



## Almaty

prepared by

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Almaty is the capital city of Kazakhstan. Almaty is the Kazakh pronunciation of the name. The Russian pronunciation, used before the breakup of the Soviet Union, is Alma-Ata (lit., "father of apple"). The city began as a Russian military fortification in 1854. Later on it was called Vernyi. In 1867, Vernyi became the administrative center of the Seven Rivers (jetisu). Both the Tsars and the Soviet leaders exiled political dissidents to this city instead of to Siberia. Leon Trotsky, for instance, was exiled to Alma-Ata during the Soviet period. During 1905-1907 revolution, a social-democrat group was formed in Vernyi. The group organized demonstrations and paved the way for the institution of Bolshevism in 1917. In 1918, a Bolshevik regime was established in the city. The name of the city was changed from Vernyi to Alm-Ata in 1921.

The first thing that strikes a Westerner in Almaty is the dual nature of the culture. Comprised of an almost equal number of Russians and Kazakhs, both languages are considered the official language of the republic. All instructions on documents, as well as writings on billboards and shops are in both languages. Recently, English, too, is finding its way into Kazakh culture slowly but steadily.

Almaty itself lies on a slope with a light north-south decline. Water from the highlands enters Almaty in the north. From there, it flows down in small brooks running at the side of the streets. A good portion of it is used for irrigation of vegetable patches, apple orchards, and the like in the city. A neat system of dams and sluices is devised whereby sufficient water can be directed to a particular orchard for a given house for a determined length of time.

Novaya Ploshad is one of three major population centers in Alma Aty. It is a complex of commercial and governmental buildings, presidential palace, and museums. The Central State Museum of Kazakhstan is located here as well. The plaza itself serves as the staging ground for national celebrations and parades as well as for demonstrations and exhibitions.

Although not the largest in Central Asia, the bazaar of Almaty was clean, well-organized, and quite well stocked, especially in dried fruits, meat, and dairy products. Unlike in the other Central Asian cities where a major part of the market is outside in the open air, almost all of the Almaty bazaar is within a large, two-story structure. The various products are divided by type and placed in good order on display. The prices are mostly set and often marked on the goods on display. This orderliness is missing, for instance, in the bazaars of Bishkek.



Those who visit Almaty in summer would most likely enjoy the many city parks in which shade trees and flower beds abound. In fact, Almaty is known to be the greenest city in Central Asia. One such park is the Panfilov Guards Park, adorned by a cathedral as well as a the Glory Memorial, dedicated to the 28 Kazakh soldiers who withstood an attack by dozens of German tanks in 1941.

Visitors to the bazaar on such a hot day would most likely drink kumis (fermented mares milk). The Kazakhs regard Kumis the most refreshing drink in the world and drink it like water, in fact, in place of water. Outside the main part of the city, walking in the back alleys, one is surrounded by orchards--apples, pommegranates, plums, grapes, cherries--all bursting over the mud-brick walls. The downside of this luxury is the barking of the dogs that guard the houses with such worthy treasures. They bark continuously from midnight till dawn.

A major sight outside the city proper (about 10 miles) is the Medeo. It is a complex of sports facilities, hotels, and entertainment center on a grand scale. It has played a major role in training athletes and accommodating performances on ice. For skaters, for instance, there is a cloak room for 2,500 people, a skate rent service, and a number of bars.



Many monuments grace the streets and parks of Almaty. Among the most memorable are those of Abai Kunanbayev, Chokan Valikhanov, Amangeldy Imanov, Mukhtar Auezov, and Jambul Jabayev.

Some of the major figures, like Mukhtar Auezov who spent almost all his literary career studying the works of Abai Kunanbayev have museums of their own. The Auezov Museum, for instance, traces the development of Kazakh culture from a nomadic groups of herders to a modern, almost Western people.



In the process, especially as an illustration of the life of Abai, Auezov's work traces the difficulties of settling the restive tribes and familiarizing them with the Russian language and culture. Others, like Jambul Jabayev, have museums of their own in the towns and villages from which they hail.

One of the major libraries in Almaty is the Pushkin Library with over five million books. It is also one of the most prominent collections of Oriental manuscripts and of books printed in Europe during the 18th and 19th centuries.



The Republic's Museum of Folk Musical Instruments has a collection of musical instruments, especially the many types of domras and drums that have been developed in the region in the past. An interesting feature of the museum is the sound reproduction (vocal as well as instrumental) of samples of the performance of the instruments on display. These sound segments accompany the explanations of the guide as he or she describes the circumstances (wars, tuys, wakes, etc.) in which a particular type of drum or dombra was used.



Similarly, the Central State Museum of Kazakhstan exhibits not only the achievements of the Kazakhs in recent years, but a good picture of nomadic life, instruments of war employed by the the Chingizid and Timurid ancestors of the Kazakhs, as well as the type of clothes and jewelry they wore. Even the original studies of Chokan Valikhanov and other Kazakh scholars are exhibited, often the contents are illustrated on large murals. The thing to see here, however, is the statue of Altun Adam (the Golden Man), a relic of the days of the Sakas (5th century B. C.), discovered in the course of excavating a kurgan (burial site).

