

Tajikistan Tour | Central Asian Small Group Tour

Reading List

The Great Game: The Struggle for Empire in Central Asia

by Peter Hopkirk

Peter Hopkirk's spellbinding account of the great imperial struggle for supremacy in Central Asia has been hailed as essential reading with that era's legacy playing itself out today.

The Great Game between Victorian Britain and Tsarist Russia was fought across desolate terrain from the Caucasus to China, over the lonely passes of the Pamirs and Karakorams, in the blazing Kerman and Helmund deserts, and through the caravan towns of the old Silk Road—both powers scrambling to control access to the riches of India and the East. When play first began, the frontiers of Russia and British India lay 2000 miles apart; by the end, this distance had shrunk to twenty miles at some points. Now, in the vacuum left by the disintegration of the Soviet Union, there is once again talk of Russian soldiers "dipping their toes in the Indian Ocean."

The Washington Post has said that "every story Peter Hopkirk touches is totally engrossing." In this gripping narrative he recounts a breathtaking tale of espionage and treachery through the actual experiences of its colorful characters. Based on meticulous scholarship and on-the-spot research, this is the history at the core of today's geopolitics.

Inside Central Asia: A Political and Cultural History of Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkey, and Iran

by Dilip Hiro

The former Soviet republics of Central Asia comprise a sprawling, politically pivotal, densely populated, and richly cultured area of the world.

In this comprehensive new treatment, renowned political writer and historian Dilip Hiro places the politics, peoples, and cultural background of this critical region firmly into the context of current international focus.

"For those who still get their "-stans" mixed up, Hiro's book provides a detailed and nuanced overview of the region of central Asia. He explains the ethnic tensions, religious intolerance and struggle for political identity in the lands caught between two behemoths—the splintered Soviet empire and the rising Chinese one."

-Financial Times, Best Books of 2009

"Readers acquainted with Mr.Hiro's prolific writing about Asia and the Islamic world will be unsurprised to learn that Inside Central Asia is a conscientious guide to the region, full of dependable history-telling and analysis."

-The Economist

"Hiro's account provides a fast-moving and well-sourced genealogy of the Central Asian republics' political and economic trajectories, focusing on the post-Stalinist period up to the present day. It is unlikely that more comprehensive analysis of this period in Central Asia has been written, and it serves as a valuable update to Hiro's earlier Between Marx and Muhammad: the Changing Face of Central Asia."

-Issac Scarborough, n+1

Tajikistan: A Political and Social History

by Kirill Nourzhanov

This book is a historical study of the Tajiks in Central Asia from the ancient times to the post-Soviet period. For millennia, these descendants of the original Aryan settlers were part of many different empires set up by Greek, Arab, Turkic and Russian invaders, as well as their own, most notably during the Middle Ages. The emergence of the modern state of Tajikistan began after 1917 under Soviet rule, and culminated in the promulgation of independence from the moribund USSR in 1991. In the subsequent civil war that raged between 1992 and 1997, Tajikistan came close to becoming a failed state. The legacy of that internal conflict remains critical to understanding politics in Tajikistan a generation later. Exploring the patterns of ethnic identity and the exigencies of state formation, the book argues that despite a strong sense of belonging underpinned by shared history, mythology and cultural traits, the Tajiks have not succeeded in forming a consolidated nation. The politics of the Russian colonial administration, the national-territorial delimitation under Stalin, and the Soviet strategy of socio-economic modernisation contributed to the preservation and reification of sub-ethnic cleavages and regional identities. The book demonstrates the impact of region-based elite clans on Tajikistan's political trajectory in the twilight years of the Soviet era, and identifies objective and subjective factors that led to the civil war. It concludes with a survey of the process of national reconciliation after 1997, and the formal and informal political actors, including Islamist groups, who compete for influence in Tajik society

The Silk Road - Central Asia, Afghanistan and Iran: A Travel Companion

by Jonathan Tucker

Stretching from the ancient Chinese capital of Xian across the expanses of Central Asia to Rome, the Silk Road was, for 2,000 years, a vibrant network of arteries that carried the lifeblood of nations across the world. Along a multitude of routes everything was exchanged: exotic goods, art, knowledge, religion, philosophy, disease and war. From the East came silk, tea, jade, paper, porcelain, spices and Buddhism; from the West, horses, weapons, lions, precious stones and cotton. From its earliest beginnings in the days of Alexander the Great and the Han Dynasty, the Silk Road expanded and evolved, reaching its peak under the Tang and Byzantine empires and gradually crumbling along with the decline of the Mongol empire. In this beautifully-illustrated book, which covers the Central Asian section of the Silk Road - from Lake Issy Kul through Tashkent, Samarkand, Bukhara, the Kyzyl Kum Desert, Khiva and Merv to Herat, Kabul and Iran - Jonathan Tucker uses traveller's anecdotes and a wealth of literary and historical sources to celebrate the cultural heritage of the countries that lie along the Silk Road and illuminate the lives of those who once travelled through the very heart of the world.

China's Asian Dream: Empire Building along the New Silk Road

by Tom Miller

"China", Napoleon once remarked, "is a sleeping lion. Let her sleep, for when she wakes she will shake the world." In 2014, President Xi Jinping triumphantly declared the lion had awakened. Under his leadership, China is pursuing a dream to restore its historical position as the dominant power in Asia.

From the Mekong River Basin to the Central Asian steppe, China is flexing its economic muscles for strategic ends. By setting up new regional financial institutions, Beijing is challenging the post-World War II order established under the watchful eye of Washington. And by funding and building roads, railways, ports and power lines—a New Silk Road across Eurasia and through the South China Sea and Indian Ocean—China aims to draw its neighbours ever tighter into its embrace.

Combining a geopolitical overview with on-the-ground reportage from a dozen countries, China's Asian Dream offers a fresh perspective on the rise of China' and what it means for the future of Asia?

The Silk Road in World History

by Xinru Liu

The Silk Road was the contemporary name for a complex of ancient trade routes linking East Asia with Central Asia, South Asia, and the Mediterranean world. This network of exchange emerged

along the borders between agricultural China and the steppe nomads during the Han Dynasty (206 B.C.E.-220 C.E.), in consequence of the inter-dependence and the conflicts of these two distinctive societies. In their quest for horses, fragrances, spices, gems, glassware, and other exotics from the lands to their west, the Han Empire extended its dominion over the oases around the Takla Makan Desert and sent silk all the way to the Mediterranean, either through the land routes leading to the caravan city of Palmyra in Syria desert, or by way of northwest India, the Arabian Sea and the Red Sea, landing at Alexandria. The Silk Road survived the turmoil of the demise of the Han and Roman Empires, reached its golden age during the early middle age, when the Byzantine Empire and the Tang Empire became centres of silk culture and established the models for high culture of the Eurasian world. The coming of Islam extended silk culture to an even larger area and paved the way for an expanded market for textiles and other commodities. By the 11th century, however, the Silk Road was in decline because of intense competition from the sea routes of the Indian Ocean. Using supply and demand as the framework for analysing the formation and development of the Silk Road, the book examines the dynamics of the interactions of the nomadic pastoralists with sedentary agriculturalists, and the spread of new ideas, religions, and values into the world of commerce, thus illustrating the cultural forces underlying material transactions. This effort at tracing the interconnections of the diverse participants in the transcontinental Silk Road exchange will demonstrate that the world had been linked through economic and ideological forces long before the modern era.
