
Travel Guide Almaty

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Quick view

Almaty – a brief overview

A captivating blend of elaborate baroque churches and clunky Soviet-era public buildings, all flanked by the snow-capped Zailiysky Alatau Mountain, Almaty is a long way from the Borat stereotype. Enriched by Kazakhstan's mining boom, it's certainly not cheap but has plenty to recommend it, whether its quirky museums, interesting history or lovely surrounding countryside.

Impressively good restaurants and bars are springing up all over the city as its wealthy inhabitants demand more excitement, although the city's cultural character remains unchanged.



Kazakhstan

General Information

Country overview

Unexplored by many, Kazakhstan is an intriguing and little-known land of vast plains, mountainous horizons and beautiful culture.

Geography

Five times the size of France and half the size of the USA, Kazakhstan is the second largest state in the Commonwealth of Independent States, and is bordered by the Russian Federation to the north and west, the Caspian Sea, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan to the southwest, Kyrgyzstan to the south and China to the southeast.

90% of the country is made up of steppe, the sand massives of the Kara Kum and the vast desert of Kizilkum, while in the southeast of the country the mountains of the Tian Shan and the Altai form a great natural frontier with tens of thousands of lakes and rivers. The Aral Sea and Lake Balkhash are the country's largest expanses of water.

General knowledge

Key facts

Population: 17736896

Population Density (per sq km): 7

Capital: Nursultan.

Language

The official language is Kazakh, a Turkic language closely related to Uzbek, Kyrgyz, Turkmen and Turkish. The government has begun to replace the Russian Cyrillic alphabet with the Turkish version of the Roman alphabet. Meanwhile, the Cyrillic alphabet is in general use and most people in the cities can speak Russian, whereas country people tend to only speak Kazakh. English is usually spoken by those involved in tourism. Uygur and other regional languages and dialects are also spoken.

Currency

Kazakh Tenge (KZT; symbol ₸). Notes are in denominations of ₸ 10,000, 5,000, 2,000, 1,000, 500 and 200. Coins are in denominations of ₸ 100, 50, 20, 10, 5, 2

and 1.

Electricity

220 volts AC, 50Hz. Round two-pin continental plugs are standard.

Public holidays

Listed below are the public holidays for the period January 2020 to December 2021.

Note

Muslim festivals are timed according to local sightings of various phases of the moon and the dates given below are approximations. During the lunar month of Ramadan that precedes Eid al-Fitr, Muslims fast during the day and feast at night and normal business patterns may be interrupted. Some disruption may continue into Eid al-Fitr itself. Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha may last up to several days, depending on the region.

2020

New Year's Day: 1 January 2020
Kazakhstan Nations Day: 1 January 2020
Orthodox Christmas Day: 7 January 2020
International Women's Day: 9 March 2020
Nauryz Meyrami (Persian New Year): 23 March 2020
People's Unity Day: 1 May 2020
Defender of the Fatherland Day: 7 May 2020
Victory Day: 11 May 2020
Capital City Day: 6 July 2020
Kurban Ait (Feast of Sacrifice): 31 July 2020
Constitution Day: 31 August 2020
First President of the Republic of Kazakhstan Day: 1 December 2020
Independence Day (Republic Day): 16 and 17 December 2020

2021

New Year's Day: 1 January 2021
Kazakhstan Nations Day: 1 January 2021
Orthodox Christmas Day: 7 January 2021
International Women's Day: 8 March 2021
Nauryz Meyrami (Persian New Year): 21 – 23 March 2021
People's Unity Day: 1 May 2021
Defender of the Fatherland Day: 7 May 2021
Victory Day: 9 May 2021
Capital City Day: 6 July 2021
Kurban Ait (Feast of Sacrifice): 20 July 2021
Constitution Day: 31 August 2021
First President of the Republic of Kazakhstan Day: 1 December 2021
Independence Day (Republic Day): 16 and 17 December 2021

All information subject to change.



Travel etiquette How to fit in

Social Conventions

Kazakhs are very hospitable. When greeting a guest, the host gives him/her both hands as if showing that he/she is unarmed. When addressing a guest or elder, a Kazakh may address him/her with a shortened form of the guest's or elder's name

and the suffix 'ke'. For example, Abkhan may be called Abeke, Nursultan can be called Nureke. This should be regarded as indicating a high level of respect for the visitor.

At a Kazakh home, the most honoured guest, usually the oldest, is traditionally offered a boiled sheep's head on a beautiful dish as a further sign of respect.

National customs forbid young people whose parents are still alive from cutting the sheep's head. They must pass the dish to the other guests for cutting. Inside mosques, women observe their own ritual in a separate room, and must cover their heads and their arms. Formal dress is often required when visiting the theatre, or attending a dinner party. Shorts should not be worn except on the sports ground.



Health Health

Food & Drink

All water should be regarded as being a potential health risk. Water used for drinking, brushing teeth or making ice should have first been boiled or otherwise sterilised. Milk is pasteurised and dairy products are safe for consumption. Only eat well-cooked meat and fish. Vegetables should be cooked and fruit peeled.

Other Risks

Hepatitis B, C and E and tuberculosis occur. Increased cases of meningitis and encephalitis have been reported in Almaty. Tick-borne encephalitis is a problem in mountains and forests, particularly during April, May and June. There is some presence of rabies. For those at high risk, vaccination before arrival should be considered. If you are bitten, seek medical advice without delay.

Contractual physician of Lufthansa

Dr. Han, E. Olga
Djambula Street
H 63 „Evelina-med“
Almaty 050013
Republic of Kazakhstan
Tel. +7-727-272-1818

Please note that Lufthansa accepts no responsibility for the treatment nor will it bear the cost of any treatment.



Phone calls & Internet Phone calls & Internet

Telephone/Mobile Telephone

Dialing code: +7

Telephone

International calls can be made at a reduced rate from 2000-0800 local time. All major cities are equipped with card operated phones. Cards can be purchased at kiosks, and can be used to make international calls. The best card to make international calls with is an *i-card+*.

Mobile Telephone

Roaming agreements exist with most international mobile phone companies. Coverage is good around the main cities.

Internet

There are Internet cafes in most towns and cities. Internet access is also available in major hotels, but services are usually more expensive than in cafes.



Top 10 sights Top 10 sights in Almaty

Presidential Palace

Although you can't go in, Almaty's imposing Presidential Palace is worth visiting for the austere Soviet architecture alone. Originally intended to house a museum dedicated to Lenin, it is now home to President Nursultan Nazarbayev instead.

4 Republic Square
Almaty
Kazakhstan

Central State Museum

A comprehensive look at Kazakhstan's past, starting with Bronze Age relics and continuing right up to the decision to make Astana the capital in place of Almaty.

Furmanov Street
Almaty
Kazakhstan

Opening times:
Wed-Mon 0930-1730

www.csmrk.kz

Kazakh State Circus

Housed in a purpose-built whitewashed concrete circus tent, Almaty's Kazakh State Circus opens for performances each night, with clowns, acrobats and jugglers all on the bill.

Abay Ave 50
Almaty
Kazakhstan

Opening times:
Various

Kok-Tobe

A 1,110m hill overlooking the city, Kok-Tobe is capped with a 372m TV tower and a cluster of attractions, among them life-sized bronze statues of The Beatles.

Kok-Tobe
Almaty
Kazakhstan

kok-tobe.kz

Kazakh Museum of Folk Musical Instruments

It might not sound like the most riveting way to spend an afternoon, but this quirky museum is considerably more interesting than it first appears. As well as listening to an in-house band, visitors can try their hand at making music of their own.

Zenkov St
Opening times:

Almaty
Kazakhstan

Tue-Sun 0900-1700

Almaty Zoo

The 21-hectare zoo is worth a visit to get a look at some of Kazakhstan's native fauna including wolves and beavers.

Ormanov St
Almaty
Kazakhstan

Opening times:
Daily 0900-2100 (summer)
Daily 0900-1900 (winter)

www.almatyzoo.kz

Monument of Independence

A towering white pillar that dominates the huge Respublika Alany square, Almaty's Monument of Independence is topped with a gold-plated man standing atop a snow leopard.

Satpaev St
Almaty
Kazakhstan

Nikolsky Sobor

Built in 1909, the dramatically beautiful Nikolsky Sobor or St Nicholas Cathedral boasts turquoise walls and golden onion domes that conceal an even more opulent interior.

cnr of Qabanbay Batyr & Baytursynuly
Almaty
Kazakhstan

Kazakhstan Museum of Arts

Almaty's main art gallery is home to a huge collection of art spanning every century from the 12th onwards. The Soviet-era works are particularly fascinating.

Satpaev St
Almaty
Kazakhstan

Opening times:
Tue-Sun 1000-1800

www.gmirk.kz

Tel: +7 727 394 5718

Geology Museum

Complete with helpful English-language interactive displays, Almaty's Geology Museum documents the country's impressive mineral wealth, which includes huge deposits of copper, bauxite and oil.

Dostyk Ave 85
Almaty
Kazakhstan

Opening times:
Mon-Fri 1000-1700



Shopping in Almaty

Shopping in Almaty

Key Areas

Most of the shopping action in Almaty happens in and around Zhybek-Zholy or 'Arbat' as it's locally known. Here you can find shops and boutiques selling everything from international branded fashion to local crafts and food. Also worth checking out is Barakholka, a huge open-air market that specialises in fake designer goods, as well as the odd handicraft and some truly excellent handmade clothes. You can also easily find felt dolls, lavishly embroidered rugs and sheepskin slippers.

Markets

Barakholka is the largest market, although the monthly Ablai Khan is also a good bet for handicrafts. Zelyoni Bazaar (Green Market) is the main spot for fresh produce.

Shopping Centres

Tsum, a Soviet era department store on Abylai Khan Avenue, is the main mall and good for souvenirs. Silk Way City Mall on Tole Bi Street is home to scores of fashion boutiques.



Restaurants

Restaurants in Almaty

From chunky noodles served with mutton (or horse if you're unlucky) to tasty grilled kebabs, Kazakh fare is simple but designed to fill you up. Most of Almaty's restaurants focus on local fare, although pizza, Chinese and Russian food is easy to find.

La Grenouille

Almaty's smartest restaurant serves classic French dishes including the frogs' legs after which it is named.

Shevshenko 18
Almaty
Kazakhstan
Price: Expensive

Khodja Nasreddin

Tasty Uzbek fare served up in a picturesque central courtyard in large portions.

Luganskiy Street 54
Almaty
Kazakhstan
Price: Expensive

Restaurant Yurta

Perched atop Kok-Tobe, Yurta does excellent Kazakh food with a stunning view.

Kok-Tobe
Almaty
Kazakhstan
Price: Moderate

Mend-AI

Although Kazakhstan is land-locked, fish is shipped from Turkey once a fortnight and much of it ends up here.

Mendikulova Street 30 Price: Moderate
Almaty
Kazakhstan

Taj Mahal

Delicious freshly made Indian fare served up in a traditional setting.

Masanchi St 59 Price: Cheap
Almaty
Kazakhstan



Nightlife Nightlife in Almaty

Most of Almaty's bars are found within hotels, with little beyond late-night coffee shops available elsewhere. Those in the market for luxury lounges are spoilt for choice and there are plenty of English-style pubs. Nowhere, however, is cheap.

Guinness Pub

Even Almaty has an Irish bar and this is a good one, with live bands on Fridays and Guinness on draught.

Dostyk Ave
Almaty
Kazakhstan

Queen's Pub

Nice for a quiet drink, Queen's Pub is a cheerful British bar.

Shevchenko St 100
Almaty
Kazakhstan

Jantik Club

Heaven for Beatles fans, Almaty's top live music venue regularly gives tribute acts a platform.

Seyfullin Ave
Almaty
Kazakhstan

Chukotka

Crowded on weekends, Chukotka boasts two floors, live DJs and a huge drinks menu.

Gogol St 40
Almaty
Kazakhstan



Calendar of events Calendar of events

Jazzystan International Jazz Day

Almaty welcomes renowned international jazz musicians to this special event celebrating UNESCO's International Jazz Day, which aims to draw attention to the role of jazz in bringing together people of different cultures and nationalities.

March - April 2020

Venue: Luxor Wellness Club

National Unity Day

Everyone's off work on this public holiday, and Kazakhstanis of all ethnicities are encouraged to join together for a day of festivities. In Almaty, this usually includes a parade in Abay Square, and there are plenty of other events highlighting different cultures too, including concerts and dance shows.

May 1, 2020

Venue: Throughout Almaty and Kazakhstan

Almaty Apple Festival

Forests of wild apples flourish in the countryside surrounding Almaty, and apples are thought to have originated from this region. Multiple varieties are on display at the annual apple festival, and visitors can take a bite out of the juicy fruit, buy a selection to take away, and enjoy fun activities.

September 2020

Venue: First President's Park



Hotels Hotels in Almaty

Thanks to Kazakhstan's bountiful mineral wealth, much of what's on offer is either ridiculously expensive or very basic indeed. Nevertheless, with the majority of large chains present, finding somewhere decent to stay is relatively simple.

The Ritz-Carlton

Set within the glass and steel Estentai Tower, the Ritz-Carlton is vast and very comfortable.

Esentai Tower
Al-Farabi Ave 77/7
Almaty
Kazakhstan

Category: Expensive

InterContinental Almaty

Huge and comfortably appointed with the usual high standards you'd expect from an InterContinental.

Zheltoksan St 181
Almaty
Kazakhstan

Category: Expensive

Dostyk Hotel

A beautiful red-painted pile decked out in traditional Russian style.

Kurmangazy Str.36
Almaty
Kazakhstan

Category: Moderate

Grand Ai Ser Hotel

Modern and comfortable, the Ai Ser also boasts a terrific indoor pool, as well as its own hookah bar and billiard room.

Pozharskogo Street 1
Almaty
Kazakhstan

Category: Moderate

City Hotel Tien Shan

Renovated in 2011, this place has simple, but comfortable rooms plus a restaurant, gym and sauna.

Kunaev St 34
Almaty
Kazakhstan

Category: Cheap