

Caravans & Kingdoms, Marco Polo's Silk Road

The Stans! New AFS Small Group \$3998

Aug 14-25, 2026

(Post trip extension with Glamping in Kazakhstan August 25-29 option below.)

 Check Availability

Price is located at the bottom of the daily itinerary

Discover the Heart of the legendary Silk Road through Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan with us in 10 unforgettable days. You've been asking for this. Get ready now to step back in time for a once-in-a-lifetime adventure deep into central Asia. This exclusive AFS journey promises meaningful connections and spectacular landscapes.

We curated this itinerary with the best expert guides to Escort you through these remote lands with seamless logistics, lovely hotels, delicious cuisines, and hidden gems that you know about each day.

It begins in the bustling Boulevards of **Tashkent**, to the cultural treasures of **Samarkand**, **Dushanbe**, and **Bukhara** to lively **Almaty**, where modern life blends with ancient cultures.

We travel by high-speed train, scenic roads, and an internal flight to trace the footsteps of ancient cultures in three diverse countries. Along the way, enjoy Colorful markets and minarets, explore UNESCO World Heritage sites, marvel at Tumarid architecture, photograph serene mountain scapes, and enjoy the buzz of vibrant capital cities. We connect you with friendly local artisans for cultural immersion to make it large fun. But it's also an education with daily tours, providing lessons in history of Asia's wonders.

This year, the Stans are so popular that they have finally made it easy for visitors. No visas for Kaz and Taj and an eazy-E visa for Uzb. Don't miss this ultimate new adventure of discovery. Spaces will fill quickly for with our AFS Travel Lovers who love collecting new countries in their passports.



For your bragging rights, you can say that you did the Stans in style! You'll love the Hilton and other great hotels, all at an excellent price with internal flight and bullet trains included. Your GTL Deanna is thrilled to lead this fun group after studying the regions over a year.

It's not just about masterpieces of art and architecture. You'll discover sacred sites that reveal the faith and devotion of the people who have thrived here for centuries, far off the tourist-trodden paths.

Echoes of the timeless Silk Road is all about awe-inspiring natural beauty and a celebration of vocation. This is one vacation that is an adventure worth taking and a memory maker to last you a lifetime!

Our Glorious AFS Itinerary

Make a Reservation | Check Availability

[Tap for printable itinerary](#)

 Web content is continuously updated, whereas PDF versions may contain outdated details due to their static nature.

August 14 - Depart USA to Tashkent, Uzbekistan. For the best airlines on best fares and routes, look no farther than Turkish, Qatar, or Emirates and non-stop Uzbekistan Airways. Some may want to go in a few days early for a lovely stopover in Istanbul, Doha, Dubai or add a stop post trip. Note that Land starts on August 16.



August 16 - City of Contrasts: Tashkent Arrival and Unveiling the Capital

Welcome to Uzbekistan! Most flights arrive early in the morning. Transfer to the hotel and immediate check-in. You can have a rest after your long flight, take a shower, and have breakfast before meeting your group and guide at noon for the welcome briefing. After lunch at a local restaurant, we will set out on an orientation tour of Tashkent, the capital of Uzbekistan and the largest city in Central Asia with a population of around 3 million people. Tashkent is not only the biggest city in Central Asia, but also one of the oldest. Unfortunately, most of its historic buildings were destroyed in a catastrophic earthquake in 1966, after which Tashkent was rebuilt as a model Soviet city.

We will then visit Independence Square, a symbol of freedom for the Uzbek people since they declared independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. Next, we take a stroll on Tashkent's artists' corner, locally known as Broadway. At Amir Timur Square, we will then encounter Uzbekistan's national hero, Emperor Timur (Tamerlane). At the end of the day, we will enjoy our welcome dinner, celebrating the start of what promises to be a captivating adventure through Central Asia.

Accommodation: [Hotel Inspira](#) 4*, incl. early check-in. (2nts) Enjoy next one the Spa, Pool and robots.

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

August 17 - Tashkent's Timeless Treasures: From Ancient Qurans to Artistic Metros

After breakfast, we visit the Old City area of Tashkent where you will find the Khast Imom Complex which contains the ancient holy Quran of Caliph Osman. We will then experience the bustling crowds of traders at Chor-Su Bazaar, the city's main market. We will also have the opportunity to experience a ride on the beautifully decorated Tashkent Metro. We complete the city tour of Tashkent with a visit to the Applied Arts Museum.

Accommodation: Hotel Inspira-4*

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner



August 18 - Silk Road Echoes: Bukhara's Labyrinth Awaits

After breakfast, we will transfer to the train station to catch the high-speed train to Bukhara (8:00 am – 12:20 pm) and then drive to the town of Bukhara (c. 30 minutes) for lunch and then check in at the hotel. In the afternoon, we will have a walking tour of Bukhara, seemingly everyone's favorite and one of the most important trading hubs on the Silk Road, as well as a respected center of theology and scholarship. The Old City (a UNESCO World Heritage Site) has been well preserved and is crammed full of minarets, mosques, and madrassas. Your guide will show you Bukhara's unmissable sights, including the Poi Kalon complex, the bazaars inside Bukhara's unique trading domes, and the Lyabi Hauz area. As you wander the labyrinthine streets you will soak up the city's atmosphere.

Accommodation: Hotel Paradise Plaza 4*

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner



August 19 - Bukhara's Living History & Evening Dash to Samarkand

Today we have some more time to explore Bukhara. We will visit Ark Fortress, Bolo Hauz Mosque, the Ayub Mausoleum and spring. There is also time for shopping or visiting workshops of local masters of different handicrafts, if you like. In the afternoon, transfer to the train station (30 min) and take the bullet train to Samarkand. Dinner at the restaurant next to our hotel. After dinner, who likes, may visit illuminated Registan Square.

Accommodation: [Hotel Zarafshon Parkside](#) 4* (2nts)

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

August 20 - Timur's Legacy: The Blue Majesty of Samarkand



Sublime Samarkand was the capital of the Timurid Empire; Timur was one of history's greatest conquerors. His vast empire rivaled any, stretching across the Eurasian steppe. He ruled his kingdom with an iron fist, whilst at the same time patronizing the arts and literature. Much of the architectural heritage from this period has been preserved, allowing us to see how the city might have been at the peak of Timur's power.

We will start the city tour with a visit to Gur-e-Amir, the gilded mausoleum where Timur is buried. We will hear stories from his life and how he began the construction of Samarkand. We will then visit Registan Square, the most famous landmark in all of Uzbekistan. This square was the focal point of medieval Samarkand and is framed by three beautiful madrassas (religious schools), Ulugbek, Sherdor, and Tillya Kori. We will end the city tour with a visit to Shah-i Zinda, a magnificent tiled necropolis.

Accommodation: Hotel Zarafshon Parkside 4*

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner



August 21 - Across the Fann Mountains: Iskander Kul's Serenity to Dushanbe's Lights

After breakfast, it is time to say goodbye to the marvelous cities of Uzbekistan and transfer to the border crossing with Tajikistan. Today's scenic drive is long, but the stunning landscapes and stuff at Kul make it truly unforgettable. We will pass through both border checkpoints on foot, complete all necessary formalities, and meet our Tajik guide and driver on the other side. We will then continue on a very scenic driving day through the Zarafshan Mountains to Dushanbe, the capital of Tajikistan.

On the way, we will visit Iskander Kul, a picturesque mountain lake located 30 km off the main road. The lake, named after Alexander the Great ("Iskander" is the Persian form of Alexander), is triangular in shape and considered one of the most exquisitely beautiful lakes in all of the former Soviet Union. It's nestled in the Fann Mountains at an altitude of 2,200m. We will have lunch on the shore of the lake.

Those who like, can then take a short hike to a nearby waterfall. Be prepared for colder weather in the mountains. In the afternoon, we will depart from Iskander Kul and finish driving to Dushanbe.

After an ascent to the Anzob Tunnel, our route is along the Vazob River down to the Varzob Gorge, a popular weekend getaway for locals from Dushanbe. We will reach Dushanbe in the evening, check in at the hotel, and have dinner.

Accommodation: [Hotel Hilton](#) 5*. (2nts). From the Hilton, you can take in Tajikistan's history at the National Museum of Tajikistan and Ismoil Somoni Monument on the edge of Rudaki Park, all within four kilometers. Enjoy our full-service spa, indoor heated pool, and fitness center.

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner



August 22 - Dushanbe: Monday Markets and Mosaic Marvels



Fountain and the National Library in Dushanbe, the Capital of Tajikistan. Central Asia

Originally, Dushanbe was a small village centered on a market that took place every Monday. The Persian word Dushanbe means “Monday”, so this is how the city got its name. It was during the Soviet Union that Dushanbe became the industrial center of Tajikistan and the capital city it is today.

We will tour the marvelous modern Navruz Palace. Today we will also have a chance to visit a famous stone mosaics master, whose works are also on display in Navruz Palace. Touring today also includes the Museum of Musical Instruments and Folklore. Badakhshani actor Gurminj Zavkybekov began this small but fascinating museum. Displaying a fine collection of beautifully crafted antique and modern instruments from Afghanistan, the Pamirs, Turkey, and China, the museum is often the scene of exuberant performances and demonstrations. After, we will visit the statue of Ismail Somoni, whose mausoleum you saw in Bukhara. This large monument commemorates the 1,100th anniversary of the Samanid State, a Golden Age of the Tajik nation when science

and arts flourished. From there, we will walk up to Rudaki Park, dedicated to the great Persian poet Rudaki, who also lived during the Samanid period, in the 10th century AD.

Accommodation: Hotel Hilton 5*

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner



August 23 - From Dushanbe to the Steppes: Almaty, Kazakhstan Welcomes You

After breakfast, check-out from the hotel. We will visit today the main market of Dushanbe. In the early afternoon, transfer to the airport to catch an Air Astana flight to Almaty. Upon arrival at Almaty Airport, meet your local guide and transfer to the city center.

Settle into your room at 4 star Novotel Hotel. After a short rest, enjoy the beautiful cable car ride to Kok-Tobe hill. There we will have a fabulous Kazakh welcome dinner with a night city view. (Aby restaurant).

Accommodation: [Hotel Novotel](#) 4* (2nts) Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner.



Novotel Hotel

The hotel offers high-speed wifi, a fitness center, a pool & sauna, a restaurant with a bar & outdoor terrace, and parking facilities. Novotel Almaty City Center is located in the very center of Almaty and its cultural. Stroll down Dostyk Avenue with lots of cafes & restaurants, or have a walk along the canal or parks. Enjoy the Cable Car for Kok Tobe Hill, activities around & central location to most of the interesting places, such as parks or shopping.

August 24 - Kazakh Rhythms: Ethno-Village Traditions and Almaty Farewell

We will start our morning at the lively Republic Square, where we will learn a bit of the history of Kazakhstan from the Kazakh Khanate to modern day, meanwhile enjoying the view of the majestic Tyan-Shan mountains.

We will continue through the landmarks of downtown Almaty towards the Panfilov Park to see the most famous sight of Almaty, Zenkov Cathedral. In the same Park is the impressive Soviet Glory Memorial, a tribute to 28 men who, as the narrative goes, repulsed 50 German tanks from the outskirts of Moscow during World War II. We will have a nice lunch at a Georgian (or Russian) restaurant nearby.



After lunch: Ethno-Village Traditions you will immerse yourself in Kazakh culture, learning about traditions and rituals in the Huns ethno-village, about an hour's drive from Almaty. On arrival, you'll be welcomed by hostesses greeting you with a national ritual called **Shashu**. It involves showering guests with sweets, as Kazakhs do during weddings and other ceremonies. The sweets must be picked up and kept, as Kazakhs believe

they will bring good luck in the future. At Huns, you will learn how to bake puffy Kazakh bread, see the inside of the Kazakh yurt, learn a lot about the traditions of Nomads, and be a spectator at a thrilling performance of national horse games. The games include Jigitovka (horseback riding with acrobatic elements), Atpen audaryspak (jostling and pushing a rival while on horseback) and Kyz kuu, where a boy chases a girl on horseback. If he catches her he will be rewarded with a kiss; but if he fails, she can lash him!

We will have a nice farewell dinner to toast each other goodbye on a journey well done before arriving back at the hotel at about 9 pm.

Accommodation: Hotel Novotel 4*

August 25 - Homeward Bound: Departure from the Silk Road

Transfer to the airport and fly back home.

Meals: Breakfast



Deposit: \$500

LAND PRICE: \$3998 per person twin share. \$120 pre-paid gratuities added to invoice for licensed guides and drivers throughout main trip. This does not cover any personal tipping.

Price based on 22 participants

Single room supplement +\$895 and limited to just a few

Price includes

- All transfers, including airport pick-up and drop-off
- Accommodation is based on two people sharing a double/twin room; breakfasts included
- Lunches and dinners (full board)
- Local guides in each city/ country plus Central Asian tour manager and AFS GTL for the entire trip
- All entry fees as per the itinerary
- All cultural activities and special arrangements
- Bullet train tickets
- Flight from Dushanbe to Almaty

Not Included: Gratuities (these will be added to the invoice as a separate item for easier distribution), international airfare, and travel insurance.

Wow we feel the main trip is more than enough for most people, some in our group are insisting on doing all five Stans. So we are offering a pre-and post extension sold as a package that cannot be broken up. It will extend your trip a week before and a week after the main trip.

To book this package choose the proper package.

[Make a Reservation | Check Availability](#)

Pre & Post Trip Package Overview

- **August 12 - WED: Arrival in Ashgabat. City tour.**
- **August 13 - THU: Ashgabat region.**
- **August 14 - FRI: Ashgabat – Dashoguz (9.50 am – 10:40 am) – Khiva (c. 3h).**
- **August 15 - SAT: Khiva city tour. Flight to Tashkent (11:00 pm- 0:20 am).**

• **August 16 - SUN: Start of the main tour at noon.**

+ **Main Trip - August 14-25** +

• **August 25 – TUE: Almaty – Bishkek (250 km, c. 5h)**

• **August 26 – WED: Bishkek – Burana Tower – Chon Kemin (180 km, c. 4h)**

• **August 27 – THU: Chon Kemin – Bishkek (160 km, c. 3h)**

• **August 28 – FRI: Bishkek city tour**

Land Price for the Pre & Post Extension is \$3495 + \$3998 = \$7493 [Travel insurance](#) required for entry into the extension countries, not is doing main package only. Gratuities of \$110 + 120 for main will be added to invoice for your convenience.

Welcome to Turkmenistan! Most international flights arrive in Ashgabat in the early hours—expect Turkish Airlines from Istanbul or FlyDubai/Emirates from Dubai. Visa on arrival is

arranged with our pre-approved invitation letter. Transfer to the hotel, early check-in, and breakfast. Take some time to rest after your journey.

Late morning, gather with your tour leader and fellow travelers for a welcome briefing and group lunch. In the afternoon, we'll set out for an orientation tour of the Turkmen capital—Ashgabat, the “city of love,” renowned for its extravagant white marble architecture. We'll visit the city's most striking landmarks: the towering Monument of Independence (Turkmenistan's marble “Eiffel Tower”), the rocket-like Arch of Neutrality, the distinctive “Palace of Happiness” (wedding registry hall in the form of an eight-pointed star), and the National Memory Complex, featuring an eternal flame and the dramatic Earthquake Memorial (a giant bull hoisting the earth).

This evening, we'll enjoy a welcome dinner with panoramic city views.

Accommodation: Hotel Diwan 5* (or similar), early check-in included

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

August 13 – THU: Ashgabat region.

Breakfast at the hotel. Today's explorations start with the ancient ruins of Old Nisa (UNESCO World Heritage Site), once the heart of the Parthian Empire. Sitting atop a rugged hill at the edge of the Kopet-Dag Mountains, Old Nisa's remnants evoke a lost era—its semi-excavated complexes were royal residences and temples. When the Parthians moved on, the site's legacy carried over to New Nisa, just a couple of kilometers away.

Next, we'll drive to Geokdepe village to visit the famed Geokdepe stud farm and meet the legendary Akhal-Teke horses—celebrated for their speed, grace, and shimmering coats. There will be time to ride, feed, and photograph these remarkable animals. Lunch will be served at the farm. On the way back to Ashgabat, we'll stop at the country's largest mosque and the family mausoleum of the first President, Turkmenbashi.

Back in the city, we'll tour the National Museum of History, home to over 327,000 artifacts from Old Nisa, Ancient Merv, and other archaeological sites. There's also time for a visit to a lively local market. Dinner tonight is accompanied by a Turkmen folklore show.

Accommodation: Diwan 5* or similar

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

August 14 – FRI: Ashgabat – Dashoguz (9:50 am – 10:40 am) – Khiva (approx. 3 hrs)

Morning flight to Dashoguz. After landing, we'll enjoy a farewell lunch Turkmen-style at a local restaurant. In the afternoon, we transfer to the Uzbekistan border. The crossing is on foot and may take around two hours—be prepared for some waiting. On the Uzbek side, you'll meet your new guide and driver for the final hour's drive to Khiva.

Tonight, dinner and overnight in Khiva. Time permitting, we'll take a sunset stroll atop the old city walls for sweeping views of Khiva's historic center.

Accommodation: Hotel Farovon 5* or similar

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

August 15 – SAT: Khiva city tour. Flight to Tashkent (11:00 pm – 0:20 am)



Monumen Arch of Independence in sunset.
Ashkhabad, Turkmenistan.

After breakfast, our walking tour of Khiva begins. The walled Ichan-Kala—the city’s UNESCO-listed inner fortress—awaits, packed with more than 50 monuments and hundreds of ancient homes. Entering through the imposing city gates, the turquoise-tiled Kalta Minor minaret rises before you, a hallmark of Islamic design. Our tour will wind through Khiva’s maze of madrassahs, palaces, and mosques.

Late in the evening, we’ll check out of the hotel and transfer to the airport for a domestic flight to Tashkent (departing 11:00 pm, arriving just after midnight). Transfer to the hotel in Tashkent.

Accommodation: Hotel Inspira-S 4*

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

August 16 – SUN: Start of the main tour at noon.

Morning at leisure. At noon, regroup with your fellow travelers and begin the main group tour.

Main Trip

Extension Portion #2 Aug 25-29, 2026

Post-trip to Kyrgyzstan - Eagles & Horses

Almaty to Bishkek. August 25 – August 29, 2026.

August 25 – TUE: Almaty – Bishkek (250 km, c. 5h).

After breakfast, meet your Kyrgyz guide and set off from Almaty for the drive to Kyrgyzstan—expect around 3-4 hours to the border. Cross on foot, then continue by vehicle for another hour to our hotel in central Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan’s capital. Check-in and settle in.

This evening, we’ll take an introductory walk and enjoy a Kyrgyz welcome dinner at a local restaurant, complete with a folklore show—dancers, musicians, and a “Manaschi,” the famed storyteller of the national epic, Manas.

Accommodation: Hotel Orion 5* or similar

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

August 26 – WED: Bishkek – Burana Tower – Chon Kemin (180 km, c. 4h).

Kyrgyzstan is all about its mountains, and today we head deep into the Tien Shan range, to Chon Kemin Nature Park. The first stop is Burana Tower, near Tokmok, about 80 km east of Bishkek. Here, in the village stadium, we’ll witness traditional Kyrgyz horse games. The highlight is Buzkashi (or Kok Boru), a raw, frenetic contest where two teams of riders race across the field, battling for possession of a headless goat carcass—an ancient nomadic ritual brought to life. You’ll also see Kyz Kuumai, “Catch the Girl,” where a young man and woman race across the steppe for a kiss, or a playful beating if he fails. There’s time to meet the players after the games, grab some photos, and ask questions. Lunch is served in a local family’s home.

After lunch, we visit Burana Tower itself—an 11th-century minaret and the last remnant of Balasagun, capital of the Karakhanid empire. Climb the spiral stairs for sweeping Chuy Valley views, and explore the open-air museum of balbals (ancient carved stone figures). We continue a couple more hours into the Chon Kemin valley, checking in at the glamping yurt camp “Ala Kush.” Free time before dinner to soak in the mountain scenery, relax, or take a short hike. Dinner is at the camp.

Accommodation: Glamping yurt camp “Ala Kush”

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

August 27 – THU: Chon Kemin – Bishkek (160 km, c. 3h).

After breakfast, you have the option of a two-hour horse ride, a walk, or simply relaxing at the camp. Later in the morning, watch as local artisans demonstrate the age-old craft of shyrdak—vibrant felt carpets made using centuries-old techniques. Next, we visit an eagle hunter for a performance and up-close encounter with his bird. Lunch is at the yurt camp before we return to Bishkek in the afternoon. Check in at the hotel.

Dinner tonight is in a local restaurant.



A group of traditional kazakh eagle hunters holding their golden eagles on horseback with a heard of horses running in the background. Ulgii, Mongolia.

Accommodation: Hotel Orion 5* or similar
Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

August 28 – FRI: Bishkek city tour.

Bishkek, with its Soviet-era boulevards and leafy parks, is a young city by Central Asian standards. Our walking tour starts at Philharmonic Hall and winds through Oak Park toward the main square, Ala-Too. At the square, we'll visit the National History Museum for a crash course in Kyrgyz history and culture. The afternoon is free—explore on your own or relax.

Regroup in the evening for a festive Kyrgyz farewell dinner.

Accommodation: Hotel Orion 5* or similar
Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

August 29 – SAT: Departure from Bishkek.

Check out of the hotel by noon. Transfer to the airport for your flight home.

Meals: Breakfast

Price per person twin share \$3495

Price based on 15 participants. Two single rooms available for additional \$425

Price includes

- Transfer from Almaty to Bishkek on two large buses (one to the Kazakh side of the border and one from the Kyrgyz side of the border to the hotel)
- Transport for transfers and excursions (good condition car with a/c)
- 12-19 people – 2 Mercedes Sprinters with enough space for luggage
- Double/Twin room accommodation in the hotels, including breakfast
- Meal as indicated in the program;
- Bottled water throughout the tour;
- English speaking tour guide
- Entry fees to museums according to the program;
- Folklore show in Bishkek
- Eagle hunting show in Kemin
- Horse games at Burana

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