

A Taste of the Silk Road: Almaty to Moscow

https://www.irtsociety.com/?post_type=journeys&p=3931



Overview

The Highlights

- Grand trek across Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Russia
- The most stylish, comfortable way to see sights rarely seen by Western travelers: aboard the *Golden Eagle*
- Samarkand's Registan Square, with its stunning three madrasahs
- Night visit to the famous gas burning crater of Darvaza
- Mamayev Kurgan War Museum in Volgograd, which commemorates the battle of Stalingrad

- Moscow's Kremlin, Red Square, and St. Basil's Cathedral
- Visit Zenkhov Cathedral & Chimbulak Resort in Almaty, Kazakhstan
- Samarkand, Merv, Khiva, Ashgabat, Bukhara & Tashkent city tours
- All meals, wine and beer with lunch & dinner, off-train tours, and gratuities included

The Tour

The Taste of the Silk Road rail adventure offers travelers unparalleled access to places few Westerners have ventured, and is one of the most exotic and best-loved by Society of IRT members. This abbreviated version of the Silk Road journey allows you to visit the storied sites of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Russia in only 13 days.

The luxurious [Golden Eagle](#) will transport you back in time. Follow in the footsteps of Marco Polo along one of the world's oldest and most historic trade routes. This great caravan road linked the kings of Europe with the luxuries of Asia—most significantly, its silks and spices. It is preserved to a remarkable degree.

Learn about the classic [21-day Silk Road](#) journey.

Itinerary

Day 1: Arrive Almaty

Upon arrival at Almaty Airport, you will be met and transferred to the Intercontinental hotel, a luxury five-star property located opposite the Presidential Palace in Almaty's Republic Square for a one-night stay.

Day 2: Almaty

Almaty is the largest city in Kazakhstan and is notable for its wide tree-lined boulevards. Surrounded by the majesty of the Tien Shan Mountains, this beautifully verdant city derives its name from 'alma' meaning 'apple'. Just a short distance from the city, apple orchards thrive in abundance.

Our city tour includes a visit to Panfilov Park where we have the opportunity to visit the Zenkhov Cathedral which was built entirely of wood. We'll also go out of the city to the Chimbulak resort, where a cable car ride will give you spectacular views of Almaty and the mountains.

Day 3: Tashkent

Tashkent is the capital city of Uzbekistan. We spend time touring this modern Soviet-style city,

which was rebuilt following the devastating earthquake of 1966. Our tour of the city includes the Old Town, where traditional homes and religious buildings line the narrow streets. Here, in a small library, we'll be privileged to see one of Islam's most sacred relics – the world's oldest Koran. This is followed by a visit to the Railway Museum and the Museum of Applied Arts.

Day 4: Samarkand

The mention of Samarkand, more than any other city, instantly conjures up evocative images of the Silk Road. Founded in the 6th century BC, Samarkand's stunning architecture hints at its former status as one of the most important cities in Asia. It is particularly noted for its architectural remains from the 14th to the 17th century, when it flourished as the fabled capital of the Mongol empire of Timur and his successors.

Today we will visit some of its most significant sites including Registan Square, the refined elegance of the beautifully proportioned Bibi Khanum Mosque and the Ulag Beg observatory, one of the earliest Islamic astronomical observatories built in 1428. Before dinner we will return to the now illuminated and awe-inspiring Registan Square.

Day 5: Bukhara

Bukhara is quite simply outstanding. Like Khiva, UNESCO sponsored the renovation of much of the city for its 2,500th anniversary in 1999. The highlight of this wonderful tour is a visit to The Ark, a fortified residence of the Emirs of Bukhara – the despotic and ruthless leaders who ruled until Soviet times.

We then travel out of the city to experience the Emir's enchantingly named, Palace of the Moon and Stars. This evening, weather and time permitting, we will enjoy a barbecue on the station platform before our train departs.

Day 6: Merv

From Bukhara we transfer to the ancient and mainly unrestored remains of Merv. Once an important stopping point on the Silk Road, it claims to have briefly been the largest city in the world during the 12th century.

1794 saw the demise of Merv, after the Emir of Bukhara destroyed the dam which the population depended on for its water.

Day 7: Ashgabat & Darvaza

Ashgabat, the capital of Turkmenistan is known as the 'Las Vegas of the Kara Kum'. Situated between the Kara Kum desert and the Kopet Dag mountain range, Ashgabat is a relatively modern city built upon the ruins of the Silk Road city of Konjikala and the Soviet city built after the devastating earthquake of 1948.

The city's extravagant fountains, golden domes and towering modern buildings appear strangely incongruous in this desert setting. Highlights on our visit include a visit to the National Museum

and Kipchak Mosque.

The Golden Eagle makes a brief scheduled stop at Ichoguz, where we have the option to leave the train and make a short journey to Darvaza's famous burning gas crater, a spectacular sight best seen at night.

Located in the middle of the Kara Kum desert where the area is rich in natural gas, the 70 metre-wide crater is known by locals as the 'Door to Hell' and has been burning for over 40 years. A unique experience that is not to be missed.

Day 8: Khiva

From Urgench we travel to the ancient city of Khiva, founded 2,500 years ago. As one of the Silk Road's most important trading posts and now a World Heritage Site, it lies at the crossroads of the routes between Mongolia, Russia, China and Persia.

A truly magnificent sight to behold, it rises out of the desert to reveal a wealth of impressive architecture. Stepping back in time, we discover its impressive mosques, madrassas, bazaars and minarets within Khiva's ancient walls.

Day 9: Kara Kum

Today we enjoy a relaxing day on board as we travel across the vast expanse of the Kara Kum desert.

As well as experiencing the unique landscape, you can take the opportunity to chat to fellow passengers and maybe take a Russian language lesson. Enjoy the train's beautiful lounge car and take meals in the dining cars.

Day 10: Volgograd

Standing on the banks of the Volga, Stalingrad, as it was known in Soviet times, was the dramatic scene of one of the most important WWII battles. The Russians heroically turned back the Nazi advance here to alter the course of the war. We visit the poignantly sobering Mamayev Kurgan war memorial, followed by an informative museum visit.

Day 11: Moscow

Today we arrive into Moscow, our final destination. Included in our time spent in Moscow is two nights at the outstanding, five-star Baltschug Kempinski hotel, overlooking the Moskva River with an unrivalled view of the Kremlin, Red Square and St. Basil's Cathedral.

Day 12: Moscow

Our touring program of Moscow principally takes us to the grandeur of the Kremlin – the spiritual, historical and political heart of Moscow – and to see the treasures of the Tsars in the Armoury Chamber. We also visit Red Square, an iconic symbol of Russia's former military and political

might with its eclectic mix of fascinating architecture, such as the ornate St Basil's Cathedral's magnificent onion-domed spires, the beautiful facade of the world famous GUM department store, constructed in Tsarist times, and the somber and evocative site of Lenin's tomb.

With our Freedom of Choice touring option you may instead wish to travel out of the city center to Sergiev Posad, home to one of the most beautiful monasteries in Russia and the historical and spiritual center of the Russian Orthodox Church or visit the famous State Tretyakov Gallery (National Museum of Fine Art).

Day 13: Moscow

After breakfast in your hotel, you will be transferred to Moscow Airport for your onward flight.

Why not extend your stay in Moscow with additional nights to explore more of the city at your leisure or have time to take in a performance at the world-renowned Bolshoi Theatre? Tickets need to be pre-booked and are subject to schedule and availability.

Dates & Prices

More

Three visas are required for this journey (for U.S. citizens); please allow six weeks for this process. Visa requirements vary depending on citizenship. Please inquire.

Kremlin museums are closed on Thursdays; in this case, Kremlin museums tour occurs morning of departure day.

Latest News: View owner [Owen Hardy's blog](#) on improvements on the *Golden Eagle*.