This focused survey of Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Iran ranges from the Persian-Turkic Silk Road oases of Samarkand and Bukhara to the ruins of Darius I’s Persepolis, the ceremonial capital of the Achaemenid kings, and over the graceful bridges of Isfahan’s Zayende River. Admire seven different UNESCO World Heritage Sites along the old caravan routes from Central Asia into Iran, becoming familiar with the culture, nature, science, history, architecture and spiritual beliefs that have had such a profound impact on the modern world.
ITINERARY (B=Breakfast, L=Lunch, D=Dinner)

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 14
INDEPENDENT DEPARTURES FROM U.S.
Depart U.S. on international flights bound for Tashkent, Uzbekistan.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 15
INDEPENDENT ARRIVALS IN TASHKENT, UZBEKISTAN
Flights arrive in Tashkent late tonight or early the next morning. Upon arrival, transfer to the hotel for check in and rest.
Overnight: Lotte City Hotel Tashkent Palace or similar

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 16
TASHKENT
Following breakfast attend an introductory lecture and trip orientation before setting out to explore Uzbekistan’s capital city, Tashkent.

Although it doesn’t look it today, Tashkent is one of the oldest cities in Uzbekistan. A major caravan crossroads, it was taken by the Arabs in 751 and by Genghis Khan in the 13th century. Tamerlane feasted here in the 14th century and the Shaibanid khans in the 15th and 16th centuries. The Russian Empire arrived in 1865, and Uzbekistan was not an autonomous country again until 1991 after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Tashkent lost much of its architectural history in a devastating earthquake in 1966, so although it is an old city most of its construction is recent. Today, the city is a jumble of wide tree-lined boulevards, oversized 20th-century Soviet buildings, and reconstructed traces of the old city with mud-walled houses, narrow winding lanes, mosques, and madrassahs (religious schools).

Stroll through a labyrinth of mud-walled houses surviving from the 19th century to Khast Imam Square, where some of Tashkent’s oldest monuments remain.

View the Uthman Koran, considered by Sunni Muslims to be the oldest Koran in the world. Written on deerskin 19 years after the death of Mohammed, the manuscript was compiled in Medina by Uthman, the third caliph of Islam. (Shi’a Muslims believe that Uthman’s successor, Ali, was the first true caliph, and his version of the Koran is held to be the only true version.). It has been inscribed onto the UNESCO Memory of the World Register.

Also admire the Kukeldash Madrassah, one of the largest 16th-century madrassahs remaining in Central Asia.

Next, visit the private art studio of a sixth-generation Uzbek ceramicist whose family has revived the lost art of natural dye use, and are teaching contemporary Uzbek ceramicists their rediscovered techniques.

End the day with a privately guided tour of the Museum of Applied Arts, housed in a traditional mansion built in 1898.

Gather this evening for a festive welcome dinner at a local restaurant before returning to the hotel for an overnight.
Overnight: Lotte City Hotel Tashkent Palace or similar (B, L, D)

MONDAY, OCTOBER 17
TASHKENT / TRAIN TO SAMARKAND
In the morning transfer to the railway station for the high-speed express train to Samarkand, a UNESCO World Heritage site.

Modern Samarkand is built on the ruins of ancient Afrosiab, and once went by the name of Marakanda. Its strategic location, cultural wealth, and worldly riches made Samarkand an attractive target for the world’s most famous conquerors.

Begin a city tour at the Registan Square, the centerpiece of Samarkand, and the most recognizable landmark for visitors. Three emblematic madrassahs frame the square, and loom over the empty space in the center. The Registan (simply meaning “place of sand”), was at the center of ancient Samarkand and was a public square and marketplace before the three madrassahs were built. In its reconstruction, the square maintains the majesty that it has radiated through the ages.

Visit the Gur-Emir Mausoleum, the final resting place of Tamerlane, originally built for his grandson after the latter’s death, at the turn of the 15th century.

After lunch at a local restaurant, visit Bibi Khanum Mosque, built by Tamerlane to be the largest mosque in the Islamic world, and dedicated to the memory of his favorite wife. Architects from India and Persia were brought in to build the mosque, and 95 elephants were reportedly used to transport the marble and other building materials from India to Samarkand.

Browse the animated Syab Bazaar, just across the street from the Bibi Khanum Mosque. Vividly dressed women oversee neat stacks of brilliant produce and burlap sacks of nuts and spices.
Dinner tonight is at a local restaurant.

Overnight: Registan Plaza Hotel or similar (B, L, D.)

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 18
SAMARKAND

As you continue exploring glorious Samarkand, wander the row of tombs and mausoleums collectively called Shah-i-Zinde, or “place of a living king,” stretching between the present and the past. At its front is living Samarkand, and at its back the dusty slopes at the edge of ancient Afrosiab. Behind the complex and set into the hill lies an active cemetery with gravesites dating back as far as the 9th century, and as recently as the present day.

Continue to Ulug Bek’s Observatory. The astronomer-king was fascinated by the stars and the cosmos and built one of the most advanced observatories of the ancient world. The observations, which he undertook with the naked eye only, predated the telescope by over 150 years. They were aided by the building itself, which housed a large vertical half-circle, only a quarter of which remains today. By using careful methods, rigorous observation, and meticulous recording, Ulug Bek calculated the length of the year to within a minute of the modern accepted value. He also created the most comprehensive (to that date) catalog of the heavens, earning his place in history.

Take a private tour of the Afrosiab History Museum, which houses artifacts from the ancient city of Afrosiab, once a potent capital, and now an archaeological site guarding treasures of antiquity.

After lunch, visit a workshop where hand-crafted paper is made according to traditions handed down from the 8th century, when paper-making began in Samarkand.

End the day with a visit to the internationally recognized fashion designer Valentina Romanenko’s private studio followed by dinner at the home of a local family.

Dinner tonight is at a local restaurant.

Overnight: Registan Plaza Hotel or similar (B, L, D.)

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 19
SAMARKAND / DRIVE TO BUKHARA

Following breakfast, depart for Bukhara. Along the way, stop for lunch at the village of Vobkent, outside Bukhara. Here meet with villagers and learn about Uzbekistan’s rural life.

On arrival in Bukhara, enjoy a free afternoon to rest and discover independently. Bukhara is a fantastic place to shop for and crafted souvenirs from the local cloth printers, wood carvers, gold and silk embroiderers, and jewelry makers.

Dinner tonight is at the hotel.

Overnight: Hotel Sasha and Son or similar (B, L, D.)

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 20
BUKHARA

Spend the day exploring Central Asia’s most ancient living city. Bukhara and Samarkand are roughly the same age, but Bukhara’s design has preserved an antique feel that Samarkand’s interspersed modernity lacks.

Begin at Lyabi-Hauz Plaza at the center of Bukhara’s old town. The atmosphere is cooled by the long rectangular reflecting pool that makes up the center of the plaza, and by the shade of the trees that ring the plaza. The mulberry trees here are hundreds of years old and frame the 16th and 17th century madrasahs that makes up three of the four edges of the ensemble.

Continue to the 12th-century Kalon assembly, including the Kalon Mosque and Minaret and the Mir-i-Arab Madrassah, surrounding an open plaza teeming with merchants and local vendors. The minaret towers over the dusty square, looking down from a height of more than 150 feet, and casting its shadow between the mosque and the madrasah.

Located not far from Kalon Mosque is the Ark Citadel, the original fortress of Bukhara, likely dating back two thousand years or more. The current structure has been built and rebuilt on the same site throughout its history, and has preserved something of the form, purpose, and function of the first Ark.

Just behind the Ark Citadel is the infamous Zindan Prison and the even more infamous “bug pit” or “black hole,” the cell where two of Britain’s finest Great Game players, Colonel Charles Stoddart and Captain Arthur Conolly, were imprisoned before their execution.

Also visit the Ismael Samani Mausoleum, the 10th-century resting place of Ismael Samani, founder of the Persian Samanid Dynasty, with its sixteen different styles of brickwork. The little mausoleum was buried under the shifting desert sands and not discovered until the 20th century.

End the day with a walk through Bukhara’s old Jewish Quarter, where in the mid-19th century 2,500 families of prosperous merchants were estimated to have been living. Cut off in the 15th century from contact with other Jews, the Bukharan Jews developed their own dialect of the Tajik-Persian language that incorporates many Hebrew words, their own style of dress and their own unique form of Judaism.

In the evening, dine and enjoy a performance by local artists at a nearby madrasah.

Overnight: Hotel Sasha and Son or similar (B, L, D)

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 21
BUKHARA / DRIVE TO MARY, TURKMENISTAN

This morning depart Bukhara and cross the border at Farap into Turkmenistan. The border formalities for exiting Uzbekistan and entering Turkmenistan can be time consuming.
After entering Turkmenistan, stop for lunch in the town of Turkmenabat, before continuing to Mary. Upon arrival in Mary, check in to the hotel for dinner and a one-night stay.

_Saturday, October 22
Mary / Merv / Fly to Ashkabad_

Set out this morning to explore the ancient remains of Merv. The fertile oasis of Merv has supported human life for over 4,000 years. Formed from the rich silt at the mouth of the Murghab River where it soaks into the Kara Kum Desert, the oasis was an early Bronze Age center. The earliest of the five ancient cities at Merv is attributed to Cyrus the Great in the 6th century BC. The ruins of Merv were listed as a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1999 because of the wealth of ongoing information they offer regarding the evolution of urban centers.

After lunch, visit the Museum of History and Ethnography in Mary. The museum is housed in an old merchant’s house dating from the 19th century. Displays include discoveries from Merv, Gonur-Depe and other Turkmen archaeological sites.

Time permitting, wander Mary’s small bazaar, admiring stacks of brilliant fruits and displays of nuts and raisins, handmade carpets and Turkmen jewelry.

Later, transfer to the local airport for the short evening flight to Ashkabad. Upon arrival, check in to the deluxe city center hotel and enjoy dinner at the hotel’s restaurant with sweeping views over the city.

_Sunday, October 23
Ashkabad_

Today explore vibrant Ashkabad. Originally known as Konjikala, the city was destroyed by Mongols in the 13th century. In 1881, the Russians built a fortress on the site as a buffer against English-dominated Persia, and by the early 20th century Ashkabad was a prosperous and flourishing city. In 1948 a massive earthquake leveled Ashkabad, killing over two-thirds of the population. Recently Ashkabad has seen a boom in new construction, which has had a major impact on the look of the city. Modern marble and gold monuments have sprung up all over town. In fact, in 2013, the Guinness Book of World Records awarded Ashkabad the record for the highest density of white marble buildings in the world.

Begin at the new History and Ethnography Museum. The historical exhibits begin with artifacts ranging from stone-age tools to carved ivory drinking horns and move through time, telling the story of Turkmenistan through the ages.

Following lunch, visit the UNESCO World Heritage site of the ancient Parthian Kingdom of Nisa, accompanied by a professional local archaeologist. More than two thousand years ago, the Parthian Empire spread out from Nisa and took its place among such kingdoms as the Achaemenid under Cyrus the Great and the Macedonian under Alexander the Great.

On the way back to the city, make a stop at the Kipchak Great Mosque. The huge $100-million-dollar mosque in former Turkmen President Niyazov’s hometown of Kipchuk was inaugurated in 2004. The mosque is big enough to hold 10,000 people, and its 164-foot golden dome had to be lowered in place by helicopter. Verses from Niyazov’s own spiritual book, the Ruhnama, are etched on the walls alongside Koranic verses. Niyazov was buried here in the family mausoleum that he built, along with the mosque, with government funds.

Enjoy a musical performance this evening during dinner.

_Overnight: Hotel Oguzkent or similar (B, L, D)_

_Tuesday, October 25
Mashad / Fly to Tehran_

This morning, set out to tour Mashad. Visit the areas of the Imam Reza shrine that are permitted to non-Muslims, the tomb and museum of Nadir Shah and the Khajeh Rabi Mausoleum.

In the evening take a flight to Tehran.

_Overnight: Hotel Espinas or similar (B, L, D)_

_Wednesday, October 26
Tehran_

After the Mongols destroyed the Silk Road city of Rey, Tehran rose in its place as the region’s most important trading center. By 1789 Tehran had become the capital of Persia under the Qajar ruler, Agha Mohammed Khan. While the city grew in prominence, it remained basically unchanged until the massive modernization efforts of the 1920s. Since then, Tehran has grown...
in population from less than 300,000 to a metropolis of more than eight million. Modern Tehran is full of shops, museums, mosques, minarets, restaurants, teahouses and a sprawling bazaar.

Spend the day visiting the local bazaars and sampling the city’s museums. Begin at the Golestan Palace complex, the oldest of Tehran’s historic monuments. Encompassing several palatial buildings around a cool green garden, the complex includes the Marble Throne, created from 65 pieces of yellow Yazd marble. In 2013, Golestan Palace was inscribed onto the UNESCO World Heritage list.

Showcasing objects from Iran’s distant past through to 19th century calligraphy, the Reza Abbasi Museum gives a general overview of the development of decorative and applied arts throughout Iran’s long and storied history. Highlights include the metal and gold objects from the Sassanid Dynasty (about 650AD) and many paintings by the museum’s namesake, Reza Abbasi, a 17th-century painter of the Isfahan School famous for his miniature portraits.

Also visit Tehran’s traditional bazaar in the Tajrish neighborhood before returning to hotel for a free evening. Dinner tonight is independent.

Overnight: Hotel Espinas or similar (B, L)

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 27
TEHRAN / FLY TO SHIRAZ

Continue the exploration of Tehran this morning with a visit to the Archaeological Museum, which displays Persian antiquities, art and artifacts from Iran’s long past. Tools thought to have been made by Neanderthals, figures from the Achaemenid Empire, bronzes, carvings, prehistoric pottery and artifacts from Susa and Persepolis can be seen here.

After lunch at a local restaurant, transfer to the airport for the afternoon flight to Shiraz. Upon arrival, check in to hotel and enjoy dinner at a local restaurant.

Overnight: Homa Hotel or similar (B, L, D)

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 28
SHIRAZ

After breakfast, set off on a full-day tour of the “City of Roses and Nightingales.” The fabled city of Shiraz has a remarkable history stretching over 2,500 years. It is the capital of Fars province where the Persian language of Farsi originated. One of the most important cities of the Islamic medieval period, Shiraz has reigned as the capital of several Islamic dynasties. A major artistic, religious, and academic center, the city is famed for its poetry, its luxuriant gardens, its learning centers and extravagant architecture. Beautiful, romantic, and hospitable, Shiraz is the favorite of many travelers, and remains one of the most enjoyable places to visit in all of Iran.

Explore the lovely pink-tiled Nasir-ol-Molk Mosque, constructed from 1876 to 1887. It is an explosion of color with some of the finest examples of Persian Islamic tilework and architecture in Shiraz.

Visit the Narenjestan Garden with its beautiful cypress-lined avenues. Naranjestan Ghavam Museum was once the grand house of the Qavam family who were wealthy governors in the Shiraz region.

Continue to the Tomb of Hafez, Iran’s favorite poet. Surrounded by a lovely garden, the tomb is a place of pilgrimage and reverence. Hafez was born and died in Shiraz in the 14th century, and his poetry is memorized by many Iranians. The marble tombstone is engraved with some of his verses. The teahouse by a cooling pool is a wonderful place to sit and people-watch.

Following dinner at a local restaurant, return to the hotel.

Overnight: Homa Hotel or similar (B, L, D)

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 30
ISFAHAN

Set off on a full-day guided tour of Isfahan. Under the rule of Shah Abbas the Great of the 16th-century Safavid dynasty, Isfahan became a celebrated and beautiful city, referred to as Nesf-e-Jahan, meaning “half of the world.” Even after centuries of turmoil and destruction at the hands of foreign invaders, Isfahan’s grace is palpable.

Visit one of the world’s largest public squares, Maiden-e Naghsh-e Jahan, also known as Imam Square. In the center of Isfahan, it is one of the largest urban squares in the world. Shah Abbas the Great built the graceful ensemble in the early 17th century after he
moved the capital here. A UNESCO World Heritage site, the square was the symbolic center of the Safavid Empire.

Here, find the Ali-Qapu Palace, where Safavid Kings watched polo games from the balcony. The Ali-Qapu Palace was built at the end of the 16th century and was intended as a gateway to the royal palaces beyond.

Isfahan’s Imam Mosque, at the far end of Imam Square, is considered by many to be the most beautiful in the world. Flanked by two tall turquoise minarets, its massive entry portal is 80 feet high, and decorated with cobalt, turquoise and lapis lazuli mosaic tiles and complicated stalactite moldings. The inner courtyard surrounds a reflecting pool, and four iwans, or portals, lead into four fabulously decorated sanctuaries.

The Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque is an exquisite small mosque on Imam Square built during Shah Abbas’ time, and dedicated to his father-in-law. This beautifully decorated 17th-century mosque took nearly 20 years to complete. The Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque was once called the Women’s Mosque, because of a tunnel running between it and the Ali Qapu Palace, which allowed the royal women to attend prayers without being seen in public.

After lunch, stop at the spectacular UNESCO-listed Friday Mosque and see the beautiful Ali Minaret at the Ali Mosque, Isfahan’s tallest at over 150 feet. Built during Seljuk times, the minaret is decorated with interlocking stars and Kufic inscriptions picked out in ceramic tiles.

Take a walk in the former Jewish Quarter, called the Juibareh, one of the oldest neighborhoods in Isfahan. Jews no longer live here, although about a thousand still live in Isfahan.

Enjoy free time for personal exploration this evening. Dinner tonight is independent.

MONDAY, OCTOBER 31
ISFAHAN

Continue exploring Isfahan today. Visit the Armenian Quarter, location of several churches, including the Vank Cathedral. The sand-colored stonework of Vank Cathedral conceals a beautifully ornate interior, with delicate tilework and gilt embellishments. Vank is an important historical reminder of the Armenian migration to Isfahan and is located in the Armenian neighborhood of New Julfa. During the 17th century, Armenians began settling at the southern bank of the Zayandeh Roud River and the cathedral dates from some of the earliest settlement in 1606. Used now as a museum, a memorial to the Armenian genocide and as the home of a historic printing press, Vank is still at the heart of the community of Armenian-Iranians and houses over 20,000 volumes of literary and religious works in Armenian.

Admire some of the five graceful bridges over Isfahan’s Zayendeh River. The oldest bridge is the Pol-e Sharestan, initially built during Sassanian times and renovated by the Seljuks in the 12th century. The Khaju Bridge, (Pol-e Khaju) built by Shah Abbas II in the 17th century, has 23 arches and connects the Khaju quarter with the Zoroastrian quarter. Another especially beautiful bridge is the 33-arched Si-o-se Pol Bridge, with its arcades on either side of the walkway.

Stop at Chehel Sotun Palace, built by Shah Abbas II in 1647. Set in a park by a long pool between the Ali Qapu Palace and Chahar Bagh Avenue, the pavilion was used for receptions and entertainment. The name means “40 Columns,” and refers to the 20 wooden columns supporting the entrance to the Great Hall, multiplied by their reflection in the pool. Inside are wonderful frescoes, miniatures and ceramics.

In the afternoon explore Isfahan’s amazing 17th century Qeisarieh Bazaar and stroll the narrow lanes lined with artisans and shopkeepers. More than a mile of covered walkway shelters brass and copperware craftsmen, jewelers, miniature painters, rug merchants and throngs of shoppers.

Tonight celebrate the end of the journey during the farewell dinner at a local restaurant.

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 1
DEPART ISFAHAN

The tour concludes with transfers to the airport for international departures. (B, Meals Aloft)
and culture of Central Asia and Iran. This is a strenuous program based on
HMSC members and friends who are interested in learning about the history
of uneven terrain. There will be a lot of walking in old cities, natural areas,
and archeological sites. Typically, the weather is warm during the day with
cool but pleasant nights. Since some of the travel will be in remote areas,
everyone must be flexible concerning time schedules, food, insects, weather,
road conditions, and dust. In order to enjoy this trip, a spirit of adventure and
anticipation, and the desire to explore spectacular natural areas are musts.
There are a couple of relatively long drives. Travel is by scheduled jet aircraft
and private motor coach. Accommodation is in the best available lodging
ranging from Western three-star equivalent to world-class five-star hotels.
Participation on an HMSC program requires that passengers be in generally
good health and able to walk unassisted for up two miles a day. It is essential
that persons with any medical problems and related dietary restrictions make
them known to us well before departure. We can counsel participants on
whether an expedition is appropriate for them.

Tour Excludes: International airfare between the U.S. and the tour start and
cities; air taxes and fuel surcharges; pre- or post-tour services; visa or
passport fees; medical and trip cancellation/interruption insurance; evacuation
costs; food or beverages not included in group meals; items of a personal
nature such as laundry, alcohol, telephone expense, excess baggage fees,
photo/video expenses inside museums (where allowed); other items not
expressly listed as included.

Reservations, Deposits, and Final Payment: To reserve a space on this
program, a non-refundable $1,000 deposit is required per person. Please make
checks payable to Harvard University and send along with the completed
reservation form to: Travel Program, Harvard Alumni Travels, 124 Mount
Auburn Street, 6th Floor, Cambridge, MA 02138. Reservations are
acknowledged in order of receipt. Balance of payment for all land and air costs
is due by check only by July 14, 2016, 90 days prior to departure.

Cancellations and Refunds: Cancellations are effective when received by the
Travel Program in writing. Should you have to cancel the following charges
will apply: Notice received more than 90 days prior to departure: $1,000 per
cancellation fee (amount of deposit); notice between 90 and 61 days prior to departure: 50% of the land tour cost; no refund shall be issued if
cancellation is received 60 days or less prior to departure date. No refunds shall
be issued after the tour has commenced. No refunds shall be issued for
missing meals, sightseeing tours, or any unused services. Cancellation of air reservations is subject to the rules and regulations of the
respective air carrier companies.

Tour Size: This tour, exclusively designed for the Harvard Museums of
Science & Culture (HMSC) is limited to 20 participants on a first come, first
served basis. The minimum group size is 12. Should the minimum not be met,
we reserve the right to cancel the program, levy a small group surcharge,
and/or send the program without a HMSC representative.

What to Expect / Physical Health: This exclusive expedition is designed for
HMSC members and friends who are interested in learning about the history
and culture of Central Asia and Iran. This is a strenuous program based on
long travel days and rigorous scheduling. Some walks are potentially long and
over uneven terrain. There will be a lot of walking in old cities, natural areas,
and archeological sites. Typically, the weather is warm during the day with
cool but pleasant nights. Since some of the travel will be in remote areas,
everyone must be flexible concerning time schedules, food, insects, weather,
**SILK ROAD IN CENTRAL ASIA & IRAN**  
October 14–November 1, 2016 

**RESERVATION FORM**

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E-mail

If possible, please assign a roommate.  □ Smoker  □ Non-smoker

I understand if a roommate is not secured for me by final payment date, I will be charged the single supplement amount.

□ I wish to pay the additional $1,495 for a single supplement.

Enclosed is a check for ______ $1,000 deposit per person payable to “Harvard University” to hold ____ place(s) on the “Silk Road in Central Asia & Iran” program.

OR  □ Please charge my deposit of $______________ to  

Visa  □ MasterCard  □ AMEX

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We confirm that I/we have carefully read the information on refunds, general conditions and the responsibility clause specified in the tour conditions.

Signature____________________________________________________   Date________________________

Signature____________________________________________________   Date________________________

Please return this form with deposit check to: Harvard Alumni Travels, 124 Mount Auburn Street, 6th Floor, Cambridge, MA 02138 or fax it to (617) 496-8782. QUESTIONS? Please call us at (617) 495-2463 OR e-mail hmsctravel@hmsc.harvard.edu

**HMSC Membership**

The museums’ exhibitions draw on Harvard’s historic collections, and its educational programs for children and adults provide public access to the expertise of the university’s research scholars. A forum for thoughtful and informed exchange of ideas, the museums depends on membership to support their activities and outreach to communities in Cambridge and beyond.

□ I would like to become a member at the following level:  

$35 Senior/Student  □ $50 Individual  □ $85 Family  □ $125 Supporting  □ $250 Sustaining  □ $500 Patron

Please enclose a separate check made out to the Harvard Museums of Science & Culture for membership. Thank you.