

60US60

Three Stans Grand Journey: Uzbekistan, Tajikistan & Turkmenistan

Duration: 14 days / 13 nights

Day 1: Day 1: Arrival in Tashkent - Capital of Uzbekistan

Welcome to Central Asia! Your epic three-country journey begins in Tashkent, Uzbekistan's modern capital blending Soviet architecture with ancient Islamic heritage. After airport pickup, check into your hotel and meet your guide for a welcome orientation and dinner.

PM:

Airport Arrival & Transfer

Meet your guide at Tashkent International Airport. Private transfer to hotel (30-40 minutes depending on traffic).

Hotel Check-in & Rest

Check into your 4-star hotel in central Tashkent. Freshen up after your flight.

Welcome Orientation

Meet your tour leader for a detailed briefing about the 14-day journey, visa requirements, and what to expect crossing three countries.

Welcome Dinner at Afsona Restaurant

Enjoy authentic Uzbek cuisine including plov (national dish), samsa, shashlik, and fresh bread. Perfect introduction to Central Asian flavors.

Overnight at hotel

Day 2: Airport Arrival & Transfer

Meet your guide at Tashkent International Airport. Private transfer to hotel (30-40 minutes depending on traffic).

Overnight at hotel

Day 3: Breakfast at Hotel

Start your day with continental breakfast featuring local pastries, fruits, and Uzbek tea.

Overnight at hotel

#### Day 4: Early Breakfast & Checkout

Hearty breakfast before border crossing. Pack essentials in day bag for easy border processing.

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*Overnight at hotel*

#### Day 5: Early Breakfast

Fuel up for a day of mountain exploration. Pack camera, sunscreen, and layers for changing mountain weather.

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*Overnight at hotel*

#### Day 6: Breakfast & Checkout

Final Tajik breakfast at guesthouse. Pack up for border crossing.

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*Overnight at hotel*

#### Day 7: Breakfast at Hotel

Leisurely breakfast preparing for full day of sightseeing.

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*Overnight at hotel*

#### Day 8: Breakfast & Checkout

Final breakfast in Samarkand. Pack for departure to Bukhara.

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*Overnight at hotel*

#### Day 9: Breakfast at Hotel

Enjoy breakfast in atmospheric old town setting.

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*Overnight at hotel*

### Day 10: Early Breakfast & Checkout

Hearty breakfast before long but fascinating drive. Pack snacks and water.

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*Overnight at hotel*

### Day 11: Breakfast with Fortress Views

Start the day with breakfast overlooking the ancient city.

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*Overnight at hotel*

### Day 12: Breakfast & Checkout

Final Uzbek breakfast. Pack all belongings for border crossing.

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*Overnight at hotel*

### Day 13: Breakfast at Hotel

Good breakfast before busy day of sightseeing and desert drive.

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*Overnight at hotel*

### Day 14: Sunrise at Darvaza Crater

Wake early to see the crater in morning light. Different but equally spectacular. Final photos at this incredible site.

### Day 15: Breakfast at Hotel

Final breakfast. Pack and prepare for checkout (late checkout possible depending on flight time).

## Day 16: Day 2: Tashkent City Tour - Old Meets New

Explore Tashkent's fascinating contrasts: ancient Islamic architecture, Soviet-era monuments, and modern skyscrapers. Visit the spiritual heart of Uzbek Islam at Hazrati Imam Complex, experience the vibrant Chorsu Bazaar, and ride the world's most beautiful metro system.

### PM:

#### Breakfast at Hotel

Start your day with continental breakfast featuring local pastries, fruits, and Uzbek tea.

#### Hazrati Imam Complex

Visit Uzbekistan's spiritual center housing the world's oldest Quran (7th century Uthman Quran). Explore stunning mosques, madrasahs, and the Imam's mausoleum.

#### Chorsu Bazaar Experience

Immerse yourself in Central Asia's most colorful market. Marvel at pyramids of spices, dried fruits, nuts, and watch traditional bread-making in tandoor ovens.

#### Lunch at Besh Qozon

Traditional Uzbek restaurant serving lagman noodles, manti dumplings, and fresh salads.

#### Tashkent Metro Tour

Ride the spectacular Soviet-era metro, each station a unique palace featuring chandeliers, marble, and Central Asian motifs. Visit Alisher Navoi, Kosmonavtlar, and Amir Timur stations.

#### Amir Timur Square & Independence Square

Photo stops at Tashkent's main squares showcasing post-independence monuments and Soviet-era grandiosity.

#### Minor Mosque Visit

Admire the stunning white marble Minor Mosque with its elegant dome and minarets.

## Day 17: Hotel Check-in & Rest

Check into your 4-star hotel in central Tashkent. Freshen up after your flight.

## Day 18: Hazrati Imam Complex

Visit Uzbekistan's spiritual center housing the world's oldest Quran (7th century Uthman Quran). Explore stunning mosques, madrasahs, and the Imam's mausoleum.

## Day 19: Drive to Tajikistan Border (Jartepa/Sarazm)

Scenic 4-hour drive through fertile valleys and mountain foothills. Your guide will brief you on border procedures.

### Day 20: Drive to First Lake (Mijgon)

Scenic 1.5-hour drive climbing into Fann Mountains. Pass through traditional Tajik villages with apricot orchards.

### Day 21: Return to Uzbekistan Border

Drive back to Jartepa/Sarazm border crossing.

### Day 22: Gur-Emir Mausoleum

Visit the tomb of Amir Timur (Tamerlane), founder of the Timurid Empire. Stunning blue ribbed dome and golden interior. See the massive jade tombstone.

### Day 23: Drive to Bukhara

Scenic 4-hour drive through desert landscapes. Option to stop at ancient caravanserai ruins along historic Silk Road route.

### Day 24: Ark Fortress

Explore the massive citadel that was home to Bukhara's emirs for over a millennium. Walk the ramparts, visit throne room, and museum.

### Day 25: Desert Drive to Khiva (7 hours)

Cross the spectacular Kyzylkum Desert ("Red Sand") via M37 highway. Stop at Amu Darya River (ancient Oxus River of Alexander the Great). Pass through oasis towns, desert stretches, and cotton fields. Your guide shares Silk Road history.

### Day 26: Kalta Minor Minaret

Marvel at the massive turquoise-tiled minaret, intended to be tallest in Central Asia but never completed. Perfect photo opportunity.

### **Day 27: Drive to Shavat-Dashoguz Border**

Transfer from Khiva to Uzbekistan-Turkmenistan border (approximately 60 km, 1 hour).

### **Day 28: Independence Park**

Visit Ashgabat's crown jewel park with fountains, monuments, and massive Arch of Neutrality.

### **Day 29: Camp Breakfast**

Simple but hearty breakfast: bread, cheese, tea, eggs. Pack up camp.

### **Day 30: Nissa Fortress (UNESCO Site)**

Visit the 3rd century BC ruins of ancient Parthian capital, just 18km from Ashgabat. See remains of palaces, temples, and the famous Parthian Rhytons (drinking horns) discovery site.

## Day 31: Day 3: Cross to Tajikistan - Penjikent & Ancient Sogdiana

Today marks your first international border crossing! Drive through scenic mountains to the Uzbekistan-Tajikistan border at Jartepa/Sarazm. After crossing, explore the ancient ruins of Penjikent, known as the "Pompeii of Central Asia," dating back to the 5th-8th centuries.

### PM:

#### Early Breakfast & Checkout

Hearty breakfast before border crossing. Pack essentials in day bag for easy border processing.

#### Drive to Tajikistan Border (Jartepa/Sarazm)

Scenic 4-hour drive through fertile valleys and mountain foothills. Your guide will brief you on border procedures.

#### Border Crossing Formalities

Exit Uzbekistan and enter Tajikistan. Process typically takes 1-2 hours. Keep passport and visa documents ready.

#### Welcome to Tajikistan! Drive to Penjikent

Short 30-minute drive to Penjikent, an ancient Sogdian city. Check into guesthouse.

#### Lunch at Local Penjikent Restaurant

Try Tajik specialties like qurutob (bread with yogurt sauce) and osh (Tajik-style plov).

#### Ancient Penjikent Ruins Tour

Explore the remarkably preserved 5th-8th century Sogdian city ruins. See residential areas, bazaar, temples, and fortress walls. Your guide brings this "Pompeii of Central Asia" to life.

#### Rudaki Museum Visit

Small museum showcasing Sogdian artifacts, frescoes, and exhibits about Persian poet Rudaki, the "father of Persian poetry."

## Day 32: Welcome Orientation

Meet your tour leader for a detailed briefing about the 14-day journey, visa requirements, and what to expect crossing three countries.

## Day 33: Chorsu Bazaar Experience

Immerse yourself in Central Asia's most colorful market. Marvel at pyramids of spices, dried fruits, nuts, and watch traditional bread-making in tandoor ovens.

## Day 34: Border Crossing Formalities

Exit Uzbekistan and enter Tajikistan. Process typically takes 1-2 hours. Keep passport and visa documents ready.

### **Day 35: Lake 1: Mijgon (Lowest Lake)**

First of the seven cascading lakes. Deep blue waters at 1,640m elevation. Photo stop and short walk.

### **Day 36: Border Crossing (Tajikistan to Uzbekistan)**

Exit Tajikistan, re-enter Uzbekistan. Usually faster on return journey.

### **Day 37: Shah-i-Zinda Necropolis**

Walk through this breathtaking "street of tombs" - 11 mausoleums connected by azure-tiled passageways. Each tomb showcases unique tilework patterns. Climb 36 steps (count them!) and count again on return for local legend.

### **Day 38: Arrival & Hotel Check-in**

Check into boutique hotel in Bukhara's old town - many hotels are converted madrasahs or merchant houses.

### **Day 39: Bolo Hauz Mosque**

Admire the elegant wooden pillars and painted ceiling of this 18th-century mosque, still active for Friday prayers.

### **Day 40: Lunch Stop in Roadside Café**

Simple but tasty meal at highway café - experience real Uzbek roadside culture!

### **Day 41: Kunya Ark Citadel**

Explore the Khan's fortress with throne room, harem, mint, and jail. Climb to battlements for panoramic city views.



#### **Day 42: Border Crossing to Turkmenistan**

Cross from Uzbekistan (Shavat) to Turkmenistan (Dashoguz). Thorough customs inspection - be patient. With our LOI support, process is smooth. Allow 2-3 hours. Welcome to Turkmenistan!

#### **Day 43: Turkmenbashi Mosque**

Tour one of Central Asia's largest mosques, built of white marble with gold domes. See the mausoleum of Turkmenistan's first president.

#### **Day 44: Drive to Mary City (4-5 hours)**

Long desert drive to Mary, Turkmenistan's fourth-largest city. Pass through more Karakum Desert, occasional oases, and gas fields.

#### **Day 45: Tolkuchka Bazaar Visit**

Experience Central Asia's largest bazaar (open Wed, Sat, Sun). Find traditional Turkmen carpets, silver jewelry, embroidered hats, and handicrafts. Perfect for final souvenirs.

## Day 46: Day 4: Seven Lakes of Tajikistan - Fann Mountains Paradise

One of the tour's absolute highlights! Journey into the stunning Fann Mountains to visit the legendary Seven Lakes (Haftkul/Marguzor Lakes), each more beautiful than the last. Turquoise waters surrounded by dramatic peaks create unforgettable photographic opportunities.

### PM:

#### Early Breakfast

Fuel up for a day of mountain exploration. Pack camera, sunscreen, and layers for changing mountain weather.

#### Drive to First Lake (Mijgon)

Scenic 1.5-hour drive climbing into Fann Mountains. Pass through traditional Tajik villages with apricot orchards.

#### Lake 1: Mijgon (Lowest Lake)

First of the seven cascading lakes. Deep blue waters at 1,640m elevation. Photo stop and short walk.

#### Lakes 2-3: Soya & Hushyor

Continue upward visiting Soya Lake (known for color variations) and Hushyor Lake (one of the largest). Short hikes along shores.

#### Lakes 4-5: Nofin & Khurdak

Visit the smallest but charming Nofin Lake surrounded by willows, and medium-sized Khurdak Lake with mountain backdrop.

#### Lakeside Picnic Lunch

Traditional Tajik lunch with fresh bread, cheese, vegetables, fruits, and tea. Enjoy mountain serenity.

#### Lake 6: Marguzor (Largest Lake)

The largest and most spectacular lake. Optional 30-minute hike to viewpoint for panoramic photos.

#### Lake 7: Hazorchashma (Highest Lake)

The final lake at 2,400m elevation. "Hazorchashma" means "thousand springs" - fed by numerous mountain streams. Most remote and pristine.

#### Return Drive to Penjikent

Descend from mountains as sun sets, golden light illuminating peaks. Arrive back at guesthouse.

## Day 47: Welcome Dinner at Afsona Restaurant

Enjoy authentic Uzbek cuisine including plov (national dish), samsa, shashlik, and fresh bread. Perfect introduction to Central Asian flavors.

## Day 48: Lunch at Besh Qozon

Traditional Uzbek restaurant serving lagman noodles, manti dumplings, and fresh salads.

### **Day 49: Welcome to Tajikistan! Drive to Penjikent**

Short 30-minute drive to Penjikent, an ancient Sogdian city. Check into guesthouse.

### **Day 50: Lakes 2-3: Soya & Hushyor**

Continue upward visiting Soya Lake (known for color variations) and Hushyor Lake (one of the largest). Short hikes along shores.

### **Day 51: Drive to Samarkand**

Beautiful 3-hour drive through Zerafshan Valley, passing cotton fields and villages.

### **Day 52: Bibi-Khanym Mosque**

Explore the massive ruins of Timur's grand mosque, once the largest in Central Asia. Walk through the enormous main portal and courtyard.

### **Day 53: Lunch at Chinar Restaurant**

Welcome to Bukhara with local specialties. Try Bukhara-style plov (different from Samarkand style).

### **Day 54: Trading Domes Tour**

Walk through three preserved trading domes where Silk Road merchants sold hats, money exchange, and jewelry. Now filled with craft shops - perfect for authentic souvenirs.

### **Day 55: Arrival in Khiva**

First glimpse of Khiva's mud-brick walls rising from desert. Check into hotel inside or near Ichan-Kala fortress.

### **Day 56: Juma Mosque (Friday Mosque)**

Walk through the unique "forest of columns" - 212 carved wooden pillars supporting the roof of this 10th-century mosque.

### **Day 57: Lunch in Dashoguz**

First Turkmen meal! Try chorba (soup) and fitchi (spinach-filled pastry).

### **Day 58: National Museum of Turkmenistan**

Explore Turkmenistan's history from ancient times through Soviet era to independence. See the famous Akhal-Teke horse exhibits.

### **Day 59: Lunch in Mary**

Local restaurant in Mary city.

### **Day 60: Farewell Lunch at Ashgabat Restaurant**

Final group meal together. Share highlights and exchange contact information with fellow travelers. Traditional Turkmen feast.

## Day 61: Day 5: Return to Uzbekistan - Samarkand, Jewel of the Silk Road

Bid farewell to Tajikistan and cross back into Uzbekistan. Drive to legendary Samarkand, one of the world's oldest continuously inhabited cities. This afternoon, witness the breathtaking Registan Square at sunset - the most iconic view in all of Central Asia.

### PM:

#### Breakfast & Checkout

Final Tajik breakfast at guesthouse. Pack up for border crossing.

#### Return to Uzbekistan Border

Drive back to Jartepa/Sarazm border crossing.

#### Border Crossing (Tajikistan to Uzbekistan)

Exit Tajikistan, re-enter Uzbekistan. Usually faster on return journey.

#### Drive to Samarkand

Beautiful 3-hour drive through Zerafshan Valley, passing cotton fields and villages.

#### Arrival & Hotel Check-in

Check into centrally located 4-star hotel in Samarkand. Freshen up after border crossing.

#### Lunch at Samarkand Restaurant

Welcome back to Uzbekistan with Samarkand-style plov and shashlik.

#### Registan Square - Golden Hour Tour

Stand before Central Asia's most magnificent sight: three stunning madrasahs forming the Registan. Visit Ulugbek, Sher-Dor, and Tilya-Kori madrasahs. Watch as sunset light transforms blue and gold tiles into pure magic.

#### Siab Bazaar Evening Visit

Quick stop at Samarkand's main bazaar for evening shopping - dried fruits, spices, local bread.

## Day 62: Tashkent Metro Tour

Ride the spectacular Soviet-era metro, each station a unique palace featuring chandeliers, marble, and Central Asian motifs. Visit Alisher Navoi, Kosmonavtlar, and Amir Timur stations.

## Day 63: Lunch at Local Penjikent Restaurant

Try Tajik specialties like qurutob (bread with yogurt sauce) and osh (Tajik-style plov).

## Day 64: Lakes 4-5: Nofin & Khurdak

Visit the smallest but charming Nofin Lake surrounded by willows, and medium-sized Khurdak Lake with mountain backdrop.

### Day 65: Arrival & Hotel Check-in

Check into centrally located 4-star hotel in Samarkand. Freshen up after border crossing.

### Day 66: Lunch at Platan Restaurant

Traditional Samarkand cuisine in beautiful courtyard setting. Try local somsa and Samarkand-style lagman.

### Day 67: Lyabi-Hauz Complex Walk

Gentle orientation walk around Bukhara's central pool (Lyabi-Hauz means "pool shore"). See Nodir Devon Begi Madrasah and Khanaka. Watch locals playing chess under mulberry trees.

### Day 68: Lunch at Minzifa Restaurant

Hidden courtyard restaurant serving refined Bukharan cuisine.

### Day 69: Evening Walk in Ichan-Kala

Take your first magical walk through Khiva's inner city as evening light turns mud bricks golden. Marvel at minarets silhouetted against sunset. Orientation for tomorrow's full tour.

### Day 70: Islam Khoja Minaret & Madrasah

Climb Khiva's tallest minaret (45 meters) for spectacular bird's-eye views of the entire fortress city and surrounding desert.

### Day 71: Flight to Ashgabat

Domestic flight from Dashoguz to Ashgabat (approximately 1.5 hours). Fly over Karakum Desert.

### Day 72: Lunch at Local Restaurant

Turkmen cuisine with rice pilaf, shashlik, and ishlekli (meat pie).

### Day 73: Ancient Merv Tour - Erk Gala

Begin at Erk Gala, the oldest part (6th century BC). Walk atop massive earthen walls of the original fortified settlement.

### Day 74: Airport Transfer

Private transfer to Ashgabat International Airport. Your guide assists with check-in and bids farewell.

### Day 75: Day 6: Samarkand Full Day - UNESCO Wonders

Dedicate a full day to exploring Samarkand's incredible architectural heritage. From Amir Timur's tomb to the stunning Shah-i-Zinda necropolis with its mesmerizing blue tilework, every corner reveals why Samarkand was the heart of Timur's empire.

#### PM:

##### **Breakfast at Hotel**

Leisurely breakfast preparing for full day of sightseeing.

##### **Gur-Emir Mausoleum**

Visit the tomb of Amir Timur (Tamerlane), founder of the Timurid Empire. Stunning blue ribbed dome and golden interior. See the massive jade tombstone.

##### **Shah-i-Zinda Necropolis**

Walk through this breathtaking "street of tombs" - 11 mausoleums connected by azure-tiled passageways. Each tomb showcases unique tilework patterns. Climb 36 steps (count them!) and count again on return for local legend.

##### **Bibi-Khanyim Mosque**

Explore the massive ruins of Timur's grand mosque, once the largest in Central Asia. Walk through the enormous main portal and courtyard.

##### **Lunch at Platan Restaurant**

Traditional Samarkand cuisine in beautiful courtyard setting. Try local somsa and Samarkand-style lagman.

##### **Ulugh Beg Observatory**

Visit the remains of the medieval astronomical observatory built by Timur's grandson, the scientist-king Ulugh Beg. See the massive sextant used for star charts.

##### **Afrosiab Museum**

Learn about ancient Samarkand (formerly Afrosiab) through archeological artifacts. See the famous 7th-century Sogdian frescoes.

##### **Traditional Bread Workshop**

Visit family bakery to watch tandoor bread-making. Try your hand at shaping dough and decorating with traditional stamps. Take home fresh hot bread!

### **Day 76: Amir Timur Square & Independence Square**

Photo stops at Tashkent's main squares showcasing post-independence monuments and Soviet-era grandiosity.

### **Day 77: Ancient Penjikent Ruins Tour**

Explore the remarkably preserved 5th-8th century Sogdian city ruins. See residential areas, bazaar, temples, and fortress walls. Your guide brings this "Pompeii of Central Asia" to life.

### **Day 78: Lakeside Picnic Lunch**

Traditional Tajik lunch with fresh bread, cheese, vegetables, fruits, and tea. Enjoy mountain serenity.

### **Day 79: Lunch at Samarkand Restaurant**

Welcome back to Uzbekistan with Samarkand-style plov and shashlik.

### **Day 80: Ulugh Beg Observatory**

Visit the remains of the medieval astronomical observatory built by Timur's grandson, the scientist-king Ulugh Beg. See the massive sextant used for star charts.

### **Day 81: Evening at Poi-Kalyan Complex**

Visit Bukhara's iconic trio: Kalyan Minaret (12th century "Tower of Death"), Kalyan Mosque, and Mir-i-Arab Madrasah. Watch sunset illuminate ancient bricks.

### **Day 82: Chor Minor ("Four Minarets")**

Visit this quirky gatehouse with four distinctive blue-domed towers. One of Bukhara's most photographed sights.



### **Day 83: Lunch at Zarafshon Restaurant**

Traditional Khivan cuisine in atmospheric old building.

### **Day 84: Arrival in Ashgabat**

Transfer from airport to hotel. First glimpses of the white marble city - utterly unlike anywhere else on Earth.

### **Day 85: Drive to Darvaza Crater (5 hours)**

Epic journey into Karakum Desert. Roads get rougher as you leave civilization. Stop at small villages, see desert landscapes, watch for camels. Your guide explains the crater's fascinating formation story.

### **Day 86: Gyaur-Kala Fortress**

Explore the 4th century BC fortress, Merv's second incarnation. See remains of Buddhist stupa and Zoroastrian fire temple.

### **Day 87: Departure**

Depart Turkmenistan with incredible memories of three countries, countless UNESCO sites, new friends, and the adventure of a lifetime. Safe travels home!

## Day 88: Day 7: Samarkand to Bukhara - Silk Road Journey

Travel from Samarkand to Bukhara, another UNESCO Silk Road jewel. Arrive in time for an atmospheric evening walk through Bukhara's old town, where merchant caravans once rested and traded exotic goods from China to Europe.

### PM:

#### Breakfast & Checkout

Final breakfast in Samarkand. Pack for departure to Bukhara.

#### Drive to Bukhara

Scenic 4-hour drive through desert landscapes. Option to stop at ancient caravanserai ruins along historic Silk Road route.

#### Arrival & Hotel Check-in

Check into boutique hotel in Bukhara's old town - many hotels are converted madrasahs or merchant houses.

#### Lunch at Chinar Restaurant

Welcome to Bukhara with local specialties. Try Bukhara-style plov (different from Samarkand style).

#### Lyabi-Hauz Complex Walk

Gentle orientation walk around Bukhara's central pool (Lyabi-Hauz means "pool shore"). See Nodir Devon Begi Madrasah and Khanaka. Watch locals playing chess under mulberry trees.

#### Evening at Poi-Kalyan Complex

Visit Bukhara's iconic trio: Kalyan Minaret (12th century "Tower of Death"), Kalyan Mosque, and Mir-i-Arab Madrasah. Watch sunset illuminate ancient bricks.

## Day 89: Minor Mosque Visit

Admire the stunning white marble Minor Mosque with its elegant dome and minarets.

## Day 90: Rudaki Museum Visit

Small museum showcasing Sogdian artifacts, frescoes, and exhibits about Persian poet Rudaki, the "father of Persian poetry."

## Day 91: Lake 6: Marguzor (Largest Lake)

The largest and most spectacular lake. Optional 30-minute hike to viewpoint for panoramic photos.

### Day 92: Registan Square - Golden Hour Tour

Stand before Central Asia's most magnificent sight: three stunning madrasahs forming the Registan. Visit Ulugbek, Sher-Dor, and Tilya-Kori madrasahs. Watch as sunset light transforms blue and gold tiles into pure magic.

### Day 93: Afrosiab Museum

Learn about ancient Samarkand (formerly Afrosiab) through archeological artifacts. See the famous 7th-century Sogdian frescoes.

### Day 94: Sitorai Mokhi-Khosa Palace

Tour the last Emir's summer palace combining Russian and Oriental architecture. See the harem quarters and beautiful gardens.

### Day 95: Tash Hauli Palace

Tour the "Stone Courtyard" palace with incredible tilework, exploring the reception courtyard, harem courtyard, and court yard. Each more ornate than the last.

### Day 96: Evening Drive Through Modern Ashgabat

Orientation drive past illuminated marble buildings, golden statues, and massive monuments. See the famous "Gate of Neutrality."

### Day 97: Arrival at Darvaza Gas Crater - Sunset

As sun sets, approach the crater. First view is breathtaking - a 70-meter wide burning pit in the desert. The roar of flames, intense heat, and surreal orange glow create otherworldly atmosphere.

### Day 98: Sultan Sanjar Mausoleum

Visit the iconic 12th-century mausoleum with its massive corrugated dome. Once visible for miles across the desert, guiding caravans to the city.

## Day 99: Day 8: Bukhara Full Day - The Noble Bukhara

Spend a full day exploring Bukhara, Central Asia's best-preserved medieval city. From the ancient Ark Fortress to the trading domes where merchants bartered for centuries, every street tells stories of the Great Silk Road.

### PM:

#### **Breakfast at Hotel**

Enjoy breakfast in atmospheric old town setting.

#### **Ark Fortress**

Explore the massive citadel that was home to Bukhara's emirs for over a millennium. Walk the ramparts, visit throne room, and museum.

#### **Bolo Hauz Mosque**

Admire the elegant wooden pillars and painted ceiling of this 18th-century mosque, still active for Friday prayers.

#### **Trading Domes Tour**

Walk through three preserved trading domes where Silk Road merchants sold hats, money exchange, and jewelry. Now filled with craft shops - perfect for authentic souvenirs.

#### **Lunch at Minzifa Restaurant**

Hidden courtyard restaurant serving refined Bukharan cuisine.

#### **Chor Minor ("Four Minarets")**

Visit this quirky gatehouse with four distinctive blue-domed towers. One of Bukhara's most photographed sights.

#### **Sitorai Mokhi-Khosa Palace**

Tour the last Emir's summer palace combining Russian and Oriental architecture. See the harem quarters and beautiful gardens.

#### **Bahauddin Naqshband Complex**

Visit the mausoleum and mosque of Bahauddin Naqshband, founder of the influential Naqshbandi Sufi order. Important pilgrimage site.

## Day 100: Lake 7: Hazorchashma (Highest Lake)

The final lake at 2,400m elevation. "Hazorchashma" means "thousand springs" - fed by numerous mountain streams. Most remote and pristine.

## Day 101: Siab Bazaar Evening Visit

Quick stop at Samarkand's main bazaar for evening shopping - dried fruits, spices, local bread.

### **Day 102: Traditional Bread Workshop**

Visit family bakery to watch tandoor bread-making. Try your hand at shaping dough and decorating with traditional stamps. Take home fresh hot bread!

### **Day 103: Bahauddin Naqshband Complex**

Visit the mausoleum and mosque of Bahauddin Naqshband, founder of the influential Naqshbandi Sufi order. Important pilgrimage site.

### **Day 104: Pakhlavan Mahmud Mausoleum**

Visit Khiva's most sacred site, the mausoleum of the 14th-century poet-philosopher-wrestler. Stunning blue and white tilework.

### **Day 105: Campfire Dinner Under Stars**

Traditional Turkmen dinner cooked over fire: shashlik, bread, vegetables, tea. Sit on carpets eating dinner with the crater's glow illuminating the night.

### **Day 106: Large and Small Gyz Gala**

See these mysterious Seljuk-era structures with unique corrugated walls. Their original purpose still debated by archaeologists.

## Day 107: Day 9: Desert Journey to Khiva - Through Kyzylkum

Embark on an epic desert drive across the legendary Kyzylkum Desert following ancient caravan routes. Watch landscapes change from oases to pure desert. Arrive at Khiva, an incredibly preserved fortress city that feels like stepping into an illustrated fairy tale.

### PM:

#### Early Breakfast & Checkout

Hearty breakfast before long but fascinating drive. Pack snacks and water.

#### Desert Drive to Khiva (7 hours)

Cross the spectacular Kyzylkum Desert ("Red Sand") via M37 highway. Stop at Amu Darya River (ancient Oxus River of Alexander the Great). Pass through oasis towns, desert stretches, and cotton fields. Your guide shares Silk Road history.

#### Lunch Stop in Roadside Café

Simple but tasty meal at highway café - experience real Uzbek roadside culture!

#### Arrival in Khiva

First glimpse of Khiva's mud-brick walls rising from desert. Check into hotel inside or near Ichan-Kala fortress.

#### Evening Walk in Ichan-Kala

Take your first magical walk through Khiva's inner city as evening light turns mud bricks golden. Marvel at minarets silhouetted against sunset. Orientation for tomorrow's full tour.

## Day 108: Return Drive to Penjikent

Descend from mountains as sun sets, golden light illuminating peaks. Arrive back at guesthouse.

## Day 109: Handicraft Workshops Visit

Meet local artisans making traditional Khivan crafts: wood carving, ceramics, miniature painting. Opportunity to purchase authentic crafts directly from makers.

## Day 110: Night at the Crater

Sleep in traditional yurts or tents near the crater. Fall asleep to the crater's roar, wake to spectacular sunrise. Stars above, fire below - pure magic.

## Day 111: Keshk Fortress

Final stop at this medieval caravanserai. Watch sunset turn ancient mud-brick ruins golden.

## Day 112: Day 10: Khiva Full Day - Living Museum City

Spend the entire day exploring Khiva's Ichan-Kala fortress, a UNESCO World Heritage Site frozen in time. With over 50 historic monuments packed into the walled city, every turn reveals minarets, madrasahs, and palaces showcasing Central Asian architecture at its finest.

### PM:

#### **Breakfast with Fortress Views**

Start the day with breakfast overlooking the ancient city.

#### **Kalta Minor Minaret**

Marvel at the massive turquoise-tiled minaret, intended to be tallest in Central Asia but never completed. Perfect photo opportunity.

#### **Kunya Ark Citadel**

Explore the Khan's fortress with throne room, harem, mint, and jail. Climb to battlements for panoramic city views.

#### **Juma Mosque (Friday Mosque)**

Walk through the unique "forest of columns" - 212 carved wooden pillars supporting the roof of this 10th-century mosque.

#### **Islam Khoja Minaret & Madrasah**

Climb Khiva's tallest minaret (45 meters) for spectacular bird's-eye views of the entire fortress city and surrounding desert.

#### **Lunch at Zarafshon Restaurant**

Traditional Khivan cuisine in atmospheric old building.

#### **Tash Hauli Palace**

Tour the "Stone Courtyard" palace with incredible tilework, exploring the reception courtyard, harem courtyard, and court yard. Each more ornate than the last.

#### **Pakhlavan Mahmud Mausoleum**

Visit Khiva's most sacred site, the mausoleum of the 14th-century poet-philosopher-wrestler. Stunning blue and white tilework.

#### **Handicraft Workshops Visit**

Meet local artisans making traditional Khivan crafts: wood carving, ceramics, miniature painting. Opportunity to purchase authentic crafts directly from makers.

#### **Sunset at City Walls**

Walk along the ancient fortress walls as sunset turns the entire city golden-bronze. Unforgettable final evening in Uzbekistan.

## Day 113: Sunset at City Walls

Walk along the ancient fortress walls as sunset turns the entire city golden-bronze. Unforgettable final evening in Uzbekistan.

## Day 114: Drive to Ashgabat (4 hours)

Return to capital for final night. Arrive late evening.

## Day 115: Day 11: Cross to Turkmenistan - Welcome to the Land of Marble

Your second international border crossing! Say goodbye to Uzbekistan and enter mysterious Turkmenistan. After crossing at Shavat-Dashoguz, fly to Ashgabat, one of the world's most unique capitals built entirely of white marble. Evening arrival in this surreal city.

### PM:

#### Breakfast & Checkout

Final Uzbek breakfast. Pack all belongings for border crossing.

#### Drive to Shavat-Dashoguz Border

Transfer from Khiva to Uzbekistan-Turkmenistan border (approximately 60 km, 1 hour).

#### Border Crossing to Turkmenistan

Cross from Uzbekistan (Shavat) to Turkmenistan (Dashoguz). Thorough customs inspection - be patient. With our LOI support, process is smooth. Allow 2-3 hours. Welcome to Turkmenistan!

#### Lunch in Dashoguz

First Turkmen meal! Try chorba (soup) and fitchi (spinach-filled pastry).

#### Flight to Ashgabat

Domestic flight from Dashoguz to Ashgabat (approximately 1.5 hours). Fly over Karakum Desert.

#### Arrival in Ashgabat

Transfer from airport to hotel. First glimpses of the white marble city - utterly unlike anywhere else on Earth.

#### Evening Drive Through Modern Ashgabat

Orientation drive past illuminated marble buildings, golden statues, and massive monuments. See the famous "Gate of Neutrality."



## Day 116: Day 12: Ashgabat to Darvaza - The Door to Hell

The adventure of a lifetime! Morning tour of Ashgabat's marble monuments, then drive into the Karakum Desert to witness one of Earth's most dramatic sights: the Darvaza Gas Crater, burning continuously since 1971. Camp under the stars next to this inferno - an experience you'll never forget.

### PM:

#### Breakfast at Hotel

Good breakfast before busy day of sightseeing and desert drive.

#### Independence Park

Visit Ashgabat's crown jewel park with fountains, monuments, and massive Arch of Neutrality.

#### Turkmenbashi Mosque

Tour one of Central Asia's largest mosques, built of white marble with gold domes. See the mausoleum of Turkmenistan's first president.

#### National Museum of Turkmenistan

Explore Turkmenistan's history from ancient times through Soviet era to independence. See the famous Akhal-Teke horse exhibits.

#### Lunch at Local Restaurant

Turkmen cuisine with rice pilaf, shashlik, and ishlekli (meat pie).

#### Drive to Darvaza Crater (5 hours)

Epic journey into Karakum Desert. Roads get rougher as you leave civilization. Stop at small villages, see desert landscapes, watch for camels. Your guide explains the crater's fascinating formation story.

#### Arrival at Darvaza Gas Crater - Sunset

As sun sets, approach the crater. First view is breathtaking - a 70-meter wide burning pit in the desert. The roar of flames, intense heat, and surreal orange glow create otherworldly atmosphere.

#### Campfire Dinner Under Stars

Traditional Turkmen dinner cooked over fire: shashlik, bread, vegetables, tea. Sit on carpets eating dinner with the crater's glow illuminating the night.

#### Night at the Crater

Sleep in traditional yurts or tents near the crater. Fall asleep to the crater's roar, wake to spectacular sunrise. Stars above, fire below - pure magic.

## Day 117: Day 13: Darvaza to Ancient Merv - Silk Road Archaeology

Wake to sunrise at the crater, then journey to Mary to explore Ancient Merv, once the world's largest city and a crucial Silk Road hub. Walk among ruins spanning 2,000 years of history, from Zoroastrian fire temples to Islamic monuments.

### PM:

#### **Sunrise at Darvaza Crater**

Wake early to see the crater in morning light. Different but equally spectacular. Final photos at this incredible site.

#### **Camp Breakfast**

Simple but hearty breakfast: bread, cheese, tea, eggs. Pack up camp.

#### **Drive to Mary City (4-5 hours)**

Long desert drive to Mary, Turkmenistan's fourth-largest city. Pass through more Karakum Desert, occasional oases, and gas fields.

#### **Lunch in Mary**

Local restaurant in Mary city.

#### **Ancient Merv Tour - Erk Gala**

Begin at Erk Gala, the oldest part (6th century BC). Walk atop massive earthen walls of the original fortified settlement.

#### **Gyaur-Kala Fortress**

Explore the 4th century BC fortress, Merv's second incarnation. See remains of Buddhist stupa and Zoroastrian fire temple.

#### **Sultan Sanjar Mausoleum**

Visit the iconic 12th-century mausoleum with its massive corrugated dome. Once visible for miles across the desert, guiding caravans to the city.

#### **Large and Small Gyz Gala**

See these mysterious Seljuk-era structures with unique corrugated walls. Their original purpose still debated by archaeologists.

#### **Keshk Fortress**

Final stop at this medieval caravanserai. Watch sunset turn ancient mud-brick ruins golden.

#### **Drive to Ashgabat (4 hours)**

Return to capital for final night. Arrive late evening.

## Day 118: Day 14: Ashgabat & Departure - Journey's End

Your final morning in Central Asia. Visit Nissa fortress ruins just outside Ashgabat, then time for last-minute souvenir shopping. Farewell lunch before airport transfer. Depart with memories of three incredible countries.

### PM:

#### **Breakfast at Hotel**

Final breakfast. Pack and prepare for checkout (late checkout possible depending on flight time).

#### **Nissa Fortress (UNESCO Site)**

Visit the 3rd century BC ruins of ancient Parthian capital, just 18km from Ashgabat. See remains of palaces, temples, and the famous Parthian Rhytons (drinking horns) discovery site.

#### **Tolkuchka Bazaar Visit**

Experience Central Asia's largest bazaar (open Wed, Sat, Sun). Find traditional Turkmen carpets, silver jewelry, embroidered hats, and handicrafts. Perfect for final souvenirs.

#### **Farewell Lunch at Ashgabat Restaurant**

Final group meal together. Share highlights and exchange contact information with fellow travelers. Traditional Turkmen feast.

#### **Airport Transfer**

Private transfer to Ashgabat International Airport. Your guide assists with check-in and bids farewell.

#### **Departure**

Depart Turkmenistan with incredible memories of three countries, countless UNESCO sites, new friends, and the adventure of a lifetime. Safe travels home!