Here's what it's like inside Turkmenistan, the secretive Asian dictatorship that is stricter than North Korea, where the streets are paved with marble and gold

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The central Asian nation of Turkmenistan is one of the world's most secretive and mysterious countries.

Information from the central Asian country is tightly controlled and few people enter, while its human rights record is decried, and it has virtually no free press.

But its president, Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov, is keen to present the country — and himself — as strong.

Berdymukhamedov, who has been in power since 2006, often shows off by posing with fancy cars or on horseback, but the country might also be heading towards economic collapse.

The country's capital, Ashgabat, is one of the most unusual capital cities in the world, its streets lined with marble and filled with golden statues despite the economic troubles of the natural-resource-rich nation.

While not much information leaks out of the country, we do know a little bit about it. Take a look at all we know about Turkmenistan below:

## Turkmenistan is a country in central Asia, with a population of just under six million and plentiful gas reserves.

## But it's a highly secretive country that is often referred to as a hermit nation. It strictly controls access to the country, and allowed just 6,000 people to enter in 2016.

Source: [*CNN*](https://edition.cnn.com/2019/08/10/asia/turkmenistan-caspian-sea-intl-hnk/index.html)

## One tourist who has been to both countries said that in Turkmenistan: "I could walk around more freely than in North Korea, but it was very apparent I was being watched."

## The country's leader is President Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov, who has ruled the country as a dictatorship since 2006. He is unofficially referred to as "The Protector," and is the latest in a line of Turkmen leaders to embrace a cult of personality.

Turkmenistan nominally has elections — Berdymukhamedov [won 97% of the vote](https://inews.co.uk/news/world/turkmenistan-president-gurbanguly-berdimuhamedow-weights-video-229444) in the last election.

## A 69-foot gold leaf statue of Berdymukhamedov riding a horse was unveiled in the capital city of Ashgabat in 2016 — called "The Protector."

Source: [*Business Insider*](https://www.businessinsider.com/turkmenistans-dictator-just-built-a-huge-golden-statue-of-himself-riding-a-horse-2015-5?r=US&IR=T)

## Downtown Ashgabat is filled with huge monuments and buildings, which along with their marble edifices, are often adorned with lavish amounts of gold.

## Turkmenistan markets itself as a country that embraces tradition, nature, and manufacturing, as a video made this year to advertise the Caspian Economic Forum, a conference held in the west of the country, showed.

Source: [*CNN*](https://edition.cnn.com/2019/08/10/asia/turkmenistan-caspian-sea-intl-hnk/index.html)

## But the Turkmenistan is widely derided for its human rights record. Human Rights Watch calls it "one of the world’s most isolated and oppressively governed countries" and says that "all aspects of public life are controlled by President Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov and his associates."

Source: [*Human Rights Watch*](https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2019/country-chapters/turkmenistan)

## The economy could also currently be at risk of collapse.

The Foreign Policy Centre, a British think tank, warned in 2019 that the country's penchant for marble and strict information control is obscuring reality.

The reality, it says, is that Turkmenistan is "in the middle of a sustained economic crisis that has seen hyper-inflation in the lives of ordinary people and widespread food shortages, all despite its vast gas reserves."

Ruslan Myatiev, the editor of [a news website about Turkmenistan](https://turkmen.news/) based in The Netherlands, [told CNN in August](https://edition.cnn.com/2019/08/10/asia/turkmenistan-caspian-sea-intl-hnk/index.html) that: "There is not enough food in the state-run shops so every morning people have to line up for hours to buy such staples as flour, bread or sugar."

Source: [*The Foreign Policy Centre.*](https://fpc.org.uk/publications/spotlight-on-turkmenistan/)

## The think tank also warned of Turkmenistan's "massive human rights abuses" and "use of forced labour," and said that the economic crisis has "in turn led to the regime’s repression of its people becoming ever tighter and its personality cult becoming ever more grandiose."

Freedom of Information group Reporters Without Borders ranked Turkmenistan last in the world for press freedom in its 2019 World Press Freedom Index.