

Turkmenistan UNESCO Sites Tour

Duration: 4 days

You will visit: Kunya Urgench, Darvaza Gas Crater, Ashgabat, Mary, Merv.

Tour Itinerary:

Day 1: Khiva – border – Kunya Urgench – Darvaza

Pass through customs, and transportation may not be available in the transit zone. Once you pass border control, your Turkmenistan guide will meet you, and together you'll embark on a 100 km drive to Kunya-Urgench, the capital of the Khorezmshah Dynasty. Kunya Urgench is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, your tour will include:

- Visit the Tyurabek-Khanym Mausoleum (14th century), the burial site of a Mongolian princess, and the Sayid Ahmed Mausoleum (14th century), the burial place of a leader of the Golden Horde.
- Discovery of the Kutlug Timur Minaret (11th-13th centuries), which at 62m is the tallest minaret in Central Asia.
- Travel to the 12th-century Sultan Tekesh Mausoleum of Khorezmshakh.
- Exploration of Kyrk Molla Hill (Forty Mullahs Hill), a fortress covering three hectares of land that includes the famous Mamun Library (8th-9th centuries) and an ancient cemetery believed to hold present-day healing powers.
- Walk through the Fakhreddin Razi Mausoleum (a.k.a. mausoleum of Arslan II, 13th century), a rare survivor of the Mongol invasion and one of the oldest, most unique structures in all of Central Asia.

Tour duration: 1-2 hours.

In the afternoon, you'll take a six-hour drive to the Darvaza Gas Crater, located in the middle of the Karakum Desert. You'll set up camp and enjoy the magnificent ring of fire by night. A delicious fire-cooked meal will be served for dinner near the burning gas crater, a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

Day 2: Darvaza – Ashgabat

Begin your day by witnessing the stunning desert sunrise before indulging in a camp-style breakfast. Afterwards, you'll visit the mud crater before embarking on a scenic drive to Ashgabat, which spans 280 kilometres and takes approximately four hours to complete. Along the way, you'll have the opportunity to take photos of the majestic dunes and graceful camels. Visit the Akhalteke horse stables, where you'll learn about the care and training of these pure-bred Turkmen horses, known for their incredible speed, agility and sleek beauty. Upon arrival in Ashgabat, check in to the hotel and free time. Overnight in Ashgabat.

Day 3: Ashgabat – Mary

Tour Ashgabat with your private local guide and driver. Meet at the hotel for a half day of sightseeing in the capital:

- Old Nisa, a spectacular archaeological site just 15km 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 - one of the largest mosques 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;
- Neutrality Monument, 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.

Tour duration: 5 hours.

After your tour, transfer to the domestic airport to catch a flight from Ashgabat to Mary (370 km, 40 min). Upon arrival in Mary, transfer to the hotel. Overnight in the Mary Hotel.

Day 4: Mary – Merv –Turkmenabad – border – Bukhara

Your guide and driver will meet you for your drive to Merv (40 km, 40 min), an ancient trade centre on the Great Silk Road and a 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 a 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 archaeological 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 centre 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 chiselled into its walls.

Tour duration: 5 hours.

After completing the sightseeing tour of Old Merv, transfer to the Turkmenistan-Uzbekistan border crossing (270 km, 4-5 hrs). Go through border formalities at both checkpoints.

Inclusions:

- Accommodation based on double/twin room sharing, with breakfast, 2 nights;
- Accommodation in a shared yurt or a tent at Darvaza, with dinner and breakfast (1 night);
- All road transfers (1-2 persons in sedan, 3-8 persons in minivan, 4WD in Darvaza);
- Economy class flight tickets from Ashgabat-Mary;
- Private, local English-speaking escort guide;
- Entrance fees to sights as per itinerary;
- 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 (4 lunches and 2 dinners);
- Travel insurance;
- All other charges and services not mentioned under "Inclusions".