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Tour Notes

Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan & Tajikistan –
Heart of the Silk Road

Tour Duration – 15 Days



Tour Rating

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

Tour Pace

Busy

Tour Highlights

- ✓ The splendour of the cities of Khiva, Bukhara and Samarkand
- ✓ The desert wonders of Merv.
- ✓ The striking monuments of Ashgabat
- ✓ The stunning scenery of Lake Iskander Kul





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Tour Map - Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan & Tajikistan - Heart of the Silk Road



Tour Essentials

- Accommodation:** Mix of hotels and tourist cottages
- Included Meals:** Daily breakfast (B), plus lunches (L) and dinners (D) as shown in the itinerary.
- Group Size:** Maximum of 12
- Start Point:** Tashkent
- End Point:** Tashkent
- Transport:** Private cars or minibuses, domestic flights
- Countries:** Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan & Tajikistan



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Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan & Tajikistan - Heart of the Silk Road

This tour concentrates the essence of Central Asia, visiting three now distinct states connected across the centuries by the Silk Road's east west trading legacy. Important historic cities such as Tashkent, Dushanbe, and Ashgabat, join the fabled khanates of Bukhara and Khiva, and incredible archaeological sites such as Merv and Konye-Urgenche. The itinerary doesn't aim to provide an in-depth exploration of Central Asia, but it does pack an incredible amount into a relatively short time, identifying a culturally rich and varied vein through neighbouring states that survived the wholesale homogenising of the Soviet period to emerge once again. If this is your first experience of Central Asia it won't be your last.

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 – Tashkent

Arrive in Tashkent and transfer to hotel accommodation. Depending on arrival schedule there may be time to explore the city. Overnight at Shodlik Palace or similar.

Tashkent

Uzbekistan's capital displays its Silk Road heritage even today. An ancient city dating back 2000 years it is the largest in Central Asia and probably it's most cosmopolitan. Although much of it has been rebuilt following an earthquake in the 1960s, its old quarters still retain their charm with narrow streets and 500 year old mosques, medressas and other religious buildings. Tashkent has always been a centre of commerce and trading links established with Russia made it wealthy during the Middle Ages. In the middle of the 19th century it was a focus of rivalry between the Emir of Bukhara and the city of Khokand to which Tashkent paid tribute. Seizing the opportunity to take advantage of the regional turmoil, the Russian army was able to gain control of Tashkent, bringing it under the Tsar's rule in a gradual process of imperial expansion throughout Central Asia. Tashkent became the capital of Russian Turkestan and attracted great numbers of immigrants – today there are sizeable Russian and Korean communities within the city.

Day 2 – Tashkent to Khiva (Approximate journey time: one hour)

This morning we return to the airport and fly to Urgench, driving from there to Khiva. The ancient khanate is a stunning city, now a UNESCO World Heritage Site, possessing a wealth of remarkable monuments. The afternoon is spent exploring its sights, including mosques and madrassas, and mausoleums of former khans. Overnight Malika Khiva Hotel or similar. (B)



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Khiva

Khiva is one of the true highlights of this astounding region – its ancient monuments have been superbly preserved and its historic centre contains more than fifty of them, along with around 250 old houses dating back to the 18th and 19th centuries. The inner town, or Ichon Qala, is encircled by 18th century mud walls and holds the cream of Khiva's sites, a collection of remarkable palaces, mosques and mausoleums capped with bright blue domes and bedecked with stunning decoration. Minarets poke into the sky while its graceful archways betray links with Moghul India, and it is easy to visualise what this city once looked like when it was one of the most important in the region. Khiva was once an independent khanate renowned as a centre of the slave trade – raiders from Khiva would set off to vulnerable communities bringing back slaves to live in tortuous conditions, or be sold to end up somewhere else along the Silk Road. Peter the Great first sought to bring Khiva under his control in 1717, but it was not to be – Russian forces were tricked and then massacred, humiliating the Tsar. In following years a number of attempts were made to free Russian slaves and take Khiva but it was not until 1873 that it fell.

Day 3 – Khiva

Today we continue to visit the city's sights. After lunch there'll be time to explore independently on foot. Overnight Malika Khiva Hotel or similar. (B)

Day 4 – Khiva - Konye-Urgench – Dashogus - Ashgabat (Approximate journey time: four hours)

Leaving Khiva, we cross the border into little-known Turkmenistan, heading for the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Konye-Urgench, an ancient capital of the land of Khorezm known for its beautiful mausoleums. Afterwards we drive to the airport at Dashogus for a flight to Turkmenistan's capital, Ashgabat. Overnight Ak Altyn Hotel or similar. (B)

Please note: *The procedure for crossing borders can be lengthy even at quieter times. The border guards (especially those on the Uzbekistan side) carry out thorough searches of luggage and will pay close attention to any medicines and reading materials.*

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

Day 5 – Ashgabat - Mary

Today we discover the sights of Ashgabat, a modern city characterised by extensive and some would say eccentric building projects. Later we return to the airport and fly to Mary, an oasis town close to the ancient city of Merv. Overnight Mary Hotel or similar. (B)

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 all but destroyed the city, which had 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



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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.

Day 6 – Mary - Merv - Bukhara (*Approximate driving time: five hours*)

This morning we visit the array of mosques, citadels and Buddhist stupas found at the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Merv, the most important ancient site in Turkmenistan, dating back 2,500 years. Afterwards we cross the border back into Uzbekistan and head to Bukhara, Central Asia's holiest city. Overnight Caravan Hotel or similar. (B)

Merv

The site of Merv spreads over one hundred square kilometres and holds the remains of a number of ancient cities spread over 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, Merv is a microcosm of Central Asian history and a delight to explore.

Day 7 – Bukhara

We spend today exploring Bukhara, another UNESCO World Heritage Site and where a superbly preserved old quarter makes it one of the region's most spectacular cities. Overnight Caravan Hotel or similar. (B)

Bukhara

Mighty Bukhara is renowned as the holiest of Central Asia's cities and is said to have been in existence when Alexander the Great passed through the region, more than two thousand years ago. Its old centre is exceptionally well preserved and contains old madrassas and mosques, ancient minarets and protected buildings dating back as far as the 10th century. The independent khanate of Bukhara was one of the focal points of the 'Great Game' – a period of imperial rivalry between Britain and Russia in the 18th and 19th centuries that saw each seek to expand their influence. The British sent Alexander Burnes to the city in 1832 in an attempt to bring the city into their sphere of influence, but this was inconclusive and although Burnes was treated well, later emissaries were to fare far worse – two English officers were kept captive there for some time before eventually being executed in Bukhara's Registan square.

Day 8 – Bukhara - Gijduvan – Samarkand (*Approximate driving time: five hours*)

After breakfast we drive to the legendary city of Samarkand, stopping en route at Gijduvan, locally renowned as a centre for ceramics. Upon arrival in Samarkand we begin to explore. Overnight Malika Hotel or similar. (B)

Day 9 - Samarkand

Today is dedicated to discovering Samarkand's remarkable ancient heritage. The city is most famous for its UNESCO World Heritage Site of Registan which contains perhaps the most breath-taking architecture in the whole region. It's easy to spend hours among the square's mosques and madrassas, all elaborately decorated in blue ceramic tiles and traditional Islamic art. Overnight at Malika Hotel or similar. (B)

Samarkand

Samarkand is perhaps the most atmospheric of all of Uzbekistan's and the whole region's cities, a glorious collection of immaculately preserved monuments that reach their climax in the superb Registan square, renowned as the finest architectural ensemble in Central Asia. Founded in the 8th century BC by the Persians, Samarkand has always been an important centre for the various forces passing through and has at



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times been controlled by Arabs, Sogdians and the armies of Alexander the Great. It was Timur who left the greatest mark on the city, designating it as his capital and embarking on a program of building that was continued after his death to produce one of the most startling sights in Asia. Vivid blue capped minarets jostle for space with tiled medressas, enormous arched gateways decorated with Islamic art and numerous mosques and mausoleums of the great and the good, as well as a marvellous observatory built by the ruler and astronomer Ulug Beg. Samarkand takes your breath away – there is no other place like it.

Day 10 – Smarkand - Panjakent (*Approximate driving time: one to two hours*)

After breakfast we cross the border into Tajikistan, driving towards Panjakent and stopping at the nearby UNESCO World Heritage site of Sarazm, dating from 3,500 BC. Panjakent itself has a remarkably well-preserved old town, a vestige of its past significance as a Silk Road trading city. On arrival there's time to explore the city. Overnight Sughd Hotel or similar. (BLD)

Day 11 – Panjakent - Dushanbe (*Approximate driving time: three-and-a-half-hours*)

Leaving Panjakent, we drive to Dushanbe, capital of Tajikistan, over the 2,900m Anzob Pass. On arrival there's time to see some of the sights and soak up the atmosphere of a little-visited Central Asian city. Overnight Hotel Vatan or similar. (BLD)

Dushanbe

Dushanbe is a relatively modern town that rose to prominence during the Soviet era, when it was made the capital of the Tajik Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic and named Stalinabad. Its name means 'Monday in the Tajik language, arising from the fact that this was the day that the market was held, when Dushanbe was still a small and fairly insignificant village. The ousted Emir of Bukhara, fleeing from the Bolsheviks, stayed in Dushanbe and cooperated with Enver Pasha's Basmachis until he had to leave the region. From Dushanbe, he fled to Afghanistan in 1921, the year the town was freed from the Basmachis as well.

Day 12 - Dushanbe - Iskanderkul (*Approximate driving time: four hours*)

It's a stunning drive today, for the most part on a surprisingly good roads, through the lofty Fann Mountains to Iskanderkul. On arrival there's time to hike around the lake shore, exploring nearby waterfalls, springs and villages. Overnight Tourist Cottages. (BLD)

Day 13 – Istravshan- Khujand (*Approximate driving time: three-and-a-half-hours*)

After breakfast we drive over Shahristan Pass, through the Azob Tunnel to Khujand, the capital of northern Tajikistan. En route we will stop in Istravshan and visit the Mugh Fortress, Kok-Gumbaz Madrassa, Chor-Gumbaz mosque, and a local bazaar. On arrival we have time for a city tour. Highlights include Pushkin Square, Kamoli Khujandi Square, the fortress of Timur Malik and the city's central market, one of the oldest in Tajikistan. Overnight Khujand Hotel or similar. (BLD)

Day 14 – Tashkent (*Approximate driving time: four hours*)

Today we cross back into Uzbekistan and drive to Tashkent for our final night. Overnight Shodlik Palace or similar. (B)

Day 15 – Tashkent

The tour ends today after breakfast with airport transfers departing to meet onward flights. (B)



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Optional Extension - Fergana Valley

Day 1- Tashkent - Fergana (Approximate driving time: five hours)

After a leisurely breakfast we drive to Fergana, stopping at Kamchik Pass for photos. If we arrive in good time there may be an opportunity to look around. Overnight Hotel Asia Fergana or similar. (B).

Day 2- Rishtan – Margilan

Today we visit Rishtan, famous for its traditional cobalt pottery techniques, Margilan to witness traditional silk production, and later call in at a local bazaar. Overnight Hotel Asia Fergana or similar. (B).

Day 3- Kokand – Tashkent

After breakfast drive back to Tashkent via Kokand visiting Khudoyar Khan's Palace, the Norbuta Museum- Bia Madrassah, and the Modarikhon Mausoleum. Overnight at Shodlik Palace Hotel or similar. (B)

Day 4- Tour ends.

The tour ends today after breakfast with airport transfers departing to meet onward flights. (B)

Tour Inclusions/Exclusions

Tour Inclusions:

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

Excluded:

International flights
Any airport taxes
Travel Insurance
Visas
Drinks
Tips (discretionary)

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 present there are no warnings against travel to Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan Please feel free to contact us should you have any specific concerns or would like to know in detail what measures are being taken to ensure visits remain trouble free and without incident.





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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. On this tour you can expect rooms to be en-suite, with private bathroom and you will find your hotel has a restaurant and/or bar.

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.

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 can be taken to the nearest police station, where they could 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).

A similar ban on smoking in public places has been introduced in Uzbekistan and while it is not currently as strictly enforced as in Turkmenistan it is wise to adhere to it.

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.



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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 may 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 \$4-8
Dinner \$8-10

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 \$2-3
Water (Large bottle 1.5 L) \$1

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 \$3-4 per person per day for the guides and around \$2 per person per day for the driver.

Foreign Exchange

ATM Availability: ATM machines are not widely available

Credit and Debit Card Acceptance: Cards are not widely accepted

Local Currency: The currency in Uzbekistan is the Som. In Tajikistan it is the somani, and in Turkmenistan it is the Manat

Recommended Currency for Exchange: US dollars – these should be crisp and free from any marks as many places will not accept them otherwise

Where to Exchange: Your guide will advise you

Joining your Tour

Flight Information

Our advertised prices do not include the cost of international flights. Please contact us if you would like a quotation to book a 'flight inclusive' package. Your flight inclusive package will be fully protected by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) ATOL protection scheme.

Joining your Tour Abroad

Customers booked on the 'Land Only' arrangements will receive a free airport transfer, both on arrival and departure. 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.



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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, and must be valid for the entire duration of your holiday.

Visa Information

Many nationalities including UK, no longer require a visa to enter Uzbekistan for visits of up to 30 days. Please check the website for the details <http://www.uzbekembassy.org/>.

US citizens can obtain an e-visa for stays of up to 30 days which allows two or more entries for an additional fee. Please check the website for the details www.e-visa.gov.uz.

Most nationalities require a visa for Turkmenistan and UK passport holders can arrange this prior to travel or on arrival at the border. A Letter of Invitation approved by the State Migration Service of Turkmenistan will be required which will be provided by Undiscovered Destinations.

Most nationalities require a visa for Tajikistan and an e visa is now available for many. Please check the website <http://www.tajembassy.org.uk/consular-section/visa-enquires>. A Hotel Voucher and a Letter of Invitation may be required and these will be provided by Undiscovered Destinations.

These guidelines can change at any time and you should check with your nearest embassies.

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 the 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. Alternatively UK citizens can visit www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice

Vaccinations & Protection

We strongly recommend that you contact your doctor's surgery or a specialist travel clinic for up-to-date information and advice regarding 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 and Meningitis.

It is **VERY IMPORTANT** that you are aware that any form of pills and medication will be carefully scrutinised at border crossing points, in particular by the Uzbekistan border guards. If you are travelling with prescribed medication you should take a letter from your doctor and a prescription with you, which make it clear that you are legally permitted to take the items- this also applies to items such as sleeping tablets.



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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.

Preparing for your tour

Climate

The region can be bitterly cold in its winter months and fiercely hot during July and August. The best time to visit is generally accepted to be from May to June, and September to 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 will definitely need warmer clothing for the time spent at Lake Iskander Kul and in the Fann Mountains. It is also advisable to wear a hat during the day to protect from the sun. You should make sure that you bring a waterproof jacket for any rainy days. As Uzbekistan is conservative in terms of dress codes you should make sure that you bring a few outfits that are suitable for entering mosques and religious buildings – long sleeves and trousers / long skirts are a good idea.

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 is a must. Insect repellent, including a bite spray will also be useful to have.

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 sized rucksack is acceptable. Please note that you will be crossing land borders on this tour, so you may wish to take wheeled luggage; some border crossings can be lengthy.

Electric Supply & Plugs

Electrical supply is 220V and plugs usually 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 22nd August 2019.