THE SILK ROAD

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The Greatest Overland Route in History

Over many centuries, traders, nomadic warriors, prophets, emigrants and adventurers traversed the Silk Road that crossed much of the known world from Europe to the Far East, a 12,000-kilometer route through some of the harshest terrains on earth. But the huge deserts, endless steppes and towering mountains were only the physical barriers that the intrepid travellers had to surmount; there were also brigands, wars, unfriendly potentates, natural disasters and disease.

Commerce was the chief activity along the route and although it is known as the Silk Road, that precious commodity was only one of the many goods traded from the Mediterranean to the Pacific. Caravans loaded with everything from glass, furs, porcelain, perfume, gems, and carpets to slaves, livestock, spices, mirrors, paper, gunpowder and a thousand other things moved East and West along what has been described as the greatest overland route in the history of mankind.

Scholars say the first recorded mention of the Silk Road dates back to around 100 BC when a Chinese expedition set off west to purchase horses in Central Asia where they learned that the silk they had brought was highly prized in the bazaars. But it is believed that the route was already several thousand years old by then and Alexander the Great followed much of it during his eastern conquests.

Marco Polo, Genghis Khan and Tamerlane were other historical figures familiar with the great Eurasian highway. Lesser known were the itinerant priests, pilgrims and proselytisers who spread word of the principal religions of the world - Buddhism, Islam, Zoroastrianism, Hinduism, Christianity and Confucianism - from one end of the Silk Road to the other.

And as the voyagers met in oases, towns and cities such as Damascus, Erzurum, Isfahan, Bukhara, Samarkand, Kokand, Xian and Nara, they swapped ideas on art, science, and philosophy from some of the greatest civilizations the world has ever seen - the Chinese, Indian, Persian, Roman, Greek, Byzantine, Egyptian and Mesopotamian.

These ideas were then passed on again and again, both to the East and to the West, in what was perhaps the greatest cultural exchange in the history of mankind.

The glory days of the Silk Road began to come to an end with the opening of sea trade between Europe and Asia in the late 15th century by explorers like Vasco de Gama. Merchants could now trade silk, spices, pearls and other goods directly, cutting out the middlemen who grabbed a share of the profits along the old land route. The sea route was also a faster and safer alternative.

With these new economic realities, the Silk Road began to fade in importance and eventually became a distant, yet fabled memory highlighted only in history books, works of literature and legend.

But today, the Silk Road is once again hosting travelers and the World Tourism Organization is playing a key role in ensuring this renewed activity continues to expand and prosper. The Organization first saw its chance in 1991 when the newly-independent Central Asian republics, largely isolated during decades of Soviet rule, began to open up to outsiders.
The Silk Road Today

The Silk Road today is a rich tapestry of tourism destinations and products based on the unique and outstandingly rich heritage, nature, and traditions of dozens of distinct histories, peoples and cultures all along the timeless route now extending a warm welcome to visitors.

A modern-day silk worm farm in the small Greek town of Soufli; Egypt’s Red Sea coast where ships from India once unloaded their cargoes of silk and that now boasts some of the finest scuba diving in the world; the Muslim call to prayer from a mosque in the ages-old caravan city of Bukhara in Uzbekistan and the still bustling bazaar in the western Chinese city of Xian where Silk Road merchants have haggled for centuries.

All these experiences and many, many more await the visitor seeking to capture the magic of the old Silk Road, for adventure travellers who want an active holiday among the stunning natural scenery and tourists eager to witness at first hand the fascinating and exotic local customs.

In 1993 the UNWTO initiated a long-term project to organize and promote the Silk Road as a tourism concept. In 1994 representatives from 19 participating nations came together and adopted the historic Samarkand Declaration on the Silk Road Tourism and approved a special logo to be used by all governments, organizations and private sector entities involved.

Since then forums and meetings were held and in 2002 the participants adopted the Bukhara Declaration on Silk Road Tourism which stressed the benefits of sustainable tourism and outlined specific steps to stimulate cultural and ecological tourism to Silk Road destinations. A Silk Road Tourism Office, hosted by the Uzbek government and with support of UNWTO was opened in Samarkand in 2004.

The World Tourism Organization published a Silk Road Tourism brochure in 1997, which was highly appreciated by the countries participating in the UNWTO Silk Road Project. This new brochure presents a mosaic of tourism products, sites and attractions of the Silk Road region as a whole, with the objective of contributing to a better knowledge of its tourism potential.
A Mosaic of Tourism Destinations

Crossing several countries, the Silk Road offers an amazing number of places to visit:

**Armenia**
Situated at the crossroads of ancient trade and invasion routes, for many centuries Armenia was a key link on the Silk Road and today its landscapes and monuments still attract eager travellers.

**Azerbaijan**
Besides its historical attractions, Azerbaijan also offers the stunning natural beauty of its diverse landscape, which includes coastline, forests, mountains and plains.

**China**
China was the raison d’être of the Silk Road as the Chinese discovered silk, were the first to cultivate it for commercial purposes and sent out emissaries to the West.

**Democratic People’s Republic of Korea**
Temples, palaces, tombs and other ruins mark the route of the Silk Road as it reached its extreme eastern terminus on the Korean Peninsula.

**Egypt**
With 7,000 years of history, Egypt has long been at the centre of global commerce and at the axis of trade routes linking Asia, Europe and Africa.

**Georgia**
There are indications that goods from as far away as India passed through Georgia centuries before there was trade from China heading west on the Silk Road.

**Greece**
Located on the edge of the eastern world, Greece was a major player in the commerce of the valuable textile.

**Iran**
When the Silk Road was at the height of its glory, the Persians acted as middlemen in the trade of the brilliant fabric.

**Israel**
Straddling a region where ageless civilizations and magnificent empires were born, prospered and disappeared, Israel boasts the holy sites and heritage of three of the world’s greatest religions.

**Japan**
As the Land of the Rising Sun, Japan was for much of the world the most beguiling country in the East, fabled throughout the ages for its traditions, wealth and stunning art.

**Kazakhstan**
Larger than all Western Europe, Kazakhstan is a vast country of steppes and mountains rich in natural beauty.

**Kyrgyzstan**
Kyrgyzstan’s landscape of high, forested mountains and lush, grassy steppes attracted Silk Road travellers thankful for the region’s cool climate.
Mongolia
This little-known land was the home of Genghis Khan, the legendary Silk Road conqueror and statesman, and where the inhabitants retain the nomadic lifestyle and traditions of their ancestors.

Pakistan
For centuries, part of the Silk Road wound its way south from Central Asia, across some of the highest mountains in the world, down through what is today Pakistan.

Republic of Korea
Across the centuries, the Korean Peninsula has served as a cultural bridge between the Asian continent and the islands of Japan.

Syria
The ancient Syria was world-famous for two industries – the manufacture of silk cloth of gold, and that of finely-carved wood, inlaid with ivory and mother of pearl.

Tajikistan
Rugged and mountainous, Tajikistan sits at the heart of Central Asia, with China to the east and the Indian subcontinent to the south.

Turkey
Turkey has been a centre for cultural and commercial exchanges through the ages.

Turkmenistan
Elaborately woven, bright crimson carpets created by the delicate hands of nomadic tribal women have become the artistic symbol of Turkmenistan.

Ukraine
East meets West in this country’s Crimea peninsula and merchants flocked here from all over the known world to deal in the exotic goods which fuelled trade along the old Silk Road.

Uzbekistan
The fabled mosques and madrasas of Samarkand, Bukhara and Khiva, with their marvellous design and colourful tile work, are just some of the sites in Uzbekistan linked to the Silk Road.
Ancient Cities and Heritage Sites on the Silk Road
Heritage Sites

The goal of these pages is to provide historical and cultural information and, where available, a generous photographic record regarding some of the important Silk Road urban centers and their buildings. While the history of the Silk Road is very much a history of interaction between nomadic and sedentary cultures, much of the economic and cultural development people normally think of in connection with the Silk Road is that in urban settings. Given constraints of what is freely available to us for visual material, in many cases the pages will focus on a single architectural complex or even a single famous building.

Cathedral of Saint Echmiadzin
ARMENIA

Located in the city of Echmiadzin, the cultural, political and religious center of the Armenian Apostolic Church for many centuries, the Cathedral of Saint Echmiadzin is the oldest Christian church in a country that was the first in the world to adopt Christianity. Founded in the 4th century, the cathedral has been rebuilt many times over the centuries. Highlights include the 5th century northern wall with figured reliefs boasting Greek inscriptions, frescoes, the 18th century interior painted by Ovnatanyan and the Tsarist-era buildings of the seminary. Among the cathedral’s collection of religious artefacts are what is said to be a lance which pierced Jesus’ side during the crucifixion, wood from Noah’s Ark and St. Gregory the Illuminator’s hand.

Old Baku
AZERBAIJAN

Azerbaijan’s premier Silk Road attraction is in the capital Baku itself. The 21-hectare Icheri Sheher, or Inner City, was largely built during the Middle Ages and is a UNESCO-listed World Heritage Site. Encircled by fortress walls, the district contains the Shirvanshakh Palace, considered one of the masterpieces of Azeri architecture and which provides a fascinating glimpse into how local rulers lived between the 13th and 15th centuries. Among the Icheri Sheher’s other attractions are the Maiden Tower, the Mohammed Ibn Abu Bakr mosque.
and more buildings, all reflecting the importance of Baku as a major political, cultural and economic center which played a leading role as a commercial hub for merchants from Genoa, Venice, Russia and Central Asia.

Buddha Art Caves
CHINA
Clustered around the old Silk Road trading hub of Dunhuang in Gansu Province are a number of cave complexes containing spectacular and colourful examples of ancient Buddhist art including murals, statues and carvings. Beginning in the 3rd century, Buddhist monks from India and Central Asia arrived here to instruct local disciples, translate texts and preach. As the riches of the town grew, the Buddhists built their cave temples which scholars describe as the among the finest existing examples of Eastern religious art. Along with depictions of Buddha, there are wonderful scenes of hunting, feasting and dancing, as well as celestial beings flying through the sky. Of particular interest are the Mogao caves where artists worked for 1,000 years until the 14th century.

The Great Pyramid
EGYPT
Considered as the most famous structure in the entire world, the Great Pyramid was built as a tomb over a period of 20 years by King Cheops around 2650 B.C., or 43 centuries ago, and is the only survivor of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. Until the 19th century, it was the tallest building on earth. Almost 2.5 million blocks of stone were used to build the Great Pyramid that measures 230 meters at the base and rises 137 meters above the desert. Situated in Giza, which is on the outskirts of Cairo, the pyramid is part of the Giza Plateau that features other pyramids and the Sphinx. There is also a museum containing the Sun Boat that was discovered in the 1950s near the pyramid and was meant to carry the body of the pharaoh to the afterlife.

The Cave City of Uplistsixe
GEORGIA
Entire cities carved out of rock are common in parts of Europe and Asia, but none are quite as impressive as the cave towns of Georgia and Uplistsixe is one of the country’s oldest and largest. A flourishing city dating from the 1st century B.C. and situated on the Silk Road, Uplistsixe was destroyed by the hordes of Genghis Khan’s son Khulagu and its residents wiped out 1,300 years later. Today, travellers can visit the city’s ancient streets, theatre, royal halls, homes, a pharmacy and a church which still remain, while viewing the granaries and large clay wine vessels that provide a glimpse into the daily life of the inhabitants. Uplistsixe is located near the town of Gori where Soviet leader Joseph Stalin was born.

The Delphi Temple
GREECE
Of all the many ancient sites in Greece, Delphi is the only one which possesses such a potent spirit of place. Built on the slopes of Mt. Parnassos overlooking the Gulf of Corinth and extending into a valley studded with cypress and olive trees, Delphi was regarded by the ancients as the centre of the world. According to their beliefs, Zeus released two eagles at opposite
ends of the world and they met in Delphi. It reached its height as a shrine dedicated to Apollo in the 4th century B.C. when pilgrims laden with gifts came to seek advice in the form of oracles by the high priestess Pythia.

Mehdun-e-Imam

IRAN

One of the largest public squares in the world, the Mehdun-e-Imam in the lovely city of Isfahan is also one of Iran’s premier tourist attractions. Built in the 17th century by the great Shah Abbas who staged polo matches there, the square is still a beehive of activity for locals and visitors frequenting the site’s four main attractions. Anchoring one end of the square is the Imam Mosque, a magnificent structure of blue tiles, a huge dome and soaring minarets; on the eastern side is the smaller, but still beautiful Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque; to the west is the Ali Ghapu Palace where Shah Abbas once entertained his guests; and on the northern end is the fascinating bazaar filled with merchants selling everyday objects and Iranian arts and crafts.

The Khodza Ahmed Yassavi Mausoleum

KAZAKHSTAN

A complex of temples and palaces in the southern city of Turkestan, the Khodzha Ahmed Yassavi mausoleum is dedicated to the celebrated Sufi poet and preacher of the same name and was commissioned by conqueror Tamarlane in the 14th century. Boasting the largest dome in all of Central Asia measuring 40 meters in diameter, the mausoleum also contains a sacred bronze water vessel weighing two tons, a mosque, a kitchen to feed pilgrims and preachers and dozens of rooms. Over the tomb of Yassavi is a ribbed cupola that was the first of its kind in the region. Once the most visited shrine in Central Asia, the complex still attracts the Muslim faithful, especially during religious holidays.

The Roman City of Caesarea

ISRAEL

On the shores of the Mediterranean Sea, King Herod created Caesarea, the first real Roman city in what would become Israel. During the king’s reign, it grew to be the second-largest city in size and importance in the country and later played a vital role in the development of both early Christianity and Judaism as part of the Talmud was written there. Caesarea’s most important feature was the harbour also built by King Herod and was one of the three largest such ports in the world. Uncommonly for the time, it was an artificial harbour and the huge breakwater which protected the ships and wharves was made of marine Roman concretes, a newly developed substance. These days, visitors can take an underwater tour of the complex.

The Mausoleum of King Tongmyong

DPR KOREA

In 277 B.C., King Tongmyong founded Koguryo, the first feudal state in Korea and the strongest and most influential in the history of the Korean Peninsula. During its almost 1,000 years of existence until 668 A.D., Koguryo developed as an economic, political, military and cultural powerhouse in northeastern Asia and its people exported fine silk and other goods to Central Asia, Japan and other surrounding regions. Located in Pyongyang district, the mausoleum of
King Tongmyong and the Jongrung Chapel cover 220 hectares. Koguryo culture is also highlighted in the many tombs decorated with finely executed murals that have been recognized by UNESCO as a World Cultural Heritage Site.

**Bulguksa Temple and Seokguram Grotto**

**REPUBLIC OF KOREA**

Often called the “museum without walls”, Gyeongju, the former capital of the ancient Silla Kingdom (57 B.C. to 935 A.D.), boasts a pair of glorious historical and cultural attractions – Bulguksa Temple and Seokguram Grotto. Built over a period of 27 years from 774 to 751 B.C. on the slopes of Mt. Tohamsan, the Bulguksa Temple features two magnificent pagodas dedicated to the Buddha. Another shrine to the religion that traveled east on the Silk Road is the nearby Seokguram Grotto with its serene stature of the Buddha surrounded by Bodhisattvas and guardian deities gazing out over the forested hills to the horizon. Both the temple and the shrine are on the UNESCO World Cultural Heritage Site list.

**Karakorum**

**MONGOLIA**

After Genghis Khan died in the early 13th century, his son and successor, Ogedei, established Karakorum as the capital of the Mongols’ ever-expanding empire. Going against the tradition of his forefathers who believed the Mongol leaders should stay close to their roots and live in “gers” or round, felt tents out on the steppes, Ogedei Khan constructed wonderful palaces and temples. But 40 years later, Genghis’ grandson, Kublai Khan, moved the capital to present-day Beijing. Eventually, the stones of Karakorum were used to build the Erdene Zu monastery in the 16th century. Modern-day visitors can still see some of the stones from the original Mongol complex. Called “turtle stones”, they marked the boundaries of the city which was once the heart of the mightiest empire in the world.
Hissar Fortress
TAJIKISTAN

All along the Silk Road, fortresses stood guard against brigands, invading armies and unrest. One of the best preserved is the Hissar Fortress in the town of the same name and which was built in the time of Tamarlane and still used by the local representative of the Emir of Bukhara until the 1920s. The fort’s 28 hectares are surrounded by a single defensive wall. There are excellent views from the top of the fortress and two madrassas, or Muslim religious schools, are located outside the walls with one containing a small museum with displays of clothing, ceramics and jewelry. There is also a 16th century mausoleum of the religious scholar Makhtum Azam and a delightful chaikhane, or teahouse, at the base of the fort that is located 30 kilometers west of Dushanbe.

Genoese Fortress in Sudak
UKRAINE

First settled by the Greeks, over the centuries the region of the Crimea where the seaside town of Sudak is located was also governed by Scythians, Goths, Huns, Khazars, Tatars, Turks and Russians. But it was under the Genoese who seized the town in 1365 that Sudak itself became a key trading hub where slaves from Eastern Europe were sent to Egypt and silk, spices, linen and other goods were brought from the Indies for onward sale to Europe. To protect their lucrative business, the Genoese built the fortress with its kilometres of battlemented walls and tall watch towers overlooking the town and which can be visited today. After over a century of rule, the Genoese were forced out by the invading Ottoman Turks who easily breached the fortress’ defenses.

Khiva’s Ichan Kala
UZBEKISTAN

Khiva was an oasis town and caravan stop on the northern Silk Road spur between Central Asia and Russia and famed for its artisans. The old city, or Ichan Kala, was built between the 10th and 19th centuries, carefully restored over the past fifty years and is today an open-air museum and the region’s finest existing example of an old Silk Road city. Within its walls, the 26-hectare district contains 23 madrassahs, six mosques, six mausoleums, bazaars, a hammam bath and 290 old, listed houses. Historical and architectural delights include the blue-tiled Kalta Minar minaret; the Kunya Ark, or Old Fortress, where over the centuries the khans resided; and the ancient darvazas, or city gates, through which travellers would pass in and out of old Khiva.

Ulu Mosque and Divrigi Hospital
TURKEY

Considered the most elaborately decorated medieval monuments in the Anatolia region of Turkey and as masterpieces of Islamic architecture, the Ulu Mosque and Hospital in Divrigi were built during the reign of Emir Ahmet Shah in 1229. The mosque’s highly sophisticated vault construction and the creative, exuberant style of animal and flower carvings, especially on the three doorways, are unique features of the complex which is a UNESCO-listed site. The hospital, commissioned by the emir’s wife, was converted into a madrassa in the 18th century and the complex was used as secret hideaways for the treasures of Istanbul’s Topkapi Museum during World War II. Both buildings feature striking decorative elements derived from Iranian and other influences.
Heritage Cities

Xian

CHINA

During 11 dynasties the city of Xian (formerly known as Chang’an) was the capital of China and is considered by many scholars as the true starting point for the Silk Road on the Asian mainland. From Xian, the route divided into two separate roads so travellers could avoid the often times fatal Taklamakan Desert.

According to historians, the first person to travel the Silk Road was Chinese – Zhang Qian – who trekked West in the 2nd century BC to search for military allies against the Huns and returned home 13 years later full of fascinating tales, making him a kind of Marco Polo in reverse.

Monuments from the golden days of the great trade route can still be visited today such as the well-preserved ancient city wall and gate towers, as well as the impressive Great Wild Goose Pagoda. Xian’s Shaanxi Provincial Historical Museum boasts a special Silk Road exhibit and the city frequently hosts international Silk Road conferences and meetings.

Mashad

IRAN

Religious sites were also destinations for those traversing the Silk Road and the Iranian city of Mashad has long been an important pilgrimage centre for Shiite Muslims from around the world. Long before they reach the city, the devotees can see the golden dome of the shrine of Imam Reza, the eighth imam they have come to honour and who was buried here after his death by suspected
poisoning in the 9th century. Dazzling mirror work, chased gold and silver designs, marble and intricate tile work decorate the mosque which is visited by an estimated one million pilgrims a year from around the world. Another important site is the turquoise-domed Gowhar Shad Mosque, built by the wife of a Timurid shah in the 15th century. Many visitors to Mashad make the short journey to Toos to visit the tomb of Persia’s finest epic poet, Ferdowsi, or to Neishapur where Omar Khayyam is buried, before visiting the bazaar to purchase one of the fine, locally-made carpets.

**Samarkand**
**UZBEKISTAN**
Samarkand, almost alone among the Silk Road cities, symbolized the mystery and magnificence of the exotic East and Central Asia. Over the centuries it has been the sole inspiration for many travellers to make the dangerous trek along the route and spawned many fascinating tales. Once known as Afrasiab, this city of magnificent turquoise and buff-coloured mosques and mausoleums is still one of the treasures of the Silk Road.

One of those mausoleums is that of the great and feared conqueror Tamerlane whose capital was Samarkand and from where he and his descendents set out to subdue surrounding lands and peoples to create a true trans-Asian empire. On any must-see list in Samarkand is Registan Square, the Bibi Khanum Mosque, the Shah-i-Zinda mausoleum complex and the Imam Al-Bulahari Mausoleum shrine located just outside the city. Visitors today also throng Samarkand’s famous bazaars to buy handicrafts and other traditional items from the region. The city was the site of the Samarkand Declaration on Silk Road Tourism in 1994.

**Nara**
**JAPAN**
Widely recognized as the final eastern terminus of the Silk Road, Nara was the ancient capital of Japan and where the country’s primary sites from that era are located. One of the highlights is the Shosoin Treasure Repository of the Emperor where many valuable pieces such as jewels, silverware, glass work, writing instruments and other artefacts linked to the Silk Road are housed.

Another attraction is the Todaiji Temple built in the 8th century and famous for its Great Buddha, the largest bronze statue in the world. Horuji Temple in Nara is one of the oldest temples in Japan and also the oldest wooden structure in the world. Chinese Buddhist priests founded Toshodaiji Temple to introduce Ritsu doctrines to local believers. Nara is also home of the highly-acclaimed Research Centre for Silk Roadology established in 1989 to study the history and culture of the route and sponsor Silk Road conferences.

**Peshawar**
**PAKISTAN**
Silk Road travellers arriving from the West and from Central Asia passed through the fabled Khyber Pass and nearby Peshawar on their way to South Asia. In those days the city’s bazaars were fascinating hubs of commercial activity and remain so today with shops offering silk, samovars, priceless rugs, spices, leather, gold and silver, just as they have for centuries.

Housed in a building dating from the British Raj, Peshawar Museum contains some of the finest works of the Ghandara civilization which flourished centuries before Christ, including sculptures, terracotta figurines and everyday objects, as well as a mammoth standing Buddha. There are also fine displays of Islamic and tribal artefacts.

One of the city’s most impressive sights for
generations of visitors is the Bala Hisaar Fort at the eastern approach to Peshawar. The fortress' origins are lost in the mists of time but it was described by the early Chinese voyager Hsuan Tsang and is today a military headquarters.

Aleppo
SYRIA
One of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in history, Aleppo was a flourishing hub for several important trade routes in the region, linking Mesopotamia, the Fertile Crescent, the Arabian Peninsula and Egypt. Centuries later, the city handled commercial traffic in goods from the East bound for France, England and the Netherlands. Caravans were, of course, the main mode of trade and merchants, their beasts and cargos would put up at “khans” or caravanserais, some of which are still in use. The name of one, the Banadiqa Khan, hints at the history of commerce here as “banadiqa” means “the inhabitants of Venice” in Arabic. Aleppo’s souks, or markets, remain bustling business centres and are little changed since the days when Europeans haggled over prices and products with their local counterparts. Sites dating from those times include the Citadel fortress with its crenellated battlements and towers frowning over the city, the Great Mosque and the many churches, ancient houses, Arab baths and schools.

Istanbul
TURKEY
Where East and West truly merge, Istanbul remains one of the world’s most fascinating and vibrant metropolises. As the one-time seat of the Byzantine Empire, the city then known as Constantinople was the centre of the Christian world for many centuries. But following its conquest by the Muslim Turks in the 15th century, it entered a new era as the seat of the Islamic Caliphate and of the vast Ottoman Empire which stretched across most of the Near and Middle East.

Through the centuries, the city’s rulers built the most magnificent monuments, both secular and religious, and Istanbul today is a must for anyone fascinated by history and the intermingling of cultures. At the top of the list for any visitor is the domed Hagia Sofia, originally built as a church in the 6th century and later converted into a mosque with towering minarets. Other sites include the Topkapi Palace, where the sultans held court and gambolled in the opulent harem; the stunning Blue Mosque, decorated with the famous Iznik tiles, and a host of palaces, baths and churches. The glory days of the Silk Road are recalled in the Covered Bazaar; considered the largest such market in the world.

Pendzhikent
TAJIKISTAN
Dating from the 5th century and built on a commanding site overlooking the Zerafshan River, Pendzhikent was a stopover 1,000 years ago on the great highway where the native Sogdians coexisted with Chinese and Indian traders, while Zoroastrians, Hindus and Buddhists all freely practiced their religions. A key Silk Road link nearby funnelled goods east to China or south towards the subcontinent and was in use until the 1940s. Arab invaders destroyed the old city then known as Bunijkath, but modern-day visitors can pick out where Zoroastrian temples, mansions and the citadel once stood. A wealth of fascinating objects from the height of the city’s splendour were excavated in the 1930s and can be seen at the Rudaki Museum which also contains reproductions of Sogdian murals, including one depicting a Chinese envoy meeting with local authorities and several others showing dignitaries dressed in silks.

Almaty
KAZAKHSTAN
Besieged and wrecked by the Mongols, Almaty was a Silk Road city famous for its apples, from which it’s Kazakh name is derived. Colonized by the expanding Russian empire in the 19th century, Almaty received waves of ethnic Korean and German deportees under the Soviets and the descendents of these exiles today mix freely with the Kazakhs and Russians to create a cosmopolitan atmosphere.
One highlight of the city is the Central State Museum that features displays chronicling the history of Kazakhstan from the age of the dinosaurs to the present. Of particular note are a scene of the Mongols looting a Kazakh city in the 13th century; a replica of the fabulous 5th century suit of golden armour belonging to a Scythian notable discovered near Lake Issyk Kul and a display detailing local nomadic life centred around a huge yurt and there is even a stuffed camel for added colour.

**Jerusalem**

Described as “The City Which Belongs to the World”, Jerusalem was already an ages-old entrepot centuries before the Silk Road existed and Jews, Romans, Byzantines, Arabs, Crusaders, Mameluks, Ottomans and the British have all left their marks. Sacred to the world’s three great faiths, Jerusalem is a fascinating blend of ancient monuments and religious shrines where the deeply traditional easily coexists with the most modern. Spreading over the Judean Hills and located halfway between the Mediterranean and the Dead Sea, Jerusalem is the heart of the Holy Land with much of its historical centre surrounded by perfectly preserved 16th century walls built by the Ottoman Turks. Sites here revered by Jews, Muslims and Christians include the Temple Mount, the Western Wall, the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, the Via Dolorosa, the Mount of Olives and Gethsemane. After viewing these monuments, visitors can spend hours touring the twisting lanes and bustling bazaars of the old city, walking in the footsteps of so much of mankind’s secular and religious history.

**Tbilisi**

**Georgia**

A crossroads of history, trade and invasion, Tbilisi was founded in the 5th century and was at one time conquered by Persians, Seljuk Turks, Arabs and Russians. Georgian kings made the city their capital on several occasions over the centuries and Tbilisi was famed for its sulphur hot springs, vibrant city centre and old caravanserais. The stout towers and high walls of the Narikala Fortress provide an excellent view of today’s Tbilisi, once again the capital of the former Soviet republic and which offers a myriad of attractions for the visitor. In the Old Town, houses with ornate wooden balconies recall the past, as do the Sioni Cathedral and Anchiskhati Church. Pre-Christian gold ornaments and important medieval relics are on view at the Georgian State Museum and the Georgian Art Museum while the Open-Air Museum displays rural dwellings brought from around the country and faithfully restored.

**Athens**

**Greece**

Athens, Greece’s capital is known as the birthplace of democracy and for its theatrical performances underneath the Parthenon. A walking tour of Plaka can be combined with a visit to the Acropolis and the National Archaeological Museum. Other tours include a day’s outing to Cape Sounion, an early morning climb up to Lycabettus Hill followed by visits to the Goulandris Museum of Cycladic and Ancient Greek Art, as well as the Byzantine Museum. A day trip can be taken to the Metaxoughio area, an entire neighbourhood in the city center with its old silk factories that are being converted into cultural centers.
Selim Caravanserai Tour
ARMENIA
Beginning in the Armenian capital Yerevan, the tour’s first stop in the Khor Virap Abbey which is an important pilgrimage destination for Armenians and where, according to legend, St. Gregory the Illuminator was imprisoned for 13 years before the king accepted Christianity (making Armenia the first Christian nation in the world) and freed him. Noravank Monastery is one of the most vivid monuments dating from medieval times with the vestibule of the church decorated with religious reliefs. Silk Road merchants swapped news and tales of the road at the Selim caravanserai, built in 1332. The National Park of Sevan is known as “The Pearl of Armenia” and Lake Sevan is one of the highest navigable lakes in the world at 2,000 meters above sea level.

Grand Caucasian Range Tour
AZERBAIJAN
Azerbaijan, one of the countries straddling the East-West juncture of the Eurasian landmass, has many attractions related to the Silk Road as well as a wealth of natural wonders and this tour of the northeastern and southwestern slopes of the Grand Caucasian Range takes in both. Visitors first stop off at the famous, 6th century fortress of Chyrag-gala, then proceed along the dramatic Utugchai Gorge to the Khaltan Pass and the Ghirdymanchai Gorge, following the old Caucasian artery linking Europe and Asia. The
ancient fort of the Albanian tsar Djavanshir is next on the itinerary. Travellers traverse the mountain plateau of Shaknabat and the Shakhdag range before arriving at a cluster of villages which still preserve their medieval way of life and distinct language.

Tour of Kashgar
CHINA
Historically the city of Kashgar was the meeting point for four Silk Road branches and today is still a trade hub for merchants from Pakistan, the neighboring former Soviet republics and, of course, China itself. A tour of the city’s historical sites begins with a visit to the 15th century Id Kah Mosque, which is the largest in the Xinjiang region, and located on the bustling square of the same name. But the city’s best example of Islamic architecture is the green-domed Abakh Hoja Tomb that contains the remains of five generations of Uygur nobility. Last but not least is the Sunday market, considered one of the finest bazaars in Central Asia and where shoppers can find anything under the sun every day of the week. On Sunday, camels and other livestock are traded.

Islamic Cairo Tour
EGYPT
As the centre of the Muslim world for many centuries, Cairo is filled with Islamic monuments and this tour takes such structures as the Citadel of Salah Al-Din Al-Ayyubi, a magnificent fortress which was home to most Egyptian rulers for around 700 years; the 19th century Alabaster Mosque, or Mosque of Mohamed Ali, featuring impressive domes and minarets; the Mosque of Sultan Hassan dating from 14th century; the Al-Zahar Mosque located on the grounds of the famous Islamic university and one of the oldest mosques in the world; the Mosque of Ahmed Ibn Tulon, one of the largest mosques in the world and dating from the 9th century. The tour also includes the Mosques of Al-Muayid and Amr Ibn Al-Aas.

Georgian 16-day Cultural Tour
GEORGIA
Although small, Georgia is rich in dramatic landscapes. The towering, snow-capped Caucasus Mountains descend to the
subtropical Black Sea coast and fertile valleys and rushing rivers give way to semi-desert regions. As one travels around the country, there is a plethora of ancient cave towns and fortresses to visit, as well as churches and monasteries, archaeological sites, vineyards and more. This tour takes in all the country’s main attractions and visits almost every historical province: Kartli, Kakheti, Imereti, Guria, Racha, Achara, Svaneti, Mekheti, Mtiuleti and Khevi. All along the way, travelling experience the history, culture and traditions of each region and enjoy the warm hospitality and wonderful food for which Georgia is famous.

Tabriz City Tour
IRAN
Situated on a major trade and invasion route in northwestern Iran near the Turkish and Azeri borders, Tabriz is a former capital of the country and has seen a lot of history. A tour of the city would include the 14th century Arg citadel that was built on the ruins of a huge mosque and from which criminals were once thrown to their deaths; the Kabood Mosque, known for its outstanding mosaic tile work; the Shah Goli park with an artificial lake located just east of the city and a popular weekend picnic spot for local residents; the maze-like 15th century covered bazaar famous for its carpets and jewelry; and the Church of St. Mary, dating from the 18th century and one of a half dozen churches serving Tabriz’ vibrant Armenian community.

Northern and Southern Tours
GREECE
The Northern tour starts at Thessaloniki, the capital of Macedonia and second most important city of the Byzantine Empire. It passes through Pella, the birthplace of Alexander the Great, Eastern Macedonia and Thrace and ends at the small town of Soufli with its characteristic cocoon houses where the tradition of sericulture and silkworm breeding has been kept till this day. The Southern tour starts from Nafplion, ancient capital of Greece and passes through the archaeological sites of Mycenae, Epidaurus and Olympia as well as the modern city of Kalamata, renowned for its silk scarves. The tour ends at the impressive ruins of the Byzantine city of Mystras where sericulture flourished for centuries and the many mulberry trees used for that purpose gave their name to the Peloponnese (Moreas) region.

Nabatean Spice and Incense Route
ISRAEL
Two hundred years before the birth of Christ, the Nabataean empire extended from the Sinai Desert to what is today Saudi Arabia, with the capital in Petra (in present day Jordan). Israel’s Negev Desert was a vital hub for the Nabataeans trade in frankincense, myrrh, spices and luxury goods flowing from the Arabian Peninsula to the Mediterranean ports and their settlements were later occupied by the Romans and Byzantines. One of the most impressive of seven excavated and restored towns is Mamshit, or Memphis to the Romans, where visitors can view Nabataean palaces, Byzantine churches, ancient baths and reservoirs. Filled with dramatic landscapes, fortresses and oases, this area is also popular for desert safari tours.
Asuka and Tonomine Tour
JAPAN
In Japan’s Nara prefecture, the Asuka and Tonomine areas contain a number of fascinating attractions dating from prehistoric times to the 19th century with many featuring the large stones common to the region. The Ishibutai Burial Mound, composed of 30 gigantic stones, is one of the largest such tombs in the country with a 19-meter-long chamber and the Kameishi stone, named for its tortoise-like shape, baffles experts on how it was used. Another mysterious stone is the Sakafuneishi which may have been used for drawing water in the Imperial Palace garden or to squeeze sake and oil. Attractions from more recent times here include the 6th century Asukadera Temple and the Kashihara Jingu Shrine built in 1889 and situated in a lovely, tree-filled park.

Tour of Otrar
KAZAKHSTAN
An ancient city along the old Silk Road and the flourishing centre of a trade network which stretched from the Mediterranean to China, Otrar was famed for its huge library and massive fortress boasting a unique water supply system which helped the city repulse many sieges over the century. But in the 13th century, the governor killed trade envoys sent by Ghengis Khan and the Mongol sent a huge army to extract revenge by laying waste to the city as part of a new Central Asian campaign. Visitors to the city can see the mud-brick ruins of Otrar’s main citadel, the central town district, suburbs and earthen fortifications.

Korea and the Silk Road
DPR KOREA
As one of the first silk-producing regions in the world, Korea was instrumental in the establishment of the Silk Road and Korean silk was considered the finest produced in northeastern Asia during the Koguryo Dynasty. Local merchants carried the precious material east to Japan and also west to Mongolia and on to Central Asia where frescoes in a Samarkand palace show two envoys sent by the Koguryo king. This tour highlights the history of those times with visits to the Tangun Mausoleum in Pyongyang, the Central History Museum, Nampo, Mount Kuwol and other sites that contain 6,000-year-old silk production artefacts and examples of ancient silk.

Nomad Tour
MONGOLIA
With around half of Mongolians still living as nomads, an excellent way to learn about these tenacious and traditional people is to include home stays with them as part of a tour of the country. Travellers can choose to stay with nomads from several different ethnic groups or in different areas of this huge country. Visitors choosing this exciting option can experience the ages-old hospitality for which Mongolians are famous and witness their hosts handling horses and livestock, hunting, practicing their shaman-based religion and going about their daily routines. Accommodation is provided in wooden-framed, “gers” or round felt tents also known as yurts, and food is simple and basic, consisting mostly of lamb, milk and cheese.
Tour of Old Lahore
PAKISTAN
One of Pakistan’s oldest cities, Lahore over the centuries was the seat of government of Muslim sultans, Moghul rulers in the 16th century and then the Sikhs before it became an important city for the British during the Raj. On any traveller’s must-see list in Lahore would be the Shalimar Gardens, built by Shah Jehan and famed for the 400 fountains, lakes and waterfalls; Akbar the Great’s Royal Fort with its marble pavilions, courts, balconies and gates; the red sandstone Badshahi Mosque dating from the 17th century and said to have the largest mosque courtyard in the world able to accommodate 60,000 of the faithful; and the majestic Tomb of Jehangir, boasting a Moghul garden, intricate marble screens and floral designs on the marble grave of the great ruler.

Ancient Christian Churches
SYRIA
Christianity spread through Syria from the earliest days of the religion and many Christian sites still exist around the country. One of the most important is the village of Maalola where the inhabitants still speak Aramic, the language of Christ, and which contains the monasteries of Saint Sarkis and Saint Takla, named for two early Christian martyrs. Nearby is the Lady of Sednaya convent. In the great city of Aleppo is the Byzantine Cathedral of St. Helena, later converted into a mosque. The tour includes visits to the Mar Moussa monastery in Nabk, the Bosra Cathedral and the Saint Simeon Basilica, or Qalaat Samaan, which during the Middle Ages was one of the most important churches in the world, and Saint Paul’s Church in Damascus.

The Sogdian Route
TAJIKISTAN
Three key auxiliary routes of the Silk Road wound through what is today Tajikistan and were heavily travelled between the 5th and 12th centuries: the Sogdian, Karategin and Pamir routes. The tour along the Sogdian route, which ran from Samarkand to Kashkar; begins in Penjikent, an ancient city of the great trading empire of the Sogdians, and which today still bears traces of Buddhist, Persian, Chinese and Greek influences. Ura Tyube, another stop, was seized by Alexander the Great and is famed for its Islamic monuments and the nearby archaeological sites. Other sites on the tour include Kokand, Isfara, Bunijkat, Ayni and Zaravshan.

Civilizations Tour
TURKEY
There are few better ways to journey through Turkey’s fascinating past than with a tour of southeastern Anatolia starting in the city of Diyarbakir where traces of the Romans, Byzantines and Ottomans remain. Then on to Hasankeyf to view the castle and the Artukid before visiting Mardin. An ancient citadel overlooks the city and its famous religious monuments such as the Kaimiye and Zinciriye madrassahs and the Deyr-ul Zaferan monastery of the Syrian-Jacobite Christians. Next on the itinerary is Sanliurfa, which over the ages has hosted Seljuks, Arabs, Byzantines and others and the nearby Harran, famed for its beehive houses and the world’s first university, which was once occupied by the Hittites, Assyrians, Persians and Romans. The tour ends in Gaziantep and the Sarkli cave, one of the oldest settlements in Anatolia.
Crimea Silk Road Sites

UKRAINE

Positioned at a vital crossroads for both trade and invasion, the Crimea in present-day Ukraine played an important role between Europe and Asia over the centuries. This tour combines invigorating walking excursions with relaxation at the seaside, along with historical sites highlighted by the Eski-Kermen cave town dating back to the 6th century that was heavily fortified with impressive battlements and well-protected gates, and the Shuldan cave monastery. Another must-see attraction is the Khan’s Palace in Bakhchisaray, the seat of the Crimean khans who were descended from Genghis Khan’s invaders. Built by Christian slaves in the 16th century, the palace contains a museum with furniture, textiles, glassware and other objects detailing the lives of the khans.

Kalian Complex in Bukhara

UZBEKISTAN

Bukhara remains one of the true jewels of the Silk Route. In the old days, caravans searching for the city from the desert were guided to Bukhara by the intricately-decorated minaret soaring into the sky from the Poi Kalian ensemble. In its 1,000 years of existence, the minaret was spared by Genghis Khan, used as an execution site where convicted criminals were tossed from the top, and damaged by a Soviet shell. Alongside is the turquoise-tiled Kalian Mosque, the second-largest mosque in Central Asia that was destroyed by Genghis Khan and later rebuilt. The complex also contains the Kalian madrassah where many generations of budding Muslim scholars and mullahs have dedicated years to studying the Koran and arguing the finer points of Islam.
The Silk Road traversed some of the most dramatic landscapes on the planet: the highest mountain ranges, most extensive deserts, endless steppes, huge rivers, inland seas and everything in between. These natural wonders still exist, of course, and today's travellers have the opportunity to enjoy an entire range of well-developed and exciting outdoor activities from skiing, white water rafting and climbing in the mountains, to bird watching, trekking, hunting and fishing.

ARMENIA

Natural Sites
An easy day trip from Yerevan is Mount Aragats that boasts four separate peaks with the northern summit the highest at 4,090 meters. Even novice hikers fitted out with good boots, compass, water and adequate clothing can reach the southernmost peak in around two hours. Another popular ramble is to the Shaki Waterfall, some 200 kilometers southeast of Yerevan, where the Vorotan River tumbles down through the impressive gorge.

Adventure and Sport Tourism
Tsakhadzor means “Valley of Flowers” and spring and summer are best for treks through this region. But in the winter, skiers can enjoy the slopes where the Armenian Olympic team trains with ski and boot rentals available.

Special Interest Tourism
Situated between two faunal zones, Armenia hosts both northern and southern species of birds and is fast becoming popular with foreign birdwatchers seeking out the some 350 known species. Armenia is the breeding ground for five species of eagle: steppe, golden, lesser spotted, booted and short-toed snake eagle, as well as other birds of prey and several rare and endangered species particular to the Caucasus.

Hunting and Fishing
Hare, ducks and quail are the most common prey for local and visiting hunters in the country’s mountain and lake districts, while excellent trout fishing is the attraction at Lake Sevan, the Araks and Pazdan rivers and a number of reservoirs.

AZERBAIJAN

Natural Sites
Situated on the northern slopes of the Murovdag mountain range at an altitude of 1,576 meters above sea level, Lake Geygel is surrounded by thick forests and is the center of a natural reserve that includes a 100-hectare recreational area. Another natural site not to be missed is Nabran, just 160 kilometers from Baku and where forested hills meet the golden sands of the Caspian Sea. There are modern resorts in the area catering to both Azeri and foreign visitors.

Adventure and Sport Tourism
Trekking and equestrian tours of varying length and difficulty are available through the Garachai River gorge, as well as to the summits of the Ragdan, Garyndag and Shagdag mountains.
Special Interest Tourism
Bird watching is available from holiday camps in the Talysh region where eagles, pheasant, peacocks and other wild birds are common. There are colonies of griffons inhabiting the high rocks in some mountain and forested areas and game tours are organized in the Shemakha region.

Hunting and Fishing
One of the more exotic ways to hunt in Azerbaijan is using falcons which go after quail, pheasants, little bustard, partridge and grouse. There is a wealth of fishing opportunities in the Caspian (including spear fishing) and anglers seek out trout, perch, carp, bream, salmon and other species in the country’s rivers and lakes.

CHINA

Natural Sites
The Tianshan Mountains, stretching 2,500 kilometers from east to west through central Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, have an average altitude of 4,000 meters and contain stunning scenery, including the Kaidu River; a lake inhabited by large numbers of swans in the spring and summer and snow-capped peaks. The many river valleys and grassland areas are bursting with wild flowers in season and dotted with the white tents of the Kazak herders.

Adventure and Sport Tourism
Western China’s mountains and deserts along the Silk Road provide ample opportunity for dune safaris, sand sledding, camel treks, expeditions by horseback, hiking, camping and mountain climbing, as well as some winter sports. There is also rafting on the Yangtze and Yellow Rivers in Qinghai Province.

Special Interest Tourism
Cavers and geologists, both professional and amateur, find Western China fascinating with its many caves and unique geological formations and deposits. Bird watchers flock to Bird Island in Qinghai Province where lodging and food are available.

Hunting and Fishing
Foreign big game hunters in China bring home record trophies of such animals as Marco Polo sheep, Tien Shan argali and other prizes. The country’s many lakes and rivers are perfect spots for the vacationing fisherman keen to catch trout and other species.

EGYPT

Natural Sites
Hundreds of thousands of palm trees and an estimated 70,000 olive trees thrive in the Siwa Oasis in the Western Desert, thanks to the 300 natural springs which also attract a variety of birds. Although visited by Alexander the Great, the oasis’ isolation over the intervening centuries has aided the Berber inhabitants in largely maintaining their unique culture.

Adventure and Sport Tourism
Fantastic coral reefs, crystal clear water and schools of brightly coloured fish attract divers and snorkelers from all over to Egypt’s “Red Sea Riviera” which has become one of the world’s leading resort areas. Another activity for adventure-minded visitors are the desert safaris organized in the Sinai or the Western Desert. Egypt also boasts many fine golf courses that are popular with northern European visitors in the winter months.
Special Interest Tourism
Bird watching at Egypt’s many oases where species from Europe come to spend the winter, spa visits to special health resorts along the Red Sea and in Aswan and yacht tourism stopping off at Red Sea and Mediterranean ports are all highly popular with foreigners.

Hunting and Fishing
Although a desert country, Egypt has many lakes where fresh water fishing is popular and boats and equipment can be hired for deep sea fishing excursions on the Red Sea. Ducking hunting is possible at some of the country’s oases.

GEORGIA

Natural Sites
With its towering mountains, beautiful coast, monasteries and vineyards, Georgia is rich in its variety of landscapes. The Borjomi-Kharagauli National Park covers 68,000 hectares and is one of the largest in Europe with forests, canyons and alpine meadows. In western Georgia, the Kolkheti National Park contains a state nature reserve and extensive wetlands which include Lake Paleastomi.

Special Interest Tourism
There are botanic tours, bird watching tours and horse trekking of from one to five days organized in the Borjomi-Kharagauli National Park.

Hunting and Fishing
Wild boar, deer, mountain goat and bear are just some of the trophy game available in Georgia’s Kahehi region and the central Caucasus mountain range. Brown trout is the fish to go for in the Assa River, high in the remote Khevsureti region, and fisherman have returned with specimens of 30 cm in length and more. Many locals still catch fish by hand in some parts of the country.

GREECE

Natural Sites
Brown bears are not usually associated with southeast Europe, but the huge beasts are among the many wild animals that inhabit the 7,000-hectare Pindos National Park situated between Ioannina and Grevena. One of Europe’s most important wetlands, the Evros Delta, offers a diversity of habitats including coastal lakes, lagoons, rivers and islets where 330 varieties of birds call home. Wild horses are among the delta’s 80 mammal species.

Adventure and Sport Tourism
It was the home of the gods to the ancient Greeks and now mere mortals can enjoy climbing Mt. Olympus, just one of the exciting options in Greece for the adventurous traveller. In winter there is skiing in Parnassos and when the warm weather returns white water rafters and kayakers flock to the Voidomatis River. Mainland Greece’s long Mediterranean shoreline and many islands provide a wealth of sites for scuba and skin divers.

Special Interest Tourism
Nature lovers who insist on including flora and fauna spotting will find a true paradise for their pastime here with bird and flower viewing along the shores of Lake Kerkini in northern Greece and bird and wild animal watching in the Evros Delta and around Lake Prespa.
Hunting and Fishing
According to the season, hunters can enjoy going after fowl, wild boars and other game in designated areas around Greece and there is an abundance of fishing opportunities in the country’s lakes and surrounding Mediterranean Sea.

IRAN

Natural Sites
Visible from many hundreds of miles away, Mount Damavand at 5,770 meters is one of the highest peaks in the Eurasian land mass and its summit is covered with snow throughout the year. It is an excellent site for trekking in the summer months with many springs, streams and lush vegetation. In contrast, Iran’s extensive salt deserts in the centre of the country are some of the least inhabitable places on earth, but still fascinating to visit.

Adventure and Sport Tourism
Mountain ranges, deserts, plains, forests, coastal regions and the world’s largest inland sea all provide venues for adventure travellers whether it is skiing, cave exploring, desert safaris, mountain climbing, scuba diving, horse trekking or even windsurfing in the Caspian Sea.

Special Interest Tourism
Wildlife spotting is particularly rewarding in Iran where wild zebras, mountain sheep, wild boar, cheetahs, gazelles and others species – some quite rare such as the leopard – are found. For the bird watcher species native to the country and migrants passing through on their way north or south include eagles, geese, flamingos, falcons, owls, pheasant and grouse.

Hunting and Fishing
Iran boasts dozens of designated hunting reserves where foreign game hunters can seek out Persian ibex, several species of wild sheep and wild boar on which there are no limits as the pigs are considered a pest. Caspian snowcock, pheasant, quail, geese, grouse, partridge and duck are also hunted while fishermen can try for salmon, trout and perch.

ISRAEL

Natural Sites
Israel’s Dead Sea is the lowest place on earth and the saltiest body of water in the world. Despite its name, the Dead Sea is also rich in flora and fauna, while the many hot springs and low altitude make the perfect location for spa and health tourism. The Ramon “Machtesh”, or erosive crater in the Negev Desert, is a treasure trove of geological phenomena, unique flora and fauna and even archaeological sites with hiking trails and desert safari routes.

Adventure and Sport Tourism
Camel tours and off-road desert safaris are popular pastimes in Israel and for those more interested in a sea holiday, there is wonderful sailing along the Mediterranean coast and great diving among the coral reefs off the Red Sea resort of Eilat.

Special Interest Tourism
The faithful of all religions come to Israel to visit the many sites mentioned in the Old and New Testaments and those with an interest in archaeology can take part in digs of Biblical and historical
excavations. The country is also a major destination for bird watchers as 500 million migrating birds pass through Israel twice a year.

**JAPAN**

**Natural Sites**
For over 1,000 years, logging has been prohibited in Mount Kasuga Primeval Forest as the mountain is considered sacred and is designated as a World Heritage Site cultural landscape. Sightseers visit the forest to view its evergreen, broadleaf trees such as oak and chinquapin. The Yoshinoyama Mountainous Area is famous for its cherry blossoms with the entire mountain divided into four areas according to the order in which the cherry trees blossom in April. Yoshinoyama is also worth a visit in fall for the display of autumn leaf colours and in the winter for the dramatic snowscapes.

**Special Interest Tourism**
Many visitors come to Japan for the eco-tourism activities which include bird watching and forest and hot spring bathing.

**KAZAKHSTAN**

**Natural Sites**
Located near the former capital of Almaty, the 200,000-hectare Ile-Alatau National Park boasts heights of between 600 and 5,000 meters, picturesque forests of fir, apple and apricot trees, rare flowers and more than 1,700 species of animals, birds and fish. The Aksu-Dzhabagly Preserve is the only one of its kind in all of Central Asia and was one of the first in the world to receive the status of a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve. Logging, farming and industry have been banned there for more than 70 years.

**Adventure and Sport Tourism**
Kazakhstan’s extensive mountain ranges afford visitors many opportunities to practice such adventure sports as white-water rafting, hiking, mountain climbing, skiing and horse trekking with professional guides and world-class facilities and equipment.

**Special Interest Tourism**
Bird watching and botanical tours in the country’s natural parks and preserves are popular with foreign visitors, as are archaeological tours taking in sites dating from prehistorical times.

**Hunting and Fishing**
For thousands of years, Kazakh nomads have hunted fox, wolf and hares with golden eagles from horseback and duck and partridge with hawks or falcons. These days, visitors can accompany these hunters of the steppes on exciting trips and there is also more traditional hunting with hounds and guns for fox, wolf, badger and hare. In the country’s cold, clear rivers, lakes and streams trout, carp and the mammoth sheetfish are the preferred prey of fishermen.

**DPR KOREA**

**Natural Sites**
Situated on the border between DPR Korea and China, Mount Paektu is considered sacred among the region’s people and is virtually untouched by man. At 2,750 meters high, the mountain is a rugged expanse of peaks and deep river valleys. Another noted natural site is Mount Chilbo, located on the
central coast of North Hamgyong Province with astounding views of the peaks, valleys and sea.

**Adventure and Sport Tourism**
Treking through the stunning landscapes and vistas on Mount Paektu, Mount Chilbo and Mount Myohyang is the main adventure tourism activity in DPR Korea.

**REPUBLIC OF KOREA**

**Natural Sites**
The Republic of Korea is one of the best countries in East Asia for both serious and casual birdwatching as the country has some of the world’s most extensive tidal flats and steepest tidal ranges. Some 400 bird species have been spotted here and the best birdwatching is in mid-winter when many geese and ducks arrive from the north, or during the main migration seasons between April and May and from September to November.

**KYRGYZSTAN**

**Natural Sites**
A Central Asian country of tremendous natural beauty and proud nomadic traditions, Kyrgyzstan occupies the Tien-Shan mountain range which stretches over hundreds of kilometers across the north-eastern part of Central Asia. While much of its land area is mountainous, between the snow-covered mountain summits lie broad grassy highland valleys and a large salt lake- Issyk Kul, which occupies a highland basin in the north-east.

**Special Interest Tourism**
Rafting is a popular outdoor activity in Kyrgyzstan. Also horse trekking can be practiced throughout the Kyrgyz territory. There are excellent circuits for mountain biking available- given the variety of terrain in Kyrgyzstan, which ranges from deserts, steppes, mountains to glaciers. Scuba diving can be done in a clear water lake and also participating in treks with gliders and paraplanes is possible.

**Hunting and Fishing**
There are various means for hunting including the possibility to hunt with golden eagles accompanied by the nomadic people of the mountains. Of the possible preys, Marco Polo Sheep are the most popular. Fishing is possible in many mountain rivers and lakes. Popular fish are trout and pike-perch.

**MONGOLIA**

**Natural Sites**
This huge country’s most stunning natural site is easy to visit as it’s all around you: the fabled steppes. Mongolia’s grassy and windswept plains forged the nomadic tribes which carried all before them under the horse hair standard of Genghis Khan. Other breathtaking sites are the Gobi Desert, one of the most feared in the world and which was avoided by Silk Road travellers because of its size and myriad dangers, and Lake Huvsgul, known as “The Blue Pearl of Asia”.

**Adventure and Sport Tourism**
Steppe and mountain trekking, kayaking, camping trips with accommodations in traditional nomad “gers” or yurts, camel expeditions across the Gobi Desert and mountain and glacier climbing in the
majestic Altai Range are all on offer for the adventure traveller.

**Special Interest Tourism**
Situated between Siberia and the warm lands to the south, Mongolia hosts a wealth of migratory birds for watchers with local species including the Amur falcon, Altai snowcock, Oriental plover, Pallas’ fish eagle, Mongolian lark and many others. Wildlife spotters will delight in seeing the endangered Argali wild mountain sheep in the Gun-Galuut Nature Reserve as well as fox, gazelle and deer.

**Hunting and Fishing**
For anglers, Mongolia is a prime fishing ground for lenok, Siberian white fish, Siberian grayling and taimen, a type of trout known as the "King of the Rivers" and one of the largest freshwater fish on earth.

**PAKISTAN**

**Natural Sites**
Stretching from the Arabian Sea in the south to the Himalayas in the north, Pakistan is a huge country with a wide variety of landscapes and 14 national parks, as well as wildlife sanctuaries, game reserves and protected wetlands. The largest of the parks is the Hingol National Park along the Makran coast in Baluchistan and covering more than 600,000 hectares. Among the many animal species here are crocodiles and sea turtles. In the far north along the border with China, Khunjerab National Park hosts the extremely rare snow leopard, the Himalayan ibex, the Marco Polo sheep and the Tibetan red fox.

**Adventure and Sport Tourism**
With its mountains and deserts, Pakistan offers no end of adventure tourism such as white-water rafting on the Indus River and in the regions of Swat, Chitral and Hunza, as well as skiing, mountain biking and desert safaris.

**Special Interest Tourism**
Pakistan’s national parks are wonderful sites to spot such species as the elusive leopard, black bear, golden eagle, lammergeier vulture and peregrine falcon. Birdwatchers should visit the country’s many lakes such as Haleji in the south which is a major breeding, nesting and wintering area for water fowl.

**Hunting and Fishing**
Most wild animals are protected in Pakistan but hunters can pursue wild boar on special expeditions in the Punjab. Trout fishing is possible in the Gilgit, Swat and Chitral regions.

**SYRIA**

**Natural Sites**
Al Talila Reserve east of the tourism destination of Palmyra is one of Syria’s most important natural sites, an expanse of arid rangelands home to both exotic wild animal species such as gazelles and onyx, as well as nomadic tribesmen with their camel herds who retain traditional grazing rights. Other important natural sites are the Mar Mousa Reserve and the Shoh and Arz near the northwestern city of Idlib which is also rich in archaeological sites.

**Adventure and Sport Tourism**
The Syrian desert which extends over more than half the country is ideal for off-road vehicle safaris, camel riding and horseback excursions arranged by local tour organizers.
Special Interest Tourism

Foreign bird watchers flock to wetland and desert areas of Syria to spot the elusive Iraq babbler, Montagu’s harrier, steppe eagle, white-cheeked bulbul and other species. In the spring, flower spotting is a popular pastime as is watching the dramatic desert sunsets all year around.

TAJIKISTAN

Natural Sites
In its bid to protect the country’s fragile ecosystems, the government of Tajikistan has created a number of national parks, forest reserves, recreational zones and other areas open to the public with many located in the dramatic Pamir Mountains. Many of these protected areas are home to such species as the snow leopard, Bukhara deer, golden eagle, bear and spiral-horned goat as well as endangered trees and plants.

Adventure and Sport Tourism
Ice climbing, glacier trekking and mountain climbing on Somion Peak, the highest mountain in the entire region at 7,500 meters, are three of the more extreme adventure sports possible in Tajikistan. But there are also milder pursuits such as trekking or biking the Pamirs, or taking part in a jeep safari. It is best to use local guide services who know the region well.

Special Interest Tourism
Tajikistan’s mountains provide an excellent venue for bird watching and for those who want to attempt to see the indigenous Marco Polo sheep or other local animal species.

Hunting and Fishing
Big game hunters come from around the world to seek out the Marco Polo sheep on hunts organized by local experts with all modern conveniences provided. Other game here include wild boar, Urail sheep and the Siberian ibex.

TURKEY

Natural Sites
Situated in the central Turkish region of Cappadocia, the Ihlara Valley is a deep, narrow gorge 14 kilometers long. Carved out by a lovely river, the valley offers breathtakingly beautiful trekking routes and it is also famous for its churches, monasteries and cave homes built by Christian refugees centuries ago. The Kure Mountains National Park, covering 37,000 hectares in the western Black Sea region, hosts a wide range of wildlife, and is one of the most important sites for biodiversity in Europe.

Adventure and Sport Tourism
All around the country Turkey’s rivers are ideal for white water rafting and canoeing, while the extensive system of mountain ranges provides trekkers, hikers, mountain climbers and skiers with many places for their adventures. Tours by horseback are also popular and Turkey has facilities for paragliding, hang gliding and hot air ballooning.

Special Interest Tourism
Turkey’s rocky coastline between Izmir and Antalya indented with bays, coves, inlets is a yachtsman’s dream and many of the mooring sites are near impressive ancient monuments and ruins. Cave exploration is another pastime possible in many parts of the country.
Hunting and Fishing
Visiting foreigners are allowed to hunt in Turkey only in organized groups and with permission issued by the Environment and Forestry Ministry. Fishing licences are available through approved travel agencies.

UKRAINE

Natural Sites
Two of Ukraine’s most spectacular natural sites are Tchernorechenskyi (Black River) Canyon in Crimea with its dramatic gorges and swift-flowing river, and the Grishko Central Botanical Gardens covering 130 hectares and known for splendid landscapes and bracing air.

Adventure and Sport Tourism
Hiking, off-road vehicle safaris, rafting, mountaineering, skiing, cave exploring and camping are all possible in Ukraine and local guide services are available.

UZBEKISTAN

Natural Sites
Uzbekistan boasts three of Central Asia’s most prominent landscapes – desert, steppe and mountain, and all provide stunning sites for the travelling nature lover. The first reserve established in the country back in 1926 is the Zaamin National Park with 47,000 hectares and close to 200 species of animals and birds, including the rare Asiatic black bear, snow leopard, black stork and bearded vulture. Nearby is the Nuratin Nature reserve established to protect the Kyzyl Kum ram and which is famous for its canyons.

Adventure and Sport Tourism
Camel trekking in the desert, alpine skiing, cave exploring, mountaineering, hiking, rafting, rock climbing and mountain biking are the principal adventure sports for visitors in Uzbekistan and tour organizers can arrange trips with all modern conveniences.

Special Interest Tourism
Bird watchers are discovering the rich sightings in Uzbekistan where such species as Pander’s ground jay, the blue-cheeked bee eater and yellow-breasted tip call home. In the foothills of the Tien-Shan range, wild flower spotting in the spring is a popular activity for visitors.

Hunting and Fishing
Argali sheep, wolf, Siberian mountain buck, desert gazelle and the Tien-Shan bear are the prize big game trophies in Uzbekistan. There is wonderful fishing in the country’s many rivers and streams feeding off the snowfall from the high peaks and ranges.
Traditions and Culture on the Silk Road

In a region steeped in culture, the nomads, villagers and city dwellers of the Silk Road countries have customs dating back thousands of years. This rich tapestry of fascinating traditions include lifestyles, folk practices and beliefs, crafts and cuisine which modern-day visitors can also enjoy through the warm and welcoming hospitality of their Silk Road hosts.

ARMENIA

Traditions and Culture
Armenians and tourists gather each September in the capital Yerevan for the three-day Kenats Festival which salutes the country’s wine, food, music, arts and crafts.

Crafts
One of Armenia’s oldest crafts, which dates back at least to the 9th century, is the carving of stone crosses or “katchkars”. Found throughout the country, katchkars are also inscribed with important information on the history of the Armenian people. As in other countries of the region, carpet weaving is a major handicraft and the art has recently undergone a renaissance after decades of neglect.

Cuisine
Tender grape leaves stuffed with meat, rice and herbs and called “dolma” is one of the stars of the Armenian table, as is lavash, a tasty, oval-shaped flat bread. Armenian brandy and wine have won international awards.

AZERBAIJAN

Traditions and Culture
One of the most important silkworm breeding regions in the Middle East since ancient times, Azerbaijan’s silk makers are still active in Sheki, Ordubad and Ghiandj. A major holiday dating back to the pagan era and still celebrated today is Novruz Bayramy, or Spring Holiday, to mark the spring equinox on 20-21 March.
Crafts
Silk goods are a speciality of Azerbaijan’s artisans, as are fine wool carpets and decorative metalwork.

Cuisine
Rice “pilaus” made with a wide variety of meats, greens and even fruit are a staple in Azerbaijan where “shashlik” or kebabs of mutton, fish, chicken, potatoes and aubergines are popular main courses.

CHINA

Traditions and Culture
Western China, where most of the country’s Silk Road sites are located, is a true melting pot of many cultures including those of the local Uygur Sunni Muslim people, the Huis, the Tu minority, the Kazakhs, Tajiks, Mongols, the Han Chinese and even Tibetan Buddhists. And they all have their own traditions and beliefs.

Crafts
Exquisite embroidery, jade carvings, porcelain, calligraphy, batiks, bronzes and jade carvings are just some of the handicrafts available.

Cuisine
The thick noodle dish known as “laghman” is a favorite in China’s old Silk Road cities, as is “pulau”, here made with fried rice, mutton and grated turnip. The delicious flat bread called “nan”, thin-skinned dumplings, tea with milk and fermented mare’s milk are other local culinary delights.

EGYPT

Traditions and Culture
With one of the oldest cultures in the world, Egypt is steeped in tradition and visitors can witness timeless scenes and activities in tiny Nile villages and the big cities. A fascinating insight into pharaonic times is the Sun Festival at the Abu Simbel Temple held from April to October.

Crafts
Egypt’s bazaars and souvenir shops are wonderful places to browse, haggle and buy everything from copies of ancient hieroglyphics painted on papyrus to Islamic art. Of particular delight are copperware from Cairo and Luxor and gold and silver jewellery.

Cuisine
Mediterranean and Middle Eastern cooking come together in Egyptian cuisine and just a few of the tastier examples are the cabbage rolled around rice and green vegetables known as “mahshy”; vegetables cooked with tomato sauce, or “bamya”, and “molokheyia”, a delicious green vegetable soup.
GEORGIA

Traditions and Culture
Georgia has been a centre for silk growing and manufacturing since the 5th century B.C. and these activities continue today. Silk cloth and clothing can be purchased in souvenir shops. Other age-old traditions include wine making and sheep breeding.

Crafts
Jewellery crafted to ancient designs is popular for foreign souvenir hunters, as are ceramics - especially bowls and glasses for wine.

Cuisine
Highlights of the Georgian cuisine include “katchapuri”, a thin cheese pie; young lamb cooked in a sauce of damson plums, onions and herbs called “chakapuli”; grilled sturgeon; and peppery mutton dumplings or “khinkhali”.

GREECE

Traditions and Culture
A flourishing traditional way of life in Greece is the growing of mastic trees which provides the raw material for chewing gum, liquors, candies and medicines. For visitors wanting to experience old Greek culture first hand, there are traditional mansions and fortress-like towers converted into guest houses in central Greece and the southern Peloponnese.

Crafts
The island of Sifnos is famed for its unique ceramics, while wood carvings are the keepsake of choice for visitors to Skyros.

Cuisine
Greek cuisine is famous around the world, but of course it is best eaten in its homeland. Dishes to try include grilled meats (“souvaki” or “gyros”), cheese pie, stuffed cabbage and grape leaves, feta cheese and walnut cake, all washed down with local wine, ouzo or retsina.

IRAN

Traditions and Culture
Nomads from various ethnic and linguistic groups still live, migrate and tend their flocks much as they have for thousands of years in Iran, and villagers and townspeople along the old Silk Road still wear the traditional dress of their forefathers. A rite celebrated since pre-Islamic times is “nowruz” or “new year” which ushers in spring.
Crafts
Carpet weaving is perhaps Iran’s best known craft industry and visitors can pickup rugs ranging from simple tribal pieces of wool to grand carpets made with silk. Iranian hand printed cloths and metalwork are also prized for their beauty.

Cuisine
A fresh salad of diced tomatoes, green peppers and onion sprinkled with lemon juice, grilled chicken or lamb kebab on fluffy, saffron-coloured rice and the refreshing yoghurt and herb drink known as “doqh” is a typical and delicious Iranian meal. There are also a wide assortment of wonderful stews and several kinds of fresh-baked flat breads.

ISRAEL

Traditions and Culture
Among Israel’s diverse population an array of cultures flourish. Arab Bedouins in the northern Negev and Galilee keep their traditions alive in their towns and encampments where hospitality is warmly extended to visitors. Among Israel’s city dwellers, the Hassidic Jews still dress and worship as they did for centuries in Europe.

Crafts
Bedouin weaving and embroidery, olive wood carvings and Jewish religious artefacts and items of everyday life are popular purchases for visitors to Israel.

Cuisine
Jewish cuisine in Israel combines dishes and ingredients from 80 separate cultures and countries with special foods for each religious holiday. Arab and Druze cuisine, using only the freshest ingredients, is also widely available.

JAPAN

Traditions and Culture
While constantly embracing the new, the Japanese people are also deeply traditional in their everyday lives, customs and celebrations. Two age-old examples of culture which can be enjoyed by today’s visitors are the Paper Fan Scattering Ceremony at the Toshodaiji Temple in May and the Deer Antler Cutting Festival in October.

Crafts
In Nara, Japan’s premier Silk Road city, there are a number of ancient skills still practiced including the crafting of delicate Nara Fude writing brushes, fine Nara Sarashi textiles and the milky white Akahadayaki pottery.

Cuisine
Over the past several decades, Japanese food has spread around the world. Three of the highlights of this distinct cuisine from the Nara region are “somen” noodles, sake flavoured Narazuke pickles and Kakinoha “zushi” or salmon or mackerel wrapped in persimmon leaves.
KAZAKHSTAN

Traditions and Culture
Many of the customs of Kazakhstan had their origins in the people’s nomadic pastoral background and include their love for horses, hunting with falcons, using “yurts” or traditional tents for vacationing and oral traditions of storytelling.

Crafts
Leather and metal goods and musical instruments were fashioned by the nomads as easily transportable objects and are still made today according to traditional processes and designs.

Cuisine
Nomadic traditions are also reflected in Kazakh cuisine such as the horsemeat or mutton and noodle dish national dish known as “beshbarmak”, sausages and flat bread. And to drink? Fermented mare’s milk.

DPR KOREA

Traditions and Culture
All along the Silk Road, silk from Koryo was highly prized for its lightness and silk worm growing and manufacture is still practiced in DPR Korea. Traditional festivals in DPR Korea include peasant celebrations surrounding the planting and harvesting of crops.

Crafts
Delicate and graciously-coloured celadon ceramics from Koryo were a treasured export item on the Silk Road and are still made today. Other crafts include silk embroidery, straw mats and other goods.

Cuisine
Just a few of the highlights of DPR Korea’s national cuisine are “sinsonro”, an exquisite dish cooked in a casserole dish, cold noodles and the ginseng wine called “insamsul”.

REPUBLIC OF KOREA

Traditions and Culture
A Korean tradition now popular everywhere is “taekwondo”, the martial art which also trains the unity of body and mind. The World Taekwondo Festival is held in early summer in Cheonju and also features traditional art performances and field trips to experience other aspects of Korean culture.

Cuisine
A staple of the Korean diet which is also very healthy is “kimchi”, cabbages and other vegetables
marinated in a spicy sauce. More substantial fare on the Korean table includes “bulgogi”, thin strips of grilled beef, and “bibimbap”, a dish of boiled rice and mixed vegetables.

MONGOLIA

Traditions and Culture
A vast nation where half the inhabitants still follow a nomadic lifestyle, Mongolia has a wealth of traditions dating back thousands of years. One of the oldest is the Naadam Summer Festival when Mongolians gather for three days of horse races, archery contests, wrestling matches, music and festivities.

Crafts
Conforming to their nomadic traditions, Mongolians are masters of easily-transportable handicrafts which include fine cashmere garments, wooden and felt goods, leather products and weavings.

Cuisine
Guests visiting Mongolians in their traditional “gers” or yurts are offered meat dishes such as lamb and beef, a meat-filled ravioli called “buuz”, wheat pastries and dried meat curds.

PAKISTAN

Traditions and Culture
A true crossroads of the world, Pakistan has absorbed elements of many cultures over the millennia from its ancient indigenous Indus Valley civilizations to the British Raj. Islam is the country’s majority religion and Muslim customs are the basis for most Pakistani traditions.

Crafts
Pakistan’s bazaars are a shopper’s delight. Every conceivable handicraft can be found here with many areas specializing in a particular item. Embroideries, tribal jewellery, silverware, printed cloths, traditional clothing, earthenware pottery and inlaid work are just a few of the crafts available.

SYRIA

Traditions and Culture
Each year Syria hosts a Silk Road Festival where traditions from its own past and those of other countries along the route are revived and put on display. As Arabs and Muslims, Syrians delight in extending hospitality to visitors.

Crafts
Syrian mosaics and glasswork have been renowned for many centuries, along with its “damascene”
metal work named for the country’s capital. Textiles of all kinds are also famous, especially silk and brocaded cloths and all of which are on sale in the country’s main souks and souvenir shops.

Cuisine
Highlights of Syrian cuisine include “kebbeh”, a mixture of ground meat, wheat, onions and spices formed into an egg-shaped ball and fried, and “tabboleh”, a refreshing salad of ground wheat, parsley, tomatoes, mint and onions. Drinks include the strong spirit, “arak”, and fine red wines.

TAJIKISTAN

Traditions and Culture
Tajik culture is a fusion of Central Asian, Persian and latterly, Russian traditions. Like the people in most of the region, Tajiks are largely semi-nomadic and while they are Muslims, they are not strict in their religious practices. Many of the older people still wear traditional clothing: for the men, quilted coats, high boots and skullcaps. For the women, brightly coloured dresses and headscarves.

Crafts
Local crafts include beautifully designed skullcaps, embroidered cloths, or “suzanis”, gaily coloured woollen socks and gloves, and coral and silver jewellery from the Pamir mountain people.

Cuisine
Steamed dumplings filled with lamb, egg-filled ravioli and chickpea samsas and an array of vegetable dishes are standard fare at a Tajik meal. Tea, or “chai” is the staple drink taken throughout the day.

TURKEY

Traditions and Culture
Silk remains as a key material in all types of Turkish textiles, including carpets, clothes, scarves and embroidery, and Bursa is the centre of the country’s ages-old silk trade. Another widespread Turkish tradition dating from ancient times is the seasonal migration of villagers with their flocks of sheep, goats and cattle.

Crafts
Handwoven Turkish carpets and rugs of silk and wool are famous throughout the world, as is the country’s gold and silver jewellery in a wide assortment of styles, designs and prices. Turkish leather goods, mostly jackets, coats, handbags, belts and shoes are also highly prized by visitors.

Cuisine
Turkish cooking is considered one of the finest in the world and was heavily influenced by cultural interaction with other societies during
the long centuries of migration from the steppes of Central Asia and the legacy of the Ottoman’s imperial kitchens. Wonderful soups, kebabs, stuffed savory pastries and vegetables and sweet desserts are the stars of the Turkish table.

UKRAINE

Traditions and Culture
Ukraine’s Crimea region was the most actively involved in the Silk Road trade and it is here where invaders and traders left their stamps on the local traditions and culture. Russian, Turkish and Tartar influences are the most noteworthy in this region’s rich mix of customs.

Crafts
Amber jewellery, traditional wooden ornaments and Ukrainian embroidery are just a few of the beautiful handicrafts available in Crimea and much of the rest of the country.

Cuisine
A blend of European and Asiatic dishes, Ukrainian cooking is renowned in the region and some of the favourites are “borsh”, or beetroot soup topped with sour cream, “golubets”, or stuffed cabbage and various types of local wines.

UZBEKISTAN

Traditions and Culture
Uzbekistan is the heart of Central Asia and many of the traditions and customs throughout the region originated here and then spread along the Silk Road. At the same time, the Uzbeks absorbed practices, languages and beliefs of other peoples passing through.

Crafts
As in many countries of the former Soviet Union, traditional crafts are being revived in Uzbekistan which now has a flourishing handwoven carpet industry, for example. Other crafts include embroidery, ceramics and metalwork.

Cuisine
No Uzbek meal would be complete without skewers grilled kebabs of lamb or other meats, along with the lamb and rice dish “plov” and the round flat bread known as “lepeshka”. Tea is the main drink although wine, beer and spirits are widely available.
Silk Road Travel Tips

Along a route taking in so many countries with so many diverse cultures, political systems, stages of development, travel conditions, tourism infrastructure, climates, etc., setting down tips for the traveller which apply to each and every country is impossible. But there are some general rules that visitors should take into consideration when venturing out on the old Silk Road.

When to Go:
All agree that spring and autumn are the best seasons for visiting most of these countries. Winters can be extremely cold, especially in the Caucasus and Central Asia, and summer temperatures well into the 30s Celsius or above are the norm.

Visa Arrangements:
One of the first steps travellers should take is contacting the embassies of countries on their itinerary for details on visa requirements. Plan well ahead as visa application and approval can be a lengthy process for some countries.

Know Before You Go:
With the increase in tourism along the Silk Road over the past decade or so, there has been a flood of books, articles and Internet publications about the region and the individual countries. Consult these and destination country websites before planning your trip.

Getting There:
Major international airlines serve all the capitals plus some of the bigger cities of the Silk Road countries and on arrival one can make onward domestic travel arrangements. It is also possible to travel overland along all or part of the route. There are a number of tour operators who offer guided visits and special interest tours to the Silk Road.

Health:
Discuss with your doctor and/or local health authority about what vaccinations may be needed and which medical supplies to bring along. Health care can be rudimentary in some areas.

Safety:
Use common sense as you would travelling anywhere in the world. Institutions are still developing in some Silk Road countries and potential visitors should keep an eye and an ear on news reports from those regions they plan to visit and while actually there.

Local Sensitivities:
Visitors should always respect the local customs, mores and especially religious beliefs and holy sites as many of the countries on the Silk Road are deeply conservative and traditional. Before visiting a country, consult the guidebooks on local cultural conditions and how to behave.

Accommodations:
All the Silk Road countries have a range of hotels from luxury accommodations in the capital and larger cities to cheap guest houses and hostals. In some countries, there may be only one or two international standard five-star hotels. Wherever one plans to stay, it is recommended that room reservations be made as far in advance as possible.
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