

# Seven Wonders of Kazakhstan: Why Fashion Tourism Is Booming in Central Asia

Over 1.2 billion travelers made international fashion tourism one of the most reliably growing economy sectors last year. The increased demand among Chinese and Indian for global travel and luxury items are helping to perk up their neighbors' coffers. **Kazakhstan**, the largest landlocked country in the world, has attracted attention, both as the **2017 World EXPO** host and new luxury marketplace. It now has set an ambitious goal of raising **tourism's GDP share** up to eight percent within a decade. This figure is comparable to the latest stats for **the Persian Gulf region** boosted by business travel and the popular resort nation of **Dominican Republic**. From the Altai Mountains, home to some 600 sacred sites, to the remnants of the Great Silk Road, to the Caspian Sea waterfront, and affordable luxury goods... Kazakhstan has many things to offer to the most discerning of travelers. With about **25,000 Americans** discovering Kazakhstan every year, this is a real opportunity to experience an authentic place before the crowds gather at this ancient crossroad of cultures. Here are seven must-see places to check off your Kazakhstan bucket list.

## THE BAYTEREK TOWER



*Bayterek Tower*

Astana, Kazakhstan's capital city, boasts fine examples of contemporary architecture. **Bayterek Tower**, without a doubt, serves as the young nation's symbol. Conceptualized by the President Nursultan Nazarbayev, its height of 97 meters represents the year the capital was moved from the mountainous Almaty to the plains of Astana: 1997. Notably, it is one meter higher than the Big Ben in London! Its design evokes a great white tree on top of which sits a golden egg of the mythical bird Samruk from an ancient Kazakh legend. The best part is the breathtaking 360-degree views from the top! The saying goes that if you make a wish and place your hand into the

gilded handprint on the top platform, it will come true, powered by the Kazakh good fortune and ambition.

## EXPO 2017



Courtesy

*Astana Expo 2017*

The theme of the EXPO 2017 was “[Future Energy](#)”. Over [four million people](#) visited its [grounds](#). If you missed this opportunity, do not fret. The main pavilion – [Nur Alem](#) – has been reopened recently as part of the permanent exhibition space in Astana. This futuristic glass dome is the world’s largest spherical building. Each of its eight floors represents a different kind of energy: fossil fuel, sustainable, etc. If you aren’t afraid of heights, take a stroll on the glass walkway and peer down at the cascading lower floors below feeling as you’re floating on air. There is also a unique [Skating Rink](#) to get your own energy flowing!

## ASTANA OPERA HOUSE



Courtesy

*Astana Opera House*

The Met in New York, La Scala in Milan, Teatro Municipal Cinelandia in Rio de Janeiro are fixtures of cultural and urban landscape. Even though [Astana Opera House](#) is rather young (it opened in 2013), it has already found its place on the opera aficionados map. Designed by the Italian Enrico Moretti and Maria Cairoli of Biobyte at \$300 million construction price tag, its classic look is closer to Bolshoi Theater in Moscow than the

famed daredevilry of the Sydney Opera House. The Main Hall has a seating capacity of 1250. Worldwide, there is an increase in popularity of live performances with some prestigious venues like the Vienna Opera achieving unprecedented [99.02% sold-out rates for the season](#). Hoping to attract globetrotting music lovers, the Astana Opera House repertoire features historic highlights and ticket prices are kept affordable.

## MAUSOLEUMS OF SHYMKENT



*Mausoleum of Khoja Ahmad Yasawi in the town of Turkestan, Kazakhstan*

The desert sands, the nomads, the mysteries of ancient catacombs... Tom Cruise's action thriller *Mummy* [made over \\$400 million](#) at the global box office despite poor reviews proving that public thirst for historical adventures in faraway lands is still strong. Southern Kazakhstan is home to some of the oldest monuments along the Great Silk Road. A day trip outside Shymkent, Kazakhstan's third largest city, takes you to Turkestan. This small quiet town is home to an exquisite piece of Islamic architecture: [Mausoleum of Khoja Akhmet Yassawi](#). This UNESCO World Heritage Site was built in the 14<sup>th</sup> century and has two beautiful domes, the largest in Central Asia. Currently a museum, it draws pilgrims from all over the world. As a bonus, en route to Turkestan, inquire if you can stop at the grave site of Aristan Bab. He was a mystic and a teacher who had received Prophet Mohammad's amanat beads. Watch out of the free-roaming camels nearby.

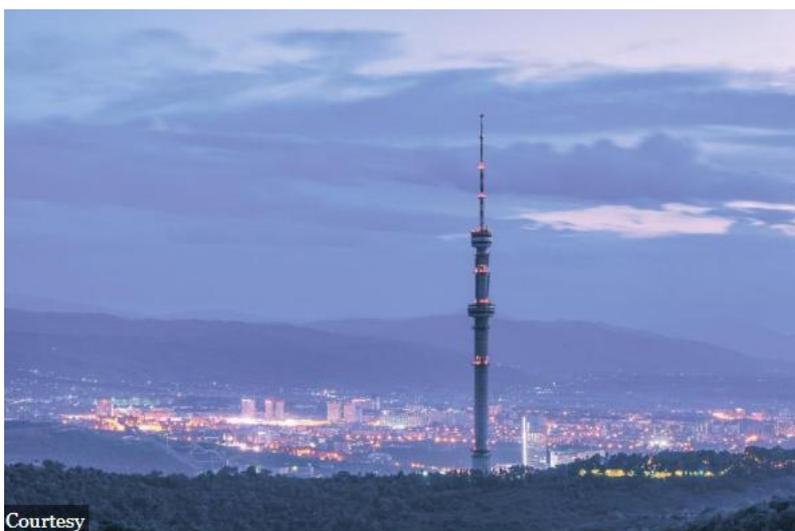
## ESENTAI TOWER & MALL



*Esentai Mall*

Millennials are posed to become [the largest spending generation in history](#) in addition to already being the most well-travelled. Fueled by these trends, fashion tourism has a new destination: Almaty, Kazakhstan's former capital and region's largest metropolis, is catering to both the domestic and visiting tourists. [Esentai Tower & Mall](#) epitomizes Almaty as a world-class shopping destination. It that houses the Ritz-Carlton Hotel and a boutiques galleria headlined by Louis Vuitton, Gucci, Prada and the Saks Fifth Avenue outpost. If you are not in the mood for a spree, enjoy a coffee and an art tour on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor. While getting ready for the visit or just to keep up with the latest trends, follow [Esentai on Instagram](#): its social media game is on point (even if in Russian language only)!

## KOK-TOBE HILL



*Kok-Tobe*

With over [\\$400 billion governmental funds](#) spent each year on tourism marketing campaigns, countries often compete to wow potential guests with

appealing *postcard* imagery. Luckily, Almaty has a truly magnificent backdrop of the snow-peaked Ile Alatau Mountains that are easily accessible from city center. The mega-popular [Kok-Tobe Hill](#) allows you to create your own million-dollar panorama pics! Getting up this natural vista platform is part of the fun. The ride along the nearly two-kilometer suspended cable car is smooth and scenic. Kok-Tobe Hill has several fascinating entertainment options, including a hillside roller coaster and live impromptu concerts at the nearby Beatles sculpture. Yes, [kitsch R us!](#)

## SHYMBULAK SKI RESORT



*Shymbulak*

Do you ski? Consumer reports show [a decrease in attendance](#) on the slopes of traditional North American and Alpine skiing destinations with Eastern European and Central Asian resorts benefitting from infrastructure investments and changing weather patterns. In Kazakhstan, ski enthusiasts bet on [Shymbulak](#). A town just outside Almaty is open for skiing all year round! There are three ski lifts that reach the remarkable height of 10,500 feet above sea level. Two years ago, it was the talk of the ski world as part of Almaty's bid to host [2022 Winter Olympic Games](#). While that honor went to Beijing, Kazakhstan is benefiting from winter tourism boost as it reportedly readies its more competitive Olympic bid again. You can weigh in your own set of pros and cons as you marvel at the view of Almaty, the [City of a Thousand Colors](#), from above.

*This story was co-authored with Sasha Lipovtsev*