Itinerary

16 Day Essentials of the Silk Road Small Group Tour – 2026

***IMPORTANT NOTE: Any extra nights, optional tours or other amendments, will not be visible on this itinerary.**

Day 1: Arrive Dushanbe, Tajikistan

Arrive at Dushanbe airport and complete all formalities, including border control, customs, and luggage collection. Transfer to your hotel for check-in. In the afternoon, meet in the hotel lobby for a guided city tour.

Dushanbe, named after the Persian word for Monday, was originally a market village where traders gathered each Monday. During the Soviet period, the city grew to become the most important industrial centre in Tajikistan, but local markets like Shohmansur Bazaar preserve its commercial heritage.

Today, explore a blend of tradition and modernity in Dushanbe. Highlights include the monument of Ismoili Somoni, founder of the Samanid dynasty; the serene Rudaki Park; and Dushanbe's famed flagpole in Flag Square, once the world's tallest according to the Guinness Committee. Continue to the National Museum of Tajikistan for insights into the country's history and culture, browse colourful stalls at Mehrgon Bazaar, and enjoy panoramic city views from Victory Park in the eastern hills.

APPROXIMATE DRIVING DISTANCE: N/A

APPROXIMATE TRAVELLING TIME: N/A

MEALS: Nil

OVERNIGHT: Hotel Atlas

Day 2: Dushanbe

In the morning, meet the group for an excursion to Hissar Fortress, located 27 km west of Dushanbe. This ancient fortress, with origins dating back over two millennia, once enclosed the palace of Ibragimbek Khan from the Bukhara Emirate. Its formidable walls once protected gardens, a pool, and a vibrant market with a caravanserai. Today, visitors can admire the 18th- and 19th-century gate towers and surviving walls, exemplifying the region's classic fortification style. After exploring the site and its surroundings, return to Dushanbe.

After lunch, visit the Tajikistan Antique Museum, featuring natural history exhibits, traditional costumes, and a model Tajik house. A key highlight is the Museum's impressive statue of the "Reclining Buddha." The ethnographic section displays Tajik crafts, including ceramics, embroidery, woodcarving, and jewellery.

APPROXIMATE DRIVING DISTANCE: N/A

APPROXIMATE TRAVELLING TIME: N/A

MEALS: Breakfast

OVERNIGHT: Hotel Atlas

Day 3: Dushanbe ~ Penjikent, Tajikistan

After breakfast, depart through the picturesque Varzob valley and traverse the Anzob Pass-Tunnel en route to Lake Iskander Kul (Alexander the Great Lake), nestled in the heart of the Fan Mountains. Take time to visit the 50m-high waterfall (2 km north of the lake) and scenic Snake Lake before continuing your journey.

Proceed to Penjikent, one of Central Asia's oldest cities, with a history dating back 5,500 years. Ancient Penjikent was the easternmost outpost of the Sogdiana Empire, renowned in Zoroastrian holy texts. The city's name translates as "Five Villages" in Russian. Tour the Penjikent excavations and the Museum of Archaeology in Old Penjikent, dubbed the "Pompeii" of Central Asia, with its preserved palaces, necropolises, Zoroastrian temples, and frescoed merchant homes—all rediscovered in 1933 after the city's destruction during the Arab conquest. Learn more at the onsite museum about its vibrant Sogdian culture. In town, visit the Rudaki Museum, home to artifacts spanning from the Bronze Age to the Sogdian era, with a special focus on local poet Rudaki and original frescoes from the ancient city.

APPROXIMATE DRIVING DISTANCE: 240km

APPROXIMATE TRAVELLING TIME: 4.5hrs

MEALS: Breakfast

OVERNIGHT: Hotel Penjikent Plaza

Day 4: Penjikent ~ Samarkand, Uzbekistan

After breakfast, transfer to the Tajik-Uzbek border at Jartepa. Enter Uzbekistan and continue to the historic city of Samarkand—a legendary crossroads and melting pot of world cultures. Founded in the 7th century B.C. as ancient Afrosiab, Samarkand reached its highest splendour under the Timurids from the 14th to 15th centuries.

Today, explore the evocative landmarks of Samarkand, a jewel of the Silk Road. Visit Registan Square, the city's iconic heart for centuries, dominated by three majestic madrasahs: the Ulug-Bek Madrasah (built in the 15th century), the ornate Tillya-Kori Madrasah (17th century), and the striking Sher-Dor Madrasah (17th century). Continue to Gur Emir – the impressive mausoleum of the conqueror Timur (Tamerlane), revered as a masterpiece of Islamic architecture from the Medieval East.

APPROXIMATE DRIVING DISTANCE: 60km

APPROXIMATE TRAVELLING TIME: 1.5hrs

MEALS: Breakfast

OVERNIGHT: Hotel Grand Samarkand

Day 5: Samarkand ~ Bukhara, Uzbekistan

This morning, visit the Ulugbek Observatory—an extraordinary medieval astronomical centre established in the 1420s—where leading scholars of the era charted over a thousand stars and performed remarkable measurements with its giant meridian arc

Continue to the Shohi-Zinda Necropolis on the slopes of Afrosiab Mountain, an ancient and visually stunning architectural complex. This “Street of the Living King” features more than twenty mausoleums, dating from the 11th to the 19th centuries, adorned with dazzling blue tiles, high portals, and intricate majolica. Conclude your time in Samarkand with a visit to a traditional silk paper manufactory, where you'll learn about the centuries-old techniques once used to produce paper for Arabic manuscripts.

After sightseeing, depart for Bukhara.

APPROXIMATE DRIVING DISTANCE: 300km

APPROXIMATE TRAVELLING TIME: 5hrs

MEALS: Breakfast

OVERNIGHT: Hotel Caravan Plaza

Day 6: Bukhara – City Tour

Enjoy a sightseeing tour of Bukhara, an ancient city and one of the Silk Road’s most illustrious centres of Islamic culture and learning. The city boasts hundreds of well-preserved mosques, madrassas, bazaars, and caravanserais that date from the 9th to 17th centuries.

Your excursion begins at the main square of Old Bukhara—Lyabi Hauz, beside the monument of a man on a donkey. Tour highlights include:

- **Lyabi Hauz complex**: Nadir Devanbegi medrese and khanaka, Kukaldosh medrese
- **Jewish quarter**
- **Magoki Attor mosque**: the city’s first mosque and a rare pre-Mongol structure
- **Trading Domes** (three domes)
- **Traditional Men’s Bath** (XVI century, exterior only)
- **Ulughbek medrese**: Uzbekistan’s most ancient medrese
- **Abdulazizkhan medrese**: the city’s most lavish madrassa

- **Poi Kalan complex**: pre-Mongol Kalan Minaret, Kalan mosque, and Miri Arab medrese
- **Ark Citadel**: the historic fortress
- **Boloi Hauz mosque**
- **Chashmai Ayub mausoleum**
- **Samanid mausoleum**: the first mausoleum in Central Asia and the second in the Islamic world
- **Puppet Workshop Museum**: Experience Uzbekistan's rich puppetry tradition at Lyabi Hauz, enjoy a brief puppet performance, and perhaps find your own puppet lookalike as a memorable souvenir.

APPROXIMATE DRIVING DISTANCE: N/A

APPROXIMATE TRAVELLING TIME: N/A

MEALS: Breakfast

OVERNIGHT: Caravan Plaza

Day 7: Bukhara ~ Tashkent, Uzbekistan

Early this morning, board a train to Tashkent, one of Central Asia's five largest cities. Tashkent is a unique blend of modern skyscrapers, historic buildings, ancient mosques, and bustling bazaars, all interwoven with lush parks and contemporary shopping centres. Following the 1966 earthquake, many old structures were restored, giving the city a dynamic new look

Your guided tour continues in the New Town. Begin at Independence Square (Mustaqilliq Maidoni), Uzbekistan's principal square, surrounded by government offices and shaded with gardens, fountains, and flower beds. At its heart stands the bronze globe symbolising Uzbekistan's independence, alongside the Sorrowful Mother Monument and eternal flame—symbols of national remembrance and sites for wedding day traditions.

Proceed to Navoi Theatre Square, home to Uzbekistan's State Academic Grand Theatre, designed by Soviet architect Alexei Schusev. The lavish interiors and culturally themed halls celebrate the nation's artistic diversity, while colourful fountains in front of the theatre perform choreographed displays to classical music. Visit the Museum of Applied Arts—housed in the elegantly decorated former residence of Imperial Russian diplomat Alexander Polovtsev—which showcases masterful Uzbek crafts and decorative arts collections.

Enjoy a free afternoon to explore the city at your own pace.

APPROXIMATE DRIVING DISTANCE: 550km

APPROXIMATE TRAVELLING TIME: 7hrs

MEALS: Breakfast

OVERNIGHT: Hotel Al Anvar

Day 8: Tashkent – City Tour

This remarkable city is a real embodiment of modern elegance, while still deeply rooted in its Oriental traditions. Enjoy a discovery tour through Uzbekistan's capital, weaving between ancient squares and buildings as well as modern landmarks of this 2,000-year-old metropolis. Begin in the Old Town: Tashkent stands as both the nation's heart and one of the Central Asia's oldest cities, with many of its historical monuments dating to the 15th and 16th centuries. Every alley and edifice in the Old City has a fascinating story.

A true highlight is the Khast Imam Complex—the spiritual and architectural heart of Tashkent. This ensemble includes the Friday Jami Mosque, Barak Khan Madrasah, Tillya Sheikh Mosque, and the Kaffal Shashi Mausoleum built in intricate brickwork. Opposite the mosque, the Library of the Spiritual Administration holds the revered 17th-century Osman Quran, one of the most significant Islamic relics. The Kukeldash Madrasah, the largest in Tashkent, remains a prominent Koranic school. Nearby, the Juma Mosque of Khoja Ahrar Vali serves as the city's central Friday mosque.

No visit to Tashkent is complete without exploring Chorsu Market, the city's iconic bazaar crowned with a vast green dome. Here, mountains of vibrant spices, stocks of fresh bread and fruit, sweets, and a colourful array of local crafts—including kurpacha (mattresses), skullcaps, chapan (quilted cloaks), ceramics, and knives—offer a truly immersive slice of Uzbek daily life.

APPROXIMATE DRIVING DISTANCE: N/A

APPROXIMATE TRAVELLING TIME: N/A

MEALS: Breakfast

OVERNIGHT: Hotel Al Anvar

Day 9: Tashkent ~ Fergana, Uzbekistan

After breakfast, travel to the Fergana Valley, Central Asia's most fertile region, embraced by the Tien Shan mountains and watered by the Syr Darya's tributaries. Alexander the Great established a city at the valley's edge in 329 BC, and Silk Road caravans from China began passing through a few centuries later, turning the valley into a flourishing trading and cultural oasis. Over the millennia, the Fergana Valley has seen the rule of empires from Sogdiana and the Kokand Khanate to Imperial Russia and the Soviets, each leaving their mark on its landscapes, crops, and crafts.

Stop in Rishtan—a centre famed for its dazzling ceramics, made possible by locally abundant red clay and mineral pigments. Generations of potters have passed down intricate techniques, yielding pottery decorated with vivid floral and geometric motifs in blue and green glazes on creamy white backgrounds. As you travel through verdant fields and abundant orchards, experience firsthand how the Fergana Valley's rich soil and traditions support the region's renowned artistic legacy.

APPROXIMATE DRIVING DISTANCE: 315km

APPROXIMATE TRAVELLING TIME: 5hrs

MEALS: Breakfast

OVERNIGHT: Hotel Asia

Day 10: Fergana ~ Osh, Kyrgyzstan

Today, cross the border into Kyrgyzstan and discover Osh—the country's oldest city, with a history stretching back more than 3,000 years. Osh has long been a crossroads on the famous Silk Road, linking East and West, and today its vibrant Jayma Bazaar still sits at the same location as it did 2,000 years ago, bustling with merchants and travellers from across Central Asia.

Towering over the city, Solomon's Throne (Suleiman-Too Mountain) is a unique historical and architectural monument and UNESCO World Heritage site. Covered in ancient rock drawings, the mountain is one of Central Asia's holiest Islamic sites, known as "Kichik-Mecca," and attracts pilgrims who climb to Babur's House for spectacular views and reflection.

Explore the cave-based Historical Cultural Museum at the base of the mountain, with exhibits ranging from shamanism and Zoroastrianism to local weapons, pottery, and handicrafts. The Silk Road Museum provides a deeper dive into Osh's rich trading and cultural history, with displays on regional crafts and social traditions.

APPROXIMATE DRIVING DISTANCE: 140km

APPROXIMATE TRAVELLING TIME: 2hrs

MEALS: Breakfast

OVERNIGHT: Hotel Classic

Day 11: Osh ~ Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan

Take a morning flight to Bishkek, the capital and largest city of Kyrgyzstan, nestled at the foot of the Kyrgyz Ala-Tau Mountain Range. Bishkek is renowned for its lush green parks, marble-faced public buildings, Soviet-style apartment blocks, and abundant tree-lined streets irrigated by narrow channels. It is often cited as the greenest city in Central Asia, with more trees per person than anywhere else in the region.

Today's sightseeing tour includes the bustling Osh Bazaar, famous for its colourful produce and vibrant atmosphere; the State History Museum, which showcases Kyrgyzstan's compelling heritage; the Museum of Applied Arts with its exhibits of traditional Kyrgyz handicrafts; and Ala-Too Square, the city's main public space—a hub for national events and celebrations surrounded by monumental government buildings, open-air galleries, theatres, and the famous Oak Park.

APPROXIMATE DRIVING DISTANCE: N/A

APPROXIMATE TRAVELLING TIME: N/A

MEALS: Breakfast

OVERNIGHT: Hotel Garden

Day 12: Bishkek ~ Bokonbaev, Kyrgyzstan

Transfer to Bokonbaev village, located on the scenic southern shore of Issyk-Kul Lake. Known for its picturesque surroundings and vibrant Kyrgyz culture, Bokonbaev offers visitors a wonderful array of traditional experiences—from eagle hunting demonstrations and felt-making workshops to horseback rides and panoramic treks with stunning lake views. The quiet beaches here are perfect for swimming and relaxing, while nearby Skazka ("Fairytale") Canyon charms with its colourful rock formations.

Tonight, immerse yourself in the local nomadic heritage with a memorable stay in a traditional Kyrgyz yurt camp.

APPROXIMATE DRIVING DISTANCE: 300km

APPROXIMATE TRAVELLING TIME: 6hrs

MEALS: Breakfast

OVERNIGHT: Yurt Camp

Day 13: Bokonbaev ~ Karakol, Kyrgyzstan

The charming atmosphere of Karakol whisks you back a century, immersing you in the legacy of Tsarist Russia. Founded in 1869, the town retains numerous wooden buildings and grand structures that evoke its Russian imperial past. Stroll through the town to discover the ornate Russian Orthodox Holy Trinity Cathedral (1896) and the unique, pagoda-style Dungan Mosque (1899), both architectural gems reflecting Karakol’s multicultural roots.

Later, venture into the spectacular Jety-Oguz Gorge, celebrated for its dazzling red sandstone formations—the legendary “Seven Bulls” and the heart-shaped “Broken Heart” rocks. You’ll have time for horseback riding or gentle hiking to capture panoramic views, visit a nomadic Kyrgyz yurt, and savour a cup of tea or try kumis, the traditional fermented mare’s milk.

APPROXIMATE DRIVING DISTANCE: N/A

APPROXIMATE TRAVELLING TIME: N/A

MEALS: Breakfast

OVERNIGHT: Green Yard Hotel

Day 14: Karakol ~ Charyn Canyon ~ Almaty, Kazakhstan

En route to Almaty, stop at the breathtaking Charyn Canyon—often called the “Grand Canyon’s younger brother.” Dramatically sculpted by the Charyn River over 12 million years, the canyon stretches for 154 km and plunges up to 300 metres deep. The most iconic section is the Valley of Castles, renowned for its fiery red cliffs and rock formations that resemble towering fortresses. This geological marvel is spectacular in the daylight and equally magical under a starlit sky.

After an excursion through the Canyon, continue to Almaty.

APPROXIMATE DRIVING DISTANCE: N/A

APPROXIMATE TRAVELLING TIME: N/A

MEALS: Breakfast

OVERNIGHT: Hotel Uyut

Day 15: Almaty

Set against the backdrop of the stunning snow-capped Zailiysky Alatau, Almaty combines Russian charm and cosmopolitan energy. After breakfast, enjoy a spectacular drive into the mountains surrounding the city. Begin with a visit to Medeo Gorge, home to the world’s largest high-altitude skating rink (Medeo) and a massive protective dam—the gorge itself set at an altitude of 1,520–1,750 metres in the foothills of the Trans-Ili Alatau. Then travel by cable car to Shymbulak (Chimbulak) ski resort, perched at 2,230 metres and renowned for its outstanding scenery and sunny mountain climate.

On returning to central Almaty, set out on a guided city tour showcasing the city's development and legacy. Highlights include the Presidential Palace, Republic Square, Monument of Independence, Astana Square, Abai Square, and the Palace of the Republic. Stroll through leafy Panfilov Park to admire the wooden Zenkov Cathedral and the Memorial of Glory and Eternal Flame.

After lunch, enjoy a shopping tour at the bustling Green Bazaar, renowned for its colourful produce and local specialities.

APPROXIMATE DRIVING DISTANCE: N/A

APPROXIMATE TRAVELLING TIME: N/A

MEALS: Breakfast

OVERNIGHT: Hotel Uyut

Day 16: Depart Almaty

After enjoying breakfast at the hotel, you will meet your driver for a transfer to the airport for your onward flights.

MEALS: Breakfast