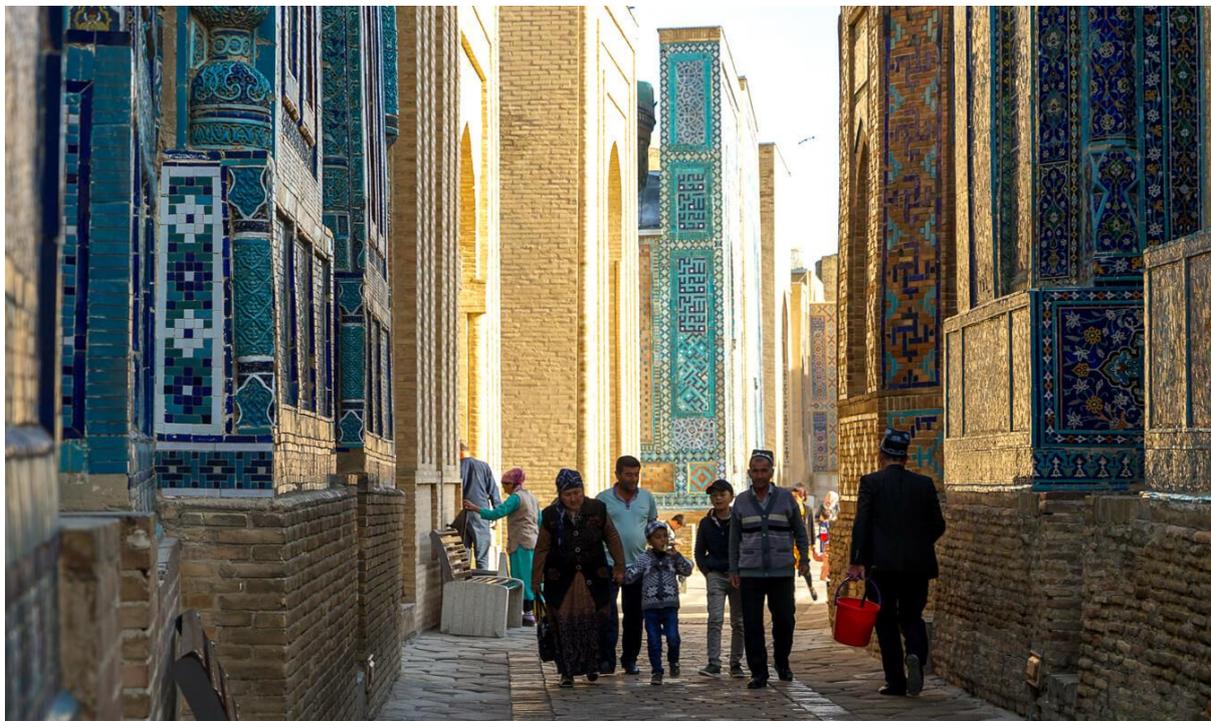


## Best of Central Asia Tour 2022 – Four Stans

Price: €4,380 per person. Deposit: €500. Payment can also be made in USD or CHF.  
Single supplement available for €850 and required for solo travelers.

**Guaranteed departures on the following dates:**

**28 August – 17 September 2022 | 11 September – 1 October 2022**



*Kalpak Travel's Best of Central Asia Tour combines the cultural highlights and natural beauty of four different countries in one epic journey. In each of the four 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](#) 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 four 'Stans with us to experience the very best of Central Asian hospitality on an unforgettable adventure.*

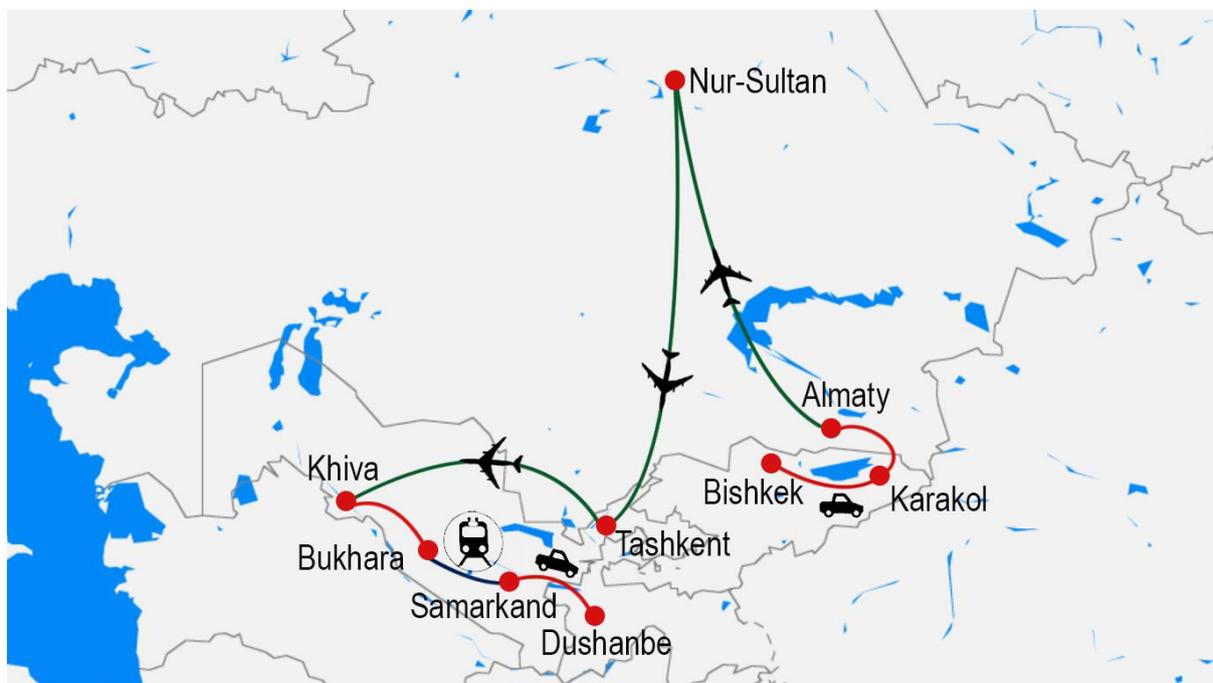
### Highlights

- Combine the cultural highlights and natural beauty of Central Asia in a single tour
- Visit the diverse [capitals of four 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

## Itinerary Overview

- Day 1: Bishkek – Burana – Kochkor (270km, 5h)
- Day 2: Kochkor – Song Kul (150km, c. 4h)
- Day 3: Song Kul – Kochkor – Tamga (270km, 6h)
- Day 4: Tamga – Jety Oguz – Karakol – Tepke (c. 150km, 4-5h)
- Day 5: Tepke – Charyn Canyon - Almaty (400km, 7-8h)
- Day 6: Almaty City Tour
- Day 7: Medeo & Shymbulak – Nursultan (flight)
- Day 8: Nursultan City Tour
- Day 9: Nursultan – Tashkent (flight)
- Day 10: Tashkent City Tour
- Day 11: Tashkent – Khiva (flight)
- Day 12: Khiva Walking City Tour
- Day 13: Khiva – Bukhara (480km, c. 8h)
- Day 14: Bukhara Walking City Tour
- Day 15: Bukhara – Samarkand (train, c. 2h)
- Day 16: Samarkand City Tour
- Day 17: Samarkand City Tour – Penjikent (60km, c. 1-2h)
- Day 18: Day trip to “Seven Lakes”
- Day 19: Penjikent – Iskander Kul – Dushanbe (290km, c. 7h)
- Day 20: Dushanbe City Tour
- Day 21: Departure from Dushanbe

## Map



## Itinerary

### Day 1: Bishkek – Burana – Kochkor (270km, 5h)

Welcome to Kyrgyzstan! Most flights arrive very early in the morning. You will transfer to the hotel and check-in with time to rest after your long flight, take a shower, and have breakfast. Meet your fellow travelers and your guide at 10:00 AM in the hotel lobby and depart for the mountain village of Kochkor. Our first stop will be Burana Tower near the town of Tokmok, 60km east of Bishkek.

Burana's 11th-century minaret is the only remaining building from the ancient city of Balasagun, once the capital of the mighty Karakhanid empire. You can walk up the winding staircase and enjoy a wide view of the scenic Chuy Valley. There is also a small open-air museum of balbals, carved stone figures often found around ancient burial mounds. After a couple more hours ride, we arrive in Kochkor, where we visit a workshop where local women produce carpets from felt. You can even try to make your own. Dinner in a family-run guesthouse and overnight in a simple hotel.

*Overnight in Hotel Nomad Lodge or similar*

### Day 2: Kochkor – Song Kul (150km, c. 4h)

After breakfast, we start our ascent towards mountain lake [Song Kul](#). The lake is not very far from Kochkor, but due to bad road conditions, it will still be a quite long and bumpy ride to the lake. Lake Song Kul is a mountainous lake on the altitude of 3016 meters above the sea level. The nomads pass their summer on the "jailoo" (summer pasture) with their animals. We will arrive in time for lunch, which will be served in the yurt camp. Free time in the afternoon to go on a walk to the shore or horse ride and observe nomadic life. The yurt camp is located about 3 kilometers from the shore of the lake. We will also watch a match of Kok Boru – a traditional spectacle of horsemanship.

*Overnight in a yurt (2 people in a yurt, shared western toilets outside, simple shower)*

### Day 3: Song Kul – Kochkor – Tamga (270km, 6h)

After breakfast, we will drive to [Issyk Kul](#), "the pearl of Kyrgyzstan" and the second-largest mountain lake in the world. At an altitude of 1,600 meters, it is warm enough in summer for swimming and a popular beach destination for the Kyrgyz and Kazakh people. The way down to Kochkor is the same road again. It's only a short distance on from Kochkor to Issyk Kul, but we will have several interesting stops along the way. Our first stop is in the village of Kyzyl Tuu, where we will meet a yurt maker and learn more about this traditional nomadic dwelling. Many people in this village are involved in yurt making business. Near Bokonbayevo, we will meet an eagle hunter, who will show us his eagle and give a short demonstration for us. At Skazka (Fairytale) Canyon, which derives its name from its bizarre landscape made of fabulous rock formations, we will walk for around one hour. From here, it is then just half an hour to reach our destination, a yurt camp near the shore of Issyk Kul.

Dinner and overnight in the yurt camp.

*Overnight in yurt (2 people in a yurt, shared bathroom facilities)*

### Day 4: 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 5: Tepke – 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 Park 4\* or similar*

### **Day 6: 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 Kazzhol Park Hotel 4\* or similar*

### **Day 7: Almaty – Nursultan (flight)**

After breakfast, we are heading to the mountains just outside of Almaty. We will take a cable car to reach one of the main landmarks of Almaty, the Shymbulak ski resort, where you will enjoy wonderful views of the Ili Alatau Mountains from the top at 3,200 meters altitude. On the way to the ski resort you will pass the legendary Medeo skating rink. It is located in the picturesque Medeo Gorge at an altitude of 1,600 m and it is one of the largest and highest ice rinks in the world. After lunch, transfer to the airport to catch the domestic flight to the Kazakh capital Nursultan (4 PM – 6 PM). Dinner on the way to the hotel. Check-in at the hotel.

*Overnight in Hilton Garden Inn 4\* or similar*

### **Day 8: Nur-Sultan 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. We will also have a chance to see the center of the "old" part of Nusultan and have a walk along Ishim river.

*Overnight in Hilton Garden Inn 4\* or similar*

**Day 9: Nursultan – Tashkent (flight)**

After breakfast, check-out from the hotel. On the way to the airport we will visit the futuristic Expo 2017 complex which boasts the biggest spherical building in the world, the Nur Alem Museum of the Energy. It was originally the Kazakh Pavilion. From there we will continue to the airport to catch the flight to the Uzbek capital Tashkent (2:10 PM – 3:10 PM, Air Astana).

From Tashkent airport we transfer to the hotel in the city center and have Uzbek welcome dinner in a local restaurant.

*Overnight in Hotel Inspira-S 4\* or similar*

**Day 10: Tashkent City Tour**

With a population of over 3 million people, [Tashkent](#) is the largest city in Central Asia. Its history dates back to the first century BC when an urban settlement grew up around a major caravan crossroad on the Silk Road. Much of what you see today, however, dates from the late 20th or 21st centuries, as a devastating earthquake in 1966 destroyed much of the older city. Rebuilding Tashkent was a major Soviet infrastructure project, with laborers coming to work here from across the Soviet Union.

We will start the day's sightseeing at the Monument of Courage, which remembers the victims of the earthquake. We will then walk to Independence Square, a symbol of freedom for Uzbekistan's citizens, who declared their independence when the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991. At Amir Timur square you will see the statue of the great conqueror. Next, we drive to Chorsu Bazaar, Tashkent's green-domed market, with its acres of spices, fresh produce, and traditional crafts. We will also visit the Old City to find the Khast Imom complex, which houses the historic holy Quran of Caliph Osman. Today's city tour will end with the Museum of Applied Arts, an ornate, rainbow-colored building that was previously the official residence of the Russian Ambassador.

*Overnight in Hotel Inspira-S 4\* or similar*

**Day 11: Tashkent – Khiva (flight)**

Free time in the morning. Around noon we transfer to the airport to take the domestic flight to Urgench (Khiva). The flight departs from Tashkent at 1:40 PM and arrives in Urgench at 3:10 PM. From the airport of Urgench it takes about 40 minutes to reach the hotel in the old town of Khiva. Check-in and free time until dinner.

*Overnight in Hotel Zarafshan 3\* or similar*

**Day 12: 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 13: Khiva – Bukhara (480km, c. 8h)**

We will check out from the hotel after breakfast and depart around 9:00 AM to Bukhara. 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 Bukhara. 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 Safiya 3\* or similar*

**Day 14: 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 15: Bukhara – Samarkand (train, c. 2h)**

Today morning you can choose to spend some free time in the city or to visit a couple more sights near Bukhara.

First, you may visit the Mausoleum of Naqshbandi, 15 km outside the city center. There are many orders in Sufism, all of which have been represented at different times in what is now Uzbekistan. The Naqshbandiyya order has a great and long-lasting influence, and the memorial place is still a popular place of pilgrimage for Sufis. From here, we will visit the summer residence of the last Emir of Bukhara. In Persian it is called Sitorai Mokhi Hossa, "the place where the moon meets the stars". Return to Bukhara for lunch.

In the afternoon, on the way to the train station, we will stop to see the Chor Minor Madrassa. The style of the madrassa and its four minarets (chor means "four") is reminiscent of the Char Minar in Hyderabad, India. Our high-speed train departs from Bukhara at 3:50 PM and we arrive in Samarkand at 5:20 PM. Transfer to the hotel for check-in and dinner.

*Overnight in Hotel Rabat 3\* or similar*

**Day 16: Samarkand City Tour**

Sublime [Samarkand](#) evokes an almost mythical past full of romance and intrigue. This was the domain of Emperor Timur, one of history's greatest (and most ruthless) 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 Samarkand's Timurid-era architectural heritage has been preserved, allowing us to see how the city might have been at the peak of Timur's power.

We will start the day with a visit to the Gur-e-Amir, the mausoleum where Timur is buried. Our guide will tell stories from Timur's life and how and why he began to build in Samarkand. We will then go to the Registan, Samarkand's central square, which is undeniably Uzbekistan's most famous landmark. This focal point of medieval Samarkand is framed by three beautiful madrassas (religious schools): Ulugbek, Sherdor, and Tillya Kori. Next, we will stroll through the spacious courtyard of the

Bibi-Khanum Mosque, an impressively tiled structure that is said to have been gifted to Timur by one of his wives.

After lunch, we will have time to explore Siyob Bazaar, where fruit and vegetables grown in the rich soils of the Zarafshan Valley are sold in a colorful market. You may explore the city on your own during your free time this evening.

*Overnight in Hotel Rabat 3\* or similar*

### **Day 17: Samarkand City Tour – Penjikent (60km, c. 1-2h)**

After breakfast, we will check-out from the hotel and continue to explore the fairytale city of Samarkand. We go first to the Shah-i Zinda, a magnificent tiled necropolis; and then visit Ulugbek's Observatory, which was once the biggest research center in Central Asia. Ulugbek was decades ahead of the West with his observations of the solar system and the Earth, and we will learn more about his story in this prestigious setting. After lunch, it is time to say goodbye to the marvelous cities of Uzbekistan and transfer to the border crossing with Tajikistan. We will pass through both border checkpoints on foot, completing all necessary formalities, and meet our Tajik guide and driver on the other side. On the way to Penjikent, just off the main road, we will stop at the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Sarazm, the ruins of which date from the 4th to 2nd millennia BC. Upon arrival in Penjikent, we will then check-in at the hotel for two nights. Penjikent translates as "the city of five villages" and is located in the verdant Zeravshan River valley. Established in the 5th century, Penjikent was a thriving regional hub on the Great Silk Road. If time allows, we can visit the town's local market today – or otherwise the following day in the morning.

*Overnight in Hotel Umarion or similar*

### **Day 18: Day trip to "Seven Lakes"**

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 lakeshore before hiking back down to the sixth lake and returning by road to Penjikent.

*Overnight in Hotel Umarion or similar*

### **Day 19: Penjikent – Iskander Kul – Dushanbe (290km, c. 7h)**

Today is a long but very scenic driving day through the Zarafshan Mountains to Dushanbe, capital of Tajikistan. On the way, we will visit Iskander Kul, an idyllic mountain lake 30km off the main road. The lake, named after Alexander the Great ("Iskander" is the Persian form of Alexander), is triangular in shape and considered one of the most exquisitely beautiful lakes in all of the former Soviet Union. It's nestled in the Fann Mountains at an altitude of 2,200m. We will have lunch on the shore of the lake. Those who want to do so can then take a short hike to a nearby waterfall. Be prepared for colder weather in the mountains. In the afternoon, we will depart from Iskander Kul and finish driving to Dushanbe. After an ascent to the Anzob Tunnel, our route is along the Vazob River down to the Varzob Gorge, a popular weekend getaway for locals from Dushanbe.

We will reach Dushanbe in the evening, check-in at the hotel, and have dinner.

*Overnight in Hotel Atlas 4\* or similar*

**Day 20: Dushanbe City Tour**

As well as being the capital, [Dushanbe](#) is the largest city in Tajikistan. It was a small village with a market every Monday. The Persian word for Monday is Dushanbe, and that's how the settlement got its name. It was not until the Soviet period that Dushanbe grew into the political and industrial center of Tajikistan.

Our city tour will start with a visit to the National Museum of Antiquities with its famous Sleeping Buddha, excavated from the Buddhist monastery at Ajina Teppa. Our next stop is the Navruz Palace. Initially, this building was envisaged as the largest teahouse in the world. However, during construction (which involved hundreds of artisans from all over Tajikistan), the interior became so impressive that it was decided to use it as a palace instead of a teahouse. This is a unique opportunity to tour the interior of this ornate modern palace. After lunch, we will visit the statue of Ismail Somoni whose mausoleum you saw in Bukhara. This large 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 up to Rudaki Park, dedicated to the great Persian poet Rudaki, who also lived during the Samanid period, in the 10th century AD.

*Overnight in Hotel Atlas 4\* or similar*

**Day 21: Departure from Dushanbe**

Transfer to Dushanbe Airport for your flight back home.

**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 in each country
- All entry fees as per the itinerary
- Afrosiyob train tickets from Bukhara - Samarkand
- Economy class flight tickets from Almaty-Nursultan, Nursultan-Tashkent, Tashkent-Urgench

**Price does not include**

- International air fares to and from Central Asia
- Covid-19 PCR tests, if required (at the moment needed for entry to Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan) – they cost around 20 USD and we can arrange it for you in each country
- 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**

- The departure is guaranteed
- The maximum group size is 12 people
- We can advise and take care of all visas for you, if you need them. All four 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 and you have to be fully vaccinated against Covid-19
- 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](#)
- Read more about [food in Central Asia](#)