



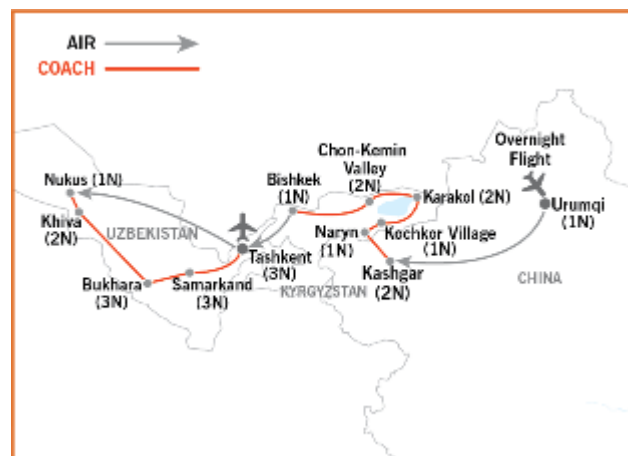
## Road to Samarkand

Immerse Yourself | 24 Days | Active

Urumqi - Kashgar - Naryn - Kochkor Village - Karakol - Chon-Kemin Valley -  
Bishkek - Tashkent - Nuxus - Khiva - Bukhara - Samarkand

Journey through the heart of Central Asia, crossing beautiful deserts and mountain landscapes. Discover ancient cities full of intricate Islamic architecture, thriving bazaars and mystical old-world atmosphere, all linked with the legends of the Silk Road.

- Journey over the Tian Shan Heavenly Mountains
- Watch a fascinating Eagle Hunter at Lake Issyk-Kul
- Browse the colourful bazaars
- Explore the impressive Ark Fortress
- Uncover the history of the Silk Road



#### Road to Samarkand tour inclusions:

- Return international economy flights, taxes and current fuel surcharges (unless travelling land only)
- All accommodation
- All Meals
- All Sightseeing and entrance fees
- All transportation and transfers
- English speaking National Escort (if your group is 10 or more passengers) or local guides
- Visa fees for UK and EU passport holders
- Specialist advice from our experienced travel consultants
- Comprehensive travel guides
- Safe and secure with ABTA, ATOL and IATA

*The only thing you may have to pay for are personal expenditure e.g. drinks, optional excursions or shows, insurance of any kind, tipping and early check in or late check out. These are all payable locally.*

#### Immerse Yourself:

Designed for those who wish to be further immersed in the authentic charm of Asia; tours in our Immerse Yourself range include more cultural and active experiences. You will be accompanied by our dedicated and professional National Escorts and local guides, whose unparalleled knowledge will turn your holiday into an unforgettable experience. These tours include:

- Cycling and walking through classic sites
- Unique cultural experiences and encounters
- Off the beaten track destinations

#### Active Tours:

'Road to Samarkand' is an **Active** tour. This is the most demanding level of tour Wendy Wu Tours offers. As a whole, this itinerary requires a high level of fitness involving hiking and travelling to remote areas where tourist facilities are less developed. This itinerary also visits areas of high altitude. If you have an existing respiratory, vascular or coronary condition, we recommend checking with your doctor before undertaking this itinerary. Driving over the Torugart Pass you will reach the highest point of this tour at 3,750m, it is recommended to stay well hydrated and well rested in areas of high altitude.

- On some days driving distances are very long and it will take the whole day to reach your destination
- Hiking will generally last around 2-3 hours at a time, sometimes on an incline and mostly on uneven ground
- There will be long periods of walking whilst sightseeing
- In Kyrgyzstan you will be staying in basic accommodation called 'home stays' in local people's homes or guest houses

Of course, our National Escorts and local guides will always endeavour to provide the highest level of service and assistance; however, they cannot be expected to cater for customers who are unfit to complete the itinerary. If you require any more information about the pace of the tours in our Immerse Yourself range, please contact our reservations team who will be happy to answer your questions.

## Itinerary – Road to Samarkand

### Days 1-2: Urumqi

Fly overnight to Urumqi. You will be met at the airport in the arrivals hall by your Local Guide and/or National Escort from Wendy Wu Tours. Together with all other group members who may be arriving at a similar time, you will transfer 1 hour to your hotel. Depending on your time of arrival the rest of the day is yours to start soaking up the local culture with some leisurely sightseeing at the International Grand Bazaar. Either this evening or the next, a tour introduction will be held in the hotel. Food and drinks will not be served at this meeting. It is simply an opportunity for your group to meet and learn more about travelling in Central Asia.

#### Destination Information

**Urumqi** – Urumqi is located at the heart of the Uygur Region of Xinjiang. Urumqi, meaning ‘fine pasture’ in the local language, is situated along the ancient Silk Road and was an important hub during China’s Tang Dynasty.

**International Grand Bazaar** – The International Grand Bazaar is a large market and store area, where you can purchase regional products from Xinjiang district as well as from around Central Asia. There is also an 80m sightseeing tower, a mosque and an opera theatre.

### Day 3: Urumqi - Kashgar

This morning, drive approximately 2 hours to Tian Chi (Heavenly Lake). On arrival, change to an ‘environmental bus’ at the bus park and drive a further 10 minutes up to the lake. You will be given the option to enjoy either a short boat cruise or a walk along the boardwalk at the lake’s shore. Spend approximately 1 hour here before returning to Urumqi. This evening, transfer to the airport for your nearly 2-hour flight to Kashgar. Upon arrival in Kashgar, you will be met by your Local Guide and transferred to your hotel.

#### Destination Information

**Tian Chi (Heavenly Lake)** – Considered one of the best attractions in China, the Tian Chi is situated in the Heavenly Mountain range. It is a large pristine lake surrounded by alpine meadows and snow-capped mountains reminiscent of Switzerland or the Rocky Mountains.

**Kashgar** – Kashgar is a fabled city embracing a rich mix of people and cultures, and has a truly Central Asian atmosphere. It remains a centre of trade and therefore is developing to become a modern-day oasis city; however, the Old Town, with its narrow streets, retains its heritage. The town is flooded with foreign and domestic tourists each weekend, coming to see the renowned Sunday Bazaar and Animal Market. We will have the opportunity to explore the charms of this historical city, including the sites of these famous markets without the large crowds, which we believe will only enhance your experience of Kashgar.

## Day 4: Kashgar

Enjoy a day of leisurely sightseeing in and around Kashgar, involving 2 hours of walking during the morning and touring by bus in the afternoon. Begin with the elegantly tiled Tomb of Abakh Hoja, which was built in 1640 to reflect the artistic style of Samarkand. Return to the heart of the city and visit the Id Kah Mosque before exploring the old alleys that intertwine around Id Kah Square. See artisans producing copper pots and traditional musical instruments, carpet and kilim rug sellers, and carpenters making colourful children's cots.



*Please watch your valuables within the market streets near Id Kah Mosque. Women should bring a scarf from home, as you are required to cover your head at some attractions today.*

### Destination Information

**Tomb of Abakh Hoja** – Located on the outskirts of town, this tomb was built by Abakh Khoja, a powerful ruler in the 17th century. The tomb is a major pilgrimage destination as it is considered one of the holiest Muslim sites in Xinjiang district.

**Id Kah Mosque** – The largest mosque in China, Id Kah Mosque is located in the central square in Kashgar City. Originally built in 1442 as a small structure, it has been renovated and enlarged to create today's size and scale. The complex is 16,880sqm in size, and comprise of a courtyard, Hall of Prayer and the Gate Towers.

## Day 5: Kashgar - Naryn

Ak-Bejit Pass altitude: 3282m

Travel today from China to Kyrgyzstan, ascending in altitude as you cross the border and the Tian Shan Range (Heavenly Mountain) via the Torugart Pass, which forms a natural divide between the two old rival cities.

After breakfast, check out from the hotel and drive 50km to the first checkpoint where each individual passenger must go through immigration procedures (make sure you get an exit stamp). You may be required to do a health check where they will take your temperature. Your luggage will be removed from the bus and scanned. No photographs are to be taken at any of the checkpoints. You will then re-board the group bus and continue driving approximately 100km on a winding and rough road to the top of the pass. This is a popular route for large cargo trucks, so the road surface is in a bad condition and early morning traffic jams occur as trucks queue up to cross the border. From here, depending on the road conditions, you may need to walk for approximately 100m, carrying your own luggage to the Kyrgyz border. You will have two passport checks at this point. You will meet your Kyrgyz Local Guide and board mini buses for the journey to Naryn. After approximately 20 minutes you will arrive at the Kyrgyz customs checkpoint where you may have your bags searched thoroughly and then go through immigration procedures (make sure you get an entry stamp). Drive for 1 and a half hours to Tash Rabat Caravanserai, which has been restored to its former glory and then travel another 2 and a half hours to Naryn for an overnight stay.

*This is a very long day and the road to Naryn is quite bumpy and dusty, although you will be passing through a scenic, interesting, and memorable region. Temperatures leading up to the pass through to Naryn will be cold all year round, so rug up for this day as you will probably be above the snow line for most of the day. Tonight's accommodation will be a local guest house.*

*Please note that the maximum altitude on this itinerary will be reached today at 3,750M. All passengers should stay well hydrated to acclimatise to the higher altitude.*



### Destination Information

**Torugart Pass** – Torugart Pass was favoured by the trade caravans of the Silk Road and by the marauding horseback armies of Genghis Khan. Then came the ‘Great Game’ era, when the British and Russian Empires competed to gain influence and territory through Central Asia, so they could in turn influence natural riches of the Indian Subcontinent and the Middle East. During this time, the Russians built the first modern road across this pass in 1905, making it the main border and trade route. However, in the days of the USSR, the Torugart Pass became a highly sensitive security point, with the Soviets convinced China would use this route to invade. The local people on both sides were subjected to military restrictions on their movement, even around their own villages. This border tension has eased since the breakdown of the USSR, although even as recently as 1999, the Kyrgyz border was guarded by Russian frontier troops. They are now being replaced with Kyrgyz guards.

**Kyrgyzstan** – The population of Kyrgyzstan is relatively small, roughly five million people with the main ethnic groups represented by Kyrgyz (approximately 62 per cent), Russians (approximately 14 per cent) and Uzbeks (approximately 14 per cent). The country is land-locked and shares a border with Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. Over 90 per cent of the country is covered by often arid mountains, which separate its demographic and economic centres: the Chui Valley in the North and the Ferghana Valley in the South.

### Day 6: Naryn – Kochkor Village

Dolon altitude: 3030m

This morning, drive approximately 2 hours north on a partly sealed but bumpy road past the Song Kul and Kara Kajur rivers towards Issy Kul. The landscape here in eastern Kyrgyzstan is made up of dramatic valleys and high mountain passes, and whilst crossing the Dolon Pass the altitude will reach 3,030m. After a traditional lunch served in a local family’s yurt, continue driving for a further hour to the village of Kochkor. You will be able to view a demonstration on how the traditional Kyrgyz wool carpets, called ‘shyrdak’, are made. Stay overnight in local homes here, experiencing the hospitality of the local culture and a local dinner.

### Destination Information

**Kochkor Village** – A large Kyrgyz village with a population of approximately 15,000. Most of the inhabitants are farmers and shepherds who live in yurts during the summer.

### Day 7: Kochkor Village - Karakol

Depart Kochkor Village and travel approximately 4 hours to Karakol, visiting the village of Bokonbayevo, located close to the southeastern shore of Issy Kul, en route. Enjoy lunch with a local Kyrgyz family before watching a demonstration of the traditional practice of eagle hunting. This afternoon, continue to the Russian town of Karakol, where you will proceed to your hotel and check in for a 2-night stay.



**Karakol** – Founded as a Russian military outpost in 1869, the population of Karakol surged during the 1880s when thousands of Chinese Muslims (called Dungan in Kyrgyzstan or Hui in China) settled here, fleeing persecution in China. The name of the town has alternated between Karakol and Przhevalsk several times over the past century. The Russian explorer, Nikolai Przhevalsky died here in 1888 of typhoid while preparing for an expedition to Tibet, thus the city was renamed Przhevalsk in his honour. After local protests, the town returned to its original name in 1921, then again to Przhevalsk in 1939 and finally restored to Karakol in 1991 with the fall of the Soviet Union.

## Day 8: Karakol

Rise early this morning and visit the colourful animal market, explore the interesting Przhevalskii Museum and tour a Chinese mosque. Later, visit the striking Holy Trinity Orthodox Cathedral, which was completed in 1895. All touring this morning is at a comfortable pace. In the afternoon, travel to the Valley of the Flowers and Jety-Orguz where you can enjoy a light hike through the magnificent canyon of red sandstone. Sightseeing in the canyon involves 3 hours of leisurely walking on a bush track. Although this is a gentle hike, you will need to climb some hills and slopes and you will be walking over uneven ground at altitude. If you take part in this activity, you must be able to complete it independently. Alternatively, you will need to wait on the bus.



*Women should bring a scarf from home, as you are required to cover your head at some attractions today. We recommend you wear closed shoes today for the visit to the animal market and bring a warm jacket for the hike this afternoon.*

### Destination Information

**Chinese Mosque** – The mosque was constructed in 1907, in the style of a Chinese temple for the local Dungans, yet it was built in the Kyrgyz traditional wood feathering style instead of metal nail construction.

**Przhevalskii Museum** – Przhevalskii Museum displays fascinating exhibits on the Issy Kul petroglyphs, Scythian bronze artefacts, and a short history of the geology and mineral exploitation in the region.

**Holy Trinity Orthodox Cathedral** – This wooden church was built in 1894 on the ruins of a brick church. It is said that during construction, no nails or metal fastenings were used.

**Jety-Oguz Gorge** – Jety-Oguz Gorge is a lush valley located 30km outside Karakol. The name translates to ‘seven bulls’ in the Kyrgyz language, referring to the red sandstone rock formations that resemble seven angry bulls. It is famous for its hot springs and beautiful scenery.

## Day 9: Karakol – Chon-Kemin Valley

Today, enjoy a gentle hike at Semenov Gorge for approximately 1-2 hours. You will need to climb some hills and slopes with moments of walking over uneven ground. All passengers who take part in this activity must be able to complete it independently otherwise you will need to wait near the bus. Drive 2 hours along the northern shore of Lake Issy Kul and enjoy lunch at Cholpon-Ata. This afternoon, cruise on Issy Kul and view the stunning, alpine scenery. It can get cold on the 1-hour cruise so we recommend you bring a warm jacket. Afterwards, explore the nearby petroglyphs of ibex, wolves and deer that date back to the 8th century at the open-air museum. Continue with a 2-hour drive to Chon-Kemin Valley for a 2-night stay.

### Destination Information

**Semenov Gorge** – Approximately 30km in length, Semenov Gorge is located 40km from Karakol and flows through the gorge is Ak-Suu River, which begins at a glacier.

**Chon-Kemin Valley** – The spectacular Chon-Kemin Valley is almost 80km deep and is famous for its natural beauty, abundant wildlife and mountain lakes.

**Issy Kul** – The stunning Issy Kul lake is one of the largest in the world, measuring at 170km long, 70km across and 695m deep. Explorers from the 19th century marvelled at it, one calling it ‘a blue emerald set in a frame of silvery mountains’.

## Day 10: Chon-Kemin Valley

This morning, enjoy an approximately 3-hour leisurely walk in the foothills of the mountain that surround Chon-Kemin Valley and experience traditional Kyrgyz village life. If you do not wish to take part in this activity, you will have time free at leisure in Ashu Village. Return to the village for lunch before continuing your exploration of this untouched piece of Kyrgyz countryside - take time out to appreciate the captivating views of the valley floor below.

## Day 11: Chon-Kemin Valley - Bishkek

Depart this morning and drive 2 and a half hours to Bishkek. Stop en route to see Burana Tower, a monument from the 11th century. Upon arrival in Bishkek, visit Ala-Too Square and Oak Park. In the evening, enjoy a traditional folklore performance with your dinner.

### Destination Information

**Bishkek** – The capital of Kyrgyzstan has a population of 900,000. The city did not develop until 1825, when the Kokand Khanate enclosed the site as a fortress. By 1864, the Russians had captured the fortress and in 1878, founded the city of Bishkek. Bishkek is a city of wide boulevards and marble-facade public buildings combined with numerous Soviet-style apartment blocks, laid out on a grid pattern. Most streets are flanked on both sides by narrow irrigation channels that water the innumerable trees, which provide shade during the hot summers.

## Day 12: Bishkek - Tashkent

This morning, drive 1 hour south to Ala Archa National Park where you will stop at the park's base camp. From here, your guide will take you on a 1-hour leisurely hike through the National Park whilst you take in the picturesque scenery of snow-capped mountains and fresh water rivers. Although this is a gentle hike, you will need to climb some hills and slopes and walk over uneven ground at altitude; during October, the days are shorter and the afternoons much cooler, therefore your time walking through the National Park may be limited. All participants who take part in this activity must be able to complete it independently otherwise you will need to wait on the bus. Later, transfer 1 hour to the airport for your 1-hour evening flight to Tashkent, Uzbekistan. Upon arrival in Tashkent, you will need to clear Customs and Immigration - some delays can be expected here. After these formalities, you will be welcomed by your Uzbekistani guide and transferred to your hotel for an overnight stay.



### Destination Information

**Ala Archa National Park** – Ala Archa translates as “Bright Juniper” from the Kyrgyz language and the whole gorge is covered with various trees including the main one, juniper.

**Uzbekistan** – A land-locked country which shares a border with Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and a sliver of Afghanistan in the south. Its population of 26 million is mostly made up of Uzbeks (75 per cent), Russians (6 per cent) and Kazakhs (4 per cent). Most of the country is flat, made of steppes, deserts and semi-deserts with limited reserves of fresh water; the only relief is the Amu-Darya River. In the east, Uzbekistan has a stretch of mountains with a friendly climate and rich soils. The Silk Road brought wealth and innovation here and in the 6th century AD, Western Turks brought Islam and a written alphabet, followed by Genghis Khan's invasion. The 14th century brought unity under the ruthless warrior, Timur, and Uzbekistan's prosperity rose again with Samarkand at the heart of its new civilisation.

## Day 13: Tashkent - Nukus

This morning, transfer to Tashkent airport and board your 2 and a half hours flight to Nukus. On arrival, enjoy some leisurely sightseeing, including a visit to the Savitskiy Museum, home to Soviet art collections. This afternoon, explore the historical monuments at Mizdahkan, a Hojeli Village 30 minutes away. The coach will park at the foothills of the cemetery from where there is a 10-minute walk uphill. Spend 1 hour here before returning to Nukus.

### Destination Information

**Nukus** – Nukus is a Soviet purpose built city with wide boulevards and soviet style buildings in the middle of a desert. It is now Uzbekistan's sixth largest city.

**Savitskiy Museum** – Savitskiy Museum is home to one of the finest collections in Soviet avant-garde art from the 1920's and 1930's. This collection, by dissenting artist during the Stalinist period, has survived due to its remote location.

**Mizdahkan** – Mizdahkan is a 4th Century necropolis located on three hills spanning 2 kilometres in length. Today, this complex displays different periods, styles and types of tombs and is visited by thousands of pilgrims to prevent the end of the world.



## Day 14: Nukus - Khiva

Today, drive 5 and a half hours to the ancient city of Khiva. Stop en route to visit numerous desert fortresses dating from the 1st Century, including Chalpik Kala, Kizil Kala, Toprak Kala Fortress, Ayaz Kala and Kyrk-Kzy Kala. Sightseeing at these various fortresses involves a total of 2-3 hours on foot over rough and eroded ground.

### Destination Information

**Chalpik Kala** – Chalpik Kala is known as the Tower of Silence, standing high on top of a hill. According to ancient beliefs, Chalpik Kala was also used for burial rituals.

**Toprak Kala Fortress** – Toprak Kala Fortress is an excavated ancient town dating from the 1st Century and a former residence of the Khoesm Khan, comprising the ruins of a castle, towers and dwellings.

**Ayaz Kala** – Ayaz Kala is a complex of three ruins found on the edge of the Kizilkum Desert. The high mud brick walls served as protection from nomadic raids.

**Khiva** – A small city (population approximately 40,000) which some archaeologists believe was founded around the time Christ was born and was said to have been discovered by Shem, the son of Noah. The town certainly existed by the 8th Century, as a minor fort and trading post on a Silk Road branch to the Caspian Sea and the Volga River. In the early 16th Century, Khiva was made capital of the Timurid Empire, becoming a busy slave market and pivot of the khanate for the next three centuries until Russia wrested the region from Timurid grasp in the 19th century.

## Day 15: Khiva

Today, explore this ancient city with leisurely sightseeing for 4-5 hours on foot. Visit Kukhna Ark Fortress, the turquoise-tiled Islom-Huja, the Amir-Tur Medressa and the Tash Hauli Palace. These are all located within the walled inner town called the Itchan Kala, which was the first site in Uzbekistan to achieve recognition as a UNESCO World Heritage listed site in 1990.

### Destination Information

**Itchan Kala** – A well-persevered example of Muslim architecture in Central Asia at the beginning of the 19th century, Itchan Kala is the inner town of Khiva. The town is surrounded by brick city walls, with four gates at the cardinal points.

**Kukhna Ark Fortress** – Construction of the Kukhna Ark Fortress began in the 12th century, making it one of the oldest buildings in Khiva. There is written evidence that the 'modern' citadel was built in 1668, and the complex grew to hold an arsenal, warehouse, guardhouse, jail, a large kitchen, stable and official offices. Of the buildings that once stood, you can still view the official reception hall, the ornate mint, a mosque and a harem.

**Islom-Huja** – One of Kihivas newest Islamic monuments, Islom-Huja was built in 1910 and is the tallest structure in Khiva, visible from anywhere in the city.

**Amir-Tur Medressa** – Located in the northern part of Itchan Kala, amir-Tur Medressa was founded in 1870 by the instigation of the brother of Muhammad Rahim-Khan II.

## Day 16: Khiva - Bukhara

This morning, check out of your hotel and drive approximately 9 hours to Bukhara. Upon arrival, check into your hotel for three nights.

*Road conditions can be poor between Khiva and Bukhara, so your patience is appreciated today.*

### Destination Information

**Bukhara** – Bukhara has a long history, spanning 2,500 years, and was an integral part of the Persian Empire for centuries. Within the city, there are more than 350 mosques and 100 religious colleges. Bukhara was part of what came to be called the ‘Golden Road’, the meeting point of the northern and southern branches of the Silk Road, and hence a great centre for commerce, religion and culture.

In 1913, James Flecker’s poem ‘*The Golden Journey to Samarkand*’ was published to acclaim (and a little controversy) in England and immortalised the ancient trade path between Uzbekistan’s most significant towns, Bukhara and Samarkand – “For lust of knowing what should not be known.....we make the Golden Journey to Samarkand”.

The city’s most famous landmark is the Kalon Minaret, which dates back to 1127AD. It is said that when Genghis Khan attacked and destroyed the rest of the city, he left the minaret standing, supposedly because he was struck by its beauty.

## Day 17: Bukhara

Today, explore the many interesting sites within the city, including the unique and legendary Kalon Minaret. After exploring the Ark of Bukhara, visit the Bolo Hauz Mosque. Later this afternoon, visit a local bazaar and the Chor Minor. Sightseeing around the central city involves approximately 5 hours of leisurely walking.



*Photo fees may be payable at most attractions you will visit in Bukhara, approximately USD7 in total.*

### Destination Information

**Kalon Minaret** – One of the most prominent landmarks of the city, Kalon Minaret was constructed in 1127 by the Karakhanid ruler Arslan Khan. An amazing structure standing at 47m tall, there are 14 ornamental bands and 10m deep foundations.

**Ark of Bukhara** – The Ark of Bukhara was the fortified residence of the rulers of Bukhara but also housed palaces, temples, barracks, offices, the mint, warehouses, workshops, stables, an arsenal, a prison and today a museum.

**Bolo Hauz Mosque** – Translated, Bolo Hauz Mosque means “The Mosque of the Bala Lake”, which refers to the octagonal pool located in the public forecourt lined with stone steps. Built in 1712, the mosque is splendid and still functional – believers still visit to pray every day.

**Chor Minor** – Chor Minor is a madrasa with four minarets built in 1904. Although this madrasa is not as aged as others in the city, it’s simple yet striking design of blue tiles against the desert skyline has made it one of the most notable sights in Bukhara.

## Day 18: Bukhara

This morning, venture into the labyrinthine old town, following the cobbled alleys and ancient shop fronts to the delightful Lyabi-Hauz Plaza, located in the centre of Bukhara. There will be sightseeing around the central city, with approximately 4 hours of leisurely walking around the sites. Afterwards, visit the summer residence of Emir and enjoy a cultural folk show in the evening. Photo fees may be payable at most attractions you will visit in Bukhara.

### Destination Information

**Lyabi-Hauz (or Labi-Hauz)** – Lyabi-Hauz is a plaza built in 1620, constructed around a large pool. Derived from Persian and meaning ‘ensemble near the pool’, even today that custom continues as men gather to chat, play dominoes and drink endless pots of tea at the poolside chaikhana.

**Summer Residence of the Last Bukharan Emir** – Situated 4km outside the city, the summer residence dates back to the beginning of the 20th century. The first summer palace was built by Emir Nasrullakhan.

## Day 19: Bukhara - Samarkand

This morning, drive to Shakhrisabz, located approximately 80km from Samarkand. Explore the city for 1 and a half hours, visiting sites such as the remnants of Ak-Sarai Palace, Dorus Tilavat cemetery and Kok-Gumbas Mosque. After lunch, drive approximately 5 hours by car along the mountain road (each car will seat three tour participants) to Samarkand. Upon arrival, check into your hotel for a 3-night stay.

### Destination Information

**Shakhrisabz** – Shakhrisabz is a 2700 years old city and has played a major role in the history of the Central Asian region, mostly due to Shakhrisabz being Tamerlane's hometown.

**Ak-Sarai Palace** – One of the greatest buildings in Shakhrisabz, Ak-Sarai Palace (Timur's residence) means ‘White Palace’. Timur's most ambitious project, construction began in 1380 and took 24 years to complete, a few months before the death of the great ruler. The ruins will give you an idea of the grandness and size of the project.

**Dorus Tilavat Cemetery** – Dorus Tilavat Cemetery is the original burial complex of Timur's ancestors.

**Kok-Gumbas Mosque** – Construction on the Kok-Gumbas Mosque began in 1435 on the order of Timur's grandson, Ukug Beg. The name translates to ‘blue dome’.

**Samarkand** – With a population of approximately 400,000, Samarkand is the second largest city of Uzbekistan. The real glory of Samarkand began in 329BC when Alexander the Great conquered and destroyed the nearby capital, Macaranda. According to local history, when Alexander first visited here he declared “I heard that Samarkand was beautiful but never thought that it could be so beautiful and majestic”. After Alexander's reign, the city fell under the rule of the Persian Empire, and became the capital of the Mongol Prince Tamerlane in the 13th Century. The finest builders, craftsmen, philosophers and scientists were invited to Samarkand and the reputation of its refined civilisation grew until Samarkand was a city of legend and wonder along the Golden Road. From here, the Silk Road diverged; east to China, south to India and west to Persia.

## Day 20: Samarkand

Today, explore some of the most significant sites in Samarkand and its city centre, involving approximately 6 hours of leisurely walking. Visit Timur's Guri Amir Mausoleum and Registan Square, the most spectacular architectural ensemble in Central Asia, and heart of the city. Later, visit Shah-I-Zinda and Bibi-Khanum Mosque before returning to your hotel.

*Photo fees may be payable at most attractions you will visit in Samarkand, approximately 14USD in total.*



### Destination Information

**Timur's Guri Amir Mausoleum** – Timur's Guri Amir Mausoleum is the famous blue ribbed domed mausoleum that rises over the old city's rooftops. Tamerlane was laid under a massive slab of green jade, said to be the largest Jade stone in the world.

**Registan Square** – The Registan Square is lined on three sides by sparkling turquoise tiled buildings of the Sher Dor and Tilla Qori medressas. The interior and exterior facades of the medressas are decorated with ornamental glazed brick, mosaics and carved marble. The square is considered an architectural gem representing the finest in Islamic Art and, most remarkably, a rare depiction of an animal's form. It was here that royal proclamations were read out and where justice was dispensed. The huge colourful bazaar is located nearby and one can buy nuts, dried and fresh fruit, spices, honey and a multitude of other goods.

**Shah-I-Zinda** – A mausoleum complex located northeast of the city, Shah-I-Zinda translates to 'Tomb of the Living King'. This refers to the important Muslim shrine in the region, the complex of quiet rooms around what is most likely the grave of Qusam ibn-Abbas, a cousin of the Prophet Mohammed who is thought to have brought Islam to this area in the 7th century.

**Bibi-Khanym Mosque** – One of the most impressive historic mosques in Central Asia, construction on Bibi-Khanym was started by Timur in 1399 and completed shortly before his death. The mosque commemorates Timur's wife, and was the jewel in his empire.

## Day 21: Samarkand

This morning, visit a papermaking workshop located in the Konigil village. Return to Samarkand for 2 hours of leisurely walking, visiting the Ulugh Beg Observatory to see the 'stars above Samarkand'. Later this afternoon, visit the Mausoleum of the Prophet Daniil before enjoying some time free to relax. Photo fees may be payable at most attractions you will visit in Samarkand.

### Destination Information

**Papermaking Workshop** – Samarkand has been famed for its high-quality paper manufacture throughout the ages. In this workshop of talented masters, see how the rinds of the mulberry trees are turned into paper.

**Ulugh Beg Observatory** – Uleg Beg was Tamerlane's grandson and a great astronomer. During his rule in the 15th century, he summoned the great minds of the Islamic world to Samarkand.

**Mausoleum of the Prophet Daniil** – The Biblical Prophet Daniil, known in the East as Hoja Daniyar, lived in the 4-5th century BC. He was a descendant of Solomon tsar and was revered by the three-world religion. It is thought that Temur took parts of Daniil's remains, namely a hand, to Samarkand.

## Day 22: Samarkand - Tashkent

This morning, check out of your hotel and begin the 6-hour journey to Tashkent, passing through the area of Tamerlane Gates en route. Upon arrival, check into your hotel for a 2-night stay. After a late lunch in a local restaurant, visit some of the historical sites around the city including the majestic 16th century Kukeldash Medressa, Kaffal Shashi Mausoleum, Khan Medressa and the Khast Imam Complex including the Moyie Mubarek Library Museum. Also visit the Chorsu Bazaar and the Crying Mother Monument. Touring this afternoon involves several hours on foot.

### Destination Information

**Kukeldash Medressa** – Kukeldash Medressa is one of the biggest and most famous historical monuments in Tashkent. The 16th-century Islamic school is built of mud bricks decorated with majolica and painted ceramic tiles.

**Kaffal Ash-Shashi Mausoleum** – The Mausoleum of Abubakr Kaffal Ash-Shashi is one of the most significant cultural and architectural monuments located in the old part of the city. He was considered the first Imam and preacher of Islam in Tashkent and the complex "Hazrat Imam" ("The Holy Imam") was named in his honour.

**Khan Medressa** – Khan Medressa was built in the 16th century with funds donated by the Tashkent ruler Navruz Akhmed. Today, this is the oldest educational institution in Tashkent. Though this medrassa is no longer used for its original purpose, it attracts attention for its well-preserved architectural features.

**Khast Imam Complex** – The Khast Imam Complex is named after the 10<sup>th</sup> Century Islamic scholar, famed for his knowledge of the Koran, Hadith and Islamic law. The complex was restored in 2007 and the buildings (some that date back to the 16th century) now show the splendour and grandeur of the original site.

## Day 23: Tashkent

This morning, explore some of the famous sights around Tashkent. Visit the Museum of Applied Arts, wander through the 1966 earthquake memorial, Independence and Bunyodkor Squares (the former Halklar Dustligi squares), stop for a photo opportunity outside the Russian style Alisher Navoi Theatre and visit the Amir Timur Maydoni before exploring Broadway Street where you will see local artisans and painters.



### Destination Information

**Museum of Applied Arts** – Founded in 1937, the Museum of Applied Arts currently displays over 4,000 exhibits, highlighting the history of Uzbekistan's decorative art. There are samples of woodcarving, ceramics, minting, Jeweller's art, gold-embroidery art, as well as samples of mass production of local industry of the past centuries.

**Independence Square** – The main and most beautiful square in the heart of the city, Independence Square commemorates the country's freedom. It has been a popular destination for both locals and tourists because of its beautiful monuments and fountains.



**Destination Information**

**Bunyodkor Square** – Formerly named “Friendship of the People” this modern square was built after the Tashkent earthquake of 1966.

**Amir Timur Maydoni** – Amir Timur Maydoni was founded in 1882 and originally called Konstantinovsky Square. In 1994 it was renamed to honour the great Amir Timur who founded the Timurid Empire, which lasted for 200 years. A famous monument to the great leader stands in the square’s centre.

**Day 24: Depart Tashkent**

Check out this morning and transfer to the airport for your onward flight.

## Road to Samarkand Travel Information

### Visas

Visas are required for entry into China and Uzbekistan. A standard visa processing service is included in your tour cost for UK and EU passport holders. We will require your passport, completed visa application form, and 1 passport photo, taken within the last 6 months, to process your visa. We will require all this information 8 weeks prior to departure. As per our standard visa processing service, we will have your passport for at least 4 weeks. Any visa applications that require an express 2-week service, or that are received in our office less than 6 weeks prior to departure will incur a £60 per passport express fee. In rare cases, you may be required to provide further information or documentation to the embassies and/or be required to attend an interview at the embassy in London. If this is the case, we will notify you as soon as possible.

### Insurance

It is a condition of booking with us that you take out suitable travel insurance. You must provide us with the name of your insurer, policy number and their 24-hour emergency contact number when you book with us or as soon as possible thereafter. These details will be available to your National Escort should they be required. Wendy Wu Tours will not be liable for any costs incurred by you due to your failure to take out suitable travel insurance from the date of booking.

### Eating in China & Central Asia

Chinese cuisine is one of the most influential, diverse and flavoursome culinary styles in the world with a legacy stretching back thousands of years. Though Chinese cuisine can vary greatly from Chinese food we get in the UK, it is important to keep an open mind and be adventurous. All meals (excluding drinks) are included in our fully inclusive Road to Samarkand group tours from the groups' arrival until the groups' day of departure. Please be aware that dishes selected for your meals reflect the cooking styles and signature dishes of the local area you are in.

Hotels and restaurants in this region are not generally accustomed to serving many western tourists, however by default tend to 'spice down' the dishes, due to the tourists they do service coming from Europe. The food is always local in style and derives from what is in season and harvested locally. Vegetarian only alternatives are not usually available in Kyrgyzstan, though Uzbekistani restaurants are more flexible. There are always plenty of salads, vegetables and bread offered at most meals. In remote areas, lunch may be prepared as 'picnic style' by the hotel that morning, or your guides may organise a simple meal at a local restaurant. Lunch is the main meal of the day, with dinner usually a lighter version of lunch. If you have any food allergies or any other preferences, please make them known to your guide/s at the start of your trip; they will do their best to ensure that your requirements are met, however, 'no guarantees can be made'. Long driving distances, road conditions or flight times may delay or alter your meal times, which could mean a dedicated meal is replaced by those supplied on the aircraft.

If you like, you can bring some supplements with you from home. Tea/coffee bags, instant soups or noodles, biscuits, energy bars, milk powder sachets, are all a good idea – consider your luggage weight though! There are numerous small supermarkets and shops in every town and village along the way where you can buy odd items e.g. instant noodles, muesli and chocolate bars, biscuits, drinks, chips, cakes and sweets.

In China's Xinjiang Province, you will find the food is different to what is known as 'Chinese food'. Geography and climate means that there are few vegetables and wheat is grown rather than rice, therefore noodles and flat bread feature heavily. The most common dishes are mutton kebabs with naan (flat bread) or noodle soups with mutton. Chinese breakfast dishes include cold vegetable/pickle dishes, bean curd noodles, soups, congee (rice porridge), steamed buns with pork or sweet red bean paste and green tea. You may also be served fruit, a fried egg, or toast – although the bread can be very sweet and unlike the normal bread we have at home. Black tea and coffee can usually be requested. Fresh cow's milk is not generally available.

In Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, the cuisine is influenced by Middle Eastern and Turkic (or Mediterranean) dishes – yoghurts, dried fruit, legumes, fruit vinegars, or mild spices like cumin season the common dishes such as lagman (handmade noodles), shashlyk (kebabs), naan (flat bread) and plov (rice pilaf dish). Mutton and chicken are the only meats available in most areas and feature in most dishes. Local breakfast dishes include naan and airan (like sour cream), savoury noodles with vinegar and green tea. You may also be served a fried egg, jam, honey or toast. Black tea and coffee can usually be requested. Fresh cow's milk is not generally available.

Despite the Muslim culture, drinking alcohol is acceptable and expected in this ex-Soviet region, Kyrgyzstan more so than Uzbekistan. Expect to be offered vodka (not included in your tour price) at every meal! The most popular mealtime drink is Chay (green tea) and is available at most meals, usually straight a large block of sugar crystal may be added to the pot, or even your glass. Black tea and coffee are not always served, however can usually be requested.

## Accommodation

Your accommodation has been selected for convenience of location, comfort or character, and can range from a standard hotel in one city to a family run guesthouse in a smaller town. In remote areas, accommodation may be of a lower standard and may not have all western amenities. Hotels are generally rated as local three star standards, please note that there is no international classification system for hotels and differences in facilities and quality do exist between the UK, China and Central Asia. Rest assured that all hotels used by Wendy Wu Tours are regularly inspected by our staff and our partners to ensure that standards meet your needs.

You will be travelling through a rarely visited and undeveloped area of Kyrgyzstan for a few days; from the Chinese-Kyrgyz border to the shore of Issy-Kul. This is a remote area with villages, nomadic settlements, very small towns and little in the way of tourist facilities. We have designed this itinerary to use the accommodation offered by the CBT home stay project, staying in local houses/guest houses for a few nights. The CBT 'Community Based Tourism' project started in Kochkor Village, offering income to local families and guides while providing tourists the opportunity to stay with a local family, in their simple homes, rather than in run-down Soviet era hotels. It is not essential to bring a sleeping bag; bed linen is provided at each type of accommodation and is adequate for the night temperatures. You could bring a 'sleep sheet' insert to use under the linen, just in case, though it is generally not required. Types of accommodation you may encounter on this tour include:

**Local home stay:** These provide basic yet comfortable accommodation in actual local homes, so group members may be staying in a number of different houses near each other. As these are people's real homes, the accommodation and facilities may vary between houses, generally every couple/single person will be accommodated in their own room. Homes in small towns of this part of Kyrgyzstan may have town-supplied electricity restricted for an amount of time. Dedicated western toilet and shower facilities are shared among the guests within each home. Dinner is served as a group in one of the larger houses and breakfast is generally served in the house you are staying at.

**Guesthouse:** These provide basic yet comfortable rooms in a small guesthouse. Every couple/single person will have their own room, western toilets and showers are shared, similar to a hostel. Breakfast and dinner is served in the restaurant.

**Three-star hotel:** You will be staying in hotels of three-star standards or above for the remainder of the tour.

## Transport

**Coaches:** Coaches with air conditioning are used on our group tours for city sightseeing, short excursions to the countryside and longer transfers where necessary. Main and inner city roads in China and Central Asia have a reputation for being very congested. For this reason, it may not always be possible to return to your hotel after sightseeing to freshen up before going to the restaurant for dinner. Roads in this region have generally improved over recent years, but traffic and/or weather conditions may extend driving times. Road construction work usually covers an enormous section of road - not just one or two kilometres as you may be used to. For this reason, the timings listed in the sections above are approximations only.

**Planes:** Internal flights are based on economy class, with reputable airlines.

## Development in Central Asia

Although Central Asia is developing quickly, it still lacks the international standards of civil infrastructure and tourist facilities. Concepts of personal responsibility are also different to those in the UK. Consequently, tourist and public facilities may not uphold the same safety standards as in the UK; for example, you may see a hole in the road without a warning sign or safety barricade. All of our suppliers meet local safety standards as a minimum. We want you to have an enjoyable holiday so we ask that you take extra care, use your common sense, refer to notices and follow advice from your National Escort/Local Guides.

The former Soviet countries in Central Asia were isolated and less developed by western standards for decades and all levels of infrastructure remain affected today in some way. In the tourism sector, newly built and very good hotels may still have poorly trained staff with an abrupt manner, roads can be in poor condition and officials can be corrupt. The level of English spoken outside of hotels is minimal (except for the children) and the Cyrillic alphabet is used instead of the Latin one (though this is slowly changing in Uzbekistan), so you will find your guides indispensable. We have found that those customers who embark with a sense of humour and adventure, who accept that things can and sometimes do go wrong, are those who find their experience most rewarding.

Road to Samarkand is one of our most unique and adventurous group tours, travelling along one of the world's highest roads to cross the Torugart Pass and tracing the ancient Silk Road from Kashgar to Khiva including the fabled city of Samarkand. We wish for you to embark on your journey through Central Asia with a level of tolerance and understanding. This region is remote and conditions are not as developed as they are at home. It is essential that all customers recognise the demands of factors such as basic facilities, travelling at altitude and cultural differences. The rewards of seeing and experiencing these lands, so different from your own, are immeasurable and can only be enhanced by an adventurous spirit.

## Public holidays and Religious Festivals

If you are travelling within the below Chinese Public Holidays please note that celebrations last for several days and during these times some businesses will be closed and coach, air and train travel may be affected. Tourist attractions will be open, but may be crowded. Chinese New Year is on 16<sup>th</sup> February 2018 and 5<sup>th</sup> February 2019. Golden Week public holidays fall annually between 1<sup>st</sup> – 3<sup>rd</sup> May and 1<sup>st</sup> – 7<sup>th</sup> October.

Ramadan, the Islamic festival of sacrifice will fall from the 15<sup>th</sup> May to the 15<sup>th</sup> June 2018 and the 5<sup>th</sup> May to the 4<sup>th</sup> June 2019. This festival is characterised by the faithful abstaining from consuming food and drink (including alcohol) between the hours of sunrise and sunset. After sunset, you will find the locals celebrating nightly with an iftar- a meal at sunset, which breaks the fast, followed by pre-dawn meal -Suhoor. Travellers are not expected to adhere to these customs, with food and drink available during daylight hours. Some businesses and tourist sites opening hours may be affected; though overall, there will be minimal disruption if your tour is travelling between these dates. Ramadan is an opportunity to travel through Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, witnessing this fascinating national holiday for yourself.

## Souvenirs

We want to be able to give you an opportunity to buy souvenirs so we include some stops at museums or exhibitions, which demonstrates a craft or product unique to that region with pieces available to buy. We understand that souvenir hunting is not for everyone so we aim to take you to places, which hold local interest. We trust you will enjoy these opportunities to learn about local arts and crafts and understand their historical and cultural importance.

## Group Size

Most of our groups consist of 10 travellers or more and will be accompanied by both a National Escort and local guides. There will usually be no more than 18 travellers in each group although you may encounter other Wendy Wu tour groups while you are travelling.

All our departures are guaranteed to operate with a minimum of 8 travellers booked (unless cancelled due to factors beyond our control). However, at our discretion we may operate departures with a smaller group size as we try to operate advertised departures wherever it is viable to do so. For groups with fewer than 10 travellers, departures will operate with local guides only.

## Tipping Policy

Tipping while on holiday is a firm and expected element in the tourism industry and China and Central Asia is no exception. To remove the uncertainty and stress of not knowing how much is appropriate to tip or to whom, Wendy Wu Tours operates a tipping policy for our group tours where a nominated tipping amount is paid upon commencement of the programme by each tour member. This amount is stated in all group pricing, however it is not collected in your final payment received by Wendy Wu Tours.

This nominated tipping amount is to be given to your National Escort at the beginning of your tour, who will then distribute it amongst your main service providers – guides, drivers and attendants – on your behalf during the tour. Any other tipping, such as tips for bathroom attendants or hotel porters that are taking luggage to your room, is at your discretion based on satisfaction of services received, as are gratuities for additional requested special services.



The tipping amount is determined based on the total number of passengers travelling in the group. The amount is designed to be at a reasonable level for travellers while being fair to the local people and includes a gratuity for the National Escort. The final tipping amount will be outlined in your final documentation, which is distributed 2 weeks prior to your tours departure.

### Climate

Please refer to our website or brochure for detailed temperature charts.

### After your booking

Once you have booked with Wendy Wu Tours, you will receive a confirmation invoice followed by deposit documentation, which includes a visa application form (if applicable), and a help sheet. Your final documentation pack will be sent to you approximately 2 weeks prior to departure.

### Itinerary changes

It is our intention to adhere to the day-to-day itinerary as printed; however, the order of events or sightseeing may change as we look to improve our tours or as local conditions dictate; in these circumstances we will make the best possible arrangements whilst maintaining the integrity of your trip.

1. The flights between Kashgar and Urumqi are operated on a loop system, meaning one plane will fly up and down several times a day. Unfortunately, this means that any delays are passed on to all later flights and flight departure times are extremely subject to change! Your National Escort/Local Guide will phone the airport to check the situation during the day and keep you informed of any changes.
2. As this tour visits Kashgar on a week day, we are unable to visit the renowned Sunday Bazaar and Animal Market in the height of activity, however we will have the opportunity to explore the charms of this historical city, including the sites of these famous markets without the large crowds, which we believe will only enhance your experience of Kashgar. You will however experience the Sunday Animal Market in Karakol, though smaller in scale, it is just as interesting.

**Last updated: August 2017**