

Kazakhstan

A country of steppes, peaks and singing sand dunes

Almaty – Islamic Tourism

Kazakhstan, a Central Asian Republic, is situated at the cross roads of cultures and civilizations. It has a rich legacy and plenty of ancient sites. It is also part of the Great Silk Road and shares borders with Russia, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, China and the Caspian Sea.



كلاسي.
Kulasi.

More than a hundred nationalities are found in the country. The main ethnic groups are the Kazakhs and Russians, the two major religions Islam and Christianity. There are three time zones and four climatic zones: forest-steppe, steppe, semi-desert and desert regions. The mountain ranges of Altai and the Tjan-Shan create a peculiar border on the east and southeast, melting the temperature and dampness.

The country is very rich in natural resources with a well developed industrial and agrarian sector. The main exports are petroleum, wheat and meat. As well being a major export earner, meat is a popular delicacy. The national dish is beshbarmak consisting of mutton, horse beef, beef and dough. A medicinal drink kumyss (milk of mare) has curative qualities and is used in the treatment of lung and intestinal-gastric illnesses. Tourists usually arrive from May - July and August till the middle of October. The first stop is generally the capital Astana, in the centre of the country, 1318 km from the former capital, Almaty. In 1830 Cossack forces built military fortifications in the area. In 1862 it became Akmolinsk city at the cross between China, Russia and Central Asia, which soon developed into an important trading area

Almaty is one of the largest cities in Kazakhstan with a population about 1.200.000, The former capital, which started life in 1854 as a fortress, is a business, financial and cultural center, proud of its restaurants, hotels and museums. The Central State Museum provides visitors with an insight into Kazak history: there are several exhibition halls with archaeological displays.

Panfilov Park is worth a visit as is the wooden Russian Orthodox Cathedral, constructed without nails at the beginning of last century.

The Almaty region is the main tourist area stretching from Almaty till Balkhash Lake. It is known as Semirechye or land of seven rivers (Zhetysay in Kazakh) through which the Silk Road passes.

The region is one of the largest and geographically varied in the country. Zhetysay has been famous for its unique natural attractions since ancient times. Numerous rivers spring from the tops of inimitable mountains: thousands of streams like pearl necklaces flow into a beautiful oasis. The largest river is Ili, which starts its journey in the west of China, forms the Kapchagai water-depository, and then flows into Balkhash Lake in the north. It was once the transport connection of the Great Silk Road.

The Almaty region is a region of deserts, eternal snows and rich and varied fauna and flora. One of its main attractions is Medeo, the largest winter sports mountain complex in the world with a skating-rink 1,700 m above sea level. And it's not just for those training for the olympics – amateurs can hire skates. An amusement park caters to all tastes and there are plenty of horse and pony rides, an elegant hotel, summer swimming pool and a lots of cafes and restaurants. It's also a great place to meet the locals as Almaty's residents enjoy the facilities as much as visitors.

Another attraction is the dam in Malaya Almatinka valley which saved the city from mud flows on more than one occasion. Today tourists often climb the 830 steps leading to the

embankment and a wonderful panoramic view of Zailiyskiy Alatau mountains. Some stay the night – others are content with a quick snack.

To the east of Almaty lies Essik at the foot of mountains. The town is small with cozy buildings and numerous gardens. Essik Lake is 14 km from the town center; it's one of the wonderful pearls of Tien Shan, a favorite place of rest.

The country is famous for petroglyphs - rock paintings. Tamgaly gorge - the most well known - is situated in Anrakay mountain region. Most of the petroglyphs are in a canyon, in the mouth of the gorge.

Another attraction close to Almaty is the Kapchagay reservoir, one of the largest in Kazakhstan 100 km by 25 km. It's a favoured summer holiday venue for swimming and sun bathing. The north bank is the place for rest houses and picnic areas. The 1439km Ili river is the place for adventure tourism, especially rafting and fishing.

The singing dune is another unique natural Kazak wonder, situated 182 km southeast from Almaty on the right bank of Ili river. The friction, caused by the movement of dry grains of sand, electrolyzes them and creates a vibration which makes the dunes tremble. The sound can be heard thousands of kilometres away.

Kazakhstan is a natural wonderland, a land of lakes, mountains, forests, nature reservoirs and national parks - a fascinating holiday destination which can easily be combined with a trip to other Central Asian republics, landmarks on the Silk Road with a unique and fascinating heritage. ■