

THE STANS OF CENTRAL ASIA

DETAILED ITINERARY

KAZAKHSTAN, KYRGYZSTAN, UZBEKISTAN,
TAJIKISTAN & TURKMENISTAN

Jul 23/24



The Stans of Central Asia - for thousands of years, these lands were sought after and conquered by some of the world's greatest leaders from Alexander, Attila, Genghis Khan, Tamerlane, Babur, Cyrus, and Darius of ancient Persia. Today it is the world's greatest adventure seekers who are drawn to these exotic lands of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan. Lands filled with harsh deserts, towering snow-capped peaks, ancient cities and fortresses with exotic cultures.

In Kyrgyzstan explore Lake Issyk-Kul and hike in stunning mountains. Explore Bishkek, the capital city and visit the ancient stone gods, which still remain a mystery. In Osh, visit one of the biggest bazaars in Central Asia and Sulaiman-Too Sacred Mountain (UNESCO).

Enjoy the stunning scenery of Tajikistan. In Khujand, we visit the Citadel, Mausoleum, Madrassah, mosque and bazaar. Explore Istarafshan, one of the oldest cities in Tajikistan, with 2,500 years of history.

FACTS & HIGHLIGHTS

- 27 land days • Maximum 16 travelers • Start in Almaty, Kazakhstan and finish in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan • All meals included • Includes 5 internal flights • Experience Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Uzbek, Tajik, Turkmen and Russian cultures • Walk through the Silk Road cities of Bukhara, Samarkand and Khiva • Explore the ancient cities of Margush, Merv and Nissa • Marvel at the giant gas crater of Darwaza in the middle of the Karakum Desert • Enjoy one of Asia's largest bazaars • Visit remote regions with stunning mountains and valleys

DEPARTURE DATES & PRICE

May 07 - Jun 02, 2025 - **\$9995 USD**

Activity Level: 2

Comfort Level: Some rough roads, long drives.

ACCOMMODATIONS

Comfortable accommodations with private bathrooms. 1 night camping at Gas Crater in yurts, which are equipped with beds and mattresses, and are heated by wood-burning stoves and have a modest but sufficient supply of electricity. There are 4 western style toilets and 1 shower cabin with non-heated water.

ELDERTREKS



SMALL GROUP
EXOTIC ADVENTURES
FOR TRAVELERS 50 PLUS



Visit the historic cities of Tashkent, Samarkand, Bukhara and Khiva in Uzbekistan, evoking images of caravans traveling across deserts and over mountains linking the worlds of East and West. These open-air museums are beautifully preserved Silk Road wonders filled with mosques, tombs, monuments and bazaars.

Crossing the border into Turkmenistan we will camp in the Karakum Desert overlooking a giant gas crater, one of the most unusual sights in the world. Explore Bronze Age Margush (2,500 - 1,500 B.C.) and Merv, a collection of 5 ancient cities that moved over the centuries as the river changed its course. Our journey leads us to Ashgabat, the splendid capital of Turkmenistan, built predominantly of white marble.



DAY 1 ARRIVE IN ALMATY

You will be met on arrival at the airport in Almaty and transferred to your hotel. The remainder of the day is free for you to explore on your own before meeting for our orientation meeting/welcome dinner.

Overnight in Almaty.

DAY 2 ALMATY

Today, we enjoy a full day tour of Almaty including visits to the Zhenkov Cathedral, an extraordinary Russian Orthodox Church built of wood, and a walk through beautiful Panfilov Park. We also visit the





Ancient Kyrgyz Gods



State Museum of Arts housing a collection of over 22,000 artifacts of visual and applied arts featuring cultures of Kazakhstan, Russia, Western Europe as well as the peoples of Asia and Eastern countries. In the afternoon, we will take a cable car to the ski resort of Shymbulak located in the Zailisky Alatau mountain range (2300m / 7545ft) and enjoy a wonderful panoramic view of the Medeu Valley.

Overnight in Almaty.

DAY 3 TO CHONG KEMIN VALLEY, KYRGYZSTAN

After breakfast, we drive from Almaty to the Kazakhstan/Kyrgyzstan border. Once we clear immigration and customs formalities, we continue to the Chong-Kemin Valley. This evening experience true Kyrgyz hospitality with a traditional dinner in the Kalmak Ashuu Guest House.

Overnight in Chong Kemin Valley.

DAY 4 CHONG KEMIN VALLEY

Today we will have the opportunity to visit an old soviet farm (kolkhoz) village and enjoy a short hike in the valley. After lunch we will see a performance of a Kyrgyz horse show, and in the evening experience a fun Kyrgyz night with a traditional brandy and vodka party.

Overnight in Chong Kemin Valley.

DAY 5 CHONG KEMIN VALLEY TO LAKE ISSYK-KUL

Today we drive to the Pearl of Tian-Shan, Lake Issyk-Kul and make a stop along the way in the village of Tamchy for a demonstration of felt production. We continue driving to Cholpon-Ata and board our boat to enjoy a lunch cruise on Lake Issyk-Kul. After lunch, we visit the open air Museum of Petroglyphs which covers about 42 hectares. The Petroglyphs date from the 2nd millennium BC to the Middle Ages.

Overnight in Cholpon-Ata.

DAY 6 TO KARAKOL

Today we will drive to the town of Karakol to visit to the Preshevalsky Museum, which is dedicated to the memory of Nikolai Michailovich Preshevalsky, an enthusiastic explorer accredited for his excellent works on flora and fauna of the Issyk-Kul region. He was also known for breeding a tiny horse on the steppes of Tibet, which later came to be known as the Preshevalsky horse. We also visit the local Orthodox church and mosque before returning to Cholpon-Ata.

Overnight in Cholpon-Ata

DAY 7 TO BISHKEK

Today we continue to Bishkek, stopping enroute at the Burana Tower Archaeological Museum, which



is situated on the site of a caravan town dating from the 10th century. Surrounding the area are mysterious stone heads, perhaps representing ancient Kyrgyz gods.

Overnight in Bishkek.

DAY 8 DAY TRIP TO AL ARCHA PARK

Enjoy either a hike at Al Archa Park, with snow-capped peaks reaching 9200 feet (2,800 meters). In the afternoon, we will enjoy a city walking tour of Bishkek's historic buildings.

Overnight in Bishkek.

DAY 9 TO OSH, SULAIMAN-TOO SACRED MOUNTAIN

This morning we will take a very early flight to Osh, the second largest city in Kyrgyzstan, located in the Fergana valley. Upon arrival we visit the first UNESCO World Heritage Site on this trip, Sulaiman - Too Sacred Mountain, revered as a place of worship for over a

millennium. In the afternoon we have a complete change of scenery when we visit the Osh Bazaar, one of the largest in Central Asia.

Overnight in Osh.

DAY 10 TO KHUJAND, TAJIKISTAN

After breakfast, drive to the Kyrgyzstan/Tajikistan border where we will clear immigration and customs formalities. Our new local guide and driver will then take us to Khujand. We visit the Citadel, mausoleum of Sheikh Massal ad-Din, Madrassah, Mosque of Sheikh Massal ad-Din, and Panchshanba Bazaar.

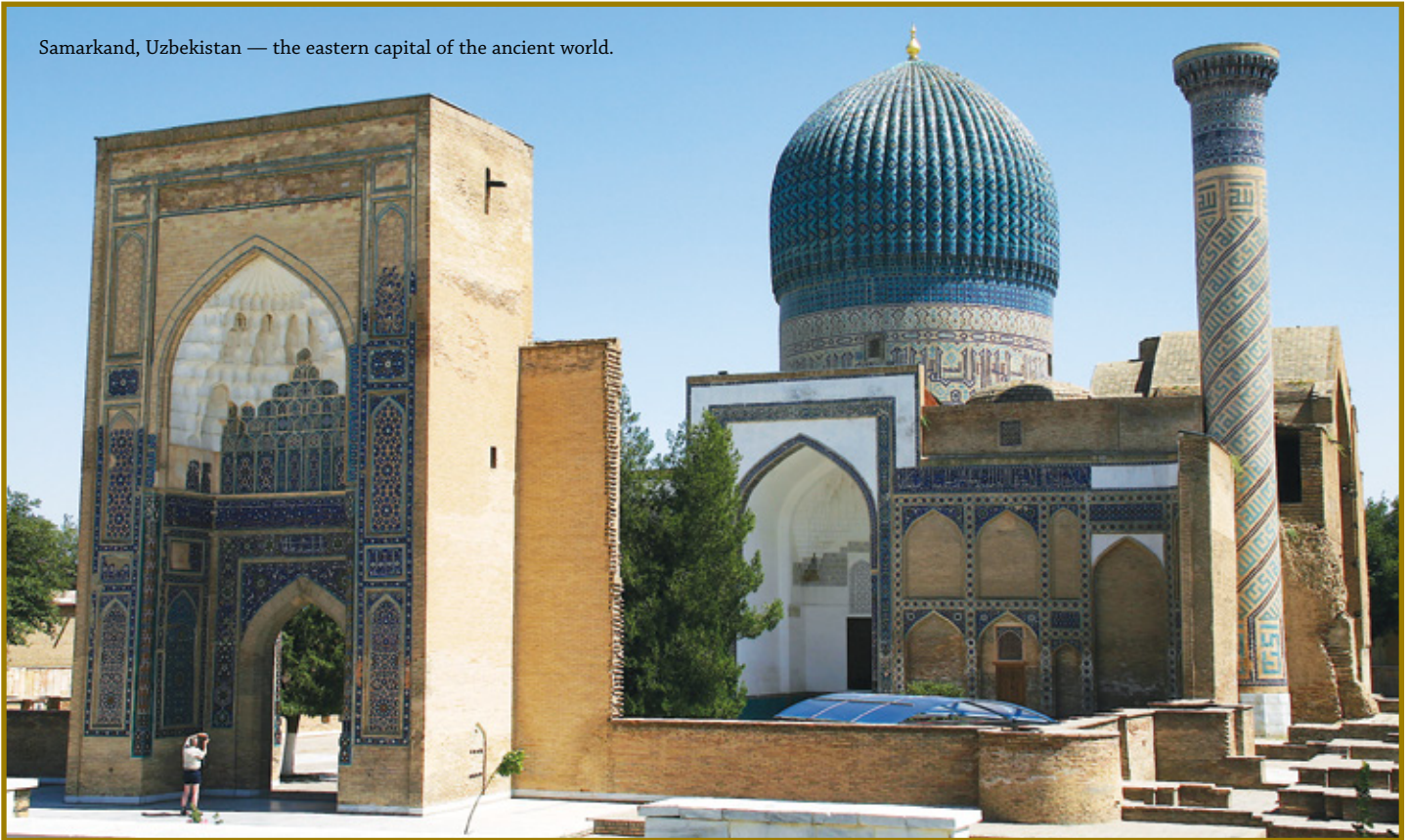
Overnight in Khujand.

DAY 11 TO ISTARAFSHAN

Our day starts with a relatively short drive to Istarafshan, a city that is one of the oldest in Tajikistan, dating back over 2,500 years. Once an important stop on the Silk Road, you will visit the Kok Gumbaz Mosque, Khazreti Shokh mausoleum



Samarkand, Uzbekistan — the eastern capital of the ancient world.



and the Mugtepa bazaar local knife makers. After lunch, we return to Khujand, and time permitting, we will visit the Arbob Cultural Palace.

Overnight in Khujand.

DAY 12 TO TASHKENT, UZBEKISTAN

After breakfast, drive to the Uzbek border. After border formalities, we continue our drive to Tashkent. Upon arrival, enjoy a city tour of Tashkent with a visit to the old city that includes the Khast Imam complex, Kaffal Shashi mausoleum and Kukaldash Madrassa. We also visit the Museum of Applied Arts.

Overnight in Tashkent.

DAY 13 TASHKENT, TO SAMARKAND

This morning we visit Independent Square, Navoi Theater Square and Amir Temur Square. After lunch we depart for Samarkand. The historic town of Samarkand, recently declared a World Heritage Site,

was and still is a crossroads and melting pot of world cultures. Founded in the 7th century BC as ancient Afrosiab, Samarkand had its most significant development in the Timurid period from the 14th to the 15th centuries.

Overnight in Samarkand.

DAY 14 SAMARKAND

On our city tour of Samarkand we visit Registan Square, the heart of ancient city, Temur's burial place, Gur Emir mausoleum and famous Bibi Khanum Mosque, which intended to out-rival everything Tamerlane had ever seen.

We also visit Shakhi Zinda necropolis, Ulugbek observatory and the silk paper center.

Overnight in Samarkand.



Inside the walled city of Khiva.





DAY 15 TO BUKHARA

Depart this morning by coach to Bukhara, regarded by many to be one of the most cultural and evocative cities in the world. Depending on performance schedules, we may have the opportunity to enjoy a puppet show. Puppet shows were popular entertainment in public places, festivals and at private family celebrations in past times.

Overnight in Bukhara.

DAY 16 BUKHARA

One of the grandest of Uzbek centers, Bukhara is an open museum with many mosques, madrassahs and a grand minaret. We spend the day visiting some of the finest examples of Islamic architecture in the world, where exquisite tile and mosaic work complements the beautiful brickwork. It is no wonder this city is a World Heritage Site! Our visit includes the Lab-e-Khauz complex with the

Nadirkhon Devanbegi Madrassah, the Mogak Attari Mosque and the Poi Kalon Minaret. We also visit the Madrassahs of Aziz Khan and the Ulugbek Ark Fortress, the residence-cum-army headquarters of the Bukharan Emirs that houses an interesting collection of objects from those days and the mausoleum of Ismail Samanid, which features some of the best 10th century brickwork, with a marked Persian influence. We conclude the day with a visit to Sitora-I-Mokhikhosa, the summer residence of the Emir.

Overnight in Bukhara.

DAY 17 TO KHIVA

We have an early morning departure for our full day's drive to Khiva (480 km / 300 miles).

Overnight in Khiva.



DAY 18 KHIVA

Today we explore the World Heritage Site of Khiva, a city where time has stood still in the age of the Arabian Nights. Our visit starts with the main site of Itchan Kala followed by Kalta Minor, the Kunya Ark, the Rakhimkhon Madrassah, the mausoleum of Pakhlavan Makhmud, the Friday Mosque and the Tashauli Palace and Harem.

Overnight in Khiva.

DAY 19 TO DARWAZA

Today we will enter Turkmenistan through the border crossing of Dashoguz. We drive southwards through the Karakum Desert to Darwaza and the giant gas crater, popularly known as “Gateway to Hell”. We will arrive at Darwaza around sunset where we will set up our camp and have dinner under the stars.

Overnight in dome tents.

DAY 20 TO ASHGABAT

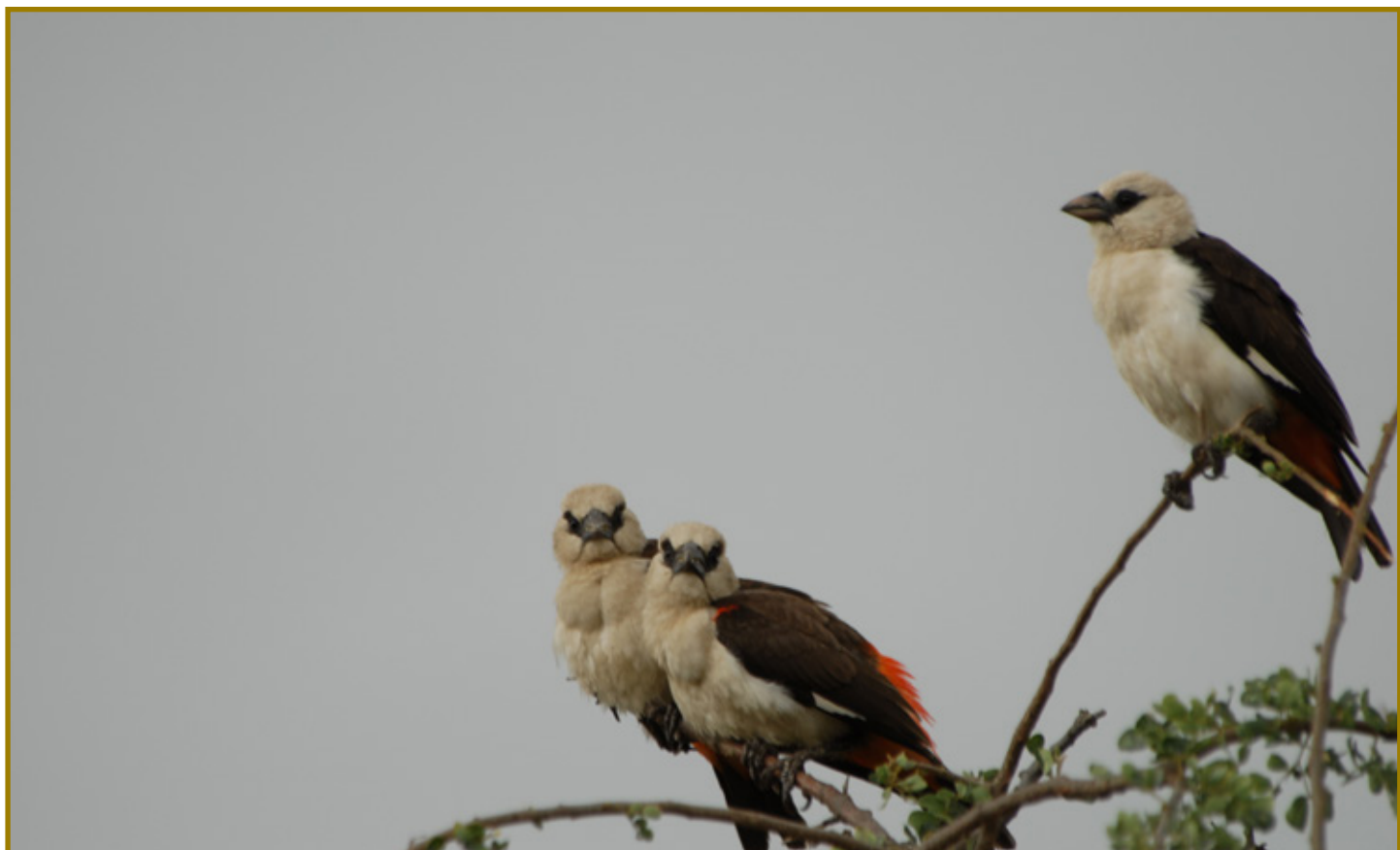
This morning we drive through the Karakum Desert to Ashgabat. At nearly 350,000 sq. km in total area, or about 79 per cent of Turkmenistan’s territory, Karakum means “black sand”. If you look carefully, at sunset and sunrise, you can see a dark grey glow over the sand which distinguishes it from other desert sands.

After lunch in Ashgabat, we visit the National Museum. The museum houses around 500,000 artifacts from archaeology, ethnography, carpets, national costumes and fabrics, musical instruments, weapons, jewelry and artwork.

Overnight in Ashgabat.

DAY 21 ASHGABAT, ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE OF NISSA

We start today with a visit to the Russian Bazaar, one of the oldest in Ashgabat. Just outside of Ashgabat, we visit the archaeological site of Nissa





which contains the remains of Old and New Nissa. The original fortified city was an important center in the early days of the Parthian Empire, and existed from 300 BC to 300 AD. Nissa was a royal residence of Parthian rulers with a palace, a fire temple and a treasury. Recent archaeological excavations have uncovered 2700 texts inscribed with black paint on clay vessel fragments. We will visit a carpet museum and later, continue on to Kipchak village to visit the largest mosque in Central Asia.

Overnight in Ashgabat.

DAY 22 TO MARY AND ANCIENT MERV

This morning we fly to Mary, followed by a transfer to Merv, the oldest of the oasis cities along the Silk Route in Central Asia. The remains of this oasis span four thousand years of human history and a number of monuments are still in evidence. Classical writers often mention Merv or Margiana, as part of the Achaemenid Empire in the 6th century BC until its invasion by Alexander the Great. The “Queen of Cities” as it was known in the Islamic world, Merv was considered as the second city after Baghdad between the 8th and 13th centuries, and was an important town on the Silk Road. We will also visit the Mary History and Ethnography Museum, where the most impressive artifacts found at Margush are on display, and confirm the importance and high levels of development in this Bronze Age culture.

Overnight in Mary.

DAY 23 MARGUSH - BRONZE AGE OF CIVILIZATIONS, TO ASHGABAT

We drive through the desert for 2 hours, into the area that used to be the delta of the Murgab River, to the site of the ancient country of Margush, believed

by many to be the birthplace of Zoroastrianism. We visit the remains of Gonur Depe, the center of Margush country, which dates back to the Bronze Age (3000-3500 BC). Archaeologists debate whether Margush classifies as a fifth ancient civilization or culture, on par with ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, India and China. The famous Bactrian gold, found at graves in northern Afghanistan, would have been from people belonging to Margush, which is also referred to as Bactria-Margiana. We take an evening flight to Ashgabat.

Overnight in Ashgabat.

DAY 24 ASHGABAT SURROUNDINGS, TO TURKMENBASHI AND AWASSA

We have a day trip in the surroundings of Ashgabat. As we travel closer to the mountains, we visit the Kowata underground thermal lake near Baharden town. For a swim in the lake, you will need to descend 175 steps to the lake, which is located at 60 meters depth. From Kowata, we drive into the mountains to Nohur village and visit its unique tribal cemetery, the nearby Kyz Bibi pilgrim site, and a local home where women practice traditional silk weaving. We return to Ashgabat and transfer to the airport for an evening flight to Turkmenbashi.

Overnight in Awaza.



DAY 25 CANYONS OF YANGIKALA

This morning we drive northeast through the foothills of the Balkan Mountain Range, past highland areas where camels, sheep and horses graze, until we reach the surreal landscape of Yangikala. From a fabulous viewpoint, we can see these impressive limestone formations, remains of massive coral reefs from pre-historic times, rise up from the desert sands with their colorful layers of rock.

We will have time to relax and enjoy the beautiful surroundings of the hotel this afternoon.

We will return to Awaza for our overnight.

DAY 26 TO ASHGABAT

This morning we fly to Ashgabat and visit the Museum of Fine Arts, housing more than 6,000 works in its collection, including paintings, sculptures, and graphic works by Turkmen, Russian and foreign artists. We will also visit private Ahalteke horse stables to see these famed horses noted for their speed and endurance. Tonight, we have our farewell dinner to the Stans of Central Asia adventure.

Overnight in Ashgabat.

DAY 27 DEPARTURE FROM ASHGABAT, TURKMENISTAN

Transfer to the airport for your departure.

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. HOW BIG ARE THE GROUPS?

Each group is limited to 16 participants. Small groups are an important ingredient in adventure travel. Small groups allow for more interaction and more personalized service throughout the itinerary.

2. WHAT IS INCLUDED IN THE TOUR PRICE?

All accommodations throughout; all meals, starting with dinner on day 1 and finishing with breakfast on departure day (i.e. the last day of the ElderTreks tour); bottled drinking water throughout the trip; all internal transportation; airport transfers on day 1 and departure day (i.e. the last day of the ElderTreks tour); all day trips and entrance fees as outlined in the itinerary; tips for hotels (portage), national guide, bus driver, restaurants and spot guides; services of a trip leader.

3. WHAT IS NOT INCLUDED IN THE TOUR PRICE?

International flights, tips to ElderTreks tour leader, alcoholic drinks, visas and travel insurance.

4. ARE THESE “EDUCATIONAL” TOURS?

Yes, in the broadest sense of the word, “educational”. We visit museums and local villages. We also have talks and discussions on many aspects of Central Asian history and culture, but this is only one aspect of what we do.

We believe that it is equally educational to meet new people on a non-commercial basis, visit their homes and even try to learn a few words in the native language. Sometimes the most “educational” moments are spent having a cold drink with locals in a street market.

5. HOW DO WE TRAVEL DURING THE TOUR?

All land transportation is included in the land price of the trip. There are 5 domestic flights, the ticket price of which is also included in the land price of the trip. We have our own vehicles for road travel. On tarmac roads we use coaches (in Ashgabat, and trip to Merv), on solid gravel and hard sand tracks we use minivans (trip to Gonur Depe/Margush). In the mountains we use minibuses (trip to Nohur) and we use 4WD vehicles (3 pax per vehicle maximum) in soft sand conditions (track from Darwaza to Ashgabat)

6. WHAT ARE OUR ACCOMMODATIONS LIKE?

One night we stay in yurts that are equipped with beds and mattresses, warm blankets, pillows, bed sheets, towels and coverlets. All yurts are heated by wood-burning stoves and the use of small solar panels provide a modest but sufficient supply of electricity. There are 4 western style toilets and 1 shower cabin with non-heated water (shared facilities).

7. WHAT ABOUT THE WEATHER?

We travel to Central Asia in the shoulder season to avoid the extreme heat of midsummer and the cold climate in winter. In general, temperatures are hot at the beginning and end of the trip (80's and 90's°F or 26°C to 35°C) and cooler in the middle portion.

8. WHEN IS PAYMENT DUE?

A non-refundable deposit of \$500 (plus insurance if you desire it) is due as soon as you decide to go and will reserve your place on the tour. The balance of the land payment is due 120 days before departure. Cancellation charges are applicable and these are outlined in the “Terms & Conditions” section of our brochure.

9. IS MEDICAL INSURANCE REQUIRED?

Insurance coverage is not included in the cost of your trip. Please note that medical insurance is not required for this adventure but is recommended. ElderTreks offers comprehensive travel insurance and we are happy to provide you with a quote if you call our office. If you are purchasing insurance elsewhere, please ensure you provide the details to ElderTreks as soon as possible.

**Please note those travelers with pre-existing medical conditions must take out travel insurance at the time of deposit*

10. WHAT MEALS ARE INCLUDED?

All meals are included, starting with dinner on day 1 and finishing with breakfast on departure day. In many cases, we simply order a number of shared dishes, so that we can try everything.

11. WHAT SHOULD I TAKE ON THE TOUR?

There is a detailed “What to Take” list in our Trip Kit, which we will send to you after you have booked the trip.

12. CAN YOU ARRANGE MY FLIGHTS?

We would be happy to take care of your air arrangements. ElderTreks offers personalized flight itineraries — not group flights. Stop over enroute, come in a few days early, or extend your stay. Call us for a customized itinerary.

13. WHAT IF I WOULD LIKE MORE INFORMATION?

If you have any further questions about the adventure, please call our office for more details. A Trip Specialist will be happy to answer your questions. A Trip Kit containing further details on the destination will be sent to you once you have booked the trip.







