



WENDY WU TOURS

Tour Dossier

ROAD TO SAMARKAND, 23 DAYS

This dossier aims to provide a straightforward description of the physical activities involved in sightseeing or travelling during the tour. All passengers should read this dossier to confirm their ability to complete the tour. This is not your final Itinerary and therefore does not mention all the sights visited.

The Road to Samarkand is one of our most unique and adventurous group tours; travelling along one of the worlds' highest roads to cross the Torugart Pass and tracing the ancient Silk Route from Kashgar to Samarkand.

We wish you to embark on your journey through Central Asia with a level of tolerance and understanding that this region is remote and conditions are not as developed as at home. The far west reaches of China and the former lands of the U.S.S.R which make up Central Asia, are quite undeveloped and it is essential that all passengers recognise the demands of factors such as basic facilities, travelling at altitude and cultural differences. The rewards of seeing and experiencing these lands, so different from your own, are immeasurable and can only be enhanced by an adventurous spirit.

The former soviet countries in Central Asia were isolated and undeveloped for decades and all levels of infrastructure remain affected today in some way. In the tourism sector, newly built and very good hotels may still have poorly trained staff with an abrupt manner, roads are in poor condition and officials are notoriously corrupt. The level of English spoken outside of hotels is minimal and the Cyrillic alphabet is used instead of the Latin one, so you will find your Local Guides indispensable.

We have found that our passengers who embark with a sense of humour and adventure, who accept that things can and do go wrong, are those who find their experience most rewarding.

Changes and updates

We ask that you keep in mind that the distances, times, standards of service and accommodation mentioned throughout your itinerary and Tour Dossier could change by the time of your departure. Wendy Wu Tours uses the feedback from our passengers and guides from each tour, and news from our offices in Shanghai and Tashkent to keep our information to you as up to date as possible however, things in this region tend to change quickly and without notice. For example, construction and roadwork tends to be carried out on a massive scale compared to Australia –

there may be new roadwork projects or roads may be improved after being completed before the expected date, new hotels or guesthouses may have popped up, or been knocked down....

Tour grade – Active paced tour

This is defined in our brochure as: "Refers to programmes where personal involvement is necessary, which can travel to remote areas and that may contain areas of high altitude, between 3,000 and 5,200metres. These tours may involve some hiking. Accommodation on these tours may be in simple hostels or camps in remote areas. These programmes also require a good level of fitness and a doctor's certificate will be required for those tour participants 70 years of age and over."

Participants need to have a good level of fitness and be able to walk over uneven surfaces without assistance. Sightseeing may involve walking and/or travelling over rough roads for extended periods. Of course, our local guides always endeavour to provide the highest level of service and assistance, but they cannot be expected to cater for passengers who are unfit to complete the itinerary.

This is quite adventurous travel and uses basic accommodation called 'home stays' in local people's houses, or yurts, in Kyrgyzstan. The more difficult aspects to consider are the poor road conditions and sightseeing at altitude. For example, at the Torugart Pass you will need to walk for at least 15mins, at an altitude of 3750ms, while carrying your own luggage between the Chinese to Kyrgyz border.

There is further information about altitude below. The section also has estimates of driving times, distances and any significant altitude reached that day.

Altitude

This itinerary spends a period of 9 days at a moderate altitude over 1300ms [4200feet]. The maximum altitudes are:

1. Day 4 when we drive over the Torugart Pass @ 3750ms [12300feet] and spend that night at Tash-Rabat @ 3500ms [11480feet]
2. Day 11 when we visit Ala-Archa Nat Park @ 2150ms [7050feet]

AMS (Acute Mountain Sickness) occurs in some people when they travel to altitudes over 3,000ms [9,840 feet]. Mild symptoms of AMS include dizziness, fatigue, nausea or loss of appetite, breathlessness or headache. These usually develop over the first 36 hours at altitude and not immediately on arrival. AMS symptoms are experienced by people of varying ages and levels of fitness, and usually the symptoms will subside after a day or so. If symptoms worsen, you should seek medical advice and descend in altitude immediately.

It is recommended to drink more (water, non-alcoholic and non-caffeinated drinks) and avoid exertion after arriving over 3,000ms.

Making sure you are well hydrated (by drinking lots of water and refraining from alcohol/caffeine) before and during the tour, as well as exercising to improve your aerobic fitness before you leave, are generally considered to be excellent ways to prevent or alleviate the severity of mild AMS. If you smoke, your doctor will probably also advise you to stop several weeks before your tour. If you have an existing respiratory, vascular or coronary condition, we recommend checking with your Doctor before undertaking this tour. Take this Tour Dossier with you to the appointment to explain the altitude at which you will be travelling.

Drinking Water

Bottled drinking water is available to buy all over the place and you should get into the habit of buying a large bottle or two every day (it is incredibly cheap) especially when acclimatising to altitude. All drinks, including water are at your own cost.

Optional extras

A number of optional extra programs may be offered by your guide/s whilst on tour, time permitting. These can range anywhere from US\$2 to US\$30 in price and involve experiences such as a boat ride, horse ride or an evening show. Remember to allow for these extras when you are exchanging money because the activity/show is probably organised by a local person, who will only be able to take local currency in cash as payment. Please feel free to ask

your guide/s when and where such optional extras could be offered so that you can allow for this when exchanging money.

Group size

In most cases, the group size will operate with a minimum of ten and a maximum of twenty passengers.

Itinerary changes

1. Order of events and sightseeing may vary according to local conditions.
2. For passengers of the 9th October '07 departure, your group will be in Kashgar from Thursday to Friday you will not be able to visit the *Sunday Bazaar* or Animal Market as printed in our 2007/08 brochure itinerary. Instead, you will be able to spend time exploring the old town area and local markets – we believe that this is a unique opportunity to explore the city without the large number of other tourists who arrive each weekend and will only enhance your experience of Kashgar.
3. The flights between Kashgar and Urumqi are operated on a loop system, meaning one plane will fly up and down several times a day. Unfortunately, this means that any delays are passed on to all later flights and flight departure times are extremely subject to change! Your Local Guide will phone the airport to check the situation during the day and keep you informed of any changes.
4. On Days 13-14, we will be staying in Khiva, instead of Urgench, enabling us to explore more of Khiva's charming old town area.

Local Guides

This itinerary will be travelling through three different countries hence it will not be possible to have a National Escort to accompany your group for the entire tour. In each country, you will have a National Guide (for groups with more than 10 passengers) and Local Guides in each city.

Meals

Hotels and restaurants in this region are far less accustomed to serving foreign, especially western tourists and so the food tends to be more local in style. There are fewer vegetables grown or available in this region – vegetarians may find this difficult and should consider carefully the suitability of this itinerary. There will be **few if any western dishes for breakfast**.

If you like, you can bring some supplements with you from Australia. Tea/coffee bags, UHT milk containers, drinking chocolate, vegemite, instant soups or noodles, biscuits, energy bars, milk powder sachets, vegemite are all a good idea – consider your luggage weight though! There are also small supermarkets and shops along the way where you can

buy odd items e.g. instant noodles, muesli bars, biscuits.

Use your common sense regarding food hygiene - do not buy food from street vendors and make sure all vegetables are cooked and fruit peeled and clean. Wash your hands, or use disinfectant wipes, before eating.

In remote areas, lunch may be prepared as a picnic style lunch, prepared by the hotel that morning, or your guides may organise a simple meal at a local restaurant. Please keep in mind that the staff may not be used to serving groups, and this can obviously mean that you may need to wait a while to be served.

If you have food allergies or any other preferences please make them known to your Local Guide/s at the start of your trip; they will do their best to ensure that your requirements are met.

Long driving distances, road conditions or flight times, for example, may delay/alter your mealtime.

In China's Xinjiang Province, you will find the food is different to what is known as "Chinese food". Geography and climate means that there are few vegetables and wheat is grown rather than rice, therefore noodles and flat bread feature heavily. The most common dishes are mutton kebabs with *nan* (flat bread) or noodle soups with mutton. Chinese breakfast dishes include cold vegetable/ pickle dishes, bean curd noodles, soups, *congee* (a rice porridge), steamed buns with pork or sweet red bean paste and green tea. You may also be served fruit, a fried egg, or toast – although the bread tends to be very sweet and unlike the bread we have in Australia. Black tea and coffee can usually be requested. Fresh milk is not generally available.

In Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, the cuisine is influenced by Middle Eastern and Turkic (Mediterranean) dishes – yoghurts, dried fruit, legumes, fruit vinegars, or mild spices like cumin season the common dishes such as *lagman* (handmade noodles), *shashlyk* (kebabs), *nan* (flat bread) and *plov* (rice pilaf dish). Mutton is the only meat available in most areas and features in most dishes. You should remember that locals regard the mutton to be better the *more* fat it contains, although most restaurants will try to remove this for western customers. Local breakfast dishes include *nan* and *airan* (like sour cream), savoury noodles with vinegar and green tea. You may also be served a fried egg, jam, honey or toast – although the bread tends to be very sweet and unlike the bread we have in Australia. Black tea and coffee can usually be

requested. Fresh milk is not generally available.

Despite the Muslim culture, drinking alcohol is acceptable in this ex-Soviet region but the most popular mealtime drink is tea. *Chay* (green tea) is available at most meals, usually straight but hosts may add a large block of sugar crystal to the pot, or even your glass! Black tea and coffee are not always served, but can usually be requested.

Accommodation in remote areas

We will be travelling for a few days through a rarely visited and undeveloped area of Kyrgyzstan; from the Chinese-Kyrgyz border to the shore of Issy-Kul Lake. This is a remote area with villages, nomadic settlements, very small towns and little in the way of tourist facilities. We have designed this itinerary to use the accommodation offered by the CBT home stay project, staying in local houses or *yurts* for a few nights.

The CBT "Community Based Tourism" project started in Kochkorka Village, offering income to local families and guides while providing tourists the opportunity to stay with a local family, in their simple homes or in the traditional style *yurts*, rather than in run-down Soviet era hotels.

It is not essential to bring a sleeping bag; bed linen is provided at each type of accommodation and is adequate for the night temperatures. However, bringing a "sleep sheet" insert to use under the linen is a very good idea. If you already have a *compact* sleeping bag, you may also like to bring this.

"yurt home stay" These round, felt tents are the traditional home of the many semi-nomadic tribes of Central Asia, called *yurts* by the Russians and *bozui* by the locals. The tents will sleep up to 8 people with both male and female group members sharing if necessary. Twin-share does not apply here. They usually have generator-supplied electricity. Toilet facilities will be basic and shared – most probably they will be squat toilets, possibly outdoors. Please keep in mind that these people come from some of the poorest and most undeveloped areas in the world, so facilities are adequate for them. As such, if you expect a tiled, disinfected bathroom you will be disappointed.

"local home stay" These provide basic but comfortable accommodation in local homes, so group members may be staying in a number of different locations. As these are people's real homes, the accommodation and facilities may vary between houses. Homes in small towns of

this part of Kyrgyzstan usually have town-supplied electricity for a restricted amount of time i.e. usually a few hours in the morning and evenings. Toilet and shower facilities may be basic and shared.

“3 star hotel” We will be staying in hotels of 3 star standard, or above, for the remainder of the tour. The fact sheet for Central Asia, entitled “What you need to know before you go” has some information about the 3 star hotel accommodations to be found on the rest of the tour.

The section below will indicate when we are staying in the more basic *yurt* or local home stays.

Electricity

When staying at either yurts or local home stays, consider that most will only have a few hours of electricity each day, from either the town’s supply or a diesel generator. The supply of electricity can be unreliable and the voltage is often unsteady and not advised for charging. We recommend that you rely on electrical devices (cameras, shavers, etc) with replaceable batteries. You will be able to recharge batteries/electrical devices at most places, but not all. You need to bring a back up battery just in case. Shops and markets in this region will not stock reliable or genuine batteries, so it is better to bring batteries from Australia. We recommend you also bring a torch, as electricity is usually turned off at night.

Whenever there is limited electricity supply, this will mean limited hot water supply also.

Traffic / Road Construction

Roads in this region have generally been improved over recent years, but road or weather conditions may still lengthen driving times. Road construction work usually encompasses an enormous section of road - not a couple of kilometres as you would be used to. For this reason, the timings listed in the section below are suggestions only.

Seatbelts

Please note that seatbelts are not compulsory by law in China, Kyrgyzstan or Uzbekistan and local people largely choose not to wear them. Wendy Wu Tours is unable to guarantee that your vehicles will be fitted with operable seatbelts.

NB: Times and distances listed in this section are suggestions only.

Days 1-2: Australia/ Urumqi. You will be met at Urumqi airport in the arrivals hall by your Local Guide from Wendy Wu Tours. Together with all other group members who may be arriving at a similar

time, you will transfer (approx ½ hr drive) to your hotel. When the whole group has arrived, a tour introduction will be held in the hotel. There will not be food or drinks served at this meeting; it is simply an opportunity for your group to meet and learn more about travelling in China. There is no sightseeing arranged today.

Day 3: Urumqi / Kashgar.

Kashgar altitude 1130ms

This morning, catch an early flight to Kashgar (flight duration 1 ½ hrs) and then commence sightseeing in Kashgar. Easy sightseeing around the old town, central and market areas of Kashgar involving 3 to 4hrs walking. Beware of pickpockets within and around market areas. At the end of the day, check in at the hotel.

Day 4: Kashgar/Torugart Pass/Tash-Rabat.

Maximum altitude reached today 3750ms

Tash-Rabat altitude – 3500ms

Accommodation – yurt home stay

Today you will be ascending in altitude as you cross the border and the Tian Shan mountain range via the Torugart Pass. After breakfast, check out from the hotel and drive 4 hrs (180kms) on a winding and rough road – this is a popular route with large cargo trucks which keeps the road surface in pretty bad condition and causes early morning traffic jams, as trucks queue up to cross the border.

At the Chinese checkpoint, each individual passenger must go through immigration procedures (get an exit stamp!), then reboard the group bus and continue driving to the Chinese border control. From here, you will need to walk for at least 15mins, carrying your own luggage, to the Kyrgyz border control. Sometimes, the guards at the Kyrgyz checkpoint will allow your transport to collect you, but do not rely on this!

At the Kyrgyz checkpoint, expect to have your bags searched thoroughly, and then go through immigration procedures (get an entry stamp!) before meeting your new local guide and boarding two minibuses. Drive 3 hrs (105kms) down a steep, winding road to settlement of Tash-Rabat.

This is a Class II border – making the crossing more difficult and time consuming for foreigners. Class II means there are two military checkpoints for each country, on either side of the actual border, located tens of kms apart. The immigration procedures, searches, document and luggage inspections and waiting usually take 1 to 2 hours, although it could take your group longer with so many people returning from Kashgar’s Sunday market. This is an incredibly scenic drive, and the crossing experience can be an adventure –

have your documents and your sense of humour ready!

Day 5: Tash-Rabat/Kochkorka

Maximum altitude reached today 3038ms

Kochkorka altitude – 1800ms

Accommodation – local home stay

This morning, change to the normal group bus. Drive approx 4 hrs (230kms) to Kochkorka Village on a partly sealed road crossing the Dolon Pass @3038ms.

Day 6: Kochkorka/Bokonbaevo

Lake Issyk-Kul altitude - 1600ms

Accommodation – local home stay

Drive approx 3 hrs (150kms) to Bokonbaevo Village on the south of Issyk-Kul Lake.

Day 7: Bokonbaevo/Karakol

Please note that this marks a return to standard hotels.

Drive approx 2 hrs (100kms) to the Jety-Oguz Mountains. Sightseeing at the canyon involves 1hr leisurely walking, then continue driving ½ hr (40kms) to Karakol and check in at the hotel.

Day 8: Karakol/Chock-Tal. Easy sightseeing this morning with 2hrs walking, then drive 2-3hrs (200kms) to Cholpon-Ata. After lunch, drive further 25kms to tonight’s hotel, located in Chock-Tal village.

Day 9: Cholpon-Ata. Return to Cholpon-Ata for leisurely sightseeing this morning, involving 2-3hrs walking.

Day 10: Chock-Tal/Bishkek

Bishkek altitude - 760ms [2500feet]

This morning, drive approx 3hrs (180kms) from hotel to Burana Tower; sightseeing here involves 1hr walking and climbing the tower is optional. Then continue to Bishkek, driving approx 2hrs (75kms) and check in at hotel.

Day 11: Bishkek – Ala-Archa Nat. Park

Ala-Archa base camp altitude – 2150ms

Drive for approx an hour (40kms) to the Ala-Archa Nat. Park, south of Bishkek and up to the park’s base camp. From here, your guide/s will take you on a 3hr (return) hike. Although this a gentle hike, you will need to climb some hills and slopes and be walking over uneven ground at altitude – all passengers who take part in this activity must be able to complete it independently. Return to Bishkek for lunch and sightseeing in the afternoon, with 1-2 hrs walking.

Day 12: Bishkek/Tashkent

Tashkent altitude – 480ms

Please note that this marks a return to average altitude.

Transfer (1hr drive) to the airport to catch a morning flight to Tashkent (flight duration

50mins). Transfer (15mins drive) to the hotel to freshen up and deposit your luggage. *[NB: Check-out time is midday so your group's rooms are unlikely to be available. This morning you will commence sightseeing and return to hotel later to rest and freshen up.]* Today is a full day of sightseeing, with 4-5hrs walking.

Day 13: Tashkent/Urgench/Khiva. This morning is an early rise to transfer back to the airport and catch the flight to Urgench (flight duration 1 ½ hrs). From the airport, transfer (¾ hr drive) to Khiva and commence sightseeing. *[NB: Check-out time is midday – as above.]* Today is a full day of sightseeing, with 4-5hrs walking.

Day 14: Topraq-Qala day trip. Drive nearly 2hrs (70kms) on a rough road to the Topraq-Qala Fort, located in the desert north east of Khiva. Sightseeing here involves 1-2hrs walking as well as taking a camel ride and a simple lunch at a nearby yurt camp, before returning to Khiva.

Day 15: Khiva/Bukhara. Drive approx 7hrs (470kms) to Bukhara and check in at hotel. There is no further sightseeing arranged for today.

Days 16-17: Bukhara. Sightseeing around the central city, with approx 3-4hrs leisurely walking each day.

Day 18: Bukhara/Samarkand. Drive approx 5hrs (280kms) to Samarkand, check in at hotel and have a late lunch there. No sightseeing arranged for this afternoon.

Days 19-20: Samarkand. Sightseeing around the central city, with approx 3-4hrs leisurely walking each day.

Day 21: Samarkand/Tashkent. Depart from the hotel early this morning and drive approx 6hrs (350kms) to Tashkent, check in at hotel and have a late lunch there. Easy sightseeing this afternoon.

Day 22: Depart Tashkent. Easy sightseeing before returning to the hotel to check out. You will be transferred from the hotel to the airport, according to the departure time of your flight.

Day 23: Arrive Australia. Arrive home.

Updated 4th July, 2007.