Celestial Mountains Snow Leopard Trek

Trip Code: SLK

Version:

WALK & TREK	GUIDED GROUP	CHALLENGING
		7



HIGHLIGHTS

- Explore Almaty's vibrant mix of Soviet heritage and Kazakh culture on a guided city tour.
- Trek through the remote Central Tien Shan, crossing six dramatic mountain passes up to 3,780m.
- Camp beside crystal-clear alpine lakes Karakol and Akkol, surrounded by pristine wilderness.
- Enjoy breathtaking views of snow-capped peaks including Khan Tengri (7,010m) and Pobeda (7,439m).
- Encounter nomadic life, wildflower meadows, and the rare chance to spot the elusive Snow Leopard.

AT A GLANCE

- 8 days trekking
- Max. altitude: 3,780m
- Join at Almaty

ACCOMMODATIONS & MEALS

VIEW DATES, PRICES & BOOK YOUR HOLIDAY HERE

Introduction

Explore Kazakhstan's remote Central Tien Shan "Celestial Mountains" on this nine-day trekking expedition, which crosses six high passes (between 3150-3780m), follows ancient caravan routes, and camps beside crystal clear alpine lakes. Supported by pack-horses and crew, you'll walk with just a light daypack, surrounded by some of the world's most striking mountain scenery.

Starting from Almaty, we follow shepherds' trails along streams and lakes into a largely untouched part of the range, where you may be lucky enough to spot the elusive snow leopard in some of the more remote valleys. Highlights include meadows bursting with wildflowers, breathtaking views of Khan Tengri (7,010m) and other snow-capped peaks and nights. We'll experience the wild beauty of the Central Tien Shan, making this an unforgettable adventure in the heart of Central Asia.

Is this holiday for you?

A unique trekking expedition through a remote part of Central Tien Shan Mountain Range. This area is rarely visited with some places remaining completely untouched by humans. This is a fully-supported camping trek with an experienced leader, full support crew and horse caravan. You will need to be fit and used to walking consecutive days up to 7 or 8 hours. Large sections of the route are on faint trails and pathless terrain, which will lead us over six high passes all above 3,000 metres including some steep ascents and descents and several river crossings.

Kazakhstan has vast, sweeping, expanses of wild countryside to explore, making it the perfect adventure travel destination. Tourism is very much still in its infancy here, making this a perfect time to visit, but this does mean that the tourist infrastructure is still limited. Unexpected changes are possible and it is important that you bring along your spirit of adventure.

Itinerary

Version:

Holiday Information

What's Included

- A KE leader
- A local guide and an English speaking interpreter
- Single timed airport transfers on arrival and departure
- All accommodation as described
- When camping a full service including food and all equipment (excluding personal equipment)
- All meals
- All land transport required by the itinerary
- All activities/excursions/entrance fees mentioned except where specified as 'optional'
- National Park entrance fees

What's not Included

- Travel insurance
- Tips
- Miscellaneous personal expenditure - drinks and souvenirs etc.

Joining Arrangements & Transfers

A single group transfer will be arranged to meet the preferred group flight on arrival at Almaty Airport. This transfer will normally be in the early hours of Day 1 of the Land Only itinerary. At the end of the trip there will be a single group transfer to Almaty Airport timed to meet the check in for the preferred group flight. This transfer will normally be at breakfast time on Day 14 of the itinerary. The KE guide or a representative of our local agent will assist with these group transfers.

Clients not arriving at the same time as the preferred group flights should make arrangements to meet the group at the hotel in Almaty at breakfast time on Day 1. Independent transfers to the group hotel can be arranged in advance at extra cost, through the KE Office. Clients booking a Land Only Package MUST provide the KE office with full details of their flights.

Hotel contact details and an emergency number will be provided with your final confirmation letter.

Meal Plan

All meals included.

Special Diets

Whilst we can cater for vegetarians, albeit sometimes with a more limited choice, we cannot always provide for special diets. Due to the nature of some of the trips that we operate and the countries in which we operate them, it can be very hard (and sometimes impossible) to cater for a wide range of dietary choices and you may have to supplement your meals with food/snacks from home. If you have specific dietary requirements please do speak to our sales team and they will be able to advise you whether or not we will be able to offer your specific choice. Please note that we are unable to provide separate menus and cannot accept liability for any problems arising from special dietary requirements or intolerances.

Food & Water

Drinking Water

It is not recommended to drink untreated water from the taps. If you are on a trekking or cycling holiday, water is supplied to fill up your individual bottles. This will be boiled, filtered or provided in large jerry cans or 5 litre bottles. Additionally you should take purification tablets or a filter bottle (such as a Water-To-Go bottle) to treat your water when in towns or where water is not supplied. We do not encourage the purchasing of single use plastic bottles.

If you are looking to sample local cuisine during your holiday you can expect to eat a lot of meat (mutton and horse are the most common) and dairy products. Beshbarmak, a dish consisting of boiled horse meat or mutton, is perhaps the most popular Kazakh dish. The meat is boiled and served in a bowl with pasta and a meat broth. Soured milk is a common ingredient and 'Kumis' (fermented mare's milk), also known as 'milk champagne', is a popular beverage amongst the nomads. Do not worry if this is not for you, international drinks and dishes will also be available in local cafes and restaurants where we will dine.

The food served during the camping section will be a mixture of local and international dishes, with ingredients purchased locally and cooked for us by well-trained camp cooks. Please note that vegetarianism is not a concept widely understood in Central Asia and choices for vegetarians will be much more limited. If you are vegetarian please remember to inform us of your dietary requirements before you travel. You may also wish to bring along some snacks from home to use during the course of your walking days.

Accommodation

We will spend 2 nights at a comfortable, centrally located hotel in Almaty. All rooms are en suite. All accommodation is allocated on a twin-sharing basis. If you are travelling by yourself you will be paired up with another single client of the same sex.

The second night of the trip is spent at Karkara Basecamp, a fixed tented camp with a dining hall, bar and shower facilities. Once on trek we spend a total of 7 nights camping in roomy 2-person tents. There is also a dining tent and toilet tent. The support team will prepare hot water for washing at each camp but there will also be a hot shower available on Day 7.

Single hotel rooms and/or single tents are available for a supplementary cost. If you are planning to extend your holiday additional nights are available on request.

Group Leader & Support Staff

The group will be accompanied by a KE leader, together with an experienced English-speaking local guide. During the trek, there will be a local trek crew including a team of porters and horses for support.

Altitude

This holiday involves going to high altitude. During the course of your trip you will reach altitudes in excess of 3500 metres. This is not something that you should worry about; the human body is quite capable of adapting to a very wide range of altitudes, but it is important that we follow some simple rules in order to acclimatise successfully. Before coming on this holiday you should read the advice on trekking at high altitude. You can also talk to one of our trekking experts if you have any concerns about altitude.

Spending Money

Approximately $150 should be allowed for miscellaneous expenses and you should take this money in the form of US dollars. Credit cards will not be accepted outside of Almaty. You should allow $80 for trek staff tips. Outside of Almaty, there is little opportunity to spend anything and all meals are included. If you are intending to buy expensive souvenirs, you should budget accordingly.

Guidance on Tipping

Tipping is expected in Kazakhstan, although you should only tip for services which are well done. The total amount that you can expect to pay in tips for your local guide, trek crew and drivers is approximately $80 (in local currency). Your KE leader will help to coordinate these payments and decide on an appropriate level of tipping for each crew member.

Baggage Allowance

For this holiday you should take one piece of luggage, which should be a soft bag such as waterproof duffel bag, and a day pack. The weight of your duffel bag whilst on trek should be no more than 12kg. Any items not required on trek (travel clothes etc.) can be left at the hotel in Almaty. For international flights please check your baggage allowance with your airline.

Group Size & Holiday Status

For each holiday there is a minimum number of participants required to enable it to go ahead. Once the minimum number is reached, the trip status will change from 'Available' to 'Guaranteed to run'. You can check the trip status for each departure in the ‘Dates and Prices’ table. Other than in exceptional circumstances, we will not cancel a trip once it has achieved this guaranteed to run status so you are free to proceed with your international flight booking and other travel arrangements.

General Information

Passport & Visas

The information that we provide is for UK passport holders.

A passport with 6 months remaining validity at the end of your stay is generally required**,** and you should have at least 2 blank pages for each country that you visit.

For other nationalities, please refer to your own Government website for the latest information.

It is your responsibility to ensure that you have the correct travel documents including vaccinations and health certificates *(see Health & Vaccinations below),* **and visas for your holiday.** Please ensure that you check the FCDO for the latest advice for **each country visited** before travel.

UK, USA and EU countries do not require a visa to visit Kazakhstan as a tourist for a period of up to 30 days. Other nationalities should check the requirements directly with their own government travel advice, or with the Kazakhstan embassy in their own country.

Health & Vaccinations

Vaccinations:

You should be up to date with the routine vaccinations recommended in the UK for overseas travel.

You must also contact your doctor or travel clinic to check if there are specific vaccinations or other preventive measures that you need for the area you are visiting, in good time before you are due to depart.

Please ensure you are looking at the recommendations for all countries visited on your holiday plus recommendations for any borders you cross.

On holidays to more remote areas you should also have a dental check-up.

It is your responsibility to ensure that you have the correct travel documents including vaccinations and health certificates.

Please check the FCDO and Travel Health Pro. For all of your intended destinations for up-to-date advice.

Severe Allergies:

If you have a severe allergy please inform the KE office before you travel. We will do all we can to help, but we cannot guarantee an allergy free environment on KE trips.

Currency

The unit of currency in Kazakhstan is the Kazakhstani Tenge.

Preparing for your Holiday

Getting some additional exercise before coming on an active holiday makes a lot of sense. The fitter you are, after all, the more enjoyable you will find the experience. You should be aerobically fit and comfortable with walking 4 to 6 hours for consecutive days, with the occasional longer day. Hill walking, with a good amount of ascent and descent, is the best training. Running, cycling and swimming are also good for developing cardiovascular fitness and stamina.

Climate

Daytime maximum temperatures will generally be between 20ºC and 25ºC, falling to between 5ºC and 15ºC at night (0ºC at the higher camps). In the mountains we can expect to encounter cool and windy conditions and some additional clothing layers are needed. During the time we have chosen to travel you can expect warm days with clear skies and little rain or snow. However, weather in mountainous areas is notoriously difficult to predict and short-lived storms can occur at any time of the year. In short, you need to be prepared for everything!

Travel Aware

As a reputable tour operator, KE supports the British Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office's **'Travel Aware'** campaign to enable British citizens to prepare for their journeys overseas. The 'Travel Aware' website provides a single, authoritative source of advice for all kinds of travellers and we recommend that before travel, all KE clients visit the official UK Government website at travelaware.campaign.gov.uk and read the FCDO Travel Advice for their chosen destination. All other nationalities should check their government websites for relevant information.

KE treat the safety and security of all clients as the most important aspect of any trip we organise. We would not run any trip that we did not consider reasonably safe. Should the FCDO advise against travel for any reason, we will contact everyone booked to travel to discuss the situation. We receive regular updates directly from the FCDO and are in constant touch with our contacts on the ground. If you have any questions about government travel advice, please call our office.

Single Use Plastic

KE do not encourage the use of single use plastic items. We are ensuring that our agents all over the world are working together to reduce the problem and educate those around them. We are leading by example in our KE office by reducing our plastic use.

Books

- Bradt Travel Guide.
- Central Asia. Lonely Planet.
- Foreign Devils on the Silk Road. Peter Hopkirk.
- Mountains of the Middle Kingdom. Galen Rowell.

Maps

- Central Asian Series at 1:500,000 scale. Almaty and Karakol sheets.
- Reise Know-How. 1:2,000,000 scale.

Private Groups Information

Make this KE Adventure holiday your own!

- Do our normal group departure dates not fit?
- Would you prefer to travel with just friends and/or family?
- Are you looking to organise a trip for your local walking, biking or mountaineering club?

It's really easy to make a trip your own. Simply select from our full range of adventure holidays and choose the dates that work for you and your group.

We are experts in creating holidays for groups of friends, families, charities and clubs. Our personal service means you'll be fully involved as we make the arrangements for your perfect adventure holiday.

Independence with Security

Travelling as a KE Private Group allows you more flexibility and choice, but still with the peace of mind that everything is pre-planned and arranged for your group by a reputable adventure travel company.

To take your first step to an amazing adventure with your friends and family complete the private group enquiry form, or call our **Sales Experts on: 017687 73966**

Travel Insurance

It is an essential condition of joining a holiday with KE Adventure Travel that you have a valid travel insurance policy to cover the cost of medical treatment and to protect the value of your holiday in the event of cancellation. When taking out insurance please ensure the policy you choose covers you for the activities and altitude included in your itinerary.

For appropriate insurance cover we recommend Campbell Irvine Direct. Please go to our Travel Insurance page for further information and to get a quote.

Equipment Information

Equipment List

Please try to keep the weight of your baggage to a minimum. See the 'baggage allowance' section for further details.

You must bring the following items:

- Hiking boots
- Trainers
- Sandals (for river crossings) - e.g. Teva / Keen style (not flip flops)
- Socks
- Underwear
- Trekking trousers
- Waterproof overtrousers
- Waterproof jacket
- Thermal baselayer shirts (2 short sleeve, 2 long sleeve)
- T-shirts
- Shorts
- Fleece jacket or warm jumper
- Warm jacket (down)
- Sunhat
- Warm hat
- Sunglasses
- Warm gloves
- Buff/scarf

- Selection of dry bags (to keep trek bag contents dry)
- Daypack 30 to 40 litres
- Headtorch and spare batteries
- Sun protection (including total bloc for lips, nose etc.)
- Insect repellent (deet)
- Water bottles 1 litre (x2) (we encourage re-filling water bottles rather than single use plastic)
- Water purification tablets
- Washbag and toiletries
- Antibacterial handwash
- Small towel
- Sleeping bag (comfort rated -5°C)
- Basic First Aid Kit including: antiseptic and antihistamine cream, throat lozenges, diarrhoea treatment (Imodium), painkillers, plasters and blister treatment, and re-hydration salts (Dioralite).

The following items are optional:

- Trekking poles (highly recommended)
- Binoculars (highly recommend for wildlife spotting)
- Swimwear (we will be camping near rivers and mountain lakes on several occcasions)
- Sleeping bag liner
- Camera

- Reusable cloth bag for shopping (to avoid plastic bags)

The following items are provided:

- Thermarest or similar sleeping mat are provided but you are welcome to bring your own for extra comfort.

Land Only Information

Please refer to the 'Joining Arrangements & Transfers' within Holiday Information for further details.

Flights and other transport to your destination should not be booked until you have received your booking confirmation and the departure is showing 'Guaranteed to Run' or 'Limited'.

Land Only Information

The LAND ONLY dates and prices are for the itinerary, joining at the hotel in Almaty. Single timed transfers are included from/to Almaty Airport.

Flight Inclusive Information

Limited seats are available at the advertised flight price, please book as early as you can. If we are unable to secure seats at the price shown, or you have requested regional departures and/or upgrades, we will provide you with an alternative quote. It is likely that flight payment will be in advance of your final holiday balance. Booking a flight inclusive package means you will benefit from full financial protection, eases your holiday planning, and leaves us to deal with airlines and schedule changes. If you book flights through KE Adventure Travel we will offset the carbon of your flight.

Regional departures and/or alternative carriers are available on request.

Flight Inclusive Information

The FLIGHT INCLUSIVE dates and prices are based on UK flights from London Heathrow to Almaty International Airport. Outbound flights will depart from the UK in the afternoon, arriving in the morning of the following day (Day 1 of the Land Only itinerary). Return flights will depart from Almaty International Airport in the morning of the last day of the itinerary, arriving in the UK in the afternoon of the same day.

Why Choose KE

Why KE

We have been working with our team in the Tien Shan mountains of Kazakhstan for over 25 years. Join us on this remote trek to one of our favourite off-the-beaten-track mountain ranges.

Please Note This document was downloaded on 11/11/2026 and the trip is subject to change