

ALEXANDRA TOLSTOY

Naryn Riding Escape, Kyrgyzstan 2019

DURATION: 10 days / 9 nights

LOCATION: Naryn area, Kyrgyzstan

BEST TIME: July - August

Summary

Wedged into a striking canyon of the Tien Shan ('Celestial') Mountains of Kyrgyzstan, the Naryn region is breathtakingly beautiful with its vast open valleys, alpine pastures and soaring, snow-covered peaks. It is here that the Kyrgyz culture is considered most 'pure' and the only people to be encountered are nomadic shepherds with their herds of horses.

Itinerary

Day 1 Bishkek

On arrival in Bishkek, early in the morning, we are met and transferred to the delightful Asia Mountains Hotel where today and tonight are spent. A small, family run hotel, facilities include air conditioning in all rooms, an outdoor swimming pool, barbeque and WiFi. This afternoon we explore Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan's capital, founded by the Russians in the nineteenth century and situated at the foot of the Tien Shan mountains with views of the surrounding glaciers. We can see the enormous Alatau Square, and may also visit the history museum or the state department store, where it is possible to buy colourful Kyrgyz felt carpets and hats. Lunch is in the hotel and dinner is in a local restaurant.

Day 2 Bishkek – Kochkorka – Eki Naryn (360 km – 4 h)

After breakfast at the hotel we drive to Naryn, visiting on the way the historical-architectural complex of Burana Tower, a minaret located on the territory of an ancient settlement and affording views of the surrounding plateau. From here we continue our way to Kochkorka where we have lunch with a local family and see a shyrdak show (the process of Kyrgyz national carpet making). After lunch we drive along the left bank of the Naryn river through small villages, as far as the confluence of the Small Naryn and Naryn Rivers, seeing only mountains, haystacks and the occasional horse herd. We cross to the other side of the Naryn River and move north along the Small Naryn until we reach the village of Eki Naryn, where we meet our horses and camp the night.

Day 3 Eki-Naryn – Oruk-Tam (5-6 hour horse ride)

We ride into the gorge of Small Naryn, where the road abruptly ascends and the swirling river remains far below in the canyon. The mountains are covered in fir trees but as we move upstream, the trees become sparser. On our journey we see occasional houses of livestock breeders and the solitary settlement of Oruk-Tam (approximately 50 houses). The rest of the landscape is deserted. In Soviet times, livestock farms were located along Small Naryn. Now the majority of them are only ruins. Dinner and overnight in camp.

Day 4 Oruk-Tam – Jakbolot (5-6h horse ride)

We continue riding, higher into the mountains. There are no longer trees, and the landscape changes dramatically. The Small Naryn River writhes and wriggles, leading us upstream and here is our favorite picnic spot for lunch. Three kilometres more, and we reach the meeting of the Jakbolot and Jilangach Rivers where we camp for the night.

Day 5. Jakbolot - Archaly (5-6h horse ride)

Today's route is dotted with marmot burrows and we meet huge herds of yaks without shepherds; unlike other animals the yaks are self-regulating! Camp tonight is near Archaly village.

Day 6. Archaly – Jaili-Suu (5-6h horse ride)

The Small Naryn River is known as Buurkan in its upper reaches. The valley of the Buurkan River, surrounded by the mountain ranges of Uch-Emchek and Djetim-Bel, is vast and open. Heading north, skirting rocks, winds our path over soft, rounded peaks. Along the Naryn floodplain are dense patches of forest, including poplar, birch, Dzhungar willow, as well as numerous shrubs, among which are Mirkaria and sea buckthorn. Tonight's camp is near the Jaili-Suu hot springs.

Day 7. Jaili-Suu (rest day)

Today we rest. There is the opportunity to walk in the surrounding mountains, hike to Teshik-Kul Lake (8km) and swim in the hot springs. We camp again in last night's camp.

Day 8 Jaili-Suu – Ton pass – Bokonbaevo village (6-7h horse ride)

Today we rise early to cross the Ton Pass. The Ton Pass is 4023 m, and only passable from the beginning of July to the end of August. The weather changes quickly, and it can rain or even snow here. After the pass we ride through the Ashuu gorge and finally come to high mountain pastures (jailoo) where nomads graze their flocks in the summer months. Not far from here transport will be waiting for us to take us to Bokonbaevo village where we stay in a guesthouse overnight.

Day 9 Bokonbaevo village – Bishkek (220 km / 3.5h)

This morning we visit the house of an eagle hunter and hear about eagle hunting, as well as having the opportunity to handle the birds. We may also visit the local felt factory. After that we visit a peaceful and unpopulated beach on Lake Issyk-Kul and enjoy lunch nearby in a Kyrgyz yurt. Closer to evening we make our way back to Bishkek and the Asia Mountains Hotel. Upon arrival we have a farewell dinner and spend the night in the hotel.

Day 10 Departure

Transfer to the airport.