

ASIA · MOUNTAINS · HIKING · ADVENTURE · CULTURE · OFF THE BEATEN PATH



Kyrgyzstan

Kyrgyzstan is mostly mountains, a land of high summer pastures, felt yurts and horse culture. Sleep beside the alpine lake of Song-Kul, trek over a high pass to turquoise Ala-Kul above Karakol, swim in the vast, never-freezing Issyk-Kul and ride with semi-nomadic herders. Community tourism networks make it cheap and easy to travel independently.

 Before you go, read the UK government's travel advice for Kyrgyzstan and entry requirements (visas, passport validity). Last updated by FCDO 14 September 2026.

 CAPITAL Bishkek	 CURRENCY Kyrgyzstani som (KGS) £1 ≈ KGS 117	 LANGUAGE Kyrgyz, Russian	 BEST TIME Jun-Sep
 DAILY BUDGET £25-£130 £ Budget-friendly	 PLUGS Type C, F 230V · adapter needed	 FLIGHT FROM LONDON 11h via Istanbul ~£450-£850 return	 TIME ZONE UTC+6 standard time

Kyrgyzstan is defined by the Tian Shan: mountains cover around 90% of the country, and in summer life moves up to the jailoo, the high pastures where families graze horses and sheep and live in yurts. A classic two- to three-week loop starts in Bishkek, circles Issyk-Kul to Karakol for treks such as Ala-Kul, crosses to Kochkor and Song-Kul, then heads south to the Silk Road caravanserai of Tash Rabat. Osh and the Fergana Valley in the south feel more Uzbek and more traditional, and pair naturally with the Pamir Highway into Tajikistan.

Travel is cheap and refreshingly informal: shared taxis and minibuses go almost everywhere, and the Community Based Tourism (CBT) network and local agencies arrange homestays, horses and drivers at fair prices. Facilities are basic, with long-drop toilets and cold water at most yurt camps, and the summer season is short, so June to September is busy at Song-Kul and on the main trails. People are often surprised by the hospitality of strangers, by how fast the weather turns at altitude, and by how widely Russian is still spoken. It suits hikers, riders and anyone happy to rough it a little.

Top 5 highlights

- 1

NATURE

Song-Kul

A lake at about 3,000 m ringed by summer pastures where herding families pitch yurts from June to September. Arrive on horseback over the mountains from Kochkor or Kyzart, sleep in a yurt camp and watch horses graze at dawn.
- 2

ADVENTURE

Ala-Kul trek

A two- to three-day hike from Karakol over a pass of nearly 3,900 m to a turquoise glacial lake, finishing at the hot springs of Altyn-Arashan. Hire a guide or team up with others at Karakol's trekking hostels.

3

NATURE

Issyk-Kul

A slightly salty lake about 180 km long that never freezes, framed by snowy ranges. The north shore has Soviet-era resorts and petroglyphs at Cholpon-Ata; the quieter south shore has eagle hunters, yurt camps and Skazka Canyon's red rocks.

4

HISTORY

Tash Rabat

A remarkably intact stone caravanserai, usually dated to the 15th century, in a remote high valley on the old Silk Road route towards China. Sleep in nearby yurts and ride up to a pass overlooking Chatyr-Kul lake.

5

SACRED SITE

Sulaiman-Too

A rocky mountain rising from the middle of Osh, a place of pilgrimage for well over a thousand years and Kyrgyzstan's first UNESCO World Heritage Site. Climb past shrines and caves for views over the Fergana Valley.

Biggest cities

LARGEST CITY

Bishkek

≈ 1.1 million people

A leafy Soviet-planned capital of wide avenues, Osh Bazaar and good cafés. Most travellers spend a day or two arranging transport and gear, with Ala Archa National Park an hour away.

2ND LARGEST CITY

Osh

≈ 360,000 people

One of Central Asia's oldest cities, with the sacred Sulaiman-Too mountain and a huge bazaar; the starting point for the Pamir Highway and the walnut forests of Arslanbob.

3RD LARGEST CITY

Jalal-Abad

≈ 130,000 people

A southern town known for its mineral springs and as a jumping-off point for Arslanbob's walnut forests and the lakes of Sary-Chelek; few travellers stay long.

Ranked by urban-area population where available. Figures are rounded estimates, and sources define city limits differently, so rankings of similar-sized cities can vary.

When to go to Kyrgyzstan

Best time: **Jun–Sep**.

Jan

Feb

Mar

Apr

May

Jun

Jul

Aug

Sep

Oct

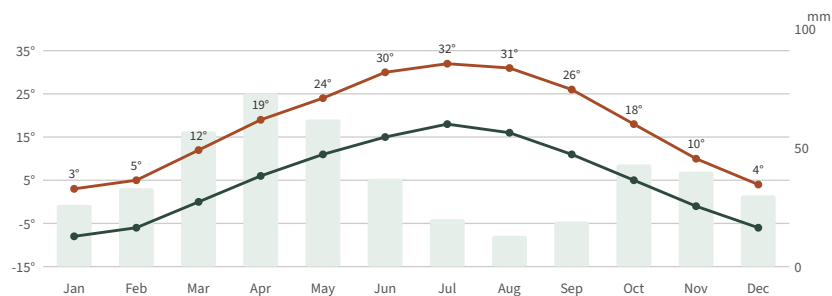
Nov

Dec

■ Best ■ Good ■ Mixed ■ Poor

Average climate in Bishkek

— High °C — Low °C ■ Rain (mm)



Festivals & events

Mar	Nooruz The spring new year on 21 March brings horse games, concerts, family feasts and communal cauldrons of sumolok, a sweet sprouted-wheat pudding stirred through the night.
Aug	Salbuurun Festival Usually held in early August at Bokonbaevo on Issyk-Kul's south shore, with golden-eagle handlers, mounted archers, taigan hunting dogs, horse games and Kyrgyz wrestling.

How much does Kyrgyzstan cost?

SHOESTRING £25 per person / day ≈ KGS 2,917 hostels, street food, buses	MID-RANGE £60 per person / day ≈ KGS 7,001 3-star hotels, restaurants, some taxis	COMFORTABLE £130 per person / day ≈ KGS 15,169 4-star+, guided trips, private transfers
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Estimates per person per day, excluding flights. Prices vary by season and city.

Food to try

Beshbarmak The national dish: boiled mutton or horse meat chopped over flat noodles with onion broth, traditionally eaten by hand; the name means 'five fingers'.	Ashlyamfu Karakol's cold, spicy noodle dish of Dungan origin, combining wheat noodles, starch jelly, vinegar, chilli and egg; best at the town's bazaar canteens.	Kymyz Fermented mare's milk, sour, fizzy and mildly alcoholic, drunk by the bowlful on summer pastures. Accept a little when offered, even if one sip is enough.
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Getting around

Shared taxis and marshrutkas (minibuses) leave Bishkek's bus stations for Karakol, Kochkor, Naryn and the lake, departing when full. Yandex Go works in Bishkek and Osh. For Song-Kul and remote valleys, hire a driver through CBT or a local agency, or travel on horseback. Flights between Bishkek and Osh take about an hour, saving a long mountain drive.

Practical information

PLUGS & VOLTAGE  C F 230V — bring a UK-to-C/F adapter	EMERGENCY NUMBERS Ambulance: 103 Fire: 101 Police: 102 Rescue and emergency: 112 Source: FCDO “Getting help”
DIALLING CODE +996	TIME ZONE UTC+6 (standard time)
TAP WATER Varies — bottled or filtered is safer	DRIVING On the right

TIPPING

Tipping is not traditional, but 10% is increasingly expected in Bishkek restaurants, some of which add a service charge. Tip trekking guides and horsemen at the end.

ETIQUETTE

Remove shoes before entering homes and yurts, never step over the dastarkhan (the cloth spread for meals), treat bread with respect, and dress modestly in the more conservative south.

MAIN AIRPORTS

Manas International Airport (FRU), Bishkek; Osh International Airport (OSS), Osh

Visas & entry for Kyrgyzstan

Shown for a British passport.

No visa needed

You can enter Kyrgyzstan as a visitor for stays of up to 30 calendar days without a visa, for each 60-day period. After this period expires, UK nationals must either leave Kyrgyzstan or obtain the appropriate documents.

To stay longer, to work or study, see more information on the available visa types.

From the UK government's FCDO entry requirements for British passport holders — read the full page for passport validity, permits and exceptions.

Health & vaccinations

See a travel health nurse, GP or travel clinic **6–8 weeks before you go**. Make sure routine UK vaccinations (such as MMR and diphtheria-tetanus-polio) are up to date.

RECOMMENDED FOR MOST TRAVELLERS

Hepatitis A Tetanus

SOMETIMES ADVISED — DEPENDS ON YOUR TRIP, ACTIVITIES AND HEALTH

Hepatitis B Measles Rabies Tick-borne encephalitis Tuberculosis Typhoid

YELLOW FEVER CERTIFICATE

No yellow fever certificate is required to enter.

MALARIA

No malaria risk

Source: TravelHealthPro (National Travel Health Network and Centre), checked 21 October 2026. This is a summary, not medical advice.

Public holidays in Kyrgyzstan

The next 12 months. Banks, offices and some sights may close, and transport and hotels get busy around these dates.

Fri 1 Jan 2027	New Year's Day
Sat 2 Jan 2027	New Year Holidays
Sun 3 Jan 2027	New Year Holidays
Mon 4 Jan 2027	New Year Holidays

Tue 5 Jan 2027	New Year Holidays
Wed 6 Jan 2027	New Year Holidays
Thu 7 Jan 2027	Christmas Day
Mon 8 Mar 2027	International Women's Day
Tue 9 Mar 2027	Eid al-Fitr (date may shift)
Sun 21 Mar 2027	Nooruz Holiday
Sat 1 May 2027	Labour Day
Sun 2 May 2027	May Holidays
Mon 3 May 2027	May Holidays
Tue 4 May 2027	May Holidays
Wed 5 May 2027	Constitution Day
Thu 6 May 2027	May Holidays
Fri 7 May 2027	May Holidays
Sat 8 May 2027	May Holidays
Sun 9 May 2027	Victory Day
Sun 16 May 2027	Eid al-Adha (date may shift)
Tue 31 Aug 2027	Independence Day

National holidays only. Dates based on lunar calendars can move by a day or two depending on official announcements.

Useful phrases in Kyrgyz

ENGLISH	KYRGYZ	SAY IT
Hello	Саламатсызбы	<i>sah-lah-maht-SUZ-buh</i>
Thank you	Рахмат	<i>rakh-MAHT</i>
Please	Сураныч	<i>soo-rah-NUCH</i>
Excuse me	Кечиресиз	<i>keh-chee-reh-SEEZ</i>
How much is this?	Бул канча турат?	<i>bool kahn-CHAH too-RAHT</i>

Know before you go

Book yurt stays, horses and drivers through CBT offices or established agencies in Kochkor and Karakol; prices are fair and they know which camps are open that week.

Carry som in cash. ATMs are reliable in Bishkek, Karakol and Osh, but not at Song-Kul or in villages, where cards are no use at all.

Pack for four seasons even in July: nights at Song-Kul and on high passes drop close to freezing, and summer storms can bring snow above 3,000 m.

Visa, health and safety rules change. Before you book or travel, check the FCDO travel advice (gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice) and TravelHealthPro (travelhealthpro.org.uk). Costs are estimates. © 2026 Pick My Trip.