



# Essential Central Asia 2020



photo: Ana Filonov

## Essential Central Asia

### Markets And Minarets Of Uzbekistan And Turkmenistan

#### Flexible Essential Trip – Classic Private Journey – 13 Days

Your choice of dates, suggested start day: Monday

*Journey through two countries and five UNESCO World Heritage sites on this essential tour. Begin in scenic Tashkent, the capital of Uzbekistan. Then set off overland through Transoxiana, the land between the Amu and Syr Darya rivers, visiting local markets on the way to legendary Samarkand. Once a great Sogdian stronghold, Samarkand was transformed by Tamerlane into one of the most beautiful centers of civilization along the Silk Route. Then it's on to Bukhara, Central Asia's oldest living city. Explore its lived-in ancient center, a tangle of mud-walled homes, stately madrassahs and quiet courtyards. Next, visit Khiva, a museum-city and the best preserved of the old Khanate cities. Finally, venture across the Amu Darya River into Turkmenistan, a land virtually unknown to western travelers. An ancient country of desert and oasis, of lost ruins and modern monuments, Turkmenistan is mysterious and welcoming, exotic and warm-hearted.*





## Daily Itinerary

Day 1, Monday	Arrive Tashkent, Uzbekistan
Day 2, Tuesday	Tashkent
Day 3, Wednesday	Tashkent • Samarkand
Day 4, Thursday	Samarkand
Day 5, Friday	Samarkand • Shahrissabz • Bukhara
Day 6, Saturday	Bukhara
Day 7, Sunday	Bukhara
Day 8, Monday	Bukhara • Khiva
Day 9, Tuesday	Khiva
Day 10, Wednesday	Khiva • Dashoguz, Turkmenistan • fly to Ashgabat
Day 11, Thursday	Ashgabat
Day 12, Friday	Ashgabat
Day 13, Saturday	Depart Ashgabat



## Tour Highlights

Tashkent	Capital of Uzbekistan, Independence Square, Navoi Theater, Kukeldash Madrassah, Kaffal-Shashi Mausoleum, Chorsu Bazaar, Museum of Applied Arts, ceramic master's Studio
Samarkand	"Crossroad of Cultures" (UNESCO World Heritage Site), Registan, Shah-i-Zinda, Bibi Khanum Mosque, Ulug Bek Observatory, Gur-Emir Mausoleum, dinner in a private home
Shahrisabz	"Historic Center of Shahrisabz" (UNESCO World Heritage Site), Ak Saray ("White Palace"), birthplace of Tamerlane
Bukhara	"Historic Center of Bukhara" (UNESCO World Heritage Site), Lyabi-Hauz Plaza, Kukeldash Madrassah, Kalon Mosque and Minaret, Ark Citadel, Zindan Prison, Emir's Palace of Moon and Stars, Museum of National Crafts, performance and dinner at local <i>madrassah</i>
Khiva	Ichon Qala (UNESCO World Heritage Site), Kyzyl Kum Desert, Amu Darya River, Tash-Hauli Palace, Dzhuma Mosque, Kunya Ark
Ashgabat	Capital of Turkmenistan, city center with monuments, National Museum of Turkmenistan, Kipchak Mosque, Ertugrul Gazi Mosque, Russian Bazaar
Nisa	Parthian Kingdom of Nisa (UNESCO World Heritage Site), Kopet-Dag Mountains

## 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

#### Arrive Tashkent, Uzbekistan

Arrive in Tashkent and transfer to the hotel. Most arrivals will be in the early morning hours, so the morning and afternoon will be free to relax and rest. This evening, get together for a **welcome dinner** with your guide.

Meals: D – Shodlik Palace Hotel or similar



### Day Two, Tuesday

#### Tashkent

Depart on a full-day 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 cross-roads, it was taken by the Arabs in 751 AD 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).

Visit **Independence Square**, **Navoi Theater**, the **Kukeldash Madrassah** (16th century), the **Kaf-fal-Shashi mausoleum** (16th century), and several other examples of medieval architecture. Following lunch at a local restaurant, visit the Tashkent **Museum of Applied Arts**, and stop in at the colorful **Chorsu (“Four Ways”) Bazaar**.

Pay a visit to a **local ceramics master** who, through research and his own artistic skill, has resurrected many of the long-forgotten, ancient techniques.

Dinner and the evening are independent. Check the schedules for the Navoi, where the city’s finest opera and theater performances take place.

Meals: B, L – *Shodlik Palace Hotel or similar*

### *Day Three, Wednesday* **Tashkent • Samarkand**

After breakfast today, set off for Samarkand, a **UNESCO World Heritage Site** called the “**Cross-road 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 a 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.*”

After check-in at the hotel, sightseeing begins with an **introductory tour of Samarkand**. Visit the glorious monuments of the city and marvel at architectural splendors such as the Registan, Central Asia’s noblest square.

**Registan Square** is 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. In addition, visit the **Gur-Emir Mausoleum** where Tamerlane and his three sons are buried. Tamerlane’s tombstone is a solid slab of green jade.

Dinner and overnight in Samarkand.

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

## *Day Four, Thursday* **Samarkand**

Today, the exploration of Samarkand continues, here in the city where Tamerlane amassed the greatest pool of artistic tradition anywhere. Admire the superb tilework, which uses nearly every motif permitted in Islamic art – floral images, geometric patterns, spirals and bands of Kufic calligraphy.

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.

The lane of mosques and tombs known as **Shah-i-Zinda** is also a highlight. At its front is living Samarkand, and at its back are the dusty slopes at the edge of ancient Afrosiab. Even on hot summer days the mausoleums remain shady and cool, and seem to lure the traveler to approach the oldest tomb at the far end. Behind the complex and set into the hill lies an active cemetery with gravesites dating back as far as the ninth century, and as recently as the present day.

Visit **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, 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.



This evening, take in a cultural performance before enjoying **dinner in a private home**.  
Meals: B, L, D – *Asia Samarkand Hotel or similar*



## Day Five, Friday

### Samarkand • Shahrissabz • Bukhara



Drive to Bukhara today, making a stop en route at **UNESCO-listed Shahrissabz**, the birthplace of Tamerlane. The city was originally founded under the name of Kesh, and was renamed Shahrissabz ("Green City") by Tamerlane himself. Here stand 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 originally standing over 200 feet high. After lunch, continue on to Bukhara.

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

## Day Six, Saturday

### Bukhara

Spend today exploring Central Asia's most ancient living city and **UNESCO World Heritage Site, the "Historic Center of Bukhara."** An oasis in the desert, Bukhara offers cool shade and rest to the modern traveler as it did to the 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 it. 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**.

This morning, sightseeing begins at the **Ark Citadel**, the ancient fortress and seat of government for the Emirate of Bukhara for over a 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 were imprisoned before their execution.

Next, visit the **Kalon Mosque and Minaret**, the second largest mosque in Central Asia, after Bibi Khanum in Samarkand. The 12th century Kalon assembly, including the Kalon Mosque and Minaret, and the Mir-i-Arab Madrassah, surrounds 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, 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 resolve into a traditional stalactite formation at the top of the minaret.



After lunch, visit 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 *madrasahs* that make up three of the four edges of the ensemble.

Then explore the nearby **Kukeldash Madrassah**, the largest of Central Asia's Koran schools, which dates from 1417. Stroll through the capmaker and spice bazaars and past street-level mosques and *madrasahs*.

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

## Day Seven, Sunday

### Bukhara

Today, visit the Summer Palace of the last emir and stop at its **Museum of National Crafts**. A short distance outside of the city sits the **Emir's Palace of Moon and Stars**, 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. After returning to the hotel, the afternoon is free for independent discovery or rest.

This evening, visit a *madrasah* to dine and enjoy a performance by local artists.

Meals: B, D – *Amelia Boutique Hotel or similar*



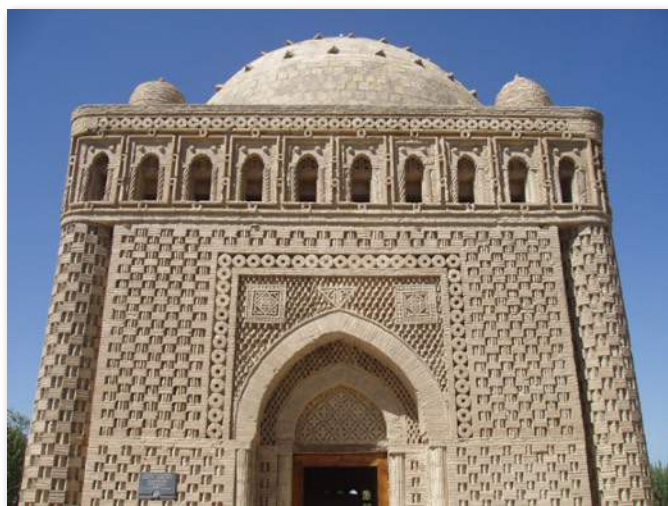
## Day Eight, Monday

### Bukhara • Khiva

This morning, head for **Khiva**, the last great city on the Uzbek itinerary. The route today passes across long stretches of the **Kyzyl Kum**, or “**Red Sand,**” **Desert**. This is the same route ridden by loaded Silk Road camel caravans, and once plagued by brigands waiting for an opportunity 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.

Arrive in the city of Khiva in time for dinner and overnight.

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





## Day Nine, Tuesday

### Khiva



Photo: Ana Filonov

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 re-creation of life hundreds of years ago. Archaeologists have found traces of human habitation around Khiva dating back to 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, and dinner tonight before an overnight at the hotel.

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

## Day Ten, Wednesday

### Khiva • Dashoguz, Turkmenistan • fly to Ashgabat



Depart today from Khiva, and cross the border **into Turkmenistan**. The drive to the border takes a little over an hour, though customs formalities can be time-consuming. Afterwards, drive to the city of Dashoguz to enjoy lunch at a local restaurant.

Later this afternoon, transfer to the airport for a flight to Ashgabat. Following an hour-long flight over the Kara Kum, or "Black Sand," desert, arrive in **Ashgabat** and transfer to the hotel. Spend the next two days getting to know this unique "City of Love" – which is the meaning of Ashgabat in Persian. Enjoy an independent evening in the capital.

Meals: B, L – *Ak Altyn Plaza Hotel or similar*



*Day Eleven, Thursday*  
**Ashgabat**

Enjoy a full day of touring in the capital today.

Spend some time at the **Altyn Asyr Oriental Market**, brimming with all types of goods for sale, from household items to traditionally patterned carpets, electrical appliances, and even animals.

Next set outside the capital to see the **Kipchak Mosque**. The huge \$100-million-dollar mosque in former Turkmen President Niyazov's hometown of Kipchak was inaugurated in 2004. The mosque is big enough to hold 10,000 people, and its 164-foot golden dome had to be lowered in place by helicopter. Verses from Niyazov's own spiritual book, the *Ruhnama*, are etched on the walls alongside Koranic verses. Niyazov was buried here in the family mausoleum that he built, along with the mosque, with government funds.



Next is the **UNESCO site of the ancient Parthian Kingdom of Nisa**. The beautiful Kopet-Dag Mountains rise up around Nisa, a site 15 miles outside of Ashgabat that was once a major center of the ancient Parthian Kingdom. More than two thousand years ago the Parthian Empire spread out from Nisa and took its place among such kingdoms as the Achaemenid under Cyrus the Great and the Macedonian under Alexander the Great. Though Nisa was ruled by a succession of dynasties, it remained an important center in the ancient world until the 13th century, when the Mongols sacked it. Today archaeological work continues at Nisa, declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2007.

The **National Museum of Turkmenistan**, with its grand approach and panoramic views, introduces modern Turkmenistan on the ground floor and ancient history in the galleries above. The historical exhibits begin with artifacts ranging from stone-age tools to carved ivory drinking horns used for Zoroastrian rituals and special occasions (called rhytons), and move through time, telling the story of Turkmenistan through the ages. Other galleries display beautiful ceramics, coins, amulets, and gold and silver artifacts. The museum also features a fantastic selection of Turkmen carpets located on the ground floor.



This evening, enjoy your farewell dinner in Turkmenistan.

Meals: B, L, D – Ak Altyn Plaza Hotel or similar

*Day Twelve, Friday*  
**Ashgabat**

After breakfast today, visit the **Ertugrul Gazi Mosque**. Inaugurated in 1998, the Ertugrul Gazi Mosque was named after the father of the founder of the Ottoman Empire. Designed to bring to mind Istanbul's Blue Mosque, the white marble Ertugrul Gazi Mosque can accommodate 5,000 worshippers.



Before lunch at a local restaurant, spend some time at the **Russian Bazaar**. The Russian Bazaar in the center of Ashgabat is a large covered market selling all kind of foodstuffs, including prepared foods, fruits, nuts, vodka, high quality caviar and traditional breads. Before independence, this was where most ethnic Russians would shop, but today anyone is welcome. Turkmen women in traditional dress make up the majority of the sales force.

The remainder of this afternoon and evening are free, and dinner is independent.

Meals: B, L – Ak Altyn Plaza Hotel or similar

## *Day Thirteen, Saturday*

### **Depart Ashgabat**

Most departures are very early this morning, in which case travelers may be transferred to the airport on the night of Day 12. For those with later flights, the trip will conclude with departure transfers after breakfast today, Day 13.

Meals: B (flight schedules permitting)

## **Flexible Essential Trip – Classic Private Journeys**

Private departures of this land itinerary can begin on the day of your choice in 2020; the suggested start day is Monday. Please note you will need to depart the U.S. one or two days prior to the tour start date due to flight schedules.

### **Private Journey Prices**

Hotels as listed in itinerary above, three star properties or equivalent

2 traveler minimum, from \$4,595 per person, twin share

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

Single supplement, from \$535

Solo traveler rate on same hotel basis, based on single room occupancy, \$6,995 plus internal air \$100 (economy class, subject to change)

### **Hotel Upgrade Prices**

With select hotels upgraded to four stars – Lotte Tashkent Palace, Sultan Boutique Samarkand, Sasha & Son Bukhara, and Grand Turkmen Hotel in Ashgabat; other hotels as listed in standard version:

2 traveler minimum, from \$5,095 per person, twin share

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

Single supplement, from \$825

Solo traveler rate on same hotel basis, based on single room occupancy, \$7,895 plus internal air \$100 (economy class, subject to change)

*Flexible Essential trip prices may vary by season and start-day, and are subject to hotel availability for your travel dates. Contact us at 1-800-424-7289 for more information.*





## Your Private Journey Includes

- Accommodations as noted in the itinerary. **See Hotel Upgrade Prices above for upgrade rates.** All room types, even in upgraded properties, are standard entry-level doubles or twins, please call for room category upgrade pricing and information.
- 12 breakfasts, 10 lunches and 9 dinners, per the itinerary. A few lunches and dinners are left independent to allow for exploration.
- Restaurant tips for included meals.
- One arrival and one departure airport transfer. (Additional arrival and departure transfers available at additional cost.) MIR will arrange for travelers to be met upon arrival and seen off on departure, whether we make your air arrangements or not.
- Ground transportation throughout itinerary by private vehicle (size of vehicle depends on number of travelers).
- Evening cultural performances per the itinerary.
- Guided sightseeing tours and entrance fees as outlined in itinerary.
- Services of experienced, English-speaking local guides, drivers and other staff.
- 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).
- 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.
- Baggage handling.
- Items of a personal nature (phone calls, email, laundry, alcohol, excess baggage, etc).
- Gratuities to local guides and drivers.
- Visa/passport fees, airport departure fees.
- Travel entry pass to Turkmenistan payable on arrival, currently \$12-\$15, subject to change
- 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.

## Flexible Essential Trips – Classic Private Journeys

Flexible Essential Private Trips are compact, well-designed, private tour itineraries – researched and ready to book on the dates you choose. They work perfectly as brief overviews of a country or as effortless extensions to group tours – great for solo travelers, couples, or private parties who prefer to travel independently but appreciate a savvy, pre-designed program.

Flexible Essential Trips feature most of the inclusions of our escorted small group tours with just a few exceptions: tours are led by local MIR guides, without an additional tour manager; fewer meals are pre-



planned, so you can eat where and when you want; and baggage handling and gratuities are left to your discretion.

## Start Planning Next Year Now

### 2021 Flexible Essential Trip – Classic Private Journey – 13 Days

At the time of writing, the land itinerary for this program next year is projected to be generally as depicted for this year. Please call if you're ready to book now.

*Private departures of this land itinerary can begin on the day of your choice in 2021, suggested start day is Monday. Please note you will need to depart the U.S. at least one day prior to your tour start date due to airline flight schedules.*

### Private Journey Prices – 2021

Hotels as listed in itinerary above, three star properties or equivalent

2 traveler minimum, from \$4,695 per person, twin share

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

Single supplement, from \$595

Solo traveler rate on same hotel basis, based on single room occupancy, \$7,095 plus internal air \$100 (economy class, subject to change)

### Hotel Upgrade Prices

With select hotels upgraded to four stars – Lotte Tashkent Palace, Sultan Boutique Samarkand, Sasha & Son Bukhara, and Grand Turkmen Hotel in Ashgabat; other hotels as listed in standard version:

2 traveler minimum, from \$5,195 per person, twin share

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

Single supplement, from \$895

Solo traveler rate on same hotel basis, based on single room occupancy, \$7,995 plus internal air \$100 (economy class, subject to change)

*Flexible Essential trip prices may vary by season and are subject to hotel availability for your travel dates. Extensions and additional nights are available on request. Contact us at 1-800-424-7289 for more information.*

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

While the accommodations are comfortable, they will vary from superior tourist-class hotels to simple and basic bed-and-breakfast-style, small, private hotels. It is important to keep in mind that the countries of Central Asia are not up to the standards North American travelers expect. Services are improving in the region; 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 will travel 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 comfortable for travel in this region, it is rated as **rigorous touring** due to the daily walking involved, the length of some overland 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 40 steps at the Shah-i-Zinda site in Samarkand. Many hotels do not have elevators. 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 Central Asia, 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 experience in the past. If you need to carry prescription medications with you 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**. If you are not able to bring a copy of the prescription, please bring an official printed list of your medications that includes the drug name, dosage, doctor's name and all other relevant information. Package labeling should clearly indicate the same information.

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. Anti-anxiety medications such as **Lorazepam** can be problematic, as can sedatives such as **Zolpidem**. Another prohibited medication in Turkmenistan is **pseudoephedrine**. 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 take with you 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>

Please read the U.S. State Department's Travel Advisory regarding travel to Turkmenistan here: <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/traveladvisories/traveladvisories/turkmenistan-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

Central Asia experiences extremely hot summers and cold winters. Spring and fall are the best months to travel to these countries. Rain is minimal. April-May brings temperatures ranging from 60-80 degrees Fahrenheit, while late August-September temperatures are typically 75-95+. October and November are cooler and quite nice, with averages ranging from 50-70 degrees Fahrenheit. Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan are warm places; those wishing to travel to these countries during the summer should be prepared for 100-115-degree weather (80-90 degrees at night). In general, air conditioning will be available at the hotels and in vehicles. Museums and restaurants on this itinerary may not have air conditioning, or it may be unreliable.

**Please remember, weather at all times of year has an element of the unpredictable.** This information comes from [weatherbase.com](http://weatherbase.com) and is based on data from previous temperatures on record. It is always advisable to check with [weatherbase.com](http://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 Central Asia.

Please call us at 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 two visas for this tour: Uzbek and Turkmen. You may also need a visa for any additional country you fly via to join the tour (such as Russia or Turkey). An estimate of current visa costs for U.S. passport holders, based on standard processing time, is \$388. 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.

Standard visa processing in the various visa sections is expected to take twenty to thirty business days for this tour. Travelers should prepare to be without their passports for that amount of time. If you plan to travel extensively in the time leading up to your MIR tour, you may need to obtain a second valid passport or use expedited processing for some of your visas. Please contact us with any questions you may have regarding the timeline for visa processing.

Extensive pre-tour paperwork is necessary to apply for these visas, which requires a foreign government approval authorization to be issued prior to submission of your application materials to the Embassies/Consulates. A valid passport with six months validity from the end of the tour is also required. 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 Tuesday, Day Two of the Essential Central Asia program. The only service scheduled for Monday, Day One, will be your airport arrival transfer and a meeting with your guide for a welcome and dinner on Monday evening. 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 needing room access before 2:00 p.m. on the Sunday before Day One will need to have additional night or nights pre-booked at additional expense, which MIR will be happy to assist with.

## Pre- and Post- Tours

MIR can arrange for an extended program in the South Caucasus countries, Western Russia or Eastern Europe. All of MIR's destinations are open to you, and all can be attached to this program. Please contact MIR for more details about exciting options for extended travel.

## Also Nearby...

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

## Flexible Essential Trips – Classic Private Journeys

**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.



**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

**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.

**Silk Route Odyssey: Caravan Across Uzbekistan**, 15 days. The center of Central Asia, Uzbekistan is home to three of the most renowned of the Silk Road oases – Samarkand, Bukhara and Khiva. Journey through these UNESCO Sites, the incredible Savitsky Museum in Nukus and the lush Fergana Valley, where Central Asia's silk production began with two cocoons hidden in the headdress of a royal Chinese bride.

**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).

### *Flexible Essential 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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