

Overseas Adventure Travel[®]

THE LEADER IN PERSONALIZED SMALL GROUP ADVENTURES SINCE 1978

Your O.A.T. Adventure Travel Planning Guide[®]



The Stans of Central Asia: Turkmenistan
& Uzbekistan

2025

Overseas Adventure Travel®

347 Congress Street, Boston, MA 02210

Dear Traveler,

I am thrilled that you are considering exploring the world with O.A.T. There are so many wonderful destinations to discover, and the itinerary described inside is a perfect way to fulfill a travel dream.

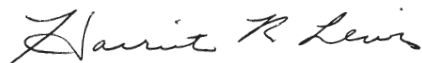
When you join us, you will slip seamlessly into local life as you explore off the beaten path in your small group. Like all our itineraries, this one is designed to give you an intimate understanding of your destination, not just a superficial view. You will get to know community leaders and try your hand at local trades during your *A Day in the Life* experience, share traditional fare and lively conversation during a Home-Hosted Visit, discuss the Controversial Topics impacting everyday life, and visit sites supported by Grand Circle Foundation. And if you choose to travel solo, you will enjoy all these cultural experiences at an unmatched value, with our FREE Single Supplements—just one of the reasons we continue to be the leader in solo travel.

To ensure you experience the true culture and feel supported every step of the way, we provide the services of a local Trip Experience Leader from the beginning of your adventure to the end. Along with introducing you to the history and culture of their homeland, these friendly experts will gladly help you out with any special requests to make your trip even more special. You can also rely on the seasoned team at our regional office, who are ready to help 24/7 in case any unexpected circumstances arise.

Plus, you can put your own personal stamp on your trip, like the **87% of our travelers who personalize their experience**. Perhaps you will choose to see more of your destination by adding an optional trip extension to your itinerary. You can also arrive a few days early to explore independently and get acclimated, customize your air itinerary, and more.

I hope you find this Travel Planning Guide helpful. If you have any further questions, do not hesitate to contact one of our Travel Counselors at **1-800-955-1925**.

Warm regards,



Harriet R. Lewis

Chair

Overseas Adventure Travel

CONTENTS

THE SILK ROAD: CENTRAL ASIA'S ANCIENT TRADE ROUTE

Your Adventure at a Glance:

Where You're Going, What it Costs,
and What's Included **4**

Your Detailed Day-To-Day Itinerary **6**

Pre-Trip Extension **16**

Post-Trip Extension **20**

ESSENTIAL TRAVEL INFORMATION

Travel Documents & Entry Requirements... **24**

Travel Protection Required

Rigors, Vaccines & General Health **27**

Money Matters: Local Currency &
Tipping Guidelines..... **31**

Air, Optional Tours & Staying in Touch **34**

Packing: What to Bring & Luggage Limits... **38**

Climate & Average Temperatures **45**

ABOUT YOUR DESTINATIONS: CULTURE, ETIQUETTE & MORE

The Cultures of Central Asia **48**

Shopping: What to Buy, Customs,
Shipping & More **54**

DEMOGRAPHICS & HISTORY

Uzbekistan..... **56**

Tajikistan **58**

Kazakhstan **60**

Kyrgyzstan **63**

RESOURCES

Suggested Reading **65**

Suggested Films & Videos **66**

Useful Websites **68**

Useful Apps **69**



Bukhara

The Silk Road: Central Asia's Ancient Trade Route

Small Group Adventure

Uzbekistan: Tashkent, Samarkand, Bukhara, Khiva, Nukus

Small groups of no more than 16 travelers, guaranteed

16 days starting from \$6,295

including international airfare

Single Supplement: **FREE**

For departure dates & prices, visit www.oattravel.com/slk2025pricing

Journey into Central Asia's heartland and uncover the rich legacy of the Silk Road, the ancient trade routes linking China to the West. In Uzbekistan, travel to Tashkent to relive the romance of traders laden with precious silks and spices and explore the medieval streets, tiled madrassahs, and lavish palaces of Bukhara and Samarkand.

IT'S INCLUDED

- 14 nights accommodation
- International airfare, airport transfers, government taxes, fees, and airline fuel surcharges unless you choose to make your own air arrangements
- All land transportation and 1 internal flight
- 32 meals—14 breakfasts, 10 lunches, and 8 dinners (including 1 Home-Hosted meal)
- 16 small group activities
- Services of a local O.A.T. Trip Experience Leader
- Gratuities for local guides, drivers, and luggage porters
- 5% Frequent Traveler Credit toward your next O.A.T. trip

Prices are accurate as of the date of this publishing and are subject to change.

The Silk Road: Central Asia's Ancient Trade Route



ITINERARY SUMMARY

DAYS	DESTINATION
1	Fly to Tashkent, Uzbekistan
2-4	Tashkent
5-7	Samarkand
8-10	Bukhara
11-12	Khiva
13-14	Nukus
15	Fly to Tashkent
16	Return to U.S.

PERSONALIZE YOUR ADVENTURE

OPTIONAL EXTENSIONS

Tajikistan: Khujand & Dushanbe
PRE-TRIP: 5 nights from **\$3,195**

Highlights of Kyrgyzstan & Kazakhstan
POST-TRIP: 7 nights from **\$3,195**

ARRIVE EARLY

We recommend that you relax after a long flight or explore more in depth before your trip. Prices shown include accommodations and private airport transfer.

- Arrive early in **Dushanbe** before your Tajikistan pre-trip extension from **\$160** per room, per night
- Arrive early in **Tashkent** before your main adventure from **\$290** per room, per night

WHAT TO EXPECT

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ Moderately Easy

Pacing: 5 locations in 15 days with two overland drives of up to 9 hours

Physical Requirements: You must be able to walk up to 3 miles unassisted each day and feel comfortable walking up and down stairs; travel on city streets, paved and unpaved roads, with several walking tours along uneven streets

Flight time: Travel time will be 18-32 hours and will most likely have one to two connections

View all physical requirements at www.oattravel.com/slk

UZBEKISTAN: THE O.A.T. DIFFERENCE

Unbeatable Value: Travel at the lowest price and per diems in the industry.

People-to-People Experiences: Enjoy an intimate introduction to Silk Road culture by dining in the home of a Karakalpak family in a remote locale near the Aral Sea. And, learn about a **Controversial Topic** when we meet a local expert for a candid conversation about Uzbekistan’s rocky road from Soviet state to independent nation.

O.A.T. Exclusives: Spend **A Day in the Life** of a farming village outside of Bukhara, where you’ll help make Samarkand bread and dine with local villagers. We’ll also have a candid conversation about the social problems facing rural villagers in Uzbekistan, and the challenges of preserving their traditional way of life in the modern world.

The Silk Road: Central Asia's Ancient Trade Route

YOUR DETAILED ITINERARY

BEGIN YOUR ADVENTURE WITH AN OPTIONAL PRE-TRIP EXTENSION

5 nights in *Tajikistan: Khujand & Dushanbe*

Day 1 Depart U.S.

Day 2 Arrive in Istanbul, Turkey • Fly to Dushanbe, Tajikistan

Day 3 Explore Dushanbe

Day 4 Discover Dushanbe • Local interaction

Day 5 Overland to Khujand • Meet artisans in Istaravshan

Day 6 Explore Khujand • Excursion to Arbob Cultural Palace

Day 7 Overland to Tashkent, Uzbekistan

Day 1 Depart U.S.

Afternoon/Evening: Depart the U.S. to begin your air journey to Tashkent, Uzbekistan, via Istanbul, Turkey.

Day 2 Arrive in Istanbul, Turkey • Fly to Tashkent, Uzbekistan

- Destination: Tashkent
- Accommodations: Lotte City Hotel or similar

Afternoon: You'll arrive in Istanbul, where you'll board your connecting flight to Tashkent, Uzbekistan. Depending on your flight schedule, you'll arrive late on Day 2 or very early on Day 3 and transfer to your hotel. Travelers who took our pre-trip to *Tajikistan: Khujand & Dushanbe* will arrive in Tashkent either very early this morning or late this afternoon for the last day of their pre-trip extension.

Dinner/Evening: On your own in the Istanbul airport.

Day 3 Tashkent

- Destination: Tashkent
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: Lotte City Hotel or similar

Early Morning: Travelers who did not arrive last night will be met at the airport by an O.A.T. representative and assisted with the transfer to your hotel in Tashkent.

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Enjoy a relaxed morning after your day of travel. You'll meet your small group for an orientation walk and Welcome Briefing held at the hotel before walking to lunch.

Lunch: At a local restaurant in Tashkent.

Afternoon: Walk to Independence Square, which represents a symbol of freedom for the Uzbek people who declared their independence from Russia in 1991. We'll also visit the Crying Mother Monument, constructed in 1999 to honor the 400,000 Uzbek soldiers who died in World War II.

After taking in the grand architecture of the Alisher Navoi Theatre, we'll head back to our hotel for free time on our own before dinner. Perhaps you'll explore the many underground stations along the Tashkent Metro—each one different with ornate mosaics, tiled archways, and domed plazas.

Dinner: Enjoy a Welcome Dinner of regional specialties at a local restaurant.

Evening: We'll drive back to the hotel after dinner, or you can choose to make more discoveries on your own in town.

Day 4 Explore Tashkent • Controversial Topic: Life in Uzbekistan post-Soviet Union • Visit Chorsu Bazaar

- Destination: Tashkent
- Included Meals: Breakfast
- Accommodations: Lotte City Hotel or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Drive to Tashkent's Old Town, where we'll explore Barak Khan Madrassah, a historical monument that has become a center for local artists and craftsmen. We'll also get to see Islam's most holy relic, one of the world's oldest Korans, and visit Chorsu Bazaar, Tashkent's famous green-domed market featuring acres of spices, produce, and traditional crafts.

Lunch: You're free to enjoy lunch on your own. Your Trip Experience Leader can recommend local restaurants to try. Or, join them for a visit

to the famed Central Asian Plov Centre, which specializes in *plov*, the savory Uzbek dish made of rice, meat, and spices.

Afternoon: You'll have a couple of hours of free time to explore Tashkent on your own. You may choose to visit the History Museum of the People of Uzbekistan, which traces the history of the more than 100 ethnic groups that make up the country today.

In the mid-afternoon, we'll regroup and meet a local woman for a conversation about the **Controversial Topic** of life in Uzbekistan after the Soviet Union's collapse.

In 1991, after some seventy years of Soviet rule, the Republic of Uzbekistan officially became an independent nation. In the West, the fall of the Soviet Union was celebrated: communism had failed, and a new era of freedom and democracy was ushered in to the many countries behind the Iron Curtain. In Uzbekistan, independence has brought sweeping changes to every aspect of private and public life—but as we'll learn, not all of these changes have been welcome. In fact, certain Uzbeks are even nostalgic for the Soviet days of old.

During our conversation with our local expert, who has been impacted personally by this transition, we'll get her thoughts on Soviet rule, and how her life and career changed after the collapse. We'll also have the chance to ask her our own questions to learn about life behind the Iron Curtain.

The rest of your afternoon and evening are yours to do as you'd like.

Dinner: On your own—your Trip Experience Leader can provide recommendations.

Evening: The evening is yours for independent explorations. Perhaps you'll head to Broadway Alley, where you can hunt (and bargain) for local crafts, artwork, and souvenirs.

**Day 5 Overland to Samarkand •
Discover Ulugh Beg Observatory • Visit
Tamerlane's mausoleum**

- Destination: Samarkand
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: Sultan Boutique Hotel or similar

Activity Note: Today, we will drive about six hours by bus to Samarkand, making stops along the way for bathroom breaks and to stretch our legs.

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: We drive to Samarkand, one of the oldest cities in the world. Established during the middle of the first century BC, Samarkand—like many Silk Road cities—was conquered and claimed a number of times, including by the troops of Alexander the Great, the Arab Caliphate, and Genghis Khan. This ancient city known for mosques and mausoleums has been at the crossroads of diverse cultures and religion since the eighth century BC. Today, Samarkand is divided into the old and new city, which has become an intersection of historical monuments, cultural centers, shops, and educational institutions.

Lunch: At a local restaurant in Samarkand.

Afternoon: After lunch, we'll discover the Ulugh Beg Observatory. This astronomical complex was, when it was built in the 1420s, one of the most advanced observatories of the ancient Islamic world. The observatory was commissioned by the Timurid prince Ulugh Beg, and was destroyed in 1449 by religious fanatics after he was overthrown and assassinated by his own son. In 1908, the Russian archeologist Vassily Vyatkin unearthed the observatory and restored it so that modern-day visitors can admire its ingenious mechanisms, including the meridian arc. Also known as the Fakhrī sextant, this device

allowed medieval scientists to measure the length of the year and the Earth's axial tilt with an astonishing degree of accuracy, rivaling the capabilities of even modern-day astronomers.

We'll spend some time discovering the observatory, then check in to our hotel in the mid-afternoon. Upon arrival, we'll have a couple of hours to relax or explore Samarkand on our own. Later, we'll depart for a tour of Gur-e-Amir, the mausoleum of conqueror Tamerlane and his descendants. During our visit, we'll also note how Gur-e-Amir features architectural components that inspired the Taj Mahal.

Dinner: At a local restaurant.

Evening: The evening is yours to enjoy. You can retire to your room for the night or ask your Trip Experience Leader for recommendations.

**Day 6 Explore Samarkand •
Visit Shah-i-Zinda necropolis •
Home-Hosted Dinner**

- Destination: Samarkand
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: Sultan Boutique Hotel or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Depart for a city tour of Samarkand. Our discoveries will include Registan Square, where we'll walk to the Old Quarter to view its hidden courtyards and tangled alleyways. We'll stroll through the expansive courtyard of marble flagstone at the Bibi-Khanum Mosque—a structure that legend says was a gift to Tamerlane by one of his wives. We'll also have free time to explore the Siab Bazaar, where fruit and vegetables grown from the rich soil of the Zarafshan Valley are sold in a colorful market.

Lunch: At a local restaurant.

Afternoon: We'll drive to Shah-i-Zinda, a towering necropolis where a cousin of the prophet Muhammad is buried. The name of the tomb translates to "Tomb of the Alive King," which refers to its original shrine and what is likely the grave of Qusam ibn-Abbas, who is said to have brought Islam to the area in the seventh century.

Then, enjoy a few hours of free time back in the city. Perhaps you'll enjoy a wine tasting and tour of a local winery, where eight wines, balsams, and cognacs are produced on site.

Next, we'll drive to the home of a local family to participate in what many travelers describe as a highlight of their adventure: a **Home-Hosted Dinner**. To ensure you have an intimate and authentic experience, we'll break into even smaller groups and visit different homes. This is a unique opportunity to learn more about life in the region—so come hungry for your home-cooked meal, and bring plenty of questions for your generous hosts.

Dinner: After making introductions, sit down together with your host family for a meal of home-cooked cuisine and cross-cultural exchange. As you dine, you'll get to know your hosts—what their lives are like, what they do for work, what challenges they face. You may take this opportunity to ask them any questions you have about Uzbek traditions, politics, and religion. You might even share a little bit about what brought you to this part of the world.

Evening: Free to rest or explore independently.

Day 7 Samarkand • Hike in the Gissar Mountains • Conversation about arranged marriages in Uzbekistan

- Destination: Samarkand
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: Sultan Boutique Hotel or similar

Activity Note: We'll spend two hours this morning hiking over uneven and sometimes steep terrain along trails in the Gissar Mountains. Travelers who do not wish to participate in this hike may stay back at the hotel and enjoy a free morning to explore on your own.

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Drive outside Samarkand to the foothills of the Gissar Mountains. We'll set off on a hike that will take us along shepherd trails to enjoy the verdant mountain scenery. We'll break up our journey by enjoying a cup of tea on the trail. Our hike concludes at Ohilik, a small mountain village, where we may get to spend some time engaging with the locals before returning to Samarkand.

Lunch: At a local restaurant.

Afternoon: Enjoy some free time this afternoon to pursue independent discoveries back in town. Perhaps you'll elect to explore the collections at the Samarkand History Museum.

Later, we'll drive to a local school to meet with two Uzbek women for a conversation about arranged marriage in Uzbekistan, and how cultural attitudes toward marriage and the role of women in society have changed over time.

Traditionally, marriages in Uzbekistan have been arranged in advance by the families of the bride and groom—girls and boys were often paired off and married before they turned 20. Since the end of Soviet rule in 1991, however,

arranged marriage has become increasingly unpopular; today, a majority of Uzbek couples, especially those living in urban areas, have chosen their spouses because of love instead of family arrangements.

Today, there is great debate about the role of arranged marriage in Uzbekistan, and we'll hear both sides during our conversation with two local women who were born in Uzbekistan, and can offer unique perspectives of how expectations for young women in this country have affected the trajectory of their lives.

Following our conversation, we'll drive back to our hotel, where you have the remainder of the day free for your own discoveries.

Dinner: On your own this evening. You can ask your Trip Experience Leader for dining recommendations.

Evening: You have the freedom to spend the rest of your evening as you wish, whether you want to retire to your room to rest before tomorrow's discoveries or take in the views on a stroll through the city.

Day 8 Train ride to Bukhara • Walking tour of Bukhara

- Destination: Bukhara
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: Amelia Boutique Hotel or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: We'll head to the train station for our rail journey to Bukhara. Before we check in to our rooms at our hotel, we'll set off on an orientation walk of the area.

Lunch: At a local restaurant in Bukhara.

Afternoon: We'll have a couple of hours to settle into our rooms or to head out for some independent exploring of this ancient holy city.

Later, we'll begin a walking tour of Bukhara at Lyab-i-Khauz, an ensemble of *madrassahs* and historical buildings built around a quiet plaza in the shade of mulberry trees, often frequented by tea-sipping, chess-playing Uzbek locals. We'll also see Bukhara's famous domed bazaars, a series of ancient arcades occupied by money changers, hat makers, rug merchants, jewelry vendors, and more.

Dinner: At a local restaurant.

Evening: The rest of the night is free to strike out on your own or retire to your room before our full day of exploring Bukhara tomorrow. Perhaps you'd like to relax in one of the oldest running *hammams* (spas) in the world at Hammomi Kord.

Day 9 Full-day tour of Bukhara • Explore Ark Citadel

- Destination: Bukhara
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: Amelia Boutique Hotel or similar

Activity Note: During our full-day tour of Bukhara, we'll walk approximately 2.5 miles as we take in the sights of the city.

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: We'll embark on a full-day tour of Bukhara with our Trip Experience Leader, departing the hotel by bus. Bukhara is a prominent destination along the Silk Road that grew wealthy on the trade that passed through. We'll visit the opulent 18th-century Bolo Hauz Mosque and the Chashma Ayub Mausoleum, the legendary spring brought forth by the prophet Job upon striking the ground with his staff. And we'll set off on foot through Old Town, exploring the many mosques, mausoleums, and blue-domed minarets of this UNESCO World Heritage Site—which still bears scars of a 13th-century invasion by Genghis Khan.

Our discoveries also include the Ark Citadel, the city's ancient fortress. During the 19th century, the British and Russian empires fought for dominance of Central Asia—a strategic rivalry called “The Great Game”—and one of the most famous moments in this struggle centered at the Citadel and its connected prison. It was here that two British officers, Charles Stoddart and Arthur Connolly (the one who coined the phrase “The Great Game”), were held in a vermin-infested pit for two years before being publicly beheaded and buried under the square outside the main gate.

Lunch: At a local restaurant in Lyab-i Hauz.

Afternoon: We'll continue taking in the sights of the city on our walk from the imposing Kalyan Minaret back to our hotel. You'll have some free time to relax or explore more on your own after our tour. You may wish to spend more time in Lyab-i Hauz and take in the grand architecture of the Magok-i-Attari Mosque, dating back to the ninth century.

Dinner: On your own—your Trip Experience Leader can provide you with recommendations.

Evening: Free for your own discoveries. You can retire to your room for the rest of the night or ask your Trip Experience Leader for recommendations.

Day 10 Bukhara • *A Day in the Life of* Nayman village • Community lunch

- Destination: Bukhara
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: Amelia Boutique Hotel or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: We'll drive to the village of Nayman, where we'll participate in *A Day in the Life* experience. Nayman is a small village of about 700 residents where the chief occupation

is agriculture and the traditional ways of life carry on. Cotton is the region's largest crop, followed by fruit and vegetable growing, and there is some small-scale animal breeding as well. Our time here will give us a true taste of rural life in Uzbekistan.

Upon arrival, we'll have the chance to speak with a local chairman of the village who will enlighten us on some of the healthcare, education, and social issues facing the community. These include domestic violence, heating fuel shortages, and an aging village population. As we'll learn, many of Nayman's youngest residents are leaving the village to move to the cities, where there are more education and economic opportunities for them. As a result, those left behind wonder who will continue the village's traditions and way of life when they are gone. This is a great opportunity to learn about the challenges facing this village and gain deeper insight into their culture.

After our conversation with the chairman, we'll walk to a local home in Nayman where three generations live under one roof. As we walk, your Trip Experience Leader will point out noteworthy sites in the town and you'll stop to mingle with any locals you might see. In such a small and remote village, your presence is likely to be as exciting to the locals as your visit here is to you. When we arrive at the family's home, we'll be welcomed in and given a tour of their home. Then it's time to roll up our sleeves and get to work: We'll be helping to prepare our lunch, which may include local delicacies such as *plov* (a rice dish) and dumplings. If you'd like, while the meal is cooking you may also help out with the family's chores. Depending on the season, you may be able to pick cotton or help harvest alfalfa.

Lunch: We'll all meet up back at the family's home to share our community lunch. As we dine, you might ask our hosts any questions you may have about life in Nayman, their occupations, or what traditions and customs they observe.

Afternoon: Bid farewell to your gracious hosts and board our bus for the return drive to Bukhara, where the remainder of the afternoon is free. You may choose to explore on your own, or take a walk to meet a local puppet master and go shopping in a nearby domed market.

Dinner: On your own. Perhaps you'll try *manti*, a dumpling popular in most Central Asian and Soviet cuisines, filled with spiced meat, such as ground lamb or beef.

Evening: Free to make independent explorations around Bukhara. Perhaps you'll venture to a local bar for a nightcap with fellow travelers.

Day 11 Bukhara • Overland to Khiva

- Destination: Khiva
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: Erkin Palace Hotel or similar

Activity Note: Our overland journey to Khiva will take approximately nine hours by bus. During our travels, we'll make stops for bathroom breaks, lunch, and to take in the scenic desert landscapes of Uzbekistan.

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: We'll depart the hotel and experience the Silk Road the way centuries of merchants did, as we spend the day traveling across the Kyzylkum Desert on our way to Khiva. We will follow the same route that camel caravans once traversed.

The Silk Road was as much an exchange of cultural values as it was an exchange of goods. Gold, saffron, vegetables, and wine came from the west, while ceramics, cinnamon, bronze, and silk made their way from the east. Along with these precious commodities came the spread of religions and customs, many of which are still practiced in the region today.

Lunch: We'll stop at a local tea house for a picnic-style lunch organized by our Trip Experience Leader.

Afternoon: As we continue on our journey to Khiva, we'll stop to witness the Amu Darya River, which in ancient times was regarded as the border between Greater Iran and Turan. We reach our hotel in Khiva late this afternoon and have free time to settle in before dinner.

Dinner: At the hotel.

Evening: The remainder of the evening is yours. You are free to return to your room to rest from our long day of travel, or join fellow travelers for a nightcap in the hotel bar.

Day 12 Walking tour of Khiva's Old Town

- Destination: Khiva
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: Erkin Palace Hotel or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: We'll set off on a walking tour of Khiva. Legend says that the ancient Silk Road oasis of Khiva was founded at the place where Shem, son of Noah, discovered water in the desert, and that the city got its name from Shem's joyful shout, "Hey va!" at the discovery. Today, Khiva is as much a living museum as it is a thriving city.

We'll spend the day exploring the sites of the city's meticulously preserved Old Town. Known as Ichon-Qala or Inner City, this UNESCO World Heritage Site exists today much as it did when travelers on the Silk Road visited centuries ago—sweeping, dun-colored walls, a towering main gate, bustling thoroughfares, and crowds of weary wayfarers await us. We'll visit Tash Hauli Palace, which resembles a fortress with high battlements, towers, and fortified gates, but was once the home of the reigning khan, Ala Kuli. The sprawling inner courtyard and open-air throne room of the palace are awash in intricate blue and white tilework that stands in stark contrast to the earthen palate of the buildings.

Other discoveries include the rebuilt ninth-century Dzhuma Mosque, and the original residence of the khans, Kunya Ark. Considered a city within a city, Kunya Ark included the khan's mosque, residence, reception hall, arsenal, harem, and more.

Lunch: At a local restaurant.

Afternoon: The remainder of the day is free for you to make new discoveries in Khiva. Perhaps you'll wish to see an Uzbek folklore show at Allakulikhan Madrassah, one of the city's oldest *madrassahs*.

Dinner: On your own—your Trip Experience Leader will provide you with options.

Evening: Your independent explorations continue through the evening. Perhaps you'll wander through Ichon-Qala on your own. Dusk and sunset are said to be the perfect times to visit.

Day 13 Khiva • Overland to Nukus

- Destination: Nukus
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner
- Accommodations: Hotel Jipek Joli or similar

Activity Note: Today our transfer from Khiva to Nukus will involve about a 4-hour bus ride over roads that may be bumpy, uneven, or winding at times.

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: The morning is free to make last-minute independent discoveries in Khiva before we depart for Nukus this afternoon. Your Trip Experience Leader can provide you with recommendations.

Lunch: On your own—your Trip Experience Leader will happily provide recommendations for nearby dining options.

Afternoon: Depart Khiva and travel overland for about 4 hours to Nukus, capital of the autonomous Republic of Karakalpakstan (legally incorporated into the nation of Uzbekistan, though it retains some sovereignty in its internal affairs). Due to its remote location near the Aral Sea, Nukus was a 'closed' city during the Soviet era, when the Red Army researched and developed chemical warfare weapons. We'll arrive at our hotel in Nukus in the late afternoon.

Dinner: At the hotel.

Evening: Yours to explore Nukus on your own, or you may choose to retire to your room for the night.

Day 14 Nukus • Visit Savitsky Museum • Dinner with a local family

- Destination: Nukus
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: Hotel Jipek Joli or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: We'll walk to the Savitsky Museum, also known as the State Art Museum of the Republic of Karakalpakstan. The museum represents the life's work of Russian painter and collector Igor Savitsky. Savitsky's legacy includes thousands of ancient to modern artistic treasures, along with the world's second largest collection of Russian avant-garde art, which he kept hidden from the watchful eyes of the KGB in this remote desert location.

Lunch: At a restaurant near the Savitsky Museum.

Afternoon: You're free to explore Nukus independently. Perhaps you'll visit a local market, or head back to the hotel to rest or share stories with fellow travelers.

Later, we'll drive to the home of a local Karakalpak family.

Dinner: Enjoy dinner with a local family in their home and experience a traditional musical performance.

Evening: You have the evening on your own to make new discoveries. Or you might choose to retire to your room to rest for a day of travel tomorrow.

Day 15 Nukus • Fly to Tashkent

- Destination: Tashkent
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner
- Accommodations: Lotte City Hotel or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Transfer to the airport this morning for a short flight back to Tashkent. We'll transfer to our hotel after we land, where our Trip Experience Leader will help us check in.

Lunch: On your own in Tashkent. Your Trip Experience Leader can recommend a restaurant or café.

Afternoon: The afternoon is free to rest, prepare for tomorrow's flight, or to make last-minute independent discoveries in Tashkent.

Dinner: We'll toast to the end of our adventure during an included Farewell Dinner at a local restaurant.

Evening: The evening is free to rest or explore independently.

Day 16 Return to U.S. or begin post-trip extension

- Included Meals: Breakfast

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: We'll check out of the hotel early this morning to transfer to the airport for your flight home via Istanbul. Or, begin your *Highlights of Kyrgyzstan & Kazakhstan* post-trip extension.

END YOUR ADVENTURE WITH AN OPTIONAL POST-TRIP EXTENSION

7 nights in *Highlights of Kyrgyzstan & Kazakhstan*

Day 1 Fly to Almaty, Kazakhstan

Day 2 Explore Almaty • Visit Zenkov Cathedral

Day 3 Overland to Cholpon-Ata, Kyrgyzstan

Day 4 Meet golden eagle hunters in Karakol • Lunch with Uyghur family • Lake Issyk-Kul

Day 5 Overland to Bishkek • Lunch with Kyrgyz family • Visit Kyrgyz horse farm

Day 6 Explore Bishkek

Day 7 Bishkek • Ala Archa National Park

Day 8 Return to U.S.

PRE-TRIP

Tajikistan: Khujand & Dushanbe

INCLUDED IN YOUR PRICE

- » 5 nights accommodation
- » 14 meals—5 breakfasts, 5 lunches, and 4 dinners
- » 6 small group activities
- » Services of a local O.A.T. Trip Experience Leader
- » Gratuities for local guides, drivers, and luggage porters
- » All transfers

PRE-TRIP EXTENSION ITINERARY

Begin your Silk Road journey in Tajikistan, land of legendary hospitality, rugged mountains, and Central Asia's oldest cities. Venture into bazaars that drew ancient caravans from distant lands, hear traditional Tajik music at a folk jam session, and experience the air of seclusion this far-flung mountain territory has maintained through the millennia and into modern times.

Day 1 Depart U.S.

Afternoon/Evening: Depart the U.S. for your flight to Dushanbe, Tajikistan, via Istanbul, Turkey.

Day 2 Arrive in Istanbul, Turkey • Fly to Dushanbe, Tajikistan

Afternoon: You'll arrive in Istanbul, where you'll board your connecting flight to Dushanbe, Tajikistan.

Dinner: On your own in the Istanbul airport.

Evening: Board your connecting flight to Dushanbe tonight. Depending on your flight schedule, you'll arrive late on Day 2 or very early on Day 3. An O.A.T. representative will meet you at the airport and escort you to your hotel in Dushanbe.

Day 3 Explore Dushanbe

- Destination: Dushanbe
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: Atlas Hotel or similar

Activity Note: Alcoholic beverages will not be served during our Welcome Dinner between February 28 and March 29 due to the observance of Ramadan.

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: You have the morning free to relax after your flight. Or, you may explore Dushanbe on your own with recommendations from your Trip Experience Leader. Perhaps you'll choose to take a morning stroll through Victory Park, which harbors the best views of the city. Later, we'll meet our small group for a Welcome Briefing before departing for lunch.

Lunch: At a local restaurant.

Afternoon: Explore Dushanbe on a guided tour, beginning at the city's main square, home to a monument dedicated to Ismoil Somoni, forefather of the Tajik nation. Rising 120 feet above the square, the statue commemorates Ismoil Somoni's founding of the Samanid Dynasty in the tenth century. Then, we visit the Tajik Museum of Antiquities, an extensive collection of relics that includes a reclining Buddha statue believed to be created in the sixth century AD. Other exhibits include the many cultural and religious artifacts that arrived in Tajikistan during its heyday at the heart of the Silk Road. Next, we'll venture behind a set of unassuming gates into the Gurminj Museum of Musical Instruments. The small collection of old and unusual instruments will come alive during a performance of Tajik folk music.

Dinner: We'll get to know each other better over an included Welcome Dinner at a local restaurant.

Evening: The remainder of the evening is yours to discover Dushanbe on your own. Or, you may retire to your room to rest for tomorrow's explorations of the city.

Day 4 Discover Dushanbe • Local interaction

- Destination: Dushanbe
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: Atlas Hotel or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Today we continue our discoveries in Dushanbe. First, we'll meet with a local member of the U.S. Agency for International Development. We'll delve into women's inequality in southern Tajikistan and discuss the pioneering women striving for equal rights. Our local speaker will also tell us about child care and hygiene education in this region.

Next, we'll crane our necks to appreciate the world's second tallest flagpole, rising more than 500 feet in front of the Palace of Nations. The flagpole cost \$3.5 million to build and was designed in San Diego. While here, we'll also stop to view some of the Tajik avant-garde paintings housed at the National Museum of Tajikistan.

Lunch: At a local restaurant.

Afternoon: Free for your own discoveries. Your Trip Experience Leader can recommend activities.

Dinner: On your own—your Trip Experience Leader can provide recommendations on the best locales based on your preferences.

Evening: The remainder of the evening is free for you to make your own discoveries. You may retire for the night, or if there's a performance scheduled, perhaps you'll take in a show at the Ayni Opera & Ballet Theatre.

Day 5 Overland to Khujand • Meet artisans in Istaravshan

- Destination: Khujand
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: Firuz Hotel or similar

Activity Note: Today, we'll be traveling over bumpy, dusty roads from Dushanbe to Khujand by bus. Total travel time, including discovery and comfort stops, will be nearly ten hours.

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Journey to Khujand, traversing the mountain passes that separate the northern arm of Tajikistan from the rest of the country. The landscapes we explore today are considered some of the most beautiful in Central Asia.

Lunch: At a local restaurant en route.

Afternoon: Continuing on our journey, we'll stop to visit the town of Istaravshan, an ancient center for trade and craftsmanship. Here, we'll meet with a traditional artisan in their home workshop to learn about their craft.

Following our visit, we'll board our bus and continue our drive to Khujand, arriving in the late afternoon and checking in to our hotel.

Dinner: At a local restaurant.

Evening: The evening is free to relax or explore on your own.

Day 6 Explore Khujand • Excursion to Arbob Cultural Palace

- Destination: Khujand
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: Firuz Hotel or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Enjoy a full day of discoveries in Khujand. Tajikistan's second largest city, Khujand is sometimes referred to as the northern capital. It lies at the entrance of the Ferghana Valley, a secluded mountain oasis that spans three countries but has a culture all its own. This area has been inhabited for well over 2,000 years, making Khujand one of the oldest cities in Central Asia. Alexander the Great established an outpost here in the fourth century BC, and it also fell to Genghis Khan's Mongol army in 1220. Khujand was an important junction on the Silk Road, and often bore the brunt of feuding overlords.

We'll explore Kamoli Khujandi Square, called Pushkin Square during Soviet times. An imposing theater dominates the scene; shows and concerts are sporadic, but the extravagant interior décor is reason enough to visit. We'll also visit the ruins of Timur Malik's castle, where he defended the city from Genghis Khan's invading armies. The city eventually

fell, but Timur Malik remains a Tajik hero to this day. Other discoveries include the Historical Museum of Sughd, built inside a corner of the city wall; and the Muslihiddin Memorial Complex. This religious center was built around the mausoleum of Sheik Muslihiddin, a poet and ruler of Khujand during the twelfth century. The original brick tomb dates back many centuries, but the complex also includes a brick minaret built in 1865 and a 20th-century mosque.

Lunch: At a local restaurant.

Afternoon: Head out to Arbob Cultural Palace, the former headquarters of a Soviet collective farm. Built in the 1950s to mimic St. Petersburg's Winter Palace, Arbob is impressively grand and sumptuously decorated. Afterward, we'll have some free time to relax; or you may choose to visit a local women's weaving cooperative.

Dinner: At a local restaurant in Khujand.

Evening: Free to spend as you please. You can choose to retire to the hotel for the evening, or ask your Trip Experience Leader for recommendations on nighttime activities in the area. Should you want to take an evening stroll, consider a visit to Somoni Park. The park comes alive at sunset, when you can observe many locals enjoying the beauty of the area. As you wander around, you'll come across statues, fountains, and vendors selling candy floss and sugary treats. You'll also spot informative mosaic tiles that tell a brief history of the region.

Day 7 Overland to Tashkent, Uzbekistan

- Destination: Tashkent
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: Lotte City Hotel or similar

Activity Note: Today's itinerary features a transfer of approximately five hours, including a border crossing, during which each traveler will be expected to carry their own luggage.

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: We depart for our border crossing into Uzbekistan, traveling over rugged, mountainous landscapes. We'll arrive in Tashkent in the early afternoon.

Lunch: At a local restaurant in Tashkent.

Afternoon: We'll check into our hotel and have the rest of the afternoon to relax or enjoy free time to explore the city.

Dinner: At a local restaurant.

Evening: The rest of the evening is yours to make independent discoveries before our group explorations of the Silk Road continue tomorrow on *The Silk Road: Central Asia's Ancient Trade Route*.

POST-TRIP

Highlights of Kyrgyzstan & Kazakhstan

INCLUDED IN YOUR PRICE

- » Airfare from Tashkent, Uzbekistan, to Almaty, Kazakhstan
- » 7 nights accommodation
- » 18 meals—7 breakfasts, 6 lunches, and 5 dinners (including 2 Home-Hosted Lunches)
- » 11 small group activities
- » Services of a local O.A.T. Trip Experience Leader
- » Gratuities for local guides, drivers, and luggage porters
- » All transfers

POST-TRIP EXTENSION ITINERARY

Journey to Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, two Turkic states nestled in the heart of Central Asia's rugged mountain ranges. Witness nomadic tribes and untouched alpine lakes, explore the post-Soviet cities of Bishkek and Almaty, and discover a coalescence of cultures thriving in a series of European- and Asian-inspired villages and towns.

Day 1 Fly to Almaty, Kazakhstan

- Destination: Almaty
- Included Meals: Dinner
- Accommodations: Hotel Kazzhol

Morning: We'll check out of our hotel early this morning and head to the airport for our flight to Almaty. Upon arrival, we'll drive to our hotel.

Lunch: On your own. Your Trip Experience Leader can recommend a café or restaurant.

Afternoon: We'll check in to our hotel, then we'll have some free time to relax or acquaint ourselves with the city on our own. Later, we'll regroup with our Trip Experience Leader for an orientation walk to get familiar with the area near our hotel.

Dinner: At the hotel.

Evening: The remainder of the evening is free to relax or continue exploring on your own. Your Trip Experience Leader can recommend evening activities in the area.

Day 2 Explore Almaty • Visit Zenkov Cathedral

- Destination: Almaty
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: Hotel Kazzhol

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Today we discover Almaty on an included excursion. With the scent of apple blossoms in the air, and the striking Tian Shan Mountain range rising from the verdant countryside, it's easy to forget you're in Kazakhstan's largest, most modern city. Our discoveries begin with a guided tour of the Central State Museum, home to archaeological

treasures spanning the entire history of Kazakhstan, from prehistoric times to the present day. We'll visit Republic Square to see the Independence Monument topped with a Golden Warrior and spend time learning about ancient musical instruments at the Museum of National Musical Instruments. Then, we'll visit Zenkov Cathedral, one of the few Tsarist-era buildings to survive a devastating 1911 earthquake.

Lunch: At a local restaurant on Arbat Street.

Afternoon: We'll have free time back at our hotel, or you may visit Almaty's Green Market on your own.

Dinner: At a local restaurant, where we'll enjoy a folk performance during our meal.

Evening: The remainder of the evening is free for you to make more discoveries or retire to your room. Perhaps you'll take an evening stroll around the streets of downtown Almaty.

Day 3 Overland to Cholpon-Ata, Kyrgyzstan

- Destination: Cholpon-Ata
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: Hotel Caprice or similar

Activity Note: Our overland journey to Cholpon-Ata, Kyrgyzstan will take around ten hours by bus, including brief stops to cross the border from Kazakhstan, and for lunch. Our border crossing today will require travelers to carry their own luggage. Our regional office highly recommends using suitcases with wheels to make this transfer easier.

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: We begin our overland journey to Cholpon-Ata as we check out of the hotel and make our way by bus to the Kyrgyzstan border.

Lunch: At a local restaurant after crossing the border.

Afternoon: Our trip continues by bus as we make our way toward Cholpon-Ata, arriving late this afternoon at our hotel.

Dinner: At the hotel.

Evening: The evening is yours to relax or perhaps have a nightcap with fellow travelers at a local bar.

Day 4 Meet golden eagle hunters in Karakol • Lunch with Uyghur family • Lake Issyk-Kul

- Destination: Cholpon-Ata
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: Hotel Caprice or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Travel to Karakol, where we'll meet the famous golden eagle hunters of the region and learn how they train their majestic golden eagles. Then, we'll visit the Przhevalsky Museum and Memorial—dedicated to the memory of Nikolay Mikhaylovich Przhevalsky, a noted Russian explorer.

Lunch: We'll have lunch in the home of a local Uyghur family. In addition to enjoying a traditional meal, we'll have an opportunity to learn about the Uyghur people, their traditions, and history.

Afternoon: Return to Cholpon-Ata, where you may opt to enjoy some free time to relax back at the hotel, or you can join our Trip Experience Leader for a walk along the shores of Lake Issyk-Kul.

Dinner: At the hotel.

Evening: You have the remainder of the evening free to retire to your room for rest or make discoveries on your own.

Day 5 Overland to Bishkek • Lunch with Kyrgyz family • Visit Kyrgyz horse farm

- Destination: Bishkek
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: Windham Bishkek Hotel or similar

Activity Note: Today we'll drive from Cholpon-Ata overland to Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, which will take nine hours total, including stops to make discoveries along our journey.

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: We'll leave Cholpon-Ata for Bishkek, stopping first to visit Cholpon-Ata's regional and open-air museum, featuring an extensive collection of petroglyphs carved into the large, lakeside boulders. We'll continue overland to the village of Donarik.

Lunch: At a local Kyrgyz family's home in the village of Donarik.

Afternoon: This afternoon, we'll stop for a short tour of the Burana historical complex, which houses the ruins of the ancient city of Balasagun. Then, we'll depart for a Kyrgyz horse farm to experience horse games. We'll continue on our drive, skirting the northern shore of Lake Issyk-Kul to visit the open-air museum and the ruins of the ancient city of Balasagun, and arrive in Bishkek late this afternoon.

Dinner: On your own—you may ask your Trip Experience Leader for recommendations. Perhaps you'll try one of the national dishes of Kyrgyzstan at a local restaurant.

Evening: You have the remainder of the evening to explore independently. You may choose to have a drink at the hotel bar, or venture out to further explore Bishkek.

Day 6 Explore Bishkek

- Destination: Bishkek
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: Windham Bishkek Hotel or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Begin a walking tour of Bishkek, the former Silk Road trade town that was under the thumb of Russian rule for more than a century. Discoveries include Ala-Too Central Square, Victory Square, and a stroll through Oak (Dubovy) and Panfilov parks. Later, we'll enjoy a visit to the American University of Central Asia, which was founded in 1993 as an international, multi-disciplinary learning community in the American liberal arts tradition.

Lunch: At a local restaurant in Bishkek.

Afternoon: The remainder of the afternoon is free to pursue individual discoveries in Bishkek. You may wish to visit a women's crafts workshop, or the Osh Bazaar, a sprawling market featuring all manner of local and imported goods.

Dinner: We'll enjoy a festive Farewell Dinner in a local restaurant with traditional Kyrgyz music.

Evening: You have the remainder of the evening free to make discoveries on your own in Bishkek.

Day 7 Bishkek • Ala Archa National Park

- Destination: Bishkek
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: Windham Bishkek Hotel or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: We'll witness some of the country's scenery during a hike around Ala Archa National Park (weather permitting), followed by a stop in the village of Chong-Tash to visit the Ata-Beyit Memorial Complex. Meaning "Graves of Our Fathers" in Kyrgyz, the site honors dark episodes in Kyrgyzstan's history, including mass murders that occurred here in 1938 at the hands of the NKVD (the interior ministry of the Soviet Union) during Stalin's purges.

Lunch: At a local restaurant in Bishkek.

Afternoon: The remainder of the day is yours to pursue individual discoveries in Bishkek. Perhaps you'll take the opportunity to find last-minute souvenirs at the Osh Bazaar, or check out the city's many art galleries, such as Nissa Art Salon.

Dinner: On your own. Your Trip Experience Leader can recommend a restaurant.

Evening: You have the remainder of the evening free to make discoveries on your own during your final night in Bishkek. Or you may choose to retire to your room to rest for your early flight in the morning.

Day 8 Return to U.S.

- Included Meals: Breakfast

Early Morning: We'll check out of the hotel and transfer to the airport for your return flight back to the U.S.

TRAVEL DOCUMENTS & ENTRY REQUIREMENTS

Your Passport

- Must be in good condition
- Must be valid for at least 6 months after your scheduled return to the U.S.
- Must have the required number of blank pages (details below)
- The blank pages must be labeled “Visas” at the top. Pages labeled “Amendments and Endorsements” are not acceptable

Need to Renew Your Passport?

Contact the National Passport Information Center (NPIC) at **1-877-487-2778**, or visit the U.S. Department of State’s official website at **www.travel.state.gov** for information on obtaining a new passport or renewing your existing passport. The U.S. Department of State allows for passport renewal by mail or, for applicable citizens, renewal online. We advise you review the process and requirements for online passport renewal on the official website.

You may also contact our recommended visa service company, PVS International, at **1-800-556-9990** for help with your passport.

Recommended Blank Pages

Please confirm that your passport has enough blank pages for this vacation.

- **Main trip only:** You will need 4 blank passport pages for the main trip.
- **Pre-trip extension in Tajikistan:** You will need 2 additional pages, for a total of 6.
- **Post-trip extension in Kyrgyzstan & Kazakhstan:** You will need 2 additional pages, for a total of 6.
- **Both a pre- and a post-trip extension:** You will need a total of 8 blank pages.

Visas Required

We’ll be sending you a detailed Visa Packet with instructions, application forms, and fees about 100 days prior to your departure. In the meantime, we’re providing the information below as a guideline on what to expect. This information is for U.S. citizens only. All visas and fees are subject to change.

- **Uzbekistan: Visa required.** A visa is not needed for U.S. citizens over the age of 55. For travelers under the age of 55, this visa is required for the main trip.
- **Tajikistan (pre-trip extension): No visa required.** This country is visited on the pre-trip extension.

- **Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan (post-trip extension): No visa required.** These countries are visited on the post-trip extension only. U.S. citizens do not need visas for stays of less than 15 days in Kazakhstan or less than 60 days in Kyrgyzstan.

Traveling Without a U.S. Passport?

If you are not a U.S. citizen, or if your passport is from any country other than the U.S., it is your responsibility to check with your local consulate, embassy, or a visa services company about visa requirements. We recommend the services of PVS International, a national visa service located in Washington D.C.; they can be reached at **1-800-556-9990** or **www.pvsinternational.org**.

Traveling With a Minor?

Some governments may require certain documentation for minors to enter and depart the country or to obtain a visa (if applicable). For further detail on the required documentation, please contact your local embassy or consulate.

Travel Protection Required:

For new bookings starting 1/1/25, Overseas Adventure Travel requires all travelers purchase travel protection with Medical Evacuation coverage of at least \$200,000 and Medical Expense coverage of at least \$50,000, due to the remote nature of your adventure.

O.A.T. Travel Protection:

If you **purchase your Travel Protection Plan** through O.A.T., no further action will be needed, as the Medical Evacuation coverage and Medical Expense coverage meets these requirements.

Your Own Travel Protection:

If you purchase your own travel protection, we recommend you review the plan to ensure Medical Evacuation coverage of at least \$200,000 and Medical Expense coverage of at least \$50,000 is included. Once you confirm your plan meets the requirements, you will need to email the following information to **TravelCoverage@oattravel.com**:

- Traveler Name(s)
- Reservation Number
- Trip Protection Provider
- Policy Number
- Date of Purchase
- Copy of your Policy Documents

You can also contact our Travel Counselors at **1-800-221-0814** to review this policy. You will be required to provide proof of coverage by 60 days prior to departure at the latest.

Emergency Photocopies of Key Documents

We recommend you carry color photocopies of key documents including the photo page of your passport plus any applicable visas, air itinerary, credit cards (front and back), and an alternative form of ID. Add emergency phone numbers like your credit card company and the number for your travel protection plan. Store copies separate from the originals.

If you plan to email this information to yourself, please keep in mind that email is not always secure; consider using password protection or encryption. Also email is not always available worldwide. As an alternative, you could load these documents onto a flash drive instead, which can do double-duty as a place to backup photos during your trip.

Overseas Taxes & Fees

This tour may have taxes and fees that cannot be included in your airline ticket price because you are required to pay them in person onsite. All taxes are subject to change without notice and can be paid in cash (either U.S. or local currency). If applicable, you will receive a list of these fees with your Final Documents.

RIGORS, VACCINES & GENERAL HEALTH

Is This Adventure Right for You?

Please review the information below prior to departing on this adventure. We reserve the right for our Trip Experience Leaders to modify participation, or in some circumstances send travelers home, if their condition would adversely affect the health, safety, or enjoyment of themselves or of other travelers.

PACING

- 5 locations in 15 days with two overland drives of up to 9 hours

PHYSICAL REQUIREMENTS

- Not appropriate for travelers using wheelchairs, walkers, or other mobility aids
- You must be able to walk up to 3 miles unassisted each day and feel comfortable walking up and down stairs
- We reserve the right for Trip Experience Leaders to restrict participation, or in some circumstances send travelers home, if their limitations impact the group's experience
- You may encounter animals on this trip. We make every effort to keep these encounters safe, however animals may behave unpredictably or dangerously at times. Please use caution when interacting with animals on this trip: Keep a safe distance, stay alert, and respect the animals

CLIMATE

- Due to the varied geography of the destinations on this adventure, you will experience a wide range of temperatures and weather conditions
- Spring and fall nighttime temperatures can be even colder (30°F) on the optional trip extensions

TERRAIN & TRANSPORTATION

- Travel on city streets, paved and unpaved roads, with several walking tours along uneven streets
- We drive overland in an air-conditioned coach and air-conditioned train to Bukhara

FLIGHT INFORMATION

- Travel times from the U.S. to Uzbekistan will be 18–32 hours with a connection in Istanbul, Turkey. Flights typically arrive in Tashkent in the middle of the night and you may arrive at your hotel in the pre-dawn hours. You may also experience difficulties during internal

flights as the Uzbekistan airport is very crowded and arrival and departure times can be erratic. Traveling to this region of Central Asia can be challenging, but the rewards make these potential difficulties well worth the effort.

ACCOMMODATIONS & FACILITIES

- All accommodations are hotel-standard, with a variety of amenities and personal service, as well as private baths

Steps to Take Before Your Trip

Before you leave on this adventure, we recommend the following:

- Check with the CDC for their recommendations for the countries you'll be visiting. You can contact them online at **www.cdc.gov/travel** or by phone at **1-800-232-4636**.
- Have a medical checkup with your doctor at least 6 weeks before your trip.
- Pick up any necessary medications, both prescription and over-the-counter.
- Have a dental and/or eye checkup. (Recommended, but less urgent)

No Vaccines Required

Recommended Vaccines

At the time of writing there were no required vaccines for this trip. The CDC recommends that all travelers be up to date on their routine vaccinations and on basic travel vaccines like Hepatitis A and Typhoid, but these are suggestions only. However, this could change in future so we encourage you to check with the CDC yourself before meeting with your doctor.

Medication Suggestions

- An antibiotic medication for gastrointestinal illness
- Prescription pain medication in the unlikely event of an injury in a remote location

Traveling with Medications

- **Pack medications in your carry-on bag** to avoid loss and to have them handy.
- **Keep medicines in their original, labeled containers** for a quicker security screen at the airport and a better experience if you get stopped by customs while overseas.
- **Bring copies of your prescriptions**, written using the generic drug name rather than a brand name to be prepared for any unforeseen loss of your medications.

We recommend checking with the State Department for medication restrictions by country: **travel.state.gov** (Go to “Find International Travel Information”, select “Country Information”, then enter the country into the search bar; if you don't see any medications specifically mentioned under the “Health” section, then you can presume major U.S. brands should be OK).

IMPORTANT: For Uzbekistan, the State Department did warn that large quantities of medication will receive scrutiny by Uzbek customs, especially any narcotic, psychotropic medication, or sleep aid. If you have any such medications, they recommend that you bring a letter from your doctor outlining the diagnosis, name of the medication, and dosage. In addition, you should also bring a copy of the actual prescription for all of your prescription medications.

If you have questions about bringing a specific medication into Uzbekistan, the State Department recommends checking with the U.S. embassy in Tashkent. They have a medications FAQ online at <https://uz.usembassy.gov/u-s-citizen-services/local-resources-of-u-s-citizens/doctors/prescription-medicines/>. *Note that the website address for the FAQ changes regularly, so if this url does not work for you, go to the main page for the embassy (<https://uz.usembassy.gov>) and use their search function.*

Staying Healthy on Your Trip

Jet Lag Tips

- Start your trip well-rested.
- Begin a gradual transition to your new time zone before you leave or switch to your destination time zone when you get on the plane.
- Attempt to sleep and eat according to the new schedule.
- Avoid heavy eating and drinking caffeine or alcoholic beverages right before—and during—your flight.
- Drink plenty of water and/or fruit juice while flying
- Stretch your legs, neck, and back periodically while seated on the plane.
- After arrival, avoid the temptation to nap.
- Don't push yourself to see a lot on your first day.
- Try to stay awake your first day until after dinner.

Allergies

If you have any serious allergies or dietary restrictions, we advise you to notify us at least 30 days prior to your departure. Please call our Travel Counselors at **1-800-221-0814**, and we will communicate them to our regional office. Every effort will be made to accommodate you.

Water

- Tap water in Central Asia is not safe to drink; use bottled or treated water instead.
- Bottled water is readily available and inexpensive. Inspect each bottle before you buy it to make sure the cap is sealed properly.
- Bottled drinks and hot drinks that have been boiled are safe to drink.

- A reusable water bottle is recommended. You will have opportunities to refill it.
- Avoid drinks with ice in them.

Food

- We've carefully chosen the restaurants for your group meals.
- Your Trip Experience Leader can suggest restaurants for any of the meals you take on your own.
- Be very careful with food sold from vendors on the street, and with uncooked foods.

TIP: *Even with safe food, some travelers will find the local cuisine in Central Asia is heavier than what they are used to, so it's worthwhile to bring a remedy for upset stomach with you—just in case.*

Electricity

A constant electricity supply cannot be guaranteed during overnight stays. Travelers dependent on electricity supply (as in the case of those with sleep apnea) should consider a different O.A.T. adventure.

MONEY MATTERS: LOCAL CURRENCY & TIPPING GUIDELINES

Top Three Tips

- **Carry a mix of different types of payments**, such as local currency, an ATM card, and a credit card. Traveler's checks are not recommended as they can be difficult to exchange and are rarely accepted in shops and restaurants.
- **We recommend that you bring a moderate cash reserve with you.** Many of the countries on this adventure rely on cash more than plastic, and ATMs are not always readily available, so it makes sense to have a reserve that you can exchange as needed.
- **Bring bills from the “large portrait” series, dated after 2000, and in good condition.** Look for crisp new money as torn, dirty, or taped U.S. bills will not be accepted.

Local Currency

For current exchange rates, please refer to an online converter tool like www.xe.com/currencyconverter, your bank, or the financial section of your newspaper.

Reminder: Good Condition Bills Only

You may have noticed the emphasis we've placed on the condition and age of your cash—advising that you bring bills from the “large portrait” series, dated after 2000, and in good condition. Think crisp new bills without tears, dirt, writing, etc.

This is because the use of U.S. bills as a “grey market” currency in Central Asia has led to a rise in counterfeits. Exchange offices and shops insist on bills in good condition so that they can judge if the money is real. What can be frustrating is that it is all in the eye of the beholder—what one business is willing to accept, another is not—but the closer to mint-condition the bill is, the more likely it will be accepted.

Uzbekistan: Uzbekistani som (so'm)

Tajikistan: Tajikistani Somoni (SM)

Kazakhstan: Kazakhstani Tenge (₸)

Kyrgyzstan: Kyrgystani Som (ЛБ)

How to Exchange Money

There is no need to obtain local currency before your trip. In fact, your U.S. bank may not carry it. You can change money when you arrive at the airport, or at banks, and money exchange offices. You can also go to an ATM to withdraw cash; the ATM will dispense local currency and your bank at home will convert that amount into U.S. dollars. Please note, while ATMs may be found in most cities in Central Asia, not all ATMs will accept U.S. cards, so you may need to try a few ATMs before finding one that works with your card. See notes on ATMs for more details and tips.

ATMs

When using the ATM, keep in mind that it may only accept cards from local banks, and may not allow cash advances on credit cards; you might need to try more than one ATM or more than one card.

Many banks charge a fee of \$1–\$10 each time you use a foreign ATM. Others may charge you a percentage of the amount you withdraw. We recommend that you check with your bank before you depart.

Lastly, don't forget to memorize the actual digits of your card's PIN number (many keypads at foreign ATMs do not include letters on their keys—they only display numbers.)

In most countries, ATMs are widely available in major cities. If you are in a rural location, it will likely be harder to find an ATM.

ATMs in Central Asia: Most cities in Central Asia will have some ATMs that take U.S. cards. However, there are some caveats:

- **You may end up trying multiple machines before you find one that works for you.** Your Trip Experience Leader can advise you of ATM locations, but can't guarantee it will accept your card.
- **ATMs are significantly harder to find outside of cities.** Stock up on currency or hit up the ATM before you go out into the countryside.
- **Many ATMs in this region charge a minimum of \$3 (USD) or up to a 3% service fee** (this is separate from the fees charged by your bank).

Credit & Debit Cards

While traveling, most countries and major cities will accept credit cards. Even if you don't plan on using a credit card during your trip, we still suggest that you bring one or two as a backup, especially if you are planning a large purchase (artwork, jewelry). We also suggest that you bring more than one brand of card (i.e. Visa, MasterCard, American Express) if possible, because not every shop will take every card. For example, although Discover and American Express cards are accepted in some countries outside the U.S., they are not widely adopted, so other brands will work at a much larger range of stores, restaurants, etc.

If you are visiting a country that does not commonly accept credit cards, they will be listed below.

Plastic isn't as commonly used in Central Asia as the U.S. or Europe. Depending on the country, you'll be able to use a card at hotels, some high-end restaurants, and shops that cater to tourists, but not at small restaurants, street vendors/bazaars, or business that cater more to locals. Uzbekistan in particular tends to be "cash only" (which is one of the reasons why we recommend you bring a cash reserve in U.S. dollars on this trip).

The businesses that do accept cards will almost always charge a 5% fee for this service. So although a credit card or two will be useful in some situations, you won't be able to rely on credit card alone, and you won't get the best price if you pay by card.

Notify Card Providers of Upcoming Travel

Many credit card companies and banks have fraud alert departments that will freeze your card if they see suspicious charges—such as charges or withdrawals from another country. To avoid an accidental security block, it is a good idea to notify your credit card company and/or bank you will be using your cards abroad. You can do this by calling their customer service number a week or two before your departure. Some banks or credit card companies will also let you do this online.

You should also double-check what phone number you could call if you have a problem with a card while you are abroad. Don't assume you can use the 1-800 number printed on the back of your card—most 1 800 numbers don't work outside of the U.S.!

Tipping Guidelines

Of course, whether you tip, and how much, is always at your own discretion. But for those of you who have asked for tipping suggestions, we offer these guidelines:

- **O.A.T. Trip Experience Leader:** It is customary to express a personal “thank you” to your Trip Experience Leader at the end of your trip. As a guideline, many travelers give \$8–\$12 USD (or equivalent in local currency) per person for each day their Trip Experience Leader is with them. *Please note that these tips can only be in cash. If you are taking any of the optional extensions, your Trip Experience Leader during the extension(s) may not be the same as the one on your main trip.*
- **Housekeeping staff at hotels:** \$1–2 per room, per night
- **Waiters:** Your Trip Experience Leader will tip waiters for included meals. If you are dining on your own remember that it is common to tip anywhere from 5%–10% in restaurants.
- **Taxi drivers:** If you are taking a taxi by yourself, keep in mind that tipping is not common practice, but many people simply let the driver keep the change by rounding up the fare to the next whole number.
- **Included in Your Trip Price:** Gratuities are included for local guides, drivers, and luggage porters on your main trip, extensions, and all optional tours.

Please note: Tips are quoted in U.S. dollars for budgeting purposes; tips can be converted and paid in local currency (this is usually preferred) or in U.S. dollars. Please do not use personal or traveler's checks for tips.

AIR, OPTIONAL TOURS & STAYING IN TOUCH

Land Only Travelers & Personalized Air

Quick Definitions

- **Land Only:** You will be booking your own international flights. Airport transfers are not included.
- **Air-Inclusive:** You booked international air with us. Airport transfers are included as long as you didn't customize your trip's dates (see next bullet).
- **Arrive Early or Stopover (select adventures only):** If you chose one of these Personalization options and purchased air through O.A.T, accommodations and airport transfers are included. However, if you chose one of our Personalization options, but did not purchase air through O.A.T., accommodations are included, but airport transfers are not. If you chose one of our Personalization options, and purchase air through O.A.T. but not the accommodations, the airport transfers are not included. We have included transfer options below.
- **Personalization on Your Own:** If you have not purchased air through O.A.T. and decided to arrive early, stay longer, or stop in a connecting city on your own, you are responsible for airport transfers and accommodations. For your convenience, a preliminary list of your included hotels is available on your My Planner at www.oattravel.com/myplanner under "My Reservations" to help you with selecting a hotel for your additional time.

Air Inclusive Travelers

If you have purchased international air with us, there are some points that may be helpful for you to know.

- **U.S. Departure:** If you are among a group of ten or more travelers who depart the U.S. from your international gateway city, it is our goal to have an O.A.T. Representative assist you at the U.S. airport with the check-in of your flight. Unless there are extenuating circumstances beyond our control, the Representative will be at the check-in counter three hours before your departure time. If you are flying domestically before your international flight, the representative will be stationed at the check-in counter for your departing international flight, not at the domestic arrival gate.
- **U.S. Return:** If you are among a group of ten or more travelers who return to the same U.S. gateway city, an O.A.T. Representative will meet you as you exit Customs and help you find taxis, buses, hotel accommodations, or connecting flights. Again, it is our goal to have our Representative waiting to assist your group. In rare instances, unforeseen circumstances may prevent this service.

- **Flying with a Travel Companion:** If you're traveling with a companion from a different household, and both of you are beginning and ending your trip at the same airport on the same dates, let us know you'd like to travel together and we'll make every effort to arrange this (please note, however, that this is not always possible). If you request any changes to your flights, please be sure that both you and your companion tell us that you still want to fly together.
- **Selecting Your Seats:** If your airline allows pre-assigned seats, you will be able to select and view them directly from the airline's website after booking. Some airlines will not allow seat confirmation until your reservation is ticketed 45–30 days prior to departure, and/or they may charge a nominal fee. You may locate your itinerary on an airline's website utilizing the Record Locator Number found on the Air Itinerary in your My Planner.

Airport Transfers Can Be Purchased

For eligible flights, airport transfers may be purchased separately as an optional add-on, subject to availability. To be eligible, your flight(s) must meet the following requirements:

- You must fly into or fly home from the same airport as O.A.T. travelers who purchased included airfare.
- Your flight(s) must arrive/depart on the same day that the group arrives or departs.
- If you are arriving early, you must have arranged the hotels through our Arrive Early personalization option

Airport transfers can be purchased up to 45 days prior to your departure; they are not available for purchase onsite. To learn more, or purchase airport transfers, please call our Travel Counselors at **1-800-221-0814**.

If you don't meet the requirements above, you'll need to make your own transfer arrangements. We suggest the Rome to Rio website as a handy resource: www.rome2rio.com

Optional Tours

Optional tours are additional add-on tours that allow you to personalize your adventure by tailoring it to your tastes and needs. And if you decide not to join an optional tour? Then you'll have free time to relax or explore on your own—it's about options, not obligations.

What You Need to Know

- All optional tours are subject to change and availability.
- Optional tours that are reserved with your Trip Experience Leader can be paid for using credit/debit cards only. We accept MasterCard, Visa, and Discover credit cards; we can also take MasterCard or Visa debit cards as long as the card allows you to sign for purchases. (You won't be able to enter a PIN.)

- To ensure that you are charged in U.S. dollars, your payment will be processed by our U.S. headquarters in Boston. This process can take up to three months, so we ask that you only use a card that will still be valid three months after your trip is over. The charge may appear on your credit card statement as being from Boston, MA or may be labeled as “OPT Boston”.
- Your Trip Experience Leader will give you details on the optional tours while you’re on the trip. But if you’d like to look over descriptions of them earlier, you can do so at any time by referring to your Day-to-Day Itinerary (available online by signing into My Planner at www.oattravel.com/myplanner).

Communicating with Home From Abroad

Central Asia does not offer the communications systems and amenities you may be used to at home. As times progress, more and more mobile services are appearing, especially in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, while Uzbekistan and Tajikistan still have progress to make.

To ensure you are available during your trip to friends and relatives at home, you will receive two copies of your hotel list, including phone numbers, with your Final Documents. One copy is for you to bring, and one to leave behind with friends or relatives in case they need to contact you during the trip. Understand that it may be difficult for friends and family to leave messages for you. (Not all hotel staff will speak English.) Please explain to your friends and family that you will not be immediately available at all times during your trip.

Cell Phones

If you want to use your cell phone on the trip, check with your phone provider to see if your phone and service will work outside of the U.S. It may turn out to be cheaper to rent an international phone or buy a SIM card onsite. If you want to use a local SIM, just make certain your phone can accept one.

Calling Apps

We recommend you use WhatsApp while abroad to communicate home and with your Trip Experience Leader while onsite. You will need a Wi-Fi connection if you do not have international coverage. Other calling options include smartphone apps such as Skype or FaceTime. You will need a Wi-Fi connection for these apps and the calls may count towards your phone plan’s data allowance. Many smartphones—and some tablets or laptops—come with one of these apps pre-installed or you can download them for free from the appropriate apps store.

Calling Cards and 1-800 Numbers

When calling the U.S. from a foreign country, a prepaid calling card can be useful because it circumvents unexpected charges from the hotel. Calling cards purchased locally are typically the best (less expensive, more likely to work with the local phones, etc.).

One reminder: Do not call U.S. 1-800 numbers outside the continental United States. This can result in costly long distance fees, since 1-800 numbers do not work outside the country.

Internet

Wireless Internet service is available in some locations but not all; some hotels will have it in the lobby but not in the rooms. Some of hotels we use on this itinerary will have a computer available—usually in the lobby or some other common room—that will let you send and receive email. There are also occasional Internet cafes at various points along this trip.

How to Call Overseas

When calling overseas from the U.S., dial 011 for international exchange, then the country code (indicated by a plus sign: +), and then the number. Note that foreign phone numbers may not have the same number of digits as U.S. numbers; even within a country the number of digits can vary depending on the city and if the phone is a land line or cell phone.

Uzbekistan: +998

Kazakhstan: +7

Tajikistan: +992

Kyrgyzstan: +996

PACKING: WHAT TO BRING & LUGGAGE LIMITS

Luggage Limits

MAIN TRIP LIMITS	
Pieces per person	One checked bag and one carry-on per person.
Weight restrictions	Checked baggage is limited to 50 lbs total ; Carry-ons are limited to 17 lbs total .
Size Restrictions	Varies by airline. Measured in linear inches (<i>length+width+depth</i>). Generally, 62 linear inches is the checked bag limit; carry-on limit is 45 linear inches .
Luggage Type	Duffel bag or soft-sided suitcase with wheels . Please do not bring a hard-sided (clamshell) suitcase.
TRIP EXTENSION(S) LIMITS	
Same as main trip.	
REMARKS/SUGGESTIONS	
<p>Luggage rules: Luggage rules and limits are set by governmental and airline policy. Enforcement of the rules may include spot checks or may be inconsistent. However one thing is the same across the board: If you are found to have oversized or overweight luggage, you will be subject to additional fees, to be assessed by—and paid to—the airline in question.</p> <p>Wheeled luggage is highly recommended as you will need to carry your own luggage at border crossings.</p>	

Don't Forget:

- **These luggage limits may change.** If the airline(s) notify us of any changes, we will include an update in your Final Documents booklet.
- It's a good idea to reconfirm baggage restrictions and fees directly with the airline a week or so prior to departure. For your convenience, we maintain a list of the toll-free numbers for the most common airlines on our website in the FAQ section.
- **Baggage fees are not included in your trip price;** they are payable directly to the airlines.

- The luggage limits above are based on your regional flights, which may be less than your international flights. Even if your international airline offers a larger weight limit, you will need to pack according to the lower restrictions.

Your Luggage

Checked Luggage

One duffel bag or soft-sided suitcase. Look for one with heavy nylon fabric, wrap-around handles, built-in wheels, and a heavy duty lockable zipper. Please do not bring a rigid (plastic shell) suitcase.

Wheels are highly recommended as you will need to carry your own luggage at border crossings.

Carry-on Bag

You are allowed one carry-on bag per person. We suggest a tote or small backpack that can be used as both a carry-on bag for your flight and to carry your daily necessities—water bottle, camera, etc—during your daily activities.

Locks

For flights that originate in the U.S., you can either use a TSA-approved lock or leave your luggage unlocked. Outside of the U.S. we strongly recommend locking your luggage as a theft-prevention measure.

Clothing Suggestions: Functional Tips

As you will experience a wide range of temperatures and weather conditions, we suggest several layers of clothing. If you like to hand-wash your clothes, look for fabrics that will dry out overnight. You can buy clothing designed especially for travel, with features like wrinkle-resistant fabric or built-in sun protection.

- **Bring rain gear (year round) and warm clothing (winter, spring, and fall):** Rainfall can occur at any time of year, so don't forget a waterproof jacket, poncho, or folding umbrella. Winter can be downright cold, and in early spring and late fall, temperatures can be chilly. Late fall through early spring bring warm gear such as a fleece, sweaters, and a coat.
- **Choose your shoes carefully:** You'll be on your feet a lot during the trip, and walking over some rough and slippery surfaces. Your shoes should be comfortable with good arch support and good traction. When selecting footwear remember that it is very common to take your shoes off in mosques and in local homes. You'll want at least one pair that you can get in and out without a struggle, and perhaps some extra socks.

Dress Codes & Style Hints

- **Dress on our trip is functional and casual.** You might want to bring one slightly dressier outfit for dining on your own at nicer restaurants or for the Farewell Dinner, but that is completely up to you.

- **If you want to blend in, opt for modest dress.** Locals tend to wear long skirts or trousers instead of shorts, so you'll be less conspicuous if you do the same. If you absolutely cannot do without shorts, they should be at least knee-length. A short-sleeve top with a modest neckline is also considered a more appropriate choice than sleeveless tops.
- **Modest clothing is especially important at religious sites and homes.** In mosques, orthodox churches, and homes the expectation is that you will cover your shoulders and cover your legs—at least to the knees. Some mosques may hand you a wrap and ask you to wear inside to ensure you are properly covered; this is common throughout the Muslim world. It is also common to remove your shoes in a mosque or in a home; you may wish to bring a couple extra pairs of socks for these occasions.
- **Headscarves are not required, but a scarf may be useful on occasion.** Female travelers will not be expected to wear a headscarf on a daily basis, but may be asked to cover their hair as a sign of respect in a mosque or an orthodox church. If that happens, you can usually rent or borrow one from the mosque/church. Or consider bringing a large scarf from home that can double as an accessory or a wrap for chilly evenings. (That way you'll get more use out of it.)

Suggested Packing Lists

We have included suggestions from Trip Experience Leaders and former travelers to help you pack. These packing lists are only jumping-off points—they offer recommendations based on experience, but not requirements. We recommend using www.weather.com and consulting the “Climate” chapter of this handbook.

And don't forget a reusable water bottle—you'll need it to take advantage of any refills we offer as we are working to eliminate single-use plastic bottles on all of our trips.

Recommended Clothing

- ☐ Shirts: A mixture of short and long-sleeved shirts in a breathable fabric.
- ☐ Trousers and/or jeans: Comfortable and loose-fitting so you can move easily or sit through long bus rides.
- ☐ Travel skirt: Female travelers can wear trousers or jeans on this trip without any issue. But if you like to wear skirts, please know that knee-length or longer is best.
- ☐ Shoes and socks: Shoes should be comfortable with good arch support and good traction. Some types of shoes that would be good choices are running shoes, trekking shoes, or light hiking boots. It is common practice to remove your shoes in mosques and in local homes, so consider a pair that you can get on and off without struggle, and perhaps bring a couple extra pairs of socks.
- ☐ Underwear and sleepwear. For female travelers, we suggest one of two sports bras—the roads are very bumpy.

- ☐ Light rain jacket/windbreaker with hood

Seasonal Clothing Recommendations

Summer

- ☐ Light materials that breathe—cotton, linen, etc. Summer can bring extreme heat waves to the region.
- ☐ Shorts aren't really considered culturally appropriate in most of Central Asia, but they're OK in some places if they are knee-length.
- ☐ Light cotton or wool sweater as motor coach air conditioning can be cold
- ☐ Swimsuit, for the occasional hotel pool

Late fall, winter, and early spring

- ☐ Bring layers! Layers are your friend.
- ☐ Cold-weather gear: sweater, fleece, jacket/coat
- ☐ Hat, gloves, scarf
- ☐ Long or thermal underwear

Essential Items

- ☐ Daily essentials: toothbrush, toothpaste, floss, hairbrush or comb, shaving items, deodorant, etc. Our hotels will provide the basics like soap and shampoo, but most hotels do not provide conditioner or a washcloth, so you may wish to pack some.
- ☐ Travel-sized toilet paper and/or packets of tissues
- ☐ Anti-bacterial "water-free" hand cleanser and/or sanitizing hand wipes
- ☐ Spare eyeglasses/contact lenses
- ☐ Sunglasses
- ☐ Sunscreen, SPF 15 or stronger
- ☐ Insect repellent
- ☐ Travel money bag or money belt
- ☐ Light folding umbrella

- ☐ Folding hiking pole, sold in most camping stores
- ☐ Electrical transformer & plug adapters

Medicines & First Aid Gear

- ☐ Your own prescription medicines
- ☐ Travel first aid kit: Band-Aids, headache and pain relief, laxatives and anti-diarrhea tablets, something for upset stomach. Maybe a cold remedy, moleskin foot pads, antibiotic cream, or allergy medication.
- ☐ An antibiotic medication for gastrointestinal illness
- ☐ Optional: A strong prescription pain medication for rare emergency purposes

TIP: The State Department says that if you are bringing any narcotic, psychotropic medication, or sleep aid into Uzbekistan you bring a letter from your doctor outlining the diagnosis, name of the medication, and dosage. In addition, you should also bring a copy of the actual prescription for all of your prescription medications. See the Health chapter for more details.

Home-Hosted Visits

Many of our adventures feature a visit with a local family, often as part of the *A Day in the Life* experience. It is customary, though not necessary, to return your hosts' generosity with a small gift. If you do bring a gift, we recommend that you bring something the whole family can enjoy, or something that represents your region, state, or hometown. Get creative and keep it small—peach jelly from Georgia, maple sugar candy from New England, orange blossom soap from California; something that can be used or used up is best. When choosing a gift, be certain to consider the local culture as well. For example, we do not recommend alcohol in Muslim countries because it is forbidden in Islam, and your hosts may be religious. Not all O.A.T. adventures include a Home-Hosted Visit; please check your final itinerary before you depart.

Electricity Abroad

When traveling overseas, the voltage is usually different and the plugs might not be the same shape.

Voltage

Electricity in Central Asia is 220 volts. In the U.S. it is 110 volts. Most of the things a traveler will want to plug in—battery chargers, smartphones, tablets or computers—can run off both 110 and 220–240. But you should check the item or the owner's guide first to confirm this before you plug it in. If you have something that needs 110 volts—like a shaver or a hairdryer—you can bring a transformer to change the current. (But transformers tend to burn out, so it might be better to leave whatever it is at home.)

Plugs

The shape of plugs will vary from country to country, and sometimes even within a country depending on when that building was built. To plug something from the U.S. into a local socket you'll need an adapter that fits between the plug and the socket. Because there are many different types of plugs in this region, it may be easier to purchase an all-in-one, universal adapter/converter combo. Versatile and lightweight, these can usually be found at your local electronics goods or hardware stores. Sometimes you can buy them at large retailers too, like Target or Walmart. If you forget to bring an adapter, you might also find them for sale at the airport when you arrive at your destination.

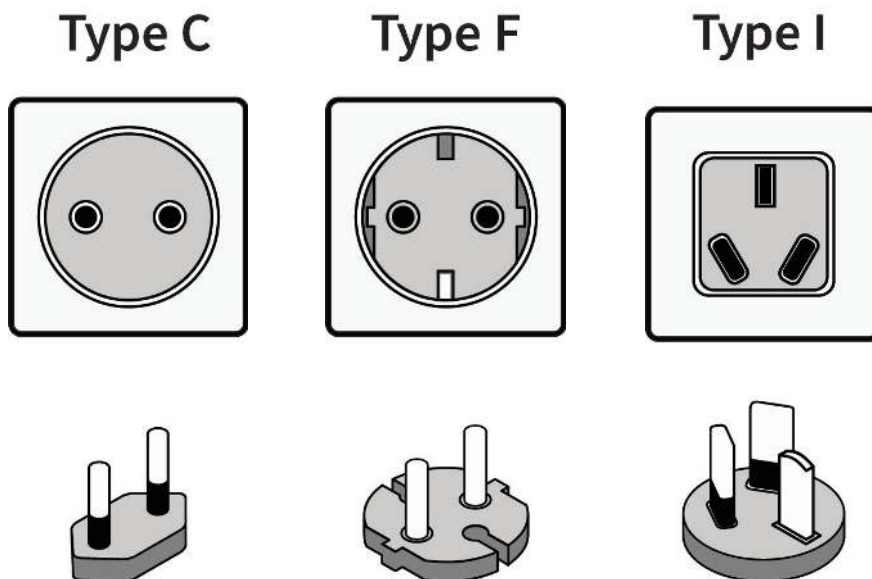
Different plug shapes are named by letters of the alphabet. Standard U.S. plugs are Type A and Type B. Here is the list of plugs for the countries on this trip:

Uzbekistan: C, F and/or I

Tajikistan: C, F and/or I

Kazakhstan: C and F

Kyrgyzstan: C and F



Availability

A constant electricity supply cannot be guaranteed during overnight stays. Travelers dependent on electricity supply (as in the case of those with sleep apnea) should consider a different O.A.T. adventure.

CLIMATE & AVERAGE TEMPERATURES

Uzbekistan: Uzbekistan is mostly flat, and only gives way to mountains at the eastern border with Kyrgyzstan. This results in a continental climate with a strong difference between summer and winter. It is not unheard of for summer temperatures to spike up to 90 degrees—or even higher during a heat wave—or for winter lows to drop to freezing. Uzbekistan’s climate is sometimes compared with the U.S. plains states, like Kansas, Nebraska, and Oklahoma.

Tajikistan: Tajikistan’s summers have been described as “scorching”. The highs can easily be in the 90s or higher. Spring and fall are far more pleasant, with temperatures in the range of 40–60 degrees, while winter lows usually hover around the 30s. Snowfall is a possibility, but rain is more common, with April and May being the rainiest months.

Kazakhstan: Bigger than the other “Stans” combined, Kazakhstan covers a lot of different terrain. But the areas we’ll visit fall into southeastern Kazakhstan, near the Kyrgyzstan border. In this region high temperatures tend to be in the 60s in spring and fall, summer highs are usually in the 80s, and winter highs generally stay in the 30s or 40s. Winter can be very cold, with temperatures below freezing and some snow. The wettest months are in April and May.

Kyrgyzstan: Roughly 65% of the country falls into either the Pamir or the Tian Shan mountain ranges, resulting in a colder climate than some of the neighboring countries (especially up at high elevations). Bishkek has a humid continental climate that is similar to the Mid-Atlantic States—think cold winters with some snow, and warm, humid summers. Lake Issyk-Kul is higher in elevation, so the average temperature is even colder, with below freezing winters and snowfall from October through April. In summer, the high temperatures are usually in the 80s (Bishkek) or 70s (Lake Issyk-Kul).

Climate Averages & Online Forecast

The following charts reflect the **average** climate as opposed to exact weather conditions. This means they serve only as general indicators of what can reasonably be expected. An extreme heat wave or cold snap could fall outside these ranges. As your departure approaches, we encourage you to use **www.weather.com** for a more accurate forecast of the locations you visit.

Average Daily High/Low Temperatures (°F), Humidity & Monthly Rainfall

MONTH	TASHKENT, UZBEKISTAN			BUKHARA, UZBEKISTAN		
	Temp. High-Low	% Relative Humidity (am-pm)	Monthly Rainfall (inches)	Temp. High-Low	% Relative Humidity (avg)	Monthly Rainfall (inches)
JAN	44 to 29	79 to 61	2.1	37 to 27	73	0.9
FEB	49 to 32	77 to 56	2.5	36 to 24	69	0.7
MAR	59 to 41	74 to 52	2.7	49 to 35	60	1.3
APR	72 to 50	74 to 43	2.4	60 to 46	52	1.2
MAY	82 to 57	72 to 35	1.6	63 to 53	40	0.4
JUN	92 to 64	59 to 25	0.6	68 to 59	33	--
JUL	96 to 68	58 to 25	0.2	73 to 63	33	--
AUG	95 to 64	63 to 25	--	75 to 60	34	--
SEP	85 to 55	65 to 27	0.2	74 to 54	40	--
OCT	71 to 46	74 to 39	0.9	61 to 42	51	0.2
NOV	59 to 39	76 to 51	1.7	50 to 35	63	0.5
DEC	48 to 32	77 to 62	2.3	39 to 29	73	0.8

MONTH	KHIVA, UZBEKISTAN			DUSHANBE, TAJIKISTAN		
	Temp. High-Low	% Relative Humidity (avg)	Monthly Rainfall (inches)	Temp. High-Low	% Relative Humidity (avg)	Monthly Rainfall (inches)
JAN	35 to 19	76	0.3	49 to 31	66	0.9
FEB	42 to 24	70	0.3	51 to 35	68	2.6
MAR	55 to 34	63	0.7	60 to 42	65	4.5
APR	72 to 48	52	0.7	69 to 49	65	4.6
MAY	84 to 59	41	0.4	79 to 56	57	2.6
JUN	94 to 68	36	0.1	91 to 64	40	0.5
JUL	97 to 71	39	0.1	96 to 67	38	0.2
AUG	94 to 67	41	--	94 to 63	40	--
SEP	83 to 55	44	0.1	86 to 55	43	0.2
OCT	69 to 43	53	0.2	74 to 46	56	1.3
NOV	52 to 32	66	0.4	60 to 38	64	1.9
DEC	39 to 24	77	0.5	51 to 33	68	2.0

MONTH	ALMATY, KAZAKHSTAN			BISHKEK, KYRGYZSTAN		
	Temp. High-Low	% Relative Humidity (am-pm)	Monthly Rainfall (inches)	Temp. High-Low	% Relative Humidity (am-pm)	Monthly Rainfall (inches)
JAN	33 to 24	81 to 65	1.1	38 to 19	79 to 66	1.0
FEB	36 to 24	82 to 64	1.2	41 to 23	82 to 64	1.3
MAR	48 to 31	82 to 63	2.4	52 to 33	84 to 61	2.2
APR	63 to 37	71 to 48	3.7	65 to 44	77 to 44	2.6
MAY	72 to 47	69 to 46	3.7	75 to 52	74 to 41	2.4
JUN	82 to 52	60 to 41	2.2	84 to 60	64 to 32	1.3
JUL	86 to 55	54 to 34	1.4	89 to 64	57 to 23	0.8
AUG	85 to 54	56 to 32	1.0	88 to 62	57 to 25	0.5
SEP	76 to 47	62 to 36	1.0	78 to 52	63 to 29	0.7
OCT	61 to 40	76 to 50	2.0	64 to 41	75 to 43	1.8
NOV	47 to 33	80 to 64	1.9	52 to 32	78 to 59	1.7
DEC	36 to 27	81 to 68	1.3	41 to 23	80 to 68	1.4

ABOUT YOUR DESTINATIONS: CULTURE, ETIQUETTE & MORE

O.A.T. Trip Experience Leaders: A World of Difference

During your adventure, you'll be accompanied by one of our local, Trip Experience Leaders. All are fluent in English and possess the skills, certification, and experience necessary to ensure an enriching adventure. As locals of the regions you'll explore with them, our Trip Experience Leaders provide the kind of firsthand knowledge and insight that make local history, culture, and wildlife come alive. Coupled with their unbridled enthusiasm, caring personalities, and ability to bring diverse groups of travelers together, our Trip Experience Leaders ensure that your experience with O.A.T. is one you'll remember for a lifetime.

The Cultures of Central Asia

Central Asia is, by its most common definition, those five “stans” that were formerly republics within the Soviet Union: Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. The Soviets tried to make these ethnic republics, but could never draw a clean line because the populations were so mixed. These countries were once the center of multiple nomadic empires, khanates, and tribes, including the Scythians, Mongols, Persians, Seljuks, and Turks. So today's arbitrary political borders have little to do with the pluralism that has thrived here—and overlapped—for centuries.

The most noticeable similarity is religious: the stans are all majority Muslim populations, with Russian Orthodoxy as the largest minority religion. With the exception of Tajikistan, where a Persian language is spoken, all the other Stans speak a Turkic language. Having occupied lands that were crisscrossed by the Silk Road trade routes, each country has a long history of commercial and cultural exchange, and because of that, an extremely high emphasis is placed on hospitality. Another commonality is the high esteem in which all these countries hold elders.

The most significant cultural differentiator has to do with lifestyles: the Uzbeks and Tajiks have long been settled peoples, and their neighbors, the Kazakhs, Kyrgyz and Turkmen, were (until very recently) largely nomadic.

The people of **Uzbekistan** claim lineage from the Islamicized descendants of Genghis Khan. Their ancestral home was in southern Siberia, but after centuries of nomadism (and warfare), they arrived in Uzbekistan and gradually settled as farmers. Many Uzbeks come from outside this lineage, but during the Soviet era, the government labeled many smaller groups as Uzbeks in order to prevent ethnic unrest and more easily govern them. Uzbek society is built upon a tight-knit network of neighborhood councils. In the cities these are known as *mahalla* (literally, “districts”); in rural areas, they are called *kishlak*; and they are always presided over by elders.

The people of **Tajikistan** descend from the ancient Indo-European Aryans, and as such they are relatives of present-day Afghans and Iranians. But when the Soviets redrew the regional borders, many Uzbeks, Kyrgyz, Turkmen, Kazakhs, Uyghur, Russians, Ukrainians, and Bukharan and European Jews were suddenly, nominally, Tajiks. It was not a happy union, and after the fall of the Soviet Union, civil war erupted. Sadly, the levels of literacy and poverty have also worsened

since the Soviets left. As in neighboring Uzbekistan, many communities are divided into *mahallas*, or neighborhoods, which are governed by respected elders. Traditionally, when a man holds a religious office or becomes a grandfather, he grows a beard.

Tajikistan's constitution assigns equal rights to both genders, but in reality, men have far more power and status. At social gatherings, men and women often are separated. Most marriages are arranged, and couples are often promised in infancy. A woman beyond the age of 23 is considered unmarriageable unless she becomes a second wife. Polygamy is illegal, but the practice is nonetheless common and a first wife will rarely leave even if her husband takes a second wife. Traditionally, the youngest son, with his wife and children, lives with his parents and takes care of them. As such, he is the heir to family property. The elder father is the family patriarch, and the mother has authority over her daughter-in-law.

In **Kyrgyzstan**, the word *kirkkyz* means "forty girls," and people believe that they are descended from the forty tribes these ladies gave birth to. Even so, one of the most revered heroes is Manas, the legendary father of the Kyrgyz people whose exploits are recounted in a national epic. He is often depicted astride a rearing horse, waving a sword. But the Kyrgyz people do not identify as warriors as much as artists. Their yurt-like homes are highly decorated and are seen as showcases of Kyrgyz art. They are adorned with brilliant carpets called *shirdaks*, but other important crafts include saddle-making, embroidery, goldsmithing, and leather making.

Strangers do not usually acknowledge each other in passing, but casual contact such as making a purchase at a market can lead to introductions, and invitations into the home.

Kyrgyz women are not as sequestered as their neighboring sisters, and they often work outside the home, but their status is still inferior to men. Marriages are less likely to be arranged, but a bride's family must provide a dowry. Tribes become important during marriage, because two people from the same tribe may not marry. A groom is expected to pay a bride price, but there is an alternate tradition of bride stealing that permits a man to kidnap any unmarried girl and make her his wife. After spending the night with her husband, the girl will be brought to her mother-in-law and declared married. It is legal to sue a man who steals a bride, but it is considered shameful to do so. Few men would ever marry a stolen but relinquished bride.

Kazakhstan is the largest of the stans, and is somewhat of a cultural outlier. The Kazakhs' adherence to Islam is looser, and since Russians absorbed them earlier (starting in the mid-1800s), the impact of Russification is stronger here. Plus, modernity has been spurred by the country's oil wealth and free-market economy. The cities are cosmopolitan and women face fewer restrictions than their counterparts in other stans.

Kazakhs trace their lineage to rebellious, 15th-century horsemen who broke from their Uzbek khan and settled in the north in what is now Kazakhstan. They separated into three hordes or *zhuz*: the Great (southern), Middle (north and east Kazakhstan) and Little (west Kazakhstan). These clan associations still have a tremendous bearing today. A popular pastime is the *aitys*, a form of verbal sparring in which two people will boast about their own town, region or clan while disparaging the other's. It involves witticisms, puns, and verses full of cultural allusions, and the person who fails to find a snappy comeback loses.

Accommodations

Because you are traveling to an undiscovered part of the world, you'll find that many of the hotels on this trip offer very basic accommodations. This means that while you will find all of the essentials, but you may encounter firm mattresses, limited dining options, or outdated furniture. Many hotels do not have elevators due to the age of the building.

Our Vehicles & Road Conditions

On this adventure, you will (very literally) be taking the road less traveled as you discover the hidden gems of Central Asia.

Therefore, it's important to note that the roads in Central Asia, particularly in Uzbekistan, are not always well-maintained. This can result in slower travel and very bumpy drives. Some travelers find an inflatable seat cushion to be valuable on the longer drives.

We travel in buses that do not have toilet facilities on board; however we do make convenience stops on a regular basis. Toilet facilities will be Asian-style (squat toilets) and may lack running water. We suggest that you bring toilet paper and hand sanitizer or wipes with you for these convenience stops.

Meals

The meals on this trip will consist of local specialties, such as a meat, soup, or salad. Vegetarian dishes are generally very simple, featuring steamed, stewed, or fried vegetables. Western food is very limited.

Religion

Islam is the predominant religion in most of Central Asia, so an understanding of the religion will assist your discoveries. Practicing Muslims are expected to pray five times daily: at dawn, noon, afternoon, sunset, and evening. Some newspapers will print the exact time each day, but others will rely on the call to prayer. The call to prayer, called the *ezan*, is sung or broadcast from minaret towers to remind the faithful that it is time to pray. Friday is the Muslim Sabbath day, but businesses in the region usually remain open.

When visiting a mosque, it is polite to be modestly dressed (no bare shoulders, no short skirts or shorts). You will be asked to remove your shoes before entering. In some mosques, female visitors are not required to cover their hair, in others you may be asked to do so. Typically a mosque that requires special dress for female visitors will have pieces to lend or rent.

The biggest religious holiday is Ramadan, a month-long celebration that is meant to teach the values of restraint and charity. During Ramadan, Muslims fast from dawn to dusk. Fasting includes no eating, drinking alcohol, cigarette-smoking, or gum-chewing. Visitors are not required to fast; however, alcohol may not be served in some establishments and some restaurants are closed. The museums and archaeological sites remain open.

Each night at sunset, families and friends gather together to celebrate *iftar*—the breaking of the fast. The festivities often continue well into the night. The mosques and some streets are decorated with lanterns, special meals are prepared for the evening breaking of the fast, and nighttime social events and festivals are planned. Ramadan follows a lunar calendar, so its dates change significantly from year to year—in 2017, Ramadan will begin at sunset on May 26th and continue until June 19th.

TIP: *Although alcohol is forbidden by Islam, attitudes towards alcohol are more relaxed in Central Asia than in the Middle East. You may want to try one of the local vodka brands—a holdover from the Soviet days. Just don't bring alcohol as a gift for the locals—if someone is personally strict in adhering to Islam, they won't be able to enjoy it.*

Central Asia is also home to large populations of Eastern Orthodox Christians. This is perhaps not surprising when you realize that put together, the Eastern Orthodox churches are the second-largest Christian denomination in the world, with an estimated 300 million followers. The different church bodies are usually organized by nation—Greek Orthodox, Russian Orthodox, etc—but are united by similar doctrine. (In Central Asia, it is the Russian Orthodox Church that is the most common.)

Practicing Orthodox Christians are expected to be baptized in the faith, to attend church regularly, and study the Orthodox bible (which contains books not included in the Protestant bible). When visiting an Orthodox religious building such as a church or monastery, it is considered polite to be covered from shoulders to below the knees—no shorts, no sleeveless shirts, and no low or revealing necklines. Female visitors may be asked to cover their hair.

Language Barrier

The main languages of Central Asia—Turkmen, Uzbek, Kyrgyz, and Kazakh—all share Turkic roots, and their usage transcends national borders based on the dispersal of different ethnic populations throughout the region. For instance, Turkmen is the official tongue in Turkmenistan but is also spoken in pockets of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. Most of these languages were originally written in the Arabic alphabet; the Soviets replaced this with the Cyrillic alphabet; and in the post-Soviet era the Latin alphabet has gradually become the norm. The exception is the Tajik language, which is related to and mutually intelligible with Persian (Farsi). It has been written in the Cyrillic alphabet since 1939. Russian is the most widely spoken foreign language, with English quickly gaining in popularity (though still not widely spoken).

You can have some great “conversations” with local people, even if you don’t speak a word of the local language. To break the ice, bring along some family photographs, or a few postcards of your hometown. Keep in mind, however, that it is always good form to know at least a few words in the local language. Your attire is a key part of your non-verbal presentation. See the Packing chapter for more details on dress in Central Asia.

Toilets

Although all our accommodations feature western-style toilets, almost all rest stops on the road and almost all public restrooms will have eastern-style squat toilets. For female travelers who are novices at using a squat toilet, a skirt might be easier to maneuver than trousers. (This does not mean you need to wear a skirt every day, just that it might be worthwhile to bring a skirt for days with long transfers through small villages.) Another option is to wear trousers, but roll up the legs. Some former travelers to Asia have also suggested looking into a device like a GoGirl or Shewee.

Public toilets will be hard to find on this adventure; it is just not a common facility in this part of the world. And inevitably, when one is found it is out of toilet paper, or soap, or both. Carry a travel-sized roll of toilet paper or packets of tissues along with something to clean your hands—like anti-bacterial gel or hand wipes—and you'll be prepared no matter what. Rest stops on the road will be widely spaced, and may be extremely basic. (There's a reason we call this trip an adventure!)

Taking Photographs

The etiquette of photographing people in most countries is about the same as it would be on the streets of your hometown. You need permission to take a close-up, but not for a crowd scene. Be especially polite if you want to photograph children or older women. If you want to shoot a great portrait, show interest in your subject and try to have a bit of social interaction first. Then use sign language to inquire if a picture is OK.

Please do not take photographs of military personnel, military compounds, or other official institutions/personnel (such as police). This may result in the confiscation of your camera.

In museums or at archaeological sites, there may be restrictions on using your flash. Please obey any signs or directions by staff; the no-flash rule protects the fragile artifacts and artwork from damage by repeated exposure to light. Occasionally, there may also be a small fee levied by the museum or site for the privilege of taking photos.

Safety & Security

As you travel, exercise the same caution and awareness that you would in a large American city. Don't be overly nervous or suspicious, but keep your eyes open. If you are venturing out after dark, go with one or two other people.

Carry a one-day supply of cash, and your passport, in a travel pouch. Don't leave valuables unattended in your hotel room. Most hotels will offer use of a hotel safe at the front desk or an electronic in-room safe (for which you can set your own personal number). Please utilize this.

Pickpockets may create a sudden distraction. In any sort of puzzling street situation, try to keep one hand on your wallet or money belt. If an encounter with a local turns out to be long and complicated and involves money or your valuables, be very careful.

Central Asian Cuisine

Since the stans were not countries per se until the Soviet era, none of them really boast what would be called a “national cuisine.” Instead, there are dishes that are specialties of the various tribes and ethnic groups, with a lot of overlap. A lot of influences, too: lying along the Silk Road, the communities of the stans enjoyed a steady flow spices and ingredients and the culinary contributions of chefs from China, India, Persia, the Middle East, and beyond.

Central Asians are famously carnivores, but there are also many **salads** (often with mayonnaise) and fresh fruits like **apricots**, **melons**, and **cherries** that are often served with **blini** pancakes. You will also find fantastic **dairy** products, including some of the best yogurt in the world. Bear in mind that not all dairy here comes from cows: sheep, goat, camels, and horses are also milked. Fermented milks are very popular (and an acquired taste.) Many doughs and batters incorporate sour milk products, giving them a tangy flavor. You might find dishes like these:

- **Plov:** (called *pilau* in Tajikistan) is the Central Asian version of rice pilaf. The rice will be simmered with mutton, onions, carrots, raisins, chickpeas or even fruit slices. It is usually cooked in a hemispherical cauldron called a *kazan* and will be presented with a flourish as the centerpiece of a special meal.
- **Shaslik:** A skewer of seasoned mutton, chicken, pork or beef cooked on a grill called a *mangal*. The skewers may also contain grilled vegetables. Shaslik is usually served with chewy **nan** (Indian-style flatbread) and onions marinated in vinegar.
- **Jigger:** A liver kebab.
- **Laghmam:** If you like Asian noodles try these long, hand-pulled pasta with lamb (or goat), pepper, and tomato sauce.
- **Manpar:** Noodles broken up and served in a savory broth with meat and vegetables.
- **Beshbarmak:** Similar to *manpar*, but the meat may be lamb (or horsemeat) and the large, flat noodles are sometimes served separately. This dish is found in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.
- **Manty:** Start your meal with these round dumplings filled with minced mutton and onion, often served with a side of yogurt and tomato salad. In Uzbekistan, they are sometimes filled with pumpkin. In Kyrgyzstan, a similar treat is called **oromo**.
- **Samsa:** This tasty snack is a triangular meat and cheese pastry baked in a clay oven. Sometimes it is made with a potato or pumpkin filling.
- **Borsok:** Sweet doughnut-like puffs that are deep fired and dipped in cream.

Shopping: What to Buy, Customs, Shipping & More

There may be scheduled visits to local shops during your adventure. There is no requirement to make a purchase during these stops, and any purchase made is a direct transaction with the shop in question, subject to the vendor's terms of purchase. O.A.T. is not responsible for purchases you make on your trip or for the shipment of your purchases.

Returns

If you discover an issue with an item, you should contact the vendor directly and expect that any resolution will take longer than it would in the U.S. We recommend that you keep a copy of all your receipts, invoices, or contracts, along with the shop's contact information. Keep in mind, local practice may vary from U.S. standards, so don't assume that you have a certain number of days after the purchase to speak up or that you are guaranteed a refund.

Crafts & Souvenirs

Central Asia & the Silk Route: Central Asia offers many fine craft items at good prices and active local markets. Due to the longstanding influence of the Silk Road, local produce markets and traditional bazaars are still very much a part of daily life here. Traditional souvenirs include ceramics, rugs, copperware and brassware, wooden boxes, and embroidery—but even if you're not looking for souvenirs, remember the markets and bazaars will offer a great opportunity to interact with the locals.

Uzbekistan: Uzbekistan is famous with for ceramics, felt caps, clothes, rugs, tent decorations, and woodwork.

U.S. Customs Regulations & Shipping Charges

For all things related to U.S. Customs, the ultimate authority is the U.S. Bureau of Customs & Border Protection. Their website, www.cbp.gov has the answers to the most frequently asked questions. Or you can call them at **1-877-227-5511**.

The top three points to know are:

- At time of writing, your personal duty-free allowance is \$800 for items brought with you. Items totaling more than \$800 are subject to duty fees.
- **Items shipped home are always subject to duty when received in the U.S.** Even when the shop has offered to include shipping and duties in the price, this typically means shipping to the nearest customs facility and payment of the export duties—not door-to-door shipping or payment of the import duties. All additional duties or shipping charges would be your responsibility. Unless an item is small enough to send by parcel service (like FedEx), chances are you will need to arrange shipping or pick-up once the item is in the U.S. and will need to pay customs duties.

- It is illegal to import products made from endangered animal species. U.S. Customs & Border Protection will seize these items, as well as most furs, coral, tortoise shell, reptile skins, feathers, plants, and items made from animal skins.

Antiques

The rules about taking antiques out of the “Stans” are strict, especially in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. That, coupled with the high likelihood of forgeries, means you should steer away from buying antiques unless you are dealing with a reputable shop that can walk you through the customs implications and provide the necessary documentation.

DEMOGRAPHICS & HISTORY

Uzbekistan

Facts, Figures & National Holidays

- **Area:** 172,742 square miles
- **Capital:** Tashkent
- **Languages:** Uzbek is the official language; Russian and Tajik are also spoken.
- **Ethnicities:** Uzbek 80%, Russian 5.5%, Tajik 5%, Kazakh 3%, Karakalpak 2.5%, Tatar 1.5%, other 2.5%
- **Location:** In Central Asia, between Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan
- **Geography:** Most of Uzbekistan has a desert climate marked by long, hot summers and short, mild winters. There is, however, a small area of semiarid grassland in the eastern part of the country known as the Fergana Valley. The Fergana Valley is surrounded by Uzbekistan's mountainous border with Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. Uzbekistan is a doubly landlocked country—one of only two in the world—meaning you'd have to cross at least two other countries to get to an ocean. It does, however, have 260 miles of coastline along the Aral Sea (an inland sea with no outlet to the ocean). The Amu Darya, Syr Darya (Sirdaryo), and Zarafshon Rivers all flow through Uzbekistan.
- **Population:** 32,768,725
- **Religions:** Muslim 88% (mostly Sunni), Eastern Orthodox 9%, other 3%
- **Time Zone:** Uzbekistan is nine hours ahead of Eastern Daylight Time (EDT). When it is noon in Washington D.C., it is 9pm in Tashkent.

National Holidays: Uzbekistan

In addition to the holidays listed below, Uzbekistan celebrates a number of national holidays that follow a lunar calendar, such as Eid-al-Fitr and Eid-al-Adha. To find out if you will be traveling during these holidays, please visit www.timeanddate.com/holidays.

01/01 New Year's Day

01/14 Defenders of the Motherland Day

03/08 International Women's Day

03/21 Nowruz

05/09 Remembrance Day

09/01 Independence Day

10/01 Teachers Day

12/08 Constitution Day

Uzbekistan: A Brief History

The first known inhabitants of Central Asia were Iranian nomads who arrived in the first millennium BC, and developed impressive irrigation systems along Uzbekistan's major rivers. By the third century BC, trade between China and the Mediterranean world was facilitated by the legendary Silk Road, and Uzbekistan, set at its nexus, benefited immensely from the constant stream of wealth and knowledge. Cities such as Bukhara, Samarkand, and Khiva were especially enriched. Silk Road trading peaked in the eighth century AD, but continued for centuries.

The Persian Empire that spread from Libya to India reached its height around 500 BC, and Uzbekistan, then organized as the provinces of Sogdiana and Bactria, formed a large part of it. When Alexander the Great defeated Persia in 327 BC, he took over these provinces and married a Bactrian princess, Roxana. Upon his death in 323 BC, the area was further Hellenicized when his Greek general Seleucus took over. In the 6th century AD, the western or K k (Blue) Turks arrived from the northern steppes, abandoning their nomadic ways to settle along the Silk Road.

The Arabs came in the eighth century AD. Though Uzbekistan maintained much of its Persian character under Arab rule, the region's culture changed significantly during this period. For example, the primary language of literature, government, and commerce switched from Persian to Arabic until the tenth century. Islam supplanted Zoroastrianism as the primary religion. And under the Abbasid Caliphate—the ruling Islamic dynasty from roughly AD 750 to the 13th century—Bukhara was transformed into a cultural center that rivaled Baghdad and Cairo.

The Mongol invasion began in 1219 and ended in 1225, led by Genghis Khan in a brutal campaign. The Mongols enacted a genocide of the indigenous Indo-Persian people, destroyed cities and irrigation systems, and resettled Mongolian-Turkic peoples here. After Genghis Khan's death in 1227, the empire was divided among his family, but it began to crumble by the early 14th century. A tribal chieftain named Timur (Tamerlane) gained power in the 1380s, and united all of western Central Asia, Iran, and Asia Minor under one state. Under Timurid rule, scholars, architects, and artisans transformed Samarkand into a palatial cultural center.

In 1501, Uzbeks invaded from the north and established the Khanate of Bukhoro (Bukhara) and the Khanate of Khiva. But by the 19th century, the khanates were overrun by Russians. The “Great Game” pitting Russia and Britain as rivals inspired the Russians to annex the region as a bulwark against British expansionism. Aided by an influx of Russian migrants, they made the khanates Russian protectorates by 1876.

After the 1917 Russian Revolution, the Bolsheviks seized power in Russia and by 1924, the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic became part of the Soviet Union. Since religion of any kind was considered subversive, almost all mosques in Uzbekistan were closed. The collectivization of farms often met bloody resistance, and the Soviets insisted on a cotton monoculture. This later caused one of the planet’s worst natural disasters, when the diversion of rivers for irrigation caused the Aral Sea, once the world’s fourth largest inland lake, to virtually disappear.

On September 1, 1991, the Uzbek SSR was renamed the Republic of Uzbekistan, and three months later it broke all ties with the Soviet Union. The first elected president, Islam Karimov, consolidated his power by suppressing dissent. In 1999, after a series of bomb attacks in Tashkent, Karimov cracked down on Islamic fundamentalists; outlawed many opposition parties; and rigged his 2000 re-election. He was met with international condemnation but then the attacks of 9/11 gave him a reprieve. He opened bases for the USA and NATO to use in the “War on Terror,” reaped millions in US aid; and took license in declaring any enemies as “terrorists.”

Karimov’s strongman tactics were unable to quell Islamic extremism, and in 2004, the Israeli and US embassies in Tashkent were bombed. In May 2005, several hundred Uzbek protesters were gunned down in a square in Andijon, and allegedly buried in a mass grave. The US joined the EU in imposing sanctions, but Karimov in turn gave the US 180 days’ to leave the airbase it had leased in Uzbekistan. His regime was accused of many more human rights abuses up until his death in 2016. His interim successor, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, won a full term as president in 2016, in an election with no real opposition. Despite his authoritarian bent, Mirziyoyev has improved international relations (notably with neighboring Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan); enacted surprising social and economic reforms; and addressed some human rights abuses.

Tajikistan

Facts, Figures & National Holidays

- **Area:** 55,251 square miles
- **Capital:** Dushanbe
- **Languages:** Tajik is the official language, although Russian is also widely used in government and business
- **Ethnicities:** Tajik 84.3%, Uzbek 13.8%, other 2%
- **Location:** Central Asia, west of China, south of Kyrgyzstan

- **Geography:** Tajikistan is mostly mountains, hills, and valleys—only 7% of the country is flat. The highest peaks are in the Pamir Mountains, which run along the southeastern edge of the country and eventually join with the Himalayas. To the north are the Alay Mountains, which form a natural border with Kyrgyzstan, and the Fergana Valley, which is where most of the population lives. Tajikistan has several rivers, which swell every spring from rain and snow/glacier melt.
- **Population:** 8,191,958
- **Religions:** Sunni Muslim 85%, Shia Muslim 5%, other 10% (estimates)
- **Time Zone:** Tajikistan is nine hours ahead of Eastern Daylight Time (EDT). When it is noon in Washington D.C., it is 9pm in Dushanbe.

National Holidays: Tajikistan

In addition to the holidays listed below, Tajikistan celebrates a number of national holidays that follow a lunar calendar, such as Eid-al-Fitr and Eid-al-Adha. To find out if you will be traveling during these holidays, please visit www.timeanddate.com/holidays.

01/01 New Year's Day

03/08 International Women's Day

03/21 Navruz

05/01 Labor Day/May Day

05/09 Victory Day

06/27 Day of National Unity

09/09 Independence Day

11/06 Constitution Day

Tajikistan: A Brief History

Set apart by its mountainous terrain and its cultural and linguistic roots in Persia, Tajikistan is an outlier relative to its other stan neighbors. But back in Neolithic times, Tajikistan's challenging location did not deter an assortment of colonizers. This included the Oxus Valley and Andronovo cultures, and practitioners of Buddhism, Nestorian Christianity, Zoroastrianism, Vedic religions, and Manichaeism. Even Tibetan and Chinese forces controlled the area between 650–680 AD.

When the Arabs swept across Central Asia in 710 AD, they transformed the region by bringing Islam. But the dominant force in Tajikistan's ancient history was Persia, whose various dynasties waxed and waned here including the Achaemenids, Sassanids, and Samanids. Beginning in 819 AD, the Samanids brought about a golden age of intellectual and creative activity, especially in Bukhara, a city that lies outside Tajikistan's borders (in modern Uzbekistan) but which claims many Tajik citizens. (Along with Samarkand, its possession is in dispute.)

Tajikistan was then part of Transoxiana, which included Uzbekistan, southern Kyrgyzstan, and southwest Kazakhstan. A definitive shift took place in 999 AD, when Turkic people from the Kara-Khanid Khanate conquered the region. Though ethnically distinct, they shared the Islamic faith and for a time the Turkic and Persian people lived peaceably. Mongols arrived in the early

13th century, but only lasted for a century before their domain broke into small khanates. The most successful was that of the warlord Timur (Tamerlane), who made Samarkand a beacon of culture. Then, from the 15th century onwards, Tajiks were subjects of the Emirate of Bukhara.

The next significant chapter of Tajik history is Russian, starting with an early 18th-century trickle of settlers into the region. It grew as Russia and Britain began playing what writer Rudyard Kipling called “the Great Game,” in which the superpowers vied for control of Central Asia. The Emirate of Bukhara was a great prize in this contest, and the Russians won it in 1868, effectively gaining control of Bukhara’s Tajik fiefdom. After the 1917 Russian Revolution, the Bolsheviks established new Soviet Socialist Republics in Central Asia, and though the Tajiks wanted their own autonomous Muslim republic, they were bounced between Turkestan and Uzbekistan.

In 1929, the Tajiks were granted their own Soviet Socialist Republic, but minus key territories in Bukhara and Samarkand, where 700,000 Tajiks still lived. This was an intentional omission. . . . From the start, Muslim *basmachi* guerrillas across Central Asia had been bristling at Soviet hegemony, and they began rebelling. The Soviets had conducted a pogrom in the Uzbek Ferghana Valley, killing 25,000 peasants and incensing the regional Muslim population. Sporadic revolts continued but eventually, the Bolsheviks crushed the resistance and drove the rebels into Afghanistan. The Bolsheviks never trusted the Tajiks and replaced all Tajik government officials with ones from Moscow. Many Tajiks fled, and the Soviets did little in terms of economic development. Insisting on a cotton monoculture, they forcibly moved entire villages to work the crop. The nation became reliant on the USSR for food and other commodities.

In the 1970s, the underground Islamic Renaissance Party started gaining support. By the end of the decade, Tajiks grew more resentful as the Soviets began using Tajikistan as a staging grounds for their war in Afghanistan, funneling billions in aid to the Afghans while Tajiks languished in poverty. Unrest grew until the USSR collapsed in 1991, and Tajikistan declared its independence.

With various factions jockeying for control, in 1992 Tajikistan descended into a bloody civil war. More than 100,000 people died due to ethnic cleansing and famine, and more than 1.2 million became refugees. In 1994, Emomali Rakhmonov (aka Rahmon) ran unopposed and was elected president. Ironically, pressure from Russia forced him to negotiate with the opposition in exile, forging a peace agreement and coalition government. As of 2021, Rahmon is still president and while he has been praised for bringing economic stability, he has also been critiqued for authoritarianism and human rights abuses. The status of Tajiks in Samarkand and Bukhara is still a sore point, but the Tajik and Uzbek governments recently reached some rapprochement.

Kazakhstan

Facts, Figures & National Holidays

- **Area:** 1,049,150 square miles
- **Capital:** Astana
- **Languages:** Russian and Kazakh are both official languages.

- **Ethnicities:** Kazakh (Qazaq) 63.1%, Russian 23.7%, Uzbek 2.9%, Ukrainian 2.1%, Uighur 1.4%, Tatar 1.3%, German 1.1%, other 4.4%
- **Location:** Central Asia, northwest of China; a small portion west of the Ural (Zhayyq) River in easternmost Europe
- **Geography:** Kazakhstan ranks as the ninth-largest country in the world, with an area equivalent to that of Western Europe. With its western-most portion lying in Eastern Europe, Kazakhstan is one of only six other transcontinental countries. Though parts of the country are covered by desert, its climate and terrain are, overall, not as harsh as either Uzbekistan's or Turkmenistan's. Important rivers include the Ili, the Syr Darya, and the Ural Rivers.
- **Population:** 18,157,122
- **Religions:** Muslim 70.2%, Christian 26.2% (mainly Russian Orthodox), other 0.2%, atheist 2.8%, unspecified 0.5%
- **Time Zone:** Kazakhstan is nine hours ahead of Eastern Daylight Time (EDT). When it is noon in Washington D.C., it is 9pm in Astana.

National Holidays: Kazakhstan

In addition to the holidays listed below, Kazakhstan celebrates a number of national holidays that follow a lunar calendar, such as Kurban Bairam. To find out if you will be traveling during these holidays, please visit www.timeanddate.com/holidays.

01/01 New Year's Day

01/07 Orthodox Christmas Day

03/08 International Women's Day

03/21 Nauryz

05/01 Unity Day

05/09 Victory Day

07/06 Day of the Capital

08/30 Constitution Day

12/01 Day of the First President of the Republic of Kazakhstan

12/16 Independence Day

Kazakhstan: A Brief History

Never mind the bumbling backwater depicted in *Borat*. Kazakhstan is the star of the stans, the region's most politically stable, economically strong, and socially advanced country. Much of this is due to Kazakhstan's vast reserves of natural gas, oil, and minerals, which has generated tremendous wealth. And much is due to the sheer determination of the Kazakh people themselves. It is all the more remarkable when you consider how it all started.

Prehistoric humans inhabited various locales within Kazakhstan but the first *homo sapiens* appeared 40,000 to 12,000 years ago in the southern, central, and eastern realms. One of the earliest cultures, the Botai (3600–3100 BC) is credited with the domestication of horses—an animal that is still central to Kazakh culture. Climate changes forced massive migrations of these

populations in and out of the steppes. In the beginning of the first millennium BC, nomadic Indo-Iranian tribes from the east and west moved in. Though not unified, they are collectively referred to as Scythian or Saka people. Some unification began with the Huns, who arrived from Mongolia during the 4th century and absorbed 26 tribes into a single state. It reconfigured several times as various Turkic khaganates and Persian dynasties claimed different territories.

By 1130 AD, Buddhists from Mongolia, the Khitans, established the Karakitay empire, which stretched from Xinjiang to Transoxiana. Genghis Khan swept through in 1218, overtaking the Khitan on his way to conquering parts of Europe and the Middle East. Mongol domination of Central Asia lasted for about 300 years, evolving to become Turkicized and administered by khanates such as the Golden Horde. At its peak, it spread from Siberia to the Danube.

When the Golden Horde splintered, Islamicized Uzbeks controlled the Kazakh steppes. They split into two groups in 1468, with the southern group migrating to Bukhara (and ultimately becoming the progenitors of modern Uzbekistan); and the northern group continuing as nomads. Calling themselves “Kazakhs,” which means “free riders,” these nomads created a loose confederation, but were unable to repulse an invasion by the Oyrats, a fierce Mongolian tribe. Needing protection, the Kazakhs swore allegiance to the Russian crown in 1731. Russia took care of the Oyrats, but also abolished the Kazakh khans, and encouraged peasants from Ukraine and Russia to move into the area. The Kazakhs frequently rose up, and some historians estimate that by 1870, nearly 25% of them died in rebellions and famines.

Fast forward to the 1917 Russian Revolution. When czarist Russia fell, a nationalist Kazakh movement called Alash Orda established an independent state that lasted for two years. As the rest of Russia descended into civil war, this new Alash Autonomy sided with the Bolsheviks. But when the Bolsheviks pushed eastwards in 1920, they annexed the Alash Autonomy and purged its leaders from the Communist Party. The Kazakhs were made part of the Kirghiz Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic: in 1925, the name was changed to Kazakh; and by 1936, it was officially declared the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic.

But something far more drastic than a name change was underway: the traditionally nomadic Kazakhs were forced to become settled farmers in new collectives. Unused to agriculture and working with largely unarable land, hundreds of thousands died of starvation. The Soviets also used the region to imprison an increasing number of deportees in labor camps. Workers from elsewhere in the USSR were relocated here to work the mines and oil fields. By the 1950s, Kazakhs were a minority in their own republic, comprising less than 30% of the population.

When the USSR collapsed in 1991, Nursultan Nazarbayev became president and served for 29 years. He was a friend to Moscow, but also a pragmatist who sought closer relations with the west, courted foreign investment, and enacted some social reforms. Nazarbayev also moved the capital to Astana (also called Nur-Sultan), and made it a gleaming homage to modernism.

At the same time, he has suppressed most opposition groups, which have repeatedly charged him with nepotism, corruption, and authoritarianism. To the latter charge, he has responded that Kazakhstan is not an authoritarian state, just a “democracy that elected the same president for 30 years.” In 2019, he announced his voluntary resignation, and his hand-picked successor, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, was elected.

Kyrgyzstan

Facts, Figures & National Holidays

- **Area:** 77,182 square miles
- **Capital:** Bishkek
- **Languages:** Kyrgyz and Russian are the official languages. Uzbek is also spoken.
- **Ethnicities:** Kyrgyz 70.9%, Uzbek 14.3%, Russian 7.7%, Dungan 1.1%, other 5.9%
- **Location:** Central Asia, west of China, south of Kazakhstan
- **Geography:** Kyrgyzstan is a rugged, mountainous nation with an average elevation of 1,062 ft. The Tian Shan range blankets the country, and as a result, Kyrgyzstan's geography is dominated by snowcapped peaks, glaciers, and high-altitude lakes. Kyrgyzstan is also blessed with significant deposits of gold and other rare metals, as well as oil and natural gas. The principal rivers are the Kara Darya and the Naryn, which come together in Uzbekistan to form the mighty Syr Darya.
- **Population:** 5,664,939
- **Religions:** Muslim 75%, Russian Orthodox 20%, other 5% (estimates)
- **Time Zone:** Kyrgyzstan is ten hours ahead of Eastern Daylight Time (EDT). When it is noon in Washington D.C., it is 10pm in Bishkek.

National Holidays: Kyrgyzstan

In addition to the holidays listed below, Kyrgyzstan celebrates a number of national holidays that follow a lunar calendar, such as Orozo Ait and Kurman Ait. To find out if you will be traveling during these holidays, please visit www.timeanddate.com/holidays.

01/01 New Year's Day

01/07 Orthodox Christmas Day

02/23 Defender of the Fatherland Day

03/08 International Women's Day

03/21 Nooruz

05/01 May Day

05/05 Constitution Day of the
Kyrgyz Republic

05/09 Victory Day

08/31 Independence Day of the
Kyrgyz Republic

11/07 Day of the Great October Socialist
Revolution

Kyrgyzstan: A Brief History

Humans appeared in what is now Kyrgyzstan as far back as 300,000 years ago. Osh, in southern Kyrgyzstan, is one of Central Asia's oldest settlements. The earliest Kyrgyz people were nomads from western Mongolia and Siberia, whose migrations descended southwards where they mingled with Scythians and other Turkic people. They practiced Tengrism, a monotheistic

religion centered around nature. When the Arabs spread across Central Asia around 751 CE, they joined with Turkic tribes and Tibetans to drive the Tang Chinese away in the Battle of Talas. The Kyrgyz were subsumed by the Turkic Kara Khanids, and Islam became the dominant religion.

But this was not the end of invasions from the east. The Mongols of Genghis Khan overran the area between 1206 and 1221. When Genghis died, his son Chaghatai inherited Transoxiana, including present-day Kyrgyzstan. But the Mongol grip was loosened by infighting and the increasing power of various Turkic khanates. The warlord Tamerlane was able to unify the southern reaches of Transoxiana, but the northern Kyrgyz did not benefit from his reign. In 1685, the Mongol Oyrats of the Dzungarian empire launched a brutal campaign that drove vast numbers of Kyrgyz south into the Ferghana Valley and rugged Pamir Alay regions, in present-day Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. When the Manchus defeated the Oyrats in 1758, the Kyrgyz became de facto Chinese subjects, but were generally left to their nomadic ways.

In 1775 the Kyrgyz leader Atke Tynay Biy Uulu sent envoys to Russia's Catherine the Great to establish a strategic alliance. Catherine accepted, but the Russian Empire simply ended up annexing the region in 1876. There were numerous revolts against tsarist authority, most notably in 1916 when many Central Asian Muslim men were forcibly conscripted into the Russian Army mobilizing for World War I. Their revolt was put down so brutally that more than 120,000 people—nearly a sixth of all the Kyrgyz people—died. Many Kyrgyz fled to China.

Kyrgyz people fared no better under the Soviets. In 1918 they became part of the Turkestan ASSR, but did not gain statehood until 1936 when Kirghizia was declared a Soviet Socialist Republic. During the Stalinist era, the Kyrgyz suffered brutal collectivizations, purges, and forced resettlements. The reinvigorated Muslim guerilla resistance was viciously put down, and in 1937, all 140 members of the Soviet Kyrgyz government were executed. The bodies were dumped in a brick kiln and the incident was never brought to light until the late 1980s. The Soviets used Kirghizia's remote location to conduct secret uranium mining and weapons development, causing environmental problems that still persist.

As the USSR began to fall, Kyrgyzstan became the first Central Asian republic to declare its independence in 1991. Physicist Askar Akaev became president, and began enacting political and economic reforms. But there was ethnic unrest and the looming threat of Islamic radicals and terrorists. Akaev began losing ground and accusations of corruption were rife. In 2005, the so-called "Tulip Revolution" forced Akaev to flee to Moscow. His successor, Kurmanbek Bakiyev, was the opposition leader, but eventually he was also accused of corruption, and the country was beset by more ethnic violence. Bakiyev fled during the Kyrgyz Revolution of 2010, and a new constitution was adopted.

The current president, Sadyr Japarov, was elected in January 2021 in a landslide election. He is considered a populist nationalist, pro-Russia, and anti-Uzbek.

RESOURCES

Suggested Reading

Central Asia & the Silk Road

The Great Game: The Struggle for Empire in Central Asia by Peter Hopkirk (1994, History) A definitive yet easy-to-read account of the race between Great Britain and Russia to secure Central Asia during the Victorian Era. Full of spies, adventurers, soldiers, and royals.

Inside Central Asia by Dilip Hiro (2011, History) The book's subtitle—A Political and Cultural History of Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Kergztstan, Tajikistan, Turkey and Iran—pretty much says it all about this comprehensive and useful book.

Tamerlane: Sword of Islam, Conqueror of the World by Justin Marozzi (2004, Biography/History) Part biography, part history, and part travel narrative, this account of the life of Tamerlane focuses on his conquests and fearsome reputation.

Tales Told in Tents, Stories from Central Asia by Sally Clayton and Sophie Herxheimer (2005, Children's/Folktales) A collection of 12 traditional stories from Central Asia with colorful illustrations. A good choice for a bedtime story with a travel flair, the book offers notes on each story and a map.

Uzbekistan

The Opportunists by Yohann de Silva (2009, Fiction) Crime lords, old debts, and intrigue fill the pages of this suspense thriller set in the black markets of Uzbekistan.

A Carpet Ride to Khiva, Seven Years on the Silk Road by Christopher Aslan Alexander (2010, Memoir) Recalling his efforts to open a traditional carpet-weaving workshop in Khiva, Alexander writes with a fondness for and an understanding of Uzbek culture that permeates this charming memoir.

Kazakhstan

Apples Are from Kazakhstan by Christopher Robbins (2010, Travel Narrative) Are apples really from Kazakhstan? Robbins tells the story of how this question turned into an impromptu trip, which in turn, leads to a sincere appreciation for Kazakhstan, its history, and its people.

Kazakhstan: Coming of Age by Michael Fergus and Janar Jandosova (2003, Culture) A lovely coffee table book with color photos, maps, and background information on Kazakhstan.

Kyrgyzstan

Roaming Kyrgyzstan by Jessica Jacobson (2008, Travel Guide) The first-person account of the author's travels in Kyrgyzstan combined with her tips and advice on traveling there.

Restless Valley: Revolution, Murder, and Intrigue in the Heart of Central Asia by Philip Shishkin (2013, Historical Nonfiction). A journalist known for his experience on the ground in Central Asia, Shishkin dives into the experiences of civilians and politicians in Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan, as they struggle through post-Soviet independence, with two revolutions, drug smuggling rings, corruption, and American interference during the Afghan war.

Suggested Films & Videos

Central Asia & the Silk Road

The Legend of Tomiris (2019, Historical Drama) This epic follows the exploits of Tomiris, a real-life Massagetaen (Scythian) warrior-queen who led armies across Central Asia to fight Cyrus the Great of the Achaemenid Empire. Herodotus says she killed him. So does this movie, but not before delivering inspiring scenes of her empowerment, tender family ties, and dramatic battles.

Mongol (2007, Drama) This thrilling Russian-Kazakh film explore the early years of Temudgin, the Mongolian chieftain who would become Genghis Khan. It is a riveting and surprising portrait of the visionary leader who transformed Central Asia, beautifully filmed in Mongolia and Kazakhstan.

Journey Along the Silk Road (2005, Travel) Japanese actor Ken Ogata retraces one branch of the Silk Road—the one that crosses the “Ocean of Sand.” In Japanese with English subtitles.

Samarkand by Amin Maalouf (1988, Fiction) Half of the story revolves around life of the 11th-century Persian poet, Omar Khayyam—his writing of the famous Rubaiyat, relations with the Seljuk rulers, travels in Central Asia, and his love affair with a female poet of the Samarkand court. The second half follows the efforts of an American to obtain the original manuscript.

Uzbekistan

To the Ends of the Earth (2020, Drama) A Japanese travel show host faces an existential crisis as she travels through Uzbekistan, and finds herself culturally adrift. In Japanese with English subtitles.

2000 Songs of Farida (2020, Drama) In 1920, Kamil awaits the arrival of his fourth wife as the first three have failed to provide an heir. A friend warns him that the Bolsheviks are coming, with different ideas about women’s roles.

Tajikistan

Luna Papa (2001, Foreign) When a young Tajik woman becomes pregnant by a traveling actor, her quirky family travels across Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan to track him down. The movie goes for a silly, fantastical touch but also speaks about some difficult/controversial subjects.

Angel on the Right (2002, Comedy/Drama) A black comedy about an ex-con who returns to his Tajik village, Asht, to help his dying mother. This prompts a stream of villagers trying to collect his many overdue debts. The cast includes real villagers from Asht.

Kosh ba Kosh (Odds and Evens) (1993, Drama) Mira returns from Russia to Dushanbe, and learns that her father has gambled her away to an old man, Ibrohim, who is eager to claim his prize. She goes into hiding just as the civil war breaks out, and everything changes. Filmed as the actual war broke out, the sound of real gunfire can be heard in the background of this well-reviewed film.

Kazakhstan

Districts (2016, Drama) In 1987, 16-year-old Arsen moves to Almaty, the then-capital of the Khazak SSR. His quest for identity is shaken as the city itself shakily adapts to *glasnost*, and his peers suck him into the world of violent disputes, drugs, crime, and Soviet rock and roll. His dire circumstances are contrasted by the beauty of his new city on the edge of the Alatau mountains.

Song from the Southern Seas (2008, Comedy/Drama) Two couples, one Russian, one Kazakh, struggle with marital distrust, friendship, and toxic masculinity when Russian Maria gives birth to a swarthy son who looks nothing like her husband, Ivan. An old family secret then comes to light, changing everything. The movie takes place in Kazakhstan but was stunningly filmed in Kyrgyzstan.

Nomad: The Warrior (2005, Drama) A young man fights to unite three warring factions in this historical epic set in Kazakhstan during the early 1700s.

Tulpan (2008, Comedy/Drama) When Asa returns from the Russian navy to his small community on the Kazakh steppe, he's looking for a chance to start his own sheep herd. But that requires proving he's ready to settle down, and that in turn requires courting the only eligible girl for miles around—Tulpan. In Kazakh and Russian with English subtitles.

Kyrgyzstan

Kurmanjan Datka: Queen of the Mountains (2014, Historical Drama) This spectacle is a patriotic epic about a real-life heroine who took up the charge of unifying 40 Kyrgyz tribes against their Kokand Khanate oppressors. It was a 2014 Oscar entry.

Beshkempir (1999, Drama) A coming-of-age story from Kyrgyzstan about Beshkempir, a 12-year-old who doesn't know he's adopted. Filmed on location in a Kyrgyz village.

Heavenly Nomadic (2015, Drama) Three generations of Tabyldy's nomadic Kyrgyz family live amidst the forbidding yet spectacular Turgan gorge landscapes of Lake Issyk-Kul. But their measured lives are disrupted when a meteorologist takes an interest in Shaiyr, Tabyldy's widowed daughter-in-law.

Useful Websites

Overseas Adventure Travel

www.oattravel.com

Overseas Adventure Travel Frequently Asked Questions

www.oattravel.com/faq

International Health Information/CDC (Centers for Disease Control)

www.cdc.gov/travel

Electricity & Plugs

www.worldstandards.eu/electricity/plugs-and-sockets

Foreign Exchange Rates

www.xe.com/currencyconverter
www.oanda.com/converter/classic

ATM Locators

www.mastercard.com/atm
www.visa.com/atmlocator

World Weather

www.intellicast.com
www.weather.com
www.wunderground.com

Basic Travel Phrases (80 languages)

www.travlang.com/languages

Packing Tips

www.travelite.org

U.S. Customs & Border Protection

www.cbp.gov/travel

Transportation Security

Administration (TSA)

www.tsa.gov

National Passport Information Center

www.travel.state.gov

Holidays Worldwide

www.timeanddate.com/holidays

History & Culture

en.wikipedia.org

Useful Apps

Flight Stats

Track departures, arrivals, and flight status

LoungeBuddy

Get access to premium airport lounges around the world

Timeshifter

Personalized tips for avoiding jetlag, based on neuroscience and your own data

GoogleMaps

Maps and directions anywhere in the world

Triposo

City guides, walking maps, and more – and it works offline

Rome2rio

Where to go, what to see, and what to do in more than 160 countries

Flush or Sit or Squat

Find a clean toilet anywhere

Uber

Ride sharing around the world

Visa Plus and Mastercard Cirrus

ATM locations

Shows the location of the nearest ATM in your network

TunnelBear

Provides a secure VPN (virtual private network) that will encrypt your browsing data when you use a public WiFi network

What's App, Skype, or Signal

WiFi calling anywhere in the world

Duolingo, FLuentU, or Babbel

Learn dozens of foreign languages

Google Translate

Fast and simple translations

XE

Currency conversions

SizeGuide

Clothing and shoe sizes in all countries

Best Units Converter

Converts currency, mileage, weights, and many other units of measurement

Tourlina

For women only, it connects you with other female travelers

Happy Cow

Locate vegan and vegetarian eateries in 195 countries

Eatwith

Dine with locals all over the world

Meetup

Connects you with locals who share your interests

Skyview

Identifies constellations and heavenly bodies

Travello

Find travel friends on the road

ALIX for One

Created by and for women, it identifies solo-friendly dining spots in major international cities

TripWhistle

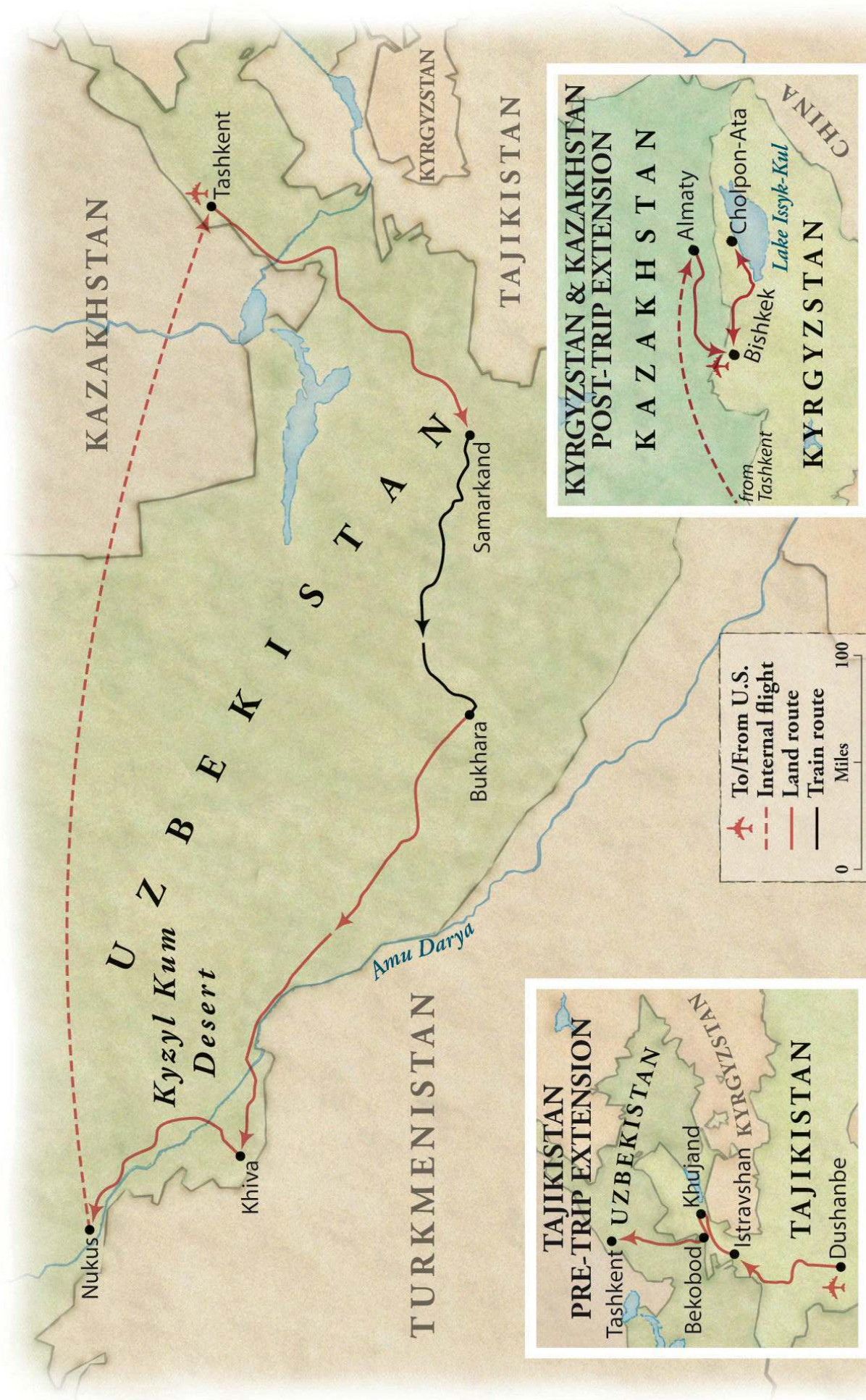
Maps your location and provides emergency numbers for police, medics, and more

GeoSure

Safely navigate neighborhoods around the world

Chirpey

For women only, connect with other women, find out what's safe, meet up, and more



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8-time travelers from Stevensville, MI



Submitted by Julia Schneider,
5-time traveler from Pinellas Park, FL



Submitted by Martin Schwartzman,
30-time traveler from Woodbury, NY



Submitted by Paul Stark, 17-time traveler
from Edina, MN



Submitted by David Fong, 16-time traveler
from Foster City, CA



Submitted by Steven dos Remedios,
23-time traveler from Oakland, CA



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