

MindStormPhoto Kyrgyzstan 2017

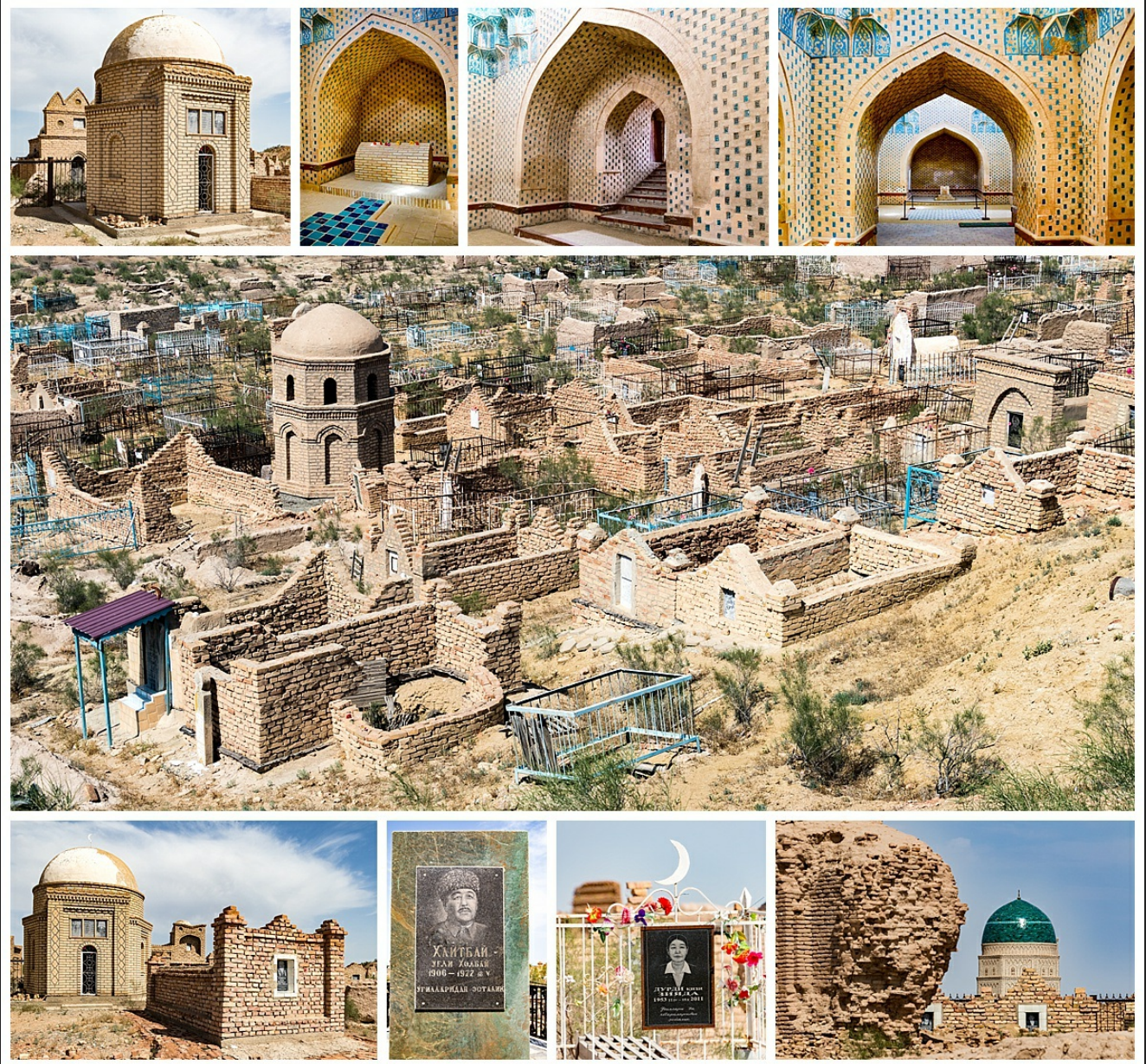


Burt and Evelyn Johnson

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Kyrgyzstan 1 – Bishkek



We are now in Kyrgyzstan, after completing our tour of Uzbekistan. There have been several cemeteries along the road, but one we stopped at today was particularly special. Looking at it from the top of a hill, it appears to be a small city (center above). It is standard for grave sites to have photographs of the deceased on the headstones of those who died since the early 20th century (center two images on bottom row). The wealthy also often create elaborate crypts for the departed (top row).



Next stop was visiting a yurt with nomads in traditional clothing (upper row), then on to a horse farm where they milk the horses to prepare kymyz, a traditional fermented drink (center image plus lower right). While we were waiting for others in our group, we watched a man doing a crossword puzzle while his grandson watched (lower left). When Evelyn tried to take the boy's photograph, he was very serious. I therefore thumbed my nose at him, which got him to laugh. He tried to mimic the expression, but put his thumb in his ear instead (center bottom), until his grandfather laughed and moved his thumb to his nose to properly perform the nyah-nyah gesture...



Next to the grandfather was an old rusted shed. We couldn't resist taking some detail photos of the blue paint and rust, which have such an interesting abstract quality to them.



We next visited a small workshop that makes traditional textiles, many of which are used for special costumes for dancers and special events. The owner drove 4 hours from the coast where she had a workshop just to greet us and show us her place, where she provides jobs for local talented women. Returning to town, we had some time to kill before catching the plane, so wandered around a large government building (bottom row).

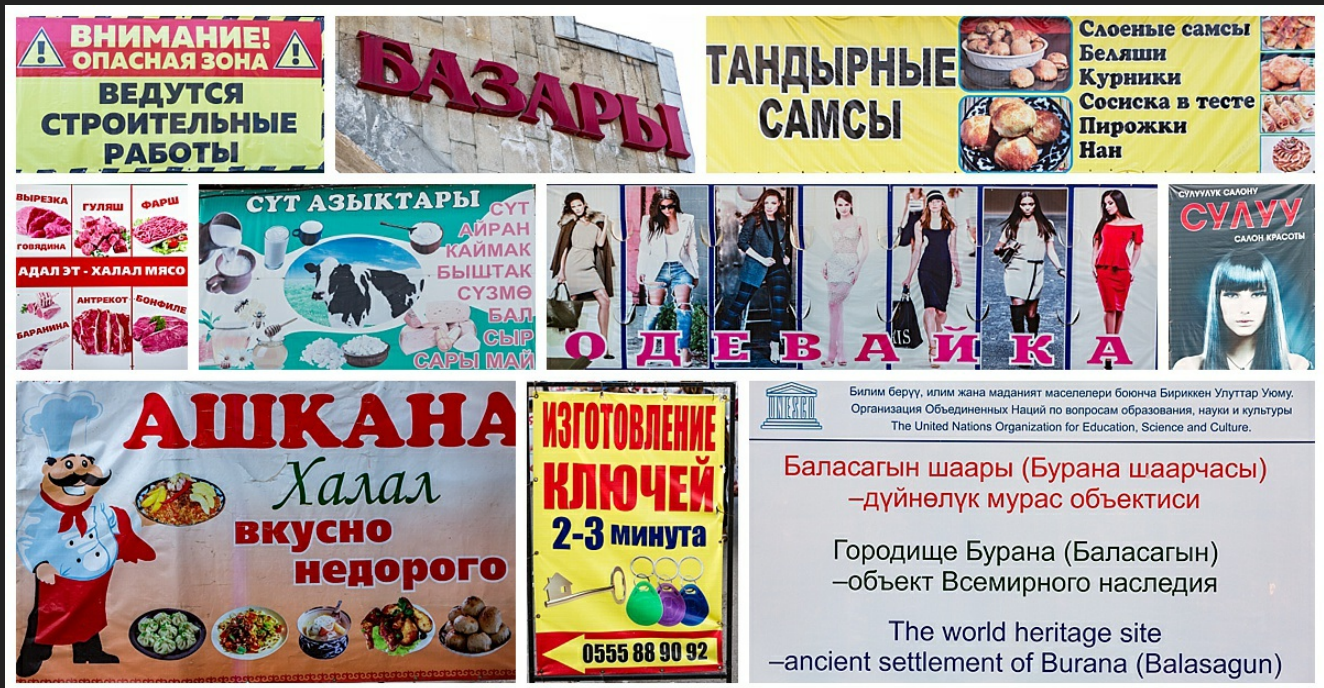


Last stop in town was the Osh Bazaar, a local indoor market selling every kind of food consumed here, spices to prepare them, as well as shoes, clothing and other dry goods.





Of course, markets are one of our favorite places for capturing interesting people photos. Business was pretty slow here on a Tuesday afternoon, so there were more images of vendors interacting with us than with customers. Top-left in lower block shows Denise, from our photo tour group, explaining to a vendor what kind of dried fruit she was looking for. For the most part, the vendors spoke to us in Russian. However the axe man (butcher upper right in lower block) put his arms around me and spoke in English saying "Kyrgyzstan.. and America...friends".



As with Uzbekistan, the local signs are intriguing to look at. Here there were much fewer with any English, though tourist spots did tend to have three languages (lower right). Many had images, making it relatively easy to figure out the meaning, but others just left you wondering, if you are not fluent in Kyrgyz (upper left and middle).

, May 27, 2017

Tour, Travel · Kyrgyzstan

Kyrgyzstan 2 – Issyk Kul



Our final days in Kyrgyzstan were long ones spent in Issyk Kul. In the early morning, we visited a chaotic animal market that is open only on Sundays. It was very similar to those we have visited in Ecuador, though sheep were the predominant animal, and there were no pigs at all (being an Islamic country, pork is less common). There were also sections of cattle (not shown), horses (lower right) and chickens, but sheep took center stage for us.



As the sun began to set, Mehmet arranged for a private concert by a family of three musicians along the shoreline, seen above. Stone-face at the start, the family members started to loosen up as they played and got into the swing of the music.



Enroute to a felt-making enterprise, we saw a cowboy working with his cattle in a flooded field. We pulled over to take some photographs, and he galloped over to us in a swamp, waving at us and having a grand time.

The felt was made in three small rooms. One was used to separate the wool and create loose felt pads (not shown). The second was used to produce a rough pattern, then dry the felt. Originally the drying was done by manually kicking the rolled up felt for three to four hours (middle left), but the family then created a machine (middle second) that reproduces the kicking mechanics -- and is rather loud while doing so... The last room is where the finishing touches are added, and the final product is displayed.

These felt rolls are widely used to make yurts to add strength, warmth and decoration. Mehmet (our tour guide) bought one (middle right) as a rug for his home.



As we were driving up to the alpine lakes (center) for reflection shots of the snow covered mountains, we stopped several times for herds of sheep traveling along the same road to their pastures (top row). We stopped at a small home with an outhouse (bottom left) to eat a picnic lunch we had brought along with us. The roads along this stretch were in truly awful shape, but there were signs that the government was trying to improve them (bottom second). There was even a small bank of yaks in one field (bottom right).



We made occasional stops along the road -- to take in beautiful landscapes and to ease our abused bones from the rough bus ride. At one stop, we saw an isolated yurt in the meadow (middle) and walked across the river to get a better look. A woman came down from the mountain, saying something totally unintelligible to any of us.

Our local guide translated and informed us that it was customary for the host to share with their guests, and the woman from the yurt offered to share a pail of liquid (upper right). This was their horse milk liquor that they offer visitors. She invited us inside (lower right) and we spent the next 20 minutes or so as her guests.



In this part of the world, Muslims prefer that their cemeteries be located near major roads, whereas other religious groups prefer being located on the mountains. As such, we saw a dozen or more each day we drove cross country. Every so often one would look interesting and be in the right light, and we would spend half an hour roaming and photographing the cemetery, while stretching our legs. With photo tours, one cannot predict opportune Kodak moments, but our guide has been great with finding these serendipitous spots.



With a little time to kill before catching our next flight, we wandered around a commemorative for soldiers who died in WWII, and an old city park. We have all gotten in the habit of searching out reflections in isolated pools of rain water. Upper-left shows Eric, from our group, laying on the ground to get an image similar to top-second above. Evelyn befriended a couple and got them to pose for her (center). The old public park was lined with a large number of statues.

Kyrgyzstan 3 – Eagle Hunters and Headless Goats



Our last evening in Kyrgyzstan was spent watching two local traditions that are unique to this part of the world. First up was a form of falconry with three nomad [eagle hunters](#).

Though often associated with Mongolia, this form of hunting with the golden eagle on horseback actually originated here. In addition to posing for the camera, as seen above, they let the eagles loose to hunt (not shown). First the eagle attacked a dead fox dragged behind a horse.

They then let the eagles loose to capture a live rabbit released in front of us. The rabbit had its lucky foot though, and lived to see another day -- as a pair of hawks attacked the eagles and chased them away from the hunting field...!



To the Kyrgyz, horsemanship is a much-prized skill. Therefore, it is not surprising that among the most popular sports are games on horseback – one is wrestling on horseback for a goat’s carcass. Two teams with equal number of horsemen each attempt to carry a headless goat (yes, you read that right...) to the goal. The regular playing field is 300 meters long by 150 meters wide. In the center of the playing field is a carcass of a goat, weighing on an average of 30-40 kilograms. Each game is 15 minutes long, and the objective of the game is to seize the goat’s carcass and deliver it into the goal post of the opposing team. The players are allowed to pick up the carcass, wrestle it from their rivals, and fling the carcass over to their team mates.

There are only a few rules to the game -- all players must stay on their horse, the player with the goat must not use anything other than his body and horse to hold the goat, one cannot grab the bridle of the opponent's horse, one cannot rear their horse, ram another horse at high speed, nor take the reins off the opponent's horse. Everything else is legal.

, May 30, 2017

[Animals, Tour, Travel · Kyrgyzstan](#)
