

## **Subject: Uzbekistan re-opens for tourism with a \$3,000 COVID-free guarantee**

Uzbekistan has outlined an innovative plan for reopening the country to tourism, starting in June 2020. New tourism standards will be combined with the launch of the “Uzbekistan: Safe Travel Guaranteed” campaign to welcome international tourists back to Uzbekistan this summer.

The key statement in President Mirziyoev’s 19 June speech was that any foreign tourist visiting Uzbekistan on a group tour with a local tour operator will be protected by a national guarantee. In the unlikely event that they become infected with COVID-19 during their stay, the tourist will receive \$3,000 in financial compensation from Uzbekistan’s Anti-Crisis Fund. The sum is equivalent to the estimated cost of medical care Uzbekistan’s citizens would receive for free if they became infected.

“We want to reassure tourists they can come to Uzbekistan,” explains Sophie Ibbotson (Twitter/Instagram: @uzambassador), Uzbekistan’s official Tourism Ambassador to the UK. “The government is so confident that the new safety and hygiene measures being implemented across the tourism sector will protect tourists from COVID-19, that the President is prepared to put money where his mouth is: if you get COVID-19 on holiday in Uzbekistan, we will compensate you.”

Tourism businesses across Uzbekistan are improving facilities and services to meet new standards of sanitary and epidemiological safety. Hotels, restaurants, and other tourist establishments are encouraged to apply for voluntary certification to demonstrate compliance with the new guidelines. Uzbektourism, the State Committee for Tourism, is compiling a register of certified businesses to give tour operators and tourists confidence that the places where they will stay, eat, and visit are safe. At the same time, businesses which do not comply with the new hygiene standards and can be traced as the source of infections will be held liable for treatment costs.

Domestic travel within Uzbekistan resumed on 1 June for those travelling between no- or low-infection “green” and “yellow” zones. International flights restart this month, with arrivals from low-risk countries such as China, Israel, Japan, and South Korea able to enter without restrictions. Arrivals from the EU and UK are permitted to enter so long as they spend 14 days in self-isolation, but this requirement will be waived as soon as these countries get their own infection rates under control and arrivals no longer pose a public health threat to Uzbekistan.

Uzbekistan took an aggressive, pre-emptive approach to stopping the spread of COVID-19, closing to tourists on 16 March when there were only a handful of confirmed cases in the country. Closed borders, grounded flights, and strict lockdown measures have resulted in one of the world’s lowest COVID-19 death rates: as of 20 June, just 19 deaths have been recorded, equivalent to 0.6 per million of the population. 750,000 people in Uzbekistan have been tested, and 6,153 were found to be infected with the disease, but of those more than two-thirds have

already recovered. New cases are being reported at just 200 a day, and the government is confident the epidemic is under control.

Since coming to power in 2017, President Mirziyoev has made tourism a priority sector for Uzbekistan. The citizens of more than 80 countries, including the UK, are able to visit Uzbekistan visa-free. International visitor numbers more than doubled from 2017-2019, and last year 6.7 million people visited the republic. Global brands such as the Hyatt and Hilton hotel chains have opened properties in Tashkent, and Uzbekistan Airways has expanded its fleet and route map with direct flights to cities such as London, New York, Paris, Frankfurt, and Milan. In 2019, tourism contributed \$1.3 billion to GDP, and although economic growth is expected to slow in 2020 due to COVID-19, the IMF predicts it will be one of very few countries worldwide to avoid recession.

Official tourism site: [www.Uzbekistan.Travel](http://www.Uzbekistan.Travel)

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