

Pearls of Central Asia Tour

Duration: 16 days

You will visit: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan.

Tour Itinerary:

Day 1: Almaty – Arrival (Kazakhstan)

Arrive in Almaty, where your driver will transfer you to your hotel. Check-in is at 14:00, after which you can enjoy free time and recharge for a 16 days Central Asia tour. Overnight stay in Almaty

Meals: none.

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

Your guide and driver will meet you at 09:00 at your hotel in Almaty. Depart for Charyn Canyon, a scenic 220km drive (3-4 hours) through picturesque Altai Mountains and charming villages. Upon arrival, enjoy a picnic lunch before hiking through Charyn Canyon, where dramatic cliffs soar up to 200 meters, and the breathtaking "Valley of Castles" stretches over 2 kilometers. Return to Almaty by late afternoon. Overnight at your Almaty hotel.

Meals: breakfast, picnic lunch.

Day 3: Almaty – Bishkek (Kazakhstan/Kyrgyzstan)

After breakfast at the hotel, meet your guide in the lobby for a sightseeing tour of Almaty. Explore the Park of 28 Panfilov Guardsmen, where you'll discover the city's history and visit Zenkov Cathedral, one of the largest wooden buildings in the world. Pay your respects at the Memorial of Glory and Eternal Flame, honoring soldiers who fought for the country's independence. Continue to Republic Square and the Almaty City Museum before shopping for sweets and souvenirs at the famous Green Bazaar.

In the afternoon, depart Almaty and drive to Bishkek, enjoying scenic natural landscapes along the 250 km route (4 hours). Pass through border control, arrive in Bishkek, and enjoy free time. Overnight in Bishkek.

Meals: breakfast.

Day 4: Bishkek (Kyrgyzstan)

After breakfast, your guide will take you to the Burana Tower (80 km), a UNESCO World Heritage Site and a remnant of the ancient city of Balasagun 11th-13th centuries. Continue to Don Aryk village for a home-cooked lunch with a local Kyrgyz family and enjoy a demonstration of traditional yurt construction.

Return to Bishkek for a short city tour showcasing Soviet-era urban planning and architecture, including Oak Park, Ala-Too Square, the Manas Statue, the National Museum of Fine Arts, the Philharmonic Hall, and the Victory Monument. Overnight at your hotel in Bishkek.

Meals: breakfast, lunch.

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

After breakfast, take a scenic drive to the breathtaking Ala-Archa National Park, located 40 km from Bishkek. Hike through the alpine gorge, enjoying views of snow-capped peaks as you visit Ak-Sai Waterfall and the banks of the Ala-Archa River. After a refreshing picnic lunch, return to Bishkek for your late afternoon flight to Tashkent (1h 10min). Tashkent, Uzbekistan's capital, it's a welcoming gateway to Central Asia with a rich cultural scene. Upon arrival in Tashkent, transfer to your hotel for an overnight stay.

Meals: breakfast, picnic-lunch.

Day 6: Tashkent (Uzbekistan)

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

Meals: breakfast.

Day 7: Tashkent – Samarkand (Uzbekistan)

Your driver will transfer to the railway station for your train to Samarkand (310km, 3h). Upon arrival to Samarkand, a guide and driver will meet you to begin your city tour of Samarkand, the capital of Tamerlane's magnificent empire: Gur Emir, the mausoleum of Tamerlane and Mirzo Ulugbek. Spectacular Registan Square with its three madrasahs (15th -17th centuries), the center of Samarkand for centuries. Bibi Khanum Mosque, built by Tamerlane, and Shakh-Zinda, a 15th century burial complex. Climb the imposing walkway and explore 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. Overnight in Samarkand.

Meals: breakfast.

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

Begin your 8th day on your Private Central Asia Tour with a delicious breakfast at the hotel. Transfer to the Uzbekistan-Tajikistan border crossing at Jartepa (50km, 1h). After passing through customs and passport control, your local Tajik guide and driver will meet you on the Tajikistan side to drive you to Seven Lakes (90km, 2hrs), located in the Fann Mountains. Each lake has its own color, varying from turquoise to purple. Have lunch at the guest house next to the fourth lake, where you'll also stay overnight.

Meals: breakfast, lunch, dinner.

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

Have breakfast at the lake before driving to ancient Penjikent (70km), the ruins of a town founded by the Sogdians in the 5th century. In old Penjikent you'll see the foundations of houses, a citadel with Zoroastrian fire temples, the remains of the city bazaar and other excavated ruins in the old city. In the newer part of Penjikent, visit a local bazaar, mosque, and the Rudaki Museum. Drive to the Jartepa border crossing via Sarazm - a UNESCO World Heritage Site founded in the 4th century BC. After crossing the border, your driver meets you and takes you to a hotel in Samarkand. Overnight in Samarkand.

Meals: breakfast.

Day 10: Samarkand – Gijduvon – Bukhara (Uzbekistan)

The Pearls of Central Asia Tour continues with a drive from Samarkand to Bukhara via Navoi and Gijduvon. Stop on the way at the Rabat-i-Malik Caravanserai (11th century) and Sardoba. Continue to Gijduvon, a small town whose traditional crafts and ceramics have been sought after in Central Asia for centuries due to their quality and colorful, decorative style. Visit the ceramic center and museum. Transfer to Bukhara and check in to the hotel. Enjoy down time as you explore the old streets of Bukhara, whose alleyways resemble a living depiction of "A Thousand and One Nights". Overnight in Bukhara.

Meals: breakfast.

Day 11: 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 (15th-16th centuries) that serve today as a tourist bazaar. Continue your excursion outside of the old city center to see the following: Poi Kalyan Ensemble, (including Kalyan Minaret, Kalyan Mosque and Miri-Arab Madrasah), next Ulugbek and Abdulazizkhan Madrasahs. Continue to Ark Fortress and museum, Bolo-Khauz Mosque and Ismail Samani. Overnight in the Bukhara hotel.

Meals: breakfast.

Day 12: Bukhara – Khiva (Uzbekistan)

Breakfast and depart from Bukhara and drive to Khiva (480 km, 7h). Today we will have an overland transfer through the 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" a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Overnight in a hotel.

Meals: breakfast.

Day 13: Khiva (Uzbekistan)

Take a walking tour around Ichan Kala with a local guide to see Kunya-Ark, the Khan's castle and inner citadel of Ichan Kala, before continuing to the following sites: Kalta Minor Tower, Muhammad Amin-Khan the largest medieval madrasah in Khiva, Mukhammad Rahimkhan Madrasah, Juma Mosque with 212 wooden columns, Tash-Hauli Palace (Stone Courtyard Palace) with its high battlements, towers and fortified gates, Necropolis of Pahlavan Mahmud the cultic center of Ichan Kala, and residence of Islam Khodja, vizier of the last khan, an ensemble consisting of a minaret with the highest observation point in town. Overnight in Khiva.

Meals: breakfast.

Day 14: Khiva – border – Kunya-Urgench – Darvaza (Uzbekistan/Turkmenistan)

After breakfast, your driver will drive to the Turkmenistan border (1h). While crossing the transit zone basic transport is available. Once you pass border control, your Turkmenistan guide will meet you, driver to Kunya-Urgench (110km). Short sightseeing tour in Kunya-Urgench, you'll visit the Tyurabek-Khanym and Sayit Ahmed Mausoleums, Kutlug Timur Minaret, Sultan Tekesh Mausoleum of Khorezmshakh and Kyrk Molla Hill. You'll enjoy a picnic lunch while exploring the area. In the afternoon, you'll take a drive to the Darvaza Gas Crater located in the middle of the Karakum Desert (280 km, 4-5h). You'll set up camp and enjoy the

magnificent ring of fire by night. A delicious fire-cooked meal will be served for dinner near the burning gas crater, once-in-a-lifetime experience. Overnight in a tent/yurt.

Meals: Breakfast, Picnic Lunch, camp style BBQ Dinner.

Day 15: Darvaza – Ashgabat (Turkmenistan)

Watch the desert sunrise before eating a camp-style breakfast. Drive to Ashgabat (280km, 4h). Enjoy the desert drive and photo ops of sand dunes and camels. Arrive in Ashgabat for a sightseeing tour of the capital. Explore the archaeological site of Old Nissa (a UNESCO World Heritage Site) and Spiritual Mosque, one of the largest mosques in Central Asia. Visit the National Museum of History, the Monument of Neutrality, Presidential Square, Ertugrul Gazi Mosque and Independence Park. Overnight at Ashgabat hotel on your last night of Central Asia tour.

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch.

Day 16: Ashgabat (Turkmenistan)

Breakfast and check-out from the hotel. Transfer to Ashgabat International Airport for departure flight. End of Private Central Asia Tour.

Meals: breakfast.

Inclusions:

- Accommodation based on double/twin room sharing, with breakfast, 14 nights;
- Trekking tent in Darvaza or shared Yurt (includes sleeping mat, sleeping bag and pillow, 1 night);
- All road transfers including airport and train station (2 persons in sedan, 3-8 persons in minivan), 4WD in Darvaza;
- Local English-speaking escort guide on days 2-5, 8-9 and 14-15;
- Local English-speaking guide for the city tours in Tashkent, Samarkand, Bukhara and Khiva;
- Entrance fees to sights as per itinerary;
- Economy-class tickets for flight from Bishkek to Tashkent;
- Economy-class tickets for train Tashkent to Samarkand;
- Meals as designated in the program;
- Visa support letter for Turkmenistan tourist visa.

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".

Good to know:

- **Passport and Visa Requirements:** *Ensure your passport is valid for at least six months beyond your travel dates and verify the visa requirements for each country on your itinerary.*
- **Health and Safety:** *Check with your doctor about recommended vaccinations and bring a basic first aid kit. Familiarize yourself with local customs and laws to ensure a safe and enjoyable journey.*
- **Climate and Weather:** *Central Asia's climate varies from hot deserts to snowy mountains. Pack suitable clothing and footwear for the conditions you'll encounter. Ask your personal tour operator for more info.*
- **Currency and Exchange:** *Learn about the local currency for each country on your itinerary and consider carrying some cash or a credit card for convenience. Always exchange money at official exchange offices.*
- **Local Culture:** *Central Asia, with its rich and diverse cultural heritage, offers unique traditions and customs that vary across regions. Respecting these cultural norms is key to a meaningful experience. Learn basic etiquette, such as appropriate dress codes in mosques and local greetings. Central Asians are known for their hospitality, so a polite demeanor goes a long way. With OREXCA, you'll gain deeper insights into local traditions, making your journey culturally enriching and respectful.*