensed. The huge colourful bazaar is located nearby.

Day 16: Samarkand**Meals: B, L, D**

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



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.

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.

Day 17: Samarkand to Bukhara via Shakhrisabz

Meals: B, L, D

Approximately 90km south of Samarkand is the town of Shakhrisabz; the birthplace of the Great Tamerlane and your destination today. Upon arrival you will explore the city site of the remnants of Ak-Sarai Palace, Dorus Tilavat Cemetery and KokGumbas mosque.

This afternoon you will continue to Bukhara.

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

Due to safety reasons, buses are not allowed on the mountain pass from Samarkand to Shakhrisabz, therefore you will travel in smaller vehicles for this leg of the journey before travelling by coach again from Shakhrisabz onwards.



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.

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.

Day 18: Bukhara

Meals: B, L, D

Today you have a full day exploring fabulous Bukhara. This incredible city, one of the most famous names of medieval Islam, is home to hundreds of registered monuments. On today's tour we visit some of the main highlights as well 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. We get to 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 of the attractions you visit, costing approximately USD\$7 in total.

Destination Information

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.

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.

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 chaykhana.

Day 19: Bukhara

Meals: B, L, D

Continue your sightseeing of Bukhara with an out-of-town excursion to visit the Sitara-i-Mokhikhosa, the summer residence of the former Emir of Bukhara where you can see 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 the suburb of St Petersburg. Continue with an excursion to Bahaiddin Naqshbandi Mausoleum, a famous Sufi spiritual leader of this region in the 14th century. Bahaiddin 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

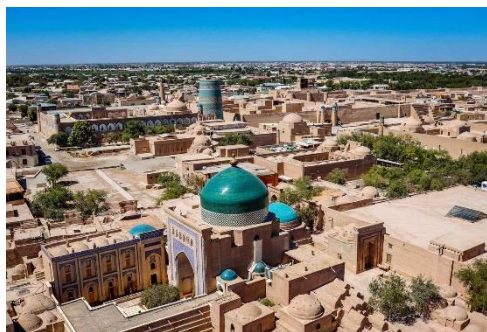
Sitora-i-Mokhikhosa – Dating back to the beginning of the 20th century, the summer residence of the Last Bukharan Emir is situated 4km outside the city. The main building of the palace consists of several reception halls and the emir’s private chambers. Among them is the white hall, shining with dazzlingly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

Day 20: Bukhara to Khiva

Meals: B, L, D

Set out for Khiva in the early morning across the famous Kyzyl Kum desert ("Red sands"). During this journey, watch in awe as the scenery changes from saksaul trees to the Amudarya riverbank. We will make several photo stops to see the desert flora and fauna. Upon arrival 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 21: Khiva

Meals: B, L, D

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

Participate in this leisure 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 22: Khiva to Ashgabat**Meals: B, L, D**

A long day of traveling today as we journey from Uzbekistan to Turkmenistan, covering approximately 265km. After the border crossing at Shavat, transfer overland to the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Kunya-Urgench - the once glorious capital of the medieval Khorezmshah Empire. We will visit the mausoleums of Turabek Hanum, Sultan Tekesh and Il-Arslan before continuing to, the minaret of Kutlug Timur and the fabled al-Mamun’s Academy of Sciences. Later, we will transfer to Dashoguz to catch an evening flight to the Turkmen capital city of Ashgabat.

**Destination Information**

Kunya-Urgench – Also known as Old Gurganj, this fascinating Old Town contains a series of monuments from the 11th – 16th centuries that testify the outstanding achievements in craftsmanship and architecture of the time.

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

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

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

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

Day 23: Ashgabat

Meals: B, L, D

This morning will be at leisure to get your bearings in this wonderful city.

Later, travel outside of Ashgabat to visit Arkadash stud farm and learn about the “winged” Akhal Tekkes horses. En route back to Ashgabat stop at the Kipchak Complex where the largest mosque in Turkmenistan and the family mausoleum of the country’s first president is located. You will visit the National Museum of History and Ethnology before returning to the hotel.

**Destination Information**

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

Day 24: Ashgabat to Mary

Meals: B, L, D

Today is an early start as you transfer to the airport for our flight to Mary. On arrival you will then head to the ancient and glorious city of Merv; a UNESCO World Heritage Site and one of the major archaeological sites of Central Asia. After touring and time to explore here, you will return to Mary to visit the local History Museum and view the wide range of archaeological artefacts that are display here.

**Destination Information**

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

Mary History Museum – Providing a glimpse into the history of this diverse city, this impressive museum showcases archaeological finds from both Ancient Merv and the Bronze Age; dating back to the 3,000BC.

Day 25: Darvaza Crater

Meals: B, L, D

In the morning you will catch a domestic flight back to Ashgabat to continue exploring this fascinating city. See the Monument and Park of Independence and the impressive Ertoghul Ghazi Mosque. This afternoon you will drive north to Darvaza and its captivating Flaming Crater. Arriving at the border between the northern and southern regions of Turkmenistan, turn off the main road for an exciting 8 kilometre desert drive. On arrival, you will take a leisurely walk around the crater as the sun sets. Finish the day eating a delicious nomadic camp-side in the serene atmosphere of the night sky and the lights of the “eternal fire”. Return to Ashgabat later this evening.

**Destination Information**

Monument and Park of Independence – A white-marble “Eiffel Tower”, commemorates the founding of Turkmenistan as an independent nation.

Ertoghul Ghazi Mosque – This prominent landmark in Ashgabat was built to honour Ertoghul Ghazi - the father of Osman I and founder of the Ottoman Empire.

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

Day 26: Ashgabat

Meals: B, L, D

Today will be your final day in Ashgabat, so make the most of it. Visit the Old Nisa Fortress; the former residence of the Parthian Empire. After lunch you will continue the fun at the colourful Russian Bazaar. Later, continue to the National Carpet Museum that exhibits an interesting collection of hand-made Turkmen carpets and various carpet objects.

**Destination Information**

Old Nisa Fortress – Residence of the former Parthian Empire from the 3rd century. Formed in an irregular pentagon shape these restored ruins comprise labyrinth walls and fortifications.

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

National Carpet Museum - This museum houses the largest collection of Turkmen handmade carpets dating back to the 18th century.

Days 27-28: Depart Ashgabat

Meals: B

Transfer to the airport for your overnight flight home.

JOURNEY THROUGH CENTRAL ASIA TRAVEL INFORMATION

VISAS:

Travel to Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan (for stays under 30 days) and Kazakhstan are visa free for Australian passport holders. Entry visas are required for all foreigners wishing to visit Turkmenistan and Tajikistan (e-visa)

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.

For the latest information on visa procedures, processing times and requirements, please kindly refer to our website <https://www.wendywutours.com.au/help-and-advice/passports-and-visas/>

Please note the visa procedures and requirements may change at any time. These changes are often made by the relevant embassy or consulate, Wendy Wu Tours acts as a third party and has no influence on the process of a visa.

Wendy Wu Tours does not accept responsibility for lost or undelivered items.

All information with regards to visas will be updated regularly on our website as we find visas process' are changing on regular basis

VISA AND IMMIGRATION NOTES:

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

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

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

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

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

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.

CURRENCY:

The 5 countries of Central Asia are very much cash-only economies. Please bring enough US Dollars in cash with you on your trip cash to cover your entire stay.

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

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

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

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

Your National Escort will remind you to do this before departure.

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

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

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

EATING IN CENTRAL ASIA:

Central Asian cuisine is diverse and flavoursome with a legacy stretching back thousands of years. It is important to keep an open mind and be adventurous. All meals (excluding drinks) are included in our fully inclusive Journey Through Central Asia group tours from the groups' arrival until the groups' day of departure. Please be aware that dishes selected for your meals reflect the cooking styles and signature dishes of the local area you are in.

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

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

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

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

LUGGAGE:

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

DEVELOPMENT IN CENTRAL ASIA:

Although Central Asia is developing quickly, it still lacks the international standards of civil infrastructure and tourist facilities. Concepts of personal responsibility are also different to those in the Australia. Consequently, tourist and public facilities may not uphold the same safety standards as in the Australia; for example, you may see a hole in the road without a warning sign or safety barricade. All 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 you National Escort/Local Guides.

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

Journey Through Central Asia is one of our most unique and adventurous group tours, tracing the ancient Silk Road, including the fabled city of Samarkand. We wish for you to embark on your journey through Central Asia with a level of tolerance and understanding. This region is remote, and conditions are not as developed as they are at home. It is essential that all customers recognise the demands of factors such as basic facilities, travelling at altitude, travelling long distances 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.

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.

You will be travelling through rarely visited and undeveloped areas of eastern Kyrgyzstan for a few days. This is a remote area with villages, nomadic settlements, very small towns and little in the way of tourist facilities.

Types of accommodation you may encounter on this tour include:

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

Guesthouse: These provide basic yet comfortable rooms in a small guesthouse. Every couple/single person will have their own room, with private western facilities. 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.

SOUVENIRS:

We want to be able to give you an opportunity to buy souvenirs so we include some stops at museums or exhibitions that 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 that hold local interest. We trust you will enjoy these opportunities to learn about local arts and crafts and understand their historical and cultural importance.

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. 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.

GROUP SIZE:

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

All our departures are guaranteed to operate with a minimum of 8 travellers booked (unless cancelled due to factors beyond our control). However, at our discretion we may operate departures with a smaller group size as we try to operate advertised departures wherever it is

viable to do so. For groups with fewer than 10 travellers, departures will operate with local guides only.

TIPPING POLICY:

Local tipping is customary in Asia. However, this can often lead to awkwardness in knowing when it is appropriate to tip and how much, as well as ensuring you have a suitable amount of change available at the time. For your convenience, with years of experiences in providing the best customer service, Wendy Wu Tours operates a kitty system on our Group Tours so your National Escort will look after this aspect of your trip for you. It also ensures that the amounts paid are reasonable for you but still fair for the local people. The amount is stated on each Group Tour page (USD\$150) will be advised again on your final documentation. Tipping is in USD and will be collected by your National Escort on the first day in each country (USD\$46 Kyrgyzstan & Kazakhstan, USD\$20 Tajikistan, USD\$53 Uzbekistan, USD\$31 Turkmenistan), and distributed throughout the tour on your behalf. Any additional tipping on any of our tours is welcomed at your discretion.

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. It may not always be possible to return to your hotel after sightseeing to freshen up before going to the restaurant for dinner due to long travelling days. Roads in generally been improved over recent years, but traffic, weather conditions and terrain 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.

PACKING LIST AND CLIMATE:

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

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

Modest clothing such as long lightweight pants and shirts that cover your shoulders for men and women is highly recommended. Headscarves for ladies are required for visits to mosques and madrassas throughout Central Asia.

Seasonal weather patterns can be quite unpredictable. Up to the minute information on worldwide weather can be found on www.weather.com

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

Wendy Wu Tours is committed to always providing a safe and healthy environment for all passengers. We work closely with our airline partners to take effective measures to protect you from contracting and spreading COVID-19, in accordance with legal requirements and government guidelines. Please follow the below link for more details on our COVID vaccination policy: <https://www.wendywutours.com.au/help-and-visas/covid-vaccination-policy/>

COVID SAFE:

Your safety and well-being will always be our Number 1 priority which is why we've instituted the most stringent COVID health and safety protocols on all of tours. As we continue to monitor current restrictions and operational impacts, these protocols will evolve, and we will provide detailed guidelines for your particular tour prior to departure. For further details please go to the following link <https://www.wendywutours.com.au/about-us/travel-with-confidence/>

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 including 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.

Updated: May 2023