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DISCOVERING UZBEKISTAN

2800 Years in the Making

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26 APR 2013: Uzbekistan is one of only two double land-locked countries in the world (countries that are themselves surrounded by landlocked countries). The former Soviet Republic, which attained Independence in 1991, lies just north of

Afghanistan and borders on Turkmenistan,
Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.



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The name of the country is said to derive from UZ- meaning 'self', BEK- meaning 'masters' and STAN- meaning 'the land of', so literally the country name means 'the land of the people who control their own destiny'.

A recent meeting of CERBA, the Canadian Eurasia Russia Business Association, was dedicated to a Parliamentary delegation from Uzbekistan for the purpose of attracting economic development through awareness of the bounties of the country.

The guest speaker at the CERBA meeting was Diloram Tashmukhamedova, the Speaker of the Legislative Chamber of the Oliy Majlis (Parliament) of the Republic. She noted in her address that Uzbekistan, while only 22 years old, has a history that dates back nearly 2800 years to the establishment of the cities of Samarkand and Bukhara.

Ms. Tashmukhamedova noted the great potential for cooperation in the areas of trade, economy, investment and tourism. For the travel and tourism perspective, I was fortunate to be sitting next to Yury Manukhov, the director of business development at Canadian Gateway/YYZ Group who, during the round table discussion, asked about the long term tourism strategy of the Republic. (Canadian Gateway currently offers an eight day Silk Road tour that includes the historic cities of Tashkent, Khiva, Bukhara and Samarkand).

The response by the Speaker, as well as Abdugafur Mamatov, a member of the Parliamentary Committee that deals with tourism, was quite positive, inviting Canadians to journey to Uzbekistan to explore the history and culture of the country, as well as discover the heritage of the Uzbek people.

The area that is now Uzbekistan first came to the attention of traders on The Silk Road that joined Asia with Central Asia and then eventually Europe and the Middle East. The Uzbekistan Guide, provided at the CERBA meeting included the quote that “A sitting man is a mat and a walking man is a river”; which captures the spirit of education and activity when it comes to both travel and nation building in the region.

And what do travellers do during a visit to Uzbekistan? Niche interests include sports (football), culinary (more than 50 varieties of palov - rice pilaf) - as well as samosas, breads, fruits, vegetables, grilled meats, soups and dairy products. Arts and Crafts include ceramics, wood carving, metal engraving, silk production and ‘ganch carvings’-elaborate rock carvings on

buildings. Architecture includes outstanding structures built from the 9th century onward with many dating to the ruler Amir Timur's (Tamerlane) construction activities in 14th century. Uzbekistan is a treasure-house of UNESCO World Heritage sites. Clients interested in photography, religion and culture will have a heyday.

But there are also adventure activities that include hiking, mountaineering, horseback riding, hang gliding, the desert and fishing.

The music of the region is traditionally played on stringed instruments resembling lutes, wind instruments (trumpets and flutes) and drums. In 2013, the International Music Festival "Sharq Taronalari" (Melodies of the Orient) will take place in Samarkand from August 25-30th.

And there are several museums in the main cities celebrating ancient and modern history, decorative and fine arts, cultural traditions and archaeology.

Without doubt the main attractions relate to the country's fabled cities. Tashkent (literally "Stone City") is the capital with a population of about 2.5 million. The subway system is beautifully decorated with glazed ceramics, marble columns, crystal chandeliers and displays relating to each station (from poets to cosmonauts). City attractions include the Chorsu Bazaar-a huge market of foods and crafts, the 16th Century Kukeldash Madrasah, the Khast Imam Mosque which houses the oldest Qur'an in the world, as well as mausoleums, palaces, the ballet and opera house, and several major museums.

Samarkand (Rock Town) is a city of legendary

proportions, founded almost 2800 years ago and known as 'The Heart of the Silk Road' and 'The Pearl of the East'. The ruler Timur, created a world capital city in the 14th century with the mosques and madrasahs that today comprise Registan Square, a World Heritage Site, as well as the necropolis and the 15th century observatory of Ulugh Beg.

Bukhara (Lucky Place) dates from the 6th century BC with its historic city core being designated a World Heritage Site of minarets, mosques, madrasahs and mausoleums.

Khiva (Low Land) is another 6th century BC city of historic monuments, houses and mosques.

We know that clients in all generational groups are looking for travel to destinations that capture their imagination, lead them to discover new cultures, remove them completely from their daily routine and open their eyes to sites and activities that are a bit off-the-beaten track.

In their trip to Canada, the Uzbekistan Parliamentary group noted the similarities between the two countries and the hope that this visit would lead to future talks regarding education, science, law-making, industry and tourism.

When we were greeted with the words Assalomu Alaykum (hello) and then Khush Kelibsiz (welcome), we knew it was delivered from the heart.

Further information on Uzbekistan is available at www.uzbekistan.org

