Mountains and Deserts of Kazakhstan

Trip Code: MDK

Version:

WALK & TREK	GUIDED GROUP	5 MODERATE



HIGHLIGHTS

- 2-day trek across the Assy Plateau in the footsteps of the Kazakh shepherds
- Trek amongst the mountains of the northern Tien Shan in the Ile-Altau National Park
- Discover the turquoise Kolsay Lakes and the multi-coloured Aktau Mountains
- Visit the red rock Charyn Canyon and climb Kazakhstan's famous 'singing sand-dune'

AT A GLANCE

- 6 days trekking
- 6 days walking and sightseeing
- Max altitude 3500m
- Join at Almaty

ACCOMMODATIONS & MEALS

VIEW DATES, PRICES & BOOK YOUR HOLIDAY HERE

Introduction

On this exciting 2 week trekking holiday we'll discover the south-eastern corner of Kazakhstan, through exploration of four of the region's most wild, remote and diverse national parks. This itinerary is crammed full of distinct landscapes and contrasting cultural experiences, from the icy Tien Shan Mountains to the red stone Charyn Canyon, and from the bustling café culture of old-town Almaty to the yurt dwelling nomads of the Assy plateau. We begin in the Alatau National Park, south of Almaty city. Here, we'll hike across 'Moon Meadow' to Shalkar Pass (2,860m), the Tuyuk Su glacial cirque (3,200m) and reach the summit of Shymubulak Peak (3,370m) for sweeping views of the northern Tien Shan. Moving east we spend 2 days trekking on shepherd's trails across the wild Assy Plateau; we'll pass scattered yurt camps belonging to nomadic Kazakh shepherds, busy tending their sheep and horses, and may even be invited to try some kumiss (fermented mare's milk). There'll be some great wildlife spotting opportunities as we descend from the plateau through the wild flower filled meadows of the Zhenishke Valley. Next, we spend 2 days in the Kolsay Koldari National Park learning why its collection of alpine mountain lakes are known as the 'Pearls of the Tien Shan'. Crossing into the desert regions we'll explore the spectacular red rock formations of the Charyn Canyon. The grand finale of our Kazakh showcase will be a visit to the multi coloured Aktau Mountains and a chance to experience the mysterious 'singing sand-dune' of the Altyn-Emel National Park. With sightseeing in Almaty, a chance to see the magnificent 'Golden Man' and the opportunity to watch an exciting horseback display also on offer, this holiday will give you a real taste Central Asia.

Is this holiday for you?

This holiday will take you on a circular journey through 4 of Kazakhstan's most wild and wonderful national parks, which we will explore through a mix of full trekking days, shorter walks, sightseeing and cultural experiences. On our trekking days you can expect to be hiking for on average 6-7hrs a day, with around 600-700m of ascent and descent, and we will also have a couple of days with shorter walks of 2-4hrs. This is a holiday crammed with magnificent contrasting landscapes, and as such you will need be prepared for walking on a variety of terrain, from glacial moraine and coniferous forest paths to grassy plateaus and sweeping sand dunes. Accommodation will be a mix of comfortable hotels and more simple mountain lodges and guesthouses. There will also be 3 nights full service camping. 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 infrastucture 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 qualified and experienced English speaking local guide
- 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) and trek support crew
- 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

The group will meet at the hotel in Almaty.

Single timed transfers are provided from / to Almaty Airport.

Anyone may join the group transfers by prior arrangement. Travelling as a group or on public transport saves energy. If this is not practical, we can provide private transfers at an additional cost. Taxis are also available.

Hotel contact details and an emergency number will be provided with your booking confirmation

Meal Plan

All meals are included in the holiday price.

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 3 nights at a comfortable, centrally located hotel in Almaty, 2 nights in a hotel in the Ile-Alatau National Park, and in Saty Village and Basshiy we will stay in simple guesthouses. All rooms are en suite.

There will also be a total of 3 nights camping. Whilst camping we use roomy 2-person tents and there is also a dining tent, a toilet tent and a camp shower.

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.

If you are travelling by yourself, you will be paired up with another single client of the same sex. 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

This group will be led by a professional and qualifed English speaking tour leader. Whilst on trek the group will be supported by a local mountain guide and a trek crew.

Altitude

This holiday involves going to moderately high altitude. During the course of your trip you will reach altitudes in excess of 2500 metres. Most people will have no difficulty with this level of altitude but before coming on the holiday, we recommend you 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 $80-100 (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 duffel bag, and a day pack. 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 10ºC and 15ºC at night. 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 -10°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 (for wildlife spotting)
- Swimwear (we will be camping near rivers and visting 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

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

Did you know that Kazakhstan translates as 'Land of the Wanderers'? At KE we firmly believe that one of the best ways to experience a country is through wandering its trails, and we are the only UK operator offering a trekking and walking holiday in this wild and wonderful corner of Central Asia. We can't wait to introduce you to the abundant array of landscapes on offer in this part of Kazakhstan!

Please Note This document was downloaded on 12/11/2026 and the trip is subject to change