

12 Days - Surreal Landscapes and Silk Road Cities of Uzbekistan



Uzbekistan: Tashkent – Nukus – Aral Sea - Khiva – Bukhara - Samarkand – Tashkent



Type: Classic

Tour Overview

Day 1: Tashkent

Welcome to Uzbekistan!

Upon clearing immigration and customs, the representative will be waiting at the airport meeting area for the transfer to the hotel.

Day 02: Tashkent

Tashkent, a charming mish mash of austere Soviet-style buildings and classical Russian architecture, has a long history of 2,200 years, and has been the capital of Uzbekistan since 1930.

We'll start by exploring the narrow winding streets of the Old Town. This area is home to Barakkhan Madrasah, Tillya Shaykh Mosque, Kaffal Shashi Mausoleum and the Library of Islamic Literature.

Under a giant dome, we'll find a delightful slice of city life in the traditional Chor-Su Bazaar. It's also a great place to buy souvenirs, watch Uzbek bread baking and taste some local food.

In the modern part of the city we'll visit the Applied Arts Museum and Mustakillik Square. We'll even take a ride on the vibrant, arty Tashkent Metro. The tour of Tashkent ends at Amir Temur Square established on the intersection of two ancient trade roads in the heart of the city.

Today's Highlights: Metro, walk through Chor-Su Bazaar.



Day 3: Tashkent – Nukus – Aral Sea

The early morning flight will bring us to Nukus, from where we start the drive into the hinterland and to the Ustyurt Plateau. The drive takes us via Kungrad district, which used to be one of the trading centres on the Silk Road.

The mysterious Ustyurt Plateau consists of a clay and stony desert with chalky mountains, jagged limestone peaks and deep sheer-sided canyons. We'll stop for a picnic lunch at Lake Sudochie. We'll also visit the ruins of a fishermen's house, a fish factory, an old lighthouse and the abandoned airport.

On arrival at the ever-shrinking Aral Sea, an hour's walk will bring us to Kurgancha-Kala, an old caravansarai and fortress from the great Silk Road period hidden in the hills.

In the evening, we'll have dinner under the starry desert sky and then retire for the night to our cosy yurts amid the surreal moon-like surroundings.

Today's Highlights: explore the Martian landscape of the dried Aral Sea.

Day 4: Aral Sea – Nukus

Let's set our alarms as it's worth the early start to watch the sunrise over this incredible landscape.

After breakfast we'll drive to the eerie 'cemetery of ships' where the husks of rusting ships lie stranded in the sand of this dry sea bed. Once they were submerged in water, so it's incredible to think that the nearest shore is now over 100 miles away. We'll visit the museum to learn more about this disaster and drive past the gas towers and gas plant. On hills near Khodzeli city we'll find the Mizdakhn necropolis - an ancient cemetery; and the ruins of the Gyaur-Kala fortress.

Today's Highlights: Visit the ship cemetery and ghost town.



Day 5: Nukus – Khiva

After breakfast we'll visit the astounding Savitsky Museum. Also known as the 'Louvre of the Desert', it houses the world's second largest collection of Russian avant-garde art - rescued from the clutches of Stalin.

We then start our drive to Khiva. On the way we'll discover the ancient desert fortresses of Khorezm – Ayaz Kala and Toprak Kala. We'll also see Chilpik Dahma, known as the Tower of Silence. The Zoroastrians would throw the bodies of their dead into this roofless tower for the birds to consume.

Today's Highlights: Savitsky art gallery.

Day 6: Khiva

Wake up in Khiva! A visit to this 6th century walled city is like travelling back in time. It is a city of colour thanks to the navy, indigo and cerulean ceramic tiles embedded in the ochre walls of many of the buildings.

We'll walk the labyrinth of sand-laden alleyways to find the Juma Mosque whose roof is supported by 213 unique columns of 10th century elm; Tash Hauli, the main palace of Khiva rulers; and Pakhlavan Mahmud Mausoleum, an open-air mausoleum. We'll also visit Muhammad Amin Khan Madrassah, Kalta Minor Minaret, Kunya Ark, Muhamad Rahim Khan Madrassah, Islam Khodja Minaret and Madrassah, and Shirgazi Khan Madrassah.

Today's Highlights: A walk through the old walled area of Ichan Kala

Day 7: Khiva – Bukhara

After breakfast we'll set off on a road trip of seven to eight hours to Bukhara. The drive takes us through the red sand Kyzylkum Desert, the 15th largest desert in the world. It's a dry and desolate, yet beautiful area, populated by nomadic tribes. We'll have stops to stretch our legs on the bank of the Amudarya River and to have lunch in a local café.



Day 8: Bukhara

Today we'll explore, Bukhara, Central Asia's holiest city. It is home to buildings spanning a thousand years of history, and a thoroughly lived-in and cohesive old centre that hasn't changed too much in two centuries. It is one of the best places in Central Asia for a glimpse of pre-Russian Turkestan.

We'll visit the Ark Fortress - the residence of Bukhara khans, Bolo Hauz Mosque, Samanids Mausoleum, Chashma-Ayub Mausoleum, and some beautiful madrassahs.

At the Poi-Kalyan complex we can see the Kalyan Minaret, also known as the 'Tower of Death'. We'll also visit the Lyabi Hauz complex, a peaceful oasis in the heart of the city containing several impressive Islamic monuments.

Today's Highlight: Walk in the Old Town.

Day 9: Bukhara – Samarkand

The City of the Dead - this is just one of the sights we will see today. Located just outside Bukhara, Chor Bakr Necropolis, as it is officially known, is an unusual and mysterious burial place for the Dzhuzjani sheikhs.

We'll also visit Chor Minor Mosque; Sitorai Mokhi Khosa – the summer residence of the last Emir of Bukhara; and Baghautdin Nakhshbandi Mausoleum – an important Muslim shrine and pilgrimage site. In the afternoon, it's all aboard the train destined for Samarkand.

Today's Highlight: Exploring the life of the last rulers of Bukhara.

Day 10: Samarkand

No name is as evocative of the Silk Road as Samarkand, which lies at the crossroads of the silk trading route through Europe and Asia.

We'll visit the awe-inspiring restored madrassas standing on three sides of the iconic Registan Square - Ulughbek Madrassah, Sher-Dor Madrassah, and the gold-covered Tillya-Kari Madrassah.

Other highlights include Bibi Khanym Mosque with its ocean-blue domes and exquisite carvings; and Shakhi Zinda Necropolis, which contains monuments dating between 500 and 1000 years old. We'll also visit Gur Emir Mausoleum and Ulughbek Observatory with its interesting underground passages.

Today's Highlight: Registan Square with its ornate portals, patterned minarets and glistening cupolas.



Day 11: Samarkand – Tashkent

We'll continue seeing the sights of Samarkand today. There's the ancient settlement and museum of Afrosiab, and the Tombstone of Saint Daniyar – the restored tomb of the Old Testament prophet Daniyar (Daniel).

At Konigil village there's time to visit the local paper mill which offers a fantastic insight into how traditional paper is still made using old-fashioned techniques.

We'll then either catch the train or drive back to Tashkent.

Today's Highlight: Witness the ancient process of handmade silk paper.

Day 12: Departure from Tashkent

Sadly it's our last day and time to say goodbye. Enjoy a final breakfast before the transfer back to the airport for the onward flight.

Highlights

- Camp under the stars in the surreal landscape of the Aral Sea.
- Be blown away by the ancient mosques, madrassas and oriental bazaars of Bukhara.
- Wander through Khiva, a UNESCO-protected site and the most romantic city on the Silk Road.

Duration

- 12D11N

Inclusions

- All services as mentioned in your itinerary
- Accommodation (DBL/TWN room basis) with breakfast
- Train tickets Tashkent-Samarkand & Samarkand-Tashkent (subject to availability, we reserve the right to change the program and/or substitute trains by other transport)
- Guides services provided in the requested languages, unless otherwise mentioned in the itinerary
- Ground transportation in private, air-conditioned vehicle
- Drinking water during sightseeing.
- Meals as per program.
- Multi-lingual 24-hour customer support hotline in all destinations.
- Welcome pack on arrival.
- Fully licensed and insured to international standard.
- All applicable local taxes.

Exclusions

- Visa fees Early check-in / late check-out
- Personal expenses
- Photo/video fees at museums
- Tips and gratuities
- Lunches and dinners

Things you need to know

- Additional airfare, airport taxes and fuel surcharges may apply.
- Additional charges may apply if changes or cancellations are made to flight tickets. We will notify you if ticket issuance deadlines are outside our standard terms and conditions.
- Breakfast box in case of very early morning departures.
- For solo traveller the single supplement is already included in the tour price.
- Where an extra bed is not available, a single supplement charge will be added for additional room.
- Where an extra bed is available, an 'Extra Bed' charge will be added.
- Infants under 2 years old are free of charge when travelling with a paying adult.
- Children under 12 years old receive a 30% discount when sharing existing bedding.
- If you have decided to travel on a local holiday or festival, certain rates may be higher. We will let you know right away if this condition applies to you.
- Accommodation is subject to availability until you have confirmed your booking and paid any relevant deposits.
- In the event your chosen hotel is not available, alternatives will be offered.
- Some of our roads can be quite bumpy, especially in remote areas such as Nukus and Termez. As smaller vehicles such as sedan cars or small minivans can only be used in mountain areas, we may need to change the transport several times throughout the tour. For example, we will use smaller vehicles for travelling and larger vehicles for sightseeing. Transfers to the Ferghana Valley may be by train or road, at our discretion.