

A City of White Marble by Day, a Crater of Fire by Night — A 6-Day Turkmenistan Itinerary

A 6-day guided loop through one of the least-visited countries on earth: Ashgabat, the Guinness World Record holder for the highest concentration of white marble-clad buildings, with its giant indoor Ferris wheel and gold-domed Wedding Palace; the 2,000-year-old Parthian ruins at Nisa; and a drive into the Karakum Desert to camp beside the Darvaza gas crater, a fire that's burned continuously since a Soviet drilling accident in 1971. Independent travel in Turkmenistan is tightly restricted, so this itinerary runs on a licensed local operator that handles the letter-of-invitation visa support, private transport and guiding throughout.

DURATION	BEST TIME TO GO	FROM
6 Days	Mar–May & Sep–Nov Spring and autumn avoid Karakum Desert summer highs above 40°C/104°F and winter cold	\$2,450 USD for 2 people · guide, hotel & yurt camp, private transport & visa support

Day 1

Arrival & Independence Park

A gentle first day easing into Ashgabat, a city rebuilt almost entirely in white marble over the last three decades.

Airport Arrival — Ashgabat International

~20 min to city center · visa-on-arrival with pre-arranged letter of invitation

A striking falcon-shaped terminal on the edge of the city; your guide meets you at arrivals with the paperwork needed to clear the visa-on-arrival process, arranged in advance through your tour operator.

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Independence Park & the Arch of Neutrality

~2 hours · free, guided walking tour

A vast marble park built around the Independence Monument, a fluted column modeled on a traditional Turkmen tent spike, with the relocated gold-topped Arch of Neutrality nearby — the clearest first look at the scale of Ashgabat's post-independence rebuilding.

Overnight — Oguzkent Hotel

5-star · from \$180–220 USD / night, for 2 people

A 5-star hotel on Bitarap Avenue, formerly run as a Sofitel, with the white-marble styling the whole city shares — the standard base for guided tours in the capital.

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Day 2

The Wedding Palace, the Ferris Wheel & the Bazaar

A full day of Ashgabat's best-known monuments, ending at a sprawling bazaar on the edge of the desert.

Wedding Palace (Bagt Koshgi)

~45 min, exterior & grounds · free

An enormous star-shaped, gold-globed registry-office tower that dominates the skyline — one of the most photographed buildings in the country, best seen from the plaza at its base.

Alem Cultural & Entertainment Centre

~1.5 hours · ticketed entry for the Ferris wheel

Home to the Guinness World Record holder for largest indoor Ferris wheel, enclosed inside a glass-and-steel dome — the view from the top takes in the full white-marble sweep of the capital.

National Museum of Turkmenistan

~1.5 hours · ticketed entry

A broad collection spanning Silk Road archaeology, Parthian and Sasanian artifacts recovered from sites like Nisa and Merv, and exhibits on Turkmen carpet-weaving and horse breeding.

Tolkuchka (Altyn Asyr) Bazaar

~2 hours · busiest Thu, Sun & holidays, on the city's outskirts

A sprawling open-air market on the edge of the Karakum where hand-knotted Turkmen carpets, silk, and livestock — camels included — are bought and sold; come on a market day for the full scale of it.

Day 3

Nisa Fortress & the Grand Mosque

A quieter day outside the capital: 2,000-year-old ruins in the morning, Central Asia's largest mosque in the afternoon.

Old & New Nisa (UNESCO World Heritage Site)

~2.5 hours including drive · ticketed entry

The earthen ruins of a 3rd-century-BC Parthian royal fortress, 18 kilometers from Ashgabat at the foot of the Kopet Dag mountains — one of two UNESCO-listed sites in the country, though little has been excavated beyond the outer walls and temple foundations.

Turkmenbashy Ruhy Mosque, Gypjak

~1 hour · free, modest dress required

One of Central Asia's largest mosques, built in the home village of the country's first president, with a marble courtyard and minarets that rival the capital's own monuments.

Overnight — Oguzkent Hotel

5-star · from \$180–220 USD / night, for 2 people

A second night back at the same Ashgabat hotel before heading into the desert in the morning.

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Day 4

Into the Karakum — the Darvaza Gas Crater

The centerpiece of the trip: a drive deep into the Karakum Desert to a crater that's been burning for more than fifty years.

Private 4x4 Transfer — Ashgabat to Darvaza

~4–5 hours / 260 km, partly off-paved track

An air-conditioned 4x4 heads north through the Karakum Desert, with a stop for lunch in a roadside teahouse along the way.

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Darvaza Gas Crater (“Door to Hell”)

Sunset through night · included in the camp package

A 60-meter-wide crater of continuously burning natural gas, created when a Soviet drilling rig collapsed into a gas pocket in 1971 and was set alight to burn off the fumes — it never went out. Most dramatic at dusk, when the flames stand out against the darkening desert.

Overnight — Darvaza Yurt Camp

Shared yurt accommodation, included in the tour package

A simple yurt camp a short walk from the crater rim, with dinner and breakfast provided — cold overnight even in warmer months, so bring a layer.

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Day 5

Back to Ashgabat & the City by Night

A morning drive back to the capital, free time, then Ashgabat's monuments lit up after dark.

Private 4x4 Transfer — Darvaza to Ashgabat

~4–5 hours / 260 km

The same desert drive in reverse, timed to arrive back at the hotel by mid-afternoon with time to rest before the evening.

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Ashgabat by Night — Illuminated Monuments Tour

~2 hours, evening · guided drive

Many of the city's white marble landmarks — the Wedding Palace, the Arch of Neutrality, the Monument of the Constitution — are dramatically floodlit after dark, best seen on a slow evening drive between them.

Overnight — Oguzkent Hotel

5-star · from \$180–220 USD / night, for 2 people

A last night in the capital before the flight home the next day.

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Day 6

Departure

A free morning before the transfer to the airport for the flight home.

Free Morning — Independence Park or Last-Minute Carpet Shopping

Flexible · hotel checkout by noon

A relaxed final morning: a last walk through Independence Park, or a stop at one of the capital's carpet shops for a Turkmen rug, before checkout.

Departure Transfer — Ashgabat International

~20 min from city center

Your guide handles the final airport formalities and sees you through to departures for the flight out.

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