Ancient Central Asia: Tajikistan & Uzbekistan

Tajikistan & Uzbekistan

Overview

This week-long adventure will take us across the vast, mountainous lands of Tajikistan and into the broad deserts of Uzbekistan in search of the region's wonderous and mysterious past.

As we venture across Central Asia, we'll trace the path of the ancient Silk Road across the mountains and cities of Central Asia on this seven-day journey through Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

Beginning in the hustle and bustle of the lively avenues of Dushanbe, capital of the Tajik Republic, to the tranquil hot springs, and strange James Bond Villian-esque architecture of the mountainside Khoja Obi Gharm spa and delving into the storied ruins of Panjakent, this route reveals the landscapes and cultures that once connected empires.

Crossing into Uzbekistan, we'll wander beneath the turquoise domes of Samarkand and Bukhara, two of the most evocative cities on the Silk Road and learning the many storied chapters of this incredible and historically important region.

Along the way we'll experience warm local hospitality, traditional cuisine, and the enduring spirit of Central Asia — a region where history and daily life remain beautifully intertwined!

Itinerary Overview

*Check out the brief overview of our **Ancient Central Asia: Tajikistan & Uzbekistan** – or scroll down to see the in-depth run through of each day of the trip.*

Day 1.	Arrival in Ashgabat
Day 2.	Mysterious Soviet Health Spa
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Day 1

Arrival in Dushanbe

Our adventure begins in Dushanbe, the capital of Tajikistan.

Upon arrival at Dushanbe International Airport, one of our drivers will greet you and transfer you to your hotel for check-in and rest. Later in the afternoon, we'll begin our discovery of the capital, a city that blends grand Soviet boulevards, leafy parks, and new national monuments with ease. Our first stops include Victory Park and the towering Ismoil Somoni Monument, symbol of the modern Tajik nation.

We'll continue to the National Museum of Tajikistan for a guided introduction to the region's ancient civilizations and Silk Road heritage, before visiting the National Tea House; a grand meeting and conference building which has hosted many great world leaders.

As evening falls, we'll stroll through Rudaki Park and the main mosque, ending the day with a traditional dinner in a local restaurant.

Accommodation: *Hotel Vatan, Dushanbe*

Included Meals: *Lunch, Dinner*

Day 2

Mysterious Soviet Health Spa

After breakfast we drive into the foothills north of Dushanbe to reach the mountain spa of Khoja Obi Gharm, a place where rugged cliffs and pine-covered slopes meet natural hot springs. Known since Soviet times for its therapeutic waters, the spa retains its original charm and atmosphere. The building itself is set against a large mountain, creating a strange Bond-villain lair vibe – perfect for an overnight stay!

The morning is set aside for exploring the area, experiencing some Soviet-era wellness treatments, enjoying traditional therapies, and relaxing with herbal tea on the terrace or walking along the forested river valley.

Dinner is served in the resort restaurant, featuring regional dishes made with mountain herbs and dairy products from nearby farms.

Accommodation: *Khoja Obi Gharm*

Included Meals: Breakfast, *Lunch, Dinner*

Day 3

Ancient Panjikent

This morning it's goodbye to our mountain stronghold as the adventure continues. Boarding our vehicles we find ourselves climbing up over the Zarafshan mountain range towards Alexander Lake. Along the way, our drive takes us through the notorious Tunnel of Death.

Construction of the Anzob Tunnel began in 2002; the work was challenging as the tunnel lies 2,720m below the surface and workers would have to cut through 5,040 metres of rock. In 2006, despite being unfurnished, the tunnel opened. Lacking sufficient lighting, air purification and drainage, the tunnel quickly became the scene of some terrible accidents; hence its grizzly moniker: The Tunnel of Death. However, 2014 saw work undertaken to fix the worst of the issues. These days it's a little rugged, but a lot safer to navigate.

Once through the Tunnel of Death, we journey north toward Panjakent, a city celebrated as the ancient "Pompeii of Central Asia." The road follows winding passes, offering spectacular mountain views before descending toward the fertile Zeravshan Valley. En route, we make a brief stop at Iskandar Kul — the "Lake of Alexander the Great" whose turquoise waters and legend-filled shores make it one of Tajikistan's natural highlights.

Arriving in Panjakent by early afternoon, we begin our exploration with the ruins of Ancient Panjakent, once a Sogdian trading centre dating back 1,500 years. Wander through the archaeological site where walls, temples, and frescoes hint at a vibrant pre-Islamic culture.

Later, we visit Sarazm, one of the oldest urban settlements in Central Asia (over 5,500 years old and UNESCO-listed). Dinner is hosted at a traditional family home.

Accommodation: *Hotel Umarien, Panjikent*

Included Meals: Breakfast, *Lunch, Dinner*

Day 4

Exploring Samarkand

Today, we'll load up our trusty vehicles and make our way towards the Uzbek border. Our destination for today, the ancient city of Samarkand. After passing through the border formalities, we'll enter our fourth country on this adventure. Uzbekistan is home to some of the most incredible ancient cities in the region, and our first stop is one of the jewels in the crown.

Perhaps there is no city associated more with the ancient Silk Road than Samarkand. Our exploration today will include the Bibi Khanum Mosque, a grand monument built for the wife of Timur; and the Registan Square, an ensemble of glittering blue-tiled madrasas. We also visit Gur Amir Mausoleum, resting place of Amir Temur himself, and the nearby Aksaray Mausoleum.

Each site reveals a layer of the city's long history — Persian, Mongol, and Islamic influences woven together in tile, stone, and legend

Accommodation: *Hotel Asia, Samarkand*

Included Meals: Breakfast, *Lunch, Dinner*

Day 5

Journey from Samarkand to Bukhara

This morning we continue our Silk Road journey westward to Bukhara, one of the most atmospheric cities in Central Asia. On the way, we pause at the Afrosiyab Archaeological Site and the beautifully restored Shakhi Zinda Necropolis, known for its dazzling tilework and deep spiritual significance.

Arriving in Bukhara by afternoon, we check in to our hotel before setting out to explore the Ismail Somoni Mausoleum, one of the oldest Islamic monuments in Central Asia, and the surrounding park. We'll also see the Ark Fortress, once the seat of the Emirs of Bukhara, and visit the Mir Arab Madrasa, a living centre of Islamic learning.

Dinner is enjoyed in the old town, surrounded by domed bazaars and centuries-old caravanserais.

Accommodation: *Hotel Orom, Bukhara*

Included Meals: Breakfast, *Lunch, Dinner*

Day 6

Discover Bukhara

Today we'll enjoy a full day to explore the best of Bukhara's UNESCO-listed old town and the many secrets and monuments hidden within!

After a hearty breakfast, we'll venture out into the city, beginning at the Labi Hauz Ensemble, where mulberry trees shade an ancient pool surrounded by madrasas and tea houses — a perfect place to feel the city's slow rhythm.

Continuing on, we'll head to the Magoki Attor Mosque, one of Central Asia's oldest surviving structures, and the intricately tiled Kalon Minaret and Poi Kalon Ensemble, admired by generations of travellers.

We'll visit the Museum of Islamic Art, located in a former madrasa, to gain deeper insight into regional craftsmanship. The afternoon is free for personal exploration — wander through the domed bazaars, browse handmade carpets, or enjoy Uzbek coffee beneath the arches of the trading domes.

Finally, we'll enjoy a free evening to relax, explore, or just take in the beautiful atmosphere of Bukhara city.

Accommodation: *Hotel Orom, Bukhara*

Included Meals: Breakfast, *Lunch, Dinner*

Day 7

Departure Day

Today our adventure comes to an end! Enjoy a leisurely breakfast at the hotel before concluding your journey through Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

Depending on flight schedules, you may wish to take a final stroll through the narrow lanes of the old city or visit a nearby artisan workshop for last-minute souvenirs.

One of our drivers will transfer you to the airport or train station for onward travel.

Included Meals: Breakfast