

Kazakhstan's customs and traditions

Kazakhstan has a very diverse population so there are many different customs and traditions. Each ethnic group has brought a special type of food for a certain holiday or songs that symbolize their heritage. The Kazakh customs and traditions have endured throughout the many hundreds of years of Kazakh culture.

A "yurt" is a traditional Kazakh structure for a home. Since the Kazakhs were originally a nomadic people, they had homes that could easily be set up, taken down and moved from one place to another. These yurts, therefore, are made from long curved pieces of wood that are tied together to create the skeleton for this round house. Large pieces of felt are placed over the wood and rags laced inside the yurt on the floor, to provide warmth and protection from the elements of nature. If you were to enter a yurt you would see many colorful and beautifully hand - crafted articles such as rags and blankets. As a guest you would sit at a round low table and eat such Kazakh delicacies as "karta", "kazy" (round pieces of dried horse meat) and "beshbarmak". Beshbarmak literally means "five fingers" in Kazakh and it is a dish made with noodles onions and sheep's meat. This meal is traditionally served with a sheep's head which is set at the "piece of honor" - the head of the table. An elder usually has the task of cutting the sheep's head and saying a blessing or a comment while giving each part of the head to a different person. Meal is accompanied by "boursak" - small round pieces of fried dough. At the end of the meal you may sit and have tea, perhaps while listening to the musicians tune up a "dombra" is a two-stringed instrument. Many Kazakhs have a deep love for music and singing, one listens to a concert of traditional Kazakh tunes with topics such as love and war.

Ancient Kazakh games are in progress, men ride about on their horses. Game competitions are the following:

-who can ride the fastest

-who is the first to catch a maiden and kiss her

who is the most agile at leaning down to pick up an article before the others can reach him and etc.

Almost all games are fast and entertaining and they focus on the men and their ability to master their horses. Even today many Kazakh men need to have strong, fast horses who will obey their commands while herding sheep across the great plains of Kazakhstan. Aside from traditional foods, games, songs the other major feature of Kazakh, culture is the traditional costumes that men and women wear. The most impressing are bride and groom costumes. The groom wears the chopan (the long robe) and extremely, beautiful hat. The bride puts on the multi-layered white gown with a long vest, her hat is tall with a long flowing veil. If the veil is behind the bride's head, the woman has already "opened her face" and the wedding ceremony has been completed.