

Marco Polo Sheep, an icon of the high Pamirs



TRIP OVERVIEW

Style: Wildlife watching / Camping / Hiking

Difficulty: Moderate

Location: GBAO, Pamir, Alichur region

Driving distance: 280 km / 87mi

Tour length: 13 days

PRICES:

1 person – 3724\$ per person

2 people – 2204\$ per person

3 people – 1860\$ per person

4 people – 1860\$ per person

5 people – 1635\$ per person

6 people – 1532\$ per person

Price includes: All meals | Transportation from and to Dushanbe, including transfer from from and to the airport | An English speaking guide | Conservancy rangers services | Camping equipment – tents, utensils, stove etc. | Camera Traps | All accommodation

WHY IS IT BETTER TO BOOK WITH ANCOT?

- 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

Close

HIGHLIGHTS:

Wildlife watching – primarily Marco Polo sheep, Bird watching in Zorkul lake, Yak Safari in a remote Pamir mountain, exploring Yashilkul and Bulunkul lakes, taking bath in natural hot-spring

DESCRIPTION:

There has been much said about the Marco Polo sheep (*Ovis ammon polii*). Etherton (1911) wrote “The chief object interest

attaching to this bleak and in-hospital land is the *Ovis polii*, whose horns form one of the finest trophies in the sportsman's collection. This grand sheep, the largest of its class and the size of a donkey, curved horns, giving it a majestic appearance. The existence of *Ovis polii* was first made known to the world by that famous traveler, Marco Polo, who traversed the Pamirs more than six hundred years ago, and from whom it derives its name." Cobbold (1900) further added that "*Ovis polii*, a wild sheep of a great size, which is found in most parts of the Pamir region. The peculiarity of these beasts are their horns, which at times attain extraordinary dimensions, one head now in the position of Lord Roberts has horns measuring seventy-five inches from the base to the tip, with a base circumference of sixteen inches, though this is an exceptional specimen."

These are encounters and descriptions from early travelers, who came to the Pamir region of Tajikistan as a part of various expeditions. Some were lured by the hunt, while others were drawn by a pure fascination for the Marco Polo sheep. Thanks to the work of the Alichur conservancy over the past decade, Marco Polo sheep populations have been steadily recovering.

Now conservancy is proudly offering wildlife-watching tours to observe and photograph the Marco Polo sheep. This tour is designed for wildlife lovers who want to combine wildlife watching with some adventure activities like yak safari. During the six days of your stay in Alichur conservancy, you will not only see and observe Marco Polo sheep but also other mammals like Siberian Ibex, Marmots, wolves and foxes. Depending on the season you will spend one night near Zorkul Nature Reserve which is identified as an Important Bird Area (IBA) for bird watching.

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: Dushanbe**

Driving distance: Around Dushanbe

Hiking distance: Short walkingThe most convenient flights to Dushanbe from the Americas and Europe are via Istanbul and Dubai, both arriving early in the morning. Upon your arrival, we will pick you up from the airport and take you directly to your guesthouse/hotel in Dushanbe for rest after your flight. Our guide and the driver will be there to help. Later you will embark on a city sightseeing tour. You will visit the local market, various parks and museums Dushanbe offers. This day will also allow you to exchange money for your personal expenses if you needed. You will have the opportunity to eat out at the best traditional restaurants in Dushanbe before hitting the road the next day to your big adventure.**Day 2: Dushanbe – Rushan**

Elevation gain: 1000m / 3280 feet

Distance: 530km / 329 mi

On the second day, after having breakfast we will hit the road towards the southeast part of Tajikistan. We will be traveling roughly 8-9 hours with a toilet and coffee break in between. Around noon we will reach Shurobod and will have lunch in one of our Markhor conservancy families. Having joined the Panj river which is the natural border between Tajikistan and Afghanistan we will drive along the border to Rushan district. Along the road, we will enjoy the views of Tajik and Afghan mountains as well as villages in Afghanistan.

Day 3: Rushan to Alichur via Khorog

Elevation gain: 1880m/6168feet

Distance: 281km / 174,6 mi

After a hearty breakfast at our guesthouse, we will continue driving along the Panj river to Khorog. Khorog is the administrative capital of the Gorno-Badakhshan province of Tajikistan and the biggest city in the whole of Pamir. On arrival in Khorog, we will visit the Afghan market first which takes place each Saturday in a special compound on the border. After doing some shopping we will drive to Khorog central park where we will have lunch followed by a trip to Khorog Botanical garden, one of the highest in the world. After we explore Khorog we resume our drive on Pamir Highway to Alichur over Koitezak pass (4271 masl). Alichur is located in a vast plain called Alichur plain and geographically located in eastern Pamir. The view and landscape of eastern Pamir differ from the western part by being at a higher altitude and mostly barren. Our conservancy staff will meet us in Alichur and in the evening we will have dinner and discuss our program for spotting Marco Polo sheep for the next 6 days.

Day 4-9: Marco Polo observation and Bird watching in Zorkul lake

Elevation range: 3700-4800m/12139-15748feet

Distance: 400 – 600km / 248 – 372 mi Depending on the season the itinerary in Alichur for Marco Polo sheep observation may vary. During the 6 days in the conservancy, we will drive to several base camps and possibly hike to some of the valleys north of Alichur village. Our rangers will set up Yurt for us to get warm and relax while waiting for the herd of Argali sheep and Siberian Ibex to descend to eat food. We will also spend one night near Zorkul lake which is south of Alichur and located right on the border with Afghanistan. This part of Tajikistan and Afghanistan is so remote that you will be there alone with the wilderness. Being an Important Bird Area,

Zorkul lake is home for several endemic and migratory bird species including bar-headed geese, Tibetan snowcocks, Himalayan snowcocks, ruddy shelducks, saker falcons, Himalayan vultures, lesser sand plovers, brown-headed gulls, yellow-billed choughs, Hume's larks, white-winged redstarts and etc. A combination of moonlike landscape and wilderness, as well as Fauna, will give us a great time and to celebrate this we will treat ourselves with a bath at a Hot-spring.

Some day we may see a small herd of Argali sheep, but eventually, we will be able to observe large male and female groups. Along the way, we will also visit some historical places including some prehistoric petroglyphs and ancient Chinese tombs. On our last day, we will drive to Bulunkul and Yashilkul lakes to observe more birds and try fresh trout's from Yashilkul lake.**Day 10: Alichur – Khorog**

Elevation loss: 1780m/5840feet

Distance: 212km / 132 miWe will say good buy to our host and great guys who helped us for all these days in the conservancy and head back to Khorog today. In Khorog we will have free time and will be able to connect to the world wide web, call our families and read the latest news in the world and in our homes.**Day 11: Khorog – Anjirob**

Elevation loss: 1192m/3910feet

Distance: 356km / 221 miToday we will head back towards Dushanbe. Again driving along the border but in a reverse direction we will make our way back to Shurobod today to the village of Anjirob where Saidi Tagnob conservancy operates. Saidi Tagnob conservancy was founded by two local families of traditional hunters now turned into conservationists in and around the villages of Yol and Anjirob. The conservancy is located in the mountain range of Hazratishoh, which is one of the most scenic places in central Tajikistan. Spectacular red rock formations, canyons, cliffs and the dark green juniper woodlands create an ideal habitat for many species of wildlife

including birds. The primary aim of the conservancy is to preserve wildlife species namely mountain ungulates and their habitat. Due to the dedicated work of conservancy families and implementation of sustainable use initiatives, the number of species is increasing, and their habitat is improving. Together with conservancy rangers we will drive to one of the camps in the mountains called devlokham tomorrow morning from where we observe markhor goats.**Day 12: Anjirob to Dushanbe**

Elevation gain: 50m/164feet

Distance: 235km / 146 miWe will get up early morning to watch the wildlife as the sun rises. The conservancy family rangers will have set of binoculars and spotting scopes for you to enjoy wildlife watching, mostly markhor. Afterwards, you will head back down on the same trail. Our drivers will meet you at the trailhead where you say goodbye to the conservancy staff and head back to Dushanbe. In Dushanbe you will have some time to rest at the hotel and then go for shopping to the souvenir shop or the bazaar. In the evening you will have a farewell dinner with ANCOT staff where you share your experience and possibly discuss your future trip to Tajikistan again.**Day 13: Flight back**

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