

# Kazakhstan Polygon Tour August 13th - August 19th 2022



## **INTRODUCTION:**

Heard of Chernobyl? You know, possibly the most famous accident in recent history, so disastrous that it's almost unbelievable. Well this is Kazakhstan's answer to Chernobyl – but it was done on purpose. The test site at Semeypalatinsk, or the Polygon, is where the Soviet Union did the majority of their nuclear testing, performing 456 nuclear tests between 1949 and 1989, with a total of 2,500 times the power of the bombs dropped at Hiroshima. The area used to be closed off, but is now open to those with permits.

Although our tour is centred around exploring the test site and surrounding areas, including the atomic lake – Lake Chagan, we'll also visit Kazakhstan's Soviet industrial north. We'll see Temirtau which is host to the largest chimney in the world and the largest open coal mine in the world, before ending the tour in futuristic Nur Sultan, formerly known as Astana, formerly known as Akmola, formerly known as Tselinograd, and soon to be something else.

## *HIGHLIGHTS:*

See the surreal  
**Semipalatinsk  
Nuclear Test Site**

Visit the futuristic  
purpose built capital  
**Nur-Sultan**

Find Lenin:  
Although hidden  
there's still much  
left over from the  
**Soviet Union**

Explore beautiful  
cosmopolitan  
**Almaty** and its  
surrounds

**Excited? Come with SAIGA to Kazakhstan**

**Travel to the 'Stans and beyond**

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Whatsapp: +77079148146 | Email: [tours@saigatours.com](mailto:tours@saigatours.com)



## Tour Details:

**DATES:** August 13th - August 19th 2022

**PRICE:** \$1350 USD (twin share),  
Single Supplement \$200 USD

**START:** Almaty, Kazakhstan

**FINISH:** Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan



### INCLUSIONS:

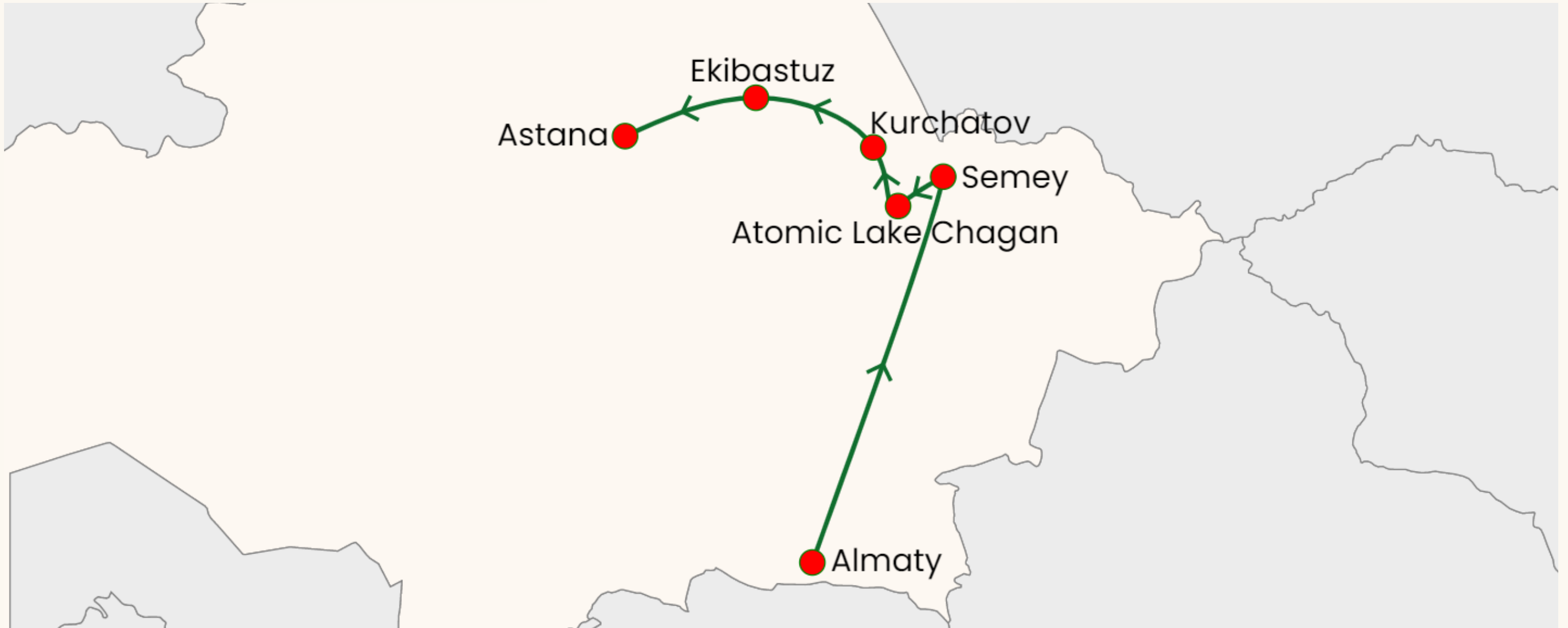
- Accommodation in twin share at roughly 3 star hotels/guesthouses, breakfast included
- Transport as per itinerary
- Entrance fees to most sites (as per itinerary)
- SAIGA guide and local guides

### EXCLUSIONS:

- Visa fees if necessary
- Visa support if necessary
- Some activities, eg. treatments at sanatorium (as per itinerary)
- Meals other than breakfast
- Transport to and from the start and end of tour
- Personal expenses such as souvenirs or any optional activities
- PCR Tests and any other COVID related expenses

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Day 1	Almaty
Day 2	Almaty
Day 3	Almaty - Semey
Day 4	Semey - Atomic Lake - Kurchatov
Day 5	Kurchatov - Polygon nuclear test site - Ekibastuz
Day 6	Ekibastuz - Nur-Sultan
Day 7	Nur-Sultan - ALZHIR - End of Tour

## Day 1: Almaty

- We start in the largest city in Kazakhstan, and until 1997, its capital. As is becoming increasingly common in Kazakhstan, Almaty was formerly known as Alma-Ata and before that Verny.
- Starting in the afternoon, we'll head out for Almaty's number one attraction and a great friend of SAIGA - the Almaty Walking Tour. This one will take in such famous sites as the Green Bazaar, the Arbat and Panfilov Park, named after the 28 Panfilov Guardsmen from Almaty, who died during the Battle of Moscow in 1941, which is right next to Zenkov Cathedral. A Russian Orthodox Church, its claim to fame is being the largest wooden structure in the world constructed with only joins, and no nails.
- If you like to have a night out of any type, whether it's fine dining, a cosy bar, a noisy pub or even the ballet, Almaty is the city you're going to want to do it in.

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## Day 2: Almaty

- Today we'll drive to a few of the destinations not within walking distance.
- We'll pass Old Square and Republic Square, the two places where the Kazakh Parliament used to take place before moving to Astana in 1997. These are also where we recently saw fatal riots in January 2022, along with the images of the destroyed city hall and presidential residence.
- We'll show you Medeo, the highest ice-skating rink in the world, and then on to Big Almaty Lake.
- Driving out to the suburbs of Almaty, we'll make a stop that isn't on other tour itineraries, and in fact most people in Almaty aren't even aware of this gem of Soviet history. Hidden in amongst medium density housing, there's a park which is now home to all the unwanted Soviet statues that were moved from their original places throughout the city and dumped unceremoniously here. Our favourite is the giant Lenin which used to be in Old Square, removed from his plinth and just standing flat on the ground with no sign or plaque to be seen.
- Back in the city centre, we'll take a ride on the Almaty metro. One of only two metros in Central Asia (the other being in Tashkent), it has just nine stations, so is largely useless to most people. However, like many metros in the former Soviet world, the stations themselves are ornately decorated, sparkling clean, and well worth a look at.

## Day 3: Almaty - Semey

- We head north today, and while it would be great to go overland, the distance we'll be covering would take a couple of days, so instead we'll catch a flight to the city of Semey.
- Semey is definitely not on the normal tourist trail. Some will know it by its Russian name - Semipalatinsk. Semey is the epitome of Soviet Kazakhstan and was formerly one of the main cities in the north of the country, although it's now overshadowed by nearby Astana (Nur-Sultan). Semey is also said to have a much stronger Russian character compared with most of Kazakhstan, owing to the closeness to the Russian border and the large scientific community.
- We'll take a look around town admiring the mosaics and public art as well as the famous Lenin Alley and 'Stronger than Death' anti-nuclear monument.



## Day 4: Semey - Atomic Lake - Kurchatov

- This is when we finally see the nuclear sites themselves. Our first stop is the famous atomic lake. This lake was made by an explosion 25 times greater than Hiroshima. While it might look like the lake was an interesting consequence of the testing, it was in fact an intentional side effect, as the experiments were designed for earth-moving purposes to artificially create lakes, harbours and canals. Unbelievably, locals fish in the lake, despite warnings by authorities that it is hazardous.
- In the afternoon we'll check on the Chagan abandoned airbase. During the Cold War this was home to one of the Soviet Union's main air force bases for the deployment of long-range bombers carrying nuclear weapons. The location is interesting as it's on the Chinese border. Part of the reason for its location was the rising tensions due to the Sino-Soviet split.
- We'll then head to the town of Kurchatov, a formerly closed city, named after Igor Kurchatov, the founder of the Soviet nuclear programme, where the headquarters of the nuclear testing was based. Most of the town is derelict now as there is no employment to sustain the town's population, providing an opportunity to explore the old Soviet apartment blocks.
- The accommodation tonight will also be a very Soviet experience.

## Day 5: Kurchatov - Polygon Nuclear Test Site - Ekibastuz

- Before leaving Kurchatov, we'll visit the Museum of the Semipalatinsk Test Site, which not just anyone can visit - they require a permit organised in advance, but don't worry, that's what we're here for. This small museum gives you an idea of the history and effects of the nuclear testing done here.
- We'll then continue on to more of the nuclear test site - known as the Polygon. 456 Nuclear tests were conducted here, and the effects can be witnessed first-hand with the destroyed surroundings and large craters caused by the explosions.
- We'll explore the bunkers used by those performing the tests and the epicentres of the explosions.
- Leaving the test site behind, we'll make a stop in Aksu, before continuing to Ekibastuz for the night.



## Day 6: Ekibastuz - Nur-Sultan

- Ekibastuz is a large industrial town in north-eastern Kazakhstan. Home of the world's tallest chimney (at 419.7m tall), the most powerful power lines, and Bogatyr – the largest open-cast coal mine. How's that for some world records?!
- Ekibastuz isn't just an industrial back water, it also has a political history as it was a place of political exile for dissidents such as Alexandr Solzhenitzyn.
- We'll arrive in the capital of Kazakhstan, Nur-Sultan, mid-afternoon, with plenty of time to do a driving tour of this very spread out, but ridiculously impressive city.
- Built in 1997, Nur-Sultan resembles in many ways other cities such as Ashgabat, or to a lesser extent Baku. Clearly built from nothing at the snap of a finger, several of the world's most iconic architects were given carte blanche and tasked with the epic job of designing an incredibly unique city.
- We'll start the city tour with a visit to Bayterek. Sometimes referred to as the “Chupa Chup” because it looks like one, Bayterek has become a symbol of Astana. From the viewing platform, which is 97 meters high, symbolising the year of the city becoming capital, you can get spectacular views over the new city.
- Next we'll visit the Palace of Independence, the shopping and entertainment centre "Khan Shatyr", probably Nur-Sultan's most famous building. The building is in the shape of a giant, slightly lop-sided tent, and it's got everything inside that you might want. Restaurants, luxury shops, and even an aquapark which has sand imported from the Maldives.
- Whats in a name? Although currently known as Nur-Sultan (after the first President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev), the city was known as Astana until 2019. Before 1997 it was Tselinograd, and before that it was Akmola or Akmolinsk in Russian.

## Day 7: Nur-Sultan - ALZHIR - End of Tour

- Our final day sees us taking a short trip out of the city to ALZHIR – the Camp of Wives of Traitors to the Motherland. In the middle of the Kazakh steppe, you'll find this camp where the family of dissidents and so-called traitors were sent. Today it's now a memorial and museum where we'll learn about this dark part of the country's history.
- We'll arrive back in Astana with some free time in the afternoon before we have our farewell dinner in a local Kazakh restaurant.
- Transfers to the airport according to your flight times.
- If you would like to spend longer in Astana, let us know and we can help you make your plans.

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