



# **Backstreets & Bazaars of Uzbekistan 2020**



# Backstreets & Bazaars of Uzbekistan

## A Cultural & Culinary Navruz Adventure

2020 – Cultural Series – 10 Days

March 16-25, 2020

*Taste your way through the vibrant heart of the Silk Road, Uzbekistan, on a culinary and cultural caravan held during the height of Navruz. A centuries-old festival, Navruz is a joyous welcoming of the return of spring and the beginning of a new year, when families and local communities celebrate over sumptuous feasts, songs and dance. Beginning in the modern capital of Tashkent, introduce your palate to the exciting tastes of Uzbek cuisine during a meeting with one of the city's renowned chefs. Explore the ancient architecture of three of the most celebrated Silk Road oases – Bukhara, Khiva and Samarkand – and browse their famed markets and bazaars for the brilliant silks, ceramics and spices that gave the region its exotic flavor. Join with the locals in celebrating Navruz at a special community ceremony, and gather for a festive Navruz dinner. Along the way, participate in hands-on cooking classes and demonstrations, meet with master artisans in their workshops, dine with local families in their private homes and discover the rich history, enduring traditions and abundant hospitality essential to everyday Uzbek culture.*





## Daily Itinerary

Day 1, Monday, March 16	Arrive Tashkent, Uzbekistan
Day 2, Tuesday, March 17	Tashkent • fly to Urgench • Khiva
Day 3, Wednesday, March 18	Khiva
Day 4, Thursday, March 19	Khiva • Bukhara
Day 5, Friday, March 20	Bukhara • celebration of Navruz
Day 6, Saturday, March 21	Bukhara • celebration of Navruz
Day 7, Sunday, March 22	Bukhara • Gijduvan • Samarkand
Day 8, Monday, March 23	Samarkand
Day 9, Tuesday, March 24	Samarkand • day trip to Urgut • train to Tashkent
Day 10, Wednesday March 25	Depart Tashkent



## MIR Signature Experiences

- Enjoy lunch and a demonstration of Uzbek cuisine hosted by a renowned Tashkent chef.
- Wander the streets of ancient Khiva, remarkably preserved within its undulating city walls of plastered mud.
- Dine in the homes of Uzbek families, experiencing Central Asian hospitality at its best.
- Experience the timeless character of Bukhara's ornate *madrassahs*, billowing turquoise domes and colorful markets in the heart of the Old Town.
- Celebrate Navruz with an evening feast of traditional Central Asian dishes.
- Enjoy the favorite holiday sweet *sumalak*, made only at this time of year.
- Join with the locals as they take part in a *Muchal Tuy* or *Sallabandon Tuy*, traditional Navruz ceremonies unique to Uzbekistan.
- Explore the architectural wonders of legendary Samarkand, admiring majestic Registan Square.
- Take part in cooking classes and demonstrations led by local masters, learning how to make traditional bread, and Uzbekistan's signature dish, *plov* (savory rice).
- Engage all your senses at the labyrinthine Urgut Market.
- Cheer on the participants at an exhilarating local *buzkashi* match, a traditional equestrian game still played much the same way as it was by medieval nomadic tribes on the Central Asian steppes.

## Tour Highlights

Tashkent	Chorsu Bazaar, Independence Square, Kukeldash Madrassah, Kaffal-Shashi Mausoleum, Navoi Theater, Barak-Khan Madrassah, Museum of Applied Arts, lunch and cooking demonstration with chef
Khiva	Old Town, or Ichon-Qala (UNESCO World Heritage Site), Tash-Hauli Palace, Dzhuma Mosque, Kunya Ark, Pakhlavan Makhmud Mausoleum, Kyzyl Kum Desert, Amu Darya River
Bukhara	"Historic Center of Bukhara" (UNESCO World Heritage Site), Lyabi-Hauz Plaza, Kukeldash Madrassah, Kalon Mosque and Minaret, Ark Citadel, Zindan Prison, Chor Minor Madrassah, Emir's Summer Palace, Museum of National Crafts, Ismael Samani Mausoleum, studio visit of an Uzbek master marionette-maker, performance at local <i>madrassah</i> , Navruz celebrations including tasting <i>sumalak</i>
Samarkand	"Crossroad of Cultures" (UNESCO World Heritage Site), Registan, Tillya-Kori Madrassah, Shir Dor Madrassah, Gur-Emir Mausoleum, Ulug Bek Observatory, Shah-i-Zinda, Siab Bazaar, Bibi Khanum Mosque, ceramic master's studio, bread-baking demonstrations at a family bakery, fashion show at Valentina Romanenko's studio, performance at El Merosi Theater of Historical Costume, <i>plov</i> cooking class
Urgut	Urgut Market, local <i>buzkashi</i> match



## Daily Itinerary

**Important note:** Please see the notes later in this document under “Pre-tour Information” for details on hotel check-in time at the beginning of the program and the best arrival times in Tashkent.

### Day One, Monday, March 16

#### Arrive Tashkent, Uzbekistan

After clearing Uzbek immigration and customs, transfer to the hotel. Most flight arrivals are in the early morning hours, so sleep in before meeting with your tour manager in the hotel. Kick off the program with **lunch at one of the top restaurants in Tashkent**. Then set off on an introductory tour of the capital of Uzbekistan.

Although it doesn't look it today, **Tashkent** is one of the oldest cities in Uzbekistan. Rock paintings in the Chaktal Mountains about 50 miles away show that humans have been here since perhaps 2000 BC. In the second century BC, the town was known as Ming Uryuk. A major caravan crossroads, it was taken by the Arabs in 751 and by Genghis Khan in the 13th century. Tamerlane feasted here in the 14th century, and the Shaibanid khans in the 15th and 16th. The Russian Empire arrived in 1865, and Uzbekistan was not an autonomous country again until 1991.

Tashkent lost much of its architectural history in a huge earthquake in 1966. Today, the city is a jumble of wide, tree-lined boulevards, oversized 20th century Soviet buildings and reconstructed traces of the old city, with mud-walled houses, narrow winding lanes, mosques and *madrassahs* (Islamic religious schools).

Begin with the **Courage Monument**, built near the dividing line between the old town and Tashkent's newer section to honor the workers from all over the Soviet Union who came to Tashkent to help rebuild the city after the earthquake in 1966.

Continue with old town sites including Kaffal-Shashi Mausoleum and Barak-Khan Madrassah. The **Kaffal-Shashi Mausoleum** dates from the 16th century. A shining silvery dome tops the mausoleum of this revered Muslim theologian, scientist and poet. **Barak Khan Madrassah** was founded by one of Tamerlane's descendants. The Arabic calligraphy and mosaics are unique to Tashkent.

The **Uthman Koran**, considered by Sunni Muslims to be the oldest Koran in the world, is safeguarded in the library of the Tillya Sheikh Mosque in the Muy Muborok Madrassah, where several of Mohammed's hairs are said to have been enshrined. Written on calfskin some time after the death of Mohammed, the manuscript is believed to have been compiled in Medina by Uthman, the third caliph of Islam. (Shi'a Muslims believe that Uthman's successor, Ali, was the first true caliph, and his version of the Koran is held to be the only true version.) Only a third of the manuscript remains, about 250 large pages bound into a huge book. It has been inscribed onto the UNESCO Memory of the World Register. The experience of viewing this 7th century sacred document is a powerful one.



Next visit the **Museum of Applied Arts**. Alexander Polovtsev, a wealthy czarist diplomat to Turkestan, admired Uzbek architecture and built a traditional mansion in 1898, inviting artisans from Samarkand, Bukhara and Fergana to decorate the interior.



Featuring the painted carved plaster called *ganche*, carved wood and tilework, the house itself is a main attraction. Exhibits include the Uzbek embroidered wall coverings called *suzani*, ceramics, jewelry, rugs and musical instruments.

The history of **Independence Square** (Mustakillik Maydoni) is revealed in the different names it has borne throughout its existence. Originally named Cathedral Square in honor of the Orthodox cathedral built here by Konstanin Kaufman, the first Russian Governor-General of Turkestan, it became Red Square in 1917. In 1966 it was designated Lenin Square, and it was not until 1992 that it became Independence Square.

See the exterior of the **Navoi Theater**. Alisher Navoi, who lived and wrote at the end of the 15th century, is Uzbekistan's most beloved poet. The Navoi Opera and Ballet Theater was built in 1947 by Japanese prisoners of war, and includes six foyers representing the main cities of Uzbekistan. The repertoire of the theater includes Uzbek music and dance, and international operas and ballets.

After touring, there will be a **welcome dinner** to celebrate the opening of your adventure.  
Meals: B, L, D – *Lotte Hotel or similar*

## *Day Two, Tuesday, March 17*

### **Tashkent • fly to Urgench • Khiva**

This morning after breakfast continue touring the capital before departing in late afternoon for the flight to Urgench.

Begin with **Kukeldash Madrassah**. Kulbobo Kukeldash, builder of the 16th century Kukeldash Madrassah, was the foster brother of Khan Abdullah. Located on a hill above Chorsu Plaza, the Kukeldash Madrassah is one of the largest 16th century madrassahs remaining in Central Asia. Constructed of baked brick with only one facade decorated in majolica and glazed bricks, the madrassah was part of an ensemble that marked the center of the old town and included the newly restored Juma Mosque.

Next enjoy a visit to the **busy Chorsu (“Four Ways” or “Crossroads”) Bazaar, with a special emphasis on the fabric area and of course, the bakery**. Open every day, the bazaar hosts traders and shoppers buying and selling anything from spices and produce to woodwork and embroidery.

Tashkent boasts the first **metro** in Central Asia. (The second is in Almaty.) Begun in 1977, each station has a different theme, some incorporating Central Asian decorative motifs and some resembling Russian palaces. With granite and marble, chandeliers and mosaics, the stations on Tashkent's three lines are meant to be “art galleries for the people.”

Lunch will be at a restaurant headed by a renowned local chef. Enjoy a special meeting with the chef to discuss Uzbek cuisine, and watch as he demonstrates how to make a selection of Uzbek dishes.

Depart after lunch to the airport for the evening flight to Urgench. On arrival, transfer to nearby Khiva.  
Meals: B, L, D (on flight) – *Asia Khiva Hotel or similar*

## *Day Three, Wednesday, March 18*

### **Khiva**

Legend says that the ancient Silk Road oasis of **Khiva** was founded at the place where Shem, son of Noah, discovered water in the desert, and that the city got its name from Shem's joyful shout, “Hey va!”



at the discovery. Today, this living city is part museum town, part recreation of life hundreds of years ago. Archaeologists have found traces of human habitation around Khiva dating from the fifth century BC. It was for hundreds of years a stop on the old Silk Road and a fortress town, but it was not until the 16th century that Khiva became the capital of the Khorezm Khanate. The khanate ruled the surrounding area for over 300 years, and was a well-known slave-trading center. Today, Khiva evokes a most remote and exotic feel with its compact old, walled city full of minarets, a khan's fort, cobbled alleys, mosques and tombs.

Begin the day **exploring Khiva on foot**. The tour includes the monuments of the **UNESCO-listed Old Town**, or **Ichon-Qala**, including the **Tash-Hauli Palace**, built in the 19th century for the reigning khan and his four wives; the **Dzhuma Mosque**, with its interior forest of carved wooden pillars; and the **Kunya Ark**, the original residence of the khans, partially destroyed in the Persian invasion of the 18th century.

Enjoy lunch at a local restaurant on the edge of the old town.

The mausoleum of **Pakhlavan Makhmud** was built in 1810 to honor the patron of Khiva, Pakhlavan Makhmud, a poet and wrestler who died in the 14th century and is thought to be buried here. Its full turquoise dome has become a symbol of Khiva, along with the nearby Islam Khodja Minaret, banded in dark and light blue.

This evening, enjoy dinner at a special restaurant before overnight at the hotel.

Meals: B, L, D – *Asia Khiva Hotel or similar*

## *Day Four, Thursday, March 19*

### **Khiva • Bukhara**

Following an early breakfast at the hotel, depart Khiva for the fabled city of Bukhara. The route today passes across long stretches of the **Kyzyl Kum (Red Sand) Desert**, the same route followed by loaded Silk Road camel caravans, and once plagued by brigands on hand to plunder their riches. Today, travelers can see dunes, *saxaul* bushes and the distant mountains. Enjoy views en route of the **Amu Darya River**, which loosely runs parallel to the Uzbek-Turkmen border.

Arrive this evening and check in at the hotel – accommodations are in a small hotel located near the historic Old Town. Enjoy dinner and overnight here.

Meals: B, L (packed en route), D – *Sasha & Son Bed & Breakfast, Amelia Boutique Hotel or similar*







Day Five, Friday, March 20

## Bukhara

**Please note**, timings today and tomorrow are highly subject to change due to the special festive nature of the Navruz period. Our touring will be intermixed with local festivities over the next two days.

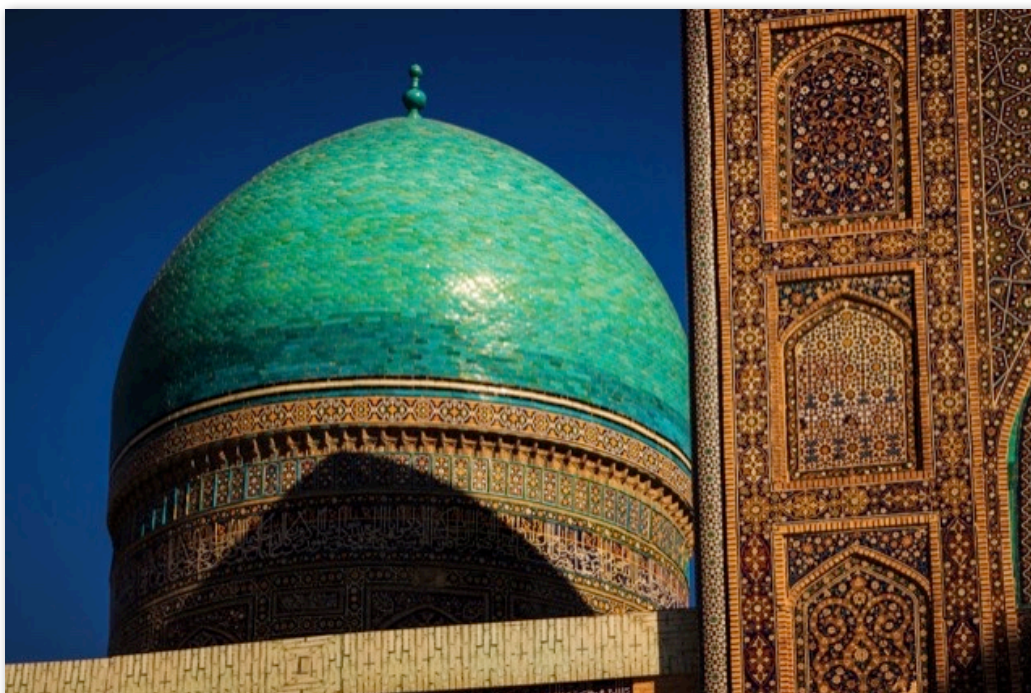
Spend today **exploring Central Asia's most ancient living city, Bukhara**, on foot and by vehicle. An oasis in the desert, Bukhara offers cool shade and rest to the modern traveler as it did to camel caravans that plied the Silk Road hundreds of years ago. Bukhara is as old as Samarkand, and has preserved its ancient architecture and design to an arguably larger extent than the latter. The Old Town in Bukhara is a **UNESCO World Heritage Site** with a unified feel, drawn together by a central reflecting pool and plaza, by commonality in the structure of the domed bazaars, and by the major monuments ringing the Old Town: Kalon Assembly, Zindan Prison, and Ark Citadel.

This morning, sightseeing begins at the **Lyabi-Hauz Plaza**, located in the heart of the Old Town. With the feel of a true oasis in an oasis town, the plaza is at the center of Bukhara's old town and is – as it has been throughout history – a place to meet friends, eat, drink and relax in the shade. The atmosphere is cooled by the long, rectangular reflecting pool that makes up the center of the plaza, and by the shade of the trees that ring the plaza. The mulberry trees here are hundreds of years old and frame the 16th and 17th century *madrassahs* that make up three of the four edges of the ensemble.

**Kukeldash Madrasah**, the largest of Central Asia's Koran schools, dates from 1570. Stroll through the cap-maker and spice bazaars and past street-level mosques and *madrassahs*.







Visit the nearby **Kalon Mosque and Minaret**, the second largest mosque in Central Asia after Bibi Khanum in Samarkand. The 12th century Kalon assembly buildings, including the Kalon Mosque and Minaret and the Mir-i-Arab Madrassah, surround an open plaza that teems with merchants and local vendors. The minaret towers over the dusty square, looking down from a height of more than 150 feet, and casting its shadow between the mosque and the *madrassah*. The minaret can be seen from all over the Old Town, as it is easily the tallest structure in the old part of Bukhara. When seen up close, the detailed brickwork becomes apparent; 14 distinct bands of brickwork circle the tower at intervals, and at the top of the minaret resolve into a traditional stalactite formation.

Continue to the **Ark Citadel**, the ancient fortress and seat of government for the Emirate of Bukhara for over one thousand years, and now a collection of museums and mosques. The current structure has been built and rebuilt on the same site throughout its history, and has preserved something of the form, purpose and function of the first Ark. Like the medieval castle complexes of Europe, the Bukhara Ark served the emirs of Bukhara as a residence, audience hall, as protection from neighboring enemies and for more mundane purposes, such as a trade center and a police station.

Just behind the Ark Citadel is the infamous **Zindan Prison** and the even more infamous “bug pit,” or “black hole,” the cell where two of Britain’s finest “Great Game” players, Colonel Charles Stoddart and Captain Arthur Conolly, were imprisoned before their execution.

Enjoy an independent lunch before continuing today’s touring. Visit a private studio to learn from a **master puppet-maker** the process of creating traditional Uzbek puppets. The expressive puppets have unique faces and are dressed in traditional Uzbek garments. It may take seven or eight days to finish a puppet. Also admire the early **19th century Chor Minor Madrassah**, whose four slender, blue-topped minarets gave it its name.

Head to the outskirts of town for a visit to the **Summer Palace** of the last emir and a stop at its **Museum of National Crafts**. A short distance outside of the city, the emir’s Palace of Moon and Stars





was built at the turn of the century after the Russians took control of Bukhara. The palace itself is something of a showpiece, as it was designed to keep the emir in luxury, but removed from the city, in isolation and political impotence. The main palace is a mixture of local materials, regional influences and Russian style. Western furniture abounds, but design choices reflect traditional Uzbek decorations.

In a clearing in a tree-filled park, a small plaza is marked with a single building, the **Ismael Samani Mausoleum**. It is the 10th century resting place of Ismael Samani, founder of the Persian Samanid Dynasty. Buried under centuries of sand, the mausoleum was only re-discovered in

1934, and took two years to excavate. Though small, it is detailed in a fashion not seen in many other Bukharan monuments. More than 16 styles of brickwork adorn the face of this cubic memorial, and their elaborate pleats and layerings are still fresh today. From inside, the transition from square walls to circular roof, created using bricks of identical size and shape, testifies to the engineering know-how of the designers. Walk three times around the mausoleum to have a wish come true.

This evening, enjoy a **show in the teahouse of a local *madrasah***, with a special dinner following the show.

Meals: B, D – *Sasha & Son Bed & Breakfast, Amelia Boutique Hotel or similar*

## Day Six, Saturday, March 21 Bukhara • Celebration of Navruz

Today's program will be spent in celebration of Navruz. **Please note**, timings are highly subject to change today due to the special festive nature of the Navruz period.

The tradition of **Navruz** started as a Zoroastrian festival to celebrate the spring equinox. In Uzbekistan, the observance begins with a *khashar* or community service project. People come together to clean and decorate their towns in preparation for the holiday, and families cook a sumptuous feast with loved ones in the hopes of a bountiful year ahead.





**By special arrangement** (and conditions permitting), the group will have the opportunity to observe and participate in festivities for one of the following celebrations that typically occur during Navruz: a *Muchal Tuy*, an Uzbek coming-of-age ceremony; or a *Sallabandon Tuy*, a rite of passage for older women as they become experienced and well-respected matriarchs of their community. Both ceremonies offer a unique perspective on the traditional customs and culture at the heart of Uzbek communities, and are not often witnessed by foreign visitors.



During the festivities, pay a visit to the home of a local family and sample the unique and traditional Central Asian sweet called *sumalak*. On the day of Navruz, Uzbeks eat *sumalak*, made of wheat grain sprouts, which symbolizes eternal life. Traditionally, *sumalak* is prepared only once a year, and only by women. As the dish cooks, women stay up late in the night, stirring the pot of grains while talking, singing and dancing.

The **afternoon is free to discover** the marvels and hidden architectural secrets of Bukhara on your own.

This evening, **meet for a memorable Navruz dinner, and discover more about the customs and traditional foods served at this joyful meal.** During Navruz, a ceremonial table setting called a *Haft Seen* is laid out with symbolic objects and foods, which typically include milk, sweets, wine, sugar and sherbet.



Meals: B, D – *Sasha & Son Bed & Breakfast, Amelia Boutique Hotel or similar*







## Day Seven, Sunday, March 22

### Bukhara • Gijduvan • Samarkand

After breakfast at the hotel this morning, set off for the most celebrated of Silk Route towns, Samarkand.

Stop en route in **Gijduvan**, and pay a visit to the **ceramics workshop** of the Narzulaev family, some of the most renowned ceramicists in Uzbekistan. Their Gijduvan-school ceramics are characterized by the use of floral ornamentation and natural colors, with an emphasis on greens and browns. Tour the kilns and the studio, where glowing handmade ceramic plates and bowls are on display.

Continue driving to Samarkand, arriving in time for lunch at a local restaurant, followed by check in at the hotel.

This afternoon, embark on an introductory tour of glorious **Samarkand**, a **UNESCO World Heritage Site** called the “Crossroad of Cultures.”

Modern Samarkand is built on the ruins of ancient Afrosiab, and once went by the name of Marakanda. Its location between China and the Western world secured its importance as a trade center and clearinghouse for cultural exchange. Islamic beliefs from the Near East crossed paths with spices from Southeast Asia and silk from the Middle Kingdom. Its strategic location, cultural wealth and worldly riches made Samarkand an attractive target for the world's most famous conquerors. In the fourth century BC, Alexander the Great arrived in Samarkand and said, *“Everything I have heard about the beauty of the city is indeed true, except that it is much more beautiful than I imagined.”*



Sightseeing begins with **Registan Square**, the centerpiece of Samarkand and the most recognizable landmark for visitors. The three emblematic *madrassahs* frame the square, and loom over the empty space in the center. It was this central space that originally gave the place its name, for *registan* simply means “place of sand.” This sandy place was at the center of ancient Samarkand, and was a public square and marketplace before the Ulug Bek, Tillya-Kori and Shir Dor *madrassahs* were built. In its reconstruction, the square maintains the majesty that it has radiated through the ages.



**Gur-Emir Mausoleum** is the final resting place of Tamerlane, but was originally built for his grandson after the latter’s death, at the turn of the 15th century. The interior of the mausoleum has been restored and is brilliant in gold leaf and fresh tile. The heavily gilded central dome opens over the set of tomb-markers resembling sarcophagi (the bodies are located well below, but are on site). All are marble, with the exception of Tamerlane’s, which is a slab of solid jade reportedly from Mongolia.

Visit the **Ulug Bek Observatory**. Though concerned with conquest, politics and other matters of terrestrial importance, Tamerlane’s grandson, Ulug Bek, found his true interest in the heavens. The astronomer-king was fascinated by the stars and the cosmos, and built one of the most advanced observatories of the ancient world. The observations, which he undertook with the naked eye only, predated the telescope by over 150 years. They were aided by the building itself, which housed a large, vertical half-circle, only a quarter of which remains today. By using careful methods, rigorous observation and meticulous recording, Ulug Bek calculated the length of the year to within a minute of the modern accepted value. He also created the most comprehensive catalog of the heavens at the time, earning his place in history.

This evening, enjoy dinner and overnight at the hotel.  
Meals: B, L, D – *Samarkand Grand Superior or similar*

*Day Eight, Monday, March 23*  
**Samarkand**

After breakfast, continue exploring the fabled oasis city of Samarkand.

The row of tombs and mausoleums collectively called **Shah-i-Zinda**, or “place of a living king,” stretches between the present and the past. At its front is living Samarkand, and at its back the dusty slopes at the edge of ancient Afrosiab. Even on hot summer days, the mausoleums remain shady and cool, and seem to





lure travelers to approach the oldest tomb at the far end. Behind the complex and set into the hill lies an active cemetery with grave sites dating back as far as the ninth century and as recently as the present day.



Browse the animated **Siab Bazaar**, just across the street from the Bibi Khanum Mosque. Vividly dressed women oversee neat stacks of brilliant produce and burlap sacks of nuts and spices. Uzbek and Tajik men in black and white skullcaps, called *doppa*, sell cabbage rolls and *shashlik*. For a pittance, an entrepreneur with a brazier of special incense will cleanse you of all bad luck.

Visit the **Bibi Khanum Mosque**, built by Tamerlane to be the largest mosque in the Islamic world, and dedicated to the memory of his favorite wife. Architects from India and Persia were brought in to build the mosque, and 95 elephants were reportedly used to transport marble and other building materials from India to Samarkand.

Have lunch today at the **a local family bakery** after being taken through the bread-making process by these local experts.

In the afternoon, visit the studio of internationally recognized fashion designer **Valentina Romanenko** (her schedule permitting). Moscow-trained Romanenko has transformed her traditional Uzbek home into a workshop and display area. In this intimate setting, decorated with brilliant Uzbek carpets and wall hangings, she creates and shows her elegant, modern fashions made with traditional fabrics and techniques. Enjoy a short presentation with graceful Uzbek women modeling Romanenko's sophisticated creations as exotic music plays.

This evening, enjoy a **cultural program at the El Merosi Theater of Historical Costume**. The show introduces the audience to the national costumes of Uzbekistan, and incorporates information about the customs and way of life of Uzbekistan's inhabitants throughout its history.

Dinner tonight includes a **master class in the art of making plov**, Central Asia's most ubiquitous dish. Learn how the freshest ingredients are combined to create the savory rice concoction that you will then consume.

Meals: B, L, D – Samarkand Grand Superior, or similar

### Day Nine, Tuesday, March 24

#### Samarkand • day trip to Urgut • train to Tashkent

After breakfast, venture outside Samarkand to the nearby town of Urgut, about an hour's drive away, and **browse the labyrinthine Urgut Market**. Stalls spill from the covered area to form wandering lanes way out in the open air, where women draped in the melting colors of *ikat* robes and men in black and white *tubeteika* caps sell their handcrafted wares. This is old Samarkand, where merchants and shoppers alike may greet you with surprise and delight simply because you're a foreigner. Sumptuous *suzani*, the finely embroidered





coverlets that Uzbek women have designed and created for hundreds of years, are handed down for inspection with long poles. Nearby, hundreds of brilliant quilted, tasseled, beaded and embroidered caps display themselves like flowers, in clumps and drifts.



A fabulous place to people-watch, the Urgut Market draws local people, and a few foreigners, from miles around. Yes, cheap plasticware and synthetic clothing from China is available if that's what you need, but hidden away behind these everyday items are the wonderful textiles and adornments of the Silk Road.

Returning from Urgut, drive to the Ohalik Mountain Range (about 15 km outside of Samarkand) and join with the locals as you **witness an exhilarating match of buzkashi**, a traditional Central Asian equestrian sport. Originating among nomadic Turkic groups sometime between the 10th and 15th centuries, *buzkashi* is sort of like polo, only with a goat carcass: the object of the game is to steal the goat

away from the other players and deliver it to an established goal line. The game is still played today according to centuries-old rules and traditions, and continues to hold an important role in modern-day Central Asian culture as a test of strength, courage and competitive spirit.

Enjoy a **festive farewell lunch** here to celebrate the end of this celebratory journey.

The return to Tashkent today will be by train. The modern rail line now connects Samarkand to the capital, and the trip can be accomplished in just over two hours in ease and comfort.

On arrival in Tashkent, transfer to the hotel for free time to rest, reflect and prepare for departure.

Meals: B, L – *Lotte Hotel or similar*



*Day Ten, Wednesday, March 25*

### **Depart Tashkent**

Following breakfast (departure time permitting), the tour concludes with transfers to the airport.

Meals: B



## Special Note

This tour is timed to coincide with Navruz, which falls on March 21 and March 22, 2020 while the group is in Bukhara. Visiting during a holiday time is an exciting way to see a country or city at its best, but please note **schedules and itineraries are highly likely to change** around Navruz celebrations. Though we make every effort to adhere to our planned itinerary, the special nature of holiday travel require a larger than normal dose of flexibility and adaptability.

## Dates for 2020 – One Departure – Cultural Series

The land itinerary is scheduled to operate on the following dates. Please note you need to depart the U.S. one or two days prior to the tour start date due to airline flight schedules.

March 16-25, 2020

## Package Prices – 2020

4-16 passengers, \$3,995 per person,  
Plus internal air \$80 (economy class, subject to change)  
Single supplement \$625

## Land Tour Includes

- Accommodations as noted in itinerary.
- Meals per the itinerary – 10 breakfasts, 7 lunches, and 8 dinners.
- Arrival/departure airport transfers. MIR will arrange for all travelers to be met on arrival and seen off on departure whether we make your airfare arrangements or not, provided you arrive and depart on the tour start/end dates in the tour start/end city.
- Ground transportation throughout itinerary by private vehicle.
- Train tickets, Samarkand to Tashkent, seated class.
- Guided sightseeing tours and entrance fees as outlined in the itinerary.
- Special events, excursions and cultural performances per the itinerary.
- Services of experienced, English-speaking local guides, drivers and other staff, including a MIR Tour Manager.
- Gratuities to local guides, drivers, porters and other service personnel.
- Bottled water at group meals.
- Baggage handling, where available.
- Complete pre-departure information including detailed packing list, reading list, *Touring with MIR* handbook with country-specific information, maps, and travel tips.
- Assistance booking your custom flight arrangements (on request; please note that international airfare is not included in the land tour cost).
- Customized visa application and instruction kit (please note, visa fees are not included in the tour price).
- Final document packet including luggage tags, final updates and more.

## Not Included

- Internal airfare (internal airfare is quoted separately and is subject to change by airlines).
- International airfare or taxes/fuel surcharges.
- Meals not specified as included in the itinerary.
- Single supplement charge, if requested or required.
- Items of a personal nature (phone calls, email, laundry, alcohol, excess baggage, etc).



- Gratuities to Tour Manager.
- Visa/passport fees, airport departure fees.
- Expenses incurred as a result of delay, modification or extension of a tour due to causes beyond MIR's control.
- Travel and trip cancellation insurance.

### Interested in travel insurance?

To learn more about all the benefits of purchasing a Travel Guard travel insurance plan, please visit [www.travelguard.com/mircorp](http://www.travelguard.com/mircorp) or contact Travel Guard at 1-877-709-5596.

## Start Planning Next Year Now

### Dates for 2021- One Departures – Cultural Series

At the time of writing, the land itinerary for this program next year is projected to be generally as depicted for this year. Next year's dates and prices are shown below – please call if you're ready to book now.

March 16-25, 2021

### Package Prices – 2021

4-16 passengers, \$4,095 per person, double occupancy  
Plus internal air \$100 (economy class, subject to change)  
Single supplement \$695 per person.

## Cultural Series

MIR's Cultural Series programs feature some of our most distinctive tour concepts and include uncommon and educational experiences, including visits to small towns and villages outside the major urban areas and capital cities. All trips feature comfortable, well-located hotels.

### Important Notes: Is This Trip Right For You?

While the accommodations are as comfortable as possible, they will vary from superior-tourist class hotels to small, intimate hotels. It is important to keep in mind that Uzbekistan may not be up to the standards North American travelers expect. Services are improving in Uzbekistan; nevertheless, you may encounter problems with plumbing, bureaucratic service, road conditions, unpaved sidewalks, uneven surfaces and steps, the availability of public restrooms and the variety of locally available foods. You are traveling in some areas which, relatively speaking, have seen few travelers, and the infrastructure is not yet fully developed.

While this program is designed to be as comfortable as possible for travel in this region, this is an adventurous tour and is rated **rigorous touring** due to the daily walking involved, the length of some overland drives and the overall shortcomings of the tourism infrastructure. This itinerary features a significant amount of touring on foot. Many streets are of packed dirt, and some attractions are only accessible via steep staircases with tall, uneven steps. In particular, staircases at watchtowers can involve steep steps inside a narrow passageway with limited light. There are fairly steep staircases with roughly





40 steps at the Shah-i-Zinda site in Samarkand. To reap the full rewards of this adventure, travelers must be able to walk at least a mile a day, keeping up with fellow travelers. Flexibility, a sense of humor and a willingness to accept local standards of amenities and services are essential components to the enjoyment of this trip.

Every effort has been made to make the information in this schedule accurate. However, trip itineraries are always subject to change. We will do our best to inform you in advance of any changes, but due to the nature of travel in Uzbekistan, this may not always be possible. Only those willing to accept these conditions should consider joining this program.

### Important Notice Regarding Prescription Drugs

Please be advised that some countries in Central Asia, most notably Turkmenistan, but also Uzbekistan, have recently stepped up their border/customs inspection and enforcement activities for arriving and departing travelers concerning pharmaceutical drugs. While baggage search has always been possible, as of late there are reports of much greater frequency for baggage search at border crossings than has been the case based on our past experience. If you need to carry with you prescription medications of any kind, you are reminded to **carry an amount suitable for personal use only, in original labeled packing and with a copy of the prescription**. Package labelling or prescription paperwork should clearly indicate your name, the drug name, dosage, and doctor's name.

Please note that some prescription drugs, including certain pain relievers such as **Tramadol** and **Hydrocodone**, which are somewhat common in the U.S., are **completely prohibited** from entry into Turkmenistan, even for personal use with a foreign prescription. Please be sure to bring alternative medication with you as these drugs (among others – call for details) are simply not allowed at the present time.

If you have concerns about prescription drugs you need to have as you travel through Central Asia, please contact your Tour Specialist before your departure for more information.

### Are You Prepared?

A Travel Guard travel insurance plan can help cover your vacation investment, offset expenses from travel mishaps and provide you with emergency travel assistance. To learn more about all of the benefits of purchasing a Travel Guard travel insurance plan, please visit [www.travelguard.com/mircorp](http://www.travelguard.com/mircorp)

Please read the U.S. State Department's Travel Advisory regarding travel to Uzbekistan here: <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/traveladvisories/traveladvisories/uzbekistan-travel-advisory.html>

If you are not already enrolled in STEP, Smart Traveler Enrollment Program, a free service to enroll your trip with the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate, please consider enrolling. For more information: <https://step.state.gov/step/>

### Weather

Uzbekistan experiences extremely hot summers and cold winters. Spring and fall are the best times of the year to travel here. Rain is minimal. May through June the temperatures range from 65 to 95 degrees Fahrenheit; September temperatures are typically 55-90. The desert is almost always cool to cold at night. Our group tour is scheduled to be in Central Asia at the best time for most people. Due to the length of the tour and the general unpredictability of weather you will likely experience a range of



temperatures and conditions over the course of your trip. We recommend checking temperature ranges online. Research using sites such as Weatherbase, available online at [www.weatherbase.com](http://www.weatherbase.com), will help you get a snapshot of daily average temperatures as well as precipitation days and more.

## International Airfare

MIR's in-house, full-service air department is available to assist with your air travel needs. Check with MIR before booking air on your own, as we are happy to research and compare the best fares available through multiple channels. Airfare varies depending on a wide variety of factors, such as dates of travel and seasonality, seat availability, special airline promotions, how restrictive ticket changes are, how long the fares can be held without purchase, routing considerations such as stopovers and more. Tour dates are based on the land tour only. Our preferred carrier for this tour is Turkish Airlines, as they offer convenient itineraries and competitive rates from multiple cities across the U.S. to Uzbekistan.

Please call us at 1-800-424-7289 to discuss air options and routings for this program, and to request a quote for your specific plans and dates of travel. We will be happy to put together a no-obligation suggested air itinerary and estimate for you at your request.

## Visas

An Uzbek visa is required for this tour. You may also need a visa for any country you fly through to join the tour (such as Russia or Turkey). Due to the extensive pre-tour paperwork required, MIR will coordinate your visa processing for you unless otherwise noted. MIR will provide all applications and instructions.

The Uzbek visa is an e-visa, which means that processing need not necessarily be timed around other travel plans or demands on your physical passport. Timings are still important though as if the visa is issued too early it can expire before use. We recommend using our preferred provider for e-visa processing. An estimate of current visa costs for U.S. passport holders, based on standard processing time, is \$116. Your exact visa fees may differ, as visa costs can depend on a number of factors, such as state of residence, processing time and more. Visa fees are always subject to change.

In the past some travelers have made their own visa arrangements instead of using MIR's preferred provider for their visa processing; either using their own visas service or attempting to process directly with the embassies/consulates. We strongly recommend you discuss it with us before choosing an alternate visa processing method, to help avoid difficulties and visa problems. **In the event that you plan to process visas without going through MIR's preferred provider, please contact us first so we can pass you detailed instructions with critical trip-specific information.**

## Pre-Tour Information

Please note that touring begins on Monday, Day One of this program. The first group meeting will be around 11:00 a.m., along with meeting with your tour manager. Lunch will be served at about 1:00 p.m. and Tashkent city touring to begin around 2:00 p.m. Because of common flight arrival times into Tashkent, for your convenience MIR has pre-booked the Tashkent hotel from the Sunday before Day One, with rooms available for check-in after 2:00 p.m. on Sunday. Many clients will arrive late Sunday night or in the very early hours of Monday morning (1:00 a.m. or similar). These clients will have access to their rooms on arrival. Clients choosing to arrive earlier and therefore needing room access before 2:00 p.m. on the Sunday before Day One will need to have an additional night or nights pre-booked at additional expense, which MIR will be happy to assist with.



## Pre- and Post-Tour Extensions

You may wish to extend your travels by adding another program before or after this tour. Our Flexible Essential Trips are perfect as brief overviews of a country or region and with flexible dates of your choice, they are easily combined with small group tours.

**Essential Tibet**, 8 days. The highlights of this stirring journey are the holy city of Lhasa and the remote monasteries and sacred refuges hidden in the heart of the forbidding Tibetan Plateau. (Works great as pre-tour with a quick flight through Beijing to Tashkent.)

**Essential Kyrgyzstan**, 8 days. On this comprehensive journey among the soaring peaks, glacial lakes and steep valleys of the Kyrgyz outback, spend a night with a village family, learning the traditional way to make felt, bake flatbread in a clay oven and milk a mare. Visit with a seasoned eagle hunter and admire dramatic landscapes of ochre and umber sandstone formations.

**Essential Tajikistan**, 8 days. Rarely-visited Tajikistan is wreathed in spectacular mountains and colored with the influence of Persia, the Islamic world and Russia. Meet local people at Fergana Valley markets, explore the ruins of ancient Penjikent and share a meal in a warm Tajik home. Visit the country's capital, Dushanbe, where an airy, light-filled space is home to the modern National Museum of Tajikistan.

**Essential Turkmenistan**, 12 days. From the golden monuments of Ashgabat and the ruins of Parthian Nisa, head into the mountains to visit a silk weaver in a tribal village home. Visit the Caspian seaport, Turkmenbashi, explore UNESCO-listed Merv and learn about traditional crafts. Camp at the "Door to Hell" and survey Kunya-Urgench, ancient capital of Khorezm.

**Essential Kazakhstan**, 7 days. Begin in the new city of Astana, capital of Kazakhstan only since 1997. Fly to Chimkent and discover the historic city of Turkistan with its UNESCO-listed mausoleum of a revered Sufi sheikh. Fly to Almaty and explore spectacular Charyn Canyon, with its strange rock formations and colorful strata.

MIR can also arrange for a pre-tour extension to Tajikistan, or private, independent tours of Armenia, Azerbaijan, or any of the other four 'Stans. Consider a private, independent travel program to explore Kyrgyzstan's nearby Lake Issyk-Kul; cross the Torugart Pass and visit Western China's fabled Kashgar Market; or spend a few days in Istanbul, Moscow or St. Petersburg.

Contact us for more details.

## Also Nearby...

For more tours to Central Asia, you may want to check out:

## Flexible Essential Trips – Classic Private Journeys

**Essential Central Asia**, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, 13 days. Explore the markets, mosques and minarets of oasis towns on the fringes of the Kyzyl Kum and Kara Kum deserts. Here, spiritual beliefs were the greatest commodities to flow along trade routes, and civilizations blossomed amidst austere natural beauty.

**Essential Uzbekistan**, 10 days. Beginning in the modern capital, Tashkent, roam the great Silk Road oases of Bukhara, Samarkand and Khiva, all of them UNESCO Sites. Admire their *madrassahs*, mosques, and minarets clad in ceramic tiles the color of the desert sky.





## Small Group Tours

**The Pamir Highway: From the Tien Shan to the High Pamirs**, 18 days. The Pamir Mountains of Tajikistan are some of the most rugged and beautiful on Earth, soaring upward where the Himalayas, the Tien Shan and the Hindu Kush meet. This adventurous journey over the Pamir Highway is a breathtaking route, in use since the time of the Silk Road.

**Journey Through Central Asia: The Five 'Stans**, 22 days. More than 2,000 years ago, the great trade routes that linked Europe and China opened Central Asia to foreign cultures, customs and religions. Join a modern-day caravan on an epic journey to five of these exotic countries — Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan.

## Conditions of Participation

Your participation on a MIR Corporation trip is subject to the conditions contained in the 2020 Tour Reservation Form and Release of Liability and Assumption of Risk Agreement. Please read this document carefully and contact us with any questions.

## Cancellation and Refund Policy

**Payment Terms:** Non-refundable deposits are accepted by check, Visa, MasterCard or American Express. Final land payments may be made by check or credit card for reservations made directly with MIR. If booking through a travel agent, please contact your agent to find out what form of payment they accept. (MIR can accept final payment from travel agents by agency check only.) Airfares are subject to change until ticketed; payment policies vary by carrier.

If you cancel your trip please notify MIR in writing. Upon MIR's receipt of notice the following charges apply to land tours (policies for air tickets, custom group trips vary):

*Scheduled MIR Small Group Tours*

Cost of cancellation, if received:

61 or more days prior to departure, deposit due or paid in full of \$750;

31-60 days prior to departure, 50% of land tour cost;

30 days prior to or after trip departure, no refund.

## References

We encourage you to speak directly with satisfied past travelers. Please request a list of references.

## Why MIR?

Regional knowledge is crucial to the success of any trip to our corner of the world. MIR combines detailed information about geography and infrastructure, history and art, language and culture, with the depth of knowledge that comes only from decades of regional experience. You may wonder how we differ from other tour operators...

## Destination Specialization

MIR focuses exclusively on the exceptional region at the crossroads of Europe and Asia. This area has been our overriding passion since 1986; we don't do the rest of the world. Our hard-earned expertise



gained over the last three decades can take you from end to end of the largest country in the world – Russia – and to all of its neighbors. We specialize in travel to Siberia, the Silk Route, St. Petersburg & Beyond. Our destinations include: Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, the Baltics (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania), the Balkans (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Slovenia), Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan), the South Caucasus (Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan), Turkey, Mongolia, China, Tibet, and Central/East Europe (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia).

## 30 Years of Experience

A travel company doesn't last more than 30 years in the business without a solid track record. MIR has helped thousands of individuals achieve their travel goals. Our dedication and experience have earned us their trust and the trust of many well-respected institutions. Today MIR is the preferred tour operator for museum, alumni and special interest organizations across the country.

## Recommended & Respected

MIR has twice been rated one of the “Best Adventure Travel Companies on Earth” by National Geographic Adventure. Several of our tours have won awards in top travel publications, such as Outside magazine and National Geographic Traveler. Our trips have been featured in books like *Riding the Hula Hula to the Arctic Ocean* and *1,000 Places to See Before You Die*.



## More Questions?


Please feel free to call us with questions at 1-800-424-7289, 8:30am-5:30pm Pacific Time.



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