The right side of the yurt is for women, called *epchi jak*, where all supplies were stored, while the left side, reserved for men, is called *er jak*, and housed supplies for hunting and cattle breeding. The central part of the yurt, opposite of the yurt door is called *tor* and is reserved for honored guests.

The yurt is the symbol of life for the Kyrgyz people, who were born, lived and died within its shelter. Even today, at the death of a family member, Kyrgyz pitch yurts in private yards or public courtyards where friends and relatives pay their final respects to the body awaiting burial.
If a man’s home is his castle, then yurts – the portable ‘castles’ of Kyrgyz nomads perched high in mountain pastures – offer vistas as panoramic as castles anywhere in the world and provide protection against the elements as effectively as stone and mortar.

A circular dwelling made of a lattice of flexible wood and covered with thick, durable felt, yurts are as sturdy and reliable as they are sensible for wandering herders seeking fresh meadows for grazing their flocks. The Kyrgyz name, boz uï, translates as ‘gray house’ since, historically, ordinary nomads could not afford to use high quality felt to cover their yurts. Therefore, Kyrgyz nomads used the wool of black and gray sheep and saved the soft, white wool for clothing or gifts for life’s important events.

The lattice of a yurt is divided into sections, called kerge. Each kerge is a collapsible series of crisscrossed wooden poles made of willow, birch, or poplar that are tied together with leather bands. Approximately, 1.5 meters high, the kerge of Kyrgyz yurts are painted a red lacquer, a practice that grew from the former tradition of using clay to prevent moisture from penetrating the wood. Curved poles that add two additional meters to the height of a yurt connect the kerge to the tunduk, the circular crown that allows sunlight to brighten the yurt and air to circulate. The door of the yurt, called the bosogo, should always face east to meet the rising sun.

The pattern of the tunduk is a national symbol of Kyrgyzstan and adorns the Kyrgyz flag, which is surrounded by 40 rays of sun representing the 40 Kyrgyz tribes that united against the Mongols in Kyrgyzstan’s epic tale of Manas.

Yurts have existed for thousands of years in Kyrgyzstan in virtually the same form as today. It takes roughly 1-2 hours to assemble or disassemble a yurt that is sufficiently spacious to house families of up to 15 people. Although weighing approximately 150 kilograms, a yurt can be easily packed up and transported on horse or camel.