



Rediscover the
meaning of travel

Tour notes

Turkmenistan – Navrus Bayram Festival

Tour Duration – 13 Days



Tour Rating

Fitness ●●●●○ | Off the Beaten Track ●●●●● | Culture ●●●●○ | History ●●●●○ | Wildlife ○○○○

Tour Pace - Busy

Tour Highlights

- ✓ Witness the splendid monuments of Ashgabat that bear testimony to the nation building ambitions of Niyazov
- ✓ Watch the fires light up the night sky while camping at the Darwaza Gas Crater
- ✓ Reflect on former glories at the ancient sites of Konye Urgench and Merv
- ✓ Join the locals for the Navrus Bayram Festival celebrations



Rediscover the
meaning of travel

Tour Map - Turkmenistan – Navrus Bayram Festival



Tour Essentials

- Accommodation:** Mix of hotels, basic lodges and camping.
Included Meals: Daily breakfast (B), plus lunches (L) and dinners (D) as shown in the itinerary.
Group Size: Maximum of 12
Start Point: Ashgabat
End Point: Ashgabat
Transport: 4WD, minibus, domestic flights
Countries: Turkmenistan



Rediscover the
meaning of travel

Turkmenistan – Navrus Bayram Festival

On the edge of the Silk Road and with a rich history stretching back millennia, Turkmenistan is a land that few have knowledge of. Dominated by forbidding desert and once the abode of fierce tribesmen renowned for their slave trading, the country today is characterised by sharp contrasts, from the futuristic building projects of the capital to remote communities living in tents among the sands. This thirteen day trip is a comprehensive journey through one of the most mysterious places in Asia. Starting in Ashgabat we combine both ancient and modern, visiting the monuments built by the previous ruler Turkmenbashi. In addition we will travel a short distance outside Ashgabat to join the local people in celebrating the Navrus Bayram Festival, the most important holiday in the entire region, before flying to Dashoguz and visiting the UNESCO listed site of Konye-Urgench, evidence of the former glories of this fascinating region. Perhaps the most exciting part of our trip is the excursion into the Karakum desert, camping at a flaming gas crater and stopping in isolated settlements to meet people who rarely see tourists. On returning to Ashgabat we visit the Parthian fortress of Nisa, before leaving the city for the mountains where we visit the town of Nohur, whose inhabitants are reputed to be descended from the armies of Alexander. We then travel through the remarkable canyon landscapes of Yangikala, to the pilgrimage site of Gozli Ata, where we spend the night in the company of local pilgrims. We will then continue to the town of Turkmenbashi from where we will fly back to Ashgabat. Turkmenistan is one of the most exciting countries in Central Asia and this pioneering trip takes you to all corners of the country, doing more than just scratching the surface but allowing you a detailed insight into its culture and history.

Tour itinerary notes

While our intention is to adhere to the day-by-day itinerary as printed below, a degree of flexibility is built in. Overnight stops may vary from those suggested and on occasions alternative accommodation, of a similar standard to that named below, will be used.

Tour Guide

Our guides are a key strength, chosen for their knowledge of and passion for the areas in which they work. All of our guides are carefully hand-picked, and are not just passing through these countries, but are usually locally born. Unlike some companies it should be noted we do not send a guide or tour leader from Undiscovered Destinations in the UK as we have every confidence in our locally appointed representative who is responsible for operating the tour on our behalf. Where possible you will have the same guide throughout your trip but on occasions it may be necessary to change the guide at one or more points during the tour.

Itinerary

Day 1 – Ashgabat

Arrive in Ashgabat and transfer to your hotel. Depending on your time of arrival, you may have the opportunity to explore the city. Overnight at Ak Altyn Hotel or similar.

Ashgabat

Ashgabat was a fairly insignificant town before the arrival of the Russians, who chose it as an administrative centre and began to develop it in the late 19th century. In 1948 it was hit by a powerful earthquake which almost completely destroyed the city, causing it to be completely rebuilt. Although reconstruction occurred during the Soviet era, it is Ashgabat's development since independence in 1991 which has given the city its very unusual character. A pet project of the then dictator Niyazov, Ashgabat was the focus of his 'nation building' efforts and as such is home to a bewildering array of monuments, most of them faced with white marble tiles that give the city an almost glittering effect. There are few cities in the world that are so linked to one man, and Ashgabat is a striking and unusual place, at odds with other Central Asian cities but fascinating in its own right.



Rediscover the
meaning of travel

Day 2 – Ashgabat

After a briefing with your tour guide spend the day exploring Ashgabat including Independence Park and Neutrality Arch with time to enjoy a traditional Turkmen lunch. Ashgabat is a city of grandiose monuments, giving an insight into the nation building efforts that took place after the breakup of the Soviet Union, and a good place to start getting to grips with Turkmenistan. Overnight at Ak Altyn Hotel or similar. (BL)

Day 3 – Mary (360 kms)

After breakfast we travel east stopping first at the Seyitdzhemaliddin Mosque at Anau; dating from the 15th century the mosque was badly damaged by an earthquake in 1948, but has since been restored. We will also visit the remains of the once important city of Abiverd, before arriving in Mary in time to visit the Regional Historical Museum. Overnight at Hotel Mary or similar. (B)

Day 4 – Merv - Ashgabat

Visit the ancient site of Merv, the most important in Turkmenistan dating back 2500 years, with an array of surviving mosques and citadels. Return to Mary for a visit to the bazaar before taking a late evening flight to Ashgabat. Overnight at Ak Altyn Hotel or similar. (B)

Merv

The site of Merv is spread over one hundred square kms and holds the remains of a number of ancient cities from across the centuries. At various times it has been home to Zoroastrians, Buddhists, Christians and Moslems and has been controlled by a number of dynasties including the Timurids. Merv's attractions are wide and varied – mausoleums of former rulers and Sufi scholars, old Seleucid citadels, traditional 'ice houses' and the remains of ancient walls. Merv was comprehensively sacked by the Mongols in the 13th century but rose to prominence again under the Timurids two hundred years later. With so many influences, it is a microcosm of Central Asian history and a delight to explore.

Day 5 – Navrus Bayram Festival- Kow Ata Underground Lake

This morning we travel out of Ashgabat to join in the celebrations of the Navrus Festival; this is held to mark the most important holiday in the entire region. In the afternoon we visit the Kow Ata underground lake before returning to Ashgabat for a night time tour of the city. Overnight at Ak Altyn Hotel or similar. (B)

Navrus Bayram Festival

The Navrus Festival is a celebration of the spring equinox and is recognised as the most important holiday throughout the region. It is a joyful occasion where the local people gather dressed in costumes representing the different clans from around the country, to enjoy a variety of different foods and a range of time-honoured entertainments including horse riding and eagle flying demonstrations, with exhibitions of traditional dancing.

Day 6 – Konye- Urgench- Dashoguz

This morning we take a flight to Dashoguz and on arrival transfer by road to Konye- Urgench, an ancient capital of the land of Khorezm, with beautiful mausoleums. After visiting its key sites we return to Dashoguz to visit the lively bazaar. The rest of the day is at leisure with no organised activities. Overnight at Hotel Dashoguz or similar. (B)

Konye-Urgench

Konye-Urgench was the capital of the ancient land of Khorezm in the 10th century, but has not had the easiest time since then. Falling first to the Seljuks and then to their successors the Khorezmshahs, it enjoyed a brief period as the centre of Islamic Central Asia, replete with numerous beautiful mosques and medressas. This was not to last long however. In 1221 it was attacked by the armies of Genghis Khan, who besieged the city for six months before destroying it, leaving little but ashes and bodies. 'Konye-Urgench became the abode of the jackal and the haunt of the owl and the kite', wrote one local historian. Having rebuilt itself it was



Rediscover the
meaning of travel

then sacked by Timur (Tamerlane), adding to its woes. Fortunately, a few architectural monuments survived this tragedy, notably the impressive mausoleums of past sultans as well as arched gates and fortresses which stand as testament to the former glories of this remote corner of Asia.

Day 7 – Darwaza (280 kms, approx. 4 hrs)

After the morning at leisure we depart by jeep to travel along the highway through the Karakum Desert to Darwaza, a burning gas crater where flames literally leap from the ground. We set up camp here, and over a barbeque dinner watch the sun go down, the crater lighting up the night sky with its fires. Overnight camping or in yurts- the tents are private while the yurts are shared by gender. (BD)

Darwaza

While drilling in 1971 geologists discovered an underground cavern filled with natural gas. The ground beneath the drilling rig collapsed, leaving a large hole with a diameter of about 50-100m. To avoid poisonous gas discharge, it was decided to burn the gas. Geologists had hoped the fire would go out in a few days but it has been burning ever since. Locals have named the cavern “The Door to Hell”, and the sight of the crater at night has a somewhat eerie feel. It now has a diameter of approximately 60m, and a depth of 20m. Hundreds of fires burn inside the crater, some of them with flames up to 10-15m high.

Day 8 – Ashgabat (310 kms)

After breakfast we set off for our return to Ashgabat, paying a visit to a desert village on the way. On arrival in the city we will visit the National Museum and onto the ruins of the ancient Parthian fortress at Nisa. Overnight at Ak Altyn Hotel or similar. (B)

Nisa

Located on a natural high platform in the foothills of the Kopetdag Mountains, the fortress of Nisa was constructed by early Parthian rulers who took over control of the area from the Seleucids in the middle of the 3rd century BC. Under Parthian rule the fortified territory was protected by 43 defense towers, and was called Mitridatkert (literally: fortress of King Mitridat). Hellenistic influence is clearly visible in the architecture, sculptures and other interior decorations found at the site. A circular temple-hall where remains of a stone altar were found indicates the location for Zoroastrian rituals. The most magnificent artefacts found to date at what is believed to have been the treasury, are a large collection of ivory rhytons, which can be seen at the National Museum in Ashgabat. Nisa has been a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 2007.

Day 9 – Nohur- Karakala (250 kms)

Today we leave Ashgabat and head to the west of the country. Our first stop will be at a stables housing some of the famous Akhal –Teke horses greatly prized by the people of Turkmenistan. We continue to the village of Nohur whose inhabitants believe that they descend from the armies of Alexander the Great. Leave Nohur behind and drive through walnut and pomegranate groves to the “Moon Mountains”, a series of rather striking barren hills. Overnight camping. (BLD)

Nohur

Nohur is home to a small community that lives in the high valleys of the Kopetdag Mountains. Nohur local culture has been preserved due to its isolation from the rest of Turkmenistan, and its distinctive features can be seen in the style of its architecture. Nohur is also a centre of keteni (Turkmen silk dress material) weaving, and this art is practiced by virtually every household even today. Next to its cultural interest, a visit to Nohur also offers opportunities to enjoy magnificent mountain landscapes, canyons, and highlands. The cemetery presents an unusual sight as each grave is protected by the horns of mountain goats. The inhabitants of Nohur believe they are descended from the armies of Alexander the Great.



Rediscover the
meaning of travel

Day 10 – Dekhistan- Balkanabat (200 kms)

An early start takes us alongside the Iranian border so we can expect to encounter several checkpoints along the way. We will stop to view the ruins of Dekhistan, once an important state in its own right, before continuing on to Balkanabat. Arrive early evening and check in to your hotel. Overnight at Nebitchi Hotel or similar. (BL)

Day 11 – Yangikala – Gozli Ata (200 kms- approx. 7 hrs)

After a visit to the local bazaar to stock up on supplies, we drive to the Balkan Mountains and the canyons of Yangikala, home to some of the best scenery in Turkmenistan. We explore on foot and take a picnic lunch among the cliffs. When the sun sets we drive to the pilgrimage site of Gozli Ata. Overnight at a local pilgrim house (multi-share accommodation). (BLD)

Yangikala

Impressive limestone formations rise up from the desert sands at Yangikala, with views of the Karabogaz Gulf in the distance. These limestone cliffs are the remains of massive coral reefs from the pre-historic Parathetys Sea. Different soil layers are clearly visible: at the lower part, the hills are coloured orange-red, whereas towards the top they become bright white. This surreal landscape is impressive at any time of day but sunset and sunrise offer particularly spectacular views. The area is reachable only by 4WD vehicles, crossing a highland region where camels, sheep and horses graze, watched over by friendly shepherds with their Alabai shepherd dogs.

Gozli Ata

The mausoleum of Gozli Ata is one of the holiest sites for pilgrims in Turkmenistan. The mausoleum, located on a low platform against the backdrop of stunning pink and red limestone rock formations, is now part of a larger Salor tribal graveyard. Gozli Ata (literally: All-seeing Father) was a famous 12th century Sufi teacher who was said to have the capacity to see inside the souls of people but who was nevertheless killed by the Mongolian armies.

Day 12 – Turkmenbashi- Ashgabat (150 kms)

We drive today to Turkmenbashi with time to visit the port and the fish market before taking a flight back to Ashgabat. Overnight at Ak Altyn Hotel or similar. (B)

Day 13 – Ashgabat

Transfer to the airport for your flight home.(B)

******Please note that as of 1st January 2018, a tourist tax of 2 US Dollars per person per night for accommodation will be introduced. This must be paid on checkout and in US Dollars cash.******

Tour Inclusions/Exclusions

Inclusions:

Arrival and departure transfers
Transport throughout
Domestic flights
All accommodation
Services of English speaking guide
Meals as listed (B – Breakfast, L – Lunch, D – Dinner)
Entrance fees for sites listed as part of the itinerary





Rediscover the
meaning of travel

Exclusions:

International flights
Transport throughout as detailed
Any airport and hotel taxes
Travel Insurance
Visas
Drinks

Important Information

Foreign Office Travel Warnings

We constantly monitor the advice posted by the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO). In particular we will always advise clients of any travel warnings. At the time of writing there are no warnings against travel to Turkmenistan. Please feel free to contact us should you have any specific concerns or if you would like to know in detail what measures are being taken to ensure visits remain trouble free and without incident.

It should be noted that this information applies to British citizens. Other nationals are asked to check the current position of their respective government.

Accommodation and Meals

Hotel Check-in Times

As a general rule most hotels will allow guests to check-in from 2pm. Please note that the price of your tour does not include guaranteed early check-in. Therefore please advise us if you would like to ensure that your room is available for an earlier arrival. This is particularly relevant on the first day of the tour and for early morning arrivals. One option is to pre-book and pay for an extra night at the beginning of your tour which will guarantee your accommodation is available irrespective of what time you arrive. Please contact us for information and costs.

It should also be noted that on many of our tours we have set-aside Day 1 of the itinerary as an 'arrival day'. For this reason and because tour participants are likely to be arriving at different times, and often from different countries, guided sightseeing or other activities are not included. If you are arriving early or before the start date of the tour and would like to organise some extra arrangements on a private basis please contact us.

Accommodation Rating

At Undiscovered Destinations we know our travellers prefer to stay in comfortable, mid-range accommodation. With a few exceptions you can expect rooms to be en-suite, with private bathroom and when necessary air-conditioning will be provided. In general you will find your hotel has a restaurant and/or bar. There are two nights of basic camping and one night in a multi share pilgrim house at Gozli Ata.

We welcome solo travellers and single rooms will be allocated subject to the applicable tour supplement. Please note that on occasions you may not always be allocated a double or twin room, as some hotels have designated single rooms. These may be smaller in size. However, the supplement payable takes this into consideration.



Rediscover the
meaning of travel

Smoking

The Government of Turkmenistan has introduced new legislation stating that smoking is prohibited in ALL public places, including streets, parks, and airports – in fact everywhere except specially designated areas (if any) in restaurants and hotels. Anybody spotted smoking will be taken to the nearest police station, where they may be kept for several hours before having to pay a fine of 300 manat (around £60). Those who refuse to go to the police station, pay the fine, or argue with police officers may end up being detained for up to 15 days. Anyone attempting to bring more than 40 cigarettes for personal use into Turkmenistan will be fined 500 manat (around £100).

Food & Drinks

The daily meal basis is shown in the tour itinerary; breakfast (B), lunch (L) and dinner (D). Please note that lunch may be a picnic. Drinks are not included and will be payable locally in cash.

Dietary Requirements

If you have any special dietary requirements you must notify us at the time of booking. While we will make every effort to cater for you, we cannot guarantee that this will be possible.

Budgeting for your Tour

You will need some extra money to cover meals and drinks not included in the tour price, any optional sightseeing, souvenirs and items of a personal nature such as laundry.

Food

The costs for meals will vary depending upon location, type of restaurant and number of courses eaten and so the prices given are an average guide. Local restaurants located off the beaten track may be less expensive, whereas an upmarket restaurant located in the centre of a major city may charge more.

Lunch \$10

Dinner \$15

Drinks

The prices for drinks can vary greatly depending upon location and the prices detailed below are an average guide. In general you would expect that drinks purchased in a supermarket or local bar to be less expensive, whilst drinks in an upmarket bar or restaurant may be more expensive.

Bottle of Beer (domestic 0.5 litre) \$4

Water (1.5L) \$1.20

Tipping – Guide and Drivers

Tipping is common practise in Central Asia. If your local guide has been helpful then you could think about tipping. If you are travelling on our group tour, a reasonable amount to allow would be around \$8-10 per person per day for the guides and around \$ 4-5 per person per day for the driver.

Foreign Exchange

ATM Availability: ATM machines are not widely available

Credit and Debit Card Acceptance: Cards are rarely accepted

Local Currency: Manat

Recommended Currency for Exchange: US Dollars

Where to Exchange: Your guide will advise you



Rediscover the
meaning of travel

Joining your Tour

Joining Tour Abroad

Customers booked on the 'Land Only' arrangements will receive a free airport transfer, if you arrive on the first day of the tour and depart on the last day. This will also apply if you book pre and post tour accommodation with Undiscovered Destinations at the hotels named in the itinerary. In order that the transfer can be arranged please ensure that you advise us of your flight information once available. Please advise the date, time and flight number for your arrival/departure. If we have not been advised of this information at least 2 weeks before travel, then you will be required to make your own way to the hotel on Day 1 of your tour.

Travel Insurance

It is a condition of booking with Undiscovered Destinations that you have adequate valid travel insurance, the cost of which is not included in the price of the tour. It is your responsibility to arrange appropriate travel insurance and ensure you have read and understood the full terms and conditions of your travel insurance policy to ensure that you are covered for all activities you intend to undertake whilst on the tour, including all optional activities. Your Insurance Policy must fully cover you for medical expenses and emergency repatriation to your home country.

Visa Information

Most nationalities require a visa to visit Turkmenistan, and this can be obtained on arrival at the airport for many. A Letter of Invitation will be required, which will be provided by Undiscovered Destinations. UK citizens can also apply for a visa at the Turkmenistan Embassy in London prior to travel.

Passports

It is your responsibility to ensure that you are in possession of a full passport, valid for at least six months after your date of return to UK.

We strongly advise that your passport contains a minimum of two blank pages, as this may be a requirement of the local immigration authorities. In addition certain countries will stipulate that the two blank pages are opposite each other. If you are unable to meet these requirements you may be refused boarding by your airline or denied entry by the immigration authorities.

For specific information about the requirements for your destination please check with the country's embassy or consulate.

Vaccinations & Protection

We strongly recommend that you contact your doctor's surgery or a specialist travel clinic for up-to-date information, advice and the necessary vaccinations. For a visit of less than one month, almost certainly you will be advised to have immunisations against the following: Diphtheria and Tetanus, Hepatitis A, Typhoid, Meningitis. If you are travelling with prescription medicine, we advise that you carry a copy of the prescription and a letter from your doctor, stating that you are legally able to take the items.

The legal status and regulation of some medicines prescribed or purchased in your home country can be different in other countries. If you're travelling with prescription or over-the-counter medicine, read this guidance from NaTHNaC on [best practice when travelling with medicines](#). For further information on the legal status of a specific medicine, you'll need to contact the embassy, high commission or consulate of the country or territory you're travelling to.



Rediscover the
meaning of travel

Preparing for your tour

Climate

The region can be bitterly cold in its winter months and fiercely hot during the July and August. The best time to visit is generally accepted to be from mid-April to June, and September to mid-November.

Clothing

When it comes to clothing it is usually recommended that lighter clothes are worn through the day, and warmer ones at night. You should wear a hat during the day for protection from the sun. You should make sure that you bring a waterproof jacket for any rainy days. Although Turkmenistan is not conservative with regard to dress code (sleeveless shirts and knee-long legwear is fine), wearing short skirts and shorts is frowned upon, and you should make sure that you bring an outfit suitable for entering mosques and religious buildings – long sleeves and trousers / long skirts.

Equipment

The first thing on your list should be a first aid kit. Whilst there is no undue cause for alarm, travellers are best advised to travel well-prepared: adequately immunized, with sufficient supplies of prescription drugs, along with a medical kit. Suncream / sunblock are a must. Insect repellent, including a bite spray, will also be useful to have. You will not need to bring a sleeping bag as bedding will be provided when camping and at the homestay. However we do recommend that you bring light sleep sheet and a towel, as well as a torch (flashlight).

Footwear

Footwear is a main priority on this tour. Comfortable walking shoes/boots are recommended.

Luggage on tour

Your luggage should not exceed 20kgs (44lbs). One large suitcase/rucksack, and one small hand luggage rucksack is acceptable.

Electric Supply & Plugs

Electrical supply is 220V and plugs are round and have two round pins like most European countries.

Tour Itinerary Versions

Please ensure that you have an up-to-date copy of these tour notes immediately before you travel, as from time to time our itineraries may be amended, either for operational reasons or in response to feedback from customers. You will be informed of any major changes to your tour but small changes may just be added to these tour notes. These tour notes were updated on 4th November 2019.