

On the Road



BRADLEY MAYHEW Coordinating Author

After reading about Afghanistan for close to 20 years, the biggest thrill of this trip was finally making it there. Watching traditional glass-makers in Herat (p483), following my armed guard along the city walls of Balkh (p487) and making the beautiful overland trip through Afghan Badakhshan (p494) were moments to treasure. This photo was taken in Faizabad by an old-school portrait photographer.

MICHAEL KOHN The month of August is bloody hot in Kyrgyzstan and I was relieved to finally reach the cool mountain retreat of Arslanbob (p352). I am sitting at a chaikhana perched over the white-water stream that rushes through town. My travel mate and I had just ordered up some *plov* (pilaf) and chai; one of the best meals I had in Kyrgyzstan.



GREG BLOOM At the door of Bukhara's 'second' synagogue, I was greeted by the rabbi's adorable granddaughters, quite possibly the last of Bukhara's Bukhara Jews (p262). With their frocks, cardigans and leggings, they appeared to have stepped right out of a 19th-century photograph. The elder took this with my 21st-century camera.

JOHN NOBLE Kazakhstan has just one work of classic old Central Asian architecture, the Yasau Mausoleum (p158) at Turkistan. The beauty of its Timurid tilework is a real lift.

PAUL CLAMMER The first sight of the Band-e Amir lakes (p483) robs your breath. In a land the colour of dust, it beggars belief that anything could be deeply blue. But it's a truly Afghan blue too, confirming what the ancients always knew: this country should be the source of the world's lapis lazuli. (*Reflections from an earlier trip.*)



For full author biographies see p548

Destination

For decades – centuries even – much of the world has regarded Central Asia as little more than a blank on the map, synonymous not with the centre of Asia but with the middle of nowhere. Yet for two millennia, the deserts, grasslands, oases and mountain ranges between the Caspian Sea and China were a thoroughfare for Silk Road traders, nomadic empires and migrating invaders, tying together Europe and Asia on the Eurasian steppes.

Central Asia's storybook history, from Alexander the Great to the khans of Khiva, litters the land at every turn. At times the storied caravan stops of Samarkand and Bukhara, with their exotic skyline of minarets and medressas, seem lifted directly from the days of Marco Polo and Chinggis (Genghis) Khan. Even today you'll get powerful whiff of the Silk Road downwind of an Uzbek kebab seller and glimpse a hint of a nomadic past in the eyes of a Kazakh businessman.

East of the desert and steppe rise the snowcapped Pamirs and Tian Shan mountains of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, hosting fantastic trekking and mountain adventures. Community-based tourism projects bring you face to face with nomadic Kyrgyz herders, meeting them in their yurts and on their terms. The region's little-visited oddities, namely Turkmenistan and parts of Kazakhstan, offer an offbeat interest all of their own.

For the people of ex-Soviet Central Asia it's been a turbulent 20 years since independence. Since then the Central Asian republics have forged differing paths, but have shared many challenges. All have grappled with economic collapse, population shifts and resurgent Islam and have reinvented their past, rehabilitated historical heroes and reinforced their national languages in an attempt to redefine and shore up what it means to be Central Asian.

But there are major differences. Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan are the only republics which seem to have bright economic possibilities – sitting pretty on enormous reserves of oil and gas. Tajikistan is the only one which has experienced the horror of civil war, whereas the others are all in dread that they will be next to succumb to Islamic fundamentalism and political meltdown. Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan have faced this challenge by sliding into pariah states, where political abductions, torture and trumped-up charges are commonplace.

Tensions persist among the claims of Central Asian fraternity. Disputes over water, electricity and gas supplies bubble under the surface and the lack of regional trust means that big issues such as the Aral Sea, the drug trade and economic cooperation don't even make it on to the table. All are destabilised to some extent by Afghanistan's political instability to the south. With Afghan poppy lords churning out 90% of the world's heroin, it's no surprise that drug smuggling and soaring rates of domestic drug use are a particular regional problem.

But it's not all political dictatorships and economic hardship. After the confusion and social turmoil of the 1990s life has settled for many Central Asians. Economies are finally growing and standards of living are gradually rising. Grassroots community tourism projects are flourishing in much of the region. International crossings have been retied with China, Afghanistan and Iran, opening up new opportunities for both trade and tourism and retying the region to the rest of the world.

Investment and nationalism are reshaping the very face of Central Asia. Cities across the region have been brought up to date by the arrival of

'Central Asia's storybook history, from Alexander the Great to the khans of Khiva, litters the land at every turn'

Turkish supermarkets, new restaurants and international standard hotels and Kazakhstan has built an entire new capital, Astana, from scratch.

All this reflects the redrawing of Central Asia. Where once Tashkent and Ashgabat looked north to distant Moscow for economic and political direction, modern Central Asians now turn also to China, Turkey, Iran, Europe and the US, all of whom are equally intent on redefining spheres of influence long blocked by the Iron Curtain. The US-led War on Terror has only raised the stakes in a geopolitical game that stretches from transcontinental gas pipelines to Islamic extremism.

In many ways Afghanistan remains the odd man out in this book's coverage of Central Asia. Never a part of the Soviet Union, its recent history has been tied to 30 years of relentless conflict, from the Soviet invasion and ensuing civil war to Taliban rule, political turmoil puts the country out of reach to most visitors. When travellers are able to return, they will find Timurid architecture to rival Samarkand, mountain beauty to match the Pamirs and a rich culture that has much in common with ethnic kin to the north.

As Central Asia's new economic and cultural ties strengthen, oil routes open and Silk Roads are redrawn, this little-understood region will undoubtedly become increasingly important to the security, economy and politics of Russia, Asia and the world beyond. The challenge for the governments of Central Asia is to meet the religious, secular and economic desires of its people, while treading the tightrope between authoritarianism and Islamisation.

Whether you want to explore the architectural gems of Bukhara or horse trek across the high Pamirs, the region once known as Transoxiana, Turkestan or Tartary offers something for everyone. And everywhere you'll be greeted with instinctive local hospitality, offering a shared meal, a helping hand or a place to stay. Add to this the intrinsic fascination of a forgotten region fast emerging as a geopolitical pivot point and you have one of Asia's most absorbing and hidden corners.

'Everywhere you'll be greeted with instinctive local hospitality, offering a shared meal, a helping hand or a place to stay'

Itineraries

CLASSIC ROUTES

SILK ROAD CITIES OF UZBEKISTAN

10 to 14 Days

Fly into **Tashkent** (p212) and get a feel for the big city before taking a domestic flight to Urgench and then a short bus or taxi ride to **Khiva** (p270), comfortably seen in a day. Then take a taxi for an overnight trip to one or two of the desert cities of **ancient Khorezm** (p270), around Urgench.

From Urgench take the long bus or taxi ride down to **Bukhara** (p257), which deserves the most time of all the Silk Road cities. Try to budget a minimum of three days to take in the sights and explore the backstreets.

From here take the golden (actually tarmac) road to **Samarkand** (p240) for a day or two. Soak in the glories of the Registan and Shah-i-Zinda and, if you have time, add on a day trip to **Shakhrisabz** (p251), the birthplace of Timur (Tamerlane).

An alternative to this route is to tack on Turkmenistan, visiting **Konye-Urgench** (p457) from Khiva before crossing the desert to **Ashgabat** (p430) and then travelling to Bukhara via the Mausoleum of Sultan Sanjar at **Merv** (p451).

This loop route through Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, starting and finishing in Tashkent, is a historical and architectural tour that links Central Asia's most popular tourist sites. You'll need at least 14 days if you tack on Turkmenistan.



OVER THE TORUGART – LAKES, HERDERS & CARAVANSERAIS

Two Weeks

This trip takes in fabulous mountain scenery, a taste of life in the pastures and the roller-coaster ride over the Torugart Pass to Kashgar. There are lots of opportunities for trekking or horse riding on this route.

From easy-going **Bishkek** (p298) head east to the blue waters and sandy beaches of **Issyk-Köl** (p315), the world's second-largest alpine lake. Take in a couple of days' trekking or visiting the alpine valleys around **Karakol** (p320). The idyllic valley of **Altyn Arashan** (p326) offers great scope for horse riding or a short trek to alpine Ala-Köl and the glorious Karakol Valley. If you have time you can explore the little-visited southern shore en route to Kochkor. If you are low on time head straight to Kochkor from Bishkek.

In small and sleepy **Kochkor** (p335) take advantage of the Community Based Tourism (CBT) program and spend some time in a yurt or homestay on the surrounding *jailoos* (summer pastures). This is one of the best ways to glimpse traditional life in Kyrgyzstan. Try to allow three days to link a couple of yurtstays by horse, although most can be visited in an overnight trip. The most popular trip is to the herders' camps around the peaceful lake **Song-Köl** (p339), either by car or on a two-day horseback trip. The pastures are popular with herders and their animals between June and August.

From here head to **Naryn** (p340) and then the Silk Road caravanserai of **Tash Rabat** (p346), where you can stay overnight in yurts and even take a difficult horse trip to a pass overlooking Chatyr-Köl. From Tash Rabat it's up over the Torugart Pass (*insha'Allah*) to wonderful Kashgar.

If you want to experience traditional life in the high pastures while enjoying stunning scenery, take this trip through Kyrgyzstan from Bishkek to Kashgar, over the Torugart Pass.



CENTRAL ASIA OVERLAND – THE SILK ROAD

Three Weeks

There are dozens of different route options for traversing Central Asia. Much of this itinerary follows ancient Silk Road paths.

Western roads into Central Asia lead from Mashhad in Iran to Ashgabat in Turkmenistan, or from Baku in Azerbaijan (by boat) to Turkmenbashi, also in Turkmenistan. If you only have a three-day transit visa for Turkmenistan you can travel from Mashhad to Mary (to visit the World Heritage-listed ruins of Merv) in one long day via the crossing at Saraghs, giving you more time at Merv and bypassing Ashgabat.

From **Ashgabat** (p430) the overland route leads to **Merv** (p451) and the Silk Road cities of **Bukhara** (p257), **Samarkand** (p240) and **Tashkent** (p212). From here head into the Fergana Valley and swing north along the mountain road to relaxed **Bishkek** (p298). From Bishkek cross the border into Kazakhstan to cosmopolitan **Almaty** (p126) and make some excursions from the city before taking the train (or bus) to Ürümqi in China.

An alternative from Bishkek is to arrange transport to take you over the **Torugart Pass** (p346) visiting the *jailoos* around **Kochkor** (p335) and Song-Köl and the caravanserai at **Tash Rabat** (p346), before crossing the pass to Kashgar. You can then continue down into Pakistan to join the main overland trail into India and Nepal.

A third alternative if you are in a hurry is to travel from Tashkent to Andijon, cross the border to **Osh** (p356) and then take a bus or a combination of bus and taxi over the **Irkeshdam Pass** (p361) to Kashgar.



The trip from Mashhad/Baku to Ürümqi/Kashgar fits nicely into an overland route from the Middle East to Asia. Much of this trip follows ancient Silk Road paths and can be completed in three weeks.

SAMARKAND TO OSH VIA THE PAMIR HWY

Three Weeks

Take in the architectural glories of **Samarkand** (p240) before taking a shared taxi across the border into Tajikistan. Check out the Sogdian archaeological site of **Penjikent** (p393) and then either hire a car for a day trip up to the Marguzor Lakes or arrange a taxi through the mountains to scenic lake **Iskander-Kul** (p396).

Continue the taxi ride through stunning vertical scenery to Tajikistan's mellow capital **Dushanbe** (p381), where you should budget a day or two to arrange the flight, shared jeep, or hired car for the long but impressive trip along the Afghan border to **Khorog** (p404) in Gorno-Badakhshan.

You can drive from Khorog to Murgab in a day, but there are lots of interesting detours here, especially the beautiful **Wakhan Valley** (p409) and its storybook 12th-century Yamchun Fort (and the nearby Bibi Fatima Springs). Nearby Abrashim Qala, another fort, offers amazing views across to Afghanistan's Wakhan Corridor. With your own transport, you can connect from **Langar** (p410) to the Pamir Hwy and continue to Murgab.

There are loads of side trips to be made from **Murgab** (p412), so try to budget a few days here to visit a local yurt camp in the surrounding high pastures. Headed north, **Kara-Kul** (p416) is a scenic highlight and worth a least a lunch stop or picnic. Once over the border in Kyrgyzstan, at Sary Tash, it's worth detouring 40km to **Sary Moghul** (p361) for its fine views of towering Pik Lenin (Koh-i-Istiqlal).

From here you can continue over the mountains to the Silk Road bazaar town of **Osh** (p356) or better still exit Central Asia via the **Irkeshtam Pass** (p361) to Kashgar.

This wild three-week jaunt ranks as one of the world's most beautiful and remote mountain road trips and is not one to rush. Hire a vehicle for at least part of the way and do the drives in daylight.



ROADS LESS TRAVELLED

AFGHANISTAN: FOR BETTER DAYS

Four Weeks

For this itinerary we'll put on our rose-coloured spectacles in anticipation of an outbreak of peace in Afghanistan. Here's to better days.

After flying in to the booming capital of **Kabul** (p476), visit Babur's Gardens, what's left of the Kabul Museum, and the city's bird market, Ka Faroshi.

Drive northwest to **Bamiyan** (p481), where the destroyed Buddhas still command a power in their absence and the valley is one of the most beautiful in the country. It's just a few hours to the surreal blue lakes of **Band-e Amir** (p483) and the site of Afghanistan's first national park.

Drive back to Kabul and fly to Herat or invest an extra week and continue on the hardcore overland route via the fabled, remote **Minaret of Jam** (p483).

Herat (p483) is perhaps the most interesting city in Afghanistan, if not the region, so budget several days to see the restored fort, the stunning Friday Mosque, bazaars and the remnants of the Timurid-era Musalla Complex.

Fly from Herat to **Mazar-e Sharif** (p486), avoiding the unadvised overland trip via Maimana. The day trip to the city's namesake Shrine of Hazrat Ali is a must, as is a day trip to historic **Balkh** (p487).

Overland eastwards via Taloqan and Kunduz to **Faizabad** (p487), and continue through stunning mountain scenery to the remote Afghan **Wakhan Corridor** (p488). Continue to **Sarhad-e Broghil** (p489) and experience Central Asia's wildest trekking, or cross into Tajikistan at Ishkashim to link up with the Samarkand to Osh via the Pamir Hwy itinerary (p28).



At the time of press it was not safe to travel in Afghanistan so consider this an armchair itinerary to dream about, for the time being at least.

SOUTHERN KAZAKHSTAN

Two weeks

You can start this trip anywhere in northwestern Kazakhstan. If you're headed from Russia, then start in Aktoobe; if coming by boat from the Caucasus, start in Aktau. Either way, start with a long train ride to Aralask, or fly there from Almaty.

The fishing port of **Aralsk** (p161) is a long way from any fish but it's a fine springboard for a visit to the Aral Sea, and the town's beached fishing boats are a powerful icon of environmental disaster.

From Aralask take the train along the Syr-Darya river, keeping your eyes peeled for a rocket launch as you pass near Baykonur Cosmodrome. Stop off at **Turkistan** (p157) to soak up Kazakhstan's only architectural masterpiece, the 14th-century Timurid tomb of Kozha Akhmed Yasau. Keep the historical vibe going with a detour to the nearby ruined Silk Road city of **Sauran** (p159) and a visit south to **Otrar** (p156), the spot where Chinggis (Genghis) Khan's troops first attacked Central Asia and where Timur (Tamerlane) breathed his last.

Vibrant **Shymkent** (p151) is the place to stock up on supplies before heading out for some rural hiking, horse riding and tulip-spotting at **Aksu-Zhabagly Nature Reserve** (p155) or **Sayram-Ugam National Park** (p156), both of which have enough homestays and ecotourism programs to keep you busy for days.

Back at Shymkent, continue the 'Silk Road by rail' theme by running the rails to **Almaty** (p126), Kazakhstan's largest city. There is plenty to do here, including visiting the iconic Scythian-era Golden Man and soaking in the wonderful Arasan Baths, before hitting the Kazakh club scene. Walk off the next day's hangover on a hike to **Bolshoe Almatinskoe Lake** (p144), set in the lovely spurfs of the Tian Shan.

This Kazakh taster takes you by train along the southern belly of Kazakhstan, through the country's most historic and Central Asian-scented cities.



TRANSCASPIA

Two Weeks

There are three major excursions inside Turkmenistan; to the north, to the west and to the east. For a shorter trip, pick just one of the following three spokes.

Headed from **Bukhara** (p257), make for Mary and base yourself there for day trips to **Merv** (p451) and Gonur (p453). Budget a couple of days in **Ashgabat** (p430), visiting the city's monuments, remaining statues of former president Turkmenbashi and the National Museum. Don't miss **Tolkuchka Bazaar** (p435) and the cable car into the **Kopet Dag Mountains** (p435). Then visit an Akhal-Teke farm for a half-day of horse riding.

From Ashgabat, visit **Nissa** (p441), **Gypjak** (p441) and the **Köw Ata Underground Lake** (p443) before visiting **Nokhur** (p443), a friendly and photogenic village that offers good hiking in the mountains. Most visitors spend two nights here, sleeping in a guesthouse. From Nokhur, continue west to the pilgrimage site of **Parau Bibi** (p443), and then remote **Dekhistan** (p445), one of many cities decimated by the Mongols. From the city of Balkanabat, head north to scenic **Yangykala Canyon** (p445), before driving back to the capital. Alternatively continue to the sleepy port town of **Turkmenbashi** (p446) and fly or train back from there.

The third leg leads into northern Turkmenistan. From Ashgabat travel to the spectacular **Darvaza Gas Crater** (p442). If you are well equipped it's possible make a desert excursion to a remote Turkmen settlement, overnighting in a yurt. From Darvaza, continue north to see the ruins of **Konye-Urgench** (p457), once capital of Khorezm, before heading into **Khiva** (p270), Uzbekistan (or flying back to Ashgabat).



This route through Turkmenistan begins and ends in Uzbekistan. You can easily do it in reverse or even exit at Turkmenbashi on the ferry to Azerbaijan. If you fly in and out of Ashgabat you'll have to do some backtracking but domestic flights are cheap.

TAILORED TRIPS

COMMUNITY TOURISM

Kyrgyzstan leads the world in small-scale ecotourism projects that connect travellers with local families, guides and shepherds.

Kochkor (p335) is a fine place to find a homestay, watch your host make *shyrdaks* (felt carpets) and arrange a horse and guide for the two-day trek to **Song-Köl** (p339), where real shepherds will put you up in a real yurt.

In the little-visited pastures of the **Talas Valley** (p349) and **Suusamyр Valley** (p348) are two other ecotourism projects; hardy travellers are guaranteed to have these to themselves.

Two great places to combine hiking and mountain hospitality are the **Marguzor Lakes** (p396) and the boxed text on p395) and **Geisev** (see the boxed text, p407) regions in Tajikistan. Hike between turquoise lakes in mountain scenery, overnighting in traditional village homestays.

In spectacular high-altitude Tajikistan, **Murgab** (p412) has a good tourism program that can arrange homestays and jeep hire for trips to local archaeological sites, high-altitude lakes and remote yurt camps.

Kazakhstan's best ecotourism option is probably **Aksu-Zhabagly Nature Reserve** (p155). Overnight horse trips into the mountains are very pleasant. Another homestay and hiking option is at **Korgalzhyn Nature Reserve** (p179), where you can spot the world's northernmost community of pink flamingos.

OFFBEAT CENTRAL ASIA

First stop is wacky Turkmenistan, 'the North Korea of Central Asia'. In **Ashgabat** (p430), stroll past the 'Ministry of Fairness' and visit the Turkmenbashi World of Fairytales amusement park – imagine Disneyland but without any of the fun.

The dinosaur footprints at **Kugitang Nature Reserve** (p456) are off the wall, but nothing compares to the burning desert around the **Darvaza Gas Craters** (p442), especially at night. Check with travel agents to see whether the craters' fires have been extinguished, as decreed by the president.

Bizarre future Turkmen attractions include a huge US\$9 billion artificial lake in the middle of the desert. Until then, you'll have to settle for a surreal swim in the underground lake of **Köw Ata** (p442).

In **Moynaq** (p280) or, better, outside **Aralsk** (p161), see beached fishing boats 150km from what's left of the Aral Sea. If the steppes of Kazakhstan appeal, go to **Aktau** (p167), 300km from...anywhere. From here track down the underground mosques of **Mangistau** (p170) and then bump across the steppe to reach the appropriately titled Valley of Balls.

Alternatively, visit the new Kazakh capital, **Astana** (p172), to stare open-mouthed at the world's largest tent (150m tall) and the excel-



lent collection of 4th-century-BC pickled horse intestines at the Presidential Culture Centre.

WORLD HERITAGE SITES

The following sites have all made it onto Unesco's list. Kazakhstan's honours include its most spectacular building, the **Mausoleum of Khoja Akhmed Yasauli** (2003; p158) at Turkistan, as well as the **Petroglyphs at Tamgaly** (2004; p148). A recent addition is the **Steppe and Lakes of Saryarka** (2008; p179), focusing on the Naurzum and Korgalzhyn nature reserves and their migratory waterbirds.

Turkmenistan offers the five historic cities of **Ancient Merv** (1999; p451), and one of the medieval world's great cities. From here it would be a shame not to visit the former Parthian capital of **Nissa** (2007; p441) or the architectural remains of **Konye-Urgench** (2005; p457), ancient Gurganj, near the Uzbekistan border.

Uzbekistan has arguably the most spectacular World Heritage sites, including **Khiva's old city** (1990; p270) and the historic cities of **Bukhara** (1993; p257), **Shakhrisabz** (2000; p251) and **Samarkand** (2001; p240).

The most recent addition to the Unesco list is Kyrgyzstan's **Solomon's Throne** (2009; p358) in Osh, a somewhat underwhelming choice despite its status as a regional pilgrimage spot.

Afghanistan boasts the **Minaret of Jam** (2002; p483) and the **Archaeological Remains of the Bamiyan Valley** (2003; p481), both of which have been included on the list of World Monuments in Danger.



ACTIVITIES

The austere **Fan Mountains** (p396) have long been one of Central Asia's premier trekking destinations. Easily visited from Samarkand, they offer a wide range of route options.

The alpine valleys of the Tian Shan around **Karakol** (p320) offer great versatility for trekking and horse trips and are probably the most popular trekking destination in the region. The **Zailiysky Alatau range** (p145), an hour south of Almaty, also has great trekking.

For true adventurers, the Afghanistan side of the **Wakhan Corridor** (p488) now offers homestays, guides, porters and donkeys for a once-in-a-lifetime trek to the Roof of the World.

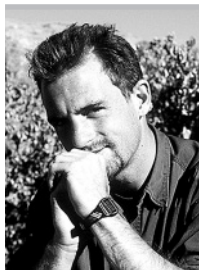
Horse riding is the natural way to traverse the pastures around **Kochkor** (p335), where community-based tourism groups can arrange horse treks to places such as Song-Köl.

Nothing conjures up the spirit of the Silk Road like travelling by camel. For the desert experience try **Lake Aidarkul** (p256) or **Ayaz-Qala** (p270) in Uzbekistan; for Bactrian camel trekking try **Rang-Kul** (p414) in the Pamirs.

Mountaineers who know what they are doing can tackle **Pik Lenin** (p362), one of the world's easier 7000m peaks. Few mountain amphitheatres can compare to basecamp on the **Inylchek Glacier** (p334), where ascents can be made to peaks around Khan Tengri.



The Authors



BRADLEY MAYHEW

Coordinating Author, Tajikistan

It must be a taste for ropey mutton that has driven Bradley repeatedly to almost every corner of inner Asia since spending six months in Uzbekistan for guidebook research. He has coordinated the last four editions of Central Asia and is the co-author of Lonely Planet guides to *Nepal*, *Tibet*, *Bhutan* and *Trekking in the Nepal Himalaya*, as well as several guides to the Silk Road. He has lectured on Central Asia to the Royal Geographical Society and was recently the subject of an Arte/SWR documentary film retracing the route of Marco Polo from Venice to Beijing. An expat Brit, Bradley lives in Yellowstone County, Montana. Check out his blog at www.bradleymayhew.blogspot.com.



GREG BLOOM

Uzbekistan

On Greg's first mission to Tashkent, in 2003, he trained newspaper reporters for the International Centre for Journalists, an American NGO. That was before most NGOs and all Western journalists were kicked out of the country after the Andijon incident. He returned to update the previous edition of this guide, narrowly escaping deportation after staying in an illegal hotel in Termiz. The Uzbek police seem more foreigner-friendly these days and this trip went without a hitch. Formerly the editor of Ukraine's Kyiv Post, Greg is now based in Cambodia and writes for Lonely Planet about Southeast Asia and former Soviet places. He blogs about his research trips at www.mytripjournal.com/bloomblogs.



PAUL CLAMMER

Afghanistan

Once a molecular biologist, Paul spent several years kicking around the Islamic world from Casablanca to Kashgar, eventually becoming a tour guide in Morocco, Turkey and Pakistan. Having watched *The Man Who Would Be King* at an impressionable age, the Khyber Pass was always in his sights, and in 2001 he made it to Afghanistan, only to find himself having dinner with two Taliban ministers a fortnight before the 9/11 attacks. He has since returned many times. He has worked on a dozen Lonely Planet guides, including writing 2007's groundbreaking *Afghanistan* and covering the North-West Frontier for the *Pakistan* guide.

LONELY PLANET AUTHORS

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**MICHAEL KOHN****Kyrgyzstan**

A journalist by profession and a traveller by nature, Michael has been churning out news articles and guidebooks from the far corners of the globe. He first visited Central Asia in 2003 to update Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan for Lonely Planet. On a second tour he covered Afghanistan and Turkmenistan, eventually taking the ferry to Azerbaijan. This time he traded deserts for mountains and took on Kyrgyzstan. Michael has also worked on Lonely Planet books to China, Mongolia, Tibet and Russia. In the off-season he calls San Francisco home, and when the weather is warm, Ulaanbaatar. He can be found online at www.michaelkohn.us.

**JOHN NOBLE****Kazakhstan**

With colleague John King, John helped destroy the Soviet Union by writing a Lonely Planet guide to it. Hoping to put independent travellers off the scent, the KGB engineered the disintegration of the country so that when Lonely Planet's *USSR* hit the bookshops in 1991 it was about a country that no longer existed. Undeterred, John has since written or co-written seven Lonely Planet guides to Soviet successor states, including three bites at Kazakhstan, which gets better and better to travel in every time. He is trying to find a way of basing himself in fascinating Central Asia for an extended period.

ANONYMOUS**Turkmenistan**

The author of the Turkmenistan chapter has chosen to remain anonymous to protect the people who helped him/her during research.

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