

KYRGYZSTAN



Landlocked in the midst of its mountainous neighbours, Kyrgyzstan's wilderness appears limitless. Where rugged ridge lines rise out of vast steppes and meadows peppered with the shaggy hides of mountain sheep, stands a gold mine of snow-capped peaks, waiting for their first summit day. Set in the staggering beauty of the Tien Shan mountains, this mountaineering expedition harnesses the bold ambitions of first ascents with the nuances of semi-nomadic territories in Central Asia's budding adventure playground.

Aim

Targeting Kyrgyzstan's unclimbed summits, we believe this expedition will be the first to explore an untamed, isolated region within the Inner Tien Shan mountains. Setting out on new routes from basecamp each day, the team will endeavour to claim their own first ascents on peaks in the range of 4800m.

Enriched by the backdrop of remote, jagged wilderness and the passing encounters with local semi-nomadic Kyrgyz shepherds, this expedition presents an ideal opportunity to achieve the ultimate goal in mountaineering.

Highlights

- Aim to summit unclimbed peaks.
- Experience a base-camp style expedition.
- Breathtaking scenery; with passes at around 3500m and surrounding mountain peaks rising to 5000m.
- Practice and improve mountaineering skills, including competency with ropes, crampons and ice axes.
- Chance encounters with Kyrgyz shepherds en route and small villages of semi-nomads.
- Finish the expedition relaxing on the beautiful shores of Lake Issyk-Kul.

Why Go

Unclimbed Peaks

Mountains cover over 95% of Kyrgyzstan's territory, with almost half the land rising above 3000m. Enchanted by the mesmerising symmetry of Khan Tengri, the mighty Jengish Chokusu, and the dizzying heights of the numerous peaks in excess of 5000m, mountaineers seldom focus on anything other. Exploring the lesser-trodden regions of

the Tien Shan, the team will aim to summit unclimbed peaks in the region of 5000m.

The Tien Shan

The Tien Shan, meaning the Mountain of Heaven, is one of the mightiest mountain ranges in Asia. Passing through China, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, with a width of 400 km and length of up to 2,000 km, two-thirds of this mountain range rises up out of land-locked Kyrgyzstan. Characterised by a combination of mountain ranges, intersected by valleys and basins such as the Turfan Depression – 154m below sea level and the lowest point in Central Asia – the elevation differences in the Tien Shan are extreme (over 7 km!).

Nomadic Culture

Roaming the mountains by day and retiring into the warmth of their yurts by night, Kyrgyzstan's nomads offer a lesson in simple, spiritual mountain living. Highly-skilled horsemen, their day-to-day life revolves around the animals they keep on the deserted grasslands, often tending to their sheep on horseback nearby small, secluded encampments. The team will cross paths with occasional shepherd, buying sheep for camp meals and heeding the warnings and wisdom they share from years spent in mountains.

Mountain Skills and Experience

Team mates with varied alpine experience will find challenge and satisfaction on this expedition. As detailed in 'Fitness', a base level of previous experience with ice axes and crampons is required. This expedition provides an opportunity build upon their prior knowledge under expert guidance ensuring confidence for higher altitudes. What's more, the scenic views from summits promise great rewards for those with significant experience too.

For anyone wishing to learn mountain or Alpine skills for the first time, Secret Compass runs a 'learn Alpine skills' [expedition in Georgia](#) for any fit teammates keen to get their first taste for such snow-bound adventures.

The Plan

Secret Compass runs expeditions with framework itineraries, rather than guided tours with set daily plans. Read more about [Our Approach](#). The following is the outline plan for this epic Kyrgyzstan expedition – the 'substance' rather than the specifics. A fuller itinerary is provided in the Kyrgyzstan Expedition Handbook which is available on request or upon application to join the team.

Teammates arrive

All teammates fly into Bishkek on or before day one of the expedition and will make their way to the local hotel by 1100 on the 23rd August to meet the Secret Compass leader. Departing from Bishkek around midday, the expedition officially begins with a six-hour drive to Tamga Village on the southern shore of Lake Issyk-Kul where the team will sit down for an introductory briefing over dinner.

On expedition

Setting off from Tamga, the team will transfer by Soviet 6WD trucks through the Barskoon pass to basecamp – home for the next eight days. Day one of the trekking phase will be used to acclimatise, recce the area and practice a few essential winter mountaineering techniques before the real ascents begin. With your basecamp tent set up for the week and cooks preparing local cuisine, energy levels should be high, ready to explore the range and identify potential peaks. The very nature of mountaineering expeditions dictates that a summit is never guaranteed, but the Secret Compass leader will consider weather conditions and team potential to ensure the team maximise their chance of claiming a first summit in the region. Don't forget to bring a camera for those all-important summit shots!

Goal achieved

With the peak(s) officially bagged (weather and conditions permitting) you'll travel back to Tamga village for a relaxing day exploring the local area and swimming in the magnificent Lake Issyk-Kul. The following morning you will say goodbye to the basecamp crew and transfer back Bishkek for a final celebratory dinner. All teammates are then free to organise onward travel from Bishkek from the morning on the 5th September (including flights leaving in the early morning on this date).

Fitness

Secret Compass expeditions are achievable by anyone with a healthy lifestyle and a good level of general fitness. Team members should be willing to be part of a team working together to achieve the goal of the expedition. As a team member, you should have an adventurous and robust spirit. At a basic level, you should be comfortable jogging for at least 45 minutes and walking for eight hours in the hills, carrying 15kg for three consecutive days. The biggest challenge on this expedition will be dealing with the trekking at altitude in potentially cold or snowy weather conditions, carrying full winter kit and camping for many days.

Previous Experience

Previous experience of alpine conditions is necessary to join this expedition. Teammates are expected to have knowledge of basic alpine skills including the use of crampons and ice axes. Anyone who has not done this before is invited to train to achieve this in advance of departure as proof of experience is required on this epic expedition. This is an opportunity for those with previous alpine skills to further develop their skills in a challenging expedition environment.

Minimum fitness requirements:

- Trek: up to eight hours per day.
- Carry: up to 15kg.
- Terrain: rocky and uneven trails and paths below the snow line. Above the snow line expect snow, ice and often steep, exposed terrain which may be glaciated.
- Altitude: up to 5000m.
- Climate: temperatures ranging from 25°C to -10°C at night.
- Age: 21+

Applicants will receive a Handbook with further expedition information. View Secret Compass' suggested [Training Plan](#) and get in touch with any fitness, health, training or kit questions which remain unanswered. Teammates who arrive without meeting the agreed minimum fitness requirements can jeopardise themselves, the team, and the expedition's goal so do take training seriously, prepare as appropriate and arrive fit and ready to go!

Included

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- Secret Compass expedition leader.
- Full communications and medical kit supported by 24hour UK Operations room.
- Local English speaking IFMGA mountain guide and drivers.
- Registration with local Rescue Services.
- All meals including local cooks and porters.
- All transport as outlined in the itinerary.
- All specialist and safety equipment.
- All accommodation.
- All local permits.

Not included

- International flights.

- Transfers from airport to hotel.
- Local airport taxes and international visas.
- Insurance (compulsory)
- Tips to local guides (discretionary but appreciated).
- Beverages and any costs of a personal nature.
- Personal equipment (your Handbook will contain a kit list).
- Any activities, transport or accommodation outside of the Secret Compass itinerary.

Exped FAQ

On application to join this epic expedition to Kyrgyzstan, potential teammates will receive a detailed Expedition Handbook. Here are some expedition-specific questions and our [general FAQ](#) will answer many other questions. Get in touch if your questions remain unanswered.

I'm a vegetarian. Can I join?

Teammates with dietary requirements are welcome to apply for this expedition and should state their specific requirements when applying.

Can I bring my own tent?

If you have a suitable lightweight or mountaineering tent you'd like to bring on this expedition, let Secret Compass know in advance so we can advise on its suitability.

What are crampons?

Crampons attach to the bottom of walking boots to facilitate trekking on snow and ice. For this expedition it is imperative everyone's boots are crampon compatible, a B2 rating boot is advised. Consult your local outdoors shop for advice. Secret Compass will provide C1 crampons for all teammates unless you tell us you have your own.

What if we don't reach a summit?

Team mates will embrace the spirit of a first ascent expedition. All unclimbed peaks have a degree of uncertainty, and even on mountains with well-trodden paths, numerous factors ensure that a summit is never guaranteed. The Secret Compass expedition leader will use acclimatisation and recce days to choose between selected peaks in accordance with team strength, weather conditions and technical difficulty to maximise chances of attaining the first summit goal.

Can I arrive a day late?

As The Plan outlines, there is a chain of transport to get teammates out to and back from Bishkek and so start and end dates are not flexible.

Can I charge all my electricals?

This will be very challenging with no access to mains power once the trekking section begins. Please ensure you are self-sufficient in terms of charging your appliances by bringing things like spare batteries, lightweight solar panels or power packs to avoid frustration.

Will my camera work in the cold?

Battery life can be a challenge in cold climates. If camera or phone battery life is of paramount importance, research the best ways to protect and keep your batteries warm and come equipped accordingly.

Will there be telephone signal?

Phone signal will be limited once the team leave Tamga for the mountains.

Will I get altitude sickness?

The peaks you will be attempting to summit are at an altitude of up to 5000m. Most people can ascend to 2400m without difficulty although symptoms can be present above 1500m. This expedition is planned to provide plenty of time for acclimatisation and part of the expedition briefing will be on signs and symptoms of acute mountain sickness, or AMS as it's known. The expedition leader is well-versed in such activities with teams at altitude and can advise and answer your questions when on the mountain.

How can I find out more?

Apply for this expedition team using the button on this page to receive your Expedition Handbook with fuller details. The Application page explains the joining process. Secret Compass is then on hand to answer any questions or to firm up your place on the team.