AT-BASHI

KYRGYZSTAN: RIDING BEYOND THE SILK ROAD

In association with Alexandra Tolstoy Travel

22 September - 3 October 2027

Tour Leader: Vadim

FROM
£7,935
PER PERSON

The Ultimate
TRAVEL COMPANY

KYRGYZSTAN:
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THE SILK ROAD

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At Bashi is Kyrgyzstan at its most exhilarating: immense open steppe made for long canters, isolated villages where horses still outnumber cars, and the Tien Shan rising along the Chinese border. This 12-day journey takes us through one of the country's least-visited regions, with a rare insight into its nomadic, Silk Road and Soviet heritage.

The journey begins and ends in Bishkek, a leafy, low-rise capital framed by mountains, before travelling south into the Naryn Region and the At Bashi range.

This is fast, varied riding. We canter for miles across rolling foothills and seemingly endless steppe, then follow rocky gorges and glacial rivers into more enclosed mountain country. The Kyrgyz horses are exceptionally fit and sure-footed, bred for precisely this terrain.

Yet the great pleasure of At Bashi is that the landscape is lived in. We ride amongst shepherds and their animals, through farmland and villages and past summer yurts scattered across the pastures. Tourism has barely made an impression here, so encounters happen naturally as we travel through rather than being arranged for visitors. Traces of the old Silk Road remain throughout the region, culminating at Tash Rabat on the ancient route towards China.

Unlike riding journeys based from a fixed camp or lodge, we travel continuously on horseback, with our private mobile camp moving ahead of us each day. This allows us to cover real distance and wake each morning somewhere new, without sacrificing comfort: spacious British-made tents, padded camp beds, hot water for washing, a separate mess tent, and generous meals freshly prepared by our three cooks. Dinner is served at proper tables by oil lamp, followed by homemade cakes and, whenever the evening allows, a campfire. It is this combination of a true journey and an unusually high level of comfort in such isolated country that makes Alexandra Tolstoy Travel distinctive.

12-Day Itinerary

Departing 22 September 2027

22 MAY LONDON / ISTANBUL

Suggested flights (not included): Turkish Airlines TK 1986 departing London Heathrow at 16.40, arriving Istanbul at 22.30.

23 SEPTEMBER ISTANBUL / BISHKEK (HOTEL)

Arrive in Bishkek and transfer to the Asia Mountains Hotel. After time to rest or swim in the outdoor pool, enjoy lunch in the hotel garden before a private guided tour of the Museum of Fine Arts. Its richly patterned felt rugs, embroidered textiles and objects from nomadic yurt life introduce us to the motifs and symbols of Kyrgyz culture, drawing on both ancient Tengric beliefs and Islam. It is a visual language we will see repeated in yurts, homes and villages throughout the journey.

Dinner in a local restaurant within walking distance of our hotel.

24 SEPTEMBER BISHKEK / BOSOGO (CAMP)

2,600m

Today we leave Bishkek for the seven-hour drive south into the Naryn Region, watching the city and cultivated plains gradually give way to the mountains.

We stop for lunch in Kochkorka with Fatima, who comes from a dynasty of felt makers. Her small museum and shop are filled with feltwork and textiles made over generations.

By late afternoon we reach our first camp, hidden in a valley amongst pine-covered mountains. Dinner is served in the mess tent by the light of oil lamps, with food drawing on the Kyrgyz, Uzbek, Uighur and Russian influences of the Silk Road and home-baked cakes a daily fixture.

After dinner we light a campfire overlooking the valley. With almost no artificial light for miles, the Milky Way stretches above us.

25 SEPTEMBER RADIAL RIDE (CAMP)

18km riding · 2,600m

Our first ride takes us into the Selkinchek mountain range, a little-travelled landscape of high valleys and narrow paths where the Kyrgyz film *Kozho-Zhash – Descendant of the Snow Leopard* was shot.

From camp we climb towards the Kyndy Pass at 3,400m. Depending on the season, we pass summer yurts surrounded by herds of mares, sheep and cattle grazing on the high pastures, and may be invited inside to drink kumiss, the fermented mare's milk that is an essential part of Kyrgyz nomadic life.

After crossing the pass, we stop for lunch in a remote valley, occasionally encountering lone shepherds and their dogs moving livestock. We then loop back to camp after around five hours in the saddle.

26 SEPTEMBER OZGORUSH VILLAGE (CAMP)

23km riding · 2,300m

Today we leave the high mountains and descend towards the isolated village of Ozgorush, riding through farmland and amongst herds of grazing animals before continuing to our camp in the Zhol-Bogoshtu Gorge.

Once the horses are settled, there is the opportunity to drive back to Ozgorush in the early evening, when village life is at its most animated. Several generations live together under one roof in cob houses; enormous haystacks are piled up for winter, hollyhocks grow beside rickety fences and elegant Taigan hunting dogs lie in the yards. Children play chükö with sheep knuckle bones in the road as cows, horses and sheep make their way home for the night.

Ozgorush is far from the tourist path, and our evening here is a chance to observe village life as it is truly lived. The closeness between village life, yurt life and the land is particular to Kyrgyzstan, where people have lived from the land for generations while leaving remarkably little mark upon it.

Itinerary continued

27 SEPTEMBER ZHOL-BOGOSHTU GORGE / BASH-KAYNDY (CAMP)

24km riding · 2,300m

Today we ride further through the foothills of the At Bashi range, meeting few people other than shepherds moving their animals across the open country. Along the way we pass the enormous hillside graveyards that are such a distinctive feature of rural Kyrgyzstan, their elaborate tombs and monuments visible from miles away.

Our next camp is set at the foot of a gorge beside a glacial river. The water is icy enough for a bracing dip, and doubles as our river fridge for chilling drinks before dinner.

28 SEPTEMBER SHAAR WATERFALL / ZHANYGUCH VILLAGE (CAMP)

46km riding · 2,000m

Today we ride up the gorge to Shaar Waterfall, the deepest-drop waterfall in Central Asia, following rocky mountain paths to the foot of the falls. On the way we may encounter a lone shepherd checking his animals or, in season, a hunter.

We return to the bottom of the gorge for a picnic lunch before the pace changes. Over the final 20km we canter across open foothills, through thickets of sea buckthorn and past an 18th-century mosque to our camp outside the village of Zhanyguch. Bred for this terrain, the Kyrgyz mountain horses are exceptionally fit and sure-footed.

29 SEPTEMBER ZHANYGUCH / POGRANICHNIK (CAMP)

31km riding · 2,430m

We begin at Koshoy Korgon, the remains of a great medieval mud-brick fortress that once guarded the Silk Road through the At Bashi Valley. Dating principally from the Karakhanid period, its massive walls enclose an area roughly 250 metres square, while its name is linked in Kyrgyz legend to Koshoy, companion of the epic hero Manas.

We ride straight through the ancient fortress, wonderfully free of barriers and signs, before setting off across the foothills. There is plenty of cantering as we pass through villages and open country towards Pogranichnik.

Our camp is one of the most beautiful of the journey, at the foot of a gorge with magnificent views up to the At Bashi mountains. Above us is an extraordinary graveyard of mud-brick mausoleums, where Soviet hammers and sickles sometimes sit alongside Islamic crescent moons, a striking visual reminder of the meshing of Kyrgyz and Soviet history.

30 SEP POGRANICHNIK / TASH RABAT (CAMP)

32km riding · 3,200m

Today we ride towards Tash Rabat, Kyrgyzstan's most important Silk Road monument. We begin by crossing an immense expanse of steppe, almost entirely without landmarks, with the At Bashi mountains stretching along the horizon and the road to the Torugart Pass and Xinjiang snaking to our right. There is plenty of open ground for long canters before the landscape changes abruptly and the route narrows between enormous rock faces.

From here we follow the Kara-Koyun River higher into the valley, passing Tash Rabat itself, a remarkable stone caravanserai that once sheltered travellers and their animals on the Silk Road routes between Central Asia and China.

We continue up the valley to camp near a yak farmer, high amongst the mountains. In the evening the last light catches the surrounding peaks, and this high, open valley produces some of the most extraordinary sunsets of the journey.

1 OCTOBER TASH RABAT / BISHKEK (HOTEL)

After breakfast we begin the seven-hour journey back to Bishkek, stopping in Kochkorka for lunch in a private home, a final glimpse of Kyrgyz hospitality.

Arrive in Bishkek in the late afternoon and return to the Asia Mountains Hotel.

Dinner this evening is at a local restaurant.

2 OCTOBER BISHKEK (HOTEL)

We start at Osh Bazaar, where Bishkek comes to shop. Stalls are heaped with kurut, nuts, dried fruit and jars of mountain honey, while elsewhere you can buy saddles, bridles and almost anything needed for a horse, alongside felt rugs and slippers.

Lunch is at Faiza, a much-loved, no-frills Bishkek institution serving Kyrgyz favourites, before an afternoon on foot exploring the city's Soviet architecture. Bishkek is particularly rich in Soviet architecture, from monumental Stalinist buildings to the adventurous concrete Modernism of the 1970s and 80s. Look closely and buildings and mosaics make witty nods to Kyrgyz nomadic culture, weaving traditional motifs into an unmistakably Soviet aesthetic.

Dinner is at a Georgian restaurant, with khachapuri, khinkali and other dishes from one of the great cuisines of the former Soviet world.

3 OCTOBER BISHKEK / LONDON

Transfer to the airport for your onward journey.

"I think I left a little part of my soul in this beautiful country"

EMMY MEIKLEJOHN

Your tour leader

Vadim Savin

Born in Kyrgyzstan, Vadim is a fluent English speaker with a deep-rooted connection to the country and an exceptional knowledge of its landscapes, people and traditions.

He has been guiding in the Tien Shan mountains for over thirty years and is known for his instinctive understanding of the terrain, weather and local culture.

Vadim has worked extensively with international film crews, including productions with Joanna Lumley and Steve Backshall, and now leads journeys for Alexandra Tolstoy Travel. Calm, steady and deeply knowledgeable, he is an invaluable presence on any expedition.

Price & What's Included

£7,935
PER PERSON

SINGLE SUPPLEMENT
£800

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.)
- Tips for guides and support team
- Government levies or taxes introduced after costing and publication of this programme on 25/09/2026.

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

VISAS AND ENTRY

UK, EU, US, Canadian and Australian passport holders do not require a visa for stays of up to 30 days. Please check the latest entry requirements before you travel.

WHAT TO PACK

We provide a detailed packing list, as well as suggested reading list. Essentials include jodhpurs, riding boots with a good tread, layers, a warm jacket for evenings and a four-season sleeping bag.

RIDING EXPERIENCE

You should be happy walking, trotting and cantering, and prepared for around six hours a day in the saddle, with a two-hour break for lunch. The traditional Kyrgyz saddles are very comfortable, with soft pads, and our local team provide well-trained horses and full support throughout.

GUIDES AND SUPPORT

You will be accompanied by an experienced English-speaking tour leader and five local horse guides. Two backup vehicles carry a seven-strong support team who move and set up camp, prepare all meals and take care of day-to-day logistics.

TRAVEL RESPONSIBLY

We are committed to responsible travel, supporting local communities and minimising our environmental impact. Guests are asked not to bring wet wipes, to use eco-friendly soap and to respect local customs, wildlife and the natural environment.

WEATHER

Expect warm days, with temperatures up to 25°C, in late spring and early autumn, with cooler mornings and evenings. Conditions in the mountains can change quickly, so be prepared for all weather.

ACCOMODATION

A mix of a comfortable hotel in town and atmospheric private camps in remote locations, with spacious British tents, padded camp beds and a mess tent for eating. Hot water for washing is provided in a separate shower tent each evening. Single rooms and non-sharing tents are available for a single supplement.

FOOD AND DRINK

Three cooks prepare fresh, from-scratch dishes inspired by Kyrgyz, Uzbek, Uighur and Russian cuisine. In the city, meals are taken at some of the best local restaurants. All meals, soft drinks and water are included, with beer and vodka provided in camp. Alcoholic drinks in the city are not included.

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It starts with a conversation

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