

GEORGES - MICHEL LALANDRE



# KYRGY ZSTAN

TRAVEL GUIDE

ITINERARIES AND TIPS FROM THE BLOG [WWW.GTLA.NET](http://WWW.GTLA.NET)  
TRANSCRIPTION OF CITY NAMES INTO THE LATIN ALPHABET  
ENGLISH/KYRGYZ LEXICON

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## DEDICATION

For “your name”

To adventures, beautiful encounters,  
and new discoveries.

Enjoy the preparations. The journey has already  
begun.

Kind travelling wishes,

Georges-Michel

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To Coralie, Marie and Florent, for sharing their travel experiences.

To my friends Aydana, Tatosh, Azamat, Fabien and Oibek, for all our conversations and for everything they have taught me about their country.

To Rebecca, for translating the English version.

To Inès, Lucie and Thibaut, for the beautiful layout of this book.

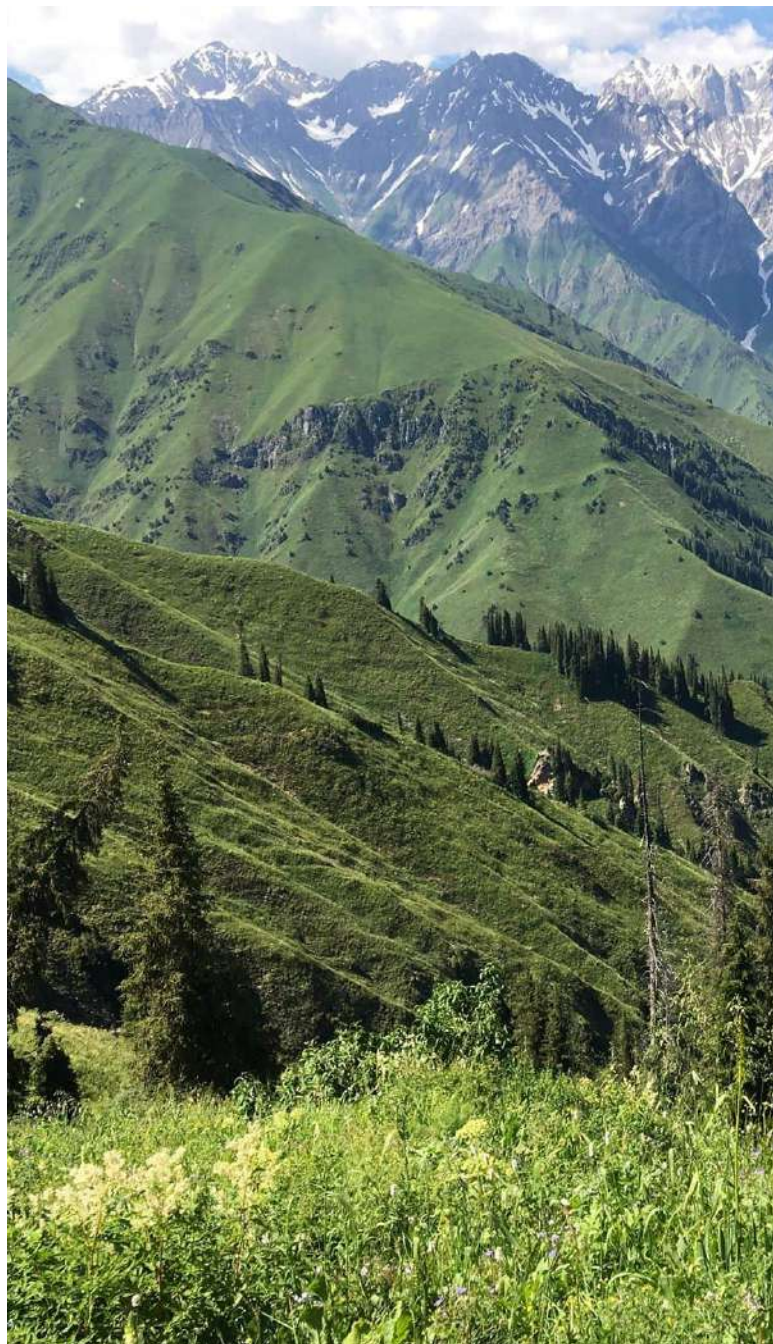
To my family and friends, simply for being themselves.

To my computer, for letting me run my blog and put this guide together.

To you, if we ever meet on the road, we'll share a beer.

And to the owner of the local bar, who just told me it's better if we each get our own.

Enjoy the read!



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## FOREWORDS

# THE ORIGINS OF THIS GUIDE



## WHO AM I?

Georges-Michel. That's my first name.

I've been travelling for quite a few years now, often using advice from different travel blogs depending on where I was going.

In 2014, when I left for my adventure in Kyrgyzstan, I realised there were almost no blogs sharing practical information about this country.

When I came back, I decided to share my experience and advice on my blog, [www.gtla.net](http://www.gtla.net), to help travellers looking for useful information, just like the bloggers I had read before had helped me.

Since then, I've kept the blog alive through my travels. There, you'll find practical tips and advice from me, my friends and my readers about each destination I've visited. Exchanging with other travellers and learning from their experiences has become one of the best parts of this whole adventure.

This book brings together all the articles and interviews about Kyrgyzstan that you can find on my blog [www.gtla.net](http://www.gtla.net).

It's my blog, in paper version, available without Wi-Fi and without battery.



**INTRODUCTION**

**KYRGYZSTAN**

## WHY KYRGYZSTAN ?

Kyrgyzstan is my favorite place. I first visited in 2014, and since 2019, I have been going back every year. I am constantly adding to this guide thanks to my friends there, feedback from travelers, and my own experiences. Over the years, I've been lucky enough to share this country with friends and family — through horseback treks, yurt nights, and deep dives into nomadic life. Some of my most unforgettable moments include:

- The trek from Ozgorush to Kazarman — a wild adventure I'll never forget.
- Kol-Suu, my favorite lake, feels like the end of the world.
- Song-Kul — where I go back every year to ride free around the lake and live to the rhythm of the nomads.

In 2023, I embarked on an adventure in a Lada Niva, the perfect 4×4 for blending into the landscape. Each trip allows me to explore a little more of this fascinating country.

Last November, I was given Hippolyte, a year-and-a-half-old foal. He lives in Song-Kul, where you can watch him grow up. The Kyrgyz people call him Hippo...

### **Ready to plan your own adventure?**

Do you dream of exploring majestic mountains and alpine lakes where nomads still ride on horseback? Wondering things like:

- Which visa do you need?
- How do you get around?
- Where should you stay?
- Can your budget handle it?

In this article, you'll find everything you need to plan your trip with peace of mind: smart tips, practical advice, and most importantly, my trusted contacts on the ground. Since 2015, I've connected them with hundreds of readers.

### FACEBOOK



*Informations  
group*

### INSTAGRAM



### MY VIDEOS



## Want even more tips and sharing?

- Facebook: The « Travelling in Kyrgyzstan» group, which I created in 2018. It's the perfect place to share updates, find great deals and connect with travelers.
- Instagram: « Travelling in Kyrgyzstan», where I share the most beautiful photos of the country.
- Download my free PDF guide it includes:
  - An English/Kyrgyz lexicon,
  - Practical advice,
  - And a wealth of information to help you plan your adventure.

Since 2020, even Le Petit Futé has recommended my blog.

I also invite you to discover the country through my [videos](#).



**PREPARING YOUR TRIP**

**WHAT DO I NEED  
TO KNOW TO PREPARE  
FOR MY TRIP  
TO KYRGYZSTAN?**

## DO YOU NEED A VISA?

European citizens do **not need a visa** for stays of less than 30 days. All you need is a passport that is valid for the entire duration of your trip. Make sure your passport gets stamped when you arrive.

If you want to extend your stay, head to the Kyrgyz Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Bishkek (10a Togolok Moldo St / Toktogul St corner).



## HOW MUCH DOES A FLIGHT COST?

Kyrgyzstan isn't an expensive destination — but there are no direct flights.

Flights with stopovers are operated by several airlines. Pegasus, Turkish Airlines, and A Jet are the most attractive options. They offer very short stopovers.

Price: between €450 and €850 in summer, depending on when you book.

### PEGASUS



*Basic baggage:  
max. 40×30×15  
cm, 3 kg  
Extra cost for  
standard carry-on  
or checked  
baggage*

### AJET



*Standard  
carry-on: max.  
55×40×23 cm,  
8 kg  
Extra cost for  
checked baggage*

### TURKISH AIRLINES



*Standard  
carry-on: max.  
55×40×23 cm,  
8 kg  
30 kg of checked  
baggage included*



*Meals included*



*Seats recline*



*Personal screens*

## Which airline should you fly with?

Pegasus is a true low-cost airline. If price is your only criterion and you're travelling with just a small carry-on bag, go for it.

Recently, AJet, the low-cost subsidiary of Turkish Airlines, has also started operating flights. Frankly, it's been a very pleasant surprise. My advice with them: choose Ankara rather than Istanbul as your stopover: the airport is very small = quick plane changes.

Turkish Airlines remains the best. I have often traveled with Pegasus. Now, if the price difference is minimal, I choose Turkish Airlines.

Regardless of the airline, plan for a layover of at least 1.5 hours. Changing planes takes time. A layover that is too short can be risky in case of delays.

For more on the topic, check out my article on [how to find a cheap flight ticket in under 40 minutes](#).

## Travel tip: Air Astana

Coralie, a reader of the blog, shared a great tip with me: if you have a long layover in Almaty or Astana (especially overnight), Air Astana offers a program called [Stopover Holidays](#).

The offer? \$19 per night in partner hotels (often highly rated).

It's all super simple:

- Online booking
- Airport driver
- Overnight stay + breakfast included
- Return to airport with private driver

## WHAT CURRENCY IS USED?



Kyrgyz som  
€1 = 100 KGS

The official currency is the Kyrgyz som.  
Exchange rate : €1 = 100 KGS.

### Is it easy to exchange cash?

Currency exchange is an excellent option. The fees are low.

Pay attention to the condition of the bills you bring:

- In euros: prefer bills of €20, €50 or €100, in perfect condition.
- €200 and €500 bills are not accepted.
- In dollars: they must be new, issued after 2005, and free of defects.

### Can I withdraw cash from ATMs?

- You can withdraw in soms (KGS) or US dollars (USD).
- Som is more practical for everyday expenses.
- Visa-compatible ATMs are only available in major cities, so make sure to withdraw enough cash before heading to rural areas.

#### **Very important:**



Don't forget to exchange your soms before leaving Kyrgyzstan.  
Once you cross the border, no one will accept them, not even banks.

### Which card should you use?

Bank fees can add up quickly.

- Before 2020, with my CIC card, I was charged around 5% on my payments and withdrawals.
- Since then, I've been using the **N26 card**, which lets me pay with no fees and withdraw with fees capped at a maximum of 1.7%.

VISA



*Locate  
a VISA ATM*

## Where can you find the right ATM for your card?

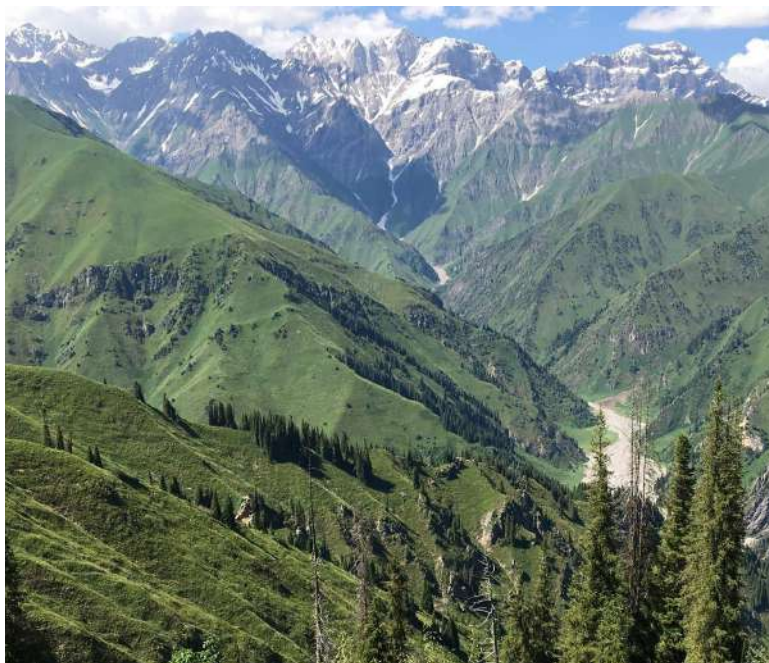
Finding an ATM that accepts your card is easy:  
there are two apps you can use.

MASTERCARD



*Find  
a Mastercard  
ATM*





## WHAT LANGUAGE DO PEOPLE SPEAK?



*Kyrgyz & Russian*



**AZAMAT**

[azamatguide@gmail.com](mailto:azamatguide@gmail.com)

**TATOSH**

[tatoshguide@gmail.com](mailto:tatoshguide@gmail.com)

The official languages are Kyrgyz and Russian, and English is rarely spoken.

### **My English-Kyrgyz lexicon to take with you.**

My friends **Azamat** and **Tatosh** and I created an **English/Kyrgyz dictionary**. Always keep this dictionary with you; I have used it often. It will help you communicate more easily when travelling by bus or taxi and staying with local people.

I didn't realize it when I created it, but in practice, it turns out to be useful in both directions. You can give it to Kyrgyz people who can read the Latin alphabet so you can communicate with them in English!

## Learning some basic Russian will be incredibly useful:

- You'll be able to connect with locals in Kyrgyzstan and other Central Asian countries.
- You'll be able to understand signs, directions, menus, and much more. Russian is written in Cyrillic.

I learned Russian and Cyrillic with **Babbel**. The app is well designed, fun, and designed for quickly learning useful phrases for travelling. By spending 15 to 45 minutes a day, I learned the Cyrillic alphabet in two weeks. In just two months, I was able to have a basic conversation.

Since then, I've also been using **Duolingo**, which has helped me reinforce my Russian in a more fun way.

### *Practical advice from my friend Tatosh*



To ask for the cost of transport, the easiest way is to ask the person to write the amount on your phone. Alternatively, they can write it on the car windows with the dust.

## WHAT'S THE MAIN RELIGION?

Kyrgyzstan is predominantly Muslim (80%), with a minority of Russian Orthodox (17%) and 3% of other denominations.

Shamanic traditions are still very much a part of local culture. It's not uncommon to hear that Kyrgyz people hold the Koran in one hand and a bottle of vodka in the other.



**TATOSH**

tatoshguide@gmail.com

## WHAT ARE THE POLICE LIKE IN KYRGYZSTAN?

The police are generally honest, though there can be some abuse, especially in certain tourist areas.

My only misadventure was at the Osh Bazaar in Bishkek, with a German friend. This place is notorious for police checks targeting tourists to extort money. It's advisable to carry a copy of your passport rather than the original.

The police arrested us and took us to their station. We were two foreigners facing six officers. After showing them a photocopy of my passport, they asked us to empty our pockets and searched us.

They found my flat banana under my pants, with my passport and 10,000 KGS. It was only when I got back to the hostel that I realized they had stolen a 1,000 KGS bill.

After all, 1,000 KGS isn't much... but it's still more than I had planned to give them.

### **How can you avoid problems?**

- Leave your passport and large bills at the hotel before heading to this bazaar, if you don't want to contribute to these officials' end-of-month income.
- Just take a photocopy of your passport and carry money in small denominations.

### **What's the situation like today?**

This story dates back to 2014. Since then, I've been back to the bazaars several times and spoken with many readers. Neither they nor I have relived the experience.

As a precaution, always keep your passport safe at the hotel. It costs nothing and helps avoid unpleasant surprises.



*Since then, I have even been able to take a ride in the Kyrgyz police's Lada Niva on the shores of Lake Song-Kul.*

## CAN I BRING MY DRONE?

Yes, I've been taking mine with me on every trip for several years. Drones are allowed in Kyrgyzstan, but there are three no-fly zones:

- Cities.
- Military zones.
- Hikers taking a nap.

Kyrgyzstan is a real playground for flying drones.

If you're a beginner, practice beforehand. The mountains are not the easiest place for a novice pilot.

My buddy Beksultan even managed to film me galloping at Song-Kul.

## WHEN SHOULD I GO TO KYRGYZSTAN?

### BEST TIME TO VISIT



*Summer,  
mid-June  
to mid-September*

### **Summer: the best time to visit (mid-June to mid-September)**

If you want to discover Kyrgyzstan in all its splendor, this is the best time. The nomads are in their yurt camps, with their herds roaming freely, and the atmosphere is at its best.

It's also the ideal season for hiking at high altitudes. You can:

- Stroll through lush, green mountains.
- Enjoy the nomadic lifestyle of families and children on summer vacations.
- Sleep in a yurt, immersed in local traditions.

### **Spring and autumn: for a more intimate adventure**

If you prefer to explore the country in a quieter atmosphere, these seasons have plenty to offer as well.

- In spring, you'll still see snow above 2,500 meters. You might even witness the transhumance of the herds.
- In autumn, the landscape takes on a wild, golden hue. You'll come across nomads on their way back down to the villages before winter.

### **Winter: cold, but full of surprises (November to April)**

Do you think Kyrgyzstan is impractical in winter? Think again! Even under the snow, there are many possibilities. You can:

- Horseback riding to Song-Kul Lake, where some yurt camps remain open.
- Put on your skis and explore the Karakol resort.
- Discover ski touring through the Kyrgyz mountains. Azamat and Nurlan will welcome you to their yurt camp in the heart of nature.



**AZAMAT**

[azamatguide@gmail.com](mailto:azamatguide@gmail.com)

*My buddies Azamat  
and Nurlan are waiting  
for you this winter.*





**HOW SHOULD  
I ORGANIZE MYSELF  
ONCE I ARRIVE?**

## HOW DO YOU GET FROM THE AIRPORT TO THE CITY?

Manas Airport is 35 km from downtown Bishkek. Once there, you'll be approached by taxi drivers offering taxis at varying prices.

The standard fare to reach the center in 45 minutes is 900 KGS. US dollars are accepted.

### What are the most practical options?

- Request a driver through your hostel: Most hostels offer a transfer for €10. It's straightforward, and there's no need to negotiate.
- Use the Yango app: The equivalent of Uber in Kyrgyzstan. You book via the app and pay in cash at the end of the ride.
- Take bus 153: If you arrive during the day, this is the most economical option. It costs 50 KGS to reach the center in one hour. The bus leaves from outside the airport, at the intersection between Osh and Chuy Prospekt.

## WHERE CAN I STAY IN KYRGYZSTAN?

### In the mountains?

You have two options: staying in a yurt or camping.

- If you're camping, make sure to bring the right equipment. Nights at high altitudes can drop below 0°C.
- If you sleep in a yurt, you'll pay around 900 KGS per night, including breakfast.

### In town?

You'll easily find hostels and guesthouses at reasonable prices. If you want to stay with a local, CBT offers excellent guesthouses for 900 KGS (breakfast included).

## DO YOU HAVE ANY HOSTELS TO RECOMMEND?

If you prefer youth hostels, below is a list of the ones I have stayed at.

### Bishkek

- **Tunduk Hostel:** Warm and relaxed atmosphere. Azema, who speaks French, contributes greatly to the friendly atmosphere. Swimming pool, large garden, and common areas, perfect for meeting people. As a bonus, the breakfast is excellent.
- **Koisha:** A great spot if you're looking for somewhere well located and lively. A 5-minute walk from the bazaar, always clean, with tasteful decor and cozy common areas, perfect for meeting other travelers.

### Chon Kemin

- **Guest house CBT:** A family-run guesthouse in a beautiful setting with good home cooking and comfortable rooms.

### Kotchkor

- Adamkali, Ideally located, just opposite Jailoo Tourism and 200 m from the bazaar and the only restaurant in town. Warm welcome from a family who speak a little English. A good place to stay before a trek.

### Toktogul

- **Kagan guest house:** Comfortable family accommodation with a pleasant garden. The grandmother is an outstanding cook, and you'll love her homemade breakfast.

### Bokonbaevo:

- **Sonun Yurt Camp:** Yurts by the lake, a perfect place to relax and enjoy the beach. Merim and her daughter speak excellent English and cook like chefs.
- **Bel Tam Yurt Camp:** Another yurt camp, ideal for spending a night by the lake.

## Karakol:

- **Jamila Guest House:** We absolutely loved it. Zina, the owner, is lovely and speaks impeccable French. Her house is extremely comfortable and clean, and her breakfast is incredible. The perfect place to stay before or after a trek.
- **Duet Hostel:** If you want a cheap hostel with a friendly atmosphere, this one is very popular with travelers. Dormitories, yurts, bar, and pool table on site.

## Altyn Arashan:

- **Ala-Kul guesthouse:** The only accommodation that can be booked on Booking.com in Altyn Arashan. If you want to guarantee a bed before leaving for Ala-Kul, this is the safest option. Jezzy will prepare a delicious dinner for you while you milk the cows with Ucha or relax in the hot springs.

## Cholpon-Ata:

- Anonymous guesthouse: Clean and well located, but its name is only in Cyrillic. GPS coordinates: 42.65230643796554, 77.09132136206541. If you find the Booking link, share it!
- Adilet : Several readers recommend this affordable guesthouse with a swimming pool.

## Tamga:

- **Tamga Guest House:** Recommended by Jane, run by a lovely family in pleasant surroundings.

## Osh:

- **Konok Hostel:** A nice hostel with a garden, bar, and good breakfast. A safe bet in Osh.



## WHERE CAN I EAT?

### How much do meals cost?

Eating in Kyrgyzstan is affordable and diverse. Whether at a restaurant, bazaar, or homestay, you'll find options to fit every budget.

- In a local restaurant: between 100 KGS and 250 KGS for a dish with meat, rice, and tea.
- In a bazaar or supermarket: meals starting at 70 KGS will leave you with a full plate.
- Dinner in a guesthouse: around 450 KGS for a hearty, home-cooked meal.

### Can I eat at a local's home?

The Kyrgyz are famous for their hospitality. If you stay in a guesthouse, your host will serve you a generous dinner, often including soup, meat, bread, and salads. Expect a hearty meal, always served with a smile.

#### *Can I eat vegetarian?*



Good news: even deep in the mountains, it's easy to request a meat-free meal. The Kyrgyz people are accommodating to travelers, and there's no shortage of alternatives: noodles, vegetables, potatoes, rice, fritters... you'll always have a choice.

## WHAT'S A TRADITIONAL KYRGYZ MEAL LIKE?

Are you ready to try the local cuisine?  
Here's what a typical meal looks like.

### **Starter**

You'll start with a shorpo, a lamb-flavored broth with potatoes, carrots, and fresh herbs.

### **Main course**

Depending on where you eat, you'll find one of these dishes on your table:

- Laghman: Fresh homemade noodles served with beef or lamb and vegetables sautéed in a spicy sauce.
- Manty: Large steamed dumplings stuffed with minced meat and onions, sometimes served with potatoes.
- Plov: A pilaf rice dish simmered with meat, carrots, and onions, flavored with spices.
- Beshbarmak: The national dish, which means «five fingers.» Boiled meat (mutton or horse) on flat noodles, topped with an onion sauce. If you want a truly local dish, this is the one to try.

### **Side dishes**

No matter where you eat, there will always be fresh raw vegetables to share: tomatoes, cucumbers, and sometimes even watermelon in season.

### **Desserts and sweets**

No elaborate desserts here, just seasonal fruit and the famous boorsok (small fried doughnuts).

### **Tea**

Throughout the meal, tea is served continuously. Whether in a yurt or at a restaurant, your cup will always be full.

## ANY GOOD RESTAURANTS TO RECOMMEND?

My buddy Fabien, who has been living in Bishkek for nine years, has tried lots of restaurants and shared his favorite places with me. I've tried several of them and I approve 100%.

### **What are your favorite places in Bishkek?**

- Faiza → Cheap, good, fast. Always busy, sometimes you have to wait, but it's worth it.
- Assorted Bukhara → The best plov in Bishkek. A classic.
- Ramada Hotel Restaurant → For a Lebanese touch.
- Pur Pur → Georgian cuisine with authentic flavours.
- Testo Mesto → Specialist in homemade ravioli.
- Furusato → The best Japanese restaurant I've ever been to. I can confirm that!
- Burger House → For when you're craving a well-made burger.
- Dolce Vita → Real Italian pizza, the kind that makes you happy.
- Chicken Star → High-quality Korean fried chicken and several vegetarian options.
- Shaolin → Authentic Chinese restaurant, with the best sweet and sour beef you can imagine.

If you have any other good places, feel free to leave them in the comments and I'll add them.



## HOW CAN I STAY HEALTHY?

### Water

The most common risk in the mountains is turista. When you hike and stay in a yurt camp, you're staying with herders. Nearby streams are often contaminated by animal droppings.

Even if the water looks clear, it is not drinkable. You must purify it with a filter bottle or a Micropur tablet. I have always followed this rule, and I have never been sick, unlike other travelers who drank it without treating it.

*Make sure to drink plenty of water during your hikes.*



## Sun exposure

In the mountains, the sun is stronger than you might think. Sunburn can be severe, even in cool weather.

- Take effective sunscreen, but above all, a long-sleeved shirt and a hat.
- Long sleeves will also protect you from scratches from branches, especially when horseback riding. Tested and approved by Basile and Loïc on our trek.

## Animal-related risks

- Rabies: As everywhere else, avoid petting stray animals.
- Mosquitoes: There are mosquitoes, but there is no risk of malaria, dengue fever, or yellow fever.

## WHAT MODES OF TRANSPORTATION ARE AVAILABLE?

Getting around Kirghizia is really easy.

### In town?

**Marshrutkas** (minibuses) → The most affordable form of public transport.

- Price: 10 KGS during the day, 12 KGS after 8pm.
- No fixed stops: wave down a minibus to make it stop.

Taxis → More comfortable, but watch out for the prices.

- Option 1: Take an official metered taxi to avoid having to negotiate.
- Option 2: Negotiated rate → between 100 and 300 KGS depending on distance.
- The easiest way in Bishkek? Use Yandex (the equivalent of Uber). You know the price before you get in and you avoid having to negotiate.

### Between cities, hitchhiking: is it easy?

Here, hitchhiking is a way of life. You give a thumbs-up and almost every car will stop.

- Some drivers give you a ride for free, while others charge a small fee.
- If you want to travel for free, say «niet dienge» (no money) in Russian or «archa djok» in Kyrgyz.

I've met several travelers who travel exclusively this way, without paying, often getting rides from truckers.

Marie, a traveller with the Travel to Kyrgyzstan group, tells us:



### **Give it a try in Kyrgyzstan!**



A small tip with big benefits:

- You save money
- You meet amazing people!
- You discover even more of the country, its landscapes, its culture, its cuisine (and yes, after inviting you into their car, some Kyrgyz people also invite you to their table!).
- Sometimes, it doesn't take any longer than taking a marschrutka...

Over the past seven weeks, I traveled from Bishkek to Kochkor, Song-Kul, Issyk-Kul (a complete loop with multiple stops/round trips between villages and tourist sites), Jyrgalant, Arslan Bob, Osh, Sary Moghol (Lenin Peak), Kazarman, Naryn... All by hitchhiking!

Most of the time there were two of us (two girls or one girl and one guy), we never waited more than 30 minutes (max!), at all hours (8 a.m., 12 p.m., 10 p.m., etc.), on main roads or deserted tracks, with almost no problems (two drivers were slightly drunk)...

Don't forget to mention 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!



*Here you'll find  
a Latin alphabet  
transcription of  
the main Kyrgyz  
towns: super  
useful in bus  
stations.*

If you have your own car, you can also hitchhike with locals. I had a few surprises while travelling in my Lada Niva... including this grandmother who couldn't believe she was seeing a tourist driving a local car. We had a good laugh the whole way!

### **What are marshrutkas?**

They're the most affordable way to travel between cities. Contrary to popular belief, they're not always overcrowded.

They depart from bus stations and serve all major cities.

### **Shared taxi?**

These 7-seater Japanese minivans leave once they are full, allowing you to travel faster and more comfortably than marshrutkas.

- Price: Between 100 and 1500 KGS, depending on the distance.
- Ideal if you're in a hurry or want to avoid frequent stops by marshrutkas.



Several daily flights are operated by local airlines.



€50



Under an hour

## What about domestic flights?

If you want to avoid a 14-hour drive between Bishkek and Osh, flying is a great option. I often hear that these flights are operated by airlines on the EU blacklist.

## What are the prices for domestic flights in Kyrgyzstan?

Prices are fixed:

- Bishkek – Talas: 2,100 KGS  
Flights on Friday and Monday
- Bishkek – Naryn: 2,100 KGS  
Flights on Friday and Monday
- Bishkek – Kerben: 3,600 KGS  
Flights on Wednesdays and Fridays
- Bishkek – Kazarman: 3,100 KGS  
Flights on Friday and Monday
- Bishkek – Batken: 4,500 KGS  
Daily flights
- Bishkek – Razzakov: 4,800 KGS  
Daily flights
- Bishkek – Karakol: 4,000 KGS  
Seasonal route (up to 4 flights per week in winter)
- Osh – Karakol: 5,000 KGS  
Seasonal route (two flights per week depending on the season)

It's more expensive than public transportation, but you save valuable time and travel in much greater comfort. The choice is yours!

### MARIE'S BLOG



## The bike?

If you're a fan of cycle touring, Kyrgyzstan is the perfect playground.

Marie, a cycling blogger, has written a detailed article about cycling in Kyrgyzstan.

If you're interested, check out her stories, tips, and experiences!



**DO YOU KNOW ANY  
GOOD CAR RENTAL  
AGENCIES IN  
KYRGYZSTAN?**

## DO I NEED AN INTERNATIONAL DRIVING PERMIT?

Yes, an international permit is required.

But if you don't have it, don't worry. You can get a certified Russian translation of your license from a notary.

Rental companies can arrange this for you before you arrive, for €30. Simply send them a copy of your driver's permit and passport.

## WHERE CAN I RENT A CAR IN BISHKEK?

I know several trusted rental companies in Bishkek that I can recommend.

In 2014, with my buddies Will and James, we tried our luck with an old Lada: a wreck we named Roxane.

It held up well, and we even sold it to Polish travelers, who took it across the Pamir before handing it over to Tajikistan.

It was the cheapest car in Bishkek: \$500 for the three of us. It was a risky gamble, but we were lucky enough to be able to sell it.

If you're looking for a safer, more reliable ride, I've got some solid contacts (I lost track of Roxane a long time ago anyway!).



## Rent a car in Bishkek, my recommendations:

Since 2022, my friend Aydown has been offering a fleet of Lada Nivas.



These rugged Soviet 4x4s are the vehicles of nomadic shepherds. Several readers have taken road trips with them, and their stories made me want to try it myself.



**AYDANA**

[aydownkyrgyzstan@gmail.com](mailto:aydownkyrgyzstan@gmail.com)

*Photo taken by my buddy Reid with a Lada from my friend Azamat.*

I love travelling in traditional vehicles.

After riding in a tuk-tuk in Sri Lanka and on a motorcycle in Pakistan and Togo, I tried out a Lada Niva in Kyrgyzstan.

It's simple, economical, and versatile: perfect if you want to blend into the Kyrgyz landscape.



## **In Bishkek, I recommend choosing between these 2 people:**

- **Aydow** offers a small fleet of cars at very reasonable prices.
- **Tatosh** can also offer you a few 4x4s at fairly attractive rates.

### ***Please note:***



Supply is lower than demand!  
Rental cars go fast in high season.  
As soon as you know your dates,  
book your car to get the best choice.

If you want to know everything about car rental in Central Asia, I have written a comprehensive article **listing the best rental companies in Central Asia** based on reader feedback and my own experiences.



**AYDANA**

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**TATOSH**

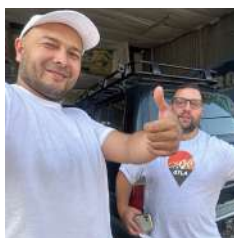
[tatoshgide@gmail.com](mailto:tatoshgide@gmail.com)



## WHO CAN I RENT A CAR FROM IN TASHKENT TO CROSS THE PAMIR MOUNTAINS AND REACH TAJIKISTAN?

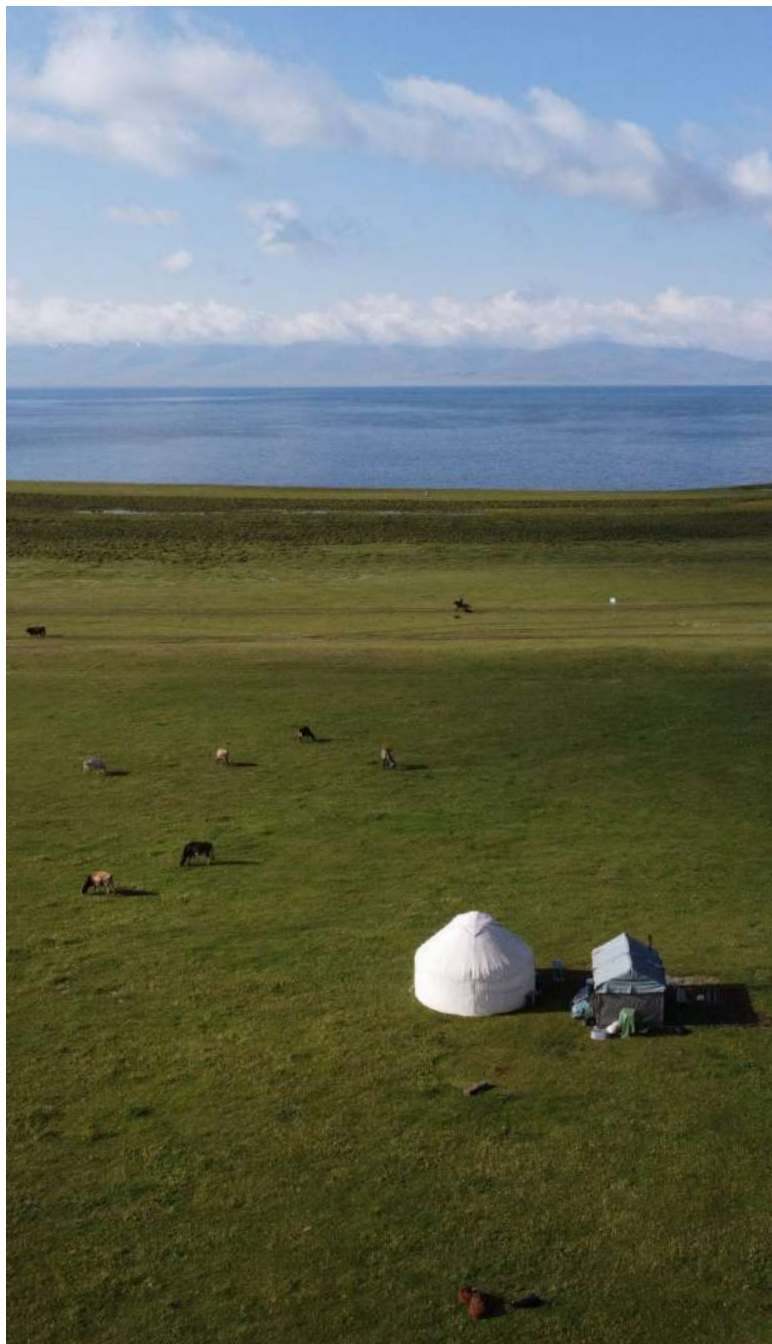
**Oibek** offers a wide range of recent cars and motorcycles, perfectly adapted to the roads of Central Asia, and in particular to crossing the Pamir.

For any information requests or to reserve a car, contact Oibek.



**OIBEK**

[oibektours@gmail.com](mailto:oibektours@gmail.com)



# **WHAT ARE THE MAIN PLACES TO VISIT IN KYRGYZSTAN?**

## WHAT WAS YOUR ITINERARY?

On my first trip in 2014, I explored Kyrgyzstan with the following itinerary:

Bishkek → Kochkor → Song-Kul Lake → Kochkor → Kyzyl-Oi → Kochkor → Karakol → Altyn Arashan → Cholpon-Ata → Bishkek → Cholpon-Ata → Bishkek



If you're planning a trip to Kyrgyzstan, you should know that getting around is easy, but time-consuming. This country is 95% mountainous, with few good roads. The result? Forget fast, straight routes: here, every kilometre brings surprises.

### How do I organize my travel arrangements?

- Don't rely solely on distances. A short distance can take hours on mountain roads.
- Expect detours. Sometimes, it's impossible to travel directly from point A to point B. For example, if you want to get from Naryn to Osh, you'll have to go back via Bishkek, unless you hire a 4×4 with a driver (and that's expensive).
- Be flexible. With bad roads and unpredictable transport, it's best to leave some buffer in your itinerary.

In short, it's all about adventure! But with the right planning and a little patience, you'll be able to fully enjoy Kyrgyzstan's incredible landscapes.

## WHAT ITINERARY WOULD YOU RECOMMEND FOR A FIRST TRIP TO KYRGYZSTAN?

Want to discover Kyrgyzstan but unsure about the ideal itinerary?

I designed these 2-, 3-, and 4-week itineraries with my local friends so you can explore the best of the country while optimizing your travel time.

You can follow these itineraries to the letter, adapt them to your own pace, or mix and match as you wish. And if you have any other ideas, share them in the comments!

## Do you have any advice on equipment to buy locally?

Take advantage of your arrival in Bishkek to gear up like a local.

My buddy Azamat gave me the best advice: don't pack before you leave. Head to the [Osh bazaar](#) and buy Kok Boru chaps and a rain cape from this vendor.

She doesn't know me, but if you'd like, send her my regards!



**AZAMAT**

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## WHAT ITINERARY WOULD YOU RECOMMEND FOR 2 WEEKS?

This itinerary lets you explore the must-sees without rushing around too much. Journeys are manageable (6 hours maximum), and you can adjust certain stages to fit your pace.



### DAY 1: BISHKEK

#### Discover the capital and its Soviet atmosphere

- Typical Soviet-era architecture
- Dordoï Bazaar, the largest in Central Asia
- Osh Bazaar, the country's largest food market
- Parks (there are over 10!)
- Nightlife
- Immersive activities: local cooking classes, introduction to shyrdak (Kyrgyz rugs)

#### **Transport tip**



Download the Yango app (equivalent to Uber). Pay the driver in cash.

## DAY 2: ALA ARCHA / TOKMOK AND THE BURANA TOWER

### Option 1: Hiking in Ala Archa

- Hike to the Ak Sai Glacier
- Picnic at the foot of the waterfall

#### How do I get there?

- 1 h drive from Bishkek
- Round-trip taxi with 6-hour wait: 3,000 KGS
- Park entrance: 80 KGS

### Option 2: Tokmok and the Burana Tower

- Animal market (Sundays only)
- Burana Tower, remnant of the Silk Road

#### How do I get there?

- Bus Bishkek → Tokmok: 150 KGS (2 hours)
- Taxi Tokmok → Burana round trip (with 1 hour wait): 600 KGS

## DAYS 3 TO 6: SONG-KUL

### 4-day horseback trek

- Horse ride at Song-Kul
- Overnight stays in yurts and immersion in nomadic culture

#### Why 4 days?

You can do it in 3 days, but with 4 days, you'll get more out of the lake and the scenery, rather than just going there and back.

Horseback riding is a must. It's the easiest option for beginners. 90% of travelers are beginner riders.

#### How do I get there?

- Bus Bishkek → Kyzart: 400 KGS (departure at 6 a.m.)

#### How do I get back?

- Last minibus Kyzart → Kochkor: 2:00 p.m.
- Private taxi Kyzart → Kochkor: 2,000 KGS (must be booked in advance)

#### After Song-Kul, two options:

- Option 1: Continue to Issyk-Kul (via Balykchy)
- Option 2: Explore Naryn or Kol-Ukok



## DAYS 7 AND 8: NARYN & KOL-SUU / KOL-UKOK

### Option 1: Naryn & Kol-Suu

- Tash Rabat Caravanserai
- Trek to Lake Kol-Suu (3 days)

#### *Please note!*



The Kol-Suu trek lasts 3 days.  
If you add it to your itinerary,  
you'll have to delete another stage.

#### How do I get there?

- Shared taxi Kochkor → Naryn: 250 KGS
- Border permit required for Kol-Suu  
(to be requested in advance)

### Option 2: Hike to Kol-Ukok

- Easy 2-day trek
- Overnight in a lakeside yurt

#### How do I get there?

- Trek departure point: the village of Isakeev  
(15 minutes from Kochkor by taxi)

## DAY 9: BOKONBAYEVO

### Discovering Bokonbayevo

- Night in a yurt by the lake
- Eagle hunting demonstration

#### How do I get there?

- Minibus Kochkor → Balykchy
- Then minibus Balykchy → Bokonbaevo

#### A must-see on the road between Bokonbaevo and Karakol

- Goryachiy Istochnik Nur hot springs: outdoors,  
overlooking Lake Issyk-Kul

## DAY 10: KARAKOL

### Exploring the city of Karakol

- Stock up on supplies for the Ala-Kul trek
- Dungan Mosque
- Russian Orthodox Church
- Karakol Museum
- Przewalski Museum
- Local bazaar

## DAYS 11 TO 13 TREK ALA-KUL

### Ala-Kul Trek (3 or 4 days)

- Hike to the Ala-Kul Pass (panoramic view of the lake at an altitude of 3,500 m)
- 3-day trek accessible to almost everyone
- Two nights in Altyn Arashan, with hot springs (natural or paid)
- Option to spend the second day on horseback to the foot of the pass

#### How do I get there?

- Cab to the village of Ak-Suu (starting point of the 3-day trek).
- Cab to the national park entrance (starting point of the 4-day trek).
- Back to Bishkek
- The trek ends at midday: you can return to Bishkek directly afterwards.

## DAY 14: BISHKEK

### Bishkek

- Take advantage of your last day in town to buy souvenirs and say hello to your new friends.

#### How do I get back to Bishkek?

- Taxi or minibus from Karakol: 6-hour journey (350 KGS)

## WHAT ITINERARY WOULD YOU RECOMMEND FOR 3 WEEKS?

If you have 3 weeks, here are two very different itineraries:

- The first follows a classic route around Lake Issyk-Kul, covering the must-sees.
- The second is more unique, crossing remote regions like Arslanbob and Sary-Chelek.

In all cases, you can adjust the program to match your own pace and desires.

These itineraries are based on the 2-week tour. For details on the stages already covered, please refer to the previous itinerary.

### Route 1

This first itinerary is a classic. You will travel around Lake Issyk-Kul, discovering the country's main points of interest. The stages are not too long (maximum 6 hours of travel).





- Days 1 to 6 → Bishkek, Ala-Archa, Song-Kul
- Days 7 and 8 → Kol-Suu or Kol-Ukok (choose according to your preference)

***Please note!***



The Kol-Suu trek lasts 3 days, so you will need to remove another stage from this itinerary.

- Day 9 → Bokonbaevo
- Day 10 → Karakol, Fairytale Canyon, or Jeti-Oguz
- Days 11 to 14 → Ala-Kul Trek (3 or 4 days)
- Day 15 → Cholpon-Ata (swimming and water sports on Lake Issyk-Kul)
- Days 16 to 18 → Chon-Kemin (3-day hike or horseback ride)
- Day 19 → Tokmok and Burana Tower
- Days 20 and 21 → Return to Bishkek

## Route 2

This second itinerary is more adventurous: the stages are longer, but you'll cross breathtaking landscapes and discover places untouched by tourism.

- Day 1 to 6 → Bishkek, Ala-Archa, Song-Kul
- Day 6 afternoon → Drive to Kazarman
- Days 7 and 8 → Arslanbob (walnut forest, waterfalls, and sacred lakes)
- Day 9 → Drive to Sary-Chelek (overnight stay in Arkit)
- Days 10 to 12 → 3- to 5-day trek to Sary-Chelek
- Day 13 → Toktogul (reservoir and wilderness)
- Day 14 → Return to Bishkek
- Days 15 and 16 → Bokonbaevo
- Day 17 → Karakol, Fairytale Canyon, or Jeti-Oguz
- Days 18 to 20 → Ala-Kul Trek (3 or 4 days)
- Day 21 → Return to Bishkek



## WHAT ITINERARY WOULD YOU RECOMMEND FOR 4 WEEKS?

If you have 4 weeks, you can slow down the pace or add off-the-beaten-path stages.

Here are some possible additions:

### Natural regions

- Chon-Orutkuu (1 day) → Hot springs
- Barskoon (1 day) → Waterfalls
- Sary-Mogol (2 to 3 days) → View of Lenin Peak (7,200 m), accessible without being a mountaineer
- Suusamyр (2-3 days) → Hike to Lake Muztor

### Cultural and historical sites

- Uzgen (1 day) → Historical complex
- Min-Kush (1 day) → Aban



## DO YOU HAVE AN AGENCY TO RECOMMEND FOR A SELF- DRIVE TOUR IN KYRGYZSTAN?

Yes, the concept My Kyrgyz Road Trip, created by Aydow and his family.

It is a 13-day turnkey self-drive road trip, designed and organized by locals, with a coherent and realistic itinerary.



*Detailed itinerary*



**AYDANA**

[aydowkyrgyzstan@gmail.com](mailto:aydowkyrgyzstan@gmail.com)

You will discover Kyrgyzstan independently, driving your own 4×4, while benefiting from a clear framework and local telephone assistance if needed.

Accommodation is booked in advance with local families, in yurt camps and guesthouses and activities are included.

The trip begins with a welcome dinner in Bishkek, a chance to meet the team and receive personalized advice for the rest of the trip.

It's the ideal option if you want a road trip that feels free, accessible, and well supported, so you can discover Kyrgyzstan with peace of mind, even if it's your first time in the country.

You can find the detailed itinerary and contact Aydow directly here.

## HOW CAN I CROSS THE BORDER BETWEEN KYRGYZSTAN AND UZBEKISTAN?

Many travelers from the Facebook group shared their experiences. Here is a summary of the feedback from Coralie, Géraldine, and Thomas:

### **How to cross the border at Osh?**

Crossing the border between Osh and Uzbekistan is very easy.

On the Uzbek side, customs officers quickly spot foreigners and often give them priority. The checks are fast: a glance at the visa, a stamp, and that's it. There are no strict controls on luggage, medication, or declared currency.

### **What should I do once I have crossed the border?**

Once in Uzbekistan, you will find a slew of shared taxis to take you to:

- Andijan
- Fergana
- Marguilan
- Tashkent (longer route, but possible directly)

Drivers accept payment in dollars.

### **Where can I exchange money?**

- Before crossing, you can exchange Uzbek soms at the Osh bazaar.
- There are also a few exchange offices at the border, but the rates are not always favorable.





# **HOW HARD ARE THE TREKS IN KYRGYZSTAN?**

## IS THERE A RANKING OF TREKS ACCORDING TO THEIR DIFFULTY?

Kyrgyzstan offers a wide range of treks. It's essential to choose itineraries that match your experience and fitness level.

Yes! Together with my buddy Tatosh, we've ranked the four most popular treks, based on:

- Her experience as a guide
- Reader feedback
- My own experience

This classification is subjective and is mainly intended for less experienced travelers in good physical condition.

And since we're in Kyrgyzstan, I'll also tell you the level of riding difficulty.



**TATOSH**

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## WHAT IS YOUR PERSONAL RANKING?

Difficulty on foot (from easiest to most challenging):

- Kol-Suu and Kol-Ukok (tie)
- Song Kul
- Ala-Kul

Difficulty on horseback (from easiest to most technical) :

- Song Kul
- Kol-Suu
- Kol-Ukok
- Ala-Kul

### **Kol-Suu and Kol-Ukok, tied for first place?**

Are you hesitating between these two treks? Even though they're listed together, in practice they have nothing to do with each other.

- Kol-Suu is easier physically, but it will require more organization. It is located in the south of the country, and just to reach its starting point will take you two days round trip. In addition, you must apply for a border permit in advance.
- Kol-Ukok is more physically demanding, but much more accessible. The trek starts 15 minutes by taxi from Kochkor, and no specific preparation is necessary.

## KOL-SUU TREK

Kol-Suu is a lake perched at an altitude of 3,500 m, very close to the Chinese border. Its spectacular setting makes it one of the most impressive treks in Kyrgyzstan.

*Kol-Suu*





#### **BEST TIME TO GO**

*Mid-June  
to mid-September*



#### **DURATION**

*3 days (including  
2 days transport)*



#### **MAXIMUM ALTITUDE AND ALTITUDE GAIN**

*3,860 m  
+180 m / -180 m*



#### **ROUND TRIP DISTANCE**

*14 km*



#### **WALKING TIME**

*4h30*

## **Difficulty and accessibility**

The trek is easy and accessible to everyone. The only physical challenge is the altitude, which can be a concern for some people.

The trail is straightforward, so you can do it without a guide.

## **Logistical challenges**

Kol-Suu's real challenge is logistics and access:

- Located in the southern part of the country, far from other points of interest.
- Travel time to the start of the trek:
- A 8 hour drive from Bishkek to Naryn
- A 5-hour jeep ride from Naryn to the yurt camps
- Border permit required (must be obtained in advance).

### ***Good to know***



You can also do the trek on horseback, but the pedestrian option is more interesting, as it's a simple round trip.

## **Water supply**

Easy, a river runs along the entire route.

## **Where to sleep?**

In a tent or yurt. From mid-May to mid-September, a dozen yurt camps are set up 6 km from the lake.

## KOL-UKOK TREK

Kol-Ukok is a high-altitude lake located at 3,000 m, perfect for a first independent hike.

*Kol-Ukok*





#### BEST TIME TO GO

Mid-June to mid-September



#### DURATION

2 days



#### MAXIMUM ALTITUDE AND ALTITUDE GAIN

3,200 m

+1,100 m

/ -1,100 m



#### ROUND TRIP DISTANCE

32 km



#### WALKING TIME

14 h

## Difficulty and accessibility

- A steady, gradual climb, ideal for beginners who are in good shape.
- A great test before tackling more difficult treks.
- A straightforward itinerary, one you can do without a guide.

## Access and logistics

- Starting point: Isakeev village, 15 minutes by taxi from Kochkor.
- Cab fare: approx. 500 KGS.
- Itinerary: round trip over 2 days.

## Water

Bring a full water bottle at the start. The river runs alongside the path, but is not always easily accessible.

## Where to sleep?

In a tent or yurt. From June to September, several yurt camps are set up before the pass and around the lake.

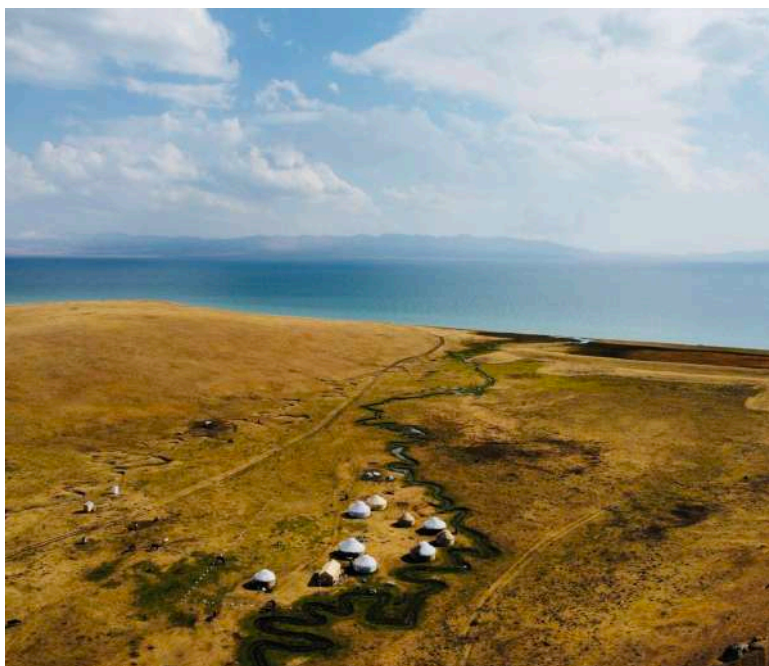
## Equestrian option not recommended: not ideal for horseback riding.

Long descent on the second day, not great for horseback riding, especially if you're a beginner.

## SONG-KUL TREK

Song-Kul is a high-altitude lake at 3,000 m, surrounded by pastures where nomadic shepherds live. It's a true display of nomadic life in Kyrgyzstan.

*Song-Kul*





#### **BEST TIME TO GO**

June to mid-September



#### **DURATION**

3 to 4 days



#### **MAXIMUM ALTITUDE AND ALTITUDE GAIN**

3,550 m  
+2,200 m  
/ -2,200 m



#### **TOTAL DISTANCE**

60 km



#### **WALKING TIME**

18 h

## **Difficulty and accessibility**

- A challenging trek, with long distances and steep climbs.
- A more relaxed first day as far as Kilemche.
- Ascent to the pass at 3,500 m = the most challenging section

## **Water**

Bring a full water bottle at the start. Some streams are not accessible, especially on the pass.

## **Where to sleep?**

In yurts or tents. Mid-May to mid-September: yurt camps at Kilemche and around Lake. Off-season: a few tourist yurts remain open near the lake.

### **Key information**



- No single trail
- multiple possible routes
- a guide is recommended

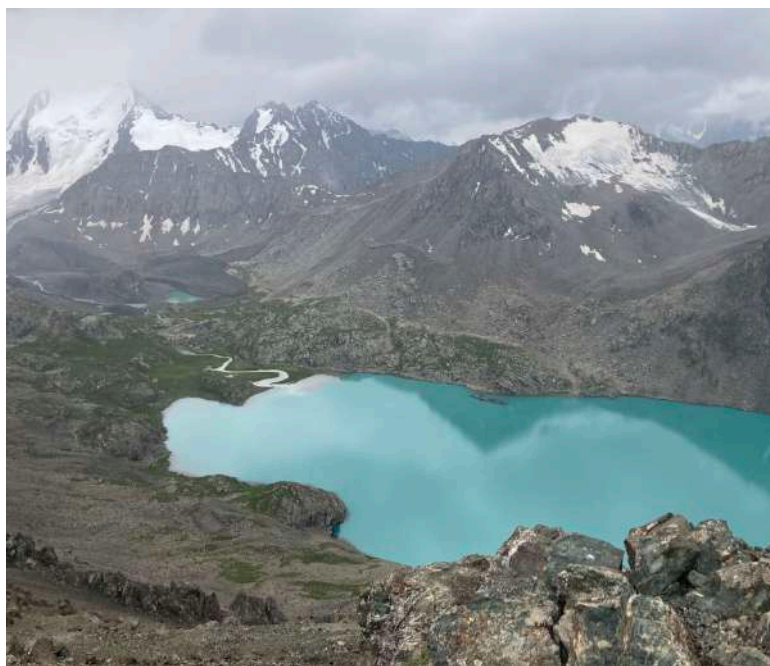
## **Equestrian option: one of the best horseback riding experiences.**

- Perfect for trail riding, even for beginners.
- An immersive experience of nomadic culture.
- Last day downhill: if you're not comfortable, you can walk beside the horse.

## ALA-KUL TREK

Ala-Kul is a lake located at 3,532 m, surrounded by steep mountains. It's one of the most spectacular treks, but also the most physically challenging. There are several routes, but here you'll find only the 3-day option, which is the least strenuous.

*Ala-Kul*





#### **BEST TIME TO GO**

Late June  
to mid-September



#### **DURATION**

3 or 4 days



#### **MAXIMUM ALTITUDE AND ALTITUDE GAIN**

3,900 m  
+2,100 m  
/ -2,100 m



#### **TOTAL DISTANCE**

50 km



#### **WALKING TIME**

25 h



#### **STARTING POINT**

Ak-Suu

## **Difficulty and physical effort**

The most physically challenging trek on the list. Many travelers underestimate it.

- A tough second day:
  - Approximately 10 hours of walking, including 6 hours just for the ascent to the lake.
  - Ascent of +1,400 m, with a steep, continuous slope.
- A highly challenging final pass:
  - Last climb: +250 m over just 400 m.
  - Altitude and soft terrain make progress difficult.
  - Breathtaking views as a reward!

A guide is a real advantage if you're a beginner hiker:

- He motivates you and supports you through the technical sections.
- They help keep you safe on the final pass, which is a true physical challenge.

## **Water supply**

Bring a full water bottle at the start.

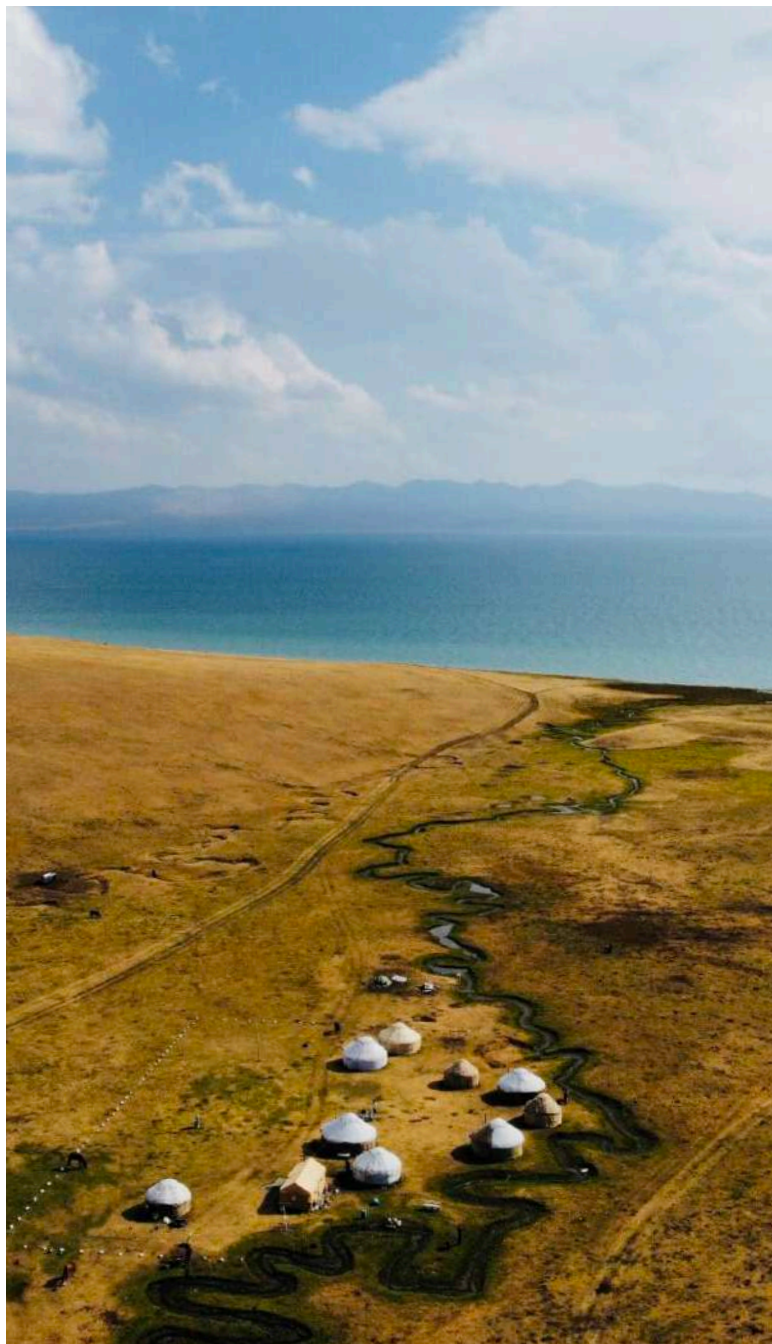
## **Where to sleep?**

In tents, yurts or guesthouses.

On the 3-day itinerary, nights are spent in Altyn Arashan, where you'll find guesthouses and hot springs.

## **Horseback riding option**

- Horses can't climb the final pass.
- Interesting alternative: spend the second day riding to the foot of the pass, then hike up while your horse waits at the bottom.



**DO YOU KNOW ANY  
RELIABLE GUIDES FOR  
HIKING AND TREKKING?**

## WHAT ARE THE RATES CHARGED BY TRAVEL AGENCIES?

As you prepare for your trip to Kyrgyzstan, you'll hear about CBTs (Community-Based Tourism). Initially, these offices were managed by a Swiss NGO supporting local tourism.

Today, the NGO no longer exists. CBTs now operate like conventional agencies, often with higher prices.

### **3 things to know before booking with a CBT**

- Each CBT operates independently. If you book through a CBT in another city, they will take a commission. It's best to book locally.
- Transport is not included. Hikes often start in the wilderness. You'll likely be offered an overpriced private cab. Always compare with a local taxi or hitchhiking.
- Excursions are standard, with little flexibility, and guides don't always speak English.

## Who do you recommend for Song-Kul?

If you're looking for someone trustworthy and good horses, I recommend my friend Tatosh. I've been doing this trek every year since 2019 with her guides and I've never been disappointed.

She's been organizing this trek for years. Tatosh has a real passion for the region and nomadic culture. Her guides are experienced and her horses are suitable for riders of all levels.

She can organize your departure from Bishkek, saving you time in Kochkor.

In addition to the trek, Tatosh can give you good advice on other places to explore in Kyrgyzstan.



**TATOSH**

[tatoshgide@gmail.com](mailto:tatoshgide@gmail.com)



## Do you have a horse to recommend?

Hippo... but only to say hello.

He's still a foal. You never ride a horse before it's four years old.

He was born in May 2024, in the wild, somewhere in the pastures of Song-Kul.

His father, Mustang, is a champion Kok-Boru stallion. Hippo has a strong pedigree.

In November, my friend Beksultan gave him to me as a sign of friendship.

Hippo will grow up in Song-Kul, among the nomadic herds.



It was our first meeting, last November in the village.

In Kyrgyz, a horse's name changes according to its age :

- Kulun (1 year old)
- Tai (2 years old)
- Kunan (3 years old)
- Dön (4 years old)

For now, Hippo is a kulun. You'll probably run into him during your stay in Song-Kul. Feel free to send me a photo.

## What are the typical rates for travel agencies?

- Horse rental: 1,500 KGS per day
- Groom: 2,500 KGS per day
- English-speaking guide: from KGS 6,000 per day
- Night in a yurt with breakfast: 1,200 KGS
- Lunch in a yurt: 600 KGS
- Dinner in a yurt: 600 KGS

## Good to know:

If you hire a guide, you'll also need to cover:

- His meals
- His accommodation
- Horse rental (for horseback excursions)

### *Tip*



If you're travelling in a group, these costs can be shared among participants.

## How can you reduce costs?

If you're on a tight budget, here are some options:

- Book an excursion without meals and take care of your own food.
- Go for a trek on foot, booking meals and accommodation only, without a guide.

## WHAT SHOULD I CHECK WITH MY GUIDE BEFORE I GO ON A TREK?

Before setting off on your trek, check that the equipment is suitable and corresponds to what was planned. It's not a question of trust, it's just common sense. It's best to avoid unpleasant surprises in the wild.

Many travelers inspect every scratch on a rental car, while a tent with a hole in it during the rain can be far more problematic!

In 2021, I went on a horseback trek with my buddy Azamat. Before we left, he told me:

- I know you trust me, but we're still going to check the gear together. I don't want you to end up in the middle of the wind with a tent that has no stakes. I've got plenty of spares here.

What should I check before setting off on a trek?

### **Make sure the agreed service is provided**

You've paid for a service, so it's only right that it should be as expected. Check it out:

- The number of porters or horses.
- Equipment included in the package (tents, sleeping bags, stove, etc.).

### **Check the quality of the equipment**

The right equipment makes all the difference when trekking. Before you head out, check:

- The condition of the tents (no holes, stakes, and poles complete).
- Quality of sleeping bags (suitable for mountain night temperatures).
- Kitchen equipment (functional stove, enough gas, clean utensils).
- If the equipment is damaged or unsuitable, request a replacement.



**AZAMAT**

[azamatguide@gmail.com](mailto:azamatguide@gmail.com)

## Check the quantity and quality of the food

- Make sure you have enough provisions for the entire trek.
- Check the freshness of the products to avoid unpleasant surprises.
- If anything is missing, it's easy to sort out before departure.

## AND BEFORE A HORSEBACK RIDE?

Before you leave, take a few minutes to check your horse:

- General condition: healthy, well-fed, with no visible wounds.
- Hooves and equipment: properly fitted saddle and bit, no chafing.
- Behavior: a tired or stubborn horse from day one is likely to be a problem for several days.

I've written a comprehensive article on [horseback riding in Kyrgyzstan](#), covering everything you need to check about your horse before you set off.



## SHOULD I TIP MY GUIDE?

This is common practice in Kyrgyzstan. My friend Fabien recommends giving 200 KGS per person per day. That's what I do.

## CAN I GO HORSEBACK TREKKING AS A BEGINNER?

That's the question my friend Tatosh gets asked the most. Her answer is simple:

- Of course you can trek on horseback as a beginner! Kyrgyz horses are small, docile, and perfectly suited for novices. At Song-Kul Lake, the majority of riders are beginners. What's more, we add cushions to our saddles for extra comfort. Don't hesitate!



**TATOSH**

*tatoshguide@gmail.com*

## DO YOU HAVE ANY GUIDES TO RECOMMEND FOR A HIKE TO SONG-KUL LAKE?



*Horseback  
riding at the  
Song-Kul lake*

Song-Kul Lake is an ideal setting for horseback riding. If you want an authentic experience at a reasonable price, I recommend Tatosh.

She organizes rides in small groups, perfect for both beginners and experienced riders, with skilled guides and well-treated horses.

Another great advantage: she can arrange your direct transfer from Bishkek to Kyzart:

- Skip Kochkor and save a day instead of searching for a local agency.
- With Tatosh, you maximize your time and budget to get the most out of your trek.



Remember to book as soon as you've made your plans. It helps her organize departures and guarantees you a spot. I had the pleasure of doing this hike with some of the blog's readers. You can read their impressions and book the hike by clicking [here](#) or by scanning the QR Code.



**TATOSH**

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## DO YOU HAVE A GUIDE TO RECOMMEND FOR THE ALA-KUL TREK?



*3-4 days trek  
at Ala-Kul*

Yes, I know a good agency with knowledgeable guides and quality equipment for going to Ala-Kul.

Before making your choice, you should know that the Ala-Kul trek can be done in 3 or 4 days, depending on your level and preferences.

### **3-day itinerary (suitable for beginners)**

This route is more accessible and lets you sleep in a guesthouse.

- Day 1: Aksuu to Altyn Arashan → 4-hour walk
- Day 2: Round trip to Ala-Kul → 7 to 10-hour walk (depending on your fitness level)
- Day 3: Return to Aksuu → 4-hour walk

Ideal if you're looking for a great adventure with minimal physical effort.

### **4-day itinerary (intermediate level)**

This route is more challenging, with nights spent in a yurt or tent.

- Day 1: National Park entrance to Sirota Camp → 12 km, 4 to 5 h
- Day 2: Sirota to Keldike Gorge → 10 km, 5 to 6 h
- Day 3: Keldike to Altyn Arashan → 10 km, 4 h
- Day 4: Altyn Arashan to Aksuu → 15 km, 4 h

## Do I need a guide for this trek?

I'm often asked if a guide is necessary. I always answer: «If you're wondering whether you need a guide, then you need a guide.»

- The 3-day trek is doable on your own with some hiking experience and good preparation.
- The 4-day itinerary is more challenging: if you've never trekked in the high mountains before, you'd be better off with a guide.

For a reliable guide, my mate Tatosh organizes these treks with well-established routes and quality equipment. You can contact her [here](#) to organize your adventure.



**TATOSH**

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## DO YOU HAVE A GUIDE TO RECOMMEND FOR THE KOL-SUU TREK?

Yes, Tatosh! Travelers who have done it with her all agree: this trek is as easy as it is beautiful. It feels like the end of the world.

She designed this adventure with friends who live in a yurt camp nestled at the foot of the lake.

### **An unforgettable 3-day trek:**

- Access: Remote track - 4×4 required, driver highly recommended.
- Start: Naryn.
- Border permit included (allow 15 days for processing).



**TATOSH**

[tatoshguide@gmail.com](mailto:tatoshguide@gmail.com)





*3-Day Trek and  
Adventure to Kel  
Suu Lake*

## How to make a reservation?

- Write to her at least 15 days in advance so she can apply for your permit.
- Send her a copy of your passport.
- Your driver will be waiting in Naryn with your permit to take you to the camp.

Book with her as early as possible to ensure you get your permit on time. This trek is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity: accessible and breathtaking. You can contact her by clicking [here](#) or by scanning the QR Code.

## DO YOU HAVE AN ENGLISH- SPEAKING DRIVER-GUIDE TO RECOMMEND WHEN VISITING KYRGYZSTAN?

Yes, Azamat! More than just a guide, he's a trusted friend and the best French- and English-speaking guide I know. A true Swiss Army knife, he can organize the tour of your dreams, whether on foot, horseback, or by car.

I've sent many readers off with him in complete confidence. They all came back thrilled, and some are even going back. You can read their testimonials on the page dedicated to him.

### **A guide and a friend with whom I've shared unique experiences**

January 2020: Azamat came to France for his first trip abroad.

2021: With my buddies Basile and Loïc, we went on an unprecedented horseback trek between Ozgorush and Kazarman. Azamat had promised us an unforgettable experience... and he was right!



Thanks to him, we were able to:

- Cross incredible and diverse landscapes.
- Ride top-quality horses.
- Meet remote nomads.

And we're not the only ones who loved it! Several blog readers do it every year and they all came back delighted.

If you're looking for a new horseback adventure or a more traditional tour, contact him [here](#).



**AZAMAT**

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## WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE TREK ON HORSEBACK?

The trek between Ozgorush and Kazarman is my ultimate adventure in Kyrgyzstan.

Azamat assured me that this was an unspoiled route with very few tourists, even in high season. I can confirm that he was absolutely right.

With Loïc and Basile, we had an unforgettable adventure on horseback. In the middle of July, we didn't encounter any other travelers: it was a dream come true!

### Who is this trek for?

This hike includes technical sections. Do it if you are a confident rider or if you are ready for a real adventure.

It is, without hesitation, my most memorable experience in Kyrgyzstan.

### What's the itinerary for this trek?

- Day 1: Horseback ride to Ozgorush with a mountain loop and overnight with Nurlan's family.
- Day 2: Horseback ride to Lake Karasuu, crossing the Taktalik Pass at 2,700 m, descent to Lake Karasuu, overnight in tents at 2,000 m.
- Day 3: Ride along Lake Karasuu to the second lake, Lake Kapka, at 2,340 m.
- Day 4: Horseback riding in Otuz Art, Belmonchok Pass at 3,200 m, picnic with snowfields, arrival at the nomad camp at 2,700 m, night in tents.
- Day 5: Horse ride to Kizil Unkur, descent to the canyon, change of scenery to green meadows and walnut forests, overnight at a local guesthouse in Kizil Unkur.
- Day 6: Last day on horseback in Arslanbob, crossing the walnut forest, picnic, arrival at the guesthouse, horses transported to Toktogul by truck, dinner at the guesthouse, end of service.



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### NEW TREK 2026



*Horseback riding  
in the heart of the  
Kyrgyz mountains*

### NEW TREK 2026



*The "Discover  
nomadic life  
on horseback  
in Kyrgyzstan"  
itinerary*

## A unique experience with Nurlan

Nurlan, a local ranger and expert guide, welcomes you to his home on the first night of your trek. It's the perfect opportunity to meet his family and immerse yourself in Kyrgyz culture.

Nurlan is an endearing character.

He'll delight you with his knowledge of plants, his love of animals and his infectious laugh.

Over time, Nurlan has become a friend, and every year I go back to see him and his family.

This trek offers an amazing diversity of landscapes. As my buddy Loïc would say: «The scenery looks like it was made by a graphic designer who wanted to get a kick out of it».

This is the perfect hike for:

- Escape the hustle and enjoy an exceptional natural setting
- Live like a true Kyrgyz rider, in complete immersion.
- Meet remote nomads, far from the beaten path.

You can do this trek if you have an adventurous spirit and don't suffer from vertigo. Azamat organizes it every year for riders who request it.

### **New for 2026**



To make treks more accessible, Azamat is organizing departures on fixed dates, with open groups and sliding-scale pricing. These trips are led by his equestrian guide friends.



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## DO YOU NEED A GUIDE FOR HIKING?

Local guides are skilled and ready to show you the ropes, but you're also free to explore on your own.

My answer to those who hesitate: «If you're debating whether you need a guide, it's because you probably do.»

### Hiking: Going solo or with a guide?

- Most hikers go solo. The trails aren't always marked, but you can buy maps in Bishkek and Karakol.
- Self-guided tours: Some agencies provide pre-booked yurt stays and a detailed itinerary through local host families.

#### ***Watch out for the weather***



If you're heading out solo, make sure you check the weather and trail conditions before you go.

### Horseback riding: can I go without a guide?

- You can't rent a horse from an agency without a guide, but you can rent one directly from a farmer for the day.
- If you're an experienced rider, you can go off and explore on your own.
- Example rates :
  - In Altyn Arashan: 1400 KGS/day
  - In Song-Kul: about 1000 KGS/day
- The advantage of riding solo: it makes it easy to meet the locals. During my solo ride, every rider I crossed greeted me and invited me to join them.

To find out more, I've written an article dedicated to [horseback riding in Kyrgyzstan](#).



**PREPARING YOUR TRIP**

**WHAT KYRGYZ  
TRADITIONS CAN  
I STILL SEE TODAY?**

## HOW CAN I VISIT AN ANIMAL MARKET?

It's easy: animal markets take place every week.

I went to the Tokmok animal market with readers who wanted to buy horses.

### **What is an animal market?**

It is a market where farmers come to buy or sell their animals.

### **What animals can I see there?**

You will mainly see:

- Sheep, goats, bulls, and horses,
- More rarely: yaks or donkeys

Horse transactions are spectacular. Buyers make them walk, trot, and especially gallop in the middle of the market before finalizing the transaction.

### **When and where do they take place?**

It's easy:

#### **Sunday morning**

- Karakol (Issyk-Kul)
- Tokmok (Chuy Valley)

#### **Saturday morning**

- Kochkor (Naryn region)

The rule is simple:

- You arrive very early, between 6:30 a.m. and 7:30 a.m. After 10 a.m., the market empties quickly.

## CAN I ATTEND A KOK-BORU MATCH?

AZEMA



*Hiking and Kyrgyz  
Nomadic Games*

Yes, Kok Boru is the most spectacular Kyrgyz game. It is the national sport.

It is an equestrian sport in which two teams of riders compete to grab a goat carcass and place it in the opposing team's goal.

### Where can I watch a Kok Boru match?

- August 31 in Bishkek: Major match at the racecourse for the national holiday.
- Talas, once a month: a festival dedicated to nomadic sports.
- Kegeti, every Sunday and Tuesday: Traditional matches in Azema's hometown. A unique immersion in local culture.

If you want to watch a match in a more authentic setting, Azema organizes an excursion to Kegeti. You can contact her directly [here](#).



## WHAT IS EAGLE HUNTING?

Eagle hunting is an age-old tradition in Central Asia. In Kyrgyzstan, hunters known as berkutchi train berkuttire (golden eagles) to capture prey in the winter. In the past, these hunters were essential for supplying villages with meat and furs.

### How do you become an eagle hunter?

According to my buddy Azamat, becoming a berkutchi is a long apprenticeship:

- Capturing a wild eagle: The hunter must take an egg from a nest perched high in the mountains. A risky mission.
- Rigorous training: the eagle is trained for four years before it is ready to hunt rabbits, foxes, and even wolves.
- A unique bond: An eagle lives for around 60 years, but according to tradition, its hunter releases it when it turns 20.

### When and where can I watch an eagle hunt?

- October to February: Hunting season - the best time to observe this practice in real-life conditions.
- All year round: demonstrations are held during training sessions to discover this amazing practice.



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## CAN I EASILY FIND HOT SPRINGS?

Yes. Hot springs are found in several regions of Kyrgyzstan.

### Where are the main hot springs?

You'll easily find them along your route:

The best-known ones:

#### Altyn-Arashan, above Karakol

- Access on foot or by 4×4.
- Outdoor pools in a natural setting.
- This is the best known and most touristy. You see it a lot in photos on Instagram. For me, it's one of the least pleasant because it's enclosed by mountains and completely in the shade.

The most hidden hot springs, tested and approved by my friends and me:

**Ak-Bermet, near Cholpon-Ata**

- Located west of Cholpon-Ata, on the northern shore of Lake Issyk-Kul.
- Easy access from the lake road.
- Open-air springs.
- One of the best equipped and very comfortable. An easy stop to include on an itinerary around Issyk-Kul.

**Kara-Tash Wild Hot Spring, Sary-Jaz Valley (near Enilchek)**

- Wild springs in the mountains.
- Access via a track from Enilchek.
- Hot pools along the Sary-Jaz River.

**Dzhuuku Istochnik, south shore of Lake Issyk-Kul**

- Located in the Dzhuuku Valley.
- Access from the lake road then via a trail.
- Springs at the bottom of the gorge, in the mountains.

**Chon-Kyzyl-Suu, on the southern shore of Issyk-Kul**

- Springs located in a gorge.
- Not very well equipped.
- A pool frequented by locals.

**Goryachiy Istochnik Nur, on the southern shore of Issyk-Kul**

- Outdoor pools facing Lake Issyk-Kul.
- Unobstructed view of the lake and surrounding mountains.
- This is my favorite hot spring: you bathe in the hot water with the lake in front of you and snow-capped peaks all around. It is mainly frequented by locals.

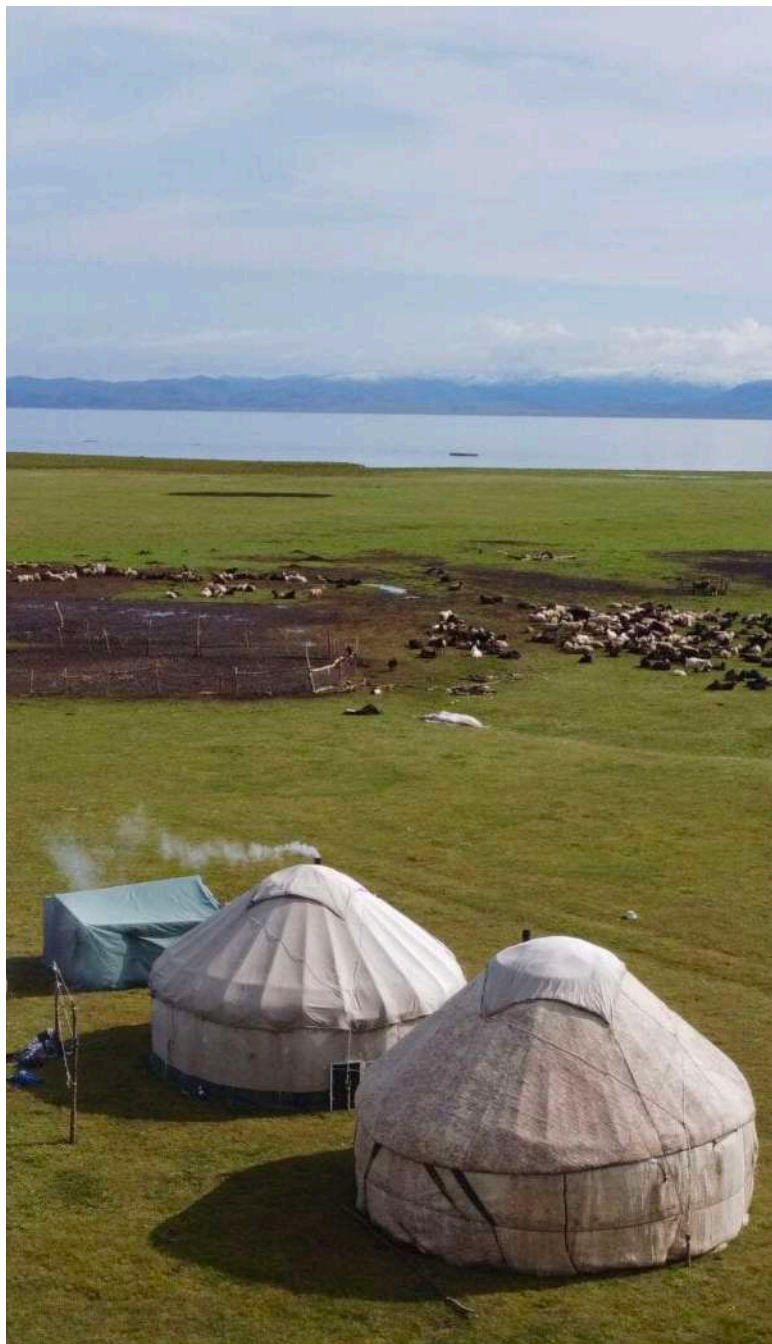
## **Are they mixed, and do I need to book in advance?**

Yes. Access is mixed.

No. Access is provided directly on site.

You may sometimes be asked to pay, depending on the site.





# **WHAT SHOULD I PACK FOR A TRIP TO KYRGYZSTAN?**

## WHAT GIFTS CAN I GIVE TO LOCALS?

Don't bring anything from home. Buy it once you're there.

I'm often asked this, and my answer is simple: don't bring anything, buy it when you get there.

Why?

- Locally bought gifts will make people just as happy.
- You're boosting the local economy by buying from them.
- You avoid assuming their needs and adapt to the moment.

### Got a real-life example?

Nurlan welcomed us into his home with my friends Loïc and Basile. We saw his kids playing ball with a plastic bag.

- Head to the village store
  - Pick up a soccer ball.
- The result: the shopkeeper is thrilled, the kids are happy, and we end up playing an impromptu game and scoring tons of little goals!

### What can I bring on a trek?

If your itinerary passes through villages, buy directly on the spot.

If you're heading into the countryside with no stores, make sure to do your shopping beforehand.

For the kids:

- Simple, shared toys: balls, Frisbees, and more...
- Avoid unnecessary items and sweets
  - They're bad for your teeth.

For the adults:

- Fresh fruits and vegetables → They are farmers, they have meat but very few fresh products.
- A watermelon if you're riding or driving
  - It's a super popular fruit.

## Another great idea

- Photos of your family, your home, your region.
- Nomads love sharing their daily lives, and they're also curious about yours.

### *Little bonus*



Don't forget my English/Kyrgyz lexicon to make communication easier!

The only exception: Azamat and cheese!  
If you're travelling with my buddy Azamat, an artisanal camembert will be the best gift you can give him. He's absolutely obsessed with it!



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## HOW MUCH MONEY SHOULD I BUDGET FOR TRAVELLING TO KYRGYZSTAN?

Kyrgyzstan remains an affordable destination, but inflation has pushed prices up, especially since 2022. Currently, for a three-week trip, I spend around €1,495 (flight included).

### **My detailed budget :**

- Plane ticket: €510
- Meals: \$150
- Hotels: €225
- Transport: €90
- Excursions (horseback riding, guided tours, etc.): €591
- Extras and souvenirs: €51
- Laundry: €6

I could spend less by eating at small local restaurants. Dinners at guesthouses cost around 450 KGS (€4.50). Eating out often cuts this budget in half. I prefer to share my meals with local families for the human experience.

### **How my budget has changed over the years**

- 2014: €1,111 (including flight)
- 2025: approximately €1,623 (including flight)

Over time, I've chosen a bit more comfort, avoiding dorms, but Kyrgyzstan remains an incredibly affordable destination.

## How much will it cost in 2026?

Travel to Kyrgyzstan is still super affordable. Here are a few budget tips for you:

### Meals

- A meal in a boui-boui: €2 to €3
- A hearty dinner in a guesthouse: €10

### Hosting

- Night in guesthouse (breakfast included): €15
- Hostel dormitory: €8

### Transport

- Bus between major cities: €3 to €5 per journey

### Activities and excursions

- Traditional Banya in Bishkek: €7  
(a must-try local experience!)
- Eagle hunting demonstration: €50 per group
- Horseback riding in Song-Kul with overnight stay in a yurt (all-inclusive): €55 per day

## How to optimize your budget?

- Cheaper flights: If you book early, you can find tickets for about €400.
- Eat local: Head to markets and small restaurants instead of guesthouse meals.

## WHAT'S THE WEATHER LIKE IN KYRGYZSTAN?

«In Kyrgyzstan, even in summer, you can experience all four seasons in one day.»

That's my buddy Azamat saying it, and trust me, he's spot on.

If you're going on a trek or spending time at altitude, expect anything. I've had days with: bright sunshine in the morning, freezing rain at midday, and polar winds in the evening. Don't be surprised.

Don't leave without :

- A warm down jacket, even in the middle of summer.
- A waterproof, windproof jacket for those surprise storms.
- A good hat and gloves if you're heading to higher altitudes.

## WHAT WAS IN YOUR BACKPACK?

As with all my trips, my bag weighed no more than 18 lbs.

My goal was to travel light and avoid checked luggage.

Why?

- Less waiting at the airport.
- No loss of baggage during stopovers.
- More freedom when travelling.

### How do I manage my clothes?

I always leave with 5 days' worth of clothes. It's the perfect balance:

- Enough to avoid doing laundry every day.
- Not too much, so you don't end up with a heavy bag.

Laundries are easy to find, between 100 and 300 KGS per load.

And if you want to save some cash, you can always wash your clothes in rivers!



**AZAMAT**

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## **My bag for Kyrgyzstan**

### **Bag and storage**

- Decathlon Forclaz 60L bag, with small daypack

### **Clothing**

- 1 pair of riding jeans, 1 pair of trekking pants
- 1 pair of swimming shorts, 5 pairs of boxer shorts, 5 pairs of socks
- 2 light shirts, 2 t-shirts
- 1 hoodie
- 1 ski jacket

### **Useful accessories**

- Money belt
- Padlock
- Headlamp (for nights in a yurt)
- Waterproof bag

### **Hygiene and care**

- Toothbrush, toothpaste
- Micropur (water purification)
- Anti-diarrheal
- Survival blanket

### **Electronics**

- iPhone (replaces camera and GoPro)
- USB adapter
- Power bank (essential on treks)

### **Style & comfort**

- Bob and sunglasses
- Spare glasses

### **Shoes**

- Trekking shoes (tested and approved)
- Sneakers (to feel more comfortable in town)
- Flip-flops (always useful)

## Camping and trekking

- Microfiber towel
- Sleeping bag
- Inflatable cushion
- Reusable water bottle

## Guidance and documentation

- Travel guide (because a bit of prep never hurts)

The essentials for travelling light, without forgetting the must-haves... and a few extras to keep you comfortable!



## WHAT SHOULD I BRING TO MAKE MY TRIP EASIER?



*Box of micropur*



*Solar shower*



*Money belt*

## What are your essentials?

### Kyrgyzstan Traveller's Handbook

- The only travel guide fully dedicated to this destination.
- More detailed than general guides to Central Asia.
- Provides a deeper understanding of local history and traditions.
- I've been featured in it since 2020!

### A box of micropur

- Essential for purifying water in the mountains.
- Rivers are often contaminated by animals.
- Avoid digestive issues and reduce your water budget.

### A survival blanket

- Ultra-compact, it shields you from cold, heat, and humidity.
- Can double as a stretcher if needed.
- A must-have for less than €2.

## Do you have any other useful accessories?

### A solar shower

A 20L water bag that warms up in the sun. Perfect if you want to avoid icy river water while riding.

### A money belt

A belt that looks normal but hides bills inside. Perfect for hiding your money discreetly.

### Riding pants

If you're not used to riding, they can help prevent chafing. If you're a good rider, you can do without them, but it's up to you to choose between style and comfort.

## IS IT EASY TO ACCESS THE INTERNET AND MOBILE DATA?

Kyrgyzstan is the perfect place to disconnect. The country is 98% mountains, and Wi-Fi is rare.

### Where to find Wi-Fi?

- Available at select hostels and restaurants.
- Often slow, so don't count on it for working online.
- Free at the airport, with the option to recharge afterwards.

### Which SIM card should you choose?

Operator «O» is the best for network coverage.

- 95 KGS = 1 week with 10 GB of data.
- Easy to buy in town or right at the airport.

### How do I make calls to or from Kyrgyzstan?

- From France to Kyrgyzstan: Add +996 before the number.
- From Kyrgyzstan to France: Add +33 before the number.

If you want to stay connected, it's best to buy a local SIM card as soon as you arrive!



## WHICH USEFUL APPS SHOULD YOU HAVE ON YOUR PHONE?

Internet speeds are often slow, so it's best to download applications before you leave. You absolutely need:

### **Maps.me — The best offline GPS**

- Free application.
- Detailed maps, including hiking routes and trails.
- Works offline without connection after downloading the maps.

If you want to find your way around easily and follow routes even without a network, **Maps.me** is the best GPS for travel.



# **HOW CAN I BE A PREPARED AND RESPONSIBLE TRAVELLER?**

## DO I REALLY NEED TRAVEL INSURANCE?

I'm not a perfect example. I've often made rash decisions that I later regretted.

To help you avoid these mistakes, here's some essential advice based on my own experiences and those of my fellow travelers.

Yes, absolutely. Travelling without insurance is foolish and can cost you a lot of money if something goes wrong.

### Why is it essential?

- Accident or illness → Medical expenses can be sky-high.
- Repatriation → A medical evacuation can cost tens of thousands of euros.
- Trip cancellation or baggage loss → Good coverage can save you a lot of hassle.

### My personal experience

In 2018, I tore my cruciate ligaments in my knee in Togo.

Thanks to my insurance, I was repatriated without paying a cent and everything was covered.

Travel insurance is not expensive, or even free (if you have a Visa Premier, for example). Don't overthink it, just get good coverage.

If you're still unsure, think about that Canadian who was travelling without insurance and had to raise \$68,000 from friends and family after contracting malaria to pay for his repatriation...

Learn from his experience so you don't make the same mistake.

## GOT ANY TRAVEL INSURANCE YOU'D RECOMMEND?

Yes, **ACS** offers excellent coverage at a reasonable price. Readers who have tested it have given me excellent feedback.

I also recommend that you read my article on **credit card travel insurance**, which may help you choose the best option.

## WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW BEFORE GOING ON A HORSEBACK RIDE?

Two key points:

- Your horse's health → Make sure he's in good physical condition before setting off.
- Your safety → Wear a riding helmet.

I had the chance to discuss this with the French ambassador in Bishkek. You'll find all the details in my article dedicated to **horseback riding**.



## ARE THERE OTHER ACTIVITIES INVOLVING ANIMALS FOR WHICH I NEED TO TAKE PRECAUTIONS?

Yes, eagle hunting and Kok Boru.

These two traditional activities are part of Kyrgyz culture. You can watch them at festivals or private demonstrations.

### What you need to know before attending

- Eagle hunting → In a classic demonstration, the eagle hunts a live rabbit, leading to its death.
- Kok Boru → This equestrian game involves two teams competing for a goat carcass. To start the game, a goat is sacrificed.

### What are the alternatives to ensure animal welfare?

You have two options:

- Attend a demonstration at a festival
  - Be aware of what you're witnessing.
- Opt for a private demonstration
  - You can ask for alternatives:
    - Replace the rabbit with a decoy for the eagle hunt.
    - Replace the goat with a fake carcass for the Kok Boru.

#### *Good to know*



These requests are becoming increasingly common at travel agencies. You can easily find demonstrations that do not involve the killing of animals.

## HOW CAN I AVOID ACUTE MOUNTAIN SICKNESS?

AMS generally occurs above 3,500 m altitude. The good news is that on a standard tour of Kyrgyzstan, you rarely exceed this limit.

Examples of altitudes:

- Song-Kul: 3,000 m → No major risk.
- Ala-Kul Pass: 3,850 m → You pass through it quickly, so there's minimal risk if you're properly acclimatized.

Thanks to Nathanaël, a blog reader and member of a trekking association in Nepal, for his advice! Always consult your doctor to validate this information.

### What are the rules for acclimatization?

Four factors influence AMS :

- Climbing speed → Don't climb too fast.
- Altitude reached → The higher you go, the more important the precautions.
- Length of stay → The body adapts, but it needs time.
- Individual susceptibility → Some people are more sensitive than others.

### What rules should you follow?

- Gradual ascent: No more than 400 m in altitude gain between each night above 3,500 m at the start of the trip.
- Avoid intense exertion at first: allow your body to adapt.
- Stay hydrated: Clear urine = good hydration.
- Don't take sleeping pills: they aggravate hypoxia during sleep.
- Listen to your body: If you feel any symptoms, slow down or go downhill.

Taking these criteria into account, we recommend that you follow these rules:

## **How do I know if I have AMS?**

AMS manifests through several symptoms. Nathanaël assigns points based on their severity:

### **1 point for mild symptoms**

- Headaches
- Lack of appetite or nausea
- Insomnia
- Dizziness

### **2 points for moderate symptoms**

- Paracetamol-resistant headaches
- Vomiting

### **3 points for severe symptoms**

- Shortness of breath at rest
- Extreme fatigue
- Reduced urine output

## **What should I do based on the score?**

- 1 to 3 points → Mild AMS → Take a paracetamol and continue climbing if symptoms subside.
- 4 to 6 points → Moderate AMS → Rest for 24 h at the same altitude before continuing. If you take 3 g paracetamol/day without improvement, go back down.
- +6 points → Severe AMS → Descend immediately to avoid serious complications (cerebral or pulmonary edema).

My buddy Christophe had this experience in Nepal. He talks about it in detail on [his blog](#).

## HOW SHOULD I MANAGE MY WASTE DURING TREKS?

Some guides burn waste on site. In France, this might seem absurd, but in Kyrgyzstan, there is no waste treatment plant.

Telling the guide not to burn the garbage is pointless. If it isn't burned in the mountains, it will be burned elsewhere...

### **So, what can we do?**

- Reduce your waste right from the start:
- Use a backpack instead of plastic bags.
- Choose local, unpackaged foods.

**Burn waste on site rather than letting it end up in a giant landfill.**

### **What else can you do to be a responsible traveler?**

**Manage your environmental impact:**

- Avoid relieving yourself near water  
→ Risk of pollution.
- Bury your excrement → Prevent river pollution and protect the flora.
- Wash your clothes at least 100 m from rivers. Even biodegradable soap must be filtered through the earth to be truly biodegradable.

**Respect the local economy:**

- Think of the local salary: In the countryside, a Kyrgyz earns around €150/month.
- Don't privatize shared taxis: Even if it's cheap for you, buying up all the seats to leave immediately deprives locals of essential transport.

### ***Any final words of advice?***



Responsible travel means adapting your behavior to local realities.

## WHAT CAN I BRING BACK FROM KYRGYZSTAN?

You can bring back lots of typical items that are often unknown in France. It's a good idea, as long as you know what can be taken across the border without any problems.

In Kel Suu, a soldier offered me a wolf head hat. Surprising, but I refused: this type of item can cause problems at customs.

I preferred to bring back a kalpak, the traditional Kyrgyz hat, which is allowed and easy to take across the border.

### **What you can bring back without worry**

- Textiles: felt, kalpak hats, slippers, felt rugs
- Handicrafts: embroidery, belts, small decorative items
- Dry goods: honey, local sweets, tea, spices (in small quantities)
- Everyday objects: tableware, wood, simple tools

As a general rule, if it's for domestic or tourist use, it's fine.

### **What is prohibited or strongly discouraged**

- Objects made of bone, horn, or animal parts
- Products derived from protected animals (wolf, eagle, snow leopard)
- Antiques without official certificates

#### ***Important***



Even if an item is sold on the market, it does not mean that it is allowed through customs.





**PREPARING YOUR TRIP**

**WHAT ARE THE PEOPLE  
LIKE IN KYRGYZSTAN?**

## IS IT DANGEROUS FOR A WOMAN TO TRAVEL ALONE?

I am often asked this question. As you may have noticed, I am not a woman. I decided to ask Coralie for her opinion. She explored Kyrgyzstan alone for three weeks in September 2018.



## **Her testimony**

### **Is it a safe and welcoming country?**

«It's one of the safest places I've traveled to. As a woman travelling alone, I never felt unsafe. The locals are often surprised to see a woman travelling alone, but they are always kind and respectful. In Bishkek, Osh, Kochkor, and Song-Kul, the locals are used to seeing female solo travelers.»

### **Were you able to get around easily?**

«I used local transportation (marshrutkas, shared taxis) without any worries. The drivers are always men, but I never felt unsafe.»

### **What were the other women like?**

«Kyrgyz women are very helpful. If they see you alone, they'll often come up and offer their help.»

### **Did you walk alone at night?**

«I did it without any problems. Of course, I took the same precautions as I would in Paris: avoid poorly lit areas and situations that feel suspicious.»

### **What were you wearing?**

With the exception of Arslanbob, where the culture is more conservative, classic travel attire is appropriate everywhere.

«I wore comfortable clothes, sometimes shorts when it was hot, and that was never an issue.»

The only real risk? Like anywhere else, encountering a drunk person. But Kyrgyz people are generally protective of tourists.

## WHO ARE THE PEOPLE I WILL MEET?

Encounters with locals and other travelers can greatly influence your perception of the country.

### **What are the local people like?**

The Kyrgyz, descendants of nomads, live in a harsh mountain environment. They are known for their hospitality and honesty. Here, doors open easily and travelers are always well received.

### **What about the other travelers?**

If you're coming to Kyrgyzstan, it's probably because you love nature and the great outdoors. You'll meet mostly experienced backpackers, accustomed to less touristy destinations.

Expect fascinating discussions in hostels and on the road. Every traveler has a unique story and incredible experiences to share!

## WHAT ARE THE THREE CULTURAL RULES THAT WILL MAKE ME A TRUE KYRGYZ?

### **Always use your right hand**

The left hand is traditionally associated with personal hygiene after using the toilet.

The right hand is used for eating, giving and receiving. I always pay attention to this.

### **Never refuse an invitation too quickly**

Tea, a meal, or kumis are all part of hospitality. I don't like kumis, but I never refuse it.

My tip: one sip is enough. Drinking it all in one go means they'll offer you more.

### **Take off your shoes when visiting someone's home or a yurt**

The interior is a clean space, shared for eating, living, and sleeping. The first time, I hesitated. Since then, I always take off my shoes without thinking twice. Keeping your shoes on is considered disrespectful to your host.



# ARE THE 2026 WORLD NOMAD GAMES TAKING PLACE IN KYRGYZSTAN?

Yes, the 6th World Nomad Games are taking place in Kyrgyzstan.

From August 31 to September 6, 2026 inclusive.

I was lucky enough to attend the very first edition of the World Nomad Games in 2014 in Cholpon-Ata.

The racetrack had just been built especially for the event.

Twelve years later, I am delighted to see the Games returning here.

## WHERE DO THE WORLD NOMAD GAMES TAKE PLACE?

### **The games are taking place in several cities:**

- Bishkek: opening ceremony.
- Kyrchyn Gorge: ethno-village and several challenges.
- Cholpon-Ata: horse racing at the racetrack and closing ceremony

## WHAT IS THE PROGRAM FOR THE 2026 WORLD NOMAD GAMES?

The program known to date is:

### **August 31, 2026**

- Opening ceremony in Bishkek, on National Day
- Access subject to specific ticket

### **September 2–6, 2026**

- Schedule of sporting events

### **Ethno-village**

- Located in the Kyrchyn Gorge, it hosts some of the competitions.

### **Equestrian sports**

- Held at the Cholpon-Ata race course, with admission likely subject to ticket purchase

### **Closing Ceremony**

- In Cholpon-Ata

## WHAT EVENTS CAN I SEE AT THE WORLD NOMAD GAMES?

The World Nomad Games immerse you in traditional sports from nomadic culture, still practiced today.

I've tried wrestling with my Kyrgyz friends several times.

On foot. On horseback. The result is always the same. I lose.

Their strength and balance are incredible.

### **What equestrian sports should you not miss?**

- Kok Boru
- Horseback wrestling (Audaryspak)
- Archery on horseback
- Tenge Ilu
- Horse racing(speed or endurance).

### **What strength and combat disciplines can you see?**

- Traditional wrestling (Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Turkish, Mongolian, etc.)
- Bull Wrestling
- Powerful Nomad

### **What precision and traditional disciplines are on the program?**

- Traditional archery
- Eagle hunting (Kusbegilik)
- Ordo (knucklebones game)

### **What traditional strategy games can you see?**

- Intellectual games (Mangala, etc.)

## IS IT EASY TO BUY A TICKET?

You can attend the World Nomad Games without going through an organized tour. Official tickets are not yet on sale, but access to the ethno-village is free. For everything else, book your accommodation and, if necessary, your rental car well in advance. Whether you are passionate about traditional sports, nomadic culture, or simply curious, the World Nomad Games are a unique experience.



**HORSEBACK TREK**

# **PREPARING YOUR HORSE TREK**

## **Planning a horseback trek in Kyrgyzstan and looking for clear, practical advice before you go?**

Since the publication of my guide to Kyrgyzstan, I've talked a lot with my readers about horseback trekking. Thanks to these exchanges, to the advice of my local friends and to my experience in the field, I've put together here the best recommendations for you to be well prepared.

This guide answers all your questions:

- Where can I find a reliable horse?
- How do you check if your horse is in good health? What to do if he hurts himself?
- What riding basics should you know before a horse trek?
- What is a typical day on horseback in Kyrgyzstan like?
- What equipment do you need for your horseback trek?
- Who should you contact to organize a worry-free trek?

## **Join the community!**

To exchange ideas with other travelers, join the Facebook group « [Travel to Kyrgyzstan](#) ». Created in June 2018, it's the ideal place to share the latest info, good tips and find fellow travelers. Don't hesitate

to contribute to keep the community alive!

## **My trusted contacts for a successful tour**

To help you travel with peace of mind,  
I recommend two trusted local guides:  
Tatosh and Azamat, experienced local guides  
to whom I have already referred hundreds  
of readers since 2015:

- Tatosh: specialist in tourist treks,  
perfect for beginner riders.
- Azamat: expert in off-the-beaten-track  
expeditions for experienced riders  
and adventurers.

## **Bonus: a self-guided adventure**

As a bonus, discover the story of Florent,  
who chose to buy his own horse to explore  
Kyrgyzstan in total autonomy.



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## WHY GO ON A HORSEBACK TREK IN KYRGYZSTAN?

Kyrgyzstan is a land of nomads, who travel through the mountains on horseback, setting up their yurt camps as the seasons change. Horses are an integral part of their life and culture.

During your treks, you will often meet nomads.

Your mount will give you a unique feeling of freedom.

- You'll be able to gallop among a horde of free-roaming horses.
- In the evening, a nomad family will welcome you and teach you to play their traditional instrument.
- You'll even learn how to milk mares and discover how kumis, the traditional fermented drink, is made.

Horseback riding is one of the best reasons to travel to Kyrgyzstan.



## IS IT RIGHT FOR YOU, AND HOW CAN YOU PREPARE FOR IT?

I met riders of all ages and backgrounds.

Among my most memorable encounters:

A French family with three children and their parents. They were travelling with :

- A guide to accompany them.
- Four horses for the five members of the family.
- The youngest children (aged 4 and 6) rode with one of their parents, seated at the front.

I was lucky enough to share a bit of the road with them after their four-day hike.

### **How do I choose the right group?**

My best advice:

- Share your trek with riders of equivalent level to avoid differences in pace.
- If levels differ too much, a second guide will enable the group to split up easily.

### **Do I need to know how to ride?**

No, before you start your hike, your guide will give you a complete riding lesson.

## WHAT ARE THE BASICS OF HORSE RIDING?

### VIDEO TUTORIAL



*How to ride  
a horse*

### ARTICLE



*How to ride  
a horse*

## WHAT SHOULD I CHECK BEFORE STARTING MY HORSEBACK TREK?

To keep things simple, here are the main rules:

### Safety rules

- Never walk behind your horse.
- Always wear a riding helmet for your safety.

### Steering your horse

- To move forward: tap your heels while saying TCHU TCHU.
- To slow down: pull on the reins while saying BRE BRE.
- To turn: steer your reins in the desired direction.

### Posture

- When going uphill: lean slightly forward.
- When going downhill: lean back.
- Lower your heels and push down on your feet.

I also invite you to read this article that explains [how to ride a horse](#).

Contrary to what some people think, horseback riding is quite physical. At the end of the day, expect to be tired and sore. Make sure you're properly equipped to avoid chafing and possible pain in the buttocks and thighs.

Before setting off, make sure your horse is in good health. Some travelers have told me about their misadventures with injured horses.

An injured horse should never be offered to travelers.

If your guide insists, refuse categorically and demand another mount.

This is a simple rule to apply everywhere, whatever the country or guide. If no one agrees to ride an injured horse, organizers will have no choice but to take better care of their animals.

## HOW DO I CHECK MY HORSE FOR INJURIES?

Before mounting, check your horse's condition to avoid any unpleasant surprises.

The most sensitive part is the girth area, where the saddle rests.

Look carefully to see if there is:

- wounds
- irritation
- swelling

A horse injured in this area should never be ridden.

In Kyrgyzstan, equipment does not always meet European standards.

It is not uncommon to see:

- straps made from car seat belts.
- DIY equipment that works.

The equipment isn't always perfect, but there's a simple solution that can prevent a lot of injuries: a foam girth sleeve or protective pad.



The same applies to shoeing:

- A complete shoeing costs around 500 soms.
- It lasts from one month to one and a half months.

An owner who regularly rents out their horse should always have it properly shod.

If you book with Tatosh (my friend who organizes hikes in Song-Kul), please note that she is already raising awareness among farmers about these issues.

***If you are presented  
with an injured horse***



Refuse it immediately  
and notify us without delay



**TATOSH**

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## WHAT SHOULD I DO IF MY HORSE GETS INJURED ON THE WAY?

Even with every precaution, your horse can get injured along the way. If you notice lameness, a cut or irritation beneath the saddle, here's what to do:

- Stop immediately to examine the animal.
- Report the problem to your guide and insist that he take the situation seriously.
- If the horse is in pain, don't continue. Get down and walk beside the horse.
- Ask for a change of horse if possible, especially if you're on an organized trek.
- If you are alone, find a place where your horse can rest and assess the severity of the injury before continuing.

If it is a recommended guide on the blog,

let me know.

## SHOULD I TAKE A PACK HORSE?

It depends on the weight of your belongings. A horse should carry no more than 25-30% of its own weight. If your load exceeds this limit, a pack horse is essential.

### When can I do without it?

For a short, light trek (e.g., Song-Kul), there is no need for a pack horse.

- It's a loop: you sleep in a yurt and meals are prepared by the nomads.
- Your belongings stay in the departure village, and you pick them up on your return.
- You travel light, so one horse is enough.

### When should I plan for one?

A pack horse is required for a long, self-sufficient trek.

- If you're carrying food and camping gear, your riding horse may become overloaded.
- An extra horse can lighten your main mount and ensure a more comfortable trek.

## IS WEARING A RIDING HELMET REALLY IMPORTANT?

Yes, horseback riding is a risky sport, even as a leisure activity. A fall can happen at any time. It's better for your helmet to take the impact than your head.

In the mountains, far from hospitals, an accident can quickly become a real problem.

Since 2019, the guides I recommend in Song-Kul have been providing Decathlon riding helmets, brought from France by readers of the blog and myself (thank you to them!).

In 2021, I discussed this issue with the French ambassador in Bishkek.

## DO I NEED TRAVEL INSURANCE?

Yes, and don't take it lightly. As with any trip, insurance is essential. Riding is a high-risk activity, and an accident can quickly turn your adventure into a nightmare.

Travelling without insurance is stupid. If something goes wrong, medical and evacuation costs can be astronomical. Don't take that risk.



## **COST OF A HORSEBACK TREK IN KYRGYZSTAN: HOW MUCH SHOULD YOU BUDGET?**

The price of a horseback ride depends on several factors. The larger your group, the lower the price, as you share the cost of the guide and logistics.

- An English-speaking guide costs a little more, a French-speaking guide a lot more.

For longer hikes, rates are negotiated according to group size and logistical requirements.

### **Why do some treks cost more?**

#### **Duration and experience of the guide**

- The longer the trek, the more it requires an experienced guide, which increases the price.

#### **Heavier logistics**

- Camping equipment for nights away from the yurt camps.
- Rented cooking equipment.

#### **Transport of equipment and catering**

Depending on the size of the group, you will need:

- One or more pack horses to carry the equipment.
- One or more grooms to manage the horses and set up and dismantle the camps.
- A cook to prepare meals and manage supplies.

### **Alternatives with a 4×4**

Some agencies offer a 4×4 vehicle to bring luggage and the cook to the camp each evening.

## WHERE AND WHEN TO GO HORSEBACK TREKKING IN KYRGYZSTAN?

If you want to ride in the best conditions, aim for the period from May to September.

- July and August are the hottest and busiest months. However, even in summer, the crowds remain reasonable.
- In Song-Kul, you can hike all year round, but winter is harsh, with temperatures ranging from  $-30^{\circ}\text{C}$  to  $-25^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $-22^{\circ}\text{F}$  to  $-13^{\circ}\text{F}$ ). Yurts remain in place to accommodate travelers, but it's best to be well equipped to cope with the cold.

Kyrgyzstan offers many incredible spots for horseback riding.

### Most popular destinations:

These are the most accessible and offer the most affordable treks:

- Song-Kul: The country's most famous lake, perched at an altitude of 3,013 meters, is surrounded by mountains. There are several routes to reach it. Yurts are available along the way to welcome you.
- Issyk-Kul: Second largest alpine lake in the world after Titicaca, this salt lake located at 1,600 m above sea level brings together numerous agencies offering treks at reasonable prices.



## **Other places for exceptional horseback riding:**

- Sary Chelek National Reserve
- An idyllic setting with lakes surrounded by walnut and conifer forests.
- Alay (south of the country): A completely different panorama with glaciers, rocky mountains and pine-covered gorges. In the distance, you'll see Mount Lenin (7,134 m).
- Karakol region: Access to the Terskey Ala-Too mountain range (up to 5,100 m altitude). Experienced riders can cross passes at over 3,800 m.
- Chong Kemin (north of Issyk-Kul): Perfect terrain for galloping through pine forests and vast pastures.
- Arslanbob: The world's largest walnut forest, offering spectacular scenery. No yurts here, as the nomads have settled down and live in huts.

## **For a longer adventure**

If you have the time and budget, you can combine several of these regions to go on longer hikes.

## WHAT LONG HORSEBACK TREKS WOULD YOU RECOMMEND IN KYRGYZSTAN?

You will find several types of hikes in the country. The right choice does not depend on the most impressive trek on paper, but on three simple things:

- your level on horseback,
- your desire for adventure,
- and your relationship with comfort.

In other words, ask yourself these questions:

- Want a relaxed horseback ride?
- Or a more challenging adventure in the mountains?

My buddy Azamat offers two horseback treks:

- one that is accessible and peaceful,
- the other is a more challenging high-mountain adventure.

## WHICH EASY ITINERARY COMBINES NOMADIC LIFE AND NIGHTS IN A YURT?

DISCOVER THIS  
TREK IN DETAIL



These are the two favorites of the blog's readers.

If you want to discover Kyrgyzstan on horseback without any pressure, the «Discover nomadic life on horseback in Kyrgyzstan» itinerary is ideal.

You travel at a comfortable pace, sleep in yurts, and share the daily life of nomadic families around Song-Kul.

It's a real horseback trek, but designed to be comfortable: no camping, no heavy logistics, just horses, wide open spaces, and time to enjoy yourself.

I recommend this trek if you want to:

- discover horseback riding in the mountains,
- experience nomadic life alongside Kyrgyz families,
- move at an accessible and comfortable pace,
- sleep in yurts, without camping or heavy logistics.



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## WHICH ITINERARY COMBINES A HIGH-MOUNTAIN ADVENTURE WITH NIGHTS IN TENTS?

DISCOVER THIS  
TREK IN DETAIL



If you are looking for a long, wilder, and more challenging horseback trek, the «In the Heart of the Kyrgyz Mountains on Horseback» itinerary is for you.

Head for the Tien Shan mountains, with long days on horseback, high mountain passes, and nights in tents, far from any infrastructure.

You spend several days in the heart of the mountains, with a real feeling of isolation.

It's a guided adventure, demanding at times, and perfect if you enjoy challenging treks.

I recommend this trek if you:

- are already comfortable on horseback,
- want a more challenging adventure,
- are looking for long days and high mountain passes,
- accept sleeping in tents in the mountains.



## WHO ORGANIZES THESE TREKS?

My buddy **Azamat** organizes these treks.

He speaks French, knows the terrain perfectly, and is used to welcoming blog readers: from beginner riders to the most experienced.

If you are unsure which of the two options to choose, he can help you choose the trek that best suits your experience and expectations.

Azamat speaks French, so feel free to write to him to organize your trek.



**AZAMAT**

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## IS A GUIDE NECESSARY, AND UNDER WHAT CONDITIONS ARE THE HIKES CONDUCTED?

## CAN I RENT A HORSE IN KYRGYZSTAN?

### **Yes, a guide is indispensable.**

A horse isn't just a means of transport, it's a living being that needs care, food and rest. Experienced local guides know their horses inside out and can anticipate their needs.

No, I don't recommend going without a guide.

### **Why don't you advise me to go without a guide?**

A horse is not an object that you can simply pick up and return.

It has:

- his habits.
- his own pace.
- his character.

If poorly saddled, poorly handled, or poorly fed, it can quickly injure itself. A Kyrgyz horse is certainly accustomed to the mountains, but that is not enough.

Without a guide, you can quickly find yourself overwhelmed by a situation you cannot control.

### **Even if I'm comfortable on horseback?**

I wanted to try the experience on my own. I rented a horse from a farmer and set off without a guide. I'm a good rider, but I wasn't completely at ease.

Just to take a break in the middle of nature: I wondered if my horse would take the opportunity to run away... and if I would have to search for it alone in this huge mountain.

## How do the Kyrgyz people manage with their horses?

They have their own unique practices. At night, they leave the horses semi-free, simply tied by their front legs, so that they can graze and drink.

In the morning, they set off to collect them. It sounds simple, but it requires genuine knowledge of both the mountains and horses. You don't become a nomadic horseman overnight.

## CAN I BUY A HORSE?

### **Yes, it's possible, but it's better to know what you're getting into.**

Head to the animal market in Karakol or Tokmok on a Sunday morning. It's a unique experience: horses, cows, sheep...

A horse is traded between \$1,000 and \$1,500, but price isn't everything.

#### ***Buying a horse is a big responsibility***



You'll need feed it, care for it, water it, and make sure it stays healthy.



## WHAT IS THE ACCOMMODATION LIKE?

Yurts are large and spacious. Most of the time, the families that welcome you have one yurt for travelers and another for themselves.

Inside, you will find simple mattresses and warm blankets. All travelers sleep in the same yurt, which helps to keep warm during the cool nights in the Kyrgyz mountains.

## HOW DO YOU WASH AND GO TO THE TOILET?

Outside the yurt camps, you're on your own.

In the camps, the toilets are rudimentary: a simple hut set apart, with a hole dug in the ground. Not very comfortable, but it does the job.

As for showers, some camps offer a cabin with a supply of cold water. Otherwise, you can always go for my favorite option: the icy river...

Most travelers are content to change their clothes...and wait until they return to the city to take a nice shower.

## WHAT KIND OF CLOTHES SHOULD I BRING?

In Kyrgyzstan, even in the middle of summer, the mountains can hold surprises. The weather changes quickly, and you may experience all four seasons in a single day.

Make sure you bring:

- warm clothes for the evening and night.
- breathable clothing for daytime wear.
- protection from the rain, because the weather changes quickly.

Your clothing must above all be suitable for riding. Unsuitable clothing causes chafing, pain, and discomfort.

Give preference to:

- high-top shoes or boots to protect your ankles.
- covering clothing, even in summer.

Below you will find a complete list of recommended equipment to pack in your bag.

## HOW CAN I GET EQUIPPED LIKE A LOCAL?

To equip yourself like a true kyrgyz, go to the Bishkek bazaar. Buy Kok Boru chaps (600 soms) and a rain cape (500 soms) from this merchant.

Loïc, Basile and I were extremely satisfied with these purchases during our trek in July 2021!



## CAN I CHARGE MY ELECTRONIC DEVICES?

**Yes, provided you bring a power bank.**

The yurt camps have no electricity, except sometimes a small solar battery. This allows nomads to power a light bulb or a satellite phone, but you cannot plug in your devices.

Manage your battery use carefully and use your devices sparingly.

## DO YOU HAVE ANY GUIDES YOU'D RECOMMEND FOR A HORSEBACK TREK IN KYRGYZSTAN?

**Yes, and if you want to leave with peace of mind, I have two guide friends to recommend to you.**

They're experienced, passionate about their country and horses, and I trust them completely. Since 2015, I've sent hundreds of readers to them, and most came back with great memories.

Tatosh is a Kyrgyz friend whom I've known since the blog was created. Every year, I send her travelers, and she has never disappointed me.

- She grew up on horseback and knows the mountains better than anyone.
- Today, she runs a small travel agency.

I recommend Tatosh for organizing [your horseback trek to Song-Kul Lake](#).



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Azamat is a very good friend of mine, and on every trip I stay with him. In 2021, I was even lucky enough to welcome him to France to show him Paris and Fontainebleau, his first trip outside Kyrgyzstan.

- An experienced rider and guide, he speaks fluent English.
- Each season, he spends more than 60 days on horseback with travelers.
- In July 2021, I went on an unprecedented trek with him and my buddies Basile and Loïc. He promised us an unforgettable experience... and he kept his word!

We're not the only ones: every year, readers of the blog travel with him... they usually come back with big smiles and great stories.

Azamat is the ideal guide to organize a **taylor-made horseback trek** for you.



**AZAMAT**

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## WHAT DOES A TYPICAL DAY ON A HORSEBACK TREK LOOK LIKE?

On a horseback trek, you don't ride all day. Stages last between 3 and 6 hours, depending on the day. Most of the time, you ride mostly at a walking pace. A horse can't gallop for 3 hours at a time.

### **Morning: a gentle start**

Your day starts early, with a hearty breakfast in the yurt or out in the open, watching the sun rise over the deserted mountains.

Once your belly is full, you help your guide prepare the horses, and off you go on your adventure.

### **Lunchtime: break and relaxation**

Depending on the itinerary, you can :

- Ride straight to the camp and settle in.
- Stop for lunch in the middle of nature, before setting off again for a maximum of three hours.

### **Afternoon: immersion in local life**

When you arrive, a family of Kyrgyz herders (5 to 10 people) welcomes you. Their main activity is herding, but they also welcome travelers.

Camp is a bit like staying on a farm in France, except that your hosts rarely speak English.

While the horses are resting, you can:

- Explore the surrounding area and take photos.
- Learn to take care of animals.
- Play soccer with the kids.
- Talk to farmers.
- Wash in a nearby river warmed by the sun.

## Evening: dinner and starry skies

Dinner is served in a yurt, around a low table, with traditional dishes. You eat sitting on the floor, Kyrgyz-style.

Then you're assigned a yurt for the night, which you share with your group. The farmers provide warm blankets for a comfortable night's sleep.

Night falls quickly, and even if you're tired, take the time to admire the sky. Far from any light pollution, the view is incredible. Probably one of the most beautiful starry skies you'll ever see.

### ***Last piece of advice before bed...***



Go to the bathroom before you go to bed. It's freezing cold at night, and you won't want to leave the yurt.

After a good night's sleep, you'll be back on horseback, ready for another day of adventure.

## WHAT SHOULD I PACK FOR A HORSE TREK?

Here is a list of essential equipment to bring with you on a horseback riding trip in Kyrgyzstan.

### Your clothes

- Warm clothes for the evening.
- Breathable clothing for daytime wear.
- Rain cape or jacket.

### Your safety

- The riding helmet.
- The chaps.
- Riding pants.

#### RIDING JEANS



#### Advice



If you prefer a less form-fitting, more versatile style that won't make you look like a tourist to your future nomadic friends, these riding jeans with padded knees and reinforced seams are ideal.

### Your health accessories

- Lifestraw water bottle.
- Wipes. They are handy for some travelers. Personally, I prefer to wash myself directly in streams, but it's up to you.

## WHAT IS THE ROLE OF HORSES IN KYRGYZ CULTURE?

### **Essential. Let me explain it through Hippo.**

This is my foal, born in May 2024 on the pastures of Song-Kul. His father, Mustang, is a champion K k B r  stallion. In November, my friend Beksultan gave him to me as a gift.

In Kyrgyzstan, giving someone a horse is a true sign of friendship.

Today, Hippo lives in Song-Kul, among the nomadic herds.



## **Why is the horse central to Kyrgyz culture?**

Kyrgyzstan is a country of mountains and transhumance. For centuries, horses have been essential to everyday life. They allowed people to:

- travel long distances,
- keep and move herds,
- hunt and defend oneself
- move between valleys and summer pastures.

Even today, horses remain essential in remote areas. You'll see, the horse is a companion.

## **Why do Kyrgyz people only ride stallions?**

In Kyrgyz culture, the horse is considered an extension of the rider's body.

In Kyrgyzstan, you will only ride stallions.

## **What is the role of mares?**

Mares are not ridden and do not have individual names.

They have two specific functions:

- reproduction
- milk production

Mare's milk is used to produce koumis, a traditional fermented drink. A mare is milked up to five times a day. The taste is distinctive, slightly fermented. It is an everyday drink for horsemen.

In Song-Kul, you can try some in the yurt camps, including the one where Hippo's mother lives.

## Why does a horse change its name depending on its age?

In Kyrgyzstan, a specific word is used depending on the age and stage of development of the horse:

- Kulun (Кулун): from birth to 1 year old, suckling foal
- Jabagı (Жабагы): around 1 year old, weaned foal
- Tay (Тай): 2 years old, young horse not yet ridden. Hippo is currently a Tay
- Kunan (Кунан): 3 years old, horse undergoing physical training
- Bishi (Бышы): 4 years old, almost adult, possible start of light work
- Ayğyr (Айгыр): 5 years old and older, adult stallion
- Biye (Бие): adult mare, regardless of age after maturity

## What are some traditional horse games?

Equestrian games are an integral part of Kyrgyz culture. These games are not just folklore. They are still part of local life, and you can sometimes watch them during festivals or local events.

They are meant to show horse mastery, strength, and courage.

- K k B r  (       ): a physical team sport played on horseback, where riders compete for a goat carcass. My mate Beksultan plays it every winter in his village, just like we play football with friends.
- Oodarysh (       ): horseback wrestling, the goal is to unbalance your opponent without falling off your saddle.
- Kyz Kuumai (         ): a race between a man and a woman. If the man catches the woman, he can kiss her. If the woman wins, she can symbolically whip him.

These games are still played during festivals, weddings, and large gatherings. K k B r  is often played in villages during winter.

## DO YOU HAVE ANY FEEDBACK FROM PEOPLE WHO HAVE TRAVELED ALONE ON HORSEBACK?

Yes, Florent, a member of the « Travel to Kyrgyzstan group », is one of the adventurers I met while preparing his Kyrgyz adventure: crossing the country solo on horseback.

### **Hi Florent, can you introduce yourself?**

Hi!

My name is Florent, I'm 33 and I've been travelling the world with my camera for the past 3 years.

I make films about adventure and the discovery of cultures around the world. My approach to travel is extreme:

- I crossed North America on freight trains and the Gobi Desert on a camel.
- I canoed down the Yukon River and spent six months travelling solo on horseback through Mongolia.
- And I lived alone in the wilderness, in Alaska.

### **Why did you choose Kyrgyzstan to travel solo on horseback?**

4 months ago, I had just returned from a long 2-year trip. At the time, I was already working on my next adventure, which should last 4 years. It includes many climbs at very high altitudes, as well as crossing countries on horseback.

A friend of mine was looking for a partner to climb the 7,138m-high Pic Lenin. So I was looking for a place where I could combine a long horse-riding trip with a high-altitude climb.

Kyrgyzstan proved to be the ideal terrain for combining these two disciplines.

## **Having already traveled by 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 lost the first one on the 2nd day...).

This was my first experience of travelling with animals, and I can tell you I was well served! It's not unusual to walk for several days without seeing a soul. The horizon is as flat as an ocean, and it's a far cry from the mountainous landscapes of Kyrgyzstan.

After a month's crossing, I went to the Oregon Valley, where I bought two horses. The goal was to go deep into the mountains and spend the winter totally self-sufficient for 5 months. So I needed two horses for this adventure.

The big difference here is that this trip was more of a philosophical retreat. After 2 years of travelling, I really wanted to retreat and stay in my teepee by a lake during the winter, with extreme temperatures ranging from -30 to -40°C.



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

In Mongolia, I had no riding experience. I think the biggest difficulty is mental, especially when you're travelling alone. It's a real challenge to overcome.

Next, it's a good idea to read several books on the subject before you leave. You'll learn a few useful tricks.

Riding a horse is not complicated in itself. However, it's important to understand that travelling with animals is totally different from any other type of trip. There are constraints to take into account, as well as a great responsibility towards your horse. Whatever happens, he must come first. You have to accept this even before you leave, because it has a huge impact on your trip.



## **How did you manage to buy your horse, and how much did you pay for it?**

In Mongolia, I bought my camels and horses directly. There isn't really an animal market like in Kyrgyzstan. You buy directly from the nomads.

In Kyrgyzstan, I bought Saphir with the help of a local (I had given him a small bill as a thank you). Not only did this enable me to buy the horse at the real price, but for someone like me, who doesn't have a great deal of experience in this field, it enabled me to acquire a healthy, reliable horse.

The price of the horse was 67,000 KGS. An additional 4,000 KGS was needed for the necessary equipment. At the end of my trip, I sold Saphir for 58,000 KGS.

## **How did you feed, water and care for Saphir?**

Unlike the Gobi Desert, where it is impossible to cross on horseback, access to water in Kyrgyzstan was not a problem. I regularly found a spring or river along the way to water Saphir.

Food was a little more complicated. Where it took a few minutes to get water, it took an average of 12 hours of grazing a day to feed itself. So I had to be careful where I stopped. To simplify things, I tied him up with a 15-metre rope and an ice axe. This gave him plenty of room to graze all night.

At high altitudes or in arid zones, grass was not abundant. As a result, Saphir lost quite a lot of weight in one month.

## **How did you ensure your horse was healthy?**

When it came to care, observation was everything. After a few days, you quickly realize if your horse is tired or stressed by a particular situation, and you have to adapt accordingly. Sometimes I would also ask the locals if they thought Saphir was in good health. But generally speaking, we didn't encounter any major problems.

Once again, my experience as a rider is limited, and I don't consider myself legitimate to advise people on this subject. Logically, however, it's a good idea to take the horse for a little walk to check that everything's normal before setting off.

It's by walking that you can tell whether your horse is having a good day or not. You can quickly see if everything's going well or if something's wrong.

The locals are very curious, especially if you have a horse. They often come to look at it and sometimes even offer to buy it. As a result, they don't hesitate to point out any minor issues they spot with your horse. In the mountains of Kyrgyzstan, everyone owns a horse, and everyone considers themselves a bit of a veterinarian.



### **What was your typical day like?**

As with any outdoor adventure, your days follow the rhythm of the sun.

- Wake-up at 6 a.m., for an 8 a.m. departure.
- Depending on the terrain, we covered between 20 and 40 km a day.

At lunchtime, the most important thing was to find a place with good quality grass for Saphir, so that he could eat for 1 or 2 hours. On average, we walked 8 hours a day.

In the evening, we had to find the perfect spot for Saphir. The quality of the tent site was secondary. Normally, horses spend up to 50% of their eating time at night. But for Saphir, it was more like 80%, as he walked all day. So stopping in a place totally devoid of grass was out of the question.

So the days were punctuated by walking and looking for nice places where my horse could rest and eat. We gave ourselves a rest day every 6 days or so.

## **What route did you take? How did you find your way?**

I bought Saphir at the animal market in Ozgon. Then someone drove us to Kara-Kulja in a pickup truck (I didn't want to leave Ozgon with the stress of walking in an urban area).

My first objective was Lake Chatyr Kul, but I wasn't sure I'd be able to get over the Shilbili Ashuu pass. Some of the locals told me it was impossible, others the opposite...

After 4 days' walking, there were no more tracks and the situation was becoming too dangerous. Finally, Saphir stopped moving. We had to make a 5-day detour via the Chaar-Tash Ashuu pass, further north.

This part of the trek was really cool, as people weren't used to seeing tourists. I was the first tourist travelling on horseback they had ever met! As a result, I was regularly invited to have tea, eat, or spend the night in the shepherds' tents or yurts.

Instead of Chatyr Kul Lake, I headed for Song-Kul Lake further north, then on to Naryn. From there, we walked to the Tong Ashuu Pass, which rises to over 4,000 meters, to reach Issyk-Kul Lake. Then we walked along the lake to Tosor (Saphir was quite tired). I ended the trip about three days before reaching Karakol.

The first part of the trek wasn't marked on Maps.me (which I use on all my trips), so I used maps and asked locals for help. From Song-Kul Lake onwards, the area becomes more popular with tourists, and all the treks are marked on Maps.me and on paper maps.

## **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. As a result, they were really curious. They wanted to know where I was from, where I was going, and were very interested.

The people are very attached to their horses, so they really respected the fact that I was riding alone through their country. They absolutely wanted to invite me to tea, to eat and even to stay overnight.

A lot of people were also interested in Saphir. He was a beautiful horse, and people came to see him and try to buy him from me. It was easy to make connections.

Definitely, if you want to meet the locals without the relationship they may have with tourists (often linked to money), travel alone on horseback. You're sure to make lots of friends.

## **What do you think are the risks of travelling alone on horseback? How can they be avoided?**

The main risk is falling. You can't avoid it, but you can reduce the consequences. That's why I always carry with me, in a small rucksack (not on the horse), a satellite phone and enough to survive for 48 hours.

During the first few days, I also take the time to get to know my horse: how he behaves in front of a car, a dog, or other animals. It's important to understand your horse so you can handle situations better.

It's also essential to start in a sparsely populated area, to minimize the stress that can be encountered in populated areas.

Apart from that, there aren't many other major risks, but you have to accept the vagaries of a long horseback trip. For example, I've changed my route several times. Once, I had to take a 5-day detour because it was impossible to cross a pass with my horse. In the end, I decided to stop walking 3 days before Karakol, as I felt that Saphir was exhausted.

### **Finally, Florent, can you share your fondest memory with us?**

The beauty of such a trip lies in its totality, and cannot be reduced to a few instagrammable moments or places.

Crossing a country on horseback is far from a peaceful journey. You regularly have to walk for several days to reach a specific place, cross mountain passes in the rain, go without food, not to mention the difficulties, risks and responsibilities inherent in travelling on horseback.

It's only once you've overcome the pain, fatigue and doubt that you really begin to appreciate the beauty of such an adventure.

Encounters are magnified by their authenticity, and the mountains, meadows and lakes reveal their true beauty in all their grandeur...



## Conclusion

Thank you Florent, for this fascinating exchange. I have my program for my next trip to Kyrgyzstan. I wish you all the best with your projects and look forward to seeing the videos.

You can find Florent  
on his [instagram](#) (@florentdefay).



# **MY TIPS AND CONTACTS FOR RENTING A RELIABLE AND AFFORDABLE 4X4**

## **Are you planning a trip to Central Asia and looking to rent a 4×4 or a motorcycle?**

Who should you rent a 4×4 from ? Looking for a reliable rental agency? This guide is for you!

## **Why book your car in advance?**

Central Asia is an adventure, but it also has roads that are sometimes chaotic and challenging terrain.

In summer, cars get booked quickly! Demand outstrips supply, and good vehicles are often booked up months in advance. By booking your 4×4 in advance, you can secure a good price and avoid wasting time once you arrive.

Planning ahead is the best way to avoid unpleasant surprises.

## **Want to explore several countries?**

Make sure the rental company has the necessary paperwork and insurance to cross borders without any worries.

## WHAT DOCUMENTS ARE REQUIRED TO RENT A CAR?

Don't forget your international Driving Permit. It's free, valid for three years, and can be obtained easily from your local town hall or prefecture.

Before booking, ask rental companies in which countries their vehicles can be driven. Many do not have the necessary permits and insurance to cross borders.

## DO I NEED AN INTERNATIONAL DRIVER PERMIT?

Yes, an international Driving Permit is compulsory! But if you don't have one, don't panic. You can get a certified Russian translation of your driving licence. Some rental companies will arrange this for you before you arrive, for €30. All you have to do is send them a scan of your driving license and passport.

## DO I NEED INSURANCE?

Yes, check with your car insurer and the insurance provider associated with your bank card. These policies may supplement the coverage included in the rental company's insurance and sometimes offer additional protection that is worthwhile.

The rental companies I recommend include insurance, but some credit cards offer additional coverage. They may cover the deductible or offer better coverage in case of problems.

The rental company's insurance is the basis. Personal insurance is a supplement, not a replacement.

Always ask your rental company what coverage is included.



## WHAT SHOULD I ASK MY RENTAL COMPANY BEFORE CHOOSING MY CAR?

### Which side is the steering wheel on?

In Central Asia, people drive on the right, but some vehicles are imported with the steering wheel on the left. Check before you book.

### Is there a mileage limit?

If mileage is not unlimited, ask for the price per extra kilometre. A flat rate of 300 km per day is usually sufficient.

### What equipment is provided?

If you're planning to drive on difficult tracks, find out what equipment is available. Trees are scarce in the mountains, so a winch won't do you much good. Ask instead:

- Traction straps
- Traction boards
- A shovel in case you get stuck

### Bonus equipment at Aydow

My friend Aydow has equipped all his cars with a compressor and a tyre plug repair kit. Simple but extremely useful when you get a flat tire in the middle of nowhere.



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## SHOULD I BRING A TENT FOR MY ROAD TRIP IN KYRGYZSTAN?

If you want to feel like a nomad, camping is a great solution. You choose your spot. You stop whenever you want. In Kyrgyzstan, camping is normal.

### **Ground tent or roof tent: what's the difference in the field?**

The difference is simple: budget and comfort.

- A ground tent is the most economical solution. It is easy to carry and suitable for all trips. In the mountains, it is not always the most comfortable option. You are dependent on the ground, wind, and humidity.
- The roof tent is like a mobile yurt. It is more comfortable and better insulated. And above all, much quicker to set up after a long day on the road. Once you're out in the field, you'll feel the difference from the very first night.

### **How much does it cost?**

In general, your rental company can provide you with a complete camping kit with everything you need for cooking and eating.

- Ground tent kit: approximately €10 per day
- Roof tent kit: approximately €25 per day

Not all rental companies offer this type of equipment. If camping is part of your plans, ask about it before booking.

## WHAT SHOULD I DO ONCE I HAVE RENTED THE CAR?

### Do a full vehicle inspection

Inspect your vehicle thoroughly, inside and out. Check for dents, scratches, cigarette burns and any other visible defects.

### Take photos as proof

Take detailed photos and send them to the rental company on WhatsApp. This way, you'll have proof of when the photos time-stamped evidence of the vehicle's condition, in case of a disagreement.

### Avoid airport pick-up

Don't pick up your car at the airport, it's always more expensive. Of course, it is more convenient, so it is up to you..

## WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I BREAK DOWN IN A REMOTE AREA?

It happens, even with a well-maintained vehicle.

In Kyrgyzstan, a breakdown is not an emergency. It's mainly a matter of time and organization.

In practice:

- your rental company knows the common mechanical issues,
- they work with a network of trusted mechanics,
- even far from cities, a solution exists.

If you break down, the first thing to accept is that you may have to wait.

## CAN I GET A REPLACEMENT VEHICLE?

**Yes. All the rental companies I recommend provide this service.**

In practical terms:

- a replacement vehicle can be provided within 24 hours,
- you must accept losing one day,
- in remote areas, this is a normal delay.

Anecdote from the field: a leak in the fuel tank of a Lexus in the mountains. I called Aydow and handed the phone to a local resident. She directed us to the nearest mechanic. The car is repaired in less than two hours. What takes time is not the solution, it's the wait.

## WHAT DOES ROADSIDE ASSISTANCE ACTUALLY COVER?

Assistance works everywhere, but not instantly.

The rental company intervenes as fast as possible, depending on distance and access.

Keep in mind:

- it covers mechanical breakdowns,
- if the issue is the rental company's responsibility, it is covered.



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## WHAT IF THE PROBLEM IS MY FAULT?

That's different. In case of:

- a bad maneuver,
- getting stuck,
- improper use of the vehicle,

the rental company will assist you and organize help, but the costs are at your expense.

Field anecdotes:

Near Issyk-Kul, some readers got stuck in the mud. Aydow organized a rescue from Balykchy. The recovery took several hours, but they eventually got the vehicle out. They have to pay the costs, which is logical, but they are able to continue their journey.

This time, on a mountain pass, the battery fails. It is impossible to restart the vehicle. Aydow sends a mechanic to replace the battery. The repair costs were covered. The journey continues, without any unnecessary stress.



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## WHAT RULE SHOULD I REMEMBER?

The further you go:

- the longer help may take,
- the more margin you need.

Here, you travel differently. You take your time. And you keep going

## WHAT ARE THE SPECIFIC DRIVING RULES IN KYRGYZSTAN?

### Headlights on all the time

In Kyrgyzstan, outside the cities, you have to drive with your headlights on during the day.

Different priority rules at roundabouts.

Unlike in France, vehicles entering a roundabout have priority.

## HOW MUCH DOES FUEL COST IN CENTRAL ASIA?

Good news: gasoline is cheaper in Central Asia than in Europe.

- Kazakhstan is a major oil-producing country, which means that its gasoline prices are among the lowest in the world: €0.42 per liter.
- In Uzbekistan: €0.79 per liter.
- In Kyrgyzstan: €0.76 per liter.
- In Tajikistan: €0.75 per liter.

## WHAT ARE THE SPEED LIMITS?

In Central Asia, it's very simple, you have to drive at:

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

## WHAT ARE THE FINES IN KYRGYZSTAN?

There are more and more speed cameras. If you don't respect the speed limits, your rental company will receive your fines and deduct them from your deposit.

Below is a list of the fines for the most common offenses:

### **Most common fines**

#### **1000 soms**

- Bad parking
- Not wearing a seat belt in town
- Driving without a license
- Exceeding the speed limit by less than 20 km/h

#### **3000 soms**

- Using a phone while driving
- Not wearing a seat belt outside built-up areas
- Driving without headlights on
- Failure to obey a red light

#### **7500 soms**

- Exceeding the speed limit by more than 40 km/h

#### **17,500 soms**

- Driving under the influence of alcohol  
zero tolerance

## WHAT ARE THE RULES REGARDING BLOOD ALCOHOL LEVELS?

Alcohol is not tolerated when driving, so do not drink before driving.

As in France, do not use your phone while driving.

## HOW CAN I NAVIGATE IN CENTRAL ASIA?

NOSTROMO



*Paper maps*

Use [Google Maps](#), [Maps.me](#) and [Soviet Military Maps](#) on your phone to find your way. To make sure they work perfectly, buy a local SIM card.

If you prefer paper maps, the most accurate ones can be purchased by clicking [here](#).



## WHO SHOULD YOU RENT A 4X4 FROM IN KYRGYZSTAN?

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

### In Bishkek

- **Aydow** is a friend who offers cars at very affordable prices. Her rates start at €65 per day, and all her cars are fully insured.
- **Tatosh** is a friend who offers a small fleet of vehicles at reasonable prices. Her vehicles can be driven in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan..

### In Osh

- **Oibek** is a good friend. He is one of the best contacts in Central Asia for car and motorcycle rentals. He offers a wide range of sturdy cars and motorcycles perfectly suited to travelling through the Pamirs. Above all, he has extensive experience and an excellent knowledge of every country in Central Asia. He is a fascinating person with plenty of stories to share.



#### AYDANA

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#### TATOSH

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#### OIBEK

[oibektours@gmail.com](mailto:oibektours@gmail.com)

He is the only rental provider I know whose vehicles can be driven in Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. Thanks to his network, he can assist you anywhere in the event of a problem.

## WHO SHOULD YOU RENT A 4X4 FROM IN KAZAKHSTAN?

In Kazakhstan, you will find several agencies such as Europcar and Hertz that rent good city cars.

The easiest way is to use a rental comparison website. Discovercars has recently launched in the country and lists the best deals. Please note that most cars cannot leave the country.

Kyrgyzstan is the only country I know of where rental companies have vehicles that can cross borders.

## WHO SHOULD YOU RENT A 4X4 FROM IN TAJIKISTAN?

Renting a car without a driver in Tajikistan is complicated. If your goal is to travel through the Pamir, the best option is to rent a vehicle from Oibek.

### Why go through him?

- Osh is the ideal starting point for exploring the Pamir.
- If you don't go through Osh, he can deliver a car anywhere in Tajikistan.

## WHO SHOULD YOU RENT A 4x4 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 contacts in the country, but I have received several very positive reviews from blog readers.

I recommend renting a car from this agency, which offers a good selection of vehicles, although they cannot be driven outside the country.



**OIBEK**

*oibektours@gmail.com*

## DO YOU KNOW A GOOD AGENCY FOR A TURNKEY ROAD TRIP IN KYRGYZSTAN?

Yes, my friend Aydow and her family created My Kyrgyz Road Trip.

This is a 13-day, turnkey self-drive tour with a tried-and-tested itinerary, a reliable 4x4, pre-booked homestays, included activities, and phone assistance.



The trip begins with a welcome dinner in Bishkek, a chance to meet the team and receive personalized advice for a stress-free trip.

This is a great option if you want to travel independently without having to deal with all the logistics.

You can check out the itinerary and contact her directly [here](#).



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## HOW DO THE THREE LEVERS IN A LADA NIVA WORK?

When driving a Lada Niva, you'll soon notice that there are three levers. Each has its own role, and here's how to use them.



### **The largest lever: the classic gearbox**

This is the main lever, just like on any car.

- Older Nivas had 4 gears.
- In 1986, the gearbox was upgraded to 5 speeds.

### **The medium lever (behind the large lever)**

This lever has three positions:

- Forward: low gears → Ideal for slow driving with greater torque, perfect for off-roading.
- In the middle: neutral → Useful only for installing certain accessories, you won't be using it.
- Backwards: high range → For normal road use.

### **Come to a complete stop first!**

You must come to a complete stop before changing the position of this lever, otherwise you risk damaging the transmission.

## The smallest lever, in the centre

It has two positions:

- Forward → Differential unlocked, standard mode.
- Backwards → Differential locked, useful for overcoming obstacles.

### Watch out!

- Never lock the differential on dry, paved roads, as you risk damaging the transmission.
- If the differential gets stuck, put it in reverse or apply the brakes at low speed, and it should unlock.

And remember: always depress the clutch before operating these levers.

### Warning



When using the transfer case, the vehicle must be completely stopped. When operating the differential lock, maximum speed: 10 km/h.

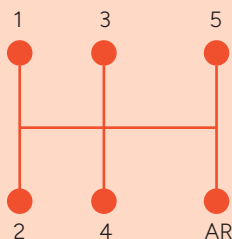
### DIFFERENTIAL

-  Unlocked 4WD
-  Locked 4WD
-  Standard 4WD mode

### TRANSFER CASE

-  Low range
-  Neutral
-  High range

### GEAR BOX





If you prefer to buy a car, I recommend getting an old Lada like I did.

You now have all the tips and trusted contacts you need to organize your road trip and rent a car in Central Asia.

Do you have any other questions you would like this guide to answer? Feel free to leave your questions, recommendations, and advice in the comments section. Enjoy the preparation, and have a great road trip. See you soon.



**CYCLING TRIP**

# **TRAVELLING BY BIKE IN KYRGYZSTAN**

Since creating the Kyrgyzstan travel group, I have met and spoken with many different people. Marie is one of them. Not only did she travel through a country I particularly love, but she did it by bike.

Those who know me know that I am passionate about cycling. A bike race brings together all the emotions of life: pain, happiness, suspense, disappointment, surprises, and joy. I have immense admiration for bicycle travelers.

It was only natural that I followed Marie's trip with great interest. When she returned, I asked her to write an article about her cycling trip to Kyrgyzstan. She kindly agreed, and we enjoyed putting together this Q&A — an interview, basically.



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

Marie, 52, is a former triathlete and a musician. A shoulder injury caused by a cycling accident now prevents me from swimming. I love cycling: I ride both road bikes and mountain bikes all year round, and I also commute by bike. I love travelling by bike. I usually go away four times a year, making the most of the school holidays — except Christmas — to get back on my bike. In summer, I usually leave for seven or eight weeks at a time. Last year, I cycled 3,200 km in Iceland, and this summer, I covered 2,700 km between Dushanbe and Bishkek.

**Why do you travel by bike?**

For me, it is the ideal mode of transport. You travel at the perfect speed to explore, talk to people and meet them — much more easily than when travelling by car. It is also more enjoyable and less polluting, even though the carbon footprint of a return flight is far from negligible.

**Who do you think cycle touring 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 their preferences and abilities.



### **Why do you travel alone?**

I love travelling alone. For me, it means complete freedom: you go wherever you want, stop whenever you want and eat whatever you feel like eating. I'm always happy to exchange a few words or even cycle a few kilometres with other cyclists I meet, but it never goes any further than that. I enjoy camping alone in nature and cycling on my own. I never feel lonely.

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.

### **Why did you choose Kyrgyzstan to travel by bike?**

For several reasons, but above all because the Silk Road and the Pamir Highway are classics among cycle tourers. After suffering quite badly from the cold in Iceland the previous year, I was looking for a slightly warmer destination. I came home from Iceland with some impressive blue frostbite!

## Where have you travelled before?

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

## How is Kyrgyzstan different?

I had never really travelled outside Europe by bike, although I had competed in triathlons in the United States. Central Asia felt like a completely different world. There is a great deal of elevation gain, even though Iceland and Scotland also involve plenty of climbing. You also have to adapt to the altitude, different food and the language barrier.

## 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.

## What insurance did you have?

I checked with my insurance provider because I thought I might need to take out a special policy. In fact, I was covered by the assistance policy included with our family car insurance for trips lasting less than three months. However, the policy only covered me personally, not my bicycle or its transportation. Looking back, that coverage was probably a little limited: if I had needed to repatriate my bicycle, the cost would not have been covered.

One day, while suffering from a bad case of traveller's diarrhoea, I accepted a lift from a truck driver. I travelled 90 km on the back of a livestock truck with a calf — without being covered by insurance.

### Advice



I recommend this article, by Georges-Michel, which explains **the coverage offered by bank card insurance.**

## **Did you have any vaccinations before you left?**

I had received all the recommended vaccinations except the hepatitis B vaccine, as I did not have enough time to complete the vaccination schedule. I planned to get it before my next trip.

So, mandatory vaccines in France: MMR, DT polio (booster) plus rabies, typhoid, hepatitis A.

## **What documents did you have with you?**

I carried my passport and vaccination record. I had also brought passport photos in case I needed them for border permits, although I ultimately did not apply for any. I also carried two copies of my passport. During a police check in Tajikistan, I was asked to hand over one of them.

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

So that's a bit of a downside. I had the Gizi map on paper, but it was only useful for getting an overview and major routes. The scale is much too large, there is no detail, some trails are marked can't be found, others that aren't 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.

## **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
- Something to filter water (even though I only filtered water from rivers, not spring water or water from wells or from pumps in villages), is nothing special... except that you have to carry everything, striking a balance between sturdiness and lightness.
- 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.

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

For the first time, a purpose-built touring bike that I had just bought for myself (made by François Coponet of Cycles Itinérances, a frame builder who lives in Mousson in eastern France) with 27.5-inch wheels.

But before that, I used to ride my old 26-inch mountain bike. Plan for mountain bike gearing with a loaded bike. In any case, there are a lot of climbs, and the roads are mostly difficult trails.

### **Choose reinforced tires!**

The roadsides are littered with pieces of vodka bottles thrown from cars. For me, I chose Schwalbe Marathon Mondial tires. I only had one flat tire (a very thin piece of cable very thin wire that managed to pierce the tire).

I had cable disc brakes and a Rollhoff hub, which were very comfortable for this type of trip (you can change gears when stationary), but before that I rode with hydraulic brakes and conventional derailleurs.

### **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 you have to push your bike for a long time. You can also choose to put it down and go hike in the mountains. I had a pair of sandals for crossing fords (and to let my feet breath when it was very hot) and a pair of trail shoes, which covered all situations.



## What accessories did you have on your bike?

- A hiking stick with a coloured ribbon tied across the rear panniers to keep cars away! (It also serves as a kickstand by locking the brakes with Velcro).

Driving in Kyrgyzstan is pretty awful. They have no idea of safe distances for passing a bicycle (they are much more comfortable overtaking horses). Keeping vehicles a little 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 recharge my phone, my e-reader, my anti-virus UV filter, and my electric lamps (I recharge using the very reliable **USB2BYK** manufactured by a **small French company**).

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.

## 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).

## **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 out 3 rear tyres, I'm a little traumatized when it comes to tires)
- 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 panniers, saddle, and even the bike itself).
- An inner tube
- Vaseline oil (but cooking oil is fine)

### **Advice**



When I was mountain biking, I also had some brake fluid, a derailleur hanger, and a small tool to be able to remove the cassette.

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

In Iceland, I checked several times a day that my tyres were not damaged, but I was much less worried about this in Kyrgyzstan. Rack and pannier bolts tend to work loose, so it is worth checking them every three or four days. I still managed to lose two pannier bolts.

Remember to clean and lubricate the chain from time to time. Dust is everywhere and easily sticks to the links.

## **Any other accessories?**

→ A basin for washing

### **Important**



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 (to survive Lake Issyk-Kul!)

## **What was your itinerary in Kyrgyzstan?**

Completely by chance. I arrived in Sary Tash (from Pamir) with the idea of going to Sary Moghul and then to Osh to get a border permit so be able to go to the regions near China, and in the end I didn't do any of that.

I traveled almost day by day, looking at the map. The only real road I followed without having any other choice was the one between Jalal-Abad and Naryn. I left it to go up to Song-Kul... after that I had no idea where to go..



In fact, it's quite complicated to plan. Some trails are so bad that you have to push your bike up the hills the whole time, and needless to say, you can't make up time on the descent: I've gone down passes without ever exceeding 5 miles per hour. One day, I «rode» all day to cover 19 miles with mud up to my hubs.

I have also followed the Silk Road Mountain Race route on several occasions. It was magnificent; certain paths are much faster than some roads (the Kazarman road is a nightmare in some places on a bike—pebbles, corrugated metal, etc.) and I planned my routes to avoid the «highways» as much as possible (the expressway between Balykchy and Bishkek) which I ended up staying on because there wasn't much and it was quite pleasant to ride.

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!

### **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.

The Kyrgyz people are very kind. I was offered tea along the way, given fruit and also nans. I was also invited to stay the night (I always declined, as I prefer to sleep far away from everything, in nature).

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

I didn't find that there were any particular risks inherent to Central Asia. Well, it's true, I suffered quite a bit from traveler's diarrhea and once from food poisoning, but I wasn't taking many precautions. And apart from the food poisoning, it didn't spoil my trip. I was glad I had been vaccinated to avoid the most serious problems (I just read that a traveler caught typhoid).

Of course, you can use Micropur tablets (if you can tolerate them, which is not my case) or filter all the water (but you have to do it twice: once with a conventional filter and then with a UV filter for the viruses that conventional filters let through). But that takes time, and I wasn't at all sure that my discomfort was caused by 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 eventually limited how much I cycled because it was so unpleasant to ride.

Otherwise, for me, the main problem was the dogs. They're not vicious at all, but they're never tied up. They have a reflex to chase bicycles. You **MUST** stop immediately and tell them to get away **VERY FIRMLY** if they're aggressive (most often they are adorable).

Normally that's enough. Once, I was annoyed at having to cross a farm, and the owner (whom they didn't obey her) threw stones in front of him to chase them away. So I kept two stones handy to do the same (don't aim at the dog, you aim in front of them), but in the end I never used them.

I only had major problems on major roads, when we were going too fast to check everything at the side of the road or to stop suddenly. Sometimes you're cycling along quietly and they appear out of nowhere. On the four-lane road from Balykchy to Bishkek, in the middle of downhill, I heard a huge bark behind me, I had a huge German Shepherd was chasing me!

I yelled « GO AWAY!!! »  
and he stopped dead in his tracks. Phew! I couldn't see myself stopping or throwing stones in front of him at 50 km/h.

## **Do you have any additional advice for readers?**

It's very easy to hitchhike, even by bike. I never stuck out my thumb, and at every pass, every bout of bad weather, trucks and even cars would stop to offer me a ride. Taxis take bikes, and even marshrutkas offered me a ride! Where do they put the bike? I don't, but since I saw a car go by with two live sheep tied to the roof, I no longer doubt their inventiveness.

Various travel guides I have read strongly emphasize that women must wear a veil in villages and not wear shorts. I wonder if we have traveled in the same country... Many Kyrgyz women are not veiled, and I have seen young girls wearing shorts in some villages. For me, it was bare arms and legs on my bike throughout the trip (when it was hot) and I never felt the slightest discomfort. It was more in the city, when I, since I was a tourist and not on the road as 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 was a pleasure. 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](#).





# **ENGLISH/KYRGYZ PHRASEBOOK**

|                                              |                                                                                                                          |
|----------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Hello</b>                                 | Salam ?<br>Салам                                                                                                         |
| <b>Nice to meet you</b>                      | Taanyshkanym<br>a uraazymyn<br>Таанышканым<br>а ыраазымын                                                                |
| <b>How are you?</b>                          | Kandaysyz ?<br>Кандайсыз ?                                                                                               |
| <b>Fine, thanks,<br/>and you?</b>            | Abdan jakshy, rakhmat.<br>A sizchi ?<br>Абдан жакшы, рахмат.<br>А сизчи ?                                                |
| <b>My name is</b>                            | Menin atym<br>Менин атым                                                                                                 |
| <b>What is your name?</b>                    | Atynyz kim ?<br>Атыңыз ким ?                                                                                             |
| <b>Welcome</b>                               | Kosh keldiniz<br>Кош келдиңиз                                                                                            |
| <b>Do you speak english?</b>                 | Siz Fransuzcha suiloj<br>alasyzby ?<br>Сиз французча сүйлөй<br>алысызбы ?                                                |
| <b>How do you say ....<br/>in kyrgyz?</b>    | Kyrgyz tilinde, kantip...<br>deshet ?<br>deshet-aitylat<br>Кыргыз тилинде, кантип<br>... дешет ?<br>по дешет, *айтылат ? |
| <b>I understand /<br/>I don't understand</b> | Tushundum / tushungon<br>jokmun<br>Түшүндүм / түшүнгөн<br>жокмун                                                         |
| <b>Yes / No</b>                              | Ooba / jok<br>Ооба / Жок                                                                                                 |
| <b>I am happy to meet you</b>                | Taanyshkanym a abdan<br>kybanychtamy !<br>Таанышканым а абдан<br>кубанычтамын !                                          |

|                                             |                                                                              |
|---------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>You are really funny</b>                 | Siz abdan kulkumushtuu<br>ekensiz<br>Сиз абдан қулқумушту у<br>экенсиз       |
| <b>You are awesome</b>                      | Azamatsyz<br>Азаматсыз                                                       |
| <b>You are very beautiful</b>               | Abdan suluusuz<br>Абдан сулуусуз                                             |
| <b>Which city<br/>are you from?</b>         | Kaisy shaardan<br>bolosuz ?<br>Кайсы шаардан<br>болосуз ?                    |
| <b>What is your phone<br/>number?</b>       | Telefon nomerin/nomeri-<br>niz kandai ?<br>Телефон номерин/из<br>кандай ?    |
| <b>My phone doesn't work</b>                | Menin telefonum<br>buzulup kaldy<br>Менин телефонум<br>бузулуп калды         |
| <b>What did you do today?</b>               | Bugun emne kyldynyz ?<br>Бугуне кылдыңыз ?                                   |
| <b>What do you want<br/>to do tomorrow?</b> | Erten emne kylgynyz kelip<br>jatat ?<br>Эртен эмне кылгыңыз<br>келип жатат ? |
| <b>What did you do<br/>yesterday?</b>       | Kechee emne kyldynyz ?<br>Кечээ эмне кылдыңыз ?                              |
| <b>It's my birthday</b>                     | Menin tuulgan kunum<br>Менин туулган кунум                                   |
| <b>Happy birthday</b>                       | Tuulgan kununuz menen !<br>Туулган кунunuz менен!                            |
| <b>Have a nice week end</b>                 | Dem alysh kununuz<br>jakshy otsun<br>Дем алыш кунunuz<br>жакшы отсун         |
| <b>Goodbye</b>                              | Salamatta kalyngyz<br>Саламатта калыңыз                                      |

|                                                   |                                                                                                                                |
|---------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Have a good day!</b>                           | Kunun'uz jakshy ulansyn !<br>Күнүңүз жакшы улансын !                                                                           |
| <b>Do you have wifi?<br/>What's the password?</b> | sizde wifi barbı? Parol kanday ?<br>сизде wifi барбы? Пароль кандай ?                                                          |
| <b>Can you take a picture of me please?</b>       | suranıç, meni sürötkö tartıp alasıñbı ? alasin-bi-koiosunbu ?<br>сураныч, мени сүрөткө тартып аласыңбы? аласыңбы - койосуңбу ? |
| <b>I'm here for vacation / work</b>               | Men es aluudamyn / sayakattamyn<br>Мен эс алуудамын . саякаттамын                                                              |
| <b>I'm here for work / business</b>               | Men bul jerde ish boyuncha/bizness boyuncha<br>Мен бул жерде иш боюнча / бизнес боюнча                                         |
| <b>I'm hungry / I'm thirsty</b>                   | Men achkamyn / men suusap atam<br>Мен ачкамын, мен суусап атам                                                                 |
| <b>Bon appétit</b>                                | Tamagynar tattuu bolsun !<br>Тамагынар таттуу болсун                                                                           |
| <b>Cheers</b>                                     | Den sooluk<br>Ден соолук !                                                                                                     |
| <b>It was very good</b>                           | Abdan daamduu eken !<br>Абдан даамдуу экен !                                                                                   |
| <b>What do you recommend?</b>                     | Emne kenesh bere alasyz ?<br>Эмне кенеш бере аласыз ?                                                                          |
| <b>I'm a vegetarian</b>                           | Men vegetarianmyn<br>Мен вегетарианмын                                                                                         |

## TO EAT

|                                             |                                                                                           |
|---------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>The menu please</b>                      | Menu beresizbi ?<br>Меню бересизби ?                                                      |
| <b>What do you recommend?</b>               | Emneni sunushtaisyz ?<br>Эмнени сунуштайсыз                                               |
| <b>What do you want to drink?</b>           | Siz emne ichkiniz kelip jatat ?<br>Сиз эмне ичкиниз келип жатат ?                         |
| <b>I would like to drink water</b>          | Men suu ichkim kelip jatat<br>Мен суу ичким келип жатат                                   |
| <b>Do you like to drink wine?</b>           | Vino ichesizbi ?<br>Вино ичесизби ?                                                       |
| <b>A tea please</b>                         | Chai berip kounuzchu<br>Чай берип коюнузчу                                                |
| <b>I would like a tea</b>                   | Men chai ichem<br>Мен чай ичем                                                            |
| <b>Do you like to drink tea?</b>            | Siz chai ichkendi jakshy korosuzbu ?<br>Сиз чай ичкенди жакшы коросузбу ?                 |
| <b>Do you prefer to drink tea or water?</b> | Sizge chai ichken jagaby je suu ichkenibi ?<br>Сизге чай ичкенби жагабы же суу ичкениби ? |
| <b>I'm not thirsty</b>                      | Men suusagan jokmun<br>Мен суусаган жокмун                                                |
| <b>What do you want to eat?</b>             | Emne jeginiz kelip jatat ?<br>Эмне жегиниз келип жатат ?                                  |
| <b>Have you eaten enough?</b>               | Kursaginız toydubu ?<br>Курсагыңыз тойдубу ?                                              |
| <b>I am very hungry</b>                     | Men abdan achka boldum<br>Мен абдан ачка болдум                                           |

## FOOD

|                                   |                                                                                 |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>I want to eat</b>              | Men tamaktangym kelip jatat<br>Мен тамактангым келип жатат                      |
| <b>I would like to eat a plov</b> | Men plov jegim kelip jatat<br>Мен плов жегим келип жатат                        |
| <b>I am not hungry</b>            | Menin kursagym tok/achka bolgom jokmun<br>Менин курсагым ток/ачка болгон жокмун |
| <b>The bill please</b>            | Esepti berip koesusbu ?<br>Эсепти берип коесузбу ?                              |
| <b>Egg</b>                        | jumurtka<br>жумуртка                                                            |
| <b>Bread</b>                      | nan<br>нан                                                                      |
| <b>Butter</b>                     | may<br>май                                                                      |
| <b>Cream</b>                      | kaymak<br>каймак                                                                |
| <b>Rice</b>                       | kürüç<br>күрүч                                                                  |
| <b>Meat</b>                       | et<br>эт                                                                        |
| <b>Fish</b>                       | balık<br>балык                                                                  |
| <b>Tomato</b>                     | pomidor<br>помидор                                                              |
| <b>Potato</b>                     | kartoşka<br>картошка                                                            |
| <b>Carrot</b>                     | sabiz<br>сабиз                                                                  |

|                 |                    |
|-----------------|--------------------|
| <b>Cucumber</b> | badıraŋ<br>бадыраң |
| <b>Cabbage</b>  | kapusta<br>капуста |
| <b>Onion</b>    | piyaz<br>пияз      |
| <b>Jam</b>      | varene<br>варенье  |
| <b>Honey</b>    | bal<br>бал         |
| <b>Beer</b>     | Sıra<br>Сыра       |
| <b>Tea</b>      | Çay<br>Чай         |
| <b>Coffee</b>   | Kofé<br>Кофе       |
| <b>Vodka</b>    | Arak<br>Арак       |
| <b>Water</b>    | Suu<br>Суу         |
| <b>Milk</b>     | Süt<br>Сүт         |

## DRINKS

## WITH YOUR GUIDE

|                                               |                                                                      |
|-----------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>I would like to change euros into soms</b> | Men evronu somgo almashtyramyn<br>Мен еврону сомго алмаштырамын      |
| <b>Do you accept euros?</b>                   | Siz evro kabil alasızby ?<br>Сиз евро кабыл аласызбы ?               |
| <b>Where can I exchange money?</b>            | Akçanı kayda almaştırsam bolot ?<br>Акчаны кайда алмаштырсам болот ? |
| <b>Where can I get the money?</b>             | Akçanı kaydan alsam bolot ?<br>Акчаны кайдан алсам болот ?           |
| <b>What weather is it today?</b>              | Bugun aba ырайı kandai ?<br>Бугун аба ырайы кандай ?                 |
| <b>Is it going to rain today?</b>             | Bugun jaan jaaıby ?<br>Бугун жаан жаайбы ?                           |
| <b>Today it is very hot</b>                   | Bugun aba ырайı abdan usyk<br>Бугун аба ырайы абдан ысык             |
| <b>What is it?</b>                            | Bul emne ?<br>Бул эмне ?                                             |
| <b>Who is it ?</b>                            | Bul kim ?<br>Бул ким ?                                               |
| <b>Who is the owner of this horse?</b>        | Bul attyn eesi kim ?<br>Бул аттын ээси ким ?                         |
| <b>Let's rest 10 minutes</b>                  | 10 munot es alaly<br>10 Минот эс алалы                               |
| <b>Where we camp?</b>                         | Kaisyl jerge jaigashabyz ?<br>Кайсыл жерге жайгашабыз ?              |
| <b>Let's sleep here</b>                       | Bul jerge ukтайлы<br>Бул жерге уктайлы                               |

|                                                  |                                                                                             |
|--------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Walk slower please</b>                        | Suranych, jayiraak basaly<br>Сураныч жайыраак басалы                                        |
| <b>What do you think?</b>                        | Kandai dep oiloisun/<br>oiloisunuz<br>Кандай деп ойлойсун/<br>суз ?                         |
| <b>Do you agree?</b>                             | Makulsunbu/<br>makulsuzbu ?<br>Макулсунбу/ сузбу ?                                          |
| <b>You're right</b>                              | Tuura aitasyn/aitasynyz !<br>Туура айтасын/сыз !                                            |
| <b>Do you need help?</b>                         | Saga/sizge jardam<br>kerekpı ?<br>Сага/ сизге жардам<br>керекпи?                            |
| <b>Can you help me?</b>                          | Maga jardam bere<br>alasyby/alasyzby ?<br>Мага жардам бере ала-<br>сынбы/сызбы ?            |
| <b>Where are you going?</b>                      | Kayaka baratasyn/<br>baratasyz?<br>Каяка баратасын/сыз?                                     |
| <b>Wait a minute,<br/>I'll be right back</b>     | Kuto tur/turunuz, men tez<br>ele kaityp kelem<br>Куто тур/унуз, мен тез<br>эле кайтып келем |
| <b>Can you speak a little<br/>slower please?</b> | Suranych jayiraak suiloı<br>alasyzby ?<br>Сураныч жайыраак<br>суйлой аласызбы ?             |
| <b>Can you repeat please?</b>                    | Suranych kaitalap<br>koesuzbu ?<br>Сураныч кайталап<br>коесузбу ?                           |
| <b>Can you write it please?</b>                  | Suranych jazyp bere<br>alasyzby ?<br>Сураныч жазып бере<br>аласызбы ?                       |
| <b>I have not heard</b>                          | Men ukkan jokmun<br>Мен уккан жокмун                                                        |

|                           |                                                                                      |
|---------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>I'm very happy</b>     | Men abdan baktıyluumun<br>/ kubanychtamyn<br>Мен абдан бактылуумун<br>/ кубанычтамын |
| <b>I'm very tired</b>     | Men abdan charchadym<br>Мен абдан чарчадым                                           |
| <b>I do not feel good</b> | Men ozumdu jaman sezip<br>turam<br>Мен озумду жаман сезип<br>турам                   |
| <b>Do not worry</b>       | Sarsana bolbonuz<br>Сарсана болбонуз                                                 |

## HORSEBACK

|                       |                                                     |
|-----------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Horse</b>          | At<br>ат                                            |
| <b>I'm beginning</b>  | Men uironup jatam<br>Мен үйрөнүп жатам              |
| <b>Can we gallop?</b> | Atty churkatsak bolobu ?<br>Атты чуркатсак болобу ? |

## DIRECTION

|                                    |                                                                                                                    |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Eastnear? Far ?</b>             | Jakynby / alysby ?<br>жакынбы / алысбы ?                                                                           |
| <b>Where is...? / How to go ?</b>  | kaerde ... ? Kantip jetsem<br>bolot ? Kaysı jerde ?<br>Кайерде... ? / Кантип<br>жетсем болот ...? Кайсы<br>жерде ? |
| <b>Straight</b>                    | Tuz / alga<br>түз                                                                                                  |
| <b>Left Right</b>                  | Sol / on'<br>Сол Оң                                                                                                |
| <b>North / South / East / West</b> | Tündük / tüştük / çığış /<br>batış<br>Түндүк / түштүк / чыгыш<br>/ батыш                                           |

## TREK

|                                          |                                                                              |
|------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Plane / Taxi / Bus / Train</b>        | uçak / taksi / avtobus / poezd<br>учак / такси / автобус / поезд             |
| <b>Tent / Sleeping bag / Groundsheet</b> | Çatır / Uktooçu baştık / Jer tōşögü<br>Чатыр / Уктоочу баштык / Жер төшөгү   |
| <b>Flashlight</b>                        | Jarik<br>Жарык                                                               |
| <b>Cold / Hot / Rain / Snow / Wind</b>   | Muzdak / Isık / Jamgır / Kar / Şamal<br>Муздак / Ысык / Жамгыр / Кар / Шамал |
| <b>Summit / Glacier / Waterfall</b>      | Too çokusu / Mönggü / Şarkiratma<br>Тоо чокусу / мөңгү / Шаркыратма          |
| <b>Mountain / Valley</b>                 | Too / Öroön<br>Тоо / Өрөөн                                                   |
| <b>Forest / Town / Village / Street</b>  | Tokoy / Şaar / Ayıl / Köçö<br>Токой / Шаар / Айыл / Көчө                     |

## WITH THE LOCALS

|                                    |                                                                   |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Your yurt is very beautiful</b> | Boz üyünüz abdan kooz eken<br>Боз үйүңүз абдан кооз экен          |
| <b>Are you married?</b>            | Turmush kurgansynby/ kurgansyzby ?<br>Турмуш кургансынбы/ сызбы?  |
| <b>I'm married</b>                 | Uilongonmun / turmush-ka chykkam<br>Уйлонгонмун / турмушка чыккам |
| <b>I'm not married</b>             | Boidokmun<br>Бойдокмун                                            |

|                                                   |                                                                                          |
|---------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Do you have children?</b>                      | Sizde bala chaka barby ?<br>Сизде бала чака барбы ?                                      |
| <b>I have children</b>                            | Menin baldarym bar<br>Менин балдарым бар                                                 |
| <b>I have no children</b>                         | Menin balam jok<br>Менин балам жок                                                       |
| <b>How old are they?</b>                          | Alar kancha jashta ?<br>Алар канча жашта                                                 |
| <b>Where do you live in the winter?</b>           | Kyshynda kaisyl jerde jashaisyn / jashaisynyz ?<br>Кышында кайсыл жерде жашайсын / сиз ? |
| <b>How long are you staying here ?</b>            | Bul jerde kancha ubakyt bolosun / bolosunuz ?<br>Бул жерде канча убакыт болосун / суз ?  |
| <b>How many people live in the yurt?</b>          | - Boz uj içinde kanča adam žašajt ?<br>- Боз уй ичинде канча адам жашайт ?               |
| <b>What animals do you have?</b>                  | Kandai janybarlaryn / janybarlarynyz bar ?<br>Кандай жаныбарларын/ ыз бар ?              |
| <b>How many animals do you have?</b>              | - Kanča mal žanybarynyz bar?<br>- Канча мал жаныбарыңыз бар ?                            |
| <b>How many brothers and sisters do you have?</b> | Kancha bir tuugansyn / tuugansynyz ?<br>Канча бир туугансын / сыз ?                      |
| <b>I have a brother and a sister</b>              | Menin baikem jana ejem bar.<br>Менин байкем жана эжем бар                                |

**It is my brother / my sister / my father / my mother**

Al menin baikem / karyndashym / atam / apam  
Ал менин байкем, карындашым, менин атам, апам

**What is your job?**

Senin / Sizdin kesibin / kesibiniz emne ?  
Сенин/ сиздин кесибин / из эмне ?

**Where do you work?**

Kaysyl jerde ishteisin / ishteisiniz ?  
Кайсыл жерде иштейсин/сиз ?

## ANIMALS

**Horse**

At  
Ат

**Panther**

Pantera  
пантера

**Wolf**

Karışkır  
Карышкыр

**Bear**

Ayuu  
Аюу

**Sheep**

Koy  
Кой

**Goat**

Eçki  
Эчки

**Yak**

Yak  
Як

**Cow**

Uy  
Уй

**Dog**

It  
Ит

**Cat**

mışık  
мышык

## HOTEL

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

## WEATHER

|                                                                                                         |                                                                                                                                                                   |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>What time is it?</b>                                                                                 | <p>Saat kancha boldu ?</p> <p>Саат канча болду ?</p>                                                                                                              |
| <b>When ?</b>                                                                                           | <p>Kachan ?</p> <p>Качан ?</p>                                                                                                                                    |
| <b>Yesterday</b>                                                                                        | <p>Kechee</p> <p>кечээ</p>                                                                                                                                        |
| <b>Today (morning / noon / evening)</b>                                                                 | <p>Bugun (erte menen / tushto / kechinde)</p> <p>Бүгүн (эрте менен. Тушто. кечинде)</p>                                                                           |
| <b>Tomorrow</b>                                                                                         | <p>Erten'</p> <p>Эртең</p>                                                                                                                                        |
| <b>Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday</b>                                   | <p>Duyshonbu, sheyshenbi, sharshenbi, beyshembi, juma, ishembı, jekshembi</p> <p>Дүйшөмбү Шейшемби Шаршемби Бейшемби Жума Ишемби Жекшемби</p>                     |
| <b>January, February, March, April, May, June, July, August, September, October, November, December</b> | <p>Yanvar Fevral Mart Aprel İyun İyul Avgust Sentyabr Oktyabr Noyabr Dekabr</p> <p>Январь Февраль Март Апрель май Июль Август Сентябрь Октябрь Ноябрь Декабрь</p> |

## HEALTH

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

## WITH TRADERS

|                                 |                                                                    |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>How much does it cost?</b>   | Kancha turat al ?<br>Канча турат, ал ?                             |
| <b>It's cheap</b>               | Bul abdan arzan<br>Бул абдан арзан                                 |
| <b>It's too expensive!</b>      | Bul oto kymbat !<br>Бул өтө кымбат !                               |
| <b>Can you lower the price?</b> | Siz baasyn arzandata alasyzby ?<br>Сиз баасын арзандата аласызбы ? |
| <b>I would like to buy this</b> | Satyp alaiyn... ushunu, bul !<br>сатып алайын ... ушуну , бул !    |

|                                                                  |                                                                                                                           |
|------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>I Love / Hate</b>                                             | Jakty / jakpady<br>Жакты / жакпады                                                                                        |
| <b>Money</b>                                                     | Akcha<br>акча                                                                                                             |
| <b>I just watch</b>                                              | Men jon ele karap jatam<br>Мен жөн гана карап жатам.                                                                      |
| <b>Bank / Post</b>                                               | Bank / Poçta<br>Банк / Почта                                                                                              |
| <b>Phone</b>                                                     | Telefon<br>Телефон                                                                                                        |
| <b>Sim Card</b>                                                  | SIM karta<br>SIM карта                                                                                                    |
| <b>Number</b>                                                    | sandar<br>сандар                                                                                                          |
| <b>One, Two, Three, Four, Five, Six, Seven, Eight, Nine, Ten</b> | Bir / eki / uch / tort / besh / alty / jeti / segiz / toguz / on<br>бир, эки, үч, төрт, беш, алты, жети, сегиз, тогуз, он |
| <b>Thirty, Forty, Fifty, Sixty</b>                               | Jyiyрма / otuz / kyrk / elu / altymysh<br>жыйырма, отуз, кырк, элүү, алтымыш                                              |
| <b>Seventy, Eighty, Ninety</b>                                   | Jetimish / seksen / tokson<br>Жетимиш, сексен, токсон                                                                     |
| <b>Hundred</b>                                                   | Juz<br>жүз                                                                                                                |

## COUNTING

## VEHICLES AND RENTAL CAR

|                                    |                                                                      |
|------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Bike</b>                        | velosiped<br>велосипед                                               |
| <b>Motorcycle</b>                  | mototsikl<br>мотоцикл                                                |
| <b>Car</b>                         | unaa<br>унаа                                                         |
| <b>Garage</b>                      | garaj<br>гараж                                                       |
| <b>Gasoline</b>                    | benzin<br>бензин                                                     |
| <b>Diesel</b>                      | dizel<br>дизель                                                      |
| <b>Tire</b>                        | şina<br>шина                                                         |
| <b>Gas station</b>                 | May kuyuuçu stantsiya<br>Май куюучу станция                          |
| <b>I would like to rent a car</b>  | Men maşına ijaraga algım kelet<br>Мен машина ижарага алгым келет     |
| <b>Is insurance included?</b>      | Kamsızdandırıuu kamtılganbı ?<br>Камсыздандыруу камтылганбы ?        |
| <b>Where can I get a car?</b>      | Kaydan maşına alsam bolot ?<br>Кайдан машина алсам болот ?           |
| <b>Where should I return it?</b>   | Men anı kayda kaytarışım kerek ?<br>Мен аны кайда кайтарышым керек ? |
| <b>I need an automatic machine</b> | maga avtomattık maşına kerek<br>мага автоматтык машина керек         |

|                                        |                                                   |
|----------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|
| <b>I would like an air conditioner</b> | Maga konditsioner kerek<br>Мага кондиционер керек |
|----------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|

|                                  |                                                              |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>I would like a child seat</b> | Men baldar oturguşun kaalaym<br>Мен балдар отургучун каалайм |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|

## MAIN CITIES

|                |        |
|----------------|--------|
| <b>Bichkek</b> | Бишкек |
|----------------|--------|

|                 |          |
|-----------------|----------|
| <b>Toktogul</b> | Токтогул |
|-----------------|----------|

|            |    |
|------------|----|
| <b>Och</b> | Ош |
|------------|----|

|                |         |
|----------------|---------|
| <b>Karaköl</b> | Каракөл |
|----------------|---------|

|                   |           |
|-------------------|-----------|
| <b>Jalal-Abad</b> | Жалалабат |
|-------------------|-----------|

|                 |        |
|-----------------|--------|
| <b>At-Bashi</b> | Атбашы |
|-----------------|--------|

|                |         |
|----------------|---------|
| <b>Karakol</b> | Каракол |
|----------------|---------|

|                  |          |
|------------------|----------|
| <b>Kyzyl-Tuu</b> | Кызылтуу |
|------------------|----------|

|               |        |
|---------------|--------|
| <b>Tokmok</b> | Токмок |
|---------------|--------|

|             |     |
|-------------|-----|
| <b>Tyup</b> | Түп |
|-------------|-----|

|              |       |
|--------------|-------|
| <b>Uzgen</b> | Өзгөн |
|--------------|-------|

|                |         |
|----------------|---------|
| <b>Sülüktü</b> | Сүлүктү |
|----------------|---------|

**Kara-Balta**

Карабалта

**Batken**

Баткен

**Balykchy**

Балыкчы

**Kemin**

Кемин

**Naryn**

Нарын

**Schamaldysai**

Шамалдысай

**Talas**

Талас

**Frunse**

Фрунзе

**Kyzyl-Kiya**

Кызылкия

**Aksy**

Аксуу

**Bazarkurgon**

Базаркоргон

**Shopokov**

Шопоков

**Tash-Kumyr**

Ташкөмүр

**Orlovka**

Орловка

**Gulcha**

Гүлчө

|                     |           |
|---------------------|-----------|
| <b>Tschonaryk</b>   | Чонарык   |
| <b>Kant</b>         | Кант      |
| <b>Cholpon-Ata</b>  | Чолпоната |
| <b>Kara-Suu</b>     | Карасуу   |
| <b>Chaidarkan</b>   | Хайдаркан |
| <b>Isfana</b>       | Исфана    |
| <b>Kökjanggak</b>   | Көкжаңгак |
| <b>Kyzyl-Suu</b>    | Кызылсуу  |
| <b>Kajyngdy</b>     | Кайыңды   |
| <b>Mailuu-Suu</b>   | Майлуусуу |
| <b>Wostotschnyi</b> | Восточный |
| <b>Kochkor-Ata</b>  | Кочкората |
| <b>Suusamyr</b>     | Суусамыр  |





**APPENDICES**

**NOTES**















# KYRGYZSTAN

## THE TRAVEL GUIDE

### PLANNING A TRIP TO KYRGYZSTAN AND ALREADY HAVE A THOUSAND QUESTIONS?

I asked myself the same questions before my first trip in 2014.  
Since then, I've gathered all the answers on my blog [www.gtla.net](http://www.gtla.net).

Wondering which visa you need, how to get around, how to organise things locally, where to sleep, and whether you can manage with a backpacker's budget? Looking for reliable contacts, good tips, or answers to more specific questions?

In this guide, you'll find all my answers, plus the contacts of my friends.  
Since 2015, I've recommended them to several hundred readers from my blog.

### A COMPLETE GUIDE

- A general travel guide.
- A guide to prepare your horse trek.
- A guide to renting a car.
- The stories of Marie and Florent, who travelled by bike and on horseback independently.
- The contacts of my guide and car rental friends.
- A English/Kyrgyz phrasebook.
- The Latin transcription of the main towns and cities.
- A few blank pages to write down your own notes :)



I'm Georges-Michel, from [www.gtla.net](http://www.gtla.net). I love travelling, exploring, and figuring things out along the way. When I know nothing about a place, and I have no idea what I'm going to do there, I usually go anyway.



The complete guide  
by [www.gtla.net](http://www.gtla.net)