

Heart Of The Silk Road

Visiting Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan & Turkmenistan
22 Nights / 23 Days, Almaty to Tashkent, 3rd - 25th May 2020



From AU\$6082 Per Person Share Twin Land Only
AU\$1000 Single Supplement Air From AU\$1806

CONTACT DANIEL AT MY TRAVEL EXPERT

T: (02) 4421 5577 E: noura@mytravelexpert.com.au



One of our Previous Groups Visiting The
Highlights Of Kyrgyzstan

Before joining the team at My Travel Expert, I spent a good portion of the prior 15 years as a tour operator working in emerging destinations, the companies I worked for were amongst the first to go into China in the early 80's and Vietnam in the early 90's, and during the time I was with them were amongst the first doing regular touring into destinations like Myanmar, the DPRK, Libya, Uganda and many more.

One of those destinations that we were amongst the pioneering travel organisers into were the republics of Central Asian Republics after the break up of the USSR. Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and more. As luck would have it, despite organising a number of groups to this region my own travels escorting groups often saw me off to other destinations like Egypt, Libya, Turkey and Myanmar

As a result I have been itching for some time to get up to Central Asia and see the wonders these incredible countries have on offer. From Registan Square, which inspired the tale of Scheherazade and 1001 Arabian nights, to the scenic beauty of places like Altyn Arashan that rival the Rockies for their grandeur.

The Central Asian Republics sat astride the Ancient Silk Road and with influences converging from China and Mongolia to the East, India and Persia to the South and Russia and the European Continent from the West, these states shown an incredibly diverse cultural array reflected in their food, music, history and day to day lives.

Whether you are exploring the tombs of one of the ancient Shieks, eating pilaf in a remote mountain town, or enjoying the soviet-esque splendour of cities like Ashgabat, there is always an experience lurking in this region for people to discover.

The programme we have put together for our small group departure in 2020 is a unique combination of location visits throughout Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. The journey starts with a journey through the wilds of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan visiting some of the most incredibly scenic spots in the world including Charyn Canyon, Lake Kaindy and Jety Oguz. We Journey through some of the worlds oldest cities including Bukhara, Mary, Samarkand and Khiva.. Lastly we also spend some time visiting some incredible desert regions - not just a quick journey through the Karakorum Desert as we traverse Uzbekistan, but the remains of the Aral Sea—formerly one of the worlds largest inland seas, and site of of the largest man-made disaster on the planet.

More to the point, as we are doing this programme with people I know and have worked with on the ground for almost twenty years, the rates and inclusions are incredible, and I thought this is the perfect opportunity for me to show this area off to more people, which is why you are seeing this packet of information! I would love for you to join me as I discover the Central Asian Republics on this once in a lifetime experience!

Regards Daniel Spierings
Senior Consultant - My Travel Expert

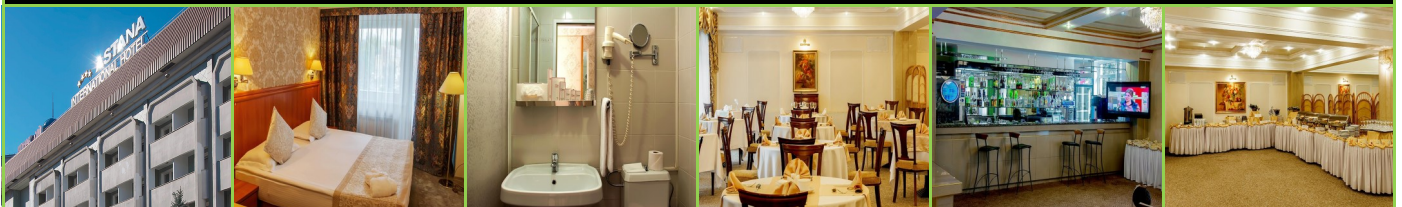
General Itinerary

Almaty to Tashkent,
3rd - 25th May 2020

Day 1: 3rd May 2020: Arrival Into Almaty

Today is an arrival day into Almaty, starting with meet and greet on arrival at Almaty airport and transfer to the hotel based on a group arrival in OZ577 from Seoul which is due to arrive at 22:05. If you are arriving at a separate time please consult with us for individual transfer costs. On arrival at the hotel we will check in, get a briefing on what to expect for the next day and retire for the night.

Almaty Accommodation: Astana International Hotel (or Similar)



Almaty Highlights



Day 2: 4th May 2020: Almaty

Today we spend the day discovering the Highlights of Almaty—the largest city in the south-east of Kazakhstan. Visits will include locations like Panilov Park (with the Zenkov Wooden-Constructed Cathedral), St Nicholas Cathedral, the National Instruments Museum, National Archeological Museum and Central State Museum. While the day does include a few museums and churches we also take in our first traditional soviet/central Asian bazaar with a visit to Almaty's famed Green Bazaar. Overnight in Almaty.

Kolsai Lakes and Charyn Canyon Highlights



Day 3: 5th May 2020: The Kolsai Lakes

We leave Almaty today for what we like to call the "Natures Wonders" part of the tour, taking the drive through the Kolsai Lakes national park (this is about 310kms and should take 5 to 6 hours) to the small village of Saty where we will leave most of our belongings at our guest house, and where we will be transferred to 4wd vehicles (the Russian Vakhtovka) to take a drive through the wilderness to visit the famed Kaindy Lake, if time permits we may visit Kolsai Lake, otherwise pending driver approval and time we will head back to the guesthouse for overnight.

Saty Accommodation: Guesthouse "Hotel" Malika (or Similar)



Day 4: 6th May 2020: Charyn Canyon

We have an early start today travelling slightly north from the village of Saty to visit Charyn Canyon - Central Asia's equivalent to Arizona's Grand Canyon - where we will visit several of the scenic spots and enjoy the natural beauty of the area before we head south to the border and cross from Kazakhstan into Kyrgyzstan, clear customs and immigration and enjoy the sweeping panoramas and landscapes as we make our way to our guesthouse in Karakol.

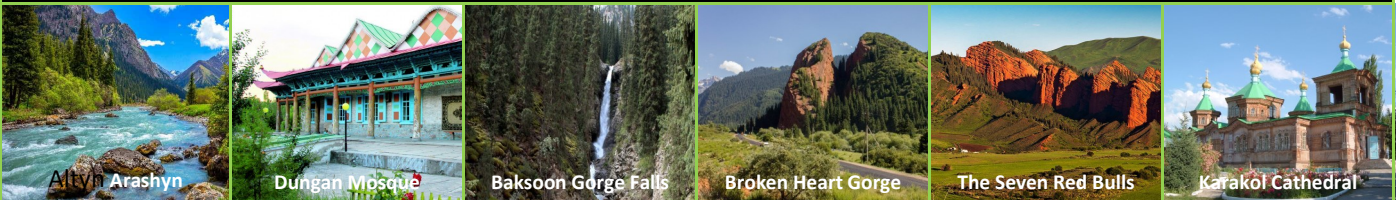
Karakol Accommodation: The Green Yard (or Similar)



Day 5: 7th May 2020: Altyn Arashyn "The Golden Spa"

Travelling in converted 4WD Military Trucks we head out to visit Altyn Arashyn, one of the most scenic gorges and locations in Kyrgyzstan. Filled with fir trees and alpine meadows, once we arrive at the top of the gorge you will have a chance to wander around the local area or indulge in a free bath at one of the hot springs, before we head back to Karakol to visit some local sights like the Dungan Mosuq, and the Russian Orthodox Church (Karakol Cathedral) which is a complex wooden construction that was built without using a single nail.

Altyn Arashyn & Jetly Oguz Highlights



Day 6: 8th May 2020: Jetly Oguz

Today we leave Karakol, and will eventually end up in the small village of Tamga after a day of travelling through the scenic hills and valleys of the area know collectively as Jetly Oguz. During the days journey we will see some of the regions most stunning and incredible sights amongst the myriad of streams, fir tree forests and alpine meadows we pass. Highlights will include the Gorge of the Broken Heart, the Gorge of the Seven Red Bulls and Barksoon Gorge with the scenic Barksoon Falls.

Tamga Accommodation: Tamga Guesthouse (or Similar)



Day 7: 9th May 2020: Lake Issyk-Kul and Bishkek

We depart the rural charms of Tamga this morning and take the last leg of our journey to Bishkek. Enroute we take

A look at the scenic spots available along the shores of Lake Issyk-Kul. Nestled by the Tien-Shien Mountains this lake is the 2nd largest mountain lake in the world, second only to Lake Titicaca, and has plenty to take in, including the now lonely tower of Burana, once the Karakhnid Dynasty's Capital little is left to see apart from the tower and the Balbals lying exposed under the open sky. The afternoon will see our arrival in Bishkek where we will have the chance to see the highlights of the largest city in Kyrgyz including the national museum, the bazaar and the Park Panilov.

Lake Issyk-Kul and Bishkek Highlights



Bishkek Accommodation: Asia Mountain Hotel 1 (or Similar)



Day 8: 10th May 2020: Bishkek to Tashkent

This morning we can level in a bit of luxury and sleep in, or take a brief exploratory walk before we head off to Bishkek Airport and hop aboard a short flight to Tashkent. On arrival, following our journey through customs we will transfer to the hotel and get ourselves settled before taking a leisurely excursion in Tashkent. We will start with a journey of Tashkent's Metro Stations taking a ride on the Tashkent Metro - the first launched in Central Asia back in 1977 - to see a number of the stations each of which is stunningly decorated in their own style, true postcard style images. Afterwards we will stop at the local workshops or local applied arts masters and find out more about traditional local woodcarving, miniature painting, embroidery, pottery and hand art.

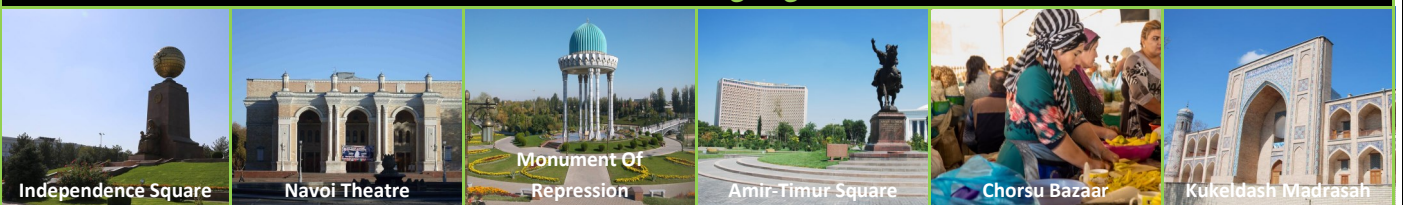
Tashkent Accommodation: Rakat Plaza Hotel (or Similar)



Day 9: 11th May 2020: Tashkent

Today is all about Tashkent, as we spend a full day exploring some of the cities unique highlights starting with a visit to the Museum of Applied arts and Amir Timur Square—which lies at the very Centre OF Tashkent City , and the location from which modern Tashkent was planned and started in 1882. Another symbol of Tashkent we will take time to visit is the Tashkent Chimes, the clock mechanisms of which were brought back as spoils of war from Germany after World War II by a soldier who had been a clockmaker before enlisting. The majority of the rest of the day will be taken up with visiting the cities monuments and fountains, before we head back to the hotel and prepare for our departure for Samarkand tomorrow.

Tashkent Highlights



Day 10: 12th May 2020: Tashkent To Samarkand

We leave Tashkent this morning, and hit up the road to Samarkand for the Ancient Civilizations part of our programme, arriving just after noon, where after checking into the hotel we will head out to see one of the most pivotal locations along the old Silk Road - Registan Square. Bounded by three incredible Madrassas (Madrassa Ulugbek, Madrassa Sherador and Madrassa Tilla-Kori) the square complex represents the symbiosis of Oriental and Arabic Influenced artwork at its heights. A location whose boundless beauty inspired the tale of a thousand and one Arabian nights, Registan Square is a true symbol of central asia and the old silk road.

Samarkand Accommodation: Asia Mountain Hotel 1 (or Similar)



Day 11: 13th May 2020: Samarkand

We spend today visiting the spectacular monuments in and around Samarkand including the Ulugbek Observatory - potentially the worlds first observatory, and the ruins of the ancient city of Afrosiyab. We also spend some considerable time visiting the sites that arose during the Timurid Epoch including the stunning Gur-Emir Mausoleum, the Shaki-Zinda Necropolis and the Bibi Khanum Mosque.

Samarkand Highlights



Shakhrisabz Highlights



Day 12: 14th May 2020: Samarkand to Bukhara

Samarkand is left behind this morning as we start our journey to Bukhara, stopping enroute to visit the wonders of Shakhrisabz, with the famed Ak-Saray Palace, the Kuk-Gumbaz, the Gumbazi Saidon and Khazrat-i-Imam Mosque. Shakhrisabz is also the resting place of Tamurlanes son - who was second in command to Ghengis Khan and led the mongols after he fell - so we will also take time to visit Jakhangir's Mausoleum. After lunch we will continue the southward drive towards Bukhara, the fortified city, where we will make our last stop before temporarily leaving Uzbekistan for the deserts of Turkmenistan!

Bukhara Accommodation: Romil Hotel (or Similar)



Day 13: 15th May 2020: Bukhara

Discovering the highlights of Bukhara is today's aim, with an array of sights to visit it should be an incredible day of touring. We will start off with highlights such as the Kalyan Minaret and Poi Kalyan Mosque, visit the Miri Arab Madrassah, and Toki Zaragon Dome, Ulugbek and Abdullaz-ikhan Madrassah, Toki Telpak Furushon Dome, Magoki Attor Mosque, Toki Sarrafon Dome, and the Labi Huaz Complex. The following lunch if the morning's sightseeing wasn't enough we will cover the Ark Fortress including Zindan Prison where prisoners once held by the local ruler almost sparked a war with the British Empire, as well as Bolo House Mosque, Ismail Samoni Mausoleum, Chashma Ayub Mausoleum and the Bazaar before we retire for the night.

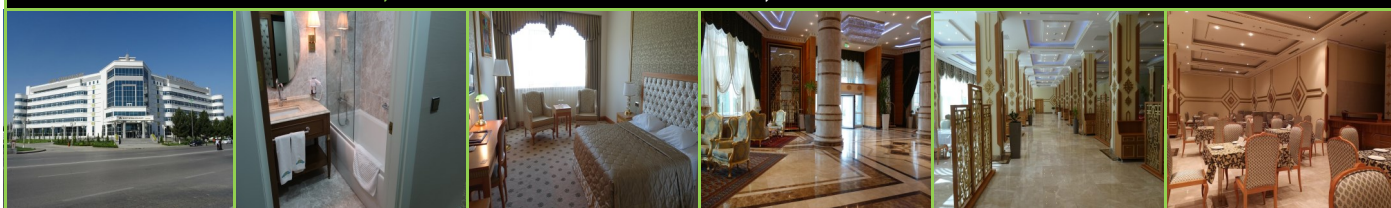
Bukhara Highlights



Day 14: 16th May 2020: Bukhara to Mary

Today is a day spent on travel as we leave Bukhara and head for the Farab border leading to Turkmenistan where we will endure the formalities of crossing the border before meeting up with our Turkmen guide and heading off to Turkmenabad (formerly Chardjou) for lunch at a local restaurant before we begin a long distance drive through the Karakum Desert where we will only stop occasionally at a few scenic spots as we make our way to the city of Mary.

Mary Accommodation: Mary Hotel (or Similar)



Mary and Merv Highlights



Day 15: 17th May 2020: Mary to Ashgabat

The Twin Cities of Mary and Merv are our day's delights, originally both called Merv, the newer city was renamed Mary to avoid some confusion, we start by visiting the UNESCO world Heritage listed sights in Merv including Erk Kala, Gyaur Kala, Sultan Kala, the ruins of Beni-Makhan and possibly the ruins of a Buddhist temple as well as Grand and Little Kyz Kalas. Afterwards we will visit the Mary Historical Museum and City Centre, visit one of the oldest Russian Orthodox Churches in Turkmenistan and more before taking an evening flight to the capital of Turkmenistan—Ashgabat, where we will be based for the next few days.

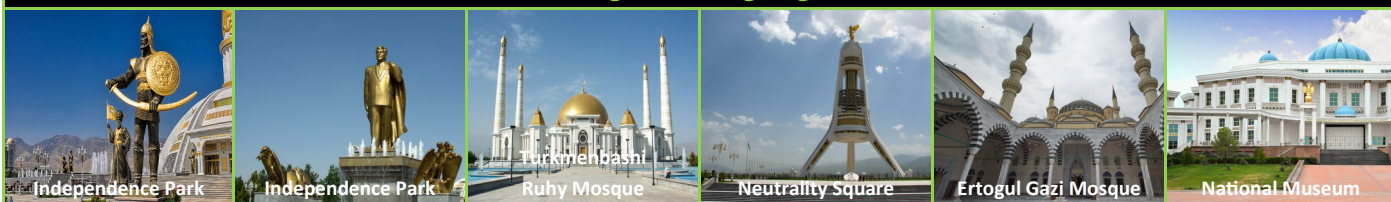
Ashgabat Accommodation: Grand Turkmen Hotel (or Similar)



Day 16: 18th May 2020: Ashgabat and Darvaza

We have a long day ahead of us today so be sure to be rested! Our day will start with touring in Ashgabat and visiting the sights of this fascinating city where under Niyazov's rule reconstruction flourished and now icons like Independence Park, Neutrality Square, Ertogul Gazi Mosque stand as huge icons Turkmenistan. We will also visit the Residence of the Parthain Kings—the UNESCO world heritage site called Old Nissa, and Turkmenbashi Ruhy Mosque, the largest in Turkmenistan. This afternoon we leave the confines of Ashgabat for a rather long road trip through an area which had been populated by mostly nomadic tribes, visiting craters caused by varying tectonic subsidence until we arrive at the Fire Crater - or Gate To Hell - a fire that has now been burning over 40 years! After taking in this unique wonder we will return to Ashgabat, which we should reach around midnight.

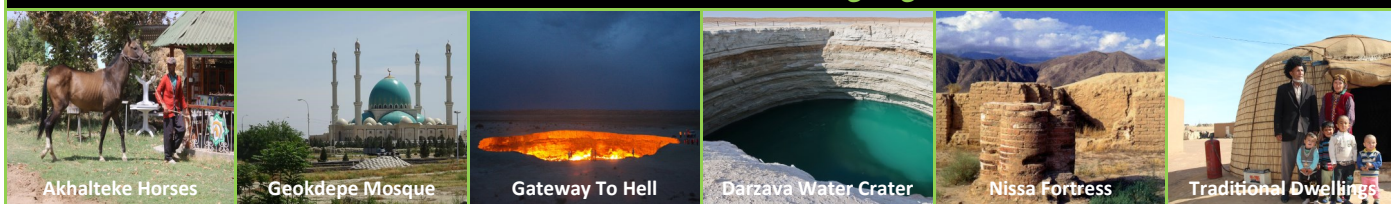
Ashgabat Highlights



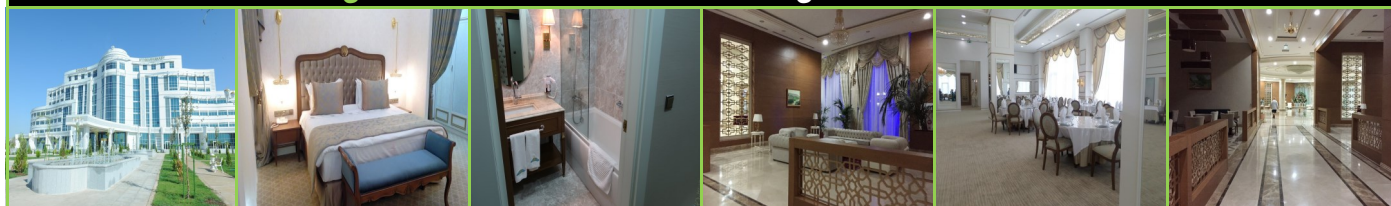
Day 17: 19th May 2020: Ashgabat to Dashoguz

When the Russians started conquering the Central Asia Region, the Turkmens were amongst the strongest to resist and the largest battle of all happened at one of the locations visited this morning —Teke Stronghold. Located at Geokdepe we will visit not only the old stronghold and fortresses but the Mosque, and take time to visit the horse breeders who have been working on the Akhalteke Thoroughbred Horse for centuries. The afternoon is then given over to visiting more incredible sights in Ashgabat including the National Museum of Turkmenistan (please note sites and days may vary based on local conditions) before we take an afternoon flight to Dashoguz.

Darvaza and Geokdepe Highlights



Dashoguz Accommodation: Dashoguz Hotel (or Similar)



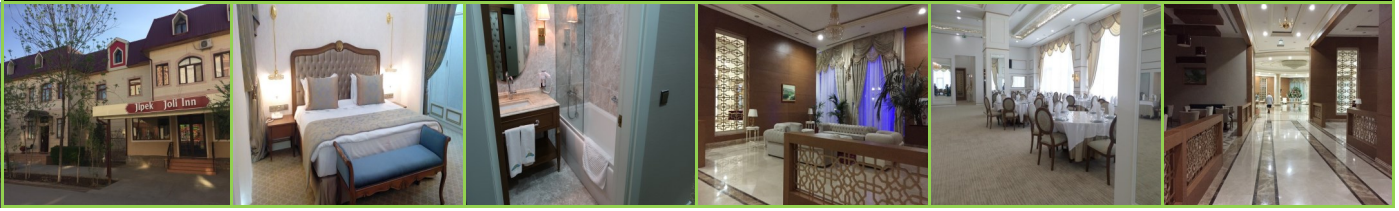
Day 18: 20th May 2020: Dashoguz to Nukus

Dashoguz has provided us with a respite, and the flight up has saved us almost a days drive, and now refreshed we can head out for the incredible lost capital of Khorezm: Kunya-Urgench with sites like the Mausoleums of Turabek Khanym, Arslan II, Najmeddin Kunra and more, as well as the remains of the second minaret, Caravan Saray and the Kunya Urgench Museum (time permitting). Afterwards rather than heading back towards Dashoguz and crossing into Uzbekistan we will head north to Khodjeyli and re-enter Uzbekistan there heading straight to Nukus where the "Desert & Disaster" section of our tour begins.

Kunya-Urgench Highlights



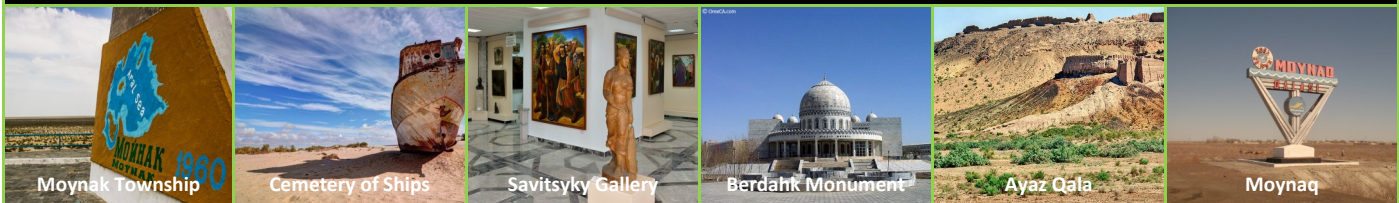
Nukus Accommodation: Jipek Joli Inn (or Similar)



Day 19: 21st May 2020: Nukus to the Aral Sea

After a relaxing night at a family run property we will head out from Nukus to discover the worlds most incredible disaster area - the Aral Sea. Over our time in Nukus we will visit the incredible Igor Savitsky Gallery—a fascinating look at Karalpakstan’s history through Art—and a great overview of the areas we will be seeing on this leg, which covers some of the most impoverished areas of Uzbekistan. Our First stop after leaving Nukus is Moynak, once a huge fishing hub it now stands abandoned and the former sea shore is host to what is often called the “Graveyard of Ships”, and from here we head out into what was once the Aral sea driving through incredible scenic canyons, and collapsed land as we journey the Ustuart Plateau to our nights Yurt Camp.

Nukus and Moynaq Highlights



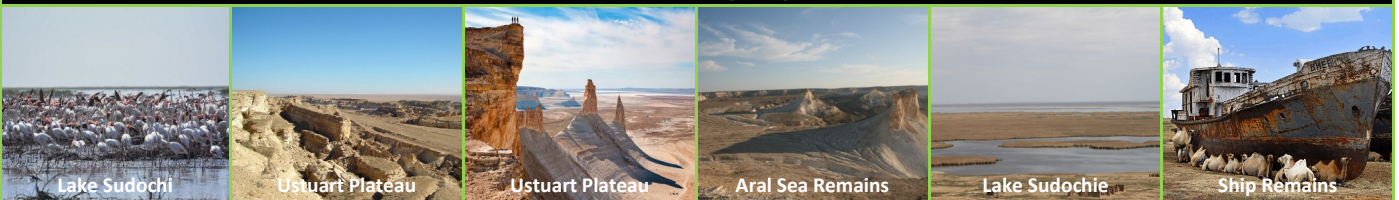
Aral Sea Accommodation: Ger Camp (or Similar)



Day 20: 22nd May 2020: Aral Sea to Nukus

Following our night in the desert we begin our journey this morning back to Nukus visiting the once seaside Silk Road stop of Kurgancgna Kala which saw its heyday back in the 13th Century. We will also pass by the abandoned settlement of Urga and a very lonely abandoned lighthouse (yes in the middle of a desert). We also take time to stop at Lake Sudochie - the last remnants of the Aral Sea in the area - for a picnic lunch. As we head through the last leg to Nukus we will stop and visit the Mizdakkhana Memorial Complex and Gaur-Kala Fortress. Overnight in Nukus

Aral Sea Highlights



Day 21: 23rd May 2020: Nukus to Khiva

Having witnessed the devastation of the receded Aral Sea we leave Nukus for the famed walled city of Khiva where we will get our last taste of Desert and Ancient Civilizations for this trip, visiting the sites of ancient Kharezm including Ota Darvaza, Kalta Minor, Muhammad Amin Khan Madrassah, the Kunya Ark (fortress - which offers stunning panoramic views of Khiva), Mukhammad Rahim Khan Madrassah, Pahlavan Makhmud Mausoleum, Islam Khodja Minaret and Madrassah, the Juma Mosque and the old Harem. Overnighting in Khiva before we return to Tashkent.

Khiva Accommodation: Hayat Inn (or Similar)



Khukus and Moynaq Highlights



Day 22: 24th May 2020: Tashkent

We return to Tashkent this morning and check in once again to the hotel we staid at previously, and today, after 22 days on the road - we gave a day of rest, take time to prepare your bags for the trip home, lounge by the pool, or set off and do some exploring of Tashkent on your own, he day is yours!

Day 23: 25th May 2020: Tashkent Departure

Following breakfast we have a late morning start, loading our luggage and checking out of the hotel before we head out on a last trip through Tashkent seeing some previously missed sights like the Tashkent TV Tower, the Khastimam Complex and Kukeldash Madrasah, as well as another visit to the largest Bazaar in Tashkent—Chor Su Bazaar. We also take time to visit the Central Asia Palov Centre where we witness the tradition of cooking a dish that by now we should all be familiar - Palov, or Pilaf as some call it. Lastly we have ourselves dinner at a local restaurant before travelling to the Airport for our 19:30 departure flight to Seoul or homeward bound.

Central Asian Dishes



Meals and Food: Central Asia and You!

On this journey we have elected to include only breakfasts (and the very rare occasional meal otherwise such as when travelling in remote areas or arriving late somewhere), this is simply because generally pre-included meals come at hotels and some of the best meals we could have might be at local restaurants, and rather than overcharging for them its better to pay locally. To this end I recommend putting aside a minimum of USD550 per person for meals whilst travelling. Often we will rely on the guide for input on places to eat, especially on days where options are limited - so if you have dietary restrictions i.e diabetic, coeliac, allergies, intolerances etc. it is more important than usual to let us know because options are tighter than elsewhere.

Transport In Central Asia



Prices & Inclusions

Heart Of The Silk Road, May 2020
Land Arrangements, Airfares, Visas, Local Costs

Tour Programme: AU\$6082.00 Per Person Share Twin or Double

Tour Programme: AU\$7082.00 Per Person In Single

This is the standard land costing (excluding international airfares but including the regional airfares), and the majority of the travel will be in share twin or double accommodation, or single if Selected. Please note though that in Saty, Tamga and the Aral Sea accommodation is extremely limited and the best we can guarantee is "Share" in these stops—which means you may end up in a twin room, or in a room with a few other people.

Tour Programme: Inclusions & Exclusions

Included in Uzbekistan:

- Twin/double share accommodation
- A/C transportation as per the program
- Meals: Breakfast in hotels
- All transfers
- Entrance tickets to sites and monuments
- Escort tour guide English speaking
- Mineral water 1l per person per day

Excludes in Uzbekistan: # International ticket # alcoholic and soft drinks # visa cost # camera/video fees at sites # personal expenses for souvenirs # tips and other voluntary gratuities # any other services and products not included above.

Included in Turkmenistan:

- Letter of invitation, registration
- Twin/double share accommodation
- English speaking guide
- A/C land transport as per program, incl. 4x4 transport for Darvaza tour
- Meals: only breakfasts in hotels + dinner (boxes) on D-14 (Darvaza trip)
- Entrance fees to the sites, museums mentioned in the itinerary
- Mineral water 1l per person per day

Excluded in Turkmenistan:

Visa fees # Immigration duty-\$14 p/p (must be paid at the border on arrival) # Photo/video camera fees at sites/museums # Meals & services not mentioned above # Expenses of personal nature # Tips to guide/drivers

Included in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan:

- Twin/double share accommodation
- A/C Transportation as per program
- Due to the road conditions for Altyn-Arashan will be provided NON A/C transport as UAZ for 2-5 pax; GAZ-66 or "Vakhtovka" for 6-14 pax; ZIL-131 or KAMAZ for 15-26 pax
- Entrance fees to sites listed
- English speaking guide
- Ecological fee
- Mineral water 1l per person per day

Excluded in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan:

International ticket # alcoholic and soft drinks # visa cost # camera/video fees at sites # personal expenses for souvenirs # tips and other voluntary gratuities, any other services and products not included above.

Airfare Ex-Sydney: From AU\$1806.00 Per Person on Asiana

Airfare Ex-Melbourne: From AU\$2026.00 Per Person on Asiana

Please note that the above flight costs are based on currently available FIT (Individual Airfares) and are subject to availability at the time of reservation, prices include all prepayable taxes surcharges and fees as at the 20th July 2019. Prices are inclusive of STPC and FOC Day Tour. Please note that alternative airlines, differing schedules or additional flights may seriously alter flight costs. Business upgrades available upon enquiry.

Suggested Flights: Asiana Airlines

With an arrival in Almaty and Departure from Tashkent we recommend flying with Asiana Airlines for our international airfare to and from Central Asia. A trip with Asiana will include a night stopover enroute to Central Asia (covered by the airline) and a free day tour to see the highlights of Seoul on the way home. If preferred more direct connections are available (though days of the week can vary) via the middle east with carriers like Etihad though please note that the end travel time is nearly the same. You can also look at using two tickets by flying somewhere like Bangkok and organizing to take a regional carrier like Uzbekistan Airways into Central Asia, but with the minimum suggested connection times between said flights you are looking at almost as long a stop as you are in Seoul in some cases—but without the free hotel or the guarantee of ensuring onward travel if connections are missed.

To that end the suggested flight itinerary for the above listed lead in airfares with Asiana is ..

Flight No	Date	Departs	ETD	Arrives	ETA	Notes
QF402	2nd May 2020	Melbourne	06:00	Sydney	07:25	(If from MEL)
OZ602	2nd May 2020	Sydney	09:30	Seoul	19:00	(Stopover Included)
OZ577	3rd May 2020	Seoul	18:10	Almaty	22:05	(Can Try for Additional Free Tour)
OZ574	25th May 2020	Tashkent	22:10	Seoul	08:55	(Arrive 26th May, inc Free Tour)
OZ601	26th May 2020	Seoul	20:00	Sydney	07:30	(Arrives 27th May)
QF433	27th May 2020	Sydney	10:00	Melbourne	11:35	(if from Mel)

Visas & Entry: Inclusions & Exclusions

Uzbekistan: Entry to Uzbekistan for stays under 30 days is now visa free for Australian Citizens

Kyrgyzstan: Entry to Kyrgyzstan for stays under 30 days is now visa free for Australian Citizens

Kazakhstan: Entry to Kazakhstan for stays under 30 days is now visa free for Australian Citizens

Turkmenistan: Is the last remaining country of those that we are visiting that require visas, we will organize all the paperwork and introductory letters, and the visa fee (currently US\$57) and the Migration Card Fee (currently US\$12) will be collected and paid locally.

Local Costs: Meals, Gratuities and More

As previously mentioned, this isn't a full board (all-meal) inclusive itinerary, and we recommend a minimum of US\$560 to cover lunches and dinners—though this is really an approximate cost. We also recommend bringing at least US\$3 per day to cover driver tips and \$5 for the Guide, other smaller tips will be needed for porters, toilet cleaners, shoe minders and others as we travel. Usually I recommend budgeting on between US\$100 and US\$150 per day for additional expenses - this is often more than most people need to cover meals, tips and shopping, but for some it is not enough, generally though it balances out and most will return with change to spare.