



Treasures of Travel

Textiles & Crafts of Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan Tour, 2023 ~ 19 days/17 nights ~

The famous Silk Road traversing these countries in the past, made them legendary for the trade and production of cotton, silk, embroidery, jewelry, and ceramics for centuries. This tour gives you an opportunity to observe the first-hand traditional techniques used, from the farming of silk cocoons to the weaving and dyeing of heirloom carpets, and the intricate painting of pottery and tiles. Along the way you'll be treated to stunning landscapes, fascinating ancient sites and regional cuisine.

Day 1 ~ Depart USA

Depart the USA on overnight flight.

Day 2: In-flight

In flight; arrival in Europe and transfer to your connecting flight to **Ashgabat, Turkmenistan**.

Day 3 ~ Ashgabat

On your arrival early morning at Ashgabat airport; you will be met and **transferred** to your hotel. After some sleep and breakfast we will start our tour to explore this exciting and ever changing city. Today we will start our day with **Carpet Museum of Turkmenistan** to see the biggest carpet in the world, which is included in the Guinness Book of World Records, and to learn about the history of famous Turkmen carpet weaving.

Next we will visit the **Fine Arts museum** to see a good selection of Turkmen jewelry, traditional costumes as well as some Russian and western European paintings.

Our last stop of the day will be at **Tekke market**, a more humble one compared with Russian market. Overnight in Ashgabat.

Day 4 ~ Ashgabat

We will spend most of the day visiting **Tolkuchka Market**, a very famous and maybe the world's largest market, certainly the largest in all Central Asia. It is the most interesting market perhaps you will ever visit, definitely once-in-a-lifetime experience.

In the afternoon we will tour the **National Museum** which offers the fine collection of historic artifacts and relics as well as some fabulous textiles and national treasures. Next, we will head to **Russian or Gulistan Bazaar**, a fascinating place for fruits, vegetables, nuts, flowers, and people-watching.

Overnight in Ashgabat.

Day 5 ~ Nukus (Uzbekistan)

Today we will take morning **flight** over Kara Kum desert to **Dashoguz** and drive from there to Kunya Urgench, an agricultural center near the Uzbek border. Located on a northerly Silk Road branch that led to Caspian Sea and Russia, this was the site of the ancient capital of Khorezm later mercilessly destroyed by both Genghis Khan and Tamerlane.

Kunye Urgench is the **UNESCO-listed old city**, including the 11th century **Gutlug-Timur Minaret**, decorated with bands of brick and few turquoise tiles. Also admire the domed hall of the **Turabeg Khanym Mausoleum**. Its geometric patterns are in effect a giant calendar signifying humanity's insignificance in the march of time. Its cupola is rather unique in the context of early Islamic architecture and has its equal only in Shiraz, Iran.

After sightseeing we will leave Turkmenistan and cross the border for Nukus in Uzbekistan. After border formalities; and arrival in Nukus, we will check in at our hotel for overnight.

Day 6 ~ Khiva

Nukus is the isolated capital of Uzbekistan's Karakalpakstan Republic, home to the Karakalpaks, a Turkic people more closely related to Kazakhs than to Uzbeks. The city is the gateway to the fast-disappearing Aral Sea; the surrounding cotton fields testify to the monoculture that stole the water from the Amu Darya and Syr Darya, the rivers that fed the Aral Sea; and it is also home to a remarkable Art Museum founded by Igor Savitsky, thanks to him many of the early 20th century Russian paintings which were banned by Moscow found the protection here. The story of this collection has been told in the award-winning documentary: *Desert of Forbidden Art*.

We will see the collection of **Savitsky Art Museum**, which is the second-largest gathering of Russian avant-garde art after the Russian Museum in St. Petersburg.

After the museum visit we will drive to Khiva. Overnight in Khiva.

Day 7 ~ 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. 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.

As soon as we have some rest in our hotel we will begin a sightseeing tour to get the feeling of this magical and once fabled ancient Silk Road city.

A city tour includes a visit to **Ichan Kala**, the inner fortress; **Woodcarving workshop**, **UNESCO workshop**, **Applied Art Museum**, the **Muhammad Amin-khan Madrassah** and its minaret; **Kunya Ark** and the **Juma Mosque** with 218 wooden pillars; the **Harem** of Khiva Khans; and the **Mausoleum of Pakhlavan Makhmud**, a famous ancient wrestler and poet who patronized Khiva. Overnight in Khiva.

Day 8 ~ Bukhara

This morning we will head for another great city of Uzbekistan, Bukhara. We will take the road across **Kyzyl Kum, or Red Sand Desert**, the same route taken by loaded Silk Road camel caravans. Stop on the way to take a look at the **Amu Darya River**, which used to be called the Oxus, and loosely parallels the Uzbek-Turkmen border. Overnight in Bukhara.

Day 9 ~ 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.

Located nearby is the **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.

We will visit 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. Overnight in Bukhara.

Day 10 ~ Bukhara

Bukhara is the centre for local artisans, and we will be able to watch many at work on a variety of handicrafts at the **Bukhara Artisan Development Centre**.

We will spend the day visiting some colorful **local markets**, where the **Karavan Saray** (Trade Domes) and former madrassahs offer splendid, colorful handmade "Suzani" production and gold embroidery, as well as other forms of textiles, clothing, jewelry, carpets and costumes. Suzani means "needle work" in Tajik language. You will also have some time at leisure to explore the town and its rich, colorful shops on your own.

In the evening we'll have the pleasure to dine in a former caravanserai and be entertained by **Bukhara's local musicians and dancers** in local costumes. Overnight in Bukhara.

Day 11 ~ 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 project but what's left now are the bits of gigantic, 40m (131ft)-high entrance covered with gorgeous blue, white and gold mosaics. Here we will have the chance to learn about the famous Shakhrisabz suzani which is very famous throughout the country with its special design and color.

Now it is time for the Silk Road city of Samarkand, Uzbekistan's most glorious city. Overnight in Samarkand.

Day 12 ~ Samarkand

Today we will head to **Urgut** to visit one of the biggest bazaars in Samarkand region. Because generally these village markets are off the tourist paths and the locals have rare chance to see visitors from other countries, they are fascinated by them. We will be able to interact with them in a natural

way, as well as get the real feeling of the countryside. One of the highlights of today's trip is visiting some villages where the famous Suzani is handmade, including a stop at Samarkand region **Suzani workshop**. It is a joy to see how the families work together to create this incredible art using the skill which has been passed from generation to generation, every new one adding their own designs as their signature. Overnight in Samarkand.

Day 13 ~ Samarkand

This day will be dedicated to the sightseeing of Samarkand.

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 *madrassahs* framing the square, with Ulughbek *madrassah* 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 and was a public square and marketplace before the **Ulughbek, Tillya-Kori, and Shir Dor *madrassahs*** 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.

Next we head to 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.

We will also visit **Fine Art Museum of Samarkand** which has a fine collection of textiles and pottery. Overnight in Samarkand.

Day 14 ~ Fergana

This morning we will drive to Fergana via Tashkent. We will drive through the magnificent **Pamir Alay Mountain Range** and its breathtaking 7,000 foot passes to Fergana valley.

Upon arrival we will check in at our hotel for some rest and overnight in Fergana.

Day 15 ~ Fergana

Our two-day tour of Fergana valley includes a visit to the city of **Margilan**, known for its handmade ikat silk production. Here we will learn about the complete process of making ikat; from the beginning to the very final product. This is demonstrated by a sample silk warp, designed with burnt coal markings on the warp, wrapped tightly with threads, dyed, dried, rewrapped in other parts, again, dyed, dried, until the warp has been colored completely following the stipulated colors. The whole process takes many days, and is illustrated by walking through the different parts of the workshop. This 360 yard warp is then transferred to a loom to weave approximately 18 inch wide fabric.

We may have the opportunity to visit local villages and markets where farmers display and sell the silkworm cocoons.

Next we will head to the old village of **Rishtan**, famous for its ceramics and home to a group of master potters utilizing the fine local clay. There is evidence of earthenware in the foothills of the Alai Range dating back one thousand years. Modern **Rishtan ceramics** are characterized by elaborate floral and geometric designs in bright blue and green hues painted on a creamy white background. The skills used to produce Uzbek ceramics have been passed down from father to son for many generations. One of the famous local artisans – Mr. Rustam Usmanov – will lead you on a tour of his workshop and show how a piece of clay becomes a piece of art in his hands. Overnight in Fergana.

Day 16 ~ Fergana

This morning we will visit **Kumtepa bazaar** to see locally produced ikat by different families and other local workshops in Fergana city. Overnight in Fergana.

Day 17 ~ Tashkent

Before we leave for Tashkent, we will first stop in the city of **Kokand** to visit the late 19th century **palace of the last Khan**. First mentioned by Arab travelers in the 10th century as an oasis town on the trade route between India and China, Kokand was known throughout history as a prosperous trading and religious center. During the 19th century, it was the capital of a powerful Kokand khanate stretching from the Fergana Valley to the southern Kazakh steppe.

The Khan's Palace with 7 courtyards and 113 rooms was completed in 1873- only three years before tsar's troops arrived, blew up its fortifications and abolished khan's job. The Palace's surviving 2 courtyards and 19 rooms house Museum of Local Studies, with jewelry and musical instruments, Uzbek furniture and Oriental porcelain. The now demolished harem used to stand at the rear of the Palace. Overnight in Tashkent.

Day 18 ~ Tashkent

We will begin our exploration with a visit to the **Museum of Applied Arts and Fine Art Museum**; the first one contains a large collection of Suzani and other textiles of Uzbekistan, as well as other items such as: ceramics, jewelry and musical instruments. The museum is in a traditional house originally commissioned for a wealthy tsarist diplomat, built in the mid-19th century, combining carved plaster decorations and painted wooden walls both inside and outside, a feast of brilliant color. The latter museum has a fine collection of the pre-Russian Turkestan- Zoroastrian artifacts, 1,000-year-old Buddhist statues, and splendid royal furnishings, as well as brilliant silk-on-cotton embroidered hangings. Our last stop will be at the **Khast Imom** complex which includes the handcraft center of the **Barak Khan Madrassah**. This is a 16th century building and religious center of the republic. Overnight in Tashkent.

Day 19 ~ Depart Tashkent

In the morning we will **transfer** you to Tashkent airport for your flight home.

Departure Dates: Based on 19 days/17 nights

April 5 ~ 23

October 4 ~ 22

Tour Price:

\$ 4,900 per person in double room based on 10 ~ 12 guests traveling together

\$800 single supplement

Price Includes:

- Accommodation for 17 nights at selected 3 & 4 stars or special boutique, and in some cities best available hotels.
- All breakfast
- All dinners
- Daily private sightseeing by comfortable minibuses or vans
Including professional driver and his expenses
- English speaking tour guide and his/her expense
- Visit to local artisan's workshop as appropriate
- Entrance fees to sites indicated in bold on the itinerary

- One domestic flight (Ashkhabad – Dashoguz)
- Arrival and departure transfers
- Baggage handling
- Visa support letter for Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan
- Information package with itineraries, travel and visa information, and luggage tags.