

## Pamir Highway & Afghan Borderlands

Tajikistan Tour | 2022

### Overview

This tour starts in **Dushanbe, Tajikistan**. We'll explore the stunning southern region of Tajikistan before joining the internationally famous M41 Pamir Highway back to the nation's capital on this 11 day adventure.

Crossing over high passes, through small local villages and marvelling at snow-capped mountains. Staying in small towns along the way, this journey will take you to some of this region's most remote but rewarding destinations, to ultimately spend time in **Dushanbe** — Tajikistan's lovely, laid back capital.

This journey will certainly be one to remember as we trundle along this stunning ribbon of semi-paved perfection through the heart of Central Asia, climbing over the vast mountains, peering across the border with Afghanistan, and enjoying the journey together.



## What's Included?

### Included:

- All Listed Meals
- All Listed Accommodation
- Drivers and Vehicles
- Local Guide
- Western Tour Leader
- Entrance Fees
- National Park Entrance Fees

### Not Included:

- Flights to/from Tajikistan
- Travel Insurance
- Snacks/Drinks/Extra Expenses
- Tips for Guides
- Tajik Visa - Advice/Support Available





## Itinerary Overview

*Check out the brief overview of our **Pamir Highway – Mountain Crossroads Tour** – or scroll down to see the in-depth run through of each day of the trip.*

- |                |                           |
|----------------|---------------------------|
| <b>Day 1.</b>  | Arrival in Dushanbe       |
| <b>Day 2.</b>  | Dushanbe to Qal'ai Khumb  |
| <b>Day 3.</b>  | Qal'ai Khumb to Khorogh   |
| <b>Day 4.</b>  | Drive to Langar           |
| <b>Day 5.</b>  | Langar to Ishkashim       |
| <b>Day 6.</b>  | Ishkashim to Khorogh      |
| <b>Day 7.</b>  | Khorogh City Tour         |
| <b>Day 8.</b>  | Drive to Qal'ai Khumb     |
| <b>Day 9.</b>  | Cross the Khaburabot Pass |
| <b>Day 10.</b> | Return to Dushanbe        |
| <b>Day 11.</b> | Departure Day             |



## Day 1

*Saturday August 20*

### ***Arrival Day in Dushanbe***

After arrival in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, all travellers will be met at the International Airport in the capital for transfer to the hotel.

After some time to relax in our local hotel, the whole tour group will meet for a pre-tour briefing where we'll discuss the upcoming adventure as a group before allowing you some free time in Tajikistan's laid back capital, Dushanbe. Alternatively, you can take the afternoon to recover from any jet-lag before our adventure begins early the following day.

**Accommodation:** *3-4 Star Hotel*

**Included Meals:** *Lunch, Dinner*

*For more information about the accommodation on this tour, check out the 'Accommodation' Tab on the Tour Page.*

## Day 2

*Sunday August 21*

### ***Dushanbe to Qal'ai Khumb***

This morning we're up and our early as our journey into the heart of southern Tajikistan begins in earnest.

Our first step will be the small town of **Norak**, home to the **Norak Dam**. Formerly the tallest dam in the world, it was completed in 1980 under the communist administration of the Tajik SSR. Today, it remains the second-largest man-made dam in the world, and a wonderful highlight for us as we trundle through the rural provinces south of Dushanbe.

Following our dam visit, we'll stop at the small town of **Danghara**, home to a fascinating local bazaar and an ancient fortress – we'll stop first at the bazaar to mingle with local Tajiks and purchase all manner of goods, as well as any supplies we may need for our onward journey.

Leaving the **Danghara Bazaar**, we'll make our way to **Khulbuk Fortress**; this ancient fortress is seen by many as a symbol of ancient civilization in Tajikistan – formerly a palace for the local ruler, it has been heavily reconstructed to show visitors the original grandiosity which the palace once commanded.

Departing Khulbuk, we'll arrive at the town of **Kulob** where we'll head straight to the local **museum** to learn about the history of the region, and the town itself. Following on from the museum, we'll stop by a beautiful **mosaic of Vladimir Lenin**, harking back to the days of the Soviet Union, before we trundle onwards, leaving Kulob, destined for our overnight stop – the city of **Qal'ai Khumb**.

**Accommodation:** *Karon Palace Hotel*

**Included Meals:** *Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner*

## Day 3

*Monday August 22*

### ***Qal'ai Khumb to Khorogh***

This morning we'll say goodbye to Qal'ai Khumb, although don't worry, we'll pass back through this regional centre on our return to Dushanbe. However, today we're venturing further into the mountainous heart of Tajikistan as we shadow the border between Afghanistan and Tajikistan on our way to the city of Khorogh.

On the way, we'll visit the village of Rushon where we'll have the chance to visit local family homes and see how locals live in this far flung corner of Central Asia. Local people across this region are very friendly and welcoming. We will not be there to exoticise them but to interact, and 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!

Following our visit to Rushon, we'll make a stop at Khorogh Airport – famed locally for its difficult approach and requirement for special training for pilots landing at this airport.

**Accommodation:** *Hotel Zafar*

**Included Meals:** *Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner*

Day 4

*Tuesday August 23*

**Drive to Langar**

This morning, we'll set out along the internationally famed **M41 Pamir Highway**. This ribbon of tarmac stretches from the Tajik capital, Dushanbe, through the mountains of eastern Tajikistan and the Pamiri region, finally ending in Tajikistan's northern neighbour, Kyrgyzstan.

We'll traverse mountain passes, deep valleys, all to reach our destination today. **Langar**.

Not to be confused with the village of the same name just across the border in Afghanistan, we'll spend the night peering over the Afghan border – marked by the Panj River, which will be our guide through this part of Tajikistan in the coming days.

**Accommodation:** *Local Guesthouse*

**Included Meals:** *Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner*

## Day 5

*Wednesday August 24*

### ***Langar to Ishkashim***

We're up bright and early this morning as we venture out along the **Panj River**, the border between the Republic of Tajikistan and Afghanistan.

As we trundle along the road, stopping for photos of the mysterious land beyond the river, we'll stop at **Vrang village** – a small settlement near the border, home to the **Buddhist Stupa**. Thought to have been constructed in the 6<sup>th</sup> century, the stupa is a sign that Buddhist civilisations thrived in this part of Central Asia many centuries ago. We'll also stop to visit the hand-carved caves used by Buddhist monks to pray all those years ago.

We'll visit shrines built by the **Zoroastrians**, an ancient religion which originates in **Persia**, modern day Iran. After a final visit to **Osorkhonai Abdullo Ansori Museum**, dedicated to the region and its colourful history, we'll set off to our final destination for today – **Ishkashim**.

**Accommodation:** *Local Accommodation*

**Included Meals:** *Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner*



## Day 6

Thursday August 25

### **Ishkashim to Khorogh**

Today we'll complete our loop through the mighty Pamir region of southern Tajikistan as we'll return for an extended stay at the city of **Khorogh**.

However, before we arrive in the city, there's still plenty to do. Our day begins with a visit to the **Ishkashim Bazaar** where we'll have a chance to mingle with locals as we venture into the local bazaar where Tajiks trade various goods with one another, creating a buzz of activity in this far flung corner of Tajikistan.

In case you've not bought enough local goods, we'll make our way to the **Afghan-Tajik cross-border market** where Tajiks and Afghans buy and sell across the border with remarkably little restriction. So, if you're looking to tick Afghanistan off your list, this may be the place to do it!

Next up, the ancient **Kakha Fortress**. The ruins of this huge defensive complex sits on the side of a mountain overlooking the Panj river. The area has been used as a defensive settlement since the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century BCE; some theorized that the fortress was built to defend caravans traversing the vital silk road which passed through this region for centuries.

Our final stop before Khorogh is the calcium-filled **Garm Chashma Hot Spa**. This natural spring is made up of numerous pools, all stained light blue by the high calcium content.

After exploring this natural wonder, we'll depart and make our way, once again, to the city of **Khorogh** where we'll check in to our hotel to get some rest before exploring the city tomorrow.

**Accommodation:** *Hotel Zafar*

**Included Meals:** *Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner*

## Day 7

Friday August 26

### **Khorogh City Tour**

Today we have a welcome change to our adventure as we'll set out on foot to explore the beautiful city in which we spent the night. The city of **Khorogh**.

Today it's off to a more leisurely pace with a visit to **Khorogh Bazaar**. The bazaar is a typical Central Asian market crammed with fresh fruit, vegetables, milk products and various other wares. Not commonly visited by tourists, we may be as much a spectacle to the locals as the colourful traders are to us.

Following our market visit, we'll call at the **Ismaili Jamatkhana Centre** not only an architectural delight but the centre for Isma'ilism in the region. Once inside the Ismaili Centre, we will learn a little more about this fascinating sub-sect of Shia Islam. We'll also have the unique opportunity to ask their opinion on the recent political change in Afghanistan, clearly visible from the ornate terraced grounds around us.

We head out of the city centre and climb higher as we drive high above Khorogh to visit the beautiful **Botanical Gardens**. A little unkempt, the Khorogh Botanical Gardens were begun in the 1940s as a project of the Soviet Union to observe the survival rate of plants at altitude and the associated climatic conditions. Not only do the gardens now boast of over 2,300 species of trees and plants and a beautiful residence fit for a president, but they also afford mesmerising views over the city.

From the gardens, we make sure to stop for a spot of lunch but not before visiting **Victory Park** and its **Soviet monuments** harking back to a different era in history.

Following lunch you have the choice of staying to relax in Khorogh, exploring a little more of the city or enjoying a drink by the river. If, however, you have the energy there is the option of an **afternoon hike** in some of the surrounding countryside. It is very mountainous, but the views over the surrounding valleys are reward enough.

**Accommodation:** *Hotel Zafar*

**Included Meals:** *Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner*

## Day 8

*Saturday August 27*

### **Drive to Qal'ai Khumb**

As we continue to trace the Panj River, we eventually bid farewell to the Pamir territory and enter Khatlon Province - located in the country's Southeast 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 centre 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).

Finally, we'll arrive in Qal'ai Khumb.

**Accommodation:** *Karon Palace Hotel*

**Included Meals:** *Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner*

## Day 9

*Sunday August 28*

### **Drive to Roghun**

Today we have a fascinating drive lined up. Leaving **Qal'ai Khumb**, we'll head north, on the true M41, peeling away from the Afghan border. The road we take is tough, on a route closed for much of the year. As the winter snow and spring rain makes the route unpassable. The driving will still be challenging and complex, but the scenery is astonishing. Along the way, we will pass over the 3,852-metre high **Khaburabot Pass**. The Russians say unless you take the M41 over the Khaburabot Pass, then you haven't truly travelled the Pamir Highway. We will regularly stop to admire and photograph this most rugged region of Tajikistan.

This route used to be the only way to reach Tajikistan's western region. Built during the Soviet period, the road was almost destroyed during Tajikistan's bloody civil war when Western rebels tried to cut this vital link. As we take the central route, we will pass through some of Tajikistan's poorest regions, but the villages are still lovely, the scenery beautiful, and the local people no less friendly. Journeying along the Obikhingou River we'll pass **Tavildara**, home of the first Tajiks.

Our final visit for the day will be the in-construction **Roghun Dam**. Originally started by the Soviets, construction had been halted until 2017 when construction restarted. We may even get the chance to venture inside this behemoth, depending on permission.

Finally, we'll arrive at our final accommodation before Dushanbe where we'll get some rest before returning to the capital city.

**Accommodation:** *Local Accommodation*

**Included Meals:** *Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner*

## Day 10

*Sunday August 29*

### ***Return to Dushanbe***

This morning we'll roll back into Tajikistan's capital, **Dushanbe**, ending our Pamir Highway adventure, although today we have a jam-packed itinerary to hit all the highlights this city has to offer.

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.

There will be some **free time** in the afternoon where you are welcome to join your tour leader on a **walking tour** of Dushanbe catching a few of the hidden Soviet Gems as well as other historical spots. Those who don't wish to join can enjoy a spot of last-minute shopping, a welcome coffee or an afternoon relax.

**Accommodation:** *Hotel Vatan*

**Included Meals:** *Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner*



Day 11

*Monday August 30*

***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.

**Included Meals:** *Breakfast*

**END OF TOUR**