

Kazakhstan & Kyrgyzstan Adventures

Trip style: Walking with sightseeing

Destination: 📍 Kazakhstan

Trip code: KRK12-WHW10

Grades: 1, 4

Carbon Footprint: 🌳 1863kg CO2



HOLIDAY OVERVIEW

The Central Asian countries of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan offer spectacular walking opportunities for those seeking adventure. Their landscapes surprise with an extraordinary mix of alpine lakes, desert sand dunes, frosted peaks, steppe grassland plains, and dizzying gorges. This holiday not only takes you to a host of see-it-to-believe-it places, but also immerses you in local culture with an eagle hunting demonstration, yurt making, dinners with local families, and a couple of nights at a traditional yurt camp on the shores of Lake Issyk-Kul.

WHAT YOU'LL LOVE

- Uncovering the history behind Panfilov Park in Almaty
- Walking to the Singing Dunes in Altyn-Emel National Park
- Soaking up the beauty of Charyn Canyon
- Trekking to the Kolsai Lakes through alpine scenery
- Taking in the views as you walk the Kara-Beltek Pass in Ak-Suu Nature Park
- Discovering Skazka Canyon, known as the fairytale canyon
- A more personalised experience thanks to small group sizes (maximum 16 people)

WHAT'S INCLUDED

- Local Tour Manager who leads walks and sightseeing
- 12 nights' touring accommodation across Kazakhstan & Kyrgyzstan
- 13 breakfasts, 12 lunches & 12 dinners
- All sightseeing and entrance fees (as per itinerary)
- Eagle hunting demonstration & yurt building experience in Kyzyl Tuu
- All in-destination transport
- Outbound flights from London including baggage and transfers
- Return flights from Bishkek including baggage and transfers

Please note: On days 10 & 11 we stay in a traditional yurt camp. Yurts will be on a shared basis, with 3 to 4 people of the same gender per yurt. Single & twin rooms are not possible here

TRIP SUITABILITY

This trip is graded at level 4, high moderate with distances ranging from 2.5 miles (4km) to 10 miles (16km). The highest ascent and descent are 2625 feet (800m). We are walking in remote countryside and on rough terrain. You can expect some sustained ascents and descents and there may be sections of scree and steep ground. A good level of fitness and mobility are essential for this tour.

ITINERARY

Day 1: TRAVEL DAY

Depart from the UK on an overnight flight to Almaty, Kazakhstan.

Day 2: ALMATY (KAZAKHSTAN)

You'll arrive at Almaty International Airport in the early morning, where your HF Holidays Tour Manager will meet you and take you to the hotel. Enjoy breakfast and rest up until about midday. Then we'll set off on a city tour to get acquainted with Almaty and its history, visiting the Republic Square and Monument of Independence. We'll walk through the old city centre to the Park of 28 Panfilov Guardsmen, which honours the fighters who defended Moscow against German invasion during WWII. We'll also visit the Russian Orthodox Zenkov Cathedral (also known as Ascension Cathedral), Museum of Musical Instruments, Abai Theatre, and Green Market.

Day 3: ALTYN-EMEL NATIONAL PARK

Distance: 2.5 miles (4 km) Ascent/Descent: 330 feet (100m) After breakfast, we'll leave Almaty and travel to Basshi in Altyn-Emel National Park via Kapchagay reservoir where you can have a swim. Altyn-Emel National Park is a vast landscape known for its unusual natural wonders, known as the "Singing Dunes" which produce a deep humming noise, like an airplane flying overhead, which you'll hear when you slide down from the top. This national park has plenty to please from its grassland plains and desert dunes to rare wildlife and the colourful surrounding mountains. On arrival at our guesthouse, we will enjoy a home-cooked lunch.

Day 4: CHARYN CANYON

Distance: 2.5 miles (4 km) Ascent/Descent: 850 feet (260m) Today we'll travel to Charyn Canyon, one of Kazakhstan's most standout sights often referred to as the "Grand Canyon of Central Asia". The canyon's about 150km long and up to 300m deep in places, and we'll head to one of the most jaw-dropping parts, the Valley of Castles where you'll gaze up at imposing pillars and rock formations that almost look manmade. We'll walk along the top of the canyon taking in the fantastic views before travelling to the village of Shatty where we'll stay for the next two nights.

Day 5: KOLSAI LAKES NATIONAL PARK

Distance: 10 miles (16 km) Ascent/Descent: 2625 feet (800m) The three alpine lakes in Kolsai Lakes National Park will be the setting for today's walk. They sit at an altitude between 1,700m and 2,650m with exceptionally clear water and an idyllic location surrounded by snow-capped peaks and wooded hillsides. We'll walk from the first to the second lake, where we'll stop for a picnic before making our way back amongst this dream-like landscape.

Day 6: CROSSING TO KYRGYZSTAN

It'll take us about an hour to two to get through the border to Kyrgyzstan and once we're through we'll visit San-Tash barrow (meaning counting stones) - a burial mound dating back from the time of Timur. We will stop here for a picnic lunch before travelling on to the stunning mountain village of Jyrgalan for dinner and an overnight stay. Our stay at Alakol-Jyrgalan Guesthouse will involve twin rooms shared by same-gender pairings with shared bathrooms.

Day 7: TURNALY-KOL PANORAMA WALK

Distance: 8 miles (13 km) Ascent/Descent: 1840 feet (560m) From our guesthouse, we'll set off on a hike to the remote mountain lake of Turnaly-Kol, taking in the wow-worthy panorama of Jyrgalan valley where wildflower-filled fields and wooded slopes will capture your attention. Once we arrive back, we'll transfer to Karakol for dinner with a local family. This will be our base for the next three nights.

Day 8: JETI OGUZ WALK

Distance: 6 miles (10 km) Ascent: 1970 feet (600m) Descent: 1810 feet (550m) We'll travel to our starting point for today's walk, which will begin at Svetlaya Polyana Gorge and head to Jeti Oguz via the impressive Kok-Jaiyk Pass. Once we're back in Karakol, we'll have dinner with a local Uigur family.

Day 9: AK-SUU NATURE PARK WALK

Distance: 7.5 miles (12 km) Ascent: 2330 feet (710m) Descent: 2660 feet (810m) A 1.5-hour transfer will take us to the starting point for our hike in Ak-Suu Nature Park, where we'll spend five to six hours crossing the Kara-Beltek Pass (2,606m) before descending to Karakol. We'll then have a half-hour transfer back to the hotel in time to have dinner with a Dungan family.

Day 10: KARAKOL SIGHTSEEING

We'll have a change of scenery today as we embark on a city tour of Karakol which begins in Przhevalskiy Museum, dedicated to the Russian explorer. We'll also visit a Russian Orthodox Church and Dungan Mosque. Then we'll journey to Issyk-Kul Lake, the world's second-largest mountain lake, which sits pretty in the Tian Shan Mountains. We'll spend the night in a yurt camp. On days 10 & 11 we'll stay in a traditional yurt camp. Yurts will be on a shared basis, with 3 to 4 people of the same gender per yurt. Single & twin rooms are not possible here.

Day 11: ISSYK-KUL LAKE & SKAZKA CANYON

After breakfast at the camp, we'll spend the morning discovering Issyk-Kul, with time to relax and swim at the beach before joining our host family for lunch. They'll teach us how to make a typical Kyrgyz dish – feel free to join in with cooking if you like. In the afternoon, we'll drive to Skazka Canyon, known as the fairy tale canyon thanks to its bewitching wind-shaped rock formations and 'sculptures'. On our way back to camp, we'll stop to meet an eagle breeder who will introduce us to his eagles and demonstrate how he hunts with them.

Day 12: TO BISHKEK

We'll start the day with an early breakfast before making our way to Bishkek. On the way, we'll stop to visit a local family in the village of Kyzyl-Tuu where they make traditional yurts by hand. We'll build our own yurt with them and have tea. From here we stop for lunch in Balykchy, a small town on the western tip of Issyk-Kul Lake. We'll visit the 11th century Burana Tower with links to the Silk Road, as well as the ruins of the ancient walled city of Balasagun. Once we reach Bishkek, we'll check in to our hotel and have dinner at a local café.

Day 13: EXPLORE BISHKEK

A look around Osh Market will start our day, where you'll see a whole array of spices, fresh fruit, vegetables and more. Enjoy lunch at a restaurant, then the afternoon is yours to spend however you wish. We'll round off our trip with a final dinner together, during which we'll be treated to local performances.

Day 14: DEPARTURE DAY

Transfer to the airport for your flight back home.

Kazzhol Park Hotel, Almaty - Kazakhstan

This 4-star modern hotel will be our base while in Almaty. Its central location puts you within easy reach of the top sights, while rooms provide a comfortable place to sleep. They come equipped with air conditioning, kettle, TV, and Wi-Fi. There's also an on-site restaurant, gym, and garden.

Aigai Kum Guesthouse, Altyn Emel National Park - Kazakhstan

The Aigai Kum guesthouse's location is its main draw, perched on the edge of this spellbinding national park. Rooms are basic, but clean and comfortable. It features 11 private rooms with shared bathrooms, a garden, and dining room. There's no Wi-Fi here due to its remote location.

Grand Kolsay Hotel, Shatty - Kazakhstan

Situated within the Kolsai Lakes National Park, Gran Kolsay Hotel is a modern hotel with mountain views. There's a wood-burning sauna (extra charge) and rooms come with en-suite bathrooms and minibar.

Alakol-Jyrgalan Guesthouse, Jyrgalan - Kyrgyzstan

This traditional guesthouse in the heart of Jyrgalan Valley provides simple yet comfortable accommodation. Rooms have shared bathrooms, and there's a lounge to rest up in with your fellow guests as well as a Finnish sauna for an additional charge.

Amir Hotel, Karakol - Kyrgyzstan

Rooms at the Amir Hotel are clean and modern while the hotel itself is just a few minutes' walk from the town centre. There's free Wi-Fi, a terrace to sit out on, and rooms come with a TV and tea and coffee maker.

Nomad Lodge Yurt Camp, Issyk-Kul - Kyrgyzstan

Located on the southern shore of Issyk-Kul lake, you'll be immersed in nature at the Nomad Lodge Yurt Camp. Sharing with three to four members of your group, you'll stay in traditional, handcrafted yurts, with beds and bedding provided. Villagers have made everything in the yurts, from the carpets to the decorations. Not only will you get a glimpse of local traditions and customs but wake up to birdsong – a far cry from towns and cities.

Ambassador Hotel, Bishkek - Kazakhstan

This 4-star hotel is in the centre of Bishkek. Rooms are spacious, light, and modern, each with a TV, en-suite bathroom, and free Wi-Fi. There's a rooftop terrace and an on-site spa to help you fully relax before your journey home.