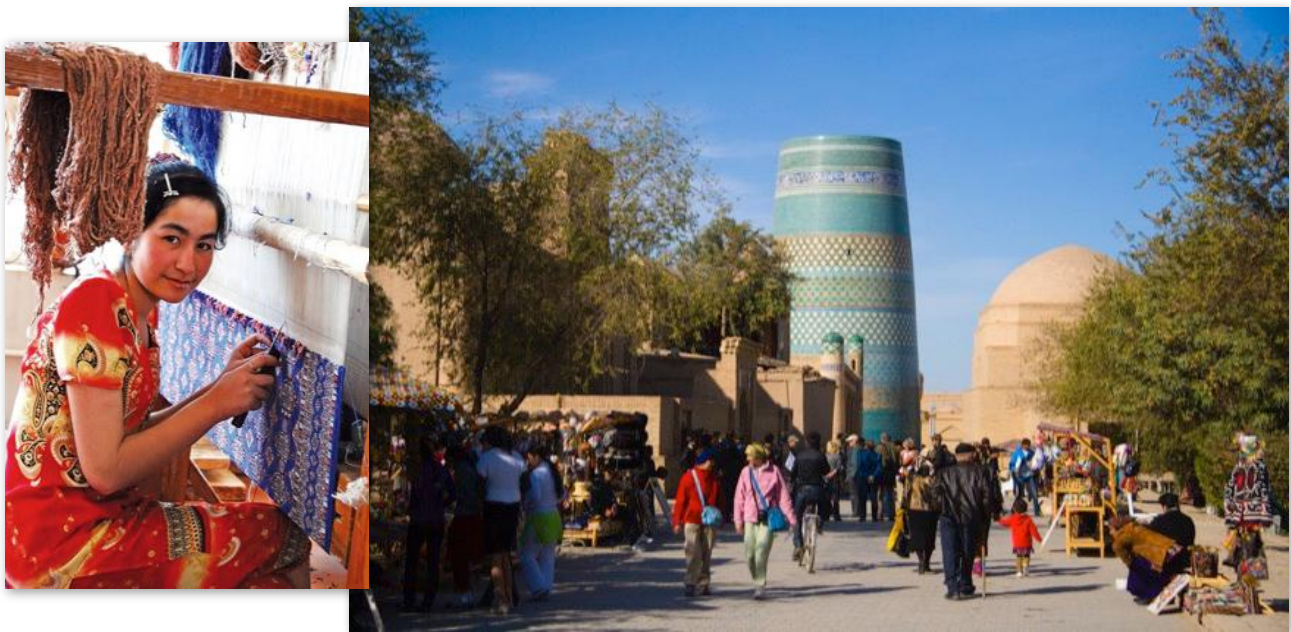




**Essence of the Silk Road**  
**Almaty to Ashgabat aboard the *Orient Silk Road***  
***Express private train***  
**2020**



## **Essence of the Silk Road**

**From Almaty to Ashgabat aboard the *Orient Silk Road Express* private train**

**Two westbound departures in 2020 – Private Rail Journey – 14 Days**

**April 2-15 • October 8-21**

*Roll through the heart of the Silk Road on this riveting rail journey by private train, experiencing seven treasured UNESCO Sites in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. The journey begins in leafy Almaty, Kazakhstan's business capital, with a traditional meal in a Kazakh yurt, and continues through the Uzbek Silk Road oases of Samarkand, Khiva and Bukhara, fabled cities of blue-tiled domes and graceful arches. In Turkmenistan, the ruins of ancient Merv and Parthian Nisa provide a counterweight to Ashgabat's gleaming modern monuments. The 14-day adventure includes seven nights onboard the comfortable Orient Silk Road Express with the remaining nights in four star hotels.*



## Daily Itinerary

Day 1, Thursday	Arrive Almaty, Kazakhstan
Day 2, Friday	Almaty
Day 3, Saturday	Turkistan
Day 4, Sunday	Tashkent, Uzbekistan
Day 5, Monday	Shahrisabz
Day 6, Tuesday	Samarkand
Day 7, Wednesday	Samarkand
Day 8, Thursday	Samarkand
Day 9, Friday	Khiva
Day 10, Saturday	Bukhara
Day 11, Sunday	Bukhara
Day 12, Monday	Merv, Turkmenistan
Day 13, Tuesday	Ashgabat • Nisa
Day 14, Wednesday	Depart Ashgabat

*Note: This train also runs in the reverse direction, from Ashgabat to Almaty.*





## Tour Features

- Enjoy the comfort and efficiency of your own private cabin on the *Orient Silk Road Express* train.
- Survey a series of fascinating cities along the rail line.
- Get a true picture of the scale and scope of the countries you are traversing.
- Join travelers from around the world to enjoy the casual and relaxed atmosphere aboard the private train, dining in comfort and chatting over drinks.
- Relax deeply as you are carried into another land, a world away from home.

## Tour Highlights

Almaty	Kazakhstan's largest city, lunch in a Kazakh yurt
Turkistan	One of the oldest cities in Kazakhstan, Kojakhan's mausoleum, (UNESCO World Heritage Site)
Tashkent	Capital of Uzbekistan, Independence Square, evening performance
Shahrisabz	"Historic Center of Shahrisabz" (UNESCO World Heritage Site), Ak Saray (White Palace)
Samarkand	Old Town (UNESCO World Heritage Site), Registan Square, Shah-i-Zinda, Afrosiab History Museum, Ulug Bek Observatory, silk carpet factory
Khiva	City walls, Old Town, Ichon Kala (UNESCO World Heritage Site)
Bukhara	Old Town (UNESCO World Heritage Site), Ark Citadel, Palace of Moon and Stars
Merv	Archaeological site of five ancient cities, the earliest attributed to Cyrus the Great (UNESCO World Heritage Site)
Ashgabat	Capital of Turkmenistan, flamboyant gilded architecture
Nisa	Parthian Kingdom of Nisa (UNESCO World Heritage Site), Kopet-Dag Mountains

## Itinerary



### Day One, Thursday Arrive Almaty, Kazakhstan

Most airline arrivals into Almaty arrive late tonight or very early tomorrow morning. Following customs procedures, transfer to a hotel for the rest of the night.  
Meals: Independent – *Royal Tulip Hotel* or similar

### Day Two, Friday Almaty

This morning after breakfast, begin an exploration of **Almaty**. Spread out at the foothills of the Zaili Alatau Mountains in the Tien Shan range, Almaty is the commercial

capital of Central Asia's biggest country, Kazakhstan. Almaty's name means "the place with apples," and the many varieties of wild apple in the vicinity give scientists reason to believe that this is where apples were



first cultivated. Today the city is thriving on the considerable foreign investment it has attracted, primarily in the oil and gas industries.

The city tour of Almaty includes **Panfilov Park**, a green oasis in Almaty's central area, renamed by the Soviets in honor of 28 Kazakh soldiers led by General Panfilov who died on the outskirts of Moscow during WWII. A monument in the park honors the soldiers, and an Eternal Flame memorializes all the people who died during the war. Also in the park is **Zenkov Cathedral**, a wooden Orthodox church built at the turn of the century.

Enjoy **lunch** here in a **traditional Kazakh yurt** before boarding the private train on its way along the Silk Road. Settle into your comfortable cabins and enjoy dinner onboard.

Meals: B, L, D – Aboard the Orient Silk Road Express

### Day Three, Saturday Turkistan

One of the oldest cities in Kazakhstan, **Turkistan** celebrated its 1,500th anniversary in 2000. Located on the steppe near the Syr Darya River, the city has a population of about 100,000. Turkistan reached its apex in the 12th century during the lifetime of the Sufi mystic, Khoja Akhmed Yasavi, who made the city a center of learning and pilgrimage.

Visit **Koja Akhmed Yasavi's mausoleum**. Tamerlane, also known as Amir Timur, commissioned the huge *mazar*, or tomb, in 1389. Persian architects arrived to build it, and continued to work until the death of Tamerlane in 1405, when construction stopped. The unfinished *mazar* escaped damage in later warfare, and today is Kazakhstan's first **UNESCO World Heritage Site**. Khoja Ahmed Yasavi was the first Turkic Muslim holy man, and his monument has the largest existing dome in Central Asia.

Meals: B, L, D – Aboard the Orient Silk Road Express

### Day Four, Sunday Tashkent, Uzbekistan



Arrive this morning in **Tashkent**, the **capital of Uzbekistan**, and spend some time touring this pleasant Soviet-style city, rebuilt with wide tree-lined boulevards after a devastating earthquake in 1966. Visit the Kukeldash Madrassah and the Amir Timur Monument.

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.

**Amir Timur Square** is the latest incarnation of a square that has switched its

allegiance at least 12 times. Originally a crossroads formed by two carriageways, the square was named



Konstantinovsk in 1882 by the Governor-General of Turkestan. Since then it has had in its place of honor a monument to the 1917 revolution, the Soviet hammer and sickle, a bust of Lenin, a statue of Stalin, and a head of Marx, among other sculptures. Since 1993, a large-scale bronze horse with conqueror Amir Timur (Tamerlane) astride has dominated the square.

This evening, schedules permitting, **attend a performance** at the Alisher Navoi Opera House or the Tashkent Philharmonic Hall. Afterwards, re-join the train as it departs for Samarkand.  
Meals: B, L, D – *Aboard the Orient Silk Road Express*



### *Day Five, Monday* **Shahrisabz**

Stop today in **Shahrisabz**, the birthplace of Tamerlane. Visit the **UNESCO-listed 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 standing over 131 feet high. A large statue of Amir Timur greets visitors to the palace. While much of the city is in ruins (with restoration work in progress), you can get a taste of the local flavor of this village by visiting its traditional bazaar and taking in the swirls of color made by women in traditional Uzbek clothing.

Re-boarding the train, enjoy a **comparative tasting of Uzbek wines**.  
Meals: B, L, D – *Aboard the Orient Silk Road Express*



### *Day Six, Tuesday* **Samarkand**

Today the train arrives in **Samarkand, Tamerlane's blue-tiled capital**. Perhaps the best-known of Silk Road towns, Samarkand, fabled oasis on the fringes of the Kyzyl Kum ("Red Sand") Desert, has been settled since the 6th century BC. **UNESCO** calls Samarkand the "Crossroads of Cultures." It has been visited through time by many of the world's conquerors – Alexander the Great, Genghis Khan and Tamerlane. Tamerlane made it his capital city and gathered the finest architects, builders and artisans of the time to enhance its

beauty.





Explore some of the city's highlights, including Shah-i-Zinda, the Afrosiab Museum and the majestic Registan. The row of tombs and mausoleums collectively called **Shah-i-Zinda**, or “place of a living king,” stretches between the present and the past. At its front is living Samarkand, and at its back the dusty slopes at the edge of ancient Afrosiab. Even on hot summer days the mausoleums remain shady and cool, and seem to lure the traveler to approach the oldest tomb at the far end. Behind the complex and set into the hill lies an active cemetery with grave sites dating back as far as the 9th century, and as recently as the present day.



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.

**Registan Square** is the centerpiece of Samarkand, and the most recognizable landmark for visitors. 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.

Tonight you spend a stationary night in one of the city's four star hotels.

Meals: B, L, D – *Registan Plaza Hotel or similar*

## *Day Seven, Wednesday* **Samarkand**

After a hotel breakfast, spend the day visiting a carpet factory, seeing how paper was made in ancient times, touring the Ulug Bek observatory and admiring the Gur-Emir Mausoleum.

Take a tour of a **silk carpet factory** that uses natural vegetable dyes to color the thread used in its carpets. Visit 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.



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.

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, now known as the Ulug Bek Observatory**. The observations, which he undertook with the naked eye only, predated the telescope by over 150 years. They were aided by the building itself, which housed a large vertical half-circle, only a quarter of which remains today. By using careful methods, rigorous observation and meticulous recording, Ulug Bek calculated the length of the year to within a minute of the modern accepted value. He also created the most comprehensive (to that date) catalog of the heavens, earning his place in history.



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

*Day Eight, Thursday*  
**Samarkand**

Enjoy some free time this morning to explore this beautiful city on your own. Re-board the train around noon and continue to the west.

Meals: B, L, D – Aboard the Orient Silk Road Express





## Day Nine, Friday

### Khiva

Today investigate Khiva, one of the most important trade centers on the Silk Road. **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.



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

Meals: B, L, D – Aboard the Orient Silk Road Express

## Day Ten, Saturday

### Bukhara



Uzbekistan's **best-preserved oasis city**, Bukhara, is next. **UNESCO-listed 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. 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.

Visit the 12th century **Kalon Mosque and Minaret**, surrounding 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. Fourteen distinct bands of brickwork circle the tower at intervals, and at the top of the minaret resolve into a traditional stalactite formation.

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, to eat, to drink, and to 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 anchor three of the four edges of the ensemble.



Enjoy a **traditional Uzbek performance** this evening along with dinner at a former *madrasah*. Overnight at a pleasant Bukhara hotel.  
Meals: B, L, D – *Asia Bukhara Hotel or similar*

### *Day Eleven, Sunday* **Bukhara**

The monumental **Mir-i-Arab Madrasah** with its matching turquoise domes is part of the Kalon assembly, and sits across from the Kalon Mosque in the center of the Old Town. The *madrasah* was a working Islamic school from the time it was built in the 16th century to its closure in 1920.



In a clearing in a tree-filled park a small plaza is marked with a single building, the **Ismael Samani Mausoleum**. It is the 10th century resting place of Ismael Samani, founder of the Persian Samanid Dynasty, and was buried under centuries of sand and not discovered until the 20th century. Though small, it is detailed in a fashion not seen in many other Bukharan monuments. More than sixteen 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.

**The Ark Citadel** is the original fortress of Bukhara and likely dates back two thousand 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.

A small distance outside of the city sits the Palace of Moon and Stars, or the **Summer Palace of the last Emir of Bukhara**. 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.



Before re-boarding the train this evening, pay a visit to the Imam of Bukhara.

Meals: B, L, D – *Aboard the Orient Silk Road Express*







## Day Twelve, Monday

### Merv, Turkmenistan • Ashgabat

Explore the **UNESCO-listed ruins of ancient Merv today**. 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 the 13th centuries, when it was sacked and burned by the Mongols.

Enjoy **lunch with a local village family**, served in their shady courtyard. Re-board the train bound for Turkmenistan. Check into a four star hotel in Ashgabat for overnight.

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

## Day Thirteen, Tuesday

### Ashgabat • Nisa

After a hotel breakfast, board a coach and drive to **UNESCO-listed 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.

In the afternoon, take a tour of **Turkmenistan's capital, Ashgabat**. 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 approximately 176,000 residents, over two-thirds of the city's population. Recently Ashgabat has seen a boom in new construction, which has had a major impact on the look of the city. Modern marble and gold monuments have sprung up all over town. In fact, in 2013, the **Guinness Book of World Records** awarded Ashgabat the record for the highest density of white marble buildings in the world.





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.

After a farewell dinner, you are taken to the airport for late-night/early morning flights back home.  
Meals: B, L, D – *Ashgabat Hotel or similar*

### *Day Fourteen, Wednesday* **Depart Ashgabat**

The journey comes to an end as you board the plane; flights usually leave very early in the morning.  
Meals: Independent



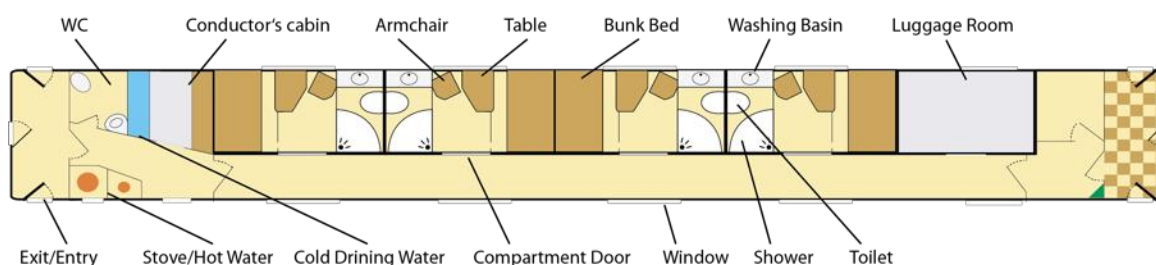
## About the Orient Silk Road Express

### Train accommodations

The *Orient Silk Road Express* train is a comfortable, though not luxurious, private train, which can accommodate up to 140 passengers. Average group sizes can range from 100-120 passengers, and off-train excursion groups top out at a maximum of 26 passengers per coach. The pleasant dining car transforms to a friendly lounge after meals. Four styles of accommodation are available aboard the *Orient Silk Road Express* for the journey between Almaty and Ashgabat: Kalif (en suite), Sultan (en suite with a wet-room-type shower), Aladdin (shower at one end, WC at both ends of each car) and Ali Baba (WC at both ends of each car). **Note:** cabin configurations and decor may vary from samples depicted.

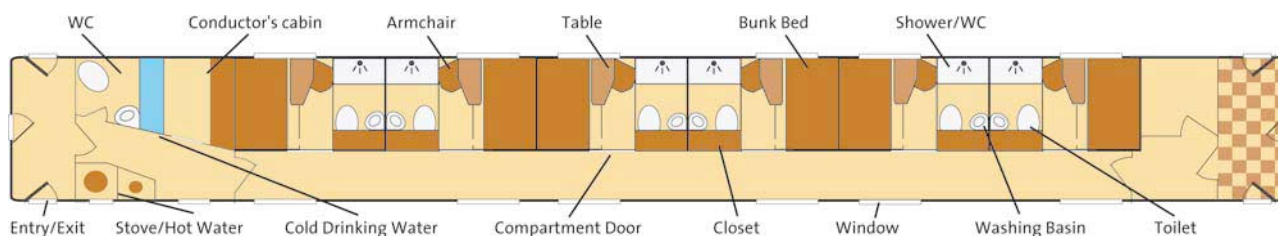
### Kalif Class

Kalif cabins are the most comfortable option available on the *Orient Silk Road Express* private train. There are four cabins to a car, and each is outfitted with a shower stall, WC and washbasin. Cabins are equipped with convertible upper and lower berths, a window-table, wardrobe and power outlets for 110/220 volts.



### Sultan Class

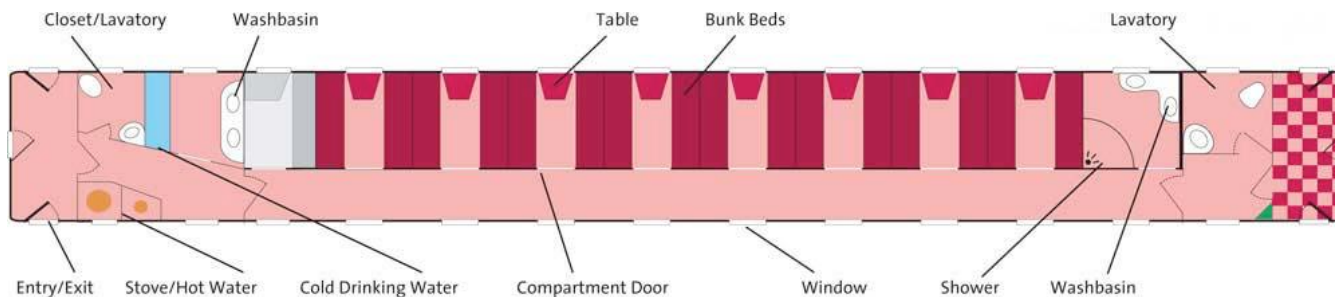
Sultan cabins, with six to a car, are slightly smaller than Kalif cabins, but are fully en suite with a wet-room-style shower in the WC. Convertible upper and lower bunks, window-table, wardrobe, and comfortable seating round out the amenities.





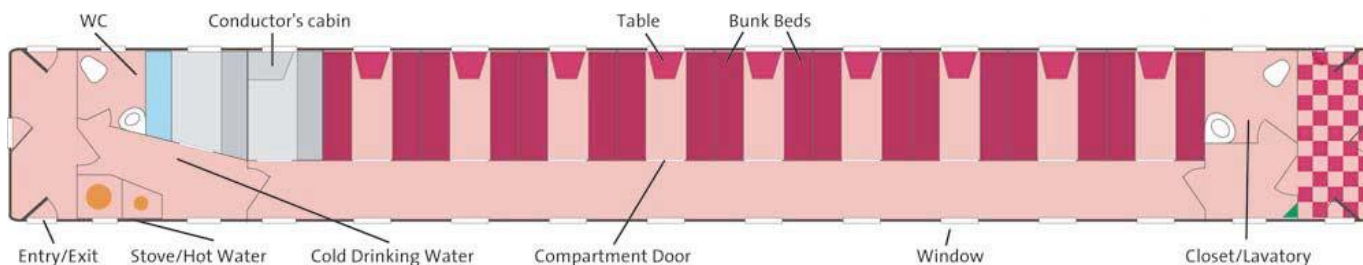
## Aladdin Class

Aladdin cabins offer comfortable accommodation with twin-berth compartments featuring two lower berths. Beds convert to comfortable sofas for daytime travel and there is storage space under the berths and above the door in each cabin. A WC is found at each end of the car and each car has a shower compartment at one end.



## Ali Baba Class

Ali Baba cabins are the best-value cabin option. They are slightly smaller than the Aladdin cabins, with the same amenities and a WC at each end of the car, but no shower. En route hotel nights provide shower opportunities.





## Dates for 2020 – Private Rail Journey

The land itinerary is scheduled to operate on the following dates. Please note that you need to depart the U.S. at least one day prior to the tour start date, due to airline flight schedules.

April 2-15, 2020  
October 8-21, 2020

**Note:** This train also runs in the reverse direction, from Ashgabat to Almaty.  
2020 eastbound departure dates are:  
April 14-27, 2020  
October 20-November 2, 2020

## 2020 Package Prices

*Note: The April and October departures of this program are priced differently*

### April 2-15, 2020 Departure only

#### **Land Tour Cost – Per Person:**

Ali Baba Class, twin share	\$6,095
Ali Baba Class, single	\$8,345

Aladdin Class, twin share	\$7,150
Aladdin Class, single	\$9,845

Sultan Class, twin share	\$10,650
Sultan Class, single	\$16,400

Kalif Class, twin share	\$10,995
Kalif Class, single	\$16,945

### October 8-21, 2020 Departure only

#### **Land Tour Cost – Per Person:**

Ali Baba Class, twin share	\$6,550
Ali Baba Class, single	\$8,875

Aladdin Class, twin share	\$7,595
Aladdin Class, single	\$10,345

Sultan Class, twin share	\$11,195
Sultan Class, single	\$17,090

Kalif Class, twin share	\$11,595
Kalif Class, single	\$17,720

#### **Private Train Tour Deposits – All departures – Per person:**

Ali Baba & Aladdin Class deposit	\$2,000
Sultan Class deposit	\$2,500
Kalif Class deposit	\$3,000

A non-refundable deposit and completed reservation form/signed release are required to hold space.



## Start Planning Next Year Now

### Dates for 2021 – Rail Journey by Private Train

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

April 1-14, 2021  
October 7-20, 2021

### Package Prices – 2021

*Note: The April and October departures of this program are priced differently*

#### **April 1-14, 2021 only**

Land Tour Cost – Per Person:

Ali Baba Class, twin share	\$6,445
Ali Baba Class, single	\$8,830
Aladdin Class, twin share	\$7,525
Aladdin Class, single	\$10,360
Sultan Class, twin share	\$11,195
Sultan Class, single	\$17,240
Kalif Class, twin share	\$11,545
Kalif Class, single	\$17,770

#### **October 7-20, 2021 only**

Land Tour Cost – Per Person:

Ali Baba Class, twin share	\$7,135
Ali Baba Class, single	\$9,530
Aladdin Class, twin share	\$7,935
Aladdin Class, single	\$10,830
Sultan Class, twin share	\$12,795
Sultan Class, single	\$18,990
Kalif Class, twin share	\$13,215
Kalif Class, single	\$19,610

#### **Private Train Tour Deposits – Per person:**

Ali Baba & Aladdin Class deposit	\$2,000
Sultan Class deposit	\$2,500
Kalif Class deposit	\$3,000



## Land Tour Includes

- Accommodation aboard the *Orient Silk Road Express* private train.
- Hotel accommodation per the itinerary (1 night in Almaty, 2 nights in Samarkand, 1 night in Bukhara, 2 nights in Ashgabat)
- Water, coffee and tea with meals.
- Meals per itinerary.
- Arrival/departure airport transfers, provided you arrive and depart on the tour start/end dates and in the tour start/end cities.
- All guided off-train tours per itinerary.
- The services of an experienced Train Tour Manager, with local guides for scheduled off-train touring.
- Complimentary tea, coffee and mineral water round the clock from your car attendant while on board the train.
- Complete pre-departure information including detailed packing list, reading list, *Touring with MIR* handbook with country-specific information, maps, and travel tips.
- Baggage handling.

## Not Included

- International airfare or surface transport to the point of joining/leaving the tour. MIR is able to arrange your air itinerary with special economy and business class rates available on several airlines. If you wish to obtain an air quote, please contact us for details.
- Optional pre- or post-tour extensions.
- Any drinks other than water, coffee and tea.
- Any drinks outside of mealtimes.
- Gratuities to local guides, drivers, porters and other service personnel.
- Visa fees.
- Any excess baggage charges.
- Visa/passport fees, airport departure fees.
- Vaccination or medical costs.
- Items of a personal nature (phone calls, email, laundry, alcohol, excess baggage, etc).
- 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.
- Trip cancellation, medical and evacuation 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 1-866-385-4839.

## Rail Journey by Private Train

Private Train tours are in a class of their own, offering the opportunity to experience remote destinations in style. These all-inclusive, overview tours aboard the fully-chartered *Orient Silk Road* private train bring together passengers from around the world. Group sizes are flexible and on the *Orient Silk Road* private train can be up to 120 passengers.





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

- This trip is moderately active, and rated **moderate to rigorous** touring due to the daily walking involved and the overall shortcomings of the tourism infrastructure. 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.
- This itinerary features a significant amount of touring on foot. Many streets and sidewalks are uneven, and some attractions are only accessible via steep staircases. Museums generally do not have elevators.
- On the train, restaurant and bar cars may be some distance from your sleeping car. Although portage is provided where possible, you may have to carry your baggage for short distances.
- Passengers may encounter problems getting on and off trains; there may be low platforms, steep steps and/or gaps between the platform and the train.
- In true expedition style, some delays or changes in the itinerary are likely.

## 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). Learn more about the destinations you are bound for by reading the country information pages at: <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/international-travel/International-Travel-Country-Information-Pages.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/>



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

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>

## 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 published fares available. Airfare varies depending on a wide variety of factors, such as dates of travel, 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. Please call us at 1-800-424-7289 for further details and for assistance with custom air reservations from your preferred departure city.

## 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 and Post-Tour Extensions

MIR can arrange for an extended program in Russia or Eastern Europe, the South Caucasus or the 'Stans. Contact us for more information.

## Also Nearby...

For more tours to this 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 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 ten days.

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

**Essential Uzbekistan**, 10 days. Roam the great Silk Road oases of Bukhara, Samarkand and Khiva, along with modern Tashkent, the Uzbek capital. Admire their mosques, *madrassahs* and minarets built of mudbricks and clad in ceramic tiles the color of the desert sky.

**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.





## 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

Please note that no partial refunds are available for any missed days of a tour or any whole or part of a tour, accommodation, meal or any other service not utilized by the participant during the tour. The quoted price represents a package price for the services offered and an itemization of individual component costs will not be provided. Please understand there will be no exceptions to our cancellation policies regardless of your situation. Should you need to cancel your travel plans, please notify us in writing immediately. At the time we receive written notification of cancellation, the following charges apply:

*Scheduled Rail Journeys by Private Train:*

121 or more days prior to departure-----deposit due or paid in full of \$2,000, \$2,500 or \$3,000

65-120 days prior to departure-----50% of the land tour cost

64 days prior to departure 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 like *Riding the Hula Hula to the Arctic Ocean* and *1,000 Places to See Before You Die*.




## More Questions?

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

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