



Kazakhstan Қазақстан

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Best Parks & Reserves

- Aksu-Zhabagyly (p85)
- Sayram-Ugam (p86)
- Korgalzhyn (p106)
- Ile-Alatau (p73)
- Altyn-Emel (p78)
- Kolsay Lakes (p76)

Best Architecture

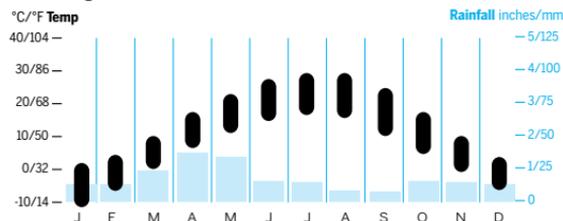
- Yasai Mausoleum (p88)
- Khan Shatyr (p98)
- Palace of Peace & Accord (p99)

Why Go?

The world's ninth-biggest country is the most economically advanced of the 'stans', thanks to its abundant reserves of oil and most other valuable minerals. This means generally better standards of accommodation, restaurants and transport than elsewhere in Central Asia. The biggest city, Almaty, is almost reminiscent of Europe with its leafy avenues, chic cafes, glossy shopping centres and hedonistic nightlife. The capital Astana, on the windswept northern steppe, has been transformed into a 21st-century showpiece with a profusion of bold futuristic architecture. But it's beyond the cities that you'll find the greatest travel adventures, whether hiking in the high mountains and green valleys of the Tian Shan, searching for wildlife on the lake-dotted steppe, enjoying home-spun hospitality in village guesthouses, or jolting across the western deserts to remote underground mosques.

When to Go

Almaty



Mid-Apr–early Jun

The steppe and hills blossom and migrating birds flock in.

May–Sep

The weather is perfect and from July it's hiking season.

Nov–Apr

It's cold, but skiers enjoy Central Asia's best facilities at Chimbulak.

Visas & Permits

Citizens of EU states, Australia, Canada, Israel, Japan, New Zealand, Norway, South Korea, Switzerland, the USA and some other countries can normally obtain tourist visas without a letter of invitation (LOI) at Kazakhstan consulates or embassies.

For most other visas you must obtain a LOI before applying, available through most travel agencies in Kazakhstan and Central Asia travel specialists in other countries, normally for US\$50 to US\$100. See p131 for further visas information. Registration is required if you are staying in Kazakhstan more than five days - see p127.

Special permits are needed to visit areas close to the Chinese border and are only available through tour firms taking you to these areas. Processing can take up to 45 days. See p129.

COSTS

Relative Cost

Slightly more expensive than Uzbekistan, cheaper than Turkmenistan.

Daily Expenses

- ➔ Hostel dorm (Almaty or Astana) 2000–2500T
- ➔ Comfortable hotel double 10,000T+
- ➔ Street snack 50–150T, good restaurant meal 2500T+
- ➔ Train from Almaty to Astana (1230km) *platskartny* (hard-sleeper train)/*kupeyny* (soft-sleeper train) 4030/6380T, plane 21,500T

Price Ranges

- ➔ **Sleeping** (per two people): \$ <8000T, \$\$ 8000–20,000T, \$\$\$ >20,000T
- ➔ **Eating** (main course): \$ <1000T, \$\$ 1000–2000T, \$\$\$ >2000T

TOP TIP

Make the effort to get beyond Kazakhstan's cities to the beautiful mountain, steppe or desert country, and the hospitality of rural homestays and guest-houses. Side trips to Aksu-Zhabagly Nature Reserve or Sayram-Ugam National Park are easy.

Fast Facts

- ➔ **Area** 2.7 million sq km
- ➔ **Capital** Astana
- ➔ **Country code** ☎7
- ➔ **Languages** Kazakh, Russian
- ➔ **Population** 17 million
- ➔ **Famous for** oil, steppe, Borat

Exchange Rates

COUNTRY	UNIT	TENGE
Australia	A\$1	140T
Canada	C\$1	148T
China	Y1	25T
Euro zone	€1	203T
Japan	Y100	160T
NZ	NZ\$1	123T
Russia	R10	46T
UK	UK£1	237T
USA	US\$1	153T

Itineraries

- ➔ **Three days** Explore Almaty and make a trip into the mountains south of the city. If you're travelling on to Kyrgyzstan in summer, use the Karkara Valley crossing.
- ➔ **One week** Extend the three-day itinerary with time in southern Kazakhstan – Shymkent, lovely Aksu-Zhabagly Nature Reserve and the splendour of Turkistan – or head for Astana, Kazakhstan's spectacular new capital.
- ➔ **One month** You can get round the whole country, taking in more adventurous and remote destinations such as the Aral Sea, the dramatic deserts outside Aktau, or the pristine, beautiful Altay Mountains in the northeast.

Resources

- ➔ www.visitkazakhstan.kz
- ➔ www.kazakhembus.com
- ➔ www.en.tengrinews.kz
- ➔ www.timeout.kz
- ➔ www.afisha.kz
- ➔ www.voxpopuli.kz