

Kazakhstan: Canyons, Singing Dunes & Alien Landscapes
12 Days Across One of Central Asia's Wildest Frontiers
April 2027

Highlights



Almaty City - Altyn Emel National Park – Aktau & Katutau Mountains - Charyn Canyon - Saty Gorge - Kolsay Lakes – Shymkent - Karatau Mountains - Aktau City - Mangystau Region

Day 1 – Welcome to Almaty: Nomads, Cathedrals & Culture

After landing in Kazakhstan's largest city, ease into the adventure with a journey back in time at the Nomad Ethno Center.

Lunch is served inside traditional yurts, followed by a hands-on nomadic archery masterclass. Because what better way to fight jetlag than by firing arrows across the steppe?

Back in the city, explore Almaty's cultural heart:

Park of 28 Panfilov Guardsmen

Ascension Cathedral

Museum of National Musical Instruments

As evening falls, settle into your hotel and prepare for the wild landscapes ahead.

Overnight: Almaty



Day 2 – Into the Steppe: The Singing Dune

The city disappears behind you as rugged SUVs point east toward Altyn Emel National Park.

Hours of open steppe lead to one of Kazakhstan's strangest natural wonders — the Singing Dune. Rising 150 metres above the surrounding plains, this giant sand mountain is known to hum and roar when the wind is right. Climb to the summit for sunset and watch endless horizons glow gold.

Tonight, enjoy a hearty homemade dinner at a local guesthouse in Basshy Village.

Drive: 250 km

Overnight: Basshy Village

Day 3 – Kazakhstan's Alien Planet

Today feels less like Earth and more like Mars.

The journey leads deep into the Aktau and Katutau Mountains, landscapes sculpted over hundreds of millions of years.

Explore:

Katutau's volcanic lava formations

Dry riverbeds winding through colourful canyons

Aktau's surreal white, pink and crimson cliffs

A gentle 7km **hike** rewards you with sweeping views across one of Central Asia's most extraordinary landscapes.

Bring your camera. You'll need it.

Overnight: Basshy Village

Day 4 – Charyn Canyon: Kazakhstan's Grand Canyon

After breakfast, head south toward one of the country's most famous natural wonders.

The Valley of Castles inside Charyn National Park looks like an ancient kingdom carved from stone. Towering sandstone formations rise dramatically from the canyon floor, shaped by wind and water over millions of years. Spend time exploring before continuing to the mountain village of Saty.

The scenery changes again as desert gives way to forests and alpine valleys.

Overnight: Saty Village

Day 5 – Hiking Through Saty Gorge

Today is all about slowing down and immersing yourself in the mountains.

Follow the Saty River through forests, meadows and remote valleys on a moderate hike toward Aliman Peak and the Ekiasha Jailau.

Expect:

Crystal-clear mountain streams

Endless green valleys

Fresh alpine air

Very few other people

This is Kazakhstan at its quietest and most beautiful.

Overnight: Saty Village

Day 6 – The Pearls of the Northern Tien Shan

Some days simply belong in a postcard.

Today you'll visit the stunning Kolsay Lakes, often called the Pearls of the Northern Tien Shan.

Walk along the shores of the first lake, surrounded by pine forests and towering mountains.

Later, continue to the remarkable Kaindy Lake, famous for the ghostly forest submerged beneath its turquoise waters.

Optional horseback rides are available for those wanting to channel their inner nomad.

Overnight: Saty Village

Day 7 – Back to Almaty

After several days in the wilderness, return to Almaty.

Spend the afternoon however you choose:

Café hopping

Shopping

Exploring local markets

Simply enjoying a hot shower and a soft bed

A chance to recharge before the next chapter begins.

Overnight: Almaty

Day 8 – South to Shymkent

A short domestic flight takes you to Shymkent, one of Kazakhstan's oldest cities and gateway to the country's southern deserts and mountains.

The day is intentionally relaxed, allowing time to explore the city at your own pace.

Overnight: Shymkent

Day 9 – Petroglyphs & Sacred Caves

Today's adventure dives into Kazakhstan's ancient past.

Explore the Karatau Mountains and visit the remarkable Arpaozen Petroglyphs, where prehistoric artists carved their stories into stone thousands of years ago.

Later, visit the mysterious Akmechet Cave, hidden deep within the landscape.

It's a day filled with legends, archaeology and dramatic scenery.

Overnight: Shymkent

Day 10 – Across the Country to Aktau

Another domestic flight transports you from mountains and steppes to the shores of the Caspian Sea.

Welcome to Aktau — the gateway to Mangystau, Kazakhstan's wild west.

Spend the evening relaxing and preparing for what many consider the country's most spectacular region.

Overnight: Aktau



Day 11 – Mangystau: The Lost World

If Kazakhstan has a secret kingdom, this is it.

Today is a full-day off-road expedition across the astonishing landscapes of Mangystau.

Highlights include:

Shokpakatasay Canyon

Remote cliffs and dramatic desert panoramas.

Shokpak Ata Underground Mosque

A sacred site carved directly into the rock.

Kapamsay Canyon

Towering limestone walls and vast open spaces.

Torysh Valley

Known as the Valley of Balls, where giant spherical stones are scattered across the desert.

Kok-Kala

Jurassic-era rock formations painted in surreal colours.

Sherkala Mountain

A legendary lion-shaped mountain rising from the steppe.

Airakty Valley

Often called the Valley of Castles, where wind-carved towers dominate the horizon.

This is the Kazakhstan few travellers ever see.

And it's unforgettable.

Overnight: Aktau

Day 12 – Farewell Kazakhstan

One final breakfast before heading to the airport.

Twelve days ago, you arrived in a modern city.

Since then you've crossed deserts, climbed dunes, walked among ancient petroglyphs, explored submerged forests, stood atop canyons and ventured through landscapes that look borrowed from another planet.

Kazakhstan rarely appears on bucket lists.

Perhaps it should.

Mihipedia Says...

If you love places that feel genuinely undiscovered, Kazakhstan delivers in spectacular fashion. One moment you're sipping tea in a yurt, the next you're standing on a dune that sings, hiking through rainbow-coloured mountains or exploring canyons that rival anything in the American Southwest.

This isn't a trip for ticking boxes.

It's a journey for travellers who still enjoy being surprised.

Hope you will come along 😊

