The Great Game

A GRAND CENTRAL ASIAN ODYSSEY

TRIP DATES

2027

June 25, 2027-July 21, 2027

This is one of our special Limited Edition Adventures, offered only every two to five years. This is the planned itinerary for the trip, but please note that changes may be made when the departure is finalized.

Wilderness Travel

The Great Game

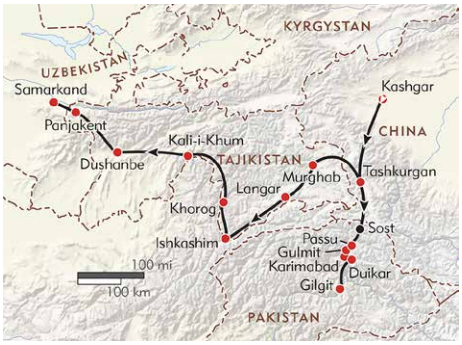
A GRAND CENTRAL ASIAN ODYSSEY

LIMITED EDITION ADVENTURES

This is a Limited Edition adventure—which means a unique trip we've never run before or offer only every few years. Led by our most experienced Trip Leaders, these journeys often take place in remote destinations with only the most basic infrastructure for tourism. If you see a Limited Edition trip scheduled for this year, now is the time to sign up, as spaces fill very early and the trip may not be back for a while! Planned daily activities and actual timings may vary due to local conditions or the discretion of your Trip Leader—it is important to bring your spirit of adventure for these special exploratory journeys!

Join Central Asia explorer and Trip Leader Roger Williams to discover the magic of the most far-flung destinations of "the Great Game," as the 19th century diplomatic rivalry between the British Empire and Tsarist Russia was known. Roger is a veteran of this fabled realm and his long-time friendships here bring us fascinating cultural opportunities as we journey from western China's Xinjiang Province to northern Pakistan's Hunza Valley, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. We begin in the former Silk Road trading post of Kashgar, with its world-famous Sunday market, then explore dazzling Hunza, known for its spectacular Karakoram Mountains and the warm hospitality of its residents. We then cross the mountains to Tajikistan on a high, remote road amid the lakes and glaciers of the High Pamirs. One highlight along the way will be gazing into the once-forbidden Wakhan Corridor, a buffer zone between Tajikistan and Afghanistan created during the Great Game between Russia and Britain. Here the Hindu Kush, Karakoram, and Pamir ranges converge in spectacular fashion and we'll meet the semi-nomadic Wakhi and Tajik people who herd their yaks beneath snow-capped 20,000-foot peaks. Come along and feast your eyes on phenomenal scenery, visit ancient sites that few travelers ever see, and meet the Uyghurs, Hunzakuts, Tajiks, and Wakhis, whose rich cultures are deeply tied to this desert and mountain realm. Note: We do plan to visit the Hunza Valley, but if conditions are not right, our alternative itinerary visit brings us to the former Silk Road hubs of Turpan, Khotan, and Yarkand in China's storied Takla Makan Desert.

Itinerary



DAY 1 KASHGAR, CHINA

Arrive in Kashgar, where you are met and transferred to the hotel. We gather in the evening for a trip briefing followed by a Welcome Dinner. Overnight at the Home 2 Suites by Hilton, a modern Western-style hotel...D

DAY 2 KASHGAR / ARTUSH / ABAKH KHODJA MAUSOLEUM

A desert oasis with an end-of-the-world feeling, Kashgar is located 600 miles southwest of Urumqi and 80 miles east of the Russian border. This famously isolated city of walled adobe compounds was the launching pad for many Tibet, Pamir, and Karakoram expeditions in the 18th and 19th centuries and was also a major center for the Great Game, serving as Britain's most remote listening post in Central Asia. Although Kashgar is changing fast and the old city walls have been torn down, it still has an exotic atmosphere, with its population of Uyghurs, Tajiks, Kirghiz, and Uzbek peoples.

Our day begins with an exploration of the outlying town of Artux and the tomb of Sultan Satuq Bughra Khan, a 9th century ruler who converted the area to Islam. After visiting a nearby commercial fig orchard, we'll have lunch at a local Uyghur home. If time permits, we visit the 7th century Mor Stupa. In the afternoon, we visit the green-tiled tomb of Abakh Khodja, a powerful 7th century ruler of Kashgar, and admire its ancient Islamic architecture and Uyghur woodcarving. Dinner at the home of a Uyghur family with local folklore music. Overnight at hotel...BLD

DAY 3 KASHGAR / SUNDAY BAZAAR / ID KAH MOSQUE

This morning we start our explorations with a visit to the famed Sunday Bazaar, which still throbs in the heart of Kashgar. People come from all across the countryside for this big weekly event, some herding their cattle to market, bringing in loads of greens by donkey, or selling colorful varieties of Uyghur hats. The market offers a chance to roam amid the aromas of fresh-baked breads, grilled lamb, cumin, and peppers, and watch the spirited negotiations of traders haggling over everything from camels, sheep, silk, spices, and fruits to household goods. Traditional Uyghur craftsmen—metalsmiths, blacksmiths, coppersmiths, cobblers, hat-makers, and woodworkers—still make all kinds of goods and supply the local farmers and shepherds with the wares of daily life. Returning to Kashgar, we visit the Id Kah Mosque, spiritual center of Kashgar and a grand Islamic structure with a central dome and flanking minarets, and walk through the artisan streets to see the remnants of old Kashgar, much of which has been demolished by the Chinese authorities. We also stop by the former Russian Consulate building, now converted to a hotel. Dinner is at the best Uyghur restaurant in town. Overnight at hotel...BLD

TRIP DETAILS AT-A-GLANCE

Length: 27 days
Arrive: Kashgar, China
Depart: Samarkand, Uzbekistan
Lodging: 26 nights in best available hotels and guesthouses
Meals: All meals included (B=Breakfast, L=Lunch, D=Dinner)
Activity: Archaeology, Cultural Adventures
Trip Level: 1 2 (3) 4 5 6
Cultural exploration and walking tours, rugged road travel

HIGHLIGHTS

- Roam the famed Sunday Market in the Silk Road outpost of Kashgar
- Experience the breathtaking setting of the Hunza Valley
- Meet the Uyghurs, Hunzakuts, Tajiks, Uzbeks, and other Central Asian peoples
- Cross the spell-binding High Pamirs on the roof of Asia
- Enjoy one of the great overland journeys of the world

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DAY 4 KARAKUL LAKE / KYRGYZ COMMUNITY / SUBASHI PASS / TASHKURGAN

After breakfast, we depart Kashgar and set out along the spectacular Karakoram Highway (KKH) as it contours through the narrow gorge of the Gez River. Completed in 1986, the KKH is one of the highest international highways in the world. In over 1,000 miles of winding mountain roads, it provides access to the unmatched mountain scenery and plunging valleys of the Karakoram Mountains. We take a break at mirror-like Karakul Lake, set at nearly 12,000 feet below the mighty snow-capped peak of Mustagh Ata (24,758'). Besides seeing stunning mountain views, we'll also have a chance to meet some of the local Kyrgyz people who graze their herds in the mountains nearby. After lunch at Karakul Lake, we continue our journey along the Karakoram Highway with a crossing of Subashi Pass (13,174'), one of the venues for the movie *The Kite Runner*. We reach the town of Tashkurgan in the mid-afternoon. Set in the High Pamirs at almost 12,000 feet, this tiny, isolated part of China's Xinjiang Province is populated mainly by ethnic Tajik people, who make their living from sheep and wool production. Later, we visit the Stone Castle, a ruined fort dating to the time when Tashkurgan was a garrison town on the Silk Road and once a meeting point of major caravan routes leading to Kashgar, Wakhan, and Hunza to the south. Fabled traveler Marco Polo once made a short excursion from Tashkurgan to the passes that lead into the upper Hunza Valley. On one of the passes he visited, he mentioned seeing hundreds of horned sheep, which were later christened as Marco Polo sheep *(ovis ammon poli)*. Dinner and overnight in Tashkurgan…BLD
Driving Details: 6-7 hours, 182 miles

Important Note for Days 4-15: We have planned to make our way to Hunza Valley, Pakistan, on these days. However, if it does not seem wise to visit Hunza for any reason, even on the day before the group is to go there, we will follow the alternate non-Hunza itinerary for these days, described on pages 13-14 following this regular itinerary. This decision will be made at the discretion of Wilderness Travel.

DAYS 5-6 KHUNJERAB PASS (15,397') / SOST, PAKISTAN / GULMIT

Just outside town, we pass through our border formalities and begin the breathtaking drive across the Khunjerab Pass and through the Karakoram Mountains. As the road winds through Khunjerab National Park, one of the highest parks in the world, we can keep an eye out for Marco Polo sheep and golden marmots. Reaching the Pakistan border at the settlement of Sost, we enter the Northern Areas of Pakistan, a region that contains five of the world's fourteen 8,000-meter peaks. After passing through immigration formalities, we return to our vehicles and continue thirty minutes to the pretty Hunza village of Passu, with sheer Cathedral Peak rising above it. Passu is a center for trekking expeditions and hikes to the nearby Batura Glacier. Most of the villagers raise yaks, goats, and sheep. We continue to Gulmit, known as Upper Hunza, a centuries-old historic town with mountains, peaks, and glaciers. Before 1974, Hunza was a princely state, and Gulmit was its summer capital. The oldest

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intact house in Gulmit is more than six centuries old. Most people have Central Asian ancestry, speak Wakhi, and belong to the Shia Ismaili sect of Islam. On Day 6 we'll take a day hike above Gulmit to Kamaris village to see firsthand the spectacular beauty of Upper Hunza. Overnights at the Silk Road Lodge Gulmit...BLD each day
Driving Details: 4-5 hours, 150 miles

DAY 7 HUNZA VALLEY

An independent princely state for over 600 years, remote Hunza was once a mysterious valley of long-lived, light-skinned people, many of whom spoke a language unrelated to any other. The road into Hunza, a branch of the old Silk Road, was once so narrow and dangerous that the Hunzakuts, as they are called, had no trouble defending it. The Hunza Valley was virtually undisturbed until the late 1970s, when the Karakoram Highway brought travelers in. In the next few days, we enjoy meeting these friendly mountain people and visiting their spectacular mountain home. After breakfast, we visit the photogenic suspension bridge at Hussaini village with magnificent views of the 22,966-foot Qaroon Peak in Shimshal. Afterwards, we drive to Attabad Lake for a short boat ride to Karimabad. In 2010 there was a massive landslide at Attabad Village. The Hunza River was blocked for more than five months resulting in the formation of a lake over 12 miles long. Many settlements and a large portion of the Karakoram Highway were submerged. Today, this lake is a popular center for all sorts of water sports. After lunch we walk through Karimabad town and bazaar. Before dinner we will have a short discussion in our hotel's royal garden about the history and people of Hunza. Dinner and overnight at Serena Altit Fort Residence...BLD
Driving Details: 1-2 hours

DAY 8 HUNZA VALLEY / KARIMABAD / ALTIT FORT / BALTIT FORT

This morning we visit Altit Fort, located just above our hotel. The history of Altit Fort dates back over 900 years. It was built by craftsmen from Baltistan who came over the Biafo Hisper Pass as part of a royal wedding procession of a prince from Baltistan who married a princess from Hunza. After the marriage ceremonies were over and the groom's party was ready to leave, there was a blizzard that closed the pass and they were stuck in Hunza for many months. There are many parts of the fort that were added in later centuries, but the watchtower and the main part of the fort were built at that time. This fort has distinctive Tibetan influences in its architecture as well as some Buddhist symbols carved throughout the structure. We also explore Baltit Fort, around 600 to 700 years old according to carbon dating tests conducted during the recent restoration of the fort by the Aga Khan Trust for Culture in Pakistan. This fort was used as the main political and residential seat of the ruling family until 1958. After the construction of a new palace, Baltit Fort was abandoned for several decades. In 1996, the Aga

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Khan Trust for Culture completed the restoration of this fort and the settlement around the fort using local labor, along with international conservation guidance and financial support from many countries and organizations. The Norwegian government and the Getty Foundation were among the top donors for this and many other similar projects in the Hunza and Baltistan region. After the ancient forts we'll visit Ganish Khun, Hunza's oldest settlement, and the sacred rocks of Hunza. Known locally as Haldekish ("a place of many male ibex"), these rocks along this old stretch of the Silk Road have petroglyphs dating from the Kushan Empire in the 1st century AD. Overnight at Serena Altit Fort Residence...BLD

DAY 9 HUNZA VALLEY / KARIMABAD

This morning we'll enjoy a lovely long walk from our hotel to the village of Hyderabad along the water channels that lace the Hunza Valley and irrigate the famed apricot orchards. After lunch at Didar's home, visit the Chumer Khun Mountain viewpoint overlooking the Hunza Valley. Before returning to our hotel, we'll stop at the local KADO, Karakoram Area Development Organization. Overnight at Serena Altit Fort Residence...BLD

DAY 10 NAGAR VALLEY / HOPER VILLAGE / HOPER GLACIER / DUIKAR

A spectacular one-hour drive brings us through the Hoper Valley to the picturesque village of Hoper (9,154'), where we have a chance to observe everyday life in a small countryside village. We can also walk up to a viewpoint of the Hoper Glacier, which snakes down the valley. After lunch in Nagar,

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we'll return to the Hunza Valley, driving through Karimabad bazaar and up to Duikar (9,515'), a great place to enjoy sunset and sunrise views. Dinner and overnight at Eagles's Nest or Hard Rock Resort, Duikar...BLD
Driving Details: 2-3 hours, 40 miles

DAY 11 GILGIT / KARGAH BUDDHA

After breakfast we drive down the mountain past Karimabad and meet up with the Karakoram Highway for the drive to the old Silk Road city of Gilgit, which has been a regional center of trade and politics for centuries. During the 7th and 8th centuries, when the Tibetan Empire ruled present-day Pakistan up to Chinese Turkestan, Buddhism prevailed in the whole region. Near Gilgit we'll visit Kargah Buddha, a larger than life-sized standing Buddha carved on a sheer rockface. After lunch at the Serena Gilgit, we head to the historic cemetery in the heart of Gilgit to visit the grave of George Hayward, a well-known figure in the Great Game who was killed in Darkut village in the Yasin Valley on his way to explore and map the high Pamiri Plateau. We then explore Gilgit Bazaar and the Aga Khan Shahi polo grounds, and take a walk over a British colonial-era hanging bridge across the Gilgit River. After a short walk to Jutiyal New Town, we'll enjoy Happy Hour at Didar's home before returning to our hotel for a BBQ dinner in the Serena Garden. If the weather is clear we can enjoy spectacular view of majestic Rakaposhi (25,551'). Overnight at Gilgit Serena Hotel…BLD
Driving Details: 2-3 hours, 65 miles

DAY 12 GILGIT / BAGROT VALLEY

After breakfast, we leave for a day trip to the Bagrot Valley, known for its picturesque beauty, high-altitude mountains, vast glaciers, livestock, forests, meadows, and rich cultural heritage. We'll visit the village of Farfu, situated just 21 miles from Gilgit, making it the closest unspoiled Shina village in the area. Farfu is surrounded by lush green fields and an abundance of apricot, apple, and other fruit trees. The mighty Diran Peak (23,838'), famous in local culture for fairies and djinns, offers a mesmerizing sight in this bucolic valley. Upon arrival in the village, we will freshen up at a local guest house and head out to explore the village, visiting a school and talking to local farmers. We will then return to the guest house for our lunch and then return to Gilgit. Overnight at Gilgit Serena Hotel…BLD
Driving Details: 2-3 hours, 43 miles

DAY 13 RAKAPOSHI VIEWPOINT / PASSU

We head north via the Karakoram Highway (a.k.a. the Pakistan-China Friendship Highway) to a Rakaposhi viewpoint for photos and a cup of tea before continuing to Passu. Rakaposhi is in the Karakoram Mountain Range. At an altitude of 25,551' it is the 27th highest mountain in the world. We

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pass through a series of tunnels and over several bridges before reaching our destination. Overnight at Silk Route Lodge…BLD
Approximate Driving Details: 3 hours, 88 miles

DAY 14 SOST / TASHKURGAN

After a short drive to Sost, we go through Pakistani border formalities and continue to Tashkurgan. We lose three hours when we cross the border from Pakistan to China, resulting in a shorter day, but we should arrive at our hotel by dinnertime. Overnight at Hotel Europa...BLD
Driving Details: 5-6 hours

DAY 15 KULMA PASS / MURGHAB VALLEY, TAJIKISTAN

We depart Tashkurgan for the Kalasu border checkpoint. After Chinese border formalities we continue past one more Chinese checkpoint to the Kulma Pass (14,314'), and enter Tajikistan territory. After completing Tajik immigration and custom formalities, we meet our Tajik team and continue to Murghab (11,869'). (Note: we may be required to take a short walk between the Tajik Customs Building and our vehicles; please ensure your duffels have wheels.) We will have a picnic lunch along the way. As we get closer to the town of Murghab the valley opens onto a plateau that saw Scythian nomadic migrations in the 6th century BC. Later, the Chinese expanded into these parts all the way to the former kingdom of Badakhshan. Murghab, "prairie river" in Persian, is the only significant town in the eastern half of Gorno-Badakhshan. It is the highest town in Tajikistan as well as in the former Soviet Union. This is where we meet the Pamir Highway. From here the highway goes south to Osh in Kyrgyzstan and southwest to Dushanbe, the capital of Tajikistan. Overnight at the Pamir Hotel in Murghab...BLD
Driving Details: 3-4 hours, 103 miles

DAY 16 ALICHUR / NAUZATASH PASS / LANGAR

Driving along the Pamir Highway, we'll see many nomad yurts nestled below the mountains. We head over Nauzatash Pass (14,685') and descend onto the Alichur Plateau. Leaving the Pamir Highway behind, we follow a remote caravan route to Khargosh Pass (14,523'), one of the last high passes on our journey. We descend into Tajikistan's Wakhan region, stopping at a military checkpost to show our permits. Soon we will have views of the mighty peaks of the Hindu Kush as we descend into the valley, following the banks of the Pamir River. The Pamir joins the Wakhan River to form the Oxus River, which in turn forms the border between Tajikistan and Afghanistan. With a picnic lunch en route, we gaze across the river into Afghanistan as we continue to Lengar, a more settled area, for our homestay overnight at a local guesthouse...BLD
Driving Details: 7 hours, 143 miles

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DAY 17 BIBI FATIMA HOT SPRINGS / WAKHAN / VRANG / ISHKASHIM

We travel along the Oxus with views to the scenic and fertile Wakhan Corridor across the river. This 85-mile-long valley is where the mighty Panj River marks the boundary between Afghanistan and Tajikistan. This narrow finger of land—one of the remotest corners of Asia—was set apart at the end of the 19th century by the British Empire to act as a buffer against potential Russian ambitions in India. We don't enter the Wakhan Corridor itself (it's in Afghanistan), but we enjoy the best of the Wakhan scenery today, following along the Panj River to the Oxus, with a stop at the mouth of the Wakhan River. We visit the shrine at Mazor, decorated with the horns of wild goats and Marco Polo sheep, and Vrang Village, where we walk up a steep hill to the site of an old stupa and a destroyed Buddhist monastery. Nearby we'll visit the home of Sufi Muborak, known locally as Bulbul-e-Wakan, "nightingale of Wakhan." We'll return to Vrang Village for lunch at a local guest house. Continuing along the Pamir Highway, we take a detour to the ruins of a fortress at Yamchun. At the revered mineral hot springs of Bibi Fatima (named for Prophet Mohammed's daughter), we will have a chance to take a dip, time permitting. We continue to Ishkashim, where we overnight at a small guesthouse...BLD

Driving Details: 69 miles

DAY 18 GARAM CHASMA VALLEY / KHOROG

Ishkashim is part of Tajikistan's Badakhshan Province. After making a few stops at scenic points along the way, we head off the main road into the Garam Chasma Valley, with a chance for another soak in a local mineral spring. After a short walk to see some interesting calcium rock created by the gushing hot spring waters, we'll have lunch at a nearby hotel restaurant. Afterwards, we

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continue to the pleasant town of Khorog (7,000'). The remainder of the day is free to rest or explore on your own. Dinner and overnight at Lal Hotel...BLD
Driving Details: 3 hours, 79 miles

DAY 19 KHOROG

Today we relax in and around Khorog, the home of a campus of Central Asian University built and sponsored by the community-supported Aga Khan Development Network. Khorog is located in a narrow valley—the town is only one street wide in some places. Pedestrian bridges span the jade Panj River here and fruit trees create shady resting places. We visit the Khorog Regional History Museum and stroll through Pamir Botanical Garden, the second highest in the world, reaching an altitude of almost 13,000 feet. Alpine plants from all over the world are grown here. We'll have lunch at a riverside cafe with the afternoon free to explore on your own. Tonight we enjoy dinner at a local home. Overnight at Lal Hotel...BLD

DAY 20 KALI-I-KHUM

Passing more villages along the Oxus River, we continue along more well-traveled roads to the outpost of Kala-i-Khum and check into the Karon Palace Hotel...BLD
Driving Details: 6-7 hours, 180 miles

DAY 21 KHABURABAT PASS / DUSHANBE

A picturesque drive by jeep brings us across the Khaburabat Pass (12,637') amid shepherds tending their livestock. As we descend into the lower valley, we leave the mountainous Badakhshan region and continue to Dushanbe, the capital of Tajikistan, with a picnic lunch en route. Overnight at the Hyatt Regency Dushanbe...BLD
Driving Details: 8 hours, 179 miles

DAY 22 DUSHANBE

Named for the Persian word for Monday, Dushanbe was once a small market village where traders gathered each Monday to sell their goods. The city's shady *chaikhanas* (teahouses) are decorated in traditional, colorful Tajik style, and the local Barakat market, a covered bazaar, reflects the city's long history as a center of trade. During the Soviet era, the city grew to be the most important industrial center in Tajikistan. Our explorations include the National Museum of Antiquities, with its fascinating collection of Greco-Bactrian and Buddhist art (as well as the largest reclining Buddha statue in the region), the monument of Ismoil Somoni who was a beloved ruler of the Samanid Dynasty (819-999 AD), the Gurminj Museum (a private museum of musical instruments), and the local bazaar. After lunch, we will visit the National Museum. Dinner is at a local restaurant, and overnight at the Hyatt Regency Dushanbe…BLD

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DAY 23 ANZOB PASS / PANJAKENT

We head to the Anzob Pass (11,063'), with magnificent panoramic views along the way. After lunch in a nearby village, we depart for Panjakent. If time permits, we'll visit the Rudaki Museum and the local bazaar before checking into our hotel. Dinner is at a local restaurant. Overnight at Hotel Rudaki... BLD
Driving Details: 7-8 hours, 162 miles

DAY 24 JARTEPE BORDER / SAMARKAND

After visiting the Panjakent Sunday bazaar this morning, we head to the border crossing from Tajikistan to Uzbekistan. Along the way, we stop at the ancient site of Sarazm, believed to be the oldest city in Central Asia. Sarazm, which means "where the land begins," dates from the 3rd millennium BC and was most likely trading with Gonar Depe in present-day Turkmenistan and the Indus Vally cities of southern Pakistan more than 2,000 years ago. After completing border formalities, we continue to Samarkand and lunch. The afternoon is at leisure for you to explore this fabulous Silk Road city. Dinner in a local restaurant followed by an evening visit to Registan Square for night photos. Overnight at Kosh Havuz Boutique Hotel…BLD
Driving Details: 1.5 hours, 40 miles

DAY 25 SAMARKAND

A sophisticated walled city when Alexander the Great took it over in 329 BC, Samarkand has had an array of rulers, from Turks to Arabs to Persians and Mongolians. They each made Samarkand their own, and Genghis Khan and his dreaded horsemen took the city in 1220. The illustrious warrior Tamerlane seized Samarkand in 1370 and while his rule was exceptionally bloody, he turned Samarkand into one of the cultural centers of Central Asia. It was during Tamerlane's time, from 1370 to 1405, that Samarkand became a city of almost mythic fame, with its soaring minarets and gleaming blue-tiled domes. During Tamerlane's conquests of other cultures, he always sent back to Samarkand the very best artists and architects and ordered them to build grand lavish monuments. The city went into decline in the 16th and 17th centuries, and the Emir of Bukhara took it into his khanate in the late 18th century. In 1865, Russian Cossacks took the city from the Emir during the height of the Great Game. The arrival of the Trans-Caspian railway 20 years later firmly linked Samarkand to Russia.

We have a full day to enjoy Samarkand starting with a morning visit to Samarkand's breathtaking main square, Registan, with its panorama of handsome blue-tiled mosques and 15th century madrassas (religious schools). The Registan was once Samarkand's main bazaar, full of caravansaries for passing merchant caravans. Tamerlane's scholarly grandson turned the Registan into the stirring masterpiece we see today. We visit Bibi Khanym tomb,

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built to commemorate the wife of Tamerlane, and the Shahr-i-Zindah, a stunning complex of mosques and tombs displaying some of Central Asia's finest mosaics of deep sapphire and turquoise tiles set off against tawny earthen walls, the Afrosiab Museum, with its frescoes dating back to the 7th and 8th centuries, Ulugbek's Observatory, and Gur Emir, the mausoleum of Tamerlane. We will also visit Kunihil village to see the traditional way of making special paper using mulberry tree skin pulp, where we will have lunch with a local family. Dinner tonight is at a local restaurant, and overnight at Kosh Havuz Boutique Hotel…BLD

DAY 26 SAMARKAND / SHAKRE SABZ

Today we take a day trip to Shakre Sabz, the birthplace of Tamerlane (1336-1405), the founder of the Timurid Empire. An undefeated commander, he is widely regarded as one of the greatest military leaders and tacticians in history, as well as one of the most brutal and deadly. We'll explore the city's monuments from the Timurid period, including the Ak Saray Palace ruins, the Dorus Tilavat seminary, the Kok Gumbaz Mosque, Amir Timur's crypt, and the Friday Mosque. Our Farewell Dinner tonight is in a local restaurant. Overnight at Kosh Havuz Boutique Hotel...BLD
Driving Details: 5-6 hours, 100 miles

DAY 27 DEPART

Transfer to the airport for departure on homeward-bound flights...B

Alternate Non-Hunza Itinerary

ALTERNATIVE NON-HUNZA ITINERARY FOR DAYS 4-15

If it does not seem wise to visit the Hunza Valley (Days 4-15) for any reason, even after the trip is in progress, we will set off to explore the oasis-cities of the southern Silk Road, including Turpan, Khotan, and Yarkand. This decision will be made at the discretion of Wilderness Travel.

By 100 BC, there were immense caravans heading across the Silk Road into the Central Asian desert, from the West bringing figs, walnuts, grapes, wool, and ivory, and from China bringing jade, porcelain, oranges, gunpowder, paper, and silk. New ideas in art and religion also traveled this fabled road. We start with Turpan, known for its sweet bounty of grapes and also for some of the most important Buddhist cave sites in Asia. We'll also discover Khotan, a magnet for Chinese traders even before the Silk Road days, and Yarkand, once an important stop for the Silk Road's cashmere trade.

DAY 4 URUMQI, CHINA / TURPAN

Depart Kashgar on a flight to the sprawling city of Urumqi, capital of Xinjiang Province. From here we head directly out to Turpan, an ancient oasis-city in the Takla Makan Desert. Turpan is located in the low Turpan Basin south of the Tien Shan Mountains and traces its roots to the Silk Road. We enjoy a local market tour and an overnight at a hotel...BLD

DAYS 5-6 TURPAN / BEZEQLIK CAVES

Turpan, even though it is deep in the Takla Makan Desert, is known as the "fruit basket" of China. Despite its bone-dry surroundings, it is an agricultural center of note, famed across China for its rich harvest of melons, cantaloupes, and grapes. An ancient, hand-dug network of underground viaducts still in use today has made this bounty possible. We'll be sure to sample the wares under the shade of vine-clad trellises. The Turpan Basin also holds some of the most important Buddhist relics in Asia, including the Thousand Buddha Caves at Bezeqlik, which we visit. These spectacular cave-grottos were dug out of the high cliffs of the Flaming Mountains about 400 AD and are full of shrines and relics. Buddhist monks inhabited these caves from the 5th to the 9th centuries. Overnights in Turpan...BLD each day

DAY 7 URUMQI

We head back to Urumqi, enjoying an afternoon visit to the local Urumqi markets, full of fine Uyghur crafts such as embroidered caps, carved jade, carpets, and gold and silver jewelry. Overnight at hotel in Urumqi...BLD

DAY 8 URUMQI / XINJIANG MUSEUM / KHOTAN

After visiting Urumqi's museum, with its unusual Caucasian mummies and artifacts dating back 4,000 years, an afternoon flight bring us to Khotan, a Silk Road outpost and still a bustling center of silk production on the edge of the Takla Makan Desert. Its name translates as "city of jade," as it once lay on the Jade Route between China and Mesopotamia, which eventually became the southern branch of the Silk Road. Overnight at hotel in Khotan...BLD

Alternate Non-Hunza Itinerary

DAY 9 JIYA / MALIKWAT RUINS / KHOTAN

We'll head out to the small town of Jiya to visit silkworm and silk-weaving facilities as well as jade production centers. We also visit the ruins at Malikwat (also known as Mallikurwatur), thought to be the remains of the ancient city of Yutien. Overnight in Khotan...BLD

DAY 10 KHOTAN SUNDAY MARKET / YARKAND

After a visit to the lively Sunday Market in Khotan, we head across the Takla Makan Desert to Yarkand, once a major Silk Road center. This 2,000-year-old settlement is set in an oasis watered by the Yarkand River. In Yarkand's Old Town, we can see Uyghur craftsmen working in wood and metal as we stroll the narrow streets amid traditional food vendors with their carts. Yarkand was the capital of the Uyghur kingdom in ancient times. Overnight at hotel...BLD

DAY 11 MARKIT

A meshrep is a traditional gathering of Uyghur men ("meshrep" means "gathering" in Uyghur), and today we'll head to the village of Markit, where we'll witness a Dolan Meshrep performance of Muqam singing and dance. Overnight at guesthouse...BLD
Approximate Driving Details: 155 miles

DAY 12 DRIVE TO KASHGAR

We depart Yarkand for Kashgar, arriving in time for lunch. The afternoon is at leisure to explore Kashgar. Overnight at hotel...BLD
Approximate Driving Details: 106 miles

DAY 13 KARAKUL LAKE / TASHKURGAN

A journey on the Karakoram Highway brings us up to beautiful Karakul Lake for views of lofty Mustagh Ata (24,758'), a snow-capped Central Asian giant. We also may meet some of the local Kyrgyz people who graze their animals in the surrounding mountains. After lunch at the lake, we continue on to Tashkurgan, crossing Subashi Pass (13,174') into the high Pamirs. Overnight at hotel...BLD

DAYS 14-15 TASHKURGAN / KHULMA / MURGHAB

DAY 16

Resume trip as per Day 16 of the regular itinerary.

Pricing

TRIP COST

Prices are per person, based on double occupancy
2027
$17,195 (13-15 members)
$18,195 (10-12 members)
$19,295 (7-9 members)
Single supplement: $1,995
Please contact us for future years' pricing

To offer the lowest possible cost, our trips are priced according to the number of participants on the trip. All costs are per person, based on double occupancy. If you wish to have a single room, you must pay the single supplement fee. Please note that Wilderness Travel staff, or guests of Wilderness Travel such as travel writers, photographers, or leaders-in-training, are not included in the tier pricing count.

CURRENCY EXCHANGE RATE

Because the prices published for our program are set so far in advance of the trip dates, we are occasionally faced with exceptional cost increases and/or currency fluctuations that affect the actual cost of running the trip. In most years, no price changes are necessary. However, we do reserve the right to raise or lower the trip price if there is a significant change in costs or exchange rates. If this is the case, your final invoice will reflect the difference in trip cost.

TRIP COST INCLUDES

- Expert leadership of a Wilderness Travel Trip Leader and local guides
- Accommodations as noted
- All meals included as indicated in the Detailed Itinerary (B=Breakfast, L=Lunch, D=Dinner)
- Land transportation, airport transfers, and sightseeing as noted
- Entrance fees to all sites listed in itinerary

TRIP COST DOES NOT INCLUDE

Internal airfare for the alternate non-Hunza itinerary, international airfare, airport departure taxes, individual arrival or departure transfers, any meals not specified after each itinerary day, optional tipping or gratuities to the leader, hotels en route to and home from the trip, any additional hotel nights that may be necessary due to international airline schedule changes or other factors, pre-trip expenses of medical immunizations, visa fees, travel insurance, and other expenses of a personal nature (alcoholic beverages, laundry, etc.).

PAYMENT SCHEDULE

At time of reservation: $600
90 days prior to departure: Balance

CANCELLATION AND TRANSFER FEE SCHEDULE

Up to 151 days prior to departure: No charge!
91-150 days prior to departure: $600 per person
90 days or less: 100% of trip cost
*Please note that this differs from our regular catalog departures.

MANDATORY EMERGENCY EVACUATION INSURANCE

Please note: Insurance for emergency evacuation is required for this trip. Call for more details.

Arrival & Departure

Upon confirming your trip reservation, we will send you a Welcome Packet that includes a list of documents (passport, visas, etc.) required for your trip. Please feel free to call if you would like this information before making your air arrangements.

If you have booked extra services before or after the trip, an Extra Services Confirmation will be sent with your Final Documents.

ARRIVAL & MEETING PLACE

Kashgar, China

Suggested Airport: Kashi Airport (KHG)
Suggested Date & Time: Day 1, June 25, by 2:00 pm

Meeting Place: A complimentary transfer will be provided from the airport to your Kashgar hotel no matter when you arrive. Please note that check-in time is 2:00 pm.

Trip members typically fly to Kashgar via Urumqi, China, with flights first stopping in other Chinese cities like Beijing (PEK), Guangzhou (CAN), Chengdu (CTU), or Shanghai (PVG).

DEPARTURE

Samarkand, Uzbekistan

Suggested Airport: Samarkand International Airport (SKD)
Suggested Date & Time: Day 27, July 21, anytime

A complimentary transfer will be provided from your Samarkand hotel to the airport, no matter when you depart. Please note that check-out time is 12:00 pm.

Most trip members return home from Samarkand via Istanbul (IST), Munich (MUC), Beijing (PEK), or Seoul (ICN).

INTERNATIONAL AIR TRAVEL

You are responsible for making your own arrangements for flights to and from Asia.

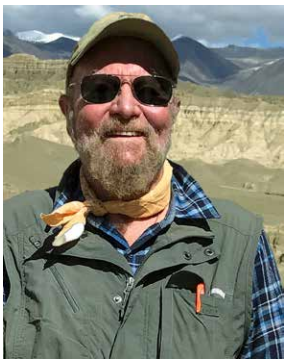
There are many online consolidators for booking travel, but for more personal help arranging air transport, you can contact Exito Travel at 1-800-655-4053 in the US or 1-800-670-2605 in Canada. They are very adept at putting flight itineraries together, to even the most far-flung places. More information can be found on Exito's website at: www.exitotravel.com.

Depending on your routing, it is necessary to depart from the US one or possibly two days prior to Day 1 of the trip itinerary. The name on your airline ticket must match the name on your passport exactly, and your passport must be valid for at least six months after your date of return to the US.

Please do not purchase your tickets until you are confirmed on the trip. Once your tickets have been purchased, please send us a copy of your airline schedule so we can reserve your airport transfers. It is your responsibility to ensure your flight times coordinate with the arrival and departure logistics for this trip.

Trip Leader

Wilderness Travel Trip Leaders have a passion and a joy for creating an unforgettable journey. We are extremely proud of them and the incredible travel experiences they make possible.



ROGER WILLIAMS

Roger Williams has been one of our most versatile guides since 1986, and he shows no sign of stopping. He spent eight years studying Tibetan Buddhism, Buddhist iconography, Himalayan languages, and woodblock art in Nepal, and another two years studying Japanese woodblock art, Japanese language, and Shingon Shu, an esoteric sect of Japanese Buddhism in Japan. If it isn't the surplus of knowledge Roger brings when he leads a trip that makes him so unique, then it may be his awareness for cultural preservation that keep trip members so loyal to his new adventures. Each year, Roger works with WT to design new trips in fascinating areas. He has led in such far-flung locations as Iran, Pakistan, northern Afghanistan, Kamchatka, Burma, Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Madagascar. When he's not leading, you can find Roger in Berkeley, California, where he is the director of Snow Lion Graphics/SLG Books, a publishing house specializing in Asian cultures. "There should be a rating higher than excellent for Roger," one trip member wrote after her journey with Roger. "His knowledge, energy, planning, and attentiveness are superlative."

What to Expect

WHAT THE TRIP IS LIKE

This trip is rated Level 3, Moderate. While the trip is not expected to be physically strenuous, the rustic accommodations, long travel days, and transportation conditions may be quite demanding. Our expedition travels to areas that have experienced very little tourism. We believe the most important requirements are a spirit of adventure and the understanding that you are visiting a remote and fascinating region. This is not designed as a hiking trip, but we do hope to have a few exploration walks of several hours during the journey.

ACCOMMODATIONS

We'll be staying in the best available city hotels, with some nights in more basic guesthouses/homestays. Single rooms can be requested, but are not guaranteed at certain properties. Wilderness Travel will do its best to secure single rooms for those who pay the single supplement, but even if this is confirmed in advance, arrangements may change while on the trip.

MEALS

All breakfasts, lunches, and dinners are included. Full breakfasts are included at hotels. When we feel it is best, we try to arrange other meals at local restaurants instead of using set meals in the hotels. Bottled water is provided throughout the trip. Village food tends to simpler and oilier than city food, but it is also an excellent chance to sample the food in rural areas.

TRANSPORT

Ground transportation is by small bus, minivan, and/or jeep. We have taken local travel times into account in planning the itinerary, though road conditions can change from week to week. While traveling in rural areas, there are few decent public bathroom facilities. We recommend that rather than using local facilities on drives, you do what the locals do and opt for a "nature break" when on road journeys.

CHOOSING THE RIGHT TRIP

Adventure travel often involves exotic destinations, unusual levels of physical exertion, or activities you may not have participated in previously. We work hard to help you choose the right trip for you, paying attention to your individual interests, abilities, and needs. If you have questions about the level of comfort or any of the activities described in this itinerary, please call Wilderness Travel at 1-800-368-2794 and ask for the Asia Manager or email us at: asia@wildernesstravel.com.

ABOUT LIMITED EDITION ADVENTURES

This is a Limited Edition adventure—which means a unique trip we've never run before or offer only every few years. Led by our most experienced Trip Leaders, these journeys often take place in remote destinations with only the most basic infrastructure for tourism. If you see a Limited Edition trip scheduled for this year, now is the time to sign up, as spaces fill very early and the trip may not be back for a while! Planned daily activities and actual timings may vary due to local conditions or the discretion of your Trip Leader—it is important to bring your spirit of adventure for these special exploratory journeys!

REFERENCES

We'd be happy to put you in touch with a past client that has traveled with us on this or a similar trip.

VISIT OUR WEBSITE

At www.wildernesstravel.com, you can book your trip online or find out about added departures, last-minute deals, and one-time Limited Edition adventures that aren't listed in our catalog. You can also access our complete library of detailed itineraries filled with enticing photos and videos, read bios of our Trip Leaders, find descriptions of trip accommodations, and check real-time availability of any trips that interest you.

Toucan Club Rewards & Discounts

We are very proud to have one of the highest rates of repeat travelers in the business, and have established the Wilderness Travel Toucan Club to reward you for your loyalty. For more information, please visit the Toucan Club page of our website at www.wildernesstravel.com/toucan.

Here's how it works:

YOUR FIRST TRIP

As a first-time traveler, you receive a lightweight Wilderness Travel T-shirt and set of durable WT Luggage Tags. On subsequent trips, we're happy to send you a new WT T-shirt and set of Luggage Tags by request.

YOUR SECOND TRIP

A top quality Wilderness Travel 32oz stainless steel insulated water bottle by CamelBak and a cozy Wilderness Travel fleece vest by Patagonia ($140 value).

YOUR THIRD TRIP

A versatile Wilderness Travel R-1 pullover by Patagonia ($150 value).

YOUR FOURTH TRIP

Discounts on the cost of your trip begin! You receive a 4% discount on the tour cost.

FIVE AND MORE TRIPS

You receive a 5% discount on the base trip cost. On your sixth trip, you receive a 6% discount, and so on up to your 10th trip. The maximum discount is 10%, with a ceiling of $500.

Note: Due to special pricing considerations, Toucan Club discounts do not apply to our Private Journeys or Special Events. However, your participation on these trips does count toward your Toucan discount on future departures of Wilderness Travel's regular adventures.

TERMS & CONDITIONS

Toucan Club travel discounts cannot be used in conjunction with any other discount, unless otherwise specified. Discounts are deducted from the base trip cost and shown on the final invoice. The base trip cost is the main land/tier cost and does not include single supplement fees, extensions, internal airfare, or other additional charges. Bonus gifts (T-shirts, luggage tags, vests, water bottles, and pullovers) will be mailed approximately three weeks prior to trip departure. Terms and conditions of Toucan Club bonuses are subject to change or cancellation at the discretion of Wilderness Travel, Inc.

T-SHIRT FRONT

T-SHIRT BACK

PATAGONIA SYNCHILLA FLEECE VEST; INSULATED CAMELBAK WATER BOTTLE

PATAGONIA R1 PULLOVER

WILDERNESS TRAVEL HAS BEEN AWARDED:

World's Best Tour Operators: *Travel + Leisure*, 2025, 12-time winner
Best Travel Specialists in the World: *Conde Nast Traveler*, 2025, 5-time winner
Best Wildlife, Hiking & Walking Trips: *AFAR Magazine*, 3 years in a row
Best Adventure Travel Companies: *USA Today*
Trip of the Year: *Outside Magazine*, 9-time winner
50 Tours of a Lifetime: *National Geographic Traveler*, 9 years in a row
Best Adventure Travel Companies: *National Geographic Adventure,* 3-time winner

Please be advised that California has established a Travel Consumer Restitution Fund under the California Seller of Travel Law that took effect January 1, 1996. This fund is designed to protect consumers from unscrupulous practices by discount airfare ticket sellers or air charter operators. Unfortunately, this law does not cover non-California residents and, even in the case of California residents, it does not cover any foreign travel where the foreign "providers of transportation or travel services" are not in compliance with the Sellers of Travel Law (compliance being defined as registered as a Seller of Travel in California and a participant in the Travel Consumer Restitution Fund). Thus none of Wilderness Travel's tours qualify and we are required by law to advise each client that they are not covered by the California Travel Consumer Restitution Fund. California law requires sellers of travel to maintain a trust account or bond. This business has a trust account. California Seller of Travel #100769640

While as accurate as possible at the time of printing, this itinerary should be considered an approximate indication of the schedule and scope of activities and trip routing, rather than an inflexible schedule of events; it is subject to change due to circumstances beyond our control. This trip is subject to the Limitation of Liability and all the terms and conditions as detailed in the General Information section of the Wilderness Travel Catalog.

Revised: May 18, 2026 4:36 PM

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