

Backpacking Kyrgyzstan's Tian Shan Mountains- Alumni

Karakol, Kyrgyzstan

Dates: August 23 - September 3, 2026



Features

- Explore the beautiful Tian Shan “Celestial Mountains”
- Experience the World Nomad Games- Traditional nomadic cultural games and festivals
- Stunning valleys and mountain passes with gorgeous glacial views
- Sample Kyrgyz cuisine in a feast prepared by local families
- Soak in relaxing natural hot springs
- 7 nights in nomadic yurt camps and tents
- 5 nights in hotels, villages or guesthouses
- Horse supported trip, so we carry lighter packs (25-35lbs)

Note: This is an expedition for the physically fit and mentally resilient. The altitude is between 6,000 to 12,700ft, and although horse supported we'll be carrying packs with significant elevation gains each day (3000-4000 ft! daily). Most of the passes have steep 3rd class terrain with loose rocks. Nearly every day there will be a mountain pass to ascend. Previous backpacking experience is required.

*Note: DIET RESTRICTIONS- Considering we are living remotely and eating local food dishes without alternatives or food separation while cooking, this trip is **not appropriate** for people who have any severe food allergies, who are lactose or gluten-free, vegans or vegetarians.*

Cost: \$4195 including lodging

Max group size: 8 Participants

Minimum Age: 18

2 NOLS Instructors

Historic Age Range: New trip!

Trip Description

A trip for those not afraid of rugged adventure and feel excited by a sense of the unknown! Come explore Kyrgyzstan's inspiring Tian Shan mountains by trekking the Ak-Suu Traverse - a popular route surrounded by glaciers, sprawling high alpine valleys, and steeped in Kyrgyz nomadic culture. This 14 day trip is a blend of demanding backcountry hiking and cultural immersion. Some of the many highlights include pristine glacial fed lakes, wild horses roaming through alpine meadows, and local yurt camps dotted around rivers. In August, the mountains are filled with a rainbow of alpine flowers and flocks of sheep often are led by nomadic Kyrgyz shepherds into the river valleys. While the Ak-Suu traverse is truly a stunning once in a lifetime adventure, it's not for the faint of heart. This trek covers over 17,000 feet of elevation gain over 55 miles with 7 awe-inspiring and challenging mountain passes.

We begin our journey in Kyrgyzstan's capital, Bishkek, where we will meet the group and have orientation in the evening. The next morning we will have breakfast and head out in a “marshrutka”, or Soviet-style minibus, east to the Issyk Kul region. We will use our first days here to decompress from traveling internationally. We'll spend a night relaxing on the south shore of lake Issyk Ku before moving onto Karakol. This bustling regional

center is nestled in the foothills of the Tian Shan mountains and influenced heavily by Russian and Dungan cultures - a Chinese ethnic minority group. We'll barter in the local bazaar, immerse in local culture, and check out some local shops as we get our gear and supplies ready for the next 8 days of trekking. We have a special dinner planned in a local Dungan home where we'll become acquainted with the famous Krygyz hospitality and a massive spread of traditional foods, such as "ashlan-fu" - a peppered cold noodle dish.

As we begin our trek, we will spend our first days focusing on building backcountry skills and acclimatizing to the altitude. Most mornings on trail will be spent sipping coffee, enjoying our surroundings before packing our bags and starting the days' adventure. Most evenings we'll set up camp as a team and eat meals together, spending the night in tents under the stars. You can expect to travel through high steppe, fairy-tale-like conifer forests, and rocky alpine terrain. After a few days hiking, we will treat ourselves to a much-needed rest in the Altyn Arashan valley where there are natural hot springs. Our guesthouse is tucked next to the scenic Arashan river. You may spend your time walking the valley, soaking in the spring, or enjoying the sunshine with some hot noodle dishes, beer, and tea. After Altyn-Arashan, we return to our tents and our route becomes more remote. All of our efforts will be rewarded when we reach the beautiful high-alpine Boz-Uchuk lakes where dinner and a yurt camp awaits us. We can celebrate our final evening in the Tian Shans as we eat on "tushuk" mats encircled by the ridgeline of granite peaks.

The excitement doesn't end when we leave the mountains...this expedition presents a unique opportunity to be in Kyrgyzstan during Independence Day and the World Nomad Games! Crowds watch traditional competitions such as "Kok boru, " a game played on horseback with the goal of putting a goat carcass in the opposing team's goal. Archery, wrestling, and falconry are also popular. Traditional dances and local handicrafts are widely demonstrated. We are so excited to offer a full day after our trek to celebrate with locals and experience this memorable holiday.

This is an expedition for the physically fit and mentally resilient. The altitude is between 6,000 to 12,700ft, and we'll be carrying packs with significant elevation gain each day. Horses will carry most of our group gear but we will still have packs to carry. Most of the passes have steep 3rd class terrain with loose rocks. Nearly every day there will be a mountain pass to ascend. Previous backpacking experience is required. Training is encouraged prior to the expedition so that you can fully enjoy everything Kyrgyzstan has to offer. Kyrgyzstan is a country that rewards the curious and spontaneous. It is common in Kyrgyz culture for plans to change and timing to be a bit more flexible.

Trip Environment

August is an excellent time to visit Kyrgyzstan. Its Boreal summer climate is typically dry and warm. Daytime temperatures in the mountains range high 50s to low 70s. Evenings are cooler, in the 30-50 degree range. The end of August is generally a sunny time of year with occasional afternoon rainstorms. There is potential for the first frosts signaling Autumn while camping at altitude. Weather in the Tian Shan mountains, like other mountain ranges, can be unpredictable. Our days can abruptly change from hot and sunny to windy with consistent cold rain or snow. Participants should expect good weather but be prepared for anything! Having good rain gear and warm layers is a must for this trip.

In the alpine, we will mostly see steppe and open meadows of grass and other low-lying vegetation such as lichens. As we descend lower into river valleys, there are open forests of Siberian fir, spruce, and Siberian larch. The forest understory can be covered in moss, ferns, and wild roses.

Wild animals in this region of Kyrgyzstan include hawks, golden eagles, rabbits, red foxes, and other small woodland creatures. Larger fauna are uncommon to see here, although the Tian Shans are also home to snow leopards, ibex, lynx, bears and even gray wolves. It will be very common to see shepherds with their flocks of sheep, cattle or bands of horses roaming freely among the mountains. The shepherds may offer us bread and tea or to take a rest in their yurts as we amble by.

Identifying and managing the hazards of steep terrain, falling and rolling rocks, weather, animals, and other environmental considerations will be a constant theme in our instruction. Consistent risk management techniques and assumption of responsibility for yourself and other group members will help make your trip healthy and enjoyable.

NOLS Staff

Our staff are NOLS professionals and certified accordingly. This means they maintain certifications in wilderness medicine and are trained to NOLS' high standards in risk management. They are senior staff at NOLS who have spent years working and teaching in backcountry environments all over the world. Additionally, our staff specialize in bringing together groups of strangers and building the group culture and camaraderie that makes NOLS trips great.

A Day in the Life

Our days on trail will begin between 6:30-7:00 am with tea/coffee and breakfast. We'll talk about the day's objectives and break into small groups and discuss more specific plans for the route in those groups. An Instructor will be leading each group to ensure learning objectives are achieved and that everyone is getting what they need from their hiking day. At the end of the day hot dinner and drinks are prepared by our Kyrgyz porters and we'll share meals while debriefing the day and enjoying the natural surroundings for the evening.

Our days in guesthouses are less structured and we will have meals prepared for us in the mornings and evenings. During this trip you will be rooming with one to two other people in single gender rooms, unless we know that you're traveling with someone on the trip or have expressed interest to room with your travel companion.

Difficulty Scale

This trip is rated 5 out of 5 on our difficulty scale.



We use a difficulty scale to help participants evaluate if a trip is right for them. It considers probable weather conditions, physicality of activities, and food and accommodations. You don't need to be a honed athlete, but pre-trip work to improve your strength, flexibility and endurance, is highly encouraged to improve your enjoyment of the place. If you have specific questions regarding physical preparation and your readiness please reach out to the Alumni Trips Department.

Food on the Trip

Kyrgyzstan has a unique cuisine, mostly centered around hearty dishes featuring dairy products, bread and meat. **Considering we are living remotely and eating local food dishes without alternatives or food separation while cooking, this trip is not appropriate for people who have any severe allergies, who are lactose or gluten free or vegans or vegetarians.** While on this trip, you can expect guesthouses to serve simple breakfasts composed of yogurts, porridge, jams, bread and fruit. Lunch and dinner consist of popular noodle dishes like Lagman, Besh Barmak, soups, or dumplings stuffed with meat and vegetables. These are often supplemented with potatoes, rice, buckwheat or all the above at once. A favorite local dish is plov - a popular Central Asian rice dish heaped with meat, carrots, cucumbers, and tomatoes. Some other culinary highlights include: “Kurut” - salty balls of dried goat's milk, “kvass” - a nourishing rye beverage, okroshka - an herbed Russian yogurt soup that is particularly refreshing in summer, and even “kumis” - fermented mare's milk. While trekking we will be snacking on bars, local nuts, and dried fruits throughout the day. Kyrgyz sweets are excellent, and we encourage you to pick up a few at the local markets we'll visit prior to the trek.

Many of our meals in towns and villages will be prepared by local yurt or guesthouse owners. As such, NOLS will most likely not be able to accommodate any allergies or dietary restrictions. Kyrgyzstan is not a place vegetarians can find options easily.

Given the cuisine will likely be a change from your diet, we encourage you to bring a few personal snacks that you enjoy. We all know there's nothing like having your favorite food to keep your motivation high.

Curriculum

This trip focuses on many traditional NOLS skills, competencies, and concepts. All of NOLS leadership skills require a certain degree of reflective thinking and intention to cultivate. International travel is a unique setting to practice leadership skills and can act as an accelerant for personal growth. Navigating cultural differences, languages and foods can be an excellent means to seek personal limits of these skills while developing our own signature style.

The instructors will provide information necessary for the group to comfortably backpack and explore, as well as optional topics as desired by participants. These could include natural history, local history, leadership, decision making, and team function, among other things.

Although the trip's focus is on backpacking skills, many participants also enjoy learning about the country, journaling, reading, or photography. Please articulate your trip and daily goals and interests and your instructors will try to accommodate you.

About Kyrgyzstan

History:

Kyrgyzstan spans a region where two of the tallest mountain ranges on earth meet. The Tien Shan (Heavenly Mountains) and the Pamir collide in the center of the largest landmass on earth. The tallest peaks soar over 7,000 meters. Fertile river valleys ringed by giants and fed by glacial rivers are home

to the Kyrgyz people. For thousands of years caravans following the Spice and Silk roads have climbed over the mountains into Kyrgyzstan. These famous trade routes meet here and then make their way across the Asian steppe. Kyrgyzstan's oldest city, Osh, has been inhabited for at least 3,000 years. Despite the longevity of this city, most Kyrgyz people were nomadic shepherds and much of the region was unsettled prior to joining the Soviet Union in 1926. Most cities and towns were created during this period, with the Soviets providing infrastructure and industrialization. Kyrgyzstan has two official languages, Kyrgyz and Russian, and they both use the Cyrillic alphabet. With the dissolution of the USSR, Kyrgyzstan officially became the Kyrgyz Republic in 1993. Now small towns and villages dot the landscape, however each summer many Kyrgyz people still follow their nomadic traditions. It is common to find yurts in alpine meadows and Kyrgyz people on horseback taking flocks of sheep and cattle into the high country to graze.

Religion:

The Kyrgyz Republic has no official religion and the right to religious freedom is enshrined in the constitution. Given its central location in Asia, Kyrgyzstan has an interesting mix of religions. Throughout the country you can find ancient sites for many religions, including Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity. Today a majority of the people are Muslim, however pre-Soviet Orthodox churches are found in the older cities. Tash Rabat, an ancient stone structure of unknown origin, is thought to have been built by Christian missionaries in the 1300-1400's. Pagan religions also influence modern Kyrgyzstan. Tengri, a polytheistic religion practiced throughout the Turkic world was brought to the region by Mongols in the 1200's. Khan Tengri, one of Kyrgyzstan's tallest mountains, is named after this lesser known world religion. One of the most popular holidays is Zoroastrian New Year, known as Nooruz. This holiday occurs on the spring equinox, and each year many villages celebrate the end of winter with a large feast and games. Variety is truly the spice of life in this fascinating country .

Culture:

Just as the trade routes through Kyrgyzstan bring a variety of goods, they have also brought a mix of cultures. As a result, differences are approached with curiosity. Frequent topics of conversation include money, religion, family, health and place of origin. Kyrgyz culture also prizes the arts. Their currency features poets, authors, songwriters, and storytellers. Social gatherings often include singing, playing music, dancing, and reciting portions of the epic poem Manas, an oral recount of the Kyrgyz origin story. Their nomadic lifestyle also places high regard for "guesting." Kyrgyz people understand that a guest may appear at any time of day, possibly experiencing hardship given the nature of the mountains. As such, Kyrgyz culture dictates that hot tea and bread shall be available for guests at all times. To be unprepared for such an occurrence would be shameful. Fitting for nomads, a common goodbye is "ak jol," meaning safe travels.

Safety:

Kyrgyzstan is a country with very low crime rates, and most crimes committed are petty theft in city centers (we believe pickpocketing in Italy and Spain is much more prevalent). The US State Department has a Level 1 (lowest level) travel advisory for Kyrgyzstan. Exercise normal precautions. Kyrgyz people view foreigners as guests, and are accordingly warm, and hospitable. Solo travelers often remark on how safe and welcome they feel while traveling in Kyrgyzstan.

Expectations of Participants

The alumni trip atmosphere is more relaxed than a typical NOLS expedition. However, it's not a full-service vacation or guided experience. You'll have to participate, carry your load, and help out as needed. These expeditions are fun, but they still require self-reliance, self awareness, risk management and sound decision making as we trek through remote areas where evacuation to modern medical facilities can take several days. Like all NOLS courses, these expeditions emphasize hands-on learning and the application of new skills in a variety of situations.

All participants need to complete and submit application materials, including a medical history form. These forms highlight the intersection of your trip's anticipated physical rigor and your current health and fitness status. Your forthright and timely completion and submission of the forms sets you and your trip up for success in the outdoors.

Alumni trips allow electronics and alcohol (for those of legal age in the country of the trip). Many participants find that these luxuries can add to the course experience and local flavor. Excessive alcohol consumption is not a part of the culture of Alumni trips.

Trip Itinerary

Aug 21/22	Most people will start traveling these days to reach Bishkek in time for orientation and adjust to jet lag.	
Aug 23	Orientation at 7:00pm at the hotel. Should take 1.5-2 hours so recommend eating beforehand. We'll be looking over our gear to bring with us to Karakol. Dinner not included this evening.	Lodging provided at <u>Shah Palace</u> in Bishkek.
Aug 24	Breakfast at the hotel, ready to depart for Issyk Kul's south shore at 9:30am. 5 hrs driving to Chyrak Yurt Camp. We will have some time to refresh and decompress at a modern yurt camp on Lake Issuk-kul.	Lodging at Chyrak Yurt Camp in Tong.
Aug 25	Breakfast at the yurt camp. Drive ~ 1.5 hrs to Karakol. We will do a walking tour of the town, explore the bazaar, and have some time to prep and pack for our expedition. In the evening we'll go to a nearby Dungan village to have a traditional local feast in a yurt with music.	Lodging at a Guesthouse in Karakol.
Aug 26	Breakfast at guesthouse. Kok Jaiyk > towards Teleti Pass. Drive ~ 1hr to our trailhead and meet the horses. Spend most of the day along graded valley roads until we reach the large glacial valley in full view of Boris Yeltsin peak.	~5 miles, +1640 ft. Tent camping.

Aug 27	Over Teleti pass > Kurgak Tor. This is a BIG day with up to 10 hrs of hiking! Ascend a stunning high alpine pass, surrounded by glaciers on all sides, and drop into gorgeous forest. Camping alongside a massive glacial river. Cross the Karakol Valley to Kurgak Tor/Sirota.	10 miles, +4100, -4200 Yurt camping.
Aug 28	Kurgak Tor/Sirota > Altyn Arashan. We will start the day by climbing through forests surrounded by pools and streams until we reach the stunning Ala-kul Lake. This is a stunning place to pause, take in the vista of a turquoise lake and mountains studded with glaciers. We'll continue on past the lake to one of the most dramatic passes of our traverse which has 360 views of the Tian-shan mountains. We'll descend the Altyn-Arashan river valley. We'll likely see flocks of sheep and herders roaming this valley, especially as we move closer to the enormous glacial fed Arashan River. We'll finish our day at Altyn Arashan Hotsprings with a well-deserved hot dinner.	9 miles, +3500ft, -5000ft Lodging at Altyn Arashan guesthouse.
Aug 29	Rest Day at Altyn-Arashan Hotsprings. Relax and enjoy a chance to soak our bodies in a wild hot spring or chill on a patio with a cool beverage. Rejoin our horse friends.	Lodging at Altyn Arashan guesthouse.
Aug 30	Altyn-Arashan Valley > Almaluu River. Spend the day ascending a stunning river valley, trek up to Ortok Pass at 11,850 ft, and descend into the verdant Ak-Suu Almaluu River Valley.	7.5 miles, +3700 ft - 2700 ft. Tent camping.
Aug 31	Ak-Suu Almaluu river > Aylanysh Lakes. Ascend a meandering river valley until we approach a waterfall and the gradual uphill to Aylanysh Pass. Views from this pass are gorgeous, offering some of our favorite scenery of the entire traverse - including of the Aylanysh lakes where we will be spending the afternoon and evening. High potential for swimming.	5 miles, +2800 ft, - 800 ft. Tent camping.
Sept 1	Alianyash Lakes > Boz-Uchuk lakes. A double pass day. Descend from Alianyash Lakes dropping into a river valley before ascending an unnamed pass where we can view the enormous Tor-Bashi (14,650 ft). Descend and weave our way around the mountains until approaching the final short pass of the day. Our descent leads us directly into the dramatic high alpine arena of the Boz-Uchuk lakes. Celebrate Kyrgyz Independence Day with dinner in yurts 15 min walk from the Lakes.	6 miles, +1900, -2400. Yurt camping .
Sept 2	Boz Uchuk lakes > Boz Uchuk valley. We savor a peaceful final morning in the mountains with a gorgeous sunrise over the lakes. Begin descending the Boz Uchuk valley until reaching a dirt road that we will cruise down. We'll be picked up by our driver and spend the night in our guesthouse in Karakol. Rest and recuperate in the afternoon. Treat ourselves with showers and a celebratory dinner in Karakol!	6.5 miles +1100ft, -2900 Lodging at a Guesthouse in Karakol.
Sept 3	Breakfast at Jamilya's. Travel to Cholpon Ata / Kyrchyn Valley. We'll be traveling ~2-3 hrs this morning back in a vehicle around the North Shore of Issyk Kul to reach the World Nomad Games . Spending the day watching falconry, horseback games, musical performances, and more. Final Dinner/Celebration and trip debrief.	Camping in Yurts or Tents at World Nomad Games.

Sept 4	Departure day. Breakfast at Cholpon Ata/Kyrchyn Valley yurt camp. Option to drive 4 hours back to the Shah Palace/Bishkek Airport. Some participants may choose to stay at the World Nomad Games. Accommodation is not included this evening.	Recommend flights starting afternoon/evening September 4 or AM September 5.
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* All distances and elevation gains/losses are approximations.

Trip Logistics

Getting to Bishkek

By Plane:

Fly to Manas International Airport (BSZ) in Bishkek. Common flights are through Istanbul or Dubai.

From Airport to Hotel:

Shah Palace offers hotel pick up. Participants who are arriving within 24 hours of the start of the trip, can arrange a shuttle service to our Bishkek hotel from the airport. We will help arrange this pick up when we have your flight information.

If you plan to arrive days in advance of this trip we recommend the following;

Yandex: Yandex is essentially Central Asia’s Uber app. Download prior to leaving. Around 25 minutes and \$10 to get into Bishkek from the airport. This app is helpful to get you anywhere in Bishkek.

Mashrutka: Can take a public bus 380 which takes you to city center (50 som or 50 cents)

Pre-book private taxi: Manas Taxi and Super Taxi come recommended, with Super Taxi giving a receipt. The normal rate charged by the major taxi companies to the city centre is 500-600 som. Pre book in the arrivals hall at the airport once you land.

Lodging

We will begin and end our journey in a comfortable, full-service hotel in the capital city of Bishkek. Outside of Bishkek, we will be staying in simple guesthouses. Guesthouses are a great way to have closer interaction with the lovely Kyrgyz people who are known for their outstanding hospitality and generosity. Often these guesthouses are clean and simple with cozy beds, showers, and indoor toilets. Do not expect guesthouses to have complimentary toiletries or additional amenities, however. We will put two to a room in single gender rooms, unless you are a couple or have expressed preference to room with your travel companion. There is potential to sleep in yurts during our trip. In yurts we will sleep close to each other on pillowed cots called ‘tomoks’, mats, and carpets. Traditional yurts do not have plumbing or electricity, however they are very warm and well-insulated from the elements. Yurts sleep 3-5 people typically. Throughout the trekking portion of the trip, we will be sleeping in tents with 2-3 people per tent.

Storage of Personal Belongings

Personal baggage that doesn’t go with us on our trek will be kept in our guesthouse in Karakol. This is reasonably secure storage, but nothing is 100 percent guaranteed. NOLS assumes no responsibility for your stored baggage.

Currency

Kyrgyzstan uses the Kyrgyz Som as its only currency. You might want cash for miscellaneous purchases throughout the trip such as snacks, alcohol, or souvenirs. You'll receive the best exchange by simply taking money out of ATM's, but your bank might charge you additional fees for this. It's often a good idea to give your credit card company a heads up that you're traveling internationally. About \$100 will be plenty of cash for the trip for incidental purchases. If you plan to purchase more expensive souvenirs, such as traditional felt carpets, err on the side of bringing more cash.

Travel Insurance

Travel insurance is worth exploring in case unforeseen events cause you to change your plans or if NOLS has to cancel a trip for any reason. Check with your personal insurance carrier and credit card to understand what you already might have or check out cat70.com or Worldnomads.com for a wide variety of options.

Carbon Footprint and Offset

Current estimates are that the Travel Industry accounts for ~8% of global emissions. This percentage includes everything from transportation to accommodation and shopping. NOLS recognizes that our business contributes to this problem but we do not have a comprehensive strategy at this point.

If you would like to offset part or all of the carbon emissions related to your Alumni trip, we recommend [South Pole](#). [Their calculator](#) can help easily calculate your footprint and choose a project to contribute to. [Here is a link to their calculator.](#)

Tipping

Tips are not generally expected by taxi drivers or restaurant servers. If you plan to tip, leave at least 100% extra.

While tipping is common in the outdoor guiding culture, your NOLS Instructors are not driven to excellence by tips but rather a love for taking people outdoors. You are welcome to tip the Instructors if you choose, but many instructors are honored by [a donation in their name to the NOLS Annual Fund](#) which supports scholarships for future NOLS students.

Immunizations / Vaccinations / Travel medications

International travel poses special health considerations. NOLS strongly advises that all participants traveling to international locations carefully consider what vaccinations or inoculations are required, recommended, or suggested for their specific travel itinerary. Consulting with a physician, travel medicine specialist, or other healthcare professional is strongly advised.

Visa/Passport

As a U.S. or E.U. citizen, all you need to enter Kyrgyzstan is a Passport that is valid for more than six months after your entry date. Please **check the expiration date** of your current passport and update it as necessary. You are entitled to a stay of up to 60 days as a tourist. Participants from outside the United States or E.U. will need to check on their [specific visa](#) requirements. E-Visa are available.

Electricity

While at hotels and some guesthouses, you will have access to wall plugs or other charging ports, but on the trail you will **not**. Bring a battery pack if you are going to need a charge.

Kyrgyzstan has two associated plug types, types C and F. Plug type C is the plug which has two round pins and plug type F is the plug which has two round pins with two earth clips on the side. Kyrgyzstan operates on a 220V supply voltage and 50Hz.

Wifi can be found in our hotel and some of the guesthouses. If you have more data/cellular needs, a temporary SIM card can be purchased in the Bishkek airport upon arrival.

Trip Registration

The best way to register is through the trip information page on the nols.edu website. A non-refundable deposit secures your spot on the trip. If any issues arise, please call the NOLS Alumni Department at (800) 332-4280. Your enrollment is complete with receipt of your full tuition and your completed application forms; these are **due 60 days before the start of your trip**.

All participants are required to submit registration materials, including a medical form. These forms highlight the intersection of your trip's anticipated physical rigor and your current health and fitness status while also providing NOLS information about things like your dietary needs.

NOLS is not responsible for additional costs incurred by late arrivals or evacuations. Those expenses are the responsibility of trip participants and we recommend purchasing travel insurance to mitigate the impact of unforeseen circumstances.

Do not book travel greater than 60 days before the start of the trip unless you have confirmed with NOLS that the trip will run. On rare occasions, we do cancel trips due to low enrollment.

Cancellation and Transfer Policy

For your reference, here is the [Alumni Trips Cancellation and Transfer Policy](#). When enrolling on a trip, you will need to agree to this policy.

Things to do in Bishkek and the surrounding areas

- Visit Osh Bazaar
- Erkindik Park
- State History Museum
- Ala Too Square
- Zhirgal Banyas
- Enjoy an evening at the Kyrgyz National Opera and Ballet
- Burana Tower in Tokmok
- Ala Archa National Park

Suggested Readings:

The Day Lasts More Than One Hundred Years - Chingiz Aitmatov

Jamila - Chingiz Aitmatov

The Great Game - Peter Hopkirk

Equipment List

Gear provided by NOLS			
Cooking Gear/ Spice Kits/water treatment	First Aid kits	Stoves, Fuel, Fuel Bottles	Emergency Communication
Reference Books	Maps & Compass	Food and Bear Canisters- n/a	Tents or Shelters

Note: NOLS Alumni does not have any of the items listed below available for rent in Kyrgyzstan through NOLS. We recommend sourcing your gear at home before your trip. For last minute needs there are some stores in Issyk Kul's south shore, our second day, (Gergert Sport, Esport Expert Shop, Red Fox Shop, Triton Shop).

Upper Body Clothing		
Equipment	Quantity	Notes
Base layer (light or midweight)	1	Light or mid-weight long underwear top, wool or synthetic (e.g. Patagonia Capilene, Terramar Performance, Icebreaker Body Zone)
Long sleeve hiking shirt	1	Important for sun protection. A hood on the shirt further aids sun protection. Synthetic or wool athletic shirts recommended.
Mid layer (fleece or puffy)	1	Fleece jacket (e.g. Patagonia R-1, Mountain Hardwear Microchill, etc.) or a light puffy.
Insulated puffy jacket	1	A warm, synthetic jacket that fits over your other layers and under your rain jacket. We recommend synthetic over down because down will not keep you warm when wet. A hood is recommended.
Wind shirt (optional)	1	A lightweight, breathable, durable nylon wind shell, in either pullover or parka style.
Rain jacket	1	Durable, waterproof, non-insulated jacket with hood. Waterproof-breathable fabrics (e.g., Gore-Tex, H2No, etc.) are both acceptable. It is important that your rain jacket fits well over all your base and insulating layers.
T-shirt (optional)	1	A lightweight synthetic or merino wool t-shirt
Sports Bra or Tank	2	Synthetic sports bra or a synthetic sports tank are recommended
Warm hat	1	Synthetic or wool. Hat should cover your ears to keep your head warm.
Gloves or mittens	1	Medium weight, synthetic. No ski gloves. Windproof/waterproof can be nice; fleece-lined gardening gloves work great.
Buff (optional)	1	To keep your neck warm and/or to protect your face from the sun.

Lower Body Clothing

Equipment		Notes
Light/midweight base layer	1	Mid-weight synthetic or wool bottoms (e.g. Patagonia Capilene, Terramar Performance, Icebreaker Bodyfit Zone). Leggings work great.
Hiking pants	1	Nylon or synthetic pants. No cotton. These should fit comfortably over lower-body base layers. Soft-shell fabrics are acceptable.
Rain pants (optional)	1	
Hiking shorts (optional)	1	Nylon, quick-dry shorts
Bathing suit	1	For hot springs and lake swims
Mid layer pants	1	Mid-weight bottoms that fit comfortably over the base-layer bottoms. Fleece pants, insulated (puffy) pants, fleece pajama pants, or synthetic sweatpants are acceptable. No cotton.
Underwear	2-4	Wear what's comfortable; cotton, silk, or synthetics are fine.

Footwear

Equipment		Notes
Approach/hiking shoes or boots	1	A sturdy pair of boots for hiking. Consider trail hiking shoes or approach shoes for something lighter than traditional boots, but not trail runners.
Sneakers, crocs or non-hiking shoe	1	Something to wear around camp, preferably impermeable to water
Socks	2-4 pairs	½ crew to crew length wool socks—cotton socks are not advised
Gaiters (optional)	1	Short gaiters to keep rocks and debris out of your shoes—tall gaiters are not needed for this hike

Sun Protection

The sun is similar to the mountain west of Wyoming in August/Sept. Regardless of skin color, you have a high chance of getting burned.

Sun hat or sun shirt	To protect your ears and head from sunburn
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Miscellaneous Personal Gear

Equipment		Notes
Backpack	1	35-55 Liters- Must be big enough to carry personal items (e.g., water, food, clothing layers and some extras)

Sleeping Bag	1	Synthetic- or down-filled bags are acceptable; down is recommended. Your bag must have a temperature rating of 20 F degrees or below.
Sleeping Pad	1	Can be foam or inflatable. Although more expensive, an inflatable sleeping pad is often more comfortable than a foam pad.
Sleeping Bag Compression Sack	1	A compression stuff sack makes your sleeping smaller to pack (example: OR Ultralight Compression Sack) A no-compression stuff sack is fine too and weighs less (example: Granite Gear Air Compressor Stuff Sack).
Trekking Poles	1-2	It is easiest to travel with a three section adjustable pole and they are nice to be able to strap to your pack as well. Adjustability is key here as a common mistake is to have a pole that can not be adjusted and is too long. Highly recommended for this trek.
Duffle bag	1	This is for your gear going with the horse packers. A small soft material duffle bag , 25 lbs max! Horse packers will be strict with this weight.
Sunscreen	1	SPF 30 or greater
Sunglasses	1	Good-quality sunglasses with 100-percent UV protection
Bathing suit	1	For a hot spring soak.
Toiletries		Toothbrush, toothpaste, small lotion, chapstick. Optional: comb, menstrual products, glasses/contacts, medications, ear plugs (travel or trial sizes are enough). <i>Note- OTC meds are not readily available in Kyrgyzstan so bring what you need from home. (NSAID, immodium etc)</i>
Bowl	1	We recommend a bowl with a lid that can hold hot food without melting or easily breaking. A lightweight kitchen tupperware works great.
Spoon	1	A spork or any eating utensil
Mug	1	An insulated mug for hot drinks
Water Bottles	2	You should be able to carry 2 liters of water in total. You can use two Nalgene or similar water bottle or a water bottle and a water bladder. We do not recommend only bringing a water bladder.
Bandana	1-2	For personal hygiene.
Headlamp / batteries	1	If it is rechargeable, check that it will last at least 5 hours/day each day we are backpacking.
Optional Items		
Hydration system		NOLS will provide Aqua Mira, but if you have a system you prefer, you are welcome to bring it.
Camera		We would love to see your photos post-trip!
Small travel towel		For guesthouses and hot springs
Pack cover (optional)		Attachable to your pack to keep it dry in rain.

