

Kyrgyzstan & Kazakhstan



...From Bishkek to
Almaty by road...

December 2015



First stop at the Capitol of Kyrgyzstan - Bishkek.

...Flying with Turkish via Istanbul (best and cheapest option to get to Kyrgyzstan these days) – the drawback is that you do arrive in the middle of the night – 03:35 AM. No visas are needed and the clearance went very swift. I had booked hotel so I could take a cab and transfer and check-in directly and get some sleep before taking on the city of Bishkek.

I was booked at the Plaza Hotel Bishkek, which was actually good value for money it turned out. Bishkek itself was really not much to see. I arranged to have a local driver (part-English speaking) to take me around and show me the main sights. We had lunch at the traditional Supara restaurant which was served in traditional Yurts at the riverbank of Bishkek. The food and service was very good here. Apart from seeing the local landmarks we made an obligatory visit to the main market where all locals go and buy their food and goods Osh Bazar. Colourful and crowded as always.





Ala-Archa gorge The mountains outside of Bishkek



Having seen what little there was to see in Bishkek, we headed out towards the **mountain ridge of Ala-Archa** some 25 km outside of Bishkek.

This was nice as we passed a bit more rural areas and villages outside of the capitol. The areas were very picturesque and I enjoyed the scenery a lot although it was quite cold in the middle of the winter. Horses were roaming freely in the fields near the road as we were travelling towards the mountain gorge station. This was the end of the road. Having parked the car, I set-off on foot and walked for a couple of hours and enjoyed the serene environment. There were also a cold stream of water flowing through the gorge.

Back in Bishkek I tried the cool place **Chicken Star restaurant**. Excellent food and highly recommended. They also had a group practising tango between the tables.

Quick Facts	
Capital	Astana
Government	Republic
Currency	tenge (KZT)
Area	2,724,902km ² water: 47,500km ² land: 2,669,800km ²
Population	16,402,861 (July 2009 estimate)
Language	Kazakh (official, state language) 64.4%, Russian (official) 95% (2001 estimate)
Religion	Muslim 67%, Russian Orthodox 24%, Protestant 2%, other 7%
Electricity	220V, 50Hz, European plug
Country code	+7
Time Zone	UTC+5 to UTC+6





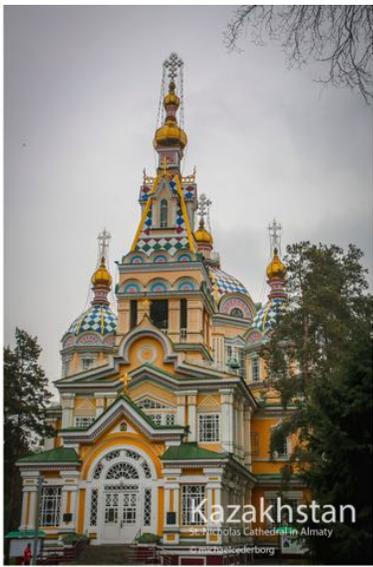
Almaty – the gateway to Kazakhstan

My driver from my two-day visit to Bishkek picked me up and delivered me to the city border where another driver was waiting to take me cross-border and all the way to Almaty. On relatively good roads crossing the mountains we made it through the border crossing without any incidents. Again, no visas required which made the transfer quite quick.

A lot of trailers transporting goods between the countries had lined up to be checked. The trip went quite uneventful and the landscape was actually quite dull. Mostly rolling hills without much cultivation or farming. The landscape become more dramatic when nearing Almaty. The high mountains as a backdrop to the city could be seen for miles away in the distance. It felt like forever before we actually did enter the city-border of Almaty. Probably because having seen the mountain ridge in the distance for hours. The name Almaty is said to mean “Full of apples”. However, any apple trees were not to be seen



Almaty - Kazakhstan



Almaty

The former capital with some 1,7 million people



Almaty used to be the capital of Kazakhstan until 1997, when Astana instead was designated capital of the country. Kazakhstan became independent from former USSR (СССР) back in 1991, but still has close links and business relations with Russia. The country also holds many ethnic Russians and Ukrainians.

I checked-in to the very posh **Grand Tien Shan Hotel** in the very centre of the city. Rated one of the very top hotels in town, I would have to agree. I explored the city on foot and spent most of my time in and around the **Panfilov Park where the Zenkov Cathedral, a 19th-century Russian Orthodox church** was located. This is a very important symbol of the city as well as the country. Absolutely amazing – and very typical Russian – decoration. Both the exterior as well as the interior was worth seeing. I visited during a service and was able to take photographs quite freely. I also visited the local market and the Central Mosque of Almaty.

I had carefully selected a restaurant for the evening: The top rated **Georgian restaurant Daredzhani**. It was so good, that I went back also on the second night to eat once again. After some business meetings (main occasion for the visit), I then flew back via Istanbul to Stockholm having spent some 6 days between the two countries in total.

Kyrgyz Republic	
Кыргыз Республикасы (Kyrgyz)	
Kyrgyz Republic	
Кыргызская Республика (Russian)	
Kyrgyzskaya Respublika	
	
Flag	Emblem
Area	
• Total	199,951 km ² (77,202 sq mi) (87th)
• Water (%)	3.6
Population	
• 2016 estimate	6,019,480 ⁽⁷⁾ (110th)
• 2009 census	5,362,800
• Density	27.4/km ² (71.0/sq mi) (176th)
GDP (PPP)	
• Total	2016 estimate \$21 billion ⁽⁴⁾
• Per capita	\$3,467 ⁽⁴⁾

