

KYRGYZSTAN

Kyrgyzstan is a rugged Central Asian country along the Silk Road, the ancient trade route between China and the Mediterranean. The Tian Shan mountains, which surround the old caravan route and dominate the country, are home to snow leopards, lynx, and sheep. In the south, the millennia-old city of Osh has a huge, busy bazaar that was once a stop on the Silk Road. It is a landlocked country bordered by Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and China. Kyrgyzstan's recorded history spans over 2,000 years, encompassing a variety of cultures and empires. Although geographically isolated by its highly mountainous terrain, which has helped preserve its ancient culture, Kyrgyzstan has been at the crossroads of several great civilizations and other commercial and cultural routes. Kyrgyzstan became independent with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. It has some oil and gas and a developing gold mining sector, but relies on imports for most of its energy needs. The major languages are Kyrgyz and Russian, and the currency is the som.



Population
5,849,296



77,202 MI²

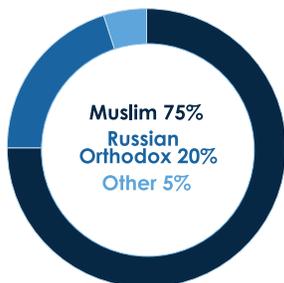
Slightly smaller than
South Dakota



Ethnicities



Religions



FAMILY LIFE

In Kyrgyzstan, it is common to have multiple generations living in the same household, and relatives may visit for extended or undefined periods of time. In rural areas, families tend to have around 4-6 children and in the cities, 1-2 children. Family meals are usually eaten together.

In the household, belongings are not always considered one's own, but rather communal. Siblings may borrow each others' items without asking. There is little consideration of privacy and people tend to prefer to spend time with others rather than alone. Much of the communication in the family is not necessarily direct, but through subtle, nonverbal communication.

Typically both sons and daughters help out with chores, which are usually divided according to traditional gender roles. Normally, the mother and daughters are responsible for cooking and household cleaning.

Parents are actively involved in the lives of their children and are the ultimate decision makers regarding their extracurricular activities, future aspirations, and sometimes marriage. Typically, the father is the main financial provider and is seen as the authority figure in the family. He will usually set the family rules with strong influence from the mother in decision making. There are a growing number of single mother families as well.

Most teenagers in the city do not work and parents may give them money for various small expenses. It is common for teenagers in villages to work to support their families on farms or in family businesses. Typically, there is a limited focus on teaching teenagers monetary budgeting.

Many households own dogs that live outside for security purposes. Cats are common pets and small dogs have become more fashionable in large cities. Pets typically are not viewed as members of the family.

FRIENDSHIP

It is acceptable for teenagers to socialize in groups and one-on-one with friends of the same gender. It is uncommon to have friends of the opposite sex, and one-on-one socialization is not considered appropriate. Friendships are often formed with classmates and neighbors, and commonly last a lifetime. Extended family members and neighbors usually make up the majority of one's closest friends.

There is a strong respect for hierarchy and it is expected that teenagers be respectful and deferential to all adults. This may include not making eye contact with adults, as looking down demonstrates one's respect and deference. It is common between friends to borrow money without returning it,

or returning it much later. Personal space is quite small, and friends may show affection through physical contact.

SCHOOL LIFE

Students generally have 5-6 classes per day and study more than a dozen subjects per quarter. They are evaluated on class participation and homework, and tested with both written and oral examinations. Students have little flexibility in choosing their academic classes, but may have the opportunity to choose some additional classes if they attend specialized high schools. Subjects are studied at the same level of difficulty by every student. Middle and high school students change classrooms for their different classes. Students commonly eat lunch in the school cafeteria and dress formally and neatly for school. Many schools have a school uniform with a white top and black skirt or pants.

In the classroom, group discussion and individual input is not commonly accepted. Fighting, bullying, and cheating may not have severe consequences in many schools. Helping friends during examinations is considered normal, and although discouraged by teachers, it is often overlooked by them. It is also not uncommon for teachers to be physical when disciplining students.

The relationship between teachers and students is very formal. Students rarely disagree or talk back to their teachers. Students are expected to stand when an adult comes into the classroom, to show their respect. Although genders are not separated in the classroom setting, students tend to self-segregate by gender.

Few parents are in close contact with their children's teachers, but they are made aware of any behavioral or academic problems. Sometimes, parents are asked by the school director and class teacher to discuss these issues on an individual basis. Most schools hold monthly parent meetings, but do not discuss the behavioral issues of individual students during these events.

Most students take part in extracurricular activities outside of school on a paid basis. Some schools may offer a limited variety of clubs, the most common being debate, student government, and language clubs.

FOOD

Most people maintain a halal diet by not eating pork, and meals are normally served with a side of bread and tea. Portions in restaurants range from regular to large sizes, and it is acceptable to ask for a bag to take leftovers home. During Ramadan, Kurban Ait, and Orozo Ait, devout Kyrgyz participate in fasting and break the fast together with friends and family. Vegetarianism is becoming more popular among younger women.

RELIGION

Religious institutions are generally only for worship and are not commonly considered a community center for non-religious activities. Mosques are frequently attended only by adult men, but sometimes teenage boys may also attend, particularly during holidays.

PERSONAL CARE

It is common for people to shower daily if they live in the city. In the villages, one may shower once a week depending on the availability of hot water. It is common to wear clothes for several days at a time before washing them. In maintaining general cleanliness of a bathroom, girls will typically clean up after themselves, but boys are unlikely to. Daughters may be responsible for doing their own laundry, but this does not extend to sons. Dryers are uncommon, so families hang their clothes to dry.



The Future Leaders Exchange (FLEX) program is sponsored by the U.S. Department of State. FLEX provides competitively selected secondary school students from 21 countries in Europe and Eurasia with the opportunity to spend the academic year in the U.S. living with a volunteer host family and attending a host high school. Begun in 1993, FLEX now has over 27,000 alumni.