



RUN DUSHANBE

MARATHON INFO

The **Dushanbe International Half Marathon** is the main event in celebrations for Dushanbe's 'Day of the City' and happens on the third Saturday of every April – for 2019 the race will take place on **Saturday April 20**. There is only the one race distance – the half marathon – that can be entered, and the race course is fully certified by AIMS (Association of International Marathons and Distance Races).

In 2019 the tenth edition of the race will take place; this will only be the fourth year that foreign amateur runners have been able to participate. Koryo Tours is very excited to present their Second Dushanbe International Half Marathon tour, which will not only get you to the event, but also allow you to explore this fascinating, yet relatively unknown, country. 2019 looks to be bigger and better in 2019 as the celebrations will reflect the 10th city day celebrations.

MARATHON ROUTE

The race route is a one way circuit taking in many of the iconic buildings, monuments, and sights of central Dushanbe: the National Museum, the Dushanbe Flagpole (the second tallest flagpole in the world), the circle of Karamov, Rudaki Park, and the National Parliament building all feature along the route with the finish line located at the Monument of Isomoli Somoni, Emir of the Samanid Empire and considered father to the Tajik nation. The route is very scenic and a great way to experience Dushanbe. And of course the streets will also be lined with locals cheering you on!

The time limit for the race is 3 hours and there are cash prizes on offer for the top 5 finishers.

TOUR

April 18 - 25
7 nights in Tajikistan

OVERVIEW

Incredible, yet relatively unknown, Tajikistan is one of the most unique countries in the world. In the heart of Central Asia, it not only has fascinating ancient and recent history – it was formerly part of all manner of empires and states up to the Soviet Union, and independence in the 1990s – but its population is also known for their friendly nature (rightly so in our experience!). The country is also filled with breath-taking scenery and views. This tour is a seven-night adventure that will not only get you there to experience all of this, but that will also allow you to join in the local Tajik celebrations for their 'Day of the City', and run in the 2019 Dushanbe International Half Marathon. Marvel at the country's mesmerising scenery, discover fascinating history, and meet the friendliest people we know!

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HIGHLIGHTS

- Participate in the little-known Dushanbe International Half Marathon, as the streets are lined with locals cheering you on
- Explore the UNESCO-listed ruins of ancient Panjikent
- Journey across the beautiful snow-capped Fan Mountains
- Camp on the shores of stunning glacial Lake Alexander
- Get a massage at the surreal Soviet health spa of Khoja Obi Garm – a surreal place like something straight from a movie

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 as possible is covered and will also add in extra activities when there is time. We will make the most of your time in Tajikistan to guarantee the experience of a lifetime.

SAFETY

At Koryo Tours our priority is yours and the group's safety. Since 2014 we have worked with a local travel agency who ensure that the journey is safe in terms of vehicles we use and areas we visit. An experienced Koryo Tours guides will accompany the trip.

DAILY ITINERARY

APRIL 18th – THURSDAY (ARRIVAL IN DUSHANBE)

AM

- The tour group meets at 13.30 in the hotel reception for an orientation & introduction meeting.

PM

- Afternoon drive to **Hissar Fortress**. This large and impressive site is said to date back to the days of Cyrus the Great (around 600BC) and to have been captured 21 times by invading forces – making one question how effective a fortress it is! Much of this area has been restored over the years and there is a lovely museum offering a nice introduction to the country – a great chance to learn about the country's history and catch up with local people who also visit the site.
- Upon our return to Dushanbe we will stop by a local school to photograph an interesting statue of **Lenin**, a soviet remnant, and learn a bit about the country's educational system too.

Overnight:

Hotel Vatan – newly built and with an excellent location. This comfortable hotel has beautiful rooms located on a designated floor with free laundry facilities, a kitchen area, and reading room. Breakfast provided buffet style in the main restaurant area.

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APRIL 19th – FRIDAY (EXPLORE DUSHANBE)

AM

- We begin with a half-day walking tour of Dushanbe, including **Victory Park, Rudaki Street, Central Park**, and the **Monument of Ismaili Somoni**. We will also follow the route of the Dushanbe Marathon. Along this route we will learn about the development of the city over the years. From its ancient origins, to the Soviet-era (when it was called *Frunze*), to modern day Dushanbe.

PM

- This afternoon is free for further exploration or for training for tomorrow's big event. We have secured the use of Dushanbe's premier gym should you wish to work out and get ready for the adventure ahead!

Overnight: Hotel Vatan, Dushanbe

APRIL 20th – SATURDAY (DUSHANBE HALF MARATHON)

AM

- Today is our main event! We make an early start for this unique opportunity: The **Dushanbe International Half Marathon!** We will run with local athletes and amateurs, and there will be medals and prizes for finishers and winners!

PM

- After the morning's exertions you deserve some rest! Therefore the afternoon will be free for relaxation or for further exploration with your tour leader to visit the nearby local market for some local flavours and experiences.
- We also expect celebrations in some local parks to mark the **City Day Holiday**. So we will find them and join in, and the most welcoming people in the world will definitely show you a good time on this occasion – be ready for some socializing and great photo opportunities too!

Overnight: Hotel Vatan, Dushanbe

APRIL 21st – SUNDAY (VARZOB VALLEY & SOVIET HEALTH SPA)

AM

- The tour continues as we depart Dushanbe and follow the Varzob River into the mountains, driving up through the **Varzob Gorge** where we will stop on the way for photos of this scenic area. Our goal for this morning is the small village of Takob. Upon arrival we will hike for 30 minutes through this hamlet where we will be rewarded by a visit to a local family whose home has amazing views of the surrounding area.

PM

- We will have lunch given to us in the local Tajik way: sitting on the floor. You will lose count of the number of courses!
- We continue our drive through the mountains until we reach our next 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.
- A full range of 'treatments' can be enjoyed here, from radon baths to massages, leeches to swimming, or you can simply explore and relax. This is one of those great 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 giving us the opportunity to explore this surreal complex late into the evening (if you're brave enough).

APRIL 22nd – MONDAY (PANJIKENT)

AM

- We begin with a long drive from the health resort over mountain roads out across the **Fan Mountains** working our way up through the '**Tunnel of Death**' – an Iranian-built long road tunnel burrowing under the mountains, the nickname overstates the danger but it can be nerve-wracking although it is very safe in reality. We stop along the way to take breath-taking shots of this beautiful mountain range. Today's destination is **Panjikent**. We will make a detour en route 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, 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 of his visits to Europe.

APRIL 23rd – TUESDAY (FAN MOUNTAINS & ALEXANDER LAKE)

AM

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

PM

- We drive along small mountain roads past local villages, abandoned factories, and scenic and stunning views. Eventually we will arrive at the remote and secluded **Iskanderkul** (Alexander Lake – named after Alexander the Great). We have the option of hiking or relaxing by its beautiful shores. The lake sits at an altitude of 2195 metres; a stunning alpine body of water.

Overnight:

Alexander Lake Guesthouse - we stay in a small mountain village seemingly cut off from the outside world with the mountains as our backdrop. , for those who wish you may watch sunset and sunrise (recommended!) in this location there are no single rooms availability. The facilities may be basic but the surrounding countryside needs to be seen.

APRIL 24th – WEDNESDAY (RETURN TO DUSHANBE)

- After a relaxing morning for photos, further hiking, or sleeping, we return over the mountain pass to **Dushanbe**. We should arrive in the capital around mid-afternoon. You can use your free afternoon for some last minute sightseeing, to visit one of Dushanbe's history museums, do some shopping, or browse in one of the unique Soviet-era **antique shops**.

Overnight: **Hotel Vatan**, Dushanbe



APRIL 25th – THURSDAY (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.

TOUR PACKING LIST

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. Temperatures can get very low overnight in some parts of Tajikistan – be prepared for changes in temperature throughout the day. In some areas it will still be cold so something warm, such as a fleece, is also a good idea to bring along (we advice 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. In such sites women are asked to wear a headscarf or something to cover the hair. Tajikistan is not a very strict Islamic country so only in sites of religious worship is this customary.
- 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/grass-lands, 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
- For running the half marathon you will of course need running kit.

TOUR PACKAGE

INCLUDED

- Airports pick up and drop off to and from Vatan, Dushanbe.
- Hotel accommodation.
- Marathon entrance fee

NOT INCLUDED

- Flights to and from Tajikistan
- Single room supplement (unless otherwise specified, US \$50 per night)

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- A Koryo Tours tour leader, Tajik tour guides, and a driver
- Warm up in Dushanbe's no. 1 gym pre-marathon
- All transportation in the country
- All entry fees for attractions and sights
- For all runners there will be a finisher's medal.
- Spending money for drinks and souvenirs
- Tajikistan visa (visa fees vary at different embassies)
- Tip for the guides (approx. US \$120)
- We occasionally have the opportunity to visit a performance - this is to be paid on the spot

ADDITIONAL NOTES

- Please note that when on tour your day-to-day itinerary may differ to what is advertised above. Your tour leader will ensure, however, that everything available at the time is covered, and replacement options are provided where needed. We will also add in extra activities when there is time.
- After the tour, we will send out a list of all participants' emails so you can keep in touch, swap photos, etc. after the tour. If you do not wish to be on this list then please let us know.

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

Many 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.

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.

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



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.

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.

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.

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Flight/train price increases are out of our control and any increase in fee may be passed on to the tourist.