

The Women's Travel Group
Silk Road in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan
October 2 - 12, 2023



Overview Daily Itinerary

Day 1, Mon, Oct 2	Arrive Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan
Day 2, Tue, Oct 3	Bishkek
Day 3, Wed, Oct 4	Bishkek • Chon-Kemin
Day 4, Thu, Oct 5	Chon-Kemin • Bishkek • fly to Tashkent, Uzbekistan
Day 5, Fri, Oct 6	Tashkent
Day 6, Sat, Oct 7	Tashkent • Samarkand
Day 7, Sun, Oct 8	Samarkand
Day 8, Mon, Oct 9	Samarkand • Bukhara
Day 9, Tue, Oct 10	Bukhara
Day 10, Wed, Oct 11	Bukhara • fly to Tashkent
Day 11, Thu, Oct 12	Depart Tashkent

This is a special small group tour prepared only for The Women's Travel Group

An easy stopover is Istanbul or Dubai. MIR is our trusted Central Asia expert. We travel with MIR frequently to excellent reviews. A good stopover is Doha, Qatar. Ask us to arrange this for you.

Land Price \$4,395

Single Supplement \$600

Ask for a share. **Room shares are guaranteed if booked before December 1, 2022.** First come first served after that.

Deposit \$600

Email: phyllisnycity@gmail.com and 646 309 5607 and Bookings to dmitry@mircorp.com

Detailed Daily Itinerary

Day 1, Mon, Oct 2 Arrive Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan

Most flights that connect from USA arrive in Bishkek very early in the morning. Upon arrival, travelers are met at the airport and transferred to the hotel. Hotel reservation includes early check-in to ensure access to rooms upon arrival early in the morning. Enjoy the day at leisure to rest after the long flight and adjust to the time difference. Meet your guide in the afternoon for the **introductory walking tour** of Bishkek city center. Later toast the start of the trip at the **welcome dinner**.

Meals: D

Novotel Bishkek City Center or similar

Opened in March of 2021, the Novotel Bishkek offers modern and contemporary 4-star comforts in the center of Kyrgyzstan's capital city. Onsite amenities include a fitness and spa facilities with a Turkish bath and sauna, massage rooms, an indoor swimming pool, and a restaurant serving local and Mediterranean fare. Multilingual front desk and concierge services are available 24 hours a day and high-speed Wifi is available throughout the property.

Day 2, Tues, Oct 3 Bishkek

The capital of Kyrgyzstan, **Bishkek** was founded as the Russian garrison of Pishpek. The city is set before a backdrop of the northern edge of the Ala-Too mountain range, and was originally a heavily forested rest stop on the Silk Road. Appropriated by the Russians in 1877, the city was eventually re-named Bishkek when Kyrgyzstan achieved its independence at the break-up of the Soviet Union. Bishkek is graced with large boulevards, friendly people and more trees than any other Central Asian city. On clear days, the permanently snowcapped mountains looming over the city provide spectacular views.

Spend the day exploring Bishkek on a guided tour of the city. Among today's highlights, visit the city's main square **Ala-Too**; the **open-air art gallery in Oak Park**, a great opportunity for shopping and people-watching stop; see the exterior of **Presidential Palace** and the **Manas Monument** in front of the Philharmonic depicting the main heroes of the Kyrgyz epic; and tour the **National History Museum** which features four floors of art and artifacts.



The sights, smells and sounds of bazaars are part of the sensory experience of Bishkek, and there are several within the city; the largest is called **Osh Bazaar**. Travelers can purchase local crafts, dried fruit, fermented milk, rice, grains, and of course the brightly colored Kyrgyz textiles by haggling with the traders in these markets.

This evening take a short drive outside of city center for **dinner at the Supara Ethno-Complex** in Chunkurchak Gorge. Wander the territory and observe a serene yurt village and the surrounding mountain scenery.

At dinner, enjoy a **Manas performance**. The Kyrgyz mythical hero, Manas, fought against the Uighur people in the 9th century. His story, the **Epic of Manas**, is a Kyrgyz epic poem with nearly a half million

verses, listed by UNESCO as a part of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. Never written down until the 19th century, the poem has been passed down by word of mouth for centuries. A performance of selections from the beloved poem is often given at Kyrgyz festivals, accompanied on the komuz, a traditional three-stringed instrument.

Meals: B, L, D

Day 3, Wed, Oct 4 Bishkek • Chon-Kemin

Today depart Bishkek and travel to Chon-Kemin Valley with stops en route. Drive about 80 km outside of Bishkek to see the **Burana Tower**. Built in the 11th century, it is one of the only existing watchtowers on the old Silk Road that traversed Kyrgyzstan. Climb up to the platform from inside the tower – while the ancient steps are steep, the view from the top is magnificent – and visit the small museum and the collection of ancient **bal-bals**, carved stone figures used as monuments.



Stop for **lunch at a local family's home** in a nearby village.

The beautiful steep-sided **Chon (Big) Kemin Valley** runs parallel to the border of Kazakhstan between two mountain ranges. The valley's population is mostly Kyrgyz, of the Sary Bagysh tribe, and many traditions are still practiced here.

Head to the village of **Tarsuu**, where you will be hosted by a local Kyrgyz family at the guesthouse. Enjoy walking about the village and soaking in the local landscapes by horse cart before dinner at the guesthouse.

Meals: B, L, D

Kemin Guesthouse or similar

The family-run Kemin Guesthouse offers comfortable accommodations in beautiful Chon-Kemin Valley. Rooms are furnished with wooden beds and local Kyrgyz fabrics, and include private ensuite bathrooms with showers, TV, and cell phone coverage. The guesthouse serves delicious meals in the main lodge, which boasts wonderful views of the surrounding mountains.

Day 4, Thur, Oct 5 Chon-Kemin • Bishkek • fly to Tashkent, Uzbekistan



Following breakfast at the guesthouse, meet with a hunter and witness a presentation of **Salbuurun**, traditional Kyrgyz hunting with eagles, long-legged Taigans (hunting dogs) known for their range and dexterity, and archers mounted on horseback.

Return to Bishkek in the afternoon and transfer to the airport for the evening flight to Tashkent, Uzbekistan.

Meals: B, L

Lotte City Hotel Tashkent Palace or similar

Located in the heart of the city, the updated Lotte City Hotel Tashkent Palace re-opened in 2013. The elegant hotel features two restaurants, one of them on the rooftop, serving regional and international cuisine. A piano bar, fitness center, outdoor pool, sauna and spa services round out the amenities. Rooms include deluxe beds, air conditioning, WiFi, satellite TV, minibar and hairdryer.

Day 5, Fri, Oct 6 Tashkent

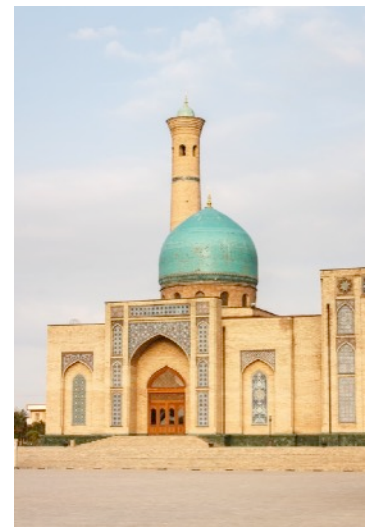
Although it doesn't look it today, **Tashkent** is one of the oldest cities in Uzbekistan. Rock paintings in the Chatkal Mountains about 50 miles away show that humans have been here since perhaps 2000 BC. In the 2nd century BC the town was known as Ming Uryuk. A major caravan crossroads, it was taken by the Arabs in 751 and by Genghis Khan in the 13th century. Tamerlane feasted here in the 14th century and the Shaibanid khans in the 15th and 16th. The Russian Empire arrived in 1865, and Uzbekistan was not an autonomous country again until 1991.

Tashkent lost much of its architectural history in a huge earthquake in 1966, and although it is an old city, most of it has been built since then. Today, the city is a jumble of wide tree-lined boulevards, oversized 20th century Soviet buildings and reconstructed traces of the old city with mud-walled houses, narrow winding lanes, mosques and madrassahs (Islamic religious schools).

Explore **Old Tashkent**, strolling through a labyrinth of mud-walled houses surviving from the 19th century to **Khast Imam Square**, where some of Tashkent's oldest monuments remain. The 16th century **Kaffal Shashi Mausoleum**, the tomb of one of the first imams of the Muslim world, and **Barak-Khan Madrassah**, also 16th century, are flanked by the 19th century **Al-Bukhari Madrassah** and the early 20th century **Tillya Sheikh Mosque**, which houses the oldest Koran in the world.

The **Uthman Koran**, considered by Sunni Muslims to be the oldest Koran in the world, is safeguarded in the library of the Tillya Sheikh Mosque in the Muy Muborok Madrassah, where several of Mohammed's hairs are said to have been enshrined. Written on calfskin some time after the death of Mohammed, the manuscript is believed to have been compiled in Medina by Uthman, the third caliph of Islam. Only a third of the manuscript remains, about 250 large pages bound into a huge book. It has been inscribed onto the UNESCO Memory of the World Register.

Kulbobo Kukeldash, builder of the 16th century **Kukeldash Madrassah**, was the foster brother of Khan Abdullah. Located on a hill above Chorsu Plaza, the Kukeldash Madrassah is one of the largest 16th century madrassahs remaining in Central Asia. Constructed of baked brick with only one facade decorated in majolica and glazed bricks, the madrassah was part of an ensemble that marked the center of the old town and included the newly restored Juma Mosque.





On Chorsu Plaza across from the Kukeldash Madrassah, **Chorsu Bazaar** spills out of the tiled dome that shades its merchants from the sun. Open every day, the bazaar is at its most exhilarating on weekends when traders and shoppers come in from outlying areas to buy and sell anything from spices and produce to woodwork and embroidery.

Visit the **private studio of the Rakhimov family**, which offers examples of ancient traditional Uzbek ceramics. Alisher Rakhimov is a sixth-generation Uzbek ceramicist whose family has been making pottery since the 1790s. He and his father, Akbar, have made an

extensive study of the history and methods of Uzbek ceramics, with a scholarly emphasis on the period from the 2nd century BC to the 15th century AD. Alisher and Akbar are adept in ancient glazing and dying techniques and can reproduce the golden ceramics of the Surkhandarya style and the stamped decorations of the Kashgari region. They have revived the lost art of natural dye use and are teaching contemporary Uzbek ceramicists their rediscovered techniques.

Browse the **Applied Arts Museum**. A wealthy czarist diplomat to Turkestan admiring Uzbek architecture, Alexander Polovtsev built a traditional mansion in 1898 and invited artisans from Samarkand, Bukhara and Fergana to decorate the interior. Featuring the painted carved plaster called *ganche*, carved wood, and tile work, the house itself is a main attraction. Exhibits include the Uzbek embroidered wall coverings called *suzani*, ceramics, jewelry, rugs, and musical instruments.

Time permitting, descend into **Tashkent's subway**, the Metro. Tashkent boasts the first metro in Central Asia. Begun in 1977, each station has a different theme, some incorporating Central Asian decorative motifs and some resembling marble palaces.

Enjoy **dinner with an invited local speaker** this evening.

Meals: B, L, D

Day 6, Sat, Oct 7 Tashkent • Samarkand

Transfer to the railway station for the morning express train to Samarkand, leaving Tashkent between 7am and 8am and arriving in Samarkand between 9am and 10am. Your baggage will be transferred to Samarkand separately by coach. Upon arrival, tour Samarkand's famous sites.

Perhaps the most well-known of Silk Road towns, **Samarkand**, fabled oasis on the fringes of the Kyzyl Kum Desert, has been settled since the 6th century BC. Because of its location on the plains where the Zeravshan River spills out from the Pamir Mountains, Samarkand became a major Silk Road crossroads.

A World Heritage Site, Samarkand is called "Crossroad of Cultures" by UNESCO. It has been visited through time by many of the world's conquerors — Alexander the Great, Genghis Khan and Tamerlane. Alexander said of Samarkand, "Everything I have heard about the beauty of the city is indeed true,

except that it is much more beautiful than I imagined.” Tamerlane made it his capital city and gathered the finest architects, builders and artisans of the time to enhance its beauty.

Begin with a visit to **Registan Square**, the centerpiece of Samarkand, and the most recognizable landmark for visitors. The three emblematic madrassahs frame the square, and loom over the empty space in the center. It was this central space that originally gave the place its name, for “registan” simply means “place of sand.” This sandy place was at the center of ancient Samarkand and was a public square and marketplace before the Ulug Bek, Tillya-Kori, and Shir Dor madrassahs were built. In its reconstruction, the square maintains the majesty that it has radiated through the ages.



Not far from Registan Square is the **Gur-Emir Mausoleum**, the final resting place of Tamerlane. It was originally built for his grandson after the latter’s death, at the turn of the 15th century. The interior of the mausoleum has been restored and is brilliant in gold leaf and fresh tile. The heavily gilded central dome opens over the set of tomb-markers resembling sarcophagi (the bodies are located well below but are on site). All are marble, with the exception of Tamerlane’s, which is a slab of solid jade reportedly from Mongolia.

Enjoy free time for shopping and independent discovery this evening.

Meals: B, L

City Hotel or similar

Nestled amongst the turquoise domes and ancient monuments of Samarkand, the City Hotel offers a comfortable stay within a short walk to some of the city’s most iconic sites. The hotel’s historic and contemporary wings feature elegant rooms with soft neutral palates and old stone accents. Rooms include private bathrooms with showers, flatscreen TV’s, air conditioning, and minibar.

Day 7, Sun, Oct 8 Samarkand

Continue to explore Samarkand on an all-day guided tour.

Wander the row of tombs and mausoleums collectively called **Shah-i-Zinda**, or “place of a living king,” stretching between the present and the past. At its front is living Samarkand, and at its back the dusty slopes at the edge of ancient Afrosiab. Even on hot summer days the mausoleums remain shady and cool and seem to lure the traveler to approach the oldest tomb at the far end. Behind the complex and set into the hill lies an active cemetery with grave sites dating back as far as the 9th century, and as recently as the present day.



See the massive and beautiful **Bibi Khanum Mosque**, built by Tamerlane to be the largest mosque in the Islamic world, and dedicated to the memory of his favorite wife. Architects from India and Persia were brought in to build the mosque, and 95 elephants were used to transport the marble and other building materials from India to Samarkand. When construction on the mosque began in 1399, it pushed the boundaries for cutting-edge architecture at the time, with a 41-meter-high blue-tiled dome and 38-meter entrance portal. Yet, much of the work was rushed and quality less than optimal; not long after completion in 1404, tiles and walls began to crumble, with the entire structure collapsing in a 1897 earthquake. The mosque was completely restored in 2007.

Browse the animated **Siab Bazaar**, just across the street from the Bibi Khanum Mosque. Vividly dressed women oversee neat stacks of brilliant produce and burlap sacks of nuts and spices. Uzbek and Tajik men in black and white skullcaps, called doppi, sell cabbage rolls and shashlik. For a pittance, an entrepreneur with a brazier of special incense will cleanse you of all bad luck.

Visit the **Ulugbek Observatory**, built by Tamerlane's grandson Ulugbek. The astronomer-king was fascinated with the stars and the cosmos and built one of the most advanced observatories of the ancient world. The observations, which he undertook with the naked eye only, predated the telescope by over 150 years. They were aided by the building itself, which housed a large vertical half-circle, only a quarter of which remains today. By using careful methods, rigorous observation and meticulous recording, Ulugbek calculated the length of the year to within a minute of the modern accepted value.

Stop at the **Afghan Uzbek Silk Carpet Factory**, which uses natural vegetable dyes to color the thread used in its carpets. Tour the gardens outside the factory where the weavers grow indigo, coleus, and dahlias to use for dye. Observe the process of dying the thread and weaving the carpets, with an opportunity to shop afterward.

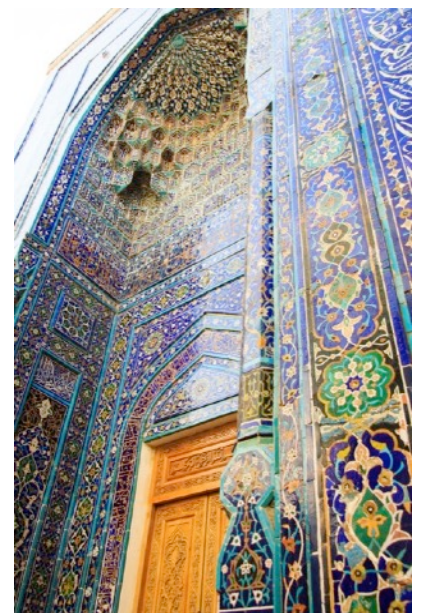
Also visit a **workshop where hand-crafted paper is made** according to traditions handed down from the 8th century, when paper making began in Samarkand. Founded in 1997 with the support of UNESCO, the workshop of Abdurakhim Mukhtarov, located in the village of Koni Gil on the outskirts of the city, produces lovely paper crafts and stationery as you watch.

Meals: B, L, D

Day 8, Mon, Oct 9 Samarkand • Bukhara

Today drive from Samarkand to Bukhara with a stop in Gijduvan to pay a visit to the **ceramics workshop of the Narzulaev family**, some of the most renowned ceramicists in Uzbekistan. Their Gijduvan-school ceramics are characterized by the use of flower ornamentation and natural colors, with an emphasis on greens and browns. Tour the kilns and the studio, and enjoy tea in the showroom, where glowing handmade ceramic plates and bowls are on display.

After checking in to the hotel in Bukhara, take an introductory walking



tour of the old town with a visit to **Poi Kalon**, also called the Bukhara Forum. The 12th century Kalon assembly, including the **Kalon Mosque and Minaret** and the **Mir-i-Arab Madrassah**, surrounds an open plaza teeming with merchants and local vendors. The minaret towers over the dusty square, looking down from a height of more than 150 feet, and casting its shadow between the mosque and the madrassah. Fourteen distinct and unique bands of brickwork circle the tower at intervals, and at the top of the minaret resolve into a traditional stalactite formation.

Stop at a few local craftsmen’s studios and enjoy dinner at a local restaurant.

Meals: B, L, D

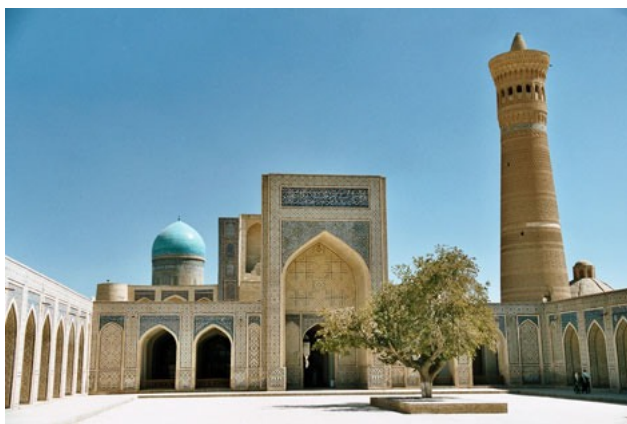
Hotel Lyabi Hauz or similar

The Lyabi Hauz Hotel is located in the old part of Bukhara within easy walking distance of 16th century shopping streets and tourist attractions. The hotel features a large 19th century hall with colorful traditional ornaments for relaxing and drinking tea. Elegant rooms are individually decorated with antique wall hangings and carpets. All rooms feature satellite TV, air conditioners, refrigerators and telephones.

Day 9, Tue, Oct 10 Bukhara

Spend the day exploring Central Asia’s most ancient living city. An oasis in the desert, **Bukhara** offers cool shade and rest to the modern traveler as it did to the camel caravans that plied the Silk Road hundreds of years ago. Bukhara is as old as Samarkand and has preserved its ancient architecture and design to an arguably larger extent than that city. The Old Town in Bukhara has a unified feel, drawn together by a central reflecting pool and plaza, by commonality in the structure of the domed bazaars and by the major monuments ringing the Old Town.

Begin at **Lyab-i-Khauz Plaza**, located in the heart of the old town. With the feel of a true oasis in an oasis town, the plaza is at the center of Bukhara’s old town and is – as it has been throughout history – a place to meet friends, to eat, to drink, and to relax in the shade. The atmosphere is cooled by the long rectangular reflecting pool that makes up the center of the plaza, and by the shade of the trees that ring the plaza. The mulberry trees here are hundreds of years old and frame the 16th and 17th century madrassahs that makes up three of the four edges of the ensemble.



Visit the **Ark Citadel**, the original fortress of Bukhara and likely dating back two thousand years or more. The current structure has been built and rebuilt on the same site throughout its history, and has preserved something of the form, purpose and function of the first Ark. Like the medieval castle complexes of Europe, the Bukhara Ark served the Emirs of Bukhara

as a residence, audience hall, as protection from neighboring enemies and for more mundane purposes, such as a trade center and a police station.

Just behind the Ark Citadel is the infamous **Zindan Prison** and the even more infamous “bug pit” or “black hole,” the cell where two of Britain’s finest Great Game players, Colonel Charles Stoddart and Captain Arthur Conolly, were imprisoned before their execution.

Admire the serene **Bolo Hauz Mosque**, across from the Ark. Called the forty-pillar mosque because of the reflection of its colonnades in the pool, the mosque was founded by 18th century emir Shah Murad.

The **Chashma Ayub Mausoleum** is not a true mausoleum, but a *qadamdjoy*, or site visited by a holy person. The Koranic prophet Ayub – the Biblical prophet Job – reportedly struck the ground with his staff here, and water immediately bubbled up from a spring. The oldest part of this multi-domed building was probably built in the 12th century. Under its many roofs are the sacred spring and the Water Supply History Museum of Bukhara.

Also pay a visit to the **Ismael Samani Mausoleum**, the 10th century resting place of Ismael Samani, founder of the Persian Samanid Dynasty, with its sixteen different styles of brickwork. The little mausoleum was buried by the desert sands and not discovered until the 20th century.



Walk through Bukhara’s old **Jewish Quarter**, in the heart of the Old Town, where in the mid-19th century 2,500 families of prosperous merchants were estimated to have been living. Cut off in the 15th century from contact with other Jews, the Bukharan Jews developed their own dialect of the Tajik-Persian language that incorporates many Hebrew words, their own style of dress, and their own unique form of Judaism. The only Bukharan synagogue allowed by the Soviets to remain in the Old Jewish Quarter is an unassuming place near the Lyabi-Hauz pool. Almost underground and still somewhat run-down, the synagogue is the center of life for Bukhara’s greatly diminished Jewish community. Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, between 70,000 and 100,000 Jews have left Uzbekistan.

This evening enjoy a **fashion show and folklore concert** at the beautiful **Laziz House** in Bukhara’s Old Town, a lovingly restored home filled with colorful handmade embroidered wall hangings (suzani) and other Uzbek décor. Relax over dinner and admire the vivid costumes of the whirling dancers.

Meals: B, L, D

Day 10, Wed, Oct 11 Bukhara • fly to Tashkent

This morning drive a small distance outside of the city to visit the **Palace of Moon and Stars**, or the Summer Palace of the last Emir of Bukhara. The palace was built for the Emir at the turn of the century, after the Russians took control of Bukhara. The grounds here are heavily planted, and arbored walkways connect the various pavilions and buildings. Wild peacocks and peahens stroll through the park-like setting, strutting with their long showpiece plumage. The palace itself is something of a showpiece, as it was designed to keep the emir in luxury, but removed from the city, isolated and



politically impotent. Stop at its Museum of National Crafts to admire the vivid *suzani*, embroidered coverlets that Uzbekistan is known for.

Return to Bukhara and enjoy some free time to browse the trade domes and workshops of craftsmen and artisans.

Transfer to the airport for the short afternoon flight to Tashkent. Mark the conclusion of the trip at the **farewell dinner** at a local restaurant in Tashkent this evening.

Meals: B, D

Lotte City Hotel Tashkent Palace or similar

Day 11, Thu, Oct 12 Depart Tashkent

Early morning transfers to the airport for international departures with connections to North America via Istanbul or Dubai.

Meals: B (packed limited early breakfast), in flight

Included

- All accommodation based on double occupancy per itinerary with breakfast daily, local service charge and tax (standard hotel check-in/out times apply unless otherwise noted: Bishkek (2 nights with an early check-in on arrival day), Chon-Kemin (1 night), Tashkent (3 nights in two stays), Samarkand (2 nights), Bukhara (2 nights) Singles must be requested.
- Private vehicles for one group arrival airport transfer in Bishkek and one group departure airport transfer in Tashkent (private airport transfers are available for travelers arriving early and staying extra days after the tour at additional cost)
- Land transportation per itinerary by private vehicles and by fast day train from Tashkent to Samarkand in economy class
- Internal flights per itinerary: Bishkek-Tashkent and Bukhara-Tashkent in economy class
- All sightseeing and excursions including entrance fees per itinerary
- English-speaking national guides per itinerary: one guide in Kyrgyzstan and one guide in Uzbekistan
- Cultural features as stated in itinerary
- Meals as listed in itinerary: hotel breakfast daily, 8 lunches and 8 dinners
- Bottled/purified water with meals
- Welcome and farewell dinners including local beer and wine
- Bottled water in vehicles during tours and transfers
- Baggage handling at hotels where available

Prices are based on 9 people going.

U.S. citizens traveling on this itinerary enjoy visa-free entry to Kyrgyzstan but must obtain a visa for Uzbekistan prior to the trip. Uzbekistan issues e-visas online. MIR will provide instructions to travelers on how to obtain the necessary e-visa for Uzbekistan.

We recommend that you read the U.S. State Department's Country Information regarding travel to the destinations on your itinerary. Check <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/international-travel.html> for up-to-date travel information.



Travelers should consider enrolling in STEP, Smart Traveler Enrollment Program, a free service to enroll your trip with the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate. For more information: <https://step.state.gov/step/>