

THE FIVE 'STANS OF CENTRAL ASIA

April 30 – May 17, 2027

Explore five Central Asian nations along the ancient Silk Road. Discover Kazakhstan's warrior traditions, Kyrgyzstan's nomadic heritage, and Uzbekistan's legendary cities of Samarkand, Bukhara, and Khiva. Trace Jewish history stretching back more than 2,000 years alongside the region's celebrated architecture and craftsmanship. Visit Tajikistan's Sogdian ruins and Turkmenistan's white marble capital with expert guidance throughout.

Brandeis | TRAVELERS

KAZAKHSTAN • KYRGYZSTAN • UZBEKISTAN
TAJIKISTAN • TURKMENISTAN

Featuring Professor Irina Dubinina



Irina Dubinina is a professor of Russian and the director of the Russian language program at Brandeis. Born in Magadan on Russia's Pacific coast, she spent much of her childhood traveling across the Soviet Union with her family, including many summers in present-day Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. These formative experiences sparked her enduring interest in Central Asia's diverse languages, cultures, and histories. Dubinina holds a Ph.D. in Russian and second language acquisition from Bryn Mawr College and an M.A. in anthropology from the University of Alaska Fairbanks. Since joining Brandeis in 2007, her research has focused on bilingualism, heritage language acquisition, sociolinguistics, and language identity. She has received numerous honors, including Brandeis' Louis D. Brandeis Prize for Excellence in Teaching and national awards recognizing her leadership in Slavic and heritage language education.



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Overview Daily Itinerary

Day 1, Fri, Apr 30	Arrive Almaty, Kazakhstan
Day 2, Sat, May 1	Almaty
Day 3, Sun, May 2	Almaty • Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan
Day 4, Mon, May 3	Bishkek
Day 5, Tue, May 4	Bishkek • Tashkent, Uzbekistan
Day 6, Wed, May 5	Tashkent
Day 7, Thu, May 6	Tashkent • Samarkand
Day 8, Fri, May 7	Samarkand
Day 9, Sat, May 8	Samarkand • Day trip to Panjakent, Tajikistan
Day 10, Sun, May 9	Samarkand • Bukhara
Day 11, Mon, May 10	Bukhara
Day 12, Tue, May 11	Bukhara
Day 13, Wed, May 12	Bukhara • Khiva
Day 14, Thu, May 13	Khiva
Day 15, Fri, May 14	Khiva • Ashgabat, Turkmenistan via Dashoguz
Day 16, Sat, May 15	Ashgabat
Day 17, Sun, May 16	Ashgabat
Day 18, Mon, May 17	Depart Ashgabat

Special Cultural Features

- Almaty Museum of Arts with a local artist
- Martial arts demonstration of Saka Warrior combat traditions
- Musical Instruments Museum with Kazakh folklore performance
- Yurt set-up demonstration
- *Salbuurun* demonstration of traditional nomadic hunting practices
- Kyrgyz horse games demonstration
- Talk on *shyrdak* felt carpets by a cultural expert, with *elechek* demonstration
- *Manas* performance
- Roundtable lunch with local professionals
- Jewish heritage sites across three Uzbek cities
- Evening drinks on a Samarkand rooftop overlooking the old city
- Private Afrosiab Museum tour with an archaeologist
- Uzbek bread baking demonstration
- Performance at El Merosi Theater of Historical Costume
- *Haqqoni* recital in Bukhara
- Plov making demonstration
- Meeting and concert with *Shashmaqom* masters
- Art historian-led tour of the Turkmenistan Museum of Carpets and Textiles
- Turkmen traditional house visit with attire and photography session

UNESCO World Heritage

- Epic of *Manas*, Kyrgyzstan
- Samarkand – Crossroad of Cultures, Uzbekistan
- Historic Centre of Bukhara, Uzbekistan
- Proto-Urban Site of Sarazm, Tajikistan
- Shashmaqom music, Uzbekistan/Tajikistan
- Itchan Kala (Old Town), Khiva, Uzbekistan
- Parthian Fortresses of Nisa, Turkmenistan

ITINERARY

Day 1, Fri, Apr 30 — Arrive Almaty, Kazakhstan Your journey begins in Almaty, spread across the foothills of the Tien Shan mountains. After settling in, an afternoon introduction takes you through Central Asia's largest city, where Soviet-era boulevards meet flourishing parks. Visit the wooden Zenkov Cathedral and wander the Green Bazaar, piled with apples, spices, and koumiss. At Republic Square, see the Monument of Independence, topped by the legendary Golden Man. The Central State Museum traces Kazakhstan's story from the Bronze Age to the present. The evening brings a welcome gathering with your fellow travelers. InterContinental Almaty or similar, B D

Day 2, Sat, May 1 — Almaty This morning, visit the new Almaty Museum of Arts for a meeting with a local artist and a look at modern works from Kazakhstan and Central Asia. Then drive to Issyk Village, where a 1969 excavation uncovered the Golden Warrior, a skeleton dressed in a coat of golden ornaments that became a national icon. The village museum displays a replica and models of ancient burial mounds. A live demonstration of reconstructed Saka warrior combat traditions brings the martial culture of the Eurasian steppes into focus, with context on fighting techniques and the role these practices played in steppe society more than two thousand years ago. InterContinental Almaty or similar, B L

Day 3, Sun, May 2 — Almaty • Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan A morning hotel lecture sets the stage before a visit to the Museum of Musical Instruments, housed in a 1907 Russian-style wooden building. The collection centers on traditional Kazakh instruments, including the *dombra*, a two-stringed lute found across Central Asia, and a folklore performance brings the national traditions to life. Later, fly to Bishkek, the capital of Kyrgyzstan. The evening is yours to explore this leafy, Soviet-planned city, with its tree-lined boulevards and mountain backdrop. Hyatt Regency Bishkek or similar, B L

Day 4, Mon, May 3 — Bishkek Drive about 50 miles outside Bishkek to the Burana Tower, one of the few surviving 11th-century watchtowers along the old Silk Road, with a small museum and a field of ancient carved stone *bal-bals* nearby. Continue to Don-Aryk village to visit a family homestead, where you'll watch bread being made, learn how yurts are built, and see demonstrations of *salbuurun*, traditional nomadic hunting practices combining eagle falconry and horseback archery. The day ends with Kyrgyz horse games, which may include *Ulak Tartysh* and *Oodarysh*, wrestling on horseback. Hyatt Regency Bishkek or similar, B L D

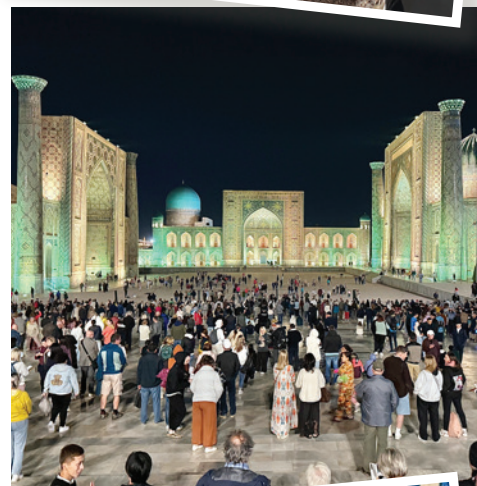
Day 5, Tue, May 4 — Bishkek • Tashkent, Uzbekistan Walk through the heart of Bishkek, starting at Ala-Too Square for the Changing of the Guard, then continuing to Oak Park's open-air gallery and the Soviet art collection at the National History Museum. At the Shyrdak Bayany ethno-gallery, learn how the bold geometric patterns of Kyrgyz felt carpets carry symbolic meaning, then watch a demonstration of the *elechek*, the traditional women's headdress that encodes social and spiritual identity. A traditional *Manas* folklore performance follows before a chance to connect with Kyrgyz professionals over lunch. Late afternoon, transfer to the airport for your flight to Tashkent. JW Marriott Tashkent or similar, B L

Day 6, Wed, May 5 — Tashkent Spend the day working through a city where wide Soviet boulevards and oversized public buildings give way to reconstructed old-city lanes with mud-walled houses and winding alleys. Visit the new Center of Islamic Civilization, where exhibitions highlight Uzbekistan's role in medieval scholarship, art, and science. Stop at the Ashkenazi Synagogue to hear about a community that largely relocated after the Soviet collapse. At a sixth-generation family ceramics studio, watch techniques rooted in centuries of Uzbek tradition and learn how that knowledge has been kept alive within one family. JW Marriott Tashkent or similar, B L

Day 7, Thu, May 6 — Tashkent • Samarkand Board the high-speed train to Samarkand, a UNESCO-listed Silk Road city that left Alexander the Great speechless. Stand in Registan Square, framed by three great madrasahs, then wander one of the city's oldest neighborhoods for a look into inner courtyards and daily street life. Visit the massive Bibi Khanum Mosque, built by Tamerlane to be the largest in the Islamic world, and browse the neighboring Siab Bazaar. End the day on a rooftop with drinks as the sun sets over the city and lights come up on the ancient Gur-Emir dome. Movenpick Hotel or similar, B L

Day 8, Fri, May 7 — Samarkand A morning lecture by the faculty leader precedes a private tour of the Afrosiab History Museum with an archaeologist, offering context on the ancient city that once stood here. Visit the Shah-i-Zinda Complex, a row of mausoleums that connects present-day Samarkand to the dusty slopes of old Afrosiab. Watch a demonstration of traditional Uzbek bread making in a clay *tandir* oven. After dinner, the El Merosi Theater of Historical Costume presents dancers and actors in meticulously recreated dress, from ancient civilizations and Silk Road traders to the courts of emirs. Movenpick Hotel or similar, B L D

Day 9, Sat, May 8 — Samarkand • Panjakent, Tajikistan • Samarkand Cross the border into Tajikistan for a day trip to Panjakent, a small city sitting above the ruins of a prosperous Sogdian trading center burned by Arab invaders in 722 AD. The Rudaki Museum brings that vanished world into focus through frescoes, artifacts, and traditional costumes, honoring the Samanid court poet considered the father of Persian poetry. Walk the medieval ruins, where excavated foundations reveal traces of merchant homes and Zoroastrian temples. Stroll the Central Bazaar, spilling over with seasonal fruit, nuts, and the city's distinctive yellow carrots. Also visit Sarazm, a 5,000-year-old settlement that earned Tajikistan its first UNESCO designation. Movenpick Hotel or similar, B L



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Day 10, Sun, May 9 — Samarkand • Bukhara Board a fast train to Bukhara, a UNESCO-listed oasis city whose ancient architecture has survived remarkably intact. Begin at Labi-Hauz Plaza, where centuries-old mulberry trees shade a long reflecting pool and 16th- and 17th-century madrassahs line the edges. Wander the covered bazaar, stacked with handwoven carpets, felt hats, and embroidered *suzani*. Explore the old Jewish Quarter, visiting the historic Kukhna Synagogue and Jewish Cemetery. Meet with a community member to view an ancient Torah scroll and learn about Bukharan Jewish history, followed by a performance of *haqqoni*, a traditional cappella devotional song sung in Tajiki-Persian. Wyndham Bukhara or similar, B L D

Day 11, Mon, May 10 — Bukhara A morning lecture by the faculty leader is followed by a visit to Poi Kalon, where the 12th-century Kalon Minaret rises over 150 feet above a dusty plaza, its fourteen bands of brickwork still sharp after nine centuries. Tour the ancient Ark Citadel with a resident archaeologist, who provides access to special expositions and illuminates its long history as fortress, residence, and seat of power. See the 10th-century Ismail Samani Mausoleum, pass the infamous Zindan Prison, then join a family to learn about *plov*, Uzbekistan's national dish of rice, meat, carrots, onions, and cumin, and its central place in the culture. The day closes with a concert of traditional *shashmaqom* music, on UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage list. Wyndham Bukhara or similar, B D

Day 12, Tue, May 11 — Bukhara Drive about 45 minutes outside Bukhara to a multi-generational family workshop specializing in *suzani*, the decorative hand-embroidered textiles made with naturally dyed silk threads. See the full process from cocoon to finished piece, and learn how the motifs, ranging from pomegranates to suns and moons, carry meaning, and how embroidery styles vary from town to town. Traditionally made by brides for their dowries, *suzanis* connect craft and identity in ways that still hold today. The afternoon and evening are yours to wander Bukhara at your own pace. Wyndham Bukhara or similar, B L

Day 13, Wed, May 12 — Bukhara • Khiva Today's journey crosses the Kyzyl Kum, or Red Sand Desert, a vast expanse stretching some 115,000 square miles between Central Asia's Amu Darya and Syr Darya rivers, to reach Khiva, the last of the great Silk Road oasis cities. Legend has it the city was founded where Shem, son of Noah, found water in the desert, his joyful cry giving Khiva its name. A Silk Road stop and fortress town for centuries, Khiva became capital of the Khorezm Khanate in the 16th century and today is part living city, part open-air museum. Arrive to walk the atmospheric old town on a brief introduction. Faravon Khiva Hotel or similar, B L D

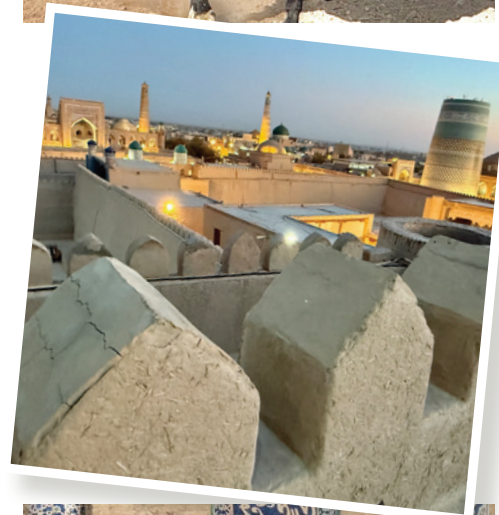
Day 14, Thu, May 13 — Khiva Khiva's UNESCO-listed Old Town feels much as it must have to Silk Road caravans: city walls, a main gate opening onto a dusty stone thoroughfare, and distinctive minarets overhead. Explore the Tash-Hauli Palace, with its detailed blue and white tilework in the open-air throne room, and the Juma Mosque, where 115 carved wooden columns create a forest-like effect around two square light wells. Visit a sixth-generation wood carving master in his intimate studio to watch traditional designs being cut and finished by hand. The Islam Khoja Minaret, at 187 feet Uzbekistan's tallest, offers views across the sun-baked rooftops below. Faravon Khiva Hotel or similar, B L D

Day 15, Fri, May 14 — Khiva • Ashgabat, Turkmenistan via Dashoguz Cross into Turkmenistan, changing vehicles at the border with some walking between checkpoints. Customs formalities can be time consuming and unpredictable, so come prepared to wait. Stop in Dashoguz, a regional center whose name translates to "stone spring," a reference to its underground water supply. Fly to Ashgabat and arrive after dark, taking a scenic route through a city the Guinness Book of World Records recognized in 2013 as having the highest density of white marble buildings in the world. Hundreds of marble structures, fountains, and broad boulevards lit bright white make for an arresting first impression of the capital. Oguzkent Hotel or similar, B L

Day 16, Sat, May 15 — Ashgabat Ashgabat has reinvented itself more than once. Destroyed by the Mongols in the 13th century and rebuilt as a Russian fortress in 1881, today's city is a product of recent construction on a grand scale: marble monuments, wide fountains, and gold-domed buildings at every turn. Visit the Arch of Neutrality, wander fountain-cooled Independence Park, and tour the National Museum of Turkmenistan, tracing the country's story from Stone Age tools to Turkmen carpets. Pass the Olympic Complex, the grand Oguzkent Presidential Palace, and the distinctive Wedding Palace, an eight-pointed star structure rising eleven stories. Oguzkent Hotel or similar, B L D

Day 17, Sun, May 16 — Ashgabat Drive 15 miles outside the city to Nisa, once a major center of the ancient Parthian Kingdom and now a UNESCO World Heritage Site, where archaeological work is still ongoing after the Mongols sacked it in the 13th century. At the Museum of Carpets and Textiles, an art historian explains the nuanced differences in carpet and textile patterns among Turkmen tribes and regions, including one of the largest hand-knotted carpets in the world. Visit a horse-breeding farm devoted to the Akhal-Teke, one of the oldest horse breeds in the world, then tour a Turkmen house decorated in classic style, with displays of jewelry, embroidered garments, and working artisans. The evening brings the group together for a farewell dinner to toast the journey. Oguzkent Hotel or similar, B L D

Day 18, Mon, May 17 — Depart Ashgabat After breakfast, check out and transfer to the airport in time for your flight home, carrying memories of an extraordinary journey through five Central Asian nations. B



Your One-of-a-Kind Journey

- Enrichment lectures by your expert faculty leader in Almaty, Bishkek, Samarkand, Bukhara, and Khiva.
- Encounter Central Asia's Jewish communities across three cities through synagogue visits, historic quarters, and traditions that have endured for generations.
- Special cultural features throughout, including demonstrations, performances, artisan visits, and expert-led museum tours.



What to Expect

Activity Level Rigorous

This tour involves full days of walking and standing, long overland travel days (some on poor roads), and one significant border crossing on foot where you must roll your own luggage. Travelers must be able to walk at least two miles daily and keep pace with the group. Tourism infrastructure in these destinations is improving but remains limited: expect unpaved sidewalks, uneven surfaces, packed-dirt streets, broken pavement, and a general lack of handrails or ramps. Some sites are accessible only by steep, uneven staircases, sometimes spiral or in narrow, dimly lit passages, and elevators are generally unavailable at touring locations. Many key sites in Uzbekistan are outdoors, often without shade, in open plazas or historic complexes exposed to the elements. Past travelers have encountered inconsistencies in plumbing, bureaucratic service, local cuisine variety, and the availability and quality of public restrooms; not all coaches have onboard toilets. Some delays or itinerary changes are to be expected.



ARE VISAS REQUIRED?

U.S. passport holders **do not** require visas for this tour to Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, or Kazakhstan. Turkmenistan is a different story: travelers must obtain a single-entry Turkmen visa at the Uzbek/Turkmen border, using a letter of invitation authorized by the Turkmen Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Ashgabat. MIR handles this application on your behalf approximately 90-120 days before your tour's land start date and will reach out in advance to collect any additional details needed to complete it. The visa fee is paid on the spot at the border; current fee details will be in your pre-departure materials. All travelers must also hold a valid passport with at least six months of validity remaining beyond the tour's end date.



INCLUSIONS

Accommodations *(with baggage handling)* Top hotels for the region, among them the InterContinental Almaty, Hyatt Regency Bishkek, the new JW Marriott Tashkent, and best-available properties in Samarkand, Bukhara, Khiva, and Ashgabat.

Transfers *(with baggage handling)* All transfers per itinerary.

Internal Air and Rail Travel Flights from Almaty to Bishkek, Bishkek to Tashkent, Dashoguz to Ashgabat. High-speed trains from Tashkent to Samarkand, Samarkand to Bukhara, Bukhara to Khiva.

Touring Comprehensive sightseeing program with entrance fees per itinerary.

EXCLUSIONS

International airfare or taxes/fuel surcharges • Meals not specified as included in the itinerary • Single supplement charge, if requested or required • Items of a personal nature (phone calls, email, laundry, alcohol, excess baggage, etc.) • Passport fees, airport departure fees • Expenses incurred as a result

Extensive Meal Program 17 breakfasts, 15 lunches, and 9 dinners, including Welcome and Farewell Dinners. Two glasses of local wine or beer per person with all dinners, or choice of soft drink, juice, tea, or coffee. Bottled or purified water with meals and in vehicles on touring days.

Tour Management Local English-speaking national guides throughout, changing in each country, accompanied by a MIR Tour Manager for the full land program who may also serve as your guide in one or more countries.

Personal Listening Devices Whisper headsets for use in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan.

Included Gratuities to your MIR Tour Manager, national guides, and drivers.

of delay, modification or extension of a tour due to causes beyond tour operator's • Turkmen visa and travel entry pass to Turkmenistan payable on arrival, currently \$109, subject to change • Travel and trip cancellation insurance (strongly recommended)



Land Tour Package Price: \$11,595 per person double occupancy
Single room supplement: \$2,195

Minimum group size 12 passengers

How to Book

For Information and Reservations:
MIR Corporation, 1-800-424-7289

\$1,000 non-refundable deposit required to reserve your space. [Please review the terms & conditions](#) for full details on inclusions, deposits, payment details and deadlines.

Disclaimer

Brandeis University is not responsible for any tour operator policies or for any refunds. MIR Corporation is the operator of this program and solely responsible for carrying out the responsibilities associated with it. Additionally, Brandeis University, as a sponsor, has no financial or legal responsibility for the program. For applicable [Terms & Conditions](#) associated with your participation in this program, please see next pages.

Travel Insurance

Brandeis Travelers partners exclusively with Meyer and Associates [brandeis.meyerandassoc.com] to offer trip insurance for our tours. Please inquire about trip insurance options once you've made your reservation to meet any time-sensitive requirements. For more information, please call Meyer and Associates at 800-635-7801 or email info@meyerandassoc.com

International Airfare

Let us handle your flights. MIR's air desk can customize your international travel. Arrive and depart on the tour's start and end dates and your airport transfers are included. Most bookings offer flexibility to change or cancel before departure (fees may apply), and our team is on hand to help if schedules shift or delays arise.

For Information and Reservations: MIR Corporation, 1-800-424-7289

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