Kazakhstan & Uzbekistan

Best of Central Asia



Turkestan Ground Jay by Yoav Perlman

Our Best of Central Asia tour combines the best of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, two landlocked countries with spectacular sceneries, interesting historical and cultural sites, wide varieties of exciting habitats, and of course both well-represented with some of the finest Central Asian birds found in this fascinating region. Our tour starts in Uzbekistan where the general topography ranges from desert flatlands to the foothills of the Tien Shan Mountains in the east. We will drive out into the remote Kyzyl-Kum Desert in search for the desert-loving Turkestan Ground Jay, a unique terrestrial species. Other special birds that we will target over the next few days include Pygmy Cormorant, Saker Falcon, Eastern Imperial Eagle, the striking Blue-cheeked Bee-eater, Streaked Scrub Warbler and Asian Desert Warbler.

From here, we travel to the scenic hills south of Samarkand in search of White-throated Robin, Eastern Rock Nuthatch, Red-headed Bunting, Asian Paradise Flycatcher and Finch's Wheatear. Our comprehensive tour continues in the remote Taukum Desert: a great start and excellent introduction to Kazakhstan birding! We will search for specialities such as Macqueen's Bustard and the handsome Caspian Plover. Wells in the area attract Pin-tailed, Black-bellied and the much-desired Pallas's Sandgrouse. Other targets include Saxaul Sparrow, White-winged Woodpecker and the striking Azure Tit.

Later on, we'll drive up into the Tien Shan Mountain range where the highly sought after Ibisbill occurs (this smart looking bird is the sole representative of its monotypic family). Other specialities in this area include Himalayan Snowcock, Güldenstädt's and Eversmann's Redstarts, Wallcreeper and the stunning White-browed (Sveretov's) Tit-warbler. Flying to the capital, Astana, we will bird the surrounding steppe in search of the enigmatic Demoiselle Crane and the critically endangered Sociable Lapwing at their favoured breeding grounds. Here we will also enjoy sightings of Pallid Harrier and both White-winged and the mythical Black Lark doing their displays over the steppe grasslands!

Itinerary & Map

Day 1	**Chimgan Mountains, Tashkent; flight to Bukhara**
Day 2	**Lake Tudakul & Bukhara**
Day 3	**Kyzyl-Kum Desert**
Day 4	**Bukhara to Samarkand**
Day 5	**Samarkand**
Day 6	**Samarkand to Tashkent**
Day 7	**Tashkent; fight to Almaty, transfer to Taukum**
Day 8	**Taukum Desert**
Day 9	**Kanshengel to Almaty**
Day 10	**Almaty to Charyn**
Day 11	**Sogety Valley**
Day 12	**Almaty to Tien-Shan Mountains**
Day 13	**Tien-Shan Mountains**
Day 14	**Tien-Shan Mountains to Almaty; flight to Astana**
Day 15 & 16	**Astana area**
Day 17	**Final departures**


Astana
Kazakhstan
Taukum Desert
Charyn
Almaty
Tien Shan
Kyzyl-Kum Desert
Uzbekistan
Tashkent
Kyrgyzstan
Bukhara
Samarkand
Tajikistan
Google Earth

Detailed Itinerary



Turkestan Tit by Yoav Perlman

Chimgan Mountains, Tashkent. Our tour starts with an exciting day trip out of Tashkent, the capital of Uzbekistan. In the morning, we'll drive up to the Chimgan Mountains located 60km east of the city to enjoy a full day of birding. Specialities that we will seek for include Yellow-breasted, Turkestan and Rufous-naped Tit, White-capped Bunting, White-winged Woodpecker, Hume's Leaf Warbler, Hume's Lesser Whitethroat, Blue Whistling Thrush, Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush, Red-rumped Swallow, European Goldfinch (grey-capped subspecies, a potential future split) and much more. We will carefully scan the sky for overhead Eurasian Griffon (Himalayan Griffon is also a possibility) and Cinereous Vulture, Booted Eagle, Long-legged and Common Buzzard, and migrating European and Oriental Honey Buzzards.

Lake Tudakul & Bukhara. In the morning we'll visit the wetlands and marshes surrounding Lake Tudakul, located west of Bukhara. The aquatic habitats are home to numerous species, including Pygmy Cormorant, Mute Swan, Greylag Goose, Dalmatian and Great White Pelican, Eurasian Spoonbill, Ferruginous and Red-crested Pochard, Gadwall, Northern Pintail, the scarce Marbled Duck, the elegant White-tailed Plover, Glossy Ibis, Pied Avocet, Temminck's Stint, Black and Bar-tailed Godwit, Collared Pratincole, Caspian and Slender-billed Gull, Little, Whiskered and Caspian Tern, Moustached and Clamorous Reed Warbler, Citrine, Masked and Black-headed Wagtail, Bearded Reedling and the strikingly plumaged Blue-cheeked Bee-eater. Species like Pied Bush Chat, Rufous-tailed Scrub Robin and Sykes's Warbler are frequently found in the surrounding scrub. In the afternoon, we will visit the fabled city of Bukhara, with star attractions being the Lyab-i Hauz pool, Nadir Divan-begi Madrasah, and the Poi-Kalyan Ensemble with the Kalyan Mosque and Kalyan Minaret.



Asian Desert Warbler by Dušan Brinkhuizen

Kyzyl-Kum Desert. Today we will venture out deep into the Kyzyl-Kum Desert in search of the highly localised Turkestan Ground Jay, a desert specialist that often sings from small bushes proclaiming its territory at this time of year, or else typically seen running across the desert like a miniature courser! Many other exciting birds that we may see in this area include Steppe and Eastern Imperial Eagle, Pied, Desert and Variable Wheatear, the elusive Streaked Scrub Warbler (a monotypic family!), Desert Whitethroat, Asian Desert, Upcher's and Syke's Warbler, Rufous-tailed Scrub Robin, Lesser Short-toed Lark, Red-backed Shrike, both Lesser and Steppe Grey Shrike and Brown-necked Raven. Any standing water in the area may attract Desert and Mongolian Finch and possibly also Grey-necked Bunting.



Turkestan Shrike by Adam Riley

Bukhara to Samarkand. In the morning, we'll bird around Bukhara to search for Ménétries's Warbler or any other species we may still be missing. After lunch in our hotel, we will then drive along the Silk Road to the city of Samarkand. Birding stops en route may produce nesting White Storks on roadside pylons, Pallid and Montague Harrier, Eurasian Sparrowhawk, Shikra, Laughing Dove, Eurasian Collared and Oriental Collared Dove, Eurasian Roller, Eurasian and Indian Golden Oriole, Siberian Chiffchaff, Black Redstart, Turkestan, Daurian and Long-tailed Shrike, Pied and Variable Wheatear, Spanish Sparrow, and Desert and Mongolian Finch. In the late afternoon, we will arrive at Samarkand in time for some initial exploration of the area.

Samarkand. Today we'll drive to the Takhta-Karacha mountain pass south of Samarkand. The scenery will be spectacular within the distance of the snow-capped Pamir Mountains of Tajikistan. The hills and valleys in the area are packed with birdlife, including goodies such as Bearded Vulture, Chukar Partridge, Eastern Orphean, Barred, Upcher's and Eastern Olivaceous Warbler, Red-headed Bunting and White-throated Robin. We might find the superb Eastern Rock Nuthatch working its way across boulder-strewn hillsides. The area is also home to stunning Rosy Starling and, if we are lucky, we might run into Asian Paradise Flycatcher or Finch's Wheatear! High plateau grasslands in this area may also hold the localised Hume's Short-toed Lark and Rock Sparrow. In the afternoon, we might have some spare time to visit the cultural sites of Registan, a famous and beautiful assembly of turquoise-blue domes and towering minarets in the city of Samarkand.

Samarkand to Tashkent. In the morning, we'll do some birding around Samarkand and later on probably some more cultural sightseeing in town. Visiting the elaborately decorated mausoleum of Tamerlane and the massive Bibi Khanum Mosque are amongst the options. After lunch, we'll start our journey back to Tashkent. We will surely make a few road stops in case we see anything of interest along the way.

Almaty. After landing in Kazakhstan's largest metropolis, we will start our drive to the remote Taukum Desert and stop at Lake Sorbulaq along the way. This large lake is a great site for breeding Dalmatian Pelican and migrant waders such as Terek Sandpiper and Lesser Sand Plover. In some years, thousands of Rosy Starling also breed around the dam, but this is dependent on the availability of crickets in the surrounding desert for them to feed on. Other birds we will be on the lookout for include Great White Pelican, Lesser Kestrel, Red-footed Falcon, the scarce White-headed Duck, Ruddy Shelduck, Red-crested and Ferruginous Pochard, Pallas's and Caspian Gull, Water Rail, stately Black-winged Stilt, Collared Pratincole and, in the



Azure (Yellow-breasted) Tit by Yoav Perlman



Caspian Plover by Dušan Brinkhuizen

surrounding reed beds, Great and Little Bittern, Black-crowned Night Heron and Clamorous Reed Warbler. Arriving at the small village of Kanshengel in the late afternoon, we will check the nearby wells for anything of interest before settling in at our nearby tented camp in the desert.

Taukum Desert. In the morning we'll search for two of Taukam's specialities: Macqueen's Bustard and Caspian Plover, which are sometimes seen right from the camp! We will check the waterholes in the area carefully, which often act as a magnet for birds such as Calandra and Bimaculated Lark, and Greater and Asian Short-toed Lark. At these wells, we also have good chances for sandgrouse species, which may include Black-bellied, Pin-tailed and Pallas's. There is also the possibility of spotting wolves in the distance when scanning the desert. Other species we will seek include Pallid Harrier, Greater Sand Plover, Temminck's and Little Stint, and Brown-necked Raven. After breakfast, we will depart to the Ili River delta which is an interesting area with a mosaic of habitats including marshes, pools, sand dunes and stands of Turanga trees. The wetlands and reed beds hold species such as Black and White-winged Tern, Dalmatian and Great White Pelican, Ferruginous Duck, White-headed Duck, Little Bittern, Paddyfield Warbler and the rare Black-headed Penduline Tit. The more forested areas are home to specialities such as White-winged Woodpecker, Yellow-eyed Dove, Striated Scops and Little Owl, Shikra, Turkestan and Azure Tit, Black-throated Thrush and the sought-after Saxaul Sparrow.

Almaty to Charyn. This morning, we will depart to the Charyn region which lies 250km east of Almaty. We will have several birding stops en route to look for species such as Richard's Pipit, Long-tailed Shrike, European Roller and Eurasian Hoopoe. It will be another scenic drive passing by deserts plains, spectacular gorges and distant snow-capped mountains. At a highland pass, we have chances for Himalayan Vulture gliding overhead, along with Cinereous Vulture and maybe even a Bearded Vulture. Other species possible in this area include Chukar Partridge, White-winged Woodpecker, Blue Whistling Thrush, Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush, Eurasian Bee-eater, Citrine and Black-headed Wagtail, White-capped, Pine, Meadow and Red-headed Bunting, Hume's Lesser Whitethroat and Pied Wheatear.



White-winged Woodpecker by Yoav Perlman

The further east we drive the less vegetated the landscape becomes, and we will be on the lookout for Horned Lark, Desert Lesser Whitethroat, Rock Sparrow and the impressive Steppe Eagle. Artesian wells in the area might produce goodies such as Grey-necked Bunting, Desert, Mongolian and Asian Crimson-winged Finches.

Sogety Valley. We will start early with a visit to the Sogety Plains to search for the sought-after Pallas's Sandgrouse. This is possibly our



Eversmann's Redstart by Yoav Perlman

best chance for this nomadic species, and we'll devote time to finding it in case we still need it. Other species that we will look for include Black-bellied Sandgrouse, Desert Wheatear, Asian Desert Warbler, Steppe Grey Shrike, Pale Sand Martin and Asian Crimson-winged Finch. Later in the morning we then visit the Charyn Canyon, where we have an excellent chance of finding Saker Falcon. After an exciting day of birding in the Charyn region, we will return to Almaty for the night.

Almaty to Tien-Shan Mountains. Today we drive up into the amazing Tien Shan Mountains passing through exciting habitats with mountain streams, alpine meadows and pristine spruce forests along the way. During the drive up we will make several stops and look for specialities such as Brown Dipper, Blue Whistling Thrush, Blue-capped Redstart, Red-fronted Serin, Songar Tit, Spotted Nutcracker, Three-toed Woodpecker and if we are very lucky, the fabulous Wallcreeper. We'll certainly stop at a scenic lake and scan along the boulder-strewn lakeshore for the cryptically coloured Ibisbill, the sole representative of this monotypic family. The juniper scrub above the treeline will be searched for targets such as White-tailed Rubythroat, Red-mantled and Common Rosefinch, Hume's Leaf and Sulphur-bellied Warbler, Black-throated Accentor, White-winged Grosbeak, Eversmann's Redstart and the delightful White-browed Tit-warbler!

Tien-Shan Mountains. Weather dependent, we will move further up in altitude to look for species such as the lovely Güldenstädt's Redstart, Red-billed and Alpine Chough, Altai and Brown Accentor, Water Pipit, and Brandt's Mountain Finch. We will carefully scan the boulder-strewn hillsides for another mountain speciality: the Himalayan Snowcock. These birds can be heard calling in the early morning and often "freeze" for long periods to avoid detection, so we will have to count ourselves lucky to find this enigmatic species!

Tien-Shan Mountains to Astana. We will continue birding for any birds we have missed, along with another opportunity to scan for Himalayan Snowcock if we were unsuccessful the previous day. After lunch, we will drive down to Almaty and catch an early evening flight to Astana, the capital of Kazakhstan.



Himalayan Snowcock by Yoav Perlman

Astana area. We will have time to explore the rich and extensive steppe grasslands outside of Astana. The area is home to the striking Black Lark as well as the critically endangered Sociable Lapwing. Both species breed here at this time of year, so we have a very good chance of seeing them. The splendid White-winged Lark also occurs here and birds are often seen displaying over the grasslands. Other species that we will carefully scan for include Saker and Red-footed Falcon, Pallid Harrier and the spectacular



Black Lark by Yoav Perlman

Demoiselle Crane. Freshwater lakes and wetlands in this area hold a good variety of species that may include Black-throated Diver, Red-necked, Black-necked, Great and Horned Grebe, White-headed Duck, Great Bittern, Pallas's and Slender-billed Gull, Gull-billed, White-winged, Whiskered and Caspian Tern, Dalmatian Pelican, the stately Greater Flamingo, twirling Red-necked Phalarope in their smart breeding plumage, Marsh, Green and Curlew Sandpiper, Spotted Redshank, Ruff, Collared Pratincole, Barred, Booted, Blyth's and Paddyfield Warbler, the stunning Bluethroat, Eastern Yellow and Citrine Wagtail and Common Reed Bunting.

Tour Grading & Key

Overall Ease		Moderate. Variable weather & some long field days offset by fairly easy birding/wildlife watching.
Birding Ease		Mostly easy, in very open conditions. Some trickier species that may require much more effort.
Accommodation		From mostly comfortable hotels to basic camping.
Walking / Trails		Variable, from easy to moderate.
Vehicles / Roads		Road conditions are variable, including windy, mountainous tracks and some off-road driving.
Photography		Can be good to very good but often impacted by distance & heat haze.
Annoyances		Variable weather conditions from dry & sunny to overcast with rain or snow. Moderate to strong winds are common.

Financial Arrangements and Important Notes

This tour is made available through our Tailor-made tours department. To explore this offering further for pricing, precise day to day itinerary, inclusions & exclusions, or to tailor the tour to your personal requirements, please contact our Tailor-made team on tailormade@rockjumper.com

Single Supplement: The single supplement cost for this tour will be charged if you wish to have single accommodation. If RBL cannot provide you with a rooming partner for these nights although you choose to share, the single supplement will become applicable. We will make all reasonable efforts to ensure that a rooming partner is found if you do wish to share.

- **Due to constantly fluctuating exchange rates, we quote our tours in 4 currencies. The tour price is fixed only in the currency printed in bold, and the actual cost in the other currencies listed will be adjusted according to**

prevailing exchange rates at the time of final invoicing. The same applies to approximate flight and single supplement rates.

- **Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registrations, a small group supplement will be offered to confirm the tour.**
- **Tour prices are subject to unforeseen increases in tour related costs and may have to be adjusted as a result.**
- **The designated tour leader/s may be changed at short due to unforeseen circumstances.**
- **The itinerary is indicative only. Changes may need to be made to the order in which the tour is conducted, or some of the venues we visit closer to departure. We will attempt to adhere as close to the original program as possible.**

- It is important for the comfort of your fellow travellers that you do not over-pack. Kindly stick to 20kg (44lb) for check-in luggage and 8kg (+-18lb) for hand luggage.
- We will spend two nights camping in the Taukum Desert. The camp is comfortable with reasonably sized tents, each containing a camp bed and foam mattress. A sleeping bag is provided, but you may bring your own should you wish. It is perhaps more convenient to bring a sleeping bag liner rather. The camp has a separate kitchen and food tent where meals are served. Washing facilities while camping will be basic. Toilets are simplistic, with conventional toilet seats.
- Much of the tour will be in remote areas with limited medical facilities or hospitals. Please ensure that you have all the necessary medication that you require for the duration of the tour.
- Although it will be late spring/early summer, the temperatures can vary greatly, from warm day temperatures of 25 to 30 degrees Celsius in the deserts (but cool in the mornings), to cold with rain and even snow possible at any time in the mountains.
- The emergence of insects on the Nursultan steppes is unpredictable but can be so heavy as to make birding very uncomfortable without adequate protection.
- Warm clothes, including gloves, woollen hat, raingear, hiking boots and thermals will come in handy for the cooler nights and mornings.
- Fitness: In general, this tour does not require a high level of fitness, but participants should be in good general health as most of the birding will be done on foot and may require walking for several hours at a time. Some of the walks in the mountains will, however, be more strenuous. Should you have any physical limitations, please notify us in advance of departure.
- Central Asian cuisine is relatively limited in variety, but usually, salad, soup and meat form the primary basis of all meals. We will have opportunities to try regional specialities at various locations on the tour.

Arrival and Departure Details

The tour departs Tashkent (Uzbekistan) on day 1. As we depart Tashkent very early, you are required to be present in Uzbekistan the night before the tour starts. The tour will conclude in Astana after breakfast on day 17.

The above information in respect of arrivals and departures is a guide only. Precise arrival and departure information will be sent to you in your Tour Confirmation package once the tour has been officially confirmed. If you wish to arrive early and/or depart late and would like assistance in this regard, kindly contact the Rockjumper office.

Tashkent International Airport, Tashkent (IATA: TAS) is the main port of entry into Uzbekistan for this tour, while Astana International Airport (IATA: TSE) is the main port of departure.

Visa requirements differ by country, nationality of the traveller and duration and purpose of your intended stay. It may be necessary to obtain a visa or an electronic travel authorization in advance of your travel. It is therefore vitally important that you check with your travel agent/consulate/embassy for exact visa requirements.

DO NOT book any flights until the Rockjumper Team have officially confirmed the tour.