

HARVARD

ALUMNI TRAVELS



THE SILK ROAD AND THE SOUTH CAUCASUS

Tashkent, Khiva, Bukhara, Samarkand, Baku, Tbilisi, Yerevan

OCTOBER 7-25, 2022

PROGRAM SCHEDULE

ITINERARY HIGHLIGHTS: Tashkent, Khiva, Bukhara, Samarkand, Baku, Tbilisi, Yerevan

- Explore Khiva's Old Town, a UNESCO World Heritage site, extensively preserved and restored—existing today as much as it did hundreds of years ago.
- Take part in a walking tour of Bukhara's Jewish Quarter, in the heart of the Old Town, and meet with community representatives at the synagogue.
- Admire Samarkand's outstanding Silk Route treasures: the Registan, Bibi Khanum Mosque and Shah-i-Zinda and Ulug-Bek's Observatory.
- Browse the animated Siab Bazaar where vividly dressed Uzbek and Tajik vendors oversee neat stacks of brilliant produce and burlap sacks of nuts and spices, cabbage rolls and shashlik.
- In Tashkent, visit the private art studio of a sixth-generation Uzbek ceramicist whose family has been making pottery since the 1790s.
- Take a curator-led tour of the Azerbaijani Carpet Museum, which beautifully displays the vivid colors and bold designs of Azeri, Caucasian and Iranian carpets.
- Enjoy a private tour and champagne reception at the Nobel Oil Club, the Nobel Brothers' Museum.
- Experience a traditional Georgian Table feast complete with local specialties and local wines.

ACTIVITY LEVEL: Level 4

STUDY LEADER: **Alexandra Vacroux** is Executive Director of the Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies and Lecturer on Government at Harvard University. The Davis Center was founded in 1948 with the hopes that the social sciences could collectively address the pressing national need to understand the Soviet Union during the Cold War. Today the center fosters opportunities for innovative scholarship, creative teaching, and broad learning to educate future leaders who will make enduring contributions and bring deep knowledge to bear on contemporary problems. Vacroux's scholarly work addresses many Russian and Eurasian policy issues. In addition, she teaches popular courses on the comparative politics of Eurasia and post-Soviet conflict. She has mentored dozens of Harvard's best and brightest Russian regional studies students and scholars. She is an active member of the bilateral Working Group on the Future of U.S.–Russia Relations, and co-chairs the Davis Center's long-running Comparative Politics Seminar.

ACCOMMODATES: 8–24 guests. *This is a Harvard exclusive program.*

PRICING: \$9,995 per person double occupancy / \$11,685 single occupancy

SCHEDULE BY DAY

B=Breakfast, L=Lunch, R=Reception, D=Dinner

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 7

DEPART FROM HOME CITY

Depart USA on international flights bound for Tashkent, Uzbekistan. (Meals in flight)

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 8

CONNECT VIA ISTANBUL / DUBAI / FRANKFURT

Connect via a gateway city en route to Tashkent (likely Istanbul or Dubai or Frankfurt—Meals in flight).

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 9

TASHKENT, UZBEKISTAN

Arrive in Tashkent very early this morning and transfer to the hotel. Rooms at the hotel will be reserved from Saturday night to enable check-in upon arrival.

Enjoy a free morning to rest after the long flight and get used to the time change. In the afternoon embark on the introductory tour of the city.

Tashkent boasts a wealth of the old as well as the new. This afternoon, tour modern Tashkent, beginning at Independence Square, a place where history is revealed in the different names it has borne throughout its existence. Make stops at the Courage Monument, dedicated to the survivors of the major earthquake in 1966, and Shahid Memorial Complex which honors the innocent martyrs killed during Bolshevik purges.

Enjoy the welcome dinner at the hotel to celebrate the beginning of the journey.

Overnight at *Hyatt Regency Hotel* (B, D)

MONDAY, OCTOBER 10

TASHKENT / URGENCH / KHIVA

Spend the day in the old Tashkent. Stroll through a labyrinth of mud-walled houses surviving from the 19th century to Khast Imam

Square, where some of Tashkent's oldest monuments remain. View the Uthman Koran, considered by Sunni Muslims to be the oldest Koran in the world. The holy book is safeguarded in the library of the Muy Muborok Madrassah, where several of Mohammed's hairs are said to have been enshrined. Visit the private studio of a renowned sixth-generation ceramicist. Browse the rich collection of Uzbek embroidery, ceramics, jewelry, rugs, and musical instruments at the Museum of Applied Arts

Fly to Urgench in the evening. Upon arrival, drive to Khiva.

Overnight at *Zarafshon Boutique Hotel* (B, L)

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 11

KHIVA

Spend today exploring Khiva's Ichon Qala (Inner city) on foot. Khiva's Old Town, a UNESCO World Heritage site, has been extensively preserved and restored, and exists today as much as it did hundreds of years ago.

The walled Old City was an independent entity and the seat of the Khanate of Khiva. The largest of the existing buildings is the Tash Hauli Palace, the home of the Khan and his four legal wives. The intricate blue and white tilework in the open-air throne room offsets the airy space set aside by the carved wooden columns.

Wood carving is a traditional specialty of Khiva, and more wooden columns are found at the Dzhusma Mosque. The mosque is partially below ground level and the 115 carved columns that support the wooden ceiling create a forest-like effect around two square light wells.

The Kunya Ark was originally built in the 12th century as the khan's fortress and residence, and encompassed numerous small courtyards surrounded by administrative buildings, sleeping quarters, kitchens, guardhouse, stables, parade area, and weapon strongholds. Much of it was lost when Persia invaded the Khivan Khanate in the 18th century, but what remains, including the mosque, harem, and throne room are beautifully decorated with ceramic tiles and majolica.

After completion of the guided tour, take some time for personal exploration.

Overnight at *Zarafshon Boutique Hotel* (B, L, D)

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 12 KHIVA / DRIVE TO BUKHARA

Today travel to Bukhara. The approximately 8-hour drive by a comfortable, air-conditioned coach lies across long stretches of the Kyzyl Kum, or Red Sands, Desert. This is the same route ridden by loaded Silk Road camel caravans and once plagued by brigands on hand to plunder their riches. The landscape is made up of dunes, *saxua*/bushes, and the distant mountains. Along the way you may catch glimpses of the Amu Darya River, which used to be called the Oxus, and loosely parallels the Uzbek-Turkmen border.

Dinner this evening will be at the hotel upon arrival in Bukhara.

Overnight *Hotel Devon Begi* (B, L, D)

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 13 BUKHARA

Spend the day exploring Central Asia's most ancient living city. An oasis in the desert, UNESCO-listed Bukhara offers cool shade and rest to the modern traveler as it did to the camel caravans that plied the Silk Road hundreds of years ago. Bukhara's Old Town has a unified feel, drawn together by a central reflecting pool and plaza, by commonality in the structure of the domed bazaars and by the major monuments ringing the old town: the Kalon Assembly, the Zindan Prison, and the Ark Citadel.

You will have a chance to meet the Senior Scientific Advisor of the Ark, who is responsible for the ongoing projects, renovations, and events within the territory of the Ark Citadel.

Visit the lovely Ismael Samani Mausoleum, the 10th-century resting place of Ismael Samani, founder of the Persian Samanid Dynasty, with its sixteen different styles of brickwork. The little mausoleum was buried under the desert

sands and not discovered until the 20th century.

After lunch, resume touring at Lyabi-Hauz Plaza, the center of Bukhara's old town. The plaza is, as it has been throughout history, a place to meet friends, to eat, to drink, and to relax in the shade.

Visit the nearby Kukeldash Madrassah, the largest Koranic school in Central Asia. Named for the statesman and general Kulbaba Kukeldash, the madrasah was built in 1568.

Stroll through the milliner and spice bazaars and past street-level mosques and madrasahs, before moving on to the 12th-century Kalon assembly, which includes the Kalon Mosque and Minaret and the Miri-Arab Madrassah.

Finish the day with a walk-through Bukhara's old Jewish Quarter, in the heart of the Old Town, where in the mid-19th century 2,500 families of prosperous merchants were estimated to have been living.

Overnight *Hotel Devon Begi* (B, L, D)

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 14 BUKHARA

Visit the Summer Palace of the last Emir and stop at its Museum of National Crafts. Called the Palace of Moon and Stars, the Summer Palace was built at the turn of the century after the Russians took control of Bukhara.

Stop at the Bakhaudin Nakshbah Complex. Bakhaudin Nakshbandi was a 14th-century Sufi mystic and founder of the Nakshbandi order of Sufis. His mausoleum complex grew from a simple tomb over his grave to a 16th-century hostel for visiting dervishes, then to a spiritual complex in the 17th century with a mosque added in the 18th century. The complex was restored in 1993 for the celebration of the 675th anniversary of the saint's birth.

The afternoon is free for independent exploration or just relaxing in the old town. This evening before dinner, visit a local madrasah to enjoy a performance by local artists.

Overnight in *Hotel Devon Begi* (B, L, D)

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 15 BUKHARA / TRAIN OR DRIVE SAMARKAND

Drive or travel by train to UNESCO-listed Samarkand. Perhaps the most well-known of Silk Road towns, Samarkand, fabled oasis on the fringes of the Kyzyl Kum Desert, has been settled since the 6th century BC. Due to its location on the plains where the Zeravshan River spills out from the Pamir Mountains, Samarkand became a major Silk Road crossroads.

Begin sightseeing in Samarkand up on arrival with a visit to the Registan, the city's centerpiece, and its most recognizable landmark. The three emblematic madrasahs frame the square and loom over the empty space in the center. Also see the Gur-Emir Mausoleum, the final resting place of Tamerlane. The interior of the mausoleum has been restored and is brilliant in gold leaf and fresh tile. The heavily gilded central dome opens over the set of tomb-markers resembling sarcophagi (the bodies are located well below but are on site). All are marble, apart from Tamerlane's, which is a slab of solid jade reportedly from Mongolia.

Upon completion of sightseeing, check in to the hotel. This evening enjoy dinner at a private home of a local family.

Overnight *Hotel Dilimah* (B, L, D)

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 16 SAMARKAND

Continue to explore glorious Samarkand. Visit the Bibi Khanum Mosque, built by Tamerlane to be the largest mosque in the Islamic world, and dedicated to the memory of his favorite wife.

Pay a visit to Ulug Bek's Observatory, built by Tamerlane's grandson Ulug Bek, who found his true interest in the heavens. The astronomer-king was fascinated by the stars and the cosmos and built one of the most advanced observatories of the ancient world.

Other highlights include the colorful bazaar, as well as the workshop where handcrafted paper is made according to traditions handed down

from the 8th century, when papermaking began in Samarkand.

During the course of the day, visit a private kindergarten for an opportunity to meet with children, teachers and administrators and discuss the system of education in Uzbekistan.

Overnight *Hotel Dilimah* (B, L, D)

MONDAY, OCTOBER 17 SAMARKAND / TRAIN OR DRIVE TO TASHKENT

Take the opportunity to experience village life in Uzbekistan with a visit to Ohalik village in the Gissar foothills approximately 30 minutes from Samarkand. Visit with a local family in their home and embark upon a hike through sheep-herder trails in the hills surrounding the village. Back in Samarkand, witness a demonstration of traditional Uzbek bread making at a local home.

Traditionally called noni, or patyr, Uzbek bread is baked in round, flat loaves in a clay oven called a tandir. They are usually shaped like a dish with a depression in the middle and decorated using a special patterned stamp. Also stop at the Uzbek-Afghan Silk Carpet Factory. Tour the gardens outside the factory where the weavers grow indigo, coleus, and dahlias to use for dye. Observe the entire process of dying the thread and weaving the carpets, with an opportunity to shop afterward.

In the evening catch the express train to Tashkent. Upon arrival, transfer to the city-center hotel for check-in and late dinner.

Overnight *Hyatt Regency Hotel* (B, L, D)

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 18 TASHKENT / FLY TO BAKU, AZERBAIJAN

In the afternoon transfer to the airport for the flight to Baku, Azerbaijan. Lunch today will be independent in flight, and dinner at a local restaurant upon arrival in Baku is included.

Overnight *Hotel Four Seasons* (B, D)

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 19 BAKU

Set out to explore Baku. Parts of Azerbaijan, notably Gobustan on the Caspian coast, show evidence of human habitation beginning in the Stone Age. Flaming natural gas vents on the Absheron Peninsula, where Baku is now located, may have inspired Zarathustra, a local resident around 1000 BC, to include fire rituals in his Zoroastrian religion. Today Baku is a booming metropolis of over 2 million people with well-preserved old city and pleasant public promenades around the Fountain Square and along the Caspian Sea waterfront.

Begin the tour with a stop at The Martyrs' Cemetery, or Martyrs' Lane, set on a terraced hill above Baku's harbor, a beautiful place formerly called Kirov Park, after one of Lenin's contemporaries. Today it pays homage to the 137 people killed during Black January 1990, when the Soviets sent tanks into the city and fired on Azerbaijani civilians. The attack marked the turning point in the country's drive toward independence. The memorial has expanded to honor the Azerbaijanis who lost their lives in the conflict with Armenia over Nagorno-Karabakh.

Take a walk-through Baku's Old City, or Icheri Shere. It was once the whole city and is the best place to get a sense of its history. It is completely encircled by the old city walls with their medieval gates.

The winding streets and alleyways are home to private residences, mosques and madrassahs, carpet merchants and tiny shops. The aura of the past that permeates the town rewards exploration and careful investigation with surprising glimpses of a bygone era. Pass by the UNESCO listed Maiden's Tower and Shirvan Shah Palace. Enjoy a curator-led tour of the State Museum of Azerbaijani Carpets and Applied Folk Art, which beautifully displays the vivid colors and bold designs of Azeri, Caucasian, and Iranian carpets.

Finish the day with dinner featuring authentic Azeri dishes and traditional mugham music.

Overnight *Hotel Four Seasons* (B, L, D)

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 20 BAKU / FLY TO TBILISI, GEORGIA

Following breakfast, transfer to the airport for a morning flight to Tbilisi. Upon arrival, take an introductory tour of Georgia's capital.

Georgia's strip of central lowlands has long been an important link between East and West. Tbilisi is set at the mouth of this passageway, in the Mtkvari River valley, and has changed hands many times. Most notably, the Arabs ruled the city for 400 years before King David the Builder defeated them in 1121 and moved his capital here from Kutaisi. The Georgian king fostered tolerance for Tbilisi's Arab population, and the city still has a multiethnic atmosphere.

Explore the red-roofed old town, its houses sporting carved wooden balconies beneath the Narikala Fortress on the hill above. The hike to the fortress may be undertaken if time permits, but if not, the view from Metekhi Church of the Virgin is perfect. Also visible from many vantage points within today's tour is Mother Georgia, a soaring monument above the city bearing a sword for her enemies and a bowl of wine for her guests. Visit the 6th-century stone Anchiskhati Basilica, the city's oldest church. Pause at Sioni Cathedral, sheltering the Cross of St. Nino, the woman who brought Christianity to Georgia, and pass by the 19th-century caravanserai built to house traveling merchants. Tour the 13th-century Metekhi Church of the Virgin, constructed on an outcropping above the river on the site of David the Builder's former palace.

Make stops at a working bakery and a craft studio before checking in to hotel in the afternoon. Enjoy the free evening at leisure, and dinner tonight is independent.

Overnight *Rooms Hotel* (B, L)

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 21 TBILISI

Visit Tbilisi's best museums, including the Georgian National Museum with one of the largest collections of ancient gold decorative arts as well as very well-preserved medieval cloisonné; the Museum of Soviet Occupation,

which was created to commemorate the almost 900,000 Georgians who were killed or deported during the Soviet years of 1921 to 1991; and tour the Georgian National Art Gallery.

Conclude the day with a private tour and reception at the house museum of Georgian painter Elene Akhvlediani (1901-1974), who is probably best remembered in Georgia for her atmospheric paintings of old Tbilisi. She was one of an influential generation of Georgian artists who began their careers in the early 20th century. Her interests included stage and costume design, and during her lifetime she produced designs for over 70 productions. Her studio, always a gathering place for artists, musicians, and poets, was transformed in 1978 into a house museum.

Return to hotel for the free evening and an independent dinner.

Overnight *Rooms Hotel* (B, L)

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 22 TBILISI / DAY TRIP TO MTSKHETA & GORI

Today make a day trip to the towns of Mtskheta and Gori. Leaving Tbilisi, the first stop is Jvari Monastery, an imposing structure atop a hill overlooking the confluence of the Kura and Aragvi Rivers.

Continue to Mtskheta, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Mtskheta was the capital of the eastern Georgian kingdom of Iberia from the 3rd century BC until the 5th century AD. Because of its location, it was an important market town.

On the way to Gori, make a stop in the temporary refugee village Tserovani. Here, on land owned by the Georgian government, 2200 individual houses were constructed in about a week's time, and thousands of displaced individuals live in small, private cottages. Meet with people who live in the village, visit the local school, and tour the small businesses set up with help from USAID that help support the population. Stalin was born here in December 1879 and lived here until 1883. The family's original wooden hut on Stalin Avenue is today the Stalin House

Museum. On the grounds of the museum is Stalin's private railway car, used to carry him in style throughout the Soviet Union.

Time permitting, visit the nearby cave town of Uplistsikhe, meaning Lord's Castle. It was once one of the most important stops along the trade route linking Byzantium with India and China and was primarily inhabited by artisans and merchants. Although heavily eroded and damaged by earthquakes, the town is still fascinating to explore.

Returning to Tbilisi in the evening, enjoy a musical performance and dinner of delicious Georgian specialties.

Overnight *Rooms Hotel* (B, L, D)

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 23 TBILISI / DRIVE TO YEREVAN, ARMENIA

Following breakfast, depart for the Armenian border. After the usual border crossing formalities, continue the drive to Yerevan. Armenia famously claims to be the first country to embrace Christianity as a state religion, and this record informs its history. Powerful old churches built of huge blocks of red or yellow stone are silhouetted on the hilltops or tucked away in the valleys. Thousands of basalt khachkar crosses, lovingly carved and filigreed memorial stones dating from the 10th century onward, draw the eye towards the east.

The drive today takes us across the Armenian countryside, stopping at Sevanavank Monastery, located on a peninsula that was once an island in Lake Sevan. The monastery is made up of two remaining churches – the Church of Saint Astvatsatsin and the Church of Saint Arakelots – though it was a much larger compound at one time and ruins of other buildings can be seen. It was founded in the year 874 AD and was an important center of pilgrimage for Armenian Christians throughout the Middle Ages.

Blue-green Lake Sevan, at over 6,200 feet above sea level, is one of the largest alpine lakes in the world. Filling two inter-mountain depressions, the brilliant lake is a favorite resort for citizens of Yerevan, about 45 miles

away. Arrive in Yerevan in the evening and check in to the city-center hotel before dinner.

Overnight *Alexander Hotel* (B, L, D)

MONDAY, OCTOBER 24 YEREVAN

Today explore Yerevan, the capital city of Armenia, a city older than Rome. Yerevan was founded under the name Erebuni in 782 BC. In the 4th century, Armenia became the first country in Europe to adopt Christianity as its official religion. The Armenian peoples' faith, culture and language have managed to survive through centuries of conflict with Arabs, Mongols, Persians, and Turks: Yerevan changed hands 14 times between 1512 and 1735.

Take a drive from Republic Square along Abovyan Street to the Cascade Complex. The giant Cascade stairway links central Yerevan to the Mother Armenia Statue in Victory Park. The top of the Cascade and along the stairway offer fantastic views of Yerevan and Mt. Ararat on a clear day. The Cafesjian Museum of Modern Art, built on the extensive collection of Gerard Cafesjian, is located inside and focuses on sculpture, glass, and paintings from contemporary artists.

Ride the escalators towards the top of the stairway and reach the Mother Armenia statue. Designed so that its interior resembles the iconic St. Hripsimeh Church at Echmiadzin, the base of this 167-foot monument was first used as a museum dedicated to World War II. In 1995, it was renamed the Military Museum of Mother Armenia and includes exhibits pertaining to the Nagorno-Karabakh war.

After lunch, drive to the town of Echmiadzin, founded as Vargarsapat in 117 AD and once the capital of Armenia. It is best known as the spiritual center of Armenia and the seat of the Patriarch of the Armenian Apostolic Church. It is a special place of pilgrimage for Christian Armenians the world over.

It was here that St. Gregory the Illuminator (who converted Armenian King Trdat III to Christianity at the end of the second century) had a vision of Christ descending to Earth, and

on this spot the Cathedral at Echmiadzin was built in 301.

Return to the Yerevan the festive farewell dinner marking the conclusion of the program.

Overnight *Alexander Hotel* (B, L, D)

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 25 DEPART YEREVAN

The tour concludes this morning with transfers to the airport for departing flights.

(B)