GO BOLDLY

BIG TRIPS, GRAND PLANS, AND FAR-FLUNG ADVENTURES

ON SAFARI IN KENYA  TREKKING IN NEPAL  OAXACAN TASTE TOUR  EGYPT ON THE RISE
HOPPING HAS ALWAYS been a big deal in Uzbekistan. Trace a finger along a map of the Great Silk Road – the ancient world’s most important trading-route network connecting the East and the West – and you’ll find this Central Asian nation nearly at its midpoint. From the second century BC, caravans from China to the Mediterranean converged here to swap spices, salt, teas, precious metals, and, of course, silks. Today, its former Silk Road bazaar cities, such as Samarkand and Bukhara, remain remarkably intact, with blue-tiled domes and minarets of sunbaked clay bricks.

These outposts are also home to traditional artisans who create patterned silks, ceramics, textiles, and carpets. In an effort to preserve the country’s oldest customs, the government doesn’t tax craft workshops, which gives visitors Old Town Road

Uzbekistan’s Silk Road outposts are as shoppable now as in Marco Polo’s day.

BY NICOLE TRILIVAS
access to an impressive array of studios that double as some of the world’s most authentic souvenir shops.

In this area, which still echoes with the legends and legacies of historic headliners such as Genghis Khan and Alexander the Great, recent infrastructure investments from China and newly relaxed visa regulations mean that tourism is increasing. In short, now’s the time to visit. An organized tour with ample downtime makes for a fuss-free way to move between major cities in this far-flung destination. In addition to shopping-centric destinations, stops on a well-rounded tour might include the Soviet-style capital of Tashkent and the city of Khiva – and perhaps even a short stay in a traditional yurt camp in the countryside.

Here’s where to shop along the Silk Road for well-made, timeless treasures.

**SAMARKAND**

One of Central Asia’s oldest inhabited cities, breathtaking Samarkand is crammed with must-sees, including the hallowed Shah-i-Zinda necropolis, containing mausoleums dating to the eleventh century; an observatory built by astronomer and mathematician Ulugh Beg in the 1420s; and the grandiose, UNESCO-recognized Registan Square.

**Happy Bird Art Gallery & Craft Center**

Happy Bird is a tidy complex of several galleries, the highlight of which is Lena Ladik’s fairy-house-like studio on the top level. Ladik, originally from Ukraine, designs whimsical clothing fashioned from vintage fabrics and silks collected from across the ‘Stans and the former Soviet Union (once a Soviet Socialist Republic, Uzbekistan declared independence in 1991, shortly before the union’s collapse). Ladik’s one-off pieces are fanciful but in vogue (literally – she’s happy to show you her double-page spread in *Vogue Russia*).

On the complex’s ground floor, a nameless paper shop carries delicate mulberry-silk-paper handicrafts, including fragile dolls and even purses and tunics. The items are handmade using ancient methods at a Chinese-style paper mill called Meros in nearby Konigil village, which is also open to visitors. 43a Tashkentskaya Street.
depicting scenes from important religious manuscripts or age-old myths. Miniature painting in Bukhara dates back to the sixteenth-century Shaybanid dynasty, descendants of Genghis Khan who once conquered Bukhara. (Legend has it that the only reason the Kalyan Minaret still stands is because Genghis thought it too impressive to destroy.) Today, master craftsman Toshev Davron teaches the elegant art of miniature painting to more than 100 students in his workshop, which sits atop the store that displays his ornate illustrations.

Khakikat Street (near the southern entrance of Toqi Telpak Furushon Bazaar).

Gijduvan Ceramics Museum
To see suzani needlework in action, head to the town of Gijduvan, just north of Bukhara, where several generations of women stitch vast swatches of creamy cotton with airy silk thread. Here you’ll also find richly glazed ceramics for sale. These bowls, serving dishes, and decorative plates are thrown, glazed, and fired on-site under the guidance of sixth-generation master craftsman Abdul Narzullaev, who still uses all the traditional methods – including a donkey-driven rotary mill. 55 Kimsan Street.

BUKHARA
Alongside Samarkand, Bukhara was Uzbekistan’s other major Silk Road stop, as well as a key site for Islamic study. A web of trading domes and bazaars housing shops and stalls operates around Bukhara’s twelfth-century Po-i-Kalyan complex, which consists of the Kalyan Mosque, fitting up to 12,000 worshipers; the Mir-i Arab Madrassa, a still functioning Islamic school; and the 150-foot-tall Kalyan Minaret.

Suzani Shop
Merchant Behruz Ahmedov stocks kaleidoscopic silk-embroidered blankets and pillow covers that he sources from female artisans in Bukhara and Uzbekistan’s Fergana Valley. Known as suzani (meaning “needlework”), these hand-embroidered fabrics were once created as part of dowries and still feature traditional motifs and symbols such as peppers (protection) and pomegranates (fertility).

It’s not uncommon to see areas of a suzani piece deliberately left unfinished, because, as Ahmedov puts it, “nothing is perfect but Allah.” Skip the hyperbright pieces: Muted colors signal the use of natural dyes from sources such as indigo and dahlia flowers. Third Trading Dome, Hakikat Street.

Davron Toshev Miniatures Workshop
Miniatures are intricate illustrations on handmade silk or cotton paper, usually depicting scenes from important religious manuscripts or age-old myths. Miniature painting in Bukhara dates back to the sixteenth-century Shaybanid dynasty, descendants of Genghis Khan who once conquered Bukhara. (Legend has it that the only reason the Kalyan Minaret still stands is because Genghis thought it too impressive to destroy.) Today, master craftsman Toshev Davron teaches the elegant art of miniature painting to more than 100 students in his workshop, which sits atop the store that displays his ornate illustrations. 55 Khakikat Street (near the southern entrance of Toqi Telpak Furushon Bazaar).

Contact your preferred Virtuoso Travel Advisor for additional details and to book your Wymara getaway.
“Uzbekistan’s hand-embroidered textiles and suzanis are truly exquisite and shockingly well priced. If they interest you, bring an extra duffel bag, bargain gently, and pride yourself on buying direct.”

– Betty Jo L. Currie, Virtuoso agency executive, Atlanta

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During Exeter International’s 11-day tour of Uzbekistan, Silk Road explorers stop in Tashkent, Khiva, Bukhara, and Samarkand, and soak in views from 10,856-foot Greater Chimgan peak. In each destination, visitors immerse themselves in local culture – cooking plov, a traditional rice dish, in the home of a master suzani embroiderer in Bukhara, for instance. Optional add-ons include touring a silk-carpet workshop and watching a folk-dance show at a former harem in Khiva. Departures: Multiple dates, through December 27; from $4,425.

On a nine-day journey by Ker & Downey, travelers can stock up on hand-lacquered miniatures crafted by on-site artists at the nineteenth-century Abul Kasim Madrassa in Tashkent, see intricate tilework in Bukhara, sample local vintages with dinner at Samarkand’s Khovrenko Winery, and walk through the UNESCO-listed center of Itchan Kala in Khiva. Between cities, enriching stops await, such as a visit to a family’s yurt in the Kyrgyz Desert. Departures: Multiple dates, through February 26, 2020; from $7,200.

Cox & Kings’ 12-day, local-expert-heavy tour of Tashkent, Samarkand, and Bukhara presents ample culture-infused experiences. Travelers can learn about Uzbek cuisine during a cooking demonstration, for instance, and take a craft detour with weavers and other artisans in the Fergana Valley. Departures: Multiple dates, through February 26, 2020; from $5,135.