

**KAZAKHSTAN**  
**BIRDING IN THE HEART OF CENTRAL ASIA**  
**MAY 12 – 26, 2011**

**EXTENSION TO UZBEKISTAN**  
**MAY 25 – 31, 2011**

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*Kazakhstan is a huge country - four times the size of Texas but with just 1/16th of the population. There is a fine diversity of habitats and a mouth-watering array of birds special to Central Asia that is difficult or impossible to find elsewhere. The country is set in the very heart of Asia – a mix of, and bridge between Siberia, Mongolia, the Middle East and China. Everything is on a vast scale. Great expanses of flat steppe grasslands merge into sandy and stony deserts. Dotted here and there are saline and freshwater lakes which act like magnets to nesting and migrant birds. In sharp contrast, the massive towering peaks of the Tien Shan Mountains - an extension of the Himalayas - edging onto China rise to over 20,000 feet. Here we find ecosystems varying from massive tracts of deciduous and coniferous forest cut by untamed rivers in deep gorges at lower elevations, to snow-capped peaks and flower-rich alpine meadows higher up.*

*The bird-life is phenomenal! Apart from a large list of more typically European species there is a stunning list of very special breeding birds largely confined to Central Asia and tricky or impossible to find elsewhere: Dalmatian Pelican; McQueen's Bustard; Ruddy Shelduck; White-headed Duck; Himalayan Griffon; Cinereous Vulture; Pallid Harrier; Shikra; Steppe Eagle; Saker, Barbary and Red-footed falcons; Great Black-headed and Steppe gulls; Ibisbill; Black-winged Pratincole; Caspian and Greater Sand plovers; Sociable Lapwing; Pallas's Sandgrouse; Himalayan Snowcock; Demoiselle Crane; Oriental Turtle-dove; Pale-backed Pigeon (Eversmann's Dove); White-winged Woodpecker; Brown Dipper; Pale Sand Martin; Citrine Wagtail; Brown-necked Raven; Southern Gray and Rufous-tailed (Isabelline) shrikes; Eurasian Nutcracker; Sulphur-bellied, Asian Desert, Sykes's, Booted, Hume's, Greenish, Paddyfield, Moustached and Blyth's Reed warblers; Himalayan, Black-throated and Brown accentors; Blue Whistling-Thrush; White-tailed (Himalayan) Rubythroat; Rufous-tailed Scrub-Robin; White-winged (Guldenstadt's); Blue-headed and Rufous-backed redstarts; Pied, Desert and Isabelline wheatears; Bimaculated, White-winged and Black larks; Rosy Starling; Black-headed and White-crowned penduline-tits; Turkestan, Azure and Songar tits; White-browed (Severzov's) Tit-warbler; Grey-hooded, Pine, Meadow, Red-headed and Chestnut-breasted buntings; Saxaul Sparrow; Fire-fronted Serin; Black-headed and Plain Mountain-finches; Desert, Crimson-winged and Mongolian finches; Red-mantled Rosefinch and White-winged Grosbeak. Not to mention some very nifty mammals and reptiles.*

*Uzbekistan is a country steeped in ancient history. In ancient times it was a rich region of splendid cities and cultures based along the Great Silk Route to China – a true crossroads between east and west. The country is steeped in fabled historical sites in Tashkent, Samarkand and Bukhara where ancient civilisations have travelled and fought over possession of central Asia for thousands of years. Superbly intact and incredibly beautiful, extravagant ancient architecture is everywhere in our midst. There is also a short-list of very special birds to be found. Several species at the western edge of their range in Asia such as Asian Paradise Flycatcher, Long-tailed Shrike and Pied Bushchat mix with local specialties such as Pygmy Cormorant, White-tailed Lapwing, Menetrie's*

*Warbler, Blue-cheeked Bee-eater, Hume's Lark, Yellow-breasted Tit, Persian Nuthatch, Finsch's and Variable wheatears, White-throated Robin, Eastern Orphean Warbler and Clamorous Reed-Warbler. At the top of the "want-list" is the enigmatic and curious Turkestan (Pander's) Ground Jay, easily found in the stony deserts of Kizzyl-kum.*

*British birders have been enjoying these stable countries and their fantastic birds and history ever since they gained independence after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The best birding sites are well-established and there is an excellent network of local guides. VENT operated its first and highly successful tour in 2009. We are sure that participants will be delighted with this extraordinary central Asian experience.*

**May 12-14, Days 1-3: To Astana.** Flights to Astana from the United States depart on May 12 with connections through Europe, arriving Astana (airport code TSE), the new capital of Kazakhstan. Former names include Akmola, Akmolinsk, Tselinograd, and Aqmola. Flights generally arrive late on May 13 or very early on May 14 with connections from Frankfurt, Germany or Istanbul, Turkey. After meeting our local guide (Day 3), we will check into our hotel, take a short rest before heading out at *ca.* 08.00 for the remainder of the day in order to begin our exploration of this fantastic area. The surrounding area is one of seemingly endless steppe and marshland interspersed with immense reedbeds and marshes resplendent with large numbers of waterbirds and our first Paddyfield, Cetti's, Moustached, Grasshopper and Savi's warblers, Bluethroat, Citrine Wagtail and a perplexing array of many colorful races of Yellow Wagtail.

NIGHTS: Day 1-2, on Aircraft; Day 3, Astana (Hotel TBA)

**May 15, Day 4: Astana.** A full day visiting the best birding sites in the Kurgalgin wetlands reserve. Our main targets here are nesting groups of the globally endangered Sociable Lapwing, which our local guide should have "staked-out" for us". There are many other fine attractions in this vast landscape. Roadside colonies of Black-winged Pratincoles and White-winged Terns in glorious breeding plumage should be dotted with migrant shorebirds such as Red-necked Phalaropes, Spotted Redshank, Terek Sandpiper, Ruffs displaying in all their finery, Little and Temminck's stints. These enumerable wetlands and lakes should also produce breeding Dalmatian Pelican, Great Bittern, White-headed Duck, Red-necked and Eared grebes, Whooper Swan, Greylag Goose, Red-crested Pochard and Caspian Terns. More special still are often close colonies of splendid Great Black-headed Gulls, with a supporting cast of Steppe and Slender-billed gulls!

The damp grassy steppe contain elegant Demoiselle Cranes while scattered scrub, bush should hold Booted Warbler, Pallid Harrier and gorgeous little Red-footed Falcons. Three other very special birds we should find easily today are Bimaculated, Black & White-winged Larks, often numerous along the roadside, but species confined to the Central Asian steppes.

NIGHT: Astana (Hotel TBA)

**May 16, Day 5: Fly to Almaty.** After a final morning's birding in the Astana area we will fly to the attractive city of Almaty. If time permits we will commence our exploration of the Almaty area this afternoon.

NIGHT: Tau-Samal Hotel, Almaty

**May 17, Day 6: Drive Almaty to Taukum Desert.** This morning we will head out of Almaty passing through fields of poppies and other wildflowers and all with the spectacular backdrop of the icy Tien Shan Mountains. We will make several stops along the way including a fascinating area of ancient petro glyphs; a scrubby, rocky area for the perky Persian (Eastern Rock) Nuthatch and a breeding colony of exotic European Bee-eaters. With a bit of luck we may find something exceptional such as Little Bustard which we encountered on our 2009 tour!

We will take an *al fresco* lunch in the field before continuing on to our tented camp in the Taukam Desert. All things being equal we should arrive in time for afternoon tea and an opportunity to view Black-bellied and possibly Pin-tailed sandgrouse coming to drink at an artesian waterhole.

NIGHT: Private Tented Camp, Taukam Desert

**May 18, Day 7: Taukum Desert and Turanga Woodland.** Today is a wonderful day in which we will encounter a wide variety of habitats and some fine birds and other wildlife. Awakening in the midst of this remote desert, we will likely be watching the amazing display of McQueen's Bustards close to our camp before breakfast! Then we will set forth along narrow back-roads through a variety of steppe/desert habitats to an area of unique Turanga woodland where with a bit of luck we should encounter such specialties as Turkestan Tit, Saxaul Sparrow, White-winged Woodpecker, Pale-backed Pigeon (Eversmann's or Yellow-eyed Dove) and if we are especially lucky Pallid Scops-Owl. Along the way we will undoubtedly encounter a myriad of Greater Short-toed, Lesser Short-toed and Calandra larks and Isabelline Wheatears and Isabelline (Rufous-tailed) Shrikes but amongst which we must diligently search for Asian Desert Warbler and Little Owl. Other possible species along our way include Pied and Desert wheatears, Rock Petronia, Spanish Sparrow, gorgeous little Azure Tits and Black-headed and White-crowned penduline tits.

NIGHT: Private Tented Camp, Taukam Desert

**May 19, Day 8: Taukum Desert to Almaty.** Early this morning we will drive for about 15-20 miles into the desert looking for beautifully marked Caspian and Greater sandpipers. After breakfast we will break camp and head back towards Almaty. Probably around lunch time we will stop at Lake Sorbulak, a paradise for waterbirds. This site actually constitutes a series of large and small lakes in the semi-desert north-west from Almaty. Here colonies of Dalmatian and Great White pelicans, Garganey, Ruddy Shelduck and the Caspian form of Steppe Gull occur side by side. Nearby fringing scrub acts as a magnet for migrant and nesting birds such as Eurasian Hoopoe, European Roller, European Bee-eater, Shikra, Lesser Gray Shrike, Blyth's Reed-warbler, Syke's Warbler, Oriental Turtle-Dove and Desert finch.

NIGHT: Tau-Samal Hotel, Almaty

**May 20-21, Days 9-10: Almaty to Lake Bartogay.** Heading out from our hotel in Almaty this morning we travel 125 miles (200 km) east to one of the more spectacular and well-known sites in Kazakhstan - the red, yellow and black canyons of the Charyn River Gorge. Amidst this lovely scenery we should encounter raptors such as Egyptian, Himalayan Griffon and Cinereous Vultures; Long-legged Buzzard; Golden Eagle; Saker Falcon and Lesser Kestrel. In the occasional wetlands, small rivers and scrub running through this expansive dry rocky landscape are possibilities for Black Stork; Chukar; Tawny Pipit; Pied and Isabelline wheatears; Rufous-tailed and Blue rock-thrushes, Hume's Whitethroat, Chestnut-breasted, Grey-hooded and Rock and Red-headed Buntings. We may come across roadside colonies of the bizarre, pink-and-black, nomadic Rosy Starlings.

On Day 10, we continue our explorations, seeking out species still missing and adding further special birds such as Rufous-tailed Scrub-Robin, Mongolian and Crimson-winged Finches coming down to drink at the edge of remote Lake Bartogay. We will probably find a colony of Pale Sand Martins (a recent split from Bank Swallow).

NIGHTS: Lodge Accommodation at Baiseit

**May 22, Day 11: Return to Almaty.** Returning to Almaty today, we can continue birding *en route*, maybe searching for Ferruginous Pochard, Eastern Olivaceous Warbler and Black-headed Penduline-Tit in riverside willows, and arrange to arrive back in good time for a little personal sight-seeing of this interesting city with its old orthodox Russian cathedral, lovely parks and fascinating markets.

NIGHT: Tau-Samal Hotel, Almaty

**May 23, Day 12: Tien Shan Mountains.** It will take us about two hours to transfer from Almaty to the Astronomical Observatory, situated at the Big Almaty Gorge of the northern Tien Shan Mountains at an altitude of over 8,500 feet. During our steep ascent we'll pause to seek out the Brown and White-throated Dippers and Blue Whistling-thrushes along the fast-flowing mountain streams. In the open patches of mature, mixed deciduous/coniferous forest Greenish and Hume's warblers are quite common. The observatory is an old Soviet construction in a lovely open area of flower-covered alpine meadows and juniper-covered slopes, with a 360 degree backdrop of steep alpine peaks. Arriving in time for lunch, we can spend the afternoon ambling close to the Observatory where the stunning little White-tailed (Himalayan) Rubythroat and Fire-fronted Serins are readily found.

NIGHT: at the Observatory.

**May 24, Day 13: Tien Shan Mountains.** We have a full day in this glorious high-altitude landscape to find a wonderful array of alpine specialists. Black-throated, Altai and Brown accentors, Sulphur-bellied Warbler, Red-mantled Rosefinch, White-winged Grosbeak and the incomparable White-browed (Severzov's) Tit-warbler await us! We will descend a short distance by coach to the Large Almaty Lake where wide, braided, stony river beds are home to the utterly unique Ibisbill. Higher up in the mountains above the Observatory at an altitude of 10,500 feet, we will look for Lammergeier, Himalayan Griffon, Red-billed & Yellow-billed choughs, Black-headed & Plain Mountain-finches, White-winged (Guldenstadt's) Redstart and the star-attraction: Himalayan Snowcock which we saw so well on our 2009 tour.

NIGHT: at the Observatory.

**May 25, Day 14: Tien Shan Mountains to Almaty.** We will spend much of the day in the Tien Shan region and slowly make our way back to Almaty, arriving by late afternoon. This will allow for further searches at high altitude for anything so far missed, and also to descend slowly through the forests for Rufous-backed (Eversmann's) and Blue-capped redstarts, Songar Tit and Eurasian Nutcracker at mid-elevations.

Participants departing home will be taken to your hotel in Almaty for rest and dinner. Those continuing onwards to Uzbekistan will fly from Almaty to Tashkent, Uzbekistan this evening.

(Departing Tour Participants) NIGHT: Tau-Samal Hotel, Almaty  
(Uzbekistan Tour Participants) NIGHT: Beldersay Hotel, Tashkent, Uzbekistan

**May 26, Day 15: Kazakhstan Tour Ends.** Those returning homeward will be transferred to the Almaty International Airport (airport code ALA) for flights departing this morning. Depending on your flight schedule, you may be required to overnight in Europe on May 26, arriving home May 27.

## **EXTENSION TO UZBEKISTAN**

**May 26, Day 15: Drive Tashkent to Samarkand.** In the grounds of our splendidly located Beldersay Hotel set amid mixed forests of broad-leaved we should find Red-rumped Swallows and Common House Martins around the hotel itself, while the bushes can be alive with the cacophony of Common Nightingales, Hume's Whitethroat, Greenish and Hume's leaf warblers. There is a great selection of Tits here, and we should find delightful Yellow-breasted Tits, Turkestan Tit and possibly Rufous-naped Tit. White-capped Buntings sing from wires, while overhead on rising thermals we may encounter Lammergeier, Eurasian Griffon and Eurasian Black Vulture, Common and Long-legged Buzzards. After a hearty breakfast stew will start out for Samarkand. *En route* we will hopefully have the rare Variable Wheatear staked out for us in addition to a nesting colony of White Storks. We should arrive into Samarkand in time for some preliminary exploration of this fabulous city.

NIGHT: Malika Prime Hotel, Samarkand

**May 27, Day 16: Samarkand.** Today there are many wonders in store for us with a day based in and around the ancient city of Samarkand. We will commence with an early morning start, driving out of the city to rocky, scrub and bush-covered hills of the Takhtakaracha Pass lying between Samarkand and Zarafshan, where Tamerlane roamed in centuries past. High on the wanted list will be White-throated Robin (Irania) along with Eastern Orphean Warbler and the obscure Hume's Lark. Also here are Persian (Eastern Rock) Nuthatch, Turkestan and Yellow-breasted Tits, Asian Paradise-Flycatcher and Chestnut-breasted (White-capped) Bunting. Back in time for lunch, we shall wander from our hotel into the quiet, small ancient city area to explore its historical treasures. The massive Bibi Khanum mosque (once the largest in Central Asia), The Registan, Timur's Mausoleum, the Street of Tombs and the local bazaar present a stunning and memorable "visual overload" of exquisitely elaborate tiled, painted and carved buildings.

NIGHT: Malika Prime Hotel, Samarkand

**May 28, Day 17: Samarkand to Bukhara.** We can opt for an early start to nearby wetlands on the outskirts of Samarkand for such specialties as White-crowned Penduline Tit, or spend more time immersing ourselves in the historical delights of Samarkand. Later in the morning, we continue our journey along the Silk Road to Bukhara (also known locally as Buxoro). Formerly one of the most important trading cities anywhere in Central Asia, there is a rich and colourful history and an overwhelming number of historic sites of interest. The turquoise-blue domes and towering minarets of Bukhara provide a wonderful backdrop to our stay here, while the markets and covered bazaars are bustling, a great place to barter for a huge range of very inexpensive souvenirs such as jewellery, spices and the famous Bukhara rugs. Needless to say, we shall have some time to explore this wonderful city.

NIGHT: Asia Bukhara Hotel, Bukhara

**May 29, Day 18: Bukhara.** "So much to do – so little time"! We will have an early start to spend much of the morning exploring close-by wetlands, which surround the oasis city of Bukhara. These oases can be extremely attractive to a wealth of water and marsh-loving species and we hope for plenty of Pygmy Cormorants, Dalmatian Pelicans and Glossy Ibis and an abundance of herons and egrets, Blue-cheeked Bee-eater plus perhaps scarcer finds such as Marbled Duck. Elegant White-tailed Lapwings are easily found. The extensive reed beds, marshy and dry scrub cover here is home to many additional smaller species of interest: Menetrie's Warbler, Clamorous and Eurasian Reed warblers, Rufous-tailed Bush-Robin, Pied Bushchat and Long-tailed Shrike; (the latter two at the furthest west of their Asiatic range). Returning to the city by late morning, we will be able to spend more time discovering further historical delights – the Ark (the fortified citadel of the Emir within the immense city walls), the Bolo-Hauz Mosque, the 10<sup>th</sup> century Ismail Samani Mausoleum and the Char Minar with its four elaborately tiled minarets.

NIGHT: Asia Bukhara Hotel, Bukhara

**May 30, Day 19: Bukhara to Tashkent.** Our final day of birding will be perhaps one of the most memorable? A very early start must be made into the Kizil-kum desert, where we expect to arrive just after dawn. This very special region is home to one of the most sought-after of all the birds that occur in Central Asia - the legendary Turkestan (Pander's) Ground Jay. They are best located in the cool of the early morning when they can be often found along the roadside. We will return to Bukhara for lunch followed by some relaxing local birding and/or further opportunities to take in some further/last sights of Bukhara, including the historic town centre with its surrounding old madrassahs, the Kalyan Minaret - a 150 foot tall tower built in the 12th century, and also the Miri-Arab Madrasa and Trade Domes. In the evening we will take a flight from Bukhara arriving back in Tashkent by the evening for an overnight stay.

NIGHT: Shodlik Palace Hotel, Tashkent

**May 31, Day 20: Uzbekistan Tour Ends.** This morning, we will transfer to the Tashkent International Airport (airport code TAS) for departing flights to Europe with connecting flights to the USA. Depending on your flight, an overnight in Europe may be required for May 31, arriving home on June 1.

**\*\* The tour schedule depends closely on internal flights, which may change from the itinerary listed. If so, the itinerary will be altered, with all of the special regions still being visited.**

**MEDICAL EVACUATION INSURANCE REQUIREMENT:** All participants will be **required** to purchase a medical evacuation policy for this tour and will be asked to sign and return to the VENT office a waiver stating that this has been done. Such a policy should be available from any insurance company which provides trip cancellation coverage.

**EXTRA ARRANGEMENTS:** Should you wish to make arrangements to arrive early or extend your stay, please contact the VENT office at least two months prior to your departure date. We can very easily make hotel arrangements and often at our group rate, if we receive your request with enough advance time.

**TOUR SIZE:** Both the Kazakhstan and the Uzbekistan Extension tours will be limited to 12 participants.

**TOUR LEADER:** David Bishop plus local leaders.

**David Bishop** loves his vocation and cannot imagine anything better than exploring wild and beautiful places in Asia and the Pacific in the company of friends and clients. He has spent much of the past 35 years studying the birds and natural history of the Oriental region, in addition to New Guinea, the Southwest Pacific, and most recently Central Asia. David was once a police officer amid the streets of London's West End, but has emerged as an acknowledged authority on the birds of these exotic regions. His enthusiasm for these places and their birds is contagious. This, along with his skills in locating wildlife, sharing what he sees with others, and conversing with local people in their native language, ensures you the very finest quality tour. David has undertaken a number of expeditions to survey the birds and other wildlife of previously unexplored regions throughout New Guinea (largely together with Jared Diamond) and the Oriental Region. This has resulted in a number of exciting discoveries and rediscoveries including the incomparable Wallace's Standardwing, a bizarre bird-of-paradise. Some of the results of this work, together with observations gained during the VENT tours he leads, have been published in the scientific and semi-popular literature to which David is a regular contributor. In July 1997, David, together with Brian Coates, published *A Guide to the Birds of Wallacea (Sulawesi, the Moluccas, and Lesser Sundas)*, and David is currently working on other book projects. David lives with his wife and daughter (his son currently resides in England) in the attractive university town of Armidale, NSW, Australia.

**FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS:** The fee for the **Kazakhstan** tour is **\$6445** per person based on double occupancy from Astana which includes internal flights (Astana-Almaty), and meals beginning with dinner on Day 3, ending with dinner on Day 14. The fee for the **Uzbekistan Extension** is **\$2940** per person based on double occupancy from Almaty which includes internal flights (Almaty-Tashkent / Bukhara-Tashkent) and meals beginning with lunch on Day 14, ending with dinner on Day 19. Both fees include lodging as stated in the itinerary, ground transportation, gratuities, and guide services provided by the tour leader and local guides. Tour fees do not include airfare from your home to Astana and return from Almaty for those on the main tour or return from Tashkent for those on the extension; Medical Evacuation Insurance (required); transfers or accommodation other than those mentioned in the itinerary; alcoholic beverages; special gratuities; departure taxes; visa fees; phone calls; laundry; or items of a personal nature. Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the group does not have sufficient registration a small party supplement may have to be charged.

The single supplement for the Kazakhstan tour is **\$445**; and the single supplement for the Uzbekistan Extension is **\$185**. You will be charged a single supplement if you desire single accommodations or if you prefer to share but have no roommate and we cannot provide one for you. Single accommodations are limited at some facilities and NOT available at Taukum Camp. At times, even if a single room has been confirmed, single accommodations may not be available. If this occurs, an appropriate refund of the single supplement will be made upon the group's return.

**EXCHANGE RATE SURCHARGES:** In the erratic global financial markets of today, it is difficult to predict foreign currency exchange rates over the long term or at the time of operation of a tour or cruise departure. Tour prices are based upon the rate of exchange at the time of itinerary publication. If exchange rates change drastically, it may be necessary to implement a surcharge. If a surcharge is necessary, every effort will be made to minimize the amount. In many cases, these additional foreign exchange rate surcharges are passed to VENT by its vendors and suppliers.

**FUEL AND FUEL SURCHARGES:** In the uncertain, often volatile oil market of late, it is difficult – if not impossible – to predict fuel costs over the long term, and more specifically, at the time of operation of this departure. Our prices are based upon the prevailing fuel rates at the time of itinerary publication. While we will do everything possible to maintain our prices, if the fuel rates increase significantly, it may be necessary to institute a fuel surcharge.

**TOUR REGISTRATION:** To register for this tour, please contact the VENT office. The deposit for this tour is **\$500** per person. If you prefer to pay your deposit by check, your tour space will be held for 10 days to allow time for the VENT office to receive your deposit and completed registration form. If you prefer to pay your deposit using a credit card, your deposit must be made with MasterCard or Visa at the time of registration. The VENT registration form should then be completed, signed, and returned to the VENT office. Full payment of the tour fee is due 120 days prior to the tour departure date.

**CANCELLATION POLICY:** Cancellation penalties and refunds are based on the following schedule: if cancellation is made 120 days or more before the tour departure date, a cancellation fee of **\$250** per person will be charged unless the deposit is transferred to a new registration for another VENT tour that will operate within the next 12 months, in which case the cancellation fee will be **\$100** per person. If cancellation is made fewer than 120 days before departure date, no refund is available. This policy and fee schedule also applies to pre-trip and post-trip extensions. *We strongly recommend the purchase of trip cancellation insurance for your protection.*

<u>If you cancel:</u>	<u>Your refund will be:</u>
120 days or more before departure date	Your deposit minus \$250*
Fewer than 120 days before departure date	No refund available

\*Unless the deposit is transferred to a new registration for another VENT tour that will operate within the next 12 months, in which case the cancellation fee will be \$100 per person.

**TRIP CANCELLATION & MEDICAL EVACUATION INSURANCE:** A brochure and application form regarding optional coverage for baggage, illness, and trip cancellation can be obtained through the VENT office. **We strongly recommend that you purchase trip cancellation insurance as soon as possible to protect yourself against losses due to accidents or illness.** VENT recommends *Travel Insured International* as our preferred insurance provider. Check with your insurance agent regarding coverage you may presently have via other insurance policies that may cover illness during your trip. **Waiver for pre-existing conditions is available however stipulations apply, usually requiring the purchase of the insurance soon after registering.** Optional expanded insurance coverage is available and includes items such as work-related cancellation, medical upgrade, and a “Cancel for Any Reason” clause among others. Contact *Travel Insured International* prior to registration for details. Not all insurance providers provide the same levels of coverage. If you purchase insurance through a company other than *Travel Insured International*, please be advised that rules and stipulations may be different.

**Medical Insurance which covers you for emergency evacuation/repatriation during the trip is required for this tour.** This coverage is included in the Worldwide Trip Protector plan offered by *Travel Insured International*. If you do not choose to purchase the insurance through *Travel Insured International*, you will need to do so through another insurance provider. A good website for information and acquisition of emergency evacuation/repatriation insurance is: [www.insuremytrip.com](http://www.insuremytrip.com).

**Victor Emanuel Nature Tours is not a participant in the California Travel Consumer Restitution Fund. California law requires certain sellers of travel to have a trust account or bond. This business has a bond issued by Travelers in the amount of \$50,000. CST #2014998-50.**

**AIR INFORMATION:** Victor Emanuel Travel is a full-service travel agency and wholly owned subsidiary of Victor Emanuel Nature Tours (VENT). Victor Emanuel Travel will be happy to make any domestic or international air travel arrangements from your home and return. Please feel free to call the VENT office to confirm your air arrangements. All internal flights will be booked through the VENT office with the cost added to your final invoice.

**ACCOMMODATIONS:** In Astana, Almaty, Tashkent, Samarkand and Bukhara the hotels will be of reasonable, 3\*/4\* standard and some are really very attractive. In the Tien Shan Mountains, we use simple, clean twin-bedded rooms at the former Astronomical Observatory, which we'll probably have to ourselves and is the only accommodation available. Each block of four rooms has a separate, shared shower and WC. Camping in the deserts of Kazakhstan is the best way to experience the area and reach far into this vast habitat. We have our own exclusive simple private camp set up for us with small sleeping tents with sleeping bags and mattresses in each twin/single tent. There is a separate tent for meals and shower & WC tents.

**CLIMATE:** Climate will be quite varied – very hot in the desert areas of Uzbekistan (possibly up to 35+ C/100 F), yet cool (5+ C/40 F) in the high altitude of the Tien Shan Mountains of Kazakhstan. Rain, or even snow, is a possibility in the mountains.

**CLOTHING:** This is one of those trips where a little bit of everything is a good idea! Light, easily washable, quick-drying clothes, sunglasses and sun-hat for the hot steppe and desert, but some lightweight, but warm, layered clothing for the higher altitudes (possibly up to 10,000ft) – this includes a warm hat, fleece, light gloves etc. Bring a light waterproof too. Light, but sturdy walking boots should cover all eventualities. It is best to avoid shorts (especially for women) and anything too “revealing” – partly for discretion, but also for protection from the sun (though in the cities people are very “modern” and wear light western clothing). Do note, however that 24 hour laundry is available at all of the hotels we stay at and if need, laundry can be done in just a few hours or less!

**CURRENCY:** Local currency in Kazakhstan is the Tenge; and in Uzbekistan the Sum, of which you will probably need very little. US\$ can be exchanged on arrival. ATM machines are readily available in Kazakhstan and some of the hotels will exchange currency.

**DIFFICULTY:** We will at times have to travel long distances, some on poor or unpaved roads – but the journeys help emphasise the vastness and adventure. Transport will vary from place to place and in most areas, good, comfortable, modern coaches will be used, but more rugged four-wheel drive vehicles will be required in a few places. Walking for these tours is mostly easy to moderate; even in the high elevations of Tien Shan Mountains, we are mostly walking short distances on flat terrain.

**DOCUMENTS:** A passport valid for at least six months beyond your planned departure from Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan is required. Visas are also required for entry by United States citizens and must be obtained prior to arrival. Non United States citizens should check with their consulate/embassy for instructions. If your air schedule means we have to return to Kazakhstan after Uzbekistan, then a double-entry visa will be required. Instructions on obtaining visas will be provided after registration.

**EQUIPMENT:** You should pack a pair of binoculars that are in good repair, along with a belt pack or day pack (good for carrying books, sunscreen, extra film, etc.). Your leaders will have spotting scopes; but if you have one and wish to bring it, please feel free to do so. Items such as toothpaste, soap, deodorant, cosmetics can be purchased in country, but it is simpler to bring your own supply. Bring a small amount of insect repellent – we do not anticipate many mosquitoes, but some damper and marshy areas may host a few. For the few nights camping, there are sleeping bags provided, but you may wish to bring a thin sleeping bag liner with you. Bring a lightweight,

super-absorbent, microfiber, quick-drying camping towel. A couple of packets of moist towelettes and/or hand-cleanser can be a pleasant way of keeping refreshed and clean en route – especially useful are the antiseptic type – useful for hand-washing prior to the picnic lunches. Sunscreen is a must. And a small flashlight will be good for the nights camping. There are reasonable photo opportunities for those who enjoy scenic photography, bring plenty of film if using it, for those on digital, ensure you have batteries and means to recharge and store images.

**HEALTH:** There are no mandatory health requirements for Kazakhstan or Uzbekistan. If you are taking prescription medication or over-the-counter medicine, be sure to bring an ample supply that will allow you to get through the tour safely. Please consult your physician as necessary. Remember to pack all medication in your carry-on baggage, preferably in original containers or packaging. As airline baggage restrictions can change without warning, please check with your airline for procedures for packing medication. As standard travel precautions, you should always be up to date with tetanus shots, and strongly consider inoculations against Hepatitis types A and B.

In addition to your physician, a good source of general health information for travelers is the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta. The CDC operates a 24-hour recorded Travelers' Information Line 877-FYI-TRIP (394-8747) or you can check their website at [www.cdc.gov/travel](http://www.cdc.gov/travel). Canadian citizens should check the website of the Public Health Agency of Canada: [www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/new\\_e.html](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/new_e.html) (click on travel health).

Because you are visiting the Tein Shan Mountains areas (11,000 feet), don't forget to take precautions to avoid altitude sickness. One suggestion is to try hot tea or water when you arrive, and during the first day move slowly and eat lightly.

**MISC:** Departure Tax – none from Kazakhstan; US \$10 from Uzbekistan (subject to change)  
Electricity - 220 V AC, 50 Hz; round two-pin continental plugs are standard  
Language – Kazakh and Uzbek; both a Turkic language  
Time – Kazakhstan is 9 hours, and Uzbekistan is 10 hours ahead of Eastern Daylight Saving Time

**SUGGESTED READING:** Our website, [www.ventbird.com](http://www.ventbird.com) offers an affiliated online store that carries a wide variety of items for birding and nature lovers, including over 6,000 books. A portion of the sales from this store benefits the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. You may also visit such other online stores such as [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com), and for those out-of-print or hard-to-find titles, [www.abebooks.com](http://www.abebooks.com) or [www.buteobooks.com](http://www.buteobooks.com) which specializes in ornithology books. There are no adequate field guides to this region however a combination of various bird books to other regions covers most species:

***Most Recommended:***

Svenson, Lars, Peter J. Grant, Killian Mullarney, and Dan Zetterstrom. *Birds of Europe*. Princeton University Press, March 2000. This is the best of the Europe / middle-east / N. Africa guides and covers most species we encounter other than localised and near-endemic birds. It has the most up to date taxonomy, identification detail and illustrations than other guides and has received excellent/rave reviews.

***Others:***

Kazmierczak, Krys and Ber Van Perlo. *Birds of the Indian Subcontinent*. 2000. This is book of Indian birds also covers a large number of the species encountered, including most of those not covered by the European guides. Well illustrated and modern.

Knystautus, Algirdas. *The Natural History of the USSR*. Century Press. 1987. This book is possibly out of print, but gives an interesting, attractively illustrated and very digestible overview of all habitats and wildlife of the former USSR of which Kazakhstan was part. Well written and nicely illustrated, it is good pre-tour background reading.

Porter, Richard, Lars, S. Christensen and P. Sciermacker-Hansen. *Field Guide to the Birds of the Middle East*. Helm. 2004. This is another very well-illustrated, up to date guide to a region (the Middle East) that will include many of the species we may encounter.

## ***Kazakhstan, Page 10***

Wassink, Arend and Gerald Oreel. *The Birds of Kazakhstan*. De Cocksdorp, Texel. 2007. (ISBN 978-90-11462-1-0) This book is not a field guide, but an interesting atlas, listing and mapping species occurring in Kazakhstan, Published privately by Arend Wassink. Useful background with a few good photos – but not the book to buy for identification.

### ***Travel:***

Bloom, Greg, Noble, John and Bradley Mayhew. *Central Asia Travel Guide*. 2007. Lonely Planet

Macleod, Callum and Bradley Mayhew. *Uzbekistan*. Odysee Travel Guides. 1999.

Schreiber, Dagmar. *Kazakhstan Nomadic Routes from Caspia to Altai*. Odysee. 2008. ISBN 978-962-217-789-5.

A beautifully illustrated, superbly presented and well researched account of this fascinating country. Arguably one of the very best travel guides I have ever come across.

**TIPPING:** Tipping (restaurants, porters, drivers, local guides) is included on VENT tours. However, if you feel one or both of your VENT leaders or any local guides have given you exceptional service, it is entirely appropriate to tip. We emphasize that such tips are not expected and are entirely optional.

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