

## Best of Central Asia Tour - Summer

Price: €4950 per person. Deposit: €500. Payment can also be made in USD or CHF.  
Single supplement available for €800 and required for solo travelers.

**Guaranteed departures on the following dates in 2024:**

**16 June – 7 July 2024 | 14 Jul 2024 - 4 Aug 2024**



*Kalpak Travel's Best of Central Asia Tour combines the cultural highlights and natural beauty of five different countries in one epic journey. You will visit some of the modern and historic capitals, and see firsthand the cultural treasures and traditions of both the nomadic people who have crossed this region for centuries, and also the people who have settled in its cities. The eclectic contemporary architecture Ashgabat contrasts with the sprawling Soviet-styled cities of Almaty, Bishkek, and Dushanbe, and nothing can prepare you for the impact of the great Silk Road cities, where flourishing Islamic culture and the medieval Timurid Empire left a lasting architectural legacy. Travel across the five 'Stans with us to experience the very best of Central Asian hospitality on an unforgettable adventure.*

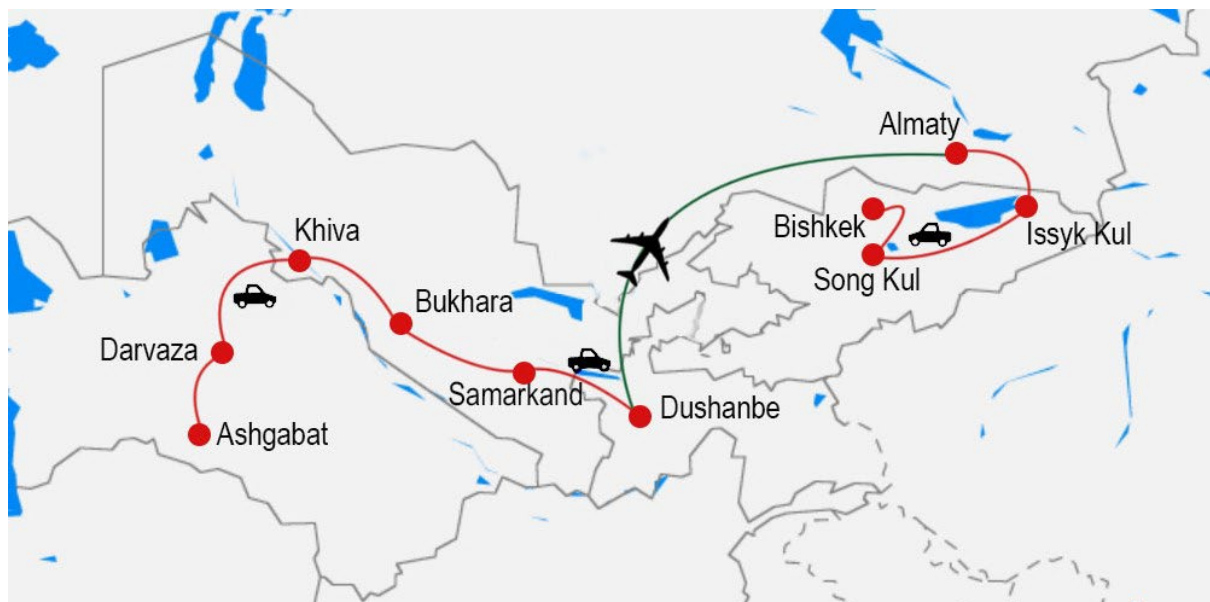
## Highlights

- Combine the cultural highlights and natural beauty of Central Asia in a single tour
- Gaze upon the turquoise alpine lakes of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan
- Sleep in traditional yurts and experience Kyrgyz nomadic culture firsthand
- Marvel at Registan Square and other architectural wonders of in ancient Samarkand
- Wander the bustling streets of UNESCO World Heritage Sites of Khiva and Bukhara
- Shop in authentic oriental bazaars for everything from hand-woven silks to spices

## Itinerary Overview

- Day 1: Ashgabat City Tour
- Day 2: Ashgabat - Old Nisa - Darvaza (280km , ca. 5h)
- Day 3: Darvaza - Dashoguz - Khiva (360km, c. 7h).
- Day 4: Khiva City Tour
- Day 5: Khiva – Bukhara (450 km, c. 7h).
- Day 6: Bukhara City Tour
- Day 7: Bukhara -Samarkand
- Day 8: Samarkand City Tour
- Day 9: Samarkand City Tour
- Day 10: Samarkand - Seven Lakes - Penjikent
- Day 11: Penjikent - Iskanderkul (150 km, c. 3h).
- Day 12: Iskanderkul - Dushanbe (140 km, c. 3h). City tour.
- Day 13: Dushanbe - Almaty (flight)
- Day 14: Almaty City Tour
- Day 15: Almaty - Charyn Canyon - Tepke (c. 7-8h).
- Day 16: Tepke - Karakol - Tamga (c. 150km, 4-5h).
- Day 17: Day trip to Barskoon Gorge and Arabel Plateau.
- Day 18: Tamga - Skazka - Kyzyl Tuu - Kochkor (190 km, c. 4h).
- Day 19: Kochkor - Song Kol
- Day 20: Song Kol - Burana - Bishkek (350 km, c. 6h).
- Day 21: Bishkek City Tour and Ala Archa National Park.
- Day 22: Departure

## Map



## Itinerary

### Day 1: Ashgabat City Tour

Welcome to Central Asia! Upon arrival, you can check in and take some well-deserved rest after your long flight.

In the late morning, we will start the city tour with a visit to the Sunday Bazaar called Tulkuchka, including the livestock section with camels. Later, we have a short sightseeing tour (3-4 h) in Ashgabat. The tour includes a visit to the National Museum of History, the Arch of Neutrality, and the Independence Park. After dinner, drive back to the hotel through the New City area of Ashgabat enjoying the view with all its night illuminations.

*Accommodation: Hotel Diwan 5\**

### Day 2: Ashgabat - Old Nisa - Darvaza (280km , ca. 5h)

After breakfast, we drive to Old Nisa fortress (UNESCO World Heritage site) – the earliest of Parthian Empire capitals. Located in an atmospheric area on an irregular pentagon hill, at the foot of the Kopet-Dag Mountains, Old Nisa is a beautiful landmark. 14 hectares in size, the fort accommodates two semi-excavated complexes of the Parthian period (III c. BC – III c. AD) structures, designated as royal residence and temple complex. Then drive back to Ashgabat, stopping en route at National Memorial Complex “Halk Hakydasy” with WWII and Earthquake memorials. We continue to the Spiritual Mosque, one of the biggest mosques in Central Asia, and the Turkmenbashi Mausoleum nearby. Then continue driving to a farm in Anau, about 8 km southeast of Ashgabat, the Ahalteke horse stable, where you can see the famous Turkmen horses called Akhal Teke. We will have lunch at the horse farm. In the afternoon, we will drive on to the Darvaza Gas Crater, located in the middle of the Karakum Desert (270km, 4-5 h.). Together we’ll enjoy a delicious fire-cooked meal for dinner, then sleep overnight at the yurt camp.

*Accommodation: Overnight in Yurt Camp (2 people per yurt, shared bathroom facilities)*

### Day 3: Darvaza - Dashoguz - Khiva (360km, c. 7h).

In the morning we will drive for around 4-5 hours on terrible roads through the desert to the town of Dashoguz. Turkmen farewell lunch in a local restaurant. In the afternoon we transfer to the nearby border with Uzbekistan. Cross the border on foot, meet your Uzbek local guide and driver, and drive for another hour to Khiva. Please note: The border crossing may take around 2-3 hours. Dinner and overnight in Khiva.

*Accommodation: Hotel Asia 3\**

### Day 4: Khiva City Tour

Our walking tour of Khiva will begin after breakfast. Khiva is bursting with historical sites and today you will get a chance to see them all. We will visit the walled inner-city section of Khiva called the Ichan-Kala. This old section of the city contains more than 50 historic monuments and hundreds of centuries-old houses. The entire citadel is protected as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. As you walk through the enormous city gates, you will be confronted by a glistening beacon of Islamic design, the Kalta Minor. Our tour delves deep into all of Khiva’s sites. During dinner tonight there will be a performance by local dancers and singers, immersing you in Khorezmian culture.

*Accommodation: Hotel Asia 3\* or similar*

**Day 5: Khiva – Bukhara (450 km, c. 7h).**

We will check out from the hotel after breakfast and depart around 8:00 AM to Khiva. It is a long ride through the Kyzylkum Desert, and the roads are shaky in places. On the way, we will stop for lunch and also have time to stretch our legs. At the end of this arduous drive, we will be rewarded with the magnificence of Bukhara. We will arrive in the evening, just in time for dinner in the Old City, and check in at the hotel.

Please note: Flight and train schedule Khiva-Bukhara is available only on relatively short notice. If a flight or a train is available, we will use that instead of road transfer.

*Hotel Paradise Plaza 4\* or similar*

**Day 6: Bukhara City Tour**

Bukhara is the next of our UNESCO World Heritage Site stops. The city's very name -Bukhara – conjures up images of the exotic Orient. For centuries, it was an important trading post and center of scholarship. The Old City has been well preserved and is crammed full of minarets, mosques, and madrassas. Its once notorious canals and pools, the source of many an epidemic, have now been drained, but the most famous, Lyabi-Hauz, is still there. Today it's an oasis shaded by mulberry trees in the heart of the city. Your guide will show you Bukhara's unmissable sights, and you can soak up the atmosphere wandering through the labyrinthine alleyways. Highlights of today's walking tour in Bukhara include the Poi Kalon complex, the Ark Fortress, Bolo Hauz Mosque, the Ayub Mausoleum and spring, the bazaars inside Bukhara's unique trading domes, and the Samanid Mausoleum. The guided tour will end in the afternoon and you will have some free time. Dinner in the old town.

*Hotel Paradise Plaza 4\* or similar*

**Day 7: Bukhara -Samarkand**

Today morning we visit a couple more sights near Bukhara. First, we visit the Mausoleum of Naqshbandi, 15 km outside the city center. There are many orders in Sufism, all of which have been represented at different times in what is now Uzbekistan. The Naqshbandiyya order has a great and long-lasting influence, and a memorial place is still a popular place of pilgrimage for Sufis. From here, we will visit the summer residence of the last Emir of Bukhara. In Persian, it is called Sitorai Mokhi Hossa, "the place where the moon meets the stars". On the way back to the old town we will stop to see Chor Minor madrassah. In the afternoon at 03.20 PM, we will transfer to the train station to catch the high-speed train to Samarkand (1.5 hours train ride). In the evening after dinner, we visit Registan Square, the most famous landmark in all of Uzbekistan. This square was the focal point of medieval Samarkand and is framed by three beautiful madrassas (religious schools), Ulugbek, Sherdor, and Tillya Kori.

*Accommodation: Hotel Jahongir Premium 3\* or similar*

**Day 8: Samarkand City Tour**

Sublime Samarkand was the capital of the Timurid Empire; Timur was one of history's greatest conquerors. His vast empire rivaled any, stretching across the Eurasian steppe. He ruled his kingdom with an iron fist, whilst at the same time patronizing the arts and literature. Much of the architectural heritage from this period has been preserved, allowing us to see how the city might have been at the peak of Timur's power.

We will start the city tour with a visit to Bibi-Khanum Mosque, a structure that legend says was gifted to Timur by one of his wives. We will also have some time to explore Siyob Bazaar. After lunch, We will complete today's city tour with a visit to Gur-e-Amir, the gilded mausoleum where Timur is buried. We will hear stories from his life and how he began the construction of Samarkand.

*Accommodation: Hotel Jahongir Premium 3\* or similar*

**Day 9: Samarkand City Tour**

After breakfast, we continue to explore the fairytale city of Samarkand. We go first to the Shah-i Zinda, a magnificent tiled necropolis; and then visit Ulugbek's Observatory, which was once the biggest research center in Central Asia. Ulugbek was decades ahead of the West with his observations of the solar system and the Earth, and we will learn more about his story in this prestigious setting. Our next stop will be the Konigil Paper Mill. Here you will see the process of making paper from mulberry tree bark, just as it was done in 8th-century Samarkand. After lunch, we will visit Afrasiyab Museum to learn about the ancient city of Samarkand – then known as Afrasiyab – which was destroyed by the Mongols in the early 13th century. Uzbek farewell dinner in a popular local restaurant.

*Accommodation: Hotel Jahongir Premium 3\* or similar*

**Day 10: Samarkand - Seven Lakes - Penjikent**

Today, embark on a memorable adventure as we cross the border from Uzbekistan to Tajikistan. Our day trip will start with a bumpy ride into the mountains to explore the area of the Seven Lakes. This mountain valley is not far from Penjikent, but due to the terrible road conditions, this trip takes a full day. We will drive up until the sixth lake. It is then a short and easy hike of about two hours (both ways) to the seventh and highest lake, Hazorchashma. There will be time to enjoy the scenery and wander along the lake shore before hiking back down to the sixth lake and going slowly by road to Penjikent with a few stops in some of the mountain villages.

*Accommodation: Hotel Umarion 2\* or similar*

**Day 11: Penjikent - Iskanderkul (150 km, c. 3h).**

Today we will drive to Iskander Kul, a mountain lake named after Alexander the Great. Triangular in shape, it is considered one of the most exquisitely beautiful lakes in all the former Soviet Union nations, It is nestled in the Fann Mountains at an altitude of 2,200m. The route is a delightful one, through rugged mountain scenery. On the shore of the lake, we will have lunch. Free time in the afternoon with different optional activities, such as a boat ride, a short hike to a nearby waterfall, and a visit to a nearby mountain village. Dinner and overnight at the lake.

*Accommodation: Cottage on the lake shore*

**Day 12: Iskanderkul - Dushanbe (140 km, c. 3h). City tour.**

Today, our journey takes us from the stunning shores of Iskander Kul to the vibrant city of Dushanbe, the capital of Tajikistan. After an ascent to the Anzob Tunnel, our route is along the Vazob River down to the Varzob Gorge, a popular weekend getaway for locals from Dushanbe. We will reach Dushanbe in time for lunch. Originally, Dushanbe was a small village centered on a market which took place every Monday. The Persian word Dushanbe means "Monday", so this is how the city got its name. It was during the Soviet Union that Dushanbe became the industrial center of Tajikistan and the capital city it is today.

We will visit the Museum of Antiquities with its 13m-long sleeping Buddha, then tour the marvelous modern Navruz Palace. We will then enjoy a nice city view from the top of the newly built Independence Monument. Next, we will visit the Ismail Samani statue. This large gold and marble monument commemorates the 1,100th anniversary of the Samanid State, a Golden Age of the Tajik nation when science and arts flourished. From there we will walk across to Rudaki Park, dedicated to the great Persian poet Rudaki, who lived under the Samanids during the 10th century. Dinner in a nice Tajik restaurant.

*Accommodation: Hotel Rumi 4\**



**Day 13: Dushanbe - Almaty (flight)**

In the morning we will visit the local bazaar or you can enjoy your free time until the transfer to the airport at 11:00 AM. Our flight is scheduled for 1:30 PM – 4:15 PM to take us to Almaty, Kazakhstan. We will meet our local Kazakh guide at the airport and transfer to the city for our Kazakh welcome dinner in a local restaurant.

*Accommodation: Hotel Kazzhol Park 4\* or similar*

**Day 14: Almaty City Tour**

Almaty is the largest city in Central Asia's richest country, Kazakhstan. For 70 years – up until 1997 Almaty was the country's capital and it remains today the country's business and educational center. We will visit Panfilov Park to see the impressive memorial dedicated to the Soviet soldiers who fought in WWII and take a look at the most famous Orthodox cathedral of Almaty. In the afternoon, you have some free time to explore the city on your own or relax at the hotel. Your guide will be available and happy to suggest places to go/ things to see or do.

In the evening we meet up again in the hotel lobby and take the cable car to Kok Tobe Hill, from where you will have a nice view of the city. Then we have dinner and return back to the hotel.

*Accommodation: Hotel Kazzhol Park 4\* or similar*

**Day 15: Almaty - Charyn Canyon - Tepke (c. 7-8h).**

Today we will have a very long ride and partly on bad roads. About halfway between Tepke and Almaty, we will stop for a picnic lunch at one of the most famous natural sights in Kazakhstan, Charyn Canyon. The canyon is often compared to the Grand Canyon, although it is much smaller in size with a total length of 80-90km. The part of the canyon you will visit is known as the Valley of Castles for its unusual rock formations. It is 3km long and 100m deep. We will walk these 3km down to the river, and have our lunch in a scenic spot there. We continue our drive to Kazakh – Kyrgyz border Kegen. Meet your Kyrgyz guide and driver and transfer through the Kyrgyz mountains to the village of Tepke, where we will spend the night in the welcoming guesthouse/ farm of a family who breed horses.

*Accommodation: Reina Kench Farm/ Guesthouse*

**Day 16: Tepke - Karakol - Tamga (c. 150km, 4-5h).**

Today we will drive to Karakol and will have a short sightseeing tour of the town's most interesting sights. These include the Dungan Mosque, built in 1904; and the wooden Russian Orthodox Church, which has been standing since 1869. We will have lunch with a local Dungan family in Yrdyk village and continue our drive along the Southern shore of Issyk Kul Lake. En route, we will take a diversion into the side valley of Jety Oguz, famous for its two red rock formations called "Seven Bulls" and "The Broken Heart". You will see these rocks and our guide will tell you the legends behind their interesting names. Our destination for today is a yurt camp near the shore of Issyk Kul. In the evening we will learn how to cook traditional dumplings called manty.

*Accommodation: Yurt Camp (shared bathroom facilities)*

**Day 17: Day trip to Barskoon Gorge and Arabel Plateau.**

After breakfast, we visit Barskoon Gorge. There are two interesting monuments along the road – a bust of Yuri Gagarin, who holidayed on the South shore of Issyk Kul after his historic first manned space flight. From Barskoon we will drive further up toward Kumtor Gold mine, to the beautiful Arabel plateau at almost 4000m altitude. Picnic lunch. After, we drive back down to the main road and back to our yurt camp. Those who like can go swimming at the beach nearby. During dinner, we will watch a folklore concert by a local family of musicians.

*Accommodation: Yurt Camp (shared bathroom facilities)*

**Day 18: Tamga - Skazka - Kyzyl Tuu - Kochkor (190 km, c. 4h).**

After breakfast, drive to Kochkor along the southern shore of lake Issyk Kul. Our first stop is at Skazka Canyons. Skazka means “fairytale” and it’s a reference to the bizarre rocky landscape, which has been formed by wind and rain into fabulous sculptures and formations. We will go for a short hike here. We will also meet an eagle hunter, who will show us his eagle and tell us about his passion. Next, we will stop at the village Kyzyl-Tuu, where you will meet a yurt maker, who will tell you more about the traditional nomadic dwelling. We will set up a yurt together. Lunch with the family in Kyzyl-Tuu. Continue to Kochkor. Upon arrival in Kochkor, we will see the demonstration of how shyrdak, traditional felt carpets, are meticulously crafted. We have the opportunity to observe skilled artisans as they create intricate patterns using vibrant colors and centuries-old techniques. It’s an enriching experience to witness the preservation of this traditional art form. Dinner and overnight in a small hotel.

*Accommodation: Nomad Lodge Hotel*

**Day 19: Kochkor - Song Kol**

After breakfast, we start our ascent towards mountain lake Song Kul. The lake is not very far from Kochkor, but due to bad road conditions, it will still be a quite long and bumpy ride to the lake (c. 3 hours). Lake Song Kul is a mountainous lake at an altitude of 3016 meters above sea level. The nomads pass their summer on the “jailoo” (summer pasture) with their animals. We will arrive in time for lunch, which will be served in the yurt camp. Free time in the afternoon to go on a walk to the shore or horse ride and observe nomadic life. The yurt camp is located about 3 kilometers from the shore of the lake. We will also watch a match of Kok Boru – a traditional spectacle of horsemanship.

*Accommodation: Yurt Camp (shared bathroom facilities)*

**Day 20: Song Kol - Burana - Bishkek (350 km, c. 6h).**

Today we will depart for Bishkek. Our first stop is Burana Tower near the town of Tokmok. Burana’s 11th-century minaret is the only remaining building from the ancient city of Balasagun, once the capital of the mighty Karakhanid empire. You can walk up the winding staircase and enjoy a wide view of the scenic Chuy Valley. There is also a small open-air museum of balbals, carved stone figures often found around ancient burial mounds.

From Burana, we will drive further to Bishkek.

*Accommodation: B Hotel 3\* or similar*

**Day 21: Bishkek City Tour and Ala Archa National Park.**

After breakfast, we will drive to Ala Archa National Park, 30km outside Bishkek (c. 1h). We will walk in the park, appreciate the mountain views, and inhale the wonderfully fresh, clean air. After this interlude, we will drive to the nearby Ata Beiyit memorial complex and cemetery. Here we can learn more about the Stalinist repressions in Kyrgyzstan. The famous Kyrgyz writer Chingiz Aitmatov and his father are buried here as well. After another 20 minutes ride, we will have lunch inside a yurt in the ethno complex Supara.

In the afternoon we will have a short city tour of Bishkek, with a walk in the Park and a visit to the National Museum. There will be also a last opportunity to buy some souvenirs. Farewell dinner.

*Accommodation: B Hotel 3\* or similar*

## Day 22: Departure

Meet your driver in the hotel lobby for your transfer to the airport.

Please note: If you like to explore more places in Central Asia, we can arrange a private extension trip for you. You could visit for example Tashkent and Astana, the Uzbek and Kazakh capitals, or spend more time in the Kyrgyz mountains.

## Price includes

- All transfers, including airport pick-up and drop-off
- Accommodation based on two people sharing a double/twin room; breakfasts included
- Full board (all lunches and dinners)
- English-speaking local tour leader in each country / for groups of more than 6 people tour leader accompanying the group during the whole trip
- All entry fees as per the itinerary
- Train tickets
- Economy class flight tickets
- Visa support letters for the Turkmenistan tourist visa

## Price does not include

- International air fares to and from Central Asia
- Hotel charges for additional services
- Consular fees for tourist visas
- Travel insurance (required)
- Personal expenses (e.g. souvenirs)
- Alcoholic beverages
- Tips for guides and drivers (optional)

## Important Information

- All listed departures are guaranteed
- The maximum group size is 12 people
- You can also opt to book the whole itinerary as a private tour. We can arrange extra nights before or after the trip, and suggest private tour extensions.
- We can advise and take care of all visas for you. Citizens of most countries are eligible for an e-visa for Tajikistan, and a visa on arrival for Turkmenistan, with a letter of invitation pre-arranged by us. Other countries are visa free for most nationalities.
- A €500 per person deposit is required at the time of booking, and the balance is due 15 days prior to departure. Terms & Conditions: <https://kalpak-travel.com/terms-and-conditions/>
- Travel insurance is required
- We are happy to suggest flights to get to Central Asia and back home: please contact us
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