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 Charyn Canyon
- Uzbekistan – Tashkent, Samarkand, Bukhara and Khiva
- Tajikistan – Dushanbe and Penjikent
- Turkmenistan - Ashgabat, Ancient Merv and Nisa

Tour Costs Per Person

Per Person Share Twin/Double Room

$18,200

Price Per Single Room

$22,300

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 (as at 01/09/2026)
- 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 (subject to minimum numbers)

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

Tour Itinerary

24 Days

Day 1 | Home – Dubai

THURSDAY 30 SEPTEMBER

We commence the tour with an overnight flight to Dubai.

Day 2 | Dubai

FRIDAY 01 OCTOBER (D)

On arrival in Dubai early this morning, we will be met and transferred to our hotel. We enjoy time to rest and relax before an early dinner together this evening. We then return to the airport for our overnight flight to Bishkek.

Day 3 | Dubai - Bishkek

SATURDAY 02 OCTOBER (B,D)

We arrive in Bishkek early this morning and will be met and transferred directly to our hotel.
Take time to rest and recover from the flight.

This evening, we enjoy a welcome dinner accompanied by a folklore show, featuring traditional music and a variety of Kyrgyz musical instruments.

Day 4 | Bishkek

SUNDAY 03 OCTOBER (B,D)

Bishkek is the largest city in Kyrgyzstan and the country's cultural, political and economic centre. It is a relaxed city, characterised by wide streets, leafy spaces and an unhurried pace of life.

Today we explore Bishkek on foot, beginning at Ala-Too Square, where we see the Changing of the Guard. We continue past the Manas Monument, dedicated to Kyrgyzstan's legendary national hero, along with the Independence Monument and government buildings. At the Old Square, we see Parliament House and the Lenin Monument before continuing to the Museum of History and Victory Square.

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 fascinating plants and animals that thrive here, protected by the strict ban on hunting.

Day 6 | Bishkek - Almaty

TUESDAY 05 OCTOBER (B,D)

Almaty is a leafy and attractive city, with wide streets, elegant buildings and numerous parks, squares and fountains. Set against the spectacular backdrop of the Tien Shan Mountains, it is often referred to as the “garden city”.

On arrival, we enjoy an afternoon walk through Panfilov Park, home to the colourful Zenkov Cathedral. Constructed almost entirely of wood, this striking Russian Orthodox cathedral is one of Almaty’s most distinctive landmarks, renowned for its ornate interior and beautifully decorated walls.

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. 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. One of the largest cities in Central Asia, Tashkent is an interesting blend of old and new, where modern buildings and shopping centres sit alongside historic mosques and traditional bazaars. Much of the city was rebuilt following a devastating earthquake in 1966, which dramatically changed its appearance.

Our city tour includes the richly decorated Museum of Applied Art, with its impressive collection of traditional carpets, gold embroidery, ceramics, porcelain, jewellery, furniture and musical instruments. We also visit Independence Square, with its attractive fountains and gardens, and Alisher Navoi Theatre Square. We view the Romanov Palace from the outside, an ornate late 19th-century building decorated with turrets and intricate latticework. Lastly, we visit the impressive Islamic Civilization Center, a major cultural and educational complex housing one of the world’s oldest surviving Quran manuscripts.

Day 10 | Tashkent

SATURDAY 09 OCTOBER (B,D)

Today we explore the Old Town of Tashkent, beginning with a visit to Kukeldash Madrasah, which continues to serve as an Islamic school. We continue to Khast-Imam Square, home to the beautiful Barak Khan Madrasah, Tillya Sheikh Mosque and Kaffal Shashi Mausoleum. Here we also have the opportunity to see the historic Quran associated with Caliph Osman.

We also visit the renowned Rakhimov family ceramic workshop, where we learn about the traditional techniques used to create their distinctive ceramics. There will be an opportunity to try your hand at the potter's wheel and learn about the firing, glazing and painting process.

We finish with a stroll through the colourful Chorsu Bazaar, a wonderful place to experience the sights, sounds and everyday life of Tashkent.

Day 11 | Tashkent - Dushanbe

SUNDAY 10 OCTOBER (B,D)

This morning we transfer to the airport for our flight to Dushanbe. Meaning "Monday" in Persian, Dushanbe takes its name from the weekly market once held here each Monday. From its beginnings as a small market village, the city grew considerably during the Soviet era to become the capital and economic centre of Tajikistan.

Our sightseeing begins at the Ismoili Somoni Monument, an impressive 40-metre-high monument honouring the founder of the Samanid dynasty. We continue to the Dushanbe Flagpole, which at 165 metres held the Guinness World Record as the world's tallest flagpole when it was completed in 2011. We also visit Rudaki Park, the Tajikistan State Museum and colourful Mehrgon Bazaar, before continuing to Victory Park for views across Dushanbe and the surrounding hills.

Day 12 | Dushanbe

MONDAY 11 OCTOBER (B,D)

Today we continue our exploration of Dushanbe with a visit to the Museum of National Antiquities, home to an impressive collection of artefacts tracing thousands of years of Tajikistan's history. Among its highlights is the remarkable reclining Buddha.

We continue to Kohi Navruz, originally conceived as a traditional teahouse before developing into an impressive cultural palace. Its beautifully decorated rooms showcase a variety of traditional Tajik craftsmanship and decorative styles.

We also visit the studio of Djamshed Juraev, a master of mosaic art, before continuing to Hissar Fortress, the remains of an historic fortified complex associated with the Emirate of Bukhara.

Day 13 | Dushanbe – Samarkland via Penjikent

TUESDAY 12 OCTOBER (B,D)

Today we travel to Penjikent, one of the most ancient cities in Central Asia, with a history stretching back thousands of years. Situated in the picturesque Zaravshan Valley, its name means "Five Villages".

On arrival, we visit the archaeological site of Old Penjikent, often referred to as the "Pompeii of Central Asia". Dating back to the 5th century, the ruins reveal the remains of this once-thriving ancient city. We also visit the Rudaki Museum and explore 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 Central Asia, with a history stretching back more than 2,700 years. Once an important crossroads between East and West, the city flourished along the Great Silk Road and today is home to an extraordinary collection of historic monuments, mosques and mausoleums.

Today we explore this legendary city, beginning at magnificent Registan Square, which for centuries formed the heart of Samarkand. Here we see three impressive madrasahs: the Ulugbek Madrasah (15th century), Tilya-Kori Madrasah (17th century) and Sher-Dor Madrasah (17th century). We then visit Gur Emir, the magnificent mausoleum of the great conqueror Tamerlane.

This evening, we enjoy dinner at a traditional local house followed by a light show.

Day 15 | Samarkand - Bukhara

THURSDAY 14 OCTOBER (B,D)

Today we continue our journey on to Bukhara, taking the train if possible. 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.

Day 16 | Bukhara

FRIDAY 15 OCTOBER (B,D)

This morning, we visit a lively oriental bazaar filled with traditional colours, spices and aromas. We then continue our exploration of Bukhara, discovering some of the city's beautiful mosques, madrasahs and historic monuments.

Highlights include the Ark Citadel, the Mausoleum of the Samanids, Chor Minor Madrasah and Lyabi Khauz Square, one of the most atmospheric areas of Bukhara. Centred around a tranquil pond, the square is surrounded by historic buildings and is also home to a monument honouring Khoja Nasreddin, a beloved figure in Central Asian folklore. Later, we visit the Chashma-Ayub Mausoleum and Bolo Haouz Mosque.

This evening, we 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 today a remarkable open-air museum and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. At its heart is the beautifully preserved walled old city of Ichan-Kala, home to an extraordinary collection of historic palaces, mosques, madrasahs, minarets and mausoleums. Surrounded by imposing ancient walls, its narrow streets and monumental architecture offer a wonderful glimpse into Khiva's past as an important trading centre along the Silk Road.

Day 18 | Khiva

SUNDAY 17 OCTOBER (B,D)

Today we explore the old town of Khiva, visiting its many historic highlights, including the impressive Kunya Ark Fortress and Mohammed Amin Khan Madrasah. We admire the beautifully decorated Islam Khodja Minaret, before continuing to the Palvan Kari Complex and Rafanek Madrasah.

This 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)

This morning, we travel to the last 'Stan' of our journey — Turkmenistan.

After crossing the border, we continue to Dashoguz, where we visit a vibrant local market, offering an interesting glimpse into everyday life, along with the Dashoguz Regional Museum, which provides an insight into the history and culture of the region.

We enjoy dinner together before transferring to the airport for our evening flight to Ashgabat.

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, the Constitution Monument, the Ferris Wheel, a viewpoint at the Wedding Palace and Halk Hakydasy Memorial Complex.

Day 21 | Ashgabat – Mary/Merv - Ashgabat

WEDNESDAY 20 OCTOBER (B,D)

This morning we journey across the vast desert plains to Mary, gateway to one of Central Asia's greatest ancient cities — Merv, a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

We begin our exploration of Mary with visits to the Grand Mosque, Regional Library and Central Green Bazaar, where colourful stalls offer spices, freshly baked bread, fabrics and traditional Turkmen handicrafts. We also visit the Russian Orthodox Church, an interesting reminder of the city's more recent past.

This afternoon we continue to Ancient Merv. Founded more than 2,500 years ago, Merv flourished at the crossroads of civilisations and empires and became an important centre of trade, culture and learning. Conquered by Alexander the Great, shaped by Persian rulers and later flourishing under the Seljuk Turks, the city became one of the great centres of the medieval world. Its fortunes changed dramatically with the arrival of the Mongols in the 13th century. Today, its vast archaeological site contains the remains of ancient fortresses, mausoleums and city walls, offering a fascinating insight into Merv's extraordinary past.

After a long but rewarding day, we transfer to Mary Airport for our flight back to Ashgabat.

Day 22 | Ashgabat

THURSDAY 21 OCTOBER (B,D)

This morning we complete our exploration of Ashgabat, beginning with a visit to the National Museum of History & Ethnography. Its extensive collection traces Turkmenistan's remarkable history through the ages, with ancient artefacts, archaeological discoveries, traditional crafts and treasures from some of the country's earliest settlements.

We continue to Nisa, one of Turkmenistan's most important archaeological sites. Set against the foothills of the Kopet Dag Mountains, this ancient settlement offers a fascinating glimpse into the powerful civilisations that once flourished in this part of Central Asia.

Returning to Ashgabat, we visit the impressive Turkmenbashi Ruhi Mosque and Mausoleum, before continuing to an Akhal-Teke horse centre. Considered one of the world's oldest and most distinctive horse breeds, the elegant Akhal-Teke has been closely associated with the people and culture of Turkmenistan for thousands of years and is renowned for its beauty, endurance and distinctive metallic sheen.

This evening we come together for our farewell dinner, a wonderful opportunity to reflect on the many memorable experiences and remarkable places we have shared during our journey through the Five Stans.

Day 23 | Ashgabat – Dubai - Auckland

FRIDAY 22 OCTOBER (B)

Sadly, today we farewell Central Asia and begin our journey home, bringing our memorable journey through the Five Stans to a close.

Note: It is an early departure as we transfer to Ashgabat Airport for our flight to Dubai, where we connect with our flight to Auckland.

Day 24 | Auckland

SATURDAY 23 OCTOBER

Arrive Auckland 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.

The Five Stans

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