



And Silk Road Cities



The ancient cities of Samarkand and Bukhara lie on the edge of the Karakum Desert. They are watered by the rivers flowing west towards the Caspian Sea from the Pamir and Tien Shan mountains. Samarkand is probably the best known of the Central Asian Silk Road cities. Its magnificent monuments were built during the reign of Tamarlane, who made it the capital of his vast empire. On a clear sunny day the snowy summits of the Fann Mountains may be seen - the most westerly ridges of the Pamir.

The trip starts with sightseeing. With city tours we will take in some of Samarkand's instantly impressive monuments including the Registan Square, a great, but little-known wonder of the world; the Gur-Emir Mausoleum where Tamarlane was buried and the Great (Bibi Khanum) Mosque which overlooks the colourful bazaar. Bukhara, by contrast, reveals itself more slowly and can be more rewarding as a result. First mentioned in Chinese chronicles in the 5th century, Bukhara is one of the oldest trade and cultural centres in Central Asia. Once boasting more than 350 mosques and 100 religious colleges, the city is still a constant feast of old and beautiful buildings with fascinating narrow, twisting alleys in the old quarter. For the trek we take a short bus ride from Samarkand over the border to Pendjikent. Then with a change of vehicles, we follow the Shing river into the mountains to the first camp site by the sixth Marguzor Lake. Here, pack-donkeys take over and carry personal luggage and camping gear for the trek through stunning moun-

Equipment, weather and clothes

What makes this area attractive for trekking is the settled weather encountered during the summer months. However, mountain weather is variable, rain could be encountered at any time. With the changing weather patterns world wide please be prepared for rain and even flurries of snow and winds on the higher passes and by the Mutnye Lakes. Waterproofs are essential. In the mountains expect day temperatures of about 20°C. In the evenings after the sun sets you will need warm clothes; an extra fleece or duvet jacket is recommended especially at the higher campsites. This is especially true of the Mutnye Lakes area where it will be very cold. On the other hand, in towns, afternoon temperatures often rise to above 30°C. In towns please dress with consideration of the local religion and traditions. If you are already a hiker or backpacker you will probably have much of the clothing and equipment required such as good walking boots; a three season sleeping bag and 35 litre day/rucksack. Donkeys will carry all communal equipment and most of your main luggage; a strong, soft bag is easier than a framed rucksack or hard suitcase for the donkeys to carry. We have a small stock of bags suitable for this which can be purchased here, otherwise they are available in Samarkand. A detailed equipment list will be sent with confirmation of booking.

Food and accommodation

All meals and accommodation are included. On trek a cook prepares all meals using mainly local fresh foods which are plentiful at this time of year. In towns we eat hotel breakfasts but lunches and dinners are in good restaurants so you can sample a variety of local cuisine and the Central Asian atmosphere. Accommodation in towns is en-suite in double rooms in good hotels but standards are often lower than in the West. On trek 3-person, double-skinned, dome tents are used - but only 2 people are expected to share so there is plenty of room. The campsites are remote with no permanent facilities. Although camp staff will do the majority of work some help with camp chores is appreciated, such as pitching your tent. We recommend that you take a small "goody bag" with you for times when you need some extra energy or are suffering from a lack of appetite. We try to cater for vegetarians but we cannot provide the same standard as is expected in the West. We suggest that vegetarians take their own protein supplement if this is likely to cause a problem.

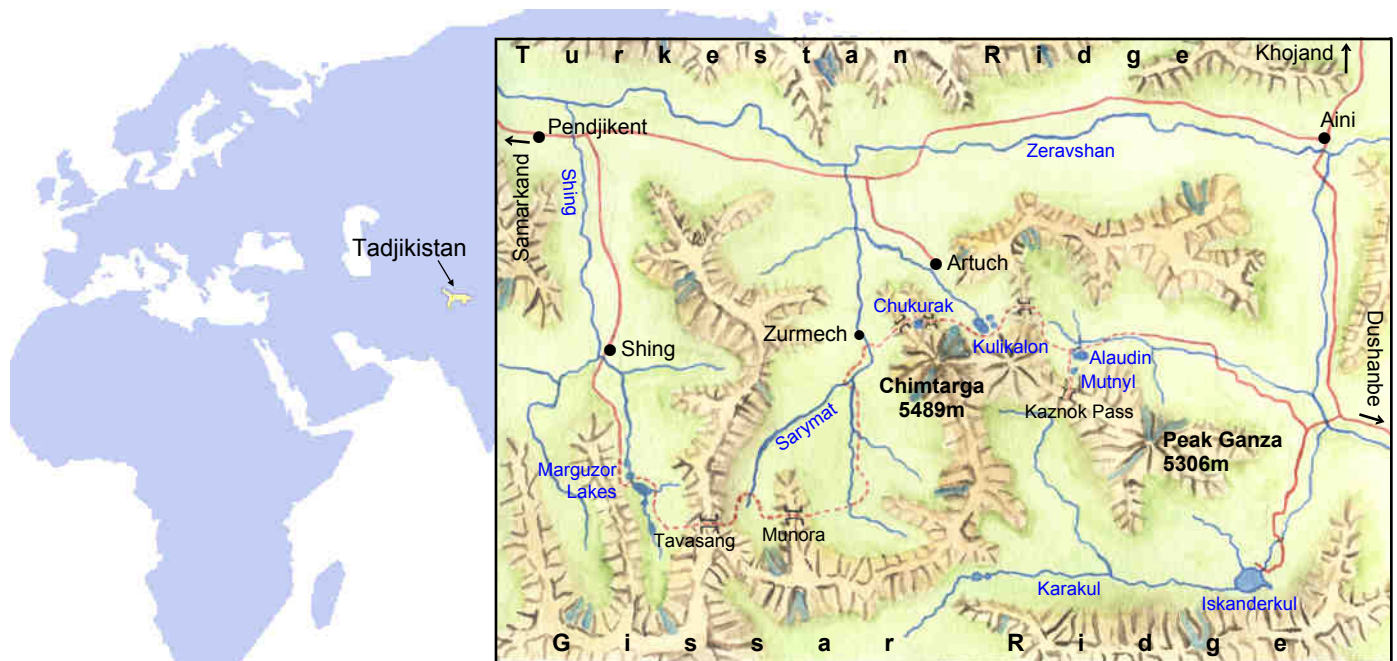
tains. Canyons with clear, rushing rivers, high glaciated summits, a wide variety of colourful panoramas, picturesque river valleys and hundreds of colourful lakes set amongst juniper forests make this one of the most attractive mountain regions in Central Asia. The alpine meadows are extremely beautiful with a profusion of flowers and lush grass. Several Golden Eagles have their home here along with various vultures, chuffs, hoopoes and other colourful bird life. The chances are you will not be bothered by insects! We will pass several summer camps of local Tadjiks who take their flocks of sheep and goats into the mountains for summer grazing. They are usually very hospitable and often invite passing tourists to tea or to sample their yogurt or bread. Apart from the mountains, perhaps the most striking feature of Tadjikistan is the riotous sense of colour. The Tadjiks love vivid colours, as many as possible, wherever possible. In many of the small villages they still speak the ancient Sogdian dialect, the language that Alexander the Great heard when his conquests brought him to these mountains. At the end of the trek, before descending from the Alaudin Lakes to meet the return vehicle to Samarkand, we ascend the snowy Kaznok Pass to see the magnificent panorama of high mountains which have towered above us for the last days of the trek- Chimtarga, Energia and Zamok.

Health matters and documents

An emergency medical kit accompanies the trek and the staff includes qualified medical personnel. We nevertheless recommend that you carry your own personal first aid kit. A means of purifying your drinking water, such as iodine tablets, is essential. A suggested list of contents as well as more general health information is included in the pre-departure information. No special inoculations are required for entry into Uzbekistan or Tadjikistan but we recommend that you consult your doctor for any recommended inoculations and that your Tetanus injections are up-to-date. Two visas, a Tadjik trekking permit and an ecological tax are required. These will be applied for on a group basis. The cost for EWP to organise the relevant visa and permit documents and to process your Uzbek double entry visa is £100. The Tadjik visa will be issued in Pendjikent; please take €100 in cash for this, the issue of the trekking permits and the tax. These have to be paid locally.

Grade and qualifications

This trek is within the capabilities of any normal healthy and fit individual who is used to hill walking. The route is not difficult but will on occasion require the expenditure of a fair amount of energy. The trekking is of an outstanding quality. The route is not difficult but there are high, often steep, passes to cross with corresponding height gain and loss. There are river crossings to be made, some over good bridges, some small over roughly made ones. Despite the high, steep mountain passes most of the walking is on good paths. The average day involves some 5-7 hours walking. The last day of the trek up to the Kaznok pass is steep and over snow but well worth the effort it takes to get there. Walking poles are very useful throughout the trip; a telescopic one is particularly good. Donkeys will carry the majority of the luggage allowing you to walk with only a day pack.



Outline itinerary

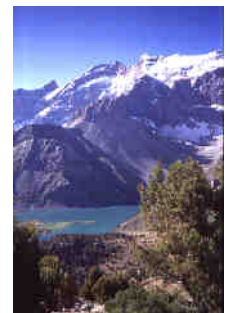
The following itinerary is intended as a working guide only and is subject to variation as a result of local conditions, weather and governmental restrictions. Schedules and timings in Asia do not work as in Western Europe, please be prepared to be flexible, it is all part of the "Asian experience". Flight schedules, both international and domestic, are subject to change and we reserve the right to alter (lengthen or shorten) the trek at any time if necessary. Time: GMT +5.

- Day 1 Overnight flight to Tashkent (6 hours), the capital of Uzbekistan.
- 2 Fly to Bukhara in Uzbekistan (1.5 hours). Tour of Bukhara. First mentioned in Chinese chronicles in the 5th century, Bukhara is one of the oldest trade and cultural centres in Central Asia. The narrow, twisting alleys of the old quarter are fascinating to explore. Night in a comfortable hotel.
- 3 4-5 hour drive by private bus to Samarkand to see the magnificent monuments, mosques and bazaars. Tour of Samarkand. Night in a hotel.
- 4 Drive 1½-2 hours by private bus to Penjikent, 40 miles east in Tadjikistan, by the Zeravshan River. A 4WD vehicle takes us past Shing to the sixth Marguzor Lake (4 hours) where we will camp.
- 5 The donkeys arrive in the morning to carry the luggage. After a gentle section we climb steeply, passing the village of Kiogli, to camp below the Tavasang Pass at about 3000m, (10,000').
- 6 After crossing the Tavasang Pass, 3300m, (11,050') we descend to the Sarymat river for lunch. A gentle climb through sparse juniper woods leads to a magical meadow and campsite below the icy north face of Gardish.
- 7 Walk up to the Munora Pass, 3520m, and descend to the deep, craggy gorge of the Archa-Maidan river. The more energetic can take in a side trip to visit Lake Pshtykul before dropping down to the campsite - this option makes for a long but rewarding day.
- 8 We go down the Archa-Maidan valley to Zurmech Wood. Along the way we pass several small villages which appear to blend into the rocky mountainsides. At Zurmech we pass through semi-wild apple, cherry and apricot orchards to reach our camp by a crystal clear stream 1900m, (6330').
- 9 Walk up a colourful canyon to the Zurmech Pass, 3260m. Descend to the Chukurak lakes. The gnarled junipers and steep cliffs combine to make this a very scenic spot. The inviting lake waters are icy cold! Camp by the lake.
- 10 Cross the Chukurak Pass to Kulikalon hollow with its numerous streams and lakes. Camp by Bibijona Lake with magnificent panorama of the steep glaciated north face of the Chimtarga, the highest summit of the Fann.
- 11 We spend an extra night here; relaxing or doing a circular walk from the campsite.
- 12 Hike up to the Alaudin Pass, 3860m, (12,860'), from where there are stunning views of the deep blue Alaudin Lakes and the main peaks. Descend to a campsite by the lakes.
- 13 We go up to the Mutnye ("Murky") Lake at 3800m, which is surrounded by glaciers and summits, amongst which are Energia 5120m, Zamok 5070m and Chimtarga, 5489m, the highest peak in the Fann. This is our highest campsite. Alpine flowers liven up the stark, high mountain setting.
- 14 After an hour's walk we reach snow fields leading up to the Kaznok Pass, 4040m. (13,500') - a magnificent viewpoint. A ski-stick or ice-axe is useful for the last part of this ascent. The guide will carry a rope to fix on the snow slope for added security. We return to our campsite then descend to spend a second night at the Alaudin Lakes.
- 15 Walk down the valley to our waiting transport. Drive down the Zeravshan river valley, to Penjikent, 5-6 hours. We have lunch in Penjikent before continuing on to our hotel in Samarkand, 1½-2 hours.
- 16 Drive back to Tashkent for our afternoon flight back to London arriving back in the early evening.

Flights Included in the UK departure cost: Uzbek Air scheduled flights LHR/Tashkent;
Uzbek Air domestic flights Tashkent/Bukhara

Included in the land section: all transport, food and accommodation in Central Asia, (tents on trek, hotels in towns), mess shelter, toilet screen, stools; donkeys to carry luggage; cook; English speaking, medically-qualified trip leader/guide, sightseeing costs in the itinerary.

Not included: Passport, personal insurance, visas and tips. Most clients like to show their appreciation to the trek staff, especially to the donkey handlers, for good service and general helpfulness throughout the trip. In such a case, although this is not compulsory in any way, we would recommend a small US\$ tip.



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