



## ROAD TO SAMARKAND

Go Beyond Tour | 23 Days | Physical Level 3

Bishkek – Cholpon Ata – Karakol – Bokonbayevo – Naryn - Tash Rabat –  
Kochkor – Chong Kemin - Tashkent – Samarkand – Bukhara – Khiva -  
Tashkent

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

- Uncover the beauty of Samarkand
- Learn about traditional paper making
- Discover holy Bukhara
- Meet nomads in Kyrgyzstan
- Explore the Exotic Khiva
- Watch traditional eagle hunting

## TOUR MAP

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## ROAD TO SAMARKAND TOUR INCLUSIONS:

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- Return international economy flights, taxes and current fuel surcharges (unless a land only option is selected)
- All accommodation (3-4 stars hotels & guest house)
- Meals as specified
- All sightseeing and entrance fees
- All transportation and transfers
- English speaking National Escorts (if your group is 10 or more passengers) and Local Guides
- 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:

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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 whilst rewarding you with experiences of a lifetime. You will be accompanied by our dedicated and professional National Escorts and local guides, whose unparalleled knowledge will turn your holiday into an unforgettable experience.

### PHYSICAL LEVEL 3:

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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.

‘Road to Samarkand’ is rated as a **physical level 3** 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
- There will be a few days of walking whilst sightseeing with 5 – 7 hours a day. The hikes will generally last around 1-2 hours at a time, sometimes on an incline and mostly on uneven ground.
- In Kyrgyzstan you will stay overnight in a guest house that has private facilities.

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:

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This tour is 23 days in duration including overnight international flights in both directions as this is the most likely flight option from Australia.

For travellers booked on ‘Land Only’, the price includes your arrival/ departure airport transfers if arriving/departing on the start and conclusion date of your tour. Please advise your international flight times to our reservations team. Join the tour on Day 2 in Bishkek and end the tour on Day 22 in Tashkent. Please refer to your final itinerary for more specific meeting instructions pertaining to your departure.

### ITINERARY CHANGES:

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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 dinner and welcome meeting.

*An early check in on day 2 is included from 6am (including breakfast). If you require additional nights, please contact our reservations team.*



### **Destination Information**

**Bishkek** - The capital of Kyrgyzstan has a population of nearly 1,000,000, 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.

### **Day 3: Ala-Archa National Park**

Meals: B, L, D

Today you will visit Ala Too Square, the White House and Oak Park before continuing to Ala-Archa National Park, stopping at base camp. Within this time you will rise from 750 to 2100m above sea level.

Spend 1 hour on a leisurely walk taking in the picturesque scenery of snow-capped mountains and freshwater rivers. This is a gentle hike, that includes climbing some hills and slopes and walking uneven terrain. Participants must be able to complete this walk independently, otherwise you will be able to wait at the bus.



In the afternoon, continue with a city-tour in Bishkek, which will involve a 2-3 hours walking tour to the main sights of the capital. Visit Manas Monument in Philharmonic Square, then enjoy a walking tour around main Ala Too Square to watch the changing of the Guard of Honor ceremony. Continue to Manas Monument, the Old Square, Lenin's Monument, the Oak park and the Victory Square.

### **Destination Information**

**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.

**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: Cholpon Ata / Lake Issyk Kul**

Meals: B, L, D

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



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

**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.

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

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

**Day 5: Karakol**

Meals: B, L, D

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

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



This afternoon visit the interesting Przhevalsky Museum and examine the regions diverse religious influences with visits to the striking Holy Trinity Orthodox Church and the Chinese mosque.

**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.

**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 1895 on the ruins of a brick church. It is said that during construction, no nails or metal fastenings were used.

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

**Day 6: Jety-Oguz Gorge**

Meals: B, L, D

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

In the afternoon, travel to the Valley of Flowers and Jety-Oguz Gorge where you can enjoy a light hike through the magnificent canyon of red sandstone. Sightseeing in the canyon involves 1 hour of leisurely walking on a bush track. Although this is a gentle hike, you will need to climb some hills and slopes and you will be walking over uneven ground at altitude. If you take part in this activity, you must be able to complete it independently. Alternatively, you will need to wait on the bus.



In Jety-Oguz you can also enjoy horseback riding, visit a yurt and have a cup of tea or the Kyrgyz national beverage. Dinner will be provided with a local Dungan family in Karakol City. Learn the fascinating story of why this Muslim Chinese group immigrated to the region 140 years ago, how they made the area their home, and how families today keep their traditional culture and cuisine alive.

### Destination Information

**Sunday Animal Market** - Early on Sunday mornings, Kyrgyzstan's biggest animal markets takes place around 2km north of central Karakol. Typical of such markets, you'll observe locals bargaining over thoroughbred horses or bundling sheep into the back seats of cars amid the backdrop of white-topped mountains.

**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. It is famous for its hot springs and the beautiful scenery.

**Dungan People** – a group of Muslim people of Chinese origin residing in China and former soviet republics. members of this ethnic group also call themselves Hui.

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#### **Day 7: Bokonbayevo Village**

Meals: B, L, D

Drive around 3 hours to Bokonbayevo Village and watch a demonstration of Eagle Hunting. Return to your vehicle for your 3-hour journey with breath-taking views as you make your way to Naryn.



### 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 and is often how young eagles are trained.

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

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#### **Day 8: Tash Rabat**

Meals: B, L, D

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

After visiting Tash Rabat, you will return to Naryn for your overnight stay.



### Destination Information

**Tash Rabat Caravanserai** - For centuries, these lands connecting China, the Middle East and Europe, through countries like Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, were the superhighway of international trade. Caravans of goods travelled in all directions, carrying wares to be traded. Necessities or luxuries, they created a moving market that entire economies relied on. Mountains often provide either a backdrop or a foreground – beautiful but foreboding, especially when you think about how many people have passed through this region throughout history. Often Caravanserais, or travellers' inns, were built in mountainous valleys. The Tash Rabat Caravanserai is one of the best preserved on the old Silk Road from China to Istanbul.

**Day 9: Kochkor**

Meals: B, L, D

Transfer to Kochkor this morning, the centre of Kyrgyz national felt handicrafts.

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



Continue to Chon Kemin National Park, where upon arrival, you will have time to explore the village.

### Destination Information

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

**Day 10: Chong Kemin National Park**

Meals: B, L, D

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



In the afternoon, proceed to Bishkek airport to catch a flight to Tashkent. On arrival, you will check in at your hotel and enjoy dinner.

*Please note, the visit to Ashu Village is not guaranteed and is dependent on your flight time.*



### Destination Information

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

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

**Day 11: Tashkent**

Meals: B, L, D

In the morning, journey back in time exploring Tashkent's town sights; Barak Khan Madrassah and Kukeldash Madrassah and Tila Shaikh Mosque and their archives – known for rare copies of the Koran. Stop at Chorsu Bazaar – the oldest market in Tashkent.

In the afternoon you will be invited to the workshop of famous family of ceramists in Uzbekistan - Akbar and Alisher Rakhimov. Here you will learn about their pastime.



### Destination Information

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

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

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

**Day 12: Tashkent to Samarkand**

Meals: B, L, D

In the morning you will drive 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 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> millennium B.C., Samarkand was known to the ancient Greeks as Marakanda, and the 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 Madrassah built in the 15<sup>th</sup> century; the Tillya-Kori Madrassah built in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and the Sher-Dor Madrassah, also built in the 17<sup>th</sup> 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 Kori Madrassahs. The interior and exterior facades of the madrassahs are decorated with ornamental glazed brick, mosaics and carved marble. The square is considered an architectural gem representing the finest in Islamic Art and, most remarkably, a rare depiction of an animal’s form. It was here that royal proclamations were read out and where justice was dispensed. The huge colourful bazaar is located nearby.

**Day 13: Samarkand**

Meals: B, L, D

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



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

The remainder of the day will be at leisure.

### Destination Information

**Bibi-Khanum Mosque** - One of the most impressive historic mosques in Central Asia, construction on Bibi-Khanym was started by Timur in 1399 and completed shortly before his death.

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

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

**Day 14: Samarkand**

Meals: B, L, D

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



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

After lunch transfer back to Samarkand and spend the rest of day at leisure.

### Destination Information

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

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

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

**Day 15: Shakhrisabz**

Meals: B, L, D

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



Return to Samarkand this afternoon.

*Please note that coaches are not allowed on the route to Shakhrisabz so you will travel in cars.*

**Destination Information**

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

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

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

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

**Day 16: Samarkand to Bukhara**

Meals: B, L, D

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

Arrive in Bukhara this afternoon and check into your hotel, where you have the remainder of the day is at leisure.

**Destination Information**

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

**Day 17: Bukhara**

Meals: B, L, D

You will have a full day of 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 as some lesser known sights along the way. Bring a fully charged camera battery.



Today's sightseeing includes Lyab-i-Hauz ensemble - modern centre of traditional Uzbekistan, Nadir Devanbegi Madrassah, Khanaga and Magoki Attari Mosques, Poi Kalon Minaret and Mosque, see Madrassahs Aziz Khan and Ulugbek.

After lunch you will visit the Ark of Bukhara, Bolo Hauz Mosque and the Mausoleums of Ismail Samanid and Chashma Ayub. We will also visit Hunarmand UNDP Assisted workshops near Lyabi-Hauz, a chance to see traditional block printing, metal chasing, suzani embroidery, carving and gold embroidery.

*Women should bring a scarf from home, as you are required to cover your head at some attractions today. Photo fees may be payable at most attractions you will visit in Bukhara, approximately USD7 in total.*

**Destination Information**

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Day 18: Bukhara**

Meals: B, L, D

Continue your sightseeing of Bukhara with an out-of-town excursion to visit the Sitorai Mokhi-Khosa, 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 Petergof Palace in the suburb of St Petersburg.



Continue with an excursion to Bahauddin Naqshbandi Mausoleum, a famous Sufi spiritual leader of this region in the 14th century. Bahouddin 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.

**Destination Information**

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

**Day 19: Khiva**

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 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.

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

**Day 20: Khiva**

Meals: B, L, D

Khiva is made for walking. It is compact and well maintained 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 Kunya 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 19<sup>th</sup> century Tash Hauli Palace.

**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 12<sup>th</sup> 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.

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

**Day 21: Khiva to Tashkent**

Meals: B, L, D

Today you will transfer 1hour to Urgench airport for your flight to Tashkent.

Tashkent is one of the oldest and largest cities in Central Asia and has been the Uzbek capital since 1920. The city is very much a showpiece of Soviet and post-Soviet architecture.



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

You have the remainder of the day at leisure.

### Destination Information

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

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

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### **Day 22-23: Depart Tashkent to Dubai, then continue to Australia**

Meals: B

Early morning transfer to the airport for your flight to Australia via Dubai.

*Late check-out is not included. Additional nights' before and after your tour can be arranged. Please contact our Reservations team to book.*





## ROAD TO SAMARKAND TRAVEL INFORMATION

### VISAS:

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Travel to Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan (for stays under 30 days) are visa free for Australian passport holders.

Please be advised that your passport must have at least six months validity left on it when you arrive back into Australia.

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

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/>

### VISA AND IMMIGRATION NOTES:

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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.

Several 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:

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We strongly recommend that you take out a policy as soon as you pay your deposit. Wendy Wu Tours cannot in any way be made liable for any additional cost incurred by the customer on any tour due to the customer not having adequate travel insurance. We also 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 original.

## EATING IN CENTRAL ASIA:

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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 Road to Samarkand group tours from the groups' arrival until the groups' day of departure. Please be aware that dishes selected for your meals reflect the cooking styles and signature dishes of the local area you are in.

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

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

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

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

## LUGGAGE:

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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.

### GROUP SIZE:

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

### ACCOMMODATION:

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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. Types of accommodation you may encounter on this tour include:

**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.

### PORTERAGE:

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Please be aware that portorage is not included on the Road to Samarkand Tour. You will therefore need to be able to handle your own luggage within the hotel and when using transportation like trains and coaches.

### TRANSPORT:

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**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.

### TIPPING POLICY:

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

### DEVELOPMENT IN CENTRAL ASIA:

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Although Central Asia is developing quickly, it still lacks the international standards of civil infrastructure and tourist facilities. Concepts of personal responsibility are also different to those in Australia. Consequently, tourist and public facilities may not uphold the same safety standards as in Australia; for example, you may see a hole in the road without a warning sign or safety barricade. All our suppliers meet local safety standards as a minimum. We want you to have an enjoyable holiday, so we ask that you take extra care, use your common sense, refer to notices and follow advice from your National Escort/Local Guides.

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

### PERSONAL EXPENSES & OPTIONAL TOURS:

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**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.

## SOUVENIRS:

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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.

## PACKING LIST AND CLIMATE:

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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 madrassahs 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](http://www.weather.com)

## VACCINATIONS AND YOUR HEALTH:

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

## BEFORE YOU LEAVE:

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

## AFTER YOUR BOOKING:

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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 2024