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Walking in Kyrgyzstan

KYRGYZSTAN - TRIP CODE WKYZ

WALKING AND TREKKING

Why book this trip?

Discover the unspoilt wilderness and semi-nomadic culture of Kyrgyzstan on series of day walks. Hike through the gorges of the Tien Shan mountains on a journey that takes you around the shores of vast Lake Issyk Kul. Meet eagle hunters among the surreal red mountains of Djety-Oguz Gorge and experience a night in a traditional yurt tent.

- **Osh Bazaar** - Mingle among the locals at this lively market in Bishkek, the Kyrgyz capital
- **Ala Archa Gorge** - Hike through dramatic landscapes to a waterfall
- **Altyn** - Arashan Valley - Walk in the shadow of the snow-capped Palatka Peak

**INCLUDED MEALS**Breakfast: 8
Dinner: 3**TRIP STAFF**Explore Tour
Leader / Trek
Guide
Driver(s)**TRANSPORT**Bus
4WD**ACCOMMODATION**6 nights simple
guesthouse
1 nights simple
homestay
1 nights simple yurt**WALKING****GRADE:**
Moderate**GROUP SIZE:**

10 - 16

Itinerary

Itineraries on some departure dates may differ, please select the itinerary that you wish to explore.

DAY 1 - Join trip in Bishkek, the relaxed Kyrgyz capital

The trip starts today in Bishkek, the capital of Kyrgyzstan. Situated dramatically at the foot of the Tien Shan range at an altitude of around 800 metres, Bishkek is a modern city of wide tree-lined boulevards and open squares.

There are no activities planned for today and you are free to arrive at any time although please note that your guesthouse room may not be available until after 2pm. Complimentary airport transfers are provided to all customers arriving both today (day 1), and on day 2, into Manas International Airport (FRU), which is around an hour's drive from our guesthouse. As many flights don't arrive into Bishkek until late tonight or the early hours of tomorrow morning, your Leader does not plan to hold the welcome meeting until after breakfast tomorrow (day 2).

If you arrive with time to explore you may like to head to Ala-Too Square, a favourite place for locals to gather where there are some great examples of Soviet-influenced Brutalist architecture.

**ACCOMMODATION:**

Tien-Shan Guesthouse (or similar)

Grade: Simple Guesthouse**SINGLE ROOM AVAILABLE**



MEALS PROVIDED: NONE

DAY 2 - Discover the city on foot and by bus; visit to Osh Bazaar

Flights from London usually arrive in the very early hours of this morning. We'll make a leisurely start and your Leader plans to hold a welcome meeting after breakfast (please check the notice board in reception for timings) before heading out on a sightseeing tour of the city by bus and on foot. We learn about the main monuments and buildings of the city, and take a stroll through Oak Park. A former Silk Road settlement, Kyrgyzstan's capital is a young city, starting life as a clay fort built by the Khan of Kokand in 1825 only to be destroyed by the Russians 43 years later. It was rebuilt in 1878 and it is from this time that Bishkek evolved.

We'll also pay a visit to the lively Osh Bazaar, a large, crowded and colourful market where you can mingle alongside the locals doing their every-day shopping. The variety of goods on sale is huge - everything from vegetables, grains, baked goods, spices, dried fruits, nuts, clothing, shoes, meat and hats. If you're feeling brave you may wish to try some Kumis (fermented mares milk and the national drink of Kyrgyzstan), a very acquired taste!



ACCOMMODATION:

Tien-Shan Guesthouse (or similar)

Grade: Simple Guesthouse



SINGLE ROOM AVAILABLE



MEALS PROVIDED: BREAKFAST

DAY 3 - Trek to a waterfall in the beautiful Ala Archa Gorge

We head out of the city today to the beautiful Ala Archa Gorge, in the Ala Archa National Park, located around 40 kilometres to the south of Bishkek in the Tien Shan Mountains. Our hike takes us along the rocky valley, passing through pine forests and alpine meadows, to a scenic spot where the Ak Sai waterfall cascades down the steep sides of the gorge. The valley's wooded slopes, water meadows and craggy cliffs provide habitats for a variety of animals including the shy Marco Polo sheep, bear, lynx, wild boar, wolves and, in its upper reaches, snow leopards.

Today's six kilometre hike is expected to take around four-and-a-half hours with a total ascent and descent of around 800 metres.





ACCOMMODATION:

Tien-Shan Guesthouse (or similar)



Grade: Simple Guesthouse



SINGLE ROOM AVAILABLE



MEALS PROVIDED: BREAKFAST

DAY 4 - Drive to the Chon Kemin Valley via the Burana Tower; walk in the Valley

Departing Bishkek to the east, we stop to visit the 9th century Burana Tower, all that remains of the ancient Soghdian city of Balasagun. The tower is believed to be the oldest minaret in Central Asia with a detailed external pattern of relief work in brick. Nearby are many balbals (memorial stones) dating from the 5th to 7th century AD. Many of the carvings of the deceased hold cups which are believed to represent hospitality, as well as swords representing a willingness to fight.

Our destination for tonight is the picturesque Chon Kemin Valley. Around 180 kilometres east from Bishkek and quite close to the Kazakh border, Chon Kemin is one of Kyrgyzstan's 13 national parks. Our small homestay is located on the valley floor, covered with green meadows that are full of wildflowers in spring and early summer, while forests of fir trees cloak the higher slopes. We plan to set out on an afternoon hike and enjoy the tranquillity of this remote place.

Today's five kilometre hike is expected to take around four-and-a-half hours with a total ascent and descent of around 500 metres.



ACCOMMODATION:

Chon Kemin Homestay (or similar)



Grade: Simple Homestay



MEALS PROVIDED: BREAKFAST & DINNER

DAY 5 - Journey around the shores of Issyk Kul to Karakol; walking tour

Today we drive south through the Kungey Alatau mountain range to reach Lake Issyk Kul. The second largest alpine lake in the World, it is 182 kilometres long, up to 60 kilometres wide and lies at an altitude of just over 1600 metres. Issyk Kul translates as 'warm lake' - the lake's saline waters never freeze over despite the region's sub-zero winters.

Heading north-east around the lake, we stop to see some ancient petroglyphs at Cholpon-Ata that date back to between the 7th century BC and 3rd century AD. More than 5000 stones of varying sizes are covered with figures of hunters, ibex, goat and reindeer. It's believed that the site may have once been a gigantic open air temple. Cholpon-Ata itself was a popular resort during the Soviet era and many sanatoria were built here. These fell on hard times after the break-up of the USSR, but today many are being refurbished and the area is undergoing something of a renaissance.

We continue on a road following the shore to arrive in the city of Karakol. Strategically located, this was once a Russian military outpost, and the gateway of expeditions into the Tien Shan and beyond. In the late afternoon we plan to explore the city further on a walking tour. We'll see a Chinese influence at the Dungan mosque built in 1910 in the style of a Buddhist pagoda (it is made of wood without any nails) whilst the strong Russian influence is evident at the Orthodox Cathedral. The great Russian explorer Prjevalsky died in Karakol before an expedition to Tibet and the small museum dedicated to him gives a great insight into the 19th century Central Asian explorers

This evening we enjoy a meal cooked by a family from an ethnic minority group, either Dungan or Uighur; both groups are Muslim people of Chinese origin. We not only sample their hospitality but also learn about their traditions and lifestyle.



ACCOMMODATION:

Altamira Hotel (or similar)



Grade: Simple Guesthouse



SINGLE ROOM AVAILABLE



MEALS PROVIDED: BREAKFAST & DINNER

DAY 6 - Hike in the Altyn-Arashan Gorge with the chance to take a dip in thermal springs

We swap our bus today for a four-wheel-drive truck and head out for the whole day to the wilds of the Altyn-Arashan Valley. The name means Golden Spa and the valley is famous for its hot springs of 50 degree sulphur-infused water, the perfect antidote to weary bodies at the end of today's trek! Today's hike starts out from the middle of the valley near the thermal springs then follows the river, surrounded by pine forests on the surrounding hills. Ascending further up the valley the scenery opens up to reveal the spectacular snow-covered Palatka Peak (4740m). We return along the same route.

Today's 15 kilometre hike is expected to take around five-and-a-half hours with a total ascent and descent of around 230 metres.



ACCOMMODATION:

Altamira Hotel (or similar)

Grade: Simple Guesthouse



SINGLE ROOM AVAILABLE



MEALS PROVIDED: BREAKFAST

DAY 7 - Walk in Djety-Oguz Gorge and meet the eagle hunters. Overnight in a yurt by the lake

After sightseeing in the morning we drive to Djety-Oguz, the Valley of the Seven Bulls, so named because there are seven large red sandstone rock formations towering over the valley. During Soviet times this area became known as a health retreat, becoming famous when Yuri Gagarin came here to decompress here after his first flight in space. Our hike takes us along the river, through pastures and past forests of spruce. Whilst at Djety-Oguz we will meet with a golden eagle hunter and witness this ancient skill in action. Central Asia is the birthplace of the ancient tradition of eagle hunting. The nomads who roamed the Central Asian steppes began to tame these birds of prey thousands of years ago and the tradition was passed on from generation to generation. Kyrgyzstan is one of the few countries that still follow some traditions of the nomadic civilization and there are a handful of expert hunters left to this day who are determined to keep this ancient practice alive.

Leaving Djety-Oguz behind we return to the shores of Issyk Kul and overnight at a yurt camp by the lake for a chance to experience a taste of the nomadic lifestyle, still practiced in Kyrgyzstan. Yurts are circular dwelling structures made from a wooden frame covered in felt and traditionally they were furnished with colourful rugs and blankets with a raised sleeping platform. We will sleep on more conventional beds and depending on the size of the group there may be two or sometimes three people sharing each yurt. There is a separate block with flush toilets and hot showers at the camp and a large dining yurt. After settling into our yurts, we will have the opportunity to relax and unwind or perhaps go for a swim in the lake.

Today's eight kilometre hike is expected to take around three hours with a total ascent and descent of around 400 metres.



ACCOMMODATION:
Tosor Yurt Camp (or similar)

Grade: Simple Yurt



MEALS PROVIDED: BREAKFAST & DINNER

DAY 8 - Drive to Kochkor, visit a shirdak (rug) workshop before returning to Bishkek

In the morning we continue along the southern shore of Issyk Kul before heading away from the lake to Kochkor, a typical Kyrgyz town where we will visit a workshop where shirdaks (traditional Kyrgyz felt rugs) are made. It takes the wool from approximately five sheep to make one shirdak rug and the process is slow and labour-intensive. Designed in an inlaid patchwork of highly contrasting colours such as red and green, yellow and black or brown and white, the rugs are usually full of symbolic motif images from everyday life such as goat horns, shepherds and yurts.

After lunch in Kochkor we drive back to Bishkek for our final night and the opportunity to celebrate with a final night meal and reflect on our experiences over the past week



ACCOMMODATION:

Tien-Shan Guesthouse (or similar)



Grade: Simple Guesthouse



SINGLE ROOM AVAILABLE



MEALS PROVIDED: BREAKFAST

DAY 9 - Trip ends in Bishkek.

The trip ends after breakfast today at our guesthouse in Bishkek.

There are no activities planned for today and you are free to depart at any time. If your flight is departing later in the day luggage storage facilities are available at our guesthouse. If you would like to receive a complimentary airport transfer today, you need to depart from Manas International Airport (FRU), which is around an hour's drive away.



MEALS PROVIDED: BREAKFAST

Trip information

Climate and country information

Kyrgyzstan

Climate

Summer day temperatures can reach a maximum of 32°C in the lower slopes of the Tien Shan in July and August, although, as with any mountain area, temperatures can vary greatly and you should be prepared for extremes of weather. Night temperatures drop dramatically, possibly reaching zero degrees at night.

Time difference to GMT	Plugs	Religion	Language
+5	2 Pin Round	Islam, Russian Orthodox.	Kyrgyz, Russian.

Budgeting and packing

Clothing

Bring light and comfortable clothing that can be layered according to the temperature. The weather conditions in the mountains can be changeable, and it can become cool especially at night so make sure you bring warmer layers. Tops made from wicking materials which keep you drier and warmer are recommended as a base layer, and walking trousers are preferable to trousers of heavier material such as jeans. A waterproof jacket is essential at all times in case of rain and wind.

- Breathable wind and waterproof jacket (you may also wish to bring waterproof trousers)
- T-shirts
- Long sleeved tops
- Sunhat
- Warm hat
- Gloves
- Long trousers
- Shorts (if you prefer to walk in them)
- Swimwear and small towel if you wish to bathe in the lake
- Midlayer Fleece/pullover
- Socks (liner and thicker pair)

Footwear

We recommend you bring lightweight walking boots, make sure that your boots are worn-in and comfortable before the start of the trip. Also trainers or sandals for relaxing and general wear. We suggest that on international flights you either carry your walking boots in your hand luggage or wear them - should your luggage be lost or delayed, your own boots are the one thing that will be irreplaceable.

Luggage

20kg

Luggage: On tour

One main piece of luggage and a daypack.

Equipment

- Sunglasses
- Sun cream
- Small Torch (with spare batteries and bulb)
- Walking poles (if you normally use them)
- Personal first aid kit - On each walk a first aid kit is carried but you should have your own blister kit, supply of plasters, aspirin and other essentials.
- Insect repellent
- Reusable water bottle (minimum 1 litre) - Get 15% discount on a Water-to-Go bottle www.explore.co.uk/about-us/responsible-travel/water-to-go-discount-with-explore
- Lunch box/Tupperware (useful for packed lunches)

Tipping

Explore leader

Tipping isn't compulsory, and we work hard to ensure that our leaders all receive a fair wage. You may however, want to recognise a leader that's done a great job or really added to your trip by giving them a tip. We're often asked about the recommended amount. It's a tricky one, and down to personal preference, but we'd recommend between £15 to £20 per person per week as a guideline.

Local crew

Although entirely voluntary, tipping is a recognised part of life in this region of the world. Some local staff will look to members of the group for personal recognition of particular services provided. Accordingly please allow approximately £20 for tips.

In order to make things easier for you, the Leader may organise a group tips kitty and if this is the case, they will account for it throughout the tour.

Kyrgyzstan

Food and drink

The costs for meals may vary depending upon location, type of restaurant and number of courses eaten and so the prices given are an average guide. Local restaurants located off the beaten track may be less expensive, whereas an upmarket restaurant located in the centre of a major city may charge more.

Lunch price	Dinner price	Beer price	Water price
£3	£5	£1	£0.3

Foreign Exchange

Local currency
Som.

Recommended Currency For Exchange

Take your spending money in US\$ cash, as many bars and shops only accept hard currency (and often lack the facility to change travellers cheques). We recommend you take new (post 1990), good condition dollar bills. Large notes may attract a slightly higher exchange rate than small ones.

Where To Exchange

In major towns. Your tour leader will advise you.

ATM Availability

Very limited do not rely on this.

Credit Card Acceptance

Limited to major restaurants and stores in cities only.

Travellers Cheques

Not recommended for these tours.

Transport, Accommodation & Meals

Transport Information

Bus, 4WD

Accommodation notes

In Bishkek and Karakol we stay in simple guesthouses, all rooms have en suite bathrooms. At the homestay in Chon Kemin we will be accommodated in twin share rooms with shared bathroom facilities. Yurts are circular dwelling structures made from a wooden frame covered in felt and traditionally they were furnished with colourful rugs and blankets with a raised sleeping platform. At the Tosor Yurt camp which is located by lake Issyk Kul, we will sleep on conventional beds with all bedding provided and, depending on the size of the group, there may be two or sometimes three people sharing each yurt. (Normally, couples would have their own yurt) There is a separate block with flush toilets and hot showers at the camp and a large dining yurt.

Essential Information

Government Travel Safety Advice

We strongly recommend that you check your government's travel advisory for up-to-date information and advice about your destination: safety and security, entry requirements, health, local laws and customs. For UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office advice [click here](#).

For more information from Explore about travel advice, [click here](#)

Under 18 immigration guidance

Please note that some countries require proof of parental consent when travelling overseas with under 18s. Please check requirements with the relevant embassy or consular office well in advance of travel if this applies to your party.

Price Guarantee

Once your booking has been confirmed we guarantee the price will not increase, whatever the circumstances. Before booking please ensure you have read our important tour pricing information. [Booking Conditions](#)

Visa and Passport Information

Kyrgyzstan: Nationals of the EU, Canada, Australia and the United States don't need a visa to enter and can stay for a maximum of 60 days. Other nationalities may require a single entry visa and should consult the relevant consulate or www.kyrgyzvisa.com for more information.

If you do require assistance in obtaining a visa then you may be able to apply through Explore's recommended visa service in the UK, Travcour. See www.travcour.com to download the relevant visa application for your trip, if applicable (UK citizens only), along with details of how to apply for your visa through Travcour. The Team at Travcour will be happy to answer specific questions relating to visa applications, please call them directly on 0208 5431846.

It is your responsibility to ensure that you are in possession of a full passport, with the correct validity for your chosen destination.

Booking conditions

Before booking your Explore trip, please ensure that you read both our Essential Information and Booking Conditions.

Transfers

Find out more about [Trip Transfer Terms and Conditions](#) before you book.

Booking a land only package with Explore

Customers who have chosen to book on the 'Land Only' arrangements of our tour, please ensure that you have checked your tour specific 'Joining Instructions' prior to booking your own travel arrangements. Your joining instructions can be found below in the dates and prices information.

You may also be eligible for the Free Explore Transfer.

Joining Tour Abroad

Customers booked on the 'Land Only' arrangements will receive a Free Transfer, provided you arrive and depart on the tour only itinerary start and end dates. The complimentary transfers will be arranged from the Explore designated airport or train station to your trips joining point, and then back from the ending point to the designated airport or train station. Generally the airport or station that Explore have selected will be the one that is closest to the town or city where the trip starts, or the one nearest to the joining point. It will be either an airport or train station but not both.

The exception to this rule is customers who are booked on a tour where the joining and ending point is at the designated airport or train station.

Free transfers are not available for Self-Guided, Polar, Tailormade or Tours for Churches customers.

If you are not eligible for the Free Transfer then you will need to make your own way through to the joining and ending point. On a majority of our tours Explore will be able to provide a private transfer at an additional cost. Please ask for a quote at the time of booking.

For more information regarding the Explore Free Transfer [click here](#)

Insurance

It is a condition of booking with Explore that you have adequate valid travel insurance. It is your responsibility to arrange appropriate travel insurance and ensure you have read and understood the full terms and conditions of your travel insurance policy to ensure that you are covered for all activities you intend to undertake whilst on the tour, including all optional activities. Your Insurance Policy must fully cover you for medical expenses and emergency repatriation to your home country. Please ensure your policy includes medical emergency helicopter evacuation in the event of illness or injury and covers the entire duration of your holiday. If you are trekking at altitude please ensure that there is no upper altitude limit which may limit or exclude cover for your trip. The cost of many of our Polar Voyages will exceed the capped amount covered by standard insurance premiums and you will be required to pay an additional premium to cover the full value of your trip. Please ensure that you are covered for the full amount of your holiday cost, as insufficient cover could invalidate a claim under the policy. Medical and repatriation insurance cover is not mandatory for UK residents who are travelling on trips within the United Kingdom.

Read more information about what travel insurance is required.

Flight information

Explore offers a wide range of flexible flying options to make joining and leaving our trips easy. Read more about them [here](#).

Flight Information

You are able to book this tour on a 'land only' basis or as a 'flight inclusive' package. Your flight inclusive package will be fully protected by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) ATOL protection scheme.

Booking a flight inclusive package with Explore

We have a good selection of flights not only from London but from many regional airports around the UK allowing us to compare fares between scheduled carriers as well as low cost and charter airlines. Our dedicated flights team will match the best flight options to your arrival and departure airport. On our website we display a UK flight inclusive package guide price which is generally based on a London departure. To avoid paying supplements or to secure your preferred flight option, we recommend booking as early as possible, especially for peak travel dates.

Maximum altitude (m)

2800

Kyrgyzstan

Vaccinations

Nothing compulsory, but we recommend protection against tetanus, infectious hepatitis, typhoid and polio. Please check the latest requirements with your travel clinic or doctor prior to departure. The above is not an exhaustive list. Further information regarding vaccinations and travel health advice can be found by following the NHS and NaTHNaC links at [Explore Travel Health](#) and from your local healthcare provider. Visa and vaccination requirements are subject to change and should be confirmed by you before travelling.

Walking and Trekking information

DAILY DISTANCES

Day 3	6km	4.5hrs
Day 4	5km	4.5hrs
Day 5		
Day 6	15km	6hrs
Day 7	8km	3hrs

Walking grade

Moderate

Trek details

Walks on 4 days for between 3 to 6 hours. Hiking is on earth and gravel tracks.

Max walking altitude (m)

2800

Additional Information



Reviews



AWARD WINNING
EXPLORE LEADERS



PRICE GUARANTEE
PROMISE



AIRPORT
TRANSFERS