

# Uzbekistan's Wildlife & Culture

## Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

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### Outline itinerary

- Day 1** Depart London.
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- Day 2/3** Ugam-Chatkal National Park.
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- Day 4** Tashkent.
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- Day 5/6** Samarkand.
- 
- Day 7/8** Bukhara.
- 
- Day 9** Tashkent.
- 
- Day 10** Fly London.
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### Departs

May.

### Focus

Birds, other wildlife and culture.

### Grading

Grade A/B. Slow-paced walks, sometimes over rough terrain. Maximum altitude of around 2,600 metres



### Dates and Prices

See website (tour code UZB01).

### Highlights:

- 2 days exploring Ugam-Chatkal National Park.
- Pander's Ground Jay.
- City tours of Samarkand & Bukhara.
- Yellow-breasted & Rufous-naped Tits, White-capped Bunting & Lammergeier possible.
- Visit the Kyzyl Kum Desert & Amu-Bukhara Canal.
- Led by expert naturalist guide



Images from top: Blue Whistling Thrush, Shahi Zinda, Samarkand & Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters.



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## Introduction

Uzbekistan is a spectacular and little-visited country lying on the famous 'Silk Road' that once connected the East with the West. It offers a wonderful mix of central Asian history and culture with an exciting variety of birds, mammals and other wildlife. From the Islamic architecture of its cities to its peaceful desert oases, grasslands, wetlands and magnificent mountains, Uzbekistan has much to offer and is sure to become as popular a destination for Naturetrek as Kazakhstan, its larger and better-known neighbour to the north.



Charvak Lake, Chimgan

Our tour begins with a flight to Tashkent, from where we transfer to Ugam Chatkal National Park for a 2-night stay. Here, amongst the dramatic rocky peaks of the western Tien Shan Mountains, we will explore the alpine meadows and montane forests in search of Lammergeier, White-capped Bunting, Yellow-breasted Tit and Blue Whistling Thrush. Travelling back west, we will then spend one night in Tashkent before continuing to the ancient city of Samarkand for two nights.

Samarkand is home to some of the world's oldest medressas and a mausoleum thought to have inspired the Taj Mahal! We will take a city tour here to enjoy its cultural and historical highlights and look for wildlife along the banks of the Zeravshan River, where we will hope to see such species as Turkestan Tit, Blyth's Reed Warbler and Bactrian (Bukhara) Deer, a recent split 'Red Deer split'.

Our final destination will be Bukhara, a city whose central buildings are subtler in design than those in Samarkand. En route we will cross the Takhta-Karacha Pass, where Juniper forests and mountain meadows may yield Isabelline Shrike and Eastern Pied Wheatear. During our 2-night stay here we will explore the Kyzyl Kum Desert and the Amu-Bukhara canal where we hope to find the beautiful Pander's Ground Jay, plus Blue-cheeked Bee-eater and Menetries's Warbler. Each evening we will return to Bukhara, giving us time to admire the local architecture, but we will also devote one day to exploring some of the 140 or so protected structures found throughout the city. Finally, we will return to Tashkent by high speed train and, after a last night in the city, we must leave this fascinating country at the heart of Asia and join our flight home.



White-winged Woodpecker

## Itinerary

*Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather & other local considerations can necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.*

## Day 1

## Depart London

We fly from London to Tashkent, with a stop en route in either Istanbul or Moscow depending on flight schedules.

## Day 2

## Arrive Tashkent & transfer Ugam-Chatkal National Park

Upon arrival in Tashkent we will be met by our local guide and, after a refreshment stop, we will make our way east towards Ugam-Chatkal National Park. Ugam-Chatkal is located on the western end of the Tien Shan Mountains and, during our time here, we will be looking for a wide variety of interesting species that inhabit the alpine meadows and montane forests. The journey between Tashkent and Ugam-Chatkal will take a couple of hours and the remainder of the afternoon will be at leisure, although your guide will be very happy to take you out in search of your first birds including White-winged Woodpecker, Sulphur-bellied Warbler and the attractive Blue Whistling Thrush. Our comfortable hotel is located near the village of Chimgan, a ski resort in the winter, which offers stunning views across the mountains, the highest peaks of which are likely to still be capped in snow.



White-capped Bunting

## Day 3

## Ugam-Chatkal National Park



Himalayan Griffon

We now have one and a half days to explore the wonderful habitats and scenery of Ugam-Chatkal National Park. Most of our time in the reserve will be spent at around 1,500 to 2,000 metres in altitude. Soaring over the high peaks here we can expect to see a variety of vulture species, including Eurasian Griffon, Himalayan Griffon, Lammergeier and Eurasian Black (Cinereous) Vulture. The upper forests and rocky slopes are home to White-capped, Rock and Red-headed Buntings along with Yellow-breasted Tit (a sub-species of Azure Tit), Rufous-naped Tit, Eastern Rock Nuthatch, Siberian Stonechat and Red-fronted Serin.

Over the lower forests of mixed spruce and deciduous trees glide Short-toed Eagle, Booted Eagle, Crested Honey Buzzard and Barbary Falcon, whilst in the woods themselves we will look for Rufous Turtle Dove, Indian Paradise Flycatcher, Hume's Warbler, Blue-capped Redstart, Brown Dipper and Eurasian Golden Oriole.

## Day 4

## Tashkent

Following a final morning's birdwatching, we will head back towards Tashkent. The remainder of the afternoon will be spent enjoying a city tour of the Uzbek capital. Once a walled city, Tashkent means 'Stone Village', and there are still areas of traditional houses and bazaars to be found, crisscrossed by a maze of narrow streets. Other parts of the city, however, are more modern in style, a combination of development undertaken since the city became the nation's capital in the 1930s and rebuilding following the earthquake in the 1966. Straighter streets, open spaces and greenery are indicators of the Soviet influence. The city is also cut by a series of canals fed by the Chirchiq River. Two of these are called the Ankhor and Bozsu canals. The Bozsu is favoured by fishermen, while the Ankhor has been recently renovated to create a pleasant promenade through the city centre.

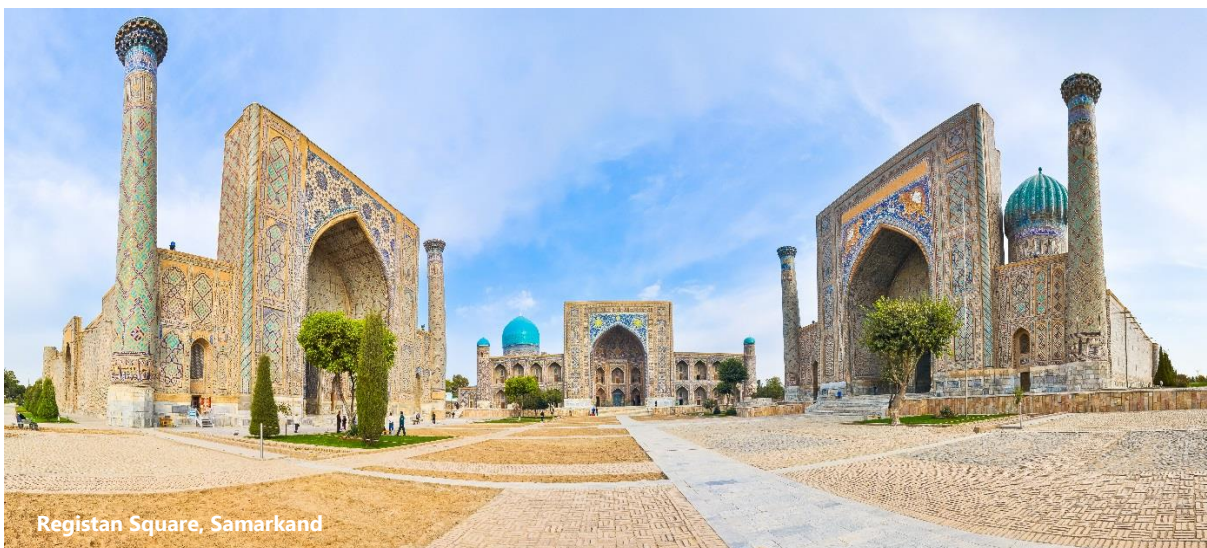


## Days 5 – 6

## Samarkand

This morning we will journey on board a different mode of transport as we take the AFROSIAB high speed train west, to Samarkand. We arrive in Uzbekistan's second city in time for a tour of its cultural and historical highlights.

Samarkand has a population of around half a million people, and rivals Rome in terms of its long, turbulent history and age. It is a very beautiful city and home to a number of buildings decorated with highly detailed and colourful mosaics, made up predominantly of shades of blue. Some of the monuments and highlights we will visit include the spectacular Registan Square, Sherdor Madrasah, Bibi Khanum Mosque and Mausoleum of Gur-Emir. The mausoleum of Gur-Emir is said to have inspired the design of the Taj Mahal!



The following day we will make our way out of the city to the Zeravshan River flood plain. The river's name translates as 'gold-bearing', which is thought to be connected to the sands containing gold found further upstream. An alternative, more interesting, explanation comes from a local legend about a drought, a sage, dark forces and a sacrifice, which ultimately resulted in the return of the water along with the bonus of gold nuggets!

While we are not expecting to find any gold nuggets here, we will be looking for the river's avian treasures including Turkestan Tit, White-winged Woodpecker, Black-crowned Night Heron, Eastern Olivaceous Warbler and Blyth's Reed Warbler. The rare Bactrian or Bukhara Deer - a recent 'Red Deer split' - has also been re-introduced into the area.

## Days 7 – 8

## Bukhara

This morning we will leave Samarkand and travel to Bukhara. Our journey will take us through the Takhta-Karacha Pass, an area of mountain meadows and juniper forests, home to an interesting range of bird species including Egyptian Vulture, Barbary Falcon, Yellow-eyed Pigeon, Blue Rock Thrush, Western Crowned Warbler, Hume's Warbler and Isabelline Shrike.



From the pass it will take us around 3 hours to reach Bukhara and we aim to arrive at our comfortable hotel in time for dinner. Those who still have some energy may wish to take a short stroll around the nearby streets and squares.

During our time around Bukhara we will spend a day exploring the Kyzyl Kum Desert, focusing in particular around the Amu-Bukhara Canal. Our main target here will be the localized Pander's Ground Jay. A member of the corvid family, this smart-looking bird with a pinkish chest and black bib, has an omnivorous diet and favours a habitat of sand dunes dotted with plenty of bushes. Other species to look out for include Black-bellied Sandgrouse, Syke's Warbler, Great Bustard,

Asian Desert Warbler and Rufous-tailed Scrub Robin.


Along the canal banks there are reeds and Tamarisk bushes growing, where we will look for Paddyfield Warbler, Reed Bunting of the *Palustris* subspecies (Large-billed), Savi's Warbler, Menetries Warbler and Bearded Tit. We will also find a variety of ducks, herons, egrets and other water birds. As we spend time on the canal banks, we should also look out for Black-headed (Yellow) Wagtail, Pied Bushchat and Blue-cheeked Bee-eater.



## Day 9

## Tashkent

Our final day in this area will be spent exploring the city, visiting such monuments as:

- **Samanids' Mausoleum** – Built around the end of the 9th century in a square shape and constructed of burnt brick, Samanids' Mausoleum is situated in a park near the centre of Bukhara. Thought to be the oldest Islamic monument in Central Asia, it was built for the father of the man who founded the Samanid state, but later also became the burial site for Ismail Samani himself and his son. Despite its modest size, it is of great architectural and historic value as it is one of the few unmodified buildings of its time remaining.
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- A photograph of the Samanid Mausoleum in Bukhara, Uzbekistan. The building is a square, brick structure with a large central dome and four arched entrances. It is surrounded by a low wall and a paved area. The sky is clear and blue.
- **Chashma Ayub Mausoleum** – This building is at the site of a holy spring that is associated with the prophet, Job, and now houses the Museum of Water. Its name means 'The Spring of Holy Ayub'. A distinctive feature of the building is the double dome with conical cap over the central building, known as a 'Harezmi-style' dome.
  - **Poi-Kalyan complex** – Located off Bukhara's main square, this complex consists of three main buildings built over four centuries. The oldest is the Kalyan Minaret, a 45-metre tall tower with a staircase that winds up the inside. Its elegant appearance belies its somewhat gruesome history. The other two main buildings are more decorative, displaying the skill of both the architects and ceramic workers.
  - **Ulughbek Medressa** – The original Medressa of Bukhara's main square, parts of the building show mathematician Ulughbek's love of astrology. It was the centre of secular science for a time and lectures on maths, astrology, philosophy and theology were given in the lecture halls and teaching rooms.
  - **Lyabi-Hauz complex** – This ensemble is built around three sides of a reservoir in the modern heart of Bukhara. Many such pools around Bukhara were drained to reduce the spread of disease, but this one remains. Mulberry trees planted in the 15th century surround the pool, making it a pleasant place to spend some time. The Jewish Quarter is located to the south of the square and there are Jewish and Islamic legends associated with the complex.
  - **Sitorai Mokhi Khosa** – Roughly translated, its name means the Palace of the Moon-like Star, in memory of the wife of an emir. Both the original summer palaces that stood here were destroyed and this structure was built, at the behest of the last Emir of Bukhara, in the 1900s by the best of the Bukhara masters and two Russian engineers. As well as the private chambers, there is a ceremonial terrace and several ornate throne rooms.

- **Bolo Khauz Mosque** – This complex has one of the few remaining pools in the city at its centre – the 'children's pool'. It's said that this mosque was commissioned by an emir's wife due to her husband's preference for public prayer among the common people. It has been modified several times, including the addition of an ayvan that displays the craftsmanship of traditional Uzbek art.
- **Ark** – The Ark Citadel is a town within a town; as old as Bukhara itself and home to the royal emirs for over a thousand years. It was, unfortunately, mostly destroyed by a bombing raid in the 1920s, although parts have been restored and there is ongoing work to reconstruct as much of this ancient structure as possible.



After our city tour, we must, regretfully, leave this fascinating city and take a train back to Tashkent for our final night in Uzbekistan.

## Day 10

## Fly London

This morning we will catch our flight back to London, via Istanbul or Moscow, arriving later the same afternoon

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## Tour Focus

The main focuses of this holiday will be birds and, to a lesser degree, other wildlife as well. Uzbekistan's fascinating culture and history will also be enjoyed.

## Tour grading

In terms of physicality, this is a relatively straightforward wildlife holiday with no high altitude trekking or overly demanding walks involved. However, it is likely that over the course of each day, we will cover several miles in total and sometimes over rough ground. The distances covered will be tailored to suit the group, however a reasonable level of fitness is required, and some of our time in the field will be spent at an altitudes of up to 2,600 metres. All walks will be taken at a slow pace.

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## Accommodation and food

We will be using a variety of tourist hotels of 3\* standard or equivalent, each room with private facilities. All food and accommodation is included in the price of this tour.

## Additional Expenses

On this tour you will need to budget extra for:

- Your visa, which must be applied for prior to departure. (visas can be applied for via the Republic of Uzbekistan Embassy in London or via their e-visa system. Please see [http://www.uzbekembassy.org/e/visas\\_for\\_tourists/](http://www.uzbekembassy.org/e/visas_for_tourists/) for details)
- Drinks other than water (which is provided throughout)
- Personal expenses – souvenirs, postcards, etc.
- Discretionary tips to local guides and local staff.
- Photography or videography fees for museums.

## Climate

Uzbekistan has an arid continental climate, with the north being colder than the south. Also located in the northern hemisphere, it has similar seasons to the UK, with November to February being the coldest months and July to August being the hottest. It does not get much rain, with an average year seeing just 300mm rainfall at most.

This tour will run in May, a good season to visit as the temperatures will be warm, but not overly hot and there is only a small likelihood of some showers. We can expect the weather to be mainly clear and sunny. The highest temperatures are likely to be experienced in Bukhara and may reach around 30°C. Early mornings and evenings can feel cool, particularly in the mountains.

## Your safety & security

You have chosen to travel to Uzbekistan. Risks to your safety and security are an unavoidable aspect of all travel and the best current advice on such risks is provided for you by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. In order to assess and protect against any risks in your chosen destination, it is essential that you refer to the Foreign Office website – [www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/uzbekistan](http://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/uzbekistan) regularly prior to travel.

## How to book your place

In order to book your place on this holiday, please give us a call on 01962 733051 with a credit or debit card, book online at [www.naturetrek.co.uk](http://www.naturetrek.co.uk), or alternatively complete and post the booking form at the back of our main Naturetrek brochure, together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost plus any room supplements if required. If you do not have a copy of the brochure, please call us on 01962 733051 or request one via our website. Please stipulate any special requirements, for example extension requests or connecting/regional flights, at the time of booking.



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