

# Central Asia Explorer

A CULTURAL ODYSSEY TO SAMARKAND AND BEYOND



This is one of our special Repertory trips, offered only every two to five years. This is the planned itinerary for the trip, but please note that changes may be made when the departure is finalized.

# Central Asia Explorer

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## A CULTURAL ODYSSEY TO SAMARKAND AND BEYOND

Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan—sometimes known as the four 'Stans—reveal a rich historical and ethnic canvas, filled with dazzling scenery and a multitude of architectural wonders. From the blue-domed Silk Road oasis of Samarkand, where Tamerlane once held sway, to Issyk-Kul, a vast alpine lake surrounded by the forested peaks of the Tien Shan, our journey with veteran Central Asia Trip Leader Roger Williams brings us through the heart of the Silk Road. We'll enjoy a full exploration of these four countries, roaming ancient bazaars that take us back to the times of the Arabian Nights, meeting local families and traditional artisans, and exploring nine World Heritage Sites, including magnificent Bukhara, a 2,000-year-old city wrapped in medieval mosques, and Khiva, a walled town isolated in a vast desert. Join us for the ultimate Silk Road adventure!



Wilderness Travel

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# Itinerary

## DAY 1

### ALMATY, KAZAKHSTAN

Arrive in Almaty, the metropolitan hub of Kazakhstan, where you are met at the airport and transferred to our group hotel. In the evening, we'll gather for a Welcome Dinner and trip briefing at our hotel. Overnight at the Hotel InterContinental or similar...D

## DAY 2

### ALMATY / TAMGALY TAS

This morning, we'll drive out to Tamgaly Tas, a World Heritage Site filled with 5,000 rock petroglyphs ranging from solar deities and animals from the Middle Bronze Age (14th-13th century BC) to the warriors, archers, men on horseback, flag standards, and other signs of power struggles in the Middle Ages (6th-12th century AD). These carvings offer a fascinating look at ancient migratory periods. We'll enjoy a picnic lunch and later return to Almaty. In the evening, we'll head up to Kok Tyube for a grand view of Almaty and its wonderful environs. Dinner at Tyubeteka restaurant. Overnight at hotel...BLD  
Driving Details: Approximately 200 miles, 5 hours

## DAY 3

### ALMATY / BISHKEK, KYRGYZSTAN

A morning excursion brings us to Issykurgan, the excavation site of the Golden Warrior, a statue of a Scythian warrior unearthed from a kurgan (burial mound) in 1969. A skeleton was also found here and is believed to be an 18-year-old soldier dating from the 2nd-3rd century BC. We visit the site and the museum, then return to Almaty. Our explorations in Almaty, founded in the mid-19th century as a Russian frontier fort, include Panfilov Park, the city's central park, named after the Panfilov Heroes who died fighting the Nazis outside of Moscow, the multi-colored Zenkov Cathedral, one of the world's largest wooden buildings that was constructed without the use of a single nail, and the Museum of Kazakh Musical Instruments. If time permits, after lunch we head out to visit the Kasteyev Museum of Art, housing some rare 18th-19th century paintings of Russian masters that survived the purges of the Stalin era. Later, we transfer to the airport for our flight to Bishkek. We'll have dinner at our hotel. Overnight at Hyatt Regency or similar...BLD

## DAY 4

### BISHKEK / ISSYK-KUL LAKE / KARAKOL

With the rising sun, we'll depart for a scenic drive along the southern edge of Issyk-Kul, the second largest saline lake in the world. Though it's surrounded by snow-capped peaks, the lake never freezes, its name means "warm lake" in the Kyrgyz language. We'll stop in the small village of Bokonbaevo for an eagle hunting demonstration by local eagle hunters. We'll also visit with local villagers to watch traditional felt making. After lunch with a Kyrgyz family in a nearby village, we'll continue on to the peaceful town of Karakol, with its shady poplar trees, apple orchards, and back streets lined with Russian gingerbread cottages. This town was called Preshevalsky In Soviet times, after the famed 19th century scientist-explorer Nicolai Preshevalsky who died here in 1888



## TRIP DETAILS AT-A-GLANCE

<b>Length:</b>	24 days
<b>Arrive:</b>	Almaty, Kazakhstan
<b>Depart:</b>	Ashgabat, Turkmenistan
<b>Lodging:</b>	23 nights in hotels
<b>Meals:</b>	All meals included (B=Breakfast, L=Lunch, D=Dinner)
<b>Activity:</b>	Archaeology, Cultural Adventures
<b>Trip Level:</b>	1 2 ③ 4 5 6 Cultural exploration and walking tours, rugged road travel

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Issyk-Kul Lake in the Tien Shan Mountains of Kyrgyzstan
- Ancient Samarkand, capital of Tamerlane, with its magnificent blue mosques
- Nine World Heritage Sites including the Silk Road cities of Bukhara and Khiva

# Itinerary (cont'd)

while on an expedition and is buried on the lakeshore nearby. Preshevalsky was one of the pioneering members of Russian Geographical society and is credited with introducing the wild Mongolian horse (takhi), renamed Preshevalsky's horse, to the world. He also made some very interesting studies about the region on the endemic flora and fauna. Upon arrival at our hotel, enjoy the rest of the afternoon at leisure, followed by dinner in the home of a local family. Overnight at the Hotel Karagat or similar...

BLD

Driving Details: Approximately 230 miles, 7 hours

## DAY 5

### KARAKOL

An early start allows us to witness the best action at Karakol's famous animal market—the Mal Bazaar. Shepherds from surrounding regions travel long hours to bring their livestock to trade here—on foot, by cart, by tractor, by car, and even by motorcycle. This is old-style commerce at its best, with everyone evaluating the living merchandise; prices on handsome horses, sheep, and cattle fluctuating wildly by the hour; buyers struggling to load finicky sheep onto their flatbed trucks; and sellers trying to convince you to purchase their horses (they'll understand if you politely decline).

The old Orthodox Church, with its six golden onion domes, was founded in 1869 when Karakol was a garrison town on the edges of the Tsarist Russian Empire. Set peacefully in a grove of trees, it's a beautiful building with green-roofed towers, intricate decoration, and a central dome that's painted on the inside with constellations. Here, we'll learn about the Dungans—Muslim people of Chinese origin who are known for their kindness, industry, and hospitality. Mostly farmers, the Dungans immigrated to the region 140 years ago during a period of local unrest and still practice many traditional elements of their culture and cuisine. The Dungan Mosque—designed and constructed by Chinese artisans and completed in 1910, is still used today—it is a colorful wooden structure originally built without any nails. Don't miss the two large murals depicting beautiful images of rainbows and the solar system.

We also visit the One Village One Project Association, opened in 2011 to provide an opportunity for Kyrgyz women to produce high-quality crafts and food products. We'll spend time in the office and studio space, and observe as local women demonstrate how they create traditional

handmade crafts, in particular felt goods such as slippers, wallets, bags, and toys, all created with locally produced wool and natural dyes. We continue to Karakol's small Regional Museum, which is located in a former Russian landowner's brick home and features exhibits on area petroglyphs and archaeological finds, regional costumes, Kyrgyz applied art, and photographs.

After lunch at the home of a local family, where we will have a cooking class on traditional Kyrgyz noodle making, we drive to Jety Oguz Canyon, known for its red sandstone cliffs. On the way, we pass the red Broken Heart Hill, where two suitors are fabled to have killed each other in a struggle for a beautiful woman, who then died of a broken heart herself. Further on, the massive red wall of the Seven Bulls soars upwards. Return to hotel for dinner and overnight...BLD

## DAY 6

### KARAKOL / CHOLPAN ATA

This morning we visit the Przhevalsky Museum, where we view a collection of photos and instruments used by the 19th century Russian explorer Nikolay Mikhaylovich Przhevalsky during his explorations of Central Asia and Tibet. We will also visit his grave on the museum grounds. He died in Karakol, whose name became Przewalski, or Przhevalsky, in his honor until Kyrgyzstan's independence in 1991.

Later we depart for Cholpan-Ata, a town on the northern shore of Issyk-Kul Lake, where we will visit a petroglyph site, created by local tribes in the Neolithic period. The images are mainly primitive long-horned ibex, horses, camels, and snow leopards.

After checking in to a lakeside hotel, if time permits, we will board a boat and glide over the second-largest alpine lake in the world, beautiful spring-fed Issyk-Kul. Surrounded by soaring mountains, the lake is often clear down to depths of 15 feet. Enjoy dinner at the hotel this evening...BLD

## DAY 7

### CHOLPAN ATA / BURANA / BISHKEK

From Cholpan Ata, we visit the open-air museum of Burana, famous for its brick minaret known as the Burana Tower. Built in the 11th century, it is one of the only existing watchtowers on the old Silk Road that traversed



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Kyrgyzstan. Climb up to the platform from inside the tower—while the ancient steps are steep, the view from the top is magnificent. The area was historically a settlement called Balasagun, the birthplace of the poet Jusup Balasagun, whose surviving work consists of an epic poem called "Kutadgy Bilig" or "the knowledge which brings happiness." The settlement was an important seat of power, and was so celebrated that Genghis Khan's Mongol horde spared the city from destruction when it began to conquer the region in the early 13th century. The Mongols renamed the city Gobalik, meaning "good city." Visit the small museum and the collection of ancient bal-bals, carved stone figures used as monuments. Enjoy lunch at the home of a local family and witness a demonstration of traditional Kyrgyz horse games, such as Ulak Tartysh, a sort of polo played with a goat carcass, and oodarysh, a kind of wrestling match on horseback. You may also observe kyz-kumai, or "bride-chasing," in which a young man chases a young woman—both of them on horseback and wearing traditional costumes—and tries to kiss her. If he is not successful, the woman gets to hit him with her quirt. After arriving in Bishkek in the evening, enjoy a walk to the city's central square. Ala-Too Square was laid out in 1984 and adorned with a giant statue of Lenin. In 2003, a new statue, called Freedom, replaced Lenin. This is where the public gathers to celebrate. Visit the covered open-air art gallery in Oak Park, a great opportunity for shopping and people-watching. Local artists and painters congregate here to display and sell their pieces to the public. Enjoy strolling along the walkways lined with contemporary and traditional artworks, including paintings of Kyrgyzstan's famed mountain scenery, local cityscapes, portraiture, and more. Overnight at the Hyatt Regency or similar...BLD  
Driving Details: Approximately 190 miles

## DAY 8 BISHKEK

Our explorations today include sprawling Alatoo Square, where we see the changing of the guards and the massive Manas monument, and the history museum, with its ceiling murals depicting scenes from World War II and the Holocaust. In Dubovy Park, home to an open-air sculpture museum, we'll watch artists painting in the outdoors. Later, we'll visit the village of Supara for some traditional Kyrgyz cuisine with local folk music—a wonderful introduction to the thriving local culture. Overnight at hotel...BLD

## DAY 9 BISHKEK / TASHKENT, UZBEKISTAN

The sights, smells, and sounds of bazaars are part of the sensory experience of Bishkek, and there are several within the city; the largest is called Osh Bazaar. In these markets, travelers can purchase local crafts, dried fruit, fermented milk, rice, grains, and of course the brightly colored Kyrgyz textiles.

The Ala Archa National Park, established in 1976, is centered on the steep forested gorge of the Ala Archa River and the mountains that surround it. An alpine park, Ala Archa includes more than 20 glaciers and 50 peaks, which range from 12,000 to 15,000 feet. Soviet alpinists used to train here at a camp. After our visit to the park, we transfer to the airport for an evening flight to Tashkent. Dinner and overnight at the Hyatt Regency Tashkent or similar...BLD

Tashkent: Once a walled city and a bustling Silk Route caravan crossroads, this city's name in Turkic means "city of stone." It fell to Genghis Khan's mounted hordes in the 13th century and did not become prosperous again until the 15th century under Tamerlane, who bequeathed the city to his 10-year-old grandson Ulugbek in 1405. In 1865, the Russians snatched Tashkent away from the Emir of Bukhara, and it became the main Tsarist (and later Soviet) center for espionage during the Great Game of territorial rivalry between Russia and Britain. Within 10 years after Tashkent was taken, the Russian General Konstantin Kaufman, the architect of Russia's conquest of Central Asia, took Samarkand, Bukhara, Khiva, and Khotan, and became governor of a brand new Russian province. The arrival of the Trans-Caspian Railway in 1889 and Russia's relocation of Russian workers and factories to Tashkent turned it into an industrial center by the 1920s. Much of the city was destroyed by a great earthquake in 1966, but there are still some parts of the old town left where you can see 15th and 16th century buildings.

## DAY 10 TASHKENT

A city tour brings us to the old section of the city, Hast Imam Complex, Barak Khana seminary, Tila Shaikh archives, home to the oldest copy of the Usman Koran dating back to 7th century AD, Chorsu Market, Kukeldesh madrassa, and the studio of a master potter. We'll also visit the Mustaqillik Square History Museum, with its

# Itinerary (cont'd)

unique Buddha statues, and the Museum of Applied Arts, where we explore its Uzbek needlework and pottery from throughout the region. Overnight at hotel...BLD

## DAY 11

### TASHKENT / TRAIN TO SAMARKAND

Following a scenic two-hour train ride from Tashkent, we arrive in Samarkand, where we settle into our hotel. After lunch with a local Uzbek family, we'll enjoy a walk to Samarkand's breathtaking main square, Registan, with its panorama of handsome blue-tiled mosques and 15th century madrassas (religious schools). The Registan was once Samarkand's main bazaar, full of caravansaries for passing merchant caravans. Tamerlane's scholarly grandson turned the Registan into the stirring masterpiece we see today. This evening, we'll have a special visit to Gur Emir, the mausoleum of Tamerlane, and have a chance to watch the sunset amid the stunning architecture. Overnight at Hotel Dilimah or similar...BLD

Samarkand: A sophisticated walled city when Alexander the Great took it over in 329 BC, Samarkand has had an array of rulers, from Turks to Arabs to Persians and Mongolians. They each made Samarkand their own, and Genghis Khan and his dreaded horsemen took the city in 1220. The illustrious warrior Tamerlane seized Samarkand in 1370 and while his rule was exceptionally bloody, he turned Samarkand into one of the cultural centers of Central Asia. It was during Tamerlane's time, from 1370 to 1405, that Samarkand became a city of almost mythic fame, with its soaring minarets and gleaming blue-tiled domes. During Tamerlane's conquests of other cultures, he always sent back to Samarkand the very best artists and architects and ordered them to build grand lavish monuments. The city went into decline in the 16th and 17th centuries, and the Emir of Bukhara took it into his khanate in the late 18th century. In 1865, Russian Cossacks took the city from the Emir during the height of the Great Game. The arrival of the Trans-Caspian railway 20 years later firmly linked Samarkand to Russia.

## DAY 12

### SAMARKAND

In the village of Urgut, we take a stroll through the Sunday market and see where old silks were once traded and sold. In Shakre Sabz, birthplace of Tamerlane, the founder of Uzbekistan, we'll explore its monuments from the Timurid period, including the Ak Saray Palace ruins, Dorus Tilavat

seminary, and the Kok Gumbaz mosque. In the afternoon, we'll visit Kunihil village to see the traditional way of making special paper using mulberry tree skin pulp, and also visit an Afghan carpet collector and store. Overnight at hotel...BLD

## DAY 13

### SAMARKAND

We visit Bibi Khanym tomb, built to commemorate the wife of Tamerlane, and the Shahr-i-Zindah, a stunning complex of mosques and tombs displaying some of Central Asia's finest mosaics of deep sapphire and turquoise tiles set off against tawny earthen walls, the Afrosiab Museum, with its frescoes dating back to the 7th and 8th centuries, and Ulugbek's Observatory. In the afternoon, we'll visit the mansion of Kalantarov, a wealthy Jewish merchant, and later a museum that sheds light on the Jewish culture in Central Asia. Dinner at Oasis Garden Restaurant. Overnight at hotel...BLD

## DAY 14

### SAMARKAND / GIJDUVAN / BUKHARA

Following the Royal Road—the old Silk Route dotted with traditional villages—we'll have the opportunity to stop at Malik Rabat, a World Heritage Site and one of the oldest Persian caravanserais of the region. It was greatly destroyed in earthquake of 1968, but the building has an impressive portal called "peshtak" that still remains. We'll also visit an old Silk Road covered well/cistern nearby. In Gijduvan, we visit the traditional studio of a third-generation master potter. After lunch at his family home, we continue to Bukhara. Overnight at Hotel Omar Khayyam or similar... BLD

Driving Details: Approximately 160 miles

## DAYS 15 AND 16

### BUKHARA

With two full days in this fascinating city, whose beautifully restored medieval quarter is now a World Heritage site, we visit the impressive Lyab-i Khauz architectural complex, once the principal source of water for all of Bukhara; Magak-i Attari Mosque, where Jews and Muslims once worshipped beside one another; Nadir Divan-begi Madrassa, with its gorgeous tile work; Poi Kalon minaret, with its incredible brickwork; and the madrassas of Abdulaziz Khan and Ulugbek. One afternoon, we have the special opportunity to visit with one of Bukhara's most well-known miniaturist artist Davlat Toshev, in his

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home studio. We will also see the Ark Fortress, once used as the army headquarters by the Bukharan emirs; the Zindan Prison, with its underground dungeon and Bug Pit; and then the brick monuments in the mausoleum of Ismail Samanid. If time permits, we'll visit the Bahauddin Nakshbandi Complex and mausoleum of a 14th century Sufi mystic. Overnight at hotel...BLD

#### DAY 17

##### BUKHARA / KHIVA

Today we drive across the Kyzyl Kum desert to Khiva, enjoying a picnic lunch en route. Upon arrival in Khiva this evening, we will have dinner accompanied by a performance of traditional Khorezmian music with the folklore group, Khalfi. Brilliant costumes, historic songs, and traditional instruments are featured in this program of local music and dance. Overnight at Euro Asia Hotel or similar...BLD  
Driving Details: Approximately 280 miles, 7-8 hours

Khiva: Like Bukhara, Khiva was once a minor stop on the Silk Road during the 8th century. It began to prosper under the rule of the Uzbek Shaybanid tribesmen, who captured it in the 16th century. As a Shaybanid khanate, it became one of the two major slave markets of Central Asia for hundreds of years (Bukhara was the other). Turkomen raiders captured people as far away as the Caspian and delivered them to Khiva's slavers. In the early 18th century, the Khan of Khiva made an alliance with Russia for protection against marauding tribes, and the Russians sent troops to Khiva in 1717 with the idea of protecting it. The crafty Khan had by then lost interest in the arrangement with the Russians and had them killed. He sent the head of their leader, Prince Alexander Bekovich, back to Russia with the few survivors. Khiva was taken over shortly thereafter by a Persian invader and began to prosper from trade between Russia and neighboring khanates. Two British officers, Captain James Abbott and Lieutenant Richmond Shakespear, entered Khiva separately in 1839 and 1840, ostensibly to negotiate with Khan over the release of certain slaves. As this was the height of the Great Game, they may have really been there to study strategic routes between Khiva and Russia. In 1872, Khiva became too much of a thorn in Russia's side, and as Russian troops under General Kaufman advanced on it, the Khan surrendered.

#### DAY 18

##### KHIVA

We enjoy a full-day walking tour of atmospheric Khiva, including the fortress of Itchan Kala, protected by thick brick walls; Kalta Minor minaret, decorated in turquoise tiles; Kunya Ark, with its copper cannons; Madrassa Rahimkhan, the emerald green-domed mausoleum; Pahlavan Makhmud, Islam minaret and museum; as well as the Friday mosque and Tashala Palace. Overnight at hotel...BLD

#### DAY 19

##### KUNYA URGENCH, TURKMENISTAN / ASHGABAT, TURKMENISTAN

Crossing the Turkmenistan border, we arrive in Kunya Urgench, with its pre- and post-Mongol monuments, including Turabek Khanym's mausoleum with its intricate tile work said to represent the night sky. (Note: During the border crossing, you must wheel or carry your own luggage several hundred feet to catch a public shuttle bus—and it can be hot at times). Later, we'll transfer to the airport and fly to Ashgabat, the Turkmen capital, an ancient city surrounded by the Kara-Kum ("black sands") desert. Overnight at the Hotel Oguzkent or similar...BLD  
Driving Details: Approximately 50 miles

#### DAY 20

##### ASHGABAT

In the morning we'll visit the famous archaeological site of Nisa, which served as the winter capital of the Parthian rulers. We then explore the Grand Mosque, the largest mosque in Central Asia, whose golden dome welcomes devout Muslim worshippers. After returning to the city, we'll visit the Arch of Neutrality and the Wedding Palace for photos followed by a guided tour of the extensive Carpet Museum. Overnight at hotel...BLD

#### DAY 21

##### ASHGABAT / MARY / MERV

We take a short morning flight to the town of Mary in southeastern Turkmenistan. A drive through the Heart of the Kara-Kum desert brings us to the vast ruins of ancient Merv, once one of the most important cities along the Silk Road. Founded around the 6th century BC, it grew to become the third largest city in the world in the 10th century AD. The archaeological site sprawls over 30,000 acres of desert that was once a fertile oasis. Returning to Mary, we visit the Mary Archaeological Museum, with

# Itinerary (cont'd)

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its collections of artifacts from local archaeological sites, including Gonur Depe, a Bronze Age settlement that once supported a rich caravan culture. It was at its zenith from 1600-1300 BC, and later declined and was eventually abandoned after the Murghab River diminished. If time permits, we'll pay a special visit to local artist Chary's house to see his studio and enjoy a cup of tea before having dinner at a local restaurant. Overnight at Hotel Mary or similar... BLD

## DAY 22 MARY / ASHGABAT

After breakfast, we will set out by vehicle back to Ashgabat. Along the road between Ashgabat and Merv are several intriguing historic sites, which we will visit en route. 18th century Persian ruler Nader Shah, who by all reports was an ethnic Turkmen, built a fortress here during his wars of conquest; its remains still radiate grace and beauty. Outside of Ashgabat, we'll stop at a horse-breeding farm devoted to the renowned Akhal-Teke horse, arguably the oldest cultured breed of horse in the world. We will have a special visit with the owners, discussing the workings of the farm and about the breed. These elegant horses have long, slender necks, small heads, long legs, and narrow chests. They are said to have lent their genes to both the Arabian horse and the American Quarter Horse. If time permits, we will visit Geok Depe, where a stunning mosque has been erected to commemorate those who died during the famous siege of 1880, when more than 8,000 Turkmen soldiers and civilians lost their lives protecting the area from Russian invasion. Arrive in Ashgabat in time for dinner and overnight at Oguzkent Hotel or similar...BLD  
Driving Details: Approximately 226 miles, 4-5 hours

## DAY 23 ASHGABAT

In the morning, we visit Altyn Asyrr Oriental Market, brimming with all types of goods for sale, from household items to traditionally patterned carpets, electrical appliances, and occasionally even animals. Returning to the city, we visit the fascinating State History Museum and the Russian Bazaar, one of the largest and oldest of the covered markets in Turkmenistan, with its colorful stalls of spices, food, and clothing. We gather tonight for our Farewell Dinner at a local restaurant in Ashgabat. Overnight at hotel...BLD

## DAY 24 ASHGABAT / DEPART

Transfer to the Ashgabat airport and depart on homeward-bound flights...B



# Trip Cost, Payment & Insurance

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## TRIP COST

Prices for this trip are being finalized. Contact us and we'll send them to you as soon as they are available.

To offer the lowest possible cost, our trips are priced according to the number of participants on the trip. All costs are per person, based on double occupancy. If you wish to have a single room, you must pay the single supplement fee. Please note that Wilderness Travel staff, or guests of Wilderness Travel such as travel writers, photographers, or leaders-in-training, are not included in the tier pricing count.

## CURRENCY EXCHANGE RATE

Because the prices published for our program are set so far in advance of the trip dates, we are occasionally faced with exceptional cost increases and/or currency fluctuations that affect the actual cost of running the trip. In most years, no price changes are necessary. However, we do reserve the right to raise or lower the trip price if there is a significant change in costs or exchange rates. If this is the case, your final invoice will reflect the difference in trip cost.

## TRIP COST INCLUDES

- Expert leadership of Wilderness Travel Trip Leader Roger Williams and local guides
- Accommodations as noted
- All meals included as indicated in the Detailed Itinerary (B=Breakfast, L=Lunch, D=Dinner)
- Land transportation and sightseeing as noted
- Entrance fees to all sites listed in itinerary

## TRIP COST DOES NOT INCLUDE

International airfare, internal airfare (see separate cost above), airport departure taxes, individual arrival or departure transfers, any meals not specified after each itinerary day, optional tipping or gratuities to the leader, optional helicopter flight, hotels en route to and home from the trip, any additional hotel nights that may be necessary due to international airline schedule changes or other factors, pre-trip expenses of medical immunizations, visa fees, travel insurance, and other expenses of a personal nature (alcoholic beverages, laundry, etc.).

## PAYMENT SCHEDULE

At time of reservation: \$600

90 days prior to departure: Balance

## CANCELLATION AND TRANSFER FEE SCHEDULE

Up to 151 days prior to departure: No charge!

91-150 days prior to departure: \$600 per person

90 days or less: 100% of trip cost

\*Please note that this differs from our regular catalog departures.

## MANDATORY EMERGENCY EVACUATION INSURANCE

**Please note:** Insurance for emergency evacuation is required for this trip. Call for more details.

# Arrival & Departure

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Upon confirming your trip reservation, we will send you a Welcome Packet that includes a list of documents (passport, visas, etc.) required for your trip. Please feel free to call if you would like this information before making your air arrangements.

If you have booked extra services before or after the trip, an Extra Services Confirmation will be sent with your Final Documents.

## ARRIVAL & MEETING PLACE

Almaty, Kazakhstan

**Suggested Airport:** Almaty International Airport (ALA)

**Suggested Date & Time:** Day 1, by 3:00 pm

**Meeting Place:** A complimentary transfer is provided from Almaty International Airport to the group hotel for all trip members, no matter when you arrive. A Wilderness Travel representative will meet you outside the customs area and will be holding a Wilderness Travel sign and/or a sign with your name on it. They will then transfer you to the group hotel. There will be a Welcome Dinner and orientation in the evening of Day 1.

**Please Note:** Since many flights arrive in Almaty in the early morning hours, we have guaranteed early check-in for you at the group hotel on Day 1. Your room will be ready no matter when you arrive on Day 1.

## DEPARTURE

Ashgabat, Turkmenistan

**Suggested Airport:** Ashgabat International Airport (ASB)

**Suggested Date & Time:** Day 24, anytime

A complimentary transfer will be provided from the Hotel Oguzkent to Ashgabat International Airport, no matter when you depart. Please note that check-out time on Day 24 is 12:00 pm.

## INTERNATIONAL AIR TRAVEL

You are responsible for making your own arrangements for flights to and from the trip.

There are many online consolidators for booking travel, but for more personal help arranging air transport, you can contact Exito Travel at 1-800-655-4053 in the US or 1-800-670-2605 in Canada. They are very adept at putting flight itineraries together, to even the most far-flung places. More information can be found on Exito's website at [www.exitotravel.com](http://www.exitotravel.com).

Depending on your routing, it will be necessary for you to depart from the US one or two days prior to Day 1 of the trip itinerary. We recommend you arrive at least one night early so that you have a full day to recover from jet lag. Extra hotel nights can be arranged for you (at extra cost). The name on your airline ticket must match the name on your passport exactly, and your passport must be valid for at least six months after your date of return to the US.

Please do not purchase your tickets until you are confirmed on the trip. Once your tickets have been purchased, please forward a copy of your email flight confirmation from the airline. It is your responsibility to ensure your flight times coordinate with the arrival and departure logistics for this trip.

# Trip Leader

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Wilderness Travel Trip Leaders have a passion and a joy for creating an unforgettable journey. We are extremely proud of them and the incredible travel experiences they make possible.



## ROGER WILLIAMS

Roger Williams has been one of our most versatile guides since 1986, and he shows no sign of stopping. He spent eight years studying Tibetan Buddhism, Buddhist iconography, Himalayan languages, and woodblock art in Nepal, and another two years studying Japanese woodblock art, Japanese language, and Shingon Shu, an esoteric sect of Japanese Buddhism in Japan. If it isn't the surplus of knowledge Roger brings when he leads a trip that makes him so unique, then it may be his awareness for cultural preservation that keep trip members so loyal to his new adventures. Each year, Roger works with WT to design new trips in fascinating areas. He has led in such far-flung locations as Iran, Pakistan, northern Afghanistan, Kamchatka, Burma, Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Madagascar. When he's not leading, you can find Roger in Berkeley, California, where he is the director of Snow Lion Graphics/SLG Books, a publishing house specializing in Asian cultures. "There should be a rating higher than excellent for Roger," one trip member wrote after her journey with Roger. "His knowledge, energy, planning, and attentiveness are superlative."

# Trip Details

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## WHAT THE TRIP IS LIKE

The trip is rated Level 3, moderate. While this trip is not expected to be physically strenuous, the rustic accommodations, long travel days, and transportation conditions may be quite demanding. Accommodations are in good city hotels and in comfortable rustic lodges. Overland travel is in minivans and small buses, depending upon the size of the group. Road conditions can be very basic, and trip members should be prepared for long drives. Our expedition travels to areas that have experienced very little tourism. We believe that the most important requirements are a spirit of adventure and the understanding that you are visiting a remote and fascinating region. This is not a hiking trip, but we do hope to have opportunities for walks of two hours or more during the journey.

## CHOOSING THE RIGHT TRIP

Adventure travel often involves exotic destinations, unusual levels of physical exertion, or activities you may not have participated in previously. We work hard to help you choose the right trip for you, paying attention to your individual interests, abilities, and needs. If you have questions about the level of comfort or any of the activities described in

this itinerary, please call Wilderness Travel at 1-800-368-2794 and ask for the Asia Manager or email us at [asia@wildernesstravel.com](mailto:asia@wildernesstravel.com).

## REFERENCES

We'd be happy to put you in touch with a past client that has traveled with us on this or a similar trip.

## VISIT OUR WEBSITE

At [www.wildernesstravel.com](http://www.wildernesstravel.com), you can find out about added departures, last-minute deals, and special WT Expeditions that aren't listed in our catalog. You can also access a complete library of our detailed itineraries and browse the customized reading guides for each of our adventures.

## HELPFUL LINKS

Wilderness Travel has compiled a list of useful websites for travelers. Find the Client Forms & Helpful Links page of our website: ([www.wildernesstravel.com/toucan/links](http://www.wildernesstravel.com/toucan/links)).



## WILDERNESS TRAVEL HAS BEEN AWARDED:

**World's Best Tour Operators:** *Travel + Leisure*, 2022, 11-time winner

**Best Travel Specialists in the World:** *Conde Nast Traveller*, 2022, 3 years in a row

**Best Wildlife, Hiking & Walking Trips:** *AFAR Magazine*, 3 years in a row

**Best Adventure Travel Companies:** *USA Today*

**Trip of the Year:** *Outside Magazine*, 9-time winner

**50 Tours of a Lifetime:** *National Geographic Traveler*, 9 years in a row

**Best Adventure Travel Companies:** *National Geographic Adventure*, 3-time winner

Please be advised that California has established a Travel Consumer Restitution Fund under the California Seller of Travel Law that took effect January 1, 1996. This fund is designed to protect consumers from unscrupulous practices by discount airfare ticket sellers or air charter operators. Unfortunately, this law does not cover non-California residents and, even in the case of California residents, it does not cover any foreign travel where the foreign "providers of transportation or travel services" are not in compliance with the Sellers of Travel Law (compliance being defined as registered as a Seller of Travel in California and a participant in the Travel Consumer Restitution Fund). Thus none of Wilderness Travel's tours qualify and we are required by law to advise each client that they are not covered by the California Travel Consumer Restitution Fund. California law requires sellers of travel to maintain a trust account or bond. This business has a trust account. California Seller of Travel #100769640

While as accurate as possible at the time of printing, this itinerary should be considered an approximate indication of the schedule and scope of activities and trip routing, rather than an inflexible schedule of events; it is subject to change due to circumstances beyond our control. This trip is subject to the Limitation of Liability and all the terms and conditions as detailed in the General Information section of the Wilderness Travel Catalog.

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