



Celestial Mountains Tour Company

SILK ROADS TOUR

The Pamir Highway

DAY 1 Tashkent. You will be met by a company representative and accompanied to the hotel. After lunch a city tour. Dinner at a local restaurant will finish the day's program. Hotel accommodation.

Tashkent – the capital of Uzbekistan and once an important town on the Great Silk Road. Due to the destruction of most of the ancient city during 1917 revolution and the 1966 earthquake, little remains of Tashkent's traditional architectural heritage. Tashkent is, however, rich in museums and Soviet-era monuments.

DAY 2 After breakfast at the hotel, get ready for a day's drive to Samarqand. Hotel accommodation.

Samarqand, meaning “stone fort” from Old Persian, is one of the oldest inhabited cities in the world and was included in the World Heritage List by UNESCO.

DAY 3 Travel to Penjikent, stopping at the excavation site of bronze age Sarazm on the way. After lunch in Penjikent, visit the excavation site of the ancient Sogdian city discovered lying under the modern town. Spend the night in a traditional local home (guest rooms around a central courtyard).

Sarazm lies some 20km from the modern town of Penjikent. It was a major settlement between the 4th and 2nd centuries BC, standing on a ridge on the banks of the Zeravshan River and was the center of a local mining industry. Penjikent was rediscovered in the mid-20th century and is still an active archaeological site. The Sogdian city, (5th-7th centuries), is often referred to as the “Pompeii of Central Asia”.

DAY 4 Drive to Dushanbe, along the Zarafshan River Valley, then stopping at Iskandarkul Lake. In the afternoon, continue South over Anzob Pass (3,373 m) and through Varzob Gorge. Accommodation in a guest house. Zarafshan means “gold cast around” and indeed there is still gold to be found in this region.

DAY 5 In the morning, visit Hissor Fort, formerly capital of Eastern Bukhara province. After lunch head back to Dushanbe for a visit to the bazaars and museums. Hotel accommodation.

The site has two madrassas (18th-19th centuries), one of which is now a fine ethnographic museum. With its centerpiece - the 14m reclining Buddha in Nirvana, (the largest surviving statues of the Buddha in Central Asia).

DAY 6 Depart from Dushanbe towards Khorog and the Pamirs. Accommodation in a guest house.

Near Taval-Dara, debris from the 1992-96 civil war – tanks and armoured vehicles – can still be seen by the roadside. The more conservative attitudes of this region can be seen in the local style of dress and beards, but the hospitality is just as welcoming.

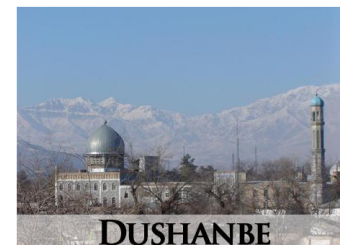
DAY 7 Continue by road from Kalaikhum to Khorog, the capital of Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast (GBAO). From Kalaikhum, the road follows



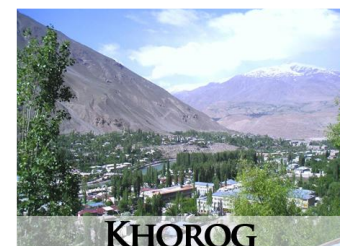
AMIR TIMUR - TASHKENT



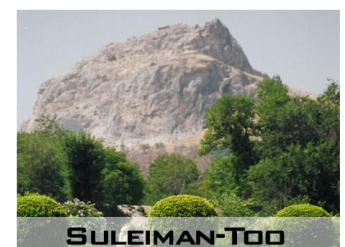
PAJAKENT BAZAAR



DUSHANBE



KHOROG



SULEIMAN-TOO

the river Panj, which forms Tajikistan's border with Afghanistan. Accommodation in a guesthouse. This is a fascinating drive with its charm of contrasts. On the Tajik side of the river, the road is asphalted and buildings have electricity and are constructed using metal and glass. On the Afghan side – only about 100 m distant – the road is a donkey track and buildings are mud and wood.

DAY 8 Continue south to Ishkashim, which stands at the mouth of the Wakhan River valley. When we arrive at Langar, we will stay in a traditional style. This is where the 19th century Great Game ended, when Britain and Russia signed a treaty adding a strip of the Wakhan valley to Afghanistan to create a neutral buffer zone between their two empires. As we enter the Wakhan, there are amazing views of the Pamirs.

DAY 9 In the cool of the morning, make a steep climb above Langar village and see the petroglyphs carved into the rock and visit Bulunkul Lake and the Chinese cemetery at Besh Gumbez, then continue to Murghab (3,630m). Accommodation in Murghab, in a homestay arranged by a local ecotourism project. There is an opportunity to buy handcrafts made by local people from felt and yak hair. Leaving behind the lush valley of the Wakhan and the Pamiri tribes, the landscape and peoples change as the route slowly ascends higher into the Pamirs. The terrain becomes barren and rocky. This region is inhabited by nomadic Kirgыз herders.

DAY 10 Drive north over Ak-Baital Pass – at 4,655m, the highest section of road in the former USSR. On the way down from the pass, we will stop briefly at a Great Game-era Russian military post. Accommodation in a local family house. Traditional home-made dinner. By lake Karakul, there are some mysterious stone circles. The road crosses a second high pass at Kizyl-Art (4,280 m), which forms the border with Kirgызstan, before descending to Sary-Tash . On the other side of the pass, the scenery suddenly changes, becoming as green and lush as the Pamir Plateau was barren.

DAY 11 Morning drive over Taldyk pass (3615 m) to the Fergana valley and Osh - Kirgызstan's most ancient city that boasts a 3000 year history. In the centre of the city is a hill called Takht-i-Suleiman (“Suleiman's Throne”) - a local place of pilgrimage. Accommodation in a guest house in Osh. As well as the impressive views from the top of Suleiman’s Throne (1,070 m) there is an interesting museum built into the cliff face. Our tour will also include Babur's house, Rabat Abdullah Khan Mosque and Mausoleum and the famous Osh Bazaar.

DAY 12 Drive to Chichkan valley – a picturesque place on the way between Osh and Bishkek. Dinner. Overnight in hotel. We stay in a hotel, hidden in a coniferous forest on the bank of crystal clear mountain river.

DAY 13 Drive to Bishkek. Accommodation in the hotel. City tour. Dinner in a local restaurant will help sum up the impressions, conclude the tour program, and a chance to relax before flying back home. Hotel accommodation. Bishkek cannot claim to be one of the major cities of the world, like London, Paris or New York. It is, however, the capital city of Kyrgyzstan and does have a number of important and interesting buildings, monuments, parks, museums, galleries, theatres and other places worth seeing or visiting.

DAY 14 Airport transfer.