

# Adventure Treks

*Mountains that remember their shepherds.*

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**A 9-day Fann Mountains crossing, from Tajikistan into Uzbekistan**

*Dushanbe · Iskanderkul · Alauddin · Kulikalon · Seven Lakes · Samarkand*

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## About this journey

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The mountains of Central Asia are not playgrounds. They are inhabited. The Pamirs are full of villages older than the United States. The Tian Shan still has families who move between summer pasture and winter house, the way their great-grandparents did. The Fann Mountains rise above Tajik hamlets where every shepherd knows the name of every peak. When you trek here, you are walking through a landscape that belongs to someone.

That is the philosophy of an Ohalik trek. We are not here to conquer or to summit. We are here to walk well, with local people, in mountains they call home. Our porters are sons of the village. Our cooks are mothers and aunts. We pay them properly. We carry our rubbish out. We sleep in cottages where they exist, in homestays where we are welcomed, and in tents where we must.

This trek is the classic east-to-west crossing of the Fann Mountains. It begins at Lake Iskanderkul, climbs into the high lakes, crosses two passes, descends through three working villages, ends at the Seven Lakes, and walks you out across the border into Uzbekistan. The last bed is in Samarkand.

## Why this trek

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The Fann Mountains are the most accessible of the great Central Asian ranges, with seven hundred peaks above three thousand metres, dozens of glacial lakes, and a network of villages whose people have lived here since the Sogdian centuries. Our route crosses the range from east to west. You will sleep at five different altitudes. You will cross two passes. You will descend into three different villages. You will eat bread baked that morning. You will swim in lakes the colour of nothing you have seen before. And you will finish, on the last day, with a hot shower at our family hotel in Samarkand.

For travellers who want the Pamir Highway, the Tian Shan around Karakol and Song-Köl, the Yagnob Valley with its Sogdian-descended language, or the Ustyurt plateau in Karakalpakstan, we offer separate departures on request.

## The journey, day by day

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## Day 1 · Dushanbe to Iskanderkul Lake

Morning drive north out of Dushanbe across the Anzob Pass at 3,372 metres, where the road climbs from green valleys into bare rock and the long tunnel passes under the mountain. The road descends into the Iskanderkul valley by afternoon. First night at the lake, named for Alexander the Great, who, by tradition, lost a beloved horse here on his march east. An easy walk around the lake shore at sunset, to ease the legs after the road.

### AT A GLANCE

|                       |                                                                             |
|-----------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Drive</b>          | Dushanbe to Iskanderkul via the Anzob Pass (3,372 m), approximately 4 hours |
| <b>Walk</b>           | Easy walk around the lake shore in the late afternoon                       |
| <b>Walking time</b>   | About 1 hour                                                                |
| <b>Distance</b>       | 2 to 3 km                                                                   |
| <b>Altitude range</b> | 800 m (Dushanbe) to 2,195 m (Iskanderkul)                                   |
| <b>Logistics</b>      | Road transfer, cottages at Iskanderkul lake                                 |

*The lake that holds the name of an emperor.*

## Day 2 · Iskanderkul to the Alauddin Lakes

Drive west and then south to the trailhead near Vertikal camp, then trek up the river valley to the Alauddin Lakes, where turquoise pools sit in a granite basin under the Fann ridge. Camp set among the trees by the largest lake. Hot tea and a slow first evening at altitude, letting the lungs adjust before the harder days ahead.

### AT A GLANCE

|                       |                                                                                 |
|-----------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Drive</b>          | Iskanderkul to the trailhead, approximately 3 hours                             |
| <b>Walk</b>           | Trek up the river valley to the Alauddin Lakes                                  |
| <b>Walking time</b>   | 4 to 5 hours                                                                    |
| <b>Distance</b>       | 10 to 12 km                                                                     |
| <b>Altitude range</b> | 2,300 m to 2,780 m                                                              |
| <b>Logistics</b>      | Camp by the largest lake, cottages at the camp or two-person tents by the shore |

*Water the colour of nothing you have seen before.*

### Day 3 • Day trip to Mutniy Lake

A full day's trekking up to Mutniy Lake at approximately 3,500 metres, directly under Chimtarga peak, the highest in the Fann Mountains. The walk goes through scree fields and past the silent upper basins. Lunch by the lake, where the water is so cold it stops the heart for a moment. Return to the Alauddin camp in the afternoon. A day designed to push the lungs without committing to overnight altitude.

#### AT A GLANCE

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|-----------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Walk</b>           | Trek to Mutniy Lake (~3,500 m) under Chimtarga peak and return to camp |
| <b>Walking time</b>   | 6 to 7 hours round trip                                                |
| <b>Distance</b>       | 12 to 14 km round trip                                                 |
| <b>Altitude range</b> | 2,780 m to 3,500 m and back                                            |
| <b>Logistics</b>      | Lunch at Mutniy Lake, return to Alauddin camp for the night            |

*The body learning what altitude feels like.*

### Day 4 • Alauddin to Kulikalon, via the Alauddin Pass

The hardest day of the trek. We climb from the Alauddin basin to the Alauddin Pass at 3,780 metres, with the great wall of Chapdara above us. The pass opens to a view of half the range. Descent past the Bibijannat lakes and onward to the Kulikalon group, where five pools lie scattered across a high meadow.

#### AT A GLANCE

|                       |                                                                                            |
|-----------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Walk</b>           | Climb to the Alauddin Pass (3,780 m), descend past Bibijannat lakes to the Kulikalon group |
| <b>Walking time</b>   | 7 to 9 hours                                                                               |
| <b>Distance</b>       | 14 to 16 km                                                                                |
| <b>Altitude range</b> | 2,780 m to 3,780 m to 2,800 m                                                              |
| <b>Logistics</b>      | Tents by the largest of the Kulikalon lakes                                                |

*The pass that turns the body inside out and gives it back cleaner.*

## Day 5 • Kulikalon to Artuch mountaineering camp

A gentler day. We descend from the Kulikalon meadows through juniper forest to the Artuch mountaineering camp, a Soviet-era base where the wooden cottages still hold the climbing logbooks of the Tajik SSR and the smell of pine. Hot shower for the first time in days. Travellers who prefer to keep the wilder option may walk on to the Chuqurak lake and spend the night under canvas there.

### AT A GLANCE

|                       |                                                                 |
|-----------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Walk</b>           | Descend through juniper forest from Kulikalon to Artuch camp    |
| <b>Walking time</b>   | 3 to 4 hours                                                    |
| <b>Distance</b>       | 8 to 10 km                                                      |
| <b>Altitude range</b> | 2,800 m to 2,180 m                                              |
| <b>Logistics</b>      | Cottages at Artuch (with hot shower), or tents at Chuqurak Lake |

*The cottages that remember every climber who passed through them.*

## Day 6 • From the high country into the village

We descend further, leaving the high country for the inhabited valleys. The day's destination is one of three Tajik mountain villages — Guitan, Zimtud, or Gazza — where we are received in the home of a friend. The choice of village depends on the season, the weather, and which host is most ready to receive a small group at the time of our arrival. Bread is baked for us. Children come to the door. Dinner is qurutob, torn bread softened in dried-yogurt water, with tomatoes from the garden, eaten on the wooden platform.

### AT A GLANCE

|                       |                                                                          |
|-----------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Walk</b>           | Descent into the inhabited valleys, arriving at Guitan, Zimtud, or Gazza |
| <b>Walking time</b>   | 5 to 6 hours                                                             |
| <b>Distance</b>       | 12 to 14 km                                                              |
| <b>Altitude range</b> | 2,180 m to approximately 1,800 m                                         |
| <b>Logistics</b>      | Village homestay, traditional dinner of qurutob                          |

*The village that is still the village.*

## Day 7 • From the village to the Tovasang Pass

A long day's trekking, climbing through the upper pastures towards the Tovasang Pass, the trek's second crossing. The shepherds' camps lie scattered on the slopes; some hand us tea as we pass, some only nod. Lunch on a rock above the long view back into Tajikistan. Camp at the foot of the pass on the western side.

### AT A GLANCE

|                       |                                                                   |
|-----------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Walk</b>           | Climb through the upper pastures to the foot of the Tovasang Pass |
| <b>Walking time</b>   | 6 to 7 hours                                                      |
| <b>Distance</b>       | 12 to 14 km                                                       |
| <b>Altitude range</b> | 1,800 m to approximately 3,000 m                                  |
| <b>Logistics</b>      | Two-person tents at the foot of the pass                          |

*The pass the shepherds walked when their fathers were children.*

## Day 8 • Tovasang to the Seven Lakes

A long descent into the Marguzor valley, where the Seven Lakes — Haft Kul in Tajik — lie strung along the river, each one a different colour. Green at the head, jade at the second, blue at the third, indigo at the fourth, then three more lower down that hold their own colours: copper, pearl, silver. We walk along the chain. Camp at one of the larger lakes.

### AT A GLANCE

|                       |                                                                                 |
|-----------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Walk</b>           | Cross the Tovasang Pass and descend into the Marguzor valley of the Seven Lakes |
| <b>Walking time</b>   | 7 to 8 hours                                                                    |
| <b>Distance</b>       | 14 to 16 km                                                                     |
| <b>Altitude range</b> | 3,000 m to the Tovasang Pass to approximately 2,200 m                           |
| <b>Logistics</b>      | Tents by a lake, or a small mountain guesthouse if the schedule allows          |

*Seven lakes, seven colours, one river that holds them all.*

## Day 9 · Seven Lakes to Samarkand, via Panjakent and Sarazm

We leave the mountains. Morning drive west out of the Marguzor valley to Panjakent, the medieval Sogdian city whose seventh-century murals are now in the Hermitage. Stop at the Sarazm archaeological site, where a five-thousand-year-old Bronze Age city is still being excavated, older than Persepolis and older than the alphabet.

By afternoon we cross the border into Uzbekistan at Jartepa. Samarkand by evening: a hot shower at our family hotel, a long dinner, the first proper bed in nine days.

### AT A GLANCE

|                       |                                                                                                      |
|-----------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Drive</b>          | Marguzor valley to Samarkand via Panjakent and Sarazm, approximately 5 hours plus border formalities |
| <b>Walk</b>           | Site walks at Panjakent and Sarazm                                                                   |
| <b>Walking time</b>   | About 1 hour of walking at the archaeological sites                                                  |
| <b>Distance</b>       | 2 to 3 km at sites                                                                                   |
| <b>Altitude range</b> | 2,200 m to 710 m (Samarkand)                                                                         |
| <b>Logistics</b>      | Amira Boutique Hotel in Samarkand, farewell dinner, hot shower                                       |

*Home, with new dust on your boots and the mountains under your fingernails.*

## A few practical notes

**Group size.** Small private parties, typically two to ten trekkers. Solo travellers welcome.

**Fitness.** High but achievable. You must be comfortable walking six to eight hours a day on uneven mountain ground for several days in succession, with a daypack. The most demanding day is Day 4 over the Alauddin Pass. We strongly recommend a fitness preparation programme in the months before departure. We are happy to share a regimen our guides use.

**Altitude.** The trek crosses the Alauddin Pass at 3,780 metres on Day 4 and the Tovasang Pass on Day 7. The day trip to Mutniy Lake on Day 3 reaches approximately 3,500 metres. Camps sit between 1,800 and 3,000 metres. Travellers with cardiovascular or respiratory conditions should consult their doctor before booking, and tell us at confirmation.

**Accommodation.** Cottages at Iskanderkul and at Artuch mountaineering camp, with hot showers at both. A village homestay on Day 6. A small mountain guesthouse may be available at the Seven Lakes. Otherwise, two-person tents with foam pads, a separate kitchen tent, and a cook on staff. Bedding can be supplied if you do not bring a sleeping bag.

**Visas and border crossing.** We cross from Tajikistan into Uzbekistan at the Jartepa land border on Day 9. The border is open daily; we will brief you on the documents required at the time of confirmation. Many nationalities now travel both countries visa-free or with e-visa; we advise individually at booking.

**Best season.** Late June through early September. We do not run this trek outside that window because the high passes are unsafe.

**A note on the numbers.** Walking times, distances, and altitudes on this page are typical for the route and season. Weather, group pace, and the state of the trail on the day can shift them. Our lead guide reviews the day's plan with the group each evening for the day ahead.

**Pricing.** On request. Quoted per traveller against final group size. Includes all permits, porters, horses where needed, cook, food on trek, transfers, and the Samarkand night at our family hotel.

**To begin.** Write to [hello@ohalik.com](mailto:hello@ohalik.com). Tell us when you can travel, who you are travelling with, your fitness level honestly, and any trek you have done before. We will write back, by hand, within two working days.