SILK ROAD IN CENTRAL ASIA & IRAN
APRIL 6-23, 2019

This focused survey of Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Iran ranges from the Persian-Turkic Silk Road oases of Samarkand and Bukhara to the ruins of Darius I’s Persepolis, the ceremonial capital of the Achaemenid kings, and over the graceful bridges of Isfahan’s Zayende River. Admire eight different UNESCO World Heritage sites along the old caravan routes from Central Asia into Iran, becoming familiar with the culture, nature, science, history, architecture, and spiritual beliefs that have had such a profound impact on the modern world. Get to know these countries, laced together with the traces of the old Silk Road that linked the Eastern and Western worlds.

Begin in Uzbekistan’s capital, Tashkent, a jumble of wide tree-lined boulevards, oversized Soviet buildings and traces of the old city. Explore the fabled Silk Road cities of Samarkand and Bukhara, with their blue-tile domes and elegant minarets. Admire the flamboyant gilded architecture of Turkmenistan’s capital, Ashgabat, and continue into Iran, a country that has been in existence for over 2,500 years. Browse its fabulous bazaars, admire its splendid architecture and complex ornamentation, wander its venerable archaeological sites, and converse with the hospitable people who call it home.

GROUP SIZE: From 12 to 25 guests

PRICING: Per person double occupancy: $9,495 / Single supplement: $1,625

STUDY LEADER: To be announced
SATURDAY, APRIL 6 & SUNDAY, APRIL 7
HOME / TASHKENT, UZBEKISTAN
Depart on independent flights to Tashkent, Uzbekistan. Upon arrival, transfer to the hotel for check-in and rest.
*Lotte City Hotel Tashkent Palace (meals in flight)*

MONDAY, APRIL 8
TASHKENT
Following breakfast and an introductory lecture, set out to explore Uzbekistan’s capital city. Stroll through a labyrinth of mud-walled houses surviving from the 19th century. View the Uthman Koran, written on deerskin 19 years after the death of Mohammed, and considered by Sunni Muslims to be the oldest Koran in the world. Also visit the private studio of a sixth-generation Uzbek ceramicist whose family has revived the lost art of natural dye.
In the evening, gather for a welcome dinner.
*Lotte City Hotel Tashkent Palace (B, L, D)*

TUESDAY, APRIL 9 & WEDNESDAY, APRIL 10
SAMARKAND
Hop the high-speed train to Samarkand, Tamerlane’s beautiful blue-tiled capital. Explore the majestic, UNESCO-listed Registan Square, and enjoy a home-cooked dinner with a local family. Visit the Bibi Khanum Mosque, built by Tamerlane to be the largest mosque up to that time, and admire Ulug Bek’s Observatory, one of the most advanced observatories of the ancient world. Drop in at a workshop where hand-crafted paper is made, and visit the private studio of fashion designer Valentina Romanenko.
*Emir Han Hotel (2B, 2L, 2D)*

THURSDAY, APRIL 11 & FRIDAY, APRIL 12
BUKHARA
Depart for UNESCO-listed Bukhara, stopping for lunch in the village of Vobkent to learn about rural life. Begin at Lyabi-Hauz Plaza at the center of Bukhara’s old town, and admire the 12th-century Kalon Mosque and Minaret. Inspect the Ark Citadel, the original fortress of Bukhara, and meet its Senior Scientific Advisor. Discover the Zindan Prison, where two British “Great Game” players were imprisoned before their execution. Take a walk through Bukhara’s old Jewish Quarter, where in the mid-19th century 2,500 families of prosperous merchants were estimated to have been living. Also enjoy a performance by local dancers at a former madrassah.
*Hotel Sasha and Son or Asia Bukhara Hotel (2B, 2L, 2D)*

SATURDAY, APRIL 13 & SUNDAY, APRIL 14
TURKMENABAT / ASHGABAT, TURKMENISTAN
Cross the border into Turkmenistan and survey Turkmenabat, the second-largest city in the country, before boarding a flight to the capital, Ashgabat. Explore the modern capital, where marble and gold monuments have sprung up all over town. In 2013, the Guinness Book of World Records awarded Ashgabat the record for the highest density of white marble buildings in the world. Visit the UNESCO site of Nisa, center of the ancient Parthian Kingdom, accompanied by a local archaeologist. More than two thousand years ago, the Parthian Empire spread out from Nisa, and took its place among such kingdoms as the Achaemenid under Cyrus the Great, and the Macedonian under Alexander the Great.
*Hotel Oguzkent (2B, 2L, 2D)*

MONDAY, APRIL 15 & TUESDAY, APRIL 16
MASHAD
Drive to the Iranian border, and continue to the eastern Iranian city of Mashad. In 817 the eighth grandson of the Prophet Mohammed, Imam Reza, died here suddenly while on a journey. Pilgrims began arriving at his burial site, and today his tomb is one of the holiest Shi’ite shrines in Iran—visited by 12 million Shi’ite Muslims a year. Access the areas of the Imam Reza shrine that are permitted to non-Muslims, the tomb and museum of Nader Shah, and the Khajeh Rabi Mausoleum.
**SHIRAZ/PERSEPOLIS**

Fly to Shiraz and set off on the all-day tour of this “City of Roses and Nightingales.” Explore the lovely pink-tiled Nasir-ol-Molk Mosque, an explosion of color with fine examples of Persian Islamic tilework. Visit the Narenjestan Garden with its beautiful cypress-lined avenues, and continue to the Tomb of Hafez, one of Iran’s favorite poets. The teahouse by a cooling pool is a wonderful place to sit and people-watch. Depart for one of the most important sites of the Ancient World: the ceremonial capital of the Achaemenid kings—Persepolis—a UNESCO World Heritage site built on a monumental scale of sculpted stone. Admire the rock carvings at Naghsh-e Rostam, thought to be the tombs of Darius the Great, Xerxes and Artaxerxes.

**ISFAHAN**

Under the rule of Shah Abbas the Great of the 16th century Safavid dynasty, Isfahan became a celebrated and beautiful city. Visit one of the world’s largest public squares, Maiden-e Naghsh-e Jahan, also known as Imam Square. Shah Abbas built the graceful ensemble in the early 17th century. A UNESCO World Heritage site, the square was the symbolic center of the Safavid Empire. Here, find the Ali-Qapu Palace, where Safavid Kings watched polo games from the balcony. Imam Mosque, Flanked by two tall turquoise minarets, is considered by many to be the most beautiful in the world. Stop at the spectacular UNESCO-listed Friday Mosque, and visit the Armenian Quarter, to see the sand-colored stonework of Vank Cathedral. Take some time to stroll the narrow lanes lined with artisans and shopkeepers at Isfahan’s amazing 17th-century Qeisarieh Bazaar.

**KASHAN/QOM/TEHRAN**

On the road to Tehran, visit Kashan to wander one of Iran’s most treasured gardens, UNESCO-listed Bagh-e Fin, with its centuries-old cypress trees. Make a stop in the sacred city of Qom, home to the important Shi’ite shrine of Fatima al-Masumeh, sister of the eighth Imam. Tehran, the capital since 1789, has grown in population from less than 300,000 to a metropolis of eight million. Modern Tehran is full of shops, museums, mosques, minarets, restaurants, teahouses and a sprawling bazaar. Begin exploring at UNESCO-listed Golestan Palace, encompassing several palatial buildings and the Marble Throne, created from 65 pieces of yellow Yazd marble. Browse the Archaeological and Islamic collections at Iran’s National Museum, and take a fascinating tour of Iran’s Crown Jewels.

Celebrate the conclusion of the journey during a festive farewell dinner.

**DEPART TEHRAN**

The tour concludes with transfers to the airport for international departures.

(B, flight times permitting, in flight)