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UZBEK HOLIDAYS

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Contents:

1. Holidays of Uzbekistan.....	3
2. Independence Day.....	3
3. Navruz.....	3
4. Ramazan-Hait.....	4
5. Festival “Boysun Bahori”.....	4
6. Festival “Sharq Taronalari”.....	5
7. Traditions of Uzbekistan.....	5

As a rule, every country has its major national holiday. More often than not this is Independence Day. In the past most of today's independent states - including the USA - were colonies, dominions, protectorates, or mandated territories. In other words, they were dependencies. So, many peoples in Asia, Africa and America were engaged in achieving their ultimate goal of liberty and independence.

Independence Day is the major and the most revered holiday in Uzbekistan. The country gained independence on August 31, 1991. This year the date has been celebrated for the fourteenth time. On Independence Day outdoor fetes and gala concerts take place in all cities, towns and villages of Uzbekistan. The main show is held on the huge stage of Alisher Navoi National Park in Tashkent. Following the president's complimentary speech addressed to the nation, there begins a grand-scale dramatic performance given by the country's best actors, singers and dancers. The night sky is illuminated with a multi-colored fireworks display. It has also become a tradition to hold a folklore festival in one of Tashkent's parks on Independence Day. During this festival ethnic cultural centers of Tashkent present folk songs, dances, arts, crafts, and cuisines of over 130 ethnic groups who live in Uzbekistan in peace and accord. After gaining independence, the residents of Uzbekistan could enjoy their civil rights only after the Constitution had been adopted. It was such an important political event for Uzbek people that in 1992 the date of December 8th was proclaimed as Constitution Day, a yearly national holiday.

The calendar of the national holidays of Uzbekistan also has Commemoration Day which is celebrated on May 9th. On this day all those Uzbekistan citizens who gave their lives for the freedom of their motherland, who bravely fought in the World War II, who selflessly worked in the home front for the sake of the victory over the fascist Germany, are commemorated. March 8th is celebrated as International Women's Day in Uzbekistan. On this day men of all ages and status show their love and respect to women, give flowers and presents to them. October 1st is celebrated as Teacher's Day.

All the peoples consider spring the time of revival, renewal, great expectations and hopes. The spring holiday Navruz is the incarnation of all this. The holiday is celebrated on March 21st, on the day of the vernal equinox. According to the oriental calendar Navruz marks the beginning of the New Year. Navruz began to be celebrated in a very distant past and has always been a pagan, folk holiday, a holiday called for by nature itself - and it remains like this till now. In the independent Uzbekistan Navruz acquired a new connotation: it has become a national holiday. The people of all the ethnic groups living in Uzbekistan celebrate this holiday with great enthusiasm. A few days before Navruz, people usually arrange *hashar* (voluntary and joint public work), during which they clean and decorate their cities, towns and villages. By the time Navruz begins all the preparations for the feast are completed. Multi-dish and sumptuous meal is the acme of the holiday, which from the earliest times has been made with the hope

that the year ahead will be productive and profitable. The main dish of the feast is undoubtedly the ritual *sumalak*. The residents of Uzbekistan can have it only once a year, the guests of the country might try it, if ever, once in a lifetime. *Sumalak* is made from sprouts of wheat grains, symbolizing eternal life, and wheat flour. It has the consistency of a thick cream and has a pleasant distinctive taste. The dish is given as a treat to the family members, relatives, the beloved ones, guests and neighbors. According to tradition, on Navruz people forgive each other all the offences and make friends with all those they used to bust up. The poor, lonely and sick are paid visits to and are given special care and presents. Navruz is celebrated over the period of one month. The famous literary work “*Navruznama*”, which was supposedly written by *Omar Khayam*, has the following momentous lines: “The one who celebrates and has fun on the day of Navruz will have a happy life till the next Navruz”.

New Year’s Eve and New Year’s Day are also celebrated by Uzbek people with great enthusiasm. In every family a New Year tree is decorated and a feast is prepared. Outdoor fetes take place, too. Various entertainment programs are broadcast on TV.

Among the state holidays of Uzbekistan there are many religious ones. They are celebrated according to the Muslim lunar calendar. In the Soviet times these holidays were banned in Uzbekistan. But after the country became independent, these holidays were legalized and by now they have acquired really nation-wide character. One of the most significant Muslim holidays is *Kurban-hait*. It is the day when the faithful should make a gratifying oblation in accordance with their personal incomes. After the ritual praying the faithful go on visits or receive guests at home. On this day those who are poor and suffering are taken a special care of.

Ramazan-Hait is a holiday of moral purification and spiritual revival. This holiday comes after 30-day fast and falls at the ninth month of the Muslim calendar. During these days it is a custom to commemorate the deceased, to visit and help the sick, lonely and poor.

There is a variety of yearly festivals held in Uzbekistan, too. They are very popular with the people and treated as holidays. One of them is the folk festival “*Boysun Bahori*” (Spring of Boysun), which is held in the mountainous Boysun District, *Surkhandarya* Province. The way of life of many generations has remained almost unchanged in this area. Each family preserves and passes down from generation to generation the standards of home arrangement, old rituals, traditions and customs that date back to the age of the pre-Muslim pagan culture. In Boysun ritual songs and dances, performances of the *akyn* narrators of folk tales and legends continue to live their natural life, not as a theatrical performance for tourists. It is here that a thousand years ago *akyn* narrators composed the heroic epic “*Alpamysh*”. The people of Boysun consider themselves to be the descendants of the legendary *Alpamysh*. They tell stories about him and his deeds

relevant to surrounding gorges and villages. Thus it is no wonder that along with 19 other regions in the world, in 2001 Boysun District was included in the UNESCO List of "Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity". Every year the participants of "Spring of Boysun" come from scores of countries. The festival attracts a lot of professional and amateur folklorists. During the festival one can travel in time and learn the ancient secrets of fire-worshippers' rituals and shaman cults, make acquaintance with the life of the distinctive region where culture and traditions of ancient peoples have been well preserved.

The international musical festival '*Sharq Taronalari*' has become very popular and prestigious. For the first time it was held in Samarqand in 1997 on the initiative of Islam Karimov, Uzbekistan's President. The venue of the festival was not a random choice at all: they took into account the fact that Samarqand - as an ancient center of the Great Silk Road and a depository of the cultural heritage of the Uzbeks - is of great significance not only to Central Asia but to the countries to the east and west. The first festival was a success beyond expectations. Folk music performers from 29 countries took part in it. The fifth festival held in August 2005 attracted a record number of participants and visitors from over 50 countries. Unforgettable were the performances of the throat singing band '*Uran Khai*' from the Republic of Tuva, (Altai, Russian Federation), the folk singer Simara Imanova from Azerbaijan, Chinese and Indian musicians. Everybody was deeply impressed by the Uzbek performers of the ancient national musical genre *maqom*.

Most likely, everybody is familiar with the following collocation: "in accordance with the rites of hospitality". In a sense it reflects one of the most ancient and highly valued customs that has survived to our time. In the older days, however, among the peoples of the Orient, including the Uzbeks, hospitality was a must in terms of life standards and morality.

On setting out on a journey, a traveler often found himself in hostile environment of nature. But what consoled him was the hope that in the nearest village and even in an isolated nomad's tent he will be provided with shelter, food and warmth.

To turn somebody down or to give him bad reception, which conflicts with the traditions, meant to disgrace the family, village, and clan. The tradition ordered to be hospitable even to an enemy. Not without reason the old ancient saying states: "Hospitality is rated higher than courage."

Nowadays the principles of hospitality turned into good and useful traditions that help people in their contacts and behavior. Some of these principles have been expressed in aphoristic form: "It is better to come in time than to come early", "He who invites somebody to dinner should take care about night accommodations too."

Uzbek people usually have big families consisting of few generations. In such families respect towards elderly people is a tradition. Certain line of conduct is observed in the relations between men and women. Thus salutation by shaking hands is permissible only between men. While shaking hands, as a rule, it is advisable to show interest in each other's health and personal progress. It is customary to greet women with light bow placing right hand over the heart.

To turn down invitation to lunch or dinner or to be late for the one is considered to be rather impolite. Usually guests arrive with souvenirs for the hosts and sweets for children. On entering the house one should take off the foot-gear. According to the old tradition men and women should sit at different tables, but this tradition has full support only in the rural areas. The head of the family himself seats the guests, with the most respected guests being offered the seats furthest to the entrance. After the eldest among the present at the feast reads short praying for the hospitable home, the host offers his guests the traditional cup of tea followed by feast itself.

Traditions and customs of Uzbek people living on the crossroad of the Great Silk Road were taking shape within many centuries as a result of interaction of Zoroastrian rituals of the *Sogdians* and *Bactrians* and traditions of nomadic tribes, with certain impact of Islamic traditions and rites set by the Koran in later period.

Specific role in the life of Uzbeks is given to the customs connected with the birth and upbringing of children, marriage and commemoration of deceased relatives. A wedding is preceded by engagement ceremony – “*Fatiha tuy*”. On the appointed day guests come to the house of the girl who has been proposed to. After the matchmakers announce the purpose of their visit the rite “*Non sindirish*” - "Breaking of a scone" is being performed and the day of marriage is fixed. The bride's relatives give presents to their counterparts on the side of the groom. From this moment young people are considered to be engaged.

Wedding in the life of the Uzbeks is of great significance and is celebrated with a special solemnity. It consists of a number of ceremonies that should be performed without failure. In the bride's family her parents dress up the groom with *sarpo* – the wedding robe. After mullah (Moslem priest) reads praying for the newly-weds and declares them husband and wife, the young people usually go to ZAGS – office for official civil registration of marriage, thus supplementing the wedlock in the face of God with the one in the face of people.

The obligatory attribute of a wedding is festive table with multiple guests. Two hundred or three hundred guests at the wedding party is considered to be a typical phenomena. As a present for the young couple the groom's parents should provide the newly-weds with a house or a separate flat to live in, whereas the bride's parents should furnish it and provide everything that the young couple might need

during the first years of the married life. All this is not cheap, of course, but in such cases who cares about money.

The climax of a wedding ceremony is the bride's leaving her parent's house for the house of her groom. In some areas of Uzbekistan there has also remained the ancient ritual of purification, which goes back to Zoroastrian tradition, when the young couple walks around the fire three times before groom brings the bride into his house.

Next morning after the wedding party the rite "*Kelin salomi*" - reception of the bride in her new family should be performed. The groom's parents, his relatives and friends give presents to the bride and she greets everyone with deep bow.

Such important event in the life of young family as baby birth is accompanied with ritual celebration "*Beshik toyi*" – "Wooden cradle". On the fortieth day after the baby is born relatives of the young mother bring lavishly decorated cradle – *beshik* and everything which is needed for the newborn, as well as wrapped in tablecloth baked scones, sweets and toys. According to tradition while guests are having good time and are regaling themselves on the viands, in the child's room the aged women perform the rite of the first swaddling of the child and putting baby into *beshik*. The rite finishes with the ceremony of a baby's first 'showing itself' to the public. The invited guests gather round the cradle which they scatter with sweets and sugar wishing the baby happiness and success.

The birth of a boy brings to the family a real elation and responsibility. Before the child reaches the age of nine it is necessary to perform ancient sanctified Islamic rite of circumcision – *hatna qilish* or *sunnat toyi*. Prior to the rite in the presence of the elders from neighbourhood suras (verses from Koran) are read and holiday table is served. The elders bless the small boy and give him presents. At last there comes the culminating point of the ceremony when a stallion, decorated with beautiful harness and ribbons, appears; the boy is seated on it; and all the guests begin to wish him to grow up a healthy man and brave horseman.

Funeral and commemoration for the dead are also featured in the code of life regulations. Twice, in twenty days and in one year after the death, funeral repast is arranged. In the morning, right after morning praying, *plov* is served. The ceremony lasts one and a half - two hours. While eating those present at the ceremony commemorate the deceased and read *sorash* from Koran.

All these important events in the life of an Uzbek family come about with the assistance and direct participation of *mahalla* members. *Mahalla* is a community of neighbours which is based on the full independence and self-governing with the purpose of conducting joint activities and rendering mutual assistance. *Mahalla* as a structural unit has existed for centuries and originally was a kind of trade - union committee of craftsmen. Management is executed by *mahalla* community

committee elected at the common meeting of residents. Makhalla specifically takes care of organization and arrangement of weddings, funerals, commemoration, and the rite of circumcision.

Mahalla in a sense is self-supporting organization which meets the urgent spiritual and bodily requirements of the citizens. Practically in each *mahalla* there functions *choykana* - tea house, barber's shop, and frequently there is a mosque to serve the community. On Fridays, however, men visit a cathedral mosque to perform common praying *namaz*.

For all that, *mahalla* is not just an association of mutual aid. The community plays a broad spectrum of roles, including those of supervisory and educative ones. Children in *mahalla* grow up under the supervision of the whole community and are brought up invariably in the spirit of respect and obedience to elderly people. Community also observes the ancient tradition of mutual aid – *hashar*. Many hands make light work. Thus residents voluntarily and without payment help neighbors to build a house, to arrange a wedding party or commemorating *plov*, to improve conditions of the neighborhood.

Mahalla acts as an upholder of folk customs and traditions. Not without reason it can be said that a man is born and lives in *mahalla*, and when he dies *mahalla* administers the last rites for him.

Glossary:

1. Independence Day - Day when has declared Uzbekistan the independence.
2. Commemoration Day - Day of a victory over fascism, this day remember all victims on great domestic war.
3. Navruz - The national spring holiday, is considered the beginning of new year.
4. Sumalak - The Uzbek national dish which usually prepares to Navruz.
5. Festival - Mass festival, display of achievements musical, theatrical, variety, circus or motion picture arts.
6. UNESCO - The intergovernmental organization, the specialized establishment of the United Nations
7. Great Silk Road - In antiquities and Middle Ages caravan road from China in the countries of Average and Forward Asia on which among the various goods transported also the Chinese silk.
8. ZAGS - Organ a recording of marriage.
9. Namaz - Muslim daily pray.
10. Mahalla - Quarter taking place under the control of local authority.

Source:

<http://www.sairamtour.com>

<http://www.roxanatour.com>