CENTRAL ASIA GUIDE



GROUP TOUR · 8 DAYS

Mangistau – Karynzharyk Tour

Round trip from Aktau · Kazakhstan

Duration 8 days, 7 nights	Start and end Round trip from Aktau	Best time to visit Apr–Oct
Group tour from $1,596 per person	Group size Max 9 travellers	Tour type Hiking, Jeep (4x4), Nature
Difficulty Moderate	Departures 4 guaranteed dates	

Prices and dates valid for 2027 departures. Issued 16 November 2026.

Tour highlights

An 8-day 4×4 camping expedition from Aktau through the deserts and canyons of Mangystau. The first day leads to the Fallen Land of Zhygylgan, the rock-cut Shakpak-Ata mosque and Kapamsay Canyon, then on to the round boulders of Torysh, Akespe Gorge, the purple Jurassic clays of Kokala, the yurt-shaped Sherkala and the castle-like cliffs of Airakty. After the white salt flat of Tuzbair you spend a night in a shared yurt, before the underground mosque of Karaman-Ata, Ybyk Gorge and a camp by Kyzylkup (Tiramisu) Canyon.

Bokty Mount, the Mars Panorama and Dragon Crest of Bozjyra and a night beneath the Bozjyra Fangs follow, then the Senek dunes and a hotel night in Zhanaozen. The highlight comes at the end: an off-road crossing of the Ustyurt Plateau via Onere to the remote Karynzharyk Depression, where you camp among salt flats and isolated mountains before the drive back to Aktau. Five nights are spent in tents, one in a yurt and one in a hotel, with an English-speaking tour leader throughout.

Difficulty: Moderate. No altitude or technical sections, but long 4×4 days (about 125–310 km a day, much of it off-road, up to 146 km off-road on the Karynzharyk days), short walks at the sights and five nights of basic camping in the desert. Not suitable for children under 6, pregnant women or people with disabilities.



Karynzharyk depression in Mangystau



Boszhira Tract in Mangystau

Where you'll stay

Night 1	**Kapamsay Canyon**	Camping in tents at Kapamsai Canyon
Night 2	**Airakty – Valley of Castles**	Camping in tents at Airakty
Night 3	**Tuzbair Salt Flat**	Shared yurt at a camp near Tuzbair
Night 4	**Kyzylkup – Tiramisu Canyon**	Camping in tents at Kyzylkup
Night 5	**Bozjyra (Boszhira)**	Camping in tents beneath the Bozjyra Fangs
Night 6	**Zhanaozen**	Hotel in Zhanaozen or similar
Night 7	**Karynzharyk Depression**	Camping in tents in the Karynzharyk Depression

Listed accommodation or similar, same category.

Day-by-day itinerary

DAY 1

Zhygylgan, Shakpak-Ata, Kapamsai Canyon

162 km on road & 61 km off-road

After pick-up in Aktau, the journey begins at 10:00 AM with Zhygylgan, also known as the Fallen Land, a vast geological depression near the Caspian coast scattered with house-sized boulders. Natural patterns and ancient markings create a landscape that hints at the presence of prehistoric creatures.

Next, visit the Shakpak-Ata Underground Mosque, an ancient mosque carved directly into the chalk rock of the Tyub-Karagan peninsula. Its architecture and historical significance make it a truly unique site to explore.

The adventure then leads to Kapamsai Canyon, where steep cliffs and dramatic rock formations highlight the region's rugged natural beauty, making it a perfect spot for photos and quiet reflection.

The day concludes with camping at Kapamsai Canyon, where you can enjoy a hot dinner and spend the night under a canopy of stars, surrounded by the serene desert landscape.

Meals include lunch during the day and a warm dinner in the evening, with accommodation in tents at the campsite.

Overnight	**Kapamsay Canyon** · Camping in tents at Kapamsai Canyon
Meals	Lunch, Dinner
Travel	Aktau – Kapamsay Canyon (223 km)

DAY 2

Torysh, Akespe, Kokala, Sherkala, Airakty

141 km on road & 39 km off-road

The day begins with Torysh, also known as the Valley of Balls. This area is famous for its mysterious spherical rock formations, a unique geological phenomenon that captures the imagination of all who visit.

Next, continue to Akespe Gorge, where sheer limestone cliffs rise dramatically above a winding path. Each turn reveals new rock formations, offering a sense of wonder at the canyon's rugged beauty.

After lunch at a local café, the route continues to Kokala, home to the Jurassic Clays. Here, vibrant purple hues and ancient rock layers create a striking landscape, showcasing millions of years of geological history.

A short drive brings you to Sherkala Mount, often called the "Sphinx of Mangystau." Its distinctive shape, reminiscent of a yurt, makes it one of the most iconic natural landmarks in the region.

The final stop is Airakty, the Valley of Castle-Shaped Mountains. Walk among towering rock formations that resemble fortresses and soak in the dramatic desert scenery.

Overnight at Airakty in tents, surrounded by the otherworldly landscape. Outdoor breakfast, lunch, hot dinner. Camping in tents.

Overnight	**Airakty – Valley of Castles** · Camping in tents at Airakty
Meals	Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
Travel	Kapamsay Canyon – Airakty – Valley of Castles (180 km)

DAY 3

Tuzbair Salt Flat, yurt camp near Tuzbair

157 km on road & 94 km off-road

Today's drive leads to the lower part of Tuzbair, where white chalk cliffs rise above a dazzling salt flat (sor) and striking rock formations. Take in its expansive, tranquil landscape and walk across the salt flat.

In the evening, continue to a traditional yurt camp near Tuzbair, enjoy a hot dinner and spend the night in a shared yurt.

Meals: Outdoor breakfast, lunch, hot dinner.
Accommodation: Shared yurt at the camp.

Overnight	**Tuzbair Salt Flat** · Shared yurt at a camp near Tuzbair
Meals	Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
Travel	Airakty – Valley of Castles – Tuzbair Salt Flat (251 km)

DAY 4

Karaman Ata Underground Mosque, Ybyk (Porous Gorge), Zhanaozen, Kyzylkup (Tiramisu) Canyon

240.5 km on road & 69.6 km off-road

Begin the day at Karaman Ata, one of Mangystau's remarkable underground mosques. This revered site and necropolis, carved directly into rock, offers insight into the region's spiritual history and is a fascinating place to explore.

Next, visit Ybyk (Porous Gorge), where unusual porous walls, grottos and narrow passages create an awe-inspiring landscape that highlights the raw power of nature.

After a stop in Zhanaozen, drive to the Shakpakty panorama above Kyzylkup, also known as Tiramisu Canyon due to its layered rock formations that resemble the famous dessert. Explore the canyon and enjoy a peaceful evening camping amidst this iconic landscape.

Meals: Field breakfast, lunch, hot dinner
Accommodation: Camping in tents

Overnight	**Kyzylkup – Tiramisu Canyon** · Camping in tents at Kyzylkup
Meals	Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
Travel	Tuzbair Salt Flat – Kyzylkup – Tiramisu Canyon (310 km)

DAY 5

Bokty Mount, Bozjyra National Park: Mars Panorama, Dragon Crest, Under the Fangs

46 km on road & 78 km off-road

The day starts at Bokty Mount, a striking pyramid-shaped peak with bands of colored geological layers that rises dramatically from the desert, resembling a natural monument carved by time and wind. On the way to Bozjyra you also pass Naiza mountain.

After lunch at a local café, continue to Bozjyra National Park and the Mars Panorama viewpoint. From here, the cliffs and ridges stretch out in surreal formations, creating a landscape that feels almost extraterrestrial. Next comes Dragon Crest, a jagged ridge whose spine-like formations resemble the mythical dragon it is named after.

Camping: End the day camping at the foot of the iconic Bozjyra Fangs. Enjoy a hot dinner at the camp and spend the evening stargazing in the serene desert surroundings.

Meals: Field breakfast, lunch, hot dinner
Accommodation: Camping in tents

Overnight	**Bozjyra (Boszhira)** · Camping in tents beneath the Bozjyra Fangs
Meals	Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
Travel	Kyzylkup – Tiramisu Canyon – Bozjyra (Boszhira) (124 km)

DAY 6

Bozjyra Middle Fangs, Senek Sand Dunes, Zhanaozen

147 km on road & 38 km off-road

Begin the day at the Middle Fangs, a panoramic viewpoint overlooking the iconic twin limestone peaks of Bozjyra, among the most photographed landmarks in Mangystau.

After lunch at a local café, continue to the Senek sand dunes and on to Zhanaozen, where you spend the night in a hotel – a chance to shower and rest before the remote off-road crossing to the Karynzharyk Depression the next day.

Meals: Field breakfast, lunch, dinner
Accommodation: Hotel in Zhanaozen

Overnight	**Zhanaozen** · Hotel in Zhanaozen or similar
Meals	Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
Travel	Bozjyra (Boszhira) – Zhanaozen (185 km)

DAY 7

Onere Spring, Karynzharyk Depression

15 km on road & 146 km off-road

Travel across the Ustyurt Plateau, an exciting off-road route through endless plains that showcase the region's unique flora and tranquil desert landscapes.

The first stop is Onere, a remote landscape area with a spring, surrounded by the natural beauty of the plateau. From there, continue to the Karynzharyk Depression, a vast desert depression with salt flats, isolated mountains and breathtaking elevation changes, with wide panoramas of the Ustyurt escarpments.

The day concludes with camping in the Karynzharyk Depression, where you can relax after an adventurous day and enjoy the mesmerizing desert night sky.

Meals: Breakfast, lunch, hot dinner
Accommodation: Camping in tents

Overnight	**Karynzharyk Depression** · Camping in tents in the Karynzharyk Depression
Meals	Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
Travel	Zhanaozen – Karynzharyk Depression (161 km)

DAY 8

Karynzharyk – Zhanaozen – Return to Aktau

165 km on road & 145 km off-road

After a last sunrise over the depression and breakfast at camp, drive back across the Ustyurt Plateau to Zhanaozen and on to Aktau, where the tour concludes. Upon arrival, participants are transferred to their hotel or the airport, depending on onward travel plans.

Meals: Field breakfast, lunch
Accommodation: None (end of journey)

Overnight	Departure day, no overnight
Meals	Breakfast, Lunch
Travel	Karynzharyk Depression – Aktau (310 km)

What's included

Included

- Transportation through the tour. Arrival pickup from the hotel or airport, and transfer to the tour start point.
- Guide: English-speaking local tour leader throughout the journey.
- Meals: Three meals per day featuring local cuisine, from lunch on the first day to lunch on the last day.
- Accommodation: 5 nights of tent camping with all camping equipment provided, 1 night in a shared traditional yurt and 1 night in a hotel in Zhanaozen.
- Activities & Access: All entrance fees to sites are included. Additional amenities include wet towels for refreshing the body.
- Insurance & Safety: Accident insurance coverage is included.

Not included

- Flights & Visas: International and domestic airfare and visa fees.
- Expenses: Tips for guides and drivers, personal shopping, and optional extras.
- Additional Accommodation: Hotels beyond what is included in the itinerary.
- Other Activities: Optional activities outside the planned program (riding, trekking, or plane rides not included).
- Note: In case of unexpected weather conditions such as storms, heavy rain, or strong winds, the group may be required to leave the campsite and move to the nearest guesthouse for safety. Please note that this alternative accommodation will be at an additional cost.

Prices and dates

Valid for 2027 departures

Group tour, per person

Tour	Double / twin room	Single supplement
8 days	**$1,596**	–

Same price on all departures. 6% deposit, balance 30 days before tour starting date.

Guaranteed group departures

2027

Start	End	Weekdays	Status
31 Mar 2027	7 Apr 2027	Wed – Wed	Available
28 Apr 2027	5 May 2027	Wed – Wed	Available
4 Aug 2027	11 Aug 2027	Wed – Wed	Available
1 Sep 2027	8 Sep 2027	Wed – Wed	Available

Availability as of 16 November 2026. Check current availability on the tour page.

Book or ask a question

Choose a date or ask us anything about this tour. We usually reply within one working day.

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