

Expats in Kazakhstan: Teaching and Living in Kazakhstan



Kazakhstan is offering many excellent one-year contracts to qualified teachers from around the world right now.

As part of a programme to develop the education of the country, the roles combine teaching students and mentoring local teachers using English as the language of learning.

The teachers of choice are skilled, experienced teachers from Australia and New Zealand, UK, America and South Africa.

So what is it like to teach and live in Kazakhstan; a place that seems more Russian than European, much smaller than it really is, more about oil and uranium than teaching and learning?





An American in Kazakhstan

American teacher, William Lutschak recently taught Physics at the Nazarbayev International School (NIS) in Uralsk, Kazakhstan. He describes his experience there: "I was teaching Physics to year 11 students. The school had about 100 teachers with 15 international teachers. There were about 500 students in the school. They were all friendly, respectful and happy to have international teachers there. I started an astronomy study group at the school. My main surprise working in Kazakhstan was the emphasis on team teaching. At first, communication between us teachers was difficult and I often needed to use Google Translate. However, as time went on, our communication did get easier.

The local teachers were friendly and happy to have international teachers at the school. I appeared on the local television talking about the school and Uralsk. I did like the city and its cultural aspects and participated in what is called the American Corner on Saturdays and in the local church."

Teaching Geography in Kazakhstan

Geography teacher Corey Johnson, who also taught at one of the NIS schools in Kazakhstan, says: "The students were fantastic and really eager to learn, and that made teaching fun for me; especially when my students were engaged in the lesson. We used a curriculum developed by Cambridge for all of the NIS schools. The teachers I worked with were very diverse, also the students came from many different cultures and backgrounds, and this meant I had to be aware of cultural differences, and adapt my teaching to fit my students. Even though all of the teachers and students came from different backgrounds they found a way to work together in harmony, and I think that was pretty amazing."



Teaching and living in Kazakhstan

Ex-international school Headteacher and now an international teacher recruitment advisor, Andrew Wigford from the UK, who has travelled on several occasions to schools in Kazakhstan says: "It's a huge country; as big as the whole of Western Europe. It is located in northern and central Eurasia and shares borders with Russia, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan and the Republic of China. Astana is the capital city and has been so since 1997.

All the schools in the Nazarbayev Intellectual School network are trilingual with the main subjects being taught in Kazakh, Russian and English. The schools are state funded and selective. The students also receive exceptional funding support if they move on to higher education in Kazakhstan and even gain good state financial support if they choose to attend universities overseas.

Having spent time at schools in Russia, China and Eastern Europe, on my first visit to Kazakhstan, I expected similarities in terms of people, architecture, education and culture. However what I experienced



surprised me. Astana is a new city, most of which has been built in the last ten years. The architecture is striking and, in some cases, unlike anything I'd seen before. The city has a very different feel and you immediately sense that you are in a very unusual country.

The infrastructure in Astana is good. Driving is relatively calm compared to other countries I've visited. The buildings are well spread out and there is a sense of order to the city layout. It's a small city of just over one million people and there is real sense of space. The roads are wide and there is a good traffic system. The drivers even stop for you at zebra crossings! Many apartments have good internet connection, satellite TV, excellent heating and hot water, and are very spacious.

The people of Kazakhstan are amazingly friendly who warmly welcome you. They're incredibly helpful and inquisitive at the same time. As a foreigner you do stand out and people in the street do notice you. Most Kazakh teachers and students have a good level of English but many local Kazakhs who work in the shops speak little or no English. A basic grasp of Russian goes a long way here. There are big shopping centres and they're amazingly well stocked with popular stores from all over the world.

The weather can be very cold! Temperatures can drop to -40 degrees in the middle of the winter and snow storms are common but nothing stops here during bad weather. Good clothing is a must and you can get told off by concerned locals if you go out without a hat (only because they are concerned for your good health)! In the summer though the temperature soars into the high 30's and for five months the weather can get very hot and sometimes humid.

The NIS schools all have a friendly atmosphere. The students are very studious and highly motivated and all want to get into university. They do not pay for their schooling and have all won scholarships to attend the school based on academic achievement. Most of them have a very good level of English. They hold the overseas teachers in very high esteem. Most international teachers working in Kazakhstan say that the work is incredibly rewarding – a place where they are making a real impact. The expat teachers work alongside their Kazakh counterparts and are heavily involved in mentoring and professional development.”

Lee Wilson who has been teaching in Kazakhstan for two years says: “For all the differences, I'm loving Kazakhstan. The people are amazing, the students ultra bright and the local staff are incredibly dedicated. There's nothing quite like a class of twelve super bright students to remind you of the very reasons why you went into teaching in the first place!”

More information about teaching in Kazakhstan is available at <http://www.ticrecruitment.com/nis>

