

The Tatars

Over 10 million Tatars live around the world, majority of them populate the territory of the Russian Federation. Although the Tatars are scattered across large areas, and many find themselves as ethnic minorities in various regions in the Russian Federation, the Republic of Tatarstan with its capital in Kazan, is a central focus of Tatar culture, crafts and lifestyle.

Tatar language (belongs to Turkic language family), Tatar culture, customs and traditions differ from Russian culture. The majority of Tatars practice Islam. The Tatars who live in Tatarstan are usually referred as the Volga Tatars.



The Republic of Tatarstan



The modern Republic of Tatarstan is situated in the heart of the Russian Federation; it occupies the area between the Volga River and the Ural Mountains.

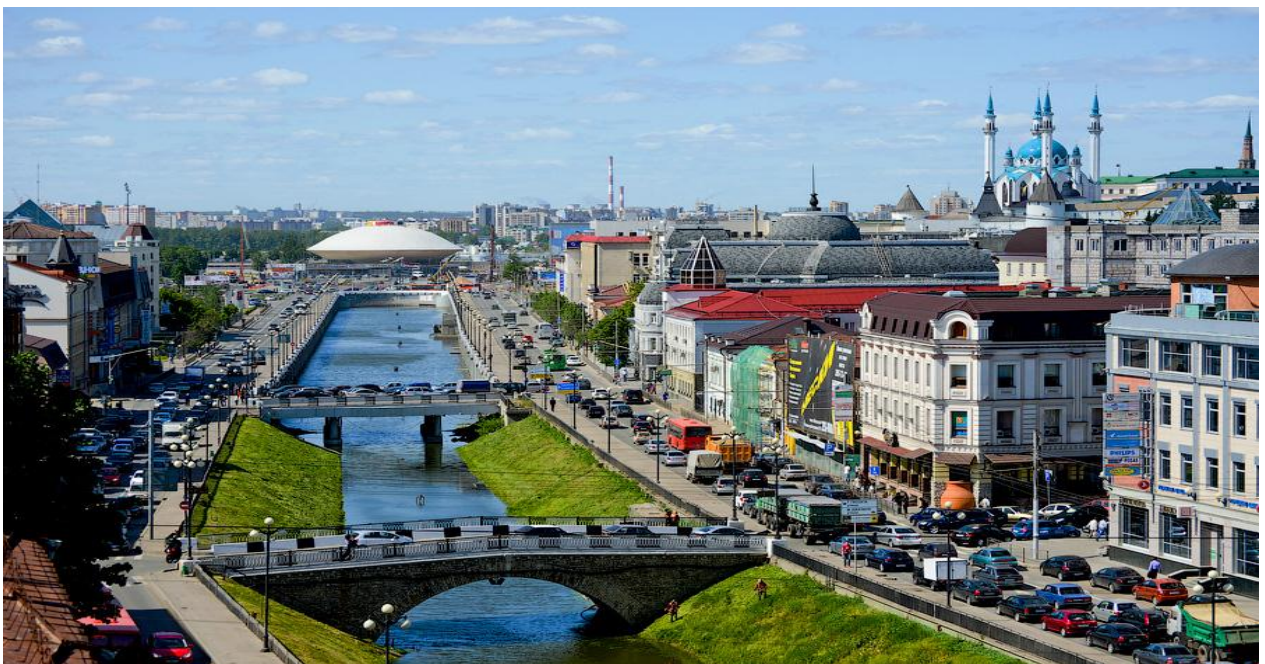
Brief history: The ancestors of the Volga Tatars were the Bulgarians from the Black Sea area who had come to Europe after the Khazar Conquest. Volga Bulgars formed a very prosperous state named Volga Bulgaria in the early Middle Ages. Volga Bulgaria (also Great Bolgaria) later became the Kazan Khanate and, eventually, contemporary **Republic of Tatarstan**. Volga Bulgaria was a powerful and developed state, trading with the entire known world: The ancestors of the Volga Tatars were the first in Europe to smelt high-quality cast iron. They were also well-known for their quality and beautiful metalwork, pottery, gold and silver work, jewelry, leather goods.

Volga Bulgaria was invaded by Tatar-Mongols in the late 1230s, and it became a part of Golden Horde. The people that populated the area eventually got the name of *Tatars*. By the 1430s, the Khanate of Kazan was established. In the middle of the 16th century, the Kazan Khanate was conquered by the Russian Empire and became part of the Russian Empire. After World War I, with the establishment of the Soviet Union, Tatarsiya (region of the Tatars) was established as an autonomous region. In 1990, after the collapse of Soviet Union, the Republic of Tatarstan declared sovereignty, which served to heighten consciousness of its culture and heritage. It became an independent state while remaining part of the Russian Federation. In 1994, the Mutual Treaty between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Tatarstan was signed. As of today, the Republic of Tatarstan is considered a federal subject of the Russian Federation.

The city of Kazan

Kazan is the capital of the Republic of Tatarstan. It is one of the largest industrial and cultural centers of Russia. Kazan is often referred to as the sports capital of Russia: It has hosted the 2013 Summer Youth Olympic Games; it will host 2015 World Aquatics Championships, and 2018 FIFA World Cup.

The multi-ethnic city of Kazan, populated by over 20 different ethnicities is honored by UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization). Kazan serves as a perfect example of the peaceful co-existence of Muslims and Christians in one place. The Kazan Kremlin, the historic and cultural downtown, is a World Heritage Site.



The Tatar Culture

The Republic of Tatarstan enjoys the richest historical and cultural heritage. Combination of at least four types of cultural interaction (Turkic, Finno-Ugric, Bulgarian and Slavonic-Russian) and two religions (Islam and Christianity) account for unique features of this locality, originality of art, cultural and historical values.

The **Tatar language** is a member of the Kypchak West Turkic language group of the Altaic family. The written Tatar language has been based on the Cyrillic script since 1938 (Latin and Arabic prior to that). The majority of Tatars, residing in Tatarstan, speak Tatar and Russian.

Tatar Art: Until the end of the nineteenth century, calligraphy and applied arts (leather mosaic, embroidery, weaving, beading, and jewelry) were the forms that Tatars embraced and developed. Representational art started to flourish at the beginning of the twentieth century. Tatar art has distinctive features that are present in ornamental patterns and designs that are related to Islamic art traditions. Volga **Tatar music** differs from the music of other Turkic peoples because of its monophonic structure and the pentatonic scale. The folk songs are usually accompanied by *garmun* (accordion), *kurai* (flute). **Tatar literature** has developed along two lines, oral folk literature and a written literature covering both religious and secular topics. **Tatar architecture:** House-building traditions of the Volga Tatars developed for centuries under the influence of religious, aesthetic and cultural features of local population.



Tatar holidays and traditions

The Tatars traditionally celebrate both religious and secular holidays that preserve and showcase many of ethnic traditions and customs. Among the most popular is **Sabantuy**.

It is fun and fit celebration of the end of spring sowing.



The event's centerpiece is *maidan*, where competitions showcase the strongest, the fastest and the most talented. There are ethnic wrestling, horse race, running, jumping, climbing the wood pole and many other fun and fit activities.



Tatar costumes and decorative art



Tatar ethnic clothing and costumes are made from bright materials and always are accompanied by a lot of decorations and embroidery. The traditional clothing of urban and rural people differs in designs, quality of the material and intricacy of the decorations. Head of Tatar man and woman is always covered by richly embroidered headgear: *tubetei*, *kalfak*, *yaulyk*. A costume includes beautiful boots *chitek* made of colorful soft leather. Tatar women traditionally carry a lot of trappings and jewelry. The Tatar jewelers employ a unique knobby filigree, stamping, molding, engraving, blacking, incrustation. The Tatars decorate their clothing as well as household goods with embroidery and beading of various intricate design of vegetative character.



Tatar ethnic decorative ornaments

The Tatars has been very proficient in jewelry, textile, embroidery and leather crafting from a very early stage. All these decorative and applied arts have the same common elements: They all carry traces of the graceful,

delicate and intricate combination of floral, vegetative, zoomorphic and geometrical motifs and patterns of the Islamic art. Tatar ornamental styles are built on graphic forms and radiant colors inspired by the law of rhythm and symmetry.



Variations of motifs resembling different flowers and parts of plants can be easily found in all Tatar applied art. Multiple shapes, forms, silhouettes of **buds, stems, petals, rosettes and tulips** determine the surface of the

artworks. **Floral bouquets, young sprouts, leaves, and flower-sun motif** are especially popular in boot designs. **Horn-shaped motifs** and **cloud-like motifs** are the most popular and the most ancient ones. Geometrical shapes and forms, like **polygons and octagons**, are common to Tatar art. **Lines, waves, spirals, zigzags, six or eight point stars** – all of these interlace and create intricate, arabesque designs.

Tatar Leather Mosaic



Among many decorative leather art techniques (application, burning, stamping, embroidery, and painting) **mosaic** is the hardest to execute and to find. Leather mosaic – a unique type of leather crafting - has been created and refined in Kazan metro area centuries ago. Kazan leather mosaic art is a sophisticated and delicate combination of the softest leather and traditional Tatar ethnic ornaments cut and stitched together by hand.

Widely popular and famous across Russia and throughout Europe and Asia in the 18 and 19th centuries, so-called *Kazan* or *Tatar boots* crafted using the leather mosaic technique are slowly regaining their popularity thanks to dedicated and passionate craftsmen in the Kazan area who have been creating masterpieces by hand. **Kazan stitch** – the bonding mechanism of the technique - cannot be reproduced by a machine. There is nothing else in the world that looks and feels the same!

