




The Five Stans

 **Tour Length:** 24 Days

 **Tour Departs:** 30 September 2027

This tour is developed to see all Five Stans of Central Asia. During the tour you get in touch with all major remains of the Great Silk Road as well as modern life of these bright countries. Being so different in the modern history all Central Asian states have a common past, kindred customs and traditions. Discover the legacies of nomads, conquerors and traders as you follow ancient Silk Road routes, explore grand cities, remote canyons, and timeless desert fortresses.

Highlights

- Kyrgyzstan - Bishkek and Ala-Archa National Park
- Kazakhstan – Almaty, Medeo Gorge and Kok-Tobe Hill
- Uzbekistan – Tashkent, Samarkand, Bukhara and Khiva
- Tajikistan – Khujand, Istaravshan and Dushanbe
- Turkmenistan - Konya-Urgench, Ashgabat, Merv and Mary

Tour Costs Per Person

Per Person Share Twin/Double Room

\$17,500

Price Per Single Room

\$21,600

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Tour Costs

Inclusions

- Economy Class Air Travel ex Auckland (upgrade to Premium Economy or Business Class available at additional cost)
- Prepaid government, airport, security, port taxes and charges
- Superior hotel accommodation
- Meals as indicated in the itinerary
- Sightseeing and entrance fees as indicated in the itinerary
- English speaking local hosts and guides as appropriate
- Baggage handling of 1 suitcase per person – where possible
- Tips to local guides, coach drivers, cruise staff
- Escorted by Maher Tours Leader

Exclusions

- Any meals and sightseeing not specifically mentioned in the itinerary
- Passport and Visa Fees
- Travel insurance – advice and assistance offered
- Items of a personal nature such telephone charges, laundry, drinks etc.

Booking Conditions

- Initial Deposit due at time of booking:
NZD\$3,000 per person
- Second Deposit due Tuesday 30 March 2027
NZD\$3,000 per person
- Final Payment Balance
Due Friday 02 July 2027
- This tour is not suitable for those that require wheelchair assistance or mobility assistance. A good level of health and fitness required

To register for this tour please contact us at 0800 500 518 or tours@mahertours.co.nz

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Tour Itinerary

24 Days

Day 1 | Home – Dubai

THURSDAY 30 SEPTEMBER

Late this afternoon, we report to the airport and join the flight to Dubai.

Day 2 | Dubai

FRIDAY 01 OCTOBER (D)

We arrive in Dubai early this morning and after clearing Customs and Immigration formalities, we are met and transferred to our hotel for the day. We have an early dinner at the hotel before returning to the airport for our flight to Bishkek.

Day 3 | Dubai - Bishkek

SATURDAY 02 OCTOBER (B,D)

Early morning arrival in Bishkek. Transfer to the hotel for recovery after flight. In the evening, we enjoy a welcome dinner with a Folklore show. Artists will represent different national musical instruments and showcase their techniques.

Day 4 | Bishkek

SUNDAY 03 OCTOBER (B,D)

Bishkek is the largest city in Kyrgyzstan, as well as the modern cultural, political and economic centre of the republic. It is a calm city with wide streets and beautiful houses with its original, measured rhythm of life. Coming to Bishkek, the first thing that attracts attention is that the city is literally immersed in greenery. A huge number of parks makes the air unusually fresh and clean. It is generally accepted that there are more trees for each resident than in any other city in Central Asia. Today we enjoy a walking tour around Ala Too Square to watch the ceremony of changing of the Guard of Honor, including Manas Monument, the main national hero of the Kyrgyz people, Independence Monument, governmental buildings. We finish the tour at the Old Square with Parliament House and the only surviving Lenin Monument in Central Asia. We proceed to Museum of Applied Arts and Victory Square where finish the tour.

Day 5 | Ala-Archa Gorge

MONDAY 04 OCTOBER (B,D)

Today we visit Ala-Archa National Park, located at an altitude of 2,100 meters. This beautiful reserve is a small valley within a dramatic gorge, where the ridges are crowned with permanent glaciers and the slopes are covered in pristine spruce forests. Meltwater from the glaciers form streams that flow down into the Ala-Archa River. The park is also known for its remarkable wildlife. You may spot the elusive snow leopard, which is listed in the Red Book of endangered species, and in the high valley lives a rare blue bird that the Kyrgyz call the "bird of happiness." Many other fascinating plants and animals thrive here, protected by the strict ban on hunting.

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Day 6 | Bishkek - Almaty

TUESDAY 05 OCTOBER (B,D)

Almaty is a sunny, cozy city surrounded by greenery with wide streets, beautiful buildings, numerous parks, squares and fountains. It is no coincidence that the beautiful city at the foot of the emerald ridges of the Tien Shan is called the "garden city". In the spring, when the southern outskirts are buried in the bloom of apple, apricot, and cherry orchards, the city becomes like a fairy tale. The magnificent green outfit and the majestic panorama of the mountains make the city of Almaty unlike other cities. On arrival, we take an afternoon walk in Panfilov Park with Zenkov Cathedral in the centre. The cathedral is one of the nine most unique monuments of wooden buildings in the world. Its wall paintings and interior decorations amaze visitors with its beauty and splendor.

Day 7 | Almaty

WEDNESDAY 06 OCTOBER (B,D)

After breakfast, we make our way to Medeo Gorge, located 25 km from Almaty at an altitude of over 2,000 metres. Medeo is home to the world's highest mountain ice skating rink and the largest ski resort in the region. On the way, we'll stop by a dam that protects the city from avalanches and mudslides that often cascade down the slopes. We'll then take a cable car ride to the top for breathtaking views of the majestic Tien Shan Mountains. Returning to Almaty, we'll continue to the Kok-Tobe recreational area for another scenic cable car ride. From the observation deck at the top of Kok-Tobe Mountain, we'll enjoy a panoramic view of Almaty and its surroundings, including one of the tallest TV towers in the world. Our final stop is the Museum of History, which houses a fascinating collection of exhibits that showcase Kazakhstan's important role throughout history.

Day 8 | Charyn Canyon

THURSDAY 07 OCTOBER (B,D)

Today we'll visit the magnificent Charyn Canyon and its famous Valley of the Castles, named for its striking pillars and rock formations that resemble grand, manmade fortresses. Often compared to the Grand Canyon in the United States, Charyn Canyon may be smaller in size but is equally stunning in beauty. You can choose to hike down to the canyon floor and climb back up or simply admire the breathtaking views from the canyon rim above.

Day 9 | Almaty - Tashkent

FRIDAY 08 OCTOBER (B,D)

This morning we transfer to the airport for our flight to Tashkent. Tashkent is one of the five largest cities in Central Asia. Here, modern skyscrapers stand side by side with historic buildings and ancient mosques, while modern shopping centres blend with traditional oriental bazaars and markets. Many of the old structures were restored after a powerful earthquake in 1966, which partially destroyed the city and dramatically changed its appearance. Our city tour also includes a richly decorated Museum of Applied Art. Exhibits include national carpets, gold embroidery, ceramics, porcelain, jewelry, small furniture and musical instruments. We will also visit the Independence Square, a favorite resting place for local people with beautiful fountains of the city, Alisher Navoi Theatre Square.

Day 10 | Tashkent

SATURDAY 09 OCTOBER (B,D)

Our first visit is Kukeldash Madrasah, which still serves as a Koran School. You will also see the Khast-Imam Square with the beautiful Barak Khan Madrasah, the Tillya Sheikh Mosque and the Kaffal Shashi Mausoleum made of simple brickwork. Here you can also take a look at the Koran written by the third Caliph Osman (644 - 656). We will also visit the well-known ceramic workshop of Rakhimov family. In the workshop you can see with your own eyes how unique products are made from fired clay. Moreover, you can work yourself with the material on the potter's wheel, and take part in firing, glazing and painting the works. A stroll through the huge Chorsu bazaar will let you experience the everyday life with all your senses.

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Day 11 | Tashkent - Dushanbe

SUNDAY 10 OCTOBER (B,D)

This morning, we fly to Dushanbe and we start our city tour. Named for the Persian word for Monday, Dushanbe was at one point a small market village where traders would gather each Monday to sell their goods. During the Soviet era, the city grew to be the most important center of production in Tajikistan, but the Shohmansur covered market reflects Dushanbe's historical ties to local trade.

Day 12 | Dushanbe

MONDAY 11 OCTOBER (B,D)

This morning, we visit the Monument of Ismoili Somoni — the founder of the Tajik nation — located on the city's main square. This 40-meter-high monument honours Ismaili Saman-Khuda, the founder of the Samanid dynasty in the 10th century. The base contains a permanent exhibition about the Samanids and is paved with granite slabs, while the upper part of the statue is covered in gold. Next, visit the Tajik Flagpole — the world's tallest flagpole — which entered the Guinness Book of World Records in August 2011 at 165 meters high, marking the country's 20th anniversary of independence. We continue on to Dushanbe's Museum of National Antiquities, home to impressive artifacts and exhibits, including the massive reclining Buddha. The museum provides fascinating insights into the evolution of people who have lived in Tajikistan for thousands of years. Next, visit Kohi Navruz, followed by a stop at the studio of Djamshed Juraev, a master of mosaic art.

Day 13 | Dushanbe – Samarkand via Penjikent

TUESDAY 12 OCTOBER (B,D)

Today we travel to Penjikent, a city well-known among travellers for its historic sites, architectural monuments, and beautiful recreation area along the banks of the Zaravshan River. Penjikent is one of the most ancient cities in Central Asia, with a remarkable history spanning 5,500 years. Its name translates from Russian as "Five Villages." Upon arrival, we will visit the excavation site of Old Penjikent — often called the "Pompeii of Central Asia" — dating back to the 5th century, with its ancient palaces and necropolises. We will also explore the Rudaki Museum and the old town of Penjikent before continuing our journey to Samarkand.

Day 14 | Samarkand

WEDNESDAY 13 OCTOBER (B,D)

Samarkand is one of the oldest cities in the world, founded eight centuries before our era. Once, it was the most important crossroads between East and West, with the Great Silk Road passing through it. As a result, Samarkand has preserved an extraordinary number of cultural and historical monuments — including mausoleums, mosques, museums, ancient ruins, and more.

Today you will explore this legendary city, one of the Silk Road's most significant sites. Visit Registan Square, which for centuries was the heart of Samarkand. Several remarkable buildings here have survived in their original form since their construction. You will see three stunning madrasahs: the Ulugbek Madrasah (15th century), the Tilya-Kori Madrasah (17th century), and the Sher-Dor Madrasah (17th century). Next, visit the Gur Emir — the magnificent mausoleum of the great Tamerlane. Dinner will be served at a traditional local house.

Day 15 | Samarkand - Bukhara

THURSDAY 14 OCTOBER (B,D)

Bukhara was one of the greatest trading centres on the Silk Road, with a history stretching back thousands of years. Humans have lived in the region for at least five millennia, and the city itself has existed for about half that time. Located along the Silk Road, Bukhara has long been a thriving center of trade, scholarship, culture, and religion. Our city tour in Bukhara will include the magnificent architectural complex of Poi Kalon, featuring the Kalon Minaret, the Kalon Mosque, and the Mir-Arab Madrasah. We will also visit the Toki Zargaron trading domes and the Magok-i-Attori Mosque.

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Day 16 | Bukhara

FRIDAY 15 OCTOBER (B,D)

This morning, we visit a lively oriental bazaar filled with traditional colours, spices, and aromas. Continue our walk through Bukhara to discover some of its most beautiful architectural ensembles of mosques and madrasahs. Highlights include the Ark Citadel, the Mausoleum of the Samanids, Chor Minor Madrasah, and Lyabi Khauz Square — one of the main squares in the city and a true gem of Bukhara. This square is home to an impressive architectural ensemble consisting of a mosque, a madrasah, and a monument honouring Khoja Nasreddin — a beloved figure in oriental folklore. The area is centred around a serene pond with a fountain and serves as a popular gathering place for festivals and official celebrations. Later, we visit Chashma-Ayub Mausoleum and the Bolo Haouz Mosque. In the evening, enjoy a folklore show at the Nadir Divan Begi Madrasah.

Day 17 | Bukhara - Khiva

SATURDAY 16 OCTOBER (B,D)

We continue our journey to Khiva, travelling through the Kizilkum Desert — the “red sands” — which once carried invaders, nomadic hordes, and the armies of the Persians, Alexander the Great, and Genghis Khan. Khiva, once part of ancient Khorezm on the Great Silk Road, is now a remarkable open-air museum and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Nearly every building here is a historical treasure. In the old town of Ichan-Kala alone, around 60 monuments have been preserved, including the citadel, palaces, mosques, minarets, and mausoleums — all of which vividly reflect the ancient eastern cityscape of Khiva. Archaeological findings suggest that Old Khiva, which dates back to the 5th century, served as a vital stop on the Great Silk Road. The old city within Ichan-Kala’s massive walls covers about 30 hectares and is surrounded by sturdy 6–8 metre-high ramparts. Outside the walls, protective ditches once filled with water encircled the city. The fortress walls have four gates, each reinforced with defensive towers and observation galleries.

Day 18 | Khiva

SUNDAY 17 OCTOBER (B,D)

Visit the old town of Khiva and explore its highlights, including the impressive Kunya Ark Fortress and the Mohammed Amin Khan Madrasah. Admire the beautifully decorated Islam Khodja Minaret, then see the Palvan Kari Complex and the Rafanek Madrasah. In the afternoon, we continue our exploration with visits to the Uch-Avliyo Mausoleum, the historic Juma Mosque, the ornate Tash-Hauli Palace, and the Arab Mohammed Khan Madrasah.

Day 19 | Khiva - Ashgabat

MONDAY 18 OCTOBER (B,D)

In the morning, we travel to the last ‘Stan’ of our journey — Turkmenistan. Dashoguz has a vibrant local market, ideal for observing daily life and purchasing local products and Dashoguz Regional Museum, which offers insights into the history and culture of the region.

We have dinner before we catch an evening flight from Dashoguz to Ashgabat.

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Day 20 | Ashgabat

TUESDAY 19 OCTOBER (B,D)

Enjoy a city tour of Ashgabat — recognized by the Guinness Book of World Records as the world's most white-marble city (even its telephone booths are clad in marble!). Ashgabat, the capital of Turkmenistan, sits atop the world's fourth-largest natural gas reserves and is often described as one of the world's most secluded cities. Our tour will take us through the city centre, the lively Russian Bazaar, the striking Ertogrul Gazi Mosque, Independence Park, the Neutrality Arch, and a viewpoint at the Wedding Palace. We will also visit an Akhal-Teke horse farm. This ancient purebred horse, developed around 5,000 years ago by early civilizations of this region, is famous for its striking appearance and unique adaptation to hot climates. Akhal-Teke horses have influenced the development of many modern horse breeds and remain a national pride.

Our tour continues to the ancient site of Nisa — one of Turkmenistan's most significant historical landmarks. Located near Ashgabat at the foot of the Kopet Dag Mountains, Nisa was once a major centre of the Parthian Empire. Finally, visit the Museum of History to gain deeper insight into Turkmenistan's rich cultural heritage.

Day 21 | Ashgabat - Mary/Merv

WEDNESDAY 20 OCTOBER (B,D)

This morning we embark on a journey into the heart of one of Central Asia's greatest lost cities — Ancient Merv, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Traveling across vast desert plains to Mary, we reach the site of a city that once rivalled the world's greatest metropolises. Founded more than 2,500 years ago, Merv thrived at the crossroads of civilizations and empires. It was conquered by Alexander the Great, shaped by Persian kings, and later rose to become the glittering capital of the Seljuk Turks — a centre of power, science, and art that influenced lands from the Central Asian steppes to the sands of Egypt. But in the 13th century, the Mongol invasion brought Merv's golden age to an abrupt end. Today, echoes of its former glory linger among its ruins — crumbling fortresses, ancient mausoleums, and weathered walls that once protected one of the most advanced cities of its time. Here, history whispers through the desert winds, and each step connects you with centuries of human ambition and achievement.

Day 22 | Merv - Ashgabat

THURSDAY 21 OCTOBER (B,D)

After exploring the ancient ruins of Merv, our journey continues to the modern heart of Mary—a vibrant city that beautifully bridges past and present. We'll begin at the bustling central bazaar, where vendors sell everything from fragrant spices and freshly baked bread to colourful fabrics and traditional Turkmen handicrafts. This is a wonderful chance to experience daily life in Mary, where local culture comes alive in the lively rhythm of trade and conversation. Next, we step inside the peaceful Russian Orthodox Church, a striking reminder of Mary's colonial-era past, offering a quiet moment beneath its ornate domes and icon-covered walls. We then visit the Juma Mosque, Mary's grand modern mosque, with its spacious courtyard and graceful architecture that reflects the region's deep Islamic heritage. As the afternoon sun begins to set, we depart Mary and make our way back to Ashgabat. The drive back offers a final glimpse of the desert landscapes that have shaped civilizations for thousands of years—a fitting transition from the rich history of Merv and Mary to the bold modernity of Turkmenistan's capital.

Day 23 | Ashgabat – Dubai – Auckland

FRIDAY 22 OCTOBER (B)

Sadly, today we must depart this fascinating part of world history and start our journey home. Note, it is an early departure from Ashgabat! After the short flight to Dubai, we connect with our flight to Auckland.

Day 24 | Home

SATURDAY 23 OCTOBER

Arrival time is mid-morning.

Mobility on Tour

Sightseeing at nearly all of the palaces, fortresses and some temples involves climbing quite a number of steps. These palaces were built to provide defense against potential invaders so nearly all of them stand on top of a hill, while the interiors have layers of narrow hallways and steps to slow down the advance of enemies once they were inside. The steps tend to be quite large, not level and sometimes without handrails. Mosques and Madrassas also tend to be built at an elevation, as this is the most auspicious position according to ancient beliefs. This means you sometimes need to walk from the bus park to the entrance, and/or need to climb some steps inside. People with knee or hip injuries, who have poor balance or are otherwise unable to complete these activities independently should consider the suitability of this itinerary carefully.



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