

Explore Turkmenistan Tour

Duration: 8 days

You will visit: Ashgabat, Mary, Merv, Gonur Tepe, Darvaza, Turkmenbashi, Yangykala.

Tour Itinerary:

Day 1: Ashgabat – arrival

Arrive in Ashgabat, the capital of Turkmenistan. A driver will meet you at the airport to bring you to your hotel, where check-in begins at noon.

Tour Ashgabat with your private local guide and driver. Meet at the hotel for sightseeing in Ashgabat to the following sites:

- Old Nisa, a spectacular archaeological site just 15 km from the city. Nisa was the capital of the Parthian Empire, founded in the 3rd century BC and remaining in power for nearly 500 years. Today it's listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.
- Turkmenbashi Ruhy Mosque, the largest mosque in Central Asia. Also referred to as the Spiritual Mosque and the Gypjak Mosque, it includes a mausoleum with the tombs of former president Turkmenbashi and his immediate family members.
- Arch of Neutrality, a 95-meter-high tower topped with a gold statue of former president Saparmurat Niyazov (Turkmenbashi) that rotates to face the sun. Ride to the top in a funicular to tour a small museum and enjoy a panoramic view of the city.
- Independence Park, including the yurt-shaped Independence Monument housing the Museum of National Values. The museum is surrounded by lavish fountains, 27 statues of Turkmenistan's key historical figures and a golden sculpture of Niyazov himself.
- Statue of Lenin, unique in that it stands on a large base ornately decorated in traditional Turkmen ornamentation.
- National Museum of History, displaying over half a million items from every region of the country, including rare and priceless artifacts from ancient times through the Middle Ages.
- Gulistan Bazaar (also known as the Russian Bazaar), one of the oldest markets in the city, a clean yet lively place to buy snacks and mingle with local shoppers.

Overnight in Ashgabat hotel.

Tour duration: approximately 5 hours

Day 2: Ashgabat – Mary – Merv – Mary

Take an early morning flight from Ashgabat to Mary (370 km, 40 min).

Upon arrival your guide and driver will meet you for your drive to Merv (40 km, 40 min), an ancient trade center on the Great Silk Road and UNESCO World Heritage Site. Your guided sightseeing tour of Merv will include:

- Sultan Sanjar Mausoleum (12th century) – Considered by many to be the most majestic architectural monument of Merv, this mausoleum amazes with its thick walls, symmetrical proportions and domed top that displays amazing architectural craftsmanship for its day.
- Greater Kyz Kala and Lesser Kyz Kala (8th-9th centuries) - These unique fortified homes are built of mud brick, with no known archeological equivalents.
- Askhab Mausoleums (9th-12th centuries) - Built for two of the prophet Muhammad's earliest disciples, the Askhab Mausoleums are one of Turkmenistan's most important pilgrimage sites today.
- Erk Kala (6th century BC), the seat of ancient Merv and its oldest settlement, whose remaining walls are nearly 30 meters high. Climb the walls for a great view of the surrounding area.
- Gyaur Kala (3rd century BC) - Merv's second oldest settlement, famous for its thick, 2-km long walls.
- Beni Makhan Mosque and cistern (7th-9th centuries) - Also called the Juma Mosque, it's located in the center of ancient Gyaur Kala, along with an intact cistern that still functions today.
- Muhammad Ibn Zeid Mausoleum (12th century) - A popular Sufi shrine and one of the city's finest structures due to its symmetrical architecture and Arabic inscriptions chiseled into its walls.

After completing the sightseeing tour of Old Merv, return to Mary to visit the Mary History Museum. Housed in a marble hall, the museum has six main exhibition rooms holding artifacts from ancient and modern history.

Overnight in Mary hotel.

Tour duration: 5 hours

Day 3: Mary – Gonur Depe – Ashgabat

After breakfast, your guide and driver will meet you at hotel reception to travel to Gonur Depe (100 km, 1 hr 30 min).

Gonur Depe (2000 BC) is the largest settlement in historical Margiana, also known as Margush. Spend the afternoon walking among the remains of a sprawling city that contained a palace, temples with fire altars, living quarters, ovens and extensive burial grounds, including a royal tomb with skeletal remains.

Return to Mary and fly back to Ashgabat on the evening flight (370 km, 40 min). Overnight in Ashgabat.

Day 4: Ashgabat – Gokdepe – Darvaza

After breakfast, drive to Gokdepe (50 km, 1 hr) for a visit to the Saparmurat Hajji Mosque. Built in 1995 and named after Turkmenistan's first president, its blue domes and 63-meter-high minarets distinguish it from other mosques in the region. Tour the Gokdepe Ethnographic Museum before continuing your journey.

Your next stop is the Akhalteke horse stables to learn about the care and training of these pure-bred Turkmen horses, prized for their incredible speed, agility and sleek beauty.

Continue to Darvaza Gas Crater (275 km, 4 hrs), also known as the Door to Hell. Enjoy the drive through the Karakum Desert, stopping to take photos of sand dunes and camels along the way.

Arrive at the crater in the evening to enjoy a spectacular sunset view before admiring the crater's flames accentuated by a pitch-black sky. The fire crater is about 80m in diameter and 30m deep, and staring into this 'Door to Hell' with your own eyes is an experience like no other. Set up camp and enjoy a meal cooked over the fire as you lounge near the burning crater.

Overnight in tents or a yurt.

Day 5: Darvaza – Ashgabat – Turkmenbashi/Awaza

Wake up early to see the sunrise and enjoy a camp-style breakfast before continuing your journey. Before leaving the desert, you'll stop to visit the nearby mud and water craters.

On your return drive to Ashgabat (275 km, 4 hrs), you'll visit the Erbent Village, one of the few nomadic villages still existing in the desert, to learn about the traditional Turkmen lifestyle.

Upon arrive in Ashgabat, transfer to the domestic airport to take a flight to Turkmenbashi (575 km, 50 min). Arrival in Turkmenbashi and proceed to Awaza (20 km, 20 min), a newly built resort area along Turkmenistan's Caspian Sea coast. Take a stroll along the beach and enjoy the fresh seaside air.

Overnight at the Awaza hotel.

Day 6: Awaza – Yangykala – Balkanabat

After breakfast, meet your guide and driver at reception. Transfer to one of the most picturesque natural sites of Turkmenistan, Yangykala Canyon (170 km, 3 hrs).

Enjoy a hike among the cliffs and gorges of Yangykala Canyon, the perfect location for beautiful panoramic photos of white, yellow and red canyon slopes. Climb to Crocodile Mouth, a small pass and unique rock formation from which you'll have a bird's eye view of the canyon.

Your next stop is Gozli Ata Mausoleum and Kemal Ata Cemetary (67 km, 2 hrs). Gozli Ata ("All-Seeing Father") was a well-respected 14th century Sufi saint whose grave, along with the adjacent grave of his wife, is considered one of the holiest sites in all Turkmenistan.

Drive to Balkanabat in the afternoon (180 km, 3 hrs). Take a short tour of the Trailblazer Memorial, dedicated to the pioneer founders of Balkanabat, and the Church of Nativity of the Blessed Virgin, an Eastern Orthodox church established in 1990.

Overnight in Balkanabat hotel.

Day 7: Balkanabat – Nohur – Ashgabat

Drive to Ashgabat in the morning by way of Nokhur Region in the Kopet Dag Mountains, a scenic drive through gorgeous ridges and mountain villages.

Stop at the Kow-Ata Underground Lake, hidden 60 m beneath the earth at the foothills of the Kopet Dag Mountains. Jump in for a quick swim in its warm sulfur waters before continuing your drive to Ashgabat.

Arrive in Ashgabat and check in to the hotel.

Overnight in Ashgabat.

Day 8: Ashgabat

Check out of the hotel by noon and transfer to the airport for departure to your next destination. End of Explore Turkmenistan Tour.

Inclusions:

- Accommodation based on double/twin room in a hotel, with breakfast (6 nights);
- Accommodation in a yurt or tent at Darvaza, shared room, with dinner and breakfast (1 night);
- Utensils and necessary equipment for camping at Darvaza (sleeping bags, sleeping mats, pillows, dining table, chairs);
- Transportation – all transfers, pick and drop from airports (1-2 people in sedan, 3-8 in minivan, 4WD in Darvaza and Yangikala);
- Private, local English-speaking escort guide;
- Entrance fees to the sights as per itinerary;
- Economy class flight tickets from Ashgabat-Mary, Mary-Ashgabat and Ashgabat-Turkmenbashi (flight times subject to change based upon availability);
- Visa support letter for Turkmenistan tourist visa;
- 1L bottle of water per person per day.

Exclusions:

- Consular fees for Turkmenistan tourist visa and migration tax;
- International flight tickets before and after the tour;
- Tips are not included (driver, guide, porter);
- Hotel charges for additional services;
- Full board (lunches and dinners);
- Travel insurance;
- All other charges and services not mentioned under “Inclusions”.