



Pamir Highway Wildlife Safari

TRIP OVERVIEW

Style: Roadtrip / Wildlife watching

Difficulty: Moderate

Location: Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan

Driving distance: 2050 km / 1274mi

Tour length: 17 days

PRICES:

- 1 person – 3681\$ per person
- 2 people – 2417\$ per person
- 3 people – 1990\$ per person
- 4 people – 1990\$ per person
- 5 people – 1808\$ per person
- 6 people – 1635\$ per person

Price includes: All meals | Transportation from and to Dushanbe, including transfer 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

HIGHLIGHTS:

Driving the famous Pamir Highway, Authentic Pamiri hospitality, High altitude mountain lakes, mammal watching, bird-watching, local cultures and traditions, spectacular mountain views

DESCRIPTION:

Undoubtedly Pamir Highway road trip is the most popular activity among tourists visiting Tajikistan, and for good reason. The contrast in landscape and people along the way, accompanied with historical sights and often with an element of unpredictability due to the road conditions and many other factors, as well as many possibilities for detours and adventure activities such as hiking, mountaineering, cycling, and trekking make such trip a real adventure of a lifetime. On this trip, we decided to add another component to the Pamir Highway road trip – the wildlife! In fact, Pamir Highway road trip is a trip across the country and across different habitats, which gives one a possibility to meet quite a diverse assembly of wildlife species that Tajikistan hosts. Of course, this safari is not same as the one in Africa where the possibilities to observe the wild animals in the wild are large and guaranteed in wildlife protected parks, nevertheless, our team of biologists, naturalist guides and dedicated rangers have gained considerable experience in wildlife monitoring and the possibilities of encounters with them in Tajikistan's wilderness, that the chances of seeing and observing wildlife on this trip are guaranteed. This Pamir highway trip is not going to be a usual one, to see wild animals we shall make several side trips and detours to places like Vakhsh mountain range, Tigrovaya Balka Nature reserve, Bartang, and Wakhan valleys. We shall go from lowland semi-deserts of southern Tajikistan to high plateau deserts and tundra of Pamir and see such mammals as Jackal, Bactrian Deer, Goiteres Gazelle, Markhor Goat, Urial Sheep, Siberian Ibex, Marco Polo Sheep, Brown Bear, Marmot, Wild Boars, Wild Yak and a variety of bird species and if we get too lucky possibly a snow leopard. Also not to mention the diversity of plant species which are just countless some of which are endemic. A combination of landscape, History, Culture, and Wildlife makes this tour one of its kind in the region.

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 walking
The most convenient route from Europe or the Americas to Tajikistan's capital is via Turkey. Turkish Airlines operates flights from Istanbul to Dushanbe three times per week and arrives early in the morning. Once you arrive at 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 a 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 four completely tailored halls where the Tajik government holds high official meetings. In the evening you will meet with our lead biologist who will give you information about the wildlife species you will see on the tour and conservation effort made by ANCOT in Tajikistan.

Day 2: Dushanbe to Tigrovaya Balka Nature Reserve

Elevation loss: 400m / 1312ft

Driving distance: 170km/106mi

We start from Dushanbe early in the morning heading south to Jillikul town along Vakhsh river. The Nature Reserve's main entrance is just 7 km south of Jillikul. Upon arrival, we register our names at the entrance and meet with the reserve's rangers who will be assisting us on our trip. Most of the rangers of the reserve are people from surrounding villages who grew up working in the reserve. Before continuing into the reserve we will visit the reserves museum, where we will learn about the history of the reserve and its fauna and flora. We will also look into the map of the reserve in the museum to learn how to navigate in the area. After entering the reserve we will drive 15 km to a rangers hut called Darya-Kul, where we load off our belongings and have lunch. After lunch, we will drive further south into the reserve to a place called Korolevskaya Dacha or King's resort. With more than a dozen water bodies in the reserve, we will start our wildlife watching with birds. The avifauna of the reserve consists of 43 Native, 58 Breeding, 66 Wintering, and around 30 migratory species. Closer to the evening we will drive into the forest to spot Bactrian Deer. By the dark, we will be able to see Jackals and wild boars. After the dark, we will return to our lodge and have dinner before going to sleep.

Day 3: Tigrovaya Balka Nature reserve

Driving distance: 100km/62mi

One of the main species that we shall be concerned about on this trip is a Goitered Gazelle. This species is almost extinct in the reserve due to habitat fragmentation that happened in the last 3 decades and still going on. However few survived due to good protection by the reserve's staff. In the past, we were able to spot four individuals and by continuous monitoring, we will be able to tell the population trends. After the Gazelle sighting, we will drive to the steppe area to spot Hawks and Buzzards. For the Lunch we will drive to Korolevskaya Dacha again, to be closer to our next sighting area. After lunch, we will drive down closer to the sandy semi-desert area to spot Pheasants and if we are in the migration season of Bustards. We will drive back to our lodge at dark again after more deer sighting today.

Day 4: Tigrovaya Balka Nature Reserve – Darvoz

Elevation gain: 560 m / 1840 feet

Driving Distance: 275 km / 171 mi After spending two days in the reserve which is at the lowlands we will move to the mountainous area today. Darvoz region where the Hazratishoh mountain range lies on the frontier of Tajikistan is home to a family-based conservancy. This mountain range is home for a variety of wildlife like Markhor goats, Brown bears, Foxes, Wolves, Porcupine, Badger, Lynx, and birds such as Himalayan vulture, Griffon vulture, Lammergeier, Cinereous vulture, Egyptian vulture, Long-legged Buzzard, Golden Eagle, Common Kestrel, Barbary Falcon, and many other passerine birds. We will stay at one of our Markhor conservancy guesthouses, making some rest and bird watching stops en-route in steppes and agriculture fields near Dangara. Our guesthouse will be located by the Panj River on the border with Afghanistan.

Day 5: Darvoz

Elevation gain: 300-500 m / 985-1640 feet

Hiking distance: 10-12 km / 6-7.5 mi The territory of the conservancy stretches all the way to the Dashtijum Nature Reserve from the northwestern side and is the biggest in terms of area. Run by a family of former hunters who carry out wildlife surveys, habitat protection, and management in its territory the conservancy has served many tourists who are into wildlife photography, game watching, and trekking. As a result of conservation work and implementation of sustainable management practices, the number of wildlife is thriving in its territory. Communities here to a great extent engage in mountain agriculture. Many families practice beekeeping and take pride in their practice. In fact, the honey produced here is considered the best in Tajikistan. The highlights of the area include an abundance of wildlife, birds, waterfalls, towering snowy peaks, incredible flower fields (Amaryllis), and breathtaking views into Afghan villages across the river. Today we will hike to a place called mushroom land above the camp, from where we will be able to see a lot of animals.

Day 6: Darvoz – Khijez

Elevation gain: 1150m/3773feet

Driving distance: 304km/189mi Today after breakfast we will have a long drive to Bartang valley. We will break the whole drive into three sections and will be making stops for bathrooms, tea, lunch, and bird-watching. We will also stop for you to have a look at the small Afghan villages across the river. The closer we will be getting to Bartang, the more

remote and less developed the villages will become. In Bartang we will drive to the cozy village of Khijez situated on the bank of the Bartang River. Bartang valley is famous for its untouched nature and exceptionally hospitable people. We shall stay at the local conservancy family house for an overnight.

Day 7: Khijez – Ravmed – Jizev

Elevation gain: 880m/2890feet

Driving distance: 45km/28mi

Hiking distance: 6 km /3.7 mi Asiatic Ibex is the most common wildlife of Pamir mountains and is morphologically rather different from those in other countries, and also between the different areas of Tajikistan considerable variation in horns and coloration can be found. Six community-based conservancies in the region protect this iconic animal. Early in the morning, we will drive towards Ravmed village some 20 km further in the valley, making stops en-route to scan the slopes of the surrounding mountains for the Ibex. We will have lunch in a remote Ravmed village where people still live traditionally. After lunch, we will drive back to the main road and hike to yet another side-valley of Bartang river to Jizev. An easy 3-hour hike will take us to the picturesque tiny village where we spend the night in a traditional Pamiri house.

Day 8: Jizev – Khorog

Elevation loss: 600m/1968feet

Driving distance: 85km/53mi Today we will have breakfast and hit the road towards a town called Khorog set on the bank of the Panj River, which is the administrative capital of Gorno-Badakhshan province of Tajikistan. Here we will settle in a good traditional hotel with a shower and bath after many days of staying at homestays and in the wild. At the afternoon we will go out to explore Khorog's famed Botanical Garden after which you will have some free time on your own to explore the local mosque and central Park.

Day 9: Khorog – Yamchun

Elevation gain: 630m/2050feet

Driving distance: 160km/100mi Today we head to the spectacular Wakhan valley. We will drive four hours before reaching Ishkashim, where Wakhan valley starts. At Ishkashim we will do some bird-watching and continue to Darshai village where we will have lunch at the local home. Today we will see two of the most impressive architectural heritage of the ancient Silk Road, Yamchun and Kah-Kaha forts which once guarded this section of the Silk Road from the bandits and invaders. This part of Tajikistan is also identified as an Important Bird Area. We will have 4-5 hours of driving mostly on a dirt road partly paved and arrive early in the afternoon. Our destination is the village of Yamg, and we will stay with a homestay family tonight. After lunch in Ishkashim, we continue driving west along the Panj river, here we enter the wide Wakhan valley. Along the road, we will stop to visit Yamchun fortress and bath at Bibi-Fatima hot spring. Tonight we stay at a local Wakhi family house.

Day 10: Yamchun – Zong

Elevation gain: 540m/1772feet

Driving distance: 45km/28mi

Hiking distance: 8km/5mi We continue exploring Wakhan today. In the morning we will visit a museum dedicated to the work and life of an 18th-century Ismaili religious scholar, poet, and musician at Yamg village. Later on, we will discover the Buddhist stupa in the next village left here from the times of the Kushan Empire which ruled these territories during the 1st and 3rd centuries. At the same time we will stay focused on finding one of the least studied birds in the world the large-billed reed warbler, considered extinct for some time in the past it was rediscovered in Thailand in 2006, and breeding in Wakhan in 2011. This one surely will be one of your lifers. After visiting the stupa we continue to the village of Zong where we undertake yet another hike to the ancient Silk Fortress, ruins of which have been preserved. Located on the slope of the mountain, the hike to the fortress offers an exceptional view of the Wakhan valley and Hindu Kush mountains of Afghanistan. After spending some time in the fortress we descent to the village and take another bath in a hot spring. We stay at the local guesthouse tonight.

Day 11: Zong – Zorkul lake

Elevation gain: 1400m/4593feet

Driving distance: 140km/87mi Today we drive to one of the most remote parts of Tajikistan, a place registered as Key Biodiversity Area and is protected by the Government of Tajikistan – Zorkul lake area. Otherwise named Lake Victoria in English literature of the 19th century this place was a boundary of famous Anglo-Russian rivalry known as the Great Game. Many explorers of the 18th and 19th centuries visited this place as it is the major tributary Panj river and consequently to Amu or Oxus river that attracts many wildlife species, especially waterfowl birds.

Day 12: Zorkul Lake

Elevation gain: 100-500m/328-1640feet

Driving distance: 10-50km/6.2-31miWe will spend the whole day observing and studying the Zorkul area fauna today. Zorkul lake area represents a wide valley near the border of Afghanistan at an altitude of 4100 masl with poor vegetation. The lake is 6 meters deep, occupies an area equal to 3900 hectares, and is a freshwater lake surrounded by a wetland. 125 breeding pairs of bar-headed geese were documented in the last survey conducted in 2011, which is a flagship species of the lake. But the reserve was classified as an IBA because it also supports significant numbers of the populations of several other bird species, either as residents or as overwintering, breeding, or passage migrants. Apart from the water and wetland habitats the reserve's landscape also includes a steppe and mountain areas, where such mammals as Marco Polo sheep, Siberian Ibex, mountain weasel, and Snow leopard can be seen. Here we will stay in tents.

Day 13: Zorkul lake – Bashgumbez

Elevation loss: 100m/328feet

Driving distance: 150km/93miToday you will see different culture from that of a western Pamir. We will travel to one of the few Kyrgyz settlements in Eastern Pamir, a village called Bashgumbez. Most of the population here are ethnic Kyrgyz, who originally lived a nomadic life and to this day preserved the elements and traditions of their past. Local people in this region have established a community-based wildlife conservation organization to protect their wildlife resources from poachers and excessive livestock grazing. They have achieved successful results over time and today they can easily show you where Marco Polo sheep or Ibex come to forage in and around their territories. The village is located in the wide Alichur valley on a plateau at 4000 masl. Today you will sleep in a traditional Kyrgyz Yurt and learn how to ride a Yak.

Day 14: Bashgumbez – Karakul

Elevation range: 4000-4650-3950m/13123-15255-12960feet

Driving distance: 210km/130miIn the morning we will drive to one of the gorges in the conservancy and spend time scanning the slopes and the valley to spot Marco Polo sheep and possibly the snow leopard. Closer to noon we will drive to Murgab town, which is the biggest town in the eastern Pamir. This is the far eastern frontier of Tajikistan where historically Russians held their military points even before Tajikistan was formed as a country. Today it's a small town that resembles a settlement on the surface of the moon. We will have lunch in Murgab and continue driving north to Karakul over the highest point on our trip – the Akbaital pass at 4655 masl. Karakul is crater represented by a massive lake created by a meteor fall some 5 million years ago. This lake also hosts a lot of waterfowls, mostly the same species that are found in Zorkul lake, however, the site is usually visited by vagrants that are not found elsewhere. We will stay in the village located on the Eastern side of the lake in the house of the local Kyrgyz family.

Day 15: Karakul – Osh

Elevation loss: 2980m/9777feet

Driving distance: 285km/177miWe leave Tajikistan today and enter Kyrgyzstan. We travel up to the Kyzyl Art pass (4336 masl) in the morning where we cross the Tajik border control, after some 30 km at the entrance of the Alai valley we cross the Kyrgyz border checkpoint. The landscape will change dramatically from an Arid mountainous area to a humid vegetated Alai plain. We will drive further to the Alai mountain range which connects the Pamir and Tien Shan ranges. Along the way, you will have a glimpse of the nomadic way of life that the Kyrgyz pastoralists lead here, with all the green pastures dotted with yurts. Passing over a scenic Toldyk pass at 3554 masl, we drive into Osh city the second-largest city in Kyrgyzstan. Having a climate much like Dushanbe, but more humid, Osh was also one of the major Silk Road towns, so here we will visit its most famous site Solomon's Throne – the rock that looms over the city and is an important Muslim pilgrimage site. We will have dinner in a traditional Kyrgyz restaurant and stay at a local hotel tonight.

Day 16: Osh – Bishkek flightAfter breakfast, we will catch an early flight to Bishkek. On arrival, we will spend some time exploring this classic green soviet-style city by visiting its bazaar and central square, later we will spend some free time of our own. In Bishkek, we will stay at a Hotel.

Day 17: Departure homeToday we will transfer you to the airport for your departure home.

End of the 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