



Buzkashi & Persian

New Year Tour

TOUR OVERVIEW

March 18 – 27, 2021
9 Night tour in Tajikistan

SUMMARY

Travel to Tajikistan over the Nowruz Persian New Year and see the Buzkashi (goat-pulling on horseback), ancient history, and breathtaking scenery.

As a crossroads of Central Asia and the Silk Road, Tajikistan has a rich and vibrant culture bringing together Persian, Greek, Turkic, Mongol, Russian, and Soviet culture throughout the ages.

Beginning from the capital Dushanbe, the centre of modern Tajik culture, we'll explore southern Tajikistan and set out across the countryside to find the Buzkashi. Watch as hundreds of horsemen work in teams and as individuals to pull a goat carcass through a goal. Dubbed the 'world's most dangerous sport', Buzkashi is a sight to behold!

We'll then head north over the beautiful and rugged Fann Mountains in the footsteps of Alexander the Great and Babur, the first Mughal emperor, on the way stopping at the colossal Khoja Obi Garm Soviet sanatorium - a gigantic Bond villain-like hideout - and the crystal clear waters of Lake Alexander, and pass through the 5 km long Anzob tunnel before reaching the Sughd region, once ancient Sogdia at the mouth of the Fergana Valley.

This tour will be led by expert tour leader Rich Beal, who has extensive experience planning and leading tours throughout Tajikistan and Central Asia. Because of Rich's close connection to the country, his fellow Tajik guides and friends like to joke the country is basically his third home (China and Mongolia being first and second)!

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.

The Experts in Travel to Rather Unusual Destinations.

info@koryotours.com | +86 10 6416 7544 | www.koryotours.com
27 Bei Sanlitun Nan, Chaoyang District, 100027, Beijing, China



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 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 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 amazing 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 interesting.

The Experts in Travel to Rather Unusual Destinations.

info@koryotours.com | +86 10 6416 7544 | www.koryotours.com
27 Bei Sanlitun Nan, Chaoyang District, 100027, Beijing, China

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 |

The Experts in Travel to Rather Unusual Destinations.

info@koryotours.com | +86 10 6416 7544 | www.koryotours.com
27 Bei Sanlitun Nan, Chaoyang District, 100027, Beijing, China

DAILY ITINERARY

MARCH 18 – THURSDAY (DAY 1)

Arrival day in Dushanbe

AM

- This morning is a free morning for settling in, exploring and acclimatizing whilst we wait for the whole tour group to arrive on different flights.

PM

- After our initial **pre-tour meeting and briefing**, 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 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, kitchen area and reading room. Breakfast provided buffet style in the main restaurant area.

MARCH 19 – FRIDAY (DAY 2)

Dushanbe City Tour

AM

- We begin our day with a morning **walking tour of Dushanbe** both by car and by foot, visiting the following locations:
- **Victory Park** | Built in 1975 commemorating the Victory in the Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945, this Soviet built monument offers great views of Dushanbe.
- **Rudaki & Somoni Avenues** | The two main streets in Dushanbe formally known as Lenin street and Putovskiy 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 Park** | 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 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** | With many of the cities old market places now closed in Dushanbe's drive for modernization we 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 Tea house** | For end-of-day relaxation this was once the largest tea house in the world, but it has now been remodeled as an entertainment facility for local people. now holding a cinema, bowling alleys and 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 20 – 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, stunning geological formations, and bizarre palatial residences of the Tajik elite.
- Our destination for the morning is the the **small village of Anzob**, where we join our friends for some traditional Tajik hospitality at their home. For those whom wish to we can hike into the mountains for amazing views of the surrounding valley.

PM

- 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.
- Late afternoon is left to **free time for your own explorations and adventures** in Dushanbe - holiday decorations would be up by now and a lively atmosphere on the weekend can be expected.

Meals: Breakfast and Lunch

Overnight: Hotel Vatan



MARCH 21 – 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!

Please note that 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 so as 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 assurance.

Meals: Breakfast and Lunch

Overnight: Hotel Vatan.

MARCH 22 – 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, leeches to swimming, or 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!

Meals | Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner.

Overnight | Khoja Obi Garm Spa, Fann Mountains. 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 to opportunity to explore this surreal complex late into the evening (if you’re brave enough.)



MARCH 23 – TUESDAY (DAY 6)

AM

- This morning we bid farewell to our villains 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 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: Local hotel in the city

MARCH 24 – WEDNESDAY (DAY 7)

AM

- A day of exploration today 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 two 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 marveling 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 not only the area but 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 **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 and built during the Soviet 1950's. This is a fantastic local curiosity.

Meals | Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner.

Overnight | Local hotel.



MARCH 25 - THURSDAY (DAY 8)

AM

- Departing Khujand, we retrace some of our route back over the Fann 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.
- 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.

Meals | Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner.

Overnight | Sugd Hotel, Panjikent. 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 26 – Friday (DAY 9)

AM

- This morning we bid farewell to Panjikent but not before a stop as its interesting and colourful **local market**. Driving out back to the **Fann 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**.

Meals | Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner.

Overnight | Hotel Vatan, Dushanbe.

MARCH 27 – SATURDAY (DEPARTURE DAY)

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 to other regions of Tajikistan and beyond– please speak to your Tour Manager to discuss options.

End of Tour



ACCOMODATION

We will be staying in a range of accommodation on this adventure from 3-4 *. All accommodation has 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 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 this can be expected with almost every meal, and 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 for on the 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 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 the cities and countryside; there are some long drives which will be broken up where possible.



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 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. For women travelers, 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

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 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 travelers 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 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, 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. 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 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

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.

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.

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.

