

TAJIKISTAN

Tajikistan is a landlocked country in Central Asia surrounded by Afghanistan, China, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan. It is known for rugged mountains, and is popular for hiking and climbing. The Fann Mountains, near the capital Dushanbe, have snow-capped peaks that rise over 16,400 feet. The range encompasses a notable bird habitat named for Iskanderkul, a turquoise lake formed by glaciers. The traditional homelands of the Tajik people included present-day Tajikistan, as well as Afghanistan and Uzbekistan. Battered by a five-year civil war at the onset of its independence from the Soviet Union in the 1990s, Tajikistan struggles with poverty and instability, and in some ways remains dependent on Russia, both for its economy and to help counter security problems. Tajikistan is also expanding its ties with China. Beijing has extended credits and has helped to build roads, tunnels and power infrastructure. Chinese firms are investing in oil and gas exploration and in gold mining. Tajik is the official language with Uzbek and Russian also used, along with various dialects. The currency is the somoni.

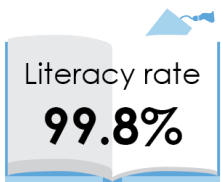


Population
9,750,799



55,637 MI²

Slightly smaller than
Wisconsin

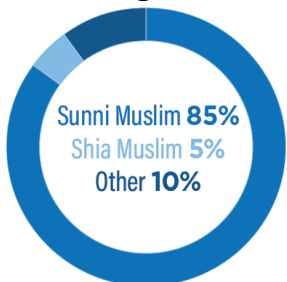


Literacy rate
99.8%

Ethnicities



Religions



FAMILY LIFE

Fathers usually have more authority than mothers in Tajik families, but the grandmother may also be the authority figure in a household since age is highly respected. Traditional families are multi-generational and women commonly move into their husband's family home after getting married, and so children often grow up with their parents and paternal grandparents. Tajikistan also has a high level of labor migration, so it is common for one or both parents to work abroad while children stay with their grandparents or other relatives. Women often work in the capital city but the majority of women outside Dushanbe are homemakers, and men are considered financially responsible for the family. Many people do not like spending time alone, and even if they do, homes are often too small for each family member to be alone. When teenagers want time away from their family, they may go for a walk, more often with friends than alone.

Siblings in Tajikistan often share everything without asking for permission. There is little understanding of privacy or personal possessions, but teenagers will usually ask before taking a family possession that is valuable or may be needed by someone.

There are many chores in Tajik households due to a lack of modern conveniences, and all children are expected to help out. Jobs generally follow traditional gender roles, but in homes where there are either no sons or no daughters, there is no distinction. Children often feel a strong sense of responsibility to help their families, and girls in particular have a significant role in taking care of younger children. In rural areas, children are expected to contribute to agricultural work alongside their parents.

Parents do not usually monitor their children's online activities or restrict them from sharing information online. In rural areas, parents may have little understanding of the internet. Children may also access the internet from internet cafés where there are few restrictions. Parents make many decisions for teenagers, which often include planning details of their day. Adult children also find it valuable to ask their parents for advice since they have more experience. Tajik students have little independence and often have significant responsibilities taking care of their family and home.

Pets are not popular and when families do have them, they rarely live indoors. Pets are not considered to be a part of the family and are often seen as dirty or dangerous.

FRIENDSHIP

Students generally study together in one group from first grade through high school graduation, and so they develop close bonds with each other. Teenagers also often develop close friendships with

their neighbors and extended family. Boys and girls typically do not socialize with one another, especially one-on-one. Teenagers in rural areas rarely have friends of the opposite gender and if they want to socialize, they often takewalks around town and visit parks. In cities, boys and girls may be friends at school, but do not socialize one-on-one. A group of Tajik teenagers will typically split into groups according to gender when they are together.

Age is very important in Tajik culture, and everyone shows respect to their elders. Young people even look up to relatives who are only a few years older. Teenagers usually have a formal relationship with their parents, and a close, less formal relationship with their grandparents. There is significant deference to elders, and teenagers may look down when speaking with adults. Girls may also avoid making eye contact with boys. It is more common for both boys and girls to be emotionally close to their mothers and speak openly about their problems, and to have a difficult time directly confronting people who are older.

SCHOOL LIFE

Students in Tajikistan study 5-7 subjects every day and receive daily homework that gets checked by their teachers. Teachers randomly ask students to go to the blackboard or to orally answer questions, and they are evaluated mostly through oral exams and sometimes written. There are no elective classes. Bullying and fighting are common problems, and teachers or administrators may or may not intervene. Students are not expelled for fighting, but their parents may be called to speak with the principal. Parents are held responsible for their children's behavior and can be forced to pay fines if they misbehave. Cheating is widespread and not considered to be a significant problem. Tajik students often think it is positive to help their classmates, and do not see the difference between cheating and helping others succeed.

Tajik students usually move from room to room as a class but might stay in one room in rural areas where schools are smaller and there are fewer resources. Relationships between students and teachers are very formal, and students are often intimidated by their teachers. Most classes are not separated by gender, but military preparation classes are split where boys participate in army exercises and girls learn first-aid. Boys and girls usually choose to sit and socialize separately when they have classes together.

Extracurricular activities are not provided by schools and students who want to participate in arts, sports, or other activities can join clubs or take private lessons in the community which usually involve a fee. Schools organize formal academic competitions called Olympiads and top students may be required to participate. Since opportunities for making friends with similar interests through extracurricular activities are limited, teenagers commonly become friends with their cousins, classmates, and neighbors.

FOOD

Most people are Muslim and follow a halal diet. Families usually eat traditional food and are not accustomed to trying new dishes. Meals are often quite formal. The whole family may eat together, or men and women may eat separately. Vegetarianism is nearly unheard of.

RELIGION

Only men attend mosque, and boys under age 18 are forbidden by law from attending. Women and children learn about religion through word of mouth, and superstition is widespread. The government is very secular and tries to limit the risk of radical extremism by downplaying the role of religion in society.

PERSONAL CARE

It is common for people to shower once every 3-4 days, since Tajiks often believe that showering often or leaving the house with wet hair will make you sick. Each family member may have their own towel, or there may be one shared among several people. Teenage girls are used to doing their own laundry and that of other family members, but may not know how to use modern washers and dryers. It is uncommon for boys to do laundry.



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.