



Silk Roads of Central Asia

Mountains, Plains and Nomadic Heartlands in Kyrgyzstan & Uzbekistan

20 August–1 September 2026

(MM 140)

12 nights • £6,070

Lecturer: Dr Peter Webb

Monumental Persian, Indian and Chinese remains in spectacular landscapes.

The northern spur of Central Asia's majestic mountains is a little visited region of great historical significance.

Unspoilt rural Kyrgyzstan – includes a night in a yurt in a traditional nomad camp.

The trades that flourished on the Silk Roads continue to thrive in Uzbekistan today; visit the artisan workshops of local masters.

Towering above the heart of Central Asia are the ranges of the earth's tallest mountains. These awe-inspiring peaks are the nearly impenetrable barriers that delineated the natural frontiers of Asia's great civilisations. Here are the very edges of the Persian, Indian and Chinese worlds, where dramatic geography stemmed their expansion. Yet while the mountains blocked the progress of settled empires, intrepid horseback nomads found ways to thrive. The Scythians, Turks and Mongols navigated the valleys and passes as safe havens for their own remarkable transregional empires. They built capitals deep in the ranges, supporting flourishing trading routes.

Here distinct cultures looked in shared awe at the unconquerable peaks, seeing them as the "roof of the world", the abode of gods, dragons, and manifold dangers – natural and supernatural. As a result, these mountains are a fulcrum of world history: a meeting point of peoples from far directions. This incredible region is the only place on earth where the ruins of Tang Dynasty Chinese forts, Persian monuments and Turkic caravanserais can be found almost side-by-side with the remains of Buddhist monasteries, Nestorian Christian cemeteries and Islamic minarets.

This tour through the Tien Shan and Ferghana ranges of Kyrgyzstan and eastern Uzbekistan offers a chance to experience the historic meeting point of the settled and nomadic worlds. As Kyrgyzstan is still mostly untouched by tourism, many sites preserve their natural settings off the beaten track. And it still supports some nomadic populations too, who retain many of their age-old traditions,



Burana Tower. From the series "Along the Silk Road"

and the tour explores their life and culture, including a night in their summer pasture at Son Kul, a mountain lake at 3,000 meters above sea level.

Our journey entails long minibus rides and some tracts of unpaved roads, but the reward is discovering unique sites, enjoying exceptional natural beauty, and experiencing a vital place in world history where few venture today.

Itinerary

Day 1. Fly at c. 11.30am (Turkish Airlines) from London Heathrow to Bishkek via Istanbul, arriving Bishkek c. 4.00am. *Rooms are available from 2.00pm today for those not flying from London but joining in Kyrgyzstan.*

Day 2: Bishkek. The morning is free for rest. The mostly Soviet-constructed capital of Kyrgyzstan is the site of the State History Museum, one of the most important museums in Central Asia. Also visit the Mikhail Frunze Museum, dedicated to the Soviet revolutionary. Overnight in Bishkek.

Day 3: Navekat, Tokmok, Shabdan. Depart Bishkek and travel east through the Chui Valley, stopping at the ancient Silk Road settlements of Navekat and Suyab. Continue to Balasagun, once the capital of the Karakhanid Empire and a major centre of trade and culture in the 10th–11th centuries. The city has long vanished, but the impressive Burana Tower still stands. First of two nights in Shabadan village.

Day 4: Shabdan. Start the morning with a gentle hike through the scenic Chon-Kemin Valley, with its lush meadows, rolling hills, and forested slopes. After a traditional lunch, watch a demonstration of yurt building and experience *boorsok* bread-making. Conclude the day with an evening performance of the *Epic of Manas* by a local villager.

Day 5: Kochkor, Naryn. Drive through the Kochkor Valley and stop at the K k-Tash Mausoleum (12th century), the first known structure linked to the Qara Khitai or Western Liao – a powerful yet little-known Buddhist empire that ruled Central Asia in the 12th

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century. In the afternoon, visit a nearby village for a demonstration of felt carpet-making (shyrdak) by skilled artisans. Continue to Naryn for the first of two nights.

Day 6: Tash-Rabat, Kara-Suu. Near the Chinese border lies the Tash-Rabat Caravanserai (3,200m), built in the 15th century on the site of a monastery to protect Silk Road caravans. Not far away, Koshoy Korgan is a 250-square-metre earthen enclosure, thought to be the remains of a 12th-century Karakhanid citadel.

Day 7: Naryn, Son-Kul. In the morning, drive from Naryn to Son-Kul Lake (3,060m). The road winds through rugged terrain, offering spectacular views of the surrounding mountains of the Kyrgyz Range. At this beautiful lakeside stop on the plateau, there is a chance to explore, experience traditional nomadic activities, or simply contemplate the serene setting. Overnight in Son-Kul.

Day 8: Kazarman, Jalalabad. Travel south along the newly completed north–south road, a scenic route through dramatic mountain terrain. The journey winds from the high pastures of Son-Kul through gorges, forested slopes and broad valleys, before descending into the Fergana Basin near Jalalabad. Includes a village lunch stop and other breaks along the way. Overnight in Jalalabad.

Day 9: Uzgen, Osh. Approximately 40km south of Jalalabad lies Uzgen, one of Central Asia's principal political hubs before the Mongol era and Karakhanid capital from the 9th to 13th centuries. Its well-preserved mausolea and minaret rank among Kyrgyzstan's finest archaeological landmarks. Continue to Osh, gateway to the fertile Fergana Valley. One of the oldest cities in Central Asia, Osh is known for its bustling bazaar and the Sulayman Too Mountain, a sacred site of pilgrimage. Overnight in Osh.

Day 10: Namangan, Kokand. In the morning, cross the border into Uzbekistan and on to Namangan, known for its vibrant markets and Islamic architecture. Visit Khodja Amin's mausoleum and mosque, and the workshop of a renowned silk artisan. In the afternoon, en route to Kokand, stop at Axsikent – the ruins of a once-prosperous ancient trading city. First of two nights in Kokand.

Day 11: Kokand, Rishtan. Once the capital of a powerful Khanate, Kokand is distinguished by the grand Islamic architecture of its mosques, madrasas and mausolea. Renowned for its vibrant glazed ceramics, Rishtan boasts a pottery tradition that spans over a thousand years. Visit some prominent workshops, where artisans continue this age-old craft.

Day 12: Kokand, Tashkent. Built between 1863 and 1873 by the last ruler of the Kokand Khanate, the Khudoyarkhan Palace is a richly decorated complex, known for its colourful tilework and grand architecture. Drive on to Tashkent via the scenic Kamchik Pass, stopping for lunch along the way and arriving in the afternoon. Overnight in Tashkent.

Day 13: Tashkent to London. Transfer to the airport for the c.11.00am direct flight to London (Uzbek Airways), arriving at approximately 3.00pm.

Lecturer

Dr Peter Webb. Lecturer in Arabic at Leiden University and a specialist in the cultural history of the Muslim world. Peter has travelled extensively across the Middle East and Central Asia and has studied at the Universities of Damascus and Isfahan. He held a fellowship at the Museum of Islamic Art, Berlin, where he researched Muslim architecture and Arabic calligraphy, studying monuments of medieval Egypt and Uzbekistan. In Oman, he studied pre-Islamic sites and local shrines dedicated to ancient Arabian prophets as part of his current research focus on the legends and history of Arabia. His publications include *Imagining the Arabs* (Edinburgh University Press, 2016), a comprehensive exploration of the Arab people in early Islam, *The Arab Thieves* (Brill, 2019), a critical study of Arabian outlaw tales, and *The Genius of Invective – Ibn Zaydūn's Letter Explained* (New York University Press, 2025).

Practicalities

Price, per person. Two sharing: £6,070 or £5,270 without international flights.
Single occupancy: £6,550 or £5,750 without international flights.

Included: international air travel (economy class) with Turkish Airlines: London to Bishkek via Istanbul (aircraft: Airbus 321, Airbus A350-900) and Uzbekistan Airways: Tashkent to London (aircraft: Airbus 321Neo); travel by private air-conditioned coach, and minivans; hotel accommodation; breakfasts, 11 lunches and 11 dinners with wine, water and tea/coffee; all admissions; all tips; all taxes; the services of the lecturer, tour manager and national guides.

International flights: we travel to Bishkek with Turkish Airlines via Istanbul, as it currently is the most reliable and convenient option for reaching Kyrgyzstan. However, we return directly to London from Tashkent with Uzbekistan Airways for the same reason: the flight is at the most convenient time.

Visas: Kyrgyzstan: for stays of up to (and including) 60 days, citizens of the UK, EU, the USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand do not require a visa. **Uzbekistan:** For stays of up to (and including) 30 days, citizens of the UK, EU, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand do not require a visa. Citizens of the USA who have reached 55 years of age are also exempt. Citizens of the USA under the age of 55 are required to apply for an electronic visa.

We will advise on this. Citizens of other countries should check their requirements with the relevant authorities.

Accommodation. We use the best available hotels, but between Bishkek and Osh the choice is limited. **In Bishkek:** Sheraton Bishkek (marriott.com/en-us/hotels/frusi-sheraton-bishkek/overview): 5-star hotel with panoramic views of the city and the Tien Shan mountains. **In Shabdan:** Ashu Guest House (ashu.kg): comfortable guest house with cosy rooms, warm hospitality, and good mountain views. It also has an indoor pool. **In Naryn:** Grand Khan Hotel (grand.khantengri.kg): modern 4-star hotel with spacious rooms. **In Son-Kul:** Nomad's Dream Yurt Camp (nomads-dream.kg/en.html), and/or Ak Sai Camp (sonkul-ak-sai.asanomad.com/en/): two authentic yurt camps set near the shore of the lake. **In Jalalabad:** Jannat Regency Hotel (jannat-regency-jalalabad.jannat.kg/en/): 5-star hotel

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with spacious and comfortable rooms. **In Osh: Jannat Resort** (jannat-resort-osh.jannat.kg/en): 5-star hotel offering elegant rooms and amenities, including indoor and outdoor pools. **In Kokand: Silk Road Hotel** (silkroad-kokand.uz/en-gb/): this hotel blends Oriental traditions with modern comforts. **In Tashkent: Crowne Plaza Hotel** (ihg.com/crowneplaza/hotels/us/en/tashkent/tastm/hoteldetail): modern hotel with spacious and comfortable rooms.

Single rooms are doubles for sole occupancy throughout the tour. Please note that at the hotel in Shabdan and at the Yurt Camp, only twin rooms are available. Please also note that facilities at the Yurt Camp are shared, and toilets are located in a separate compound.

How strenuous? This is a long and particularly demanding tour, beginning with a very late arrival into Bishkek and involving frequent hotel changes. Infrastructure in Kyrgyzstan is still developing and outside Bishkek and Osh (the main cities), services and accommodation are basic – though clean and comfortable. There is one night in a traditional Yurt camp, which will require some adaptation: the toilets are shared and located outside the yurt. Some road journeys are unavoidably long and occasionally bumpy due to road conditions. Some sites are located on uneven ground and irregular paving. Altitude is a factor to consider in certain areas, with Son-Kul Lake situated at an elevation of 3,060mt. This tour is best suited for travellers who are flexible, physically fit and prepared for some discomfort.

The average distance by coach per day is c. 70 miles.

Group size: between 10 and 22 participants.