10:30 – 12:00

Selling the Silk Road: Unite and Conquer
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78 NEW TRIPS FOR 2007
AUSTRALIA'S GREAT OCEAN WALK, CAFFEINE-FUELLED COLOMBIA, CAMBODIA'S HIDDEN TEMPLES...

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Silk Road
Your expert guide to Asia’s ancient network

SRI LANKA
Voyage to the Bay of Bengal for tales of the unexpected featuring Sri Lanka, the Andaman Islands and Bangladesh

Plus!
Gorilla-watching in the Congo, motorhome adventures, best wildlife, tips and more. See p4

North Korea
Journey into the undiscovered north

Swiss Grand Tour
From the ‘Grand Canyon’ to Heidi’s House – Switzerland’s greatest hits

First 24 Hours: Austin, Texas
Short Break in Bratislava, Slovakia
Travel Icon: Edinburgh, Scotland
SILK ROAD

TRIP PLANNER

This vast trading network once dominated life across Asia. Following its routes is one of the great travel experiences and also a glimpse into how the modern world was born...

WORDS BRADLEY MAYHEW
The Persian Silk Road

**DURATION:** 21 DAYS

**Best for:** Architecture, history, cities

**ROUTE:** Tabriz • Tehran • Qom • Isfahan • Yazd • Shiraz • Mashhad • Rabat-i-Sharif

**WHY DO IT?** Follow Marco Polo’s route across the Iranian plateau, visiting the highlights of Persian architecture.

The best way to reach the country’s huge capital, Tehran, a modern city built atop the Silk Road settlement of Rey. At Tehran, it’s well worth detouring along a southern branch of the Silk Road that connected traders to the maritime route (the boats of which superseded the main overland route from the 19th century onwards). A trip south via the holy city of Qom reveals the classical Persian architecture of Isfahan and the ancient Zoroastrian centre of Yazd, and also allows you to loop back to Shiraz, visiting the once-powerful (now ruined) Persian capital at Persepolis.

From Shiraz, fly to Mashhad (1.5 hours), though purists may prefer to follow in the footsteps of Marco Polo, who made the 1,500km journey overland across the fringes of the Dasht-i-Lut Desert. Mashhad is home to the beautiful Timurid-era (1370-1507) Mosque of Gohar Shad and shrine of Imam Reza, and is a major Shiite Muslim pilgrimage site. Admirers of Persian literature may also want to spend the day visiting the nearby tombs of two of Persia’s greatest classical poets, Abolqasem Ferdowsi and Omar Khayyam, buried in Tus and Nishapur respectively.

Finally, for a taste of what the Silk Road traders once experienced, continue on to the Turkmenistan border to visit the 12th-century Rabat-i-Sharif Caravanserai, near Serakhs, where you can still make out stables, baggage stores and merchants’ rooms.
**Kyrgyzstan**

**Yurts & mountain valleys**

**DURATION: 14 DAYS**

**Best for:** Mountain scenery, homestays, horseriding, trekking, meeting locals

**ROUTE:** Bishkek • Karakol • Kochkor
• Naryn • Tash Rabat • Torugart Pass
• Kashgar (China) or Osh

**WHY DO IT?** An impressive network of homestays make this an easy place to get a taste for the nomadic life.

Begun with a couple of days touring the Soviet-influenced sights of Kyrgyz capital Bishkek, from the Museum of Fine Arts to the statue of national hero Manas. Afterwards, hire a car, or taxi, via a homestay (see ‘Top Tips’) and dip east past the Silk Road-era minaret of Burana to Issyk Kul, a huge alpine lake fringed by the snow-capped mountains of the Tian Shan. Karakol, in the east, is a particularly good base for some excellent short treks into the surrounding Alpine valleys, and an overnight stay in the Altyr Arashan Valley or a three-day trek to Ala Kul mountain lake is worth the added time.

From here, head south to Kochkor, one of the best places to take advantage of Kyrgyzstan’s excellent array of community-based tourism organisations. Homestays can arrange a wonderful three-day horse trek around the yurt-fringed mountain lake of Song Kul, staying with shepherds en route.

Past Naryn, the one must-see detour is the Tash Rabat Caravanserai, a picturesque Silk Road landmark hidden down a side valley. Overnight in the yurt-camp here before hiking up the ridge the next morning for views of stunning Chuyi Kul lake. From here, you are just a couple of hours’ drive from the Torugart Pass, the incredibly scenic border crossing over the mountains to Kashgar in China, and beyond. But only consider taking this route between May and October, when the weather is more forgiving.

If you are not crossing into China, take the little-travelled backroad south-west from Naryn to Karakol and down into the ancient city of Osh, one of the great bazaar towns of the Fergana Valley.

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**Top Tip**

Community-based tourism organisations help visitors get the best out of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan: most offer value homestays, vehicle hire and even horse treks. Kyrgyzstan is the regional leader; try CT (www.kyrgyzct.com).
The Pamir Highway

**Duration:** 14 days

**Best for:** Mountain views, road trips, adventure, trekking, cycling, yurt stays

**ROUTE:** Dushanbe - Khorog - Ishkashim
- Murghab - Sary Tash & Irkeshtam (both Kyrgyzstan)

After securing transport from Tajikistan's capital Dushanbe, it's a long but scenic, two-day drive (or 45-minute flight) to Khorog, where you can join up with the Pamir Highway. This is the mountain capital of the autonomous far-eastern Gorno-Badakhshan region (note: travel within this area requires a permit separate to your visa). From here, your best bet is to hire a Soviet-era jeep and head south to Ishkashim, on the Afghan border, to travel the beautiful Tajik side of the Wakhan Valley. Marco Polo travelled the area in the 13th century and you can still explore several of the Silk Road forts that date from that time. The views across the border towards Afghanistan and the Hindu Kush range are also amazing.

As you swing back up north to the main Pamir Highway, you soon enter the high Pamir plateau, devoid of trees and broken only by the occasional turquoise lake or remote cluster of yurts. Community tourism programmes based in regional capital Murghab can help you to explore what is one of the most beautiful, remote and little-visited corners of high Asia.

From Murghab, swing north past horizons of deep blue lakes and muscular Pamir peaks, before rising into Kyrgyzstan at Sary Tash. Detour west for views of the 7,134m-high Lenin Peak, then head east to finish at the wild and beautiful Irkeshtam Pass, marking the border with China.
Central Asian oases

**Duration:** 10-18 days

**Best for:** Islamic architecture, desert cities, bazaars, cultural life

**ROUTE:** Tashkent • Samarkand • Bukhara • Khiva • Konye Urgench • Darvaza • Ashgabat • Merv

**Central Asian oases**

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**ROUTE:** Tashkent • Samarkand • Bukhara • Khiva • Konye Urgench • Darvaza • Ashgabat • Merv

**Why do it?** With classic stops like Samarkand, Bukhara and Khiva, Uzbekistan is the architectural heartland of the Central Asian Silk Road.

Uzbekistan, the jewel of the Silk Road, is a treasure trove of ancient cities, deserts, and bazaars. From Tashkent, the capital, to the ancient city of Samarkand, Uzbekistan offers a unique blend of history, culture, and natural beauty. With a mix of Islamic architecture, desert landscapes, and bustling bazaars, Uzbekistan is a must-visit destination for any traveler seeking to explore Central Asia.

**How to visit:**

1. **Tashkent:** Start your journey in Tashkent, the bustling capital city. Visit the must-see attractions such as the Ulugbek Observatory and the Tashkent Metro Station, which is one of the deepest in the world.
2. **Samarkand:** Head to Samarkand, known as the city of luminous blue domes, for its stunning Registan Square and the stunning blue tylework of the Shah-i-Zinda necropolis. The tomb of Tamerlane, who more than anyone else shaped the face of the city, is also a must-see.
3. **Bukhara:** Visit Bukhara, a city renowned for its ancient bazaar and the ancient fortress, Ark. The city is also known for its traditional weavings, which you can enjoy at the Bukhara Weaving Factory.
4. **Khiva:** Khiva, the ancient city, is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Explore its narrow streets and visit the Id-Kul Medrese, one of the oldest madrasahs in Central Asia.
5. **Konye Urgench:** Konye Urgench, the ancient capital of the Khwarezmian Empire, is home to the Urgench Walls, the largest mudbrick walls in the world.
6. **Darvaza:** Darvaza, also known as the “Door to Hell,” is a natural gas crater that can be explored. It’s a unique attraction and a must-see for its natural beauty.
7. **Ashgabat:** Ashgabat, the capital of Turkmenistan, is known for its neoclassical architecture and the epic Darvaza gas crater.
8. **Merv:** Merv is an ancient city and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Visit the Merv Museum and explore the ruins of ancient architecture.

**When to visit:** The best time to visit Uzbekistan is during the months of May to September, when the weather is mild and comfortable. October to April can be cold and snowy.

**How much does it cost:**

The cost of a trip to Uzbekistan can vary depending on the duration of your stay and the activities you choose to engage in. However, generally, a trip to Uzbekistan can cost around $1,500 to $2,500 per person, including flights, accommodation, and basic food expenses.

**Tips:**

- Always negotiate prices before hiring a guide or buying souvenirs.
- Uzbekistan has a rich cuisine, so make sure to try local dishes such as plov, lagman, and nang.
- The Silk Road is a popular destination, but it’s not overcrowded like some other tourist spots.
- Be sure to visit the ancient cities of Samarkand, Bukhara, and Khiva.

**Visit Uzbekistan:**

- **Tashkent:** Visit the Ulugbek Observatory and the Tashkent Metro Station.
- **Samarkand:** Visit the Registan Square and the Shah-i-Zinda necropolis.
- **Bukhara:** Visit the Id-Kul Medrese and explore the ancient bazaar.
- **Khiva:** Visit the Urgench Walls and the Id-Kul Medrese.
- **Darvaza:** Visit the Darvaza gas crater.
- **Ashgabat:** Visit the Merv Museum and explore the ruins of ancient architecture.

**Getting there:**

- **Flights:** Uzbekistan Airways offers direct flights from many cities around the world, including Los Angeles, San Francisco, and London.
- **Train:** The Trans-Siberian Railway passes through Uzbekistan, offering a unique way to explore the region.
- **Car:** Renting a car is a great way to explore the countryside and remote areas.

**Planning your trip:**

- **Visas:** Visit the Uzbek Ministry of Foreign Affairs website for visa information.
- **Accommodation:** Uzbekistan has a wide range of accommodation options, from budget-friendly hostels to luxury hotels.
- **Activities:** Explore the ancient cities, visit the Darvaza gas crater, and hike in the beautiful mountain landscapes.

**Wanderlust May 2017 | 49**
Incredible architecture, beguiling culture, Silk Road splendour – Welcome to Iran...

wanderlust.co.uk/planatrip/insp ...
RT @wanderlustmag: How to sample the Silk Road's highlights in as little as 9 days: wanderlust.co.uk/planatrip/insp ...
The Wanderlust guide to the best of the Silk Road

The Silk Road can be a massive undertaking or a great focus for a fortnight’s trip to Central Asia. Set out the map and start scheming!

The Silk Road is the greatest travel route of all time. Spanning roughly 8,000km from Istanbul to Beijing, the Silk Road is a sprawling network of ancient trade routes that connected the East and West for centuries.

What is the best time to visit?

The best time to visit the Silk Road depends on your interests and the region you’re visiting. Spring (March to May) and autumn (September to November) are the most popular times to travel, with warm weather and fewer crowds.

What to pack for the Silk Road?

The Silk Road is a long journey, so it’s important to pack light and bring the right clothes for the climate you’ll be visiting. Depending on the region, you may need warm clothing, such as long-sleeved shirts, sweaters, and waterproof jackets.

Where to stay on the Silk Road?

There are a variety of accommodations available on the Silk Road, from luxury hotels to basic hostels. Be sure to research the options in each region and book in advance to secure your spot.

What to eat on the Silk Road?

The Silk Road is known for its diverse cuisine, with influences from the East and West. Be sure to sample local dishes, such as kabsa, shawarma, and bamiyan.

What to see on the Silk Road?

The Silk Road is known for its historical sites, such as ancient ruins, temples, and markets. Be sure to visit places like Petra, the Old Silk Road, and the Great Wall of China.

What to do on the Silk Road?

From hiking in the mountains to exploring ancient cities, there’s plenty to do on the Silk Road. Consider taking a hot air balloon ride over the desert or visiting a local market to try new foods.

Ready to go?

The Silk Road is a unique and adventurous travel destination that offers a glimpse into the rich history of the region. With its diverse culture, stunning landscapes, and delicious cuisine, it’s sure to be an unforgettable trip.

More information

Visit our website for more information on planning a Silk Road trip, including tips for budgeting, packing, and what to expect.

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Ready to explore the Silk Road?

Start planning your trip today!
Afghanistan & Tajikistan: Wakhan Pamir Adventure
Wild Frontiers
From: £4895.00
In Afghanistan’s distant north-eastern corner lies the Wakhan corridor. This narrow strip of land once formed the buffer zone between the British and Russian Empires and was of immense strategic im...

Tajikistan Discovery
Intrepid
From: £1595.00
Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan sprawl across the vast expanses of Central Asia but are still hidden from many visitor’s minds. Despite offering outstanding beauty, simplicity and a feeling of complete r...

Central Asia Adventure – Almaty To Tashkent
G Adventures
From: £1499.00
Stop and marvel at Charyn Canyon, Explore Karakol with guided city tour. Settle into a Chong-Kemin homestay, Visit the Mug Teppe settlement

The Heart of the Silk Road (15 Days)
Undiscovered Destinations
From: £2599.00
The legendary Silk Road occupies a mythical place in the imaginations of travellers, a remote region through which countless traders journeyed. Follow in their footsteps on this small group tour.

Mountains and Marvels of Central Asia
KE Adventure Travel
From: £1695.00
Trek the Fann Mountains and explore Uzbekistan’s Silk Road cities
The Silk Road: From wishlist to ticked list

Lyn Hughes
Wanderlust Travel Media