



UZBEKISTAN THROUGH THE AGES / 1

UZBEKISTAN

For many of us, visiting Uzbekistan might seem like an adventure into the unknown. The country doesn't feature often in our daily newspapers and Central Asia was, during some periods, one of the world's most isolated regions. But, as your journey and our expert tour educators will reveal, there is much to be said about this land and culture that developed as a key part of the Great Silk Road trading route. Uzbekistan's cities – as you can still see today – were once capitals of Islamic art, architecture, and empires. This area is known for its fierce rulers, from Genghis Khan to Timur the Lame to Joseph Stalin, until suddenly, in 1991, a new nation called Uzbekistan was born. Uzbekistan's Jewish heritage is also long and fascinating, from the millennia-old "Bukharan" community to a revitalizing rabbi from Morocco and the later Ashkenazi influx. We hope this timeline gets you excited about discovering Uzbekistan but keep in mind that the dates mentioned here are often approximate only.

■ General timeline ■ Jewish timeline

THE PERSIAN INFLUENCE

- BCE** — 100,000 First human inhabitants domesticate horses and are able to roam widely
- 1000 Persian groups establish settlements along the Amu Darya and Syr Darya rivers
Population and agriculture will remain based in fertile east, not the arid west
Wealthy trading towns at Bukhara and Samarkand established
Agriculture more settled, culture less nomadic than others in Central Asia
- 700 *According to tradition, Jews from Lost Tribes of Israel arrive in region*
- 600 Region will be for centuries loosely part of different (mainly Persian) empires
Tajiki, a Persian dialect, will become dominant language of the region
Local pop. and culture will remain strong despite different empires over centuries
- 458 *Another tradition holds that Jews arrive here from Persia fleeing persecution*
- 328 Short-lived conquest by Alexander the Great before Persians reassert control

ON THE SILK ROAD

- 100 Uzbekistan is a key part of the Great Silk Road trade route from China westwards
The Isro'il (Israelites) flourish as traders and merchants
They speak Tajiki with Hebrew influence, have Persian-Jewish culture
Later, the Jews of Central Asia become known as "Bukharan Jews"



timeline

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■ General timeline ■ Jewish timeline

- CE**
- 224 Most locals follow Zoroastrianism, the official religion of Persian empires
Some Jews move to escape pressure to convert to Zoroastrianism
 - 550 Turkic tribes settle in area and play important role in developing Silk Road
- ### THE RISE OF ISLAM
- 710 Arab conquest introduces Islam but strong Persian, Turkic cultures remain
 - 751 Battle of Talas ends Chinese expansion, cements Muslim control of Central Asia
 - 819 The vast Samanid (Persian, Sunni) Empire takes control with Bukhara as capital
Bukhara a major intellectual trade and cultural center of Islamic world
Jews protected and tolerated as dhimmi but subject to special taxes
Jews, often artisans and merchants, forbidden from owning land
 - 999 *Have limited contact with Jews of Muslim world, none with Europe*
- ### GENGHIS KHAN AND THE UZBEKS
- 1220 Bloody Mongol conquest led by Genghis Khan
 - 1328 Legendary Mongol emperor Timmur the Lame born near Samarkand
 - 1360 Samarkand capital of his vast empire which stretches from Iran to Pakistan
Samarkand and Bukhara famed for superb Islamic architecture and scholarship
A growth period for Jews, a magnificent synagogue built in Bukhara
Jewish weavers and dyers, including many from Persia, help revitalize cities
Bukharan Jewish women known for gold embroidery
 - 1510 Uzbek Shaybanid dynasty completes conquest of Central Asia
Uzbeks, Mongol tribes originally from Siberia, become largest group
They merge with Turkic tribes, speak Turkic languages, especially Chagatai-Uzbek
Uzbek leaders (khans) known for military skill, Sunni religiosity, arts patrons
Tajik-Persian speakers (incl. Jews) now minority along with other smaller groups
Under Uzbeks, contact between Bukharan and Persian Jews diminishes
 - 1538 Bukhara and its architecture thrives under last great Mongol khan, Abdullah II



timeline

UZBEKISTAN THROUGH THE AGES / 3

■ General timeline ■ Jewish timeline

CENTRAL ASIA NO LONGER CENTRAL

- 1598 Abdullah's death starts decline of the Shaybanid dynasty and wider region
Landlocked: The Silk Road falls into disuse as ocean trade now dominant
Area divided between local rulers and isolated from rest of Islamic world
Jews suffer from periods of discrimination and persecution
Have to wear black cap and cord belt, slapped in face when pay annual tax
Most Jews not allowed to live outside Jewish quarter in Bukhara
Forced conversions to Islam create new, shunned group of chalas, crypto-Jews
- 1720 Jewish community in Samarkand declines after earthquake
Bukharan Jews isolated in world Jewry, own customs and identity weakening
- 1793 Revival and reintegration led by Rabbi Yossi Maimon from Morocco
He introduces Sephardi customs to replace forgotten Persian customs
Recruits European religious teachers, encourages pilgrimages to Israel
Population grows with Jewish refugees fleeing from persecution in Persia
- 1849 2,500 families in Bukhara, Jews now allowed to live outside Jewish quarter
A network of new schools and communities
Not allowed to build new synagogues so pray in homes of wealthy families
Economy boosted as Bukharan Jews have special trading rights in Russia

END OF THE ISOLATION: RUSSIA AND THE RAILROADS

- 1850 The "Great Game": Russia and Britain compete for control of Central Asia
- 1876 Russian Empire directly or indirectly rules all of today's Uzbekistan
Uzbek khanates or regions have limited autonomy under Russia
50,000 Jews in Samarkand, 20,000 in Bukhara enjoy civic equality
Close ties with Russians make Jews a powerful trading class
Uzbek leaders and population resent these ties, launch restrictions and attacks
- 1900 Modernization: Railroads, telephones, press, telegraphs, new populations
Arrival of Russian settlers and officials transforms Tashkent and other urban areas
Resistance to Russia takes different forms including moderate Islamic groups



timeline

UZBEKISTAN THROUGH THE AGES / 4

■ General timeline ■ Jewish timeline

- 1914 Railway connects Jews in Bukhara, Samarkand, and Tashkent
Ties with rest of Jewish world strengthen. 30 synagogues in Samarkand
Ashkenazim arrive from Russia looking for new opportunities and fleeing pogroms
- 1914 Railroad also facilitates Aliyah. 1,500 Jews move to Land of Israel
- 1916 Local uprising against Russian rule leads to massacres and suspicion on both sides

A S O V I E T C R E A T I O N : U Z B E K I S T A N

- 1917 The Russian Revolution: Russian Communists seek control of Central Asia
- 1918 The Basmachi Rebellion: Fierce local resistance against Communist Red Army
Many local Jews initially support Russian Communists, fear local Muslim control
This leads to riots against Jews
- 1922 The Red Army triumphant. Soviets establish "divide and rule" policy in Central Asia
- 1924 USSR divides Central Asia into 5 separate Soviet Republics including Uzbekistan
Islam suppressed, Russian officials brought in to control local Communist Party
Uzbekistan nationalism develops alongside local, linguistic, and Islamic identities
Synagogues, Jewish newspapers, schools, culture suppressed
Hopes in Soviets diminish, 4,000 Jews secretly move to Israel
- 1930 Pop. of Soviet Uzbekistan c. 4.7 mil. Capital Tashkent heavily Russian
A command economy: Stalin demands entire economy based around cotton
Agricultural collectivization and over-reliance on cotton crops leads to famine
Local resistance and Islamic life driven underground but remains strong
- 1937 Stalin's Purges: Local leaders, nationalists, intellectuals executed
- 1941 World War II: Hundreds of thousands sent to Eastern Front to fight Germans
A time also of new arrivals: Soviet move factories and Russian workers to Tashkent
Stalin forcibly exiles "suspect" Chechens, Koreans, Tartars to Uzbekistan
A new Siberia: Stalin sends political prisoners, incl. many Jews to Uzbekistan
More than 1 million Jews fleeing Holocaust pass through Uzbekistan
- 1945 While most leave, others stay. Jewish population peaks at 200,000



timeline

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■ General timeline ■ Jewish timeline

Two separate Jewish communities: "Bukharan locals" and Ashkenazi newcomers
Ashkenazim tend to be wealthier, more educated, less religious
Both groups suffer from Muslim and Soviet anti-Semitism
Estimated 550,000 soldiers and civilians from Uzbekistan killed during WWII

UZBEKI STALINISM WITHOUT STALIN

- 1953 After Stalin's death, less fear but little freedom
- 1959 Sharaf Rashidov, an Uzbeki, rules local Communist Party for next 34 years
Nepotism, corruption, repression, environmental problems thrive under his rule
Economy built on providing USSR with cotton leads to massive overuse of water
Aral Sea, one of world's largest inland rivers, loses 90% of water in next decades
93,344 Jews, 1.2% of total population. 50,445 live in capital Tashkent
Yiddish and Russian are now main first languages of local Jews
A minority (19,266) speak Judeo-Tajik, traditional language of Bukharan Jews
- 1967 Six Day War leads to upsurge of Soviet and local anti-Semitism
- 1972 Ban on Aliyah temporarily relaxed. 8,000 Jews leave for Israel
Rashidov receives huge funds from USSR due to "miraculous" cotton harvests
- 1983 Great Cotton Scandal: He dies while suspected by Moscow of falsifying records
USSR purges local communist leaders
Islam strengthening with growth of religious practice, identity, and education
- 1985 Uzbek replaces Russian as language of education

A NEW NATION, OLD AUTHORITARIANISM

- 1989 Islam Karimov, an Uzbeki, takes over local Communist Party
Gorbachev's calls for glasnost (openness) opposed by hard-line Karimov
- 1991 USSR collapses. Karimov declares Uzbekistan independent state
Uzbekistan is the largest of the "five stans," the Central Asian states formerly part of USSR
Karimov renames Uzbekistan Communist Party the People Democratic Party
Same leaders and tactics: Authoritarian, secular, tied to corruption and nepotism



timeline

UZBEKISTAN THROUGH THE AGES / 6

■ General timeline ■ Jewish timeline

	<p>Opposition banned, including both moderate and militant Muslim parties</p> <p>Karimov wins series of flawed elections, remains in power until death in 2016</p> <p>Economy stagnant as reliance on cotton, now sold on world market, continues</p> <p>With rising Uzbeki nationalism and language laws, many minority groups emigrate</p> <p>Many ethnic Russians leave. They drop from 14% of pop. in 1959 to 2% in 2017</p> <p>Great majority of Jews leave, mainly for Israel and US (esp. Queens, New York)</p>
— 1997	Jewish population, 95,000 in 1980, drops to 35,000. Emigration continues
— 2001	<p>US allowed to use Uzbekistan's air bases in war against Taliban in Afghanistan</p> <p>US aid and other diplomatic ties increases</p> <p>Unspoiled heritage: Khiva, Samarkand, Bukhara UNESCO World Heritage sites</p>
— 2004	Islamicist attacks increase. Suicide bombers hit US and Israel embassies
— 2005	<p>Hundreds of anti-govt. protesters killed by govt. troops in Andijan</p> <p>US condemns killings. EU temporarily places sanctions on Uzbekistan</p> <p>Claims that 1 million children and adults each year forced by govt. to harvest cotton</p>
— 2014	Karimov's daughter accused of plundering state assets worth \$65 billion
— 2016	Karimov dies. His deputy takes control, introduces limited liberalization
— 2017	GDP per capita \$6,900, 158th in world. Pop 32.1 million, was 15.4 million in 1970
— 2018	<p>Ethnic Uzbek 84% of population. Just 5% listed as Tajiki (may be far higher)</p> <p>First language Uzbek 75%, Russian 14%</p> <p>88% Sunni Muslim, 9% Christian (Eastern Orthodox)</p> <p>50% of pop now urban. Was 34% in 1960. Tashkent has 2.5 million residents</p> <p>Jewish communities in Samarkand, Tashkent, and Bukhara</p> <p>Most Jews speak Russian, some still speak Judeo-Tajik</p> <p>Population of Uzbekistan: 33.5 million</p> <p>Jewish Population: c. 3,000-8,000</p>