Population: 5,171,943 (2014 est.)

Area: 488,100 sq km (about the size of California)

Capital: Ashgabat

Language: Turkmen (official) Russian (interethnic)

In 1991 the Soviet Union reported near universal literacy in all of its republics, Turkmenistan included. In recent years the government of Turkmenistan has worked to cultivate a nationalist narrative for its citizenry via standardized humanities curriculum during secondary education. There are approximately 1800 schools providing at least one grade of secondary education, 56% of which are operating on two-shift systems (day and night school, primarily in the cities). The universities and institutes of higher learning are all located in Ashgabat, with one exception (a pedagogical institute in Chärjew).

Turkmenistan is the southwesternmost Central Asian republic formerly a part of the Soviet Union. Since 1985 the country has been led by two dictators: President For Life Saparmurat Niyazov until his death in 2006 and Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedow, both of whom have developed cult of personality leadership styles. Turkmenistan shares borders with Iran, Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan. Oil and natural gas constitute the primary source of wealth for the country making up 62% of national exports. Turkmenistan’s Karakum Desert dominates the landscape of the country, taking up over 70% of the territory and yielding the highest recorded temperatures in the former Soviet Union, above 50 degrees Celsius.

RELIGION
As with the other Central Asian republics, Turkmenistan is dominated by adherents to Sunni Islam. Recent surveys show 97% of Turkmen associate with the religion. Historically, Islam was integrated into the Turkmen tribal structure through the holy tribes known as övlät. The övlät tribes adopted certain Sufi practices while maintaining ancestor worship. Members of one of the six övlät tribes were often called upon to be present at various life-cycle events: birth, marriage, death in order to confer blessings and mediate conflicts.

ETHNICITY
Turkmen ethnicity makes up a significant portion of the Turkic ethnic group (about 150 million worldwide). Turkmen are distinguished by a variation of Turkic language shared with Turkey and Azerbaijan, namely the Oghuz branch. Turkmen ethnicity is represented across the Middle East and Central Asia, with significant populations in Turkmenistan, Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, Syria, Azerbaijan, Pakistan, and southern Russia. The Turkmen language has survived numerous alphabet changes, from Arabic, to Latin, to Cyrillic and back to Latin. In Turkmenistan, the issue of alphabet usage carries significant political overtones.

FAMILY, RELATIONSHIPS & CUSTOMS
Historically, Turkmen social structures are primarily marked by tribal affiliation, and they continue to play a significant role to this day. Marriages in Turkmenistan occur most frequently among people in their early 20s. Marriages tend to be endogamous, within tribal groups. Most married couples will have a baby within the first year of marriage, and it is possible for the groom’s parents to demand a divorce after that amount of time if they suspect that their daughter-in-law is infertile. Polygamy, although tolerated, is rarely practiced and was never common among the Turkmens.
Over the past 25 years Turkmenistan has become most famous for its dictators, Turkmenbashi Saparmurat尼亚zov and Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedow. The most famous soccer player from Turkmenistan is Muslim Agaev whose career spanned from 1991 to 2008. He was a striker for FC Merw in the city of Mary. How are you? Yagdaylaň nähili? Fine, thank you. yaxshi, sagh bol What is your name? Ading nama ? My name is mening Adim Please. baş, (ba-sh) Thank you. sag boluň. (sahg-bol-ung) Good morning…….ertiriiňiz hayyrly bolsun. (er-ti-ring-iz-hay-uhr-luh-bol-sun)

FAMOUS TURKMN
Over the past 25 years Turkmenistan has become most famous for its dictators, Turkmenbashi Saparmurat Niyazov and Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedow. The most famous soccer player from Turkmenistan is Muslim Agaev whose career spanned from 1991 to 2008. He was a striker for FC Merw in the city of Mary.

FAMILY, RELATIONSHIPS & CUSTOMS (CONTINUED)
Families are close and tend to extend beyond the nuclear family, so that households often times include three or four generations of relatives. A common Central Asian superstition (and elsewhere) regarding newborn babies posits that non-family members should not be allowed to see the infant for 40 days after birth.

CONTEMPORARY TURKMENISTAN
The Ahal Tekke breed of horse is the national symbol of Turkmenistan and the importance of the famous breed accounts for the fact that Turkmen, unlike their Central Asian neighbors, do not eat horse meat. Turkmenistan shares its popular dish, Plov (pilaf), with the other Central Asian and Caucasian countries. Turkmenistan is home to the infamous “Door to Hell” less bombastically known as the Derweze natural gas field, which is a pit in the middle of the Karakum Desert that has been burning continuously since it was discovered in 1971. Turkmenistan is marked by extreme disparity of wealth between the elegant and ostentatious design of Ashgabat, the “City of White Marble,” and rural squalor. Turkmenistan is one of the many countries used to substantiate the “curse of natural resources” economic theory. Tourism to the country is allowed, although an American who travels to Turkmenistan must always be accompanied by a local guide.

TURKMEN IN THE USA
Although foreign tourists can visit Turkmenistan, the government maintains fairly restrictive travel allowances for its own citizens. More significantly, poverty and lack of preexisting family connections in the United States mean that very few Turkmen have made their way to America. There is little to no information on Turkmen ethnic populations in the United States. Ethnic Turkmen populations that have made it to the United States arrived via Afghanistan and Iraq, primarily as refugees.