



photo: Phil Kidd

Silk Route Odyssey: Caravan Across Uzbekistan 2020



photo: Ana Filonov



Silk Route Odyssey: Caravan Across Uzbekistan

Two Departures in 2020 – Explorer Series – 15 Days

May 15-29 • September 4-18

The center of Central Asia, Uzbekistan is home to three of the most renowned Silk Road oases – Samarkand, Bukhara and Khiva. Journey through these UNESCO sites and the lush Fergana Valley, where Central Asia's silk production began with two cocoons hidden in the headdress of a royal Chinese bride. Travel between the Amu Darya and Syr Darya rivers to experience the ancient caravan cities, cultural wealth, hospitable people and striking natural scenery of Uzbekistan, Central Asia's most vibrant country. From the modern city of Tashkent, journey to Fergana, one of the oldest centers of civilization. View the timeless majesty of the Registan in glorious Samarkand, explore the covered bazaars and teahouses of Bukhara and stroll the intriguing Old Town of Khiva. This cultural immersion tour is a fantastic opportunity to learn about Uzbek life and culture. Savor traditional plov in private homes, meet master craftsmen in their private studios and bargain with locals in the bazaars.



Daily Itinerary

Day 1, Friday	Arrive Tashkent, Uzbekistan
Day 2, Saturday	Tashkent • Fergana via Kokand
Day 3, Sunday	Fergana • day trip to Margilan and Rishtan
Day 4, Monday	Fergana • Tashkent
Day 5, Tuesday	Tashkent • train to Samarkand
Day 6, Wednesday	Samarkand
Day 7, Thursday	Samarkand • day trip to Shahrisabz
Day 8, Friday	Samarkand • Navoi • Debaland • Nurata • Kyzyl Kum Desert Yurt Camp
Day 9, Saturday	Kyzyl Kum Desert Yurt Camp • Bukhara
Day 10, Sunday	Bukhara
Day 11, Monday	Bukhara
Day 12, Tuesday	Bukhara • Khiva
Day 13, Wednesday	Khiva
Day 14, Thursday	Khiva • Nukus • fly to Tashkent
Day 15, Friday	Depart Tashkent



MIR Signature Experiences

- Visit three of the most renowned Silk Road oases and four UNESCO sites.
- Discover the unique heritage of Tashkent, an old Silk Route city and modern capital.
- Learn about the life and work of local artisans during visits to both ceramics and silk workshops in the rural Fergana Valley.
- Admire the majesty of the Registan and explore the architectural wonders of legendary Samarkand.
- Sample delicious *qoyun* (melon) and traditional Uzbek *plov* (savory rice) at an authentic tea house.
- Traverse the red sands of the Kyzyl Kum Desert on camelback, a centuries-old mode of Central Asian transport.
- Spend the night in a nomadic yurt camp in the desert, relaxing around a campfire under the stars.
- Experience the timeless character of Bukhara's Old Town with its winding streets and colorful markets.
- Wander the streets of Khiva, a remote desert town that possesses an exotic feel.
- Tour the trove of rescued Russian art at the Savitsky Museum, a gem in the desert of remote Nukus.
- Celebrate this Silk Route Odyssey over a feast of traditional food in a private home.

Tour Highlights

Tashkent	Independence Square, Kukeldash Madrassah, Kaffal-Shashi Mausoleum, Navoi Theater, Barak-Khan Madrassah, Chorsu Bazaar, Museum of Applied Arts
Fergana Valley	Agricultural center of the country, beautiful mountain views, towns of Fergana, Margilan, Rishtan and Kokand
Fergana	Dinner in a private home, Museum of Local Studies
Kokand	Khudayar Khan's Palace, Jami Mosque, Amin Beg Madrassah, Dakhma-i-Shahon tombs
Margilan	Silk workshop, Kumtepa Bazaar, Al-Margilony Park
Rishtan	Ceramics master's workshop
Samarkand	"Crossroad of Cultures" (UNESCO World Heritage Site), Registan, Ulug Bek, Tillya-Kori and Shir Dor <i>madrassahs</i> , Ulug Bek Observatory, Bibi Khanum Mosque, Gur-Emir Mausoleum, Shah-i-Zinda
Shahrisabz	"Historic Center of Shahrisabz" (UNESCO World Heritage Site), birthplace of Tamerlane, Ak Saray ("White Palace")
Navoi	Birthplace of the poet Navoi, Malik desert steppe
Debaland	Hassan and Hussein Mosque
Nurata	Ancient well system (<i>karez</i>)
Kyzyl Kum Desert	Overnight in yurt in "Red Sand" desert, camel ride, Aidarkul Lake
Bukhara	"Historic Center of Bukhara" (UNESCO World Heritage Site), Lyabi-Hauz Plaza, Kukeldash Madrassah, Kalon Mosque and Minaret, Mir-i-Arab Madrassah, Ark Citadel, Zindan Prison, Ismael Samani Mausoleum
Khiva	Old Town, or Ichon Qala (UNESCO World Heritage Site), Kyzyl Kum Desert, Amu Darya River, Tash-Hauli Palace, Juma Mosque, Kunya Ark
Nukus	Capital of the autonomous region of Karakalpakstan, Savitsky Art Museum, the world's second-largest collection of Russian avant-garde art



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, Friday

Arrive Tashkent, Uzbekistan

After clearing Uzbek immigration and customs, transfer to the hotel. This afternoon, begin 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 Chatkal 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, and although it is an old city, most of it has been rebuilt since then. 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).

A tour of Tashkent includes **Independence Square**, the 16th century **Kukeldash Madrasah** and **Kaffal-Shashi Mausoleum**, **Navoi Theater**, **Barak-Khan Madrasah** and several other examples of medieval Islamic architecture. Visit the busy **Chorsu (“Four Ways” or “Crossroads”) Bazaar**. The evening is free to relax and enjoy an independent dinner at leisure.

Meals: B, L – *Bek Hotel or similar*

Day Two, Saturday

Tashkent • Fergana via Kokand

Following breakfast at the hotel, head to the **Fergana Valley**. Surrounded by the Tien Shan mountain range and watered by tributaries of the Syr Darya River, the Fergana Valley is the most fertile part of Central Asia. Alexander the Great founded a city here in the southwestern mouth of the valley in 329

BC. Traders from China came this way as they created the trade route we call the Silk Road in the first century BC. The whole valley became a rich oasis, with irrigated fields producing grains, fruits, silk, cotton, nuts and vegetables, and supporting horses, cattle, sheep and camels. There is evidence that Buddhism made its way here from China before the advent of Islam during the eighth century AD.

Ruled by the Kokand Khanate in the 18th and 19th centuries, the valley was taken by Imperial Russia at the end of the 19th. During the 20th century, the Soviet Union dedicated the valley to the cotton monoculture, sapping its fertility and its water, and derailing its agricultural diversity.



photo: Ana Filonov



The first stop in the valley is the village of **Kokand**, first mentioned by Arab travelers in the 10th century as an oasis town on the trade route between India and China. Kokand was known throughout history as a prosperous trading and religious center. During the 19th century, it was the centerpiece of a powerful khanate stretching from the Fergana Valley to the southern Kazakh steppe. **Note:** if schedules permit, the train from Tashkent to Kokand will be used. If not, this will be done as an overland drive.

Time in Kokand is spent touring the **Khudayar Khan's Palace**, built between 1863-1873. At the time of its construction, it was one of the most luxurious palaces in Central Asia. Today, only 19 of the original 113 rooms have survived intact, and restoration continues to return this palace to its former beauty. See the **Jami Mosque**, a remnant from the time when Kokand was filled with 600 mosques and 15 *madrassahs*. Visit the **Amin Beg Madrassah** and **Dakhma-i-Shahon tombs**, or the Grave of Kings, where the khan and his family are buried.



Continue on to the city of **Fergana** proper. The city of Fergana is the newest settlement in the Fergana Valley, established in 1876 as a Russian garrison town under General Mikhail Skobolev. Located in the southern Fergana Valley near the 16,000-foot Alai Mountains, Fergana is more Russian than Uzbek. Its first settlers were encouraged to plant trees, and today it has the reputation of being one of the greenest cities in Uzbekistan. The first building was the fortress, which still stands in the downtown part of the city.

Check into the hotel and enjoy dinner and overnight here.

Meals: B, L, D – *Asia Fergana* or similar

Day Three, Sunday

Fergana • day trip to Margilan and Rishtan

Today, get started with a visit to the **Museum of Local Studies**, where a 3-D map brings to life the importance of the green valley in ancient times. Then continue on to nearby **Margilan**.

About 13 miles out of Fergana, Margilan has been known as a center of silk production since the ninth century. A survey of the town includes a stop at **Al-Margilony Park** and **Kumtepa Bazaar**, said to be one of the most authentic in the valley. **Tour the workshop of a silk master** to observe the process of silk-making, and learn more about the traditional *ikat* and *khan atlas* or “king of silk” pattern distinctive to Uzbek silk fabrics.

Depart for a visit to the town of **Rishtan**, famous for ceramics produced by skilled craftsmen. Pottery has been produced in this area for more than 800 years, using local red clay and pigments made from minerals and grasses. Modern Rishtan ceramics are characterized by elaborate floral and geometric designs in bright blue and green hues painted on a creamy-white background. The skills used to produce Uzbek ceramics have been passed down from father to son for countless generations. Enjoy **lunch at the home of a master artist**, and tour his private studio to learn more about the process of making these ceramics.



This evening, return to Fergana and enjoy a **meal of Uzbek specialties in the home of a local family.**

Meals: B, L, D – *Asia Fergana or similar*

Day Four, Monday

Fergana • Tashkent

Get a very early start this morning and, after a quick breakfast, drive to Tashkent. Afternoon touring will include some of the special museums in the capital city, including 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.

Dinner and overnight at the hotel.

Meals: B, D – *Bek Hotel or similar*

Day Five, Tuesday

Tashkent • train to Samarkand

Following an early breakfast, **board the country's first high-speed, modern train** for the two-and-a-half-hour ride to **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. Alexander the Great, upon his arrival in the fourth century BC said, "Everything I have heard about the beauty of the city is indeed true, except that it is much more beautiful than I imagined."



Upon arrival in Tamerlane's great city, enjoy a short introductory tour of the city's highlights, and transfer to the bed-and-breakfast-style hotel for check-in and dinner.

Meals: B, L, D – *Asia Samarkand or similar*

Day Six, Wednesday

Samarkand

Today, explore glorious Samarkand, the city where Tamerlane amassed the greatest pool of artistic tradition anywhere. 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 madrasahs** were built. In its reconstruction, the square maintains the majesty that it has radiated through the ages.

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 (to that date) catalog of the heavens, earning his place in history.

See the sandy hills where excavation continues on the remains of the seventh

century Sogdian civilization, and stroll through the city's colorful bazaar, dwarfed by the massive Bibi Khanum Mosque, one of Central Asia's largest. In addition, visit the **Gur-Emir Mausoleum** where Tamerlane and his three sons are buried. Tamerlane's tombstone is one solid slab of green jade.

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 present day.

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.

This evening, enjoy a cultural program of music and dance followed by dinner at a local restaurant.
Meals: B, L, D – *Asia Samarkand or similar*





Day Seven, Thursday

Samarkand • day trip to Shahrisabz

This morning, travel about a hundred miles to **UNESCO-listed Shahrisabz**, the birthplace of Tamerlane, located in a valley of the Pamir Mountains. The city was originally founded under the name of Kesh, and was renamed Shahrisabz (“Green City”) by Tamerlane himself. Here, see the ruins of **Ak Saray** (“White Palace”), built in the 14th century and one of Tamerlane's most ambitious projects. The palace complex included a massive portal covered with incredible blue, white and gold

ceramic tile mosaics and stood over 131 feet high. A large statue of Tamerlane (or Amir Timur, as he is known here) greets visitors to the palace.

Visit the local market and have lunch before returning to Samarkand. The remainder of the afternoon and evening are yours to explore Samarkand on your own. Dinner is independent.

Meals: B, L – Asia Samarkand or similar

Day Eight, Friday

Samarkand • Navoi • Debaland • Nurata • Kyzyl Kum Yurt Camp

Sightseeing this morning takes you to the **Kyzyl Kum (“Red Sand”) Desert**, a 115,000-square-mile desert stretching through Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan between the Amu Darya and Syr Darya rivers. Pass through **Navoi**, a modern town situated in the Malik desert steppe zone, and named after Alisher Navoi, a poet who lived in the Middle Ages. Near Navoi, Alexander the Great's troops in 327 BC prepared for the siege of Marakanda.

Stop in **Debaland**, where the **16th century Hassan and Hussein Mosque** is located. Khasan and Khusein were the grandsons of the prophet Mohammed. Some believe three visits to this sacred mosque are equal to one visit to Mecca. Continuing on to **Nurata**, a long-lived town set between farmlands and the arid Uzbek steppe, explore the ancient well system, *karez*, built during the reign of Alexander the Great.

Following lunch, continue the drive into the Kyzyl Kum Desert, reaching the **yurt camp** late in the afternoon. Enjoy time to relax or explore the surroundings; there may be time for a first opportunity to ride a camel. This evening, dinner is prepared over the campfire. Enjoy the beauty of the desert under a crystal-clear dome of stars. (Note: Yurt camps feature shared toilet and shower facilities.)

Meals: B, L, D – Yurt Camp



Day Nine, Saturday

Yurt Camp • Kyzyl Kum Camel Safari • Bukhara

After breakfast at the yurt camp and a few introductory tips on **camel riding**, set off on these “ships of the desert,” a centuries-old mode of Central Asian transport. Get a new perspective on the sandy dunes, and travel as the ancient caravans once did – for a much shorter distance.

This afternoon, the destination is **Aidarkul Lake**, a beautiful oasis in the midst of the Kyzyl Kum sands. Framed on the north by the Nuratin Mountains, Aidarkul Lake is a haven for migrating birds. A picnic lunch is served, then depart overland to Bukhara.

The name **Bukhara** comes from the Sanskrit word *vikhara*, meaning monastery. Due to its ideal location along a major trade route, Bukhara became a cultural and trade center of Central Asia. For centuries, it was a center of Judaism until the Arabs invaded and took power during the eighth century. From that time on, Bukhara became a nucleus for Islamic studies. Modern-day Bukhara has over 140 architectural monuments, and is a designated **UNESCO World Heritage Site**.

Arrive this evening, and check into the centrally-located hotel for dinner and overnight.

Meals: B, L, D – *Amelia Hotel, Minzifa Hotel or similar*

Day Ten, Sunday

Bukhara



Spend today exploring Central Asia's most ancient living city. 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 has 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: the Kalon Assembly, the Zindan Prison and the Ark Citadel. Locals often say:

“Samarkand is the beauty of the earth, but Bukhara is the beauty of the spirit...”

Lyabi-Hauz Plaza. 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.



This morning, sightseeing begins at 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.

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, and was buried under centuries of sand and not discovered until the 20th century. 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.

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.

Kukeldash Madrassah, the largest of Central Asia’s Koran schools, dates from 1417. Stroll through the cap-maker and spice bazaars and past street-level mosques and *madrassahs*.

Enjoy lunch before continuing sightseeing with 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 palace 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.

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

Meals: B, L, D – *Amelia Hotel, Minzifa Hotel or similar*



Day Eleven, Monday

Bukhara

The day is free to discover the marvels and hidden architectural secrets of Bukhara on your own. This evening, **meet for dinner with a local Bukharan architect**, who will provide an interesting look into the current state of historical and architectural renovations in Bukhara. Meals: B, D – *Amelia Hotel, Minzifa Hotel or similar*



Day Twelve, Tuesday

Bukhara • Khiva

Following an early breakfast at the bed and breakfast, depart Bukhara for the **fabled city of Khiva**. The route today runs across long stretches of the Kyzyl Kum Desert. This is the same route walked 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. Make a stop en route to take a look at the Amu Darya river, which loosely parallels the Uzbek-Turkmen border. Accommodations are in a small hotel located near the historic Old Town. Arrive by evening and enjoy dinner and overnight here.

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



photo: Ana Filonov

Day Thirteen, Wednesday

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, the 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.

Spend 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 **Juma 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. Dinner will be at the hotel tonight.

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



Day Fourteen, Thursday

Khiva • Nukus • fly to Tashkent

Depart today for the small city of **Nukus** in western Uzbekistan. Nukus is the capital of the autonomous region of Karakalpakstan, home to the Karakalpaks, a Turkic people more closely related to Kazakhs than to Uzbeks. A modern city, Nukus is at the center of an area crisscrossed by old caravan routes and dotted with ancient ruins. The surrounding cotton fields testify to the monoculture that stole the water from the Amu Darya and Syr Darya, the rivers that fed the Aral Sea. About 230 km north is Muynak and the former seashore.



Visit the incredible **Savitsky Art Museum**, whose founder, Igor Savitsky, was able to amass a wonderful collection of thousands of banned avant-garde Russian art pieces without interference from Moscow. The story of this collection has been told in the award-winning documentary, *Desert of Forbidden Art*.

The **museum houses the second-largest collection of Russian avant-garde art** after the Russian Museum in St. Petersburg.

This afternoon, enjoy lunch at the Museum Cafe accompanied, schedules permitting, by **local Karakalpak throat singers**.

Then fly to Tashkent from Nukus. Tonight, celebrate the conclusion of your odyssey with a feast of Uzbek national dishes and a **farewell toast**. There will be free time for packing, strolling and some last-minute souvenir shopping.

Meals: B, L, D – *Bek Hotel or similar*

Day Fifteen, Friday

Depart Tashkent

Following breakfast, the tour concludes with transfers to the airport.

Meals: B

Dates for 2020 – Two Departures – Explorer 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.

May 15-29, 2020

September 4-18, 2020



Package Prices – 2020

4-12 passengers (maximum 12), \$4,895 per person,
Plus internal air \$100 (economy class, subject to change)
Partial single supplement \$595*

* A partial single supplement is available for this tour. Single rooms are available in the standard hotels, but may not be available in the yurt camp where this program spends one night. We do our best to ensure a single room whenever possible and available.

Land Tour Includes

- Accommodations as noted in itinerary.
- 15 breakfasts, 12 lunches, and 12 dinners. A few meals are not included so that you may enjoy a chance to experiment on your own.
- Arrival/departure airport transfers. MIR will arrange for all travelers to be met on arrival and seen off on departure whether we make your flight 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.
- 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

- International airfare or taxes/fuel surcharges.
- Internal airfare (internal airfare is quoted separately and is subject to change by airlines).
- 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 or contact Travel Guard at 1-877-709-5596.



Start Planning Next Year Now

Dates for 2021– Two Departures – Explorer 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.

May 14-28, 2021

September 3-17, 2021

Package Prices – 2021

4-12 passengers, \$4,995 per person, double occupancy

Plus internal air \$100 (economy class, subject to change)

Partial single supplement \$595*

** A partial single supplement is available for this tour. Single rooms are available in the standard hotels, but may not be available in the yurt camp where this program spends one night. We do our best to ensure a single room whenever possible and available.*

Explorer Series

Explorer Series tours, with a maximum of 12 travelers, are the perfect match for those seeking a more active adventure. These interactive, cross-cultural journeys are more limited in size and more spacious in depth and focus. We use a variety of accommodations ranging from small, private hotels and bed and breakfasts to rustic lodges and homestays, and trips may feature hiking or kayaking opportunities.

Important Notes: Is This Trip Right For You?

While the accommodations are comfortable, they will vary from tourist-class hotels to small, intimate hotels. This itinerary does not use four- or five-star properties. One night is spent in a rustic yurt camp (with shared WC and shower facilities separate from yurts). There are no yurts with en suite toilet or shower facilities – shared plumbing facilities are centrally located. 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 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 van rides 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 80 steps at the Shah-i-Zinda site in Samarkand. The stay in the desert involves some long drives of more than eight hours, and driving over rough, dusty and unpaved roads, a ride on a camel and very basic WC facilities located some distance from your yurt. If you rely on electricity for CPAP, or for any other reason, you must have your own battery or other back-up, or please reconsider participation. 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. If you are looking for a less adventurous experience, MIR offers other scheduled small group tour options featuring more comfortable accommodations. Please ask for details on these tours (for example our **Journey Through Central Asia**) as well as a custom private journey which may be a better match for your interests and physical capabilities.

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

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.



Please remember, weather at all times of year has an element of the unpredictable. This information comes from weatherbase.com and is based on data from previous temperatures on record. It is always advisable to check with weatherbase.com closer to your departure date for current conditions and forecasts for the specific region you will be visiting.

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

At the time of writing, U.S. passport holders require one visa for this tour: Uzbek. You may also need a visa for any additional country you fly via to join the tour.

The Uzbek visa is now an e-visa which can be issued within 90-days of your tour start date. 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 return shipping. Visa fees are always subject to change.

Visa processing for this tour should take about a week, and the passport need not be out of your hands during that time as long as you are eligible for an e-visa. Please contact us with any questions you may have regarding the timeline for visa processing.

A valid passport with six months validity from the end of the tour is necessary to apply for this visa.

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 Friday, Day One of the Silk Road Odyssey program. Lunch will be about 1:00 p.m. and touring will 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 Thursday before Day One, with rooms available for check-in after 2:00 p.m. on Thursday. Many clients will arrive late Thursday night or in the very early hours of Friday morning (1:00 a.m. or similar). These clients will have access to their rooms on arrival. Clients needing room access before 2:00 p.m. on the Thursday 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.

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 mosques, *madrasahs* and minarets clad in ceramic tiles the color of the desert sky.

Small Group Tours

Return to the North Caucasus, 14 days. Discover the ravishing mountain landscapes, medley of cultures, and overflowing hospitality of North Ossetia, Ingushetia, Chechnya, and Dagestan in the North Caucasus region, where ancient mountain tribes have guarded their way of life for thousand of years.

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 (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia), 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 such as *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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