

## Walks and Wildflowers in the Mountain Valleys of Northern Kyrgyzstan

<https://www.kudutravel.com/tours/kyrgyzstan-walking-tour>

**29 June – 12 July 2020**

The Kyrgyz Republic is land-locked, but its 6 million people have a vast area of meadows and mountains in which to roam – and roam they do throughout this enthralling area of Central Asia, as their nomadic lifestyle takes them from lush valleys to high peaks in search of pasture for their animals and food for themselves. Horses are their chosen means of transport, carrying their worldly goods and their yurts and providing an essential part of the Kyrgyz economy and their traditional sporting activities.

Part of the exotic Silk Road of international trade for the last 2,000 years, Kyrgyzstan unfolds to greet the adventurous traveller with 80% of the country dominated by the Mountains of Heaven or Tian Shan. Lush valleys, full of flowers, and rivers carving pathways through the land give our walkers time to experience this unique terrain as snow-capped peaks, rising to over 7,000 metres, reveal themselves on our gentle climbs.

Our nomadic itinerary includes the world's second largest mountain lake, Issy-Kul, petroglyphs, ancient forts and a historic caravanserai, plus the Soviet era architecture of Kyrgyzstan's capital, Bishkek. As we explore this little-known country, dubbed as the Switzerland of Central Asia, we are accompanied by a Kyrgyz English-speaking guide throughout and by specialist bird and flower experts for four days.

Our accommodation is in small hotels and a guesthouse, in rooms with private en-suite facilities, while the food reflects all the variety and the welcoming nature of the country's diverse ethnicity.

### Itinerary

#### DAY 1

##### **B, L, D included**

After arriving in the morning at Manas airport in Bishkek, we transfer to the city centre for breakfast. Later we continue (1.5 hrs) to the mountains south of the city where our accommodation for 3 nights is in well-appointed replica yurts, overlooking a remote valley. Driving time: 2 hrs

#### DAY 2

##### **B, L, D included**

Our walk (8 km/4 hrs round trip, 200 m ascent/descent) in the Alamedin river valley is a perfect introduction to Kyrgyzstan's rich flora. We are accompanied by a botanical guide for 2 days as we learn to identify native species such as *Eremurus tianschanicus*, *Codonopsis clematidea*, *Aconitum leucostomum*, *Rosa kokanica* and *Papaver croceum*.

Driving time: 3 hrs

#### DAY 3

##### **B, L, D included**

We spend the day in the nearby Ala Archa National Park, named after the native Juniper tree. The views become increasingly more spectacular as we ascend above the river (4 km/3 hrs round trip, ascent/descent 250 m). Our botanical guide helps us to distinguish different species of *allium*, *astragalus*, *lonicera*, *pedicularis* and *ligularia*. In the afternoon, we visit

the moving and architecturally inspiring Ata-Beyit memorial, commemorating victims of Stalin-era repression.

Driving time: 2 hrs

#### **DAY 4**

##### **B, L, D included**

Our first stop today is the Burana Tower in the Chuy valley. This edifice is the restored remains of a minaret in Balasagun, an important city between 9<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> century, founded by the Soghdians, an ancient Iranian people, and invaded in 1218 by Genghis Khan, who renamed the city Gobalik or 'pretty city'. After lunch in Tokmok, we continue to the Chon Kemin valley and our charming guesthouse for 2 nights. We have time to stretch our legs on a walk through the village and the surrounding countryside before dinner (4 km/1 hr).

Driving time: 4.5 hrs

#### **DAY 5**

##### **B, L, D included**

We set off on foot from the guesthouse for a circular walk in the Kungoy Ala-Too Range (12 km/5 hrs, ascent/descent 450 m). We picnic en route and cross the river several times. The rest of the afternoon is free to relax, enjoy the indoor swimming pool or ride Kyrgyz horses with a Kyrgyz guide.

Driving time: none

#### **DAY 6**

##### **B, L, D included**

We head for Issyk Kul, the large high-altitude lake, passing through the historically notorious Boom Gorge. We visit the open-air Petroglyph museum in Cholpon Ata, an extensive field of glacial boulders with carvings mostly attributed to the Saka Usuns (Scythians) and dated from 8<sup>th</sup> century BC to 1<sup>st</sup> century AD. We continue along the north shore of the lake before turning south towards Karakol. On the outskirts of this city, located between the lake and the Terskey Ala Too Mountains, we visit a museum dedicated to the explorer, naturalist and spy Nikolai Przhevalsky. We stay for 3 nights in a small 3-star hotel.

Driving time: 5 hrs

#### **DAY 7**

##### **B, L, D included**

Weather-permitting, we access a high altitude area (3000 m) using a chair lift to spend the day walking, birdwatching and botanising as we descend gradually. In the afternoon, we visit the Dungan Mosque, still used by this historic Chinese race of immigrants, and the wooden Russian Orthodox Cathedral, both restored and returned to their original purpose in post-Soviet time.

Driving time: 1.5 hrs

#### **DAY 8**

##### **B, L, D included**

Our circular walk (13 km/6 hrs, 600 m ascent/descent) today is in the picturesque less-visited Jyrgalan valley, 1.5 hrs' drive from Karakol. We are accompanied by a local ornithological guide as we look for birds such as red-fronted serin, blue-capped redstart or Turkestan shrike.

Driving time: 3 hrs

## **DAY 9**

### **B, L, D included**

As we drive along the southern shore of Issyk Kul towards Naryn in central Kyrgyzstan, we stop at Jety Oguz to admire the red sandstone formation known as the Seven Bulls and hear the legend of its creation. We break our journey again in Bokonbaevo for lunch and a visit to a felt workshop where we learn how traditional *shyrdak* rugs are made. In Naryn, established as a fortress on the caravan route during the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, we settle into our 3-star hotel with spacious rooms (3 nights) and a traditional restaurant popular with locals. Driving time: 6 hrs

## **DAY 10**

### **B, L, D included**

Today we walk (4 hrs) in the less well known Salkyn Tor National Park, a short drive east of Naryn. Once again, we follow a scenic river valley enjoying mountain views all around. There is some free time in the afternoon for individual exploration of Naryn and souvenir shopping for the area's renowned textiles.

Driving time: 1 hr

## **DAY 11**

### **B, L, D included**

We start early and drive to a remote area near the Chinese border in the At Bashy Mountains to walk (9 km/5 hrs, 500 m ascent/descent) and to visit the enigmatic and atmospheric Tash Rabat caravanserai. In the wide valley below, we explore the ruins of a small citadel dating from the 10<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> century with associations to the legendary Kyrgyz hero, Manas.

Driving time: 4 hrs

## **DAY 12**

### **B, L, D included**

Today we are heading for Bishkek. Kochkor, a large village with tree lined streets, situated at a busy crossroads, halfway along our route, makes a convenient lunch stop. We arrive in the capital in the afternoon and settle into our elegant 4-star hotel, centrally located in a quiet side street.

Driving time: 6 hrs

## **DAY 13**

### **B, L, D included**

Early morning is the best time to wonder through Bishkek's largest market, the Osh Bazaar. We start our walking city tour at the Presidential Palace, known as the White House. We continue through a series of public parks and gardens with many memorials, including the equestrian statue of Manas at Ala Too Square, previously the Lenin Square until 1991, though Lenin's statue still has pride of place. We finish at the monumental Victory Square with the Martyrs of the Revolution Monument as its centrepiece. The rest of the afternoon is free to pursue individual interests.

## **DAY 14**

### **B included**

A morning transfer to the airport concludes our holiday.

### **Off the Beaten Track**

Please be aware that electricity and water supplies may occasionally be erratic and travel arrangements can be disrupted. Kudu Travel will endeavour to do everything possible to ensure a smooth-running tour, but please be ready with your sense of humour and tolerance when travelling in a developing country.

## Activity Level

### Moderately Demanding

9 walking days, 1 to 6 hours daily. Waterproof hiking boots which offer good ankle support are essential, as the terrain is generally rough underfoot and can be muddy.

## Temperatures

In July, temperatures are likely to range from 15°C to 32°C in Bishkek, 13°C to 27°C in Karakol and 18°C to 30°C in Naryn. July is one of the driest months in Kyrgyzstan.

## Accommodation

- 3 nights in a country holiday resort, 37 km from Bishkek. We stay in well-appointed replica yurts overlooking a remote valley. Alt. 2150 m
- 2 nights in a charming guesthouse in a village in the Chon Kemin valley. Facilities include a heated indoor swimming pool. Alt. 1530 m
- 3 nights in a small 3-star hotel in Karakol. Alt. 1800 m
- 3 nights in a small 3-star hotel in Naryn. Alt. 2000 m
- 2 nights in an elegant 4-star hotel in Bishkek, centrally located in a quiet side street. Alt. 750 m

**Trip Price**, per person sharing:

**£3,320.75** until 28<sup>th</sup> September 2019

**£3,410.50** until 28<sup>th</sup> December 2019

**£3,500.25** until 28<sup>th</sup> March 2020

**£3,590** after 28<sup>th</sup> March 2020

<https://www.kudutravel.com/faq#discounts>

**£500** deposit per person

**£360** single room supplement

*Please note that the single room supplement is imposed by the hotels and not by Kudu Travel. If you are willing to share but no other suitable guest books on the trip, we regret that the supplement will be payable. We endeavour to obtain double rooms for single occupancy whenever possible.*

## Price Includes

- Accommodation for Days 1 through 14, on a twin shared basis
- Meals, with beer and soft drinks at lunches and wine at dinners, when available, as listed in the daily notation
- Land transportation in private air-conditioned minibuses, except during free periods
- Entrance and sightseeing fees, except during free periods
- Services of Kudu tour leader, local guide and driver throughout
- 2 days with a botanical guide and 2 days with an ornithological guide
- Tips for driver, local guides, porters, restaurant and hotel staff (appreciation for your Kudu tour leader is at your discretion)

## Price does not Include

- Flights to and from Bishkek airport
- Trip cancellation, medical or other insurance
- Immunisations, prescriptions or other medical requirements
- Passport, visa and health documentation
- Personal expenses (laundry, alcohol besides beer or wine at group lunches/dinners, free time activities, etc.)

- Transport and transfer of excess baggage
- Kyrgyz departure tax, if any

### **VALUE FOR MONEY - SO MUCH IS INCLUDED**

On Kudu trips, you will only need money for postcards, presents to take home, the odd G & T or an irresistible ice cream. Festival and opera tickets, museum and gallery entrances, National Park fees, all meals (with a very few exceptions specified in individual itineraries), wine with lunch and dinner, access to specialist books carried by the guides, gratuities for porters and hotel and restaurant staff, boat rides, train trips, internal flights, wine tastings, 4WDs with drivers, the services of skilled local guides and trackers etc. are ALL INCLUDED in the cost of your holiday.

We are confident that, like previous very satisfied guests, you will discover that our tours give you excellent value for money.

### **Visa and Health Requirements**

Visitors from the UK, EU, Canada, Australia and New Zealand do not require a visa for entry to Kyrgyzstan (for visits up to 30 days).

At present, there are no specific and compulsory health requirements for entry to Kyrgyzstan but you may wish to **consult your doctor (at least 6 weeks before you travel)** about updating your immunisation against Hepatitis A, polio, tetanus and typhoid, or anything else they consider advisable. A dental check-up is also a good idea. You may also wish to check the advice given to travellers by the Department of Health (<https://www.nhs.uk/using-the-nhs/healthcare-abroad/healthcare-when-travelling-abroad/>) and the FCO (<https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice>).

### **Insurance**

It is essential, and a condition of booking, that you protect yourself with a suitable travel insurance policy as soon as you book a trip. We can arrange comprehensive cover for UK residents. For further details, please see the brochure, or ask our office.

### **Size of Party**

This trip will run with a minimum of 4 and a maximum of 14 guests.