

KAZAKHSTAN

Kazakhstan, a Central Asian country and former Soviet republic, extends from the Caspian Sea in the west to the Altai Mountains at its eastern border with China and Russia. It also shares borders with Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan. The northern city of Nur-Sultan (formerly Astana) became the capital of Kazakhstan in 1997, replacing Almaty, which is the largest metropolis and a long-standing trading hub. It is a huge country the size of Western Europe and has vast mineral resources. Major investment in the oil sector has brought rapid economic growth. The varied landscape stretches from the mountainous, heavily populated regions of the east to the sparsely populated, energy-rich lowlands in the west, and the industrialized north, with its Siberian climate and terrain. Kazakh and Russian are the major languages, and the currency is the tenge.

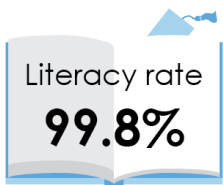


Population
18,995,549



1,052,090 MI²

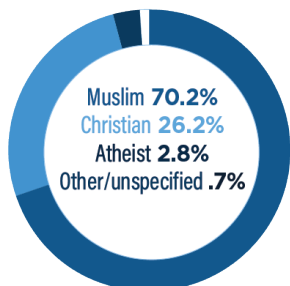
Roughly 4 times the area of
Texas



Ethnicities



Religions



FAMILY LIFE

Family is one of the most important aspects of culture in Kazakhstan and they tend to be very close and connected in each others' lives. Children usually live at home until they start their own families or move to another city for work or study. Extended family, including grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins may also live in the same household. If they do not, it is likely they will visit frequently. Usually the father is responsible for financial matters in the household. Spending time together as a family is important and it is considered disrespectful if a child spends too much time with friends or on other activities, especially if it keeps them from helping with household chores.

Some teenagers have their own rooms, but many are accustomed to sharing space with siblings or other family members.

Household responsibilities are usually divided between children and it is common for the youngest daughter, when she is old enough, to help cook, clean, and prepare for guests. Eating habits and practices vary from family to family, but most families regularly have home-cooked meals. In many families, the mother prepares meals, often with the help of her children. Many men and boys know how to cook, but generally it is expected that the females in the house will prepare the meals.

It is not common for teenagers to have a part-time job, and parents usually give a small allowance to their children. Students take responsibility for their school work, extracurricular activities and, in many cases, getting themselves to and from school.

Parents are usually involved in their children's extracurricular activities and often encourage them to take certain classes or join athletic teams. Public transportation is reliable and safe and teenagers are able to get around town to sports and other activities independently.

Many families have house cats, but keeping dogs inside the home is rare. Most families who own dogs keep them outside to protect their property. Stray dogs and cats are common in Kazakhstan, and considered dangerous.

FRIENDSHIP

Teenagers socialize both in groups and one-on-one. It is common to spend time at cafes and shopping centers and taking walks with friends. Parents are usually not involved in choosing the friends of their children. It is uncommon for friends of opposite genders to spend time together one-on-one. Most teenagers are closest with their classmates from school, since they usually spend most of their time with them. Teenagers also often have close relationships with cousins, family friends, and neighbors.

Teenagers tend to communicate more indirectly. If a teenager is having a problem, parents may need to make extra effort to find out what the problem is. Each family is unique in its methods of communication between members, however. Teenagers usually try not to show negative emotions initially and may not complain or express disappointment outwardly.

SCHOOL LIFE

The state curriculum consists of 12-15 subjects with 5-6 main subjects. Students are evaluated on a daily basis which includes homework, periodic quizzes, and a final exam. Exams are often oral with written exams being less common. Policies concerning fighting, bullying, and sexual harassment vary and are determined by the school management. Usually teachers are not strict about cheating and plagiarism. Although it is discouraged, consequences for cheating are minimal, and a teacher will simply tell the student to stop. Students often believe that helping their friends with homework or tests is a demonstration of good friendship.

Teachers always maintain authority in the classroom. Students call them by their first and patronymic (middle) names, never by their first name alone. Students show respect by listening, keeping quiet in class, sitting properly, and raising their hands to answer a question. Open discussion and active participation is uncommon. Teachers rarely know their students' parents personally, and report cards are given to students to share with their parents.

Students usually join clubs, participate in sport activities, and attend music lessons outside of school, at their own expense.

FOOD

Many people do not eat pork for religious reasons, and fast during the holy month of Ramadan. Eating habits and practices vary from family to family, but most families regularly have home-cooked meals. In many families, the mother prepares meals, often with the help of her children. Vegetarianism is not a common practice.

RELIGION

Even though 70% of the population identifies as Sunni Muslim, only 15-20% practice regularly. Places of worship are rarely used for social gatherings. Kazakhstan is home to a variety of ethnicities who celebrate both Muslim and Christian holidays. There are also a number of secular holidays. New Year's Eve is a very popular holiday that includes inviting friends over and eating a big meal. Kurban Bairam and Eid al-Fitr are celebrated, but not all families observe these holidays.

PERSONAL CARE

It is normal to shower once every day, more frequently if one participates in sports. It is generally acceptable to wear the same clothes several times before washing them as long as they are not dirty. Some teenagers may wash their own clothes but it is usually done by the mother. Clothes dryers are not common. Teenagers are expected to clean up after themselves in the bathroom.



The Future Leaders Exchange (FLEX) program is sponsored by the U.S. Department of State. FLEX provides competitively selected secondary school students from 22 countries in Europe and Eurasia with the opportunity to spend the academic year in the U.S. living with a volunteer host family and attending a host high school. Begun in 1993, FLEX now has over 29,000 alumni.