ABSOLUTENOMADS
ADVENTURE TRAVEL & TOURS

Soviet Kyrgyzstan

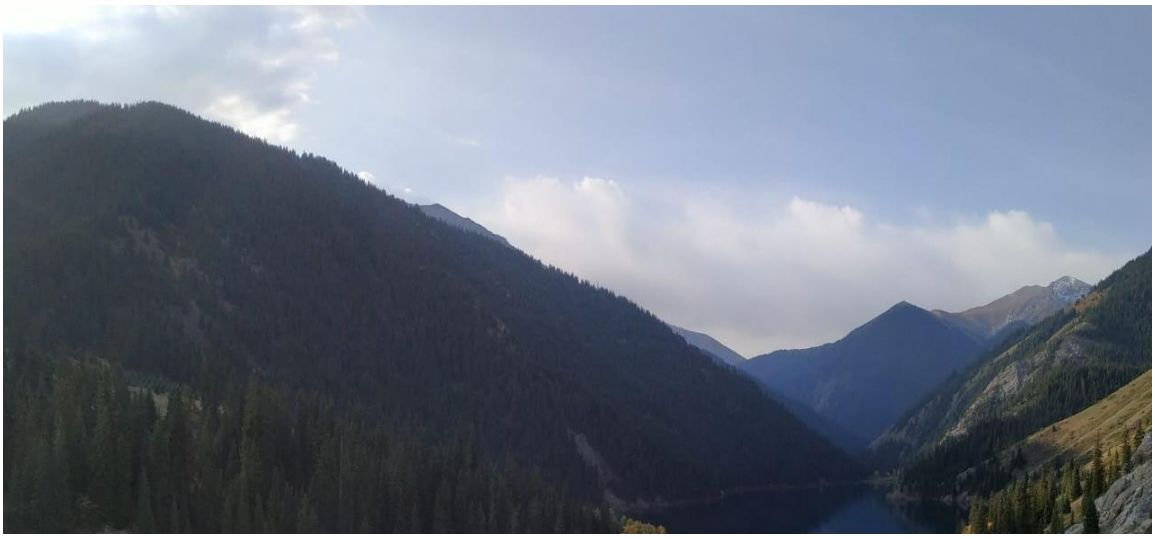
Kyrgyzstan Tour

Overview

Kyrgyzstan, tucked away in its small corner of Central Asia, more than makes up for its relatively small size with its impressive scenery. Kyrgyzstan may have slipped under the radar for many travellers, with most opting to visit the vast plains and gaudy cities of the country's northern neighbour, Kazakhstan. But wait! Kyrgyzstan has a few surprises waiting; apart from its beautiful people, stunning mountain ranges and crystalline lakes, much of the country was sealed off to the world during its service to the USSR. Uranium processing plants, deep coal mines, and even secret torpedo research institutes meant that many cities, towns, and villages were removed from the maps of the time.

Now the Soviet Union is no more and we're free to explore this amazing country. We will not only visit many of the country's central highlights but make a journey, as only we can, in authentic Soviet style. We will use Soviet produced vehicles to complete the tour as we head out into the wilds of Kyrgyzstan in search of its communistical past. We will board in hotels, yurts, homestays and even Soviet health spas; as we travel, we will use all manner of vehicles to traverse this stunningly beautiful country.

So, join us as we travel to Kyrgyzstan and uncover the country's past as we journey in the footsteps of Marco Polo, Tamerlane, the pundits of the Great Game and even the shadow of Yuri Gagarin.



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What's Included?

Included:

- All Listed Meals
- All Listed Accommodation
- Drivers and Vehicles
- Local Guide
- Tour Leader

Not Included:

- International Flights
- Travel Insurance
- Snacks/Drinks/Extra Expenses
- Tips for Guides
- Kyrgyz Visa



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Itinerary Overview

*Check out the brief overview of our **Soviet Kyrgyzstan Tour** – or scroll down to see the in-depth run-through of each day of the trip.*

Day 1.	Arrival Day in Bishkek & Flight to Osh City
Day 2.	The Closed City of Mailuu-suu
Day 3.	Bishkek City
Day 4.	Explore the Soviet Legacy at Issyk Kul
Day 5.	Urban Exploration in a Uranium Processing Plant
Day 6.	Natural Wonders of Kyrgyzstan
Day 7.	Explore Jyrgalan Valley on Horseback
Day 8.	The Soviet Ghost Town of Enilchek
Day 9.	Explore Cholpon-Ata
Day 10.	Discover Kyrgystan's Ancient Petroglyphs
Day 11.	Departure Day

Day 1

Arrival Day in Bishkek & Flight to Osh City

Whether you've arrived the day before or early this morning, we'll meet in the capital of Kyrgyzstan, the city of **Bishkek**.

However, we won't remain here for long as our adventure begins further south, nestled deep in the mountains of Kyrgyzstan. We'll board our domestic flight from Bishkek, heading south to the city of **Osh**, where our adventure begins.

Upon arrival, we'll have some free time to explore the city and take in local life as we prepare to set out into the countryside in search of communist relics!

Accommodation: *Grand Chavo Hotel, Osh*

Included Meals: *Lunch, Dinner*

For more information about the accommodation on this tour, check out the 'Accommodation' Tab on the Tour Page.

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Day 2

The Closed City of Mailuu-suu

We'll start the day with an exploration of **Osh** city. From the grand **Statue of Vladimir Lenin** in the heart of the city, to the many **mosaics and murals** harking back to the days of the Kyrgyz SSR.

On our adventures, we'll be sure to stop at the **Drama Theatre** – a fantastic example of well-preserved Soviet-era architecture, with blue tiled mosaics on both sides.

Continuing on, we'll pay a visit to the grand **Suleiman-too Mountain**. Be prepared for a bit of a walk as we trek up to the old Soviet-era museum dug into the side of the mountain!

The views over the city from this city-centre mountain cannot be missed, and as we descend back into the hustle and bustle of Osh, we'll prepare for our expedition into the countryside. Our destination for today is a town named **Mailuu-suu**; existence of this town used to be classified and access was only granted to those working in its hidden underground mines. However, whilst other towns around the country mined for copper, iron, or coal, the workers in this closed town mined for uranium.

Much of the fissile material for the USSR's first nuclear weapons came from this small mountain town, and now the Soviet Union is no more, we're able to pay it a visit!

As we depart Mailuu-suu, we'll visit the vast **Toktogul Reservoir**, a huge body of water in central Kyrgyzstan created by the Soviets when they built the Toktogul dam between 1960 and 1976.

Finally, we'll make our way to the beautiful Chychkan Canyon where our overnight guesthouse is located; a chance to prepare for more adventures tomorrow!

Accommodation: *Oson Guesthouse, Chychkan*

Included Meals: *Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner*

Day 3

Bishkek City

This morning we'll arrive back in the nation's capital, Bishkek. We'll explore the city like locals, on foot! A chance to rub shoulders with local Kyrgyz amidst the hustle and bustle of city life.

Our first stop on our **Bishkek Soviet Walking Tour** will be the **Ballet and Opera Theatre**, one of the city's finest landmarks. Built in 1955, the theatre was designed by the famed Soviet architect L. Laburenko. The building's architecture borrows less from Soviet constructions and instead adopts a more classical Greek feel, although don't be disappointed as there are a few hammers and sickles thrown in for good measure.

From the Ballet and Opera Theater, we will stroll onto the **Museum of Fine Arts,** another impressive Soviet structure; this one is a real Soviet modernist construction more akin to a building associated with its communist roots.

Any visit to Bishkek wouldn't be complete without that ubiquitous visit to **The White House**, which was only completed in 1985; the White House is another example of Socialist classicist architecture. Bishkek's White House is home to the country's presidential offices and in its relatively short life, has already been at the heart of 3 significant demonstrations and mini-revolutions.

As we continue our exploration and visit many of Bishkek's highlights, such as the **Lenin statue**, **State Department Store**, **National Flagpole**, and the **Circus building**, we will also learn about the **Interhelpo Cooperative.** The Interhelpo cooperative was formed in Czechoslovakia in response to Vladimir Lenin's call to the international proletariat to develop the Soviet Republics in the 1920s. On our walk, we will see some of the sites associated with the **Interhelpo** and we'll get to talk about the realities and challenges of those times and the eventual collapse of the Union. We'll finish the day with a dinner consisting of typical Soviet dishes many still enjoyed today.

Accommodation: *Damas Hotel, Bishkek*

Included Meals: *Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner*

Day 4

Explore the Soviet Legacy at Issyk Kul

This morning we'll prepare to head out of the city once again, making our way towards what is perhaps one of Kyrgyzstan's most well-known natural wonders, **Lake Issyk-Kul (Warm Lake)**.

Issyk-Kul is the world's second-largest saline lake after the **Caspian Sea** and the second-largest mountain lake after Lake Titicaca**.** During the Kyrgyzstan's Soviet era, the lake became a popular vacation resort, home to numerous sanitoria where workers from many of the country's secretive uranium mines and other projects could unwind and relax.

As we trundle across the country to our lakeside retreat, we'll make stops at some of the Kyrgyz towns that still house many **Soviet buildings**, **monuments**, and **statues.**

Upon arrival at our **lakeside yurt camp**, we will check into our traditional tented homes and slow the pace. At the lake you'll be able to relax on the beach and soak up the surrounding views or take a walk along the southern Issyk-Kul shores.

This evening we will enjoy a **typical Kyrgyz meal** cooked by our host family.

Accommodation: *Asman Yurt Camp, Issyk Kul*

Included Meals: *Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner*

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Day 5

Urban Exploration in a Uranium Processing Plant

Today we'll leave our luggage in-situ as we will return for another night. Upon departure, be sure to dress in your best urbex clothing as we head out to an area filled with **abandoned and derelict buildings;** this may be a little more special than some other sites you've visited in the past as it was formerly a **uranium processing plant.** Built during the Soviet Union, the plant was not listed on any maps, closed to most people and only accessible with special permission.

However, the world has changed; the Union is no more, so it's open to all. We'll visit in our cars from the period and have time to explore. Within the facility, there remains more detail than you may have thought possible.

Of course, after a busy morning exploring, a drink is always needed, and for us, we have some long-time friends to call upon. Our friends in the region have been producing **handmade wines** since before the Soviet Union. Many of the wines are made from various flower petals, berries and even wild cherries; samples will be available but take care as the day isn't over just yet as our next call will be to visit some local **Eagle Hunters**.

Eagle hunting is something that has been taking place across Central Asia and Mongolia for many thousands of years; we will meet with a family of fourth-generation eagle hunters to hear their tales and eventually watch a short demonstration of eagle hunting, known as **Salburuun** in this part of the world.

From our introduction to eagle hunting, we have one last activity to enjoy at the lakeside as we hike to a beautiful **panoramic viewpoint** to catch that must-see **sunset over Issyk-Kul Lake**.

After dinner, we will build a fire for those who wish, sit around to share those all-important travel stories and enjoy our local wine; like all travel drink purchases, it always tastes that little better when enjoyed in-country.

Accommodation: *Asman Yurt Camp, Issyk Kul*

Included Meals: *Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner*

Day 6

Natural Wonders of Kyrgyzstan

Our destination today is the city of **Karakol**, once named **Przhevalsk** after the famed Russian explorer **Nikolay Przhevalsky** who died of typhoid here (if his name sounds familiar, he's the explorer who discovered the now renowned Mongolian Przewalski's horse).

Karakol was established as a Russian military outpost in 1869; since then, it has grown to become Kyrgyzstan's fourth largest city. It was somewhat of a hub for adventures and explorers during its growth, many of whom were major players in the period known as the Great Game.

Before we reach the town of Karakol, we do have a mini-adventure ahead of us as there are some must-see sites along the way. Our first, the beautiful **Fairytale Canyons.** Said by many Kyrgyz to be one of the most stunning places in the whole country, the **Fairytale Canyons** (**Skazka Canyon**) were named by early Russian explorers due to the area's otherworldly feel. The canyons are filled with fantastical geological sandstone formations; local legend has it that there is even a huge sleeping dragon nestled amongst the rolling red sediment.

Our next stop will be the 24-metre high **Barskoon Waterfall**, surrounded by a beautiful, forested landscape, designated a national park. As we journey around the region, we will be sure to continue our Soviet theme as we stop at some impressive **roadside monuments**. The first is an ageing **Soviet truck monument** whilst the second is a **bust of Yuri Gagarin**; after his monumental trip into space, he came to Kyrgyzstan for a holiday relaxing and hiking in this region.

Our final stop before we reach **Karakol City** is the **Red Cliffs (Seven Bulls**) of **Jeti-Oguz**, a stunning red sandstone cliff formation that looks like it has just burst from the earth beneath.

Once we arrive in **Karakol**, we will be sure to walk around some of the must-see sights, such as the **Dungan Mosque**, the **Russian Orthodox Church** and of course, the **Przhevalsky Museum**, to learn more about this Cold War-era adventurer.

As the afternoon continues, we'll catch a traditional game of **Kok-Boru**, a local horseback sport between local teams, followed by a traditional **Kyrgyz performance**.

Accommodation: *Karagat Hotel, Karakol*

Included Meals: *Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner*

Day 7

Explore Jyrgalan Valley on Horseback

This morning we'll depart early as we head out for more of an authentic Kyrgyz tour, our destination; **Jyrgalan Valley.**

Jyrgalan Valley is a stunning mountain valley located east of **Issyk-Kul Lake**, only a stone's throw from the **Kazak border** and close to **China**. The valley is surrounded by snow-capped mountains belonging to the **Tianshan Mountain Range**. You may think that this utopian valley is as far removed from the Soviet Union as it's possible to get, but you'd be wrong.

Jyrgalan Village in the lower reaches of the valley owes its origins to Kyrgyzstan's red past. Prior to the 1930s, most of the valley's inhabitants were nomadic until coal was discovered and mining began. Jyrgalan Village was built in 1964 to house the miners and their families. Many residents have long gone to seek better opportunities, although some remain; we will visit some existing families before making the most of this outdoor paradise.

Once we have finished our foray into the stunning wilderness, we will return to the Jyrgalan village to relax; for those who wish, you may want to unwind in that most Russian of traditions the banyon (sauna).

Once you're suitably chilled, we will join our local hosts and learn a little more about Kyrgyz culture and food, helping the family prepare some traditional snacks before dinner.

Accommodation: *Jyrgalan Village Guesthoues*

Included Meals: *Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner*

Day 8

The Soviet Ghost Town of Enilchek

We bid goodbye to our hosts and journey onwards to our destination for today, the **Sary-Jaz Valley**. We will traverse high mountain passes passing remote river valleys and secluded villages, making sure to stop to get those all-important photos.

Say Jaz Valley is located deep within the **Tian Shan Mountains**, it sees little rainfall, so it is not as abundant in wildlife as yesterday's beautiful affair. Still, what it lacks in flora and fauna, it makes up for in mineral despots such as tungsten, tin and other valuable earth metals. Although we're not here to look for these, the Soviets were, and what they left behind is perfect for our next stop. An ambitious project not just to extract the region's wealth but also to build a whole new town was started; hospitals, houses, apartments, schools, and kindergartens were constructioned, although it was all abandoned along with the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

The town of **Enilchek** is excellent for our period exploration; now mostly abandoned, there are around 30 families that cling on, making this desolate part of the world their home. So remote is Enilchek we will trade our Soviet salons for the famed Russian **Uaz 452**, a **4X4** which can easily traverse the rugged roads. Once we arrive at the town, we will have a detailed explanation of the area as well as meet a family or two before having free time for your own **individual exploration**.

Once we have finished, we'll have a long drive returning across the mountains to the hub of the region; **Karakol.** It is here we'll have a well-deserved rest, readying ourselves for tomorrow's adventure.

Accommodation: *Karagat Hotel, Karakol*

Included Meals: *Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner*

Day 9

Explore Cholpon-Ata

Today we venture onwards, circling **Issyk-Kul Lake,** driving towards the famous resort town of **Cholpon-Ata.**

As we continue our adventure, we will pass many small towns and villages, many of them still retain their Soviet period architecture. As we drive, we'll make stops to visit a few and stop to get views of the eastern end of the lake.

Our first such stop is the village of **Ysyk kol,** from where we will get splendid views of the eastern end of the lake. It is also in this region that the Soviet Union used to run their **secret torpedo tests**; it has been said that the lake's water was perfect for such tests, and, due to the depth, it is also ideal for retrieving the projectiles for further study.

Moving on, we'll make another stop at the small town of **Tyup**. Tyup has a park that retains a soviet armoured carrier and a few more statures. As well as this, we are able to look a lot further back in history when stopping by the nearby village of San Tash (counting stones); in **San Tash,** there is an odd pile of stones; it is claimed that when Tamerlane once marched through the region to battle with his troops, he ordered each of them to place a stone in a pile. Upon their return, they were to remove their stones. The pile would then indicate how many soldiers Tamerlane had lost in battle (the small hollow in the top is said to be those who returned.)

We continue skirting the lake until we arrive at our destination **Cholpon-Ata** a resort town located on the northern shores of **Issyk-Kul Lake** and the administrative centre for the region. The town contains many **Soviet-era sanatoria,** and in its heyday, visitors from all across the USSR were brought here on organized tours and work units to enjoy a break and work on their health and relax to improve work efficiency. These days, Cholpon-Ata has an aging town feel in need of a little TLC.

Once in town and checked into our accommodation we'll have free time; you can relax by the shores of the lake or do a little exploration.

Accommodation: *Karven Hotel, Cholpon Ata*

Included Meals: *Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner*

Day 10

Discover Kyrgyzstan's Ancient Petroglyphs

We start our day with a visit to the **Open-Air Petroglyph Museum** located on the outskirts of Cholpon-Ata. The petroglyphs, some of which date back to over 4000 years, are impressive, depicting hunting scenes, sacrifice, victory, war, and everyday activities. The park, also known as **the Rock Garden**, contains other features such as **Balbal** (carved stone warriors), tombs, and stone circles.

Once our visit to the **Stone Garden** has finished, we'll continue on completing our circuit of the lake as we drive on to the western end of **Issyk-Kul** to the town of **Balykchy.**

Balykchy was built in 1954 and, during the country's Soviet period, grew to be a significant industrial hub; much of the wool and crop processing from the region took place here before being loaded onto trains, trucks and even planes and taken deeper into the USSR.

Once in **Balykchy,** we have some time for some exploration; immediately, it is apparent that when the USSR ceased to exist, so did that important trade through **Balykchy.** The gloss of the town may have faded, but there are still some ageing Soviet buildings and semi-abandoned factories for us to explore. Perfect for us to imagine how important the town would have been. Within the city, there is also a chance to catch another **Lenin statue** as well as a few images of him on the sides of buildings.

Later in the day, we'll bid a sad farewell to vehicles and drivers and board our last mode of transport, an ageing train, itself a product of the USSR. It may not be the most comfortable journey that you've ever taken by train, but it's interesting, and you have a chance to see a little more of the country's past.

Once we reach Bishkek, we will head to our last group meal before enjoying one or two drinks and sharing a few more travel tales.

Accommodation: *Damas Hotel, Bishkek*

Included Meals: *Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner*

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Day 11

Departure Day

Today, it's time to bid goodbye to Kyrgyzstan.

Although the tour is over, we hope you'll be flying home with a head full of memories and stories to share with your friends, family and fellow Soviet enthusiasts!

END OF TOUR

Included Meals: *Breakfast*