CENTRAL ASIA GUIDE

GROUP TOUR · 15 DAYS

Five Stans tour from Bishkek to Ashgabat

Bishkek – Ashgabat · Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan

Duration 15 days, 14 nights	Start and end Bishkek – Ashgabat	Best time to visit Apr–Oct
Group tour from $3,490 per person	Tour type Culture, Multi-country, Nature, Silk Road	Difficulty Easy
Flights and train A flight and 2 train journeys included	Departures 9 guaranteed dates	

Prices and dates valid for 2027 departures. Issued 16 November 2026.

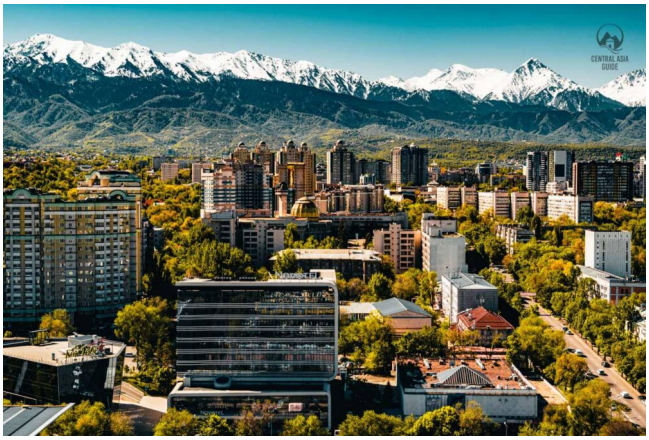
Tour highlights

Experience the highlights of Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan on an exciting 15-day journey through the heart of Central Asia. From the alpine landscapes of Kyrgyzstan and a boat trip on the stunning Issyk-Kul Lake, to the spectacular Charyn Canyon in Kazakhstan and the legendary Silk Road cities of Samarkand and Bukhara, this tour combines dramatic scenery, ancient history, vibrant cultures and unforgettable local experiences.

The adventure reaches its finale in Turkmenistan, where you explore the ancient ruins of Merv and Nisa, discover the striking marble capital of Ashgabat and venture into the Karakum Desert to the legendary Darvaza Gas Crater. Spending the night in the desert beside the glowing “Gates of Hell” makes this Five Stans Express an ideal choice for travelers looking for a perfect balance of culture, nature, adventure and iconic Central Asian experiences.

Difficulty: Easy. Sightseeing tour with short walks (Skazka Canyon, Jeti-Oguz Gorge, Charyn Canyon viewpoints, Marguzor Lakes). The pace is busy: 15 days in five countries, four land border crossings, several long drives of 276–390 km, and nights in yurt camps on Issyk-Kul and at the Darvaza Gas Crater.

Jeti Oguz valley seven bulls rock formations in Issyk Kul



Kazakhstan Tours

Where you'll stay

Night 1	**Bishkek**	My Hotel or similar
Night 2	**Cholpon Ata**	Caprice Lakeside Resort or similar
Night 3	**Royal Gate yurt camp**	Royal Gate yurt camp
Night 4	**Karakol**	Hotel 78 or similar
Nights 5–6	**Almaty**	Kazzhol Hotel or similar
Night 7	**Tashkent**	Art Deluxe Hotel or similar
Nights 8–9	**Samarkand**	Zilol Baht Hotel or similar
Night 10	**Bukhara**	Al Hayat Hotel or similar
Night 11	**Mary**	Taj Palace Hotel or similar
Nights 12–13	**Ashgabat**	Sport Hotel or similar
Night 14	**Darvaza Gas Crater**	Darvaza yurt camp

Listed accommodation or similar, same category.

Day-by-day itinerary

DAY 1

Bishkek, arrival

Arrive in Bishkek at any time. Standard hotel check-in is after 14:00. Enjoy some free time to relax or explore on your own before the group gathers.

At 14:00, meet your guide and fellow travelers for a welcome briefing covering the itinerary and travel plan, followed by a city tour of Bishkek. In the evening, join a welcome dinner at a traditional restaurant to sample authentic Kyrgyz cuisine.

Note: since most flights to Bishkek arrive late at night or early in the morning, we highly recommend booking an extra night at the hotel prior to the tour start date.

Overnight	**Bishkek** · My Hotel or similar
Meals	Dinner

DAY 2

Bishkek - Burana Tower - Cholpon-Ata by road

Start the day with breakfast at the hotel. Our journey begins with a visit to the Burana Tower, an ancient minaret in the Chuy Valley in northern Kyrgyzstan. The tower, along with funerary monuments, earthworks, castle remains and three mausoleums, is all that survives of ancient Balasagyn, a town founded by the Karakhanids at the end of the 9th century. Enjoy lunch in Iskra village with a local Dungan family, an ethnic group of Chinese Muslims who fled China, and taste their traditional cuisine.

We then continue to Issyk-Kul, the largest lake in Kyrgyzstan and one of the deepest in the world, driving to your hotel located right on the lakeshore. Your first stop at Issyk-Kul is the Petroglyph Museum, spanning 42 hectares dotted with ancient stones, tombs, balbals and petroglyphs dating from the 2nd millennium BC to the 4th century AD. Enjoy free time to relax on the beach and swim in the lake. Dinner at the restaurant is available at your own expense.

Overnight	**Cholpon Ata** · Caprice Lakeside Resort or similar
Meals	Breakfast, Lunch
Travel	Bishkek – Cholpon Ata

DAY 3

Cholpon-Ata - Bokonbaevo - Issyk-Kul south shore by road, 320 km

Start the day with breakfast at the hotel and take a boat trip on Issyk-Kul, the largest lake in Kyrgyzstan and one of the deepest in the world.

En route to the south shore, stop in the village of Bokonbaevo to meet a local eagle hunter and his bird of prey, a chance to witness eagle hunting, one of the nomads' most ancient traditions. Enjoy dinner and an overnight stay at a yurt camp.

Overnight	**Royal Gate yurt camp** · Royal Gate yurt camp
Meals	Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
Travel	Cholpon Ata – Bokonbaevo (320 km)

DAY 4

Skazka Canyon - Barskoon Gorge - Jeti-Oguz - Karakol by road

After breakfast, visit Skazka Canyon ("Fairytale" in Russian), where wind and time have carved the rocks into surprising shapes and sizes. Keep an eye out for formations that resemble skyscrapers, castles or animals. Next, head toward Barskoon Gorge, famous for its waterfalls. The best known, "Tears of a Leopard", sits near a monument to Yuri Gagarin, the first cosmonaut, who loved this spot and often rested at the nearby Tamga military sanatorium.

Continue to Jeti-Oguz Gorge. Its name means "seven bulls" in Kyrgyz, after seven giant red-brown rock formations that resemble bulls standing together. Take a walk here to enjoy the striking landscape. Arriving in Karakol, visit the city's landmark sights, including the Russian Orthodox Cathedral and the Dungan Mosque. For dinner, try ashlan-fu, a specialty of Dungan cuisine unique to this region.

Overnight	**Karakol** · Hotel 78 or similar
Meals	Breakfast
Travel	Bokonbaevo – Karakol

DAY 5

Karakol - Charyn Canyon - Almaty by road, 390 km

Enjoy breakfast at the hotel before departing toward the border. Cross from Kyrgyzstan into Kazakhstan – ready for another stamp in your passport! After completing border formalities, meet your Kazakh guide and driver and continue into Kazakhstan as the landscape gradually shifts around you.

Along the way, visit Charyn Canyon, one of Kazakhstan's most striking natural landmarks. Explore its dramatic rock formations from several viewpoints – it is often compared to a "mini Grand Canyon" for its scale and color. Continue toward Almaty, driving through scenic steppe and mountain scenery, and arrive in Kazakhstan's largest city.

Overnight	**Almaty** · Kazzhol Hotel or similar
Meals	Breakfast
Travel	Karakol – Almaty (390 km)

DAY 6

Almaty city tour and Kok-Tobe

Enjoy breakfast at the hotel before setting out to discover Almaty on a light walking tour of the city's main highlights. Visit Republic Square, stroll through Panfilov Park and admire the beautiful Zenkov Cathedral. Then explore the lively Green Bazaar, where local colors, aromas and flavors bring the city's everyday life vividly to the surface.

Next, head to Kok-Tobe, the highest point in the city, known for its sweeping panoramic views in every direction. Getting there is part of the experience: a cable car ride starting near Hotel Kazakhstan glides over some of Almaty's oldest neighborhoods and its lush fruit-growing gardens. At the top you'll find the iconic 372-meter TV Tower, visible from across the city, along with stunning mountain and city views and a handful of attractions to enjoy. In the evening, dinner at a local restaurant.

Overnight	**Almaty** · Kazzhol Hotel or similar
Meals	Breakfast, Dinner

DAY 7

Almaty - Tashkent by flight

Enjoy breakfast at the hotel, then transfer to the airport for your flight to Tashkent (Kazakhstan Uzbekistan). On arrival, you'll be welcomed by our local team and transferred to your hotel (standard check-in from 14:00). Flight times are subject to change – Almaty–Tashkent flights operate daily at varying schedules.

Begin your tour in Tashkent's historic heart at the Khast-Imam Complex, home to the Barak-Khan Madrasa, the Tilla-Sheikh Mosque and the Kaffal Shashi Mausoleum. Afterward, discover the modern side of Tashkent, starting at Independence Square, one of the largest public squares in the world and a powerful symbol of Uzbekistan's sovereignty. Continue to the Memorial to the World War II Victims, followed by the Monument of Courage, commemorating the devastating 1966 earthquake.

Finish the day exploring the legacy of Amir Temur, the celebrated Central Asian conqueror and statesman, at the Amir Temur Museum and Square. Return to the hotel for an overnight stay.

Overnight	**Tashkent** · Art Deluxe Hotel or similar
Meals	Breakfast
Travel	Almaty – Tashkent (flight)

DAY 8

Tashkent - Samarkand by morning train

Enjoy breakfast at the hotel before transferring to the train station at 07:30 for your 08:30 departure to Samarkand, arriving at 10:55.

Our sightseeing starts at the Gur-Emir Mausoleum, the resting place of Tamerlane and one of the city's most majestic complexes. Originally built as a khanaka and madrasa for Muhammad Sultan, Timur's grandson, it later became the tomb of Amir Timur and his descendants. Next comes Registan Square, the vibrant heart of Samarkand, whose name means "place of sand". The square is framed by three madrasas: the 15th-century Ulugbek Madrasa, the 17th-century Sher-Dor Madrasa and the Tillo-Kori Madrasa, famed for its golden dome.

We continue to the Bibi-Khanym Mosque, the largest 15th-century mosque in Central Asia, built in honor of Tamerlane's wife, and Siyab Bazaar, Samarkand's oldest market. The day ends at the Shakhi-Zinda Necropolis, a stunning complex of eleven mausoleums built between the 14th and 15th centuries, adorned with shimmering blue tiles. Its main mausoleum is attributed to Kusam ibn Abbas, a cousin of the Prophet Muhammad; "Shakhi-Zinda" means "The Living King" in Persian. Return to the hotel for an overnight stay.

Overnight	**Samarkand** · Zilol Baht Hotel or similar
Meals	Breakfast
Travel	Tashkent – Samarkand (train)

DAY 9

Samarkand - Sarazm - Marguzor Lakes (Tajikistan) - Samarkand

Enjoy breakfast at the hotel before meeting your driver at 09:00 for the transfer to the Jartepa–Sarazm border crossing (Uzbekistan Tajikistan). Around 10:00, meet your local Tajik team and continue to the Marguzor Lakes. En route, visit the Sarazm archaeological site and museum, a UNESCO World Heritage Site with a history stretching back 5,500 years, followed by the old central market in Penjikent.

Drive along the lakes and villages, stopping for photos and to take in the scenery. In case of limited time, bad weather or poor road conditions, the drive continues only as far as Lake 6, the largest of the Marguzor Lakes; a visit to Lake 7 cannot be guaranteed. Optional lunch is available near Lake 3 (own expense).

By 16:30, return to the border, where you'll be met by your Uzbek team for the transfer back to your hotel in Samarkand.

Overnight	**Samarkand** · Zilol Baht Hotel or similar
Meals	Breakfast
Travel	Samarkand – Seven Lakes (Haft Kul) Seven Lakes (Haft Kul) – Samarkand

DAY 10

Samarkand - Bukhara by train

Enjoy breakfast at the hotel before transferring to the train station at 09:00 for your 10:00 departure to Bukhara, arriving at 11:45.

In Bukhara we visit the Faizulla Khojayev House-Museum, the family home of a prominent statesman and politician whose father was a wealthy 19th-century merchant, and the Chor-Minor Madrasa (1807), whose four uniquely decorated towers ("Four Minarets") symbolically represent the world's major religions.

We continue to Sitorai Mokhi-Khosa, the summer residence of Bukhara's last Emir, a striking blend of Eastern and Russian architectural styles, and the Bahauddin Naqshband Mausoleum, one of Central Asia's most significant Muslim sanctuaries, often called the region's "Mecca". After the excursion, transfer to the hotel.

Overnight	**Bukhara** · Al Hayat Hotel or similar
Meals	Breakfast
Travel	Samarkand – Bukhara (train)

DAY 11

Bukhara - "Farap" land border - Merv - Mary by road

Enjoy breakfast at the hotel before transferring to the Farab border at 08:00 (Uzbekistan Turkmenistan). Your Turkmen local team will meet you at the border for the transfer to Merv (255 km, about 5 hours).

Explore Ancient Merv, once ranked among the most important cities of the Islamic world alongside Baghdad, Cairo and Damascus. Highlights include the Greater and Lesser Kyz Gala (6th–7th century), the Complex of Askhabs (8th–14th century), Erk Gala (6th century BC), Gyaur Gala (4th century BC), the Hoja Yusup Hamadani complex and the mausoleums of Sultan Sanjar and Muhammad ibn Zeid. After sightseeing, continue to Mary (35 km, about 40 minutes) for an overnight stay.

Overnight	**Mary** · Taj Palace Hotel or similar
Meals	Breakfast
Travel	Bukhara – Mary

DAY 12

Mary - Ashgabat by road, 360 km

Enjoy breakfast at the hotel before driving to Ashgabat (360 km, about 4 hours).

Upon arrival, enjoy a city tour of Turkmenistan's striking capital. In 2013, the Guinness Book of Records recognized Ashgabat as the "white marble city", home to the largest concentration of white marble buildings in the world. Highlights include the Monument and Park of Independence, Ashgabat's main flagpole, the Arch of Neutrality, the Constitution Monument, the Ferris Wheel and the Wedding Palace, along with a panoramic view over the city from the Halk Hakydasy Memorial Complex atop the hill.

Overnight	**Ashgabat** · Sport Hotel or similar
Meals	Breakfast
Travel	Mary – Ashgabat (360 km)

DAY 13

Ashgabat - Nisa - Akhal-Teke horses

Enjoy breakfast at the hotel, then visit the National Museum of History & Ethnography, home to a rich collection of over 500,000 ancient artifacts from Turkmenistan across nine themed halls. The Hall of Ancient History features flint tools from the Mesolithic era used by prehistoric peoples of western Turkmenistan, alongside Neolithic ceramics and ornaments from the earliest settlements along the northern slopes of the Kopet-Dag.

Next, drive to Nissa Fortress, the "Sanctuary of Parthian Kings" and a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 2007. The ruins of this ancient settlement lie 18 km from Ashgabat, in the village of Bagyr. On the return journey, stop at the Turkmenbashi Ruhy Mosque and Mausoleum, one of the largest mosques in Central Asia.

Finish the day at the Horse Stable, home to Turkmenistan's national pride, the Akhal-Teke, widely considered one of the world's most beautiful horse breeds. Bred by Turkmens for over 5,000 years, this unique breed has never been crossed with others; the farm is home to more than 35 of these striking horses.

Overnight	**Ashgabat** · Sport Hotel or similar
Meals	Breakfast

DAY 14

Ashgabat - Darvaza Gas Crater by road, 276 km

Enjoy breakfast at the hotel, then set off to visit the "Altyn Asyr" Oriental Bazaar (open Wed, Thu, Sat, Sun) at Jygyldyk, 20 km north of Ashgabat. One of the largest open-air bazaars in the world, it's packed with colorful rugs, jewelry, carpets, silk, traditional Turkmen costumes and, in other sections, livestock. If the bazaar is closed on the day of your visit, you'll instead visit Gulistan Bazaar, known locally as the "Russian Bazaar", the oldest covered market in the city.

In the afternoon, drive to the Darvaza Gas Crater (276 km, about 4 hours), one of Central Asia's most iconic sights. Fed by the region's abundant natural gas reserves, the crater has been burning continuously for over 50 years, glowing in the heart of the Karakum Desert. Along the way, you'll also have the chance to see nearby water and mud craters. As night falls and the crater lights up the sky, settle in for a barbecue dinner and an overnight stay in a Turkmen yurt or private tent camp.

Overnight	**Darvaza Gas Crater** · Darvaza yurt camp
Meals	Breakfast, Dinner
Travel	Ashgabat – Darvaza Gas Crater (276 km)

DAY
15

Darvaza - Ashgabat, departure

Start the day with a picnic-style breakfast in Darvaza before driving back to Ashgabat (276 km, about 4 hours). Upon arrival, enjoy some free time for last-minute shopping and packing. End of service, with departure from Ashgabat.

Overnight	Departure day, no overnight
Meals	Breakfast
Travel	Darvaza Gas Crater – Ashgabat (276 km)

What's included

Included

- Small group tour.
- Private transportation throughout.
- English-speaking guide.
- Accommodation as per program.
- Meals as per program (14 breakfasts, 2 lunches, 4 dinners).
- Flight: Almaty – Tashkent (economy class).
- Train ticket: Tashkent – Samarkand (economy class).
- Train ticket: Samarkand – Bukhara (economy class).
- Visa support letters for Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan tourist visas.
- Assistance with the Turkmenistan e-visa application (a letter of invitation is no longer required): once we receive your documents, we submit the application, and the State Migration Service then sends you a link to complete the form and pay the fees.

Not included

- Airport transfer: 50 USD one way per person.
- Personal expenses and travel insurance.
- Extra night in Bishkek: 120 USD (double/twin room) / 90 USD (single room).
- Extra night in Ashgabat: 160 USD (double/twin room) / 120 USD (single room).
- Visa fees (if required), including the Turkmenistan e-visa fee: standard 40 USD per person (processing about 10–14 business days) or urgent 80 USD per person (about 5–7 business days).
- Customs fee in Turkmenistan, paid at the border: 16 USD per person.
- PCR test in Turkmenistan, still mandatory, paid at the border: 35 USD per person.
- Meals not listed as included (in Turkmenistan on average 10–18 USD per meal).
- Any services not listed above.

Prices and dates

Valid for 2027 departures

Group tour, per person

Tour	Double / twin room	Single supplement
Express 5 Stans Tour with Darvaza	**$3,490**	+ $490

Same price on all departures. 20% deposit, balance 30 days before tour starting date.

Optional extras

- Pre-tour accommodation in Bishkek (1 night): double/twin room $120, single room $90
- Post-tour accommodation in Ashgabat (1 night): double/twin room $160, single room $120

Guaranteed group departures

2027

Start	End	Weekdays	Status
10 Apr 2027	24 Apr 2027	Sat – Sat	Price on request
24 Apr 2027	8 May 2027	Sat – Sat	Price on request
8 May 2027	22 May 2027	Sat – Sat	Price on request
22 May 2027	5 Jun 2027	Sat – Sat	Price on request
28 Aug 2027	11 Sep 2027	Sat – Sat	Price on request
11 Sep 2027	25 Sep 2027	Sat – Sat	Price on request
25 Sep 2027	9 Oct 2027	Sat – Sat	Price on request
10 Oct 2027	24 Oct 2027	Sun – Sun	Price on request
23 Oct 2027	6 Nov 2027	Sat – Sat	Price on request

Availability as of 16 November 2026. Check current availability on the tour page.

Book or ask a question

Choose a date or ask us anything about this tour. We usually reply within one working day.

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