

The 5 Stans of Central Asia

Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan,
Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan



September 2027 | 30 Days

\$16,800 per person, twin share

Solo Supplement: \$2,200

Tour Highlights

- History, history and more history in every direction
- Uzbekistan's Samarkand, Bukhara and Khiva
- Outstanding examples of Islamic architecture
- Turkmenistan's ancient cities of Merv and Nisa
- Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan's snow-capped mountains and lakes
- Learning about nomadic life in remote locations
- Warm and friendly locals who love interacting with you



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Tour overview

Central Asia, or "The Stans", is a vast landlocked region of Asia, popular amongst travellers who want to experience one of the world's last great frontier lands.

The Silk Road was a network of Eurasian trade routes spanning 6,400 km, linking East to West, and fostering the exchange of goods, ideas, and cultures that shaped human history. Central Asia is defined as much by its climate as by its geography. The region's aridness made agriculture difficult, and as a result, few large cities developed. Instead, the region was dominated by the nomadic horse people of the Steppe. Historically conquered by many warriors, the area finally fell under Stalin's rule, where it was known as Turkestan. After independence, the five former Soviet Central Asian Republics emerged — Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan.

Uzbekistan shines with some of the world's most celebrated Islamic architecture. Walking through Registan Square in Samarkand, the old town of Bukhara, and Khiva's walled city is like exploring open-air museums of mosaics, domes, and minarets. Enigmatic Turkmenistan is unlike anywhere else, where the ultra-modern, marble-clad capital of Ashgabat contrasts sharply with the ancient ruins of Merv and Old Nissa. Few tourists make it beyond the capital, and the friendly locals are the ones taking photos — of us!

The most rugged and remote, Tajikistan is dominated by the legendary Pamir Mountains, where high-altitude landscapes meet warm village hospitality. In contrast, Kyrgyzstan is defined by its mountains and nomadic spirit. In this wild frontier, you'll meet Eagle hunters, experience village hospitality, and dine inside yurts. Crossing more spectacular mountains into Kazakhstan, the largest and most modern country, we conclude our journey with the fantastic museums and cultural sites of Almaty.

Our journey encompasses many historic places and "storybook" destinations. Beautiful monuments, some restored and some not, museums full of ancient artifacts, colourful bazaars, stunning landscapes and wonderfully friendly locals.



Activity rating: Active

This tour requires a good level of fitness. You should be able to walk for up to an hour at a steady pace, manage stairs, varied terrain and inclines, and board and disembark transport independently



9th September 2027 DEPARTURE

Depart Australia for Tashkent, Uzbekistan. Our recommended flight is via Dubai, and we will provide you with an individual flight plan for your journey.

Day 1, Friday 10th September ARRIVAL – TASHKENT, UZBEKISTAN

On arrival in Tashkent, we'll have a light dinner at the hotel and our welcome meeting, then a good night's rest before exploring the city tomorrow. Overnight: Tashkent. **D**

Day 2, Saturday 11th September TASHKENT

Today we'll take a walking tour of Uzbekistan's capital, Tashkent. We'll visit the city's main squares, stroll along its tree-lined streets, and explore the metro stations—an attraction in their own right. In the afternoon, share your first of many cups of tea at a family-run ceramic workshop, and learn about one of Uzbekistan's oldest art forms. Overnight: Tashkent **B/D**

Day 3, Sunday 12th September TASHKENT

Prepare for sensory overload this morning at Chorsu Bazaar, Tashkent's expansive local market. We'll visit the Khast Imam Complex with its stunning mosques and mausoleums, as well as the Applied Arts Museum. We'll learn about Uzbekistan's more recent history at the memorial museum and finish our day at a well-known local restaurant serving Central Asia's most traditional meal, plov. Overnight: Tashkent **B/D**

Day 4, Monday 13th September TASHKENT – SAMARKAND

An early start today, as we take the comfortable high-speed train to Samarkand (approx 2.5 hours). Situated at the crossroads of world cultures for over two and a half millennia, Samarkand is one of the most important and beautiful sites on the Silk Road. We'll have an orientation walk on arrival and visit the enormous and impressive Registan Square, Bibi Khanym Mosque and Gur-e-Amir Mausoleum. Overnight: Samarkand **B/D**

Day 5, Tuesday 14th September SAMARKAND

This morning we'll continue our exploration of the city's most famous landmarks, including the surprisingly beautiful Shah-i-Zinda, the fascinating Ulugbek Observatory and the Afrosiyob Museum. In the afternoon, we'll visit the silk paper centre and the carpet factories that produce the silk carpets the region is famous for, returning to the city for dinner. Overnight: Samarkand **B/D**

Day 6, Wednesday 15th September SAMARKAND – BUKHARA

This morning, we'll take another fast train journey from Samarkand to Bukhara (approx. 1.5 hours). We'll leave our luggage at the hotel and head out to explore this lovely city, which has been a hub for traders and travellers since its foundation over 2,000 years ago. Our guided tour will include the Labi Hauz complex, the stunning domes of the old city, Bozori Kord Khammam (sauna), and the Ulugbeg and Abdulazizhkan madrassahs. We'll return to our hotel in the late afternoon to freshen up and will spend the next three nights here. Overnight: Bukhara **B/D**

Day 7, Thursday 16th September BUKHARA

Mosques, madrasas and markets await today as we continue to explore the fascinating ancient city of Bukhara. Highlights include the Ark Fortress, Bolo Hauz Mosque and the Samani Mausoleum. Your afternoon is free, and our hotel is centrally located near the ancient trading domes, the ideal place to wander, have a coffee, or pick up a local handicraft. This evening we'll enjoy a folk show at Devonbegi Medressah. Overnight: Bukhara **B/D**

Day 8, Friday 17th September BUKHARA

Today, we'll explore more of the delights of fascinating Bukhara. This includes the summer palace of the last emir of Bukhara and the mausoleum of Baha al-Din Naqshband. We'll also visit the local synagogue and a puppeteer workshop, and if time permits, you can wander the fabulous trading domes again and haggle for a memento or two. Overnight: Bukhara **B/D**

Day 9, Saturday 18th September BUKHARA – MARY, TURKMENISTAN

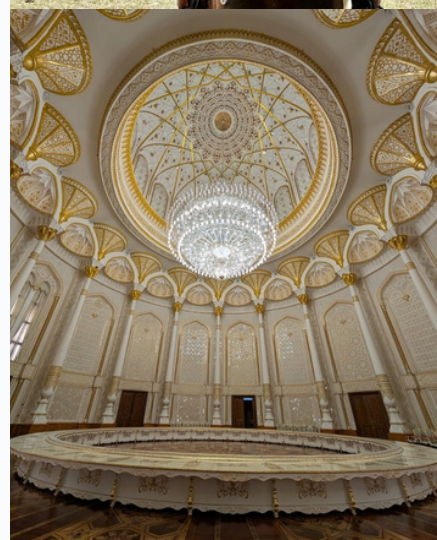
Today is a challenging travel day, as we say goodbye to Uzbekistan for a few days and cross into Turkmenistan. The roads are arduous, and the border formalities can be lengthy and often frustrating. However, this is part of the experience of visiting lesser-travelled countries. We'll meet our new driver and guide for the journey through the desert to Mary for a one-night rest stop. Overnight: Mary **B/D**

Day 10, Sunday 19th September MARY – MERV – ASHGABAT

Today, we'll drive east towards Bayram-Ali, the historical and cultural park of Ancient Merv, listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The cities that developed at Merv together formed one of the most complex urban centres on the Silk Route of Central Asia. We'll explore the well-preserved remains, then return to Mary to visit the local History Museum. It presents an astounding array of archaeological finds dating from 3000 BC to the late 19th century. In the afternoon, we'll continue our desert drive to Ashgabat, Turkmenistan's capital. Overnight: Ashgabat **B/D**

Day 11, Monday 20th September ASHGABAT AND SURROUNDS

Today, we'll visit the fortress of Old Nisa, a UNESCO World Heritage Site and the earliest Parthian Empire capital at the foot of the Kopet-Dag Mountains. Next, we'll visit a local stud farm to meet the family and learn about their pure-blood Akhal-Tekke horses. We'll return to Ashgabat via Kipchak village to visit the biggest mosque in Turkmenistan and the family mausoleum of the first president. We'll conclude our day at the National Museum of History, home to over 325,000 objects, including artefacts from many of Turkmenistan's archaeological sites. Overnight: Ashgabat **B/L/D**



Day 12, Tuesday 21st September ASHGABAT – DASHOGUZ

Prepare to be surprised! Ashgabat is one of the quirkiest cities, made of white Carrara marble that positively shines in the desert sun. This morning we'll explore the city's main monuments, then at lunch we'll try our hand at preparing our own "somsa" (local dumpling) in a cooking class. Finally, we'll visit the fascinating National Carpet Museum, home to the world's largest carpet and other exquisite objects. In the late afternoon, we'll transfer to the airport for our evening flight to Dashoguz (1 hour). You can grab a snack for dinner at Ashgabat airport, if you have room after lunch! Overnight: Dashoguz **B/L**

Day 13, Wednesday 22nd September DASHOGUZ – KHIVA (UZBEKISTAN)

After breakfast, we'll leave Dashoguz and travel to the UNESCO-listed Kunya Urgench, with its wonderful architecture and monuments dating back to the 11th century. We'll then drive to the Uzbek border to meet our original Uzbek guide. Once again, patience will be needed as we complete border formalities before driving to Khiva (approx 1 hour). Legend has it that the son of Noah founded Khiva, while archaeology suggests it was founded as early as 5000 BC. In its heyday as the last resting place of caravans before crossing the desert to Iran, Khiva was a vital stop on the Silk Road where the sale of camels, carpets, coffee and concubines shaped capitalism as we know it. Overnight: Khiva **B/D**

Day 14, Thursday 23rd September KHIVA

Today, we'll explore the magnificent Khiva, regarded as one of Central Asia's most coherent and well-preserved examples of Muslim architecture. Even though this walled city is small, there are seemingly endless alleyways and sites (to say nothing of craft shops) to discover with the help of our guide. We'll explore the highlights of the old city, including the city gates, the Allakuli Khan Madrasah, the Kalta minaret, the Kunya Ark fortress, the Juma mosque and the Tosh Hovli Palace. Overnight: Khiva **B/D**

Day 15, Friday 24th September KHIVA – TASHKENT

We'll continue exploring Khiva this morning, visiting the sites we didn't have time for yesterday. The fascinating Silk Museum showcases the traditional silk-making process, from silkworm cultivation to weaving, within the historic setting of the ancient Itchan Kala. We'll have lunch at a local restaurant, followed by free time before our evening flight to Tashkent (1.5 hours). We'll overnight at a hotel near the airport, before flying to Dushanbe in the morning. Overnight: Tashkent **B/L**

Day 16, Saturday 25th September TASHKENT – DUSHANBE (TAJIKISTAN)

This morning, we'll take an early flight to Dushanbe (which means Monday), a relatively new city named after the traditional bazaar held here on Mondays. We'll meet our new guide and visit some of the city's key sites, including the decadent Navruz Palace and Tajik Buddha. This 14m Buddha statue, the largest of its kind in Central Asia, was transported in 43 pieces by a team of restorers from the Hermitage Museum and painstakingly restored to what we see today. The city's Archeological Museum is a fascinating visit, with exhibits from its many civilisations (Greek, Buddhist, Hindu, Zoroastrian and Islamic). Overnight: Dushanbe **B/D**

Day 17, Sunday 26th September ISKANDERKUL LAKE DAY TRIP

Today we'll take a scenic day trip to Iskanderkul Lake, nestled in the heart of the Fann Mountains (approx 3hrs). The mountain roads will be rough, but the beautiful views of the lakes along the way are worth it. Named after Alexander the Great and sitting at an altitude of 2,200 metres, this glacial lake is simply stunning. We'll have lunch overlooking the lake, then spend some time walking in the area. The hike to the nearby waterfall is approximately 1.5 hours and rated as challenging. Overnight: Dushanbe **B/L/D**

Day 18, Monday 27th September DUSHANBE

This morning we'll continue our tour of the delightful capital, visiting the central mosque, the National Museum of Tajikistan and the impressive Friendship Square. Time permitting, we'll take a stroll through the extensive Rudaki Park, named after the Tajik poet. After lunch, we'll visit Hissar Fortress, the residence of Bukhara Emirs during the 18th century, with its original city walls and arched gateways. Overnight: Dushanbe **B/D**

Day 19, Tuesday 28th September DUSHANBE – BISHKEK (KYRGYZSTAN)

Today is another travel day, as we fly from Dushanbe to Bishkek (via Tashkent). Pack a good book, as the flight schedules often result in a few hours' wait in Tashkent. Overnight: Bishkek **B/D**

Day 20, Wednesday 29th September BISHKEK AND SURROUNDS

This morning we'll head out of Bishkek to the breathtaking Ala-Archa Alpine National Park, in the Tian-Shan Mountains for a light hike. There are some 20 glaciers within the park, and it is also home to the endangered and very rare snow leopard. We'll return to the city to explore the highlights of the capital, including the colourful atmosphere of the Osh Bazaar, and Lenin Square. At tonight's dinner we'll try the traditional Kyrgyz hunting dish "Tash Mangal", followed by a folklore show and Manas performance. Overnight: Bishkek **B/D**

Day 21, Thursday 30th September BISHKEK – CHON-KEMIN

This morning we'll continue our sightseeing in Bishkek, visiting its impressive monuments, tree-lined boulevards, gardens and historic city squares. After lunch we'll travel to the beautiful Chon-Kemin Valley. We'll stop en route at the Burana Historical Complex, an open-air archeological museum of Balbals (carved stone warriors). We'll arrive at our guesthouse for dinner. Overnight: Chon-Kemin **B/D**



Day 22, Friday 1st October CHON-KEMIN

Today we'll experience local life in the Chon Kemin valley, starting with a demonstration of felt carpet making and then horse games played by locals. After lunch, we'll visit Kalmak Ashuu Gorge on a horse and cart (a light hike is also possible). In the afternoon, there'll be free time to explore the local village and soak up the stunning mountain scenery. A delicious homemade dinner will be served on the terrace, opening to the panoramic view of the mountains and village. Overnight: Chon-Kemin **B/L/D**

Day 23, Saturday 2nd October CHON-KEMIN – KARAKOL

Today we'll take a scenic five-hour drive to Karakol via the shores of Issyk-Kul Lake. In the village of Bokonbaev, we'll visit a local hunter who keeps golden falcons and shares stories of traditional falconry, including an eagle-hunting demonstration. Our lunch is at a local villager's home, before we continue to Jeti Oguz Gorge, a scenic regional township of beautiful hills and streams. Those who wish can take a gentle one-hour walk to enjoy the views and fresh mountain air, before we continue to Karakol. On arrival, we'll visit the all-wood Russian Orthodox church (built without nails) and the Dungan mosque, reflecting the culture of the local Dungan Muslim community originally from western China. We'll spend the next two nights at a local guesthouse. Overnight: Karakol **B/L/D**

Day 24, Sunday 3rd October DAY TRIP TO JYRGALAN

This morning we'll visit the local livestock market. Kyrgyz come from all over the region to buy and sell horses, sheep, and cattle – and also to socialise! This is the only animal market in Kyrgyzstan, and people may travel for days with their livestock to reach it. It's the perfect place to dive into local culture. After this, we'll set out through the beautiful landscapes and traditional villages of the Jyrgalan Valley. We'll visit a local home and learn how to cook a Kyrgyz bread called Boorsok – small pieces of dough fried in a Kazan (steel pot) over an open fire – followed by a barbecue lunch. You'll love the freshly cooked boorsok served with jam or honey! Walking through the area is a great way to learn more about Kyrgyz rural life. Overnight: Karakol **B/L/D**

Day 25, Monday 4th October KARAKOL – CHOLPON ATA

This morning, we'll visit the Museum of Explorer Nikolai Przhevalsky, then travel to the Reina-Kench Ranch on the banks of the Jyrgalan River. There'll be time to explore the farm before our organic lunch prepared from products grown on the farm. We'll continue to Cholpon-Ata, where we finish our day with dinner and a boat trip on the beautiful alpine lake surrounded by snow-capped mountains. Overnight: Cholpon Ata. **B/L/D**

Day 26, Tuesday 5th October CHOLPON ATA – ALMATY (KAZAKHSTAN)

This morning, we'll visit the fascinating open-air Petroglyphs Museum, which features over 5,000 ancient rock carvings dating back to 1500 BC. Then we'll begin our journey towards Kazakhstan. It's about a 3-hour drive to the border, where we'll change drivers and guides. We'll continue travelling to Almaty (another 3 hours), where we will spend the next four nights. Overnight: Almaty **B/D**

Day 27, Wednesday 6th October ALMATY

Today, we'll enjoy a walking tour of Almaty, the former capital of Kazakhstan. At Panfilov Park, an eternal flame commemorates the fallen soldiers of 1917–20 (the Civil War) and 1941–45 (WWII) and burns in front of a giant black monument of soldiers from all 15 Soviet republics. We'll visit the Museum of National Musical Instruments' collection of traditional Kazakh instruments – wooden harps, horns, bagpipes, and the lute-like two-stringed dombra. We'll continue to the Green Bazaar and then Kok-Tobe Hill, where there is a great viewing deck, souvenir shops, and, bizarrely enough, a bronze monument devoted to the Beatles. Overnight: Almaty **B/D**

Day 28, Thursday 7th October DAY TRIP TO ESIK VILLAGE

Today we'll head out to explore the beautiful local countryside. Our first stop is Esik Village, lying on the Issyk River at the foot of the Tian Shan Mountains. Here, archaeologists found the grave of a Scythian warrior that contained an elaborate costume adorned with thousands of gold pieces. It has become known as the gravesite of the Golden Warrior. In the afternoon, we'll drive on to Ile-Alatau National Park, famous for its wildlife and scenic beauty. We'll return to Almaty for dinner. Overnight: Almaty **B/D**

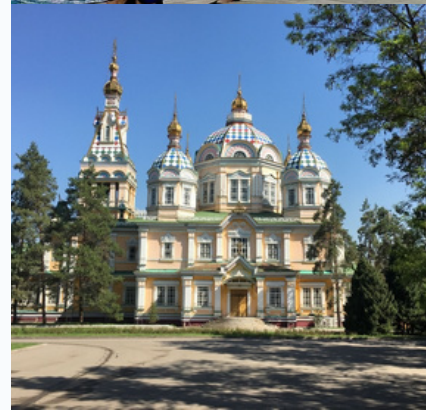
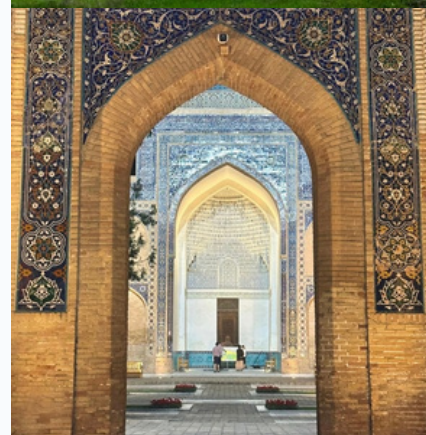
Day 29, Friday 8th October ALMATY

We'll continue our sightseeing in Almaty with visits to Republic Square, Independence Monument, and Arbat Street, a popular area filled with artists selling their works. The Central Historical Museum showcases Kazakhstan's history from bronze-age burial mounds to the modern day. One of our favourites is the ethnographic display, which features yurts, horse and camel gear, jewellery and exotic costumes dating back to the 18th century. In the afternoon, we'll sample some of Kazakhstan's surprisingly good wines, then return to the hotel to rest, as it's an early start tomorrow! There'll be a light dinner available at the hotel. Overnight: Almaty **B/D**

Day 30, Saturday 9th October DEPARTURE

We'll transfer to the airport for our early-morning flight. Flights are via Dubai and will arrive home on Sunday morning.

Note. If you'd like to combat the jet lag with a stopover in Dubai, this can be arranged when we book your flights.





Accommodation

Our hotels are carefully chosen to capture the local atmosphere and set you up in an ideal location. You can expect basic, comfortable, independently owned and operated establishments with en-suites. Below are sample hotels on this tour:

Amiran Hotel, Bukhara
www.amiranboutiquehotel.uz

Kosh Havuz, Samarkhand
www.koshhavuz-hotel.com/en

Rumi Hotel, Dushanbe
www.therumihotel.com

Kazzhol Hotel, Almaty
www.kazzhol.com/ru/almaty

Why Blue Dot?

Travel is more than just moving from one place to another; it is an opportunity to explore this vast planet, connect with its people and marvel at its beauty. We have established a group of loyal, like-minded travellers who share this feeling and have taken multiple tours with us. With Blue Dot, you'll experience

- Thoughtfully designed itineraries with unique experiences
- Small, inclusive groups with a maximum of 16 travellers on most tours, and often fewer
- The support of both an Australian tour leader* and experienced local guides
- Programs designed to meet the needs of mature-age travellers
- Hands on, personalised service including customised flight bookings
- Tipping included in your tour cost

*Australian leaders accompany groups with more than 10 travellers.

Blue Dot welcomes solo travellers

In fact, over half of our clients are solo travellers. We understand it can be daunting to travel on your own, and we'll ensure your travel is inclusive and enjoyable, while prioritising your safety. You can confidently join our groups, knowing that we bring solo travellers together to share the camaraderie of an unforgettable adventure.

Enquiries and bookings

A \$500 deposit is required to secure your booking.

For more information:

 02 9906 5770

 enquiries@bluedottravel.com.au