



The dream of the azure domes

- Uzbekistan's Silk Road cities

8-days with expert Danish & English-speaking guide

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Uzbekistan offers the modern-day traveler a journey back to a time when Tashkent, Bukhara and Samarkand, were once major trade centers on the lucrative Great Silk Road route. Tempting bazaars, sparkling azure domes, images of golden desert landscapes, and monuments heralding the religious glory are brought back to life. Uzbekistan still holds onto the vestiges of this glorious past. Its main ancient cities have been visited for centuries by heavily loaded camels and traders. We follow their track to the legendary cities of Samarkand, Bukhara and Tashkent intertwined with their own unique modern-day atmosphere. Beautiful azure domes, thousand-year-old mosques, harem rooms and a colorful tangle of the most beautiful mosaics await everywhere. We dive into the myths and history here, where the realms of Alexander the Great, Genghis Khan and Timur Lenk arose, sparkled and burst. On the trip through Uzbekistan, we travel comfortably through pristine landscapes in the desert and mountains along the Silk Road route, which used to be the main thoroughfare of world civilization, where not only goods but also science, ideas and religion were exchanged. The adventure is still alive!

Day 1. Departure

Day 2. Arrival Tashkent. City tour

Early morning: Arrival at Islam Karimov Tashkent International Airport, at 12 km of the city center of the Uzbek capital Tashkent. You meet your guide at the airport gates and you check-in early at the hotel. Time for rest after the long night, before breakfast at the hotel. Tashkent,

historically known as Chach, is the capital and largest city of Uzbekistan. Tashkent has grown to become the most populous city in Central Asia, with a population in 2018 of 2,485,900. Similar to other cities within Uzbekistan, Tashkent formed as one of the major trading posts and later a city, on the lucrative Silk Road caravan

route in this part of Central Asia. Tashkent was a favored stop for merchants given its geographical location along the Silk Road and, for its reasonably temperate climate. Its history can be traced back over thousands of years and what we see today, is a modern-day version of this once glorious city. It is in northeastern Uzbekistan, near the border with Kazakhstan. According to Abu Rayhan Biruni the name comes from the Turkic name Tash (stone) and Kent (city), "Stone City". Before Islamic influence started in the mid 8th century CE, Tashkent was influenced by the Sogdian and Turkic cultures. After Genghis Khan destroyed it in 1219, it was rebuilt and profited from the Silk Road. From the 18th to the 19th century, the city became an independent city-state, before being re-conquered by the Khanate of Kokand. In 1865, Tashkent fell to the Russian Empire, and became the capital of Russian Turkestan. In Soviet times, it witnessed major growth and demographic changes due to forced deportations from throughout the Soviet Union. Much of Tashkent was destroyed in the 1966 earthquake, but it was rebuilt as a model Soviet city. It was the fourth-largest city in the Soviet Union at the time, after Moscow, Leningrad and Kyiv. Today, as the capital of an independent Uzbekistan, Tashkent retains a multiethnic population, with ethnic Uzbeks as the majority. In 2009, it celebrated its 2,200 years of written history.

After breakfast you have an excursion along the old part of Tashkent: The Khazrati Imam complex consists of the Barakhan and Muiy Muborak madrassah, Tilla Shaykh mosque and the Kaffal Shashi Mausoleum.

The Barakhan madrassah was built in the 16th century under supervision of Nauruz Ahmadha. Over 20 craftsmen sell their hand made products inside the courtyard: ikat fabrics, jewelry, woodcarving, pottery. Tilla Shaykh mosque. Tilla Sheikh means Golden Sheikh. This is the former main mosque in Uzbekistan. It was constructed by the Kokand khan Mirza Akhmed Kushbegi in 1856-57 years. In the mosque yard there are winter and summer halls for



prayers, short minarets, warehouse rooms and a library. The mosque is decorated with carved mihrab niche, minbar, window apertures.

The Muiy Muborak madrassah was built in the 16th century. It contains the hair of the Prophet Muhammad (Muiy Muborak means 'Sacred Hair') and currently the small building behind the Hazrat Imam Mosque is a library of Muslim Board of Uzbekistan, where the Koran of Khalif Uthman, dated 7th century and rare manuscripts are kept. People claim it is the oldest Koran in the world. The red dots on one page are said to be the blood of the third caliph Uthman, who was apparently murdered while reading it.

The Kaffal Shashi Mausoleum was erected in honor of the Abu Bakr ibn Ali ibn Ismail al-Kaffal Al-Shashi. This native of Tashkent was one of the first imams of the Muslim world, a preacher and a propagator of Shafiism in Tashkent, a well-known Muslim scholar, connoisseur of the Qur'an, the Hadith, Islamic law and lexicology. The initial design of the tomb was not saved. Its current form has been drawn by Ghulam Husayn in 1542. From the architectural point of view, the mausoleum was erected in the form of khanaka (complex including cells, mosque, shrine, etc.). The construction being finished around 1865, it was considered one of the largest mosques in Tashkent, where the main holiday prayers (Eid Ramazan and Eid al-Adha) were conducted. The mosque itself is a unique symbol of Tashkent architectural style: at the entrance to the mosque there is a terrace with twenty-carved columns of sandalwood. The mosque also has two large blue domes, the interior of which is decorated with gold leaf as in the Tillakari madrassah in Samarkand. Window openings of domes are designed so that the sun's rays continuously penetrate inside the mosque from sunrise to sunset. At the entrance to the mosque stand two 53 m high minarets.

Djuma Mosque of Khodja Akhrar Vali is the only Tashkent sample of a Friday (duma) mosque of the domestic type that used to be widespread in Central Asia in





Poi Kalan complex in Bukhara

the late Middle Ages. The main building has the form of the cube blocked by a dome with four windows in the low cylinder. On east wall turned into the yard, the large arch is cut through.

In the 8th century the foundation for the mosque was laid in the previously Zoroastrian Tashkent that lay in ruins after the Arab conquest. The first Friday Mosque (Juma masjidi) was built in 1451 at the expense of Sheikh Ubaydulla Hodzhi Akhrar. He was a great master of Sufism, the head of Muslim clergy and a descendant of prophet Mahomed. In 2003 the mosque was newly built up (after earthquake at the end of the 19th century, and decay following the atheistic regime).

After this you have time for shopping at the Chorsu Bazaar. This is the traditional bazaar located in the center of the old town. Under its blue-colored domed building all daily necessities are sold. The bazaar extends outside too and it's through these alleys that you'll find all the other goods. You will find fresh fruits, dried

fruits and tables piled high with nuts. There is an entire bakery section dedicated to all kinds of (famed and sacred) Uzbek bread. And inside the main dome of the bazaar is the meat section. Chorsu means "crossroads" or "four streams" in Persian. Everywhere you go, you still find vibrant bazaars that give you a small sense of what the Silk Road may have been like.

In the afternoon you continue the tour along the new part of the city. First stop, is the State Museum of Fine and Applied Arts of Uzbekistan. The museum contains over 4,000 exhibits on decorative art in Uzbekistan, including wood carving, ceramics, embossing, jewelry, gold weaving, embroidery, and samples of mass production in local industry. We continue to Monument of Courage, dedicated to the 1966 earthquake in Tashkent. Finally, the Minor Mosque, built in the traditional eastern and Uzbek style (opened in 2014), and Tashkent Television Tower (from outside). The

construction of the Toshkent Teleminorasi was decided in 1971 in order to spread the TV and radio signals all over Uzbekistan. With its 375-metre-height it is the 12.th tallest tower in the world. Overnight at the hotel at Tashkent.

Day 3. and 4. Tashkent – Bukhara by train. City tour

Breakfast-box to be taken from the hotel, and transfer to Tashkent Railway Station. Morning train to Bukhara. In the old days, the journey from Tashkent to Bukhara took weeks. Today it takes 4 hours by train. During the drive you enjoy the views of the desert. On arrival to Bukhara Railway Station, meet your driver and transfer to the city center to start the excursion within Bukhara. We spend the whole day in Bukhara and make an extensive city tour, where we literally review the history of the city on our way around to the biggest and most famous sights.

According to a number of scholars the name dates back to the Sanskrit "Vihara" (Buddhist monastery). This word is very close to the word in the language of the Uyghur and Chinese Buddhists, who named their places of worship the same way. However, no artifacts related to Buddhism and Manichaeism have yet been found in the city and oasis. According to the Encyclopedia Iranica, the name Bukhara is possibly derived from the Sogdian *βuxārak* ("Place of Good Fortune"). The history of Bukhara stretches back millennia. In medieval times, Bukhara served as the capital of the Samanid Empire, Khanate of Bukhara and was the birthplace of Imam Bukhari. At the beginning of the 11th century, Bukhara became part of the Turkic state of the Karakhanids. Their rulers were big builders: the Kalyan minaret, the Magoki Attori mosque, palaces and parks. Located on the Silk Road, the city has long been a center of trade, scholarship, culture, and religion. During the golden age of the Samanids, Bukhara became a major intellectual center of the Islamic world. The historic center of Bukhara, which contains numerous mosques and madrassas, has been listed by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site. The Samanid



Samanids Mausoleum, Bukhara



Empire seized Bukhara, the capital of Greater Khorasan, in 903 CE. Genghis Khan besieged Bukhara for 15 days in 1220. As an important trading center, Bukhara was home to a community of

medieval Indian merchants from the city of Multan (modern-day Pakistan) who were noted to own land in the city. Bukhara was the last capital of the Emirate of Bukhara and was besieged by the Red Army during the Russian Civil War. During the Bukhara operation of 1920, Red Army troops under the command of Bolshevik general Mikhail Frunze attacked the city. On 31 August 1920, the Emir Alim Khan fled to Dushanbe. The citadel (the Ark) was destroyed, and the red flag was raised from the top of Kalyan Minaret. The Bukharan People's Soviet Republic existed from 1920 to 1925 when the city was integrated into the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic.

Samanids Mausoleum. Built in the 10th century as the resting place of the powerful and influential Islamic dynasty that ruled the Samanid Empire from approximately 900 to 1000. It contained three burials, one of whom is known to have been Nasr II (ruled 914-943 CE). The religious law of orthodox Sunni Islam strictly prohibits the construction of mausoleums over burial places. This stresses the significance of the Samanid mausoleum, which is the oldest surviving monument of Islamic architecture in Central Asia and the sole monument that survived from the era of the Samanid dynasty. The Samanid Mausoleum might be one of the earliest departures from that religious restriction in the history of Islamic architecture.

Perfectly symmetrical, compact in its size, yet monumental in its structure, the mausoleum not only combined multi-cultural building and decorative traditions, such as Sogdian, Sassanian, Persian, Buddhist (dome) and even classical and Byzantine architecture, but incorporated features customary for Islamic architecture – a circular dome and mini domes, pointed arches, elaborate portals, columns and intricate geometric designs in the brickwork. At each corner, the mausoleum's builders employed squinches, an architectural solution to the problem of supporting the circular-plan dome on a square. The building was buried in silt some centuries after its construction and was revealed during the

20th century by archaeological excavation conducted under the USSR.

Bolo-Khauz Mosque.

This rectangular shaped mosque was built in 1712 (inscribed in 1993 on the UNESCO



World Heritage Site list). The prayer room during the wintertime is a room with four columns and several entrances. The 12-meter-high iwan, bordered by bulged roofs sustained with twenty painted wood columns, serves as a summer prayer room attached to the three sides of the winter hall. The columns are decorated with colored muqarnas. The interior of the

mosque is typical 18th-century Central Asian style.

Citadel Ark ('city in the city'). The Ark is a massive fortress located in the city of Bukhara, initially built and occupied around the 5th century CE. In addition to being a military structure, the Ark encompassed what was essentially a

town that, during much of the fortress history, was inhabited by the various royal courts that held sway over the region surrounding Bukhara. The Ark was used as a fortress until it fell to Russia in 1920.

Mausoleum of Chashma-Ayub. Its name means Job's well, due to the legend in which Job (Ayub) visited this place and made a well by striking the ground with his staff. The water of this well is still pure and is considered healing. The current building was constructed during the reign of Timur and features a Khwarazm-style conical dome uncommon in Bukhara. In 2008 it was added to the UNESCO World Heritage Tentative List.

Poi Kalan Complex. Many of the city's main sights, including beautiful mosques with stunning blue domes, city gates and impressive squares, are gathered in the Poi Kalyan complex, where the city's tallest minaret also towers: the Arslan Khan Minaret, also known as the Death Minaret. It was here that the ruling emir until well over 100 years ago let rivals and



Typical Central Asian Bazaar in Bukhara



criminals throw from the top. Po-i-Kalan or Poi Kalan (which means "At the Foot of the Great One"), is an Islamic religious complex. It consists of three parts, the Kalan Mosque (Masjid-i Kalan), the Kalan Minaret (Minâra-i Kalân) to which the name refers to, and the Mir-i-Arab Madrasah. The positioning of the three structures creates a square courtyard in its center, with the Mir-i-Arab and the Kalan Mosque standing on opposite ends. In addition, the square is enclosed by a bazaar and a set of baths connected to the Minaret on the northern and southern ends respectively. The congregational mosque in the complex is one of the largest mosques in Central Asia behind the Bibi Khanum Mosque of Samarkand

and the Great Mosque of Herat (Afghanistan). The place where the complex Po-i-Kalan is located is the site of a few completely ruined buildings from the past. In pre-Islamic era there was a central cathedral for fire-worshippers. Since 713, at the site south of the Ark, several mosques were built then razed, restored after fires and wars, and moved from place to place. In 1127, the Karakhanid ruler Arslan-khan completed construction of the mosque with the minaret. The greatness of the structures so amazed Genghis Khan, he mistakenly believed the mosque to be a khan's palace. He destroyed the original Friday Mosque in 1220, leaving only the Kalan Minaret untouched. The Kalan Mosque and Mir-i Arab Madrasah of the current day were commissioned in 1515 and 1535 respectively by Shibani Kahn's nephew Ubaydullah Khan after he and his father Mahmud Sultan gained authority over Bukhara.

the Kalan Mosque. It was constructed entirely out of baked bricks. It is a cylindrical structure with a wide base narrowing upwards towards its upper lantern. Legend dictates that during construction, the master builder, Bako, finished building only the base of the structure before taking a three-year hiatus to allow the foundation to solidify. After this three years period he then completed the minaret, with the solid foundation laid out allowing the minaret to achieve such grand stature. The monumental size is further complemented by an intricate set of decorations consisting primarily of brickwork techniques. Parallel bands of unique brick sculpting cover the exterior of the minaret without a single repetition, and the lantern itself supports a sixteen arched rotunda. Additionally, a set of terra cotta stalactites surround the base of the lantern, serving as the visual transition from the narrow cylindrical shaft of the minaret to the expanded base of the lantern. These stalactites contain two



Kalon Minaret (Tower of Death). The Minâra-i Kalân or "Grand Minaret" was originally built alongside the foundation of

vegetal motifs mirroring the motifs developed in Sassanid art in Iran: one is a vegetal twig inscribed in an arch and the

other is a trefoil inscribed within a triangle. Finally, a turquoise band of tiled inscriptions lies directly underneath the three-layered stalactite decorations supporting the base of the lantern.

Miri-Arab Madrasah. The construction is credited to Sheikh Abdullah Yamani (of Yemen) in 1535. Prior to the construction of the madrasah, Ubaydullah-khan was waging war against Iran. He managed to seize control of Herat several times, resulting in the capture of a great many captives. Eventually, Ubaydullah-khan sold 3,000 of these Persian captives in order to provide the funding for the construction of the Mir-i-Arab Madrasah. The wooden tomb of Ubaydullah-khan is situated in the middle of the vault (gurbana) in the Mir-i-Arab Madrasah. The Mir-i-Arab has a rectangular courtyard with four inwards facing iwans, each one situated uniquely at the center-point of one of the rectangular edges. The interior of the structure also holds its own mosque and mausoleum in addition to the lecture halls that the four iwans function as. One particularly notable element of the madrasah structure is its ornate two-story facade covered by glazed mosaic tiles inspired again by late Timurid artwork. This facade directly faces the Kalan Mosque and is further flanked on either side by blue domes, adding to the aggrandizing effect of the Poi Kalan ensemble.

Kalon Mosque. The Masjid-i Kalan was completed in 1515 emulating the model of the mosque built in the time of Arslan Khan with the addition of a large blue dome atop the mihrab. The architectural style of the mosque also draws inspiration and clear analogs to the Bibi Khanum Mosque in Samarkand. The mosque itself is 130 x 81 meters and the impressive 30-meter height of the blue dome makes the structure particularly imposing. Four iwans lie on the axes of the courtyard with an even larger arched iwan denoting the east-facade of the main structure. As the structure extends inwards from the main building, the shape transitions from a square base into an octagon and eventually a cylindrical structure as one

extends further into the area of the mihrab standing opposite of the east-facade. The interior of the structure consists of a hypostyle layout which meets the internal courtyard through two hundred and eighty-eight domes lining the inner courtyard. The Kalan Mosque is an entirely inwards facing build with its lack of exterior windows juxtaposed against the open courtyard in the center of the structure. Several kinds of decorative designs line the massive exterior of the mosque. Upon reconstruction in 1515, the exterior walls were decorated with majolica and other ornamental tiles. The mihrab, iwans, and the walls of the mosque are all decorated primarily with traditional artwork correspondent to the late Timurid period including blue and white tile mosaics, vegetal motifs, and patterned glazed brick lining the building.





Samarkand - Registan Square by night. This beautiful square should be seen at daylight and at night to get the best

Ulughbek Madrasah. Ulughbek, Tamerlane's grandson, was an enlightened and intellectual ruler. He was very much concerned with development of science in his large kingdom. He ordered to build a madrasah (school) in conservative and strict Bukhara, the Islamic capital of Central Asia, in the hope the city would become a center of science and education as well. Ismail Isfagani and Najmeddin Bukhari, the best architects of the time built it in 1417. The structure shows harmonious proportions and forms of its elements; it has little decoration and yet looks impressive and even majestic. It is a rectangular building with a large portal and a courtyard. It features an entrance corridor splitting and leading in two directions: to the mosque and darskhona classroom. The school could seat up to 80 students. They studied Astronomy, Mathematics, Arabic and religious subjects. Many graduates from the madrasah became eminent scholars and poets. The gate of the madrasah has a carved inscription taken from the Koran: 'The pursuit of knowledge is the

responsibility of every Muslim man and woman'. Ulughbek was famous for his astronomical research throughout the world. That is why astral designs in the decoration of the madrasah predominate. Some decorative elements differ in the ways they were made, which is evidence of the fact that the madrasah has been restored several times.

Abdul-Aziz khan Madrasah. Built in 1652 (during the reign of the Timurid dynasty) across Ulugh-Beg Madrasah. The school marks the remarkable progress of medieval Central Asian architecture. It shows the amazingly high skills of Central Asian architects, builders and artists at that time. The high pishtaq portal is splendidly decorated. The iwan gateway has many facets and ornamental stalactites and is covered with verse lines of famous poets. The decorative patterns are bright and rich wavy plant designs. There are even images of a Chinese dragon and a mythical bird called Simorgh inside them (a sign of Bukhara's close relations with

Silk Road kingdoms). The walls and chambers of the madrasah show most of the decoration techniques of that time: relief majolica, marble carving, tile and brick mosaic, wall painting and even gilding. The darskhona classroom features beautiful murals in blue on a white background. They depict landscapes like those of Chinese or Indian paintings. The decoration of the madrasah got not completed because a political coup took place in the absence of the ruler.

Lyabi-Khauz Complex. The Lyabi Khauz Ensemble (1568–1622) is the name of the area surrounding one of the few remaining Khauz, or pond, in the city of Bukhara. Several such ponds existed in Bukhara prior to Soviet rule. The ponds acted as the city's principal source of water, but were also notorious for spreading disease, and thus were mostly filled in during the 1920s and 1930s by the Soviets. The Lyabi Khauz survived owing to its role as the centerpiece of an architectural



Magoki-Attor Mosque. It is speculated as built in the 9th to 10th-century on the remains of a Zoroastrian temple from the pre-Islamic era. Before the Arab conquest there was a bazaar here, a market for idols, potions, spices, attar (perfumes) and other goods. Besides this, there was formerly a Temple of the Moon (Mah) close to this place.

Before the construction of the first synagogue, Jews in Bukhara had shared a place in the mosque with Muslims. Some say that Bukharian Jews and Muslims worshipped alongside each other in the same place at the same time. In the 12th-century, when Kara-Khanids reigned in Bukhara, the mosque was substantially rebuilt and re-dressed. The floor of the mosque is about 4.50 meters below the earth's surface. This is the reason for the mosque being called 'maghāki' which is Persian for "in a ditch" or "in a pit".



ensemble dating back to the 16th to 17th centuries. The Lab-i-Hauz square with the large basin is the center of the city, and here are tea houses, where Uzbek men drink green tea, talk and play board games.

Day 5. Bukhara – Samarkand by vehicle. Ceramic workshop in Gijduvan, and arrival in Samarkand

After breakfast at the hotel, You depart for a 275 km drive to Samarkand crossing the



Nodir Devonbegi Madrasah. In 1622-1623 the vizir of Imamkuli-khan, Uzbek beg Nodir Devon, built this initially as a caravanserai as part of the architectural ensemble of the Lyabi-house. It was later converted into a madrasah. In 1993 it was included in the UNESCO World Heritage List.

Trading Domes. In the old dome-clad buildings, there are still plenty of active workshops and stalls producing high-quality local crafts, just as they have done for centuries. Delicate hand-woven fabrics that Central Asia is famous for: suzani, silk and ikat and handmade woodwork, pillows, rugs and ceramics in stunning colors. Still existing medieval shopping malls. The Great Silk Road live! Overnight at the hotel at Bukhara

countryside. Today we head north to Gijduvon located between Zeravshan and the Shimolii Canal in an area where the cotton fields are everywhere. This is the beaten path where both Alexander the Great and Timur Lenk set out on a journey to win the prize over them all: India with all its splendor and wealth. After 15 km you have already a first stop at Gijduvan. This town is one of the centers for ceramics in Central Asia. Here you may learn more about local pottery and its unique colors, spending some time at the workshop. The town has a distinct style of the pottery which is defined by applying a unique turquoise-bluish color to the pottery. Some notables including Prince Charles, the Prince of Wales and Hillary Clinton have been to G'ijduvon to see the work of local craftsmen. G'ijduvon is also famous for its



local cuisine and is considered to have the best fish frying and shashlik making techniques. Many other restaurants in the

country, including those in Tashkent, copy G'ijduvon's fish frying technique, but in G'ijduvon the fish is de-boned before frying what does not happen elsewhere. Many agree

that G'ijduvon was able to cultivate a more refined cuisine because it is one of the earliest populated areas in Central Asia. Continue to Samarkand in the afternoon (260 km). We continue from here to Samarkand - also referred to as the Garden of the Soul, the Jewel of Islam and the World Mirror. This Central Asia's most legendary city has a thousand-year history as a cultural center on the Silk Road. Check-in at the hotel. Time for freshen up





and rest. Overnight at the hotel at Samarkand.

Day 6. Samarkand city tour. Registan Square, Ulughbek Madrasah, Sher-Dor Madrasah, Tilya-Kori Madrasah, Gur-Amir Mausoleum, Bibi-Khanym Mosque, Siyob Bazaar, Shakhi-Zinda Necropolis and Ulugbek Observatory

After breakfast at the hotel, you have a city tour in Samarkand. Samarkand is among the oldest continuously inhabited cities in Central Asia. There is evidence of human activity in the area of the city from the late Paleolithic Era, though there is no direct evidence of when Samarkand was founded; several theories propose that it was founded between the 8th and 7th centuries BCE. Prospering from its location on the Silk Road between China and the Mediterranean Sea, at times Samarkand was one of the largest cities of Central Asia. By the time of the Achaemenid Empire of Persia, it was the capital of the Sogdian satrapy. The city was conquered by Alexander the Great in 329 BCE, when it was known as Markanda, which was rendered in Greek as Μαράκανδα. The city was ruled by a



Famous handmade dolls from Bukhara...

succession of Iranian and Turkic rulers until it was conquered by the Mongols under Genghis Khan in 1220. Today, Samarkand is the capital of Samarqand Region and still one of the largest cities of Uzbekistan. The city is noted as a center of Islamic scholarly study and the birthplace of the Timurid Renaissance. In the 14th century, Timur (Tamerlane) made it the capital of his empire and the site of his mausoleum, the Gur-e Amir. The Bibi-Khanym Mosque, rebuilt during the Soviet era, remains one of the city's

most notable landmarks. Samarkand's Registan square was the city's ancient center and is bounded by three monumental religious buildings. The city has carefully preserved the traditions of ancient crafts: embroidery, goldwork, silk eaving, copper engraving, ceramics, wood carving, and wood painting. In 2001, UNESCO added the city to its World Heritage List as Samarkand – Crossroads of Cultures.

In the morning you visit the famous **Registan Square**. The most famous sight is without a doubt Registan Square, located in central Samarkand and is one of the most beautiful squares in the world. On three sides, in perfect architectural harmony, the square is framed by buildings, minarets and madrassahs. Here, the Ulughbek Madrasa and the Tillya-Kori Madrasa, together with the Shir Dor Madrasa, stand as a unique architectural masterpiece under UNESCO protection. In 1220, the city was heavily ravaged by Genghis Khan's hordes, but from 1369, the city experienced another boom under Timur Lenk, making it his capital. The name Rēgistan means "sandy place" or "desert" in Persian. The Registan was a public square, where people gathered to hear royal proclamations, heralded by blasts on enormous copper pipes called dzharchis - and a place of public executions. The square was regarded as the hub of the Timurid Renaissance. It is framed by three madrassahs (schools):

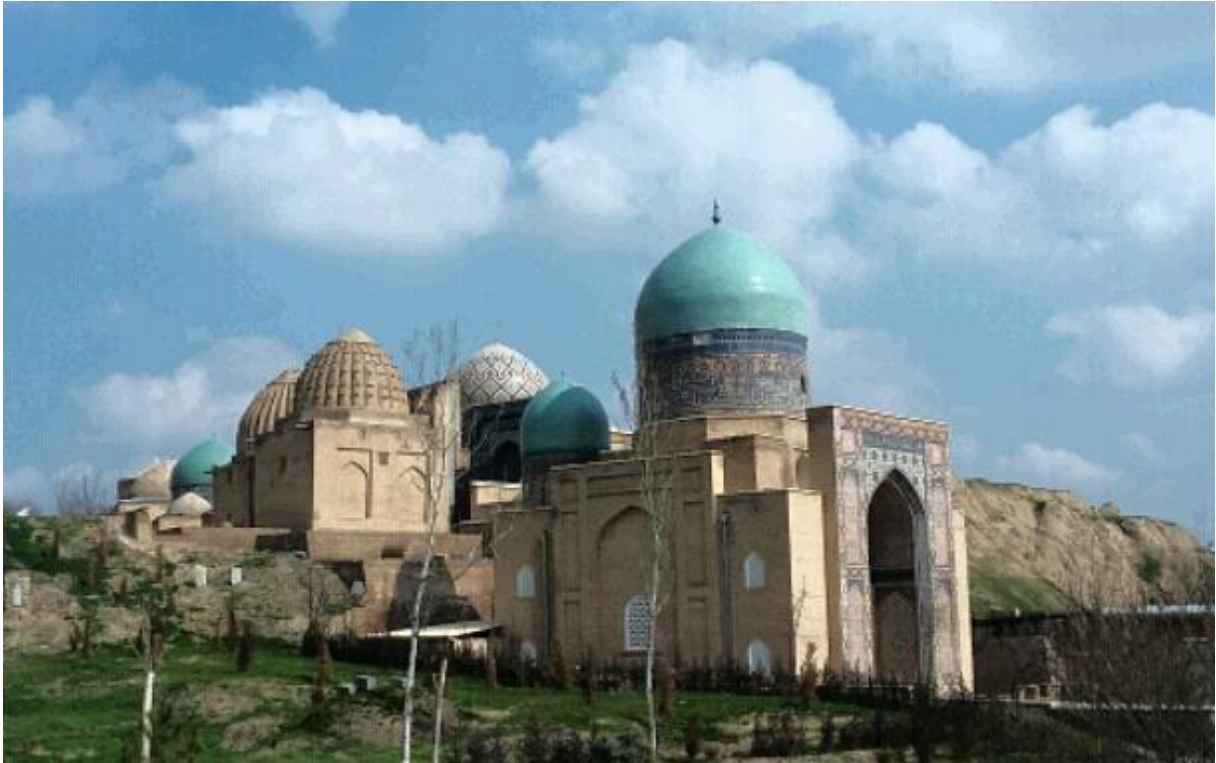
Ulughbek Madrasah. Built by Ulugh Beg during the Timurid Empire era (15th century). It has an imposing iwan with a lancet-arch pishtaq or portal facing the square. The corners are flanked by high minarets. The mosaic panel over the iwan's entrance arch is decorated by geometrical stylized ornaments. The square courtyard includes a mosque and lecture rooms and is fringed by the dormitory cells in which students lived. There are deep galleries along the axes. Originally the Ulugh Beg M adrasah was a two-storied building with four domed darskhonas (lecture rooms) at the corners. The Ulugh Beg Madrasah was one of the best clergy universities of the Muslim



Orient in the 15th century. Ulugh Beg himself gave lectures here. During Ulugh Beg's government the madrasah was a center of learning.

Sher-Dor Madrasah. In the 17th century the ruler of Samarkand, Yalangtush Bakhodur, ordered the construction of the Sher-Dor madrasah. The tiger mosaics with a rising sun on their back are especially interesting for their depiction of living beings and use of Persian motifs.

Tillya-Kori Madrasah. Yalangtush Bakhodur ordered the construction of the Tillya-Kori madrasah (as he did for the Sher-Dor Madrasah 10 years before). It was not only a residential college for students, but also played the role of grand masjid (Friday Mosque). It has a two-storied main facade and a vast courtyard fringed by dormitory cells, with four galleries along the axes. The mosque building is situated in the western section of the courtyard. The main hall of the mosque is abundantly gilded.



Shakhi-Zinda necropolis, Samarkand

Afterwards you go to **Guri Amir Mausoleum**. The Guri Amir is a mausoleum of the Turco-Mongol conqueror Timur (Tamerlane). It occupies an important place in the history of Central Asian architecture as the precursor and model for later Mughal tombs, including the Gardens of Babur in Kabul, Humayun's Tomb in Delhi and the Taj Mahal in Agra, built by Timur's descendants. Gur-e Amir is Persian for "Tomb of the King". This architectural complex with its azure dome contains the tombs of Tamerlane, his sons Shah Rukh and Miran Shah and grandsons Ulugh Beg and Muhammad Sultan. Also honored with a place in the tomb is Timur's teacher Sayyid Baraka. The earliest part of the complex was built at the end of the 14th century.

Curse of Timur

When Soviet scientists wanted to open Tamerlane's tomb, rumors went around Samarkand that opening the tomb would curse those who opened it. Local leaders attempted to warn the excavation team of the "risks". The tomb is inscribed with two warnings that read "When I Rise from the Dead, The World Shall Tremble".



Allegedly, once opened another inscription was discovered: "Whosoever Disturbs My Tomb Will Unleash an Invader More Terrible than I". Even though people close to Gerasimov claim that this story is a fabrication, the legend persists. The tomb was opened on 20 June 1941, two days before the start of Operation Barbarossa. Apparently, Stalin believed in the curse

and ordered Timur be reburied. According to legend, the remains of Timur were taken to the frontlines of Stalingrad to inspire the Muslim troops in the Red Army. Tamerlane was reburied with full Islamic burial rites on December 20, 1942, about one month before the Soviet victory at Stalingrad (though by this time the German Army at Stalingrad was already encircled).

Bibi-Khanyim Mosque. This is one of the most important monuments of Samarkand, allegedly named after Timur's beloved wife. In the 15th century it was one of the largest and most magnificent mosques in the Islamic world. By the mid-20th century only a grandiose ruin of it still survived, but major parts of the mosque were restored during the Soviet period. After his Indian campaign in 1399 Timur decided to undertake the construction of a gigantic mosque in his new capital. When he returned from his military campaign in 1404 the mosque was almost completed. However, Timur was not happy with the progress of construction, and immediately had various changes made, especially on the main cupola. The scale of Timur's plans pushed the building techniques of the time to their limit, and the building's integrity was not helped by the rushed nature of its construction. The dome cannot be seen from the courtyard, for whole building is covered up from inside by the grandiose pishtak, which framed a monumental, deeply embedded Iwan. The Iwan does not allow getting inside the underlying construction supporting the dome; this can only be done from the sides. In the middle of the courtyard is located the stone pedestal – the huge Quran stand – crafted from ornate marble blocks. This remarkable sight originates from the time of Timur. In the construction of three domes of the mosque, sophisticated in Timur's time, one important innovation was applied: a two-fold construction. There is a hollow space between the inner ceiling and the outer cupola. After the visit of the mosque, time for shopping at Siyob national bazaar. Here you may find plenty of fresh and dried fruits, sweets, buts, variety of



national bread (for instance Samarkand naan) and all kinds of souvenirs.

In the afternoon you continue the tour.

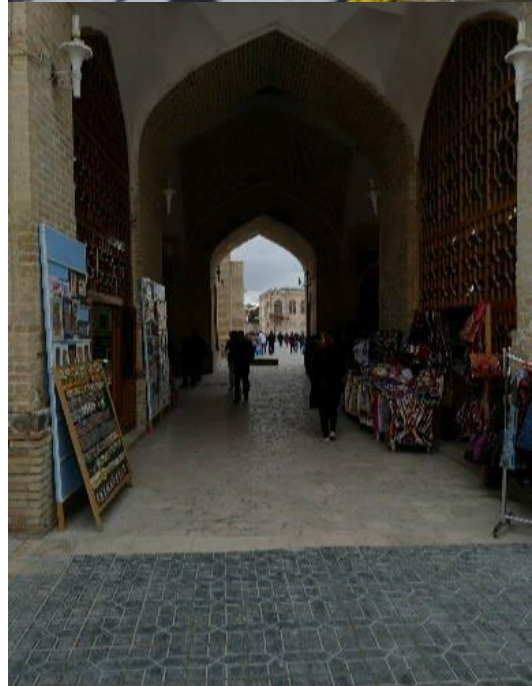
Shakhi-Zindah Necropolis. This Ensemble includes mausoleums and other ritual buildings of 11-15th and 19th

centuries. The name Shah-i-Zinda (meaning "The living king") is connected with the legend that Qutham ibn Abbas, a cousin of the Prophet Muhammad, is buried here. He came to Samarkand with the Arab invasion in the 7th century to preach Islam. Popular legends speak that he was beheaded for his faith, but he didn't die, took his head and went into the deep well (Garden of Paradise), where he's still living now. The Shah-i-Zinda necropolis was formed over eight centuries (from 11th till 19th) and now includes more than 20 buildings.

Ulughbek Observatory. The observatory's foundation was built around 830 and the construction of the observatory was completed in 1422–1428.

Ulugh Beg, grandson of Timur, became the ruler of Samarkand in the 15th century. He was a very skilled in mathematics and astronomy. He taught many important astronomers. He invited over 60 skillful mathematicians and astronomers to help build this observatory and also a madrassa in Samarkand. This observatory was built according to the plans of the Maragha observatory, established in 1259 by Nasir al-din al-Tusi in Azerbaijan. Ulugh Beg's observatory included the largest quadrant principle device. The building allowed a maximal size for the arc of the circle. This device was carefully oriented, and the arc was scaled very accurately. This device was very versatile. It could accurately measure the sun from the horizon, the altitude of a star and other planets. The duration of the year, period of planets, and eclipses were measured by this device. Ulugh Beg's measurements of planets closely relate to today's measurement, showing us the phenomenal accuracy of the device. Overnight at the hotel at Samarkand.

Day 7. Samarkand – Koni Ghil Meros workshops and Mausoleum of Khoja Daniyar - Tashkent. Transfer to Tashkent by coach



After breakfast you leave the city to visit the handicraft center of Koni Ghil Meros. Today it is the largest center consisting of tradition-based silk paper manufacturing, wood carving, pottery, bread baking, metal carving, jewelry art, golden embroidery, agro house, cattle breeding, oil production etc. You may walk around getting acquainted with all those crafts, enjoying the process and buying or tasting some finished products.

On your way back to the city you visit the Mausoleum of Khoja Daniyar. According to legend, Khodja Daniyar was a companion of Kusam ibn Abbas, who was believed to be a relative of the Prophet and one of the first Islamic preachers in Central Asia. Other legends associate Khodja Daniyar with the Koranic and Biblical prophet Daniyar/Daniel, a descendant of King Solomon, known for his lion's den. The mausoleum is still a pilgrimage place for the followers of all three Abrahamic religions. According to biblical history, in 605 BCE, Daniel was captured by the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar and led to Babylon. There he deserved high respect for his spirituality and divine insight. History refers to two places of burial of the Holy Daniel - Babylon itself and Susa town. However, legend says that Amir Timur (Tamerlane) brought Daniel's arm from Susa in Iran to Samarkand. The mausoleum was built above his grave in the 14th century (re-built in the early 20th century). Next to the mausoleum you find a source of water that should have healing properties. The mausoleum is unadorned, and this is even more noticeable given the contrast with the elaborate decoration of Samarkand's other sites. The 12m-long stone building, the latest of many on this site, dates from the 19th century and supports five simple domes. Inside is Daniel's tomb; it's considered a holy site,



so you must remove your shoes and be conservatively dressed to avoid giving offence. A peculiar feature of Khodja Daniyar's legend is that the saint (or at least his arm) continues to grow in the tomb. This unusual miracle has necessitated the lengthening of his white marble sarcophagus several times during its history. It is now some 18m in length and covered in green and gold prayer rugs. Green is the color of Islam; the gold denotes the importance of the saint. In the afternoon you have a 310 km drive to Tashkent by coach (which takes about 5 hours). On arrival, transfer to the hotel. Check-in and overnight at the hotel at Tashkent. Optional: Journey from Samarkand to Tashkent may be arranged by train (Subject to availability).

Day 8. Transfer to Tashkent International Airport.

