



Photography tour to Kazakhstan: extraterrestrial landscapes

14 days | 14 Nov 2026 - 27 Nov 2026

-  Photography
-  Photography group tours

STARLING wouldn't be STARLING if we didn't occasionally launch something spectacular. This time is no different. We are organising a photography tour to the raw, untamed and unknown beauty of Kazakhstan. This trip takes us to a setting that will leave you speechless. To extraterrestrial panoramas and historical mystery. You will come home with the most unique images and experiences. A journey to unseen colours and textures, to the largest salt flats and canyons. A journey to another world, it seems!

A truly unique journey

Kazakhstan, "The land of nine landscapes"... A dream destination for photographers due to its extreme and photogenic diversity. It is a gold mine for landscape photographers and will take your breath away at every turn. The endless steppes, the high mountains, the mountain lakes, the canyons, the otherworldly chalk landscape and the multicoloured desert hills. You name it, Kazakhstan has it. The country invites photographers to learn not one, but many techniques and to approach it from different perspectives. Above all, the country invites you to pause and enjoy it endlessly!

Historical Necropolises and Chalk Formations

During this trip, we will venture into the Mangistau steppe, a fascinating and unique part of the larger Kazakh steppe and the Ustyurt Plateau. The area is distinguished by a combination of arid steppe, semi-desert and otherworldly geological formations.

Characteristic landscapes include vast chalk cliffs, limestone mountains, deep canyons and salt flats. The region is rich in fossils of extinct marine animals (whales, sharks, rays) and is home to unique geological phenomena.

We will also visit the Kenty Baba Necropolis, one of the most important and mysterious historical sites in the Mangistau region. It has been a sacred place since the 10th century, deep in the steppe, serving as both a burial ground and a place of pilgrimage, and is known for its unique architecture and engravings.

Valley of Balls, also known as Torysh, will also be visited! This is one of the most bizarre and photographically interesting geological phenomena in the Mangistau region! It is a vast valley in the steppe littered with thousands of perfectly round stone balls with a diameter of 3 to 4 metres. The enormous concentration of balls is what makes Torysh so unique. The landscape is often compared to an abandoned bowling alley for giants or the surface of Mars and is a dream for photographers, especially at sunrise and sunset.



The spectacular natural wonders of the Ustyurt Plateau

The Ustyurt Plateau is a vast clay desert covering approximately 200,000 km² that stretches across Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. It is an inhospitable but spectacular area, characterised by steep, multicoloured cliffs, fossils and various unique and



breathtaking rock formations.

We admire Tuzbair, a huge salt flat approximately 15 km long and 4 km wide. The 60 m high cliffs form the most bizarre patterns and shapes.

We also visit one of the deepest depressions in the region: the Karynzharyk Depression, which reaches a depth of approximately 75 m below sea level!



The grand finale of the trip: the yellow formations of Kyzylkup and the limestone of Bozzira.

The most visually stunning and geologically diverse locations... the icing on the cake... we're saving them for last.

The Kyzylkup Valley, also known as the Tiramisu Canyon! An area that stands out for its intense, layered colours. We visit the gorges and climb the slopes with panoramic views of the "Mars-like" landscape and see the colours change according to the light of the rising or setting sun.

And finally, the Bozzhira Valley, probably the most iconic symbol of Mangistau's wild, otherworldly landscapes. In contrast to the multicoloured Kyzylkup, Bozzhira is dominated by bright white and pale pink limestone and chalk, creating a dramatic contrast with the surrounding desert plain.



What makes this photography tour to Kazakhstan so special?

- It feels like travelling across multiple continents: from the Alps to the salt flats of South America and the deserts of Africa.
- Nowhere else will you find such an extreme and extraterrestrial landscape. We embark on a journey that feels like a trip to another planet, far away from civilisation.
- Due to the remote location of many sites, we often have nature "all to ourselves".
- We capture the immense and varied wilderness, which can still be found in its pure form in few other countries.
- You will be accompanied by professional nature photographer Yves Adams.

Meet your guide

During this trip, you will be accompanied by professional and passionate photographer Yves Adams. Yves has a deep love for Kazakhstan and has travelled to the country numerous times. He is a jack of all trades and will provide you with intensive guidance.



Is this photography tour something for you?

- You are passionate about extreme landscapes.
- You want to come home with unique images, LOTS of unique images.
- You love a touch of adventure and have confidence in STARLING, Yves and our network.
- You are keen to go on an expedition to the most spectacular locations and camps.
- You are open to sacrificing comfort at times in exchange for the most unique photos.

Itinerary & Locations

14/11

Depart from home to Aktau

We fly from our airport of choice to the city of Aktau in southwestern Kazakhstan.

15/11

Arrival in Aktau

We arrive in Aktau where we find our transfer to the hotel. We can rest for a bit and head outside for our first introduction to the city and the Kazakh culture.

16/11

Khanga Baba Necropolis and Kozdikara Lake

We depart for the Mangistau steppe and visit the ancient Khanga Baba Necropolis and the mysterious Kozdikara Lake.

17/11

Kenty Baba Necropolis - the Mosque of Shakpak Ata - Torysh

We start the day with a visit to the Kenty Baba Necropolis. Then we head into the gorges of Kapamsay Canyon and visit the Mosque of Shakpak Ata, which is carved into the rocks. Finally, we end with the magical and surreal Valley of Balls (Torysh)!

A fantastic day!

18/11

The Lion Mountain and the ruins of Kyzyl Kala

We photograph the unique formations of Kokala and then continue on to the Lion Mountain (Sherkala). We end the day with an exploration of the ruins of Kyzyl Kala and the layered Airakty Valley.

19/11

Tuzbair

We spend a whole day in majestic Tuzbair. An enormous salt lake, flanked by white chalk cliffs and spectacular reflections and views.

20/11

The chalk canyons of the Syndy region

We continue our journey to the Syndy region to capture the impressive chalk canyons. This is followed by a transfer to the southern city of Janaozen.

21/11

The depressions of the Ustyurt Plateau

We explore the vast Ustyurt Plateau and enter the Karynzhyryk depression to see the spooky silhouette of the Three Brothers (Tri Brata). Finally, we visit the Kendirli Salt Marsh.

22/11

Karynzhyryk - Tiramisu Canyon

We get up early for a sunrise shoot in Karynzhyryk. Later in the day, we travel through the layered Tiramisu Canyon and stop for a break at Zhakpakty (spring) before continuing on to colourful Kyzylkup.



23/11

Kyzylkup - Transfer to Bokty Mountain

We will do a morning shoot in the red and yellow formations of Kyzylkup and later in the day transfer to the striking Bokty Mountain.

24/11

To Bozjyra

Today we make the transfer to our highlight: the iconic Bozjyra.

25/11

Highlights on the road to Kogez

We rise early again for sunrise in Bozjyra, where the towering limestone monoliths are bathed in the morning light. We then travel on to the golden yellow Dunes of Senek and arrive in Kogez in the evening for an overnight stay in a traditional yurt village.

26/11

An underground mosque and spectacular gorge on the way to Aktau

We visit the Karaman Ata underground mosque and then drive through the spectacular Porous Gorge, which merges into Karagiye Hollow (one of the lowest points in Kazakhstan). In the evening, we return to Aktau.

27/11

Time to head back home

Unfortunately, our trip has come to an end. We are transferring to Aktau Airport for our flight home and will arrive home today.

Practical

Accommodation, transport and flights

We stay in hotels and camps with four-season tents. A professional chef accompanies us throughout the trip and provides us with delicious meals. Sleeping bags are not included but can be rented through us. Even though it gets very cold at night, you will not feel cold if you have the right equipment. In Aktau, we will sleep in a comfortable hotel and break up the journey with hotel stays along the way.

We will travel in 4x4 vehicles on roads that we are not used to. The roads are off-road and often unpaved. This makes the experience even more unique.

You will fly from your airport of choice to Aktau. International flights are not included in the price. With a guaranteed departure, each participant will receive a proposal to book the flights through us. It is also possible to book the flights on your own initiative. Prices vary from 700 euro to 1000 euro, depending on the connection and when the flights are booked.

Climate and clothing

The Mangistau steppe has already made the transition to winter in November. You should prepare for cold, dry and windy conditions, especially when you are in the open, unprotected desert landscapes. Temperatures range between 2 and 10 degrees Celsius, and it can freeze at night. On average, the sun shines for 9 hours a day and the skies are often clear.

Given the cold and wind, layered clothing is essential. You will often stand still in the same spot for some time to take the perfect photo. Thermal underwear, a hat and scarf, gloves, warm shoes, lined trousers, fleece and/or down, several thinner layers and a windproof and waterproof jacket will be crucial. Finally, it will also be important to protect your camera equipment from dust, water and cold. But all the tips on this will follow. Are you ready for this adventure?



Price

4995 euro (Price per person)

Included

- all camping gear (tents, sleeping bag, cooking gear, ...)
- all drinking water
- all excursions and entrance tickets for parks
- all meals
- all nights
- all transport at site
- enthusiast guiding by professional STARLING photographer
- specialized local guides

Excluded

- international flights and airport taxes
- personal expenses
- tips for local collaborators (horeca, hotel,...)
- travel insurance and cancellation insurance (available for purchase through us)
- visa fees (if applicable)

