



MindStormPhoto Kazakhstan 2017

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Kazakhstan 1 – Almaty



We have now left Kyrgyzstan and entered into Kazakhstan. Within the group, we refer to the three countries we have visited as "the Stans," because the separate names are so long and tongue twisting to say.

We stopped at a photogenic church by a small lake for a reflection shot. The weather cooperated, with almost no wind, resulting in a mirror-smooth lake surface, and just enough clouds to give the sky some interesting texture.



On our first night in Kazakhstan, a small group drove to a local graveyard late at night to photograph the stars. I was testing the new "Pure Night star filter" that is designed to eliminate any city lights on the horizon, as well as deepen the color of the sky and increase star contrast. The images above have only very basic contrast and leveling edits, and look much better than the same images without the filters, so I am impressed on my first test.



The next day we drove to a "village" for lunch where the locals dress in traditional costume, and entertain guests in the traditional ways of Kazakhstan. We saw them making wool thread (center-left and center-second), watched them have a meal together (lower-left) in a staged setting that nevertheless looked authentic to our cameras. After lunch, we watched the matron of the family make a fried bread similar to a donut that is popular in the region (lower-right).



After lunch, the family entertained us with their horseback prowess. They started with "Atpen audryspak", which is basically arm wrestling on horseback, with the object being to pull the other person from his horse (upper-right and center-right). The winner then rears his horse in celebration (center). There were then numerous passes by us with various horseback circus stunts (lower-right plus video at end of this post).



A visit to the Green Bazaar gave us more opportunities to capture vendors and their wares.



Ending with another image from the church reflected in the lake. This is more of a traditional image, without the tree acting as a frame.

, May 31, 2017

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Kazakhstan 2 – Singing Dunes



While driving to our Kazakhstan destination the next day, we saw a herd of horses standing in a pond not far from the road. As is common with this tour, that meant stopping the bus, and getting out for half an hour of photography. The horses did indeed present wonderful images to capture (bottom). However, we were intrigued by the cowboys controlling this herd riding their dirt motorcycles (in lieu of horseback) to round them up (top).



Another roadside cemetery gave us a chance to stretch our legs and further explore.



Our main target for today was the Altyn-Emel National Park known for their famed **Singing Dunes**. The sand dunes get their name from the way their **particles rub against each other and make a sound**, when the wind is blowing hard, or a person's footfall creates a mini-landslide.

Jamil, our local guide in both Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, loved to have fun, and started jumping for joy (and our cameras) on the dunes (left-center and bottom). Many small lizards were creating intricate trails in the sand (right-center and bottom), so Evelyn decided to capture them too (upper-right).



Another major destination along our tour was [Charyn Canyon](#). This is a colorful, multi-layered deep ravine canyon in Kazakhstan, looking like a smaller scale Grand Canyon in Arizona. The road to reach this canyon is steep and poorly maintained, to the point that only four-wheel drives are allowed (and for very good reason!).



Throughout the canyon are natural rock formations that give the impressions of various animals in a petrified zoo. The frog and toad in upper-right is pretty obvious. The owl in upper left also stands out pretty quickly. Which others can you spot in the block above?

We had a chance to stretch our imagination with seeing "animals in the sky," like the flying dragon (middle-left)...

, June 1, 2017

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Kazakhstan 3 – Kaiyundy Lake



One of our destinations today was [Kaiyundy lakes national park](#), a lake created as the result of an earthquake induced landslide blocking the river, in the Kolsai Lake National Park. The trees in the region were flooded and died. However, the water is so cold that the trees did not deteriorate, and instead remain standing, making an almost abstract scene.

The scene is breath-taking, however many tourists have taken the identical shot. Adding a little in-camera vertical movement while the shutter was open gave something closer to what my mind's eye was seeing.



At the highest point in the steppes, we came across the Assy-Turgen observatory, named after the Assy plateau and the Turgen gorge leading up to this peak. The observatory is in current operation, and we were prevented from passing the razor wire boundary. Though the observatories themselves are standard construction and look well maintained, the administration was clearly Soviet construction and bore signs of urban decay (lower right). If we had been allowed inside, we could have gotten more details and see an operating telescope...



In past years, the area around the observatory would be filled with yurts from animal herders (sheep, cattle and horses) arriving for their summer pasture. This was a very long Winter though, and it is still too cold for the animals at night. As such, there was only a lone yurt, with Clara, a woman entrepreneur, who had agreed to feed our band of hungry photographers (lower center) and our drivers, Arthur, Constantin, and Dimitri.



We then went to Saty village, to watch a yurt being raised. At first I thought it was a tacky version updated to make it easier to assemble. We later found though, that modern yurts, as used by animal herders in this region, do indeed include a wooden door with hinges, with the sides made from garden accordion fencing. The modern Kazakh have updated the production of their mobile homes to make use of modern alternatives.



After the yurt was raised, the family engaged in a traditional picnic, thanking their gods and asking for a bountiful season.



For those wishing to know what the Kolsai Lake trees really looked like, here is an addendum to satisfy curiosity...

, June 2, 2017

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