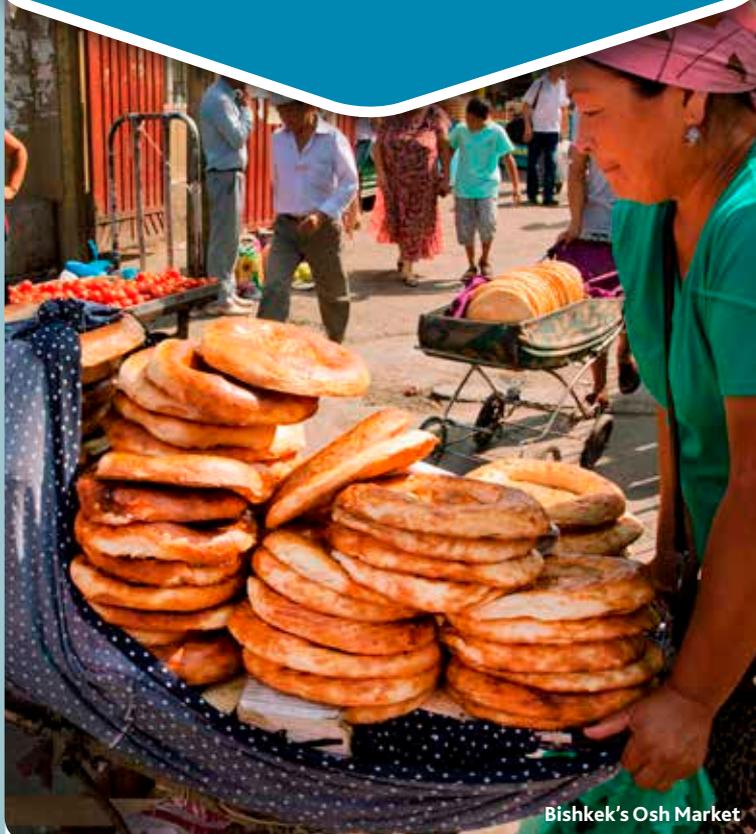


First time in Bishkek



Bishkek's Osh Market

Bishkek doesn't get the appreciation it deserves. Dig into the cuisine, art scene or nightlife of Kyrgyzstan's capital and you'll be pleasantly surprised by this gateway to the Tien Shan mountain range.

👁️ SIGHTS

Ala-Too Square

(Chuy Avenue)

Surveyed by a triumphant statue of national hero Manas, Bishkek's nominal centre is architecturally Neobrutalist in style yet has a photogenic quality – especially when slowly goose-stepping soldiers change the guard beside the soaring national flagpole.

Art Group 705

(705.kg; Bokonbaev 149a)

Well-curated irregular exhibitions on a wide variety of themes and a grungy hipster space make this a great stop for art-seekers. Go through the gate at Bokonbaev 149 and then circle round to the door at the back marked '705'. It's only open when an exhibition is on, so call or check the website before visiting.

Holy Resurrection Cathedral

(pravoslavie.kg; Togolok Moldo 495/6)

The bright blue spires of this Russian Orthodox cathedral, opened in 1947, stand out along Jibek Jolu. The spartan interior is decorated with icons and studded with candles.

State Museum of Fine Arts

(knmii.kg; Abdrakhmanov (Soviet) 196)

Come here for Kyrgyz embroidery and felt rugs, a splendid variety of paintings, and rotating exhibitions of touring works.

🍷 ACTIVITIES

TUK Trekking

(tuk.kg; Kievskaya St 168)

A Bishkek-based association that organises walking, horse-riding,

cycling and skiing trips to a variety of regional beauty spots, mostly on one-day excursions at weekends. Joining one of these is a great way to save money on transport and, more importantly, can be a wonderful way to meet a cross-section of locals and expats.

Zhirkal Banyas

(00 996 312 486031; Toktogul 53, cnr Sultan Ibraimov (Pravda))

This large, gender-segregated bathhouse has a twin-cupped façade that looks like a bad architectural joke. However, the low-lit, artistic interior is well maintained and makes a great place to unwind... unless you're uncomfortable with nudity. Manicures and massages cost extra, but there's no charge for flogging yourself with venik (birch twigs) in traditional Russian style.

✂️ EATING

Adel Hotpot

SICHUAN ££

(00 996 558 871666;

Baytik Baatyr (Soviet) 21)

This serves authentic Chinese hotpot, down to the yin-yang style split pots filled with fiery red broth. Order the fatty lamb meat for a Kyrgyz touch, or stick with Sichuanese favourites like lotus root, tofu and fish balls.

Arzu

CENTRAL ASIAN ££

(00 996 312 460697;

Togolok Moldo 7)

One of central Bishkek's most convivial higher-end restaurants serves delicious national cuisine. Its unusually tasty laghman (long, stout noodles) come in 16 varieties. Service can be slow.

Chaikhana Navat

TEAHOUSE

££

(navat.kg; Kievskaya St 141/1)

The city-centre outpost of this local chain is hugely atmospheric, with Central Asian handicrafts decorating the space. The menu runs across Central Asia in its variety, and it's all reliably good.

Hanoi

VIETNAMESE ££

(00 996 704 069999; Chuy 92)

Find legit pho, spring rolls and more in this great-value Vietnamese restaurant. The menu is in Vietnamese and Russian, so just guess your way – you can't go far wrong as it's all delicious.

🍷 DRINKING

Bar 12

(00 996 551 121212;

Razzakov 32, 12th fl)

Atop a downtown high-rise, this self-consciously exclusive bar/nightclub has panoramic views from comfortable sofas, where suave guests smoke shishas and sip well-mixed cocktails. There's a dancefloor upstairs.

Chemodan Zusmanovicha

(facebook.com/chemodanzusmanovich; 4th Microdistrict 6/2)

The location in a residential area near Orto-Say Bazaar makes this spot hard to find, but the cool ambience and well-crafted mixed drinks at 'Zusmanovich's Suitcase' make it worth the effort. Check its social-media pages for details on live music and other types of performance.

Na Kryshe

(00 996 558 860860; Chingiz

Aitmatov (Mira) 93)

'On the Rooftop' is popular for panoramic mountain views and unusually late hours that make it one of the few places in the city to party into the early morning.

Pinta Pub

(00 996 312 323099; Frunze 418)

Locally brewed draught beers and chechyl (smoked cheese) make for a classic night out in Bishkek. If there's a big sporting event on, you'll need to make a reservation for the patio tables near the large projector screens.

Don't miss

On the east side of Panfilov Park, **Kyrgyz National Drama Theatre** is the place for popular Kyrgyz-language works, more often than not written by Chinghiz Aitmatov, Kyrgyzstan's premier man of letters (00 996 312 665717; Abdumomunov 222).



FIRST TIME IN BISHKEK



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- 20 Southside B&B

TOP PICKS

🛏️ Sleeping

Asia Mountains

Best for a secluded space (asiamountains-hotels.com)
Hidden between rail tracks and apartment blocks, this delightful 19-room getaway is striking for its gardens and birdsong.

Bugu Hotel

Best for laid-back atmosphere (buguhotel.kg)
From the rustic log-cabin-style common space to the airy rooms, this boutique hotel has modern nomad vibes.

££

££

Capsule Hotel

Best for a budget option (capsulehotel.kg)
In what bills itself as the first capsule hotel in Central Asia, the 20 comfy, lockable sleeping pods include towels and toiletries.

Hotel Evropa

Best for smart interiors (hotelevropa.kg)
This small new business-boutique hotel uses classic floral-heraldic motifs to add interest to the rooms' stylishly minimal design.

£££

Lotos Guesthouse

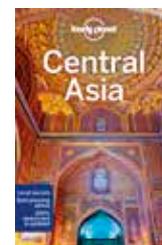
Best for feeling at home (00 996 772 163240)
The friendly family who run this cosy two-storey guesthouse make stays a delight, with delicious breakfasts, too.

Southside B&B

Best for some peace and quiet (southside.kg)
This comfortable B&B's Central Asian styling and on-site sauna are a respite from the hectic centre of Bishkek.

£

£££



FURTHER READING

Our *Central Asia* guidebook (£19.99) is available as an eBook from lonelyplanet.com/shop (£13.99). The Kyrgyzstan chapter is also available singly, to download as a PDF (£2.99).