



AFGHANISTAN

THE LAND OF THE TURQUOISE AND LAPIS

May 22 - June 05, 2024
Led by Tour Manager Nancy Weber

Located at the crossroads of China and Mediterranean Europe, Afghanistan is rich in culture and history. It is a melting pot of cultural, ethnic, and linguistic diversity. With its rich past and recent events, it still preserves various architecture, paintings, music, poetry, art, and relics of bygone civilizations. From ancient cities to spectacular nature and some of the highest mountains in the world, it remains unpredictable and continues to amaze visitors.

Afghanistan is home to some incredible treasures bound to leave you in awe. This journey will take you from bustling Kabul to the foothills of the Hindu Kush. Follow in the footsteps of Marco Polo and Alexander the Great as you explore the country's safest areas in the northern regions. Visit the fabulous city of Herat, which was once a great medieval center for Islamic learning and culture. Marvel at the legendary mountain caves of Bamyán and the spectacular lakes of Band-e-Amir. Join us to tour the historical town of Mazar-i-Sharif, famous for its blue-tiled mosque, and Balkh, the nearby ancient caravan town.

Ihab Zaki
Managing Director

Wednesday, May 22
Arrive in Dubai (UAE)



Upon arrival in **Dubai**, meet and transfer to the *Hotel* for check-in, free rest of the day at leisure and overnight.

Note: Standard check in time is 3:00 pm. if you arrive on May 21 or early morning of May 22, an extra hotel night needs to be booked.

Thursday, May 23
Dubai



Enjoy a free day at leisure and overnight at the *Hotel*. **(B)**

Note: The Afghani representative will take care of all the visa arrangements.

Friday, May 24
Dubai - Kabul (AFGHANISTAN)



Upon arrival in **Kabul**, meet and transfer to *Safi Landmark Hotel* or similar for check-in, enjoy the rest of the day free at leisure and overnight at the *Hotel*. **(D)**

Note: Standard check in time is 3:00 pm. if you arrive on May 23 or early morning of May 24, an extra hotel night needs to be booked.

Saturday, May 25
Kabul



After breakfast, head to visit the major archaeological treasures of Afghanistan at the **National Museum**, which features hidden artifacts. Then, head to see the **Royal Palace Darul Amann** from a distance from the National Museum. We will be able to visit if it is open. Enjoy lunch, and then drive to a beautiful **Hill** with a walk to the top to view the skyline of Kabul. Return to the *Hotel* for dinner and overnight. **(B,L,D)**

Sunday, May 26
Kabul - Bamyán



After breakfast, transfer to the airport for our flight to **Bamyán**, and upon arrival, meet and transfer to the *Hotel* for check-in and then head to explore one of the

most remarkable cities. Once located on a major trading route, the Bamyán Valley became an important center of Buddhism in the 4th and 5th centuries AD. The city offers 12,000 ancient Buddhist caves carved in the high cliffs flanking the valley. Cautiously preserved, the caves introduce us to the old world of Buddhist monasteries, Buddha's niches, carvings, and frescoes. Marvel at the gigantic, jaw-dropping places of the two great Buddhas. Climb a 38-meter place, head for lunch, and then onward to the base of **Shar-e Zohak** (Red City) at the eastern end of the Bamyán Valley. Over the centuries, the fortified fortress protected the region from many aggressors. It is best remembered for defying the Mongol siege of 1222. Gholgola city (Scream Town) is the site of the infamous population massacre by Genghis Khan, who swore to avenge his grandson and was killed during the siege. Gholgola commands a splendid view over the fertile Bamyán Valley and its famous Buddhist heritage. Return to the *Hotel* for dinner and overnight. **(B,L,D)**

Monday, May 27
Bamyán



After breakfast, begin the drive (50 mi) to **Band-e Amir**, where we will see a beautiful chain of lakes. The mineral composition shows each lake as a different color, from stunning turquoise to a deep blue-black. It is a hiking experience like no other. The magnificent landscape and its serenity are enjoyable for a quiet rest. Head back to Bamyán for lunch, then continue the drive to **Dare Azhdar**, the Valley of the Dragon. Climb to the top of the astonishing massive rock formation deemed to be the remains of a fierce dragon. According to legend, reminiscent of St. George, the monster tyrannized the local villagers before being killed by Hazrat Ali, Prophet Mohammed's son-in-law. End the day at the **bazaar** for an opportunity to mingle with the Hazaras and bargain for attractive handicrafts. Return to the *Hotel* for dinner and overnight. **(B,L,D)**

Tuesday, May 28

Bamyān - Kabul



Enjoy breakfast and a free morning at leisure. After lunch, transfer to the airport for our flight to **Kabul** and, upon arrival meet and head to visit the renowned **Chicken Street**, a famous stop on the “hippy trail.” It is still home to some of the country’s best craft shops offering a great opportunity for souvenir shopping, where we will find one of the famous stones, which is the Lapis stone, a deep, celestial blue color stone that remains the symbol of royalty and honor, gods and power, spirit and vision. Transfer to the *Hotel* for check-in, dinner, and overnight. **(B,L,D)**

Wednesday, May 29

Kabul - Herat

After breakfast, transfer to the airport for our flight to **Herat**. Upon arrival, meet and transfer to the *Hotel* for check-in and have lunch. Afterward, head to visit the impressive and well restored citadel of **Qala-i-Ikhtiyaruddin** with its precious, small museum, then head to a traditional **sesame oil factory** (if opened) for a visit. Enjoy some of the most intricate tile work in the world at the **Friday mosque** (Masjid-i-Jami) and visit the courtyard, where Tamerlane’s 14th-century sherbet bowl is on display. We will also see the factory, where tiles are still made in the traditional method, where unique examples of the 12th-century pieces are available for purchase. Return to the *Hotel* for dinner and overnight. **(B,L,D)**

Thursday, May 30

Herat

Begin the day with a tour of **Jahad Museum**, where life-size models and paintings illustrate the Russian war and the heroism of thousands of Heratians who lost their lives for the liberation of Afghanistan. Get the chance to visit the 15th-century **monuments** from when Herat was the capital of the Mongol empire: the **Musalla complex** with the minarets and mausoleum of Gohar Shad, the brilliant wife of Shah Rukh, son of Tamerlane, and the Amir Sher Nawaye Mausoleum. Visit the **Khwaja Abdullah Ansari Shrine**, an important example of Timurid architecture and a popular pilgrimage place where we can purchase a new or antique carpet. Afghans traditionally value carpets and consider them an expensive investment (comparable to a car in the West). In the late afternoon, visit the **tomb of two princes**, Qasim and Abdullah, before returning to the *Hotel* for dinner and overnight. **(B,L,D)**

Friday, May 31

Herat - Kabul



Transfer to the airport for your flight to Kabul and upon arrival, head to visit **Istalif**, a city which is brought back to life by a group of gifted artists and artisans. Potters produce turquoise-colored bowls, plates, jugs, and teacups in an attractive, rustic style. Transfer to *Safi Landmark Hotel* for check-in, dinner and overnight. **(B,L,D)**

Saturday, June 01

Kabul - Mazar-I-Sharif



After breakfast, head to the airport for our morning flight to Mazar-i Sharif. Upon arrival, begin with a two-hour drive from Mazar-I-Sharif, where Afghanistan’s most unexpected and rewarding sights lies: the 28-meter **Buddhist stupa Takht-e Rostam**. Carved out of rock, like the churches of Lalibela in Ethiopia, this complex sits high above the valley. It is one of the country’s most enduring legacies from the pre-Islamic era in present day. We will cross Tangi Tashkurgan, once a major crossroad on the trading route; then we will visit **Baghe Jahan Noma**, a palace built by King Abdul Rahman circa 1874. The town is situated in a strategic location near the dramatic gorge that borders the northern fringes of the Hindu Kush foothills. Transfer to *Arsalan Hotel* or similar for check-in, dinner and overnight. **(B,L,D)**

Sunday, June 02

Mazar-I-Sharif



Enjoy breakfast and then begin the day with a drive to the city of **Balkh**, named Bactria in ancient times. It was the spiritual center of Zoroastrianism. Currently, and a delightful old-walled city, approximately 55 miles from the Amo Darya River. Also, visit **Khowaja Parsa mosque**, built in 1598 after the name, then head to the **grave of Rabia Balkhe**, the first poet to write in Farsi, and visit the remains of Balkh city walls and walk to the top of one of the towers. Visit the **Nogonbad Mosque**, which dates back to the 8th and half 9th century, before returning to the *Hotel* for dinner and overnight. **(B,L,D)**

Monday, June 03

Mazar-I-Sharif - Kabul



After breakfast, head to the airport for our early morning flight to **Kabul** and upon arrival begin the day with visits to the **Karthei Sakhi shrine** located at the foot of the Asamayi Hill, now better known as Television Hill, **Chihilsutun Palace**, **Babur Garden**. Enjoy lunch at a local restaurant and then head to visit Birds market,

Murad Khaney, It is a district in the old city, which is very nice and has old buildings and shows how Kabul looked like back in the 70s. Some houses there has been renovated by Turquoise Foundation also visit Shah 2 Shamshira Shrine, Pule Khishti mosque (which was the favorite mosque of OBI (he used to pray there frequently when he was in Kabul), Largest mosque of Kabul (from outside of the Masque). enjoy a walk in Mandi area of Kabul and the sunset from Bibi Mahru hill. transfer to the *Hotel* for check-in, dinner and overnight. **(B,L,D)**

Tuesday, June 04

Kabul - Dubai (UAE)



Enjoy breakfast and then transfer to the airport for your flight to Dubai and upon arrival, head to visit the **Louvre Museum** located on Saadiyat Island in Abu Dhabi enjoy lunch at a local restaurant then head to visit the **Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque**, one of the world's largest mosques and a massive architectural work of art that deliberately blends different Islamic architectural schools. It features 82 domes, more than 1,000 columns, 24-carat-gold gilded chandeliers and the world's largest hand-knotted carpet. The main prayer hall is dominated by one of the world's largest chandeliers. After the visit transfer to the *Hotel* for dinner and overnight. **(B,L,D)**

Wednesday, June 05

Dubai - USA



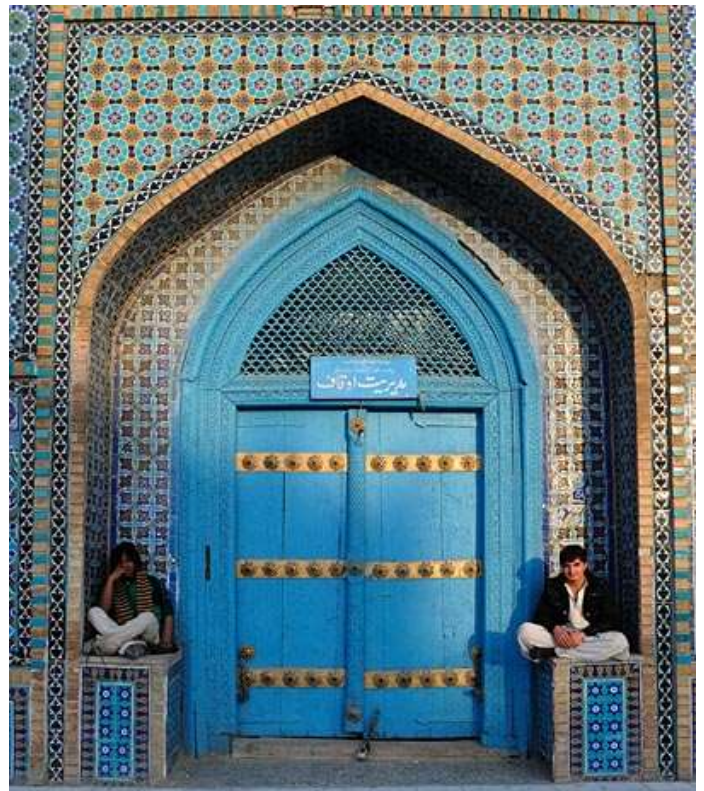
Enjoy breakfast and then transfer to the airport for your flight back to the US. **(B)**

We reserve the right to change the order of activities/visits or sites due to unexpected events such as flight cancellations or changes of schedule, or any other reasons beyond our control. We will do our best to ensure that any necessary changes when/if needed to meet the needs of our clients".



Special Trip Remarks:

Anyone wishing to join this trip must understand that in many places the tourist infrastructure is very primitive. Some days are long and hard, and the level of services will not match those offered in more conventional tourist locations. The hotels are quite comfortable but lack the luxuries of the west. Security checkpoints can be rather long on some days and we have to adhere to the instructions of our guards and escorts and have a flexible, patient attitude when delays happen. Many companies in Europe have been successfully running tours to Afghanistan since 2004 and we are using the top logistics and organizing agency in the country to handle our program. They are accustomed to managing foreign groups, but participants should be aware that last minute changes and amendments to routing, modes of travel or overnight stops will happen if deemed prudent to do so. We also have the right to omit at short notice any destination due to security concerns. Food can be nondescript, and alcohol is not allowed in the country. Women and men should keep their arms and legs covered while women may sometimes have to wear a lose head scarf when entering religious towns or sites. By signing up for this tour, participants are acknowledging their full understanding and acceptance of all terms and conditions and are admitting that they are in good physical and mental health and are equipped with an open mind, a sense of adventure and a tolerant and patient spirit to cope



Tour Cost (Land Only):

6 - 7 travelers \$8,995.00

8 - 12 travelers \$7,995.00

Per person sharing in double occupancy

Single Supplement: \$795.00

Price based on group size of minimum 6 participants and maximum 12 participants

Trip Grade: III Lodging Level: **

About your Tour Manager, Nancy Weber... Nancy loves to travel, learn languages, people, and sparkling wines! Nancy worked in the chemical industry in the US and Canada, and she lived in Jordan and Iraq for eight years, working as a training consultant and as Iraq's Country Director for an NGO. She speaks Arabic and a few other languages. Moreover, she loves the Middle East and genuinely appreciates the people and culture in that part of the world. Nancy also lived and worked in Russia for four years as a business training consultant. She speaks Russian, is passionate about Russia, and adores the people living there. She traveled on our first STS North Caucasus adventure in 2017 - she was so happy to see and experience Chechnya and Dagestan finally! Nancy has been managing a few of our tours, and she enjoys visiting off-the-beaten-track places the most, especially

those countries that see very few tourists/travelers. She is thrilled to lead our groups to these beautiful parts of the world and is excited to introduce their fascinating culture, people, and unmatched hospitality. She has been rated so highly by our travelers as a kind and efficient coordinator and does a superb job ensuring the smoothness of these programs.

Tour Includes:

- Airport/Hotel/airport transfers.
- Accommodation in hotels as per the itinerary (based on 3-4-star categories or best available in all cities outside of Kabul).
- Meals as mentioned in the itinerary (B: Breakfast, L: Lunch and D: Dinner).
- Tour Manager (provided the minimum number of travelers is reached).
- Sightseeing in each city as per the itinerary.
- Services of English-speaking guides.
- Armed security (when and if needed).
- All domestic flights within country.
- Visa support letter.
- Entrance fees to all mentioned sites and museums.
- Bottled water on the bus during touring days.
- Gratuities to guide, drivers, and porters (provided minimum number of travelers is reached).

Tour does not include:

- International Airfare USA-DUBAI-USA
- Flights DUBAI-KABUL -DUBAI (approx. \$775.00).
- Afghanistan visa (currently obtainable in Dubai \$400.00+\$50.00 service fee - subject to change).
Passports should not have any Israeli stamps or visas.
- 3-night hotel in Dubai (approx. 600.00).
- Beverages with or without meals.
- Items of a personal nature (camera fees at Afghan sites, laundry, emails, excess luggage, etc.).
- Transfers if not arriving/departing on scheduled tour dates.
- Dayroom/overnights necessitated by changes in airline schedules or early arrival.
- Trip surcharge to operate below required minimum participants.
- Travel protection insurance.
(HIGHLY RECOMMENDED)

Trip Grade

III Challenging: Parts of the trip are physically challenging, involve some hiking on unpaved terrain or in sand. There may be long drives on rough roads; weather conditions with high heat (in the 90's). You may have simple picnic lunches, primitive bathroom facilities along the road and remoteness from modern towns or cities.

Lodging Level:

**** Delightful:** Comfortable yet on the Spartan side, usually small but always with private facilities. Some breakfasts are simple and basic, but all hotels should have "working" A/C though not very reliable. (Average classification if you dare to compare to western style hotels is about 2 or 3 stars.

