



The Mountain Crossroads

Kyrgyzstan to Tajikistan

TOUR OVERVIEW

August 18 – 27, 2018

2 nights in Kyrgyzstan and 8 nights in Tajikistan (10 nights in total)

SUMMARY

The M41 **Pamir Highway** is a great route for any adventurous traveler following a road historically well-trodden by trade caravans (one link of the mighty Silk Route) and now by us! Crucial to both the old and current 'Great Game', this remains one of the most spectacular mountainous routes in the world and is still relatively little-travelled by western tourists, due largely to its location; locked away in Central Asia snaking through Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, and Uzbekistan.

We begin our adventure in Osh, Kyrgyzstan, visiting this ancient city with over 3000 years of history. We head up through the fertile Fergana Valley, cross the border into Tajikistan, push through the Pamir mountain range where we travel under the gaze of the 7134 metre **Lenin Peak**. Continuing with a stop at Murgab, known during the Soviet period as the Perminsky Pass, cutting through the Pamirs and eventually opening up into the Wakhan corridor; the division between Tajikistan and Afghanistan. we follow this border valley towards the Tajik capital city; **Dushanbe**.

Along our journey we will meet many of the varied peoples whom have made this tough landscape their home and catch a glimpse of their daily life, much of which remains little changed over the centuries. Also We will see some of the world's most stunning mountain scenery and unique ecology. We will have the chance to stop for photos, explore with optional hikes or simply relax and take in views, vibes, and atmosphere on this epic odyssey!

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 will also add in 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 priority is yours and the groups 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. 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 many of our other country tours in true Koryo fashion we will fill the day from dawn to dusk. This trip obviously has long drives, but we will break these up with stops to absorb the landscape and meet the locals.

We spend two nights in the hotel at the end of the tour, everywhere in-between will be one night hotel stops along the travel route, on some days it will mean early departures and late arrivals to make the most of the day. We have to cover a lot of ground, but at the same time we will make sure there are stops to explore what we are driving through and not simply whizz past interesting spots.

In this area the roads themselves are of mixed quality, with much of the way being sealed (paved) roads but other areas consisting of dirt and rock roads. Some of the mountain passes are high sided with large cliffs either side of the road – we have the best drivers though; experienced on these roads and conditions, they will look after us all the way!

Accommodation offered is of a good, clean, basic standard. As we are mostly in remote locations some of the hotels will have limited hot water supply and rooms can be somewhat simple. On this tour patience, understanding and tolerance for the occasional difficulty are essential – But we know you'll be too busy having an amazing time to worry about the occasional lack of hot water or slightly bumpy road!

The tour is adventurous and a true travel experience which will leave you with many stories and an insight into this relatively unknown part of the world – if this tickles your fancy then join us now!

DAILY ITINERARY

AUGUST 18 – SATURDAY (DAY 1)

After arrival in **Osh, Kyrgyzstan** all group members will be met at the airport and be taken to the tour hotel. We will gather at 13:00 in the hotel reception for our tour briefing and orientation.

In the afternoon, we will tour the city and visit the **Sulaiman-Too Sacred Mountain** and its various sites. This beautiful area has amazing views over Osh and was once a place of worship for Muslims as well as earlier pre-Islamic people. It is also one of Kyrgyzstan's first UNESCO listed sites.

At the top of the mountain we will view the **Babur's house**, which is now a mosque. The history of this small building is fascinating, and we'll learn about the stories surrounding it. Other sites that we will visit on the mountain are the **Tahti Suleiman Mosque**, a cave complex and the Museum of Sulaiman.

Meals: Lunch and dinner.

Accommodation: 3-4* hotel in Osh

AUGUST 19 – SUNDAY (DAY 2)

This morning we visit the **Jaima Bazaar**, an amazing market that is one of the largest in Central Asia and sells everything you could possibly need and a lot you wouldn't! Locals say Jaima Bazaar has been in existence for over 2000 years. We will have some time to explore the stalls and see trade being conducted from the backs of old shipping containers and the remains of Soviet-era trucks. Practice your haggling skills before lunch.

This afternoon we begin our adventure with a drive to the village of **Sary-Tash** through the high **Taldyk Pass**. This road was constructed between 1930 and 1932, and offers some grand views as we snake up over 3615 meters.

After our first day of driving we stay in this remote village with a population of only 1500 hardy souls. This backwater is surrounded by high mountains, seemingly cut off from the world outside.

Meals: Breakfast, lunch, dinner.

Accommodation: Local homestay.

AUGUST 20 – MONDAY (DAY 3)

After an early start we leave heading out back onto the highway, driving up through the **Kyzyl Art border point** up to 4,280 m. We say goodbye to our Kyrgyz guides and drivers and greet our Tajik hosts at the **Kizil Art border point**. The stark landscape on our route will make for some great photography as we make stops along the way. We are now in the **Republic of Tajikistan!**

After lunch we continue on to **Karakul Lake**. This high altitude lake was formed millions of years ago after a meteorite impact. We will stop here to enjoy the stunning views of the lake with the snow-capped **Lenin Peak** (which reaches 7134m, but is considered one of the easiest 7000m peaks in the world to climb) as its backdrop.

We drive upwards over the 4650m Ak-Baital Pass, the highest point on the M41 (Pamir) highway. In Tajikistan it is said that you are closest to the moon here, not only for the height of the place, but also due to the scenery looking like a lunar landscape. We eventually arrive in **Murgab** — formerly known as the Pamirsky Post, which was founded by the Russians in 1893 as their most advanced military outpost and remains the highest town in Tajikistan at 3,618 metres. The town is now home to around 4000 inhabitants. In Murgab, we will pay an afternoon visit to the **local bazaar**, the nearby **Lenin statue** and some Soviet reliefs.

Before dinner we will stop by a local yak herder's house to see what life is like in these remote regions of the country as well as learning just one herds yak!

Meals: Breakfast, lunch, dinner.

Accommodation: Local hotel.

AUGUST 21 – TUESDAY (DAY 4)

Today we drive to Langar village, continuing along the Pamir highway over the Khargush Pass at 4344 meters, driving past mountain lakes and arid lunar landscapes. We will stop for photographs as we go.

The pass leads us out to the **Wakhan Valley**, which runs for about 350km sandwiched between the **Pamir** and the **Karakorum** mountain ranges. This valley supports around 12,000 inhabitants in Tajikistan, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. Along the route we will follow the Panj River as it flows along the border with Afghanistan. We will regularly stop to take photos of the beautiful landscapes; time permitting we will also view some ancient petroglyphs (rock carvings).

We will stay the night in Langar village, (not to be confused with the village of the same name just across the border in Afghanistan)

Meals: Breakfast, lunch, dinner.

Accommodation: Local guesthouse.

AUGUST 22 – WEDNESDAY (DAY 5)

After breakfast and a short walk through the village, we continue along the Panj River and the border with Afghanistan following the Wakhan corridor.

We will stop at Vrang village to see **Osorkhonai Abdullo Ansori** and its museum. This once-important site is well worth the visit to view the ancient cave dwellings of Buddhist monks who lived here in the past, at the fringes of Buddhist civilisation.

As we continue onwards after lunch, we will tour the **Kahkaha Fortress** — to view the remains of this 4th century A.D fortress. This once-great, clay-built fortification is said to be named after a legendary epic hero; a king of fire worshippers. Its ruins now offer views of the surrounding countryside as well as a history lesson.

Our aim today is to make it to the town of **Khorogh**, the regional capital of the GBO area (**Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region**) with a population of 28,000. We will be able to squeeze in a chance to relax or soak in the outdoor **Garm Chashma Hot Springs** and the grave of Nosiri Khisrav Qabodieni.

Meals: Breakfast, lunch, dinner.

Accommodation: Local hotel.

AUGUST 23 – THURSDAY (DAY 6)

We continue our journey along the Panj River bordering Afghanistan, following the route of the old Silk Road and tracing in the footsteps of explorers such as Marco Polo.

On our drive today we will visit the many small towns and villages that line this well trodden path. In **Rushan, Dekh, Amun, and Kevran** we will visit local family homes and catch a glimpse of life in this remote corner of the world. Local people across this region are very friendly and welcoming. We will not be there to exoticise them but to interact, to hear what their lives are like, to learn and experience even in brief moments a little bit of commonality – you'll see when we are there what a treat this can be!

Meals: Breakfast, lunch, dinner

Accommodation: Local hotel.

AUGUST 24 – FRIDAY (DAY 7)

As we continue to trace the Panj River, we eventually bid farewell to the Pamir territory and enter **Khatlon Province** - Located in the Southeast of the country and one of the least visited parts of Tajikistan.

During the Soviet period, this was also one of the country's poorest regions, We will stop to view towns and cities along the way while looking out for the Soviet architecture dotted around this area. One of these towns is **Shurobod**, where very few changes have taken place since independence was achieved in 1991. Here we will stop here to see impressive mosaics of Lenin that remain on the side of the buildings.

We will also stop at **Kulyab**, the center of Khatlon province and fourth biggest town in Tajikistan. Kulyab has a history stretching back over 2500 years and borders Afghanistan. We will walk around the city, stop in at the **local museum**, and visit the **market** (one of the best ways to mix with the locals and their culture).

Meals: Breakfast, lunch, dinner.

Accommodation: Local hotel.

AUGUST 25 – SATURDAY (DAY 8)

Today is our final drive on the M41 Pamir Highway as we drive to towards the national capital, **Dushanbe**. *En route* we will stop to see the amazing **Khulbuk Fortress**, built in the 9th - 12th centuries AD and once a governor's palace. The fortress has been shortlisted at UNESCO as a place of "outstanding universal value to the world".

Later, we will also stop to view **Norak Basin** - a large reservoir that was created in 1961 when the 300 meter **Nurek Dam** was constructed. The dam is currently the second highest in the world. Unfortunately, we cannot get right next to it, but we can view it from a distance.

We make our final leg driving into the Dushanbe city for a well-deserved rest! We'll have dinner, and afterwards will have the opportunity to have a much needed drink in one of Dushanbe's bars – the first one is on us!

Meals: Breakfast, lunch, dinner.

Accommodation: Local hotel.



AUGUST 26 – SUNDAY (DAY 9)

This morning we begin our day with a city tour of Dushanbe. We will visit **Victory Park** on the hills above Dushanbe, where we'll have great views of the city. We will then stop on **Rudaki Street** to walk to Dushanbe's **Central Park**, stopping for photos at the Monument of Ismaili Somoni that is situated on the site of the old Lenin statue. Passing **Rudaki Park**, we will then walk on to the entrance of the **National Museum** where we will learn a little more about the beautiful country we have been visiting.

After lunch we will drive to the Victory tank monument ("**Oslinie Ushi**" — "The donkey ears", the local name for this monument), and visit the botanical gardens, before finishing our day with a visit to the **world's largest tea house** with its amazingly decadent interior.

Meals: Breakfast, lunch, dinner.

Accommodation: Local hotel.

AUGUST 27 – MONDAY (DAY 10)

Departure day! Airport transfers are provided for everyone regardless of the time of flight or where you are going.

There is also the option of extending your room until a later date – contact us to discuss this

End of Tour

ACCOMODATION

We will be staying in a range of accommodation on this adventure. For the first and last night of the tour we will be in 3-4 star hotels, and for the remainder of the tour we will stay mostly in 2-star hotels where the rooms will have en suite bathrooms.

There is one night where we will be staying with Kyrgyz families in a local home stay. This accommodation is very pleasant, but in true Kyrgyz tradition we will have to share the facilities. For this night only we may not be able to offer all tourists single supplements (those that are available will be offered in order of bookings received)

Single supplement is 45 USD per night. Please note for the home stay this will be finally confirmed if possible on the spot.

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

FOOD

All meals are included in this tour.

Plov is the national dish of Tajikistan - this rice based dish 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 the delicious locally cooked fresh bread.

Green and Black tea is the national drink and this can be expected with almost every meal. There will be the chance to purchase alcoholic beverages for an extra fee in most locations.

DIETRY REQUIREMENTS

Please note that vegetarian food choices can be limited although your needs can be catered for on the tour. If however you have any specialist 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 with you to supplement what you can eat of what is offered on the tour

TRANSPORT

All ground transport is included in this tour.

We use a combination of minibuses and 4x4's to get around in depending on the location and terrain. As previously mentioned, the roads will vary from sealed surfaces to those consisting of dirt and rock.

VISAS

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

KYRGYZSTAN VISA

Most nationalities no longer require a visa to travel to Kyrgyzstan for up to 60 days including Australia, Belgium, UK, Germany, Netherlands, Canada, New Zealand, Ireland, USA and Switzerland. Other nationalities should check with their nearest embassy and obtain a visa in advance if required.

TAJIKISTAN VISA

All visitors to Tajikistan require a visa. You will need to obtain your visa & Gorno-Badakshan Autonomous Oblast (GBAO) permit 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 are able to carry and lift your own luggage and walk with it for short distances.

Most travelers 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.in such sites women are asked to wear a head-scarf or something to cover hair. Tajikistan is not a militantly Islamic country so only in sites of religious worship is this customary.
- Temperatures can get very low overnight in some parts of Tajikistan – be prepared for changes in temperature throughout the day

- 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

- In some areas it will still be cold so something warm, such as a fleece, should be brought along.

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*, Peter Hopkirk. Looks dull but 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*, Peter Hopkirk. Specifically relates to the Bolshevik's annexation of Central Asia,
- *Eastern Approaches*, Fitzroy MacLean. 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

KYRGYZSTAN

The official currency of Kyrgyzstan is the Kyrgyzstan Som (KGS). This can only be obtained within Kyrgyzstan. Conversion of KGS back into other foreign currencies may prove difficult.

There are many private money changers in Kyrgyzstan, but if you choose to use them you must be sure to check the rate and your change carefully (your Tour Leader can advise). Major credit cards are rarely accepted in shops and restaurants even in bigger cities. In Bishkek you may be able to find ATMs that accept international cards and use them to withdraw local currency; however these should not be relied on as your sole financial source. Some souvenir sellers and tourist restaurants may accept USD or EUR as payment but all other purchases in Kyrgyzstan must be made in local currency.

TAJIKISTAN

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 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 travelers will probably come from all corners of the world and likely cover 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 travelers 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, please 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 travelers booked on your trip prior to departure.

IMPORTANT TRAVEL NOTES

- As a responsible tour operator, your safety is our priority. Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are safe countries 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 15 (please check with Tour Manager), as well as those who are less able as some hiking is involved (albeit, relaxed).
- The route is the second highest altitude international highway in the world (4,655 metres). We will take time to adjust to the heights and make the journey as comfortable as possible.
- 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 Koryo Tours cannot arrange visas or the tour is cancelled by our local 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 US\$ 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 all of our travellers 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.