BLOG POST

Exploring the Shared Heritage of Traditional Bukharian Jewish Houses: Watch Day in Bukhara, Uzbekistan

May 25, 2022



On March 30, 2022, a Watch Day was held in Bukhara, Uzbekistan, to celebrate the Traditional Bukharian Jewish Houses in the city's historic center. The event welcomed over 120 participants, including local children, researchers, heritage professionals, and ustos (traditional historic trades workers). Also in attendance were regional and city authorities and national partners, including representatives from the UNESCO Tashkent Office, Bukhara State University, the Bukhara branch of the Department of Cultural Heritage, and the City of Bukhara.

The Traditional Bukharian Jewish Houses project was launched after World Monuments Fund (WMF) included the houses on its 2020 World Monuments Watch. "These houses truly represent the cultural dialogue in the Silk Roads city of Bukhara. Although the traditional Bukharian Jewish houses are currently endangered by various factors mainly caused by a large-scale emigration of Bukharian Jews from Uzbekistan in the 1990s, the Bukharian Jewish vernacular heritage remains

highly appreciated by Bukharians," stated Dr. Ona Vilekis, a researcher at University College London and the International Institute for Central Asian Studies (IICAS). Sukhrob Babaev, the project lead in Bukhara, confirmed the shared nature of the traditional Bukharian Jewish houses: "It is impossible to imagine the city without the Bukharian Jewish mahallas. Via this project, we would also like to conserve and highlight the importance of preserving the traditional Bukharian vernacular architecture techniques." An opportunity for the diverse community of Bukhara to celebrate their cultural heritage, Watch Day encouraged participants to share their vision of the benefits and challenges of the conservation of the unique vernacular architecture of the Historic Center of Bukhara, UNESCO World Heritage site.



Watch Day presentation at the local Jewish school in Bukhara.

Watch Day began with an interactive activity at the local Jewish school where Bukharian students presented why the historic center of Bukhara and the traditional Bukharian Jewish houses are important to them. Each group of students presented their personal point of view and engaged in a dynamic conversation with the other teams. At the end of the event, all participants received a Watch Day tote bag with material about the importance of cultural heritage conservation. "We have presented our visions of the traditional Bukharian houses. Some of my friends, who are living in the historic center, even showed their own homes and shared their family histories! For me, it was exciting to do a presentation in English and to see how differently we perceive the notion of home and similarly love our traditional houses, the houses of our grandparents, in Bukhara," said Sitora Babaeva, an eighth-grade student at School No.39.

The day continued with a roundtable discussion, titled "Theory and Practice for the Preservation of Traditional Bukharian Vernacular Architecture," hosted at another heritage building in the historic center. This second activity brought together researchers, heritage professionals, and ustos. The workshop provided an opportunity for different types of professionals to engage in a dynamic and productive conversation around the needs, challenges, heritage values, and opportunities on the conservation of the traditional Bukharian houses. "It was a quite useful meeting. We have identified a number of challenges that currently the vernacular architecture of Bukhara is facing. However, we have also found ways to jointly solve



Roundtable discussion, "Theory and Practice for the Preservation of Traditional Bukharian Vernacular Architecture", during Watch Day.

them in the fields of conservation and restoration, legal protection, and capacity building," commented Sadullo Khodjaev, Director of the Bukhara Regional Center for Heritage Conservation.

Local researchers and ustos brainstormed several initiatives that will be developed further within the framework of the Traditional Bukharian Jewish Houses project. Bakhtiyor Rizaev, professor at the Bukhara State University, announced that the results of the roundtable will inform the History and Cultural Heritage educational program of the university: "It would be useful to conduct such meetings regularly in order to introduce heritage conservation methods based on traditional vernacular architecture techniques into day-to-day practice of our graduates." The roundtable also included a visit to a traditional Bukharian Jewish house on Turkijandi Street. These discussions will also inform the development of the conservation guidelines being produced in the next months.



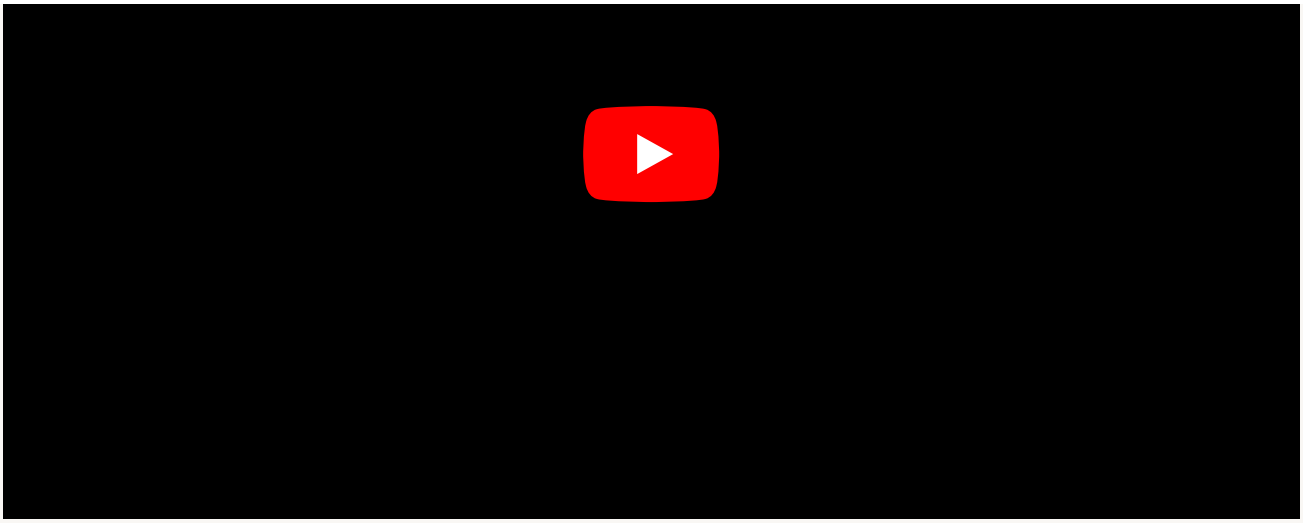
Musical performance held during the Watch Day exhibit opening.

Watch Day concluded with the opening of a photo exhibition devoted to the traditional Bukharian Jewish houses at the Center for Applied Arts "Ustoz Shogird" of Davlat Toshev. The event was attended by Zhomol Nasyrov, Deputy Mayor of Bukhara.

"The vibrant community engagement activities that we had today in Bukhara are of vital significance. Having the involvement of the Bukharian community in this project is critical to define the most meaningful and inclusive way to conserve a shared heritage for everyone," said Javier Ors Ausín, WMF Program Manager. "The implementation of activities together with the community and listening to the community is a cornerstone of the Traditional Bukharian Jewish Houses project." Ultimately, the project will result in the development of conservation guidelines for the diverse community and heritage of Bukhara.

WMF's work at this site was made possible, in part, by support from the David Berg Foundation and Tianaderrah Foundation / Nellie and Robert Gipson.

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Group photo of students at the local Jewish school in Bukhara during Watch Day.

View of Watch Day participants during a visit to one of the preserved traditional Bukharian Jewish Houses in the historic center of Bukhara.

Group shot of the Watch Day roundtable participants.

Visitors to the photography exhibition devoted to the traditional Bukharian Jewish Houses, including Deputy Mayor of Bukhara Zhomol Nasyrov; Director of IICAS Dmitriy Voyakin; project lead Dr. Ona Vileikis; WMF Program Manager Javier Ors Ausin; and representatives from UNESCO Office in

Tashkent.







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600 Fifth Avenue
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