

# Uzbekistan's Ancient Cities: Travel Back in Time

Uzbekistan has well preserved the relics from the time when Central Asia was the centre of Tamerlane's empire, which also coincided with the development of education and commerce. The cities of today's Uzbekistan, including Samarkand, Bukhara, Khiva, Tashkent and Shakhrisabz live in the imagination of the West as the symbols of oriental beauty and mystery.

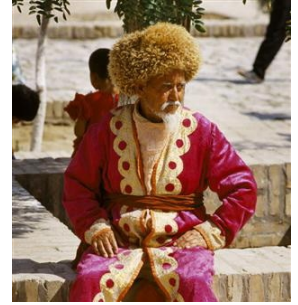


Many cities which are located in modern Uzbekistan were in ancient times on the Silk Road, on the road between the East and the West. The trade route was named after silk – the Chinese material that was in great demand in Europe.

The advantageous geographical location of the Uzbek cities made them naturally attractive to numerous conquerors. The territory of modern Uzbekistan was conquered many times by various nations and warriors, including Alexander the Great. Alexander founded at least eight cities in Central Asia between 334–323 BC.

As for caravans, they started passing on the Great Silk Road later, since the year 138 when China opened its borders for trading. During the period from 484 to 1150 the region was invaded by the western tribes: Huns, Turks and Arabs, the latter brought a new religion – Islam. Within that period, many mosques and madrasahs had been built in Samarkand, Bukhara and Khiva. Most of them were built during the reign of Samanids.

Many cities were totally destroyed during the invasion of Genghis Khan in 1220. Later, the great conqueror Timur, known in the West under the name of Tamerlane, revived the destroyed cities using for that the slaves and builders who had been captured during Timur's successful military campaigns. Tamerlane annexed Persia, Baghdad, he also headed to Anatolia and India. The majority of the architectural buildings that were located in Samarkand today, were built by Tamerlane and his grandson Ulugbek.



## The Cities of Uzbekistan

### Samarkand

Samarkand is one of the oldest cities of Uzbekistan and of the world. In the middle of the first century BC it was known under the name of Marakanda and later known as Afrosiab. It was the capital of the powerful state Sogd, the center of Amir Timur's great empire. The numerous monuments of Samarkand and its suburbs impress tourists with their beauty and splendor. The refined architectural shapes, intricate ornamentation, mosaics, blue-tile domes and facades are interesting for all who visit these beautiful buildings.

### Tashkent

Although Tashkent was probably first settled around the 1st century BC, written records date the city to its Arab occupation in the 8th century AD. The 13th-century defeat to Genghis Khan and his Mongolian forces threw Tashkent into an era of turmoil. The Mongols lost the city in the 14th century when the Timurids Empire seized control. The Timurids Empire ruled Tashkent until the late 15th century, when the Sheibanids swept through the region. Today, Tashkent is the capital of Uzbekistan.



### Bukhara

The settlement of Bukhara in Uzbekistan dates back to the 8th century and for the next 200 years it used to be the center of an expanding Islamic kingdom and prospered as a trade and intellectual center for Central Asia. During the Mongol invasion it was destroyed by Genghis Khan in 1219. Subsequently it was ruled by a succession of regional powers, including descendants of Genghis Khan, Turks, and Uzbeks. Once one of Islam's most sacred cities, Bukhara contains many examples of fine Islamic architecture.

### Khiva

Khiva is known as a museum city under the open sky. It existed as a town for about 900 years, but was developed into the settlement as it is today only by the 19th century, when it was the last oasis on the northern Russian slave trade route. Important spiritual and cultural values came from the large scientific centers of astronomy, mathematics, and medicine that existed in this area centuries ago. One can wander through the narrow streets of Khiva, peeking into the small courtyards through the wooden carved doors. The life inside the gardens assures the visitor that it is not just a museum, but also a living city.

#### Baysun

Do you wish to travel back in time that will transfer you to a forbidden territory that keeps the memory of culture of Greek and Baktrian and Kushan kingdoms that fell into oblivion of heathen ceremonies of fire-worshippers, and shaman cults? Trade caravans traveled here through Iron Gates in narrow mountain canyon for thousands of years. Armies of Alexander the Great, Chengiz Khan, Tamerlan passed through this area.

#### Nukus

Nukus is located in the north of Uzbekistan near the Aral Sea, surrounded by three deserts – the Kara Kum, Kyzyl Kum desert and rocky Ustyurt. Despite the fact that the city is only 70 years old, the land on which it stands, is an ancient cultural stratum, which archaeologists have identified as belonging to the IV century BC. er. – IV century AD.

#### Ferghana and the Ferghana Valley

The city of Fergana, in the south of the Ferghana Valley is one of the youngest cities in Uzbekistan. It was founded in 1876, after annexing the Kokand Khanate to the Russian Empire. And a new town called New Margilan was founded 12 km away from the city which became the center of Ferghana region.

#### Nurata

Even some local residents of Uzbekistan do not know well about the ancient history of the town. It was lost in the outskirts of Kyzyl Kum desert in the foothills of the mountains Nuratau (which stretch from Jizzakh to Navoi). The highest point of the whole mountain area is the peak Hayatbashi (2169 m).

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