



Treasures of Travel

The Jewels of Central Asia ~ Uzbekistan, 2024

For over two millennia, this area has formed a bridge between Europe and Asia, mingling people and trading goods via the thoroughfare that came to be known as the Silk Road. Central Asia's storybook content combined with stunning scenery will captivate you, and the generous instinctive hospitality of the people here will warm your heart. The atmosphere of the ancient trading posts and the evidence of nomadic empires will haunt you throughout the journey.

Day 1

Depart the USA on overnight flight.

Day 2 ~ Tashkent-Nukus

Fly to Europe and take connecting flight to Tashkent; arrive in International Tashkent airport, transfer to domestic airport and flight to Nukus. Arrival in Nukus, transfer to your hotel for check-in and overnight. overnight in Nukus.

Day 3 ~ Nukus-Khiva (135 miles)

Today you will have a **city tour in Nukus**. First, you will visit the **Museum of Savitsky** which exhibits the masterpieces of forbidden art. Museum collects 20th century Russian avant-garde paintings, works of Sokolov, Komarovskiy and Amaravella group. The curator of the Karakalpakstan state museum of art collected the artworks in 1960s. He purchased banned works from persecuted soviet artists, sometimes free. He carefully preserved and finally exhibited them in this remote central Asian art-house. After that, we drive outside of Nukus to see **Mizdakhn necropolis** which used to be an ancient city centuries ago. Archaeological findings confirmed that area was continuously captured from the 4th century BC till about 14th century AD. Later afternoon we drive to Khiva. Overnight in Khiva.

Day 4 ~ Khiva

The exact age of **Khiva** is not known. Legend has that it was founded when Shem, son of Noah, discovered a well here; the city's name was derived from Shem's joyful shout "Hey va" on seeing the well. As a result of a Soviet conservation program in the 1970-80s it's now official 'city museum'.

Khiva certainly existed by 8th century as a minor fort and trading post on the Silk Road, but it was not until the 16th century that Khiva became the capital of the Khorezm Khanate and a well-known slave-trading center. The Khanate ruled the surrounding area for over 300 years. Today, Khiva evokes a most remote and exotic feel with its compact old walled city full of minarets, a khan's fort, cobbled alleys, mosques and tombs.

We will spend the day exploring Khiva on foot. The tour includes the **UNESCO World Heritage Old Town, or Ichon-Qala**, including the **Tosh-Khovli Palace**, built in the 19th century by Alloquli khan; the **Juma Mosque** interesting for 218 wooden pillars supporting its roof; the **Kukhna Ark**, the original residence of the khans with its harem, mint, stables, arsenal, barracks, mosque and jail; and the ancient well of Khievak, the source of city's foundation.

Woodcarving workshop, UNESCO workshop - Khiva Silk Carpet Workshop has three main collections of carpets and suzanis: **Timurid Collection**, which are carpets and suzanis based on designs taken from fifteens century miniatures, **Khiva Majolica Collection** based on the dazzling turquoise, white and deep blue tiles that adorn the madrasahs, mausoleums and palaces of Khiva, and finally **Khiva**

Doors and Pillars Collection, based on the intricate carved wooden doors and pillars in Khiva. We will also visit **Applied Art Museum**. Overnight in Khiva.

Day 5 ~ Khiva-Bukhara (265 miles, 7 hours' drive)

This morning we will drive to the fascinating city of Bukhara. With its more than 140 architectural monuments Bukhara is a "town museum" dating back to the Middle Ages. The city consists of narrow streets, green parks and gardens, historical and architectural monuments belong to different epochs, but locate very close to each other. The road from Khiva to Bukhara goes through famous **Kizilkum desert**. On the way we will enjoy the view to **Amu Darya River**, the deepest river in Central Asia, formed by the confluence of the Panj and Vakhsh in Tajikistan and flowing into Aral Sea. Upon arrival in Bukhara, we will transfer you to your hotel for overnight. Overnight in Bukhara.

Day 6 ~ Bukhara

We will spend today exploring **UNESCO World Heritage Site -the "Historic Centre of Bukhara"** which has buildings spanning a thousand years of history, and a thoroughly lived –in old city. An oasis in the desert, Bukhara offers cool shade and rest to the modern traveler as it did to the camel caravans travelling on the Silk Road hundreds of years ago.

Our sightseeing begins at **Lyab-i-Hauz Plaza**, built around a pool in 1620 right in the heart of the old town; it is shaded by mulberry trees as old as the pool and serves - as it has had throughout history--a place to meet friends, eat, drink, and relax.

We will visit the nearby **Kukeldash Madrassah**, the largest of Central Asia's Koran schools, which dates from 1417. A stroll through artisans' shops will take us to the 12th century Kalon assembly which consists of the **Kalon Mosque and Minaret**, and the **Mir-i-Arab Madrassah**. At the time of foundation Kalon Minaret was probably the tallest building in Central Asia, its 14 ornamental bands, all different, include the first use of the glazed blue tiles that were to saturate Central Asia under Timur.

In the evening you will have some time to explore the city on your own or relax. Overnight in Bukhara.

Day 7 ~ Bukhara

This morning first we will tour nearby located **Ark Citadel**, a royal town-within-a-town which is Bukhara's oldest structure, occupied from the 5th century right up until 1920; the ancient fortress and seat of government for the Emirate of Bukhara is now a collection of museums and mosques. The Bukhara Ark being the trade center served the emirs of Bukhara as a residence, audience hall, as protection from neighboring enemies. Behind the Ark is **Zindon Prison**, with its infamous "bug pit" where two British spies Stoddart and Conolly were brutally imprisoned as part of the 19th century struggle in the great game between Britain and Russia for influence over this strategic oasis town.

Next, we will stop at the **Ismael Samani Mausoleum**. The 10th century resting place of Ismael Samani, founder of the Persian Samanid Dynasty, is detailed with sixteen different styles of brickwork. The little mausoleum was buried under centuries of sand and not discovered until the 20th century.

This afternoon we will drive to the **Last Emir's Summer Palace** called **the Palace of Moon and Stars** located only 6 km (3.73miles) north of Bukhara. The present buildings were a joint effort for Alim Khan by Russian architects and local artisans to create luxurious place for khan but with Russian intention to keep him out of city in political impotence.

We will end our day with **traditional Uzbek performance** this evening. Overnight in Bukhara.

Day 8 ~ Bukhara-Sharísabs-Samarkand

On the way to Samarkand, we will stop in Tamerlane's hometown **Shakhrisabze** (Green City) which is the **UNESCO World Heritage** site. The town was formerly called Kesh but later renamed by Timur. Here one can see the ruins of Timur's summer palace **Ak Saray (White Palace)**. It was probably Tamerlane's most ambitious projects but what's left now are the bits of gigantic, 40m (131ft)-high entrance covered with gorgeous blue, white and gold mosaics.

In the evening we will arrive in **Samarkand**, a **UNESCO World Heritage Site**, built on the ruins of ancient Afrosiab, once known to the Greeks as Marakanda. Its location between China and the western world secured its importance as a trade center and a hub for cultural exchange. Its strategic location and

cultural wealth made Samarkand an attractive target for the world's most famous conquerors. Overnight in Samarkand.

Day 9 ~ Samarkand

After his conquest, Tamerlane made Samarkand the capital of his empire and worked to improve the city, which had suffered under the Mongols. Under Tamerlane and his grandson Ulughbek architecture and decorative art flourished. They both had access to the best building and decorative materials, as well as the finest and most skilled architects and artisans, ever assembled in one place at one time.

We start the exploration of Samarkand with a visit to **Registan**, which is the centerpiece of the city and the most recognizable landmark for visitors. There are three *madrasahs* framing the square, with Ulughbek madrasah being the oldest. It was this central space that originally gave the place its name, as "registan" means "place of sand." This sandy place at the center of ancient Samarkand was a public square and marketplace before the Ulughbek, Tillya-Kori, and Shir Dor *madrasahs* were built.

Our next stop is at **Gur-Emir Mausoleum**. Tamerlane, his two sons and two grandsons, including Ulughbek, lie beneath this surprisingly modest mausoleum. The interior of the mausoleum has been restored and is beautifully decorated with gold leaf and fresh tile. Underneath the central dome there is the set of tomb-markers resembling sarcophagi (as with other Muslim mausoleums the stones are just markers, the actual crypts are in a chamber beneath). All are marble, with the exception of Tamerlane's, which is a slab of solid jade reportedly from Mongolia.

Our last stop will be at the **Bibi-Khanum Mosque**, built by Tamerlane to be the largest mosque and the jewel of his empire, dedicated to the memory of his favorite Chinese wife. Overnight in Samarkand.

Day 10 ~ Samarkand

Today we will carry on touring, thus learning more about Samarkand making the first stop at **Ulughbek's Observatory**. While Tamerlane built the world's largest mosque of his time, his grandson Ulughbek constructed the world's most accurate observatory; he was probably more famous as an astronomer than as a ruler. He was fascinated by the stars and the universe and built an immense astrolab for observing them. As a result of the observations, he undertook with the naked eye only, he calculated the length of the year to within a minute of the modern accepted value; and predated the telescope by over 150 years. He used the building itself, which housed a large vertical half-circle, only a quarter of which remains today. Ulughbek also created at that time the most comprehensive catalog of the heavens, earning his place in history.

Next, we'll continue to the avenue of tombs at **Shahr-i-Zindah** which means the 'tomb of a living king' and refers to the holiest shrine-what is probably the grave of Qusam ibn-Abbas, a cousin of Prophet Mohammed who is said to have brought Islam to this area. Except of this and few other early tombs, the rest belongs to Timur's and Ulughbek's family and favorites. After lunch you will be able to enjoy some free time in Samarkand. Overnight in Samarkand.

Day 11 ~ Samarkand-Tashkent (Train)

Breakfast and check out from the hotel. Free day in Samarkand to explore the city on your own. Evening is the **train** to Tashkent. Arrival and check in to the hotel. Overnight in Tashkent.

Day 12 ~ Tashkent

A full day is dedicated to a sightseeing tour in Tashkent. Today you will visit **Independence Square**, which is the main square of the country and was erected as a symbol of victory over fascism in World War II. Then you will have a chance to walk along the **local Broadway**, a walking street between Independence Square and Amir Timur Square. Furthermore, you can take a **ride** on the famous **Tashkent metro**, among the most beautiful subways in the world. The first line was opened in 1977. Then you will visit the **old part of the city**, which includes Chorsu Bazaar, Kukaldash Madrasah, and the Hast Imam complex, which consists of several madrasahs, mosques, and mausoleums. The highlight of its exhibits is the Othman Quran, which is the world's oldest Quran copy, dating back to the 8th century. The Quran belonged to Othman Ibn Affan, the Third Caliph (of the four righteous Caliphs who

succeeded the prophet Muhammad). Othman was killed by non-muslims in the 8th century. His blood spread over the Quran that you can still see on its pages. Overnight in Tashkent.

Day 13 ~ Tashkent

Full day is dedicated to a sightseeing tour in Tashkent. First you will visit **Courage Monument** which is a memorial complex, erected in honor of the elimination of the consequences of the Tashkent earthquake. Then the tour continues to **Zangi Ota memorial complex**. According to legend, Zangi-Oota was a shepherd and distinguished for his wisdom and good deeds. Today you can also visit the **State Museum of Timurids' history** which has 3,000 different items including jewelry, musical instruments, weapons, various coins, paintings, documents, historical manuscripts and clothing of Timurid's period. The city tour will be completed by visiting the **State Museum of Applied Arts of Uzbekistan**, consisting of fine examples of glasses and national clothing, hand and machine embroidery, skullcaps and national fabrics, carpets and woodcarving. Overnight in Tashkent.

Day 14

Transfer to the airport for departing flight to home.

Best time to travel:

Spring and Fall