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Essential Silk Route (19 Days)

Tajikistan, Uzbekistan & Kyrgyzstan

September 29-October 17, 2022

See traces of the Great Silk Road and get acquainted with the history and modern life of Central Asian states. You will be impressed by magnificent mountains and primeval nature of Kyrgyzstan & Tajikistan with wild landscapes of Tien-Shan Mountain Range: densely planted forests of conifers, wide valleys and raging rivers, unique mountain lakes with transparent water, magic glaciers, herds of horses, sheep and yaks, magnificent canyons. Feel the charm of Uzbekistan - one of the oldest countries in the world, colorful, warm and mysterious.

Tajikistan

Sep 28 Arrive Istanbul in time to connect to flight to Dushanbe (DYU) TK254 depart 21:15, arriving at 03:55 on Sep 29.

Sep 29 Thurs Day 1 Arrive Dushanbe TK254, 03:55 / Hotel Atlas (B,D)

Arrival in Dushanbe airport, after finishing any procedures (border control, customs, luggage) transfer to hotel for immediate check-in.

Breakfast & a leisure morning to rest after the long flight.

This afternoon, a city tour. Named for the Persian word for Monday, Dushanbe was at one point a small market village where traders would gather each Monday to sell their goods. During the Soviet era, the city grew to be the most important center of production in Tajikistan, but the Shohmansur covered market reflects Dushanbe's historical ties to local trade. Visit monument of Ismoili Somoni and Rudaki park and Highest Flag Shock in the world (certificated by Guinness comity) in the center of city. Then visit Tajikistan State museum, then visit the Mehrgon Bazaar and Victory Park – here view of Dushanbe from East hills.

Dinner at a local restaurant.

Sep 30 Fri Day 2 Dushanbe Sightseeing / Hotel Atlas (B,L)

In the morning an excursion to Hissar Fortress. Located outside of Dushanbe (27 km. to west), the Hissar Fortress houses the remains of the palace of Ibragimbek Khan, belong of Bukhara Emirate. Its thick walls once guarded a pool, garden, and palace, while the fortress itself opposed a noisy market and caravanserai. What remains today is a portion of the wall and the gate towers, which are representative of the 18th and 19th century style,.

Return to Dushanbe and lunch at a local restaurant. After lunch, visit Tajikistan Antique Museum. The Museum includes natural history exhibits, Tajik costumes, and a mock-up of a Tajik house. With highlights - biggest statue of “Relaxing Buddha” Ethnographic part of Museum showcases traditional Tajik crafts, including ceramics, embroidered fabrics, woodcarving and jewelry.

Oct 1 Sat Day 3 Drive to Penjikent, approx. 4 hours / Hotel Umajen (B,D)

Depart at 8 am and drive through picturesque scenery of Varzob valley and Anzob pass-tunnel.

Continue to Penjikent, one of the most ancient cities of Central Asia (5500 years). Ancient Panjikent was of the easternmost settlements of the Sogdiana Empire, an Iranian civilization that ruled swathes of territories in Central Asia more than a thousand years ago.

We will arrive at about noon and have lunch in a local cafeteria, then proceed to the Penjikent excavations & The Rudaki Museum in the center of the town. The museum is filled with artifacts, from the Bronze Age to the Sogdian era, and natural history exhibits from around the region. Frescoes from the Old Penjikent archaeological site are a highlight of the museum.

Dinner at a local restaurant.

Uzbekistan

Oct 2 Sun Day 4 Drive to Samarkand / Hotel Grand Samarkand (B,D)

Today we depart at 8 am and head towards Tajik/Uzbek border Jartepa. It is approx. 1.5 hr drive to the border, plus one hour for border proceedures.

The historic town of Samarkand is a crossroad and a melting pot of world's cultures. Founded in the 7th century B.C. as ancient Afrosiab, Samarkand received its most significant development in the Timurid's period from the 14th to the 15th centuries.

If all goes smoothly/quickly at the border we may arrive at about 11 am. In this case, we have 1-1.5 hr tour before and lunch at local restaurant. (pay direct). Then continue touring.

Sites to visit include: the "Ruins of Afrosiab" - the excavation and museum of the ancient town (6 BC-13 AD), the Gur Emir Mausoleum (15c); the "Stars above Samarkand " – Ulugbek Observatory (15c).

Optional (pay directly): Enjoy a one hour wine tasting at Samarkand Wine factory if you like, before heading to dinner at a local restaurant on the Old City. If you choose not to attend the wine tasting you can go for a walk in the park nearby.

Oct 3 Mon Day 5 Samarkand Sightseeing / Hotel Grand Samarkand (B,D)

With a history dating back 2700 years, Samarkand became famous as the capital of the vast state created by Tamerlaine and later ruled by his grandson Ulugbek in the 14th-15th centuries. The historic town is a melting pot of the world's cultures and recently declared a World Heritage Site. Founded in the 7th century B.C. as ancient Afrasiab, Samarkand had its most significant development in the Timurid period from the 14th to the 15th centuries.

We start our day with an excursion to Shahi Zinda Necropolis (14-15c) and St. Daniel Mausoleum (St. Daniel from the bible)-a popular place for local pilgrims whom we shall see doing their sacred rituals.

Lunch on your own, pay direct.

This afternoon visit to the Registan Ensemble (a main highlight of Samarkand) including Ulugbek (15c), Shir Dor (17c), the Tillya Kari (three beautiful Madrassahs ,17c.).

Next we go to Bibi Khanum Mosque and the Silk Bazaar.

This evening, attend a show at "El Merosi," Theater of Historical Costumes. This 40-50 min show begins at 6 pm. Afterwards, dinner at a local restaurant.

Oct 4 Tues Day 6 Bukhara via Shakhrisabz / Hotel Asia (B,L)

We depart at 8 am for the 1.5 hour drive to Shakhrisabz, one of the most ancient cities in Central Asia and the birthplace and home town of Central Asia's foremost conqueror - the Great Amir Temur. In

certain periods through its long history, it has appeared as the center of some of the most important events in world history - sometimes glorious, sometimes tragic.

Upon arrival in Shakhrisabz, we visit Ak Saroy Palace (14c) – the greatest palace built by Tamerlan, similar in structure to Samarkand's Bibi Khanum Mosque, but unparalleled in size and decoration. It took 20 years to build and was destroyed by Abdulla Khan of Bukhara in the XVII century.

Next, we visit Kok Gumbaz Mosque; see the remains of a once grandiose complex - the Dorus-Syadot (House of the prophet's decrees) mausoleum where Jahangir, the most beloved son of Amir Temur, was buried. This monument became the family burial-vault of the Temurids. Ancient plane trees still grow in this place - the sacred symbol of Shakhrisabz.

Visit another fabulous complex - Dorut-Tilavete (The House of Contemplation) consisting of two mausoleums - Khazreti Sheikh (Shamseddin Kulial) and Ghumbezi Seyeedon with the Kok-Ghumbaz (Blue Dome) mosque.

Lunch at the local restaurant.

We then shall go to see the domed bath house (has been under renovation-should be open by our dates).

Shakhrisabz, is also a traditional center of folk arts, especially embroidery. We visit the trading aisle at the market to see the embroiders of Tubiteykas (traditional hats), suzane, carpets and belts.

Continue 5 hrs drive to Bukhara - a real city-museum: every building is a real exhibit. Ancient mosques, citadels, mausoleums, madrassas, monuments - all this can be visited, selflessly strolling around the city, because here every corner of the earth keeps its memory. Once upon a time, the Great Silk Road ran through Bukhara, which is purposefully reviving today.

Oct 5 Wed Day 7 Bukhara Sightseeing / Hotel Asia (B,D)

Full day sightseeing tour.

Start with a visit to Makhallya Khuma," the ancient Jewish block of houses and synagogue. Then traditional covered bazaars including Toki Zargaron Trading Dome (1569-70); Toki Telpak Furushon Trading Dome, Toki Sarrafon Trading Dome (16th c.).

Excursion to Sitora-i-Mokhikhosa, the summer palace of the last Emir of Bukhara (1911). The style is an eclectic mix of European, Russian and Oriental design and there is a good exhibition of traditional Suzane embroidery as well as Chinese porcelain brought along the Silk Road from China. The white hall decorated with carved alabaster resembles halls in Peterhof Palace in the suburb of St Petersburg.

We stop for lunch at local restaurant., pay direct

The Kosh Madrassah Ensemble (sponsored by Abdullah-khan II (1561-1598), the most successful khan of Shaibanid dynasty (1566-67), Ulugbek Madrassah (1417+); Magak-i Attari Mosque (16c) - one of the earliest religious buildings of Islamic era in Bukhara, Chor Minor Madrassah and Lyabi Khauz Ensemble (17c).

Dinner at local restaurant. Folk Show at Nadir-Divanbegi Madrassah (17c).

Oct 6 Thur Day 8 Train to Khiva / Hotel Malika (B,D)

NOTE: Take some fruit, cheese, breads from the breakfast buffet to snack on the train which is during the lunch period. We can also stop at a market in downtown.

We depart at 8 am and drive 40 km/ approx. 50 min to visit Gijduvan Ceramics Museum. Gijduvan school of traditional ceramics holds a special place among others. Gijduvan became the main supplier of ceramics to Bukhara in the first decade of the 20th century. We enjoy the process of creating pottery in a local workshop of Ibodullo Narzullaev - a famous Uzbek ceramist including a wide variety of goods full of bright colors and ornaments: painted bowls and plates, elegant jugs, neat teapots and pots.

We proceed to Khiva via Kizilkum Desert (red sands) by train - the route of invaders, nomadic hordes and armies of Persians, Alexander the Great and Genghis Khan. Dep 12:24 – Arr 17:51.

Oct 7 Fri Day 9 Khiva Sightseeing / Hotel Malika (BL))

Another city located on the Great Silk Road is the ancient Khorezm, or Khiva, as it is called now. Khiva can be regarded as an open-air museum - included in the UNESCO list, because here, every building is an ancient treasure.

About 60 historical monuments, including the citadel, palaces, mosques, minarets and mausoleums, have been preserved in the old part of Ichan-Kala, which, like nothing else, preserves the image of the ancient eastern city of Khiva. The findings of archaeologists suggest that Old Khiva, which existed already in the 5th century, served as a stop on the Great Silk Road.

The old city, located within the walls of Ichan-Kala, covers an area of about 30 hectares and is surrounded by a massive wall of 6-8 meters. On the outside of the walls ditches were dug, which were filled with water. In the fortress wall there are four gates, fortified by shock towers and supplemented by observation galleries.

For this morning's tour in the inner city no transport will be used, we enjoy a pleasant easy walking tour.

Sites will include: Ichan-Kala Medrese of Muchammad Aminchan, Minaret Kalta Minor, Kunya Ark Fortress, Mausoleum of Pakhlavan Makhmud and Said Alauddin and enjoy view of whole ancient Khiva.

Lunch in a local restaurant.

Continue touring with visits to Juma Mosque, Tash Hauli Palace and Harem, Ensemble Islam Chodja (Khodja) minaret, Madrasah Alla Kuichan.

Oct 8 Sat Day 10 Fly to Tashkent / Hotel City Palace (B,D)

Transfer to the airport for flight to Tashkent departing 9:30 am, arrives 10:50 am. (or evening flight on Day 9 depending on schedule).

The capital of Uzbekistan, this wonderful city is an embodiment of the modern elegance that is inherent in many world capitals. At the same time, it remains an oriental city. Tashkent has its own unique flavor. It combines medieval buildings as if descended from the pages of old oriental tales, elegant European architecture from the period of the Turkestan governor-generalship, standard concrete "boxes" of the Soviet era and, finally, glittering skyscrapers of glass and concrete (modern business centers and banks). The city is lined with a grid of straight and wide streets and avenues, decorated with emerald green parks, gardens, fountains imbued with crystal strands.

On arrival lunch and begin our tour. Sites to visit include: the Mustakillik (Independence) Square in the heart of Tashkent and Tashkent Metro decorated with local marble and granite --like an underground palace; central square Amir Timur Maydoni - dominated by a statue of Timur on horseback and the Alisher Navoi Opera and Ballet Theatre.

Dinner at local restaurant.

Oct 9 Sun Day 11 Tashkent Sightseeing / Hotel City Palace (B,L)

This morning we begin our tour with a visit to the sprawling, colorful Chor-Su bazaar- a great place to soak up the essence of Uzbekistan. At 2500 years old, it is one of the oldest markets and was once one of the busiest, since it is located on the silk route. The location hasn't changed in all these years, but the old buildings have been replaced by modern ones. The mammoth marble vanity monuments of Tashkent might represent the sanitized modern facade that President Karimov wants foreigners to believe, but Chorsu Market is the vibrant reality, warts and all. It is crowded, lively and noisy, with a slice of all the nation's social strata there to see. The fruit and vegetables are of beautiful quality, and the spices, dried fruits and nuts inside the main blue dome are delicious.

Next, we tour the historic Old Quarter of the city starting with Madrasah Kukeldash close to Su bazaar. Built in 1570, it was part of an ensemble of the city's main square. For many years it was the center of the city's life. In the XVIII century, the madrasah arranged caravansary carriageways for merchants and hosted living quarters for craftsmen. In the XIX century, the madrasah served as a fortress of Kokand Khans. Until 1865, Madrasah Kukeldash served as a place of public execution in order to strengthen people's morality. Today the restored current madrasah fulfills its original function: educating students. Also, the faithful come here for Friday prayers.

We shall also visit the Kaffal Shashi Mausoleum, Barak Khana Seminary, Tila Shaikh Mosque and archives known for the exhibit of a rare copy of Koran written by the third Caliph Othman.

Lunch at local restaurant.

This afternoon we visit the excellent Museum of Applied Arts. Time permitting, we also visit the crafts section of the local market.

Oct 10 Mon Day 12 Drive to Fergana / Hotel Asia (B,L)

We depart at 8 am for the drive to Fergana (350 km/6-7 hrs), visiting interesting sites along the way. We stop for lunch in Kokand, the former capital of the powerful Kokand Khanate that once dominated the whole Fergana Valley.

After 4.5 hours drive, our first stop is Rishtan – center of unique ceramic production in Uzbekistan. Rishtan is known today as one of the largest centers in Central Asia of manufacture of unique glazed ceramic. The Rishtan pottery tradition uses a unique turquoise–ultramarine palette that differs entirely from colors in other Central Asian regions. Rishtan- made ceramics differ technically as well, with thin, delicate walls and a translucent, smooth glaze. Rishtan is the only place in Central Asia where the well–known “ishkor” glaze is still used, and the vibrant blue colors of Rishtan ceramics are the only colors which are fixed using the “ishkor” glaze.

We shall visit the Rishtan pottery workshop of Rustam Usmanov and the Japanese School. Rustam Usmanov - master ceramist and painter has participated in archeological expeditions to research and restore lost ornaments and patterns and his artwork combines deep knowledge of the local traditions. His masterpieces are displayed in the State Museum of Art of Uzbekistan, the State Hermitage and Museum of Ethnography of St. Petersburg, Russia and the Museum of Arts of Peoples of the Orient in Moscow, Russia.

Lunch at local restaurant.

Next, we go to to Margilan to see the process of handmade production of Han-Atlas silk fabric at the Yodgorlik Factory. Located in the southeast of Fergana Valley, Margilan is considered to be one of the ancient cities in Uzbekistan and Central Asia, as well as a big centre of international trade. The caravan routes connected Europe with East Asia via Margilan. From time immemorial, the people of Margilan have been busy manufacturing beautiful silk fabrics, making Margilan city well-known all over the world.

Continue to Fergana (90 km/56 miles/approx. 1-1.5 hr). Transfer to hotel for check-in & dinner at hotel restaurant, pay direct.

Kyrgyzstan

Oct 11 Tues Day 13 Drive to Osh-Fly to Bishkek / Hotel Plaza (B,L)

This morning we shall have a short tour visiting Al Fargoniy Monument and Square and the modern city before our drive to Dostlick, the checkpoint on the Uzbek- Kyrgyz border. There is a 200 meter transit zone.

Afterwards we drive to Osh (2 hrs to border, 1 hr border procedures, 15 min to Oash), one of the oldest towns in Central Asia, located on the southeast edge of the Fergana Valley at the northern foot of the Pamir -Alai mountain range. Nestled in green slopes, Osh lies on both sides of the Ak-Bura River, at an altitude of 940-1070 m above sea level. The age of the city can be judged from the rock drawings and inscriptions found on the northern slope of the four-headed Suleiman Mountain. This mountain is located in the center of Osh and is a unique historical and architectural monument. The mountain was defense from enemies and its presence governed the unusual layout of the ancient city of Osh. A small mazar was built on the southeastern slope of the mountain, and was named Kichik Mekka ("Small Mecca") where the Muslims of the Fergana Valley would come to pray. Osh became their second Mecca.

Visitors are attracted to the bazaar in Osh with its distinct oriental colors and the aromatic smells of spices and fruits. Lunch at local restaurant.

Afternoon tour: visit Suleiman Mount, the mosque of Babur and browse the national bazaar.

Evening Flight to Bishkek. On arrival transfer to the hotel. Dinner at hotel restaurant, pay direct.

Oct 12 Wed Day 14 Bishtek Sightseeing / Hotel Plaza (B,D)

Bishkek is located where the Kazakh steppe meets the foothills of the majestic snow-capped Tien-Shan mountains. Bishkek was founded in 19th c. after the Kokand conquerors erected a fortress that guarded the caravan routes extending from Tashkent through Chuvalley to Issyk-Kul Lake and Kashgar (China). In 1991 the city Frunze was given the name Bishkek. The city is beautiful any time of the year, though it is at its best in spring, when the central squares (Ala-too, Victory and others) are covered with red tulips and daffodils. The city contains about 20 parks, one of the largest being the Dubovyi (Oak) Park.

Enjoy a relaxed morning and we begin our walking tour at 10 am. Sites to visit include: Ala-Too Square, The National Museum of History (1 hour), Frunze House, The Art Museum; see the Opera House and the Concert Hall (near which there is a statue of National Hero Manas).

Lunch at a local restaurant at some point in the midst of the touring, about 1 pm. Return to the hotel at about 4 pm. Some time to refresh and we walk to dinner in Kyrgyz national restaurant.

Oct 13 Thurs Day 15 Chon-Kemin Gorge / Hotel GH Kemin or Ashuu (B,D)

On the way to Chon-Kemin Gorge we make a stop at Karakhanid's minaret of the 12 century - Burana tower (1.5 hrs from Bishtek). Nowadays it is a museum complex which includes the tower itself, reconstructions of mausoleums found on the site, remains of a citadel, collection of balbals (grave stones used by nomadic Turkic peoples), petroglyphs (stone carvings) and a small museum.

Lunch, pay direct. Continue 1.5 hr drive on a good paved road to Chon Kemin. Chon Kemin is a quiet valley with several small villages and farmers' lands surrounded by magnificent mountains and fir forest. It is just a wonderful place to be, to sit on the doorstep and watch time pass by with a pot of tea.

Enjoy this beautiful gorge! Our evening our dinner will be accompanied by a song of Manaschi. The epic poem Manas is central to Kyrgyz traditional culture and character, psychology and spirit. It is recited by specialists known as Manaschi, who holds a special place of respect in Kyrgyz culture. Performance & dinner at hotel restaurant.

Oct 14 Fri Day 16 Chon-Kemin – Karakol / Green Yard Hotel (B,L)

We drive along the southern shore of the Issyk-Kul Lake. The lake sits in a hollow surrounded by snowcapped peaks of Terskei and Kungei Ala-Tau mountain ranges at the altitude of 1600 m. The Lake is 180 km long, 60 km wide and 700 m deep. 134 streams and rivers flow into the lake but none flows out, explained by underwater tectonic activity.

After approx. 1-1.5 hr drive we stop in Bokonbaevo village where we attend a demonstration of a traditional form of falconry found throughout Central Asia – hunting with eagles. Eagle hunting plays a key role in nomadic lifestyle and is widely used not only during national competitions and shows but also throughout routine life of local people.

Lunch arranged by a local family in the village. Afterwards, continue approx. 2 hrs to Jeti-Oguz Gorge. Here we admire fantastic rock formations made of red sandstone, local pastures have long been used by shepherds to graze flocks of sheep and herds of horses.

Onward 30 more minutes to Karakol.

Oct 15 Sat Day 17 Karakol-Issyk-Kul Lake / Karven Hotel (B,D)

The atmosphere of Karakol town will bring you hundred years back and give you an impression of Tsarist Russia. We depart hotel at 9 am for our 2 hour city tour includes: Old Russian Style houses (1870 – 1910), Russian Orthodox Church (1886), Dungan Mosque (1899) that was made out of wood with no nails and Karakol Bazaar.

After our tour, we proceed along the northern shore of Issyk-Kul Lake (approx. 2 hrs).

Our hotel is located on the shore of the lake near Cholpon-Ata. This afternoon is free to enjoy relaxation by the lake. Dinner at hotel restaurant.

Oct 16 Sun Day 18 Visit Cholpon-Ata & drive to Bishkek / Hotel Plaza (B,D)

We depart at 9 am driving approx. 15 minutes to Cholpon-Ata. Here we visit the petroglyphs - a large open-air collection of rock carvings sometimes referred to as a Stone Garden, which covers some 42 hectares and contains a number of prehistoric monumental structures (stone circles, tombs, the remains of a boundary stone wall, balbals) and petroglyphs (dating from the II millennium BC thru the Middle Ages and up to the VI century AD). The stones have plaques giving some information (a short description and a date), and there are several routes marked with arrows around the "stone garden."

The shortest route in the Stone Garden takes 20-30 minutes. But there is a longer route to the upper side of the museum, which enables visitors to explore a collection of stone balbals, stone inscriptions, stone circles and a spectacular panorama of the Cholpon-Ata bay of Issyk-Kul Lake.

We also visit Cholpon-Alta Museum of History. It exhibits a wide collection of national embroidery. Transfer to Karakol along beautiful landscapes of the lake and mountains. The atmosphere of Karakol town will bring you hundred years back and give you an impression of Tsarist Russia. Karakol in previous times had another name – Prjevalsk, in honor of the famous Russian explorer of Asia – Nikolai Prjevalski, whose grave is situated at the shore of Issyk-Kul Lake. Visiting of Prjevalsk Museum. The town was founded in 1869 and constructed in an old Russian style with many buildings from Tsar time.

Lunch in a local restaurant. Continue3-3.5 hrs to Bishkek.

Folklore show in the evening during the dinner. Artists will demonstrate different national musical instruments and techniques of playing.

Oct 17 Mon Day 19 Depart Bishtek (FRU)

Check out of your hotel and meet your driver in the lobby for a transfer (if pre-arranged) to the airport in time for your departure flight. Standard hotel check-out times apply.

Price: $4565 per person based on min 4 people, single room supplement: $890.
Plus flight Istanbul-Dushanbe (estimate): $420. You are free to book on your own.

Includes:

Accommodations based on availability with daily breakfast:

Dusanabe: Hotel Atlas 4* https://www.atlashoteldushanbe.com/
Penjikent: Hotel Umariyon 3* https://umariyon.business.site/
Samarkand: Hotel Grand Samarkand 4* http://www.grand-samarkand.com/en/
Bukhara: Hotel Asia 3* http://asiahotels.uz/en/asia-bukhara.html
Khiva: Hotel Malika 3* http://www.malika-khiva.com/
Or Hotel Asia http://asiahotels.uz/en/asia-khiva.html
Tashkent: Hotel City Palace 4* https://citypalace.uz/
Fergana: Hotel Asia 3* http://asiahotels.uz/en/asia-ferghana.html
Bishkek: Hotel Plaza 4* http://www.plazahotel.kg/ru/
Chon-Kemin Gorge: GH Kemin or Ashuu
Karakol: Hotel Green Yard https://greenyard.kg/
Bishkek: Hotel Plaza 4* http://www.plazahotel.kg/ru/

Arrival and departure transfers on our dates
Early check in on Day 1
Flight tickets within the tour: Kiva-Tashkent & Osh-Bishkek
Transport by minivan/minibus depending on group size
Meals: half board – either B & L or B & D as indicated in day by day itinerary
Entrance and ecological fees
English speaking guide throughout the tour, different one for each country.

Does Not Include: flight to Istanbul, flight Istanbul-Dushanbe, visa fees, camera and video fees, alcohol beverages, PCR test costs

NOTES:

Sequence of daily activities may vary depending on timing and various local conditions as well as in-tour flight schedule changes. Flights within the tour are subject to change. We will adjust as needed to attempt to visit all sites. Please be assured all activities and sightseeing will be covered.

Sites can close at any time without much advance notice. Should this happen, the guide will find other interesting thigs to do and see.

Weather: https://www.weather2travel.com/may/central-asia/
The average temperatures May: 65-85 F with 12-15 hours of daylight; Oct: 48-72 F with 9-11 hours of daylight.

Hotels
The star ratings listed cannot be compared to the same ratings in the US. In a couple of the cities the highest

level is 3* (which may seem more like a 2 star). If new/better hotels open, we will switch. Please have an accepting attitude. Sometimes, even when we received confirmation from the hotel, our reservation can be cancelled. This can happen even after you have let the US and without our advanced knowledge. Such are the business practices in this part, and many parts, of the less developed world. It is quite frustrating to us all!

Road Conditions:

Tajikistan – first 100 miles on a new paved road, last 60 miles are paved but may be a little bumpy
Kyrgyzstan - Half of the road is European highway, the other half is paved but a little bit bumpy road.

Vehicles:

All vehicles have seat belts and ac, are kept clean and in good mechanical condition. Depending on number of travelers, we may have a sedan, mini-van or minibus. Always more seats than people.

Guides and drivers

There will be an accompanying guide throughout your journey (different one for each country) who is highly educated and speaks very good English. In some places, we may also have local guides in addition to the escort. In all cases the guides do not cross borders. You will be assisted with border formalities on one side and proceed to the check point where you are met by the guide on the other side. The drivers do smoke but will not do so in the vehicle. However, you may still smell it on their clothes, body, breath. There is nothing we can do about this. Carry a handkerchief with lavender scent or similar to help ease the discomfort if you are sensitive and try to sit furthers from the driver.

Border Crossings

The time it takes to pass through a border is unpredictable. Some crossings require a walk between exit and entry. Have luggage on wheels and keep weight of carry-on (day bag) to minimum. We suggest back pack style for day bag as easiest to manage without assistance.

Distances between border checkpoints:
Tajikistan/Uzbekistan (Jartepa) – walk 350 meters independently. The road is paved in good condition.
Uzbekistan/Kyrgyzstan (Dustlick) – walk 300 meters independently. The road is paved in good condition.