

TRAIN : **Golden Eagle Luxury Train**
JOURNEY : Republics of the Silk Road
Journey Duration : Upto 14 Days

DAY 1 ALMATY

Arrive at Almaty Airport, where you are met and transferred to the stylish five-star Intercontinental Hotel.

On your first evening in Almaty, you will be invited to a champagne drinks' reception before our exclusive Welcome Dinner.

Specially selected international wines are included with dinner, as with all meals during the tour.

DAY 2 ALMATY

Almaty is the largest city in Kazakhstan and is notable for its wide tree-lined boulevards.

Surrounded by the majesty of the Tien Shan Mountains, this beautiful city derives its name from 'alma' meaning 'apple'. Just a short distance from the city, apple orchards thrive in abundance.

Our morning city tour includes a visit to Panfilov Park, where we visit the unique Zenkhov Cathedral which was built entirely of wood, and Independence Square.

This afternoon board our private train, the Golden Eagle and settle into well-appointed en-suite cabins. Tonight, we enjoy a Welcome Dinner.

DAY 3 LAKE ISSYK-KUL & BISHKEK

This morning, we will enjoy a guided tour of the open-air Museum of Petroglyphs at Lake Issyk-Kul, a sacred site used by the Saka priests for sacrifices and other rites to the sun god. Some of the petroglyphs date from the Bronze Age with later engravings dating to the 10th century. Following this, we are treated to breathtaking flight demonstration of Eagle Hunting, a 4,000-year-old art. You will learn the story of eagle hunting, the characteristics of the Golden Eagle and the fascinating details of this Kyrgyz nomadic tradition.

Originally a caravan rest stop serving the travellers that came through the area along the Great Silk Road, Kyrgyzstan's capital city, Bishkek, is the location of our afternoon sightseeing. Here we will visit the Ala-Too Square, built 1984 to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the Kirghiz Soviet Socialist Republic in Kyrgyzstan and a city tour of the local parks, rich in Soviet history, including statues of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels and the Memorial for the Red Guards.

DAY 4 TASHKENT

This afternoon we arrive in Tashkent, the capital city of Uzbekistan. We spend time touring this modern Soviet-style city, which was rebuilt following the devastating earthquake of 1966. Our tour of the city includes the Old Town, where traditional homes and religious buildings line the narrow streets.

In a small library here, we will be privileged to see one of Islam's most sacred relics – the world's oldest Koran. This is followed by a visit to the Railway Museum and the Museum of Applied Arts.

DAY 5 BUKHARA

Bukhara is quite simply outstanding. Like Khiva, UNESCO sponsored the renovation of much of the city for its 2,500th anniversary in 1999. The highlight of this wonderful tour is a visit to The Ark, a fortified residence of the Emirs of Bukhara – the despotic and ruthless leaders who ruled until Soviet times. Our touring programme will also transport us to the grandeur of Poi-Kalyan Square, home to the iconic Kalyan Mosque, a living relic of traditional Islamic design. Stroll through the mosque's large maksura rooms, pillar-domed galleries, and deeply recessed niches, and you will be transported to a bygone era.

Immerse yourself in the lively pulse of the city as we explore the bustling Trading Domes of Bukhara and gather at Lyabi-Hauz Square, a vibrant social hub cocooned by a pool and embraced by the soothing shade of mulberry trees and local tea rooms. We then travel out of the city to experience the Emir's enchantingly named 'Palace of the Moon and Stars'.

This evening, weather permitting, we will enjoy a barbecue on the station platform before our train departs.

DAY 6 MERV

From Mary we transfer to the ancient and mainly unrestored remains of Merv. Once an important stopping point on the Silk Road, it claims to have briefly been the largest city in the world during the 12th century. 1794 saw the demise of Merv, after the Emir of Bukhara destroyed the dam which the population depended on for its water.

DAY 7 ASHGABAT & DARVAZA

Ashgabat, the capital of Turkmenistan is known as the 'Las Vegas of the Kara Kum'. Situated between the Kara Kum desert and the Kopet Dag mountain range, Ashgabat is a relatively modern city built upon the ruins of the Silk Road city of Konjikala. The Soviet city was largely rebuilt after the devastating earthquake of 1948.

The city's extravagant fountains, golden domes and towering modern buildings appear strangely incongruous in this desert setting. Highlights on our visit include a visit to the National Museum and Kipchak Mosque.

The Golden Eagle makes a scheduled stop at Ichoguz, where we have the option to leave the train and make a short journey to the famous burning gas crater at Darvaza, a spectacular sight best seen at night. Located in the middle of the Kara Kum desert where the area is rich in natural gas, the 70-metre-wide crater is known by the locals as the 'Door to Hell' and has been burning for over 40 years. A unique experience that is not to be missed.

DAY 8 KHIVA

Today, we travel to the ancient city of Khiva, founded 2,500 years ago. As one of the Silk Road's most important trading posts and now a World Heritage Site, it lies at the crossroads of the routes between Mongolia, Russia, China and Persia. A truly magnificent sight to behold, it rises out of the desert to reveal a wealth of impressive architecture. Stepping back in time, we discover its impressive mosques, madrassas, bazaars and minarets within Khiva's ancient walls.

DAY 9 SHAHKRISABZ

Believed to be the birthplace of Amir Timur, the military prodigy who modelled himself on Genghis Khan and used similar violent methods to conquer and control his Empire, we visit the UNESCO-honoured statue of Amir Timur and his Ak-Saray Palace. This majestic palace in Shahkrisabz took over a quarter of a century to build, and was originally decorated with colourful, highly detailed mosaic but also included delicate calligraphic inscriptions from the Qur'an. Amid the decorative facing, there is an inscription showing the date 798 (1395 – 1396 AD) which was when the building was completed.

DAY 10 DUSHANBE

This morning, we visit Dushanbe, the capital of Tajikistan, situated on the Varzob River and its opulent Kohi Navruz Palace. Enjoy a guided tour with a local expert guide, who will tell the fascinating story of the teahouse-turned palace. You will explore each beautiful hall decorated with breathtaking chandeliers, while learning about each of the artists and designers that worked incredibly hard to build and decorate this majestic palace. After the tour, we will enjoy tea and local delicacies in the palace before returning to the Golden Eagle to continue our journey.

DAY 11 SAMARKAND

Just the mention of Samarkand instantly conjures up evocative images of the Silk Road, more so than any other town. Founded in the 6th century BC, Samarkand's stunning architecture hints at its former status as one of the most important cities in Asia and is particularly noted for its architectural remains from the 14th to the 17th century, when it flourished as the fabled capital of the Mongol empire of Timur and his successors.

Today, we will visit some of its most significant sites including Registan Square, the refined elegance of the beautifully proportioned Bibi Khanum Mosque and the Ulag Beg observatory, one of the earliest Islamic astronomical observatories built in 1428.

Prepare for an unforgettable evening in Samarkand that will leave an indelible mark on your memory. As the sun sets and night descends upon this ancient city, we will whisk you away to the illuminated Registan Square, where an extraordinary spectacle unfolds. From your prime front-row seats, you'll be treated to a dazzling light show that weaves the rich tapestry of Samarkand's history and significance.

DAY 12 SAMARKAND

Spend the morning continuing to explore Samarkand, with a visit the famous necropolis Shakh I Zindah, a stunning collection of mausoleums dating back to the 9th century. From here we travel to ancient settlement of Afrasiab to visit a museum which houses ancient artefacts collected during the excavation of the city, including the famous frescoes from the Palace of Varkhuman, which date back to the 7th century.

We return to the train for lunch and continue our journey through Uzbekistan towards the Fergana Valley.

DAY 13 MARGILAN, RISHTAN & KOKAND

This morning, we visit the ancient city of Margilan, famous for its production of silk, considered by many as the best in Central Asia. Here we will visit the Margilan Factory which is considered

the best of its kind in Uzbekistan. Producing 6,000 metres of silk per month, the factory has preserved a manual and traditional method of silk production. We will explore the whole process of making silk from the mulberry trees used to feed the silkworms to the hardworking staff hand weaving the colourful ikat fabric on traditional looms.

From Margilan we continue by coach onto Rishtan which is home to Uzbekistan's world-famous ceramic industry. Here we will discover the secrets of the techniques of the ancient craft from prominent local artisan Rustam Usmanov. Witness the magic of pottery in action during a close up demonstration by a master professional at work and get a behind-the-scenes look at the meticulous craftsmanship that goes into decorating these exquisite ceramics.

Kokand is one of the most ancient cities of Uzbekistan and served as a critical trading post on the Silk Road. Highlights of our touring include the majestic Palace of Khudayar Khan (the Pearl of Kokand), and the Jami Mosque, Kokand's most impressive Mosque.

This evening, we enjoy our Farewell Dinner on board the Golden Eagle as we return to Tashkent.

DAY 14 TASHKENT

After breakfast on board the Golden Eagle, you will be transferred to the airport for your onward flight.