QUICK FACTS
Population: 24.8 million
Area: 451,515 square km (a bit larger than California)
Capital: Tashkent (pop. 2.2 million)
Languages: Uzbek (official), Kazakh, Tajik, Kyrgyz, Russian

EDUCATION
Education in Uzbekistan has followed similar trajectories as the other Central Asian republics. The Soviet legacy has left the country with a high literacy rate, an educational system that is divided into three parts: basic (1-9), specialized (10-11), and higher (BA, MA, etc.). Uzbekistan along with the rest of the post-Soviet world is in the process of reforming its educational system to bring it in line with the Bologna Initiative and increase the mandatory number of years of education from 9 to 12.

RELIGION
Uzbekistan has been a seat of Islamic thought and practice for over a millenium. The Registan square in Samarkand played host to three major schools of Islamic learning or Madrasahs and is to this day one of the largest pilgrimage and tourist draws to the Central Asian region. The Islam practiced by Uzbeks is primarily Sunni and tends to be less infused with ancestor worship and Sufi practices than other Central Asian republics, such as Kyrgyzstan or Tajikistan.

ETHNICITY
The Uzbek national project is a rather recent affair and poses more significant hurdles for the government than in other, more demographically homogenous cultures. Like Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan contains a large number of ethnic minorities, especially, Tajiks and Kyrgyz. The city of Samarkand is a majority Tajik city, and is a common example of ethnic enclaves that exist across the Ferghana Valley, shared by three nation states: Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan in a swirl of borders.

FAMILY, RELATIONSHIPS & CUSTOMS
Uzbek men tend to congregate around ubiquitous teahouses known as choyhona. There are many rituals in Uzbek culture surrounding the table cloth or the dusterhon.

Uzbeks likely take their name from a khan of the Golden Horde in the 14th century, although he never ruled over the tribes that would eventually become the Uzbek ethnicity. Uzbekistan is the world’s only twice-landlocked country, none of the nations bordering Uzbekistan have access to oceans. Western Uzbek geography is dominated by the Karakum and Kyzkum deserts, parts of which are shared with Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan. The eastern portion of the country has the highest population density, and Uzbekistan’s capital city, Tashkent is the most populous city in all of Central Asia. At one point it was the fourth most populous city in the entire Russian empire. Uzbekistan includes the ancient Islamic cultural centers of Bukhara and Samarkand. At its pinnacle during the period of the Samanids, Bukhara is now a city-museum (like Venice, or Toledo) and a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Updated: 7/13/15
FAMILY, RELATIONSHIPS & CUSTOMS (CONTINUED)

...Tables are low to the ground. Similar to Russian and other post-Soviet cultures, Uzbeks maintain the traditional health practice of shunning cold things, including seating surfaces and beverages. Traditional patriarchal family structures and relationships are the norm in Uzbekistan, with significant differences in custom for men and for women. Popular celebrations and holidays include Soviet secular holidays such as New Year’s (Jan. 1), Victory Day (May 9) and Women’s Day (March 8) but also include Islamic holidays such as the observance of Ramadan, or the Zoroastrian Persian holiday of Nowruz.

CONTEMPORARY UZBEKISTAN

Like Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan has been led by one president since its national inception in 1991. Islam Karimov has managed to win elections with incredibly high voter turnout rates and margins of victory. His task has been complicated by the significantly mixed ethnic identity of the population and the rise of militant political Islam. Economically, Uzbekistan is rich in natural resources like gold and oil. Uzbekistan is also one of the world leaders in cotton farming and exporting. Every year, during the harvest season, able-bodied professionals, soldiers, students, and often children are requisitioned for cotton-picking for a couple of days. Uzbek cotton is used to manufacture South Korean money.

Uzbekistan spends $200 million (U.S.) on its military and maintains astanding army of 150,000 soldiers, making it the strongest military power in the Central Asian region. The entire northwestern region of the country (about one third of its total area) is made up of the autonomous republic of Karakalpak (meaning: black hat). Karakalpak people reside around the remnants of the Aral Sea, a region that was historically prosperous, but has now sunk deep into poverty, partially due to the drying of the region’s water supply and mismanagement of water resources.

UZBEKS IN THE USA

Uzbek migration to the United States has increased significantly in the last two decades. In 2000 only 4,842 people of Uzbek ethnicity reported living in the U.S., whereas by 2011, 43,000 people born in Uzbekistan were reported to be living in the U.S. The increase is in part explained by the inclusion of Russians born in Uzbekistan in the number. Uzbekistan’s emigrant population is higher than other Central Asian republics because its overall population is higher.

USEFUL LINKS

http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-16218112
http://steppemagazine.com/