PACK LIGHTLY

THE SILK ROAD, STILL STANDING

Uzbekistan

Four cities on one train line, what a day really costs, and which blue-domed square is worth the extra night.



p. 23 The route picker: your Silk Road trip in one look

p. 30 What a day really costs, printed as a till receipt

p. 37 The registration rule nobody explains before you land

45 PAGES · USD PRICES · VISA-FREE 30 DAYS · EDITION 2026.07

photo: Wikimedia Commons

Start here

the shape of an Uzbekistan trip, what it costs, what to sort first



Uzbekistan is a straight line across the desert with four stops that changed the world. Tashkent, Samarkand, Bukhara and Khiva sit on one rail corridor, and a fast train links the first three in an afternoon. This guide is built around that line: what each city is worth, where to slow down and where a single night is plenty, and the handful of things to sort before you fly. All of it offline, in your pocket.

The shape of a trip

Most trips run west along the old road: Tashkent to Samarkand to Bukhara by fast train, then Khiva by night train or a short flight. Ten days does the four cities without rushing.

What a day costs

Backpacking runs about 20 USD a day, mid-range around 50, captured for this edition. The full receipt, bed to teahouse, is itemised on page 30.

Sort before you fly

Most passports enter visa-free for 30 days, so check yours. Add travel insurance, an eSIM, and book the Afrosiyob fast train early. Page 32 lists the order.





HOW THE LINKS WORK

Some booking links earn Pack Lightly a commission, at no extra cost to you. Full disclosure is on the last page.

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QUICK JUMPS

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The registration rule 37

Your trip on one page

10 days · 20 to 120 USD/day · best Apr-May and Sep-Oct

If you read nothing else, this page is the trip. The classic route runs Tashkent to Samarkand to Bukhara by fast train, then Khiva to close the loop. Ten days, spring or autumn. Budget from the bars below, not from resort rates. Book the three things at the bottom right before you fly; the rest is cheaper and easier to sort once you are in the country.

THE ROUTE

Tashkent day 1-2
2h10 fast train
Samarkand day 3-5
1h30 fast train
Bukhara day 6-8
6h night train
Khiva day 9-10

BUDGET PER DAY

Backpacker	20 USD
Standard	50 USD
Comfort	120 USD

BOOK FIRST

01	International flights, 6 to 8 weeks out	Aviasales
02	Afrosiyob fast-train seats, 2 to 4 weeks out	12Go
03	eSIM, install before departure	Saily

BEST MONTHS

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
desert heat or winter cold	desert heat or winter cold	shoulder: hot or cool edges	best: mild and dry	best: mild and dry	shoulder: hot or cool edges	desert heat or winter cold	desert heat or winter cold	shoulder: hot or cool edges	best: mild and dry	shoulder: hot or cool edges	desert heat or winter cold

This is a cash country. Carry som for markets, taxis and tickets; cards work in city hotels and better restaurants.

The one thing to book early is the Afrosiyob fast train. Seats between the big cities sell out in the shoulder months.

Uzbekistan at a glance

scores 0-100 · pack-lightly country-comparison data

SCORECARD

Culture	90
Budget friendly	85
Friendliness	85
Safety	80
Food and drinks	70
Nature	50

Budget travel	20 USD/day
Mid-range	50 USD/day
Luxury	120 USD/day

CULTURE · HISTORY · ARCHITECTURE · CRAFTS · FOOD

source: country-comparison tool, 2026-07

SIX FRAMES OF THE TRIP













01

The country

What Uzbekistan is, why four desert cities hold some of the finest architecture on earth, and the three regions you need to know before you pick dates.

IN THIS CHAPTER

What Uzbekistan is 07

The Silk Road, still standing 08

What Uzbekistan is

36M people · 3 regions · the easy way into Central Asia

A double-landlocked republic of 36 million people in the heart of Central Asia, bordered by the other four stans and Afghanistan. Tashkent is the capital and the entry point: a green Soviet-planned city that most trips start from. Uzbekistan is the easiest of the stans to travel. A fast train links the three headline cities, hotels sit inside restored madrasas, and the country switched to visa-free entry and free currency exchange in 2018, which turned a bureaucratic slog into a smooth trip. What you come for is singular: Samarkand, Bukhara and Khiva hold the densest run of Timurid and Silk Road architecture anywhere, and it is still standing.

CAPITAL
Tashkent
~2.6M people

POPULATION
36M
Muslim-majority, secular

CURRENCY
UZS
1 USD = ~12,600 som

BEST MONTHS
Apr-May
and Sep-Oct

THREE REGIONS, THREE CHARACTERS



The two great cities: Samarkand, Bukhara

Silk Road core · fast train · hot summers

Where the trip lives. Timur's capital and the old holy city, an afternoon apart by rail. The blue domes and tiled squares most people picture are here.



Khiva and the desert west

walled city · Kyzylkum · the Aral Sea

A whole walled town you can walk in an hour, out where the Kyzylkum desert takes over. Push further and you reach Moynaq and the ships stranded by the drained Aral Sea.



Tashkent and the green east

capital · Fergana crafts · Chimgan hills

The modern capital, plus the Fergana Valley where the silk and ceramics are actually made, and the Chimgan foothills for a day of air after the desert cities.

The Silk Road, still standing

why the monuments are here, and how to read them

The reason to come is a single thread of history. For a thousand years the caravan routes between China and the Mediterranean ran through these oases, and the trade paid for madrasas, mausoleums and mosques on a scale the desert had no other reason to hold. Timur, the fourteenth-century conqueror, made Samarkand his capital and dragged the best craftsmen of Asia there to build it. His grandson Ulugh Beg added an observatory that mapped the stars before Europe caught up. What survived earthquakes and Soviet neglect was restored hard in the last decades, so what you walk through today is genuine in outline and heavily rebuilt in surface.

UNESCO SITES	GOLDEN AGE	THE SIGNATURE	WALK TIME
4	**1370-1500**	**Blue tile**	**10 days**
Samarkand, Bukhara, Khiva, Shakhrisabz	Timurid dynasty	majolica and mosaic	for all four cities

☆ Samarkand dazzles and Bukhara feels lived-in. If you only deepen one, give Bukhara the extra night; its old town is a single walkable warren, not a set of separated monuments.

🕒 Go early or late. The tiled squares face harsh midday light and heavy tour traffic from 10 to 4; the colour and the quiet both return at the edges of the day.

GO DEEPER

The full run of monuments in the landmarks guide, the wider culture in the culture page, and the top picks in best places.

02

Where to go

The four cities on the line, the valley where the crafts are made, and the desert edge most trips skip. What each one is worth, and where a single night is plenty.

IN THIS CHAPTER

Samarkand 10

Bukhara 11

Khiva 12

Tashkent 13

Fergana Valley 14

The desert west 15

Samarkand

Timur's capital · 2-3 nights · the big-hitter monuments



The headline act. The Registan, three madrasas facing a single square, is the image that sells the country and it holds up in person: stand in the middle at opening and it is close to empty. Around it sit the rest of Timur's ambition, the Gur-e-Amir where he is buried, the Bibi-Khanym mosque he overreached on, and Shah-i-Zinda, a tiled avenue of tombs that is the most beautiful corner in the city and the one people underrate. Two full days covers it without a march; a third buys the Ulugh Beg observatory and a slower pace.

THE SET-PIECES, RANKED

- [ ] **Registan.** Go at 7am and again after 6pm for the light.
- [ ] **Shah-i-Zinda.** The quiet masterpiece; the tilework is the real thing.
- [ ] **Gur-e-Amir.** Small, intense, Timur's tomb under a fluted dome.
- [ ] **Bibi-Khanym.** Grand and half-ruined; worth a walk-through, not an hour.

Skip the evening Registan light show unless it is free with your ticket. The square at dusk needs no soundtrack.

The monuments are spread out. A day taxi or Yandex Go between them beats the midday walk in summer heat.

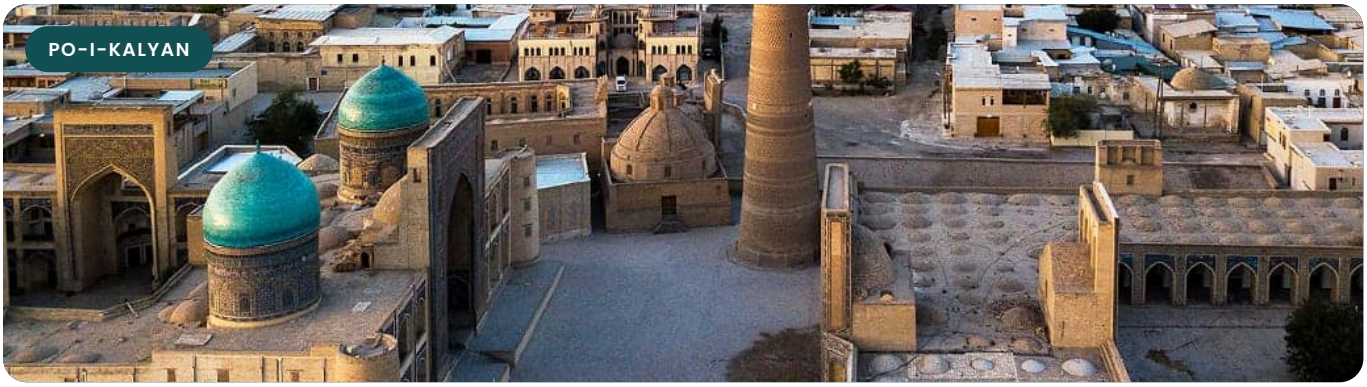
MORE ON THE SITE

The full walking order and ticket notes in the Samarkand guide.

photo: Wikimedia Commons

Bukhara

the lived-in old city · 2-3 nights · walk it, do not tour it



If Samarkand is a set of monuments, Bukhara is a whole preserved town, and it is the one most travelers end up loving. The old center is a compact warren of madrasas, trading domes and teahouses you can cross on foot, anchored by the Kalyan minaret that Genghis Khan reportedly left standing out of respect. Base yourself around Lyab-i-Hauz, the old pool square, and let the days go slow: the Ark fortress, the covered bazaars, the tiny Chor Minor with its four blue towers on the edge of the residential lanes. This is where an extra night pays off.

THE SET-PIECES, RANKED

- [ ] **Po-i-Kalyan.** Minaret, mosque and madrasa around one plaza.
- [ ] **Lyab-i-Hauz.** The pool square; base and eat here.
- [ ] **Ark fortress.** The emir's citadel, good city views.
- [ ] **Chor Minor.** Small, odd, photogenic; a short walk east.

Sleep inside the old town in a converted merchant's house. The lanes are dead quiet after the day-trippers leave and it is the best of the city.

The trading domes sell the same scarves at every stall. Prices halve two lanes back from Lyab-i-Hauz.

MORE ON THE SITE

Where to stay and the full monument list in the Bukhara guide.

Khiva

the walled museum-city · 1-2 nights · the far west stop



Khiva is the outlier: a fully walled inner town, Itchan Kala, that you can loop in an hour, out past the Kyzylkum desert at the far western end of the country. It is smaller and more compact than the other two, almost a film set, and that cuts both ways. Half a day covers the monuments; the reward for staying the night is the empty morning after the tour buses from Urgench roll out. The stubby turquoise Kalta Minor, an unfinished minaret, is the postcard. Reach it by night train from Bukhara or a short flight into Urgench, 35km away.

THE SET-PIECES, RANKED

- [ ] **Kalta Minor.** The fat turquoise minaret; the image of Khiva.
- [ ] **Kunya Ark.** The old fortress and the best wall-top view.
- [ ] **Islam Khoja minaret.** Climb it for the rooftop panorama.
- [ ] **The walls at dusk.** One all-access ticket covers the town.

Buy the single combined ticket at the west gate. It covers almost every building inside the walls for two days.

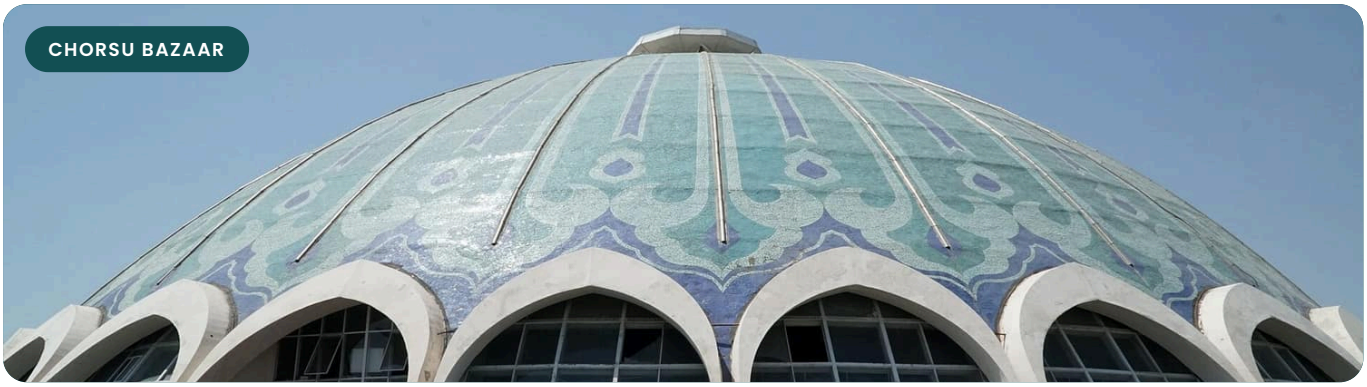
Sleep inside the walls. Once the day buses leave, the lit lanes are yours and it is the whole reason to overnight.

MORE ON THE SITE

Getting there and the night-train notes in the Khiva guide.

Tashkent

the capital · 1-2 nights · arrival, food, and the metro



Most trips begin here, and Tashkent rewards a day rather than three. A 1966 earthquake and Soviet rebuilding left a green, wide-boulevarded capital with less old fabric than the desert cities, but real pleasures: the domed Chorsu Bazaar piled with fruit and spice, the Khast Imam complex, and a metro whose stations are chandeliered marble halls worth riding for their own sake. It is also the best eating in the country and the easiest place to sort a SIM, cash and train tickets before you head west. Give it the first day and the last.

WORTH THE DAY

- [ ] **Chorsu Bazaar.** Under the blue dome; go hungry.
- [ ] **The metro.** Ride Kosmonavtlar and Alisher Navoi stations.
- [ ] **Khast Imam.** The religious complex and an ancient Quran.
- [ ] **Plov Center.** Lunch-only, the city's famous cauldrons of osh.

Photography in the metro is now allowed. Ride mid-morning, off peak, to get the halls near empty.

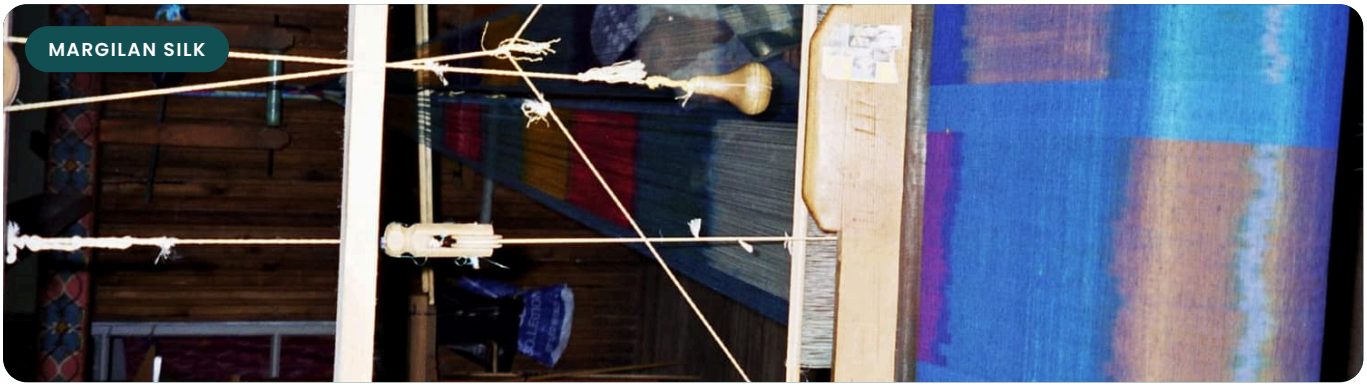
Eat plov at lunch, not dinner. The famous osh centers cook one batch and sell out by mid-afternoon.

MORE ON THE SITE

Arrival logistics and neighbourhoods in the Tashkent guide.

Fergana Valley

where the crafts are made · 1-2 nights · the detour east



East of Tashkent, over a mountain pass, the Fergana Valley is the fertile, densely settled heart of the country and the place the crafts actually come from. Margilan is the silk town, where the Yodgorlik factory still weaves ikat by hand from cocoon to cloth. Rishton makes the blue-and-white ceramics you see in every bazaar. Kokand keeps a khan's palace. It is a detour, not part of the main line, so add it only if you have the days and want the making rather than the selling. Two nights is plenty.

THE CRAFT STOPS

- [ ] **Margilan.** Yodgorlik silk factory, hand-woven ikat.
- [ ] **Rishton.** Ceramic workshops, the blue glaze.
- [ ] **Kokand.** The Khan's Palace and old madrasas.
- [ ] **The pass.** The Kamchik route in itself is a scenic drive.

Buy silk at the source in Margilan, not the tourist domes. Same ikat, half the price, and you see it woven.

Shared taxis over the Kamchik pass are the normal way in. Fill a seat at the Tashkent lot; it goes when full.

MORE ON THE SITE

The valley towns in Fergana, plus Margilan and Kokand.

The desert west

Nukus, the Aral Sea, and a night under the stars



Past Khiva the country empties into the Kyzylkum. Two things pull travelers out here. Nukus, capital of the Karakalpakstan region, holds the Savitsky Museum, a startling collection of banned Soviet avant-garde art saved in the middle of nowhere. Beyond it, Moynaq was a fishing port until the Aral Sea was drained for cotton; its rusting ships now sit on dry seabed, one of the clearest sights of environmental collapse anywhere. Closer to the main route, a night in a yurt camp by Lake Aydarkul near Nurata breaks the desert with stars and a campfire. This is off the standard line: add it only with time to spare.

Moynaq is a long day from Nukus. Hire a driver early; there is nothing to eat out on the old seabed.

The Aydarkul yurt camps are basic and cold at night, even in summer. Bring a warm layer and treat it as camping, not a hotel.

MORE ON THE SITE

The far west in Nukus, the Aral story in Moynaq, and the desert lakes in Nurata and off the beaten path.

03

What to do

How to read the architecture so it stops blurring together, where the crafts are real, what to eat, and where to sleep in each city.

IN THIS CHAPTER

Reading the monuments 17

Crafts and bazaars 18

Food spotlight 19

Where to stay: Samarkand, Bukhara 20

Where to stay: Khiva, Tashkent 21

Reading the monuments

five words that stop the buildings blurring together



By the third city the blue portals start to merge. A little vocabulary fixes that and turns sightseeing into reading. Almost everything you see is one of four building types, fronted by the same giant arch and skinned in two kinds of tile. Learn the five words below and each monument tells you what it was for.

THE FIVE WORDS

- [ ] **Madrasa.** An Islamic college, rooms around a courtyard. Most of the big square-fronted buildings.
- [ ] **Pishtak.** The huge rectangular entrance portal. The bigger it is, the more the patron was showing off.
- [ ] **Iwan.** A vaulted hall open on one side, the shaded space behind the portal.
- [ ] **Majolica vs mosaic.** Painted tiles fired whole, versus cut pieces set like a jigsaw. Mosaic is older, dearer, sharper up close.
- [ ] **Necropolis.** A street of tombs, like Shah-i-Zinda. Built for the dead, decorated for the living.

Look for the restoration line. Sharp, even tiles are recent; faded, uneven ones are original. Both are worth seeing, but it explains why some domes gleam and others don't.

A licensed guide for one morning in Samarkand pays for itself across the whole trip. After that you can read the rest yourself.

GO DEEPER

The full monument rundown in religious landmarks and the history in the culture page.

photo: Wikimedia Commons

Crafts and bazaars

what is real, what to pay, and where to buy it



Uzbekistan is one of the last places where the Silk Road crafts are still made by hand, and buying at the source beats the trading-dome markup every time. The four things worth carrying home are silk ikat, blue-glaze ceramics, suzani embroidery, and Samarkand's mulberry-bark paper. Everything is negotiable except fixed-price workshop goods; a friendly first counter of roughly half the asking price is normal in the bazaars and unwelcome in a family studio.

BUY AT THE SOURCE

- [ ] **Ikat silk.** Margilan, Yodgorlik factory.
- [ ] **Ceramics.** Rishton and Gijduvan workshops.
- [ ] **Suzani.** Bukhara and Shakhrisabz embroidery.
- [ ] **Paper and knives.** Konigil near Samarkand, Chust blades.

Natural-dye ikat costs more than chemical-dye and ages better. Ask; workshops are proud to tell you which they use.

Carry cash in som for markets; workshops take cards. Big antique carpets need an export stamp, so buy from a shop that handles it.

GO DEEPER

The craft towns in Margilan and the wider scene in culture.

photo: Wikimedia Commons

Food spotlight

the dishes that repeat, and what they cost

Uzbek food is meat, bread, rice and tea, done well and cheaply. Plov, the national rice dish, changes recipe from city to city and is worth ordering in each. Bread is a round stamped loaf called non, treated with near-reverence, never placed upside down. Below is what you will actually eat, with typical restaurant prices.

DISH	WHAT IT IS	PRICE
Plov (osh)	Rice pilaf with mutton and carrot, the national dish	USD 3-6
Shashlik	Charcoal-grilled meat skewers	USD 1-3
Manti	Steamed dumplings of meat and onion	USD 2-5
Samsa	Tandoor-baked meat or pumpkin pastry	USD 1-2
Lagman	Hand-pulled noodles in broth	USD 2-4
Non and green tea	Stamped bread and a pot of kok choy	USD 1

prices from the local-food-and-drinks dataset, captured 2026-06


SAMSA, FROM THE TANDOOR


NON, NEVER UPSIDE DOWN

See the full dish list with photos, regional variants and prices in the free food tool on pack-lightly.com.

Open What to Eat and Drink

Where to stay: Samarkand and Bukhara

prices per night, double room · sleep in the old center

One rule covers both cities: sleep in the old center, not the modern grid. Converted merchant houses and small madrasa-style guesthouses cost little more than a bland business hotel and put you a two-minute walk from the monuments at dawn. Book the first nights ahead in spring and autumn; the best small places fill first.

Samarkand

hostel **10 USD** mid **35 USD** comfort **100 USD**

Base near the Registan or in the old mahalla lanes east of it, walkable to Shah-i-Zinda. Check what a room costs near the Registan, or find the dorm scene through Hostelworld.

Bukhara

hostel **9 USD** mid **32 USD** comfort **90 USD**

Stay in a converted house around Lyab-i-Hauz, inside the walkable old town. See what the old center is charging tonight; backpackers cluster on Hostelworld.

Guided old-town walks, day trips to Shakhrisabz and Gijduvan, and craft workshops book out in high season.

See guided tours in Samarkand

Where to stay: Khiva and Tashkent

prices per night, double room · walls versus capital

Two different logics. In Khiva, sleep inside the walls of Itchan Kala so you get the empty lit lanes after the day buses leave. In Tashkent, base near a metro stop in the center; the city is spread out and the metro is the fast, cheap way across it. Both are easy to book close to arrival outside peak weeks.

Khiva

hostel 8 USD mid 30 USD comfort 85 USD

Guesthouses inside Itchan Kala put you among the monuments at night. Check rooms inside the walls, or the cheaper beds on Hostelworld.

Tashkent

hostel 10 USD mid 40 USD comfort 110 USD

Base near a central metro stop like Amir Timur or Kosmonavtlar. See what the center is charging; the hostel scene runs through Hostelworld.

Mid-range and up in both cities, with free cancellation while your plans are still moving.

Find Stays on Booking.com

04

Routes and itineraries

Eight ready-made trips by who you are and how long you have, a day-by-day two-week plan, and the real map of the line you will ride.

IN THIS CHAPTER

The route picker 23

Two weeks, days 1–7 24

Two weeks, days 8–14 25

The route on a map 26

The route picker

find the closest trip to yours, then adjust

Eight trips by traveler, length and budget. Totals are per person unless noted, on-the-ground costs excluding international flights, using this edition's prices.

SOLO · 7D · BACKPACKER

The train loop

USD 350 · guesthouses + fast train

- Tashkent 2
- Samarkand 3
- Bukhara 2

SOLO · 10D · BACKPACKER

All four cities

USD 520 · adds Khiva by night train

- Tashkent 2 · Samarkand 3
- Bukhara 3
- Night train, Khiva 2

COUPLE · 10D · MID

Four cities, boutique houses

USD 1,700 for 2 · converted merchant homes

- Tashkent 1 · Samarkand 3
- Bukhara 3 · Khiva 2
- Flight back from Urgench

COUPLE · 7D · COMFORT

Samarkand and Bukhara, deep

USD 2,300 for 2 · 4-star, private guide

- Samarkand 3: guided
- Bukhara 3: slow
- Fast train between

FAMILY · 12D · MID

Cities plus a yurt night

USD 3,000 · family of 4

- Tashkent 2 · Samarkand 3
- Nurata yurt 1 · Bukhara 3
- Khiva 2

CULTURE · 14D · MID

Full Silk Road plus crafts

USD 1,400 · adds Fergana

- Four cities
- Fergana Valley 2
- Nurata yurt 1

SLOW · 21D · MID

No rush, rail hops

USD 1,300 · long stays, less moving

- A week each in the big three
- Day trips out
- Khiva to finish

OFF-BEAT · 14D · MID

Add the Aral Sea

USD 1,700 · Karakalpakstan detour

- Four cities
- Nukus + Savitsky 2
- Moynaq day, dry seabed

Two weeks, the classic line

days 1-7 · Tashkent to Bukhara by fast train

The route worth flying for, refined for first-timers. Book the Afrosiyob fast-train seats (days 3 and 6) a few weeks ahead through 12Go; the rest can be decided on the day.

1	**Arrive Tashkent** TAS · day zero	Land, SIM and cash at the airport, taxi to a central hotel. Easy evening, an early night before the west.
2	**Tashkent** metro + bazaar	Chorsu Bazaar at opening, the marble metro stations, Khast Imam. Plov at lunch. Book onward seats.
3	**Fast train to Samarkand** 2h10 · afternoon Registan	Morning Afrosiyob. Drop bags, walk to the Registan for the late light, dinner in the old lanes.
4	**Samarkand monuments** 7am start	Registan at opening, Shah-i-Zinda, Gur-e-Amir, Bibi-Khanym. Break through the midday heat.
5	**Samarkand, slow** observatory + paper mill	Ulugh Beg observatory, the Konigil paper workshop, Siab Bazaar. A second dusk at the Registan.
6	**Fast train to Bukhara** 1h30 · old town	Midday train. Settle around Lyab-i-Hauz, wander the trading domes, dinner by the pool.
7	**Bukhara on foot** Po-i-Kalyan + Ark	Kalyan minaret and mosque, the Ark fortress, Chor Minor on the edge. Slow tea in the afternoon.

Two weeks, the classic line

days 8-14 · the desert, Khiva, and home

The second week turns west into the desert and back east to fly home. The Bukhara to Khiva leg is the long one: an overnight train or a six-hour drive across the Kyzylkum.

8	**Bukhara, second day** crafts + Sitorai palace	The summer palace, a suzani workshop, last of the bazaars. Board the night train west after dark.
9	**Arrive Khiva** Itchan Kala	Into the walled town. One combined ticket, Kalta Minor, Kunya Ark for the wall-top view. Overnight inside.
10	**Khiva morning** empty lanes	The town before the buses, Islam Khoja climb, then transfer to Urgench for the flight or train east.
11	**Nurata and a yurt** optional detour	Break the return with a night at an Aydarkul yurt camp: campfire, stars, a short camel ride if you want it.
12	**To the Fergana Valley** crafts at the source	Over the Kamchik pass. Margilan silk, Rishton ceramics. The green, lived-in east of the country.
13	**Fergana, slow** workshops + Kokand	The Yodgorlik factory, Kokand's Khan Palace, a last round of bazaars before turning back for Tashkent.
14	**Tashkent and fly** last plov	Back to the capital. A last plov, any final shopping, evening flight out.

The route on a map

the line you actually ride, west across the desert

One rail corridor carries the whole trip. The fast Afrosiyob covers Tashkent to Samarkand to Bukhara; the long western leg to Khiva is a night train or a road crossing of the Kyzylkum.



WHAT THE LEGS COST AND TAKE

LEG	MODE	TIME	FARE
Tashkent to Samarkand	Afrosiyob fast train	2h10	USD 12-25
Samarkand to Bukhara	Afrosiyob fast train	1h30	USD 10-18
Bukhara to Khiva	Night train or road	6-7h	USD 15-25
Urgench to Tashkent	Domestic flight	1h40	USD 40-70

fares captured 2026-06; book fast-train seats early through 12Go

05

When to go

The two windows worth targeting, the festivals worth planning around, and exactly what a day on the road costs at three budgets.

IN THIS CHAPTER

Weather, crowds, price 28

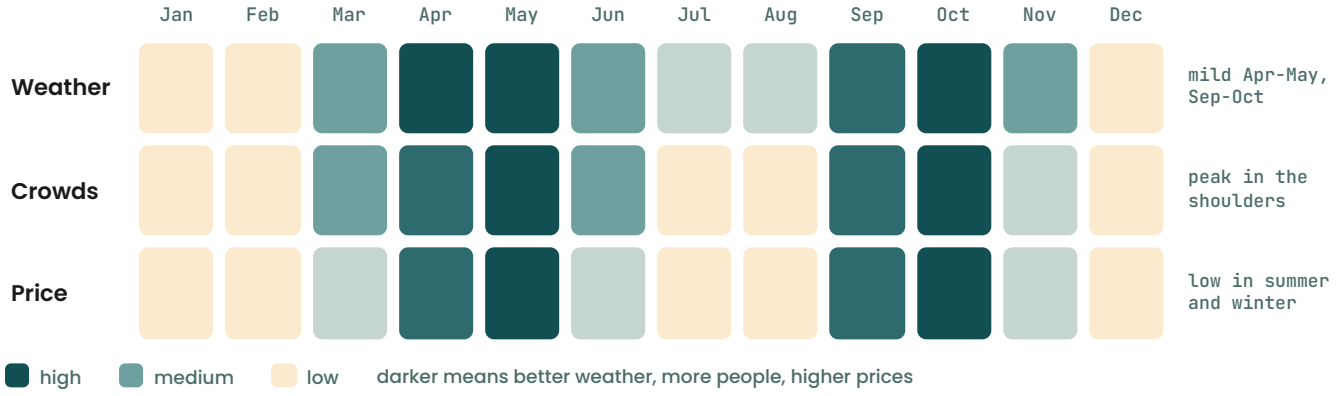
Festivals worth timing 29

What a day costs 30

Weather, crowds, price

12-month calendar · the two good windows

Uzbekistan has a sharp continental climate, and the year has two clear windows. Spring, April into May, brings green oases and mild days before the furnace. Autumn, September into October, cools off with the melon and grape harvest still on. Summer bakes the desert cities past 40C, and winter is genuinely cold with short days. Aim for the shoulders and you get comfortable sightseeing and full monuments without the summer heat.



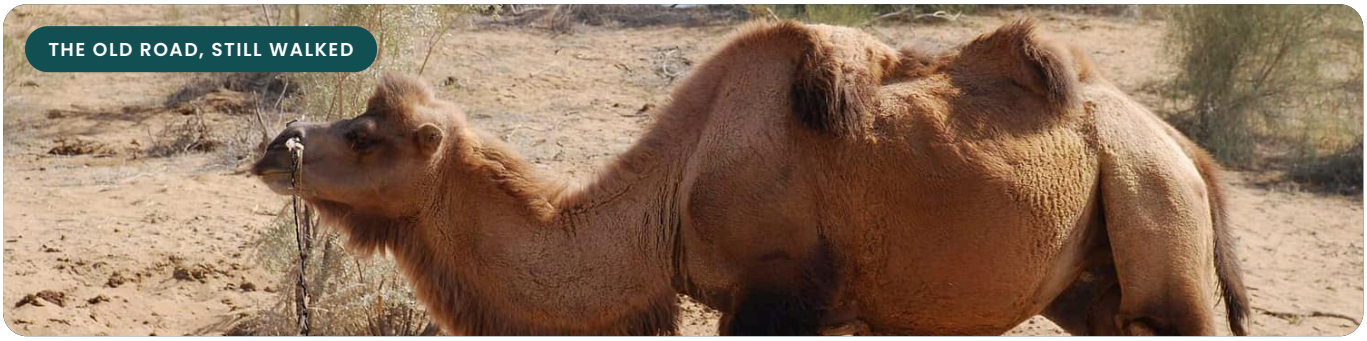
source: best-travel-time dataset and country-comparison, captured 2026-06

Summer is doable if you flip your day: sightsee at dawn and after 5pm, rest through the worst heat. Rooms are cheapest then.

Navruz, the spring new year around 21 March, is the biggest celebration of the year and worth timing a trip around.

Festivals worth timing

the dates that change what you see



Most of the year is fine to visit, but a handful of dates transform a city or fill every hotel. Navruz is the one to plan a trip around; the two music and craft festivals are worth a detour if the timing lands.

THE CALENDAR

- [ ] **Navruz, around 21 March.** Spring new year, the biggest festival: street food, music, sumalak cooking. Book ahead.
- [ ] **Boysun Bahori, April or May.** A folk-culture festival in the southern mountains, UNESCO-listed traditions.
- [ ] **Silk and Spice Festival, Bukhara, late May.** Crafts, costume and music through the old town.
- [ ] **Sharq Taronalari, Samarkand, late August.** The Oriental Melodies music festival at the Registan, odd years.
- [ ] **Independence Day, 1 September.** National holiday, parades and closures; plan travel around it.

GO DEEPER

Dates and closures in the public holidays page and the month-by-month picture in best travel time.

photo: Wikimedia Commons

What a day costs

three travel styles · printed the way the day spends it

Daily budgets hide in averages, so here is the day itemized instead: a bed, meals, getting around, one monument ticket, and the tea at the end. Three real versions of the same day in Uzbekistan.

A DAY IN UZBEKISTAN

* backpacker *

guesthouse bed	7.00
non and tea	1.00
samsa lunch	2.00
shashlik dinner	4.00
metro + shared taxi	1.50
one monument ticket	3.00
water + fruit	1.50
TOTAL / DAY	**~20 USD**

country-comparison data · 2026-06

A DAY IN UZBEKISTAN

* standard *

3-star double, half	18.00
cafe breakfast	3.00
restaurant lunch	6.00
dinner with drinks	9.00
taxi and Yandex	4.00
monument tickets	5.00
guide, half day, split	5.00
TOTAL / DAY	**~50 USD**

country-comparison data · 2026-06

A DAY IN UZBEKISTAN

* comfort *

boutique house, half	55.00
hotel breakfast	incl.
restaurant lunch	10.00
dinner, good table	18.00
private driver, half day	20.00
private guide	12.00
tea and extras	5.00
TOTAL / DAY	**~120 USD**

country-comparison data · 2026-06

Run the same numbers for your own dates, group size and currency in the free budget calculator on pack-lightly.com.

Open the Budget Calculator

06

Practical

Visa, money, trains, eSIM, health, packing. The boring parts you only read once. Done right, you never think about them again.

IN THIS CHAPTER

Book in this order 32

Money and transport 33

Bed, bag, signal 34

Health basics 35

Book in this order

four things before you fly · the rest on the ground

Uzbekistan rewards a little planning on exactly four fronts and punishes over-planning everywhere else. Hotels, drivers and most tours are cheaper and easier once you are in the country. The four things below have a natural order, and only one, the fast-train seat, genuinely sells out.

8 wk before

International flights

Most routes connect through Istanbul, the Gulf or Moscow into Tashkent, with some direct from Europe. Fares soften six to eight weeks out.

Compare fares on Aviasales

4 wk before

Insurance + visa check

Buy travel insurance with solid medical cover. Then confirm entry: most nationalities enter visa-free for 30 days, and everyone else files a quick e-visa online. Passports need three months validity beyond arrival.

Check entry rules per passport

2 wk before

Afrosiyob seats + first nights

The fast train between Tashkent, Samarkand and Bukhara sells out in high season. Lock the two legs and your first two hotel nights; the rest can wait.

Book train seats on 12Go

1 wk before

eSIM

Install before departure, activate on arrival. 10 to 15 GB covers two weeks of maps, translation and uploads across the cities.

Set up a Saily eSIM

Fast-train tickets open around 45 to 60 days out. In Navruz and the autumn shoulder they sell fast, so book the day they release.

Bring a spare bank card. Cash is king here and one blocked card can strand you between working ATMs.

Money and transport

a cash economy · fast trains and shared taxis

Uzbekistan runs mostly on cash. The som comes in large notes, cards work at hotels and city restaurants, and everything else wants paper. ATMs are common in cities and some dispense US dollars; carry a stack of small som for markets, taxis and tickets. Between cities the Afrosiyob fast train is the way to travel; off the rail line, shared taxis leave when full from set lots, and Yandex Go is the honest meter inside cities.

ITEM	BACKPACKER	MID	COMFORT
Bed, guesthouse to 4-star	USD 8	USD 35	USD 100
Plov or restaurant meal	USD 3	USD 8	USD 20
Monument ticket	USD 2	USD 4	USD 6
Yandex ride across town	USD 1.50	USD 3	USD 6
Fast train, city to city	USD 10	USD 18	USD 30

verified 2026-06 · per-category detail in the budget guide

GETTING AROUND: WHAT BEATS WHAT

Fast train for the three main cities, night train or a hired car for the desert leg to Khiva, domestic flights to save a day back from Urgench or Nukus. Inside cities, ride the metro in Tashkent and use domestic flights only for the long western hops. Shared taxis are the local default for anywhere off the railway: agree the price before you get in, and pay to fill an empty seat if you want to leave sooner. Book combined rail tickets through 12Go.

THE FULL PICTURE

Cash and card detail in the currency rundown, the full cost model in budget saving, and cheap air legs in domestic flights.

Bed, bag, signal

hotels · packing · eSIM, the three solved problems

BED

For mid-range and up, Booking.com has the deepest inventory and free-cancellation options, including the converted merchant houses in Bukhara and Khiva. For dorms and social guesthouses, Hostelworld has the better review pool. The family-run places in the old towns are the pick everywhere; they often pass back a small discount on a direct message.

BAG: THE SHOULDER-SEASON LIST

- [ ] Layers: hot days, cold desert nights, cool spring mornings
- [ ] Modest clothing for mosques: covered shoulders and knees
- [ ] A scarf, useful for sun, dust and covering up
- [ ] Sun hat, sunglasses, SPF 50; the light is fierce
- [ ] Comfortable walking shoes for uneven old-town stone
- [ ] Refillable water bottle and electrolyte sachets
- [ ] Type C/F plug adapter, 220V
- [ ] A power bank for long train and car legs
- [ ] Two payment cards plus a cash reserve in USD
- [ ] Hotel registration slips kept together (see page 37)

Signal. Install an eSIM before you fly and activate on arrival. A 10 to 15 GB plan covers two weeks of maps and translation. Local Ucell or Beeline SIMs are cheaper for stays over a month; bring your passport.

Set up a Saily eSIM

06

GO DEEPER The full season-by-season list in the packing list, mosque and dress notes in the dress code page, and plans compared in the eSIM write-up.

Health basics

six weeks out · most of this list is reassurance

Uzbekistan is a low-drama health destination. There is no malaria, pharmacies are common in cities, and the main risks are the sun, the heat and an upset stomach from the change in diet. The list below is everything that actually needs doing, in order.

THE SHORT LIST

- [ ] **Six weeks before:** travel-clinic visit. Confirm routine vaccines (MMR, DPT, flu) are current.
- [ ] **Recommended:** Hepatitis A and typhoid for a food-and-market trip. Hep A is a two-shot series; start early.
- [ ] **Skip:** malaria pills. There is no malaria risk in Uzbekistan.
- [ ] **Pack:** loperamide, rehydration salts, paracetamol, high-factor sun cream, a wide hat.
- [ ] **Water:** drink bottled or filtered; tap water is not reliable for visitors.
- [ ] **Insurance:** solid medical cover with evacuation, since top hospitals are in Tashkent.

IF SOMETHING GOES WRONG

Tashkent has the best private clinics in the country and is where serious cases are treated; the regional cities cover the basics. Pharmacies (dorixona) handle stomach upsets, minor infections and cuts over the counter. Dial 103 for an ambulance and 102 for police; hotel reception is the fastest route to an English-speaking doctor.

READ ON The shot-by-shot schedule in the vaccinations breakdown, clinics in the hospitals page, and cover compared in the travel insurance rundown.

07

Safe and smart

The one bit of bureaucracy that trips people up, the etiquette that is load-bearing, and the language minimum that changes how people respond.

IN THIS CHAPTER

Staying smart: the registration rule 37

Etiquette: do and do not 38

Language and emergencies 39

Staying smart

the registration rule, and the small grifts to know

Uzbekistan is a very safe country: violent crime against travelers is rare and people are famously hospitable. The two things worth understanding are one piece of paperwork that catches visitors out, and a small set of overcharging habits in the tourist zones.

THE REGISTRATION RULE

Foreign visitors are meant to be registered for the nights they spend in the country. Hotels and guesthouses do this automatically and hand you a small registration slip (registratsiya) at checkout. The whole job is simple: keep every slip together and do not throw them away until you have left. Enforcement has relaxed a lot and short gaps for a night train or a yurt stay are generally fine, but the slips are your proof if anyone asks at departure. If you camp or stay somewhere unregistered, keep the next hotel slip that follows it.

WATCH 01

The unmetered taxi

Street taxis and airport touts quote a tourist price several times the going rate, especially on arrival.

The fix: use Yandex Go for a fixed fare, or agree the number before you get in. Locals pay a fraction.

WATCH 02

The bazaar markup

The trading domes and tourist bazaars open at several times the real price and expect a haggle.

The fix: counter at roughly half, walk two lanes back, or buy at the workshops where prices are fixed and fair.

WATCH 03

The "antique" that is not

Carpets and coins sold as old and export-cleared are usually neither, and real antiques need a stamp to leave.

The fix: buy new from a reputable shop, and only buy genuine antiques from a dealer who handles the export certificate.

BONUS

Money changers on the street

The old black market is gone since 2019; street changers now just short-count you.

The fix: change at a bank or ATM. The official rate is the real rate now.

07

MORE ON THE SITE

The full safety picture and the current registration detail in the safety breakdown.

Etiquette: the short list

first four are load-bearing · the rest smooth the day

Eight things that matter. The first four cause real offense if you ignore them; the rest simply make you a welcome guest. Uzbek hospitality is generous, and a little respect is returned tenfold.

DO

Dress modestly at mosques

Covered shoulders and knees. Women, keep a scarf handy for the head at active shrines.

DO NOT

Photograph people without asking

Especially women and elders. A smile and a gesture at the camera is usually met with a yes.

DO

Treat the bread with respect

Place non right-side up, break it by hand, never bin it. Bread is close to sacred here.

DO NOT

Refuse the tea

Accepting a cup, and a little food, is how you accept the welcome. Turning it down reads as cold.

DO

Remove shoes in homes

And in some prayer rooms. Follow your host; there are usually slippers by the door.

DO NOT

Point your sole at people or food

When sitting on floor cushions, tuck your feet away. Feet toward the spread is rude.

DO

Try a few words of Uzbek or Russian

Salom and rahmat go a long way. Russian is widely understood alongside Uzbek.

DO NOT

Eat openly in daytime during Ramadan

In conservative areas, be discreet with food and drink until sunset out of respect.

If invited home, a small gift for the host, sweets or something from your country, is warmly received.

A raised voice loses the room here as everywhere in the region. Patience and a smile solve most snags.

MORE ON THE SITE

Customs, dress and hospitality in the culture page and what to wear in clothes.

Language and emergencies

a handful of words · the numbers to keep

Uzbek is the national language, written in Latin script, and Russian is widely spoken across the cities. A few words in either open doors. English is common in hotels and among younger guides, less so on the street.

THE TEN WORDS THAT HELP

ENGLISH	UZBEK	RUSSIAN
Hello	Salom	Zdravstvuyte
Thank you	Rahmat	Spasibo
Yes / No	Ha / Yo'q	Da / Nyet
How much?	Qancha?	Skolko?
Water	Suv	Voda
Delicious	Mazali	Vkusno
Sorry	Kechirasiz	Izvinite
Where is…?	…qayerda?	Gde…?

POLICE	AMBULANCE	FIRE	UNIFIED
102	103	101	112

GO DEEPER

More phrases and script notes in the language page.

08

Tools and reference

The live tools this guide was built from, the cut-out cards for your wallet, and the sources behind every number.

IN THIS CHAPTER

Take the live tools with you 41

Print cards: cut, fold, take 42

Sources and methodology 43

A note on the links 45

Take the live tools with you

scan to open · data updates after this PDF was printed

This guide is a snapshot; the tools behind it keep updating. Scan a code or type the short URL. Each one is preloaded with the same Uzbekistan data this guide was built from.



Trip Budget Calculator

Uzbekistan: 20 USD/day backpacker, 120 USD/day comfort.

pack-lightly.com/
tool/budget-calculator/



Country Map

The Silk Road cities to the Aral Sea, mapped.

pack-lightly.com/
tool/country-map/



Best Time to Travel

Best: April-May and September-October. Month by month.

pack-lightly.com/
tool/best-travel-time-worldmap/



What to Eat and Drink

Plov from 3 USD, plus dozens more dishes with prices.

pack-lightly.com/
tool/local-food-and-drinks/

Print cards: cut, fold, take

print at 100% scale · credit-card size, 85 x 54 mm

Print this page on A4 or US Letter at 100 percent (no fit-to-page), cut along the dashed lines, and the two cards live in your wallet for the trip. The form fields are interactive in Acrobat and iOS Preview if you would rather type than write.

UZBEK AND RUSSIAN · ESSENTIALS

Hello	Salom / Zdravstvuyte
Thank you	Rahmat / Spasibo
Yes / No	Ha, Yo'q / Da, Nyet
How much?	Qancha? / Skolko?
Water	Suv / Voda
Delicious	Mazali / Vkusno
Where is…?	...qayerda? / Gde?
Sorry	Kechirasiz / Izvinite

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EMERGENCY · UZBEKISTAN

Police	102
Ambulance	103
Fire	101
Unified	112
Currency	UZS (som)

My hotel: _____

Address: _____

Insurance #: _____

Left card front, right card back: print double-sided on the short edge and they fold into one.

Lost the guide, kept the card? The QR opens the live Uzbekistan hub with every page this guide links to, plus updates published after this edition.

pack-lightly.com/uzbekistan/

Photograph both cards before you cut. A phone copy of the emergency card still works when the wallet is at the hotel.

Keep your hotel registration slips tucked behind this card. They are your proof at the airport on the way out.

Sources and methodology

every number traces to a dated source



WRITTEN BY

Wouter van Kemenade

Founder of Pack Lightly. Twenty-plus countries on the ground, data-led travel writing with a performance-marketing background. Every number in this guide is verified against a source listed below; if a price moves more than 15 percent, the next edition flags it.

SOURCES USED IN THIS EDITION

1. Hotel and guesthouse pricing: Booking and Hostelworld snapshot 2026-06, Samarkand, Bukhara, Khiva and Tashkent centers.
2. Currency rates: ECB and open reference rates, 2026-06.
3. Visa policy: the Uzbekistan e-visa portal (e-visa.gov.uz) and national guidance, retrieved 2026-05-15.
4. Daily-cost model: Pack Lightly country-comparison dataset, captured 2026-06.
5. Travel advisories: FCDO and US State Department, last checked 2026-06.
6. Climate and seasons: best-travel-time dataset and 10-year averages, captured 2026-06.
7. Pack Lightly Uzbekistan cluster pages, retrieved 2026-07: visa · budget · safety · best travel time · eSIM

Methodology. Pack Lightly's country scores aggregate eleven dimensions into the 0-100 scorecard on page 5, re-scored on a regular cycle. Budget figures come from the country-comparison and budget-calculator datasets, climate verdicts from the best-travel-time dataset, both stamped with their capture date where they appear.

What changed in edition 2026.07: first release of the Uzbekistan guide on the v2 design standard. Next planned update: January 2027. Not covered in depth here: trekking in the eastern mountains, and deep dives on Shakhrisabz and Termez, which have their own pages on the site.

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Image credits

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15. **Plov / osh rice pilaf, cooking**. Wikimedia Commons contributor, CC0.
16. **Po-i-Kalyan minaret and mosque, Bukhara, aerial**. Wikimedia Commons contributor, Public domain / free use (Wikipedia lead image).
17. **Registan ensemble, daytime panorama, different angle**. Wikimedia Commons contributor, CC BY 2.0.
18. **Registan Square, Samarkand, three madrasas, golden**. Wikimedia Commons contributor, Public domain / free use (Wikipedia lead image).
19. **Round Uzbek non bread, stamped pattern**. Wikimedia Commons contributor, CC BY 2.0.
20. **Rusted ship graveyard, Moynaq / Aral**. Wikimedia Commons contributor, CC BY 2.0.
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23. **Suzani embroidery, floral medallion detail, Shahrisyabz**. Wikimedia Commons contributor, Public domain.
24. **Yurt camp by Aydarkul lake /**. Wikimedia Commons contributor, CC BY-SA 4.0.

Tour data and prices: Viator Partner API, captured July 2026. Author portrait and brand marks: Pack Lightly.

A note on the links in this guide

disclosure · why this guide is free

This guide is free because some of the booking links inside it are affiliate links. When a reader books a stay, a transport leg, or an eSIM through one of those links, the merchant pays Pack Lightly. The reader pays the same price either way.

The pick comes before the partner. A hotel area or a transport platform is chosen for the trip it makes, and where a partner link exists for it that link is used; where none does, the plain link still points there. An overrated sight is still called overrated, and a cheaper option that beats the famous one keeps the slot. The commission funds the guide, it does not choose for it.

Questions, corrections, or a place you tested that belongs in the next edition: write to hello@pack-lightly.com.

Partners linked in this edition: Aviasales · Booking.com · 12Go · Saily · Hostelworld · Stay22 · GetYourGuide · via Travelpayouts

Links can outlive a print run. If one stops working, the live version of every page in this guide sits under pack-lightly.com/uzbekistan.

This file is versioned; the edition is on the cover. The next planned update lands January 2027 and replaces this file at the same download.