THE SILK ROAD
IN
CENTRAL ASIA
Uzbekistan - Turkmenistan - Kazakhstan - Kyrgyzstan

with

World Affairs Council
Of Greater Houston
Global Perspectives, Local Conversations

16 Days/ 14 Nights
Apr 12-27, 2019
## Program outline:

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Silk Road in Central Asia

**Highlights:**
- Khiva in Uzbekistan.
- Ashgabat adorned with florescent lights.
- Old Nisa, Parthian capital city.
- National Museum in Ashgabat.
- Ruins of old Merv.
- Crossing Oxus River following Alexander the Great’s route.
- Bukhara with numerous mosques and madrasahs.
- Legendary Samarkand.
- Tomb of Tamerlane.
- Almaty with big squares and impressive museum.
- Driving through Kazakh Steppes.
- Karakum Desert.
- Impressive mountain ranges.
- Local folk dance show.
- Delicious local food.
FLIGHTS

Suggested flights will be on Turkish Airlines and Air Astana

Apr 12    Houston to Istanbul  
TK 34     dep: 9:05 pm / arr: 4:55 pm on Apr 13

Apr 13    Istanbul to Tashkent  
TK 370    dep: 6:10 pm / arr: 12:40 am on Apr 14

Apr 23    Tashkent to Almaty  
KC 128    dep: 2:20 pm / arr: 4:50 pm

Apr 27    Bishkek to Istanbul  
TK 349    dep: 6:40 am / arr: 9:35 am

Apr 27    Istanbul to Houston  
TK 33     dep: 1:55 pm / arr: 7:15 pm

The fare for listed flights is  
$1560 per person, economy class  
$5248 per person, business class (TK only)  
including taxes, surcharges and fees, as of Nov 11, 2018. Fare is based on availability. These fares are non-refundable. Fares can increase substantially as we get close to departure date.
INCLUDED SERVICES:
• 14 Nights hotel accommodation with daily breakfast.
• 13 lunches and 4 dinners as indicated in the itinerary, including one special dinner in Bukhara with folk music and dances.
• English speaking professional tour guides in each country.
• Transportation with AC vehicles & driver.
• Arrival and departure transfers - only for suggested flight arrival & departures.
• Domestic flights in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan.
• Two small bottles of water per person per day on the vehicle everyday.
• All entry fees to places mentioned in the itinerary.
• Tips for meals and accommodations.

NOT INCLUDED:
• International airfare.
• Visa fees / entry-exit fees if applicable.
• Drinks with included meals, except tea or coffee for breakfast.
• Gratuities for guides & drivers.
• Porterage tips.
• Personal expenditures like phone calls, laundry, medical expenses.
• Travel insurance (can be provided by Tourcom on request.)
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Silk Road in Central Asia

Program Details

Day 1: Fri, Apr 12, 2019  Leave Houston, TX
We will leave Houston for Tashkent, Uzbekistan.

Day 2: Sat, Apr 13  Tashkent
We will arrive in Tashkent, Uzbekistan. We will meet our guide and driver who will take us to our hotel in Tashkent.

Overnight in Tashkent  Meals: -

Day 3: Sun, Apr 14  Tashkent
Tashkent is the capital city of Uzbekistan. It is an ancient city on the Silk Road. Little remains of that city after the 1966 earthquake and earlier modernization work following the 1917 revolution.

In the old Tashkent residential neighborhood called Sibzar, lies Khazrat Imam Square with a complex of architectural monuments that sprang up here in the course of several centuries around the burial-place of Kaffal ash-Shashi, Tashkent's first imam. It was he, after whom the square was named Khazret Imam (“Saint Imam”).

We will visit his mausoleum and the Friday Mosque. Close to Khazret Imam Square, there stands Barak-Khan Madrasah. The height of its portal, decorated with majolica and glazed tile mosaics, is accentuated by a deep lancet niche with little decorative arches. Then we will go to the Kukeldash Madrasah in Chorsu Square, the largest madrasah in Tashkent. In this very place, there was a crossroad of caravan roads, “chorsu” and the town's trading square was formed.

After the Madrasah, we will stroll through the Chorsu (Crafts' Bazaar). Our visit will be completed with a visit to the Museum of History of Uzbekistan.

Overnight in Tashkent  Meals: B – L

Day 4: Mon, Apr 15  Tashkent – Khiva
We will fly to Urgench in the morning and drive to Khiva.

Khiva contains some of the best-preserved examples of Islamic architecture in Central Asia within its walled Ichan-Kala (Royal Court). The Ichan-Kala encloses buildings dating from the 12th century, but most of its palace buildings, mosques, madrasahs, mausoleums and other structures date from 1780-1850, when the city prospered as a trade depot and fortress along the caravan routes.
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Overnight in Khiva – Urgench Meals: B – L – D

Day 5: Tue, Apr 16 Khiva, Uzbekistan - Dashauz – Ashgabat, Turkmenistan

Right after breakfast we will drive to the Uzbek – Turkmen border to cross it at the check point, Shavat/ Dashoguz. After crossing the border, we will have lunch in the town and take our domestic flight to Ashgabat (650 km south of Dashauz across the Karakum Desert).

Rest of the day at leisure in Ashgabat.

Overnight in Ashgabat Meals: B – L
Day 6: Wed, Apr 17  Ashgabat

Ashgabat is a relatively young city, growing out of a village of the same name established by Russians first as a fort town in 1881. It's not far from the site of Nisa, the ancient capital of the Parthian Empire, and it grew on the ruins of the Silk Road city of Konjikala, which was first mentioned as a wine-producing village in 2nd century BC and was leveled by an earthquake in 1st century BC. Konjikala was rebuilt because of its advantageous location on the Silk Road and it flourished until its destruction by Mongols in the 13th century.

We will visit the archeological site of Old Nisa, one of the first capitals of the Parthians, which was traditionally founded by Arsaces I in 3rd century BC. It was reputedly the royal necropolis of the Parthian kings, although it has not been established that the fortress at Nisa was neither a royal residence nor a mausoleum. The fortress at Nisa was declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO.

After lunch we will continue sightseeing in Ashgabat including the Ashgabat National Museum of History, which displays artifacts dating back to the Parthian and Persian civilizations.

Overight in Ashgabat  Meals: B – L
Day 7: Thu, Apr 18  Ashgabat – Mary
We will take a domestic flight to Mary this morning. Upon arrival, we will drive to Old Merv.

Mary is the capital city of Mary Province in Turkmenistan. The city is an oasis in the Karakum Desert, located on the Murghab River. The ancient city of Merv was an oasis city on the Silk Road, which was claimed to be the largest city in the world in 12th century briefly. The site has been listed by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site.

Merv consists of four discrete walled cities very near to each other, each of which was constructed on uninhabited land by builders of different eras, used and then abandoned and never rebuilt. These cities correspond to these main periods; the oldest and the smallest Erkgala, corresponds the Achaemenid Merv; the second one is Gawurgala, which surrounds Erkgala, comprises the Hellenistic and Sassanian metropolis and also served as an industrial suburb to the Abbasid/Seljuk city; Soltangala is by far the largest of the four. The smaller Timurid city was founded a short distance to the south and is now called Abdylkahangala.

Various other ancient buildings are scattered between and around these cities. All of the sites are preserved in the “Ancient Merv Archaeological Park”.

After our visit, we will drive back to Mary and visit Mary Regional Museum.

Overnight in Mary  Meals: B – L – D

Day 8: Fri, Apr 19  Mary, Turkmenistan – Bukhara, Uzbekistan
In the morning, we will drive to Turkmen-Uzbek border via Turkmenabad and cross the border at the check point, Farab.

We will drive to Bukhara. Upon arrival, we will leisurely stroll through the Bukhara historic center.

Overnight in Bukhara  Meals: B – L

Day 9: Sat, Apr 20  Bukhara
Bukhara is the capital of the Bukhara Province of Uzbekistan. The region around Bukhara has been inhabited for at least five millennia and the city has existed for half that time.

Located on the Silk Road, the city has long been a center of trade, scholarship, culture and religion. The historic center of Bukhara, which contains numerous mosques and madrasahs, has been listed by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site.
Ethnic Tajiks constitute the majority in Bukhara, but the city long had a population including Jews and other ethnic minorities, as well. Our sightseeing will include Ismael Samani Mausoleum, vault of Bukhara rulers' dynasty, Chor-Minor and Chasma-Ayub Mausoleums, Registan Ensemble, Ark Fortress, Bolo-Hauz Complex, Poli-Kalon Ensemble including the mosque and the minaret, Madrasah Miri-Arab, Amir-Alim-Khan Madrasah, Taqi (Trading Domes), Kukeldash Madrasah, Magoki Attari, Ulugh Beg and Abdul Aziz Madrasahs.

Overnight in Bukhara
Meals: B – L – D

Day 10: Sun, Apr 21
Bukhara – Shakhrisabz – Samarkand
In the morning we will drive to Shakhrisabz.

Ancient Kesh, the city, where the Shaker of the Universe, Great Timur (Tamerlane) was born is now called Shakhrisabz, the “Green City”. Its monuments are mainly attributed to the Timur's time. The historic center called Shakrisabze is another UNESCO World Heritage Site.

It is near Shakhrisabz that Alexander the Great spent winters and met his wife Roxanna and that Ptolemy defeated the Achaemenid Empire.
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Being another Silk Road city, Shakhrisabz presents amazing monuments including Aq-Sarai (“White Palace”), Tamerlane's summer palace in the 1300s. It was the grandest of Timur's buildings with its archway the widest in Central Asia. Today only some parts of the palace remain. Later we will visit Kok-Gumbaz Mosque, named for its blue dome and Dorus-Siadat, the mausoleum of Timur's elder son Djehanghir.

After lunch, we will drive to Samarkand for overnight.

**Overnight in Samarkand**  **Meals: B – L – D**

**Day 11: Mon, Apr 22  Samarkand**

Samarkand is the capital of the Samarkand Province and most noted for its central position on Silk Road between China and the West, and for being an Islamic center for scholarly study.

Located on an irrigated valley of the Zeravshan River in the center of Uzbekistan, area of present Samarkand always ensured favorable conditions for human settlements. In the 14th century, it became the capital of the empire of Timur (Tamerlane) and is the site of his mausoleum (the Gur-e Amir). In 2001, UNESCO added the city to its World Heritage List as “Samarkand-Crossroads of Cultures”.

Today we will visit Registan, the heart of ancient Samarkand. It was a place of public executions, where people gathered to hear royal proclamations, as well, heralded by blasts on enormous copper pipes called dzharchis. Notable buildings of Registan are Ulugh Beg, Sher-Dor and Tilya-Kori Madrasahs. Chorsu, the ancient trading dome is situated right behind the Sher-Dor and is well restored.
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In the afternoon, we will continue seeing the architectural monuments of Samarkand. We will visit Gur-e Amir Mausoleum, Bibi Khanum Mosque, Shah-i-Zinda Ensemble, Ulugh Beg Observatory, Ruins of Afrosiab- the site and the museum of the ancient town (6c BC-13c AD.)

Overnight in Samarkand  Meals: B – L

Day 12: Tue, Apr 23  Samarkand – Tashkent – Almaty, Kazakhstan

Very early in the morning we will be transferred to Samarkand airport for our flight to Tashkent. Upon arrival we will drive to the city center for some free time before afternoon flight to Almaty, Kazakhstan.

Upon arrival in Almaty, our guide and driver will meet us and take us to our hotel.

Overnight in Almaty  Meals: B – L

Day 13: Wed, Apr 24  Almaty

We have our full day program in Almaty.

In the 10-14th centuries, settlements in the territory of the so called “Big Almaty” became part of the trade routes of the Silk Road. At that time, Almaty became one of the trade, craft and agricultural centers on the Silk Road and possessed an official mint. The city was first mentioned as Almatu in books from the 13th century.

We will visit Panfilov’s Park with Zenkov’s Orthodox Cathedral, Great Patriotic War Memorial and National Musical Instruments Museum. We will continue sightseeing tour at Republican Square and State History Museum, which exhibits terrific Scythian treasures, including the priceless Kargaly diadem, once the property of a female shaman.

Later we drive to the Sunkar Falcon Center to see hundreds of indigenous raptors including golden eagles, endangered Saker falcons and Eurasian black vultures.

After city tour drive on cable car to the top of Kok Tube mount to admire view of the evening city and enjoy the views of Tien-Shan Mountain Range.

Overnight in Almaty  Meals: B – L
Day 14: Thu, Apr 25  Almaty, Kazakhstan – Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan

In the morning we will drive to Bishkek, the capital and the financial center of Kyrgyzstan.

We will drive on the edge of the fabulous Kazakh Steppe passing herds of horses, flocks of sheep... The steppe extends more than 2,200 km from the area east of the Caspian Depression and north of the Aral Sea, all the way to the Altai Mountains. It is the largest dry steppe region on earth, covering approximately 804,500 square kilometers. The Kazakh Steppe lies at the southern end of the Ural Mountains, the traditional dividing line between Europe and Asia. Much of the steppe is considered to be either semi-desert or desert.

Originally a caravan rest stop, possibly founded by the Sogdians, on one of the branches of Silk Road through the Tien-Shan Range, the location was fortified in 1825 by the Uzbek khan of Kokhand with a mud fort. Nowadays the capital and industrial centre of Kyrgyzstan, Bishkek is a city of wide avenues, handsome buildings and Soviet heritage. The gesturing statue of Lenin can still be seen in the city's vast central square, yet it is the permanently snow capped Kyrgyz Alatau mountain range which towers over Bishkek providing a quite stunning backdrop.

In Bishkek we will visit Manas Square, State History Museum and do a walking tour around the main Ala Too Square to watch ceremony of changing of the Guard of Honor, Independence Monument, main governmental buildings, and finish at the Old Square with Parliament House. Finally, we will transfer to the Victory Square to finish our city tour.

Overnight in Bishkek  Meals: B – L
Day 15: Fri, Apr 26  Bishkek – Balasagun - Bishkek

Today, we will have an excursion to Burana Tower, which is actually a large minaret in the Chuy Valley (80 km from Bishkek, 1.5 hours). The tower, along with gravel markers, some earthworks and the remains of a castle and three mausoleums, is all that remains of the ancient city of Balasagun, which was established by the Karakhanids at the end of the 9th century. We explore ruins of that important trading point at the Great Silk Road and visit a little local museum telling about that civilization. Also watch a collection of Balbals, ancient Turkic tombs.

Then we will have lunch at a local village, visiting a local family. After lunch we will drive back to Bishkek.

Overnight in Bishkek  Meals: B – L
Day 16: Sat, Apr 27          Departure
This is end of our adventure on the ancient Silk Road. We will be transferred to airport for our return flight.