



TURKMEN

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Chapter 1 | Profile



The Independence Day Parade
Wikimedia / Kerri-Jo Stewart

Introduction

Turkmenistan was the fourth-largest state form after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.^{1, 2} The strategic value of the region has long tempted world powers to conquer it throughout history, including the Persians, Greeks, Mongols, Muslims, and Russians. However, the Turkmen people have proven resilient, maintaining tribal and clan loyalties and keeping cultural traditions largely intact, despite frequent occupations and domination by foreign influences. Closely related to other Turkic peoples, the Turkmen have maintained a distinct identity.^{3, 4}

Shaped by the rugged deserts of Central Asia, life in Turkmenistan remains largely unchanged from centuries past. Essentially unknown to much of the world, this sparsely populated country of approximately 5.4 million inhabitants remains isolated and subject to authoritarian rulers and economic inequality.^{5, 6}

1 Central Intelligence Agency, "Central Asia," *The World Factbook*, n.d., https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/wfbExt/region_cas.html

2 Central Intelligence Agency, "Turkmenistan," *The World Factbook*, 8 October 2019, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/tx.html>

3 MaryLee Knowlton, *Turkmenistan, Cultures of the World* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Benchmark, 2006), 5.

4 William Mark Habeeb, *The Growth and Influence of Islam in the Nations of Asia and Central Asia: Turkmenistan* (Broomall, PA: Mason Crest Publishers, 2005), 13–14.

5 William Mark Habeeb, *The Growth and Influence of Islam in the Nations of Asia and Central Asia: Turkmenistan* (Broomall, PA: Mason Crest Publishers, 2005), 14.

6 MaryLee Knowlton, *Turkmenistan, Cultures of the World* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Benchmark, 2006), 7–8.

Geography

Area

Turkmenistan is the southernmost of the Central Asian republics. It shares borders with the Caspian Sea (1,786 km or 1,109 mi), Iran (992 km or 616 mi), Afghanistan (744 km or 462 mi), Uzbekistan (1,621 km or 1,007 mi), and Kazakhstan (379 km or 235 mi).⁷

Turkmenistan has a total land area of 488,100 sq km (188,456 sq mi), slightly larger than California, and a bit smaller than Spain. It mostly comprises desert and steppe lands.^{8, 9} The Karakum Desert occupies over 350,000 sq km (135,135 sq mi) or nearly 80% of the nation.¹⁰

Central Asia's Pamir-Alay mountain chain, where peaks reach up to 3,000 m (9,842 ft), extends into the far eastern part of the country. Dry and sandy slopes, plateaus, and sharply descending ravines make up the Kopet-Dag range, which stretches along Turkmenistan's border with Iran.¹¹

Climate

The climate of Turkmenistan is classified as a subtropical desert. The average annual precipitation is approximately 191 mm (7.5 in) but varies substantially within the country. The northeast typically receives less than 80 mm (3 in) annually, while the Kopet-Dag Mountains in the southwest can receive as much as 400 mm (15.7 in). Precipitation occurs mainly from October through April, and little rain falls during the summer.^{12, 13, 14}

Temperatures throughout the year range from 14–16°C (57–61°F), with wide variations across the country. Summers are dry and hot; temperatures below 35°C (95°F) are rare. Desert temperatures can soar to extremes of 50°C (122°F). Winter temperatures are much cooler. In the far southern regions near the Afghanistan border, temperatures can fall to –33°C (–27°F). Near Ashgabat, the capital, it rarely dips below freezing (0°C or 32°F). Summer temperatures in the north rarely rise above 32°C (90°F), and winter temperatures commonly range from –9°C to –7°C (16°F to 20°F).^{15, 16}

7 Central Intelligence Agency, "Turkmenistan," *The World Factbook*, 8 October 2019, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/tx.html>

8 Central Intelligence Agency, "Turkmenistan," *The World Factbook*, 8 October 2019, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/tx.html>

9 MaryLee Knowlton, *Turkmenistan, Cultures of the World* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Benchmark, 2006), 8–9.

10 Denis Sinor et al., "Turkmenistan," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 10 July 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Turkmenistan>

11 Glenn E. Curtis, ed., *Turkmenistan: A Country Study* (Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1996), <http://countrystudies.us/turkmenistan/>

12 Glenn E. Curtis, ed., *Turkmenistan: A Country Study* (Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1996), <http://countrystudies.us/turkmenistan/>

13 Nicolai Orlovsky and Leah Orlovsky, "Water Resources of Turkmenistan: Use and Conservation" (paper, Jacob Blaustein Institute for Desert Research, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Sede Boker Campus, Israel, n.d.), <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.167.2605&rep=rep1&type=pdf>

14 Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, "Country Profile—Turkmenistan," 2012, <http://www.fao.org/3/ca0371en/CA0371EN.pdf>

15 William Mark Habeeb, *The Growth and Influence of Islam in the Nations of Asia and Central Asia: Turkmenistan* (Broomall, PA: Mason Crest Publishers, 2005), 22–23.

16 Denis Sinor et al., "Turkmenistan," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 10 July 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Turkmenistan>

Bodies of Water

Amu Darya River

Formed by the convergence of the Pyandzh and Vakhsh rivers along the Afghanistan-Tajikistan border, the Amu Darya flows along Turkmenistan's northeastern border. It is the longest river in Central Asia and the primary source of water for Turkmenistan.^{17, 18} It has been heavily dammed and is now navigable only by small boats due to dense sediment concentration. The decline of the water level in the Amu Darya is related to the disappearance of the Aral Sea.^{19, 20}

Tejen River

The Tejen River, known as the Harīrūd in Afghanistan, where it originates, follows a 1,130 km (702 mi) course. The river marks part of the Turkmenistan-Iran border before flowing into the steppes south of the Karakum Desert.²¹ The Tejen is fed by mountain snowmelt, and the primary flow is between March and May. During the summer months, the river bed is frequently dry.²²

Murgab River

The headwaters of the 978 km (608 mi) Murgab River are in the western Hindu Kush, between Afghanistan and Pakistan. From its origin, the river flows west and then north through Afghanistan, before crossing the border into Turkmenistan, where it disappears into the sands of the Karakum Desert.^{23, 24} Due to its heavy concentrations of salt, the river's water has become undrinkable.²⁵

Atrek River

Originating in the Kopet-Dag Mountains, the Atrek River becomes one segment of the border between Turkmenistan and Iran before flowing into the Caspian Sea, where it terminates in a boggy river delta.²⁶ The river valley is of great interest to archaeologists, who have found evidence of connections between Middle Eastern and Central Asian cultures.^{27, 28}

- 17 Glenn E. Curtis, ed., *Turkmenistan: A Country Study* (Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1996), <http://countrystudies.us/turkmenistan/>
- 18 Denis Sinor et al., "Turkmenistan," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 10 July 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Turkmenistan>
- 19 William Mark Habeeb, *The Growth and Influence of Islam in the Nations of Asia and Central Asia: Turkmenistan* (Broomall, PA: Mason Crest Publishers, 2005), 21.
- 20 Bruce Pannier, "Turkmenistan: Projects Sounding Alarm Bells in Region (Part 2)," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 30 August 2004, <https://www.rferl.org/a/1054573.html>
- 21 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Harīrūd," 1 February 2012, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Harirud>
- 22 John F. Shroder and Sher Jan Ahmadzai, *Transboundary Water Resources in Afghanistan: Climate Change and Land-Use Implications* (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2016), 201.
- 23 T. Petr, "Coldwater Fish and Fisheries in Afghanistan," UN FAO Corporate Document Repository, 1999, <http://www.fao.org/docrep/003/x2614e/x2614e08.htm>
- 24 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Morghāb River," 12 December 2014, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Morghab-River>
- 25 Rafis Abazov, *Historical Dictionary of Turkmenistan* (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2005), 113.
- 26 Encyclopedia of Nations, "Turkmenistan," Advameg, n.d., <http://www.nationsencyclopedia.com/geography/Slovenia-to-Zimbabwe-Cumulative-Index/Turkmenistan.html>
- 27 Alvin Powell, "First U.S.-Led Iran Dig in Decades," *Harvard University Gazette*, 7 April 2005, <https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2005/04/first-us-led-iran-dig-in-decades/>
- 28 Igor S. Zonn et al., *The Caspian Sea Encyclopedia* (New York: Springer, 2010), 43–44.

Karakum Canal

The rapid expansion of cultivation in the Soviet era, coupled with scarce precipitation, left many Turkmen farmers heavily dependent on irrigation. The response of Soviet planners was to build the Karakum Canal, a 1,400 km (870 mi) artificial river traversing the length of the Karakum Desert. Construction of the canal was completed in 1967. The canal provides irrigation to some 9,841 sq km (3,800 sq mi) of agricultural land. The canal's unforeseen drawbacks include the salinization of arable lands and waterlogging of the surrounding desert.^{29, 30}

Caspian Sea

Scholars disagree over whether the Caspian, a completely landlocked body of water, is a lake or a sea. Because it is landlocked, the law of the sea (which extends navigation rights to all states) does not govern its waters.³¹ Traditionally, the Caspian has been used only by the nations that border it: Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Russia, Azerbaijan, and Iran. The Caspian has substantial, proven oil reserves, although there is debate about exactly how much.^{32, 33} After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the division of oil rights proved contentious among border countries. In 2018, the Caspian's five coastal states finally signed an agreement on how to divide oil and gas resources.^{34, 35} Turkmenistan has developed a multimillion-dollar seaside resort to attract tourism.³⁶

Altyn Asyr

With several artificial lakes already built, Turkmenistan has begun construction on another in the Karakum Desert. Known as Altyn Asyr, the first stage of the lake was completed in the summer of 2009. The new lake will feed its vital water reserve into Ashgabat via a man-made river. The estimated time to completion is 20 years. The ecological impact of this project has generated controversy, with some observers viewing it as a grandiose folly of Turkmenistan's rulers.^{37, 38, 39, 40}

- 29 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Karakum Canal," 20 July 1998, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Karakum-Canal>
- 30 Rolando Y. Wee, "The Karakum Canal in Turkmenistan," *World Atlas*, 12 June 2019, <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/karakum-desert-and-canal-turkmenistan.html>
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- 32 Oleg Konstantinovich Leontiev et al., "Caspian Sea," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 14 March 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Caspian-Sea>
- 33 Bernard A. Gelb, "Caspian Oil and Gas: Production and Prospects," Congressional Research Service, 8 September 2006, 1–3, <http://www.iwar.org.uk/news-archive/crs/9652.pdf>
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- 35 Oliver Carroll, "Caspian Sea: After 22 Years of Wrangling, Deal Over Oil and Gas Rich Body of Water Reached—And It's Good News for Russia," *Independent*, 10 August 2018, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/russia-says-deal-to-settle-status-of-caspian-sea-reached-a8486311.html>
- 36 Farangis Najibullah, "Take It Or Else: Turkmen Officials Forced to Spend Vacations at Overpriced State Resort," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 7 July 2019, <https://www.rferl.org/a/avaza-awaza-turkmen-officials-forced-to-spend-vacations-overpriced-state-resort/30041754.html>
- 37 Luke Harding, "Turkmenistan Tries to Green Its Desert with Manmade Lake," *Guardian*, 17 July 2009, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2009/jul/17/turkmenistan-golden-age-lake>
- 38 Associated Press, "Huge Lake Being Filled in Turkmenistan Desert," *NBC News*, 16 July 2009, http://www.nbcnews.com/id/31945853/ns/world_news-world_environment/t/huge-lake-being-filled-turkmenistan-desert/#.XX_EHGZ7IPY
- 39 Jane's Defence, "Turkmenistan: Natural Resources," *Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment—Russia and the CIS*, 21 June 2011.
- 40 Murat Sadykov, "Turkmenistan: Soviet-Style Vanity Fuels Artificial Lake Project," *Eurasia Net*, 9 September 2013, <https://eurasianet.org/turkmenistan-soviet-style-vanity-fuels-artificial-lake-project>

Major Cities

Ashgabat

The capital, Ashgabat, has an estimated population of 810,000 and lies in the foothills of the Kopet-Dag Mountains. The city started as a military fortress. In 1885, a railway reached the area, sparking the town's expansion as its residents shifted from their reliance on agriculture for their livelihood.^{41, 42, 43}

Ashgabat was devastated by a 1948 earthquake in which nearly two-thirds of the population perished. The Karakum Canal passes just north of the city and has been responsible for much of its prosperity. The canal forms a lake that provides transportation, hydroelectric power, and space for recreational opportunities. The city is home to the Turkmen History Museum, which houses thousands of artifacts. Several important schools are in the city, including the Academy of Sciences of Turkmenistan and various agricultural, medical, and technical institutes.^{44, 45}

After independence, authoritarian leader Saparmurat Niyazov began to rebuild Ashgabat as the centerpiece of his cult of personality. Greenery, historical monuments, and houses were demolished to make way for grandiose yet impractical projects at national expense. Niyazov's successor, Gurbanguly Berdimukhamedov, set out to erase Niyazov's legacy and remake the city once again. Today, Ashgabat holds such world records as the largest enclosed observation wheel and the largest fountain.^{46, 47}

Turkmenabat

Turkmenabat is Turkmenistan's second-largest city, with a population of over 234,000. It is the main urban center in the eastern portion of the country. It began as a fort to guard crossings on the Amu Darya River and became a Russian railroad settlement in the 19th century. Today, it is the biggest port on the Amu Darya and a center for cotton ginning, silk milling, and fur production. The nearby Kugitang reserve is home to rare animal and plant species.^{48, 49, 50}

- 41 Central Intelligence Agency, "Turkmenistan," *The World Factbook*, 8 October 2019, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/tx.html>
- 42 Lonely Planet, "Ashgabat," n.d., <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/turkmenistan/ashgabat>
- 43 William Mark Habeeb, *The Growth and Influence of Islam in the Nations of Asia and Central Asia: Turkmenistan* (Broomall, PA: Mason Crest Publishers, 2005), 98–99.
- 44 William Mark Habeeb, *The Growth and Influence of Islam in the Nations of Asia and Central Asia: Turkmenistan* (Broomall, PA: Mason Crest Publishers, 2005), 98–101.
- 45 Lonely Planet, "Ashgabat," n.d., <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/turkmenistan/ashgabat>
- 46 Stanislav Volkov, "People are Afraid to Say a Word: Inside Ashgabat, Central Asia's Closed City," *Guardian*, 16 October 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2017/oct/16/people-afraid-inside-ashgabat-turkmenistan-closed-city>
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- 48 World Population Review, "Population of Cities in Turkmenistan (2019)," 2019, <http://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/turkmenistan-population/cities/>
- 49 Encyclopædia Britannica, "Türkmenabat," 19 July 2013, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Turkmenabat>
- 50 Advantour, "Turkmenabat, Turkmenistan," n.d., <https://www.advantour.com/turkmenistan/turkmenabad.htm>

Dashoguz (Dashowuz)

Located at the northern end of the Karakum Desert in the oasis of Khiva, Dashoguz is the northernmost point of Turkmenistan, near the Uzbek border. It was once a major stop along the Silk Road.^{51, 52} In modern times, the city has become an important agricultural and industrial center, housing over 166,000 people.^{53, 54} The waters of the nearby Amu Darya River, along with some of its tributaries, enable farmers to cultivate cotton and jute intensively.^{55, 56} The health of residents has been affected by the drying up of the Aral Sea, which has introduced windborne saline debris into the air.^{57, 58}

Dashoguz is the main city in the northern part of the country. It is home to a sizeable ethnic Uzbek population. Although it was a settlement in the early 19th century as part of the Khanate of Khiva, the Soviets transformed it into a modern administrative center.⁵⁹ After independence, it became a major border crossing point with Uzbekistan. This role became more pressing because of the likelihood that subsidized Turkmen goods would be smuggled into Uzbekistan.^{60, 61, 62}

Mary

Located on a large oasis in the Karakum Desert close to the Murghab River, Mary is one of Turkmenistan's oldest cities. It began as a settlement of the Oxus Civilization, which flourished in Central Asia more than 4,000 years ago.^{63, 64, 65} Later referred to as Mouru in ancient Persian texts, the city was a provincial capital of the Persian Achaemenid Empire. Alexander the Great took control in the third century BCE and renamed it Margiana.⁶⁶

After the Arabs gained control of the area in the seventh century CE, the city was rebuilt as the capital of Khorasan and served as a base for Muslim proselytization.⁶⁷ In the 11th century, the Seljuk Turks made it their capital, named Merv. Under the Seljuks, Merv became a repository of knowledge and learning, replete with libraries

- 51 William Mark Habeeb, *The Growth and Influence of Islam in the Nations of Asia and Central Asia: Turkmenistan* (Broomall, PA: Mason Crest Publishers, 2005), 101.
- 52 Encyclopædia Britannica, "Daşoguz" 19 July 2013, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Dasoguz>
- 53 Rafis Abazov, *Historical Dictionary of Turkmenistan* (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, Inc. 2005), 45–46.
- 54 World Population Review, "Population of Cities in Turkmenistan (2019)," 2019, <http://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/turkmenistan-population/cities/>
- 55 Turkmenistan.it, "Dashoguz," 2002, <http://www.turkmenistan.it/dashoguzgb.html>
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- 58 Bruce Pannier, "New Bill Arrives for Damage to Aral Sea," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 30 May 2018, <https://www.rferl.org/a/new-bill-arrives-for-damage-to-aral-sea/29259882.html>
- 59 Paul Brummell, "Dashoguz Region: The North – Dashoguz," *Turkmenistan*, (December 2005): 164, <https://books.google.com/books?id=fG9zk5Y3MugC&lpg=PA164&ots=Ea34cN2tRi&dq=Dashoguz%20%22Khanate%20of%20Khiva%22%20-wikipedia&pg=PA164#v=onepage&q=Dashoguz%20%22Khanate%20of%20Khiva%22%20-wikipedia&f=false>
- 60 Minority Rights Group International, "State of the World's Minorities and Indigenous Peoples 2011," Refworld, 6 July 2011, 134–35, <https://minorityrights.org/wp-content/uploads/old-site-downloads/download-1077-Full-text.pdf>
- 61 Najia Badykova, "Regional Cooperation in Central Asia: A View from Turkmenistan," *Problems of Economic Transition* 48, no. 8 (December 2005): 62–95.
- 62 Norwegian Refugee Council/Global IDP Project, "Profile of Internal Displacement: Turkmenistan," 18 October 2005, <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/3f49147c4.pdf>
- 63 Michel Danino, "A Brief Note on the Aryan Invasion Theory," *PRAGATI Quarterly Research Journal* 3, no. 108 (April–June 2009): 5–20, <https://www.scribd.com/doc/191127057/A-brief-note-on-the-Aryan-Invasion-Theory-Michel-Danino>
- 64 Carl C. Lamberg-Karlovsky, "Archaeology and Language: The Case of the Bronze Age Indo-Iranians," in *The Indo-Aryan Controversy: Evidence and Inference in Indian History*, eds. Edwin F. Bryant and Laurie L. Patton (New York: Routledge, 2005), 142–177.
- 65 Andrew Lawler, "Central Asia's Lost Civilization," *Discover Magazine*, 30 November 2006, <https://www.andrewlawler.com/central-asias-lost-civilization/>
- 66 Encyclopædia Britannica, "Mary," 19 July 2013, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Mary-Turkmenistan>
- 67 Encyclopædia Britannica, "Mary," 19 July 2013, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Mary-Turkmenistan>

and observatories.^{68, 69} In 1221, Mongol armies plundered the city, and residents were forced to flee.⁷⁰ It did not reemerge as an urban center until the Russians annexed it in 1887. In 1937, the Soviet government changed its name to Mary.⁷¹

Turkmenbashi

Turkmenbashi, formerly known as Krasnovodsk, lies on the shores of the Caspian Sea. It was renamed in honor of the late president Saparmurat Niyazov, who bestowed the title Turkmenbashi (Head of all Turkmen) upon himself. Built as a bridgehead for the Russian military campaign to pacify Central Asia in a race against the British, it became the last stop for the Trans-Caspian Railway in the late 19th century.^{72, 73, 74} Today, it is the site of petrochemical works and a large oil refinery.^{75, 76}

History

Until 1924, the Turkmen were a nomadic tribal people lacking political unity and national identity.⁷⁷ There was no established nation before the 1920s, and no borders defined the area.⁷⁸ What is now Turkmenistan has endured almost continuous invasions by its neighbors, yet Turkmen culture has survived all attempts at conquest. The harsh geography served the Turkmen well, making the area difficult to conquer and secure.⁷⁹

Scattered across a vast desert plain, the Turkmen depended on animal herding rather than agriculture for much of their history.^{80, 81} Chieftains established their bases at the local water source, since control of water resources conferred power.⁸² Groups frequently fought for control of the oases in an environment without centralized political authority. As nomads, the Turkmen prized mobility and viewed settled farming as an invitation to predatory behavior.⁸³

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- 70 Leo De Hartog, *Genghis Khan: Conqueror of the World* (Barnes and Noble, 1989), 111.
- 71 Bernard Cloutier (blog), "Turkmenistan," 1997, <http://berclo.net/page97/97en-turkmenistan.html>
- 72 Encyclopædia Britannica, "Turkmenbashi," 10 May 2011, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Turkmenbashi>
- 73 Atul Aneja, "The Great Game Along the Silk Route," *Hindu*, 28 September 2016, <http://www.hindu.com/2007/04/20/stories/2007042004881100.htm>
- 74 Lonely Planet, "Turkmenbashi," 2017, <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/turkmenistan/ashgabat/background/history/a/nar/b95106cd-48c1-40ff-ada5-3003f24a059b/357814>
- 75 Vladimir Razumovskiy, "Seydi Oil Refinery Gets First Oil from Yoloten Field," *Turkmenistan.ru*, 23 July 2006, <http://www.turkmenistan.ru/en/node/4831>
- 76 Encyclopædia Britannica, "Turkmenbashi," 10 May 2011, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Turkmenbashi>
- 77 Encyclopædia Britannica, "Turkic Peoples," 28 August 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Turkic-peoples>
- 78 MaryLee Knowlton, *Turkmenistan, Cultures of the World* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Corporation, 2006), 21.
- 79 William Mark Habeeb, *The Growth and Influence of Islam in the Nations of Asia and Central Asia: Turkmenistan* (Broomall, PA: Mason Crest Publishers, 2005), 25.
- 80 Jack Cassin, "Archeological Prehistory of Turkmenistan," 2000, http://www.weavingartmuseum.org/ex3_prehist.htm
- 81 Denis Sinor et al., "Turkmenistan," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 10 July 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Turkmenistan>
- 82 Eurasia Net, "Desert Gold: Niyazov's Conflicted Approach to Turkmenistan's Water Woes," 16 April 2004, <https://eurasianet.org/desert-gold-niyazovs-conflicted-approach-to-turkmenistans-water-woes>
- 83 Rafis Abazov, *Culture and Customs of the Central Asian Republics* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2007), 25–30.

Early History

Disagreement exists about which people first inhabited the area that is now Turkmenistan. Around 6000 BCE, tribes of goat herders occupied the lands near the Kopet-Dag mountains, along the Caspian Sea or near the oases of the river valleys. These peoples likely migrated from Mongolia or Siberia.^{84, 85} The area fell under the influence of the various kingdoms of the time, including the Oxus Civilization (of which little is known), the Persian Achaemenid Empire, the Macedonian Empire of Alexander the Great, the Parthians of Iran, and the Sassanians from Persia, who ruled for over 400 years.^{86, 87, 88}

Arab traders expanded commerce into Central Asia in the seventh century CE. By the eighth century, the Arab caliphate controlled the area between the Aral and Caspian Seas. It introduced Islam to the inhabitants, and assimilated them into trade and cultural networks based in Arab lands. Over time, Arab influence waned, but Islamic influence continued. The Oghuz Turks, forbearers of ethnic Turkmen, had begun to migrate into western Central Asia, northern Persia, and present-day Turkey.⁸⁹ They established tribal confederations, as well as the Seljuk Empire, in the 11th century.⁹⁰ Parts of the area encompassing modern Turkmenistan subsequently came under the control of Genghis Khan and Tamerlane.^{91, 92} For several centuries, competing Central Asian tribes exerted nominal control over the area. By the 18th century, the Persians had established authority over the southern half of present-day Turkmenistan, while the Khanate of Khiva controlled the northern half.⁹³

The Russians and Czarist Colonial Rule

In the 19th century, Imperial Russia developed an interest in Central Asia, especially the Turkmenistan region. The Turkmen established trade relations with the Russians while simultaneously launching raids into their territory. This provoked the Russians into a series of military attacks and the establishment of military fortifications. Although the western regions of Turkmenistan fell under Russian control by 1868, tribes in the eastern and southern regions put up fierce resistance. In 1881, the city of Gök-Tepe fell to the Russians, signaling an end to any meaningful Turkmen resistance. By 1885, all Turkmen tribes had surrendered, and Turkmenistan became part of Transcaspia, itself part of then-Russian Turkestan. Modern Turkmenistan's southern borders with Afghanistan and Iran were established during that time. For the next century, the fate of Turkmenistan was bound to that of the Russian Czarist government and later the Soviet socialist state.^{94, 95, 96}

Following the Russian revolution of 1917, the Transcaspian area witnessed many battles against the Bolsheviks. Ashgabat fell to the Bolsheviks in 1918, and by the end of 1920, most of Turkmenistan was under their rule. The Soviet Union was formally established in 1922, with all Soviet territories firmly under Communist rule. In 1925,

84 William Mark Habeeb, *The Growth and Influence of Islam in the Nations of Asia and Central Asia: Turkmenistan* (Broomall, PA: Mason Crest Publishers, 2005), 26–27.

85 MaryLee Knowlton, *Turkmenistan, Cultures of the World* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Corporation, 2006), 21–22.

86 MaryLee Knowlton, *Turkmenistan, Cultures of the World* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Benchmark, 2006), 24, 27.

87 William Mark Habeeb, *The Growth and Influence of Islam in the Nations of Asia and Central Asia: Turkmenistan* (Broomall, PA: Mason Crest Publishers, 2005), 32.

88 Denis Sinor et al., “Turkmenistan,” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 10 July 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Turkmenistan>

89 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, “Turkic Peoples,” 28 August 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Turkic-peoples>

90 Denis Sinor et al., “Turkmenistan,” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 10 July 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Turkmenistan>

91 William Mark Habeeb, *The Growth and Influence of Islam in the Nations of Asia and Central Asia: Turkmenistan* (Broomall, PA: Mason Crest Publishers, 2005), 34–35.

92 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, “Timur,” 15 February 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Timur>

93 William Mark Habeeb, *The Growth and Influence of Islam in the Nations of Asia and Central Asia: Turkmenistan* (Broomall, PA: Mason Crest Publishers, 2005), 34–35.

94 William Mark Habeeb, *The Growth and Influence of Islam in the Nations of Asia and Central Asia: Turkmenistan* (Broomall, PA: Mason Crest Publishers, 2005), 35–37.

95 MaryLee Knowlton, *Turkmenistan, Cultures of the World* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Benchmark, 2006), 29–30.

96 Denis Sinor et al., “Turkmenistan,” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 10 July 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Turkmenistan>

Turkmenistan was formally renamed the Turkmen Soviet Socialist Republic, with the national boundaries that exist today. These boundaries were specifically drawn to fragment ethnic groups and prevent any unification or threats to the Soviet government in Russia.^{97, 98, 99}

The Soviet Era

Though most Turkmen were indifferent to Soviet Marxism, some embraced it. This was significant because it signaled that identity was tied to place rather than tribe or clan. It marked the beginning of a new national identity. The unification of tribes through a common language substantially aided the nationalist agenda. Yet, the legacy of nomad culture—groups based on genealogy—remained.¹⁰⁰

The Soviets set up collective farms on which everyone was expected to work; those who resisted were often jailed or killed. Many Turkmen moved to the cities to work in state factories. These changes destroyed the traditional lifestyle of these formerly nomadic peoples.¹⁰¹ Many others fled into the Karakum Desert or neighboring Iran and Afghanistan. More than 1 million Turkmen became refugees.¹⁰²

The Soviet government transferred workers from other republics and Russia to Turkmenistan. Although they Turkmen allowed to continue to practice Islam, the government established practices that limited religious influence and promoted the official atheist position of the Soviet Union. These practices angered the Turkmen, who staged a revolt that lasted from 1927 to 1932. The revolt failed and the government executed thousands of Turkmen in the aftermath. and were installed in the government. Moscow placed many ethnic Russians and Turkmen communist leaders in government positions in the hope that it could command their complete loyalty. The strategy was effective, and by the 1950s, Turkmenistan had become one of the most stable Soviet republics.^{103, 104}

Independence

Turkmenistan declared itself an autonomous republic within the USSR in August 1990. Party leader Saparmurat Niyazov became president. In October 1991, Turkmenistan declared itself fully independent. In December of that same year, the USSR dissolved.^{105, 106, 107} Private property once again became legal in 1997 as the country rediscovered its autonomy after Soviet rule.¹⁰⁸

In 1992, the country adopted a constitution that gave the most power to the president. Niyazov was elected president and focused on creating the infrastructure for a new state, including the establishment of a currency and the implementation of economic reforms. Although the economy remained centralized, the new president

97 William Mark Habeeb, *The Growth and Influence of Islam in the Nations of Asia and Central Asia: Turkmenistan* (Broomall, PA: Mason Crest Publishers, 2005), 38–39.

98 Denis Sinor et al., “Turkmenistan,” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 10 July 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Turkmenistan>

99 MaryLee Knowlton, *Turkmenistan, Cultures of the World* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Benchmark, 2006), 29–30.

100 Adrienne Lynn Edgar, *Tribal Nation: The Making of Soviet Turkmenistan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004,) 4, 31–32.

101 William Mark Habeeb, *The Growth and Influence of Islam in the Nations of Asia and Central Asia: Turkmenistan* (Broomall, PA: Mason Crest Publishers, 2005), 38–39.

102 MaryLee Knowlton, *Turkmenistan, Cultures of the World* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Benchmark, 2006), 31.

103 William Mark Habeeb, *The Growth and Influence of Islam in the Nations of Asia and Central Asia: Turkmenistan* (Broomall, PA: Mason Crest Publishers, 2005), 40.

104 Adrienne Lynn Edgar, *Tribal Nation: The Making of Soviet Turkmenistan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004,) 31.

105 William Mark Habeeb, *The Growth and Influence of Islam in the Nations of Asia and Central Asia: Turkmenistan* (Broomall, PA: Mason Crest Publishers, 2005), 42.

106 Denis Sinor et al., “Turkmenistan,” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 10 July 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Turkmenistan>

107 U.S. Department of State, “The Berlin Wall Falls and USSR Dissolves,” Office of the Historian, n.d., <https://history.state.gov/departmenthistory/short-history/berlinwall>

108 William Mark Habeeb, *The Growth and Influence of Islam in the Nations of Asia and Central Asia: Turkmenistan* (Broomall, PA: Mason Crest Publishers, 2005), 42–43.

courted international investment, particularly in the areas of oil and gas. Niyazov canceled the presidential election in 1994 and had his term extended until 2002; in 1999, the parliament declared him “President for Life,” a position he held until he died of heart failure in 2006. During his tenure, Niyazov promoted a personality cult, even renaming the days and months, a moon crater, a horse breed, a canal, a city, and much more after himself and his family members. He chose to be known as “Turkmenbashi,” meaning “Head of all Turkmen.”^{109, 110, 111}

Gurbanguly Berdimukhamedov was inaugurated as the new president in 2007. He took some steps to dismantle the cult of “Turkmenbashi,” but grandiosity and authoritarianism remained central features of government.^{112, 113} Nevertheless, the historically isolated country began to establish ties with the world community.¹¹⁴

In 2008, the country approved a new constitution, overhauling the government. The charter gave greater powers to the president and the parliament but also introduced some democratic reforms.¹¹⁵ In 2011, further changes were adopted regarding who may run for president. Prospective candidates no longer needed the approval of an advisory board. Instead, they had to have either the backing of a political party or 50,000 signatures.¹¹⁶

Turkmenistan was alone among Central Asian republics when it did not offer airspace or facilities to the United States and coalition troops for operations in Afghanistan in the wake of the 9/11 attacks. Citing its permanent neutrality policy, the Turkmen government initially steered clear of any involvement. It gradually altered its position, allowing U.S. and NATO forces to use facilities to conduct refueling and supply operations for the Afghanistan campaign.^{117, 118}

Recent Events

In 2010, breaking the virtual stranglehold of Russia on gas exports, Turkmenistan opened a pipeline to China through Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. Turkmenistan also rebuilt the East-West pipeline designed to provide even more gas to the Caspian Coastal Pipeline.^{119, 120} That same year, the country opened a second pipeline to Iran, in an effort to increase annual exports to that country. However, recent tension between the two over funding has threatened this partnership.^{121, 122} In 2018, construction began on a 1,800 km (1,118 mi) natural gas pipeline that will connect Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India.¹²³

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- 109 William Mark Habeeb, *The Growth and Influence of Islam in the Nations of Asia and Central Asia: Turkmenistan* (Broomall, PA: Mason Crest Publishers, 2005), 42–45.
- 110 Bess Brown, “Saparmurad Niyazov,” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 15 February 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Saparmurad-Niyazov>
- 111 Denis Sinor et al., “Turkmenistan,” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 10 July 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Turkmenistan>
- 112 Bess Brown, “Saparmurad Niyazov,” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 15 February 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Saparmurad-Niyazov>
- 113 Denis Sinor et al., “Turkmenistan,” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 10 July 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Turkmenistan>
- 114 Global Security, “Turkmenistan—Foreign Relations,” 27 July 2018, <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/centralasia/turkmen-forrel.htm>
- 115 Associated Press, “Turkmenistan Approves New Constitution to Increase President’s Powers,” *Pravda*, 26 September 2008, <http://english.pravda.ru/news/world/26-09-2008/106469-turkmenistan-0/>
- 116 Maureen Cosgrove, “Turkmenistan Adopts New Law Regulating Presidential Elections,” *Jurist Legal News and Research*, 2 June 2011, <http://jurist.org/paperchase/2011/06/turkmenistan-adopts-new-law-regulating-presidential-elections.php>
- 117 Jane’s Defence, “Turkmenistan: External Affairs,” *Jane’s Sentinel Security Assessment—Russia and the CIS*, 21 June 2011.
- 118 Catherine A. Fitzpatrick, “Is the U.S. Violating Turkmenistan’s Neutrality with the NDN?” *Eurasia Net*, 1 August 2010, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/61652>
- 119 Robert M. Cutler, “Turkmenistan Diversifies Gas Export Routes,” *Robert M. Cutler on Energy and Eurasia*, 8 July 2010, http://www.robertcutler.org/blog/2010/07/turkmenistan_diversifies_gas_e.html
- 120 Richard Galpin, “Struggle for Central Asian Energy Riches,” *BBC News*, 2 June 2010, <https://www.bbc.com/news/10131641>
- 121 BBC News, “Turkmenistan Opens New Iran Gas Pipeline,” 6 January 2010, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8443787.stm>
- 122 Terra Nova, “Why Iran and Turkmenistan Need to Solve Their Gas Dispute Amicably,” *Observer Research Foundation*, 22 November 2018, <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/why-iran-and-turkmenistan-need-to-solve-their-gas-dispute-amicably-45677/>
- 123 BBC News, “Turkmenistan Profile—Timeline,” 16 February 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-16098048>

Despite paying lip service to political reform, President Berdymukhamedov's authoritarian rule continued unabated. In 2012 and 2017, he won additional presidential terms in elections in which he ran virtually unopposed.¹²⁴

Government

Turkmenistan is considered one of the world's most repressive and isolated countries. President Berdymukhamedov has transferred his predecessor's cult of personality onto himself, and the internal security apparatus tightly controls public life. Unauthorized political or religious expression is strictly curtailed. Dozens of people, mostly former government officials who fell out of favor, have been victims of undue detention in prisons and labor camps.^{125, 126, 127}

Although ostensibly a presidential republic, the government of Turkmenistan lacks checks on the president's power and functions autocratically. There are three branches of government, the legislative, judicial, and executive, but the parliament and the judiciary are largely under the control of the president. The president is directly elected to a term of seven years and technically limited to two consecutive terms. The president has the power to appoint governors, mayors, and Supreme Court justices. He can dissolve the parliament only if the 125-member body is unable to select a speaker. The parliament consists of a single house, the Mejlis, and members are elected to five-year terms.^{128, 129, 130} In 2019, Turkmenistan announced that it would be adopting a bicameral legislature system.¹³¹

Media

While a law enacted in 2013 proclaims freedom of the press and bans censorship, the reality is that there is no freedom of the press in Turkmenistan. Governmental authorities monitor media outlets, run printing presses, and set editorial policies.^{132, 133, 134} As a result of government control, media outlets are often used to disseminate propaganda. At least one reporter was killed after being tortured in prison, and several others have been blacklisted after being detained.^{135, 136} In 2019, Turkmenistan overtook North Korea to become the world's worst media environment, according to Reporters without Borders.¹³⁷

- 124 BBC News, "Turkmenistan Profile—Timeline," 16 February 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-16098048>
- 125 Human Rights Watch, "Turkmenistan, Events of 2018," 2019, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2019/country-chapters/turkmenistan>
- 126 Paul Stronski, "Turkmenistan at Twenty-Five: The High Price of Authoritarianism," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 30 January 2017, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2017/01/30/turkmenistan-at-twenty-five-high-price-of-authoritarianism-pub-67839>
- 127 Campaign for the Protection of the Disappeared in Turkmen Prisons, "Turkmenistan: End Enforced Disappearances," 3 June 2016, <https://provetheyarealive.org/turkmenistan-end-enforced-disappearances-2/>
- 128 Denis Sinor et al., "Turkmenistan," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 10 July 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Turkmenistan>
- 129 U.S. Department of State, "U.S. Relations with Turkmenistan," 8 July 2019, <https://www.state.gov/u-s-relations-with-turkmenistan/>
- 130 Central Intelligence Agency, "Turkmenistan," *The World Factbook*, 8 October 2019, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/tx.html>
- 131 Tariq Saeedi, "Turkmenistan switches to bicameral system of parliament—Why?" News Central Asia, 27 September 2019, <http://www.newscentralasia.net/2019/09/27/turkmenistan-switches-to-bicameral-system-of-parliament-why/>
- 132 BBC News, "Turkmenistan Country Profile," 26 February 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-16094646>
- 133 Central Intelligence Agency, "Turkmenistan," *The World Factbook*, 8 October 2019, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/tx.html>
- 134 BBC News, "Turkmenistan Country Profile," 26 February 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-16094646>
- 135 Reporters without Borders, "Confined to a Psychiatric Hospital for Talking to a Radio Station," 20 January 2016, <https://rsf.org/en/news/confined-psychiatric-hospital-talking-radio-station>
- 136 Reporters without Borders, "Turkmenistan," 2019, <https://rsf.org/en/turkmenistan>
- 137 Amy Mackinnon, "The World's Worst Country for Journalists," *Foreign Policy*, 28 May 2019, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/05/28/the-worlds-worst-country-for-journalists-turkmenistan/>

The Berdymukhamedov administration seeks to minimize or wipe out the influence of outside media accessed through the internet and satellites.¹³⁸ Turkmenistanis were allowed internet access for the first time in 2008. People can connect to the internet at cyber cafes, but fees for access and data usage are prohibitive. Foreign-based opposition, news, social media, and cloud storage websites are blocked. The government does not admit to blocking any websites.^{139, 140}

Economy

Traditional Economy

Traditionally nomadic, the Turkmen were herders moving from one grazing site to another. Animals were the source of their food, clothing, materials for tents, and other necessities. Tribes living near the sea supplemented their diets with fish. Though the tribes occasionally bartered with each other, they formed no organized economic system.¹⁴¹

Some tribes became more sedentary as they settled around the fertile oases or in the foothills, where rivers provided water for cultivating crops. Access to water allowed other basic industries and services to develop, including pottery and shop keeping. Around 500 BCE, Turkmen cities were part of the larger economy that flourished along the Silk Road. The majority of the people still depended on traditional nomadic ways. Economic exchange was confined mostly within tribes or clans. This system remained largely intact until the 20th century.¹⁴²

The Russians sought to change the entire structure of the nation, investing in huge collective farms and a few state-owned factories. Many nomads were forced to work on these collectives or move to the cities and work in factories. Most farming focused on cotton, which was shipped to Moscow. With the discovery of oil and gas, the Russians built pipelines to transport the resources to other parts of the Soviet Union. Only some of the revenues from agriculture or oil and gas stayed in Turkmenistan, leaving it the poorest of all the Soviet republics. Due to Turkmenistan's heavy reliance on agriculture, the demise of the Soviet Union was minimally disruptive to the republic's economy.¹⁴³

Current Economy

Turkmenistan is one of the most important producers of natural gas in the world. Oil and gas exports make up a quarter of the gross domestic product (GDP), and government revenues rise and fall along with energy prices. Proposed pipelines to Europe and South Asia promise to increase the nation's export routes and raise revenues. Food processing and textiles are other important industries. The overall industrial sector makes up 44.9% of GDP, and services make up 47.7%.^{144, 145}

138 Reporters without Borders, "Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov," 2016, <https://rsf.org/en/predator/gurbanguly-berdymukhammedov>

139 Reporters without Borders, "News: Turkmenistan," 20 January 2016, <https://rsf.org/en/news/turkmenistan-1>

140 Turkmen News, "Qurium: Dozens of Foreign Websites & Social Networks Blocked in Turkmenistan," 7 August 2019, <https://en.turkmen.news/news/dozens-of-foreign-websites-social-networks-blocked-in-turkmenistan/>

141 William Mark Habeeb, *The Growth and Influence of Islam in the Nations of Asia and Central Asia: Turkmenistan* (Broomall, PA: Mason Crest Publishers, 2005), 59.

142 William Mark Habeeb, *The Growth and Influence of Islam in the Nations of Asia and Central Asia: Turkmenistan* (Broomall, PA: Mason Crest Publishers, 2005), 59.

143 William Mark Habeeb, *The Growth and Influence of Islam in the Nations of Asia and Central Asia: Turkmenistan* (Broomall, PA: Mason Crest Publishers, 2005), 61.

144 Central Intelligence Agency, "Turkmenistan," *The World Factbook*, 8 October 2019, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/tx.html>

145 William Mark Habeeb, *The Growth and Influence of Islam in the Nations of Asia and Central Asia: Turkmenistan* (Broomall, PA: Mason Crest Publishers, 2005), 66–68.

Nearly half of Turkmen are employed in agriculture, even though it accounts for only 7.5% of GDP.¹⁴⁶ The most significant crop is cotton, grown on nearly 50% of irrigated land. Turkmenistan ranks among the world's top 10 cotton-producing countries.^{147, 148, 149}

Although most of Turkmenistan is desert, areas around the oases are intensively cultivated. The government is involved in efforts to diversify the agricultural sector; wheat, fruits, and vegetables are becoming important crops. Farms are no longer state-owned but are often collective. Most crops must be sold at prices designated by the state.^{150, 151}

Turkmenistan is currently experiencing its worst economic crisis since independence. Low energy prices have undermined the government's ability to subsidize utilities and foodstuffs like flour, sugar, and cooking oil. Basic goods are becoming scarce, prices are rising, and wages are shrinking. Currency restrictions, corruption, and isolationism are contributing to economic stagnation.^{152, 153, 154} In 2019, the government announced the privatization of several state-controlled industries like roads, railways, maritime transport, telecommunications, and the national air carrier.¹⁵⁵

Ethnic Groups and Languages

Turkmenistan is largely homogenous, with 85% of the population classified as Turkmen. Other groups include Uzbeks (5%) and Russians (4%); another 6% are Armenian, Kazakh, Tatar, and Ukrainian.^{156, 157}

Turkmen

Ethnic Turkmen trace their origin to the mythical warrior Oghuz Khan and are descendants of the Oghuz tribe.¹⁵⁸ Turkmen are subdivided into tribes, of which the two largest are further subdivided into regional branches that have little in common. The largest tribe is the Teke, consisting of two subdivisions: the Ahal Teke, who inhabit the populous Akhal region in the south, and the Mary Teke, traditional rivals of the Ahal who occupy the Mary region along the border of Iran and Afghanistan. The Yomut tribe is similarly divided: The Western Yomut inhabit the Balkan region, bordering the Caspian Sea and Iran. The Northern Yomut are predominant in the Dashoguz region bordering Uzbekistan.^{159, 160}

- 146 Central Intelligence Agency, "Turkmenistan," *The World Factbook*, 8 October 2019, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/tx.html>
- 147 William Mark Habeeb, *The Growth and Influence of Islam in the Nations of Asia and Central Asia: Turkmenistan* (Broomall, PA: Mason Crest Publishers, 2005), 66.
- 148 Economy Watch, "Turkmenistan Economy," 5 October 2012, http://www.economywatch.com/world_economy/turkmenistan/
- 149 M. Shahbandeh, "Cotton production by country worldwide in 2017/2018 (in 1,000 metric tons)," Statista, 24 September 2019, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/263055/cotton-production-worldwide-by-top-countries/>
- 150 Central Intelligence Agency, "Turkmenistan," *The World Factbook*, 8 October 2019, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/tx.html>
- 151 William Mark Habeeb, *The Growth and Influence of Islam in the Nations of Asia and Central Asia: Turkmenistan* (Broomall, PA: Mason Crest Publishers, 2005), 66.
- 152 Bruce Pannier, "Turkmenistan's Uzbek Problem," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 28 June 2018, <https://www.rferl.org/a/turkmenistan-s-uzbek-problem/29325881.html>
- 153 Farangis Najibullah, "Take It Or Else: Turkmen Officials Forced to Spend Vacations at Overpriced State Resort," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 7 July 2019, <https://www.rferl.org/a/avaza-awaza-turkmen-officials-forced-to-spend-vacations-overpriced-state-resort/30041754.html>
- 154 Central Intelligence Agency, "Turkmenistan," *The World Factbook*, 8 October 2019, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/tx.html>
- 155 Eurasianet, "Turkmenistan: Research defunded, transportation privatized, government downsized," 31 January 2019, <https://eurasianet.org/turkmenistan-research-defunded-transportation-privatized-government-downsized>
- 156 Central Intelligence Agency, "Turkmenistan," *The World Factbook*, 8 October 2019, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/tx.html>
- 157 MaryLee Knowlton, *Turkmenistan, Cultures of the World* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Benchmark, 2006), 67.
- 158 Adrienne Lynn Edgar, *Tribal Nation: The Making of Soviet Turkmenistan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004,) 20.
- 159 Global Security, "Turkmenistan — People," 14 June 2019, <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/centralasia/turkmen-pop.htm>
- 160 MaryLee Knowlton, *Turkmenistan, Cultures of the World* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Benchmark, 2006), 68.

Russians

Thousands of Russians relocated to Turkmenistan during the Soviet era. Many Russians were brought in to fill administrative and other government positions and became the upper class of the republic. Following independence, the Turkmen regarded Russians as outsiders. Since many Russians held dual citizenship, they were not welcomed by the new government. In 2003, President Niyazov eliminated dual citizenship, and many ethnic Russians returned to Russia. Turkmenistan has further demonstrated its animosity to ethnic Russians by banning Russian media, removing Russian studies and Russian language from the educational system, and refusing to recognize degrees from Russian universities.^{161, 162}

Uzbeks

Most ethnic Uzbeks live in the region near the border with Uzbekistan. Relations between the majority Turkmen and Uzbeks have been strained. In 2006, the government closed all Uzbek-language schools and shut down the only Uzbek-language newspaper. In 2008, many ethnic Uzbeks were deported, dividing some families because not all members could obtain passports. Many Uzbeks have only temporary residence and are at constant risk of deportation. They also dislike the requirement that they must give up their native dress in favor of the Turkmen costume. Uzbeks feel there is a systematic attempt to destroy their language and culture.^{163, 164}

¹⁶¹ MaryLee Knowlton, *Turkmenistan, Cultures of the World* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Benchmark, 2006), 70–71.

¹⁶² Bruce Pannier, “Is Turkmenistan Being Pulled into Russia’s Orbit?” Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 16 January 2019, <https://www.rferl.org/a/iqshloq-ovozi-turkmenistan-pulled-into-russia-s-orbit/29713898.html>

¹⁶³ News Briefing Central Asia, “Uzbek-Turkmen Talks Disappoint Both Ethnic Minorities,” Institute for War and Peace Reporting, n.d., <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/uzbek-turkmen-talks-disappoint-both-ethnic-minorities>

¹⁶⁴ Bruce Pannier, “Turkmenistan’s Uzbek Problem,” Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 28 June 2018, <https://www.rferl.org/a/turkmenistan-s-uzbek-problem/29325881.html>

Turkmen Cultural Orientation

Chapter 1 | Profile, Assessment

Read the following statements and answer True or False

- | | | | |
|----|--|---------------------------------------|--|
| 1. | All of Turkmenistan's rivers flow into the Caspian Sea. | <input checked="" type="radio"/> True | <input checked="" type="radio"/> False |
| 2. | Turkmenistan shares borders with China and Russia. | <input checked="" type="radio"/> True | <input checked="" type="radio"/> False |
| 3. | Turkmenbashi is a city named after Turkmenistan's first president, Saparmurat Niyazov. | <input checked="" type="radio"/> True | <input checked="" type="radio"/> False |
| 4. | Oil and gas make up a large portion of Turkmenistan's economy. | <input checked="" type="radio"/> True | <input checked="" type="radio"/> False |
| 5. | Turkmenistan is the safest country for journalists in Central Asia. | <input checked="" type="radio"/> True | <input checked="" type="radio"/> False |

Turkmen Cultural Orientation

Chapter 1 | Profile, Assessment Answers

1. False:
Turkmenistan's only river that flows into the Caspian Sea is the Atrek. The Murgab and Tejen rivers are absorbed into the sands of the Karakum Desert, and the Amu Darya flows to the Aral Sea.
2. False:
Turkmenistan borders the Caspian Sea, Iran, Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan.
3. True:
Turkmenbashi was renamed in honor of President Niyazov, who gave himself the title "Turkmenbashi," or "Head of all Turkmen." The city was formerly known as Krasnovodsk and lies on the shores of the Caspian Sea.
4. True:
Turkmenistan is one of the most important producers of natural gas in the world. Oil and gas exports make up 25% of the country's GDP.
5. False:
While a law enacted in 2013 proclaimed freedom of the press and banned censorship, the reality is that there is no freedom of the press in Turkmenistan. In 2019, Turkmenistan overtook North Korea to become the world's worst media environment.

Chapter 2 | Religion



The Turkmenbashi Ruhy Mosque
Flickr / Kalpak Travel

Introduction

Islam arrived in Turkmenistan in the seventh century CE with Arab traders and traveling Sufi mystics. Because the Sufis preached a personal form of Islam, it was relatively easy to assimilate local beliefs into the new faith. As a result, Islam developed as an individual expression in Turkmenistan, more so than in many other Muslim countries.¹

Today, about 89% of Turkmen identify as Sunni Muslim.² Some religious intolerance is apparent, mostly owing to the legacy of Soviet atheism and the desire of the current government to suppress free expression. Historically, Turkmen did not strive to regulate religious beliefs, since tribal affiliation superseded religion. Presently, religious oppression stems from the government's fear of radical Islamist groups rather than intolerance toward other beliefs.³

Religion has never occupied a central role in Turkmen culture, and people are flexible about what they consider appropriate behavior and worship. Turkmen do not adhere to a strict Muslim doctrine or rely on formal observances

1 William Mark Habeeb, *The Growth and Influence of Islam in the Nations of Asia and Central Asia: Turkmenistan* (Broomall, PA: Mason Crest Publishers, 2005), 70–72.

2 Central Intelligence Agency, "Turkmenistan," *The World Factbook*, 11 September 2019, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/tx.html>

3 MaryLee Knowlton, *Turkmenistan*, *Cultures of the World* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Benchmark, 2006), 89–90.

and prayers. They practice a kind of folk Islam infused with Sufi mysticism and based on the veneration of saints. The customary law of the Turkmen often supersedes Sharia law. Adapting their religion to include Soviet doctrine and the teachings of former president Niyazov has helped Turkmen thwart attempts to eradicate Islam from the country.^{4, 5, 6}

Pre-Islamic Religion

Little is known about the earliest indigenous religions of Turkmen tribes. As Persians expanded into the region, they brought Zoroastrianism with them; this became the official religion of the Sassanian Empire, which included Turkmenistan. The influence of Zoroastrianism waned as Arabs and Turkic tribes encroached, around the seventh century CE. Turkic tribes worshiped multiple deities when the Arabs introduced the monotheistic religion of Islam.⁷

Islam in Turkmenistan

Islam in Turkmenistan is a blend of Sufi mysticism, early shamanism, and Zoroastrianism.⁸ The practices of the Sufis who brought Islam to the area relied more on an internal understanding of God than on the dogmatic interpretation of scripture. As such, Sufism was relatively accommodating to local beliefs, and incorporating those beliefs into Islam's religious practices encouraged conversion within the tribes. The Islam of present-day Turkmenistan retains aspects of Sufi mysticism not seen among other, more traditional followers.^{9, 10, 11} Perhaps for this reason, and despite Turkmen protestations, there are Muslims who call the Turkmen form of Islam "a primitive pre-Islamic tradition dressed over in Islamic garb."¹²

Since Turkmen tradition involved ancestor worship, Turkmen tribes came to think of those who brought them Islam as "community fathers." They also believed that certain people had magical powers and could become saints; as a result, these people's burial sites were treated as shrines and became places for the faithful to honor these revered figures. In present-day Turkmenistan, these shrines retain great importance, and people often make pilgrimages to them in hopes of communicating with the departed spirits. Many shrines are dedicated to local saints who may be unknown outside a particular village. Pilgrims come to the shrines for various reasons, including asking for advice and for divine intervention to resolve problems, or simply to pay homage to the departed.¹³

- 4 William Mark Habeeb, *The Growth and Influence of Islam in the Nations of Asia and Central Asia: Turkmenistan* (Broomall, PA: Mason Crest Publishers, 2005), 72.
- 5 MaryLee Knowlton, *Turkmenistan*, Cultures of the World (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Benchmark, 2006), 90–91.
- 6 Adrienne Lynn Edgar, *Tribal Nation: The Making of Soviet Turkmenistan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004,) 26.
- 7 William Mark Habeeb, *The Growth and Influence of Islam in the Nations of Asia and Central Asia: Turkmenistan* (Broomall, PA: Mason Crest Publishers, 2005), 70–72.
- 8 American Foreign Policy Council, "Turkmenistan," *World Almanac of Islamism*, 21 September 2018, <http://almanac.afpc.org/Turkmenistan>
- 9 William Mark Habeeb, *The Growth and Influence of Islam in the Nations of Asia and Central Asia: Turkmenistan* (Broomall, PA: Mason Crest Publishers, 2005), 70–72.
- 10 Rafis Abazov, *Historical Dictionary of Turkmenistan* (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, 2005), 142–143.
- 11 David Tyson, "Shrine Pilgrimage in Turkmenistan as a Means to Understand Islam among the Turkmen," *Central Asia Monitor—Online Supplement 1* (1997), <http://www.uga.edu/islam/turkmen.html>
- 12 David Tyson, "Shrine Pilgrimage in Turkmenistan as a Means to Understand Islam among the Turkmen," *Central Asia Monitor—Online Supplement 1* (1997), <http://www.uga.edu/islam/turkmen.html>
- 13 David Tyson, "Shrine Pilgrimage in Turkmenistan as a Means to Understand Islam among the Turkmen," *Central Asia Monitor—Online Supplement 1* (1997), <http://www.uga.edu/islam/turkmen.html>

Many rituals have emerged around visitations to holy sites. A memorial meal known as *sadaka* and *kurban* underscores the importance of offerings and sacrifice in Islam, and the concept of *hudaiyoli* refers to sharing a meal at a shrine. Some shrines are equipped with cooking utensils and hearths, and the meal is prepared and eaten at the shrine. Usually, an animal is slaughtered, and family, guests, and other visitors share the meal. Leftover food is often given to the poor when pilgrims return to their homes.¹⁴

Sunni Islam

Muslims believe that Islam has existed eternally but has been revealed over time by a series of prophets—including Abraham, Moses, and Jesus—culminating with the Prophet Muhammad (570–632 CE). For Muslims, Muhammad’s message is the final and definitive revelation of the faith. The literal meanings of the Arabic term *islam* are “to submit” or “to surrender.” A Muslim, therefore, is one who submits to the will of Allah, or God, the sole creator of the universe. God’s message is contained in the Quran, the sacred scriptures of Islam, which were revealed to Muhammad and subsequently recorded and compiled in written form. The essence of this message is found in the *shahada*, the recitation of the Islamic creed and the first of the faith’s Five Pillars, or fundamental duties: “There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is the prophet of Allah.” The remaining four duties include the performance of daily ritual prayers (*salat*); the payment of a tax to support the Muslim community, particularly the poor and needy (*zakat*); fasting during the holy month of Ramadan (*sawm*); and undertaking a pilgrimage to the holy city of Mecca (*hajj*) if able to.^{15, 16, 17}

Other Religions

Approximately 11% of the population adheres to religions other than Islam.¹⁸ Most non-Muslims are ethnic Russians who belong to the Russian Orthodox Church. About 1,000 Jews reside in Turkmenistan’s major cities.¹⁹

²⁰ Other religious minorities include Protestants, Catholics, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Shia Muslims, Buddhists, and Bahais.²¹

14 David Tyson, “Shrine Pilgrimage in Turkmenistan as a Means to Understand Islam among the Turkmen,” *Central Asia Monitor—Online Supplement*, 1 (1997), <http://www.uga.edu/islam/turkmen.html>

15 Muhsin S. Mahdi et al., “Islam,” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 15 August 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Islam>

16 BBC Religions, “Prophet Muhammad (570–632),” 7 August 2011, http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/islam/history/muhammad_1.shtml

17 MaryLee Knowlton, *Turkmenistan*, Cultures of the World (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Benchmark, 2006), 91.

18 Central Intelligence Agency, “Turkmenistan,” *The World Factbook*, 11 September 2019, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/tx.html>

19 William Mark Habeeb, *The Growth and Influence of Islam in the Nations of Asia and Central Asia: Turkmenistan* (Broomall, PA: Mason Crest Publishers, 2005), 75.

20 World Jewish Congress, “Turkmenistan,” April 2018, <https://www.worldjewishcongress.org/en/about/communities/TM>

21 United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, “USCIRF Annual Report 2019: Countries of Particular Concern: Turkmenistan,” 2019, https://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/Tier1_TURKMENISTAN_2019.pdf

Religion and Government

The constitution guarantees freedom of religion, but in practice, this freedom is not fully realized. Only Sunni Muslim and Russian Orthodox groups have been recognized. Religious groups must register with the government. Members of unregistered religions are not allowed to practice their faith in public, are forbidden to disseminate religious materials, and cannot recruit members.^{22, 23, 24}

Tight controls on religious instruction and institutions originate from the fear that religion will become politicized and threaten the government.²⁵ Fear of radical Islam has led to government support of the Turkmen version of Islam.²⁶ Officials have tried to encourage Sufi traditions and blend them with the government's ideas of national strength. President Niyazov, for example, reconstructed the mausoleum complex of Hoja Yusup Hamadani, a 12th-century Sufi scholar. The site is one of the nation's most important pilgrimage destinations.²⁷

In 2009, the government banned any Turkmen from making the *hajj* to Mecca and asked them to go instead to one of the nation's shrines—even paying for pilgrims' accommodations.^{28, 29} In 2010, the government again allowed pilgrims to make the hajj to Saudi Arabia. Yet, despite being given thousands of slots by the Saudi government, only 153 people reportedly made the trip in 2018, and 160 in 2019. Pilgrims travel on a special flight ordered by the president himself, and upon their return, they perform ceremonies in the Mosque of Spirituality in Kipchak, where they express gratitude to the president for his support of their pilgrimage.^{30, 31, 32}

Religion in Daily Life

Under Soviet rule, the focus of religious activity shifted from the mosque to the home. Although Islam is an integral part of their cultural heritage, few Turkmen are fully aware of the elements of their faith. Some Turkmen are non-believers who support religious revival only as a part of national revival. Despite the many impressive mosques that have been built since independence, most Turkmen do not regularly attend prayer services.^{33, 34, 35}

- 22 MaryLee Knowlton, *Turkmenistan*, Cultures of the World (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Benchmark, 2006), 89.
- 23 William Mark Habeeb, *The Growth and Influence of Islam in the Nations of Asia and Central Asia: Turkmenistan* (Broomall, PA: Mason Crest Publishers, 2005), 75.
- 24 United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, "USCIRF Annual Report 2019: Countries of Particular Concern: Turkmenistan," 2019, https://www.uscirtf.gov/sites/default/files/Tier1_TURKMENISTAN_2019.pdf
- 25 John Anderson, *Religious Liberty in Transitional Societies: The Politics of Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 158.
- 26 William Mark Habeeb, *The Growth and Influence of Islam in the Nations of Asia and Central Asia: Turkmenistan* (Broomall, PA: Mason Crest Publishers, 2005), 73–74.
- 27 American Foreign Policy Council, "Turkmenistan," *World Almanac of Islamism*, 21 September 2018, <http://almanac.afpc.org/Turkmenistan>
- 28 American Foreign Policy Council, "Turkmenistan," *World Almanac of Islamism*, 21 September 2018, <http://almanac.afpc.org/Turkmenistan>
- 29 Felix Corley, "Turkmenistan: Exit Bans, Haj Ban, Visa Denials Part of State Religious Isolation Policy," *Forum 18 News Service*, 2 February 2010, <http://wwwrn.org/articles/32575/?&place=russia-cis>
- 30 United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, "USCIRF Annual Report 2019: Countries of Particular Concern: Turkmenistan," 2019, https://www.uscirtf.gov/sites/default/files/Tier1_TURKMENISTAN_2019.pdf
- 31 State News Agency of Turkmenistan, "Pilgrims from Turkmenistan, Who Perform Hajj to Mecca And Medina, Return Back Home," 27 August 2018, <http://tdh.gov.tm/news/en/articles.aspx&article14265&cat30>
- 32 Embassy of Turkmenistan, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, "Turkmen pilgrims have made a hajj," 2019, <https://saudi.tmembassy.gov.tm/en/news/5067>
- 33 William Mark Habeeb, *The Growth and Influence of Islam in the Nations of Asia and Central Asia: Turkmenistan* (Broomall, PA: Mason Crest Publishers, 2005), 70–74.
- 34 U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, "Turkmenistan: International Religious Freedom Report 2010," 17 November 2010, <https://2009-2017.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2010/148807.htm>
- 35 American Foreign Policy Council, "Turkmenistan," *World Almanac of Islamism*, 21 September 2018, <http://almanac.afpc.org/Turkmenistan>

President Berdymukhamedov touts Turkmenistan's national heritage as Islamic and emphasizes religious freedoms gained following independence. Nevertheless, religious instruction may be offered only by state-approved instructors and in approved institutions, although some unofficial religious education takes place. Mosques can offer religious instruction only after school and for no more than four hours a week.^{36, 37, 38}

Religious Events and Holidays

Turkmen observe Ramadan, the Islamic month of fasting. During this time, they refrain from eating, smoking, or drinking from dawn to dusk. After dark, families, and friends get together to pray and celebrate the end of the day's fast.³⁹

There are two religious holidays celebrated by the Turkmen: Kurban Bayramy (also called Gurbanlyk) and Oaza Bayramy. Kurban Bayramy is a three-day holiday celebrated with the sacrifice of a sheep and preparation of traditional foods shared with friends and family. Equivalent to Eid al-Adha in other Muslim cultures, this holiday commemorates the willingness of Abraham to sacrifice his son. People also play on huge swings, especially built for this day, believing that they can cleanse their souls by sailing through the air.^{40, 41}

Oaza Bayramy corresponds to Eid al-Fitr in the Arabic-speaking world and marks the end of the fasting month of Ramadan. Beginning at midnight on this day, Turkmen dress in their finest clothes and go out to celebrate at parties and feasts with family and friends. Music and dance accompany celebrations.⁴² On this day, the president announces a decree of amnesty for those who repent of their crimes. In 2018, 611 people were pardoned.^{43, 44}

Will you be celebrating Gurbanlyk?

Soldier:	thiZ gurwanlik belleyangiZmi?	Will you be celebrating Gurbanlyk?
Local:	howa!	Yes!

Exchange 1

- 36 American Foreign Policy Council, "Turkmenistan," *World Almanac of Islamism*, 21 September 2018, <http://almanac.afpc.org/Turkmenistan>
- 37 William Mark Habeeb, *The Growth and Influence of Islam in the Nations of Asia and Central Asia: Turkmenistan* (Broomall, PA: Mason Crest Publishers, 2005), 73–75.
- 38 United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, "USCIRF Annual Report 2019: Countries of Particular Concern: Turkmenistan," 2019, https://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/Tier1_TURKMENISTAN_2019.pdf
- 39 William Mark Habeeb, *The Growth and Influence of Islam in the Nations of Asia and Central Asia: Turkmenistan* (Broomall, PA: Mason Crest Publishers, 2005), 94.
- 40 Q++Studio, "Upcoming Turkmenistan Public Holidays (September 2019–July 2020)," 2019, <https://www.qppstudio.net/public-holidays/turkmenistan.htm>
- 41 MaryLee Knowlton, *Turkmenistan*, Cultures of the World (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Benchmark, 2006), 123.
- 42 MaryLee Knowlton, *Turkmenistan*, Cultures of the World (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Benchmark, 2006), 123.
- 43 Marat Gurt and Robin Paxton, "Turkmenistan Frees Over 3,700 Prisoners in Amnesty," Reuters, 27 August 2011, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-turkmenistan-amnesty/turkmenistan-frees-over-3700-prisoners-in-amnesty-idUSTRE77Q0Q720110827>
- 44 Eurasia Net, "Turkmenistan's mommy issues," 12 June 2018, <https://eurasianet.org/turkmenistans-mommy-issues>

Places of Worship

Religious buildings for Turkmen Muslims include mosques, mausoleums, and shrines associated with venerated saints. The Kipchak Mosque is the most well-known mosque in Turkmenistan and the largest in Central Asia. It is also known as the Turkmenbashi Ruhy Mosque (meaning “the mosque of Turkmenbashi spirituality”) after President Niyazov. The mosque was built between 2002 and 2004 in Niyazov’s hometown at a cost of USD 100 million.⁴⁵ The mosque is surrounded by four minarets rising to 91 m (298 ft), symbolizing 1991, the year that Turkmenistan gained independence.⁴⁶

The Turkmenbashi Mausoleum, which stands near the Kipchak Mosque, is the burial place of President Niyazov, his mother, and his two brothers, who were killed in the 1948 earthquake. Opposite the mausoleum, there is a memorial complex for the victims of the 1948 earthquake. The image of the mosque appears on Turkmenistan’s banknotes.⁴⁷ Since there are passages from Niyazov’s moral guidebook chiseled in the mosque’s columns, many mainstream Muslims consider the building sacrilegious.⁴⁸

Other mosques include the Geokdepe Saparmurat Haji Mosque west of Ashgabat and the 15th-century Seyit Jemaletdin Mosque in Anau. The Kipchak and Geokdepe mosques are open to non-Muslims. Among the more notable shrines are the mausoleum of the 13th-century mystic Najmeddin Kubra, a destination for pilgrims and the holiest shrine in Kunya Urgench; the Mausoleum of Mane Baba in Mane, built in the 11th and 12th centuries; and the Mausoleum of Turabek-Khanym, the daughter of the Uzbek Khan, bringer of Islam to the area of Kunya-Urgench.⁴⁹

May I enter the mosque?

Soldier:	manga metjide girmek mUmkinmi?	May I enter the mosque?
Local:	howa	Yes.

Exchange 2

There are over 400 registered mosques in Turkmenistan, up from only four in 1987.⁵⁰ Yet while new mosques have been built since independence, many others have been demolished, often as part of the government’s grandiose urban renovation projects. In 2004, the government destroyed at least seven mosques, causing a climate of fear. By 2016, more than half of Ashgabat’s mosques had met this fate. Houses of worship belonging to other faiths, such as Seventh Day Adventists and Hare Krishnas, have also been destroyed in recent years.^{51, 52, 53}

45 MaryLee Knowlton, *Turkmenistan*, Cultures of the World (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Benchmark, 2006), 93.

46 Advantour, “Turkmenbashi Ruhy Mosque, Gypjak Village,” n.d., <https://www.advantour.com/turkmenistan/ashgabat/turkmenbashi-ruhy-mosque.htm>

47 Advantour, “Turkmenbashi Ruhy Mosque, Gypjak Village,” n.d., <https://www.advantour.com/turkmenistan/ashgabat/turkmenbashi-ruhy-mosque.htm>

48 Caravanistan, “Kipchak Mosque,” 27 March 2019, <https://caravanistan.com/turkmenistan/kipchak-mosque/>

49 Oriental Express Central Asia, “About Turkmenistan: Monumental Sites,” Orexca, 2011, http://turkmenistan.orexca.com/monumental_sites.shtml

50 American Foreign Policy Council, “Turkmenistan,” *World Almanac of Islamism*, 21 September 2018, <http://almanac.afpc.org/Turkmenistan>

51 MaryLee Knowlton, *Turkmenistan*, Cultures of the World (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Benchmark, 2006), 92.

52 Felix Corley, “More than Half Ashgabat’s Mosques Now Destroyed,” *Chronicles of Turkmenistan*, 15 April 2016, <https://en.hronikam.com/2016/04/more-than-half-ashgabads-mosques-now-destroyed/>

53 New Humanitarian, “Seven mosques destroyed in one year, activists say,” 5 January 2005, <http://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news/2005/01/05/seven-mosques-destroyed-one-year-activists-say>

Do I need to cover my head?

Soldier:	men bashimi ErtmElimi?	Do I need to cover my head?
Local:	howa	Yes.

Exchange 3

Behavior in Places of Worship

Non-Muslims may visit some places of worship in Turkmenistan. However, Muslim shrines, often found inside cemeteries, may be off limits to non-Muslim visitors. Those wanting to visit a mosque or shrine should inquire in advance if and when they can visit.⁵⁴

Must I take off my shoes inside the mosque?

Soldier:	men icherde kEwshUmi chikarmalimi?	Must I take off my shoes inside the mosque?
Local:	howa	Yes.

Exchange 4

When visiting a mosque, be sure to ask a local if there are any specific requirements. It is not acceptable to enter the mosque when others are conducting prayers. Once inside, as with most religious or sacred institutions, speak softly and respectfully, and do not disturb those at prayer.⁵⁵

When do you pray?

Soldier:	thiZ hachan namaZ okayarsingiZ?	When do you pray?
Local:	biZ gUnortan namaZ okoyari	We pray at noon.

Exchange 5

Modest clothing is recommended when visiting places of worship. For men, trousers and long-sleeve shirts are common; for women, long skirts and long-sleeve blouses with a head cover or scarf are recommended. Before entering a mosque, shoes should be removed, but not socks. Loud talking, laughing, eating, photographing, or smoking are not acceptable in places of worship. Walking in front of someone who is praying is not acceptable.^{56, 57}

54 Oriental Express Central Asia, "About Turkmenistan: Monumental Sites," OrexCA, 2011, http://turkmenistan.orexca.com/monumental_sites.shtml

55 Istanbul Trails, "Mosque Rules and Etiquette," June 2008, <http://www.istanbultrails.com/2008/06/mosque-rules-and-etiquette/>

56 Huda, "Etiquette Tips for Visiting a Mosque as a Non-Muslim," Learn Religions, 4 February 2018, <https://www.learnreligions.com/etiquette-of-visiting-a-mosque-2004463>

57 Istanbul Trails, "Mosque Rules and Etiquette," June 2008, <http://www.istanbultrails.com/2008/06/mosque-rules-and-etiquette/>

Turkmen Cultural Orientation

Chapter 2 | Religion, Assessment

Read the following statements and answer True or False

- | | | | |
|----|---|---------------------------------------|--|
| 1. | Islam is the official state religion of Turkmenistan. | <input checked="" type="radio"/> True | <input checked="" type="radio"/> False |
| 2. | The mosque is the focus of religious activity in Turkmenistan. | <input checked="" type="radio"/> True | <input checked="" type="radio"/> False |
| 3. | The Turkmenbashi Ruhy Mosque is the most important mosque in Turkmenistan. | <input checked="" type="radio"/> True | <input checked="" type="radio"/> False |
| 4. | Thousands of Turkmen pilgrims make the <i>hajj</i> to Mecca every year. | <input checked="" type="radio"/> True | <input checked="" type="radio"/> False |
| 5. | Hundreds of mosques have been built in Turkmenistan since independence in 1991. | <input checked="" type="radio"/> True | <input checked="" type="radio"/> False |

Turkmen Cultural Orientation

Chapter 2 | Religion, Assessment Answers

1. False:
The constitution of Turkmenistan identifies the country as a secular state, but the national heritage has been defined as Islamic.
2. False:
Despite the many impressive historical and recently built mosques, most Turkmen do not attend prayer services regularly. Some are nonbelievers who support religious revival only as part of a national revival.
3. True:
The main mosque of Turkmenistan—and largest in Central Asia—is the Kipchak Mosque, also called the Turkmenbashi Ruhy Mosque (“the mosque of Turkmenbashi spirituality,” named in honor of former President Niyazov). The mosque was completed in Niyazov’s hometown in 2004 at the cost of USD 100 million.
4. False:
Despite being given thousands of slots to make the hajj to the holy city of Mecca by the Saudi government, only 153 Turkmen made the trip to Mecca in 2018 and 160 in 2019.
5. True:
There are over 400 registered mosques in Turkmenistan, up from only 4 in 1987.

Chapter 3 | Traditions



The world's largest yurt, Mary
Wikimedia / Amustard

Introduction

Although home to several nomadic peoples, the land that is now Turkmenistan has been mostly a Turkmen nation since the eighth century CE. Throughout their history, Turkmen have endured by relying on clan and family foundations. Their sense of identity still comes from their historical tribal ties. These ancient tribal loyalties proved solid enough to withstand Soviet attempts to destroy them, and the commitment to family remains strong.^{1, 2}

Turkmen, like other Central Asian peoples, have a long tradition of hospitality. Guests and even strangers may be invited to share a meal with a family.³ The Turkmen are gracious, modest, and hospitable people who respect others. They value community and family before the individual.⁴

¹ Rafis Abazov, *Culture and Customs of the Central Asian Republics* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2007), 14–15.

² William Mark Habeeb, *The Growth and Influence of Islam in the Nations of Asia and Central Asia: Turkmenistan* (Broomall, PA: Mason Crest Publishers, 2005), 77, 80–81.

³ Rafis Abazov, *Culture and Customs of the Central Asian Republics* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2007), 247.

⁴ Culture Grams Online Edition, "Turkmenistan," 2011.

Formulaic Codes of Politeness

Turkmen are deferential toward seniors, value hospitality, and place importance on honest and sincere generosity. It is considered rude to attempt to assist, argue with, or otherwise show disrespect toward seniors. Family dynamics are important and respected by each of the family members. Since the fall of the Soviet Union, Turkmen have sought ways to re-implement other traditions and customs that were suppressed during Soviet rule, such as the emphasis on horses and horsemanship.⁵

Turkmen may be cautious when communicating with foreigners for the first time. Local police are alert to and suspicious of contacts between strangers and locals.⁶ Government officials need permission before agreeing to meet with foreign nationals, even those who represent foreign companies.⁷

Good morning.

Soldier:	ertiringiZ hayirli bolthun	Good morning.
Local:	ertiringiZ hayirli bolthun	Good morning.

Exchange 6

Good afternoon.

Soldier:	EylaningiZ hayirli bolthun	Good afternoon.
Local:	EylaningiZ hayirli bolthun	Good afternoon.

Exchange 7

When meeting, males generally shake hands and say, “*Asalaam aleikum*.” Women usually shake hands with other women but not with men.⁸ Direct eye contact is expected, but men should avoid prolonged eye contact with women lest it be mistaken for inappropriate advances or attention.⁹

Good evening!

Soldier:	gich yagshil	Good evening!
Local:	gich yagshil	Good evening!

Exchange 8

A woman may politely acknowledge a social greeting from a male with a nod, but she will never initiate a greeting or handshake with a male outside of her family. Foreign males should never greet or make overtures to Turkmen women.¹⁰

5 Jeffrey Hays, “Turkmen Character and Customs,” *Facts and Details*, April 2016, http://factsanddetails.com/central-asia/Turkmenistan/sub8_7b/entry-4815.html

6 Paul Brummell, *Turkmenistan: The Bradt Travel Guide* (Guilford, CT: The Globe Pequot Press Inc., 2005), 59.

7 Paul Brummell, *Turkmenistan: The Bradt Travel Guide* (Guilford, CT: The Globe Pequot Press Inc., 2005), 56.

8 Culture Crossing, “Turkmenistan: Greetings,” 2017, http://guide.culturecrossing.net/basics_business_student_details.php?Id=7&CID=209

9 Culture Crossing, “Turkmenistan: Eye Contact,” 2017, http://guide.culturecrossing.net/basics_business_student_details.php?Id=10&CID=209

10 Culture Crossing, “Turkmenistan: Greetings,” 2017, http://guide.culturecrossing.net/basics_business_student_details.php?Id=7&CID=209

Good night!

Soldier:	gijangiZ rahat bolthun!	Good night!
Local:	gijangiZ rahat bolthun!	Good night!

Exchange 9

How are you?

Soldier:	yaghdylaringiZ nahili?	How are you?
Local:	gowi, gati gowi	Fine, very well.

Exchange 10

In the aftermath of the Soviet era, Turkmen were quick to drop the use of *yoldash*, or comrade, when addressing each other. In formal and official situations, it is customary to address a man as *jenap*, meaning “mister,” followed by his surname (e.g., Jenap Rejepow).¹¹

Hi, Mr. Rejepow.

Soldier:	thalam jenap rejepov	Hi, Mr. Rejepow.
Local:	thalam!	Hello!
Soldier:	gowumi yaghdylaringiZ?	Are you doing well?
Local:	howa	Yes.

Exchange 11

It is acceptable to refer to a woman as *khanyim* or “madam” (e.g., Khanyim Rejepow). In less formal social settings, visitors will hear younger people referring to older and senior people as *yashuly*, meaning “respected one.” Occasionally, elders address younger or junior members as *jigi*, or in some dialects as *ini*.¹²

Hospitality and Gift Giving

Despite their initially cautious attitude toward strangers, Turkmen are hospitable people who believe that guests should be warmly received. Turning away, a guest is shameful, even if they arrive unannounced.¹³ It is customary to remove one’s shoes at the door before entering a house.^{14, 15}

How is your family?

Soldier:	mashgalangyZ gowumi?	How is your family?
Local:	olaram gowi, kEp thagh bolung	They are doing fine, thank you.

Exchange 12

11 Rafis Abazov, *Historical Dictionary of Turkmenistan* (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, 2005), xvi–xvii.

12 Rafis Abazov, *Historical Dictionary of Turkmenistan* (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, 2005), xvi–xvii.

13 Culture Grams Online Edition, “Turkmenistan: Visiting,” 2011.

14 iExplore, “Turkmenistan—Travel Tips,” n.d., <https://www.iexplore.com/articles/travel-guides/middle-east/turkmenistan/travel-tips>

15 Kalpak Travel, “Packing List for Central Asia,” 23 November 2016, <https://kalpak-travel.com/blog/packing-list-central-asia/>

If invited to a home, it is customary to bring a gift.¹⁶ Turkmen do not usually open gifts in public, so your gift may remain unopened in your presence. It is appropriate to wrap gifts and ensure they are not too expensive. Chocolates or other sweets are popular gifts.¹⁷ Food made from wheat is also appreciated because wheat represents the source of life. Flowers are always acceptable, but it is customary to ensure there is an odd number of them as even numbers are used exclusively in funerals.¹⁸ Alcohol is not advisable since Turkmen are Muslim, but any gifts from a home country are enthusiastically received.¹⁹

This gift is for you.

Soldier: bu thiZe thowghat

This gift is for you.

Local: men oni kawul edip biljek dal

I cannot accept this.

Exchange 13

Eating Customs and Food

When dining, Turkmen usually sit on the floor, and food is spread on a cloth called a *sachak*.²⁰ Guests should be particularly careful not to step on this cloth because it is considered sacred.²¹ According to Islamic tradition, only the right hand is used for eating. Although some may eat with their hands, other Turkmen use utensils. Utensils should also be used only with the right hand.²²

Turkmen eat *chorek* (bread) at every meal. Never cut bread with a knife or tear it with only one hand because *chorek* represents the source of life. Break bread with two hands and eat every piece.²³ It is taboo to place *chorek* on the ground or to put it face down.²⁴

In some rural regions, Turkmen eat on a low circular wooden table around which cushions are arranged for guests. Because people use their hands to eat and passing food by hand is appropriate table etiquette, guests will have the opportunity to wash their hands prior to the meal. There will usually be a wash basin near the dining area or, in rural settings, at a tap outside. Food such as bread, meat, or fruit is always passed around the table with the right hand. The left hand is considered unclean, and food passed with the left hand is deemed to be defiled. When a meal is finished, guests are once again expected to wash their hands before coffee or tea is served.²⁵ In some regions of the country, Turkmen do not eat on the street, as eating in public may be regarded as strange behavior by locals.²⁶

16 Bradley Mayhew et al., *Central Asia: Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan* (Oakland, CA: Lonely Planet Publications, 2007), 87.

17 Culture Crossing, "Turkmenistan: Gift Giving," 2017, http://guide.culturecrossing.net/basics_business_student_details.php?id=23&CID=209

18 Culture Grams Online Edition, "Turkmenistan: Visiting," 2011.

19 Paul Brummell, *Turkmenistan: The Bradt Travel Guide* (Guilford, CT: The Globe Pequot Press Inc., 2005), 58.

20 Culture Grams Online Edition, "Turkmenistan: Eating," 2011.

21 Advantour, "Turkmen National Traditions," n.d., <https://www.advantour.com/turkmenistan/traditions.htm>

22 Culture Grams Online Edition, "Turkmenistan: Eating," 2011.

23 Culture Grams Online Edition, "Turkmenistan: Eating," 2011.

24 Bradley Mayhew et al., *Central Asia: Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan* (Oakland, CA: Lonely Planet Publications, 2007), 87.

25 Bradley Mayhew et al., *Central Asia: Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan* (Oakland, CA: Lonely Planet Publications, 2007), 87–88.

26 Culture Crossing, "Turkmenistan: Taboos," 2017, http://guide.culturecrossing.net/basics_business_student_details.php?id=14&CID=209

I really appreciate your hospitality.

Soldier:	thiZing mihmanthEyerlighingiZe Eran minetdar	I really appreciate your hospitality.
Local:	ol high	It is nothing.

Exchange 14

Types of Food

According to tradition, guests should be served more food than they can eat. Large arrays of salads, fruit, bread, sausages, meat, and chicken dishes, and sweets are offered.²⁷

This food is very good.

Soldier:	bu nahar Eran gowi	This food is very good.
Local:	bu palou	It's palow.

Exchange 15

Frequently, the first course will be a *chorba*, a rich meat and vegetable soup.²⁸ This may be followed by a thick stew made from meat (often mutton) and onions called *dograma*.²⁹

What ingredients are used to make dograma?

Soldier:	doghramaning ichinde nameler bar?	What ingredients are used to make dograma?
Local:	chErEk, et, thoghan we chorba	Bread, meat, onion, and soup.

Exchange 16

The highlights of any meal are the main courses, such as *manty* (large ravioli-like dumplings stuffed with ground meat and onion), *shashlik* (grilled, spicy kebabs of meat or fish), or the Central Asian rice favorite, *plov* (*palow*), a mix of rice and meat.^{30, 31}

What is the name of this dish?

Soldier:	bu naharing adi name?	What is the name of this dish?
Local:	bu manti	This is manty.

Exchange 17

Although Muslims are prohibited from consuming alcohol, homemade vodka, called Beyik Turkmenbashi Sovgad (Gift of the Great Turkmenbashi), is a popular drink. While much of the cult of former president Niyazov is gone, the vodka named after him is still popular. Despite its steep price, Turkmen may share a communal bottle with foreign visitors.³²

²⁷ Paul Brummell, *Turkmenistan: The Bradt Travel Guide* (Guilford, CT: The Globe Pequot Press, Inc., 2005), 59.

²⁸ Oriental Express Central Asia, "Cuisine of Turkmenistan," n.d., http://www.turkmenistan.orexca.com/cuisine_turkmenistan.shtml

²⁹ Donna Goldstein, "Turkmenistan on a Plate," Saudi Aramco World, January/February 2006, <http://www.saudiaramcoworld.com/issue/200601/turkmenistan.on.a.plate.htm>

³⁰ Bradley Mayhew et al., *Central Asia: Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan* (Oakland, CA: Lonely Planet Publications, 2007), 83.

³¹ Culture Grams Online Edition, "Turkmenistan: Diet," 2011.

³² Qishloq Ovozi, "Keeping People's Spirits Up -- A Shot of Turkmenbashi or the Kyrgyz Hose," Radio Free Europe, 28 April 2014, <https://www.rferl.org/a/qishloq-ovozi-turkmenistan-kyrgyzstan-vodka-alcohol/25365770.html>

The food tastes so good.

Soldier:	naharing taghami Eran thUji	The food tastes so good.
Local:	thag bolung	Thank you.

Exchange 18

Dress Code

Turkmen can be conservative when it comes to dress. They consider it inappropriate for men or women to wear shorts. Women should wear long dresses or skirts and cover their arms.³³

How should I dress?

Soldier:	men name geymeli?	How should I dress?
Local:	enamingiZi doli yapyan rahat eshik geying	Wear loose fitting clothes that cover your body.

Exchange 19

Traditional dress is often worn daily, not just for tourists or during festivals. Women commonly wear a long dress, called a *koynek*, with embroidery around the neck. Pants called *balak* are typically worn under the *koynek*. Only the bottom border of the *balak* is visible under the *koynek*. Men wear loose blue-colored trousers and a white shirt. A heavy silk jacket with red and gold stripes serves as outerwear.^{34, 35}

Is this acceptable to wear?

Soldier:	shu geyinshim bolyami?	Is this acceptable to wear?
Local:	howa	Yes.

Exchange 20

Women style their hair away from the face, under a scarf or in braids. Headgear worn on special occasions can be elaborate, and its adornments often represent a family's wealth. Men wear soft wool hats called *telpek* or *borek*, which indicate the tribe of the wearer.^{36, 37}

In the home, Turkmen wear knitted slippers or socks called *joraps*. The *joraps* can be made of wool, cotton, or silk; their geometric or floral designs vary by region.^{38, 39} Many younger Turkmen prefer Western dress, but there has been some societal pressure to return to traditional dress as some consider Western clothing inappropriate. Often, they wear traditional-style and Western-style clothing together.^{40, 41}

33 Eurasia Travel, "Turkmenistan: Dress Code," n.d., http://eurasia.travel/turkmenistan/traditions/dress_code/

34 Eurasia Travel, "Turkmenistan: Dress Code," n.d., http://eurasia.travel/turkmenistan/traditions/dress_code/

35 MaryLee Knowlton, *Turkmenistan*, Cultures of the World (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Benchmark, 2006), 74–75.

36 Bradley Mayhew et al., *Central Asia: Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan* (Oakland, CA: Lonely Planet Publications, 2007), 60–61.

37 Eurasia Travel, "Turkmenistan: Dress Code," n.d., http://eurasia.travel/turkmenistan/traditions/dress_code/

38 Eurasia Travel, "Turkmenistan: Dress Code," n.d., http://eurasia.travel/turkmenistan/traditions/dress_code/

39 MaryLee Knowlton, *Turkmenistan*, Cultures of the World (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Benchmark, 2006), 75–76.

40 Eurasia Travel, "Turkmenistan: Dress Code," n.d., http://eurasia.travel/turkmenistan/traditions/dress_code/

41 Jeffrey Hays, "Clothes in Turkmenistan," *Facts and Details*, April 2016, http://factsanddetails.com/central-asia/Turkmenistan/sub8_7b/entry-4823.html

Non-Religious Holidays

New Year's Day

The first national holiday is 1 January, New Year's Day. New Year's Eve is arguably the most popular holiday in the nation. For a week prior, people attend special concerts and go to circuses, ballets, and other celebrations. On New Year's Eve, families gather for meals, and, at midnight, people flock to the streets, drinking champagne and shouting slogans to welcome the new year. Decorated fir trees fill homes, and children receive presents on New Year's morning.⁴²

Nowruz

An ancient Persian spring festival, Nowruz is celebrated in Turkmenistan on 21–22 March. It is the most ancient of Central Asian festivals and a time for festive meals, music, and regional fairs. It is essential to have a good Nowruz celebration because it is believed that this holiday sets the tone for the rest of the year. People buy or make new clothes, and families devote much effort and expense in preparation for it. In many parts of the country, yurts are set up in the main squares or parks as temporary shops and eateries. Horse races and rooster fights are frequent events during this holiday.^{43, 44, 45}

Victory Day

Victory Day, 9 May, was instituted by the Soviets following World War II.^{46, 47} It memorializes those killed in the fight against the Nazis. It also is a time to commemorate those who died in all conflicts. The day is filled with commemoration events and parades. It is common for multiple generations to gather for large dinners, sometimes at restaurants rather than at home.⁴⁸

Independence Day

Although formal independence came after the fall of the Soviet Union and the ratification of the constitution, 27 October 1991 is remembered as the day when Turkmenistan declared itself a republic.^{49, 50} Independence Day celebrations are large and elaborate affairs with parades, speeches, concerts, and fireworks.⁵¹

42 Rafis Abazov, *Culture and Customs of the Central Asian Republics* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2007), 240–241.

43 Q++Studio, "Upcoming Turkmenistan Public Holidays (September 2019–July 2020)," 2019, <https://www.qppstudio.net/public-holidays/turkmenistan.htm>

44 Rafis Abazov, *Culture and Customs of the Central Asian Republics* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2007), 238–239.

45 Eurasia Travel, "Celebrating Nowruz in Turkmenistan," n.d., http://eurasia.travel/turkmenistan/traditions/celebrating_nowruz_in_turkmenistan/

46 Q++Studio, "Upcoming Turkmenistan Public Holidays (September 2019–July 2020)," 2019, <https://www.qppstudio.net/public-holidays/turkmenistan.htm>

47 A Global World, "Turkmenistan Celebrates Victory Day," n.d., <http://aglobalworld.com/holidays-around-the-world/turkmenistan-victory-day/>

48 Rafis Abazov, *Culture and Customs of the Central Asian Republics* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2007), 241–242.

49 MaryLee Knowlton, *Turkmenistan, Cultures of the World* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Benchmark, 2006), 121–122.

50 Q++Studio, "Upcoming Turkmenistan Public Holidays (September 2019–July 2020)," 2019, <https://www.qppstudio.net/public-holidays/turkmenistan.htm>

51 Rafis Abazov, *Culture and Customs of the Central Asian Republics* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2007), 240.

Neutrality Day

The last official holiday of the year, Neutrality Day, is held on 12 December and reaffirms Turkmenistan's decision to remain neutral in regional and global conflicts. The United Nations officially recognized this status in 1995.^{52, 53, 54}

Other Holidays

There are several other holidays celebrated throughout the country: On Memorial Day, held on 12 January, the nation observes a day of solemnity. Flag Day, on 19 February, is a day for parades and nationalistic speeches by politicians. The 8th of March is International Women's Day when the country pays tribute to women.^{55, 56, 57}

Constitution Day—sometimes referred to as Revival and Unity Day—is held on 18 May. This holiday honors the ratification of the post-independence constitution in 1992. Earthquake Remembrance Day, 6 October, is a time to remember the victims of the disastrous 1948 earthquake in Ashgabat. Families also use this time to honor relatives by visiting gravesites or going to mosques to pray for the victims of wars.⁵⁸

Finally, some celebrations are not official holidays but are nevertheless important to the nation. Recognizing the cultural importance of the carpet, Turkmen Carpet Day is celebrated on the last Sunday in May. The third Sunday of July is the Galla Bayramy Festival, or Wheat Harvest Day, introduced during the Soviet era to recognize record wheat production.^{59, 60} Melon Day is a farm festival celebrated on the second Sunday in August. Although it is still celebrated, it has become less popular since the death of President Niyazov.^{61, 62}

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- 52 United Nations, "International Day of Neutrality 12 December," 2017, <https://www.un.org/en/events/neutralityday/background.shtml>
- 53 Q++Studio, "Upcoming Turkmenistan Public Holidays (September 2019–July 2020)," 2019, <https://www.qppstudio.net/public-holidays/turkmenistan.htm>
- 54 MaryLee Knowlton, *Turkmenistan*, Cultures of the World (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Benchmark, 2006), 121–122.
- 55 Flags of the World, "Turkmenistan," 24 May 2015, <https://fotw.info/flags/tm.html#1992>
- 56 Q++Studio, "Upcoming Turkmenistan Public Holidays (September 2019–July 2020)," 2019, <https://www.qppstudio.net/public-holidays/turkmenistan.htm>
- 57 MaryLee Knowlton, *Turkmenistan*, Cultures of the World (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Benchmark, 2006), 121–122.
- 58 Q++Studio, "Upcoming Turkmenistan Public Holidays (September 2019–July 2020)," 2019, <https://www.qppstudio.net/public-holidays/turkmenistan.htm>
- 59 Paul Brummell, *Turkmenistan: The Bradt Travel Guide* (Guilford, CT: Globe Pequot Press, Inc., 2005), 50.
- 60 Open Central Asia, "Turkmenistan Celebrated Harvest Festival—Galla Bayramy," 20 July 2010, <http://www.ocamagazine.com/turkmenistan-celebrated-harvest-festival-galla-bayramy>
- 61 Q++Studio, "Upcoming Turkmenistan Public Holidays (September 2019–July 2020)," 2019, <https://www.qppstudio.net/public-holidays/turkmenistan.htm>
- 62 MaryLee Knowlton, *Turkmenistan*, Cultures of the World (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Benchmark, 2006), 121–122.

Dos and Don'ts

Do

- **Do** remove your shoes when entering a mosque, a holy site, or a private home. Shoes are considered dirty, and wearing them inside the mosque will require that the area be washed.
- **Do** bring a small gift when invited to a Turkmen home. It demonstrates appreciation and shows that you are gracious.
- **Do** praise the quality of the food. It is a compliment to the host and to those who made the food.

Don't

- **Don't** walk in front of a person who is praying, as it invalidates their prayer.
- **Don't** sit next to a member of the opposite sex in a public place unless they are your spouse or child. Doing so implies intimacy between the two parties.
- **Don't** point a finger at anyone. It is an accusatory gesture.

Turkmen Cultural Orientation

Chapter 3 | Traditions, Assessment

Read the following statements and answer True or False

- | | | | |
|----|---|--|---|
| 1. | Elderly Turkmen greet one another with <i>yoldash</i> (comrade), a habit acquired during the Communist era. | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> True | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> False |
| 2. | Turkmen do not wear shoes inside homes or mosques. | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> True | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> False |
| 3. | Alcohol is banned in Turkmenistan. | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> True | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> False |
| 4. | Turkmen treat bread with deep respect. | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> True | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> False |
| 5. | Turkmen do not celebrate the New Year on 1 January because it is not a Muslim holiday. | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> True | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> False |

Turkmen Cultural Orientation

Chapter 3 | Traditions, Assessment Answers

1. False:
In the aftermath of the Soviet era, Turkmen discarded the use of the *yoldash* greeting in favor of traditional greetings that predate Soviet rule.
2. True:
Shoes are considered dirty and soiling for floors. It is customary to remove shoes at the door before entering a house or mosque.
3. False:
Although Muslims do not drink alcohol, homemade vodka called Beyik Turkmenbashi Sovgad (The Gift of the Great Turkmenbashi) is a popular drink. Turkmen enjoy sharing a bottle of this drink even with foreigners.
4. True:
It is taboo to place bread (*chorek*) on the ground. Bread is never cut with a knife or torn with only one hand. Instead, it is typically broken into pieces with two hands, and every piece has to be eaten.
5. False:
The first national holiday is 1 January, New Year's Day. New Year's Eve is arguably the most popular holiday in the nation. For the week prior, people attend special concerts and go to circuses, ballets, and other celebrations.

Chapter 4 | Urban Life



Neutrality Road in Ashgabat
Wikimedia / Christian Tørrissen

Introduction

Approximately half of Turkmenistan's population lives in and around the capital Ashgabat, continuing an urban legacy that began during the Soviet era.¹ Today, Turkmenistan's urban development is affected by the authorities' desire to project an image of prosperity, competence, and modernity for the country at the expense of reality. Impressive government investments in urban renovation, medical facilities, education reform, and transportation infrastructure are viewed by many as attempts to shift focus away from persistent problems like unemployment, water shortages, and severely underperforming medical and educational systems. Government officials routinely withhold or manipulate statistics and data, and harass, restrict, or censor the population to maintain the official narrative.^{2, 3, 4, 5}

- 1 Central Intelligence Agency, "Turkmenistan," *The World Factbook*, 11 September 2019, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/tx.html>
- 2 Bradley Jardine, "Turkmenistan's Water Insecurity Is a Man-Made Problem," *Diplomat*, 14 July 2015, <https://thediplomat.com/2015/07/turkmenistans-water-insecurity-is-a-man-made-problem/>
- 3 Jeffrey Hays, "Health and Health Care in Turkmenistan," *Facts and Details*, April 2016, http://factsanddetails.com/central-asia/Turkmenistan/sub8_7d/entry-4835.html
- 4 Eurasianet, "Will Turkmenistan's Education Reform Work?" 5 March 2013, <https://eurasianet.org/will-turkmenistans-education-reform-work>
- 5 Overseas Security Advisory Council, Bureau of Diplomatic Security, U.S. Department of State, "Turkmenistan 2019 Crime & Safety Report," 3 June 2019, <https://www.osac.gov/Country/Turkmenistan/Content/Detail/Report/8ee07088-e206-4092-9782-15f4aed3ca7c>

Urban Challenges

A major problem facing the country is rampant unemployment. Although official statistics place the unemployment rate at 3–4%, foreign analysts and independent media surveys suggest that 50–60% of all Turkmen are unemployed, a figure that holds true even for Ashgabat’s workforce. Despite government proclamations of support and cooperation toward the business community, dozens of small businesses closed down in Ashgabat in 2019.^{6, 7, 8}

May I use your phone?

Soldier:	thiZing telefoningiZi ulanmak mUmkinmi?	May I use your phone?
Local:	howa	Sure.

Exchange 21

Ashgabat and other cities suffer from routine clean water shortages, and residents are forced to stand in line to fill water buckets. The shortages can be dangerous, especially during recent record summer heat. In the summer of 2019, the port city of Turkmenbashi experienced days of unexplained tap water shortages, leading to a near doubling in price of bottled water. Turkmenistan ranks as the world’s ninth-most water insecure country.^{9, 10}

Despite the water shortages, the government has embarked on massive greening projects—such as park developments and campaigns to plant millions of trees—that require large amounts of water through irrigation, sprinkler systems, or water trucks. The country’s existing vegetation is dying at a rapid rate, even as government officials hold stage-managed tree planting ceremonies. Ashgabat’s city planners have also diverted precious water from the Amy Darya River to supply the city’s many public fountains.^{11, 12}

As President Berdymukhamedov remakes Ashgabat into a gleaming showcase for his regime, many of the city’s traditional homes and neighborhoods are being demolished to make way for ostentatious highways, monuments, and high-rises. Thousands of people have lost their homes, and many report that they have not received either compensation or alternative housing; attempts to bring these grievances to the authorities have been met with harassment and intimidation.^{13, 14}

- 6 Orient, Media—Turkmen News Agency, “In 2018, the unemployment rate in Turkmenistan was the lowest,” 23 January 2019, <https://orient.tm/en/in-2018-the-unemployment-rate-in-turkmenistan-was-the-lowest/>
- 7 *Economist*, “Turkmenistan finds a novel solution to mass emigration,” 5 July 2018, <https://www.economist.com/asia/2018/07/05/turkmenistan-finds-a-novel-solution-to-mass-emigration>
- 8 Chronicles of Turkmenistan, “Turkmenistan fears the growth of terrorism due to high unemployment rate,” 25 June 2019, <https://en.hronikatm.com/2019/06/turkmenistan-fears-the-growth-of-terrorism-due-to-high-unemployment-rate/>
- 9 Bradley Jardine, “Turkmenistan’s Water Insecurity Is a Man-Made Problem,” *Diplomat*, 14 July 2015, <https://thediplomat.com/2015/07/turkmenistans-water-insecurity-is-a-man-made-problem/>
- 10 Eurasianet, “Turkmenistan: Tiger, tiger, burning dimly,” 27 August 2019, <https://eurasianet.org/turkmenistan-tiger-tiger-burning-dimly>
- 11 Bradley Jardine, “Turkmenistan’s Water Insecurity Is a Man-Made Problem,” *Diplomat*, 14 July 2015, <https://thediplomat.com/2015/07/turkmenistans-water-insecurity-is-a-man-made-problem/>
- 12 Eurasianet, “Turkmenistan Attempts Quixotic Greening of the Desert,” 12 March 2013, <https://eurasianet.org/turkmenistan-attempts-quixotic-greening-of-the-desert>
- 13 Human Rights Watch, World Report 2018, “Turkmenistan, Events of 2017,” 2018, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2018/country-chapters/turkmenistan>
- 14 Farangis Najibullah, “Turkmen Starting to Complain in Greater Numbers,” Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty, 23 April 2014, <https://www.rferl.org/a/turkmenistan-complaints-government-azatlyk/25359749.html>

Urban Healthcare

In 2015, Turkmenistan spent 6.3% of GDP on healthcare.¹⁵ The country has the highest infant mortality rate and the lowest life expectancy in Central Asia. Major causes of death are cardiovascular disease, cancer, and respiratory disease. The primary health hazards are poor diet, polluted drinking water, and industrial and agricultural pollutants, especially near the Amu Darya River and the disappearing Aral Sea. Hepatitis A and typhoid are widespread, and tuberculosis poses a significant challenge.^{16, 17, 18}

Is Dr. Saparow in, sir?

Soldier:	doghtor saparov barmi?	Is Dr. Saparow in, sir?
Local:	yok	No.

Exchange 22

Post-independence healthcare in Turkmenistan has been controversial. In 2004, President Niyazov ordered all hospitals outside Ashgabat to be closed and 15,000 trained doctors and healthcare professionals to be fired. They were replaced by military medical personnel who faced allegations that they were not adequately trained. In Niyazov's judgment, people needing medical care could make the journey to Ashgabat.¹⁹

Is there a hospital nearby?

Soldier:	golayda kethelhana barmi?	Is there a hospital nearby?
Local:	howa, shahering merkeZinde bar	Yes, in the center of town.

Exchange 23

Upon his rise to power in 2006, President Berdymukhamedov, a dentist and former health minister, reopened the shuttered medical facilities and started an ambitious program to modernize and improve healthcare in the country. Tens of millions of dollars have been invested in gleaming new medical and physical fitness facilities—most of them in Ashgabat—replete with state-of-the-art equipment. Yet despite the impressive buildings, the health system remains ineffectual, because most medical personnel are poorly trained and perceived as incompetent.²⁰

^{21, 22, 23} Independent media have documented instances of disastrous misdiagnoses of patients.²⁴

- 15 Central Intelligence Agency, "Turkmenistan," *The World Factbook*, 11 September 2019, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/tx.html>
- 16 World Health Organization, Regional Office for Europe, "Turkmenistan to speed up collaboration with WHO to strengthen health system," 26 May 2016, <http://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/Health-systems/health-workforce/news/news/2016/05/turkmenistan-to-speed-up-collaboration-with-who-to-strengthen-health-system>
- 17 Jeffrey Hays, "Health and Health Care in Turkmenistan," Facts and Details, April 2016, http://factsanddetails.com/central-asia/Turkmenistan/sub8_7d/entry-4835.html
- 18 Gov.uk, "Foreign travel advice, Turkmenistan," n.d., <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/turkmenistan/health>
- 19 Farangis Najibullah, "Real State of Turkmen Medical Care a Far Cry from Official Images," Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty, 6 April 2014, <https://www.rferl.org/a/turkmenistan-health-care-shortcomings/25322982.html>
- 20 Farangis Najibullah, "Real State of Turkmen Medical Care a Far Cry from Official Images," Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty, 6 April 2014, <https://www.rferl.org/a/turkmenistan-health-care-shortcomings/25322982.html>
- 21 AP Companies, "Health care system in Turkmenistan," n.d., <https://www.ap-companies.com/services/ekspatam/turkmenistan/>
- 22 Atajan Nepesov, "Central Asia news: Turkmenistan healthcare in coma," Ferghana News, 26 September 2017, <https://enews.fergananews.com/articles/3042>
- 23 Gov.uk, "Foreign travel advice, Turkmenistan," n.d., <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/turkmenistan/health>
- 24 Jeffrey Hays, "Health and Health Care in Turkmenistan," Facts and Details, April 2016, http://factsanddetails.com/central-asia/Turkmenistan/sub8_7d/entry-4835.html

Do you know what is wrong?

Soldier: name boZulandighini bilyangiZmi?

Do you know what is wrong?

Local: yok

No.

Exchange 24

Healthcare is ostensibly free and universally available under the state insurance system. In reality, however, the system is severely underfunded, and many medications and materials are in short supply. In order to actually receive care, patients must often pay for everything out of pocket. Doctors have been accused of creating artificial queues so that patients must pay bribes for “expedited” service. Medical care has proven to be a significant financial burden for many Turkmen; some with serious illnesses have had to sell their homes or cars to afford treatment.^{25, 26}

The government’s approach toward healthcare implementation has been fraught with accusations of mishandling, as they have faced allegations that international medical protocols and standards are followed only on paper. Available health data and statistics are unreliable as their authenticity is called into question.^{27, 28}

Many Turkmen, especially those who could afford it, have sought medical treatment abroad, especially in Iran, India, Russia, and Turkey. The government, in an attempt to protect its image, is doing all it can to prevent citizens from engaging in medical tourism, including requiring time-consuming paperwork and instructing border guards to keep patients from leaving the country.^{29, 30}

Urban Education

Under President Niyazov, education in Turkmenistan suffered severe setbacks. Turkmen replaced Russian as the only language of instruction, even though there are four primary languages spoken in the country. Compulsory schooling was reduced to nine years, and many universities were shut down. Textbooks in all schools were replaced with the *Ruknama*, Niyazov’s book of moral principles, and propaganda. Niyazov’s measures are believed to have caused considerable harm to the country’s intellectual potential.^{31, 32, 33}

In 2013, the education ministry introduced wide-ranging reforms to bring Turkmenistan’s education system in line with Western standards. Mandatory schooling was expanded from 9 to 12 years. The new curriculum focused on traditional subjects like science, math, history, Turkmen, and foreign languages, as well as Turkmen culture,

- 25 Farangis Najibullah, “Real State of Turkmen Medical Care a Far Cry from Official Images,” Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty, 6 April 2014, <https://www.rferl.org/a/turkmenistan-health-care-shortcomings/25322982.html>
- 26 AP Companies, “Health care system in Turkmenistan,” n.d., <https://www.ap-companies.com/services/ekspatam/turkmenistan/>
- 27 Jeffrey Hays, “Health and Health Care in Turkmenistan,” Facts and Details, April 2016, http://factsanddetails.com/central-asia/Turkmenistan/sub8_7d/entry-4835.html
- 28 Atajan Nepesov, “Central Asia news: Turkmenistan healthcare in coma,” Ferghana News, 26 September 2017, <https://enews.ferghananews.com/articles/3042>
- 29 Farangis Najibullah, “Real State of Turkmen Medical Care a Far Cry from Official Images,” Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty, 6 April 2014, <https://www.rferl.org/a/turkmenistan-health-care-shortcomings/25322982.html>
- 30 Atajan Nepesov, “Central Asia news: Turkmenistan healthcare in coma,” Ferghana News, 26 September 2017, <https://enews.ferghananews.com/articles/3042>
- 31 Eurasianet, “Will Turkmenistan’s Education Reform Work?” 5 March 2013, <https://eurasianet.org/will-turkmenistans-education-reform-work>
- 32 Borgen Project, Blog—Latest News, “8 Facts about Education in Turkmenistan,” 16 July 2019, <https://borgenproject.org/8-facts-about-education-in-turkmenistan/>
- 33 Weebly, “Turkmenistan Education,” n.d., <http://turkmenistaneducation.weebly.com/>

economics, environmental studies, and information technology. Classes began to be taught in Russian and English in addition to Turkmen, and steps were taken to accommodate children with disabilities.^{34, 35, 36}

The academic year lasts from September through May. Primary school begins at age six and lasts four years. Lower secondary school lasts six years, and upper secondary lasts two years. In 2015, the literacy rate stood at 99.7%. In 2012, the government spent 3% of GDP on education.^{37, 38, 39}

Despite recent reforms, the quality of education in Turkmenistan is still woefully lacking. Much of instruction time is taken up by mandatory attendance of patriotic and political rallies and events celebrating national holidays. Intensive teaching schedules and a lack of educational resources have led to a severe shortage of qualified teachers.^{40, 41, 42, 43}

Turkmenistan's higher education system does not meet the country's needs. There are 24 higher learning institutions, all state run. The system suffers from a shortage of faculty and can only accommodate about 10% of high school graduates. Students gain college admission through a highly competitive entrance exam, but also through personal connections and widespread bribery. University curricula are tightly controlled and in line with state ideology.^{44, 45, 46} Research on politically sensitive topics is limited.⁴⁷ In 2019, Turkmenistan announced it would cease state funding for research institutions of higher learning.⁴⁸

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- 34 Eurasianet, "Will Turkmenistan's Education Reform Work?" 5 March 2013, <https://eurasianet.org/will-turkmenistans-education-reform-work>
- 35 Weebly, "Turkmenistan Education," n.d., <http://turkmenistaneducation.weebly.com/>
- 36 Katarina Schrag, "Education in Turkmenistan," Borgen Magazine, 15 November 2017, <https://www.borgenmagazine.com/education-in-turkmenistan/>
- 37 Borgen Project, Blog—Latest News, "8 Facts about Education in Turkmenistan," 16 July 2019, <https://borgenproject.org/8-facts-about-education-in-turkmenistan/>
- 38 Education Policy and Data Center, "Turkmenistan, National Education Profile, 2018 Update," 17 January 2019, https://www.epdc.org/sites/default/files/documents/EPDC_NEP_2018_Turkmenistan.pdf
- 39 Central Intelligence Agency, "Turkmenistan," *The World Factbook*, 11 September 2019, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/tx.html>
- 40 Eurasianet, "Will Turkmenistan's Education Reform Work?" 5 March 2013, <https://eurasianet.org/will-turkmenistans-education-reform-work>
- 41 Borgen Project, Blog—Latest News, "8 Facts about Education in Turkmenistan," 16 July 2019, <https://borgenproject.org/8-facts-about-education-in-turkmenistan/>
- 42 Weebly, "Turkmenistan Education," n.d., <http://turkmenistaneducation.weebly.com/>
- 43 Turkmen News, "State Employees, Students Forced to Rehearse Turkmen Independence Day Celebrations," 27 August 2019, <https://en.turkmen.news/news/state-employees-students-forced-to-rehearse-turkmen-independence-day-celebrations/>
- 44 Borgen Project, Blog—Latest News, "8 Facts about Education in Turkmenistan," 16 July 2019, <https://borgenproject.org/8-facts-about-education-in-turkmenistan/>
- 45 Victoria Clement and Zumrad Kataeva, "The Transformation of Higher Education in Turkmenistan: Continuity and Change," in J. Huisman et al., eds., *25 Years of Transformations of Higher Education Systems in Post-Soviet Countries* (Palgrave Studies in Global Higher Education, Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, 2018), 387–405, https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-319-52980-6_15
- 46 Stateuniversity.com, "Turkmenistan, Higher Education," 22 December 2009, <https://education.stateuniversity.com/pages/1576/Turkmenistan-HIGHER-EDUCATION.html>
- 47 Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2019, "Turkmenistan," 2019, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2019/turkmenistan>
- 48 Eurasianet, "Turkmenistan: Research defunded, transportation privatized, government downsized," 31 January 2019, <https://eurasianet.org/turkmenistan-research-defunded-transportation-privatized-government-downsized>

Restaurants

Turkmen rarely eat in public settings except for weddings and celebratory events. Consequently, most restaurants cater to foreigners.⁴⁹ Ashgabat offers a wide choice of restaurants, including cafes, steakhouses, and establishments featuring Japanese, Italian, and Turkish cuisines. In some high-end restaurants, menu prices can be per 100 g (3.5 oz), not per item, which can be as high as 400 g (14.1 oz). Additionally, main dishes may be served a la carte, and side dishes may need to be ordered separately at additional cost. In keeping with perceived tourist preferences, some restaurants play loud dance music during evening hours.^{50, 51, 52}

I'd like some hot soup.

Soldier:	men giZghin chorwa ithleyarin	I'd like some hot soup.
Local:	bolyar	Sure.

Exchange 25

What type of meat is this?

Soldier:	bu nahili et?	What type of meat is this?
Local:	goyun eti	Lamb.

Exchange 26

The teahouse, or *chaikhana*, is a ubiquitous social and gastronomic establishment in Turkmenistan and other parts of Central Asia. Locations are usually shaded and near pools or streams. The patrons are generally men, but women are allowed as well. In addition to tea, often of the green variety, food is usually offered. Other dining options include cafes, markets, and street stalls.^{53, 54}

Do you have a dessert?

Soldier:	thiZde desertler barmi?	Do you have a dessert?
Local:	howa, biZde sheksheki bar	Yes, we have shek-sheki.

Exchange 27

I would like coffee or tea.

Soldier:	men kofe yada chay ithleyarin	I would like coffee or tea.
Local:	bolyar	Sure.

Exchange 28

49 William Mark Habeeb, *The Growth and Influence of Islam in the Nations of Asia and Central Asia: Turkmenistan* (Broomall, PA: Mason Crest Publishers, 2005), 85.

50 iExplore, "Turkmenistan—Food and Restaurants," n.d., <https://www.iexplore.com/articles/travel-guides/middle-east/turkmenistan/food-and-restaurants>

51 TripAdvisor, "Restaurants in Ashgabat," September 2019, https://www.tripadvisor.com/Restaurants-g293966-Ashgabat_Ahal_Province.html

52 Lonely Planet, "Central Asia in Detail, Eating," 2017, <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/central-asia/in-location/eating/a/nar/514e9452-3e8f-44e2-8950-a1543e8f0211/1336195>

53 iExplore, "Turkmenistan—Food and Restaurants," n.d., <https://www.iexplore.com/articles/travel-guides/middle-east/turkmenistan/food-and-restaurants>

54 Lonely Planet, "Central Asia in Detail, Eating," 2017, <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/central-asia/in-location/eating/a/nar/514e9452-3e8f-44e2-8950-a1543e8f0211/1336195>

A typical Turkmen dinner consists of pilaf, bread, and vegetables. Another popular choice is *manty*, dumplings stuffed with meat, onion, and pumpkin. Dried, twisted melon is a popular snack. Tipping is not common, and therefore not expected, but may be appreciated in return for exceptional service.^{55, 56, 57}

May I have a glass of water?

Soldier:	bir stakan thu thoramak mUmkinmi?	May I have a glass of water?
Local:	howa, haZir	Yes, right away.

Exchange 29

Can I have my total bill, please?

Soldier:	mening hathawiming jemini getirip bilerthingiZmi?	Can I have my total bill, please?
Local:	howa, elwetde	Yes, of course.

Exchange 30

Market Places and Street Vendors

True to Turkmenistan's Silk Road heritage, most towns have bazaars where virtually anything can be purchased, including food. Bazaars are open daily from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m.^{58, 59} Tolkuchka, on the outskirts of Ashgabat, was once one of the largest and most spectacular open-air bazaars in Central Asia; since its relocation, it has lost some of its popularity and prominence. The bazaar is busiest on Thursday, Saturday, and Sunday from around 8 a.m. to 3 p.m., and many stalls close at around midday.⁶⁰ Most markets outside of Ashgabat close for the daylight hours during the cotton harvest in the fall. Government shops often close for lunch and on Sundays.⁶¹

Is the bazaar nearby?

Soldier:	golayda baZar barmi?	Is the bazaar nearby?
Local:	howa, ol yerde thagh tarapda	Yes, over there on the right.

Exchange 31

Do you sell *alaja*?

Soldier:	thiZ alaja thatyangiZmi?	Do you sell <i>alaja</i> ?
Local:	howa	Yes.

Exchange 32

55 iExplore, "Turkmenistan—Food and Restaurants," n.d., <https://www.iexplore.com/articles/travel-guides/middle-east/turkmenistan/food-and-restaurants>

56 Jeffrey Hays, "Food in Turkmenistan," Facts and Details, April 2016, http://factsanddetails.com/central-asia/Turkmenistan/sub8_7b/entry-4820.html

57 On the Go Tours, "Turkmenistan Travel Tips & Useful Info," n.d., <https://www.onthegotours.com/Turkmenistan/Travel-tips-and-useful-info>

58 Lonely Planet, "Central Asia in Detail, Eating," 2017, <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/central-asia/in-location/eating/a/nar/514e9452-3e8f-44e2-8950-a1543e8f0211/1336195>

59 iExplore, "Turkmenistan—Shopping and Leisure," n.d., <https://www.iexplore.com/articles/travel-guides/middle-east/turkmenistan/shopping-and-leisure>

60 Lonely Planet, "Tolkuchka Bazaar," n.d., <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/turkmenistan/ashgabat/shopping/tolkuchka-bazaar/a/poi-sho/1578188/357814>

61 State News Agency of Turkmenistan, Turkmenistan Today, "Cotton Harvest Campaign Starts in Turkmenistan," 5 September 2018, <http://tdh.gov.tm/news/en/articles.aspx&article14468&cat29>

Turkmen rugs, also known as Bukhara rugs, are the country's best-known products. The rugs are usually of a deep, rich red hue and contain intricate asymmetric geometrical patterns. Turkmen take great pride in the rugs, whose motifs adorn the national flag. The rugs, in many shapes and sizes, are usually prominently displayed at bazaars and stores. Before purchased rugs can be taken out of the country, special export permission must be obtained from a government office at the Carpet Museum in Ashgabat. Rugs older than 1984 may not be taken out of the country. Rug quantities exceeding 1.5 sq m (16.14 sq ft) require the payment of an export duty.^{62, 63}

Do you have any more of these?

Soldier: shulardan bashgha yene barmi?

Do you have any more of these?

Local: yok

No.

Exchange 33

May I examine this close up?

Soldier: men shunga gowuja therethem bolyarmi?

May I examine this close up?

Local: bolya

Sure.

Exchange 34

Money, Credit Cards and ATMs

The national currency of Turkmenistan is the Turkmen manat (TMT), which is subdivided into 100 tenne. In September 2019, the official exchange rate was TMT 3.5 for USD 1; however, the rate is artificially maintained by the Turkmen government, with the black market exchange rate hovering around TMT 25–27 for USD 1. There are no ATMs, and credit cards are usually not accepted.^{64, 65, 66, 67} As its economic troubles deepen, Turkmenistan is believed to have the world's second-highest inflation rate, reaching as high as 357%.^{68, 69}

Can you give me change for this?

Soldier: thiZ shUni bEldUrip bilyangiZmi?

Can you give me change for this?

Local: yok

No.

Exchange 35

62 iExplore, "Turkmenistan—Shopping and Leisure," n.d., <https://www.iexplore.com/articles/travel-guides/middle-east/turkmenistan/shopping-and-leisure>

63 World Travel Guide, "Turkmenistan Shopping and Nightlife," n.d., <https://www.worldtravelguide.net/guides/asia/turkmenistan/shopping-nightlife/>

64 Caravanistan: The Silk Road Travel Guide, "Turkmenistan," 11 September 2019, <https://caravanistan.com/turkmenistan/#transport-in-turkmenistan>

65 On the Go Tours, "Turkmenistan Travel Tips & Useful Info," n.d., <https://www.onthegotours.com/Turkmenistan/Travel-tips-and-useful-info>

66 Economist, "Turkmenistan Finds a Novel Solution to Mass Emigration," 5 July 2018, <https://www.economist.com/asia/2018/07/05/turkmenistan-finds-a-novel-solution-to-mass-emigration>

67 XE Currency Converter, "1 USD to TMT = 3.51000 Turkmenistani Manats," 30 September 2019, <https://www.xe.com/currencyconverter/convert/?Amount=1&From=USD&To=TMT>

68 Eurasianet, "Turkmenistan's Vicious Cycle," 5 June 2018, <https://eurasianet.org/turkmenistans-vicious-cycle>

69 Pete Baumgartner, "Spinning Its Wheels: With Turkmenistan in a Skid, Berdymukhammedov Pedals On," Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty, 13 June 2018, <https://www.rferl.org/a/turkmenistan-in-a-skid-berdymukhammedov-pedals-on/29289107.html>

Do you accept U.S. currency?

Soldier:	thiZ amerikan dolarini kawul edyangiZmi?	Do you accept U.S. currency?
Local:	yok, biZ dinge manat kawul edyari	No, we only accept manat.

Exchange 36

Urban Traffic and Transportation

There are registered taxi services in Ashgabat, but most taxis are unregulated private vehicles and may lack safety features. Some taxis are shared among multiple passengers. Even taxis that have meters rarely use them. It is recommended to bargain and agree on a fare before the ride. Some hotels in Ashgabat can arrange for rental cars, but all options include a driver. Local driving may be dangerous, as drivers often disregard traffic laws.^{70, 71, 72, 73}

Turkmenistan's big cities have low-cost urban bus routes. The upkeep of bus stops and the age of buses may vary. Ashgabat's bus fleet is modern but can be overcrowded during peak hours. Minibuses, or *marshrutkas*, are another option. Unlike buses, which run on a set schedule, minibuses set off only once all seats are occupied.^{74, 75, 76, 77}

Will the bus be here soon?

Soldier:	avtobus bathim gelermi?	Will the bus be here soon?
Local:	howa	Yes.

Exchange 37

The passenger train system has recently been upgraded, with a new train station in Ashgabat and a fleet of new Chinese-made trains. There is daily service from Ashgabat to Turkmenbashi, Balkanabat, Mary, Turkmenabat, and Dashogus. Trains are considered slow but safe and reliable.^{78, 79, 80}

70 Caravanistan: The Silk Road Travel Guide, "Turkmenistan," 11 September 2019, <https://caravanistan.com/turkmenistan/#transport-in-turkmenistan>

71 iExplore, "Turkmenistan—Transportation," n.d., <https://www.iexplore.com/articles/travel-guides/middle-east/turkmenistan/transportation>

72 Eurasia Travel, "Transport in Turkmenistan," n.d., http://eurasia.travel/turkmenistan/transport_in_turkmenistan/

73 Overseas Security Advisory Council, Bureau of Diplomatic Security, U.S. Department of State, "Turkmenistan 2019 Crime & Safety Report," 3 June 2019, <https://www.osac.gov/Country/Turkmenistan/Content/Detail/Report/8ee07088-e206-4092-9782-15f4aed3ca7c>

74 iExplore, "Turkmenistan—Transportation," n.d., <https://www.iexplore.com/articles/travel-guides/middle-east/turkmenistan/transportation>

75 Eurasia Travel, "Transport in Turkmenistan," n.d., http://eurasia.travel/turkmenistan/transport_in_turkmenistan/

76 Overseas Security Advisory Council, Bureau of Diplomatic Security, U.S. Department of State, "Turkmenistan 2019 Crime & Safety Report," 3 June 2019, <https://www.osac.gov/Country/Turkmenistan/Content/Detail/Report/8ee07088-e206-4092-9782-15f4aed3ca7c>

77 Silk Road Explore, "Important Tips You Should Know When Travel Turkmenistan. Part 2," 10 May 2016, <https://silkroadexplore.com/blog/important-tips-you-should-know-when-travel-turkmenistan-part-2/>

78 Caravanistan: The Silk Road Travel Guide, "Turkmenistan," 11 September 2019, <https://caravanistan.com/turkmenistan/#transport-in-turkmenistan>

79 Eurasia Travel, "Transport in Turkmenistan," n.d., http://eurasia.travel/turkmenistan/transport_in_turkmenistan/

80 Overseas Security Advisory Council, Bureau of Diplomatic Security, U.S. Department of State, "Turkmenistan 2019 Crime & Safety Report," 3 June 2019, <https://www.osac.gov/Country/Turkmenistan/Content/Detail/Report/8ee07088-e206-4092-9782-15f4aed3ca7c>

Where can I get a cab?

Soldier:	men nirede taksi tutup bilerin?	Where can I get a cab?
Local:	shol yerde	Over there.

Exchange 38

Ashgabat has the country's only international airport. There are domestic airports at Dashgouz, Turkmenbashi, Mary, and Turkmenabat, with several daily flights between Ashgabat and the other airports. Flights can be delayed due to fog or winter weather. The state-owned carrier is Turkmenistan Airlines (THY), with a modern fleet of 39 Boeing aircraft. Despite THY's good safety record, the European Aviation Safety Agency suspended flights between Turkmenistan and the European Union in January 2019, pending confirmation that THY meets international safety standards.^{81, 82, 83, 84}

Where can I rent a car?

Soldier:	men nirede mashin prokada alip bilyan?	Where can I rent a car?
Local:	shaherde	Downtown.

Exchange 39

Which road leads to the airport?

Soldier:	haythi yol aeraporda akidyar?	Which road leads to the airport?
Local:	gUndoghara tarap gidyan akidyar	The road heading east.

Exchange 40

81 Caravanistan: The Silk Road Travel Guide, "Turkmenistan," 11 September 2019, <https://caravanistan.com/turkmenistan/#transport-in-turkmenistan>

82 Export.gov, "Turkmenistan—Transportation," 21 July 2019, <https://www.export.gov/article?id=Turkmenistan-Transportation-Market>

83 iExplore, "Turkmenistan—Airports," n.d., <https://www.iexplore.com/articles/travel-guides/middle-east/turkmenistan/airports>

84 Overseas Security Advisory Council, Bureau of Diplomatic Security, U.S. Department of State, "Turkmenistan 2019 Crime & Safety Report," 3 June 2019, <https://www.osac.gov/Country/Turkmenistan/Content/Detail/Report/8ee07088-e206-4092-9782-15f4aed3ca7c>

Street Crime

Turkmenistan does not release crime statistics, and authorities have officially stated that there is no crime in the country. In reality, the country is considered relatively safe, but petty and violent crimes do occur. In Ashgabat and other cities, opportunistic thieves may target foreigners in bazaars, taxis, buses, or trains. Common sense measures are recommended, such as not leaving valuables in plain sight, not carrying large sums of cash in public, and avoiding public transport at night.^{85, 86, 87}

Violent crimes such as assault, rape, and murder can occur and are sometimes directed at foreigners. The murder rate in Ashgabat is unofficially estimated at one per week. Violent crime is exacerbated by poverty and drug and alcohol abuse.^{88, 89}

There is a strong police presence in Ashgabat and other cities, serving to deter criminality. An 11 p.m. curfew is in place throughout the country. Nevertheless, institutional corruption is very high, and policemen may abuse their

power. During traffic stops, especially late at night, police may ask for a bribe even after being presented with valid papers.^{90, 91, 92, 93}

The government has declared several restricted travel zones throughout the country. These areas include the border with Iran, Uzbekistan, and Afghanistan, the Dashgouz region in the north, and parts of the Caspian coast. Travel to these areas requires government approval, which should be secured far in advance.^{94, 95}

85 Country Reports, Travel Edition, "Crime Information for Tourists in Turkmenistan," n.d., <https://www.countryreports.org/travel/Turkmenistan/crimes.htm>

86 Phil Sylvester, "Crime in Turkmenistan: 4 Things to Know before You Go," World Nomads, 4 October 2018, <https://www.worldnomads.com/travel-safety/central-asia/turkmenistan/turkmenistan-safety-guide>

87 Overseas Security Advisory Council, Bureau of Diplomatic Security, U.S. Department of State, "Turkmenistan 2019 Crime & Safety Report," 3 June 2019, <https://www.osac.gov/Country/Turkmenistan/Content/Detail/Report/8ee07088-e206-4092-9782-15f4aed3ca7c>

88 Country Reports, Travel Edition, "Crime Information for Tourists in Turkmenistan," n.d., <https://www.countryreports.org/travel/Turkmenistan/crimes.htm>

89 Overseas Security Advisory Council, Bureau of Diplomatic Security, U.S. Department of State, "Turkmenistan 2019 Crime & Safety Report," 3 June 2019, <https://www.osac.gov/Country/Turkmenistan/Content/Detail/Report/8ee07088-e206-4092-9782-15f4aed3ca7c>

90 Country Reports, Travel Edition, "Crime Information for Tourists in Turkmenistan," n.d., <https://www.countryreports.org/travel/Turkmenistan/crimes.htm>

91 Phil Sylvester, "Crime in Turkmenistan: 4 Things to Know before You Go," World Nomads, 4 October 2018, <https://www.worldnomads.com/travel-safety/central-asia/turkmenistan/turkmenistan-safety-guide>

92 Overseas Security Advisory Council, Bureau of Diplomatic Security, U.S. Department of State, "Turkmenistan 2019 Crime & Safety Report," 3 June 2019, <https://www.osac.gov/Country/Turkmenistan/Content/Detail/Report/8ee07088-e206-4092-9782-15f4aed3ca7c>

93 Transparency International, Corruption Perceptions Index 2018, "Turkmenistan," 2018, <https://www.transparency.org/country/TKM>

94 Phil Sylvester, "Crime in Turkmenistan: 4 Things to Know before You Go," World Nomads, 4 October 2018, <https://www.worldnomads.com/travel-safety/central-asia/turkmenistan/turkmenistan-safety-guide>

95 Overseas Security Advisory Council, Bureau of Diplomatic Security, U.S. Department of State, "Turkmenistan 2019 Crime & Safety Report," 3 June 2019, <https://www.osac.gov/Country/Turkmenistan/Content/Detail/Report/8ee07088-e206-4092-9782-15f4aed3ca7c>

Turkmen Cultural Orientation

Chapter 4 | Urban Life, Assessment

Read the following statements and answer True or False

- | | | | |
|----|---|---------------------------------------|--|
| 1. | Shortages of drinking water are a serious problem for Turkmen city dwellers. | <input checked="" type="radio"/> True | <input checked="" type="radio"/> False |
| 2. | Under Turkmenistan's state health insurance system, healthcare is free and universally available. | <input checked="" type="radio"/> True | <input checked="" type="radio"/> False |
| 3. | Turkmen frequently eat out and socialize in restaurants. | <input checked="" type="radio"/> True | <input checked="" type="radio"/> False |
| 4. | People who wish to take carpets out of Turkmenistan need a special government permit. | <input checked="" type="radio"/> True | <input checked="" type="radio"/> False |
| 5. | Tolkuchka is Turkmenistan's largest port on the Caspian Sea. | <input checked="" type="radio"/> True | <input checked="" type="radio"/> False |

Turkmen Cultural Orientation

Chapter 4 | Urban Life, Assessment Answers

1. True:
Turkmenistan ranks as the world's ninth-most water insecure country. Several cities suffer from routine clean water shortages, and residents are forced to stand in line to fill water buckets. In the summer of 2019, the port city of Turkmenbashi experienced days of unexplained tap water shortages. Drinking polluted water is one of the primary health hazards in Turkmenistan.
2. False:
Many times, patients have to pay for everything out of pocket. Doctors have been accused of creating artificial queues so that patients must pay bribes for timely service.
3. False:
Because of the expense, most Turkmen reserve eating at restaurants for important events such as weddings. In some regions of the country, people do not eat on the street, as eating in public may be regarded by locals as strange behavior. Most restaurants cater to foreigners.
4. True:
Before purchased carpets can be taken out of the country, special export permission must be obtained from a government office in Ashgabat. Carpets made before 1984 cannot be taken out the country.
5. False:
Tolkuchka is a large bazaar outside of Ashgabat. It was once one of the largest and most spectacular open-air bazaars in Central Asia.

Chapter 5 | Rural Life



Camel herder, Mary
Flickr / Hans Birger Nilsen

Introduction

In 2018, 48.4% of Turkmenistan's population was rural.¹ Since 2007, the government has invested over USD 13 billion in a development program meant to improve all aspects of life in rural areas. But, like with most other government initiatives, the emphasis was placed on showcase projects that could serve as backdrops for official ceremonies and speeches. New model villages, many of them uninhabited, were proudly featured on state media. But many more communities in Turkmenistan have seen no improvements since the Soviet era. The lives of rural Turkmen are harsher than their urban counterparts, with infrastructure, medical care, and education of considerably poorer quality than in cities.^{2, 3, 4, 5}

- 1 Denis Sinor et al., "Turkmenistan," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 10 July 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Turkmenistan>
- 2 Oguljan Tairova, "Hundreds of Villages Untouched by Turkmenistan's Rural Development Program," *Turkmen News*, 29 January 2019, <https://en.turkmen.news/spotlight/hundreds-of-villages-untouched-by-turkmenistan-s-rural-development-program/>
- 3 Maria Yanovskaya, "Turkmenistan, Lost in the Desert: Routine Life for Centuries," *Ferghana News*, 10 August 2009, <http://enews.ferghananews.com/article.php?id=2563>
- 4 Chronicles of Turkmenistan, "The Asian Games torch passed through 'Potemkin village' in Turkmenistan (photos)," 16 September 2017, <https://en.hronikatm.com/2017/09/the-asian-games-torch-passed-through-potemkin-village-in-turkmenistan-photos/>
- 5 Business Turkmenistan, "Turkmen Entrepreneurs Build New Village in Ak Bugday Etrap," 24 July 2019, <https://business.com.tm/post/4159/turkmen-entrepreneurs-build-new-village-in-ak-bugday-etrap>

Land Distribution and Ownership

Despite being an arid country, 72% of Turkmenistan's land is used for agriculture: either crop production at just over 4% or herding, which constitutes 67.8% of the land.⁶ After independence, Turkmenistan began to transition away from Soviet-style collective farming and toward a market-oriented system. Reform has been limited and faltering, due primarily to government corruption and environmental constraints.^{7, 8, 9}

Do you own this land?

Soldier:	thiZ shu yering eyethimi?	Do you own this land?
Local:	howa	Yes.

Exchange 41

The constitution recognizes private land ownership, but most privately owned land is for personal households and adjacent small agricultural plots. For farmers to be granted private land ownership, they must prove their willingness and ability to successfully farm the land, usually over two or three years. Private land may not be sold, gifted, or exchanged.^{10, 11, 12, 13}

Most land is owned by the state, but individuals or groups are allowed to lease the land. The state grants leases through local farmers' associations. Leases are awarded for 1–10 years; a typical farm averages 2.5 hectares (6.1 acres). The farmers' associations set yearly production goals and can terminate leases if they deem the land is misused. Leases are nontransferable, and unused land reverts to the farmers' association for redistribution.^{14, 15, 16}

Do you know this area very well?

Soldier:	thiZ shu yerlere beletmi?	Do you know this area very well?
Local:	howa	Yes.

Exchange 42

- 6 Central Intelligence Agency, "Turkmenistan," *The World Factbook*, 8 October 2019, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/resources/the-world-factbook/geos/tx.html>
- 7 Rimma Gluhikh et al., "Land Reform in Turkmenistan: Does It Work?" Research Gate, February 2003, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/297674706_Land_Reform_In_Turkmenistan_Does_It_Work
- 8 Jeffrey Hays, "Agriculture in Turkmenistan," Facts and Details, April 2016, http://factsanddetails.com/central-asia/Turkmenistan/sub8_7d/entry-4840.html
- 9 Zvi Lerman and Karen Brooks, "Land Reform in Turkmenistan," Research Gate, June 1998, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/305398598_Land_Reform_in_Turkmenistan
- 10 Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Gender and Land Rights Database, "Turkmenistan: Prevailing Systems of Land Tenure," n.d., http://www.fao.org/gender-landrights-database/country-profiles/countries-list/land-tenure-and-related-institutions/prevailing-systems-of-land-tenure/en/?country_iso3=TKM
- 11 Business Turkmenistan, "Ownership and Use of Land," 2 September 2019, <https://business.com.tm/articles/197/ownership-and-use-of-land>
- 12 Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2019, "Turkmenistan," 2019, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2019/turkmenistan>
- 13 Zvi Lerman and Karen Brooks, "Land Reform in Turkmenistan," Research Gate, June 1998, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/305398598_Land_Reform_in_Turkmenistan
- 14 Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Gender and Land Rights Database, "Turkmenistan: Prevailing Systems of Land Tenure," n.d., http://www.fao.org/gender-landrights-database/country-profiles/countries-list/land-tenure-and-related-institutions/prevailing-systems-of-land-tenure/en/?country_iso3=TKM
- 15 Business Turkmenistan, "Ownership and Use of Land," 2 September 2019, <https://business.com.tm/articles/197/ownership-and-use-of-land>
- 16 Jeffrey Hays, "Agriculture in Turkmenistan," Facts and Details, April 2016, http://factsanddetails.com/central-asia/Turkmenistan/sub8_7d/entry-4840.html

Turkmenistan lacks a framework for functional property rights. The government uses its control over the farmers' associations to ensure most of the arable land is planted with cotton or wheat, cash crops that the government buys from farmers at below market value. Local officials can confiscate property based on personal whims, and the judicial system provides minimal protection to individuals and businesses.^{17, 18, 19, 20, 21}

Rural Economy

In 2017, agriculture contributed 7.5% of Turkmenistan's GDP and employed 48.2% of the workforce.²² Cotton and wheat are the primary crops grown by government directive. The rural population is also engaged in sheep, goat, and camel husbandry.^{23, 24} Silk production is also an important and longstanding tradition.^{25, 26}

Since most of Turkmenistan's land area is desert, farmers rely heavily on irrigation. Over time, this has led to increased soil salinity, soil contamination with agricultural chemicals, and desertification. Sandstorms that spread salt and chemicals over large areas are increasingly frequent.^{27, 28, 29, 30}

Amid Turkmenistan's ongoing economic crisis, unemployment, and poverty are starkly felt in rural areas. National unemployment may be as high as 60% and is prevalent among youth.^{31, 32, 33} Food shortages and long lines at shops are reported on a weekly basis. Pensions and state paychecks are delayed, and cash withdrawals from banks are limited. In the areas bordering Iran and Uzbekistan, people bribe the authorities to turn a blind eye to cross-border trade.^{34, 35, 36, 37, 38}

- 17 Zvi Lerman and Karen McConnell Brooks, *Turkmenistan: An Assessment of Leasehold-Based Farm Restructuring* (Washington, DC: The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/The World Bank, 2001), xii.
- 18 Jeffrey Hays, "Agriculture in Turkmenistan," *Facts and Details*, April 2016, http://factsanddetails.com/central-asia/Turkmenistan/sub8_7d/entry-4840.html
- 19 Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2019*, "Turkmenistan," 2019, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2019/turkmenistan>
- 20 GAN Business Anti-Corruption Portal, "Turkmenistan Corruption Report," May 2016, <https://www.ganintegrity.com/portal/country-profiles/turkmenistan/>
- 21 Jeffrey Hays, "Agriculture in Turkmenistan," *Facts and Details*, April 2016, http://factsanddetails.com/central-asia/Turkmenistan/sub8_7d/entry-4841.html
- 22 Central Intelligence Agency, "Turkmenistan," *The World Factbook*, 8 October 2019, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/resources/the-world-factbook/geos/tx.html>
- 23 Jeffrey Hays, "Agriculture in Turkmenistan," *Facts and Details*, April 2016, http://factsanddetails.com/central-asia/Turkmenistan/sub8_7d/entry-4840.html
- 24 Denis Sinor et al., "Turkmenistan," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 10 July 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Turkmenistan>
- 25 YnFx, "Turkmenistan Spinning New Life into Its Silk Industry," 27 November 2015, <https://www.yarnsandfibers.com/news/textile-news/turkmenistan-spinning-new-life-into-its-silk-industry/>
- 26 Orient: Media-Turkmen News Agency, "Turkmen Silk Producers Have Over-Fulfilled the Plan on Production of Cocoons," 12 June 2019, <https://orient.tm/en/turkmen-silk-producers-have-over-fulfilled-the-plan-on-production-of-cocoons/>
- 27 Naturvernforbundet, Norwegian Society for the Conservation of Nature, "Environmental issues in Turkmenistan," 7 October 2009, <https://naturvernforbundet.no/international/environmental-issues-in-turkmenistan/category947.html>
- 28 Bradley Jardine, "Turkmenistan's Water Insecurity is a Man-Made Problem," *Diplomat*, 14 July 2015, <https://thediplomat.com/2015/07/turkmenistans-water-insecurity-is-a-man-made-problem/>
- 29 Eurasianet, "Turkmenistan: Kicking the Coke Habit," 3 September 2019, <https://eurasianet.org/turkmenistan-kicking-the-coke-habit>
- 30 AKIpress, "It's Raining Salt: Toxic Aral Sea Storm Sparks Health Fears in Central Asia," *Radio Free Europe*, *Radio Liberty*, 29 May 2018, <https://www.rferl.org/a/toxic-aral-sea-salt-storm-sweeps-over-parts-of-uzbekistan-turkmenistan/29257503.html>
- 31 Stanislav Volkov, "People are Afraid to Say A Word: Inside Ashgabat, Central Asia's Closed City," *Guardian*, 16 October 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2017/oct/16/people-afraid-inside-ashgabat-turkmenistan-closed-city>
- 32 Paul Goble, "Little-Known Turkmenistan About to Become Known for Its Big Problems," *Jamestown Foundation*, 14 February 2017, <https://jamestown.org/program/little-known-turkmenistan-become-known-big-problems/>
- 33 Farangis Najibullah, "Turkmen Starting to Complain in Greater Numbers," *Radio Free Europe*, *Radio Liberty*, 23 April 2014, <https://www.rferl.org/a/turkmenistan-complaints-government-azatlyk/25359749.html>
- 34 BBC News, "Turkmenistan Country Profile," 26 February 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-16094646>
- 35 Eurasianet, "Turkmenistan: A Dog's life," 17 September 2019, <https://eurasianet.org/turkmenistan-a-dogs-life>
- 36 Eurasianet, "Turkmenistan: Kicking the Coke Habit," 3 September 2019, <https://eurasianet.org/turkmenistan-kicking-the-coke-habit>
- 37 Pete Baumgartner, "Spinning Its Wheels: With Turkmenistan in a Skid, Berdymukhammedov Pedals On," *Radio Free Europe*, *Radio Liberty*, 13 June 2018, <https://www.rferl.org/a/turkmenistan-in-a-skid-berdymukhammedov-pedals-on/29289107.html>
- 38 Turkmen News, "Pensions and Benefits Delayed as Cash Shortage Bites in Turkmenistan," 19 July 2019, <https://en.turkmen.news/news/pensions-and-benefits-delayed-as-cash-shortage-bites-in-turkmenistan/>

The government forbids Turkmen from working abroad. Authorities have gone as far as stopping hundreds of people from boarding airplanes because they suspected them of leaving the country to work overseas. Nevertheless, rural Turkmen report to independent media that they depend on remittances from relatives working in Turkey.^{39, 40, 41} Some impoverished rural residents are vulnerable to being trafficked abroad for forced labor.⁴²

Every fall, thousands of students, public employees, and military personnel are forced to participate in the cotton harvest. Refusal to work carries the threat of reprisals such as job loss or salary deduction. Some well-paid professionals hire other workers to take their place. Cotton picking is hazardous, and field lodging is often filthy, leading to accusations against the government of forced labor and child labor. In 2018, the United States banned the importing of cotton from Turkmenistan. Nevertheless, much of the cotton goes to Turkey, where it is used for garments carrying a “Made in Turkey” label.^{43, 44, 45, 46}

Is there lodging nearby?

Soldier:	golayda mihmanhana barmi?	Is there lodging nearby?
Local:	howa	Yes.

Exchange 43

Rural Transportation

Turkmenistan’s roads and highways need upgrades and repairs. As of 2017, the country had 13,737 km (8,535 mi) of paved roads. Outside of Ashgabat and other major cities, roadways are uneven, unmarked, poorly lit, and riddled with potholes. Drivers in rural areas can expect to encounter agricultural vehicles, slow trucks, and livestock. Drivers often ignore traffic laws, and accidents are common.^{47, 48}

Is there a gas station nearby?

Soldier:	golayda benZapravka barmi?	Is there a gas station nearby?
Local:	howa	Yes.

Exchange 44

- 39 Paul Goble, “Little-Known Turkmenistan About to Become Known for Its Big Problems,” Jamestown Foundation, 14 February 2017, <https://jamestown.org/program/little-known-turkmenistan-become-known-big-problems/>
- 40 Pete Baumgartner, “Spinning Its Wheels: With Turkmenistan in a Skid, Berdymukhammedov Pedals On,” Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty, 13 June 2018, <https://www.rferl.org/a/turkmenistan-in-a-skid-berdymukhammedov-pedals-on/29289107.html>
- 41 Oguljan Tairova, “Hundreds of Villages Untouched by Turkmenistan’s Rural Development Program,” Turkmen News, 29 January 2019, <https://en.turkmen.news/spotlight/hundreds-of-villages-untouched-by-turkmenistan-s-rural-development-program/>
- 42 Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2019, “Turkmenistan,” 2019, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2019/turkmenistan>
- 43 Eurasianet, “Turkmenistan: Kicking the Coke Habit,” 3 September 2019, <https://eurasianet.org/turkmenistan-kicking-the-coke-habit>
- 44 Anti-Slavery, “Forced Labour Tainted Cotton: from Turkmenistan via Turkey,” 5 April 2019, <https://www.antislavery.org/forced-labour-tainted-cotton-from-turkmenistan-via-turkey/>
- 45 Turkmen News, “Slight Relief for Teachers in Eastern Turkmenistan over Cotton Campaign,” 30 September 2019, <https://en.turkmen.news/news/slight-relief-for-teachers-in-eastern-turkmenistan-over-cotton-campaign/>
- 46 Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2019, “Turkmenistan,” 2019, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2019/turkmenistan>
- 47 Export.gov, “Turkmenistan—Transportation,” 21 July 2019, <https://www.export.gov/article?id=Turkmenistan-Transportation-Market>
- 48 Overseas Security Advisory Council, Bureau of Diplomatic Security, U.S. Department of State, “Turkmenistan 2019 Crime & Safety Report,” 3 June 2019, <https://www.osac.gov/Country/Turkmenistan/Content/Detail/Report/8ee07088-e206-4092-9782-15f4aed3ca7c>

Is there a train station nearby?

Soldier: golayda vokZal barmi?

Is there a train station nearby?

Local: yok

No.

Exchange 45

Bus service between the major cities of Ashgabat, Dashgouz, Mary, Turkmenabashi, and Turkmenabat is offered in comfortable and modern coaches. For travel between smaller cities and towns, the busses may be less up to date. Bus travel is generally faster than taking the train.⁴⁹

Is there a good auto mechanic nearby?

Soldier: golayda gowi mehanik barmi?

Is there a good auto mechanic nearby?

Local: howa

Yes.

Exchange 46

Can you take me there?

Soldier: thiZ meni shol yere akidip bilyangiZmi?

Can you take me there?

Local: howa, bilyan

Yes, I can.

Exchange 47

Ferries leave from the port of Turkmenbashi to cross the Caspian Sea. These ferries are actually cargo ships that take on passengers, who must bring food and water because none is provided; facilities are basic. Once a vessel arrives in port, it can wait up to a week before docking. Travelers need to have enough food and water and be

sure that their Turkmenistan visa does not expire while they wait to dock.⁵⁰ Passenger boats travel along the Amu Darya River in the northeast of the country, reaching Turkmenabat.⁵¹

In a symptom of his haphazard authoritarianism, President Berdymukhamedov has attempted to impose his profound appreciation for bicycles onto the country's population. In 2013, he ordered all able-bodied Turkmen to purchase bicycles and participate in a nationwide mass riding event. Prices of bicycles predictably skyrocketed. State media often show Berdymukhamedov leading government officials and diplomats on bicycle rides, during which he performs inspections and gives directives.^{52, 53, 54}

49 iExplore, "Turkmenistan—Transportation," n.d., <https://www.iexplore.com/articles/travel-guides/middle-east/turkmenistan/transportation>

50 Overseas Security Advisory Council, Bureau of Diplomatic Security, U.S. Department of State, "Turkmenistan 2019 Crime & Safety Report," 3 June 2019, <https://www.osac.gov/Country/Turkmenistan/Content/Detail/Report/8ee07088-e206-4092-9782-15f4aed3ca7c>

51 iExplore, "Turkmenistan—Transportation," n.d., <https://www.iexplore.com/articles/travel-guides/middle-east/turkmenistan/transportation>

52 Simon Osborne, "On your Bikes! Turkmenistan President Orders Entire Nation to Saddle Up for National Cycling Day," *Independent*, 21 August 2013, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/on-your-bikes-turkmenistan-president-orders-entire-nation-to-saddle-up-for-national-cycling-day-8778694.html>

53 Eurasianet, "Turkmenistan's Vicious cycle," 5 June 2018, <https://eurasianet.org/turkmenistans-vicious-cycle>

54 Eurasianet, "Turkmenistan: Cycling President, Spending Dragon," 30 October 2018, <https://eurasianet.org/turkmenistan-cycling-president-spending-dragon>

Rural Healthcare

Despite being officially included in the universal healthcare system, rural Turkmenistan faces acute healthcare challenges and shortcomings. Unlike the specialized showcase hospitals in Ashgabat, rural healthcare facilities are in disrepair and severely short on medicine and supplies. Many rural hospitals lack running water, central heating, and indoor toilets. Proper sanitation and hygiene are impossible to maintain, and there are shortages in basics like syringes, needles, and hydration salts. Patients must pay for all services and supply their own food.^{55, 56, 57}

Is there a medical clinic nearby?

Soldier: golayda klinika barmi?

Is there a medical clinic nearby?

Local: howa, o tayda

Yes, over there.

Exchange 48

Physicians and staff are in short supply, and those who are available are often undertrained. Patient treatment and the prescribing of drugs are often left to nurses.^{58, 59, 60} Corruption is also prevalent, with some medical professionals forcing disabled patients to make monthly payments to keep their disability status and receive state benefits.⁶¹

My arm is broken, can you help me?

Soldier: mening elim dEwUldi, thiZ manga kEmEk edip bil-erthingiZmi?

My arm is broken, can you help me?

Local: howa, men thiZe kEmEk edip bilerin

Yes, I can help you.

Exchange 49

In addition to inadequate medical care, rural areas are plagued by poor nutrition, drug abuse, and ignorance about how diseases spread. Childhood and overall mortality rates are higher in rural than in urban areas. A lack of clean drinking water has led to the spread of kidney problems and hepatitis. Injuries like burns, insect bites, and sexually transmitted infections often go untreated. The lack of medical services has caused many rural people to turn to traditional medical practices like herbs, healers, and prayer.^{62, 63, 64, 65, 66}

- 55 Farangis Najibullah, "Real State of Turkmen Medical Care a Far Cry from Official Images," Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty, 6 April 2014, <https://www.rferl.org/a/turkmenistan-health-care-shortcomings/25322982.html>
- 56 AP Companies, "Health Care System in Turkmenistan," n.d., <https://www.ap-companies.com/services/ekspatam/turkmenistan/>
- 57 Sebastien Peyrouse, "The Health of the Nation—the Wealth of the Homeland! Turkmenistan's Potemkin Healthcare System," PONARS Eurasia, February 2019, <http://www.ponarseurasia.org/memo/health-nation-wealth-homeland-turkmenistans-potemkin-healthcare-system>
- 58 Farangis Najibullah, "Real State of Turkmen Medical Care a Far Cry from Official Images," Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty, 6 April 2014, <https://www.rferl.org/a/turkmenistan-health-care-shortcomings/25322982.html>
- 59 AP Companies, "Health Care System in Turkmenistan," n.d., <https://www.ap-companies.com/services/ekspatam/turkmenistan/>
- 60 Sebastien Peyrouse, "The Health of the Nation—the Wealth of the Homeland! Turkmenistan's Potemkin Healthcare System," PONARS Eurasia, February 2019, <http://www.ponarseurasia.org/memo/health-nation-wealth-homeland-turkmenistans-potemkin-healthcare-system>
- 61 Bruce Pannier, "Paying to Stay Disabled in Turkmenistan," Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty, 24 January 2018, <https://www.rferl.org/a/turkmenistan-disabled-state-subsidies-cutbacks/28994142.html>
- 62 Antoine Blua, "Turkmenistan: In the North, Residents Thirst for Clean Drinking Water," Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty, 28 April 2004, <https://www.rferl.org/a/1052524.html>
- 63 Jeffrey Hays, "Health and Health Care in Turkmenistan," Facts and Details, April 2016, http://factsanddetails.com/central-asia/Turkmenistan/sub8_7d/entry-4835.html
- 64 Atajan Nepesov, "Turkmenistan Healthcare in Coma," Ferghana News, 26 September 2017, <https://enews.ferghananews.com/articles/3042>
- 65 Oguljan Tairova, "Hundreds of Villages Untouched by Turkmenistan's Rural Development Program," Turkmen News, 29 January 2019, <https://en.turkmen.news/spotlight/hundreds-of-villages-untouched-by-turkmenistan-s-rural-development-program/>
- 66 UNICEF, "Country Office Annual Report 2018: Turkmenistan," 2018, https://www.unicef.org/about/annualreport/files/Turkmenistan_2018_COAR.pdf

Rather than address the rural healthcare crisis, President Berdymukhamedov and his government have treated it as a threat to their legitimacy and to the idealized image of Turkmenistan, which they are attempting to present to the world. Authorities have expelled or severely limited most foreign NGOs involved in healthcare. Until 2015, provincial doctors were forbidden to disclose information about HIV infections. Currently, Turkmen infected with HIV must undergo compulsory treatment and are subsequently not allowed to leave the country. The government has also lowered or eliminated drug subsidies, causing prices to rise.⁶⁷

Rural Education

Most formal education is provided by the state; there are no religious schools per se. Some mosques do offer supplemental education, but strictly outside of normal public school settings.^{68, 69} In 2014, primary school enrollment stood at 89% nationwide. Secondary school enrollment was slightly lower, at 85%.⁷⁰

Is there a school nearby?

Soldier:	golayda mekdep barmi?	Is there a school nearby?
Local:	howa	Yes.

Exchange 50

The quality of rural schooling is low. Classrooms are likely to be in disrepair, and schools have few textbooks, inadequate facilities, and a limited number of teachers.^{71, 72} Early childhood and pre-primary education programs are rare, especially in rural areas. The recent construction of kindergartens across the country has not been enough to meet the need.⁷³

Do your children go to school?

Soldier:	mekdebe okuwchilar gatnayarlarmi?	Do your children go to school?
Local:	howa	Yes.

Exchange 51

Enrollment in higher education is low, standing at 7.98% in 2014. Male enrollment is higher than female enrollment, at 9.74% versus 6.2%.⁷⁴ Higher education opportunities are severely restricted for the rural population, with all but three of the country's universities located in Ashgabat.⁷⁵

67 Sebastien Peyrouse, "The Health of the Nation—the Wealth of the Homeland! Turkmenistan's Potemkin Healthcare System," PONARS Eurasia, February 2019, <http://www.ponarseurasia.org/memo/health-nation-wealth-homeland-turkmenistans-potemkin-healthcare-system>

68 William Mark Habeeb, *The Growth and Influence of Islam in the Nations of Asia and Central Asia: Turkmenistan* (Broomall, PA: Mason Crest Publishers, 2005), 87–88.

69 Weebly, "Turkmenistan Education," n.d., <http://turkmenistaneducation.weebly.com/>

70 Index Mundi, "Turkmenistan—School Enrollment," n.d., <https://www.indexmundi.com/facts/turkmenistan/school-enrollment>

71 UNESCO, "Turkmenistan," World Data on Education, 6th ed., May 2007, http://www.ibe.unesco.org/fileadmin/user_upload/archive/Countries/WDE/2006/ASIA_and_the_PACIFIC/Turkmenistan/Turkmenistan.pdf

72 William Mark Habeeb, *The Growth and Influence of Islam in the Nations of Asia and Central Asia: Turkmenistan* (Broomall, PA: Mason Crest Publishers, 2005), 87–88.

73 UNICEF, "Country Office Annual Report 2018: Turkmenistan," 2018, https://www.unicef.org/about/annualreport/files/Turkmenistan_2018_COAR.pdf

74 Index Mundi, "Turkmenistan—School Enrollment," n.d., <https://www.indexmundi.com/facts/turkmenistan/school-enrollment>

75 Borgen Project, Blog—Latest News, "8 Facts about Education in Turkmenistan," 16 July 2019, <https://borgenproject.org/8-facts-about-education-in-turkmenistan/>

Village Life

Turkmenistan has 552 rural settlements (*geňeşlikler*) and 1,902 villages. In rural areas, the local government consists of local councils (*geňeşlar*). Members of local councils are directly elected by citizens for three-year terms. Local councils govern economic, social, and cultural affairs, prepare and implement budgets, and collect local taxes.^{76, 77}

Can you take me to your mayor?

Soldier:	thiZ meni hakiming yanina akidip bilerthingiZmi?	Can you take me to your mayor?
Local:	howa	Yes.

Exchange 52

Where is the nearest checkpoint?

Soldier:	ing golay barlagh nokadi nirede?	Where is the nearest checkpoint?
Local:	iki kilometrden	It's two kilometers.

Exchange 53

Each council elects a chair (*arçın*) from among its ranks to oversee its work. The chair is responsible for functions like regulation of public and private enterprises, maintenance of the area's economic, social, and cultural relations, and management of human resources. Any irregularities or negligence are the responsibility of the chair.^{78, 79}

Does your mayor live here?

Soldier:	thiZing hakimingiZ shu yerde yashayami?	Does your mayor live here?
Local:	howa	Yes.

Exchange 54

At the district and provincial levels, executive authority is exercised by a local governor (*hakim*). The governor is appointed directly by the president and is accountable only to him.⁸⁰

Respected mayor, we need your help/advice/opinion.

Soldier:	hormatli hakim, biZe thiZing kEmEghingiZ/ teklibingiZ/pikiringiZ gerek	Respected mayor, we need your help/advice/ opinion.
Local:	howa	Yes.

Exchange 55

76 United Nations, International Human Rights Instruments, "Common core document forming part of the reports of States parties: Turkmenistan," 1 March 2019, 3, 10, 12, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=HRI%2fCORE%2fTKM%2f2019&Lang=en

77 LegislatiOnLine, "Law on Gengesh (2005)," 2005, <http://www.legislationline.org/documents/id/4335>

78 United Nations, International Human Rights Instruments, "Common core document forming part of the reports of States parties: Turkmenistan," 1 March 2019, 12–13 https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=HRI%2fCORE%2fTKM%2f2019&Lang=en

79 LegislatiOnLine, "Law on Gengesh (2005)," 2005, <http://www.legislationline.org/documents/id/4335>

80 United Nations, International Human Rights Instruments, "Common core document forming part of the reports of States parties: Turkmenistan," 1 March 2019, 13, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=HRI%2fCORE%2fTKM%2f2019&Lang=en

Border Crossings

Entry into Turkmenistan from all the neighboring countries is possible, but there are no international train or bus services into the country. The most frequently used border crossings are those with Uzbekistan and Iran. Crossing the border takes approximately two hours. There is usually an entry fee of approximately USD 14. Land border crossings are open daily from about 9 a.m. to 6 p.m., with a midday break. Turkmenistan has been known to close its borders around elections and on National Flag Day (19 February).^{81, 82}

Is this all the ID you have?

Soldier:	shu thiZing bar dokumentleringiZmi?	Is this all the ID you have?
Local:	howa	Yes.

Exchange 56

Show us the car registration.

Soldier:	mashining shahadatnamathini gErkEZing	Show us the car registration.
Local:	bolya	OK.

Exchange 57

There are three crossing points on the Uzbekistan border, one on the Kazakhstan border, and five on the Iran border.⁸³ The borders with Iran, Uzbekistan, and Afghanistan; the Dashgouz region in the north; and parts of the Caspian coast have been declared restricted travel zones.^{84, 85}

Please get out of the car.

Soldier:	mashindan dUshengiZlang	Please get out of the car.
Local:	bolya	OK.

Exchange 58

Are you carrying any guns?

Soldier:	thiZing yaningiZda yaraghlar barmi?	Are you carrying any guns?
Local:	howa	Yes.

Exchange 59

81 Caravanistan, "Turkmenistan Border Crossings," 3 September 2019, <https://caravanistan.com/border-crossings/turkmenistan/>

82 Lonely Planet, Turkmenistan/Asia, "Land," n.d., <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/turkmenistan/transport/getting-there-away/land>

83 Eurasia Travel, "Transport in Turkmenistan," n.d., http://eurasia.travel/turkmenistan/transport_in_turkmenistan/

84 Phil Sylvester, "Crime in Turkmenistan: 4 Things to Know before You Go," World Nomads, 4 October 2018, <https://www.worldnomads.com/travel-safety/central-asia/turkmenistan/turkmenistan-safety-guide>

85 Overseas Security Advisory Council, Bureau of Diplomatic Security, U.S. Department of State, "Turkmenistan 2019 Crime & Safety Report," 3 June 2019, <https://www.osac.gov/Country/Turkmenistan/Content/Detail/Report/8ee07088-e206-4092-9782-15f4aed3ca7c>

Landmines

Turkmenistan is a signatory to the Land Mine Treaty of 1997, even though it has not passed any national legislation or implemented measures required by Article 9 of the treaty. The measure forbids the purchase, sale, transfer, or manufacture of land mines.^{86, 87, 88}

In 2005, the government submitted documentation stating that old stocks, including over 6.5 million landmines inherited from the Soviet Union, had been destroyed and that the nation was in full compliance with the treaty. Furthermore, the government states that no border regions are mined and that there have been no known casualties as a result of land mines.^{89, 90, 91}

Is this area mined?

Soldier:	shu tEwErEk minalananmi?	Is this area mined?
Local:	howa	Yes.

Exchange 60

- 86 Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction, "States Party to the Convention: Turkmenistan," n.d., <https://www.apminebanconvention.org/states-parties-to-the-convention/turkmenistan/>
- 87 Landmine & Cluster Munition Monitor, "Turkmenistan: Mine Ban Policy," 5 October 2012, <http://www.the-monitor.org/en-gb/reports/2019/turkmenistan/mine-ban-policy.aspx>
- 88 Landmine & Cluster Munition Monitor, "Turkmenistan," 13 September 2002, <http://archives.the-monitor.org/index.php/publications/display?url=lm/2002/turkmenistan.html>
- 89 Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction, "States Party to the Convention: Turkmenistan," n.d., <https://www.apminebanconvention.org/states-parties-to-the-convention/turkmenistan/>
- 90 Landmine & Cluster Munition Monitor, "Turkmenistan: Mine Ban Policy," 5 October 2012, <http://www.the-monitor.org/en-gb/reports/2019/turkmenistan/mine-ban-policy.aspx>
- 91 Landmine & Cluster Munition Monitor, "Turkmenistan," 13 September 2002, <http://archives.the-monitor.org/index.php/publications/display?url=lm/2002/turkmenistan.html>

Turkmen Cultural Orientation

Chapter 5 | Rural Life, Assessment

Read the following statements and answer True or False

1. The main cash crops in Turkmenistan are cotton and wheat. ☒ True ☒ False
2. Provincial governors (*hakim*) are selected by local councils that consist of 12 elderly men and no women. ☒ True ☒ False
3. The Iran-Turkmenistan land border crossings have been closed since the Iranian Revolution. ☒ True ☒ False
4. The government encourages citizens to work abroad to mitigate high unemployment. ☒ True ☒ False
5. Turkmen can cross the Caspian Sea from Turkmenbashi by taking a ferry. ☒ True ☒ False

Turkmen Cultural Orientation

Chapter 5 | Rural Life, Assessment Answers

1. True:
Most of the arable land is planted with cotton or wheat, which are the country's main cash crops. The government buys these cash crops from farmers at below-market value.
2. False:
Governors are appointed directly by the president and are accountable only to him.
3. False:
The border crossings with Uzbekistan and Iran are the most frequently used. There are five land crossings on the Iran-Turkmenistan border.
4. False:
The government forbids Turkmen from working abroad, and authorities have gone as far as stopping people suspected of intending to work abroad from boarding airplanes to leave the country.
5. True:
Ferries leave from the port of Turkmenbashi to cross the Caspian Sea. These ferries are actually cargo ships. Facilities on the ships are limited, and passengers have to bring their own food and water aboard.

Chapter 6 | Family Life



A Turkmen family
Flickr / tjabeljan

Introduction

The Turkmen people were traditionally nomadic, and their society was centered on ancestral tribal affiliations. These kinship groups exerted the greatest political and economic influence on daily life. Family groups followed collective principles by which money and resources were shared to support the needs of the group. Even as these nomads became more sedentary starting at the beginning of the 20th century, the family was still central to ownership of land, economic transactions, political unity, and management of social conflicts.¹ Today, the family unit remains significant in the lives of most Turkmen.²

¹ Adrienne Lynn Edgar, *Tribal Nation: The Making of Soviet Turkmenistan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 21–25.

² William Mark Habib, *The Growth and Influence of Islam in the Nations of Asia and Central Asia: Turkmenistan* (Broomall, PA: Mason Crest Publishers, 2005), 81.

Typical Household and Family Structure

The extended family is the central unit of Turkmen society. Households commonly extend beyond the nuclear family to include generations of grandparents, parents, sons (including their families), and unmarried daughters. Apartments in urban areas are often too small to house a typical extended family, however. To address this problem, city dwellers usually try to maintain strong ties with their rural kin.^{3,4} Fathers are considered the heads of the family, and it is common for sons to remain in the household until 30 or 40 years old.⁵ Endogamous marriages, or marriages arranged within tribal groups, are typical among people in their early 20s. Families often start shortly after marriage; if a wife proves to be infertile, the groom's parents can demand a divorce.⁶

Turkmen families have experienced a somewhat steady decline in fertility rates in recent decades; in 1964, the fertility rate reached 6.79 children born to women in their child-bearing years, while in 2015, that rate dropped to 2.93. Births per 1,000 people have also seen a decline—after peaking in 1963 with 45.038, the birth rate dropped to 23.343 in 2019. The cause of this decline is uncertain and subject to various theories.^{7,8,9} Government concern about smaller families prompted plans to assist families with more than eight children. These include a one-time payment of USD 250, free dental care for life, and free public transportation.¹⁰

How many people live in this house?

Soldier:	shu Eyde nache adam yashayar?	How many people live in this house?
Local:	on	Ten.

Exchange 61

Does your family live here?

Soldier:	thiZing mashgalangiZ shu yerde yashaya-mi?	Does your family live here?
Local:	howa	Yes.

Exchange 62

3 UNICEF, "Turkmenistan 2003 Childrearing Study," n.d., www.ceecis.org/child_protection/word/TurkmRearingS.doc

4 William Mark Habeeb, *The Growth and Influence of Islam in the Nations of Asia and Central Asia: Turkmenistan* (Broomall, PA: Mason Crest Publishers, 2005), 81.

5 Jeffrey Hays, "Families, Homes and Everyday Life in Turkmenistan," *Facts and Details*, April 2016, http://factsanddetails.com/central-asia/Turkmenistan/sub8_7b/entry-4817.html

6 University of Washington, "Classroom Country Profiles: Turkmenistan," *Henry M. Jackson School of International Studies*, 1 July 2015, <https://jsis.washington.edu/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/TURKMENISTAN.pdf>

7 Index Mundi, "Turkmenistan—Fertility Rate, Total (Births Per Woman)," 2015, <https://www.indexmundi.com/facts/turkmenistan/indicator/SP.DYN.TFRT.IN>

8 Macrotrends, "Turkmenistan Birth Rate 1950–2019," n.d., <https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/TKM/turkmenistan/birth-rate>

9 Ranjit Devraj, "Declining Birth Rates Not Exclusive to Wealthy Nations," *Inter Press Service News Agency*, 2 July 2018, <http://www.ipsnews.net/2018/07/declining-birth-rates-not-exclusive-wealthy-nations/>

10 BBC News, "Turkmenistan's Plan for Baby Boom," 5 March 2008, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/7279540.stm>

Living with In-Laws

Typically, newlyweds are expected to live with the husband's family for a few years before moving into their own household.¹¹ Upon entering their 30s, Turkmen husbands who still live in their parents' household commonly begin the process of moving out and starting their own household. As a husband departs his family home, he will receive a portion of his father's wealth to assist in establishing an independent livelihood.¹²

Is this your entire family?

Soldier:	shu thiZing tutush mashgalangiZmi?	Is this your entire family?
Local:	howa	Yes.

Exchange 63

If he is the youngest male in his family, he will be responsible for taking care of his parents when they are elderly.^{13, 14} Because the youngest son takes care of his parents until their death, tradition dictates that the parents' possessions, including the house and its furnishings, are awarded to him.¹⁵

Where do you work, sir?

Soldier:	jenap, thiZ ishleyangiZmi?	Where do you work, sir?
Local:	jenap, men fermer	I am a farmer, sir.

Exchange 64

Are you the only person in your family who has a job?

Soldier:	thiZing mashgalangiZda dinge thiZ ishlimi?	Are you the only person in your family who has a job?
Local:	yok	No.

Exchange 65

11 Sharon Baştuğ and Nuran Hortaçsu, "The Price of Value: Kinship, Marriage and Meta-Narratives of Gender in Turkmenistan," in *Gender and Identity Construction: Women of Central Asia and the Caucasus*, eds. F. Acar and A. Günes-Ayata (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2000), 126.

12 MaryLee Knowlton, *Turkmenistan*, Cultures of the World (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Benchmark, 2006), 79–89.

13 Sharon Baştuğ and Nuran Hortaçsu, "The Price of Value: Kinship, Marriage and Meta-Narratives of Gender in Turkmenistan," in *Gender and Identity Construction: Women of Central Asia and the Caucasus*, eds. F. Acar and A. Günes-Ayata (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2000), 126.

14 William Wood, "Turkmens: Marriage and Family," in *Encyclopedia of World Cultures: Turkmens*, 1996, <http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Turkmens.aspx>

15 CultureGrams, "Turkmenistan: Lifestyle," n.d., http://online.culturegrams.com/secure/world/world_country.php?contid=3&wmn=Asia&cid=190&cn=Turkmenistan

Gender Issues

Turkmen culture is traditionally patriarchal.¹⁶ Men are the authority figures in families, and women are expected to support them. Women typically hold a significant influence on issues related to children and the home.¹⁷ Women and girls are expected to manage and carry out household chores, including cooking, cleaning, and caring for young children.¹⁸ It is not uncommon in rural areas for older females to stay at home to look after the younger children.¹⁹ During the nation's annual cotton harvest, women work alongside men on the farms, a somewhat rare instance of men and women working side by side.²⁰ Polygamy is illegal but still practiced in rural areas.²¹

Families welcome baby boys with great fanfare; they will be whom the parents rely on for support after they are too old to work.^{22, 23} Girls are viewed as temporary members of the family whose permanent place will be the household they enter upon marriage.^{24, 25} Parents, particularly fathers, are likely to express emotional attachment to young sons but not to daughters. Girls learn that their role is to serve other members of the family—in particular, males.²⁶

Boys have greater freedom to move about the community as they grow up; girls must stick close to their mothers. As girls mature physically, they are expected to guard their virginity.^{27, 28} They are assisted by the family, which shelters them from contact with males outside the family who might compromise their honor.^{29, 30}

Did you grow up here?

Soldier: thiZ shu yerde EsdUngiZmi?

Did you grow up here?

Local: howa

Yes.

Exchange 66

- 16 MaryLee Knowlton, *Turkmenistan*, Cultures of the World (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Benchmark, 2006), 77.
- 17 CultureGrams, "Turkmenistan: Family," n.d., http://online.culturegrams.com/secure/world/world_country.php?contid=3&wmn=Asia&cid=190&cn=Turkmenistan
- 18 Susan Somach, "Gender Assessment: USAID/Central Asian Republics" (report for the United States Agency for International Development, March 2010), 49–51, <http://www.culturalpractice.com/wp-content/downloads/3-2010-7.pdf>
- 19 International Women's Rights Action Watch, "Turkmenistan" (report prepared for the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, 35th Session, May 2006), <http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/iwraw/publications/countries/turkmenistan.htm>
- 20 Environment News Service, "Perils of the Cotton Harvest in Turkmenistan's Toxic Fields," 30 September 2005, <http://www.ens-newswire.com/ens/sep2005/2005-09-30-01.html>
- 21 Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2019, "Turkmenistan," 2019, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2019/turkmenistan>
- 22 Sharon Baştuğ and Nuran Hortaçsu, "The Price of Value: Kinship, Marriage and Meta-Narratives of Gender in Turkmenistan," in *Gender and Identity Construction: Women of Central Asia and the Caucasus*, eds. F. Acar and A. Günes-Ayata (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2000), 127.
- 23 Irina Liczek, "The Struggle for Gender Equality in Central Asia: Democracy, International Norms and Islamic Resurgence" (doctoral dissertation submitted to the New School for Social Research, May 2005), 66.
- 24 'Abd AllāhAhmad Na'im, ed., *Islamic Family Law in a Changing World: A Global Resource Book* (London: Zed Books, 2002), 31.
- 25 Irina Liczek, "The Struggle for Gender Equality in Central Asia: Democracy, International Norms and Islamic Resurgence" (doctoral dissertation submitted to the New School for Social Research, May 2005), 65.
- 26 Sofia Kasymova, "Gender Socialization: Central Asia," in *Encyclopedia of Women and Islamic Cultures: Family, Law and Politics*, eds. Suad Joseph and Afsaneh Najmabadi (The Netherlands: Kininklijke Brill NV, 2005), 198.
- 27 Irina Liczek, "The Struggle for Gender Equality in Central Asia: Democracy, International Norms and Islamic Resurgence" (doctoral dissertation submitted to the New School for Social Research, May 2005), 66–67.
- 28 Sofia Kasymova, "Gender Socialization: Central Asia," in *Encyclopedia of Women and Islamic Cultures: Family, Law and Politics*, eds. Suad Joseph and Afsaneh Najmabadi (The Netherlands: Kininklijke Brill NV, 2005), 198.
- 29 Carole Blackwell, *Tradition and Society in Turkmenistan: Gender, Oral Culture and Song* (Richmond, Surrey, England: Curzon Press, 2001), 49.
- 30 Sofia Kasymova, "Gender Socialization: Central Asia," in *Encyclopedia of Women and Islamic Cultures: Family, Law and Politics*, eds. Suad Joseph and Afsaneh Najmabadi (The Netherlands: Kininklijke Brill NV, 2005), 198.

The Soviets attempted to introduce greater gender equality in Turkmen society, but their policies proved challenging to implement. Although there were some advancements in literacy and legal reforms, gender equality was not achieved because the Turkmen people continued their Islamic traditions. Following independence, some constitutional guarantees of equality were introduced but remain unrealized. The patriarchal culture maintains a particularly strong hold in rural areas, and, as a result, customary laws play a much more significant role than written laws or constitutional guarantees.³¹

Residents of rural areas typically practice strict gender segregation.³² Although there is gender balance in education, men and women choose different programs and careers. Men generally opt for science, technical, math, and government professions, while women tend toward business administration, law, humanities, and the arts.^{33, 34}

In January 2015, the president signed the first National Action Plan on Gender Equality in coordination with the United Nations, calling for the promotion of women's equal access to education, health care, and the labor market.³⁵

Marriage

The most important ceremony in a Turkmen family is the wedding.³⁶ The legal age to marry is 18—raised from 16 when the new Family Code of Turkmenistan was enacted in 2012—although marriage at 17 years old is possible with parental consent; 6% of girls are married by 18. To ensure clan unity, many marriages in rural areas are arranged. A prospective groom pays a bride price (*qalin*) to the family of the bride.^{37, 38, 39} Some arranged marriages, especially in rural areas, are forced marriages.⁴⁰

Are you married?

Soldier:	thiZ EylEnenmi?	Are you married?
Local:	yok	No.

Exchange 67

- 31 Melissa Donahue, "Transitioning from Patriarchal Society: Women's Rights and Gender Equality," *ESSAI* 5, no. 1 (2007): 46–47, <http://dc.cod.edu/essai/vol5/iss1/18>
- 32 Sofia Kasymova, "Gender Socialization: Central Asia," in *Encyclopedia of Women and Islamic Cultures: Family, Law and Politics*, eds. Suad Joseph and Afsaneh Najmabadi (The Netherlands: Kininklijke Brill NV, 2005), 198.
- 33 United Nations Development Program, "Beijing Platform for Action +15 in Europe & CIS: Education and Training of Women," 4 May 2011, https://www.academia.edu/23505986/Central_Asia_Gender_socialization
- 34 Susan Somach, "Gender Assessment: USAID/Central Asian Republics" (report for the United States Agency for International Development, March 2010), 49–51, <http://www.culturalpractice.com/wp-content/downloads/3-2010-7.pdf>
- 35 UN Women, "Turkmenistan Outlines Upcoming Key Gender Equality Activities," 3 August 2016, <https://eca.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2016/08/turkmenistan-outlines-upcoming-key-gender-equality-activities>
- 36 Jeffrey Hays, "Marriage in Turkmenistan," *Facts and Details*, April 2016, http://factsanddetails.com/central-asia/Turkmenistan/sub8_7b/entry-4816.html
- 37 Girls Not Brides, "Turkmenistan," February 2018, <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/child-marriage/turkmenistan/>
- 38 Social Institutions and Gender Index, "Gender Equality and Social Institutions in Turkmenistan," n.d., <http://genderindex.org/country/turkmenistan>
- 39 International Women's Rights Action Watch, "Turkmenistan" (report prepared for the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, 35th Session, May 2006), <http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/iwraw/publications/countries/turkmenistan.htm>
- 40 Social Institutions and Gender Index, "Gender Equality and Social Institutions in Turkmenistan," n.d., <http://genderindex.org/country/turkmenistan>

Is this your wife?

Soldier:	bu thiZing ayalingiZmi?	Is this your wife?
Local:	howa	Yes.

Exchange 68

When a woman marries, she becomes part of her parents-in-law's household. The relationship between the mother-in-law and the new bride can be contentious, and success depends on the deference of the daughter-in-law. The young wife is expected to take over all household duties in her new home. A woman may not speak to her father- or mother-in-law until given permission. Tradition also dictates that she cover her mouth with a scarf in the presence of her in-laws, including her brothers-in-law and any elders in the household of either gender.^{41, 42, 43}

A wife's status within the household may strengthen if she bears a son, or if a younger son brings his wife into the home. A woman is expected to work to repay the qalin and the cost of the gifts given to her or her family before the wedding.⁴⁴

Are these people part of your family?

Soldier:	shu adamlar thiZing mashgalangiZdanmi?	Are these people part of your family?
Local:	yok	No.

Exchange 69

Although a married woman becomes a member of her husband's family, she generally maintains strong relations with her brothers. Siblings help a woman to retain ties to her birth family. It is common for brothers to be the only family members who visit a married woman because they remain responsible for the safety of their sister.⁴⁵

Do you have any brothers?

Soldier:	Do you have any brothers?	thiZing doghanlaringiZ barmi?
Local:	Yes.	howa

Exchange 70

41 MaryLee Knowlton, *Turkmenistan*, Cultures of the World (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Benchmark, 2006), 77.

42 International Women's Rights Action Watch, "Turkmenistan" (report prepared for the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, 35th Session, May 2006), <http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/iwraw/publications/countries/turkmenistan.htm>

43 CultureGrams Online Edition, "Turkmenistan: Family," 2011, http://online.culturegrams.com/secure/world/world_country.php?contid=3&wmn=Asia&cid=190&cn=Turkmenistan

44 International Women's Rights Action Watch, "Turkmenistan" (report prepared for the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, 35th Session, May 2006), <http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/iwraw/publications/countries/turkmenistan.htm>

45 Carole Blackwell, *Tradition and Society in Turkmenistan: Gender, Oral Culture and Song* (Richmond, Surrey, England: Curzon Press, 2001), 49–51.

The Bride Price

The qalin, the bride price paid to the bride's family, can put economic stress on the groom's family and may limit a man's choice of spouse. Some traditional families may use the qalin to restrict the woman's choice by charging a high price as a filtering effect on potential suitors. The government continues to tacitly support this custom because it is so deeply entrenched in Turkmen culture that it would be very difficult to eradicate.⁴⁶

A secondary effect of the qalin is that low-income families often force their daughters to marry at a young age. Also, parents may limit their daughter's education in the fear that too much education may affect their marriage suitability. The qalin can also have the effect of keeping women in unwanted marriages, as well as confining them to their homes and making them dependent upon males for financial support.⁴⁷

Divorce

Divorce is legal in Turkmenistan, but it is considered relatively rare and has a stigma attached to it.⁴⁸ Divorce is often not a realistic recourse for women, as they commonly depend economically on their husbands. A woman could allege spousal abuse, but this is generally not sufficient enough grounds for divorce. The husband can declare a divorce in cases of infertility or infidelity on the part of the wife. In a divorce under these circumstances, the husband would retain custody of the children. Divorce proceedings brought by either partner are permissible under Islamic tradition and old Turkmen tribal law. There are no reliable judicial statistics on the number or nature of divorces in Turkmenistan.⁴⁹

Women have a right to spousal support when divorced; the Turkmen Family Code declares that spousal support is a right by law and is to be maintained in certain circumstances even after divorce. All issues related to custody, child support, and alimony are determined by the court.⁵⁰

Status of the Elderly and Children

In Turkmenistan, as in other Central Asian countries, respect for elderly persons in or outside the family is profound. The constitution requires adult children to take care of their parents.⁵¹ Elder care facilities do exist, but Turkmen are conspicuously absent from them, as it would be considered disgraceful to a Turkmen family to commit its elders to a nursing or elder home. Grandparents are considered integral family members and sources of wisdom and spirituality. Turkmen children are expected to show unconditional obedience to their parents, who are presumed to know best. Unruly or disobedient children bring shame to the family.^{52, 53}

46 International Women's Rights Action Watch, "Turkmenistan" (report prepared for the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, 35th Session, May 2006), <http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/iwraw/publications/countries/turkmenistan.htm>

47 International Women's Rights Action Watch, "Turkmenistan" (report prepared for the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, 35th Session, May 2006), <http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/iwraw/publications/countries/turkmenistan.htm>

48 Jeffrey Hays, "Marriage and Weddings in Turkmenistan," Facts and Details, April 2016, http://factsanddetails.com/central-asia/Turkmenistan/sub8_7b/entry-4816.html

49 International Women's Rights Action Watch, "Turkmenistan" (report prepared for the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, 35th Session, May 2006), <http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/iwraw/publications/countries/turkmenistan.htm>

50 International Women's Rights Action Watch, "Turkmenistan" (report prepared for the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, 35th Session, May 2006), <http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/iwraw/publications/countries/turkmenistan.htm>

51 William Mark Habeeb, *The Growth and Influence of Islam in the Nations of Asia and Central Asia: Turkmenistan* (Broomall, PA: Mason Crest Publishers, 2005), 84.

52 Larry Clark, Michael Thurman, and David Tyson, "Turkmenistan: Social Structure," in *A Country Study: Turkmenistan*, ed. Glenn E. Curtis (Washington, DC: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 1996), <http://countrystudies.us/turkmenistan/11.htm>

53 Carole Blackwell, *Tradition and Society in Turkmenistan: Gender, Oral Culture and Song* (Richmond, Surrey, England: Curzon Press, 2001), 49.

Social Events

Weddings

Weddings are significant social events. Because many marriages are still arranged, it is common for a bride and groom to first meet at their wedding. Young people may arrange their own matches, but parental approval is still crucial. Although dating before marriage is still considered unacceptable, in Ashgabat and other major cities, it is becoming more popular.^{54, 55}

It is customary for a boy's parents to visit the home of a potential bride to make certain that she is of good character and capable of bearing children. They must also convince the girl's parents that their son will provide for their daughter; the qalin is then negotiated. Today, the qalin is often given to the couple in the event that they wish to immediately establish their own household.⁵⁶

Congratulations on your wedding!

Soldier:	toyungiZ bilen gutlayarin!	Congratulations on your wedding!
Local:	thilap geleningiZ UchUn thagh bolung	We are honored you could attend.

Exchange 71

Weddings have both a civil and a religious ceremony. Following these, a large celebration (*toi*) is held, with dancing and food. The size of the wedding is dictated by what the groom's family can afford; for many, it will be a substantial portion of their life savings.⁵⁷

I wish you both happiness.

Soldier:	men thiZing ikingiZe baght arZu edyarin	I wish you both happiness.
Local:	thilaningiZ UchUn minetdar	We are honored.

Exchange 72

The clothes of Turkmen brides are more than just beautiful attire; they act as superstitious charms to ward off evil spirits. The bride often covers her traditional red wedding dress with a cape adorned in amulets and charms. A pocket sewn into the cape contains coal and salt to further guard against bad luck and evil spirits.⁵⁸

The *bashsalma* is a ceremonial changing of the headdress, marking a woman's transition from single to married. The ceremony involves a symbolic "fight" for the bride's maiden headdress (*takhya*), which is replaced with a white scarf and given to the groom's youngest sister. The ritual is to ensure the happy future marriage of the sister and reinforce the role of a woman as a wife and mother.⁵⁹

54 CultureGrams Online Edition, "Turkmenistan: Dating and Marriage," 2011, http://online.culturegrams.com/secure/world/world_country.php?contid=3&wmn=Asia&cid=190&cn=Turkmenistan

55 Nuran Hortaçsu, Sharon Ş. Baştuğ, and Ovez Muhammetberdiev, "Change and Stability with Respect to Attitudes and Practices Related to Marriage in Ashkabat, Baku, and Ankara: Three Turkic Cultures," *International Journal of Psychology* 36, no. 2 (2001): 118.

56 CultureGrams Online Edition, "Turkmenistan: Dating and Marriage," 2011, http://online.culturegrams.com/secure/world/world_country.php?contid=3&wmn=Asia&cid=190&cn=Turkmenistan

57 CultureGrams Online Edition, "Turkmenistan: Dating and Marriage," 2011 http://online.culturegrams.com/secure/world/world_country.php?contid=3&wmn=Asia&cid=190&cn=Turkmenistan

58 Advantour, "Wedding Rituals and Traditions: Charms," n.d., <http://www.advantour.com/turkmenistan/tradition/charms.htm>

59 Advantour, "Wedding Rituals and Traditions: Charms," n.d., <http://www.advantour.com/turkmenistan/tradition/charms.htm>

Funerals

Turkmen practice Islam and follow Islamic law regarding the specific rituals surrounding death and dying.⁶⁰ When a person has died, the body is washed by someone of the same gender. Traditionally, there are three washings of the corpse, with the last typically involving some kind of perfume. Afterward, the body is wrapped in a white shroud.⁶¹

I would like to give my condolences to you and your family.

Soldier:	men thiZe we thiZing mashghalangiZa ginanch bildiryarın	I would like to give my condolences to you and your family.
Local:	Thank you.	thagh bolung

Exchange 73

Turkmen do not leave the home for seven days following the death of a loved one. They believe that it takes that long for the spirit to depart the house. Family members do not bathe or change clothes during the week. Women cover themselves fully with a long scarf and men wear traditional skullcaps.⁶²

Women normally do not attend funerals, although they may visit gravesites; however, they do participate in ritual feasts commemorating the death.^{63, 64} These feasts are staged on the 7th day, the 40th day, and one year after the passing.⁶⁵

Please be strong.

Soldier:	mert bolung	Please be strong.
Local:	thinanshar	We will try.

Exchange 74

A *janazah*, or funeral prayer, is recited at the gravesite. The body is removed from its wooden coffin and placed in a tomb, with the head pointing toward Mecca.^{66, 67} Turkmen prefer to say that someone has “passed on” rather than “died.”⁶⁸

60 Victoria Clement, “Turkmenistan: Religion,” Countries and their Cultures, n.d., <http://www.everyculture.com/To-Z/T-rkmenistan.html>

61 Bilal Abu Aisha, “Funeral Rites and Regulations in Islam,” n.d., <http://www.missionislam.com/knowledge/funeral.htm>

62 Abby, “Turkmen Funerals and Swimming in an Underground Cave,” Peace Corps Journal, 2 November 2008, <http://beingthechange4peace.wordpress.com/2008/11/02/2-november-2008-turkmen-funerals-and-swimming-in-an-underground-cave/>

63 Victoria Clement, “Turkmenistan: Religion,” Countries and their Cultures, n.d., <http://www.everyculture.com/To-Z/T-rkmenistan.html>

64 Bilal Abu Aisha, “Funeral Rites and Regulations in Islam,” n.d., <http://www.missionislam.com/knowledge/funeral.htm>

65 Victoria Clement, “Turkmenistan: Religion,” Countries and their Cultures, n.d., <http://www.everyculture.com/To-Z/T-rkmenistan.html>

66 Bilal Abu Aisha, “Funeral Rites and Regulations in Islam,” n.d., <http://www.missionislam.com/knowledge/funeral.htm>

67 Al-Islam, “Rules About Burial of the Dead Body,” n.d., <http://www.al-islam.org/laws/burial.html>

68 Victoria Clement, “Turkmenistan: Religion,” Countries and their Cultures, n.d., <http://www.everyculture.com/To-Z/T-rkmenistan.html>

Family Celebrations

The *sunnet* is the ceremony of circumcision for boys at the odd-numbered ages of 5 or 7. Men and women who have reached the age of 63 are treated to a special birthday celebration. The number 63 is significant because it is the age at which the Prophet Muhammad died.⁶⁹

Naming Conventions

The standard form of a Turkmen name is the family name first, followed by the given name. It is common for people to refer to each other by their given or first name, followed by the father's name.⁷⁰

Are these your children?

Soldier: bular thiZing chaghalaringiZmi?

Are these your children?

Local: howa

Yes.

Exchange 75

Turkmen names show the influence of Soviet rule. The *-vich* suffix is often attached to a father's name, *-ovna* for women. Either *-ov* or *-ev* were often added to the family names for men and *-ova* or *-eva* for women. For example, if a family name were Kurban, it would often become Kurbanov for a man or Kurbanova for a woman. Following independence and the Russian departure from Turkmenistan, people returned to the traditional renditions of family names. The Russian suffixes were replaced with *-ogly* or *-gyzy* so that Kurban became Kurbanogly or Kubangyzy.⁷¹

The Turkmen people are sensitive to honorifics and often use them when addressing each other. They use titles with first names. Younger people use *yashuly* when speaking to an older person, while *jigi* or *ini* is used when referring to a younger person. In recent trends, young people use the more formal *jenap* and *jenaplar* for mister, *siziň alyhezrentiniz*, and *onyň alyhezretiniz* in official situations, and *agam* as a polite title for a client.⁷²

69 CultureGrams Online Edition, "Turkmenistan: Life Cycle," 2011, http://online.culturegrams.com/secure/world/world_country.php?contid=3&wmn=Asia&cid=190&cn=Turkmenistan

70 Rafis Abazov, *Historical Dictionary of Turkmenistan* (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, 2005), xvi–xvii.

71 Rafis Abazov, *Historical Dictionary of Turkmenistan* (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, 2005), xvi–xvii.

72 Rafis Abazov, *Historical Dictionary of Turkmenistan* (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, 2005), xvi–xvii.

Turkmen Cultural Orientation

Chapter 6 | Family Life, Assessment

Read the following statements and answer True or False

- | | | | |
|----|---|---------------------------------------|--|
| 1. | Turkmen newlyweds are expected to live with the husband's family for a few years. | <input checked="" type="radio"/> True | <input checked="" type="radio"/> False |
| 2. | Divorce is illegal in Turkmenistan. | <input checked="" type="radio"/> True | <input checked="" type="radio"/> False |
| 3. | In 1991, the government banned the practice of paying a bride price. | <input checked="" type="radio"/> True | <input checked="" type="radio"/> False |
| 4. | In Turkmen society, the youngest son inherits the parents' house. | <input checked="" type="radio"/> True | <input checked="" type="radio"/> False |
| 5. | The legal marriage age in Turkmenistan is 15. | <input checked="" type="radio"/> True | <input checked="" type="radio"/> False |

Turkmen Cultural Orientation

Chapter 6 | Family Life, Assessment Answers

1. True:
Typically, newlyweds are expected to live with the husband's family for a few years before moving into their own household. Upon entering their 30s, married men who still live in their parents' household begin the process of moving out and starting their own household.
2. False:
Divorce is legal, but is relatively rare and carries a stigma. Furthermore, divorce is often not a realistic option for women. For husbands, grounds for divorce can include infertility or infidelity.
3. False:
The government continues to tacitly support paying a bride price because it is deeply entrenched in Turkmen culture and would be very difficult to eradicate.
4. True:
Because the youngest son takes care of his parents until their death, tradition dictates that the parents' possessions, including the house and its furnishings, be awarded to him.
5. False:
The legal age to marry is 18 years old. The marriage age was raised from 16 to 18 when the new Family Code of Turkmenistan was enacted in 2012.

Turkmen Cultural Orientation

Further Readings and Resources

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Turkmen Cultural Orientation

Final Assessment

Read the following statements and answer True or False

- | | | | |
|-----|--|--|---|
| 1. | Turkmenbashi is the capital of Turkmenistan. | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> True | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> False |
| 2. | The Amu Darya is Turkmenistan's most important river. | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> True | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> False |
| 3. | President Niyazov was assassinated by a police officer in 2010. | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> True | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> False |
| 4. | Turkmen women do not participate in funerals. | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> True | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> False |
| 5. | A flu epidemic decimated the population of Ashgabat in 1948. | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> True | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> False |
| 6. | Most of Turkmenistan's land area is covered with deserts. | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> True | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> False |
| 7. | Teahouses (<i>chaikhana</i>) can be found along the ancient Silk Road from Central Asia to the Middle East. | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> True | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> False |
| 8. | After the death of President Niyazov, the government adopted a new constitution that restored civil liberties and introduced free and competitive elections. | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> True | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> False |
| 9. | The Uzbek minority enjoys a privileged status in Turkmenistan. | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> True | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> False |
| 10. | Religious instruction is closely monitored by the government. | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> True | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> False |

- | | | | |
|-----|--|--|---|
| 11. | <i>Kurban Bayramy</i> is the holy book of Turkmen Sufis. | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> True | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> False |
| 12. | Turkmen families must care for the elderly by law. | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> True | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> False |
| 13. | Dining etiquette includes washing the hands before and after a meal. | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> True | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> False |
| 14. | Muslim Turkmen boys are not circumcised. | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> True | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> False |
| 15. | The <i>nowruz</i> is a traditional dress worn by women during mourning periods. | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> True | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> False |
| 16. | Cotton from Turkmenistan is banned in the United States. | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> True | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> False |
| 17. | Food should never be touched with the left hand. | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> True | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> False |
| 18. | During the month of Ramadan, no one can smoke in public during daylight hours. | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> True | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> False |
| 19. | Muslim Turkmen are forbidden by law to wear Western clothes. | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> True | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> False |
| 20. | Turkmenistan has only one international airport. | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> True | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> False |
| 21. | Travel to some areas in Turkmenistan requires government approval. | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> True | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> False |
| 22. | <i>Manat</i> is a meticulously prepared meat and vegetable stew that is served on religious holidays and celebrations. | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> True | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> False |

- | | | | |
|-----|--|---------------------------------------|--|
| 23. | Women become members of their husbands' families after they marry. | <input checked="" type="radio"/> True | <input checked="" type="radio"/> False |
| 24. | Turkmen mourn for seven days following the death of a loved one. | <input checked="" type="radio"/> True | <input checked="" type="radio"/> False |
| 25. | Turkmen brides wear red on their wedding day. | <input checked="" type="radio"/> True | <input checked="" type="radio"/> False |
| 26. | Turkmenistan Airlines ranks among the safest airlines in Central Asia. | <input checked="" type="radio"/> True | <input checked="" type="radio"/> False |
| 27. | Turkmen infected with HIV have to leave the country to receive adequate treatment. | <input checked="" type="radio"/> True | <input checked="" type="radio"/> False |
| 28. | Turkmenistan is a state signatory to the Mine Ban Treaty. | <input checked="" type="radio"/> True | <input checked="" type="radio"/> False |
| 29. | Many Turkmen are forced to work in the yearly cotton harvest. | <input checked="" type="radio"/> True | <input checked="" type="radio"/> False |
| 30. | Because Turkmenistan is an agrarian nation, unemployment is extremely low. | <input checked="" type="radio"/> True | <input checked="" type="radio"/> False |

Turkmen Cultural Orientation

Final Assessment Answers

1. False:
Ashgabat is the capital of Turkmenistan. Formerly known as Krasnovodsk, the city of Turkmenbashi was built as a bridgehead for the Russian campaign to control Central Asia. It was renamed in 1993 in honor of President Niyazov.
2. True:
The Amu Darya, flowing along the northeastern border, is the longest river in Central Asia and the primary source of water for Turkmenistan.
3. False:
Niyazov died unexpectedly of heart failure at the age of 66 in December 2006. Before he died, he suffered several heart attacks and had a bypass operation.
4. True:
Women traditionally do not attend funerals, but they do visit the gravesites afterward. Women participate in ritual feasts that commemorate the passing on the seventh day, 40th day, and the one-year mark after the death.
5. False:
In 1948, Ashgabat was devastated by an earthquake measuring 7.3 on the Richter scale. Nearly two-thirds of the population perished in the earthquake, making it one of the deadliest ever recorded. President Niyazov's mother and two brothers were killed in that earthquake.
6. True:
The Karakum Desert occupies over 350,000 sq km (135,135 sq mi), or nearly 80% of the country's total area of 488,100 sq km (188,456 sq mi).
7. True:
The *chaikhana* is a ubiquitous social and gastronomic establishment in Turkmenistan and other parts of Central Asia. Teahouses are usually located near pools or streams. Most patrons are men, but women are allowed in as well.
8. False:
Turkmenistan is one of the world's most repressive and isolated countries. After assuming power, President Berdymukhamedov continued his predecessor's authoritarian rule.
9. False:
Relations between the majority Turkmen and minority Uzbeks are strained. Many Uzbeks have only temporary residence and are at constant risk of deportation.

10. True:
The government exercises tight control over religious instruction. Mosques can offer no more than four hours of religion classes per week. Religious instruction may be offered only by state approved instructors and in approved institutions.
11. False:
Kurban Bayramy is a religious holiday known as Eid al-Adha in many other Muslim countries. The holiday commemorates Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son.
12. True:
The constitution requires adult children to take care of their parents. There are elder care facilities in Turkmenistan, but residents are conspicuously absent from them.
13. True:
Washing of the hands before and after meals is an important part of hygiene. When a meal is finished, guests are expected to wash their hands before coffee or tea is served.
14. False:
Turkmen boys participate in the ceremony of circumcision at the odd-numbered ages of five or seven.
15. False:
Nowruz is an ancient spring festival in Central Asia and parts of the Middle East. It is celebrated in Turkmenistan for two days, on 21–22 March.
16. True:
In 2018, the United States banned the importing of cotton from Turkmenistan, due to allegations of forced labor during Turkmenistan's yearly cotton harvest. However, much of the cotton from Turkmenistan goes to Turkey, where it is used for garments carrying a "Made in Turkey" label.
17. True:
Food is always passed around the table with the right hand. The left hand is considered unclean. Food passed or touched with the left hand is considered defiled.
18. True:
Muslims and non-Muslims alike must avoid smoking, drinking, or eating in public places during daylight hours throughout the month of Ramadan.
19. False:
Many younger Turkmen prefer Western dress, but there has been some pressure to return to traditional dress. Some consider Western clothing inappropriate. Often, traditional-style clothing and Western-style clothing are worn together.
20. True:
Ashgabat is the only international airport in Turkmenistan. A few international flights leave from Ashgabat; the farthest destinations are Britain to the west and Beijing to the east.

21. True:
The government has declared several restricted travel zones throughout the country, including the border with Iran, Uzbekistan, and Afghanistan, the Dashgouz region in the north, and parts of the Caspian coast. Permits should be secured far in advance.
22. False:
The Turkmen manat is the national currency of Turkmenistan, subdivided into 100 tenne.
23. True:
When a woman marries, she becomes part of her parents-in-law's household. She is expected to take over all household duties in her new home. She may not speak to her parents-in-law until given permission.
24. True:
Turkmen believe that it takes seven days for the spirit of a person who has died to depart the house. They stay home and do not shower or change clothes during the week. Women cover themselves fully with long scarves, and men wear traditional skullcaps.
25. True:
A Turkmen bride wears a traditional red wedding dress with a cape adorned in amulets and charms. A pocket inside the cape contains coal and salt to guard against bad luck and evil spirits.
26. False:
Despite the good safety record of the state-owned carrier, the European Aviation Safety Agency suspended flights between Turkmenistan and the European Union in January 2019, pending confirmation that the airline meets international safety standards.
27. False:
Turkmen infected with HIV must undergo compulsory treatment in the country and are not allowed to leave the country afterward.
28. True:
Turkmenistan signed the Mine Ban Treaty in 1997 and ratified it in 1998. The government states that no border regions are mined and that there have been no known casualties as a result of land mines.
29. True:
Every fall, thousands of students, public employees, and military personnel are forced to participate in the cotton harvest. Refusal to work can cause job loss or salary deduction. Some well-paid professionals hire other workers to take their place.
30. False:
National unemployment may be as high as 60% and is prevalent among youth.