

#### DAY 1: ALMATY, KAZAKHSTAN

Arrive in Almaty, the cultural capital of Kazakhstan, and transfer to your hotel. Explore this ancient, sophisticated city—once a thriving center along the fabled Silk Road—at your leisure this evening.

Accommodations: Rixos Almaty

#### DAY 2: ALMATY

After breakfast, set out on a daylong tour of Almaty. Visit Park of 28 Panfilov, dedicated to a local infantry unit that attempted to defend Moscow against Nazi forces during World War II; and admire the eye-catching domes of Ascension Cathedral, one of the tallest wooden buildings in the world. Head to bustling Zelyony Bazaar to get a glimpse of daily life in the city, then continue to the Central State Museum of the Republic of Kazakhstan to learn about the country's long and layered history. This evening, clap along to a Kazakh folk performance during a welcome dinner.

Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Accommodations: Rixos Almaty

#### DAY 3: ALMATY / BISHKEK, KYRGYZSTAN

Travel to the outskirts of Almaty and explore Issyk State Historical and Cultural Reserve Museum. Gain a unique insight into ancient Kazakh culture while walking amongst 80 prehistoric burial mounds. Later, join a museum curator to discover the mysterious story of the Golden Man—a skeleton discovered in warrior's garb and covered by thousands of golden ornaments. After lunch, enjoy some time on your own before heading to the airport to catch a flight to Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan's capital city.

Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Accommodations: Hyatt Regency Bishkek

#### DAY 4: BISHKEK

This morning, meet with wildlife conservationists to learn about National Geographic grantee Tatjana Rosen's efforts to protect snow leopards—Central Asia's iconic feline species. Then set out to discover Bishkek, visiting the city's Stalinist-style presidential palace and the expansive Ala-Too Square. Later, head to the Kyrgyz National Museum of Fine Arts for a special tour with its chief curator. Spend the evening at the Supara Ethno-Complex, a restaurant and event space designed to reflect traditional

nomadic lifestyles. Enjoy a private fashion show and cap off the day with a folkloric song and dance performance in a private yurt.

Meals Included: Breakfast, Dinner

Accommodations: Hyatt Regency Bishkek

#### DAY 5: BISHKEK / TASHKENT, UZBEKISTAN

Drive into the lush hills surrounding Bishkek to the 11th-century Burana Tower, the only structure that remains of the Silk Road city of Balasagun. Savor a hearty lunch in the home of a local family, then continue to a nearby village. Here, in the pristine heart of Kyrgyz nomad country, you will experience unique nomadic traditions that date back thousands of years—including demonstrations of horseback archery, falconry and felt making. Later, sit down for a moving performance of verses from the Epic of Manas, Kyrgyzstan's cherished national poem, listed by UNESCO as a part of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. Return to Bishkek for an evening flight to Tashkent, Uzbekistan

Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Accommodations: Lotte City Hotel Tashkent Palace

#### DAY 6: TASHKENT

One of the oldest cities in Uzbekistan, Tashkent was once a major trading post on the Silk Road. Tour this eclectic Uzbek capital, strolling past the blue-domed mosques and mausoleums of Khast Imam Square. Take a look at the aged pages of the Quran of Uthman, believed to be one of the oldest extant copies of the holy book. Wander through piles of colorful spices, dried fruit and fragrant rice at Chorsu Bazaar and pay a visit to the Museum of Applied Arts—a collection of Uzbek handicrafts housed in the lavish former mansion of a Russian imperial diplomat. Later, enjoy a visit to the private studio of a family that has been creating traditional ceramics for 6 generations.

Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch

Accommodations: Lotte City Hotel Tashkent Palace

#### DAY 7: TASHKENT / SAMARQAND

Board a fast train to Samarqand, dubbed a “crossroad of cultures” by UNESCO. Set on the edge of the Kyzylkum Desert, this legendary city flourished in the 14th and 15th centuries under the rule of Timur and his successors. Explore Registan Square, home to some of the finest examples of Islamic architecture

in the world, and see the glittering turquoise dome of the Bibi Khanum Mosque, dedicated to Timur's favorite wife. Stroll through the historic Siab Bazaar and visit the Shah-i-Zinda necropolis, adorned in a stunning spectrum of blue tiles. This evening, unwind in the city of Samarqand and enjoy an evening at your leisure.

Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch

Accommodations: Dilimah Hotel

#### DAY 8: PANJAKENT, TAJIKISTAN / SAMARQAND, UZBEKISTAN

Embark on a day trip to the city of Panjakent in Tajikistan, a former settlement of the pre-Islamic Sogdiana civilization located on the banks of the Zeravshan River. Delve into the Iranian heritage of this ancient city with visits to the ruins of Zoroastrian temples, a necropolis and a residential area. Discover Sogdian artifacts at the Rudaki Museum, named after the 9th-century Persian poet Rudaki, and explore Panjakent's Central Market Bazaar. Back in Samarqand, enjoy dinner hosted by a local family in their home.

Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Accommodations: Dilimah Hotel

#### DAY 9: SAMARQAND / UZBEK COUNTRYSIDE

This morning, venture into the countryside surrounding Samarqand to glimpse rural Uzbek life. Hike along feathery grasslands, over windswept hills and past weathered canyons en route to a local village. Here, you'll have a chance to chat with the residents about the changes their lives have seen over the years and witness certain customs that have remained unchanged for centuries. Return to the city for lunch, then enjoy an afternoon at your leisure or choose to take a private tour of the Afrasiab Museum. Marvel at the weapons, ceramics and frescoes excavated from the ancient city of Afrasiab—the historic core of Samarqand—destroyed by the Mongols in the 13th century.

Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch

Accommodations: Dilimah Hotel

#### DAY 10: BUKHARA

Depart by train to Bukhara, once an intellectual and cultural center of the Islamic world and a flourishing Silk Road town. Stroll Bukhara's historic center, which has changed little since the days when caravans

passed through, and pay a visit to the unusual Chor-Minor madrasa, featuring 4 differently shaped minarets. Discover the Po-i-Kalyan religious complex, whose bright blue domes can be seen from a distance and admire the stunning mosaics of the Nadir Divan-Begi madrasa.

Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch

Accommodations: Devon Hotel

#### DAY 11: BUKHARA

Continue your exploration of Bukhara on foot with a visit to the 10th-century Samanid mausoleum. Pause at the vividly colored Bolo-Hauz Mosque; visit the fifth-century Ark, the massive fortified residence of the emirs of Bukhara. This afternoon, make your way to the Old Jewish Quarter, home to a community of Bukharan Jews who speak their own dialect of Tajik-Persian mixed with Hebrew. Alternatively, head outside the city center to the opulent summer palace of the Bukharan emirs and venture to the serene mausoleum of Bahauddin Naqshband, the founder of the Naqshbandi order of Sufis and one of the most revered figures in the Muslim world. Round off the day with a master class in the art of making plov, Central Asia's national dish, consisting of rice, vegetables and meat cooked in a spice-infused broth. Enjoy this aromatic feast for dinner at a local home.

Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Accommodations: Devon Hotel

#### DAY 12: BUKHARA/KHIVA (KHIWA)

Bid goodbye to Bukhara and travel to Khiva. The capital of an independent khanate for almost a millennium, Khiva was a vital stop on the Silk Road and harbors one of the best-preserved old towns in Central Asia. A tightly knit maze of streets forms the city's core, and its mud-colored buildings are accented with brilliant shades of blue.

Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Accommodations: Erkin Palace (or similar)

#### DAY 13: KHIVA

Following breakfast, set out on a tour of magical Khiva—a trip into its historic center and the World Heritage Site of Itchan Kala. Explore the corridors and courtyards of Tash Hauli Palace, former home of the Khivan ruler Allah Kuli Khan; marvel at the turquoise dome of the mausoleum of the famed

pahlavan, or warrior, Mahmud; and weave between a forest of wooden columns at the Juma Mosque. Later, enjoy dinner accompanied by traditional music performed by a local folkgroup.

Meals Included: Breakfast, Dinner

Accommodations: Erkin Palace (or similar)

#### DAY 14: KHIVA / DAŞOGUZ, TURKMENISTAN / ASHGABAT

Cross the border into Turkmenistan, stopping in the city of Daşoguz and venturing through the lively local bazaar. After lunch, continue to the airport to fly to Ashgabat, Turkmenistan's largest city. This gleaming metropolis holds the Guinness World Record for the highest density of buildings adorned with white marble.

Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch

Accommodations: Oguzkent Hotel

#### DAY 15: ASHGABAT

Brimming with golden domes, soaring minarets and futuristic skyscrapers, modern Ashgabat is largely the creation of Turkmenistan's charismatic leader, the late Saparmurat Niyazov. On a city tour, visit the nearby ruins of Nisa, the capital of the ancient Parthian Empire which rivaled Rome. Stop by the towering Monument of Neutrality; wander through the manicured paths of stately Independence Park, and admire the Presidential Palace's golden-domed exterior. Toast to your Silk Road journey at a festive farewell dinner, followed by a fashion show where you'll have the opportunity to meet and speak with a local fashion designer.

Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Accommodations: Oguzkent Hotel

#### DAY 16: ASHGABAT

Transfer to the airport and depart for home.

Meals Included: Breakfast