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# Jewels of the Silk Road: Uzbekistan Highlights

Uzbekistan Tour

## Overview

Join us on our adventure through the heart of the Silk Road, tracing the footsteps of great adventurers like Marco Polo, and great leaders like Alexander the Great. Uzbekistan is home to the legacy of the great Persian Empire, and was a major stopping point between the kingdoms of Europe and the mysterious east. The world famous Silk Road was the first major cross-continential trade route, and turned Uzbekistan from empty desert to a hub of culture.

Our journey begins in the heart of the nation's capital, Tashkent. Once one of the largest cities in the Soviet Union, and today the centre of an independent Uzbekistan. We'll spend our time mixing with local Tashkenters, exploring the history of the city, and the local culture surrounding us. After Tashkent, we'll make our way to the ancient city of Samarkand, a dizzying maze of ancient alleyways, domed rooftops, and stunning history.

Continuing our voyage, we'll head to the nearby Emirate of Bukhara – we'll be transported back to the days of towering minarets, Islamic architecture, and the legacy of a once great empire. But our exploration does not end with the marvels of ancient architecture. We'll dive further into Uzbekistan's heritage and culture as we visit the city of Khiva, another hub of ancient history, before circling back to end in the capital once again.

Alternatively, you can join us on our Aral Sea Extension – during this short trip, we'll visit what's left of the Aral Sea, venture through ship graveyards, and learn about the destructive power which humanity has wrought on this inland body of water.

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# What's Included?

Included:

- English Speaking Guide
- Western Tour Leader
- All Listed Meals
- Accommodation
- Internal Flights
- All Included Sightseeing
- All taxes & entrance fees to protected areas

Not Included:

- Single Supplement
- Extra Night(s) Accommodation
- International Flights
- Uzbekistan Visa
- Snacks
- Tips

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# Itinerary Overview

*Check out the brief overview of our **Jewels of the Silk Road Tour** – or scroll down to see the in-depth run-through of each day of the trip.*

| | |
|---|---|
| **Day 1.** | Arrival in Tashkent |
| **Day 2.** | From Tashkent to Samarkand |
| **Day 3.** | Samarkand: The Heart of Persia |
| **Day 4.** | From Samarkand to Bukhara |
| **Day 5.** | Bukhara: The Ancient Capital |
| **Day 6.** | Journey to Khiva |
| **Day 7.** | Explore Khiva |
| **Day 8.** | Return to Tashkent OR Extension: Day 1 |
| **Day 9.** | Departure Day OR Extension: Day 2 |
| **Day 10.** | Extension: Day 3 |

Day 1

## *Arrival in Tashkent*

Welcome to Uzbekistan! Upon your arrival at Tashkent International Airport, you'll be greeted by our driver and transferred to your hotel.

After meeting with the rest of the tour group, we'll head out to Independence Square in the heart of the city, a chance to rub shoulders with local Tashkenters as they go about their daily lives. After the square, we'll delve deeper into local life and culture with a visit to the bustling Chorsu Bazaar, a thriving local market where we'll be overwhelmed by the bright colours, intruiging smells, and the sound of local traders filling their stalls with exotic spices, local food, handicrafts, and other local treasures. This is the perfect opportunity to pickup small local souvenirs to remind you of our time in Tashkent.

Our next stop is the awe-inspiring Barak-Khan Madrasah, a masterpiece of Islamic architecture filled intricate mosaics, beautiful traditional art, and a reminder of why Uzbekistan was once a hub of culture, art, and architecture.

As the afternoon turns into evening, we'll gather together for our first group meal, a chance to get to know the other travellers joining us on this adventure, and also to try out traditional Uzbek cuisine for the first time.

**Accommodation:** Hotel Uzbekistan

**Included Meals:** Dinner

Day 2

## *From Tashkent to Samarkand*

This morning we'll wake up ready to continue our adventure as we're leaving the capital and making our way deeper into the heart of the country.

After breakfast, we'll depart Tashkent for Samarkand, catching one of the many high speed trains which criss-crosses the country. Our destination for today is one of the oldest cities in Central Asia and a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Our journey begins at the iconic Registan Square, one of the most famous sites in Samarkand, and perhaps all of Uzbekistan. A masterpiece of Islamic art and architecture that serves as the bustling centre of the city.

From the stunning architectural beauty of Registan Square, we'll journey deeper into the city to the magnificent Bibi-Khanym Mosque, one of many incredible mosques dotted across the region. Islamic art covers the walls, punctuated with inscriptions from the Quran in beautiful Arabic calligraphy.

Our visit today culminates at the legendary Gur-e Amir Mausoleum, the final resting place of Tamerlane himself. A majestic blue dome towers above the mausoleum, making it difficult to miss. Even after many centuries, we'll be struck by the solemnity with which local people visit this site, making it the perfect way to wind down a day of adventure.

Finally, as the sun sets over the ancient city of Samarkand, casting a warm glow over its timeless monuments, we'll retreat to the comfort of our hotel for another delicious Uzbek group meal.

**Accommodation:** Local Hotel

**Included Meals:** Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 3

## *Samarkand: The Heart of Persia*

Today, we'll continue our adventure across Samarkand, starting with a visit to the world-renowned Ulugh Beg Observatory – once home to ancient Uzbek scholars peering deep into the sky above looking for clues about the universe, mapping the movements of stars and planets.

Moving from science to religion, we'll make our way through Samarkand to the Shah-i-Zinda necropolis. A stunning collection of tombs and mausoleums, filled with incredible examples of traditional architecture and local Islamic artworks. From here, we'll make our way to the nearby Afrosiab Museum, home to many of the artefacts uncovered when ancient Samarkand was rediscovered under the rule of the Soviet Union. Treasures from days of the Silk Road trading, the mighty empire, and the eventual decline of the city.

As the day draws to a close, you'll have the opportunity to immerse yourself in the vibrant energy of Samarkand's bustling streets or simply relax and unwind at the hotel. Whether you choose to explore the local bazaars, wander the winding walkways and alleyways of the city, or simply enjoy the view over this ancient city, this evening will be the perfect way to round up our time in this amazing city.

**Accommodation:** Local Hotel

**Included Meals:** Breakfast, Lunch

Day 4

## *From Samarkand to Bukhara*

As we bid farewell to Samarkand, we'll continue our journey to the city of Shakhrisabz, a city with an astounding legacy, home to many remnants of the great empire once led by Tamerlane.

Arriving in the city, we'll make our first stop at the awe-inspiring Ak-Saray Palace. Home to intricate facades, traditional architecture and towering arches. The palace was completed just before the death of Tamerlane, and was listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2000, making is a real highlight on our adventure into Uzbekistan's history.

We'll continue to the majestic Dorut Tilavat Complex, a sacred religious sanctuary, home to beautiful gardens and crystalline pools. This complex was used by Tamerlane and his closest family and friends as a place to pray and reflect.

After a enjoying a relaxed lunch in the charming surroundings of Shakhrisabz, we'll continue towards the nearby city of Bukhara, another jewel of the Silk Road and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. As we drive towards the city, we'll pass local nomadic families, living in the desert the same way their ancestors have lived for hundreds of years.

Upon our arrival in Bukhara, we'll head to our hotel. As the sun sets over the ancient city, casting a golden glow over its historic monuments and bustling bazaars, we'll meet for our group meal and go through our plans for an adventure in Bukhara tomorrow!

**Accommodation:** Local Hotel

**Included Meals:** Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 5

## *Bukhara: The Ancient Capital*

Today, our journey begins with a full day of exploration in the ancient capital of Bukhara. Our first stop of the day is the imposing Ark Fortress. An awesome citadel looking over the city, acting as a sentry post, ready to defend the city from outside invaders.

From the Ark Fortress, we'll make our way to the magnificent Kalon Mosque and Minaret, the distinctive dome and towering minaret standing tall above the city's skyline, and we'll spend the morning wandering the courtyards and passing through the magnificent archways which make this site one of the most famous in the country. The inceredible artwork, inctracate patterns, and beautiful architecture make this a real highlights. After leaving the mosque, we'll wander through the atmospheric streets of the old Jewish Quarter, a chance to experience the winding streets and see how local people continue to live in the city.

Our journey through Bukhara's streets culminates with a visit to the Poi Kalyan Complex and the Lyab-i Hauz Ensemble, where the tranquil waters of the ancient reservoir beckon weary travelers to rest and recharge. We'll spend the afternoon relaxing here, amidst the gently swaying trees, admiring our beautiful surroundings.

As the day draws to a close, we'll once again marvel at the sun setting over the ancient rooftops which surround us. Tomorrow, we'll leave Bukhara, preparing to head to the city of Khiva to continue our adventure!

**Accommodation:** Local Hotel

**Included Meals:** Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 6

## *Journey to Khiva*

Today, we'll depart Bukhara and head to the city Khiva, a living museum of medieval architecture nestled within the desert sands of the Kyzylkum. Upon arrival in the city, we'll head straight out into the city to begin our adventure!

Our first stop in Khiva is the UNESCO-listed Ichan Kala fortress. Ancient walls and stunning watchtowers which have stood the test of time. This fortress was once tasked with overseeing the security of this ancient city, today its mighty towers still define much of Khiva's skyline, and it remains an example of military architecture from the days of ancient empire. Within the fortress walls lies the exquisite Tash Hauli Palace, a true gem of Islamic architecture and a testament to the opulence of Khiva's golden age.

Our journey through Khiva's streets culminates at the iconic Kalta Minor Minaret. Unlike most minarets we've seen so far on this journey, rather than being an architectural marvel made of sandstone, Kalta Minor is an artistic marvel – a beautiful combination of azure tiling, geometric patterns, and vibrant colour.

As the day draws to a close, we'll gather at a local restaurant to unwind and enjoy the city's local food; as the evening draws to a close, we'll head to bed as we prepare to continue our exploration of the city tomorrow.

**Accommodation:** Local Hotel

**Included Meals:** Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 7

## *Explore Khiva*

This morning we'll awake surrounded by the ancient buildings and winding streets of Khiva, ready to head out for another day of exploration.

Our adventure begins with a visit to the incredible Juma Mosque, a marvel of Islamic architecture. From the outside, the sandstone exterior is an imposing construction, but the inside is another example of beautiful religious design. Following on from the mosque, we'll visit the sprawling Kunya-Ark Citadel, a fortress that once served as the seat of power for the kings of the region.

Our journey through Khiva's historic streets continues with a visit to the fascinating Islam Khodja Minaret and Madrasah. The minaret holds incredible views over the city, so for those who wish, we'll climb the beautiful tower to take a look at the city from above.

As the day draws to a close, we'll make our way through the city to the Tash Hauli Palace, where a traditional dance performance awaits us. This will be a chance to experience Uzbek culture and tradition through the medium of dance.

As the performance draws to a close, we'll return to our hotel for our final night in Khiva before we return to Tashkent tomorrow.

**Accommodation:** Local Hotel

**Included Meals:** Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 8

***Return to Tashkent OR Extension Day 1***

After breakfast, we'll head to nearby Urgench for our flight back to Tashkent. Upon our arrival in Tashkent, we'll head to the esteemed State Museum of History. Nestled within the bustling streets of the capital city, it provides a cultured end to our adventure through the country.

This afternoon, you'll be free to venture through the city to your hearts content, whether you plan to shop for souvenirs, visit local cafes and restaurants, or just wander the streets experiencing local life, this is your chance to unwind after an incredible journey.

**Accommodation:** Hotel Uzbekistan

**Included Meals:** Breakfast, Lunch

**EXTENSION: Day 1**

Today marks the beginning of our two-day extension to the Aral Sea, a journey that promises to be both enlightening and sobering.

After breakfast, we'll head to the nearby city of Urgench, from where we'll towards Muynak, a once-thriving port town that now stands as a poignant testament to the environmental challenges facing the Aral Sea region. Along the way, we'll pass through the vast desert landscapes of Karakalpakstan, making regular stops to appreciate the beautiful countryside which surrounds us.

Upon arrival in Muynak, we'll visit the haunting ship graveyard, where rusted vessels lie abandoned on the dry seabed. This town was once a coastal hub, with fisherman and traders making it their home, however, the retreating sea has now rendered this area into nothing but desert.

**Accommodation:** Local Hotel

**Included Meals:** Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 9

***Departure Day OR Extension Day 2***

After breakfast, we'll bid farewell to Uzbekistan as you transfer to the airport for your onward journey. We hope you'll leave Central Asia with cherished memories of a truly unforgettable adventure!

**Included Meals:** Breakfast

**END OF TOUR**

**EXTENSION: Day 2**

This morning, we'll set out on an excursion to the Aral Sea, once one of the largest inland bodies of water in the world.

As we traverse the vast expanse of the desert landscape, we'll witness the haunting sight of abandoned fishing boats stranded on the dry seabed.

After exploring the Aral Sea region, we'll drive to Nukus for lunch before catching our flight back to Tashkent. Upon arrival back in the nation's capital, we'll enjoy our final group meal together, remenisicing about our adventure, and discussing the memories we've made along the way!

**Accommodation:** Hotel Uzbekistan

**Included Meals:** Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 10

***Extension Day 3***

After breakfast, we'll bid farewell to this incredible country as you transfer to the airport for your onward journey. Airport transfers are included, alternatively, if you'd rather spend some extra time in Tashkent, speak to your Tour Manager who can advise.

**Included Meals:** Breakfast

**END OF EXTENSION**