



Itinerary

20 Day Five Stans of the Silk Road Tour

IMPORTANT NOTE: This is the default version of the tour itinerary. Any extra nights, optional tours or other amendments, will not be visible on this version. If you have booked extras, Please contact info@myholiday2.com.au for a personalised version of your itinerary

Day 1: Arrive Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan – City Tour

Arrive early morning in Bishkek, where an early check-in at your hotel is included, along with a transfer. Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan's largest city, is the modern cultural, political, and economic heart of the country. Known for its wide streets, distinctive architecture, and relaxed pace of life, Bishkek stands out with its lush greenery. The abundance of parks fills the city with fresh, clean air, and it's said that Bishkek has more trees per resident than any other city in Central Asia.

Today, we'll explore Bishkek on a walking tour, starting at Ala-Too Square, where we'll witness the Changing of the Guard ceremony. Highlights include the Manas Monument, honouring the legendary national hero of the Kyrgyz people, and the Independence Monument, alongside the main government buildings. We'll continue to Old Square, where the Parliament House and Central Asia's last surviving Lenin Monument are located. From there, we'll visit the Museum of Applied Arts and finish our tour at Victory Square with a brief excursion there.

DRIVING DISTANCE: N/A

MEALS: Nil

OVERNIGHT: Hotel Garden or similar

Day 2: Bishkek ~ Bokonbaevo

On the way, we'll visit the Burana Tower, part of an archaeological and architectural museum complex and a protected cultural heritage site. The tower was carefully restored to its original design using materials excavated in the late 19th century. Built in the 10th and 11th centuries, the minaret originally stood at 40 metres, though some researchers suggest it may have been as high as 45 metres.

We'll then continue to the southern shore of Issyk-Kul Lake, one of the world's largest mountain lakes. Nestled in the Northern Tien Shan at an altitude of 1608 metres, Issyk-Kul is renowned for its natural beauty, unique climate, and pristine surroundings. Often called the "pearl of Kyrgyzstan," the lake is celebrated for its mountain-sea climate, fresh air, abundant sunshine, mineral-rich waters, and numerous hot springs, making it a truly special destination.

DRIVING DISTANCE: 300km

MEALS: Breakfast, Dinner

OVERNIGHT: Yurt camp or similar

Day 3: Bokonbaev ~ Karakol

Continue to Karakol along the southern shore of Issyk-Kul Lake. On the way, we'll visit Barskoon Gorge for a light hike to the 'Tears of Leopard' waterfall. This gorge, one of the most scenic spots along Issyk-Kul's southern coast, is renowned for its high waterfalls and dense spruce forests. It's also home to Kyrgyzstan's largest gold mine, Kumtor. Later in the afternoon, we'll make a brief stop at Jeti-Oguz Gorge, known for the striking Seven Bulls and Broken Heart Rock formations.

Upon arrival in Karakol, we'll take a short city tour before checking into the hotel. In the evening, enjoy a hands-on masterclass in cooking Laghman, one of Central Asia's most celebrated dishes.

DRIVING DISTANCE: 170km

MEALS: Breakfast, Dinner

OVERNIGHT: Hotel Green Yard or similar

Day 4: Karakol ~ Almaty, Kazakhstan

We continue our journey into the next country on our tour – Kazakhstan. After completing border formalities, we'll drive on to see the stunning Charyn Canyon and its Valley of the Castles, named for its towering rock formations that resemble grand, man-made structures. Charyn Canyon is often compared to North America's Grand Canyon; while smaller, it matches its beauty. You'll have the choice to hike down to the valley floor and back up, or to take in the spectacular views from the canyon rim above.

DRIVING DISTANCE: 430 km

MEALS: Breakfast

OVERNIGHT: Hotel Plaza or similar

Day 5: Almaty – City Tour

Almaty is a sunny, inviting city filled with greenery, featuring wide streets, beautiful architecture, and an abundance of parks, squares, and fountains. Nestled at the base of the emerald Tien Shan mountains, it's no wonder Almaty is known as the "garden city." In spring, when the southern edges of the city burst into bloom with apple, apricot, and cherry orchards, Almaty feels like a scene from a fairy tale. The city's lush greenery and stunning mountain backdrop make it truly unique.

Almaty is home to numerous attractions that both delight locals and captivate visitors. We'll start with a walk through Panfilov Park, where Zenkov Cathedral, one of the world's nine unique wooden structures, stands proudly in the centre. The cathedral's intricate wall paintings and decor impress with their beauty and grandeur. Next, we'll visit the Museum of History, which houses a vast collection of exhibits showcasing Kazakhstan's important role in history.

Our final stop is a cable car ride up Koktobe Mountain, where an observation deck offers the best views of the city by day or night.

DRIVING DISTANCE: N/A

MEALS: Breakfast

OVERNIGHT: Hotel Plaza or similar

Day 6: Almaty ~ Dushanbe, Tajikistan

Transfer to the airport for your flight to Dushanbe on Air Astana KC131. Sightseeing activities will depend on your arrival time.

Dushanbe, originally a small settlement at a crossroads, earned its name from the bustling bazaar held there each Monday (in Tajik, “Dushanbe” means “Monday”). Today, it’s a modern capital with a thriving infrastructure, industry, and beautiful parks and gardens.

Our exploration of Dushanbe begins with a city tour of this vibrant capital, featuring wide, shaded avenues. We’ll visit the Museum of Archaeology to uncover the region’s rich history. The day concludes with a visit to Hisor Fort, a 19th-century Bukharian fortress. Once the residence of the Bukhara emir’s governor, the fortress features impressive baked-brick gates with two towers and a central arch that once guarded the metre-high walls. Despite the wear of time, the gates still evoke strength and resilience. Nearby, two historic madrassas have also been preserved.

DRIVING DISTANCE: N/A

MEALS: Breakfast

OVERNIGHT: Hotel Atlas or similar

Day 7: Dushanbe – City Tour

In the morning, visit the Monument of Ismoil Somoni, the forefather of the Tajik nation, located in the main square. This 40-metre-high monument was built in memory of Ismaili Saman-Khuda, founder of the Samanid dynasty in the 10th century. The base features a permanent exhibition on the Samanids and is paved with granite slabs, while the statue’s upper part is gilded.

Next, we’ll visit the Tajik flagpole, once the world’s tallest, standing at 165 metres. Recognised in the “Guinness Book of World Records” in August 2011, it marked the country’s 20th independence anniversary. Following the flagpole, we’ll continue to Dushanbe’s Museum of National Antiquities, where impressive artefacts are on display, including the massive reclining Buddha, providing insights into the history of Tajikistan’s people over millennia.

Our tour concludes with a visit to Kohi Navruz, followed by a stop at the workshop of Djamshed Juraev, a master of mosaic art.

DRIVING DISTANCE: N/A

MEALS: Breakfast

OVERNIGHT: Hotel Atlas or similar

Day 8: Dushanbe ~ Khujand

Depart by 8 am for a scenic drive to Khujand via Istaravshan. Along the way, we’ll explore the well-preserved old town of Istaravshan, with its maze of narrow alleys winding through shaded, mud-walled Central Asian homes. You’ll also enjoy stunning views of the majestic Fan mountain ranges.

DRIVING DISTANCE: 340km

MEALS: Breakfast

OVERNIGHT: Hotel Firuz or similar

Day 9: Khujand ~ Tashkent, Uzbekistan

Khujand is Tajikistan's oldest city, founded around 2,500 years ago during the time of Alexander the Great. Today, it's a welcoming city with lush parks, charming squares, and friendly locals. The Syr Darya River flows through the city centre, providing a popular spot for relaxation and swimming. A key attraction in Khujand is the Panjshanbe Bazaar—one of Central Asia's largest and most renowned covered markets. Nearby, we'll visit the impressive Sheikh Muslihiddin Mosque and Mausoleum, an early medieval monument that remained in use until the early 20th century.

Afterwards, we'll transfer to the border and continue into Uzbekistan, a vibrant and captivating country of the East. Uzbekistan offers a rich architectural heritage, countless historical monuments, colourful bazaars, and beautifully preserved natural landscapes within its national parks.

DRIVING DISTANCE: 180km

MEALS: Breakfast

OVERNIGHT: Hotel Ramada or similar

Day 10: Tashkent – City Tour

Tashkent is one of Central Asia's five largest cities. Here, modern high-rises blend with historic buildings, ancient mosques, and traditional oriental bazaars alongside contemporary shopping centres. Many old buildings were carefully restored after a powerful earthquake in 1966, which significantly altered the city's landscape.

Our first stop is Kukeldash Madrasah, which still operates as a Quran school. Next, we'll visit Khast Imam Square, home to the stunning Barak Khan Madrasah, Tilya Sheikh Mosque, and the Kaffal Shashi Mausoleum, known for its elegant brickwork. You'll also have the chance to see an ancient Quran believed to have been written by the third Caliph, Osman (644–656). We'll continue to the Museum of Applied Art, finishing the tour with a ride on the city's underground.

DRIVING DISTANCE: N/A

MEALS: Breakfast

OVERNIGHT: Hotel Ramada or similar

Day 11: Tashkent ~ Samarkand

In the morning, we'll take a train to Samarkand (08:00 – 10:00) or travel by road, depending on ticket availability. Samarkand, founded eight centuries before our era, is one of the world's oldest cities. It once served as a vital hub connecting East and West along the Great Silk Road. As a result, the city is home to an extraordinary number of cultural and historical monuments, including mausoleums, museums, mosques, and ancient ruins.

Today, you'll explore the legendary city of Samarkand, one of the Silk Road's most significant sites. We'll start at Registan Square, which was the heart of Samarkand for many centuries. Here, you'll see three

stunning madrasahs: the Ulug-Bek Madrasah from the 15th century, the Tilya-Kori Madrasah from the 17th century, and the Sher-Dor Madrasah, also from the 17th century. We'll also visit Gur Emir, the magnificent mausoleum of the great Tamerlane. Enjoy a traditional dinner in a local home to end the day.

DRIVING DISTANCE: N/A

MEALS: Breakfast, Dinner

OVERNIGHT: Hotel Grand Samarkand or similar

Day 12: Samarkand ~ Bukhara

Continue onwards to the historic city of Bukhara, renowned for its rich heritage and beautifully preserved architecture. Upon arrival, we'll begin a city tour, immersing ourselves in Bukhara's cultural and architectural treasures. Our first stop is the impressive Poi Kalon complex, the heart of Bukhara's old city. Here, we'll marvel at the iconic Kalon Minaret, a towering structure that has stood since the 12th century, symbolising the city's resilience and beauty. Next, we'll visit the expansive Kalon Mosque, one of Central Asia's largest, with a capacity for thousands of worshippers and stunning views over the city. Opposite the mosque, we'll explore the Mir-Arab Madrasah, a remarkable Islamic school with intricate tile work and a tranquil courtyard.

From there, we'll head to the Toki Zargaron trade domes, a bustling area where local merchants have traded goods for centuries, offering everything from jewellery to textiles. We'll also visit the Magok-i-Attori Mosque, one of the oldest surviving mosques in Central Asia, with a unique design that reflects the region's ancient Zoroastrian roots.

This tour through Bukhara's landmarks offers a glimpse into the city's long and fascinating history, capturing the essence of Silk Road splendour.

DRIVING DISTANCE: 370km

MEALS: Breakfast

OVERNIGHT: Hotel Asia Bukhara or similar

Day 13: Bukhara – City Tour

In the morning, we'll explore a vibrant oriental bazaar, filled with traditional colours and enticing aromas. Our journey through Bukhara continues with visits to its stunning architectural ensembles of mosques and madrasahs. Highlights include the Ark Citadel, the Mausoleum of the Samanids, and the unique Chor Minor Madrasah.

We'll then head to Lyabi Khauz Square, one of Bukhara's main squares and a true architectural treasure. Here, an ensemble of a mosque, a madrasah, and a monument to Khoja Nasreddin, a beloved figure in oriental folklore, surrounds a picturesque pond with a fountain. This area is popular for hosting festivals and official celebrations in Bukhara.

Our tour continues to the Chashma-Ayub Mausoleum and the Bolo Mosque. To finish the day, we'll enjoy a folklore show at the Nadir Divan Begi Madrasah, offering a delightful insight into the region's rich cultural heritage.

DRIVING DISTANCE: N/A

MEALS: Breakfast

OVERNIGHT: Hotel Asia Bukhara or similar

Day 14: Bukhara ~ Khiva

We continue our journey to Khiva, travelling through the Kizilkum Desert (Red Sands)—a historic route once crossed by invaders, nomadic tribes, and the armies of Persians, Alexander the Great, and Genghis Khan.

Our destination, the ancient city of Khorezm, now known as Khiva, was a key stop along the Great Silk Road many centuries ago. Today, Khiva is often described as an open-air museum and is listed as a UNESCO World Heritage site. Nearly every building here is a historical gem, with around 60 preserved monuments in the old part of Ichan-Kala, including citadels, palaces, mosques, minarets, and mausoleums, capturing the essence of an ancient eastern city.

Archaeological findings suggest that Old Khiva, established as early as the 5th century, served as a vital Silk Road stop. The walled old city of Ichan-Kala spans around 30 hectares, enclosed by formidable 6-8 metre walls with ditches surrounding the perimeter once filled with water for protection. The fortress wall includes four grand gates, reinforced by guard towers and observation galleries, standing as timeless witnesses to Khiva's rich history.

DRIVING DISTANCE: 450km

MEALS: Breakfast

OVERNIGHT: Hotel Asia Khiva or similar

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DRIVING DISTANCE: 450km

MEALS: Breakfast

OVERNIGHT: Hotel Asia Khiva or similar

Day 15: Khiva – City Tour

Explore the historic old town of Khiva, starting with the impressive Kunya Ark fortress, the Mohammed Amin Khan Madrasah, and the intricately decorated Islam Khodja Minaret. We'll also visit the Palvan Kari Complex and Rafanek Madrasah.

In the afternoon, continue discovering Khiva's treasures with visits to the Uch-Avliyo Mausoleum, Juma Mosque, Tash-Hauli Palace, and the Arab Mohammed Khan Madrasah.

DRIVING DISTANCE: N/A

MEALS: Breakfast

OVERNIGHT: Hotel Asia Khiva or similar

Day 16: Khiva ~ Darwaza, Turkmenistan

In the morning, we enter the final 'Stan' of our journey – Turkmenistan. After crossing the border between Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, we continue to Konya-Urgench, once the capital of the powerful Khorezmia, which ruled here until the Mongol invasion. This ancient town holds the ruins of Khorezm's former capital, which was part of the Achaemenid Empire. Abandoned by its inhabitants 350 years ago in favour of a new settlement, Konya-Urgench has remained largely untouched. In 2005, it was designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site as one of Turkmenistan's most significant archaeological sites, containing a wealth of well-preserved monuments dating from the 11th to the 16th centuries. These include mosques, caravanserai gates, fortresses, mausoleums, and minarets whose architectural influence reached Iran, Afghanistan, and the Mughal Empire in 16th-century India.

Our exploration will include the Kutlug Temir Minaret, the Tubarek Khanum Mausoleum, the Sultan Tekesh Mausoleum, the Fahriddin Mausoleum, and the 12th-century burial mosque, along with the impressive 15th-century Gutlug Temir Minaret.

We then continue to Darwaza, home to the famous "Gateway to Hell," a unique natural gas crater that has been burning continuously since 1971. Located in the middle of the vast Karakum Desert, this 50 to 100-metre-wide crater was ignited to prevent toxic methane from escaping. The fiery pit is a spectacular sight, especially at sunset, and the smell of sulphur guides the way if the crater isn't visible from afar. Here, we'll enjoy a BBQ dinner, taking in the incredible views as the sun sets over this surreal landscape.

DRIVING DISTANCE: 380km

MEALS: Breakfast, Dinner

OVERNIGHT: Yurt Camp or similar

Day 17: Darwaza ~ Ashgabat

After breakfast, we'll set off for Ashgabat, arriving around midday. Upon arrival, we'll head to a local restaurant for lunch before transferring to our hotel for check-in and a brief rest.

In the afternoon, enjoy an introductory city tour of Ashgabat. Highlights include the city centre, the bustling Russian Bazaar, the striking Ertogrul Gazi Mosque, Independence Park, the Neutrality Arch, and the scenic viewpoint at the Wedding Palace.

DRIVING DISTANCE: 280 km

MEALS: Breakfast

OVERNIGHT: Hotel Sport or similar

Day 18: Ashgabat – City Tour

Enjoy a city tour of Ashgabat, renowned in the Guinness Book of Records as the world's most white-marble city—even its phone booths are clad in this valuable stone. Ashgabat, the capital of Turkmenistan and the fourth-largest city globally for natural gas reserves, is often referred to as “the most closed city in the world.”

We'll visit the Akhal-Teke horse farm, home to the oldest purebred horse breed, developed around 5,000 years ago by ancient civilizations of modern-day Turkmenistan. Known for their striking appearance, Akhal-Teke horses are well-adapted to hot climates and have influenced the development of many horse breeds worldwide.

Next, we'll continue to Nisa, one of Turkmenistan's most significant historical sites. This unique ancient monument, located near Ashgabat at the foot of the Kopet Dag Mountains, offers a fascinating glimpse into the region's storied past. We'll also visit the Museum of History to conclude our tour, gaining further insight into the rich heritage of Turkmenistan.

DRIVING DISTANCE: N/A

MEALS: Breakfast

OVERNIGHT: Hotel Sport or similar

Day 19: Ashgabat

Today, we'll embark on an exciting journey to discover the iconic Akhal-Teke horses, a true symbol of Turkmenistan's heritage. Our day begins with a scenic 40 km drive northwest of the city to visit a renowned stud farm where these magnificent animals are bred and cared for. With a history spanning over 5,000 years, the Akhal-Teke horses are among the oldest and purest breeds in the world, known for their grace, lean bodies, and fine bone structure. These horses are prized for their racing abilities and are celebrated by jockeys across Eurasia.

During our visit, we'll explore the stables and witness the exceptional care and training that ensure the horses maintain their unique qualities. We'll also learn about their deep cultural significance to the Turkmen people, who consider the Akhal-Teke horse a living national treasure. After this enriching experience, the afternoon is free for you to relax or explore at your own pace before your departure, leaving you with unforgettable memories of Turkmenistan's equestrian heritage.

DRIVING DISTANCE: 80km

MEALS: Breakfast

OVERNIGHT: Hotel Sport or similar

Day 20: Depart Ashgabat

Today you will be transferred to the airport for your departure. This marks the end of our services, and we hope your journey has been filled with unforgettable memories. Thank you for choosing us, and we wish

you safe travels and a pleasant onward journey.

MEALS: Breakfast