

THE GOLD BEACON OF BUKHARA

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Have you heard about the magnificent and luxurious Kalon Minaret in Bukhara? Its beauty and sturdy foundation are truly captivating. As you wander through the city, its imposing height draws your attention from every corner, inviting you to explore its depths. The Kalon Minaret stands as a symbol of Bukhara's rich history and architectural prowess, captivating visitors with its grandeur and intricate details.

This minaret, part of the Kalon Minaret Complex, has stood as a testament to architectural brilliance for almost nine centuries. Its charm and uniqueness endure to this day, making it not just a landmark but a beacon of history and culture that shines brightly among the city's other historical monuments. The historical significance of the Kalon Minaret is as rich and layered as the intricate patterns adorning its surface, each telling a story of the artisans who crafted it and the generations who have admired it.

Bukhara is home to many ancient and historical monuments, each contributing to its reputation as a city renowned worldwide for its cultural and spiritual values. The city's national dishes, historical figures, and architectural heritage intertwine to create a vibrant tapestry of history. Every historical site in Bukhara holds significance, each seemingly imbued with the essence of the past. They stand as silent witnesses to the lives and customs of our ancestors, preserving stories that resonate through time.

One such remarkable site is the Minorai Kalon, often referred to as the jewel of Bukhara. This tower has captivated tourists, foreigners, and local residents alike for nearly 900 years. Bukhara cannot be envisioned without this monument, which is an integral part of the Poyi Kalon complex. Its presence is so iconic that at a prestigious event held in Beijing last year, this complex was included in the list of the eight wonders of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, further solidifying its status on an international stage.

The origins of the Kalon Minaret are steeped in history. Arslan Khan Karakhani, the ruler of Bukhara from 1102 to 1130, was deeply concerned about the dangers faced by caravans lost in the arid deserts surrounding the city. To address this pressing issue, he decided to construct the tallest structure in Bukhara as a guiding beacon. Among numerous architects vying for this monumental task, he favored the design proposed by Usta Baqo, leading to the tower's remarkable construction.

The base of the tower, meticulously restored according to Usta Baqo's original design, is crafted from stone and a special rock mixture. It extends an impressive 9 meters below ground level and reaches a height of approximately 50 meters. The tower tapers elegantly as it ascends, culminating in a stunning muqarnas—a hallmark of Islamic architecture.

Visitors can enjoy breathtaking panoramic views through 16 arched windows within the structure, each offering a unique perspective of the surrounding landscape. The summit is accessible via 104 spiral stairs winding their way up inside the tower.

Originally, a mosque served as a bridge leading to the minaret, emphasizing its role in religious life. Both the base and decorative elements of the tower are constructed from meticulously arranged bricks. It is said that Usta Baqo employed camel's milk and egg whites instead of water during the construction of the Tower of Kalon, a testament to his innovative techniques that contributed to its durability. To adorn the minaret elegantly, decorative rings were shaped from bricks along its belt, ensuring that no two decorations are identical—a reflection of the artisan's commitment to craftsmanship.

Every tourist visiting Bukhara Sharif cannot overlook this majestic tower, which stands 47.5 meters tall with a circumference of 36 meters and boasts a history spanning nine centuries. Although originally built adjacent to a mosque and madrasa to call people to prayer, the term "minaret" itself derives from Arabic and means "beacon," perfectly encapsulating its purpose as a guiding light for those navigating both land and faith.

In essence, the Kalon Minaret is not just an architectural marvel; it is a living testament to Bukhara's enduring spirit and cultural heritage. Whether you are an avid historian, an architecture enthusiast, or simply a curious traveler, a visit to this magnificent structure promises an unforgettable journey through time, connecting you with the echoes of the past and the vibrancy of present-day Bukhara.

Minarai Kalon is not merely an architectural monument; it is a symbol of resilience and faith that has served as a guiding star for caravans journeying to Bukhara for centuries. Constructed under the reign of Amir Arslan Khan Muhammad ibn Suleiman, the last ruler of the Karakhanids, this magnificent minaret was built between 1124 and 1127. Its imposing structure and intricate design reflect the advanced engineering and artistic capabilities of its time, making it a pivotal part of Bukhara's historical landscape.

According to historical accounts, nestled within one of the courtyards surrounding the tower lies the grave of its master builder, Baqo. This resting place is significant as it marks the point where the highest shadow of the minaret falls. The choice to position his grave here was dictated by his will, which poignantly states: "Bury my body in the yard next to the tower; if the tower falls, let it fall on my grave and crush my bones. But, God is my witness, the minaret will not fall until Doomsday." This testament not only underscores Baqo's unwavering faith in his creation but also highlights the deep spiritual connection between the architect and the monument.

While many attribute the minaret's enduring strength and beauty to Baqo's innovative use of materials like camel milk and egg whites in its construction, there exists another layer of significance. Inscribed on the belt of the minaret are verses 107-109 from Surah Yunus, which further enhance its spiritual aura. These verses convey a powerful message: "If Allah afflicts you with harm, there is no one who can help except Him... And follow what is revealed to you, and God is the best of those who judge." The intention behind

these inscriptions is clear: to assert that "no one can harm this minaret except Allah." This divine protection has been a source of strength for the structure throughout its tumultuous history.

The story of Minarai Kalon is rich with historical events, including its survival through countless wars and invasions. One notable incident occurred in 1220 when Mongol troops, led by Genghis Khan, invaded Bukhara Sharif. As they began their assault on the city, Genghis Khan found himself drawn to the Arslan Tower. In a moment of unexpected reverence, his fox-skin cap was blown off his head, and his horse recoiled in fear. Recognizing this as a sign, he reflected on the sanctity of the tower and decided against its destruction. This pivotal moment spared not only Minarai Kalon but also saved significant portions of Bukhara from ruin.

Fast forward to September 20, 1920, when Bukhara faced another wave of violence during an invasion led by Mikhail Frunze and the Red Army. The city endured three relentless days of bombardment from both ground forces and aerial attacks. Local residents, unfamiliar with aircraft, referred to them as "birds with iron wings." This brutal assault resulted in what became known as the "small apocalypse," devastating approximately 70% of Bukhara's artistic and architectural treasures, including mosques and madrasas.

Despite the destruction surrounding it, Minarai Kalon stood resilient. Although parts of the tower were damaged during this bombardment, it miraculously withstood the artillery fire aimed at it. Reports indicate that seven to eight bullet holes marred its surface and over twenty bombs were dropped in attempts to bring it down. Even rainwater and melting snow were allowed to flow beneath it, yet the tower remained steadfast.

The endurance of Minarai Kalon through such trials is a testament to its remarkable construction and spiritual significance. Today, it stands not only as a beacon of architectural ingenuity but also as a symbol of hope and resilience for all who visit Bukhara. Its majestic presence continues to inspire awe and reverence, reminding us of the deep historical narratives woven into its very fabric.

At the root of any narrative lies the truth, a foundation upon which history is built. One might wonder what Minarai Kalon has witnessed over the centuries—what events it has seen, and who has bowed before its towering presence. The fate of this minaret is intricately woven with the fate of our nation, reflecting our struggles and triumphs. The scars of history are evident, particularly during the tumultuous years of the Soviet invasion. When the Soviet troops, led by Mikhail Frunze, descended upon Bukhara, their intent was clear: to obliterate both the spirit and the physical manifestations of our heritage. They targeted the minaret from airplanes, raining down bombs in an attempt to erase its significance. Despite sustaining significant damage, Minarai Kalon endured this storm, emerging as a symbol of resilience and loyalty to our country.

Today, this unique monument stands proudly as one of the jewels of Uzbekistan, drawing visitors from around the globe who come to marvel at its architectural beauty and

historical significance. However, amidst the admiration lies a misconception that must be addressed: some refer to this historical building as the "Tower of Death." This label is not only cold but also grossly inaccurate. Historians affirm that this tower was never a site for executions; throughout history, no emir or khan has condemned anyone to death by casting them from its heights.

One poignant account involves a figure named Fayzi Avliya from Vobkent, as recounted by the writer Sadriddin Aini. Fayzi traveled to Bukhara Sharif, where he earned money and selflessly aided his fellow villagers. In a bold act, he even stole the emir's flag from the tower's summit. After the Amir unjustly imprisoned several innocent individuals, Fayzi humbly requested their release. His bravery earned him the Amir's willingness to forgive him; however, the courtiers disagreed. In a moment of profound conviction, Saint Fayzi threw himself from the minaret, proclaiming that he would not be complicit in sins for personal gain. While the historical accuracy of this event remains unverified, it should not tarnish the reputation of such a magnificent structure. Instead, titles like "Bukhara's Beautiful Bride," "Bukhara's Beautiful Princess," "Bukhara's Guardian," or "Lion's Tower" resonate far more fittingly with its grandeur.

During the Karakhanid era, Minarai Kalon served not only as a stunning architectural feat but also as a vital hub for community life. The imams of the mosque would call the people of Bukhara to prayer using a precise sundial located at its base. At night, a roaring fire in the closed hearth at the top of the tower illuminated the surroundings, casting a warm glow that guided caravans arriving in Bukhara Sharif. This beacon of light ensured that travelers found their way without getting lost, while nearby neighborhoods filled with laughter as children played freely under its watchful gaze. The Kalon Tower alleviated the burdens of those making their way to prayer on cold winter nights by providing light in place of lanterns.

Historically, Minarai Kalon also served as a warning system against enemy attacks. From its towering height, scouts could spot approaching armies and signal defensive measures to protect the city. The majestic views from the top offered tourists breathtaking panoramas of Bukhara and its lush green fields—a testament to nature's beauty juxtaposed against human ingenuity.

The minaret's design evokes comparisons to human form; some historians even suggest that it was built to mirror the height of Adam, peace be upon him, which is said to be 60 feet tall. This connection further emphasizes the spiritual significance imbued within its structure.

Moreover, Minarai Kalon is often referred to as a unique encyclopedia of Bukhara architecture. Many architectural masterpieces that once adorned the city have been lost to time due to invasions and natural disasters. Master Baqo, who designed this minaret, replicated the exquisite decorations of those lost monuments in his work, ensuring that their legacy lived on through his creation.

At the beginning of the 20th century, Bukhara was home to 220 distinct neighborhoods (guzars), each featuring numerous minarets that dotted the skyline. This abundance of towers standing in parallel lines earned Bukhara the moniker "the city of towers." However, today only 17 minarets remain, and among them, Minarai Kalon stands out for its impressive size, strength, antiquity, beauty, and prominent location in the city's central square.

In essence, Minarai Kalon is not just a relic of the past; it is a living testament to our history—one that continues to inspire awe and reverence in all who encounter it. Its enduring presence serves as a reminder of our resilience and our commitment to preserving our cultural heritage for future generations.

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As we prepare to honor the 900th anniversary of the Kalon Minaret, an overwhelming sense of pride envelops us. This monument transcends mere stone and mortar; it is a cherished relic that has withstood the test of time, embodying the resilience and creativity of our ancestors. Its presence in the heart of Bukhara serves as a constant reminder of our rich cultural heritage, one that has been meticulously passed down through generations. Each era has contributed its own layer of significance and meaning, enriching the narrative of this magnificent structure. It is not just a historical landmark; it is a living testament to our identity and a symbol of our collective spirit. As custodians of this ancient gem, we

bear the solemn responsibility to preserve its magnificence, ensuring that future generations can admire and learn from it, just as we do today.

The Kalon Minaret is more than a mere physical structure; it embodies the essence of human achievement and creativity. Every intricate element crafted by skilled artisans serves as a testament to our ingenuity and skill. Designed by Usta Baqo, one of the most talented craftsmen of his time, the minaret has captivated hearts and minds for nearly nine centuries. Its enduring beauty and architectural elegance are not just aesthetic qualities; they speak volumes about the artistry and sophistication inherent in Bukharan architecture during its golden era. The minaret stands tall, not only as an architectural marvel but also as a beacon of inspiration for all who encounter it.

As we embark on this momentous celebration, let us take a moment to reflect on the myriad stories and traditions intricately woven into the fabric of the Kalon Minaret. It is essential to engage with scholars, artists, and historians who can illuminate its significance in both local and global contexts. By bringing together diverse voices and perspectives, we can create a rich tapestry of events, exhibitions, and discussions that honor this landmark's legacy. Workshops, lectures, and artistic performances can breathe new life into the narratives surrounding the minaret, fostering a deeper appreciation for its historical context and contemporary relevance.

In conclusion, the 900th anniversary of the Kalon Minaret is not merely a milestone; it serves as a clarion call for all of us to recognize, celebrate, and preserve our cultural heritage. Let us unite as a community and as a nation to ensure that this iconic symbol continues to inspire awe and admiration for generations to come. Together, we can foster a renewed commitment to safeguarding our history while celebrating the vibrant culture that has flourished around this monumental structure.

As the sun dips below the horizon, casting a warm glow over Bukhara, the Arslankhan Tower reveals its true beauty in the twilight. A visit at dusk is not just recommended; it is an experience that every traveler must embrace. The soft hues of sunset dance upon its ancient stones, creating an ethereal ambiance that enchants all who stand before it.

As you stand before the tower, take a moment to admire the intricate cypress frame that surrounds it. Each curve and detail tells a story of artistry that has been honed over generations. Its elegant design and sturdy foundation speak volumes about the skill and craftsmanship of our ancestors. The Arslankhan Tower is not merely a building; it is a testament to their strength, resilience, and enduring artistic legacy.

The play of light and shadow on the tower's intricate details creates a mesmerizing spectacle that captures the imagination. As dusk settles in, feel the weight of history envelop you as you gaze up at this enduring symbol of Bukhara's rich past. The flickering lights from nearby homes illuminate the surroundings, adding to the magic of the moment. Each glance at the tower invites reflection on the countless lives it has witnessed—the prayers offered, the celebrations held, and the stories shared beneath its watchful gaze.

