

The Tajik Pamirs



Tourism Product Portfolio for International Travel Trade

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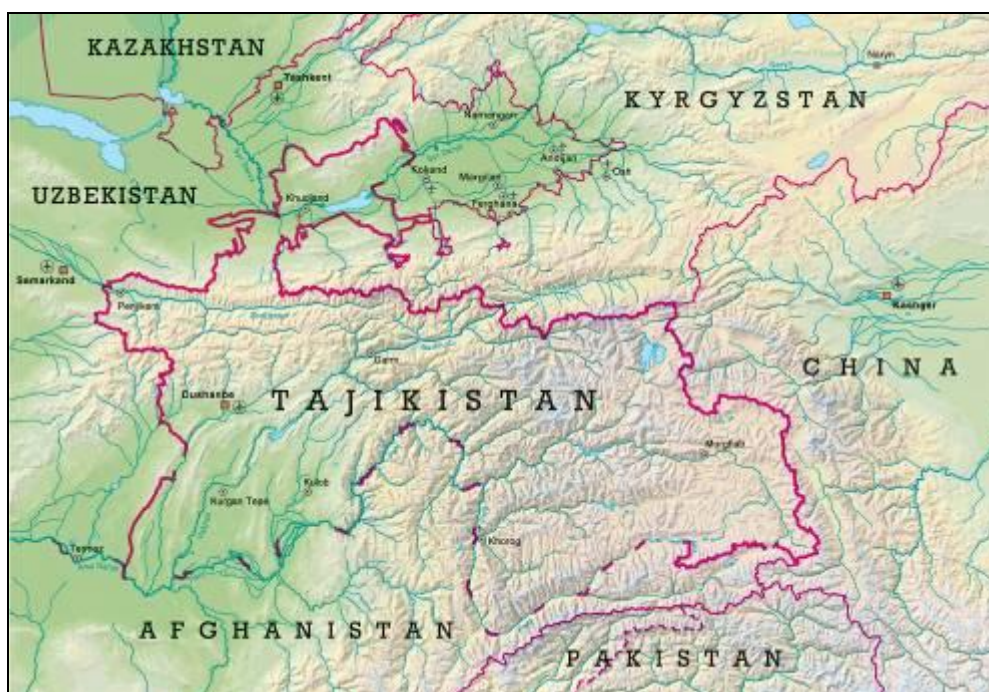
Introduction

Tajikistan – an undiscovered and exciting tourist destination

Tajikistan, located in the heart of Asia, is currently developing its tourist infrastructure to make available to the international market its wealth of unspoilt natural beauty, its ancient history and the unrivalled hospitality of its people.

Independent since the break-up of the Soviet Union in 1991, Tajikistan is poor in natural resources but rich in tourist attractions: it offers extraordinary opportunities for adventure and eco-cultural tourism with untouched landscapes, archaeological treasures and attractive itineraries for walking and trekking with charming homestays along the way. Tajikistan was marked by conflict in the immediate post-Soviet period but is today one of the most stable and secure countries in Central Asia.

A number of hotels of international standard have recently opened in the capital Dushanbe and elsewhere, and local tour operators are actively seeking partners in developed countries for organising tours. **Turkish Airlines**, **Baltic Air** and **Somon Air** fly from European airports to Dushanbe; there are also connections from Moscow and St. Petersburg. The visa regime has recently been liberalised for tourists.



Sharing borders with Afghanistan in the south, Uzbekistan in the west, Kyrgyzstan in the north and China in the east, 93% of Tajikistan's territory is mountainous, and more than half is over 3,000m; it includes three of the highest mountains in the world: *Ismoil Somoni Peak* (7,495m), *Ibn Sina Peak* (also known as *Lenin Peak* - 7,135m) and *Korzhenevskaya Peak* (7,105m). The two principal ranges, the Pamirs and the Alay Mountains, give rise to many beautiful streams, rivers and lakes. The longest mountain glacier in the world, the *Fedchenko*, is in the Pamirs.

Since time immemorial, the territory of Tajikistan has been a cross-roads for the passage of the many different peoples that occupied and controlled Central Asia. Cimmerian and Scythian tribes, several Persian dynasties, Macedonian/Greek armies under Alexander the Great, Parthians, Bactrians, Kushans, Huns, Hephtalites, Mongol hordes, Nestorian Christians, Arabs, Russians, even British - all left their mark on the region. Tajikistan was on several of the itineraries called collectively the **Silk Road** and was also the theatre of the closing episodes of Anglo-British imperial rivalry known as the **Great Game**.

The Tajiks are an Indo-European people and their language and culture have their roots in Persian civilisation. Many of the most famous poets, philosophers and scientists of the Persian language from Central Asia (Khorasan, Bukhara, Samarkand, Balkh and other locations) are claimed by Tajiks as their own: Abu Abdullah Jafar ibn Mohammad **Rudaki** (858-941), Hakim Abu'l-Qasim **Firdawsi** (935-1020), Abu Rayhan Muhammad ibn Ahmad **Biruni** (973-1048), Abu Ali Sina (c. 980-1037 - known in the West as **Avicenna**), **Nasir Khusraw** (1004-1088), Jalal ad-Din Muhammad Balkhi (1207-1273 - known in the West as **Rumi**). Tajikistan's literacy rate of 99.5% is one of the highest in the world.

Basic facts about the Tajik Pamirs (Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast - GBAO):

Population: approx. 205,000

Surface area: approx. 64,000 square km. (nearly 50% of total surface area of Tajikistan and 1.5 times the size of Switzerland)

Arable land: 240 square km. (0.4% of the total)

The Western Pamirs (Darvaz, Vanj, Rushan, Shughnan - including the regional capital Khorog - Roshtkala and Ishkashim districts, population approx. 190,000) are inhabited by people of Irano-European extraction.

The Eastern Pamirs (Murghab district, population approx. 15,000) are mainly inhabited by people of Kyrgyz (Turkic) extraction, although there is a significant minority in Murghab town originating from the Western Pamirs.

Human settlements between 1,200 and 3,500m

For further information see page 8 and:

- www.pamirs.org
- www.pecta.tj

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The Aga Khan Foundation (AKF) is supporting a community-based tourism project in the Pamirs in the east of Tajikistan. The support includes training and basic equipment for service providers such as tour operators and homestays, and websites and information centres for tourists. The projects emphasise sustainability and ecological awareness.

With a view to facilitating contacts with partners in developed countries, this “generic” product portfolio describes some of the most attractive tours being offered by the Tajik tour operators in the Pamirs.

Tajikistan Country Profile

Full name:	Tajikistan
Capital city:	Dushanbe
Largest city:	Dushanbe (pop. 580,800)
Official Language:	Tajik (Russian is also widely used)
Population:	Approx 7 million
Religions:	Sunni Muslim 85%, Shi'a Muslim 5%, other 10%
Government:	Republic
Currency:	Somoni (TJS)
Exchange rate:	€1 = approx. TJS 5.60 (July 2010)
Climate:	In the Western part of the country, the summers are hot and the winters are mild. In the Pamirs, the lower-lying areas (valleys feeding into the Panj river) have summer temperatures ranging from approx. 20° to 30°C in July, with cool nights. In the high plateau area of the Eastern Pamirs the equivalent temperatures are 5° to 25°C. Winters are long and very cold.
International Airport:	Dushanbe Airport in Dushanbe
Passport/Visa:	A visa is required for travel to Tajikistan. Applications made to Tajik Consulates in Europe (e.g. Berlin and Brussels) are dealt with efficiently and expeditiously.
Time zone:	GMT + 5
Safety:	Relatively safe, however, there is a residual threat from terrorism in Central Asia.
Hotel:	In Dushanbe, there are a small number of large hotels. Most are ex-Soviet era and tend to be over priced and in poor condition. There are a few newly built hotels offering western standards of accommodation for around from \$100 to \$220 per room. In the Pamirs there are a few small hotels in Khorog, the regional capital, and many home stays in all districts - for around \$10 per person per night you get a comfortable bed in a family home. The facilities are basic, i.e. no running water and an outside toilet, but guests can expect comfortable clean rooms, good local food, and a very warm welcome.
Hospitals:	There are hospitals, clinics and health centres throughout the country offering standards of health care from basic to fairly good.

1. The Tajik Pamirs

1.1 Introduction

The Pamirs, located principally in the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast (GBAO) in eastern Tajikistan, are one of the highest mountain ranges in the world, containing peaks over 7000m. The territory comprises a large high plateau area (Murghab district in the east) and several deep valleys running west into the Panj river (in antiquity known as the Oxus; in local languages “panj” means “five” and the name Panj is said to come from the fact that the five main Pamir valleys feed into it). GBAO shares frontiers with China in the east, Kyrgyzstan in the north and Afghanistan in the west and south.



The Pamirs from the air

The region is inaccessible to road traffic for as much as six months in winter, and was considered during the Soviet period as a strategic border area to which special permission was required for travel. It is therefore very much “virgin territory” for tourism, with little relevant infrastructure. As such, it combines extraordinary attractions for adventure and eco-tourism with untouched high-altitude landscapes and many opportunities for walking and trekking. The Pamirs were on one of the southern branches of the Silk Road and possess fortresses and other monuments bearing witness to the traffic of goods and ideas (petroglyphs, Buddhist monasteries, shrines and caravanserais). The “Great Game” was played in the Pamirs.

The population of GBAO comprises a minority of ethnic Kyrgyz on the high plateau (originally nomadic but today mainly sedentary) and several ancient Iranian ethnic groups occupying the valleys and lower lying areas: their hospitality is legendary, as is their love of music and dancing. During the Soviet period, because of their isolation, Pamiris were able to preserve their religion and culture while benefiting from the remarkable social achievements of the USSR (99% literacy and universal health care). They practice a very tolerant form of Islam.

As a result of community-based tourism projects implemented by the Aga Khan Development Network and the French NGO ACTED and funded by the governments of Switzerland, Canada, the European Union and other international agencies such as The Christensen Fund, a very basic infrastructure combining a tourist information centre, homestays, trained guides and handicraft production has been put in place and a number of hotels and local tour operators have started business. The aim of the projects currently being implemented is to increase rural livelihoods – village organisations are supported and part of the fees received by homestay owners are returned to a village fund.

A few inbound tour operators in Europe (Switzerland, France, Germany and others) have begun to offer the Pamirs as part of their catalogue. The region is currently attractive mainly to tourists willing to accept a certain amount of discomfort in search of exceptional experiences.

Flights to the Tajik capital Dushanbe originate in Riga (Baltic Air), Istanbul (Turkish Airlines) and Frankfurt (Somon Air); Dushanbe can also be reached from St. Petersburg and Moscow. Access to Khorog, the capital of the Tajik Pamirs is by small plane (Yak 40 or Antonov); all flights originate in Dushanbe and are only operated when there is no cloud cover. The alternative road journey takes approximately 14 hours in a 4x4 and offers en route spectacular views of the Panj river and of high mountain passes. The road journey can be broken with attractive homestays in a relaxing natural environment.

There is a developed road network throughout the Tajik Pamirs, extending up to the furthest villages at the head of the valleys and on the high plateau; it was built during the Soviet period and has not been much maintained since independence in 1991 (N.B. the "Pamir Highway" between the Pamirs and Kyrgyzstan was actually started in the 19th century during the "Great Game"). Access to sites and sights is therefore easy, although roads are bumpy and dusty. The isolation of the region is a risk factor in case of serious illness or accident but the Pamirs are untouched by unrest in neighbouring regions.

There are no accurate statistics on numbers of tourists visiting the Pamirs. A recent statement by the Deputy Chairman of the Tajik State Committee for Youth, Sports and Tourism claims that 16,000 tourists visited Tajikistan in 2008, of which 3,000 visited GBAO. The potential is much higher.

Tourism in the Pamirs is far from self-sustaining and is as yet a fragile flower, but one that is destined to grow in importance as one of the only available sources of long-term sustainable income for the local population.

1.2 Itineraries in the Pamirs

The itineraries proposed below are for combined jeep/hiking tours. Specially tailored (and more arduous) trekking tours, with qualified guides, incorporating various destinations described below are easily organised on request (see maps in the Annex and list of trekking routes and details on www.pamirs.org/trekking.htm). Longer hikes can be organised within some of the itineraries described below, with tented accommodation in lieu of Homestays according to visitors' wishes. In all village locations, traditional musical entertainment can be organised with local musicians and dancers on request. N.B. In the Pamirs "a cup of tea" (*Yak piula choy*) is understood to mean a sit-down meal.



An informal musical gathering



"Yak piula choy" - Photo Surat Toimastov



A musical picnic in the botanical garden

The itineraries assume arrival from Dushanbe by air (tickets can be arranged). Road travel from Dushanbe can also be organised, with one or two interesting overnight stays and sightseeing en route. Given the uncertainty about flights in adverse weather conditions, the road option may be preferred by some tour organisers (add 2 or 3 days to the itineraries described below).

All the tours described below, since they include overnight stays in local homes, provide exceptional opportunities for getting to know the people of the Pamirs and their culture, traditions, legends, music and religion.

Note on traditional Pamiri houses:

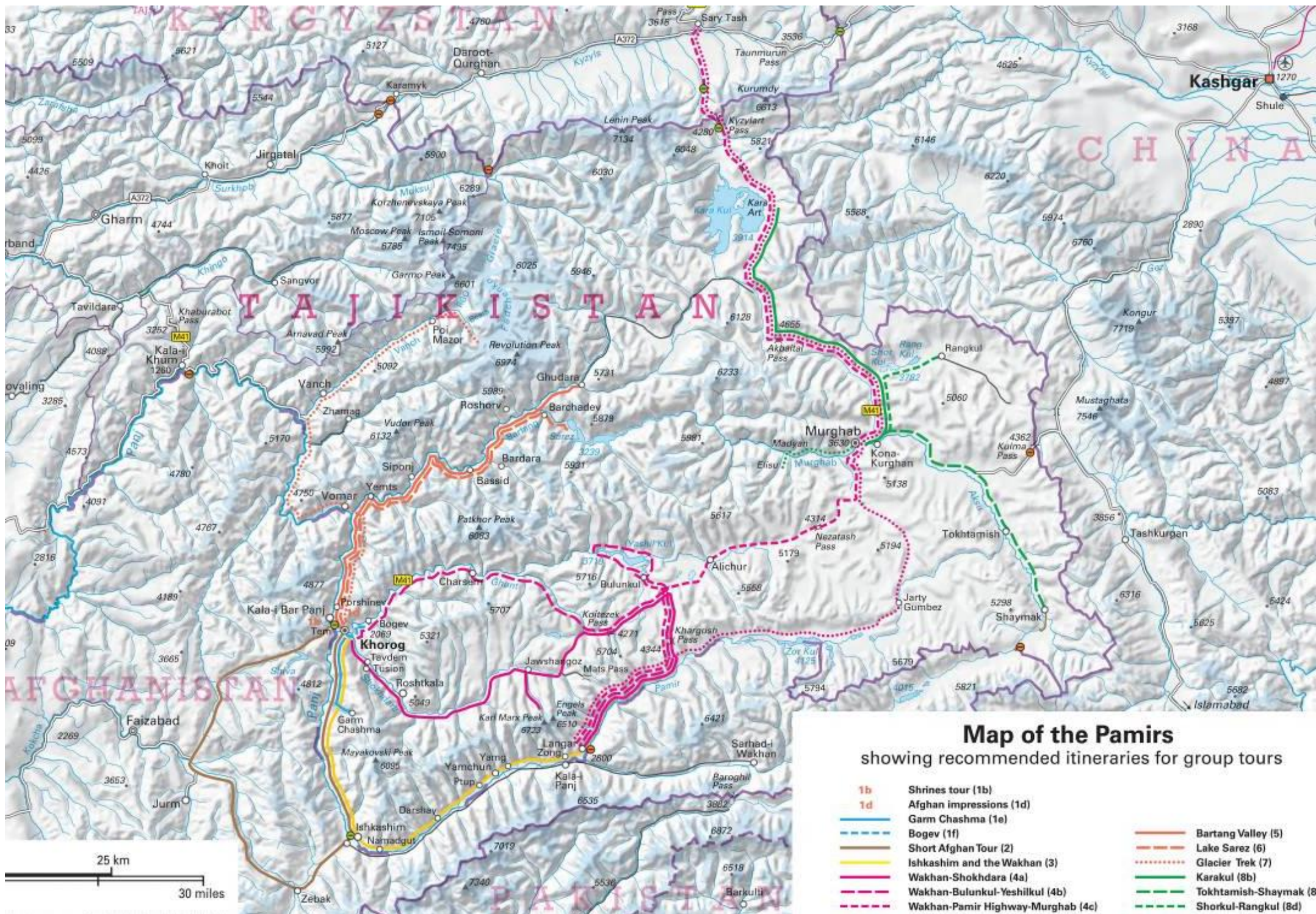
One of the most important repositories of the culture of the Pamirs is the traditional Pamiri house, locally known as 'Chid'. The symbolism of specific structural features of the Pamiri house goes back over two and a half thousand years. It is the symbol of the universe and also the place of private prayer and worship for Pamiri Ismailis (the Ismailis have as yet no mosques in Gorno-Badakhshan) and embodies elements of ancient Aryan philosophy – including Zoroastrianism – many of which have since been assimilated into Pamiri Ismaili tradition. What to the untrained eye looks like a very basic – even primitive – structure, is, for the people who live in it, rich in religious and philosophical meaning. For more information see: www.pamirs.org/pamiri%20house.htm.



Interior of traditional Pamir house

1.3 Overview of itineraries in the Pamirs and map

Number of tour (* see map, page 11)	Name of itinerary	Number of days	Page number
1a)	Town Tour	Day tour	12
1b)*	Shrines Tour	Day tour	13
1c)	Accompanied walks	Day tour	13
1d)*	Afghan Impressions	Day tour	13
1e)*	Garm Chashma	Day tour	14
1f)*	Bogev	Day tour	14
2)*	Short Afghan Tour	3 – 7 days	15
3)*	Ishkashim and the Wakhan	2 – 6 days	16
4a)*	Wakhan – Shokhdara	7 – 8 days	20
4b)*	Wakhan – Bulunkul – Yeshilkul	8 days	21
4c)*	Wakhan – Pamir Highway – Murghab	9 days	21
4d)*	Wakhan – Great Pamir - Murghab	9 days	22
5)*	Bartang Valley	2 – 10 days	23
6)*	Lake Sarez	5 days	24
7)*	Glacier Trek	6 days	25
8a)	Jailoo Tour	2 – 5 days	26
8b)*	Karakul	2 days	26
8c)*	Tokhtamish – Shaymak	Day tour	27
8d)*	Shorkul - Rangkul	Day tour	28
8e)	Madyan - Elisu	Day tour	29



Map of the Pamirs

showing recommended itineraries for group tours

- 1b Shrines tour (1b)
- 1d Afghan impressions (1d)
- 1e Garm Chashma (1e)
- 1f Bogev (1f)
- 2 Short Afghan Tour (2)
- 3 Ishkashim and the Wakhan (3)
- 4a Wakhan-Shokhdara (4a)
- 4b Wakhan-Bulunkul-Yeshilkul (4b)
- 4c Wakhan-Pamir Highway-Murghab (4c)
- 5 Bartang Valley (5)
- 6 Lake Sarez (6)
- 7 Glacier Trek (7)
- 8a Karakul (8a)
- 8b Tokhtamish-Shaymak (8b)
- 8d Shorkul-Rangkul (8d)

1.4 Description of itineraries in the Pamirs

1) Day Tours from Khorog

1a) Town Tour – comprising:

Bazaar – see how Khorog families do their shopping, talk with traders



Afghan trader at Khorog Afghan market

Afghan Market – Every Saturday Afghan traders are permitted to cross the bridge across the Panj river carrying their wares to a specially created customs-free zone – everything from used auto parts to colourful fabrics and traditional herbal remedies. Buy an Afghan hat, talk to the traders and learn about life in Afghan Badakhshan.



Khorog Regional Museum – with explanations of the history of the Pamir region from the Stone Age and Silk Road to the Great Game and the Soviet Union; see the piano carried on foot from Osh by 20 bearers for the daughter of the Russian Commander in 1914.

Photo Khorog Museum

Picnic in the *Khorog Botanical Garden*, second highest in the world, with its museum and displays.

Khorog Park – recently redesigned

Tea with a Khorog family

Optional:

- Site of *Aga Khan University* Campus with explanation of University's aims and academic programme
- Visit to *Aga Khan Lycée* – first private school in Tajikistan – during term time participate in English-language cross-cultural discussion with students
- Visit to a Khalifa (religious leader) for discussion
- Visit to a musician's home for a concert and dancing
- Visit to *Mountain Societies Development Support Programme* for discussion of development programmes in the Pamirs.

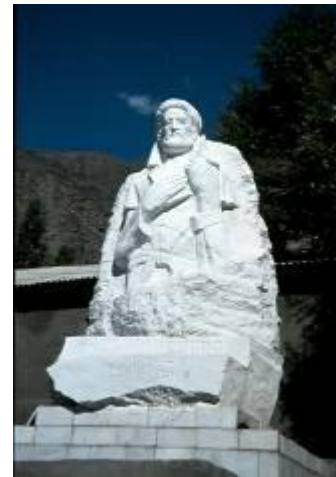
1b) Shrines tour – with explanations by religious leaders; picnic and tea in traditional Pamiri house:

Tem – *Imam Zainulabiddin* (third Ismaili Imam);

Porshinev – *Piri Shoh Nasir* with holy spring and statue of Nasr Khusraw (approx. 1004-1077), who is recognised as one of the great poets of the Persian language and an important Muslim philosopher – in the Ismaili community of Central Asia he is revered as a saint and the founder of Ismailism in the Pamirs; *Mir Sayyid Ali Hamadoni*; *Gumbazi Pir Sayyid Farrukhshoh* with superb calligraphic decoration on the ceiling; *Sumbi Duldul*, named after Hazrat Ali's horse who is reputed to have left a footprint here.



Shrine *Gumbazi Pir Sayyid Farrukhshoh*



Statue of *Nasr Khusraw* in *Porshinev village*

1c) Accompanied Walks – There are several attractive and easy hikes in and near to Khorog. Day excursions with picnic and guide can be organised (e.g. the *Shrines Tour* above can be done as a walking tour).

1d) Afghan impressions: Guided walking Tour from Khorog across the bridge to Afghanistan and up to the historical site of Kala-i Bar Panj (“Fortress of the upper Panj”), the residence of the rulers of ancient Badakhshan – picnic on the site with views of Khorog, Porshinev and the Panj. A guide will explain the historical background to the site. The round trip is approx. 20km.

In 1880, the pundit and holy man Mukhtar Shah was here spying for the British and described the fortress then:

“Passing for half a mile through the cultivation and hamlets of Bar Panjah village (200 houses) to the right and left I reached the fort of that name with a garden before the entrance to the right. This fort, situated on the left bank of a branch of the Panjah, which river here splits up into three channels, enclosing low forest-covered islands, is an oblong 400 paces east and west and 300 north and south. The walls are more than 20 yards high and 6 yards in thickness, with a rampart and parapets for the protection of the defenders. The wall towards the river is built on a rock rising out of the water. The bastions, eight in number, are, as usual, placed at the corners and intermediately. There is a spring of water in the fort. Behind the fort is a large garden, also well-fortified and well-supplied with all sorts of fruit.”

1e) Garm Chashma – Bathe in the legendary hot spring with reputed magical healing properties. Garm Chashma is located about 35 kilometres south of Khorog up a picturesque side valley from the Panj. Visit shrine to Hazrat Ali. Travel by jeep – Picnic at the hot spring, tea on the way back with a family in a traditional Pamiri house.

1f) Bogev fire temples, ruins of medieval *Kafirkala* fortress and *Mushkilkusho* shrine – ten kilometres from Khorog by jeep, picnic at the site and tea in a traditional Pamiri house (option hike)



Bogev fire temple (Photo Peter Burgess)

2) Short Afghan Tour (3-7 days)

This trip takes the visitor high above the river Panj to the beautiful deep blue Shiva Lake ("Kol-i Shewa – 3,110m) and over the mountains on paths worn by local nomads since time immemorial to Ishkashim, where the Panj is crossed again into Tajikistan.



*Sheva Lake, Afghan Badakhshan
(Photo Google Earth)*

John Wood (explorer of Zorkul in 1838 – see below) and Dr. Albert Regel (the Russian explorer who was here in 1882) recorded the beauty and size of the lake. Ole Olufsen, leader of a Danish expedition in 1888-9, noted that the lake was believed by the local people to be full of sea-horses, that “come out of the water to graze, and then pair with the horses in the fields, and this crossing is said to be very good for the breed. To venture out on these lakes is death, as the sea-monsters would immediately pull one down into the deep.”

This isolated mountain area has so far been untouched by security problems. The trip can be undertaken by jeep or on horseback. Homestays are available, but camping is an option.

3) Modular Tours to Ishkashim and the Wakhan (2-6 days)

All these tours are modular in the sense that they can be extended from the preceding tour on the list. All offer spectacular views across the Panj river to Afghanistan and the snow-clad peaks of the Hindu Kush; historical and archaeological sites will be explained by qualified guides.

3a) 2 day tour:



Day 1 – to Ishkashim via Garm Chashma (as above under day tours from Khorog) – Overnight in nearby homestay.

Panj river near Ishkashim



Day 2 – visit: ruins of Silk Road Caravanserai in Nut; Kakhkaha fortress, named after the legendary leader of the Siahposh (“black robed”) people (now living in Nuristan in Afghanistan), who is reputed to have ruled the Wakhan region in pre-Islamic times; the oldest parts of the fortress are actually dated to the Kushan period (first to third centuries BCE);

Kakhkaha fortress in Namadgut village



Ostoni Shohi Mardon shrine in Namadgut, with fine carving on the doors and the five stone balls with which, according to local legend, Ali juggled when defeating Kakhkaha.

Interior of shrine Ostoni Shohi Mardon

Return to Khorog. Tea in traditional Pamiri house.

Option: Afghan market: every Saturday except in Winter and early Spring (or on official holidays) local inhabitants are permitted to cross the bridge across the Panj to an island in mid-stream where Afghan traders offer their wares, as in Khorog (see above 1a).

3b) 3 day tour: as above.

Day 2 – i) Hike to visit Petroglyphs in Darshay – some dating back to the Kushan period, others with Islamic inscriptions.



Petroglyphs in Darshay and Langar (Photos Vatani Alidodov)



ii) Visit shrine *Shoh Isomuddin* in Ptup village with a fine garden filled with old twisted sacred trees. The shrine is dedicated to Shoh Hasan Medina who is believed to be one of the first Ismaili envoys who preached to and converted the local people.

Shrine *Shoh Isomuddin* in Ptup

iii) Visit the vast fortress complex *Zamr-i-atish-parast* (Fortress of fire worshippers) near Yamchun village, also attributed by legend to Kakhkaha. Parts of this fortress date to the Graeco-Bactrian and Kushan periods (3rd to 1st centuries BCE) – other parts are early mediaeval.



Zamr-i-atish-parast (Fortress of fire worshippers) near Yamchun

iv) *Bibi Fotima* hot spring in Yamchun, believed by the local people to improve female fertility Overnight in nearby home stay. Day 3 – return to Khorog, with tea in traditional Pamiri house.

3c) 4 day tour: as above.

Day 3 – visit:

i) Museum in Yamg village in the residence of the astronomer and scholar Sufi Muboraki Vakhoni (1839-1930). The museum houses his manuscripts and exhibits a collection of traditional tools, musical instruments and clothes and is a very fine example of a traditional Pamiri house with superb carved pillars and beams.

Just outside the museum is the solar calendar used by Sufi Muboraki for determining the start of the Navruz (Spring) festival.



Skylight in Yamg museum



Stupa in Vrang



Entrance to Yamg museum

ii) Vrang village: Buddhist stupa and shrine/museum *Osorkhonai Abdullo Ansori*, dedicated to the mystic and Sufi poet Abdullo Ansori, who lived in the 11th century CE.

Overnight in nearby homestay.

Day 4 – return to Khorog, with tea in traditional Pamiri house.

3d) 5 day tour: as above.

Day 4 – Travel to the village of Langar and hike to see pre-historic Petroglyphs. Visit shrine *Mazori Shoh Kambari Oftob*, meaning literally ‘Holy Place of the Master of the Sun’, which would suggest that, like many other holy places in the Wakhan, it was revered already in pre-Islamic times.

Overnight in nearby homestay. Bactrian camels are bred near Langar and camel trekking can be organised.



Shrine Mazori Shoh Kambari Oftob

Day 5 – Return to Khorog, stopping en route in Zong village for hike to visit site of *Vishimkala* fortress (‘Silk Fortress’ in the Wakhi language, also known by its corresponding Tajik name of *Abreshimkala*) dating from the medieval period. According to legend, the fortress was once covered entirely in silk.



Vishimkala fortress in Zong

4) Wakhan Circuit Tours

4a) Wakhan - Shokhdara (7 - 8 days)

As 5-day Wakhan tour, visit *Vishimkala* on Day 4 and

Day 5 – travel from Langar up the beautiful Pamir river to the Pamir Highway (look out for Bactrian camels en route) and into the upper Shokhdara valley. Overnight in homestay in Jawshangoz village.



Pamir river



Bactrian camels on Pamir river



Peaks Engels (c) and Marx (r)

Day 6 – hike south towards the Mats Pass with spectacular views of Karl Marx Peak (6,723m) and Engels Peak (6,510m). Return to Jawshangoz. Horses are also available.

Day 7 – return to Khorog, visiting fortresses in Deruj (late Kushan period, 2nd-3rd centuries CE), Shashbuvad (19th century CE) and Roshtkala (7th century CE) and shrine of *Sayyid Jalol Bukhori* in Tavdem village. Tea in traditional Pamiri house.



Shrine of Sayyid Jalol Bukhori



Deruj fortress

Optional additional day hiking above the Shokhdara river with overnight in Tusion village.

4b) Wakhan – Bulunkul - Yeshilkul (8 days)

As 5-day Wakhan tour, visit Vishimkala on Day 4 and

Day 5 – travel from Langar up the beautiful Pamir river to the Pamir Highway and to Bulunkul village for overnight stay.

Days 6 and 7 – visit Bulunkul lake and hike around spectacular Yeshilkul lake (it means green lake and lives up to its name) with Scythian burial grounds and Chinese caravanserai.



Bulunkul



*Caravanserai in Sumantash
(Photo Surat Toimastov)*



Yeshilkul

Day 8 – return to Khorog down the Pamir Highway, with stop in Bogevo (see 1f above) and tea in traditional Pamiri house.

4c) Wakhan - Pamir Highway - Murghab (9 days)

This and the next trip are especially suited to visitors continuing to Osh and Kyrgyzstan, e.g. with return air flight from Bishkek – road transport to Osh can be organised as well as flights Osh-Bishkek)

As 8-day Wakhan-Bulunkul-Yashilkul tour, and

Day 8 – Bulunkul to Murghab – overnight in yurt.

Day 9 – to Osh (427km) or return to Khorog (311km)

Optional: the itinerary can be shortened by 2 days (days 6 and 7) by excluding the visit to Bulunkul and Yeshilkul and travelling from Langar to Alichur on day 5 – overnight in yurt in Alichur.

4d) Wakhan - Great Pamir - Murghab (9 days)

As 6-day Wakhan tour, visit *Vishimkala* on Day 5 and

Day 6 – travel from Langar up the beautiful Pamir river and through the checkpoint at Khargush to Zorkul lake (the first non-local visitor was Captain John Wood in 1838 and the lake used to be called Wood's Lake or Lake Victoria by British Great Game players) and to the hunting camp at Jarty Gumbez for hot spring bath and overnight stay.



Zorkul



Great Pamir to Bendersky Pass



*Istyk River near
Jarty Gumbez*

Day 7 – hiking around Jarty Gumbez with guide from hunting camp who will show visitors the Scythian burial grounds and (if possible) flocks of Marco Polo sheep (*Ovis Poli*) on the distant hillsides

Day 8 – travel to Murghab for overnight yurt stay

Day 9 – continue to Osh (427km) or return to Khorog (311km)

5) Bartang Valley (various options from 2 to 10 days)

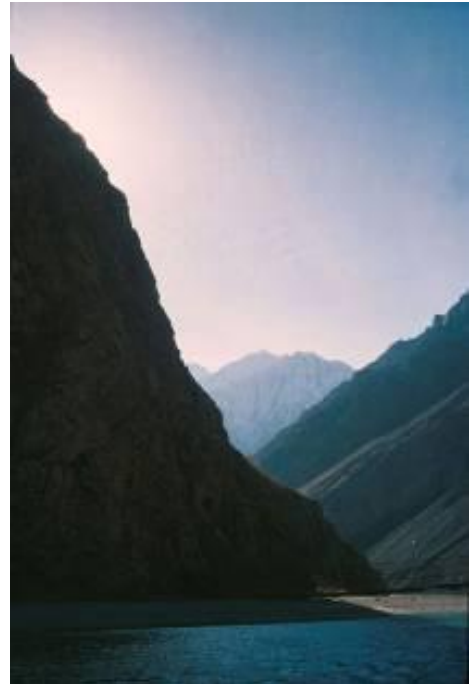
The valley of the Bartang river is one of the most picturesque in the Pamirs (Bartang means “narrow passage” and its people are among the most hospitable, keeping alive many of the old Pamiri traditions.



Yapshorv village (Bartang)



Rasuj village (Bartang)



Bartang near Yemts village

The valley is long (158 km to the last village, Ghudara) and there are many homestays in traditional Pamiri houses on the way. Both jeep and hiking tours can be organised, or a combination of both. A Bartang tour can be combined with the Sarez tour (see below). N.B. This trip and the Sarez tour are best undertaken in late spring, early summer or autumn, as the road along the river is often flooded in the hottest months.

6) Lake Sarez (5 days)



The sapphire-coloured Lake Sarez was formed in 1911 by the blocking of the Murghab river by a massive landslide, provoked by an earthquake. Sarez is the name of the village that lies submerged at its bottom. (N.B. This itinerary requires adequate physical fitness).

Day 1 - Drive from Khorog up the Bartang valley to the spectacularly located village of Barchadev approx. 130km from Khorog). Overnight stay in a traditional Pamiri house.

Day 2 – Sarez is reached in six to eight hours after a fairly steep climb (16km – height difference approx. 800m – Sarez is at 3,339m) up a well-constructed path. Camping.

Lake Sarez (Photo Misha Romanyuk)

Day 3 – Walking and trekking near the lake (a boat trip can be organised). Camping.



Barchadev village

Day 4 – Return to Barchadev. Overnight stay in a traditional Pamiri house.

Day 5 – Return to Khorog – tea in a traditional Pamiri house. Visit shrines in Bardara, Bassid and Vomar.



Carvings in shrine in Bardara village



Shrine in Bassid



Exterior of shrine in Bardara

The tour can be extended on the return journey by one or more overnight stays in the pretty villages en route to Khorog.

7) Glacier Trek (6 days)

The Pamirs contain, of course, many glaciers, among which the *Fedchenko* Glacier, the longest mountain glacier in the world (77km – 270 km²). Willi Rickmer Rickmers, one of the pioneers of European skiing, who traversed several of them in 1913 and again in 1928 as leader of an official German-Soviet expedition, linked the distinctive nature of the Pamirs to their glacial formation. “The glaciers of the Pamirs have certain distinctive features. We owe to the climate the wonderful preservation of those elementary geomorphological shapes and signs of glaciation which, in the Alps, are scoured by the rain and overgrown with vegetation. In the Pamirs, rivers have sawn sharp-edged canyons into sediments without carrying away the walls. The Pamirs occupy a place in the line of transformations between desert and luxuriant jungle. They are sensitive and react quickly, whereas the Alpine glaciers are sluggish, and their tongues have longer in which to melt. Without the glaciers on the Roof of the World, there would not have been empires in Turkestan.”

Ascent to the *Fedchenko* and other high mountain glaciers requires much experience, preparation, and specialised equipment. At the end of the Vanch valley, however, there is a relatively accessible if arduous trekking route to glaciers below the *Fedchenko*. N.B. Glacier trekking is always dangerous and this trip must only be undertaken with qualified mountain guides who know the route well.

Day 1 – Drive from Khorog to Poi Mazor, last village in the Vanch valley. Visit reputed grave of Hazrat Ali. Homestay.

Day 2 – Drive to end of jeepable road beyond Poi Mazor and trek to the snout of the Bears (Medvezhiy) glacier; this gives you a superb view up the steep Russian *Geographical Society* (Geograficheskogo Obshchestva) glacier, down which, it is said, Soviet mountaineers used to ski after visiting the Fedchenko glacier) with Peak Garmo (6,595m) at its head. Camping.



Poi Mazor



Bears Glacier
(Photo Markus Hauser)

Day 3 – Trek along and across the moraine-covered snout of the Bears glacier, wading through its icy stream, across the snout of the *Abdulkhagor* glacier and steep climb up the lateral moraine / ablation valley (3,500m). Nice views of surrounding peaks. Trek across moraine to *Abdulkhagor* Glacier. Camping.

Day 4 – Trek in and out of the ablation valley – tremendous views down and across the plunging, steep crevassed section of the *Abdulkhagor* glacier, free of moraine, with smaller feeder glaciers coming in (4,400 metres). Begin descent to Poi Mazor. Camping.



Peak Garmo (Photo Markus Hauser)

Day 5 – Return to Vanch valley. Overnight in traditional Pamiri house.

Day 6 – Return to Khorog - tea in a traditional Pamiri house.

8) High Plateau Yurt Tours from Murghab

Murghab (“river of birds” - 3,650m) is the main town of the Eastern Pamirs and the centre of the district known also as Murghab. The majority of the population are of Kyrgyz ethnic extraction and until the 1950s led an essentially nomadic way of life. Due to a decrease in numbers of livestock at the end of the Soviet period, the population has become sedentary and fewer migrate to yurt encampments with their livestock in the summer.

The tours listed below all begin in Murghab. They are also “modular” in the sense that they can be combined with, for example, tours **5c** (Wakhan-Pamir Highway-Murghab) and **5d** (Wakhan-Great Pamir-Pamir Highway-Murghab) above. For those visitors who wish to concentrate on the “high plateau experience” these tours can be planned as a combination tour, with Murghab as the primary destination (either from Osh in Kyrgyzstan or from Dushanbe via Khorog) and starting point for all these tours. Day tours can be extended for hiking according to the wishes of visitors. Mountain bikes can be rented in Murghab as another option.

8a) Jailoo tour (2 - 5 days)

Tours of the high summer pastures (‘jailoo’ in the Kyrgyz language), combining yurt accommodation and participation in the life of the herders (most own sheep, goats, yak and cattle), can be organised at variable lengths according to visitors’ wishes. Camel trekking is also available.



Yurt side valley near Murghab



Yurt interior



Preparing the yak for milking

8b) Karakul (2 days)

This tour is best undertaken either on the way out of the Pamirs, or on the way in, in which case only one day need be planned. The impressive high plateau road to Karakul follows the Akbaital river – in places the desert terrain resembles a moonscape (it was once on the bottom of the ocean).



Pamir Highway North of Murghab



Pool on Pamir Highway



Akbaital River

Travel is by jeep and the round trip Murghab-Karakul-Murghab (total 270km) requires two days due to the poor condition of the surface on much of the Pamir Highway. The village of Karakul has several yurt stays and homestays.



Karakul looking south

Karakul is a spectacularly beautiful lake. Despite its name (“Black Lake”), for most of the year the cloudless skies and pure air (3,923m) give it a translucent azure colour. Enjoy the views from different points around the lake – follow in the footsteps of the great Russian scientist, naturalist and explorer Nicolai Severtsov, who was here in 1878 and brought back 20,000 plant specimens, 60 mammals, 350 birds and 20 fish.



Drawings from Nicolai Severtsov’s collections (Pamir Archive – Markus Hauser)

At the northern end of the lake, at a place known as Kara-Art, a track turns off west to pre-historic geoglyphs and Saka graves, located about 500m from the turnoff.

8c) Tokhtamish - Shaymak (day tour)

From Murghab town, at the junction of the Akbaital and Aksu rivers – where the river becomes the Murghab – a road branches off the Pamir Highway to the east, leading past the village of Kona-Kurghan with its interesting graveyard, up the Aksu valley (“White river”) to Tokhtamish and Shaymak (approx. 250km round trip). Travel is by jeep and the road leads first in the direction of the border crossing to China at the Kulma Pass (not open for tourist traffic at the time of writing) and then follows the fence protecting the no-mans-land border area as far as Shaymak. The road offers views of the peak of Mustagh Ata (“Father of the Ice”, 7,546m) in the Tashkurgan Autonomous County in China on the other side of the Sarikol range. It also passes several attractive lakes and ancient burial grounds. Some are of pre-historic Scythian origin. A small homestay is available in Shaymak.



Ruins of a caravanserai on the road to Shaymak



Kyzylgorum lake



View of Mustagh Ata from Tokhtamish

8d) Shorkul - Rangkul (day tour)

Some 19km north of Murghab town on the Pamir Highway, a road leads east to the beautiful iridescent lakes of Shorkul and Rangkul. Travel is by jeep, but the short distance to Rangkul (65km) and the pure scenery make this also an attractive hiking route. There are yurt stays and homestays in the village of Rangkul. Camel trekking can be organised from here.



Shorkul



Rangkul



Opposite Shorkul there are ancient Kyrgyz graves and a large rock outcrop known locally as *Chiragh Tash* ('lamp rock') from the light that supposedly shines from inside a cave on the eastern side some fifty metres from the ground. According to legend, the light comes from the eye of a dragon guarding a treasure in the cave (the entrance to the cave resembles an eye). Two Great Game players, Ney Elias (1885) and Francis Younghusband (1891) were here and recorded the legend.

From Rangkul there are views of the peak of Mustagh Ata ("Father of the Ice", 7,546m) in the Tashkurgan Autonomous County in China on the other side of the Sarikol range.

Chiragh Tash

8e) Madyan-Elisu (day tour)

At the southern entrance to Murghab town a road leads west along the Murghab river to Madyan and, up a side valley, to the hot spring *Elisu*. The valley on the way to Madyan benefits from a micro-climate that is significantly warmer than the rest of Murghab district and the land supports some grain crops and lush pasture. A yurt stay and homestay are available at the hot spring.



Views along the road to Madyan

*All photos © Robert Middleton
www.pamirs.org unless otherwise indicated*

PROFILES OF INCOMING TOUR OPERATORS OFFERING THE PAMIRS AS A DESTINATION

Pamirs Tourism Adventure, Ltd.

Pamirs Tourism Adventure is a tour operator company located in the Pamir mountainous areas administratively known as Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast (GBAO) as part of the Republic of Tajikistan. This mountainous area contains 8 long routes via spectacular sceneries of wild, virgin nature with views to high sky-scraping mountains, such as Peak Karl Marx, and Engels, Hindukush mountain ranges and Mustagh-Ata Peak in Pakistan and China. We are specialized in providing a variety of tourism services such as transportation, food and lodging, home stays along the route, mountain trekking, horse-riding and experienced English and German speaking guides for various areas in GBAO. In addition we give visa support for our clients wishing to visit the area and also obtain GBAO permits for this mountainous area where there are some restrictions.

Our advantage compared to other tourist organizations operating in the country is that we are based right in the destination and support our clients on the spot. The company serves all categories of tourists depending on their interests and requirements. We provide our services starting from May till the end of October, when it is the best season for visiting places with various complexities in different locations of this mountainous area.

Pamirs Tourism Adventure always receives good feedback from the clients.

Products and services

Jeep Tours

Jeep tours on the Pamir Highway or along the Wakhan Corridor, visiting historical sites and staying in family homes in villages, is the choice of most tourists visiting the Pamirs for the first time. Jeep Tours can be combined with hiking and trekking.

Hikes and Treks

We organize moderate one-day hikes or challenging adventurous several-day treks, according to the wishes of the clients: the valley of the Vanj is wide and green; Yazgulem, more sparsely inhabited, is narrower and more rugged; the Fedchenko glacier can be reached from the top of both valleys; the Bartang valley offers the most varied scenery in the Pamirs.

Stays in villages

This will give you a new perception of the meaning of some common-place terms such as "happiness", "poverty", "hope" and "faith".

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Pamir Silk Tour Company

The Pamir Silk Tour Company has been providing high-quality professional services to tourists in Central Asia since 1997. We organize many different fascinating tours in Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Afghanistan and China, tailored to the specific needs of tour operators and individual tourists:

Our Services include:

- Mountain itineraries and trekking;
- Adventure tours in the Pamirs and ecotourism;
- Mountaineering in the Fan mountains and the Pamirs;
- Treks in Great Pamir (Tajikistan) and Little Pamir (Afghanistan);
- Combined tours Tajik and Afghan Pamirs;
- Trek to the famous Wakhan corridor & Great & Little Pamir in Afghanistan;
- Ecotours to Jisev valley (Bartang);
- Expeditions to high mountains of the Pamirs: Somoni (formerly Communism), Korjanevsky, Lenin, Patkhor, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels;
- Tours in Penjikent and the Fann mountains;
- Ethnographic and cultural visits throughout Central Asia;
- Rafting on high mountain rivers: Murghab, Ghunt, Shakhdara & Bartang;
- Jeep tours along the famous Silk Road;
- Mountain Bike tours;
- Wildlife observation (e.g. Marco Polo sheep) and photography;
- Bird watching;
- Horse-back trekking;
- Camel trekking;
- Helicopter excursions.

Our company has more than seven employees with good experience in the tourism sphere. The manager has a certificate "Management in Tourism" and has 26 years experience in this sphere. Most of our clients are from Europe and Russian (different ages, only 10% of them are families).

Products and services

Through The Pamir /Dushanbe-Darvaz (via Khaburrubat pass)-Bartang-Jizev-Ravmed-Kudara-Kara kul-Murgab-Yashil kul-Langar-Ishkashim-Khorog-Darvaz –Dushanbe (via Kulyab region)

This tour is specially developed for acquaintance with the basic sites located on highways of the Pamir. Also short two-day track to one of the most beautiful valleys of Badakhshan is included. Tour starts and finishes in Dushanbe. During this tour tourists will learn about the history of the country and traditional music, dance, cooking, handicrafts etc. of the Pamirs and the local community of Tajikistan. Tourist will participate in discussions with local people and learn life of the high mountain village (situated at an altitude of 3938 m).

Trek to famous Sarez Lake 15 days, period for tours: June-September, number of tourists per group: 1-15 people

Tour includes moving along a pedestrian track for 10 days. Some sites of a track demand big efforts and require tourists to be in a good health and physical condition.

From Dushanbe to Osh Kyrgyzstan

During this tour tourists will learn about the history and traditional music, dance, cooking, handicrafts etc. of the Pamirs and the local community of Tajikistan. Tourist will participate in

discussions with local people and learn life of the hi mountain village (situated at an altitude of 3938 m).

Tajik & Afghan Pamirs

The tour start in Tajik and will continue to Afghan Badakhshan. During this tour tourist will experience the life of the local communities, living in both sides of the Pamirs in Tajikistan and Afghanistan.

Photo Safari in Tajikistan

The tour starts in the North part of Tajikistan from old Penjekent city and will finish in Kyrgyzstan.

Soft rafting in Murgab river

The Blue eyes of Pamir

This tour will pass by 7 most beautiful lakes of the Pamirs.

Expedition to peak Somony

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Tour de Pamir

The "Tour de Pamir" ("TDP") organizes tourist excursion service for national and foreign tourists to the main attraction of the Pamirs. The office of the "TDP" is situated in Khorog, in the Republic of Tajikistan. "TDP" offers an opportunity to visit one of the most interesting mountain districts of our planet – the Pamirs (Tajikistan). Gorno - Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast (GBAO, Pamir) in the Republic of Tajikistan – it is one of the highest uplands of the world. The mountains occupy 98 % of all territory of the region. The average height of the mountains is 5-6km, and highest peak is 7495m - I.Somoni's Peak (in the past - Communism peak). From year to year our highlands become more and more popular among the tourists, who appreciate visiting colorful places, the abundance of wild animals, vegetation and numerous hills.

Products and services

"TDP" provides tours where the tourists can see and enjoy the high-mountainous nature, can ascent the mountains and enjoy the wonderful views, can visit health resorts in the mountains and other exotic places like ancient architectural monuments, fortresses and sacred places.

The "TDP" organizes both walking and automobile excursions.

The "TDP" offers hunting of marmots, partridges, foxes, mountain goats and rams (arkhar).

The "TDP" provides its customers with meals during all the tours. Also the necessary equipment, guides – interpreters, drivers and maps are provided.

According to the requests of the customers it is possible to do a tailor-made tour.

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Ajam Tour LLC

Travel agency "Ajam Tour" is the company for which the opinion of each client is very important. We do not work for the sake of profit, our main purpose is the satisfaction of the customers that have chosen us. Located in Dushanbe, we offer various tours to all directions of Tajikistan from north to south, from east to west. Also, with our excursion tours you have an opportunity to get acquainted with rich culture, language and life of the Tajik people. For many tourists, it is the country which attracts with the ancient history and languages that have remained here. You will be surprised also with the landscapes of the wild nature, which our hospitable country is generously presenting. The best hotels, restaurants and other entertaining complexes are waiting for fans of convenience and comfort. And for the those, wishing to gain some more extreme experience, we have prepared special tours: climbing, rock-climbing and Mountain Rivers. This will give you enough adrenaline and positive experience that you will not forget in all your life.

We have the certificate of touristic activity given by the Committee of Youth, Sport & Tourism of Tajikistan. Our tours can be realized in any time of season, they are proper for all category of people (woman, man, couples, elder people, youth, children, scientists, historians, groups, students. etc.)

Our services:

- Booking of hotels;
- Cottage Rent;
- Registration of invitations;
- Translation of documents and certification.

Our company is engaged in translation of documents in seven languages (English, German, French, Japanese, Chinese, Russian, Tajik, Persian, Dari) on various subjects. Also we certify all necessary documents translated into foreign languages.

Products and services

We offer various tours to historical places of Tajikistan which basically lie on the Great Silk Road.

Jeep Tour to Pamir 13 days / 12 nights

Discover Pamir

This trip covers the most interesting places of the mountains and the country itself. Stunning mountains, spectacular road on Tajik-Afghan border and drive along the ancient Silk Road. Arid plateaus of high Pamir, meetings with hospitable inhabitants in summer pastures and remote villages. Observe many different geographical sceneries and landscapes and listen to local music.

Guiding services are offered by company guides, fluently speaking English and many other foreign languages. Maximum group size: 12 people.

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Pamir Travel LLC

Tour agency "**Pamir Travel Ltd**" began in 1992, and since then has enjoyed fame and popularity as one of the best tour operators in Central Asia. Tajikistan, located in the heart of Central Asia, is surrounded by Uzbekistan, Kirghizstan, Afghanistan and China. Travel with us on the wide space of Central Asia, and also back in time along the routes of the Great Silk Road. Visit ancient and historical cities of Penjikent, Khujand, Istiravshan, Isfara, Hissar, Kabadian, Pamir, Vakhn, Ishkashim, Vrang, and Zong. Our routes pass from sun dried deserts up to high, snow covered peaks, which you will find in the wonderful mountainous country Tajikistan.

Our company "**Pamir Travel Ltd**" organizes many different fascinating tours and services throughout Tajikistan and Central Asia. We are experts in aspects of travel, transport, transfers, visa support, airline tickets, accommodation, excursions and trekking. Including horse and camel riding, rafting, expeditions, climbing, jeep tours, adventure and activity holidays, historical and cultural tours. Our experienced local guides will ensure that your trip is filled with happy lasting memories of your time in Central Asia.

Products and services

All mountain activities are available from May to October. Other tours can be scheduled throughout the year. Tours are tailor made to suit your requirements, below are a sample of some of our most popular trips, which can be combined or adjusted as required.

Pamir Highway 9 days/8 nights

The tour begins with a spectacular flight through (not over!) the mountains from Dushanbe to Khorog, capital of the Mountainous Badakhshan Autonomous Region. From Khorog we take a 4WD vehicle through the stunning sights of the Pamir Highway, over the Ak-Baital Pass (at altitude of 4,650m, one of the highest stretches of road in the world). This tour follows the route from Khorog to Murgab, which was once the Shugnon branch of the ancient Silk Road. Accomodation in Traditional Pamir homestays. Group size from 1 – 25 people.

Visa support

A new simplified Visa application process has been introduced. Tajikistan is now one of the Central Asian countries where visas can be obtained in most simple and straight forward way. Prices and time for issuing at oversees consular offices have been standardized and simplified. Some countries do not need a Visa Support Letter (VSL) when applying for a visa. All other nationals need a VSL from a local travel agency that will be sent by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the consulate processing the visa request. If required we can supply Visa Support Letter according to your request. In addition, nationals of 80 countries are able to obtain tourist visas at some points of entry, including Dushanbe International Airport. If we are meeting visitors at the airport we are able to offer support for this process.

Transport

Pamir travel has a large fleet of vehicles and experienced drivers suitable for traveling in mountain roads and can arrange transport and transfer services from all points in Central Asia.

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