



# Essential Turkmenistan 2020



## Essential Turkmenistan

From the Capital to the Caspian

### Flexible Essential Trip – Classic Private Journey – 12 Days

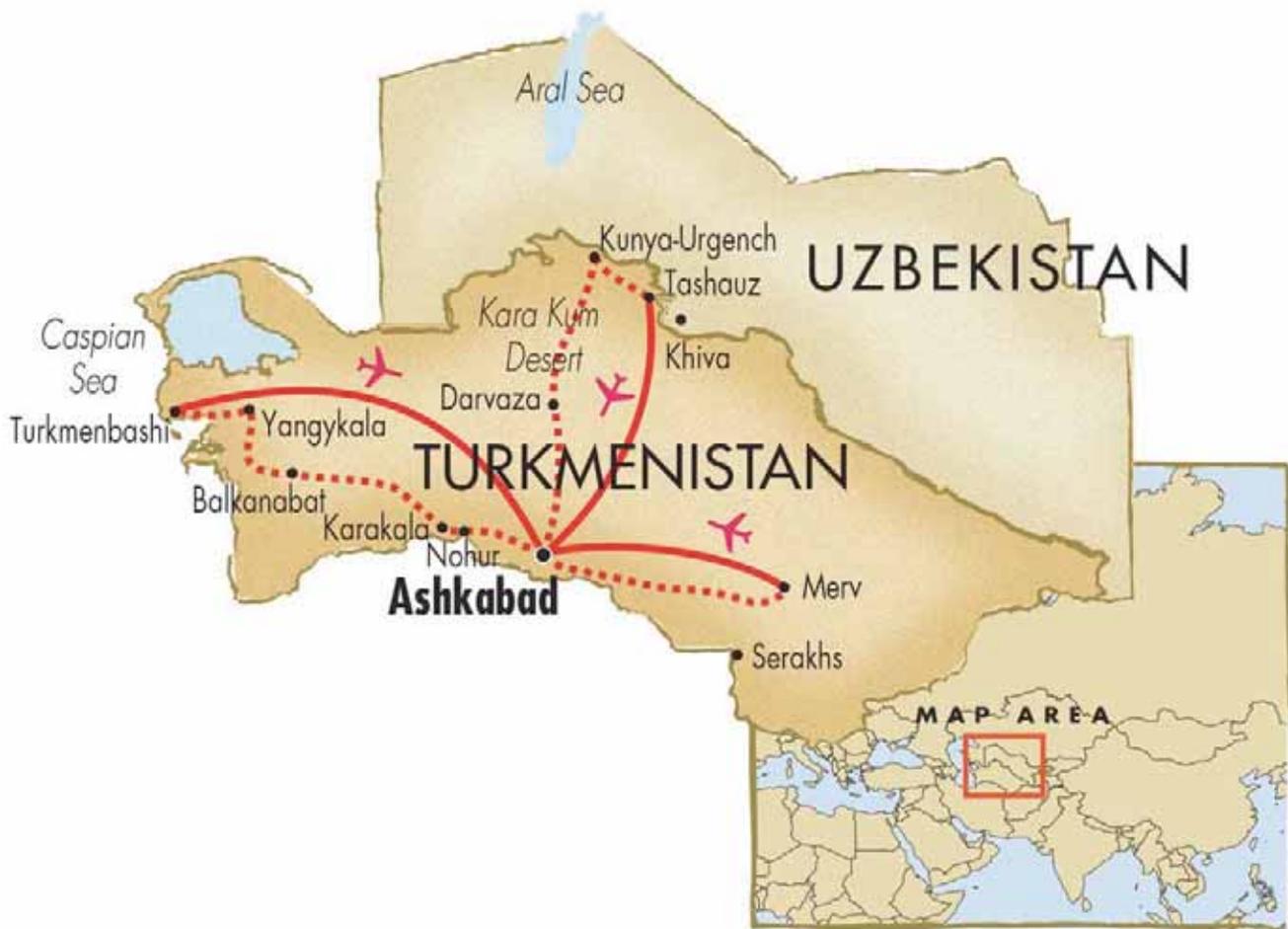
Your choice of dates, suggested start day: Friday

*From the marble and gold monuments of the capital, Ashgabat, and the UNESCO-listed ruins of Parthian Nisa, head into the mountains to visit a silk-weaver in a tribal village home. Discover the country's only seaport, Turkmenbashi, where the abundant oil is refined and shipped over the shallow Caspian Sea, then drive through glorious, striated Yangykala Canyon. Explore UNESCO-listed Merv's five ancient cities and spend some time admiring the Zoroastrian sites of Bronze Age Gonur Depe. Camp at the "Door to Hell," the burning Darvaza Gas Crater, and survey Turkmenistan's third UNESCO Site, Kunya-Urgench, ancient capital of Khorezm.*



## Daily Itinerary

Day 1, Friday	Arrive Ashgabat, Turkmenistan
Day 2, Saturday	Ashgabat
Day 3, Sunday	Ashgabat • Nohur • Serdar
Day 4, Monday	Serdar • Karakala • Turkmenbashi
Day 5, Tuesday	Turkmenbashi • Gozli Ata
Day 6, Wednesday	Gozli Ata • fly to Ashgabat
Day 7, Thursday	Ashgabat • Mary
Day 8, Friday	Mary • Merv
Day 9, Saturday	Mary • fly to Ashgabat • Darvaza
Day 10, Sunday	Darvaza • Dashoguz • Kunya-Urgench • fly to Ashgabat
Day 11, Monday	Ashgabat
Day 12, Tuesday	Depart Ashgabat



## Tour Highlights

Ashgabat	National Museum of Turkmenistan, Spiritual Mosque and Mausoleum of Turkmenbashi, Independence Park, Geok Depe Mosque, Akhal-Teke horse farm, “Stairs of Health”
Nisa	Parthian Kingdom of Nisa (UNESCO World Heritage Site), Kopet-Dag Mountains
Nohur	Tribal village, meal with a silk weaving family, tribal cemetery
Karakala	Sumbar River Valley
Turkmenbashi	Caspian seaport
Yangykala Canyon	Gorgeous striped hills and cliffs, Gozli Ata pilgrimage site, Kaytarmysh volcanic rock formations
Mary/Merv	Ruins of Margiana and Archaeological Museum in Ancient Merv (UNESCO World Heritage Site), Kara Kum Desert, Mary Museum, Anau Mosque
Darvaza	“Door to Hell” – Darvaza’s flaming gas crater, tent camping
Kunya-Urgench	Historic town center (UNESCO World Heritage Site), Kutlug-Timur Minaret

## Daily Itinerary

### Day One, Friday

#### Arrive Ashgabat, Turkmenistan

Upon arrival in Ashgabat, you are met and transferred to the hotel. The afternoon and evening are free to rest, with dinner at the hotel.

Meals: D – Ak Altyn Plaza Hotel or similar

### Day Two, Saturday

#### Ashgabat

Begin touring the capital city today. In spite of its location on a trade route, **Ashgabat** never achieved the status and influence of other Silk Road cities like Khiva or Bukhara. Originally known as Konjikala, the city was destroyed by Mongols in the 13th century. In 1881, the Russians built a fortress on the site as a buffer against English-dominated Persia, and by the early 20th century Ashgabat was a prosperous and flourishing city. In 1948, a massive earthquake leveled the city, killing over two-thirds of the population. Recently, Ashgabat has seen a boom in new construction, which has had a major impact on the look of the city.



Touring begins with the **National Museum of Turkmenistan**. The museum, 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.

Wander the fountain-cooled **Independence Park**, a huge green space in the center of the city. The park is lined with monuments, statues, marble stairs, flower-filled gardens, and benches.

After an independent lunch, continue with a trip to the outskirts of town to visit **ancient 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 2,000 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.

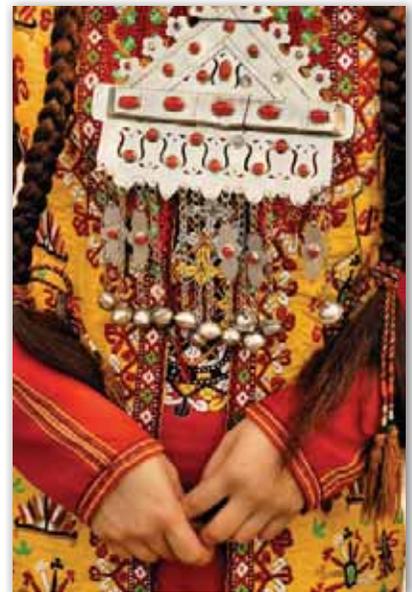
Return to the city for an independent dinner and overnight at the hotel.  
Meals: B – Ak Altyn Plaza Hotel or similar

### Day Three, Sunday Ashgabat • Nohur • Serdar

Depart Ashgabat today after breakfast at the hotel. On the way to the countryside, visit **Geok Depe Mosque**. Forty minutes or so from Ashgabat lie the ruins of the 19th century Geok Depe Fortress, bombarded by forces of the Russian Empire in an 1881 battle. Nearby, the striking aquamarine dome of the 1996 Saparmurat Hajji Mosque commemorates the battle.

Continue to the tribal mountain village of **Nohur**. Thirty-six hundred feet above the Kara Kum Desert on both sides of the Sumbar River Valley lie the cool valleys and hillside villages of the **Nohur people**. These tribal people have historically been isolated from the rest of the country and, to a great extent, have held on to their culture and traditions. The women are renowned for their silk embroidery and the special patterns in their felt designs, while families grow cabbages, tomatoes, pomegranates, and almonds, and also herd sheep and goats. The tiny alleyways of the villages are lined with houses made of stacked stone and ornamented with carved timbers found nowhere else in Turkmenistan.

Pay a visit to the home of a family that has been **weaving the special tribal patterns** of the Nohur people for generations. Observe them at their looms, and learn about the Zoroastrian ornamentation used in their decoration. After a picnic lunch, see the hillside **tribal cemetery**, whose traditional graves are adorned with wild sheep or goat horns. Only local people may enter the cemetery, as it is a sacred place.



Continue driving to the town of Serdar. Check in at the guesthouse and enjoy dinner before overnight.  
Meals: B, L, D – Chinar Guesthouse or similar



## Day Four, Monday

### Serdar • Karakala • Turkmenbashi

After breakfast at the guesthouse this morning, depart for the Sumbar River Valley and Madau desert community. This morning's drive will be about five hours, including rest stops. Considered one of the most beautiful places in Turkmenistan, the **Sumbar River Valley** is a fertile region studded with pomegranate orchards and settled with small farms. The fast-moving Sumbar River originates in Iran, and its water becomes part of the Iran-Turkmen border past the valley, where it empties into the Atrek River.

Continue to **Karakala**, a small town within the region of the Sumbar River Valley in the southwestern Kopet-Dag Mountains. The dry subtropical area includes a nature preserve protecting the endangered Persian leopard. Stop at **Dehistan**, a 500-acre ancient and medieval site where earthen banks mark the position of the former walls. Excavations have unearthed blocks of housing, caravanserais, mosques, and mausoleums. For many years, Dehistan was a prominent market town on a major caravan route. Irrigated agriculture began here in the 3rd millennium BC and lasted until the 14th century, when the disappearing forests of the surrounding Kopet-Dag Mountains caused the land to dry up.

Drive through this gas-rich region to Turkmenbashi, arriving in the evening. Turkmenistan's only seaport, **Turkmenbashi** was originally named Krasnovodsk, and founded when Peter the Great's emissary Prince Alexander Bekovich arrived at the Caspian harbor to bring Russian "protection" to the khan of Khiva. Bekovich and most of his men were promptly killed, and the empire didn't make real inroads into the area until 1819. After Saparmurat Niyazov became president in 1990, he renamed the port in honor of his title, Turkmenbashi, meaning "Father of all Turkmen." Turkmenistan's largest oil refinery is located here.

Take time for an independent dinner this evening before overnight at the hotel.

Meals: B, L (picnic) – *Hotel Seyrana or similar*

## Day Five, Tuesday

### Turkmenbashi • Gozli Ata

Breakfast will be at the hotel this morning before setting off. First, depart for **Goshoba**, which is the gateway to fabulous **Yangykala Canyon** and its striated limestone cliffs that create a bizarre, yet beautiful, desert moonscape. Drive through the wildly scenic canyon, admiring a panorama of folded and layered slopes, barren of vegetation but colored with vivid minerals. Enjoy a picnic lunch amid the strange hills.

Continue to the tomb of **Gozli Ata**, a 14th century Sufi holy man who is buried here with his wife in arid Yangykala Canyon, far from any town. The remote mausoleum has become a pilgrimage site where the faithful come to pay their respects. A small cemetery near the mausoleum contains carved tombstones. Women visit Gozli Ata's wife's mausoleum to petition her for fertility, leaving scarves and tiny cradles.

Have dinner and spend the night in the guesthouse at the shrine.

Meals: B, L, D – *Pilgrim Guesthouse at Gozli Ata*



## Day Six, Wednesday

### Gozli Ata • Turkmenbashi • fly to Ashgabat

After a rustic breakfast, explore the surrounding area, including the **volcanic rock formations of Kaytarmysh**. In the afternoon, return to the Caspian coast and the Turkmenbashi airport for an evening flight back to the capital. Enjoy an independent dinner back in Ashgabat before overnight at the hotel.

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

## Day Seven, Thursday

### Ashgabat • Mary

After breakfast this morning, depart due east for the city of Mary. En route, stop at the **Anau Mosque** for touring and enjoy an independent lunch. Farther along, pay a visit to the former Silk Road town of **Abiverd**. Eighteenth-century Persian ruler Nader Shah, who by all reports was an ethnic Turkmen, built a fortress here during his wars of conquest; its remains still radiate grace and beauty. The small town of Abiverd was a flourishing Silk Road center until Genghis Khan's hordes destroyed it in the 13th century. An even earlier site, a Bronze Age city named Altyndepe, was abandoned around 1600 BC.



Upon arrival in Mary, about a four- to five-hour drive from Ashgabat, visit the **Mary Museum** to explore its extraordinary ethnographic and archaeological sections for an overview of the multi-layered history of this city.

Meals: B – *Hotel Mary, Margush Hotel, or similar*

## Day Eight, Friday

### Mary • Merv

After breakfast at the hotel today, begin exploring the remains of ancient civilizations in this corner of Turkmenistan.

First, visit the capital of **Margiana**, **Gonur Depe**, center of a 4,000-year-old Zoroastrian civilization, and get acquainted with the palace, Zoroastrian Temple Temenos, and necropolis. This Bronze Age site was surrounded by strong fortress walls, and its adobe buildings are subsiding into the desert. After a picnic lunch, continue to Merv.

The fertile oasis of **Merv** has supported human life for over 4,000 years. Formed from the rich silt at the mouth of the Murghab River, where it soaks into the **Kara Kum Desert**, the oasis was an early Bronze Age center. The earliest of the five ancient cities at Merv is attributed to Cyrus the Great in the 6th century BC. Merv was the center of several succeeding civilizations, and became an important way station on the Great Silk Road between the 2nd and 13th centuries, when it was sacked and burned by Mongols.

The ruins of Merv were listed as a **UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1999** because of the wealth of ongoing information they offer regarding the evolution of urban centers. The 13th century geographer



Yaqut lived there for three years and wrote, “...verily but for the Mongols I would have stayed and lived and died there. Hardly could I tear myself away.”

Return to the modern town of Mary tonight for an independent dinner and overnight at the hotel.  
Meals: B, L (picnic) – *Hotel Mary, Margush Hotel, or similar*

## *Day Nine, Saturday* **Mary • fly to Ashgabat • Darvaza**

Breakfast will be at the hotel before transferring to the airport for the morning flight back to Ashgabat. Back in the capital, enjoy an independent lunch and some light touring.

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.

Next set off north, heading for the central part of Turkmenistan. The route to Darvaza passes through **Erbent**, and including stops will be about four to five hours. The little oasis at Erbent Village, surrounded by desert dunes, is the home of Teke tribal people, who live here in their traditional yurts, baking flatbread in clay ovens, and milking camels.

**Darvaza** is a tiny town of about 350 semi-nomadic Teke tribal people just outside the “**Door to Hell,**” the **Darvaza Gas Crater**. Located about 160 miles north of Ashgabat in the Kara Kum Desert, Darvaza was a site of natural gas exploration in the 1970s. The story goes that the drilling equipment was swallowed up by a huge sink hole, which was filled with gas. Engineers decided to burn off the gas to make the cavern safe for more drilling – yet it has been burning ever since. Visit two of the craters here, and take stunning evening photos as the light descends into darkness.

Dinner tonight will be *al fresco*, barbecue-style. Overnight in tents near the crater.  
Meals: B, D – *Tented camp*

## *Day Ten, Sunday* **Darvaza • Dashoguz • Kunya-Urgench • fly to Ashgabat**

After breakfast at the tent camp this morning, continue transiting the country. The main stop today will be at the border town of Kunya-Urgench, about a three-hour drive from the overnight site. The best road passes through Dashoguz, a border town in northwestern Turkmenistan.

**Kunya-Urgench** is an agricultural center of about 30,000 near the Uzbek border. It is the site of the ancient capital of Khorezm, which was razed by both Genghis Khan and Tamerlane. About half a mile south of town lie the remains of the **UNESCO-listed old city**, including the 11th century **Kutlug-Timur Minaret**, ringed with 18 bands of decorative mud brick and blue majolica tiles. The minaret was for many years the tallest in Central Asia. About 1,000 feet from the minaret is the domed hall of the **Turabek Khanum Mausoleum**. Notable for the interlocking design of its remarkably preserved ceiling, the mausoleum was built for the daughter of one of the leaders of the Golden Horde.

After a picnic lunch in Kunya-Urgench, head back to the airport in Dashoguz and catch an evening flight back to the capital.  
Meals: B, L – *Ak Altyn Plaza Hotel or similar*



*Day Eleven, Monday*  
**Ashgabat**

After breakfast this morning, begin the final day of touring. Start with a little exercise at the “**Stairs of Health**” in the foothills of the Kopet-Dag Mountains. Follow the example of Turkmenistan’s current president and climb part of the Stairs of Health, also known as the Health Path. A 36-km concrete path snaking up and along the southern foothills, the path is a hot and challenging route that was constructed at the request of the country’s first president, Saparmurat Niyazov. The views of Ashgabat from the top are said to be very nice by those who have made it.

Next, depart for Chuli Valley. Drive into the Kopet-Dag foothills to **Chuli Mountain Gorge**, whose cool streams and forested slopes are perfect for relaxing and picnicking, or hiking and rock-climbing. Enjoy an independent lunch here at an outdoor restaurant.



Drive to a horse-breeding farm devoted to the **renowned Akhal-Teke horse**, arguably the oldest cultured breed of horse in the world. The owner accompanies you on the tour to explain the workings of the farm, and offers insights on this beloved breed. These elegant horses have long, slender necks, small heads, long legs, and narrow chests. They are said to have lent their genes to both the Arabian horse and the American Quarter Horse.

On the way back to Ashgabat, visit the **Spiritual Mosque and Mausoleum** of the first President of Turkmenistan. The huge \$100-million-dollar mosque in the former president’s hometown of Kipchak was inaugurated in 2004. The mosque is large 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.

Celebrate your last night in Turkmenistan with a farewell dinner at a local restaurant.

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

*Day Twelve, Tuesday*  
**Depart Ashgabat**

The trip concludes with transfers to the airport.  
Meals: B

**Flexible Essential Trip – Classic Private Journey**

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



## Private Journey Prices

Package pricing depends on the dates/days of travel and are subject to change based on availability and other factors. Please contact MIR if pricing for your preferred tour start date is not shown below.

2 traveler minimum, \$3,595 per person, twin share

Plus internal air tickets \$280 (economy class, subject to change)

Partial single supplement \$575

Solo traveler rate, inclusive of single supplement: \$5,295, plus internal air tickets \$280 (economy class, subject to change)

## Hotel Upgrade Prices

Hotel upgrade prices depend on the dates/days of travel, and are subject to change based on availability and other factors. Hotel upgrade is based on using the Oguzkent Hotel or a similar hotel in Ashgabat, while other properties will be as listed on the itinerary.

2 traveler minimum, from \$3,895 per person, twin share

Plus internal air tickets \$280 (economy class, subject to change)

Single supplement, from \$750; single supplement only applicable to Oguzkent Hotel

Solo traveler rate, inclusive of single supplement: \$5,995, plus internal air tickets \$280 (economy class, subject to change)

## Your Private Journey Includes

- Accommodations as noted in the itinerary. **Note: The accommodations in Gozli Ata are very basic, and private rooms will not be available.** Accommodations are rustic, and WC facilities are outhouse-style. In addition, one night near the Darvaza Gas Crater is spent in tented camps with outhouse-style facilities and no showers.
- 11 breakfasts, 6 lunches, and 5 dinners per the itinerary. Some lunches and dinners are left free to allow independent 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 in your group).
- Guided sightseeing tours and entrance fees as outlined in itinerary.
- Services of experienced, English-speaking local guides, drivers, and other staff, including National Guide.
- 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, drivers, National Guide.
- 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.

## Start Planning Next Year Now

### 2021 Flexible Essential Trip – Classic Private Journey – 12 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 Friday of your choice in 2021. 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

*Package pricing depends on the dates/days of travel and are subject to change based on availability and other factors. Please contact MIR if pricing for your preferred tour start date is not shown below.*

2 traveler minimum, \$3,695 per person, twin share  
 Plus internal air tickets \$300 (economy class, subject to change)  
 Partial single supplement \$595  
 Solo traveler rate, inclusive of single supplement: \$5,395, plus internal air tickets \$300 (economy class, subject to change)

### Hotel Upgrade Prices

*Hotel upgrade prices depend on the dates/days of travel, and are subject to change based on availability and other factors. Hotel upgrade is based on using the Oguzkent Hotel or a similar hotel in Ashgabat, while other properties will be as listed on the itinerary.*

2 traveler minimum, from \$3,995 per person, twin share  
 Plus internal air tickets \$300 (economy class, subject to change)  
 Single supplement, from \$795; single supplement only applicable to Oguzkent Hotel  
 Solo traveler rate, inclusive of single supplement: \$6,095, plus internal air tickets \$300 (economy class, subject to change)



## 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.

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

The accommodations vary from superior tourist-class to more basic hotels, guesthouses, and a tent camp. It is important to keep in mind that the country of Turkmenistan may not be up to the standards North American travelers expect. Services are improving; however, you may encounter problems with bureaucratic service, road conditions, plumbing, unpaved sidewalks, uneven surfaces and steps, variety of locally available foods, and availability and quality of public restrooms. You are traveling in some areas that see 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. One night is spent in a remote pilgrim guesthouse where sleeping accommodations will be shared with other group members and WCs will be rustic outhouses. One night is spent in a tent camp without access to running water. Nights can be cold. 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.

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

To reap the full rewards of this adventure, travelers must be able to walk at least a mile a day. 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.

### Important Notice Regarding Prescription Drugs

Please be advised that some countries in Central Asia, most notably Turkmenistan, 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.



## 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 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

Located in the center of Central Asia, far from the mitigating effects of the ocean, Turkmenistan's climate is sharply continental. As the country is more than four-fifths desert, it is dry year-round. Rainfall is slight throughout the country, with the exception being the occasionally damp northern winters. By and large the summers are extremely hot and dry, with temperatures sometimes topping 100 degrees Fahrenheit. The winters can range from mild to downright cold, with the lowest lows dipping to or below freezing.

Spring and fall are the best times to visit, before or after the extreme heat of the summer. It is important to remember that in a dry desert climate, there can be a wide margin between daytime high temperatures and nighttime lows. Sparse vegetation and low humidity do little to trap the day's heat, so when the sun sets, be prepared for dramatic temperature changes.

**Please remember, weather at all times of year has an element of the unpredictable.** This information comes from [www.weatherbase.com](http://www.weatherbase.com) and is based on data from previous temperatures on record. It is always advisable to check with [www.weatherbase.com](http://www.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 carriers for this tour are Lufthansa and Turkish Airlines, as they offer convenient itineraries and competitive rates from multiple cities across the U.S. to Turkmenistan.

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: 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 \$154. 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 Turkmen visa processing is expected to take ten to fifteen 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.**

## 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 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 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 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 Trips*

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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