

About Tajikistan.

Tajikistan and the whole Central Asian Region of the world have a fascinating natural and cultural history. Tajikistan is steeped in history and culture. Legendary figures, such as; Alexander the Great, who brought his conquering armies right into the Pamirs and reportedly may have died of malaria contracted in the area; The era of the Bactrians and Sogdians in the 1st Century BC; The Arab conquest during 7th Century; The Samanids and the leader Somoni (now adopted as the Republic's national hero) of the 10th Century; and The Mongols and the legendary Guengis Khan, who's hordes swept across the region. The Pamirs and bordering Afghanistan were also the scene of "The Great Game", an intelligence duel between the then Russian and British Empires, played well into the 1930s, to seek influence in the region.

The Tajiks were ruled by the Khans of Bukhara, until the Russian revolution of 1917. After 1917, self-determination was granted by Lenin, but the 1920s Soviet nationalities policies, under the direction of Stalin, saw Soviet rule enforced from Moscow by Red Army troops, who put down Muslim resistance after the Russian civil war. Tajikistan was first established as an autonomous region within Uzbekistan in 1924, but was later granted Union Republic status in 1929. Of the 1.1 million Tajiks in 1929, only 300,000 were included within the Soviet Republic of Tajikistan, while the historic centres of the Tajik people, Bukhara and Samarkand, were claimed by the more powerful Soviet Republic of Uzbekistan. Moscow's divide-and-rule policy controlled local tensions within the Republic.



Statue of Lenin, Kurgan-Tyube city, Tajikistan.

However, with the break up of the Soviet Union in 1991, the newly independent Republic of Tajikistan soon saw civil unrest and civil war. This five-year conflict was based more on an intricate web of centuries-old clan and regional rivalries than any deep ideological beliefs. A fragile peace emerged in 1997, leading to the present stability and peace of the new millennium. The current Government includes representatives of all regions of the country and the political situation has much improved. Tajikistan now benefits from greater stability. Parliamentary elections held in February 2000 saw six parties taking part, making it the first multi-party elections in the Republic's history. The effects of civil war and the Russian economic crisis have faded, creating a better environment for investors and development. There is a stable and democratic government, law and order is returning, society is becoming more open and people are becoming more prosperous. Tajikistan has the fastest growing population in the region and a large proportion of young people looking for opportunities to improve their and their families' future. Now is the time for redevelopment and development in Tajikistan.

Moreover, the situation in Tajikistan and the region is no longer complicated by concerns about border security. The long-running Afghan war and crisis is coming to a more stable conclusion and a new friendly Afghan government is in place. There is an increased presence of Russian Federation security forces and other peacekeeping forces in the region. Tajikistan, in particular, is rapidly opening up to the rest of the region and is uniquely placed geographically and culturally in the world. It is situated at the centre of the former Russian influence (Russian speaking), the former British influence (English speaking) and the Chinese influenced part of the world. Its' population not only speak the native languages, but also many speak Russian and increasingly more speak English. There is a great opportunity for Tajikistan to develop links on the international stage and to attract international investment. Similarly, now is the time for international organizations and institutions to invest in the future of Tajikistan and the region as a whole.

Khatlon and Kurgan-Tyube:

The Khatlon Region is the most southerly and hottest part of Tajikistan, bordered by Uzbekistan to the west, Afghanistan to the south and Pakistan is just a thin strip of land away. It is also the gateway to the Pamirs and China beyond. Kurgan-Tyube is the capital of this region and is the third largest city in Tajikistan. The city is named after the ancient fortress hill in its centre, high hill or in Tajik Qurghonteppa. This hill is an artificial hill fortress between two rivers, the River Juibor and the River Khonum. It has a commanding view of the Vakhsh River valley and has been fortified by many historical leaders. The castle fortress belonged to Marhambek and the Bukkara Emirs and was centre of government for the districts of Saroycamar (Pyanj), Jilikul and Kurgan-Tyube area in the 19th Century. Kurgan-Tyube is the Russian name for the city. The city is surrounded by mountains and is situated in a valley near the River Vakhsh floodplain. It was built on what was once marshland and is one of the most southerly former Soviet cities. It is very much a rural city, surrounded by arable land and countryside. It is a collection of government buildings, two nine-floor apartment blocks, several five-floor blocks and many one-floor houses. Smaller villages surround the centre, some merging with the city suburbs. Kurgan-Tyube is the administrative centre for the whole of the Khatlon Region of Tajikistan.

Geography of Tajikistan:

Tajikistan (officially Jomharii Tojikistan) is an independent former Soviet Socialist Republic in Central Asia. This landlocked country is Central Asia's smallest republic, bordered on the north by Kyrgyzstan, on the north and west by Uzbekistan, on the east by China and on the south by Afghanistan. Tajikistan contains the autonomous region of Gorno-Badakhshan (the Pamirs), which occupies 44.5 percent of the Republic. The whole of Tajikistan is extremely mountainous and settlement is mainly concentrated in the lower lands. The total area is some 143,100 sq km (55,250 sq miles). Only some 7 percent of the country is arable land. Mountains occupy 93 percent of Tajikistan's territory, with the southern reaches of the Tian Shan range and the Pamirs, and more than half the Republic lying at an elevation of 3000 metres (9843 ft) or greater. Its eastern part includes the bulk of the high Pamir Plateau. The highest mountain in the former Soviet Union, Communism Peak, now renamed Somoniyon Peak after a historic Tajik leader, (7498 m / 24,599 ft) is located in the northeast of this range. Large glaciers, such as the greatest continental glacier in the world, the 77 km long Fedchenko Glacier, and large lakes such as; Sarez (70 km long, 500m deep, formed by an earthquake in 1911), Yashilkul, Karakul (glacial lakes) and Kayrakum (the Tajik Sea) feed numerous fast flowing streams and rivers and lowland areas are confined to the Fergana Valley in the north

and the Vakhsh, Pyanj and other river valleys in the southeast. Like its neighbours, Tajikistan is in a seismological active part of the world with earthquakes and tremors often occur to this day.



Mountain glaciers of central Tajikistan.

Climate, Fauna and Flora:

Tajikistan's climate is extremely continental, with a great variety of climatic conditions. Temperatures can reach highs of 50C (Summer in Kurgan-Tyube or further southeast) and lows of -63C in the winter of the high Pamirs. Great contrasts of temperatures exist between the alpine and lowland areas. While the average daytime temperature in July is more than 32C in the valleys, it is less than 10C in the mountains. Precipitation is low overall, although mountains in the west have an average rainfall of 1600mm (62.4 in) per year. Steppe and alpine vegetation predominate, with wild tulips, irises, edelweiss, etc. There are also large areas of semi-arid and arid desert, arid mountains with wild pistachio trees, dwindling areas of coniferous and deciduous forest, with ancient maple and walnut trees, and salt and river marshes. Main crops include cotton, wheat (becoming less due to drought conditions) and rice (rice paddies increasing year by year).

This unique amount of different climatic zones in such a small area leads to an extremely varied fauna. The last Caspian Tigers were hunted back in the 1972, however there are still the endangered Snow Leopard, wolves, brown bears, lynx, deer, badgers, foxes, desert hedgehogs, porcupines, marmots, pikas, wild boar, 'yak', numerous varieties of mountain goat and sheep, such as the Siberian Horned Goat, ibex and the endangered, giant Marco Polo Sheep. There is also reported to be the elusive 'Giant Snowman'! Further south and west, there are colonies of desert jerboas, various bats, deadly snakes such as vipers and Cobras, large monitor lizards (called the sand crocodile by locals), numerous large tortoises, geckos, green marsh frogs and toads. Also famous for silk moths and associated small-scale cottage silk industry (the silk road). The Pamirs are still popular for hunters, paying huge amounts of money for one shot at an endangered species!

Many birds of prey, such as eagles and hawks, ride the mountain thermals, as do lammergeiers and vultures. Other birds include owls, minor birds, hooded crows, cranes and egrets, swans and geese, bee-eaters, partridges and various migratory birds. Large fishes lurk in the various waters, such as the

wonderfully patterned Scafringus, the strange, poisonous rat-tail fish and the amphibious lungfish. Arthropods include an assortment of scorpions and deadly spiders, malarious mosquitoes, alpine swallowtail butterflies and a huge variety of dragonflies, crickets, grasshoppers, mantids, stick insects and beetles.



Nesting vultures, Sarband Mountains, southern Tajikistan.

SWORDE-Teppa's initial programmes and projects are all based or linked to the Republic of Tajikistan. Here are some of the reasons why?

1. SWORDE-Teppa believes that the stability of this region of the world is dependent on key states and their stability and future prosperity. Tajikistan is a key player in this region and we believe, for various reasons, will develop more in international importance. Thus support is needed in Tajikistan for future stability.
2. Tajikistan is the bridge between cultures, between Turk, Persian, Mongol and Chinese, between the old 'Great Game' Empires of Russia and Great Britain and the new independent states, between Europe and Asia. This link between cultures is key to the success of the region.
3. Tajikistan neighbours China (a potential huge trade partner).
4. Tajikistan neighbours Afghanistan, and is in close proximity to Pakistan, India and Kashmir. Tajikistan is thus central and a stable base for many possible aid and development programmes in some of these countries.
5. Tajikistan is central to aid and development programmes in the Central Asian Republics.
6. Tajikistan is the geographical centre of the new and emerging economies of the former Soviet Central Asian Republics.
7. SWORDE-Teppa's two founders and trustees are both presently based in Tajikistan and have years of experience and contacts working in the Republic.
8. There are great many vital programmes and projects to be implemented in Tajikistan.
9. There are very many enthusiastic and qualified nationals wishing to help build a more prosperous community with the support of SWORDE-Teppa and others.
10. There are many hundreds of thousands of potential beneficiaries in need of our assistance.