

## SILK ROAD: THE FIVE 'STANS OF CENTRAL ASIA

(Uzbekistan-Turkmenistan-Tajikistan-Kyrgyzstan-Kazakhstan)

Depart 02 September 2019 - Small group touring



### Day 1: 02 Sept - Arrive – Tashkent

Upon arrival into Tashkent International Airport you will be met by our local guide and transferred to your hotel where you will stay for two nights. The day is at your leisure to explore Tashkent – the capital and largest city of Uzbekistan, known for its many museums and its mix of modern and Soviet-era architecture. In the evening we will have our welcome dinner.

### Day 2: 03 Sept - Tashkent

After breakfast, we start our tour from the Independent square and Amir Temur square located in the “new city”, the heart of Tashkent. We then travel to the old town visiting the Kukeldash Madrassah (the largest and best preserved Quran school in Central Asia) and Chorsu Bazaar. Next to Chorsu is the Madrassah of Barak-Khan where the Uthman Qur’an (VII) is kept. We also visit the Khast-Imam complex, Tilla-Shaiyh Mosque and the mausoleum of Kaffel-Shashi, one of the first Imams who died in 976/977. Dinner tonight is at a local restaurant.

### Day 3: 04 Sept - Tashkent – Urgench and Khiva

Today we have an early morning flight to Urgench, the capital of Khorezm province. We will visit Ichan Kala - a UNESCO World Heritage Site. At the center is the Juma Mosque with 212 wooden supports and minaret, and to the west is the Madrassah of Muhammad Amin Khan - the largest madrassah in Central Asia. We also visit the Kunya Ark Fortress known as the heart of the inner town, the Tower Kalta Minor, Tash-Khauli Palace, the Mosque Ark, the Minaret of Islam Khodja, and the Minaret of the main Vizir and Caravansaray of Allakhuli-Khan. After lunch, we continue to the Memorial of Pakhlavan Makhmud, the Khiva Bazaar, and the craft centers of Khiva. The evening is free for you to relax or explore more of the surrounds of Khiva.



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#### Day 4: 05 Sept - Khiva – Shavot border – Dashoguz – Kunya Urgench – Darvaza (360 km)

After breakfast we drive to the Uzbekistan-Turkmenistan border Shavot - Dashoguz checkpoint. You will be met by our local guide in Turkmenistan and drive to Kunya Urgench – the old capital of the Khorezm region and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Kunya Urgench is the largest historical and archaeological park in the north of Turkmenistan with numerous ruins and monuments. Great Muslim scholars like al-Beruniy, al-Khorezmiy and Avicenna once worked there. In this old city we visit the Portal of Caravan Saray, Il-Arslan Mausoleum the oldest standing monument of Kunya Urgench (12<sup>th</sup> C.), Mausoleum of Khorezm shah Sultan Tekesh, Horezm Academy (3-13<sup>th</sup> C.), Mausoleum of Turabek Hanum, Minaret of Kutlug Timur (14<sup>th</sup> C.), one of the highest minarets in Central Asia, the Mausoleum of Najmeddin Kubra (13<sup>th</sup> C.) and lastly the Mausoleum of Soltan Ali (15<sup>th</sup> C.). In the afternoon, we drive to Darvaza to see the flaming gas crater at sunset. Known locally as the "Door to Hell" or "Gates of Hell", the Darvaza gas crater is a natural gas field that collapsed into an underground cavern. Dinner tonight is a barbecue style feast and an overnight stay in tents at a camp site.



#### Day 5: 06 Sept - Darvaza – Ashgabat (260 km)

Today we drive to Ashgabat, the capital of Turkmenistan, and its many, many white marble buildings. Along the way we visit two other craters - one with water and the other with sulfur. We also stop to visit a Yerbent Nomadic village, where you can see the local way of life in the desert - Turkmen yurts, dromedaries and tandyr (“mud oven”).

#### Day 6: 07 Sept - Ashgabat – Tolkucha Bazaar – Nissa – Ruhy Mosque – Ashgabat

After breakfast, we drive to Altyn Asyr bazaar (formerly Tolkucha), the largest open air market in Central Asia. We will visit the National Park of Independence, Arch of Neutrality - a 75m high monument with a revolving golden statue of the first President Turkmenbashy, and “Alem” the World’s largest indoor ferris wheel. We then continue to the historical and archaeological site of Ancient Nissa - capital of Parthunisa, a sacred city and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The Parthian Empire was one of the most powerful and influential civilizations of the ancient world and a brilliant rival of Rome which prevented the expansion of the Roman Empire to the East.

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### Day 7: 08 Sept - Ashgabat – Mary – Farap – Bukhara



Today we have an early morning flight to Mary, the second largest city in Turkmenistan once known as the “Pearl of the East”. We visit the sites of the ancient towns that have perished and arisen many times from the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C. to 12<sup>th</sup> century A.D. including; Gyz Gala & Oglan Gala, Complex of Askhabs, Giaur Gala, Erk Gala, Soltangala, Soltan Sanjar Mausoleum, and Ibn Zeid Mausoleum. After the tour of Mary, we drive to Farap, a checkpoint where we cross the border and continue our trip to Bukhara.

### Day 8: 09 Sept - Full Day in Bukhara

After breakfast we start on a walking tour of Bukhara, the most complete example of a medieval city. We visit Lyabi-Khauz Ensemble, Magoki-Attori Mosque, Chor-Minor Madrasah, trade domes, Kalyan Minaret and Kalyan Mosque, the Miri-Arab and Ulugbek and Abdulazizkhan Madrasahs, Ark Fortress, Bolo-Khauz Mosque, Ismail Samani and Chashma-Ayub mausoleums.



### Day 9: 10 Sept - Bukhara – Samarkand

Today we visit Sitori-i-Mokhi Khosa - the summer residence of Bukhara's last emir with its unique mixture of Oriental and Russian architecture. We then visit the Mausoleum of Bahauddin Naqshband and the Chor-Bakr Necropolis - also known as the city of the dead. In the afternoon we take a high-speed Afrosiyob train to Samarkand.

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## Day 10: 11 Sept - Samarkand

Samarkand is the second largest city of Uzbekistan with evocative skylines of domes and minarets and a mixture of Iranian, Indian, Mongolian, and western and eastern culture. Today we visit Shakh-Zinda complex, a Necropolis which is probably one of the most significant religious complexes in Samarkand and monument of unique architecture in whole Central Asia. Lunch is at a traditional Uzbek house with master class of "Osh" cooking. After lunch we will visit the Registan Square and its three madrassahs - Ulughbek, Sherdor and Tilla-Kori. We also visit Gur Emir Mausoleum, the remains of Bibi-Khanym Mosque, the Siab Bazaar and Ulughbek observatory.. Dinner and night stay at the hotel.



## Day 11: 12 Sept - Samarkand – Panjikent (Jarteppa border) – Iskandarkul (220 km)

After breakfast we depart to Panjikent, towards Tajikistan. Panjikent is an ancient city and you can still see the ruins of the old Sogdian town founded in 5<sup>th</sup> century and abandoned in the 8<sup>th</sup> century by Arabs. To the west of Panjikent are the Sarazm ruins - an ancient settlement in Central Asia over 5000 years ago. Dinner and an overnight stay at the Saratog guest house.

## Day 12: 13 Sept - Saratog - Iskandarkul – Khujand (237 km)

Today we drive to Khujand, the second-largest city of Tajikistan. We will visit Istarafsan, a museum city once the ancient center of trade and crafts. In 2002 Istarafsan widely celebrated its 2,500 anniversary of the city. Today is a free day to look around Panjshanbe Market and opposite is the Sheikh Muslihiddin mausoleum.



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### Day 13: 14 Sept - Khujand – Isfara (Batken border) – Osh ( 390km)

Today we head to the Tajik-Kyrgyz border. At the Kyrgyz border the local guide will meet you and you will continue your way to Osh, the second largest city in Kyrgyzstan. We visit Sulayman Mountain, situated in the city center, considered a place of pilgrimage for local Muslims, because according to the legend, biblical prophet Solomon (Sulayman in the Koran) was buried at the foot of it.

### Day 14: 15 Sept - Osh – Bishkek

Today we a morning flight to Bishkek, the capital and largest city of Kyrgyzstan. We visit Oak Park, Ala-Too square, Kyrgyz National Philharmonic, Statue of Manas, Victory Square and Oriental market. After lunch transfer to the Ala-Archa National Park 40km away. You will visit alpine gorge through which the fast flowing Ala-Archa River runs, flanked by tall, snow-covered peaks with steep-sided, forested, mountain slopes. Optional hiking in the gorge.



### Day 15: 16 Sept - Bishkek – Chon Kemin (162km)

Today you will be transferred to Chon Kemin gorge. On route to the gorge you will visit Burana Tower, a minaret dating from the 11<sup>th</sup> century. You can climb to the top if you wish to experience the same view that Silk Road travelers saw themselves. Burana Tower served as a sign along the Great Silk Road to let travelers know there was a city and place to have a rest. Nearby you will see an open air museum of Balbans (stone warriors). These grave-stones look like warriors as they were made in honour of brave soldiers who died for their Motherland. On this night you will have the opportunity to enjoy a home stay from a Kyrgyz family. Optional horse riding and horse game.

### Day 16: 17 Sept - Chon Kemin – Kochkor (120km)

In the morning you will be transferred to Kochkor village. On the way we have a hiking tour to the Konorchek Canyons. In the Kochkor village a local family will show you how the national felt carpets are made. You can even learn the art of felt making and create your own carpet together with them!

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### Day 17: 18 Sept - Kochkar – Karakol (260 km)

6After breakfast we depart for the city of Karakol, a small town of green avenues and wooden cottages. On the way we pass along the southern coast of Lake Issyk-Kul, a stop at the canyons Skazka, and Jeti Oguz Rocks.



### Day 18: 19 Sept - Karakol – Charyn – Almaty (380km)

After an early breakfast we drive to the Kyrgyz-Kazakh border and to Almaty, the former capital of Kazakhstan and its largest city. We will visit one of the most popular places of Kazakhstan - Charyn Canyon, with its gorgeous red and orange sandstone layers. It is an amazing creation of nature that has existed for millions of years, picturesque and very diverse in geomorphologic aspects.



### Day 19: 20 Sept - Almaty

Today is a full day of sightseeing in Almaty. We visit the Park of 28 Panfilov Guardsmen, Zenkov Cathedral, Central State Museum of Kazakhstan and Republic Square. Enjoy a panoramic view of the city at Kok-Tobe Hill. We conclude with a farewell dinner at a local restaurant.

### Day 20: 22 Sept - Depart Almaty

Today you will be transferred to the airport for your onward journey.

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