

The Five Stans Tour of Central Asia *New*

Explore the remarkable cities of the Silk Road, discover mountains, deserts and natural wonders, and uncover the rich cultural heritage that defines this vast yet little-known region of Asia.



Group departures

See overleaf for departure dates

Holiday overview

Style	Tour
Accommodation	Hotels, guest houses, yurt camp (1 night)
Grade	Tour
Duration	25 days from London to London
Min/Max group size	4 / 12. Guaranteed to run for 4
Trip Leader	Timur Muslimov
Land only	Joining in Tashkent, Uzbekistan Ending in Almaty, Kazakhstan
Max altitude	2,400m/7,875ft, Seven Lakes, Day 16

Private Departures & Tailor Made itineraries available



tel: +44 (0)1453 844400 info@mountainkingdoms.com www.mountainkingdoms.com

Mountain Kingdoms Ltd, 20 Long Street, Wotton-under-Edge, Gloucestershire GL12 7BT UK
Managing Director: Steven Berry. Registered in England No. 2118433. VAT No. 496 6511 08

Departures

2025 Dates:

Sat 06 Sep - Tue 30 Sep

2026 Dates:

Mon 16 Mar - Thu 09 Apr

Group prices and optional supplements

Please contact us on +44 (0)1453 844400 or visit our website for our land only and flight inclusive prices and single supplement options.

Please note that there is no single room option at the yurt camp in Darvaza.

No Surcharge Guarantee

The flight inclusive or land only price will be confirmed to you at the time you make your booking. There will be no surcharges after your booking has been confirmed.

Will the trip run?

This trip is guaranteed to run for 4 people and for a maximum of 12. In the rare event that we cancel a holiday, we will refund you in full and give you at least 6 weeks warning. Many trips do fill up quickly - we advise you to book early if you want to secure a place(s) on the dates of your choice.

Insurance

We offer a travel insurance scheme - please contact us for details.

Private Departures

We can also offer this trip as a private holiday. A Private Departure follows exactly the same itinerary as the group departure but at dates to suit you (subject to availability) - please contact us with your preferred dates.

Tailor Made service

We pride ourselves on the level of quality and choice we provide for our clients who want a fully tailor made holiday. A holiday will be created especially for you by one of our well-travelled experts. They will be able to advise on the accommodation best suited to your needs, the sights you should visit (and those to avoid!) and the best walks and activities matched to your ability. In short, we will work together with you to create your perfect holiday. If you would like to explore the idea of a Tailor Made holiday with Mountain Kingdoms then please call us on +44 (0)1453 844400 or see the Tailor Made pages of our website for further inspiration.



Your tour leader & guides



Tour Leader

Your leader for the Five Stans is Timur Muslimov. Timur will help you get the most out of your holiday, ensuring your safety and welfare. He will co-ordinate all the arrangements and manage the border crossings, ensuring that everything runs as smoothly as possible.

Timur Muslimov

Timur was born and raised in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, where his passion for travel and hospitality took shape. He is the son of Rustam Muslimov, who we have been working with for many years. Timur now has four years of professional experience in tourism and hospitality management - co-ordinating and managing trips in Uzbekistan and across the wider region. His focus is always on ensuring seamless and memorable experiences for his clients. Timur enjoys finding deeper connections between cultures, history, and the journeys he helps curate whilst, away from work, his biggest passions are football and geopolitics.



Local expert guides

In the main cities and some other locations on this tour, you will also have an expert local guide. They will give you a real insight into the history and culture of the places you are visiting.

Pictured here is Shakhnoza who has been leading tours in Uzbekistan since 1999 and considers it a genuine privilege to share the passion she has for the art, architecture and history of her country with her 'guests' and to see their eyes light up.

Your transport

As you will be spending a lot of time driving across the great landscapes of the Five Stans, the comfort and quality of your vehicle is paramount.

We provide minibuses with varying capacities depending on the group size and the country. Vehicles are changed when crossing borders and after flights/train journeys.

For smaller groups we use models such as the Hyundai Grand Starex and Toyota HiAce and for larger groups, a Toyota Coaster or Mercedes Sprinter. All the vehicles are equipped with air conditioning and seat belts and bottled water is carried.

For parts of the trips where minibuses are not suitable, we use 4x4 vehicles



Minibus



Interior of minibus



4 x 4 vehicle

Please note that these images are only examples of the types of vehicles we may use.

Your trip highlights

- Discover the splendours of the ancient Silk Road cities of Samarkand, Khiva and Bukhara
- Explore ruined cities in the desert and important archaeological sites
- See natural wonders including the Charyn Canyon, the Fann Mountains and the 'Door to Hell'
- Learn about the many artisan crafts of the region including ceramics, felt making and weaving
- Spend a night in a yurt and try your hand at building one
- Take in the highlights of the modern-day cities of Tashkent and Ashgabat
- Relax and let your Tour Leader manage the many border crossings and logistical complexities

At a glance itinerary

Days 1-2	Fly to Tashkent in Uzbekistan. Guided walking tour.
Day 3	Fly to Nukus. Visit Savitsky Museum and Mizdakhan Necropolis
Days 4-6	Drive to Khiva with visit to Chipkyk Kala. Tour of Khiva and sunset visit. Free day in Khiva.
Day 7	Cross to Turkmenistan and drive to Darvaza across the Karakum Desert. Visit 'Door to Hell'.
Days 8-9	Drive to Ashgabat and city tour. Fly to Mary and visit ruins at Merv.
Days 10-14	Cross back into Uzbekistan and drive to Bukhara. Tour of Bukhara and visits to craft workshops. Train to Samarkand. City tour and free day.
Days 15-17	Cross into Tajikistan and drive to Panjakent. Visit Sarazm. Day trip to Fann Mountains. Drive to Khujand and city tour.
Day 18	Cross into Uzbekistan and drive to Kokand with sightseeing. Drive to Rishtan and visit Rustam Usmanov. Drive to Fergana.
Day 19	Cross into Kyrgystan and drive to Osh. Tour of Osh and fly to Bishkek
Days 20-21	Drive to Balasagun and visit Burana tower, continue to Kochkor village. Visit felt workshop. Drive to Issyk-Kul Lake, Kyzyl-tuu village and Bokonbaevo. Eagle hunting demonstration.
Day 22	Drive to Karakol with visit to Skazka Canyon and Jety-Oguz Gorge.
Days 23-24	Cross border into Kazakhstan and visit Charyn Canyon. Drive to Almaty. Day trip to Ethno Aul, a replica of a traditional Kazakh Village.
Day 25	Fly to London.

Trip summary

This tour of the Five Stans is a truly epic journey into the heart of Central Asia. Covering an area greater than the size of Western Europe, it's an immense region of unbelievable contrasts with diverse landscapes ranging from the vast deserts of Karakum and Kyzylkum, to the rolling steppes of Kazakhstan, and the towering mountains of the Tien Shan and the Pamirs. Along with the superlative scenery you will discover incredible historic and cultural sights and the timeless traditions and craftsmanship of the local people.

You begin in Tashkent, the cosmopolitan capital of Uzbekistan, before flying east to the town of Nukus, home to the famous Savitsky Museum, the 'Lost Louvre of Uzbekistan'. From Nukus you drive back east across the mighty Kyzylkum Desert to visit Khiva, one of the gems of Uzbekistan, an ancient city of the Great Silk Road, with a beautifully preserved city centre. You then cross into your second Stan, Turkmenistan, nowadays one of the least known of the Five Stans and a country of great extremes. Here you will encounter the great Karakum Desert, see the incredible burning crater at Darvaza and visit the atmospheric ruins of several great cities of the Silk Road, including Merv, now just a shadow of its bygone greatness. As a contrast you visit the capital Ashgabat, a city built of marble and dazzling to the eye.

Border hopping once more back into Uzbekistan you will visit two more jewels of the great Silk Road, the magnificent cities of Bukhara and Samarkand with their incredible heritage and fabulous Islamic architecture. Then it's on to your third Stan of the trip, Tajikistan, the smallest and most mountainous of the five Stans. You visit Panjakent, another important city of the Silk Road, and also make a foray to Sarazm, site of one of the oldest settlements in Central Asia. For a change of pace you will have a day to explore the scenically stunning lakes and peaks of the Fann Mountains before crossing back into Uzbekistan to spend some time in the rich and fertile Fergana Valley, famed for its skilled artisans and craftsmen.

Finally saying goodbye to Uzbekistan, you drive on to Kyrgyzstan, your fourth Stan of the trip, and explore the historic trading city of Osh as well as the picturesque countryside with its nomadic culture. You visit settlements on the southern shore of Lake Issyk-Kul, to learn about the crafts of the local people as well as their ancient tradition of hunting with golden eagles. There are also scenic wonders to feast your eyes on with the red stone gorges of the Skazka Canyon and Jety-Oguz. Finally you drive to Kazakhstan, your fifth and final Stan and the largest of them all. On your way to the town of Almaty, you have time to wonder (and wander) at the remarkable Charyn Canyon, before ending your epic journey at Ethno Aul, a typical Kazakh settlement where you'll watch displays of horse riding and dancing and enjoy a final taste of the delicious regional specialties.

You will travel in comfortable, modern, air-conditioned minibuses (see page 3), as well as taking three internal flights and a train ride to break up the long road journeys. You will be accompanied throughout by a Tour Leader from Uzbekistan who will manage the logistics at the various border crossings and ensure that everything runs smoothly. He will be ably assisted by expert local guides in each of the Stans. Accommodation is a mix of 3* and 4* hotels, guest houses and a yurt camp for one night, all have been carefully selected for their comfort, character and good locations. All in all, this is a superb exploration of a vast, varied and utterly enthralling region of the world.

Central Asia - an introduction by Steve Berry, MD

For those of us living in the U.K. our natural attention always has centred very much on Western European history, culture and tradition. We rarely see or hear very much about Central Asia! We are left only with echoes of Marko Polo, Genghis Khan, and Tamerlane, and stories from a few explorers like Sven Hedin and William Moorcroft, and others. When we do look further east, it is the Silk Road which predominates our impressions of Central Asia, most recently amplified by Joanna Lumley when she produced an absolutely fabulous documentary showing us the deserts, camels, ancient cities, mountain ranges and Sino-Tibetan people of the Steppe. The point is that starved of information we cannot help but feel a deep sense of mystery whenever Central Asia is mentioned. We imagine people living in yurts hunting with eagles, caravans of spices, silks, and salt. We see in our mind's eye walled cities, minarets and tiled mosques, mausoleums and monuments, but there is so much more!



What is far more difficult to imagine is the sheer unbelievable scale of Central Asia. The five main Stans (Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan) total a land area of 4,006,715 sq. kms. The whole of the U.S.A is 3,790,000 in comparison!! Imagine now the scale of the countries which surround the whole of Central Asia. China, Russia, Iran and Afghanistan together ring-fence the five Stans. Outer Mongolia (1,564,116 sq.km) almost touches Kazakhstan, but not quite.

If you think it is all desert think again. Of course, there are vast tracts of fertile land suitable for cotton and hardy wheat, and there are some of the biggest, most beautiful mountain ranges on the planet including the Tien Shan, and most of the Pamirs. Sadly, it once contained the 4th largest lake in the world, the Aral Sea, but from 1960 to 1998, the sea's surface area shrank by 60%. By 1998, it had dropped to a size of 28,687 km².

I can tell you that when you have taken the leap, and flown into the five Stans you find yourself among people who seem only vaguely aware that anything exists outside their gigantic lands. There is a different smell in the air, and a sense of time stood still. After all, Samarkand is one of the oldest cities in the world and is thought to have been occupied for 2,700 years. On this tour you will visit archeological sites of even more ancient cities dating back some two thousand years BC. In Central Asia time itself seems to pass more slowly, or maybe that impression is created by the traces everywhere of old Soviet rule: men driving decrepit Russian motorbikes and sidecars, the occasional Russian lorry or tram, and the faceless, run-down modern apartment blocks, interspersed with grand buildings of Russian Imperial architecture. At a village level, people still mainly ride horses and donkeys. Even on the roads you see donkeys and carts, and yes, you will see camels too. The one exception to cities of a bygone age has to be Ashgabat, Turkmenistan's vanity capital. Here the vehicles are all white Chevrolets, and the ultra-modern, white marble buildings are best seen at nighttime when they are lit up with individual computerized light-shows, changing colour and pattern every few minutes. Even the roads of Ashgabat are so silky smooth that they reflect all the coloured buildings, and the inevitable bright brake lights.

I urge you to go and see this vast, remarkable, diverse, and completely compelling region of the world for yourself. You won't be disappointed!

Your trip itinerary

Day 1: Fly London to Tashkent

Depart London on an overnight flight to Tashkent.

Overnight: In flight

Day 2: Arrive Tashkent. Transfer to hotel. Afternoon city tour.

You will land in Tashkent in the early morning and on arrival you will be welcomed by your Tour Leader and transferred to your hotel. You will check in and have breakfast and then have a few hours rest after your long flight.

Later you will meet for lunch at a local restaurant and in the afternoon you will have a city tour. Tashkent is the capital of Uzbekistan and claims to be the most cosmopolitan city of Central Asia. Although it has been continuously inhabited for over 2,000 years, a massive earthquake in the 1960s levelled most of the city and a modern city was born. The city is noted for its tree lined streets, numerous fountains and pleasant parks. On your tour you will visit the Khast-Imam complex - Khast Imam is the religious centre for Muslims in Central Asia and includes the Barak Khan Madrasah (16th century), Tilla Shaykh Mosque (the Osman Koran, believed to be world's oldest Koran, is kept in the library of this mosque) and the mausoleum of Abu Bakr Kaffal Shoshi (a 13-14th century Islamic scholar). You will also visit the Chorsu Bazaar - this huge and busy bazaar, the largest in Tashkent, is set beneath a magnificent dome decorated in traditional Uzbek style with blue tiles. A vast variety of goods are sold here and a visit here is a great introduction to daily life in Uzbekistan.

You will also take a ride on the famous Tashkent Metro. The metro was built between 1966 and 1977, and was the first metro in Central Asia. The subway stations (especially those of the first two lines built) are very beautiful and are famed for their amazing architecture. Platforms are richly decorated with glazed columns, bas reliefs, stucco and enamel, chandeliers and original art.

For dinner you will be taken to a themed restaurant and perhaps have your first taste of Uzbekistan's famous national dish, 'plov', a traditional dish of Central Asia which you will encounter throughout your travels through the Five Stans.

Overnight: Al Anvar Hotel or Similar, Tashkent (Meals: BLD)

Day 3: Fly to Nukus - 1 hour 40 minutes. Visit Savitsky Museum of Art and Mizdakhan Necropolis.

This morning you will take the early flight to Nukus, an isolated, rather nondescript city, located in the valley of the Amu Darya River.

Nukus's main claim to fame is as home to the Savitsky Museum, a museum which has been called the 'lost Louvre of Uzbekistan' and a "museum of forbidden art". It has one of the most remarkable collections of dissident and Avant Garde Soviet art anywhere. You will have a guided tour of the museum, which houses some 90,000 artefacts and art works, including many works by 20th century Russian painters, much of it collected and brought here by Igor Savitsky. Savitsky was a renegade artist from Moscow who, during the Soviet era, found sanctuary from the authorities in this isolated backwater and started to collect art works. There are works in the collection of both Russian and Uzbek artists who worked after the 1930s, when all work that wasn't 'socialist realism' was banned by Stalin. Savitsky brought together this impressive collection, of which only a small percentage is on show, and the museum was created under his guidance in 1966 and he was its first curator. It also houses an impressive collection of archaeological objects and folk art.



In the afternoon you will visit the nearby remains of ancient Mizdakhan, about half an hour from the centre of Nukus. Mizdakhan is one of the oldest and most visited pilgrimage sites of the region. Local legend says this is where Adam was buried, which may account for its sacred status in ancient times. The city of Mizdakhan was founded in the 4th century BC and inhabited right up until the 14th century AD when it was destroyed by Timur (Tamerlane), the Turko-Mongol leader who conquered most of Central Asia. After its destruction the city was depopulated but it remained a sacred place even after this, although as a 'city of the dead' it was solely a

necropolis and burial place. Tombs and mosques were still being built here right up to the 20th century. It is an atmospheric place, though rather windswept and lonely. After your visit you will return to Nukus for dinner.

Overnight: Tashkent Hotel or Similar, Nukus (Meals: BLD)

Day 4: Drive to Khiva - 220 km, approximately 7 hours. Explore fortresses of the Kyzylkum Desert.

Today you will drive to Khiva, crossing the vast Kyzylkum Desert, which lies between the two great rivers, the Syr Darya and the Amu Darya, (the Oxus River of ancient times). The Kyzylkum Desert (in Turkic meaning 'red sand' although it mostly isn't!) is one of the most extensive deserts in Asia. The crossing of this desert was an important stage on the Great Silk Road - Alexander the Great, Genghis Khan and Tamerlane all passed through here, as did British and Russian spies in the 19th century, often disguised as holy men and horse traders, during the secret stratagems of the 'Great Game', when Russia and England were vying for Influence in the region.

Your first visit of the day will be to Chilpik Kala, just 40 km from Nukus. This great circular structure on a hill top, was originally a Zoroastrian burial place or 'Tower of Silence'. In Zoroastrianism, once the dominant religion in Persia, towers such as Chilpik Kala were an important element in their burial rituals. In such towers the bodies of the dead were exposed to the elements so that with the effect of the sun and birds (usually vultures) they could be disposed of naturally. The impressive tower at Chilpik Kala is thought to have been built over 2,000 years ago. From the top of the ruins there are excellent views over the surrounding country and to the River Amu Darya.

From Chilpik Kala you continue your journey across the desert, following the route of ancient caravans, and visiting further ancient fortresses which once guarded the way along the Silk Road. You should arrive in Khiva by the early evening.

Overnight: Orient Star Hotel or Ulli Oy Boutique Hotel or Similar, Khiva (Meals: BLD)

Day 5: In Khiva with sightseeing.

Khiva is an ancient city of the Great Silk Road, once famous as a slave trading post. Nowadays the well preserved city centre is a delightful labyrinth of narrow mud-walled alleyways and spectacular blue mosaics that will transport you back in time. In the morning you will have a tour of the magnificent Ichan Kala architectural complex, built over the 12th to 19th centuries. Now a UNESCO World Heritage site it was the site of the residence of the last Khan and of high officials, clergy and rich merchants. The complex includes the Ismail Khodja Mausoleum, Mohammed Amin Khan Madrassa, Kunya-Ark Castle (16-17th century), Kalta Minor Tower, Tash-Hovli Palace (19th century), Pahlavan Mahmud Mausoleum (14-18th century), and the Juma Mosque (10th century).



Later you will visit a ceramic workshop. The ceramics of Khiva are famous and the making of ceramics is one of the most respected traditional crafts in Uzbekistan, with time-honoured techniques being passed on from generation to generation.

After lunch you will have time free for your own exploration or for shopping.

In the late afternoon you will meet your Tour Leader to go to the Ark Watch Tower to enjoy a wonderful sunset over the city from the roof of the tower, from where there are all round panoramic views over Ichan Kala and the mosques, minarets and city walls of Khiva.

Overnight: Orient Star Hotel or Ulli Oy Boutique Hotel or Similar, Khiva (Meals: BLD)

Day 6: Day at leisure in Khiva. Navruz Festival in the spring.

On our autumn departure you will have a full day to explore Khiva further on your own.

If you are travelling on our spring departure, your day in Khiva will coincide with the annual Navruz Festival. Navruz means 'new day' and the festival signifies the arrival of spring, re-birth and renewal. It is celebrated across much of Central Asia and is one of Uzbekistan's most important festivals. An official National Holiday, you'll find the streets thronging with people in festive spirit. Music and dance are central to the occasion, as is

wearing traditional dress and enjoying special festive foods. Make sure you try some sumalak - a delicious type of porridge made from wheat grains with spices and flavourings added - and don't forget to make a wish when you do!

During the day, your Tour Leader will be on hand to explain the celebrations and advise where to go, but it's a great time to simply wander around the lively streets and enjoy the party mood. 'Navruz muborak'!

Overnight: Orient Star Hotel or Ulli Oy Boutique Hotel or Similar, Khiva (Meals: B)

Day 7: Drive to the Turkmenistan border at Savat. Drive to the 'The Door to Hell' at Darvaza - 370 km, approximately 6-7 hours.

Today its onward to Turkmenistan! From Khiva it's a just an hour's drive to the border at Savat. You will be accompanied and assisted through the border crossing by your tour manager. They will deal with all the paperwork and formalities and you will just walk through to the Turkmenistan side with your day pack to meet your onward transport. Be prepared though, the whole process can take 3-4 hours!

Welcome to Turkmenistan! Once at a crossroads of civilization, Turkmenistan is nowadays one of the least known and least explored of the Five Stans. It is a country of extremes, of harsh landscapes and extreme climate. Much of the country is desert - the Karakum Desert, (literally 'black sands') a region of vast landscapes and fearsome reputation, makes up eighty per cent of the country's area. In the past Alexander the Great passed through with his armies on his way to conquer India, and other empire builders such as Genghis Khan also left their mark. Important archaeological ruins such as Kunya-Urgench, Nisa and Merv mark major stops along the ancient Silk Road.



From the border at Savat you will drive to Darvaza in the heart of the vast Karakum Desert, one of the largest sand deserts in the world. It's a long (rather bumpy journey) to get there and you may not arrive until late evening. In Darvaza you will stay at a yurt camp, surrounded by the vastness of the Karakum and enjoy a night of tranquility in the desert. After dinner at the camp you will visit the Darvaza Crater. The gas crater at Darvaza is one of Turkmenistan's most unusual and surreal sights. It is known as the 'Door to Hell'. This crater, set in the middle of the desert, has a diameter of 60-70 metres and it is about 30 metres deep and was formed when a natural gas field collapsed into a crater during gas exploration work and ignited, possibly as long ago as 1971. You see the crater at night when it is at its most spectacular and you will enjoy the mesmerising sight of the flames against the dark desert sky, as the ground rumbles and hundreds of natural gas fires illuminate the floor and rim of the crater.

Overnight: Yurt Camp at Darvaza (Meals: BLD)

Day 8: Sunrise at Darvaza. Drive to Ashgabat - 280km, 3-4 hours. City tour of Ashgabat.

After enjoying a spectacular sunrise over the desert you will have breakfast before setting off for the drive to Ashgabat, the capital of Turkmenistan. The road across this amazing desert can sometimes be a little challenging as it's rather rough and dusty. On arrival in Ashgabat you will check into your hotel.

In the afternoon you have a tour of Ashgabat. Ashgabat is the capital and largest city of Turkmenistan and is one of the strangest cities in the world. In 2013 the Guinness Book of Records awarded Ashgabat the record for the highest number of white-marble-decorated buildings. It's said to be the 'marble heart of central Asia'. It is a city of grand buildings which dazzle the eye, wide, wide avenues and manicured parks and gardens. All around are immense monuments to Turkmen pride.

In the afternoon you will have a tour to visit some of the most impressive of Ashgabat's monuments including the Monument of Neutrality, a huge three legged arch supposedly inspired by the design of traditional Turkmen tents. With a height of 95m it's higher than the Statue of Liberty! You will also visit the gardens of Independence Park with its monuments and statues of national heroes. You may also visit the excellent National Museum of Turkmenistan which contains many of the treasures recovered from the nearby ancient fortress of Nisa which you will also visit. Nisa was the capital of an ancient and powerful civilisation, the Parthian Empire, which flourished in the region from mid-3rd century BC to the 3rd century AD.

At night the impressive buildings, monuments, statues and fountains of modern Ashgabat are illuminated in a colourful display and you will be taken on a short drive to see the city lights - a fitting way to end your visit to this extraordinary city.

Overnight: Sport Hotel or Similar, Ashgabat (Meals: BLD)

Day 9: Fly to Mary. Visit Merv - 40 km, 1 hour each way.

This morning you will fly to the city of Mary - a short flight of only 40 minutes. This is an important city in the southeast of Turkmenistan founded in the 19th century near the ruins of the ancient abandoned city of Merv.



You will drive the short distance to visit Merv, formerly an important oasis city in the Karakum Desert. Merv is nowadays a little known cultural gem but its importance in the ancient world should not be underestimated. In the 12th century it is thought to have been one of the largest and most cosmopolitan cities in the world, with an estimated population of over half a million. As well as acting as a stopping place for traders on the Silk Road, Merv was famous for its textiles, notably silk and cotton, and was an important intellectual centre for cultivating notable poets, mathematicians, astronomers, physicians, musicians and physicists. Merv was destroyed by the Mongols, under the son of Genghis Khan, in 1221 AD, with an estimated 700,000 deaths and it never recovered fully. Merv is one of the world's great vanished cities. In 1888, George Curzon, future viceroy of India, wrote of Merv "In the midst of an absolute wilderness of crumbling brick and clay, the spectacle of walls, towers, ramparts and domes, stretching in bewildering confusion to the horizon, reminds us that we are in the centre of bygone greatness". You will have plenty of time to explore the numerous ruins and archeological sites.

You will have lunch in nearby Bayramali town and return to Mary to overnight.

Overnight: Margush Hotel or Similar, Mary (Meals: BLD)

Day 10: Drive to border with Uzbekistan at Farap - 240 km, 6 hours approximately. Cross into Uzbekistan and drive to Bukhara - 120 km, 1½-2 hours.

Today you will make the long drive to the border at Farap. Again at this crossing into Uzbekistan, you will be looked after by your Tour Leader.

After the crossing you will make the drive to the city of Bukhara, another ancient city of the Silk Road. Bukhara was for many centuries important to merchants and traders as well as being a major intellectual centre of the Islamic world, renowned for its scholarship and culture. The city is a wonderful example of well-preserved Islamic architecture. The writer Fitzroy Maclean visited Bukhara in 1938 and he called it an enchanted city, whose buildings rivalled "the finest architecture of the Italian Renaissance".

Overnight: Rayyan Hotel or Similar, Bukhara (Meals: BLD)

Day 11: Sightseeing in Bukhara.

Today you will have a full day of sightseeing in Bukhara. The city is one of the most complete examples of a medieval Islamic city and much of the historic centre, which is still largely intact, has been listed as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO and contains numerous fabulous buildings.

Among other places you will visit today is the fabulous Samanid Mausoleum, the tomb of Ismail Samani and other members of the Samanid dynasty who ruled central Asia in the 9th and 10th centuries. This tomb is considered a masterpiece of 10th century Muslim architecture. You will also visit the nearby Chashma-Ayub Mausoleum, originally built in the 12th century and rebuilt over the years. This mausoleum is said to be the site of Job's well, a holy spring connected in legend to the Prophet Job (Ayub's Well in the Koran) and known for its pure water and healing properties. As an example of one of Bukhara's gems from more recent times, you will visit the Bolo Haouz Mosque, built in the early 18th century and the official place of worship for the Emir at that time.

The complex consists of a beautifully decorated Friday mosque, a small minaret, and a pond (hauz), which gave the name to the whole.

You will have lunch in a local restaurant.

Overnight: Rayyan Hotel or Similar, Bukhara (Meals: BLD)

Day 12: Morning sightseeing in Bukhara. Transfer to station and take the train to Samarkand - 269 km, 2½ hours.

This morning you will enjoy further sightseeing in Bukhara and also get to see some of Bukhara's arts and handicrafts, with visits to some craft workshops including embroidery and jewellery workshops. Bukhara is famed for the ancient art of gold embroidery using gold thread. Masters of this traditional craft use gold embroidery to decorate mens' and womens' caftans, dresses, turbans and skullcaps. You will also visit a jewellery workshop. Jewellery and jewelled objects are another important craft in Bukhara. Much of the beautiful local jewelry features intricate blue enamelwork echoing the blue tiles of the buildings.

After your sightseeing you will transfer to the railway station for your train at midday. The train journey itself is a very interesting experience! The broad gauge railway harks back to Soviet times, plus the scenery is surreal. On arrival in Samarkand you will be met and taken to your hotel.

Overnight: Shohjahoan Palace Hotel & Spa or Similar, Samarkand (Meals: BLD)

Day 13: Full day tour of Samarkand. Evening visit to El Merosi Theatre.

Samarkand is located in the magnificent region of the Oxus and Syr Darya rivers and historically occupied a strategic and advantageous geographical position on the Great Silk Road. It is one of the world's most ancient cities, with a history that stretches back over 2,750 years, which makes it as old as Rome, Athens and Babylon. It served as the capital city for Tamerlane. There are magnificent examples of medieval architecture preserved in Samarkand, striking in their shape and rich colours.



You will have a full day's sightseeing. Firstly you visit Registan Square, one of the most impressive squares in the world. It was the heart of the ancient city of Samarkand - a public square where people gathered to hear royal proclamations and to enjoy celebrations as well as having a more grisly role as a place of public executions. The square is bounded by three madrasahs, masterpieces of Islamic architecture, the Ulugh Beg Madrasah, The Sher-Dor Madrasah and the Tilya-Kori Madrasah.

You will also visit the Gur-i Amir Mausoleum. Built in the 15th century this mausoleum is a masterpiece of medieval Islamic architecture. The great Turk-Mongol conqueror Timur (also known as Tamerlane) is buried here along with his two sons and two grandsons. The Gur-i Amir is a fine example of medieval craftsmanship and is important architecturally as being the prototype of much Mughal architecture found in buildings in India such as the Taj Mahal.

You may also visit a local paper mill where paper is made using the bark from mulberry trees. And if time permits, you may explore Samarkand's famous bazaar. The bazaar is normally packed with locals and you can mingle with them as you browse the vast range of fantastic local wares and produce.

Later, before you go to dinner, you will visit the El Merosi Theatre where you can see a show demonstrating the traditional costumes of Uzbekistan through the ages, along with classical Uzbek music.

Overnight: Shohjahoan Palace Hotel & Spa or Similar, Samarkand (Meals: BLD)

Day 14: At leisure in Samarkand. Optional wine tasting tour or day trip to Shakhrisabz and Langar.

Today you can either have a day at leisure in Samarkand to explore more of its wonders on your own, or take an optional tour.

One option is to visit the Khovernkho Winery, tour the winery and their small museum and enjoy a tasting of some local Uzbek wines.

Alternatively you could choose a day trip to visit a couple of important historical sites near to Samarkand: Firstly to Shakhrisabz, the former capital of the great Emperor Tamerlane, now a World Heritage Site. And then on to visit the traditional mountain village of Langar which houses the tomb of the Sufi scholar Mohammed Sadik Langar as well as an ancient mosque.

Further details (including prices) can be requested for both these options from the Mountain Kingdoms office. These excursions should be booked in advance.

Overnight: Shohjahoan Palace Hotel & Spa or Similar, Samarkand (Meals: B)

Day 15: Drive to border with Tajikistan at Jartepa - 45 km. Cross the border and continue to Panjakent. Sightseeing at Sarazm and visit Rudaki Muuseum.

It is quite a short drive from Samarkand to the border at Jartepa where you will cross the border into Tajikistan.

Tajikistan is smallest of the five Central Asian states and shares borders with Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan in the north and west, China to the east and Afghanistan to the south. It has more, and higher mountains than any other country in the region - nine tenths of the country is mountainous and more than half of the country is over 3,000m. In the east are the Pamirs and in the west the stunning Fann mountains. The capital is Dushanbe which you do not visit on this trip.

From the border you drive the short distance to the town of Panjakent, a UNESCO World Heritage location, built on the site of an ancient city dating back over 2,000 years and another important centre on the Silk Road.

From Panjakent you will visit the nearby important but little visited archeological site of Sarazm, the location of one of the oldest settlements in Central Asia. Sarazm dates back over 5,000 years to the Bronze Age, when it was especially important for its local mines, especially for copper and tin, key components in the making of bronze. The most important find to date from this site is the so called 'Lady of Sarazm', who was buried in the 4th century BC wearing beautiful jewelry of lapis beads and bracelets of seashells. You will also visit the Rudaki Museum which houses finds from Sarazm as well as from ancient Panjakent. You may have time to visit the local bazaar and mosque in Panjakent.

Overnight: Panjakent Plaza Hotel or Similar, Panjakent (Meals: BLD)

Day 16: Day trip to the Fann Mountains, 2,139m/7,018ft. Take tea at local tea house.

It is just a short drive of about one hour from Panjakent to reach the beautiful Fann Mountains. The Fann Mountains are an extension of the Pamir-Alay range and feature about a hundred peaks, with several over 5,000 meters, including the highest peak of the region Chimtarga at 5,489 m. In these mountains Tajik shepherds graze their flocks on remote upland pastures and mountain villages are home to friendly local people with unique traditions, customs and language.



Though relatively unknown these lovely mountains are becoming better known as (for Tajikistan!) they are more easily accessible and as well as spectacular landscapes they offer excellent opportunities for some fine hikes and for trekking. Here are numerous beautiful snowcapped summits and glaciers as well as many dazzling blue and green lakes - known as the Marguzor Lakes (the Seven Lakes).

You will explore the Seven Lakes area and also have the opportunity to meet some local people and enjoy their hospitality when you take tea at a local tea house.

After your exploration you will return to Panjakent to overnight.

Overnight: Panjakent Plaza Hotel or Similar, Panjakent (Meals: BLD)

Day 17: Drive to Khujand - 275 km, 4 hours - passing through the Shakriston Tunnel, 3,378m/11,083ft. Sightseeing in Khujand.

Your journey today takes you from Panjakent to Khujand through a scenic landscape of mountains and valleys. You will also drive through the famous Shakriston Tunnel. At five kilometers long this tunnel, which was built with funding from China in 2012, is the longest road tunnel in Central Asia. You finally arrive at the city of Khujand, strategically set on the banks of Syr Darya River and lying at the mouth of the verdant Fergana Valley.

Khujand was once an important Silk Road city, dating back about 2,500 years to the days of the Persian Empire, and said to have been founded by Alexander the Great. It is Tajikistan's second largest city and is nowadays a bustling metropolis. One of the most impressive buildings in Khujand is the magnificently restored Khujand Fortress which houses an interesting museum with finds dating back to time of Alexander the Great. Also in the historical centre of Khujand you may visit the beautiful Mausoleum of Sheikh Muslihiddin, named after Muslihiddin Khujandi, a poet and ruler of the town who lived in the 12th century. His mausoleum has been rebuilt and extended many times since the 12th century. Across from this complex is the Panjshanbe Bazaar, one of the largest and most interesting covered markets in Central Asia. It is especially busy on Thursday, after which it is named - 'panchshanbe' being Tajik for Thursday.

Overnight: Hotel Parliament Palace or Similar, Khujand (Meals: BLD)

Day 18: Drive from Khujand to Kokand in Uzbekistan -140 km, 5-6 hours. Tour Kokand. Visit a ceramic workshop in Rishtan and drive to Fergana.

Today you drive for about 80 km to the border near the town of Koni bodom, where you cross back into Uzbekistan. This is a very quiet border and it should be a relatively quick and painless process. You then continue to the town of Kokand, situated in the western part of the Fergana Valley, the most fertile region of Uzbekistan.

Kokand city is one of the most ancient cities of Uzbekistan and was an important trade centre on the Silk Road up to the time of its destruction by the Mongols in the 13th century. It then came to fame again in the 18th and 19th centuries as capital of the rich and powerful Kokand Khanate, becoming again a cultural and trading centre. It was also famed as a religious centre and had a reported 300 mosques as well as countless madrassahs. Today



Kokand is known as the 'City of Artisans' and is famed for its artisan workers and fine traditional handicrafts. You will visit the Khudoyar Khan Palace, once the opulent residence of the last ruler of the Kokand Khanate and known as one of the most extravagant oriental palaces in Central Asia. Nowadays the remaining façade, courtyards and rooms are still immensely impressive. You will also visit the Jami Mosque (The Friday Mosque), a magnificent mosque built in the 19th century on the site of earlier mosques, as well as the Norbut-biy Madrasah, once the largest and most important religious and educational centre of the city.

From Kokand you will drive in an hour to the city of Rishtan, a city famous for its brilliant blue and white ceramics. Here you will visit the house of an acknowledged master of ceramics, Rustam Usmanov, and you will tour his workshop and small museum of ceramics.

From Rishtan you drive to the town of Fergana (about 45 minutes) to overnight.

Overnight: Tantana Hotel or Similar, Fergana

Day 19: Drive to border with Kyrgyzstan at Dustlik - 110 km, 2 hours - and continue to Osh. City tour. Evening flight to Bishkek and transfer to hotel.

Today you drive to the border at Dustlik where the crossing into Kyrgyzstan should be straightforward. Kyrgyzstan is mountainous country, bordered by three of the other Stans, Kazakhstan in the north and Tajikistan and Uzbekistan in the south and west, as well as China to the east and south. Nearly eighty per cent of the land area of Kyrgyzstan is mountainous, with the immense ranges of the Tien Shan, the Pamir Alay and Kyrgyz Alatau dominating the landscape. Although geographically isolated by its mountains, Kyrgyzstan has been at the crossroads of many civilisations as part of the Silk Road and is a fascinating blend of cultures and historical heritage.

After crossing the border you will drive the short distance to the city of Osh, the second largest city in Kyrgyzstan after the capital Bishkek.

Osh, located in the fertile Fergana Valley, is also the oldest city in Kyrgyzstan, estimated to be more than 3,000 years old. It was one of the most important cities on the trade routes to China and India, being roughly at the midpoint of the route. The city of Osh and the surrounding valley are dominated by the Sulaiman-Too Mountain which has been a sacred spot for several millennia and was formerly a place of pilgrimage as well as acting as an important landmark for travelers in times past. You will visit various monuments on the mountain including the Sulaiman-Too Mosque, a place of worship since ancient times and the museum. There are far-reaching views of the city and surrounding countryside from the top of the mountain. You will also visit the ancient Jayma Bazaar, where there has been a bazaar for over 2,000 years. You will have lunch in a local café.

In the evening you will fly to Bishkek the capital of Kyrgyzstan. On arrival you will be taken to your hotel. You may stop at a café for dinner or have dinner at your hotel.

Overnight: My Hotel or Similar, Bishkek (Meals: BLD)

Day 20: Drive to Kochkor Village - 195 km, 3 hours. With a detour to Burana Tower - 2 hours.

On the way while driving to Kochkor village you will make a detour to visit the remains of the ancient city of Balasagun. Balasagun was an ancient city, capital of the Karakhanid Empire, a Turkik dynasty which flourished from the 9th to the 14th century. The main landmark surviving from the city's destruction by the Mongols is the Burana Tower, originally the minaret of the city's Jami Mosque - all that is left of a once flourishing city that welcomed thousands of traders on the Silk Road.



You then continue to Kochkor, stopping for lunch on the way at a café. Kochkor is a large village set at 1,800m/5,905ft. With a background of mountains it is surrounded by lush pastures dotted with herds of sheep and horses and is a centre for farming, herding and cattle breeding. The people of Kokchor are very hospitable and during your visit you will get an insight into the lifestyle of local nomads and learn about the culture of the region. The village is famous for its workshops for various crafts such as embroidery and traditional handicrafts, but especially for handmade felt carpets. These are of two types of local carpets - 'alakiyiz' (tekemet) which are used as floor or wall covering and are made by pressing different coloured pieces of felt together, and 'shyrdak', stitched wall or floor coverings. The skilled artisans making these carpets use only natural materials and each pattern has a hidden meaning related to traditions and daily life. Such felt carpets are traditionally used by nomads to decorate their yurts and to keep them cozy.

You will visit one of these workshops for a demonstration of felt-making with the cutting and sewing of appliques and there may be the opportunity to purchase felt items as souvenirs, carpets and smaller items such as coasters, hot pads, purses and little stuffed animals.

You will overnight in a local guest house and have the opportunity to sample traditional nomadic food and drinks.

Overnight: Guest House, Kochkor (Meals: BLD)

Day 21: Drive to Bokonbaevo Village - 118 km, 2 hours driving plus 4 hour detour to Kyzyl-Tuu village.

After breakfast with your local hosts you will set off to drive to Bokonbaevo Village. On the way you will make a detour to Kyzyl-Tuu village, set on the south shore of Issyk-Kul Lake. The name Issyk-Kul means 'warm lake' because a curious characteristic of this beautiful mountain lake, one of the deepest in the world, is that it never freezes, due to the salinity of the water. The village of Kyzyl-Tuu is an excellent place to experience traditional Kyrgyz nomadic culture. The inhabitants of this village are craftsmen, especially skilled in the construction of yurts, the time honoured accommodation of nomads across Central Asia traditionally portable round tents covered with skins or felt. In Kyzyl-Tuu you will see how these yurts are made and may even have a go at helping in the assembly and erection of a yurt. You will have lunch with a local family in Kyzyl-Tuu. After lunch you will continue to Bokonbaevo, a small town set on the southern shore of Lake Issyk-Kul, with spectacular views of the Ala-too mountains. This is another place where Kyrgyz nomadic traditions are kept very much alive, not only with the culture of yurts, felt making and horses but also the practice of hunting with

eagles (berkut). In the ancient tradition of eagle hunting, golden eagles were trained to kill hares and foxes to provide fur and meat in the cold winter months. Eagle hunters (berkutchi), passed down their knowledge from generation to generation and developed a close bond with their eagles. A hereditary eagle hunter will show you how they care for their eagles and will demonstrate how they use them for hunting.

Day 22: Drive to Skazka Canyon and Jety-Oguz Gorge. Continue to Karakol - 30 km.

Today you continue along the south shore of the lake and visit Skazka Canyon, also called Fairy Tale Canyon, famous for its colourful red rock formations. Thousands of years of erosion have created intricate patterns and spectacular contrasts with a variety of bizarre and vivid multi-coloured rock formations. Walking through the canyon is like walking on Mars and against the background of the blue lake it is all superbly picturesque.

Travelling on you will also visit Jety-Oguz Gorge, another area of stunning red sandstone formations, also known as 'Seven Bulls' after unusual red rocks supposedly suggestive of seven bulls seen here. While here you may also take a gentle walk to see a nearby waterfall.

You will have lunch in a café before continuing to the town of Karakol. Karakol is located near the eastern tip of Issyk-Kul Lake and is the fourth largest city in Kyrgyzstan. It is known as the adventure capital of Kyrgyzstan, being a gateway to the Tien Shan Mountains as well as to Lake Issyk-Kul. Karakol has long been at a crossroads for trade and migration and the meeting of peoples and this is a town of great ethnic diversity. In the afternoon you will have time for a tour of the city to see two of Karakol's principle sights, the Dungan Mosque and the Holy Trinity Russian Orthodox Cathedral.

Overnight: Altamira Hotel or Similar, Karakol (Meals: BLD)

Day 23: Drive to the border with Kazakhstan - 2 hours. Visit Charyn Canyon and continue to Almaty - 3-4 hours.

Today, after breakfast, you will drive through the beautiful Karkara Valley to reach the border with Kazakhstan. Kazakhstan is a huge country and the largest of the Five Stans. It stretches all the way from Siberia to the deserts of Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan and is the 9th largest country in the world and the world's largest landlocked country. Its land borders total 13,200 km and its geography and terrain are immensely varied. While the country is mostly rather bleak steppe, there is spectacular scenery and snowcapped mountains in the Tien Shan Mountains, which form a great natural boundary along Kazakhstan's south eastern border with Kyrgyzstan.



From the border you drive to the town of Kegen and continue to the famous Charyn Canyon. The Charyn Canyon, sometimes referred to as 'the Grand Canyon's little brother', is very impressive and atmospheric. It is more than 12 million years old and over the millennia the Charyn River has carved a spectacular gorge, up to 300 metres deep in places, and sculpted into many weird and colourful cliffs, crags and rock formations. There are in fact several canyons of which the Valley of the Castles is the best known and most easily accessible.

You will then continue your drive to reach Almaty. Although no longer the capital city, Almaty is the largest city in Kazakhstan with a beautiful natural setting between mountains and plains.

Overnight: Kazakhstan Hotel or Similar, Almaty (Meals: BLD)

Day 24: Visit to Ethno Aul (a Kazakh traditional village) - 35 km, 1 hour each way.

Today you will have a day trip out of Almaty to visit Ethno Aul, a replica of a traditional Kazakh village. This village has been designed to recreate the atmosphere of a typical Kazakh settlement, with charming wooden houses, intricately carved decoration and colourful textiles. Here you will have an introduction to a day in the life of a Kazakh nomad and learn about their unique customs and traditions. Local people will entertain you with a display of folk dancing and they will also demonstrate their fine equestrianism with a display of horse riding, showing off the skills of both riders and the horses. You will also have the chance to try your hand at some Kazakh cookery and enjoy a lunch of traditional Kazakh dishes, including perhaps your last chance of the trip to enjoy 'Plov', Central Asia's ubiquitous dish.

You then drive back to Almaty where you will have some free time before a farewell dinner to celebrate the completion of your epic journey.

Overnight: Kazakhstan Hotel or Similar, Almaty (Meals: BLD)

Day 25: Transfer to airport for flight home.

This morning you will depart for Almaty airport at about noon for your flight back to London. **(Meals: B)**

Our grading system

This Five Stans Tour of Central Asia is graded as a Tour, as described below.

Tours

Tours may include any of the following activities: sightseeing, visiting local villages, exploring temples, game viewing, birdwatching, mountain flights, city tours and dramatic journeys by road, rail, or river. Occasionally there will be short, gentle walks so that you can properly explore the cultural sites you are visiting.

What the price includes

Mountain Kingdoms aims to offer the best value for money. We do not charge extra for meal packages or apply local charges and try to ensure that all the key elements of your holiday are included.

What's included:

- ✓ 24 x breakfasts, 21 x lunches and 21 x dinners included
- ✓ Good standard hotel accommodation (usually 3-4 star) in main cities, best hotels or guest houses available in outlying towns on a twin-share basis
- ✓ 1 night in a yurt camp on a multi-share basis
- ✓ An excellent, English-speaking leader to accompany you throughout the tour
- ✓ Services of specialised city and local guides in different locations
- ✓ Group airport transfers for international flights on arrival and departure
- ✓ Economy class return air fares from the UK & UK
- ✓ Departure Tax (flight inclusive only)
- ✓ All internal flights and domestic transfers
- ✓ All road transport by private vehicles
- ✓ Sightseeing and entrance fees where specified
- ✓ Carbon offsetting with the Ecoan Tree Planting Project (for clients taking our flight inclusive option)
- ✓ A free Mountain Kingdoms Water-to-Go bottle

Airport transfers

The cost of a transfer to/from the airport is included in the price of your holiday. This is a single group transfer which is arranged to coincide with the timings of the group flights. If you book your own flights which arrive/depart at different times to this, or we book flights at your request that have different timings, we will be happy to provide a quote for a separate transfer. Please contact us should you require any further information.

What's not included:

- ✗ Lunch and dinner on days 6 and 14
- ✗ Travel insurance
- ✗ Visa fees
- ✗ Optional wine tasting in Samarkand or excursion to Shakhrisabz on Day 12
- ✗ Camera fees (this is a very small charge levied to take photos inside some of the museum complexes)

Water-to-Go Reusable Bottle Campaign

We have joined the campaign to help cut down on the use of plastics and, in particular, single-use water bottles. To do this we have teamed up with the revolutionary company, Water-to-Go who have developed a multi-use drinking bottle with a reusable filter that eliminates over 99.9% of all microbiological contaminants. This makes water from virtually any source safe to drink and significantly reduces the need for travellers to buy bottles of water wherever they are in the world.

Our clients who are not given a free Mountain Kingdoms kit bag for their holiday (these are required for certain treks), will instead receive a free Mountain Kingdoms Water-to-Go bottle. These unique Water-to-Go bottles can also be purchased from us at a discounted rate.

For further information about our campaign visit <https://www.mountainkingdoms.com/water-to-go-reusable-bottle-campaign>.

Your accommodation

We will endeavour to secure the hotels named in the itinerary but if our first choice of hotel is not available we will book a suitable alternative of a similar standard.



Al Anvar Hotel or Similar, Tashkent

We mainly use the Al Anvar Hotel in Tashkent. A modern, comfortable hotel with an indoor pool and sauna as well as a terrace and a bar. Rooms come complete with tea/coffee making facilities, fridges and free Wi-Fi.



Tashkent Hotel or Similar, Nukus

This is a large modern hotel, in the centre of Nukus town and not far from the Savitsky Museum. Rooms are spacious and clean, and bathrooms are good with plenty of hot water. Free Wi-Fi is available. The hotel has a restaurant and serves a good buffet breakfast.



Orient Star Hotel or Ulli Oy Boutique Hotel or Similar, Khiva

The Hotel Orient Star is well-placed in the heart of the city, not far from the historical centre of Khiva with a good location near to the main gate of the citadel. This historic hotel was originally a theological school, built in the 1850s. It has been renovated into a comfortable hotel although the original interior of the 'Mardrash' remains untouched. Rooms are comfy and the hotel has wi-fi.

We also use the Olli Oy hotel in Khiva which is conveniently situated within the walls of Ichan Kala. It is a small and bright hotel with light wooden trim throughout. The hotel has a very pleasant sun terrace and restaurant. Rooms include fridges and kettles and modern en suite bathrooms, and Wi-Fi is free throughout.



Yurt Camp at Darvaza

Located just 500m from the 'Gates of Hell' crater at Darvaza, the yurt camp is perfectly positioned to make the most of this natural phenomena. The camp comprises 6 yurts, which each sleep 4-6 people on single trestle beds. There are bio-toilets and washing facilities at the camp. There is also a restaurant for meals which has both outdoor and covered areas. Please note there is no single room option here and yurts are normally arranged into male and female guests. You may be sharing a yurt with other tourists who are staying the night, not just your own group.



Sport Hotel, Ashgabat

This large hotel is in the centre of Ashgabat, within the 'Olympic Village' and next to a lively mall. Like the city of Ashgabat it is built in marble and is quite ornate! Rooms are well-equipped and spacious with comfortable beds and good attached bathrooms. Wi-Fi is available. The hotel has a restaurant and an indoor pool and you can enjoy far-reaching views from the 9th floor roof terrace.



Margush Hotel, Mary

The Margush Hotel is located in the centre of town and is one of the best hotels in Mary. Decorated with white marble, it is a modern property with an outdoor pool, bars and a restaurant serving buffet breakfasts. Rooms are large and air-conditioned and Wi-Fi is available in the hotel.



Rayyan Hotel or Similar, Bukhara

The Rayyan is a small restored boutique hotel located right in the heart of the old city. It is beautifully decorated in traditional style with colourful tiles and antique furnishings. The en suite guest rooms are air-conditioned with a good range of amenities including kettles and fridges. Free Wi-Fi is available.



Shohjahon Palace Hotel & Spa or Similar, Samarkand

Billed as 'antique on the outside, modern on the inside', the Shohjahon's exterior is certainly in keeping with the ornate style of the Silk Road cities. Within a short walking distance of Registan Square, the hotel is well-situated, and it also offers an indoor pool and spa as well as an enticing roof terrace. Rooms have a good range of amenities including free Wi-Fi and tea/coffee making facilities.



Panjakent Plaza Hotel or Similar, Panjakent

The Panjakent Plaza is a mid-range hotel on the outskirts of Panjakent town. Rooms are large and light with comfortable beds and modern bathroom facilities. There is a restaurant and bar on site, and the hotel has a sun terrace for relaxation.



Hotel Parliament Palace or Similar, Khudjand

The Parliament Palace is located right on the river in Khujand. Large rooms have comfortable beds and private bathrooms and offer either river or mountain views. There is a fitness centre and spa at the hotel as well as restaurant and bar. Wi-Fi is available.



Tantana Hotel or Similar, Fergana

The Tantana is a modern, mid-range hotel that offers a comfortable stay in Fergana. Rooms are spacious with Wi-Fi and good private bathrooms. The hotel has its own restaurant which serves a generous buffet breakfast.



My Hotel or Similar, Bishkek

My Hotel is a modern, 3 star hotel, centrally located in Bishkek. Rooms are comfy with attached bathrooms, fridges and kettles. There is a snack bar at the hotel and a restaurant serving good, buffet breakfasts. Wi-Fi is freely available throughout.



Guest House, Kochkor

The 'Fatima' guest house is situated in the small village of Kochkor (Kochkorka) in the Naryn region, which is considered the centre of felt production in Kyrgyzstan. The two-storey guest house has 10 twin-share rooms - 4 of which are en suite, whilst the other rooms share a bathroom. There is a private courtyard and a small shop selling local handicrafts. The owners of the guest house are engaged in the production of felt and can demonstrate the process to guests.



Guest House, Bokonbaevo

In Bokonbaevo we use the Emily Guest House. Located close to the shores of Issy Kul Lake. this small, family-run property, offers clean, comfortable rooms with private bathrooms. Home-cooked meals are served around a shared table in the dining room and there is also a cosy lounge for guests to use. Additional accommodation is offered in attractively decorated yurts which have been built in the garden. These also have en suite facilities.



Hotel Amir or Similar, Karakol

Hotel Amir in downtown Karakol has been providing excellent hospitality since 2006. Well-equipped, modern rooms have private bathrooms, fridges, coffee machines and internet service. A good western-style buffet breakfast is served in the hotel's restaurant and there is also a billiard room and terraced garden for guest use.



Kazakhstan Hotel or Similar, Almaty

The 4 star Kazakhstan hotel is a monument to Soviet architecture. It dates back to 1977 and is included in the State List of Historical and Cultural Monuments of Local Significance. Located in the business centre of Almaty, the hotel offers well-equipped rooms with private bathrooms and all facilities. There is Wi-Fi throughout the hotel and panoramic views to the mountains from the bar on the 25th floor. There are several dining options and a 24-hour bar

Meal arrangements

24 x breakfasts, 21 x lunches, 21 x dinners. All meals except lunches and dinners on days 6 and 14. Days 6 and 14 are kept free for your own exploration, it therefore makes sense for you to choose your own meal times, and sample some local restaurants of your own choice.

Flight arrangements

Flight inclusive from price

Our 'Flight inclusive from' price is based on the best fare available at the time of printing. As airfares change on a constant basis, this should be used only as a guide price. Rest assured that, at the time of booking, we will endeavour to get the best possible price for the flights you need. Remember, the earlier you book the greater your chances of securing the best fare.

Flight inclusive packages booked through Mountain Kingdoms are protected through our ATOL bonding scheme.

Flight upgrades and regional Airports

Please call us on +44 (0)1453 844400 for flight options from regional UK airports, Business Class upgrades, alternative airlines and stopovers. Please also check our website for the most up to date flight inclusive 'from' prices.

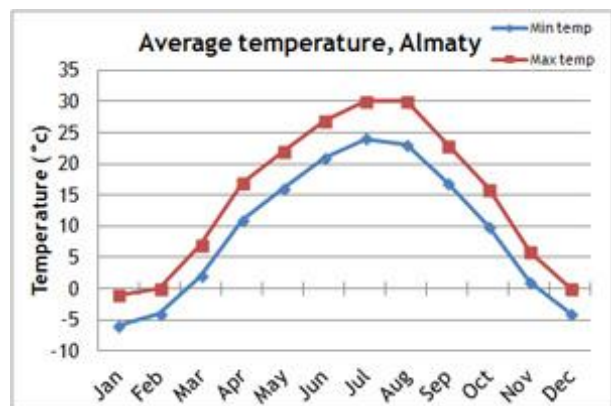
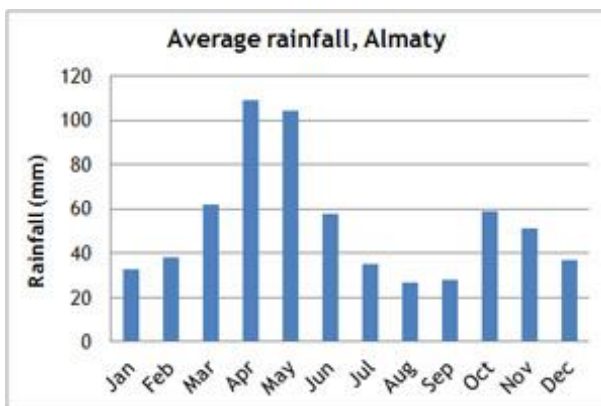
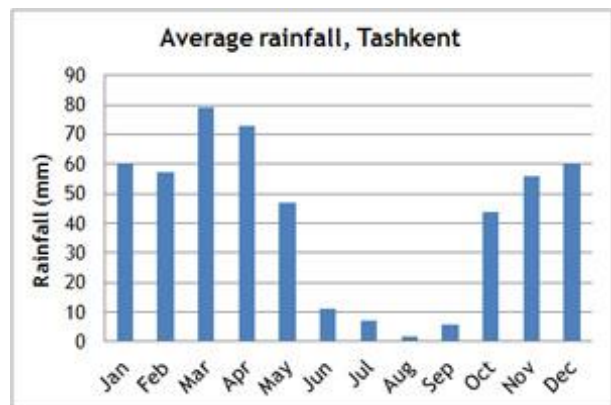
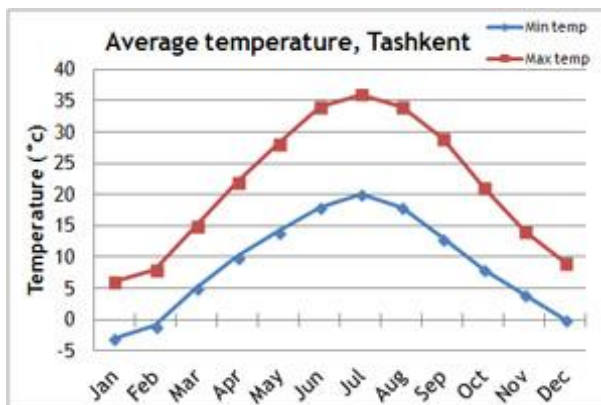
Further information

When we receive your booking, we send you a full Trip Dossier which contains details of any visas and vaccinations required, a suggested gear and clothing list and lots of useful information. If you do have queries at this initial stage do call us on 01453 844400 and we will be pleased to offer advice.

The nature of adventure travel

Every effort will be made to keep to this itinerary but we cannot guarantee that things may not change, either before you travel or while you are away. By its very nature, adventure travel involves an element of the unexpected, particularly in more remote areas. A variety of factors such as adverse weather conditions, changes to local schedules and difficulties with transportation can all contribute to the need to make changes to the itinerary, often at the very last minute. Our Operations Manager and your Trip Leader will make every effort to maintain the integrity of the original itinerary and minimise the impact of any changes, but an easy-going and flexible nature is a real asset! Please note that all timings and distances given are approximate.

Climate information



The above climate charts are for the start and end of the tour.

Although weather patterns and extremes will of course vary across the Five Stans, the wider region generally enjoys hot, dry summers and harsh, cold winters. Spring (late April-June) and autumn (September-October) are the best time for touring. At these times you can expect warm daytime temperatures with little rain, although it can still be chilly at night. If travelling in the more mountainous areas, you can experience much cooler temperatures and less predictable weather, whilst the deserts will inevitably be quite hot. Good layering with your clothes is a must!

We arrange the departures of this tour for the autumn and spring months to experience the best, and most reliable, weather conditions.

Why book this holiday with Mountain Kingdoms?

- This is a carefully designed tour of many of the most important cultural, historic and scenic sights across five of the 'Stans' of Central Asia. It has a balanced mix of sightseeing, experiences, travel and time for your own exploration or relaxation.
- You will have a professional, English-speaking leader, who will navigate the border crossings and other logistical complexities of the tour on your behalf.
- You will also have expert local guides to give you an in-depth insight into the nature, culture, history and cuisine of the areas you are visiting.
- Accommodation is a hand-picked collection of comfortable and well-located hotels and guesthouses. plus a night in a yurt camp.
- We use modern, comfortable, air-conditioned minibuses and 4 x 4 vehicles (as appropriate) for the driving sections of the tour.
- The tour was researched by our MD, Steve Berry, in 2024. He would be happy to discuss any aspects of the trip and answer any questions you may have. Call Steve on 01453 844400 or email steve@mountainkingdoms.com
- We have a maximum group size of 12 to ensure all the benefits of a genuine small group experience.
- If you wish to fly with a specific airline, from a regional UK airport or on alternative dates to the main group we would be happy to arrange this for you. Please contact our Flights Manager for flight options, quotes and further information.
- As part of our commitment to 'Tourism Declares a Climate Emergency', we will be carbon-offsetting all international flights booked through us by donating funds to the Ecoan Tree Planting Project in Peru.

If we've tempted you to take your next holiday with us, we advise you to check availability and you can do this via our website: www.mountainkingdoms.com or by calling the team on +44 (0)1453 844400. Bookings can be made online, by phone or by completing a booking form and returning it to us. We can also provisionally hold places if you need time to consider your options.

Mountain Kingdoms - distinctly different

Truly independent

In an age where many so-called 'independent' travel companies have in fact been bought out by multi-national giants, we remain fiercely independent with all the benefits this offers our clients.

Value for money prices with an emphasis on quality

We are not in the business of cutting our itineraries and services to the bone to offer eye-catching cheap prices. We use some of the best airlines, and typically 3 or 4 star hotels in cities. We include the majority of meals and private transport for road travel. We use excellent equipment and appoint well-trained staff and leaders. Last year, over 98% of our clients rated their Mountain Kingdoms holiday as 'excellent' or 'good'. We are members of AITO and bound by their quality charter.

Complete financial security

You can book with us confident that your holiday has full financial protection. Flight inclusive holidays are financially protected by the Civil Aviation Authority under ATOL licence number 2973 and 'Land Only' holidays are covered by a bond secured with ABTOT.

No Surcharge Guarantee

Your peace of mind is important to us so we have a No Surcharge Guarantee on all Land Only and Flight Inclusive bookings. This means that there will be no change to the price of your holiday once we have confirmed your booking, regardless of fluctuations in exchange rates or fuel prices.

Award winning Responsible Tourism

We feel strongly that all our holidays should benefit local communities, protect the environment and respect local traditions, religion and heritage. You can read more about the charities we support and our Responsible Tourism commitments and initiatives on the following page or at www.mountainkingdoms.com.

Genuine small group travel

Almost all of our holidays have a maximum group size of just 12, plus leader. This provides more contact with your leader, readier access to off-the-beaten-path areas, greater interaction with local communities and a reduced environmental impact.

Loyalty Discount

If you have previously travelled with us we recognise your loyalty with a discount on future trips.

Booking your holiday - it couldn't be easier

Once you've chosen your Mountain Kingdoms holiday you can book online, call the office or complete and post a booking form which can be found in our brochure or downloaded from our website. If you would like to hold a place on one of our trips, whilst you make up your mind, please give us a call to make a provisional booking. This is a no-obligation, no-cost booking and we will hold your place until space comes under pressure or we need your decision.

Comprehensive information

When we receive your booking we send you a full trip dossier which contains details of visas and vaccinations required, a suggested gear and clothing list and lots of useful information. In fact, everything you need to know to give you peace of mind and allow you to prepare for your trip of a lifetime.



RESPONSIBLE TOURISM STATEMENT CLIMATE EMERGENCY PLAN



For over 33 years, Mountain Kingdoms has been offering people the chance to visit amazing places on this extraordinary planet. We now offer trips to all corners of the world, but we are conscious that inevitably our holidays have a detrimental impact on the world around us, and we want to do all we can to reduce our carbon emissions. We are a signatory to Tourism Declares a Climate Emergency, along with a growing number of like-minded, reputable tour operators. For more information, please visit www.tourismdeclares.com

From 2020 onwards, we will be focusing on how we can reduce the carbon emissions that our holidays produce, and how to counterbalance this carbon by supporting carbon offset measures. Here are some of our current and future plans to minimise the impact of our business as a whole:

Carbon Offsetting

Already doing:

- ✓ We have been offsetting carbon since 2007, but will be increasing our donations to the [Ecoan tree planting project](#) in Peru this year. This is with a trusted partner where the funds go directly to a project where the community plants trees on its own land.

Will do:

- ✓ We are working on making our carbon offsetting more accurate and targeted.
- ✓ In future, we will add to that a further estimate for carbon produced by hotels, local road travel, trains and internal flights to arrive at a carbon offset sum for each trip we operate.
- ✓ Carbon offsetting will be included in our holiday prices. For our Flight Inclusive holidays it will include the international flight and any emissions produced by inland travel and accommodation. Our Land Only prices will include the cost of offsetting emissions caused by inland travel and accommodation.

Reducing Carbon Emissions

Already doing:

- ✓ We already offer the majority of our customers a free filtered water bottle which means they can instantly cut down on their single-use plastic consumption. This will be an ongoing project.
- ✓ We already predominantly use locally owned hotels, but will continue to ensure that, where possible, we use these rather than multinational chains.
- ✓ We have joined the Tourism Declares a Climate Emergency initiative to stand alongside like-minded travel companies, to work together to initiate best practices to make tourism as sustainable as possible.

Will do:

- ✓ We will re-evaluate our flights to make sure we are using the most fuel efficient airlines with the youngest fleets and, where possible, direct flights for each trip.
- ✓ We will stop offering unnecessary optional flights – for example our Everest sightseeing trip.
- ✓ We will eliminate unnecessary staff flights wherever possible.
- ✓ We will look at minimising internal flights.
- ✓ We will be asking all our worldwide agents and suppliers to look at their own carbon footprint and encourage them to reduce it.
- ✓ We will promote our more low impact trips to give customers an informed choice.

As part of our wider commitment to Responsible Tourism, we will continue to support a number of charities with whom we have had a long standing relationship over many years. These include: Shiva Charity in Nepal (Ginette Harrison School), Simien Mountains Mobile Medical Service and Porter Welfare, as well as setting aside a sum for emergency disaster relief should the need arise.

