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# The Stans: Nomads' Land Along the Silk Road

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## Correction Appended

If [Cambodia](#) and [Vietnam](#) are today's pearls of the Orient, then the Central Asian countries of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan - commonly referred to as "the Stans" - are diamonds in the rough. But what these former Soviet republics lack in polish they make up for in historical riches, rugged beauty and, at least for now, few tourists.

Bisected by the Silk Road - the 2,000- year-old trade route that linked [Europe](#) to [China](#) - the Stans are dotted with museum-quality ruins and architecture from the Middle Ages. Throw in a countryside of canyons, mountain forests and prehistoric glaciers, and the Stans begin to sparkle beneath their raw edges.

Some of the storybook cities of Uzbekistan, with their ornate mosques and citadel walls, are UNESCO World Heritage Sites. Tajikistan's crumbling gems include the eerie lost city of Penjikent. And Kyrgyzstan, perhaps the most welcoming of the Stans, has a stunning terrain that includes the Al-Archa National Park (for bird watching, trekking and even glacial skiing), and Lake Issyk-Kul, one of the world's largest alpine bodies of water. Boris Yeltsin has even vacationed there.

The Stans, however, may not be everyone's cup of horse milk. Tourist resources are scarce; rural accommodations may be limited to yurts and tents. But modern-day nomads may find that's reason enough to go.

**Correction:** Jan 29, 2006, Sunday:

A photograph last Sunday with an article on "the Stans," the Central Asian countries of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan was published with an erroneous caption. The photograph showed a market in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, not the Royal Thimphu Golf Course in Bhutan. It was taken by Shamil Zhumatov of Reuters, not by Julia Wilkinson of Lonely Planet Images.