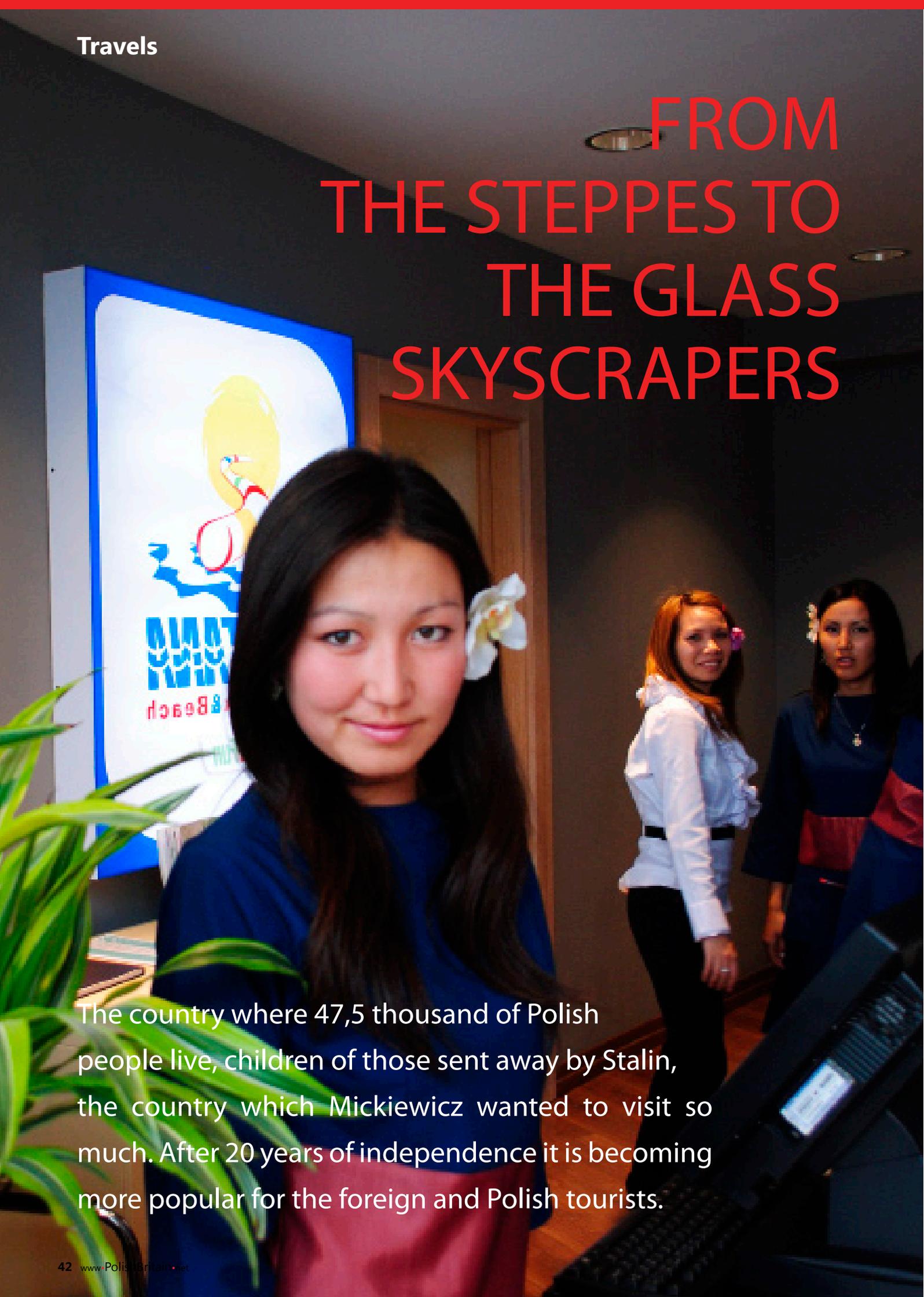


FROM THE STEPPES TO THE GLASS SKYSCRAPERS



The country where 47,5 thousand of Polish people live, children of those sent away by Stalin, the country which Mickiewicz wanted to visit so much. After 20 years of independence it is becoming more popular for the foreign and Polish tourists.

Martin Malik is a traveller and a real life adventurer, who I met one beautiful, spring day in a coffee shop in London. Thanks to Martin, who definitely travels a lot, because he goes to Asia every year for few months, I received a lot of beautiful pictures and other materials from his escapades. Kazakhstan for example is a very picturesque country, where Martin brought a lot of precious information from. Kazakhstan is the ninth biggest country in the world, and you would need three days to cross it from one end to another. In Kazakhstan we can find for example empty military bases, left behind after collapse of the Soviet Union. Besides that, there is steppe, horses, wild camels, sheep and a complete lack of people in the wide open

sand years before Jesus Christ. Almaty was the capital of Kazakhstan until 1998, and today it still remains the biggest city. Before we leave Almaty to explore great Kazakhstan, first it is worth get to know it. First I recommend visiting the National Museum, which is housed in a big white building, with a round blue roof. There are various displays inside, starting from the bronze era, through the Genghis Khan times, until today. There is also a full sized yurt, white weapons, and national costumes, riding



Meat shop...as we can see the hygiene is poor



In Kazakhstan we can see wild horses, what makes Kazakhstan even more picturesque

spaces. Partly that's what Kazakhstan looks like, it is huge and empty. On the other hand Kazakhstan is a country rich in natural beauty. It also has high mountains (the tallest is Mount Tengri 6995 above sea level). Kazakhstan has also big cities, and one of the best places worth coming to, is Almaty.

The Travel Base

The city of Almaty has the biggest number of international flight connections in Kazakhstan. To get to this city we can use one of many carriers. The cheaper ones include Turkish Airlines. For a one way ticket with one stopover we would pay about £380, booking it a month before. Almaty is a great city to start expeditions to the other parts of the country. The city itself is very old, and the first people inhabited Almaty one thou-

sand years before Jesus Christ. Almaty was the capital of Kazakhstan until 1998, and today it still remains the biggest city. Before we leave Almaty to explore great Kazakhstan, first it is worth get to know it. First I recommend visiting the National Museum, which is housed in a big white building, with a round blue roof. There are various displays inside, starting from the bronze era, through the Genghis Khan times, until today. There is also a full sized yurt, white weapons, and national costumes, riding equipment for horses and camels, and a statue of the Golden Man. The display about the ancient city of Turkistan is also there. Quite unusual to a European is an exhibition about the Second World War, which promotes pro-Soviet ideologies. We can find Lenin and Stalin seen as the good characters, and the Soviet Union as the saviour of the world and Kazakhstan. A nice place to visit after the museum is the Panfilov Park, where you can eat some ice cream and roller skate, what is very popular here. From here it is very close to the medieval cathedral, which is yellow and was build entirely of wood (what might be hard to believe). The biggest recreational part of Almaty is the Gorky Park. There are various attractions here, like for example a zoo, a pond with small boats to hire, amusement park and nice nature. The next interesting experience is the Arasan Baths. We can relax here and take some rest by using showers, swim in an arctic cold water and

get a very expensive massage. Hot, high pressure shower, massage, and the jump to freezing water! If we have any money to blow, we can spend it on horse racing, betting in the Hippodrome. Kazakh people teach their children how to ride a horse from the early childhood, so in the future they could gallop like free birds through the steppe. Another good idea is to go out of the city by a Kok-Tobe cable car to the Koktobe hill, where we can listen to the music and admire the Almaty's panorama. Almaty is surrounded by mountains, what apart from great trekking offers winter sports. Then after dinner we can go back to Almaty to spend a night.

The Natural Beauty

Kazakhstan is rich in oil, gas and coal, but apart from that it has beautiful, turquoise lakes. One of them is the Big Almaty Lake, which we can get to by taking bus no 63 from the city of Almaty. You should get off at the last stop. Then we have to climb a tall mountain because the lake is at the altitude of 2500 m above the sea level. There are two ways up: one of them is quite easy

The Kazakhs are very nice and friendly people. They will gladly take a traveller underneath their roof.





A view at the picturesque lake of Almaty. Regardless of the sunny weather and the middle of summer, the water in the lake is freezing cold.

but long, and the other one is shorter but very hard. Martin Malik chose the shorter way and climbing 7km took him 5h, and as he says, conquering this mountain was not easy. Those who make it to the top can admire amazing turquoise colour and beautiful transparency of the lake. The water is unfortunately very cold so you can forget about swimming.

Another picturesque area is the Kolsay Lakes, 330km from Almaty. All three lakes are at the altitude of above 1800m above the sea level. You can see wild horses on the alpine landscape, yurts, black storks, sheep and many other animals. At the first lake there are a lot of tourists because it is easily accessible. By the second lake, there is a relaxing quiet and mountains rising above the lake and reflecting their beauty in the natural mirror of the water.

Another must see is the Charyn Canyon. It reminds of the American Grand Canyon but it's not as huge. It was created when the Charyn river flew very fast from mountain range of Tian Shan, and it carved a canyon of total depth from 150-300 metres, and also created interesting rock formations called the Valley of Castles. It is possible to come down with rope to the bottom of the canyon, although Martin Malik did it without a rope. The canyon is 100km long, but its most dramatic part protected by the national park is much smaller.

Footsteps Of The Silk Road

It's good to leave Almaty for few days to Shymkent. It's a capital city of southern Kazakhstan, located close to the

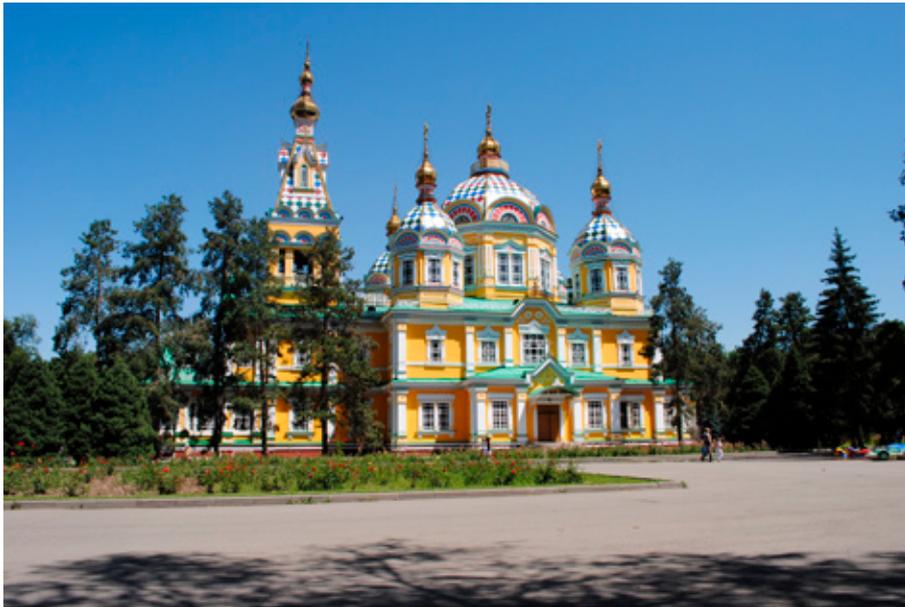
border with Uzbekistan. We can visit the History Museum to see furs of animals living in this area. Also the Central Park is worth having a look. Our traveller Martin Malik spent two days in Shymkent and he does recommend it. There is a lot to do here and it is also a good travel base to other places in the area, like: Sayram, famous Turkistan and the Aksu-Dzabagly Nature Reserve – says Martin. And can we see in the above mentioned places? The town of Sayram is about 3000 years old and used to be one of the trade towns on the ancient Silk Road. There is also Kydra Minaret from the X century (a tower next to the mosque for bringing the faithful ones for prayers), and the XIII century mausoleum of Karashash-Ana, made of grey brick, and with a tomb inside. From there we pass through the Friday Mosque to Mirali Bobo mausoleum, where we can see a tomb of X century Islamic teacher. Not to be missed is also the gate to the town of Sayram, which is quite difficult not to see. It is easy to notice for those going to the central bus stop. One of the most interesting places is the Abd al Aziz-

Baba, built with three domes, and set in a beautiful garden. Apart from that there is also the Maryam Ana mausoleum, built in the XIV century.

Previously mentioned, Aksu-Dzabagly Nature Reserve has a total area of 1319 km². The entry is paid and requires a guide, who at additional cost can take us through the reserve on a horse. The reserve's main office (called "zapovednik") is located close to the village of Dzabagly and it is the best place to pay for the entry, a guide and a horse. Aksu-Dzabagly reserve is a home to many animal species, like bears and many kinds of goats and eagles. In the high regions of the reserve there are glaciers, rivers, valleys and a waterfall in the Kshi-Kaindy region. The expedition around the park takes minimum one day, and if we want to see a glacier at the altitude of 3800 m above the sea level, and 2000 rocks which are 900 years old, and if we want an expedition to even more remote and higher parts of the mountains, then the guide will want us to sleep inside the caves! The last recommended place to be explored in the south eastern Kazakhstan is Turkistan. This ancient town is one of the most popular of religious pilgrimage in Central Asia, but also a town gladly visited by tourists. Turkistan is also called the second "Mekka of the east". One of the attractions is the XIV century great mausoleum built by the brave Timur. There is also the XV century Rabigh Sultan Begum mausoleum, and the main building – the Yasau mausoleum. Martin Malik also recommends a walk on the top of the Old Town walls, what guarantees a great view of the mausolea. There are also few other mosques nearby, a rose garden and the archeological-ethnographic museum, about the ancient Turkistan, old costumes, coins, Timur and

The Charyn Canyon.





other remains from those times.

On The Way To The North

After Turkistan it's good to travel to the south east, to the capital of Kazakhstan – Astana. However before that, first it's worth going to Semey (Semipalatinsk), called the city of poets. A Russian writer Fyodor Dostoyevsky used to live here, and Abay Kunanbaev – the national poet and philosopher. Semey is also the birth place of Vladimir Klitschko, winner of many prizes including the golden medal of the Olympic Games in Atlanta. It is also good to go to Lenin Street, to see the biggest attraction of the city – the Abay Museum. The museum has a collection of many objects used by Abay Kunanbaev, his photos, monuments and books about him. There is also a full sized, beautifully crafted yurt, with hand made carpets and furniture from the Abay times. Next to the yurt there are also everyday tools, set in the landscape of Kazakh steppe. In the other room, on the wall there are paintings of great poets and philosophers. There is of course Abay, but also Goethe, Socrates and Mickiewicz. The next important place is the Fyodor Dostoyevsky museum, which is located in an old home, where Dostoyevsky used to live and work with his lady friend for two years. The same as it was in the previous museum; here we can also find pictures, books and everyday things used by the great Russian writer, known mainly from his novel "Crime and Punishment".

In the Art Museum we can find a lot of beautiful paintings painted by Russian, Kazakh and European artists. We can see paintings of people working in the countryside, paintings showing XVI century Venice, and a few beautifully painted

women in the contexts of a fight between heaven and hell. There is also a gallery on the ground floor where we can buy Lenin statues. Unfortunately the history of Semey is not that beautiful. On the Kazakh steppes Russians used to carry out nuclear tests, and between 1949 – 1989 they dropped 470 nuclear tests! Kazakh people always knew when it happened, because the ground was shaking every time a bomb was dropped. Another interesting place is the History and Local Sciences Museum, which is thought to be the oldest in Kazakhstan. Out of all exhibitions, the one giving biggest concerns is the one about the nuclear tests, carried out around Semey during Khrushchev times. There are pictures of people after radiation, with burns and birth defects.

Some of the pictures are a real life horror. On the other hand there is a different, a very ironic exhibition, about the "glorious" Red Army and Lenin. Martin Malik who visited this museum asked the staff what was the point of this "circus", if because of the Soviets there were so many victims of the regime and nuclear tests, but the museum employees did not answer anything. Another exhibition worth recommending is the one about dinosaurs, which used to live in the territory of today's Kazakhstan.

The New Capital

From Semey we are going to Astana, the modern capital of Kazakhstan. The city is best visited in summer, because winters are long and temperature often drops below -30°C. The capital lies on both sides of the Ishim river. On the southern part of the river there is the modern part of the city. Astana is the most expensive place of Kazakhstan and it's twice more expensive than Almaty. The Bayterek Tower - the most popular symbol of Kazakhstan is a transparent building with a glass dome on the top. Bayterek has its meaning in the Kazakh legend. It symbolizes a mythological story about the bird called Samruk, which laid a golden egg filled with a mystery of human desires and luck on the top of a tree, very high and beyond people's reach. Today however we can get to the top of Bayterek, to the place similar to a golden egg. From the top, there is a good view at the whole of the Nurzhol Bulvar, the famous street of Kazakhstan. There is





a good view from the top at Nurzhol Bulvar, the famous street of Kazakhstan.

The Museum of the President is hard to miss, as it is a huge building. There are photos of young president Nazarbaev with his family and when he worked on a construction site. There are also Polish accents here, like for example photos of president Nazarbaev with president Kwasniewski and the pope John Paul II. There are also presents and medals from other leaders – from Poland there is a medal of the White Eagle. All objects inside the museum are beautiful and the museum itself looks like a palace. Then going through a backyard from the Museum of Art we get to the promenade, where we can see some of the tall, glass buildings, the monument of warrior on a horse (Abylay Khan), and young and beautiful Muslim women strolling on the promenade. It's also worth mentioning that the Kazakh version of Islam is the tamest of Asia. Although women sometimes wear black shawls, they also wear short and tight skirts, high hill shoes, and shirts which highlight their breasts in a beautiful way! The fact is that Kazakhstan is inhabited by a lot of Russian and Oriental sweethearts, what gives us an opportunity to see a lot of beautiful women.....

Coming back to the subject, the promenade and the buildings around make an impression. Walking through the promenade, on one side we have colourful glass buildings, and on the other side a Water Park with swimming pools, slides and paid beach for £2,13 a day. Then, at the end of the bridge you can take a photo next to a big Chinese calendar and follow the road to the amusement park and food stalls....and not it's not so expensive as for Astana. After

1,5 km walk we will get to Kubay Batyr, where there is a small hill and a pole with a flag of Kazakhstan. In front of it there is a monument built to the remembrance of the Soviet regime! On one hand, in every museum they love the Soviets, and in Astana we find out, that this love is not so passionate after all. The monument itself is very modest and doesn't look like a "100% shift work of a Soviet builder", but small, carved stones, which used to be used in funeral ceremonies. On the left, there is a circus which looks like a flat and grey ship from outer space. On the right there is a big shopping centre called Duman. This object is full of shops and monuments. There is for example an Eiffel tower and a pyramid, although the most interesting is the oceanarium with a lot of fish, including sharks. We can go through a 70m long tunnel and watch fish swimming above our heads. This attraction costs £4, 25 (1000 TG) and additionally 45 pence (100 TG) for taking photos. Then going

on Kubanaba Street we can see the architecturally bravest building of the whole of Kazakhstan. It is Khan Shatyr, with a total height of 150m, in a shape of a tent and with a needle on the top. It is build from a material absorbing heat, what means that if it is -30°C outside, there will much warmer inside. In the central point inside, there is a launcher which throws people to the top and slowly brings them down. Apart from that there are streets with top class shops, gardens, restaurants, cinema, small golf course, and even a swimming pool with palm trees and a beach, where you can play volleyball.

At End Of The Expedition "Switzerland"

The last place in Kazakhstan which I'm writing about is the Burabay National Park (250km from Astana). We can get there by a shared taxi within 2, 5 hours. The whole area is called "the Kazakh Switzerland". There are beautiful lakes surrounded by trees and interesting rock formations. At the entrance to the lake there are a lot of huge, flat rocks and tourists resting on them. It's a big tourist resort with a lot of expensive hotels and restaurants.

Błażej Szczypka

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All texts and pictures: Martin Malik

In Kazakhstan it is better to live well with police.

