



RIDE WORLD WIDE

Kyrgyzstan 2011

Ride Information Sheet

Kyrgyzstan is one of the smallest of the Central Asian Republics with a population of about 5,000,000. It is a country of mountains and lakes. In the north the spectacular Tien-Shan mountains rise up, forming the border to Kazakhstan and the natural scenery is wonderful and largely unspoilt. Anyone considering a visit to Kyrgyzstan should remember that its borders have only recently opened up following conversion to democracy in the early 1990s after years of communism. It is still very much a developing country in terms of service and infrastructure and as a result, delays and changes to even the most carefully planned itinerary are, unfortunately, possible. They must also bear in mind that you will be riding in very remote areas where communications can be difficult. This is certainly a ride for the adventurous and independent traveller and, although your local guides will do their utmost to make sure your trip runs smoothly, riders are expected to think for themselves. If you plan to visit Kyrgyzstan you must be aware that flexibility, an open mind and a willingness to accept local standards and local expectations - which will not match those you are used to at home - are prerequisites!

Dates Trips can be run between May and September usually for 14 days with 10 or 11 days riding. We have one set date departure for 2011 but private departures and tailor-made rides can be arranged for groups on request.

The Horses & Riding The horses are of the local Kyrgyz breed. A little bigger than Mongolian ponies, though quite similar, they are around 14hh to 15hh. They are sturdy and sure-footed and are used to rough mountain terrain, generally shod with studded shoes for extra grip in the mountains. They are trained in a slightly different style to our horses and are used to a fairly loose rein, they are easy and fun to ride and will willingly canter for miles through open grassy meadows. The horses are ridden in snaffles and tack is local style, scruffy but comfortable, with some English army style saddles and with seat savers available. Saddle bags are provided.



Riding There is generally about 6 to 8 hours riding a day on these trips, riding from camp to camp, although occasionally riding days can be longer depending on conditions. Local horsemen are on hand to tack up, untack and look after the horses throughout the ride and rides will be lead by a local guide accompanied by a European guide, either Domenico, who is Italian but speaks excellent English, or Jonathan Cormack, who is from the UK. Domenico has several years experience running rides in the hills of Northern Pakistan, and in Morocco as well as in Kyrgyzstan and has travelled extensively in Kyrgyzstan and Central Asia. Jonathan is a farrier by trade but after riding with Domenico in Kyrgyzstan some years ago has returned each year and become an old hand. Domenico plans the routes and is very much an adventurer and likes to change itineraries to take in new points of interest - so each ride has something new! Groups are generally limited to a maximum of 10 guests.

Pace The pace is very much dependent on the terrain. It is generally slow to moderate with a lot of slow going along mountain tracks and some tiring climbs for the horses. However there are also opportunities for long canters along the valley floors and lake shores. The pace can, of course, be varied to suit the abilities of the group.

Riding Experience It is not essential to be a very experienced rider on these trips but you will need a good level of fitness as hours in the saddle are long. The riding can be quite slow and the style of riding is quite different from our own and so everyone is learning a little. The horses are fairly small, easy and well behaved, inspiring confidence. However you will definitely enjoy your trip much more if you are saddle fit and if you have not done much riding will certainly need to be prepared to put up with some hardship as new muscles are discovered! We highly recommend that anyone planning to join a ride puts in regular hours riding before they go to get used to the time spent in the saddle.

Terrain & Altitude The riding takes place through the Tien-Shan mountains, where the high grassy meadows contain an abundance of wild flowers (including wild irises and edelweiss). Forests of larch, spruce and juniper hide wildlife such as wolf, lynx, wild boar, wild sheep and brown bear. Eagles, hawks and buzzards are often seen, diving to catch their prey. Following old trails, still used by shepherds pasturing stock today, you will cross high passes of up to nearly 4000 meters. You will often need to lead horses over rough terrain so you may feel the effects of altitude. The routes are organised so that you have time to acclimatise but bear in mind that altitude affects each person differently and we would not recommend this ride to those with a history of altitude sickness at similar levels. Also alcohol and tiredness generally increase the effects of altitude so you should not over exert yourself unnecessarily and should be fit and healthy!

Safety Rides are accompanied by an English speaking guide and at least one local groom. A medical kit is carried on the ride and both a mobile 'phone and also a satellite 'phone are carried for emergencies. A vehicle usually meets the group every night, and also sometimes at lunch. On a few nights pack horses are used instead of the back up vehicles so you will be away from the back up team and a long way from civilisation and the safety that goes with this.

Accommodation Accommodation is in simple campsites, (small 2 man 'dome' tents are provided), staying in traditional felt 'yurts' and in good quality hotels in Bishkek. Hotels in Bishkek are an international 3* standard. Facilities at campsites and also when staying with local people are very basic (no showers or proper loos and you need to take your own sleeping bag) - this is a holiday for adventurous people who wish to experience nature, enjoy exploring off the beaten track and can cope without luxuries! Camps will usually be set up by a river, where it is possible to wash - although the water is often ice cold (a limited amount for washing can be heated on the fire and sometimes you can be surprised by a Kyrgyz style sauna!) A cook and horsemen will accompany you throughout the trip and will prepare camp, light fires and cook for you, although some help around camp, in putting up tents and so on will be appreciated. For most nights there will be a central mess tent set up for meals and a back up vehicle will transport luggage and will meet you in the evenings. On some nights, where vehicle access is not possible, pack horses are used to transport luggage and there will be no mess tent.



Meals Breakfast, lunch and dinner each day are included. Breakfast and lunch when camping are simple and might be bread and biscuits with eggs, cold meats, cheeses, tinned fish, apples, jam and honey. Tea and coffee are available and also local yoghurt when camping next door to a yurt. When camping the evening meal is cooked on a small camping stove or a fire and therefore will be reasonably simple, generally potatoes, rice or pasta with meat stews or fresh fish when camping by the lake. A great deal of effort is made by the cook and you will be surprised by some of the delicacies that appear on the table in the middle of the mountains. (Vegetarian food or other special dietary requirements can be catered for if notice is given in advance).

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Meals cont. Alcohol is not included but certain amount of beer and vodka can be carried in the back up vehicle. The hotels and main cities have reasonable restaurants with a good selection of European and Eastern dishes.

Weather Winter temperatures in Kyrgyzstan drop to well below freezing for several months. May to August is the mild Kyrgyz summer, when average temperatures in the mountains are 13 to 17 degrees C sometimes rising to 25 degrees C. It will often be hotter in Bishkek, the capital, with summer temperatures as high as 35 C. It can rain at any time and nights can be cold, particularly at altitude, when temperatures may well drop below zero at anytime of year. July and August are the warmest months, but the weather can be unpredictable with blue skies one minute and rain the next.

What to bring We will send you a list of things we suggest you bring when your booking is confirmed.

Itineraries Below is an example of the Issykul to Ak Sai Ride. **Please note:** This is a draft of the sort of itinerary expected and the exact day by day arrangements may be varied by your guide if conditions require:

Issykul to Ak Sai Valley Ride This ride takes you high into the Celestial Mountains, following in the footsteps of warriors, nomads and a thousand Silk Road traders. This is a new and adventurous route beginning at Lake Issykul where you are guests of a family of falconers who still hunt in the mountains with their Golden Eagles. From Issykul you set off riding south towards the Peak Danova - Kyzyl Asker massif close to the Chinese border. The route is isolated, for the most part riding at altitudes above 3000 meters, so both tough and very rewarding.

Saturday 30th June - Depart London (eg British Midlands flight BD991 departing London Heathrow at 13.30 and arrive arriving Bishkek the following morning at 03.45)

Sunday 31st July - You will be met at Bishkek airport from your flight, and driven to a hotel in town. The morning to rest, settle in, relax and in the afternoon perhaps visit the city and main bazaar before setting off on a drive of about 3 to 4 hours to the village of Bokombaevo on the shores of lake Issykul. You are guests of the Sogen Bai family. Perhaps time for a Kyrgyz sauna before dinner and the night in the home of a local family. (B,L,D)



Monday 1st August - Breakfast and an early start, driving to meet the horses who are waiting in the valley of the Tosor pass. Saddle up and set off riding, climbing a zig-zag trail with lovely views back to Isskul. Eventually the path joins an old military road and here you meet the jeeps. Hopefully there will be time before sunset to cross the pass (3893 meters) and camp on the grassy plains beyond. The campsite, at 3500 meters, is in a beautiful open valley, close to a lake and looking on to glaciers. Dinner and night in camp. (B,L,D)

Tuesday 2nd August - Saddle the horses in the early morning and set off, crossing the Ashuluu Tebe river which flows down from the glaciers. In front of you lies the Kalcha pass, the only one to cross the Tereskey range of mountains and at 3982 meters the highest point of the ride. The climb is not steep, a relatively gentle trail leads to a broad saddle and from here you descend to the Kalcha river. Here the valley narrows and becomes a steep sided canyon. Continue along this for about 3 or 4 hours to the Burkhan valley where camp will be set up at about 3000 meters. Hopefully the back up jeeps will join you here as there is a dirt track used by hunters and shepherds though the terrain is boggy. Dinner and night in camp. (B,L,D)

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Thursday 4th August - Breakfast and saddle the horses. The pack horses will be loaded today as well as you set off into terrain where the jeeps cannot follow. Crossing the Naryn river you follow the Chakir Korut valley to a pass of the same name, with views towards glaciers on your left. The climb is not too arduous but after reaching the pass at 3882 meters you will probably need to dismount and lead the horses down the steep shale for about 600 meters to the Djagalmai valley. Here camp is set up at about 3300 meters. Dinner and night in camp. (B,L,D)



Friday 5th August - Breakfast and mount up, crossing the river and climbing into the Karachik valley, the corridor which leads to the giant Ak Sai valley. You will find the remains of an old jeep road that used to reach this remote area years ago. Continuing up the valley you arrive at the Kobiurzenty pass at 3907 meters, the gateway to Ak Sai. The views from here are staggering with the Kyzyl Asker peaks and their glaciers directly in front of you. The valley is 30km wide at this point and beyond is the Kokshall Too range which forms the border with China. This area was closed during Soviet times and even now permits are required so very few tourists reach this spot. Dinner and night in camp. (B,L,D)

Saturday 6th to Monday 8th August - The support vehicles should be able to join you again, depending on conditions, and you will set up a base camp close to two glaciers which flow into lakes. From here you can explore by horse or on foot this fantastic wilderness. There is plenty of wildlife and with good binoculars you are likely to see the rare Marco Polo sheep - one of the favourite preys of the snow leopard which, though incredibly shy, is sure to inhabit this area. Night spent in camp. (B,L,D)

Tuesday 9th August - After breakfast strike camp and mount up. There is a military check point to go through before you follow the Ak Sai river along an old military track with a border fence running alongside. You are gradually losing altitude now and begin to see the first signs of human inhabitation, shepherds who bring their flocks to graze the high pastures. Dinner and night in camp (B,L,D)

Wednesday 10th August - Continue riding along dirt tracks, descending to the next military post. This valley has been a corridor to the Chinese border for centuries, part of the old Silk Road, and until the late 50's was still used by traders and their caravans of camels and horses, taking goods to China. The wide green valley is dotted with yurts and hundreds of animals: horses, cattle, yaks and sheep - these pastures are said to be some of the best in the country. It also offers good going for the horses and there are chances to move on, with long canters to cover more ground. Dinner and night in camp. (B,L,D)



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Thursday 11th August - Breakfast and the last day riding. You first have to cross the At Bash pass at 3300 meters, then across one more check point before reaching the At Bash (Horses Head) valley. Here you say farewell to the horses and drive to a guest house in the village. Dinner and night in At Bash. (B,L,D)

Friday 12th August - Set off driving, first to the town of Naryn and then on to the shores of Issykul. Camp will be set up on the shores of Issykul, a last campfire in the Kyrgyz mountains. Dinner and night in camp. (B,L,D)

Saturday 13th August - Breakfast in camp and pack up, driving back to Bishkek. You will be driven to your hotel, time to check-in, relax and then some final shopping before a farewell dinner at an Italian restaurant. Night in a hotel in Bishkek. (B,L,D)

Sunday 14th August - Transfer to the airport for your flight home (eg. British Midlands flight from Bishkek departing 05.35, arriving London Heathrow 09.35).



2011 dates & rates:

Issykul to Ak Sai - 31st July to 14th August

Rate: £2250 per person

Single supplement - £250

Rate **includes** 14 nights accommodation in twin rooms / tents, meals, all riding, guiding, equipment, services of a local and a western guide, back up vehicle and horsemen, airport transfers and other transfers as indicated.

The rate does **not include**, International flights to Bishkek, visa fees, personal travel / medical insurance (which you must have); any tips you may wish to leave; personal items in hotels (telephone calls, laundry etc); bar bill for extra drinks. If you would like a single room / tent, there will be a supplement of £250 payable - this supplement is not payable if you are happy to share a room with another rider.

Departures subject to a minimum of 6 riders.

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Travel arrangements The meeting point for the ride is Bishkek airport. British Midlands currently have direct flights from London Heathrow to Bishkek on Mondays, Thursdays and Saturdays, departing London approx 13.30, arriving Bishkek 03.15 (the next day). On return they depart Bishkek Tuesdays, Fridays and Sundays at about 05.30, arriving London 09.30 (same day). Flight prices vary depending on dates and time of year but budget on around £750 - £850 return - please call us for a quote. If you prefer to book your own flights you can call British Midlands direct on 0870 6070555 (www.fly-bmi.co.uk), or you can try Trailfinders on 0207 9383939 who will be able to quote other airlines (eg Turkish Airways who fly to Bishkek via Istanbul).

General visa and health information (NB this is only a brief outline - further information will be sent to you if you make a confirmed booking)

Visa If you hold a full British Passport, a visa is required to visit Kyrgyzstan and this can be obtained in advance by post or in person from the Embassy in London. The current fee for a multiple entry tourist visa for holders of full British Passports is £50 and application takes 3 to 4 working days.

Health No jabs are required as a condition of entry to Kyrgyzstan from the UK and Europe although The Hospital for Tropical Diseases in London recommends that you ensure you are up to date with Polio, Tetanus, Typhoid and Hepatitis A. There is no Malaria risk in Kyrgyzstan.

(draft 08/02/11)

