



10 days Tajikistan Snow leopard Adventure – February 2021

TRIP OVERVIEW

Style: Wildlife watching/hiking

Difficulty: Moderate to Difficult

Location: Darvoz and Alichur

Length: 10 Days / 11 Nights

Departure: February 15, 2021 / 11 Nights

JOINING PRICE:

2120\$ per person

The group will consist of minimum 4 and maximum of 6 people

Price includes: All meals | Transportation from and to Dushanbe, including transfer from and to the airport | An English speaking guide | Conservancy rangers services | Wildlife watching equipment | Camera Traps | All accommodation

- All the tours listed here have been developed exclusively by ANCOT
- Tours listed are built upon many years of experience in wildlife conservation and management
- The pricing policy is established on the priority conservation needs and long-term sustainability of tourism
- If you are looking for a wildlife tour in Tajikistan, book it with professionals, from whom you can learn so much, what you will probably never learn and experience by booking with

- regular commercial tour operators
- You may find similar wildlife tours with cheaper prices. However, you will not benefit wildlife conservation by using a cheaper way

HIGHLIGHTS:

Possibility of Snow Leopard watching in Darvoz mountains of Tajikistan. Seeing other wildlife such as Siberian Ibex, Markhor goats, Brown Bears, and others as well as different species of birds including birds of prey such as Himalayan griffon, Bearded vulture, Golden Eagle, and others. Witness one of the best practice of wildlife conservation in the whole region and be part of the local community of conservationists.

DESCRIPTION:

Hunting of snow leopards has been banned in Tajikistan since 1968. Yet, snow leopards continue to be captured and hunted due to the danger they pose on livestock in the mountain regions. In their works from their Soviet expeditions, Govrilyuk and Yaroshenko (1987) describe the most prolific hunter of Soviet Tajikistan. He goes by the name of Chegebai:

“Chegebai had a great deal of knowledge of his mountains, ibex, mountain sheep, and the snow leopard. He could outthink their thoughts. He could feel their desires. He knew where and when a herd of mountain goats will move. He saw which path they would take and where the snow leopard is waiting for them. He had caught and hunted more than 50 snow leopards in his life. Chegebai has shown us self-made traps. He has told us how to catch the snow leopard with bare hands, tie him up, and bring him home. Chegebai learned how to respect his enemy and even developed a deep love for him.”

This passage illustrates to what extent snow leopards have been hunted and misunderstood by local communities. Although it presents a historic view, snow leopards continue to be meagerly understood among shepherd communities in remote regions of Central Asia. The government of Tajikistan and the Association of Nature Conservation Organizations of Tajikistan are working to mitigate human-wildlife conflict throughout Tajikistan. Over the last decade, the number of mountain goats and sheep has been increasing in our conservancies, which is the main food source of snow leopards. As a result, snow leopards have more natural prey and are less likely to attack livestock in the villages. Communities have also been constructing predator-proof corrals, which further prevents snow leopard attacks. Now some of the conservancies are a permanent habitat for snow leopards including M-Sayod conservancy in Darvoz region where this tour will be conducted.

We offer this 10-day tour for wildlife enthusiasts who wish to track and possibly encounter the elusive snow leopard. The tour includes hiking, overnighting in quiet mountain inns and yurts, and camping in the mountains in search of a snow leopard. This will be the ultimate adventure in the mountains. You will walk through old trails and cross streams in beautiful gorges. During your stay, you will see other wildlife such as Ibex, Markhor, and Brown Bears. Snow leopards are shy cats and it is hard to spot one. February and March are the months they are most active due to the mating season. For a decade, our guides have been following and watching snow leopards in our conservancies. Their knowledge will help you to find the snow leopard. Teamed together with our guides, you will hike in different valleys and mountains to spot snow leopard in their hunting sites or kill sites, which is where a snow-leopard has left its dinner. Once a site is identified, the guides will take you closer to observe and take pictures.

Some days can be challenging and other days can be extremely challenging because reaching these sites is not an easy task. However, our guides will do their best to get you close. We will make sure your challenging days are rewarded with delicious and nutritious homemade meals. We offer this tour as a holiday package, where you can come and stay in our lodge with your friends and family. We offer other daily activities for friends and family such as hikes and educational tours on different mountain ungulates. Our qualified rangers will take very good care of you, your family, and friends.

Tour is offered only to small groups and carried out from January to mid-March. Join us next winter for the most spectacular snow leopard tracking experience in Tajikistan.

CONSERVATION:

Association of Nature Conservation Organizations of Tajikistan (ANCOT) supports the conservation of wildlife in areas managed by people from the local communities. These organizations – being it local NGOs or small family businesses – are rooted in the local communities and aim at providing benefits to the whole populations of the areas where they are active. Through the revenues generated from tourism, we motivate these local communities to protect their natural resources and wildlife. Thus participating in this tour you are contributing to the conservation of endangered wildlife species and their habitats in Tajikistan.

Day 1: Arrive in Dushanbe

Driving distance: Around Dushanbe

Hiking distance: Short walkingThe most convenient route from Europe or the Americas to Tajikistan's capital is via Turkey. Turkish Airlines operates flights from Istanbul to Dushanbe 3 times per week and arrives early in the morning. Once you arrive to Dushanbe airport our representatives will meet you and take you to the hotel where you will rest after your flight. Closer to lunchtime you will meet your guide at the lobby and embark on a sightseeing tour of Dushanbe. You will visit the central square with big Ismail Somoni monument and the tallest flagpole in Central Asia. After having lunch in a traditional Tajik restaurant you will visit Kokhi Navruz Palace, a huge entertainment and business complex consisting of 4 completely tailored halls where Tajik government holds high official meetings. In the evening you will meet with our lead biologist who will give you detailed information about the Snow Leopard, its behavior, history and conservation status in Tajikistan.

Day 2: Dushanbe – Darvoz

Elevation range: 900-1920-1050m/2952-6299-3444feet

Driving distance: 282km/175miIn the morning after the breakfast you will drive to Darvoz region in the south east of the country. Known as the gates of Pamir, Darvoz region of Tajikistan is comprised by high rocky mountains and the Hazratishoh mountain range. After reaching Darvoz where we will join the Panj river – a border between Tajikistan and Afghanistan and drive to the camp located right on the bank of the river with a perfect view of surrounding mountains. The position of the camp is so perfect in the mountains that you will start scanning the area right on arrival and spotting Markhor goat is nearly guaranteed. In the evening you will meet with the conservancy staff and discuss the tour plan.

Day 3-9: Snow Leopard tracking

Elevation range: 1050-2800-1050m/3444-9186-3444feet

Hiking distance: 40-60km/24-37miFor the next 7 full days you will be in search of the snow leopard. Before your arrival rangers will do a pre-scouting, so by the time you get to Darvoz there will be some information where the snow leopard was seen, or cam-trapped or where the rangers spotted its tracks. Depending on this information you will start planning the next 7 days program to spot the cat together with the rangers. Each morning the local rangers will leave the camp before sunrise and position themselves on the best viewing slopes. If they spot a snow leopard, or another interesting animal they will signal the rest of the group to follow.

Well adapted for life in a cold high mountain habitat, snow leopard creeps up the mountain ridge early in the morning or evening, getting above the ibex or markhor, which are having their morning or evening meal below the cliffs and hills where there is more forage. If rangers find such place where groups of ibex or markhor are seen along with snow leopard tracks, they will set a tent nearby for the group to spend time observing. During the daytime, when wildlife is less active it will be possible to do some bird watching. In February, mostly raptor birds can be seen, different species of vultures, eagles.

Our everyday program will consist of hiking in mainly Zighardara and obgard valleys. Having breakfast early in the morning in our camp we will drive to a trailhead and climb up the valley to our watching spots and observe the area. During the day we will be hiking in different directions to install or check our camtraps. The spotting will go on for how ever long you want, the rangers will escort anyone back and forth from the spotting slopes to the camp (unless the weather become really bad) we will have at least one ranger spotting throughout the day. Around lunchtime our camp cook will prepare an excellent hearty meal and you will get extra energy to spend the rest of the day. Spending the day in the mountains we will be returning to our camp in the evenings to rest and have dinner.

Day 10: Back to Dushanbe

Elevation loss: 250m/820feet

Driving distance: 282km/175miAfter hopefully successful snow leopard trip we will head back to

Dushanbe in 4-5 hours. Thus we complete our snow leopard tour in Tajikistan. We will have some time for shopping and rest before farewell dinner today. Day 11: Departure Early morning you will be transferred to the airport where our staff will help you with the registration to your flight and leave Tajikistan.

End of tour! What's Included

- All meals
- Professional and knowledgeable guides will lead the tour.
- Transportation from and to Dushanbe, including transfers from and to the airport
- Conservancy rangers services
- Camping equipment – tents, utensils, stove, etc.
- Other equipment such as camera traps, watching scopes, etc. if outlined in the itinerary
- All accommodation – Hotels, Guesthouses, and homestays

Meals: What To Expect

During the hikes: Most of our hikes include a variety of meals to nourish our bodies with enough carbohydrates, proteins, and fats. We usually have pasta, rice, sausages, cheese, oatmeal, canned lentils and beans, sugar, and bread. We also carry fresh vegetables and can easily accommodate vegetarians.

Additionally, we have snacks such as dried fruits, fresh fruits, chocolate bars, and each break will include hot coffee and tea. We can accommodate people with special dietary needs.

In guesthouses, home-stays, and restaurants (Tajik cuisine):

Tajik cuisine offers a large variety of fruit, meat, and soup dishes. The most popular among them are dishes such as Oshi palov, kurutob, Shurbo, Laghmon and snacks like sambusa and mantu. The national drink is green tea, respectively. Traditional Tajik meal begins with small dishes of dried fruits, jams, and halva, followed by soup and meat, and finished with plov. Tea accompanies every meal and is often served between meals. Besides traditional dishes, most restaurants serve Russian borsh and popular shashlyks.

Shurbo: *boiled meat on the bone with chickpeas, red and green peppers, potatoes, carrots, and onions.*

Laghmon: *the same with homemade noodles*

Oshi Palov: *a rice dish made with shredded yellow turnip or carrot and pieces of meat, all fried together in vegetable oil or mutton fat.*

Shashlyks: *chunks or minced meat on a skewer cooked over an open fire. Vegetarian versions are often available.*

What's Not Included?

- Clothes, raingear, and footwear
- Any other expenses of a personal nature
- Tips (Always optional)

What Gear To Bring

- Personal soap/shampoo
- Personal medicines (especially against diarrhea, altitude sickness, and car sickness), most of the passes on the road are above 3500m
- High protection Sun-screen
- Sunglasses
- Sun hat
- Flashlight
- Strong hiking shoes
- Plastic bottle for water and water purification tablets, if you intend to hike in remote areas
- Camera (Including spare batteries. You won't believe how many pictures you will be taking and if you don't have a proper camera you'd wish you had one)
- Trekking poles, if there is trekking involved
- Gifts (People in most of the villages in Tajikistan are among the poorest in the world, however, they will share their last crust with you to offer hospitality. Therefore it will be nice of you to bring gifts like toys and books for the children, winter clothes or cosmetics and chocolates for women and man)

What Clothes To Bring

We will email you what kind of gear to bring depending on the season. Summers are usually warm in central Tajikistan; however, if you are going up to higher altitudes (above 2500m/8200ft) you will need warmer clothing, including a sweater and windproof jacket

Driving

Due to its mountainous nature, geographical remoteness, and deteriorated roads, traveling in most parts of Tajikistan involves a lot of driving, especially to the Pamir region. We use services of experienced drivers, who have been driving at least 5 years on such road conditions. In most cases, we use 4wheel drive SUV like the Nissan Patrol and Toyota Land Cruisers. For bigger groups, we may use 4WD Vans. We've found that how you get there significantly influences the tone of your journey, and therefore we always make sure that your ride is comfortable with reliable transportation.

Safety Considerations:

Your safety is our top priority. Only trained guides and experienced rangers will accompany you during your hike. All of our rangers and guides are local from the nearby villages, of the respective conservancy. All guides are trained to offer first aid and always carry the necessary first aid kit.

FAQ

Click on this [link](#) to read answers to frequently asked questions



2019 winter trip report

By Frans De Schamphelaere

[READ HERE](#)



2020 Winter Trip report

By Ralf Bürglin

[READ HERE](#)