

Kyrgyzstan :

The www.gtla.net
Blog Travel
Guide

Georges-Michel Lalandre

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For "your name"
To adventures, encounters and discovery.
Happy preparations.

Kind travellings

Georges-Michel



Georges-Michel is my name.

I have been traveling for quite a few years and depending on my destination, I found help and advice in different travel blogs.

In 2014, when I went to live my adventure in Kyrgyzstan, I realized no travel blogs and no information existed on this country.

When I came back, I decided to share my experience and my advice on my travel blog, www.gtla.net, in order to help travelers looking for information, like the bloggers I had consulted previously had done.

Since then, I have kept my blog alive along with my travels. You can find information and practical advice there, from myself, my friends and readers, on every destination I have visited. It is a real pleasure to exchange with other travelers and find enrichment through their experiences.

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This book brings together all the articles and interviews on Kyrgyzstan that you can find on my travel blog www.gtla.net.

This is the hard copy version of my blog. You won't need wifi nor battery to research it!

Acknowledgments

To Coralie, Marie and Florent for sharing their experiences.

To my friends Aïgul, Azamat, Fabien and Oïbek for all our interactions and the many things they taught me about their country.

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To my family and friends for being themselves.

To my computer that allowed me to maintain my blog and format this guide.

To you, reader, if we ever meet, we'll have a beer together ...

To the bar manager who told me I am better off buying
two beers than just one

Happy reading !

1 Introduction

Kyrgyzstan is my favourite country. My first trip to this country was in 2014. Since then, I regularly return.

I continuously enrich this article thanks to my friends there and to the reader's feedback. During my last trip in July 2021, I was able to discover new regions, new treks and to meet a lot of new people.

Are you too interested in preparing your trip in this unknown country, where nomads live and ride horses, in the middle of magnificent mountains and alpine lakes? Are you wondering which visa to take, how to get around, where to stay, and if you can get by on a backpacker's budget?

Are you looking for reliable contacts, good tips or answers to even more specific questions?

You will find all your answers in this article, as well as my friend's contacts, to whom I have referred several hundred readers since 2015. Feel free to send me a message if you require more information. To exchange with other travellers, join the Facebook group, [Travelling to Kyrgyzstan](#).



I created this group in June 2018. It's the perfect place to exchange the latest information, the latest best tips and to find travel companions for your excursions. Don't hesitate to contribute and keep the group alive.

This book brings together all the resources I have gathered on Kyrgyzstan. Through these pages, you will find:

- A general guide to prepare for your trip.
- A guide dedicated to horseback riding.
- The testimony of Florent who bought a horse to travel alone across the country.
- A guide dedicated to car rental.
- The testimony of Marie who crossed the country alone on a bicycle
- A French/Kyrgyz Lexicon.
- The transcription of the name of the cities in the Latin alphabet.

To be informed of the latest Covid related news, I invite you to consult the "travel advice covid alert", on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' website.



2 What do I need to know to prepare my trip to Kyrgyzstan?

2.1 Do I need a visa?

Travellers from 60 different countries do not need a visa for stays less than 60 days. Your passport must simply be valid for the duration of your stay. Make sure that it has been stamped on arrival. You can check on <https://www.onlinevisa.com/visa-policy/> if you [need a visa or not](#).

If you wish to extend your visa, go to the Kyrgyz Ministry of Foreign Affairs (10a Togolok Moldo Street / Toktogul Street - Bishkek).

2.2 How much does the flight cost?

[Kyrgyzstan](#) is not an expensive destination, but there are no direct flights.

Flights with stopovers are provided by several companies. **Pegasus, Turkish airlines and Aeroflot are the most interesting.** Depending on the date you book, they offer very short stopovers: from €380 to €450 in the summer.

For more information on the subject, you can read my article on [how to find a cheap flight ticket](#) in less than 40 minutes.

Coralie, a reader of the blog, told me about a really good deal with **Air Astana** . If you have a long stopover in Almaty or Astana (especially an overnight one), the company has a [Stopover Holidays](#) program, with a \$1 night in partner hotels (often starred +++): **everything is done online, they send you a driver to the airport, night and breakfast at the hotel, and return with driver to the airport.**



2.3 What currency is used?

The official currency is the Kyrgyz Som. 1€= 100 KGS.

ATMs will offer you the option to withdraw in KGS or \$. Keep in mind that **KGS are easier to use for everyday purchases. Visa-compatible ATMs are found only in major cities.** Make sure to withdraw enough money to survive between each city stop.

IMPORTANT: You will NOT be able to change your Kyrgyz soms once you have crossed the border, do it before! Nobody will change your Kyrgyz soms, not even banks...

Commissions from traditional banks can be quite high. Before 2020, I made transactions with my CIC card. I was charged around 5% on my withdrawals and payments.

Since then I have been using my N26 card. It allows me to pay without fees and to make withdrawals with a maximum fee of 1.7%.

You can discover the card here/



To find an ATM compatible with your card, it's very simple, there are 2 apps:

Visa :



Mastercard:



2.4 What language is spoken?

The official languages are Kyrgyz and Russian. Hardly anyone speaks English.

With my local friends, we have created a [French/Kyrgyz lexicon](#)

When travelling by bus or taxi and when staying with locals, it will facilitate the communication.

I didn't think about this when I made it, but I quickly realised that it is **useful in both directions**. You can hand it to Kyrgyz people who can read the Latin alphabet, and exchange with them in English!

Learning basic Russian will be very useful: You will be able to communicate with locals in Kyrgyzstan and in all other countries in Russian. You will be able to read Cyrillic, which will allow you to understand signs, directions, restaurant menus and anything else you see...



I learned Russian and Cyrillic with Babbel. The app is really well done. It's interesting, fun and designed to help you quickly acquire notions that are really useful when you travel.



By spending between 15 and 45 minutes a day, I learned Cyrillic in 2 weeks. After 2 months, I could hold basic conversations.

Don't hesitate to test it and give me your opinion.

Tip for people working in France: If you have been working for more than 2 years, you can use your CPF account to finance Russian language courses.



Last tip: To enquire about the price of a trip, the easiest way is to ask the person to write down the amount on your phone or why not, in the dust of a car window.

2.5 What is the religion?

The country is 80% [Muslim](#), 17% Russian Orthodox and 3% other religions. All religions are still marked by shamanism and Muslims like to say that they have the Koran in one hand and a bottle of vodka in the other.

2.6 What is the police like?



The police is quite honest. My only mishap was in the Osh Bazaar in Bishkek, with a German friend. It is **known, that the police stop tourists in this place**, to get money from them. It is recommended to go there with a copy of your passport.

They arrested us and took us to their office. We were two foreigners and six policemen. I showed them a photocopy of my passport. They made us empty our pockets and searched us. **They found my flat banana, under my trousers, in which was my passport and all my money**

(10 000 soms or 142€). When I returned to the hostel, I noticed that they had taken a 1000 soms note (14.5€).

It is better to leave your passport and large denominations safe at the hostel before going to this bazaar, if you do not want to contribute to making ends meet for these officials.

This story is from 2014, since then I have been back to the bazaars many times and I have exchanged with many readers. Neither them nor I have had to relive that experience. Anyways, to stay on the safe side, leave your passport at the hotel.

2.7 When to travel to Kyrgyzstan?

The ideal period is from mid-June to mid-September. Outside of these periods, hiking and camping are possible but the passes are snowed in and the farmers have dismantled their yurts. You will have to manage by your own means.

If you want to know more about off-season travel, you will find [a feedback from Stéphane](#), a reader of the blog.

3 How do I organize myself once I'm there?

3.1 How to get from the airport to the city?



The airport is just over 35 km from Bishkek city centre. There are hawkers waiting for taxis. **The price of the 45-minute ride is 500 som.** They will offer it to you for 800 to 1000 soms. Dollars are accepted.

The easiest solutions are:
-Ask your hostel in Bishkek to send you a driver. It will cost you 9€.
-Download the [Yandex](#) application, it is the equivalent of Uber. You pay the driver in cash directly at the end of the trip.

If you arrive during the day, you can also take bus 153 for 50 KGS which will take you into town within 1 hour. You will find the bus stop outside of the airport at the intersection of Osh and Chuy prospekt.

3.2 Where to stay?

In the mountains, **you can choose between staying in a [yurt](#) or camping.** If you want to camp, make sure you have the right equipment, as it is not uncommon for temperatures to drop below 0°C at night in the mountains.

If you want to stay in a yurt, a night with breakfast will cost you 750 KGS.

In the city, you can easily find hostels and guest houses at reasonable prices.

If you want to stay with a local, you can trust the CBTs, which propose very good guest houses for 750 KGS, breakfast included.

3.3 Do you have any hostels to recommend?

If you're more of a hostel goer, you'll find below a list of the ones I have stayed in. As a bonus you'll find a useful piece of information, missing from all other travel guides: the addresses written in Cyrillic, which is essential when looking for directions:

In July 2021 I went back to Bishkek, I visited new hostels but the best ones are still the same:



In Bishkek:

[Apple Hostel:](#)

One of the best hostels in Bishkek.
This hostel is great because it has lots of common areas

where you can meet people and find fellow travellers. It is also extremely clean, they clean all the time. It's a 10-minute walk from the Bazaar. **And what's even more convenient is that it's located next to the bus station (20 meters), which makes it easier for you to continue on your journey.**

The hostel offers treks at very attractive prices and the rates are the same whether you book online in advance or book directly at the hostel's counter.

Aigul, the owner, is **a very good friend of mine so she offers you a 10% discount off your night's stay if you book by email:** aigulkyrgyzstan@gmail.com

Tunduk Hostel : Another very good hostel, clean, comfortable with a good breakfast. **Azema actively contributes to the warm atmosphere of the place.** The refreshing swimming pool, the beautiful garden and the many common areas will make it easy for you to meet the many travellers who stay at this hostel.

Azema, the owner, is **a very good friend of mine so she offers you a 10% discount off your night's stay if you book by email:** azematunduk@gmail.com

[Address](#) and [map](#)

Koisha: The staff are very friendly, the dormitories are comfortable and **the decoration is original** and beautiful.

In Tokmok:

Alma Farm: My friend Aigul's parent's farm. It's a farm in the middle of the countryside with chickens, ducks, a vegetable garden.

It's the ideal spot for resting before heading to discover the Tokmok animal market (the biggest in the country),

the Burana tower, the Ak Beshim site, or going for a day trip on horseback. Overnight accommodation is only 600 soms in a very modern and comfortable room. You can book directly via aigulkyrgyzstan@gmail.com

In

Kochkor:

Adamkali, Well placed, just opposite Jailoo Tourism and 200m from the only restaurant in town and the bazaar. The family who run the guest house are very friendly and speak some English.

[Address](#)

In Toktogul :

Kagan guest house: A very comfortable family guest house with a nice garden. The grandmother who cooks and serves breakfast is a real cordon bleu.

In Bokonbaevo:

Sonun yurt Camp: A small, comfortable yurt camp on the lakeshore. It is the ideal place to rest and enjoy the beach. Merim and his daughter speak very good English and are real cordon bleu.

[Bel Tam Yurt camp:](#) EmilieBP recommends this camp which is ideal for a night by the lake.

In

Karakol:

Jamila Guest House: I fell in love with this Guesthouse discovered in July 2021. Zina the owner is charming, she speaks an impeccable French. Her house is clean, very comfortable and she offers an incredible breakfast. It is the ideal place to stay before or after a trek in Karakol.

[Duet Hostel:](#) Many travellers recommend this hostel which is very cheap and has everything you need (dormitory or yurts). It has a bar and a pool table.

In Cholpon Ata:

It is a very clean and nice Guesthouse whose name I have only in Cyrillic. I put you the GPS point and the photo of the coordinates. It is clean and very well located. If you can get the booking link, don't hesitate! gps point :



In

Tamga:

[Tamga Guest House:](#) Jane also recommends this Guest House run by a charming family in a beautiful setting.

In

Osh:

[Konok Hostel](#) : Very nice, with its garden, its bar and its breakfast, this hostel is a good address in Osh.

3.4 Where to eat?




The food is good and cheap. **Breakfast is always included in both guest houses and hostels.**

Other meals will cost you between 70 KGS and 250 KGS, depending on where you eat.

In the Guest House the dinner is 450 KGS. Kyrgyz people are very friendly and welcoming, your host will offer you a very hearty meal. In the restaurant you will eat for 100 KGS to 150 KGS. At this price you will get meat, rice and tea. In the street you can buy ready-made trays in the supermarkets or eat in the bazaars for 70 KGS.

3.5 Do you have any restaurants to recommend?

My friend Fabien, who has been living in Bishkek for 5 years, made me a list of all the good restaurants he tried. and after trying them myself, I 100% back up his recommendations.

- **Faiza** (cheap, good, fast, always crowded, sometimes you have to wait, but it's worth it)
 - **Assorted Bukhara** (the best plov in Bishkek)
 - **The Ramada hotel restaurant** (Lebanese food)
 - **Pur Pur** (Georgian food)
 - **Testo Mesto** (ravioli)
 - **Furusato** (best Japanese in my whole life) **I second this**
- 
- **Burger House** (burger)
 - **Dolce Vita** (real Italian pizza)
 - **Chicken Star** (high quality fried chicken, Korean style, and other very interesting dishes good for vegetarians)
 - **Shaolin** (not far from apple hostel, a very good real Chinese with the best sweet and sour beef you can imagine)

If you have any other good addresses, don't hesitate to leave them in a comment, I'll add them.

3.6 How to stay healthy?

The most common risk is turista. Especially in the mountains. When you go hiking and stay in yurt camps, you are staying with herders. **The surrounding waterways are contaminated by animal waste. Even if the water is clear, it is not safe to drink. It is essential to purify it with [a micropur tablet](#).** I always purified my water, which prevented me from getting sick, unlike other travellers who drank it without treating it.



The sun can be a hidden enemy you don't think about! In the mountains the sun is very strong and you can easily get sunburnt. Bring sun cream, but a good long-sleeved shirt and a hat are best! Long sleeves will also protect you from branches when riding (experienced by my friends Basile and Loïc during our horse trek in July 2021.)

A final risk is rabies, but same as anywhere, simply avoid petting stray animals. **There are mosquitoes, but dengue, malaria and yellow fever are absent.**

3.7 What are the means of transportation?

It is really easy to get around in Kyrgyzstan.

In town:

Public transportation is widely spread. You can travel by minibus called [Marshrutkas](#) . The fare is 10 KGS whatever the journey, 12 KGS after 8pm. Note that there are no public transport stops, **you just have to reach out, arm pointing downwards in order to stop the bus, and get on.**

If you prefer a taxi, call an official metered taxi company, the city fare is between 70 KGS and 120 KGS depending on the distance (that's why it's easier to take a metered company if you don't know the distance).



In Bishkek the easiest way is to use the [Yandex](#) app. It will allow you to know the price in advance.

To circulate between cities, you also have several options:

Hichhiking:

It is the easiest way to travel. **Hitchhiking is an institution.** If you stand at the side of the road and give a thumbs up, almost every car will stop. **All Kyrgyz people practice hitchhiking. Depending on your destination, the driver will charge you or not.** If you have time you can travel for free, I met several travellers who travelled exclusively like that, without paying, often being picked up by truckers.

As a testament to this, Marie, a member of the [Travelling to Kyrgyzstan](#) group , **shared a cool testimonial with us:**

«  Give it a go in Kyrgyzstan! 

A little advice that goes a long way!

1- You save money

2- You meet the best people!

3- You discover even more of the country, its landscapes, its culture, its cuisine (and yes, after inviting you into their cars, some Kyrgyz will also invite you to their table! 😊)...

4- Sometimes it doesn't take longer than taking a maschruta...

During the last 7 weeks, I went from Bishkek to Kochkor, Song Kuul, Issik Kuul (All the way around with multiple stops/back and forth between villages and touristic sites), Jyrgalant, Arslan Bob, Osh, Sary Moghol (Lenin peak), Kazarman, Naryn... all by hitchhiking !



Most of the time we were 2 (2 girls or 1 girl/1 guy), we did not have to wait more than 30 minutes (max !), at anytime (8h00, 12h00, 22h00...), on main roads or deserted tracks, without any trouble or almost (2 slightly drunk drivers)...

Don't forget to specify that you don't want a taxi, don't have any money ("niet dienge/ soms" in Russian, "archa djok" in Kyrgyz), smile... and go for it! 😊 »

Minibuses called Marshrutkas:

These are the cheapest. At the beginning of my stay, travellers told me to use shared taxis because the Marshutkas buses overfilled. I took several Marshutkas, always sat comfortably and they never stopped to pick up people on the way.

Here you will find a [alphabet transcription of the main Kyrgyz cities](#): very useful in the bus stations.

Shared taxis:

These are Japanese 7 seater minivans. The purpose is to share the total fare amount with the other passengers. The driver waits until the taxi is full before leaving. **This is a slightly more expensive means of transportation (usually between 100 and 150 som) but faster and more comfortable than the Marshutkas.** Below is a list of prices that I have compiled for the main routes. Please note that the price changes according to the price of petrol and the travel time changes according to the weather.

- **Bishkek-Kochkor:** 400 KGS / 4 h
- **Bishkek-Cholpon Ata :** 350 KGS / 4 h
- **Bishkek-Karakol :** 400 KGS / 6 h

- **Bishkek-Balykchy:** 200 KGS / 2 h
- **Bishkek-Bokonbayevo:** 350 KGS/ 5h
- **Bishkek-Talas:** 500 KGS/ 6h
- **Bishkek-Jalal Abad:** 1,500 KGS/ 9h
- **Bishkek- Bazar Korgon:** 1 500 KGS/ 9 hrs
- **Bishkek-Toktogul:** 500 KGS/ 5h
- **Bishkek-Chon Alay:** 200 KGS/ 2pm
- **Bishkek/ Bakten:** 1600 KGS/ 12h
- **Bishkek-Tokmok:** 150 KGS/ 2h
- **Bishkek-Naryn:** 500 KGS / 8 h
- **Bishkek-Osh:** 1500 KGS / 12 h
- **Bishkek-Almaty:** 400 KGS/ 5h
- **Bishkek-Astana:** 2500 KGS/ 18h
- **Bishkek-Chymkent:** 620 KGS/ 8h

The members of the group, [Travelling to Kyrgyzstan](#), have allowed me to update the fares and have sent me the fares for new trips they have made in 2021, see below:

- **Karakol- cholpon ata:** 3500 KGS
- **Bishkek - Kashka Suu:** 25 KGS
- **Bokonbaevo - Karakol:** 150 KGS
- **Tokmok-karakol:** 500 KGS
- **Tamchy- Bishkek:** 300 KGS
- **Balakchy-Tamchy:** 100 KGS
- **Tamga - Bishkek:** 300 KGS
- **Kochkor - Balyktchy:** 150 KGS
- **Balyktchy - Tosor:** 300 KGS
- **Shazka canyon - Tamga:** 50 KGS
- **Bishkek - kyzart:** 300 KGS
- **Tosor - Karakol:** 150 KGS
- **Balykchy -Cholpon Ata:** 250 KGS
- **Kotchkor-Balykchy :** 200 KGS
- **Balikchy-Karakol:** 200 KGS

- **Karakol-Cholpon Ata:** 150 KGS
- **Bishkek-Arslanbob:** 1500 KGS
- **Arslanbob-Och:** 200 KGS
- **Arslanbob-Bazar Korgon:** 60 KGS
- **Bazaar Korgon-Jalalabad:** 30 KGS
- **Jalal-Abad-Och:** 120 KGS
- **Naryn - Bishkek :** 300 KGS

By plane:

This is the fastest way to get to Osh in the south, while avoiding a 12 hour drive. **Several companies provide daily shuttle services, within an hour's flight time, for almost the same price as taxis.** You can buy tickets directly at the airport or on the [Pegasus](#) website.

I often hear that flights are operated by blacklisted companies.



Pegasus is a company that flies from France. It is not blacklisted. It subcontracts with Air Manas, I myself tested a flight with this company in August 2019, I did not feel insecure and everything went perfectly well.

The trip cost me €50 because I booked it the same day, but if you book in advance you can get it for €30. There is quite a difference in prices compared to public transportation, but you save a lot in time and comfort. And again that is up to you.

By bicycle:

The country is a great playground for cycling enthusiasts. The number of bicycle tourists is increasing. That's why I asked Marie, who is a cyclist and a [cycling blogger](#), to write an article on the subject. You will find her anecdotes, tips and experiences in the article she wrote about [cycling](#) in Kyrgyzstan.

4 Do you know of any good car rental agencies in Kyrgyzstan?

4.1 Who to rent a car from in Bishkek?

I can recommend several reliable rental companies in Bishkek.

Though, in 2014 with my mates Will and James, we opted to buy an old Lada: a wreck of a car, that we named Roxane.

It held up and we even sold it to Polish travellers who crossed the Pamir with it, and then sold it in Tajikistan.



It was ~~the wreck~~ The car was the cheapest in Bishkek and it cost us \$500. There were 3 of us and we were lucky to be able to sell it.

But if you're looking for a more reliable and safer car, I know some good rental companies (Anyways, I've lost track of Roxane long ago!).

I recommend to choose between these 3 people:

[Azamat](mailto:azamatguide@gmail.com) (azamatguide@gmail.com) offers you a small fleet of cars at very good prices and **as he is a friend, he offers a 5% discount to readers of the blog.** [Aigul](mailto:aigulkyrgyzstan@gmail.com) (aigulkyrgyzstan@gmail.com) Aigul can also offer you some 4*4 at very interesting rates, **they also offer tours with drivers at very attractive rates.**

Currently the offer is lower than the demand, the rental cars are booked out well in advance during the high

season. **If you want to rent a car in summer, book it as soon as you know the dates of your trip, so that you avail of a choice.**

To find out everything about car rental in Kyrgyzstan and surrounding countries, I have written a comprehensive article, based on readers' feedback and my personal knowledge, which lists : [all the best car rental companies in Central Asia](#).

4.2 Who to rent a car from in Osh to cross the Pamir River into Tajikistan?

[Oibek \(oibektours@gmail.com\)](mailto:oibektours@gmail.com) offers a wide range of recent and robust cars and motorbikes fully adapted to the roads of Central Asia and especially to the crossing of the [Pamir](#). He also offers repair and guarding services for your own car.

For any information and/or to [book a car](#), please contact Oibek

5 What are the main places to visit?

5.1 What was your itinerary?

My itinerary during the 3 weeks on my first trip in 2014 was as follows:

Bishkek / Kochkor / Lake Song Kul / Kochkor / Kyzyl Oil / Kochkor / Karakol / Altin Arachan / Cholpon Ata / Bishkek / Cholpon Ata / Bishkek

Getting around Kyrgyzstan is easy, but time consuming. The country is **95% mountainous and has only few good and easily drivable roads.** This makes it difficult to tour the country. If you want to get to the main

cities, you will have to go back and forth to Bishkek, or in the least backtrack often.

For example, if you go South to Osh and want to go to Naryn further North, you won't be able to go directly from one city to the other unless you rent a 4*4 with a private driver, at an exorbitant price. Only a track in very bad condition, because snowed in most of the time, connects the 2 cities. You will have to go back up North to Bishkek to go down South to Naryn.

The distance does not matter, it is the terrain and the state of the roads that will make it easier or harder for you to get to a destination.

5.2 Which itinerary do you recommend for a first trip to Kyrgyzstan?

Many readers ask me for advice on how to plan their itinerary.

The itinerary for my first trip is fairly standard.

Below you will find 2, 3 and 4 week itineraries. I have thought them up with my local friends to optimize them as much as possible.



The main points of interest in Kyrgyzstan You can follow them in full or in part. You can also create others and share them in comments 😊

Take advantage of your arrival in Bishkek to follow the best advice my buddy **Azamat** gave me, before my horse trek in July 2021.



Go to the Osh bazaar in Bishkek and buy these Kok Boru chaps (600 soms) and this rain cape (500 soms) from this merchant. It's local, cheap and above all very efficient. Don't pack too much before your departure, take advantage of your arrival to equip yourself like a local!



I'll leave you [her GPS coordinates](#). She won't remember me, but don't hesitate to greet her for me



2 week itinerary.



This is the ideal route to discover the main points of interest in the country. The stages are not too long (maximum 6 hours of transport). Most of the route is a loop. You can cut out steps to enjoy certain places longer.

Day 1: Bishkek:

Visit the city and discover the typical Soviet architecture.

-The **Dordoi** bazaar which is the biggest in Central Asia .

The **Osh** bazaar which is the biggest food bazaar where you can see the cultural diversity of the country.

-The parks, more than 10 all over the city.

-The nightlife.

-Local cuisinecooking class.

-Shyrdak (local carpet) making class.

Near the city:

- **Tashtar Ata: My friend Aigul told me about it** . Have a unique spiritual experience. You can purify yourself and get rid of your sins by bringing your old socks and burning them in the fire.

-**Shooting range:** If you are a thrill seeker, you can practice shooting Kalashnikovs and other firearms.

To get around Bishkek, download the Yandex application. It's the equivalent of Uber and allows you to pay the driver in cash.

Day 2: 2 Options:

Option 1: Ala Archa:

-Hike to the end of the Ak Sai glacier.

-Take a picnic at the same name waterfall.

How to get to Ala Archa?

It is 1 hour from Bishkek. Take a taxi from Bishkek to Ala Archa, which will wait for you for 6 hours on the spot and will cost 3000 soms. The entrance to the reserve costs 80 soms.

Option 2: Tokmok:

-**If you are lucky enough to go on a Sunday**, you can go to the Animal Market (the biggest in the country).

It is 2 hours from Bishkek. There are regular minibuses from the bus station for about 150 soms.

To go to the Burana Tower, you can take a taxi back and forth from Tokmok, that will wait 1 hour for about 600 soms.

Days 3, 4, 5 and 6: Song Kul, 4-day horseback riding.



-Horse riding, discovery of the Song Kul lake. Immersion in the nomadic culture and yurts stay.
-**The horseback riding is a must and is the easiest for beginners.** 90% of the travellers are beginner riders.
-It can be done in 3 days but **I really recommend you to do it in 4 days**, take your time and really enjoy it, rather than going back and forth.

How do you get to Song Kul?

Take bus 514 from Bishkek to Kyzart which leaves at 6am, for 400 soms.

How to leave Kyzart?

You have to go to Kochkor (the town where you will find means of transportation to continue your journey) after the trek. The last Marshrutka from Kyzart

leaves at 2pm. If you need a taxi, it costs 2000 soms from Kyzart to Kochkor but it must be booked in advance.

From Kochkor, several options are available, you can:

- take a taxi to Balykchy and continue around Lake Issy Kul skipping days 7 and 8 of this itinerary. (If you wish to stop in **Balikchy**, you can visit the fish market and see the abandoned boats in the lake.)
- follow the 2 options I suggest for days 7 and 8.

Days 7 and 8: 2 Options

Option 1: Naryn:

Caravanserai of Tash Rabat
-Hike to Lake Kol Suu.

Please note! The Kol Suu trek lasts 3 days, you will need to remove another stage from this itinerary. In order to travel to the Lake, you need to acquire a border permit, which you must apply for in advance.



How do you get to Naryn?

From Kochkor you can take a shared taxi for 250 soms.

Option 2: Kol Ukok:

Easy 2-day hike.

-Night in a yurt on the lake shore.

How to get to Kol Ukok?

The start of the trek is in the village of Isakeev, 30 minutes from Kochkor, easily accessible by taxi

Day 9: Bokonbaevo:

Beach and yurt stay on Lake Issy Kul.

-Eagle hunting demonstration.

How do you get to Bokonbaevo?

You have to take a taxi or a minibus to Balykchi. From Balykchi you take another minibus to Bokonbaevo.

Little extra: On the road between Bokonbaevo and Karakol, discover the hot springs of [Goryachiy Istochnik Nur](#). They are in open air, with a beautiful view of the lake IssyK kul and the surrounding mountains.

Day 10: Karakol:

- Stock up for the Ala Kul trek.

-Zoo.

-Dungan Mosque.

-Pravoslavik Church.

-Parakol Museum.

-Przewalskii Museum.

-Local bazaar.

Days 11, 12 and 13: Ala Kul Trek 3 or 4 days

-Hike to the top of the Pass where the view of the lake, located at 3500 m above sea level and surrounded by mountains, is totally incredible. There are different routes. **The 3 day route is accessible to almost everyone. The 2 nights are spent in a guest house in Altin Arashan.** You can rest well and enjoy the

hot springs (there are priced ones and natural ones, both are very nice).

The second day of the trek can be done on horseback to the foot of the pass, which is not accessible by horse.

How do you get to the Ala Kul trek?

You can take a taxi to Asku village (for the 3 day trek) or to the entrance to the national park (for the 4 day trek).

The trek ends at noon, so you can take a bus or taxi back to Bishkek right afterwards.

Day 14: Bishkek :

-Use your last day in town to buy souvenirs and say goodbye to your new friends.

How to get back to Bishkek?

You can take a taxi or minibus from any city. From Karakol it will take you 6 hours and 350 soms.

3 week itineraries:

For a 3-week stay, I propose 2 different itineraries.

They are based on the 2 weeks itinerary. For this reason, I invite you to **refer to the previous itinerary to see the details of the stages.**

As for the 2 weeks itinerary, **you can delete stages, to enjoy more time in certain places.**

Route 1:



This first itinerary is classic. You go around the Issy Kul lake, discovering the main points of interest of the country. The stages are not too long (6 hours of transport maximum).

Day 1: Bishkek.

Day 2: Ala Archa.

Days 3, 4, 5, 6: 4 day Song Kul trek.

Days 7 and 8: Kel Suu or Kol Ukok. Please note! The Kol Suu trek is 3 days long, you will have to delete another stage of this itinerary.

Day 9: Bokonbaevo.

Day 10: Karakol, Fayrtale Canyon or Jeti Oguz.

Day 11: Karakol, Fayrtale Canyon, Jeti Oguz or start of the 4 day Ala Kul trek.

Days 12, 13 and 14: Ala kul 3 or 4 days.



Day 15: Cholpon Ata.

-Swimming

-Jetskiing, parasailing, pedal boats.

Days 16, 17 and 18: Chon Kemin.

-Trekking in the national park (3 days on foot or horseback).

How do you get to Chon Kemin?

You can take a taxi or minibus from Cholpon Ata.

Day 19: Tokmok.

Days 20 and 21: Bishkek.

Route 2:

This second route is less traditional. It combines the traditional tourist route with the discovery of beautiful and little-visited areas such as **Arslanbob** and **Sary Chelek** . Some of the stages are long, which gives you the chance to cross the country and discover the diversity of the landscape along the roads.



Day 1: Bishkek.

Day 2: Ala Archa or Tokmok.

Days 3, 4, 5, 6: 4 day Song Kul trek.

Day 6: The trek ends at noon, you can take a taxi to Kazarman.

- Overnight in Kazarman.

How do you get to Kazarman?

You can take a taxi from Kochkor to Kazarman.

Day 7 and 8: Arslanbob.

-Walnut

Forest.

-Waterfall.

-Sacred lakes.

How do you get to Arslanbob?

You can take a taxi from Kazarman to Arslanbob.

Day 9: Bus or taxi to Sary Chelek.

-Overnight in Arkit.

Days 10, 11 and 12: Sary Chelek (my favourite trek):

-The 5 day trek requires a good level of horsemanship,

The 3-day course is much more accessible.

-You can also do it on foot.



Day 13: Toktogul:
-The reservoir

How do you get to Toktogul?
You can take a taxi or an Arkit minibus to Toktogul.

Day 14: Bishkek.

Days 15 and 16: Bokonbaevo.

Day 17: Karakol, Fairytale canyon or Jeti oguz.

Days 18, 19 and 20: Ala Kul Trek 3 or 4 days.

Day 21: Bishkek.

4 week itinerary :

If you are going for 4 weeks. I suggest you take inspiration from the previous itineraries. Depending on your wishes, you can travel more slowly or add stops in the following places:

- **Chon Orutkuu, 1 day:**
-Hot springs.

- **Barskoon,** 1 day:
-The waterfalls.
- **Uzgen,** 1 day:
-The historical complex.
- **Min Kush,** 1 day:
-An old Soviet village.
- **Sary Mogol,** 2 to 3 days:
-The starting point to prepare for the ascent of **Lenin Peak**, one of the most mythical peaks in the region. The climb requires a permit and mountaineering skills, but the base camp is easily accessible.
You can see **Lake Tulpär** and have a magnificent view of the peak: a 7200m mountain, the second highest in the Pamir.
- **Suusamyr** 2 to 3 days:
-Hike to **Muztor Lake**.
- **Talas** 3 to 5 days:
-The Manas memorial (one of the holiest places in the country)
-The Kirov reservoir, with Lenin's head carved into the rock.
-Hike or ride from Talas to Toktogul. You will pass through the forest where you may meet wild animals on the way.
-Visit the **Best Tash** National Park.
-Talas is the city where the best Kok Boru players are.

5.3 How to cross the border between Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan?

Several people in the facebook group have done so, and you will find below a summary of the experiences of Coralie, Géraldine and Thomas:

Crossing the border in Osh is really easy. On the Uzbek side, the customs officers "spot" foreigners and make them pass in front of everyone else. They just look at the visa, stamp it and that's it. They don't ask for anything, neither about medication nor currency.



Once you **cross the border**, there are plenty of **(communal) taxis** to Andijan, Fergana, Marguilan or even directly to Tashkent. It is possible to pay in dollars. You can change Uzbek soms at the bazaar in Osh (there are

also a few exchange offices at the border) but don't change too much because the rate is not worth it.

6 Do you know of any reliable guides for hiking and trekking?

6.1 What are the rates for tourist agencies?

When starting to prepare your trip to Kyrgyzstan, you will find a lot of information about [CBT](#). At the beginning it was a Swiss NGO, which had offices with independent coordinators all over the Kyrgyz territory. The focus was to make locals work so that they could benefit directly of the income from tourism. Since then, the NGO has faded away in favour of the locals and **in fact, the approach has become more commercial than associative. It is a travel agency like any other (often more expensive).**



Clearly, if you want to go through a CBT, you should know that:

- Each **CBT is independent**. If you book a tour from the CBT in city A via the CBT in city B, the latter will take a commission. **Book directly in the desired city.**

Tours usually don't include transfer. In the land of the nomads, horse riding and walking tours do not leave from

the cities. To move to and from a destination, they will suggest a private taxi, which is usually very expensive.

If you book a trek via a CBT, always compare the price of the trip with a taxi fare or even consider hitchhiking (either way the money will go to the locals).



Since 2015, for the Song Kul Lake trek, I recommend you go through [Aïgul](#) which offers a very interesting service from Bishkek. I personally did this trek again with their guides in July 2019 and July 2021.

Below you will find the standard rates of tourist agencies:

Horse	rental/	day:	1000	KGS.
Guide/		day:	1500	KGS.
Night	with	breakfast in yurt:	900	KGS.

Lunch in yurt: 450 KGS.
Dinner in yurt: 450 KGS.

Good to know:

If you take a guided tour, you will have to pay for the guide's meals, accommodation and horse hire. If you are in a group, you can share these costs with your friends.

If you are on a smaller budget:
- **You can take a tour without meals**, to reduce costs, but you will have to bring your own food.
- For walking tours, you **can** simply book meals and accommodation, without taking a guide.

6.2 What should I check with my guide before I go on a trek?

Before leaving with your guide, check that the equipment is suitable and that the service is conform.

It's not a question of trust, it's just normal. It will save you from unpleasant surprises once you're in the middle of nowhere.

Most travellers look at the smallest details of scratches on a rental car... However, a scratch or a dent in the bodywork is much less disabling than a tent with a hole in it on a rainy night.

In July 2021, I went on an organised horse trek, organised by my mate [Azamat](#). Before leaving, we checked the equipment together. He told me **"I know you trust me, buddy, but we'll check the equipment together. I don't want you to be out in the wind with a tent without hooks. I've got plenty of spare ones here.**

To depart serenely and make the most of your trek, here is a non-exhaustive list of things you should check:
- That the service is conform: check the number of

porters, the number of horses, the equipment. You have paid for a service, it is normal that it is respected.
- That the equipment is of good quality: check the state of the tents, the quality of the sleeping bags and the cooking equipment. The nights are cold in the mountains, it is essential that you have quality equipment in order to sleep well. If the equipment is not suitable, ask for a change,
- That the food is in quantity and of quality: Make sure you have enough food for everyone, and for the duration of your trek. If you feel that you are short of supplies, it is easy to have them supplemented at the start of the trek.

Concerning horseback riding, pay attention to the condition of your horse on the first day. Make sure it is not injured, if it is, ask for another one. I have written an article dedicated to horse riding, you can find there what you have to check on your horse before leaving.

6.3 Do you have any guides to recommend for a hike on Song Kul Lake?

The [Song Kul](#) lake offers an ideal setting for a horseback ride, if you want to have an authentic experience at a reasonable price, I recommend:

[Aigul](#) who proposes horseback riding for small groups of riders, beginners or not, at a very good price. **All of this under the supervision of competent guides who take good care of the horses.**

Last but not least, Aigul organizes your transfer directly from Bishkek to Kyzart (starting point of all hikes).

Most travellers go to Kochkor. **Aigul saves you from spending a night in Kochkor and looking around all day through toursit agencies.**



Book with her, as soon as you are sure of your plans, it will save you time and make her planning easier. I was able to do this hike with readers of the blog in July 2019 and 2021

6.4 Do you have any guides to recommend for a hike in Sary Chelek?

I discovered, [Sary Chelek](#) in July 2019, my friend Aigul had told me that it was her favourite trek. **She had explained to me that it is a perfectly preserved nature reserve and still very little touristy, even during the high season. I can confirm that she is absolutely right.**

It's my favourite place, I spent 5 incredible days there, horse ridding ! I went with my friend Aurélien, our guides Misa and Nurbek with whom we roamed the reserve in wild camping, **we only met 2 other travellers, in the middle of July: what a dream.**

The 5 day horseback ride is **quite technical, do it if you have a good level of horsemanship, it is really amazing.** The 3 day trek is suitable for beginners. As for the walking treks, it is up to you to decide according to your level and previous experience.



These two guides are really great! Misa is a real cordon bleu, and Nurbek an outstanding fisherman, their duo allows to magnificent bivouacs:

6.5 Do you have a guide to recommend for the Ala Kul trek?

Yes, I know a good agency with competent guides and good equipment to go to [Ala Kul](#).

To help you in your choice, it's good to know you can do this trek in 3, 4 or 7 days via 3 different routes.

The 3-day route is **accessible to beginners** and you will be able to sleep in guesthouses. The 4-day tour is more challenging, but is **accessible to intermediate level** and the nights are spent in tents in bivouacs.



The 3-day itinerary is as follows:

Day 1: Asku to Altyn Arashan, about 4 hours walk.

Day 2: Return to Ala Kul, about 7 to 8 hours walk.

Day 3: Return to Asku, about 4 hours walk.

The 4-day itinerary is as follows:

Day 1: from the entrance of the national park to Sirota Camp 12 km in 4 or 5 hours.

Day 2: Sirota to Keldike Gorge 10 km in 5 or 6 hours.

Day 3: Keldike Gorge to Altyn Arashan 10 km in 4 hours.

Day 4: from Altyn Arashan to Asku village 15 km in 4 hours.

The 7 day trek is broken down as follows:

Day 1: Jeti Oguz to Telty Gorge. **8 km**
Day 2: Telty gorge - Telty pass (3800m). **7 km**
Day 3: Telty Pass - Karakol Gorge (2500m). **8 km**
Day 4: Karakol Gorge - On Tor Gorge. **10 km**
Day 5: On Tor Gorge - Kurgak Tor Gorge to Alakol Lake (3560 m). **7 km**
Day 6: Alakol Pass (3830 m) Downhill from the pass to Keldike Gorge and to Altyn Arashan Valley. (2500 m). **17 km**
Day 7: Arashan Valley - Aksuu village. **15 km**

I am often asked, if a guide is needed to do this trek. I usually reply, that **"if you are asking if you need a guide, then you need a guide!"**.

If you need a guide, my friend Aigul organises these treks. You can contact her via aigulkyrgyzstan@gmail.com

6.6 Do you have an English-speaking driver-guide to recommend when visiting Kyrgyzstan?

Yes, Azamat, who is not only a trusted friend but also the best French and English-speaking guide I know. He is a real Swiss knife who can put together the tour of your dreams and join you by walking, on horseback or by car.

I have confidently sent several readers to him, and they have all come back delighted. You can find the testimonies of some of them on the page dedicated to him.

In January 2020, I was honoured to host him in France, for his first ever foreign trip!

In July 2021, we got together with my friends Basile and Loïc for a brand new horse trek. Azamat had promised me that it would be an unforgettable experience.

He created a trek for us, in a unknown remote region, between Ozgorush and Kazarman.



Nurlan, the local ranger, joined our group. We were his first tourists. He pleased us with his knowledge of plants and his infectious laugh.

Azamat had excellent horses in store for us, which allowed us to travel through diverse and incredible landscapes and meet authentic isolated nomads.

My mates and I can tell you, it was truly amazing. Suzanne, a reader of the blog, and her 11 year old daughter also travelled with him in August 2021. They loved it.

If you would also like to experience a new horseback riding adventure or a more classic tour, you can contact him : azamatguide@gmail.com .



6.7 How to attend nomadic games and an eagle hunting show?

Nomadic games:

They take place every 2 years and the 2022 edition will be held in Turkey.

The main games are wrestling (ground or horse), archery (ground or horse), falconry and equestrian games.

The most famous game is Kok Boru: It consists in two teams of riders competing for a goat carcass.

There are several possibilities to attend a game:

The biggest game takes place in the racecourse stadium in Bishkek, on the bank holiday on the 31st of August Once a month a big festival is also held in Talas.

If you want to see a more confidential game, my friend Azema organises a trip to Sussamyr in her home village. The locals play a game every Sunday and Tuesday there (a bit like us in France with club football)

If you are interested, you can contact her directly here

The eagle hunt:

This is an ancient Kyrgyz tradition. In Kyrgyz the eagle is called *berkuttire* and the hunters, *berkutchi* . They were the ones who provided the villagers with food and furs during the winter.

How does one become an eagle hunter?

My friend Aigul explained to me that to begin, the hunter has to capture the eagle in the wild. He takes an egg from a nest (which is not without risk). He trains it for 4 years, after which it is ready to hunt rabbits, foxes and even wolves.

An eagle lives for about 60 years and spends $\frac{1}{3}$ of its life with its hunter as tradition dictates that the hunter releases it when it turns 20.

The hunting season is between October and February, but you can attend demonstrations during training sessions which go on all year round.

6.8 Do you have a local agency to recommend for group tours?

Yes, if you want to join a group with a guaranteed departure, **I recommend you contact my friends Samuel and Fabien who offer really nice trips.**

Samuel is famous in Kyrgyzstan, he arrived from Switzerland in 2004, fell in love with the region and created his own ecotourism agency in Bishkek. Since 2014, my friend Fabien, who arrived in Kyrgyzstan as part of a mission with Médecins Sans Frontières, has also fallen in love with the local charms and has joined him in Nomad's Land.

They organise all types of ecotourist trips during the summer and winter. The main idea being meeting the local populations.

They guarantee trip departures for groups all year round, so if you want to go on transhumance with the Kyrgyz shepherds during the autumn, go skiing in winter or spend an incredible New Year's Day on the shores of Lake Song Kul, don't hesitate to contact them.

On top of that, they're offering a super 5% discount to blog readers. Just tell them they've been recommended by Georges-Michel (that's me) or Gtla (that's me too).

Don't hesitate to visit [their website](#) and say hello to them.

6.9 Is it necessary to hire a guide for the walks?

The guides are competent and well trained, but of course you can also travel independently. To put it simply, I am used to telling people who ask that question: **"if you are wondering if you need a guide, then you need a guide"**.

Walking tours:

Most of the hikers I met did not have a travel guidebook. The trails are not marked, but you can easily find maps in big cities like Bishkek or Karakol.

You can travel independently and sometimes even stay in yurts pre-booked in a travel agency. The

agency will give you the itinerary and the name of the family that will host you for the night. If you are going alone, just check the weather forecast to be sure you are safe.



Horseback riding:

You cannot rent a horse independently from a travel agency. **However, a farmer can rent you a horse for the day.** If you are an experienced rider, a guide is not

necessary.

During my stay in Altin Arachan, in the heights of Karakol, I rented a horse from a farmer for 1400 KGS a day. **In Song Kul I met a Frenchman who had rented a horse for 1000 KGS a day.** Riding without a guide will make it easier to meet the locals. All the local riders I met, during my day alone with my horse, came to greet me and offered me to follow them.



7 What should I take with me when travelling to Kyrgyzstan?

7.1 What can I offer as a gift to the locals?

Don't bring anything! I am asked this question more and more often. **My answer is very simple, don't bring anything: buy local.**

I thought about it and exchanged a lot with my friends there. You will please your hosts and the people you meet by offering them products bought locally. **In addition, you will be supporting the local economy.** Finally, it allows you not to prejudge their needs but to adapt to them, which for me is the essence of a gift.

In July 2021, Nurlan welcomed us to his house with my friends Loïc and Basile. We noticed that his children were playing ball with a plastic bag. We went to the village shop to buy a football and gave it to the children.

The shopkeeper was happy, the children and all their friends in the village too. As a bonus, we were able to kick a little in the ball and share a good moment with the villagers.

When you go on a trek and there is no shop on the route, you can do your shopping in the village where you start. For the children I recommend you offer **simple toys** that **can** be used in a group, such as balls, frisbees...

For adults, they will appreciate fresh fruit, fresh vegetables. Nomads are herders who have meat but no crops. Fruit and vegetables are expensive foodstuffs for them, which they will appreciate. If you travel on foot, you will quickly be limited in volume. If you are riding or driving, don't hesitate to take a

watermelon, it is a very popular fruit. Finally, take photos of your family, friends, home and region. Nomads love to share and show you their daily lives, but they also love to see yours.

Of course don't forget my English/Kyrgyz lexicon to facilitate your exchanges 😊

7.2 What budget to expect for a backpacker?

During my 3 weeks of travel in 2014, I spent €1133.96 including flights.



My expenses were as follow :

- **Airfare:** 455€.
- **Meals:** 167.42 €.
- **Hotels:** 158.14 €.
- **Transport:** 122.04 €.
- **Excursions:** 121.67 €.

- **Withdrawal fees:** 36.12€.
- **Unlisted expenses:** 69.29 €.
- **Laundry** 4.28 €.

I didn't always go for the cheapest. You can spend less in terms of food, hotel and even airfare. For example, meals in Guest Houses are charged at 450 KGS, you can easily get away with half the price by eating out, but I always stayed with nice and welcoming families which made me want to stay and share a meal with them.

In 2019 and 2021, I spent about 1300€ including flights on each trip. I haven't listed my expenses, I've become a bit more conservative over time. I don't like sleeping in dormitories as much, but the budget is still affordable!

7.3 What to pack in your backpack?

As with any trip, my bag did not exceed 8kg.

Each time I manage to keep my backpack as hand luggage. This forces me to make sure that it is not too heavy. It saves me having to wait for it when I arrive at the airport and, above all, it prevents the company from losing it during stopover.

I only take 5 days worth of clothes, I think it's the ideal compromise to enjoy the trip while stopping and taking time for myself.

As anywhere else, it's easy to find laundromats. Prices vary from 100 KGS to 300 KGS per machine, depending on the place. You can also wash your clothes for free in the many rivers and streams.

Here are the contents of my bag.

Decathlon Forclaz 60 bag :

- 1 backpack (for the day)
- [1 money belt:](#)

- riding jeans
- trekking trousers
- swimming shorts
- 5 pants
- 5 pairs of socks
- 2 decathlon shirts
- 2 t shirts
- padlock
- headlamp
- hoodie
- ski coat
- waterproof bag
- Toothbrush
- toothpaste
- Iphone!
- adapt USB current
- Sun hat
- Sunglasses
- 1 pair of spare glasses
- trekking shoes
- trainers
- flip-flops
- microfiber towel
- sleeping bag
- airbag
- bottle
- box of micropur
- box of anti diarrhoea
- survival blanket
- travel guide

7.4 What do I need to bring to make my trip easier?

To travel in the country, the 3 essential items I had and highly recommend you take are:

[Kyrgyzstan Traveller's Handbook](#). This is the only travel guide dedicated exclusively to this destination. **The others include all Central Asian countries and are less comprehensive.**

There are very few books on this rather confidential destination. This guide will allow you to learn much more about the history and traditions. **Since 2020, I have been listed in the guide.**

[A box of micropur](#): To purify the clear water. In the mountains, yurt camps are set up in herder's territories. **Waterways are full of animals and are dirty with faeces. Even if the water is clear, you must purify it to avoid getting sick.** A box of micropur will also reduce your water budget. A bottle of water costs 1€, while a micropur tablet only costs 18 cents.

[A survival blanket](#): This is the essential item to take with you on your trip. It takes up very little space and can protect you from heat, cold or humidity. It is even strong enough to be used as a stretcher. **At less than 2 €, it would be silly to do without it.**

7.5 You can also take along some accessories that can be very useful:

[A solar shower](#) It's a 20-litre water bag that heats up in the sun. Personally I used to wash in streams, but the water temperature is around 10° only. **Most travellers did not wash during the several days of the horseback ride.** If you don't like icy cold water, you can take this gadget with you and fill it with water a few hours before you arrive at camp so you can shower at the end of the day.

[A money belt](#) It's a normal looking belt in which you can hide up to 20 notes. **It's the best way to hide your money.**

[Riding trousers](#): Personally, I hesitated a lot and **I didn't take it because of fashion reasons.** I couldn't picture myself arriving in a nomadic camp in such attire. If you are a good rider you can do without one, but if you are not used to riding, I advise you to take one. **It's your choice between style and chafing pain.**

7.6 Is there easy access to the Internet and 3g?

It is the ideal place to disconnect. First of all, it is 98% wilderness and wifi is not much available. You will always find some wifi in hostels and some restaurants but at a low speed.

It's free at the airport, they give you some, and then you can top up. "O" is the best operator for 95 soms = one week with 10GB of internet.



- To call **Kyrgyzstan**: the code is + 996.
- From **Kyrgyzstan** to France: the code is + 33.

7.7 Are there any useful applications to have on your smartphone?

As the speed is quite slow, it is wiser to download the apps before leaving. **Whether you use Android or an Iphone, you absolutely need:**

[Maps.me](https://www.maps.me/) - My favourite offline map app, **it's free**. You can geolocalise yourself and follow routes while offline. There are a lot of roads and trails, it's the best GPS for travelling.



8 How to be a prepared and responsible traveller?

I am not an example, I have often done things without thinking, which I regretted later.

To avoid these regrets, here are some of my tips and my travelling friend's feedback.

8.1 Is it necessary to take out travel insurance?

Yes, as with any trip, you should think about insurance.

Travelling without insurance is stupid and can cost you a lot of money in case of problems.

In 2018, I ruptured my knee's cruciate ligaments in [Togo](#) and thanks to my insurance, my repatriation was easy and didn't cost me a cent.

Travel insurance is cheap or even free (prime visa insurance). Don't think about it and get yourself a good cover.

My accident in Togo allowed me to "test it for you" and I can guarantee you that I was very happy to know who to turn to and that I would be taken care of without having to pay anything.

[This Canadian, who was travelling without insurance](#) and suffered a Palu attack, relied on his family and friends to raise the \$68,000 needed for his repatriation.

8.2 Do you have any travel insurance to recommend?

Learn from his experience, so as not to repeat his mistake.

[ACS](#) offers insurance with very good and cheap cover. I have had nothing but positive feedback from readers.



8.3 What do I need to know before going on a horseback ride?

2 essential things:

Make sure your horse is in good health.
Ensure you are safe by wearing a [riding helmet](#) (bomb).

2 subjects on which I had the chance to discuss with the French ambassador in Bishkek, in July 2021



You can find all the details in my article on horseback riding.

8.4 Are there any other activities with animals that I should take precautions for?

Yes, eagle hunting and Kok Boru.

These two activities are traditional and part of Kyrgyz folklore. You can attend private demonstrations or festivals.

A classic demonstration of eagle hunting consists of an eagle chasing a live rabbit, which leads to the death of the rabbit...

A game of Kok Boru consists of two teams of riders competing for a goat carcass.

To start the game, The sacrifice of a goat is needed.

You have two options:

Attend a demonstration at a festival, with full knowledge of the facts.
Attend a private demonstration, which takes place at your request. In this case, you can easily ask for **the rabbit to be replaced by a decoy and for the goat to be replaced by a fake goat carcass.**

These requests are becoming more and more common from travel agencies, and it is easy to find demonstrations that do not involve the death of animals.

8.5 How to avoid acute mountain sickness?

This ailment occurs for the vast majority of people above 3500m. Don't worry, in a classical tour of Kyrgyzstan, **this is an altitude that you rarely reach.** Song Kul is at 3000 m. You climb higher at the Ala Kul Pass (3850m) but you don't stay there long. Thanks to Nathanaël (reader of the blog and member of an **association that organises treks in Nepal**) for all this

information, which I recommend you double check with your doctor.



What are the rules to follow to acclimate?

Four main factors determine the occurrence of acute mountain sickness:

- Ascent speed,
- Altitude reached,
- Duration of the stay
- Personal predisposition

Taking these criteria into account, we advise you to follow these rules:

- Don't climb too high too fast, on average 400 metres between each night above 3500m at the beginning of your stay.
- Avoid intense efforts at the beginning of your stay.
- Climb high enough to acclimatise if you have to go to a very high altitude (over 5000).

- Drink enough water (have clear urine, be alert to signs of dehydration)
- Do not take sleeping pills, which encourage breathing pauses during sleep, which worsens hypoxia.
- Listen to your body and accept its limits.

8.6 How to recognise if you are suffering from AMS (Acute Mountain Sickness)?

AMS is manifested through different symptoms. Nathanael assigns points to them according to their severity. According to the score you can take the necessary dispositions:

- Headaches: 1 point.
- Lack of appetite or nausea: 1 point.
- Insomnia: 1 point - Dizziness: 1 point.
- Headache resistant to 1g of paracetamol: 2 points.
- Vomiting: 2 points.
- Shortness of breath at rest: 3 points.
- Abnormal or disproportionate fatigue: 3 points.
- Decreased urination: 3 points.

8.7 What should I do according to the score?

From 1 to 3 points: AMS light, take a level 1 analgesic such as paracetamol. Respect the doses of use. Continue your progression if the symptoms disappear.

> From 4 to 6 points: AMS moderate, same recommendations as above with, in addition, 24 hours of rest at the same altitude before continuing the progression. The maximum acceptable dose of analgesic before telling you that you should probably descend (if you have not already done so): 3 g of paracetamol (1 dose / 6h)

> 6 points: AMS severe, it is imperative that you come down in order to avoid an evolution towards life-threatening complications (cerebral or pulmonary oedema).

My buddy Christophe unfortunately had this experience in Nepal. He tells you about it in a [very interesting](#) way [on his blog](#).

8.8 How do I manage my waste when trekking?

Several readers reported that their guides burnt the waste on site during the treks.

In France, this is not normal, but in Kyrgyzstan, [there is no waste treatment plant](#).

Explaining to the guide not to burn the rubbish there makes no sense. If it is not burnt on the mountain in front of you, it will be brought back to town and burnt somewhere else...

The best you can do is to limit the amount of waste you incinerate:

Use your backpack instead of plastic bags, and limit your use of packaged goods by choosing fresh, locally produced food.

What remains can be incinerated there: You are being more responsible in managing your waste than to letting it go to giant landfills.

To stay on the same topic, waste is not the only source of pollution, you are too 😊

You can limit your impact:

Avoid doing your business near water streams, it is a source of pollution. If possible, bury your poo. This way it prevents the rain from washing it away (which pollutes rivers) and when left on the ground it prevents vegetation from growing. When washing and washing clothes, keep at least 100m (or more) away from rivers. Soap (preferably to laundry detergent) is perfectly biodegradable **BUT NOT IN**

WATER ! (even soap that is commercialised as biodegradable) it has to be filtered through the soil to biodegrade.

8.9 Any last words of advice?

Yes, once you're there, don't forget that travelling is cheap because the Kyrgyz income is very low (in the countryside about 150€/month or less).

Think about it, for example: When you take a collective taxi, the cost per person is very low for you, but high for a local. You might be tempted to buy all the seats and leave immediately instead of waiting. But then you would be depriving the locals of a much needed transport solution.

Of course there are many other things you can do to be a responsible and better traveller. I've made a list of things that seem essential to me and that I've realised in the course of various exchanges with my readers, are not necessarily known to everyone. **If you have other elements to contribute, don't hesitate to leave them in the comments.**

9 What are the people like in Kyrgyzstan?

9.1 Is it dangerous to travel alone as a woman?

As you may have noticed, I am not a woman. However, I have often been asked about the **possibility of travelling alone as a woman**.

I asked Coralie, from the Kyrgyzstan travel group, to share her testimony following her trip in September 2018:

"I went alone for three weeks last september, I had no problems with safety. It's one of the safest places I've ever travelled to, and as a **woman, no worries. Kyrgyz people are mostly surprised to see a woman travelling alone** (i.e. without her husband, how is it possible?!) but they are curious and not pushy at all.

In big cities like Osh or Bishkek, or in tourist places (Kochkor or Song Kul), **people are more used to seeing women alone**.

I travelled a lot by local transport (mashrutka, collective taxis), it was very easy and I never felt in danger, knowing that the drivers are always men. I travelled a lot on foot, including in the cities, and I had very few solicitations, and none insistent from the taxis. **Kyrgyz people are happy to help you with information**.

I also found that there was a kind of solidarity between women: if they see you alone, they will help you, ask you if you need anything. I often wandered alone in the evening, in town, no particular worries.

I live in Paris, so something I wouldn't do in Paris, I wouldn't do in Kyrgyzstan either, and if I had a bad feeling (which rarely happened), I would simply back track. Obviously, an encounter with a drunk guy is possible, there is no zero risk as anywhere. And Kyrgyz are rather "protective" of their tourists.



Concerning the outfit, apart from Arslanbob which is more traditional (trousers, top covering the buttocks and shoulders, and still...), I was clearly in comfortable travel clothes (clearly not my most elegant dress ahah). But I don't think wearing shorts if it's hot attracts any more inappropriate remarks or stares."

9.2 Who are the people I will meet?



Encounters with locals and other travellers can have a big influence on your opinion of the country.

The locals:
The Kyrgyz are a [nomadic](#) people living in a harsh mountain environment. As a traveller you will meet people who are welcoming, warm and honest. **I never felt unsafe in Kyrgyzstan.**

I can guarantee that you will have amazing and inspiring discussions in each of your hostels.

10 Do you have any tips for a horse trek?

You want to go **horseback riding in Kyrgyzstan** and you are looking for a maximum of information to prepare your trek?



You want to go **horseback riding in Kyrgyzstan** and you are looking for a maximum of information to prepare your trek?

Since the publication of my travel [guide to prepare your trip to Kyrgyzstan](#), I regularly exchange with the readers about horse trekking. Thanks to our discussions, the advice of my local friends and my experience, I can share with you our tips and recommendations through this specific guide.

Do you want to experience a well-prepared horseback riding adventure in the Kyrgyz mountains?

Do you want to know where to find a horse? How to check if your horse is injured? What to do if it is? Do you want to know the basics of horse riding? What a day on horseback in Kyrgyzstan is like? What equipment you need for your ride? Where to go for a safe ride?

Here you will find all the answers to the questions that my friends, readers and I have asked ourselves before our first trip.

To exchange with other travellers, join the Facebook group, [Travelling to Kyrgyzstan](#). I created this group in June 2018. It's the ideal place to exchange the latest information, the latest best tips and find travel companions for your excursions. Don't hesitate to contribute and keep the group alive.

In order to depart serenely, you will find the contact details of my friends Aigul and Azamat, local guides, to whom I have already confidently referred hundreds of readers since 2015.

As a bonus, at the end of this guide: an interview with Florent, who bought a horse to travel independently across the country.

10.1 Why travel on horseback?

[Kyrgyzstan](#) is a country of **nomad people, who travel on horseback through the mountains**, setting up their yurt camps according to the seasons. Horses are an integral part of their life and culture.

On your treks, you will often meet real nomads who will ride through the mountains.

Thanks to your equine companion **you will experience a unique feeling of freedom.**

This is the only travel mode you will find yourself galloping among a herd of wild horses. It is also the only way you will share an evening with a family of nomads who will teach you how to play their traditional instrument. And only in this way will you learn to milk mares in order to make adulterated alcohol.

Horseback riding is one of [the main reasons why you should go to Kyrgyzstan](#).



10.2 Who is it for?

For anyone who wants to. I met people of all ages and from all walks of life. The most amazing encounter was a **French family, of 3 children**, accompanied by their parents.

They had a guide and 4 horses. The 2 youngest children (4 and 6 years old) shared their parent's horse (one sat in front of its mother and the other in front of its father). I

did part of my return journey with them. They had just done a 4 day ride.

The best advice I can give you is to **share your trek with people who have a similar level of riding** or to take a second guide to allow the group to split up, if necessary, according to levels.



10.3 Do I need to know how to ride?

No, before you start your trek **your guide will give you a full riding course.**

10.4 What are the basics of horse riding?

To keep it simple, here are the main rules:

- Never walk behind your horse.
- Always wear a helmet for your safety.
- Use your reins to direct your horse.

- Kick your heels and say TCHU TCHU to make it go faster.
- Pull on the reins and say BRE BRE, to slow down
- To turn left, you pull the reins to the left.
- To turn right, you pull your reins to the right.
- When riding uphill, you lean your body forward to help your mount.
- On the other hand, when going downhill, you lean backwards.
- Pull hard on the reins to make him back up.
- Last but not least, wear high shoes so that you don't hurt yourself with the stirrups. Press your feet down and lower your heels so that you don't get stuck in the stirrups.

Contrary to what some people think, horseback riding is quite physical. At the end of the day, you will be tired and sore. **If you are well equipped, you will avoid chafing and possible pain in the buttocks and thighs.**

10.5 What should I check before I start my trek?

I've had a lot of discussions about this with travellers who have ended up with injured horses. It is not normal to be offered to ride an injured horse. **If this is the case, refuse it and ask for another one.**

This is a simple advice, that can be applied in any country and with any guide. When travellers decline to ride on injured horses, the organisers will no longer offer injured horses.

10.6 How do I check my horse for injuries?

Take a good look at the condition of your horse before you ride him. The most common injury is at the girth of the saddle, as shown in the picture below.

This is a poor country. On the photo for example, the saddle strap is made from a car seatbelt. You are not in France, you cannot expect a European standard saddle. **However, it is possible for the owner to go to a bazaar, buy some fleece and sew a protection on the girth at a very reasonable price.**



The same goes for shoeing. **A complete shoeing costs 500 som and is valid for one and a half month.** A villager who regularly rents his horse therefore has no objective reason not to shoe it.

Aigul, my friend, whom I recommend you go through for the Song Kul trek, shares my opinion on this

subject and has raised awareness among the farmers she works with. If however you book with her and you are presented with an injured horse, refuse it and let us know as soon as possible.

10.7 What to do if it is injured?

If the condition of your horse seems abnormal, **ask your guide for another one. An injured horse should not be ridden.**

If the guide refuses, insist on another horse. The guide knows that you are right. The health of the animal and your mental well-being are at stake. Nobody enjoys riding an injured animal.

Don't hesitate for a second, your only risk is to delay your trek by 1 or 2 hours 😊

If it is a recommended guide on the blog, let me know.

10.8 Should I take a packhorse?

A horse should not carry more than 25 or 30% of its weight. If the weight exceeds, you need a pack horse. If you are going for a short period of time with not much belongings, you don't need a pack horse.

- For Song Kul for example, it is not necessary. It's a loop, you sleep in a yurt and meals are prepared by the nomads. You leave most of your belongings in the village of departure and get them back when you return. **You travel very light.**

- For a longer trek, where you take your food and camping gear, you need a pack horse.



10.9 Is wearing a riding helmet really important?

Yes, horse riding, even if it is a leisure activity, is still risky. A fall on the head can unfortunately happen. You are better off falling on the helmet...

Especially since horse riding in the mountains is nowhere close to hospitals.



Since 2019, the guides that I recommend in Song Kul have been supplied by myself and readers (whom I wish to thank) with riding helmets from Decathlon.

10.10 Do I need to take out insurance?

Yes, as with any trip, you need to be insured. Horse riding is a risky activity. Travelling without insurance is stupid and can cost you a lot of money if a problem occurs.

10.11 Where to go on a horse trek in Kyrgyzstan?

You can go horseback riding in different places. The most popular and cheapest places to trek are:

- **Song Kul:** The country's most famous lake, located at 3013m above sea level, is a beautiful

body of water, surrounded by mountains. There are different treks to reach the lake, ranging from 1 to 4 days. All the way long you will find welcoming yurts.

- **Issy Kul** : The second largest alpine lake in the world, after Lake Titicaca. It is a salt lake located at 1600m altitude where you will easily find agencies that will offer you a trek at a correct price.

Here are other places where you can go on beautiful horseback rides:

- **The Sary Chelek National Reserve** will allow you to admire beautiful lakes surrounded by dense forests and nut forests.
- **Alay**, to the south, offers a completely different panorama of glaciers, high rocky mountains and pine-covered gorges. In the distance you can see Mount Lenin (7134 m.)
- **Karakol region** which will allow you to access the Terskey Ala-Too mountain range (up to 5100 m). If you have the riding skills and the appropriate physical condition, you will be able to cross passes at more than 3800 m.
- **Chong Kemin** to the north of Lake Issyk Kul, will give you the opportunity to gallop through pine forests and vast pastures.
- **Arslanbob** also offers an incredible panorama, home to the largest walnut forest in the world. However, you will not be able to sleep in yurts. Here the nomads have settled down and live in huts.

If you have more time and your budget allows it. You can go on [longer hikes](#), travelling through several of these regions.

10.12 How much does it cost to ride a horse?

The rates vary greatly. The more people join the group, the better rates you will find as you will all share the guide's fees.

An English-speaking guide is a little more expensive and a French-speaking guide is even much more expensive.

For longer hikes, prices are negotiable depending on the group and the logistics involved. There are several elements that increase the cost.

Longer treks require more experienced and therefore more expensive guides.



The logistics are greater and include :

-camping gear and
- kitchen equipment (for evenings not spent in yurt

camps)
this equipment is rented

In order to transport this material, depending on the size of the group, you need :

- one or more pack horses.
- one or more horse groomers to manage the horses and the setting up and dismantling of the camps.
- a cook to prepare the various meals and manage the food.

*Some agencies will suggest that a 4*4 joins the camp each evening, with the luggage and a cook. Personally, I find it beats the purpose of free horse trekking with a group and really isn't eco-friendly. Incidentally, it is not less expensive.*

10.13 When is the best time to go horseback riding in Kyrgyzstan?



La meilleure période est **la haute saison qui est de mai à septembre**. Les mois de juillet et août sont les plus chauds. Ce sont aussi les plus touristiques (même si cette notion est encore peu importante).

A Song Kul, tu peux faire des randonnées et dormir dans des yourtes (qui restent spécialement pour les groupes de voyageurs) **toute l'année**. Les conditions sont très spéciales, l'hiver il fait entre -10° et -20°.

The best period is **the high season, which is from May to September**. July and August are the hottest months. They are also the most touristic (although this is not yet a very important concept).

In Song Kul, you can hike and sleep in yurts (which remain especially for travel groups) **all year round**.

During the winter time, the weather conditions are very specific, with temperatures that vary between -10° and -20°C.

10.14 Is a guide necessary and what are the trekking conditions?

Yes, it is essential. You won't find anyone who will rent you a horse without a guide for more than one day. If you are not an experienced rider, I would not recommend it:

The guides know their horses inside out. A horse is a living being, which needs food, rest and care.

The guide knows its needs perfectly.

At night, the Kyrgyz let the horses run free (they bind their forelimbs) so that they can graze and drink. In the morning, they go to collect them. This is a technique that cannot be learned in one day. It requires a perfect knowledge of the mountains and the horses.
I rented a horse for one day from a farmer and went off on my own. I'm a good rider, but I wasn't

completely reassured when I had a natural urge. I didn't want my horse to get away from me and I having to go looking for him alone in this huge mountain.

10.15 Can I buy a horse?

Yes, the best place to buy a horse is the Karakol or Tokmok [Animal Market](#). It is an amazing place where you can buy all sorts of animals.

[A horse](#) trades for \$800 to \$1,200. Beyond the price, if you want to buy a horse, make sure you know how to take care of it.

I repeat: it is a living being for which you become responsible: you must care for it, feed it and water it.



10.16 What about accomodation?

The yurts are large and spacious. Usually the families who host you have one yurt for the travellers and another for
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themselves. **They have warm blankets and basic mattresses.** All travellers sleep in the same yurt. This is a good way to keep warm because of the coolness of the Kyrgyz nights.

10.17 How do you wash and go to the toilet?

You have to manage as best as you can outside of the yurt camps. Within the yurt camps, there is a very basic toilet.

It is a hut, far from the camp, in which a hole is dug in the ground. It is quite elemental.

Some camps have a hut that serves as a shower cabin, with a small supply of cold water. You can also wash up in the icy streams that surround the camps.



The most common option taken among travellers is a simpler one. They just change their clothes and wait until they get back to town to have a proper shower.

10.18 What kind of clothes should I bring?

In summer it is very hot, but at night it is very cold. **Take warm and covering clothes.** The weather can be changeable, so remember to bring rain gear so you don't get caught.

Finally, make sure that your clothes are suitable for riding, to avoid chafing and other pains. It is essential that you wear high shoes or boots so that your stirrups do not hurt your ankles.



10.19 Can I charge my electronic devices?

Yes, if you have an external battery.

The yurt camps have no electricity or only a small solar battery. This is used by nomads to run a light bulb or a satellite phone. You will not be able to charge your

electronic devices. You will have to learn to manage your batteries and use your devices wisely.

10.20 Do you have any guides to recommend?

Yes, if you want to leave with peace of mind, I have two local guides who are also friends of mine, that I can recommend. They are experienced, in love with their country and with horses and I have full confidence in them.

For these reasons, I have sent them hundreds of readers since 2015.

Aigul is a Kyrgyz woman I met during my first stay in the country. Since then we have remained friends and since the creation of the Blog, I have sent her readers every year.



She loves her country and has been riding since she was a child.

Today, she runs a small travel agency. Her experience as a guide allows her to offer horseback riding tours in different parts of the country with local and experienced guides.

I recommend Aigul, to organise [your fabulous trek to Song Kul Lake](#) or to venture into [the more confidential Sary Chelek trek](#).

You can contact her via: aigulkyrgyzstan@gmail.com

Azamat is also a very good friend, I stayed with him in Toktogul. I also had the chance to receive him for a week in France and showed him Paris and Fontainebleau, for his first ever foreign trip.



He is an experienced guide, an excellent rider and speaks fluent French and English. **In 2019, he spent more than 60 days riding with travellers. In July 2021, we got together with my friends Basile and Loïc for a brand new horse trek. Azamat had**

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promised us an unforgettable experience and we can confirm, it was incredible. We are not the only ones, Suzanne, a reader of the blog and her 11 year old daughter, also went with Azamat in August 2021. They loved it.

[Azamat is the ideal guide to organise a hand picked horseback ride for you.](#)

You can contact him via azamatguide@gmail.com

10.21 What is a typical day on the trail?

During a horse trek, you don't ride all day. **The different phases last between 3 and 6 hours depending on the day.** Most of the time you are at a walking pace. A horse cannot gallop for 3 hours straight.

You start your day early in the morning with breakfast in the [yurt](#), or by admiring the sunrise in the middle of the deserted mountain.

Once your belly is full, you help your guide preparing the horses and you set off to ride the mountain. At noon, depending on the day's route, you arrive at your destination camp or you break for lunch. If it is the latter option, you set off again for a maximum of 2 hours horse riding before reaching your day camp.

The camp is a family of traditionnal farmers (5 to 10 people). They welcome tourists in addition to their livestock activity.

It is comparable to staying in a farm in France. Kyrgyz people are open and welcoming but very rarely speak English.

The horses will be able to rest and feed. During this time, you can roam the surrounding nature, take pictures, learn how to take care of the animals, play football with the children and chat with the farmers.

You can also make use of the surrounding waterways and the sun to wash yourself. For dinner, everyone gathers in a yurt and eats traditional dishes while sitting on the floor at a low table. After the meal, your hosts will show you to **your room**. **This is one of the yurts in the camp that you will share for the night with your group.** The farmers will provide you with warm blankets to make sure you have a good night's sleep.



It gets dark very early, but even if you are tired, I encourage you to stay and admire the night sky. The total absence of pollution will allow you to admire the most beautiful starry sky of your entire travelling life.

Last advice, go to the toilet before going to bed. The nights are so cool that it is best not to leave your yurt.

After a good night's sleep, you will wake up ready for a day of horseback riding and scenery viewing.

10.22 What should I pack for a horse trek?

In Kyrgyzstan, even in summer, in the mountains, you can have all four seasons in one day. **Take clothes for all situations.** The weather can be changeable, you need clothes for hot, cold and rainy conditions

Finally, make sure that your clothes are suitable for riding, to avoid chafing and other pains. It is essential that you wear high shoes or boots so that your stirrups do not hurt your ankles.



Health accessories:

During your treks in the Kyrgyz mountains, you will have to drink water from streams. This water is often contaminated by animal waste and must be purified.

The Lifestraw water bottle:

This water bottle with integrated filter allows you to filter up to 1000 litres of water. Then, you only need to change the filter.

Riding accessories :

The riding helmet:

It protects your head in case of a fall. Since I fell on a motorbike in Togo, I have become more concerned about my safety when travelling. Bringing a European standard bomb with you can make a difference in case of an unfortunate fall. Think about it.

The chaps:

I'm not going to recommend a pair of shoes. It's up to you whether you prefer trainers or hiking boots. On the other hand, when riding, you need high shoes. This will protect your instep and ankles from the stirrups. This is also why you need chaps. Every time I rode in jeans and trainers, my legs regretted it. The chaps are not very bulky. They will offer you a very good protection to the lower parts of your legs, whatever your shoes are.

Riding trousers:

These are the most suitable trousers for horseback riding, especially if you are a beginner. It avoids all the chafing pains and allows you to spend much more pleasant evenings.

I have done several treks in jeans and even if I am not a beginner, it is not an experience I would repeat. Here is the women's version.

If you prefer a looser fitting and a more casual look to seem less touristy in front of your future nomadic friends.

These riding jeans with padding and stitching are ideal
[See on amazon](#)

Camping accessories:

Wipes:

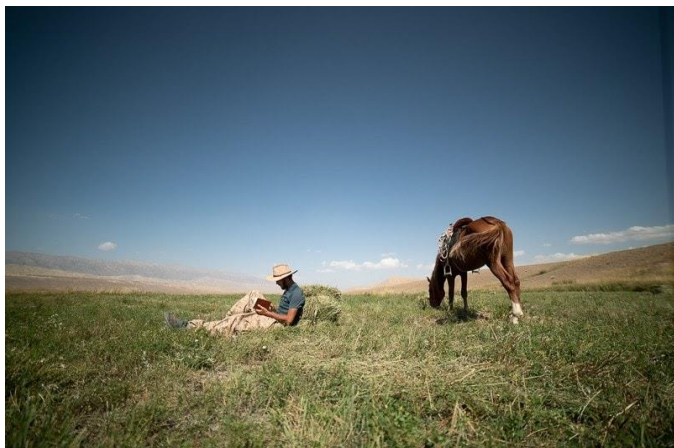
This is the only item in this guide that I am not keen on using, but that's just my personal opinion. Many travellers use them and are very happy with them. When you come to think about it, it's not at all environmentally friendly, nor financially interesting. Do as you wish, personally I manage without and wash in the streams.



11 Do you have any feedback from people who have travelled alone on horseback?

Yes, Florent who is a member of the [Kyrgyzstan travel](#) group. I met him when preparing his Kyrgyz adventure: the lonesome crossing of the country on

horseback. Florent is an experienced adventurer, he has already crossed the Gobi desert with a camel and spent more than 6 months riding solo in [Mongolia](#).



He shares his travels by making films of his adventures for television and is currently preparing a new, even more extreme adventure! We talked before, during and after his adventure and this is how the idea of this interview was born, in which **he tells us about his journey on horseback.**

11.1 Hi Florent, can you introduce yourself?

Hi, my name is Florent, I'm 33 years old and I've been travelling the world for 3 years with my camera. I make movies orientated on adventure and the discovery of different cultures around the world. I travel in an extreme manner, I have crossed North America on fret trains, the Yukon in a canoe, lived alone in the wilderness in Alaska ...

11.2 Why did you choose Kyrgyzstan to travel solo on horseback?

Four months ago I had just returned from a long 2 year trip. I was working on my next adventure which should last 4 years, it includes many climbs in very high altitude as well as crossing countries with horses. A friend of mine was looking for a partner to climb [Peak Lenin](#) (7,138m).



I was looking for a place where I could link a long trip on horseback with a very high-altitude climb. The country was perfect for both.

11.3 You have already travelled on horseback in Mongolia, how was this trip to Kyrgyzstan different?

In Mongolia I started by crossing the [Gobi desert](#) with a camel (I had bought two, but I lost the first one on the second day...). It was my first experience of travelling with animals and I was well served. It is not rare to walk several

days without meeting a single person, the horizon is flat like an ocean, we are really far from the landscapes of [Kyrgyzstan](#).

Then after a month's crossing I went to the Oregon Valley where I bought two horses (I was going deep into the mountains to spend the winter in total autonomy for 5 months) so I needed two horses. The big difference here is that it was more of a philosophical retreat. I had just travelled for 2 years and I was going to stay in my teepee by a lake all winter with extreme temperatures of -30 to -40c°...

11.4 What level of riding do you need to try this adventure?

In Mongolia I had no riding experience. I think the **biggest difficulty is in the strength of mind when you travel alone**. Then it is better to read several books on the subject beforehand which will allow you to learn a few things.

Riding a horse is not complicated, but you have to take into account that travelling with animals is totally different from any other trip. **You have many constraints, as well as a great responsibility towards your horse. Whatever happens, it has to come first. You have to accept this even before you leave, because it has a huge impact on your trip.**



11.5 How did you manage to buy your horse and what price did you pay for it?

In Mongolia I bought my camels and horses directly. There is no real animal market like in Kyrgyzstan. The sell happens with the nomads. In Kyrgyzstan I bought Saphir with the help of a local (I had given him a little financial contribution). Not only does it allow me to buy the horse at the real price, but for someone like me with no experience in this field, it helps to acquire a horse of good quality.

The price of the horse was 67,000 sum. Add an extra 4 000 sum for the equipment. I sold Saphir at the end of the trip for 58 000 sum ...

11.6 How did you manage to feed and water Saphir on a daily basis?

Unlike the Gobi desert, which you can't cross on horseback. Access to water in Kyrgyzstan is not a problem. I regularly found on the road spring water or a river to quench Saphir.

For the food it was a bit more complicated, where it takes a few minutes for your horse to fill up with water, he will have to graze on average 12 hours a day ... You have to be mindful of where you stop. To keep it simple, I tied him up with a 15-metre rope and an ice axe. He had plenty of room to graze all night. At high altitudes or in arid places, there was not much grass. Saphir lost a lot of weight in one month.

Observation was key to notice any health issues. After a few days, you realise if your horse is tired, stressed by this or that situation and you have to adapt. I also sometimes asked the locals if Saphir was in good health... But widely speaking we did not encounter any major problems.



11.7 What did you check on your horse each day before departure?

Once again, my experience as a rider is limited, which is why I don't feel legitimate to advise people on this subject... But logically, we do a small check around the

horse to see if everything is normal before setting off. Then, it's once you're on the move that you can tell if your horse is having a good day or not...

The locals are very curious, especially if you have a horse. They will come and look at it, sometimes they offer to buy it ... so they don't hesitate to tell you if they see a little problem on your horse, in the mountains in Kyrgyzstan everybody has a horse, everybody is a bit of a vet...



11.8 What was your typical day like?

As in any outdoor adventure, your days are punctuated by the sun... In the morning, wake up at 6 am for an 8 am departure. Depending on the terrain, **we cover 20 to 40 km per day**. At lunchtime the most important thing is to find a place with good grass for Saphir (so he can eat for 1 or 2 hours). On average we walked 8 hours a day.

In the evening we have to find an ideal place for Saphir (the quality of the tent site is secondary...). **In normal circumstances, the night represents up to 50% of the**

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time that the horses eat. For Saphir it was more like 80% as he walked all day... Under no condition could we stop in a place totally devoided of grass. **The days are therefore punctuated by walking and by looking for nice places where your horse can rest and feed.** We gave ourselves a rest day every 6 days or so.

11.9 What route did you take? How did you find your way?

I bought Sapphire at the animal market on Ozgon. Then someone drove us to Kara Kulja by van (I didn't want to leave Ozgon with the stress of walking through an urban area). **My first goal was the [Chatyr Kul](#) lake**, but I was not sure if I could pass the Shilbili Ashuu pass. Some of the locals told me it was impossible, others the opposite...

In the end, after 4 days of walking there were no more tracks, **it was becoming too dangerous, and finally Saphir stopped moving.** We had to make a 5 day detour to the Chaar-Tash Ashuu pass further north. This part of the trek was really cool, as people were not used to seeing tourists. **I was the first tourist they saw on horseback.** So I was regularly invited to have tea, a meal or spend the night in the tents or yurts of the shepherds.

Instead of the lake Chatyr Kul I changed direction towards the lake [Son Kul](#) more to the north, then towards Narin. From there we walked to the Tong Ashuu pass which is over 4,000 meters high and reached the Issyk-Kul lake. Then we walked along side the lake to Tosor (Saphir was quite tired) and stopped 3 days from Karakol.

The first part of the trek was not referenced on Maps.me (which I use in all my trips), so I used traditional maps, and the help of the locals ... Then from the Son Kul lake we arrive in more touristic areas, and therefore all the treks are referenced on maps.me and on traditional maps ...

11.10 Has the horse changed your relationship with the locals?

I was quite surprised when the locals told me that they had never or very rarely seen tourists travelling alone on horseback. So they were really curious, they wanted to know where I had started from, where I was going... People are very connected with their horses that's why they really respected the fact that I was travelling through their country, alone on horseback. They really wanted to invite me to have tea, to eat and to stay with them for the night.



Many people were also interested in Saphir. He was a beautiful horse and people were coming to see him and try to buy him off me, so bonds are easily created. **Definitely if you want to meet the locals without experiencing the money-tourist relationship they might have, travel alone on horseback, you will make many friends for sure...**

11.11 What are the risks of travelling on horseback alone? How can you avoid them?

The main risk is the unfortunate fall, you can't avoid it, but you can reduce the consequences ... That's why I carry at all times (in a small backpack and not on the horse) a satellite phone and enough to survive 48 hours. **The first few days I also take time to get to know my horse (how he behaves when a car approaches, a dog, other animals).** It is also important to start in a sparsely populated area, in order to reduce as much as possible the stress of populated areas.

There are not so many other risks, but one has to accept the hazards of a long journey on horseback. I changed my route several times. Once I was forced to take a 5-day diversions because it was impossible to cross a pass with my horse. **In the end I decided to stop the walk 3 days before Karakol, because I felt that Saphir was too tired.**

11.12 Finally, Florent, can you share with us your most beautiful memory?



The beauty of a trip lies in its globality and cannot be reduced to a few instagrammable moments or places. Crossing a country on horseback is far from being a peaceful journey, you often have to walk for several days to reach a particular place, pass through gaps in the rain, go without food, not to mention the difficulties, risks and responsibilities inherent in travelling on horseback... It is once you have overcome the pain, the fatigue, the doubts, that you begin to appreciate the beauty of such an adventure. The encounters are then magnified by their authenticity, the mountains, meadows, lakes, reveal to you in their greatness their true beauty...

11.13 Conclusion

Thank you Florent, for this fascinating exchange. I have my program for my next trip to Kyrgyzstan. I wish you all the best in your projects and I'm looking forward to their release on video. You can find Florent on his instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/florentdefay/>

12 Do you have any tips for renting a reliable car ?

You are planning your trip to **Central Asia** and you want to **rent a 4x4 or a motorbike**. You are wondering who to rent your car from? Where to find a good rental agency? This guide is for you!

A road trip to Central Asia requires **good preparation**, the state of the roads, the terrain, the climate and the lack of offer require that **you organize the rental of your car in advance**.

In the summer, **supply is lower than demand**. This year, the phenomenon has been amplified by **COVID**, which had most rental companies selling off their cars. Booking your car in advance will ensure that you get a fair price and won't waste time there.



If you are travelling to several countries, you need a rental company that provides car papers and insurance that will allow the vehicles to [cross borders](#).

12.1 What documents are needed?

Don't forget your international driving licence. **It is free and valid for 3 years.**

Ask the rental companies in which countries your vehicle can be driven. **Many rental companies do not have the necessary permissions and insurances to allow their vehicles to cross borders.**

12.2 Do I need insurance?

Yes, check with your car insurance and your credit card insurance. They can add up to the guarantees offered by the rental company's insurance.

The rental companies I recommend have insurance, but **bank cards in particular can sometimes offer very interesting additional guarantees.** In any case, ask your rental company what insurance guarantees it offers.

12.3 What should I ask my rental company before choosing my car?

- Ask him which side the steering wheel is on. In Central Asia we drive on the right side, but it **is not uncommon for vehicles to be imported with the steering wheel on the right.**
- Be sure to check the mileage package. **If the mileage is not unlimited, be sure to ask for the price of the extra kilometre.** If the package is 300 km per day, you should not have to pay extra, as you will not be driving that many km per day.

- Ask your rental company about the equipment they provide. If you want to do some crossing, in the mountains trees are rare, a winch is useless. Ask if it's possible to get **traction straps, windscreen plates and a shovel** which are very useful if you get stuck.

12.4 What to do once you have rented the car?

Make a complete inventory of your vehicle, inside and out.

Make **a note of all the dents, scratches and cigarette holes and don't hesitate to take photos to prove your good faith in case of disagreement with the rental company.** You can send your photos by whatsapp to the rental company to have a proof of the date you took the photos.

Don't pick your car up at the airport, it's always more expensive. But at the same time it sure is more convenient, so **it's up to you 😊**.

12.5 What are the rules of the road specificities?

In Kyrgyzstan, outside of the cities, **you have to drive with your headlights on.**

Also, unlike in France, priority is to those entering the roundabouts.

12.6 What is the price of petrol in Central Asia?

The good news is that petrol in Central Asia is cheaper than in Europe.

Kazakhstan is a major oil-producing country, which allows it to have one of the cheapest petrol prices in the world:				
	€0.39	per	litre.	
In	Uzbekistan:	€0.45	per	litre.

In Kyrgyzstan:	€0.57	per	litre.
In Tajikistan: €0.73 per litre			

12.7 What are the speed limits?

In Central Asia speed limits are very simple:

- 60 km/h in the city.
- 90 km/h outside of the cities.
- 110 km/h on motorways.

12.8 What are the rules regarding drink driving levels?

Alcohol is not tolerated while driving, do not drink and drive.

12.9 How do I find my way?

Use Google Maps, Maps.me and Soviet Military Maps on your phone to find your way around. To be sure they work properly, buy a local sim card. If you prefer traditional paper maps, the most accurate ones can be bought on

<https://nostromoweb.fr/en/maps-tourism/>

12.10 Who to rent a 4×4 from in Kyrgyzstan?

In Kyrgyzstan, I can recommend several of my friends who have rental agencies:

In Bishkek:

[Azamat](mailto:azamatguide@gmail.com), (azamatguide@gmail.com) is a friend who offers cars at very cheap prices. His rates start at **\$45 per day**, and he offers a **5% discount to all blog readers**.

[Aigul](mailto:aigulkyrgyzstan@gmail.com), (aigulkyrgyzstan@gmail.com) is a friend of ours who offers a small fleet of vehicles at reasonable prices. **Her vehicles can be driven in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan.**

In Osh?

[Oibek \(oibektours@gmail.com\)](mailto:oibektours@gmail.com) is a good friend. He is the guy to go to in Central Asia for all **car and motorbike** rentals. He offers a wide range of recent and robust cars and motorbikes perfectly suited for **travelling in Pamir**. He has incredible experience and knowledge of all the countries in Central Asia. He is a fascinating guy with a lot to say.

It is the only rental company I know whose vehicles can be driven in Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. On top of that, thanks to his network, he is able to assist you in case of problems in any of these countries.

12.11 Who to rent a car from in Kazakhstan?

In [Kazakhstan](#), you will find several agencies like Europcar or Hertz that rent good city cars. For travelling throughout the country, **I recommend Topcar**. It is an agency in Almaty that a reader told me about. Since then, several other readers have recommended it to me. I have only good feedback and their prices are very fair. Unfortunately their vehicles cannot leave the country. **rental companies in Kyrgyzstan are the only ones I know of which rental vehicles can cross borders.**

12.12 Who to rent a 4×4 from in Tajikistan?

You will have a hard time finding a car without a driver in Tajikistan.

If you want to travel through the Pamir, it is best to rent a car from Oibek. Osh is the ideal place to start your journey through the Pamir. If you are not going through Osh, Oibek can drop you off in any city in Tajikistan.

12.13 Who to rent a car from in Uzbekistan?

I sometimes read that it is impossible to rent a car without a driver in Uzbekistan. This is not true, it is possible and easy. I don't have any contact in the country, but I have several very good feedbacks from the readers of the blog. **I recommend you rent a car from Autoprokat** which offers a nice range of vehicles that unfortunately can't leave the country.

If you prefer to buy your own car, I advise you to take an old Lada, as I did.

13 Do you have any feedback from people who have travelling by bike?

Since the creation of the [Kyrgyzstan travel](#) group, I have met and discussed with many different people. **Marie is one of them. Adding to the fact that she travelled to a country I particularly like, she actually did it by bike.**

Those who know me know that I am passionate about cycling. A bicycle race brings together the emotions of a lifetime, pain, happiness, suspense, disappointment, surprise and joy. **I have a huge admiration for travellers on bikes.**



It is quite naturally that I followed Marie's trip with great interest. When she came back, I asked her to write an **article about a cycling trip in Kyrgyzstan**. She did me the honour of accepting and we had fun doing this Q&A (an interview 😊)

13.1 Hi Marie, thank you for agreeing to share your cycling experience in Kyrgyzstan. First of all, can you introduce yourself?



Marie, 52 years old, ex-triathlete (a shoulder injury-falling off my bike now prevents me from swimming) and musician. I love cycling (I ride my bike all year round by road and mountain bike, and also I ride a bike to work) **I love to travel, and I love cycling. I usually go 4 times a year, I make the most of the holidays (except for Christmas) to ride my bike.** In the summer, I usually leave for 7 to 8 weeks in a row. 3200 km last year in

Iceland, 2700 km this summer between Dushambé and Bishkek.

13.2 Why do you travel by bike?

For me, this is the ideal mode of transportation. The perfect pace to discover: the possibility to talk, to meet people (much more than by car) , the pleasure added, less pollution than by car (even though the carbon footprint of a return trip by plane is far from negligible 😞)



13.3 Who do you think cycling is for?

For everyone! You can ride 100 km a day (often it can be complicated with a loaded bike on the bad and uneven tracks of Central Asia 😊) and camp in the middle of nowhere. You can also ride 20 km a day and sleep in homestays or with the locals. Everyone travels according to his desires and capabilities.



13.4 Why do you travel alone?

I like to travel alone. **For me, it's absolute freedom, you go where you want, you stop when you want, you eat what you want.** I'm happy to exchange a few words or even a few kilometres with cyclists when I meet them, but that's as far as it goes. I like camping alone in nature, I like riding alone, I never suffer from loneliness.

Maybe one day I'll be able to get my husband to join me, but I know it will be a different journey. And that I will still be continuing on my own.

13.5 Why did you choose Kyrgyzstan to travel by bike?

For many reasons, but above all because the Silk Road and the Pamir Highway are classics for cycling travellers . After having suffered quite a bit from the cold last year in Iceland **I was looking for a less icy destination (I**

brought back some very nice blue frostbites from there 😊
)

13.6 Where have you travelled before?

Especially Scotland, Iceland, England, France and, of course, Italy.

13.7 How is Kyrgyzstan different?

I had never really left Europe on a bike (even though I had done triathlons in the USA). , Central Asia is really another world. **There is a lot of difference in altitude** (even if in Iceland and Scotland you also climb a lot), you have to deal with the altitude, the change of food, the language.

13.8 Have you had any specific training?

Not at all. I cycle a lot all year round (9500 km on my bike last year, during trips, but also for daily commuting as well as for pleasure) , I am undertaking specific training all year round 😊

13.9 What insurance?

I had asked my agency, thinking that they would arrange a special policy for me to take out. **But in fact I was covered by the family car insurance ([Mondial Assistance](#))** for stays of less than 3 months. That said, when I think about it, I was only covered for myself and not for transport. With hindsight, this was perhaps a little risky. If I had to repatriate the bike, it wasn't covered. One day, suffering from a strong dose of tourista, I accepted to take a lift with a truck. So I travelled 90 km with a calf on the plateau of a cattle truck... without been covered by insurance.

I recommend this article, by Georges-Michel, which explains the coverage offered by [bank card insurance](#).



13.10 Did you have any vaccinations before you left?

I had done all the recommended vaccines except hepatitis B (I hadn't time in the vaccination calendar, I'll do it next time).

So the compulsory vaccines in France: MMR, DT polio (updated) plus rabies, typhoid, hepatitis A.

13.11 What documents did you have with you?

Passport, vaccination card, I had also taken passport photos in advance for the border permits (which finally, due to lack of time, I didn't ask for) and two copies of my passport (in Tajikistan I was asked for one which I had to leave with an officer at a police checkpoint).

13.12 What maps do you use to find your way around Kyrgyzstan?

So that's a bit of a grey area. I had the [Gizi map](#) as a paper map but it was just useful as an overview and for the main

routes. The scale is way too big, there is no precision, some tracks indicated cannot be found, others are not on the map...

Finally, [OpenStreetMap](#) (participatory digital mapping) was the most useful to me. I use the [Locus Map](#) app which allows me to make my tracks, to import them (very practical!) and which manages the difference in altitude (I can graphically visualize the routes, which is very useful when cycling!) Therefore it was mainly via my telephone that I travelled, even though I always took a look at the paper map to get an overall view.

13.13 What kind of equipment did you bring on this trip?

Multi-purpose clothing (it can be cold at high altitudes and very hot on the plains). I also had waterproof clothes, you can do without them... even if we are happy to have them when it starts to rain.

A good tent, a good sleeping bag, water filtering equipment (although I was only filtering river water, not the spring water, nor the water from wells, nor the water from the pumps in the villages), it's nothing special. except that you have to carry everything, you have to compromise between the bulky and the light equipment.

For the stove I had opted for a petrol stove (you can find them anywhere) but I also had a mini gas stove (70g) as a backup. **The petrol smelling bottle of fuel does not necessarily pass easily at the airport. Cooking with gas during the last week allowed the smell to evaporate.**



13.14 Which bike did you use for this trip (type of bike, development, wheels, tyres)?

For the first time I had a real travel bike that I had just bought for myself (made by François Coponet of Cycles Itinérances (<http://cycles-itinerances.fr/>), a framer who lives in Mousson in the East of France) with 27.5 inch wheels.

Before I used to ride my old 26" mountain bike. With a loaded bike you should plan a mountain bike development. It's a lot of climbing anyways, and the roads are mostly rough tracks.

Choose reinforced tyres! The roadsides are littered with pieces of vodka bottles thrown from the cars 😞 For my part, I chose Schwalbe world marathon. Only one puncture (a piece of cable that managed to break through).



I had cable disc brakes and a rollhoff hub, very comfortable for this kind of trip (you can shift gears when you are standing still), but before that I used to ride hydraulic brakes and classical derailleurs.

13.15 I saw on your pictures that you don't have automatic pedals: why?

Because it's not versatile enough. With trail shoes I can ride and walk comfortably. Sometimes, it happens that you have to push the bike for a long time. You can also choose to put it down and go for a walk in the mountains. I had a pair of sandals to wade rivers (and to ventilate my feet when it was very hot) and a pair of trail shoes. that covered all situations.



13.16 What accessories did you have on your bike?

A hiking stick with a coloured ribbon stretched across the back panniers to keep cars out of the way! (I also use it as a kickstand by blocking the brakes with velcro).

Kyrgyz road driving is quite deplorable. They have no notion of safe distances for overtaking bicycles (they are much more comfortable overtaking [horses](#)). Keeping vehicles at a distance is also a matter of safety ...

A mirror is great too, unfortunately I had broken mine at the start of the trip. The bell was only ever used to amuse the kids.

I also had a hub dynamo so I could charge my phone, my booklamp , my UV virus filter and my electric lamps (I recharged thanks to the very reliable USB2BYK made by a small French company (<http://www.eurecart.fr/>)

That said, in Iceland the hub dynamo provided most of the electrical production (one phone charge per day) and the solar panel was anecdotal. Whereas in Kyrgyzstan the very present sun was almost entirely sufficient to recharge everything.

13.17 How did you maintain your bike?

I didn't do anything in particular.

Clean and oil the chain from time to time, adjust the brakes when the cables relax. Adapting tyre pressure to the track (deflate a bit when the track is really bad in order to cushion)

13.18 What equipment did you take with you to maintain and repair your bike during your trip?

I really like to be independent and to be able to repair as many things as possible myself. So I have quite a large tool kit.



- Pump with pressure gauge
- Puncture repair material (dissolve, patch, scraper)
- Small clamp
- Very complete multi-tool with chain drift, torx spanner, all spanners
- Allen key, screwdriver, pedal lifter, various spanners, spoke wrench....
- Spare spokes for two-wheelers
- 1 spare tyre (since Iceland where I blew 3 rear tyres I'm a bit traumatized with tyres)
- Brake cables x2
- Derailleur cables x2
- Spare pads x3 pairs (one spare + one spare)
- Rilsans
- Twine
- Two small pieces of road tyres that can be used as a patch if the tyre tears (some people sew the tyres back on, one day I'll have to try).
- Spare meter battery

- A few pieces of wire and heat-shrink tubing (in case I rip the wire off the dynamo hub)
- Some chain links.
- 3 very strong tyre changers (one steel, two aluminium)
- Replacement screws for luggage racks and panniers
- Very strong black tape (useful for everything... repairing the tent, the bags, the saddle, the bike...)
- An inner tube
- Vaseline oil (but cooking oil is fine)
- (when I was riding a mountain bike I also had some brake fluid, a derailleur hanger and a small tool to remove the cassette)

13.19 What do you recommend checking on a bike each day before setting off?

In Iceland, I checked several times a day that the tyres were not torn, but in **Kyrgyzstan I was much cooler**. The screws on the panniers like to take their independence... every 3 or 4 days, it's really useful to check that they haven't (I did lose two pannier screws though).

Remember to clean and grease the chain from time to time, as dust is omnipresent, it likes to stick to the links.

13.20 Any other accessories?

A basin for washing (be careful to dispose of the soapy water away from rivers, soap is perfectly biodegradable but not in the water! Discharged directly into rivers without being filtered by the soil, is deadly for aquatic organisms).

Olive oil for cooking (grocery shops don't offer much choice and you quickly get fed up of Chinese noodles. Olive oil helps in a great way to properly cook peppers, onions, courgettes, apples lentils over the long term, it

saves your appetite); mosquito repellent (in order to survive Lake Issik Kul!)

13.21 What was your itinerary in Kyrgyzstan?

Quite random. I arrived in Sary Tash (from the Pamir) with the idea of going to Sary Moghul and then to Osh to get a border permit to be able to go to the regions close to China and finally I ended up doing none of it.

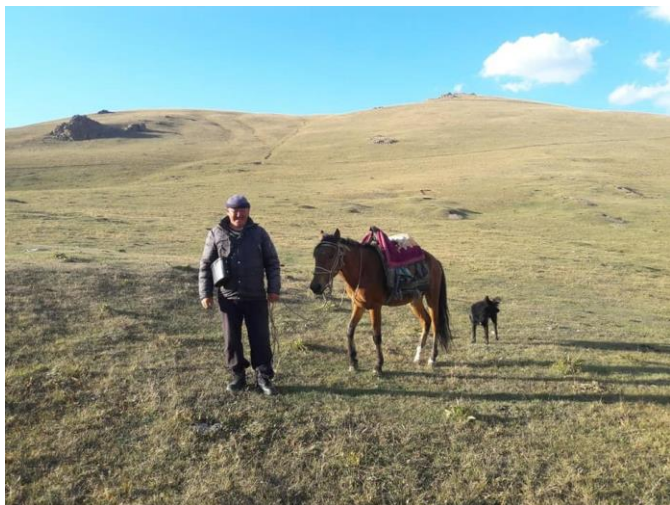
I kind of travelled day by day looking at the map. The only real route I followed without being able to do otherwise was the one between Jalal Abad and Naryn. I left it to go up to [Song Kul](#)... then I had no idea where to go.

It's actually quite complicated to plan. Some of the tracks are so bad that you go up the passes pushing all the time, **and no point in saying you'll make up for it on the way down: I've ridden down passes without ever exceeding 8 km/h. One day, I "travelled" all day only to do 30 km, and with mud all the way up to my hub.**

I have also on some occasions followed the trail of the Silk Road Mountain race. It was beautiful, some trails are much faster than some roads (the Kazarman road is terrible in certain places for a bike - rocks, corrugated iron ...) and I took routes to avoid "highways" as much as possible (the expressway between Balykchy and Bishkek) which I finally stayed on because there was not much traffic, and it was quite pleasant to keep on moving forward.

I didn't want to do EVERYTHING over a given time, I hate bucket lists. I prefer to go where I want, to enjoy a place I like, to leave another one that I only half like without having finished visiting.

Of course I missed a lot of stuff, but I took the time to go to the remote places that I adored. When I left I saw some very beautiful and tempting mountains... no big deal, I'll be back 😊



13.22 What was your budget for this trip?

It depends a lot on each person, but everything there is very cheap for us. Except in Bishkek where I stayed at the [Tunduk Hotel](#) (I recommend it: it was great!), I always slept in a tent for free. **For food from time to time (when I could find it) I ate in a restaurant at lunchtime (between 200 soms and 400 soms).** Otherwise, I shopped in grocery shops, in bazaars along the way.

Kyrgyz people are very nice. They offered me tea all along the road, gave me fruits and also nans. They

also invited me to sleep over (I always refused, I prefer to sleep far away from everything in nature).

13.23 Do you think there are any particular risks associated with travelling in this part of the world?

I did not find that there were risks inherent to Central Asia. Well, it's true, I have suffered quite a bit from turista and once from food poisoning but I didn't take many precautions. And apart from the food poisoning it didn't spoil the trip for me. I was happy to be vaccinated to avoid the most serious problems (I just read about a traveller who got typhoid).

Of course, you can use micropur pellets (if you can stand it, which I can't) or filter all the water (but you have to do it twice: once with a classic filter and then with a UV filter to eliminate the viruses that conventional filters let through). But it takes time and I was not at all sure that my discomforts came from the water. **Honestly, next time I'll do the same thing and too bad for the turista.**

Traffic when you're a cyclist can be complicated. I have to admit that in the South, the M41 gave me cold sweats. In Bishkek I ended up limiting myself because it was so unpleasant to ride.

Otherwise, the main problem for me was the dogs. They are not bad at all, but they are never tied up. They have an instinct to chase bikes. You ABSOLUTELY have to stop immediately and tell them to get out of the way VERY FIRMLY if they are aggressive (most of the time they are adorable).

Normally this is enough. I was once annoyed to cross a farm and the owner (whom they did not obey to) threw stones at them to keep them away. As a result I kept two

pebbles handy to do the same (you don't aim at the dog, you aim in front of them). In the end I never used them.

I've only had big problems on the big roads, when you are going too fast to check things on the side road or to suddenly stop. Sometimes you drive slowly and they come out of nowhere. On the 4 lane road from Balkychy to Bishkek, in the middle of a descent, , I heard a huge bark behind me, a huge German shepherd was tailing me!

I yelled "GET OUT!!!!" and he stopped dead in his tracks. I couldn't picture myself stopping or aiming at him with my rocks at 50km/h.



13.24 Do you have any additional advice for readers?

It is very easy to hitchhike even by bicycle. I never hitchhiked and at every pass, at every bad weather condition, trucks and even cars would stop to offer me a lift. Taxis take bikes and even mashrutkas would offer me a ride!. (where do they put the bike? I don't know, but ever

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since I saw a car driving by with two live sheep tied up to the roof I don't doubt their creativity anymore 😊)

Various travel guides that I have read, strongly assert that women, should be veiled in the villages and not to wear shorts. **I wonder if we have travelled through the same country...** Many Kyrgyz women are not veiled, and I have seen young girls in shorts in some villages. For me it was short sleeves and legs on my bike all along the trip (as soon as it was hot) I never felt the slightest discomfort. It is rather in town, when I visited that I wore a skirt, because there I was a tourist and not a cyclist.

And I almost forgot, the most important thing to prepare the trip is to read [the complete guide to travel in Kyrgyzstan](#) by Georges-Michel.

Thanks Marie, for this great interview. It's really nice. I wish you many new cycling adventures and I can't wait to follow them! I invite you to follow Marie on her blog of [tricks for your bike](#).

14 Conclusion

I hope you had as much fun reading this guide as I had writing it.

I wish you a very good trip, looking forward to meeting you on the road and sharing a bit of the journey together.

Now I let you live your adventure, meet people and tell me about them. Do not hesitate to use the blank pages at the end to take some notes.

One last thing, if you have liked this guide, leave a comment on Amazon, and share your opinion with other travelers.

Don't hesitate to give this book away, lend it, leave it in a book box. A book only lives through the eyes of those who read it!!!

15 English/ Kirghiz phrasebook

English	Kirghiz	Transcription
Politness		
Hello	Салам	Salam?
Nice to meet you	Таанышканыма ыраазымын	Taanyshkanyma yraazymyn
How are you?	Кандайсыз?	Kandaysyz?
Fine, thanks, and you?	Абдан жакшы, рахмат. А сизчи?	Abdan jakshy, rakhmat. A sizchi?
My name is	Менин атым	Menin atym
What is your name?	Атыңыз ким?	Atynyz kim?
Welcome	Кош келдиңиз	Kosh keldiniz
Do you speak english?	Сиз англисче сүйлөй алысызбы?	Siz anglisçe suiloй alasyzby?
How do you say in kyrgyz?	Кыргыз тилинде, кантип ... дешет? по дешет, *айтылат?	Kyrgyz tilinde, kantip... deshet? deshet-aitylat ?

I understand / I don't understand	Түшүндүм / түшүнгөн жокмун	Tushundum/ tushungon jokmun
Yes / No	Ооба/ Жок	Ooba/ jok
I am happy to meet you	Таанышканыма абдан кубанычтамын!	Taanyshkanyma abdan kybanychtamyn!
You are really funny	Сиз абдан кулкумуштуу экенсиз	Siz abdan kulkumushtuu ekensiz
You are awesome	Азаматсыз	Azamatsyz
You are very beautiful	Абдан сулуусуз	Abdan suluusuz
Which city are you from?	Кайсы шаардан болосуз?	Kaisy shaardan bolosuz?
What is your phone number?	Телефон номерин/из кандай?	Telefon nomerin/nomeriniz kandai?
My phone doesn't work	Менин телефонум бузулуп калды	Menin telefonum buzulup kaldy
What did you do today?	Бүгүн эмне кылдыңыз?	Bugun emne kyldynyz?
What do you want to do	Эртен эмне кылгыңыз	Erten emne kylgynyz kelip jatat?

tomorrow?	Келип жатат?	
What did you do yesterday?	Кечээ эмне кылдыңыз?	Kechee emne kyldynyz?
It's my birthday	Менин туулган кунум	Menin tuulgan kunum
Happy birthday	Туулган кунунуз менен!	Tuulgan kununuz menen!
Have a nice week end	Дем алып кунунуз жакшы отсун	Dem alysh kununuz jakshy otsun
Goodbye	Саламатта калыңыз	Salamatta kalynyz
Have a good day !	Күнүңүз жакшы улансын !	Kunun'uz jakshy ulansyn!
Do you have wifi? What's the password?	сизде wifi барбы? Пароль кандай?	sizde wifi barby? Parol kanday?
Can you take a picture of me please?	сураныч, мени сүрөткө тартып аласыңбы? аласыңбы - койосуңбу?	suranıç, meni sürötkö tartıp alasıñby? alasinbi-koiosunbu ?
I'm here for vacation / work	Мен эс алуудамын . саякаттамын	Men es aluudamyn/ sayakattamyn
I'm here for	Мен бул жерде	Men bul jerde ish

work / business	иш боюнча / бизнес боюнча	boyuncha/ bizness boyuncha
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To eat		
I'm hungry / I'm thirsty	Мен ачкамын, мен суусап атам	Men achkamyn/ men suusap atam
Bon appétit	Тамагынар таттуу болсун	Tamagynar tattuu bolsun!
Cheers	Ден соолук!	Den sooluk
It was very good	Абдан даамдуу экен!	Abdan daamduu eken!
What do you recommend?	Эмне кенеш бере аласыз?	Emne ken;esh bere alasyz?
I'm a vegetarian	Мен вегетарианмын	Men vegetarianmyn
The menu please	Меню бересизби?	Menu beresizbi?
What do you recommend?	Эмнени сунуштайсыз	Emneni sunushtaisyz?
What do you want to drink ?	Сиз эмне ичкиниз келип жатат?	Siz emne ichkiniz kelip jatat?
I would like to drink water	Мен суу ичким келип жатат	Men suu ichkim kelip jatat
Do you like to	Вино	Vino ichesizbi?

drink wine?	ичесизби?	
A tea please	Чай берип коюнузчу	Chai berip kounuzchu
I would like a tea	Мен чай ичем	Men chai ichem
Do you like to drink tea?	Сиз чай ичкенди жакшы коросузбу?	Siz chai ichkendi jakshy korosuzbu?
Do you prefer to drink tea or water?	Сизге чай ичкенби жагабы же суу ичкениби?	Sizge chai ichken jagaby je suu ichkenibi?
I'm not thirsty	Мен суусаган жокмун	Men suusagan jokmun
What do you want to eat?	Эмне жегиниз келип жатат?	Emne jeginiz kelip jatat?
Have you eaten enough?	Курсагыңыз тойдубу?	Kursagıñız toydubu?
I am very hungry	Мен абдан ачка болдум	Men abdan achka boldum
I want to eat	Мен тамактангым келип жатат	Men tamaktangym kelip jatat
I would like to eat a plov	Мен плов жегим келип жатат	Men plov jegim kelip jatat

I am not hungry	Менин курсагым ток/ ачка болгон жокмун	Menin kursagym tok/achka bolgom jokmun
The bill please	Эсепти берип коесузбу?	Esepti berip koesuzbu?

Food		
Egg	жумуртка	jumurtka
Bread	нан	nan
Butter	май	may
Cream	каймак	kaymak
Rice	күрүч	kürüç
Meat	эт	Et
Fish	балык	Balık
Tomato	помидор	Pomidor
Potato	картошка	Kartoşka
Carrot	сабиз	Sabiz
Cucumber	бадыраң	Badırañ
Cabbage	капуста	kapusta
Onion	пияз	piyaz
Jam	варенье	varene

Honey	бал	bal
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Drinks		
Beer	Сыра	Sıra
Tea	Чай	Çay
Coffee	Кофе	Kofé
Vodka	Арак	Arak
Water	Суу	Suu
Milk	Сүт	Süt

With your guide		
I would like to change euros into soms	Мен евроны сомго алмаштырамын	Men evronu somgo almashtyramyn
Do you accept euros?	Сиз евро кабыл аласызбы?	Siz evro kabil alasızby?
Where can I exchange money?	Акчаны кайда алмаштырсам болот?	Akçanı kayda almaştırsam bolot?
Where can I get the money?	Акчаны кайдан алсам болот?	Akçanı kaydan alsam bolot?
What weather	Бугун аба	Bugun aba yrayi

is it today?	ырайы кандай?	kandai?
Is it going to rain today?	Бугун жаан жаайбы?	Bugun jaan jaaiby?
Today it is very hot	Бугун аба ырайы абдан ысык	Bugun aba yrayi abdan ysyk
What is it?	Бул эмне?	Bul emne?
Who is it ?	Бул ким?	Bul kim?
Who is the owner of this horse?	Бул аттын ээси ким?	Bul attyn eesi kim?
Let's rest 10 minutes	10 Мунот эс алалы	10 munot es alaly
Where we camp?	Кайсыл жерге жайгашабыз?	Kaisyl jerge jaigashabyz?
Let's sleep here	Бул жерге уктайлы	Bul jerge uktaily
Walk slower please	Сураныч жайыраак басалы	Suranych, jayiraak basaly
What do you think?	Кандай деп ойлойсун/сүз?	Kandai dep oiloisun/oiloisunuz
Do you agree?	Макулсунбу/сүзбү?	Makulsunbu/makuls uzbu?
You're right Do	Туура айтасын/сыз!	Tuura aitasyn/aitasyny!
Do you need	Сага/ сизге	Saga/sizge jardam

help?	жардам керекпи?	kerekpi?
Can you help me ?	Мага жардам бере аласынбы/сызбы?	Maga jardam bere alasyaby/alasyzby?
Where are you going ?	Каяка баратасын/сыз ?	Kayaka baratasyb/baratasyz?
Wait a minute, I'll be right back	Күтө тур/унуз, мен тез эле кайтып келем	Kuto tur/turunuz, men tez ele kaityp kelem
Can you speak a little slower please?	Сураныч жайыраак суйлой аласызбы?	Suranych jayiraak suilo alasyzby?
Can you repeat please ?	Сураныч кайталап коесузбу?	Suranych kaitalap koesuzbu?
Can you write it please?	Сураныч жазып бере аласызбы?	Suranych jazyp bere alasyzby?
I have not heard	Мен уккан жокмун	Men ukkan jokmun
I'm very happy	Мен абдан бактылуумун/кубанычтамын	Men abdan baktylumun/kubanychtamyn
I'm very tired	Мен абдан чарчадым	Men abdan charchadym

I do not feel good	Мен озумду жаман сезип турам	Men ozumdu jaman sezip turam
Do not worry	Сарсана болбонуз	Sarsana bolbonuz

Horseback

Horse	ат	At
I'm beginning	Мен үйрөнүп жатам	Men uironup jatam
Can we gallop?	Атты чуркатсак болобу?	Atty churkatsak bolobu?

Direction

Eastnear? Far ?	жакынбы / алысбы?	Jakynby/ alysby?
Where is ? / How to go ?	Кайерде... ? / Кантип етсем болот ...? Кайсы жерде?	kaerde ...? Kantip jetsem bolot? Kaysı jerde?
Straight	Түз	Tuz/ alga
Left Right	Сол Оң	Sol/ on'
North / South / East /	Түндүк/ түштүк/ чыгыш / батыш	Tündük/ tüştük/ çıgış/

West		batış
Plane / Taxi / Bus / Train	учак / такси / автобус / поезда	uçak / taksi / avtobus / poezd

Trek		
Tent / Sleeping bag / Groundsheet	Чатыр / Уктоочу баптык / Жер төшөгү	Çadır / Uktooçu başlık / Jer töşögü
Flashlight	Жарык	Jarik
Cold / Hot / Rain / Snow / Wind	Муздак / Ысык / Жамгыр / Кар / Шамал	Muzdak / Isık / Jamgır / Kar / Şamal
Summit / Glacier / Waterfall	Тоо чокусу / мөңгү / Шаркыратма	Too çokusu / Möngü / Şarkıratma
Mountain / Valley	Тоо / Өрөөн	Too / Öröön
Forest / Town / Village / Street	Токой / Шаар / Айыл / Көчө	Tokoy / Şaar / Ayl / Köçö

With the

locals		
Your yurt is very beautiful	Боз үйүңүз абдан кооз экен	Boz üyünüz abdan kooz eken
Are you married?	Турмуш кургансынбы/сызбы?	Turmush kurgansynby/kurgansyzby?
I'm married	Уйлонгонмун / турмушка чыккам	Uilongonmun/turmushka chykkam
I'm not married	Бойдокмун	Boidokmun
Do you have children?	Сизде бала чака барбы?	Sizde bala chaka barby?
I have children	Менин балдарым бар	Menin baldarym bar
I have no children	Менин балам жок	Menin balam jok
How old are they?	Алар канча жашта	Alar kancha jashta?
Where do you live in the winter?	Кышында кайсыл жерде жашайсын/сыз?	Kyshynda kaisyl jerde jashaisyn/jashaisynyz?
How long are you staying here ?	Бул жерде канча убакыт болосун/суз?	Bul jerde kancha ubakyt bolosun/bolosunuz ?

How many people live in the yurt?	- Боз уй ичинде канча адам жашайт?	- Boz uj içinde kanča adam žašajt?
What animals do you have?	Кандай жаныбарлары н/ыз бар?	Kandai janybarlaryn/janyba rlarynyz bar?
How many animals do you have?	- Канча мал жаныбарыңыз бар?	- Kanča mal žanybarynyz bar?
How many brothers and sisters do you have ?	Канча бир туугансын/ сыз?	Kancha bir tuugansyn/tuugans ynyž?
I have a brother and a sister	Менин байкем жана эжем бар	Menin baikem jana ejem bar.
It is my brother / my sister / my father / my mother	Ал менин байкем/ карындашым/ менин атам / апам	Al menin baikem / karyndashym / atam / apam
What is your job?	Сенин/ сиздин кесибин/из эмне?	Senin/Sizdin kesibin/kesibiniz emne?
Where do you work ?	Кайсыл жерде иштейсин/сиз ?	Kaisyl jerde ishteisin/ishteisiniz ?

Animals		
Horse	Ат	At
Panther	Пантера	Pantera
Wolf	Карышкыр	Karışkır
Bear	Аюу	Ayuu
Sheep	Кой	Koy
Goat	Эчки	Eçki
Yak	Як	Yak
Cow	Уй	Uy
Dog	Ит	It
Cat	Мышык	mışık

Hotel		
Hotel / Guesthouse / Yurt	Мейманкана / Конок үй / Боз үй	Meymankana / Konok üy / Boz üy
Room / Bed / Sheet / Blanket	Уктоочу бөлмө / керебет / шейшеп / Жууркан	Uktooçu bölmö / kerebet / şeyşep / Juurkan
Shower / Toilet / Towel	Душ / Туалет / Сүлгү	Duş / Tualet / Sülgü
One night /	Бир түн /	Bir tün /

One week	Бир жума	Bir juma
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Weather		
What time is it?	Саат канча болду ?	Saat kancha boldu?
When ?	Качан?	Kachan?
Yesterday	Кечээ	Kechee
Today (morning / noon / evening)	Бүгүн (эрте/ менен/ Тушто. кечинде)	Bugun (erte menen/ tushto/ kechinde)
Tomorrow	Эртең	Erten'
Monday Tuesday Wednesday Thursday Friday Saturday Sunday	Дүйшөмбү Шейшемби Шаршемби Бейшемби Жума Ишемби Жекшемби	Duyshonbu, sheyshenbi, sharshenbi, beyshembi, juma, ishembi, jekshembi
January February March April May June July August September October	Январь Февраль Март Апрель май июнь июль Август Сентябрь Октябрь	Yanvar Fevral Mart Aprel Mai Iyun Iyul Avgust Sentyabr Oktyabr

November	Ноябрь	Noyabr
December	Декабрь	Dekabr

Health		
Help	Жардам	Jardam
I'm sick /	Ооруп жатам /	Oorup jatam /
I'm injured /	Жаракат алдым / Мени	Jarakat aldım /
I've been robbed	ТОНОП кетишти	Meni tonop ketiştı
Hospital /	Оорукана /	Oorukana /
Firefighter /	Полиция /	Politsiya /
Police	Өрт өчүргүч	Ört öçürgüç
Doctor	Дарыгер	Dariger
Diarrhea /	Ич өткөк /	İç ötkök /
Vomiting /	Кусуу /	Kusuu /
Stomach ache	Ашказан оору	Aşkazan ooru /
/ Fever	/ Ысытма	ısıtma
Pharmacy	Дарыкана	Apteka
Antibiotics /	Антибиотик /	Antibiotik /
Antiseptics	Антисептик	Antiseptik

With traders		
How much does it cost?	Канча турат, ал ?	Kancha turat al?

It's cheap	Бул абдан арзан	Bul abdan arzan
It's too expensive!	Бул өтө кымбат!	Bul oto kymbat!
Can you lower the price?	Сиз баасын арзандата аласызбы?	Siz baasyn arzandata alasyzby?
I would like to buy this	сатып алайын ... ушуну, бул!	Satyp alaiyn... ushunu, bul!
I Love / Hate	Жакты жакпады	Jakty/ jakpady
Money	акча	Akcha
I just watch	Мен жөн гана карап жатам.	Men jon ele karap jatam
Bank / Post	Банк / Почта	Bank / Poçta
Phone	Телефон	Telefon
Sim Card	SIM карта	SIM karta

Counting		
Number	Сандар	sandar
One, Two, Three, Four, Five, Six,	бир, эки, үч, төрт, беш,	Bir/ eki/ uch/ tort/ besh/ alty/

Seven, Eight, Nine, Ten	алты, жети, сегиз, тогуз, он	jeti/ segiz/ toguz/ on
Twenty Thirty, Forty, Fifty, Sixty	жыйырма, отуз, кырк, элүү, алтымыш	Jyiyрма/ otuz/ kyrk/ elu/ altymysh
Seventy, Eighty, Ninety	Жетимиш, сексен, токсон	Jetimish seksen tokson
Hundred	Жүз	Juz

Vehicles and rental car		
Bike	велосипед	velosiped
Motorcycle	Мотоцикл	mototsikl
Car	Унаа	Unaa
Garage	Гараж	Garaj
Gasoline	бензин	Benzin
Diesel	дизель	Dizel
Tire	шина	Sina
Gas station	Май куюучу станция	May kuyuuçu stantsiya

I would like to rent a car	Мен машина ижарага алгым келет	Men maşına ijaraga algım kelet
Is insurance included?	Камсыздандыруу камтылганбы?	Kamsızdandıruu kamtılğanbı?
Where can I get a car?	Кайдан машина алсам болот?	Kaydan maşına alsam bolot?
Where should I return it?	Мен аны кайда кайтарышым керек?	Men anı kayda kaytarışım gerek?
I need an automatic machine	мага автоматтык машина керек	maga avtomattık maşına gerek
I would like an air conditioner	Мага кондиционер керек	Maga konditsioner gerek
I would like a child seat	Мен балдар отургучун каалайм	Men baldar oturguçun kaalaym

16 The main cities in Latin and Cyrillic alphabet:

Bichkek	Бишкек
Och	Ош
Jalal-Abad	Жалалабат
Karakol	Каракол
Tokmok	Токмок
Uzgen	Өзгөн
Kara-Balta	Карабалта
Balykchy	Балыкчы
Naryn	Нарын
Talas	Талас
Kyzyl-Kiya	Кызылкия
Bazarkurgon	Базаркоргон

Tash-Kumyr	Ташкөмүр
Gulcha	Гүлчө
Kant	Кант
Kara-Suu	Карасуу
Isfana	Исфана
Kyzyl-Suu	Кызылсуу
Mailuu-Suu	Майлуусуу
Kochkor-Ata	Кочкората
Toktogul	Токтогул
Karaköl	Каракөл
At-Bashi	Атбашы
Kyzyl-Tuu	Кызылтуу
Tyup	Түп
Sülүktü	Сүлүктү
Batken	Баткен
Kemin	Кемин
Schamaldysai	Шамалдысай
Frunse	Фрунзе
Aksy	Аксуу
Shopokov	Шопоков
Orlovka	Орловка
Tschonaryk	Чонарык
Cholpon-Ata	Чолпоната
Chaidarkan	Хайдаркан
Kökjanggak	Көкжаңгак
Kajyngdy	Кайыңды
Wostotschnyi	Восточный
Suusamyr	Суусамыр

Take notes and don't hesitate to send them to me to update the blog:

