

CENTRAL ASIAN SILK ROAD TOUR

Price: €4,740 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 2023:

23 April - 7 May 2023 | 6 August - 20 August 2023 | 1 October - 15 October 2023



Kalpak Travel's Central Asian Silk Road Tour will lead you through the remarkable cities of the [Great Silk Road](#), many of which are now UNESCO World Heritage Sites. You will discover the cultural treasures and traditions of both the nomadic people who have crossed the region for millennia, and of the settled population. Explore three of the sprawling, Soviet-era capitals of Central Asia. Absorb the architectural legacies of flourishing Islamic cultures and the mighty Timurid Empire in [Samarkand](#), [Bukhara](#), and [Khiva](#). In your two-week stay, you will be immersed in centuries of history and the diverse cultures of the peoples who built the 'Stans as you see them today.

Highlights

- Tour modern [Tashkent](#), Uzbekistan's capital and the largest city in Central Asia
- Explore the remarkably well-preserved city of [Khiva](#), an open-air museum surrounded by mud brick walls
- Visit the charming Old City of [Bukhara](#), a UNESCO World Heritage Site
- Discover ancient Khorezm, including the ruined fortresses of Ayaz Kala and Toprak Kala
- Be wowed by the spectacular Registan and the other architectural wonders of [Samarkand](#)
- Shop in authentic oriental bazaars for everything from hand-woven silks to spices
- Discover Iskander Kul, an idyllic mountain lake named after Alexander the Great
- Sightsee amongst the parks, museums, and monuments of [Dushanbe](#)
- Tour vibrant [Almaty](#), Kazakhstan's largest city and cultural heart
- Explore Kyrgyzstan's green, modern capital, [Bishkek](#)
- Watch a performance of Kyrgyz horse games and meet an eagle hunter

Itinerary Overview

- Day 1: Arrival in Tashkent and City Tour.
- Day 2: Tashkent – Khiva (flight, 7:15 AM – 8:45 AM).
- Day 3: Khiva – Bukhara (450 km, c. 7h).
- Day 4: Bukhara City Tour.
- Day 5: Bukhara - Samarkand (train, 3:50 PM – 5:20 PM).
- Day 6: Samarkand City Tour
- Day 7: Samarkand – Penjikent (70 km, c. 2h).
- Day 8: Penjikent - Iskander Kul – Dushanbe (300km, c. 7h).
- Day 9: Dushanbe City Tour.
- Day 10: Dushanbe – Almaty (flight, 7:00 PM – 9:45 PM).
- Day 11: Almaty City Tour.
- Day 12: Almaty – Bishkek (flight, 5:40 PM – 6:35 PM).
- Day 13: Bishkek City Tour.
- Day 14: Day trip to Burana Tower.
- Day 15: Departure from Bishkek.

Map



Itinerary

Day 1: Arrival in Tashkent and City Tour.

Welcome to Uzbekistan! Transfer to the hotel and early check-in at the hotel. You can have a rest after your long flight, take a shower, and have breakfast before meeting your group and guide in the late morning in the hotel lobby. Today, you will begin an authentic journey deep into the remarkable history of Uzbekistan.

Where better to start than a tour of [Tashkent](#)? The largest city in Central Asia is a curious blend of Islamic and Soviet influences. Visit the Old City area of Tashkent where you will find the Khast Imom Complex which contains the ancient holy Quran of Caliph Osman. Experience the bustling crowds of traders at Chor-Su Bazaar. Visit Amir Temur Square to view the statue of the great conqueror and next to it, the grand Independence Square. We complete the city tour of Tashkent with a visit to the Applied Arts Museum.

Please note: If you arrive a day early, we can book an extra night for you at the hotel.

Hotel Wyndham 4 or similar*

Day 2: Tashkent – Khiva (flight, 7:15 AM – 8:45 AM).

Today we will need to get up very early to catch the domestic flight to Urgench, which departs from Tashkent at 7:15 AM. Arriving at Urgench Airport at 8:45 AM, we will then transfer to Khiva (c. 40 min). We will have breakfast in Khiva before starting our walking tour of the city.

A jewel of desert architecture, [Khiva](#) is one of the most important centers of ancient Khorezm. Locals believe that Shem, son of Noah, founded the city when he discovered a freshwater spring in the middle of this vast desert. Archeologists believe the city was founded some 2,500 years ago. Today, Khiva is the most architecturally intact and tightly packed of Central Asia's Silk Road cities. Its intense blue-and-green tile work ranks as some of the most ornate in Uzbekistan, and the entirety of the Ichan-Kala - the inner city - is listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. It also has the feel of a movie set or an open-air museum. Khiva is full of incredible architecture, and today we will get the chance to see it all. The focus of our tour is the walled Ichan-Kala, within which are preserved more than 60 historic monuments and hundreds of centuries-old houses. You will also have time on your own to wander around this fabled town. During dinner, we will have a folklore performance of traditional Khorezmian dances and songs on kush-nay, a musical instrument very specific to the Khorezm region.

Hotel Asia 3 or similar*

Day 3: Khiva – Bukhara (450 km, c. 7h).

We will check out from the hotel after breakfast and depart around 8:00 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 Bukhara. We will arrive in the evening, just in time for dinner in the Old City, and check-in at the hotel.

Please note: Flight and train schedule Khiva-Bukhara is available only on relatively short notice. If a flight or a train is available, we will use that instead of road transfer.

Hotel Paradise Plaza 4 or similar*

Day 4: Bukhara City Tour.

[Bukhara](#) is the second of our UNESCO World Heritage Site stops. The city's very name -Bukhara - conjures up images of the exotic Orient. For centuries, it was an important trading post and center of scholarship. 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. Today it's an oasis shaded by mulberry trees in the heart of the city. Your guide will show you Bukhara's unmissable sights, and you can soak up the atmosphere wandering through the labyrinthine alleyways. Highlights of today's walking tour in Bukhara include the Poi Kalon complex, the Ark Fortress, Bolo Hauz Mosque, the Ayub Mausoleum and spring, the bazaars inside Bukhara's unique trading domes, and the Samanid Mausoleum. The guided tour will end in the early afternoon and you will have some free time. Later, we will visit a family house restaurant in the old town for a cooking master class on a traditional Uzbek dish called "plov".

Hotel Paradise Plaza 4 or similar*

Day 5: Bukhara - Samarkand (train, 3:50 PM – 5:20 PM).

Today morning you can choose to spend some free time in the city or 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.

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. After dinner, on the way to the hotel, drive by Registan Square for an evening view of the magnificent madrasahs.

Hotel Hilton Garden Inn 4 or similar.*

Day 6: 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. We will also 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. Our next stop will be the Konigil Paper Mill. Here you will see the process of making paper from mulberry tree bark, just as it was done in 8th-century Samarkand.

Hotel Hilton Garden Inn 4 or similar*

Day 7: Samarkand – Penjikent (70km, c. 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. Finally, we will visit Afrasiyab Museum to learn about the ancient city

of Samarkand – then known as Afrasiyab – which was destroyed by the Mongols in the early 13th century. After the Uzbek farewell 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, complete 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. 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. Together we will visit the local market and the mosque. Our guide will tell us more about the region's influential past.

In the evening, we will have a cooking master class in a nice teahouse with a garden. We will also invite a singer and drum player (dutar) and they will perform traditional songs from the Zarafshon region called “doyra”.

Hotel Panjakent Plaza 3 or similar*

Day 8: Penjikent – Iskander Kul – Dushanbe (300 km, c. 7h).

Today is a long but very scenic driving day through the Zarafshan Mountains to Dushanbe, the capital of Tajikistan. On the way, we will visit Iskander Kul, an idyllic mountain lake 30 km 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.

Hotel Hyatt Regency 5 or similar.*

Day 9: 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 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. Most of the rooms are now used for official government meetings with guests from abroad, or for international conferences. Just one room is open to the public, and usually, weddings take place there. This is a unique opportunity to tour the interior of this ornate modern palace. After, 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. In the afternoon we visit Hissor Fortress, one of the main historical sights of the country. The strategically important fortress guarded the town, which was a staging post on the old Silk Road, and it is said that it was overcome and destroyed by the likes of Cyrus the Great and Alexander the Great. What remains today is a portion of the wall and two monumental gate towers from the 18th century. Return back to Dushanbe (c. 30 min) and have free time before dinner in a local restaurant.

Hotel Hyatt Regency 5 or similar.*

Day 10: Dushanbe – Almaty (flight, 7:00 PM – 9:45 PM).

Our flight to Almay departs only in the evening, so we will have some more time for sightseeing in Dushanbe. After a leisurely breakfast, we start the day with a visit to the National Museum of Antiquities with its famous Sleeping Buddha, excavated from the Buddhist monastery at Ajina Teppa. Touring today also includes the Museum of Musical Instruments and Folklore. Badakhshani actor Gurminj Zavkybekov began this small but fascinating museum. Displaying a fine collection of beautifully crafted antique and modern instruments from Afghanistan, the Pamirs, Turkey, and China, the museum is often the scene of exuberant performances and demonstrations. We will also visit the newly built independence monument – from the top you can enjoy a nice view of the city. Our next destination is the city's main market. In the afternoon, we will visit the handicrafts center of Dushanbe. Here you can meet many masters of different types of crafts, including some who have been involved in the construction of Navruz Palace. We can spend as much time as you like in the crafts center, talking with masters and watching their works.

In the late afternoon transfer to the airport to catch our Air Astana flight to Almaty, Kazakhstan (7:00 PM – 9:45 PM). Upon arrival at Almaty Airport meet your Kazakh guide and driver and transfer to the hotel.

Hotel Rixos 5 or similar.*

Day 11: Almaty City Tour.

[Almaty](#) is the largest city in Central Asia's richest country, Kazakhstan. Until 1997, it was the capital, and it remains the country's business and educational center. Roads here are wide and tree-lined, and there are good views of the Zailisky Ala-Too Mountains which form the backdrop to the city. The name Almaty means "the place with apples" and it is believed that this is where apples originated from.

Today afternoon we will start exploring the city. We will visit Almaty Museum to get an introduction to the city's history. Then we take a stroll at the oldest parks of Almaty and see the Square of Victory dedicated to the heroes of World War Two with the nearby Museum of Musical Instruments. We also have a look at the city's oldest orthodox cathedral – the only building that survived the big earthquake in 1911. After walking in the park we will continue with a food tour at the Green market which is the main market of Almaty. Let's discover the history of the country through the food and stories of the merchants of the Green Market. We will see some of the main buildings representing Soviet architecture of Almaty before heading to Koktobe Hill to enjoy a panoramic city view.

Hotel Rixos 5 or similar.*

Day 12: Almaty – Bishkek (flight, 5:40 PM – 6:35 PM).

This morning we will take a cable car to reach one of the main landmarks of Almaty – Shymbulak ski resort. At this time of the year, the ski season will not start yet, but you will enjoy the wonderful view of Ili Alatau mountains. On the way to the ski resort you will see the legendary Medeo skating rink. The skating rink is located in the picturesque Medeo Gorge at an altitude of 1600m and it is one of the largest high mountain skating rinks in the world. Medeo is also known as the "Factory of Records" because more than 120 world records were set here. Enjoy your walk surrounded by the marvelous mountains of Trans-Ili Alatau. Lunch in the city.

In the afternoon, transfer to the Airport to catch your flight to Bishkek (5:40 PM – 6:35 PM). Meet your Kyrgyz guide in the arrival hall of the airport. Kyrgyz welcome dinner on the way to the hotel.

Hotel Orion 5 or similar*

Day 13: Bishkek City Tour.

[Bishkek](#), the charming capital of Kyrgyzstan, is relatively young. It started as a Russian garrison named "Pishpek" in the late 19th century, and it was only during the Soviet period that it grew into a city. It is a very green place, with tree-lined boulevards and many parks.

In the morning we will visit Ala Archa National Park, located in the Tien Shan mountains, around 30km to the south of the city. We will have a light walk and enjoy the mountain scenery. On the way back to the city we will have lunch at the beautiful ethno-yurt complex Supara with a folklore show.

Afternoon city tour of Bishkek. During the city tour, we will learn the history of both Bishkek and Kyrgyzstan, as part of the Great Silk Road, and the more recent Soviet Union, and get a glimpse of how it is shaping today. We will explore main sights such as the Ala-Too square, the White House, and the old square, but also discover interesting places off-the-beaten path.

Cooking workshop of a traditional central Asian bread "kattama" and dinner with a local family. The special recipes include natural ingredients which provided nomads with the necessary energy in harsh environments.

Hotel Orion 5 or similar*

Day 14: Day trip to Burana Tower.

We will begin the day with a two-hour drive to [Burana Tower](#), 85km east of Bishkek. The minaret at Burana was built in the 11th century in the medieval city of Balasagun, the capital of the mighty Karakhanid Empire. You can climb up the winding staircase to enjoy extensive views of the Chuy Valley. There is also an open-air museum featuring a collection of ancient balbals, carved stone figures used as monuments. We will have lunch in a local family's house in the nearby village and watch a performance of national horse games called Kok Boru or Ulak Tartysh. In the afternoon we will have a chance to meet an eagle hunter, who will make a short performance for us. Later, return to Bishkek.

Free time and optionally visit the colorful and busy Osh Bazaar and do some shopping for local dried fruits or souvenirs. Farewell dinner.

Hotel Orion 5 or similar*

Day 15: Departure from Bishkek.

Sadly the time has come to transfer to the airport for your flight back home. We hope you will have enjoyed your trip to Central Asia and will return soon to discover more places in this beautiful part of the world!

Price includes

- Full board (all lunches and dinners)
- Accommodation based on two people sharing a double/twin room; breakfasts included
- English-speaking local tour leader in each country / for groups of more than 6 people tour leader accompanying the group during the whole trip
- Entrance fees to all sights listed in the itinerary
- All transfers in a safe and comfortable vehicle with A/C, including pick up and drop off from the airport
- Cultural activities mentioned in the itinerary
- Economy class flights: Tashkent-Urgench, Dushanbe-Almaty, Almaty-Bishkek
- Train ticket from Bukhara-Samarkand

Price does not include

- International airfares 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, starting from 1 person
- The maximum group size is 12 people
- The weather in Central Asia is stark continental, with cold winters and hot summers. We recommend traveling in spring (April/ May) or in fall (September/ October).
- You can opt to book the whole itinerary as a private tour. We can also arrange extra nights before or after the trip, and suggest private tour extensions.
- We can advise and take care of all visas for you. All 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](#)
- Read more about [food in Central Asia](#)