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Uzbekistan Cultural Orientation

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Chapter 1 - Profile

Introduction

Its blend of Central Asian deserts, steppes, oases, river valleys, and mountains places Uzbekistan at the nexus of the great trade routes of ancient and modern history: the Royal Road of Noble Bukhara, the Silk Road, and the Golden Road to Samarkand. Great soldiers of antiquity like Alexander the Great and Cyrus the Persian as well as the equestrian archers from Mongolia have written their names on Uzbek history.

The past two centuries have seen Uzbeks writing their national narrative in Arabic, Cyrillic, and Latin characters. In addition, the Islamic states yielded to Russian rule and finally Soviet domination dissolved, making way for an independent republic with broad links to the global community. A question remains whether true post-communist political and economic reform will be the next chapter in Uzbekistan's history.



© Rob Treadway
Children picking cotton near Bukhara

Geography

Area

Uzbekistan lies at the core of Central Asia. It is surrounded by the new republics of Central Asia; Kazakhstan to the north, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to the east and southeast, Turkmenistan to the southwest, and Afghanistan to the south. Most of its land mass of 447,400 sq km (172,742 sq mi), roughly the size of California, lies between the region's two major rivers: the Syr Darya and the Amu Darya.¹

Climate

Uzbekistan's climate is classified as continental. Substantial portions of Uzbekistan are desert-like and have an extended hot, dry summer. The spring is generally mild and rainy in the east. Autumn also brings rainfall and, in higher elevations, early frosts. The winter season is unpredictable with freezing temperatures throughout the country and snowfall at higher elevations. Average summer temperatures range from 26°C–32°C (79°–90°F). Figures for desert regions in the summer are appreciably higher surpassing 40°C (115°F). Winter averages lie between -6°–2°C (21°–36°F).²

Topography

A topographic map of Uzbekistan shows great variety ranging from the parched Turin Basin of the far northwest to the central steppes and flat desert plains that account for

¹ CIA World Factbook. "Uzbekistan." 13 December 2007. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/uz.html>

² Encyclopedia of the Nations. "Uzbekistan: Climate." 2007. <http://www.nationsencyclopedia.com/Asia-and-Oceania/Uzbekistan-CLIMATE.html>

roughly two thirds of the country. The foothills and mountains of the southeast are extensions of the Tian Shan and Gissaro-Alay ranges to the east and southeast. They are part of the *Pamir Knot* or “roof of the world.” The two main rivers, the Syr Darya, which irrigates the Ferghana Valley and the Amu Darya, which irrigates the Khorzem Oasis, traverse the country and drain into the Aral Sea. Elevations range from near sea level in the Turkmenistan border region of the far west to more than 2,000 m (6,500 ft.) in the east. Only about 4.8% of the land is forested; this in the Ferghana Valley.³

Major Rivers

Amu Darya

From its headwaters in the Hindu Kush, the Amu Darya cuts through the high Pamir mountains of Tajikistan. It traces a 2,540 km (1,578 mi) path through the country separating the Kyzyl Kum (Red Sands) and the Kara Kum (Black Sands). Heavily silted, it finally drains into the Aral Sea.⁴

Syr Darya

The Syr Darya begins in Kyrgyzstan and falls from the Tian Shan Mountains into the Ferghana Valley. Bypassing Tashkent, it completes a 2,137 km (1,335 mi) journey through eastern Uzbekistan and the Kyzyl Kum (Red Sands), terminating in the Aral Sea.

Zarafshan

The Zarafshan is the third largest river of Uzbekistan. Upstream, where it flows through Tajikistan, the river is known as the Mostchokh Darya. It enters Uzbekistan through the Zarafshan Valley, located in the Samarkand region. It provides water for some of the most important oases in the country.⁵

Major Cities

Tashkent

As the capital city of Uzbekistan, Tashkent is Central Asia’s premier city. As a result of several earthquakes, the last major one in 1966, and seven decades of socialist architecture, little is to be seen of its 2,000 year history as a trade center. The city became a part of the Mongol Empire in the 13th century and the Russian Empire in the 19th. Its population today is more than 2.1 million.⁶

³ Country Studies. U.S. Library of Congress. “Uzbekistan: Geography.” 1996.
<http://countrystudies.us/uzbekistan/15.htm>

⁴ Highbeam Encyclopedia. The Columbia Encyclopedia, Sixth Edition. “Amu Darya.” 2007.
<http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1E1-AmuDarya.html>

⁵ *Uzbekistan: The Golden Road to Samarkand*. MacLeod, Calum and Bradley Mayhew. 1997. Passport Books.

⁶ BBC News. “Timeline: Uzbekistan.” 29 August 2007. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/country_profiles/1295881.stm

Samarkand

The city of Samarkand is situated on an oasis and is home to approximately 366,000 people.⁷ As such it is known as the “Crossroads of Cultures.” With its distinctive blue-domed monuments, Samarkand was added to the UNESCO list of World Heritage sites in 2001.⁸

Bukhara

With a population of 276,000, Bukhara is Uzbekistan’s best preserved city. The oldest section of the city is full *madrassas* (Islamic seminaries) and souvenirs of its royal past such as the Ark Fortress. The Kalyan Minaret, Bukhara’s most famous landmark, was once the tallest structure in Central Asia. It was spared destruction when the 14th century Mongol emperor, Timur, torched the city.⁹

Shakhrisabz

Nearly 70,000 people live in Shakhrisabz. It lies south of Samarkand and seems totally untouched by Russian rule. Many ruins testify to its past as the birthplace of Timur. Originally known as Kesh, its current name means “green city.”¹⁰

Media

The media in Uzbekistan has been characterized as not deviating from the official party line.¹¹ There are six daily newspapers and one weekly journal, *Mohiyat*. Two of the papers have a Russian edition. *Pravda Vostoka* is a national daily, and the others are regional. All are either government owned or, in the case of Uzbekistan *Ozovoi*, owned and operated by the ruling People’s Democratic Party (PDP).

A similar state of affairs exists with broadcast media. There are eight TV networks, which have Central Asian satellite uplinking.¹² They too are operated by prominent PDP members with direct guidance from the Ministry of Information. Following the 2005 uprising in Andijan, Janon, the official news agency, imposed greater government control on domestic political reporting. The Foreign Ministry has never allowed western news



⁷ Mongabay. “2005 Population Estimates for Cities in Uzbekistan.” 2000–2007..

http://www.mongabay.com/igapo/2005_world_city_populations/Uzbekistan.html

⁸ BBC News (International Version). “Silk Road City Marks 2,750 Years.” 26 August 2007.

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/6965037.stm>

⁹ Mongabay. “2005 Population Estimates for Cities in Uzbekistan.” 2000–2007..

http://www.mongabay.com/igapo/2005_world_city_populations/Uzbekistan.html

¹⁰ Silkroad Foundation. “Tamerlane (1336–1405) - The Last Great Nomad Power.” 2000.

<http://www.silk-road.com/artl/timur.shtml>

¹¹ Reporters Without Borders For Press Freedom. “State Media Serve President’s Reelection Bid, While Independent Journalists Seem Doomed to Disappear.” 24 December 2007.

http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=24841

¹² BBC News. “Country Profile: Uzbekistan.” 24 December 2007. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/country_profiles/1238242.stm

agencies to operate independently inside the country. An exception to this policy might be in the making. CTC, an independent Russian broadcaster has acquired controlling interest in Kazakhstan's Channel 31 Group for the equivalent of USD 65 million in cash. CTC has also been permitted to register and operate a broadcasting company in Uzbekistan.¹³

Government

In practice, governance in Uzbekistan emanates from the President's office in the capital of Tashkent down through provincial governments called *hokimiats*. Each of the country's 12 *wiloyatlar*, or provinces, are governed by a *hokim* (state governor) who has been appointed by and can be replaced by the President. Interests and influence work their way upwards through the *hokimiat* by the force of regional power lobbies, which have their roots in ancient clans. The *hokim* is expected to be sensitive to the needs of his district. However, this often translates to being aware of his district's skills and resources, using them as barter in exchange for favor with the Office of the President. The President also appoints the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Ministers, who in turn oversee the Ministries of Agriculture, Trade, Energy, Transportation, Culture, Education, Health, and Labor. All ministries answer to the President.

The acceptance of authoritarian leadership was a lesson learned well from the Soviets. The 250 seat legislature, *Oly Majlis*, only meets for a few days each year and all parties in the legislature support the President and his policies. The democratic language of the Constitution of December 1992 is wholly cosmetic. Any provision can be superseded by executive, presidential decree. Unquestioned central rule is the norm in Uzbekistan.¹⁴

Economy

Since independence, government leaders have promised to develop a market-based economy. Post-communist economic reform never came about because many of the country's economic leaders are in fact aging *apparatchiks* left over from the Soviet era. Some well-intended reforms have failed for reasons other than lack of political will. For instance, plans to shift away from cotton cultivation have stalled for two reasons. About 40% of Uzbekistan's hard currency income is still generated by cotton export.



Tractor near the Amu Darya River

The energy production sector, which rests on sure and certifiable deposits of oil and natural gas, has been slow to develop. The latter could be a double boon for the country's economy. Exploitation of oil and gas deposits could liberate Uzbekistan from dependence on energy imports and render the country self-sufficient in energy. Extracting the substantial mineral deposits such as gold, uranium, copper, and silver, awaits foreign

¹³ CTC Media Press Center. "CTC Expands into Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, Fast-Growing Markets with a Combined Population of Over 40 Million." 4 September 2007. <http://www.ctcmedia.ru/press-center/releases/?id=122>

¹⁴ Country Studies. U.S. Library of Congress. "Uzbekistan: Government." 1996. <http://countrystudies.us/uzbekistan/44.htm>

investment. All future economic development is contingent on economic reform and creating a climate for foreign investment. Moreover, real economic development will remain static until a transparent domestic trade code consistent with global economic norms is put in place.¹⁵

History

Antiquity

When Alexander the Great invaded Central Asia in 330 B.C.E. he found the area had already been traversed by Mesopotamians (from modern-day Iraq) and other Indo-Europeans. Western Turks who invaded the area in the 6th century B.C.E. were already settled in the area around Samarkand and Bukhara. As late as the 1st century B.C.E. Persian nomads were drifting into present-day Uzbekistan in great numbers. Along with invaders yet to come, they left their ethnic signatures on the faces of modern Uzbeks.¹⁶



Courtesy of Wikipedia
Persian painting of Alexander the Great

Islamization

The road to the west was easier for the Muslim Arabs who carried Islam across North Africa than for those who braved the steppes of Central Asia. To be sure, Arab expeditionary forces under Qutaibah ibn Muslim penetrated the land they called “Mawarannahr”¹⁷ in the early 8th century C.E. The river “Mawarannahr” refers to was the Amu Darya, known to the Greco-Roman world as the Oxus. Early Arabs found the people of the region to be firm adherents of Buddhism and, in some areas near Persia, Zoroastrianism. It wasn’t until the 10th century C.E. that great numbers of *madrassas* or Islamic seminaries began to spring up first in the Bukhara area and later in Samarkand and Tashkent.¹⁸

Seljuk Turks

Using modern-day Uzbekistan as a stepping stone, Seljuk Turks¹⁹ under Tughril Beg (1037–1063 C.E.) invaded and conquered Persia in 1051 C.E. Moving westward they conquered Baghdad in 1055 C.E. Within a century they created the broad empire of Turkestan. This empire lasted until the mid-14th century and stretched from China in the east to the Anatolian Peninsula in the west and north into Russia. Turkic Mongol rule set

¹⁵ Mongabay.com. “Uzbekistan: Economy.” 2000–2007.

http://www.mongabay.com/reference/country_studies/uzbekistan/ECONOMY.html

¹⁶ Global Security. “Military History.” c. 2000–2007.

<http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/centralasia/uzbek-history.htm>

¹⁷ From the Arabic ma-wara-an-nahar or “that which lies beyond the river.” It is the equivalent of the Latin Transoxiana.

¹⁸ Country Studies. Library of Congress. “Uzbekistan. The Early Islamic Period.” 1996.

<http://countrystudies.us/uzbekistan/2.htm>

¹⁹ The Seljuk Turks were a Turkic Sunni Muslim dynasty. From the 11th to 14th century, the Seljuks ruled a vast empire that included parts of the Middle East and Central Asia from the 11th to 14th centuries.

the stage for later and greater Mongol empire ambitions. Today's Republic of Turkey regards the Seljuk Empire as its ancestor.²⁰

Mongol Empires

By the turn of the 14th century, Chinggis (1165–1227 C.E.), the orphaned son of a tribal chieftain born in Mongolia's Gobi Desert, was agitating for unity among northern Mongol tribes. Genghis, as Chinggis was later known, emerged as Khan or leader of a tribal confederation. Having augmented his forces with Turkic recruits, he and his archer horsemen embarked on campaigns southward and eastward. In the span of 25 years Genghis conquered a large part of China, including Beijing, and subdued substantial parts of Central Asia.²¹ At his death, Genghis Khan's empire was divided among his four sons. The area of Uzbekistan fell to his second son, Chagatai.

The Timurids

Chief among the descendents of Chagatai's Mongol dynasty in Central Asia was "Timur²² the Lame" (1336–1405 C.E.), who was born in a village south of Samarkand. In spite of the limp caused by a riding injury at an early age, Tamerlane, personally lead his archers on great campaigns.

They traveled east to India and China and west as far as Smyrna (Turkey) and north to Moscow. At home, he burned and then rebuilt the major cities of his realm leaving Samarkand the architectural pearl of Central Asia. On the eve of a confrontation with the emperor of Ming China in 1405, Tamerlane died along the banks of the Syr Darya River. His body was embalmed and placed in an ebony coffin to be buried in the Gur-e-Amir Mausoleum in Samarkand.



© Rob Treadway
Statue of Timur

The Timurid dynasty came to an end in 1506. Tamerlane's great-great-great grandson, Babur, fled invading Uzbek forces and left Ferghana Valley for India. There he established the Mughal Kingdom that begat kings like Shah Jahan and architectural landmarks like the Taj Mahal and Shalimar Gardens.²³

The Uzbeks

The Uzbeks, named after descendents of Öz Beg, the Turkic Mongol, ruled Uzbekistan from 1500–1865. It was a period of decline in trade, because the land trade route, the Silk Road, was being replaced by faster oriental sea routes discovered by Portuguese and Italian explorers.

²⁰ Yeditepe Universitesi. "Seljuk Turks. Turkish Culture and History." 28 July 2005.

http://turkishhistoryandculture.org/index.php/Seljuk_Turks

²¹ Alamo Community College District. May, Dr. Timothy. "Mongol History. Genghis Khan." 2001.

<http://www.accd.edu/sac/history/keller/Mongols/empsub1.html>

²² The name derives from a Turkic Mongol word meaning "iron."

²³ Geocities. "Timur and Timurids." No date. <http://www.geocities.com/Athens/5246/Timur.html>

Chief among the early Uzbeks was Muhammad Shaybani Khan (1451–1510 C.E.), the poet king who ruled for ten years and died trying to annex eastern Persia.²⁴ Later Uzbek kings had to contend with invasions from Czarist Russia. As early as 1554, Tsar Ivan the Terrible invaded Central Asia. Later Tsars, like Peter the Great, furthered Russia's interest in the agricultural lands of the Central Asian Steppes.

The Russians

In 1717 the expeditionary force sent by Tsar Peter the Great to Khiva in Central Asia failed. Nearly everyone was killed. Another Russian march on Khiva in the winter of 1839–1840 failed as well, ending with great loss of life. Nonetheless, Russia's resolve was strengthened for it saw Khiva as the key to control of India's northern frontier. As Britain was consolidating its long hold over India in the mid 19th century, Russia was determined to frustrate the British Empire. In this way, Central Asia, the corridor to India, regained the strategic importance it had lost when the Silk Road declined.

In 1865, the Russians succeeded in conquering Tashkent. Khiva and Bukhara fell soon thereafter. Uzbekistan became a regional power base. A rail link with Moscow was soon established and Uzbek cotton filled the market gap created by the U.S. Civil War. Central Asia was being modernized by an eastern European power.

Over the next 50 years, several waves of Russian colonists made their way to Uzbekistan. Czarist Russia extended its hold over its new protectorate in Central Asia and all of present-day Uzbekistan came under Russian rule. Central Asians ceded control of their affairs to the Russians, but resistance came in the form of an Islamic reform movement known as the Jadidists.²⁵

The Soviet Era

When news that a Bolshevik revolution had toppled the Tsar reached the Uzbeks in February 1917, there were regional expectations that an autonomous state could be established. Lenin himself sent an appeal on behalf of the Comintern²⁶ to the Muslims urging them to rebel against Tsar Nikolai. In addition, he gave them a promise of self-determination. In mid 1917, a new and independent Muslim Khanate²⁷ was proclaimed in Kokand. However, in February 1918, a Soviet response came in the form of a brutal assault during which most of the city's 50,000 residents were killed. Muslim popular resistance flickered for several years. In 1924 the Soviet Socialist Republic of Uzbekistan was founded on territory of the former khanates.²⁸ By that time Lenin was dead and a new chapter in Soviet history had begun: Josef Vissarionovitch Yukashvili Stalin.

²⁴ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Uzbekistan: The Early Uzbeks." 2008.
<http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-73654/Uzbekistan>

²⁵ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Uzbekistan: Russian and Soviet Rule." 2008.
<http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-73655/Uzbekistan>

²⁶ The Comintern (from Communist International) was an international Communist organization founded in Moscow in March 1919 to aid in the creation of the Soviet republic.

²⁷ Khanate is an Islamic entity governed by a Khan or chieftain.

²⁸ Uzbektourism National Company. "History of Uzbekistan." 23 September 2005.
<http://www.uzbektourism.uz/en/section.scm?sectionId=2927>

The Stalinist era is a catalogue to ever tightening Soviet control of Uzbek life and brutal repression. In several waves of purges all resistance to Moscow's control was decimated. Following the arrest and execution of Chief Commissar Khojayevo, the nationalists, and the original Uzbekistan Communist Party members in 1938, the government and party ranks in Uzbekistan were filled with people loyal to the Moscow government. In this period the *kolkhoz* or farm collectives came into being. Likewise, all private ownership was abolished.

The years following Stalin's death in 1953 were characterized by relaxation of political repression. However, economic exploitation continued as two generations of Uzbek leaders bartered Uzbekistan's cotton for a large measure of personal favor with the Central Committee in Moscow. Political dissent was being carefully aired in public forums when Mikhail Gorbachev articulated his doctrine of *perestroika* and *glasnost*.²⁹ When the 1991 coup against Gorbachev by discontented hard-liners in Moscow failed, independence movements throughout the Soviet Union were fueled. Dominos were falling. In December 1991, Uzbeks voted for independence and chose Islam Karimov, a dedicated communist, as their president.³⁰

Independence

The Communist Party of Uzbekistan crumbled and in its place was born the People's Democratic Party. The National State Security has replaced the KGB. The leadership promised free and fair elections, but this has not materialized. Press censorship is now unconstitutional, but the government dominates the media and journalists who challenge this control are harassed and arrested. When Karimov's leadership was challenged by a series of bombs in Tashkent in 1999, the President declared the incident a coup attempt by Islamic radicals. As a reprisal, several hundred Islamic leaders were arrested and imprisoned. Subsequent elections in 2000 and 2002 that have reinstalled President Karimov have been described by the U.S. State Department as neither free nor fair.³¹ As late as January 2008, Karimov was being reconfirmed in popular election when more than 90% of the population was said to have elected him.

Ethnic Groups

When the Soviet Union created the Soviet Republic of Uzbekistan in 1924, it included ethnic groups other than the majority, Uzbeks. At that time, some ethnic Uzbeks were left in neighboring republics. Russians were the largest minority at about 8% of the population. After independence this number fell to about 5.5%. At independence all non-Uzbeks were offered citizenship. Most chose not to accept the offer and chose to emigrate to countries where their ethnicity constituted the majority. Uzbeks living in the surrounding republics opted to return to their home land. In this way, the population of Uzbekistan became more homogenous.

²⁹ *Glasnost* and *perestroika* are the terms used to describe reforms introduced by the Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev in the mid- to late 1980s. The reforms called for freedom of information as well as economic restructuring.

³⁰ Mongabay.com. "Uzbekistan: History." 2000–2007.
http://www.mongabay.com/reference/country_studies/uzbekistan/HISTORY.html

³¹ Encyclopedia of the Nations. "World leaders 2003: Uzbekistan." 2007.
<http://www.nationsencyclopedia.com/World-Leaders-2003/Uzbekistan-LEADERSHIP.html>

Uzbeks

The Uzbeks, who account for 80% of the population, are primarily of ethnic Turkish origin with some Mongolian and Persian ancestry. Their language is related to Turkish. Uzbeks practice the Salafi school of Sunni Islam. The household division of labor has men working outside while women remain responsible for all activities within the home

Kazakhs

Kazakhs are descendants of nomadic livestock herders. They are found in the northern border region of Uzbekistan and comprise 3% of the population. Their Turkish-derived language is one of the most widely spoken in Central Asia

Kyrgyz

The small Kyrgyz minority inhabits the Ferghana Valley, a fertile area that was split into separate administrative entities by the Soviets. These areas then became parts of different nation-states including Uzbekistan. The Kyrgyz language is also derived from Turkish.

Tajik

The Tajiks are an Indo-European people who comprise 5% of the population of Uzbekistan. However, many experts agree this is an underestimation. Tajikistan was engulfed in civil war after independence in 1991. This made return to their ancestral homeland unlikely for many Tajiks. Islam Karimov, president of Uzbekistan, is of Tajik descent. He is reputed to speak better Russian and Tajik than he does Uzbek.³²

³² Country Studies. Library of Congress. "Ethnic Composition." 1996.
<http://countrystudies.us/uzbekistan/19.htm>

Chapter 2 - Religion

Overview of Major Religions

About 88% of the population of Uzbekistan, i.e., 25 million people, identifies with one or more forms of Islam; either the moderate Sunni Hanifi³³ sect or the separatist, mystical sect of Sufism called *naqshbandi*. The Sufi movement, which accounts for about 25% of all Muslims in Uzbekistan, began in Iraq and Syria during the 9th century C.E. Sufism is rejected by Sunni and Shi'a Islam.³⁴ The non-Muslim minority is composed of mostly Russian Orthodox believers who are a vestige of Czarist Russia's 19th century occupation of the Central Asian Republics. Less than one-tenth of one percent of the population are adherents of Judaism (c. 20,000). Only two cities, i.e., Tashkent and Samarkand, have congregations with permanent rabbis.³⁵ Assorted Christian sects such as Baptists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Korean Protestants, and Seventh-day Adventists account for the remainder of the population that identifies with religion.³⁶

Islam

Towards the end of the 7th century C.E., Islam spread rapidly westwards across Africa and eastwards across central and south Asia. Following 8th century conquests of Central Asia by Arab armies, *Mawarannahar*,³⁷ as present-day Uzbekistan was then known, became an Islamic province. By the 10th century Islam had replaced Buddhism, Judaism, and Christianity as the principal religion. As a faith it teaches monotheism as it was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad in the Qur'an. Muslims, followers of Islam, are required to observe the five pillars of faith. These are five daily prayers (*salat*); fasting during the month of Ramadan (*saum*); pilgrimage to the holy city of Mecca (*hajj*); giving charity and alms to the poor (*zakat*); and declaring the central principal of the faith (*shahada*). The latter means repeating that there is but one God and Muhammad is his prophet. In the decades following the death of Muhammed, two sects of Islam emerged that have persisted to present times: Sunni and Shi'a Islam.



© World Bank Photo Collection
Gateway to Oq Soy village, Tashkent-Termoz highway

Mainstream Islam embraces the Sunni sect and most Uzbeks are Sunni Muslims. Muslims who follow this main form of Islam believe that there were four rightly guided Caliphs who followed in succession after the death of Muhammad. After the death of the fourth Caliph, leaders of the faith embraced the Qur'an and the sayings and teachings of

³³ Founded by Abu Hanifa in the second century of Islam, this is the most liberal of the four schools of Islamic jurisprudence.

³⁴ Forum 18. Oslo, Norway. Rotar, Igor. "Uzbekistan: Sufism Used for Uzbek Propaganda in the USA." 13 May 2004. http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=319

³⁵ The Federation of Jewish Communities of the CIS. "Uzbekistan." 2007.

<http://www.fjc.ru/communities/communities.asp?aid=80073>

³⁶ Mongabay. "Country Profile: Uzbekistan." February 2007.

http://www.mongabay.com/reference/country_profiles/2004-2005/Uzbekistan.html

³⁷ Arabic "*ma-wara-an-nahar*" or that which lies beyond the river, i.e. land beyond the Oxus river. Its Latin equivalent was the geographic region known as Transoxania.

Muhammed, called the *sunna*. For Sunni Muslims, leadership of the faithful cannot be inherited. Islamic Jurisprudence, or law, rests in four somewhat different schools or sects of Sunni Islam, each based on the collected writings of the four main scholars of early Sunni Islam: Ibn Hanbal, Ibn Malik, Abu Hanifa, and Shaf’ei. The *madrassas* or Islamic seminaries of Uzbekistan have traditionally followed the most liberal of the four sects, i.e., that of Abu Hanifa.³⁸

Role of Religion in Government

Uzbekistan is a secular state, and the relationship of state and religion in the post-Soviet government of President Karimov is very much *noli me tangere*.³⁹ Its constitution guarantees theoretical freedom of religion, but in reality, religion of any sort is permitted only so long as it does not challenge governance. Non-Muslim religions are tolerated if they do not criticize the government and if they refrain from proselytizing Muslims. Prior to 1917, there were more than 20,000 mosques in Central Asia, most of which were in Uzbekistan. Under Stalin, the number dropped to 65.⁴⁰ Since the fall of the Soviet Union nearly 20 years ago, the number of registered mosques has risen to more than 1,800. Because of the seeming surge in religious activity, the government continues to assert its control over religion by requiring all clerics and places of worship to be registered. There is no religious authority that is permitted to confront the authority of state leadership. Public prayer gatherings can be construed as meetings for political purposes and can result in detention.⁴¹ In the aftermath of the 1999 terrorist bombings outside government buildings in Tashkent, the government’s fear of radical Islam was used as a justification for strengthening repressive measures against perceived religious challenges to the authority of the state.⁴² Any possibility of a politicization of Islam is likely to come as a result of opposition to the current government and less from a grassroots reawakening of Islamic fervor.



© Adam Baker
Young boy at mosque in Bukhara

Religion and Daily Life

The mosque or prayer room of the local *mahalla*⁴³ is the center of Uzbek Islamic life. Prayer is mandatory for every devout Muslim. Both men and women may go to the mosque to pray, but prayer rooms are segregated into male and female sections. *Mullahs* or religious leaders, who conduct prayer services, are exclusively male. Many people

³⁸ “A Brief History of Islam [p. 203–4].” Soon, T. In *The Blackwell Companion to Contemporary Islamic Thought*. Ibrahim Abu-Rabi, Ed. 2004. Blackwell Press.

³⁹ Latin for “do not touch me”.

⁴⁰ *Terrorism and Militancy in Central Asia*. Mohanty, J.K. “Growth of Fundamentalism and Radical Groups in Central Asia [p. 122].” 2006. Gyan Books

⁴¹ Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor. U.S. Department of State. “Uzbekistan: Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – 2000.” 23 February 2001. <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2000/eur/858.htm>

⁴² European Commission. External Relations. “The EU’s relations with Uzbekistan: Country Profile. Political Situation.” January 2006. http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/uzbekistan/intro/index.htm

⁴³ *Mahalla* (alternative *malhalla* and *malhallah*) from the Arabic meaning “place” or “neighborhood.” It is a traditional Islamic communal structure which has been co-opted by the current government as a unit of local of political organization.

pray at home, sitting on a rug. The Islamic traditions that have survived 70 years of Soviet domination, i.e., the basic five pillars, are observed with quiet rigor by many, but not all, Uzbeks.

Male–female interaction in everyday life is less volatile than in fundamentalist countries, however the usual rules apply, e.g., unmarried couples do not spend time alone and there is no dating in the western sense. Unmarried women do not move about in society without being chaperoned by their families.

Although the majority of the population is Islamic, tolerance of minorities in Uzbekistan is widespread. Non-Muslims have their own places of worship. However, discussing religion or religious topics outside of small religious gatherings is not completely acceptable and would likely come to the attention of leaders of the *mahalla*. In secular society, people of different faiths interact with each other largely without restrictions, yet communal life is still structured around the ethical standards of Islamic life.

Religious Holidays

The fasting month of Ramadan and the festival which celebrates its close, *Ruza Hayit*, are not celebrated with the same vigor that Uzbeks show at the feast of sacrifice, *Kurban Hayit*, also called *Kurban Bairam*. This festival, which coincides with the Hajj celebrations, comes approximately 70 days after the month of Ramadan and is counted as the highest holy day in the Islamic year. The government severely limits the number of pilgrims who are permitted to travel abroad for Hajj pilgrimage. In 2007, only 5,000 of a quota of 20,000 permitted by Saudi Arabia authorities were allowed to participate.⁴⁴ The lunar Islamic calendar bases the dates and times of religious festivals on astronomical sightings of the moon, subject to reconfirmation by religious scholars. For the calendar year 2008 (Islamic Year A.H. 1429),⁴⁵ the festivals fall on approximately these dates: *Ruza Hayit*, 8 October and *Kurban Hayit*, 9 December.

The month of Ramadan brings with it special considerations for foreigners visiting the country. For Muslims it is a period of intense introspection and personal meditation. During this month, Muslims cannot eat, drink or smoke between sunrise and sunset. Only the very young, the elderly, and the infirm are excepted from the fast. If Ramadan occurs during the summer, these injunctions are particularly trying. Many restaurants and hotels are open during this period and serve meals to visitors. However, in public one should not eat, drink, or smoke in the presence of Muslims during Ramadan. One should also keep in mind that fasting may cause people to be more irritable and tired than usual.

⁴⁴ Radio Free Europe - Radio Liberty. Saidazimova, Gulnoza. "Central Asia: Pilgrims Depart for Hajj Amid State Control, Financial Burdens." 4 January 2006. <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2006/01/ce26baa8-a61b-4805-a4dc-d6e9c4066d96.html>

⁴⁵ A.H. is Latin for *anno hegira* or the year of the Prophet's flight from Mecca. It forms the basis of Islamic time reckoning.

Places of Worship

While every district or city has at least one mosque, the principal cities of Uzbekistan boast mosques and *madrassas* that are considered among the best examples of classical Islamic architecture in Central Asia. Among these are the majestic monuments of Samarkand's Registan Square and the azure mosaics of the nearby Bibi-Khanoum Mosque, famous because it is also a mausoleum for Tamerlane's Chinese wife, Saray Mulk Khanum. Equally impressive perhaps is the Kalon⁴⁶ Mosque complex with its adjacent towering Kalon Minaret, built in the 12th century by Arslan Khan.⁴⁷ The third member of this trio of monuments is the Mir-i-Arab *madrassa* or seminary with its luminous blue domes that stand out against the filigree Koranic calligraphy of the sand-colored gates. The Czarist Russian conquerors of the 19th century also left their mark on Uzbekistan's landscape in the form of Orthodox Christian churches and the impressive Cathedral in Tashkent.



© Giorgio Montersino
Prayer time at Samarkand mosque

Mosque Etiquette

Regulations differ from one *mahalla* to another regarding entry of non-Muslims into mosques and *madrassas*. Government sponsored tours of historical monuments usually include visits to places of worship. These have been cleared with local Islamic authorities in advance.

Exchange 1: May I enter the mosque?

Soldier:	May I enter the mosque?	machitga kirishim mumkinma?
Local:	Yes.	Ha

For those who desire to visit one or more of the famous monuments, it is best to inquire with local authorities if and when visits may be permitted. If clearance is issued, it will be for periods outside the regular prayer periods.

Exchange 2: When do you pray?

Soldier:	When do you pray?	Qachon namoz ohQiysiz?
Local:	We pray at noon.	biz tushlik vaQtida namoz ohQiymiz

Several points of etiquette must be observed by visitors. Visitors have to be dressed modestly. This means clean, pressed trousers and long sleeve shirts. In some districts, women may be denied entry completely. If admitted, they must also dress modestly in long skirts and blouses with no flesh showing, and head scarves.

⁴⁶ Kalon means in the Tajik language "great."

⁴⁷ Sacred Destinations. "Kolan Mosque and Minaret, Bukhara." c.2005–2007. <http://www.sacred-destinations.com/uzbekistan/bukhara-kalon-minaret.htm>

Exchange 3: Do I need to cover my head?

Soldier:	Do I need to cover my head?	boshimga biror narsa kiyishim kerakma?
Local:	Yes.	Ha

Smoking, eating, loud talking or photography inside mosques is off limits. Non-Muslims should avoid touching any of the artifacts in the mosque or walking in front of people who might be praying. Doing so invalidates their prayers. Visitors must remove their shoes in the vestibule outside the mosque.

Exchange 4: Must I take off my shoes inside the mosque?

Soldier:	Must I take off my shoes inside the mosque?	poyavzalimni machit ichkarisida yechishim kerakma?
Local:	Yes.	Ha

Chapter 3 - Traditions

Traditional Economy

With about 35% of the nation engaged in agriculture, farming activity (e.g., cotton cultivation) contributed 29.1% to the gross domestic product (GDP) in 2005. In the same year, mining and industry (gold, tungsten, fossil fuels, and textile processing) contributed another 28.7%, and the services sector comprised 43.2% of the GDP.⁴⁸



Although the Soviets never introduced heavy industry to Uzbekistan, they relied heavily on the country for natural gas and gold production. Under the Soviets it was the largest producer of natural gas and the second largest producer of gold.⁴⁹ Fame, however, as opposed to fortune, has come through the weaver's craftsmanship, which has produced intricate wool and silk carpets and textiles since the days of the Silk Road.

Greetings and Interaction

Whether Uzbek or a member of one of the minority cultures like the Kazakhs or Tajiks, the spaces between the people of Uzbekistan are filled with polite gestures and ritualized speech that has been refined and formalized over many years. A polite greeting will usually bring a sincere response and open the door to friendly exchanges. The same greeting can be used during any time of day: Morning, noon, or evening.

Exchange 5: Good morning.

Soldier:	Good morning.	as salomu alaykum
Local:	Good morning.	walaykim as salom

When entering a room or making a social call where several men are gathered, a heartfelt handshake is a customary to greeting. Every event is a new beginning and handshaking usually begins with the person on the right and proceeds toward one's left. Particular attention should be paid in greeting the *aqsaqals*, or venerated elders with white beards. They are at the head of traditional society and should be greeted first and with pointed cordiality.

Exchange 6: Good night!

Soldier:	Good night!	yaKhshi yiotib turing!
Local:	Good night!	yaKhshi yiotib turing!

⁴⁸The Federation of International Trade Associations. "Uzbekistan. Economic Indicators." January 2007. <http://www.fita.org/countries/uzbek.html>

⁴⁹ *The Rebirth of Uzbekistan: Economy and Society in the Post-Soviet Era*. Yalsin, Resul. "Economic Transformation [p.179]." 2002. Reading, UK: Garnet & Ithaca Press

The left hand should not be used in a handshake. Occasionally, a stranger may offer his wrist in place of his hand. This is only a sign that his hands are not clean. It is inappropriate for a man to shake hands with a woman. Women among themselves do not shake hands either, but they do touch each other's shoulders with their right hands. As for personal space, Americans and Europeans are used to greetings made at a distance of one meter. Central Asians rather prefer less distance for friendly greetings.



© Jackson Carson
Uzbek greeting

Exchange 7: How are you?

Soldier:	How are you?	yaKhshimisiz?
Local:	Fine, very well.	yaKhshi, raHmat

Likewise, the western habit of prolonged eye contact is likely to make Uzbek males and females a bit uneasy. Fixed eye contact is offensive and can send the wrong message. Women rarely look into the eyes of males outside their own family.

Exchange 8: Hi, Mr. Salimov.

Soldier:	Hi, Mr. Salimov.	salom janob salimof
Local:	Hello!	salom!
Soldier:	Are you doing well?	yaKhshi yuribsizma?
Local:	Yes.	Ha

Individuality is a western trait. In Uzbek society the single individual is the visible member of a large invisible family. Asking after parents or children, without reference to the wife, is a gesture that is greatly appreciated.

Exchange 9: How is your family?

Soldier:	How is your family?	oylangiz yaKhshima?
Local:	They are doing fine, thank you.	yaKhshi, raHmat

Dress Codes

The correct form of dress in the “Sunny Republic,” as Uzbekistan has traditionally been called, is a matter of squaring comfort and cultural sensitivity. With 300 days of sunshine per year and roughly two months of chilly winter, light cotton garments are best for the prolonged summer. However, warm boots, woolen layers, and insulated jackets are advised for colder weather or visits to mountainous regions.

Exchange 10: Is this acceptable to wear?

Soldier:	Is this acceptable to wear?	mana buni kiysam bohkladima?
Local:	Yes.	Ha

At all times of the year, trousers and long-sleeved shirts for men and long skirts and long-sleeved blouses for women are advised. Muslim sensibilities must be respected. This means conservative dress so that flesh does not show.

Exchange 11: How should I dress?

Soldier:	How should I dress?	Qanday kiyinishim kerak?
Local:	Wear loose fitting clothes which cover your body.	tanangizni ohraidigan keng kiyim kiying

Social Events

Weddings

Since 88% of the population is Sunni Muslim, most social events and rights of passage are observed with a mixture of folklore and religion. Traditional celebrations, called *toi*, are carried out to the accompaniment of festive music. Feasts like the *toi marosimi* or wedding, the *beshik toi* or birth of a child, and *sunnat toi* or ritual circumcision can be identified in the neighborhood by the festive sounds of the *surnai* (brass horn) and *karnai* (reed clarinet), the stringed *dutara*, and the *doira*, tambourine. Wedding feasts of rich families can go on for as long as a week, with separate receptions held for the bride and groom.



Exchange 12: Congratulations on your wedding!

Soldier:	Congratulations on your wedding!	nikoH tohyingiz bilan tabriklayman!
Local:	We are honored you could attend.	tashrif buyirganiz uchun faKhrilanamiz

Visitors to these celebrations are always welcome. There is much singing and dancing, as well as mountains of *plov*.⁵⁰ At all such occasions, men and women are segregated. Men sit on great trestles or elevated benches, often with legs crossed. The Islamic backdrop of these events seldom stanches the flow of alcohol. Vodka, a legacy of Russian occupation, and *champanski*, or sparkling wine, are welcome *toi* table guests.

Exchange 13: I wish you both happiness.

Soldier:	I wish you both happiness.	ikalangizga baKht tilayman
Local:	We are honored.	ihtirom ila tashakur

Funerals

Funerals are usually carried out, if possible, within 24 hours of death as is prescribed in Islam. Following the washing of the body and wrapping in a shroud, a procession of men makes its way through the streets of the *mahalla* or neighborhood to the cemetery.

⁵⁰ *plov*, alternate spellings *pilov* and *pilau*, is the rice dish known in the West as “pilaf.”

Exchange 14: I would like to give my condolences to you and your family.

Soldier:	I would like to give my condolences to you and your family.	siz va oylangizga taaziya bildiraman
Local:	Thank you.	raHmat

Young men usually wear red and elders wear white during the funeral procession. Women do not attend the graveside prayers. The customary period of mourning is 40 days.

Exchange 15: Please be strong.

Soldier:	Please be strong.	bardam bohling
Local:	We will try.	Harakat Qilamiz

Hospitality

After so many years of isolation and estrangement from their own culture, Uzbeks seize the opportunity to welcome visitors and new friends from abroad. Guests are accorded great hospitality and their presence honors the house that receives them. Before entering a house shoes should be removed at the threshold and polite greetings should be rendered.



Invitations to stay for a meal are almost automatic and should not be dismissed lightly. Even the most modest of households will make great sacrifice for the sake of hospitality which is captured by the Uzbek proverb, “treat your guest better than your father.”

Exchange 16: I really appreciate your hospitality.

Soldier:	I really appreciate your hospitality.	meHmondorchiligingiz uchun kata raKhmat
Local:	It is nothing.	ovarasi yohQ

When offered either tea (*choy*) or bread (*non*), always accept. It is considered rude to decline. The response *oling* (just one helping) is a face-saving way to avoid refusals.⁵¹

⁵¹ World Volunteer Web. Teicher, Jessica. “Uzbekistan notebook: The experiences of a Peace Corps volunteer.” 30 August 2005. <http://www.worldvolunteerweb.org/browse/sectors/human-rights/doc/uzbekistan-notebook-the-experiences.html>

Food and Eating Habits

A visit to a public restaurant or an invitation to dine in an Uzbek house is sure to make the guest acquainted with one of the more than 100 versions of the national dish, *plov*. It differs in rice and spicing from one geographic region to the next and is usually served with mutton or goat. In addition, it might contain extras like raisins or quince.



© ndingureji / flickr.com
Uzbek fare in Samarkand

Exchange 17: This food is very good.

Soldier:	This food is very good.	bu taom juda yaKhshi ekan
Local:	It's palov.	bu palou

Good Muslim manners in Uzbekistan dictate that both host and guest wash their hands before and after the meals. When seated, all guests traditionally wait for the oldest male to begin eating as a signal that the meal has begun. Males and females dine separately. The *plov* rice is rolled into oily bite-sized balls and eaten with the right hand. This is because the left hand is associated with bathroom hygiene and is considered unclean.

Exchange 18: What ingredients are used to make plov?

Soldier:	What ingredients are used to make plov?	palou Qandai masaliQlardan tayorlanada?
Local:	Meat, onion, carrot, rice and spices.	gohsht, pioz, sabzi, gurich va ziravorlar

A long farming tradition has permitted settled Uzbeks to develop a rich culinary culture. Their kitchen has an impressive list of staples like *shashlik*, mutton kebabs served on skewers; *manty*, small meat and onion dumplings; and *shurva*, meat and vegetarian soups. Appetizing side dishes like *dulma* or stuffed grape and cabbage leaves and *somsa*—meat and vegetable pastries baked in clay ovens—are every popular.

Exchange 19: What is the name of this dish?

Soldier:	What is the name of this dish?	bu taomning nomi nima?
Local:	This is somsa.	bu somsa

Green salads made of cucumber and tomatoes are often served as appetizers as well as *kasy*, sausage made of horsemeat. Muslims are prohibited from eating pork.

Exchange 20: The food tastes so good.

Soldier:	The food tastes so good.	taom juda mazali ekan
Local:	Thank you.	raHmat

Non-Religious Holidays

The first of the secular holidays in Uzbekistan is that of New Year, 1 January. It is followed by Women's Day on 8 March, a new but quaint celebration during which men

greet women with the first flowers of spring. The most cherished holiday, *Navroz* or “New Day,” falls on 21 March. It has been called the Central Asian New Year and is Persian in origin. Coinciding with the coming of spring and the solstice, it is marked by public singing, dancing, horse racing, public circuses, and poetry recitations. Newcomers to Uzbekistan might be surprised at the public enthusiasm for the polo-like holiday sport of *baiga*, which is played with the decapitated corpse of a goat.⁵²

Exchange 21: Will you be celebrating Navroz?

Soldier:	Will you be celebrating Navroz.	navrohzni nishonlaysizma
Local:	Yes!	Ha!

On May 9, the Uzbeks observed a Soviet-era holiday, the Day of Memory and Respect (Memorial Day) which commemorates the sacrifices of the veterans and martyrs of the “Great Patriotic War, 1941-1945”; known in the U.S. as World War II. Independence Day, the birth of Uzbekistan as a republic independent of the defunct Soviet Union, is celebrated on 1 September. Educator’s Day comes in the autumn on 1 October. It is followed by Constitution Day, the last holiday of the year, on 8 December.

Do’s and Don’ts

Do remove your shoes when entering a house or visiting a holy site.

Do compliment an Uzbek host on his hospitality and the quality of his food.

Do bring a small non-alcoholic house gift if invited to an Uzbek house for dinner.

Do dress modestly, covering arms and legs, when entering a holy site.

Do use the whole hand and arm when beckoning to an Uzbek.

Don’t walk in front of people during their prayers. It invalidates their prayer.

Don’t use the left hand to pass things to a Muslim. The left hand is considered unclean.

Don’t point a finger at an Uzbek. Finger-pointing is demeaning.

Don’t beckon an Uzbek by curling your index finger. This is considered insulting since only animals are called in this manner.

Don’t bring search dogs into a mosque or holy place. Dogs are unclean animals in Islam and their presence renders prayer invalid.

⁵² *Uzbekistan: The Golden Road to Samarkand*. MacCleod, Calum and Bradley Mayhew. “Festivals and Holidays [p. 70].” 2004. New York: W.W. Norton

Chapter 4 - Urban Life

Urbanization

The urban population of Uzbekistan, which since 2005 has stood at 37% of the total population, has grown at a slow but steady rate since independence.⁵³ Since 2001, the rate of urban growth has been around 1.1%.⁵⁴ This growth is attributable to the creation of new urban areas like Almalyk, Navoi, and Zarafshan, rather than rural to urban migration from the countryside to the ancient population centers such as Bukhara, Samarkand, and Tashkent. Urbanization has diminished the urban government's ability to provide municipal services, including health, social, and educational programs. Other developmental issues such as urban mobility, integration of urban and suburban transport systems, housing demands, and unplanned growth, also challenge urban governance.⁵⁵ Larger cities like Tashkent and Samarkand have slum-like, socially depressed areas where unskilled and marginally employed workers are concentrated.



Health Issues

In the early 1990s, Uzbekistan attempted to continue the Soviet-era policy of free medical care while simultaneously endorsing the concept of privatizing health care. However, the availability of healthcare resources has declined.⁵⁶ In addition to a lack of available equipment, medication, and supplies, doctors and hospitals accept cash payments only.⁵⁷ Understandably, the healthcare system is considered woefully inadequate.

Exchange 22: Is there a hospital nearby?

Soldier:	Is there a hospital nearby?	yaQin atrofda kasalKhona borma?
Local:	Yes, in the center of town.	Ha, shaHar markazida

Transitioning from state-owned medical facilities and government healthcare professionals to partial private sector care created a two-tier national health care system that exists and functions only in urban areas.

⁵³ United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. "World Population Prospects: The 2006 Revisions. Uzbekistan." 20 September 2007. <http://esa.un.org/unpp>

⁵⁴ UNICEF. "Uzbekistan. Statistics." 2005. http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/uzbekistan_statistics.html

⁵⁵ UNESCO Social and Human Sciences. "National Roundtable of the Uzbekistan MOST National Liaison Committee." 2 June 2005. http://portal.unesco.org/shs/en/ev.php-URL_ID=8165&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html

⁵⁶ U.S. Department of State. Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs. "Background Note: Uzbekistan." December 2007. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2924.htm>

⁵⁷ Consulate General of Uzbekistan in New York City. "About Uzbekistan: Health." No date. <http://www.uzbekconsulny.org/uzbekistan/health/>

Exchange 23: May I use your phone?

Soldier:	May I use your phone?	telefoningizdan foydalansam maylima?
Local:	Sure.	albata

At one level, basic preventative medicine and emergency services are provided free of charge to all citizens. Currently, extended and specialist care is only available to those who can afford private treatment.

Exchange 24: Is Dr. Kalimov in, sir?

Soldier:	Is Dr. Kalimov in, sir?	dohktor karimof shu yerdamilar?
Local:	No.	yohQ

Environmental pollution is the chief factor influencing the health of the population. Toxic industrial waste and excessively high levels of air and water pollution, vestiges of Soviet-era neglect, are positively correlated to the country's poor standard of public health. Moreover, only 82% of the people have access to improved sources of drinking water.⁵⁸

Urban Employment

The transition from the central, planned economy of the pre-independence period to a market economy lacking skilled labor has resulted in an unsatisfactory employment base. The exodus of Russian and Ukrainian bureaucrats and technocrats from the upper echelons of industry in the early 1990s created an economic slump and an imbalance in the labor force that has yet to be righted.



Exchange 25: Are you the only person in your family who has a job?

Soldier:	Are you the only person in your family who has a job?	oylangizda faQat siz ishlaysizma?
Local:	No.	yohQ

Those state-owned factories that failed to privatize have foundered. Manufacturing in general has stagnated because of the shortage of skilled labor. The United Nations Development Program reports national employment statistics for the year 2004 as follows. In a workforce consisting of 9,945,000 male and female workers, 424,000 or 4.26% were unemployed.⁵⁹ In addition, 20% were underemployed.⁶⁰ The absence of official urban

⁵⁸ UNICEF. "Uzbekistan: Statistics." 2004. http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/uzbekistan_statistics.html

⁵⁹ UNDP. Uzbekistan in Figures. "Employment and Labor Market." 2008. http://www.statistics.uz/data_finder/941/

⁶⁰ CIA World Factbook. "Uzbekistan." 13 December 2007. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/uz.html>

poverty statistics and definitions betrays the government's reluctance to openly address urban socio-economic ills.⁶¹

Education

The Ministry of Education credits free public education for its 99.3% national literacy rate.⁶² Public schooling is comprised of a system of approximately 9,700 basic schools.

Exchange 26: Does your family live here?

Soldier:	Does your family live here?	sizning oylangiz shu yerda yashaydima?
Local:	Yes.	Ha

At the top level, there are colleges and universities, all of which are public and provide free education to qualified candidates.⁶³ School attendance is mandatory up to and including the ninth grade (about age 15). Uzbekistan educates 93% of all school-age females and 96% of all school-age males, indicating that public education is equitable and not fraught with sex discrimination. Clearly, educational opportunities in urban areas are more plentiful than in rural areas.⁶⁴

National leaders in education have responded positively to international initiatives aimed at aiding higher education in Uzbekistan and integrating colleges and universities into the global academic network. Several developmental projects have been implemented in the past few years. In 1999, the University of Auckland, New Zealand created an academic chair in Preservation and Management of Historic Centers at the Architectural and Civil Engineering Institute Mirzo Ulugbek in Samarkand. Then, in August, 2001, the University of Maryland announced the first virtual university in Central Asia, making distance learning available in Uzbekistan.⁶⁵ Lastly, the University of Westminster, U.K., established an endowed research post in Knowledge Economy at the Tashkent University in 2006. These types of changes are bringing American style education and distance learning techniques to the region.

Housing

Urban housing is a priority in most of the Central Asian Republics. This is especially true in Uzbekistan where the role of the state in providing housing is shrinking. The housing shortage is linked to the post-independence transition from planned economy to privatization and free market environment. Most housing is from the Soviet era and

⁶¹ USAID. Making Cities Work. "Uzbekistan. Urban Profile." October 2002.

<http://www.makingcitieswork.org/files/pdf/e-europe-central-asia/Uzbekistan.pdf>

⁶² CIA World Factbook. "Uzbekistan." 13 December 2007. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/uz.html>

⁶³ U.S. University Directory. "Uzbekistan—Secondary Education." 2008.

<http://education.stateuniversity.com/pages/1652/Uzbekistan-SECONDARY-EDUCATION.html>

⁶⁴ UNICEF. "Uzbekistan. Statistics." No date.

http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/uzbekistan_statistics.html

⁶⁵ University of Maryland. UM Newsdesk. "Maryland Moments, August, 2001." 2001.

http://www.newsdesk.umd.edu/facts/mm/01_02/aug.cfm

consists of overcrowded, six or nine story apartment blocks assembled from prefabricated concrete slabs.

Exchange 27: How many people live in this house?

Soldier:	How many people live in this house?	bu yerda Qancha odam yashaydi?
Local:	Ten.	ohnta

The growing population is struggling to cope with a shortage of jobs and the dwindling availability of family dwellings.⁶⁶ Land owners are reluctant to convert agricultural land for housing purposes because land provides more income from cash crops cultivation such as cotton.

Exchange 28: Do you own this land?

Soldier:	Do you own this land?	bu yerning egasi sizma?
Local:	Yes.	Ha

Notwithstanding these conditions, experts in regional development report a recent surge in real estate activity in the Ferghana Valley, a portion of which lies within Uzbekistan. The funds driving this land development activity are generated largely through foreign currency transfers by Uzbek labor migrants. In recent years, Uzbek migrants working abroad have transferred approximately USD 500 billion annually to Uzbekistan.⁶⁷



Restaurants and Dining Out

Visitors to Uzbekistan’s major cities may be invited to dine in a restaurant instead of at someone’s home. There is no shortage of quality restaurants in Tashkent, Samarkand, or Bukhara.

Exchange 29: I’d like some hot soup.

Soldier:	I’d like some hot soup.	menga isiQ shohrva olip keling
Local:	Sure.	albata

The ever popular *chaikhana* or tea house is a time-honored place for men to gather on a carpeted wooden dais with *piyolas* (decorated glass tea cups). Here they swap the latest news over *shashlik* (skewered meat), *plov* (national rice dish), or *laghman* (mutton with wheat noodles).

Exchange 30: I would like coffee or tea.

Soldier:	I would like coffee or tea.	men kohfe yioki choyichaman
Local:	Sure.	albata

⁶⁶ USAID. “Central Asia Brief.” 2002–2006. <http://www.makingcitieswork.org/urbanWorld/central-asia>

⁶⁷ Eurasianet.org. Khamidov, Alisher. “Real Estate Booming in Ferghana Valley.” 8 February 2007. <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav080207.shtml>



Restaurants in Uzbekistan run the gamut from Continental to Russian, Korean, Chinese, and Indian. Most hotels offer Russian food and will serve specialties such as *strogen* (beef stroganoff). Food can also be purchased from street stalls, which often sell *lipioshka* (unleavened bread), *samsa* (samosas), and *manty* (meat dumplings).

Exchange 31: What type of meat is this?

Soldier:	What type of meat is this?	bu nimaning gohshti?
Local:	Lamb.	Qohy gohshti

Alcoholic beverages, both domestic and imported, are popular and readily available along with hookahs and belly dancing in many of the nightclubs.⁶⁸ *Shampanski*, a sparkling wine, can be found in all the restaurants. A popular yogurt drink, *kefir*, is served at breakfast.

Exchange 32: Are you still serving breakfast?

Soldier:	Are you still serving breakfast?	nonishta buyirsam bohladima?
Local:	Yes.	Ha

It is not uncommon for more affluent Uzbeks to invite guests to dine and, if invited, it is understood that the host will pay. The concept of “going dutch” is not familiar to Uzbeks. If foreigners are dining together they will be presented with one bill at the end of the meal.

Exchange 33: Put this all in one bill.

Soldier:	Put this all in one bill.	bularning hamasini birga Hisoplang
Local:	Okay.	Khohb bohlada

One can usually expect to enjoy a complete meal at a public restaurant for less than USD 10. Street vendors sell food for around USD 2.

Exchange 34: Can I have my total bill, please?

Soldier:	Can I have my total bill, please?	iltmos, menga umumiy narKhni aytsangiz?
Local:	Yes, of course.	Ha, albata

Gratuities are not expected, but if given in the range of 10% of the total, they are appreciated and create a favorable impression of the guests. Some restaurants may include a service fee on the bill, at which point a tip is not needed.

⁶⁸ iExplore. Uzbekistan Food & Dining. c. 1999–2008. <http://www.iexplore.com/dmap/Uzbekistan/Dining>

Exchange 35: Do you have a dessert?

Soldier:	Do you have a dessert?	shrinliklar borma?
Local:	Yes, we have fruit, pastries and ice cream.	ha bizda mevalar pshiriQlar va muzQaimoQ bor

It is common for Uzbeks to wash their hands before a meal and, in Islamic fashion, to wash their hands and rinse their mouths following a meal. This is done in the restroom or in an adjacent ablution area.

Exchange 36: May I have a glass of water?

Soldier:	May I have a glass of water?	bir stakan su olib keling?
Local:	Yes, right away.	Ha, bir daQiQa

Exchange 37: Where is your restroom?

Soldier:	Where is your restroom?	hojatKhonangiz Qayerda?
Local:	That room to your left, over there.	ana u yerda chaptagi Khona

Marketplace

Few Uzbek cities have anything approaching a western shopping mall. However, all have a shopping bazaar area, usually in the old town. These open air markets are not only the center of the Uzbekistan economy; they are also the social centers of many Uzbek's daily life.

Exchange 38: Is the bazaar nearby?

Soldier:	Is the bazaar nearby?	bozor yaQin atrofdama?
Local:	Yes, over there on the right.	Ha, ana u yerda ohngda

In Tashkent the bazaar region is called "Broadway." The shopping stalls of the bazaars and open-air markets feature Uzbekistan's rich and decorative applied arts, including ancient and modern patterns in glass, cotton, silk, leather, wood, and metal. Open from mid morning to late evening, they usually close for an extended lunch hour from 2–4 p.m.

Exchange 39: How much longer will you be here?

Soldier:	How much longer will you be here?	u yerda necha vaQt bohlasiz?
Local:	Three more hours.	yana uch soat

Rugs have been manufactured, either by hand or by machine, in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan for centuries. The rugs, known as turkomen rugs, usually reflect Mongolian and Turkish art. The most commonly used motif is called *gul* and these carpets are most often red in color.⁶⁹ However, today the famous carpets traditionally

⁶⁹ ERugGallery. "Turkmenistan/Uzbekistan." 2007.

http://www.eruggallery.com/learnrugs/learn_detail/make/lrn_make_turkmenistan.htm

attributed to Bukhara are actually imports from nomad looms of neighboring Turkmenistan.

Exchange 40: Can I buy a carpet with this much money?

Soldier:	Can I buy a carpet with this much money?	bu pulga gilam sotib olsam bohladima?
Local:	No.	yohQ

Merchants often occupy narrow niches in the bazaars and have limited space to display all their wares. Large domed pavilions hold rows of merchants divided by types of wares. Food, ranging from fresh fruit to nuts and from spices to prepared foods, sits on tables in stalls located in the food rows while rugs can be found in their own row. Other rows may house small workshops where craftsmen sell their jewelry, wood carvings, and other crafts.



Hats for sale in a Khiva market

Exchange 41: Do you sell piyolas?

Soldier:	Do you sell piyolas?	siz piyola sotasizma?
Local:	Yes.	Ha

Rugs, clothing, and embroidery may come in various sizes and colors. A shopper interested in seeing a wider selection should ask the owner if he has additional samples.

Exchange 42: Do you have any more of these?

Soldier:	Do you have any more of these?	sizda bulardan yana borma?
Local:	No.	yohQ

Bargaining is a studied art for Central Asian shopping. Once begun, it should be followed seriously until both parties reach their limits, whether the item is purchased or not. Walking away without bargaining can be considered rude.

Exchange 43: May I examine this close up?

Soldier:	May I examine this close up?	yaQinroQdan kohrsam bohladima?
Local:	Sure.	albata

Foreigners should know the fair market value of an item before making an offer. Likewise, they must consider the limits of what they are prepared to pay. Many merchants are willing to accept dollars as payment.

Exchange 44: Can you give me change for this?

Soldier:	Can you give me change for this?	buni maydalab beraolasizma?
Local:	No.	yohQ

The national currency, *sum*, is worth 100 *tiyin*. It is available in coins of 1, 3, 5, and 10 *tiyin*, and in banknotes of 25, 50, 100, 200, 500, and 1000 *sum*. The U.S. dollar is almost an alternative currency, but it is not legal tender and should be exchanged only in hotels and banks.



Courtesy of Wikipedia
Uzbek banknote

Exchange 45: Do you accept US currency?

Soldier:	Do you accept US currency?	aQsh pulini Qabul Qilasizma?
Local:	No we only accept som.	yohQ, biz faQat sohm Qabul Qilamis

Currency must be declared at customs on arrival and unauthorized currency transaction can quickly lead to unpleasant incidents involving the police. It is unwise to display large amounts of currency, foreign or domestic, in the bazaars.

Exchange 46: Give me money

Local:	Give me money	menga pul bering
Soldier:	I don't have any.	menda pul yohQ

Bazaars are frequented by street vendors, touts, and petty criminals looking for opportunities to exploit foreigners.⁷⁰ Pickpockets are also a problem in urban areas so it is advisable to not wear expensive jewelry.

Exchange 47: Please, buy something from me.

Local:	Please, buy something from me.	mendan biror narsa sotib oling, iltimos
Soldier:	Sorry, I have no money left.	kechirasiz, menda pul Qolmada

Transportation

At the time of independence, Uzbekistan could boast a regional network of railroads and highways superior to that of other Central Asian Republics. More than 81,600 km (50,703 mi) of paved roads and 3,656 km (2,271 mi) of train lines link the major cities and production centers of the country with domestic destinations and the major cities of Asia and Eastern Europe. Moscow is a 56-hour train ride from Tashkent.

Exchange 48: Is there a train station nearby?

Soldier:	Is there a train station nearby?	yaQin atrofda poyezd bekati borma?
Local:	No.	Ha

⁷⁰Department of Foreign Affairs. "Uzbekistan." 28 November 2006. <http://dfa.ie/home/index.aspx?id=448>

Four of the twelve airports have been designated as international departure and arrival centers. Uzbekistan Airways services twelve domestic airports and foreign destinations such as Beijing, Moscow, Tel Aviv, Paris, Frankfurt, and London.⁷¹

Exchange 49: Which road leads to the airport?

Soldier:	Which road leads to the airport?	Qaysi kohcha tayoragoHga olib borada?
Local:	The road heading east.	sharQ tononga yohlangan kohcha

A state regulated transport company, Oriental Express Central Asia (OrexCA), is the principal provider of bus, minibus, taxi, and auto rental services. They provide regular and reliable transport between major urban centers. Their offices are usually in city centers, adjacent to the main square.



© Yann / flickr.com
Minibuses in Tashkent

Exchange 50: Where can I get a cab?

Soldier:	Where can I get a cab?	taksini Qayerdan ushlasam bohlada?
Local:	Over there.	ana u yerda

OrexCA hourly rates are fixed and published for tourists at USD 7 for a rental car, USD 15 for minibus, and USD 25 for tourist buses.⁷² These prices include fuel and the driver's fees.

Exchange 51: Will the bus be here soon?

Soldier:	Will the bus be here soon?	aftobus yaQin orada keladima?
Local:	Yes.	Ha

One additional agency, Silkroad Transportation in Tashkent, coordinates rental cars with drivers at rates comparable with the state-regulated agency. Currently there are no rentals without a driver available.

Exchange 52: Where can I rent a car?

Soldier:	Where can I rent a car?	Qayerdan ijaraga mashina olsam bohlada?
Local:	Downtown.	shaKhar markazidan

There are numerous taxi cabs that can be found in the larger cities, such as Tashkent. Many taxis, however, are unlicensed so it is best to use ones that are officially marked. Fares must be negotiated prior to entering the vehicle.⁷³

⁷¹ Development of Tourism Exchange Between Italy and Uzbekistan. "Geografic Area." No date. <http://uzbekistan.progetti.informest.it/english/geografia.HTM>

⁷² Oriental Express Central Asia. "Transportation Services in Uzbekistan." Circa 2003–2008. http://www.orexca.com/transport_auto.shtml

Exchange 53: Can you take me there?

Soldier:	Can you take me there?	meni u yerga olib boraolasizma?
Local:	Yes, I can.	Ha, olib boraolaman

Gas stations can be seen alongside the major roadways and in urban areas. However, they are less frequent in rural areas.

Exchange 54: Is there a gas station nearby?

Soldier:	Is there a gas station nearby?	yaQin atrofda yoQilghi stansyasi borma?
Local:	Yes.	Ha

Auto mechanics can also be found in urban areas but they may not have access to all the necessary car parts for a repair.

Exchange 55: Is there a good auto mechanic nearby?

Soldier:	Is there a good auto mechanic nearby?	yaQin atrofda mashinani tuzatadigan yaKhshi usta borma?
Local:	Yes.	Ha

⁷³ Oriental Express Central Asia. "Transportation Services in Uzbekistan." c. 2003–2008. <http://www.orexca.com/transport.shtml>

Chapter 5 - Rural Life

Rural Economy

Sixty-three percent of Uzbekistan's population lives in rural areas farming the country's irrigated river valleys; yet, only 10.5% of the land is arable. Peasant farmers (*dekan*) make their living from the principal cash crop: cotton. Cotton or "white gold" generates most of the country's export revenue and accounts for about 40% of its hard currency. Uzbekistan is the world's fourth largest cotton producer and trails behind only the United States in its cotton export amounts.⁷⁴

Exchange 56: Do your children go to school?

Soldier:	Do your children go to school?	bolalaringiz maktabga borishadima?
Local:	Yes.	Ha

At the beginning of the Soviet era, c. 1930, large *kolkhoz* or collective farms were assembled from small farms. Following independence, collective farms were to be reformed and workers were supposed to be part owners, permitted in theory to grow whatever they want. In fact, the *kolkhoz* system is still operational and is still run by collective managers, *kolkhozi*. Little has changed in the past 16 years, an era theoretically defined by reform and privatization of socialized entities. Soviet-era collective equipment and irrigation systems have yet to be replaced. Interestingly, the Uzbekistan constitution does not specifically endorse the concept of private land ownership.⁷⁵

Village Life

Farmers have ample opportunity to cultivate small subsistence gardens that yield most of the food the *dekan* family consumes. Surplus food is sold or bartered in local open-air bazaars by farmers who live in an almost cashless economy. People walk a lot and visit their neighbors. Men spend off hours in the village *chaikhana* or tea shop. Typically, only the manager of the collective farm is part of the ruling political class. These managers who serve as mayors and village leaders are often former Communist Party officers who retained their privileged positions and power during the transition to independence. Their families eat meat every night. Yet throughout the villages of Uzbekistan, there are cars that do not run and telephones that frequently don't work.⁷⁶



© Nathan Harris
Collective farm

Exchange 57: What is your telephone number?

Soldier:	What is your telephone	telefonigizning raQami
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⁷⁴ U.S. Department of State. "Uzbekistan. 2006 Investment Climate Statement." 2006. <http://www.state.gov/e/eeb/afd/2006/62049.htm>

⁷⁵ International Federation of Surveyors. Torhonen, Mika-Petteri. "Land Tenure in Transition: Case Uzbekistan." April 2002. http://www.fig.net/pub/fig_2002/Ts7-6/TS7_6_torhonen.pdf

⁷⁶ *Uzbekistan: The Golden Road to Samarkand*. Macleod, C. and B. Mayhew. 2004. New York: W.W. Norton.

	number?	necha?
Local:	My phone number is 325681.	mening telefon raQamin ohtis iki eli olti sakson bir

Transportation

The network of rail and road transportation still exists principally to service the agricultural and mineral sectors. Cotton and minerals are transported in government-owned trucks and trains to government cotton gins or refineries. Passenger services between villages and nearby towns and cities are largely done through an aging fleet of government-owned Soviet-era buses from the 1970s. Because the transportation infrastructure is inadequately developed, rural areas are not likely to derive any benefit from tourism in the near future.⁷⁷



Exchange 58: Can you take me to your elder?

Soldier:	Can you take me to your elder?	meni oQsoQolingizning oldiga olib boraolasizma?
Local:	Yes.	Ha

Health Care

In rural areas there is very little in the way of western-style health care available. A two-tiered system provides rudimentary primary care free to all rural citizens. Even so, there is a lack of uniformity in the regional administration of the national health care program.

Exchange 59: Do you know what is wrong?

Soldier:	Do you know what is wrong?	nima bohlganini bilasizma?
Local:	No.	yohQ

Under this system, basic care facilities in rural areas are viewed as satellites of major urban centers. They are staffed by a regional physician who is allocated on the basis of population statistics and may service several care facilities in each district.⁷⁸ More specialized care is available in urban centers, some of which is at private clinics and is provided at a cost to the patient.

Exchange 60: Is there a medical clinic nearby?

Soldier:	Is there a medical clinic nearby?	yaQin atrofda shifoKhona borma?
Local:	Yes, over there.	Ha, u yerda

⁷⁷ Euromonitor International. "Travel and Tourism in Uzbekistan. Executive Summary." May 2007. http://www.euromonitor.com/Travel_And_Tourism_in_Uzbekistan

⁷⁸ Wiley Interscience. International Journal of Health Planning and Management. "Primary Health Care Reform in Uzbekistan." 29 August 2007. <http://www3.interscience.wiley.com/cgi-bin/abstract/116310132/ABSTRACT>

Nonetheless, funding from the Ministry of Health is not distributed uniformly or equitably. There is a serious shortage of vaccines and medicines in hospitals and pharmacies. Medical personnel are not well trained. Throughout the 1990s the rates of vaccination for serious childhood diseases declined markedly. To offset this crisis, the United States has provided selective developmental aid in the form of equipment to maternity and pediatric care facilities in both rural and urban areas.⁷⁹

Education

The constitution of Uzbekistan provides for free education to all citizens and basic schooling is mandatory through the first nine grades. About 80% of the country's approximately 9,700 basic schools are in rural areas and they provide education to about 6.5 million pupils. Yet, these are poorly maintained and lack modern teaching aids. Moreover, teachers are inadequately trained and classrooms lack heating and sanitary facilities.⁸⁰

Exchange 61: Is there a school nearby?

Soldier:	Is there a school nearby?	yaQin atrofda maktab borma?
Local:	Yes.	Ha

Education in rural areas is often subordinated to the agricultural economy. When the cotton is harvested, both teachers and pupils are taken from the schools and forced to work in the fields.⁸¹

The country's schools were targeted in 2007 by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) for developmental assistance in three areas: policy planning, governance, and management; curriculum and textbook modernization; and upgrades through information technology.⁸² About 670,000 students and nearly 63,000 teachers in three of Uzbekistan's poorest rural regions, Tashkent district, Surkhandarya and Kashkadarya, will be the main beneficiaries of this newly inaugurated aid project.⁸³ In 2004, the U.S. government launched an additional program, School Connectivity for Uzbekistan, to promote the use of information technology and internet in Uzbek schools. Under this program the number of internet users has increased dramatically.⁸⁴

⁷⁹ The White House. "Medical Care is Improving in Uzbekistan." 24 November 2004. <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2004/11/20041124-3.html>

⁸⁰ Asian Development Bank Consultancy. "Oezbekistan: Rural Basic Education: Uzbekistan." 2 January 2008. <http://www.evd.nl/zoeken/showbouwsteen.asp?bstnum=194619&location=&highlight=>

⁸¹ IRIN UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. "Uzbekistan: Focus on Rural Schools." 10 August 2004. <http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?reportid=24481>

⁸² Asian Development Bank Consultancy. "Oezbekistan: Rural Basic Education: Uzbekistan." 2 January 2008. <http://www.evd.nl/zoeken/showbouwsteen.asp?bstnum=194619&location=&highlight=>

⁸³ Asian Development Bank. "ADB Helps Improve Education in Uzbekistan." 11 December 2007. <http://www.adb.org/Media/Articles/2007/12320-uzbekistani-educational-projects/default.asp>

⁸⁴ Digital Divide Network. Katz, Ari. "Internet Use in Uzbekistan's Schools." 10 December 2004. <http://www.digitaldivide.net/articles/view.php?ArticleID=28>

Gender Issues

In the Soviet era, men and women had equal access to education, health care, and employment. Gender equity was largely a workplace issue and related to work output. Yet, this ideology did not penetrate the home, where women were wives and mothers given the prime responsibility of nurturing the family. Women put in long hours of unpaid labor at home.⁸⁵ Gender issues played an important role in the socialization of Central Asia.



Foremost among the gender issues in the Soviet *hujum*, or socialist emancipation of women, was getting rid of the veil. Yet, the veil became something of an icon of cultural autonomy in resistance to the Soviet influence and in restoring Central Asian identity in Uzbekistan. Minority forces advocating Islamization of Uzbek society have made a return to the veil the touchstone of their campaigns.⁸⁶ In the post-independence era, the government continues to endorse gender equity and has written this into the constitution. In failing to endorse Islamists' demands for a return to the veil, the government has taken an implicit stand on the issue.

Who is in Charge?

The levels of governance in Uzbekistan predate the Soviet era and have remained unchanged. The country is divided into 12 *viloyat* or regions. These in turn consist of *hokimiat* or districts presided over by the *hokim* or district leader.

Exchange 62: Do you know this area very well?

Soldier:	Do you know this area very well?	bu yerni juda yaKhshi bilasizma?
Local:	Yes.	Ha

At the communal level of governance is the *mahalla* or neighborhood which is overseen by a venerated elder, the *aqsaqal* (aksakal). The *aqsaqal* or “white beards” are also recognizable by their long white robes.

Exchange 63: Does your elder live here?

Soldier:	Does your elder live here?	oQsoQolingiz shu yerda istiQomat Qiladima?
Local:	Yes.	Ha

⁸⁵ Asian Development Bank. “Country Gender Assessment: Uzbekistan.” December 2005. <http://www.adb.org/Documents/Reports/Country-Gender-Assessments/cga-uzbekistan.pdf>

⁸⁶ Historycooperative.org. *Journal of World History*. “Book Review. Veiled Empire: Gender and Power in Stalinist Central Asia.” June 2005. http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/jwh/16.2/br_7.html

Foreigners are routinely introduced to the *aqsaqal* as a matter of course, because entertaining foreigners without official sanction can entail complications for local nationals. These elders are knowledgeable about most events in their *mahalla* and their assistance can smooth the journey of any visitor in the area. When visiting with the *aqsaqal*, greet him with great respect.



Exchange 64: Respected leader, we need your help / advice / opinion.

Soldier:	Respected leader, we need your help / advice / opinion.	hurmatli rayis, bizga sizning yordamingiz / maslahatingiz / fikringiz kerak
Local:	Yes.	yaKhshi

Checkpoints

Checkpoints, both at national border crossings and at points along major domestic transportation arteries, are a necessary way of life in Uzbekistan.

Exchange 65: Where is the nearest checkpoint?

Soldier:	Where is the nearest checkpoint?	eng yaQin tekshiru bohlima Qayerda joylashgan?
Local:	It's two kilometers.	bu yerdan iki kilometr narida

For native Uzbeks, a checkpoint means producing the national identity card each citizen above the age of 16 is required to carry. They are issued by the local district police office.

Exchange 66: Is this all the ID you have?

Soldier:	Is this all the ID you have?	bor Hujatingiz manabularma?
Local:	Yes.	Ha

Foreigners are required to produce a valid visa and the customs declaration of portable currency they receive on entering the country. The Uzbek government is keen on prohibiting the movement of Islamic insurgents and illegal weapons through its territory.

Exchange 67: Show us the car registration.

Soldier:	Show us the car registration.	mashinaga tegishli Hujatlarni kohrsating
Local:	OK.	Khohp

Checkpoints run by the national police may involve stopping vehicles and searching the contents.

Exchange 68: Are you carrying any guns?

Soldier:	Are you carrying any guns?	sizda Qurol borma?
Local:	Yes.	Ha

Routine questioning frequently entails passengers exiting the vehicle but seldom involves bodily searches.

Exchange 69: Please get out of the car.

Soldier:	Please get out of the car.	iltimos, mashinadan chiQing
Local:	OK.	Khohp

Visitors have no choice but to comply with such searches and provide authorities any information requested.

Landmines

Uzbekistan is not a signatory to the Land Mine Treaty and has not participated in any international forum for the limitation or eradication of landmines. Furthermore, it abstained from the December 2005 vote on landmine use in the U.N. General Assembly.⁸⁷



© Liz Wade
Afghan-Uzbek border country

Exchange 70: Is this area mined?

Soldier:	Is this area mined?	bu atrof minalanganma?
Local:	Yes.	Ha

The country's official policy is that mines are essential to its national security and their use helps control the passage of weapons, narcotics, and terrorists. Visitors are urged to be careful when traveling in border regions.

⁸⁷ Landmine Monitor. "LM Report 2006. Uzbekistan." 12 September 2006.
<http://www.icbl.org/lm/country/uzbekistan>

Chapter 6 - Family Life

Family Structure and Roles

The character of the Uzbek family as a social unit has changed somewhat over one hundred and fifty years of foreign rule. Uzbeks retained their clan, or extended family, structure under Czarist domination.

Exchange 71: Is this your entire family?

Soldier:	Is this your entire family?	bu sizning butun oylangizma?
Local:	Yes.	Ha

Under Soviet rule beginning in the late 1920s, however, clans were required to forego large, hereditary land holdings in favor of collective farms or *kolkhoz*.

Exchange 72: Are you married?

Soldier:	Are you married?	uylanganmisiz?
Local:	No.	yohQ

Communist ideology deemphasized the importance of membership in a clan as a source of identity. In sum, the individual no longer derived his sense of self from membership in a prestigious clan, but rather from his relation to and role in the workers' society.

Exchange 73: Did you grow up here?

Soldier:	Did you grow up here?	siz shu yerda kata bohlganmisiz?
Local:	Yes.	Ha

As a result, after the Soviet Union was disbanded in 1991, the nuclear family, rather than the extended clan, remained as the locus of family life for Uzbeks. This was especially true of urban areas where workers' apartments were small and unsuitable for more than five or six inhabitants.



© TV_Creations / flickr.com
Women at a madrassa in Bukhara

Exchange 74: Do you have any brothers?

Soldier:	Do you have any brothers?	aka ukalaringiz borma?
Local:	Yes.	Ha

The Typical Household

Urban families tend to average five members, whereas rural families tend to be slightly larger with grandparents and unmarried females living in the same dwelling.

Exchange 75: Is this your wife?

Soldier:	Is this your wife?	bu sizning rafiQangizma?
Local:	Yes.	Ha

The society remains patriarchal and is about 88% Sunni Muslim, which influences the division of household responsibilities. Family roles derive from these factors. In practice this means the father or husband is head of the family or household. Wives, children, and unmarried females are under the authority of the husband or father.

Exchange 76: Are these your children?

Soldier:	Are these your children?	bu sizning bolalaringizma?
Local:	Yes.	Ha

The mother runs the household with the support of daughters and other females living in the house. There is great respect for elders and the elderly as well as for visitors. It is the respect for guests that is the font of the country’s rich tradition of hospitality. All these traits are deeply rooted in the Muslim world.⁸⁸

Exchange 77: Are these people part of your family?

Soldier:	Are these people part of your family?	bu odamlar oylangiz aazolarima?
Local:	No.	yohQ

Marriage

In the Islamic culture of Uzbekistan, marriage is an inevitable life-cycle event. Bachelorhood or spinsterhood is virtually unknown as are western-style alternative life arrangements such as gay and lesbian partnerships. Marriages are most commonly arranged by the family and take place in the early twenties for females and the mid twenties for males, depending on the educational or employment status of each partner.⁸⁹ Higher education tends to delay the age of marriage somewhat. Polygamy, a vestige of a distant Islamic past, has been illegal since Soviet times.



© Amali Agalar
Wedding celebration in Bukhara

The wedding celebrations, which follow the brief Islamic *nikoh* or marriage contract, can be elaborate and extend over several days. While the groom’s family often pays a bride price, the bride’s family bears the expense of the wedding celebration.⁹⁰ Newly married couples settle into a *mahalla* or neighborhood community that is presided over by the “white beard” elder or *aqsaqal*. As a structural unit, these self-governing communities provide support and assistance for the constituent families. They help to organize and arrange weddings, funerals, and other life-cycle celebrations.⁹¹

⁸⁸ *Uzbekistan: A Short Road Traveled. My Peace Corps Experience, 2001* [pp. 63-77]. Duncan, W.C..2005. Tennessee: Artifactman Publishing Co.

⁸⁹ United Nations Development Programme. Uzbekistan in Figures. “Family Formation.” 2008. http://www.statistics.uz/data_finder/185/

⁹⁰ Every Culture. “Culture of Uzbekistan”. 2007. <http://www.everyculture.com/To-Z/Uzbekistan.html>

⁹¹ Central Asia-Caucasus Institute. Kassymbekova, Botagoz. “Uzbekistan’s Mahalla: A Democratic Tool for Authoritarian Rule?” 19 November 2003. http://www.cacianalyst.org/view_article.php?articleid=1916

Divorce

The constitution gives men and women equal rights, but in matters of divorce the state impedes the process for women. Civil courts routinely delay divorce proceedings and frequently require a certificate of reconciliation from the local *mahalla*. The *aqsaqal* is more often than not opposed to divorce.⁹² The rate of divorce, which has actually declined since 1991, was 0.7% in 2002.⁹³ Nonetheless, international human rights agencies report significant levels of domestic violence in Uzbekistan with battered women receiving no state protection. Men can abuse their wives with relative impunity. Women, who have no legal recourse through prosecution or divorce because the police seldom prosecute wife beaters, sometimes turn to suicide as an escape from their misery.⁹⁴

Family Celebrations

Traditional rituals revolve around family life. Each ritual known as a *toi* celebrates a life cycle transition. Some examples are birth or wooden crib celebration (*beshik toi*), circumcision (*sunnat toi*), engagement (*fatikha toi*), and weddings (*nikoh toi*). Almost without exception each celebration is preceded by great planning and preparation. Men and women wear holiday costumes. Men wear *chapan* or robes, with headcaps and boots made of thin leather. Women wear scarves, robes and *sharovars*, or wide slacks that narrow in the bottom.⁹⁵ Festive foods and sweets are prepared with *plov*, the national rice and meat dish, an indispensable ingredient in all celebrations. As the ceremonies unfold they are accompanied by song and dance and often spill over into a second, or (in the case of weddings) a third day. Visitors to the locale, although strangers to the *mahalla*, are welcome to these celebrations.⁹⁶

⁹² Women Living Under Muslim Laws. "Uzbekistan: Divorce System Works Against Uzbek Women." 3 November 2006. <http://www.wluml.org/english/newsfulltxt.shtml?cmd%5B157%5D=x-157-545124>

⁹³ United National Development Programme. Uzbekistan in Figures. "Crude Divorce Rate." 2008. http://www.statistics.uz/data_finder/189/

⁹⁴ Human Rights Watch. "Uzbekistan Turns its Back on Battered Women. Uzbek Women Forced to Remain in Violent Marriages." 7 October 2001. <http://hrw.org/english/docs/2001/07/10/uzbeki72.htm>

⁹⁵ UZINTOUR "Uzbek Customs." 2007. http://uzintour.erava.com/en/about_uzb/customs/

⁹⁶ UNESCO. Kurbanova, Dilnoza. "Rich Traditions Cement Family and Community Ties in Uzbekistan." Spring 2006. http://src.unescoapceiu.org/pdf/2006/sangsaeng/060529_ss_vol15_p46-47.pdf

Naming Conventions

Muslims in Uzbekistan are free to name their children according to Sunni practice. This means selecting a first name that commemorates an Islamic hero or includes an amalgam of “*abd*” (servant of) plus one of the 99 divine Quranic attributes such as Abd-el-Jelil (Servant of the Exalted). A long list of Quranic and genteel names for girls exists as well. Children carry their patronymic name (father’s name) as a middle or second name. Family names remain unchanged and women take on their husband’s surname.

