

Day by Day Itinerary 2015

Unusual Central Asia Adventure “Stan Countries”

**Travel Arrangements by:
UNIVERSAL TRAVEL SYSTEM
800/255-4338**

**ITINERARY
CENTRAL ASIA**

THU. Day 1	Leave NEW YORK by Lufthansa LH #405	9:40 PM
FRI. Day 2	Arrive FRANKFURT	11:20 AM
	Leave FRANKFURT by LH #648	1:35 PM

KAZAKHSTAN

Arrive **ALMATY** 10:30 PM
HOTEL HYATT REGENCY

SAT. Day 3
B,D

ALMATY

11: 00 AM Morning drive to Almaty Canyon to visit Medeo Sports Center. Enjoy the wonderful panorama.

The afternoon takes you to the Museum of Musical Instruments in a striking 1903 wooden building. It is the city's original museum. It has a fine collection of traditional Kazak instruments, wooden harps and horns, bagpipes, the lute-like two stringed dombra, and the viola-like three string kobiz. Proceed to the Central State Museum, which gives a worthwhile picture of Kazakhstan's history, including geology, archeology and early history with a miniature replica of Kazakhstan's chief archeological treasure, the Golden Man. Also, visit the Soviet era exhibits of space flight, nuclear testing. Other important exhibit is a colorful Yurt. Also Kazak carpets for sale.

SUN. Day 4
B,D

Leave **ALMATY** this morning by minibus for a pleasant drive.
(240 kms - 4 hours)

KYRGYZSTAN

Arrive **BISHEK**, the capital city.
HOTEL HYATT REGENCY

This modern city has its origin in a settlement at the cross roads of several caravan routes to Tibet and China. The Khan of Kokand built a clay fort in 1825, called Pishpek, from which the city got its name. It was not until the 19th century that the city began to grow on site of the ruined fortress into a sizeable town. Today, Bishek is a major cultural and industrial center. It is just in the past 30 years that it has been landscaped and planned gardens to its present city.

CONT.
SUN. Day 4

Afternoon sightseeing will take you to the State Historical Museum where you will see two Yurts, a small archeological exhibit, and a display of Kirghiz carpets, embroidery and other applied crafts. You will go to one of the many bazaars in which you can find everything from Brazilian oranges to local products to clothing to cheap Kirghiz souvenirs. Then proceed to Ala Archa Canyon, part of which is state park where you can see a glacier and a grand rugged, but an accessible gorge.

MON. Day 5
B,L,D

BISHEK

Full day excursion to Issyk Kul Lake.

Lake Issyk-Kul is a huge dent, filled with water, in the Alautau ranges that form the Northern arm of the Tian Shan River. The lake never freezes because of a combination of extreme depth, thermal activity and mild salinity. Heat spas lined its shores in Soviet days with guests from all over the USSR. The lake is 170 km long and 70 km across. It is said to be the world's second largest Alpine lake, after Lake Titicaca in Bolivia.

TUE. Day 6
B,D

Leave **BISHEK** by HY#780

9:45 AM

UZBEKISTAN

Arrive **TASHKENT**
HOTEL SHERATON

10:10 AM

Afternoon tour.

Visit the Museum of Applied Art where you can see traditional crafts, jewelry and carpets, Independence Square and Peoples Friendship Palace.

WED. Day 7
B,D

TASHKENT

Morning sightseeing tour.

Visit to the Aybek Museum of History, which contains excellent pre historic and religious items of Central Asia, then proceed to Old Town with its maze of narrow streets. You will see Kukeldash Madrassa with a grand domed courtyard. From there continue to Barak-Kahana Madrassa which now houses the Central Asian Muslim religious administration whose Mufti is the Islamic Archbishop of Central Asia. Opposite, you will see Telashayakh Mosque.

cont.

WED. Day 7

Leave **TASHKENT** by HY #1159
Arrive **TERMEZ**
HOTEL TERMEZ

2:35 PM

4:25 PM

THU. Day 8
B,D

Leave **TERMEZ** this morning crossing into
(Subject to **Uzbekistan double entry visa**)
REPUBLIC OF AFGHANISTAN

Enjoy a pleasant drive via Tash Gozar to arrive in Mazare Sharif,
the capital of the Balkh province.
HOTEL MAZAR

Afternoon city tour to visit the famed Mosque and Shrine of Ali,
the fourth Caliph of Islam. Mazare is a busy market place for
Karakul and carpets, as well a center for Buzkashi.

FRI. Day 9
B,D

Leave **MAZARE SHARIF** for a short drive crossing into

UZBEKISTAN

to arrive **TERMEZ**.

Leave **TERMEZ** by HY#1154
Arrive **TASHKENT**
Leave **TASHKENT** by HY#1309
Arrive **SAMARKAND**
HOTEL AFROSIAB

12:00 Noon

2:00 PM

3:20 PM

4:35 PM

SAT. Day 10
B,L,D

SAMARKAND

Morning excursion to **TAJIKISTAN**, to visit Pendzikent,
situated on a valley terrace on the banks of the Zeravshan river.
Although in Tajikistan, Pendzikent is closer to Samarkand than Dushanbe,
the capital founded in the 5th century as a principality of the Sogdian
Empire. This is the most revealing of all Sogdian sites because no one
has built on it since the Arabs destroyed it. Its existence remained
unknown until in the summer of 1933 as a Tajik shepherd stumbled over
an 8th century Sogdian manuscript. This brought archeologists running.
They found 90 more and remains of a castle. The manuscripts describe
the city and painted a picture of a sophisticated city. Excavation at
Bunjikath (as it was known) site began in 1946 and is much larger than
Afrasiab.

cont.
SAT. Day 10

Afternoon Samarkand Tour.

Ulugbek Medressa on the west side is the oldest, finished in 1420 under Ulugbek. Beneath the little corner domes were lecture halls, and at the rear a large mosque. About 100 students lived in two stories of dormitory cells, some of which are still visible. The other buildings are imitations by the Shaybanid Emir Yalangtush.

The entrance portal of the Sher Dor Medressa, opposite Ulugbek's and finished in 1636, is decorated with roaring tigers. In between is the Tilla Kari Medressa, completed in 1660, with a pleasant, garden-like mosque courtyard.

Guri Amir Mausoleum - Guri Amir Tomb of the emir. Timur, two sons and two grandsons, including Ulugbek, lie beneath this surprisingly modest mausoleum topped by fluted azure dome. Timur had built a simple crypt for himself at Shakhrisabz, and apparently had this one built in 1404 for some of his sons and grandsons. But when he died on the way to China in 1405 he was buried here, because the passes to Shakhrisabz were snowed.

SUN. Day 11
B,D

Leave **SAMARKAND** this morning by motorcoach for a pleasant drive to **SHAKHRIZABS**, about 50 miles south of Samarkand, at the foot of the Zeraushan Mountains.

One of the centers of the Great Silk Route, Shakhrisabz was founded in the 3rd - 2nd century B.C. in the days of the Greco-Bactrian Kingdom.

The main attractions, however date to the late 12th, early 14th century and belong to the Muslim architecture. Tamerlane spent his childhood in the magnificent Aksarai Palace, whose great ruins tower to the high of 38 meters (125 ft) in the very heart of the town.

Leave **SHAKHRIZABS** for a drive to **BUKHARA**.
HOTEL NEW BUKHARA

An oasis in the enveloping Kyzylkum Desert, 250 km (160 miles) downstream from Samarkand on the Zeravshan River. Bukhara was once the most interesting city in the world. It had 360 mosques and 80 Madrassas. Now, it is a medium size city. Still, historic monuments are strewn more densely than in Samarkand and they illustrate 1,000 years of history. Most of the center is an architectural preserve and the streets are lined with Madrassas and old bazaars. The Name Bukhara dates from the first century A.D. and may come from Vihara, Sanskrit for Monastery, or Bukhar, a Farsi word for "source of knowledge".

MON. Day 12
B,D

BUKHARA

Today's City tour includes the Kalyan Minaret ,it was built by the Karakhans in 1127. In almost nine centuries it only needed minor cosmetic repairs. Jenghiz Khan was so dumfounded by it that he ordered it spared. At the minaret's feet is the 16th century Kalyan Mosque which is big enough for 10,000 people. Continue to the Ark, Bukhara's huge palace fortress which goes back 2 millennia. Although, the present

cont.

MON. Day 12

walls are probably less than 300 years old. Now, it is a museum of local studies. In the Protocol court are exhibits of archeology, carpets, chased copper utensils, embroidery, jewelry and pottery.

Continue to the Ismail Samani Mausoleum, the city's oldest monument. Built in 905 and one of the most elegant in Central Asia, the little Mausoleum of the Samanid Dynasty's founder his father and grandson. Its delicate Teracotta Brickwork disguises massive walls that helped it survive without restoration (except of the dome) for almost 11 centuries. Proceed to the Emir's Palace, built for Said Alim Khan, the last Emir. Now, it is a museum for fine Chinese porcelain.

Drive to Lyab-I-Khauz Plaza. The Plaza was constructed around a pool in 1620. This most picturesque and relaxing spot in town is shaded with Mulberry trees. As old as the pool on the East side is a statue of Khodzha Masredin, a semi-mythical "Wise Fool" who appears in Sufi teaching tales around the world. To the East, The Nadir Divanbegi Madrassa was built as a Caravanserai, but the Khan thought it was a Madrassa. so they hurried up and made it one in 1630. On the West side he built a boarding house for Muslim dervishes, which is now an exhibition hall. To the North is the Kukeldash Madrassa which was built in the 1500's by Abdullah, the greatest Shaybanid Khan. From there proceed to the covered Bazaars. Just North is the oldest surviving mosque in Central Asia. The Magak-I-Attari with 12th century facade and 16th century reconstruction. This may be the city's holiest spot.

Afternoon at leisure.

This evening enjoy a Folklore show.

TUE. Day 13
B,D

Leave **BUKHARA** by motorcoach via **KARAKUL** and cross the border into

TURKMENISTAN

to arrive for lunch at **CHARJOU** (Turkmenia's second oldest city)
Continue via Bajram-Ali for **MARY (MERV)**.
HOTEL SANDJAR

A regional center of Turkmenia, Mary is located some 350 km (250 miles) to the East of Ashkhabad capital of the republic. To the North-East of modern Mary lies the Ancient Merv - a vast territory on which many ancient states (from those of the Akhmenids to those of the Seljuks and the Timurids) rose and fell, leaving behind impressive monuments of their glorious days. Among them the most famous is the Mausoleum of Sultan Sanjar (12th century) which has been registered by the United Nations as a historical treasure.

WED. Day 14
B,D

MERV

Sightseeing tour of Merv includes the oldest of the five Merv fortresses, Erk-Kala thought to date from the 6th century B.C. Today, this is a big earthen doughnut about 600 meters across (1800 ft). The ramparts are about 50 meters high (165 ft) offering a good view of the surrounding landscape. Giaur-Kala, constructed during the third century B.C. by the Sassanians, is even larger and the fortress walls are still solid with 3 gaps where the gates once were. West of this fortress are the 11th century walls of the central citadel, Sultan-Kala built by the Seljuks. The best remaining testimony to the Seljuk's power at Merv is the 38 meter (120 ft) high Mausoleum of Sultan Sanjar, the grandson of Alp Arslan. The question of why the Mausoleum survived when almost nothing else did, are the 3 meter (10 feet) thick walls and the 6 meter (18 ft) deep conical foundation, which allowed the structure to ride out any earthquake. About 1 kilometer (3000 ft) West of Sanjar's Tomb is another Seljuk monument, the 12th century Mausoleum of Mohammed Ibn Zeid. The small earthen brick building was heavily restored earlier this century. Ringed by spindly trees lends the scene to a biblical flair.

Leave Mary by motor coach via **TEZDEN** for **ASHKABAD**, the capital of Turkmenistan.

HOTEL GRAND TURKMEN

THU. Day 15
B,D

ASHKABAD

Morning tour to old Nisa. Slightly above Ashkhabad (15 km or 9 miles), nearer the mountains, are the ruins of old Nisa, seat of the Parthian kings from the late 3rd century B.C. to early 3 century A.D. At the height of its power, Nisa was the capital of an empire stretching West as far as Iraq and Syria. The Parthians also ruled Persia. Old Nisa was the citadel comprising royal palaces, temples and tombs. Although little has been excavated so far, nearby new Nisa survived until the middle ages. The defensive walls were 10 meters (35 ft) thick at the base. There is a grand view of the desert from a natural veranda backed by green mountains.

Afternoon city tour. We will visit the History Museum. It contains stone fragments sharpened by man 200,000 years ago, and 17 priceless 2nd and 1st century B.C. carved ivory horns from Nisa, which were used by Parthians as water vessels in Zoroastrian rituals. Continue your tour to a park behind the museum in which an unusual statue of Lenin is found. In the Museum of Fine Art view jewelry and paintings of Russians challenged by Turkman warriors. Go to the Carpet Museum to view the world's biggest Turkmen carpet. The carpet is 80 meters (300 ft) long and 10 meters (32 ft) wide. It took four women 3.5 years to make.

FRI. Day 16

Return by air to U.S. or continue with the Extension.