

The Kyrgyz Republic



General Information on the Kyrgyz Republic



The Kyrgyz Republic, sometimes called the "Switzerland of Asia", is one of five independent states in Central Asia. It is located in the northeastern part of Central Asia and has common borders with Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and western China.

The territory of the Kyrgyz Republic is 198.5 thousand sq. km, slightly smaller than South Dakota. The forested area makes up 3.5%, 4.4% is lakes and waterways, and 53.5% is agricultural.

The Kyrgyz Republic is a continental mountain country with a large variety of landscapes, animals and vegetation.

There are 1,923 lakes in the Kyrgyz Republic; the combined area of water is 6,836 sq km. The largest lakes in the republic are:

- Issyk-Kul Lake, the second largest alpine lake in the world with a surface area of 6236 sq km
- Son-Kul Lake with a surface area of 275 sq km
- Chatyr-Kul Lake with a surface area of 175 sq km.





The longest rivers in the republic are:

- Narin River, 535 km long
- Chu River, 221 km long
- Chashkap River, 205 km long.

For sheer mountain splendor, the Kyrgyz Republic can be compared with Nepal or Switzerland. The Tian Shan (Celestial) Mountains offer some of the most challenging peaks in the world; Pobeda Peak is more perilous than Everest. The slightly smaller Mt. Tengri is almost unrivaled in beauty.

The altitude of the Kyrgyz Republic varies from 132 m. to 7439 m. (300 to 3,180 ft) above sea level. About 94% of its territory is more than 1000 m above sea level, and 40% is more than 3000 m above sea level with large glaciers and eternal snow.

The climate varies immensely according to altitude. In the lowlands, summer is dry and hot, with an average temperature of 32° C. Winter is rather cold, at -24° C.

The high mountain ecological system of the Kyrgyz Republic is vulnerable. Of the 198.5 thousand sq. km of the republic only about 30% is suitable for year-round inhabitance, and the majority of people live in the most comfortable 20%.



In 2006, *the population* of the Kyrgyz Republic was 5,213,898 of which 64.9% was Kyrgyz. Other ethnic groups include: Russian (12.5%), Uzbek (13.8%), Ukrainian (1%), German, Tartar, Dungan, Kazakh, Uigur, and Tajik. Representatives of about 80 nations and nationalities live in the Kyrgyz Republic.

Religions: Muslim 75%, Russian Orthodox 20%, other 5%

Languages: Kyrgyz and Russian

Life Expectancy: males: 64.48 years, females: 72.7 years (2006 est.)

Literacy: 97% (2002 est.)

The Fergana mountain range divides the country into two regions:

- Northern Kyrgyz Republic: Chui, Issyk-Kul, Naryn, and Talas regions;
- Southern Kyrgyz Republic: Osh, Jalal-Abad, and Batken regions.



The geographically isolated southern provinces tend to be more conservative and Islamic than the industrialized, Russified north. 50.5% of the population of the republic lives there. The Chui and Talas valleys in the north are second in population: 21.2% of the population of the republic. 15.1% of the population of the republic lives in the Issyk-Kul and Naryn regions. The Chui region has the highest population density (not including Bishkek city) with 37.2 persons per square kilometer.

Bishkek, the capital city (population 824,900 2002 est.), dates only as far back as 1825. It is the industrial center of the Kyrgyz Republic and the only town in the world named after a wooden plunger - a *bishkek* is a churn used to make fermented mare's milk.

The 4800m (15,744ft) permanently snowcapped ramparts of the Kyrgyz Alatau range loom over the city, beckoning travelers to come and explore.



The cultural makeup of the nation is surprisingly varied and yet there is considerably less ethnic tension in the Kyrgyz Republic than in most Central Asian countries. Relations between the ethnic groups seem fairly harmonious, with much inter-marriage.



Traditional Kyrgyz culture is associated with a cycle of oral legends 20 times longer than the *Odyssey*, about a hero-of-heroes called Manas. Among contemporary authors the most well-known is Chinghiz Aitmatov. His most famous works are: *A Day Lasts Longer Than a Century*, and *The Place of the Skull*.

Currency: Som (approx. 38.5 Som to a U.S. dollar, February 2007)

The Kyrgyz Republic's major achievement since independence in 1991 has been to establish the basic framework for a market economy. In 1993 it became the first country in Central Asia to introduce its own currency. On December 20, 1998, the Kyrgyz Republic became the 133rd member of the World Trade Organization.

The economy is divided between the agricultural, industrial and service sectors. Major industries include food processing, tourism, hydroelectric power and mining. Major trading partners are the countries of the former Soviet Union and Germany. The standard of living has fallen and the social costs have been high.



Government type: Republic

Independence: 31 August 1991 (from the Soviet Union)

Constitution: adopted 5 May 1993, revised 30 December 2006

Executive Branch:

Chief of State: President Kurmanbek Bakiyev

Head of Government: Prime Minister Azim Isabekov

Legislative Branch: the bicameral Supreme Council or Zhogorku Kenesh consists of the People's Assembly and the Legislative Assembly

Judicial Branch: Supreme Court judges are appointed for 10-year terms by the Supreme Council on the recommendation of the president; Constitutional Court; Higher Court of Arbitration.

Diplomatic representation in the US:

Chief of Mission: Ambassador Zamira Sydykova

chancery: 2360 Massachusetts Ave., Washington, DC 20008

telephone: [1] (202) 338-5141

FAX: [1] (202) 386-7550

Diplomatic representation from the US:

Chief of Mission: Ambassador Marie Yovanovitch

Embassy: 171 Prospect Mira, 720016 Bishkek

Mailing Address: use embassy street address

Telephone: [996] (312) 551 241

FAX: [996] (312) 551 264

Kyrgyz Flag



Kyrgyz Seal



Flag description: a red field with a yellow sun in the center, whose 40 rays represent the 40 Kyrgyz tribes; in the center of the sun is a red ring crossed by two sets of three lines, a stylized representation of the roof of the traditional Kyrgyz yurt.

Military branches: Army, National Guard, Security Forces (internal and border troops), Civil Defense

Time Difference: 10 hours ahead of Washington, D.C.

Brief Historical Overview



The earliest known residents of what is now the Kyrgyz Republic were the Saka warrior tribes (also known as Scythians), from about the 6th century BC to the 5th century AD. Alexander the Great met perhaps his stiffest resistance from the Saka tribes during his 4th century BC advance through Central Asia. The region was under the control of various Turkic alliances from the 6th to 10th centuries, with a sizeable population living on the shores of Lake Issyk-Kul. Ancestors of today's Kyrgyz people probably lived in Siberia's upper Yenisey basin until at least the 10th century, when under the influence of Mongol incursions they began migrating south into the Tian Shan. This emigration accelerated with the rise of Genghis Khan in the 13th century. The present-day Kyrgyz Republic was part of the inheritance of Genghis' second son, Chagatai.

The territory of the Kyrgyz Republic was the scene of a pivotal battle in 751, when the Turks and their Arab and Tibetan allies drove a large Tang Chinese army out of Central Asia. In 1685 ruthless Mongol Oyrats of the Zhungarian Empire arrived, who drove vast numbers of Kyrgyz south into present-day Tajikistan. When the Oyrats were defeated by the Manchu (Qing), the Kyrgyz became de facto subjects of the Chinese, who mainly left them to their nomadic ways. In the 18th century the feudal tentacles of the Kokand khanate began to encircle them, though the feisty Kyrgyz constantly made trouble from their Tian Shan redoubts. As the Russians moved closer in the 19th century, various Kyrgyz tribal leaders made their own peace with Russia or Kokand. Russian forces slowly rolled over the towns of Kokand, their advance culminating in the defeat of Tashkent in 1865. The Kyrgyz Republic became part of the Russian Empire in 1864 and the Kyrgyz were gradually eased into the tsar's provinces of Fergana and Semireche. The new masters then began to hand land over to Russian settlers, and the Kyrgyz put up with it until a revolt in 1916, which was heavily put down by the Russian army.

In 1918 period Kyrgyz lands became part of the Turkestan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR) within the Russian Federation, then a separate Kara-Kyrgyz Autonomous Oblast in 1924 and a full Soviet Socialist Republic in 1936.

In February 1990 Askar Akayev, a physicist, was installed as the first president of the Kyrgyz Republic. In August 1991, the Kyrgyz Republic's independence was declared, and six weeks later, Akayev was elected president, running unopposed. In May 1993 a new Kyrgyz constitution dispensed with the last structural vestiges of the Soviet era. Akayev and his economic program got a solid popular vote of confidence in a referendum in 1994 and again in 1995 elections. In 2000 Akayev was reelected president in a campaign widely viewed as undemocratic.

The February 2005 parliamentary elections were marked by numerous, serious violations that subsequently sparked protests. On March 24, 2005, Akayev, fled the country after protesters overran government buildings in Bishkek. Kurmanbek Bakiyev was installed as interim president, and in July 2005, he was elected president in election that marked tangible progress towards meeting international standards. Following opposition-led street protests in November 2006, Kyrgyzstan adopted a new constitution that curbed the power of the executive and provided the possibility of an improved system of checks and balances between the branches of government. In December 2006, the parliament adopted amendments to the new constitution that restored certain powers to the president, to include nomination of constitutional and supreme court justices, appointment and dismissal of regional governors and heads of local administrations, and control over defense and security bodies. The next presidential and parliamentary elections are scheduled for 2010.