

Pamir Highway Tour August 1st-11th 2024 Tajikistan



INTRODUCTION:

This is a great tour for nature lovers, taking in all the best parts. The Pamir Highway is famous for a reason, and no trip to Tajikistan is complete without it. We're starting this tour in Osh, Kyrgyzstan, from where we'll start the epic drive to Dushanbe via Murghab, Ishkashim, Khorog and loads of spectacular lakes and unbelievable views. We'll make our way through the Tajik side of the Wakhan Corridor, skirting the Afghan border, at one point just a few metres away, and you'll be able to see across the narrow river that forms the border. Using 4x4s for this trip, you'll be experiencing roads like you might not have before, and at times it'll feel like we're the only people in the world.

HIGHLIGHTS:

Take in the breathtaking views on the Pamir Highway

Get a peak across the Panj River at the mysterious country of Afghanistan

Spend a night at the epic Soviet Sanatorium of Khoja Obi Garm

Excited? Come with SAIGA to Central Asia!

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Tour Details:

DATES: August 1st-11th 2024

PRICE: \$1650 USD (twin share),
Single Supplement \$175 USD

START: Dushanbe, Tajikistan

FINISH: Dushanbe, Tajikistan



INCLUSIONS:

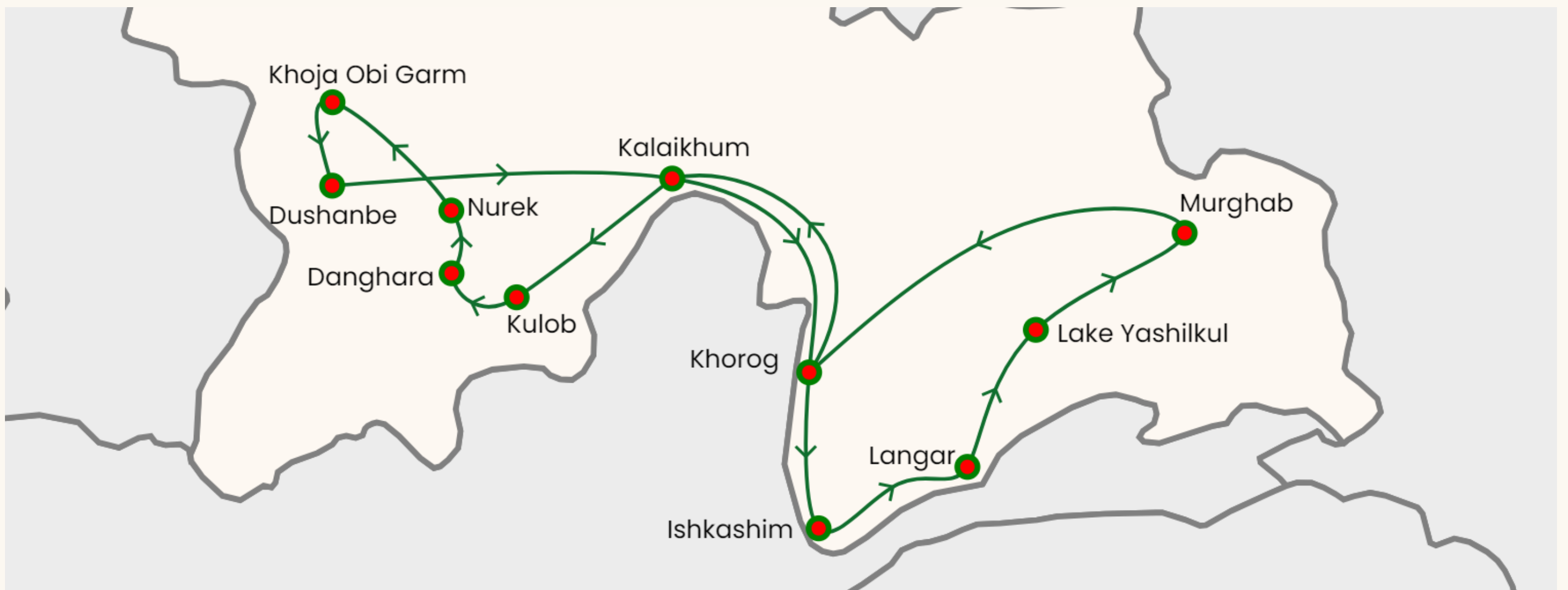
- Accommodation in twin share at roughly 3 star hotels/guesthouses, breakfast included
- Where itinerary mentions yurt or homestay accommodation, single supplement and twin share may be affected
- Land transport as per itinerary
- Entrance fees to most sites (as per itinerary)
- SAIGA guide and local guides

EXCLUSIONS:

- Visa fees if necessary
- Visa support if necessary
- Some activities, eg. mineral spas (as per itinerary)
- Meals other than breakfast
- Transport to and from the start and end of tour
- Personal expenses such as souvenirs or any optional activities
- PCR Tests and any other COVID related expenses

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Day 1: Dushanbe

- Arrive in Dushanbe and transfer to the hotel.
- We will spend our first day exploring Dushanbe, Tajikistan's capital city. We'll take a tour of the city centre, including Rudaki Street, the Somoni Monument and Central Park, where you can gawk at the huge flagpole which was the largest in the world from 2011 to 2014.
- Next we'll visit the the National Museum of Tajikistan, where we'll see one of the biggest (literally and figuratively) objects of Tajik pride - the "Buddha in Nirvana" (Reclining Buddha), an impressive 13 metre high clay statue.
- We'll visit the largest teahouse in the world, where you can either just enjoy a locally made tea, or have something to eat in this iconic building.

Day 2: Dushanbe - Kalaikhum

- Leaving Dushanbe we'll start driving east today, towards to Pamirs. We'll cover about 310km, which will take 7-8 hours.
- Crossing the Sagirdasht Pass, we'll get our first of many spectacular panoramic views of snow-capped mountains, valleys, rivers and waterfalls.
- We'll arrive in Kalaikhum in the early evening, a cute little town of 1,600 people, nestled into the valley. From here you can easily see across the river Panj into Afghanistan.
- I'm sure it's not just us that finds something really strange and exhilarating about looking across a border. It's just a few metres, you could throw a rock there, and yet it's like a whole different world. Especially when the other country is one that is so special and unique.

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Day 3: Kalaikhum - Khorog

- Leaving Kalaikhum, we will be driving along the River Panj, which forms Tajikistan's border with Afghanistan, and this is a fascinating drive. On the Tajik side of the river, the road is made, there is electricity and buildings are constructed using metal and glass. On the Afghan side however, just a few metres away across the narrow river, the roads are unmade, and the houses are small mud structures. It's not like this part of Tajikistan is cosmopolitan and well-developed, but there's still a stark contrast.
- We'll arrive in Khorog, the capital of the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast (GBAO), which we require special permits for, after about 5-6 hours, covering 260km. Although it was once of strategic importance to the Soviet Union, this is now a really poor area of Tajikistan.
- We'll visit the Khorog bazaar, the museum and the pretty incredible Botanical Gardens, which has been newly renovated and is the highest botanical gardens in the world! And all the while, Afghanistan is just over there.

Day 4: Khorog - Ishkashim - Yamg

- Just outside Khorog, we'll stop at the Garam Chashma hot springs to get ourselves off to a relaxing start, before another day driving the Pamir. There are also cafes here for those who would rather relax with a beverage and bite to eat.
- Today we'll travel about 160km, over the course of 5-6 hours.
- We'll check out the ruins of Kah-Kakha Fortress, left over from the Kushan era of the 4th Century AD.
- Arriving in Yamg we'll see the tomb and reconstructed house museum of Sufi mystic Mubarak Kadam, along with the stone that was used as a solar calendar 700 years ago.

Day 5: Yamg - Vrang - Langar

- Today will be a bit of a slower day, with only about 3-4 hours of driving, travelling 100km.
- We won't actually be in the Wakhan Corridor, but as we drive along the River Panj, we'll be just across the river from it, the Hindu Kush to the south and the Pamirs to the north.
- Our first stop will be at the Yamchun Fort. Although desolate and remote now, the Wakhan Corridor and Pamir Highway was once an important section of the Silk Road, and the area is littered with ruins of caravanserais, fortresses, stupas, towers and palaces. Sadly though, over centuries of war, earthquakes and mudslides, most of them are either completely ruined, or barely recognisable. This one is the best preserved, and there it is also believed by some that there is a Zoroastrian fire temple within this fort.
- Then we will be in Vrang, where we'll see the caves dug by the Buddhists who used to live here.

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Day 6: Langar - Khargush Pass - Alichur Valley - Murghab

- We'll keep driving along the next section of the Pamir Highway, on a section of road that was completed in 1931. It will take us about 7-8 hours to travel 260km today.
- Crossing the Khargush Pass, the terrain here will be getting drier and more barren, the lush Wakhan Valley far behind us now.
- Coming down out of the pass, we'll stop at Yashilkul and Bulung Kul, two more spectacular lakes.
- This part of the Pamirs was made famous by the Chevy Chase and Dan Akroyd film Spies Like Us.
- After a pretty exciting day of driving and sight-seeing, we'll arrive in Murghab and spend the night there.
- Arrive in Murghab, a small city in the Alichur Valley. Surrounded by high snow-covered mountains, this area is inhabited by Kyrgyz and Pamir Tajik people. From here you'll get great views of the high summit of Muztagh Ata Peak, which is 7,546m, but actually in China.
- Take a walk to explore the city and its traditional market. We'll stop for a picture at the Lenin statue of course. A large number of the shops here are constructed using shipping containers giving the local market a very colourful unique feeling.

Day 7: Murghab - Koi Tezek Pass - Gunt Valley - Khorog

- Today we will head back towards Khorog. The Pamir Highway used to typically be done by starting in Osh in Kyrgyzstan, and ending in Dushanbe, or vice versa, but with the border between the two countries being closed, we have to do it as a circuit now. There are some places where we'll have to travel back on the same road, but today we'll be on a new road. We'll do about 320km today, and it will take roughly 7-8 hours.
- There will be loads of photo stops today. Almost every corner we turn we'll want to get out and take a picture. We'll pass several high plateau lakes, and after crossing the Koi Tezek Pass, we'll stop in Jelondy Village where we can use the hot springs. This one is particularly famous with locals and people come from all over the country for its healing properties.
- Continuing along the Gunt Valley, we'll arrive in Khorog in the evening.

Day 8: Khorog - Kalaikhum

- Today we'll be driving back along the River Panj. We'll do about 260km in 7-8 hours, with loads of photo stops along the way.
- Even though it's not our first time skirting the Afghan border, you'll notice different things this time and we'll probably end up stopping in different spots for photos.

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Day 9: Kalaikhum - Kulob - Danghara - Nurek

- Leaving Kalaikhum, we'll head back towards Dushanbe, but on a completely different road to the one we took at the start of the tour.
- We'll drive through Kulob, which with a population of 100,000, will feel like a huge city after where we've just been.
- Driving out of town we'll visit Hulbuk Fortress.
- Our next stop will be in Danghara, which is the hometown of the President, Emomali Rahmon, as well as the country's first Deputy Prime Minister, Asadullo Ghulomov, and a number of other senior government officials and members of parliament.
- Next we'll stop at the Nurek Hydro Electric Station, usually known simply as Nurek Dam. Completed in 1980, this was one of the Soviet Union's successful infrastructure projects. Standing a proud 300m tall, it was the tallest man-made dam at the time, and was only out done in 2013 by Jinping-I Dam in China.

Day 10: Nurek - Khoja Obi Garm

- Today will mark our last full day in Tajikistan. We'll drive past Dushanbe, and we're going to spend the afternoon and evening at an amazing building which really encapsulates what we're all about.
- Khoja Obi Garm is a Brutalist behemoth Soviet-era sanatorium that is still in operation. The drive there is like the opening scene from the film *The Shining*. It's run by the Tajikistan Trade Union organisation to provide workers with rest and relaxation. The treatments are a little unorthodox as they include radon baths, electric shock therapy, pulsating circulation treatment as well as mud baths and acupuncture (treatments not included in tour price). It's an absolute dream for any lovers of weird Soviet stuff.

Day 11: Khoja Obi Garm - Dushanbe - End of Tour

- We'll leave the Soviet splendour of the previous night behind us as we return to Dushanbe.
- Arriving back in the capital around lunchtime you'll be transferred to the airport according to your flight times.
- If you'd like to see some more of Central Asia, you can join us in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan after this tour.

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