



SILK ROAD UNCOVERED: UZBEKISTAN & KYRGYZSTAN

Classic Tour | 22 Days | Physical Level 2

Tashkent – Nukus – Khiva – Bukhara – Samarkand – Tashkent – Bishkek – Cholpon Ata –
Karakol – Tamga – Chon-Kemin – Bishkek

Embark on an exploration that follows ancient trading routes through Uzbekistan & Kyrgyzstan. Along the way, explore age-old, fabled cities full of intricate architecture and thriving bazaars, cross vast mountain and desert landscapes, and glimpse the lifestyle and traditions of the nomadic people of the steppe. Prepare for an epic adventure fully entwined with the legends of the Silk Road.

- Explore ancient, Silk Road cities
- Wander the bustling Chorsu Bazaar
- Enjoy a Samarkand wine tasting
- Stay in a yurt on the shores of Lake Issyk Kul
- Discover the incredible Kyrgyz countryside

TOUR MAP



SILK ROAD UNCOVERED TOUR INCLUSIONS:

- Return international economy flights, taxes and current fuel surcharges (unless a land only option is selected)
- All accommodation
- All meals
- All sightseeing and entrance fees
- All transportation and transfers
- English speaking National Escort
- Specialist advice from our experienced travel consultants
- Comprehensive travel guides
- Safe and secure with ABTA, ATOL and IATA

The only thing you may have to pay for are personal expenditure e.g. drinks, optional excursions or shows, insurance of any kind, customary tipping, early check in or late check out and other items not specified on the itinerary.

CLASSIC TOURS:

These tours are designed for those who wish to see the iconic sites and magnificent treasures of Central Asia on an excellent value group tour whilst travelling with like-minded people. The tours are on a fully inclusive basis so you'll travel with the assurance that all your arrangements are taken care of.

You will be accompanied by our dedicated and professional National Escorts in each country, whose unparalleled knowledge will turn your holiday into an unforgettable experience.

PHYSICAL LEVEL 2:

All of our tours feature a physical rating to help you select the right holiday for you. To travel on any of our tours requires unaided mobility and the ability to stroll around the sights.

‘Silk Road Uncovered’ is rated as a **physical level 2** tour. A moderate level of fitness is required. You will be on your feet for most of the day, with longer walks that include ascents and descents on steps or uneven paths. Travelling conditions may be more challenging in some areas.

Travelling in Central Asia is both rewarding and challenging because of the lack of basic infrastructure, such as roads or a transportation system. This tour covers a vast distance and reaching the sites involves travelling through areas of Kyrgyzstan which are barren, remote and without any modern facilities.

- There will be short periods of walking whilst sightseeing often on steep or uneven ground.
- There are periods of driving on rough unsealed roads or tracks. Expect long drives.
- Whilst all accommodation included has private en-suites, the yurt stay may be more basic than what you’re used to.
- Whilst parts of Kyrgyzstan sit at significant elevation, this tour stays between 700m and 2,200m, so the effects of Altitude Mountain Sickness should be minimal. Regardless, we recommend staying well hydrated and informing your National Escort if you feel unwell.

Of course, our National Escort will always endeavour to provide the highest level of service and assistance; however, they cannot be expected to cater for customers who are unfit to complete the itinerary. If you require any more information about the pace of the tours, please contact our reservations team who will be happy to answer your questions.

JOINING YOUR TOUR:

The tour is 22 days in duration including return international flights or 20 days in duration based on ‘Land Only’. Join the tour on Day 2 in Tashkent and end the tour on Day 21 in Bishkek.

Travellers booked on ‘Land Only’, the price includes your arrival/departure airport transfers if arriving/departing on the start and conclusion date of your tour, or when booking pre/post night accommodation with Wendy Wu Tours.

Please note – this tour combines two separate groups: *Ultimate Uzbekistan* and *Spirit of Kyrgyzstan*. Some travellers will finish after Uzbekistan, some new travellers will join in Kyrgyzstan, and others will be with you throughout the entire journey. Travellers doing the full *Silk Road Uncovered* will fly together from Tashkent to Bishkek. The group size will never exceed 20.

DETAILED ITINERARY

Days 1-2: Fly overnight to Tashkent

Meals: D

Fly overnight to Tashkent. On arrival, you will be met in the arrival hall. Together with all other group members who may be arriving at a similar time, you will transfer approximately 1 hour and 30 minutes to your hotel.

Early check-in is included.

Additional nights' before and after your tour can be arranged. Please contact our Reservations team to book.



Destination Information

Tashkent – Tashkent is the capital and largest city of Uzbekistan, as well as the most populated city in ex-Soviet Central Asia, with a population of 3 million people. Much of the city was destroyed in the 1966 Tashkent earthquake, though it was rebuilt afterwards as a model Soviet city.

Day 3: Tashkent

Meals: B, L, D

Today, explore Uzbekistan's capital, beginning in Tashkent's historic old town. Visit the Barak Khan Madrassah and Tila Shaikh Mosque, home to valuable Islamic archives, before continuing to Chorsu Bazaar, the city's oldest and most vibrant market. Enjoy some free time to wander.

Next, visit a workshop of a famous ceramist family, Akbar and Alisher Rakhimov, where you will learn about the history of ceramics before enjoying tea with freshly baked sweets and pastries. Later, discover modern Tashkent with a visit to Amir Temur Square and the beautifully decorated Tashkent Metro, famed for its striking Soviet-era design.

Sightseeing today is around 3-4 hours on foot.



Destination Information

Barak Khan Madrassah – Built in the 16th century with funds donated by the Tashkent ruler Navruz Akhmed, today this is the oldest educational institution in Tashkent. Though this madrassah is no longer used for its original purpose, it attracts attention for its well-preserved architectural features.

Tila Shaikh Mosque – The original mosque was built in 1890 and nowadays one of the largest of its kind in the city of Tashkent. It is part of the famous historical and religious complex Hast Imam, which is situated in front of Barak Khan madrassah.

Day 4: Tashkent to Khiva via Nukus

Meals: B, L, D

Rise early and transfer to the airport for your flight to Nukus, a journey of approximately 2 hours.

Your first stop is the Igor Savitsky Museum, often called the “Louvre of the Desert.” Here, you’ll discover one of the world’s most significant collections of Russian avant-garde art, alongside Soviet-era masterpieces and fascinating Karakalpak ethnographic artifacts — all preserved against incredible odds during the Soviet period.



After the museum and lunch, commence the 200 km drive to Khiva, stopping at Chalpik Kala (Tower of Silence), an ancient Zoroastrian funerary site. Also stop at Toprak Kala, an ancient fortress town, believed to have been a royal and administrative centre of Khorezm between the 1st and 5th centuries.

Destination Information

Nukus – This remote and isolated city hosts one of the best collections of Soviet art in the world. It is the 6th largest city in Uzbekistan.

Khiva – This small town may have been founded up to 2,500 years ago and was said to have been discovered by Shem, the son of Noah. The town certainly existed by the 8th Century, as a minor fort and trading post on a Silk Road branch to the Caspian Sea and the Volga River.

Day 5: Khiva

Meals: B, L, D

Discover the walled inner town of Ichan Kala, Uzbekistan’s first UNESCO World Heritage site, listed in 1990. Visit the Kukhna Ark Fortress, the turquoise-tiled Islam-Khodja Minaret, and the mausoleum of Pakhlavan Makhmud



Continue to Madrassah Rakhimkhon, once a centre for studies in religion, astronomy, geography, and mathematics, then see the striking Kalta Minor Minaret and the 19th-century Tash Hauli Palace, decorated with fine china-blue tiles.

This evening, enjoy a traditional folklore performance demonstrating unique Khoresmian style, music and traditions.

Sightseeing today is around 4 hours on foot.

Destination Information

Itchan Kala – A well-preserved example of Muslim architecture in Central Asia at the beginning of the 19th century, Itchan Kala is the inner town of Khiva. The town is surrounded by brick city walls, with four gates at the cardinal points.

Day 6: Khiva to Bukhara

Meals: B, L, D

Depart for Bukhara across the famous Kyzyl Kum Desert, known as the “Red Sands.” The journey is approximately 470 km and takes 7–8 hours along a route that follows the ancient Great Silk Road. En route, there will be several photo stops to capture the desert landscapes, flora, and fauna, as well as a stop on the banks of the Amudarya River, the fabled “Oxus” of antiquity. Arrive in Bukhara in the late afternoon.

**Destination Information**

Bukhara – Bukhara is a city with a history spanning over 2,500 years and was an integral part of the Persian Empire for centuries. The city is home to more than 350 mosques and 100 religious colleges. As a key point along the Silk Road, Bukhara became a major centre of commerce, religion, and culture. Its most famous landmark, the 12th-century Kalon Minaret, is said to have survived Genghis Khan’s invasion because he was struck by its beauty, even as the rest of the city was destroyed.

Day 7: Bukhara

Meals: B, L, D

Begin a full day discovering Bukhara’s many remarkable sights with a walking tour of the historical centre, starting at the Lab-i-Khauz ensemble, the modern heart of traditional Uzbekistan. Continue to explore both the city’s must-see landmarks and hidden gems, including madrassah Nadir Khon, Devanbegi Khanaga, Mogaki Attari Mosque, the Poi Kalon Minaret and Mosque, and the madrassahs of Ulugbek and Aziz Khan.



Time permitting, watch a plov cooking demonstration and enjoy a delicious lunch of the national dish.

In the afternoon, visit the Ark Fortress, Bala Hauz Mosque, the Mausoleum of Ismail Samani, and Chashma-Ayub. Conclude the day at the Hunarmand workshops near Lyabikhauz, supported by the UNDP, where you can observe traditional crafts including block printing, metal chasing, suzani embroidery, carving, miniature painting, and gold embroidery.

Sightseeing today is around 4 hours on foot.

Destination Information

Poi Kalon Minaret – One of the most prominent landmarks of the city, the 47m tall Kalon minaret was constructed in 1127 by the Karakhanid ruler Arslan Khan.

Ark of Bukhara – The fortified residence of the rulers of Bukhara but it also housed palaces, temples, barracks, offices, the mint, warehouses, workshops, stables, an arsenal, a prison and nowadays a museum.

Bolo Hauz Mosque – Translated the name of the mosque means “The Mosque of the Bala Lake”, which refers to the octagonal pool located in the public forecourt lined with stone steps.

Day 8: Bukhara to Samarkand

Meals: B, L, D

Head out of town this morning to see the Sitora-i-Mokhikhosa, the summer residence of the former emir, showing a unique mixture of traditional Russian style architecture mixed with local oriental traditions.

Depart Bukhara for Samarkand by train, a journey time of around 1.5 hours, arriving in the late afternoon. Depending on the group size, luggage will be transferred by road.



Destination Information

Sitora-i-Mokhikhosa – Located 4 km outside Bukhara, this summer residence dates back to the early 20th century. The first palace was built by Emir Nasrullakhan and served as a seasonal retreat, showcasing a mix of Russian and Central Asian design elements.

Samarkand – Samarkand is Uzbekistan’s second-largest city. Its prominence began in 329 BC when Alexander the Great conquered the nearby city of Maracanda. Renowned for its beauty, Samarkand became a hub for builders, craftsmen, philosophers, and scientists, growing into a legendary city along the Silk Road. From Samarkand, the Silk Road diverged east to China, south to India, and west to Persia, making the city a vital centre of commerce and culture.

Day 9: Samarkand

Meals: B, L, D

Today, explore the highlights of Samarkand and its city centre, beginning at Registan Square to admire its three stunning madrassahs: the Ulug-Bek Madrasah (15th century), the Tillya-Kori Madrasah (17th century), and the Sher-Dor Madrasah (17th century). Visit Gur Emir, the mausoleum of the great conqueror Tamerlane.

Continue to the Bibi-Khanum Mosque, the grandest structure of Amir Temur’s era, before exploring the Silk Road bazaar and the Shahi Zinda necropolis. The day concludes with a visit to Bagizagan Winery, including a tour of the museum and a wine tasting experience. Sightseeing today is around 3-4 hours on foot.



Destination Information

Registan Square – One of Samarkand’s most iconic landmarks, Registan Square is framed on three sides by the turquoise-tiled Sher-Dor and Tillya-Kori Madrasahs. Both the interiors and exteriors are richly decorated with ornamental glazed brickwork, mosaics, and carved marble.

The square is celebrated as an architectural gem of Islamic art and is particularly notable for its rare depiction of animals in Islamic decoration. Nearby, a large bazaar offers a wide variety of goods including nuts, fresh and dried fruit, spices, honey, and local crafts.

Shah-i-Zinda – This mausoleum complex, whose name means “Tomb of the Living King,” is located northeast of the city. It surrounds what is believed to be the grave of Qusam ibn-Abbas, a cousin of the Prophet Mohammed who is thought to have brought Islam to the region in the 7th century. The complex features a series of quiet, beautifully decorated rooms, making it both a spiritual and architectural highlight of Samarkand.

Day 10: Samarkand | Shakhrisabz

Meals: B, L, D

This morning, travel approximately 90 km south of Samarkand to Shakhrisabz, the birthplace of the great conqueror Amir Timur (Tamerlane). The journey takes around 2 hours. Explore the city’s highlights, including the remnants of Ak-Sarai Palace, the Dorus-Tilavat cemetery, and the Kok-Gumbas Mosque. Return to Samarkand in the afternoon.

**Destination Information**

Shakhrisabz – A 2700-year-old city that has played a major role in the history of the Central Asia region, mostly due to it being the birthplace of Amir Timur in 1336. During the early years of the Timurid Dynasty, the city enjoyed his considerable patronage.

Ak-Sarai Palace – One of the greatest buildings in Shakhrisabz, Ak-Sarai Palace means ‘White Palace’. Timur’s most ambitious project, construction began in 1380 and took 24 years to complete, a few months before the death of the great ruler.

Dorus Tilavat Cemetery – The original burial complex of Timur’s ancestors and was formed after the death of the eminent religious leader Shamsiddin Kulal, the founder of Sufism, the spiritual mentor of Emir Taragay and of Timur himself.

Kok-Gumbas Mosque – Construction on the Kok-Gumbas Mosque began in 1435 on the order of Timur’s grandson, Ukug Beg. The name translates to ‘blue dome’.

Day 11: Samarkand to Tashkent

Meals: B, L, D

Continue exploring Samarkand with a visit to Ulugbek’s Observatory, built in 1428–1429 by Ulugbek, the grandson of Amir Timur, followed by a visit to the ancient settlement of Afrosiab.



Enjoy some leisure time for shopping in Samarkand before transferring to the train station in the late afternoon for your 2-hour journey to Tashkent. Depending on the group size, luggage will be transferred by road.

Destination Information

Ulugh Beg Observatory – Ulugh Beg was Tamerlane’s grandson and a great astronomer. During his rule in the 15th century, he summoned the great minds of the Islamic world to Samarkand.

Afrosiab – Located on the spurs of the Chupan-Ata hills northeast of present-day Samarkand. According to legend, it was here on the banks of the river Siab that the Turanian king and hero Afrosiab, a figure from the folk epic Shahnama, founded the town that later became the capital of Sogdiana.

Day 12: Goodbye Uzbekistan, Hello Kyrgyzstan

Meals: B, L, D

Transfer to the airport this morning for your flight to Bishkek, capital of Kyrgyzstan. The rest of the day is at leisure until a welcome dinner in the evening.



Destination Information

Bishkek – The capital of Kyrgyzstan which did not develop until 1825, when the Kokand Khanate enclosed the site as a fortress. By 1864, the Russians had captured the fortress and in 1878, founded the city of Bishkek. Bishkek is a city of wide boulevards and marble-facade public buildings combined with numerous Soviet-style apartment blocks. Most streets are flanked on both sides by narrow irrigation channels that water the innumerable trees, which provide shade during the hot summers.

Day 13: Bishkek & Ala Archa National Park

Meals: B, L, D

Begin the day at Ala-Archa National Park, a stunning alpine haven in the Tian Shan mountains, 40 minutes outside of Bishkek. Enjoy some light walking before returning to Bishkek for lunch.

In the afternoon, explore the city’s highlights, including Central Square, the iconic Manas Monument, and a bustling local bazaar (closed on Monday’s). Sightseeing today is leisurely, with approximately 3–4 hours on foot.



Destination Information

Ala Archa National Park – Ala-Archa is an alpine national park in the Tian Shan Mountains. The name Ala Archa translates as ‘Bright Juniper’ from Kyrgyz as the whole gorge is covered with various trees including the main one – juniper.

Central Square – Also known as Ala-Too Square, Bishkek's central public square was laid out during the Soviet era and redesigned in 2003 following independence, when a statue of Lenin was replaced by a monument to Manas, the hero of the Kyrgyz national epic.

Day 14: Bishkek – Cholpon-Ata

Meals: B, L, D

Travel 5-6 hours by road to the shimmering northern shores of Issyk Kul, the world's second-largest alpine lake. Despite its high-altitude setting, its saline waters never freeze—earning it the evocative name ‘Warm Lake’.

En route, pause for lunch and a visit to the fascinating Museum of Nomadic Civilization, offering insight into Kyrgyzstan's rich nomadic heritage.



On arrival in Cholpon-Ata, take to the water for a scenic one-hour motorboat cruise, soaking up the vast, tranquil beauty of the lake framed by distant mountain ranges. Later, check in to your hotel for an overnight stay.

Destination Information

Cholpon-Ata – A resort town on the northern shore of Issyk-Kul, Central Asia's largest lake, Cholpon-Ata is Kyrgyzstan's main summer destination. The town is known for its beaches, mild climate, and the open-air Petroglyphs Museum, which contains thousands of Bronze Age rock carvings scattered across a hillside site.

Issyk Kul – Issyk-Kul is the second largest mountain lake in the world, after Lake Titicaca in South America. Its name means “warm lake”, as it does not freeze in winter due to its natural salinity. The lake stretches 200 km in length and 60 km in width, with a maximum depth of 730 m, surrounded by the dramatic peaks of the Terskey and Kungey Ala-Too ranges.

The Museum of Nomadic Civilization – Dedicated to the thousand-year history of the nomadic peoples of Kyrgyzstan, the museum holds a rich collection of artifacts, historical objects, and traditional clothing that illuminate the daily life, culture, and customs of those who once roamed the region's vast steppe and mountain landscapes.

Day 15: Cholpon-Ata – Karakol

Meals: B, L, D

After breakfast, travel 3-4 hours east along the scenic shores of Issyk Kul to Karakol, with the vast lake and mountain vistas as your constant backdrop.

En route, stop in the village of Tup to sample kurut, the region's distinctive dried Kyrgyz cheese. Continue to a nearby farm to learn about the breeding of prized thoroughbred horses and impressive Arashan rams, an important part of Kyrgyz pastoral culture.



Continue to Karakol and relax in a local hot spring, a perfect way to soak in the surrounding natural beauty, then join a Dungan family for a delicious dinner, offering a taste of their unique culinary traditions. Overnight in a hotel in Karakol for two-nights.

Destination Information

Karakol – Located in eastern Kyrgyzstan near the eastern tip of Lake Issyk-Kul and at the foot of the Terskey Ala-Too mountains. Known for its blend of Russian, Dungan, and Kyrgyz influences, Karakol offers unique architecture, including the historic Russian Orthodox cathedral and the Dungan Mosque.

Kurut – A traditional Central Asian dairy product: a hard, salty cheese ball made from dried, fermented milk. It has a long shelf life, making it a staple for nomadic peoples, and is often enjoyed as a snack or accompaniment to meals.

Ak-Suu Hot Springs – A natural thermal spa renowned for their warm, mineral-rich waters, believed to have therapeutic properties.

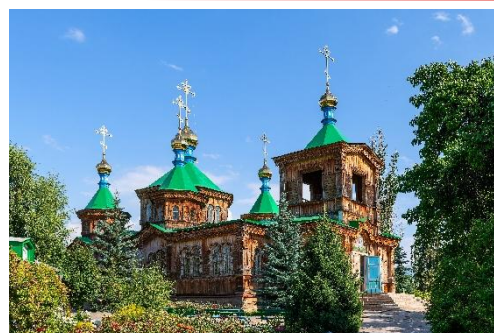
Day 16: Karakol

Meals: B, L, D

After breakfast, head to Karakol Gorge for an easy one-hour walk around the ski base, surrounded by alpine scenery, before returning to Karakol.

Return to discover Karakol's highlights today, including the Dungan Mosque, the wooden Russian Orthodox Holy Trinity Church, and a local bazaar.

Following lunch at a local restaurant, visit the inspiring One Village One Product centre, a social enterprise that supports local women and promotes the products they produce, such as jam, dried fruit and felt souvenirs.



This evening, visit a welcoming Uyghur family for dinner and a traditional lagman noodle-making demonstration.

Sightseeing today is leisurely, with approximately 3–4 hours on foot.

Destination Information

Dungan Mosque – The Dungan Mosque in Karakol is a remarkable architectural landmark built in 1910 by the Dungan community, who fled to Kyrgyzstan from China. It is famous for being constructed entirely of wood without the use of a single metal nail, blending traditional Chinese design with Islamic purpose.

Holy Trinity Church – The Holy Trinity Cathedral is a striking wooden landmark in Karakol, originally built in 1895 on the site of an earlier brick church destroyed by an earthquake. Its intricate architecture reflects the Tsarist era, featuring traditional five-domed styling and elaborate fretwork.

Lagman – Lagman is a signature Central Asian dish consisting of thick, hand-pulled noodles served with a savory stir-fry of meat (usually beef or lamb) and seasonal vegetables. A culinary staple of the Uyghur and Dungan people, it is seasoned with a fragrant blend of garlic, cumin, and star anise.

Day 17: Karakol – Tamga

Meals: B, L, D

Rise early to experience the lively Karakol Animal Market before breakfast. Then, journey 2-3 hours along the scenic southern shores of Issyk Kul to the village of Tamga, with ever-changing lake and mountain vistas along the way.

En route, visit the dramatic Jetti-Oguz Gorge, renowned for its vivid red sandstone formations, including the romantic ‘Broken Heart’ and the towering ‘Seven Bulls’. Enjoy an easy one-hour walk through the gorge, taking in sweeping views of this striking landscape before stopping for lunch.



Continue to Tamga and check in to your yurt camp, featuring private en suite facilities, where you’ll stay for the next two nights. This evening, help the camp chef prepare dinner – traditional manty dumplings, a beloved Central Asian dish.

Please note – The animal market is a traditional working livestock market. Conditions are basic and can be crowded, noisy, and muddy, and animal welfare standards may differ from those expected in New Zealand. Some guests may find the experience confronting. The visit is optional, and guests may choose to remain at the hotel.

Destination Information

Karakol Animal Market – One of the largest and most authentic markets in the region, it offers a fascinating glimpse into traditional trading practices, where locals gather to buy and sell livestock.

Jetti-Oguz Gorge – Located near Karakol, it is famous for its striking red sandstone cliffs, including the iconic “Seven Bulls” formation. It is a popular destination for hiking, horseback riding, and photography.

Manty – Large steamed dumplings that are a staple of Kyrgyz cuisine, manty are traditionally filled with minced lamb and onion, though beef and pumpkin variations are also common. Typically accompanied by sour cream or a spiced vinegar dip.

Day 18: Skazka Canyon & Barskoon Gorge

Meals: B, L, D

Enjoy a full day of exploration beginning with a visit to Skazka Canyon, where you'll take a 1–2 hour walk among its surreal red rock formations and sculpted landscapes.

Continue to Kadji-Sai village for lunch with a local family of musicians, accompanied by a lively folk performance showcasing traditional Kyrgyz culture.

In the afternoon, explore Barskoon Gorge and view the famous 'Tears of the Snow Leopard' waterfall from a scenic lookout, with around 1–2 hours on foot.

**Destination Information**

Skazka Canyon – Also known as “Fairy Tale Canyon”, the vividly colored rock formations shaped by erosion resembles a fantastical landscape of towers, spires, and cliffs.

Barskoon Gorge – The gorge is approximately 25 km long and is famous for its natural landmarks, including the Barskoon Waterfall and cliffs formed by tectonic and erosional processes. It provides access to alpine meadows, trekking routes, and is home to diverse flora and fauna.

Day 19: Tamga – Chon-Kemin

Meals: B, L, D

After breakfast, travel to Chon-Kemin Nature Park, a scenic journey of approximately 4-5 hours through Kyrgyzstan's changing landscapes.

En route, meet a traditional eagle hunter and observe the training techniques of these magnificent birds of prey, an ancient nomadic practice still preserved today. Continue to Kyzyl-Tuu village, renowned for its master craftsmen, where you will learn about the traditional art of yurt construction.

Arrive in Chon-Kemin for a one-night stay in a guesthouse. Learn how to make the hearty Kyrgyz dish of tash kordo. Enjoy a leisurely walk for around 2 hours in the surrounding nature park while you wait for dinner to cook.



Destination Information

Chon-Kemin Nature Park – Covering approximately 26,000 hectares and features a mix of alpine meadows, forests, rivers, and mountains. It is home to diverse wildlife, including ibex, roe deer, bears, and numerous bird species.

Kyzyl-Tuu Village – A rural settlement in Kyrgyzstan providing a glimpse into traditional Kyrgyz life, including livestock herding, local crafts, and daily routines.

Day 20: Chon-Kemin – Bishkek

Meals: B, L, D

Begin the morning learning to make Boorsok, the golden, pillowy fried bread central to Kyrgyz hospitality, enjoyed fresh as part of a traditional breakfast.

Set off on the 3-4 hour journey back to Bishkek, with a stop at the iconic Burana Tower, an 11th-century minaret rising from the Chuy Valley. Climb to the top for sweeping panoramic views of the surrounding steppe (optional), then wander the open-air museum to discover the enigmatic ancient stone figures known as balbals, scattered across the landscape like silent sentinels.



Before continuing to Bishkek, witness a thrilling display of ulak tartysh, the national sport of the nomadic peoples of Central Asia, as skilled horsemen compete in a test of strength, horsemanship, and strategy that has been played across these plains for centuries.

Please note: ulak tartysh is traditionally played with a goat carcass, however, for this demonstration a replica will be used.

Enjoy lunch before arriving in Bishkek, where the afternoon is yours to explore at leisure. The journey concludes with a farewell dinner to celebrate your time in Kyrgyzstan.

Destination Information

Burana Tower – This minaret was built in the 11th century in the medieval city of Balasagun, capital of the mighty Karakhanid Empire. Visitors can climb up the minaret's winding staircase to enjoy a wide view of the scenic Chuy Valley. There is also an open-air museum here featuring a collection of ancient balbals, carved stone figures often found around ancient burial mounds.

Ulak Tartysh – Kyrgyzstan's ancient national sport, ulak tartish (also known as Kok-boru) pits two teams of riders against each other in a fierce contest of horsemanship and strength. Recognised by UNESCO as an Intangible Cultural Heritage, it remains one of the most thrilling expressions of nomadic culture in Central Asia.

Day 21: Depart Bishkek

Meals: B

Any time before your flight is at leisure. You will be transferred from your hotel to the airport, according to the departure time of your international flight.

Late check-out is not included. Additional nights' before and after your tour can be arranged. Please contact our Reservations team to book

UZBEKISTAN & KYRGYZSTAN TRAVEL INFORMATION

VISAS:

Travel to Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan (for stays under 30 days) are visa free for New Zealand passport holders. Please be advised that your passport must have at least six months validity left on it when you arrive back in New Zealand.

All information with regards to visas will be updated regularly on our website as we find visas process' are changing on regular basis.

For the latest information on visa procedures, processing times and requirements, please kindly refer to our website <https://www.wendywutours.co.nz/help-and-advice/passports-and-visas/>

EATING IN CENTRAL ASIA:

All meals are included on our fully inclusive Classic tours, from dinner on the group's arrival day until breakfast on the day of departure. Our schedule of meals is designed so that you can experience the local dishes, their individual flavours as well as different ways they are prepared and cooked. Breakfast is buffet style served at the hotel with western options available (yurts and guesthouses are local dishes). Lunch and dinner are often served at a restaurant or with a local family.

Uzbek and Kyrgyz cuisine share many similarities, both influenced by Nomadic, Middle Eastern, and Turkic traditions, featuring ingredients such as yoghurt, dried fruit, legumes, and mild spices like cumin. Common dishes include lagman (handmade noodles), shashlyk (kebabs), naan (flatbread), manty (steamed dumplings), and plov (rice pilaf) — considered the national dish of Uzbekistan and a true centrepiece of Central Asian cooking. Mutton and chicken are the main meats and feature in most meals. Uzbek cuisine in particular is renowned for its rich, hearty flavours and generous hospitality, with meals often shared communally. Local breakfasts often include naan with airan (a yoghurt-based drink) and green tea. You may also be served a fried egg, jam, honey, or toast. Black tea and coffee are widely available in cities but may be limited in more remote areas. Fresh milk for tea or coffee is not commonly served; dairy is more often consumed as yoghurt-based drinks such as airan.

Despite the predominantly Muslim culture, drinking alcohol is widely accepted across this ex-Soviet region — Kyrgyzstan more so than Uzbekistan, where alcohol is available but less prominent. The most popular mealtime drink is chay (green tea), available at most meals, often served with a large sugar crystal added to the pot or glass.

We suggest bringing your favourite tea or coffee bags, biscuits, and any other snacks from home. There are also small supermarkets and shops in most towns along the route where you can pick up local brands of snacks and drinks.

If you have any food allergies or dietary preferences, please let us know at the time of booking. Your National Escort will do their best to accommodate your requirements; however, no guarantees can be made. Vegetarian options are available but may be limited and repetitive in rural areas. There are always plenty of salads, vegetables, and bread on offer.

ACCOMMODATION:

Your accommodation throughout the tour has been carefully selected for its convenient location, comfort, and authentic character. Standards tend to be simpler than what you may be accustomed to. Properties are generally rated at a local three- to four-star standard; however, hotels, yurt camps and guesthouses do not follow an international rating system, so facilities and quality may vary from those in the New Zealand.

Hotels – Hotels provide twin rooms with two single beds, therefore unfortunately we cannot guarantee a double bed, even if it is requested.

Yurt – A yurt, locally known as a “boz ui”, is the traditional home of nomads across Kyrgyzstan. Constructed from a wooden frame covered with felt and canvas and often raised on wooden platforms, these circular tents are designed to withstand the region’s harsh mountain climate. Inside, you’ll find warm fabrics, furs, and beautifully crafted wooden furniture that combine comfort and practicality. Yurts typically feature two or three single wooden beds with linens, a heating stove, thick blankets, a low table with chairs, and one electrical socket, offering a cozy and authentic nomadic experience.

This tour features a stay in a yurt including an en-suite bathroom.

Guesthouse – These provide basic yet comfortable rooms in a small guesthouse. Every couple/single person will have their own room, with private western facilities. Breakfast and dinner is served in the restaurant.

DEVELOPMENT AND WHAT TO EXPECT:

Travelling in Central Asia offers both rewards and challenges. While the region is developing rapidly, it still differs from the west in terms of infrastructure and tourist facilities. Safety standards and signage may differ from what you are used to. For example, you may encounter road hazards such as uneven surfaces, unmarked holes, or minimal safety barriers.

Uzbekistan has undergone significant change in recent years. Its famous Silk Road cities (Tashkent, Samarkand, Bukhara, and Khiva) are well set up for visitors, with good hotels and improving infrastructure. Outside of the main cities, facilities may be more basic. English is not widely spoken beyond hotels and tourist sites, though Russian is commonly understood. Uzbekistan uses a Latin-based alphabet, though Cyrillic is still commonly seen, particularly among older signage and publications. Your National Escort will be invaluable for communication and navigation throughout.

Kyrgyzstan's infrastructure reflects its Soviet history and mountainous terrain. Roads can be in poor condition, and levels of English outside hotels are limited. Newly built hotels may have excellent facilities but staff with less experience in international tourism. Cyrillic is the standard alphabet, so your guides will be indispensable for navigating and communicating. Travellers with a sense of humour and flexibility are often those who find the experience most rewarding.

Factors such as weather, road conditions, and occasional closures may affect the schedule. Your National Escort will do everything possible to minimise disruption but cannot guarantee against delays, changes, or, in rare cases, cancellations of parts of the itinerary.

INSURANCE:

It is a condition of booking with us that you take out suitable travel insurance. You must provide us with the name of your insurer, policy number and their 24-hour emergency contact number when you book with us or as soon as possible thereafter. These details will be available to your national escort should they be required. Wendy Wu Tours will not be liable for any costs incurred by you due to your failure to take out suitable travel insurance from the date of booking.

TIPPING POLICY:

Tipping is customary in most parts of the world, and Central Asia is no exception. To save you the uncertainty of knowing who to tip, how much, and having the right cash to hand at the right time, Wendy Wu Tours operates a simple tipping policy. A stated amount is collected by your National Escort at the start of your tour and distributed to local guides and drivers throughout the journey. The amount is set at a fair and reasonable level for all, and includes a gratuity for the National Escort.

Whilst most of our travellers appreciate the convenience of this arrangement, we recognise it may not suit everyone. As this is a group tour, however, we kindly ask that all guests follow the same protocol to ensure fairness to fellow travellers and the smooth running of your tour.

GROUP SIZE:

On Classic Tours in Central Asia, will be no more than 20 travellers in each group although you may encounter other Wendy Wu our groups while you are travelling.

All our departures are guaranteed to operate with a National Escort in each country with a minimum of 10 travellers booked. However, at our discretion we may operate departures with a smaller group size, as we endeavour to run all advertised departures wherever viable. For groups with fewer than 10 travellers, departures may operate with local guides only.

TRANSPORT:

Road conditions across both Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan can vary considerably. In Kyrgyzstan in particular, many routes are rough, narrow, or unpaved, especially in mountainous regions. In Uzbekistan, main routes between cities are generally in better condition, though rural roads may still be challenging. Travel times may be longer than expected, so journeys require flexibility and patience.

Coaches – An air-conditioned coach will be used throughout the tour to provide comfortable transfers and sightseeing travel, unless road conditions prevent it. In Kyrgyzstan particularly, where road conditions or upgrades require it, smaller vehicles may need to be arranged.

Planes – Internal flights are based on economy class. Pre-seat flight allocation is not available. It is not uncommon for flights to be cancelled or rescheduled last minute, and your National Escort will re-organise sightseeing accordingly.

Trains – The Afrosiyob train is used. Luggage may be transferred by road due to limited storage space onboard. Please ensure your suitcase is lockable.

Baggage Information - We recommend that you do not exceed 20kgs of checked in baggage on your international flights as many of the domestic airlines we use have a luggage allowance of 20kgs. In addition to this you are permitted to take 5kgs as hand baggage. Any additional luggage can be paid for locally.

CURRENCY:

Uzbekistan – The local currency is the Uzbekistani Som (UZS). Uzbekistan remains largely a cash-based society; while major hotels and larger restaurants in cities accept Visa credit cards, cash is essential for markets, smaller restaurants, and rural areas. ATMs are available in major cities including Tashkent, Samarkand, Bukhara, and Khiva, though they can be unreliable. US dollars are the most useful foreign currency to bring, as they offer the best exchange rates; euros are also accepted at most exchange bureaux. We recommend bringing a supply of clean, undamaged notes as torn or marked bills may be refused.

Kyrgyzstan – The local currency is the Kyrgyz Som (KGS). As with Uzbekistan, cash is king outside of major cities and card payment facilities are limited in rural areas, markets, and smaller restaurants. ATMs can be unreliable away from Bishkek and Karakol. US dollars and euros are the most widely accepted foreign currencies for exchange.

For both countries, we recommend carrying a mix of cash and cards, notifying your bank before departure to avoid your card being blocked, and keeping small denomination notes handy for day-to-day purchases

CLIMATE:

Uzbekistan is best visited in spring (April to early June) or autumn (September to October), when temperatures are mild and comfortable, typically ranging from 15°C to 28°C. Summers (June to August) can be hot, with temperatures reaching 40°C, particularly in the desert cities of Bukhara and Samarkand. Lightweight, breathable clothing and high-factor sun protection are essential in summer months.

Kyrgyzstan is best visited between April and October, when the landscapes are accessible, vibrant, and at their most rewarding. Spring (April–May) brings blooming valleys and crisp, fresh air with temperatures ranging from 10°C to 22°C, while summer (June–August) offers warm, sunny days ideal for trekking and yurt stays, with valley temperatures reaching up to 32°C. September is widely considered one of the finest months to visit, with mild days, cooler evenings, and low rainfall. By October, autumn colours paint the valleys gold before colder temperatures and early snowfall begin to close mountain roads.

Throughout both countries, mountain weather can change quickly. Layered clothing, a warm jacket, and a light waterproof are recommended regardless of when you travel.

VACCINATIONS AND YOUR HEALTH:

Wendy Wu does not give specific health advice, but we do recommend you see your doctor at least six weeks prior to travel for advice and to allow time for any necessary vaccinations. Please remember to take your itinerary with you.

Medication – Bring a doctor's prescription if you travel with prescription medicines and declare them on your customs declaration form. Some medications may not be permitted.

Water – Tap water is not safe to drink in either Uzbekistan or Kyrgyzstan. Bottled water is widely available.

Altitude – Whilst parts of Kyrgyzstan sit at significant elevation, this tour stays between 700m and 2,200m, so the effects of Altitude Mountain Sickness should be minimal. Regardless, we recommend staying well hydrated and informing your National Escort if you feel unwell.

ITINERARY CHANGES:

It is our intention to adhere to the day-to-day itinerary as printed; however, the order of events or sightseeing may change as we look to improve our tours or as local conditions dictate; in these circumstances we will make the best possible arrangements whilst maintaining the integrity of your trip.

AFTER YOUR BOOKING:

Once you have booked with Wendy Wu Tours, you will receive a confirmation invoice including a visa application form (if applicable), and a help sheet. Your final documentation pack will be sent to you approximately 2-3 weeks prior to departure.

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