

ETHNIC DIVERSITY OF UZBEKISTAN AND TRADITIONAL LIFESTYLES

Teshaboyeva Nafisa Zubaydullayevna

Jizzakh branch of the National University of
Uzbekistan named after Mirzo Ulug'bek Instructor

Rashidova Shaxnoza

Student

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Abstract. Uzbekistan is one of the most ethnically diverse countries in Central Asia, thanks to its long history at the crossroads of trade routes, empires, and migrations. While ethnic Uzbeks form the majority, a rich tapestry of minorities — including Tajiks, Kazakhs, Karakalpaks, Russians, and others — make up a significant part of the social fabric. This diversity is not just demographic: it profoundly shapes local traditions, languages, cultural practices, and communal life. Understanding this mosaic is key to appreciating Uzbekistan's heritage and contemporary identity.

Ethnic Composition of Uzbekistan: Current Data

Based on the most recent publicly available data (e.g., CIA World Factbook):

Uzbeks: ~83.8 % of the population

Tajiks: ~4.8%

Kazakhs: ~2.5%

Russians: ~2.3%

Karakalpaks: ~2.2%

Tatars: ~1.5%

Other ethnicities (including Kyrgyz, Koreans, Turkmens, Ukrainians, etc.): several small communities make up the rest. According to the National Statistics Committee (as reported by media), as of January 1, 2021, the number of Uzbeks was about 29.2 million (84.4%), Tajiks around 1.7 million (4.9%), Kazakhs ~821,200 (2.4%), Karakalpaks ~752,700 (2.2%), Russians ~720,300 (2.1%). Karakalpakstan, a semi-autonomous republic in Uzbekistan, has a population of about 1.99 million (as of mid-2023). Key Ethnic Groups and Their Traditional Lifestyles, Uzbeks. Language & Identity: Ethnic Uzbeks speak Uzbek, the official language of the country.

Cultural Practices: Their culture is deeply rooted in agriculture, craftsmanship (especially silk weaving, ceramics), and hospitality. Traditional Uzbek homes often have a courtyard (hovli), a garden, and a dedicated guest room ("mehmonxona"). Cuisine: Famous for plov, somsa, laghman, and various breads. Sharing food is a strong symbol of hospitality.

Festivals: Navruz, the spring equinox holiday, is widely celebrated and brings together people of various ethnic backgrounds.

Tajiks. Predominantly reside in historic cities such as Samarkand and Bukhara. Their language is a form of Persian (Tajiki), and they have a rich tradition of poetry, classical music, and literature. Traditional homes often have inner courtyards; their architecture reflects Persian influences. Their cuisine includes dishes like qurutob and local bread varieties.

Kazakhs and Kyrgyz. Though a minority, their historical lifestyle was strongly nomadic: living in yurts, moving with herds of sheep, horses, and camels. Equestrian culture is very important: horse riding, traditional games, and eagle hunting (in some areas) remain part of their heritage. They produce felt items, such as rugs and clothing, using traditional techniques.

Karakalpaks. Primarily live in Karakalpakstan, in the north-western part of Uzbekistan near the Aral Sea. Their language (Karakalpak) is Turkic and more closely related to Kazakh than to Uzbek. Traditionally, they engaged in fishing, especially in the Aral Sea, although ecological changes have drastically impacted this lifestyle. They are also known for weaving and distinct folk music traditions. Russians in Uzbekistan number around 720,000 (about 2.1% per some media/official estimates). Many live in urban centers (e.g., Tashkent, Bukhara). Their cultural influence is visible in architecture, education (some schools teach in Russian), and in the presence of the Russian Orthodox Church.

Other Minorities

Koreans: There is a small Korean minority in Uzbekistan. Tatars, Turkmen, Kyrgyz, Ukrainians, among others, also live in Uzbekistan, each preserving parts of their heritage in language, cuisine, and customs. **Interethnic Relations and Social Life.** Despite ethnic differences, social cohesion in Uzbekistan is relatively strong. Traditional values like respect for elders, family solidarity, and hospitality are broadly shared. The mahalla system (neighborhood/community) plays a crucial role in social life. It fosters local cooperation, collective decision-making, and cultural exchange. Mixed marriages (between members of different ethnic groups) are not uncommon, further blending traditions and creating shared cultural spaces.

Preserving Minority Languages: While Uzbek is dominant, there are ongoing efforts (by cultural institutions, schools, and media) to support minority languages such as Karakalpak, Tajik, and others.

Cultural Identity Amid Modernization: As Uzbekistan urbanizes and modernizes rapidly, traditional lifestyles (especially nomadic or rural ones) are under pressure. **Environmental Impact:** For Karakalpaks, the ecological disaster of the Aral Sea has severely impacted fishing and traditional livelihoods. **State Support:** The government promotes multiculturalism through cultural festivals, museums, and educational programs. International recognition (e.g., UNESCO) helps to preserve music, crafts, and oral traditions.

Conclusion. Uzbekistan's ethnic diversity is one of its most valuable assets. The coexistence of Uzbeks, Tajiks, Kazakhs, Karakalpaks, Russians, and other groups has created a rich tapestry of traditions, languages, and lifestyles. While modernization and environmental challenges pose real threats to some age-old practices, there is also a strong cultural revival and institutional support to preserve this heritage. Maintaining this diversity is not just about safeguarding the past — it's about nurturing a more inclusive and resilient national identity for the future.

Adabiyotlar, References, Литературы:

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