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## **TOURISM IN THE KYRGYZ REPUBLIC**

Kyrgyzstan is a country in the northeast of Central Asia, bordering Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and China. It covers an area of about 200,000 sq km.

The Kyrgyz people were first mentioned in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC in historical records of ancient Chinese chronicler Sima Qian. According to them, the Kyrgyz state was located near their kindred nomadic Xiongnu state and stretched over 3,500 kilometres. It had a population of 100,000 people and 80,000-strong army. With a view to these historical facts, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution in 2002 recognising the 2,200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Kyrgyz statehood. However, many historians mention even earlier periods of the emergence of the Kyrgyz state based on archaeological findings and preserved historical and cultural monuments. In particular, recently scholars have encountered the name 'Kyrgyz' in official Chinese chronicles dated the 10<sup>th</sup> century BC.

By history, the territory and peoples of ancient Kyrgyzstan stood at the origins of the greatest economic and cultural phenomenon in the world history – the Great Silk Road. Occupying an advantageous geographical position on trade routes and absorbing the cultural achievements of the East and West, Kyrgyzstan became a bridge that connected both.

There were three branches of the ancient caravan route passing through high mountain passes of the Tien Shan and Pamir and the territory of Kyrgyzstan: Pamir-Alai, southern and northern. These roads have connected East and West for fifteen centuries. Although the routes of silk trade were changing over millennia, the caravan tracks through Kyrgyzstan remained constant because Kyrgyzstan was a kind of guardian of the 'mountain gate' of this ancient caravan road.

In addition to natural attractions, Kyrgyzstan is rich in historical and cultural monuments located on the routes of the Great Silk Road, which is one of the most significant achievements in the history of world civilization. Its longest section passed through the territory of Central Asia, including Kyrgyzstan. Here merchants' caravans passed and stopped. Those stops include the Tash-Rabat Inn, foot of the sacred Suleiman Mountain, the Burana Tower, and the city of Uzgen, where the Uzgen Archaeological-Architectural Museum Complex is now located.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, tourism has not only an economic but also profound social, cultural, diplomatic, and political significance. Thanks to tourism, cultural, infra-



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structural, and security issues are now closely intertwined among most nations and regions of the world. The tourism industry is one of the priority export-oriented sectors of the Kyrgyz economy. The development of tourism in Kyrgyzstan was positively influenced by the World Nomad Games held in 2014–18. They made a huge contribution to the cultural and spiritual enrichment of society and greatly strengthened public awareness of the history of the Kyrgyz nomadic civilization. The World Nomad Games have created a favourable image of Kyrgyzstan as a promising tourist destination in Central Asia. They received high-profile media coverage from Forbes, National Geographic Traveler, Financial Times, The Guardian and were praised at the level of international ratings and organizations (Global Spots 2013, World Travel and Tourism Council). Moreover, such reputable outlets as *The Guardian* and *Lonely Planet* included Kyrgyzstan in the list of ten and five best places to visit in 2019, respectively.

Kyrgyzstan is a country of magnificent mountain ranges of the Tien Shan and Pamir-Alai, which occupy 90 percent of its territory. It is a beautiful corner of pristine nature and rugged terrain located in the heart of Central Asia. It is home to 29 mountain peaks over 4,000 meters and 45 three-thousanders, which have given this country fame as the 'Land of Heavenly Mountains.' There are more than 200 tourist routes waiting for those who like hiking and horseback riding. The country also has a lot to offer for climbers, namely some of the highest mountains of the world: the famous Victory Peak (7,439 m) and Khan-Tengri Peak (7,010 m).

More than 2,000 alpine lakes lie in the Kyrgyz part of the Tien Shan Mountains. Resorts and guest houses located around Issyk-Kul Lake, which is one of the deepest in the world (702 m), offer their guests a beach recreation in the centre of Asia. The name of this moderately salty body of water, which is fed by hundreds of underground sources, means 'hot lake', because Issyk-Kul never freezes. The sight of the mountain peaks surrounding the lake always fascinates the travellers. This mountain ring protects Issyk-Kul from cold air masses coming from the north and hot air from the south, thereby providing a pleasant and comfortable microclimate that gives travellers all the opportunities for relaxation. A breeze blowing towards the lake from the mountains, low humidity, clean air, plenty of sunshine, water rich with minerals, hot springs, and therapeutic mud will improve health and lift the spirits of all guests of the lake. Sports enthusiasts will surely enjoy sailing. Another place of interest is Song Kol Lake, lying at an altitude of more than 3,000 meters above sea level, which also attracts travellers from all over the world.

Skiers in Kyrgyzstan are offered 13 ski resorts. Mountain peaks give birth to swift rivers that are interesting for fans of rafting and kayaking. The Chu River, which cuts its way through the Boom Gorge, is the country's main arena for mountain rafting.

Kyrgyzstan is a great place for ethnographic tourism. About 5,000 objects of historical and cultural heritage scattered throughout the republic provide an opportunity to look into the ancient past of Kyrgyzstan. In the south of the country, travellers are attracted by the city of Osh located in the culturally rich Ferghana Valley. In 2000, the city turned 3000 years old and hosted events under the auspices of UNESCO. The heart of the city is Sulaiman-Too Sacred Mountain, named after Prophet Solomon. Its five peaks and slopes contain 101 sites with petroglyphs representing humans and animals and 17 sites identified as ancient places of worship, which are testaments to the fact that this mountain played a major role in the religious rites of ancient peoples. The mountain located at the crossroads of the Silk Road arteries is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Kyrgyzstan is a country of rich history and nomadic cultural tradition, which has become an integral part of the national identity of the Kyrgyz people.

Go ahead! Do not miss an opportunity to see magnificent architecture, picturesque nature, hypnotic lakes, and dazzling mountain peaks. Welcome to Kyrgyzstan!