

# Kazakhstan at a glimpse

## Facts

- **Full name:** Republic of Kazakhstan
- **Location:** Central Asia
- **Population:** 15.4 million (UN, 2005)
- **Capital:** Astana ( 375,000 inhabitants)
- **Largest city:** Almaty (over 1 mln inhabitants)
- **Area:** 2.7 million sq km (1 million sq miles)
- **Population Density:** 5.5 per sq km
- **Major languages:** Kazakh, Russian
- **Major religions:** Islam, Christianity
- **Life expectancy:** 58 years (men), 69 years (women)
- **Monetary unit:** 1 Kazakh tenge = 100 tiyn
- **GNI per capita:** US \$2,930 (World Bank, 2006)
- **Main exports:** Oil, ferrous and nonferrous metals, machinery, chemicals, grain, wool, meat, coal
- **Largest trading partners:** The Russian Federation, China, Germany, the US and Italy



- **Time zones:** Central Zone: GMT + 5, Western Zone: GMT + 4
- **Internet domain:** .kz
- **International dialling code:** +7

## Geography

A huge country covering a territory equivalent to the whole of Western Europe, five times the size of France and half the size of the USA. Kazakhstan is the ninth largest in the world and the second largest state in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). 90 per cent of the country comprises of steppes, the sand massifs of the Kara Kum and the vast desert

of Kizilkum, while in the southeast of the country the mountains of the Tian Shan and the Altai form a great natural frontier with thousands of lakes and rivers. About 300 glaciers are located in the mountains. The Aral Sea and Lake Balkhash are the country's largest expanses of water. The highest point of Kazakhstan is 7.010 meters above sea-level (Khan Tengry Peak). The lowest point is

132 m below sea-level in western Kazakhstan (Karahay hollow, east of the Caspian Sea). The climate is continental and fairly dry with cold winters and hot summers. The hottest month is July (August in mountain regions). As summers are ferociously hot and winters bitterly cold, spring (April to June) and autumn (September to October) are the best seasons to visit.

## Economy

Kazakhstan has vast mineral resources and enormous economic potential. The country's main assets are its huge and largely untapped oil and gas fields, which may match those of Kuwait in volume. Since independence, there has been major foreign investment in the Caspian oil sector. Oil development has brought rapid economic growth, which saw GDP increase by around 9 per cent annually since 2000. Kazakhstan also enjoys large reserves of coal, copper, iron, zinc,

lead, aluminum, uranium. Stone, such as marble and granite, is quarried in large quantities. The country's industries are predominantly geared towards processing these raw materials. Agriculture still accounts for half the economic output. The country produces meat and grain. However, one of the consequences of extensive cultivation has been the excessive demand on water supplies, in particular Kazakhstan's rivers and those of its neighbour Uzbekistan. This was the major basis of one of

the greatest ecological disasters of recent times, resulting from inefficient irrigation projects – causing severe shrinkage of the heavily polluted Aral Sea. Since independence, Kazakhstan has joined the IMF, World Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, and has signed a partnership and co-operation agreement with the EU. It also belongs to the main regional economic co-operation venture, the Central Asian Economic Union (ECO).

## Cities

### Astana

The capital city was transferred from Almaty to Astana in December 1997 (formally it was known as Akmola until 1998). President Nazarbaev cited Astana's more central and less earthquake-prone location, better telecommunications and transport infrastructure, rail links with Russia and availability of undeveloped land for the city's development among its advantages.

### Almaty

It was until very recently the capital of Kazakhstan (1929-1997) Now, Almaty with a population of over one million is an economic, financial, scientific, educational, cultural and transport center of the country. The underground railway will soon be operational. It is a green city with modern architecture, cool fountains and parks. Situated in the southern part of the country, it enjoys a beautiful setting between mountains and plains with spectacular mountain views.

Formerly known as Alma-Ata, it is called Almaty since 1994. The word Almaty means "apple abundance" from the Turkic word "alma" meaning apple tree.. The climate varies from continental to sub-continental and in some places almost arctic. The southern and northern parts of the city are located in different climatic zones. The temperature may rise or fall 10° to 15°C within 24 hours. It is possible to visit five climatic zones within a day or less while traveling around the Almaty region.

## Social profile

### Population

Ethnically it is a diverse country, with the Kazakhs comprising over 53% of the population, the Russians covering just over a quarter, with smaller minorities of Ukrainians, Germans, Chechens, Kurds, Koreans and Central Asian ethnic groups accounting for the rest.

indicates a high level of respect. Kazakhs do not object receiving uninvited guests, that is why when you come to a Kazakh home unexpectedly you will be treated as if you were invited.

Chai-Khana (tea-rooms) where visitors may sip this Kazakh specialty. It is drunk very strong with cream. Almaty is renowned for its apples – indeed the city was named after them.

### Language

The official state language is Kazakh, a Turkic language closely related to Uzbek, Kyrgyz, Turkmen and Turkish. Russian is utilized as a second official and for international communication. The Cyrillic alphabet is in general use. English is usually spoken by those involved in tourism

### National cuisine

In general Kazakhs prefer meat dishes. A favourite national dish is beshbarmak. It is cooked lamb, horse meat, beef and dough. Such horse meat dishes as kazy, karta, zhal, zhaya and, of course, kumys (mare's milk) are favourites. A medicinal drink kumys (mare's milk) has curative qualities and effects and is used for the treatment of lung and gastro-intestinal disorders. Cafes where this can be ordered are called Kumys-Khana. In the steppe and desert regions where camels are bred, their milk, called shubat, is offered to guests. Kazakh tea or chai is very popular and there are national cafes called



### Traditions and customs

Kazakhs are very hospitable and like to welcome visitors. When greeting a guest, the host gives him/her both hands depicting they are unarmed. When addressing a guest or elder, a Kazakh may address them using a shortened form of their name, adding the suffix 'ke'. For example, Abkhan may be called Abeke, Nursultan can be called Nureke. This

## Political structure:

Kazakhstan is a presidential republic. Head of State: President Nursultan A. Nazarbayev, has been in office since 1991. Elections in December 2005 returned Mr Nazarbayev for a further seven-year term.

The parliament consists of two chambers, Senate and Mazhilis (the lower chamber). Head of the Government: is the Prime Minister, Karim Masimov.