Uzbekistan is the ultimate destination when you’re [backpacking the Silk Road](https://www.bunchofbackpackers.com/backpacking-silk-road-overview-guide/), but it also has a reputation for being difficult to travel through.

Luckily, Uzbekistan is realizing its tourism potential, and has done away with many of the restrictive measures putting tourists off of visiting this amazing Central Asian country. Traveling in Uzbekistan is getting easier with every passing day; there’s no time like the present to plan a trip to Uzbekistan!

****Sometimes you’re thoroughly checked at the border.**** In 2016, when I was exiting to [Afghanistan](https://www.lostwithpurpose.com/afghanistan-travel-guide/), they went through every. single. thing. in my bags, and almost all the files on my computer. However, in recent times things have become more relaxed at the borders. When I crossed in and out in 2020, they didn’t even look at my bag, let alone go through it.

* ****Officials might check your mobile phone and/or computer when entering and exiting the country.****They’re looking for anything suspicious, from religious material to photos of police/military in Uzbekistan to commentary on the government… but adult content is mainly what they’re looking for. Again, this is less likely since the relaxing of borders in 2019.
* ****You can’t bring in any drugs containing codeine.****Yes, they’ll check the ingredients of any drugs you bring in, so do keep your pills in their designated boxes or bottles.
* ****Don’t bring in any prescription pills unless your name is on the bottle.****Just in case.
* ****Hide any photo (or other) files that border officials might find suspicious.****This could include that one porno you really just can’t go without (seriously, though, streaming, it’s the 21st century), or photos from inside Uzbekistan that have guards or other officials in them—a big no-no. Here’s [how to hide files on your computer](https://www.lostwithpurpose.com/hide-files-border-crossings/).

## ****Money in Uzbekistan****

Money in Uzbekistan used to be a bit of a nightmare. There were no working ATMs, money was traded on the black market, and you needed to carry around massive stacks of bills for every little transaction. Luckily, things have changed a lot in recent years! Here’s what you need to know about money in Uzbekistan as of 2020:

* ****Uzbekistan’s currency is the Uzbek som.****Up until recently, there was a black market rate and an official rate. However, as of September 2017 this is no longer the case; exchange rates for Uzbek som in banks are about the same as black market rates.
* ****Change money at banks.****Before September 2017, visitors were advised to change money with black market money changers. However, this is no longer the case. Foreign currency can and should now be changed at money exchanges and banks where possible. You can find them in every major city, though you might need to rely on unofficial exchanges in more remote areas.
* ****You don’t need a bag for your money anymore.****Uzbekistan has finally introduced large denomination banknotes. Before you needed a separate bag just to carry your cash, but now a wallet will suffice!

****Accommodation in Uzbekistan****

Staying in places in Uzbekistan used to be complicated thanks to a strange registration system, but rules have eased in recent years. Accommodation in Uzbekistan isn’t hard to find, but there are still a few things to be aware of:

* ****Hotels and guesthouses in Uzbekistan should still give you registration slips.****These slips will have the dates of your stay written on them, and hotels will usually give them to you when you check out. You may need them to exit the country, but officials have become much more lax about this in recent times; they just want to see if you have enough registration slips to (loosely) show how long you were in the country.
* ****Hostels exist, but they fill up quickly in high season… as do hotels.****Be sure to book ahead at popular hostels and hotels in major cities. You can book online using sites like [Booking.com](https://www.booking.com/country/uz.html?aid=951954).
* ****Couchsurfing is technically not allowed.**** There *are*people who host or are hosted, but we can’t officially recommend it, as you could potentially get your host in trouble. It’s up to you to use your own discretion, of course. Homestays are becoming more popular in Uzbekistan these days, if you’re interested in getting a local experience.

## ****Transportation in Uzbekistan****

Getting around in Uzbekistan is generally a breeze, as long as you know the following things about transportation in Uzbekistan:

* ****Shared taxis are often the cheapest transportation option.****Shared taxis in Uzbekistan are often the same price—or cheaper!—than trains. Check with a local or your hotel manager to get an idea of how much they cost before you go; you usually have to haggle.
* ****When taking a shared taxi, do***not***let the taxi driver leave before the car is full.****Some taxi drivers will try to rip you off by claiming they’re a shared taxi, then driving off and making you pay for all of the seats. To prevent them from doing this, stand outside the taxi until it’s full. Be bold!
* ****Don’t be afraid to ask other passengers how much taxis should cost.****Most Uzbeks are very friendly and will be happy to help you get the proper price. (Unfortunately, some are also shady and will make you pay more so they get a discount, but I’ve found the former is more common than the latter!)
* ****You’ll be checked before entering the metro in Tashkent.**** Uzbekistan is big on security. Guards will scan your bag and possibly peek inside before you can fully enter the metro. Never fear, the guards are quite friendly!
* ****You***can***take photos inside Tashkent’s metro!****Years ago, photography was strictly prohibited; unfortunate considering how beautiful the Tashkent metro is! These days, photography is allowed so long as there are no guards in your photos (they usually step out of the way) and you don’t photograph down the train tunnels themselves.
* ****Buses stop often, but not for food.****Don’t forget to pack snacks when heading off on a long journey!
* ****You should keep windows closed while driving.****Uzbeks believe open windows on the road will lead to colds, and will often shut the windows right after you open them. Don’t ask questions… unless it’s too hot to function.
* ****You can see trains and travel times on the****[**Uzbekistan Railways website**](https://e-ticket.railway.uz/lang-en/index.html)****.****It doesn’t always work when it comes to buying tickets—I’m not sure it works at all for foreign cards, actually—but it gives a good overview of options.
* ****You need your passport to buy train tickets.****It shouldn’t be a problem since you’ll always have your passport on you… right?

## ****Culture and dress in Uzbekistan****

Learning about the culture and how to dress is one of the most important things you need to know before traveling Uzbekistan! Here are some things you need to know:

* ****Uzbekistan’s official language is Uzbek.****It’s a Turkic language and is written using Latin letters. If you know a bit of Turkish, you might be able to understand snippets of conversation!
* ****Russian is common in Uzbekistan.****Many Uzbeks know Russian as a second language, and it’s the main language of 14% of the population. Being able to read the Cyrillic alphabet or knowing some Russian phrases is useful in Uzbekistan. You can learn some basic Russian through free apps like [Duolingo](https://www.duolingo.com/enroll/ru/en/Learn-Russian), though for more in-depth learning I personally use and highly recommend [Pimsleur audio lessons](https://amzn.to/3dmeAwx).

****English isn’t so common.**Youth in cities will often know some English (because internet), but the older people get, the less common English is. Never fear, people in tourist areas usually speak some English.**

* ****Islam is the majority religion in Uzbekistan.****Figures say anywhere from 70% to 96% of the Uzbek population is Muslim.
* ****Islam can be loosely interpreted in Uzbekistan’s cities.**** You won’t be hard-pressed to find Muslim men downing a shot of vodka (or three) in the evenings, and women move more freely and dress much liberally than in other Islamic countries. However, things get conservative quite quickly in rural areas.

****Uzbekistan was part of the Soviet Union.**It declared its independence on September 1, 1991. There’s still a large minority community of Russians living in Uzbekistan.**

* ****There’s not much of a dress code for women at major sights.****Despite being an Islamic country, plenty of women go into major Islamic sights without headscarves in shorter dresses and skirts. That doesn’t mean girls should roll in with hot pants and tube tops, though—modest dress is always appreciated. Headscarves aren’t mandatory, even in major mosques, though it would be wise to bring a scarf for less touristy mosques.

****Islam Karimov was the first president of Uzbekistan, and you don’t want to insult him.**He died in 2016, to the great sorrow of the Uzbek people, but was internationally known for running an authoritarian regime guilty of many**[**human rights abuses**](https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/05/13/uzbekistan-massacres-abusive-aftermath)**. Uzbeks love him, foreigners are dubious, and it’s better to avoid the subject overall.**

## ****Food in Uzbekistan****

Uzbekistan isn’t known for its cuisine, but there’s plenty of food to go around, Check below for all you need to know about food in Uzbekistan.

* ****Prepare for culinary monotony.****Though Uzbek food *can* be delicious and Uzbek produce is rich and varied, food can be heavy and pickings slim when eating out on a budget. By the time you leave Uzbekistan, you’ll be having nightmares about *plov*.
* ****The most common dishes are***lagman***(noodle dish),***plov***(rice),***shashlik***(kebab), and***manty***(dumplings).**** Though restaurants usually have all of them listed as options, it’s also common to be told they only actually have one or two of the options. For more famous Uzbek dishes, check out this guide to [food in Uzbekistan](https://www.emilyluxton.co.uk/central-asia/what-to-eat-in-uzbekistan/).
* ***Plov***is king in Uzbekistan.*****Plov* is a rice pilaf-like dish commonly found in Uzbekistan (and throughout the rest of Central Asia) and is the proclaimed National Bestest Food Evar according to many an Uzbek. Though simple—and heavy, as it’s cooked in animal fat—it can be hearty and delicious. Beware: you’re guaranteed to need a nap after eating.
* ****If you**are getting scurvy**need a dose of veggies in your life, head to the market.****There’s a decent Korean population in Uzbekistan. Refreshing Korean-influenced vegetable salads are common in many of the bazaars.
* ****For cheap eats, look for “CHOYXONA” signs.**** *Chaikhanas* are small teahouse-restaurant combinations. If there are plenty of locals inside, you know you’ve found a keeper!
* ****Eat melons. Lots and lots of melons.****The melons in Uzbekistan are utterly succulent, and famous in the region. You don’t want to miss out! Late summer/early fall is melon season in Uzbekistan.
* ****Vegetarians and vegans are***not***common in Uzbekistan.**** People will have trouble understanding what you’re asking for. Be cautious; what you get might still have meat or animal products in it.

## ****Officialdom and security in Uzbekistan****

I saved the best for last! (Sarcasm.)

Uzbekistan is a land in love with all things official and bureaucratic. There are a handful of things you definitely need to be aware of before entering the country, else you risk pissing off people in power. Though things might sound complex, I assure you it’s not so bad in practice.

Just be attentive… and play nice.

* ****Never, ever take photos of anything military, power plants, or transportation.****You’ll get in trouble, and security forces may think you’re a spy. You never *ever* want to give an official reason to believe you’re a spy in these kinds of countries.
* ****Always carry a copy of your passport with you.**** Uzbekistan loves a good security check. It’s wise to have an ID on you at all times.
* ****Be wary of police after bribes.**** This used to be a big problem, but not so much anymore. However, this almost happened to me once in Andijan in 2016. To avoid coughing up any [baksheesh](https://www.lostwithpurpose.com/baksheesh/) (bribe money), always show a *copy*of your passport to officials, rather than the real deal. Otherwise, they could take your passport and demand money from you to get it back.
* ****You officially need hotel registration slips for every night you’re in Uzbekistan.****Though this is still officially the case, as of 2019 airport and border crossing officials only sometimes check if you have hotel registration slips. You don’t really need to have one for *every*day.
* ****If traveling through the Fergana Valley, do make sure to have a slip for each night.****The valley is the one place where you might get in trouble if you don’t have registration slips for each night. It’s closely watched by the government due to [violent uprisings in the past](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andijan_massacre). Don’t worry, the area is safe to visit (I highly recommend it!), but you need to be on top of your slips there.
* ****Keep your tickets when taking overnight trains.****You can use them as registration slips, too.

So ends my lengthy list of things to know before visiting Uzbekistan! If any of you have more tips or questions about things you need to know when traveling to Uzbekistan, **give a shout in the comments**. The more information, the merrier.