Journey Through Central Asia: The Five `Stans
2015
Journey Through Central Asia: The Five ‘Stans
A Classic Silk Road Survey

Five departures in 2015 – Premier Series – 21 Days

April 6-26 • April 27-May 17 • August 17-September 6 •
September 14- October 4 • October 12-November 1

More than 2,000 years ago, the great trade routes that linked Europe and China opened Central Asia to foreign cultures, customs and religions. Historically linked with such names as Alexander the Great, Genghis Khan and Tamerlane, Central Asia has been religiously and politically influenced by the Islamic world, the West and Russia in turn. This in-depth visit to the five ‘Stans offers a rare and exciting view into the cultural personalities of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan. Admire masterpieces of Islamic architecture, interact with locals in vibrant bazaars and witness the daily life of these countries – visiting eight awe-inspiring UNESCO World Heritage Sites along the way.
**Daily Itinerary**

Day 1, Monday  
Arrive Almaty

Day 2, Tuesday  
Almaty

Day 3, Wednesday  
Almaty • drive to Lake Issyk-Kul

Day 4, Thursday  
Lake Issyk-Kul • Cholpan-Ata • Bishkek

Day 5, Friday  
Bishkek • fly to Osh • Fergana

Day 6, Saturday  
Fergana • day trip to Margilan, Rishtan, Kokand

Day 7, Sunday  
Fergana • Khujand

Day 8, Monday  
Khujand • Tashkent

Day 9, Tuesday  
Tashkent • Samarkand

Day 10, Wednesday  
Samarkand

Day 11, Thursday  
Samarkand • Shakhrisabze • Bukhara

Day 12, Friday  
Bukhara

Day 13, Saturday  
Bukhara

Day 14, Sunday  
Bukhara • Khiva

Day 15, Monday  
Khiva

Day 16, Tuesday  
Khiva • Nukus

Day 17, Wednesday  
Nukus • Kunya Urgench • Tashauz • fly to Ashkabad

Day 18, Thursday  
Ashkabad • day trip to Nisa

Day 19, Friday  
Ashkabad • day trip to Mary/Merv

Day 20, Saturday  
Ashkabad

Day 21, Sunday  
Depart Ashkabad
MIR Signature Features

- Enjoy the views of the Tien Shan Mountains from Central Asia’s most beautifully situated city, Almaty.
- Listen to a Kazakh folk performance while dining in a traditional yurt-style restaurant.
- Attend an exciting exhibition of traditional horse games in Kyrgyzstan.
- Listen to selections from the traditional Kyrgyz poem, *The Epic of Manas*.
- Visit Kyrgyzstan’s second largest city, Osh, and meet with local students.
- Learn about the life and work of local silk and ceramic artisans during visits to their workshops in the rural Fergana Valley and Tashkent.
- Dine at the homes of local Uzbek families and sample traditional Central Asian dishes.
- Applaud the unsurpassed majesty of the Registan and learn about the architectural marvels of fabled Samarkand.
- Experience the timeless character of Bukhara’s Old Town with its winding streets, colorful markets, and chaikhana (tea houses).
- Admire the trove of rescued Russian art with an expert who leads you behind the scenes at the Savitsky Museum, a gem in the desert in remote Nukus.
- Learn about the environmental impact of the shrinking Aral Sea from a local expert.
- Explore the extensive ruins of the ancient city of Merv, and learn about its turbulent history from an expert guide.
- Venture outside Ashkhabad to visit a horse-breeding farm devoted to the renowned Akhal-Teke horse, arguably the oldest cultured breed of horse in the world.

Tour Highlights

**Almaty**
- Tien-Shan Mountain Range, Panfilov Park and Zenkov Cathedral, Small Almaty Gorge, Medeo Sports Complex, Green Bazaar

**Lake Issyk-Kul**
- Second-largest high-altitude lake in the world, petroglyphs at Cholpan-Ata

**Burana Tower**
- One of the only remaining Silk Road watchtowers in Kyrgyzstan

**Bishkek**
- Capital city of Kyrgyzstan, Ala-Too Mountain Range, National History Museum

**Osh**
- Suleiman-Too Sacred Mountain (UNESCO World Heritage Site), view of Babur’s House

**Fergana Valley**
- Margilan market, ceramics master in Rishtan Village, Kokand including Khan’s Palace

**Khujand**
- Second-largest city in Tajikistan, Syr Darya River, Timurmalik Fortress, Muslihidden Madrassah, Sogdian Museum, Penjshanbe Bazaar

**Tashkent**
- Square of Independence, Kukeldash Madrassah, Kaffal-Shashi Mausoleum, Palace of People’s Friendship, Museum of Applied Arts

**Samarkand**
- “Crossroads of Cultures” (UNESCO World Heritage Site), Registan, Shah-i-Zinde, Bibi-Khanum Mosque, Uleg Bek Observatory, silk carpet factory

**Shakhrisabzé**
- “Historic Centre of Shakhrisabzé” (UNESCO World Heritage Site), Ak Saray (White Palace)

**Bukhara**
- “Historic Centre of Bukhara” (UNESCO World Heritage Site), Lyab-i-Khauz Plaza, Kukeldash Madrassah, Kalon Mosque and Minaret, Ark Citadel, Zindan Prison, Ismael Samani Mausoleum, Summer Palace of the last Emir

**Khiva**
- Ichon-Qala (UNESCO World Heritage Site), Kyzyl Kum Desert, Amu Darya River, Tash-Hauli Palace, Dzhumga Mosque, Kunya Ark, Khievak well

**Nukus**
- Capital of the autonomous region of Karakalpakstan, Savitsky Art Collection, with the world’s second largest gathering of Russian avant-garde art

**Kunya Urgench**
- (UNESCO World Heritage Site), 11th-century Kutlug-Timur Minaret, Turabek Khanym Mausoleum

**Ashkhabad**
- National Museum of History and Ethnography with carpet section, Russian Bazaar, Kipchak Mosque, Akhal-Teke horse farm
Daily Itinerary

Important note: If you are considering a pre-tour night, please see the notes at the end under “Pre- and Post-tours.” Hotels in Almaty are more expensive than travelers may expect, so those wishing to avoid additional costs should plan to arrive late Monday night or in the early hours of Tuesday a.m.

Day One, Monday
Arrive Almaty

Most airline arrivals into Almaty arrive late tonight or very early the following morning. Following customs procedures, transfer to a hotel for the rest of the night.
Meals: Independent – Dostuk Hotel or similar

Day Two, Tuesday
Almaty

This morning after breakfast, begin an exploration of Almaty and its environs. Spread out at the foothills of the Zaili Alatau Mountains in the Tien Shan range, Almaty is the commercial capital of Central Asia’s richest country, Kazakhstan. Present day Almaty sits on the site of an old Silk Road oasis town called Almatu; laid waste by the Mongols in 1211, the city left no ancient remains. Almaty’s name means “the place with apples,” and the many varieties of wild apple in the vicinity give scientists reason to believe that this is where apples were first cultivated. Today the city is thriving on the considerable foreign investment it has attracted, primarily in the oil and gas industries.

The city tour of Almaty includes Panfilov Park with its Zenkov Cathedral, and a visit to the Green Bazaar where one can find all types of produce, nuts, and dried fruits. Panfilov Park, a green oasis in Almaty’s central area, was renamed by the Soviets in honor of 28 Kazakh soldiers led by General Panfilov who died on the outskirts of Moscow during WWII. A monument in the park honors the soldiers, and an Eternal Flame memorializes all the people who died during the war. Also in the park is Zenkov Cathedral, a wooden Orthodox church built at the turn of the century without the use of nails.

Next, head out of town to the Small Almaty Gorge. The gorge snakes upward from Almaty to approximately 5,000 feet, where the Medeo Sports Complex is located. As the coach climbs upward, the spring-blooming violet poppies of the steppe give way to wild apple and apricot forests. The glacier-fed Small Almaty River becomes narrow and the stony cliffs steeper. The complex is set among craggy peaks and alpine slopes that bear the
traces of an ancient glacier. Enjoy an authentic Kazakh welcome lunch and a musical performance at a local restaurant.

After lunch, return to the city center to visit the State Central Museum with its collection of applied art, and tour the delightful Museum of Musical Instruments, located in a 1907 Russian style wooden building formerly called the House of Officers. Created in 1980, the museum exhibits a collection of traditional Kazakh instruments, including the dombra, a two-stringed instrument ubiquitous in Central Asia.

Dinner this evening is independent.
Meals: B, L – Dostuk Hotel or similar

Day Three, Wednesday
Almaty • Lake Issyk-Kul

Get an extra early start today, setting off land for Kyrgyzstan. Travel on the western road, and arrive at the hotel on the shores of Lake Issyk-Kul by early evening. Kyrgyzstan’s beautiful Lake Issyk-Kul is the second-largest high-altitude lake in the world, after Titicaca. Located at an altitude of 5279 feet, Issyk-Kul is a slightly saline lake with no outlet, surrounded by the rugged Tien Shan Mountains. Some evidence suggests that a 2nd century BC trade center is submerged under the lake water.

Dinner at the hotel. The evening is free to relax and enjoy the lake.
Meals: B, L, D – Karven Issyk-kul Hotel or similar

Day Four, Thursday
Lake Issyk-Kul • Cholpan-Ata • Bishkek

This morning, depart to the capital of Kyrgyzstan, Bishkek.

Make a stop at Cholpan-Ata, one of several places in the Kyrgyz Chu Valley where you can see petroglyphs thought to have been created by the tribes of the Neolithic period. The images are mainly primitive long-horned ibex, horses, camels and snow leopards. There are several thousand petroglyphs here, providing a glimpse into the world of the Iron Age.

Next, stop at the Burana Tower, one of the only existing watch towers remaining from the old Silk Road. The settlement that formerly surrounded it, Balasagyn, has disappeared. The open-air museum here features a collection of ancient bal-bals, carved stone figures used as monuments. Enjoy an opportunity to see an exhibition of the local traditional horse games.

Continue to Bishkek, stopping for lunch en route. Arrive by early evening, and check in to the hotel. The capital of Kyrgyzstan, Bishkek was founded as the Russian garrison of Pishpek. The city is set before a backdrop of the northern edge of the Ala-Too mountain range, and was originally a heavily forested rest stop on the Silk Road. Appropriated by the Russians in 1877, the city was eventually re-named Bishkek when Kyrgyzstan achieved its independence at the break-up of the Soviet Union. Two rivers, the
Alamedin and Ala-Archa, run from the mountains through the city into the Chuy River, which also forms the Kazakh border. Bishkek is graced with large boulevards, friendly people and more trees than any other Central Asian city. On clear days, the permanently snow-capped mountains looming over the city provide spectacular views.

Enjoy dinner at a local restaurant, with a performance of selections from the traditional Kyrgyz poem, *The Epic of Manas*.

Meals: B, L, D – Hyatt Hotel or similar

**Day Five, Friday**

Bishkek • fly to Osh • Fergana

This morning depart on a flight to Osh. On arrival in Kyrgyzstan’s second largest city, located in the Fergana Valley, travelers are met by a local coach and guide. Here, learn about Osh through the eyes of locals during a visit with students.

Visit Suleiman’s Throne. Nicknamed Kichik-Mecca (Little Mecca), Suleiman’s Throne is one of the holiest Islamic sites in Central Asia, though even before the prophet Suleiman was said to have been buried here, it was known as a peaceful retreat and was called Bara-Kuh (Beautiful Mountain). Pilgrims travel to the hill from all over the world to meditate and to undertake the climb up to Babur’s House. The small stone shelter is where Babur, the 14th century Muslim leader who founded the Mughal Dynasty in India, came at 14 years of age to perform his chilli, a forty day fast for meditation. The sacred mountain was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2009.

Late this afternoon, cross the border into Uzbekistan and drive to the city of Fergana. Arrive in Fergana for dinner at the hotel and overnight. Patience is required for this border crossing, as there can be busy crowds and long lines.

Meals: B, L, D – Asia Fergana or similar

**Day Six, Saturday**

Fergana • day trip to Margilan, Rishtan, Kokand

Following breakfast at the hotel, depart on a guided tour of the Fergana Valley. Surrounded by the Tien Shan Mountain Range and watered by tributaries of the Syr Darya River, the Fergana Valley is the most fertile part of Central Asia. Alexander the Great founded a city here in the southwestern mouth of the valley in 329 BC. Traders from China came this way as they created the trade route we call the Silk Road in the 1st century BC. The whole valley became a rich oasis, with irrigated fields producing grains, fruits, silk, cotton, nuts and vegetables, and supporting horses, cattle, sheep and camels. There is evidence that Buddhism made its way here from China before the advent of Islam during the 8th century AD.
The city of **Fergana** is the newest settlement in the Fergana Valley, established in 1876 as a Russian garrison town under General Mikhail Skobolev. Located in the southern Fergana Valley near the 16,000-foot Alai Mountains, Fergana seems more Russian than Uzbek. Its first settlers were encouraged to plant trees, and today the streets are lined with plane and poplar trees, giving the city its reputation as one of the greenest cities in Uzbekistan. The first building was the fortress, which still stands in the downtown part of the city. After a short introductory drive around Fergana, continue on to spend some time at the **Margilan market**.

Margilan was a major Silk Road stop by the 9th century, but local legends proclaim that its history dates back to the time of Alexander the Great. Margilan, like much of the valley, is known as a traditional stronghold of Islam. In the 19th century Margilan had a dozen madrassahs (Islamic religious schools) and over 200 mosques, most of which were destroyed by the Russians in the late 19th century. Following a short city tour, visit a **silk workshop** to observe the process of silk-making, and learn more about the traditional *ikat* and *khanatlas* or “king of satin” pattern distinctive to Uzbek silk fabrics.

The next stop is in the old village of **Rishtan**, famous for its ceramics. There is evidence of earthenware in the foothills of the Alai Range dating back one thousand years. Pottery became prominent in this region due to the unusual amount and excellent quality of locally accessible raw materials — red clay and pigments made of minerals and mountain grasses.

Modern **Rishtan ceramics** are characterized by elaborate floral and geometric designs in bright blue and green hues painted on a creamy white background. The skills used to produce Uzbek ceramics have been passed down father to son for countless generations. Enjoy lunch at the **home of a master artist**, and tour his private studio to learn more about the process of making these authentic ceramics.

Continue to the city of **Kokand**. First mentioned by Arab travelers in the 10th century as an oasis town on the trade route between India and China, Kokand was known throughout history as a prosperous trading and religious center. During the 19th century, it was the centerpiece of a powerful khanate stretching from the Fergana Valley to the southern Kazakh steppe.

**Meals:** B, L, D – Asia Fergana or similar

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**Day Seven, Sunday**

**Fergana Valley • Khujand**

This morning after breakfast, drive to the Tajik border. Border formalities can be time-consuming.
After crossing the border into Tajikistan, continue to Khujand. Situated at the entrance to the Fergana Valley on the Syr Darya River, Khujand is the second largest city in Tajikistan. Its origins have been attributed to both Alexander the Great (in 329 BC) and Cyrus the Great of Persia (several centuries earlier); whichever is true, the city is an ancient one. A former religious center and an important Silk Road stop, Khujand is home to several medieval monuments. A city tour includes a visit to the Timuralik Fortress, the Muslihiddin Madrassah, the Sogdian Museum and the exciting Penjshanbe Bazaar.

Khujand’s pink-painted covered bazaar is filled with goods to buy – both local and imported clothing, shoes and sundries. Outside the huge columned structure, rows of tables are covered with bags of brilliant spices and nuts, straw-beded melons with macramé handles and piles of vegetables.

Twelfth century leader and poet Muslihiddin Khudjandi is buried here in the Muslihiddin memorial complex, which has been rebuilt many times since that time. Today the complex includes a 16th century mosque and 19th century minaret as well as the poet’s mausoleum.

Enter the Historical Museum of Sogdiana through a reconstructed medieval city gate. Displays include ancient Sogdian artifacts and exhibits from more recent Tajik history. On the left bank of the Syr Darya in the middle of Khujand are the remains of its 10th century citadel, restored in 1999. Archaeological excavations around the walls have uncovered artifacts from the 4th century BC.

Enjoy dinner at a local restaurant and an overnight at a Tajik hotel.

Meals: B, L, D – Khujand Grand Hotel or similar

Day Eight, Monday
Khujand ● Tashkent

After breakfast at the hotel this morning, depart for Uzbekistan’s capital, Tashkent. Although it doesn’t look it today, Tashkent is one of the oldest cities in Uzbekistan. Rock paintings in the Chaktal Mountains about 50 miles away show that humans have been here since perhaps 2000 BC. In the 2nd century BC the town was known as Ming Uryuk. A major caravan crossroads, it was taken by the Arabs in 751 and by Genghis Khan in the 13th century. Tamerlane feasted here in the 14th century and the Shaibanid khans in the 15th and 16th. The Russian Empire arrived in 1865, and Uzbekistan was not an autonomous country again until 1991.

Tashkent lost much of its architectural history in a huge earthquake in 1966, and although it is an old city, most of it has been built since then. Today, the city is a jumble of wide tree-lined boulevards, oversized 20th century Soviet buildings and reconstructed traces of the old city with mud-walled houses, narrow winding lanes, mosques and madrassahs.

The tour today includes the Square of Independence, the Navoi Theater, the Palace of Peoples’ Friendship and the Tillya Sheikh Mosque, to see one of the oldest Korans in the world. Time permitting this afternoon, visit the Tashkent Museum of Applied Arts.

The history of Independence Square (Mustakillik Maydoni) is revealed in the different names it has borne throughout its existence. First named Cathedral Square
in honor of the Orthodox cathedral built here by Konstantin Kaufman, the first Russian Governor-General of Turkestan, it became Red Square in 1917. In 1966 it was designated Lenin Square, and it was not until 1992 that it became Independence Square.

Alisher Navoi, who lived and wrote at the end of the 15th century, is Uzbekistan’s most beloved poet. The **Navoi Opera and Ballet Theater** was built in 1947 by Japanese prisoners of war, and includes six foyers representing the main cities of Uzbekistan. Each foyer is decorated differently, using carved and painted plaster (ganche), woodcarving and frescoes. The repertory of the theater includes Uzbek music and dance, and international operas and ballets.

The **Uthman Koran**, considered by Sunni Muslims to be the oldest Koran in the world, is safeguarded in the library of the **Tillya Sheikh Mosque** in the Muy Muborok Madrassah, where several of Mohammed’s hairs are said to have been enshrined. Written on deerskin 19 years after Mohammed’s death, the manuscript was compiled in Medina by Uthman, the third caliph of Islam. (Shi’a Muslims believe that Uthman’s successor Ali, was the first true caliph, and his version of the Koran is held to be the only true version.) It has been inscribed onto the **UNESCO Memory of the World Register**. The experience of viewing this 7th century sacred document is a powerful one.

Enjoy a free evening to explore independently.
Meals: B, L – Hotel Lotte City or similar

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**Day Nine, Tuesday**

**Tashkent • Samarkand**

This morning, set off early for Samarkand, a **UNESCO World Heritage Site** called the “**Crossroads of Cultures**.” Modern Samarkand is built on the ruins of ancient Afrosiab, and once went by the name of Marakanda. Its location between China and the Western world secured its importance as a trade center and a clearinghouse for cultural exchange. Islamic beliefs from the Near East crossed paths with spices from Southeast Asia and silk from the Middle Kingdom. Its strategic location, cultural wealth and worldly riches made Samarkand an attractive target for the world’s most famous conquerors.

After an early-afternoon check-in at the hotel and **lunch at a private home**, sightseeing begins at the **Registan**, which is considered to be Central Asia’s noblest square. Registan Square is the centerpiece of Samarkand, and the most recognizable landmark for visitors. The three emblematic **madrassahs** frame the square, and loom over the empty space in the center. It was this central space that originally gave the place its name, for “registan” simply means “place of sand.” This sandy place was at the center of ancient Samarkand and was a public square and marketplace before the Ulug Bek, Tillya-Kori, and Shir Dor madrassahs were built. In its reconstruction, the square maintains the majesty that it has radiated through the ages.

Visit **Gur-Emir Mausoleum**, the final resting place of Tamerlane, but originally built for his grandson after the latter’s death, at the turn of the 15th century. The interior of the mausoleum...
has been restored and is brilliant in gold leaf and fresh tile. The heavily gilded central dome opens over
the set of tomb-markers resembling sarcophagi (the bodies are located well below, but are on site). All
are marble, with the exception of Tamerlane’s, which is a slab of solid jade reportedly from Mongolia.
Meals: B, L, D – Registan Plaza Hotel or similar

Day Ten, Wednesday
Samarkand

This morning continue exploring Samarkand with a
visit to the Bibi-Khanum Mosque, built by Tamer-
lane to be the largest mosque in the Islamic world,
and dedicated to the memory of his favorite wife.

Continue to the row of tombs and mausoleums col-
lectively called Shah-I-Zinde, or “place of a living
king,” stretched between the present and the past. At
its front is living Samarkand, and at its back the dusty
slopes at the edge of ancient Afrosiab. Even on hot
summer days the mausoleums remain shady and cool,
and seem to lure the traveler to approach the oldest
tomb at the far end. Behind the complex and set into
the hill lies an active cemetery with gravesites dating
back as far as the 9th century, and as recently as the
present day.

After lunch, make a stop at Ulug Bek’s Observatory. Though concerned with conquest, politics and
other matters of terrestrial importance, Tamerlane’s grandson Ulug Bek found his true interest in the
heavens. The astronomer-king was fascinated by the stars and the cosmos and built one of the most ad-
vanced observatories of the Ancient World. The observations, which he undertook with the naked eye
only, predated the telescope by over 150 years. They were aided by the building itself, which housed a
large vertical half-circle, only a quarter of which remains today. By using careful methods, rigorous obser-
vation and meticulous recording, Ulug Bek calculated the length of the year to within a minute of the
modern accepted value. He also created the most comprehensive (to that date) catalog of the heavens,
earning his place in history.

Visit a silk carpet factory that uses natural vegetable dyes to color the thread used in its carpets. Tour
the gardens outside the factory where the weavers grow indigo, coleus and dahlias to use for dye. Ob-
serve the entire process of dying the thread and weaving the carpets, with an opportunity to shop after-
ward.

Attend a performance of a young Uzbek dance troupe before dinner this evening.
Meals: B, L, D – Registan Plaza Hotel or similar

Day Eleven, Thursday
Samarkand • Shakhrisabze • Bukhara

This morning get an early start and depart for UNESCO-listed Shakhrisabze, the birthplace of
Tamerlane. The town itself was originally founded under the name of Kesh, and was renamed Shakhris-
abze (Green City) by Tamerlane himself. Here one can see the ruins of Ak Saray (White Palace), built
in the 14th century and one of Tamerlane’s most expansive undertakings. The palace complex included a massive portal covered with incredible blue, white and gold ceramic tile mosaics and standing over 131 feet high. After lunch, continue on to Bukhara for check-in at the bed & breakfast and a late dinner.

Meals: B, L, D – Sasha and Son’s Bed & Breakfast, Amelia Hotel, or similar

Day Twelve, Friday

Bukhara

Spend today exploring Central Asia’s most ancient living city and UNESCO World Heritage Site, the “Historic Centre of Bukhara.” An oasis in the desert, Bukhara offers cool shade and rest to the modern traveler as it did to the camel caravans that plied the Silk Road hundreds of years ago. Bukhara is as old as Samarkand, and has preserved its ancient architecture and design to an arguably larger extent than that city. The Old Town in Bukhara has a unified feel, drawn together by a central reflecting pool and plaza, by commonality in the structure of the domed bazaars and by the major monuments ringing the Old Town, the Kalon Assembly, the Zindan Prison, and the Ark Citadel.

This morning, sightseeing begins at Lyab-i-Khauz Plaza, located in the heart of the old town. With the feel of a true oasis in an oasis town, the plaza is at the center of Bukhara’s old town and is – as it has been throughout history – a place to meet friends, to eat, to drink, and to relax in the shade. The atmosphere is cooled by the long rectangular reflecting pool that makes up the center of the plaza, and by the shade of the trees that ring the plaza. The mulberry trees here are hundreds of years old and frame the 16th and 17th century madrassahs that make up three of the four edges of the ensemble.

Visit the nearby Kukeldash Madrassah, the largest of Central Asia’s Koran schools, which dates from 1417. Stroll through the capemaker and spice bazaars and past street-level mosques and madrassahs, before moving on to the Kalon Mosque and Minaret, the second largest mosque in Central Asia, after the Bibi Khanum in Samarkand.

The 12th century Kalon assembly, including the Kalon Mosque and Minaret, and the Mir-i-Arab Madrassah, surrounds an open plaza that teems with merchants and local vendors. The minaret towers over the dusty square, looking down from a height of more than 150 feet, and casting its shadow between the mosque and the madrassah. The minaret can be seen from all over the old town, as it is easily the tallest structure in the old part of Bukhara. When seen up close the detailed brickwork becomes apparent; fourteen distinct bands of brickwork circle the tower at intervals, and at the top of the minaret resolve into a traditional stalactite formation.

Located nearby is the Ark Citadel, the ancient fortress and seat of government for the Emirate of Bukhara for over one thousand years, and now a collection of museums and mosques. The current structure has been built and rebuilt on the same site throughout its history, and has preserved something of the form, purpose and function of the first Ark. Like the medieval castle complexes of Europe, the Bukhara
Ark served the emirs of Bukhara as a residence, audience hall, as protection from neighboring enemies and for more mundane purposes, such as a trade center and a police station.

Investigate Zindan Prison, with its infamous “bug pit” where two British spies were brutally imprisoned as part of the 19th century struggle in the Great Game between Britain and Russia for influence over this strategic oasis town.

Visit the Ismael Samani Mausoleum. The 10th century resting place of Ismael Samani, founder of the Persian Samanid Dynasty, is detailed with sixteen different styles of brickwork. The little mausoleum was buried under centuries of sand and not discovered until the 20th century.

During touring today, meet with a local Bukharan architect who will provide an interesting look into the current state of historical architectural renovation in Bukhara. Enjoy a traditional Uzbek performance this evening along with dinner at a former madrassah.

Meals: B, L, D – Sasha and Son’s Bed & Breakfast, Amelia Hotel, or similar

Day Thirteen, Saturday
Bukhara

Today visit the Summer Palace of the last emir and stop at its Museum of National Crafts to admire the vivid suzani, embroidered coverlets, that Uzbekistan is known for. A short distance outside of the city sits the emir’s Palace of Moon and Stars, built at the turn of the century after the Russians took control of Bukhara. The palace itself is something of a showpiece, as it was designed to keep the emir in luxury, but removed from the city, in isolation and political impotence. The main palace is a mixture of local materials, regional influences, and Russian style. Western furniture abounds, but design choices reflect traditional Uzbek decorations.

Meals: B, L, D – Sasha and Son’s Bed & Breakfast, Amelia Hotel, or similar

Day Fourteen, Sunday
Bukhara • Khiva

This morning head for the last great city on the Uzbek itinerary, Khiva. The drive today traverses long stretches of the Kyzyl Kum, or Red Sands, Desert. This is the same route taken by loaded Silk Road camel caravans and once plagued by brigands on hand to plunder their riches. Stop en route to take a look at the Amu Darya River, which used to be called the Oxus, and loosely parallels the Uzbek-Turkmen border.

Arrive in Khiva in time for dinner and overnight.

Meals: B, L, D – Asia Khiva Hotel or similar
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 the living city is part museum town, part re-creation of life hundreds of years ago.

Archaeologists have found traces of human habitation around Khiva dating from the 5th century BC. It was for hundreds of years a stop on the old Silk Road and a fortress town, but it was not until the 16th century that Khiva became the capital of the Khorezm Khanate. The khanate ruled the surrounding area for over 300 years, and was a well-known slave-trading center. Today, Khiva evokes a most remote and exotic feel with its compact old walled city full of minarets, a khan’s fort, cobbled alleys, mosques, and tombs.

Spend the day exploring Khiva on foot. The tour includes the monuments of the **UNESCO-listed Old Town, or Ichron-Qala**, including the **Tash-Hauli Palace**, built in the 19th century for the reigning khan and his four wives; the **Dzhuma Mosque** with its interior forest of carved wooden pillars; the **Kunya Ark**, the original residence of the khans, partially destroyed in the Persian invasion of the 18th century; and the ancient well of Khievak, which made settlement here feasible.

**Meals:** B, L, D – Asia Khiva Hotel or similar

**Day Sixteen, Tuesday**

**Khiva • Nukus**

Depart today for the small city of **Nukus** in western Uzbekistan. Nukus is the capital of the autonomous region of Karakalpakstan, home to the Karakalpaks, a Turkic people more closely related to Kazakhs than to Uzbeks. A modern city, Nukus is at the center of an area criss-crossed by old caravan routes and dotted with ancient ruins. The surrounding cotton fields testify to the monoculture that stole the water from the Amu Darya and Syr Darya, the rivers that fed the Aral Sea. About 230 km north is Muynak and the former seashore. Learn about the environmental impact of the shrinking Aral Sea from a local expert.

Visit the incredible **Savitsky Art Museum**, whose founder, Igor Savitsky, was able to amass a wonderful collection of banned avant-garde Russian art pieces without interference from the Soviets. The story of this collection...
has been told in the award-winning documentary, *Desert of Forbidden Art*. The **collection is the second-largest gathering of Russian avant-garde art** after the Russian Museum in St. Petersburg.

Dine this evening at the hotel or a local restaurant.
Meals: B, L, D – Hotel Rakhnamo or similar

**Day Seventeen, Wednesday**

**Nukus • Kunya Urgench • Tashauz • fly to Ashkabad**

Depart by coach from Nukus to the Turkmen border. Customs formalities can be time consuming, so patience is a virtue this morning.

After the crossing, visit **Kunya Urgench**, an agricultural center of about 30,000 near the Uzbek border. It is the site of the ancient capital of Khorezm, which was razed by both Genghis Khan and Tamerlane. About half a mile south of the town lie the remains of the UNESCO-listed **old city**, including the **11th-century Kutlug-Timur Minaret**, ringed with 18 bands of decorative mud brick and blue majolica tiles. Also admire the domed hall of the **Turabek Khanyum Mausoleum**. Notable for the interlocking design of its remarkably-preserved ceiling, the mausoleum was built for the daughter of one of the leaders of the Golden Horde.

Drive to the city of **Tashauz** and visit a local market before the transfer to the airport for a flight to Ashkabad. Following an hour-long flight over the Kara Kum or Black Sands desert, arrive in **Ashkabad** and transfer to the hotel for overnight.
Meals: B, L – Sofitel Hotel or similar

**Day Eighteen, Thursday**

**Ashkabad • day trip to Nisa**

Following breakfast at the hotel, visit the UNESCO site of the ancient **Parthian Kingdom of Nisa**. The beautiful Kopet-Dag Mountains rise up around Nisa, a site 15 miles outside of Ashkabad that was once a major center of the ancient Parthian Kingdom. More than two thousand years ago the Parthian Empire spread out from Nisa and took its place among such kingdoms as the Achaemenid under Cyrus the Great and the Macedonian under Alexander the Great. Though Nisa was ruled by a succession of dynasties, it remained an important center of the ancient world until the 13th century, when the Mongols sacked it. Today archaeological work continues at Nisa.
After returning to Ashkabad, venture outside the city to visit a horse-breeding farm devoted to the renowned Akhal-Teke horse, arguably the oldest cultured breed of horse in the world. The owner accompanies you on the tour to talk about the workings of the farm and about the breed. These elegant horses have long, slender necks, small heads, long legs and narrow chests. They are said to have lent their genes to both the Arabian horse and the American Quarter Horse.

The History and Ethnography Museum, with its grand approach and panoramic views, introduces modern Turkmenistan on the ground floor and ancient history in the galleries above. The historical exhibits begin with artifacts ranging from stone-age tools to carved ivory drinking horns and move through time, telling the story of Turkmenistan through the ages. Other galleries display weapons, applied arts such as carpets and jewelry, and the flora and fauna of Turkmenistan. Be sure to examine the huge meteor, complete with unknown elements in its composition.

Return to the hotel after dinner at a local restaurant.
Meals: B, L, D – Sofitel Hotel or similar

Day Nineteen, Friday
Ashkabad • day trip to Mary/Merv

This morning fly to Mary for a guided exploration of the ruins of the ancient remains of Marghiana (Merv) as it was once called by classical Roman and Greek writers, located 22 miles from the city of Mary.

The fertile oasis of Merv has supported human life for over 4,000 years. Formed from the rich silt at the mouth of the Murghab River where it soaks into the Kara Kum Desert, the oasis was an early Bronze Age center. The earliest of the five ancient cities at Merv is attributed to Cyrus the Great in the 6th century BC. Merv was the center of several succeeding civilizations, and became an important way station on the Great Silk Road between the 2nd and the 13th centuries, when it was sacked and burned by the Mongols.

The ruins of Merv were listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1999 because of the wealth of ongoing information they offer regarding the evolution of urban centers. The 13th-century geographer Yaqut lived there for three years and wrote “verily but for the Mongols I would have stayed and lived and died there. Hardly could I tear myself away.”

Return to Ashkabad by an evening flight. Dinner tonight will be independent.
Meals: B, L – Sofitel Hotel or similar
Day Twenty, Saturday

Ashkabad

This morning, operating schedules permitting, see the enormous $100-million-dollar Kipchak Mosque in former Turkmen President Niyazov’s hometown of Kipchak. Inaugurated in 2004, the mosque is big enough to hold 10,000 people, and its 164-foot golden dome had to be lowered in place by helicopter. Verses from Niyazov’s own spiritual book, the Ruhnama, are etched on the walls alongside Koranic verses. Niyazov was buried here in the family mausoleum that he built, along with the mosque, with government funds.

After a farewell lunch and cultural performance this afternoon, continue touring Ashkabad. In spite of its location on a trade route, Ashkabad never achieved the status and influence of other Silk Road cities like Khiva or Bukhara. Originally known as Konjikala, the city was destroyed by Mongols in the 13th century. In 1881 the Russians built a fortress on the site as a buffer against English-dominated Persia, and by the early 20th century Ashkabad was a prosperous and flourishing city. In 1948 a massive earthquake leveled Ashkabad, killing over two-thirds of the population. Recently Ashkabad has seen a boom in new construction, which has had a major impact on the look of the city.

Dinner tonight will be at the hotel or a local restaurant.
Meals: B, L, D – Sofitel Hotel or similar

Day Twenty-One, Sunday

Depart Ashkabad

Most departures are very early this morning, in which case travelers may be transferred to the airport on Saturday night. For those with later flights, the tour will conclude with departure transfers after breakfast today.
Dates for 2015 – Five Departures – Premier Series

The land itinerary is scheduled to be operated on the following dates. Please note you will need to depart the U.S. at least one day prior to the tour start date, due to airline flight schedules.

April 6-26, 2015
April 27-May 17, 2015
August 17-September 6, 2015
September 14-October 4, 2015
October 12-November 1, 2015

Package Prices :

2014 Price Lock

**This offer is valid until September 15, 2014, or on publication of 2015 prices on our website
http://www.mircorp.com**

6-16 passengers (maximum 16), $7,495 per person, double occupancy
Plus internal air $250 (economy class, subject to change) - Note: for 2015 travel, internal air will be invoiced at the 2015 rate when available and is not able to be locked in.
Single supplement $1,295

2015 Price

**To Be Determined**

Land Tour Price Includes

• Shared accommodations in well-located first class hotels in the major cities and best available hotels elsewhere.
• 20 breakfasts, 19 lunches, and 15 dinners. A few dinners are not included so that you may enjoy a chance to experiment on your own.
• Bottled water at group meals.
• Restaurant tips for included meals.
• Services of an experienced, English-speaking MIR Tour Manager with local guides at specific sites.
• Arrival/departure transfers. MIR will arrange for all travelers to be met on arrival and seen off on departure whether we make your airfare arrangements or not, provided you arrive and depart on the tour start/end dates in the tour start/end cities.
• Transportation throughout itinerary by private coach or van (size of vehicle depends on group size).
• Guided sightseeing tours and entrance fees as outlined in itinerary.
• Special events, excursions and cultural performances per the itinerary.
• Baggage handling where available.
• Gratuities to local guides and drivers.
• Complete pre-departure information including detailed packing list, reading list, insurance information.
• Touring with MIR handbook with country-specific information, maps, and travel tips.
• Customized visa application and instruction kit (please note, visa fees are not included in the tour price).
• Final document packet including luggage tags, final updates, and more.
Not Included in Land Tour Price

- Internal airfare is quoted separately and is subject to change by airlines.
- International airfare or taxes – available through MIR; please call for rates.
- Meals not specified as included in the itinerary.
- Alcoholic beverages.
- Single supplement charge, if requested or required.
- Items of a personal nature (phone calls, laundry, etc.).
- Gratuities to Tour Manager.
- Visa fees.
- Travel and trip cancellation insurance.

Interested in travel insurance?
To learn more about all the benefits of purchasing a Travel Guard travel insurance plan, please visit [www.travelguard.com/mircorp](http://www.travelguard.com/mircorp) or contact Travel Guard at 1.877.709.5596.

Premier Series

MIR’s Premier Series programs feature some of our most distinctive tour concepts and include uncommon and educational experiences, including visits to small towns and villages outside the major urban areas and capital cities. While all MIR trips feature comfortable, well-located hotels, Premier Series programs take advantage of five star or best in class properties along the way wherever possible. In some cities properties are chosen for location over actual star ratings.

Important Notes: Is This Trip Right For You?

While the accommodations are as comfortable as possible for the region, they will vary from four and five star properties to relatively basic and simple hotels in the more remote cities we visit. It is important to keep in mind that the countries of Central Asia are, in general, not up to the standards North American travelers expect. Services are improving in the region; nevertheless, you may encounter problems with plumbing, bureaucratic service, road conditions, unpaved sidewalks, uneven surfaces and steps, variety of locally available foods, and availability and quality of public restrooms. You are traveling in some areas which, relatively speaking, have seen few travelers, and the infrastructure is not yet fully developed.

While this program is designed to be the most comfortable possible for travel in this region, it is rated as rigorous touring due to the daily walking involved, the length of some bus rides and the overall shortcomings of the tourism infrastructure. This itinerary features a significant amount of touring on foot. Many streets are of packed dirt, and some attractions are only accessible via steep staircases with tall uneven steps. In particular, spiral staircases at architectural sites (such as the Burana Tower) can involve steep steps inside a narrow passageway with limited light. In addition, there are fairly steep staircases with roughly 80 steps at the Shah-i-Zinde site in Samarkand. Some other sites and hotels may not offer elevators. To reap the full rewards of this adventure, travelers must be able to walk at least two miles a day, keeping up with fellow travelers. Border crossings may require crossing a relatively long distance by foot while managing your own bags – up to about a half-mile. Flexibility, a sense of humor and a willingness to accept local standards of amenities and services are essential components to the enjoyment of this trip.

Every effort has been made to make the information in this schedule accurate. However, trip itineraries are always subject to change. We will do our best to inform you in advance of any changes, but due to the nature of travel in Central Asia, this may not always be possible. Only those willing to accept these conditions should consider joining this program.
Are You Prepared?

A Travel Guard travel insurance plan can help cover your vacation investment, offset expenses from travel mishaps and provide you with emergency travel assistance. To learn more about all of the benefits of purchasing a Travel Guard travel insurance plan, please visit [www.travelguard.com/mircorp](http://www.travelguard.com/mircorp)

Weather

Planning your adventure should take all aspects of your destination into account, including the weather that you're likely to experience while on the road. Keep in mind that the weather at all times of the year is highly unpredictable and planning the best time of year should always be coupled with flexible packing, to allow you to make the best of any situation that comes up.

Central Asia experiences hot summers and cold winters. The best times to travel to these countries are in spring and fall, to catch the best temperatures between the hot parts of the summer and the cold winters. Rain is minimal. April-May brings temperatures ranging from 60 to 80 degrees Fahrenheit, while late August-September temperatures are typically 75-95+. Those whose plans don’t allow travel in April-May or August-September can still catch great opportunities to visit as early as March, or as late as October-November. At these times, comfortable touring weather is still called for, with warm days and cooler nights/early mornings. Travelers to Central Asia and Iran in March and November might want to bring along some additional warmer layers to help adjust to the difference between mountainous areas and desert areas.

Our group tours are scheduled to be in Central Asia at the best times for most people. Due to the long distances covered on many of our programs and the amount of time spent on the road, it is fair to say you will experience a range of temperatures and conditions over the course of your trip. One recent group had unusual snow flurries at the beginning of their tour, and ended in short sleeves and sunglasses. We recommend checking temperature ranges online. Research using sites such as Weatherbase, available online at [www.weatherbase.com](http://www.weatherbase.com), will help you get a snapshot of daily average temperatures as well as precipitation days and more.

International Airfare

MIR’s in-house, full-service air department is available to assist with your air travel needs. Check with MIR before booking air on your own, as we are happy to research and compare the best fares available through multiple channels. Airfare varies depending on a wide variety of factors, such as dates of travel and seasonality, seat availability, special airline promotions, how restrictive ticket changes are, how long the fares can be held without purchase, routing considerations such as stopovers, and more. Tour dates are based on the land tour only. Our preferred carriers for this tour are Lufthansa and Turkish Airlines, as they offer convenient itineraries and competitive rates from multiple cities across the U.S. to Central Asia.

Please call us at 800-424-7289 to discuss air options and routings for this program, and to request a quote for your specific plans and dates of travel. We will be happy to put together a no-obligation suggested air itinerary and estimate for you at your request.

Visas

At the time of writing, U.S. passport holders require three visas for this tour: Uzbek (double-entry), Tajik and Turkmen. You may also need a visa for any additional country you fly via to join the tour (such as
Russia or Turkey). Extensive pre-tour paperwork is necessary to obtain these visas. MIR will provide you with the necessary applications and instructions.

Total current visa costs for the five ‘Stans visas for U.S. passport holders, based on standard processing time, is $394. Please note, visa costs are always subject to change.

Visa processing for this tour will take two to three months. Travelers should prepare to be without their passports for that amount of time. If you plan to travel in the time leading up to your MIR tour, you may need to obtain a second valid passport or use expedited processing for some of your visas. Please contact us with any questions you may have regarding the timeline for visa processing.

Pre- and Post- Tours

Many travelers choose to extend their Journey Through Central Asia program by adding one or more pre-tour nights in Almaty. This allows them to rest and relax after the long journey halfway around the world. There are a couple of key factors to keep in mind when planning additional nights. Please note that Monday, Day One of this program is left completely free as an arrival day. Hotel rooms are available from about 1:00 p.m. Monday onward and this night is included in the price of your tour package. Most clients who leave the U.S. on Sunday will arrive in Almaty either late Monday night, or very early in the morning (1:00 a.m.) on Tuesday, and will be transferred to the hotel and checked into their waiting rooms. Touring will then begin in the daylight morning of Tuesday.

Some clients will choose instead to travel to Almaty on a similar schedule, but will leave the U.S. on Saturday. Those who do will arrive in the early morning hours (1:00 a.m.) of Monday and need to know that the hotel is not guaranteed to be available at that time. The only way to guarantee access to the hotel for early a.m. arrivals in general is to pre-book and pre-pay the previous night. MIR can make that booking for you, but it is important to note that hotels in Almaty are more expensive than many American travelers expect. Almaty is the business capital of Kazakhstan, and attracts a lot of oil and gas money, as well as investment from western nations. Those clients planning to pre-book an additional night or nights should know that the prices for nights at the tour hotel are often higher than expected, again due to the large number of business travelers visiting Almaty, and frequent hotel space issues due to conventions and conferences. Hotel rates of $345 - $450 per room per night are not out of the ordinary at the level of hotel used for the group portion of the tour. Alternate hotels are available at lower rates (on the order of $150 - $225 per room per night), and your tour specialist can help you make the best plan for those early morning Monday (or earlier) arrivals.

One option that appeals to many travelers is to make a European stopover instead of arriving early in Almaty. Prices at good quality airport-area hotels in Frankfurt are often more reasonable than in Almaty, and stopping in your European gateway en route usually does not add significantly to the cost of your air ticket. Leaving the U.S. on Saturday and overnighting Sunday night in Europe allows for a Monday night (or Tuesday a.m.) arrival in Almaty, with a stop on the way to fight the fatigue of travel, at a good price.

The August 17 departure of this tour is specifically timed to coincide with the Treasures of the South Caucasus tour to Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan, which begins in Baku, Azerbaijan. The Five ’Stans tour ends in Ashkhabad, Turkmenistan and you can fly from Ashkhabad to Baku across the Caspian Sea on Lufthansa and arrive on the same day. This would put you in Baku early morning of Day 1, and the hotel is not guaranteed to be available at that time unless you pre-book and pre-pay for an additional night in Baku, which MIR is happy to arrange for you. Touring begins on Day 2 of the Treasures of the South Caucasus program. Alternatively, you may wish to visit Iran as a post-tour – we’ve arranged our Essential Iran package with flexible start dates to be added on easily after the Five ’Stans. To begin an
Essential Iran tour, travelers cross the Iranian border overland from Ashkabad, and add a night in Mashad and a flight to Tehran (both at additional cost) before beginning the Essential Iran itinerary in Tehran. Contact us for more details.

Also Nearby...
For more tours to Central Asia, you may want to check out

Flexible Essential Trips – Classic Private Journeys
Essential Central Asia, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, 13 days. Explore the markets, mosques and minarets of oasis towns on the fringes of the Kyzyl Kum and Kara Kum deserts. Here spiritual beliefs were the greatest commodities to flow along trade routes, and civilizations blossomed amidst austere natural beauty.

Essential Kyrgyzstan, 8 days. On this comprehensive journey among the soaring peaks, glacial lakes and steep valleys of the Kyrgyz outback, spend a night with a village family, learning the traditional way to make felt, bake flatbread in a clay oven and milk a mare. Visit with a seasoned eagle hunter and admire dramatic landscapes of ochre and umbre sandstone formations.

Essential Tajikistan, 8 days. Rarely-visited Tajikistan is wreathed in spectacular mountains and colored with the influence of Persia, the Islamic world and Russia. Meet local people at Fergana Valley markets, explore the ruins of ancient Penjikent and share a meal in a warm Tajik home. Visit the country’s capital, Dushanbe, where a 1,600-year-old Reclining Buddha sleeps in the Museum of Antiquities.

Essential Turkmenistan, 12 days. From the golden monuments of Ashkabad and the ruins of Parthian Nisa, head into the mountains to overnight in a village home. Visit the Caspian seaport, Turkmebashi, explore UNESCO-listed Merv and learn about traditional crafts. Camp at the “Door to Hell” and survey Kunya-Urgench, ancient capital of Khorezm.

Essential Kazakhstan, 7 days. Begin in the new city of Astana, capital of Kazakhstan only since 1997. Fly to Almaty and explore spectacular Charyn Canyon, with its strange rock formations and colorful strata. Visit with a Kazakh family and lunch in a yurt. Discover the historic city of Turkistan and its UNESCO-listed mausoleum of a revered Sufi sheikh.

Essential Uzbekistan, 10 days. Beginning in the modern capital, Tashkent, roam the great Silk Road oases of Bukhara, Samarkand and Khiva, all of them UNESCO Sites. Admire their mosques, madrassahs and minarets clad in ceramic tiles the color of the desert sky.

Essential Iran, 10 days. Visit a trio of Iran’s finest cities to discover Persian treasures and modern Islamic daily life. See spirited Tehran, the country’s marketplace, romantic Shiraz with its miles of roses, and beautiful Isfahan, its arched bridges glowing in the evening light.

Small Group Tours
Central Asian Epic Overland Adventure, 17 days. Get a taste of the incredible diversity along the Silk Road. Discover the Kyrgyz highlands with their summer pastures of nomadic herders, as well as the classic blue-tiled architecture of UNESCO-listed Samarkand and Bukhara. Overnight in a yurt camp near a 15th century caravanserai and drive over the spine of the Silk Road, 12,000-foot Torugart Pass, into Western China. Browse the incredible Kashgar animal market, enjoy a meal in an Uzbek home, visit a silk master’s private workshop and have lunch at a ceramics master’s studio.
The Pamir Highway & Across Fabled Frontiers, 18 days. The Pamir Mountains of Tajikistan are some of the most rugged and beautiful on Earth, soaring upward where the Himalayas, the Tien Shan and the Hindu Kush meet. This adventurous journey over the Pamir Highway is a breathtaking route, in use since the time of the Silk Road.

Silk Route Odyssey: Caravan Across Uzbekistan, 15 days. The center of Central Asia, Uzbekistan is home to three of the most renowned of the Silk Road oases — Samarkand, Bukhara and Khiva. Journey through these UNESCO Sites, the incredible Savitsky Museum in Nukus and the lush Fergana Valley, where Central Asia's silk production began with two cocoons hidden in the headdress of a royal Chinese bride.

Chinese Turkestan and Central Asia, 24 days. Silk, spices, tea, precious metals and jewels, carefully lashed to pack camels, made their way from one world to another along the old Silk Road. Follow in the footsteps of early explorers who plied these trade routes connecting East with West.

Ancient Persia, Modern Iran, 18 days. Persia, the exotic land that is home to one of the world's oldest civilizations, has been known in the west as Iran since 1935, and is a modern country of almost 69 million people. Explore Iran's fabulous bazaars, admire its splendid architecture and complex ornamentation, discover its formidable archaeological sites and converse with the people who call it home.

Once Forbidden Lands of Central Asia & Iran, 20 days. The countries of Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Iran are woven together like the burnished threads of a fine Persian carpet. From earliest recorded history, these lands have exchanged rulers, architecture, art and religion. Explore the dazzling bazaars and extravagant desert architecture along the byways of the old Silk Road between Tashkent and Tehran.

Conditions of Participation
Your participation on a MIR Corporation trip is subject to the conditions contained in the 2015 Tour Reservation Form and Release of Liability and Assumption of Risk Agreement. Please read this document carefully and contact us with any questions.

Cancellation and Refund Policy
Payment Terms: Non-refundable deposits are accepted by check, Visa, MasterCard or American Express. Final land payments may be made by check or credit card for reservations made directly with MIR. If booking through a travel agent, please contact your agent to find out what form of payment they accept. (MIR can accept final payment from travel agents by agency check only.) Air fares are subject to change until ticketed; payment policies vary by carrier.

If you cancel your trip please notify MIR in writing. Upon MIR’s receipt of notice the following charges apply to land tours (policies for air tickets, custom group trips vary):

Scheduled MIR Small Group Tours
Cost of cancellation, if received:
61 or more days prior to departure, deposit due or paid in full of $500
31-60 days prior to departure, 50% of land tour cost;
30 days prior to or after trip departure, no refund.
References
We encourage you to speak directly with satisfied past travelers. Please request a list of references.

Why MIR?
Regional knowledge is crucial to the success of any trip to our corner of the world. MIR combines detailed information about geography and infrastructure, history and art, language and culture, with the depth of knowledge that comes only from decades of regional experience. You may wonder how we differ from other tour operators...

Destination Specialization
MIR focuses exclusively on the exceptional region at the crossroads of Europe and Asia. This area has been our overriding passion since 1986; we don’t do the rest of the world. Our hard-earned expertise gained over the last 28 years can take you from end to end of the largest country in the world – Russia – and to all of its neighbors. We specialize in travel to Siberia, the Silk Route, St. Petersburg & Beyond. Our destinations include: Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, the Baltics (Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia), the Balkans (Croatia, Montenegro, Albania, Macedonia, Kosovo, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina), Central Asia (the five ‘Stans), Iran, the Caucasus (Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan), Mongolia, China, Tibet and Central/East Europe (Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Bulgaria, Romania).

28 Years of Experience
A travel company doesn’t last 28 years in the business without a solid track record. MIR has helped thousands of individuals achieve their travel goals. Our dedication and experience have earned us their trust and the trust of many well-respected institutions. Today MIR is the preferred tour operator for museum, alumni and special interest organizations across the country.
Recommended & Respected

MIR has twice been rated one of the “Best Adventure Travel Companies on Earth” by National Geographic Adventure. Several of our tours have won awards in top travel publications, such as Outside magazine and National Geographic Traveler. Our trips have been featured in books like Riding the Hula Hula to the Arctic Ocean and 1,000 Places to See Before You Die.

More Questions?

Please feel free to call us with questions at 1-800-424-7289, 8:30am-5:30pm Pacific Time.

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