

Best of Central Asia Tour - Spring

Price: €5,400 per person. Deposit: €500. Payment can also be made in USD or CHF.
Single supplement available for €900 and required for solo travelers.

Guaranteed departures on the following dates in 2024:

13 Apr 2024 - 6 May 2024 / 4 May 2024 - 27 May 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 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 of 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 ancient [Samarkand](#)
- Wander the bustling streets of the UNESCO World Heritage Sites of [Khiva](#) and [Bukhara](#)
- Shop in authentic oriental bazaars for everything from hand-woven silks to spices.
- Feast on a barbecue next to Turkmenistan's burning gas crater known as "the Gate of Hell"

Itinerary Overview

Day 1 (optional): Ashgabat - Darvaza (280km , c. 5h)

Day 2: Ashgabat City Tour

Day 3: Ashgabat - Old Nisa - Ashgabat

Day 4: Ashgabat - Dashoguz (flight) - Kunya Urgench - Nukus (c. 3h).

Day 5: Nukus -Khiva (c. 3-4h)

Day 6: Khiva City Tour

Day 7: Khiva - Tashkent (flight)

Day 8: Tashkent City Tour - Bukhara (train, 4h)

Day 9: Bukhara City Tour

Day 10: Bukhara -Samarkand (train, c. 2h)

Day 11: Samarkand City Tour

Day 12: Samarkand City Tour

Day 13: Samarkand - Seven Lakes - Penjikent

Day 14: Penjikent - Iskanderkul - Dushanbe (c. 7h)

Day 15: Dushanbe City Tour

Day 16: Dushanbe - Almaty (flight)

Day 17: Almaty City Tour

Day 18: Almaty - Charyn Canyon - Karakol (c. 7-8h)

Day 19: Day around Karakol

Day 20: Karakol - Skazka - Bokonbayevo (c. 4-5h).

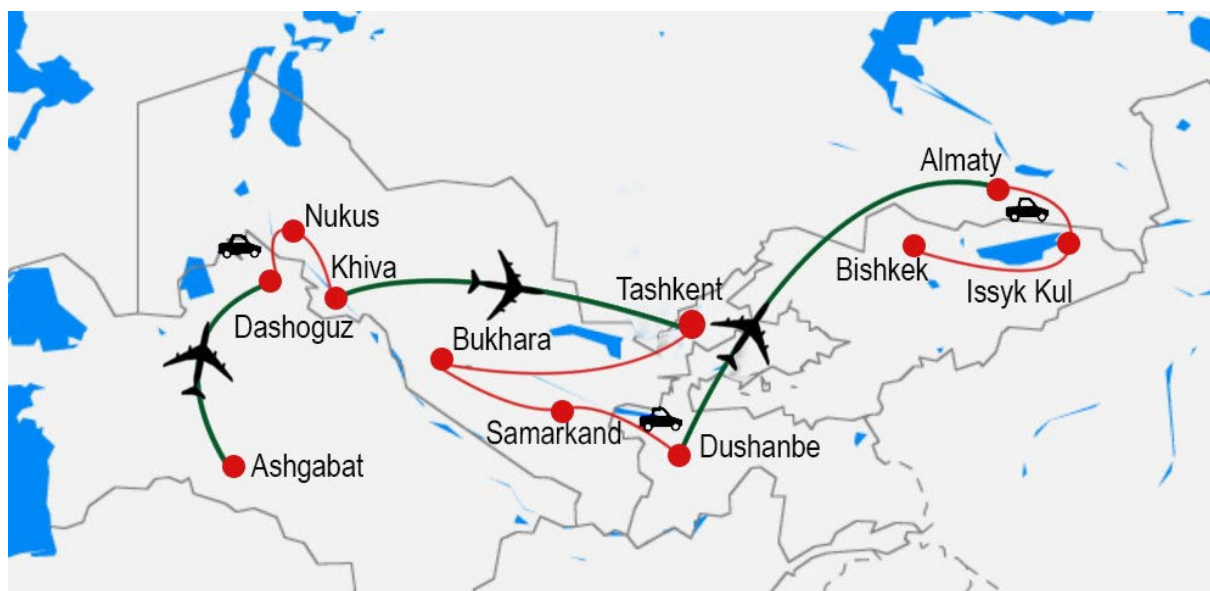
Day 21: Bokonbayevo - Kyzyl Tuu - Chon Kemin (c. 4h).

Day 22: Chon Kemin - Burana - Bishkek

Day 23: Bishkek City Tour

Day 24: Departure

Map



Itinerary

Day 1 (optional): Ashgabat - Darvaza (280km , c. 5h)

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

In the afternoon, we will drive to the Darvaza Gas Crater, located in the middle of the Karakum Desert (270km, 4-5 h.). Together we will enjoy a delicious fire-cooked meal for dinner, then sleep overnight at the yurt camp.

Please note: It's a long and shaky ride to the gas crater and we will drive the same way back to Ashgabat on the following day. If you are not particularly eager to visit this place, you can arrive in Ashgabat on the following day and save 250 EUR.

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

Day 2: Ashgabat City Tour

After camp-style breakfast, we return back to Ashgabat on the same road (c. 4-5h). Today it's Sunday and we will have a chance to visit the Sunday Bazaar called Tolkuchka, including the livestock section with camels. In the afternoon, 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. Turkmen welcome dinner with a folklore show.

*Accommodation: Hotel Diwan 5**

Day 3: Ashgabat - Old Nisa - Ashgabat

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 a royal residence and temple complex. Then drive back to Ashgabat, stopping en route at National Memorial Complex "Halk Hakydasy" with WWII and Earthquake memorials. Spend some time at the Memorial Complex. Lunch at a local restaurant.

After lunch, 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 horse stable, where you can see the famous Turkmen horses called Akhal Teke. Then we drive back to Ashgabat.

*Accommodation: Hotel Diwan 5**

Day 4: Ashgabat - Dashoguz (flight) - Kunya Urgench - Nukus (c. 3h).

Catch a flight from Ashgabat to Dashoguz at 9.50 AM (50 min flight) and transfer to Kunya Urgench (100 km, 2 h.). Have lunch and step into the pages of history as you explore Kunya Urgench's ruins. Discover the remnants of mausoleums that, while not perfectly preserved, still exude a mystical charm. Behold the towering Kutlug Timur Minaret that reaches for the sky, symbolizing the architectural mastery of their time. Explore the cultural significance of Kunya Urgench as you unravel the stories woven into its ancient stones.

Then it's time to say a fond farewell to Turkmenistan and cross the border into Uzbekistan, our second "Stan". Our destination for today – Nukus – is less than an hour's drive from the border. On the way to Nukus, we will stop at the ancient cemetery of Mizdakhan. Check-in at the hotel in Nukus and Uzbek welcome dinner.

*Accommodation: Hotel Tashkent 3**

Day 5: Nukus -Khiva (c. 3-4h)

We will start the day exploring Nukus, the capital of the autonomous Republic of Karakalpakstan with its distinct culture, history, and even own language. We will visit the State Art Museum which was founded by Igor Savitsky, a Russian artist and collector, who dedicated his life to preserving and showcasing artworks that were considered controversial and unconventional during the Soviet era. The collection spans a wide range of styles, including paintings, sculptures, and applied art, with a particular emphasis on the 20th-century avant-garde movement. We will also have a walk around the local vicinity to see life in Nukus. Then we will drive around three to four hours to Khiva. Upon arrival, we will check in at the hotel and meet up again for dinner.

Accommodation: Hotel Asia 3 or similar*

Day 6: 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 7: Khiva - Tashkent (flight)

Free time in the morning with optional activities and after lunch transfer to Urgench airport (c. 40 min). Domestic flight from Urgench to Tashkent (3:20 PM – 4:40 PM). Check-in at the hotel and dinner in a local restaurant.

Accommodation: Hotel Inspira-S 4 or similar*

Day 8: Tashkent City Tour - Bukhara (train, 4h)

With a population of over 3 million people, Tashkent is the largest city in Central Asia. Its history dates back to the first century BC when an urban settlement grew up around a major caravan crossroad on the Silk Road. Much of what you see today, however, dates from the late 20th or 21st centuries, as a devastating earthquake in 1966 destroyed much of the older city. Rebuilding Tashkent was a major Soviet infrastructure project, with laborers coming to work here from across the Soviet Union.

We will start the day's sightseeing at the Monument of Courage, which remembers the victims of the earthquake. We will then walk to Independence Square, a symbol of freedom for Uzbekistan's citizens, who declared their independence when the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991. At Amir Timur Square you will see the statue of the great conqueror. Next, we drive to Chorsu Bazaar, Tashkent's green-domed market, with its acres of spices, fresh produce, and traditional crafts. We will also visit the Old City to find the Khast Imom complex, which houses the historic holy Quran of Caliph Osman. Today's city tour will end with the Museum of Applied Arts, an ornate, rainbow-colored building that was previously the official residence of the Russian Ambassador.

After early dinner, transfer to the train station to catch the modern high-speed train to Bukhara (6:45 PM – 10:35 PM). Transfer to the hotel in the old town and check in.

Accommodation: Hotel Paradise Plaza 4 or similar*

Day 9: Bukhara City Tour

Today we will have a walking tour of Bukhara, one of the most important trading hubs on the Great Silk Road, as well as a respected center of religious learning. 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, an oasis shaded by mulberry trees in the heart of the city. Your guide will show you the city's unmissable sights, and you can soak up the atmosphere wandering through Bukhara's labyrinthine alleyways. Key sites on today's tour itinerary include the historic trading domes, Magokiatori mosque, and the Poi Kalon complex. We will also visit the Ark Fortress, the 10th-century Samanid Mausoleum, and Bolo Hauz Mosque. Dinner in the old town.

Accommodation: Hotel Paradise Plaza 4 or similar*

Day 10: Bukhara -Samarkand (train, c. 2h)

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 11: 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 12: 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 13: 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 14: Penjikent - Iskanderkul - Dushanbe (c. 7h)

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, then take a short hike to a nearby waterfall. We can also go on a short boat ride.

We reach the Tajik capital Dushanbe in the evening just in time for dinner.

Accommodation: Hotel Rumi 4 or similar*

Day 15: Dushanbe City Tour

Originally, Dushanbe was a small village centered on a market that 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. Arriving in Dushanbe you will meet your Tajik guide and start the city tour. 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 or similar*

Day 16: 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 17: 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 18: Almaty - Charyn Canyon - Karakol (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 town of Karakol. Check-in at the hotel and dinner with a Uighur family.

Accommodation: Hotel 78 or similar

Day 19: Day around Karakol

Karakol was founded as a Russian military outpost in 1869. It grew in the 19th century after explorers came to map the peaks and valleys separating Kyrgyzstan from China. In the 1880s Karakol's population surged with an influx of Dungans, Chinese Muslims fleeing warfare in China. After breakfast, we will tour the town's most interesting sights. The tour includes the Dungan Mosque, built in 1904; and the wooden Russian Orthodox Church, which has been standing since 1869. We will also visit the museum of Russian explorer Przhevalsk and the local market of Karakol. After the short city tour, we will drive about half an hour to Yrdyk village visit the small Dungan Museum, and learn about Dungan ethnicity. Lunch at the Dungan family house. Afternoon excursion to Jety-Oguz gorge, which is a lush valley with some striking red sandstone rock formations (the "seven Bulls" from which the valley takes its name). Easy hike in the gorge and return back to Karakol. Dinner in restaurant Dastorkon.

Accommodation: Hotel 78 or similar

Day 20: Karakol - Skazka - Bokonbayevo (c. 4-5h).

Today we will drive along the southern shore of Lake Issyk Kul to a yurt camp near Bokonbayevo on the shore. Our first stop along the way is at Skazka (Fairytale) Canyon, which derives its name from its bizarre landscape made of fabulous rock formations, we will walk for around one hour. We will also meet an eagle hunter, who will show us his eagle and give a short demonstration for us. In the evening we will enjoy a folklore concert by a family of local musicians.

Accommodation: Yurt Camp (2 people in a yurt, shared bathroom facilities)

Day 21: Bokonbayevo - Kyzyl Tuu - Chon Kemin (c. 4h).

Today we will drive to Chon Kemin. Before departing from Bokonbayevo, we will first 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. Our next stop is in the village of Kyzyl Tuu, where we will meet a yurt maker and learn more about this traditional nomadic dwelling. We will be able to set up a yurt together. Lunch with the yurt maker and his family. We will then continue driving to the mountain valley of Chon Kemin. Before dinner, we learn how borsook, fried bread, is made and we can taste it.

Accommodation: Kemin Guesthouse

Day 22: Chon Kemin - Burana - Bishkek

We will spend the entire morning in Chon Kemin Valley. We will watch a performance of traditional Kyrgyz horse games. There is also an optional hike on foot or horseback to a panoramic viewpoint. After lunch, we will then depart to Bishkek with a stop en route at 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 another one and a half hours to Bishkek. Check-in at the hotel and dinner in a local restaurant.

Accommodation: B Hotel 3 or similar*

Day 23: Bishkek City Tour

Bishkek is a city of wide boulevards and marble-faced public buildings combined with numerous Soviet-style apartment blocks surrounding interior courtyards. There are also thousands of smaller privately built houses, mostly outside the city center. Streets follow a grid pattern, with most flanked on both sides by narrow irrigation channels, watering innumerable trees to provide shade in the hot summers. We will visit Ala-To Square and visit the newly renovated History Museum. Walk along Oak Park to the open art gallery of sculptures. Farewell dinner.

Accommodation: B Hotel 3 or similar*

Day 24: Departure

Meet your driver in the hotel lobby for your transfer to the airport or continue the tour on an extension trip.

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 accompanying the group for the whole time
- 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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