From 1929 to 1936, Almaty was the capital of the [Kazakh ASSR](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kazakh_Autonomous_Socialist_Soviet_Republic). From 1936 to 1991 it was the capital of the [Kazakh SSR](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kazakh_Soviet_Socialist_Republic). After Kazakhstan became independent in 1991, Almaty continued as the capital until 1997, when Astana (renamed to [Nur-Sultan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nur-Sultan) in 2019) was designated a return to the historic capital.

Almaty remains the largest, most developed, and most ethnically and culturally diverse city in [Kazakhstan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kazakhstan). Due to development by the Soviet Union and relocation of workers and industries from European areas of the Soviet Union during [World War II](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_War_II), the city has a high proportion of [ethnic Russians](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russians) and [Ukrainians](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ukrainians). The city lies in the foothills of [Trans-Ili Alatau](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trans-Ili_Alatau) (or Zailiysky Alatau) in the extreme south-east.

It has a relatively mild climate with warm and dry summers and quite cold winters. Since the city is in a tectonically active area, it has an endemic risk of [earthquakes](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Earthquake). Although most tremors do not cause any significant damage, Almaty has suffered some large destructive earthquakes.

In 1997 the capital was moved to Astana (renamed to [Nur-Sultan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nur-Sultan) in 2019) in the north-central part of the country. Since then Almaty has been referred to as the 'southern capital' of Kaz