



# Kyrgyzstan КЫРГЫЗСТАН

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## Best Community Tourism Outfits

- CBT Karakol (p263)
- CBT Naryn (p281)
- Jailoo Kochkor (p277)
- CBT Arslanbob (p288)

## Best Yurtstays

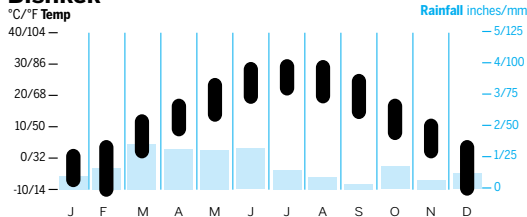
- Song-Köl (p273)
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## Why Go?

Kyrgyzstan is a nation defined by its topography: joyously unspoiled mountainscapes, stark craggy ridges, and rolling summer pastures (*jailoos*) are brought to life by semi-nomadic, yurt-dwelling shepherd cultures. Add to this natural beauty a well-developed network of homestays and the recent introduction of visa-free travel, and it's easy to see why Kyrgyzstan is rapidly becoming the gateway of choice for Western travellers in Central Asia. As can be expected in a country where the vast majority of attractions are rural and high altitude, the timing of your visit is crucial. Summer is ideal with hikes and roads generally accessible. Midsummer also sees Kazakh and Russian tourists converge on the beaches of never-freezing Lake Issyk-Köl. From October to May, much rural accommodation closes down and the yurts that add such character to the alpine vistas are stashed away. So think twice about a winter visit unless you've come to ski.

## When to Go

### Bishkek



**May–Jun** Flowers bloom and tourist numbers are low; higher mountains may be snow-bound.

**mid-Jul–early Sep** Ideal for treks; accommodation heavily booked; cities stifling hot.

**Mar** Rural accommodation closed; trekking areas inaccessible; good for skiing.

## Visas & Permits

At least 60 nationalities can visit Kyrgyzstan without visas, including citizens of Korea, Japan, most major Western countries and former Soviet countries. Many visitors who do need a visa can arrange for one on arrival through an agency. Border-zone permits are required for visiting some border zones but this generally only affects mountaineers climbing in the highest mountain areas. For more information on visas, see p309.

### COSTS

#### Relative Cost

Marginally the cheapest state in Central Asia.

#### Daily Expenses

- ➔ Hostel dorm (Bishkek) 400–900som, midrange hotel US\$30–80
- ➔ Street snack 15–40som, basic self-service cafeteria meal 60–100som
- ➔ Good restaurant meal in Bishkek 400som
- ➔ 1L of petrol 42som

#### Price Ranges

- ➔ **Sleeping** (for two people) \$ <2000som, \$\$ 2000–5000som, \$\$\$ >5000som
- ➔ **Eating** (main course) \$ <100som, \$\$ 100–300som, \$\$\$ >300som

## Itineraries

- ➔ **One week** Head for Lake Issyk-Köl where Karakol makes an ideal base for a few days skiing or hiking in the alpine valleys, depending on the season.
- ➔ **Two weeks** If you're heading to Uzbekistan from Kyrgyzstan, apply for your Uzbek visa in Bishkek. While it's being processed visit Issyk-Köl and Song-Köl, then return to Bishkek to collect your visa. From Bishkek, head to the Fergana Valley via Osh, stopping in pretty Arslanbob en route.
- ➔ **One month** With more time, you can add a two-week pre-arranged horse-trek, mountaineering or trekking expedition to the two-week itinerary.

### TOP TIP

Kyrgyzstan's towns aren't attractions in themselves, only bases for exploring the countryside, and our suggestions are just initial pointers. The best way to explore is to simply head out into *jailoos* and hills and find your own way. But remember that everything is seasonal.

## Fast Facts

- ➔ **Area** 198,500 sq km
- ➔ **Capital** Bishkek
- ➔ **Country code** ☎996
- ➔ **Languages** Kyrgyz, Russian
- ➔ **Population** 5.6 million
- ➔ **Famous for** Yurts, hats, horsemen

## Exchange Rates

COUNTRY	UNIT	SOM
Australia	A\$1	45.6som
Canada	C\$1	47.5som
China	Y1	8.0som
Euro zone	€1	62.3som
Japan	¥100	49som
NZ	NZ\$1	39.6som
Russia	R10	14.9som
UK	UK£1	77.2som
USA	US\$1	49.2som

## Resources

- ➔ [www.celestial.com.kg](http://www.celestial.com.kg)
- ➔ [www.cbtkyrgyzstan.kg](http://www.cbtkyrgyzstan.kg)
- ➔ [www.helvetas.kg](http://www.helvetas.kg)
- ➔ [www.kyrgyzstan.orexca.com](http://www.kyrgyzstan.orexca.com)
- ➔ [www.timesca-europe.com](http://www.timesca-europe.com)