



Ten Facts about Kazakh Culture

1. Variety of geographical features and natural resources

Kazakhstan is the 9th largest country in the world and the world's largest landlocked country. It has steppes, forests, desert and mountains.

- It has large reserves of many metals, natural gas and oil.
- The largest city is Almaty in the south, and the capital, Astana, is growing. These two cities are where our delegates reside.
- There is considerable pollution and radiation from Soviet nuclear testing in the northeast.
- Some beautiful photos of modern buildings and natural beauty to look at online: <http://www.skyscrapercity.com/showthread.php?t=1495867>
- Photo gallery from National Geographic: <http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2012/02/astana/ludwig-photography#/11-american-like-mcmansions-670.jpg>

2. Totalitarian regime becoming a fledgling democracy

Historically, Kazakhstan has not been a democracy with a large middle class; many hold the belief that the use of a “strong hand” in government is a viable way for Kazakhstan's development. Nursultan Nazarbayev is the strongman president and former head of Kazakhstan's Communist party. There is no freedom of the press.

3. Trend toward developing a free-market economy

Many people are facing difficulty in adjusting to a growing free-market economy since the country became independent from the former USSR in 1991. With commodities of minerals and oil reserves as the mainstay of the economy, it is hard hit by the current drop in oil & other commodity prices worldwide. The economy is also hurt by widespread corruption and political controls.

4. Hierarchical society

Strong social hierarchy means special treatment for some and different levels of power within an authoritarian structure. Who you know helps to get ahead in work settings and get things done in the bureaucracy. Kazakhstanis don't tend to question their superiors. Historically, there has been little social mobility.

5. Group-oriented culture

People are less independent and more group oriented than in the United States. High group loyalty and sacrifice – must be a “team player”. Developing relationships critical to doing business with others. Younger educated Kazakhstanis starting to shift to competitive tendencies in business.

6. Communication style fairly indirect

Communication style may be indirect with an emphasis on saving face and giving feedback discreetly. May seem overly polite to North Americans before getting acquainted. The two forms of “you” - formal and informal - reinforce this.

7. Tribal history and self-identity

The tribal history of nomads still has strong influence on self-identity. People identify with their ‘juz’ (horde) and the clan they belong to. (The three juz or zhuz, are located geographically.)

8. Formality in social protocol and eating

- Tend to be fairly formal with adhering to protocol and social conventions, especially in business and with new acquaintances.
- When offered food or assistance, it is polite to say “no thanks” once or twice, with the intention to not cause work for the other person and show respect. Then on the 3rd invitation/ request, it’s appropriate to accept. If a person says “no” 3 times, then the answer is a definite “no”.
- Kazakhstanis tend to expect formal hospitality from others as well. In formal social settings, such as a banquet, persons with highest status or authority are usually served first.
- Dress styles vary; can be more formal than in California, especially in work setting and depending on professional status. People in their 20’s tend to dress more casually than older counterparts.

9. Food preferences

The traditional national food dish is Beshbarmak, a meat dish served with potatoes or noodles and used to be eaten with five fingers, the literal meaning of the word. It is made from lamb, horse, beef or chicken. It is typical of the Kazakh diet: a meat dish eaten warm.

Kazakhstanis tend to eat: home-cooked meals, vegetables, fruit, various kinds of tea (any time of day, with breakfast and after dinner), dairy foods, and sweets. Not big on fast food, although some young people buy it. Their cuisine is not spicy. No pork, please!

10. International space launch center

Kazakhstan is the launching site for international space exploration programs by the Russians. Baikonur Cosmodrome is the first and largest space launch center in the world.

