

2012

Turkmenistan Visitor Guide



U.S. Embassy in Turkmenistan

Public Affairs Section

5/7/2012

U.S. Embassy Ashgabat

New Visitor Guide

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Contact Information

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Regional Security Office

Emergency Number (Post One) 940045 or 865032542

Regional Security Officer (RSO) 488014 or 692684

Assistant RSO 489254 692685

Program approval process

All placements with any state host institution in Turkmenistan have to be cleared and approved officially by the Government of Turkmenistan. As soon as the American specialist is identified, the Embassy initiates the process by submitting the proposal for the placement of this specialist at a government institution. The proposal will include the brief description of the program, suggested scope of activities, and include the bio of the American specialist. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan will receive the diplomatic note and start the review/approval process with the appropriate entities. Once the program is reviewed and passed through all relevant authorities, the Embassy is notified through a return diplomatic note if the program is approved or not. If approval is granted, the Embassy will start working with the host institutions on the details of the placement.

Needed:

- biography or resume
- proposed scope of work; list of presentations/curriculum

Visa and Registration

Once the approval is granted, the Embassy will submit a request for a Letter of invitation (LOI), issued by the Turkmen State Immigration service. The process of getting LOI usually takes 10 working days, but that takes place only after the program is officially approved by the Government of Turkmenistan.

One can use the LOI to apply to the nearest Turkmen embassy to get Turkmen visa before arrival to Turkmenistan, or print out and take the LOI, keeping it easily accessible while traveling to Turkmenistan, to be issued Turkmen visa upon arrival at the Ashgabat International airport. You will use the LOI to board the plane and also to obtain your visa upon arrival in Ashgabat.

Needed:

-a good quality scanned color copy of passport bio page

Arrival

When disembarking the plane, look for a person with a CIP (Commercially Important Person) sign on the tarmac holding a clip board. The person will have your name on a list. You will then be directed to an airport van that will take you to the CIP lounge. Give the baggage handler your luggage tickets. Your suitcases will be pulled and brought to you in the CIP lounge. The Expeditor will be expecting you there and will help with the in-processing.

Needed:

- 1) A copy of your LOI
- 2) About \$230 (smaller denomination bills in a very good condition – **worn or torn bills are not accepted**; note payment in U.S. dollars only – do not bring other currencies) for visa fees that also include:

| Item | Cost |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| Registration fee | \$10.00 |
| CIP lounge upon arrival at the Ashgabat airport | \$30.00 (also \$30.00 upon departure) |
| Airport expediting fee – arrival | \$40.00 (also \$40.00 upon departure) |
| Turkmen visa fee upon arrival | \$81.00 (up to one month only) |
| Actual expenses (Consular fee, visa foil, etc.) | \$19.00 |

Turkmenistan is a cash-only economy, so plan on bringing sufficient cash with you (and that should be only new looking banknotes with no marks or tears on them). Trying to schedule time to get cash initially from your Visa or MasterCard at Turkmen banks is impractical.

The driver will take you to the hotel. If staying in a hotel, buy bottled water upon arrival at the hotel. Do not drink the tap water in any establishment; **drink only bottled water and it is advised you use it to brush your teeth.**

Registration with Migration Services

The day after arrival you and/or your passport will be picked up and taken to the Embassy for registration. If the passport is submitted for registration in the morning, it is usually ready by the afternoon. If it is submitted in the afternoon – it is ready the next morning.

Needed

- 1) Passport
- 2) Passport size photo (If you do not have an extra, a passport photo can be taken at the embassy quite easily. However, short term visitors can avoid this trip to the embassy altogether by providing a photograph.)

Housing

Ashgabat

Although apartments for rent are listed in the local “Reklamnyi Vestnik,” or Unclassified Ads, which is available for sale at any kiosk, this is not the best option for visitors. Local hotels remain the best short-term housing option, and prices start at \$65/night, breakfast included.

Typically, apartments in the capital can be rented by the day, week, or month. Homestays and dormitories are not available and are not permitted by local immigration laws.

Rent for a one room or one bedroom (two-room) apartment for foreigners in Ashgabat generally starts at \$550/month for an un-renovated “Soviet” model. Nicer apartments with modern renovations run \$600-1000/month and up.

Rent prices do not depend on the location of the apartment, but PAS generally works with realtors to find housing closer to the city center, the Embassy and the Public Affairs Section. The Public Affairs section of the Embassy will work with realtors to find an appropriate apartment for rent and assist in negotiations. This could be done two ways:

- 1) PAS staff works with realtors and finds the apartment for you, takes photos and clears them with you, and once approved, agrees on the rent, concludes the contract on your behalf.
- 2) PAS will reserve a hotel room for 3-4 days and in the meantime, you can work with PAS staff and realtors to find an apartment you like.

Regions

There is always housing available in the regions. PAS works with regional realtors to find apartments on a case-by-case basis.

Rent in the regions is slightly lower than in Ashgabat, but it’s important to note that rent for foreigners will always be higher than rent for locals. In the regions rent for an apartment with all the necessary

equipment, good water-supply (without 11pm cut-offs, lack of hot water etc) and stable electrical power will go from \$500 upwards.

Communications

Internet

Internet penetration is low in Turkmenistan and completely open internet can be found only at the Information Resource Center run by the U.S. Embassy (Ak Altyn Hotel, 4th Floor). 3G cards with internet capability for phones can be purchased through local phone providers. However, all visitors should be aware that internet speed is quite slow.

Phone

The Embassy will provide you with a U.S. Embassy phone for use during your stay.

Post

Local mail is unreliable at best. Packages and letters shipped from the US typically take anywhere from two to five weeks to arrive and are frequently opened. Very few expatriates report never having received packages or documents. Neither DHL nor UPS operate within Turkmenistan. As such, it is advised to carry as many goods as excess baggage on arrival.

Use of Embassy Pouch by Fulbright Scholars

Fulbright Scholars are authorized to make a one-time shipment of educational materials to the American embassy in the country of assignment. This shipment cannot exceed four copy-paper-size boxes, none of which may weigh more than 50 pounds. These materials **cannot** be sent back to the United States by pouch. Address these packages to:

Cultural Affairs Officer
7070 Ashgabat Place
Department of State
Washington, DC 20521-7090

The *Fulbright* Scholar's name must appear in the return address.

Fulbright Scholars assigned to a country with a Category A, Category B, or Category C post may use the pouch for letter mail up to 2 pounds to and from the United States. Letters must be addressed as follows:

Name of Grantee
7070 Ashgabat Place
Dulles, VA 20189

Fulbright Scholars must also use this address as the return address on all mail from abroad.

Do not include any mention of the U.S. Embassy, the Department, Fulbright, or any other official title references in addresses using the 20189 ZIP code. The 20189 ZIP can only be used for letter mail up to the 2-pound limit and cannot be used for mailing of the one-time shipment of educational materials.

Embassy-Specific Policies

Blogging

Grantees are working under the umbrella of the U.S. Embassy in Turkmenistan, and should be aware that statements made in a public forum are often construed as representing the U.S. government. All blogs and other electronic statements should contain a disclaimer that the opinions included are not representative of the U.S. government or its policies. You are a cultural ambassador of the United States on an official U.S. government-funded exchange program and unfavorable statements made about the country or government of Turkmenistan can—and have in the past—jeopardized an individual's ability to work in-country.

Travel

Grantees fall under U.S. Embassy Ashgabat Chief of Mission travel policy. If the Regional Security Officer deems a place within Turkmenistan as unsafe for official Americans, this restriction applies to grantees. Travel to Iran and Afghanistan are also both not allowed under any circumstances. All international travel requests must be sent to your designated Program office in Washington, DC, depending on your program, as well as the Cultural Affairs Officer. The Cultural Affairs Officer must be notified in advance of any domestic travel, and will refer to the Regional Security Officer as needed. This is for security reasons, as well as to be able to locate you in case of a family emergency in the United States.

Money and Banking

Turkmenistan is a cash-economy. Credit cards are not accepted, save at the major hotels. Grantees are advised to bring a fair amount of new, crisp American bills with them for spending purposes. Many foreigners obtain a bank account through the Bank of Pakistan in Ashgabat. However, check cashing service is available at the Embassy for grantees. Please be prepared to withdraw no more than \$500 per day from the cashier.

The exchange rate is fixed at 2.843 manat/dollar.

Transportation

Airlines

International carriers flying into Ashgabat include Lufthansa and Turkish airlines that fly three and five times a week respectively. Turkmenistan airlines fly to London, Frankfurt, Istanbul and other locations at more competitive rates. Further there are daily connections to Moscow and one or two flights to the other central Asian capitals. Note that Turkmenistan Air does not have agreements with other carriers

so passengers traveling internationally must collect their luggage and go through customs and re-check in with the new airlines when changing flights. **Domestic** flights are reasonable and have a good safety record on their frequent scheduled flights between Ashgabat and Turkmenistan's regional centers. US. Embassy travel section will provide help with obtaining tickets for your program-related and personal travel when needed. Please, ask assistance from PAS staff.

Train

Local railway transportation within Turkmenistan consists primarily of daily departures between capital city Ashgabat and regional centers in Turkmenistan.

Taxi

The main mode of the public transportation in the city is taxi and bus. Gypsy cabs should cost 2-5 manat for a one-way trip anywhere in the city. However, they might not be insured or have proper functioning seatbelts. The advisable means of private transportation in Turkmenistan are marked Yellow Cabs which are usually located at the airport and near major hotels (make up only approximately 1 percent of the taxi population). Yellow Cabs are the only registered taxis and are discernable by their bright yellow color, green Turkmen license plates (which denote official or government vehicles), and light affixed to their roof. The Yellow Cabs have meters, however, most of the time they are not utilized, so agreeing on a price prior to using one is advisable. Taxis can also be called by phone at 32-97-74 or 75; these offer a flat rate for transport within the city but typically charge 10 manat for the calling service.

Bus

Public buses in Ashgabat are cheap but often overcrowded. There are two options to pay for buses: monthly passes or per ride. For people who stay in the city for a month or longer, monthly travel passes are available. They can be obtained at the main bus stops (across from Ashgabat Park by the OSCE (popularly known as "First Park"); in front of the Ministry of Train Stations; near train station itself; in front of Russian Bazaar bus stop, across from the Watan cinema). There are also designated women sitting near the bus stop selling travel passes for 8 Manat the last week of each month. These travel passes are unlimited use until the next month and are valid for all city buses and trolley buses. The person using it just has to show the pass when getting off the bus.

The other option is to pay with cash (coins) when getting off the bus (not when getting on). Rides on trolleys and long green, blue, white buses are 20 Tenge; Mini buses are 60 Tenge. Pay the bus driver directly if change is needed - drivers will give change; otherwise put the exact change in the money box near the driver.

Safety

Turkmenistan is generally a safe country with a low crime rate and little harassment of foreigners. The biggest safety hazards are:

Traffic Accidents

Rules of the road are often ignored in Turkmenistan and the country is not pedestrian-friendly. Please use extreme caution.

Heat

The summer can hover around 120 degrees Fahrenheit and the climate is quite dry. Be sure to drink more than adequate water, bring sun protection, and suitable clothing.

Health

The health care system in Turkmenistan is poor. Despite having a state-of-the-art equipment, internal knowledge is relatively low and test results and procedures often are poorly done. Bring an ample supply of over-the-counter medication that you would like to have with you, and contact the Cultural Affairs Officer prior to arrival to discuss the best method of obtaining prescription medication. Make sure that your medical insurance has a medical evacuation component.

Electronics

Voltage is 220, and electricity supplies can fluctuate considerably. It is a wise precaution to unplug all electrical equipment, and you may wish to consider buying surge protectors for expensive items. Power cuts tend to be of short duration but regular, while water can occasionally go off. Please, bring plug adapters for any equipment you bring with you to be able to use here. Some of the equipment might need transformers to use the 220 V line.

Customs and Culture

Photography

Photography without permission is not a good idea. There is, invariably, a policeman on every corner who will enquire as to why you want to take picture. Do **not** take pictures of the Presidential Palace or government buildings (which are generally easily recognized by the guards outside; the entire area around the Nissa Hotel/Magtymguly Turkmen State University is off-limits to photographers).

Smoking and Drinking

Smoking in the streets is illegal. Public drunkenness is punishable.

Gifts

It is best if you bring small Americana gifts either from your institution, or your home town/state to share with your new friends/colleagues.

Also, it is customary to take flowers and chocolate for your host if you are invited to someone's house. If you are invited for a wedding, birthday, or any other ceremonial family event, flowers and cash gift in an envelope is customary.

For memorial events, only cash donations are customary, no flowers for Muslim families.

Climate and Dress

Turkmenistan has an extreme continental climate: temperatures in Ashgabat vary between 46°C (114°F) in summer and -5°C (23°F) in winter, although it has been known to reach -22°C (-8°F) in extremity. Temperatures in the desert in summer can reach 50°C (122°F) during the day before falling rapidly at night. During the winter, it can reach -10° to -15°C (14° to 15°F). Turkmenistan has a subtropical desert climate that is severely continental. Summers are long (from May through September), hot, and dry, while winters generally are mild and dry, although occasionally cold and damp in the north. Most precipitation falls between January and May; precipitation is slight throughout the country, with annual averages ranging from 300 millimeters in the Kopetdag to eighty millimeters in the northwest. The capital, Ashgabat, close to the Iranian border in south-central Turkmenistan, averages 225 millimeters of rainfall annually. Average annual temperatures range from highs of 16.8°C in Ashgabat to lows of -5.5°C in Dashoguz, on the Uzbek border in north-central Turkmenistan. The almost constant winds are northerly, northeasterly, or westerly.

Required clothing:

For those intending to visit the desert in summer, lightweights are vital for the day with warmer clothing for those intending to spend the night in the open. Heavyweights should be taken for winter visits.

Turkmenistan is a Muslim-predominant country, though quite liberal. It is best to wear more or less conservative/formal clothes throughout the year.

Shopping

Groceries and Goods

Yimpash – three floors

Address: 75 Turkmenbashy Avenue, next to the “Senagat” bank

Hours: Daily 09:00 – 21:00

Phone: 45-42-66 – operator will switch to different sections of Yimpash

Turkish owned Yimpash is the only major shopping mall with a supermarket in Ashgabat. There are no pork products or alcohol sold at Yimpash. The ground floor has groceries, produce, toiletries, cleaning supplies, cosmetics, pet food, household, office and decorative goods, a full bakery, cheese counter, meat counter, and fresh popcorn sold outside. Around the ground floor perimeter are electronics, stationary, house wares, and a dry cleaner. The second floor has furniture, household items, linens, clothing and shoes for men, women, and children. On the third floor find a Wella hair salon for men and women, a bowling alley, a children’s play area, and restaurants.

Supermarket Five Star (“Bash Yildiz”)

Address: Located on Mir and Moscovsky Streets, first floor of Paytagt building (tall blue towers)

Hours: 09:00- 18:00

Phone: 47-74-92 – administration will switch to the necessary department

Five Star is smaller than the grocery store in Yimpash but stocks a full range of groceries, produce, toiletries, cleaning supplies, bread and packaged baked goods, a variety of domestic and imported cheeses, and has a fresh meat counter. Also available are fresh frozen chicken breasts, generally difficult to find anywhere in Ashgabat. There are many imported items that Yimpash does not carry, especially from Europe and on occasion even the U.S. Items tend to come and go here, so buy favorites in bulk because it might not be available the next time.

There are also several stores in Paytagt selling clothes, shoes, baby goods, stationary and office supplies, and house wares.

Univermag (Turkmenistan Shopping Center) – three floors

Address: Magtumguly Avenue behind the U.S. Embassy, across the street from the Ashgabat Hotel

Hours: 09:00 – 20:00 Monday-Saturday, closed on Sundays

Univermag is comprised of numerous small shops specializing in clothing for men, women, and children, leather coats, appliances, office equipment, luxury goods, and some grocery items. On the ground floor is “**Keyik**”, a full service hair salon and “**Shazada**”, a small café serving meals and sweets.

Teke Bazaar

Address: Situated on Azadi Street, within walking distance of the Ak Altyn Hotel – location of the Public Diplomacy Section of the U.S. Embassy

Hours: Daily 06:00 – 20:00

Teke Bazaar is most noted for its fresh flowers, loose or in bunches. There are many florists, any of whom can create special bouquets made to order. Teke also has produce, fresh meat, cheeses, cakes, spices, nuts, groceries, and a few sundries.

Mir Bazaar – two floors

Address: On the corner of Turkmenbasy Avenue and Yunus Emre Street (across from the Turkish hospital next to USAID)

Hours: Daily 08:00 – 20:00. Closed once a month on Tuesday for cleaning

Phone: 45-56-62

One of the main bazaars closest to the U.S. Embassy residential compound, Mir Bazaar is an open-air marketplace containing shops and numerous store fronts selling produce, sweets, cakes, bread, meat, dairy, music, DVDs, house wares, candy, groceries, alcohol, toiletries, clothing, shoes, sundries, books, school supplies, toys, decorative items, and fabric.

Russian Bazaar – two floors

Address: Azadi Street, within walking distance of the U.S. Embassy past the Academy of Sciences compound

Hours: Daily 08:00 – 20:00

The produce section only is closed on the first Monday of each month, the rest is open

Phone: 92-52-57- administration, 92-07-28 - reception will connect with other stores

The Russian Bazaar is an extensive open-air covered food market ringed with shops on the top (second floor) and stalls on the ground floor selling virtually everything. Seasonal produce is the main attraction but there are sweets, cakes, bread, fish, meat, and dairy. The outer shops sell music, DVDs, house wares, candy, groceries, toiletries, and alcohol. The wine shops will typically have locally made vodka, brandy, and wines. The stalls in the farthest edges of the market have clothing, shoes, sundries, books, school supplies, toys, decorative items, and Turkmenistan souvenirs. Numerous fabric stores dot the area around the Russian Bazaar.

Ashgabat Shopping Center – three floors

Address: 74 Azadi Street, multi story building right next to the Russian Bazaar

Hours: Daily 09:00 – 22:00, stores closed for lunch 13:00-13:30

Phone: 51-08-09

Ashgabat Shopping Center sells shoes, bags, clothing, cloth, jewelry, toys, cosmetics, toiletries, food, and has coffee shops.

Altyn Asyr Shopping Center – two floors

Address: Gorogly Street, across from the Grand Turkmen (near Russian bazaar)

Hours: 09:00 – 18:00, closed for lunch and on Sundays

Phone: 35-51-73

Carpet store on the first floor is open 7 days a week, hours 09:00- 19:30, closed for lunch 14:00-14:30

Carpet store phone: 92-35-63

The Altyn Asyr features cotton. There are several clothing boutiques and a couple of state clothing stores with bargain-priced cotton garments, linens, and towels. There is also a specialty store selling only cotton balls, batting, and swabs. The rest of the mall has various small shops selling Turkmen carpets (certificate included), art, jewelry, silk shawls, and an electronics store.

Gul Zaman Florist & Gift Shop

Address: 98/2 Magtymguly Avenue

Hours: Daily 09:00 – 21:00

Phone: 93-80-68

This shop sells greeting cards, flowers, baskets, vases, gift bags, Christmas trees, holiday decorations, and such.

“Altyn Asyr” Bazaar ex-“Tolkuchka” Bazaar

Address: approx. 25 minutes drive north outside of the city of Ashgabat

The Altyn Asyr is a new market opened in February 2011 that was built to replace the historic outdoor Tolkuchka. Whereas “Tolkuchka” translated to “Push [Market]” due to the throngs of people crowding the aisles and stalls of the old silk road bazaar, the new “Altyn Asyr” means “Golden Age”. The Altyn Asyr Bazaar, purportedly the largest trade complex in Central Asia, covers an area of 100 hectares and is located outside of the city Ashgabat in the sands of the Karakum Desert. It was constructed in the shape of Turkmenistan's traditional "Ahal" carpet pattern.

The territory is divided into market sectors according to type of product – food and household goods, building materials, furniture, Turkmen textiles and footwear, electronics and home appliances, accessories and fragrances, jewelry, rugs, Turkmen musical instruments and handicrafts. To make shopping easier and less confusing, each sector is assigned a particular Latin letter that corresponds to guide boards located throughout the bazaar. For example the “C” section sells handicrafts and carpet articles; the “E” section is for food products. Within each sector are orderly rows of shops, much like a strip mall. Gone are the outdoor stalls and chaos that was found in Tolkuchka.

In the spacious areas between sections there are several benches surrounding fountains or lawns and some snack bars, though no shade. In the center of the complex close to the main entrance stands a 98 foot (30 meters) tall clock tower, visible from all parts of the Altyn Asyr, which serves as a guide to those who may get lost in this huge bazaar.

Turkmen Carpets

All carpets bought in state stores receive the documentation necessary to take a carpet out of the country, including export customs fees at the airport (recommended for short term visitors/TDY personnel). Privately bought carpets without documentation that have gone to the Carpet Museum for certification are still subject to customs fee upon exit at the airport.

State Carpet Stores (Turkmen “Haly” Shops)

Carpet prices include certification and customs fees to take the carpet out of Turkmenistan. Quality and prices are generally good and are consistent from one state store to another. Stores also sell small rugs and handcraft items for gifts.

Carpet Store

Hours: 09:00-19:00, closed on Sunday

Address: Gorogly Street, near Watan cinema

Phone: 92-25-50

Carpet factory & store

Address: Kemine Street, road behind the circus

Hours: 09:00-19:00

Phone: 93-82-80

There is a national carpet store inside this factory which sells carpets to the public.

“Altyn Gol” carpet store

Address: “Altyn Asyr” shopping center, first floor, near the Russian Bazaar

Tel: 39-21-56

Carpet Museum Shop

Address: Located on Gorogly Street, next to the Grand Turkmen Hotel

Tel: 39-88-90

“Aysenem” carpet store

Address: Gorogly Street, inside the “Vestel” building

Hours: 09:00- 19:00

Phone: 23-37-74

Hotel Carpet Stores

Carpet prices include certification.



Ak Altyn

Address: Ak Altyn Hotel on Magtymguly Avenue

Hours: 09:00-20:00, closed Sundays

Phone: 36-37-00

There is also a souvenir shop located on next to the carpet store.

Grand Turkmen

Address: Grand Turkmen Hotel on Shevchenko Street, in front of the “Altyn Asyr” shopping center, near the Russian Bazaar

Hours: 10:00- 20:30, closed Sundays

Phone: 51-05-55 reception, will connect with carpet store

Several hotels have gift and carpet shops but the ones in the **Grand Turkmen** (there are four) are noteworthy for Turkmenistan souvenirs, carpets (certificate included), Turkmen jewelry, handicrafts, scarves, shawls, bags, and art.

Kumush Halychy inside the Oguzkent Hotel

Address: Oguzkent Hotel on Bitarap Avenue

Hours: 8:00-18:00, not closed for lunch.

Phone: 24-30-04 (store) or 63-86-16 (owner’s cell)



This is one of the 17 stores located inside the Oguzkent. Carpets are available for purchase other times than operating hours by calling the owner, Kumush on her cell 63-86-16 (speaks Turkmen and a little Russian).

Private Carpet Sellers

There are many reputable merchants who sell carpets out of their homes. Ask around for recommendations. Usually the carpet certificate is either not provided at all, or not included in the price and takes a few days for the vendor to obtain. Individuals who buy a carpet can obtain certificates themselves by taking the carpet to the Carpet Museum for certification. Carpet size, tribal affiliation, and age will determine the cost of certification; it is figured per square meter of carpet. There will still be customs fees at the airport though. Carpets identified as older than 50 years will not be certified, since they are considered part of cultural heritage.

Dining

Note: Smoking is allowed in restaurants in Turkmenistan. If you are bothered by cigarette smoke you might want to eat early before the dinner crowds arrive or choose a restaurant with outdoor seating.

Aygul, a.k.a. “The Pork chop Place” (pork chops, Turkmen, grilled kebabs)

Address: Located on Hudayberdiyev (Niyazov) Street - follow the road in front of the Horse Ministry for several miles, restaurant behind the Hyundai dealership on the right

Hours: 09:00 - 23:00

Phone: 49-85-62

Ashgabat Hotel and Bar (Turkmen & Russian)

Address: 74 Magtumguly Avenue, catty-cornered across the street from the U.S. Embassy

Hours: 11:00 - 23:00 (closed beginning May 29, 2011 for reconstruction)

Phone: 35-49-09

Altyn Jam (AJ’s) (Turkmen & European)

Address: 101 Magtumguly Avenue, inside the “Akja” center

Hours: 07:00 - 23:00

Phone: 93-52-84

Il Restorantino (Italian, Sushi)

Address: 73 Magtumguly Avenue, located in the back of the Univermag shopping center;

5-minute walk from the U.S. Embassy chancellery

Hours: 10:00 - 22:00

Phone: 35-78-28

Ayna Seafood Restaurant (seafood)

Address: 156 A Kemine Street - road behind the circus across from the Ak Altyn Hotel - location of the Public Diplomacy Section of the U.S. Embassy, close to the U.S. Embassy chancellery

Hours: 11:00 - 23:00

Phone: 93-70-01

Aziya Chinese Restaurant (Chinese)

Address: Archibil Avenue, located in the Aziya Hotel directly opposite the U.S. Residential Compound

Hours: 09:00 - 23:00

Phone: 48-96-18

Assuda Nusay (Turkish, European)

Address: 54/A Alisher Novai Street, in front of Inspiration Park toward the large drug store (“dermahanna”), across from the Daykhan Hotel

Hours: 08:00 - 23:00

Phone: 92-02-50

Altyn Asyr (Turkmen & Russian)

Address: 138A Magtamguly Avenue close to the circus across from the Ak Altyn Hotel - location of the Public Diplomacy Section of the U.S. Embassy

Hours: 10:00 – 22:30

Phone: 36-35-35

Ak Altyn (continental menu, hamburgers)

Address: 141/1 Magtymguly Avenue (Ak Altyn Hotel - location of the Public Diplomacy Section of the U.S. Embassy)

Hours: 08:00 – 23:00/24:00

Phone: 36-37-00

ABC Hotel and Restaurant (Uzbek and European)

Address: Archibil Avenue, located across from the cluster of apartments by the U.S. Residential Compound

Hours: 08:00 - 23:00

Phone: 48-86-67

Ahal Hotel (Italian)

Address: 35 Archabil Avenue, located across from the U.S. Residential Compound

Hours: 16:00 - 23:00

Phone: 48-87-37

Baghdad Café (Pizza)

Address: Intersection of Turkmenbashy Avenue and Shevchenko streets, basement of the place called French Boutique

Hours: 09:00 - 22:45 (reservation hours), 11:00-22:00 (open)

Phone: 39-19-80

British Pub (Turkish & European)

Address: Located on Gorogly Street across from the Grand Turkmen Hotel

Hours: 09:00 - 03:00

Phone 92-23-36

Coffee House (European)

Address: 15 Turkmenbashy Avenue, next door to the OSCE, across from Ashgabat Park (popularly known as “First Park”)

Hours: 09:00 - 23:00

Phone: 39-60-06

Cafe-Bar Paytagt (European)

Address: At the intersection of Pervomayska and Moskovsky Blvd; on the top floor of the Paytag Building (great view of Ashgabat)

Hours: 11:00 - 23:00

Phone: 47-75-06

Café Nazik (European & Italian)

Address: 40 Alisher Novai Street

Hours: 10:00 -23:00, business lunch Monday- Friday 12:00-16:00

Phone: 93-19-96

Cafe Shokoladnitza (pastries)

Address: 15 Azadi Street # 9

Hours: 09:00 - 22:00

Phone: 93-09-84

Erzurum (Turkish, delivers to embassy)

Address: Shevchenko Street inside the Chynar shop building, near the Turkish Cultural Center

Hours: 09:00 - 22:30

Phone: 27-53-71

Grand Turkmen (continental menu)

Address: Gorogly Street #50 (Grand Turkmen Hotel)

Hours: 08:00 - 23:00

Phone: 51-05-55

Hotel Nebitchi Restaurant (Turkmen & European)

Address: Archabil Avenue #29 (near the U.S. Embassy residential compound, across the street)

Hours: 08:00- 23:00

Phone: 48-02-61

Iceberg Café (Turkmen, grilled kebabs)

Address: Situated behind the circus across from the Ak Altyn Hotel - location of the Public Diplomacy Section of the U.S. Embassy

Hours: 09:00 - 22:00

Phone: 36-18-08

Iranian Truck Stop

(Turkmen, kebabs, call for fish kebabs one day in advance – fish is fresh caught to order)

Address: 458 Turkmenbashi, go south towards the Ashgabat City gate, restaurant is located on the left at the old Iranian customs point. No sign, but two portraits of the presidents of Iran and Turkmenistan are hung in front of the building.

Hours: 10:00 - 22:00

Phone: 48-87-70 (Enesa Kurban – proprietress)

Literally a diner for truckers going to and fro Iran and Turkmenistan. May call ahead for large groups.

Kopetdag Restaurant, a.k.a “Irish Pub” (European & Turkish)

Address: Intersection of Magtymguly and Svaboda Streets, before the traffic circle, across from President Bank

Hours: 09:00 - 23:00

Phone: 27-21-15

Minara (international cuisine; good Indian curry dishes)

Address: In Independence Park on Turkmenbashi Avenue; on the fifth floor of the pyramid building “5 legs” (great view of Ashgabat)

Hours: 10:00 - 23:00

Phone: 47-22-86

Merdem (Turkish & Turkmen)

Address: Oguzkhan Street #7, across from the Turkmenistan Theater – turn off the main road at the sign then drive a short way, restaurant is on the left, (Turkish cuisine is on the second floor of building, Turkmen food in the yurts out back)

Hours: 08:00- 23:00

Phone: 49-80-02, 49-80-09

Maral restaurant (Turkmen & Turkish)

Address: 30 minute drive from Ashgabat in Chuli (take the one ‘road to Chuli’), a gem of a spot with beautiful views at the base of the Kopetdag Mountains

Hours: 09:00 - 23:00

Phone: 31-22-22, 37-54-62

Nescafe Express (Turkmen cafeteria style)

Address: Café on the first floor of the Dom Byta Owadan, across from the Russian Bazaar

Hours: 08:00 -19:00

Phone: 35-68-27

Pizza House (pizza, sandwiches, soups)

Address: Magtymguly Avenue, across the street catty-corned from the U.S. Embassy

Hours: 08:00 - 23:00

Phone: 39-56-00

President Hotel – Italian Restaurant (Italian)

Address: Archabil Avenue #54 (bottom floor of the President Hotel)

Hours: 12:00 - 23:00

Phone: 40-00-00

SimSim (Western & Japanese cuisine incl. sushi)

Address: Awrabat Street, Ahdaliba 50/1, located near Mir Bazaar

Hours: 10:00 - 23:00

Phone: 45-33-43

Shazada Café (Turkmen & Asian), 50’s American Style Decorations

Address: Behind the Embassy in the Univermag shopping center, first floor

Hours: 09:00- 23:00

Phone: 39-57-64

Shazada Café (Turkmen & Asian)

Address: Turkmenbashy Street, Lenina-Nagina

Phone: 22-06-21

Ulu Dag (Turkish)

Address: 15 Halmuradov Street, near the Narhoz Institute and Gaudan Supermarket

Hours: 08:00- 23:00

Phone: 26-29-35

Yastoy (Turkmen, grilled kebabs)

Address: Andalyp Street - tiny road parallel off the main drag on the right, near the intersection by Five Star (Paytag building) in the Santa Barbara Shopping Center on the 2nd floor above the drug store (“dermahanna”)

Hours: 10:00 – 23:00

Phone: 47-40-25

Yimpash Food Court (various eateries serving international cuisine)

Address: Yimpash supermarket, third floor

Hours: 08:00- 23:00

Phone: 45-42-66

Zip Bar (Turkmen, cheap beer)

Address: Alisher Novai Street, behind the Dayhan Hotel (inside the backyard)

Hours: 09:00- 23:00

Phone: 93-04-34

Oguzkent Hotel

Address: 231 Bitrap Avenue

Phone: 44-95-00

Oriental Express: first floor

Central Asian, Turkmen and Turkish specialties

Hours: Tuesday-Sunday, 07:00-23:00

All Day Dining: first floor

International cuisine. Grill Bar in spring and summer with assortment of shih kebabs

Hours: 7 days a week, 06:30-19:00

La Table restaurant (is the same for Panoramic Lounge) fifteenth floor (top)

French cuisine (reservations suggested)

Hours: Tuesday-Sunday, 18:30-22:30

Pool Bar: first floor

Hours: open in spring and summer Monday-Sunday 10:00-18:00

The Bar: (beverages, light menu) first floor
Hours: 7 days a week, 08:00-22:30

Education

TURKMENISTAN'S EDUCATION SYSTEM AN OVERVIEW

The Ministry of Education supervises all the institutions of education in Turkmenistan. Turkmenistan's education system is broken down into the following levels:

1. Kindergarten and preschool - children ages 1.5-7 attend these schools in preparation for first grade.
2. Primary school (1-4 grades) - children ages 7-10 study basic subjects in Turkmen or Russian language.
3. Secondary school (5-10 grades) - children ages 11-16 study according to a national curriculum in Turkmen or Russian language. For all primary and secondary schools we can differentiate the following: some schools have only one language of instruction-Turkmen, and locally they are called Turkmen schools. Some schools are divided into two parts, where a part of school has Russian as a language of instruction, and the second half has Turkmen as a language of instruction. Locally, they are called mixed schools. There are also such schools as Turkmen-Russian school, where education is conducted based on the Russian national curriculum, offering 11 years of study and directly is under the Russian Embassy; Anadolu Turkish School, where education is conducted based on the Turkish national curriculum, offering 11 years of study and directly is under the Turkish Embassy. There used to be a German school, sponsored by the German embassy since 1996 and graduates of the school received the German Diploma of school completion, but starting with this school year it was changed in to a usual Turkmen school.
4. Vocational School - two year or three year college for secondary school graduates, which replaces the two-year work requirement and provides technical training in specific trades.
5. University (5 years-except the Art Academy and Medical Institute-6 years)). Post-graduates must complete a two-year work requirement in their specialized fields in order to receive their university diplomas.
6. Postgraduate study was not available in Turkmenistan between 1998-2008, and was just recently re-established.

General secondary education is compulsory and consists of 10 years of study. Secondary school education is free throughout the country. Strong schools: Russian-Turkmen school, Turgut Ozal Turkmen-Turkish school, School 27, school #7, school #6, school for gifted children named after A. Niyazov, School 16.

There is at least a dozen of specialized schools in Ashgabat. Specialized schools are specialized either in languages and literature, history, or math and physics. For example, school # 27 would offer English from grade 1, and then starting with the second or third grade, students can choose a second foreign language: German or French. There are two schools, specialized in music, where students study both educational curriculum and music curriculum.

Close to 110,000 students graduate from high schools in Turkmenistan every year. After completing secondary school, students must fulfill a two-year work requirement prior to applying for higher education. However, a student may choose to complete the two-year work requirement by attending two years of vocational study. Several vocational schools exist in each region of the country, which mainly are medical, pedagogical and art schools.

Eighteen higher education institutions exist in Turkmenistan, all of which are in Ashgabat, with the exception of a Pedagogical Institute in Turkmenabat, an Energy Institute in Mary and Agricultural Institute in Dashoguz. Higher educational institutions train students in economics, medicine, agriculture, jurisprudence, oil and gas engineering, transportation, communications, languages, music, and art. Higher education in Turkmenistan is free of charge, with the exception of a Turkmen-Turkish University, which has a commercial department and student enrolled at that department pay about USD 900 for each year of study, but their number is very small compared to the number of students who study at ordinary departments of the University for free.

The following is the number of places available in Turkmenistan's universities and institutes of higher education:

Magtymguly State University - 500
Azadi World Languages Institute - 170
Seidi State Pedagogical Institute - 160
Agriculture University - 350
Polytechnic Institute - 500
Institute of National Economy - 250
Institute of Transport and Communications - 230
Institute of Sports and Tourism - 80
Medical University - 280
Institute of Culture - 60
National Conservatory - 75
Arts Academy - 45
Institute of Energy - 180
Turkmen-Turkish University - 350

Military Institute - 550
Police Academy - 150

The quota for university admissions, compared to the years before independence (1991), has decreased nearly five times.

The language of instruction in all universities is Turkmen. Unfortunately, there are very few books developed in Turkmen for many basic fields of study. Study and instruction at higher educational institutions is severely hampered by a lack of textbooks. Due to the compulsory shift in recent years from Russian to Turkmen language in Latin script, very few textbooks exist at any level. Students usually study from notes based on lectures given by university professors, or they use books, published during the Soviet period in Russian with Cyrillic script.

Distance learning or after work educational programs do not officially exist in Turkmenistan (though a few private language centers offer evening courses). Such programs were abolished after Turkmenistan gained independence (1991). Internet access is restricted in Turkmenistan and is available only through the government-owned Turkmen Telecom Internet provider. In recent years, the government, through the Supreme Council on Science and Technology has collaborated with NATO's Silk Highway Project to introduce Internet services to a limited number of universities and research institutes. But usage of these centers is strictly tight and monitored for the content.

Postgraduate education was re-established in 2008. No master's degrees or doctorates have been granted in the country from 1998 to 2008, when the government closed the Academy of Sciences by a presidential decree. The president established the Supreme Council for Science and Technology to replace the Academy of Sciences in 1998. In 2008, under the new president the Academy of Sciences was re-opened. The Academy oversees the work of Turkmenistan's research institutes, such as the Institute of Desert Study, Institute of Biology, Institute of History, Institute of Geology, etc. It also partially oversees research at universities and serves as an advisory body to the president on science and technology issues. Staff members and a special committee, consisting of all university rectors, research institute directors, and Ministry of Education officials, oversee the Academy of Science's work.

Many postgraduate students who desire to continue their education usually travel abroad, to Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Armenia, Turkey, the European Union, the USA, and other countries that offer scholarships to Turkmen students.

In 1995-1996, Turkmenistan signed intergovernmental agreements with all NIS countries, by which Turkmenistan agreed to recognize higher education diplomas earned in the NIS before January 1, 1993. Turkmenistan law states that accreditation of diplomas earned in foreign countries after January 1, 1993 must rest on an agreement or memorandum of understanding on bilateral accreditation of higher education degrees. Thus far, Turkmenistan has signed such memoranda with several countries, Russia, Ukraine, Belorussia, Romania, Kazakhstan, Turkey, and Malaysia.

However, only students who graduated from State universities will be taken under consideration for accreditation of their diplomas. The Government of Turkmenistan has the final decision on selection. The Turkmen Government does not recognize any other diplomas received abroad. If foreign diploma holders want to validate their degrees, the Ministry of Education requires them to request approval and to pass a test reviewing the disciplines that foreign institutions do not cover (e.g., Turkmen History, Turkmen language, etc.).

