Yurt Camps on the Silk Road, Turquoise Water at 3,000 Meters — A 9-Day Kyrgyzstan Itinerary

Kyrgyzstan in nine days: two days getting oriented in Bishkek's Soviet-era squares and sprawling Osh Bazaar, a drive along Issyk-Kul's northern shore past the 11th-century Burana Tower to the wooden-mosque town of Karakol, a red-rock detour into Jeti-Oguz canyon, and a horseback and 4x4 climb up to the nomadic yurt camps of Song-Kul — a glacier-fed lake at 3,016 meters with no road access and no permanent buildings — with real hotels, licensed drivers, and 2026 prices for every stop.

DURATION
9 Days

BEST TIME TO GO
June to September (Song-Kul Yurt Season)
The high jailoo pastures around Song-Kul only open once the snow clears the passes, and most yurt camps operate June through September — July and August are warmest, while June and September bring thinner crowds and crisp nights.

FROM
$1,150 USD / person
for 2 people

Day 1 Arrive in Bishkek

Touch down at Manas International Airport and settle into the capital's leafy Soviet-era grid before a first taste of Dungan-style noodles a few blocks from Ala-Too Square.

Private Airport Transfer — Kyrgyz Concept

~35 minutes · From $25 USD, private car for 2

A private driver meets arrivals at Manas International Airport for the 30km run into central Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan's leading destination management company since 1999.

Kyrgyz Concept · +996 312 90 60 60 · www.kyrgyzconcept.com

Ala-Too Square & Oak Park Walk

~1.5 hours, self-guided · Free

An easy evening walk across Bishkek's vast central square, past the changing of the guard at the State Historical Museum, and into Oak Park's Soviet-era sculpture garden.

Dinner — Faiza

~1 hour · $8–$12 USD / person, Dungan noodles

A 24-hour Bishkek institution run by the capital's Dungan (Chinese Muslim) community, famous for hand-pulled lagman noodles and steamed manty dumplings at plastic-tablecloth prices.

Faiza · faiza.kg

Overnight — Hyatt Regency Bishkek

From $140 USD / night, for 2 people

A five-star landmark on the capital's main avenue, with a rooftop pool and the city's most reliable international-standard rooms after a long flight.

Hyatt Regency Bishkek · +996 312 661 234 · hyatt.com/hyatt-regency-bishkek

Day 2 Bishkek & Ala Archa Canyon

A morning inside the sprawling Osh Bazaar's spice and dried-fruit stalls, then an afternoon hiking granite-walled Ala Archa canyon less than an hour from downtown.

Osh Bazaar

~1.5 hours, self-guided · Free (bring cash for purchases)

Bishkek's largest and oldest market spills across covered halls and open lanes of dried apricots, horsemeat sausage, felt hats, and Silk Road spices, largely unchanged since Soviet times.

Ala Archa National Park Half-Day Hike — Kyrgyz Concept

~5 hours, guided · $60 USD / person, transport & park fee included

A 40-minute drive climbs into a glacier-carved canyon of the Kyrgyz Ala-Too range, where a guided trail follows the Ala Archa River toward waterfalls and 4,000-meter peaks.

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Dinner on Your Own — Bishkek City Center

$10–$20 USD / person

An open evening to explore Bishkek's growing restaurant scene around Chuy Avenue, from Georgian khachapuri houses to European-style cafés.

Overnight — Hyatt Regency Bishkek

From $140 USD / night, for 2 people

A second night at the capital's five-star landmark before tomorrow's drive out to Issyk-Kul.

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Day 3 Burana Tower & On to Karakol

A stop at an 11th-century minaret stranded in farmland, a look at Bronze Age petroglyphs on Issyk-Kul's shore, and a full drive along the lake's north side to Karakol.

Burana Tower

~45 minutes, self-guided · ~$2 USD entrance

The crumbling minaret is the last trace of Balasagun, a Silk Road city on the Karakhanid trade route — a steep interior staircase climbs to a platform looking out over the Chüy Valley's balbal stone figures.

Transfer — Bishkek to Karakol via Cholpon-Ata

~6 hours total, private car · From $180 USD, private car for 2

The drive follows Issyk-Kul's northern shore, the world's second-largest alpine lake, with a stop in Cholpon-Ata to see open-air Bronze Age petroglyphs scattered across a boulder field above the water.

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~4 hours, guided · $45 USD / person, horse & guide included

The Community Based Tourism network's local guides lead a ride past the Seven Bulls rock formation — a jagged red-sandstone ridge — and on to the Valley of Flowers meadow beneath snow-streaked peaks.

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~30 minutes, self-guided · Free

A short walk from the canyon's entrance leads to a second, smaller red outcrop split down the middle, tied to a well-known Kyrgyz legend of doomed love.

~1 hour · $8–$12 USD / person, home-style Kyrgyz

A family-run roadside yurt serves fresh bread, kymyz (fermented mare's milk) for the curious, and mutton plov to riders coming off the trail.

From $55 USD / night, for 2 people

A last night in Karakol before heading inland toward Song-Kul.

Hotel Issykkul Karakol · hotel-issykkul.com

A long drive along Issyk-Kul's quieter southern shore, a stop inside a canyon of wind-carved sandstone spires, and a homestay night in the gateway town for Song-Kul.

~5.5 hours total, private car · From $150 USD, private car for 2

The route traces Issyk-Kul's less-visited south shore before a stop at Skazka ('Fairytale') Canyon, where wind and rain have carved red-and-white sandstone into ridges resembling castle walls and a sleeping dragon.

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~1.5 hours, self-guided · ~$1 USD entrance

An easy trail winds between eroded red-clay formations named for their shapes — Great Chinese Wall, dragon spine, castle turrets — best walked in late-afternoon light.

From $25 USD / person, per night, with meals

A family homestay in Kochkor, the small market town that coordinates trips up to Song-Kul, with a home-cooked dinner and breakfast included through the Community Based Tourism network.

CF1 Kyrgyzstan — Kochkor Office · +996 770 443 331 · cbtkyrgyzstan.kg

Day 7 Up to Song-Kul Lake

A 4x4 and horseback climb over the Kalmak-Ashuu pass to a roadless alpine lake at 3,016 meters, where nomadic families spend every summer grazing livestock on the jailoo.

4x4 Transfer — Kochkor to Song-Kul

~3 hours, 4x4 · $60 USD, shared vehicle for 2

A Soviet-era UAZ van climbs the switchbacked Kalmak-Ashuu pass to Song-Kul's basin, the last stretch of road giving way to open pasture with no permanent buildings in sight.

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Afternoon Horseback Ride Along the Shore

~2 hours, guided · $20 USD / person, horse & guide included

A gentle ride traces Song-Kul's grassy shoreline past grazing herds, with the lake's glassy surface reflecting the surrounding 4,000-meter ridgeline.

Overnight — CBT Song-Kul Yurt Camp

From $85 USD / person, per night, full board

A traditional felt yurt on the lakeshore, heated by a wood stove and fitted with quilted toshok mattresses — dinner is cooked over an open fire by the host family and eaten by lamplight.

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Day 8 A Full Day on the Jailoo

Overnight — CBT Song-Kul Yurt Camp

From $85 USD / person, per night, full board

A second night on the lakeshore, with the Milky Way typically visible overhead thanks to zero light pollution at 3,016 meters.

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Day 9 Song-Kul to Departure

A last 4x4 descent from the jailoo to Kochkor, then a long drive back across the Chüy Valley to Manas International Airport for the flight home.

4x4 Transfer — Song-Kul to Kochkor

~3 hours, 4x4 · $60 USD, shared vehicle for 2

The return descent retraces the Kalmak-Ashuu pass back down to Kochkor, swapping high pasture for the Chüy Valley's wheat fields and roadside apricot stands.

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Transfer — Kochkor to Manas International Airport

~4 hours, private car · From $140 USD, private car for 2

A private car covers the final stretch back across the Boom Gorge and Chüy Valley to Bishkek's Manas International Airport, timed for an evening departure.

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Departure — Manas International Airport (FRU)

Self-guided

Closes a nine-day loop that ran from Bishkek's Soviet squares to a red-rock canyon of stone bulls and two nights in a nomad's yurt beside a roadless alpine lake.