

# THE PEARL OF THE ORIENT - SAMARKAND AND UZBEKISTAN TO ATTRACT MORE TOURISTS



Uzbekistan is committed to making tourism one of the primary drivers of its economy, replacing cotton cultivation. Cotton is one of the country's main sources of income, but it has also led to severe environmental issues, such as the depletion of the Aral Sea.

Cotton fields require a significant amount of water, around 10,000 liters, just to get one kilogram of fiber. **This led the Soviet authorities to overexploit water resources to irrigate crops and even divert rivers that fed the Aral Sea.**

Uzbek President Shavkat Mirziyoyev believes that if they can multiply their income from tourism by three or four times, they can stop cotton farming altogether. The president estimates that with a well-implemented strategy, the country could receive up to 15 million foreign tourists by 2030, double the number from 2023. This would bring in up to \$5 billion in revenue.

Uzbekistan, the so-called Pearl of the Orient, has implemented an "open-door policy" to attract tourists. This policy exempts citizens from almost 100 countries from obtaining visas, while citizens from 55 other countries can easily apply online. The government has invested \$1 billion in critical infrastructure over the past two years, including restoring historical monuments, roads, bridges, and energy and water facilities. This investment has attracted private investments of \$2 billion for the same purposes.

## The Pearl of the Orient

Located on the Silk Road midway between China and Europe, Samarkand, often referred to as the 'Pearl of the Orient,' is considered one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities worldwide. Historians place its foundation between the 8th and 7th centuries BC. Samarkand's prosperity, which made it one of the largest cities in Central Asia and the capital of Timur's (Tamerlane) empire, can be attributed to its strategic location.

Samarkand is home to many wonders, including the Registan, a public square in the heart of the ancient city. The Registan is framed by three madrasas and is known to leave even the most experienced tourists speechless. One of the monuments left by Timur reads, "If you want to know about us, examine our buildings."

One of the most notable buildings in Samarkand is the Bibi Janun Mosque, which was named after one of Timur's women. Construction of the mosque began in 1399 and was completed five years later. According to a historian, engineers and workers from different places participated in the work, and 95 elephants from India were used to transport materials.

## Connectivity Is Crucial

Uzbekistan's commitment to tourism is evident in its emphasis on connectivity. To this end, the

country has acquired six high-speed Talgo trains from Spain, which **link the capital city of Tashkent with the historic Silk Road cities of Samarkand and Bukhara.**

Due to numerous shrines and mosques, Bukhara, the fourth-largest city in Uzbekistan, is a popular destination for Muslims. Religious tourism is a priority for the country's authorities, with over a thousand shrines estimated to be allocated within Uzbekistan's borders.

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