# Summer Academy Khorog (Tajikistan) 2026

## Cultural Heritage at the Mountain Crossroads of Central Asia

**Description**

Cultural heritage is of enormous importance throughout Central Asia. This is not only true for top-down state branding, identity building and the promotion of tourism but also for daily, affective or unspectacular encounters of local communities with cultural heritage. The changing socio-cultural, political and economic situation in Central Asia adds new meaning, layers, as well as challenges to understanding and preserving cultural heritage in its various forms. Recent initiatives by governmental and international organizations, as well as a surge in academic research, show the relevance of cultural heritages for processes of national identity, connection between regions, and communities.

What is considered cultural heritage by different stakeholders, and who can claim legitimate right to engage with cultural heritage is not always coherent. In the Central Asian republics, the understanding of cultural heritage and how to live with or even in it is informed by current national and international discourses as much as it is by colonial legacies and thus reflects societal change as well as geopolitical orientations.

The Summer Academy takes place in Khorog, the capital of the Autonomous Region of Mountain Badakhshan in Tajikistan. Overlooking the Panj river and the border between Tajikistan and Afghanistan at an altitude of 2.200 m, Khorog is an ideal place to explore cultural heritage as expressions of past and present experiences of mountain societies living along the crossroads of Central Eurasia. While mountain societies were often considered peripheral, this Summer Academy offers the opportunity to experience connectivities and cultural connectedness in and across Pamir Mountains of Central Asia. The material and immaterial legacies around us will offer multiple vantage points for discussing theories, methods, and approaches to cultural heritage in particular from the perspective of cultural infrastructure that shapes discourses, practices and politics on different scales, from the local to the translocal.

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| Where: | University of Central Asia, Khorog, Tajikistan |
| When: | 17 – 30 August 2026 |
| Duration: | 14 days (2 days of transfer Dushanbe-Khorog, 10 days Khorog, 2 days return transfer to Dushanbe) |
| Language: | English |

Level: Graduate students (MA and PhD), exceptions for advanced BA (see below)

Credits: Certificate of Participation

Costs and scholarships: Course fee 200 EUR including tuition, study materials and excursions. Full scholarships (course fee waivers, travel and accommodation grants) are available for participants enrolled in an institution of higher learning in Tajikistan or other Central Asian countries. Other participants can apply for a number of scholarships including travel and accommodation grants. Other expenses such as insurance, visa, meals and individual activities during the weekend are not included.

**Programme**

Through a programme of lectures, reading/discussion sections, cultural visits and small research exercises, participants are offered diverse ways of engaging with cultural heritage, practices and meanings around it, as well as with contested, muted or `difficult' heritage. At the same time, participants will acquire and deepen knowledge about the cultural history of the Badakhshan region of Tajikistan in the Central Asian context and its wider Eurasian (especially Iranian and South Asian) connectivities. Specific attention will be paid to questions of material cultural heritage in the rural space, immaterial culture (music, dance and poetry), cultural heritage and adventure tourism, and community initiatives to preserve and valorise cultural heritage. Pending confirmation, the programme will include regional excursions.

**Participants**

The Summer Academy offers spots for up to 15 participants. Seven spots are reserved for participants who at any time of 2026 are or will be enrolled at institutions of higher learning in Central Asian countries. The Summer Academy is open to MA- and PhD-students from disciplines such as history, anthropology, area studies, fine arts, cultural studies and human geography with an interest in cultural heritage and the Central Asian region. Advanced BA-students may be exceptionally considered on the basis of strong letters of motivation. The Summer Academy will be held in English. Knowledge of languages spoken in the region is an asset but not a requirement.

**Requirements**

English language competency on a level sufficiently high to read, discuss and write is expected (at least an equivalent of iBT TOEFL 80/PBT TOEFL 550 for non-native speakers).

Participants are responsible for organising their own travel to Dushanbe, including visa (if applicable) and insurances and accommodation until departure for Khorog and after return to Dushanbe. Participants are also responsible for obtaining the obligatory permit for travel to GBAO (Mountain Badakhshan Autonomous Region). The organisers will provide general information on visa and permits, but accept no responsibility for the accuracy of this information. Transportation from Dushanbe to Khorog and from Khorog to Dushanbe as well as local transportation for programmed excursions will be organised by the Summer Academy. The organisers of the summer academy reserve the right to adapt the schedule to local circumstances and requirements. All changes will be announced in due time.

**Summer Academy Faculty**

The Summer Academy is led by Jeanine Dağyeli (University of Vienna, Dept. of Near Eastern Studies & Austrian Academy of Sciences, Institute of Iranian Studies), Ariane Sadjed and Florian Schwarz (both Austrian Academy of Sciences, Institute of Iranian Studies) in collaboration with faculties from

Social Sciences and Humanities of University of Central Asia in Khorog, Tajikistan. It is financially supported by a grant from the Austrian Cluster of Excellence Eurasian Transformations.

**Application**

If you want to apply for the Summer Academy **Cultural Heritage at the Mountain Crossroads of Central Asia,** please send your application including a CV and a letter of motivation to iran.office@oeaw.ac.at by **May 15, 2026**.

PhD candidates should additionally provide a short description of their research project.

Please indicate in your application which of the following options applies to you:

- you are or will be enrolled in 2026 an institution of higher education in Central Asia country (please indicate the country, the university and a ref) and are therefore eligible for a full fee waiver and a travel and accommodation scholarship

Or, if you are not enrolled at an institution of higher education in Central Asia, please indicate whether

- you would attend the Summer Academy with your own funding from your home institution or other funding sources, including self-funding, or whether
- you are applying for a partial travel and accommodation scholarship.

**Timeline:**

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| 21 April 2026 | Publication of call |
| 15 May 2026 | Deadline for applications |
| 31 May 2026 | Notification of applicants about outcome of selection process |
| | Further organizational information for successful applicants |
| | Preliminary notification on scholarships |
| June 2026 | Scholarship details, reading materials, further details on programme and teaching faculty |
| 17 August 2026 | 7 am: Departure from Dushanbe for overland transfer to Khorog |
| 28 August 2026 | Return to Dushanbe (arrival 30 August) |

**Contact**

I you have any further questions regarding the Summer Academy, please feel free to contact the organisers directly:

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