



UZBEKISTAN AND KARAKALPAKSTAN ADVENTURE TOUR

TOUR

October 28th - November 6th 2024

OVERVIEW

Join experts in Central Asian travel, Koryo Tours, on our inaugural Uzbekistan tour. Enjoy the blockbuster sights of Uzbekistan, the heart of the Silk Road... And explore its hidden treasures, too!

Tempted by the Golden Road to **Samarkand**? Uzbekistan's highlights have drawn travellers for centuries. From the showstoppers in Tamerlane's blue-domed capital to **Holy Bukhara**, where the sky-scraping **Tower of Death** so impressed Genghis Khan he spared it from the city-wide orgy of destruction.

Uzbekistan boasts many more survivors against the odds. On this Uzbekistan tour, we voyage into the remote northwest, **Karakalpakstan**, where trawlers lie beached far from the tragic Aral Sea. Here, we will see spell-binding paintings saved from Soviet authorities who had killed some of the artists.

This Uzbekistan tour, taking you by **road, rail, and air**, will unlock amazing human survival stories. On a collective farm outside Tashkent, we'll learn about the **Koreans** deported here en masse from the Soviet Far East. Some ended up Heroes of Socialist Labour as they grew the best rice for plov, the Uzbek pride and joy, and embodied the spirit of internationalism.

An Uzbekistan Tour like no other. Relish the oasis cities of Samarkand, Bukhara and Khiva. And discover Soviet thrills like a top-secret solar furnace built, surely, for a Bond villain...

Scroll down for an overview of the Uzbekistan and Karakalpakstan Tour highlights, tour itinerary, transport options, Uzbekistan visa information, and extra add-ons. Nick Bonner and Calum MacLeod will accompany this tour.

Guest lecturer: Calum MacLeod

Calum explored Uzbekistan in 1992, the first year of independence. He has been returning ever since to enjoy more of its cultural and natural treasures. He co-wrote the first dedicated guidebook to Uzbekistan in English (Odyssey, with Bradley Mayhew) and has designed Koryo's inaugural tour.

Calum worked as China correspondent for The Times and The Independent, and Asia correspondent for USA Today. But says nothing beats a round of shashlik kebabs, on a plate of warm naan bread, at an Uzbek bazaar.



DAY ONE: Monday 28th October

Arrival Day

- **Flights to Tashkent** (airport code TAS). Arrive from many international destinations. Let us know which flight you will be on, and we will arrange your pick-up and transfer to the hotel. Arriving even earlier is, of course, fine and can be accommodated.
- 18:00 Today we start the tour with a group dinner of excellent local food, coordination and a briefing session, before the adventure ahead!

Meals | Dinner

Overnight | Tashkent

DAY TWO: Tuesday 29th October

Tashkent and Parkent - Peeling back Uzbekistan's multilayered capital.

- **Polar Star Collective Farm.** We head south to explore the fascinating story and enduring legacy of the Korean people in Central Asia, forced here by Stalin from the Soviet Far East in 1937. The museum at this former kolkhoz commemorates Kim Pen Hwa, who led farmers in transforming marshland, winning a record haul of Socialist Labour Hero medals, raising football stars and changing public sentiment.
- **Institute of the Sun.** Bond villain lair! Next, we travel east through the Parkent wine country to the foothills of the Tien Shan Mountains and the formerly off-limits Institute of the Sun. This giant solar furnace, one of only two worldwide, was a top-secret military installation fired by 12,000 mirrors. Melting experiments continue today...so mind your step.
- Evening - Transfer to Tashkent airport for evening flight to Nukus (20.00-21.40), capital of Karakalpakstan.

Meals | Breakfast and Lunch

Overnight | Nukus

DAY THREE: Wednesday 30th October

Nukus and the Ship Graveyard

- **Nukus and Muynak.** The “Land of Black Hats”, deserts and drama, Karakalpakstan is the Stan within a Stan, a (nominally) autonomous republic that occupies over one-third of Uzbekistan’s land and hides many Soviet secrets – including a bioweapons island on the Aral Sea. Today we will be accompanied by a veteran Aral expert.
- **Mizdakhn Cemetery.** For legends, ladders and star-crossed lovers, we join local pilgrims at hilltop Mizdakhn, the oldest active necropolis in Central Asia. Highlights include the cool beauty of the Mazlumkhan Sulu mausoleum, where bow-tie tiles reflect the citadel’s first, fire-worshipping faith, Zoroastrianism. At the legendary tomb of Adam, better known as a world clock, visitors pile up seven bricks to delay doomsday.
- **Aral Sea Ship Graveyard.** We travel by road to Muynak, the fishing port and holiday town abandoned by the sea. Trawlers rust below a lighthouse on a dry, toxic seabed now over 100km from the shoreline. Two museums illustrate one of the world’s worst ecological disasters: the Aral has shrunk by 90% thanks to thirsty cotton farming.

Meals | Breakfast and Lunch

Overnight | Nukus

DAY 4: Thursday 31st October

Nukus and Khorezm - a day packed with fabulous art and desert forts.

This trip to Karakalpakstan will be fulfilling a decades-long dream of Koryo Tours' co-founder and CEO, Nick Bonner to visit the stunning 'lost' avant-garde art at the Savitsky Museum.

- **Igor Savitsky Art Museum.** The remoteness of Karakalpakstan helped canny collector Savitskiy (1915-84) save from oblivion what’s become the region’s top attraction. He rescued the twilight zone of the Russian avant-garde by squirrelling paintings away in his adopted home Nukus. Highlights include Yevgeny Lysenko’s The Bull, with its shotgun eyes, and sketches on food wrappers of her seven gulag years by Nadezhda Borovaya – Savitsky fooled officials by saying they depicted Nazi concentration camps.
- **The Egypt of Central Asia.** We make the overland transfer to Khiva by exploring the clay fortresses (kala) that protected the “lost” civilisation of ancient Chorasmia (Khorezm). From the 4th century BC to the 3rd century AD, its people worshipped at Zoroastrian fire temples, traded widely, painted graceful murals, studied the stars and loved their wine. Our stops will include a clamber up the Chilpik Dakhma, a Tower of Silence where birds of prey picked clean the departed. We will be accompanied by our very own ace archaeologist.

Meals | Breakfast and packed lunch

Overnight | Khiva

DAY 5: Friday 1st November

Khiva

- This walled wonder remains so intact you can still believe, like a visitor in 1873, that it's no "real city, but a leaf torn from the enchanted pages of the Arabian Nights."
- **Minarets, madrasahs, mausolea and more.** Our walking tour enters Khiva's UNESCO-listed inner city through the West Gate. The Kalta Minaret, the first of several outstanding towers, stayed "Short" when Bukhara's jealous emir enticed the architect away mid-project (legend has it).
- **Muhammad Rahim Khan Madrasah.** The city's last grand madrasah (Islamic college), built by the reformist ruler better known as poet Feruz. Meet his waxwork in the history museum here - and watch out for circus acts.
- **Pakhlavan Mahmoud Mausoleum.** "Will I be remembered over my ashes?" runs a poem above the tombstone of Khiva's wrestler-saint. Seven centuries later, join the crowds of pilgrims answering his question.
- **The Juma (Friday) Mosque.** This offers a cool retreat from the bright desert heat. Over 200 wooden pillars are carved with symbols stretching back into Khorezm's Zoroastrian roots.
- Grab a bike to roam the outer city, including the dilapidated charm of Islam Khodja's summer retreat. Feruz's modernising prime minister received Russian and other ambassadors in its beautiful reception halls.

Meals | Breakfast and Lunch

Overnight | Khiva

DAY 6: Saturday 2nd November

Khiva to Bukhara

- **Cross Kyzyl Kum (Red Sands).** Today, it is time to cross the vast Kyzyl Kum, the biggest desert plain in Central Asia at around 300,000 square kilometres. Silk Road traders battled the elements for centuries. Miners dig for them at remote gold and uranium towns Zarafshan and Uchkuduk. The Kyzyl Kum stretches the width of Uzbekistan here between the region's two major rivers.
- The Syr Darya to the north (the Jaxartes to the ancients) long marked the boundary between the nomadic steppe and settled civilisations. The Amu Darya (Oxus) to the south separates the Kyzyl Kum from the Kara Kum (Black Sands) desert of Turkmenistan and long divided the Persian and Turkic worlds. At the journey's end, we enter Bukhara, which beautifully combines these elements and more.

Meals | Breakfast and Packed Lunch

Overnight | Bukhara

DAY 7: Sunday 3rd November

Bukhara - Everywhere else, it was said, light shone down from heaven. In Holy Bukhara, the light shone up.

- **Lyabi-Hauz ensemble.** We stay in a nearby boutique hotel, so this atmospheric square forms your hub too as it's long been for Bukharans drawn by the mulberry-tree shaded pool (hauz), teahouses and madrasah, now packed with tempting handicrafts.
- **Trading places.** Our city walk follows the network of 16th-century domed bazaars, including the Cap Makers, Jewellers and Money Changers, that fuelled Bukhara's second golden age – and still offer great shopping.
- **Kalon Minaret.** Bukhara's world-beating "Great" Minaret is an 11th-century masterpiece and lighthouse for trade caravans seeking oasis refuge. It was dubbed the Tower of Death for the criminals, sewn into sacks, and tossed from the top on market days.
- **Ismail Samani Mausoleum.** The sands of time hid this brilliant brick cube, packed with symbolism, from the Mongol war machine. Its builder (849-907) ushered in a golden age when Central Asia's scientists and writers led the world.
- **Backstreet delights.** We have a wealth of recommendations to reward the curious.

Meals | Breakfast and Lunch
Overnight | Bukhara

DAY 8: Monday 4th November

Bukhara to Samarkand

- **Royal Road.** Today, we take the Royal Road, an ancient caravan route linking the foremost cities of Transoxiana.
- **Gijduvan.** After the towering Vabkent Minaret, we pause in Gijduvan where the tomb of Khoja Abdulkhalik Gijduvani (1103-79) draws the faithful on the Bukhara pilgrimage circuit of Seven Sufi Saints.
- The town is also famous for master potters such as brothers Abdullo and Alisher Narzullaev, who craft traditional floral designs of local browns and yellows with unique colour glazing fired in huge tandyr kilns. Further east, we stop at two 11th-century survivors: the intriguing, nine-domed Deggoroniy Mosque and the Rabati Malik caravanserai, a Silk Road service station.

Meals | Breakfast and Lunch
Overnight | Samarkand

DAY 9: Tuesday 5th November

Samarkand

- Follow in the footsteps of giants to savour the Mirror of the World.
- **Gur Emir Mausoleum.** From peerless blue dome to epic occupant, the “Tomb of the Ruler” has it all, although he’d planned a simpler resting place. Amir Timur (Tamerlane, 1336-1405) was the last nomadic conqueror to shake the world, from Russia to India.
- **Registan ensemble.** The crossroads of Tamerlane’s capital, where six arteries met under a domed bazaar, bloomed into Samarkand’s stunning centrepiece after grandson Ulug Beg, the astronomer-king, built his beautiful madrasah (Islamic college). Two more, two centuries later, complete the most photographed sight on the Silk Road.
- **Shah-i-Zinda necropolis.** Climb the Staircase of Sinners to enter the street of the dead, the city’s holiest site. Timurid family tombs from the 14th century showcase an unrivalled celebration of ceramic art in turquoise blues and floral motifs.
- **Tomb of Daniel.** Yes, of the lions’ den. Tamerlane brought the saint’s remains to Samarkand where they grew each year, so the grave was enlarged into today’s super-sized sarcophagus. Join pilgrims here from all three major Abrahamic religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam.
- **Kalontarov mansion.** On former Soviet Street, in the UNESCO-protected European town, explore the eclectic home of Jewish merchant Abram Kalontarov. He hoped to entertain Tsar Nicholas II, but instead had to house the Central Committee of the Uzbek Communist Party from 1925-30.

Meals | Breakfast and Lunch

Overnight | Samarkand

DAY 10: Wednesday 6th November

Samarkand to Tashkent

- Transfer by fast Afrosiyob train to Tashkent (08.23-12.12)
- If time allows before your flight, ride the jaw-dropping metro to imposing squares, monumental buildings and fine museums. No longer demolishing Soviet cultural heritage, the capital now celebrates its architecture as Tashkent Modernism.
- Afternoon - Transfer to the airport. Departure.

End of tour.

Meals | Breakfast and Lunch



