

Apricot- 'Sakura' & graceful
cranes in Kyrgyzstan –
beautiful mountain landscapes in
spring colors with Miksture
April 12.th – April 22.th 2023



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Apricot-Sakura, graceful Demoiselle cranes, beautiful landscapes, thermal springs, nomadic culture and crafts, delicious food, active and informal travel with like-minded from different countries. A journey for the traveler, interested in culture and nature. Tour-leader and local guides guide in English, Danish (Swedish, Norwegian) and German. Of course, we bring along guide(s) speaking Romance language if needed. Max. 12 participants on this unique journey.

A trip to Kyrgyzstan is a trip to Central Asia's welcoming and hospitable Silk Road culture. Central Asia has always been a patchwork of ethnicities and traditions. Wedged between Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, China and Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan travellers throughout history have feasted their senses on Kyrgyzstan's intoxicating mix of culture, wildlife, and dramatic landscapes of the fabled Tien Shan Mountains.

Kyrgyzstan is a magnificent destination at any time of the year, but the Kyrgyz spring is particularly beautiful. Short and intense, beginning ultimo March, when waves of high-pressure systems bring dry weather, clear skies, and warmer diurnal temperatures. In few days the winter snow and ice melts and the soil begin to thaw. From then, the springtime goes fast.

On this comprehensive 10-day Kyrgyzstan journey, we make our own Central Asian "apricot-Sakura" amidst the beautiful Tien-Shan Mountains. Our itinerary is comprehensive, and we have included many highlights, e.g., watching hundreds of roosting Demoiselle Cranes in eastern Kyrgyzstan, nocturnal excursion for howling wolves and whistling owls, getting acquainted with the ancient Kyrgyz nomadic culture, food, and beautiful crafts (e.g., the famous Shyrdak.



In Japan, celebrating the cherry blossoms (Sakura) is the symbol of the spring, a time of renewal, and the fleeting nature of life. In Kyrgyzstan there is not tradition celebrating the Sakura, but the blossoms of the apricot trees are remarkable. Apricots are one of the first trees to flower in spring. The trees covered in lovely white flowers tinged with pink, and the air is filled with its sweet scents. A major attraction, especially when the delicate flowers frame the majestic snow-capped Tien Shan Mountains, making it extra picturesque and special. Spring is also the time when animals such as marmots wake up after hibernation and migrating birds starts to return. Demoiselle cranes must take one of the toughest migrations in the world to their winter range in India. During their migratory flight south, they have to cross the Himalayan mountains to get to their over-wintering grounds. Many die from fatigue, hunger and predation from Golden eagles. In March and April, they begin their long spring journey back to their northern nesting grounds. In eastern Kyrgyzstan, we visit one site where hundreds of cranes roost while foraging and pair bounding. Like other cranes, it has a dancing display, more balletic than the common crane, with less leaping. It has a loud trumpeting, higher pitched than the common crane. Accommodate comfortable for one night in the traditional yurts (a portable, round tent covered with felt and used as a dwelling by the nomadic Kyrgyz), visiting bustling bazaars, the famous Sunday-animal market in Karakol, meeting the many ethnic Central Asian groups (Dungan, Uighur, Kalmak, Uzbeks, Russians and of course Kyrgyz) that lives here, enjoying outdoor thermal springs, etc.

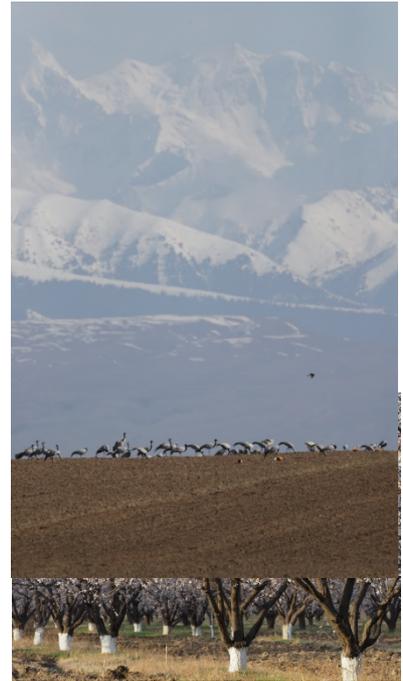
The tour is packaged with international flight from any European country (pls contact us for overseas flights), accommodation and all land arrangements including transport, meals, and excursions in Kyrgyzstan. Our experienced tour leaders and guides lead the tours. In Kyrgyzstan, the nomadic tradition is still alive and after this journey packed with exciting and beautiful events, you will feel alive and refreshed. Welcome!

Day 1. April 12: Departure

Day 2. April 13: Arrival Bishkek: City tour and welcome dinner

Arrive in the capital city of Bishkek. Transfer to the hotel, settle into your room and enjoy the breakfast. Bishkek is the largest city of Kyrgyzstan and is the administrative centre of the Chuy Region. Bishkek is situated at an altitude of about 800 meters, just off the northern fringe of the Kyrgyz Ala-Too Range some 40 kilometres away, an extension of the Tian Shan Mountains. These mountains rise to a height of 4,895 meters and provides a spectacular backdrop to the city. North of the city, a gently undulating steppe extends far north into neighbouring Kazakhstan.

Today, enjoy a guided tour of the city. Head to the centre and explore the city of wide boulevards and marble-faced public buildings combined with numerous Soviet-style apartment blocks surrounding interior courtyards. There are also thousands of smaller privately built houses, mostly outside the city centre. The streets follow a grid pattern, with most flanked on both sides by narrow irrigation channels, watering innumerable trees to provide shade in the hot summers. The central part of the city is laid out on a rectangular grid plan. The city's main street is the east-west Chui Avenue named after the region's main river. In the Soviet era, it was called Lenin Avenue. Along or near it are shops, government buildings, universities, and bazaars. The main north-South Street is Yusup Abdrakhmanov Street, still commonly referred to by its old name, Sovietskaya Street. Several major shopping malls located along it. Today, Bishkek is a modern city with many restaurants and cafes, and with many second-hand European and Japanese cars and minibuses crowding its streets. At the same time, Bishkek still preserves its former Soviet feel with Soviet-period buildings and gardens prevailing over newer structures. Explore the centrally located Ala-Too Square, with lunch in a local restaurant, followed by a visit to the State Museum of Applied Arts, containing examples of traditional Kyrgyz handicrafts, which offers a sweeping



overview of Kyrgyz culture, from stone-age petroglyphs to a wide array of traditional ceremonial costumes. The main government building, the White House, is a huge, seven-story marble block and the former headquarters of the Communist Party of the Kirghiz SSR. You have the afternoon at leisure to explore the city and shop for local crafts. Gather this evening for a welcome dinner. Overnight at the hotel.

Day 3. April 14: Bishkek – Karakol (private chartered bus). Along the Silk Road; Burana Tower
Today, travel overland to Karakol, near the eastern tip of Lake Issyk-Kul, about 380 kilometres from the capital Bishkek. The town offers clear-day backdrops of snowy peaks of the Tian Shan Mountains, contrasted against the old blue shutters and whitewashed walls of some remnant antique colonial-period houses. These recall the town's Russian-era heyday: founded in 1869 as a support town for the then-new garrison of Teploklyuchenka (Ak-Suu), it housed many merchants, officers, and explorers, most famously Nikolai Przhevalsky (in whose honour Karakol was renamed Przhevalsk between 1939 and 1991). Many unique cultures contribute to the town's culinary history and cultural heritage: Kyrgyz, Tatar, Russian, Dungan, Uighur, Kalmyk, Uzbek, and more. Karakol is a fascinating gateway to the region's diverse history, cuisine, and nature. En route, we stop at the Burana Tower, a large minaret in northern Kyrgyzstan. It is located about 80 km east of the country's capital Bishkek, near the town off Tokmok (city of Nightingales). The tower, along with grave markers, some earthworks and the remnants of a castle and three mausoleums, is all that remains of the ancient city of Tokmok, which was established by the Karakanids at the end of the 9th century. The tower was built in the 11th century and was used as a template for other minarets. An external staircase and steep, winding stairway inside the tower enable visitors to climb to the top. It is one of the oldest architectural constructions in Central Asia. The entire site, including the mausoleums, castle foundations and grave markers, now functions as museum and there is a small building on the site containing historical information as well as artifacts found at the site and in the surrounding region. Upon arrival in Karakol, we accommodate in a comfortable hotel for the next two nights. Dinner in town.



Day 4. April 15: Day-excursion; Dancing Demoiselle cranes

Rise early and enjoy breakfast before driving to eastern shore of Issyk Kul. Today we are looking for the elusive Demoiselle Crane on its roosting sites. The Demoiselle crane is slightly smaller than the Common Crane but has similar plumage. When first brought to France from the steppes of Russia, the Demoiselle Crane was so named by Queen Marie Antoinette, for its delicate and maiden-like appearance. Adults has pale bluish grey body plumage, long white feather plume stretches from eye to beyond the head, long black feathers hang from breast, reddish-orange eyes, black legs, short bill. It has a long white neck stripe and the black on the foreneck extends beautiful down over the chest in a plume. It is found in central Euro Siberia, ranging from the Black Sea to Mongolia and North-eastern China. The three eastern populations occurring in eastern Asia, Kazakhstan/central Asia, and Kalmykia (between the Black and Caspian Seas). There are also three remnant populations occurring near the Black Sea and Turkey. The two wintering ranges including India and surrounding countries and north-western Africa cantered in Sudan. Demoiselle cranes must take one of the toughest migrations in the world. In late August through September, they gather in flocks of up to 400 individuals and prepare for their flight to their winter range. During their migratory flight south, demoiselles fly like all cranes, with their head and neck straight forward and their feet and legs straight behind, reaching altitudes of 4,900–7,900 meters. Along their arduous journey, they have to cross the Himalayan Mountains to get to their over-wintering grounds in India. Many die from fatigue, hunger and predation from Golden Eagles. Simpler, lower routes are possible, such as crossing the range via the Khyber Pass. The bird is symbolically significant in the culture of India and Pakistan, where it is known as Koonj. In March and April, they begin their long spring journey back to their northern nesting grounds. In eastern Kyrgyzstan, we visit one site where hundreds of cranes roost while foraging and pair bounding. Like other cranes, it has a dancing display, more balletic than the common crane, with less leaping. It has a loud trumpeting call, lower-pitched than the common crane.

Day 5. April 16: Karakol. Sunday Livestock Market, Przhevalsky Museum and Memorial Set, Dungan Mosque and Orthodox Cathedral of the Holy Trinity

The Karakol livestock Market is famous in the region for being big and friendly, and indeed, it is. We need to come early to this livestock market as most business happens early morning between 5 a.m. and 10 a.m. every Sunday. The day begins with hundreds of farmers and herders trekking into the market from nearby villages with small holdings of stock selling 1 to about 4 animals to gather in the marketplace to trade livestock mainly sheep, cattle, donkeys, and horses etc. This gathering point is a unique opportunity to see and meet the locals, watch the negotiations, see the additional services offered by artisan including hoofing, saddling and the merchants who come to sell food drink and many other merchandise and services. "You can buy anything from the Sunday Market in Karakol except chicken milk and cow's egg." This is a real-life exposure to the Kyrgyz people. There are some amazing characters present. It is dusty, smelly, and crowded, the ground is thick with dung and most people find it wonderful. The creatures get fixed and locals loading and unloading sheep of their new owners into the back of a sedan is a common sight. A spectacle looking quite odd but that seems the way of transportation. It is a livestock market and people trading here for food. Very different to Western style supermarket with prepacked meat. A photographer's paradise but not a petting zoo place. Trading at the market is swift and boisterous between the old traders; animals are carefully inspected, and haggling is done with finger. Keep an ear out for the phrase 'Bosh-bosh!' ('Coming through!') or you risk being ploughed over by a cartload of fat-tailed sheep or one the potential buyers taking the horses for a test ride. On clear days, the backdrop of white-topped mountains is more striking from here than from the town centre. This afternoon, enjoy a visit to Przhevalsky Museum and Memorial Set a 15 km outside the city. The museum hosts the life story of Nikolay Mikhailovich Przhevalsky.

The first Russian Scientist-Geographer, studying in detail the geography, flora and fauna and discovered more than 200 plant species in Central Asia. Przhevalsky also collected an enormous zoological collection, which comprised several thousand of species of plant, animals, birds, fishes, and insects. Beginning from 1870, he arranged four large expeditions to Mongolia, China, and the Tibet. Today there are personal things, documents photos and articles of Przhevalsky kept there. Not far from the Museum, there is the traveller's tomb and monument. In the 1880s, Karakol's population surged with an influx of Dungan's, Chinese Muslims fleeing warfare in China. We visit the pretty, wooden mosque built by Chinese artisans to serve Karakol's community of Dungan's. Designed by a Chinese architect, the

building is constructed entirely without nails and much of its imagery, including a wheel of fire, reflects the Dungan's' pre-Islamic, Buddhist past. Instead of a minaret, the mosque has a wooden pagoda. All colours represent different Dungan cultural concepts, red - protects from evil spirits, yellow - contributes to the accumulation of wealth and brings prosperity and green - symbolizes happiness. Last, we visit the Orthodox Cathedral of the Holy Trinity in Karakol. This is one of something like forty orthodox churches in the country, and a fine example of architecture and its checked history stands as a witness to the commitment and dedication of the community of the faithful. The story of the church goes back to July 1869, when Karakol was a garrison town established as an outpost on the edges of the Tsarist Russian Empire. A chapel was established in the city centre to serve the Cossacks and other troops sent here, and a small brick building on stone foundations was erected. When completed, it was the tallest building in the city, with the tip of the cross standing some 26 meters above the ground with three golden onion domes. Return to hotel. Dinner in town, and overnight at hotel.

Day 6. April 17: Karakol – Tamga (private chartered bus); Southern shore of Issyk Kul, Jeti-Oghuz; red sandstone cliffs - Broken Heart & Seven Bulls

Today, we leave Karakol and drive to Tamga village on the southern shore of Issyk Kul. Along the way, we stop in Jeti Oghuz, a popular destination 20 km from Karakol. With its red sandstone rocks, “Seven Bulls” and the split in half “Broken Heart,” Jeti Oghuz draws in both foreign and domestic visitors alike. Of course, we during all the travel marvel the blooming of apricots in gardens and orchards. Around this time, particularly in April, the apricot trees, blooms and are gorgeous when covered with fragrant pink blossoms before leaves emerge. There are literally dozens of different varieties of apricots, which gives ripe apricots from early summer, right through until late summer. It also gives a lot of variety of flavours and uses. The edible blossoms have a mild apricot flavour with a sweet floral aroma and subtle texture that precede the small, peachy-orange fruits that later develop in the summer. Though their proper name is *Prunus armeniaca*, apricots probably come from China rather than Armenia. The earliest known writings about apricots are from the time of the emperor Yu, around 2200 BC, and some sources say they were known in India in 3000 BC. The Kyrgyz climate is ideal for the apricot trees. The cold weather is necessary for the tree to become dormant and the warm weather to produce fruit. Apricot trees are very vigorous and are usually grafted onto plum rootstocks (or occasionally peach). They can grow into massive trees and are a deciduous tree reaching approximately 9 meters tall with a canopy spanning 6 meters wide. Apricot blossoms are said to symbolize ‘timid love’ and can be given as a gift from an admirer. Their beauty inspired this famous 9th century Japanese Waka-style poem by Sugawara no Michizane: “When the wind blows from the east, Let the wind send your perfume to me, my dear apricot. Though you are no longer with me, do not forget blooming in the spring.” Central Asian apricots considered the most delicious in fruit flavour and texture. Late afternoon we arrive to our cosy guesthouse in Tamga, 1500 meters from the south shore of Issyk Kul. Here we spend the next two nights.

Day 7. April 18: Easy hiking to Tamga Tash; Tibetan Buddhist inscriptions and afternoon excursion to Barskaun mountain gorge; among amazing mountainous landscapes

Today, explore a relaxed hike (or if wished, a relaxed day in the guesthouse) to Tamga Tash, sacred stones discovered in Kyrgyzstan which provide clear evidence for the historic existence of Buddhism in the land. Buddhism arrived in the 1st century AD and flourished in the region until the Western Turks invaded the territory in the 7th century. The forceful arrival of the Turks

sparked the slow decline of Buddhist thought, which was gradually replaced by Islam. The Tamga Tash stones were discovered in the late 19th century near the banks of the Tamga River along the southern perimeter of Lake Issyk-Kul in eastern Kyrgyzstan. Buddhist prayers dated to the 8th-9th centuries and Tibetan petroglyphs are engraved on the stone with the common Buddhist mantra, “Om Mani Padme



Hum” (“Oh, the Pearl Shining in the Lotus Flower!”). The Tamga Tash inscription dates to the Dzungar Khanate of the 15th-17th centuries. The words carved in a rigid and bold bas-relief style, with some letters as large as 10 centimetres. The monolith split in two, which local legend asserts was an act of the epic hero Manas that testifies to his immense, superhuman strength. It is a wonderful hike in arid landscape and orchards, and we will be back for late lunch in the guesthouse. In the afternoon, we drive into the Barskoon gorge. At the beginning of the gorge, grow rare shrubs and steppe grasses. On both slopes of the canyon rise huge Tien-Shan spruce trees. Above 2800 meters, grow juniper groves. Along the road running through the gorge of Barskoon there are unusual monuments such as the Soviet truck on the platform and a bust of the first cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin, vacationing in the sanatorium in Tamga after his flight into space. From the gorge, you can see the snowy peaks of the surrounding mountains; the highest and most beautiful ones are the Peak of Panfilov Heroes (4610 m) and the Peak of the World Peace Council (4310 m). Through the gorge runs the road to the Kumtor gold mine, and it is noteworthy that in many small tributaries of the river can be seen the pieces of golden sand shining in the sun. Dinner in the guesthouse.

Day 8. April 19: Thermal springs and accommodation for one night in nomadic yurts

Today, depart for Bokonbaeva, one hour’s drive from Tamga. First stop is Ak Suu outdoor thermal springs. There is nothing better than a dip in its pools and the hot springs are open all year round. There are several baths of different temperatures. The hottest bath rises above 40 degrees. This is even too hot for some bathers. Fortunately, you can also choose from a less hot bath, and there is even an ice-cold bath to immerse yourself. Bokonbaevo is the main city along the Southern shore of Lake Issyk Kul. It’s a small town that feels more like an outgrown village and in its suburbs, you have wonderful views over farm fields and the snow-capped peaks of the Ala too mountain range. Here we accommodate in yurts close to Lake Issyk Kul. The camp’s idyllic village setting makes it a peaceful place to relax, while you can also get an insight into the daily lives of the Kyrgyz people. The yurts are simple and authentic, with views over the mountains. Every yurt decorated in traditional Kyrgyz style with comfortable beds. All yurts have heating and electricity. There are shared toilet facilities and outdoor showers with hot water in the shared area of the camp. Eating is a social activity here in the main yurt, dining homemade Kyrgyz dishes and fruity desserts, using fresh ingredients from the fields. Afternoon is at leisure to explore the surroundings and relaxation. Overnight in yurts.





Day 9. April 20: Kyrgyz crafts; Shyrdak, beautiful felt carpets and transfer to Bishkek (private bus)

After breakfast, we leave the yurt camp and drive towards Bishkek. We make a stop in Bokonbaeva to experience another Kyrgyz nomadic tradition, namely the art of felt making. Felt is used for building yurts and the beautiful Kyrgyz carpets and rugs. The carpets have traditional patterns and are called Shyrdaks. Each carpet and rug have its own stories to tell with its unique symbols. Shyrdaks were used to cover the floors in the yurts, but even nowadays, every Kyrgyz household decorates its homes with the colourful carpets, and it is a wonderful craft to bring home. After lunch in Bokonabeava we drive to Bishkek and accommodate in a comfortable hotel. Dinner in Bishkek.



Day 10. April 21: Ala Archa National Park; alpine landscapes and wild tulips

Today we make an excursion to Ala Archa National Park, an alpine national park in the Tian Shan Mountains of Kyrgyzstan, established in 1976 and located approximately 40 km south of Bishkek. In Kyrgyz, the archa, which gives the park its name, is a juniper which the Kyrgyz people have traditionally held in special esteem, using smoke from its burning wood to chase away evil spirits. However, the archa is not supposed to be planted near the home, because it is believed gradually to sap the energy from human beings living close-by. The park covers about 200 square kilometres, and its altitude ranges from about 1,500 meters at the entrance to a maximum of 4,895 meters at Semenov-Tian-Shan-sky Peak, the highest peak in the Kyrgyz Ala-Too Range of the Tian Shan. There are more than 20 small and large glaciers and some 50 mountain peaks within the park. Two smaller rivers, the Adygene

and the Ak-Sai, originate from these glaciers' melting waters. We look for birds and plants – at this time of year it's possible to watch some of the 12 species of tulips. Today the majority believes that the birthplace of tulips is Holland, but it is not true. Of course, that's the place we get those elegant bouquets and onion cultivars from, but the birthplace of these plants is Central Asia, and it still is the guardian of wild members of this species. Tulips are ancient plants that emerged about 10 million years ago. The Dutch got them only at the end of the XVI century thanks to Ozhiru de Busbecq diplomat, served as ambassador of the Ottoman Empire, who brought the bulbs of «red lily» to the Austrian Emperor Maximilian II, and finally from the capital of Austria - Vienna professor Carolus Clusius had introduced them to Holland. Turks were first to notice the beauty of tulips; traveling with caravans along the Silk Road, on the Asian steppes and mountain areas, they brought these flowers to Europe, where even before the Dutch began to plant them in their gardens and breed and select these elegant plants. You have the afternoon at leisure to explore the city and shop for local crafts. We meet in the hotel lobby for farewell dinner in one of Bishkek's top restaurants

Day 11. April 22: Travel home

Depart Bishkek. Transfer to the airport early this morning for your international flights home.

ABOUT THE TOUR!

This is an active journey. Of course, the activity level will be adjusted so it fit all clients, and everyone can enjoy this journey. There is certain flexibility, so individual wishes and pace can be respected. We know the areas and the conditions. We are well prepared, and make sure the participants achieve the best possible comfort – tasty, healthy and enough food! Comfortable accommodation and vehicles with experienced drivers. The food is very delicious, and we make priority to present you for food mirroring the regions diverse cultures. We provide mineral water during all tour and serve tea to all meals. During the days we make tea and coffee-breaks.

Prior departure, and usually at booking confirmation, we send a detailed packing list and information about what to bring. Sovietistan Travel are of course always prepared to assist and explain, so please feel free to ask us about every matter.



Kyrgyzstan – Apricot Sakura and graceful cranes. 12.th April – 22.th April 2023

Price per person (in shared double-room):
1.398 USD/PAX

Single room: 300 USD/PAX - Is possible for surcharge in most accommodation; guest-house and hotels. Please note that, single room accommodation may not be available in the one-night accommodation in yurt-camp at Bokonbaeva.

Payments & Terms 500 USD of the trip cost will confirm your place on the tour. The final balance is due 1.th December 2022. All prices are quoted in U.S. dollars and must be paid in U.S. dollars unless other agreed with Sovietistan Travel. Per person pricing is based on double occupancy. The solo rate is paid by participants who specifically request single accommodations and is subject to availability. If you are traveling alone and wish to share accommodations, we will try to match you with a roommate of the same gender. However, if a roommate is not available, the published solo rate will be charged. Please note that solo accommodations are limited and cannot always be guaranteed throughout. For our full set of Terms & Conditions, please visit our website.





Price include: Guiding by Tour Leader from Sovietistan Travel and our team of local guides
• Transportation according program in Kyrgyzstan
• All accommodation in Kyrgyzstan according day-to-day program
• All meals in Kyrgyzstan; indicated by BLD (B (Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner)
• Local beer and wine during dinners at meals in restaurants and cafes
• Necessary permits for Restricted Area sites
• Local entrees and fees in National Parks and other places visited according day-to-day program
• Services of Sovietistan Travel Tour Leader
• Administration from Sovietistan Travel
• Visa support (if needed), e.g. Letter of Invitation (LOI).

Price does NOT include. other transportation not mentioned in the program, International flight ticket to/from Kyrgyzstan
• Land arrangement in Kyrgyzstan
• domestic transport in homeland prior arrival/departure Kyrgyzstan
• Arrangements not mentioned in the program
• Tips to drivers
• Travel insurance – mandatory!
• Money for own expenses.
• Anything strictly personal (e.g., money for own expenses – actually very little needed, laundry, phone calls, any excess luggage charges, snacks).