



Alumni

SILK ROAD BY PRIVATE JET

OCTOBER 23 - NOVEMBER 8, 2026



Featuring Venice, Almaty,
Samarkand, Bukhara, Tbilisi and Istanbul

Dear EXPLORERS and Friends,

Retrace the footsteps of ancient traders on an extraordinary private jet journey across the legendary Silk Road—a route where East and West once met in a vibrant exchange of goods, knowledge and culture. This meticulously curated itinerary invites you to experience the richness and diversity of Central Asia and the Caucasus with uncommon ease and exclusivity, traveling across remote and storied landscapes aboard a private jet.

More than a means of transportation, your private jet becomes an essential part of the journey—eliminating logistical challenges and lengthy layovers, and instead offering seamless connections between destinations that would be difficult to reach on a traditional tour. With a dedicated flight crew, in-flight fine dining and generous seating, every flight is a relaxing experience that allows you to reflect, rejuvenate and prepare for the next remarkable encounter. It's a rare opportunity to cover vast distances in comfort, all while maintaining a cohesive and immersive narrative of this historic route.

Along the way gain deeper insight through the guidance of an accompanying Silk Road expert, who will illuminate the fascinating intersections of history, religion and art that defined this ancient trade network. Whether wandering through medieval madrassas in Uzbekistan, admiring the ingenuity of observatories and mausoleums or witnessing the living traditions of master artisans, each moment connects past to present in unforgettable ways.

This is more than a tour—it's a thoughtfully designed experience where the marvels of the Silk Road unfold in rich detail, paired with elevated accommodations, exclusive access and cultural encounters that would be nearly impossible to replicate independently.

Your aircraft is limited to 14 premium seats and space is filling quickly. Make your reservation today, and share this unique opportunity with family and friends who may be interested in exploring the Silk Road by private chartered jet at an exceptional value.

To reserve visit uillinois.orbridge.com or call (833) 672-6727.

Sincerely,



David Bambrey
President
University of Illinois Alumni Association
<https://uiaa.org/explorers/>

WITH GUEST LECTURER AND SILK ROAD EXPERT, SOPHIE IBBOTSON

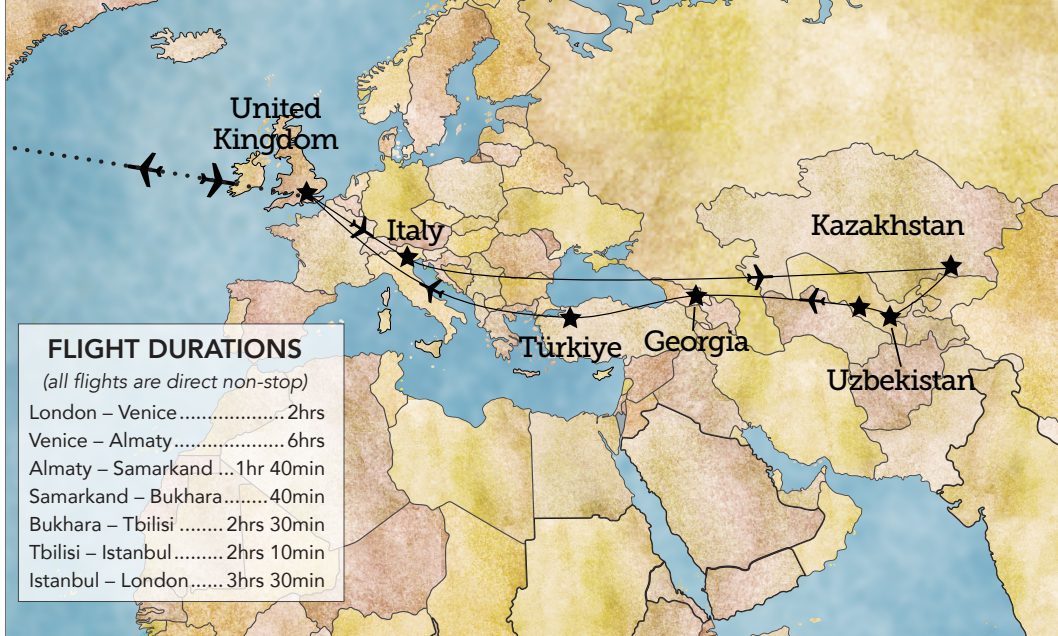
Joining this extraordinary journey is Sophie Ibbotson, a renowned author, consultant and lecturer with over 15 years of experience specializing in the Silk Road and Central Asia.

A graduate of the University of Cambridge and a Visiting Fellow at Oxford University's Changing Character of War Centre, Sophie brings an exceptional depth of knowledge that bridges cultural heritage, economic development and regional geopolitics.

Sophie has served as a consultant to the World Bank, Asian Development Bank and numerous national tourism boards, with a focus on preserving and promoting the heritage of Silk Road destinations. She was honored with Uzbekistan's Turizm Fidoyisi Medal for her contributions to cultural and tourism development, and she previously served as Uzbekistan's official Tourism Ambassador to the UK.

Throughout the tour Sophie will provide in-depth commentary, engaging lectures and enriching conversations, offering guests a rare, firsthand perspective on the history, culture and contemporary relevance of the Silk Road.





17-DAY ITINERARY

Day 1: En Route from U.S.

Day 2: Arrive in London, England

Upon arrival to London Luton Airport an Orbridge representative will be waiting to assist with your transfer to the hotel.

The afternoon is yours to enjoy at leisure followed by a special welcome reception and dinner this evening.

Overnight: Brown's Hotel (R,D)

Day 3: London | Fly to Venice, Italy

Enjoy breakfast at the hotel before returning to London Luton Airport to board your privately chartered jet.

After takeoff share a celebratory welcome toast and become acquainted with your dedicated crew. Get settled in your premium leather seat and plug into in-flight entertainment and convenient charging stations. Pillows, blankets and amenity kits are available for additional comfort.

Lunch will be elegantly served at your seat on fine china accompanied by cutlery and a selection of beverages.

Upon arrival transfer to your five-star hotel to refresh and unpack. Later be treated to an aperitivo at a nearby café, and then walk to the Doge's Palace for an exclusive tour.

Overnight: The Gritti Palace (B,L,D)

Day 4: Venice

Basilica di San Marco | Marco Polo's Home | Fondazione Rubelli | Palazzo Fortuny

The Republic of Venice played a key role in the Silk Road trade routes that changed the face of Europe—bringing cultural traditions, religions and ideas from the East to the West for the first time in history.

After breakfast join a local guide on a walking tour. See the magnificent Basilica di San Marco—with special Pala d'Oro access, the historic district where Marco Polo once lived and the Rialto Bridge—the city's oldest of four spanning the Grand Canal. Then break for lunch at a local restaurant.

This afternoon visit Fondazione Rubelli, a family-run textile company renowned for producing some of the world's most luxurious fabrics since the 19th century.

Continue to Palazzo Fortuny, a magical space that fuses Gothic Venetian architecture with the creative spirit of the early 20th century.

Once the home and studio of Mariano Fortuny—a Spanish-born artist, inventor and textile designer—the museum's rooms now display Fortuny's innovations in fabric dyeing, lighting design and theatrical staging.

Refresh at the hotel before rejoining the group for dinner at a local restaurant.

Overnight: The Gritti Palace (B,L,D)

Day 5: Venice | Fly to Almaty, Kazakhstan
Tessitura Bevilacqua | Atelier Nicolao

Venice's craftsmen thrived from Silk Road trade routes linking Europe and Asia.

Today visit Tessitura Bevilacqua, one of the last remaining workshops still using centuries-old jacquard looms to weave sumptuous velvet fabrics. Watch skilled artisans at work and gain insight into the intricate process of silk weaving.

Continue to Atelier Nicolao, a prestigious costume designer that has been crafting historical garments for opera, film and grand Venetian celebrations since 1980.

Learn how the Silk Road influenced Venetian fashion and the detailed artistry of handmade period costumes.

Afterward return to your private jet for the flight to Almaty, Kazakhstan, an important Silk Road trading hub connecting China, Persia and Europe.

Lunch will be served en route.

Upon arrival transfer to your five-star hotel with time to unpack and refresh before gathering for dinner featuring a lively folk dance performance.

Overnight: The Ritz-Carlton, Almaty (B,L,D)

Day 6: Almaty

Russian Orthodox Ascension Cathedral | Kazakhstan's Central State Museum | Kazakh Museum of Folk Musical Instruments

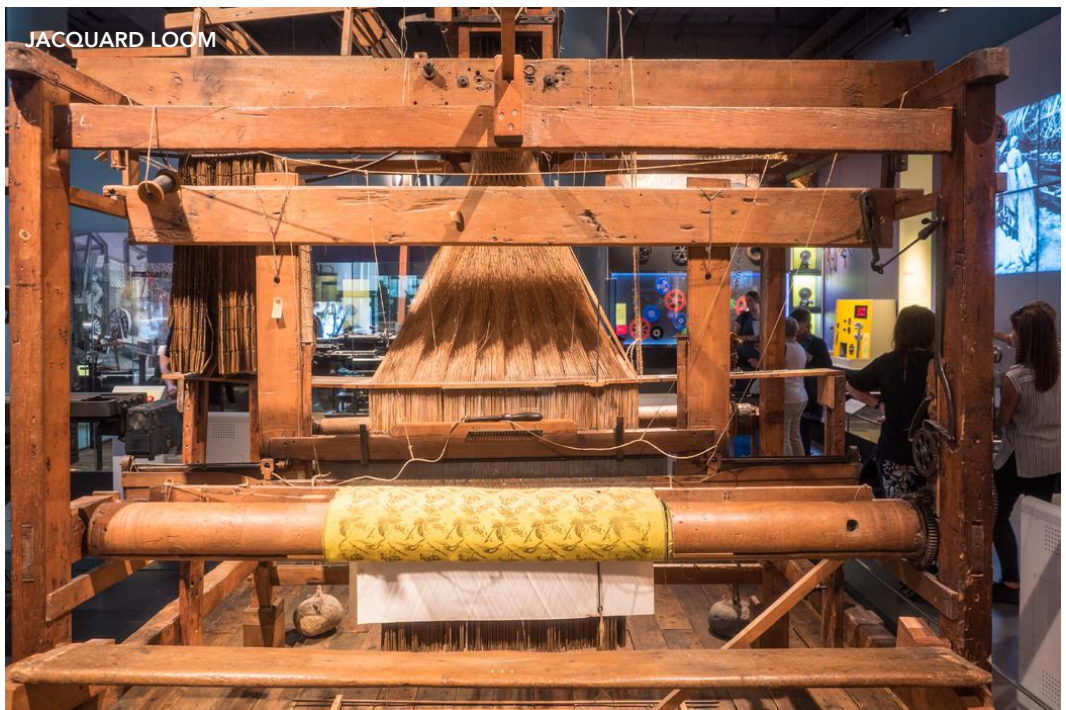
Enjoy breakfast at the hotel followed by a city tour accompanied by local guides.

Settlements in the greater Almaty area thrived along the Silk Road trade routes from the 10th through the 14th centuries. Learn more about how this fascinating history shaped the city on a day of excursions that include an inside visit at the magnificent Russian Orthodox Ascension Cathedral and Kazakhstan's Central State Museum, home to more than 200,000 historically significant items.

Continue to the Kazakh Museum of Folk Musical Instruments. Dating back to 1908, the museum showcases an impressive collection of more than 1,000 traditional instruments—many of which are rare or unique to Central Asia.

As the sun sets this evening experience one of Central Asia's most ancient and revered traditions—falconry. Gather in a scenic outdoor setting to witness skilled berkutchi (eagle hunters) demonstrate the deep bond between human and raptor, a practice that dates back thousands of years.

Overnight: The Ritz-Carlton, Almaty (B,L,D)





Day 7: Almaty | Fly to Samarkand,

Uzbekistan

Afrasiab Settlement and Museum | Ulugh Beg Observatory | Registan Square | Gur-Emir Mausoleum

After breakfast return to the airport to board your private jet. Today you will journey south to Uzbekistan with refreshments served en route.

Situated in the Zeravshan River valley, the fortified city of Samarkand has been at the crossroads of culture and religion more than 2,000 years. This Uzbek gem was also considered one of the most important trading sites on the Silk Road, facilitating the exchange of goods, art and ideas between China, Persia, India and the Mediterranean.

Join a local guide for a visit to the Afrasiab Museum near the ancient Afrasiab settlement.

Continue to the Ulugh Beg Observatory—one of the greatest astronomical achievements of the medieval Islamic world.

The observatory's most remarkable feature is its massive sextant, used to measure the positions of celestial bodies with extraordinary precision.

After checking into your hotel, gather at the hotel restaurant for lunch before setting out for Registan Square—a quintessential landmark of the Silk Road and one of Central Asia's most dazzling sites. Here, a tile artisan will demonstrate traditional restoration techniques honed over centuries.

Later see the Gur-Emir Mausoleum, an iconic architectural masterpiece from the Timurid era

and the final resting place of Tamerlane (Amir Timur), the legendary 14th-century conqueror (and grandfather of Ulugh Beg who also rests within the mausoleum).

Tonight gather at a restaurant in the city for dinner highlighted by a fashion show.

Overnight: Hilton Samarkand Regency (B,L,D)

Day 8: Samarkand

Shakhi-Zinda | Bibi-Khanym Mosque | Siab Market | Konigil Village Paper Mill | Khujum Silk Carpet Factory

Today visit the Shakhi-Zinda necropolis, a collection of mausoleums and tombs spanning over nine centuries.

Continue to Bibi-Khanym Mosque featuring towering archways, immense domes and uniquely patterned tile work.

Just steps from Bibi-Khanym Mosque is Siab Market—a colorful bazaar featuring a diverse array of local delicacies including fragrant spices, dried fruits, traditional Uzbek bread, sweets and pastries, and a vast array of handcrafted goods.

Visiting Konigil village's paper mill, learn about the once-lost art of Samarkand silk paper-making, revived using sustainable methods. See the entire handcrafted production process, from soaking and beating the mulberry bark to drying and polishing the paper on stone slabs.

After lunch visit a factory dedicated to the art of silk carpet weaving and learn why UNESCO has given special recognition protecting this ancient tradition.

The day's grand finale is a mesmerizing sound and light display at Registan Square. From private seating with an exclusive vantage point watch as vibrant projections illuminate the intricate facades of the madrasas.

Afterward continue to a nearby restaurant for dinner featuring folk dance performances.

Overnight: Hilton Samarkand Regency (B,L,D)

Day 9: Samarkand | Fly to Bukhara

Ismail Samani Mausoleum | Ark Citadel | Bolo Hauz Mosque

Early this morning return to your private jet for the flight to Bukhara located on the edge of the Kyzyl Kum and Kara Kum deserts.

Like Samarkand, trade in Bukhara began over 2,000 years ago and is a well-preserved medieval city and UNESCO World Heritage Site with over 150 monuments that showcase its history.

Bukhara's strategic location along the Silk Road brought immense wealth and a striking mix of cultures exhibited in the places and people you will encounter over the next two days.

This afternoon marvel at the Ismail Samani Mausoleum of the Samanid dynasty; the ancient fortress of the famous Ark Citadel and its archaeological museum, throne room, and reception and coronation court; and the Bolo Hauz Mosque built in 1712 which features a 20-column entrance portico reflecting its mirror image in the nearby reservoir.

Overnight: Wyndham Bukhara (B,L,D)

Day 10: Bukhara

Sitorai Mokhi-Khosa Palace | Lyabi-Hauz Ensemble | Magoki Attori Mosque | Trading Domes of Bukhara | Kalyan Complex

Following breakfast continue your exploration of Bukhara with an inside tour of Sitorai Mokhi-Khosa palace, a lavish summer residence of Bukhara's last emir, Mohammed Alim Khan. Outside stroll the tranquil gardens and beautifully designed courtyards featuring fountains, marble pathways, ornamental pavilions and lush greenery.

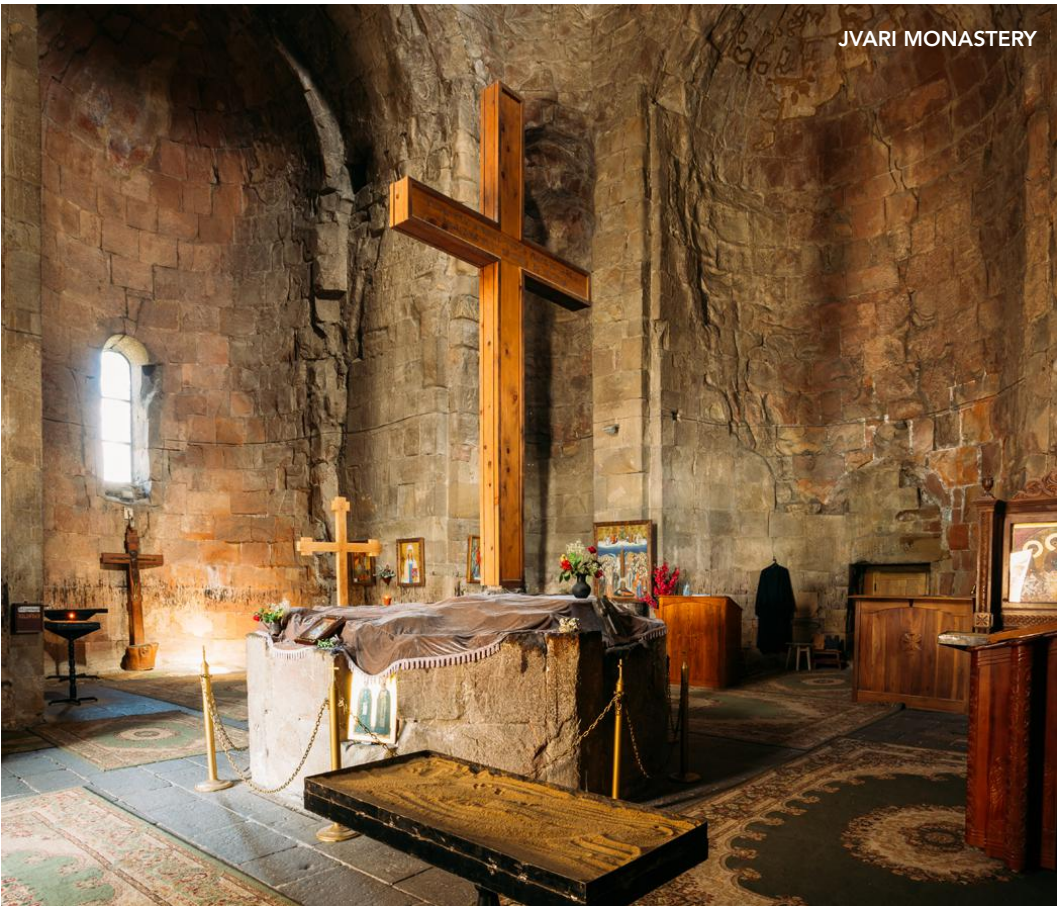
Later meet a local artist dedicated to preserving the tradition of Persian miniature painting, once used to illustrate manuscripts along the Silk Road.

After lunch continue to Lyabi-Hauz Ensemble, one of the most beloved and lively gathering spots in Bukhara. This historic complex consists of three grand structures: the Kukeldash Madrasa, the Nadir Divan-Begi Khanqah and the Nadir Divan-Begi Madrasa.

Next visit the Magoki Attori Mosque, an ancient mosque and former Zoroastrian temple. From here stroll to the 16th century Trading Domes built during the Shaybanid dynasty under which merchants and buyers bustled with activity. Discover the Poi-Kalyan religious complex whose grand minaret and bright blue domes are a testament to the city's status and grandeur. Explore on your own before returning to your hotel.

Overnight: Wyndham Bukhara (B,L,D)





Day 11: Bukhara | Fly to Tbilisi, Georgia
Metekhi Church of the Assumption | Abanotubani | Narikala Fortress | Sioni Cathedral | Tbilisi Caravanserai

Fly to Tbilisi. Lunch will be served en route.

During an afternoon guided tour, visit a few of Tbilisi's historical highlights including Metekhi Church of the Assumption, one of the most significant landmarks in Tbilisi; the Sulfur Bathhouse District which was frequented by royalty and Silk Road traders; Narikala Fortress, an ancient stronghold that has protected the city since the 4th century; and Sioni Cathedral, a pilgrimage destination that houses the Sacred Cross of St. Nino.

This evening step inside the historic Tbilisi Caravanserai for an exclusive wine tasting experience inside its captivating wine museum. Guided by a knowledgeable sommelier explore Georgia's ancient winemaking traditions—some of the oldest in the world—while savoring a curated selection of fine local wines.
Overnight: Tbilisi Marriott Hotel (B,L,D)

Day 12: Tbilisi

Jvari Monastery | Svetitskhoveli | Uplistsikhe | Georgian National Museum

Today visit two sacred landmarks—both UNESCO World Heritage Sites and major pilgrimage destinations on the Silk Road—tied to the origins of Christianity in Georgia.

Jvari Monastery, meaning “Monastery of the Cross,” was built in the 6th century on the very site where St. Nino erected a wooden cross in the 4th century. The monastery attracted believers who came to see the miraculous cross thought to have had healing and protective powers.

Continue to Uplistsikhe, an ancient rock-hewn city and a significant archaeological site featuring a labyrinth of caves, tunnels, pagan temples, a royal palace, wine cellars and even an ancient pharmacy.

Those who are interested may join an optional visit to the Georgian National Museum.
Overnight: Tbilisi Marriott Hotel (B,L,D)

Day 13: Tbilisi | Fly to Istanbul, Türkiye

Enjoy breakfast before returning to your private jet destined for Istanbul featuring two days of guided exploration of the city's rich mosaic of culture and history.

En route enjoy lunch and refreshments at your seat or in the company of others at the stand-up bar and lounge.

After check-in meet at the hotel pier to board a motor yacht for an unforgettable sunset cruise along the Bosphorus, the legendary strait that serves as Istanbul's lifeline.

As the golden light reflects off the water, glide past a panorama of ornate palaces, restored Ottoman mansions, towering fortresses and elegant waterfront residences. Sip on refreshments as you take in the ever-changing skyline admired by travelers for centuries. A Byzantine visitor in the 12th century aptly described Istanbul as "the city of the world's desire." And from the Bosphorus it's easy to see why.

Overnight: Four Seasons Hotel Istanbul At The Bosphorus (B,L,D)

Day 14: Istanbul

Spice Market | The Hippodrome | Blue Mosque | Hagia Sophia | Grand Bazaar | Whirling Dervish Ceremony

Set out for a guided panoramic tour of Istanbul's cultural highlights stopping first at the Spice Market. Then stop for a tasting of Turkish delight and traditional Turkish coffee.

Visit the Hippodrome—once the center of public life in the Byzantine Empire. See several surviving monuments including the Obelisk of Thutmose III, the Serpent Column, the Walled Obelisk and the Fountain of Wilhelm II (added in the 19th century by the German emperor).

Next see the iconic Blue Mosque, renowned for its stunning blue tiles and towering minarets. Learn about its construction and significance as one of Istanbul's most important religious landmarks.

Proceed to the Hagia Sophia, a UNESCO World Heritage Site and architectural marvel that has served as a church, mosque and museum over the centuries.

After lunch continue to the Grand Bazaar to stroll its network of more than 4,000 shops.



CISTERN



The increased demand for luxury goods and grain drew traders from throughout the Middle East and Asia to Istanbul's sumptuous bazaars and marketplaces, marking the end of the Silk Road trade route in the West.

Before dinner gather for a one-of-a-kind experience—a Whirling Dervish Ceremony in the underground Sarnıç Cistern, an ancient water structure dating back 1,500 years. This ritualistic dance, performed by the Mevlevi Order of Sufi Islam, is both an artistic expression and a deeply spiritual act. Flickering candlelight and echoing Sufi music create a mystical atmosphere amidst this private cistern setting.

Overnight: Four Seasons Hotel Istanbul At The Bosphorus (B,L,D)



BOSPHORUS CRUISE

Day 15: Istanbul

Topkapi Palace Museum | Various Excursion Options

This morning visit Topkapi Palace Museum, the opulent complex that was both Imperial offices and the residence of the Ottoman sultans for nearly 400 years. Today it's an impressive museum featuring displays of Chinese porcelain, calligraphy and lavish chambers.

Lunch and the remainder of the afternoon are at leisure. Relax at the hotel, explore independently or choose to join one of the following optional activities (*no additional fees*).

Grand Bazaar Historic Roof Tour: From the rooftop vantage point, admire the vast and varied views over the city. During the 20-minute walk take advantage of fantastic photography opportunities to capture the contrasting light and colors, domes, skyscrapers and bridges.

Hürrem Sultan Hamam Turkish Bath: Discover the ancient traditions of Hamam bathing. On our exclusive tour you will visit the famous Hurrem Sultan Hamam, dating from the 16th century and designed and built by Mimar Sinan, the chief Ottoman architect and enjoy the famous Turkish bath experience.

Ebru Turkish Marbling Workshop: Get an up-close look at this centuries-old art form where delicate swirling patterns float on water before being masterfully transferred onto paper or fabric. This intricate technique involves floating



DERVISH CEREMONY

pigments on the surface of a water bath treated with a special thickening agent, allowing artists to manipulate the colors into delicate, marbled designs using combs, brushes and fine-tipped tools. Historically this art of marbling was only transferred to paper but now these glorious patterns can be transferred to many kinds of surfaces including leather, glass, furniture and book covers.

Pera, Galata and Cukurcuma Tour: Pera and Galata are two of the oldest neighborhoods in Istanbul. These districts became important cultural centers in the late 80's and 90's. Explore the various local boutiques, musical instrument shops, and cafés and restaurants. Continue to Cukurcuma, whose history dates back five centuries, to see Istanbul's best antique stores.

Fener and Balat Tour: Formerly Istanbul's Greek Orthodox and Jewish neighborhoods, Fener and Balat are known for their aged but beautiful houses and charming churches. Recently the area has garnered fresh interest for new businesses, with stores opening up regularly.

Tonight celebrate this extraordinary adventure touring the Silk Road during a special farewell dinner at a private waterfront venue featuring magnificent views of the Bosphorus—an ideal setting to share stories and memories of this exceptional journey with your fellow travel companions.

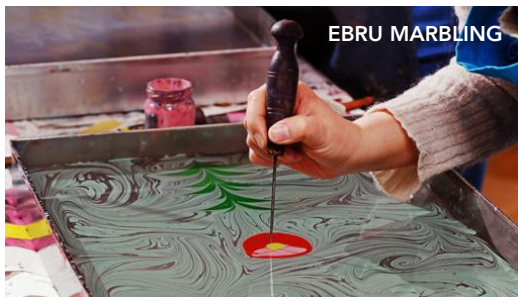
Overnight: Four Seasons Hotel Istanbul At The Bosphorus (B,D)

Day 16: Istanbul | Fly to London, England

After breakfast return to the airport to board your private jet one final time for the return flight to London. Delight in lunch, convivial camaraderie and afternoon tea service during the journey.

Transfer to your hotel and enjoy the remainder of the evening at leisure.

Overnight: Brown's Hotel (B,I)



Day 17: London | Depart for U.S.

Following breakfast guests departing during the suggested times will take a complimentary transfer to the airport for flights home. (B)

Travel with peace of mind. Our private jet experience includes the flexibility to adjust the itinerary and accommodations, if necessary, based on global conditions at the time of departure. Daily activities will be determined by weather, schedules and various other elements that comprise this robust tour.





Premium Hotel Accommodations

BROWN'S HOTEL



THE GRITTI PALACE



THE RITZ-CARLTON, ALMATY



HILTON SAMARKAND REGENCY



WYNDHAM BUKHARA



TBILISI MARRIOTT HOTEL



FOUR SEASONS HOTEL ISTANBUL AT THE BOSPHORUS



FAIRMONT WINDSOR PARK





YOUR PRIVATE JET – BOMBARDIER GLOBAL 6000

While in the air, enjoy the experience and attention of an enthusiastic crew who strives to create an environment that ensures you'll enjoy the journey as much as each destination.

Reclining leather VIP-style seats are outfitted with a leg rest, power outlets and USB charging ports, providing supreme comfort for travel between destinations.

While in flight, enjoy complimentary beverage service featuring non-alcoholic options plus select beer, wine and spirits. All in-flight meals are served directly to your seat with fine china and cutlery.



DAY-BY-DAY ITINERARY

- Day 1:** En Route from U.S.
- Day 2:** Arrive in London, England (R,D)
- Day 3:** London | Fly to Venice, Italy (B,L,D)
- Day 4:** Venice (B,L,D)
- Day 5:** Venice | Fly to Almaty, Kazakhstan (B,L,D)
- Day 6:** Almaty (B,L,D)
- Day 7:** Almaty | Fly to Samarkand, Uzbekistan (B,L,D)
- Day 8:** Samarkand (B,L,D)
- Day 9:** Samarkand | Fly to Bukhara (B,L,D)
- Day 10:** Bukhara (B,L,D)
- Day 11:** Bukhara | Fly to Tbilisi, Georgia (B,L,D)
- Day 12:** Tbilisi (B,L,D)
- Day 13:** Tbilisi | Fly to Istanbul, Türkiye (B,L,D)
- Day 14:** Istanbul (B,L,D)
- Day 15:** Istanbul (B,D)
- Day 16:** Istanbul | Fly to London, England (B,L)
- Day 17:** London | Depart for U.S. (B)



WHAT'S INCLUDED

- 15 nights accommodations at deluxe hotels
- Airfare for 7 flights aboard the private aircraft
- A special welcome reception, 15 breakfasts, 13 lunches and 14 dinners including special welcome and farewell dinners
- Full guiding services of a team of Orbridge Expedition Leaders
- Expertise and insight from a Silk Road scholar throughout the tour
- All excursion transportation and entry fees
- Luggage portage at hotels and airports
- Expedited customs and immigration inspections where available
- Processing fees for our preferred provider's visa services (price of visas are not included)
- \$100,000 medical evacuation insurance for covered reasons
- All gratuities

TOUR RATES

Category	Standard Rate	Special Rate*
Double	\$74,999	\$69,995
Single	\$84,999	\$79,995

*Per person double occupancy except where noted as single.



For more information and to reserve visit uillinois.orbridge.com or call (833) 672-6727.

View full terms at: jet-terms.orbridge.com

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TOUR HIGHLIGHTS

- Discover Venice's rich artisanal heritage with exclusive visits to Tessitura Bevilacqua, where intricate textiles are woven on centuries-old looms, and Atelier Nicolao, renowned for its exquisite handcrafted costumes.
- Witness a spellbinding 3D sound and light show in Samarkand's majestic Registan Square—a UNESCO World Heritage Site.
- Explore the rich history of Bukhara including the iconic Ark Citadel, a fortress of ancient power.
- Settle into Georgia's Tbilisi Caravanserai for an exclusive sommelier-led wine tasting.
- Embark on a private yacht for a sunset cruise along the Bosphorus.
- Experience Istanbul's grandeur with visits to Topkapi Palace, Hagia Sophia and the Blue Mosque, followed by an unforgettable Whirling Dervish performance and private cocktail celebration in an underground cistern.



Alumni

University of Illinois Alumni Association
EXPLORERS Travel Program
Alice Campbell Alumni Center
601 S. Lincoln Avenue
Urbana, IL 61801

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What Guests Are Saying...

You can always count on U of I EXPLORERS trips for interesting sites, quality tours, and fun companions!

~UIAA EXPLORERS Traveler

I always enjoy being with fellow alumni and making new friends when visiting a new location.

~UIAA EXPLORERS Traveler

Orbridge is an amazing company, I really appreciate and enjoy their approach to the details and comfort of our trip.

~UIAA EXPLORERS Traveler

The EXPLORERS program is open to alumni of the University of Illinois, their families, and friends.