TOUR CODE

JHCA

ADVENTURESABROAD

THE ULTIMATE 'FIVE STANS'

with Jonathan Hodgson

28 days

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Day 1 *Arrival in Bishkek, Kyrgyz Republic (Kyrgyzstan)*

Welcome to the Kyrgyz Republic!

Originally, Bishkek was called Pishpek. In 1926 Pishpek became the capital of the Kyrgyz Autonomous Republic. In 1936, as the capital of the Kyrgyz 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.

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

Day 2 *Bishkek - Karakol*

Today we travel by road to Karakol via the southern shore of Lake Lake Issyk-Kul (400 km / 7 hours). This less-travelled route features gorgeous landscapes, canyons and lagoons.

The atmosphere of Karakol is reminiscent of Tsarist Russia, with traditional Russian houses and one of the few remaining large Slavic communities in Central Asia. A Russian military outpost founded on July 1, 1869, Karakol grew in the 19th century after explorers came to map the peaks and valleys separating Kyrgyzstan from China. In the 1880s Karakol's population surged with an influx of Dungans, Chinese Muslims fleeing warfare in China.

Overnight in Karakol. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 3 *Karakol - Lake Issyk-Kul - Cholpon-Ata*

This morning we have a sightseeing tour in Karakol, including the wooden Dungan Mosque, built entirely without metal nails by Chinese artisans for the local Dungans between 1907 and 1910, and the similarly appealing wooden Russian Orthodox church -- Holy Trinity Cathedral -- completed in 1895. Used as an officer's club during Soviet times, it is now restored and in use as a church again. The Regional Museum has exhibits on the Issyk Kul Lake petroglyphs, Scythian bronze artifacts, and a short history of the geology and mineral exploitation in the region.

Departing Karakol, we drive to the northern shore the lake and overnight near Cholpon-Ata, a resort popular with wealthy Kazakhs and Russians. Later In the afternoon we'll enjoy a cruise on Lake Issyk-Kul, 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 due to its depth and salinity (the lake has no outlet); hence its name, which means "warm lake" in the Kyrgyz language.

Overnight in the Cholpon-Ata area. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 4 *Cholpon-Ata Area - Bishkek*

Today we travel the northern route back to Bishkek.

On the way 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 2,800 and 1,900 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'll also visit the Burana Tower and the nearby remnants of a castle and three mausolea. This is all that remains of the ancient city of Balasagun, which was established by the Karakhanids at the end of the 9th century. An external staircase and steep, winding stairway inside the tower enables visitors to climb to the top. The entire site now functions as museum and there is a small building on the site containing historical information as well as artifacts found at the site and in the surrounding region.

We continue to Bishkek.

Overnight in Bishkek. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 5 *Bishkek: City Tour, Kyrgyz Republic - Almaty, Kazakhstan*

Today we tour Bishkek, including Oak Park, Central Square, Statue of Manas, and Victory Square. We will also visit the National Historical Museum, an enormous example of socialist realist architecture and 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.

After our tour we travel by road to the Kazakh border, complete border formalities and continue to Almaty, a relatively young city by Central Asian standards. Founded by Russians in 1854, it was merely a fort named Zailisky, then 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.

Overnight in Almaty. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 6 *Almaty: City Tour*

Today we tour Almaty, visiting Zhenkov's Cathedral. Built in 1904, it is an extraordinary example of a Russian Orthodox church built in wood. We also 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.

We also include a ride on the new cable car at Medeo for some spectacular mountain views.

Overnight in Almaty. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 7 *Almaty - Astana*

This morning we head out of Almaty and visit the Turgen Gorge, located in the Ile-Alatau Natural Park, where trade caravans traveled eastward to China and India in ancient times. Turgen Gorge is rich in conifers and mixed forests, alpine and sub-alpine meadows, lakes and springs, as well as picturesque waterfalls. We will have an easy walk to the beautiful "Bear" Waterfall, surrounded by rocks with imprints of plants from pre-Ice Age. After some time to enjoy the scnerey and fresh air we return to Almaty in time for our flight to Astana.

Astana is the second largest city in the country. It took over the role of capital city from Almaty (the largest city) in December 1998. It is undergoing a massive transformation, whereby top international architects have been enlisted to make Astana a worthy capital, not only of Kazakhstan but of all Central Asia. The result is an interesting and intriguing blend of old Soviet architecture and space-age modern designs.

Overnight in Astana. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 8 *Astana: City Tour*

Today we tour this unique (some say bizarre) capital, the highlights of which fall mainly under the rubric of "architectural marvel." Our tour around the city includes Baiterek Tower, nicknamed "Chupa Chups" by the locals due to its similarity to a giant lollipop. This 97 meter high building offers a great view of the city as well as an art gallery, an aquarium and a restaurant. In the center of the top sphere, the ever-so-humble President Nazarbayev has made a golden palm print where visitors may put their own hands.

We also visit the Duman entertainment complex, President Cultural Center, Orthodox Church, Mosque of Astana, and the memorial complex Atameken, an outdoor museum giving you an overview of the entire country in a miniature version. This 1.7-hectare exhibit features more than 200 mock-up pieces, creating Kazakh cities and historical memorials.

Overnight in Astana. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 9 *Astana, Kazakhstan - Tashkent, Uzbekistan*

Today we fly to Tashkent, the capital of Uzbekistan and the third largest of the former Soviet Republics. Depending on the timing of today's flight, we may be able to accomplish sightseeing either before or after our flight.

Overnight in Tashkent. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 10 *Tashkent: City Tour - Khiva*

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 Khiva, once the most remote of the Silk Road's oasis cities.

Overnight in Khiva. Meal plan: Breakfast and lunch.

Day 11 *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 12 *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 lunch.

Day 13 *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 14 *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 15 *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 16 *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 17 *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 18 *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 19 *Samarkand: At Leisure*

Today is at leisure to enjoy the delights of Samarkand on your own. Your Tour Leader can help you plan your day.

Overnight in Samarkand. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 20 *Samarkand - Shakhrisabz - Termez*

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.

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

Overnight in Termez. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 21 *Termez: City Tour*

Today'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 22 *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 three 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 23 *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 24 *Dushanbe - Istravshan - Khujand*

After breakfast drive to Khujand via the Shahriston Pass. Enroute visit historical site of Istravshan, one of the oldest cities in Tajikistan, having existed for more than 2500 years. This small town has one of the best-preserved old towns in Tajikistan, punctuated with some lovely traditional architecture. The settlement was conquered by Alexander the Great; we visit Mug Teppe, the site of an ancient fort that Alexander stormed. The gate was reconstructed in 2002 and not much of the original site is visible, but the views of the city and the surrounding mountains are fantastic.

We continue to Khujand, the second-largest city of Tajikistan, situated on the Syr Darya River at the mouth of the Fergana Valley.

Overnight in Khujand. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 25 *Khujand: City Tour, Tajikistan - Ferghana, Uzbekistan*

Today we tour Khujand, one of Tajikistan's oldest towns, founded by Alexander the Great more than 2,300 years ago. Secure behind the Fan Mountains, Khujand has managed to escape the ravages of Tajikistan's civil war, and has always been safe for travel. It remains the wealthiest part of the country, producing two-thirds of the country's industrial output.

Khujand's Panchshanbe Bazaar is a typical Central Asian market full of sights, sounds and smells. Remains of city citadel from the 10th century on the left bank of the Sir-Darya river an architectural and artistic monument which was used as a fortification work up to the beginning of the 20th century. The citadel surrounded by thick clay walls with towers occupied the area of 64 thousand square metres. The remains of the walls date back to the 18-19th centuries. Unique burial-vault of Sheikh Muslihitdin was re-planned and rebuilt several times. The early structures are referred to the 12-13th and the beginning of the 14th centuries. Among the early constructions there were kept beautiful majolica incrustations, later on used by the builders of the mausoleum. Next to the Mausoleum there stands a 20th century mosque with a 20-column hall and painted ceiling and a 21-metre high minaret of the 19th century.

We drive to the border crossing between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, complete border formalities, and drive through to Ferghana.

Overnight in Ferghana. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 26 *Ferghana Valley*

The Ferghana Valley’s scenery is spectacular. Views of its green fields, long poplar plantations, lines of mulberry trees (for silk) and many villages are always backed by the high, vast Tien Shan Range that runs from this part of the world right across Central Asia to the north of China. Villages are comprised of typically Central Asian courtyard houses surrounded by orchards and mulberry plantations. Everywhere you'll see small mosques and tea houses, a major node of social interaction for local men.

We begin our sightseeing with a visit of the Ferghana Bazaar, a sprawling, busy hive of shopping activity. We then continue with a drive to nearby Margilan where we will visit the Yodgorlik Silk Factory and see the whole iqat process of traditional silk weaving. We will also visit a 19th century madrassa where we will see a demonstration of block-printing on traditional fabrics.
We continue sighseeing with a visit of Rishton to see the famous Ferghana pottery at a local master's workshop where we will see how the ceramics are made and to visit his pottery museum.

We return to Ferghana in the late afternoon.

Overnight in Ferghana. Meal plan: Breakfast and lunch.

Day 27 *Ferghana - Kokand - Tashkent*

We depart for Tashkent via Kokand and the Fort/Palace Museum of Khodoyar Khan, the last Khan of Kokand. Upon arrival in Tashkent, time-permitting, we may finish any sightseeing deferred from earlier in our program.

Overnight in Tashkent. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 28 *Departure from Tashkent*

Departure from Tashkent

BON VOYAGE! Meal plan: Breakfast.