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EXTENDED TURKMENISTAN

Duration: **11 days / 10 nights** · Luggage: **Hand luggage: 1, max 5 kg · Checked luggage: 1, max 20 kg**

Up-to-date dates, prices and included services: moai.ch/turkmenistan

An extraordinary journey through the heart of Turkmenistan, from marble cities and scorching deserts to fiery craters and canyons.

From Ashgabat's monumental elegance to the ruins of ancient capitals like Nisa, Merv, and Kunya Urgench—UNESCO heritage—you'll traverse centuries of history and legend.

The wildest landscapes await in the Koytendag, with dinosaur footprints, mysterious caves, and hidden waterfalls, before you experience the unique thrill of the Darvaza Crater, also known as the Gateway to Hell.

You'll uncover the genuine hospitality of rural villages, where traditions, craftsmanship, and timeless vistas come alive.

The journey continues to the wind-sculpted Yangykala canyons, with breathtaking colours and shapes, before reaching the shores of the Caspian Sea.

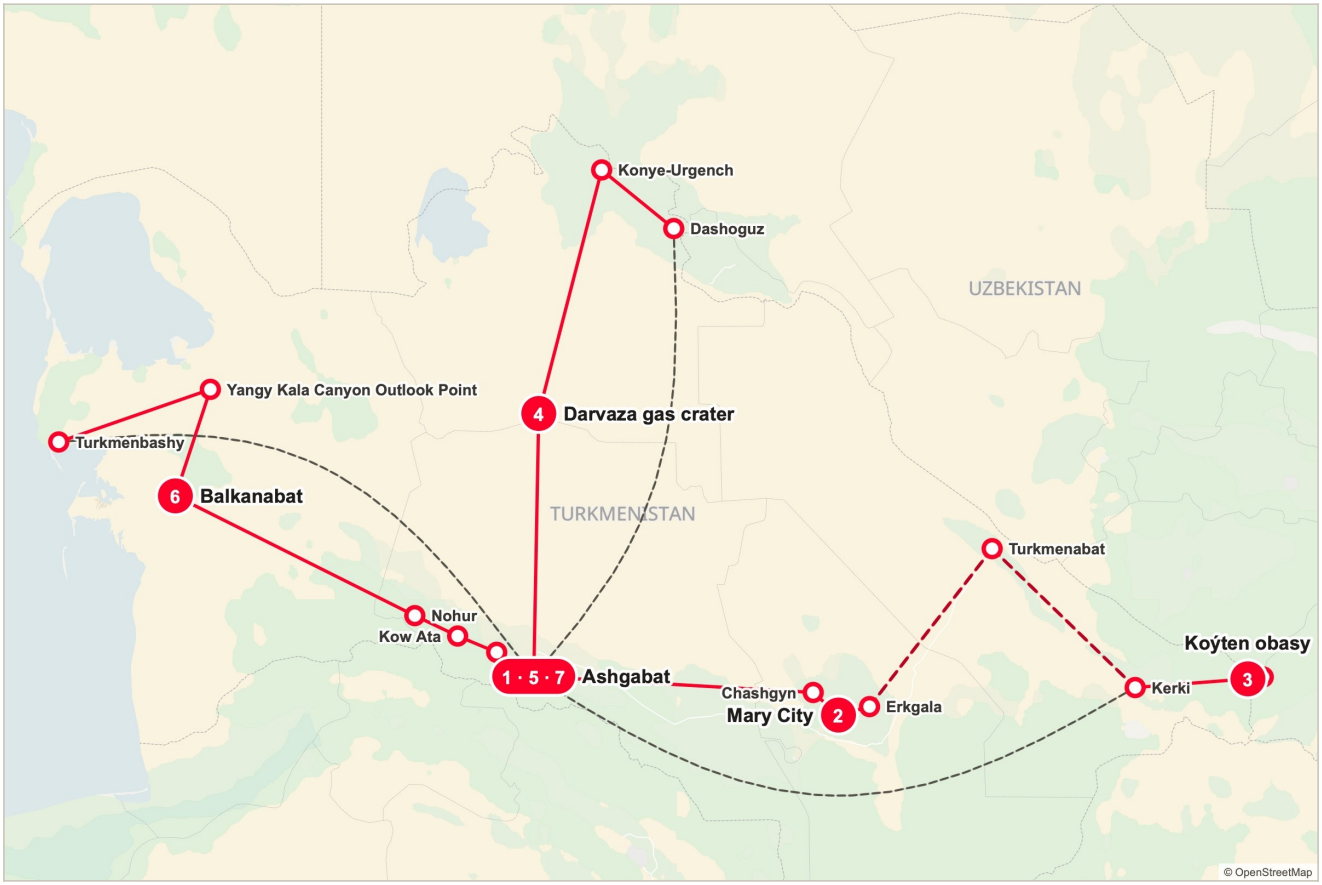
An intense and diverse itinerary, perfect for those seeking authentic, off-the-beaten-path destinations.

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The route



1. **Ashgabat**
   1 night · Day 2
2. **Mary City**
   1 night · Day 3
3. **Koýten obasy**
   2 nights · Days 5–6
4. **Darvaza gas crater**
   1 night · Day 7
5. **Ashgabat**
   1 night · Day 8
6. **Balkanabat**
   1 night · Day 9
7. **Ashgabat**
   1 night · Day 10

Itinerary

Day 1 – Departure for Turkmenistan

Evening departure from Milano (or other cities) with an overnight Turkish Airlines flight via Istanbul. Arrival in Ashgabat early the following morning.

Day 2 – Arrival in Ashgabat

Arrival at Ashgabat International Airport in the morning. Meet with your local guide and transfer to your hotel (early check-in). Free time to rest for a while.

Transfer to visit the **Nissa Fortress**, the Sanctuary of the Parthian Kings. The **UNESCO** declared the fortress a

World Heritage Site in 2007. Nissa is described as one of the first capitals of the Parthians. Founded by Arsaces I (reign ca. 250 BCE – 211 BCE), it is considered the royal necropolis of the Parthian kings. However, it has not yet been definitively established whether the fortress was a royal residence or a mausoleum.

Tour of the city of **Ashgabat**. In 2013, the Guinness Book of Records named Ashgabat the "City of White Marble": it features the highest concentration of white marble buildings in the world. You will see the **Ashgabat Olympic Stadium**, the **Independence Monument and Park**, the **flagpole**, the **Neutrality Arch**, the **Constitution Monument**, the **Ferris wheel**, the **Wedding Palace**, and enjoy panoramic views of Ashgabat from the hill; the **Halk Hakydasy Memorial Complex**, the **Alabay Monument**, and the **Ertogrul Gazi Mosque**.

Overnight: 4* hotel in Ashgabat · Meals included: lunch, dinner

Day 3 – Ashgabat Chashgyn Mary

After breakfast at the hotel, departure by car for **Mary** (360 km). Along the way, visit the ruins of the **Seyitjemalledin Mosque in Anau**, built in 1456 when Abu-ibn-Kasim Baber Bahadurkhan ruled in Khorasan (1446–1457). The construction was funded by Bahadurkhan's vizier, Muhammad Hudaidot, who also chose the site near the tomb of his father, Sheikh Jemaleddin, originally from Anau. The central square hall (10.5 metres per side) was topped by a dome. In later periods, the mosque was partially rebuilt. By the 19th century, ground subsidence had already severely damaged the building, and it was completely destroyed in the 1948 Ashgabat earthquake. Today, only the lower parts of the portal and some wall fragments remain.

On the route, stop at **Abiwerd**, once an important commercial city of northern Khorasan. It was a key node of the Great Silk Road between Nisa and Merv and maintained connections with Nishapur, beyond the Kopetdag Mountains to the south.

Continue through the picturesque Turkmen countryside. Upon arrival, head north to the village of **Chashgyn**, where you will witness an engaging demonstration of local craftsmanship. You will see artisans creating **traditional carpets**, **felt mats**, **dyed yarns**, and woven products. You will discover unique skills such as making **brooms** and crafting **national musical instruments**. The locals will also show you **camel milking** and other fascinating traditions. A hearty lunch at a local family's home to experience authentic Turkmen hospitality. Arrival in Mary.

Overnight: 4* hotel in Mary · Meals included: breakfast, lunch, dinner

Day 4 – Mary Merv Kerki

Morning visit to the main buildings in the centre of **Mary**. Visit the **Mary Bazaar** to discover the variety of local products, and the **Russian Orthodox church**, one of the oldest in Turkmenistan.

Transfer to **Merv** to explore the ancient city – known as the "Queen of the World," one of the most important Islamic capitals alongside Baghdad, Cairo, and Damascus.

The visits include: **Greater Kyz Gala and Lesser Kyz Gala** (6th–7th century), the **Ashab Complex** (8th–14th century), **Erk Gala** (6th century BCE), **Gyaur Gala** (4th century BCE), the **Hoja Yusup Hamadani Complex**, the **Mausoleum of Sultan Sanjar**, and the **Mausoleum of Muhamed Ibn Zeid**.

After the visits, in the evening, departure on the **overnight train** to **Kerki** (21:00 – 07:00).

Night train · Compartments with four berths for two people · Meals included: breakfast, lunch, dinner

Day 5 – Kerki Koyten Village

Early morning departure for the adventure in the stunning **Koytendag Valley** (183 km, 3h).

Along the way, visit the **Mausoleums of Astana-baba and Alemberdar**. Walk through the village of **Koyten**.

Overnight: Guesthouse in the village of Koyten · Meals included: breakfast, lunch, dinner

Day 6 – Koytendag Valley

Morning departure for the famous **Dinosaur Plateau**, an extraordinary geological wonder that reveals the story of prehistoric giants.

Explore the plateau, admiring the abundance of **dinosaur tracks** preserved for over 145 million years. Imagine the colossal creatures that once roamed these lands, leaving their indelible marks on the ground. Lunch at the **Dinosaur Plateau**, savouring the flavours of the region surrounded by a breathtaking landscape.

Continue towards the enigmatic **Grotta Kyrk Gyz**, a place steeped in legends: here, according to tradition, forty girls found refuge within its walls.

Immerse yourself in the unique tradition of the **"goat massage"**, a local practice known for its therapeutic effects: you will witness the agility of the goats as they climb onto your back, performing a gentle massage with their hooves.

Proceed to the evocative **Umbar-Dere waterfall**, a cascading oasis nestled among the hills. Enjoy the tranquillity and beauty of nature.

Overnight: Guesthouse in Koyten Village · Meals included: breakfast, lunch, dinner

Day 7 – Koyten Village Kerki Ashgabat Darvaza

Breakfast at the guesthouse, then transfer to **Kerki** (183 km, 3h) and flight to **Ashgabat**.
Upon arrival at Ashgabat International Airport, meet your driver and depart by car towards the **Darvaza Burning Gas Crater** (276 km, 4h), one of the country's most famous tourist destinations. The area is rich in natural gas. Burning for over 50 years, the **Darvaza Crater** shines like a pearl in the Karakum Desert and is also known as the **Gate of Hell**.

In addition to the fire crater, you will also visit the **water and mud craters**. Among the most intense aspects of this journey are the fresh desert air and the direct experience of nomadic life.

At night, as the crater's light illuminates the sky, you will stay in a **Turkmen national yurt** or in **private tents**, with a barbecue dinner. This unique landscape in the world will captivate you and make you want to return.

Overnight: Yurt or private tents · Meals included: breakfast, lunch, dinner

Day 8 – Darvaza Kunya Urgench Dashoguz Ashgabat

Picnic-style breakfast at **Darvaza**, followed by transfer to **Kunya Urgench** (389 km, approx. 6h).
City tour including visits to the **Caravanserai Gate**, the **Minaret of Mamun**, the **Mausoleum of Il-Arslan**, the **Mausoleum of Sultan Tekesh**, the **Academy of Khorezm**, the **Minaret of Kutlug Timur**, and the **Mausoleum of Turabek Hanum**.

After the visits, transfer to **Dashoguz** International Airport and flight to **Ashgabat**.

Overnight: 4* Hotel in Ashgabat · Meals included: breakfast, lunch, dinner

Day 9 – Ashgabat Gokdepe Kowata Nokhur Village Balkanabat

After breakfast at the hotel, visit the **Mosque and Mausoleum of Turkmenbashi Ruhi**, which was the largest

mosque in Central Asia at the time of its construction.

Continuation towards the **Gokdepe Fortress** (54 km), besieged in December 1880 by the Russian Imperial Army. The Siege of Gokdepe lasted 23 days, after which the city was stormed. Visit the **Geokdepe Mosque (Saparmyrat Hajy)**, built in 1995 to commemorate the defeat, known for its turquoise roof and white marble structure.

Visit the stables to admire the national pride of the Turkmen people: the **Akhal-Teke horses**, considered among the most beautiful in the world. The Turkmen began breeding this breed 5,000 years ago, and it was never crossbred with others. Illustrious emperors like **Alexander the Great** and **Darius I** desired to own them. The farm houses over 35 splendid specimens. According to superstition, every sick person who touches an Akhal-Teke will soon recover.

Transfer to the **Kowata Underground Lake**, located 107 km from Ashgabat. The Turkmen name Kow-Ata means "father of the caves". This underground area resembles a magnificent auditorium: total length 230 m, height up to 20 m, and width up to 57 m in some places. The cave floor is covered with dissolved limestone formations (stalagmites). Its warm, gushing, clear, and emerald-green waters maintain a constant temperature of 33–37 °C. **It is recommended to bathe in the lake**.

We then proceed to the **mountain village of Nokhur**, nestled in a small valley between the Kopet Dag mountains. Apart from the main road, the streets are so narrow that a car barely passes between the stone walls. The **Nohkuri**, inhabitants of this remote mountain village, stand out distinctly from other Turkmen tribes. According to legends, **Noah's Ark** docked here: the animals were set free, and various seeds were planted. Indeed, the nature of Nohur differs from the surrounding areas. Visit the **great tree** and one of the **unique cemeteries** in the area, an isolated one where almost every tomb is marked by a wooden pole decorated with goat horns. Finally, make a wish at the **Kyz Bibi votive tree**. After the visit, transfer to **Balkanabat**.

Overnight: 4* Hotel in Balkanabat · Meals included: breakfast, lunch, dinner

Day 10 – Balkanabat Yangykala Turkmenbashi Ashgabat

After breakfast at the hotel, transfer to the **Yangykala Canyon** (180 km).

Along the way, visit the pilgrimage site of **Gozli-Ata**.

Continuation to the **Yangykala canyons**, among the most spectacular natural landscapes in Turkmenistan. The expression "Yangy kala" in Turkmen means "fire fortress". The white, yellow, ochre, purple, and red rock walls, sculpted into bizarre shapes by wind and rain, resemble fantastic stone castles. Exploration of the canyons.

After the visit, transfer to the airport of **Turkmenbashi** and flight to **Ashgabat**.

Overnight: 4* Hotel in Ashgabat · Meals included: breakfast, lunch, dinner

Day 11 – Return

Morning transfer to Ashgabat International Airport, return flight via Istanbul, arriving in the early afternoon.

For those interested, Turkish Airlines usually offers layovers with an overnight stay (accommodation provided by the airline and the tour operator) for a brief visit to Istanbul. If you have time and interest, we can check the availability of this option.

Meal included: breakfast

Good to know

- Flight schedules are subject to change by Turkmenistan Airlines. Hand luggage must weigh no more than 5 kg, and checked luggage no more than 20 kg per person. If luggage exceeds the weight limit, an additional fee of approximately 2-3 USD per kg may apply.
- A rapid COVID-19 PCR test will be conducted upon arrival.
- Ensure you have **1, 5, and 10 USD banknotes** to facilitate and speed up visa and other airport procedures. Make sure the notes are new or in good condition, undamaged, and **issued no earlier than 2009**.
- Most places accept **cash only**, and credit cards often do not work. It is advisable to carry small-denomination USD banknotes in good condition, issued no earlier than 2009, for personal expenses and tips.
- To communicate with your contacts (family, friends, or colleagues) during your stay, we recommend downloading the **IMO messaging app** onto your phone before your trip. Standard messaging apps (WhatsApp, etc.) are blocked, and VPN functionality is not guaranteed.

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NOTES

Thank you!

To thank you for your interest and for printing or sharing this itinerary, here is a voucher worth **US$ 130** on your next trip. Use the discount code **PDF**.

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