



# Four Golden Stans

| Days | Westbound             | Countries   | Distance | Activity level |
|------|-----------------------|---|----------|----------------|
| 29   | Astana to<br>Tashkent | Kazakhstan + Kyrgyzstan + Tajikistan + Uzbekistan | 5,435 km | ● ● ● ● ●      |

**This incredible journey will take you through four of the "Stans" of Central Asia, across mountains and steppes, treading in the footsteps of those who travelled the ancient Silk Road with their caravans, winding trails through deserts, exchanging wares, ideas and people which has led to the extraordinary melting pot of cultures that exists in the region today.**

# Itinerary

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## Day 1 Astana

Our journey begins in Astana - a living monument to modernity in Kazakhstan.

This evening you join your Tour Leader and fellow travellers at 5:00pm for your Welcome Meeting as detailed on your joining instructions.

Meals - Dinner

## Day 2: Astana and to Almaty

We explore the sights before boarding the train south to Almaty, perhaps still the country's most important city and full of architectural wonders set against a backdrop of magnificent peaks.

Sightseeing - Astana City Tour

Meals - Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner

## Day 3: Arrive Almaty

This morning we arrive in Almaty. Thanks to an abundance of natural resources, Almaty is a sophisticated patchwork of leafy avenues, European cafes, refined restaurants and glitzy shopping malls.

Sightseeing - Almaty city tour and Kok Tobe cable car (if time allows)

Meals - Breakfast, Dinner

## Day 4: To Karakol Via Charyn Canyon

Our departure takes us to Charyn Canyon, a natural wonder said to rival the Grand Canyon. Then it's on to Kyrgyzstan. In a land of celestial mountains and rolling pastures, yurt-dwelling nomadic spirits roam free. Explore the awe-inspiring scenery and learn about Kyrgyz culture. Across the border we arrive in Karakol.

Sightseeing - Excursion to the "Valley of Castles", Charyn Canyon

Meals - Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner

## Day 5: Karakol and Djety Oguz

Today we visit a Chinese mosque, which was constructed in 1907, in the style of a Chinese temple for the local Dungans, yet was built in the Kyrgyz traditional wood feathering style instead of metal nail construction.

We will also visit the striking Holy Trinity Orthodox Cathedral, which was completed in 1895.

In the afternoon we travel to the Valley of the Flowers and Djety-Oguz where we can enjoy a light hike through the magnificent canyon of red sandstone.

Sightseeing - Djety Oguz gorge

Meals - Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner

## Itinerary (cont.)

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### Day 6: Lake Issyk Kul and to Chon Kemin

After breakfast we drive to Chon Kemin valley, a unique natural reserve where glaciers are bordered with coniferous forests and steppe. We see the contrast of green meadows in the valley permanent snow covering the ranges of Kungei-Ala-Too and Zailiyskiy-Ala-Too which tower above us. Tonight we'll experience Kyrgyz hospitality in a guesthouse in the quaint village Ashu.

Sightseeing - Lake Issyk Kul, Cholpon-Ata petroglyphs.

Meals - Breakfast & Dinner

### Day 7: To Bishkek

After a walk in the foothills, we continue on to Kyrgyzstan's capital, Bishkek. Along the way we stop to wander around the Burana Tower, before spending the evening enjoying Bishkek's many parks and intriguing soviet buildings.

Sightseeing - Burana Tower Historical Complex, Bishkek City tour

Meals - Breakfast & Dinner

### Day 8: Bishkek - Ala Archa National Park

We experience a Kyrgyz alpine adventure in Ala Archa National Park. Take a rewarding trek to rushing rivers, waterfalls and glaciers. The park is high altitude and much cooler than Bishkek – to enjoy it fully, bring proper footwear and clothing.

Sightseeing - Ala Archa National Park excursion

Meals - Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner

### Day 9: Toktogul

Our final highlights in Kyrgyzstan are Toktogul Lake reached via mountain passes at 3000m. You will drive over the Too-Ashu Pass and through Suusamyr valley to see the sparkling waters.

Sightseeing - Toktogul Lake

Meals - Breakfast & Dinner

### Day 10: To Osh

In Osh we visit the bazaar, still the largest market in Central Asia. You walk along the colorful rows of Golden market, watch black smiths working and smell aromas of spices, fruits and vegetables of Food market. Sulaiman Mount, towering above the city remains one of the main shrines of the Islamic world and we follow the way of all pilgrims up to the top of the hill to see the little mosque of Babur, The Great Moghul Dynasty founder and to take in a bird's eye view of the city.

Sightseeing - Osh City tour

Meals - Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner

## Itinerary (cont.)

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### Day 11: To Fergana

Today we cross into Uzbekistan and visit the amazing potters of Margilan and the silk making factories of the Fergana Valley.

Sightseeing - Fergana Valley artisans

Meals - Breakfast & Lunch

### Day 12: To Khujand

Our next "Stan" awaits as we cross into Tajikistan and drive to Khujand, one of the oldest cities in Central Asia, dating back about 2,500 years. It is situated on the Syr Darya at the mouth of the Fergana Valley and was a major city along the ancient Silk Road.

Meals - Breakfast & Dinner

### Day 13: Khujand

The city will delight, not only with the intricate woodcarvings of the region but also with the vast array of ancient monuments; the fortress, palace and mosque as well as Panjshanbe bazaar, considered as one of the oldest markets of the region.

Sightseeing - Excursion to Khistervarz to visit local woodcarvers, Arbob Palace, and City tour.

Meals - Breakfast & Lunch

### Day 14: Khujand to Dushanbe

Leaving the northern capital of Tajikistan we travel to Dushanbe via Istaravshan. Located in the northern foothills of the Turkistan mountain range, Istaravshan is one of the oldest cities in Tajikistan and offers an opportunity to interact with local Tajiks and see local craftsmen at work.

Sightseeing - Mugtepa Fortress in Istaravshan

Meals - Breakfast & Dinner

### Day 15: Dushanbe

Dazzling Dushanbe awaits where we explore the national history, including a visit to see ancient fortress of Hissor, one of the most precious historical sites of Tajikistan.

Sightseeing - Dushanbe City tour, visit to Hissor Fortress and Medrassah Kuhna.

Meals - Breakfast & Dinner

## Itinerary (cont.)

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### Day 16: Iskanderkul Lake and Penjikent

Continuing to Penjikent, an ancient city from the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC, via the beautiful Iskanderkul lake. According to the legend, the Lake was named after Alexander the Great, known as Iskander in the East. They say that Alexander the Great's path to Central Asia from India laid through this lake.

Sightseeing - Iskanderkul Lake

Meals - Breakfast & Lunch

### Day 17: To Samarkand

After a morning city tour of Penjikent and Excursion to the Seven Lakes, we depart Tajikistan bound for Golden Uzbekistan.

Sightseeing - Rudaki Ethnographic museum, Excursion to Seven Lakes

### Day 18: Samarkand

Samarkand, often considered the jewel in the crown of Central Asia awaits.

Registan Square is truly unrivalled in its magnificence, a far cry from the "sandy place" from which its name derives. Stand in wonderment at the glittering mosques and madrassahs, and awe inspiring monuments of Amir Timur's time.

Sightseeing - Samarkand City tour including Registan Square

Meals - Breakfast & Lunch

### Day 19: Samarkand

Today we spend more time exploring the history and mystery of this fabulous city. Wander the bazaar in the afternoon at leisure and find some hidden gems.

Sightseeing - Half day city tour

Meals - Breakfast & Dinner

### Day 20: To Bukhara via Shakhrisabz

Today we journey via Shakhrisabz, birthplace of Timur and still symbolic of the power he commanded over the region. Visit Ak Saroy Palace – the greatest palace, built by Tamerlane, similar in structure to Samarkand's Bibi Khanum Mosque, but unparalleled in size and decoration. The inscription survived only in part, yet the ruined entrance towers stand in monumental testimony to an age of power writ large on tiled canvas.

Sightseeing - Excursion to Shakhrisabz

Meals - Breakfast & Dinner

## Itinerary (cont.)

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### Day 21: Bukhara

Bukhara, an incredible city, home to hundreds of monuments, from the soaring Poi Kalon Minaret ensemble, to the Ark Fortress, architectural wonder of the Samanid Mausoleum and Chor Minor located close by the tranquil resting spot of Lyabi-hauz. Take some tea under the mulberry trees to reflect on all that you have seen so far. Don't miss out on a visit to the bazaar to choose your silk carpet to provide a lasting memory of this journey.

Sightseeing - Full day city tour

Meals - Breakfast & Lunch

### Day 22: Bukhara

Today we venture out of town to visit the Sitora-i-Mokhikhosa, the summer residence of the former emir of Bukhara where you can see unique mixture of traditional Russian style of architecture harmoniously mixed with local oriental traditions.

Sightseeing - Visit to Sitorai Mokhi-Khosa Palace, City exploring and free time

Meals - Breakfast & Dinner

### Day 23: Bukhara to Khiva

Today takes us across the desert to Khiva, once the glorious capital of the Khorezmshah Empire, a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Meals - Breakfast & Lunch

### Day 24: Khiva

Made for walking, you will discover all the major sights of the Ichan Kala, the citadel, where we will see the truncated Kalta Minor minaret, the Kunya Ark and many more. We climb the city walls to look out across the town and the desert beyond. You can imagine the layers of history around. Who else has walked these walls? This evening we dine with a local family.

Sightseeing - Walking city tour

Meals - Breakfast and Dinner

### Day 25: Khiva to Nukus via Ayaz Qala

Situated on a hilltop overlooking the Kyzylkum Desert, the 4BC site of Ayaz Qala encompasses the ruins of an ancient Khorezm fortress and we get a glimpse of the fortunes of empires long forgotten. We continue on to Nukus, capital of the autonomous Republic of Karakalpakstan sitting on the banks of the Amu Darya river which once tracked the southern route of the Silk Road.

Sightseeing - Toprak Kala Fortress

Meals - Breakfast & Lunch

## Itinerary (cont.)

### Day 26: Nukus

Today brings the opportunity to visit the incredible collection of the Nukus Museum of Art named after its founder, Igor Savitsky. Savitsky amassed works to inspire the next generation in Karakalpakstan, including many Russian artists who were banned under Stalin but who were had painted in or were influenced by Central Asia. It was not until after his death and the independence of Uzbekistan in 1991 that the full extent of the collection and its importance was finally seen.

Sightseeing - City tour and Savitsky Museum

Meals - Breakfast & Dinner

### Day 27: To Urgench and to Tashkent

We make our way to Urgench for our afternoon departure when we board our overnight train to our final destination, Tashkent, who cleverly juggles its cultural and historical past, the Soviet era's impact and modern day lifestyles.

Meals - Breakfast

### Day 28: Tashkent

Tashkent is one of the oldest and largest cities in Central Asia, the Uzbek capital since 1930, and very much a showpiece of Soviet and post-soviet architecture.

Although much of the Old City was lost to an earthquake, Tashkent still retains some of its ancient treasures. Visit the Madrasah Kukeldash - an Islamic School that sits beside the 15th century Jume Mosque, the Museum of Applied Arts where the colourful building is an attraction in itself, see the statue of the 14th century national hero, Amir Temur (Tamerlane) on horseback in Armir Temur Square,

Get amongst the hyper-activity of the Chorsu Bazaar found in the unique complex of trade halls crowned with magnificent blue domes. This is one of the oldest and largest Bazaar's in central Asia. Gather around one of the steaming street kitchens and sample some Plov, the king of Uzbek cuisine.

Sightseeing - City tour including old town and Chorsu Bazaar

Meals - Breakfast & Dinner

### Day 29: Tashkent

Our journey ends in Tashkent and we reflect on this monumental journey through countries, broken by borders but united in history and peoples.

Meals - Breakfast

### Journey Summary

|          |                             |
|----------|-----------------------------|
| Day<br>1 | Astana - journey begins     |
| Day<br>2 | Astana and depart to Almaty |

Evening departure

## Itinerary (cont.)

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|           |   |                 |
|-----------|---|-----------------|
| Day<br>3  | Arrive Almaty   | Morning arrival |
| Day<br>4  | To Karakol via Charyn Canyon (Kyrgyzstan border crossing) |                 |
| Day<br>5  | Karakol - day trip to Djiety Oguz                         |                 |
| Day<br>6  | To Chon Kemin via Cholpon Ata                             |                 |
| Day<br>7  | To Bishkek  |                 |
| Day<br>8  | Bishkek - day trip to Ala Archa                           |                 |
| Day<br>9  | To Toktogul Lake  |                 |
| Day<br>10 | To Osh  |                 |
| Day<br>11 | To Fergana (Uzbekistan border crossing)                   |                 |
| Day<br>12 | To Khujand (Tajikistan border crossing)                   |                 |
| Day<br>13 | Khujand   |                 |
| Day<br>14 | To Dushanbe via Istaravshan                               |                 |
| Day<br>15 | Dushanbe  |                 |
| Day<br>16 | To Penjikent via Iskanderkul Lake                         |                 |
| Day<br>17 | To Samarkand (Uzbekistan border crossing)                 |                 |
| Day<br>18 | Samarkand   |                 |
| Day<br>19 | Samarkand   |                 |



# Itinerary (cont.)

|           |                              |                          |
|-----------|------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Day<br>20 | To Bukhara via Shakrisabz    |                          |
| Day<br>21 | Bukhara                      |                          |
| Day<br>22 | Bukhara                      |                          |
| Day<br>23 | To Khiva                     |                          |
| Day<br>24 | Khiva                        |                          |
| Day<br>25 | Khiva to Nukus via Ayaz Qala |                          |
| Day<br>26 | Nukus                        |                          |
| Day<br>27 | To Urgench and to Tashkent   | Afternoon<br>departure   |
| Day<br>28 | Tashkent                     | Early morning<br>arrival |
| Day<br>29 | Tashkent - journey concludes |                          |

## What's included

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### Group size

15 maximum



### Meals

28 breakfasts

11 lunches

21 dinners



### Transfers

All transfers including to and from the airport.



### Accommodation

25 hotel / guesthouse (twin share)

1 tent

2 train

Optional single supplement available for hotel stays on this journey – prices available on request.



### Sightseeing

Comprehensive schedule of sightseeing with certified Local Guides. You'll have a generous sprinkling of free time to relax or explore on your own.



### Expertise

An experienced Tour Leader accompanies the whole journey to keep your adventure on track. Local Guides are native to each destination and as certified professionals will share their immense knowledge with you. 24/7 support is available in the office and on the ground.

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## Contact Us

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### Client enquiries and reservations

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