

HARVARD

ALUMNI TRAVELS



SILK ROAD ODYSSEY: THE FIVE 'STANS

SEPTEMBER 27 – OCTOBER 15, 2021

DETAILED ITINERARY

Trace the path of the great camel caravans along the ancient Silk Road, admiring the vaulted portals of the mosques and madrassas, their domes cloaked in sky-blue ceramic tiles. Explore five UNESCO World Heritage sites, including the historic Old Towns of the fabled Uzbek oases, Samarkand, Bukhara, and Khiva. Wander the fabulous bazaars and step into the past on the streets of Silk Road trade centers crowned with complex Persian architecture.

GROUP SIZE: 12-20 guests

PRICING*: \$8,695 per person double occupancy / \$1,345 single occupancy

**Note: Guests who transferred from the 2020 departure will maintain their original price*

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.

Prior to joining the Davis Center in 2010, Alexandra held a variety of scholarly and business positions in the American and Russian capitals. In Washington, DC, she was a Scholar at the Kennan Institute (Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars). While living in Moscow for more than a decade in the 1990s, she was consultant to the Russian Privatization Agency, President of the American brokerage for the Brunswick Warburg investment bank, and member of the board of United Way Moscow. She also served as research associate at the Center for Economic and Financial Research (CEFIR), a Russian think tank associated with the New Economic School.

She is recipient of a Dean's Distinction Award from Harvard's Faculty of Arts and Sciences, and of the Alumni Award from the Education for Public Inquiry and International Citizenship (EPIIC) Program at Tufts.

As a commentator, she has been praised as "refreshing," "straightforward," and "quick and to the point." She has appeared on stations ranging from WBUR, Fox News Radio, China Central TV, Hromadske TV (Ukraine), and speaks regularly at community forums at home and abroad.

SCHEDULE BY DAY

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

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 27

DEPART U.S.

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 28

ARRIVE ALMATY, KAZAKHSTAN

Upon arrival transfer to your hotel.

Overnight: *Hotel Intercontinental Almaty (Meals aloft)*

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 29

ALMATY

After breakfast, begin exploring Almaty.

Visit the State Central Museum with exhibits that detail the development of Kazakhstan and its people.

Enjoy a trip up the Kok-Tobe Cable Line and the view from the top of the 3,800-foot hill.

After lunch, visit the Panfilov Park with its Zenkov Cathedral, a wooden Orthodox church built at the turn of the century without the use of nails. It is one of the few buildings in Almaty that came through the devastating 1911 earthquake.

Explore the Museum of Musical Instruments, located in a 1907 Russian-style wooden building formerly called the House of Officers. The museum exhibits a collection of traditional Kazakh instruments.

Stop at the Green Bazaar in the center of Almaty, where fresh fruits and vegetables, including the delicious apples that Almaty is famous for, are on sale.

This evening enjoy a special welcome dinner at a local restaurant.

Overnight: *Hotel Intercontinental Almaty (B, L, D)*

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 30

ALMATY

This morning enjoy a lecture from your study leader before traveling to the mountains outside of Almaty to visit the Small Almaty Gorge. The gorge snakes upward from Almaty to approximately 5,000 feet, where the Medeo Sports Complex is located.

Enjoy lunch at a restaurant near Medeo. Then, in the afternoon attend a demonstration of traditional Kazakh falconry at a falcon farm outside of Almaty.

Return to the hotel for an evening at leisure.

Overnight: *Hotel Intercontinental Almaty (B, L)*

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 1

ALMATY / BISHKEK, KYRGYZSTAN

This morning after breakfast transfer to the airport for a short flight to Bishkek, the capital of neighboring Kyrgyzstan. Upon arrival, embark on an introductory tour of the city.

Begin your exploration of the city with a visit to Victory and Oak Parks, the Ala Too Square, the monument "Manas on the Horse," the exterior of the imposing neoclassical Parliament Building, and the vibrant Osh Bazaar.

During the tour, meet with a resident Kyrgyz individual who participated in the April 7, 2010 revolution and together visit the Ata-Beiit Memorial Complex on the outskirts of Bishkek to pay respects to the fallen Kyrgyz heroes and leaders from ancient times to the modern times who have been laid to rest.

Enjoy dinner at a local restaurant this evening.

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

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 2

BISHKEK

After breakfast, travel 80 km outside of Bishkek to the Burana Tower. Built in the 11th century, it is one of the only existing watchtowers on the old Silk Road that traversed Kyrgyzstan.

While in the countryside, attend a demonstration of Kyrgyz horse games, such as Ulak Tartysh, a sort of polo played with a goat carcass, and kurosh, which is wrestling on horseback.

Transfer to the nearby Don-Aryk village for lunch at the home of a local family and an opportunity to meet with the villagers.

This evening enjoy dinner with a Kyrgyz *Manas* folk performance.

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

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 3 **BISHKEK / TASHKENT, UZBEKISTAN**

Transfer to the airport for the short flight to Tashkent, Uzbekistan.

Although it does not look it today, Tashkent is one of the oldest cities in Uzbekistan. Rock paintings in the Chaktal Mountains about 50 miles away show that humans have been here since perhaps 2000 BC.

This afternoon tour Tashkent, beginning with a visit to the Museum of Applied Arts. Exhibits include the Uzbek embroidered wall coverings called *suzani*, ceramics, jewelry, rugs, and musical instruments.

Stop at the Courage Monument, dedicated to the survivors of a major earthquake in 1966.

Enjoy dinner this evening at a local restaurant.

Overnight: *Lotte City Hotel Tashkent Palace (B, L, D)*

MONDAY, OCTOBER 4 **TASHKENT**

Start today with a tour of modern Tashkent beginning at the Independence Square, which has donned numerous names throughout its existence from Cathedral Square to Lenin Square.

The Shahid Memorial Complex honors the innocent martyrs (shahid) who were killed during Stalin's purges in 1938. The blue-domed rotunda and cooling fountain that

mark their graves are set amid a green area with a canal running through it.

To commemorate the 550th anniversary of Alisher Navoi, the father of Uzbek language and literature, a statue of the poet was unveiled in Alisher Navoi National Park.

After lunch with specially invited local guests, the focus of the afternoon's program will be Old Town Tashkent. Stroll through the 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.

Admire the Kukeldash Madrassah, one of the largest 16th century madrassahs remaining in Central Asia.

While in the Old Town, visit the private art studio of a sixth-generation Uzbek ceramicist whose family has been making pottery since the 1790s.

Enjoy dinner at a local restaurant tonight.

Overnight: *Lotte City Hotel Tashkent Palace (B, L, D)*

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 5 **TASHKENT / KHUJAND, TAJIKISTAN**

This morning after breakfast drive across the border to Khujand, Tajikistan.

Tour Khujand on arrival, including visits to the Timurmaliq Fortress, the Muslihidden Madrassah, and the Sogdian Museum.

Enter the Historical Museum of Sogdiana through a reconstructed medieval city gate. Displays include ancient Sogdian artifacts and exhibits from more recent Tajik history.

After your city tour, check in to the hotel. During dinner this evening, meet with representatives of a local NGO and hear their experience of living and working in Tajikistan.

Overnight: *Hotel Khujand Grand (B, L, D)*

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 6 **KHUJAND / SAMARKAND,** **UZBEKISTAN**

After breakfast at the hotel, set out to explore the exciting Panshanbe Bazaar. Khujand's pink-painted covered bazaar is overflowing with goods to buy.

Next, begin the return drive to Uzbekistan through the stunning Pamir Mountain Range.

Stop for lunch at a local restaurant. Arrive in Samarkand late afternoon and enjoy the evening at leisure.

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

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 7 **SAMARKAND**

Begin exploring Samarkand with a visit to the Registan, considered to be Central Asia's noblest square. Three emblematic madrassahs frame the square and loom over the empty space in the center.

Visit the Gur-Emir Mausoleum, the final resting place of Tamerlane.

Following lunch, stop at 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.

Wander the row of tombs and mausoleums collectively called Shah-i-Zinda, or "place of a living king," stretching between the present and the past.

Pay a visit to Ulug Bek's Observatory. Though concerned with conquest, politics and other matters of terrestrial importance, Tamerlane's grandson Ulug Bek found his true interest in the heavens,

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

Also visit a workshop where handcrafted paper is made according to traditions handed down from the 8th century, when papermaking began in Samarkand.

Enjoy dinner at a private home before returning to the hotel.

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

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 8 **SAMARKAND / BUKHARA**

Following breakfast at the hotel, depart for Central Asia's most ancient living city, Bukhara. 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.

Upon arrival in Bukhara, take a free afternoon to rest and explore independently. Bukhara is a fantastic place to shop for handcrafted souvenirs from the local cloth printers, wood carvers, gold and silk embroiders, and jewelry makers.

Dinner tonight is at the hotel.

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

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 9 **BUKHARA**

Spend the day exploring Bukhara. Stroll through the capmaker and spice bazaars and past street level mosques and madrassahs, before moving on to the Kalon Mosque and Minaret. The minaret towers over the dusty square, looking down from a height of more than 150 feet, and casting its shadow between the mosque and the madrassah.

Located nearby is the Ark Citadel, the original fortress of Bukhara and likely dating back two thousand years or more.

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

Just behind the Ark Citadel is the infamous Zindan Prison and the even more infamous "bug pit" or "black hole," the cell where two of Britain's finest Great Game players, colonel

Charles Stoddart, and Captain Arthur Conolly, were imprisoned before their execution.

Also 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.

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.

This evening visit a nearby madrassah to dine and enjoy a performance by local artists.

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

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 10 BUKHARA

Travel a short distance outside of the city this morning to the Summer Palace of the last Emir of Bukhara also known as the Palace of Moon and Stars. The palace was built for the Emir at the turn of the century, after the Russians took control of Bukhara.

Stop at the nearby Bakhaudin Nakshbandi Complex. Nakshbandi was a 14th century Sufi mystic and founder of the Nakshbandi order of Sufis.

Return to Bukhara for lunch in the old town followed by a free afternoon. Gather in the evening for dinner at a local restaurant.

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

MONDAY, OCTOBER 11 BUKHARA / KHIVA

Today depart Bukhara for Khiva by train. The approximately 5- to 6-hour ride by a comfortable air-conditioned train 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, *saxual* 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.

Arrive in Khiva in time for dinner and a short-guided walk around the Old Town at dusk, time permitting.

Overnight: *Hotel Asia Khiva (B, L, D)*

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 12 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 Dzuma 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.

Take some time in the evening for personal exploration and enjoy dinner with a performance of Khorezmian music and dance.

Overnight: *Hotel Asia Khiva (B, L, D)*

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 13
KHIVA / DASHOGUZ,
TURKMENISTAN / ASHGABAT

This morning cross the border into Turkmenistan to the town of Dashoguz and take a flight to Ashgabat.

Despite its location on a trade route, Ashgabat never achieved the status and influence of other Silk Road cities like Khiva or Bukhara. Originally known as Konjikala, the city was destroyed by Mongols in the 13th century,

Upon arrival, transfer to your hotel and enjoy dinner at the hotel restaurant with sweeping views over the city.

Overnight: *Hotel Oguzkent (B, L, D)*

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 14
ASHGABAT

Spend today exploring Ashgabat. Begin at the new History and Ethnography Museum with its grand approach and panoramic views. The museum introduces modern Turkmenistan on the ground floor and ancient history in the galleries above.

Stop at a farm specializing in breeding and raising Akhal-Tekke horses, arguably the oldest cultured breed of horses in the world.

Following lunch, visit the UNESCO Site of the ancient Parthian Kingdom of Nisa, accompanied by a professional local archaeologist.

On the way back to the city, make a stop at the Kipchak Great Mosque. The huge \$100-million-dollar mosque in former Turkmen President Niyazov's hometown of Kipchuk was inaugurated in 2004.

Gather this evening for the festive farewell dinner to celebrate the end of the journey.

Overnight: *Hotel Oguzkent (B, L, D)*

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 15
DEPART ASHGABAT

The program concludes with early morning transfers to the airport for departures to the U.S. (*Meals in flight*)