Budget Central Asia Small Group Tour

Duration: 14 days

You will visit: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan

Tour Itinerary:

Day 1 – **SUN: Almaty – Arrival (Kazakhstan)**

Upon arrival in Almaty, check into the hotel at noon. After your flight, take some time to rest and recharge for your fourteen-day Central Asia Group Tour. Spend the night at the hotel in Almaty.

Meals: none

Day 2 – Mon: Almaty – Charyn Canyon – Almaty (Kazakhstan)

Start your second day with a hearty breakfast at the hotel. Your tour guide and driver will be waiting to meet you at your hotel in Almaty. Leave Almaty and make your way to Charyn Canyon, taking in the breathtaking views of the Altai Mountains and quaint villages enroute (220 km, 3-4 hours). Arrive at Charyn Canyon in time for a scenic picnic lunch. Take a hike through this stunning canyon, characterized by towering mountains reaching up to 300 meters and the picturesque "Valley of Castles" stretching over 2 kilometers. Return to Almaty in the late afternoon. Overnight at the hotel.

Meals: breakfast, picnic-lunch

Day 3 – Tue: Almaty – border - Bishkek (Kazakhstan/Kyrgyzstan)

After breakfast at the hotel, your guide will meet you in the lobby for a sightseeing tour of Almaty. Visit Park of 28 Panfilov Guardsmen, where you'll learn more about the city's history and see one of the largest wooden buildings in the world, Zenkov Cathedral. Visit the Memorial of Glory and the Eternal Flame. Continue to Republic Square and Almaty City Museum. Shop for sweets and souvenirs at the famed Green Bazaar.

Depart Almaty and drive to Bishkek via a newly built highway enjoying the nature landscapes on the way (250 km, 4 h.). Pass border control and arrive in Bishkek, then transfer to hotel. Overnight in Bishkek.

Meals: breakfast

Day 4 – Wed: Bishkek – Burana – Bishkek (Kyrgyzstan)

Breakfast at the hotel on the fourth day of your Central Asia Group Tour. Begin your day with a city tour of Bishkek's impressive examples of Soviet urban planning and architecture: Oak Park, Ala Too Square, Manas Statue, the National Museum of Fine Arts, the Philharmonic Hall, and Victory Monument.

Transfer to Don Aryk village for lunch with local Kyrgyz family at their home. After lunch, local women will demonstrate the construction of a yurt, and you can even take part in it! Then drive to Burana Tower, part of the ancient city of Balasagun (11-13th centuries) and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Return to Bishkek. Overnight at the hotel.

Meals: breakfast, lunch

Day 5 – Thu: Bishkek – Ala Archa – Tashkent (Kyrgyzstan/Uzbekistan)

Your Central Asia group tour continues with a scenic drive to the stunning Ala-Archa National Park. After a delicious breakfast, your guide will meet you and take you to this breathtaking alpine gorge. Hike through the park, admiring the snow-capped peaks as you make your way to Ak-Sai Waterfall and the banks of the Ala-Archa River. After an energizing picnic lunch, return to Bishkek for your late afternoon flight to Tashkent. Upon arrival in Tashkent, you'll be transferred to your hotel. Overnight in Tashkent.

Meals: breakfast, picnic-lunch

Day 6 – Fri: Tashkent (Uzbekistan)

After breakfast, your guide and driver will pick you up from your hotel to begin Tashkent city tour. Your private tour will include: a visit to the Museum of Applied Arts, an informative collection of Uzbekistan's finest handicrafts housed in an ornately decorated villa. Take a ride on the Tashkent Metro. Each station is decorated with ceramic tiles and murals depicting a unique theme. Walk through Amir Timur Square and Independence Square, admiring the paintings for sale on 'Broadway' Drive. Excursion to the Old City, including the architectural complex Hast-Imam (15th century), which holds the oldest known Quran in the world. Visit to Chorsu Bazaar, one of the oldest markets in Central Asia, where you can sample or buy sweets, fruits and souvenirs. Overnight at the hotel.

Meals: breakfast

Day 7 – Sat: Tashkent – Samarkand (Uzbekistan)

On your 7th day the driver will transfer you to the railway station in the morning for a train journey to the stunning city of Samarkand. You will have Samarkand city tour, visit Gur Emir, and the impressive Registan Square, with its three Madrasahs dating back to the 15th to 17th centuries. Take in the beauty of Bibi Khanum Mosque and stroll through the multi-level complex of Siab Bazaar, where you can find souvenirs and sample local sweets, fruits, and the famous Samarkand bread. Explore the impressive Shakhi-Zinda, a 15th-century burial complex, and walk the imposing pathway to see its blue-domed tombs. End the day with a visit to the Ulugbek Observatory, where you can view the remains of a 14th-15th-century sextant and tour the Ulugbek Museum. After a full day of exploration, rest and relax at your hotel. This is just one of many exciting experiences you'll have on your Central Asia Group Tour.

Meals: breakfast

Day 8 – Sun: Samarkand – border – Seven Lakes - Penjikent (Uzbekistan/Tajikistan)

Begin your day with a delicious breakfast at the hotel before transferring to the Uzbekistan-Tajikistan border crossing at Jartepa (50km). After passing through customs and passport control, your local Tajik guide and driver will be waiting for you on the Tajikistan side to take you to the breathtaking Seven Lakes (90km). Located in the Fann Mountains, each of the Seven Lakes boasts its own unique color, ranging from turquoise to purple. Take in the natural beauty of this special place and enjoy your lunch at a guest house near the fourth lake. Continue your journey to the charming city of Penjikent, where you'll spend the night at a hotel.

Meals: breakfast, lunch, dinner

Day 9 – Mon: Penjikent – border – Samarkand (Tajikistan/Uzbekistan)

Have breakfast and start a tour to ancient Penjikent, the ruins of a town founded by the Sogdians in the 5th century. In old Penjikent you'll get to see the foundations of houses, a citadel with Zoroastrian fire

temples, the remains of the city bazaar and other excavated ruins. In the newer part of Penjikent, visit a local bazaar, mosque, and the Rudaki Museum. Drive to the Jartepa border crossing (30 km, 40 min) via Sarazm, a UNESCO World Heritage Site founded in the 4th century BC. After crossing the border, you'll continue your group tour in Uzbekistan, with your driver meeting you at the border to take you to your hotel in Samarkand. Overnight at the hotel.

Meals: breakfast, lunch

Day 10 – Tue: Samarkand – Gijduvon – Bukhara (Uzbekistan)

After breakfast at hotel, free time. Group tour of Central Asia continues with a drive from Samarkand to Bukhara via Gijduvan ceramic center and pottery master-class, before having lunch.

Drive to Bukhara an don the way visit the Emir's Summer Residence at Sitorai Mokhi-Khosa (19th century). This is a unique site combining Oriental and Russian architecture (please note that no English-speaking guide provided here). Check-in to the hotel in Bukhara.

In the evening, there is a National show at Nadir Divan-Begi Madrasa with dinner. Overnight at the hotel.

Meals: breakfast, lunch, dinner

Day 11 – Wed: Bukhara (Uzbekistan)

Begin the morning with a city walking tour led by your local guide. Your private tour will include the Lyabi-Hauz Ensemble, Magoki-Attori Mosque and the Trade Domes (15-16th centuries) that serve today as a tourist bazaar. Continue your excursion to Poi Kalyan Ensemble, including the Kalyan Minaret, Kalyan Mosque and Miri-Arab Madrasah. Visit Ulugbek and Abdulazizkhan Madrasahs. Discover the Ark Fortress and museum in Bukhara. Next site is Bolo-Khauz Mosque with a pond. Last site is the mausoleum of Ismail Samani. Finish your 6-hour walking city tour. Free time in the evening. Overnight at the hotel in Bukhara.

Optional Activity: Immerse yourself, literally, in centuries-old traditions at the Bozori Kord Hammam, a traditional Turkic bathhouse. Opened in the 14th century, it's been in operation ever since.

Meals: breakfast

Day 12 – Thu: Bukhara – Khiva (Uzbekistan)

Breakfast. In the morning depart Bukhara and drive to Khiva (480 km, 7 h). Today we will have an overland transfer from Bukhara to Khiva through Kyzylkum desert. Caravans on the Great Silk Road carrying porcelain and spices used the same route for hundreds of years. Arrival in Khiva, the "museum under the open sky" late in the afternoon. After check-in, free time to discover Khiva. Overnight in a hotel located inside or near Ichan-Kala, the historical center of Khiva and a UNESCO World Heritage Site.
Meals: breakfast

Day 13 – Fri: Khiva – Urgench – Tashkent (Uzbekistan)

After breakfast at the hotel, take a walking tour around Itchan-Kala with a local guide in your Central Asia Group Tour. Start with Kunya-Ark Khan's castle and the inner citadel of Ichan Kala, before continuing to the following sites: Kalta Minor Tower, the tallest minaret in Central Asia; Muhammad Amin-Khan, the biggest medieval madrasah in Khiva and Mukhammad Rahimkhan Madrasah; Juma Mosque, with 212 wooden columns and a minaret 32.5 m high; Tash-Hauli with its high battlements, towers and fortified gates; Necropolis of Pahlavan Mahmud, the cultic center of Ichan Kala; residence of Islam Khodja, vizier of the last khan.

In the late afternoon you will be transferred to Urgench airport (35 km, 45 min) for a flight to Tashkent (1093 km, 1 h 40 min). Upon arrival transfer to the hotel. Overnight at the hotel.

Meals: breakfast

Day 14 – Sat: Tashkent, departure (Uzbekistan)

Free morning before hotel check-out by noon. Your driver will take you to the airport for your flight home. End of the Budget Central Asia Group Tour.

Inclusions:

- Accommodation based on double/twin room sharing, with breakfast, 13 nights;
- All road transfers including airport and train station (2 persons in sedan, 3-8 persons in minivan);
- Local English-speaking escort guide on days 2-5 and 8-9;
- Local English-speaking guide for the city tours in Tashkent, Samarkand, Bukhara and Khiva;
- Entrance fees to sights as per itinerary;
- Yurt construction show in Don Aryk village with lunch on day 4;
- Gijduvan pottery master class and lunch;
- National folklore show and dinner in Bukhara;
- Economy-class tickets for flights from Bishkek to Tashkent and Urgench to Tashkent;
- Economy-class tickets for Tashkent to Samarkand train;

- Meals as designated in the program;
- 1L bottle of water per person per day;

Exclusions:

- Tour leader to accompany the group for the whole duration of the tour;
- Meals not indicated in the program;
- Hotel charges for additional services;
- Personal travel insurance;
- International flight tickets before and after the tour;
- All visas, e-visas and visa support letters to Central Asia countries;
- Tips are not included (driver, guide, porter);
- All other charges and services not mentioned under “Inclusions”.