



## PERSIAN NEW YEAR TAJIKISTAN

### TOUR OVERVIEW

**MARCH 16 - MARCH 25 2023**

9 Night tour in Tajikistan

### SUMMARY

Narouz (new day) festival, also known as Persian New Year has its origins partly rooted in the ancient Iranian religions such as Mithraism and Zoroastrianism. It is now seen as the celebration of the new spring and the year to come. In Tajikistan, the holiday is marked on the first day by a meal at home with family and friends after spring clean. During the remainder of the week, events such as dancing and wrestling take place in the build-up to the national sport of Buzkashi.

Some consider the fantastic sport of Buzkashi to be the most dangerous in the world. It is a spectacular event from its build-up through to its action. It could be described a mixture of polo meets rugby, played on horseback with up to 500 individual contestants competing for prizes by trying to wrestle over a goat's carcass. The winner of each round will be the one to break out of the melee and place the goat upon a central mound.

For the rest of the tour, we take in the understated capital Dushanbe with its polished centre and outlying Soviet monuments and architecture. We leave the city on our way over the stunning snow-capped Fan Mountains to Khujand we stop at the **Khoja Obi Garm Spa** health spa. In Khujand, we visit the history museum, market and the tallest statue of Lenin in central Asia. Retracing some of our steps we drive through the world's longest tunnel crossing the country to the historical city of Panjikent where we learn not only about Rudaki, the 5<sup>th</sup>-century Persian poet but we also visit the ancient city now a world heritage site close to the Uzbek border. Driving back over the Fan Mountains to Dushanbe we couldn't think of a better end to the tour than paying a visit to a semi-functional cognac factory for some free samples, shopping and photography.

*Please note that the itinerary may differ slightly to what is below, but your tour leader will do their best to ensure that as much is covered as possible and add extras when there is time. We visit Tajikistan regularly and know the best places to go to make your trip even more unique. We will make the most of your time in Tajikistan to guarantee the experience of a lifetime.*



## SAFETY

At Koryo Tours, our main priority is your safety and that of the group's. Since 2014 we have worked with a local travel agency that ensures that the journey is safe in vehicles we use and the areas we visit. You are entering the country as a legal tourist, and therefore must obey the local laws and customs. One of our experienced Koryo Tours guides will accompany the trip.

## WHY SHOULD I BOOK THIS TOUR?

As with all of our tours we keep you busy believing in value for money, you will be kept on your toes from Dawn until dusk. Not only will we visit what is listed on the itinerary but will make use of free time and the long drives by stopping to see as much of the country as we can. We have been working in Tajikistan with our partners for many years adapting the tour as time goes by to gain the most out of this wonderful country and all it has to offer. We choose our hotel stays not only for their comfort and location but their unique and unusual style making the tour even more enjoyable.

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## MAP & ITINERARY



DAY 1	Arrival in Dushanbe
DAY 2	Dushanbe
DAY 3	Day-trip to Takab
DAY 4	Buzkashi
DAY 5	Drive to Khoja Obi Garm Spa
DAY 6	Drive to Khujand via Iskander Kul
DAY 7	Khujand
DAY 8	Drive to Panjikent
DAY 9	Return to Dushanbe
DAY 10	Departure Day

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## DAILY ITINERARY

### MARCH 16<sup>th</sup> – THURSDAY (DAY 1)

#### AM

- This morning is a free morning for settling in, exploring, and acclimatizing while waiting for the rest of the tour group to arrive.

#### PM

- This afternoon after our pre-tour meeting, we drive to the **Hissar Fortress**. This large fort is said to date back to Cyrus the Great (600BC) and to have been captured 21 times by invading forces. Much of this area has been restored, but it has a lovely museum that offers an excellent introduction to this fascinating country - a great chance to learn about the country's history and catch up with local people.
- Upon our return to Dushanbe, we will stop by a local school to photograph an impressive **statue of Lenin**.

**Meals:** Lunch and welcome dinner in Dushanbe

#### Overnight:

**Hotel Vatan** - a new hotel located within 5 minutes walk of the main city. This comfortable hotel has beautiful rooms located on a designated floor with free laundry facilities, kitchen area and reading room. Breakfast provided buffet style in the main restaurant area.



## MARCH 17<sup>th</sup> – FRIDAY (DAY 2)

### AM

We begin our day with a morning walking tour of Dushanbe; we will travel with a mix of driving and on foot visiting the following sites:

- **Victory Park:** Built-in 1975 commemorating the Victory in the Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945, this Soviet-built monument offers excellent views of Dushanbe.
- **Rudaki & Somoni Avenues:** the two main streets in Dushanbe formally known as Lenin Street and Petoskey Street. These grand avenues were renamed in the early 1990s after the poet Rudaki and the ancient king Ismail Somoni, lined with a mixture of past Soviet architecture and modern Tajik grand buildings.
- **Rudaki Parks:** A beautifully laid out park with a grand statue of the poet Rudaki, located opposite the brilliant national library building.
- **Ismaili Somoni Monument:** This fantastic statue of the ancient king stands on the former site of Lenin. It is said that Somoni's crown contains 10 kilograms of Tajik gold.
- **Mehrgon Market Building:** As with many of the cities, old market places are now closed in Dushanbe's drive for modernization. We visit one of the new areas where local people travel to buy fruit and vegetables and other necessities.

### PM

- **National Museum of Antiquities:** this museum gives us a more in-depth look at the complicated history of Tajikistan and the surrounding countries.
- **Botanical Gardens:** Popular for wedding groups as well as housing a vast range of Central Asian flora.
- **National Tea House:** for end-of-day relaxation this was once the largest tea house in the world, but it has now been remodelled as an entertainment facility for local people. It has recently been renovated and holds a small cinema, bowling alleys and even various shops. We can still visit to view the amazingly intricate work carried out in its construction.

**Meals:** Breakfast and Lunch.

**Overnight:** Hotel Vatan.

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## MARCH 18<sup>th</sup> – SATURDAY (DAY 3)

### AM

- After breakfast, we drive out of Dushanbe following the **Varzob River** north to the stunning **Varzob Valley** along the way we pass scenic lakes, spectacular geological formations and bizarre palatial residences of the Tajik elite. Our next destination is the small **village of Anzob**; where we join our friends for some traditional Tajik hospitality at their home. After lunch, for those who wish to, we can hike into the mountains for amazing views of the surrounding valley.
- Upon our return to Dushanbe, if there are any local events such as holiday wrestling, dancing or singing, we will stop making the most of our time.

### PM

- Late afternoon is left free for your own explorations and adventures in Dushanbe - holiday decoration will be up by now and a lively atmosphere on the weekend can be expected

**Meals:** Breakfast and Lunch

**Overnight:** Hotel Vatan.

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## MARCH 19<sup>th</sup> – SUNDAY (DAY 4)

### AM

- Today we go to see the most remarkable sporting event imaginable – **Buzkashi**! This is a flamboyantly violent and aggressive game played by hundreds of men on horseback, wrestling over a goat carcass to try to score 'goals' with it. It simply has to be seen to be believed, the photos you will get will blow the mind of anyone you show them to! We may have a long drive as the location of this spectacular event does change from year to year. The aim is to arrive when the event is in the throes of setting up watching the competitors arrive. We will stay until the end to make the best use of our time for photography and enjoyment.

### PM

- The day will be spent at the sports fields, in addition to Buzkashi, there may be **wrestling** and **dancing** giving us the opportunity for mingling and people-watching considered to be the friendliest people in all of Central Asia. Snacks and drinks are often available for sale as well as an incredible day is assured!

**Meals:** Breakfast and Lunch

**Overnight:** Hotel Vatan.

## MARCH 20<sup>th</sup> – MONDAY (DAY 5)

### AM

- After a later start today we will drive through the mountains until we reach our destination; the **Khoja Obi Garm Spa**, a vast sanatorium built into the side of a mountain above natural hot springs – like a James Bond villain's lair meets the hotel from *The Shining*! An authentic relic of the USSR days.

### PM

- Once settled in, a full range of 'treatments' can be enjoyed here, from radon baths to massages, leeches to swimming, or simply explore and relax. This is one of those tremendous Soviet-era buildings that are hard to find these days; you will love this experience!

**Overnight:**

**Khoja Obi Garm Spa** - the rooms in this Soviet monster are a little more basic and older, although warm and comfortable. Use of many of the health facilities is included whilst also allowing us to explore this surreal complex late into the evening (if you're brave enough.)

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## MARCH 21<sup>st</sup> – TUESDAY (DAY 6)

### AM

- This morning we bid farewell to our villain's lair and drive onwards to the northern city of **Khujand**, passing over, and through the Hissar Mountains, the route itself is part of the adventure including a drive into the 5km long Iranian-built **Anzob Tunnel**. On the way, we will stop at **Iskander Kul – Alexander Lake** –where Alexander the Great himself stopped for lunch during his advance through Central Asia.

### PM

- We continue and cross into the **Fergana Valley** – the ancient crossroads of cross-continental trade and home to some of the Silk Road's great cities, Arriving in **Khujand** (previously known as Leninabad) we'll stop at a giant **Lenin statue** at a hydro-electric dam. Communism personified!

**Meals:** Breakfast, lunch and dinner

### Overnight:

**Bahoriston Hotel**\_- this hotel resort is located in Qayraqqum around 15 mins drive from Khujand. Nestled on the Kayrakum reservoir banks, the hotel is a comfortable yet bizarre option, combining pseudo-Romanesque architecture whilst reliving the cult seventies show the prisoner. It has health spa facilities on site, restaurants, a bar, night club and even bowling.

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## MARCH 22<sup>nd</sup> – WEDNESDAY (DAY 7)

### AM

- Today, a day of exploration as we first stop by the traditional **Panjshanbe Market** one of the largest in Central Asia. We immerse ourselves in local life whilst trying to pick up a bargain or buying everything from local snacks to Soviet memorabilia. Opposite the market sits the beautiful **Sheikh Muslihiddin Mausoleum and Mosque**. This complex was erected on the **Tomb of Muslihiddin Khudjandi** the sixteenth-century building allows us to learn a little more about Islam in central Asia whilst also marvelling at the ancient carpentry from inside the main prayer hall. Before lunch, we have one more stop to visit the **Khujand Fortress**, this Silk Road fortification has been in situ for over 2500 years in its many forms. Its current build includes a fascinating museum looking at the history of the area and the whole region.

### PM

- After a local lunch, we continue the tour of the city by visiting the **giant statue of Lenin** (the biggest in central Asia,) and on to the bizarre building **Arbob Cultural Palace** originally housing the former headquarters of a Soviet collective farm. It was designed as a recreation of the St. Petersburg Winter Palace built during the Soviet 1950s, a fantastic local curiosity!

**Meals:** Breakfast: Lunch and dinner

**Overnight:** Bahoriston Hotel

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## MARCH 23<sup>rd</sup> - THURSDAY (DAY 8)

### AM

- As we bid Farwell to Khujand, we retrace some of our route back over the Fan Mountains before following a stunning river valley on to the Ancient city of Panjikent. The drive is a real treat as apricot blossoms dot the countryside our only

other distraction as we're dwarfed by the enormous geological features evident in this part of the world. Our destination is **Panjikent**. We will make a detour en route to visit A giant statue of Lenin standing watch over a local reservoir, perhaps the largest statue of its type in the world.

### PM

- This afternoon we have a historic tour of **ancient Panjikent**, viewing ruins of the Sogdian town founded in the 5th century and finally abandoned in the 8th century by the Arabs after their conquest of the region. **Foundations of houses**, a **citadel city bazaar**, and **Zoroastrian fire temples** are all visible as we walk around this UNESCO listed site. Dinner tonight will be a traditional style in a beautiful local home.

### Overnight:

**Sugd Hotel** - this locally owned and run hotel is a small guest house with comfortable rooms, beds and warm showers. The owner is always happy to engage guests in conversation, often sharing his travel stories to Europe.

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### MARCH 24<sup>th</sup> – Friday (DAY 9)

#### AM

- This morning we bid farewell to Panjikent but not before a stop as its exciting and colourful **local market**. Driving out back to the **Fan Mountains**, we will visit an old Soviet **Cognac factory**, we have the opportunity to sample its produce and photograph this large partially abandoned site.

#### PM

- **By mid-afternoon, we arrive back into Dushanbe where** you can make the use of your free afternoon for some last-minute sightseeing into one of the history museums, local shopping or browsing one of the unique Soviet-era **antique shops**.

**Overnight:** Hotel Vatan, Dushanbe

### MARCH 25<sup>th</sup> – SATURDAY (DEPARTURE DAY)

End of tour. All group members will be taken to the airport for their flights as we bid each other a fond goodbye after this eventful epic journey!

Extensions are possible – please speak to your Tour Manager to discuss options.

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## ACCOMMODATION

We will be staying in a range of accommodation on this adventure from 3-4 \*. All accommodation has an en suite and based on a shared option.

Single supplement is 50 USD per night.

Extra nights at the beginning of the tour are possible - please contact your Tour Manager for prices and information.

## FOOD

Most meals are included in this tour although there is time allowed in Dushanbe for your own exploration. Your tour leader will be able to advise on the options when you arrive.

Plov is the national dish of Tajikistan - this rice-based dish is usually served with meat and vegetables. We will certainly try a lot of this as we travel on our journey.

Other staples consist of shish-kebabs made from either lamb or beef. Usually, every meal will come with the delicious, locally cooked fresh bread.

Green and Black tea is the national drink; this can be expected with almost every meal, and there will be a chance to purchase alcoholic beverages in most locations.

## DIETARY REQUIREMENTS

Please note that vegetarian food choices can be limited although your needs can be catered for on tour. If however, you have any special dietary requirements, please do let us know in advance.

In this region, the availability of certain specialized products for restricted diets, e.g. gluten-free or dairy-free, is minimal or non-existent. We would strongly recommend you bring these dietary items.

## TRANSPORT

All ground transport is included in this tour.

We use minibuses to get around in the cities and countryside; there are some long drives which will be broken up where possible.

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## VISAS

You will require the following visa of which the application is a relatively straightforward process, but Please contact us should you need any advice or supporting documents for your visa application:

### TAJIKISTAN VISA

All visitors to Tajikistan require a visa. You will **not** need to obtain a Gorno-Badakshan Autonomous Oblast (GBAO) for this tour. You may now apply for your visa online at the following link:

<https://www.evisa.tj/>

## PACKING

Generally speaking, we recommend you pack as lightly as possible and make sure that you can carry and lift your own luggage and walk with it for short distances.

Most travellers carry their luggage in a backpack, although an overnight bag with a shoulder strap would suffice if you travel lightly. Smaller bags or backpacks with wheels are convenient. A lockable bag or small padlock is useful as your luggage may get stowed separately and unattended while you travel.

## ESSENTIALS

- Day pack - for carrying essentials when exploring destinations like water, camera, snacks, jacket, etc.
- Lightweight clothing - a mixture of covering lightweight clothing and some warm layers are recommended. It is best to check the weather and seasonal information before travelling. Please also bring clothing that covers arms and pants/skirts that go past the knee for entry into local religious sites. For women travellers, a light scarf is also a good idea for covering shoulders and arms.  
*\* Temperatures can get very low overnight in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.*
- Comfortable shoes for full-day walking/trekking - closed-in shoes will help to protect your feet from cuts and scratches when walking through cities as well as bush/grasslands, and will also act as a barrier protection in rare cases against bites or stings
- Wind and waterproof jacket
- Sun protection - hat, sunscreen, sunglasses, and lip balm

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## RECOMMENDED

- Personal medical kit - we recommend you carry items such as mild pain killers, electrolytes, Band-Aids and insect repellent.
- Water bottle - we recommend a 1.5 liter capacity for which we can provide potable water. Bottled water is also available but we prefer to use safe drinking water rather than contribute to polluting the environment.
- Spare batteries - our trips have access to power to recharge batteries for phones and cameras most days, but we recommend you take spare batteries for your camera.
- Electrical travel adapter plug
- Inner sleep sheet/bag for added comfort during overnight stays.
- Money belt
- Torch or flash light
- Hand sanitizer
- Neck pillow for those long, bumpy drives

## OPTIONAL

- Ear plugs to guard against street noise and snorers.
- A good book, a journal and music player for longer drives.
- Images from home - during our trip there will be many opportunities for you to meet and talk with locals. One way to start any conversation is with pictures. We recommend that you bring some photos / postcards of your family, home, city or country where you live, animals peculiar to your country etc.

## VALUABLES

Please try to avoid bringing unnecessary valuables, and use your hotel safe. We strongly recommend that you photocopy all important documents e.g. air tickets, passport, vaccination certificate, etc. and keep the copies separate from the originals. While not valid, a photocopy makes it very much easier to obtain replacements if necessary.

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## BACKGROUND READING

- The Great Game, Peter Hopkirk looks dull but one of the most fascinating books you can read on the 19<sup>th</sup> century posturing, wars, alliances and intrigues caused by the imperial rivalry of Britain and Russia.
- Setting the East Ablaze, Peter Hopkirk which specifically relates to the Bolshevik's annexation of Central Asia,
- Eastern Approaches, Fitzroy Maclean Fitzroy Maclean recounts his adventures in Central Asia during the Soviet era in the 1930s and 40s.
- The Lost Heart of Asia, Colin Thurbron recounting his travels through Central Asia in the aftermath of the break-up of the Soviet Union.

## CURRENCY

### TAJIKISTAN

The official currency of Tajikistan is the Tajik Somoni (TJS). Tajikistan is mainly a cash-only economy. Only change money at officially authorized currency exchanges. These are often found at bazaars, airline offices and hotels. Very few establishments will accept credit cards. There is a small, but increasing number of ATMs in Dushanbe and other larger towns, but none in rural areas and they may not accept foreign cards or have enough cash to dispense. US dollars are the most widely accepted foreign currency; other currencies, apart from Euros or Russian rubles, may be difficult to exchange.

## TRAVELLING ON A GROUP TRIP

As you travel on a group trip, you will be exposed to all the pleasures and maybe some of the frustrations of travelling in a group. Your fellow travellers will probably come from all corners of the world and likely a range of age groups too.

We ask you to understand the various needs and preferences of your group - patience with your fellow travellers is sometimes required for the benefit of everyone's travel experience. Remember too that you have responsibilities to the group. If you are requested to be at a place at a specific time, ensure that you don't keep the rest of the group waiting.

We have found time and time again that the very best trips we operate are those where the dynamics within the group work well - this takes just a little effort on your part.

We cannot provide you with contact details and any personal information about your fellow travellers booked on your trip before departure due to privacy reasons.

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#### IMPORTANT TRAVEL NOTES

- As a responsible tour operator, your safety is our priority. Tajikistan is a safe country to visit, but your Tour Leader and local guides will advise you further about travel in these locations.
- This tour is not suited for children under the age of 12 (please check with Tour Manager), as well as those who are less able as some hiking is involved (albeit, relaxed).
- If you have a medical condition which may affect your health or safety during your trip, you must inform us before the visa application.
- ❓ After the tour, we will send out a list of all participants' emails so you can keep in touch, swap photos etc. If you do not wish to be on this list, then please let us know.

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## TERMS & CONDITIONS

**CANCELLATION** If you are unable to receive visas for this tour or the tour is cancelled by our partners a full refund will be made. Please note this tour is charged in US\$ If we receive any other currency this will be converted to US\$ on that day's exchange rate fixed by the Bank of China. Any refund will be made according to the euro amount we received and not the original currency sent. With all refunds, Koryo Tours will not be held liable for any bank charges.

**STANDARD DISCLAIMER:** Koryo Tours reserves the right to withdraw service and cancel a tour at any time. In this eventuality, a full refund of any monies paid by the customer will be made.

Koryo Tours cannot be held responsible for any mishap to yourself or your property and in particular any consequence or effects of flight/train cancellation/delay, robbery, sickness, government intervention or other such happenings.

**INSURANCE** Koryo Tours insist that tourists travelling on all of our tours have full medical insurance. You are advised to insure yourself against any possible risk that may occur and in particular to ensure that sufficient insurance has been obtained in respect of any dependant relatives. It is your responsibility to be covered by insurance which must include medical expenses and the cost of repatriation should you become too ill to continue.

The prices on this website are correct at the time of website publication; however, Koryo Tours reserves the right to raise or lower its prices at any time. We also reserve the right to correct errors in both advertised and confirmed prices (both before and after your confirmation has been issued). Please note, changes and errors sometimes occur. Flight/train price increases are out of our control, and any fee increase may be passed on to the tourist.

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