



GIPPSLAND  
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# STUNNING STANS

Kazakhstan – Kyrgyzstan – Uzbekistan –  
Tajikistan – Turkmenistan

**28 August - 19 September 2026**

Personally Escorted by Jacquie Turner



Journey through the captivating ‘Five Stans’, a mosaic of countries intricately linked by a common history of Soviet influence yet distinctly independent in character.

Explore the serene landscapes of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, where lush expanses and tranquil beauty await. Then, venture into the grand mosques and vibrant bazaars of Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, rich with history and cultural splendour.



**Friday 28 August** **Melbourne - Kazakhstan** **(Inflight meal)**

We transfer from Warragul to Melbourne Airport for our flight to Almaty, Kazakhstan. Departures are also available from other Australian cities.

**Saturday 29 August** **Almaty, Kazakhstan** **(D)**

On arrival into Kazakhstan, we will be met & transferred to our hotel RIXOS HOTEL ALMATY, or similar, for a two-night stay.

The remainder of the day will be at leisure. Tonight, we will enjoy a delicious dinner at a local restaurant.



**Sunday 30 August** **Almaty** **(B L)**

Spread out at the foothills of the Zaili Alatau Mountains in the Tien Shan range, Almaty is the largest city in Central Asia's richest country, Kazakhstan. Present-day Almaty sits on the site of an old Silk Road oasis town called Almatu; laid waste by the Mongols in 1211, the city left no ancient remains. Almaty's name means "the place with apples," and the many varieties of wild apple trees in the vicinity give scientists reason to believe that this is where apples were first cultivated. Today the city is thriving on the considerable foreign investment it has attracted, primarily in the oil and gas industries.

Today we will explore the city of Almaty, starting in the historical **Panfilov Park**. The Panfilov Park is dedicated to a local infantry unit that was martyred defending Moscow from Nazi attack in World War II, we will be able to view the eye-catching domes of the Ascension Cathedral, & one of the tallest wooden buildings in the world.

Next, we will visit two museums, the charming **Museum of Musical instruments** & the **State Museum**, one of the largest in Central Asia. This museum houses the most significant collection of Kazakh historical, archaeological, and modern cultural and political artifacts.

Prior to lunch, we'll take in a sweeping view of Almaty from **Kok-Tobe Hill**, which rises 1,100 meters above sea level — the highest point in the city.

Our day of exploring will conclude after a visit to the **Sunkar Falconry** in the Big Almaty Gorge. Founded in 1989, the center is home to many rare and endangered species of birds of prey, including imperial eagles, steppe eagles, and the golden eagle — Kazakhstan's national pride

Apon arrival back to Almaty this evening dinner will be at leisure.

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### Monday 31 August

### Almaty - Charyn Canyon- Kolsay-2 Lake

(B L D)

After checking out of our hotel this morning we will start the drive to **Charyn Canyon** (approximately 2.5hour drive) – one of the most picturesque places in Kazakhstan.

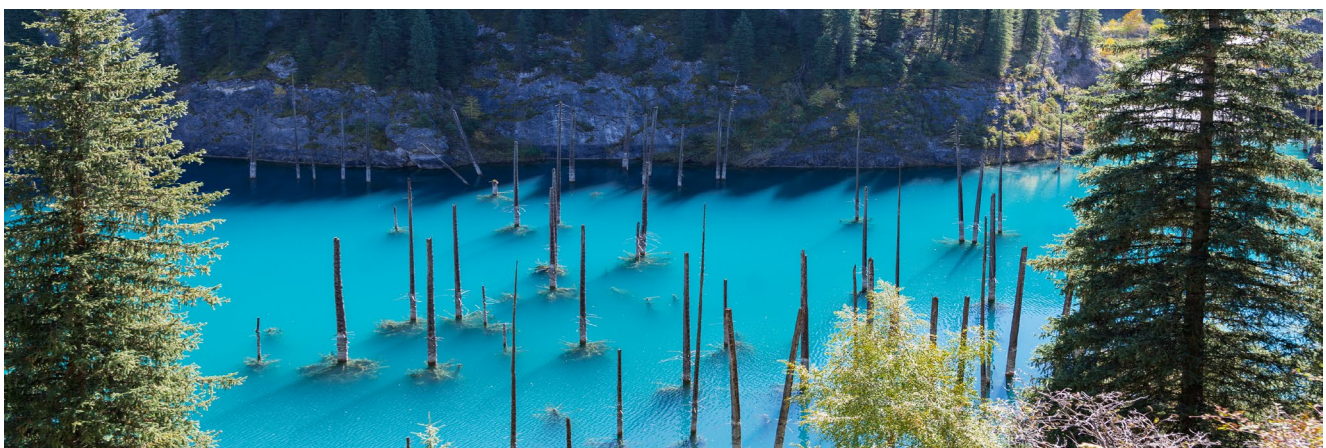
The canyon stretches 154 km along the Charyn River in the northern Tien Shan Mountain range. In parts, it attains a depth of 150 to 300 meters (490–980 ft).



After exploring the wonders of **Charyn Canyon** we will continue the drive (approximately 2hours) to the GRAND KOLSAY HOTEL, *or similar for the night*.

This afternoon we will take a pleasant walk on the lake shore at **Kolsay-2 Lake**, only a short 10-minute drive from our hotel.

Tonight, dinner will be hosted at our hotel.



**Tuesday 1 September**

**Border crossing into Kyrgyzstan - Karakol**

**(B L D)**

After enjoying lunch at our hotel, we will make the journey by road to **Karkara Village** situated on the Kazakhstan-Kyrgyzstan border (approximately 2hour drive). *Please note you will need to be prepared to carry your own luggage across the border crossing.*

Once we cross the border, we'll meet our local Kyrgyzstani driver-guide and set off on a scenic mountain drive to Karakol, taking approx. 2 hours with possible opportunities for photo stops along the way.



Upon arrival in Karakol, we will check into our hotel for the night at the **KARAGAT HOTEL**, or *similar*.

This evening, we will enjoy a **cultural Dungan family dinner** - an intimate and immersive experience that offers insight into the Dungan people, a Chinese-Muslim ethnic minority who migrated to Kyrgyzstan in the 19th century. Savor a homemade meal featuring traditional Dungan dishes, such as *lagman* - hand-pulled noodles served with vegetables and meat. During the meal, we'll hear stories about the Dungan community's history, customs, and way of life, shared directly by our local hosts.

**Wednesday 2 September**

**Karakol - Kaji-say (Issyk-Kul Lake)**

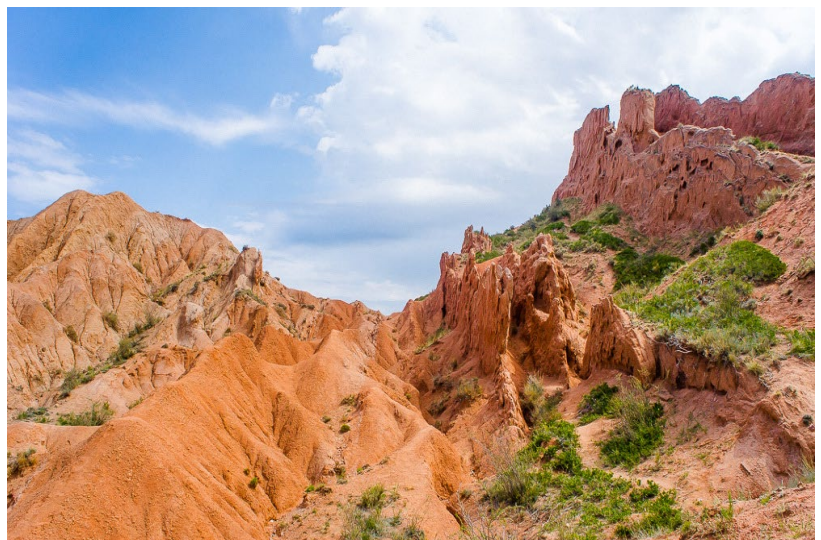
**(B L D)**

After we check out of our hotel we will embark on a scenic drive to **Barskoon Gorge & Waterfalls** (approximately 1.5 hour drive). We will have the opportunity to enjoy the scenic alpine surrounds whilst embarking on this short hike to view the waterfalls, along the way we will also see the **Yuri Gagarin Monument**, commemorating the Soviet cosmonaut who visited the area after his historic space flight.

After our beautiful walk we will enjoy a refined mountain coffee break, prepared on-site by our private catering team- featuring freshly brewed coffee, herbal teas, and pastries, served in a beautiful alpine setting.

We continue our journey along the scenic southern shore of **Lake Issyk-Kul** (approximately 1.5 hour drive), taking in the ever-changing landscapes of rugged mountains and semi-desert terrain along the way.

Our next stop is **Skazka Canyon** - also known as *Fairy Tale Canyon* - famed for its striking, naturally formed sandstone sculptures that resemble castles, animals, dragons, and mythical creatures. Here, you'll have time to enjoy light hiking and photography amidst this surreal and colorful landscape.



Lunch will be served in **Kajy-Sai village** at a charming local café, reserved exclusively for our group. The meal is freshly prepared on-site by a dedicated catering team and features a thoughtfully curated menu highlighting seasonal local produce and traditional Kyrgyz Flavors - all in a relaxed and comfortable indoor setting.



Following lunch, we continue through to **Tong village** where we will enjoy a private **Nomadic Games Show**, this is an immersive cultural experience celebrating Kyrgyz equestrian traditions and athleticism. The shows highlights include Eagle hunting demonstrations, Horseback archery display, Kok Boru & Horseback wrestling.

We will be staying at the unique ELESTET YURT CAMP, for one night, located near the southern shore of Issyk-Kul, the camp offers a blend of traditional nomadic living and modern comfort. Dinner will be included at our yurt camp stay tonight, followed by a private folk

concert featuring traditional Kyrgyz music.

### Thursday 3 September

### Tong - Bishkek

(B L)

We are making our way to Bishkek today; this does mean we bid farewell to the **Issyk-Kul Lake** that has been our base for the past few days. Stopping one last time along the lake shores to enjoy a quiet coffee break with amazing views.

On route to our next destination, we'll briefly stop at the **Burana Tower**, a striking 11th-century brick minaret once part of Balasagun, the Karakhanid Empire's vibrant Silk Road capital. We'll have the opportunity to explore the tower, its stone carvings (balbals), and a small museum that offers insight into the history of the Karakhanid Empire.

Nearby, we will witness a live horseback stunt show performed by a trained team of equestrian stuntmen. Through synchronized riding, they'll recreate scenes from ancient horseback warfare.



Today's lunch will be hosted by a **local Kyrgyz family** in their home. Enjoy a traditional meal and take part in a hands-on demonstration of yurt construction—discovering how these iconic nomadic dwellings are built, from the wooden frame to the felt covering. You're invited to help raise the structure while listening to the family's stories and ancestral wisdom.

After lunch, we will continue our journey along a scenic mountain road—an alternative route that showcases breathtaking views of rolling hills, valleys, and distant peaks.

This afternoon we arrive in **Bishkek** and will check into the beautiful five-star property THE ORION HOTEL, or similar, our home for the next two nights.

Dinner is at your leisure tonight. You can choose between an evening stroll – a relaxed walk in the Oak Park and Erkindik Boulevard, passing by local art displays and enjoying the city's atmosphere, or a visit to local artisan shops or markets browsing for handmade felt products, traditional Kyrgyz textiles, and locally crafted souvenirs.

**Friday 4 September**

**Bishkek**

**(B L D)**

We will start the day with a guided walking tour of central Bishkek today, exploring the city's Soviet-era architecture, leafy boulevards, and key landmarks such as: **Ala-Too Square, Oak Park & Erkindik Boulevard & The White House.**

Lunch will be served at one of Bishkek's most elegant restaurants, renowned for its sophisticated take on Kyrgyz and Central Asian cuisine.

In the afternoon, the exploration continues with a visit to the **Gapar Aitiev Museum of Fine Arts**, where you'll enjoy a private guided tour led by an art expert. Afterwards, we'll head to the **Kyrgyz National Opera and Ballet Theatre**—a stunning neoclassical building dating back to 1955. Here, a performing artist from the theatre will take you on an exclusive behind-the-scenes tour, revealing the venue's architecture, history, and its vital role in Kyrgyz cultural life.

During your visit, we'll be joined by a state-recognized artist and scholar of Kyrgyz folk music, honored with the Excellence in the Arts award by the President of Kyrgyzstan. As both a musician and researcher, they will share fascinating insights into the evolution of Kyrgyz musical traditions and offer a brief live performance on traditional instruments—a rare and intimate opportunity to connect deeply with the country's cultural heritage.



To conclude this memorable day, we'll indulge in a festive dinner at a carefully selected restaurant, celebrating the end of your journey through Kyrgyzstan with exquisite local flavors and warm company.

**Saturday 5 September**

**Bishkek- Tashkent, Uzbekistan (by air)**

**(B L)**

Enjoy a leisurely morning on our final day in Kyrgyzstan before departing for Uzbekistan.

Mid-morning, we'll visit an **artisanal boutique** showcasing a carefully curated selection of handmade Kyrgyz goods—felt textiles, hand-embroidered items, and locally crafted ceramics. Then, continue our shopping adventure at one of **Bishkek's bustling local markets**, where you can sample and purchase regional snacks like dried fruits, nuts, and sweets, or browse stalls featuring traditional household items and crafts.

Lunch will be served at a contemporary Kyrgyz restaurant, highlighting seasonal ingredients and creative interpretations of local flavors.

This evening, a private transfer will take us to **Manas International Airport** for your flight to Tashkent.

The rest of our evening is at leisure as we check in to the **HYATT REGENCY TASHKENT**, or *similar* the first true luxury accommodation in Uzbekistan, where we will *stay for two nights*.



**Sunday 6 September**

**Tashkent**

**(B L)**

*Tashkent is a vibrant modern capital with a rich history spanning over 2,000 years. It embraced Islam in the 8th century AD and grew into a vital commercial hub during the Middle Ages. The city's historic districts still reflect its significant role on the ancient Silk Road. In 1220, Tashkent became part of Genghis Khan's empire, and later, in 1865, it was incorporated into the Russian Empire. Recognizing its cultural and religious heritage, Tashkent was named the Cultural Capital of the Islamic World in 2007, celebrated for its many historic mosques and religious sites.*

This morning, embark on a full-day tour of Tashkent's historic **'Old Town.'** Begin with the **Khasti-Imam Complex**, a stunning late 16th-century Islamic seminary that serves as the seat of the Sunni Mufti of Central Asia. Here, you'll have the rare opportunity to see the 7th-century Koran—one of the two oldest Korans in the world. Next, visit the **Kukeldash Madrasah**, an impressive example of Islamic architecture.

Afterwards, take a leisurely stroll through **Independence Square and its surrounding park**, & take a ride on the **Tashkent metro** to admire some of its most ornate Soviet-era stations. The tour continues with a visit to the **Museum of Decorative and Applied Arts**, showcasing exquisite local craftsmanship.

To conclude the day, stop by the **studio of the renowned Rahimov family**, where you'll see exceptional examples of ceramic art created by several generations of this talented family.

**Monday 7 September**

**Tashkent - Dushanbe, Tajikistan (by air)**

**(B L D)**

This morning, we will meet our driver and guide for transfer to **Tashkent International airport** for our flight to Dushanbe, Tajikistan

We will arrive at Dushanbe midway through the day today and will be transferred to our hotel for check in at the **HILTON HOTEL DUSHANBE**, or similar, for one night.

Enjoy a half-day orientation tour of **Dushanbe, the capital of Tajikistan**, nestled along the Varzob River.

We will also explore **Independence Square and the monument to Ismail Samani**, the founder of Tajik statehood.

Next, visit the city’s jewel—the magnificent **Kohi Navruz Palace**. On a guided tour with a local expert, discover the fascinating transformation of this teahouse-turned-palace. Explore its stunning halls adorned with dazzling chandeliers while learning about the artists and craftsmen behind this masterpiece. Over 4,000 artisans worked non-stop for four years to create this palace, using more than 60 types of stone, 90 types of wood, millions of mosaic elements, SWAROVSKI crystals, and gold leaf.

Afterward, stroll through **Independence Square** and enjoy a walk in **Rudaki Park** and the **Botanical Gardens**, cherished by locals for their ancient trees and peaceful atmosphere. Following lunch featuring local specialties at a nearby restaurant, we’ll drive to **Hissar Fortress**, located 30 km west of Dushanbe, to explore the remains of this 18th-century stronghold. After our day of exploring, we will return to Dushanbe for dinner at a local restaurant.



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**Tuesday 8 September**

**Dushanbe - Penjikent (by road)**

**(B L)**

*Ancient Penjikent was one of the easternmost cities of the Sogdiana civilization—an influential Iranian culture that once ruled vast territories across Central Asia. Zoroastrianism was the dominant religion, and the sacred texts of the faith refer to Sogdiana as “the second-best land” created by God. The region’s history dates back to the Bronze Age and is linked to iconic historical figures such as Cyrus the Great, Darius I, Xerxes, and Alexander the Great. The Sogdian civilization flourished in the early 5th century AD, a period marked by the rise of long-distance trade along the Silk Road.*

Today, we will travel from Dushanbe to Penjikent, a journey of approximately five hours by road. On arrival, we will check-in our hotel. **PENJIKENT PLAZA HOTEL**, or similar, for one night.

Lunch will be served at one of the city’s charming local restaurants.

After lunch, embark on a guided tour of **Penjikent**. We’ll explore the **UNESCO World Heritage Site of Sarazm**—an important archaeological site dating back over 5,000 years—visit the **Rudaki Museum**, and take in the key sights of the city.

Dinner is at your leisure this evening, allowing you the freedom to explore local dining options or relax at the hotel.

**Wednesday 9 September      Penjikent- Marguzor lakes - Samarkand (by road)      (B L D)**

Early this morning, we depart Penjikent by road for the **Marguzor Lakes**, located in western Tajikistan’s stunning Fann Mountains—where snow-capped peaks tower above narrow gorges and hidden alpine lakes shimmer with extraordinary color.



Our journey takes us to the breathtaking **Haftkul**, or “**Seven Lakes**”—a series of interconnected mountain lakes, each with its own name, character, and local legend. As we follow a winding mountain road, we’ll pass traditional villages and visit several of the lakes, including **Mijgon, Soya, Hushyor, Nophin** (2139 m a.s.l.), **Khurdak, Marguzor**, and **Hazor Chashma** (2400 m a.s.l.).

In the afternoon, we continue toward the Uzbekistan–Tajikistan border, crossing near Jartepo. After re-entering Uzbekistan, we drive on to the historic city of Samarkand.

Upon arrival, check in to the **KOSH HOVUZ BOUTIQUE HOTEL**, or a similar, for a two-night stay. In the evening, enjoy a leisurely promenade at the iconic **Registan Square**, followed by dinner at a local restaurant.

**Thursday 10 September      Samarkand      (B L D)**

*One of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world, Samarkand flourished thanks to its strategic location along the ancient Silk Road, the vital trade route connecting China to the Mediterranean. Founded around 700 BC by the Persians, the city was already a thriving capital of the Sogdian satrapy when Alexander the Great conquered it in 329 BC. Throughout its history, Samarkand has been a cornerstone of Persian civilization and a beacon of culture, science, and commerce in Central Asia.*

Today, immerse yourself in the rich history and architectural grandeur of Samarkand on a guided sightseeing tour of its most iconic monuments.

Begin with a visit to the **Ulugh Beg Observatory**, built by the grandson of Tamerlane—one of the most celebrated astronomers of the 15th century. Then, explore the sacred necropolis of **Shah-i-Zinda**, a stunning avenue of mausoleums from the 14th century, renowned for their intricate tilework and masterful craftsmanship.

Continue to the magnificent **Bibi-Khanum Mosque**, once one of the largest and most impressive mosques in the Islamic world, before soaking in the vibrant atmosphere of **Siab Market**, where locals shop for fresh produce, spices, and traditional goods.

Later, enjoy a special lunch of Samarkand’s famous pilaf, hosted by a local family. Watch and learn during a live cooking demonstration, offering insight into the preparation of this beloved national dish.

Afterwards, explore the magnificent **Gur-Emir mausoleum of Tamerlane and Timurids**.

End your visit to Samarkand at the stunning **Registan Square**, one of Central Asia’s most magnificent historical sites. Surrounded by three grand madrasas with intricate mosaics and turquoise domes, the square has amazed Silk Road travelers for centuries—and still captivates today. Enjoy dinner at a local restaurant, reflecting on the day’s discoveries.



**Friday 11 September**

**Samarkand - Bukhara (by fast train)**

**(B L D)**

After breakfast, we will board the **high-speed Afrosiyob train** for our journey to Bukhara, a comfortable and scenic ride of approximately 1 hour and 45 minutes.

*Bukhara was once one of the main centres of Persian civilization beginning from the 6th century BC. Today, the city's remarkable architecture and archaeological treasures represent a vital legacy of Central Asian history and art. Bukhara's significance continued well into modern times. The last Emir, Muhammad Alim Khan (1880–1944), ruled during a period of great political change, and the Trans-Caspian Railway, constructed in the late 19th century, brought the city into a new era of connectivity and commerce.*

*Recognized for its cultural and historical importance, the historic center of Bukhara is designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. It is considered the most complete example of a medieval city in Central Asia, with much of its original urban fabric remarkably well preserved.*

Upon arrival at Kogon Station near Bukhara, we will visit one of the area's architectural highlights — the **Seid Abdal-Akhd Khan Palace**. Originally designed by a renowned Russian architect, this elegant structure remains one of Kogon's most impressive landmarks. (Please note: the visit will be an exterior viewing only, as the palace is currently under restoration).

We then continue by road to Bukhara and proceed to check in at your hotel, the **MERCURE BUKHARA OLD TOWN HOTEL**, or similar, for two nights.



After lunch at a local restaurant, we'll visit **Sitora-i-Mokhi-Khosa**, the elegant summer palace of the last Emir of Bukhara. Blending European and traditional Bukharan styles, the palace offers insight into royal life. Its stunning Reception Hall, decorated with carved stucco and mirrors, remains a model for modern Uzbek artisans.

We'll conclude the day with an early evening orientation walk through **Lyabi Hauz Square**, the atmospheric heart of the Old Town, surrounded by centuries-old madrasahs and shaded by mulberry trees.

Dinner will be enjoyed on the rooftop terrace of the **Minorai Kalon Hotel**, offering unforgettable panoramic views of the square and historic skyline—a magical setting as the city begins to glow under the evening lights.

**Saturday 12 September**

**Bukhara**

**(B L)**

Today, discover the holy city of Bukhara, where echoes of past empires live on in its remarkable architecture. Begin with the **Ismail Samani Mausoleum** and the elegant **Bolo-Hauz Mosque**, its tall iwan beautifully reflected in the pool. Enjoy a panoramic view from the **Shukhov Tower**, offering a unique perspective of Old Bukhara. We will cross the street to visit the **Ark Citadel**, once the seat of power for Bukhara's rulers for over a millennium.

Lunch will be hosted at the private studio of **master suzani artisan Aka Rakhmon**, surrounded by his vibrant embroidery works.



In the late afternoon, visit the **Magok-i-Attari Mosque**, once an ancient Zoroastrian temple, now one of Bukhara's oldest surviving religious sites.

Then, stop by the studio of renowned **papier-mâché puppet-maker Usto Iskandar** for a private masterclass, offering insight into this charming local craft.

Continue to the historic **Trading Domes**, with a coffee or tea break and local desserts at a rooftop café near the **Ulugbek Madrasa**.

End the day at the famed **Kalyan Minaret Complex**, one of Bukhara's most iconic landmarks.

Dinner is at leisure at a local restaurant.

**Sunday 13 September**

**Bukhara - Khiva (by fast train)**

**(B L D)**

This morning, we will start our journey to Khiva by fast train or Air-conditioned coach (pending fast train time table release).

On arrival into Khiva, we will check into our hotel **FAROVON BOUTIQUE HOTEL**, or *similar*, for a two-night stay.

*Khiva, also known as Khorezm, is truly a living open-air museum. It stands out as the only city in Central Asia to have survived almost entirely intact from ancient times. Situated south of the Aral Sea, Khiva is the best-preserved of Uzbekistan's historic cities, offering a rare glimpse into the past.*

*The city's unique architectural ensemble features stunning palaces, traditional houses, and public buildings, beautifully interwoven with elegant minarets and madrasahs. Unlike the ancient ruins of Pompeii and Herculaneum, Khiva remains a vibrant, inhabited city—where history and daily life coexist seamlessly.*



Enjoy an early afternoon visit to the extravagant **Nurrulla-bay Palace** and near-by **photography museum**. This evening, enjoy the sunset and amazing views of Khiva from the old city walls. Dinner is included tonight at a local restaurant.

### Monday 14 September

### Khiva

(B L)

Today, embark on a full-day exploration of the medieval town of Khiva, wandering through its winding alleyways and ancient streets. Discover iconic landmarks such as the **Ata Darvaza gate**, the imposing **Kunya Ark Citadel**, the intricate **Muhammad Amin-Khan Madrasah**, and the towering **Islam-Khodja minaret and museum**. Marvel at the striking **Kalta Minor Minaret**, the **solemn Pahlavan Mahmud Mausoleum**, and the historic **Shir Gazi Khan Madrasah**, among many others.

We will visit the remarkable **Juma Mosque**, famed for its 200 individually carved wooden pillars that create a stunning forest of artistry. Experience the lively atmosphere of the **Caravanserai and local bazaar**, where vibrant local culture and crafts come alive.

Lunch will be served at a local restaurant, featuring the region's famous "green pasta" (shivit oshi)—a beloved Khivan specialty.

In the afternoon, visit the impressive **Tash-Hauli Palace and Harem**, renowned for its exquisite tilework and intricate architecture. After the guided tour, enjoy the remainder of your afternoon & evening at leisure, giving you the opportunity to further explore the ancient citadel at your own pace. Dinner this evening is at your leisure.



### Tuesday 15 September

### Khiva – Dashoguz - Ashgabat

(B L D)

This morning, we will be transferred to the Shavat border for our crossing into Turkmenistan. *Please be prepared to carry your own luggage across the border.*

After completing the border crossing, we'll be met by our local escort guide on the Turkmen side and continue by road to Dashoguz, before heading onward to **Kunya-Urgench—a UNESCO World Heritage Site** and the ancient capital of the Khorezm region, once part of the Achaemenid Empire. From the 12th century onward, Kunya-Urgench rose in prominence to become the second most important city in Central Asia after Bukhara.

The ‘**Old Town**’ is home to an array of remarkable monuments dating from the 11th to 16th centuries. During your visit, you’ll explore well-preserved remains including mosques, mausoleums, the gates of a caravanserai, ancient fortresses, and a towering 60-meter minaret—a true highlight of the site.

In the late afternoon, we’ll transfer (approx. 1.5-hour drive) to **Dashoguz Airport** for your evening flight to Ashgabat.



Upon arrival into Ashgabat, we will be transfer to YILDYZ HOTEL, or similar for a leisurely 3-night stay.

This evening, enjoy an included dinner at a local restaurant in the city, offering a taste of Turkmen cuisine and hospitality.

### **Wednesday 16 September      Ashgabat - Darvaza Crater - Ashgabat      (B L D)**

We begin the day with an orientation tour of Ashgabat, a city unlike any other—holding the Guinness World Record as the ‘Most Marble-Clad City in the World.’

Our tour includes stops at several of the capital’s most striking landmarks: **The Monument and Park of Independence**, the **rocket-shaped Arch of Neutrality**, the grand **Ertugrul Gazi Mosque**, and the eye-catching “**Palace of Happiness**”—each a symbol of the city’s unique architectural identity.

We then continue to the **National Museum of History**, one of the largest museums in Central Asia. Here, you’ll explore fascinating collections of ancient artifacts, including items uncovered from key archaeological sites across Turkmenistan.

After lunch at a local restaurant, we set off on an unforgettable journey to the **Darvaza Crater**, located deep in the Karakum Desert—a drive of approximately 3.5 hours.

As we near the site, we veer off the main road for an adventurous 8-kilometre off-road desert drive, leading us to a spot just a few hundred metres from the flaming crater, often referred to as the “**Door to Hell**.”



By day, it may appear as little more than a smouldering pit, but as dusk falls, the fire intensifies—casting an eerie, otherworldly glow that transforms the landscape into something truly spectacular.

You’ll have time to walk around the crater’s edge and take in the surreal surroundings before enjoying a freshly cooked nomadic-style dinner under the stars. As the flames flicker and dance, and the desert sky deepens overhead, it’s a perfect moment for quiet reflection amid nature’s raw beauty and mystery.

After dinner, we begin our return drive to Ashgabat (approximately 3.5-hour drive), arriving at the hotel around midnight for a well-earned rest.

**Thursday 17 September**

**Ashgabat - Old Nisa - Ashgabat**

**(B L D)**



Following breakfast at the hotel, we travel by road to the ancient fortress of **Old Nisa**—the royal sanctuary of the Parthian kings. Located just 18 km from Ashgabat, this striking archaeological site sits on an irregular pentagon-shaped hill at the foot of the Kopet-Dag Mountains. Founded in the 3rd century BC, Old Nisa served as the capital of the Parthian Empire, a powerful state that thrived for over 550 years and rivaled the Roman Empire. Recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, Old Nisa is celebrated for its historical and cultural significance.

We then continue by road to **Geok Depe** (approx. 1 hour drive), where we visit a beautiful mosque built on the grounds of a former Teke stronghold. This was the site of the fiercest battle for Russian domination in Central Asia during the late 19th century.

Our next stop is a private visit to the **Arkadash Stud Farm**, home to the legendary Akhal-Teke horse—one of the oldest and most prestigious horse breeds in the world, renowned for its speed, stamina, and shimmering coat.

On our return journey to Ashgabat, we stop in **Kipchak village** to visit Turkmenistan’s largest mosque, an architectural marvel that also houses the family mausoleum of the country’s first president.

Back in Ashgabat, enjoy a traditional **Turkmen folk show** before dinner, featuring local music, dance, and cultural performances that offer a deeper connection to Turkmen heritage.

Dinner will be available at the hotel tonight before our departure tomorrow.

**Friday 18 September**

**Depart Ashgabat to Dubai**

**(Inflight meal)**

As the tour has come to an end, today we will be transferred to the international airport for the flight to Melbourne via Dubai with day use at the Dubai Airport Hotel.

**Saturday 19 September**

**Dubai- Melbourne**

**(Inflight meals)**

This afternoon we shall arrive back to Melbourne, we will be met and transferred by coach back to Warragul.





**YOUR TOUR ESCORT: Jacquie Turner** has more than 40 years' experience as a highly successful travel agent and tour escort.

With this itinerary, Jacquie will show you some absolutely fascinating and unusual sights including some wonderful local cultural activities. Along with the local guides she will ensure you have a most memorable journey.

*"I am so looking forward to this tour because it is somewhere completely different and a little bit off the beaten path"*– Jacquie Turner.

## INCLUSIONS

- Melbourne to Kazakhstan & Turkmenistan to Melbourne economy airfares and taxes
- All internal flights - economy airfares and taxes
- Business class train ticket for high-speed trains (Samarkand-Bukhara-Khiva)
- All transfers including coach travel between Warragul and Melbourne Airport
- Fully escorted throughout the entire tour by Jacquie Turner  
*In the unlikely event that Jacquie is not available to escort all or part of the tour, she will be replaced with a well-trained tour escort.*
- Hotel accommodation in twin-bedded/double rooms with private facilities – ranging from 4 to 5-star hotels including a yurt stay for one night.
- Experienced driver, and local guides
- Private, air-conditioned coach travel except on days when a minibus is required for easier access in local areas
- Complimentary bottled water is provided in all vehicles throughout the tour
- Letter of invitation for Turkmenistan including registration into the country
- Visa fee for Turkmenistan (USD85) and immigration duty of USD 18 per person
- 51 meals as per itinerary - 19 Breakfasts (B), 19 Lunches (L), 13 Dinners (D)
- Extensive sightseeing and entry fees as per itinerary
- Gippsland Travel hat or cap; luggage strap, luggage tags; hand gel
- End of tour Journal and USB with photos showcasing your time on the tour
- All local taxes, hotel service charges and portage of one suitcase per person
- Eco taxes into national parks
- All **Tipping** of local guides, coach drivers, hotel and restaurant staff at included meals
- Minimum 15 tour participants, maximum of 20 tour participants

## EXCLUSIONS

- Travel insurance (a surcharge may apply for passengers with any pre-existing medical conditions)
- Expenses of a personal nature like laundry, telephone calls, medical expenses
- Any meals & beverages not included.

## ITINERARY HIGHLIGHTS

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- Explore the historic and ethnic legacy of Almaty, the cultural capital of Kazakhstan
- Visit the Sunkar Falconry Center, featuring species of rare and endangered birds of prey in Almaty
- Explore the natural wonders of the Charyn Canyon, Kolsay and Kaindy lakes in Kazakhstan
- Enjoy the scenic beauty of Kyrgyzstan
- Learn to prepare and enjoy traditional Dungan cuisine
- Experience the art of traditional Kyrgyz falconry
- Witness Kyrgyzstan's national horseback game
- Enjoy a traditional Kyrgyz music and dance performance at the yurt camp
- Enjoy a private guided tour at Gapar Aitiev Museum of Fine Arts with an art expert
- Enjoy a private Kyrgyz National Opera and Ballet Theatre backstage visit with a renowned Kyrgyz artist
- See one of the four oldest Korans in the world in Tashkent
- Explore ancient Penjikent in Tajikistan
- Explore the ruins of Hissar Fortress in Dushanbe, Tajikistan
- Visit Amir Timur mausoleum and the Registan Square in Samarkand
- Taste the famous Pilaf at the authentic local teahouse in Samarkand
- Ascend the Shukhov Tower for a panoramic view of the Ark Fortress in Bukhara
- Stop at the Silk Road teahouse for tea and oriental sweets tasting in Bukhara
- Visit the impressive Nurulla Bay Palace with the Photography Museum in Khiva
- Admire the unbeatable views of ancient Khiva at sunset from the old city walls
- Visit Kunya-Urgench - the ancient capital of Khorezm in Turkmenistan
- Explore an amazing natural phenomenon – Darvaza Burning Crater
- Admire the famous breed of Akhal-Teke horses at a stud farm near Ashgabat
- Meet local craftsmen to learn about the customs and traditional crafts

28 August- 19 September 2026

*Costs based on exchange rates prevailing on 23 July 2025*

- Business class and Premium Economy on some flights may be available on application.
- Should you wish to extend your travel arrangements after the tour, please contact me to discuss further options.
- Should you select to travel on flights other than the included group flights, or upgrade to business/first class or premium economy, payment for the air fares will be required at the time of booking the flights. Please note separate terms and conditions will apply.
- The tour will only operate subject to a minimum of 15 participants. In the unlikely event that minimum numbers are not reached, a full refund of the deposit is applicable.
- Please note dates advised are subject to change pending flight schedule release.

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## GIPPSLAND TRAVEL ESCORTED TOURS - TERMS & CONDITIONS

### INTRODUCTION:

This contract is governed by Gippsland Travel Centre Pty Ltd and all members of the travelling parties as listed on your itinerary.

Gippsland Travel Centre acts as the agent selling and coordinating products on behalf of a third-party travel supplier/s. A separate contract with the supplier/s will apply and will be governed by the supplier's Terms and Conditions. Gippsland Travel cannot guarantee the performance of any third-party supplier/s. Gippsland Travel may receive fees, commissions, gifts or financial incentives from third party supplier/s under this contract.

### LATE BOOKINGS

Higher deposit payments are required for late bookings. A guarantee of full payment is required at the time of booking for all bookings received within 4 weeks of departure.

### PASSPORT and VISA

A valid passport is required for all international travel.

If you do not hold an Australian passport, you may require a resident return visa. Some countries require a visa to be issued before you depart Australia. Gippsland Travel will advise you of all passport and visa requirements for this tour.

The Australian Government through the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade regularly updates travel advice on various destinations. We recommend that you refer to [www.dfat.gov.au](http://www.dfat.gov.au) for the latest updates before choosing to travel and prior to departure.

### HEALTH & FITNESS

A minimum level of fitness is required to be able to participate on a Gippsland Travel Tour, you are required to at least:

- Be able to walk at least 1 hour on uneven surfaces without the use of any walking aid (walking stick for stability is acceptable)
- Walk up flights of stairs and short, steep hills
- Stand for 20 minutes without needing to sit down, often in hot/humid climates
- Carry your own hand luggage / handle your own suitcase when portage is not supplied eg. at airports.
- Get on and off various modes of transport without assistance, including small boats. Assistance will be offered where necessary.

Passengers must inform us of any medical conditions which may affect your ability to participate in the tour.

At our discretion we can exclude you from a tour or any activity if we consider that you are unable to safely participate in that tour or activity or we consider your participation may place the safety of other guests at risk.

You will be requested to supply a letter from your doctor indicating your prescription medication and your reason for taking it, which shall be carried in the event of an emergency. This information will remain confidential and can be supplied in a sealed envelope.

### BOOKINGS SOLD ON A SHARE BASIS

Bookings may be accepted on a share room basis on the proviso that the person requesting the share reservation agrees that while every effort will be made to match suitability of the passengers there is no guarantee that a share room can be provided. If a share room is not available at the time of final payment, either the single room supplement will apply, or the cancellation conditions detailed in your itinerary will apply.

### UNUSED COMPONENTS OF THIS TOUR

We regret refunds will not be given for any unused component of this tour, such as meals, entry fees, accommodation or transfers.

### GOVERNING LAW

These booking conditions are governed by the law in force in Victoria, Australia.

### ITINERARY CHANGES and ITINERARY VARIATIONS

Gippsland Travel reserves the right to amend the hotels, itinerary and excursions if deemed advisable or necessary due to adverse weather conditions, road conditions or other unforeseen circumstances. Any necessary alternative arrangements will be made to a similar standard. Occasionally circumstances beyond the control of Gippsland Travel make it necessary to change airlines, hotels or amendments to daily activities. We will inform you of any changes as soon as they occur.

### FLIGHT SCHEDULES

Airlines schedules are subject to change without notice. Voluntary date changes will incur fees. Gippsland Travel is not liable for delays or disruption of air travel.

### FORCE MAJEURE:

Force Majeure means the occurrence of an event that is beyond Gippsland Travel's reasonable control and which could not have been reasonably prevented by Gippsland Travel. Force majeure includes, but is not limited to: acts of God, accident, riots, war, terrorist act, epidemic, pandemic, quarantine, outbreaks of infectious disease or any other public health crisis, civil commotion, breakdown of communication facilities, natural catastrophes and natural disasters (including but not limited to flooding, fire, earthquake, landslide), adverse weather conditions, high or low water levels; government directed travel restrictions or omissions, changes in laws or regulations, national strikes, explosion, generalised lack of availability of raw materials or energy, nuclear or other industrial accident causing environmental pollution or contamination; change in law, meaning, enactment, amendment (including repeal) in the law or administration of any law in Australia or any jurisdiction or territory relevant to the booking contract, which includes changes in statute, regulation, determination, by-law, declaration, licence and the common law as applicable from time to time. For the avoidance of doubt, Force Majeure shall not include (a) financial distress nor inability of either party to make a profit or avoid a financial loss, (b) changes in market prices or conditions, or (c) a party's financial inability to perform its obligations hereunder. In the event that a Force Majeure is declared, the customer will be bound by the third-party supplier/s Terms and Conditions, if applicable.

### NB applicable to the STUNNING STANS 2026 itinerary only:

Please note in the event that the Stunning Stans 2026 tour has to be postponed due to a Force Majeure being declared in any of the countries included in the itinerary, funds paid will be held in credit for the postponed tour. The airlines will advise the applicable criteria for cancelled airfares.

### TERMINATION OF BOOKING CONTRACT OR CHANGE OF TRAVEL ARRANGEMENTS DUE TO FORCE MAJEURE

If Gippsland Travel, in its reasonable opinion, considers that any Force Majeure event prevents Gippsland Travel (whether directly or through its employees, contractors, subcontractors and agents) from lawfully or safely providing any products or services subject of the booking contract with you, Gippsland Travel may immediately by written notice; (a) terminate the booking contract (in whole or part of); or (b) change your travel arrangements as reasonably practicable to ensure your safety and invoice for any additional costs.

If you are eligible for a refund once a booking has been cancelled, the balance less any non-refundable amounts will be forwarded to you once received by Gippsland Travel from the third-party supplier/s.

Gippsland Travel is not responsible for any delays of refunds from the third-party supplier/s. Refunds from third party supplier/s can take in excess of 6 weeks. Refunds will be processed as per original form of payment.

Travel insurance policies may provide cover for cancellation fees subject to their terms and conditions.

### LIMITATION OF LIABILITY:

Subject to Australian Consumer Law, Gippsland Travel does not accept any liability in contract, tort or otherwise for any injury, damage, loss, delay, additional expense or inconvenience caused by a third-party supplier/s over who we have no direct control. Gippsland Travel is not liable for Force Majeure or any other event which is beyond our control or which is not preventable by us.

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