

VERCORS ESCAPADE

Great trek to the Pamir lakes Discover the legend of Lake Sarez, Tajikistan

20 days – 10 trekking days



Unique itinerary guided by women of the organization
Women Rockin' Pamirs



- **Dates:** From the 2nd to the 21st of September 2019
- **Group:** mixed, 4 to 10 people
- **Price:** from 2450 € to 3550 €

The benefits of your trip are donated to the organization Women Rockin' Pamirs to pursue the professional education of women in Tajikistan.

- from 9 to 10 guests: 2450 € / guest
- from 6 to 8 guests: 2770 € / guest
- from 4 to 5 guests: 3350 € / guest

This trip takes you on an innovative journey to the turquoise gems in the heart of the Pamir mountains, with a final on the Lake Sarez, a legendary and symbolic place in Pamir culture.

As the journey unfolds, we will take time to discover the places that we cross, may they be small towns, villages, hot springs, or the Pamiri nature in all its austere splendor; as well as their inhabitants; shepherds, inhabitants of remote villages.

The rocky, mineral landscape, scattered with glaciers, brings calmness to the trekker and will invite him to reflection. To ease our travel, donkeys will carry your luggage for the whole trek.

• Your guides:

Zaragul Zahurbekova, lives in the Bartang valley and finishes her studies of English at the university of Khorog. She grew up spending her summers on these high Pamiri plateau and knows the area by heart. She will accompany you on this trip. Zaragul speaks English, Russian, Tajik and Shughni, her mother tongue.



Christine Oriol has spent the last 8 years roaming the Tajik mountains and is the co-author of the trekking guidebook *Trekking in Tajikistan* (Cicerone editions). Trainer and co-founder of Women Rockin' Pamirs, she will be your guide for this trip, in partnership with Furough. She speaks English, Russian, basic Tajik and French.

• Highlights of the trip:

- Unique circuit in a traverse, exploring the Pamir lakes above 4,500m elevation, including the legendary Lake Sarez
- Special boat trip across Lake Sarez
- Co-guided by an international guide with extended experience of Tajikistan and a Tajik guide trained by the program Women Rockin' Pamirs, and a trainee under the Women Rockin' Pamirs' program
- Gentle acclimatization
- Exploring the Jelondy hot springs
- Time is taken to discover the villages, encounter their inhabitants thanks to the 9 homestay nights.
- The profit of this trip goes to the local population and for the professional training of women in Tajikistan

- **Itinerary:**

This description of the itinerary provides you the outlines of the planned trip. Nevertheless, the guides may be changing some of it according to the weather forecasts, natural events, or the group's necessities. We will ensure to always provide justification for any modifications and will strive to make your trip an unforgettable experience with the usual travelling hazards of this new destination that is Tajikistan.

Day 1. Dushanbe - Kalaikhum (1,600 m)

Welcome at Dushanbe airport. Journey to Kalaikhum in our own 4x4 vehicles. Road conditions in Tajikistan are unreliable, notably on the legendary Pamir motorway, which follows the course of the river Panj.

7-hour drive

Night in a homestay

Day 2. Kalaikhum - Khorog (2,200 m)

We follow the border between Tajikistan and Afghanistan as far as Khorog, a little town and capital of the Pamir region this is where we live and work with the young women guides who are trained by Women Rockin' Pamirs. We picnic by the river with the trainees and have an opportunity to chat with them about their desire to become hiking guides.

7-hour drive

Night in a homestay

Day 3. Khorog (2,200 m)

We take time for a full day in Khorog to discover the town and its inhabitants: we visit the bazaar (open market with fruits and vegetables, and Pamiri socks) in the morning. For lunch, we take a lunch of Kyrgyz inspiration and go on in the afternoon go for a walk under the shade of the trees of the botanical garden.

Night in a homestay

Day 4. Khorog - Jelondy (3,550 m)

After a visit to the local market with its wonderful colors and scents, we set off for Jelondy. The aim is to acclimatize gently by spending the night in the thermal resort where you can relax in the waters of the hot springs. There are very few tourists here. This is the holiday resort for the Pamiris who come here for relaxation and cures. It is too good to miss.

4-hour drive

Night in the thermal resort

Day 5. Jelondy - Bulunkul (3,700 m)

After visiting the high plateau in the Pamirs with its salt lagoons, we arrive in Bulunkul, known as the coldest village in Tajikistan. Here Pamiri and the Kirghiz people live side by side in harmony. We spend some time getting to know the locals and drinking tea in a yurt. We experience a Pamiri shower, with water heated by a wood or dried cow dung. To round off our visit we need to taste grilled local fish from the Bulunkul lake.

2-hour drive

Night in a homestay

Day 6. Bulunkul and the caravanserail (3,700 m)

Finally, we break in our walking boots! Albeit staying at the same altitude, we start our trek with a day spent getting closer to Yashikul lake and discovering its historical heritage ('kul' means lake in Kirghiz). We visit the ruins of a caravanserail, ancient stopover for merchants on the Silk Road and set up the tent next to the lake, on a small peninsula.

7-hour hike

Night in tents

Day 7. Yashikul Peninsula - the end of the lake (3,700 m)

We continue on the north shore of the Yashikul lake and open big eyes to absorb the beauty of the day: great view of the lake and of the mountain range reaching 5700m behind the lake. We cross 2 rivers and the marshes surrounding them to finally camp a last night close to the lake.

7-hour hike

Night in tents

Day 8. End of Yashikul lake - Langar valley (3,950 m)

We leave Yashikul lake to enter the Langar valley, where the livestock is grazing still for a few weeks before going down to the village. Summer is ending. We camp next to the shepherd camp, whose shepherd may give us a bit of fresh yogurt to taste.

5-hour hike

Night in tents

Day 9. Langar Valley - Lake Chapdarkul (4,500 m)

We climb gently but steadily up to the amazing Lake Chapdarkul where we camp for the night. It might be cold at this altitude but the view of the glaciers more than makes up for this and the following day we descend again (a little!).

6-hour hike

Night in tents

Day 10. Lake Chapdarkul - Lake Taxin (4,350 m)

After skirting Lake Chapdarkul we reach the highest point of our trek, a small mountain pass at 4700m. You can often see signs of bears or snow leopards here. We reach the green waters of Lake Taxin by a wild and little used path. Here we pass the foot of a wonderful glacier, and might well meet the shepherd and his family who make woolen socks and the best bread in the Pamirs!

6-7-hour hike

Night in tents

Day 11. Lake Taxin - Lake Zarojkul (4,500 m)

We promise a spectacular day on the way to our next campsite, by the side of lake Zarojkul. Some people believe Lake Zarojkul to be the most beautiful of the Pamir lakes. We agree with Oscar Wilde who said 'beauty is in the eye of the beholder'. Yes, it is magnificent, and we will make the most of this area tomorrow as well.

4-hour hike

Night in tents

Day 12. Lake Zarojkul - the other Langar valley (3,850 m)

We walk alongside small lakes in a rocky, wild landscape. We go down and join a larger valley, which is also called Langar, which will lead us to our destination, Lake Sarez. First, however, we pass the encampment of Zaurbek the shepherd, who usually asks all the hikers he meets to give him medicine

5-6-hour hike

Night in tents

Day 13. The other Langar valley - Lake Sarez (3,300 m)

Our descent into the valley is steep, and we stride over rocks and enjoy finding the first trees that we have seen for a few days since we have been in the rocky landscape on the roof of the world. We arrive at the bank of Lake Sarez, the sleeping dragon. Here you will finally discover the legend of the lake, and you might well encounter meteorologists or geologists, because scientists are also attracted to this lake.

6-hour hike

Night in tents

Day 14. Lake Sarez - Barchidiv (2,600 m)

A big and long day for this last trekking day! Waking up at dawn, we cross Sarez by boat because recent landslides have destroyed the path along the lake, and we will start walking down the 20km path until the first village. We will arrive at night. Our hosts will receive us with a good warm meal in their Pamiri house.

8-hour hike

Night in a homestay

Day 15. Barchidiv (2,600 m)

A rest day and a day to meet the inhabitants of the Bartang valley, to drink tea with them, to visit the traditional Pamiri gardens with their water channel systems and their permaculture set-up.

Night in a homestay

Day 16. Barchidiv - Kalaikhum (1,600 m)

We say goodbye to our friends and set off for Kalaikhum. We follow the Bartang river on a typical, local, difficult road. However, our drivers are experienced and drive us safely to our next destination. Along the way, they will probably entertain us with stories about their lives because our drivers are famous for their knowledge of secrets of Tajikistan.

10-hour journey

Night in a hotel

Day 17. Kalaikhum - Dushanbe (900 m)

We spend another long day in the car, bidding farewell to the Panj and gazing at the villages of mud houses on the Afghan side of the Oxus (the ancient name for the river Panj). We reach the capital city in time to enjoy some creature comforts and re-adapt to city life.

7-hour drive

Night in a hotel

Day 18 and 19. Dushanbe (900 m)

These final days are spent visiting Dushanbe and its surroundings. After being immersed in the culture of rural life, we now explore town life, its means of transport, perhaps the museum that retraces the history of the Silk Road, the Persians, the Buddhists, the invasions, the Soviet era, the civil war. If you feel like it, we go on a day hike in the mountains at the north of the city. In this way, we can enrich our knowledge of this beautiful country and of its generous, honest people.

Night in a hotel

Day 20. Departure

We take you to the airport early in the morning, because all good things have to end. No more fermented yogurt, bread, black tea, potato soup, pilaf, cucumber salad and other pleasures of central Asia. No more glaciers, high altitude lakes, sharp peaks and wild valleys. No more wonderful encounters, Pamiri dances, Tajik smiles. One thing is certain however... you will be back.

• Included:

- international trekking guide with 8+ year experience in Tajikistan (French and English speaking)
- Tajik female guide trained by Women Rockin' Pamirs paid in the most beneficial way
- Tajik female guide trainee, as part of her training with Women Rockin' Pamirs
- all accommodation
- all meals
- mineral or filtered water
- road transfers
- permits for Tajik National Park and for Lake Sarez crossing
- use of donkeys during the trek
- motor boat crossing of Lake Sarez

• Not included:

- flights to Tajikistan
- visa and GBAO permit (60 €)
- insurance
- entrance fees (botanical garden...)
- drinks and snacks not included in full board
- the membership fee to Women Rockin' Pamirs
- tips

• Trekking level:

Experienced trekkers, 5 to 8 walking hours a day, up to 20 km a day. Maximum elevation: 4,700 m. Your backpack should not weight more than 12kgs.

To enjoy your trip to the fullest, we recommend that you practice a regular physical activity several months before the trek.

The climatic conditions (cold in altitude), the tiredness in link with the elevation and the probable

digestive discomforts require a good basic physical and mental condition to enjoy this adventure.

- **Accommodation:**

- overnight stays in hotel are based on trekkers sharing a double room; if a single room is wanted, a supplement is payable on reservation.
- overnight stay in thermal resort shared room, small dormitory.
- nights in homestays in a traditional Pamiri house: you sleep in a common area, which is also used as a meeting and eating space. Women and men sleep in separated areas. The architecture of the Pamiri house and the local culture may make you feel a lack of intimacy. But you are at the heart of the Pamiri culture!

- **Meals:**

Travelling in Tajikistan, this small country deep into Central Asia requires from the traveler flexibility, benevolence and adaptability to accept the proposed meals.

The guides do their best to guarantee a diversified and balanced diet by choosing quality restaurants and accommodation. At homestays, we kindly ask you to accept with gratitude what our hosts will serve us. Be sure that they do the best with what they have.

During the trek, we will have a cook that will prepare hearty and tasty meals.

Tajikistan is a country, which started only recently to welcome tourists. Nevertheless, our team can accommodate specific diets (vegetarian, vegan, gluten-free...). Kindly state your needs when you enroll in the trip.

- **Hygiene and Health :**

There is no compulsory vaccination to enter Tajikistan. Nevertheless, try and be up to date of your usual vaccinations (diphtheria, tetanus, poliomyelitis, typhoid). It is recommended to be vaccinated against hepatitis A.

It is usual for travelers arriving in Tajikistan to have a stomach bug because of diet change and climate.

It is essential to be careful to wash your hands after having used the toilets, and before and after each meal.

To drink, use bottled water. Boiled water served for tea is safe.

In the villages, hot showers are available most of the time.

In homestays, toilets are often a simple hole in a cabin in the backyard.

- **Flights:**

Information with the Turkish Airlines

<https://p.turkishairlines.com/>

Buy your evisa online at www.evisa.tj without forgetting the GBAO permit

- **To know more about Women Rockin' Pamirs:**

This trip is proposed by the organization Women Rockin' Pamirs which aims at the emancipation of women thanks to mountain tourism professional trainings and jobs. We aim at the development of sustainable and responsible tourism aiming at the professional independence of women and the financial balance for the local communities in the respect of the natural and cultural environment. The benefits of your trip are donated to the organization Women Rockin' Pamirs to pursue the professional training of women in Tajikistan.

www.womenrockinpamirs.org