

# TURKMENISTAN - THE COUNTRY STILL LIVING IN THE PAST



personality came to an end.

Turkmenistan does not belong to either the richest or most charming countries in the world. Though on the other hand, its very bizarre character, sad history and traditional way of life make it a very peculiar and interesting place to visit. Last year, the self-proclaimed president, 'the Father to All Turkmen', Saparmurat Niyazov died and thus the horror-like era of the cult of his

Turkmenistan does not have the most convenient neighbors. It lies in Central Asia and is surrounded by Iran and Afghanistan to the South, and Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan to the North. Until 1991, the country belonged to the Soviet Union, and soon after this unfortunate empire crashed, the Communist leader Niyazov usurped the power to rule over the country.

The major economic potential of Turkmenistan lies in its natural gas reserves. The quickly evolving industry may finally bring the much needed financial contribution to the state treasury.

Visitors who come here will soon notice how tightly run this state is. The police are everywhere, as well as the secret informers. There is almost no freedom of expression, the independent media don't exist, and internet access is strictly forbidden.

No wonder that local people try not to draw too much attention to themselves. The traditional life of the Turkmen is that of nomadic shepherds. The most precious aspect of their traditions, which incidentally is much praised all around the world, are the local oriental rugs. They are famous due to the rich geometric patterns and intricate designs, which are now often copied in India and Pakistan. Those who make them often come to sell their best work to the capital of Turkmenistan, Ashgabat, to the traditional markets, which present a major tourist attraction of the region.

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