

CENTRAL ASIA TRAVEL INFORMATION

VISAS:

Depending on the passport you hold, a visa may be required for entry to Central Asia and is not included in the tour price. Please visit the relevant Visa Application Centre websites as per the countries you are visiting on the tour to find out more information and how to apply.

VISA AND IMMIGRATION NOTES:

As Central Asian immigration and customs officials are notoriously strict, please make sure you keep all forms for when you exit the country. A lost customs or immigration form could result in a fine.

When entering Uzbekistan, you will need to complete a foreign currency declaration form and keep a copy yourself. Failure to do so accurately or exiting the country with more currency than when you entered may result in delays, fines or the additional sums being confiscated.

Ensure you exchange any unspent local currency prior to departure as there is generally no exchange offices at international airports in Dushanbe and Bishkek.

A number of medications containing tramadol, morphine, opiates or any other similar constituent component are banned in Turkmenistan and are considered narcotic drugs. Do not bring any medications containing these drugs into the country.

Some medications available over the counter or by prescription in other countries, such as sleeping tablets, may be illegal or restricted in Uzbekistan. You should declare all prescription medications and other restricted items on arrival in Uzbekistan and carry a copy of the prescription with you.

INSURANCE:

It is a condition of booking with us that you take out suitable travel insurance. You must provide us with the name of your insurer, policy number and their 24 hour emergency contact number when you book with us or as soon as possible thereafter. These details will be available to your national escort should they be required. Wendy Wu Tours will not be liable for any costs incurred by you due to your failure to take out suitable travel insurance from the date of booking.

EATING IN CENTRAL ASIA:

Central Asian cuisine is diverse and flavoursome with a legacy stretching back thousands of years. It is important to keep an open mind and be adventurous. All meals (excluding drinks) are included in our fully inclusive Journey Through Central Asia group tours from the groups' arrival until the groups' day of departure. Please be aware that dishes selected for your meals reflect the cooking styles and signature dishes of the local area you are in.

In Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, the cuisine is influenced by Middle Eastern and Turkic (or Mediterranean) dishes – yoghurts, dried fruit, legumes, fruit vinegars, or mild spices like cumin season the common dishes such as lagman (handmade noodles), shashlyk (kebabs), naan (flat bread) and plov (rice pilaf dish). Mutton and chicken are the only meats available in most areas and feature in most dishes. Local breakfast dishes include naan and airan (like sour cream), savoury noodles with vinegar and green tea. You may also be served a fried egg, jam, honey or toast. Black tea and coffee can usually be requested. Fresh cow's milk is not generally available.

Vegetarian only alternatives are not usually available in Kyrgyzstan, though Uzbekistani restaurants are more flexible. There are always plenty of salads, vegetables and bread offered at most meals. In remote areas, lunch may be prepared as 'picnic style' by the hotel that morning, or your guides may organise a simple meal at a local restaurant. Lunch is the main meal of the day, with dinner usually a lighter version of lunch. If you have any food allergies or any other preferences, please make them known to your guide/s at the start of your trip; they will do their best to ensure that your requirements are met, however, 'no guarantees can be made'. Long driving distances, road conditions or flight times may delay or alter your meal times, which could mean a dedicated meal is replaced by those supplied on the aircraft.

Despite the Muslim culture, drinking alcohol is acceptable and expected in this ex-Soviet region, Kyrgyzstan more so than Uzbekistan. Expect to be offered vodka (not included in your tour price) at every meal! The most popular mealtime drink is Chay (green tea) and is available at most meals, usually straight a large block of sugar crystal may be added to the pot, or even your glass. Black tea and coffee are not always served, however can usually be requested.

If you like, you can bring some supplements with you from home. Tea/coffee bags, instant soups or noodles, biscuits, energy bars, milk powder sachets, are all a good idea – consider your luggage weight though! There are numerous small supermarkets and shops in every town and village along the way where you can buy odd items e.g. instant noodles, muesli and chocolate bars, biscuits, drinks, chips, cakes and sweets.

DEVELOPMENT IN CENTRAL ASIA:

Although Central Asia is developing quickly, it still lacks the international standards of civil infrastructure and tourist facilities. Concepts of personal responsibility are also different to those in the UK. Consequently, tourist and public facilities may not uphold the same safety standards as in the UK; for example, you may see a hole in the road without a warning sign or safety barricade. All our suppliers meet local safety standards as a minimum. We want you to have an enjoyable holiday, so we ask that you take extra care, use your common sense, refer to notices and follow advice from you National Escort/Local Guides.

The former Soviet countries in Central Asia were isolated and less developed by western standards for decades and all levels of infrastructure remain affected today in some way. In the tourism sector, newly built and very good hotels may still have poorly trained staff with an abrupt manner, roads can be in poor condition and officials can be corrupt. The level of English spoken outside of hotels is minimal (except for the children) and the Cyrillic alphabet is used instead of the Latin one (though this is slowly changing in Uzbekistan), so you will find your guides

indispensable. We have found that those customers who embark with a sense of humour and adventure, who accept that things can and sometimes do go wrong, are those who find their experience most rewarding.

Journey Through Central Asia is one of our most unique and adventurous group tours, tracing the ancient Silk Road, including the fabled city of Samarkand. We wish for you to embark on your journey through Central Asia with a level of tolerance and understanding. This region is remote, and conditions are not as developed as they are at home. It is essential that all customers recognise the demands of factors such as basic facilities, travelling at altitude, travelling long distances and cultural differences. The rewards of seeing and experiencing these lands, so different from your own, are immeasurable and can only be enhanced by an adventurous spirit.

ACCOMMODATION:

Your accommodation has been selected for convenience of location, comfort or character, and can range from a standard hotel in one city to a family run guesthouse in a smaller town. In remote areas, accommodation may be of a lower standard and may not have all western amenities. Hotels are generally rated as local three to four star standards, please note that there is no international classification system for hotels and differences in facilities and quality do exist between the UK and Central Asia.

You will be travelling through rarely visited and undeveloped areas of eastern Kyrgyzstan for a few days. This is a remote area with villages, nomadic settlements, very small towns and little in the way of tourist facilities.

Types of accommodation you may encounter on this tour include:

Yurts: Yurts are the traditional home of nomads in Central Asia. They are made from a wooden frame and layers of felt and canvas erected on a wooden platform. The interior is filled with warm fabrics as well as ornate wooden furniture. Nomads in Kyrgyzstan live in yurts in the months around summer. Staying in a yurt will allow you to experience the unique and intrinsic aspect of local life in Kyrgyzstan. Although they are not luxurious, they do offer comfortable accommodation in remote regions of the country.

Guesthouse: These provide basic yet comfortable rooms in a small guesthouse. Every couple/single person will have their own room, with private western facilities. Breakfast and dinner is served in the restaurant.

Three and four star hotels: You will be staying in hotels of three and four star standards for the remainder of the tour.

SOUVENIRS:

We want to be able to give you an opportunity to buy souvenirs so we include some stops at museums or exhibitions that demonstrates a craft or product unique to that region with pieces available to buy. We understand that souvenir hunting is not for everyone so we aim to take you to places that hold local interest. We trust you will enjoy these opportunities to learn about local arts and crafts and understand their historical and cultural importance.

TIPPING POLICY:

Local tipping is customary in Asia. However, this can often lead to awkwardness in knowing when it is appropriate to tip and how much, as well as ensuring you have a suitable amount of change available at the time. For your convenience, with years of experiences in providing the best customer service, Wendy Wu Tours operates a kitty system on our Group Tours so your National Escort will look after this aspect of your trip for you. It also ensures that the amounts paid are reasonable for you but still fair for the local people. The amount is stated on each Group Tour page will be advised again on your final documentation.

TRANSPORT:

Coaches: Coaches with air conditioning are used on our group tours for city sightseeing, short excursions to the countryside and longer transfers where necessary. It may not always be possible to return to your hotel after sightseeing to freshen up before going to the restaurant for dinner due to long travelling days. Roads in generally been improved over recent years, but traffic, weather conditions and terrain may extend driving times. Road construction work usually covers an enormous section of road - not just one or two kilometres as you may be used to. For this reason, the timings listed in the sections above are approximations only.

VACCINATIONS AND YOUR HEALTH:

We recommend that you contact either your GP for advice on vaccinations and travel health. Wendy Wu Tours is committed to always providing a safe and healthy environment for all passengers.

<https://www.wendywutours.co.uk/help-and-advice/travel-health/>

ITINERARY CHANGES:

It is our intention is to adhere to the day-to-day itinerary as printed; however, the order of events or sightseeing may change as we look to improve our tours or as local conditions dictate; in these circumstances we will make the best possible arrangements whilst maintaining the integrity of your trip.

AFTER YOUR BOOKING:

Once you have booked with Wendy Wu Tours, you will receive a confirmation invoice including a visa application form (if applicable), and a help sheet. Your final documentation pack will be sent to you approximately 2-3 weeks prior to departure.

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