

Your First Adoption Trip to Kyrgyzstan

You are approaching a very exciting point in your adoption process. You are about to travel to Kyrgyzstan to meet with your prospective adoptive child. This quick guide will give you a better understanding of what to expect when traveling to Kyrgyzstan, also called the Kyrgyz Republic.

Whether you are an experienced international traveler or leaving the United States for the first time, we encourage you to read this guide carefully and take these tips to heart. Many of these tips were written by our families who travelled to Kyrgyzstan and wanted to leave advice for future families. First we will review the basic schedule of your trip, and then provide some travel tips and suggestions.

1. You need to physically be in Kyrgyzstan bonding with your child within one month of accepting your adoption referral. You will travel to Bishkek, the capital city. You'll need to go through immigration and customs. It will most likely take you about an hour to go through customs. Walk out to the arrivals area of the airport. If you will be traveling through any other countries on your way to or from Kyrgyzstan, please let your adoption caseworker know so they can help you get the necessary travel visas before your trip!
2. Once you are in the arrivals area you will be met by our Foreign Supervised Provider, Mrs. Chinara Abdyldaeva, who will be holding a sign reading *World Links*. We'll forward your photos to her so she'll know what you look like. Chinara is pictured below. She should be up front and looking for you. In the unlikely event that she doesn't find you and you don't see her in the first 10-15 minutes, please call or message her. If you are calling from your American phone, dial 011-996-552-593-070. If you are calling from a local phone, dial 996-552-593-070. Chinara will escort you to your hotel or apartment. She will also go over your schedule for the rest of your stay, provide her contact information, and availability schedules. Chinara has been working with adoptive families for many years and is very familiar with the adoption process. You are in good hands while abroad.
3. After you get a restful night's sleep, Chinara will take you to visit with your child at the orphanage. You will tentatively follow the schedule below. Please be aware that this schedule depends on your own flight arrival and departure times. If your plane arrives at Bishkek very late, you may not have the "Day 1- Settle into your hotel" time. Instead, you would start with the bonding visits with your child or children right away.



DAY 1:	We try to plan your arrival to give you enough time to recover from almost 24 hours of travel. Today you can get settled into your hotel and rest. You will have a busy day tomorrow.
DAY 2:	Today you will meet your child. We encourage you to have something for the child when you first meet. Giving them a toy might make it easier to play and start bonding with your child. The medical and background history of your child will be reviewed with you. Orphanage personnel work on their own schedule, so you may have to wait until they are available. Spend that time with your child.
DAY 3:	This is a very important day. Today you will have an opportunity to meet with the doctor, caregivers, and social workers working with your child. You can find out about your child's background and history. You are encouraged to take lots of pictures and a video of your meeting. Ask to have a medical examination done. You may videotape the examination for your doctor at home. We advise you to prepare questions in advance, as well as write down any questions you may have since yesterday's visit. This will be the time to ask all your questions and get answers from the people that have cared for your child.
DAY 4-9	On these days you will continue to visit your child. You will spend several hours per day with your child following their normal routine.
DAY 10	If you are sure you want to proceed with your adoption, today you will visit your child and go to the notary to sign some official adoption paperwork, including the official petition to the central adoption authority of Kyrgyzstan confirming your intent to adopt your child, as well as power of attorney for Chinara to apply for your child's birth certificate and passport. The notary's office is located downtown, so it can also be a good time to go sightseeing or get some souvenirs. You must also decide on your child's new name and let Chinara and your caseworker know the exact spelling.
DAY 11	Today is the last day you get to spend with your child before going back to the United States. Spend that time well.
DAY 12	Chinara will take you to the airport and you will fly back home.

SECTION 1: BEFORE YOU LEAVE THE UNITED STATES:

1. **Make sure your passport is valid for at least 1 full year from the date of your trip.**
2. Make a copy of your passport and keep this copy separate from the original.

3. Make sure you have sent World Links your Foreign Fee Part 1 payment at least two weeks prior to your departure date!
4. Check to make sure your medical coverage applies to overseas travel.
5. Obtain additional medical coverage, if existing coverage does not apply to overseas travel.
6. Consider obtaining travel insurance. It protects you in the event of sudden unforeseen circumstances associated with travel.
7. Make sure all U.S. State Department and CDC recommended pre-travel immunizations are obtained.
8. You may consider obtaining an international cell phone or contacting your current cell phone carrier and signing up for an international plan.
9. Consider a money belt to protect your money from pickpockets and to carry your passport. Two money belts are best to separate your funds between two people. Alternatively, you can transfer money into a temporary checking account and use a debit card while in Kyrgyzstan linked to that account. If you choose to use a bank debit card, please make sure your PIN is no more than 4 digits. You will not be able to access your funds if your PIN is more than 4 digits. Make sure there is no limit to how much you can withdraw at a time, as you may have large expenses to pay in Kyrgyzstan. Another option is to bring a pre-paid travel card from AAA.
10. Remember, most countries in the world do not function with the same electrical equipment as the United States. Make sure you bring an adaptor if you're packing any electronics!
11. Please be careful when eating local food Kyrgyzstan. A diet that is too different than what you are used to can cause you to have an adverse reaction.
12. Be sure to pack your clothing according to the season and weather! We recommend you check online for a real-time weather report in Kyrgyzstan.
13. We suggest speaking with a pediatrician, family doctor, or other specialist before your trip. They may be able to give you some ideas on what to look for (i.e. birth weight, head circumference, etc.) Also, ask your doctor for literature on child development and information on children who have lived in institutions. Knowledge of developmental milestones will give you a better understanding of the degree of institutional delay your child has experienced.
14. Enroll in the Department of State's STEP program that will provide you with important health and safety alerts throughout your travel and stay abroad.
15. Take additional money for your hotel, food (same prices as in the U.S.), souvenirs and other travel and sightseeing expenses. Hotels can usually be paid for with a credit card, but most

restaurants and stores only accept cash. ATMs aren't as common, so please plan accordingly. You can bring up to \$5000 cash per person to the Kyrgyz Republic without declaration. You can leave the Kyrgyz Republic with up to \$3000 cash per person without having to file declaration.

16. **Please bring only new clean \$100 or \$50 bills.** Banks will not exchange any bills that have markings or writings on them, bills that are torn, old or worn out. Contact your local bank at least one week in advance to tell them of your need for clean bills.
17. **Please bring \$20-\$40 for notary fees for your in-country paperwork that needs to be done on this trip. You can exchange US dollars into Kyrgyz soms before your trip or while you are in Bishkek. Our representative will help you with any currency exchanges you may need.**

SECTION 2: WHEN YOU ARRIVE IN BISHKEK:

Upon your arrival to the airport, you will move through passport control. Stay in your line with passport in hand. After passport control you will get your luggage. There will be many porters who will want to help you with your luggage. If you don't have much luggage you won't need their help (they are unreasonably priced). There is only one turnstile to get to the luggage claim area. After getting your luggage you will go through customs.

SECTION 3: "OVER THERE!"

As the adage goes, "When in Rome, do as the Romans do." Any time you visit a foreign country, it is important to adhere to the customs of that country or you may insult your hosts. Although you may be on private business, you will still be a representative of the United States of America to the people you encounter, and it is important that you understand how social interactions and customs differ in the Kyrgyz Republic from those in the United States.

Some American families who have gone to the Kyrgyz Republic find it is challenging because of the culture shock. Differences of language, food, culture, and environment seem overwhelming. Don't let your spirits sink, though, because by the second day, most people adjust somewhat and the second trip is easier than the first.

Remember: We're guests in another society in the Kyrgyz Republic. The norms there are not the same as in the USA. Do not expect people to behave the same and do not expect quite as much courtesy or smiling as you'll see in the USA. It's not that the Kyrgyz are any less happy or courteous, but it's expressed in different ways. It helps to put your ideas

of what is normal on a shelf and revisit them once you return to the USA. Be open to a new adventure – you'll not only have a new family member but also a new sense of life once experiencing Kyrgyz culture firsthand. It's a wonderful experience.

World Links takes great pride in having caring and dependable people working with our families while you stay in the Kyrgyz Republic. They may speak English with an accent however, so don't be shy or embarrassed in asking them to repeat themselves. You will be well taken care of from the moment you arrive in the Kyrgyz Republic until the time you leave. Do not be afraid to ask questions, express your concerns, or relax and enjoy yourself during your stay in the Kyrgyz Republic.

Your World Links representative will be your best resource if you have any questions or concerns while you are abroad. Our representative and translators are very experienced and have worked with us for many years, so they will be able to solve problems quickly. If there is an issue that you think is best discussed with our main office you are always welcome to contact the agency at 570-344-8890 or contact your caseworker directly. After you are back home, your caseworker will be your main contact person for any questions or concerns.

Please do not discuss your private adoption with anyone except our agency staff and representative.

After your first trip to the Kyrgyz Republic, you must file USCIS form I-800 (*Petition to Classify Convention Adoptee as an Immediate Relative*). USCIS will review your Form I-800 and the accompanying evidence World Links will provide to determine whether your child qualifies as a Convention adoptee. Your caseworker will assist you with the process.

Medical Examiner Online Privacy

The medical examiner performing the required Embassy medical check for your child will need your email on file. If you would like to set up a new email address for this purpose, please let your caseworker know so we can provide your new email address. We can only provide one email address for each family! If you prefer to use the email address World Links already has on file for you, your caseworker will do so. Please indicate your preference below.

I prefer the medical examiner who performs my adopted child's required Embassy exam to use a different email address than the one provided in my adoption paperwork. My preferred email address for this purpose is:

General Tips:

- ★ Do not leave your valuables unattended. Keep your cellphone out of easy reach from a potential thief.
- ★ Lots of sleep helps with the jetlag. It's important to let yourself adjust to the change while you are there and when you come home.
- ★ A portable DVD player, iPad, or some other portable form of entertainment device can be worth its weight in gold, especially if you're bringing kids. Kyrgyz TV is all in foreign languages!
- ★ You can get a SIM card with Chinara for your phone. Tell your phone company you'll be out of the USA during the dates you travel. You can also get a temporary international plan. Skype worked great!
- ★ A/C adaptor: they use the same 220V 50hz as Europe, both the larger and smaller diameter sockets (plug prongs) can be found, the smaller is far more common. **Bring an adaptor if you bring any electronics.**
- ★ Batteries: Bring rechargeable batteries with adaptor for a digital camera.
- ★ Hand sanitizer is a really good idea. Use it often.
- ★ Bring your own toilet paper? Local toilet paper is comparable to cheap USA brands.
- ★ Hotel towels are functional, but tend to be thin.
- ★ Bottled water from the grocery store is a good idea. While you're there you can get some fresh fruit for the children at the orphanage. They love fruit! There are around 15 children in most orphanages.
- ★ Before you travel, register with the US Embassy and check to see if there are any events happening during your trip.

Clothing:

- ★ Pack light! Too much or too heavy luggage can cause an inconvenience.
- ★ Depending on the time of the year one of the most important items you'll be wearing is a pair of comfortable, waterproof boots. You'll probably wear these all day, everyday because the sidewalks aren't always shoveled.
- ★ Other important items are: hat, gloves, scarf, and coat. As simple as this sounds, many aren't prepared. I didn't bring a hat or scarf and my gloves were in my suitcase. I was thinking that I wouldn't really need them going from the airport to the car, and from the car to the train station. Wrong! It's a 5-minute walk wherever you go. A scarf is as valuable as a hat! They do sell great hats in Kyrgyzstan, but you need one the minute you step outside.

- ★ In Kyrgyzstan, women often wear heels. If you prefer not to wear heels, dark colored shoes, or chunky heels or chunky boots are quite common. You can certainly get by with black shoes of almost any type. Make sure they're comfortable – you'll do a lot of walking if you want to see a lot.
- ★ Men wear dark color shoes, predominately black leather with rubber soles or lug soles, or black low boots, again mostly leather. Some hiking boots, though these are worn more by tourists or the younger crowd. Doc Martin-style black leather shoes with lug soles are great. Snow is not cleared, but rather trampled and sanded, making things grey.
- ★ Coats: locals wear longer coats, furs are common, and the predominant color is black. Some dark charcoal grey, a few brown or dark green. Many furs, leathers, and combinations thereof.
- ★ Layer, layer, layer. Some buildings are very warm inside, and you'll want to take a few layers off. But no two buildings were the same, so having choices is great.
- ★ Another great item we bought was a money holder that went around your calf. It was so much more comfortable than the one around the waist. It was easier to get to, also.

Plane ride:

- ★ Bring snacks.
- ★ Bring sleeping masks – they don't turn the lights out until 2 AM, and they don't hand out sleeping masks. One of those inflatable crescent neck rolls doesn't hurt, either. You really do want to sleep on the plane, it helps with the jetlag.
- ★ Planes in that part of the world do not have large overhead storage bins, so check as much baggage as you can. You'll have some legroom, but barely any overhead space.

Hotel:

- ★ World Links or Chinara can recommend a hotel to you, but you have to book your own room. Some hotel possibilities are:
 - ★ Futuro
 - ★ Golden Dragon
 - ★ Hyatt
- ★ If you ask Chinara or her family to join you for a meal, please pay for them, as the restaurants may be a little out of their price range.
- ★ Most hotels have high-speed internet access. Bring your phone, laptop or device with you and you will be able to communicate with your family and doctor.

Visiting the Orphanage

- ★ At the orphanage, we were photographed with the child in the director’s office. These photographs are presented in court as proof that we had visited the child at the orphanage before the court hearing. Our camera was used for the pictures, so make sure you have your phone or camera on-hand at the orphanage. You’ll need at least 10 shots, and Chinara will get them printed for you prior to the court hearing.

- ★ Bring treats, such as candy or fresh fruits for the children.

- ★ If you want to give a gift to orphanage staff, only give small souvenir items.

Please sign below to indicate that you read and understood this guide, and return a signed copy to World Links. We suggest saving a copy for yourself.

Signature

DATE

Signature

DATE