



UZBEKISTAN & TURKMENISTAN

A JOURNEY THROUGH CENTRAL ASIA

OVERVIEW

Journey across these two central Asian countries, the so-called Stans, and discover their long, variegated history, impressive sites and exotic ambiance.

This ancient trading route has long been steeped in romance, with bustling bazaars, spectacular mountain and desert scenery, and extravagantly adorned cities continuing to attract intrepid travellers from the west. Over the last decade, travel to these Central Asian countries has opened up and tourist infrastructure has developed, making their legendary cities more accessible.

Led by archaeologist Ben Churcher, this 16-day tour combines intricate Islamic architecture, stunning Emirs' palaces, and splendid mosques, madrassahs, minarets and mausoleums with visits to the Silk Road cities of Tashkent, Khiva, Ashgabat, Mary, Bukhara and Samarkand. Along the journey, we'll visit the evocative ruins of Kunya-Urgench, wander through the archaeological ruins left by ancient Parthian kings at Nisa, and explore Sassanian citadels and Achaemenid cities in the desert oasis of Merv.

An optional six-night, post-tour extension to Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan is available with this tour.



TOUR LEADER

Ben Churcher is an archaeologist who has a strong interest in history and archaeology, primarily of the Muslim world.

TOUR DATES

May 14-29, 2025 | 16 Days

TOUR PRICE

\$12,860 per person, twin share
\$1,980 single supplement

TOUR DEPOSIT

A **\$1,000** non-refundable deposit is required per person to confirm your booking on tour.

GROUP SIZE

Maximum number of **16** in group

ITINERARY

Tashkent (1 night), Khiva (2 nights), Nukus (1 night), Ashgabat (3 nights), Mary (2 nights), Bukhara (3 nights), Samarkand (2 nights), Tashkent (1 night)

INCLUSIONS

15 nights' accommodation in centrally located 3 to 5-star hotels. All breakfasts, 13 lunches and 12 dinners. Services of an expert tour leader and an experienced tour manager throughout. All internal economy flights. All ground transport, entrance fees and tipping.

DETAILED ITINERARY



Start & Finish

The tour starts on Wednesday 14 May, with a transfer arranged on arrival at Tashkent airport to take you to the Lotte City Hotel Tashkent Palace, Tashkent.

The tour ends at c.6.00pm on Thursday 29 May, after a transfer to Tashkent International Airport. For those continuing on the post-tour extension, there will be an afternoon flight from Tashkent to Bishkek.

TOUR HIGHLIGHTS

Khiva

Explore the walled city of Khiva, a trading post and fort dating back to the 8th century. Enter through the city gates of the fabled old town, exploring the labyrinthine of narrow streets, surrounded by fortress walls.

Kunya-Urgench

Admire the restored Central Islamic architecture at the World Heritage site of Kunya Urgench, located to the north of Ashgabat. The site's mausolea and minarets survive despite being largely destroyed by Ghengis Khan.

Merv

Once the world's biggest city, discover the Silk Road metropolis of Merv, home to outstanding examples of Sassanid and Achaemenid cities once occupied by Persians, Arabs, Turks, Mongols and Uzbeks.

Bukhara

Tour this heritage-listed 'city-museum', home to over 100 protected monuments reflecting Bukhara's long-standing history on the Silk Route as a centre for trade, scholarship, culture and religion.

Samarkand

Survey the treasures of this Silk Road town, romanticised by generations of poets and playwrights. A highlight will be the vast labyrinth of blue-tiled, honeycomb-vaulted mausoleums in the Shah-i-Zinda necropolis.

Included meals are indicated with B, L, D.

Wednesday 14 May

Arrive Tashkent

Passengers will arrive into Tashkent International Airport at various times. Academy Travel will organise individual or group transfers from the airport to the hotel. After checking in and time to freshen up, a light dinner will be available in the hotel. Overnight Tashkent (D)

Thursday 15 May

Tashkent & Khiva

An important trading post in Central Asia, Tashkent has a chequered history of invasion from Genghis Khan to the Russian occupation. Our orientation of Tashkent begins with Amir Timur Square, dominated by a statue of the powerful Timurid military leader and statesman Amir Timurid on horseback. The buildings around the square are all built in differing styles of architecture from the Samarkand style to the baroque. We pass by the modern Parliament building and see Independence Square, a favourite place for relaxation for the locals with its impressive monuments, fountains and gardens. Following an early dinner, we travel to the airport for our flight to Urganj, with a short transfer to Khiva on arrival. Overnight Khiva (B, L, D)

Friday 16 May

Khiva

Entering the walled city of Khiva, a trading post and minor fort since the 8th century, is like stepping into another era surrounded by history. Our sightseeing this morning includes the Kunya Ark, the citadel of the Khiva rulers complete with the Khan's harem. Inside the city walls we visit the mosques, minarets and madrassas of the old town. Of particular note is the Pakhlavon Mahmud Mausoleum, the resting place of Khiva's patron saint. Following lunch, we spend the afternoon at Kibla Tozabog – the summer palace of the Emirs of Khiva. Returning to the hotel, there is time to freshen up before we enjoy dinner at local restaurant. Overnight Khiva (B, L, D)



Khiva



Kunya Urgench

Saturday 17 May

Khiva to Nukus

Departing Khiva this morning, we make our way to the outpost of Nukus, not far from the northern border of Turkmenistan. The first stop on our journey is Toprak Qala, an ancient fortress nestled in the heart of Karakalpakstan. Abandoned in the 6th century, it was the main temple complex of the Khorezm kings who ruled this area in the 3rd and 4th centuries. We explore the ruins, with many rooms of the main corner palace still clear. Our journey continues until we reach the ruins of Chilpik Dakhma, an ancient Zoroastrian Tower of Silence believed to be the earliest example of the traditional funerary practice from the 1st century BCE. Arriving in Nukus, we enjoy a late lunch together before visiting the Savitzky Art Museum, containing one of the world's greatest collections of avant-garde art, rescued from Stalin's clutches. We end the day with dinner in a local restaurant. Overnight Nukus (B, L, D)

Sunday 18 May

Nukus to Ashgabat

Today we cross into Turkmenistan, meeting our Turkmen guide and coach driver after completing the lengthy border crossing process. We continue to Kunya Urgench, for centuries one of the most important cities on this stretch of the Silk Road. Destroyed by Genghis Khan in the 13th century, it is now a UNESCO World Heritage Site with well-preserved monuments and amazing architecture well worth exploring. Following lunch in a local cafe, we visit the Najmitdin Kubra Mausoleum and the Turabek Khanum complex with its geometric patterned octagonal dome featuring beautiful mosaics. We then travel to Dashoguz Airport and board an evening flight to Ashgabat, with dinner in our hotel on arrival. Overnight Ashgabat (B, L, D)

Monday 19 May

Nisa & Ashgabat

A short drive takes us to Nisa this morning, where we explore the ruins of the ancient Parthian kings dating from the 3rd century BCE. We visit Gypjak, site of the Turkmenbashi Ruhy Mosque – the largest in Central Asia with its four minarets soaring above the gold dome built as a monument to Turkmenistan's first president. Following lunch back in Ashgabat, which means "the city of love" in Arabic, our afternoon is spent at the Turkmen carpet museum, which boasts the world's largest hand-woven rug. Dinner tonight is in the hotel. Overnight Ashgabat (B, L, D)

Tuesday 20 May

Ashgabat

Today is spent exploring Turkmenistan's capital, home to a record number of lavish marble palaces, with gleaming gold domes and vast expanses of manicured parkland. We begin at the National Museum of Turkmenistan – a sprawling complex surveying the country's long history,



Merv



Bukhara

with exceptional archaeological and ethnographic exhibits – before visiting the Neutrality Arch, Independence Park and the Rukhnama Monument. After lunch in a local restaurant, the afternoon is spent exploring the lively Russian Bazaar, built during the Soviet era and one of the largest covered markets in Turkmenistan. Dinner tonight is in a local restaurant. Overnight Ashgabat (B, L, D)

Wednesday 21 May

Mary & Merv

An early start this morning takes us along the newly built high-speed road to the oasis city of Mary. We enjoy lunch in a local restaurant, before venturing to the ancient city of Merv. Occupied at various times by Persians, Arabs, Turks, Mongols and Uzbeks, it was once a major centre for religious study and an important commercial metropolis before being destroyed by Genghis Khan's son and the Mongols in 1221CE with an estimated 700,000 deaths. We begin our explorations at the imposing fortress of Gyaur Kala, a major eastern outpost of the Sasanian Empire. Inside the ruins of this square city surrounded by 2km of walls, we find the remains of an old mosque, a monastery and cisterns. When Gyaur Kala was gradually abandoned, a new city, Sultan Kala, grew up to the west. Making our way over to Sultan Kala, we visit the recently restored Mausoleum of Sultan Sanjar, under whom Merv reached the height of its prosperity throughout the 11th and 12th centuries. Returning to Mary for lunch, the afternoon is at leisure. We end the day with dinner in a local restaurant. Overnight Mary (B, L, D)

Thursday 22 May

Gonur Depe

We begin today with a visit to the archaeological park of Gonur Depe, located a few kilometres from ancient Merv. Once a Bronze Age fortress town, it was discovered in 1972 by Greek-Russian archaeologist Viktor Sarianidi who worked at the site until his death in 2013. During the excavations, archaeologists were able to connect several areas of the town to Zoroastrianism with the strong belief that the town was home to Zoroaster himself. Located on a low hill near the bed of the Murghab River, Gonur Depe was far more than a sprawling settlement – complete with a royal palace, burial grounds, a complex aqueduct system and temples with fire altars. Our tour will also visit the necropolis where fabulous grave goods were found that are now housed in the National Museum. Following our site visit, we enjoy a picnic lunch before returning to Mary with the afternoon at leisure. Dinner tonight is in a local restaurant. Overnight Mary (B, L, D)

Friday 23 May

Bukhara

We depart Turkmenistan today for Bukhara, a drive of 380km including a stop for lunch en route. Crossing the border back into Uzbekistan, we will complete the border procedures



Samarkand



Shah-i-Zinda

before continuing to our hotel, with time to freshen up on arrival before dinner. Overnight Bukhara (B, L, D)

Saturday 24 May

Bukhara

The city of Bukhara has long been a centre of trade, scholarship, culture and religion, and the historic centre is now a UNESCO World Heritage site. Our sightseeing today includes the 10th-century Ismail Samani Mausoleum, one of the most highly-regarded expressions of Central Asian architecture. We also visit the Ark Fortress with its bulging buttresses, once a royal palace now converted to a museum; the vast Chashma Ayub Mausoleum, built on top of an ancient spring; and Madrasa Ulugbek, the oldest surviving madrasah in Central Asia. We pause for lunch together in Doston House, showcasing a variety of local dishes, before continuing our sightseeing in the beautiful townscape of the Old City. Uzbek dances are one of the best examples of this nation's vibrant culture, and this evening we enjoy a folklore show in the courtyard of a 17-century madrasah. Overnight Bukhara (B, L)

Sunday 25 May

Bukhara

Further exploration of Bukhara this morning takes us to Char Minar, built as a gatehouse to a madrasa. We also visit the Balyan and Kalon Mosques and the House of Faizullah Khodjaev, an infamous Bukhari personality who plotted with the Bolsheviks to overthrow the Emir and was rewarded with the presidency of the Bukhara People's Republic. We finish sightseeing at the Lyabi Hauz Plaza, providing a glimpse into the local modern culture. The afternoon and evening are at leisure. Overnight Bukhara (B)

Monday 26 May

Bukhara to Samarkand

Today begins with an early departure from Bukhara, first stopping to view the spectacular 12th-century minaret in the city of Vobkent. We continue to the Rabat-i Malik Caravanserai, unusual in style as it resembles an early Abbasid palace rather than a traditional Seljuk inn house, before enjoying lunch in Samarkand on arrival. The afternoon is spent exploring the Bibi Khanum Mosque, the jewel in Tamerlane's empire, with dinner tonight in a local restaurant. Overnight Samarkand (B, L, D)

Tuesday 27 May

Samarkand

Our touring today begins in the very heart of this ancient city with a visit to Registan Square. Regarded as the hub of the Timurid Renaissance, this public square framed by three imposing madrasahs has today been carefully restored to its original glory. Our next stop is the Gur Emir Mausoleum – Tamerlane's resting place. After lunch we make our way to

HOTELS

Hotels on this tour vary from four and five-star to more simple three-star hotels, according to what is available. Some hotels are large constructions and lack any distinctive atmosphere. Others are small and simple, but well located. Please also note that the standard of service in the hotels is not necessarily at the same level as other countries.

Tashkent, Lotte City Hotel Tashkent Palace

(2 nights, total)

Khiva, Orient Star Khiva

(2 nights)

Nukus, Hotel Jipek Joli

(1 night)

Ashgabat, Oguzkent Hotel

(3 nights)

Mary, Hotel Mary

(2 nights)

Bukhara, Hotel Shahrison

(3 nights)

Samarkand, Kosh Havuz Boutique Hotel

(2 nights)

WEATHER

Average temperatures in both countries during the tour should be approximately 28°C during the day with minimums of 14°C at night. Be prepared for cooler nights in the latter part of the tour with temperatures easing as the tour progresses further into Spring.

FITNESS REQUIREMENTS

Grade Three

This tour is among our most physically demanding. Please visit our website for more information on the fitness requirements for this tour.



Shah-i-Zinda, an avenue of mausoleums that contain some of the richest tile work in the Muslim world, made famous for its sparkling blue colours. We end our day of touring at the Ulugbek Observatory, destroyed after Ulugbek's death and only unearthed again by archaeologists in 1908. The evening is at leisure. Overnight Samarkand (B, L)

Wednesday 28 May Samarkand to Tashkent

We depart Samarkand this morning and make the 300km journey by train to Tashkent, where we have lunch on arrival before checking into our hotel. There is time for some afternoon sightseeing before we meet this evening for our farewell dinner. Overnight Tashkent (B, L, D)

Thursday 29 May Depart Tashkent

Our final morning is at leisure, with the option to visit the Chor-su bazaar and the old town. Rooms are available until we transfer to the airport this evening, where the tour concludes. For those continuing our journey on the post tour extension, we take an afternoon flight from Tashkent to Bishkek, capital of Kyrgyzstan. (B)

A NOTE ON THE ITINERARY

Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan can be challenging destinations. While we have selected reputable hotels, standards are variable and many of the comforts of travel which we have come to expect are simply not available. A good level of physical fitness, patience in dealing with border crossings and a preparedness to accept last-minute changes to the travel program are required. Due to the unpredictable nature of Turkmenistan, there could be last minute changes to this portion of the itinerary. We will be sure to update you if any changes arise before departure.



ENQUIRIES & BOOKINGS

For further information or to secure a place, please contact **Jamal Fairbrother** on 9235 0023 (Sydney) or 1800 639 699 (outside Sydney) or email:

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