



# «Culture of Kazakhstan»



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## About Kazakhstan

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- ***Kazakhstan*** is a wealth of frosty mountain peaks, sparkling glaciers, softly rustling evergreen forests, huge rocky canyons bridged by colorful rainbows, emerald mountain lakes, wild rivers, poetic sunrises, and unique plant and animal life.

***Kazakhstan*** is the birthplace of ancient Eurasian civilizations, the motherland of nomadic peoples, and an important part of the Great Silk Road (1,400km).

***Kazakhstan*** is the motherland of the great philosopher and founder of sufism, Khodja Akhmed Yassawi, whose mausoleum and mosque survive in the ancient town of Turkestan. There are twenty-seven thousand ancient monuments throughout the nation: The Saks Burial Mounds (6th-3rd centuries B.C.), Golden Man of Issyk, and countless others.







## **National Flag of the Republic of Kazakhstan**

**The National Flag of the** Republic of Kazakhstan is a piece of right-angled cloth of a sky-blue color with a picture of a golden sun with 32 rays in the center, sitting above a soaring steppe eagle. The flagstaff has a vertical line of national ornamentation. The picture of the sun, its rays, eagle and ornament are gold in color. The width/length ratio of the flag is 1:2.



- **National Emblem of the Republic of Kazakhstan**

The coat of arms of the Republic of Kazakhstan was adopted on June 4, 1992. The authors of the emblem are Zhandarbek Melibekov and Shota Ualikhanov. About 245 projects and 67 description designs of the future arms took part in the final competition.

The National Emblem of the Republic of Kazakhstan is an image of shanyrak, the upper dome-like portion of a yurt, against a sky blue background which irradiates (in the form of sun rays) uyks (supports) set off by wings of mythical horses. The circle shape of the Emblem is a symbol of life and eternity. The shanyrak symbolizes the well-being of family, peace and calm.

A design very similar to the Kazakh shangyraq is used in the flag of neighboring Kyrgyzstan; it is known as "tunduk" in Kyrgyz.

The colour version of the National Emblem of the Republic of Kazakhstan consists of two colours: gold and sky blue. The golden color corresponds to the light, clear future of the Kazakhstani people, and the blue sky colour is a symbol of the aspiration to peace, goodwill, friendship and unity with all peoples.

The name of the country in Kazakh, КАЗАХСТАН, is in the lower part of the coat of arms.



## Information on Kazakhstan

**Population:** 14,820,900 (official data as of January 1, 2002)

**Capital:** Astana

**Major languages:** Kazakh, Russian

**Religions:** Islam, Christianity

**Monetary unit:** Kazakhstan tenge

**Internet Domain:** .kz

The Republic of Kazakhstan is a presidential democracy; a secular, stable and social state whose highest values are its people and their lives, rights and freedoms.

The Republic of Kazakhstan lies directly between Europe and Asia, between 45° and 87° of East longitude, 40° and 55° of North latitude.



## Kazakh Language

The official language of Kazakhstan is Kazakh, a Turkic language. State organizations and local governmental bodies also use Russian. The government encourages citizens to study and speak several languages. Everybody has the right to use their native language and the right to choose their language for communication, study and work. This contributes to people of various ethnic origin and religions living and working peacefully in the country.

## Religion

Diversity of religions; most prevalent are Islam and Christianity.



## Public holidays:

January 1,2 - New Year

March 8 - International Womens' Day

March 22 - [Nauryz Meyramy](#)

May 1 - Kazakhstan National Unity Day

May 9 - Victory Day

June 10 - Day of the Capital

August 30 - [Constitution](#) Day

December 16 - Independence Day







## Culture of Kazakhstan

Kazakhs are an extremely hospitable people. If you come to a Kazakh home unexpected you will be received as if you had been invited. Since early childhood, principles of respect for guests and older people, as well as peacefulness and tolerance, are instilled in every Kazakh, and these are the national features of Kazakh culture and tradition.

Kazakh culture is a Eurasian culture, which belongs to both the East and West, without being Eastern or Western, remaining original, which is characteristic of the vast majority of Indo-European civilizations. There are many fascinating places of interest in Kazakhstan, and importantly, **no political or ethnic conflicts.**

## Customs and traditions

Since ancient times, Kazakhs have carefully preserved and passed down through generations their traditions of hospitality, respect for elders, peace and tolerance.







## **Culture of Kazakhstan**

### **Kazakh culture and national traditions**

The Kazakh people are rich in traditions. From birth through old age and death, every step of their lives has historically been marked with celebration. Even their funeral ceremonies have their own special symbolism.

Unfortunately, many rich and interesting traditions and customs of the Kazakh people have been forgotten throughout the past century. Real sovereignty is just now being reestablished in Kazakhstan due to the process of democratization. These abandoned traditions are just now being rediscovered by the Kazakh people. These traditions include being respectful to old people; being patriotic to the motherland; being honest; and learning to love mankind.





- Traditionally every guest is offered Kazakh cuisine at the dastarkhan (the low table) in a yurt. The yurt is one of the most sensible types of movable house. It is a comfortable and practical home, ideally suited to local conditions and ways of life - one of the greatest inventions of the Eurasian nomads.
- It is easily taken apart (it is said that a Kazakh woman can do it in half an hour) and carried by horses and camels. The yurt consists of three main elements: an extensible trellis base (the kerege), a dome made of poles (the uyk) and a round top (the shanyrak).





In ancient times **Turks** were reputed as the most skillful **felt-makers**. These days the Kazakhs use felt to cover the yurt and for its internal decoration, as well as to make **carpets**, dresses and shoes. The Kazakhs live surrounded by **ornaments**. They richly decorate their yurts with wall carpets and **multi-colored embroideries**.

**Handicrafts** - harnesses, felt mats (tekemets), and articles made of wood, bone and metal - are lavishly decorated. **Headdresses**, dresses, bags and saddle-cloths are beautifully embroidered. They use traditional designs and carvings to make and decorate the wooden cups, large bowls and ladles used to serve kumis (fermented mare's milk).



- *The horns of mountain rams and goats are used to decorate beds and caskets. Leather is used to make quivers, belts, harnesses and flasks (torsyks) for water and kumis. Kazakh artisans are also very skillful jewelers.*
- *Steppe yergers (jewelers) favor white silver. Traditional Kazakh bell-shaped earrings, original bracelets (blezics), or the traditional bracelet linked to three rings with fine chains will certainly impress you.*
- *Kazakh national dress varies by regions. Men wear chapans, a kind of dressing gown with a belt, made of velvet and richly embroidered. They cover their heads with a soft skullcap (tobetai), a tall felt cap (kalpak) or a fox-fur hat with earflaps (malakai).*
- *The women's national costume consists of a white cotton or colored silk dress, a velvet waistcoat with embroidery, and a cap or a silk scarf.*



**Kazakh music and musical instruments:** The Kazakhs love the art of wordplay and their akyns (poets), who improvise at public competitions (aitys) accompanied by Kazakh stringed musical instruments: the **dombra** or the **kobyz**.

[Nauryz](#) (Islamic New Year) is one of the biggest holidays in [Central Asia](#). In Kazakhstan it is celebrated on the day of the spring equinox, **March 22**. On that day, the streets of villages and towns are transformed. Guests are hosted in **beautiful yurts** with the traditional **Nauryz kozhe** dish made of seven traditional ingredients. People respecting this nearly month-long holiday

forgive each others' debts and offences







- **National games:** these are usually performed on horseback and are an opportunity to witness the Kazakhs' outstanding **riding skills**. Kazaksha **kures** (Kazakh wrestling), **baiga** (horse racing over 25, 50 or 100 km), **kokpar** (a sort of polo game played with a dead goat), **kyz-kuu** (catch the girl) and **altybakan** (six-pole swing).





# **Traditional customs in Kazakhstan**

## **Kazakh culture and national traditions**



**Besik Toi** The arrival of new birth, whether it be of a foal, calf, or baby also involved another celebration called Besik Toi. For babies, the tradition of Besikke Salu was practiced and involved placing the baby in the cradle for the first time. Special foods are prepared, and all the relatives, neighbors, and nearby children are invited. Guests to the feast brought "Shashu," or candies, kurts, and coins. The baby's cradle is made by a special master carver. Only women who have conceived their own children are allowed to place babies in their cradles, and any woman who would place a friend's baby in this place of honor must sew and present a new itkoitek to the baby's mother.

The symbolism of the cradle is important in Kazakh tradition, which may be one reason that the Kazakhs often call their native place "Golden Cradle." When a mullah would be present for the Besik Toi, he would shout the baby's new name into his ears. And in ancient times, seven items - including a whip, a bridle, a fur coat, and a blanket would be placed in the cradle. Each of these items meant something to the family. A bridle and a whip signified family hopes that the baby might ride a horse, be brave or even become a batyr.



## Tusau Kesu

After the baby's cradle and crawling stage, the scene is set for another celebration: when the baby begins to walk for the first time.

Wealthier parents would butcher a cow for this celebration; less wealthy parents, a sheep. For the ceremony, black and white thread was prepared in advance to tie the baby's legs. The mother would ask one of the more energetic woman first to bind the baby; and then to cut the string. In this way the baby's first step would be toward his mother. Everybody would then wish the family great success for the baby's future. Here the reader might ask a question: Why use black and white thread instead of red or green? White is symbolized in this case to mean hopes for success without any obstacles. Black and white is associated with the concept of honesty, even to the level of taking a thread which does not belong to you. Cutting of such a thread meant if you see a person stealing something or an unpleasant situation, the watcher should try immediately to intervene.



# Kyz Uzatu (Marriage)

- Seven or more people from the groom's side would come one day to take the bride back to their house. Whatever the number, it had to be odd. Godparents came first, then the groom would come with his friends. Below we try to describe the "Kyz Uzatu" ceremony.

- **1. *Kopshik kystyrar*** - This was a gift for the bride's sister-in law for having accompanied the groom. It might be something substantial .. for example, a cloth or fabric for a dress.
- 2. "*Shashu*"** - was mentioned earlier. When the groom came to the bride's house, one of the respected woman of the aul would throw shashu or special treats. Everyone would try to catch one, for this would indicate a successful marriage for their daughter too.
- 3. *Kyim ilu*** - This was the name for another gift giving. When those responsible for the matchmaking entered the house, a woman would greet them and hang up their coat. When they left, she would return the coats, upon which she would be presented a special gift for her service.
- 4. *Tabaldyryk kadesi*** - Here the matchmakers again are expected to give a gift to enter the room.
- 5. *Sybaqa asu*** - When the matchmakers have taken their places, the hostess prepares a special meat from the previous winter's slaughtering. She puts into the Kazan good parts of meat and pelvic, marrow, and breast bones.
- 6. *Malga bata jasatu*** - After the sybaga has been consumed and tea is drunk, the host grabs the sheep which was brought to be slaughtered for the celebration, and one of the old men would give bata (a blessing). The slaughter was to occur just before the matchmakers were going to take the bride from her home and to the home of the groom. After the meal, the groom's family side would put money into the dish which earlier contained the meat consumed in the meal. The women from the bride's side would then share it with each other.



- **7. Kuiryk bauyr asatu** - Before starting to eat the meat of the specially slaughtered sheep, the host would make kuirik baur -which meant boiled and sliced fat tail and liver with sour cream. He would then put slices of the dish into his kinsmen's mouth; the rest of that they would spread on their cloths. After that the matchmaker again would give money to the woman who treated him to kuirik baur.

**8. Saga togytu** - Following the kuirik baur ceremony, one of the woman would say: Look here! How can our matchmakers appear in public with greasy clothes? Come together kinswomen, let's wash them." This ceremony would usually take place near the river in the summertime. So matchmakers would be pushed into water. Of course, they wouldn't like to be in the water alone, so they would often attempt to hold onto one of the beautiful ladies from the opposite family. If there was no river, wealthy people would sometimes make a special pond for the occasion. I remember it happened when we were children. Bala Kamsa from the wealthy tribe of Kazibek (later he lived in Turkey and died there) made a special lake when he married his son to a very beautiful and clever woman. There were lots of Kamza in those times. Every ritual meant something. You could ask a question such as "Why did they put "kuirik baur" into their mouth?" One possible answer was that "If you'd eat more liver you'd be more friendly with you brothers and sisters." There were two reasons for stirring kuirik baur with sour cream. The first meaning: Kazakhs liked white color, it was associated with sincerity. Second, it would be more tasty. After the matchmakers had been dunked in the river, the host and hostess would present them with new cloths. They would say: "If something was wrong before, this is washed up now. So, this is our present to you; let's have a long term, close relationship."

**9. Kuim tigu** - According to Kazakh tradition, the matchmakers mustn't sleep. They had to eat, to sing songs, and to tell funny stories the whole night, otherwise the opposite side would sew up their cloths.

**10. Bosaga attar** - After eating Kuirik baur, the groom is invited to the master yurt. Entering of the yurt is called bosaga attar .

The bride's parents would call the groom and kiss him. There they stayed only a short time. They would especially slaughter a sheep for his sake, and treat him to marrow and breast bones. Asikti zhilik is a special bone for the groom, because it has asyk. Asyk is a national toy of Kazakh boys. Playing with this toy, they learn how to count which would later be important for a herdsman. The groom is treated to that bone in the hope that he might also have a son who would play the asyk. The breastbone symbolized the parent's wish of friendship and to bear together all the good and bad aspects of life.

- **11. Neke oku** - This is also an important ceremony in the life of the bride and groom. If they had shared a bed before marriage, it was considered a sin. Muslims called it "Nimakham." In Kazakh tradition the marriage ceremony itself is celebrated by a mullah. Lots of people would gather in the room. They were witnesses, and had to taste the wedding water. There they found salt, sugar and the wedding ring. The water would symbolize faithfulness. Sugar symbolized their sweet love for each other, and the ring was to recall memories of the wedding.

**12. Kvz kashar-tundik ashar** - Here the sister-in law makes a bed for the newlyweds, and it would be placed inside the screen. Then she would close the front felt of the door (tundik). Then she would give the bride's arm to the groom; and for that service he had to give her a present. The bride's tender arm would make it difficult for the groom to breath. After the sister-in-law gave the happy couple a blanket, she received another present and pretend to leave them alone; but hiding somewhere she would intercept or overhear, and in the morning she would understand even more from the groom's face and mood.

**13. Shatyr baiqazy** - After the wedding the bride would be invited to the marquee, or home of the groom's parents. They would then be told: "you are now married, and can freely without any shyness walk as husband and wife. You'll have your own shanirak-yurt. This time somebody from the groom's family would give a present for shatir baigazi. **14. Korjyn soqu** - The matchmakers usually brought a "korjyn," or saddle bag with two compartments filled with presents and sewed closed. Women friends of the bride's mother would then gather to open the korjyn, removing the special presents for the parent's of the bride, these might include a fur coat or other fine apparel and food. All the women, including the bride, would then gather around and taste food items from the korjyn.

**15. Moiyn tastau** - This ceremony would be held if the bride's family had a separate yurt for young people. A sheep would also be slaughtered, and on this occasion the spinal column would be given to the groom to nibble on. If he nibbled that bone cleanly, it meant that he would please his wife and she would be beautiful for along time. If his nibbling was not clean, he would pay a fine to the sister-in law. This ceremony was intended to teach the young people to be neat.

**16. Shanyrak koteru** - If you remember, a shanyrak is a wooden circle forming the smoke opening of a yurt. Only men who had children were allowed to lift it. If the ground was flat and the yurt was large, he lifted it with the help of a horse or a camel.

horse nearby. This meant that he wished the young couple to be hospitable and generous.

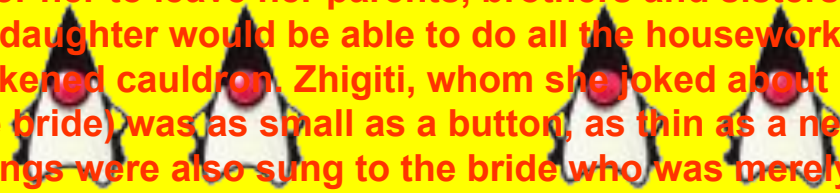
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18. *Saukele kigizy* - For this event the matchmakers would be invited to the new yurt. The bride's mother would put a saukele on her daughter. A saukele was an old fashioned embroidered headdress for a bride. Upon seeing the saukele for the first time, the mother-in law would give her kinswoman a present called "korimdik." In this saukele the bride looked like a princess; and the entire wedding suit is beautiful.



19. *Bosagaqa ilu* - After the feast at the bride's yurt, the groom came to reclaim his wife. Before that he would hang a Shapan (oriental robe) at his in-law's threshold. It meant that he was a son, too, of the bride's parents. He would help and protect them. Why did he hang his robe at the threshold? This was a sign that he could be called upon by his wife's parents to work for their household upon their beckoning.

20. *Saryn (auzhar)* is a kind of farewell or parting. When the bride's side gathered to say farewell to her, women stayed inside and men outside. The bride would weep, for it was of course difficult for her to leave her parents, brothers and sisters. The bride's mother would tell how her daughter would be able to do all the housework and be able to handle a heavy and blackened cauldron. Zhigiti, whom she joked about before the marriage, would say she (the bride) was as small as a button, as thin as a needle and too young to marry. Farewell songs were also sung to the bride who was merely bought by a wealthy person and taken away. The sister-in law who was a friend, would advise her how to behave in a new place, and they would wish her health. If the bride was a beloved daughter, the father wouldn't show his tears. He would ride away and weep somewhere else. The respected bride would be watched far into the distance, and the mother would weep long hours. She of course didn't want to part with her daughter, but there was nothing to be done. Kazakhs believe that daughters were born for another family.



Good bye!