



PALACE TOURS
Travel Like Royalty

PALACE TOURS

Golden Eagle: Republics of The Silk Road

13 Nights • Luxury Experience

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Overview

Journeying aboard the Golden Eagle, we will travel through the magnificent “Five Stans” – a fascinating patchwork of countries, stitched together by a shared history of Sovietisation, yet fiercely independent in identity. From the magnificent mosques and bustling bazaars of Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan to the breath-taking verdant expanse and ethereally tranquil landscapes of Tajikistan and Kazakhstan, this incredible 14-day adventure is your invitation to one of the world’s greatest train journeys.

ALMATY – LAKE ISSYK-KUL – BISHKEK – TASHKENT – KHIVA – DARVAZA – ASHGABAT – MERV – BUKHARA – DUSHANBE – SHAHRIZABZ – SAMARKAND – MARGILAN – ANDIZHAN – OSH – KOKAND – TASHKENT

TOUR HIGHLIGHTS

- Discover the 4,000-year old art of *Golden Eagle* hunting at Lake Issyk-Kul
- Learn a new craft in a traditional Kyrgyz bread making class
- Evening drinks reception on the beautifully lit Registan Square, Samarkand
- See the Darvaza Burning Gas Crater light up the night sky in the Kara Kum desert
- Explore the historic, UNESCO honoured, cities of Khiva, Merv, Bukhara and Samarkand

Your Itinerary

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 statutes 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

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.

DARVAZA & ASHGABAT

The *Golden Eagle* makes a brief scheduled stop at Ichoguz, where we have the option to leave the train and make a short journey to Darvaza's famous burning gas crater, 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.

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.

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.

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.

We then travel out of the city to experience the Emir's enchantingly named 'Palace of the Moon and Stars'. This evening, weather and time permitting, we will enjoy a barbecue on the station platform before our train departs.

DUSHANBE

This morning, we visit the capital of Tajikistan, Dushanbe, 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.

SHAH RIZABZ

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 Shahrizabz 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.

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 Ulugh Beg observatory, one of the earliest Islamic astronomical observatories built in 1428. Before dinner we will return to the now illuminated and awe-inspiring Registan Square.

MARGILLAN, ANDIZHAN & OSH

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 Yodgorlik Margilan Factory which is considered the best and only one 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.

Our next stop is the town of Andizhan, dating back to the 9th century. The city is renowned as the birthplace of Zahiruddin Babur in 1483. He was a descendant of Amir Timur, who was once the ruler of this area. During our short visit we explore the Jami Madrasah and mosque, one of the biggest religious complexes in the region, decorated with beautiful geometric patterns of pandjara and Islamic inscriptions.

Late afternoon we arrive in Osh, a popular destination for Muslim pilgrimages as it is home to the sacred Sulayman Mountain, visible from all areas of the city and named in honour of the Qur'anic Prophet Solomon. Our *Freedom of Choice* touring options include a walking tour of the city, taking in spectacular Soviet mosaics, murals, and public art, plus a visit to some of the major architectural sites and monuments honouring World War Two soldiers and Chernobyl victims. Alternatively, you can enjoy a traditional bread making class. Bread is an important part of the local diet and across Kyrgyzstan it not only varies by its shape, but also by its taste, and the unique way in which it is baked.

KOKAND

Kokand is the main transportation junction in the Fergana Valley and is located at the crossroads of the two main ancient trade routes. It is known that each of the Khanates of Turan had their own impressive palace. One of these architectural monuments is the citadel of the last Kokand Khan, Khudayar Khan.

Today, we will visit the Khudayar Khan Fortress and its remaining buildings and courtyards, the best way to understand not only the history of the buildings but also the lives and times of Khudayar Khan, his wives and his family. We will also have an opportunity to visit the museum displaying jewellery, clothing and metal-ware.

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

TASHKENT

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

Tips & Travel Guide

LUXURY ACCOMMODATION

The *Golden Eagle*, comprising three categories of cabins, featuring state-of-the-art amenities and en-suite facilities, is the only private train of its kind operating in these regions of the world.

RELAXING ON BOARD

Unwind in comfortable surroundings and watch the world go by as you get to know fellow passengers in the social heart of the *Golden Eagle*, the Bar Lounge Car.

DINING ON BOARD

Our beautifully designed Restaurant Cars provide a wonderful venue to enjoy the sumptuous meals prepared by our Executive Chef and his highly skilled onboard restaurant team.

Terms & Conditions

PAYMENT TERMS:

- 25% of the total tour cost due at booking
- 75% or the balance due no later than 95 days prior to departure
- For bookings made within 90 days of departure, full payment is required at the time of booking.

CANCELLATION FEES:

- 96 days before departure: 25% cancellation fee
- 95 - 65 days before departure: 50% cancellation fee
- less than 65 days before departure: 100% cancellation fee

Cancellations should be intimated by FAX to the corporate office in Miami FL.

The above times are based on European time. In order to provide enough time for processing cancellation, guests need to add 3 business days to the above timeframes. An administration fees of 15% on any monies paid by the client will be charged prior to refund.

We strongly recommend purchasing travel insurance to cover the losses incurred in case of cancellation. For information on available plans or to purchase travel insurance, please visit www.palacetours.com/insurance.

Ready to Book Your Journey?

Contact Palace Tours for personalized rates and departure dates

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