

The Land of Adventure

For many, Kyrgyzstan is the synonym for extreme tourism. Thanks to its mountainous landscape the country is gradually becoming a hot spot for all adrenaline enthusiasts.

Climbing

Kyrgyzstan provides a venue for the most extreme climbers in the world. The northern Tien Shan's highest summit is Peak Pobeda (7439m). First climbed in 1943, Pobeda is the most northern seventhoussender of Earth. Not far from Peak Pobedy rises Khan Tengri (6995 m), "Lord of the Sky". This towering pyramid first climbed in 1936 each summer attracts climbers from all over the world.



In the south of Kyrgyzstan in the Pamirs is Peak Lenin (7,134 m). With easy routes up its broad face this peak attracts climbers going into altitude for the first time. High altitude climbing in Kyrgyzstan shows great potential for growth, with no peak fees and easy access the area could become a destination point as Nepal and Pakistan.

The southwest of Kyrgyzstan provides excellent opportunities for mountain climbing and trekking up to 4000 m which is the altitude where the glaciers start. Here remote valleys and soaring granite walls first attracted large numbers of Soviet climbers in the 1980s. This type of mountain tourism also is possible in the accessible peaks near Bishkek, wooded valleys of southern Issyk Kul, as well as glaciers of the northern Tien Shan.

Skiing

Kyrgyzstan has a lot of opportunities for skiing and heliskiing in the mountains too. 95% of the territory of the country is lying in the mountains of Tien-Shan. Hundreds of virgin slopes are waiting for the skiers who love wild nature and nice free runs on the fresh snow.

Eco trekking, through which the tourists discover both local culture as well as the nature, is a growing trend in the country. Kyrgyz are one of the few remaining nations that still use yurts as seasonal dwellings and keep alive their traditions of moving into the high mountains in summer to tend to sheep, horses and cattle. The high mountain lakes and pastures of the Naryn region attract more and more eco tourists each year. These are tourists that have hiked in mountains in their own countries but still seek new adventures.



Cycling

Cycling is also a great way of seeing Kyrgyzstan. The standard of roads varies greatly. The main Bishkek to Osh road (650 km) has been upgraded recently and is up to Western European standards. The other main roads are not in very good condition, but are fit for cycling. Secondary roads are almost all gravel tracks. Some of these can be quite strenuous.

To make the most of a tour in Kyrgyzstan you need a mountain bike or a robust tourer that can cope with the gravel tracks.

Horse Riding

Horse riding is also quite popular with the tourists. Few places on earth can claim such a fine tradition of horsemanship, or a life so orientated around the horse, and local horsemen will guide you through the verdant, flower-filled valleys, across the wide open steppe lands and over the high mountain passes. The best way to glimpse Kyrgyzstan from the locals' perspective is on horseback. Kyrgyz horses are hardy, wiry beasts, purpose-built for high altitude and rough paths.

Particularly recommended areas to explore on horseback are the foothills of the Kyrgyz Ala-Too, the Issyk-Kul to Kazakhstan trek via Balbay, the route from near Kochkor to Lake Song-Kul and, for more experienced riders, the Tien-Shan and At-Bashy mountains.



Rafting

Whitewater rafting is an exotic way to relax in Kyrgyzstan. For trips starting at half a day there is the Chui River, which flows through the austere scenery of the eerie Boom canyon, just two hours from Bishkek by car, and also the nearby Chong Kemin river. Further afield and more rigorous are trips on the Suusamyr valley (Levels 3-4), including a trip through flooded marshlands and on the Kekemeren river (Levels 2-4), through fast-changing landscape at the western edge of Suusamyr valley.

To the west of Naryn, rafting trips go through the dramatic gorges of the Naryn river (Levels 3–4), while camping with nomads. In the autumn of 1999 a group of rafters from Russia took on the magnificent marble canyons of the perilous Sary Jaz river – and lived to tell the tale.

Santa Claus Lives in Kyrgyzstan?

Hoping to revive its shaky tourism industry, Kyrgyzstan declared itself the new home of Santa Claus. Citing Swedish engineering firm that determined the ideal spot for Santa's main office as Kyrgyzstan since it is the geographic center of the world, officials in this predominantly Muslim country quickly moved to capitalize on the finding. They named a mountain peak after Santa, to join Mounts Lenin, and Yeltsin, and declared 2008 "The Year of Santa Claus".

<http://www.kyrgyzjer.com>

Date: 2009-01-26

Article link: <http://www.tourism-review.com/travel-tourism-magazine-the-land-of-adventure-article767>