



## The 5 “Stans” Of Central Asia

*The 5 Stans of Central Asia: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan,  
Tajikistan & Turkmenistan*

**Co-led by Jack Wheeler and Richard Bangs**

**Friday, September 11 to Wednesday, September 30, 2026**



ExtraordinaryTravelersClub.com

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**WHEELER-WINDSOR  
EXPEDITIONS**



# The 5 “Stans” Of Central Asia

***Central Asia.* The very words evoke the ultimate in the remote, the exotic, the unknown full of wonders.**

Here you will find the ancient cities of the Silk Road still in all their splendor, the Mountains of Heaven, and the Seven Pearls of Shing. Here you will meet the descendants of the people who fought Alexander the Great 2,300 years ago still living in their remote mountain villages and luxuriate in 5-star hotels. As we explore Central Asia we’ll experience five exotic countries, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan. These are often referred to as the “5 Stans.”

This is a fabulously life-memorable experience of one of our world’s most historically mysterious, culturally magnificent, and scenically glorious regions anywhere. The photos here are only a glimpse of what you’ll see when you’re there with us.

Meet us in Astana, Kazakhstan for **The Heart of Central Asia from Sep 11 to Sep 30, 2026.**

We’re happy to discuss anytime!

Contact [jack@wheelerwindsorexpeditions.com](mailto:jack@wheelerwindsorexpeditions.com) or [holiday@wheelerwindsorexpeditions.com](mailto:holiday@wheelerwindsorexpeditions.com)

Blue Skies!

Jack Wheeler



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# The Heart of Central Asia

The heart of Central Asia was known to the Greeks and Romans as Transoxiana after being conquered by Alexander – the land between Central Asia’s two great rivers, the Oxus (now the Amu Darya) and the Jaxartes (the Syr Darya).

Both rivers flow out of the massive Tien Shan (Heavenly Mountains) bordering China – along with the Zeravshan River along which are the Silk Road’s two most famous oases, Samarkand and Bukhara.

Today, Transoxiana is primarily in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan, however we also visit Kazakhstan. In fact, Turkmenistan has finally reopened and now we are going.



*Day 1 – Friday, Sep 11 - Arrival*

You need to arrive today in [Astana, capital of Kazakhstan](#). There are non-stop flights from many major cities, for example, some traveling from the U.S. may fly through Frankfurt or Dubai. You will be met and transferred to check-in at the 5-star [Rixos Astana](#).



*Day 2 – Astana, Saturday, Sep 12*

Astana, the country's capital city for the past 22 years is a most extraordinary sight to see. Everything you see was built from scratch in the middle of total nowhere since 1998 with money being no object. Today we explore the astounding glitz of Astana, the capital city.



### *Day 3 – Astana to Almaty, Kazakhstan*

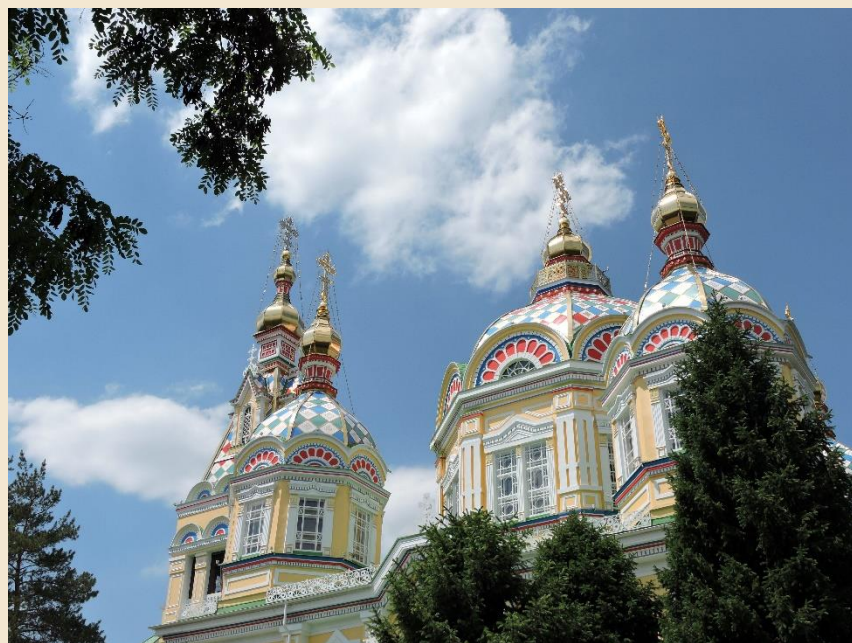
Today will fly to the former capital, Almaty. We drive to gorgeous Big Almaty Lake (35 km). We'll enjoy a delicious barbeque lunch at the lake, as we did here below!



### *Day 3 (continued)*

After lunch we return to Almaty to see the city. We'll visit Panfilov's Park with Zenkov's Orthodox Cathedral, Great Patriotic War Memorial and Museum of Kazakh Folk Musical Instruments.

We'll see Zelonniy Bazar (Green Bazaar), Central mosque, Medeo and the Independence Monument in Republic Square. Visit to Kok Tube Hill for views of the city. After dinner we retire for a good rest.



### ***Day 4: Almaty - Charyn Canyon - Karakol***

On the way from Almaty to Karakol, we drive to Charyn Canyon (200 km), those who wish to can walk up and down along the unique canyon and see pictures created by nature. Picnic lunch. Our plan is to reach Karakol and cross Kazakhstan-Kyrgyzstan border point on the way (200 km from Charyn Canyon to Karakol).



*Day 4: Karakol (continued)*

In Karakol we'll see the Dungan Mosque (left) and Holy Trinity Orthodox Church (right) in the town of Karakol. The original church burned down in 1890 and was rebuilt in 1895, then taken over by the Bolsheviks and turned into a club. Rebuilt as a church and services began in the 1990's. Women must wear a headscarf to enter this church. We have dinner and overnight at the hotel.



***Day 5: Karakol - Djety Orguz - Bokonbaevo - Kochkor***

Today we'll be amazed to reach the gigantic bright red-orange rocks of Jety Oguz, the Seven Bulls. The best view is an overlook called the Seven Bulls' Calf. We then drive along the shimmering [\*Issyk Kul\*](#), the second largest alpine lake on earth after Titicaca. We'll see the snow-capped range of the mighty Tien Shan Mountains of Heaven.



Jety Oguz, the Seven Bulls



Issyk Kul Lake and Tien Shan Mountains

*Day 5: Karakol - Djety Orguz - Bokonbaevo - Kochkor (continued)*

After lunch, we drive to Bokonbaevo village and we'll see a traditional eagle hunting demonstration. We can hold these powerful eagles as we did here.



At the end of the day, we stay at a lodge in Kochkor. At dinner, local musicians will serenade us with Kyrgyz music.

## *Day 6: Kochkor – Issyk Kul Lake*

As we drive from Bokonbaevo we'll see more beautiful scenes. Finally we gaze upon the beautiful Issyk Kul Lake,

This lake is considered a gem of Kyrgyzstan, where the nomads often congregate each summer with their herds of yaks, horses, and flocks of sheep.



## Day 6 - *Lake Issyk Kul* (continued)

We are able to spend time at a yurt camp just as people who still maintain a traditional nomadic way of life still do, which is rare.



Here, right, is one of our travelers who enjoyed staying in the yurts, which are surprisingly comfortable and warm.



***Day 7: Lake Issyk Kul – Burana - Bishkek***

We enjoy the morning seeing the light on Lake Issyk Kul, then head toward Bishkek. On our way we stop at the famous 1,100 year old [Burana Tower](#). Those who wish to climb the internal stairs can go to the top to see the incredible views.



## *Day 8: Bishkek*

In Bishkek, the [capital of Kyrgyzstan](#), we'll have a short city tour of Central Square, State Filarmony and Victory Square. adorned with statues of Manas, the epic 9<sup>th</sup> century warrior founder of the Kyrgyz people. The city's backdrop is the snow-capped Tien Shan Mountains of Heaven. Then we fly from Bishkek to Tashkent.



## *Day 9: Tashkent*

Central Asia's largest city is [Tashkent, capital of Uzbekistan](#). The millennia-old city was turned to rubble by an earthquake in 1966, and has been transformed into a spectacular modern city.



As we explore the city, you may find authentic gifts at the gigantic *Chorsu Bazaar*, where just about anything made or grown in Central Asia is for sale (at great prices if you know how to play the bargaining game!) In the late afternoon, we'll train to Sammarkand.



## *Day 10 and Day 11: Samarkand*

In Samarkand, we visit the famous Registan Square, Gur-Emir Mausoleum, Bibi Khanum Mosque, Central bazaar. Lunch at 13:00. Check in to the hotel after lunch. Overnight at the hotel.

The [World Heritage Site of Samarkand](#), almost 3,000 years old with truly great ancient architectural wonders. From the enormous Registan Square to the Tombs of Tamerlane and Bibi Khanoum, to the Shah-i-Zinda temple complex to the observatory of the Sultan astronomer Ulug Beg and more.



## *Day 12: Samarkand – Penjikent - Haf Kul*

We drive through Penjikent located on Tajikistan territory Customs procedures on Uzbekistan and Tajikistan border posts. Drive to Haf Kul-seven lakes, a place magical natural beauty known as *The Seven Pearls of Shing*. A remote mountain valley contains a chain of seven stepping-stone lakes, each one astonishingly clear and of different colors. Here's a sample:



We visit all seven, stay overnight at a lakeside guest house and enjoy a home cooked meal.

## *Day 13 – Haf Kul - Penjikent – Samarkand, Uzbekistan*

After breakfast we drive to back to Penjikent.

We'll pass through the village in the Valley of Shing where people have lived here for millennia and still speak a version of ancient Sogdian – the language of those whom Alexander fought 2300 years ago.



In Penjikent, we visit the famous ancient open bazaar, the museum of Rudaki, and the nearby [6,000 year-old World Heritage Site of Sarazm](#).

After lunch we drive to the border and cross back into Uzbekistan, we're back at our hotel in Samarkand by day's end. After a relaxing dinner we can retire early for a good night's sleep.



## *Day 14 & Day 15: Bukhara*

On the great Silk Road, we come to the [World Heritage Site of Bukhara](#). The ancient oasis has a history of 5,000 years, a city-museum with over 140 architectural monuments. and we can explore Lyabi-Khauz Ensemble, Magoki-Attori Mosque, Chor-Minor Madrasah, trade domes, Kalyan Minaret, Kalyan Mosque and Miri-Arab Madrasah, Ulugbek and Abdulazizkhan madrasahs.

Oldest is the *Well of Job*, (*top right*) the site of where Job in the Old Testament struck the ground with his staff and out gushed a spring in the desert. Job is identified as from “the Land of Uz” which is “east of the Euphrates” – Uzbekistan. The water from the spring is clear and drinkable to this day.



## *Day 14 & Day 15 Bukhara (continued)*

Today we continue exploring Bukhara: Ark Fortress, Bolo-Khauz Mosque, Ismail Samani and Chashma-Ayub mausoleums, Sitorai Mokhi-Khosa – summer residence of Bukhara’s last emir. Head to Mausoleum of Mausoleum of Bakhouddin Naqshbandi. The Ark Fortress Citadel (*below*) with its massive walls, the palace-fortress of Bukhara rulers since 500 BC.



There’s immensely more and we’ll be exploring it all over these two days. If you want to take home a beautiful memory or gift from Uzbekistan, Bukhara has the best selection of handmade crafts, tapestries, knives, fine rugs, scarves, and more!

## *Bukhara (continued)*

Yet despite Bukhara's historical wonders, its greatest charms are its people who have lived here for so many centuries and continue to live their traditions. You'll see that Bukhara's people of all ages are warm and friendly.



## *Day 16: Bukhara – Khiva*

We finish up in Bukhara with some last minute shopping this morning. There are many options if you want unique gifts for those at home!



This afternoon we fly from Bukhara to Khiva, over the Kyzylkum desert. Just imagine, caravans on the Great Silk Road carrying porcelain and spices used the same route for hundreds of years. The ancient Silk Road oasis of Khiva on the lower Oxus/ Amu Darya has been unchanged for centuries.

## *Day 17 & Day 18: Khiva*

For a full day and a half we explore the [World Heritage Site of Khiva, with its walled center of Itchan Kala](#) a UNESCO World Heritage site. We'll visit Mukhammad Amin Khan Madrasah, Mukhammad Rahimkhan Madrasah, Kalta Minor, Kunya-Ark, Juma Mosque, Toshkhovli Palace, Pakhlavan Makhmud Mausoleum, Minaret of Islom Khodja.

Surrounded by 40ft-high Snake Walls that writhe around the city, its labyrinth of narrow lanes adorned with blue and aquamarine tile mosaics remains as the best-preserved of the oases of the Silk Road, yet unknown to the outside world.



## *Day 18 – Khiva to Turkmenistan, Darwaza Gas Crater*

**The fifth “Stan” of Central Asia is unique.** After finishing in Khiva, we drive to Turkmenistan and after crossing the border, we drive straight into the center of the Kara Kum Black Sand Desert to our camp where we will spend the night. For it is between twilight and dawn that what we are camped next to becomes a truly and uniquely memorable spectacle.

Yes, we are at the [Darvaza Gas Crater, the “Door to Hell.”](#) This is an evening and a sight you’ll never ever forget. Not to mention a chance for an extraordinary photo. Here’s one of Brandon Wheeler when he led the Central Asia Expedition. You’ll have a photo like this yourself!



## *Day 19 – Darwaza to Ashgabat, Turkmenistan*

After breakfast we depart our camp and drive across the Kara Kum, when we reach [Ashgabat, capital of Turkmenistan](#) we check-in the luxurious 5-star hotel. As the hotel is over the top, so is the entire city. The city holds the Guinness Record for most marble-clad buildings on earth – all apartments for government employees. It is astounding how the former dictator [Saparmurat Niyazov](#) (1940-2006) largesse was limitless in constructing his personality cult. Here's the approach to his monument, his statue in solid gold.



The extraordinary monuments, all built in the last 25 years, are endless. From gigantic marble and gold mosques, to the towering Fountain Shopping Mall with huge waterfalls spilling down its sides, to the jaw-dropping Ice Palace winter sports complex, there's no end to the exorbitance to see.



In terms of history, we'll want to see the [World Heritage Site of the Parthian Fortresses of Nisa](#). No matter how many times the armies of Rome tried to defeat the Parthian Empire and take their capital of Nisa, they always failed. The Roman soldiers were defenseless against "the Parthian Shot" enabling a Parthian to dispatch an enemy directly behind him while racing away.



We have no choice but to have our Farewell Dinner be as extravagant as this city. We'll have a lot to celebrate.

***Day 20 – September 30, 2026***

This is Departure Day. Most flights leave early in the morning. You should be able to either fly to Tashkent or directly out of Ashgabat to Istanbul, then to flights home. We must bid each other *adieu* until our next adventure!

## THE 5 STANS OF CENTRAL ASIA DETAILS

*Dates: Friday, September 11 to Wednesday, September 30, 2026*

*Designed by Jack Wheeler*

**Register:** [WWX-Central Asia-2026-Sep-11-to-30](#)

*All Inclusive per person:* \$13,800 Deposit \$3,400 to register, flexible payments, balance due by June 10, 2026.

We enjoy the best lodging and restaurants. It is unique it what we experience, how we experience it, and in value. *The Heart of Central Asia* was personally designed by Jack Wheeler exclusively for our travelers with WWX leadership and outstanding local guides.

### ***Includes:***

- \*All accommodation (double-occupancy) as specified in itinerary.
- \*All 3 meals with group (B-L-D), including bottled water and soft drinks, throughout the itinerary.
- \*All transportation: internal air flights (inside Central Asia), all trains and ground transport.
- \*All activities, excursions, entrance fees to museums with the group in the itinerary.
- \*Guidance on visas, health requirements if any, or other relative matters.

### ***Does not include:***

- \* International air travel. Early or late nights outside of trip dates, we can assist with this.
- \* Meals, snacks, services, and activities not with group or in itinerary.
- \* Personal expenses for incidentals, additional alcoholic drinks, laundry, internet, and optional gratuities.
- \* Visa fees. Note: We provide all support documents required for visas.
- \* Hotel Private Room for Solo Travelers: Best to choose this Single Supplement: US\$1,400. If you or we later find a roommate, you can notify us and we can reverse that option.

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*Dates: Friday, September 11 to Wednesday, September 30, 2026*

Register: [WWX-Central Asia-2026-Sep-11-to-30](https://www.wheelerwindsorexpeditions.com/register/WWX-Central-Asia-2026-Sep-11-to-30)

*All Inclusive per person:* \$13,800

Note: Deposit to register online; payments by card or check, balance by June 10, 2026.

### *Deposits, Payments, Cancellations and Refunds*

\*Refund of deposit and balance in full on the condition of a fully-paid acceptable replacement for you.

\*Transferable, deposit of US \$3,400 upon booking. Refundable in the event of an acceptable replacement for you.

\*Balance in full must be received by June 10, 2026.

\*Hotel Single Occupancy Supplement: US\$1,400

\* *Note:* We strongly advise you consider trip cancellation insurance. Your travel agent can assist.

*Important caveat: Every effort will be made to adhere to the itinerary above. Due to the vagaries of travel in this region and of adventure travel in general, the itinerary may be altered in any way necessary. Participants are expected to accept this, and to maintain a cheerful attitude on an adventure such as this.*

To apply for your participation in this extraordinary adventure, please contact us immediately. Only a small number of travelers with an adventurous attitude may participate.

Contact to discuss: [explore@wheelerwindsorexpeditions.com](mailto:explore@wheelerwindsorexpeditions.com)

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**Dr. Jack Wheeler**, has been called the “real life Indiana Jones” by the Wall Street Journal has traveled to all 193 countries on all seven continents. He’s had two parallel careers: one in adventure and exploration with *Wheeler Expeditions*; the other in the field of geopolitics after receiving his Ph.D. in Philosophy from the University of Southern California, where he lectured on Aristotelian ethics. He wrote *The Adventurer’s Guide* (New York: Mackay, 1975), described by Merv Griffin as “the definitive book for anyone wishing to lead a more adventurous and exciting life.” He has three “first contacts” with tribes never before contacted by the outside world: a clan of Aushiri in the Amazon, the Wali-ali-fo in New Guinea, and a band of Bushmen in the Kalahari. He retraced Hannibal’s route over the Alps with elephants; led numerous expeditions in Central Asia, China, Tibet, Africa, the Amazon and elsewhere, including 21 expeditions to the North Pole; and has been listed in *The Guinness Book of World Records* for the first free fall sky-dive in history at the North Pole. Jack founded Wheeler Expeditions in 1976, and has conducted exclusive expeditions to dozens of countries across the globe for over 45 years. On a personal note, in the early 80’s he married Ms. Rebel Holiday in St Tropez, France, and Wheeler Expeditions has involved everyone in the family. Their two grown sons have often led expeditions and are living adventurous lives. Wheeler-Windsor Expeditions is a joint-venture with Edward Windsor, Lord Downpatrick.



**Rebel Holiday** has traveled to 90 countries and has co-led expeditions for 3 decades. She has lived in several countries and speaks three languages (English, Portuguese, and Spanish.) She is involved in business and the arts. Wherever she goes in the world, Rebel is most interested in people and cultures. Rebel has developed and teaches an information system relative to the patterns in nature, including humans. She is passionate about the study of Harmony, which can be found worldwide. Rebel is passionate about cuisine and finds the best restaurants and special activities on trips. She currently enjoys sharing the beauty of countries around the world, while based in Portugal. She is a founder of Extraordinary Travelers Club and Editor of the Club Monthly Dispatch.



**Richard Johnston Bangs** is an American author and television personality focusing on international travel. He began exploring rivers at an early age. He became passionate about adventure travel and started his company in 1973. He is considered to a pioneer in expedition and adventure travel and is the co-founder of Mt. Sobek. He is the host and executive producer of a series of American Public Television specials, including Richard Bangs Quests and Richard Bangs Adventures with Purpose. Richard is the author of twenty books. He has led countless adventurous expeditions on all 7 continents since the 1970’s and continues to lead select expeditions. Currently he is an active advisor to select innovative travel related ventures. He is a founder of Extraordinary Travelers Club. He is the lead writer for the Club Dispatch.

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*Our mission is to guide you to live an adventurous life  
by designing and leading unique, engaging journeys  
that integrate culture, history, and adventure.*

**Contact us:**

[holiday@wheelerexpeditions.com](mailto:holiday@wheelerexpeditions.com)  
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