SPICE ROADS
CYCLING

TRAILS

# MOUNTAIN BIKING KAZAKHSTAN AND KYRGYZSTAN

Tour Code
**KAZ-KAZ**

**13** DAYS
**12** NIGHTS

| | |
|---|---|
| Destinations | Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan |
| Tour Meets | Almaty |
| Tour Ends | Almaty |
| Fly in to | Almaty International Airport (ALA) |
| Fly out of | Almaty International Airport (ALA) |
| Group Size | 4-13 riders |
| Minimum Age | 18 (on scheduled departures) |

## ACTIVITY PROFILE

| | |
|---|---|
| **10** Cycling days | **503** km Total cycling distance |
| **50** km Avg distance / day | **902** m Avg climbing / day |

## PRICING

| | |
|---|---|
| Price | US$ 4,500 |
| Bike Hire (Mountain Bike) | US$ 400 |
| Single Supplement | US$ 395 |

## DEPARTURES

25 Jul - 06 Aug 2027

## WHAT'S INCLUDED

- ✓ SpiceRoads jersey
- ✓ Water bottle
- ✓ Support vehicle
- ✓ Guide(s)
- ✓ Meals (as indicated)
- ✓ Accommodation
- ✓ Snacks and drinks
- ✓ Entrance fees

## WHAT'S EXCLUDED

- ✗ International flights
- ✗ Airport pick up
- ✗ Airport drop off
- ✗ Visa fees
- ✗ Alcohol
- ✗ Tips

## TRIP PROFILE

We ride a total of 503 km over 10 cycling days. The arena for this tour is south-eastern Kazakhstan and eastern Kyrgyzstan, in the heart of the Tien Shan mountains. Other than a vehicle transfer on Day 1 (from Almaty to the start point) and on Day 12 (from Karakol back to Almaty), all of the rides are point-to-point, cycling primarily from one campsite to the next. This excludes Day 7, of course, when we take a helicopter up the mountain before riding entirely downhill back to camp! We ride along braided rivers, across high-altitude jailoos (summer pastures), and over mountain passes. The views are as spectacular as the rides are thrilling, taking us across a mix of dirt and gravel trails interspersed with true off-road sections through grasslands or rocky plains, as well as some tarmac on provincial roads. And, of course, you won't forget the incredible hospitality of the Kazakh and Kyrgyz villagers and shepherds, nor the sight of the herds of semi-wild horses that cross our path along the way.

The trip is fully supported, and your guide's expert knowledge of the area and terrain means that you always know what is coming up in terms of distance and difficulty. This makes a tremendous difference, as does the constant supply of water and refreshments along the way.

**Suitability:** This is an advanced-level mountain biking tour that should only be attempted by experienced cyclists comfortable in remote regions. Daily distances average 50 km, with the shortest ride being 27 km (the heli-biking day) and the longest 79 km (Day 6). These are full days in the saddle when factoring in surface conditions, elevation gains, and breaks. The climbs on this tour come in all shapes and sizes: some are long and mild, others short and steep, and many fall somewhere in-between. As an adventure designed specifically for mountain biking, you should have experience cycling on rough surfaces and off-road trails. This requires confident bike-handling skills, particularly on the descents. Cycling at altitudes of over 2,000 metres adds a further layer of challenge, as the thinner air can affect exertion levels and recovery times. A support vehicle follows the group throughout the journey, but please be aware that it cannot always follow directly behind; instead, it will meet the group at designated intervals. Furthermore, as the group approaches lunch or the end of the ride, the support vehicle will need to drive ahead to prepare the meal and set up the campsite. Please note that passenger seats are limited, and you should come prepared to ride the full daily distances

**Biking Conditions:** Riders can expect approximately 75% of the route to consist of vehicle-width dirt and gravel tracks, alongside sections of singletrack and off-road riding. The remaining 25% is made up of paved surfaces, ranging from high-quality tarmac to broken, bumpy, and cratered roads. The non-paved portions of this trip offer fantastic riding for mountain bikers, though it is important to remember that some sections consist of loose gravel and sandy patches that require careful navigation. Additionally, several descents are quite rocky and demand extra caution. While traffic on the paved sections is generally minimal, be prepared to share the road with cars, motorcycles, and buses, particularly when approaching towns (which, overall, are few and far between!). The Tien Shan Mountains can be windy, which may work for or against our favour depending on the direction; regardless, you will certainly need a buff to protect your mouth and nose from dust. You will also need reliable rain gear, as the occasional downpour is not uncommon; this can lead to muddy or slippery conditions, but it is all part of the adventure, and your expert guide will ensure you are safe at all times.

**Accommodations:** In Almaty (Days 1 and 12), we stay in a modern, centrally located 4-star hotel. For six nights of the tour, we sleep at campsites set up by our local team in beautiful, remote locations. Our camps include trekking tents with mats, but please bring a sleeping bag, a camping mattress (such as a Therm-a-Rest for insulation), a sleeping bag liner for added warmth or hygiene, and a pillow. Our camps also include a dining tent, a toilet tent, and even a sauna tent! On Day 4, we stay at a simple local guesthouse in Saty; low-frills but cosy. Days 6 and 7 offer some elevated comfort mid-trip at Karkara Base Camp, an adventure hub for trekkers. Here, we'll be sleeping in yurts with access to hot showers, a sauna, and drinks. In Karakol (Day 11), we stay at a centrally located yurt camp with a more modern feel. Please don't expect all hotel or campsite staff to speak English. For larger groups, we may need to use more than one accommodation and, in case of limited availability, switch to an alternative property of a similar standard to the one listed in the itinerary.

**A Note on Heli-Biking:** Helicopter flights are strictly subject to weather and pilot discretion. While we schedule tours during the most stable summer windows, safety is the final word. Should conditions prevent us from flying, we will pivot to an alternative riding route that day.

## Day 1: Meet in Almaty

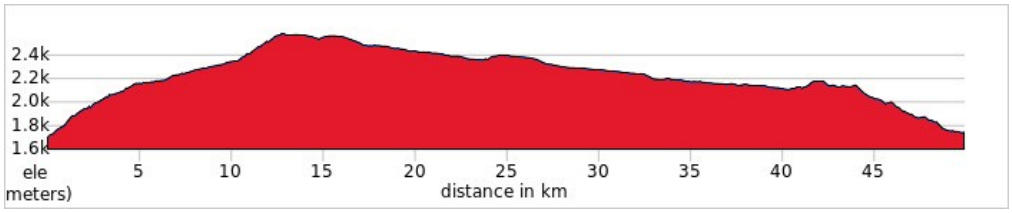
Welcome to Almaty, Kazakhstan's biggest city and the jumping-off point for any adventure into the rugged beauty of the country's great outdoors. Try to arrive as early as possible so you can explore the so-called "Garden City," where wide, leafy boulevards and Soviet-era architecture are framed by the snow-capped peaks of the Trans-Ili Alatau. You can tick off the main sights in the afternoon before we meet for our trip briefing and welcome dinner. Don't miss the candy-coloured Zenkov Cathedral in Panfilov Park or the bustling Green Bazaar. Please let us know if you require assistance with airport transfers and pre-tour hotel bookings.

Hotel Kazzhol Almaty  Dinner

## Day 2: Almaty → Turgen Gorge → Asy Plateau

It is time to hit the road! In the morning, we transfer around two and a half hours into the Turgen River Gorge. We jump on our bikes where the asphalt ends near the small settlement of Batan, beginning our adventure with a steady climb up towards the Asy Plateau. It's a testing start but, after approximately 13 km, we reach the Oi-Zhailau Pass at nearly 2,600 metres ASL. From here on, the terrain becomes more forgiving as we weave across the plateau on gravel tracks – the sky is vast, the grass a vibrant green, and the mountain panorama endless. We finish the day with an 8 km descent to our campsite on the banks of the Asy River.

Tented Camp  Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

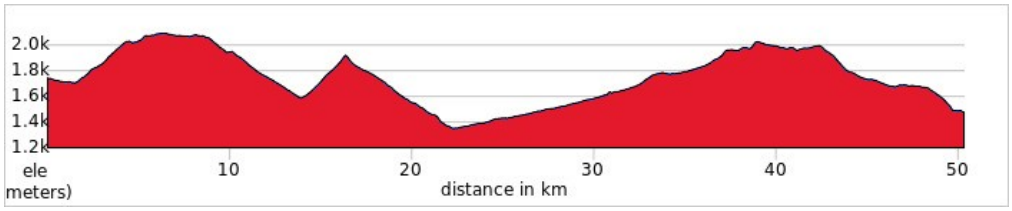



Ride 50km +1050m -1019m

## Day 3: Asy River → Zhinishke River

Today we ride from one river valley to another, crossing the rugged, deeply weathered slopes and ridges of the Northern Tian Shan mountains. The first 20 km are a thrilling challenge as we make our way up and down the legendary Zhambas Pass. This is gritty mountain biking in remote Central Asia with steep zig-zagging climbs and technical descents. The second half of the ride is gentler as we stick to the floor of a narrow valley before one final hump leads into the day's crowning descent to the banks of the Zhinishke River.

Tented Camp Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

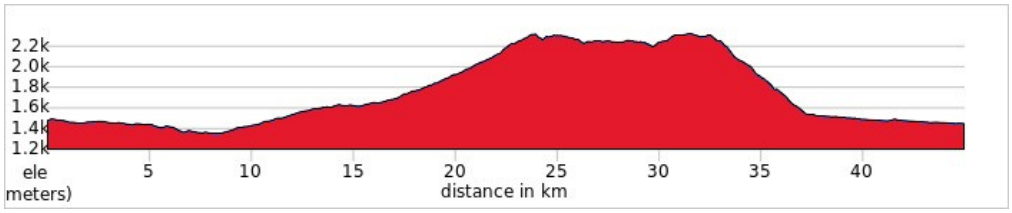



Ride 50km +1454m -1717m

## Day 4: Zhinishke River → Saty Village

We warm up with an easy 10 km along the Zhinishke River. Then the real action begins as we strike south out of the valley on a 15 km, rocky ascent that gets progressively steeper, with epic switchbacks clawing their way up the mountainside. As we climb, dry canyon walls give way to high-alpine meadows and scattered spruce trees. Reaching the summit, the views open up across the ice-clad peaks of the Kungey Alatau, and we ride through a high-altitude wilderness before a 10 km descent into the wide valley of the Shilik River. We finish the day in the village of Saty, staying in a simple but cosy local guesthouse.

Local Guesthouse Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

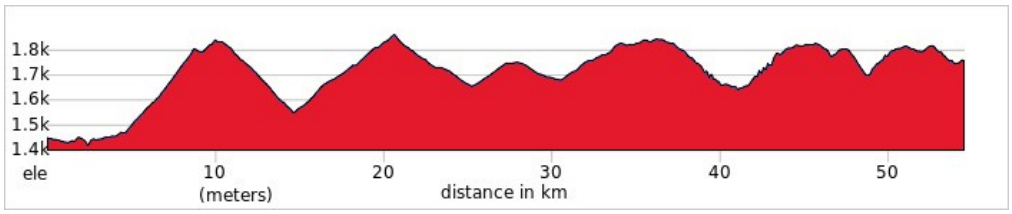



Ride 45km +1258m -1292m

## Day 5: Saty Village → Kensu River

A change of pace today as we trade off-road for tarmac, making our way from Saty to the eastern fringes of the Northern Tian Shan mountains. The road, which is generally in good condition, rises and falls with the contours of rugged mountain steppe. Besides wide, rolling grasslands we pass through a string of villages and small towns, offering a glimpse into the settled lifeways of the Kazakh highlanders. In the afternoon, we'll arrive at our tents pitched on the banks of the Kensu River. Here, at close to 2,000 metres ASL, we enjoy the crisp mountain air and sleep under the great, star-filled skies of Central Asia.

Tented Camp  Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

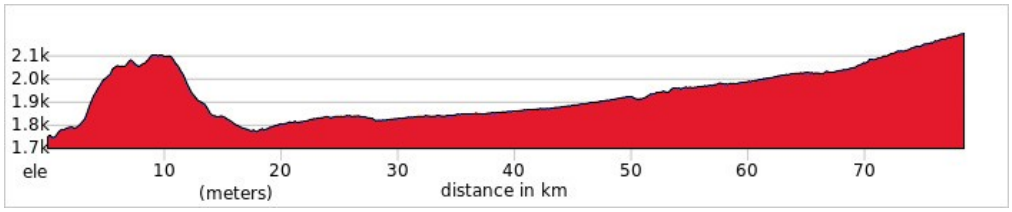



Ride 55km  +1360m  -1049m

## Day 6: Kensu River → Karkara Base Camp (Kyrgyzstan)

Today begins with an early challenge as we climb out of the valley of the Kensu River and enter the Kegen Plateau. Here, the landscape opens up into a staggering expanse of high-altitude steppe, where herds of Kazakhstan's "Five Jewels" of livestock — horses, sheep, goats, cattle and Bactrian camels — can be found roaming the grasslands or drinking by the rivers. The riding is on paved, relatively flat roads all the way to the remote border post of Karkara where we cross into Kyrgyzstan with our bikes. From here it is a final gently rising 20 km to the Karkara Base Camp, a hub used primarily for climbers looking to tackle the 7,000-metre peaks of the Central Tian Shan, but also a very welcoming home for intrepid cyclists like us! We'll be here for two nights, sleeping in yurts with access to hot showers, a sauna, and drinks for elevated comfort mid-trip.

Yurt Camp  Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

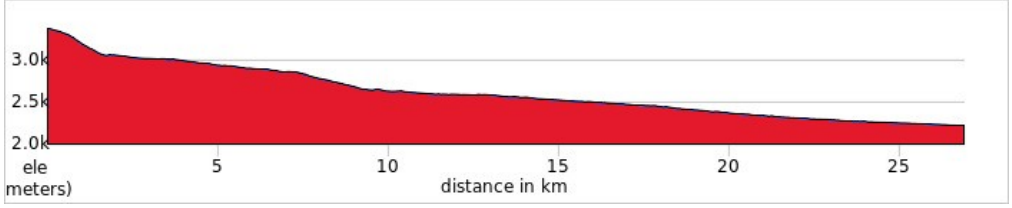



Ride 79km  +913m  -468m

## Day 7: Karkara Heli-biking

Our tour's flagship moment has arrived: boarding a Soviet-style helicopter to lift us to a mountain ridge at 3,500 m ASL before cycling back to base. It's an experience that is hard to put into words: the thrill of soaring above Central Asia to the rhythmic churn of the rotors, hopping off with our bikes, and descending along nomadic trails past forests, pastures and roaring rivers framed by snow-capped peaks. The afternoon is free to relax back at Karkara Base Camp. Please note that on rare occasions, the helicopters may be grounded due to weather conditions; in the event of a cancellation, we will head out for a scenic loop ride in the local area.

Yurt Camp  Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner



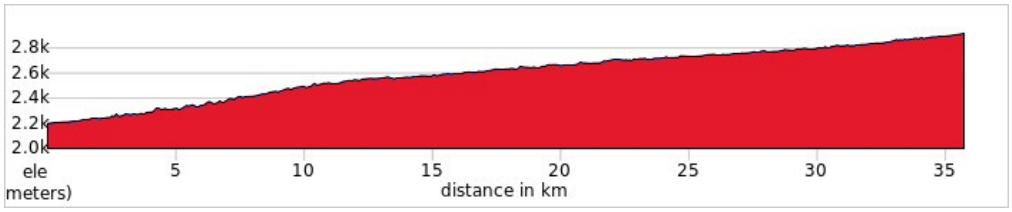

Ride 27km  +60m  -1217m

## Day 8: Karkara Base Camp → Turuk River

We say goodbye to Karkara Base Camp and gear up for the next chapter of our journey, venturing deep into the remote backcountry of eastern Kyrgyzstan. We are now in the Central

Tian Shan, home to the mighty Khan Tengri ('Lord of the Sky') — the region's most iconic peak, long revered as the sacred throne of the supreme deity by nomadic societies. Today's ride along the Karkara and Turuk rivers is a steady ascent, though with an average gradient of 3% it is very manageable. We return to the true wilderness tonight, sleeping under canvas in our mountain tents at 3,000 m ASL.

Tented Camp  Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

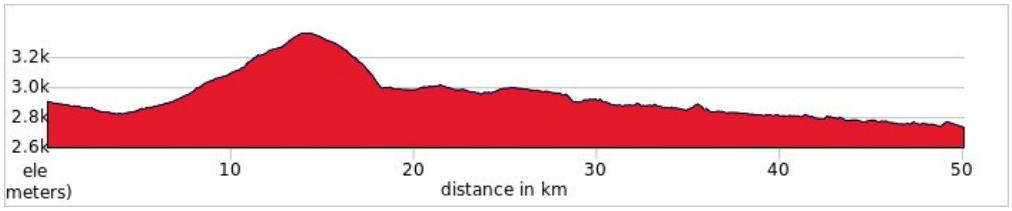



Ride 36km  +801m  -86m

## Day 9: Turuk River → Saryjaz River

We start the day by continuing upstream along the Turuk River system. The first 15 km are a steady ascent on gravel tracks, leading to the summit of the Aktog Pass. On a clear day, the unmistakable pyramid-shaped peak of Khan Tengri dominates the horizon. From the pass, we enjoy a long descent to the Saryjaz River, which braids along the valley floor in silvery, glacier-fed strands, dissecting the rolling jailoos (summer pastures). We ride leisurely through the valley with no further major climbs, following the river all the way to this evening's campsite.

Tented Camp  Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

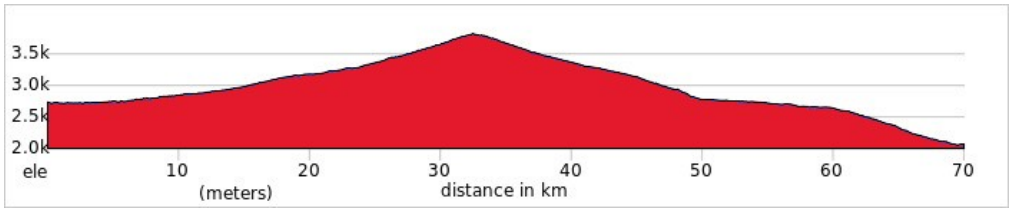



Ride 50km  +776m  -946m

## Day 10: Saryjaz River → Turgon-Ak-Suu River

Today marks our tour's last major transition as we ride from the Central Tian Shan mountains into the Issyk-Kul basin. We begin with a steady 30 km climb on a paved road to the summit of the Chon Ashu Pass, which sits at nearly 4,000 metres ASL. After soaking in the incredible vistas, we relish a fabulous descent that takes us from alpine tundra through spruce forests and lower-lying foothills carved by the Turgon-Ak-Suu River. We finish our ride after 70 km and camp along the river near the village of Ak-Bulak.

Tented Camp  Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

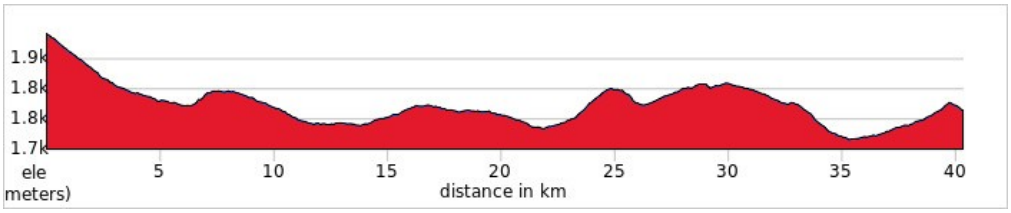



Ride 70km  +1124m  -2000m

## Day 11: Turgon-Ak-Suu River → Karakol

It is time for the home stretch! Our last ride is short but sweet as we follow a mildly undulating, paved provincial road into the city of Karakol. We pedal past vast Soviet-era agricultural grids growing wheat and potatoes, re-acclimatising to the increasing traffic which, after the remote silence of the mountains, can feel a bit foreign at first. We aim to arrive in the city by lunch and, in the afternoon, drive to Issyk-Kul. Hemmed in by the mountains, this is the second-largest alpine lake on the planet. It is so vast that it never freezes and even creates its own microclimate, offering a massive coastal contrast to the high-altitude tundra we conquered only yesterday. You'll have time to lounge by the shore and go for a swim before we return to Karakol for the night.

Yurt Camp  Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner




Ride 41km  +225m  -379m

## Day 12: Karakol → Almaty

We come full circle, returning to the bustling streets of Almaty. We depart from Karakol after breakfast for the six-hour drive back into Kazakhstan. We break up the journey with lunch near the Charyn Canyon, a vast labyrinth of sheer red sandstone walls and bizarre rock formations that drop away suddenly from the flat steppe. Depending on our arrival time in Almaty, you may have the afternoon to explore at your own pace — perhaps lounging at a pavement café or stocking up on dried fruits and local chocolate at the Green Bazaar. We reconvene in the evening for a celebratory farewell dinner to toast our adventure.

Hotel Kazzhol Almaty  Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

## Day 13: Almaty Departure

Time to say goodbye to Almaty and head home or travel to your next destination in Central Asia. There are plenty more surreal places to explore in the region which are just a quick flight away, such as the turquoise Silk Road cities of Uzbekistan. Please let us know if you require assistance with post-tour hotel bookings or airport transfers.

Breakfast

Disclaimer: The adventure cycling tours we operate often go beyond the beaten track, and the countries where we ride are not always predictable. Due to these reasons, it is occasionally necessary to reroute or update itineraries. Our guarantee is that we will not change a trip unless for safety or to improve it. Our listed hotels are always accurate at the time of writing, but should we have to change any hotel, it will always be for a similar or better one.

## NUTS & BOLTS

### Bikes

Because some people can't imagine going on a trip without their own beloved bicycle, we do not provide them as part of this tour. However, you can hire bikes locally for the price listed in the

tour pricing section. We provide hardtail mountain bikes from Haro or similar brands. If you bring your own bike, we suggest it is a full-suspension or hardtail mountain bike in good mechanical order. We don't suggest bringing a gravel bike for this tour due to the rough nature of some of the off-road trails. E-bikes are not available for hire on this tour.

### Bike Repairs

Basic spares and tools are carried by the guide and on the support vehicle, though we cannot guarantee having spares for every conceivable problem. Carrying a basic tool kit, a spare tube and a pump while riding is recommended.

### Safety

Wearing a helmet is required on all our biking adventures and is non negotiable. If you do not wear a helmet you will not be allowed to cycle. Your tour leader is trained in first aid and emergency rescue, but to a large degree you must be responsible for your own safety while riding. It is therefore compulsory that you take out travel insurance that will cover you for a mountain biking tour.

### Guides

You will be led by a local English-speaking guide and if the group is 9 people or more we will add another guide to the tour. All our guides are well informed in the history, culture and religions of the area where you are biking and are skilled at passing that knowledge on to you. Your guide is also medically trained and an experienced cyclist, able to handle most minor repairs en route.

## THE NITTY GRITTY

### Passports and Visas

Citizens of over 70 countries can enter Kazakhstan visa-free for tourism for a stay of up to 30 days per entry. Please check here to confirm if your nationality is on the official list. If you do require a visa please let us know so we can assist you with the required supporting document (do not leave this to the last minute).

**Important Entry Requirement:** Even if you are on the visa-exempt list you must download the official "QazETA" mobile app to submit a digital travel authorization, complete a standard customs/health declaration, and log your flight details prior to boarding. See here for more information and follow the steps to get the app. Please fill this in 72 hours before your flight.

Please make sure that your passport is still valid for at least six months at the end of the tour and that you have at least two blank visa pages available.

### Health

Make sure you are up-to-date on all routine vaccines before every trip. Recommended vaccinations include typhoid, polio, tetanus, and Hepatitis A. A certificate for Yellow Fever is required if arriving from an infected area within the prior six days. Please speak to your trave doctor for the most recent information.

### Weather

Southeastern Kazakhstan and eastern Kyrgyzstan feature a continental climate where weather patterns shift rapidly with the seasons and based on elevation. The sweet spot for cycling is late May to early September when daytime temperatures are between 20–30°C. But the moment the sun goes down behind the mountain peaks, camping nights at high elevations can instantly plummet to 5°C or lower. Furthermore, long mountain descents can feel incredibly cold due to the windchill, even on a clear day. Quick mountain showers or afternoon storms can happen in the highlands, so a flexible layering system is essential to stay comfortable.

### Altitude

Because our route climbs into the Tien Shan mountains, you may experience mild symptoms like breathlessness, headaches, nausea, or a loss of appetite before fully acclimatizing. This is completely normal when ascending up to 3,000 meters. The best remedies are to pace yourself and drink plenty of water. For most people, these symptoms naturally disappear within 24 to 48 hours once your body adjusts to the elevation.

### Food

Meals are included in the itinerary where B = breakfast, L = lunch, and D = dinner. While camping meals will be prepared by the the local crew and feature Central Asian and Western cuisine. Please make sure to let us know about your preferences and allergies before the start of

the tour. Please note that strict vegan, gluten-free, or severe nut-allergy diets can be difficult to cater to in remote parts of Central Asia due to limited local market ingredients. If you have strict dietary needs, we highly recommend bringing your own favorite supplementary travel snacks and staples to ensure you are fully fueled.

### Drink

Keeping you completely hydrated is a job we take very seriously. Water and energy-restoring drinks are included in the tour price while riding. Soft drinks and other beverages during meals are not included. Beer and alcohol are not available when camping and you'll need to come prepared with your own provisions.

### Solo Travelers

SpiceRoads does not require you to pay a surcharge for traveling alone. We will arrange for you to share accommodation with another traveler of the same gender and if we can not match you up we will provide a single room at no extra charge. If you prefer not to share a single supplement is payable to guarantee your own room. The cost of the single supplement is listed above.

### Money

The currency in Kazakhstan is the tenge (KZT), and in Kyrgyzstan, it is the som (KGS). Make sure to exchange or withdraw money in Almaty, as there will be no opportunities to do so once we are on the road and credit cards are not accepted in the mountains. You likely won't need much cash anyway, other than for drinks, incidentals, and tips.

## GENERAL BOOKING INFO

If this is the tour for you here's what you need to do to confirm your place:

### FLEXIBLE BOOKING CONDITIONS

Booking a SpiceRoads cycling adventure is easy and we try to do everything possible to make sure you have full flexibility and peace of mind. We do not require a deposit to hold your place on a tour and once full payment has been made your money is protected in our client account and you have the flexibility to cancel or change your booking if needed.

### CONFIRMING YOUR BOOKING

Just complete our online booking form or send your booking details offline (email or post), and we will confirm your participation. No deposit is needed to confirm your place on a SpiceRoads tour.

You are advised to read our Booking Conditions in full before you make your payment and should you require further clarifications of any of the conditions below, please email us or call our office.

### TRIP STATUS

There is a minimum number of participants (usually 2) required to enable the trip to go ahead. Once the minimum number is reached, the trip status will change from 'Available' to 'Guaranteed to Depart'. Once a trip is guaranteed to depart you are free to book your flights and make other travel arrangements. If the trip status is 'Limited' will mean we have only a small number of spaces available for booking. If you are unsure about the trip status, please email us or call our office.

### BOOKING ONLINE

From the tour page, click the 'Book Now' link. All departures for this tour will appear, just select the date you'd like to travel. For the next steps, you'll need to know the names of the people travelling. If you wish you can also provide extra details such as passport numbers, height (for bike hire), or you can add that later by logging into Manage My Trip (we'll set up an account for you automatically if you don't already have one). Our system will contact you from time to time to fill in the missing information, as it will be required before departure. However, if the trip that you are booking offers a child discount, you will have to fill out the date of birth of each rider (so we can calculate the appropriate discount).

If you are having any problems please send us an email, or give us a call (+66 026 3295) and one of our travel specialists will assist you with your booking.

### BOOKING OFFLINE

Just call us or send an email indicating which trip you want to join and we will happily send you a list of questions and process your booking for you.

## DEPOSITS AND PAYMENTS

We do not require a deposit or full payment to book a place for you on a tour.

The balance of the tour's cost (final invoice) will need to be paid 60 days before the departure date with fees for any bicycle rental(s), single supplement(s) and extra hotel nights.

In the case where a booking is made when there are less than 60 days until the tour departure date, the tour's cost should be paid in full within 72 hours of receiving an invoice from SpiceRoads. Payment can be made by credit card using our online payment gateway or by bank transfer. When making payment online you will need to confirm that you have read these booking conditions during the "checkout" process, which equates to agreeing to the terms of services and stipulations as indicated in this document.

In all cases, tour fees need to be paid "in full" before participation in a tour. No person(s) will be allowed to join a tour without fully settling their invoice and receiving a confirmation number from SpiceRoads.

The exception can be made for last-minute miscellaneous fees that can be paid locally (visas, additional local hotel bookings, etc.) can be settled on the day of arrival.

## FULL FLEXIBILITY FOR TOUR CANCELATIONS

If the tour is cancelled or postponed by SpiceRoads because we didn't make the trip numbers and the tour can't run, we will make a full cash refund (by bank transfer or on your credit card).

If the tour is cancelled for any other reason, including due to Covid related travel restrictions, we will give you a full credit (with no deductions for admin or any other small-print item) to use on any SpiceRoads tour with no time limit. (Exceptions being flights, special permits and other non-refundable items and these will be advised when booking the trip).

Before paying for your tour, you can cancel your booking with no charge and up until 40 days before departure, you can change your booking to another travel date or move your booking onto another SpiceRoads tour with no charges.

If you need to cancel after you have made full payment, please see our cancellation policy.

### Loyalty Riders Club

For those who have been on several long tours with us, we reward customer loyalty by offering repeat customers a special discount off the tour price (excludes single supplement and bike rental). If this is your fourth scheduled tour or more you will receive a 5% discount. If this is your eighth scheduled tour or more we will extend a 10% discount. The discount will be reflected in your online booking, but please contact us if any questions. Loyalty discounts cannot be used in conjunction with any other offer. Note: Only tours of 7 days or more will be applicable for a loyalty discount.

### International Flights

International flights, to and from the start and finish points are not included in the tour price. Once your tour is Guaranteed to Depart you can book your flight. Please contact us for advice before arranging flights for the best arrival and departure times. We would only cancel a trip for an extreme circumstance, but in that case, where we cancel your trip, we cannot be liable for losses incurred relating to any flight booking you have made. Please claim any losses from your travel insurance that you acquired when you booked your holiday.

### Newsletter

Our adventure travel e-newsletter is full of travel news, trip information, interesting stories and contests. To avoid missing out on special offers and updates from SpiceRoads, be sure to subscribe.

## CONTACT US

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