



Essential Uzbekistan 2020



Essential Uzbekistan

Uzbek Oases of Samarkand, Bukhara, and Khiva

Flexible Essential Trip – Classic Private Journey – 10 Days

Your choice of dates, suggested start day: Wednesday

Set between the Amu Darya and Syr Darya rivers squarely at the heart of Central Asia, Uzbekistan offers ancient caravan cities, cultural wealth, hospitable people, and striking natural beauty. Roam the great Silk Road oases of Bukhara, Samarkand, and Khiva, all three UNESCO World Heritage Sites, along with modern Tashkent, the Uzbek capital. Admire their mosques, madrassahs, and minarets built of mud bricks and clad in ceramic tiles the color of the desert sky. Every step along the way retraces the path by which silk, spices, ideas, politics, and religions moved across the ancient world.

Begin in the present, in modern Tashkent, and move into the past, to blue-tiled Samarkand. Walk gracefully proportioned Registan Square before pressing on to Bukhara. Browse the market for brilliant silks and hand-painted ceramics during a full day of independent discovery, and attend a dinner performance of traditional music and dance. Travel overland to Khiva, the seat of the ruling khan until the 20th century and the best-preserved of the caravan cities. Flying back to Tashkent, spend one final night in this exotic country before departure.

Daily Itinerary

Day 1, Wednesday	Arrive Tashkent, Uzbekistan
Day 2, Thursday	Tashkent • Samarkand by train
Day 3, Friday	Samarkand
Day 4, Saturday	Samarkand • Bukhara by train
Day 5, Sunday	Bukhara
Day 6, Monday	Bukhara
Day 7, Tuesday	Bukhara • Khiva
Day 8, Wednesday	Khiva
Day 9, Thursday	Khiva • Urgench • fly to Tashkent
Day 10, Friday	Depart Tashkent



Tour Highlights

Tashkent	Independence Square, Navoi Theater, Kukeldash Madrassah, Kaffal-Shashi Mausoleum, Barak Khan Madrassah, Friendship of Peoples Palace
Samarkand	“Crossroad of Cultures” (UNESCO World Heritage Site), Registan, Bibi Khanum Mosque, Gur-Emir Mausoleum, Uleg Bek Observatory, Shah-i-Zinda, lunch in a private home
Bukhara	“Historic Center of Bukhara” (UNESCO World Heritage Site), Lyabi-Hauz Plaza, Kukeldash Madrassah, Kalon Mosque and Minaret, Ark Citadel, Zindan Prison, Ismael Samani Mausoleum, Summer Palace of Last Emir, Museum of National Crafts, performance and dinner at a local <i>madrassah</i>
Khiva	Ichon Qala or Old Town (UNESCO World Heritage Site), Tash-Hauli Palace, Dzhuma Mosque, Kunya Ark

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, Wednesday

Arrive Tashkent, Uzbekistan



After clearing Uzbek immigration and customs, transfer to the hotel for check-in. Many flights will arrive late night on Tuesday or early Wednesday morning, so touring will begin later on Wednesday, after lunch.

This afternoon, begin touring with an introduction to 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 2nd 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 built 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).

The tour of Tashkent starts with the **National Bazaar**, also known as the **Chorsu Bazaar**. On Chorsu Plaza across from the Kukeldash Madrassah, Chorsu



Bazaar spills out of the tiled dome that shades its merchants from the sun. Open every day, the bazaar is at its most exhilarating on weekends when traders and shoppers come in from outlying areas to buy and sell anything from spices and produce to woodwork and embroidery.

Continue with **Independence Square**. Enter the spacious park-like square through a silver arch embellished with white storks. The golden globe of the Monument of Independence, constructed in 1991, sits above the 20-foot Happy Mother statue, who gazes lovingly at her child, the future of Uzbekistan. Among the fountains and flower beds other, sadder, mother figures wait for their sons around an eternal flame that honors the many Uzbeks who perished during WWII. On the outskirts of the square are Tashkent's administrative and government buildings.

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



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

Dinner this evening is independent.
Meals: L – *Lotte City Hotel Tashkent Palace or similar*



Day Two, Thursday

Tashkent • Samarkand by train

This morning, depart Tashkent and head to the ancient city of Samarkand, a **UNESCO World Heritage Site** called the “Crossroad of Cultures.” Schedules permitting, **travel to Samarkand by train** – a ride that takes about 2 hours.



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 4th 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 a long period of Arab rule, the region came under the control of Genghis Khan, whose empire stretched from Beijing to Moscow at its height and encompassed much of modern-day Central Asia. The hundred-year rule of the Golden Horde set the stage for Tamerlane’s conquest, which brought Samarkand to its apex.





Timing may change due to train schedules today, but plan on some light touring before lunch at a local restaurant.

Begin with the centerpiece of old Samarkand, **Registan Square**. The three emblematic *madrasahs* 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. Admire the superb

tilework, which uses every motif permitted in Islamic art: floral images, geometric patterns, spirals, and bands of Kufic calligraphy.

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



After lunch, continue taking in the highlights of this ancient city. Visit the ruins of **Ulug Bek Observatory** and the small museum dedicated to the astronomer-king. 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, building one of the most advanced observatories of the ancient world. The observations, which he undertook with the naked eye only, predated the telescope by over 150 years. They were aided by the building itself, which housed a large vertical half-circle, only a quarter



of which remains today. By using careful methods, rigorous observation, and meticulous recording, Ulug Bek calculated the length of the year to within a minute of the modern accepted value. He also created the most comprehensive catalog of the heavens at the time, earning his place in history.

Following the observatory, visit a workshop where **hand-crafted paper is made** according to traditions handed down from the 8th century, when paper-making began in Samarkand. Founded in 1997 with the support of UNESCO, the workshop of Abdurakhim Mukhtarov, located in the village of Koni Gil on the outskirts of the city, produces lovely paper crafts and stationery as you watch.

Round out the day with a visit to the **Afghan-Uzbek Silk Carpet Factory** outside of town. This joint venture carpet factory uses natural vegetable dyes to color the thread used in its carpets. Tour the gardens outside the factory where the weavers grow indigo, coleus and dahlias to use for dye. Observe the entire process of dyeing the thread and weaving the carpets, with an opportunity to shop afterward.

Meals: B, L – *Rabat Boutique Hotel or similar*

Day Three, Friday Samarkand

Today, continue exploring glorious **Samarkand**, the city where Tamerlane amassed the greatest pool of artistic talent anywhere.



See the massive and beautiful **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 used to transport the marble and other building materials from India to Samarkand.

Browse the animated **Siab Bazaar**, just across the street from the Bibi Khanum Mosque. Vividly dressed women oversee neat stacks of brilliant produce and burlap sacks of nuts and spices. Uzbek and Tajik men in black and white

skullcaps, called doppi, sell cabbage rolls and shashlik. For a pittance, an entrepreneur with a brazier of special incense will cleanse you of all bad luck.





Later, tour the beautiful **Shah-i-Zinda complex**. 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 complex remains shady and cool, and seems 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 9th century and as recently as the present day.

After **lunch in a private home**, continue touring. Just outside of modern-day Samarkand lie the dusty hills of the ancient city of Afrosiab, once a potent capital, now an archaeological site guarding treasures of antiquity. Scientific digs here began in the 1800s under Russian rule, and continue to this day. On site is the **Afrosiab History Museum**, which houses artifacts from the area, including pottery and tile found among the excavated walls of the town.

Dinner is independent in this engaging city.
Meals: B, L – *Rabat Boutique Hotel or similar*



Day Four, Saturday

Samarkand • Bukhara by train

The morning **train ride from Samarkand to Bukhara** allows you to cover ground with speed and comfort. Timing may change due to train schedules today, but plan on some light touring before lunch at a local restaurant.

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 took power in the region during the 8th 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**.



Bukhara was the site of one of the best-known episodes to Westerners in Central Asian history, the 19th century capture and ultimate execution of Captain Conolly and Colonel Stoddart, two British spies posing as explorers. They were involved in what was then known as the Great Game between Russia and England for control over Central Asia and access to India. The last emir of Bukhara was a notoriously brutal and crafty leader, and kept the men imprisoned for years before their public execution.

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.

Begin touring with the **Ark Citadel**, the original fortress of Bukhara that likely dates back 2,000 years or more. 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.





Continue at **Lyabi-Hauz Plaza**. With the feel of a true oasis in an oasis town, the Lyabi-Hauz 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.

The **Khanaka of Nadir Divan-Begi** was the first component of the Lyabi-Hauz ensemble, built even before the reflecting pool. The massive structure was originally a place of study and meditation for traveling Sufis.

Two phoenixes spread their wings on each side of a shining sun on the archway that leads into the **Nadir Divan-Begi Madrassah**. Seated on the east side of the Lyabi-Hauz pool, the 1622 madrassah was originally built as a caravanserai. At its opening, Bukhara’s leader, Imamkuli-khan, dedicated it to the “greater glory of Allah,” and Nadir Divan-Begi quickly had it converted to a madrassah, adding student rooms and the portal with its phoenixes. In the evenings, a performance of Uzbek folk music and dances takes place in the courtyard of the former madrassah.



The **Kukeldash Madrassah** on the north side of the Lyabi-Hauz reflecting pool is the largest Koranic school in Central Asia. Named for the statesman and general Kulbaba Kukeldash, the *madrassah* was built in 1568.

Wander through the **small shops and spice bazaars** and past street-level mosques and *madrassahs*, before heading to the hotel for check-in, independent dinner, and overnight.

Meals: B, L – *Safiya Boutique Hotel or similar*

Day Five, 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 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 that city. The city was also an important merchant center of Sephardic Jewry. The term “Bukharan Jews” refers to a large community of Jews originally from Persia who lived in the lands formerly ruled by the emir of Bukhara.

This morning, sightseeing begins at Poi Kalon, also called the Bukhara Forum. The 12th century Kalon Assembly, including the **Kalon Mosque and Minaret** and the Mir-i-Arab Madrassah, surrounds an open plaza teeming 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*. Fourteen distinct and unique bands of brickwork circle the tower at intervals, and at the top of the minaret resolve into a traditional stalactite formation.



Admire the early 19th century **Chor Minor Madrassah**, whose four slender, blue-topped minarets give it its name. Also visit Bukhara's old **Jewish Quarter**, in the heart of the Old Town, where in the mid 19th century 2,500 families of prosperous merchants were estimated to have been living. Cut off in the 15th century from contact with other Jews, the Bukharan Jews developed their own dialect of the Tajik-Persian language that incorporates many Hebrew words, their own style of dress and their own unique form of Judaism. The only Bukharan synagogue allowed by the Soviets to remain is an unassuming place near the Lyabi-Hauz pool. Almost underground and still somewhat run-down, the synagogue is the center of life for Bukhara's greatly diminished Jewish community. Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, between 70,000 and 100,000 Jews have left Uzbekistan.

Next visit **Chashma Ayub (Job's Well) Mausoleum**. In fact, this is not a true mausoleum, but a *qadamdjoy*, or site visited by a holy person. The Koranic prophet, Ayub – the Biblical prophet, Job – reportedly struck the ground with his staff here, and water immediately bubbled up from a spring. The oldest part of this multi-domed building was probably built in the 12th century. Under its many roofs are the sacred spring and the Water Supply History Museum of Bukhara.

Visit a private studio to learn from a **master marionette-maker** the process of creating traditional Uzbek puppets. The expressive puppets have unique faces and are dressed in traditional Uzbek garments. It may take seven or eight days to finish a puppet.

After an independent lunch, continue sightseeing with a visit to the **Summer Palace of the Last Emir**,



located outside the city. The palace was built for the emir at the turn of the century, after the Russians took control of Bukhara. The grounds here are heavily planted, and arborescent walkways connect the various pavilions and buildings. Wild peacocks and peahens stroll through the park-like setting, strutting with their long, showpiece plumage. The palace itself is something of a showpiece, as it was designed to keep the emir in luxury yet removed from the city, isolated and politically impotent. The main palace is a mixture of local materials, regional influences, and Russian style. Western furniture abounds, but design choices reflect traditional Uzbek decorations.

The palace grounds also hold a smaller residence, often referred to

as the harem, though that is probably an inaccurate description of its use. It overlooks a large reflecting pool, and is in turn overlooked by a platform on which the emir could recline and relax. Visit the palace's **Museum of National Crafts** before returning to the city.





photo: Ana Filonov

Next, explore the **Ismael Samani Mausoleum**, named for the founder of the Samanid dynasty. Located in a clearing in a tree-filled park, the Ismael Samani Mausoleum is the 10th century resting place of Ismael Samani, founder of the Persian Samanid Dynasty. It 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 layering 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. According to tradition, walk three times around the mausoleum to have a wish come true.



This evening, enjoy **dinner with traditional music and dance at a madrasah.**

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

Day Six, Monday

Bukhara

After morning touring outside of town, the remainder of today is free to discover the rarities and hidden architectural secrets of Bukhara on your own.

Venture outside Bukhara approximately 45 minutes to a **village studio specializing in the art of *suzani***. See a demonstration of the process from start to finish: silk



cocoons, dying, design, drawing, and embroidery in this home workshop of a multi-generational family who has been practicing the art for many years.

Return to the city with time for an independent lunch, and the afternoon free to shop, stroll, and relax before dinner.

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



Day Seven, Tuesday

Bukhara • Khiva

Following breakfast, depart Bukhara for the **fabled city of Khiva**, about nine hours on the road in total.



One of the best preserved cities along the ancient Silk Road, Khiva was a harshly-ruled, isolated desert khanate until Russian influence finally prevailed in the late 19th century. At the height of the Silk Road trade, Khiva was a haven for slave traders, pirates, and marauders. Today, Khiva evokes a remote and exotic feel unlike other stops along the route, with its compact old walled city full of minarets, a khan's fort, cobblestone alleys, mosques, and tombs.

Check-in upon arrival, and the evening is free to rest and relax. Dinner is independent.
Meals: B, L – Beg Hotel or similar

Day Eight, 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 re-creation of life hundreds of years ago.

Archaeologists have found traces of human habitation around Khiva dating from the 5th 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.

Spend the day exploring Khiva on foot, taking in the **Ichon Qala**, or Inner City. Khiva's Old Town, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, has been extensively preserved and restored, and exists today much as it did hundreds of years ago. Approaching the old town, modern-day travelers face the same sight as Silk Road caravans did, the dun-colored city walls, the main gate opening on a dusty stone thoroughfare, merchants hawking their wares from each side, and the distinctive minarets watching over the whole scene.

The largest of the existing buildings in the Ichon Qala is the **Tash-Hauli Palace**, the former home of the khan and his four legal wives. Built between 1832 and 1841, the palace was designed as a more sumptuous replacement for Kunya Ark, encompassing more than 150 rooms surrounding nine





courtyards. They include a throne room, a ceremonial and banqueting hall with brick bases for yurts, and the khan's own personal harem quarters, beautifully decorated with elaborate blue and white tilework, wooden columns, and intricately carved and painted plaster known as ganche.

Wood carving is a traditional specialty of Khiva, and filigreed wooden columns are found at the **Juma Mosque**. The mosque is partially below ground level and the 115 carved columns that support the wooden ceiling create a forest-like effect around two square light wells.

The **Kunya Ark** was originally built in the 12th century as the khan's fortress and residence, and encompassed numerous small courtyards surrounded by administrative buildings, sleeping quarters, kitchens, guardhouse, stables, parade area and weapons strongholds. Much of it was lost when Persia invaded the Khivan Khanate in the 18th century, but what remains, including the mosque, harem and throne room are beautifully decorated with ceramic tiles and majolica.

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

Dinner is independent tonight.
Meals: B, L – Beg Hotel or similar





Day Nine, Thursday
Khiva • Urgench • fly to Tashkent

Have an early breakfast at the hotel this morning, then drive to the nearby town of Urgench for a flight to Tashkent. Flight schedules can vary, but in general arrival in Tashkent will be in time for lunch. After arrival meet your city guide and driver and head to lunch at a local restaurant.

Then wind up your tour with a visit to the **acclaimed private studio of the Rakhimov family**, which offers stunning examples of ancient traditional Uzbek ceramics – many of them previously displayed in Europe and Japan. Alisher Rakhimov is a sixth-generation Uzbek ceramicist whose family has been making pottery since the 1790s. He and his father, Akbar, have made an extensive study of the history and methods of Uzbek ceramics, with a scholarly emphasis on the period from the 2nd century BC to the 15th century AD. The massive work of their father/grandfather (Mukhitdin Rakhimov), "Artistic Ceramics of Uzbekistan," is considered a fundamental must-read for anyone desiring to learn about these ancient Uzbek styles and techniques; for his life's work Mukhitdin was awarded the prestigious Soviet-era title of People's Artist of the USSR.

Following in the footsteps of their ancestors, Alisher and Akbar are adept in ancient glazing and dyeing techniques, reproducing the golden ceramics of the Surkhandarya style and the stamped decorations of the Kashgari region. The father-son artistic duo has revived the lost art of natural dye use, teaching contemporary Uzbek ceramicists their rediscovered techniques. In true Uzbek hospitality, enjoy fragrant tea and sweets while conversing with Alisher and Akbar about their art and passion for preserving and passing on their family's prized ceramics legacy.

Use any remaining time with your guide to pick up any last-minute souvenir purchases, and prepare to bid farewell to this country at the heart of the Silk Road. Dinner is independent.



Note: It is possible on Day 9 to arrange an optional excursion (*at additional cost*) from Khiva to the city of Nukus to visit the **Savitsky Art Museum**. This incredible museum was founded by Igor Savitisky, who was able to amass a wonderful collection of thousands of banned Russian avant-garde art pieces without interference from Moscow. The story of this collection has been told in the award-winning documentary, *The Desert of Forbidden Art*. The museum is about a three-hour drive from Khiva, and clients who add this optional excursion will fly back to Tashkent directly from Nukus on an evening flight - timing would not permit the Rakhimov family studio on return to Tashkent if adding the Savitsky Art Museum in Nukus.
Meals: B, L – *Lotte City Hotel Tashkent Palace or similar*

Day Ten, Friday Depart Tashkent

Following breakfast, the journey concludes with transfers to the airport.
Meals: B

Flexible Essential Trip – Classic Private Journeys

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

Private Journey Prices

Standard hotels, as listed in itinerary, or similar. Local guides only throughout program

2 traveler minimum, from \$3,195 per person, twin share

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

Single supplement, from \$495

Solo traveler rate, inclusive of single supplement: from \$4,325 plus internal air tickets \$100 per person (economy class, subject to change)

Hotel Upgrade Prices

Upgraded program with Hyatt in Tashkent, Sultan Inn in Samarkand, upgraded room at Amelia B&B, upgraded room at Asia Khiva in Khiva; or similar hotels throughout. Local guides only throughout program

2 traveler minimum, from \$3,395 per person, twin share

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

Single supplement, from \$695

Solo traveler rate, inclusive of single supplement: from \$4,745 plus internal air tickets \$100 per person (economy class, subject to change)

Upgrade to National Guide Accompaniment

If you prefer to have a National Guide along with you through the entire time in Uzbekistan, your private program can be set up for accompaniment throughout, i.e., your Uzbek guide will meet you on Day 1 and be with you until your departure on Day 10. Please note, you would still be met by local guides throughout the program, with the exception of the National Guide's hometown, where he or she would also serve as your local guide.

Please call for information regarding pricing if interested in adding this service.



Flexible Essential trip prices may vary by season and start day, and are subject to hotel availability for your travel dates. Additional nights are available on request. 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.
- 9 breakfasts, 7 lunches, and 2 dinners, per the itinerary. A few lunches and most dinners are left free to allow for 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).
- 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.
- Uzbek national guide accompaniment throughout the itinerary. **See prices above for rates to add this service.**
- 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; nor to Uzbek National Guide if adding this service.
- 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

2021 Flexible Essential Trip – Classic Private Journey – 10 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 Wednesday 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

Standard hotels, as listed in itinerary, or similar. **Local guides only throughout program**

2 traveler minimum, from \$3,295 per person, twin share

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

Single supplement, from \$545

Solo traveler rate, inclusive of single supplement: from \$4,425 plus internal air tickets

\$100 per person (economy class, subject to change)

Hotel Upgrade Prices

*Upgraded program with Hyatt in Tashkent, Sultan Inn in Samarkand, upgraded room at Amelia B&B, upgraded room at Asia Khiva in Khiva; or similar hotels throughout. **Local guides only throughout program***

2 traveler minimum, from \$3,495 per person, twin share

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

Single supplement, from \$795

Solo traveler rate, inclusive of single supplement: from \$4,845 plus internal air tickets

\$100 per person (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?

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 Uzbekistan may 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 and quality 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 the most comfortable possible 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 architectural sites 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. 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, 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.

If you have concerns about prescription drugs you need to travel through Central Asia with, 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's climate is above all dry, with annual rainfall averaging less than 20 inches per year. The summer months are driest, the late winter and early spring months of February and March relatively the wettest. Temperatures are quite hot in the middle of summer, and can rise above 100 degrees Fahrenheit, while winter temperatures can be extremely cold. Though winter averages are around 18 degrees Fahrenheit, sudden drops can cause temperatures to fall well below zero. In March through mid-April and in November, expect fewer people and more moderate temperatures, ranging from 40-70 degrees Fahrenheit. Rain is occasionally possible, but more likely in March than it is in November.



The best times to visit are the spring months of April-May and fall months of September-October when the weather is generally ideal, in our opinion. (This is also the high season and busiest time to visit.) The daytime temperatures tend to range from the 60s to low 80s and 40s to 50s at night. Summer months of June-August see temperatures during the day range from high 70s to 90s, and down to the 60s 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 Wednesday, Day One, of the Essential Uzbekistan program. Because of common flight arrival times into Tashkent, for your convenience MIR has pre-booked the Tashkent hotel



from the Tuesday before Day One, with rooms available for check-in after 2:00 p.m. on Tuesday. Many clients will arrive late Tuesday night or in the very early hours of Wednesday 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 Tuesday 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-Tours

Additional touring is available within the tour dates. Add an excursion from Khiva (at additional cost) to the city of Nukus to visit the Savitsky Art Museum with its collection of thousands of banned Russian avant-garde art pieces.

This flexible-date private journey is designed to start on a Wednesday and end on the second following Friday. However, this program is flexible enough to run in any 10-day period, allowing for an alternate start day that makes it a perfect tour to link to other 2019 flexible-date private journeys or small group programs. All of MIR's destinations are open to you – including the South Caucasus countries, Western Russia, and Eastern Europe – and can be attached to this program. Please contact MIR at 1-800-424-7289 for suggested tour packages and exciting options for extended travel.

Also Nearby...

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

Flexible Essential Trips – Classic Private Journeys

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 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 Caucasus, 10 days. Armenia's intricate stone *khachkar* crosses, the bounteous wines of Georgia, and the ancient petroglyphs of Azerbaijan are icons of these three intertwined Caucasus countries, where you can experience five UNESCO masterpieces in 10 days.

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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