

Horse Trekking:
Yaghnob/Varzob/Romit Gorges

Tajikistan's Horse Traditions: Buzkashi and Horse Trekking



The game of Buzkashi is a kind of primal polo played with the carcass of a goat. Allegedly the game was first played in the Oxus basin (now the Amu Darya river which forms the border between Tajikistan and Afghanistan). It originated some time after Ghengis Khan's armies brought expert horse-riding skills to Central Asia. Buzkashi is still a popular sport in Tajikistan and forms the backbone of Tajikistan's horse culture.

The season for playing Buzkashi starts around the Navruz festival (21-22 March). Navruz is the Persian New Year holiday, dating from Zoroastrian times and coinciding with the spring equinox. There are many traditions surrounding the celebration of Navruz, including special foods (especially *Sumanak*, made from wheat harvested while it is still green) and sporting tournaments. Buzkashi games are usually accompanied by wrestling, because in ancient times a cavalry campaign would have been followed by hand-to-hand fighting. A horseman had to be strong and skillful enough to beat his opponents on the ground as well. The season for Buzkashi continues until the end of May, although it may also be played on other holidays or special occasions.

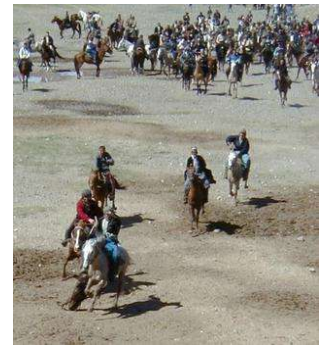
Besides its important role in the country's main sport, horses form an important part of life in Tajikistan. 93% of the country is mountainous, and 80% of the population live in villages. The horse is still one of the main forms of transport in the villages.

Come and experience Tajikistan's horse culture for yourself, perhaps as a spectator but better as a participant – trekking through the Hissor mountains. There are few better ways of experiencing the wonders of nature than from the back of a horse.

Buzkashi games



The best time to see Buzkashi is during the Navruz festival (21-22 March). However, if you wish to combine Buzkashi with a trek, we recommend coming at the end of the season (May) when the weather is warmer and the mountainsides are resplendent with green grass and blossom. Please contact us for a tailor-made itinerary including Buzkashi.

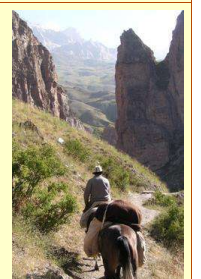



Horse trekking

Our recommended horse trekking route begins about 100 Km from Dushanbe in the Hissor mountains. The route begins by trekking up Yaghnob Gorge, passing a panorama of huge mountain peaks with sharp rocks covered with snow and ice. We will turn south and cross a mountain pass into Romit Gorge, which is lush and green. The final part of the trek is back towards the west, finishing in Varzob Gorge near Dushanbe. The season for this trek is June to September.

Detailed itinerary

Day	Itinerary
Day 1	Arrive in Dushanbe (early AM). Transfer to guest house. Breakfast, shower, rest. After lunch, orientation to Tajikistan and Dushanbe.
Day 2	Drive north through Varzob Gorge, over Anzob Pass (3,373 m), and down the other side to the village of Anzob. Meet the horses. Just a short trek today to get acquainted, to the village of Margib, 6 Km from the main road. The road winds up the narrow Yaghnob river gorge, which opens out as we approach the village. The setting here is stunning – a one-kilometre rock soars above Margib, called <i>Zaminkaror</i> , or “Holder of the Earth”. Accommodation in a local home in Margib.
Days 3-4	Trek on horseback from Margib east along Yaghnob Gorge, passing the watermill at Shobita and arriving at the village of Kiryonte, where the people live in picturesque houses resembling swallows’ nests. The people of Kiryonte are the descendants of the Sogdians, who fled Penjikent during the Arab invasions of the 7 th and 8 th centuries. The Yaghnobis have preserved the Sogdian language and culture for centuries in this remote mountain region. The villagers will introduce the group to their culture and traditions.



Day	Itinerary
Days 6-12	<p>Continue the trek east, now leaving the populated part of the valley and ascending to a 3,400 m pass. There are spectacular views of the Hissor mountain range to the north with Peak Samarkand (5,085 m) standing out along a high ridge.</p>  <p>From the pass, the road descends to the Sardai-Miona river, which we will follow south towards Romit Gorge, camping by the riverside. At Romit, we will stay in a base camp and meet with a support vehicle which will replenish our food supplies. We will make a short transfer by road to the village of Tangai, where we will stay one night before embarking on the last part of the trek, west across the mountains to Dinavak Village in Varzob Gorge.</p> <p>Spend the last night of the trek in a village home, experiencing traditional hospitality.</p>
Day 13	Return to Dushanbe by car. There will be opportunity today for sightseeing, shopping, and optionally a trip to see Hissor Fort, once the capital of Eastern Bukhara province. Accommodation in our guest house.
Day 14	Depart from Dushanbe airport.

Grade

The tour includes 11 days' trekking on horseback. Trekking is mostly on mountain paths; usually galloping is not possible. You should have some experience of horse trekking before attempting this trek. Accommodation is mostly in tents, with some nights in local village homes. Tents, equipment, food and personal belongings (usually 10 Kg per person) will be carried on pack horses.

The horses will be equipped with Buzkashi saddles, which may be slightly different to what you are accustomed to. It is recommended that you bring your own stirrup-straps etc. as these will be easier to adjust than what is available locally.

Trek Crew

The trek will be led by a local horse guide, accompanied by an interpreter and a cook.

Price Quotation

All of our tours are tailor made, so we will calculate a price for you based on your requirements. The final price will be determined by the size of your group and the exact itinerary and options that you select. Normally we include the following in our quotation:

- All documentation and paper work (visa support, registration with OVIR, trekking license, ecological tax). For groups of two or more people we can arrange a group visa for Tajikistan to be collected at the border. Individual travellers must obtain their visa in advance at an embassy or at Dushanbe airport if arriving in Tajikistan by air.
- Vehicles and drivers.
- Hire of and insurance of horses.
- Trek crew: horse guide, cook, English-speaking interpreter. Please enquire for languages other than English.
- Equipment hire (please let us know whether you will bring your own tents or whether you wish to hire them).
- Full board – except in large cities with a good choice of restaurants, where we usually provide breakfast only.
- Accommodation as specified in the itinerary.

Contact details

To request a quotation or discuss your requirements, please contact:

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