

«National Kazakh games»



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The Kazakhs preserve their national traditions which go back many thousand years. The ancient and original culture of the Kazakhs was formed in the conditions of nomadic life, which left a deep imprint on the psychology, art and life of the present-day Kazaks.

Naturally, in modern times some old Kazakh customs have died out or have changed. Gone are the customs of bride abduction, of kalym - payment of ransom money for a bride, and levirate - the compulsory marriage of a widow by the elder brother of her deceased husband. The laws of hospitality have been fully preserved, and a guest at a city apartment is accorded the same open-handed hospitality as in the nomadic yurta of the ancient times. The hosts feel offended if the visitor refuses to share a meal or at least a cup of traditional tea. The wedding ritual, the celebration of the birth of a child, the festivities held before moving to spring pastures, or in honour of an esteemed visitor, contain many elements that have been preserved down the centuries from ancient times. Another surviving custom is the respect shown to the elders - aksakals.



Among young people a popular game is kys kuu - "Catch the girl" A girl and a boy race each other on horseback: if the girl overtakes the boy, she strikes him with a lash, but if the boy is the victor, he kisses the girl

The Kazakhs are very fond of songs, music and dancing. The folk songs are created by akyns, extempore poets and singers, who not only make up the words and music for the songs, but also perform them accompanying themselves on the dombra. The folk songs reflect the centuries of the people's history, its struggle against conquerors and local bais (landowners), the labour and customs, and the beautiful natural surroundings of the native land.

Berkutchi - hunting with a golden eagle. A tradition that has already been practiced for ten centuries. They say that presenting a youngster with a fledgling of a hunting bird is tantamount to wishing him to be brave and strong young fellow. Virtually training of a golden eagle is a rare and painstaking art. The bird just caught is being slowly trained to its master (a berkutchi). For the purpose the man doesn't get a wink of sleep for several nights with the bird being subjected to similar discomfort. The bird must take food (pieces of raw meat) from its master's hand only. When the eagles has got used to the hunter, its horse and its dog, it undergoes training: first it "hunts" stuffed foxes and only then proceeds with real hunting.

This is one of the most popular and widespread Kazakh equestrian sport. Baiga is a horse racing over short and long distances (up to 100 kilometres). It is believed that the national sport originated with the need of Kazakh nomads to promote endurance in horses. Traditionally, the participants are Kazakh boys between 7 and 14 years of age. However, sometimes professional jockeys can compete with each other as well.



Kazakh traditional sports are still practiced in Kazakhstan during national celebrations.

- 1. Kokpar**The name of the sport comes from Kazakh words and means "a grey wolf." Kokpar is considered to be a kind of polo. This is a very popular masculine sport where two teams (from five to ten persons in each) of horse riders grapple over a decapitated goat, which they try to deposit in the opponent's goal. The distance between two goalposts is 300-400 metres. It lasts 15 minutes. In case of a draw, horsemen have the second round. If there is no result again, a competition between two players is organised.
- 2. Kyz kuu**Unlike Kokpar, this national game is regarded as a piece of fun than serious competition. In Kazakh language kyz kuu literally means "catch the girl". Two horse riders (a man and a woman) participate in it. To start the competition, a female rider stands at a certain distance behind a horseman. She starts riding at full speed and, as soon as she reaches him, male rider moves. Both race towards the finishing line. If the man wins he has the right to kiss the girl. Otherwise, she may beat him with a whip.
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- 4. Audaryspak**Audaryspak is a traditional horseback wrestling. The rules of this national sport are quite simple. Two wrestlers compete with each other and the winner is the rider who wrestles his opponent to the ground first. Only adult men, who are physically strong and skilful riders, have the right participate in this competition. In the past, a wrestler could represent his clan or village.
- 5. Kumis alu**In Kazakh language kumis alu means "pick up the coin." During the competition, a horse rider bends to pick up a coin or handkerchief from the ground. The competitor who gathered more coins in his round is the winner.

The traditional games listed above are still practised in Kazakhstan during national celebrations. And even if they have no practical effect nowadays, Kazakh sports are integral parts of our culture.