



## SPIRIT OF KYRGYZSTAN

Classic Tour | 12 Days | Physical Level 2

Bishkek – Cholpon-Ata – Karakol – Tamga – Chon-Kemin – Bishkek

With unspoiled, awe-inspiring scenery, fascinating culture and an air of the undiscovered, Kyrgyzstan is the ideal destination for adventurous spirits. Experience age-old traditions, meet warm and friendly locals, help prepare local dishes and glimpse the timeless lifestyle of Central Asia's nomadic people, all against a backdrop of towering mountains and vast, grassy plains.

- Explore capital Bishkek
- View the glorious Jeti-Oguz Valley
- Stay on the shore of Issyk Kul
- Walk through Skazka Canyon
- Discover fascinating bazaars
- Stay in a traditional yurt

## TOUR MAP

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## SPIRIT OF KYRGYZSTAN TOUR INCLUSIONS:

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- Return international economy flights, taxes and current fuel surcharges (unless a land only option is selected)
- All accommodation
- All meals
- All sightseeing and entrance fees
- All transportation and transfers
- English speaking National Escort
- Specialist advice from our experienced travel consultants
- Comprehensive travel guides
- Safe and secure with IATA

The only thing you may have to pay for are personal expenditure e.g. drinks, optional excursions or shows, insurance of any kind, customary tipping, early check in or late check out and other items not specified on the itinerary.

## CLASSIC TOURS:

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These tours are designed for those who wish to see the iconic sites and magnificent treasures of Central Asia on an excellent value group tour whilst travelling with like-minded people. The tours are on a fully inclusive basis so you'll travel with the assurance that all your arrangements are taken care of. You will be accompanied by our dedicated and professional National Escort whose unparalleled knowledge will turn your holiday into an unforgettable experience.

## PHYSICAL LEVEL 2:

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All of our tours feature a physical rating to help you select the right holiday for you. To travel on any of our tours requires unaided mobility and the ability to stroll around the sights.

‘Spirit of Kyrgyzstan’ is rated as a **physical level 2** tour. A moderate level of fitness is required. You will be on your feet for most of the day, with longer walks that include ascents and descents on steps or uneven paths. Travelling conditions may be more challenging in some areas.

Travelling in Central Asia is both rewarding and challenging because of the lack of basic infrastructure, such as roads or a transportation system. This tour covers a vast distance and reaching the sites involves travelling through areas of Kyrgyzstan which are barren, remote and without any modern facilities.

- There will be short periods of walking whilst sightseeing often on steep or uneven ground.
- There are periods of driving on rough unsealed roads or tracks. Expect long drives.
- Whilst all accommodation included has private en-suites, the yurt stay may be more basic than what you’re used to.
- Whilst parts of Kyrgyzstan sit at significant elevation, this tour stays between 700m and 2,200m, so the effects of Altitude Mountain Sickness should be minimal. Regardless, we recommend staying well hydrated and informing your National Escort if you feel unwell.

Of course, our National Escort will always endeavour to provide the highest level of service and assistance; however, they cannot be expected to cater for customers who are unfit to complete the itinerary. If you require any more information about the pace of the tours, please contact our reservations team who will be happy to answer your questions.

## JOINING YOUR TOUR:

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The tour is 12 days in duration including return international flights or 10 days in duration based on ‘Land Only’. Join the tour on Day 2 in Bishkek and end the tour on Day 11 in Bishkek.

Travellers booked on ‘Land Only’, the price includes your arrival/departure airport transfers if arriving/departing on the start and conclusion date of your tour, or when booking pre/post night accommodation with Wendy Wu Tours.

## DETAILED ITINERARY

### Days 1-2: Fly overnight to Bishkek

Meals: D

Fly overnight to Kyrgyzstan's capital, Bishkek.

On arrival, you will be met in the arrival hall by a local guide from Wendy Wu Tours. Together with all other group members who may be arriving at a similar time, you will transfer approximately 45 minutes to your hotel.

Early check-in is included for early arrivals. Additional nights' before and after your tour can be arranged. Please contact our Reservations team to book.



### Destination Information

**Bishkek** – The capital of Kyrgyzstan which did not develop until 1825, when the Kokand Khanate enclosed the site as a fortress. By 1864, the Russians had captured the fortress and in 1878, founded the city of Bishkek. Bishkek is a city of wide boulevards and marble-facade public buildings combined with numerous Soviet-style apartment blocks. Most streets are flanked on both sides by narrow irrigation channels that water the innumerable trees, which provide shade during the hot summers.

### Day 3: Bishkek & Ala Archa National Park

Meals: B, L, D

Begin the day at Ala-Archa National Park, a stunning alpine haven in the Tian Shan mountains, 40 minutes outside of Bishkek. Enjoy some light walking before returning to Bishkek for lunch.

In the afternoon, explore the city's highlights, including Central Square, the iconic Manas Monument, and a bustling local bazaar (closed on Mondays). Sightseeing today is leisurely, with approximately 3–4 hours on foot.



### Destination Information

**Ala Archa National Park** – Ala-Archa is an alpine national park in the Tian Shan Mountains. The name Ala Archa translates as 'Bright Juniper' from Kyrgyz as the whole gorge is covered with various trees including the main one – juniper.

**Central Square** – Also known as Ala-Too Square, Bishkek's central public square was laid out during the Soviet era and redesigned in 2003 following independence, when a statue of Lenin was replaced by a monument to Manas, the hero of the Kyrgyz national epic.

**Day 4: Bishkek – Cholpon-Ata**

Meals: B, L, D

Travel 5-6 hours by road to the shimmering northern shores of Issyk Kul, the world's second-largest mountain lake. Despite its high-altitude setting, its saline waters never freeze—earning it the evocative name 'Warm Lake'.

En route, pause for lunch and a visit to the fascinating Museum of Nomadic Civilization, offering insight into Kyrgyzstan's rich nomadic heritage.



On arrival in Cholpon-Ata, take to the water for a scenic one-hour motorboat cruise, soaking up the vast, tranquil beauty of the lake framed by distant mountain ranges. Later, check in to your hotel for an overnight stay.

**Destination Information**

**Cholpon-Ata** – A resort town on the northern shore of Issyk-Kul, Central Asia's largest lake, Cholpon-Ata is Kyrgyzstan's main summer destination. The town is known for its beaches, mild climate, and the open-air Petroglyphs Museum, which contains thousands of Bronze Age rock carvings scattered across a hillside site.

**Issyk Kul** – Issyk-Kul is the second largest mountain lake in the world, after Lake Titicaca in South America. Its name means "warm lake", as it does not freeze in winter due to its natural salinity. The lake stretches 200 km in length and 60 km in width, with a maximum depth of 730 m, surrounded by the dramatic peaks of the Terskey and Kungey Ala-Too ranges.

**The Museum of Nomadic Civilization** – Dedicated to the thousand-year history of the nomadic peoples of Kyrgyzstan, the museum holds a rich collection of artifacts, historical objects, and traditional clothing that illuminate the daily life, culture, and customs of those who once roamed the region's vast steppe and mountain landscapes.

**Day 5: Cholpon-Ata – Karakol**

Meals: B, L, D

After breakfast, travel 3-4 hours east along the scenic shores of Issyk Kul to Karakol, with the vast lake and mountain vistas as your constant backdrop.

En route, stop in the village of Tup to sample kurut, the region's distinctive dried Kyrgyz cheese. Continue to a nearby farm to learn about the breeding of prized thoroughbred horses and impressive Arashan rams, an important part of Kyrgyz pastoral culture.



Continue to Karakol and relax in a local hot spring, a perfect way to soak in the surrounding natural beauty, then join a Dungan family for a delicious dinner, offering a taste of their unique culinary traditions. Spend two nights in a hotel in Karakol.

### Destination Information

**Karakol** – Located in eastern Kyrgyzstan near the eastern tip of Lake Issyk-Kul and at the foot of the Terskey Ala-Too mountains. Known for its blend of Russian, Dungan, and Kyrgyz influences, Karakol offers unique architecture, including the historic Russian Orthodox cathedral and the Dungan Mosque.

**Kurut** – A traditional Central Asian dairy product: a hard, salty cheese ball made from dried, fermented milk. It has a long shelf life, making it a staple for nomadic peoples, and is often enjoyed as a snack or accompaniment to meals.

**Ak-Suu Hot Springs** – A natural thermal spa renowned for their warm, mineral-rich waters, believed to have therapeutic properties.

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### Day 6: Karakol

Meals: B, L, D

After breakfast, head to Karakol Gorge for an easy one-hour walk around the ski base, surrounded by alpine scenery, before returning to Karakol.

Return to discover Karakol's highlights today, including the Dungan Mosque, the wooden Russian Orthodox Holy Trinity Church, and a local bazaar.

Following lunch at a local restaurant, visit the inspiring One Village One Product centre, a social enterprise that supports local women and promotes the products they produce, such as jam, dried fruit and felt souvenirs.

This evening, visit a welcoming Uyghur family for dinner and a traditional lagman noodle-making demonstration.

Sightseeing today is leisurely, with approximately 3–4 hours on foot.



### Destination Information

**Dungan Mosque** – The Dungan Mosque in Karakol is a remarkable architectural landmark built in 1910 by the Dungan community, who fled to Kyrgyzstan from China. It is famous for being constructed entirely of wood without the use of a single metal nail, blending traditional Chinese design with Islamic purpose.

**Holy Trinity Church** – A striking wooden landmark in Karakol, originally built in 1895 on the site of an earlier brick church destroyed by an earthquake. Its intricate architecture reflects the Tsarist era, featuring traditional five-domed styling and elaborate fretwork.

**Lagman** – Lagman is a signature Central Asian dish consisting of thick, hand-pulled noodles served with a savory stir-fry of meat (usually beef or lamb) and seasonal vegetables. A culinary staple of the Uyghur and Dungan people, it is seasoned with a fragrant blend of garlic, cumin, and star anise.

**Day 7: Karakol – Tamga**

Meals: B, L, D

Rise early to experience the lively Karakol Animal Market before breakfast. Then, journey 2-3 hours along the scenic southern shores of Issyk Kul to the village of Tamga, with ever-changing lake and mountain vistas along the way.

En route, visit the dramatic Jeti-Oguz Gorge, renowned for its vivid red sandstone formations, including the romantic ‘Broken Heart’ and the towering ‘Seven Bulls’. Enjoy an easy one-hour walk through the gorge, taking in sweeping views of this striking landscape before stopping for lunch.



Continue to Tamga and check in to your yurt camp, featuring private en-suite facilities, where you’ll stay for the next two nights. This evening, help the camp chef prepare dinner – traditional manty dumplings, a beloved Central Asian dish.

*Please note – The animal market is a traditional working livestock market. Conditions are basic and can be crowded, noisy, and muddy, and animal welfare standards may differ from those expected at home. The visit is optional, and guests may choose to remain at the hotel.*

**Destination Information**

**Karakol Animal Market** – One of the largest and most authentic markets in the region, it offers a fascinating glimpse into traditional trading practices, where locals gather to buy and sell livestock.

**Jeti-Oguz Gorge** – Located near Karakol, it is famous for its striking red sandstone cliffs, including the iconic “Seven Bulls” formation. It is a popular destination for hiking, horseback riding, and photography.

**Manty** – Large steamed dumplings that are a staple of Kyrgyz cuisine, manty are traditionally filled with minced lamb and onion, though beef and pumpkin variations are also common. Typically accompanied by sour cream or a spiced vinegar dip.

**Day 8: Skazka Canyon & Barskoon Gorge**

Meals: B, L, D

Enjoy a full day of exploration beginning with a visit to Skazka Canyon, where you’ll take a 1–2 hour walk among its surreal red rock formations and sculpted landscapes.

Continue to Kadji-Sai village for lunch with a local family of musicians, accompanied by a lively folk performance showcasing traditional Kyrgyz culture.

In the afternoon, explore Barskoon Gorge and view the famous ‘Tears of the Snow Leopard’ waterfall from a scenic lookout, with around 1–2 hours on foot.



### Destination Information

**Skazka Canyon** – Also known as “Fairy Tale Canyon”, the vividly colored rock formations shaped by erosion resemble a fantastical landscape of towers, spires, and cliffs.

**Barskoon Gorge** – The gorge is approximately 25 km long and is famous for its natural landmarks, including the Barskoon Waterfall and cliffs formed by tectonic and erosional processes. It provides access to alpine meadows, trekking routes, and is home to diverse flora and fauna.

**Day 9: Tamga – Chon-Kemin**

Meals: B, L, D

After breakfast, travel to Chon-Kemin Nature Park, a scenic journey of approximately 4-5 hours through Kyrgyzstan’s changing landscapes.

En route, meet a traditional eagle hunter and observe the training techniques of these magnificent birds of prey, an ancient nomadic practice still preserved today. Continue to Kyzyl-Tuu village, renowned for its master craftsmen, where you will learn about the traditional art of yurt construction.



Arrive in Chon-Kemin for a one-night stay in a guesthouse. Learn how to make the hearty Kyrgyz dish of tash kordo. Enjoy a leisurely walk for around 2 hours in the surrounding nature park while you wait for dinner to cook.

### Destination Information

**Chon-Kemin Nature Park** – Covering approximately 26,000 hectares and features a mix of alpine meadows, forests, rivers, and mountains. It is home to diverse wildlife, including ibex, roe deer, bears, and numerous bird species.

**Kyzyl-Tuu Village** – A rural settlement in Kyrgyzstan providing a glimpse into traditional Kyrgyz life, including livestock herding, local crafts, and daily routines.

**Day 10: Chon-Kemin – Bishkek**

Meals: B, L, D

Begin the morning learning to make Boorsok, the golden, pillowy fried bread central to Kyrgyz hospitality, enjoyed fresh as part of a traditional breakfast.

Set off on the 3-4 hour journey back to Bishkek, with a stop at the iconic Burana Tower, an 11th-century minaret rising from the Chuy Valley. Climb to the top for sweeping panoramic views of the surrounding steppe (optional), then wander the open-air museum to discover the enigmatic ancient stone figures known as balbals, scattered across the landscape like silent sentinels.



Before continuing to Bishkek, witness a thrilling display of ulak tartysh, the national sport of the nomadic peoples of Central Asia, as skilled horsemen compete in a test of strength, horsemanship, and strategy that has been played across these plains for centuries.

*Please note: ulak tartysh is traditionally played with a goat carcass, however, for this demonstration a replica will be used.*

Enjoy lunch before arriving in Bishkek, where the afternoon is yours to explore at leisure. The journey concludes with a farewell dinner to celebrate your time in Kyrgyzstan.

**Destination Information**

**Burana Tower** – This minaret was built in the 11th century in the medieval city of Balasagun, capital of the mighty Karakhanid Empire. Visitors can climb up the minaret’s winding staircase to enjoy a wide view of the scenic Chuy Valley. There is also an open-air museum here featuring a collection of ancient balbals, carved stone figures often found around ancient burial mounds.

**Ulak Tartysh** – Kyrgyzstan's ancient national sport, ulak tartish (also known as Kok-boru) pits two teams of riders against each other in a fierce contest of horsemanship and strength. Recognised by UNESCO as an Intangible Cultural Heritage, it remains one of the most thrilling expressions of nomadic culture in Central Asia.

**Day 11-12: Depart Bishkek**

Meals: B

Any time before your flight is at leisure. You will be transferred from your hotel to the airport, according to the departure time of your international flight.

Late check-out is not included. Additional nights before and after your tour can be arranged. Please contact our Reservations team to book

## KYRGYZSTAN TRAVEL INFORMATION

### VISAS:

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Travel to Kyrgyzstan (for stays under 30 days) are visa free for New Zealand passport holders. Please be advised that your passport must have at least six months validity left on it when you arrive back in New Zealand.

All information with regards to visas will be updated regularly on our website as we find visas process' are changing on regular basis.

For the latest information on visa procedures, processing times and requirements, please kindly refer to our website <https://www.wendywutours.co.nz/help-and-advice/passports-and-visas/>

### INSURANCE:

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It is a condition of your booking that you are insured for the duration of your trip. We recommend comprehensive travel insurance to cover cancellation, medical requirements, luggage, repatriations and additional expenses. At a minimum, the policy is required to cover medical requirements including medical evacuations / repatriations. The choice of insurer is yours.

We strongly suggest you purchase insurance at the time you pay your deposit. This is because cancellation fees and charges are payable from that time. We may request you to provide evidence that you have taken out and paid for a policy to comply with this condition. If you fail to provide a certificate of currency of insurance within a reasonable time after our request, then this will be deemed a cancellation by you and standard cancellation fees will apply.

### EATING IN KYRGYZSTAN:

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All meals are included on our fully inclusive Classic tours, from dinner on the group's arrival day until breakfast on the day of departure. Our schedule of meals is designed so that you can experience the local dishes, their individual flavours as well as different ways they are prepared and cooked. Breakfast is buffet style served at the hotel with western options available (yurts and guesthouses are local dishes). Lunch and dinner are often served at a restaurant or with a local family.

Kyrgyz cuisine is influenced by Nomadic, Middle Eastern, and Turkic traditions, featuring ingredients such as yoghurt, dried fruit, legumes, and mild spices like cumin. Common dishes include lagman (handmade noodles), shashlyk (kebabs), naan (flatbread), manty (steamed dumplings), and plov (rice pilaf). Mutton and chicken are the main meats and feature in most meals. Local breakfasts often include naan with airan (a yoghurt-based drink) and green tea. You may also be served a fried egg, jam, honey, or toast. Black tea and coffee are usually available. Fresh milk for tea or coffee is not commonly served; dairy is more often consumed as airan.

Despite the predominantly Muslim culture, drinking alcohol is widely accepted in this ex-Soviet region. The most popular mealtime drink is chay (green tea), available at most meals, often served with a large sugar crystal added to the pot or glass.

We suggest bringing your favourite tea or coffee bags, biscuits, and any other snacks from home. There are also small supermarkets and shops in most towns along the route where you can pick up local brands of snacks and drinks.

**If you have any food allergies or dietary preferences, please let us know at the time of booking.** Your National Escort will do their best to accommodate your requirements; however, no guarantees can be made. Vegetarian options are available but often limited and repetitive in rural areas. There are always plenty of salads, vegetables, and bread on offer.

### ACCOMMODATION:

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Your accommodation throughout the tour has been carefully selected for its convenient location, comfort, and authentic character. Standards tend to be simpler than what you may be accustomed to. Properties are generally rated at a local three- to four-star standard; however, hotels, yurt camps and guesthouses do not follow an international rating system, so facilities and quality may vary from those in New Zealand.

**Hotels** – Hotels provide twin rooms with two single beds, therefore unfortunately we cannot guarantee a double bed, even if it is requested.

**Yurt** – A yurt, locally known as a “boz ui”, is the traditional home of nomads across Kyrgyzstan. Constructed from a wooden frame covered with felt and canvas and often raised on wooden platforms, these circular tents are designed to withstand the region’s harsh mountain climate. Inside, you’ll find warm fabrics, furs, and beautifully crafted wooden furniture that combine comfort and practicality. Yurts typically feature two or three single wooden beds with linens, a heating stove, thick blankets, a low table with chairs, and one electrical socket, offering a cozy and authentic nomadic experience.

This tour features a stay in a yurt including an en-suite bathroom.

**Guesthouse** – These provide basic yet comfortable rooms in a small guesthouse. Every couple/solo traveller will have their own room, with private en-suite bathroom.

### TIPPING POLICY:

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Tipping is customary in most parts of the world, and Central Asia is no exception. To save you the uncertainty of knowing who to tip, how much, and having the right cash to hand at the right time, Wendy Wu Tours operates a simple tipping policy. A stated amount is collected by your National Escort at the start of your tour and distributed to local guides and drivers throughout the journey. The amount is set at a fair and reasonable level for all, and includes a gratuity for the National Escort.

Whilst most of our travellers appreciate the convenience of this arrangement, we recognise it may not suit everyone. As this is a group tour, however, we kindly ask that all guests follow the same protocol to ensure fairness to fellow travellers and the smooth running of your tour.

#### GROUP SIZE:

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On Classic Tours in Central Asia, will be no more than 20 travellers in each group although you may encounter other Wendy Wu our groups while you are travelling.

All our departures are guaranteed to operate with a National Escort in each country with a minimum of 10 travellers booked. However, at our discretion we may operate departures with a smaller group size, as we endeavour to run all advertised departures wherever viable. For groups with fewer than 10 travellers, departures may operate with local guides only.

#### DEVELOPMENT AND WHAT TO EXPECT:

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Travelling in Central Asia offers both rewards and challenges. While the region is developing rapidly, it still differs from the west in terms of infrastructure and tourist facilities. Safety standards and signage may differ from what you are used to. For example, you may encounter road hazards such as uneven surfaces, unmarked holes, or minimal safety barriers.

Kyrgyzstan's infrastructure reflects its Soviet history and mountainous terrain. Roads can be in poor condition, and levels of English outside hotels are limited. Newly built hotels may have excellent facilities but staff with less experience in international tourism. Cyrillic is the standard alphabet, so your guides will be indispensable for navigating and communicating. Travellers with a sense of humour and flexibility are often those who find the experience most rewarding.

Factors such as weather, road conditions, and occasional closures may affect the schedule. Your National Escort will do everything possible to minimise disruption but cannot guarantee against delays, changes, or, in rare cases, cancellations of parts of the itinerary.

#### CLIMATE:

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Kyrgyzstan is best visited between April and October, when the landscapes are accessible, vibrant, and at their most rewarding. Spring (April–May) brings blooming valleys and crisp, fresh air with temperatures ranging from 10°C to 22°C, while summer (June–August) offers warm, sunny days ideal for trekking and yurt stays, with valley temperatures reaching up to 32°C. September is widely considered one of the finest months to visit, with mild days, cooler evenings, and low rainfall. By October, autumn colours paint the valleys gold before colder temperatures and early snowfall begin to close mountain roads. Throughout the season, mountain weather can change quickly, so layered clothing, a warm jacket, and a light waterproof are recommended regardless of when you travel.

## TRANSPORT:

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Road conditions across Kyrgyzstan can vary considerably. Many routes are rough, narrow, or unpaved, especially in mountainous regions. Travel times may be longer than expected, so journeys require flexibility and patience.

**Coaches:** An air-conditioned coach will be used throughout the tour to provide comfortable transfers and sightseeing travel, unless road conditions prevent it. In Kyrgyzstan particularly, where road conditions or upgrades require it, smaller vehicles may need to be arranged.

## VACCINATIONS AND YOUR HEALTH:

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Wendy Wu Tours does not give specific health advice, but we do recommend you see your doctor at least six weeks prior to travel for advice and to allow time for any necessary vaccinations. Please remember to take your itinerary with you. Safe travel has a comprehensive website that you may also find useful [www.safetravel.govt.nz](http://www.safetravel.govt.nz)

**Medication** – Bring a doctor's prescription if you travel with prescription medicines and declare them on your customs declaration form. Some medications may not be permitted.

**Water** – Tap water is not safe to drink in either Uzbekistan or Kyrgyzstan. Bottled water is widely available.

**Altitude** – Whilst parts of Kyrgyzstan sit at significant elevation, this tour stays between 700m and 2,200m, so the effects of Altitude Mountain Sickness should be minimal. Regardless, we recommend staying well hydrated and informing your National Escort if you feel unwell.

## CURRENCY:

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The local currency is the Kyrgyz Som (KGS). As with Uzbekistan, cash is king outside of major cities and card payment facilities are limited in rural areas, markets, and smaller restaurants. ATMs can be unreliable away from Bishkek and Karakol. US dollars and euros are the most widely accepted foreign currencies for exchange.

## ITINERARY CHANGES:

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It is our intention to adhere to the day-to-day itinerary as printed; however, the order of events or sightseeing may change as we look to improve our tours or as local conditions dictate; in these circumstances, we will make the best possible arrangements whilst maintaining the integrity of your trip.

**AFTER YOUR BOOKING:**

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Once you have booked with Wendy Wu Tours, you will receive an email with your confirmation invoice, along with a link to our website where you can find your visa information (if applicable) and other important information. Your final documentation pack will be sent to you approximately 2 weeks prior to departure.

**Updated: April 2026**