Canyons to the Caspian Sea: Turkmenistan in May Tour

Turkmenistan

Overview

Join us on this incredible adventure as we explore the heart of Turkmenistan, the least-visited, yet most stunning country in Central Asia!

Nestled in the heart of the region, this desert republic is little known to outsiders, but for those who do know about it, it's a must-visit country for the intrepid adventurer. Once home to great silk road civilizations, and today the land of grand marble cities and flaming gas craters, Turkmenistan is filled with incredible highlights, and wonderful people.

Our adventure will start and end in the nation's capital, Ashgabat. Known colloquially as the marble city, Ashgabat is built almost entirely out of marble, creating the impression of a gleaming oasis amidst the deserts which dominate the rest of the country. We'll spend our time visiting the many wonderous monuments and mixing with local people throughout the city's many bazaars and markets.

From here, we'll head out to the far west, visiting the cities of Balkanabat, Turkmenbashi, and ending up on the shores of the mighty Caspian Sea!

We'll also pay a visit to the famous Darvaza Gas Crater, known to many as the 'Gateway to Hell'. This great burning hole in the desert will serve as our overnight stop, giving us a chance to soak in the beautiful atmosphere of this eternal flame before we finally return to Ashgabat to end our adventure.

Itinerary Overview

*Check out the brief overview of our **Canyons to the Caspian Sea** – or scroll down to see the in-depth run through of each day of the trip.*

Day 1.	Arrival in Ashgabat
Day 2.	Underground Lakes & Balkanabat
Day 3.	Discover the Yangykala Canyon
Day 4.	Exploring Turkmenbashi
Day 5.	The Flaming Darvaza Gas Crater
Day 6.	Return to Ashgabat
Day 7.	Departure Day

Day 1

Arrival in Ashgabat

Whatever your time of arrival, we'll meet you at the airport and transfer you to the group hotel in the heart of downtown Ashgabat.

In the afternoon, we'll regroup for our pre-tour briefing and a tour around the "Pearl of Central Asia," capital of Turkmenistan, Ashgabat. Heading out into the hustle and bustle of the capital, we'll explore the Park of Independence, including a visit to the mighty Independence Monument, one of the largest and most extravagant monuments in the country.

Continuing on, we'll visit Neutrality Square, built by order of Saparmurat Niyazov, the President of Turkmenistan in 1998, followed by trips to see other various grand and glorious monuments. We'll also continue our adventure through the old Soviet part of Ashgabat, which includes a statue of Lenin, the bas-relief 'Face of War' by Ernst Neizvestny depicted on the facade of the State Archives building, as well as some buildings adorned with Soviet mosaics in the old part of the city.

Finally, we'll visit to the Fortress of Old Nisa, a UNESCO World Heritage Site and the first capital of the great Parthian Empire.

As the day draws to a close, we'll head back to the hotel to get some rest before continuing our adventure tomorrow!

Accommodation: *Sport Hotel, Ashgabat*

Included Meals: *Breakfast*

Day 2

Underground Lakes & Balkanabat

This morning we'll wake up bright and early and head out of the city.

Heading west, we'll make our first stop at nearby Geok Depe, a chance to visit a beautiful local mosque built within the former Tekke Stronghold, site of one of the largest battles for the domination of Central Asia in the late 19th Century.

Afterwards, we'll head to Geok Depe to visit one of the nation's beautiful mosques; built within the Tekke stronghold, which was the site of the biggest battle for the Russian domination in Central Asia in the late 19th Century.

We'll follow this with a visit to the private Arkadash stud farm, home of the famous Akhal-Tekke horse. The greyhound of the horse world, the Akhal-Teke horse is one of the oldest existing horse breeds on earth.

Finally, we'll visit the Kow-Ata Underground Lake. A Sulphur-heated lake situated 100 metres deep underground. We'll head down to see the lake, perhaps take a swim, explore the cave, and then have lunch at a shashlik restaurant on the spot.

Finishing up at the lake, we'll board our vehicles and head to the remote city of Balkanabat. This sleepy town is easily explored on foot, so upon arrival we'll enjoy a free afternoon of exploration before heading to our local hotel.

Accommodation: *Nebitchi Hotel, Balkanabat*

Included Meals: *Breakfast*

Day 3

Discover Yangykala Canyon

This morning we'll be leaving Balkanabat, waving goodbye to this quiet town, our destination for today is the stunning Yangykala Canyon.

Along the way, we pass impressive desert features such as rolling sand dunes, steep cliffs and geological features such as fossil beds containing evidence that this whole area was once a vast inland sea.

Known locally as the 'Grand Canyon of Turkmenistan', the Yangykala Canyon is an impressive yet little known geological feature located deep within the desert. Never failing to impress, the canyon plays host to rock formations sporting many varied colours and cliffs and canyons to make even the best-travelled visitor happy to have made this lengthy detour.

With breathtaking views all around us, we will be sure to stop and enjoy our packed lunch in this most stunning location. Once you have taken as many photos as you can, we will board our 4X4s and drive to Turkmenbashi.

Accommodation: *Charlak Hotel, Turkmenbashi*

Included Meals: *Breakfast, Lunch*

Day 4

Explore Turkmenbashi

A slower start to the day this morning as we head out to explore the Caspian city of Turkmenbashi. The oldest city in the country and one settled by Russians during their invasion from across the sea during the late Great Game.

We'll start our adventure with a visit to the local bazaar, a chance to mix with locals, share in the trading and shopping, and generally get a taste of daily life in western Turkmenistan.

Following our market visit, we'll hit the highlights of this city, with a visit to the ornate Turkmenbashy Railway Station, followed by a trip to see the Oil Worker's Square and the various grandiose monuments dotted around the city.

Finally, we'll visit a cemetery for Japanese POW's who were brought here to serve hard labour after their capture at the end of WWII, and never got home again.

Waving goodbye to Turkmenbashi, we'll make our way to the shores of the Caspian Sea, the Awaza Resort.

A bizarre collection of grandiose tourist hotels, attractions and sites, Awaza is a place that has to be seen to be believed. We'll spend our afternoon exploring this strange, and bizarre seaside attraction.

Our day ends with a transfer to the airport for our evening flight back to Ashgabat.

Accommodation: *Sport Hotel, Ashgabat*

Included Meals: *Breakfast*

Day 5

The Flaming Darvaza Gas Crater

This morning there is a bit of free time for relaxing or shopping for supplies, which may be useful as later today we're off into the desert.

Our first stop is the small desert village of Bokhurdag. It is here that we stop to sample the local cuisine and learn a little more about living outside the bright lights of Turkmenistan's flamboyant capital.

Once our journey resumes, we'll continue stopping as we travel to see other examples of the desert's mining history, visiting two other craters (one filled with water, the other with mud) a perfect pretext for the great Darvaza Gas Crater.

The incredible Darvaza Gas Crater, continuously burning since 1971, was created when Soviet engineers were drilling what they thought were vast oil fields. No oil was found, and the fields turned out to be rich in gas, evident when the drilling rig at Darvaza hit a void and collapsed in on itself. Sometime later it's believed that the escaping gas was set alight to prevent methane from polluting a nearby village. Here we are all these years later, and the gas crater has now become one of the world's most unusual tourist attractions.

We'll arrive during daylight hours to observe the transition from light to dark as the night sky becomes illuminated by the flickering blaze of the crater.

Camping next to this burning void, we will enjoy a delicious Turkmen BBQ prepared by our local crew.

Accommodation: *Camping at Darvaza*

Included Meals: *Breakfast, Dinner*

Day 6

Return to Ashgabat

Today we'll pack up and head back to Ashgabat.

After lunch, before heading back towards the capital, we will make a stop at the village of Erbent. Erbent is similar to most of the surrounding desert settlements, however, it is here that the Monument to the Basmachi Revolution is located. The Basmachi revolutionary monument is built here as this area was a Basmachi stronghold during the 1920s. The Basmachi were an Islamic group fighting the occupying Soviet forces.

Upon arrival back in the capital city, the rest of the day is yours to enjoy. You're welcome to spend this free day however you please – exploring, shopping, or even just resting now our adventure is at an end!

Accommodation: *Sport Hotel, Ashgabat*

Included Meals: *Breakfast, Dinner*

Day 7

Departure Day

Today our adventure in Turkmenistan comes to an end.

We hope you'll leave the country with a head full of memories, and a phone filled with photos!

No matter your departure time, we'll transfer you to the airport.

END OF TOUR

Included Meals: *Breakfast*