

A woman is shown in profile, focused on her work at a traditional textile loom. She wears a light pink headscarf tied in a knot, with a colorful, patterned fabric visible underneath. Her dark hair is pulled back. She is wearing a dark, possibly maroon, top. The loom is filled with vibrant threads in shades of purple, blue, and yellow. The background is slightly blurred, showing more of the loom's structure and some orange fabric on the right. The overall scene captures a moment of traditional craftsmanship.

KYRGYZSTAN & UZBEKISTAN

16-days with Tour Leader

SOVIETISTAN-TRAVEL.com



This Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan trip is a journey to Central Asia's welcoming and hospitable Silk Road cultures. The two countries are magnificent destinations anytime. Central Asia has always been a patchwork of ethnicities and traditions and travelers have throughout history feasted their senses on the countries intoxicating mix of culture, architecture, and dramatic landscapes of the fabled Tien Shan Mountains, endless steppes, and amazing deserts. We have composed a colorful palette of unique places and attractions representing Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan with respect for its people, culture, and features. On this journey we didn't make compromises. Actually vice versa. In addition to the must-see things, we have included places and attractions not covered by most traditional journeys.

We begin in Bishkek, capital of Kyrgyzstan. Upon arrival we make city excursion, and in the following days we are crossing a country where nomadic life is still present, and herds of cattle, horses, and sheep's roam freely, guarded by shepherds among apricots and mulberry trees with the beautiful backdrop of snowcapped Tien Shan mountains. We follow the Chuy Valley east and continue to Issyk Kul Lake, the second-largest mountain lake in the world, until we reach Karakol, the administrative capital of Issyk-Kul Region. Excursions to the beautiful Tian Shan mountains, hot springs, Przhevalsky Museum, the Dungan Mosque and Orthodox Cathedral of the Holy Trinity, Jeti-Oguz ("Seven Bulls" and "Broken Heart" red rock formations and continue along the southern shore of Issyk Kul with breathtaking views at the crystal-clear water. We also learn about the Kyrgyz culture: nomadic traditionally felt and Shyrdak products, food (fermented horse milk), etc. We depart Kyrgyzstan from Osh. It is the second largest city in Kyrgyzstan after Bishkek. and we make an easy stroll up aside Sulayman Mountain. This is the only World Heritage Site in Kyrgyzstan. It offers a splendid view of Osh and its environs. We drive the

short way to Dustlik, the Uzbek-Kyrgyz border and enter Uzbekistan and drive 110 km to Fergana.

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. We follow their track to the legendary cities of Samarkand, Bukhara, and Tashkent. 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, history, and culture: Tashkent city tour, famous Silk Road city Bukhara (UNESCO) with its splendid Citadel Ark, Poi Kalan Complex, Kalyan Minaret (Tower of Death), Gijduvan (ceramic), Samarkand (UNESCO) with abundance of unique monuments of ancient architecture, heritage of scientific and arts schools. Registan Square (considered to be one of the world's most beautiful squares), Guri Amir Mausoleum, Shah-i-Zinda necropolis. In Fergana - Ferghana Valleys fruit basket - we visit the finest ceramic centers in Rishton - oldest city of ceramic art, and silk-bazars in Margilan, and everywhere we meet the art and craft culture of Uzbekistan; engraving on copper, wood, and plaster-based material; jeweler's arts; carpet making; ceramics; ornamental embroidery, gold embroidery; decorative currying of tanned leather; silk spinning; making of decorative braids; inlaid works on musical instruments; painting on papier-mache; creation of decorative boxes for local tobacco; baskets, cradles, chests, and many other types.



A shyrdak is a stitched, and often colorful felt floor-covering, usually handmade in Central Asia. Kazakhs and Kyrgyz alike traditionally make shyrdaks, but especially in Kyrgyzstan, the tradition is still alive. In this part of the world felt is not only used for carpets, but also for the typical hats (kalpak)

The tour is packaged with International and domestic flights, accommodation and all land arrangements including transport, meals, and excursions. The tours are led by our very carefully selected staff of experienced tour leader and local guides. We travel maximum 20 participants! This is an active journey. Of course, the activity level will be adjusted so it fit all clients, and everyone can enjoy this journey. We can provide excellent service for the participants. There is certain flexibility, so individual wishes and pace can be respected. We know the areas and the conditions. We are well prepared and make priority to present comfortable accommodation, vehicles with experienced drivers and delicious, tasty, and healthy food mirroring the regions diverse cultures. Prior departure, we mail information and a detailed packing list about what to bring. Sovietistan Travel are of course always prepared to assist and explain, so please feel free to ask us about every matter.

Central Asia breathes thousands of years of history and adventure. Nowhere are the contours of the Silk Road's history and architecture clearer than in the region's old places and landscapes. It was here that Alexander the Great, Genghis Khan and Timur Lenk's kingdoms arose, radiated for a time, and fell apart. The countries' names have an exotic and mysterious sound, and they evoke for most travelers interested in thoughts about silk road caravans, exotic-scented bazaars, and magically beautiful azure domes.

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 most important thing about Central Asia is the unexpected - The adventure is still alive

Welcome to this wonderful adventure





SHORT DAY-TO-DAY PROGRAM

Day 1: Departure. Flight to Manas International Airport, in Kyrgyzstan's capital Bishkek - Welcome to Kyrgyzstan!

Day 2: Arrival Bishkek. Transfer to hotel (25 km) and in afternoon lunch, and relaxed city excursion in the old central part of Bishkek. Panfilov Park, Ala-Too Square and shopping malls with excellent handcraft. O/N Bishkek

Day 3: Bishkek – Karakol (380 km); Burana 'tower' (60 km), remains of the ancient city of Balasagun from the end of the 9th century, a large minaret with grave markers, some earthworks, and the remnants of a castle and three mausoleums, Issyk Kul Lake, and arrival in Karakol (former Przhevalsk), administrative center of eastern Issyk-Kul region. O/N Karakol

Day 4: Excursion to the beautiful Tian Shan mountains (60 km). Afternoon Przhevalsky Museum and Memorial Complex, the Dungan Mosque and Orthodox Cathedral of the Holy Trinity in Karakol. O/N Karakol

Day 5: Karakol – Tamga; Jeti Oghuz (20 km), Red sandstone formations: 'Seven Bulls' and "Broken Heart", arrival to Tamga village. O/N Tamga

Day 6: Tamga – Bokonbaeva; Hot springs, and workshop for handmade felt & Shyrdak production in Bokonbaeva – Bishkek. O/N Bishkek

Day 7: Tamga – Osh (domestic flight) – Fergana, Uzbekistan. In Osh short city excursion, easy stroll up aside Sulayman Mountain (UNESCO). Splendid views of Osh. The National Historical and Archaeological Museum Complex Asia. Dustlik, the Uzbek-Kyrgyz border checkpoint and transfer to Fergana (110 km). O/N Fergana.

Day 8: Fergana – Margilan (20 km); City of Silk – visit to the huge Margilan bazar and Yodgorlik factory, a famous Margilan Silk Factory. O/N Fergana

Day 9: Fergana - Rishtan (50 km). Rishtan – oldest city of ceramic art. Visit ceramic workshops with beautiful handmade ceramic to bargain – Tashkent. O/N Tashkent

Day 10: Tashkent; city tour. The Khazrati Imam complex consists of the Barakhan and Muiy Muborak madrassah, Tilla Shaykh Mosque and the Kaffal Shashi Mausoleum, Koran of Khalif Uthman, dated 7th century and rare manuscripts are kept. People claim it is the oldest Koran in the world, Chorsu Bazaar, State Museum of Fine and Applied Arts of Uzbekistan, Monument of Courage, and Tashkent Metro. O/N Tashkent.

Day 11: Tashkent – Samarkand. Transfer to Samarkand by coach (310 km). If time available, we begin excursions in Samarkand. After check-in at the hotel: time for a rest. Overnight at the hotel in Samarkand.

Day 12: Samarkand. City tour in Samarkand. Famous Registan Square (considered to be one of the world's most beautiful squares). Ulughbek Madrasah, Sher-Dor Madrasah and Tillya-Kori Madrasah. Guri Amir Mausoleum. Bibi-Khanym Mosque, Siyob national bazaar, Shah-i-Zinda necropolis and Ulughbek Observatory

Day 13: Samarkand - Gijduvan (ceramic) – Bukhara (260 km). Visit ceramic workshop, then continue to Bukhara. Included in the UNESCO World Heritage List due to the abundance of unique monuments of ancient architecture, heritage of scientific and arts schools

Day 14: Bukhara. City excursion. Samanids Mausoleum, Bolo-Khauz Mosque (UNESCO), the Citadel Ark, Mausoleum of Chashma-Ayub, Poi Kalan Complex with Kalyan Mosque, Kalyan Minaret (Tower of Death) and Mir-i-Arab Madrasah, Ulughbek Madrasah, Abdul-Aziz khan Madrasah, Magoki-Attor Mosque, trading domes, Lyabi Khauz Ensemble, Nodir Devonbegi Madrasah. Evening folklore performance (subject to availability)

Day 15: Bukhara – Tashkent. After previous days city excursion, we might include few more, additional attractions before we drive back to Tashkent. O/N Tashkent

Day 16: Flight home. Early morning transfer to Tashkent International Airport (25 km). Welcome home!



DAY-TO-DAY PROGRAM

Day 1. Departure. Flight to Bishkek, Manas International Airport, in Kyrgyzstan's capital

Day 2. Arrival Bishkek; city excursion. Arrival to Bishkek, Manas Int. Airport. After border and customs process, transfer to hotel in Bishkek center

Bishkek was originally a caravan rest stop (possibly founded by the Sogdians) on one of the branches of the Silk Road through the Tian Shan range. The location was fortified in 1825 by the Khan of Kokand with a mud fort. In the last years of Kokand rule, the Pishpek fortress was led by Atabek, the Datka. The place was named after the paddle used to churn the fermenting mare milk, showing the importance of the drink Kumis in the national culture. In 1860, Imperial Russia annexed the area razed the fort. The town was rebuilt over the destroyed fort. Tsarist Russia redeveloped the site from 1877 onward, encouraging the settlement of Russian peasants by giving them fertile land to develop. In 1926, the city became the capital of the newly established Kirghiz ASSR and was renamed "Frunze" after Mikhail Frunze, Lenin's close associate who was born in Bishkek. In 1991, it was renamed to present days name, Bishkek.

City excursion. We drive to center of Bishkek and walk through the beautiful and relaxed Panfilov Park, to Ala-Too Square. This is the central square in Bishkek, built in 1984 to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the Kirghiz Soviet Socialist Republic, at which time a massive statue of Lenin was placed in the square's center. The statue was moved in 2003 to a smaller square on the other side of the square; now pointing his hand towards north, towards Russia. It was replaced by a statue of Manas, to celebrate the 20th anniversary of Kyrgyzstan's independence. There is time at own leisure before we return to the hotel and rest prior the dinner. Overnight at hotel in Bishkek.

Day 3. Bishkek – Burana tower – Issyk Kul - Karakol - today, travel overland to Karakol, near the eastern tip of Lake Issyk-Kul, about 380 kilometers from Bishkek

After breakfast we drive to Karakol, crossing a country where nomadic life is still very present, but that's an impression you mainly get in summertime. Once a nation of nomads, today's Kyrgyzstan is dotted with yurts only in summer. For most of the year, Kyrgyz shepherds live settled lives in the valleys. Only from June to September, when the lowlands are arid, they move to summer mountain pastures. Remembering the heydays of nomadism, something that used to be nearly a synonym of the Eurasian Steppe, reaching from Hungary to Mandjuria, that provided enough space for people constantly on the move with their vast herds of

cattle, sheep, goats and, of course, horses. However, the nomadic life is still present, and along the road we frequently pass horseback riding shepherds along with their herds of cattle, horses and sheep, and the fields are not fenced, allowing big flocks of cattle and horses to roam freely. Apricots and mulberry trees are common along the road, and men with pointy white kalpaks, the national hat of Kyrgyzstan (they represent the virgin snowy peaks of the Tien Shan mountains, of course) are a common sight.

We follow the Chuy Valley east. At your right (south) side you see the impressive snowcapped Tian Shan range. The other side of the road follows the Ili River that lines the Kyrgyz-Kazakh border). Approx. 60 kilometers from Bishkek we cross the town of Tokmok (glass industry) where you see a Mig-23 converted in memorial monument. This dusty town was indeed once a Soviet military training facility where pilots of "brother" countries (such as Ethiopia during the Mengistu reign) could master the art of flying combat aircraft.

Fifteen kilometers south of Tokmok, we stop at the Burana "tower", a large minaret in the Chuy Valley in northern Kyrgyzstan. The tower, along with grave markers, some earthworks, and the remnants of a castle and three mausoleums, is all that remains of the ancient city of Balasagun, which was established by the Karakhanids at the end of the 9th century. The tower was built in the 11th century and was used as a template for other minarets. An external staircase and steep, winding stairway inside the tower enable visitors to climb to the top. It is one of the oldest architectural constructions in Central Asia. The minaret was originally 45 m high. However, over the centuries several earthquakes caused significant damage to the structure. The last major earthquake in the 15th century destroyed the top half of the tower, reducing it to its current height of 25 m. The entire site, including the mausoleums, castle foundations and grave markers, now functions as museum and there is a small building on the site containing historical information as well as artifacts found at the site and in the surrounding region.

Afterwards you continue to Issyk Kul where you follow the northern shore east. Issyk Kul is an endorheic lake. An endorheic basin is a drainage basin that normally retains water and allows no outflow to other external bodies of water, such as rivers or oceans, but drainage converges instead into lakes or swamps, permanent or seasonal, that equilibrate through evaporation. The water is crystal-clear and slightly saline. At an altitude of 1,607 m the lake is 182 km long, up to 60 km wide and its area is 6,236 km². It reaches 668 m in depth. It is the second-largest mountain lake in the world behind Lake Titicaca in South America. Issyk-Kul means "warm lake" in Kyrgyz: although it is surrounded by snow-capped peaks, it never freezes. We arrive to Karakol late afternoon/early evening. Karakol is the fourth largest city in Kyrgyzstan, about 150 km from the Chinese border. It is the administrative capital of Issyk-Kul Region.



Its resident population was 66,294 in 2009. A Russian military outpost founded on 1 July 1869, Karakol grew in the 19th century after explorers came to map the peaks and valleys separating Kyrgyzstan from China. In the 1880s Karakol's population surged with an influx of Dungan's,



Chinese Muslims fleeing warfare in China. The town offers clear-day backdrops of snowy peaks of the Tian Shan Mountains, contrasted against the old blue shutters and white-washed walls of remnant antique colonial-period houses. These recall the town's Russian-era heyday: founded in 1869 as a support town for the then-new garrison of Teploklyuchenka (Ak-Suu), it housed many merchants, officers, and explorers, most famously Nikolai Przhevalsky (in whose honor Karakol was renamed Przhevalsk between 1939 and 1991). Many unique cultures contribute to the town's culinary history and cultural heritage: Kyrgyz, Tatar, Russian, Dungan, Uighur, Kalmyk, Uzbek, and more. Karakol is a fascinating gateway to the region's diverse history, Uygur-inspired cuisine; Ashlan-Fu, Laghman, Manti, Ganfan, Samsa, Beshbarmak, Kuurdak, Oromo ... Upon arrival in Karakol, we accommodate in a comfortable hotel for the next two nights. Dinner in town.

Day 4. Excursion to the beautiful Tian Shan mountains. Afternoon Przhevalsky Museum and Memorial Complex, the Dungan Mosque and Orthodox Cathedral of the Holy Trinity in Karakol

After breakfast you leave for an excursion to a mountain valley of Tian Shan. Today we will find beautiful mountain scenery with snowy peaks, pretty lakes, spectacular waterfalls, and red-rock canyons. Tian Shan mountain range is part of the Himalayan orogenic belt, which was formed by the collision of the Indian and Eurasian plates in the Cenozoic era. It is one of the longest mountain ranges in Central Asia and stretches some 2,900 km eastward from Tashkent in Uzbekistan. The highest peak in the Tian Shan is Jengish Chokusu (also called Victory Peak) on the border of China. At 7,439 m high, it is the highest point in Kyrgyzstan. The Tian Shan's second highest peak, Khan Tengri (Lord of the Spirits), straddles the Kazakh Kyrgyz



Chinese tripoint and at 7,010 m is the highest point of Kazakhstan. Mountaineers class these as the two most northerly peaks over 7,000 m in the world.

In 1888, the Russian explorer Nikolay Przhevalsky died in Karakol of typhoid, while preparing for an expedition to Tibet, the city was renamed Przhevalsk in his honor. After local protests, the town was given its original name back in 1921 – a decision reversed in 1939 by Stalin to celebrate the centenary of the explorer's birth. Karakol then remained Przhevalsk until the demise of the Soviet Union in 1991. In the afternoon, enjoy a visit to Przhevalsky Museum and Memorial Set a 15 km outside the city. The museum hosts the life story of Nikolay Mikhailovich Przhevalsky. The first Russian Scientist-Geographer, studying in detail the

geography, flora and fauna and discovered more than 200 plant species in Central Asia. Przhevalsky also collected an enormous zoological collection, which comprised several thousand of species of plant, animals, birds, fishes, and insects. Beginning from 1870, he arranged four large expeditions to Mongolia, China, and the Tibet. Today there are personal things, documents photos and articles of Przhevalsky kept there. Not far from the Museum, there is the traveler's tomb and monument. From the explorer's tomb in nearby Issyk Kul Lake, you can overlook a little harbor and buildings. This was used by the Soviet military as a testing site for torpedo propulsion and guidance systems and Karakol was thus home to a sizable population of military personnel and their families.



We visit the Orthodox Cathedral of the Holy Trinity in Karakol. This is one of something like forty orthodox churches in the country, and a fine example of architecture and its checkered history stands as a witness to the commitment and dedication of the community of the faithful. The story of the church goes back to July 1869, when Karakol was a garrison town established as an outpost on the edges of the Tsarist Russian Empire. It was established to serve the Cossacks and other troops sent here, and a small brick building on stone foundations was erected. It was destroyed in 1890 by an earthquake and the current cathedral was built out of wood on a brick base. It took six years to complete and was finally completed in 1895. During the period of construction, a yurt served the congregation as a church. When completed, it was the tallest building in the city, with the tip of the cross standing some 26 meters above the ground with three golden onion domes. Over the years, particularly following the Revolution in 1917, it has been used as an educational center housing a school, ladies' gymnasium, and an institution of Higher Education; a Sports Hall; a Theater; a Dance Hall and even as a Coal Store. Then, in 1991, the local authority once again gave the building back to the church ... with the proviso that all further restorations were their responsibility. In the 1880s, Karakol's population surged with an influx of Dungan's, Chinese Muslims fleeing warfare in China.



Last, we visit the pretty, wooden mosque built by Chinese artisans to serve Karakol's community of Dungan's. Designed by the famous Beijing architect Chou Seu and 20 carvers with the skills of traditional Chinese architecture and composition techniques for building the mosque. The construction of outbuildings and other work involved local craftsmen. Construction of the mosque began in 1904 and was completed in 1910. Ingenious techniques allowed the builders to build the mosque with no nails. The mosque holds 42 based pillars and encircling the building is multi-tiered wooden cornice, decorated with images of plants like grapes, pomegranates, pears, peaches, including a wheel of fire, reflecting the Dungan's' pre-Islamic, Buddhist past. Instead of a minaret, the mosque has a wooden pagoda. All colors represent different Dungan cultural concepts, red - protects from evil



spirits, yellow - contributes to the accumulation of wealth and brings prosperity and green - symbolizes happiness. From 1929 to 1947 (during the Soviet era) the mosque was used as a storehouse. In 1947, the building was given to the Muslim community and continues to function as a mosque. It is registered as a historical monument and protected by law. Today the mosque is open to visitors. Return to hotel. Dinner in town, and overnight at our hotel. Overnight at the hotel at Karakol.

Day 5. Karakol – Jeti Oghuz; ‘Seven Bulls’ – Tamga

After breakfast you return to Bishkek via the southern shore of Issyk Kul which gives amazing views at the Tian Shan and the lake. First stop is Jeti-Oguz (“Seven Bulls”) located just 28 km west of Karakol in the foothills of the Terskey Ala-Too Mountains, Jeti-Oguz attracts many visitors each year with its breathtaking “Broken Heart” and “Seven Bulls” red rock formations. We continue along the southern shore of Issyk Kul with breathtaking views at the crystal-clear water. We accommodate in Tamga village, in a cozy guesthouse (with sauna, and a beautiful garden). Dinner and overnight in the guesthouse.

Day 6. Tamga – Bishkek; Bokonbaeva; felt & Shyrdak production – Bishkek

We depart Tamga, and drive towards Bishkek. After 30 minutes, we stop at Bokonbaeva to learn about the production of Shyrdak carpets. A shyrdak is a stitched, and often colorful felt floor-covering, usually handmade in Central Asia. Kazakhs and Kyrgyz alike traditionally make shyrdaks, but especially in Kyrgyzstan, the tradition is still alive. In this part of the world felt is not only used for carpets, but also for the typical hats (kalpak) and yurts. After lunch at Bokonbaeva you continue to Bishkek where you arrive at the hotel in the late afternoon. In the evening meeting in the lobby of the hotel for your dinner at a good café in the center of Bishkek. Overnight at hotel at Bishkek.

Day 7. Bishkek – Osh (domestic flight) – Fergana (Uzbekistan); Dustlik, the Uzbek-Kyrgyz border checkpoint – Welcome to Uzbekistan

Early morning transfer to Manas International Airport for transfer by domestic flight to Osh. The city is among the oldest settlements in Central Asia (more than 3000 years old). Osh was known as early as the 8th century as a center for silk production along the Silk Road. The famous trading route crossed Alay Mountains to reach Kashgar to the east. Babur, founder of the Mughal Empire and descendant of Tamerlane, was born in nearby Andijan, in the Fergana Valley, pondered his future on Sulayman Mountain and even constructed a mosque atop of the mountain. Today Osh is the second largest city in Kyrgyzstan after Bishkek. According to a census of 2009 of the total population (c. 250,000), 57.9% were Uzbeks, 34.2% Kyrgyz, 2.5% Russians, 2.2% Turks, 1.1% Tatars and 2.1% other nationalities. We drive to center of Osh and make an easy stroll up aside Sulayman Mountain. This is the only World Heritage Site in Kyrgyzstan. It offers a splendid view of Osh and its environs. This mountain is thought by some researchers and historians to be the famous landmark of antiquity known as the “Stone Tower”, which Claudius Ptolemy wrote about in his famous work Geography. It marked the midpoint on the ancient Silk Road, the overland trade route taken by caravans between Europe and Asia. The National Historical and Archaeological Museum Complex



Sulayman is carved in the mountain, containing a collection of archaeological, geological, and historical finds and information about local flora and fauna. Sulayman (Solomon) is a prophet in the Qur'an, and the mountain contains a shrine that supposedly marks his grave. Women who ascend to the shrine on top and crawl through an opening across the holy rock will, according to legend, give birth to healthy children. The trees and bushes on the mountain are draped with numerous "prayer flags", small pieces of cloth that are tied to them. The site is still a popular place for local Muslims, with stairs leading up to the highest peak where there stands a small mosque originally built Babur in 1510. of the mosque was reconstructed in the late 20th century. After 3 hours, and lunch in Osh, we drive the short way to Dustlik, the Uzbek-Kyrgyz border checkpoint in the outskirts of Osh. At the Uzbek side of the border, you meet our local Uzbek



Sulayman mountain in Osh. This is the only World Heritage Site in Kyrgyzstan. It offers a splendid view of Osh and its environs.



team and drive by our bus, 110 km to Fergana, where you have time to rest. Overnight at the hotel at Fergana.

Day 8. Fergana – Margilan (city of Silk). Bazar and Yodgorlik Silk factory

We continue 20 km to Margilan. that lies in a picturesque place that during the years of the Great Silk Road was a strategic place located at the crossroads of trade caravans coming from China to the West and vice versa. The Silk Road made Margilan the center of silk and chief keeper of its secrets. You visit one of the biggest bazars in Uzbekistan, where both food and non-food is traded, especially silk. Visit at the Yodgorlik factory, a famous Margilan Silk Factory and will get acquainted with the whole process in detail. Overnight at the hotel at Fergana

Day 9. Fergana – Rishtan (city of ceramic) — Tashkent



Ready for a snack? Of course, there is shashlik. You know it from your BBQ: skewered meat (commonly mutton) usually cooked on a grill called a mangal. These days it is also made of chicken, pork, or beef. The skewers are either all meat or sometimes meat combined with bell pepper, onion, and tomato. In fact, shashlik is the basic food of the territory comprised between the Adriatic Sea and the Sea of Okhotsk, largely encompassing the Eurasian steppe. The only thing is that the Central Asian kind of grandma's kitchen is often made up of chewy chunks of mutton and lots of fat. But you can also try manty: round dumplings filled with minced mutton, mutton fat and onion. Served on their own or sometimes with yoghurt and tomato salsa on the side if you are lucky. So far for the solid kitchen (there is much more than shashlik and manty). What about some adventurous liquid stuff? For instance, kumis. That's a fermented dairy product, traditionally made from mare's milk or donkey milk. The drink remains important to the peoples of the Central Asian steppes, of Turkic and Mongol origin: Kazakhs, Bashkirs, Kalmyks, Kyrgyz, Mongols, and Sakha. Kumis was historically consumed by the Khitan, Jurchen, Hungarians, and Han Chinese of North China as well. It is like kefir, but is produced from a liquid starter culture, in contrast to the solid kefir "grains". Because mare's milk contains more sugars than cow's or goat's milk, when fermented, kumis has a higher, though still mild, alcohol content compared to kefir. The Kyrgyz capital, Bishkek, carries the name of the paddle used to churn the fermenting mare milk. That shows the importance of kumis in the national culture

After breakfast at the hotel, 50 km morning drive to Rishtan where you visit ceramic workshops. There are great possibilities to explore your trader skills as there are plenty of beautiful ceramic to negotiate.



Rishtan is the oldest center of ceramic art in Central Asia. The famous technique of glazed earthenware, which local people use for their household needs and which is exported from Fergana Valley, was created here. Afterwards we continue to Tashkent. Overnight at hotel in Tashkent.

Day 10. Tashkent. City tour

Tashkent, historically known as Chach, is the capital and largest city of Uzbekistan. Present name comes from the Turkic name Tash (stone) and Kent (city), "Stone City". Tashkent has grown to become the most populous city in Central Asia, with a population of 2,485,900. Like 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. 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.

In the Barakhan madrassah more than 20 craftsmen sell their hand made products inside the courtyard: Ikat fabrics, jewelry, woodcarving, pottery. The Muiy Muborak madrassah 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.



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.

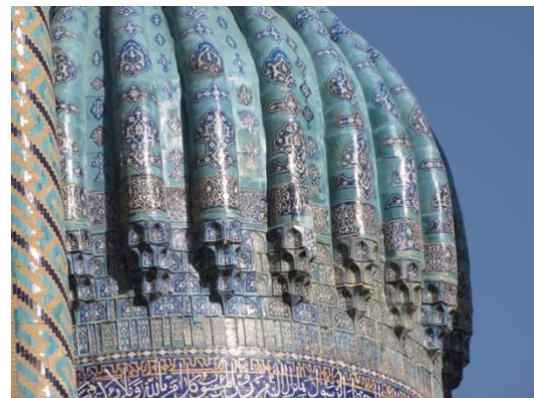
In the afternoon you continue the tour along the new part of the city. First stop, is the State Museum of Fine and Applied Arts of Uzbekistan. The museum contains over 4,000 exhibits on decorative art in Uzbekistan, including wood carving, ceramics, embossing, jewelry, gold weaving, embroidery, and samples of mass production in local industry. We continue to Monument of Courage, dedicated to the 1966 earthquake in Tashkent. Finally, we make a visit to the famed Tashkent Metro; each station has its own architectural design in marble. Overnight at the hotel at Tashkent.

Day 11. Tashkent – Samarkand. Transfer to Samarkand by coach

After breakfast you leave Tashkent and have a 310 km drive to Samarkand by coach (which takes about 5 hours). The city is not only beautiful but also very important in historical aspect. Proudly standing right in the center of Uzbekistan, on the left bank of the Zarafshan River, Samarkand generously welcomes everyone wanting to know it's unbelievable breathtaking story which takes the beginning in the earliest days of humanity. After check-in at the hotel: time for a rest before dinner. Overnight at the hotel in Samarkand.

Day 12. Samarkand. City tour in Samarkand. Registan Square, Madrasah Sher-Dor, Guri Amir Mausoleum, Bibi-Khanyam Mosque, Siyob national bazaar and Shakh-i-Zindah necropolis

Samarkand is among the oldest continuously inhabited cities in Central Asia. There is evidence of human activity around 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 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 the second largest city after its "big brother" Tashkent. Samarkand 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-Khanyam 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 weaving, copper engraving, ceramics, wood carving, and wood painting. In 2001, UNESCO added the city to its World Heritage List as Samarkand – Crossroads of Cultures.



After breakfast at the hotel, we begin with a visit the famous Registan Square. This site is one of the world's most beautiful squares. 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. It is framed by three madrasahs (schools): Ulughbek Madrasah, Sher-Dor Madrasah and Tillya-Kori Madrasah. The latter 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 main hall of the mosque is abundantly gilded.

Afterwards we drive to magnificent Guri Amir Mausoleum. This is the 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 Bibi-Khanyim Mosque 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. 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. 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.

After the visit of the mosque, time for shopping at the nearby Siyob national bazaar. Here you may find plenty of fresh and dried fruits, sweets, buts and all kinds of souvenirs, etc. Here you find the Samarkand Naan (bread); local visitors always purchase when being in Samarkand.



In the afternoon you continue the tour. The Shakh-i-Zindah necropolis complex includes mausoleums and other ritual buildings of 11-15th and 19th centuries. The name Shah-i-Zinda (meaning "The living king") relates to the legend that Qutham ibn Abbas, a cousin of the Prophet Muhammad, is buried here. The Shah-i-Zinda necropolis was formed over eight centuries (from 11th till 19th) and now includes more than 20 buildings, many of them decorated with beautiful turquoise-bluish relief majolica and intricate patterns of bricks.

Few kilometers from Shakh-i-Zindah, is the Ulughbek Observatory. The observatory's foundation was built around 830 and the construction of the observatory was completed in 1422–1428. Ulughbek was skilled in mathematics and astronomy. He taught many important astronomers and invited over 60 skillful mathematicians and astronomers to help build this observatory. Ulugh Beg's observatory included the

largest quadrant principal 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. Ulugh Beg's measurements of planets closely relate to today's measurement, showing us the phenomenal accuracy of the device. Overnight at the hotel in Samarkand.

Day 13. Samarkand – Gijduvan (ceramic) – Bukhara (260 km)

After breakfast at the hotel, drive to 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 and Hillary Clinton have been to G'ijduvon to see the work of local craftsmen. After the visit you drive 16 km to



check-in: time for a rest. Overnight at the hotel at Bukhara.

Day 14. Bukhara sightseeing; Samanids Mausoleum, Bolo-Khauz Mosque (UNESCO), the Citadel Ark, Mausoleum of Chashma-Ayub, Poi Kalan Complex: Kalyan Mosque, Kalyan Minaret (Minâra-i Kalân, "Grand Minaret, or Tower of Death") and Mir-i-Arab Madrasah., Ulugbek Madrasah, Abdul-Aziz khan Madrasah, Magoki-Attor Mosque, trading domes, Lyabi Khauz Ensemble, Nodir Devonbegi Madrasah. Evening folklore performance at Nodir Devonbegi Madrasah (subject to availability)

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 madrasahs, has been listed by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site. According to several scholars the name dates 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. The Samanid 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), noted to own land in the city. Bukhara was the last capital of the Emirate of Bukhara and 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.

After breakfast at the hotel, you get acquainted with Bukhara. Your program foresees a visit of the following: 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.

The rectangular shaped Bolo-Khauz 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.

The 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, 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.

The 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 a stick. The water of this well is still pure and is considered healing. The current building

constructed during the reign of Timur features a Khwarazm-style conical dome uncommon in Bukhara. In 2008 it was added to the UNESCO World Heritage Tentative List.

The famous Poi Kalan Complex. 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 Kalyan Mosque (Masjid-i Kalan), the Kalyan Minaret (Minâra-i Kalân), 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 flanked on either side by blue domes, blue and white tile mosaics, vegetal motifs, and patterned glazed brick lining the building adding to the aggrandizing effect of the Poi Kalan ensemble.

The congregational mosque in the complex is one of the largest mosques in Central Asia. The place where the complex Poi Kalan is located is the site of a few completely ruined buildings from the past. 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 mosque in 1220, leaving only the Kalyan Minaret untouched. The Kalyan Minaret (Minâra-i Kalân or "Grand Minaret") was constructed entirely out of baked



bricks. It is a cylindrical structure with a wide base narrowing upwards towards its upper lantern. It is also known as the "Tower of Death", because until as recently as the early twentieth century criminals were executed by being thrown from the top. For centuries before 1870, and again in the troubled years between 1917 and 1920, men were cast down to their death from the delicately ornamented gallery which crowns it.

Within walking distance from the Poi Kalan complex is the Ulugbek Madrasah. 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 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'. Ulugbek was the grandson of Tamerlane and was



an enlightened and intellectual ruler. He was very much concerned with development of science in his large kingdom. Ulugbek was famous for his astronomical research throughout the world. That is why astral designs in the decoration of the madrasah predominate.

We continue to 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.

We continue to the Magoki-Attor Mosque built in the 9th to 10th-century on the remains of a Zoroastrian temple from the pre-Islamic era. 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". Before the Arab conquest there was a bazaar here, a market for idols, potions, spices, attor (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. Enroute to Lyabi-Khauz Complex, we pass by the trading domes, still existing medieval shopping malls. The Great Silk Road live!

The most interesting shopping areas are the large, covered trading domes (toqi) that have existed since the days of the Silk Road. Toqi Sarrofon Bazaar, Toqi Telpak Furushon Bazaar, Tim Abdulla Khan Trading Dome, and Toqi Zargaron are the 4



trading domes that are still standing to this day. They are conveniently located along the popular road that leads from Lyabi Khause to the Kalyan Mosque.

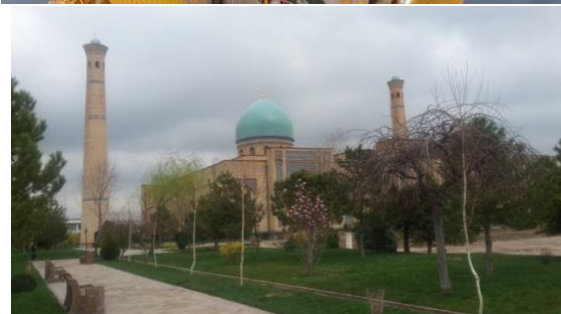
The present days obvious center and meeting point is the Lyabi Khauz Ensemble (1568–1622). The area surrounding one of the few remaining Khauz, or pond, in the city of Bukhara. Several such ponds existed in Bukhara prior to Soviet rule. The ponds acted as the city's principal source of water, but were 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 ensemble dating back to the 16th to 17th centuries. Nodir Devonbegi Madrasah from 1622-1623 as a caravanserai is 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.

In the evening enjoy folklore performance at Nodir Devonbegi Madrasah (subject to availability). Overnight at the hotel at Bukhara.

Day 15. Bukhara – Tashkent; transfer to Tashkent by train

After breakfast you leave Bukhara and have a 310 km drive to Tashkent by train (which takes about 5 hours). After check-in at the hotel: time for a rest before farewell-dinner. Overnight at the hotel in Tashkent.

Day 16. Departure home



Kyrgyzstan & Uzbekistan

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Price include: Sovietistan Travels' rates include all accommodations; meals as stated in the program, activities and excursions as described in the itinerary; from Bishkek to Tashkent; transport, services of one/two Sovietistan Travel leaders and local guides throughout the itinerary; airport transfers; permits and entrance fees.

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