



PERSIAN NEW YEAR TOUR - TAJIKISTAN

TOUR OVERVIEW

March 22 – 31, 2018
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 a Spring clean. During the remainder of the week, events such as dancing and wrestling take place in the build up to the most exciting event of the year – the national game of Buzkashi! This amazing sport is considered by some to be the most dangerous in the world. It is a breath-taking event from its build up through to its action. It could be described as 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 is the one to break out of the melee and place the goat upon a central mound.

We will of course attend this fascinating event on the day it takes place. For the rest of the tour, we take in the country's capital of Dushanbe with its polished centre and outlying soviet monuments and architecture. We leave the city and pass the stunning snow-capped Fan Mountains on our way to Khujand, where we stop at the Khoja Obi Garm Spa. In Khurjand we visit the history museum, a local market, and the tallest statue of Lenin in central Asia. Retracing some of our steps we drive through the world's longest tunnel and cross the country to the historical city of Panjikent. Here we will not only learn about Rudaki, a famous 5th century Persian poet, but also visit the ancient city that is now a world heritage site close to the Uzbek border. Driving back over the Fan Mountains to Dushanbe pay a last visit to a semi-functional cognac factory for some free samples and shopping – we couldn't think of a better way to end the tour!

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. We will also add in extra activities 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 who ensures that the journey is safe in terms of the vehicles we use and the areas we visit. An experienced Koryo Tours guide will also accompany the trip.

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WHY SHOULD I BOOK THIS TOUR?

As with all of our tours we want to offer you good value for money, which means you will be kept on your toes from dawn until dusk. Not only will we visit what is listed on the itinerary, but will also make use of free time and the long drives to see as much of the country as we can. We have been working in Tajikistan with our partners for many years, and we have never stopped adjusting and improving our tours to make sure we show you the best this beautiful country has to offer. Additionally, we choose hotels not only based on comfort and location but also based on their unique and unusual style, so as to make the tour even more interesting.

DAILY ITINERARY

MARCH 22ND – THURSDAY (DAY 1)

AM

- This morning is a free morning for settling in, exploring, and acclimatizing whilst we wait 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, and there is a lovely museum that offers a nice 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 interesting **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, a kitchen area, and reading room. Breakfast provided in buffet style in the main restaurant area.

MARCH 23RD – FRIDAY (DAY 2)

AM

Today we begin our day with a morning walking tour of Dushanbe, where we will walk or drive to the following sites:

- **Victory Park:** This Park was built in 1975 to commemorate the Victory in the Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945. The park offers great 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 amazing 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:** because many old market places have been closed in Dushanbe's drive for modernization, we will visit one of the new areas where local people travel to buy fruit and vegetables as well as 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 Teahouse:** this was once the largest teahouse 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.

MARCH 24th – SATURDAY (DAY 3)

AM

- After breakfast we drive out of Dushanbe and follow the **Varzob River** North to the stunning **Varzob Valley**. Along the way we will pass scenic lakes, stunning 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 it is possible to hike into the mountains for amazing views of the surrounding valley.
- On our way back to Dushanbe we will stop if there are any local events such as holiday wrestling, dancing, or singing to make the most of our time in the country.

PM

- Late afternoon is left free for your own explorations and adventures in Dushanbe – holiday decorations will be up by now and we will be able to expect a lively atmosphere on the weekend.

Meals: Breakfast and Lunch

Overnight: Hotel Vatan.

MARCH 25th – 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, and the photos you will take will blow the mind of anyone you show them to! The location of this spectacular event changes from year to year, so we might have to drive for a while to get there. The aim is to arrive when the event is in the throes of setting up so we can watch the competitors arrive. We will stay until the end of the game so as to make the best use of our time, enjoy this spectacular game, and of course take amazing photos!

PM

- In addition to Buzkashi there may be **wrestling** and **dancing**, which will give us the opportunity to people watch and mingle with the friendliest people in all of Central Asia. Snacks and drinks are often available for sale. An incredible day is guaranteed!

Meals: Breakfast and Lunch

Overnight: Hotel Vatan.

MARCH 26th – 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*! A true relic of the USSR days.

PM

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

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch and dinner

Overnight:

Khoja Obi Garm Spa - the rooms in this Soviet monster are a little more basic and older, although warm and comfortable. It is possible to use the health facilities at the hotel, and we will also have the opportunity to explore this surreal complex late into the evening (if you’re brave enough!).

MARCH 27th – 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 the 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 on and cross into the **Fergana Valley** – the ancient crossroads of cross-continental trade and home to some of the great cities of the Silk Road. 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 banks of the Kayrakum reservoir the hotel is a comfortable yet bizarre option, combining pseudo Romanesque architecture whilst reliving the cult seventies TV show The Prisoner. It has health spa facilities on site, restaurants, a bar, a nightclub, and even bowling!

MARCH 28TH – WEDNESDAY (DAY 7)

AM

- Today will be 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; here you can buy 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 that looks at the history of the 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 the bizarre **Arbob Cultural Palace**, which originally housed the former headquarters of a Soviet collective farm. It was designed as a recreation of the St. Petersburg Winter Palace and built during the Soviet 1950s – a fantastic local curiosity!

Meals: Breakfast: Lunch and dinner

Overnight: Bahoriston Hotel

MARCH 29TH - THURSDAY (DAY 8)

AM

- As we bid Farewell 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 huge geological features evident in this part of the world. On our way to Panjikent, we will make a short detour to visit the



tomb and **Museum of Rudaki** (Panjikent is the birthplace of Abu Abdullah Rudaki, considered by many to be the father of Persian poetry).

PM

- This afternoon we have a historical tour of **ancient Panjikent**, where we will view ruins of the Sogdian town, which was founded in the 5th century and finally abandoned in the 8th century after the Arab 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. Afterwards, we will have a traditional style dinner in a beautiful local home.

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch and dinner

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 of his visits to Europe.

MARCH 30th – Friday (DAY 9)

AM

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

PM

- **By mid afternoon we drive back into Dushanbe** where you can spend a free afternoon to do some last minute sightseeing into one of the history museums, local shopping, or browsing one of the unique Soviet-era **antique shops**.

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch and dinner

Overnight: Hotel Vatan, Dushanbe

MARCH 31ST – SATURDAY (DEPARTURE DAY)

Today the tour ends. All group members will be taken to the airport for their individual 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.

Meals: Breakfast.

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ACCOMODATION

On this adventure, we will be staying in a range of different accommodations, but all 3-4 *. All rooms have an en suite bathroom. Single travellers will be given a room to share, unless you would rather have your own room – the supplement for a single room is 50 USD per night.

Spending extra nights in Tajikistan at the beginning of the tour are also 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 advice on the options when you arrive.

Tajikistan's national dish is Plov – this is a rice-based dish that is normally 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. Normally every meal will come with delicious, locally cooked fresh bread.

Green and black tea is the national drink is choice – this can be expected with almost every meal. There will be the chance to purchase alcoholic beverages in most locations.

DIETRY REQUIREMENTS

Please note that vegetarian food choices can be limited although your needs can be catered to on the tour. However, if 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 so as such we would strongly recommend you bring these dietary items.

TRANSPORT

All ground transport is included in this tour. We use mini buses to get around in both the cities and in countryside; there are some long drives, which will be broken up where possible.

VISAS

All visitors to Tajikistan require a visa. You will need to apply for a visa yourself; the application procedure is a relatively straightforward process. You can apply for your visa online [here](#).

Please contact us should you need any advice or supporting documents for your visa application.

Please note you will **not** need to obtain a Gorno-Badakshan Autonomous Oblast (GBO) for this tour.

PACKING

Generally speaking, we recommend you pack as lightly as possible and make sure that you are able to 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, including 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.
** Please note 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

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.

BACKGROUND READING

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

CURRENCY

The official currency of Tajikistan is the Tajik Somani (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 there are none in rural areas, and they may not accept foreign cards or have enough cash to

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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 be understanding of 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 certain 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.

Due to privacy reasons we are unable to provide you with contact details and any personal information about your fellow travellers booked on your trip prior to departure.

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 Tajikistan.
- This tour is not suited for children under the age of 12 (please check with Tour Manager if you would like to bring your child on this tour), 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 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.

TERMS & CONDITIONS

CANCELLATION If you are unable to receive visas for this tour or the tour is cancelled by our partners, we will fully refund the tour price. Please note the tour price is 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 amount we received in dollars and not the original currency sent. With all refunds, Koryo Tours will not be held liable for any bank charges.

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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 increase in fee may be passed on to the tourist.