

## Uzbekistan Fact Sheet

### **Entry requirements**

All EU and most other nationalities do not need a visa to enter Uzbekistan. If you are not a UK or EU citizen please check.

### **Time**

GMT +5

### **Weather**

Easy. It is 40 degrees above at the height of summer and 40 below at the depth of winter. Rains come in the spring. Some meteorological higher being switches off the warmth at the end of October and November brings sub zero mornings though the sun shines brightly and layers and sunscreen are definitely required.

### **Money**

All prices are in Uzbekistan Sum ( or Som) though you might be given prices in dollars at souvenir stalls or carpet shops. There are loads of Sum to the pound ( 12,000 at time of writing) and the highest note is 50,000 ( about £4.25); a 100,000 sum note is in the offing not that it will help much. You will walk around with wads of cash!

Bring crisp clean dollar notes, as

- a) They are easily accepted for some purchases
- b) They are easy to change into Sum anywhere

American Express cards are as acceptable as a pork chop! Mastercard is marginally less useless as we did find one place that accepted it.

BRING VISA CREDIT OR DEBIT CARDS. Only VISA cards will work in the many ATMs that are to be found in hotel lobbies, railway stations and around the towns. Similarly, if a shop or restaurant does by some chance take credit cards it will only be VISA.

ATMs are plentiful. Whether they a) have any cash in them b) work is one of the charming unpredictability of this fascinating country. If one works then, like a good toilet, don't pass it by!

### **Prices**

Prices of goods and services vary from risibly cheap to good value. Your wads of Sum will go far.

### **Sanitation and Cleanliness**

Spankingly so. Uzbekistan could give Japan a run for its money in the cleanliness of its streets buildings and the spotless markets and bazars makes you wonder why British street markets are so messy.

Toilets are similarly pristine whether public or restaurant. Though squatters are often found there will always be a European loo in the next-door cubicle.

Toilet paper in Uzbekistan can also be used to rub down paintwork or varnish. If you are used to Andrex softness bring a roll with you. Similarly, bring a sink plug to make shaving so much easier.

No one drops litter and nor do they smoke (much) in public. Every morning armies of workers are out with witches' broomsticks sweeping the streets.

### **Food & Drink**

We put a lot of work in selecting restaurants looking for ones that were above the standard Uzbek fare. The national dish is Plov which is rather onomatopoeic for a pile of rice vegetables and meat. However, we have even found a restaurant that makes this dish taste delicious.



Eating a meal without meat is like going to a rugby match and not having a beer. No pork in this Moslem country but chicken, beef, lamb and horse. Tell us if you have dietary requests – all can be sorted with notice!

An Uzbek meal will consist of salads (with or without meat and pretty universally delicious) soup (varying from delicious vegetarian ones to greatly sought after meat ones with an oil slick on top) and a main course usually meat but we have found some pretty good vegetarian options too.

Bread varies from town to town according to local habits. From rather flat pita bread in Khiva to wonderful bread from the oven in Bukhara and Khiva.

Though a Moslem country alcohol is widely available if not drunk. The beer is good and Samarkand produces some acceptable wines. Tea is almost always drunk with your meal and the sweet lemon tea is particularly tasty. Standard worldwide beverages can be found here too.

## **Power**

Two pin European plugs abound. Some hotels had universal sockets that would accept UK plugs.

## **Communications**

Mobiles do work but our operator charges £3 a minute to make calls and £1.25 to receive them.

WiFi is available in hotels and restaurants and there was no problem with download speeds. In fact if you live in rural Britain you will probably find it far better!

Country code is +998

## **Transportation**

Uzbekistan Airways seemed fine. They are safe and comfortable but forget seat back entertainment or any frills. We personally didn't think (on walking down the plane) that business class offered much more than economy – but ask us if you require an upgrade quote!

Tashkent airport is modern but hardly Heathrow terminal 5.

Trains are excellent. The fast train from Samarkand to Tashkent is a Spanish Talgo and though slower still travels at 100mph with a pre-assigned seat service and is very comfy. The train from Khiva to Bukhara is slower but still comfortable and has a buffet car.



You need a lot of passport checks, stamps, more passport checks, more stamps to travel in either mode.

If you can get them to understand where you want to go taxis are incredibly cheap. £1-2 (24,000 sum) will probably do. Get the hotel or restaurant to order it and tell them your destination.

## **Language**

Uzbek is spoken and is written in Latin characters. If you speak Russian you will not have a problem. If you speak English most people will smile warmly and ask your name and if you support Manchester United and that is about as far as you will get. The young speak more English – some surprisingly fluently.

## **Rules**

For an ex-Soviet country there was a noticeable absence of rules (for tourists at least) except you cannot walk on the grass in the cities or smoke in public.

## Shopping

Dried fruit of all varieties including dried Melon which is delicious. Ceramics, textiles, carpets and fur hats are all to be found in the street stalls and bazars. Bargain hard and/or accept that you will be paying more than locals. Prices increase as you travel south and Khiva is often best value - certainly for hats and woodwork. Samarkand has the most amazing carpets and as far as souvenirs are concerned Tashkent is tacky.

