

BEST OF CENTRAL ASIA TOUR

Price: €4,580 per person. Deposit: €500. Payment can also be made in USD or CHF.
Single supplement available for €900 and required for solo travelers.

Guaranteed departures on the following dates:

**2 May - 23 May 2021 | 9 May – 30 May 2021 | 16 May – 6 June 2021 | 13 June – 4 July 2021 |
18 Jul - 8 Aug 2021 | 8 Aug - 29 Aug 2021 | 22 Aug - 12 Sep 2021 | 29 Aug - 19 Sep 2021 |
5 Sep - 26 Sep 2021 | 12 Sep - 3 Oct 2021 | 3 Oct - 24 Oct 2021**

**1 May - 22 May 2022 | 8 May – 29 May 2022 | 15 May – 5 June 2022 | 12 June – 3 July 2022 |
17 Jul - 7 Aug 2022 | 7 Aug - 28 Aug 2022 | 21 Aug - 11 Sep 2022 | 28 Aug - 18 Sep 2022 |
4 Sep - 25 Sep 2022 | 11 Sep - 2 Oct 2022 | 2 Oct - 23 Oct 2022**



Kalpak Travel's Best of Central Asia Tour combines the cultural highlights and natural beauty of five different countries in one epic journey. In each of the Central Asian republics you'll visit the modern and historic capitals, and see firsthand the cultural treasures and traditions of both the nomadic people who have crossed this region for centuries, and also the people who have settled in its cities. The eclectic contemporary architecture of [Nur-Sultan](#) and [Ashgabat](#) contrasts with the sprawling Soviet-styled cities of [Almaty](#), [Bishkek](#), and [Dushanbe](#), and nothing can prepare you for the impact of the great Silk Road cities, where flourishing Islamic culture and the medieval Timurid Empire left a lasting architectural legacy. Travel across the five 'Stans with us to experience the very best of Central Asian hospitality on an unforgettable adventure.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Combine the cultural highlights and natural beauty of Central Asia in a single tour
- Visit the diverse [capitals of all five Central Asian republics](#)
- Gaze upon the turquoise alpine lakes of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan
- Sleep in traditional yurts and experience Kyrgyz nomadic culture firsthand
- Marvel at Registan Square and other architectural wonders of in ancient [Samarkand](#)
- Wander the bustling streets of UNESCO World Heritage Sites of [Khiva](#) and [Bukhara](#)
- Shop in authentic oriental bazaars for everything from hand-woven silks to spices
- Feast on a barbeque next to Turkmenistan's burning gas crater known as "the Gate of Hell"

ITINERARY OVERVIEW

- Day 1: Arrival in Nur-Sultan and City Tour
- Day 2: Nur-Sultan – Bishkek | City Tour
- Day 3: Bishkek – Burana – Song Kul (380km, 7-8h) / Chon Kemin
- Day 4: Song Kul/Chon Kemin – Kochkor – Tamga (270km, 6h)
- Day 5: Tamga – Jety Oguz - Karakol-Tepke (ca. 150km, 4-5h)
- Day 6: Karakol– Charyn Canyon - Almaty (400km, 7-8h)
- Day 7: Almaty City Tour
- Day 8: Almaty - Dushanbe | City Tour
- Day 9: Dushanbe – Iskander Kul – Penjikent (290km, 7h)
- Day 10: Seven Lakes Day Trip
- Day 11: Penjikent – Istarafshan – Khujand (270km, 6h-7h)
- Day 12: Khujand City Tour – Tashkent (180km, 4h)
- Day 13: Tashkent – Samarkand (train, c. 2h)
- Day 14: Samarkand
- Day 15: Samarkand – Bukhara (train, c.1.5 h)
- Day 16: Bukhara Walking City Tour
- Day 17: Bukhara – Khiva (480 km, 8-9h driving)
- Day 18: Khiva Walking City Tour
- Day 19: Khiva – Kunya Urgench – Darvaza Gas Crater (400km, 7-8h)
- Day 20: Darvaza – Ashgabat (280km, 5h)
- Day 21: Ashgabat – Goekdepe – Ashgabat (250km, 5h)
- Day 22: Departure from Ashgabat

MAP



ITINERARY

Day 1: Nur-Sultan City Tour

Welcome to Central Asia! Most of the flights to Nur-Sultan arrive early in the morning, so you can have a rest and breakfast after the long flight. You will meet your fellow travelers and your guide at 10:00 AM in the hotel lobby to start the city tour. [Nur-Sultan](#) is Central Asia's youngest capital and a showpiece for 21st century Kazakhstan. We will visit the National Museum of Kazakhstan, walk to Independence Square, and in the afternoon enjoy the panoramic city view from the top of Baiterek Tower. We will walk along Nurzhol Boulevard, designed by celebrity architect Kisho Kurokawa, to the Khan Shatyr, the giant, tent-like shopping center designed by the equally famous Norman Foster. Finally, you will see the venue for Expo 2017, where the impressive Kazakh pavilion has a unique spherical shape.

Overnight in Hilton Garden Inn 4 or similar*

Day 2: Nur-Sultan – Bishkek | City Tour

This morning we need to get up early to catch our flight to [Bishkek](#), departing at 8:00 AM with Air Astana. The flight to the Kyrgyz capital takes less than two hours, and your Kyrgyz guide will meet you at the airport for the transfer to the hotel, where you can check in and leave your luggage. You will have lunch in Bishkek and then some light touring in what is one of the most charming and greenest cities in Central Asia. Our sightseeing program in Bishkek includes stops at Oak Park, Ala Too Square, and Victory Square.

Overnight in Hotel Plaza 4 or similar*

Day 3: Bishkek – Burana – Song Kul (380km, 7-8h) / Chon Kemin

We will depart from Bishkek at 8 AM and drive 80km to our first stop at [Burana Tower](#). This minaret was built in the 11th century in the medieval city of Balasagun, capital of the mighty Karakhanid Empire. You can climb up the minaret's winding staircase to enjoy a wide view of the scenic Chuy Valley. There is also an open-air museum here featuring a collection of ancient *balbals*, carved stone figures often found around ancient burial mounds.

In June, July, August & September: Song-Kul

From Burana we will continue driving to the village of Kochkor, where we stop for lunch. It is then another 4-5 hours drive, mostly on dirt roads, up to [Song Kul](#) and around the lake's southern shore to the yurt camp. The lake is situated at an altitude of around 3,000m and is only accessible in summer.

Overnight in a yurt (one yurt for two people, shared bathroom facilities)

In May & October: Chon Kemin

From Burana, we will drive further on into the mountains to our guesthouse in the beautiful Chon Kemin Valley. We will have lunch at the guesthouse on arrival. In the afternoon, you can walk into the village, observe the life of the local people; or opt for a short horse ride into the surrounding hills. Dinner will be served at the guesthouse.

Kemin Guesthouse (single/twin room with private bathroom)

Day 4: Song Kul/Chon Kemin – Kochkor – Tamga (270km, 6h)

After breakfast, it is time to leave Song Kul/Chon Kemin and drive to Issyk Kul, the "Pearl of Kyrgyzstan". On the way, we will stop in Kochkor to see a demonstration of how *shyrdak*, traditional felt carpets, are made. You can even try making your own! It's only a short distance on from Kochkor to Issyk Kul, where we will drive along the southern shore of the lake to Skazka (Fairytale) Canyon. The canyon derived its name from its bizarre landscape with fabulous geological formations. Our

overnight stay - a delightful yurt camp about 200m from the beach - is only a few minutes drive away.

Overnight in yurt – 2 people in a yurt, shared bathroom facilities

Day 5: Tamga – Jety Oguz – Karakol - Tepke (c. 150km, 4-5h)

Today we will drive further east along Issyk Kul's southern shore towards the town of Karakol. En route we will take a diversion into the side valley of Jety Oguz, famous for its two red rock formations called "Seven Bulls" and "The Broken Heart". You will see these rocks and our guide will tell you the legends behind their interesting names.

In Karakol, we will have lunch with a local Uighur family, and a short sightseeing tour of the town's most interesting sights. These include the Dungan Mosque, built in 1904; and the wooden Russian Orthodox Church, which has been standing since 1869. From Karakol, it is another 30km drive north to the village of Tepke, where we will spend the night in the welcoming guesthouse of a family who breed Kyrgyz horses. You can see their horses and learn how *boorsok* (deep fried bread, a speciality of Kyrgyzstan) is made.

Overnight at Reina Kench Guesthouse (single/twin room with shower and toilet in the room)

Day 6: Karakol– Charyn Canyon - Almaty (400km, 7-8h)

It is time to leave Kyrgyzstan behind and cross the mountains into Kazakhstan, driving to [Almaty](#), Kazakhstan's former capital and its largest city. It is a very long ride and partly on bad roads. About half way between Karakol and Almaty, we will stop for a picnic lunch at one of the most famous natural sights in Kazakhstan, Charyn Canyon. The canyon is often compared to the Grand Canyon, although it is much smaller in size with a total length of 80-90km. The part of the canyon you will visit is known as the Valley of Castles for its unusual rock formations. It is 3km long and 100m deep. We will walk these 3km down to the river, and have our lunch in a scenic spot there. We will arrive in Almaty in time for dinner.

Overnight in Hotel Kazzhol 4 or similar*

Day 7: Almaty City Tour

Almaty was Kazakhstan's capital until 1997 and it remains the country's business and educational center. The roads are wide and tree-lined, and there are good views of the Zailisky Ala-Tau Mountains which form a backdrop to the city. The name Almaty means "the place with apples" and it is believed that this is where apples originated from.

In Almaty we will visit Panfilov Park to see the city's most famous sight, Zenkov Cathedral. In the same park is the impressive Soviet Glory Memorial, a tribute to 28 men who, as the story goes, repelled 50 German tanks from the outskirts of Moscow during World War II. At Green Bazaar, you will get the chance to explore local Kazakh culture as you shop for fresh fruits and vegetables. There will be some free time in the afternoon to explore the city on your own, or to relax at the hotel. Your guide will be available to help and happy to suggest places to go and things to see or do.

In the evening, we will meet again in the hotel lobby and take the cable car to Kok Tobe, a hill overlooking the city from which there are panoramic views. We will then have dinner together before returning to the hotel.

Overnight in Hotel Kazzhol 4 or similar*

Day 8: Almaty - Dushanbe | City Tour

After a leisurely breakfast we will transfer to Almaty Airport to catch the Air Astana flight to Dushanbe, departing at 11:10 AM. It is under two hours flying time.

Originally, [Dushanbe](#) was a small village centered on a market which took place every Monday. The Persian word *Dushanbe* means “Monday”, so this is how the city got its name. It was during the Soviet Union that Dushanbe became the industrial center of Tajikistan and the capital city it is today. Arriving in Dushanbe you will meet your Tajik guide and have lunch in the city. We will visit the Museum of Antiquities with its 13m-long Sleeping Buddha, then walk in the shade of the trees in the Botanical Garden or tour the marvellous modern Navruz Palace (sometimes closed on Sundays). Together we will visit the Ismail Samani statue. This large gold and marble monument commemorates the 1,100th anniversary of the Samanid State, a Golden Age of the Tajik nation, when science and arts flourished. From there we will walk across to Rudaki Park, dedicated to great Persian poet Rudaki, who lived under the Samanids during the 10th century. By then it'll be time for a delicious dinner in a Tajik restaurant.

Overnight in hotel Atlas 4 or similar*

Day 9: Dushanbe – Iskander Kul – Penjikent (290km, 7h)

Today after an early breakfast we will drive to Iskander Kul, a mountain lake named after Alexander the Great. Triangular in shape, it is considered one of the most exquisitely beautiful lakes in all the former Soviet Union nations, It is nestled in the Fann Mountains at an altitude of 2,200m. The route is a delightful one, through rugged mountains scenery. On the shore of the lake we will have lunch, then take a short hike to a nearby waterfall. It is then a four-hour drive on to reach the town of Penjikent, where we arrive just in time for dinner and will stay for overnight in a hotel.

Overnight in Hotel Umarion 3 or similar*

Day 10: Seven Lakes Day Trip

Our day trip will start with a bumpy ride into the mountains to explore the area of the Seven Lakes. This mountain valley is not far from Penjikent, but due to the terrible road conditions, this trip takes a full day. Near the fourth lake, there is a guesthouse. If you want to, you can stay there after lunch and relax, otherwise we will drive further up the valley to the sixth lake. It is then a short and easy hike of about two hours (both ways) to the seventh and highest lake, Hazorchashma. There will be time to enjoy the scenery and wander along the lake shore before hiking back down to the sixth lake and returning by road to Penjikent.

Overnight in Hotel Umarion 3 or similar*

Day 11: Penjikent – Istarafshan – Khujand (270km, 6h-7h)

From Penjikent we will drive north first to Istarafshan and finally to Khujand. The road to Istarafshan is very scenic, crossing the Shahrison Pass. Istarafshan was founded by Cyrus the Great in the 6th century BC and recently celebrated its 2,500th anniversary. In the 14th century, the Timurids called Istarafshan Ura-Tube, and the city's artisans were highly regarded across Central Asia. Istarafshan is still well known in Tajikistan for its blacksmiths, who hand-craft knives of particularly high quality. We will visit the blacksmiths' workshops near the entrance to the city's market.

From Istarafshan, it is one and a half hours' drive to Khujand, the second largest city in Tajikistan. We will check in at the hotel and have dinner in the city.

Overnight in Grand Hotel 3 or similar*

Day 12: Khujand City Tour-Tashkent(180km, c. 4 hours)

Khujand is situated in the Fergana Valley on the Syr Darya River. It is another ancient city with history dating back to Cyrus the Great and Alexander the Great. Khujand's main market, Panjshanbe Bazaar, is the largest in Tajikistan. Our city tour includes the bazaar and the adjacent Maslihattin Mosque,

the Historical Museum of Khujand, and the curious Arbob Cultural Palace, which was built in the 1950s and inspired by the Peterhof in St. Petersburg.

In the afternoon, around 3:00 PM, we will depart from Khujand for [Tashkent](#). We will cross the Oybek border point on foot and meet our Uzbek driver and bus on the other side. It will take approximately two hours to reach Tashkent, the capital of Uzbekistan and the largest city in Central Asia.

Overnight in hotel City Palace 4 or similar*

Day 13: Tashkent City Tour – Samarkand (train, c. 2h)

After breakfast at the hotel we will visit Tashkent's Old City, where you will find the Khast Imom Complex. The library here displays the Quran of Caliph Osman, thought to be the oldest Quran in the world. We'll take a ride on Tashkent's famous Soviet-era metro system, which like Moscow's features some of the most ornately decorated stations in the world. Exiting at Amir Timur Square, we will view the statue of the great conqueror, and continue to the nearby Independence Square. In the afternoon we will have free time, or you can opt to visit one of several national museums, or the bustling Chorsu Bazaar.

In the evening we will take the Afrosiyob high-speed train to Samarkand (6:50 PM – 9:00 PM), and on arrival transfer to the hotel.

Overnight in Hotel Rabat 3 or similar*

Day 14: Samarkand City Tour

Sublime [Samarkand](#) was the capital of the Timurid Empire; Timur was one of history's greatest conquerors. His vast empire rivaled any, stretching across the Eurasian steppe. He ruled his kingdom with an iron fist, whilst at the same time patronizing the arts and literature. Much of the architectural heritage from this period has been preserved, allowing us to see how the city might have been at the peak of Timur's power.

We will start the city tour with a visit to the Gur-e-Amir, the gilded mausoleum where Timur is buried. We will hear stories from his life and how he began the construction of Samarkand. Then, we will go to the Registan, the most famous landmark in all of Uzbekistan. This square was the focal point of medieval Samarkand and is framed by three beautiful madrassas (religious schools), Ulugbek, Sherdor, and Tillya Kori. After lunch, we will stroll through the spacious courtyard of the Bibi-Khanum Mosque, a structure that legend says was gifted to Timur by one of his wives. We will have time to explore the Siyob Bazaar before checking in at the hotel and having dinner in the city center.

Overnight in Hotel Rabat 3 or similar*

Day 15: Samarkand – Bukhara (train, c.1.5 h)

After breakfast, we will visit the Konigil Paper Mill. At the paper mill you will see the same process of paper production from mulberry tree bark which was used in 8th century Samarkand. We will then continue our tour to the Shah-i Zinda necropolis to see the magnificent mosaic tile work and turquoise and blue domes.

After lunch, you can have some free time or visit Ulugbek's Observatory and the Afrasiyab Museum. The museum explores the ancient history of Samarkand – then known as Afrasiyab – before was destroyed by the Mongols in the early 13th century. Dinner will be in the city center.

After dinner, we will transfer to the train station to catch the Afrosiyob high-speed train to Bukhara, departing 9:00 PM and arriving 10:40 PM. We will transfer to the hotel and check in for two nights.

Overnight in hotel Safiya 3 or similar*

Day 16: Bukhara Walking City Tour

After breakfast, we will start our walking tour of [Bukhara](#), one of the most important trading hubs on the Great Silk Road, as well as a respected center of religious learning. The Old City has been well preserved and is crammed full of minarets, mosques, and madrassas. Its once notorious canals and pools, the source of many an epidemic, have now been drained, but the most famous, Lyabi-Hauz, is still there, an oasis shaded by mulberry trees in the heart of the city. Your guide will show you the city's unmissable sights, and you can soak up the atmosphere wandering through Bukhara's labyrinthine alleyways. Key sites on today's tour itinerary include the 10th century Samanid Mausoleum, Poi Kalon, Ark Fortress, Bolo Hauz Mosque, and the historic trading domes, which still house market stalls. Dinner will be in the city center.

Overnight in Hotel Safiya 3 or similar*

Day 17: Bukhara – Khiva (480 km, 8-9h driving)

We will check out from the hotel after breakfast and depart around 9:00 AM to [Khiva](#). It is a long but scenic ride through the Kyzylkum Desert, but the roads are shaky in places. On the way, we will stop for lunch in a small restaurant, and also have time to stretch our legs. At the end of this arduous drive, we will be rewarded with the magnificence of Khiva. We will arrive in the evening, just in time for dinner in the Old City, and check in at the hotel for the night.

Overnight in Hotel Zarafshan 3 or similar*

Day 18: Khiva Walking City Tour

Our walking tour of Khiva will begin after breakfast. Khiva is bursting with historical sites and today you will get a chance to see them all. We will visit the walled inner-city section of Khiva called the Ichan-Kala. This old section of the city contains more than 50 historic monuments and hundreds of centuries-old houses. The entire citadel is protected as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. As you walk through the enormous city gates, you will be confronted by a glistening beacon of Islamic design, the Kalta Minor. Our tour delves deep into all of Khiva's sites, and ends with panoramic views from the top of the Kunya-Ark Citadel. During dinner tonight there will be a performance by local dancers and singers, immersing you in Khorezmian culture.

Overnight in Hotel Zarafshan 3 or similar*

Day 19: Khiva – Kunya Urgench – Darvaza Gas Crater (400km, 7-8h)

In the morning we will drive to the Shavat-Dashoguz border post to enter Turkmenistan (60km, 1 h.). We plan to be at the check point at 9:00 AM when it opens and will pass through formalities on both sides, as well as the 1.5km of no man's land (minibus available for c. \$1). With your invitation letter you will be able to get your Turkmenistan visa on arrival, for which you will need to pay around \$100 USD per person in cash.

In Turkmenistan you will meet your Turkmen guide and driver and transfer to Kunya Urgench (100 km, 2 h.). Here you will visit the most important mausoleums and see the Kutlug Timur Minaret. In the afternoon, we will drive on to the Darvaza Gas Crater, located in the middle of the Karakum Desert (270km, 4-5 h.). Together we'll enjoy a delicious fire-cooked meal for dinner, then sleep overnight at the yurt camp.

Please note: On the September and October departures we will skip Kunya Urgench and drive directly to Darvaza, to be there before sunset. This reduces the driving time by 1-2 hours.

Overnight in Yurt Camp (2 people per yurt, shared bathroom facilities)

Day 20: Darvaza – Ashgabat (280km, 5h)

After a light breakfast at the yurt camp we will drive to Ashgabat via the water crater and the Erbent desert community. Arrival in Ashgabat will be around noon, so we will check in and have lunch at the hotel.

In the afternoon, we will have a short sightseeing tour of [Ashgabat](#). The capital of Turkmenistan has experienced a boom of marble architecture in the 30 years since independence. The tour includes visits to the National Museum of History, the Arch of Neutrality, and the newly-built Independence Park. The tour will end with dinner at Terrace, a restaurant on the seventh floor, with views of Independence Park and the surrounding buildings. Our after-dinner drive through the New City area of Ashgabat will enable you to see the city's nighttime illuminations.

Overnight in Hotel Diwan 5 or similar*

Day 21: Ashgabat – Goekdepe – Ashgabat (250km, 5h)

Today we have another busy day. After breakfast, we will drive to Old Nisa Fortress (a UNESCO World Heritage Site), the earliest of the Parthian Empire's capitals. It is located atop a hill at the foot of the Kopet-Dag Mountains. 14 hectares in size, the fort incorporates two semi-excavated complexes from the Parthian period (III c. BC – III c. AD), which have been identified as a royal residence and a temple complex. From Nisa, we will continue to the Spiritual Mosque, one of the biggest mosques in Central Asia, and then drive back to Ashgabat, stopping en route at the Halk Hakydasy national memorial complex with its WWII and earthquake memorials. Lunch will be served at a local restaurant.

In the afternoon we will visit a farm in Goekdepe, about 50km west of Ashgabat. Here you will see Turkmenistan's famous Akhal Teke horses. Then we will drive back to Ashgabat to share a farewell dinner together at the hotel.

Overnight in Hotel Diwan 5 or similar*

Day 22: Ashgabat Departure

Transfer to Ashgabat Airport for your flight back home, or to begin a private extension trip.

Price includes

- All transfers, including airport pick-up and drop-off
- Accommodation based on two people sharing a double/twin room; breakfasts included
- Full board (all lunches and dinners)
- English-speaking local tour leader accompanying the group for the whole time
- All entry fees as per the itinerary
- Afrosiyob train tickets from Tashkent-Samarkand and Samarkand-Bukhara
- Economy class flight tickets from Nur-Sultan-Bishkek and Almaty-Dushanbe
- Visa support letters for the Turkmenistan tourist visa

Price does not include

- International air fares to and from Central Asia
- Hotel charges for additional services
- Consular fees for tourist visas
- Travel insurance (required)
- Personal expenses (e.g. souvenirs)
- Alcoholic beverages
- Tips for guides and drivers (optional)

Important Information

- All listed departures are guaranteed
- The maximum group size is 12 people
- You can also opt to book the whole itinerary as a private tour. We can arrange extra nights before or after the trip, and suggest private tour extensions.
- We can advise and take care of all visas for you. Citizens of most countries are eligible for an e-visa for Tajikistan, and a visa on arrival for Turkmenistan, with a letter of invitation pre-arranged by us. Other countries are visa free for most nationalities.
- A €500 per person deposit is required at the time of booking, and the balance is due 15 days prior to departure. Terms & Conditions: <https://kalpak-travel.com/terms-and-conditions/>
- Travel insurance is required
- We are happy to suggest flights to get to Central Asia and back home: please contact us
- See our [books recommendation on Central Asia & the Silk Road](#)
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