

Kyrgyzstan is the country of nomads. Kyrgyz people were nomads for more than 2000 years and they started to live settle only at the beginning of 20th century. Anyway they managed to keep almost all their traditions and customs till our days. Even in the modern capital Bishkek the majority of people follow them. Kyrgyz people have been living in the mountains for many years and that is why they have their own rules.

Our people are very hospitable and they are always glad to see foreigners, but anyway you should try to follow our customs in order not to offend Kyrgyz. If you do become confused, do not panic, minor indiscretion will be tolerated and forgiven. The following **Dos and Don'ts** will help to minimize cultural differences and you will really have unforgettable time in the celestial Kyrgyzstan:

Do:

- Say hello (preferably in the Kyrgyz language → Salam Aleikum) when you arrive (However, repeating it when you see the same person is considered strange to Kyrgyz).
- Break bread (national one – lepushka) with hands. It's not allowed to cut it.
- Accept food and drink with the right hand or with both hands. People think that bad spirits do everything with the left hand. When you enter a mosque – use your right leg first (whereas entering a toilet, you must go with the left leg first).
- In the yurt, sleep with your feet pointing towards the door.
- if you see some food on the ground or on the floor – pick it up and put it somewhere higher to let birds eat it.
- Always ask an individual's permission before you take a photo; and respect their answer. In general people like it and they even ask you to take a photo of them.
- women must cover their heads when entering a church or a mosque.
- say thank you (Kyrgyz → rakhmat) when you are given something.
- if you want to show respect to a person, shake his hand with both your hands.
- take off your shoes when you go inside a yurt or a house.
- if somebody invites you to eat with them, come up to the table and take at least a piece of something.

Do not:

- whistle inside a room or a yurt. People believe that they will not have money anymore.
- step over the fire place. Fire is sacred for nomads.
- touch other people's hats and do not throw your own on the floor. People say you will have an awful headache if you twist or fold your hat.
- point a knife at anyone; pass a knife handle first.
- spill any milk.
- be surprised when Kyrgyz give you a traditional cup of tea that is half full.
- throw away any food in the rubbish bin.
- bargain (too) aggressively. In many countries you can bargain for 30-50% discount but not in Kyrgyzstan. Usually people can give you not more than 5%.
- be surprised too much when nomads give you the head of sheep as the first dish. In this way they show you their respect. You should eat at least a little bit. A way out without offending them is saying that you are a vegetarian. However, if you choose to do so, don't forget to act as vegetarian throughout the entire time in their presence.

Welcome to Kyrgyzstan!