Highland Hikes & Horse Trails (12 Days, 11 Nights)

Kazakhstan & Kyrgyzstan Itinerary

Page 2: Brief itinerary
Pages 3 - 8: Expanded and Detailed Itinerary

Start point: Almaty, Kazakhstan
End point: Almaty, Kazakhstan

Kazakhstan & Kyrgyzstan (12 days, 11 nights)						
Day	**Starting Place**	**Day Plan**	**Afternoon Plan**	**Evening Plan**	**End place**	**Accommodation**
1	Almaty Kazakhstan	**8am – Tour starts** **Travel to Altyn Emel National Park (3 hours)**	**Arrival at the Altyn Emel National Park "Singing Dunes" Section** **ALTYN EMEL NATIONAL PARK** Hike the Singing Dunes section, a large sand dune about 150 meters high and 3 km long, is known for the loud, organ-like sound it produces under certain weather conditions, mainly when the sand is dry	**ALTYN EMEL NATIONAL PARK** Explore the Illi River section of Altyn Emel National Park, This river flows along part of the park and supports a rich ecosystem that includes various species of birds and other wildlife. **OVERNIGHT IN A YURT AT ALTYN EMEL NATIONAL PARK**	Altyn Emel Natl. Park Kazakhstan	Yurt Stay
2	Altyn Emel Natl. Park Kazakhstan	**ALTYN EMEL NATIONAL PARK** Explore the Katutau and Aktau section of the Altyn Emel National Park In Kazakhstan's Altyn Emel National Park, the Katutau and Aktau mountains feature otherworldly terrain and vibrant sediment layers. These ranges are a must-visit for their unique geological formations and stunning photo opportunities.	**Travel to Charyn Canyon (3 hours)** **Arrive in Charyn Canyon** Hike into Charyn Canyon, a Canyon that is often compared to the Grand Canyon. (4 kilometre-hike, 1.5 hours)	**OVERNIGHT CAMPING AT CHARYN CANYON** Campfire building, outdoor dinner and camping in Charyn Canyon	Charyn Canyon Kazakhstan	Camping (No shower)
3	Charyn Canyon Kazakhstan	**OVERNIGHT CAMPING AT CHARYN CANYON** Outdoor breakfast and hike out of Charyn Canyon. (4-kilometre hike, 1.5 hours) **Travel to Kolsai & Kaindy Lakes (2 hours)**	**Arrival at Saty village** **Travel across rugged terrain on a Soviet Uzaik 4-by-4 from Saty to Kolsai & Kaindy Lakes (30 mins)** Hikes at Kolsai & Kaindy Lakes (3-kilometre hike, 1 hour)	**Return to Saty village on a Soviet Uzaki 4-by-4 (30 mins)**	Saty village Kazakhstan	Guesthouse
4	Saty Village	**Travel from Saty to Kegen (3 hours)** **Cross the Kazakh-Kyrgyz border at Kegen, Kazakhstan in the Karakaa valley**	**Travel from Kegen/Tup border crossing in the Karakara Valley to Karakol, Kyrgyzstan (3 hours)** **Arrival in Karakol, Kyrgyzstan**	**KARAKOL TOUR** Visit to Dungan Mosque Visit to Trinity Cathedral, Eastern Orthodox Church made out of word Try Ashlaynfu, a Dungan dish	Karakol Kyrgyzstan	Guesthouse
5	Karakol Kyrgyzstan	**Travel from Karakol to Jolkolot . (2 hours)** **Arrival in Jolkolot** Instructional lesson on horse riding	**Horse riding from Jolkolot to Altyn Arashan (4-5 hours)** **Arrival in Altyn Arashan** Enjoy the waters at a nearby hotspring	**OVERNIGHT AT A YURT CAMP AT ALTYN ARASHAN**	Altyn Arashan Kyrgyzstan	Yurt Stay
6	Altyn Arashan Kyrgyzstan	Travel to Ala Kul Lake on horseback Near Ala Kul Lake, you'll leave the horse and hike up for 1 hour to reach the Lake. Ala Kul Lake is at 3300 metres high. Lunch at Ala Kul Lake Hike back down 1 hour to the horses.		**Return to Altyn Arashan** **OVERNIGHT AT A YURT CAMP AT ALTYN ARASHAN**	Altyn Arashan Kyrgyzstan	Yurt Stay
7	Altyn Arashan Kyrgyzstan	**Hike around Altyn Arashan (2 hours)**	**Horse riding from Altyn Arashan to Jolkolot (4-5 hours)** **Travel from Kolkolot to Karakol . (2 hours)**	**Arrival in Karakol**	Karakol Kyrgyzstan	Guesthouse
8	Jeti Oguz Kyrgyzstan	**Travel to Skazka Canyon. (3 hours)** **Arrival in Skazka "Fairytale" canyon.** Hike and explore at Skazka Canyon. (2 kilometres, 1.5 hours)	**Travel to Kaji-Say (3 hours)** **Arrival at Kaji-Say** Explore Kaji-Say, a semi-abandoned Soviet town that was once home to a huge mining complex.	**Travel to Tong village (1 hour)** **Arrival in Tong village**	Tong Kyrgyzstan	Guesthouse
9	Tong Kyrgyzstan	Hike along and swim in parts of the Southern Shores Lake Issyk Kul. **Travel to top of a hill near Bokonbaevo for view of Lake Issyk Kul (1 hour)** Hike at hill (2 hours) to marvel at the panoramic view of Lake Issyk Kul	**Drive to Ak Sai Canyon (1 hour)** **Arrival at Ak Sai Canyon** Explore and hike at the Ak Sai Canyon (2 kilometres, 2 hours) **Travel to Song Kul (2 hours)**	**Arrival in Song Kul** **OVERNIGHT AT A YURT CAMP AT SONG KUL**	Song Kul Kyrgyzstan	Yurt Stay
10	Song Kul Kyrgyzstan	**SONG KUL ALPINE LAKE AND NOMADIC EXPERIENCE** Explore Song Kul lake and hike at Song Kul Horse riding experience in Song Kul		**OVERNIGHT AT A YURT CAMP AT SONG KUL**	Song Kul Kyrgyzstan	Yurt Stay
11	Song Kul Kyrgyzstan	**Return to Bishkek (6 hours)** Stop at Kok Moinok Canyon, and hike there. Kok Moinok is known for its Martian-like terrain (1 hour, 2-3 kilometre hike)	Explore the Burana Tower, an 11th-century tower near Tok Mok	**Arrival in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan** **Travel from Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan to Almaty, Kazakhstan by flight (1 hour)** **Arrival in Almaty, Kazakhstan**	Almaty Kazakhstan	Guesthouse
12	Almaty Kazakhstan	**Depart Almaty in the early morning (2 hours)** Arrival at Big Almaty Lake	Enjoy the scenic views and light hike around the Big Almaty Lake, known for its high altitude Alpine lake (Option to either ride an electric scooter, or to take a rental vehicle. Either option will cost USD 20 -40 extra) **Return to Almaty (1 hour)** **4pm – tour ends**		Almaty Kazakhstan	

We will make every effort to keep itineraries as described and to find suitable replacements if needed. However, we reserve the right to make changes to the itinerary without prior notice in response to unforeseeable events and safety concerns. We also reserve the right to make changes to the itinerary should we deem that a certain activity is beyond the capability of any of our traveler

Kyrgyzstan	Kazakhstan

Highland Hikes & Horse Trails: Kyrgyzstan & Kazakhstan

(12 Days, 11 Nights)

Day 1 – Singing Dunes & Steppe Silence

Begin in Almaty, then venture into Altyn Emel's vast steppe, surreal Singing Dunes, and Ili River's thriving ecosystems.

- Depart Almaty by morning for a 3-hour drive into **Altyn Emel's desert-steppe** expanse.
- Climb the **Singing Dune**, a 150-metre-high sand ridge that "sings" like an organ when dry grains shift underfoot.
- Explore the **Ili River basin**, spotting migratory birds and wildlife thriving along the riverbanks.
- Learn about the park's geology, from **multicoloured sands to wind-sculpted ridges**, while taking in sweeping steppe views.
- Spend the **night in a traditional Kazakh yurt**, under a star-filled desert sky.

Accommodation: Traditional Kazakh Yurt

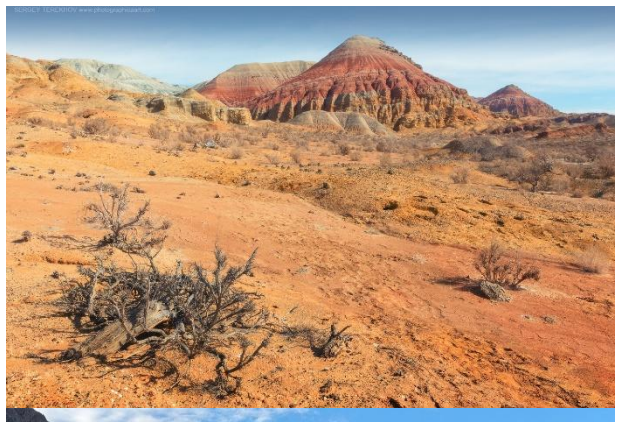
Day 2 – Painted Mountains & Red Rock Wonders

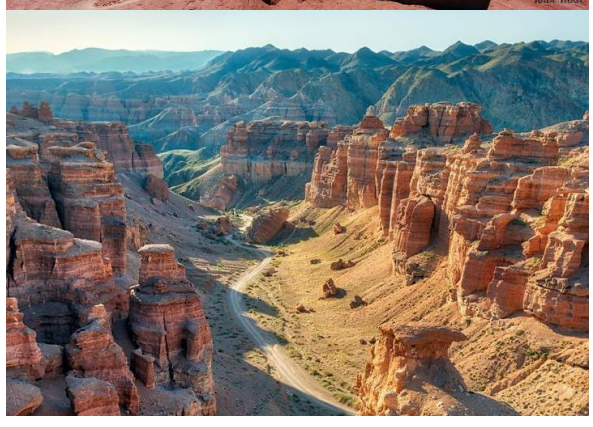
Discover Altyn Emel's dramatic mountain ranges and continue into one of Kazakhstan's most iconic natural landmarks: Charyn Canyon.

- Visit the **Katutau and Aktau Mountains**, surreal ranges of colourful sediment and volcanic rock that resemble an alien landscape.
- Travel across desert roads (3 hours) to reach **Charyn Canyo**n, often compared to the Grand Canyon for its deep gorges and striking red cliffs.
- **Hike 4 km through the Valley of Castles**, admiring towering sandstone pillars shaped by millennia of erosion.
- **Build a campfire, enjoy an outdoor dinner, and camp** beneath the starlit Kazakh sky, surrounded by canyon walls.

Accommodation: Outdoor camping by the Charyn river

Note: No shower facilities here





Day 3 – Canyon Trails & Alpine Lakes

Wake to sunrise in the canyon before journeying toward alpine beauty. From rugged cliffs to shimmering mountain lakes, today offers a contrast of landscapes.

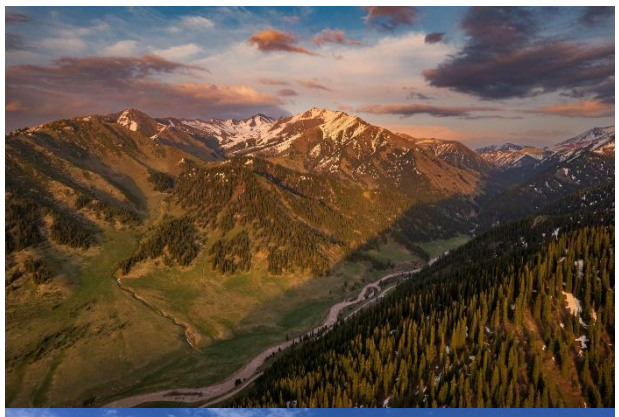
- Enjoy an outdoor breakfast at camp, followed by a 4 km hike out of Charyn Canyon.
- Travel 2 hours to **Saty village**, a rural settlement in the foothills.
- **Ride in a Soviet-era UAZ 4x4** over rugged tracks to reach the alpine gems of **Kolsai & Kaindy Lakes**.
- Hike 3 km around the lakes, where turquoise waters reflect forests of submerged trees and snow-capped peaks.
- Return to Saty village for dinner and rest in a cosy guesthouse.

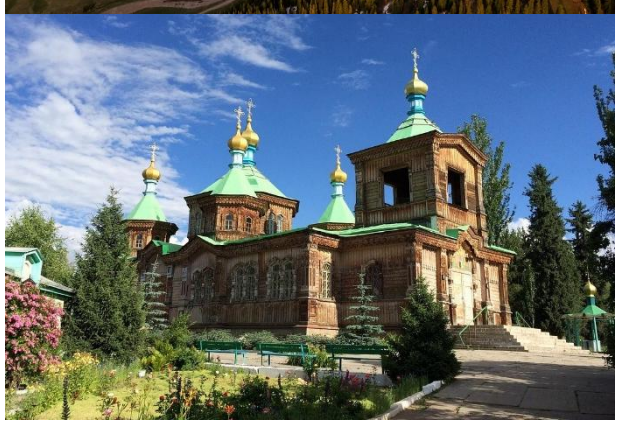
Accommodation: Guesthouse in Saty Village

Day 4 – Across Borders & Cultures

From Kazakhstan's borderlands, cross into Kyrgyzstan's Issyk-Kul region, where mosques, churches, and Dungan cuisine await.

- Drive 3 hours to Kegen, and **cross the Kazakh–Kyrgyz border at the Karakara Valley**.
- Travel onward (3 hours) to **Karakol**, gateway to the Tian Shan Mountains.
- Visit the **wooden Dungan Mosque** and the **Holy Trinity Cathedral**, each reflecting unique cultural and religious traditions.
- **Taste Ashlyanfu**, a spicy noodle dish rooted in the Dungan community's history.



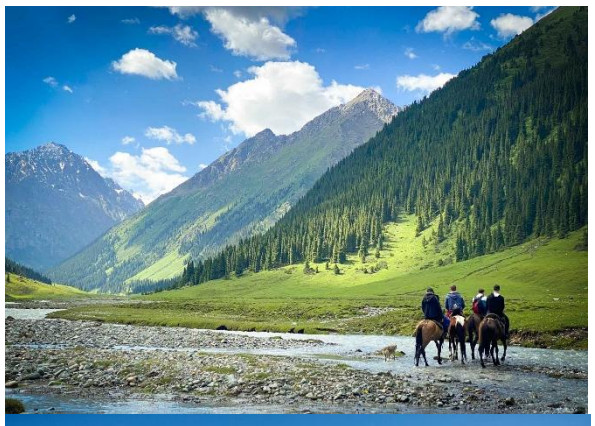


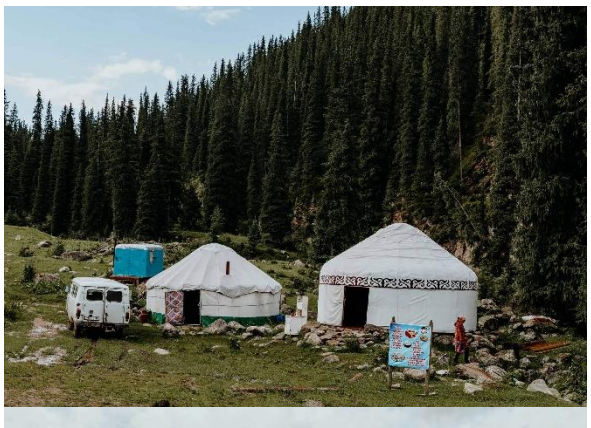
Accommodation: Guesthouse in Karakol

Days 5–7 – (3 days, 2 nights) Horse riding through Alpine Valleys & High-Altitude Lakes

From Karakol, venture deep into Kyrgyzstan's Tian Shan Mountains where horseback expeditions, hot springs, and alpine lakes create an unforgettable adventure. These three days immerse you in nomadic rhythms, combining cultural gateways with wilderness exploration.

- On Day 5**, ride through remote valleys on horseback** from Jolkolot to Altyn Arashan (4–5 hours), crossing rivers, alpine forests, and meadows.
- **Soak in hot springs** beneath snow-capped peaks, a nomadic tradition after long journeys.
- **Spend the night in a traditional Kyrgyz yurt** nestled in the lush valleys of the Altyn Arashan National Park.
- On Day 6, **trek toward Ala-Kul Lake (3,300m**), leaving horses behind for the final climb to turquoise waters cradled by glaciers.
- Picnic by the lake before descending to the valley, surrounded by sweeping Tian Shan vistas.
- **Spend another night in traditional yurts**, warmed by stoves and star-filled skies.
- **Hike shorter trails around Altyn Arashan to spot wildlife**, mountain flowers, and glacial rivers.
- On Day 7, **return to Karakol on horseback**, tracing back the route through rivers, alpine forests, meadows (4 – 5 hours).





Accommodations:
Night 5 & 6: Traditional Kyrgyz yurts
Night 7: Guesthouse in Karakol

Day 8 – Fairytales in Stone & Soviet Ghosts

Travel the southern shores of Issyk-Kul, where fantastical canyons and forgotten Soviet towns lie in wait.

- Drive 3 hours to **Skazka Canyon** ("**Fairytale Canyon**"), where multi-hued cliffs resemble dragons, castles, and mythical shapes.
- **Hike 2 km** (1.5 hours) through whimsical formations of rocks, sand and dust
- **Explore Kaji-Say, a half-abandoned Soviet mining and spa town** that once home to a large mining complex.
- Continue 1 hour to Tong village, where mountains meet the southern shore of Issyk-Kul.

Accommodation: Guesthouse in Tong

Day 9 – Shores, Canyons & Alpine Plateaus

A day of lake shores, hilltop panoramas, and canyon adventures, ending at one of Kyrgyzstan's most iconic alpine lakes.

- **Swim or stroll along the pristine southern shore of Issyk-Kul**.
- Hike 2 hours up a hill near Bokonbaevo for panoramic views of the lake.
- Journey 1 hour to **Ak-Sai Canyon**, and hike 2 km across sculpted red cliffs.
- Drive 2 hours into the **high plateaus of Song-Kul Lake**, at 3,000m.
- **Overnight in traditional Kyrgyz yurts**

Accommodation: Traditional Kyrgyz Yurt in Song Kul

Day 10 – Nomadic Rhythms at Song-Kul

Experience life on the jailoo (summer pastures), where nomads have roamed for centuries.

- Explore the wide expanse of **Song-Kul Lake, Kyrgyzstan's alpine jewel**.
- **Ride horses across open pastures** dotted with yurts.
- Learn about **nomadic customs, from dairy production to traditional games**.
- Watch the sun set over the vast lake, before gathering around a communal yurt stove.

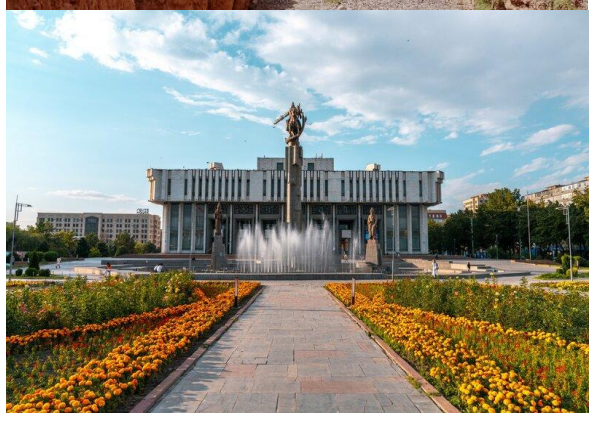
Accommodation: Traditional Kyrgyz Yurt in Song Kul

Day 11 – Canyons, Towers & Return to Almaty

Leave the alpine pastures of Song-Kul and descend back into Kyrgyzstan's valleys before crossing into Kazakhstan once more.

- Travel 6 hours from Song-Kul toward Bishkek.
- Stop at **Kok-Moynok Canyon** for a 2–3 km hike through Martian-like red rock landscapes.
- Visit the **Burana Tower**, an 11th-century Silk Road minaret and archaeological site near Tokmok.
- Arrive in Bishkek, then take a short flight (1 hour) across the border back to Almaty, Kazakhstan.
- Check in at a guesthouse in Almaty for the night.

Accommodation: Guesthouse in Almaty, Kazakhstan



Day 12 – Alpine Heights & Farewell

End your Central Asian adventure with a journey to one of Kazakhstan's most beautiful alpine lakes before returning to Almaty.

- Depart Almaty early morning for a 2-hour drive into the **Tien Shan Mountains**.
- Arrive at **Big Almaty Lake**, a striking turquoise reservoir set at 2,500m altitude.
- Option to either ride up to the summit with an electric scooter or a transport (USD 20 -40 extra)
- Enjoy a **scenic hike** around the lake's shores, surrounded by snow-capped ridges and pine forests.
- Return to Almaty (1 hour) by early afternoon.
- Trip concludes by 4 pm.