

Astana, Kazakhstan



Centralised Risk Assessment – Information reviewed and updated: September 2026

Though study abroad can broaden one's horizons, travel should always be undertaken with a clear understanding of potential risks. The purpose of this document is to highlight both the risks and the likelihood of said risks when traveling to or living in Kazakhstan, specifically with reference to the capital, Astana. Information here draws on official travel advisories and community-based safety indexes (e.g., Numbeo). Where data comes directly from residents, it may be more reflective of on-the-ground sentiment. Reference: <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/kazakhstan>.

Safety

Astana is generally regarded as a moderately safe city by international standards. Numbeo's 2026 Safety Index places Astana at approximately 66.8, indicating comparatively low levels of serious crime, while normal urban precautions remain advisable, particularly in relation to pickpocketing and petty theft.

Good practice for students:

- ✓ Keep valuables secure and be alert in busy areas and on public transport.
- ✓ Avoid walking alone late at night in poorly lit areas.
- ✓ Use reputable, app-based taxis for late-night travel (e.g., Yandex, InDrive).
- ✓ Limit visible signs of wealth (watches, electronics) in crowded places.

Political context, demonstrations, and public order

Public demonstrations do occur from time to time in Kazakhstan's major cities. Demonstrations must normally be authorised in advance, and students should avoid political gatherings or protests, particularly unauthorised ones. Large gatherings may cause temporary disruption. Students should monitor local media and official alerts and follow instructions from the local authorities.

Healthcare

Healthcare quality in Astana has improved in recent years, with private clinics generally offering higher service levels (English-speaking staff, shorter waits) than public hospitals. Nonetheless, students should calibrate expectations: specialist services—especially mental-health and continuous psychiatric care—may be limited compared to the UK, and insurance-directed evacuation can be required for complex cases. *See also: Astana Hospitals Comparison Language Link.*

Examples of facilities used by expats/insured travellers (verify coverage with your insurer):

- ✓ International SOS Clinic Astana — English-speaking doctors, 24/7 coordination, on-site diagnostics. Address: 62A Kosmonavtov St., Presidential Plaza, 5th Floor; 24/7 emergency line available. Reference: <https://www.internationalsos.com/locations/kazakhstan/astana>
- ✓ Medical Centre Hospital of the President's Affairs Administration (Presidential Hospital) — advanced tertiary care; paid services available to the public. Language support varies; check acceptance with your insurer. Reference: <https://bmcudp.kz/en/>

Emergency numbers in Kazakhstan:

General emergency 112 (nationwide). Direct lines: Police 102, Ambulance 103, Fire 101.

Water, food, purity and cleanliness

Tap-water standards in Kazakhstan vary by city and district. In Astana, many expat sources recommend bottled or boiled water for drinking; hotels and private clinics often provide filtered water. When outside controlled environments, prefer bottled water and avoid ice of uncertain origin. (Note: Almaty's water situation is often cited as better due to mountain sources; this does not necessarily apply to Astana.)

Reference: <https://www.journalofnomads.com/is-kazakhstan-safe/>

General urban cleanliness is acceptable in central districts; as with any large city, construction areas and outlying neighborhoods can be dustier/less maintained. Hand gel is advisable in markets and on public transport.

Arrival in Astana

Most visitors arrive via Nursultan Nazarbayev International Airport (NQZ). Typical transfer time to the city centre is approximately 20–30 minutes by taxi, depending on traffic. Taxis (official airport taxis or app-based) are the most direct option; there are also public buses (e.g., routes 10/12) running between the airport and central stops at frequent intervals during the day.

Reference: <https://www.welcomepickups.com/astana/airport-to-city/>

Tips:

- ✓ Use app-based taxis to see an upfront fare; avoid informal touts.
- ✓ Keep small cash for buses; card acceptance is expanding but not universal.
- ✓ At night, prefer taxis over public buses.

Transportation in the city

Astana is spread out, with wide avenues and winter weather that can be harsh. Students commonly use a mix of buses, app-based taxis, and walking in central areas. Bus routes are extensive but can feel complex to newcomers; allow buffer time for interchanges. In winter, factor in wind chill and icy pavements—appropriate footwear is essential.

Social considerations

- ✓ **Women's safety:** Street harassment is not commonly reported by expat students, but the standard guidance applies—travel in pairs late at night, use app-based taxis after dark, and avoid intoxicated crowds.
- ✓ **LGBTQ+ travellers:** Same-sex activity is legal in Kazakhstan; however, public attitudes are more conservative than in the UK. Discretion is advised in public displays of affection.
- ✓ **Alcohol & local laws:** Public drunkenness and disorderly conduct can attract police attention; carry ID. The FCDO notes periodic updates around alcohol laws and public-order enforcement—check current guidance before arrival.

Reference: <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/kazakhstan>

Weather and seasonality

Astana experiences continental extremes—very cold, windy winters and warm summers. In winter (roughly November–March), frostbite risk exists in exposed conditions; plan layered clothing, insulated footwear, and limited wait times outdoors. Campus/class schedules may be adjusted during severe weather.

Day-to-day living

- ✓ **Payments:** Cards widely accepted in malls, supermarkets, and larger cafés; keep cash for markets and small vendors.
- ✓ **Language:** Russian and Kazakh are widely spoken; English is common in international clinics, better hotels, some restaurants, and among younger city residents.
- ✓ **Connectivity:** Mobile data is inexpensive. Students using a local SIM card should be aware that Kazakhstan now requires device IMEI verification. Phones that are not properly registered may have local SIM access blocked after 30 days. Students should follow current registration guidance on arrival or consider using an international eSIM where appropriate.

Hospitals & urgent care (quick reference)

- ✓ **International SOS Clinic Astana** — First point of contact for insured international students; can coordinate referrals and evacuations. 24/7 emergency numbers available.
- ✓ **Medical Centre Hospital of the President's Affairs Administration** — Major tertiary hospital; ensure insurer recognition prior to admission.
- ✓ **Ambulance:** Dial 103 (or 112 for general emergency). Use a clinic's 24/7 line if you need English triage while waiting.

Recommendations Based on Expat Reviews

- ✓ **Preferred first contact:** International SOS Clinic Astana (English-speaking, insurance-familiar, capable of coordinating higher-level care or evacuation). For complex cases, the Presidential Hospital is a credible tertiary facility, but students should confirm insurer acceptance and language support in advance.
- ✓ **Insurance:** Students should ensure that their travel or medical insurance covers private hospitals/clinics, English-speaking care, and medical evacuation/repatriation. Those with ongoing medical or psychological conditions should discuss fitness to travel and a local contingency plan with their healthcare provider and insurer before departure.
- ✓ **Water/food:** Prefer bottled or boiled water unless you are certain of filtration; exercise standard food-hygiene precautions.