

CENTRAL ASIA

Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan

Detailed Itinerary

All itineraries subject to slight changes.

Please contact Baraka Journeys for most current itinerary

Day 1

Depart US Gateway on Lufthansa.

Day 2

Arrive Frankfurt and overnight at the Sheraton Airport Hotel.

Day 3

Depart Frankfurt. Arrive Almaty. Transfer to Hotel for overnight.

Day 4

After breakfast, enjoy sightseeing in Almaty including the **Central State Museum** which houses a fabulous ethnographic collection including the armor of the “Golden Man”, a 1st century Scythian nobleman. Visit the **Zenkov Cathedral**, one of the world’s tallest all wood buildings. Nearby visit the unique **Museum of Kazakh National Musical Instruments**, and enjoy a special folklore program. Later ascend the **Kok Tube Mountain** by cable car for a view of the city. Lunch of local specialties and a folklore program in a yurt. Return to Almaty for dinner and overnight.

Day 5

After breakfast, drive a few hours to the Kyrgyz border to begin your journey into Kyrgyzstan--a nature lovers paradise. Largely covered by mountainous terrain the capital, Bishkek, is located 800 meters above sea level in the foothills of the Tian Shan mountains which separate the country from China. This is a city of large boulevards. Visit the **Historical Museum** where you will learn about the history and culture of the nomadic people of the region. Dinner in a local restaurant with a spectacular fashion show of contemporary designs with traditional fabrics, embroidery and elements. See and hear a dramatic performance of part of the ancient Kyrgyz epic legend, the *Manas*, by a master *Manaschi* (storyteller). Transfer to Golden Dragon Hotel or similar for overnight.

Day 6

After breakfast, drive 80 km east to the restored **Burana Tower**, the remains of the Karakhanid minaret. Next to it is a unique collection of “*Bal-Bals*” stone grave markers. Continue to the nearby village for a family lunch of Kyrgyz dishes prepared and served according to their national tradition. Depending upon the season, you may eat in a nomadic yurt. You may also see a demonstration of the making of traditional felt rugs and other handicrafts. Before leaving the village, enjoy the wild excitement of **Kyrgyz national horse games** and races known as “*ulak*”. Drive further east to the resort town of Cholpon-Ata for dinner and overnight at the Aurora Hotel on lovely Lake Issy-Kul. Step back into Soviet times in this health sanitarium/resort, with its gorgeous garden, and extraordinary views of the snow capped Tian-Shan mountains

Day 7

Set out this morning to visit the **petroglyphs** of Cholpon-Ata. Dating from about 500 BC to the 1st century AD, these petroglyphs were originated by the Scythian (Saka) people, predating the arrival of the Kyrgyz in the area. The primitive images of ibex, horses and their riders, snow leopards, camels and other animals give us a glimpse of the world of these early Iron Age people. Enjoy a long drive to **Karakol**, founded in 1869, it is a picturesque small town filled with old Russian wooden “gingerbread” cottages. Visit the lively local market. Later visit the unique **Dungan Mosque** and learn about the culture of this people. On the way back to the hotel visit the **Prehevalsky Museum** dedicated to this daring Russian explorer, so little known in the west. Dinner and overnight again at the Avrora hotel in Cholpon-Ata.

Day 8 & 9

Set out in the morning for a drive back to Bishkek. After lunch, visit the **Children's Craft Center** open for youth during after school hours. See the handicrafts made by the children (available for sale) and enjoy their touching folkloric music and dance program. Time permitting, visit the excellent Soviet painting collection at the **Fine Arts Museum**. Enjoy an optional easy hike or stroll in the **Ala Archa National Park** and have a wonderful bar-b-que, local style. Overnight at the Golden Dragon Hotel or similar in Bishkek.

Day 10

Today you will take a short flight south from Bishkek to **Osh**, one of Central Asia’s oldest cities and an important crossroad on the Silk Road. Sightseeing around Osh will include the local market, and a view of the **Suleiman Sacred Mountain**. Cross the border with its formalities, and transfer by road to **Ferghana** in Uzbekistan. Dinner and overnight at the Club 777 Bed and Breakfast.

Day 11

After visiting a silk weaving factory and the ikat-silk weavers of **Marghilan**, depart by road to **Kokand**, capital of the Kokand Khanate the 18th and 19th century capital of the Khanate of the same name. Visit the museum in the **palace of the last Khan**. **Visit a potter** of the famous Rishton school and enjoy lunch in his home. In the afternoon take a long mountain pass drive to the modern city and capital, Tashkent where you will have dinner and overnight at the Tashkent Palace Hotel.

Day 12

Sightseeing in Tashkent will include the blue domed **Chor-Su market** (to see unusual cradles, handmade musical instruments and the fruit and vegetable market) **the State Art Museum, the Museum of History, the Telashaya Mosque and Barak-Khan Madrasah**. Visit the **Madrasah Abdul Khasim** near the Friendship Palace. This madrasah is the main workshop and learning center for many of the Tashkent traditional craftsmen. Enjoy their exquisite arts. Time permitting visit the spectacular underground. A meal will be offered in the evening with a special performance of folk dance and music at the **Applied Art Museum**, housed in a breathtaking diplomatic residence built in Uzbek style in 1907. Overnight at the Tashkent Palace Hotel.

Day 13

In the late morning continue by road to Samarkand, possibly stopping for typical regional lunch at Gzhizak, the geographical site called "Tamerlane's Gate." **Samarkand** was founded at the same time as Babylon, almost 2500 years ago and was called the “Pearl of the Moslem World”. There is evidence, however, of human habitation there dating back more than 10,000 years! Samarkand has been conquered by some of the most famous people of history – Alexander the Great, Genghis Khan and Tamerlane, who made it his capital and named it the “Center of the Universe”. The culture of Samarkand was developed and mixed with the cultures of Iran, India, Persia and Mongolia, and beginning as the central part of the Silk Road, with influences from China, the Middle East and Europe. Its period of greatest glory was during the height of the trade on the Silk Road from the 2nd century until the 16th century. Arrive at Malika local bed and breakfast in the late afternoon for dinner and overnight.

Day 14 & 15

Today will be devoted to sightseeing in Samarkand the long-fabled but very real, major silk road hub city. Visit the **Observatory of Ulug Bek** the grandson of Tamerlane, who developed the best observatory in the medieval world. Here are the remains of the original giant sextant, calibrated in minutes and degrees, decorated with signs of the Zodiac, and aligned with the meridians of the earth. See the **Shakhi-Sinda Ensemble of Mausoleums**. This unusual necropolis has monuments of the 14th and 15th centuries, reflecting the development of the monumental art and architecture of the Tjimurid (Tamerlane's) dynasty. After ascending the "Stairway to Heaven", come to the two most beautiful tombs in the complex, dedicated to the three most important women in Tamerlane's life. The architecture is stunning, and the remarkable tile-work adds to the beauty.

A Samarkand visit is not complete until you see the great central square of the city, the **Registan**. Here, where all the radial streets of the city met, the ruler's decrees were proclaimed, justice was done, and trading was carried out. See the magnificent 15th-17th century tile decorated brick buildings—the **Madrasahs of Ulugbek, Shir-Dor and Tilly-Akhari**. The opulent interior of the Tilly-Akhari Madrasah is breathtaking in its beauty, with the blue tile-work illuminated by the sun reflecting off the pure gold of much of the walls and ceilings. Also visit the **Bibi Khanym Mosque**, purported to have been built as a gift to Tamerlane by his Chinese main wife. Others claim it may have been built by Tamerlane himself to be grander than anything else of its time. While severely damaged by time, the elements and earthquakes, enough has been restored to show that not only was it a huge structure, but one that showed a delicate ornamentation that added to its beauty. Nearby is the market which you will have time to wander in. Visit the spectacular **Gur-Emir Mausoleum**, the central part of a major architectural complex erected by Tamerlane in honor of his grandson. Tamerlane himself is buried here, along with other important people of the time.

For textile enthusiasts, you will enjoy seeing the "Suzanae" (needlework) masterpieces when we take a morning visit to the unique **Urgut Market** near Tajikistan. Later, time permitting take a drive to the actual site of the ancient city of **Afrosiab**. Back in Samarkand, visit the city's Museum with its excellent collection of treasures from the site. See the exquisite decorations of the 19th century mosque of **Khodja Nisbatdor** or the **Khodja Abdi Darun complex**, consisting of a 12th century mausoleum, and a 19th century mosque surrounding a large pool. You will have free time to enjoy the shops and the workshops of the local craftsmen. Dinner and overnight at the Malika local bed and breakfast.

Day 16

Today we will drive to Bukhara via **Shakhrisabz**, the actual birthplace of Tamerlane. Driving over the 2000 meter high **Tastakaracha Pass**, gives you a view of the mountains surrounding Samarkand. Continue to the **Ak-Saray Palace**, Tamerlane's vast residence complex, built in the 14th and 15th centuries. Only part of the main arch at the entrance remains, but it was the tallest portal in all of Central Asia. We will also visit the **Jehangir Mausoleum**, and the 16th century bath-house. Time permitting we will visit to the **Kok Gumbaz Mosque and the nearby Mausoleums**. Enjoy lunch with a family at Michinoor, and then visit with some crafts people of the region before continuing to Bukhara for dinner and overnight and the Salom Bed and Breakfast.

Days 17, 18 and 19 Bukhara

The next three days will be devoted to enjoying the cultural and historical monuments of the Bukhara oasis of Soghdiana dating back 2300 years. Having once been conquered by Alexander the Great. Bukhara itself was once ruled by the Kushan Empire. When the Samanids came into control however, they created a large feudal state, with Bukhara as its capital. It was part of what came to be called the "Golden Road", the meeting point of the northern and southern branches of the Great Silk Road. By the 10th Century it was a great center for commerce, religion and culture. In Sanskrit, Bukhara means "Monastery", and in the Medieval Moslem East, it was known as "the noble and glorious stronghold of the faith." Bukhara gives you a feeling of being transported through time into the past. With more than 140 architectural monuments dating back to the Middle Ages, its entire historic city center is an open-air museum

Included will be a visit to the visit the oldest monument, the **Ismail Samani Mausoleum**, dating from the early 10th century. Built by one of the rulers of the Samanid Dynasty, this building is made of baked bricks laid out so that the ornamentation is never the same when the light shines on it. It is considered to be one of the finest achievements of early medieval architecture and is revered by locals who circumnavigate it, invoking wishes.

We will see the remains of the ancient walls of the city, originally built in the 9th century. We will visit The Ark (a word which translates to mean **Citadel**). This 2000 year old fortress of the emirs of Bukhara, which had blocked entry of many invading armies, until it fell to the Communist forces. This citadel has now been converted into a fascinating museum. It includes the monumental gate-house, the Friday Mosque, the Audience Chamber and Music Pavilion, and gives us a good picture of life in the late 18th and 19th centuries. Nearby, is the famous old city jail. In front of the Citadel, is the **Bolo Khauz Mosque**, originally built in the 17th Century. Visit the **Poi-Kalyan Complex**. Poi-Kalyan means "Pedestal of the Great One", and is the heart and focal point of all Bukhara. This medieval masterpiece is known the world over, with the silhouette of the majestic **Kalyan Minaret** etched against the sky of the city. Topped by a skylight rotunda, it towers 50 meters above the ground. The adjoining **Kalayan Mosque** dates from the 15th century, and is the largest in Bukhara, ranking with the largest in all of Central Asia. Its simple but monumental form mimics that of the Bibi-Khanym Mosque in Samarkand. Visit the **Kukeldash Madrasah**, the largest one still standing in all of Central Asia.

In Bukhara, you'll have an opportunity to visit a heartwarming social service project such as a school for the hearing impaired. If you did not see it in Fergana, visit several enterprises, homes, or factories which will demonstrate for you each step in the production of silk.

Visit the Magoki-Attari Mosque, dating from the 12th century. This mosque is noted for the complex geometric patterns executed in brick and enhanced by ceramic ornamentation. The Mausoleum of Chashma-Aiyub has a foundation dating from the 12th century, with additions up to the 16th century, including a conical cupola, quite atypical for Bukhara. The Ulug Bek Madrasah is the earliest surviving Madrasah, dating from 1417, when it began functioning as a Moslem religious school. On the entrance doors is the carved inscription: "It is the obligation of every Moslem man to strive to attain knowledge."

If time permits, we'll travel about 20 kilometers outside the city to visit the summer palace of the last Emir of Bukhara. He ruled until 1920, and then fled the Communist Revolution into Afghanistan. The **Sitorai-Moskhi-Khosa Palace Complex** was built in the 19th century. It has beautiful stucco interior decorations, huge banquet halls, and a large collection of costumes, silver and china. There is the residence too, of the harem, said to have numbered up to 400!

time permitting continue westward and you will see a massive brown dome, which at the time of its construction in the 17th century, was the largest in the world, and once was the center of a thriving sect of dervishes. This complex is known as Bakha ad-Din Nakshbandi. Since the fall of the Soviet regime, it is again a busy Islamic religious center.

Back in Bukhara, enjoy lunch around the beautiful pool of **Lyab-i-Khauz**. Here are huge ancient plane trees that shade two wonderful buildings from 1620, the **Nadir Divanbegi Madrasah** and **Khanaga**, the latter now an exhibition hall and a place to buy artifacts of Bukhara. There will be a lovely evening program during our Bukhara stay, including folk music and other artistic expression. Overnight in the Salom Inn Bed and Breakfast.

Day 20

After breakfast, take a very long drive through the **Kyzyl-Kum desert** along a well-travelled route on the Silk Road. Along the way you may see herds of camel or meet nomadic people living in yurts. Have a picnic lunch en route before arriving at the open air museum city of **Khiva** located in the **Khoresm oasis**, for dinner and overnight at the Hotel Khiva Madrasah.

Day 21

From Khiva to Nukus is a three hour drive. Nukus, the capital of Karakalpakstan, is home to the exceptional **Savitsky Museum**. Long isolated from Moscow and located in a new building, its ethnographic collection of Karakalpak costumes, jewelry, yurt furniture and trappings is a stunning as are its fascinating collection of avant-garde, Soviet dissident artworks of the 1920s and 30s. Artists of the period executed thousands of art works, which were acquired for the museum by the philanthropist Savitsky. Return to Khiva for dinner and overnight.

Day 22

While the Khorezm Khanate was famous in the 4th century B.C., the actual date of origin of Khiva is lost in the mists of time. Some archeologists believe it was founded about the time of the birth of Christ, and was named after the ancient **Well of Kvivak**, said to have been discovered by Shem, the son of Noah. The remains of that ancient well are in the old city, and we are likely to see many newlyweds who come here to drink its blessed water. In the 10th century, the region was the home of many great intellectuals including Abu Ali Ibn Sina (Avicenna). It was the center of a major agricultural civilization, whose armies routed the Roman regions of Marcus Crassus. Its power derived from sitting astride the great caravan routes from East to West, and in the 16th century, it became the capital of the Khoresm State.

In Khiva visit the old walled inner city of **Ichan-Kala**. The silhouettes of its towering minarets, hemmed in by flat-roofed clay built houses, and surrounded by the powerful walls of the fortress, retain the exotic image of a Central Asian feudal city. Visit the 10th century **Djuma Mosque**, with its 218 ornately carved wood columns. Against the blue sky, see the mysterious forms of the **Palace Ensembles of Kunya-Ark and Tash Khauli, the Arab Mukhammad Madrasah and the Shirgani-Khan Madrasah**. The incomplete **Kaltaminar** from 1855, was intended to be the tallest minaret in the Moslem world. Even in its unfinished state, it is 26 meters tall. In three of the historical madreassahs of the city, there are museums dedicated to ancient medicine, history and natural history. The rich decorative arts of the region, such as carpets, hand embroidery and household utensils are also showcased, giving an accurate picture of the ancient way of life of Khiva. TWe will visit what time permits. Khiva has the largest number of minarets of any city in Central Asia. After lunch and visiting Khiva, process passport formalities and drive across the border to the airport in Tachauz, Turkmenistan. Fly to **Ashkabad** for dinner and overnight at the Nisa Hotel or similar.

Day 23

Ashkabad is surrounded by the Kara Kum (Black Sand) Desert and the Kopet Dag mountains. In the morning drive to the outskirts of Ashkabad to visit the exciting **Tolkuchka Sunday market** with its large array of Turkmen carpets, embroidered textiles and jewelry. It is a wonderful place to interact with the friendly locals. We will then return to the handsome, extravagant, new city build of white marble with gold trim. You will be fascinated learning about the country's late President Niyazov "Turkmenbashy" and the vision he had for the Turkmen people for over 15 years, since the fall of the Soviet Union. After lunch, visit several wonderful museums including the **Textile and Carpet Museum, the History Museum and the Fine Art Museum and the Historical & Ethnographic Museum** with its many superb costumes (so very different from what we've seen in the rest of Central Asia). See a unique collection of carved 1st and 2nd century B.C. ivory drinking horns from Nisa. Dinner and overnight at the Nisa hotel or similar.

Day 24 & 25

Today visit the site of ancient Nisa, going back to the time of the Parthians in the 3rd century B.C. It is located at the foot of the mountains which divide Turkmenistan from Iran. Stop for a visit at a stud farm of Akhal Tekke horses. Time permitting, we'll continue on to nearby **New Nisa**, and then to **Anau**, with the ruins of the 15th century **Timurid Mosque and Mausoleum**. Another day full of interesting activities in Ashkabad and the surrounding area will await you. At a private home, enjoy a farewell dinner party with a special folklore program. Dinner and overnight at the Nisa hotel or similar.

Day 26

Depart by air in the extreme early morning from Ashkabad to Frankfurt.

Arrive in Frankfurt for optional overnight at the Sheraton Airport Hotel or continue directly to US destinations.