



Uzbekistan,

A Culinary Adventure

by Shannim Mohd Sa'ad

In the heart of Central Asia, Uzbekistan unfolds like a vibrant tapestry, woven with threads of ancient history, rich culture, and deeply rooted traditions. To explore Uzbekistan is to embark on a sensory journey, one where the true essence of the country is revealed not just through its landscapes or architecture, but through the flavours and aromas that fills the air. Uzbekistan invites you to discover its soul, one bite at a time.

“

THE ATMOSPHERE BUZZES WITH THE SOUNDS OF BARGAINING AND THE VIBRANT COLOURS OF THE MERCHANDISE, MAKING IT AN UNFORGETTABLE EXPERIENCE.

”

A Flavourful Experience of Tashkent

Chorsu Bazaar, Tashkent's ancient marketplace is a delightful sight of the city. Here amid the chaotic scene of bargaining and banter, visitors are transported to the local side of Tashkent and its culinary wonders. Under Chorsu Bazaar's giant turquoise dome, life unfolds in its truest essence. The air is filled with the scent of fresh *shashlik*, Uzbekistan's famous grilled meat skewers, harmonising with the vibrant colours of fruits and vegetables, drawing you into the bustling market to discover its diversity. From fresh fruits and vegetables to horse meat sausages, bread, and souvenirs, Chorsu Bazaar is more than just a marketplace. In the chaos of bargaining banter, you will find yourself lost in the magic of Tashkent's culinary wonders. Each taste, whether it is the succulent *shashlik* or the sweet bite of dried fruits offers a glimpse into the daily life of the locals. The experience leaves an indelible mark, not just for its flavours, but for the warm and welcoming spirit that defines Uzbekistan.

Plov, the Heartbeat of Uzbek Cuisine

The star of the menu is Uzbekistan's national dish and obsession, *plov*. This hearty dish of rice, meat, onion, carrots and cumin seeds is socially and traditionally integral to the country's culture, originating back as far as the tenth century. Imagine a massive cauldron, flames burning its sides as the rich aroma of lamb and cumin fills the air, promising a feast that embodies the heart of Uzbek cuisine. Plov is not just food, it is a communal experience, a dish that has brought families and friends together for centuries. Traditionally prepared in large quantities, *plov* is also served during



Fly with Batik Air to Tashkent
2 times a week





Uzbek handcrafted pottery



Registan Square

weddings, celebrations, and gatherings, bringing people together in a shared appreciation for good food and company. Each region in Uzbekistan adds its unique touch to *plov*. In Tashkent, it is often drier and lighter in texture due its method of preparations. In Samarkand, they tend to add chickpeas and other local ingredients, altering the texture and the taste of the dish. Another variation can be seen in Bukhara, where local dried fruits like apricots and raisins are added, providing a subtle sweet taste. The *plov* in every region reflects its local tastes, available produce, and cultural influences, making it a versatile and diverse dish throughout Uzbekistan. Wherever you taste it, *plov* tells the same story; the warmth of the community, and enduring the power of tradition.

Samarkand, a Feast for Senses

As you journey beyond Tashkent, the flavour of Silk Road beckons. Each city along the Silk Road boasts its own culinary specialties, reflecting the diverse influences of traders and travellers who traversed these ancient routes.



Plov, the legendary Uzbek cuisine

Samarkand's Siyob Bazaar is a feast for the senses. In the heart of the lively bazaar, visitors are greeted by a rich assortment of aromatic spices, the colourful selections of dried fruits and nuts and the traditional sweets like nougats and halva. Cheese lovers will find an assortment of locally produced varieties in a designated area of this bazaar.



Traditional handmade carpet

The sight of shiny golden round bread displayed on wheelbarrows, vintage baby strollers, and on rustic wooden planks added a touch of whimsy to the bustling scene. Travellers who visit Samarkand should not leave without trying this legendary bread. It is incomparably delicious. Samarkand also takes pride in its unique version of *plov*, a beloved Uzbek dish. Unlike the Tashkent's *plov* which is known for its subtle flavours, Samarkand's version is richer and more aromatic, with large chunks of meat and distinctive use of spices that reflect the city's position along the silk road. This local variation is a must-try, offering a taste of the region's culinary identity.

Bukhara, a Marketplace of Memories

The trade domes of Bukhara are a quartet of marketplaces that have been the heart



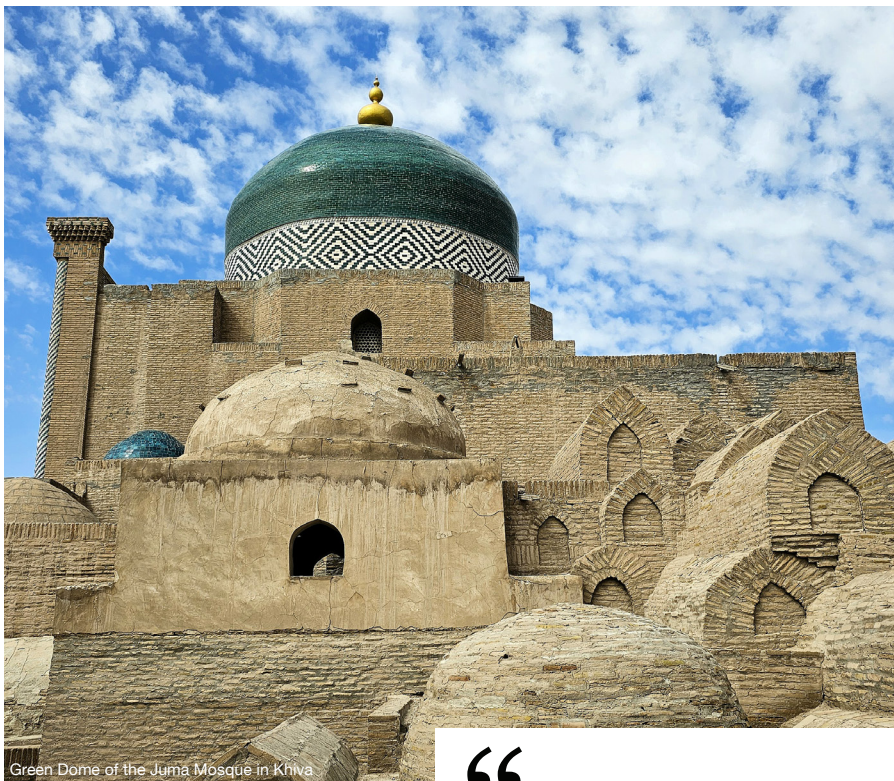
of the city for many centuries. Each dome showcases a unique selection of treasures, from intricate gold and silver jewellery, to fabrics and silk carpets. Amid the lively trade of the local goods, you will come across *samsa*, the city's famous flaky baked pastries filled with spiced meat, laced with onions and herbs. It is served freshly baked. Spices, dried nuts and a variety of cheeses in Bukhara are sold alongside exquisite silk fabrics and handwoven carpets, making it a perfect spot to pick up both edible and wearable souvenirs. The atmosphere buzzes with the sounds of bargaining and the vibrant colours of the merchandise, making it an unforgettable experience.



The writer in Registan Square, Samarkand

Khiva, a Taste of Timeless Tradition

Stepping into Khiva, a UNESCO heritage site feels like being plunged into a living fairytale, where the maze-like alleys and splendid architecture evoke a timeless charm. As you navigate the winding paths through the ancient walled city, every corner reveals a new surprise - be it a hidden restaurant with old-world European decor, or a roof top cafe offering sweeping views of the city's storybook skyline. The unique ambience complements the culinary experience, where delicate flavour of *shurpa*, a hearty soup simmered slowly with lamb, fresh vegetables and fragrant herbs captures the spirit of Khiva's culinary traditions. Another dish that is only available in Khiva is *yumurt*



Green Dome of the Juma Mosque in Khiva

barak. These are egg dumplings that are typically served with yoghurt sauce. For a sweet treat, try *chak chak*, a local delicacy made from dough pieces soaked in honey.

The Ritual of Tea

Tea represents more than just a drink in Uzbekistan. From the meticulous preparation of the tea leaves to the artful pouring of the brew, every step is taken with care, fostering connections between friends, family, and strangers alike.

Picture yourself in a *chaikhana*, a traditional tea house, where the simple art of sharing a cup of green tea becomes a moment of connection. In Uzbekistan, tea is served in intricately crafted ceramic bowls known as *piala*. The experience is often enhanced by the accompanying sweet pastries or dried fruits and nuts, which



“

Uzbekistan remains steadfast to its culinary traditions. Here, ancient recipes are not relics of the past, but living parts of the present.



The colourful produce of Uzbekistan

are offered as part of the hospitality. Every element of tea culture in Uzbekistan is steeped in tradition. It is a practice that reflects the country's deep respect for hospitality and community.



Fly with Batik Air to Tashkent
2 times a week

Artisanal Delights

Bread, or *non*, is a cornerstone of Uzbek cuisine, and its presence is felt everywhere, from bustling cities to remote villages. Uzbek bread is almost sacred, embodying cultural and spiritual significance. Each region imparts its own unique flavour and texture, making it a true reflection of the local identity. From Samarkand's gleamy golden loaves and bagel-like mini breads, to Tashkent *non* that are slapped against the walls for a crispy and fluffy finish, Uzbek bread offers an experience for travellers to cherish. In a nod to tradition, bread is often torn by hand rather than cut with a knife, reflecting the respect for this staple.

Alongside *non*, yoghurt, *kurt* and the refreshing salty yoghurt drink called *aryan*, each offer a taste of pastoral life, connecting you to the traditions of Uzbekistan's countryside. These dairy staples and their distinctive flavours are deeply rooted in the rural way of life, echoing the simplicity and authenticity of the Uzbek heritage.

Uzbek Cultural Dance



The ancient fortresses, Khiva

Preserving Traditions in a Modern World

In a world that is constantly changing, Uzbekistan remains steadfast to its culinary traditions. Here, ancient recipes are not relics of the past, but living parts of the present. Local chefs and artisans are reviving traditional techniques, using local ingredients to keep the flavours of

Uzbekistan alive for future generations. Every meal here tells a story, and every story is an invitation to connect with a culture that is as rich and as varied as the land itself.

For travellers exploring Uzbekistan, discovering the country's culinary delights is an essential part of the journey. Whether it is hearty *plov*, the delicate *shurpa*, or the simple pleasure of tea, each taste is a reminder of a country that food is more than just sustenance. It is a way of life.



Chorsu Bazaar, Tashkent

CONTRIBUTOR

Shannim Mohd Sa'ad



Shannim Mohd Sa'ad is an adventurous traveller with a deep appreciation for diverse cultures and off-the-beaten-path destinations. Along her journeys, she enjoys riding motocross, Muay Thai training, and snowboarding. Writing is her passion, compelling to share her unique experiences. Follow her on Instagram @epicadventuress and her blog epicadventuress.com



Fly with Batik Air to Tashkent
2 times a week