

MODERN SILKROAD

Joint Tour Package



TURKIC COUNCIL



www.ModernSilkRoadTour.com

ABOUT THE SILK ROAD

The Silk Road, the ancient network of trading routes stretching more than 15,000 kilometers from Japan, the Korean Peninsula through today's Central Asia, Caucasus and Anatolia to the Mediterranean Sea, dates back to the second century BC.

Formally established during the Han Dynasty of China (221–207 BC), the network began to be used regularly from 130 BC, when the Han officially opened trade with the West.

However, the greatest legacy of the Silk Road was the exchange of ideas and beliefs: culture, art, religion, philosophy, technology, language, science and architecture. It left an indelible mark on famous travelers, philosophers and warriors - from Marco Polo to Genghis Khan and the Sufi poet Rumi.

During antiquity some of the main traders along the Silk Road were the Chinese, Arabs, Somalis, Syrians, Jews, Persians, Greeks and Romans.

During medieval times, the Turkic states and peoples assumed an important place in the development as well as the protection of the Silk Road. For example, during the Seljuki Empire spanned from 1060 to around 1307, the Silk Road expanded its leading role in the world economy. The number of the caravanserais constructed along the Silk Road tremendously increased in this period of time. These caravanserais took their unique place in the pages of history as the symbols of cross-fertilization of the cultures along the Silk Road. Meanwhile, together with the other historical monuments, they became the representatives of the rich historical and cultural Turkic heritage in this corridor.

Today, the Silk Road prevails as an out of box and attractive tourism destination for the curious tourists who would like to experience a unique journey from the past to the present. The cities in the Turkic Speaking States with their historical monuments including the symbolic caravansaries as well as their natural attractions open their gates to be discovered by curious tourists who would like to taste such a different experience.

The Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States (Turkic Council) is proud to present the Modern Silk Road Joint Tour Package Project, a unique 15-day guided tour to the important landmarks along ancient and modern Silk Road in Turkey, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.

BACKGROUND TO THE PROJECT

The Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States (Turkic Council) is an international intergovernmental organisation established in 2009 to increase collaboration between its member states, namely Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkey, as well as other countries in the region.

The Turkic Council Secretariat's remit covers 14 areas, ranging from political and economic to cultural and educational. Tourism is one of the most important areas, especially the promotion of the Silk Road.

In 2014, the Fourth Summit of the Turkic Council was held in Bodrum, Turkey, the theme of which was "Tourism Cooperation." As a result of the summit, the Turkic Council Modern Silk Road Joint Tour Package Project was founded. The aim of the project is to raise global awareness of the historical and cultural significance of the Silk Road in the Turkic Council member states and the wider region.

The itinerary for the Modern Silk Road Joint Tour Package took four years to develop, as the result of 3 Ministerial and 11 Working Group meetings, as well as familiarisation (fam) trips to the countries of the member states. The 15-day guided tour offers the curious tourist a unique opportunity to discover some of the most important landmarks along ancient and modern Silk Road. Guests can make the trip in whole or in part, visiting all four member states together, separately or just two or three countries in combination.

In 2016, a Consortium of 11 of the region's leading tour operators was established to develop the project. Antur was designated the official coordinator.

In 2016, the "Turkic Council-Modern Silk Road Joint Tour Package Project Initial Road Map of Communication Strategy" was approved by Tourism Ministers during their third meeting held in Issyk Kul, Kyrgyzstan. The Consortium also signed the Global Code of Ethics of the UNWTO (World Tourism Organization) during the meeting. The Turkic Council and UNWTO cooperate closely on the basis of the Memorandum of Understanding signed by the two parties in 2015.

In April and May 2017, two Joint Tour Package fam trips took place, consisting of 59 journalists, bloggers and regional experts, as well as representatives from worldwide tour operators. Participants came from 16 countries including USA, Tunisia, UK, Singapore, Iran, Germany, Austria, Turkey and Kazakhstan.

Initial research has shown that more than one million tourists are expected to visit the Silk Road region by 2023. The Modern Silk Road Joint Tour Package brochure has much more information on this unique tour: <http://www.turkkon.org/en-US/turkic-council-modern-silk-road-joint-tour-packagebrochure/301/1644/1644/1926>.

The Modern Silk Road Joint Tour Package also serves as a development project contributing to the South-South and Triangular cooperation and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. With help from the Turkic Council, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism in Turkey trained more than 1,000 service sector employees from Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Fifty per cent of the trainees were women.

The Joint Report of the Turkic Council-UNOSSC on "How a regional organization contributes to regional and global cooperation" launched in New York during the 72nd Session of UN General Assembly on 25 September 2017 highlights the training as a successful case study: <http://www.turkkon.org/Assets/dokuman/Final-Turkic-Council-Report-Interactive-High-Res.pdf>. The joint Modern Silk Road Joint Tour Package has also been referred to in several UN reports as best practice for capacity building and job creation along the Silk Road.

ITINERARY

TURKEY

Day 1:

Arrival in Turkey
2 pm onwards: check in to our hotel in Sultanahmet and free time at the hotel.

Day 2:

After breakfast at the hotel we will meet our guide in the lobby before departing for a walking tour of Sultanahmet. We will visit Sultanahmet Mosque (due to Friday prayers we will not be able to enter the mosque), Yerebatan underground cisterns and the Hagia Sophia Museum. After lunch at the traditional Turkish restaurant Köfteci Selim Usta we will walk to the Spice (or Egyptian) Bazaar and the Grand Bazaar. We round the day off with a boat tour on the Bosphorus and return to the hotel by around 6 pm, where we will have free time before dinner in the hotel.

Day 3:

After breakfast at the hotel we depart for Istanbul Atatürk Airport for our Turkish Airlines flight to Konya. On arrival in Konya, we will take a bus tour around some of the city's most important sights from the Seljuk Empire era, including the Karatay Madrasa (museum), Ince Minaret Museum and Mevlana Museum, where we will see the Tomb of Mevlânâ Celâleddîn-i Rûmî, the famous Sufi poet. After lunch at Cemo Restaurant, we will check in to our hotel around 2 pm and have the rest of the afternoon free. At around 7 pm we will take a short bus trip to the Mevlana Culture Center, where we will watch a Mevlevi Sema Whirling Dervish show. Afterwards we return to the hotel for dinner.

Day 4:

After breakfast we check out from our hotel in Konya and depart by bus to Sultanhanı Caravanserai, where we will visit the Carpet Repair Workshop Atelier and Sultanhanı Caravanserai. Lunch will be at the caravanserai or Aksaray Orhan Ağaçlı Station. After lunch we transfer to Kaymaklı Underground City, where we will have a guided tour. We will then check in to our hotel, where we will have an hour or two to rest before departing for dinner at a local restaurant.

Day 5:

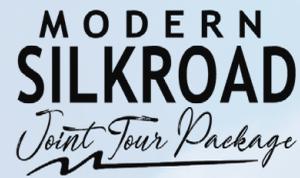
Today there is an early morning balloon ride (optional and extra) over Cappadocia before breakfast at the hotel. We then check out before visiting the Göreme Open Air Museum, Paşabağı and Devrent Valley. Lunch is at Hanedan Restaurant in a historic caravanserai. Afterwards we visit the Hacı Bektaş Veli Museum before driving to Kayseri for a visit to the Gevher Nesibe Hastahanesi (Medical Museum). After a bus tour of the city we depart for Kayseri airport for our evening flight to Istanbul Atatürk Airport on Turkish Airlines. We will wait in the international departures lounge before boarding our early morning flight to Ganja, Azerbaijan.

AZERBAIJAN

Day 1:

On arrival in Ganja airport we will meet our guide and depart for our hotel in Ganja. After resting we depart at midday to drive to the city of Naftalan to explore the Naftalan oil baths, stopping on the way to look at the Nizami Shrine. After lunch and a tour of the oil baths at a spa hotel in Naftalan, we visit the Imamzadeh Mosque before making our way back to Ganja for a city tour, visiting the Sheikh Bahauddin Complex (comprising a caravanserai, Shah Abbas mosque and medieval baths), the Shrine of the last Khan of Ganja "Javad Khans" and the museum of Mahsati Ganjavi. Dinner will be at the Ganja Entertainment Center, accompanied by national songs and dancing. After dinner we will transfer to our hotel.

ITINERARY



Day 2:

After breakfast at the hotel in Ganja we depart for Sheki, where we will visit the Old Palace of the Sheki Khans. The palaces have been nominated for UNESCO World Heritage status. We will also visit the Sheki Caravanserai and see the Shebeke artisan workshop, where they make stained-glass windows. After lunch we visit a local silk production studio, where we will have the opportunity to see how the silk is made. Afterwards, we drive to the village of Kish (Kiş) to look at the first Albanian Church. After checking in to our hotel we will have a tour of Sheki and dinner at the Khan Chelebi restaurant, accompanied by national songs and dancing before returning to our hotel.

Day 3:

After breakfast we depart for Qobustan, where we will have a tour of the petroglyphs (ancient rock engravings from the Upper Paleolithic period, 35000-34000 BC) in the Beyukdash and Kichikdash Mountains. Afterwards, we will drive to Baku to have lunch at Ciz-Biz restaurant in the Old City. After lunch we will take a walking tour of the Old City, including the Shirvanshah Palace, historic mosques and bathhouses, the Market Square, the caravanserais Multani and Bukhara and the Maiden Tower. We will then visit "Atashgah", the Temple of Eternal Fire and the Yanar Dag burning mountain and have dinner at the museum restaurant Shirvanshah, accompanied by live traditional music. The next morning after breakfast, we check out from our hotel and transfer to Baku's Heydar Aliyev International Airport for our afternoon flight to Almaty, Kazakhstan, with Air Astana.

KAZAKHSTAN

Day 1:

On arrival at Almaty International Airport we will meet our guide and transfer to the Alasha Oriental cuisine national restaurant for dinner. After dinner we drive to our hotel.

Day 2:

After breakfast at the hotel in Almaty we drive to the Almarasan Ridge to watch a spectacular performance of the Hunting Birds Show and learn about birds of prey such as falcons and eagles. We will then visit the Central Museum in Almaty before driving to Kok Tobe Mountain just outside the city centre. After lunch on the mountain at Restaurant Abai we will visit the National Museum of Musical instruments and the Kok Bazaar in Almaty. We will have dinner at a local restaurant before departing by overnight train to Turkestan.

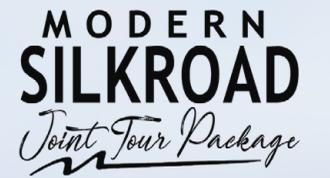
Day 3:

On arrival in Turkestan we depart for our hotel to have breakfast. Afterwards we will visit the Museum of History, Mausoleum of Khoja Akhmet Yassawi, Mausoleum of Rabiga Sultan Begim, ethno-museum Kylumet and medieval baths, with time to shop for souvenirs. After lunch, we will drive to the historic city of Otyrar, before moving on to the "ethno village" Alasha, where we will be able to watch traditional demonstrations and take part workshops. After dinner in a "yurt" (a traditional tent used by some Turkic peoples) we will transfer to Shymkent by bus and check in to our hotel.

Day 4:

After breakfast at the hotel in Shymkent we depart for Taraz, en route visiting the Mausoleums of Aisha Bibi and Babaji Khatun from the 11th and 12th centuries. In Taraz we will visit the historical complex Kone Taraz and the Tortkul caravanserai. After a bus tour of the city we will have lunch at a local restaurant and then drive 340 kilometres to the Kordai customs and immigration checkpoint on the Kazakh-Kyrgyz border before crossing into Kyrgyzstan.

ITINERARY



KYRGYZSTAN

Day 1:

After completing passport control at the Kyrgyz-Kazakh Ak-Jol border crossing we will meet our guide and transfer to the capital city Bishkek by bus. After dinner at a local restaurant we will check in to our hotel.

Day 2:

After breakfast we depart Bishkek to visit the 11th century Burana Tower located in the medieval town of Balasagun, the capital of Karakhanid State. Afterwards, we will watch traditional horse games and then drive for around 2.5 hours to Kochkor village. We will have lunch in the village and afterwards watch a carpet-making demonstration, with an opportunity to participate. We then leave Kochkor for a 2.5 hour drive to Naryn, where we will check in to the yurt camp. We will have dinner at the camp and spend the night in a yurt to experience the nomadic way of life.

Day 3:

After breakfast in the yurt camp we depart for Tash Rabat, a well-preserved 15th century stone caravanserai and one of the most important sites on the Silk Road. Afterwards we drive for approximately four hours to the resort town of Cholpon-Ata in the Issyk Kul region, with lunch en route. In Cholpon-Ata we will have a sunset cruise on Issyk Kul Lake, the second-largest saline lake after the Caspian Sea. Afterwards we will check in to our hotel in Cholpon-Ata where we will have dinner.

Day 4:

After breakfast and check out from the hotel in Cholpon-Ata we will visit the Petroglyphs Open Air Museum and Rukh Ordo Spiritual Center. After lunch, we will drive for around 4.5 hours back to Bishkek, where we will have a bus tour of the city. A farewell dinner with a traditional music performance will be held at a local restaurant. We will then check in to a hotel in Bishkek where we can rest for a few hours before our departure for Bishkek's Manas International Airport for the final departures in early morning.

You will depart for Istanbul (optional) before onward travel to your chosen destination.

Modern Silk Road Joint Tour ends.

TURKEY

Sultan Ahmet Mosque (or Blue Mosque), Istanbul

The Sultan Ahmet (or Ahmed, or Blue) Mosque was built between 1609-1617 by the architect Sedefkar Mehmet Aga on the orders of Sultan Ahmed I, who ascended the throne at the age of just 14 as the 14th Sultan of the Ottomans. He was only 19 years old when he commissioned the mosque and proved his dedication by working on the project as a labourer. He reigned over the Ottoman Empire, which covered three continents, for 14 years and died when he was only 28 years old.

Western visitors gave the name Blue Mosque to the Sultan Ahmet Mosque (although Turkish people never use this term) because of the famous blue and turquoise tiles from Iznik (Nicaea) which adorn the interior walls. There are more than 21,000 hand-painted tiles altogether, mostly in blue but with other colours such as green, white, orange and yellow.



The floral patterns on the tiles represent spring and the Garden of Eden. The beautiful tiled decorations inside the prayer hall, where bright sunlight shines in through the windows give a feeling of serenity and calm. Opposite the Sultan Ahmet Mosque is the Hippodrome, built in the Byzantine period as a sporting and social area.

When the Ottoman Turks built mosques, they were not just used as places of worship but as large complexes with a variety of buildings for different uses. There would be a hospital, a primary school and a madrasah (religious school), a soup kitchen, a bazaar (market) and a mausoleum for the sultan and members of his family. There was also a room for an astronomer (a Muvakkithane or 'time house') who would calculate the prayer times according to the Muslim calendar.

Basilica Cistern, Istanbul

The Basilica Cistern (Yerebatan Sarnici) is one of Istanbul's major landmarks and most popular tourist attractions, located just to the southwest of the Hagia Sophia in Sultanahmet.

Constructed on the orders of the Emperor of Byzantium, Justinian I (482AD to 527AD), the huge underground reservoir is 140 meters long and 70 meters wide, supported by 336 of nine meter-high marble columns in rows of 12.

Two giant stone carvings of Medusa, used as supports under the two columns at the northwest edge of the cistern, are from the Roman period.



What attracts most attention from the visitors is that the structure from which the Medusa heads have been taken is unknown. The researchers often consider that it has been brought for being used as supports to the column at the time of construction of the cistern. However, this has not prevented myths for the heads of Medusa.

The cistern was used as a location for the 1963 James Bond movie From Russia with Love, although it was credited to Emperor Constantine and not Justinian.

TURKEY

Hagia Sophia Museum, Istanbul

Hagia Sophia (Ayasofya Müzesi), one of Istanbul's most breathtaking landmarks, was a Greek Orthodox Christian church, later an imperial mosque, and is now a museum.

From the date of its construction in 537AD until 1453, when Istanbul was conquered by the Muslim Ottomans, it served as an Eastern Orthodox church during the Byzantine Empire, except between 1204 and 1261, when it was converted by the Fourth Crusaders to a Roman Catholic cathedral under the Latin Empire.

The current structure was constructed by Isidoros (Milet) and Anthemios (Tralles), who were renowned architects of their time, by Emperor Justinian's (527-565) orders. Information from historian Prokopios states that the construction that began on February 23, 532, was completed in a short period of five years and the church was opened to worship with a ceremony on December 27, 537. Resources show that on the opening day of the Hagia Sophia, Emperor Justinian entered the temple and said, "My Lord, thank you for giving me chance to create such a worshipping place," and followed with the words "Süleyman, I beat you," referring to Süleyman's temple in Jerusalem.

It was converted into a mosque under the Ottoman rule in 1453, and in 1935 it was turned into a museum functioning as one to this day. It is famous for its massive dome, considered to be the epitome of Byzantine architecture and was the world's largest cathedral for nearly a thousand years until Seville Cathedral was completed in 1520.

As of 2015, the Hagia Sophia was Turkey's most visited tourist attraction, with around four million visitors a year, according to data released by the Culture and Tourism Ministry of Turkey.

The Byzantine architecture of the Hagia Sophia served as the inspiration for many other Ottoman mosques, including the Şehzade Mosque, the Süleymaniye Mosque, the Rüstem Pasha Mosque and the Kılıç Ali Pasha Complex.



Grand Bazaar, Istanbul

The Grand Bazaar (Kapalıçarşı, meaning 'covered market') in Istanbul is one of the biggest and oldest covered markets in the world. Construction began in 1455 and wasn't finished until 1730.

Regarded as the world's first shopping mall, the bazaar is one of Istanbul's major landmarks and among the world's most visited tourist attractions, with around with 91,250,000 annual visitors (2014).

Today the Grand Bazaar is a thriving complex containing more than 4,000 shops and employing around 26,000 people. A restoration project that started in 2012 will modernise the bazaar's underpinning, heating and lighting systems and see some of the older parts demolished and rebuilt. Public toilets (there have famously been no proper toilet facilities) will also be added.



TURKEY

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Spice Bazaar (or Egyptian Bazaar), Istanbul

The Spice Bazaar (also called the Egyptian Bazaar) was constructed as a part of the külliye (a complex of buildings in Ottoman architecture) of the Yeni Cami (or New Mosque) in Istanbul.

Building of the Yeni Cami began in 1597 by order of Safiye Sultan, the wife of Padishah Murad III, and was completed in 1663, the longest construction period for a mosque in the history of the Ottoman Empire.

Safiye Sultan scoured Istanbul for a suitable location for her külliye but all the prestigious locations she chose were already occupied by magnificent buildings. It was therefore decided to build it at Eminönü (now a port near the Galata Bridge) on the coast of Istanbul's Golden Horn.



In the 17th century the Egyptian Bazaar was called the "New Bazaar" or "Valide Bazaar". Its name changed in the 18th century as spices and other items from Egypt started being sold there.

In the travel book Constantinople, written in 1874 by the Italian novelist Edmondo de Amicis, the author describes the Egyptian Bazaar thus: "Entering this, we are immediately assailed by an odour so powerful as to fairly knock one down: this is the Egyptian Bazaar, where are deposited all the wares of India, Syria, Egypt, and Arabia, which later on, converted into essences, pastilles, powders and ointments, serve to colour little hands and faces, perfume apartments and baths and breaths and beards, reinvigorate worn-out pashas, and dull the senses of unhappy married people, stupefy smokers, and spread dreams, oblivion, and insensibility throughout the whole of the vast city. After going but a short distance in this bazaar your head begins to feel dull and heavy, and you get out of it as fast as you can; but the effect of that hot, close atmosphere and those penetrating odors clings long to your clothing, and remains for all time in your memory as one of the most vivid and characteristic impressions of the East."

Karatay Medrese Museum, Konya

Karatay Medrese is a medrese (religious school) built in Konya in 1251 by the city's emir, Celalettin Karatay, who served the Seljuk Sultan.

The medrese opened as a museum in 1955 and displays beautiful Seljuk tiles and pottery, stonework and ceramic art from the period.

The dazzling turquoise, indigo and black tiles decorating its massive dome is breathtaking.

Other notable collection highlights include the reconstruction of the cruciform tile frieze of Kubadabad Palace on the southwestern shores of Lake Beyşehir in Central Anatolia, tiles from the Beyşehir Eşrefoğlu mosque in Konya Province and ceramic decoration from the dome of the tomb of the Vizier of Karatay.



Celalettin Karatay also built a caravanserai on the outskirts of Konya, the Karatay Han, located 50 kilometres east of Kayseri province on the Pinarbasi-Malatya Highway. It is among the most beautiful Seljuk Turkish caravanserais and a major stopping-point along the ancient Silk Road.

TURKEY

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Ince Minaret Museum, Konya

The Ince Minaret Medrese, now a museum, was built between 1258 and 1279 by the Anatolian Seljuk Sultanate vizier Sâhib Ata Fahreddin Ali, who later founded the Anatolian beylik (or territory) of Sâhib Ata.

The minaret was originally much taller than the section that survives today and had an unusually slender appearance in comparison to the minarets of other contemporary Seljuk mosques, hence the name of the structure.

The building has a highly ornamented stone façade which includes relief work of scripts, geometric patterning and vertical ribbon-like lines. The entrance is surrounded by a band of elegant thuluth (Islamic calligraphy) depicting Sura 36 and Sura 110, two chapters from the Koran. The minaret was damaged by lightning in 1901 and was restored in 1956. The building now houses a museum of stone and wooden objects dating from the Seljuk and Ottoman periods.



Mevlana Museum, Konya

The Mevlâna Museum in Konya is the mausoleum of Jalal ad-Din-Muhammad Rumi (1207-1273), a Persian Sufi mystic and poet more commonly known as Mevlâna or Rumi. The museum was once the lodge (tekke) of the Mevlevi order, better known as the whirling dervishes.

Sultan Ala al-Din Kaygubad, the Seljuk sultan who had invited Rumi to Konya, offered his rose garden as a burial place for Rumi's father, Baha' ud-Din Walad, when he died on 12 January 1231. When Rumi died on 17 December 1273 he was buried next to his father.

Rumi's successor Hüsametdin Çelebi decided to build a mausoleum over the grave of his master. The Seljuk construction, under architect Behrettin Tebrizli, was finished in 1274. Gürcü Hatun, the wife of the Seljuk Emir Suleyman Pervane, and Emir Alameddin Kayser, funded the construction.

The cylindrical drum of the dome originally rested on four pillars and is covered in turquoise faience-fine tin-glazed pottery on an earthenware object. Several additions were made by Selimoğlu Abdülvahit, who decorated the interior and made the carved wooden framework.



A decree of 6 April 1926 stated that the mausoleum and the dervish lodge were to be turned into a museum. It opened on 2 March 1927.

TURKEY

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Mevlevi Sema Ceremony

The origination of Sama is credited to Rumi (full name Jalal ad - Din Muhammad Rumi), the 13th - century Persian Sunni Muslim poet, theologian, Sufi mystic and founder of the Mevlevi Order.

Legend has it that Rumi was walking through the marketplace one day when he overheard the rhythmic hammering of the gold beaters. He is said to have interpreted this as the dhikr (devotional act in Islam) "la ilaha illallah" - in English, "There is no god but Allah" and became so entranced that he stretched out both of his arms and started spinning in a circle (sufi whirling). It is then that the practice of Sama and the dervishes of the Mevlevi Order were born.



Sultan Han, Aksaray Province

Sultan Han is a large 13th-century Seljuk caravanserai in the town of Sultanhanı, Aksaray Province. It is one of three huge caravanserais in the province, about 40 km (25 miles) west of Aksaray on the road to Konya. The fortified structure was built in 1229 during the reign of the Seljuk sultan Kayqubad I (who reigned between 1220 and 1237) by the Syrian architect Muhammad ibn Khalwan al-Dimashqi (Dimashqi means "from Damascus") along the Uzun Yolu (or "long road") trade route, which runs from Konya to Aksaray and continues into Persia.

After it was partially destroyed by fire, Sultan Han was restored and extended in 1278 by the governor Seraceddin Ahmed Kerimeddin bin El Hasan during the reign of Sultan Kaykhusraw III. It became the biggest caravanserai in Turkey and is still one of the best remaining examples of Anatolian Seljuk architecture.

The khan (ruler) would enter the caravanserai from the east through a pishtaq, a 13 meter high marble gate in the 50 meter-wide front wall.

The pointed arch enclosing the gate is decorated with muqarnas corbels (ornamented vaulting in Islamic architecture) and a geometrically patterned plaiting. The main gate leads into a 44 x 58 metre open courtyard which was used during the summer months. A similarly decorated archway on the far side of the open courtyard, with a muqarnas niche and joggled voussoirs (interlocking marble blocks in two contrasting colours) leads to a covered courtyard (iwan), used in winter. The central aisle of the covered hall has a barrel-vaulted ceiling with transverse ribs, with a short dome-capped tower over the centre of the vault. The dome has an oculus (circular window) to provide air and light to the hall. A square stone kiosk-shaped mosque (köşk mescidi), the oldest example in Turkey, is located in the middle of the open courtyard. A construction of four carved barrel-vaulted arches supports the mosque on the second floor. Stables with accommodation above were located in the arcades on both sides of the inner courtyard.

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Carpet Repairing and Restoring

Many carpet makers in Turkey are experts at repairing and restoring antique carpets and kilims (a tapestry woven carpet) and sumaks (another tapestry technique, sometimes spelled 'soumak' or 'sumac') from Anatolia, Persia and the Caucasus.

Skilled craftsmen and women use hand-spun wool dyed with natural colouring agents so that they blend in seamlessly with the original materials.

Old and antique carpets and kilims can also be carefully washed at the right temperature.



Kaymaklı Underground City, Central Anatolia

Troglodyte underground cave-cities existed in Anatolia as far back as the Hittite era, around 1600BC. They expanded over the centuries as invading armies crossed Central Anatolia, plundering and murdering as they went.

There are 36 underground cities in Cappadocia with hundreds of tunnels and passageways. The biggest is at Kaymaklı underground city and the deepest at Derinkuyu.

Kaymaklı underground city is built beneath a hill, known as the Citadel of Kaymaklı and was opened to visitors in 1964. It has narrow, low and sloping passages and eight floors beneath the ground. Four have ventilation shafts and are open to the public.

Today's residents of Kaymaklı (Enegup in Greek) still use some of the tunnels as cellars and storage space or as stables for horses.



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Hot Air Balloon Flight, Cappadocia

Guests will be picked up in the early from their hotel in Cappadocia by minibus and driven to the to the balloon launch site. While the crew prepare the balloons and the launch sites (around 15 minutes), you can order a coffee and pastry at the adjoining cafe.

The balloons start to take off at sunrise and ascend to around 1,000 feet (305 meters) above sea level. You will get an extraordinary view of Cappadocia from the balloon so don't forget to bring your camera or smartphone along.

The flight lasts for around an hour, floating above Cappadocia's hills and valleys, "fairy chimneys" and fantastical rock formations.

After landing, there will be a Champagne toast and flight certificates will be handed out. Your minibus driver will then take you back to your hotel where you can enjoy breakfast.



Pottery Making in Cappadocia

The Kizilirmak (red) river, also known as the Halls river, is the longest river in Turkey, running through Cappadocia and supplying the red clay used to make pottery.

Pottery has been produced in the Cappadocia area for centuries and some of the techniques still used today date back to the Hittite era of around 1600BC.

To make the clay, red earth is mixed with water and left to stand in a mud trough until it reaches the right consistency. Depending on the type of bed it comes from, the mud is either loose, gritty and soft or oily and hard or has a clay-like consistency.

The type of clay determines the style of vase or dish that is produced. When a potter's wheel starts to turn, the lump of clay is thinned out and assumes its final shape within a few minutes. It is then left to dry. When the painted, glazed vessels are sufficiently dry, they are fired at temperatures up to 600-700 celsius.

Besides producing functional items such as pots, water jars, pitchers and cooking dishes, Cappadocia's skilled potters make accurate copies of pieces made by the Hittites and Phrygians, an ancient Indo-European people.



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Üçhisar Castle, Cappadocia

Uchisar Castle is situated at the highest point of Cappadocia on the Nevsehir-Goreme road, five kilometres from the town of Goreme. There are magnificent views from the top, with Mount Erciyes in the distance.

The tall volcanic-rock outcrop is one of Cappadocia's most prominent landmarks and is visible for miles around. Full of tunnels, stairways and passageways, it was used for centuries as a place of refuge against invading armies.

It is not possible to see all the rooms due to erosion and most of those located on the north side of the castle are today used as dovecotes for pigeons. Their droppings make an excellent natural fertiliser for the surrounding orchards and vineyards.



Göreme Open Air Museum, Cappadocia

One of Turkey's Unesco World Heritage sites, the Göreme Open-Air Museum in Cappadocia is a collection of Byzantine era churches, chapels and monasteries cut out of the limestone rock and adorned with frescoes, as well as early Christian cave dwellings.

The stunning, fresco-filled Karanlik Kilise and the Tokali Kilise, 50 meters down the hill towards Göreme, are two of the museum's finest churches. The latter has an underground chapel and fabulous, recently restored frescoes.

The Göreme Open Air Museum was awarded Unesco World Heritage status in 1984, one of the first sites in Turkey.



TURKEY

MODERN SILKROAD *Joint Tour Package*

Haji Bektash Veli Tomb, Hacibektaş, Nevşehir Province

Haji Bektash Veli (1209-1271) was one of the most important philosophers and thinkers in Anatolia and taught many students at his dervish (a member of the Sufi religious order) lodge in Hacibektaş in the province of Nevşehir.

The complex is now a museum open all year round containing a large collection of historic artefacts as well as Haji Bektash Veli's tomb.

Every year hundreds of thousands of Sunni Muslims, Alevi and Bektashi from Turkey, Albania and the Americas visit the museum and festivals are held every year in August.

Since 2012, the Haji Bektash Veli complex is on the World Heritage Sites Tentative list of the UNESCO.



Kayseri Gevher Nesibe Darülfırası Museum, Kayseri

Gevher Nesibe in Kayseri is a magnificent historical complex, now a medical museum, named after an early 13th century princess, the daughter of II. Kılıçarslan, Seljuk Emperor.

The complex contains a hospital, an adjoining medical medrese ("madrassa" is the Arabic word for all types of educational institution) and a mosque. The complex ("külliye" in Turkish) is considered one of the finest examples of Seljuk architecture and contains the oldest surviving Seljuk medrese and hospital in Anatolia.

The hospital was built between 1204 and 1206 and is said to have been the first hospital in the world to treat mental disorders. Construction started immediately after Gevher Nesibe's death in 1206 and was finished in 1210. The medrese is known by various names, including the Gevher Nesibe Medrese, the Çifte Medrese (Twin Medrese) and the Gıyasiye Medrese, named after Ghiyath al-Din Kaykhusraw I who commissioned it. The tomb within the medrese is said to belong to Gevher Nesibe.

The institution was reportedly the first hospital in the world used to treat the sick as well as a place where students were trained to become physicians via apprenticeship programmes.

The university hospital at Kayseri Erciyes University is also named in memory of Gevher Nesibe.



AZERBAIJAN

MODERN SILKROAD *Joint Tour Package*

Naftalan Oil Baths, Ganja

Naftalan is a high grade black oil, found in Naftalan, Azerbaijan. It has a high naphthalene content and is known for its use in alternative medicine. It also contains large quantities of other medicinal properties such as zinc, boron, manganese, iodine, copper and lithium.

People usually sit in a bath and are covered up to their necks in the black oil.

Naftalan was first mentioned by the great Azerbaijani poet and thinker Nizami Ganjavi (1141-1201) and Marco Polo also refers to it in his treatise "On the Great Tartary", written in the 13th century.

While Naftalan crude oil is too heavy for export (unlike Azerbaijan's plentiful Caspian Sea oil), it contains about 50 per cent naphthenic hydrocarbons, which scientific research has shown is high in active substances like sterols, bile acids, vitamin D and progesterone. Naftalan treatment can help relieve skin conditions such as psoriasis, eczema and itching, as well as gynaecological problems, urinary tract infections and infertility in men.

There are numerous petroleum spa hotels in the city of Naftalan itself.



Nizami Mausoleum, Ganja

The Mausoleum of Nizami, just outside Ganja, Azerbaijan, was built in honour of the 12th century poet Nizami Ganjavi. It was originally built in 1947 in place of an old collapsed mausoleum and rebuilt in its present form in 1991.

The mausoleum has been a place of pilgrimage for Muslims for centuries. According to the Russian historian Vasily Bartold, it was first mentioned in 1606 by the Safavid court chronicler Iskander Beg Munshi.

In 1873, the Shah of Persia, Naser al-Din Qajar passed the tomb on his way home from his first tour of Europe and described it in his diary as a "very wretched brick building".

By the turn of the 20th century, the mausoleum was almost in ruins. In 1925 Nizami's grave was excavated and his remains exhumed for reburial in the centre of Ganja. However, the Soviet authorities ordered his reburial in the same location along with the erection of a temporary mausoleum. In 1947, while the new mausoleum was being built, archaeologists discovered the remains of an older one deep underground dating to the 13th century.



AZERBAIJAN

Imamzadeh Mausoleum, Ganja

Imamzadeh Mausoleum or Goy Imam Mosque is located seven kilometres north of Ganja. The mosque complex consists of other small mosques, a caravanserai and a cemetery containing the mausoleum, which is currently (2017) under reconstruction.

The mausoleum built of square bricks is the major monument of the complex. The mausoleum dome, which is 2.7 meters high and 4.4 meters in diameter, is decorated with beautiful bright-blue tiles on a dark-blue background. The mausoleum itself is 12 meters high.

The site is considered holy by Muslims and attracts thousands of pilgrims every year.

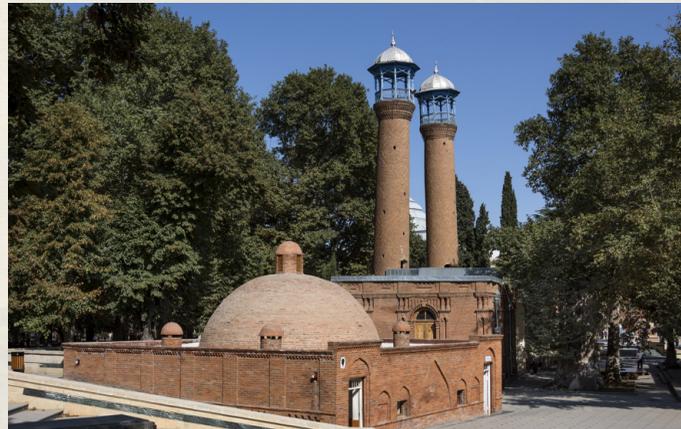


Shah Abbas Mosque, Ganja

The Juma, or Friday, Mosque of Ganja is located in the centre of the city of Ganja, Azerbaijan. Built in 1606, it is often referred to as the "Shah Abbas Mosque" as it was built on the instructions of Shah Abbas the Great during his reign of 1587-1629. Also known as Shah Abbas I of Persia, the fifth Safavid Shah of Iran, he is generally considered to be the greatest ruler of the Safavid dynasty.

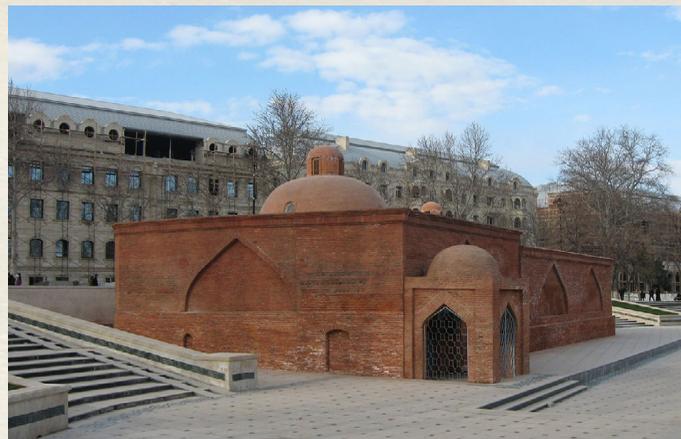
Two minarets were added to the mosque, built of traditional red brick, in 1776. In 2008, when the mosque underwent a total reconstruction, archaeologists found some old Russian bonds that showed an earlier reconstruction had taken place in 1910, not at the end of the 18th century as previously thought.

The eminent Azerbaijani poet and scientist Mirza Shafi Vazeh (1796-1852), whose works have been translated into most European languages, taught at the madrasah (religious school) that once belonged to the mosque.



Medieval Baths, Ganja

When Sheikh Bahauddin finished building the Friday Mosque, he built the Çekek Bath in 1606 again. The main function of the bath is to help Muslims perform ritual cleansing. Red bricks were used for the construction of the baths, and egg whites, clay and lime were used instead of mortar. The hammam worked until 1963. In 2002, Çekek Hammam was awarded the protection status of UNESCO by acquiring the cultural artifact status at the international level.



AZERBAIJAN

Javad Khan Mausoleum, Ganja

The Javad Khan mausoleum is located in the city of Ganja, Azerbaijan, in Shah Abbas square near the Shah Abbas Mosque, which was built in 1606. Javad Khan (c.1748-1804) was the last ruler of Ganja Khanate and his reign marked an era of prosperity for the region. He was killed in an attack on the city.

During Soviet rule of Azerbaijan, workmen building a fountain in the grounds of the mosque (work had to be halted when the digger got stuck and was never resumed) discovered a gravestone covered in Arabic script showing that it was the burial place of Javad Khan.

The mausoleum was erected in 2005 with the support of the Heyday Aliyev Foundation, a charitable organisation founded in 2004 and headed by Azerbaijan's first lady, Mehriban Aliyeva.



Old Palace of the Sheki Khans, Sheki

The Palace of the Sheki Khans, located in Sheki, high in the Caucasus mountains of Azerbaijan, was the summer residence of the Sheki khans, or "rulers". Built in 1797, full restoration works were carried out between 1955 and 1965 under the supervision of two talented architects, Kamal Mamedbekov and Nikolai Utsyn, who used the ceremonial hall on the second floor of the palace as their workshop.

Along with the pool and plane trees, the summer residence is the only remaining structure from the larger palace complex, which once included a winter palace, residences for the Khan's family and servants' quarters.

The two-storey palace measures 32 meters by 8.5 meters and is renowned for its lavish decoration, both inside and outside. Constructed of Russian wood, with French stained glass, Ottoman mosaic tiles and Iranian mirrorwork, the exterior is decorated with dark blue, turquoise and ochre tiles in geometric patterns. Inside, murals coloured with tempera (a medieval method of painting on wood panels) were inspired by the works of Nizami Ganjavi, a 12th-century Persian Sunni Muslim poet.

The layout of both floors is identical; three rectangular rooms are separated by narrow, south-facing halls ("iwans") which provide access to the rooms. The floors are accessed separately to reflect their public and private functions. Entered from the south through the two iwans, the ground floor was used primarily by clerks and petitioners. Two stairways attached to the northern façade gave access to the first floor, which was reserved for the khan's family and their guests.



AZERBAIJAN

The Mahsati Ganjavi Centre, Ganja

The Mahsati Ganjavi Centre in Ganja, Azerbaijan's second-biggest city, is dedicated to the 12th-century Persian female poet Mahsati. She was a composer of quatrains (ruba'iyat) and is said to have associated with the famous Persian poets Omar Khayyam and Nizami.

The centre houses an art gallery, a reading and research room, a music studio, music library and a national garment exhibition. In the national garments exhibition of the Centre, national clothes to the Mahsati time, in particular, those of ladies of the Renaissance Period are exhibited. The reading room contains books about the life and literacy legacy of Mahsati Ganjavi as well as rubáiyát (in digital format) in Azerbaijani, Russian and English. There are also books by other eminent Azerbaijani poets and thinkers, as well as on music and carpet making.



Sheki Caravanserai, Sheki

The rapid development of trade in the Middle Ages saw many new caravanserais (an inn for travelers with a central courtyard) being built throughout Azerbaijan.

Caravanserais were generally built along the same lines as castles - with a huge gate that made them impregnable to invaders.

Construction of the Sheki caravanserai, which covers 8,000 sq meters, began in the 18th century. It is built in two parts: Yukhary and Ashaghy, which means upper and lower respectively. The front of the building, which overlooks the street, is 14 meters high.

The lower part is rectangular with four entrances, a large inner yard and a pool in the middle. The first floor had about 300 rooms and storerooms that were used by travelers and other guests.



Each room had a manhole that was connected to the ground floor via a stepladder, which made it easy for merchants to check on the safety of their goods stored on the ground floor.

In 1988, the lower caravanserai was turned into a hotel, the Yukhary Karavanserai Hotel. It contains a restaurant serving traditional Azerbaijani cuisine and 242 international standard rooms and suites. The upper part of the caravanserai is now a historical and architectural monument. Total area of the building is 6000 m2. There are about 300 rooms and store rooms in the upper part of the caravanserai.

AZERBAIJAN

Silk Production and Silk Store in Sheki

Sheki in northern Azerbaijan has been a major centre for silk production for centuries and an important stop along the ancient Silk Road.

Merchants and travellers traded and exported beautiful silk fabrics and gold-embroidered shawls from here and, from the 15th century onwards, gossamer-like Sheki silk became renowned for its durability and was highly prized.

Silkworms were cultivated in local gardens and hundreds of local shops produced silk and silk garments. By the 16th century Sheki was the most important silk producing centre in the whole of the Caucasus and in 1829 the first silk factory was built.



In 1861, one of the world's biggest silk mills was built in Sheki and by the 19th century it became known as the "Caucasian Lyon", a reference to the centre of silk production in France.

Today, Sheki's silk factory is located around 15 minutes outside the city centre and makes silk carpets, shawls and scarves using natural dyes. An adjoining store sells fine silk goods made in the factory.

The Church of Kish, Sheki

The Church of Kish, also known as the Church of Saint Elishe, is a 12th century Caucasian Albanian church located in the village of Kish (Kış) approximately 5 km north of Sheki, Azerbaijan. It has also served as a Caucasian Albanian Apostolic church. According to a Georgian historian the population of Kish converted to the Georgian Orthodox Church (Chalcedonism) in the 10th century.

After its use as a place of worship, the church was turned into the private residence of a Georgian bishop until the 17th century. When Russia conquered the region in the early 18th century most of the people living in the village were Udis, an ancient native people of the Caucasus.



According to Robert Hewsen, an American historian and expert on the ancient history of the South Caucasus, the Udi language was prevalent north of the Kura River - an east-flowing river south of the Greater Caucasus Mountains, which drains the southern slopes into the Caspian Sea until the 19th century.

In 2000-2003 the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs funded a joint project between Azerbaijan Architecture and Construction University and the Norwegian Humanitarian Enterprise for the restoration of the church of Kish.

Radiocarbon analysis of various objects found beneath the altar of the church showed that the site was used as a place of worship as far back as 3,000 BC.

AZERBAIJAN

MODERN SILKROAD *Joint Tour Package*

Qobustan

Qobustan in modern-day Azerbaijan has been settled since 8,000BC and is famous for its ancient rock petroglyphs (rock carvings) and mud volcanoes rising out of the semi desert of Azerbaijan. Nearly 300 of the world's 700 mud volcanoes are located in this part of eastern Azerbaijan, near the Caspian Sea.

In 2007, the Gobustan Rock Art Cultural Landscape was awarded UNESCO World Heritage Status.

The 6,000 or so rock carvings are spread over an area measuring around 100 square kilometers the larger protected Gobustan Reservation - and depict people, hunting scenes, ships, constellations and animals. The oldest petroglyphs date from the 12th century BC. The site also features the remains of inhabited caves, settlements and burial grounds.



Nearby inscriptions etched around 75AD by a Roman legionnaire during the reign of Emperor Domitian are the eastern-most Roman inscriptions ever found.

The Palace of the Shirvanshahs, Baku

The Palace of the Shirvanshahs in Azerbaijan is a 15th-century palace complex, described by UNESCO as "one of the pearls of Azerbaijan's architecture". It is located in the Inner City, or Old City, of the capital Baku. Together with the Maiden Tower and other historic monuments, it is inscribed under the UNESCO World Heritage List of Historical Monuments.

In the 15th century the Shirvanshah dynasty, under Ibrahim I of Shirvan, transferred his capital from the city of Shemakha to Baku following a devastating earthquake. He committed himself to the construction of the palace - a memorial complex built around the sacred place of worship (pir) and tomb of Seyyid Yaxya Bakuvi, a Helwati Sufi saint.



The complex contains the main palace building, the divanhane (banqueting hall), burial vaults, a mosque with a minaret, the mausoleum of philosopher and thinker Seyid Yahya Bakuvi, Murad's Gate, a reservoir and the remains of a bath house.

The main building of the complex was started in 1411 by Shirvanshah Sheykh Ibrahim I. The two-storey building of the palace has three narrow winding staircases and a large doorway leads from the courtyard to the second floor into a high octahedral lodging covered with a cupola. A small octagonal vestibule behind it connects it with the rest of the lodgings in the palace.

The Shirvanshahs were patrons of the Helwati Sufiye order, and Shirvanshah Khalilullah I was buried with his family in the grounds of the palace. After the Safavid conquest of Baku in 1501, the Sufi order was expelled.

Water from the wells inside the grounds of the palace were once considered to have healing qualities, as was the hill on which the palace was built. Over centuries, the complex fell into ruin and was known in Baku as Baku Khans palace.

AZERBAIJAN

MODERN SILKROAD *Joint Tour Package*

Multani and Bukhara Caravanserais, Baku

Multani Caravanserai was established in the 14th century. It is opposite to the Bukhara Caravanserai. Now Multani is the name of the city in Pakistan. The merchants and Zoroastrians from India harnessed this caravanserai as a stop. It is assumed that these people erected the Ateshgah Temple of Zoroastrians in Surakhani. The caravanserai has a square shape and the construction of the building is in an ancient style. There are a lot of balconies around the courtyard. Now the Multani Caravanserai houses a restaurant of Azerbaijani cuisine.



Bukhara Caravanserai was constructed in the late 15th century over a trade route passing through the Shamakhi Gates of the fortress. It is close to the Maiden Tower. The caravanserai was used as a hotel, basically catering to merchants of Central Asia. The shape of the caravanserai building is square and surrounded by balconies and cells, and the portal is convex. The caravanserai has an octagonal courtyard as well as. The bulk of the architectural composition of the caravanserai has been formed by a variety of arches situated around the inner courtyard. In the year of 1964, the Bukhara Caravanserai underwent restoration, and as a result of this process, the caravanserai building was separated from its annexes built earlier which made available to see the national monument on the background of the surrounding buildings. The caravanserai building houses a restaurant which serves Azerbaijan national cuisine.

Ateshgah, Baku

The Baku Ateshgah, also known as the "Fire Temple of Baku" ("atash" is the Persian word for fire.) is a religious temple in Surakhani, a suburb of Baku, Azerbaijan.

Based on Persian and Indian inscriptions, the castle-like structure was used as a Hindu and Zoroastrian place of worship. The pentagonal complex, which has a courtyard surrounded by monks' cells and a tetrapillar-altar in the middle, was built during the 17th and 18th centuries.



The Baku Ateshgah was a pilgrimage and philosophical centre for Zoroastrians from the northwestern Indian subcontinent, who were involved in trade in the Caspian Sea area via the famous "Grand Trunk Road". The four holy elements of their belief were: ateshi (fire), badi (air), abi (water), and heki (earth).

The complex was abandoned after 1883 when oil and gas plants were established in the vicinity, ending the flow of natural gas to the temple and extinguishing the holy fire. It was turned into a museum in 1975 and the annual number of visitors is around 15,000.

The Ateshgah has been nominated for UNESCO World Heritage status and featured in an episode of Globe Trekker, an award-winning British travel programme. It was declared a state historical architectural site by the President of Azerbaijan on 19 December 2007.

AZERBAIJAN

MODERN SILKROAD *Joint Tour Package*

Yanar Dag, Absheron Peninsula

Yanar Dag ("burning mountain") is a natural gas fire that blazes continuously on a hillside in Azerbaijan (known as the "Land of Fire"), near the capital Baku. There are only a few fire mountains still in existence and most are located in Azerbaijan due to its large concentration of natural gas.

The flames at Yanar Dag eap three metres (9.8 ft) into the air from a thin, porous sandstone layer on a hillside in the Absheron Peninsula near the Caspian Sea. Popular myth has it that they were only discovered when a shepherd lit them by accident in the 1950s.



Unlike the nearby mud volcanoes of Lökbatan or Gobustan, there is no seepage of mud or liquid. The Yanar Dag flames burn steadily, fed by gas from just below the surface. They come from vents in the sandstone formations and there is an unmistakable smell of gas. Even the nearby streams, known as Yanar Bulaq, or "burning springs", can be ignited with a match. There are several such springs in the vicinity of the Vilascay River, at 115km, the longest in Azerbaijan's subtropical zone, where local people take curative baths.

The fires were reported on by historical figures such as Marco Polo and the French writer Alexandre Dumas when he visited one of the Zoroastrian fire temples that dot the area.

Baku, the Old City

The Old City or Inner City of Baku is the historic, walled part of the capital of Azerbaijan. In December 2000, along with the Palace of the Shirvanshahs and Maiden Tower, it became the first location in Azerbaijan to be classified as a UNESCO World Heritage.

Dating back to at least the 12th century, the Old City might even have begun as early as the 7th century, according to some researchers. Many monuments were built during this period, including the the Synyg Gala Minaret (11th century), the fortress walls and towers (11th–12th centuries), the Maiden Tower, the Multani Caravanserai and Hajji Gayyib bathhouse (15th century), the Palace of the Shirvanshahs (15th–16th centuries), the Bukhara Caravanserai and Gasimbey bathhouse (16th century).



In 1806, when Baku was occupied by the Russian Empire during the Russo-Persian War (1804–13), the Old City, then the only neighbourhood of Baku, contained houses and 707 shops, with a population of 7,000, most of whom were ethnic Tats. In 2007, the Old City had a population of around 3,000. Between 1807 and 1811, the city walls were repaired and fortifications extended. The Old City had two gates: the Salyan Gates and the Shemakha Gates. It was protected by dozens of cannons mounted on the walls. The port of Baku was reopened for trade, and in 1809, a customs office was established. It was during this period that Baku started to extend beyond the city walls, new neighbourhoods emerged and the terms Inner City and Outer City came into use.

With the arrival of Russians, the traditional architectural look of the Old City changed. Many buildings were constructed during the 19th century and early 20th century in the Baroque and Gothic styles. In 1865, the part of the city walls overlooking the sea was demolished and the stones sold and used in the building of the Outer City. The money obtained from this sale (44 000 rubles) went into the construction of Baku Boulevard, a wide promenade built in 1909 which runs parallel to Baku's seafont.

In 1867, the first fountains of Baku appeared in the Boulevard and two more gates were opened, one of them being famous Taghiyev Gate (1877). The opening of new gates and passageways continued well into the Soviet period.

KAZAKHSTAN

MODERN SILKROAD *Joint Tour Package*

Hunting Birds Show, Almaty

Hunting with birds of prey is an important tradition for Central Asian nomads and a golden eagle astride his master's wrists has been a symbol of the Asian Steppes for centuries. Falconry is practiced in many Central Asian countries but hunting with birds of prey such as eagles, falcons and hawks is part of the fabric of Kazakhstan.

For thousands of years it has been considered prestigious in Kazakhstan to own a bird of prey, a privilege only afforded to the rich and important. They employed skilled hunters - berkutchi - who commanded huge authority and respect. The tradition was passed down through the generations, usually only to the male members of the family but sometimes to women as well.



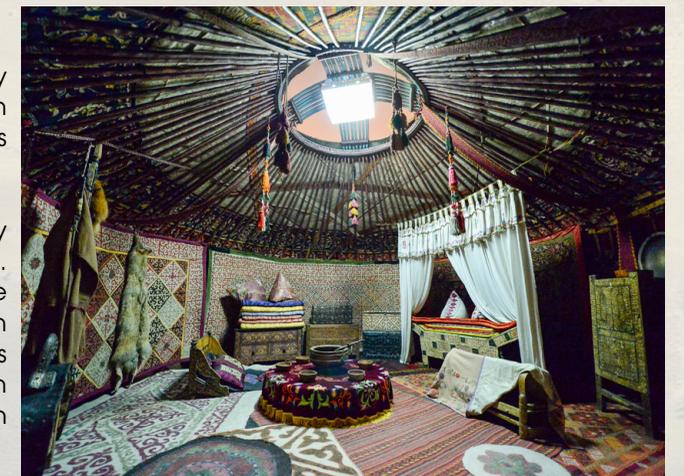
At the Hunting Birds Show, just outside the city of Almaty, visitors can watch a spectacular demonstration as well as learn about birds of prey.

The centre is the only one of its kind in Kazakhstan and runs a research programme to monitor and protect the population of birds of prey in Central Asia, including those, such as the eagle, on the endangered list. It has reared 1,060 birds and released 360 saker falcons back into the wild, a large species of falcon which breeds in eastern Europe eastwards across Asia to Manchuria.

Central State Museum of Kazakhstan, Almaty

The Central State Museum of Kazakhstan in Almaty is one of the biggest museums in Central Asia. Built in 1985, it contains more than 300,000 exhibits and has seven exhibition halls.

The first hall houses the paleontology and archaeology collections from more than 300 sites around Kazakhstan. It is here that you can also see a replica of the costume worn by the Golden Man, a warrior from the 5th century BC and one of Kazakhstan's main symbols of independence. The original is made of more than 4,000 pieces of gold and is said to be kept in a vault in the National Bank of Kazakhstan in Almaty.



In the second hall you can see items of traditional Kazakh culture and everyday life: jewelry, carpets, clothing, Kazakh embroidery and a full-size display of a nomadic house, or yurt, with a traditional interior. The most significant display is beshmet, the impressive gold-thread embroidery made by skilled craftsmen and women.

The third hall is devoted to the history and culture of the various ethnicities that have lived in Kazakhstan and other countries. There are photos, rare documents, household items and arts and crafts on display from Russia, the Ukraine, Chechnya, Turkey, Korea and Germany. There is also an exhibition entitled "Kazakhstan during the World War II (1941-1945)".

KAZAKHSTAN

MODERN SILKROAD *Joint Tour Package*

The fourth hall is entitled "Modern Kazakhstan" and represents the history of the Kazakhstan republic since 1991, when the country became independent. Exhibits include the state flag, the original Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan (dated 1995), banknotes and stamps.

The remaining halls contain archaeological finds, anthropological displays and works of art by the Russian painter H.G. Khludov, who moved to Kazakhstan in 1879.

The fifth hall named "Open Fund -Archaeological Gold of Kazakhstan" houses the exhibition consisting of unique artefacts from various regions of Kazakhstan.

The sixth hall entitled "the Museum of Anthropology" offers a unique journey into ancient times of humankind to witness primitive lifestyle of pre-historic people and the start of the civilization.

The seventh hall is a collection of artwork by H.G. Khludov (1850-1935) a distinguished Russian painter, ethnographer and historian, a member of Turkestan group of archaeology aficionados, founder of Semirechye department of the Russian Geographic Society, who moved to Kazakhstan in 1879. The Central State Museum displays the unique collection of 214 paintings by H.G. Khludov.

Kok-Tobe, Almaty

Kok-Tobe is a mountain in Almaty, Kazakhstan's biggest city. At 1,100 metres above sea level it is one of the city's major landmarks and tourist attractions, connected to downtown Almaty by a cable car, completed in 2016. The 372-metre-tall TV Tower, visible from most parts of the city, stands at the foot of the mountain.

In 2006, a recreational park and entertainment centre was opened and a bronze Beatles Monument installed in 2007. John Lennon is seen sitting on a bench with his guitar, with Paul McCartney, George Harrison and Ringo Starr standing behind him.



The park also has a number of attractions, including a Ferris wheel and a small zoo, cafes and restaurants.

It is well worth the trip up Kok-Tobe for panoramic views of Almaty and the cable car passes over some of the oldest parts of the city.

Kok Bazaar, Almaty

Kok Bazaar (also called the Green Bazaar and Zelioniy Bazaar) in Almaty is a large two-storey food market selling everything from vegetables, fruit, cheeses, sweets, sheep heads, medicinal herbs and spices and with an entire row dedicated to horse meat.

You can also buy fermented horse milk (kymyz), fermented camel milk (shubat), freshly squeezed pomegranate juice and cafes dotted around the perimeter serve bowls of thick noodles (laghman) with fried rice and meat.

The Kok Bazaar is not Almaty's only food market but is by far the biggest and most bustling and a great place to soak up local atmosphere, sample the goods before you buy and try your hand at haggling with stall holders.



KAZAKHSTAN

MODERN SILKROAD *Joint Tour Package*

Mausoleum of Khoja Ahmed Yasawi, Turkestan

The Mausoleum of Khoja Ahmed Yasawi, an eminent 12th century Sufi master, is situated in southern Kazakhstan, in the city of Turkestan. (Built between 1389 and 1405 by Timur (Tamerlane), the ruler of Central Asia, it replaced a smaller 12th century mausoleum. However, on the death of Timur in 1405 construction of the mausoleum was halted and it was never completed.

The unfinished mausoleum stands within a former citadel in the medieval town of Yassi, modern-day Turkestan. The rectangular mausoleum is just under 39 meters tall and, despite being unfinished, is one of the best-preserved and most outstanding examples of Timurid architecture. Skilled Persian craftsmen were employed to work on the project and Timur himself is reported to have participated in the building work.

The mausoleum's innovative spatial arrangements, vaults, domes and decorations served as prototypes for other major Islamic buildings of the Timurid period, in particular those in Samarkand, the city in Uzbekistan famous for its beautiful mosques and mausoleums.

Constructed of fired brick, the Mausoleum of Khoja Ahmed Yasawi has 35 rooms and contains thirty-five rooms that have a variety of functions. A conic-spherical dome, the largest in Central Asia and decorated with beautiful turquoise tiles, sits above the main hall (kazandyk), there are fragments of the original wall paintings, alabaster stalactites (muqarnas) in the intrados (the lower or inner curve of an arch), glazed tiles featuring geometric patterns and epigraphic on the exterior and interior walls, fine Kufic and Suls inscriptions on the walls and texts from the Qu'ran. The main entrance and parts of the interior were left unfinished, providing significant evidence of the construction methods of the period.



The property, burials and remains of the old town offer significant testimony to the history of Central Asia. The mausoleum is closely associated with the diffusion of Islam in this region with the help of Sufi orders, and with the political ideology of Timur.

Details of the life of Khoja Ahmed Yasawi himself are sketchy. He was born around 1103 in Sayram, a city in south east Kazakhstan, at that time known as Ispijab. His father, Sheikh Ibragim, was a well-known local figure, but Ahmed was orphaned at the age of seven and moved to Yassi with his elder sister, his only remaining close relative. His teacher was the venerable Arystan Bab, also known as Arslan Bab (both names meaning 'lion'). On the death of Arystan Bab, Khoja Ahmed Yasawi moved to Bukhara in Uzbekistan, where he became a disciple of Sheikh Yusup Hamadani, an important figure in the development of Sufism in Central Asia. He then returned to Yassi, taking the name Ahmed Yasawi, and became a highly successful propagator of Sufi Islam. He died around 1166.

Throughout his life, Yasawi had the gift of communicating to ordinary people through poems and sermons in Turkic vernacular, a major reason for his enduring popularity. His poetry was much later collected in the book entitled Divan-i Hikmet. When he reached 63, the age the Prophet Muhammad died, he retired to an underground cell, where he lived in prayer and contemplation, explaining that he had no wish to live a worldly life longer than that of the Prophet. His original small tomb was already a place of pilgrimage before Timur commissioned his grand mausoleum.

Yassi became capital of the Kazakh Khanate between the 16th and 18th centuries. Kazakh leaders chose it largely because of its spiritual significance, allowing them to claim the Islamic heritage of Khoja Ahmed Yasawi, as well as part of the legacy of Timur.

Many Kazakh khans (rulers) and other senior figures were buried here, reflecting the traditional belief that burial close to the grave of a saint would provide protection in the next world. Among the first burials was that of Amanbike, daughter of Janybek, co-founder of the Kazakh Khanate, in 1519.

Yassi was also the scene of many Kazakh khan coronations, among them Ablai Khan in 1771.

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Rabigha-Sultan Begum Mausoleum, Turkestan

Rabigha-Sultan Begum was a great-grand daughter of the Turco-Mongol conqueror Timur and wife of Abylkayyr Khan, a 15th century leader of the nomadic Uzbeks.

The small mausoleum has a tiled turquoise dome and is a replica of the 15th century original, which was demolished in 1898. Entrance is through a lovely rose garden.

Abylkayyr, who was killed in the 1468 in a battle, put the finishing touches to the structure, including the distinct brickwork at the top of the arch.



Ethno Village, Shymkent

The Ethno Village Alasha located in Shymkent is a faithful reconstruction of a nomadic Kazakh settlement, complete with yurts, horseback riders and arts and crafts stalls. It offers tourists and visitors an opportunity to experience the nomadic lifestyle for themselves and to showcase the rich history, traditions and national cuisine of the Kazakh people.

The Ethno Village also holds events and galas featuring Kazakh music, theatre, art, sporting events and equestrian competitions, such as kokpar (a Central Asian sport in which mounted players attempt to place a goat or calf carcass in a goalpost), audaryspak (mounted wrestling) and kyz kuu, often called the "kissing game" and involving a male and female rider.

Visitors are welcome to join in or try their hand at one of the various workshops led by skilled artisans.



Mausoleum Babadja Khatun, Taraz

Babaji Khatun Mausoleum was built in the 11th century and is located in the Aisha Bibi complex in the Zhambyl region of southern Kazakhstan, 18 kilometres from the city of Taraz.

Babaji Khatun was the servant of Aisha Bibi, daughter of Sufi poet Khakim-Ata and fiancée of Karakhan, a ruler from the Karakhanid dynasty. The square-shaped mausoleum is built of pale red fired brick and topped with a conical dome. It is smaller than the Aisha Bibi mausoleum and measures 6.9m x 6.9m x 5m with walls that are 1.23m thick. There is an Islamic arch on each of its four walls. On the parapet of the main facade Babaji Khatun's name is written in Arabic.



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Aisha Bibi Mausoleum, Taraz

The Aisha Bibi mausoleum, situated in the village of the same name in the Zhambyl region, 18 kilometres from the town of Taraz, was built in the 11th or 12th century and is one of Kazakhstan's most architecturally important monuments.

According to legend, the mausoleum was built by Karakhan, a ruler from the Karakhanid dynasty for his beautiful fiancée Aisha-Bibi, daughter of Sufi poet Khakim-Ata, known as Zengy baba, follower of Akhmed Yassawi.

Karakhan and Aisha fell in love with each other when she was just 16. Her father refused to give his permission for them to marry and Aisha left home.

"You will cross six rivers, but will not cross the seventh one," her father called after her as she left. Aisha then crossed six rivers but stopped at the seventh river, remembering the words of her father.



At that moment, a snake crawled out from under a stone, bit Aisha and killed her. Karakhan arrived to see his lover lying dead on the ground. Heartbroken, he ordered his architects to build a mausoleum on the same spot so that her name would be remembered for ever.

On his orders, only the best construction materials were used and the best architects engaged.

Karakhan lived a long life. Before dying, as a firm sign of his endless love to Aisha, he ordered to be buried in a place from which her mausoleum could be seen.

To the right of the Aisha Bibi building is the Mausoleum of Babes Khatun, Aisha's devoted lady in waiting. There is no tomb inside the building and the external walls are plainer than those of the Aisha Bibi Mausoleum, although an Arabic inscription runs across the top of the eastern facade, above the arched entrance.

Because the Aisha Bibi monument is associated with the eternal qualities of love it is popular with couples and newlyweds, who come here to be photographed together. Thus, it is considered that those who visit the mausoleum of "eternal bride" on wedding day will live together for a long time and will be happy.

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The mausoleum's appearance matches its legacy: it is light and symmetrical, with a filigree decoration reminiscent of fine lace. Its walls are 80 cm thick and, on the outside, decorated with carved terracotta tiles with stylized calligraphy and 60 different floral geometric patterns.

A square construction, the entrance to the mausoleum is from the east, with a gravestone in the middle.

In 1960 a protective glass dome was built and to stop visitors from touching the mausoleum. In 2002 it was restored by architect Nishan Rameto and a park built around it.

Otrar

Otrar, or Utrar, was an ancient city in southern Kazakhstan. It was the birthplace of the philosopher and mathematician Al-Farabi and among the most celebrated cities along the Silk Road during its heyday. It is thought that it was founded as early as second century BC at the time of the Kang-yu confederation.

Otrar reached its zenith between the 10th and 12th centuries, when it was a major trading centre, minted its own coins and had a library that attracted scholars from all over Central Asia.

In 1219, Otrar was the first city to fall to the Mongol warrior Genghis Khan, although its conquerors recognised the value of its strategic location and it flourished nonetheless.

In the winter of February 1405, the Turco-Mongol conqueror Timur (Tamerlane) died in one of Otrar's palaces after catching the flu.

Otrar has been on Unesco's Tentative List of World Heritage since 1998.



Kone Taraz (The Ancient City of Taraz)

Kone Taraz is an archaeological site and museum in Taraz, an ancient city in the south of Kazakhstan. It contains a number of architecturally significant buildings, including the Mausoleum Karakhan. Believed to have been built in the 11th century, during the Qarakhanid era, the beautiful mausoleum is a place of pilgrimage from people throughout Central Asia. It is built on the grave of one of the representatives of the Karakhanid dynasty and is a significant example of medieval Islamic architecture. Presumably it was built in the 11th century.

Mausoleum Dauytbek Shamansur

The Mausoleum Dauytbek Shamansur was built over the grave of Ulugh Bilge Ikbalkhan Dauytbek, a Mongol ruler, mathematician and astronomer. The short, domed construction is made of burnt brick and has two small towers at either side and doors inlaid with Arabic inscriptions.

In the centre there is a tombstone in the form of a stepped pyramid, with an inscription bearing the date of Dauytbek's death, around 1262. The mausoleum has been reconstructed several times and in 1982, was included in the list of historical and cultural monuments of national significance.

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Kali-Yunus Public Bath House

The Kali-Yunus public bath house was built in the late 19th century by a wealthy Taraz merchant, Aulie-Ata - Kali-Yunus. Hammams (Turkish baths) of this type were common in southern Kazakhstan throughout the Middle Ages and have been found in a number of cities, including Taraz and Otrar, along the Silk Road. The building features 11 brick domes of various sizes although it had fallen into disrepair is being renovated, with freshly painted murals and other decoration.



Excavation of Ancient Taraz

The ancient part of Taraz was located in the central part of the modern city, near the market square. More than three dozen mounds that belong to the ancient times containing the remains of a castle, a citadel and burial grounds, ceramics and water jugs have been uncovered, with excavation work beginning in the mid 19th century and continuing into the 20th.

Tortkul Caravanserai, Taraz

The medieval Tortkul Caravanserai was in use from the 11th-13th centuries and was destroyed during the internal conflict in the post-Mongol period.

The caravanserai, meaning "palace" or "tavern" in Persian, stood along the ancient Silk Road, a length of some 12,000 kilometers. The merchants and travelers stopped at caravanserai where they traded goods and caught up on the latest news.

The caravanserais including that of Tortkul often contained mosques, meeting halls, a hammam or bathhouse, stables for horses and sometimes a hospital and madrasa, or religious school. They offered several functions such as roadside hotels, shopping factories, warehouses and fortified fortress camps repelling the bandit attacks.



Merchants, pilgrims, diplomats and simple travelers found accommodation in such medieval taverns, without which neither international nor domestic trade could flourish.

The caravanserais were often built on the money of nobles, merchants and merely rich people for the purpose of profit. The construction of such structures was prestigious concurrently giving evidence of the government's concern for trade and its security.

The excavation studies on the archaeological site were carried out from the 80s onwards. According to archaeologists, the discovered caravanserai had only the base of walls made of large stones and burnt bricks.

KYRGYZSTAN

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Burana Tower, Balasagun

Burana tower is an 11th century minaret, located 75 kilometers from Kyrgyzstan's capital Bishkek. Originally 45 meters high, it is all that remains of the ancient city of Balasagun, one of the capitals of the Karakhanid State between the 9th and 12th centuries and an important trading stop on the ancient Silk Road.

A number of earthquakes caused serious damage to the tower. The last big earthquake in the 15th century destroyed the top half, reducing its height to 24.6 meters. In 1973 a renovation project was carried out to restore the foundations and repair the front.

Balasagyn was the birthplace of the poet, statesman and philosopher Jusup Balasagyn (born in either 1015 or 1016), who wrote the Kutadgu Bilig (Wisdom That Brings Happiness). The book, which Jusup wrote in his native Turkic language using Arab script, is one of Central Asia's most important literary works.

Near the tower there is a collection of petroglyphs, (ancient tombs and stone carvings) and a small museum containing exhibits from Kyrgyz culture past and present.



National Horse Riding Games

Horses have played an important role in the daily lives of the Kyrgyz people for thousands of years. They provided many of the daily needs of nomadic herdsman and shepherds: transport of goods and humans, food (meat) and drink (kumys).

The Kyrgyz horse is a traditional breed of small horse. Kyrgyz horse games go back centuries, often taking place as part of a holiday or big celebration. Some of the best known include:

Kiz Kuumai, a race between a boy and a girl rider. The aim of the game is for the young man to catch up with the girl, whose horse sets off five to 10 seconds before his. If he catches up with her, she must kiss him, if not, she hits whips him with her whip.

Ulak Tartysh is a fight between two teams of riders over a goat carcass. The game developed in antiquity when herds of cattle grazed year round in the steppes and mountains, exposing them to attacks by wolves. The nomads couldn't kill the wolves as they had no firearms so brave riders (djigits) would chase after them until they were exhausted and then beat them with sticks or whip them into submission.

The game was also used as a means to train horsemen, who would learn the tricks of horsemanship and combat in one go. Over time, the wolf was replaced by a goat carcass.

On the other hand, tyiyn enmey (picking up coins from the ground), jamba atma (competition in archery) and at-chabysh (horse races) are among the traditional horse games in Kyrgyzstan.



KYRGYZSTAN

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Kochkor Village and Shyrdak Show

Kochkor is a village in Naryn Region of northern Kyrgyzstan at an altitude of 1,800 meters. It is home to around 10,000 people who make a living from mainly farming and herding and one of the best places to experience the nomadic lifestyle and learn about Kyrgyz culture. Visitors can spend a night or two in a traditional tent (yurt) and sample traditional food and drinks such as fermented camel's milk.

Kochkor has a thriving trade in embroidery, traditional handicrafts and felt carpet making, an integral part of Kyrgyz nomadic heritage. There are two main types of felt carpet: Ala-kiyiz (or tekemet), a floor or wall covering made by pressing different coloured pieces of felt together and Shyrdak, a stitched wall or floor covering.

The making of Kyrgyz felt carpets is inseparably linked to the everyday life of nomads, who used felt carpets to warm and decorate their homes. Creation of felt carpets demands unity among the community and fosters the transmission of traditional knowledge - as a rule by older women who are normally concentrated in rural and mountainous areas, to younger women within the family.

At the Kochkor Shyrdak Show visitors can have a go at making their own felt carpet. There is also a small handicraft museum in the village.



Issyk-Kul Lake and Cholpon-Ata

Issyk-Kul Lake in the Tian Shan mountains in eastern Kyrgyzstan is the country's biggest lake and the second-largest saline lake after the Caspian Sea. Although it is surrounded by snow-capped peaks it never freezes over. The lake is 182 kilometre long, up to 60 kilometres wide and covers an area of 6,236 square kilometres and has an altitude of 1,607 metres.

Cholpon-Ata

The nearest town to Lake Issyk-Kul is Cholpon-Ata, a popular holiday resort with a number of hotels, guest houses and recreational facilities such as sailing and hiking.

Because of its high saline and mineral content the lake's waters have healing properties and Cholpon-Ata also has a range of spa hotels and sanatoria offering medical and beauty treatments.

During the Soviet era Cholpon-Ata was popular with visitors from around the old USSR. Many of its hotels and guesthouses are being renovated to bring them up to 21st century standards.

Just outside Cholpon-Ata there is an interesting museum and petroglyph site containing stones and tomb dating from 800 BC to 1200 AD.



KYRGYZSTAN

Petroglyphs in Cholpon-Ata

Cholpon-Ata petroglyphs are located just outside the town in the Tian Shan mountains in northeastern Kyrgyzstan. There are more than 5,000 stones, many of them up to 3,000 years old.

There are also stone circles, the remains of a boundary stone wall, balbals (images cut from stone) and tombs dating from 2,000 BC to the 6th century AD.

It is believed that the site was once a huge open-air temple, where ancient people worshipped and performed religious rituals.

The stones vary in size from about 30cm to three meters. Most of them face southwest and southeast, which is thought to be connected to sun worship. It is also thought that the stone circles were used as astronomical instruments.



Rukh Ordo, Cholpon-Ata

The Rukh Ordo (spiritual centre) just outside Cholpon-Ata on the northern shore of Lake Issyk-Kul was built in 2002 and renovated in 2008, when it was dedicated to the writer Chyngyz Aytmatov (1928-2008). He was one of the most important figures in Kyrgyz literature and among the Turkic speaking intellectuals.

The futuristic-looking spiritual centre charts Kyrgyz legend and history and is spread out over manicured gardens in five domed buildings. There are whole walls covered in murals of dashing young warriors on horseback and paintings of women in traditional headdress, magnificent white turbans draped over 25cm-high hats.

There is also a Buddhist, Catholic, Orthodox, Muslim and Jewish chapel to symbolize the unity of the major faiths. The complex also has a large concert hall with state-of-the-art acoustics, and a small pier with four pavilions to symbolize the four seasons.



KYRGYZSTAN

Bishkek

Bishkek, the capital of Kyrgyzstan and a major trading stop along the ancient Silk Road, is set at the foot of Central Asia's Tian Shan mountain range, 800 meters above sea level. It is the gateway to the Kyrgyz Ala-Too range, which stretches 454 kilometres from the west of Issyk-Kul lake to the city of Taraz in southern Kazakhstan. The Ala Archa National Park, with its glaciers and wildlife trails, lies around 40 kilometers south of Bishkek.

Bishkek is known for its historical buildings such as the State Philharmonic Hall, National History Museum, (due to reopen in 2018 after a complete renovation) and Victory Square. The modern monuments depicting traditional Kyrgyz culture are the Monument of Independence, the Monument of Manas and the other statues of the heroes from the Kyrgyz famous epic poem Manas.

The city has a flourishing arts and cultural scene served venues such as the State Museum of Fine Arts, the State Opera & Ballet Theater and the Museum of Graphic Arts.

Bishkek is also famous for being one of the greenest cities in Central Asia, with more trees per head than any other city and countless parks, providing welcome relief during the hot summers.

Other important landmarks include Erkindik Boulevard, Frunze Military Museum, Oak Park and Osh Bazaar, one of the city's biggest markets.



Tash Rabat Caravanserai, Naryn Province

Tash Rabat is a well-preserved stone caravanserai in the Naryn Province in eastern Kyrgyzstan, located at an altitude of 3,200 meters. Although some sources date its origins to a 10th century Christian monastery, local sources say that it dates from the 15th century.

In any case, the caravanserai had a political and trade importance on the ancient Silk Road. It was a place of both rest and worship while serving to protect caravans traveling to and from China from both the ravages of the weather and of bandits.

The structure is made of crushed stone on clay mortar and consists of 31 dome-shaped rooms and a central hall.

Visitors can stay in a traditional tent (yurt) nearby and there are hiking trails and horse riding stables in the area.



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Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States

(Turkic Council)

Phone: +90 212 283 16 44 (pbx)

Fax: +90 212 283 16 86

E-mail: info@turkkon.org



Antur Tourism

(Coordinator Tour Operator)

Phone: +90 212 354 22 92

Fax: +90 212 288 38 29

E-mail: turlar@antur.com.tr

For further information please visit:
www.ModernSilkRoadTour.com