



Turkmenistan & Uzbekistan Adventure

Turkmenistan & Uzbekistan Tour

Overview

This adventure will take us through the heart of **Central Asia**, beginning with a journey across **Turkmenistan**'s vast deserts, experiencing the stunning **Darvaza Gas Crater**, the shining white capital city, built entirely of marble, and visit the far west of the country to venture through the mysterious **Awaza resort**.

After Turkmenistan, we'll make a crossing into neighbouring **Uzbekistan** for a trip through time as we visit the ancient capitals of **Samarkand** and **Bukhara**, before heading north to round off our adventure in the nation's capital, **Tashkent** – home to incredible history, and a few secrets which few know about!

All in all, if you're looking for a true adventure in Central Asia, this is the trip for you – hitting all the highlights of these two great republics, and mixing in ancient history with stunning modernity – a true great Central Asian adventure!





What's Included?

Included:

- English Speaking Guide
- Western Tour Leader
- All Listed Meals
- Accommodation
- Internal Flights
- All Included Sightseeing
- All taxes & entrance fees to protected areas

Not Included:

- Single Supplement
- Extra Night(s) Accommodation
- International Flights
- Uzbekistan Visa
- Snacks
- Tips



Itinerary Overview

*Check out the brief overview of our **Turkmenistan & Uzbekistan Adventure** – or scroll down to see the in-depth run-through of each day of the trip.*

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Day 1

Arrival in Ashgabat

We'll meet in the heart of **Turkmenistan's** capital and after a bit of rest we'll begin our day with an optional in-depth orientation walk around **Ashgabat**.

Upon leaving the hotel, we'll wander along the tree-lined boulevards of the nation's capital, heading to the **Tekke Bazaar**. Tekke Bazaar is a busy market, popular amongst local people; this covered bazaar sells it all – meat, fruits, vegetables, flowers, and clothing whilst opposite, second-hand booksellers set up on weekends in the small park. If you're lucky, you may find a copy of the Ruhnama, written by the president of Turkmenistan, Saparmurat Niyazov. Niyazov famously said, "a person who reads Ruhnama three times becomes smart, and after it, he will go straight to heaven". From the Tekke Bazaar, we will wander to **Inspiration Park** – a public park at the centre of downtown Ashgabat. Inspiration Park is a narrow parkland lined with sculptures of Persian poets, scholars and great thinkers, surrounded by beautiful natural scenery.

We'll continue our exploration, calling at another Bazaar, the **Russian Bazaar**. A covered market where you will be able to pick up a vast array of items – the perfect stop if there's anything you've forgotten to pack! Cables, chargers, sweets, kimchi, baked goods, fruit & nuts as well as souvenirs. This market has it all, unless you're after Turkmen cotton. The **Alty Asyr Shopping Centre** over the road is an excellent stop for some well-priced Turkmen cotton goods offering everything from tracksuits and T-shirts to towels and bedsheets.

Once we have stopped for a spot of lunch, we will continue the walk, checking out Ashgabat's Soviet past on our visit to the **Statue of Lenin**. Ashgabat's Lenin may not be the biggest, but his enormous carpet patterned plinth compensates for this. Not far from Lenin we'll catch a glimpse of Russia's most famous poet, Pushkin at the **Pushkin Monument**. From Pushkin, we will walk onwards to visit Pervyy Park – Ashgabat's oldest park, founded in 1890, formerly named Officer Park, Lenin Park, First Park and Independence Park.

From the park, it's a short stroll to **Ashgabat Train Station**. Initially built-in 1888, the first railway station was destroyed in the 1948 earthquake along with much of the city. A new station was built in 1950 and remodelled in 2009; the station looks impressive, crowned by the eight-pointed star (Rub El Hizb). Finally, we will head back to the hotel for our first group meal.

Accommodation: Olympic Hotel, Ashgabat



Included Meals: Dinner

Day 2

Ashgabat City Tour

After a hearty breakfast, we're up and out into Ashgabat, our first stop, the **Altyn Asyr Bazaar**, formerly the Tolkuchka Bazaar. Located on the outskirts of Ashgabat, it's the largest market in the country and one of the largest in Central Asia. Relocated to its current location in 2011, Altyn Asyr is a massive affair selling everything from household goods, clothes, Turkmen carpets, camels and much more!

After our mega shopping experience, it's off to the races as we make our way to the **Ashgabat Hippodrome**. Sunday is race day here in Ashgabat, and what better animal to watch racing than the legendary Turkmen **Akhal-Teke Horses**. The greyhound of the horse world, the Akhal-Teke horse is one of the oldest existing horse breeds in the world.

After a delicious lunch, we'll explore a little more of Turkmenistan's marbled capital. Our first visit **Independence Park** and **Independence Monument**, constructed to celebrate the independence of Turkmenistan on the 27th October 1991. As well as the memorial, the park is home to an impressive array of statues of characters from Turkmen history.

From Independence to Neutrality we go! Our next visit is the **Monument of Neutrality** built in 1998; a gold statue of Turkmenbashi tops this impressive structure.

We hope you're not too tired of statues just yet as we have a few more to go – next up, the **Earthquake Monument and Museum**. A grim reminder of the terrible earthquake that struck Ashgabat in 1948, killing 110,00 people and levelling the city. Both are tastefully presented and very educational.

On our way back to the hotel, we will pass a few of Ashgabat's more unusual buildings, The Ministry of Gas is shaped like a giant cigarette lighter, The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is shaped like a globe, and our personal favourite, The Ashgabat Dental Hospital is shaped like a massive tooth!

Once we have returned to the hotel, you are free to continue exploring Ashgabat or enjoy some well-deserved rest.

Accommodation: Olympic Hotel, Ashgabat



Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

Day 3

Darvaza Gas Crater & Bokhurdag

This morning there is a bit of free time for relaxing or shopping for supplies, which may be useful as later today we're off into the desert.

Our first stop is the small desert village of **Bokhurdag**. It is here that we stop to sample the local cuisine and learn a little more about living outside the bright lights of Turkmenistan's flamboyant capital. After lunch, before heading a little deeper into the **Karakum Desert**, we will make a stop at the village of **Erbent**. Erbent is similar to most of the surrounding desert settlements, however, it is here that the **Monument to the Basmachi Revolution** is located. The Basmachi revolutionary monument is built here as this area was a Basmachi stronghold during the 1920s. The Basmachi were an Islamic group fighting the occupying Soviet forces.

Once our journey resumes, we'll continue stopping as we travel to see other examples of the desert's mining history, visiting two other craters (one filled with water, the other with mud) a perfect pretext for the great **Darvaza Gas Crater**.

The incredible Darvaza Gas Crater, continuously burning since 1971, was created when Soviet engineers were drilling what they thought were vast oil fields. No oil was found, and the fields turned out to be rich in gas, evident when the drilling rig at Darvaza hit a void and collapsed in on itself. Sometime later it's believed that the escaping gas was set alight to prevent methane from polluting a nearby village. Here we are all these years later, and the gas crater has now become one of the world's most unusual tourist attractions.

We'll arrive during daylight hours to observe the transition from light to dark as the night sky becomes illuminated by the flickering blaze of the crater.

Camping next to this burning void, we will enjoy a delicious **Turkmen BBQ** prepared by our local crew.

Accommodation: Camping, Darvaza Gas Crater

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner



Day 4

Ashgabat: Lunch, Shopping & the Stadium

For some, it may be a little bit of a hazy start after enjoying a night of peering into the flaming heart of the Darvaza Gas Crater. After breakfast, we'll climb back into the 4X4s, arriving in Ashgabat before lunch.

Once we have checked in and had a chance to freshen up, we will take local taxis into Ashgabat's marble-clad city centre to see its famous white heart. First stop, Ashgabat's grandiose, opulent shopping mall, Berkerar. **Berkerar Mall** was opened in 2015 and it looks like a cross between a mosque and a palace, from the outside at least. While the inside is just as grand, for us it's an excellent opportunity to grab a spot of lunch and see some local life before starting our walk.

Once we've eaten, it's out into the city passing wide open streets and pristine white apartments as we make our way back to the hotel. The start of our city hike takes us past the imposing **2017 Asian Indoor and Martial Arts Games Stadium Area**. The stadium area was built at the cost of around 5 billion USD. At its heart lies the **Saparmurat Turkmenbashy Olympic Stadium**, noticeable as part of the stadium is the shape of a giant Akhal-Teke Horse Head.

As we walk on through the city, we will skirt the **Presidential Area Complex**, forbidden to head inside, but we can still marvel at the magnificent golden domes and massive structures.

Before we reach our hotel, we will pass more statues, mosaics, and impressively whitened buildings.

Accommodation: Olympic Hotel, Ashgabat

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner



Day 5

Nisa Fortress & Kow-Ata Underground Lake

After breakfast today, we'll be checking out of our hotel and once again heading out of Ashgabat to explore a little more of Turkmenistan.

Our first stop is the ancient **Nisa Fortress**, a UNESCO listed site, this former Parthian capital is now just a shadow of its former self, but still fascinating. A journey around Nisa Fortress is a must for those interested in history. Believed to have been started by the first Parthian king, Arsaces I, Nisa Fortress was later named Mithradatkirt (Fortress of Mithradates) after the famed Parthian who elevated the Parthian Empire to historic greatness!

The Parthians, like their Turkmen descendants, were famed for their beautiful horses, and our next stop gets us up close to the magnificent **Akhal-Teke horses** as we visit a nearby stud farm. We will learn more about the famed Turkmen horse and its actual value at the stud farm.

As we slowly edge away from Ashgabat, we'll make one more stop at the Bakharden Cave around 60 km away from the city. The **Bakharden Cave** is a popular stop for locals on holidays and weekends who travel here to venture deep underground and swim in the **Kow-Ata Underground Lake**. Yes, it's dark, smelly, and a little bizarre, but the 100m deep sulphur-heated lake is one of those things worth trying just once. Once you've taken a swim or watched everyone else attempt it, we will lunch at one of the delicious shashlik restaurants just outside.

After lunch, it's on with the adventure as we travel further with our 4X4s to the remote desert city of **Balkanabad**. We should arrive in late afternoon, giving you the chance to explore a little of this friendly city on your own.

Accommodation: Hotel Niebitchi, Balkanabat

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner



Day 6

Yangykala Canyon & Turkmenbashi

We'll depart our hotel early this morning as we have a lot of driving and a lot to see. Our first stop is the **Balkanabat Market**. It may be small, but it's still an exciting stop to catch a little of the local life in this town. As we pass many of the local Soviet-style buildings on our way through town, we will make one final stop at the **Monument to the Desert Explorers**. Located on the outskirts of town, the Monument to the Desert Explorers is an impressive memorial constructed to honour those early Russian researchers who discovered oil and were responsible for the founding of Balkanabat.

Once we leave the dusty streets of **Balkanabat**, we're out into the desert on our way to the **Yangykala Canyon**. Along the way, we pass impressive desert features such as rolling sand dunes, steep cliffs and geological features such as fossil beds containing evidence that this whole area was once a vast inland sea.

Known by some as the '**Turkmen Grand Canyon**', the **Yangykala Canyon** is an impressive yet little known geological feature located deep within the desert. Never failing to impress, the canyon plays host to rock formations sporting many varied colours and cliffs and canyons to make even the best-travelled visitor happy to have made this lengthy detour. With breathtaking views all around us, we will be sure to stop and enjoy our packed lunch in this most stunning location. Once you have taken as many photos as you can, we will board our 4X4s and drive to Turkmenbashi.

As we cut our way through the desert, we'll eventually catch sight of the mighty **Caspian Sea**, the largest inland sea in the world. Clinging to the Caspian coast, we will pass through the port city of Turkmenbashi on our way to our final destination of the day, the resort town of **Awaza**.

A bizarre collection of grandiose tourist hotels, attractions and sites, Awaza is a place that has to be seen to be believed. We have a real treat in store as our accommodation is one of the best in the area, and the most surreal. We will check in with enough time to catch the sunset over the Caspian before a well-deserved rest.



Accommodation: Yelken Yacht Club, Awaza

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 7

Awaza Resort

Today, unlike previous days on this Turkmen adventure, you'll have a free morning to rest, relax or explore your unusual surroundings. If it's warm enough or your feeling particularly daring, you can take a plunge into the Caspian, wander along the shoreline looking at the interesting architecture or enjoy the Truman Show feel of our hotel resort.

If it's operating, we will make the day a little more bizarre and take a boat ride on the artificial **Awaza Canal**. A short 50-minute ride set to puzzle and confuse you is a perfect prelude to a pleasant lunch in **Turkmenbashi**, the oldest city in the country. Whilst the city is nowhere near as visually impressive as Ashgabat, it does have some exciting sites dotted around, many of which we will be sure to visit.

Formerly Krasnovodsk, the city was named after a fort built by the Russians after their second invasion in 1869. Krasnovodsk served as a vital jumping point for Russian imperial soldiers as they continued forwards with their conquests of Khiva and Bukhara.

On the 8th October 1993, President-for-Life Saparmurat Niyazov would rename the city after himself Turkmenbashi (Head of all Turkmens). First, we will visit the Turkmenbashi Railway Station; this pleasant Russian built station was constructed in 1895 and still departures and arrivals to and from locations across Central Asia.

From the station, we'll cross the road to see the **Oil Worker's Square** and the **Monument to the Great Patriotic War** commemorating all of those Turkmens who lost their lives in this distant conflict, including Atamurat Niyazov, the father of Saparmurat Niyazov. From the square, we will look at some of the city's architecture, which may not be so inspiring, but much of it was built by Japanese and German POWs from the war.

Our final stop of the day will be the **Cheryomushki Bazaar**, located at the heart of Turkmenbashi. This bustling market is one of the country's best, with friendly stallholders selling



local snacks and crafts. For those interested in fish from the Caspian, the fish market on site boasts an impressive selection of the sea's bounty.

Once we've had our fill of Turkmenbashi, we'll head to the nearby airport for our flight to **Ashgabat**, where we will arrive in time for our last group meal in Turkmenistan, and prepare ourselves for the adventure onward to Uzbekistan!

Accommodation: Olympic Hotel, Ashgabat

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 8

Cross into Uzbekistan

This morning we'll depart Ashgabat and make our way to the airport for our connecting flight to **Turkmenabat**, Turkmenistan's border city with its northern neighbour, Uzbekistan. Once we've arrived in the city, we'll head for the border, passing through the various customs checks before finally waving goodbye to our Turkmen friends, and heading into **Uzbekistan**.

Once we've crossed the border, we'll meet up with our new Uzbek guides, and head towards the nearby city of **Bukhara**, an ancient city that was once the heart of empires in the region. Along with nearby Samarkand, Bukhara served as the heart of the Persian world for centuries under numerous empires, and continues today as Uzbekistan's seventh largest city, and one of its most popular attractions for foreign travellers, owing to its rich history as a Persian capital, and an outpost on the renowned Silk Road.

We'll head straight for our hotel where we'll have a free evening to relax, before heading out tomorrow to experience Bukhara!

Accommodation: 3* Hotel

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch



Day 9

Explore Bukhara

Today we'll enjoy a day in the picturesque surroundings of **Bukhara**, exploring the ancient legacy of this stunning city. Our first stop of the day will be the magnificent Kalyan Minaret.

Built in 1127, the **Kalyan Minaret** is all that survives of a once grandiose **Djuma Mosque**, designed for crowds of people to worship at once. Today, the site has been rebuilt around the footprint of this great tower, now at the centre of a courtyard surrounded by galleries and stunning architecture. It's from here that the ancient call to prayer would have blasted across the city, and many locals would have descended on the site. It was, in fact, built twice – evidence suggests the soft ground led it to collapse after being nearly completed the first time – however, after almost a millennium, it shouldn't fall down again!

Next, we'll make our way to **Khoja-Gaukushon**; a great ensemble at the heart of the city, home to mosque, madrassah, and minaret. The area once served as a kind of plaza for local people to meet, trade, set up market stalls, and (rather oddly) slaughter animals – hence the name 'Gaukushon' which means 'Slaughter of Bulls'. Later, a large minaret, mosque, and madrassah were built on the site, adding to the great patchwork of beautiful buildings littered across the skyline of Bukhara.

Finally, we'll wrap up with the **Mausoleum of Naqshbandi** and the summer residence of the last Emir of Bukhara which sits a few kilometres outside the city itself. The mausoleum is a place of pilgrimage for many Sufis and a place of incredible beauty, whilst the summer palace is known as 'the place where the moon meets the stars.



This evening, we'll head to the train station to catch a late high-speed train to nearby **Samarkand**, another gem in the heart of this region.

Accommodation: 3* Hotel

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 10

Discover Samarkand

This morning we'll wake up surrounded by the ancient city of **Samarkand**, and we have a full day to experience the sights and sounds of this bustling place.

Our first stop will be **Registan Square**. The Registan is an ensemble of majestic and stunningly beautiful madrassahs, the most incredible example of Islamic architecture. The plaza would once have been dominated with a great bazaar, allowing local people to go about their business. Meanwhile, the surrounding madrassahs allow scholars to work and create a centre for Islamic scholars across Central Asia. Today, the Registan is the number one, must-see sight in the country, an unmissable experience!

We will also make a stop at the **Mausoleum of Tamerlane**, known as the Gur Emir, a national icon in Uzbekistan, followed by a visit to a necropolis which graces the northern part of the city, **Shah-i-Zinda**. A fabulous example of traditional Islamic architecture in the region, comprising of numerous buildings, towers and beautiful domed roofs. The turquoise mosaic tiling contrasts against the arid sandy backdrop of Samarkand's desert surroundings.

We'll also visit the **Bibi-Khanyam Mosque**, once the largest in Central Asia, before breaking away from the ancient history to explore the local market, known as the **Siab Bazaar**.

Whether you're searching for textiles and fabrics, exquisite and intriguing foodstuffs, or just looking for an opportunity to rub shoulders with Samarkand's locals – Siab Bazaar is the place to



visit. The market is a great place to pick up souvenirs, clothes, snacks, and all manner of things, but it's also an oddly peaceful and fun place to spend some time. Wander the aisles, chat with shoppers and market vendors, and experience life as it's truly lived in this city.

Accommodation: 3* Hotel

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 11

Tashkent & The Solar Furnace

This morning we'll bid farewell to **Samarkand** as we head to the train station to catch a high-speed train from the city and head north. This journey will take around 3 hours to our destination, **Tashkent, the capital of Uzbekistan**. Since it's near destruction during an earthquake in 1966, the city has been redeveloped, initially by the Soviet Union, leaving an obvious trace of the USSR in its city planning.

This afternoon, we'll take a trip outside of the city to the **Institute of Solar Physics**, a huge series of mirrors used to heat up a large furnace. The institute will open just for us, and run a test of the system to demonstrated the immense power of this Soviet-era megaproject.

Situated 45km outside the city, we'll pass through some of Uzbekistan's northern countryside, a far cry from the dry desert-like environment which dominates the rest of the country. Upon arrival, we'll witness the effect of these huge parabolic mirrors, heating the furnace to over 3000°C. We'll also learn about the potential that exists for clean energy from this system, since the energy produced is completely clean, and could be put to work in the future for clean energy.

Our accommodation tonight will be the **Hotel Uzbekistan** – once the premiere hotel in the country for visiting dignitaries, government officials, and the rare foreign tourist.



Accommodation: Hotel Uzbekistan

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 12

Tashkent: The Uzbek Capital

This morning we'll step out into the bustling city of **Tashkent**. Our day begins with a visit to **Amir Timur Square** at the heart of this vibrant capital. One of the main squares in Tashkent, Amir Timur is graced with a magnificent **Statue of Tamerlane**, a medieval conqueror, on horseback. Although Amir Timur is not the largest square in the city, the tree-lined pavements, and bright green grass make it perfect for an evening stroll amidst the locals of Tashkent.

From here, we will spend some time in the beautifully domed **Chorus Bazaar**, a great place to observe local life or buy those last-minute bargains, and another chance to chat with locals from the city, as well as support local independent business in Tashkent.

No visit to Tashkent would be complete without first a ride on the **Tashkent Metro** built in the former USSR; it opened in 1977. The metro network consists of three lines which crisscross beneath the streets of the city. This incredibly ornate metro system was opened in 1977 and has only grown in beauty since then. Not only is it an incredible tourist attraction in its own right, but you can use it to get between Tashkent's other incredible above-ground sites! Tashkent metro is one of only two subway systems currently operating in Central Asia (the other one being the Almaty Metro).



Our last stop for the day will be the **Fine Arts Museum of Uzbekistan**. There are, of course, hundreds of museums across the Uzbek capital worth poking your head in, however our favourite must be the State Fine Arts Museum, home to thousands of artefacts from across Russia and Europe. This Soviet-era museum holds many of the treasures confiscated from the Grand Duke Romanov, who himself likely stole them from St Petersburg. In addition, artwork from across Russia and the Soviet Union are displayed throughout this museum.

Finally, we'll return to our Soviet hotel – from here, we'll have a free evening. You'll be able to wander the streets, find and try unusual delicacies, and meet local Tashkenters.

Accommodation: Hotel Uzbekistan

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

Day 13

Departure Day

This morning, airport transfers will be provided to all travellers heading to the airport for international flights. For extension opportunities, please contact your tour manager.

END OF TOUR

Included Meals: Breakfast