

Traditionally, *kymyz* fermentation takes place in an approximately 1-meter long sealed horsehide or cowhide container of a tapering cylindrical form, called a *sabaa*. A special paddle, called a *bishkek*, sticks out through a hole in the middle of the cover to enable the churning of *kymyz*. There is speculation that the capital of the Kyrgyz Republic, Bishkek, was named after this paddle, but there appears little substantiation for this claim. The *sabaa* might also be strapped to a saddle where the natural rhythm of a day's ride in the sun replaces the painstaking task of churning by hand.

Kymyz is served in small, handle-less, bowl-shaped cups, called *piyala*. Serving *kymyz* to guests continues to be a key tenet of Kyrgyz hospitality, whether in a modern Kyrgyz home or in a yurt perched high in a *jailoo* (mountain pasture) where many Kyrgyz continue to graze their herds in summer.

Ancient Traditions of Kyrgyz Nomads

Kymyz

The horse holds a near-sacred place in the hearts of the Kyrgyz people, whose nomadic lifestyle depended on the animal as a source of labor, transportation, sustenance and health.

Among the horse's many contributions to nomadic existence was *kymyz*, mare's milk that is lightly fermented and contains numerous medicinal properties to treat kidney diseases, promote appetite, improve digestion, and reduce cholesterol. Its rich iron content addresses anemia by increasing the level of hemoglobin in blood, and it can be used in the treatment of dysentery and typhoid fever. Kyrgyz tradition holds that it also enhances immunity to the common cold!

Kymyz was first mentioned by Greek historian Herodotus in the 5th century BC as he described the lives of nomadic Scythians whose empire stretched across the Central Asian steppe to the Tien Shan mountains of modern Kyrgyzstan. Centuries later, Persian philosopher and healer Avicenna used *kymyz* in his medical practice in the 11th century.

Many Kyrgyz today undertake *kymyz* treatments, a 7- to 10-day regime of rest and relaxation, supplemented by fresh mountain air, organic food and several doses of *kymyz* per day.

Kymyz is a dairy product that is white in color, similar to kefir but produced from fermentation of the natural sugars in lactic acid, in contrast to kefir 'grains.' It is light in body compared to most dairy beverages, with a unique, slightly sour flavor and a fizzy consistency resulting from the fermentation that occurs when it is churned over a low fire for several hours. Its mild alcohol content, 0.7 to 2.5%, compares to small beer and, like beer, is usually consumed cold.

