THE FIVE STANS

5 September 2027 - 2 October 2027

Tour Cost ($AUD): $21,395

Single Supplement ($AUD): $4,250

Tour Duration: 28 days





OVERVIEW

For more than 2000 years Central Asia has been the focus of ancient east-west trade routes known as the Silk Road. Our 28-day tour to this geographically diverse and historically fascinating region is perhaps one of the most magnificent tours in our repertoire. Join us for a truly memorable journey through Central Asia! The Five Stans is one of our most popular and cutting-edge tours, taking in the extraordinary countries of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. This part of the globe is home to great steppes, magical deserts, fertile valleys and some of the highest mountains in the world. The scenery is breathtaking and remarkably varied, with green/blue glacial lakes, saw-toothed mountains, red rock formations, sparkling rivers and rolling hills. These lands produced great scholars and conquerors, and were a 19th and 20th century geopolitical chess board on which the 'Great Game' was played out between Britain and Russia. Until recently shut off from the outside world and still shrouded in legend and mystery, the personality of each of the 'stans' makes an extraordinary journey into the greatest remaining story-book history in world travel today.

Tour Fitness Level: Active

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TOUR MAP



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ITINERARY

05/09/2027 Australia – Dubai

Depart from your chosen Australian airport on the flight to Dubai.

06/09/2027 Dubai – Almaty (D)

In Dubai connect with your flight to Almaty.

Depart Dubai Air Astana KC 898, 13.55

Arrive Almaty 19.10

On arrival in Almaty we transfer to our hotel.

Rixos Hotel

Almaty

07/09/2027 Almaty (BLD)

Situated in the shadows of the Tian Shan Mountains, Almaty is the cultural and commercial hub of Kazakhstan. Literally meaning ‘rich with apples’ the former capital is known as the ‘Garden City’ for its large areas of fragrant gardens and the majestic firs and spruce of the Tian Shan Mountains that surround it. Today we explore this beautiful city before moving high up to the outskirts to see the magnificent panorama of Almaty before us.

08/09/2027 Almaty – Chon Kemin Valley (BLD)

This morning we leave Almaty and soon begin to see the high peaks of the Tian Shan Mountains. Crossing the Kazakh-Kyrgyz border at Black River, we then follow the Chuy River, and, skirting briefly back into Kazakhstan, we reach the turnoff that will take us around the back of the mountains into the serene valley of Chon Kemin.

Ashu Guesthouse

Chon Kemin valley

09/09/2027 Chon Kemin Valley (BLD)

This morning we explore the Chon Kemin valley, which is flanked by snow-capped mountains on both sides. The entire valley was formerly a collective farm and much of the Soviet rural atmosphere remains as we are transported back in time. During our walk we meet friendly and inquisitive locals and are also treated to a fantastic exhibition of horsemanship by the skillful Kyrgyz horsemen. In the afternoon we board a craft for two hours of exhilarating fun on the fast flowing Chon Kemin River. Passing through canyons and gorges we finally reach the basin and disembark.

10/09/2027 Chon Kemin – Karakol (BLD)

After breakfast we depart for Karakol and soon begin to skirt the north shore of Issyk Kul Lake. The second largest saline lake after the Caspian Sea, Issyk Kul is virtually a basin within the Tian Shan Mountains. A combination of vast depth, salinity and underground thermal activity ensures the lake never freezes. Issyk Kul is also the second largest alpine lake in the world after Lake Titicaca. We take a boat ride on the lake before we continue around the north shore to the Cossack outpost of Karakol.

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Hotel Tagaytay

Karakol

11/09/2027 Karakol – Jeti Oguz – Karakol (BLD)

Today we travel to nearby Jeti Oguz. Here inside the canyon there are extraordinary formations of red sandstone cliffs known as the ‘seven bulls’. We continue into the Valley of Flowers before reaching the magnificent Oguz valley glacier, and in this pristine environment we enjoy a BBQ lunch before heading back to Karakol.

12/09/2027 Karakol (BLD)

After breakfast we start to explore the town of Karakol. Formerly known as Przewalski, after one of the most intrepid explorers of the 19thcentury, Karakol today is a pretty Russian town filled with quaint cottages shaded by rows of huge poplar trees. We visit the fascinating memorial of Nikolai Przewalski, which charts his various expeditions, including the one to the steppes of central Asia in which he discovered a wild horse that was subsequently named after him – Przewalski’s horse. An animal rehabilitation centre in Karakol currently has two of these very rare horses and we visit the centre before walking through Karakol itself.

13/09/2027 Karakol – Bishkek (BLD)

This morning we drive around the south shore of Issyk Kul Lake. Although still ringed by the snow-capped mountains of Tian Shan, the south part of the lake is a very different landscape and at times the road skirts the very shoreline of the lake itself. Late afternoon we arrive in Bishkek and check into our hotel.

Hyatt Hotel

Bishkek

14/09/2027 Bishkek – Almaty (BLD)

Bishkek is a czarist planned city; laid on a grid with wide boulevards flanked by irrigation canals and large trees. Today we enjoy a walking tour of the city visiting Ala Too Square, the State History Museum, Oak and Victory Parks. After an early dinner we transfer to the airport for the flight to Almaty.

Depart Bishkek Air Astana KC 110, 19.25

Arrive Almaty 20.15

On arrival in Almaty we transfer to our hotel.

Rixos Hotel

Almaty

15/09/2027 Almaty – Dushanbe – Hissar – Dushanbe (BLD)

After breakfast we transfer to Almaty airport for our flight to Dushanbe.

Depart Almaty KC 131, 10.35

Arrive Dushanbe 11.30

Tajikistan, like Turkmenistan, can be considered one of the last unexplored frontiers in the world. Totally unspoilt by tourism, this delightful country is home to a warm and open-hearted populace. Upon arrival we head 30km out of Dushanbe to the fortress town of Hissar which lies on a wide mountain-fringed plain. Due to its strategic location and commanding views along the valley, the fortress was attacked numerous times in its long history, by such notables as

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Alexander the Great, Ghenghis Khan and Tamerlane. In more recent times it was a stronghold of the Islamic guerrilla fighters known as Basmachi. The Basmachi fought a guerrilla war against Soviet rule in central Asia from 1917 until 1924, when the Red Army eventually besieged the fortress. Later we return to Dushanbe.

Serena Hotel

Dushanbe

16/09/2027 Dushanbe (BLD)

Today we explore the beautiful parks, fountains and monuments of Dushanbe.

17/09/2027 Dushanbe – Iskander Kul Lake (BLD)

This morning we board 4WD vehicles and drive high up into the Fann Mountains, following the Varzob River through some of Dushanbe's most affluent neighbourhoods before ascending into stunning landscapes. We then enter the Anzob tunnel, an extraordinary 5.5km tube through the mountains which leads us towards Iskander Kul Lake. Skirting the lake we come to Sary Tag village, located beneath rugged mountain peaks punctuated by glaciers, and perched amongst some of the most beautiful vistas in the world. After lunch with a local family we walk along the Karakol river gorge back to Iskander Kul Lake where we check into our chalets that are located on the edge of the lake itself.

Iskander Kul Turbaza

Iskander Kul Lake

18/09/2027 Iskander Kul Lake – Khujand (BLD)

After breakfast we take a short walk along the river to a beautiful waterfall that tumbles into a ravine soon after the river leaves Iskander Kul Lake. We then drive north through spectacular landscapes, climbing high above the Zerafshan valley. The road then plunges into the Shahrston tunnel. Built by the Chinese and opened only in November 2012, this 5km tunnel is one of the greatest engineering feats in the world. Shortly afterwards we descend to the edge of the fertile Fergana valley which is lined with orchards and cotton fields, as we continue on to Khujand.

Parliament Palace Hotel

Khujand

19/09/2027 Khujand – Tashkent (BLD)

Khujand is Tajikistan's second largest city. It was founded 2,300 years ago and was the easternmost outpost of Alexander the Great. This morning we immerse ourselves in the labyrinth of the Khujand bazaar. In the afternoon we make the short journey to the Tajik-Uzbek border at Oybek. After customs and immigration formalities we make the two hour journey to the Uzbek capital of Tashkent.

Oscar Boutique Hotel

Tashkent

20/09/2027 Tashkent (BLD)

Today we explore Tashkent, renowned for its fountains, parks and tree-lined streets. In 2007, Tashkent was named the cultural capital of the Islamic world as the city is home to numerous historic

mosques and Islamic locations of interest. Tashkent also houses the earliest written Koran which has been in the city since 1924.

21/09/2027 Tashkent – Samarkand (BLD)

After breakfast we transfer to the railway station and board the high-speed train, the Afrosiab, which gets us to Samarkand in two hours and ten minutes.

Depart Tashkent, 08.00

Arrive Samarkand 10.10

Perhaps no name is more evocative of the Silk Road than Samarkand. This fabled city has fired the imagination of writers and poets from all over the world. On our arrival we explore the old town which is full of Uzbeks, Georgians, Tajiks and Russians, as well as many other central Asian nationalities.

Hotel Grand Samarkand

Samarkand

22/09/2027 Samarkand (BLD)

This city of fables and legends is perhaps the most exotic on the Silk Road. Known as the 'Rome of the Orient', Samarkand was already a flourishing city when Rome and Babylon were founded. The great Tamerlane was determined to make the city the most beautiful and magnificent in the world and today the city is an enduring reminder of his legacy. Today's highlights include breathtaking Registan Square, where the finest collection of buildings in Asia dominates the most public place in Samarkand. Intricate tile-work and fluted cobalt tile domes provide a spectacular vista. In a wonderful day of sightseeing we also visit Tamerlane's mausoleum, the observatory of Ulugbek and the Shahi-Zinda Necropolis.

23/09/2027 Samarkand – Bukhara (BLD)

This morning we transfer to the station and board the Afrosiab to Bukhara.

Depart Samarkand, 09.48

Arrive Bukhara 11.19

On arrival we visit the Fayzulla Khodjaev house in the old section of the city. The house belonged to Fayzulla Khojaev's father, Ubaydullokhoja, a rich merchant who traded in karakul pelt in Russia, Germany and other countries. Fayzulla Khodjaev's house is a wonderful example of 19th century residential architecture.

Minorai-Kalon Hotel

Bukhara

24/09/2027 Bukhara (BLD)

Today we explore Bukhara where, a thousand years ago, a thriving slave trade was conducted. This city is a treasure chest of ancient monuments. We see the Ark Fortress, the crumbling city wall and the superb Samanid Mausoleum, which dates back to the 9th century. We walk through the narrow streets of the old city to the splendid covered bazaar, where we enjoy meeting the colourful locals.

25/09/2027 Bukhara (BLD)

Surrounded by the vast expanse of the Kyzyl Kum Desert, Bukhara still retains the atmosphere of an ancient Silk Road city. Today we further explore this amazing settlement, strolling through its warren of narrow medieval streets to discover historic sites such as the 16th century trading domes, the

beautifully decorated Bolo Hauz and Kalyon mosques, and the Labi Hauz pond, where old men in traditional dress while away the afternoon drinking tea and playing chess.

26/09/2027 Bukhara – Khiva (BLD)

Early this morning we begin our 450-km drive across the Kyzyl Kum Desert to Khiva. The city of Khiva has retained its exotic image of a medieval oriental town thanks to the older part of the city, known as Ichan-Kala. All of Khiva's famous architectural monuments are located here. Among them are the Kunya-Ark Citadel and the Tosh-Khovli Palace, residence of the Khan, which has been preserved intact along with its ornate gates. The silhouettes of Ichan-Kala's towering minarets, hemmed in by flat-roofed houses, and surrounded by the powerful clay walls of the fortress, give a clear idea of a typical Central Asian feudal city. This afternoon we explore the remarkable minarets and monuments of Khiva.

Orient Star

Khiva

27/09/2027 Khiva – Dashoguz – Darvaza (BLD)

Today we drive to the Uzbek–Turkmen border at Shavat. After crossing the border we continue to Dashoguz where we visit the fort and have lunch. In the afternoon we depart for Darvaza, transferring to 4WD vehicles for the final leg of the journey to the one of the most extraordinary sights in the world: the Darvaza gas crater. The Derweze area is rich in natural gas, and, whilst drilling in 1971, Soviet geologists tapped into a cavern filled with gas. The ground beneath the drilling rig collapsed, leaving a large hole with a diameter of 80 metres. To avoid poisonous gas discharge it was decided the best solution was to burn it off. Geologists had believed at the time that the fire would burn all of the gas in a matter of days. More than fifty years later the crater still burns! Locals call it "The Door to Hell".

Darvaza

28/09/2027 Darvaza – Ashgabat (BLD)

After breakfast we drive to Ashgabat and on arrival, check into the hotel. The rest of the afternoon is at leisure.

Divan Hotel

Ashgabat

29/09/2027 Ashgabat (BLD)

This morning we embark on a city tour of Ashgabat including the Turkmenbashi Mausoleum. Later we visit the UNESCO World Heritage site of Nissa, once the capital of the Parthian Empire., before heading into the countryside to a farm where we see the magnificent Akhal-Teke horses in action.

30/09/2027 Ashgabat (BLD)

After breakfast we explore more of the gleaming golden-domed capital, often described as the North Korea of Central Asia. Late evening we transfer to the airport for our homeward flight.

01/10/2027 Depart Ashgabat Fly Dubai EK 2483, 05.15

Arrive Dubai 06.55

On arrival in Dubai we connect with our flight to Australia.

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02/10/2027 Arrive Australia

We arrive back home in Australia today.