

We see something very different in travel – come explore with Mondo

## Five Stans & Silk Road Discovery with Darvaza Gas Crater & Internal Flights From \$11,339pp

Seek ancient intrigue and untamed landscapes on a sweeping discovery tour of Central Asia. Follow the millennia-old paths of the Silk Road from Samarkand to Khiva, then step off the beaten path for a glimpse of the region’s nomadic traditions, whether you’re learning the art of Kazakh cooking at Huns Ethno Village or the age-old practice of Kyrgyz eagle hunting at dazzling Lake Issyk-Kul. Look into the perpetual flame of Darvaza’s gas crater – the ‘Door to Hell’ – and bear witness to one of the world’s oldest copies of the Quran in Tashkent. Soak in Chundzha thermal springs and float in the serene subterranean waters of Kow Ata, then gaze up at the mesmerising blue tiles of Registan Square in Samarkand.

Travel with ease thanks to three included flights across the region, then watch red rock canyons blend into alpine scenery from the comfort of your private transport. From the unique rock formations of Skazka ‘Fairytale’ Canyon to the mountainous tranquility of the Kolsai Lakes, unravel the secrets of the Silk Road on this unforgettable adventure.



### Day 1: Arrive Bishkek

Salam, and welcome to Kyrgyzstan! In the heart of Central Asia, this mountainous country is full to the brim with natural beauty. Upon arrival at Bishkek Manas International Airport (FRU), you’ll be transferred to your hotel to check in ahead of meeting your fellow travellers.

Once you’ve settled in, follow your local guide on an orientation city tour, visiting central Ala-Too Square for a look at the statue of Kyrgyz folk hero Manas, erected in 2011 to honour 20 years of Kyrgyzstan’s independence. Pass through the Old Square to see Government House, witness the Lenin Statue in Oak Park, then stimulate the senses

at sprawling Osh Bazaar. Continue your walk to the Kyrgyz Opera and Ballet Theatre, then conclude at Victory Square, constructed for the 40th anniversary of the end of World War II.

Return to the hotel to freshen up before your welcome dinner with your fellow travellers.

**Inclusions:** Damas International Hotel – Standard Room (Superior Upgrade: LUX Room) or similar  
Dinner

## **Day 2: Bishkek – Chon-Kemin**

After breakfast, start out on a four-hour journey to Chon-Kemin Gorge, stopping along the way to see the ancient minaret of Burana Tower, constructed in the 11th century. Climb the winding staircase for elevated views over sweeping Chuy Valley. Back on the ground, marvel at the field of balbals – anthropomorphic stone carvings traditionally found around ancient burial mounds.

Later, arrive in Chon-Kemin for the evening.

**Travel time:** Driving – approx. four hours / 160km

**Inclusions:** Guesthouse Jekshen (Standard Room) or similar  
Breakfast and Dinner

## **Day 3: Chon-Kemin – Bokonbaevo – Tamga**

Gather your energy over breakfast, then set off for a 2.5-hour journey toward magnificent Lake Issyk-Kul. Surrounded by the breathtaking Tian Shan Mountains – otherwise known as the ‘Celestial Mountains’ – this vast body of water was once a popular stop along the famed Silk Road. Follow the south shoreline to the village of Bokonbaevo, where you’ll visit a local eagle hunter, learning about the thousand-year-old Kyrgyz tradition drawing on the hunting prowess of the golden eagle.

Afterwards, continue to Skazka Canyon for a short hike through the unusual rock formations that have earned it the nickname ‘Fairytale Canyon’. Continue to Tamga, a quiet village on the shore of Lake Issyk-Kul, where you’ll spend your evening soaking up the celestial scenery with a stay at a unique yurt camp.

**Travel time:** Driving – approx. four hours / 180km

**Inclusions:** Royal Gate Camp (Yurt) or similar  
Breakfast and Dinner

## **Day 4: Tamga – Karakol**

Today, depart on an hour-long drive for Jety Oguz Canyon, captured in countless poems and paintings, where you’ll gaze upon the fabled Broken Heart rock formation, as well as the Seven Bulls – one of the most famous landmarks of Kyrgyzstan, made up of several impressive natural sandstone formations. Continue to nearby Karakol and stop by the wooden Dungan Mosque and intricately constructed Holy Trinity Orthodox Church.

**Travel time:** Driving – approx. three hours / 160km

**Inclusions:** Green Yard Hotel (Standard Room) or similar  
Breakfast and Dinner

## **Day 5: Karakol – Chundzha**

This morning, take your transfer to the Kegen border crossing as you prepare to enter the vast lands of Kazakhstan. Once crossing formalities are complete, continue to Chundzha, where you’ll conclude your five-hour journey in the famous hot springs village.

The rest of your day is spent relaxing and enjoying the therapeutic qualities of the mineral-rich, naturally heated waters that attract travellers across the region.

**Travel time:** Driving – approx. five hours / 230km

**Inclusions:** All Seasons Chundzha Hot Springs Resort & Spa (Comfort Room) or similar  
Breakfast and Dinner

### **Day 6: Chundzha – Charyn Canyon – Saty**

Rise and shine, ready for your hour-long drive to spectacular Charyn Canyon. Following the course of the Charyn River over some 50 kilometres, this red rock canyon reaches up to 300 metres in height, recalling the famed Grand Canyon. Over 12 million years, this stratified sedimentary gorge has been carved by the steady course of the river, creating wonders such as the Valley of Castles, which flourishes with a diversity of native flora and fauna despite its seemingly barren beauty.

Continue 1.5 hours more to Saty village and check in for a restful evening at your hotel.

**Travel time:** Driving – approx. three hours / 160km

**Inclusions:** Eco-Hotel Kolsay Hotel Grand (Standard Room) or similar  
Breakfast and Dinner

### **Day 7: Saty – Kolsai Lake – Almaty**

Today, take a trip to the nearby ‘Pearls of the Tien Shan’ – the Kolsai Lakes. A series of three jaw-dropping mountain lakes, the Kolsai Lakes are a striking blue departure from the desert landscapes of yesterday. Arriving at Nizhny Kolsai Lake, the lowest of the three, you’ll spend an hour walking the lush alpine shoreline, basking in the natural splendour.

Later, continue the four-hour journey westward to Almaty, the cultural hub and former capital of Kazakhstan.

**Travel time:** Driving – approx. five hours / 280km

**Inclusions:** Kazzhol Park Hotel – Standard Room (Superior Upgrade: Business Lux Room) or similar  
Breakfast and Dinner

### **Day 8: Almaty**

At the foothills of the vast Trans-Ili Alatau mountains, Almaty boasts millennia of cultural heritage. Get to know the ‘City of Apple Trees’ on a guided tour, browsing the produce stalls and local wares of the Green Bazaar, wandering the green avenues of Panfilov Memorial Park, then stopping by the colourful Zenkov Cathedral, an entirely wooden Russian Orthodox Church. Pause at the solemn memorial to the ‘Panfilov Heroes’ – a group of 28 soldiers honoured for their efforts defending a village on the outskirts of Moscow during World War II.

Delve into harmonic heritage at the Kazakh Museum of Folk Musical Instruments, study up on captivating local history at the Central State Museum of Kazakhstan, then ascend Kok Tobe mountain and its observation deck to admire panoramic views over the city. Later, take the cable car back to the city streets for the rest of your day at leisure.

**Inclusions:** Kazzhol Park Hotel – Standard Room (Superior Upgrade: Business Lux Room) or similar  
Breakfast and Dinner

### **Day 9: Almaty – Huns Ethno Village – Almaty**

Set off this morning on a 1.5-hour journey to Huns Ethno Village, where nomadic Kazakh heritage is shared openly. As you’re greeted by two Saka-period warriors in traditional armour, you’ll be taken on a journey to learn all about

this rich cultural history, from the design of traditional yurts to the preparation of delicious 'boursak' fried bread. Take up a bow for an archery class, then watch performances of traditional ceremonies and a special dance show.

After lunch, pay a visit to the Sunkar Falconry Centre to witness these majestic birds of prey in flight, hearing about their place in Kazakh culture during a thrilling demonstration.

**Travel time:** Driving – approx. two hours / 120km

**Inclusions:** Kazzhol Park Hotel – Standard Room (Superior Upgrade: Business Lux Room) or similar  
Breakfast and Dinner

## **Day 10: Almaty – Dushanbe**

Bid farewell to Kazakhstan as you transfer to the airport today for your included flight to Dushanbe. Your Tajik guide will meet you at the airport before taking you to your hotel.

Later, explore the capital of Tajikistan, starting at the impressive National Museum of Antiquities (dependent on flight schedule). Afterwards, visit the ancient Hissar Fortress, a strategic fortification and former royal residence.

**Travel time:** Flight– approx. two hours

**Inclusions:** Atlas Hotel – Standard Room (Superior Upgrade: Deluxe Room) or similar  
Breakfast and Dinner

## **Day 11: Dushanbe**

Continue your quest to uncover Dushanbe's fascinating history as you visit the Art Deco-style bronze statue of Samanid emir Ismoil Somoni. Meander through the landscaped gardens of Rudaki Park, gaze on the open-book design of the National Library of Tajikistan and stop by the 165-metre-high Dushanbe Flagpole. Stand in awe of the grand Kohi Navruz, a teahouse-turned-palace complete with elegant rotunda and man-made lake.

Conclude your day amid the vibrant stalls of Green Bazaar, then return to your hotel for an evening at rest.

**Inclusions:** Atlas Hotel – Standard Room (Superior Upgrade: Deluxe Room) or similar  
Breakfast and Dinner

## **Day 12: Dushanbe – Iskanderkul – Panjakent**

Today, take the three-hour trip to the soaring Fann Mountains, passing over the thrilling Anzob Pass. On the other side, arrive at legendary Iskanderkul Lake, where its waters peacefully reflect the rugged Gissar Range. Visit nearby Snake Lake and a gushing waterfall, then carry on for a further three-hour drive as you set a course for Panjakent.

**Travel time:** Driving – approx. six hours / 310km

**Inclusions:** Panjakent Plaza – Standard Room (Superior Upgrade: Deluxe Room) or similar  
Breakfast and Dinner

## **Day 13: Panjakent – Samarkand**

Spend your day exploring Panjakent, located in picturesque Zeravshan River Valley, and unearth the ancient ruins of Sarazm on the outskirts of the city, another popular stop along the Silk Road.

Later, cross into Uzbekistan at the Jartepa checkpoint. Upon arrival, meet your Uzbek tour guide and take the hour-long drive to Samarkand. Once you've checked in at your hotel, step out to see the hypnotic design of Registan Square. Through its intricately decorated entrance, pay a visit to the humbling Gur-e-Amir Mausoleum – the final resting place of infamous Amir Timur.

**Travel time:** Driving – approx. 90 minutes / 60km

**Inclusions:** Hilton Garden Inn Samarkand – Standard Room (Superior Upgrade: Deluxe Room) or similar  
Breakfast and Dinner

### **Day 14: Samarkand**

Standing at the crossroads of Europe and Asia, Samarkand is synonymous with the Silk Road and its historic trade. Today, dive further into its extensive history with visits to the Shah-i-Zinda necropolis, the towering 14th-century Bibi-Khanym Mosque and the innovative astronomical site of 15th-century Ulugh Beg Observatory. Peruse the countless artefacts of the Afrasiab Museum, including spectacular 7th-century frescoes.

Continue to the Tomb of Daniyar, then stop by a local paper mill for an inside look at how traditional paper has been made since the 8th century.

**Inclusions:** Hilton Garden Inn Samarkand – Standard Room (Superior Upgrade: Deluxe Room) or similar  
Breakfast and Dinner

### **Day 15: Samarkand – Gijduvan – Bukhara**

Depart for Bukhara today, breaking up the four-hour journey with a stop at the ruins of Rabati Malik, an ancient 'caravanserai' or roadside inn for weary travellers, as well as the water reservoir of Sardoba. Later, visit the house of a famous ceramicist in Gijduvan.

Arrive later today in Bukhara and set your sights on Sitorai Mokhi-Khosa, or 'Palace of the Moon and Stars', where coloured glass and detailed tiled ceilings cast a vibrant light over the decadent summer palace of the last Emir of Bukhara. Finally, take a short walk through the trading domes of Lyabi-Hauz Plaza and cool off in the shade of age-old mulberry trees.

**Travel time:** Driving – approx. four hours / 270km

**Inclusions:** Devon Begi Heritage Hotel (Standard Room) or similar  
Breakfast and Dinner

### **Day 16: Bukhara**

With over 2,500 years of history, Bukhara's status as a once-pivotal trading hub along the Silk Road affords it myriad ancient treasures and architectural wonders for eager travellers. Today, take a guided trip to the Samanid Mausoleum, marvel at the colourful ceiling and carved columns of the Bolo-Hauz Mosque, gaze up at the sloping walls of the colossal Ark of Bukhara fortress, then conclude at the awe-inspiring Poi-Kalyan complex, home to one of Central Asia's largest mosques with its twin cerulean domes.

**Inclusions:** Devon Begi Heritage Hotel (Standard Room) or similar  
Breakfast and Dinner

### **Day 17: Bukhara – Merv – Mary**

After an early breakfast, it's time to cross the border into Turkmenistan on the six-hour journey to Merv. Once you've crossed the 1.5-kilometre neutral zone, continue to the ancient settlement of Merv, believed to have once been the largest city in the world during the 12th century. Deserted in the 1780s, this historic site is now an archaeological wonderland, with the resolute Mausoleum of Sultan Sanjar standing tall against the desert landscape.

Later, continue to nearby Mary for an evening at leisure.

**Travel time:** Driving – approx. six hours / 380km

**Inclusions:** Mary Hotel – Standard Room (Superior Upgrade: Deluxe Room) or similar  
Breakfast and Dinner

## Day 18: Mary – Ashgabat

Transfer this morning for your included flight to Ashgabat (ASB), capital of Turkmenistan. Famed for its innumerable white marble buildings and grandiose national monuments, the sprawling boulevards and dazzling structures contrast the notable quietude of city life. Join a guided street tour, including a look at the region's complex history at the National Museum of Turkmenistan, the opulent Presidential and Ruhyyet Palaces, the city's record-setting Ferris wheel, the bizarre Arch of Neutrality and the astounding Ertogrul Gazi Mosque.

**Travel time:** Flight – approx. 40 minutes

**Inclusions:** Sport Hotel – Standard Room (Superior Upgrade: Suite) or similar  
Breakfast and Dinner

## Day 19: Ashgabat – Kow Ata – Geok-Tepe – Ashgabat

Take a journey beyond the bounds of Ashgabat today as you travel an hour to the mysterious underground lake of Kow Ata, where you can swim in its naturally heated waters 65-metres below the Earth's surface. Continue to Geok-Tepe Fortress and the turquoise-domed Saparmurat Hajji Mosque, then visit a horse farm to see the Akhal-Teke horses for which Turkmenistan has earned renown.

**Travel time:** Driving – approx. three hours / 215km

**Inclusions:** Sport Hotel – Standard Room (Superior Upgrade: Luxe Room) or similar  
Breakfast and Dinner

## Day 20: Ashgabat – Darvaza

Depart Ashgabat's eerie avenues and travel four hours to the Darvaza Gas Crater, named the 'Door to Hell', where a perpetual fire has burned for 40 years. After Soviet geologists tapped a cavern of natural gas in 1971, the subsequent collapse left a gargantuan hole, 60 metres across and 30 metres deep.

Settle in at your nearby yurt camp, then in the evening watch the spectacular flame that was set to burn off the poisonous gas, which stays alight to this day.

**Travel time:** Driving – approx. four hours / 280km

**Inclusions:** The Garagum Yurt Camp (Yurt) or similar  
Breakfast and Dinner

## Day 21: Darvaza – Khiva

Fill up for your full day of travel with a picnic-style breakfast, then start the drive to Uzbekistan's border, enjoying a stop for food and rest in Dashoguz. Cross the neutral zone once more, then meet with your Uzbek guide as you transfer to Khiva for the evening.

**Travel time:** Driving – approx. six hours / 370km

**Inclusions:** Arkanchi Hotel – Standard Room (Superior Upgrade: Deluxe Room) or similar  
Breakfast and Dinner

## Day 22: Khiva

The ancient trading post of Khiva has been a centre for education, science and culture in Central Asia for millennia. Positioned at an important crossroads of the Silk Road, stretching between Mongolia, Russia, China and Persia, the city's cobbled streets are brimming with captivating history.

Spend your day exploring, visiting the Islam Khoja complex for a look at the city's tallest minaret, then continuing to the wide blue minaret of Kalta Minor. Admire the intricate tiles of the Kuhna Ark citadel, former residence of the khans, carry on to the Muhammad Amin-Khan Madrasah and the Sayid Alauddin Mausoleum, then finish with a trip to Shergazi-Khan Madrasah and the hypnotic blue halls of Tosh-Hovli Palace.

**Inclusions:** Arkanchi Hotel – Standard Room (Superior Upgrade: Deluxe Room) or similar  
Breakfast and Dinner

### **Day 23: Khiva – Urgench – Tashkent**

Transfer 40 minutes to Urgench International Airport (UGC) for your included flight to Tashkent. A charming mishmash of austere Soviet-style buildings and classical Russian architecture, the Uzbek capital has a long and engrossing history. Discover the narrow streets of the Old City, stopping by Barak-Khan Madrasah and the majestic Tillya Sheikh Mosque, home to one of the world's oldest copies of the Quran.

Visit Kaffal Shashi Mausoleum and the Moyie Mubarek Library Museum, where a thumb-sized Quran is kept in an amulet case. Discover daily life under the soaring dome of Chorsu Bazaar, where you can shop for souvenirs and watch Uzbek bread-baking. Take the Tashkent Metro to the city's more modern neighbourhoods for a look at the Alisher Navoi Opera and Ballet Theatre, the central square of Mustaqillik Maydoni, and the grand Amir Temur Square, established on the intersection of two ancient trade roads in the heart of the city.

Tonight, enjoy a local farewell dinner as you say goodbye to your travel companions of the exhilarating past weeks.

**Travel time:** Driving – 40 minutes / Flight – approx. 80 minutes

**Inclusions:** Mercure Hotel Tashkent – Deluxe Room (Superior Upgrade: Prestige Room) or similar  
Breakfast and Dinner

### **Day 24: Depart Tashkent**

Spend your morning at leisure ahead of your transfer to Tashkent International Airport (TAS), where your Central Asian adventure comes to a close.

**Inclusions:** Breakfast

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## **Highlights & inclusions**

The following are included in your tour package:

### **Visit the 'Door to Hell' at the perpetually burning Darvaza Gas Crater**

At least 70 metres across and 30 metres deep, the Darvaza gas crater has been burning its theatrical flame since at least the 1980s, following a drilling operation gone awry. Set alight to mitigate the risks of poisonous gases, the fire has burned brightly ever since, making this one of the most unusual and unique natural features of Central Asia.

### **Learn the traditional practice of eagle hunting from the masters of Kyrgyzstan**

Over a thousand years of tradition are captured in the thrilling Kyrgyz practice of eagle hunting. On the shores of mesmerising Lake Issyk-Kul, bear witness to the master's as they work with their golden eagle companions to hunt with skill and precision. As they take you under their wing, you'll learn more about the majestic golden eagle and its place in the nomadic cultures of Central Asia, showcasing millennia of living Kyrgyz history.

**23 nights of handpicked accommodation in Central Asia, plus daily breakfast and dinner and more**

- 23 nights of handpicked accommodation across Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan
- 46 meals included – 23 breakfasts and 23 dinners
- Two glasses of beer or wine per person at your welcome and farewell dinners
- Stand at the ‘Door to Hell’ on a trip to Darvaza Gas Crater
- Soak in the thermal springs of Chundzha
- Embrace nomadic Kazakh culture at Huns Ethno Village
- Learn about the traditional Kyrgyz practice of eagle hunting at Lake Issyk-Kul
- Tour the rugged natural canyons of Central Asia, including Skazka ‘Fairytale’ Canyon, Jety Oguz Canyon and Charyn Canyon
- Wander the shores of idyllic Lake Issyk-Kul, alpine Nizhny Kolsai Lake and legendary Iskanderkul
- Visit the greatest historic sights of the Silk Road, from Samarkand to Bukhara and Khiva
- Uncover the secrets of the Five Stans on guided city tours of Bishkek, Almaty, Dushanbe, Panjakent, Samarkand, Bukhara, Ashgabat, Khiva and Tashkent
- Letter of Invitation for Turkmenistan visa
- Private transportation throughout your journey
- Internal economy class flights from Almaty International Airport (ALA) to Dushanbe (DYU), Mary (MYP) to Ashgabat (ASB), and Urgench (UGC) to Tashkent (TAS)
- Certified local English-speaking guides, including one guide in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, one guide in Tajikistan, two guides in Uzbekistan and one guide in Turkmenistan
- All entrance fees as per itinerary

**Departures available: March, April, May, July, August & September 2025**





