TOUR CODE

CA3

ADVENTURESABROAD

THE FIVE STANS

Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyz Republic & Kazakhstan

20 days

Updated 29/04/2013

Day 1 *Arrival in Tashkent*

Today we arrive in Tashkent, the capital of Uzbekistan.

NOTE: Due to visa procedures, it is possible that you will need to be without your passport/s for 8 weeks prior to departure.

Overnight in Tashkent. Meal plan: Dinner, if required.

Day 2 *Tashkent: City Tour - Urgench - Khiva*

Today we tour Tashkent, capital of Uzbekistan, the third largest of the former Soviet Republics.

Uzbekistan is prospering under independence and this shows in the modern capitol building at the centre of town. We visit the Old City, which has mosques and madrassas (Islamic schools) housing craft workshops and dating from the 14th century. Chorsu Bazaar, a huge open market beside Kukeldash, draws crowds of people from the countryside, many in traditional dress.

We also include Kafelsashi Mausoleum, Barak Khana Medressah, Tila Shaikh Mosque and archives. Later we drive to the Friendship Square and the Navoi Theatre.

This evening we fly to Urgench and transfer by road to nearby Khiva, once the most remote of the Silk Road's oasis cities.

Overnight in Khiva. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 3 *Khiva: City Tour*

Legend has it that Khiva was founded when Shem, son of Noah, discovered a well here. The town certainly existed by the 8th century, as a minor fort and trading post on a Silk Road branch to the Caspian Sea and the Volga. In the early 16th century, Khiva was made capital of the Timurid Empire, becoming a busy slave market and pivot of the khanate for the next three centuries.

Khiva is an ancient walled city and looks much like it did in centuries past. It is one of the few sites in Central Asia where one can easily imagine life during the time of the emirates. We will spend the morning wandering its maze of ruins and great mosques. Our tour includes Ichan Kala (walled city), Kalta Minor Minaret, Kunya Ark (inner citadel), and Madrassa Rakhimkhon. Later we walk to see Mausoleum of Pakhlavan Makhmud, Islam Khodja Minaret and Museum, the medieval Friday Mosque, and Tashauli Palace and Harem. Your afternoon is free to further explore the walled city.

Overnight in Khiva. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 4 *Khiva, Uzbekistan - Kunya Urgench, Turkmenistan - Dashauz - Ashgabat*

Today we travel by road to the Turkmenistan border (30 km). We meet our Turkmen vehicle and drive to nearby Kunya Urgench (Old Urgench). This was the capital of once powerful Khorezm Kingdom, which flourished in the 6th century BC, only to be wrested away from the last of the Persian rulers, the Sasanids, by the invading armies of the Arabs. A powerful and merciless invasion of the Mongolian hordes put an end to the ruling dynasty.

Today we see pre/post Timurid period monuments spread over a large area, including the Turabeg Khanum Mausoleum, the burial place for the Sufi dynasty that ruled Khorezm between the Mongol and Timurid invasions.

Early this evening we fly from nearby Dashauz to Ashgabat (Ashkhabad).

Overnight in Ashgabat. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 5 *Ashgabat: City Tour*

Ashgabat is located in a spectacular natural setting, between the Kara-Kum Desert and the Kopet-Dag mountain range. A settlement on the site of the city was successively occupied by the Parthians, Seljuk Turks, and the Mongols. Under Russian control, it became the administrative capital of the Trans-Caspian oblast, and was the centre of trade between the Russian empire and Persia; the Trans-Caspian railway reached here in 1885. The transliteration of the town's name was changed in 1992 to more accurately reflect the Turkmen original.

Today we tour Ashgabat, with a visit to the History Museum, including the famous carpet section.

Overnight in Ashgabat. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 6 *Ashgabat - Merv (Mary) - Turkmenabat*

Early this morning we fly to the Silk Route city of Merv. Several cities have existed on this site, which is significant for the interchange of culture and politics at a site of major strategic value. It is claimed that Merv was briefly the largest city in the world in the 12th century. The site of ancient Merv has been listed by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site.

Upon arrival we visit Merv Museum and have a comprehensive tour of Merv, visiting the ancient Hellenistic fortress of Gaiyur Kala, and the sites of Erk Kala and Sultan Kala. We shall also see the impressive mausoleum of Sultan Sanjar, one of the most powerful Khorezmian rulers.

After our visit we continue by road to Turkmenabat for overnight.

Overnight in Turkmenabat. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 7 *Turkmenabat, Turkmenistan - Bukhara, Uzbekistan*

Today we travel by road and cross the border back into Uzbekistan and Bukhara,* former capital of the once powerful Emirate of Bukhara. En route we stop at the Chor Bakr necropolis.

With buildings spanning 1,000 years of history and a thoroughly lived-in city centre that hasn't changed much in two centuries, Bukhara is one of the best places in Central Asia to catch a glimpse of pre-Russian Turkestan. Most of the city centre is an architectural preserve and includes a massive royal fortress, plenty of former madrassas, a number of ancient public baths and the remnants of a once-vast market complex. You will have some free time this afternoon to wander and enjoy this atmospheric town.

* Please note: This tends to be a rather slow border crossing, and there is an awkwardly long stretch across "no-mans-land" between border posts. Sometimes we are able to arrange baggage handlers, or to send our Uzbek transport across to meet the group, but this permission is at the whim of the border guards and we cannot guarantee this.

Overnight in Bukhara. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 8 *Bukhara: City Tour*

We spend today exploring the old quarter of Bukhara on foot. The region around Bukhara has been inhabited for at least five millennia and the city itself 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 has been listed by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site.

The highlights of today tour include Labi-hauz, a 17th century plaza built around a pool; three domed bazaars; the 12th century Kalan Minaret, once the tallest building in Asia; and the Mausoleum of Ismail Samani, the town's oldest structure (completed around AD 905) and surely one of the most elegant in Central Asia.

Overnight in Bukhara. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 9 *Bukhara - Sitorai Mokhi-Khosa - Samarkand*

This morning we depart Bukhara and travel via Sitorai Mokhi-Khosa, the summer residence of the last Emir of Bukhara. The first structures in this picturesque area were built in the mid-19th century during the rule of Emir Nasrullakhan. In the 1880s, his successor Muzaffarkhan built a palace for his beloved wife Sitora-bonu. The most skillful Bukhara craftsmen were sent to Russia to learn the best practices of country residence construction. Soon after that they constructed a sumptuous set of rooms, including throne room, which had a peculiar mixture of European and Asian architectural styles.

Our next stop is Gijduvan to visit a local potteryworks for which the area is famous.

Our destination is Samarkand. No name is as evocative of the romance of the Silk Road as Samarkand. For most people it's as mythical as Atlantis or as remote and legendary as Timbuktu. Most of Samarkand's high-profile attractions are the work of Timur, his grandson Ulughbek and the Uzbek Shaybanids, who between them made the city Central Asia's economic, cultural and intellectual epicentre in the 14th and 15th centuries. Almost everything of interest is in old town, whose layout has remained unchanged since this period.

Overnight in Samarkand. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 10 *Samarkand: City Tour*

Samarkand, sometimes called the 'Rome of the Orient', was already flourishing when Rome and Babylon were founded. During the course of our full day tour we visit the famous Registan Square, Bibi Khanum Mosque, Mausoleum of

Tamerlane, Observatory of Ulughbek, the site where Uleg Bek, grandson of Tamerlane, made some of the greatest achievements of the pre-telescope era of astronomy in the 15th century. We also visit the regal mausoleums of Shah-i Zinda, site of Central Asia's most sacred Islamic shrine; the massive mosque of Bibi Khanym, and the adjacent colourful market where you can purchase Samarkand's famous bread which Alexander the Great unsuccessfully tried to have duplicated back home in Greece, or try some of the region's local produce.

We also visit the museum on the site of the ancient Afrosiab archaeological site. The ancient core of Samarkand is located on the Afrasiab hill, named after the legendary Turanian king. The settlement arose in the 8th - early 7th centuries BC and occupied more than 200 hectares. River bluffs on the north and east and deep ravines in the south and west protected it. During the Achaemenids period, the city was encircled with a massive wall having an internal corridor and towers. Scholars identify Afrasiab with ancient Sogdian capital Marakanda, destroyed in the 4th century BC by Alexander the Great.

Overnight in Samarkand. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 11 *Samarkand - Shakhrisabz*

We depart early for Shakhrisabz, the birthplace of Tamerlane. Our route is scenic and matches that taken by Tamerlane (due to the nature of the road, we may accomplish this journey in (a) smaller vehicle/s and meet our coach in Shakhrisabz).

At Shakhrisabz, we visit where we tour Ak-Saray Palace, Kok-Gumbaz Mosque, House of Meditation and the Crypt of Timur, a man who changed the course of history and made so much of a difference to Central Asia.

This small town seems nothing special until you start seeing the ruins dotted around its backstreets. This is Timur's hometown, and once upon a time it probably eclipsed Samarkand. There's little left of Timur's Ak-Saray Palace except bits of the gigantic, 40 m (98 foot) high entrance covered with gorgeous filigree-like blue, white and gold mosaics, but it's staggering to try and imagine what the rest of this glorious summer palace must have looked like.

Overnight in Shakhrisabz. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 12 *Shakhrisabz - Termez: City Tour*

We depart Shakhrisabz and travel to Termez via Guzar-Sheerabad, where we see some beautiful geological formations amid some expansive views.

We arrive in Termez around midday. This afternoon's tour includes the archaealogical museum and the monastery of Fayez Tepe and Kampir Tepe, the remains of a city captured by the Macedonia army of Alexander the Great. On our return to Termez we visit Al-Tirimizi's Mausoleum and Sultan Saodat complex.

The Sultan Saodat complex consists of 143 structures. The earliest mausoleum, built in the northern part of the complex, dates back to the 11th century. Hasan al Amir, the founder of Termez seyeeds clan, is buried here. The portal of this mausoleum with a square layout is topped with a huge dome. Soaring up at the height of 15 metres, the portal is the highest structure of the complex. In the past it was decorated with glazed tiles whose brightness and fineness can be comparable to Samarkand prototypes.

Overnight in Termez. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 13 *Termez, Uzbekistan - Dushanbe, Tajikistan*

We have a morning departure for the Tajik border of Sarsiya. En route we stop at the Dalvarzin Tepe ruins. After completing border formalities, we travel to Dushanbe via the Hissar Fortress and Kohna Madrassah.

With a cool backdrop of mountains, lazy tree-lined avenues and pastel-hued neoclassical buildings, Dushanbe is Central Asia's best-looking capital. Although the name of the city is rather new, its historical past dated back as far as 3 thousand years. Archeologists have dug out the remains of Greek-Bactrian settlements, the site of ancient settlement from Kushan period (7th - 8th centuries), site of ancient Shishi Khon village and other medieval settlements. Since 1991 Dushanbe has been the capital of independent Tajikistan.

Overnight in Dushanbe. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 14 *Dushanbe: City Tour*

Today we include a tour of the Museum of Antiquities in Dushanbe. The huge reclining Buddha, the burial place of the Sarazm princess, Tajikistan antiques, ancient wall paintings from Penjikent, can all be found here. Later we visit the Museum of Applied Arts and the local bazaar. Dushanbe means "Monday" in Tajik, and the name reflects the fact that the city grew on the site of a village that originally was a popular Monday marketplace.

We will also visit the Gurminj Museum of Musical Instruments, founded in 1990 by Gurminj Zavkibekov (1929–2003), Tajik actor and musician, who was honored as a National Artist of Tajikistan and a laureate of the most prestigious national prize in arts for significant contributions to the cultural heritage of Tajikistan. There are about 100 musical instruments in the museum collection mostly representing the Pamiri and Badakhshani musical tradition.

Overnight in Dushanbe. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 15 *Dushanbe, Tajikistan - Almaty, Kazakhstan*

Today we fly to Almaty. Depending on our flight time, we may accomplish some Dushanbe sightseeing from yesterday, or add some additional content.

Overnight in Almaty. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 16 *Almaty: City Tour*

Today we have a full day tour of Almaty.

Compared to other cities in Central Asia, Almaty is quite young. It was founded in 1854 by Russians in the valley of Almaty and was just a fort at first. Its name was Zailisky, then it was named Verny. In 1921 it became Alma-Ata and in 1929 it became the capital of the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic. In 1993 it became Almaty.

We visit Zhenkov's Cathedral, built in 1904, and an extraordinary example of a Russian Orthodox church built in wood. Later we visit the Central State Museum with its excellent displays of Scythian art and some rock drawings depicting the ancient Nestorian pilgrim movement on the Great Silk Routes. A hall dedicated to the nomadic tribes of Kazakhstan is the highlight of the ethnic section of the museum.

Overnight in Almaty. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 17 *Almaty, Kazakhstan - Bishkek, Kyrgyz Republic*

Today we travel by road across the border to Bishkek in the Kyrgyz Republic and embark on a city tour on arrival.

Originally, Bishkek was called Pishpek. In 1926 Pishpek became the capital of the Kyrghiz Autonomous Republic. In 1936, as the capital of the Kyrghiz Soviet Socialist Republic, Pishpek was renamed Frunze in honour of a major political organizer of the Civil War who was born in Pishpek to a Moldavian family. Today Bishkek is a modern city with vast squares, crowded bazaars, impressive administrative centers, and educational institutions.

Our tour includes Oak Park, Central Square, Statue of Manas, and Victory Square. We will also visit the National Historical Museum. At the northern end of Bishkek's central square, this enormous example of socialist realist architecture was once the Lenin Museum, entirely devoted to the man himself. After independence, two of its three floors were cleared to make way for exhibits that reflected Kyrgyzstan's new status as an independent state. Luckily for visitors one floor has been preserved, along with a huge centrepiece statue of Lenin leading the revolutionary masses.

Overnight in Bishkek. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 18 *Bishkek - Lake Issyk-Kul*

Today's scenic drive takes us along the shores of scenic Lake Issyk-Kul (1607 meters / 5,272 ft), the tenth largest lake in the world by volume and the second largest saline lake after the Caspian Sea. Although it is surrounded by snow-capped peaks, it never freezes; hence its name, which means "warm lake" in the Kyrgyz language. On the way we will stop and visit the Burana Tower, located at the mouth of the Shamsy Valley. An eleventh century monument, restored by the Soviets in the 1950's, you may choose to climb the minaret to get a view over the old city walls of Balasagun, a fortification built by the Sogdians.

Overnight at Lake Issyk-Kul. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 19 *Lake Issyk-Kul - Bishkek*

In and around the town of Cholpon-Ata, on the shores of Lake Issyk-Kul, we will have the opportunity to view the Petroglyphs located above the town. Most of these etchings are from the time of the Saka-Usun peoples who lived in the area before the arrival of the Kyrgyz. These carvings are between 2800 and 1900 years old. Many of the carvings depict animals such as wolves and deer, and include the hunters that pursued them. We will also visit a small regional museum that feature many artifacts from the region and ethnological displays.

We travel by road back to Bishkek and enjoy a farewell dinner.

Overnight in Bishkek. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 20 *Departure*

Departure from Bishkek.

BON VOYAGE! Meal plan: Breakfast.

USA/ Canada
1-800-665-3998

United Kingdom
0114-247-3400