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Highlights of Uzbekistan: Tashkent, Samarkand & Bukhara

14 days | 19 days with Kyrgyzstan & Kazakhstan extension

From mosques and madrassas to blue-domed bazaars, Uzbekistan is a historic patchwork of a country, and the Silk Road is the thread that ties it all together. This tour traces that famed route: Begin in Tashkent, an ancient settlement rebuilt as a model Soviet city, before making your way to Samarkand, a former scholarly center of the Islamic world. Enter the fortresses and palaces of khans (or rulers) in Bukhara and Khiva—and to continue your journey to the mystifying heights of the Tian Shan range, tack the extension to Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan onto your trip.



Your tour package includes

12 nights in handpicked hotels
12 breakfasts, 3 lunches, and 4 dinners served with beer or wine
1 tasting of Uzbek delicacies, prepped fresh in Konigil Village
1 cooking demonstration, teaching you the tricks behind plov, the national dish
12 sightseeing tours, your ticket to visiting icons past and present
1 expert Tour Director, your storyteller and cultural insider
Pre-booked transportation, including 1 private deluxe motor coach, 1 train ride, and 3 flights
Entrances to museums, landmarks, and more—so you can skip the lines

Included highlights

Drinking in a nation's history in the heart of Tashkent's Independence Square
Riding the Tashkent Metro, each of whose stations is a museum-worthy work of art
Standing among the madrassas, or schools, of the Registan—Samarkand's legendary public square
Walking in the footsteps of royal astronomers at the Ulugh Beg Observatory
Watching artisans handcraft Samarkand paper in Konigil Village
Tasting freshly made plov, piled high onto your plate after a cooking demonstration
Taking in the soaring minarets and elegantly tiled archways of the Po-i-Kalyan religious complex

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Marah Walsh, Girl Travel Tours

Tour pace

Highlights of Uzbekistan: Tashkent, Samarkand & Bukhara

14 days | 19 days with Kyrgyzstan & Kazakhstan extension

Overnight Flight → 1 night

Day 1: Travel day

Board your overnight flight to Istanbul today.

Istanbul → 1 night

Day 2: Stopover in Istanbul

Turkey's capital marks the first stop on your travels. Once you touch down, transfer to your hotel and take it easy for the rest of the night. Tomorrow, you'll resume your journey to Tashkent.

Tashkent → 2 nights

Day 3: Arrival in Tashkent

Included meals: breakfast, welcome dinner
Xush kelibsiz, or welcome—you've made it to Tashkent! Head to your hotel and freshen up. Tonight, come together as a group for an included welcome dinner, served with beer or wine, at a local restaurant.

Day 4: Sightseeing tour of Tashkent

Included meals: breakfast, lunch
Kickstart your day in Tashkent—the largest city in Central Asia—sightseeing with your Tour Director.

- Start at the Monument of Courage. Standing at the epicenter of a 1966 earthquake that devastated Tashkent, this stunning Soviet-style memorial honors the effort to rebuild the Uzbek capital.
- Take in the spraying fountains in the heart of Independence Square, Tashkent's main plaza, and spot the Eternal Flame, burning endlessly in memory of Uzbek soldiers who died during World War II.
- Pass the Gothic facade of the Romanov Palace and the graceful archways that greet visitors to the Navoi Theater. If you get close enough to the latter, you might see an ornamental plaque: Placed in 1996, it acknowledges the Japanese prisoners of war who were forced to help build the theater.
- Ride the Tashkent Metro. More than simple subway stops, the stations that dot Central

Asia's first metro system are widely regarded as prime examples of the intersection between public art and civil infrastructure. Chandeliers, mosaics, marble—each stop reveals something different.

Enjoy an included lunch, then join your Tour Director once again for a walk through the Chorsu Bazaar. Housed within a one-of-a-kind dome—painted turquoise outside and adorned with hypnotizing triangles within—this Soviet Modernist market anchors Tashkent's Old Town and is one of the oldest and largest in Central Asia. Stroll past stalls selling spices, ceramics, and more, and see if you can find the perfect souvenir.

Samarkand → 3 nights

Day 5: Train ride to Samarkand & sightseeing tour

Included meals: breakfast, dinner
This morning, head to the station and roll out of Tashkent aboard a high-speed train. In a matter of hours, you'll pull into the Silk Road city of Samarkand—and immediately dive into its greatest highlights.

- Stand in the Registan, Samarkand's central square and symbolic heart, and marvel at the Islamic and Muqarnas architecture on display all around you.
- Admire the three madrassas, or schools, that flank the Registan: Ulugh Beg, the oldest of the trio and one of the greatest educational institutions of the Middle Ages; Sher-Dor, framed by columns and adorned with Lion and Sun mosaics; and Tilya Kori, a turquoise-domed example of the architecture of the Timurid Empire.
- Visit the Bibi-Khanym Mosque. Once one of the grandest mosques in the Islamic world, this 15th-century house of worship fell into disrepair until it was partially restored in the 1900s.
- Explore the Shah-i-Zinda necropolis, a mesmerizing complex of mausoleums rumored to be the final resting place of Qutham ibn Abbas, a cousin of the prophet Muhammad.

- Enter Gur-i Amir, the mammoth tomb of the conqueror Timur. (Look vaguely familiar? This mausoleum inspired some of the greatest examples of Mughal architecture—including the famed Taj Mahal.)

Finally, cap your day with an included dinner, served with beer or wine.

Please note: Porterage isn't included for train transfers. You should be comfortable lifting and carrying luggage over steps, onto platforms, and into storage. Due to limited space, you may only bring a carry-on and a personal item aboard the train. Larger checked bags will be shipped ahead to Samarkand.

Day 6: Ulugh Beg Observatory, Mausoleum of St. Daniel & Konigil

Included meals: breakfast, tasting
After breakfast at your hotel, head back out into Samarkand for a full day's exploration.

- Begin at the Ulugh Beg Observatory. Named after the same sultan-astronomer who built one of the Registan's three madrassas, this scientific marvel was destroyed in 1449 and all but forgotten—until 1908, when a Russian archaeologist rediscovered it.
- Enter the Mausoleum of St. Daniel, the purported grave of an Old Testament prophet revered in Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. Legend has it that Timur repeatedly tried and failed to invade modern-day Syria, foiled by the saint's body. When he finally succeeded, he ordered Daniel's body exhumed and reburied in this spot for good luck.
- Visit the rural village of Konigil, where artisans still craft Samarkand paper—made from mulberry bark and prized for its durability and beauty. Here, you'll dig deeper into Uzbek culture through hands-on workshops and tastes of the local cuisine before returning to your hotel.

Day 7: Free day in Samarkand

Included meals: breakfast
Just across the border from Samarkand, Tajikistan's Fann Mountains are home to the jewel-like Marguzor Lakes. Add today's excursion to your itinerary and you'll have the rare chance to visit the country and delight in its natural beauty.
Prefer to hang back? Consider visiting the Siyob

Bazaar, the largest of its kind in Uzbekistan. (It's a short walk from the Bibi-Khanym Mosque that you saw on your first day in Samarkand.) Its triple-arched entrance, lined with blue majolica tiles, leads to more than 17 acres of market stalls, piled high with dried fruits, tchotchkes, and more. Spend the day exploring and see what you can find!

+ A Day in Tajikistan: Alpine Lakes & Peaks

Bukhara → 2 nights

Day 8: Sightseeing tour of Vobkent & cooking demonstration

Included meals: breakfast, lunch

You'll trade one Silk Road city for another today as you trek from Samarkand to Bukhara—but before arriving at your hotel, you'll detour to the village of Vobkent for a taste of Uzbek life and hospitality.

- Meet a local family in their home and join them on a walk through Vobkent, learning about the village's history and culture as you go.
- Dive into different aspects of daily life—like farming practices and handicrafts—and snap photos of buildings built in traditional architectural styles.
- Join your hosts in their kitchen for a cooking demonstration and discover the secrets behind typical Uzbek dishes. Today's menu: plov (a one-pot lamb-and-rice delicacy that's Uzbekistan's national meal), lagman (the local take on Uyghur hand-pulled noodles), and freshly baked bread. Savor those dishes during an included lunch before bidding the family farewell and returning to your bus.

Complete the drive to Bukhara and check into your hotel. You'll arrive in the afternoon; spend the rest of the day how you wish.

Day 9: Sightseeing tour of Bukhara

Included meals: breakfast

More than five millennia have left their mark on old Bukhara, where the Silk Road brought thinkers, traders, and others from Europe and Asia together. Its UNESCO-listed Old Town is the legacy of that cultural exchange, and today, you'll join your Tour Director on a sightseeing walk through the district.

- Stand in Po-i-Kalyan, a centuries-old Islamic complex, and spy its three main highlights: the 288 domes of the Kalan Mosque, the elegant tilework of the Mir-i-Alab Madrassa, and the soaring reach of the Kalyan Minaret.
- Continue to the Ulugbek Madrassa—one of

the oldest in all of Uzbekistan—then enter the fearsome gates of the Ark of Bukhara.

Sprawling over nearly 10 acres, this imposing fortress has protected the city since the fifth century, standing against foes ranging from Genghis Khan to the Soviet Red Army.

- Walk through the domed bazaars of central Bukhara, where merchants have peddled spices, textiles, and crafts since the days of the Silk Road.

Tonight, explore Bukhara at your leisure—either savoring a meal on your own or joining us on an optional outing. Add the latter to your itinerary, and you'll get a glimpse into the life of an emir, or monarch, at Sitorai Mokhi-Khosa before venturing to the old Jewish Quarter for an included dinner.

+ Sitorai Mokhi-Khosa & Bukhara's Jewish Quarter

Khiva → 2 nights

Day 10: Khiva via Kyzylkum Desert & Khorezm folklore show

Included meals: breakfast, lunch, dinner

This morning, settle aboard your bus for a long drive across the Kyzylkum Desert, an epic expanse of red-and-gold sand that stretches from Kazakhstan in the north to Turkmenistan in the south. As you navigate its dunes and oases, stopping at a restaurant en route for an included lunch, keep your camera handy and let your imagination run wild: You're following the same paths trod by Silk Road traders hundreds of years ago.

At the end of your journey lies Khiva, another UNESCO-recognized treasure of a city. Check into your hotel and freshen up: Tonight, you'll head to another restaurant for an included dinner—served with beer or wine—and folklore show. Khiva sits in the Khorezm, a historic region with a culture all its own. Get a sense of its rich heritage during this evening's performance before returning to your room for some well-earned rest.

Day 11: Sightseeing tour of Khiva Itchan Kala

Included meals: breakfast, tasting

Though a unified city, Khiva can be split in two—Dichan Kala, the outer town, and Itchan Kala, the inner town, whose walls were laid more than 1,000 years ago. With your Tour Director as your guide, set out for the latter this morning and take in the landmarks of this UNESCO World Heritage Site.

- Tour the mosque, reception hall, and harem of the Kuhna Ark, the fortified former residence of Khiva's khans.
- Glimpse the Kalta Minor Minaret, a squat 19th-century tower fully clad in luminous turquoise tiles. (It was initially intended to become the tallest minaret in the Muslim world, but construction abruptly stopped well short of its goal.)
- Visit the Muhammad Amin Khan Madrassa, located next to the Kalta Minor Minaret. At its peak, this Islamic school was one of the largest in Central Asia—nowadays, it's a hotel.
- Enter the Juma Mosque and walk among its 212 wooden columns. Carved from black elm, some date all the way to the 10th century.
- Climb the Islam Khodja Minaret—Khiva's tallest—for a sweeping view of the city's rooftops and domes. Not quite up for the climb? Its eponymous madrassa, right next door, is also worth exploring.

Sightseeing complete, break for lunch and free time before continuing your adventures in the afternoon.

- Explore Toshhovli Palace. Built for the ruler of the Khiva Khanate, the Stone Palace stuns with blue-and-white majolica tiles and wooden ceilings painted in flashes of red and yellow.
- Pay your respects at the Pahlavan Mahmoud Mausoleum, built in honor of the Uzbekistan-born poet, philosopher, and champion wrestler. (In a country filled with exquisite tilework, the craftsmanship here might top anything you've seen so far.)
- Walk through the Allakuli Khan Madrassa and its adjacent caravanseraï, or inn, surrounded by sculptures of the merchants and travelers who passed through centuries ago.

With the sun creeping toward the horizon, head to your final stop—Khiva's walls. Atop these weathered fortifications, you'll toast to a successful day with your choice of beverage.

Tashkent → 1 night

Day 12: Flight to Tashkent

Included meals: breakfast, farewell dinner

This morning, transfer to the airport in nearby Urgench and fly back to Tashkent, where your trip began. After a free afternoon, join your groupmates at a local restaurant for a farewell dinner, served with beer or wine.

Istanbul → 1 night

Day 13: Stopover in Istanbul

Included meals: breakfast

Transfer to the airport this morning. Your final destination's up to you—head home or to Bishkek, your gateway to the heights of the Tian Shan range and the first stop on this tour's extension to Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan.

Flight Home

Day 14: Departure

Included meals: breakfast (excluding early morning departures)

Complete your journey home today.

+ Kyrgyzstan & Kazakhstan extension

Leafy landscapes. Snowcapped mountains. Famed horsemanship. Between incredible sights and indelible cultural heritage, the neighboring nations of Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan have plenty in common. Add this extension and you'll sweep from one to the other, visiting the major cities of Bishkek and Almaty by way of Issyk-Kul—a treasure of an alpine lake, the crown jewel of the Tian Shan mountains.

Bishkek → 1 night

Day 13: Flight to Bishkek

Included meals: breakfast

Fly from Tashkent to Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan's capital and largest city. After touching down, board your bus and transfer to your hotel, where you'll have the rest of the evening to unwind.

Issyk-Kul → 1 night

Day 14: Sightseeing tour of Bishkek, Burana Tower & Issyk-Kul

Included meals: breakfast, dinner

Set against the jaw-dropping heights of the

northern Tian Shan range, Bishkek is a modern city rich in natural beauty and loaded with Soviet callbacks. With your Tour Director in the lead, spend your morning sightseeing in the Kyrgyz capital.

- Start in Ala-Too Square—your first introduction to Bishkek's brutalist architecture—and spy the statue of Manas. Revealed on the 20th anniversary of Kyrgyzstan's independence, it depicts the hero of the country's most famous epic poem.
- Spot the Soviet-styled Jogorku Kenesh, or parliament building, and listen as your Tour Director explains Kyrgyzstan's transition from satellite state to independent country.
- Pause in Victory Square. Anchored by an eternal flame, set beneath a brick monument shaped like a yurt, this park honors the Kyrgyz soldiers who fought and died in World War II.

After the morning's tour, begin your journey to Issyk-Kul, stopping en route at Burana Tower. Dating to the ninth century, this minaret has survived numerous earthquakes—and, along with nearby grave markers and mausoleums, is all that remains of the ancient city of Balasagun. Finally, arrive at the shores of Issyk-Kul—one of the largest and deepest lakes in the world—and check into your hotel. Once you freshen up, reconvene with your group for an included dinner, served with beer or wine and a side of alpine scenery.

Karakol → 1 night

Day 15: Karakol via Reina Kench & Dungan dinner

Included meals: breakfast, dinner

In Kyrgyzstan's nomadic past, eagles and horses were a symbol of wealth and power. And this morning, you'll explore these vital parts of the nation's culture. First, meet the trainers of Kyrgyzstan's famous golden eagles learn how they train their majestic birds. Then, at Reina Ranch founded by a former minister of agriculture on the outskirts of Tepke village, this ranch breeds prized Kyrgyz horses and cows; as you follow the owner across the property, you'll learn about their still-prominent place in local traditions.

After bidding your host farewell, continue with your group to the city of Karakol and get ready for an included dinner which spotlights Dungan culture. An offshoot of the Hui people, the Dungan are a Chinese-speaking Muslim ethnic group almost exclusively found in former Soviet

territories. Their culture—and their cuisine—reflects their unique background; indulge in a fragrantly spiced three-course meal, served with beer or wine, before turning in for the night.

Almaty → 2 nights

Day 16: Transfer to Almaty

Included meals: breakfast

Today, you'll make the trek to Kazakhstan via the Karkara border crossing. Though you'll spend most of the day on the bus, you'll have plenty to see: The lush meadows, roaring rivers, and rolling foothills of the Karkara Valley will accompany you on your journey, the perfect sendoff for your stay in Kyrgyzstan.

Tonight, you'll roll into the city of Almaty, check into your hotel, and prepare for tomorrow's adventures.

Day 17: Sightseeing tour of Almaty

Included meals: breakfast, farewell dinner

Kazakhstan's largest city—and, until 1997, its capital—Almaty beats along as the country's cultural heart. Its ample green spaces and sporty reputation draw visitors from far and wide, and today, you'll explore some of its highlights with your Tour Director.

- Begin in Panfilov Park, a 44-acre green space dedicated to 28 Soviet soldiers who died slowing the German advance to Moscow during World War II.
- Enter Ascension, or Zenkov Cathedral. A flash of cheery pastel color in the center of Panfilov Park, it's said to be the second-tallest wooden church in the world—all the more impressive when you realize it was built without nails.
- Explore the Green Bazar, Almaty's hub for shopping, and let the smell of spices, nuts, and more wash over you. (Don't forget to grab a souvenir!)

Afterward, spend the afternoon at your leisure—maybe enjoying a stroll through the Arbat, a pedestrianized shopping zone that connects to the Panfilov Street Promenade. Whatever you decide, come together as a group in the evening for a farewell dinner, served with beer or wine, and toast to your travels.

Istanbul → 1 night

Day 18: Departure

Included meals: breakfast

Transfer to the airport for your flight to Istanbul.
After arriving, head to your hotel and prepare for
the final leg of your trip home.

Flight Home

Day 19: Departure
*Included meals: breakfast (excluding early
morning departures)*
Arrive home today.

Customize your experience

Customize your tour by adding excursion options. Excursions offered on the same day will occur at different times, so there's no need to choose.

Day 7: A Day in Tajikistan: Alpine Lakes & Peaks

From \$149.00 . Visit the link above for pricing info. (10 hours, departs in the morning, includes lunch)

Just a few hours away from Samarkand, Tajikistan's Fann Mountains soar up to 18,000 feet into the sky—and tucked among those peaks, you'll find the mystifying Seven Lakes. Cross the Uzbek-Tajik border and weave your way deeper into the range. As you go, you'll stop at each of these alpine lakes; thanks to shifting light conditions and differing mineral composition, they all shimmer in different colors. Halfway through your journey, pause at Nofin—the fourth lake—for a home-hosted lunch and a proper taste of Tajik hospitality. Bellies (and camera rolls) full, return to Samarkand, plenty of memories—and a rare passport stamp—richer.

Please note: You'll be accompanied by a different Tour Director in Tajikistan. Your Uzbek Tour Director won't join you on this excursion.

Day 9: Sitorai Mokhi-Khosa & Bukhara's Jewish Quarter

From \$75.00 . Visit the link above for pricing info. (4.5 hours, departs in the evening, includes dinner)

Thanks to its location on the Silk Road, Bukhara's long been a hub for economic and cultural exchange. This evening, you'll explore two lasting examples of that legacy: Sitorai Mokhi-Khosa and the Jewish Quarter. Begin at the former—the "Palace Like the Stars and the Moon" that once served as the summer residence of the city's emir—and tour its lavish halls and gardens. Afterward, make your way to Mahalla, a neighborhood established at the turn of the 1600s to house one of the oldest communities of the Jewish diaspora. At its peak, Bukhara's Jewish Quarter was home to about 50,000 residents; as you walk its winding streets, you'll spot the former homes of merchants and learn about the unique traditions of Bukharan Jews. Cap your outing with an included dinner in the neighborhood before returning to your hotel.

*Optional excursions may be purchased up to three days prior to departure or while on tour. Pre-purchased optional excursions cannot be canceled within three days prior to departure or while on tour. Select optional excursions require advance booking and cannot be purchased or canceled after the advanced reservation deadline. Go Ahead Tours accepts payment by cash, Visa or MasterCard for optional excursions purchased on tour. Additional fees may apply for optional excursions purchased on tour. Excursions require a minimum number of participants to operate. Details and prices are subject to change. Due to seasonal hours of operation and availability, some excursions may not operate. If this occurs, you will be refunded any payments made for that excursion post-tour. Learn more at <https://www.goaheadtours.com/about/terms>.