



# RIDE WORLD WIDE

## KYRGYZSTAN 2026

### ALEXANDRA TOLSTOY'S SARY CHELEK ADVENTURE

#### RIDE INFORMATION

Kyrgyzstan is a Central Asian state, bordering China, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, which became independent with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Settled by nomadic Kyrgyz tribes from southern Siberia in the 17th century, the area was ruled by various regional powers before coming under Russian and then Soviet rule. The majority of its six million people are Turkic-speaking and nominally Muslim, with a significant Russian minority population living harmoniously in the capital, Bishkek. The country sits in the magnificent Tien Shan ('Heavenly') Mountains and many of the Kyrgyz are still semi-nomadic, spending their summers in yurts high up in the *jailoo* (alpine pastures) with their numerous sheep and horses. The rides we offer in Kyrgyzstan take place in Sary Chelek, a remote 'garden of Eden' a 10 to 12 hour drive south west of Bishkek, that is bursting with wildflowers and home to seven lakes, fruit orchards and walnut forests. Routes have been researched and explored over the years by Alexandra Tolstoy, a fluent Russian speaker, whose love of the area started when she spent 9 months riding the Silk Road in 1999 on horse and camel. This led to a decade exploring Mongolia, Siberia, Russia and Central Asia by horse, as well as publishing a book on her travels and presenting a BBC2 series on communities that revolve around horses. Sary Chelek is the spot she loves most from all her travels - for its beauty and remoteness - although it is an area for adventurous people who enjoy getting off the beaten track and can cope without luxuries! Anyone considering a visit to Kyrgyzstan should also remember that its borders opened relatively recently after years of communism, and it is still very much developing in terms of service and infrastructure. As a result, delays and changes to even the most carefully planned itinerary are always possible and flexibility, an open mind and a willingness to accept local standards and local expectations - which will not match those you are used to at home - are prerequisites!



#### DATES

Ten-night trips are run from set dates in May, June and September, with other dates available on request for groups. See overleaf for departure dates and contact Ride World Wide to check availability.

#### HORSES

The horses used for these rides are locally owned and bred mountain horses, used by shepherds for herding livestock. They are small in height, generally between about 13.2 and 14.2hh, but strong, adaptable and extremely sure-footed. As in many Muslim countries, they do not often geld horses so many are stallions - being kept as a herd they are relaxed and easy going with no fuss between them. They are trained locally, with a slightly different riding style to UK-schooled horses. They go well on a fairly loose, relaxed rein and are easy, responsive and fun to ride.

## TACK

Kyrgyz saddles (which are simple local saddles, padded with velvet blankets) are used with English style stirrups and simple canvas or leather bridles, usually with snaffle-style bits. Saddle bags are provided. Tack is locally made and although fit for purpose is fairly basic, with very little readily available in Kyrgyzstan.

## RIDING

Ten night trips include six days riding, usually with around six hours in the saddle each riding day. Riding time does vary however, particularly as routes are little used so there can be diversions and due to the unpredictable nature of mountain weather which can often mean adjustments to the itinerary. Riding is always broken up with stops to rest and for a picnic lunch. Luggage and camping equipment is transported by back-up vehicles. Groups are limited to a maximum of 12 guests, accompanied by a guide and several local horsemen.



## WEIGHT LIMIT

80kg / 12st 8lbs. Sometimes heavier riders can be accommodated but please contact us to check and if you are close to this please let us know well in advance so arrangements for a suitable horse(s) can be made.

## PACE

Riding is at a moderate to slow pace overall, always governed by the terrain. The route takes you along mountain paths, across alpine valleys, open meadows and through some forest with some opportunities to trot and canter when the terrain allows. There is one mountain pass to cross that involves a steep climb and descent, part of which is done on foot, with the horses taken ahead by the guides.

## RIDING EXPERIENCE

These rides are aimed at riders of an intermediate standard and above. To take part you must be relaxed, comfortable and secure on a horse at a walk, trot and canter. You should be well balanced in the saddle and have experience riding for reasonably long hours at a time, outside in an open environment and over varied, sometimes difficult, terrain. The horses are sensible and extremely foot-sure on the rocky terrain, so they suit riders of different abilities, but as riding is in a remote, mountain area, all participants need to be confident and have a reasonable amount of prior experience. As with all our rides, you will also enjoy your trip much more if you are physically fit - both riding fit and with a reasonably good level of general fitness. If you do not ride regularly at home, we recommend concentrated practice in the months before you go to get used to the hours you will spend on a horse. As well as riding there is usually the opportunity to swim in a lake or river every day.

## TERRAIN, FLORA & FAUNA

The area you ride through is one of the world's last wildernesses and is hardly visited by tourists - generally you encounter nobody but local shepherds and their families. Much of the riding is on untouched ground or shepherds' paths up and down mountains, with magnificent views although occasionally the route follows a rough road (there is some tarmac work through a couple of villages). In May, June and July the wildflowers are spectacular - high meadows are full of tulips, irises, hollyhocks, orchids and numerous other gems - it was from here that Victorian botanists brought many of today's best loved species back to England. In autumn the mountains are an array of colours and ripening fruits - plums and apples can be picked straight from the saddle. Wolves and bears live high up in the mountains (although are rarely seen) and birds of note include griffon vultures, golden eagles and the sweetest voiced nightingales.

## GUIDES & SAFETY

Rides are normally led by Vasily Berezhnoi or Vadim Savin, both English-speaking experienced riders and photographers who know the area very well and have led groups from all over the world. Alexandra will accompany a ride in September, and Malika McCosh (an experienced traveller who has led several rides in Kyrgyzstan) will accompany rides in May and September. Vasily and Vadim are qualified in First Aid and carry a satellite 'phone and first aid kit at all times. There is also a further back-up team, made up of two drivers, two cooks and two camp workers, as well as four to six local horsemen. The latter are often the owners of the horses and know them, and the terrain, extremely well. They are on hand to help with anything from leading a horse to picking up a dropped water bottle, as well as tacking up and untacking. Alexandra has been working with the team since 2003.

## ACCOMMODATION

Accommodation for the first and last two nights is in the capital Bishkek, at a comfortable small hotel with outdoor swimming pool and pretty garden. All bedrooms here have en-suite bathroom. Other nights are spent camping along the riding route. Whilst camps, which are moved ahead (with luggage) by the back-up team, are simple, a tremendous effort is made to ensure they are as comfortable as possible with equipment such as tables and chairs provided and added touches such as beautiful Uzbek china and table linen adding to the unique feel. Camps are set up in stunning settings beside a rushing river or lake, to make the most of panoramic views of the mountains. Spacious British-made three-man dome tents (one per couple) are supplied for sleeping and the back-up team will strike camp as you depart on your horse and have set up the next, before you arrive at the new site. There is a big "mess" tent for eating, with sides that open-up to embrace the views, a beautifully laid table for breakfast and dinner, loo tents (shared) and a 'wash tent' - hot water is provided each day on arrival in camp. You will need to take your own sleeping bag and a sleeping mat, ideally a thermarest / camping mattress. Accommodation is based on two sharing and if you are travelling alone the single supplement is payable for a separate room/tent.



## MEALS

The camp back-up team boasts two fabulous local cooks who prepare freshly made meals from the local cuisine - a fusion of Russian and Central Asian cooking. Plenty of vegetables and fruit are available and nearly all the ingredients are organic and local. Breakfast might be fresh local flatbread, butter and homemade jam or honey, with eggs, pancakes, porridge and yoghurt also available. There is tea and freshly brewed coffee to drink. Lunch is a picnic out riding - bread, cheese, cold meat, buckwheat or pasta and tomatoes with perhaps tea and biscuits for pudding. Dinner always begins with a soup, followed by perhaps handmade dumplings, ratatouille, stuffed peppers or *plov* (pilaf with lamb). Vegetarians can, of course, be catered for, but please let us know in advance by filling in the dietary requests on the booking form. When in Bishkek meals are included at local restaurants where you can sample local and Georgian cuisine. Kyrgyz beer and soft drinks are included with lunch & dinner. If you prefer wine or spirits, you should bring your own duty free or pay the extra.



## WEATHER

Rides are run from set dates between late May and September when the weather in the area is best. During winter months (November to April) there is deep snow on the high pastures and the mountain passes are closed. In spring and early summer, the ground is scattered with wildflowers; in July, August and September, fruits are ripening and the mountains turn golden by autumn. Historic average daytime temperatures between May and September are roughly - May 21°C; June 26°C; July 28°C; August 28°C; September 22°C - although and it may be up to ten degrees hotter at midday and about ten degrees colder at nightfall and weather is anyway unpredictable! In Bishkek it is hotter still in the summer. Rain is possible at any time of year, particularly in May and early June, so you always need to be prepared for this.

## WHAT TO BRING

We will send you a list when you book.

## ITINERARY

The following is an example of the itinerary planned for set departure rides between May and September. Please note that it is only an example and may be changed in your guides' absolute discretion if they consider this best due to weather or other local conditions.

[Eg Departure from London Heathrow with Turkish Airlines overnight to Bishkek, via Istanbul eg TK1986 dep LHR 16.40, arrive Istanbul 22.30]

**Day 1** - [Connect with TK 344, depart Istanbul 00.45 arrive Bishkek at 08.45]. You will be met from your flight and transferred by private vehicle to a hotel in Bishkek where the first night is spent. After resting in the hotel, lunch in the 'Bukhara' restaurant, and time to explore the city with an English-speaking guide. Founded by the Russians in the 19<sup>th</sup> C and situated at the foot of the Tien Shan mountains with views of the surrounding glaciers, Bishkek's famous sights include the enormous Alatau Square and the dramatic statue of Manas, the Kyrgyz epic hero. (L,D)



**Day 2** - After an early breakfast, set off driving south-west to start your riding adventure (approx. ten hours' drive by private vehicle). The route is beautiful and crosses over dramatic mountain passes and the expansive Suusamyry Valley, full of nomads with their yurts and flocks of animals. Lunch at a charming local restaurant en-route. In the evening arrive at camp in time for dinner. Night in camp. (B,L,D)

**Day 3** - After breakfast meet the horses and their owners, the local horseman/guides, who will allocate their mounts carefully to suit each rider. Once mounted, set off from the poplar lined adobe village, and head for the extraordinary panoramic views of the mountains. Tonight's camp is beside a river, under the shade of walnut trees, with the opportunity to swim and watch passing shepherds with their sheep, goats, mares and donkeys. Dinner & night in camp. (B,L,D)



**Day 4** - Today's ride passes charming vernacular houses and gardens full of flowers and animals, and then through magnificent wooded mountains and wildflower meadows. Enjoy a picnic lunch on a high meadow before continuing through woodland back to the picturesque Kara Suu village. Tonight's camp is on the bank of a crystal-clear mountain river where you can have a swim before dinner. (B,L,D)

## ITINERARY cont.

**Day 5** - 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 into the national park of Sary Chelek. 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 a ford, stop for a picnic lunch next to the park ranger's little house. After lunch, more riding through meadow and orchards with chances to canter before reaching the beautiful campsite on the shore of the turquoise lakes of Lake Iri-Kul. Surrounded by mountains and meadows of wildflowers, you can swim in the pristine lake. Two nights are spent here. (B,L,D)

**Day 6** - Today's ride is a circuit, taking in views of five lakes within the Sary Chelek Reserve, surrounded all day by the most dramatic alpine scenery. Lunch on the shores of the principal lake, at a local *chai khana* (tea house). In the afternoon ride back to camp with the opportunity for along canter across the valley. (B,L,D)



**Day 7** - Today takes you over the beautiful Kotorma Pass (altitude 2446 m) to Lake Kara-Suu. The route up to the pass is steep and narrow, but ably negotiated by the local Kyrgyz horses. For part of the path, you walk on foot to avoid any stones dislodged by the horses' hooves, and on reaching the top, take in the magnificent view - often with golden 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 an almost 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 dead goat) and in the evening enjoy a campfire and the most delicious goat kebabs. (B,L,D)

**Day 8** - Breakfast in camp and set off riding again, descending from Lake Kara-Suu past a huge waterfall back to the village of Kizel Kel. This will be the final evening in camp together. (B,L,D)



## ITINERARY cont.

**Day 9** - After a final breakfast surrounded by 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. (B,L,D)

**Day 10** - Breakfast in the hotel and a full day in Bishkek. You can visit the colourful Osh Bazaar and shop for *shyr dak* - colourful felt rugs - or spices and handmade leather goods, as well as visit the Museum of Fine Arts with its wonderful collection of historical Kyrgyz art and textiles. Lunch and dinner are in local restaurants. (B,L,D)

**Day 11** - Breakfast and transfer to the airport for your flight home. [Eg Turkish Airlines TK 345 departing at 10.10 arriving Istanbul 13.05, connect with TK 1971 departing 14.50, arriving LHR at 16.45 arriving London Heathrow at 16.45] (B)

## DATES & RATES 2026

### Sary Chelek Adventure (11 days / 10 nights, 6 days riding)

11th to 22nd May with Malika McCosh **£6135 per person**

3rd to 14th June with Vadim Savin **£6135 per person**

9th to 20th September with Malika McCosh **£7215 per person**

24th September to 5th October with Alexandra Tolstoy **£7215 per person**

Single supplement £800

(Prices are based on a minimum of 8 guests).

**Rates include** - 10 nights accommodation based on two people sharing a twin/double room and tent (3 nights hotel / 7 nights camping), all riding, guiding services and equipment, all meals within itinerary and tea, coffee and local beer with meals, group transfers within itinerary and airport transfers on first and last day at set times. Rates assume twin shared rooms / tents and the single supplement is payable if you are travelling alone.

**Rates do not include** - International flights / travel to Kyrgyzstan and taxes, any visa fees, personal medical / travel insurance (which you **must** have), wine, spirits and additional non-included drinks, personal items at hotels (eg telephone calls, laundry etc) and any tips you may wish to leave.

**Single supplement** - Please also note that if you book alone, you will need to pay the supplement for a single room/tent. **This will be charged on all single bookings** unless you have arranged a sharer.

Private rides and other dates available on request for groups during July & August.



## FLIGHTS & TRAVEL INFORMATION

The meeting point for the ride is Bishkek airport. Arrival can be at any time on Day 1 and departure at any time on Day 11 as the first and last nights are spent in Bishkek. In most cases the best option is to fly via Istanbul with Turkish Airways or via Dubai with Fly Dubai. Flights from London start from approximately £700 economy return plus taxes depending on time of year and availability. We are happy to advise on, or quote for, flights (our ATOL number is 6213).

## GENERAL VISA & HEALTH INFORMATION

(NB this is a brief outline - further information will be sent to you if you make a confirmed booking)

**Visas** Visas are not required for British, EU or US Passport holders to visit Kyrgyzstan for a stay of 60 days or less.

**Health** No inoculations are legally required to enter Kyrgyzstan if travelling from Europe, but The TravelHealthPro website (NaTHNaC) recommends most travellers are up to date with Tetanus. You should always consult a health professional for further and more detailed personal advice.

(DRAFT 19/09/25)

