



PEOPLE GROUPS: UZBEKS

Uzbeks are famous for their hospitality, believing that guests are a blessing and a privilege. Even in the humblest of circumstances, a stranger is warmly received and hosted.

This landlocked country, bordering Afghanistan, has resources including oil, natural gas and gold. Ten percent of the land is irrigated and produces the world's second largest cotton crop and excellent fruits and vegetables for export.

Evidence reveals that Christianity once flourished next to Persian Zoroastrianism as the major religion. However, Arab invasions in the 700s brought Islam. Today, the majority of Uzbeks are Muslims who practice folk Islam, with neighbourhoods guided by elders. There is a resurgence of both mosque-centred and more conservative Islam.

Only 0.18 per cent out of almost 34 million people are evangelical Christians.

Over the centuries, Uzbekistan has been conquered and shaped by Persian rulers, Alexander the Great, Genghis Khan, Tamerlane, Muslim Arabs and Russia. Until 1992, Uzbekistan

was part of the Soviet Union where any religious practices were suppressed.

Modern day borders have divided the people groups of the region, leaving Uzbeks in all the surrounding countries. Many have also immigrated to work in Russia, Kazakhstan, Turkey and the USA.

The government forbids religious gatherings in homes and any unofficially authorized Bibles or religious literature. Police search for phone apps and confiscate religious literature during home raids. Certain social media apps are blocked. But believers are posting Uzbek Christian music and developing audio Bible stories in the country. Most people rely on social media to access the Bible and Christian material.

The few registered churches are officially for Russians or Koreans. Usually there is strong opposition and discrimination against new believers from their family, neighbours and the government. At times new believers are driven out of their villages and forbidden to bury their dead unless they recant their faith.

At a Glance

- Uzbeks believe that a well on the outskirts of the city of Bukhara was dug by Job of the Bible.
- In 30 years, the Uzbek Christian population has risen from almost 0 to 10,000.
- Weddings are lavish, often taking place during the harvest.
- Customs are complex; everyone knows their place and responsibilities in the extended family and community.

Pray

- For God to intervene in difficult family and community situations when someone chooses to follow Jesus.
- For those creating phone apps and educational materials in the Uzbek language.
- For traveling local teams who disciple and evangelize.
- For missionaries to come and teach English or serve in higher education. Pray for the Lord to send more labourers!



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