

MindStormPhoto Uzbekistan 2017



Burt and Evelyn Johnson

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Uzbekistan 1 – Tashkent



We have now entered Uzbekistan, and started our photographic tour with [Mehmet Özbalci](#), the same guide we used on our photo tour in Turkey last year. The above block gives a taste of the guidance Mehmet gives us. He had taken us to the [Khast Imam Mosque](#) to photograph in the late afternoon. There was a small puddle and some of us started taking photographs of the building reflection. Mehmet then saw two girls walking in the area (lower left), and convinced them to walk across the building for us a couple of times. Everyone then took turns lying next to the puddle (lower right). The result is the lead image, top row. Not much chance we would have gotten an image like that if we were traveling alone, not speaking a single word of Uzbek.

Uzbekistan was a member of the Soviet Bloc until their breakup in 1991. Since that time, the country has been a putative democracy, though the prior Communist leader was president until his death last year. Having just come from Rome, we were struck with a similarity. As mentioned in the [last blog](#), Rome was a city filled with ancient statues that were larger-than-life, which was a means of the Roman Empire demonstrating their strength.

Similarly, everything in Tashkent seems oversized with Russian-style architecture. The main roads in town are all 8 lanes wide, even though there are only enough cars to warrant 4 lanes. Within a short radius of our hotel there were four separate huge public parks, each two blocks on a side, yet they were laid out in a manner that made them green, yet unusable for families (trees planted every few feet throughout the park, leaving a few park benches to sit on, but no open spaces to play or picnic). Also, the buildings were massive, most filling an entire block, yet they were poorly utilized. One such six story hotel was abandoned. A huge museum building was closed, and we saw a single guard, and only a couple of souvenir shops.

It appears as though the government is trying to convince the world how strong the country is, even though it is clearly third world in many aspects.



The group's first photographic stop was at [Chorsu Bazaar](#), a local market, where we wandered for about an hour. Though nobody we met spoke English, most were open and friendly, smiling when we showed up. That is Evelyn in the upper left image, holding up a cut of beef and posing with the butcher, as his friend insisted on taking the photo.



The items for sale were similar in most cases to any large mercado in Ecuador, though a few items varied due to regional tastes. Bottom center image shows an overall view of the meat section of the market. As with Ecuador, there is no refrigeration in the market, but most of the meat looked fresher than what we see at our local mercado in Cuenca.



We next visited an artisan workshop that consisted of craftsmen carving and painting intricate wood designs. The level of detail is astounding.



For sunset and the "blue hour," we went to another madrasa. As we were watching the sun go down, we could see a massive lightning storm forming. When it started to rain, we took cover under an awning, hoping it would pass soon, and leave us lots of wet pavement for more reflections. Instead, the rain grew heavier as the storm strength grew, and we were treated to an outstanding lightning show. We finally had to make a dash to the bus, and that one minute in the open made us all look like drowned rats!



We'll leave Tashkent with some more images of the people we met at the market. As with most of our travels, it is the people we meet that make each place special.

, May 18, 2017

Tour, Travel · Uzbekistan

Uzbekistan 2 – Samarkand



We are now in Samarkand, the second city on our Silk Road tour in Uzbekistan – just in time for Evelyn's birthday! Jamil is our local guide in Uzbekistan, and his parents showed up to meet our train, greeting Evelyn with a bouquet of roses from their garden. His mother also baked one of the best birthday cakes we have ever tasted, and Mehmet presented Evelyn with a bottle of champagne for the group at dinner. Thank you Mehmet.



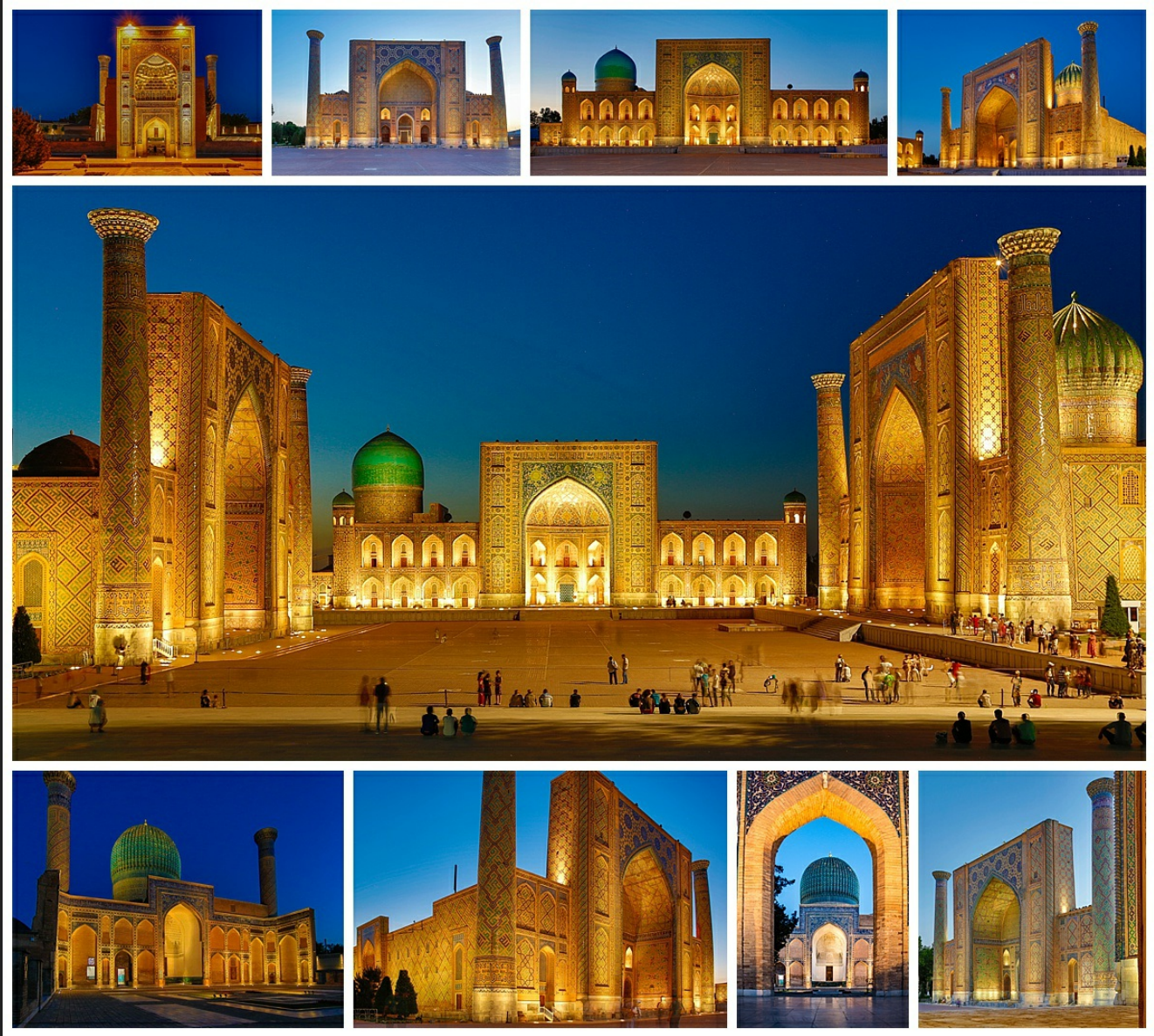
One of our stops was at a madrases where there was a local cemetery. Most of the headstones starting from the early 20th century included a photograph of the deceased, along with dates of their life, plus occasionally a listing of major accomplishments (mostly for military graves).



Another stop was a workshop making artistic paper by hand. They refer to it as "silk paper," though there is no silk involved. The paper is actually made from the bark of one year old mulberry trees – they cut down the trees and plant new ones after harvesting the bark every year.



We had a chance to photograph Shakh-i Zinda, an impressive burial complex for the elite and noble people, which remains an important pilgrimage site. Uzbekistan is a muslim country. However they are not conservative, so we rarely heard the call to prayer and almost never saw women with their faces covered.



As the sun set, the lights came on and we experienced Registan Square, a jewel in the heart of the old city. We photographed three madrasas during the "blue hour". In the middle image above, you can see how many people came to watch the lights – those were mostly locals enjoying the evening. One very pleasant change from Italy is that there are almost no tourists in Uzbekistan...



We have been pleased to see that the people of Uzbekistan are almost as welcoming to our cameras as were those in Turkey last year. It was rare to have someone indicate they did not want their picture taken, and most people smiled and waved, many times calling us over to pose with them. The locals enjoyed being in photographs with us and taking selfies with the tourists. We speak absolutely no Uzbek, and it was unusual for any of these people to speak any English, but a smile and laugh, goes a long way.



Here are some images from today of members of our group. [Mehmet](#) is the tour organizer, seen in the left image. In the second image, Mehmet is talking to Jamil, our local Uzbekistan guide. Next image shows Rich, Evelyn, a local grandmother & granddaughter, and Sue. Far right is Peter, who negotiated his baseball cap for the local hat he is seen wearing.

, May 20, 2017

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Uzbekistan 3 – Bukhara



The highlight in Bukhara (pronounced "būhara") was our visit to a blacksmith shop. The blacksmith and his son made a decorative handle, and Mehmet arranged for our group to photograph the process. The images above and the video show how this all worked out.



When touring the Jewish sector of town, we passed a [puppet workshop](#) and decided to stop in. The owner (upper left) was engaging and entertained our group by showing us how to use the puppets. That turned out to be a good sales technique, as two members of our group ended up buying three puppets for grandkids. Two of the puppets looked a lot like Rich, another member of our group.



We went to a dance show / fashion show for dinner tonight. It was more interesting and enjoyable than I had expected a fashion show to be and showed off their colorful textiles.



Bukhara is a city of colors and patterns, despite the buildings and monuments being so monochromatic. Every turn encountered colorful carpet shops, hat displays, porcelain dishes – or ornamental knives and scissors for sale. We saw the little happy men in the middle image above all over, including in the main city park, and think that it's the symbol for their upcoming spring festival.



The architectural style of the buildings in the old walled city was similar to other cities in Uzbekistan, and the newer buildings were the soviet-style pragmatic structures. We therefore looked for photogenic subject matter with different angles and viewpoints, as seen in the images above.



And, of course, the people continued to be the highlight of the visit. People engaged us frequently. The kids in the center image above rushed away from their mother and preened for our cameras, while her mother stood at the side and smiled. Lower left shows Eric from our group showing the kids what their photos looked like, while they screamed in delight.

Watch 84 seconds of the blacksmith workshop, to get an even better feel of what it was like to photograph these two.

, May 22, 2017

Tour, Travel · Uzbekistan

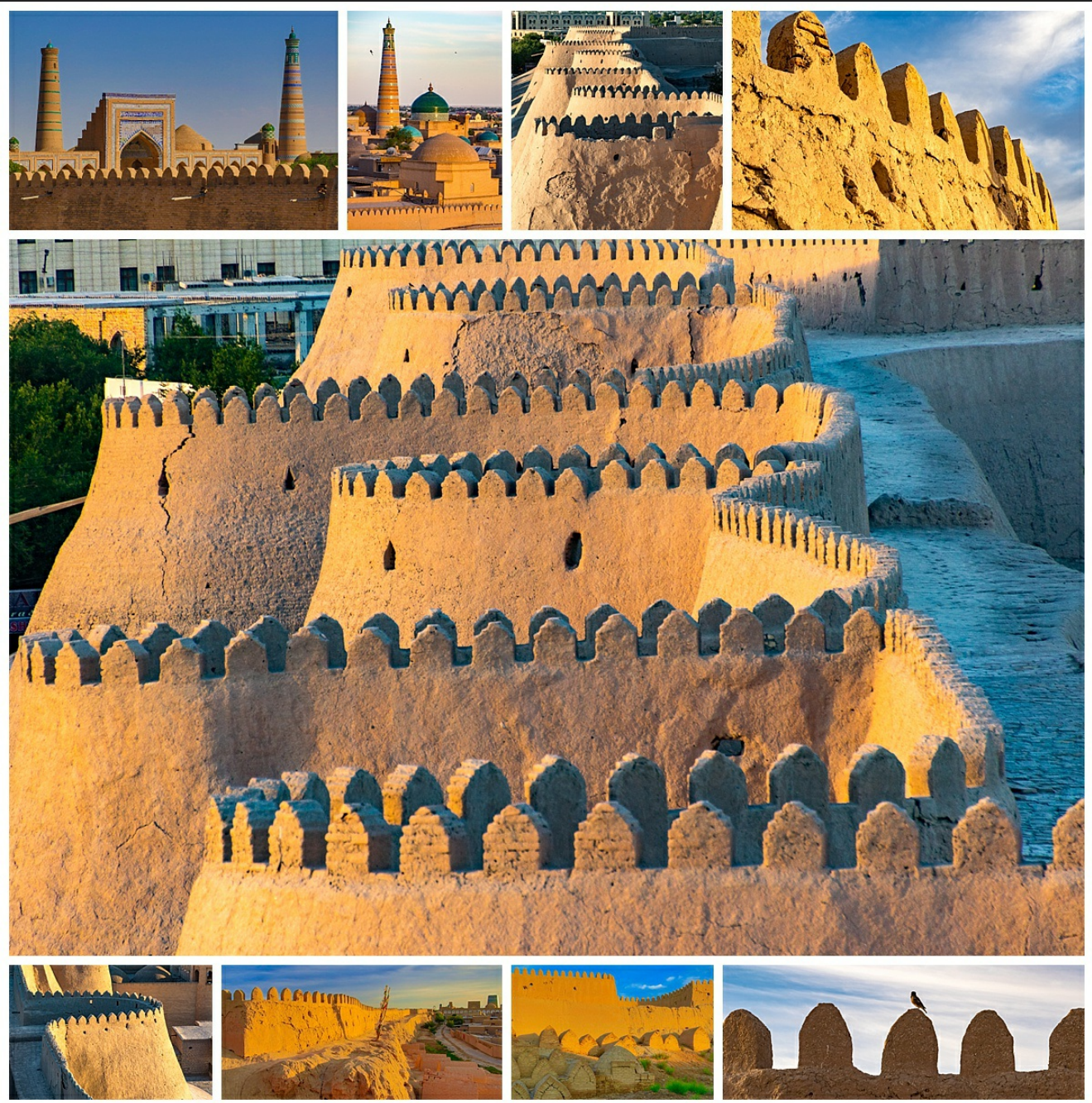
Uzbekistan 4 – Khiva



We finished our tour of Uzbekistan by visiting [Khiva](#), a small city of 50,000 people. On our first day, Mehmet (our travel guide) arranged for a private performance of traditional music. Though these trips usually produce some very nice photography, it is sometimes a bit of a scramble as everyone wants the same basic photograph (center image above).



Another stop was at Tash Hauli, the summer palace of the Emirs of Khiva. A family band there also performed Horezmian music and dance. Mehmet (our tour guide) is seen enjoying a cup of tea center-top above. At one point, Marla (one of the members of our touring group) joined in the dance (upper right).



Itchan Kala is the ancient inner city of Khiva, which is surrounded by the remnants of the original wall. We wandered around much of the wall, catching details from different angles. The outer side of the walls were sloped, making it more difficult for invaders to breach. The Eastern wall was also covered by numerous grave tombs, which helped provide still more invader barriers.



Most of the minarets and mosques are of similar design to others in the region. There was one ancient mosque though, created with wooden pillars scavenged from numerous other sites, so that each was a different design (upper-right and lower-middle).



Doors are often interesting in these very old cities, and this time they caught our eye enough to capture several of them in the images above.



It is interesting to see the various signs, and try to figure out what they mean. Sometimes they are purely in English (like the Burger sign upper left), and easy to follow. Occasionally they are multilingual, with Uzbek, Russian and English (lower left and middle right), so it is again easy to figure out, and you can then compare to the other languages. Many times, they include a picture, so even though only in Uzbek (lower middle and lower right), you can still make a good guess at what is intended. Then there are those that are solely in Uzbek, where unless you can read Uzbek, you are just left to wonder (upper right).



Once more, we will leave with some images of the people we met along the way. As we leave Uzbekistan (will be in Kyrgyzstan tomorrow), it will be the people we remember the most.

And one last memory of Uzbekistan, when one of our photography group joins in on the dancing (1 min, 50 sec)...

[Marla Breitman Dances With Uzbek Locals](#) from [Burt Johnson](#) on [Vimeo](#).

, May 24, 2017

[Tour, Travel · Uzbekistan](#)
