

Ak-Suu and Karavshin Valleys



Hello team!

It's time for another adventure in one of our favorite regions in the world.

Trekking through the Ak-Suu and Karavshin Valleys is one of the most unforgettable experiences in Epic's history. This remote corner of Kyrgyzstan offers raw, dramatic landscapes and true solitude —like stepping into Yosemite before modern development.

It's a place that leaves even veteran adventurers in awe.

After years of leading tours here, our excitement hasn't dimmed. We're thrilled to return once more and share this hidden gem with a new group of hikers seeking something extraordinary.

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Getting Ready

A few months prior to the trip, we will be sending you a number of Google Forms and documents to return in order to collect the necessary information from you.

Please do your best to fill in and return these in a timely manner.

Visa Arrangements - General Information

All guests coming on this Kyrgyzstan trip **MUST** confirm their country's visa agreement with Kyrgyzstan well in advance of the start of the tour.

- Visa fees are NOT included in the tour price, and it is your responsibility to obtain the correct visa from Kyrgyz Immigration in a timely manner, if needed.
- MOST nationalities, including the USA, UK, Europe, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, etc, are able to visit Kyrgyzstan without a visa or can obtain a visa upon arrival (VOA). Be sure to check the official immigration website to see if your nationality qualifies.
- NOT EVERY COUNTRY can receive a visa upon arrival. As such, it is a good idea to double-check.

If you do not qualify for a visa upon arrival, then you will need to visit the nearest Kyrgyz embassy to apply for one in person. [Follow this link](#) to find the one nearest you.

DOCUMENTS TO SUBMIT TO EPIC: **PASSPORT**

This is for our records and/or in case of an emergency.

Arriving in Southern Kyrgyzstan

Although Bishkek, the nation's capital, hosts the largest airport, our trip will not begin there. **Guests will need to arrive in Osh**, the largest city in southern Kyrgyzstan, in order to start this trip. There are a few ways of going about this:

Flying to Osh

Osh's airport is very small, and international arrivals are sparse. Some smaller international carriers connect Osh directly with Istanbul (Pegasus Airlines) and various airports on the Arabian Peninsula, but flights may be inconsistent or unreliable. Despite the lack thereof, arriving directly in Osh internationally is still highly recommended, as it is the most convenient.

If clients choose to fly from Osh to Bishkek of their own accord, there are numerous daily flights between Bishkek and Osh. Flight time is roughly 1 hour.

Tez Jet is the most well-known carrier, but there are a handful of other domestic airlines that also make the flight. Please choose a reputable airline, as domestic Kyrgyz carriers are dubious and often use outdated aircraft.

Driving to Osh

The long way to Osh, but a great adventure, should one choose to undertake it. Travel overland, crossing the mountains via Toktogul before descending into the Ferghana Valley. There are many interesting stops along the way, such as Sary Chelek, Arslanbob, Uzgen, and many more.

If opting for this route, we recommend setting aside a few days to do it and hiring some sort of private transport. It's a 12-14 hour straight shot from Bishkek to Osh, should you choose, but the journey makes for a great lead-up to the trip.

NOTE that we do not recommend relying on local public transport or *marshrutkas* for this journey: they're very inconsistent on this particular route, and you will likely have to make multiple transfers.

Additional Considerations

ARRIVING EARLY

- Delays do happen when you are traveling long distances via various connecting flights. Because of this fact, we advise that you arrive in Osh one day before the trip starts. That way, you can be sure to both arrive in the country on time and get a good night's rest before we start the tour.
- Included accommodation does not start until the evening of day 1. If you arrive in Kyrgyzstan in the days before the tour starts, you will need to pay for your own accommodation. We can help make hotel suggestions for you if you'd like.

AIRLINES

- Check the visa conditions of any country you plan to transit through; you may be required to have a transit visa. India and China are good examples of this.
- Please begin looking at flights now; this will allow you to get an overview of prices, routes, and possible connections. Keep an eye out for promo fares, particularly with low-cost carriers.
- Some may choose to fly into Almaty as it is a larger city and its international airport is serviced by many more international carriers.

CONNECTIONS

- If you are traveling from Europe, you will most likely connect via Istanbul.
- Pegasus Airlines is a low-cost carrier that offers many direct flights to Bishkek and Osh from Istanbul. Note that Pegasus Airlines flights depart from Sabiha Gokcen Airport (SAW), which is a 1-hour drive from Istanbul city center and 2 hours from Istanbul International.
- If you're flying from Australia or Southeast Asia, you will most likely need to connect in Almaty, Kazakhstan. Dubai is another possibility, albeit more expensive.
- We recommend checking Skyscanner, Secret Flying, and Kiwi for flights. Skiplagged may also be useful.

Accommodation in Kyrgyzstan

Prior to the trek, we will be staying at a locally owned, quaint guesthouse (twin or triple rooms).

Trip prices are based on twin-sharing rooms. Room sharing for solo travelers is always done with a member of the same sex, unless you are traveling with a friend or as a couple.

While in Osh, we try to stay at guesthouses within walking distance to shops, pharmacies, ATM machines, grocery stores, restaurants, cafes, and bars, when possible. Rooms will be en suite.

Breakfast every morning when we are staying in town will be at the guesthouse or hotel.

Food in Kyrgyzstan

- Food in Kyrgyzstan can vary greatly depending on where you are. Restaurants in Osh are not as eclectic as those in Bishkek, but there are some worthy spots that we know of.
- In the more remote parts of the country, cooking is more traditional. Classic Kyrgyz cuisine is very filling -- there will be a lot of bread, dairy, soups, and red meat. Spicing is simple. Vegetables are generally hearty and include potatoes, dark greens, and roots.
- Kyrgyz people love to offer sweets and jams at the end of every meal. Kumis (fermented mare's milk) may also be offered. It is a very strange drink, and we encourage going outside comfort zones to try it. Hosts will not be offended if you say no.
- Food whilst camping will be of the best possible quality, but please have realistic expectations of what we can deliver in the backcountry. Our main meals while trekking will be quality freeze-dried meats & veggies with healthy cereals prepared by your guide.

Daily Meals

- This adventure tour requires a lot of energy output each day, and a big part of our job is keeping everybody well-nourished, happy, and energized. Below is a list of what you can expect whilst on the trek:
- **Breakfast** typically consists of oatmeal with locally-sourced sun-dried fruits, such as prunes, cheese, savour biscuits, or naan bread. One example of a non-typical breakfast is millet with pumpkin and raisins! We also put out an assortment of cheeses, flatbreads, and cured meat.
- For lunch on the trek, we normally have soup, for example, borscht, peas or lentils, served with crisps, fried chickpeas and cheese. We enjoy refreshing drinks made with freeze-dried berries such as cranberries, blackcurrants, or lingonberries. Lunch is usually prepared once we leave camp.
- Examples of **dinner** mains are chicken tikka masala, Georgian-style baked eggplants with paprika, or lentil stew with vegetables. There are also herbal teas with local treats such as tahini halva, gingerbread, or nuts with honey.

Please let us know early on if you have any diet restrictions/preferences. If you are vegan, you might want to consider bringing some of your own food, as it can be very difficult to cater to individuals in a big group, though we always do our best.

PERSONAL SNACKS

If you have done some hiking or group travel before, then you know how important snacks are! While Epic does provide some snacks and hearty meals, it is always a great idea to bring some of your favorite trekking/travel snacks from your home country.

It is possible to find snacks in Bishkek or Osh that are similar to those one might find at home. We suggest bringing your favorite assortment of snacks and chow down during trail breaks. Gummies, nuts, jerky, energy gels, Cliff bars, granola bars, dark chocolate, superfood powder, bliss balls, etc.

Expedition Safety

You may have guessed, but this adventure tour carries a certain amount of risk since we are traveling and trekking DEEP into the mountains in a developing country. This is not your average holiday, per se. This is an active expedition.

Guest Safety is Epic's #1 priority, and our experienced ground team does everything within their power to set our group up for a safe adventure. The name of the game is security, safety first, and injury prevention.

In case of emergency, your Epic trip leader is equipped with a satellite communication device, which can contact outside emergency first responders from any place in Central Asia.

Travel Insurance for Kyrgyzstan

Travel insurance is mandatory for all participants. You will need to prove you have insurance by providing a photocopy of your policy.

If you want the best protection in case of a need for helicopter rescue, the important policy to take out is a **Global Rescue Membership**. If you don't want to go with Global Rescue for medical travel insurance, that's fine, as that is a separate policy. The membership is only for heli insurance, as it is not medical insurance.

There are lots of insurance companies on the market - we recommend that you use **Rise and Shield** or **Safety Wing** - they specialize in covering travel to unusual destinations and cover Kyrgyzstan (but do not cover all nationalities).

Make sure the insurance company chosen provides coverage for activities like trekking up to 4,500 meters and offers helicopter rescue coverage.

Medical Consideration

General Information on health considerations while traveling in Kyrgyzstan:

<https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/traveler/none/KYRGYZSTAN>

Money In Kyrgyzstan

The official currency of Kyrgyzstan is the Kyrgyz Som.

ATMs are common in the larger urban areas, like Bishkek and Osh, but less common in between. We also recommend that you bring a bit of foreign currency, like USD, Euro, or GBP. Credit cards are hit or miss.

As to how much money you should bring, here are some costs for you to take into account...

- Souvenirs vary in price from a couple of dollars up to much more expensive, depending on what you are buying and how good you are at haggling.
- Soft drinks and water are about \$1-2.
- A meal will set you back between \$3 - \$12.

MONEY RECOMMENDATION

If you take out the equivalent of 300 USD in Kyrgyz soms, you should have more than enough to get souvenirs, buy meals, buy drinks, etc.

Please see the note on tipping in the next section of this document. When we return to Osh at the end of the tour, you will have a chance to get out more cash should you need (for shopping, tipping staff, last minute purchases, etc).

Tipping Staff

Epic staff, including our ground team in Kyrgyzstan, go above and beyond for guests before, during, and after the trip to make sure that everyone has the best possible trekking experience imaginable. So, how do you show your guides some love? Well, besides bringing coffee, tipping is the next best option.

Note: Below we have included the industry standard recommendation to offer our staff some additional compensation based on your overall experience and keeping in mind the length of the trip. Show your staff some love!

Tipping recommendations (in USD): Lead Guide: \$ 100 - 125+ per guest.

Tipping recommendations for porters/mule handlers (in USD): \$50 per guest

SIM cards & Internet Access in Kyrgyzstan

Foreigners can easily obtain SIM cards in Kyrgyzstan.

Coverage in Kyrgyzstan varies. Cell phone reception will regularly drop when we are outside the major cities. Considering that we will be trekking for 80% of the itinerary in an extremely remote region, participants should expect to have no cell reception for over a week.

- There are several major networks in Kyrgyzstan: Beeline, MegaCom, and O!
- You will need your passport in order to get a SIM.
- Keep in mind that this trip is a chance for our guests to unplug and fully embrace a proper digital detox.
- The internet situation in Kyrgyzstan is spotty at best, so please have realistic expectations regarding wifi and internet speeds/access.

You can also use an e-sim, we recommend using **Saily**.

Meeting the People & Being Culturally Sensitive

Compared to its more conservative neighbors, Kyrgyzstan is a remarkably tolerant place. Locals freely express their opinions on topics as varied as religion to foreign relations, usually casually over a cup of tea or a glass of vodka.

Kyrgyz people are extremely welcoming and hospitable, which is customary of the nomadic lifestyle. Guests are treated with reverence, warmth, and lots of food. Respect is given to us, and respect is expected in return. It is our responsibility as travelers to make sure that we pay our own respects and leave a positive impact.

Here are some things to consider when interacting with local people:

- The official religion of Kyrgyzstan is Islam. The southern half of Kyrgyzstan is more conservative than the north.
- That being said, the Kyrgyz version of Islam is still quite “relaxed” compared to the rest of the Muslim world, or neighboring countries like Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. Religious extremism has never really taken root in Kyrgyzstan, although spiritualism - i.e. Sufism - is more common historically.
- By many standards, Kyrgyzstan is one of the most westernized countries in Central Asia. Dress codes are loose, and genders frequently mingle, although this is less common in the south compared to Bishkek. Avoid wearing anything too revealing while in town, as this will attract unwanted attention. We will not visit any mosques, so special dress for these will not be required.
- Gestures of affection, especially among same-sex couples, will not be received well by locals. This is an unfortunate cultural reality that we will need to respect.

- A good, strong handshake and eye contact between men is the surest way to show respect. Handshakes are usually done with the right hand. Some Kyrgyz men use the left hand as well and fully clasp yours. The position of the left hand on the arm indicates the level of respect being shown - the closer their left hand is to yours, the more comfortable they are with you. Some may also bring their right hand to their heart afterward as an added gesture.
- In general, Kyrgyz people do not shy away from drinking, and shots of vodka are sometimes offered to guests. If you abstain, it is acceptable to say no. If you accept, it is customary to drink when there's a toast and to finish the entire drink in one go.

Feel free to read our [blog post on respecting local cultures](#) for more information on the subject.

Climate in Southern Kyrgyzstan

The weather in Kyrgyzstan can be EXTREMELY variable. While it may be bright and sunny down low in the cities, it could be snowing in the mountains. Lower elevations are generally hotter and drier; snow is possible at any time of the year in the mountains, even summer. A storm can happen at any time.

The two zones we will primarily be visiting are the **Osh Region** and the **Batken Region**, the latter of which is where the trek takes place. Both straddle the agricultural powerhouse that is the Ferghana Valley and are bordered by high mountains on multiple sides: the Pamirs to the southeast, the Tian Shan to the northwest, and the Alay to the southwest. (Think of the Sierra Nevada and the Central Valley of California, or the Mediterranean Basin with the Alps.)

This kind of geography often results in peak temperatures early in the day, building humidity throughout the afternoon, and thunderstorms in the evening. That being said, it could also be very pleasant during the day and even through the night.

- The Turkestan Range, where we will be trekking, benefits from a generally sunny and mostly dry climate in summer. Most of the time, we will be trekking in our long-sleeve base layers, caps, and light trousers.
- There should just be one or two short rain showers during the entire trip, which means it is possible to get away with a membrane jacket and softshell trousers - it still can be windy on high passes.
- The climate is continental, so day and night temperatures vary greatly. Having a warm jacket for the evenings will still be necessary.
- Since we will be sleeping below 3000 meters for most of the trek, it is unlikely that we will see snow while camping, but it is still possible when crossing the high passes.

What to Pack

This “What to Pack” chapter is one of the most important sections of this entire information pack. Please read it carefully to ensure you have the right gear for the trip

You must bring the right gear for the trip. In case of an emergency, there are no outdoor shops in Osh. Buying equipment at the last second will be inconvenient and costly, most likely requiring a long detour to Bishkek. Prices for outdoor gear in Kyrgyzstan are no less than those in Europe or the USA.

Ideally, our daypacks usually weigh around 7-10 kilos, as donkeys and porters carry everything not necessary during the day — that is our food rations, cooking utensils, fuel, tents, and some personal items.

The clients’ personal allowance for pack animals is a generous 15 kg.

Though pack animals will be used for the trek, they cannot carry everything - weight limits are imposed to preserve the livelihood of the animals, who deserve our love and care, and we want to respect those limits. We hire a certain number for the trek to carry group gear, but if, for some reason, the porter team is not able to accommodate all of the guests' items, the guest in question will need to reassess and/or be responsible for hiring an additional porter.



PACKS & BAGGAGE

- ☐ Expedition Duffel Bag
or 1-2 stuff sacks for donkeys
- ☐ Day Trekking Backpack w/ rain cover

ESSENTIAL PERSONAL GEAR

- ☐ 32F/0C Sleeping Bag
- ☐ inflatable Sleeping Pad
- ☐ Inflatable Camp Pillow *

SPECIALTY EQUIPMENT

- ☐ a pair of Trekking Poles
- ☐ Headlamp
- ☐ 1L Nalgene bottle *
- ☐ Grayl Filter Bottle
- ☐ Mug
- ☐ Bowl
- ☐ Spoon

BOOTS & FOOTWEAR

- ☐ Waterproof Trekking Boots
- ☐ Camp Shoes *
- ☐ Closed Toe Sandals

OTHER PERSONAL GEAR

- ☐ Sunglasses
- ☐ Personal First Aid Kit
- ☐ Power Bank
- ☐ Chargers/Phone Cable
- ☐ Personal snacks
- ☐ Universal power adapter *
- ☐ Bum pad/camp seat *
- ☐ Ziplock plastic bag *
(for passport, phone, ..)
- ☐ Earplugs

TOILETRIES

- ☐ Toothbrush, Toothpaste
- ☐ Sun Cream (50 spf+)
- ☐ Spf Lip Balm
- ☐ Biodegradable Soap
- ☐ Deodorant
- ☐ Travel Towel

CLOTHING LAYER SYSTEMS

- ☐ Clothes for the city
- ☐ 1 Rain Shell Pants *
- ☐ 2 Trekking Pants
- ☐ 1 Fleece
- ☐ 2-3 Trekking T-Shirts
- ☐ 1 Base Layer Top
- ☐ 1 Base Layer Bottoms
- ☐ 1 Mid weight Down Jacket
- ☐ 1 Hard Shell/Rain Jacket
- ☐ 1 Gloves Light Weight
- ☐ 1 Hat for sun protection
- ☐ 1 Beanie
- ☐ 1 Buff and Bandana
- ☐ 3- 4 Merinos Trekking Socks
- ☐ 5 Underwear / Bras
- ☐ Hiking Shorts

* Optional

KYRGYZSTAN | AK SUU & KARAVSHIN VALLEY

Spending Extra Time in Kyrgyzstan

Have extra time? You can choose to stay in Kyrgyzstan either before or after the tour begins. Team members often ask us where they should visit in Kyrgyzstan if they have extra time. There are many options; here are a few suggestions of places we like, should you have extra time in the country:

- **Alay Valley** - Just a short drive away from Osh is the Alay, where the Tian Shan meet the Pamirs. Mostly uninhabited, this wide-open valley features some of the most accessible 7000+ meter peaks in Central Asia. Lenin Peak is a non-technical climb that can be tackled in only a few weeks. The valley also marks the end of the legendary Pamir Highway.
- **Bishkek** - Kyrgyzstan's capital city is surprisingly cosmopolitan and more dynamic than many would expect from the world's most landlocked nation. Microbreweries, European-style cafes, and international restaurants are all on feature in this town. Worth noting is the Korean BBQ chicken scene, and one of the most authentic Japanese restaurants we've ever been to, which offers sushi, incredibly. Given the high elevation, outdoor opportunities, and eclectic culture, we feel like this is a little version of Denver in the middle of Asia.
- **Issyk Kul** - Central Asia's favorite holiday destination, Issyk Kul is one of the world's largest alpine lakes and features a huge array of activities. The north side is mostly resorts for vacationing Russians and Kazakhs, while the south side remains largely undeveloped outside of Karakol. There's plenty of hiking in the Ala-Too Range, including the famous Ala-Kul Lake, awesome red-rock canyons, and verdant gorges to discover. Nothing wrong with just relaxing on the shores of the lake either - many are surprised to find out that Issyk Kul is saline!
- **Almaty** - Just north of Bishkek, Almaty is generally considered the "New York City" of Central Asia, being the largest and most prosperous. It is only 4-6 hours away from Bishkek by private transfer, which makes it an easy add-on. For those with the time, there are several interesting locations nearby Almaty as well, like Kaindy Lake or Altyn Emel National Park. Some people choose to fly into Almaty instead of Bishkek as well - there are more international flights going to Almaty and they are sometimes cheaper as well.

Land Borders

Guests can enter/leave Kyrgyzstan overland relatively easily to/from Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan.

Kazakhstan is the easiest border to cross to and from Northern Kyrgyzstan. Kazakh visas are relatively easy to obtain and often free or on arrival for most Western nationalities.

Uzbekistan is the nearest neighboring nation when in the south. There are multiple border crossings spread throughout the Ferghana Valley. Once you have entered Uzbekistan and made it to a larger city, such as Andijan, you can catch one of the many trains to the capital, Tashkent.

Note that China, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan all require special visas to enter. For most nationalities, you will need to organize these visas beforehand. You'll need to check with each respective immigration page for current visa procedures for these countries. Be sure to check the number of entries each visa allows - if you have a single-entry visa for any of these countries and leave said country, you will not be able to re-enter on the same visa.

[Uzbekistan immigration](#)

[Tajikistan immigration](#)

[China immigration](#)

Reading Recommendations for Kyrgyzstan

If you want to do some reading about the country before you visit, here is a list of our favorites:

- **The Great Game:** A historical novel written in the style of an espionage thriller. Explores the proxy wars and shadowy acts of the Russian Empire and the British Empire as they expand into Central Asia in the 19th century. Extremely informative and very well told. A great book for anyone looking for more context on one of the world's most unknown regions.
- **Life at the Edge of the Empire:** Oral Histories of Soviet Kyrgyzstan: The 35 oral histories in this English-language anthology touch on events including: Urkun; World War I; sedentarization; collectivization; World War II; the post-war reconstruction period; Stalin's death; the Khrushchev and Brezhnev eras; independence; and privatization.
- **Jamila:** The Second World War is at its peak, and Jamila's husband is off fighting at the front. Accompanied by Daniyar, a sullen newcomer who was wounded on the battlefield, Jamilia spends her days hauling sacks of grain from the threshing floor to the train station in their village in the Caucasus. Spurning men's advances and wincing at the dispassionate letters she receives from her husband, Jamilia falls helplessly in love with the mysterious Daniyar in this heartbreakingly epic tale.
- **Manas:** Lost and Found: Rural Kyrgyz, far from the Judeo-Christian world, has many striking biblical traditions. A comparative analysis of Kyrgyzstan's national epic Manas and Hebrew scripture reinforces the bond.
- **The Day Lasts More Than a Hundred Years:** Set in the vast, windswept Central Asian steppes and the infinite reaches of galactic space, this powerful novel offers a vivid view of the culture and values of the Soviet Union's Central Asian peoples.
- **Inside Central Asia:** A Political and Cultural History of Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkey, and Iran: In this comprehensive new treatment, renowned political writer and historian Dilip Hiro places the politics, peoples, and cultural background of this critical region firmly into the context of current international focus.
- **The Silk Roads:** Far more than a history book of the Silk Roads, this is truly a revelatory new history of the world, promising to destabilize notions of where we come from and where we are headed next.
- **Restless Valley: Revolution, Murder, and Intrigue in the Heart of Central Asia:** An illuminating novel that brings attention to post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan's growing pains. Conflicts with neighboring Uzbekistan, insurgents and drug traffickers from Afghanistan, and plenty of internal strife. A great look at modern Kyrgyzstan and what it has been through.

Early client departure protocol

In the event that a trip participant needs to leave the planned trip itinerary early due to illness, injury, family emergency, personal reasons, or simply because they want to, etc, then there are a few things to note:

Should a trip participant choose to leave the planned itinerary early for any reason, from the moment they leave the tour, all expenses from that point onwards are the responsibility of the trip participant. This includes, but is not limited to, hotels/accommodation, transportation, emergency helicopter evacuation, internal flights (even if we have purchased you a flight for the trip you are attending), meals, airport transfer, guide services - everything that is normally covered by Epic Expeditions during your tour is no longer covered once a trip participant decides to leave.

Once the decision has been made to leave the tour, the trip participant must sign an "Early Departure Waiver Form" - formally releasing Epic Expeditions of any further obligations to fulfill our tour/guide/transport/logistics services.

That said, in an emergency situation or in case of severe illness, Epic Expeditions staff will do everything within our means to aid the trip participant until they are in a safe/stable condition. When possible, Epic staff can also help you book new accommodation, flights, transport, etc when possible - but all of these expenses are for the trip participant to pay.

Point being, our staff will always be available to the best of our ability to facilitate the logistics of your departure, should you choose to leave the trip early.

Liability waiver

All tour participants will be required to sign an industry-standard waiver releasing Epic Expeditions from liability related to certain aspects of this trip. Waivers are usually issued on day 1 of the tour at our first team briefing. If you would like to request a copy of the waiver in advance, please email us.

Paying the balance

Final balance payments will be due approximately 3-4 months before the tour begins. If you have a balance owing, we will advise you of how and when to pay this.

Please remember that deposits are non-refundable.

If you would like to pay the balance sooner, please email us!

