Essence of the Silk Road
Ashkabad to Almaty aboard the Orient Silk Road Express private train
2016
Roll through the heart of the Silk Road on this riveting rail journey by private train, experiencing seven treasured UNESCO Sites in Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. The journey begins in Ashkabad, capital of Turkmenistan, where its gleaming marble monuments are counterbalanced by the ruins of Parthian Nisa and ancient Merv. Continue through the Uzbek Silk Road oases of Bukhara, Khiva and Samarkand, fabled cities of blue-tiled domes and graceful arches. End in leafy Almaty, Kazakhstan’s business capital, with a traditional meal in a Kazakh yurt. The 14-day adventure includes six nights in four star hotels and seven onboard the comfortable Orient Silk Road Express.
Daily Itinerary

Day 1, Tuesday  
Arrive Ashkabad, Turkmenistan

Day 2, Wednesday  
Ashkabad • Nisa

Day 3, Thursday  
Merv

Day 4, Friday  
Bukhara, Uzbekistan

Day 5, Saturday  
Bukhara

Day 6, Sunday  
Bukhara

Day 7, Monday  
Khiva

Day 8, Tuesday  
Samarkand

Day 9, Wednesday  
Samarkand

Day 10, Thursday  
Shakhrisabz

Day 11, Friday  
Tashkent

Day 12, Saturday  
Turkistan, Kazakhstan

Day 13, Sunday  
Almaty

Day 14, Monday  
Depart Almaty

Note: This train also runs in the reverse direction, from Almaty to Ashkabad.
Tour Features

• Enjoy the comfort and efficiency of your own private cabin on the Orient Silk Road Express train.
• Survey a series of fascinating cities along the rail line.
• Get a true picture of the scale and scope of the countries you are traversing.
• Join travelers from around the world to enjoy the casual and relaxed atmosphere aboard the private train, dining in comfort and chatting over drinks.
• Relax deeply as you are carried into another land, a world away from home.

Trip Highlights

Ashkabad	Capital of Turkmenistan, flamboyant gilded architecture
Nisa	Parthian Kingdom of Nisa (UNESCO World Heritage Site), Kopet-Dag Mountains
Merv	Archaeological site of five ancient cities, the earliest attributed to Cyrus the Great (UNESCO World Heritage Site)
Bukhara	Old Town (UNESCO World Heritage Site), Ark Citadel, Palace of Moon and Stars
Khiva	City walls, Old Town, Ichon Kala (UNESCO World Heritage Site)
Samarkand	Old Town (UNESCO World Heritage Site), Registan Square, Shah-i-Zinda, Afrosiab History Museum, Ulug Bek Observatory, silk carpet factory
Shakhrisabz	“Historic Center of Shakhrisabz” (UNESCO World Heritage Site), Ak Saray (White Palace)
Tashkent	Capital of Uzbekistan, Independence Square, evening performance
Turkistan	One of the oldest cities in Kazakhstan, Koja Akhmed Yasavi’s mausoleum, (UNESCO World Heritage Site)
Almaty	Kazakhstan’s largest city, meal in a Kazakh yurt

Itinerary

Day One, Tuesday
Arrive Ashkabad, Turkmenistan
Arrive into Askabat, and following customs procedures, transfer to the hotel for the rest of the night.
Meals: Independent – Yyldyz Hotel or similar

Day Two, Wednesday
Ashkabad • Nisa
After a hotel breakfast, check out one of Ashkabad’s flourishing bazaars before boarding a coach for the drive to UNESCO-listed Nisa, a site 15 miles outside of Ashkabad that was once a ma-


THE NATIONAL 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.

BOARD THE ORIENT SILK ROAD EXPRESS PRIVATE TRAIN THIS EVENING AND ENJOY DINNER ON THE TRAIN AS IT HEADS EAST. MEALS: B, L, D – ABOARD THE ORIENT SILK ROAD EXPRESS

**DAY THREE, THURSDAY**

**MERV**


ENJOY LUNCH WITH A LOCAL VILLAGE FAMILY, SERVED IN THEIR SHADY COURTYARD. RE-BOARD THE TRAIN BOUND FOR TURKMENISTAN. CHECK INTO A FOUR STAR HOTEL IN ASHKABAD FOR OVERNIGHT. MEALS: B, L, D – ABOARD THE ORIENT SILK ROAD EXPRESS
Uzbekistan’s best-preserved oasis city, Bukhara, is next. UNESCO-listed 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. 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.

Visit the 12th century Kalon Mosque and Minaret, surrounding an open plaza teeming with merchants and local vendors. The minaret towers over the dusty square, looking down from a height of more than 150 feet. Fourteen distinct bands of brickwork circle the tower at intervals, and at the top of the minaret resolve into a traditional stalactite formation.

With the feel of a true oasis in an oasis town, the Labi-Hauz 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 anchor three of the four edges of the ensemble.

Enjoy a traditional Uzbek performance this evening along with dinner at a former madrassah. Overnight at a pleasant Bukhara hotel.

Meals:  B, L, D – Omar Khayyam Hotel or similar
Day Five, Saturday

Bukhara

The monumental Mir-i-Arab Madrassah with its matching turquoise domes is part of the Kalon assembly, and sits across from the Kalon Mosque in the center of the Old Town. The madrassah was a working Islamic school from the time it was built in the 16th century to its closure in 1920.

In a clearing in a tree-filled park a small plaza is marked with a single building, the Ismael Samani Mausoleum. It is the 10th century resting place of Ismael Samani, founder of the Persian Samanid Dynasty, and was buried under centuries of sand and not discovered until the 20th century. Though small, it is detailed in a fashion not seen in many other Bukharan monuments. More than sixteen styles of brickwork adorn the face of this cubic memorial, and their elaborate pleats and layering are still fresh today. From inside, the transition from square walls to circular roof, created using bricks of identical size and shape, testifies to the engineering know-how of the designers.

The Ark Citadel is the original fortress of Bukhara and likely dates back two thousand years or more. 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.

A small distance outside of the city sits the Palace of Moon and Stars, or the Summer Palace of the last Emir of Bukhara. The palace was built for the Emir at the turn of the century, after the Russians took control of Bukhara. The grounds here are heavily planted, and arboried walkways connect the various pavilions and buildings. Wild peacocks and peahens stroll through the park-like setting, strutting with their long showpiece plumage.

Overnight tonight is in the Bukhara hotel.
Meals: B, L, D – Omar Khayyam Hotel or similar

Day Six, Sunday

Bukhara

Enjoy a free morning in beautiful Bukhara to shop, stroll and explore. Re-board the
train around noon and roll through the Kyzyl Kum Desert toward Khiva.
Meals: B, L, D – Aboard the Orient Silk Road Express

**Day Seven, Monday**

Khiva

Today investigate Khiva, one of the most important trade centers on the Silk Road. Khiva’s Old Town, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, has been extensively preserved and restored, and exists today much as it did hundreds of years ago. Approaching the Old Town, modern-day travelers face the same sight as Silk Road caravans did, the dun-colored city walls, the main gate opening on a dusty stone thoroughfare, merchants hawking their wares from each side, and the distinctive minarets watching over the whole scene.

Spend some time exploring Khiva on foot. The tour passes by the monuments of the Old Town, or Ichon-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 – Aboard the Orient Silk Road Express

**Day Eight, Tuesday**

Samarkand

Today the train arrives in Samarkand, Tamerlane’s blue-tiled capital. Perhaps the best-known of Silk Road towns, Samarkand, fabled oasis on the fringes of the Kyzyl Kum (“Red Sands”) Desert, has been settled since the 6th century BC. UNESCO calls Samarkand the “Crossroads of Cultures.” It has been visited through time by many of the world’s conquerors – Alexander the Great, Genghis Khan and Tamerlane. Tamerlane made it his capital city and gathered the finest architects, builders and artisans of the time to enhance its beauty.

Explore some of the city’s highlights, including Shah-i-Zinda, the Afrosiab Museum and the majestic Registan. The row of tombs and mausoleums collectively called Shah-i-Zinda, or “place of a living king,” stretches 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 grave sites dating back as far as the 9th century, and as recently as the present day.

Just outside of modern-day Samarkand lie the dusty hills of the ancient city of Afrosiab, once a potent capital, now an archaeological site guarding treasures of antiquity. Scientific digs here began in the 1800s under Russian rule, and continue to this day. On site is the Afrosiab History Museum, which houses artifacts from the area, including pottery and tile found among the excavated walls of the town.

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.

Meals: B, L, D – Emir Han Hotel or similar

Day Nine, Wednesday
Samarkand

After a hotel breakfast, spend the day visiting a carpet factory, seeing how paper was made in ancient times, touring Ulug Bek’s observatory and admiring the Gur-Emir Mausoleum.

Take a tour of a silk carpet factory that uses natural vegetable dyes to color the thread used in its carpets. Visit the gardens outside the factory where the weavers grow indigo, coleus and dahlias to use for dye. Observe the entire process of dyeing the thread and weaving the carpets, with an opportunity to shop afterward.

Visit a workshop where hand-crafted paper is made according to traditions handed down from the 8th century, when paper-making began in Samarkand. Founded in 1997 with the support of UNESCO, the workshop of Abdurakhim Mukhtarov, located in the village of Koni Gil on the outskirts of the city, produces lovely paper crafts and stationery as you watch.
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 advanced 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 observation 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.

Gur-Emir Mausoleum is the final resting place of Tamerlane, but was 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. Tonight you spend a stationary night in one of the city’s four star hotels.

Meals: B, L, D – Emir Han Hotel or similar

Day Ten, Thursday
Shakhrisabze

Stop today in Shakhrisabze, the birthplace of Tamerlane. Visit the UNESCO-listed ruins of Ak Saray (White Palace), built in the 14th century and one of Tamerlane’s most ambitious projects. The palace complex included a massive portal covered with incredible blue, white and gold ceramic tile mosaics and standing over 131 feet high. A large statue of Amir Timur greets visitors to the palace. While much of the city is in ruins (with restoration work in progress), you can get a taste of the local flavor of this village by visiting its traditional bazaar and taking in the swirls of color made by women in traditional Uzbek clothing.

Re-boarding the train, enjoy a comparative tasting of Uzbek wines.
Meals: B, L, D – Aboard the Orient Silk Road Express

Day Eleven, Friday
Tashkent

Arrive this morning in Tashkent, the capital of Uzbekistan, and spend some time touring this pleasant Soviet-style city, rebuilt with wide tree-lined boulevards after a devastating earthquake in 1966. Visit the Kukeldash Madrassah and the Amir Timur Monument.

Located on a hill above Chorsu Plaza, the Kukeldash Madrassah is one of the largest 16th century madrassahs remaining in Central Asia. Constructed of baked brick with only one facade decorated in majol-
ica and glazed bricks, the *madressah* was part of an ensemble that marked the center of the old town and included the newly restored Jummi Mosque.

**Amir Timur Square** is the latest incarnation of a square that has switched its allegiance at least 12 times. Originally a crossroads formed by two carriageways, the square was named Konstantinovsk in 1882 by the Governor-General of Turkestan. Since then it has had in its place of honor a monument to the 1917 revolution, the Soviet hammer and sickle, a bust of Lenin, a statue of Stalin, and a head of Marx, among other sculptures. Since 1993, a large-scale bronze horse with conqueror Amir Timur (Tamerlane) astride has dominated the leafy square.

This evening, schedules permitting, **attend a performance** at the Alisher Navoi Opera House or the Tashkent Philharmonic Hall. Afterwards, re-join the train as it departs for Samarkand.

**Meals:** B, L, D – *Aboard the Orient Silk Road Express*

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**Day Twelve, Saturday**

Turkistan, Kazakhstan

One of the oldest cities in Kazakhstan, *Turkistan* celebrated its 1,500th anniversary in 2000. Located on the steppe near the Syr Darya River, the city has a population of about 86,000. Turkistan reached its apex in the 12th century during the lifetime of the Sufi mystic, Khoja Akhmed Yasavi, who made the city a center of learning and pilgrimage.

Visit **Koja Akhmed Yasavi’s mausoleum**. Tamerlane commissioned the huge *mazar*, or tomb, in 1389. Persian architects arrived to build it, and continued to work until the death of Tamerlane in 1405, when construction stopped. The unfinished *mazar* escaped damage in later warfare, and today is Kazakhstan’s first **UNESCO World Heritage Site**. Khoja Ahmed Yasavi was the first Turkic Muslim holy man, and his monument has the largest existing dome in Central Asia.

**Meals:** B, L, D – *Aboard the Orient Silk Road Express*

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**Day Thirteen, Sunday**

Almaty

Arrive in **Almaty** around noon today and set out to explore the city. Spread out at the foothills of the Zaili Alatau Mountains in the Tien Shan range, Almaty is the commercial capital of Central Asia’s biggest country, Kazakhstan. 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, a green oasis in Almaty's central area, 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.

Enjoy your final dinner here in a traditional Kazakh yurt before overnight at the hotel

Meals: Independent – Royal Tulip Hotel or similar if needed for Day 14 or overnight departures

Day Fourteen, Monday
Depart Almaty

Your journey comes to an end today with a transfer to the airport for international departure.
**About Orient Silk Road Express**

**Train accommodations**
The *Orient Silk Road Express* train is a comfortable though not luxurious private train, which can accommodate up to 140 passengers. Average group sizes can range from 100-120 passengers, and off-train excursion groups top out at a maximum of 26 passengers per coach. The pleasant dining car transforms to a friendly lounge after meals. Four styles of accommodation are available aboard the *Orient Silk Road Express* for the journey between Almaty and Ashkabad: Kalif (en suite), Sultan (en suite with a wet-room-type shower), Aladdin (shower at one end, WC at both ends of each car) and Ali Baba (WC at both ends of each car). **Note:** cabin configurations and decor may vary from samples depicted.

**Kalif Class**
Kalif cabins are the most comfortable option available on the *Orient Silk Road Express* private train. There are four cabins to a car, and each is outfitted with a shower stall, WC and washbasin. Cabins are equipped with convertible upper and lower berths, a window-table, wardrobe and power outlets for 110/220 volts.

**Sultan Class**
Sultan cabins, with six to a car, are slightly smaller than Kalif cabins, but are fully en suite with a wet-room-style shower in the WC. Convertible upper and lower bunks, window-table, wardrobe, and comfortable seating round out the amenities.
Aladdin Class
Aladdin cabins offer comfortable accommodation with twin-berth compartments featuring two lower berths. Beds convert to comfortable sofas for daytime travel and there is storage space under the berths and above the door in each cabin. A WC is found at each end of the car and each car has a shower compartment at one end.

Ali Baba Class
Ali Baba cabins are the best-value cabin option. They are slightly smaller than the Aladdin cabins, with the same amenities and a WC at each end of the car, but no shower. En route hotel nights provide shower opportunities.
Dates for 2016 – Private Rail Journey

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

March 31-April 13, 2016
October 6-19, 2016

Note: This train also runs in the reverse direction, from Ashkabad to Almaty. 2016 eastbound departure dates are:
April 12-25, 2016
October 18-31, 2016

2016 Package Prices

Land Tour Cost – Per Person:
Ali Baba Class, twin share $5,795
Ali Baba Class, single $7,990

Aladdin Class, twin share $6,695
Aladdin Class Suite, single $9,290

Sultan Class, twin share $10,295
Sultan Class, single $15,590

Kalif Class, twin share $10,795
Kalif Class, single $16,490

Private Train Tour Deposits – Per person:
Ali Baba & Aladdin Class deposit $1,500
Sultan Class deposit $2,000
Kalif Class deposit $2,500

A non-refundable deposit and completed reservation form/signed release are required to hold space.

Land Tour Includes

• Accommodation aboard the Orient Silk Road Express private train.
• Hotel accommodation per the itinerary (1 night Ashkabad, 2 nights Bukhara, 2 nights Samarkand, 1 night Almaty as needed for overnight or Day 14 departures)
• Water, coffee and tea with meals.
• Meals per itinerary.
• Arrival/departure transfers, provided you arrive and depart on the tour start/end dates and in the tour start/end cities.
• All guided off-train tours per itinerary.
• The services of an experienced Train Tour Manager, with local guides for scheduled off-train touring.
Complimentary tea, coffee and mineral water round the clock from your car attendant while on board the train.

Baggage handling.

Not Included

- International airfare or surface transport to the point of joining/leaving the tour. MIR is able to arrange your air itinerary with special economy and business class rates available on several airlines. If you wish to obtain an air quote, please contact us for details.
- Items of a purely personal nature (laundry, telephone, bar account, photography at museums, etc.)
- Optional pre- or post-tour extensions.
- Any drinks at mealtime other than water, coffee and tea.
- Any drinks outside of mealtimes.
- Gratuities to local guides, train staff and your train tour manager.
- Visa fees.
- Any excess baggage charges.
- Airport departure taxes.
- Vaccination or medical costs.
- Trip cancellation, medical and evacuation 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 or contact Travel Guard at 1-866-385-4839.

Rail Journey by Private Train

Private Train tours are in a class of their own, offering the opportunity to experience remote destinations in style. These all-inclusive, overview tours aboard the fully-chartered Orient Silk Road private train bring together passengers from around the world. Group sizes are flexible and on the Orient Silk Road private train can be up to 120 passengers.

Important Notes: Is This Trip Right For You?

- This trip is moderately active, and rated moderate to rigorous touring due to the daily walking involved and the overall shortcomings of the tourism infrastructure. To reap the full rewards of this adventure, travelers must be able to walk at least a mile a day, keeping up with fellow travelers. 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.
- This itinerary features a significant amount of touring on foot. Many streets and sidewalks are uneven, and some attractions are only accessible via steep staircases. Museums generally do not have elevators.
- On the train, restaurant and bar cars may be some distance from your sleeping car. Although portage is provided where possible, you may have to carry your baggage for short distances.
- Passengers may encounter problems getting on and off trains; there may be low platforms, steep steps and/or gaps between the platform and the train.
- In true expedition style, some delays or changes in the itinerary are likely.
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

Weather

Central Asia experiences extremely hot summers and cold winters. Spring and fall are the best months to travel to these countries. Rain is minimal. April-May brings temperatures ranging from 60-80 degrees Fahrenheit, while late August-September temperatures are typically 75-95+. October and November are cooler and quite nice, with averages ranging from 50-70 degrees Fahrenheit. Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan are warm places; those wishing to travel to these countries during the summer should be prepared for 100-115-degree weather (80-90 degrees at night). In general, air conditioning will be available at the hotels and in vehicles. Museums and restaurants on this itinerary may not have air conditioning, or it may be unreliable.

Please remember, weather at all times of year has an element of the unpredictable. This information comes from weatherbase.com and is based on data from previous temperatures on record. It is always advisable to check with weatherbase.com closer to your departure date for current conditions and forecasts for the specific region you will be visiting.

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 published fares available. Airfare varies depending on a wide variety of factors, such as dates of travel, 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. Please call us at 1-800-424-7289 for further details and for assistance with custom air reservations from your preferred departure city.

Visas

A single-entry Uzbek visa, and a single-entry Turkmen visa are required for U.S. passport holders for this tour. You may also need a visa for any country you fly through prior to joining the tour, or for a country in which you plan to do a pre- or post-tour extension. Extensive pre-tour paperwork and time are necessary to obtain your visas. Travelers should expect to have their passports out of their hands for the 2-3 month period prior to the tour. MIR will provide you with the necessary applications and instructions. An estimate of current visa costs for U.S. passport holders, based on standard processing time, is $361. Your exact visa fees may differ as visa costs can depend on a number of factors, such as state of residence, processing time, and return shipping. Visa fees are always subject to change. Note: Non-U.S. passport holders may need a Kazakh visa as well.

In the past some travelers have made their own visa arrangements instead of using MIR’s preferred provider for their visa processing; either using their own visa service or attempting to process directly with the embassies/consulates. We strongly recommend you discuss with us before choosing an alternate visa processing method, to help avoid difficulties and visa problems.
Pre and Post-Tour Extensions

MIR can arrange for an extended program in Russia or Eastern Europe, the South Caucasus or the 'Stans. Contact us for more information.

Also Nearby...

For more tours to this region, you may want to check out:

Flexible Essential Trips – Classic Private Journeys

**Essential Caucasus**, Armenia, Georgia, Azerbaijan, 10 days. Armenia’s intricate stone *khachkar* crosses, the bounteous wines of Georgia and the ancient petroglyphs of Azerbaijan are icons of these three inter-twined Caucasus countries, where you can experience five UNESCO masterpieces in ten days.

**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 Uzbekistan**, 10 days. Roam the great Silk Road oases of Bukhara, Samarkand and Khiva, along with modern Tashkent, the Uzbek capital. Admire their mosques, *madrassahs* and minarets built of mud-bricks and clad in ceramic tiles the color of the desert sky.

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

**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.

Conditions of Participation

Your participation on a MIR Corporation trip is subject to the conditions contained in the 2016 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

Please note that no partial refunds are available for any missed days of a tour or any whole or part of a tour, accommodation, meal or any other service not utilized by the participant during the tour. The quoted price represents a package price for the services offered and an itemization of individual component costs will not be provided. Please understand there will be no exceptions to our cancellation policies regardless of your situation. Should you need to cancel your travel plans, please notify us in writing immediately. At the time we receive written notification of cancellation, the following charges apply:

*Scheduled Rail Journeys by Private Train:*

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95 or more days prior to departure------------------deposit due or paid in full of $1,500, $2,000 or $5,000
65-94 days prior to departure------------------------50% of the land tour cost
64 days prior to departure 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 de-
tailed 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 dif-
fer 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 three decades 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 & Be-
yond. 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 South Caucasus (Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan), Mongolia, China, Tibet, the
DPRK (North Korea) and Central/East Europe (Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Bulgaria, Ro-
mania).

Celebrating Our 30th Season in 2016
A travel company doesn’t last 30 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 mu-
seum, 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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