



Turkmenistan

Includes →

Ashgabat	374
Karakum Desert	384
Köw Ata Underground Lake	385
Gozli Ata & Yangykala Canyon	386
Mary	386
Merv	388
Gonur	391
Turkmenabat	392
Konye-Urgench	393
Dashogus	396

Best Places to Eat

- Çeşme (p380)
- Sim Sim (p381)
- Köpetdag (p380)
- Euphoria (p381)
- Chaikhana (p396)

Best Places to Stay

- Sofitel Ashgabat Oguzkent Hotel (p379)
- Nusay Hotel (p379)
- President Hotel (p379)
- Hotel Margush (p387)

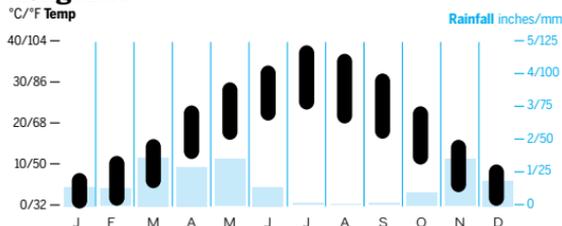
Why Go?

By far the most mysterious and unexplored of Central Asia's 'stans, Turkmenistan became famous for the truly bizarre dictatorship of President Saparmyrat Niyazov, who ruled as 'Turkmenbashi' ('leader of the Turkmen') until his death in 2006, covering this little-known desert republic with golden statues of himself and grandiose monuments to the achievements of his 'golden age'. But the least-visited of Central Asia's countries is far more than the totalitarian theme park it's often portrayed as being – it is an ancient land of great spirituality, tradition and natural beauty.

The ancient cities of Merv and Konye-Urgench inspire visions of caravans plodding along the ancient Silk Road, while the haunting beauty of the Karakum desert and other quirky natural phenomena are less expected but equally mesmerising sights. The full Turkmen experience is ultimately about mingling with the warm and fascinating Turkmen themselves, whose hospitality is the stuff of legend.

When to Go

Ashgabat



Apr–Jun Bright sunshine and cool temperatures combine to create the best climate for travel.

Sep–Nov The fierce summer heat gradually cools and winter approaches.

Dec Wrap up warm, expect to see snow in the desert and very few other travellers!

Visas & Permits

Everyone requires a visa for Turkmenistan (p405), and unless you're on a transit visa, you will need to be accompanied by a guide for the entire length of your stay in order to obtain one, which makes a trip here quite expensive by regional standards. Permits are required to visit national parks (p403) and visas need to be endorsed to permit travel in various border zones, so it's important to know your itinerary before you begin the visa application process.

COSTS

Relative Cost

The most expensive country in Central Asia.

Daily Expenses

- ◆ Basic hotel double US\$30; comfortable hotel double US\$60
- ◆ Street snack 2–10M; good restaurant meal 50M
- ◆ Marshrutka from Ashgabat to Konye-Urgench 35M
- ◆ Train from Ashgabat to Dashogus 9.58M (*kupe* class), flight 58M (book well in advance)

Price Ranges

- ◆ **Sleeping** (per two people): \$ <US\$25, \$\$ US\$25–70, \$\$\$ >US\$70
- ◆ **Eating** (main course): \$ <20M, \$\$ 20–50M, \$\$\$ >50M

Itineraries

- ◆ **Three days** Arriving on a transit visa, spend a day in fascinatingly weird Ashgabat, cross the Karakum desert and spend the night camping by the Darvaza Gas Craters and then wrap things up with a visit to historic Konye-Urgench.
- ◆ **One week** Spend at least three days in and around Ashgabat before heading east to visit the ancient sites of Merv and Gonur. From here, return to Ashgabat and travel north to Konye-Urgench, camping en route at the unforgettable Darvaza Gas Craters.
- ◆ **Two weeks** Along with the sights mentioned above, take the time for some activities, such as horseback riding in Geok-Dere, a visit to the Kōw Ata underground lake and a trip to the Yangykala Canyon and Turkmenbashi.

TOP TIP

Spending time in Ashgabat means you don't have to be with a guide, and is a good way to cut costs. The other way to avoid travelling with a guide is to get a transit visa (p405), although they tend to only be valid for three to five days, depending on your route across the country.

Fast Facts

- ◆ **Area** 488,100 sq km
- ◆ **Capital** Ashgabat
- ◆ **Country code** ☎993
- ◆ **Languages** Turkmen, Russian, Uzbek
- ◆ **Population** 5.1 million
- ◆ **Famous for** multiple personality cults, gas reserves, Akhal-Teke horses, carpets

Exchange Rates

COUNTRY	UNIT	MANAT
Australia	A\$1	2.76M
Canada	C\$1	2.75M
Euro zone	€1	3.71M
NZ	NZ\$1	2.29M
UK	£1	4.36M
USA	US\$1	2.85

Resources

- ◆ www.chaihana.com
- ◆ www.gundogar.org
- ◆ www.stantours.com
- ◆ www.turkmenistan.gov.tm