

Tajikistan and Uzbekistan Summer Tour July 24th - August 10th 2022



INTRODUCTION:

The 412km drive from Osh to Tashkent can be done in seven hours and one border crossing, but we've decided to take the long way around, covering roughly 3,000km, in 18 days, two border crossings and a flight. This tour offers something for everyone. Starting with the breathtaking Pamir Highway, where you're as far away from the modern world as you can be, this tour captures everything from spectacular nature, to ancient mosques and madrassahs, and some really funky SAIGA favourites. The route will take us through Tajikistan, along the Afghan border, and to Dushanbe. We'll stop at some of the most breath-taking sights in the world, and stay in some of the least visited spots. To round out our time in Tajikistan we'll stay at one of the most epic examples of a Soviet sanatorium, before crossing the border into Uzbekistan and seeing the ancient sites of Samarqand, Bukhara and Khiva. Changing gear, we'll make a stop in Nukus before driving out to the Aral Sea. Before ending in Tashkent, we'll make two quintessentially SAIGA stops, one at a formerly closed Soviet mining town, and one at a Soviet-built solar furnace.

HIGHLIGHTS:

Take in the breathtaking views on the **Pamir Highway**

Explore the southern capital of Kyrgyzstan - **Osh** - with its huge Bazaar

Go back in time in the Silk Road gems of **Samarqand, Bukhara and Khiva**

See the environmental disaster that is the **Aral Sea**

Excited? Come with SAIGA to Central Asia

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Tour Details:

DATES: July 24th - August 10th 2022

PRICE: \$2470 USD (twin share),
Single Supplement \$450 USD

START: Osh, Kyrgyzstan

FINISH: Tashkent, Kazakhstan



INCLUSIONS:

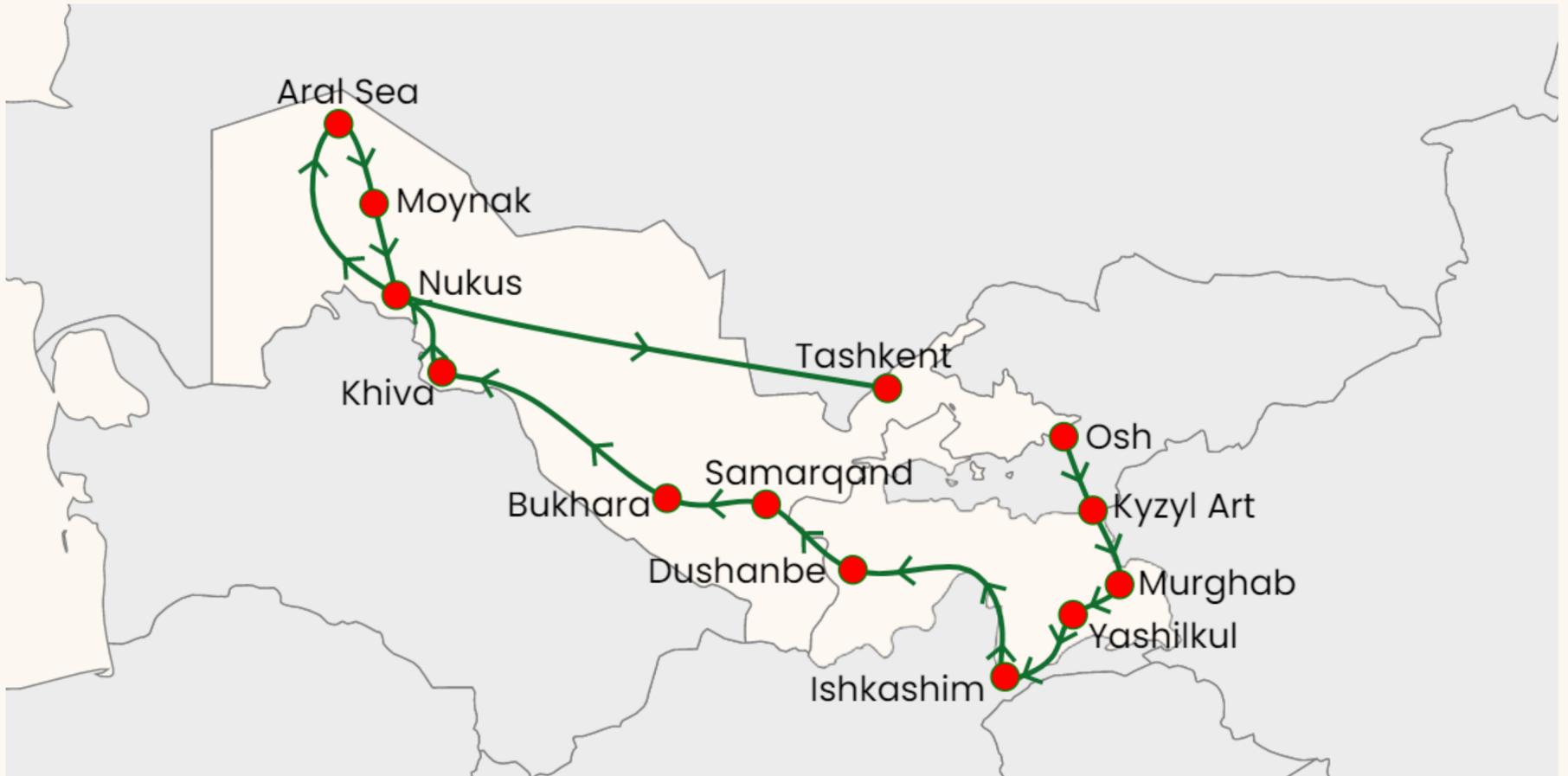
- Accommodation in twin share at roughly 3 star hotels/guesthouses, breakfast included
- Where itinerary mentions yurt or homestay accommodation, single supplement and twin share may be affected
- Transport as per itinerary
- Entrance fees to most sites (as per itinerary)
- SAIGA guide and local guides

EXCLUSIONS:

- Visa fees if necessary
- Visa support if necessary
- Some activities, eg. treatments at sanatorium (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	Osh
Day 2	Osh - Sary Tash
Day 3	Tajikistan border crossing at Kyzyl Art - Murghab
Day 4	Langar Valley - Lake Yashilkul - Langar
Day 5	Langar - Yamg - Ishkashim - Khorog
Day 6	Khorog - Kalaikhum
Day 7	Kalaikhum - Dushanbe
Day 8	Dushanbe - Khoja Obi Garm
Day 9	Cross border to Uzbekistan - Samarqand
Day 10	Samarqand
Day 11	Samarqand - Bukhara

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Day 12	Bukhara - Khiva
Day 13	Khiva - Nukus
Day 14	Nukus - Aral Sea
Day 15	Aral Sea - Nukus - Tashkent
Day 16	Tashkent - Yangiabad
Day 17	Yangiabad - Parkent - Tashkent
Day 18	Tashkent - End of Tour

Day 1: Osh

- Meeting in Osh in the afternoon, we'll take a city tour of the 3,000 year old town. Although in some ways it'll feel like we've re-entered civilisation after a few days in the Kyrgyz countryside, Osh feels a lot different to Bishkek. There's a bit of a rugged, wild west sort of feel, that's quite charming.
- We'll visit the sacred Suleiman Too Mountain, the main attraction in Osh. We'll walk to the top of the rocky outcrop, no doubt meeting lots of local pilgrims happy to have a chat on the way.
- Not only is the scraggy hill a site in itself, but it's also home to Sulaiman Too Museum, one of those famous crazy Soviet buildings that appear on all the lists of weird Soviet structures.
- Next we'll go to the Osh bazaar, one of Central Asia's largest open-air markets. This is a great opportunity to find some cool souvenirs – hats, coats, rugs, fabrics, ornaments, loads of the cool stuff you've been admiring on locals and in their houses over the past few days.

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Day 2: Osh - Sary Tash

- Today we'll drive to Sary Tash. In itself it's not much of a destination, but as the start of the Pamir Highway, it's a great place to spend a relaxing afternoon and evening before we start the next part of this epic drive.

Day 3: Tajikistan border crossing at Kyzyl Art - Murghab

- Drive to Murgab through the Ak Baytal Pass. At over 4,600m high, this is the highest section of road in the former Soviet Union.
- We'll stop near Karakul Lake for picturesque views of Lenin Peak. At 7,134m, Lenin Peak is partly in Tajikistan and partly in Kyrgyzstan, and is the second highest mountain in each country. The highest in Tajikistan is Somoni Peak, which was previously called Peak Stalina. Lenin Peak is the easiest to climb mountain over 7,000m, with the most ascends per year, for a mountain of that size.
- 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.
- Overnight in homestay in Murghab.

Day 4: Langar Valley - Lake Yashilkul - Langar

- We'll keep driving along the next section of the Pamir Highway, on a section of road that was completed in 1931. We'll stop at Yashilkul and Bulung Kul, two more spectacular lakes, then we make our way through the Khargush Pass.
- This part of the Pamirs was made famous by the Chevy Chase and Dan Akroyd film Spies Like Us.
- 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.
- After a pretty exciting day of driving and sight-seeing, we'll arrive in Langar and spend the night there.

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Day 5: Langar - Yamg - Ishkashim - Khorog

- Our first stop will be in Vrang, where we'll see the caves dug by the Buddhists who used to live here.
- Then we'll stop in Yamg village to 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.
- We'll check out Kah-Kakha Fortress and Abrashim Fortress, before arriving in Ishkashim, and continuing on towards Khorog.
- In the afternoon, before we arrive in Khorog, we'll stop at the Garam Chashma hot springs to relax after another day driving the Pamir. There are also cafes here for those who would rather relax with a beverage and bite to eat.
- Arriving in Khorog you'll have a chance to explore the city yourself. Although it was once of strategic importance to the Soviet Union, this is now a really poor area of Tajikistan.

Day 6: Khorog - Kalaikhum

- Today we'll drive to Kalaikhum, 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.

Day 7: Kalaikhum - Dushanbe

- Today we will arrive in 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.
- 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.

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Day 8: Dushanbe - Khoja Obi Garm

- Leaving Dushanbe, 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 9: Cross border to Uzbekistan - Samarqand

- Leave early in the morning to drive to Samarqand. Farewelling Tajikistan, we'll cross at the Panjakent border, and arrive in Samarqand in the early afternoon.
- Once known as the Pearl of the Muslim World, Samarqand is a city synonymous with the Silk Road. Full of towering minarets, shimmering domes and home to a splendid technicolour bazaar, it is the oldest continuously inhabited city in Central Asia.
- We'll start our time in Samarqand with a visit to the famous and spectacular Registan Square which is flanked by three beautifully decorated, sparkling blue mosaic madrassas. Once the city's commercial centre, Registan Square is modern Samarqand's centre piece.
- Optional wine tasting at the Khovrenko Winery, a small local wine factory with adjoining museum.

Day 10: Samarqand

- Today we will explore the main sites of Samarqand. Having already visited the Registan the day before, we'll start today's tour with a walk through the centre of town.
- Having died in September 2016, Islam Karimov, the First President of Uzbekistan, now has his mausoleum on the newly renamed Islam Karimov Street.
- Winding through the narrow streets of the old city, we'll stop at a particularly unique synagogue. Totally unrecognisable from the outside, it looks like any of the typical houses on either side, but inside is a bizarre and unique mixture of Uzbek and Jewish décor.
- We'll also pay visits to Bibi Khanum Mosque, Siyab Bazaar, and the grave of St. Daniel which is said to grow a foot in length every ten years.
- Visit Romanenko House, a place that is difficult to describe. This small suburban house has been transformed into a completely unique textile workshop where thirty men and women redesign ancient Central Asian clothing into colourful, modern designs.



Day 11: Samarqand - Bukhara

- Catch the train to Bukhara in the morning, and then we'll take a walking tour of the old town, including Lyabi Hauz Square, Bolo-Hauz Mosque, and the elegant blue-tiled Ulughbek Madrassa.
- On your way in and out of town you won't be able to miss a huge structure that looks like a giant ark. Known as the Ancient Ark Fortress, this was the Palace of Bukhara's Emirs, and parts of it are still open for us to visit.
- In the evening we'll sit by the lake, chilling out and taking it all in over a cold drink and a chat.

Day 12: Bukhara - Khiva

- You might like to get up for a sunrise view over Bukhara. With minarets a-plenty, there are loads of great viewing points, and the sunrise can be quite spectacular over the old city.
- After breakfast, we'll leave for Khiva, stopping for lunch at a roadside restaurant along the way.
- Arriving in Khiva in the afternoon, you might like to start exploring yourself. It's a very compact old town, so you can easily walk around and get a really good feel for the place.

Day 13: Khiva - Nukus

- In the morning we'll take a walking tour of Khiva, before driving to Nukus, the capital of the Republic of Karakalpakstan.
- In the afternoon we'll visit the Museum of Savitskiy. The Karakalpakstan State Museum of Art hosts the world's second largest collection of Russian avant garde art (after the Russian Museum in St. Petersburg). Savitskiy himself went to great lengths to save prohibited pieces of art during the Soviet Union, and amazingly you can see some of them now in this museum.

Day 14: Aral Sea

- Departure from Nukus first thing in the morning to drive towards the Aral Sea. Stopping at some Silk Road ruins and a canyon on the way, we'll drive up on to the Usturt Plateau.
- Picnic lunch at a ruined Soviet gulag, near the edge of one of the small parts of the remaining sea.
- Arriving at the main part of the sea, if you're game, you can go for a swim. There used to be 10mg of salt per litre in the sea, but now with 160g (yes, grams, not miligrams, so 16,000 times more!) it's not far off the Dead Sea (180g/l), and now you can easily float on top of the water. That's if you can bring yourself to get to the water, past all the oil and grime that's collected at the side of the sea.
- We'll spend the night in a yurt camp near the shore, from where you can watch the sun set over the rapidly disappearing sea.

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Day 15: Aral Sea - Nukus - Tashkent

- You can wake up early to see the sun rise over the water, otherwise it's breakfast then on to Moynak village, which used to be a thriving coastal town, but is now a disheveled and quiet desert town, most famous now for the ship cemetery.
- Ships lay abandoned on the old seabed as the sea receded. A lot of them were removed and destroyed, supposedly so the metal could be recycled, but a dozen or so of them were saved and are now in Moynak.
- Back in Nukus in the early evening to fly to Tashkent.
- There will have been various points during the trip where you've felt like you've returned to civilisation to different extents - arriving in Osh after Song Kol and Jalalabad, then Dushanbe after the Pamirs, Samarqand after Khoja Obigarm, but Tashkent really is the big smoke, and it will be quite exciting to get there.

Day 16: Tashkent - Yangiabad

- Our first stop in Tashkent will be the famous Chorsu Bazaar, with its iconic blue dome that's now home to meat, dairy and dried fruits. Exploring the stalls you'll learn about traditional bread-making methods, local remedies for everything including of course virility issues, and how Uzbek babies are taught to go to the toilet.
- Take a walk from Independence Square, formerly Lenin Square, through the park and past the statue of Amir Timur. Stop and browse in a small market in the park, full of old Soviet trinkets and sit under a shady pagoda for a cold drink or ice cream.
- Leaving Tashkent again, we'll drive into the mountains to visit the town of Yangiabad. A closed town during the Soviet Union, not even appearing on maps, it was built as a mining town where exiles were sent. Once home to about 10,000 people, the population is now a little over 300, and noone pays them much attention. We'll spend the afternoon wandering the streets, peeking into abandoned buildings and listening to stories from locals.
- We'll spend the night at a nearby Soviet "resort". If it's hot you can go for a swim in the river, or if you just want to relax, we might be able to find the massage lady.

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Day 17: Yangiabad - Parkent - Tashkent

- Heading back towards Tashkent, we'll drive to Parkent, where we've been granted permission to visit a spectacular example of Soviet technology and architecture – the solar furnace. Still functioning, though never really having managed to fulfil its purpose, it's not open to the public.
- Return to Tashkent just in time for lunch. You'll probably have tried plov by now, but there's no better place to have it than at the Plov Centre. This gigantic hall, decorated as if for a wedding in the 1980s, is set up for large numbers of people to eat plov in. Prepared just outside by an army of Uzbeks, it is some pretty good plov, but more than that, it is an exceptionally unique experience.
- Go to Tashkent TV Tower for fabulous views of the city.
- Visit Tashkent Land, Central Asia's answer to Disneyland. With its faded welcome sign, crumbling gift shop and creaky rides, this is another step back in time. Most tourists don't make it to this gem of Soviet infrastructure, but we just can't resist it. If you're really game you can try out the “Boomerang” rollercoaster, or if you'd like something a bit more relaxing you can take a ride on the “African tour”, a boat trip through the jungleland.
- Next we'll visit the Museum of Railway Techniques'. This outdoor museum is full of all sorts of old locomotives, and they don't mind us climbing all over them. We can even take a little train ride around the train museum. You don't have to be a train lover to enjoy this charming museum.

Day 18: Tashkent - End of Tour

- Today we finish our tour of Uzbekistan.
- We'll organise a transfer to the airport for you.
- Uzbekistan is really the heart of Central Asia and is a great spring board to the other 'Stans. Please let us know if you want to continue your Central Asian adventure.