KAZAKHSTAN (Qazaqstan)

Kazakhstan is the largest of the former republics of the Soviet Union and the world’s largest landlocked nation. Located in North Central Asia, the Kazakh national project began to develop under the control first of Tsarist and then of Soviet Russia. Due to its small territorial holdings west of the Ural River, Kazakhstan, like Turkey and Russia, can claim to be a truly Eurasian country. Nursultan Nazarbayev, the leader of the Republic of Kazakhstan for over 25 years, is one of the strongest proponents of the Eurasian Economic Union which came into official existence in 2014 and touts itself as an economic regional alternative to the European Union. Kazakhstan is mostly steppe land, with hilly plains and grassland plateaus. It is roughly four times the size of Texas.

RELIGION AND ETHNICITY
In 2009, 96% of Kazakh people identified with a religion. Primarily Islam (70.2%) and Orthodox Christianity (23.9%). Sunni Islam of the Hanafi school is the primary confession of Kazakh citizens. Other Islamic affiliations are often held by ethnic minorities in the country, such as the Chechens. Ethnicity and religious identity are closely linked in Kazakhstan, as elsewhere. During the Soviet period, the “Virgin Lands” project injected a large Russian minority into the territory, offsetting the Kazakh ethnicity and providing the quarter of the population that identify with Orthodoxy. Since 1991, many ethnic Russians have left Kazakhstan and many Kazakhs have been repatriated returning Kazakh and Islamic prevalence. Nevertheless, Russian is still spoken by a wider swathe of people in the country than Kazakh and is the “official language of business and interethnic dialogue.”

EDUCATION
Kazakhstan boasts a 99.8% literacy rate and government protected rights to kindergarten, primary and secondary education. Primary and Secondary school curriculum is state mandated and does not allow for significant variation between individual schools. Like most countries with a Soviet heritage, Kazakhstan divides secondary education into two sections between 9th and 10th grade. After 9th, a student has a number of options which include entering a vocational school, continuing on a university oriented track or terminating their education. In order to meet goals set by the Bologna Accords, Kazakhstan is pursuing the goal of extending primary and secondary education from a total of 11 years to 12. The two most important institutions of higher education in Kazakhstan are al-Farabi Kazakh National University in Almaty and L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University in Astana.

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Traditional Kazakh Dress
Kazakh is a Turkic language and many of the popular names in Kazakh society are related to names one may find in other Turkic language speaking nations. However, two centuries of Russian rule have introduced many slavicisms into the language, affecting names as well (name endings -ev-ov).

Famous people of Kazakh descent include: Timur Bekmambetov, a Russian-Kazakh, whose science-fiction/fantasy vampire series, Night Watch and Day Watch brought him international acclaim; Talgat Musabayev, a Kazakh cosmonaut who flew on three spaceflights to the Mir and International Space Stations and is currently the head of KazCosmos; and Zhansaya Abdumalik, the 15 year old chess prodigy who achieved Woman Grandmaster status at age 11 and has an Elo rating of 2379.

Kazakhstan has inherited a significant role in post-Soviet space programs, providing many of the launching grounds and landing sites for cosmonauts shuttling back and forth between the International Space Station and Earth. Kazakhstan has also had to deal with the legacy of significant nuclear weapons testing in its backyard, causing significant radiation challenges and higher rates of birth defect.

Kazakhs in the USA
The Kazakh people are very minimally represented in the U.S. population, (the 2000 U.S. Census puts the number at less than 300, while in China the Kazakh ethnicity is claimed by over 1 million people). More recent data estimates somewhere between 23,000-25,000 people of Kazakh descent live in the United States today. Reston, VA is a locus of Kazakh immigration. Many Kazakh immigrants have arrived in America by way of Turkey or China. American families have adopted a significant number of Kazakh orphans as well since the 1990’s, swelling the population.

THE KAZAKH WORDS
Welcome...........................(Qoş, keldiňiz!)
How are you? (formal)............(Qalıñız qalay?)
How are you (informal)..........(Qalıñ qalay?)
I’m from..................................(Men ...)
Thank you...........................(Raxmet!)
Help!................................. (Kömektesiňiz!)
Goodbye.............................(Saw bolıñız!)
Hello................................. (sah-lem-met-siz be?)
Yes...................................... (ee-ah.)
No....................................... (joq.)

USEFUL LINKS
http://www.everyculture.com/Ja-Ma/Kazakhstan.html