

KYRGYZSTAN RIDING ADVENTURES

In association with Alexandra Tolstoy Travel

5 - 16 JUNE 2024

FROM
£5,015
PER PERSON

Tour Leader: Malika McCosh


The Ultimate
TRAVEL COMPANY



This 10-night camp-to-camp ride is designed for intermediate and above level riders who are willing to embrace the outdoors, explore remote wildernesses, and immerse themselves in a different culture. We begin in Bishkek where we explore the capital city of Kyrgyzstan. From here we make our way southwards towards Osh, arriving at the Sary-Chelek Nature Reserve, a natural paradise known for its outstanding beauty and only accessible to a limited number of visitors per year. It is here we meet the skilled local horsemen and their horses who play a crucial role in the upcoming adventure.

From our first campsite we ride out into the wild, untamed beauty of the Tien Shan Mountains, passing along rugged mountain paths, through ancient walnut forests and across wildflower-strewn valleys dotted with alpine lakes. Riding approximately six hours per day, with a break for a picnic lunch, our journey takes us over remote mountain passes and plateaus that offer a unique glimpse into the lives of nomadic shepherds and their families who spend their summers grazing sheep in these elevated regions.

Each night we retire to a private mobile camp set up by the dedicated back-up team with individual tents and a mess tent. Here we eat delicious home-cooked meals at tables laid with Uzbek pottery and lit by oil lamps. This remarkable journey ends as we bid farewell to our trusty horse companions.

We return to Bishkek, round off our Kyrgyz adventure with souvenir shopping and more cultural exploring, before flying home.



12 - DAY ITINERARY, DEPARTING 5 JUNE 2024

5 June London / Istanbul

Suggested flights (not included in the cost of the tour) Turkish Airlines TK 1986 departing London Heathrow at 16.40 hrs arriving Istanbul at 22.30 hrs.

6 June Istanbul / Bishkek

Connect to TK 344 departing Istanbul at 00.45 hrs arriving Bishkek at 08.45 hrs. You are met from your flight and transferred by private vehicle to a hotel in Bishkek. After resting in the hotel, enjoy lunch in the 'Bukhara' restaurant, followed by time to explore the city with an English-speaking guide.

Founded by the Russians in the 19th century and dominated by the snowy peaks of the Tien Shan mountains, Bishkek is a pleasant, leafy city with wide boulevards, parks and large squares. Its famous sights include the enormous Alatau Square and the dramatic statue of Manas, the Kyrgyz epic hero.

7 June Bishkek / Suusamyр Valley

After an early breakfast, you are driven south-west from the city in a private vehicle to start your horse riding adventure (the drive is approximately ten hours). The route is beautiful and crosses over dramatic mountain passes and the

expansive Suusamyр Valley, full of nomads with their yurts and herds of animals. Lunch is at a charming local restaurant en-route. In the evening, arrive at camp in time for dinner. Night in camp.

8 June Kizel Kel

After breakfast, meet the horses and their owners, the local horsemen/guides, who allocate their mounts carefully to suit each rider. Once mounted, set off along a rocky river path, and then through magnificent wooded mountains and wildflower meadows. Enjoy a picnic lunch on a high meadow, then continue through woodland to the picturesque Kizel Kel village, passing charming, vernacular houses and gardens full of flowers and animals. Tonight's camp is on the bank of a crystal-clear mountain river where you can have a swim before dinner.

9 June Kizel Kel / Sary Chelek

This morning's ride is over mountains covered in wildflowers in spring and offering magnificent views of the valleys below. Lunch is a picnic en-route. After passing over Tas-Bel Pass, descend through a settlement of small farmsteads and enter the national park of Sary Chelek. Camp is in a beautiful and verdant valley, with a river running below.

10 June Sary Chelek / Lake Iri-Kel

The ride today is through walnut forests, up a stony track with opportunities to trot. Leaving the track, ride through orchards of wild apple and plum trees before skirting one of the park's seven beautiful lakes and, after crossing at a ford, stop for a picnic lunch next to the park ranger's little house. After lunch, more riding through meadows and orchards with chances to canter before reaching the beautiful campsite on the shore of the turquoise waters of Lake Iri-Kel. Surrounded by mountains and meadows of wildflowers, you can swim in the pristine lake. Two nights spent here.

11 June Sary Chelek

Ride around five of the lakes of Sary Chelek Reserve, surrounded by dramatic alpine scenery. Lunch on the shores of the main lake, at a local chai khana (tea house). In the afternoon, ride back to camp.

12 June Sary Chelek / Lake Kara-Suu

Today takes us over the beautiful Kotorma Pass (altitude 2,446 m) to Lake Kara-Suu. The route up is steep and narrow, but ably negotiated by the local Kyrgyz horses. Part of the path is taken on foot to avoid any



stones dislodged by the horses' hooves. On reaching the top, take in the magnificent view – often with griffon eagles circling above – before beginning to pick your way downhill, passing between tall boulders and waist-high eremurus. After lunch and tea in a local yurt, ride over a lunar landscape of rocks to the banks of Lake Kara-Suu, set on a high plateau. Here you can watch a game of ulak (a variation on polo but using the body of a headless dead goat) and in the evening enjoy a campfire and delicious goat kebabs.

13 June Lake Kara-Suu / Kizel Kel

Breakfast in camp and set off riding again, descending from Lake Kara-Suu past a dramatic waterfall back to the village of Kizel Kel. This will be the last evening in camp together.

14 June Kizel Kel / Bishkek

Final breakfast immersed in nature. Say goodbye to the horses and local team and make your way back to Bishkek by road transfer. Relax in the minibus and watch as the country whizzes by, stopping for lunch in a local dumpling restaurant en route. After arriving back at the hotel in Bishkek, dinner is in a delicious and atmospheric Georgian restaurant.

15 June Bishkek

Breakfast in the hotel and a full day in Bishkek. Visit the vibrant

Osh Bazaar and shop for colourful shyrdak felt rugs, spices and handmade leather goods, followed by a tour of the Museum of Fine Arts with its wonderful collection of historical Kyrgyz art and textiles. Lunch and dinner are in local restaurants.

16 June Bishkek / London

Breakfast and transfer to the airport for your flight home. Suggested flights (not included) Turkish Airlines TK 345 departing Bishkek at 10.10 hrs arriving Istanbul at 13.05 hrs, connecting to TK 1971 departing Istanbul at 14.50 hrs arriving London Heathrow at 16.45 hrs.

TOUR PRICES PER PERSON

Tour Price	£5,015
Single Supplement	£800

Please note we have not included the cost of the flights in the tour price. Please contact us for prices should you wish to book them through us.

PRICE INCLUDES

- Accommodation throughout as shown in the itinerary
- Breakfast, lunch and dinner daily
- Soft drinks, water, beer
- Riding guides and equipment
- Backup team including a large truck and comfortable camping
- The services of your tour leader throughout

PRICE EXCLUDES

- International flights
- Travel insurance
- Wine, spirits
- Items of personal expenditure (e.g. telephone calls / laundry etc.)
- Government levies or taxes introduced after costing and publication of this programme on 17/08/23





YOUR TOUR LEADER



MALIKA MCCOSH

Malika McCosh is a writer who grew up in Thailand, Somalia, New York and Ukraine because of her father's job at the UN. After studying Russian and French at Oxford, she joined a Household Cavalry expedition of 25 soldiers as Russian interpreter (and only female and civilian) as they drove from London to Baku, through Turkey and Georgia, over three months. Shortly after, she met her future husband by chance in a London pub, and started a new chapter of living abroad, this time as a diplomat's wife. Together they lived in Kathmandu, Damascus and Istanbul from where she wrote about travel, business and culture for *The Times*, *Conde Nast Traveller*, *Monocle* and *Cornucopia* ("Turkey for connoisseurs"). In Istanbul she started a social enterprise for Syrian refugee women called *Knitstanbul* which provides income for women through knitting and crochet. She is a bilingual French speaker, speaks good Russian and improving Turkish. She loves Kyrgyzstan for the kaymak (clotted cream), its unique blend of the Turkic and Soviet, two cultures she knows well and loves, for the opportunity to speak Russian without incurring tensions, and because 'Malika' seems to be such a popular Kyrgyz name that she sees it everywhere when there! She is an old friend of Alexandra's and they share many interests. Malika was a paying client on Alexandra's expedition in May 2023. She is a mother of three and divides her time between London and the Scottish Borders.



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