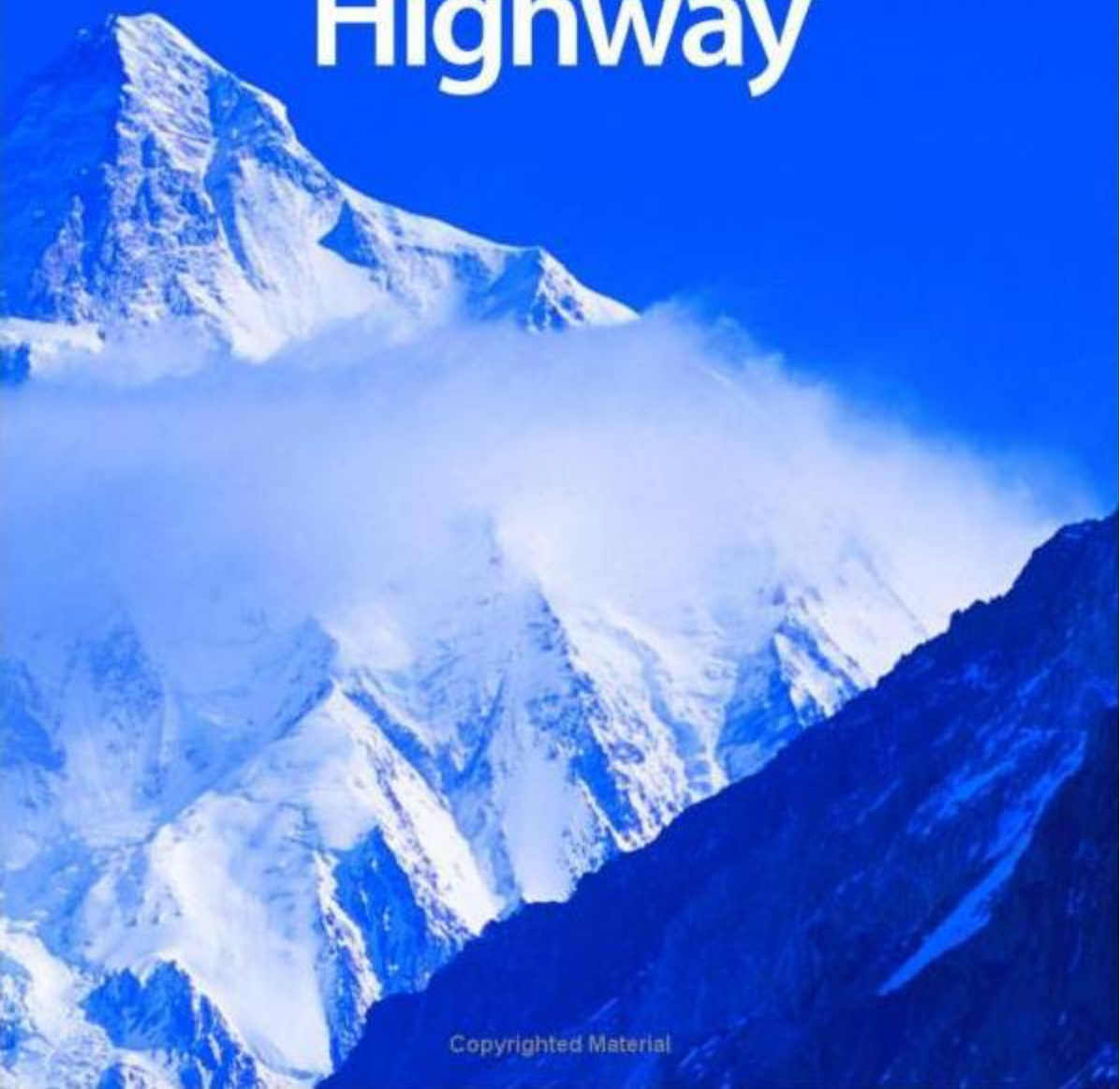


Pakistan & the Karakoram Highway



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Destination Pakistan

Pakistan has been on the brink of being tourism's 'next big thing' for more years than we care to remember. It's a destination that has so much to offer visitors, from some of the highest and most spectacular mountain ranges in the world to the architectural glories of the Mughal empire, and ancient bazaars to soul-spinning musical mystics. But every time the country seems to be gearing up to refresh the palates of travellers jaded with last year's hip destination, world media headlines send things off the rails – again.

No matter the attractions, tourism in Pakistan has always been something of a hard sell. A glance at the map shows the country living in a pretty difficult region: always-unruly Afghanistan to one side, Iran to another, and a border with India running through the 60-year-old fault line of Kashmir. But since the events of 9/11, Western pundits have increasingly been wondering if Pakistan isn't just living in a tough neighbourhood, it is the tough neighbourhood.

Pakistan and political stability have never been particularly happy bedfellows. President Pervez Musharraf, who seized power in a 1999 coup, looked to have an unassailable position until relatively recently. Selling himself as a bulwark against radical Islamism on one hand and the old corrupt elites on the other, he turned himself into a key player in Washington's 'War on Terror' and was rewarded with soft loans and military aid.

In 2007, everything was thrown into disorder. An attempt to sack the country's chief justice resulted in a red-faced retreat in the face of middle-class protests. At the same time, domestic Islamists stepped up their bloody campaigns in the wake of the deadly storming of Islamabad's Red Mosque. Pakistan's army had already found itself fighting to a standstill in the lawless Tribal Areas along the Afghan border, and later quelling related violence in the Swat Valley. It signed the short-lived Waziristan Compact that negotiated a peace – of sorts – with Pakistani Taliban, but ultimately showed that having once given official government sanction to such radicals, it was now holding a tiger by its tail.

At publication time, it was anyone's guess how Musharraf's attempts to pull things together would play. The imposition of a state of emergency curtailed the press and judiciary, and soon after being lifted, the country was rocked by the assassination of Benazir Bhutto, recently returned from exile to take her place again in Pakistani politics. Such a high-profile murder presaged a potentially very troubled future for Pakistan.

But against this background, there is another Pakistan, a world away from the headlines. Although conservative, Pakistanis are by nature a welcoming and hospitable people to foreigners, trying to get by in the face of indifference from their government and occasional hostility from the outside world. High politics is of less interest than jobs and the cost of cooking oil and flour. As such, travellers are usually met with genuine interest and enthusiasm. The scams and hustle you might experience in heavily travelled India are nowhere to be seen here. Instead, look forward to spontaneously offered cups of tea and conversations about cricket.

You'll feel like you have the country to yourself. Attractions that would have been splashed over the glossy pages of newspaper travel supplements are almost empty. While enthusiastic travel advice comes tinged with official government travel advisories, you'll need to keep one eye on the news before booking your ticket – but once here, you'll realise that Pakistan really is one of the world's best-kept travel secrets.

FAST FACTS

Population: 164,741,900
(2007 estimate)

Population under 14:
36.9%

Adult literacy: 63%
(men), 36% (women)

Infant mortality rate: 68
per 1000 live births

Gross Domestic Product
per capita: US\$2600

External debt: 55%
of GDP

Unemployment rate:
6.5% (plus substantial
underemployment)

Main exports: textiles
(garments, cotton cloth,
yarn), rice, leather, sport-
ing goods, carpets

Main imports: petroleum
& petroleum products,
machinery, chemicals,
transportation equipment

Ranking on UN Human
Development Index: 134
(out of 178)

The Authors



SARINA SINGH **Coordinating Author, Getting Started, Food & Drink, Islamabad & Rawalpindi, Directory, Glossary**

After finishing a business degree in Melbourne, Sarina bought a one-way ticket to India where she completed a corporate traineeship with the Sheraton before working as a journalist. After four years in the subcontinent she returned to Australia, pursued post-graduate journalism studies and wrote/directed an award-nominated documentary that premiered at the Melbourne International Film Festival. Sarina has worked on several dozen Lonely Planet books and has written for many other publications including *National Geographic Traveler*; further details at www.sarinasingh.com.

Life on the Road

Unforeseen deviations from planned paths have been the highlight of my subcontinental travels... Many years ago, on arrival at an Islamabad hotel, an apologetic receptionist ushered me to the 'bar', handed me a fizzless lemonade and assured me my room would soon be ready. As fate would have it, I was sitting next to an arms dealer who had just sold a cache of weapons to a mujaheddin warlord up north. The next day I found myself in Peshawar's Khyber Bazaar, where a rendezvous had been arranged with 'Mr Billy', a middle-aged Pashtun mechanic who would take me to the warlord's hideout for an interview. The hideout was a ramshackle warehouse near the Afghanistan border, and upon entering I was greeted with frosty glares from several dozen armed-to-the-hilt freedom fighters, all sitting cross-legged around their leader. The warlord was fidgeting with an AK47 for what seemed like an eternity before abruptly flinging the gun aside, pointing directly at me and asking, 'You want chicken and chips?' Four hours and three drumsticks later we had talked about everything from herbal hair-loss remedies to his plans for creating a 'collective global nation' called Islamistan, which he reckoned would be up and running in three decades, give or take a decade.



LINDSAY BROWN **Itineraries, Environment, Azad Jammu & Kashmir, Karakoram Highway, Transport**

A former conservation biologist and publishing manager of outdoor activity guides at Lonely Planet, Lindsay has trekked, jeeped, ridden and stumbled across many a mountain pass and contributed to Lonely Planet's *South India, India, Nepal* and *Bhutan* guides, among others.

LONELY PLANET AUTHORS

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PAUL CLAMMER

Destination Pakistan, History, Culture, Sindh, Balochistan, North-West Frontier Province

Paul grew up in Cambridge, and trained and worked as a molecular biologist before swapping test tubes for the vicarious thrills of tour leading and travel writing. He's spent several years kicking around the Muslim world from Casablanca to Kashgar, including a stint with a jeep safari company in northern Pakistan, and even finding time to skip over the Khyber Pass to have dinner with two Taliban ministers a fortnight before the 9/11 attacks. In the region, he's worked on Lonely Planet's *India* and *Central Asia* guides, as well as writing the first edition of *Afghanistan*.



RODNEY COCKS

Punjab

Rodney has recently been based in Kandahar, Afghanistan and northern Sri Lanka. He has lived, worked and travelled through the Middle East, Central Asia, Southeast Asia, North America and Europe. During his time as a UN Military Observer in East Timor and as a member of the UN de-mining team in Iraq, he narrowly survived two terrorist acts – the Bali bombings and the attack on the UN headquarters in Baghdad – and assisted the injured and dying in the horrific aftermaths. He was named the 2005 Victorian of the Year for his humanitarian service. Rodney has written for Lonely Planet's *Afghanistan* guide and its website. He is the author of *Bali to Baghdad and Beyond*.



JOHN MOCK & KIMBERLEY O'NEIL

Trekking in Northern Pakistan

The intrepid husband-and-wife team of John and Kimberley have logged more than 10,000km trekking in the Karakoram and Hindukush during the past 25 years. They have crossed more than 60 major passes, traversed 50 glaciers, and reconnoitred several new trekking routes in Chapursan, Shimsal and neighbouring Wakhan. Northern Pakistan has been like a second home to them, where they lived for many years working as consultants on ecotourism, protected area management and wildlife conservation. John also conducted his doctoral research in the Wakhi communities of Gojal. John and Kimberley are the award-winning authors of *Hiking in the Sierra Nevada* and their beloved *Trekking in the Karakoram & Hindukush*.



Getting Started

Apart from the usual challenges of subcontinental travel – the people-packed public transport, tedious bureaucracy and crush of human and mechanical traffic in urban hubs – Pakistan is a relatively straightforward country in which to travel, although you should always keep informed about the *latest* safety status – see p16.

Pakistani people are known for their hospitality towards visitors, although solo women may feel more at ease travelling with a companion in the more conservative regions (see p379). Unlike in neighbouring India, the tourism industry here remains comparatively small. While this means many places are less geared to foreign travellers, it also translates to exceedingly less tourist hype. Indeed, compared with India, Pakistan has far fewer touts and scams, less-rapacious taxi and autorickshaw drivers, and lacks the irksome commercial hullabaloo found in many of India's tourist centres.

In regards to pre-trip planning, make sure you give yourself a few weeks to sort out immunisations, visas and other documents you may require. You will derive greater benefit from your trip if you read up about Pakistan (especially the religious and cultural framework) as much as possible beforehand. Doing so will heighten your appreciation of the country's extraordinary sights and traditions, lower your chances of making a cultural faux pas, and better equip you to hold more-informed conversations with locals.

WHEN TO GO

Climate is the key factor in deciding when and where to travel in Pakistan. There are generally three seasons: cool (around October to February), hot (around March to June) and wet/monsoon (around July to September).

DON'T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT...

- Getting a visa (p378).
- Seeking advice about vaccinations (p396); some must be administered over a period of time.
- A travel insurance policy covering you for treks, cycling and other planned activities (p372).
- Nonrevealing clothes (women *and* men – see the boxed text, p43). Dressing respectfully wins a warmer reception in Islamic Pakistan – women need a headscarf for mosques and elsewhere (p379).
- A valid International Driving Permit (IDP), a *carnet de passage* and other necessary paperwork (p386) for those travelling overland with their own vehicle.
- Sunscreen, sunglasses and a hat for sun protection.
- Quality earplugs – street din can drive you nuts, especially in the bigger cities.
- Flip-flops (thongs) for communal/unsavoury bathrooms and a showercap (for budget hotels).
- A flashlight (torch) for unlit streets and if the electricity fails.
- Tampons – sanitary pads are widely available but tampons are not.
- Repellent to ward off bothersome little bloodsuckers (but mosquitoes aren't a problem at the height of summer and winter).
- Appropriate clothes, footwear and equipment for trekking (p336).
- A sense of adventure – Pakistan is well and truly off the tourist treadmill.

There are, however, distinct regional variations, described further in some of the regional chapters. The trekking season starts in late April and finishes by late October, peaking from mid-June to mid-September – for further details see p334.

In all seasons, the ‘continental’ climate can mean big day-to-night temperature differences. Roughly speaking, Sindh, Balochistan, Punjab and the south of North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) are most pleasant to visit from around November to February (it can get chilly at night, particularly in December and January). Note that Balochistan gets bitterly cold at the height of winter and may even see snow in January. Northern NWFP, the Northern Areas and Azad Jammu & Kashmir (AJK) are generally at their best from around May to October (although occasionally stormy), but are more or less snowbound in winter, when accessibility can be difficult. The monsoon sweeps in from around July through September, bringing bouts of heavy rain and oppressive, sauna-like humidity. The tail end of the southwest monsoon dumps steady rain across the central and eastern plains and as far north as Swat, Indus Kohistan, the Kaghan Valley and AJK. But the monsoon does not reach much further and, despite random thunderstorms, this is not a bad time to go north.

June, July and August are generally the peak months for domestic tourism, when many locals flock to the resort towns in northern Pakistan to escape the sweltering heat of the plains. Three especially popular areas – the Kaghan Valley, Upper Swat and the Galis – can get exceptionally crowded during this time. For those travelling to or from China, be aware that the Khunjerab Pass is officially closed to travellers from 15 November until 1 May. Heavy snow may even close it sooner and for longer.

You may wish to incorporate a festival or three into your itinerary (see p370); keep in mind that during Ramazan (Ramadan), business hours can be affected and most eateries close during daylight hours – for further information read the boxed text on p61.

Officials advise against travelling to Pakistan during the country’s major national election campaigns, as travel routes may experience disruptions and political expression can sometimes take a volatile turn.

IS IT SAFE?

At the time of writing Pakistan was in a state of political uncertainty, with the country placed under a state of emergency – for further details read p34. Given the thorny political climate, travellers are strongly urged to monitor events in Pakistan and seek current advice about how safe it is to travel in the country.

For political and tribal reasons there is restricted access to a number of potentially volatile areas, which are either off limits altogether for foreigners or require a permit, and possibly an armed guard, to visit them. Details are provided in the regional chapters of this book; also see p369. If you are unsure whether an area you intend visiting is a no-go zone, before setting off *always* seek the most up-to-date advice from as many reliable sources as you can, such as the Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation (PTDC) and local authorities.

Always remember that safety issues are not static. Things can swiftly change and it would be irresponsible of us to give prescriptive safety advice, especially in an increasingly unpredictable world. The most judicious way of making your journey through Pakistan as incident-free as possible is for *you* to take the responsibility of keeping abreast of the latest safety status of the region(s) you intend visiting. Apart from contacting the PTDC and other relevant authorities, ways of doing this include regularly reading local newspapers, garnering advice from locals and fellow travellers, and reading

See Climate Charts (p367)
for more information.

your country's government travel advisory (although these advisories can often be overly cautious). And of course, you should exercise the same caution and common sense that you would when travelling anywhere in the world – this includes not wandering alone (especially in isolated areas) after dark, avoiding night travel, and keeping your valuables well concealed (eg in a secure moneybelt worn under clothing). You're also strongly advised to steer clear of any public demonstrations and large gatherings (eg certain religious events). In terms of personal presentation, you are going to be much better received if you respect cultural sensibilities by dressing and behaving appropriately – this applies to both women *and* men (see p43; women should read the boxed text, p379).

For important dedicated regional safety information read the 'Travelling Safely in...' boxed texts in the Sindh (p159), Balochistan (p140), Punjab (p96), Azad Jammu & Kashmir (p181), North-West Frontier Province (p189) and Karakoram Highway (p237) chapters.

COSTS & MONEY

Pakistan is an economical country in which to travel. In terms of accommodation and restaurants there are options to fit all budgets, although greater variety is found in the larger cities. Transport, excluding domestic air travel, is relatively inexpensive and foreign tourists/students are even given a generous train-ticket concession of 25/50%. Conversely, foreigners are often charged a higher admission fee than locals for sights such as museums (exact charges are provided in the regional chapters).

So how low can you realistically go? If you opt for rock-bottom accommodation, eat a minimal amount at the cheaper restaurants, sightsee at places with no, or low, entry fees and travel by public bus, you're roughly looking at between Rs 400 and Rs 500 per day. It is important to remember that costs vary nationwide (especially accommodation), so the best way of ascertaining how much money you'll require is to peruse the relevant regional chapters of this book.

Due to the downward spiral in foreign tourism in recent times, some midrange and many top-end hotels will give discounts if requested. Don't be shy to ask for one; top-end hotels have been known to slash room rates by as much as half during lean business periods. Hotel rates, especially in northern Pakistan, may be subject to seasonal fluctuations and regional variations – for specific room rates, see the Sleeping sections throughout this book. Many hotels raise their tariffs annually, so when devising your budget it's not a bad idea to factor in possible increments on the prices provided in this book.

When it comes to filling your belly, shoestringers will be happy to know that there are plenty of ultra-cheap street eateries, while the bigger cities offer a decent selection of mid- and upper-priced choices as well. For further information about Pakistan's dining scene see p58.

For details about what currency to bring, and other money issues, read p373, and for trekking costs see p337.

TRAVEL LITERATURE

Three Cups of Tea, by Greg Mortenson and David Oliver Relin, relays a courageous man's odyssey to provide schooling, especially for girls, in remote parts of Pakistan and Afghanistan, where fundamentalism often feeds on poverty.

Kathleen Jamie's *Among Muslims* is an engaging insight into the Northern Areas, with a captivating window into facets of everyday life usually off limits to male visitors.

HOW MUCH?

Mars Bar Rs 30

Internet connection (per hour) Rs 20 to Rs 30

Toothpaste (small) Rs 25 to Rs 35

Packet of chips (25g) Rs 25

Music CD from Rs 90

The Dancing Girls of Lahore: Selling Love and Saving Dreams in Pakistan's Ancient Pleasure District, by Louise Brown, takes the reader into the family life of a dancing girl who works in Lahore's red-light Heera Mandi area.

Jonny Bealby's *For a Pagan Song* recounts an intrepid search for the Hindukush's pre-Islamic culture, following in the footsteps of Kipling's *The Man Who Would Be King*, through Afghanistan and Pakistan to the Kalasha Valleys of Chitral.

Magic Bus is Rory MacLean's witty retracing of the old hippy trail from Istanbul to Kabul, Kathmandu to Goa. It perceptively examines changes in the countries en route (including Pakistan) and the metamorphosis from spaced-out intrepids to modern backpackers.

Amritsar to Lahore by Stephen Alter is an insightful account of the author's journey across and beyond the border that divides (more than just physically) Pakistan and India.

An old classic, *To the Frontier* by Geoffrey Moorhouse, is an entertaining and well-written account of travels through Sindh, Balochistan, Punjab and NWFP.

Where the Indus Is Young by Dervla Murphy is the Irish author's vivid story of a winter she spent in Baltistan, travelling on foot and horseback with her six-year-old daughter Rachel.

INTERNET RESOURCES

Hi Pakistan (www.hipakistan.com) News and views, fashion, music, showbiz and more.

Lonely Planet (www.lonelyplanet.com) As well as lots of handy links, there's the popular Thorn Tree forum, where you can exchange information with other travellers to Pakistan.

Online Newspapers (www.onlinenewspapers.com/pakistan.htm) Links to a wide range of Pakistani newspapers including *Dawn* and *Frontier Post*.

Pakistan Railway (www.pakrail.com) National rail site: everything from train timings and seat availability to freight rates and saloon rental.

Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation (PTDC) (www.tourism.gov.pk) Official government tourism site, with national travel-related fodder.

Pakistani Virtual Library (www.southasianist.info/pakistan) Has links to a variety of topics including history, sport, trekking and even regional weather forecasts.

Itineraries

CLASSIC ROUTES

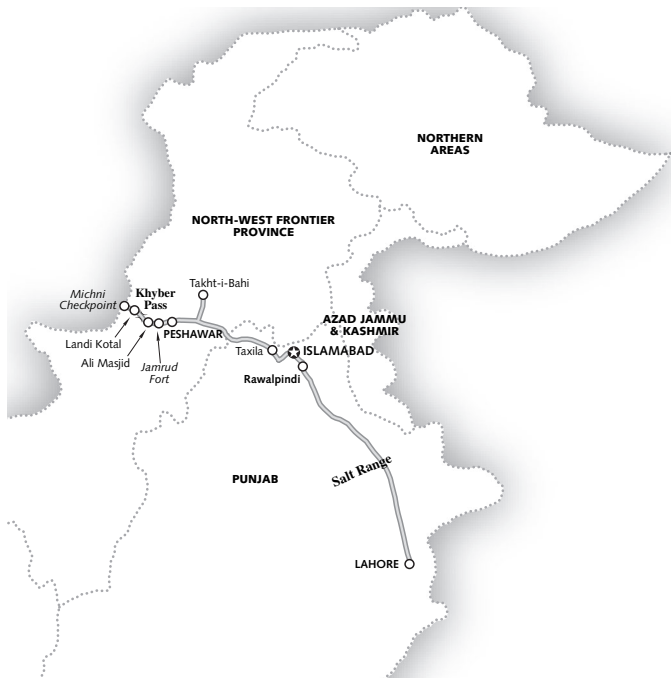
UP THE KHYBER PASS & ALONG THE GRAND TRUNK ROAD

One to two weeks

This renowned mountain pass to Afghanistan conjures images of lawless, gun-totin' Pashtuns. The truth is that it's perfectly safe – thanks to your armed Afridi gunman – but it's no less exciting for that.

Start in Pakistan's cultural capital, **Lahore** (p96), with its Mughal architecture, tempting eateries and sights such as the Lahore Fort and Badshahi Mosque. From Lahore join the rush along the Grand Trunk Rd through the barren **Salt Range** (p138) to **Islamabad** and **Rawalpindi** (p71). Pause in **Taxila** (p88) to see the wonders of Buddhist Gandhara on your way to pulse-quickening **Peshawar** (p190). A stroll through its Old City bazaars is an eye-opening essential. Organising a permit and armed guard is part of the thrill of travelling up the **Khyber Pass** (p200). The official entrance to Khyber Agency is at **Jamrud Fort** (p200). From here on houses are mini forts and the road (and railway) climbs and winds into the Sulaiman Range. The last main town before the border is **Landi Kotal** (p201), an erstwhile smugglers bazaar, still with a few gunshops. Here the working railway stops, though the ruins of tracks, bridges and tunnels continue to the border. Your stop, however, is just short of the border at **Michni checkpoint** (p201).

It's about 500km from Lahore to the famed Khyber Pass, via massive forts, Buddhist ruins, Pashtun bazaars and the nation's capital.



KARAKORAM HIGHWAY**Two to four weeks/Islamabad to Kashgar**

The Karakoram Highway (KKH) is a road of many moods that can be biked, bused, jeeped or walked. Most people take the ubiquitous minibuses that zoom up and down the highway for ridiculously cheap fares.

It's a short hop from **Islamabad** (p71) to **Havelian** (p245), the official though nondescript start of the KKH. Continue on to leafy **Abbottabad** (p245), or **Mansehra** (p249), gateway to the gorgeous **Kaghan Valley** (p251). Though the road spectacularly hugs the Indus River gorge, the initial stretch to Gilgit is frequently done without a stop to avoid the occasionally frosty reception of conservative **Indus Kohistan** (p257). From **Gilgit** (p272), the valley and the options open up. Detour to **Skardu** (p286) in Baltistan, the base for the Karakoram's best trekking; relax under soaring peaks in **Minapin** (p298), or head up the Gilgit River valley towards the **Shandur Pass** (p284) and the road to Chitral. After catching a polo match in Gilgit head north to Hunza headquarters at **Karimabad** (p299), the popular hang-out for travellers, with trekking, sightseeing and good food. From Karimabad it's only a short hop to **Gulmit** (p308) and **Passu** (p310); these friendly villages, touched by glaciers and surrounded by good trekking, are not to be missed. Adventurers should find time to explore the concealed valleys of **Shimshal** (p313) and **Chapursan** (p315). Organise your cross-border transport at **Sost (Afiyatabad)** (p314) and head to the high point of the journey – **Khunjerab Pass** (p317). Greet China in **Tashkurgan** (p318), before staying in a yurt at **Kara Kul Lake** (p320) on the way to **Kashgar** (p322) – one of Central Asia's most colourful bazaars.

Travel 1300km through stunning scenery, beside the Indus and Hunza Rivers and over a high mountain pass into Central Asia. Allow yourself at least two weeks to savour the sights and meet the locals.



BORDER TO BORDER, FROM IRAN TO INDIA

Moving from Mirjavé, on the Iranian side, to the dusty border post of **Taftan** (p387) in Pakistan, you cross over from the mystic Middle East to the spiritual subcontinent. Once formalities have been completed, make a beeline east for **Quetta** (p142), the first town of any size you'll reach in Pakistan with great shopping and eating. Kick back for a couple of days in this bazaar-busy frontier town before making your way northeast to Pakistan's cultural capital, **Lahore** (p96). En route you could divert to **Multan** (p128) for a few days to explore its many historic mausoleums. If you've got time on your side, make the trip south of Multan to **Bahawalpur** (p121), jumping-off point to **Uch Sharif** (p127) – site of some notable shrines – before setting off to Lahore. Once in Lahore, allow yourself at least four or five days to appreciate this city's fine Mughal architecture and multitude of sights. From Lahore, journey north for a few weeks to explore the unbeatable beauty of Pakistan's Northern Areas. Or, if you're itching to get straight to India, catch a bus from Lahore to the Pakistan–India border at **Wagah** (p120), making sure you coordinate your crossing into India with the captivating closing-of-the-border ceremony (see p120).

One week to one month/
Taftan to Wagah

Take between a week and a month to follow the classic overland route for 1614km through the heart of the country from border to border.



ROADS LESS TRAVELLED

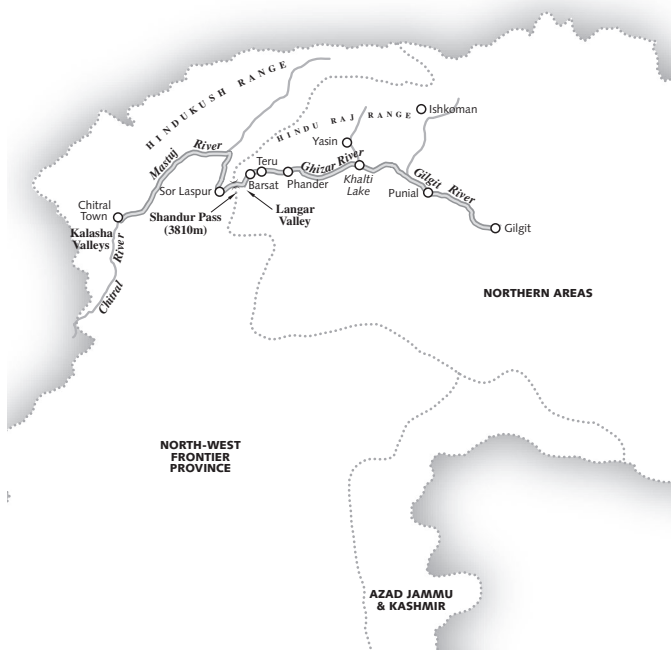
GILGIT TO CHITRAL & THE KALASHA VALLEYS VIA THE SHANDUR PASS

One week

When it's not hosting the famous polo tournament, the Shandur Pass is a little-visited barren plain, but if you have a jeep at your disposal it's a spectacular way to link several of northern Pakistan's premier destinations.

From the KKH hub of **Gilgit** (p272) head up the stunning valley of the Gilgit (aka Ghizer) River – a swirling glacial-melt torrent in summer and a brilliant blue cascade in autumn. There are plenty of reasons to linger and take a detour, and the old valley kingdoms of **Punial** (p283), **Yasin** (p283) and **Ishkoman** (p283) provide endless trekking opportunities. It's best to break the journey before the pass; choose **Khalti Lake** (p283), a natural dam on the Ghizar River with excellent fishing, or serene **Phander** (p283), overlooking a patchwork of fields and the gently meandering river. From Phander the road deteriorates, and the going gets tough. Accommodation options thin out at **Teru** (p284), about 5km from **Barsat** (p284), the last village before the pass. After Barsat enter the stunning **Langar Valley** (p284), complete with grazing yaks, before crossing the 3810m **Shandur Pass** (p284). Over the pass, the road descends quickly through crumbling terrain to the village of Sor Laspur, before circling north around Buni Zom (6550m) to the Mastuj River valley and, eventually **Chitral town** (p222). Chitral is the base for walks in the Hindukush, particularly the isolated valley sanctuaries of **Rumbur** (p231), **Bumboret** (p232) and **Birir** (p233), home to the Kalasha.

Spend a week travelling 340km through stunning mountains and hidden valley kingdoms, and catch a polo match if you can.



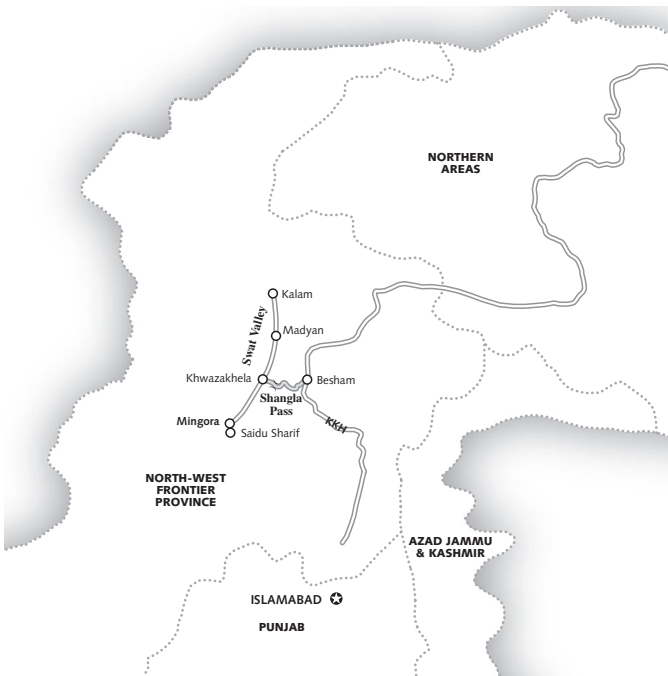
THE KKH TO SWAT VIA THE SHANGLA PASS One to two weeks/Besham to Khwazakhela

The little-traversed Shangla Pass links the historical Swat district with the famous KKH and offers glimpses of everyday life in rugged Indus Kohistan.

Although **Besham** (p258), on the KKH, and **Khwazakhela** (p214), in the Swat Valley, have little to interest travellers, they are linked by a quiet mountain road that was an earlier incarnation of the KKH, before the highway was continued south from Besham to Mansehra. The road hugs the bottom of a narrow valley from Besham to the village of Alpurai, every twist and turn revealing village life – water-powered mills, washing, fishing and playing – focused around the swift-flowing tributary of the Indus River. **Shangla Pass** (p214) at 2134m is open year-round, except during occasional heavy snows. After an interrogation at the police checkpoint, take in the fine views to Swat and back east to the Pir Panjal Range.

The busy bazaar of Khwazakhela is just over half an hour from Swat's main hub, the twin towns of **Mingora** and **Saidu Sharif** (p209), with a museum and nearby ruins of its Buddhist past. After visiting the sites, head upstream to spend a few relaxing days in the Upper Swat Valley – the erstwhile hippy hangout of **Madyan** (p214) or the hotel resort of **Kalam** (p216) with its cool mountain air, postcard scenery and fish-filled streams. Return to Mingora, where the onward options include Chitral, Peshawar and Islamabad.

It's only about 65km between Besham and Khwazakhela and 98km between Mingora and Kalam, but you can spend a week or two exploring villages and relaxing in resort towns in this historic and scenic district.



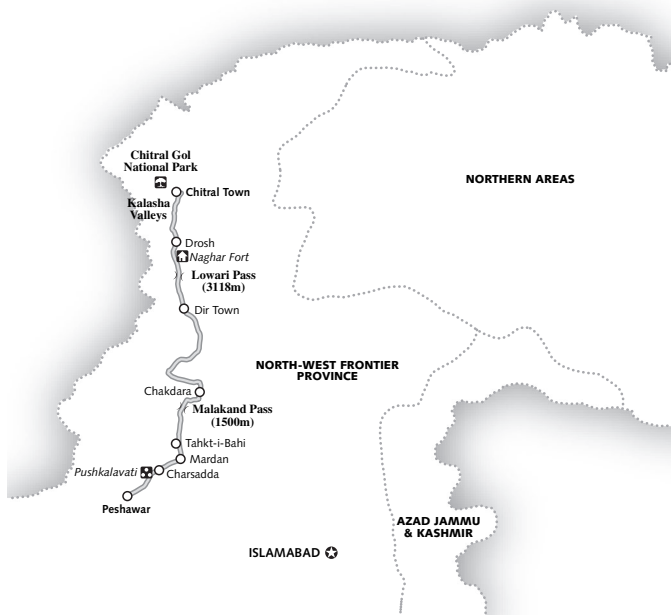
CHITRAL TO PESHAWAR VIA THE KALASHA VALLEYS & THE LOWARI & MALAKAND PASSES

One to two weeks/
Chitral to Peshawar

Chitral town (p222) is connected to the rest of Pakistan by just two roads: one to Gilgit over the Shandur Pass and one to Swat via the Lowari Pass. From the Swat Valley you need to cross another high pass, the Malakand, to reach the frontier city of Peshawar.

After exploring the Upper Chitral Valley and the splendid **Chitral Gol National Park** (p228), head south to **Rumbur** (p231), **Bumboret** (p232) and **Birir** (p233), stronghold of Pakistan's Kalasha, who still practise their pre-Islamic religion. You can even trek between the Kalasha valleys. The road continues south through the army town of Drosh and the sublime **Naghar Fort** (p220), overlooking a bend on the Chitral River. Just before the 3118m **Lowari Pass** (p219; usually open from June to October) the road suddenly zigzags up a steep mountainside in 48 switchbacks. The view from the top is superb but the weather usually isn't, so after signing the register, start the sedate decline towards **Dir town** (p218), where there are comfortable lodgings. The Swat Valley is reached at **Chakdara** (p217) and the road south crosses the 1500m **Malakand Pass** (p207) towards **Mardan** (p204), the centre for exploring several Buddhist ruins, including **Tahkt-i-Bahi** (p206). From Mardan take the road to Charsadda, and the ruins of **Pushkalavati** (p207), and then push on to the frenetic frontier city of **Peshawar** (p190) on the Grand Trunk Rd. Peshawar has lively bazaars, a hint of danger, and it's a base to visit the Khyber Pass and/or Afghanistan.

From a beautiful mountainous national park, past ancient Buddhist ruins to a dynamic frontier town, this route covers about 350km.



TAILORED TRIPS

WALKS ON THE WILD SIDE

Three weeks/Gilgit to Karimabad

Pakistan's Karakoram and Hindukush offer some of the most dramatic trekking on earth. The treks in the Trekking chapter can be strung together in several combinations – see p332 for further itineraries. This itinerary incorporates some of the best treks that are accessed from Gilgit and Karimabad, popular hubs on the KKH.

Gilgit (p272) is a great base for launching into Baltistan, Diamir and Nagyr, organising guides and for resting between treks. First head to **Skardu** (p286) to tackle the easy, two-day trek out of **Hushe** (p293) to the serene summer pastures of **Humbrok** (p362). Return to Skardu then Gilgit. From Gilgit organise transport to Chirah in the Bagrot Valley and from there start a three-day return trek to the **Diran Base Camp** (p346). Again from Gilgit, head a short distance along the KKH to **Minapin** (p298), easily accessed from the KKH, and the start of the magnificent trail to **Rakaposhi Base Camp** (p351); a three-day return trek. North of Minapin, **Karimabad** (p299) is another comfortable base for trekking. From the top of Karimabad town you can take the short and steep track up to the meadow below **Ultr** (p353); here you can spend the night with a grinding glacier before returning to espresso coffee in Karimabad the following morning.



DIVINE EXCURSION

One to two weeks/Lahore to Uch Sharif

The whole of Pakistan is dotted with magnificent shrines and mosques, but this itinerary visits those of Lahore and southern Punjab, home to some of the country's finest examples. In **Lahore** (p96), start your sacred ramble at the phenomenal 17th-century Badshahi Mosque before checking out the city's other sacred legacies including Jehangir's Tomb, Nur Jahan's Tomb, the Mosque of Wazir Khan, the Gurdwara of Arjan Dev and the Shrine of Data Ganj Bakhsh Hajveri; the last has superb qawwali (Islamic devotional singing) each Thursday (see boxed text, p104). After taking in Lahore's sacred sights, head southwest to the historic city of **Multan** (p128). Here you'll find scores of intriguing shrines including the mausoleums of Sheikh Rukn-i-Alam, Baha-ud-Din Zakaria and Shams-ud-Din Sabzwari. From Multan, catch a bus south to **Bahawalpur** (p121), an easy-going town that makes a convenient base to visit the shrines of **Uch Sharif** (p127) – the Mausoleum of Bibi Jawindi is particularly eye-catching. If you've got time (or are en route to Sindh) don't miss the extraordinary 20th-century **Bhong Mosque** (p126), situated further south, not far from the Sindh border.



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History

Both a nuclear power and important cricketing nation, Pakistan has existed as an independent country for little more than 60 years, but has been playing an important role in the historical epic of the Indian subcontinent for millennia. It has been the birthplace of the world's first urban civilisation, home to one of the great flowerings of Buddhism, and cornerstone of the Mughal empire. Born in 1947 as a homeland for Muslims, it has been a frontline state in the Cold War and is currently a key location in the struggle against violent Islamism. Understanding Pakistan's past is essential to understanding its future trajectory.

Visit www.storyofpakistan.com for timelines and short biographies of many of Pakistan's key political figures.

EARLY CIVILISATIONS

When the Europeans were dressed in animal skins and the USA was known only to the native Indian tribes, the men and women who lived on the land that is now Pakistan were part of one of the most sophisticated societies on earth. The ancient Egyptians, who lived around the same time, may have been better at building pyramids, but when it came to constructing cities, the Indus people were well ahead.

Nothing was known of the Indus civilisation until the 1920s, when excavations at Harappa and Moenjodaro revealed cities built of brick. Subsequent research has shown that the Indus people flourished around 2500–1500 BC. They had a population of roughly five million and a sophisticated bureaucracy with standardised systems for weights and brick sizes. While the evidence is sketchy, many scholars believe that a priestly elite governed the Indus people.

The Indus civilisation probably declined due to the drying of the Indus Valley. There followed centuries of economic decline and foreign conquest. The first to arrive were the Aryans, whose Vedic religion laid the basis for Hinduism as it is practised today. They were followed by Alexander the Great. When you travel in northern Pakistan and, in particular, places such as the Kalasha valleys, you may notice people with relatively pale skin, fair hair and blue eyes. According to popular theory these are the descendants of Alexander the Great's troops.

After Alexander, a series of imperial powers flexed their muscles in South Asia. The Mauryas were notable for controlling virtually all the subcontinent and promoting Buddhism. Taxila, one of Pakistan's best-preserved Buddhist sites, was founded by the Mauryans as a university. The Kushans followed close on the Mauryans' heels, entering from Afghanistan. They took the Greek culture left behind by Alexander's descendants and fused it with the art of India to produce their sublime Gandharan art. For the first three

There is an excellent introduction to the Indus civilisation on www.harappa.com. Among other things, the site has articles on the latest attempts by scholars to decode the Indus script.

TIMELINE

5000 BC

Earliest evidence of village life in Pakistan, in Mehrgarh in Balochistan – one of the world's most important Neolithic sites. Its inhabitants had domesticated crops and livestock, simple pottery and mudbrick houses.

2500–1500 BC

The Indus Valley civilisation thrives in Moenjodaro and Harappa, founding the subcontinent's first urban cultures, with a sophisticated social structure, agriculture, trading networks and writing system (yet to be fully deciphered).

563–486 BC

The life of Siddhartha Gautama (Buddha), the founder of Buddhism. Born to royalty in what is now modern Nepal, he gave up privilege to live a life of asceticism and meditation, receiving enlightenment under the Bodhi Tree in Bodhgaya (India).

centuries AD, the Kushans held sway from Taxila to Kabul and left behind a host of ruins, particularly in the Peshawar and Swat Valleys.

In AD 711 an Arab general, Mohammed bin Qasim, arrived in Sindh. He and his 6000 cavalymen were to have a major impact because they brought with them the religion of Islam. After the Arabs had made inroads from the south, in the 11th century the Turkish rulers of Afghanistan, led by Mahmud of Ghazni, brought the same message of Islam from the north. Muslims were then established as the ruling class, although it was not until the arrival of the Mughal dynasty that there was a truly formidable Islamic government able to leave a lasting architectural and cultural impression.

THE MUGHALS

The Mughals were the undisputed masters of the subcontinent through the 16th and 17th centuries. Their empire was one of only three periods in history during which the subcontinent has come under sustained, unified rule. (The others to pull off this feat were the Mauryas and the British.) The first Mughal emperor, Babur, used the traditional route to invade: from Central Asia. Having taken Kabul he conquered Delhi in 1526. The dynasty he founded endured for more than three centuries. The other great Mughal emperors included Akbar (1556–1605), Shah Jahan (1627–58) and Aurangzeb (1658–1707). Because they were Muslims, the Mughals remain a source of great pride in Pakistan. Under Akbar and his son Jehangir, Lahore was the capital of the empire, and remains home to some of the Mughals' greatest architectural legacies, including the Badshahi Mosque, the Lahore Fort and Jehangir's Tomb. All combine the Mughals' skill for working on a grand scale and their great use of arches, domes, carvings and towers.

While the Mughals are today most often celebrated for their artistic legacy, they were also excellent administrators who managed to concentrate power in the central government. Their sophisticated bureaucratic systems became particularly highly developed under Akbar. He appointed officials on the basis of merit rather than family rank. He also prevented the establishment of rival power bases by paying loyal officials in cash rather than land. While many of the Mughal rulers were hostile to their Hindu subjects, Akbar took a different view. He saw that the number of Hindus in India was too great to subjugate. Instead, he integrated them into his empire and allowed Hindus to reach senior positions in the government and the military.

Like imperial powers before and after them, the Mughals became overstretched. By the time of Aurangzeb's death, their empire had become so big it was largely ungovernable. Slowly but steadily the Mughals' power ebbed away. Their administrative systems were weakened by debilitating and very violent succession struggles and by the decadence of court life. Local power-brokers in the provinces seized their opportunity and, complaining of Muslim domination and too many taxes, mounted a series of armed rebellions. Faced

Only one-third of Moenjodaro's old city has been excavated. Exposure of the site to the elements has led to its severe deterioration.

Urdu was the court language of the Mughals. Although the national language, it's the mother tongue of less than 10% of the population. Pakistan's courts work in English.

327–325 BC

Alexander the Great invades, marching over the Hindukush towards the Indus on his way to conquer India. Returning home, his army is almost wiped out in the desolation of Balochistan's Makran Desert.

273–232 BC

Ashoka founds the Mauryan empire that stretches from Bengal to the borders of Persia. Filled with remorse for the violence that won the empire, he embraces Buddhism, dedicating himself to its propagation across his realm.

AD 100–500

Flourishing of Gandhara, the Buddhist kingdom born from the ruins of the Mauryan empire. Under King Kanishka's rule (128–51) Gandharan culture undergoes its golden age, trading with Rome and China from its capital in Peshawar.

with these challenges, the Mughals increasingly became rulers only in name. Technically, though, the Mughal empire existed right up until 1857, when the British deposed the 19th and last Mughal ruler, Bahadur Shah II.

THE BRITISH

The first Britons to arrive in India were traders from the British East India Company. They came by sea at the beginning of the 17th century and their goal was not conquest but profit. Initially they restricted themselves to business, doing deals with the Mughal emperors and local rulers. Gradually, though, the relationship changed. In time British factories were established and when faced with disputes they began to apply British rather than local law. As the profits grew, the traders became increasingly involved in local politics. Matters came to a head in 1757, when armed men fighting for the British East India Company under Robert Clive clashed with the chief (nawab) of Bengal, Siraj-ud-daula. That Clive won the encounter should have been of little surprise. Many of the nawab's soldiers had been bribed to throw away their weapons.

The British soon started behaving like imperialists, determined to take territory. The first part of present-day Pakistan to come under British control was Sindh in 1843. Next the British tackled the Sikh rulers from the rich and fertile land of Punjab before moving on to the perennially ungovernable North-West Frontier Province and Balochistan.

The first major challenge to British rule came in 1857, when much of north and central India rose up against their imperial masters. The Indian Uprising has variously been called the Sepoy Rebellion, the Great Mutiny and the First War of Independence. The Indian troops rallied around the enfeebled Mughal ruler Bahadur Shah, before finally being suppressed. The uprising was a shocking, brutal affair and left deep scars on both sides.

A major consequence of the revolt was the abolition of the British East India Company. The British crown imposed direct rule through its governor general or viceroy, and Victoria was proclaimed Empress of India. Significantly, the British made a compromise with the 565 princely rulers who controlled 40% of the land on the subcontinent. Instead of demanding that they surrender full sovereignty, the British allowed the princely rulers to keep control of their internal affairs if they professed loyalty to the Crown and surrendered all rights to conduct foreign or defence policy.

The British governed through an elite cadre of bureaucrats. Recruitment to the Indian civil service was competitive and initially restricted to British candidates. By 1910 a few Indians had been appointed to the civil service, a development that reflected the gradual shift of power in India. At the start of the 20th century, the demands for more self-governance were becoming louder and the British started to make concessions. First, some Indian councillors were appointed to advise the viceroy. Indians were then given limited

For the latest news on Pakistan take a look at www.dawn.com. *Dawn*, which is published in Karachi, is the longest-established English-language newspaper in Pakistan.

711

In response to attack on Arab traders by pirates, Arab general Mohammed bin Qasim invades Sindh. In response to Arab conquests, the mainly Hindu and Buddhist population begins to convert to Islam. Muslim rule eventually extends to Multan.

1008

Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni invades from Afghanistan, smashing Hindu power in Punjab. Mahmud launches a total of 17 expeditions to north India, expanding his empire and permanently introducing Islam to the region.

c 1300–1400

The Central Asian steppes visit nearly 200 years of chaos on northern Pakistan with the invasions of Genghis Khan's Mongol hordes (1221) and the armies of Tamerlane (1398). Both leave devastation in their wake.

roles in elected legislative councils (although the electorate was restricted to a small group of upper-class Indians). Increasingly, well-educated Indians made ever more strident demands for self-governance and found themselves in conflict with the British.

In Pakistan today there is still evidence of the British legacy. The law courts in Lahore, for instance, blend architectural styles from East and West, and the Mall (also in Lahore) is another lasting reminder of the Raj (British government in India). The British imperialists also left behind their traditional legacies: a railway network and the English language.

THE BIRTH OF PAKISTAN

Two men are generally credited with having secured the existence of Pakistan. The first was Allama Mohammed Iqbal, a poet and philosopher from Lahore. Iqbal proposed the creation of a separate Muslim state on those parts of the subcontinent where there was a Muslim majority.

While Iqbal articulated the demand for a Muslim state, it took Mohammed Ali Jinnah to put it into practice. The British were initially reluctant to divide the subcontinent, but through a mixture of brilliant advocacy skills and sheer obstinacy Jinnah got his way. Jinnah is a universally revered figure in Pakistan. You will see his image and his name depicted on buildings all over the country. He is often referred to as Quaid-i-Azam or the Quaid (Leader of the People or Great Leader).

At the turn of the century the Hindus and Muslims had been united in their struggle against the British. The Indian National Congress, which was formed in 1885 to put demands to the British, included members from both faiths. Nevertheless, in 1906 the Muslims founded another political organisation, the All-India Muslim League, 'to protect and advance the political rights of the Muslims of India and respectfully represent their needs and aspirations to the Government'.

For a time the emphasis remained on unity. In 1916 Congress and the Muslim League agreed to the Lucknow Pact, under which they were to campaign for constitutional reform together. After the British massacred a crowd of unarmed protestors at Amritsar in 1919, the demands for greater self-governance turned into an insistence on full independence. The British responded with limited concessions, increasing the number of Indians in the administration and in self-governing institutions.

The Indian leaders could see that they were making progress. But as an independent India became a realistic prospect, tensions between the Muslims and Hindus grew. Mohammed Iqbal first raised the issue of a separate Muslim homeland in 1930. He argued that India was so diverse that a unitary form of government was inconceivable. Religion rather than territory, he said, should be the foundation of national aspirations. It was the first coherent expression of the 'two-nation theory' to which Pakistan still adheres.

Rudyard Kipling's classic novel *Kim* follows the story of the orphan who becomes involved in spying for the British. It's an evocative depiction of both the Raj and the Great Game.

1526

Babur, a princely Muslim descendant of both Genghis Khan and Tamerlane, reaches out from his capital in Kabul to conquer India, founding the Mughal empire in the process.

1556–1605

Lahore flourishes as the court of Akbar the Great, under whom the Mughal empire undergoes its most sustained period of peace and greatest cultural flowering. The rebuilt Lahore Fort dates from this period.

1615

British East India Company embassy to the Mughal court of Jehangir wins it a favoured trading status, and a permanent foothold on the subcontinent, which it rapidly expands from its base in Bengal.

THE GREAT GAME

The term 'The Great Game' was immortalised by Rudyard Kipling in his novel *Kim*. It refers to the 19th-century imperial competition between Russia and Britain to win control of Central Asia. Britain sought to secure India, knowing that most invaders historically had arrived from the north. Russia, meanwhile, feared that if the British managed to establish themselves in Central Asia they could threaten the motherland itself.

At the start of the 19th century much of Central Asia was unknown territory. On both sides a motley bunch of explorers, emissaries and officers on 'shooting leave'. These young imperialists risked, and sometimes lost, their lives drawing secret maps of the region and trying to win the confidence of local rulers. The first British contacts with Gilgit, Hunza and Chitral all arose out of 'the game'.

As Russia managed to get the upper hand in Central Asia, the Great Game increasingly focused on Afghanistan. In the late 1830s, Britain wooed Kabul's amir (ruler), the charismatic Dost Mohammed, who was obsessed with recapturing the Afghan city of Peshawar from the Sikhs. Meeting with no adequate response, he then made overtures to Russia, so the British decided to depose him by arms and installed Shah Shujah in his place. But Shujah's puppet regime and the British soldiers were never popular. In 1841 a mob stormed the British compound in Kabul and sliced the British representative Alexander Burnes into small pieces. The British army made a humiliating retreat at the loss of 15,000 lives, and Dost Mohammed returned to power.

The second Anglo-Afghan war occurred in 1878, when Afghanistan opened diplomatic channels with Russia. Britain sent an army back to Afghanistan and occupied Kabul, but again, a massacre of British and Indian officers occurred in the city. Ultimately realising that occupation was impossible, the British withdrew again, placing Dost Mohammed's grandson Abdur Rahman on the throne. Britain and Russia finally agreed that Afghanistan would be a buffer between them and settled its borders for their own convenience in 1893.

A century later, the 'New Great Game' was back in play. Russian troops finally made it to Kabul only to suffer their own humiliating defeat, while the post-9/11 landscape has left Afghanistan (and Pakistan's Tribal Areas) as key playing fields in the latest round of imperial pretensions.

Iqbal gave no name to his proposed nation. That was done by a student at Cambridge University, Chaudhry Rahmat Ali, who suggested it be called Pakistan. Taken as one word Pakistan means 'Land of the Spiritually Clean and Pure'. But it was also a sort of acronym standing for Punjab, Afghanistan (North-West Frontier Province), Kashmir, Sindh and Balochistan.

By the late 1930s, Jinnah, who had previously argued for Hindu-Muslim unity, was convinced of the case for Pakistan. At its annual session in Lahore on 23 March 1940, the Muslim League formally demanded that the Muslim majority areas in northwestern and northeastern India should be autonomous and sovereign. With Congress strongly opposed, it was an issue only London could resolve. The man given the task was Lord Louis Mountbatten, who was appointed Viceroy of India in 1947. Shortly after arriving in Delhi he became

Shortly after Partition, Mountbatten predicted that East Pakistan would break away within a quarter of a century. He was right, with one year to spare.

1747

Afghan king Ahmad Shah Durani sweeps across northern Pakistan and India, capturing Lahore and Kashmir, sacking Delhi and dealing another blow to the rapidly contracting Mughal empire.

1757–1857

Following the Battle of Plassey, the British East India Company begins its military expansion across the subcontinent. Princely states are allowed to exist in semi-independence, while the Mughal crown is reduced to its court at Delhi.

1801

Ranjit Singh becomes maharaja of the newly united Sikhs and forges a powerful new kingdom from his capital in Lahore. The Afghans are kicked out of Punjab, eventually losing control of Peshawar.

convinced that the demand for Pakistan would not go away and that, despite all its objections, Congress would accept it as the price for independence.

Creating two new independent nations out of one imperial possession was not easy. Assets were divided, and a boundary commission appointed to demarcate frontiers. Cyril Radcliffe, a civil servant who had never visited India, bisected the complicated and deeply connected border areas in little over a month. British troops were evacuated and the military was restructured into two forces. Civil servants were given the choice of joining either country.

As the moment of Independence approached, huge numbers of people went on the move. Hindus, fearful of living in the new Pakistan, headed east. So too did the Sikhs. In the period before the British extended their influence to Punjab and Kashmir, the Sikhs had been the dominant power, controlling territory right up to the Afghan border. By 1849 the British military had defeated them and now, with Partition looming, they decided to move and make their future in India. The Muslims, meanwhile, were also leaving their villages and making for their new homeland.

It was the largest mass migration in modern times. Around eight million people gave up their jobs, homes and communities. Most travelled on foot or by train and in doing so risked their lives. Many never made it, becoming victims of the frenzied violence triggered by Partition. The scale of the killing was terrible: it's estimated that up to a million people were butchered in communal violence. Trains full of Muslims, fleeing westwards, were held up and slaughtered by Hindu and Sikh mobs. Hindus and Sikhs fleeing to the east suffered the same fate. For those who crossed the rivers of blood that separated the two new nations and survived, the feeling of relief was intense. And on 14 August 1947, Pakistan and India achieved independence.

While the new leaders in India were able to pick up where the British left off, their counterparts in Pakistan had to build state institutions from scratch. The task was made all the more difficult because the one man in Pakistan who could command unquestioning loyalty – Jinnah – died 13 months after Independence. His successors were both incompetent and corrupt. It took them nine years to pass Pakistan's first constitution. When General Ayub Khan took over in a coup in 1958, most Pakistanis were relieved that the politicians were being kicked out of office.

THE CREATION OF BANGLADESH

At Independence, Pakistan was already a divided country, with Bengali East Pakistan cut off from the main body of West Pakistan by the great mass of India. Tensions between the two parts were immediately significant. East Pakistan was more populous and ethnically homogenous as well as being poorer, having been cut off from the traditional Bengali capital of Calcutta (now Kolkata). Even before Independence many Bengalis had argued that the British should create two new Muslim countries. Pakistan's new rulers, few of

Freedom at Midnight describes how and why the British left the subcontinent. The authors, Larry Collins and Dominique Lapierre, examine the parts played by Gandhi, Mountbatten, Nehru and Jinnah. It reads like a thriller.

Sir Richard Attenborough's award-winning film *Gandhi* stars Ben Kingsley. It follows the life of the man who advocated nonviolence as the people of India tried to rid themselves of their British rulers.

The film *Jinnah* is Pakistan's answer to *Gandhi*. Many Pakistanis grumbled when the role of Jinnah was given to the British actor Christopher Lee because he was better known for playing Dracula.

1843

General Charles Napier exceeds his orders to annex Sindh and establish British rule. Recognising his zeal, he telegrams London with a one-word Latin confession, 'Peccavi': 'I have sinned' (Sindh).

1849

After the instability following the death of Ranjit Singh, and the fighting of two short wars, the East India Company adds Punjab and North West Frontier region to its territories.

1857–58

An army revolt in Bengal sparks the Indian Mutiny or First War of Independence that rapidly engulfs British India. Brutal massacres are perpetrated by both sides before the British regain control.

For General Niazi's version of why East Pakistan split away, read *The Betrayal of East Pakistan*. Niazi admits no fault and puts all the blame on his military superiors. Unconvincing history but interesting detail.

whom were Bengalis, wanted a strong central government and just one national language – Urdu. The Bengalis insisted that Bengali should have equal status and complained that the central government, the federal bureaucracy and the main military establishments were all located in West Pakistan.

The political party that best articulated the frustration and resentment felt by many East Pakistanis was the Awami League, and in 1963 it elected a leader who would ultimately lead East Pakistan to independence. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman began by crystallising the Bengali's demands into 'Six Points'. He accepted that there should be one Pakistan but added that the federal government should be restricted to handling defence and foreign affairs and have no tax-raising powers. He said the two wings of Pakistan should have separate currencies and East Pakistan should be allowed its own paramilitary force.

These demands were utterly unacceptable to West Pakistan, which believed that the Six Points would leave the centre with so little authority that a united Pakistan could not survive. Despite long negotiations, a compromise could not be found and by 1971 the tensions between East and West Pakistan reached snapping point. On 25 March the military ruler in Islamabad, General Yahya Khan, ordered his army to take military control of East Pakistan.

The Pakistani army was split in two. West Pakistani soldiers took to the task of restoring order in East Pakistan with relish. But most of the East Pakistani soldiers mutinied. Yahya believed that the civilian population in East Pakistan would remain largely neutral. It didn't. The Bengali population stood behind Mujibur Rahman, who by this time had been arrested. The West Pakistani troops responded by raping, murdering and even massacring whole villages. Around half a million Bengalis were killed.

At first the West Pakistani army got the upper hand, not least because the Bengali resistance fighters – the Mukti Bahini – suffered from a lack of arms. A low-level struggle might have gone on for years had not India decided to intervene. Initially, Delhi believed that the West Pakistani army would be able to cow the East Pakistanis into submission. But as the resistance continued, a consensus emerged in Delhi that an independent East Pakistan (Bangladesh) was not only in India's interests but also achievable. Half a million Indian troops were ordered into East Pakistan to support the claim of Bengali nationalism.

India enjoyed complete air superiority, and on the ground could rely on the highly motivated Mukti Bahini (generally estimated at 100,000). Lieutenant General Niazi, the Pakistani commander, never stood a chance. He was outnumbered, outgunned and operating in territory with a hostile population. In December 1971 Niazi surrendered and Bangladesh was born.

THE KASHMIR DISPUTE

Throughout the British Raj the leaders of the 565 princely states kept nominal control of their territories. For decades this amounted to nothing more

Many books on Kashmir are hopelessly biased. For an objective account as to why Kashmir has become a battleground between two nuclear rivals, read Victoria Schofield's *Kashmir in Conflict*.

1858

The British Raj is born, with India coming under direct rule of the British crown. Bahadur Shah, the last Mughal emperor, is tried for treason and exiled to Rangoon.

1889

The Gilgit Agency is formed, bringing the Northern Areas under nominal British control. Exploration of the high passes is driven by the Great Game, and British fears of Russian expansion towards India.

1893

The Durand Line is drawn by the British to establish its borders with Afghanistan. With little notion of tribal geography, the Pashtun tribes are divided in two. Repeated Afghan governments have refused to formally accept the border.

than a constitutional nicety because in practice they were subservient to the British. But in 1947 the princely rulers had the power to decide whether they joined India or Pakistan.

The choice was especially difficult for Maharaja Hari Singh of Jammu and Kashmir. His state bordered both India and Pakistan. And while he was a Hindu, his population was predominantly Muslim.

The maharaja was uncertain what to do, but many Pakistanis were determined that the predominantly Muslim Kashmiris should join Pakistan. In October 1947 Pashtun tribesmen from North-West Frontier Province tried to force the issue by invading Kashmir, with the tacit consent of the new Pakistani authorities. But the strategy backfired when the maharaja requested armed assistance from India.

India agreed to help but there was a price. The maharaja would have to agree that Kashmir joined India, not Pakistan. The maharaja did opt for India but the timing of his decision has been highly controversial ever since. Pakistan argues that he signed the Instrument of Accession under duress after Indian troops had illegally entered Kashmir. The Indians maintain the signature came before their troops were deployed.

As a result of the fighting in 1947, and the crushing defeat of the 1965 war, Pakistan currently occupies around one-third of Kashmir, which it calls Azad (Free) Kashmir, and India occupies the other two-thirds. (The situation is further complicated by the fact that, after 1947, China occupied an area called Aksai Chin in Indian-occupied Kashmir. India's objection to this was one of the factors behind the 1962 Indo-Chinese War, in which India was heavily defeated.)

Since 1988 there has been an insurgency in Kashmir that has resulted in the loss of tens of thousands of lives. Kashmiri Muslims and Islamic militants from Pakistan, Afghanistan and further afield have tried to force the Indian security forces out of Kashmir. The Indians have refused to budge and have committed chronic human-rights abuses, while Pakistani proxies have attempted to neutralise (by force or otherwise) the secular Kashmiri nationalist movement. In recent years the insurgency has become dominated by non-Kashmiri fighters based in Pakistan, and India frequently accuses Pakistan of 'cross-border terrorism'. The two countries have held sporadic talks on the issue but have never come close to reaching a solution.

In 1999 Pervez Musharraf (still just a soldier) ordered some of his troops into Indian-occupied Kashmir. Unnoticed, they took several hundred square miles of territory. Tactically, the Kargil campaign, as it became known, was a brilliant operation. Strategically, it backfired. The international community, fearful that the dispute could escalate into a nuclear exchange, demanded a Pakistani withdrawal. Ultimately India poured in numerous men and munitions to the Kargil area, forcing the Pakistanis to abandon the high Himalayan peaks they had occupied.

In 1947 Pakistan's founder, Mohammed Ali Jinnah, predicted that 'Kashmir will fall into our lap like a ripe fruit.' He could not have been more wrong.

President Musharraf was born in the Indian capital Delhi. When he was four years old, he moved to Pakistan with his parents during Partition.

1906

All-India Muslim League is founded at a conference in Dhaka. Partly a response to the Hindu-dominated Indian National Congress party, it aims to represent India's Muslims, who comprise one-fifth of the population.

1940

Muslim League adopts its Lahore Resolution, demanding the creation of a separate nation for Muslims called Pakistan. Campaigns throughout the 1940s for partition are led by Mohammed Ali Jinnah.

1947

On 14 August, independent Pakistan is born. Punjab is partitioned in great bloodshed, while Kashmir's unresolved status almost immediately sparks the first India-Pakistan War, with Pakistan seizing one-third of Kashmiri territory.

A weighty volume, *The India-Pakistan Conflict: An Enduring Rivalry* by TV Paul is nevertheless a key text for unravelling post-Partition tensions.

Pakistan: Between Mosque and Military by Husain Haqqani is a key work for understanding the way two key institutions have shaped modern Pakistani politics.

Zulfi Bhutto of Pakistan by the American academic Professor Stanley Wolpert has become the standard work on the life of the country's most inspirational, complex and, ultimately, flawed political leader.

Kashmir remains a highly emotive issue for Pakistan. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's attempt to sack Musharraf as head of the army as a result of the Kargil fiasco led to the coup that brought the general to power – a prime example of the central role Kashmir has come to play in Pakistani politics. Each day the newspapers and state-controlled TV pour out propaganda on the issue. For more than 60 years the Kashmiri people have been caught between India and Pakistan's intense rivalry. By now most Kashmiris are sick of the fighting and given a choice would probably opt for independence. But with both sides determined to hang on there is very little prospect they will be given that choice.

MILITARY MISRULE

The two countries created from British India in 1947 went down quite divergent routes. While India emerged as a robust democracy, Pakistan sat under military rule for over half its existence. Pakistan was hampered by its comparatively weaker political and economic development at Independence, and by the death of Jinnah the following year and his weak successors.

The army has come to see itself as the defender of Pakistan's honour, but its record is far from glorious. If Pakistan is, as many Pakistanis believe, a failed state, then the army must take a share of the blame. Consuming a disproportionate amount of government expenditure, and wielding significant economic as well as political power, even in times of civilian rule the military has interfered in foreign and domestic policy areas.

There have been four military rulers in Pakistan's history. All were more willing to grasp power than to give it up. The first was General Ayub Khan, a Sandhurst-educated paternalist who believed the illiterate Pakistani masses were not ready for Western-style democracy. After 11 years in power, he was forced out of office by mass protests in 1969. As a heavy drinker and habitual womaniser, his successor, General Mohammed Yahya Khan, was hardly representative of the people he ruled. He offered hope to the nation by organising Pakistan's first-ever national elections. Widely accepted to have been the fairest that have ever occurred in the country, they asserted a Bengali political nationalism unacceptable to Yahya. His response was to send the tanks into East Pakistan in a bloody, yet unsuccessful war. India's military support for Bangladeshi independence led directly to Yahya's downfall, and a brief period of civilian government under Zulfikar Ali Bhutto.

Bhutto was overthrown in 1977 (and later executed) by General Zia ul Haq. If Yahya Khan was a *bon vivant*, Zia was a puritanical prude – and a disaster for Pakistan. Propped up by American and Saudi largesse following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Zia grew the intelligence agency, Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), into one of the most powerful institutions in the country, and an enabler of radical Islamism. On the domestic front, his most damaging legacy was to impose his rigid, intolerant interpretation of Islam on Pakistan.

1948

Mohammed Ali Jinnah dies of cancer. Power effectively passes to his prime minister, Liaquat Khan, who is himself assassinated in 1951. Both events jeopardise Pakistan's early political development.

1958

In response to an economic crisis and associated social unrest, General Ayub Khan declares martial law and takes over in Pakistan's first military coup. 'Basic democracy' is introduced, along with land reforms and economic liberalisation.

1959

Pakistan's capital moves from Karachi to the purpose-built city of Islamabad. The site is chosen for its central and ethnically neutral location, and to counter Karachi's economically distorting effect on the national geography.

He introduced a series of hardline measures such as public floggings of thieves and two-month prison sentences for people seen drinking, eating or smoking during Ramazan (Ramadan). There is no reason to believe that General Zia would ever have given up power voluntarily had he not been killed in 1988, in an air crash that was almost certainly the work of saboteurs.

Pakistan's fourth military (now civilian) ruler, President Pervez Musharraf, is determined to undo Zia ul Haq's legacy. He has publicly opposed the Islamic militants, although he has taken mixed steps to challenge them, sending the army into the autonomous and radicalised Tribal Areas along the Afghan border for the first time but then leaving the controversial madrasah (Islamic college) system largely untouched for fear of provoking violent reactions. Having launched the Kargil war himself in 1999, he has continued to make an exception for Islamists fighting the Indians in Kashmir.

Musharraf has faced a fundamental contradiction throughout his rule. A man who assumed power illegally, and whose rule depends on military force, Musharraf has argued that he alone can restore democracy and economic stability. Yet military rule and democracy have never made good bedfellows in Pakistan. Musharraf's tolerance of press criticism and his progressive ideas gave him early credibility at home. But Islamists and civil society alike have pointed to the vast sums his government has received from the USA as an ally in its 'War on Terror', and the contradictions in spreading democracy by propping up army rule. The generals find it difficult to accept that Pakistan's military governments have been just as bad at economics as the civilian ones.

While President Musharraf has consistently maintained that Pakistan's army is part of the solution to the country's ills, only in 2007 did it become apparent that the army might in fact be part of the problem. An attempt to sack the Chief Justice, Iftikhar Chaudhry, led to a rare rebuke from the courts, which was backed up by mass protests. The legality of Musharraf's re-election as president months later was disputed, and although this led to his final stepping down as army chief to wear civilian clothes, it was accompanied by the imposition of a state of emergency and crackdown on civil society, the media and the independent judiciary. Planned elections for January 2008 were thrown into further turmoil with the assassination of former prime minister Benazir Bhutto, just months after her return from exile.

The army's military record is about as bleak as its political one. From the outset it has been unable to cope with the sheer size of its Indian rival. Faced with an acute military imbalance, Pakistan's first politicians made defence expenditure their top priority. Yet even today Pakistan's army is half the size of India's, with significantly fewer tanks and aircraft. Pakistan has had four major military confrontations with India. The 1971 war resulted

The 'mango theory' of regime change in Pakistan is derived from the theory that Zia's plane was blown up by a bomb hidden in a crate of mangoes.

YesPakistan.com is produced by Pakistani expatriates in North America. Its message boards and articles cover many historical and topical issues.

1965

Skirmishes in Kashmir and the disputed Rann of Kutch in Gujarat (in India) erupt into the Second India-Pakistan War. Pakistan is heavily defeated following the largest tank battles since the WWII.

1966

East Pakistan's fight for political recognition steps up with Bengali leader Mujibur Rahman's publication of his Six Points, demanding economic, political and military autonomy within the framework of Pakistani federalism.

1969

General Yahya Khan takes over from General Ayub Khan. Martial law returns, but in an attempt to disentangle Pakistan's complex constitutional and regional problems, national elections are swiftly promised.

GLACIAL WARFARE

No assessment of the Pakistani armed forces' military performance would be complete without consideration of the most hostile of all its battlegrounds: the Siachen Glacier in Kashmir. Some of the forward posts are located at a bone-chilling 6000m above sea level. Temperatures drop to -50°C and blizzards can exceed 160km/h. The air is so thin that the artillery shells that the two sides lob at each other follow unpredictable trajectories in the violent winds. In some places the opposing troops are just 300m away from each other but the extreme cold claims more lives than any fighting.

However brave the men who fight on Siachen may be, there is no escaping the fact that they are engaged in a futile and outrageously expensive battle. It is estimated that both sides commit over half a million US dollars to the conflict each day. Demilitarisation of Siachen is one of the key sticking points of negotiations over Kashmir, with Pakistan refusing to give up its (literally) high ground.

in Pakistan losing approximately one-fifth of its territory. The other three clashes, in 1947, 1965 and 1999, all took place in Kashmir. On all three occasions Pakistan started fights it was never in a position to win.

DOMESTIC TENSIONS

Domestic politics has undergone many challenges since Pakistani Independence, irrespective of whether the leader of the day arrived through the ballot box or by a coup. Despite the unifying banner of Islam, many of the deepest problems have arisen from different ethnic groups competing for a slice of political and economic power.

Of the five major ethnic groups in Pakistan (Punjabis, Pashtuns, Sindhis, Baloch and Mohajirs), the Punjabis have the upper hand. Theirs is the richest and most populous province and provides most of the army's officer corps. All the other national groups routinely complain of Punjabi dominance.

Apart from the Bengalis, who achieved independence in 1971, the most sustained campaign of ethnic violence has come from the most unlikely source: the nine million Mohajirs. In 1947 they were among Pakistan's keenest advocates. Most headed for the capital, Karachi, to secure official government posts. Their impact on the city was enormous. By 1951 the native Sindhi community had been completely outnumbered; just 14% of the city's population spoke Sindhi, as opposed to 58% who spoke the Mohajirs' language, Urdu.

Gradually, Pakistan's traditional inhabitants reasserted themselves and many Mohajirs were forced out of their government jobs. By the 1980s the Mohajirs' dreams of forging a new Islamic nation had been replaced by bitter disillusionment expressed in increasingly militant politics. The Mohajirs' political party, the Mohajir Quami Movement (MQM), has always

The Siachen Glacier is the highest battlefield on earth. Pakistan and India have fought amid the crevasses and avalanches since 1984.

1970

First-ever national elections are held in East and West Pakistan. Mujibur Rahman receives a huge mandate for eastern autonomy, overwhelmingly rejected by Yahya Khan and the West Pakistan political elite.

1971

East Pakistan declares independence as Bangladesh in response to continued political deadlock. Yahya Khan responds by sending in the army and as India becomes embroiled, fighting spreads to Kashmir: the Third India-Pakistan War.

1972

Simla Agreement between India and Pakistan attempts to normalise relations. The Kashmiri ceasefire line of the previous year is formalised as the 'Line of Control', and still remains the de facto border between the two countries.

denied any involvement in bloodshed, but there is no doubt that the conflict between the Mohajirs and the Sindhis did turn violent. At the height of the troubles in the 1980s and early 1990s, Karachi became a byword for ethnic violence. Pakistan's central government did not make a serious attempt to tackle the MQM until 1995, when the army launched a clampdown. It was a brutal campaign with many extrajudicial killings. The MQM has been forced into relative quiescence ever since, although violence again erupted in 2007 with a murderous attack on a political demonstration, allegedly by MQM supporters.

Preoccupied by their struggle with the Mohajirs, the Sindhis have always been too weak to threaten the Pakistani state and make an effective demand for independence. That is not to say they have entirely given up on the idea. In 1983, for example, armed Sindhi nationalists took control of some small towns and railway lines in Sindh, but the army, using helicopter gunships, was soon able to disperse them.

Baloch nationalists have shown greater determination. Many Baloch never wanted to join Pakistan in the first place. When the British departed, Kalat (the largest of four princely states located in Balochistan) immediately declared its independence. The new Pakistani government used troops to bring Kalat into line and on several occasions since then the army has used force to suppress armed revolts in Balochistan. The most significant began in 1973 after Zulfikar Ali Bhutto dismissed Balochistan's provincial government. The fighting lasted four years and the army had to deploy no fewer than 80,000 troops. Coming so soon after the loss of Bangladesh, it was a battle the Pakistan army had to win, which they did in bloody style. The recent exploitation of Balochistan's gas reserves has prompted a resurgence of Baloch attempts to gain political and economic autonomy, a movement that the Pakistan government has again sought to solve by purely military means.

In the run-up to Independence, Pashtun nationalists opposed the creation of Pakistan even more strongly than the Baloch. Their demand for their own land called Pukhtoonkhwa (sometimes also referred to as Pashtunistan) is not without historical justification. Before the British arrived the Pashtuns lived as one nation. In 1893 the British divided the Pashtuns by drawing the Durand Line, which today constitutes the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan.

The strength of Pashtun nationalism has diminished in large part because of the Pashtuns' relatively strong representation in Pakistan's central institutions. While the Tribal Areas have been left to stagnate (and become a haven for violent Islamism), the Pashtuns have been particularly active migrants within Pakistan. The establishment of a large Pashtun community in Karachi, for example, means many Pashtun families have a direct interest in the stability and continued existence of the Pakistani state. Despite having had the strongest national movement in 1947, the Pashtuns have never presented a

Afghanistan's dispute over the Durand Line meant it was the only country to vote against Pakistan's accession to the UN in 1947.

1977

Following the re-election of Bhutto, General Zia ul Haq overthrows the government in a coup, suspending the constitution. A year later, Bhutto is tried for conspiracy to murder and, following a disputed verdict, is hanged.

1979

Soviet army invades Afghanistan, heralding 10 years of foreign largesse to Zia, which he uses to turn Pakistan towards radical Islamist politics. Throughout this time, Pakistan becomes host to millions of Afghan refugees.

1988

General Zia is killed in a plane crash. No cause has ever been revealed, ushering in a proliferation of conspiracy theories. New prime minister Benazir Bhutto becomes the first woman to lead a modern Muslim country.

THE BOMB

In May 1998 in Balochistan's Chagai Hills, a series of nuclear tests confirmed Pakistan's membership of the world's most exclusive and dangerous club – countries with nuclear weapons. It was an extraordinary achievement for a poverty-stricken country in which around half the population is illiterate.

Pakistan had been obsessing about the bomb since the mid-1960s, when Zulfikar Ali Bhutto had declared: 'If India builds the bomb, we will eat grass or leaves; even go hungry, but we will get one of our own.' Bhutto coined the phrase 'Islamic Bomb' to capture the idea, reflecting his aspiration that his nuclear weaponry would be the pride of the Muslim world. India's first nuclear test in 1974 sparked the race in earnest, and there were national celebrations when Pakistan was finally able to match its neighbour and rival: monuments in the shape of the Chagai Hills and Shaheen-II missile are features of most major cities. International criticism was sharp, however, and brought into even keener relief when the two countries stood on the brink of war over Kashmir in 1999.

The father of Pakistan's bomb is the nuclear scientist AQ Khan, operating from the Kahuta plant near Islamabad with the aid of Chinese expertise. There was great alarm when it was revealed in 2004 that he had been the centre of a nuclear proliferation network, passing weapons technology to Libya, North Korea and Iran, with tacit government agreement. Pakistan's reaction to international concern was merely muted, placing AQ Khan under house arrest, but quietly lifting his restrictions when the furor had died down. Despite international pressure, Pakistan has refused the International Atomic Energy Agency access to Khan to question him on proliferation.

significant challenge to Pakistan's central institutions. The reason is clear: to a greater extent than the Sindhis, the Baloch and the Mohajirs, the Pashtuns have been given a share in the country.

Pakistan: Eye of the Storm
by BBC journalist Owen
Bennett Jones is an
excellent way of bringing
yourself up to speed on
the modern Pakistani
political scene.

THE BIG FAMILIES

Power and wealth in Pakistan have always been highly concentrated. In 1959, 222 individuals were making use of two-thirds of the total credit in the Pakistani banking system. In the 1970s just 22 families owned 66% of the country's industrial assets, 70% of insurance and 80% of banking. Pakistan's financial and political dynasties are intertwined, comprising a political elite that has run the country in tandem with (or alternating with) the military since Independence.

In recent years two families have dominated Pakistani politics: the Bhuttos, who lead the Pakistan People's Party (PPP); and the Sharifs, who lead the Muslim League (PML). The Bhuttos, who come from rural Sindh, represent old money and feudalism. The Sharifs, by contrast, are industrialists who have made new money – and are almost certainly now the richest family in the country. At various stages of his meteoric career, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was president, chief martial law administrator, and prime minister of Pakistan. A

1989

After Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, Pakistan continues to fund and support Islamist mujaheddin. In Kashmir, support for secular Kashmiri nationalist groups is dropped in favour of Islamist resistance in Indian-occupied Kashmir.

1996

The Pakistan-sponsored Taliban militia capture Kabul. Following the Taliban conquest of northern Afghanistan a year later, Pakistan becomes the first of only four countries to recognise them as forming a legitimate government.

1998

Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's government carries out nuclear test explosions in Balochistan in response to India's newly declared nuclear programme. The USA imposes limited economic sanctions on both sides in response.

charismatic populist with socialist leanings, he advocated state control of the economy and made an enemy of the Sharifs by nationalising their factories.

Nawaz Sharif's father, Mohammed Sharif, realised that to protect his business interests he would need political as well as financial muscle. After Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was hanged by General Zia, he placed his youngest son Nawaz in the Zia administration. In June 1979 the Sharifs were rewarded for their services to the military regime by having their company denationalised. From that moment the Sharif family fortunes soared.

But the Bhuttos made a comeback. After Zia's death, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's daughter, Benazir, returned from exile and was elected prime minister. The two families slugged it out for the next 10 years, with Nawaz and Benazir both having two terms as prime minister.

The Sharifs and the Bhuttos have rock-solid political bases. The Sharifs are based in Raiwind, just outside Lahore. You may be able to talk your way into their sumptuous estate, complete with private zoo, which has been unoccupied ever since President Musharraf forced the Sharifs into exile. And you will certainly find that many people in the area express blind faith in, and undying admiration for, Nawaz Sharif and all his relatives. Similarly if you visit Larkana in Sindh (it is near Moenjodaro and also has a private zoo), you will find people referring to Benazir Bhutto as if she had been a queen. These unswervingly loyal political heartlands provided both politicians with a springboard for their national ambitions. When over half the electorate cannot read, it is a huge advantage to come from a family that people have heard of.

Pakistan's failure to break the power of the big families has held back the country's development. In many parts of Pakistan the local landowner (often referred to as a 'feudal'), tribal chief or religious leader always wins any election. As a result, the National Assembly and Senate in Islamabad are, for the most part, filled with people whose main interest is to hang on to their wealth and privileges. The weakness of the state institutions means many Pakistani citizens are forced to rely on their local leaders to provide basic services. The courts are so slow and unreliable that many Pakistanis expect their local leader to resolve legal disputes. Having heard both sides of an argument the local bigwig will hand down summary justice on the spot. Tribal chiefs often order that people they find guilty of some misdemeanour be punished with a beating and some even have private prisons.

At the close of 2007, while the big families were as active as ever, their political futures were muddy. Both Benazir Bhutto and Nawaf Sharif returned from exile (despite both having outstanding corruption charges against them) to re-establish their political primacy, a gamble that ended in disaster with Benazir Bhutto's assassination on 27 December in Rawalpindi days after the Eid al-Adha holiday. Her son was quickly appointed her political successor, but the repercussions her murder would produce remained unclear.

1999

General Pervez Musharraf launches the Kargil war in Kashmir. With worries of nuclear escalation, Pakistan is forced to beat a retreat. When Nawaz Sharif attempts to sack Musharraf, the general overthrows him in a coup.

2001

After 9/11, Pakistan is forced to drop its support of the Taliban and begins to receive vast amounts of American aid as a result. Having declared himself president, Musharraf further consolidates his political power base.

2002

A widely boycotted referendum gives Musharraf five more years in power. Elections produce political deadlock, with Musharraf eventually gaining the support of Islamist parties, which retrospectively legitimise his 1999 coup the following year.

PAKISTAN ON THE WORLD STAGE

Pakistan has played a surprisingly important role on the world stage since Independence. Its strategic location explains why, squeezed between the powerhouse of India, and Afghanistan, long an arena for competing empires to play out their rivalries. Foreign policy has been driven by these neighbours. Knowing its relative weakness compared to Delhi, Islamabad has continually pursued the idea of 'strategic depth' to bolster its position, seeking to tie down the Indians in Kashmir while encouraging the formation of a pro-Pakistani government in Kabul to secure its restive Pashtun borderlands.

When the Soviets invaded Afghanistan in 1979, the Durand Line became an active Cold War frontline. The Americans were determined to force the Soviets out and Pakistan became their base of operations. Billions of American dollars were spent supporting the mujaheddin (Islamic fighters) who were prepared to enter Soviet-occupied Afghanistan and fight.

The Pakistani leader at the time, General Zia ul Haq, couldn't believe his luck and proceeded to skim off vast amounts of the American money. Mujaheddin who saw the anti-Soviet war as a largely nationalist struggle were sidelined by Zia in favour of the most radical Islamist factions. These continued to be supported following the Soviet withdrawal in 1989 in the hope that they would form a new Afghan government. When this gambit failed, the Pakistanis acted as midwives to the new Taliban militia, helping them take eventual control of the country. At the same time, other radicals were encouraged to take the fight to Kashmir.

Because it gave shelter to Osama bin Laden, the Taliban was removed from power by the Americans after 11 September 2001. In the process, the Pakistanis once again were in a position to benefit because the Americans now wanted to pay Pakistan to help destroy the very forces they had together created. Since then, relations between Islamabad and the newly democratic Kabul government have been rocky to say the least, with Pakistan again voicing support for negotiations with the regrouped (and rearmed) Taliban.

Pakistan has found itself in a tricky position. On the one hand it wants to encourage Islamic militancy so that there are enough young fighters to keep the Kashmiri struggle alive. On the other hand, it is trying to shut the militants down so as to prevent the possibility of an Islamic revolution at home and also to please the West and keep the aid dollars flowing in. Given the increased international focus on Islamic extremism it is unclear how long Pakistan will be able to sustain what has become a very difficult balancing act.

After 11 September 2001, *The Taliban* by Ahmed Rashid became an unlikely bestseller. It lifts the lid on radical Islamism, oil pipeline politics and Pakistan's role in regional power games.

Pakistan is the third-biggest recipient of US military aid after Israel and Egypt.

2006

Following army campaigns against Islamists in the tribal areas of Waziristan, the Pakistani army signs a controversial peace deal that sees it cede local control to pro-Taliban militants.

2007

From July to October, Islamist violence rocks Pakistan, with bloodshed ending the standoff against the radical students of Islamabad's Red Mosque. Bhutto's return from exile is targeted by suicide bombers.

2007

In November, Musharraf declares a state of emergency, and cracks down on civil society and political opposition. He finally steps down as army chief and elections are announced for early 2008. Benazir Bhutto is assassinated on 27 December.

The Culture

The concept of Pakistani culture is a relatively new one, born with the creation of the country in August 1947. But the culture itself dates back centuries, through the ancient Indus Valley civilisation, the presence of Hindu empires, the introduction of Islam and a series of Muslim empires (including the Mughal empire), and the colonial period. Since Independence, Pakistan's ethnic diversity, the modernisation process, the re-emergence of Islamic fundamentalism and the country's gradual integration into global society have combined to create a rich and diverse culture.

THE NATIONAL PSYCHE

Around 96% of Pakistan's population is Muslim, and Islam permeates the entire country, from the regular sound of the call to prayer to the open hospitality shown to guests. The country works on short hours during the fasting month of Ramazan (Ramadan), when the *iftar* (breaking of the fast at sunset) becomes the day's main social event. Religious festivals such as Eid-ul-Fitr and Eid-ul-Azha are celebrated as national holidays, and shops can remain closed for days afterwards. Pakistanis are known for their hospitality. In line with Islamic teachings, guests are considered an expression of God's blessing, and even those in the poorest strata of society go out of their way to greet and serve strangers. This openness to guests, and the sense that Pakistanis are genuinely pleased to see you, sometimes comes as something of a surprise to foreign visitors, who often arrive full of headlines about Islamists and the 'War on Terror'.

If Islam was the driving force behind Pakistan's creation, it has also helped forge its nationalist character. On Independence Day (14 August), Pakistan Day (23 March) and Defence of Pakistan Day (6 September), newspapers, TV and radio blare with references to Pakistan's greatness, while national flags are flown and buildings decorated. Such nationalism is in part defined by Pakistan's search for security amid its fraught relationship with India. The founding belief of a secure homeland for Muslims finds repeated echoes in the touchstone issue of Kashmir, as well as bloody involvements with Afghanistan and Bangladesh.

The repeated involvement of the military in politics (often driven by these same issues) has made Pakistanis both very politically aware as well as being quite cynical about the ruling political classes. As the army has ruled Pakistan for more than half the country's existence, elections, when held, are a cause for celebration. The downfall of a regime is similarly marked joyfully, tinged with the bitter hope that next time things might be a little better for the ordinary man and woman, *in sha' Allah* (if God wills it).

LIFESTYLE

The family is the central unit of daily life in Pakistan. Men are considered the heads of the family unit, and in the vast majority of cases are the breadwinners. With working life dominated by men, the public sphere is overwhelmingly masculine. In contrast, private family life is often dominated by women, who bring up the children and run the household. Traditionally, extended families have been the norm with several generations living together, but with the drift towards urbanisation in full swing in Pakistan, nuclear families are becoming ever more common.

Marriages are typically arranged, and are seen as much as the joining of two families as two individuals. Families meet and investigate a number of

If you find yourself in a sticky situation, use the word '*mehman*' (pronounced may-marn), which translates as 'guest'. It can have a very positive effect on locals, especially if you're experiencing a communication barrier.

prospective spouses for their children with a view to selecting the best and most appropriate person. Love marriages, while increasingly acceptable among middle classes, are often seen as scandalous among more traditional families, where the 'shame and honour' nature of society seeks to maintain the 'purity' of the family's women.

Dowry is an important part of many Pakistani marriages. Parents of the bride give her money or assets such as jewellery and household goods to take into the new family. The often high cost of dowries is a reason frequently cited for delaying marriage, as it can easily become a debt trap for lower income groups. The cost of dowry is also a key factor in the popularity of marriages between first cousins, as it keeps wealth within the family.

Pakistan's diverse Islamic traditions lead to different interpretations of customs, which lead to variations in the way families live and operate. In the more orthodox and conservative traditions (tribalised Pashtuns for example), women may be forbidden from working outside the family home or even being seen by men they are not related to. In public, a burka (a long gown covering the face and shoulders) may be worn. Education is not seen as a priority for such women, whose key responsibility is raising children.

At the other end of the spectrum are families that subscribe to a more moderate, progressive interpretation of Islam. Women in such families do not observe purdah (the custom among some Muslims of keeping women in seclusion), and there is little or no emphasis on following the traditional Islamic dress code. Once educated, they work in areas of their choice. These families may, however, still hold some traditional views about women and family life; having educated their daughter, they may still insist that she marries a person of the family's choosing. Most Pakistani families fall somewhere between these positions.

Beyond the family, society frequently operates on the level of clans (*biradaris* for Punjabis, or Pashtun *khels*). Clans are hierarchical structures consisting of chiefs and members; chiefs take care of the needs of their group, including employment, and offer mediation and advice, receiving loyalty and subservience in return. During elections, tribal chiefs frequently decide who to vote for and the members of the tribe do so *en bloc* for the selected candidate. When there are feuds between tribal chiefs, members of each tribe are expected to side with their respective leader. Clans are either a subset of a tribe or an extended blood lineage group that traces its history to some common origin.

Unlike in India, there is not such a clearly defined caste system in Pakistan. Castes are associated with professions. People are classified, for example, as traders, barbers and shoemakers, but membership of a caste does not relegate someone to a specific status for life.

These traditional structures are changing, with clan ties often weakening as many families move away from their old rural homes towards the cities. Further challenges face different parts of society. In the Pashtun Tribal Areas, increased radicalisation by Islamists threatens traditional hierarchies by force of arms, while in Punjab the *biradaris* have become more significant on the political stage in lobbying for their communities.

POPULATION

Home to an estimated 164 million people, Pakistan is the sixth most populous country in the world. It's a rapidly growing and young nation, having more than quintupled its population since Independence in 1947. Around half of all Pakistanis live in fertile Punjab, while just 5% live in vast Balochistan (over 40% of the country's area). Agriculture, still the backbone of the economy, accounts for such an uneven spread, although as elsewhere in the world,

Arranged marriages have met the online world with matrimonial websites such as www.shadi.com serving Pakistan's middle-class singles.

While primary education is free in Pakistan, the cost of textbooks can put school out of reach for the poorest Pakistanis, helping fuel the boom in madrasahs (Islamic colleges), most of which offer financial support to pupils.

DOS & DON'TS Sarina Singh

Pakistanis are known for their hospitality towards visitors, and your appreciation will be registered if you respect local customs and sensibilities. While you're not expected to get everything 'right', common sense and courtesy will get you a long way. If you're unsure of how to act in certain settings (eg mosques), ask someone and/or watch what the locals do. Refrain from public displays of affection as this is not condoned by society and is likely to cause offence. You may see Pakistani men publicly holding hands with each other – this is an accepted expression of nonsexual friendship.

Dress Matters

The way in which you dress is going to have a profound impact on how you are perceived by locals. Revealing as little flesh as possible is the way to go for both women *and* men. Long, loose, nonrevealing garments should be worn by both sexes. One recommended option for both men and women is the *shalwar kameez* (traditional tunic-and-trouser combination), which can be easily (and cheaply) tailormade or bought at local markets. Women should always have a scarf handy to cover their head and chest when appropriate (for comprehensive information about what women should wear see p381). Needless to say, public nudity is completely taboo, and swimwear is only acceptable at public or hotel swimming pools. Women should seek advice from relevant regional tourist offices about appropriate swimwear at beaches; this could range from knee-length shorts and T-shirts to a *shalwar kameez*.

Religious Etiquette

Places of worship are of enormous spiritual significance and visitors should show respect by dressing and acting appropriately. Some places may not permit foreigners or women to enter (if you're unsure, ask someone). Remove your shoes before entering (don't forget to tip the shoeminder Rs 3 to 5 when retrieving them) and, once on site, never step over any part of someone's body or walk right in front of someone praying.

Always make it a point to be respectfully dressed when visiting a place of worship – foreign men have caused offence in the past by failing to do so. The key is for men to not wear revealing clothes such as shorts or singlet tops, or dirty or ripped clothing. Women must cover their heads at *all* mosques and gurdwaras (Sikh temples); men usually have to only cover their heads at gurdwaras.

Loud and intrusive behaviour is not on and neither are displays of affection or kidding around. Don't smoke – note that tobacco of any kind is prohibited at gurdwaras in Pakistan – and be sure to observe any photography restrictions (ask somebody if you're unsure).

Eating & Visiting Etiquette

It's considered polite to offer and accept food and drink with the right hand, and to use this hand for eating and other social acts such as shaking hands. This is because the left hand is used for less appetising actions such as removing dirty shoes etc.

If you're lucky enough to be invited to someone's home, dress respectfully and consider taking a gift such as a bunch of flowers, box of sweets or, if possible, a souvenir from your home country. Unless specifically asked not to, always remove your shoes when entering a private house, and wait for your host to escort you inside. If you're unsure of protocols such as how to address household members, simply ask your host. Male visitors are usually restricted to a particular area of the house (eg the lounge), but women may be taken to the 'heart' of the home to join female family members, enabling them to see an aspect of daily life that few males are privy to.

urbanisation accounts for major population movement. Thirty years ago over two-thirds of people lived in rural areas compared to the cities, a proportion that has now completely reversed. Although all cities have grown, Karachi in particular continues to suck in migrants in vast numbers, its population of 14 million growing by nearly 5% a year.

On current growth rates, Pakistan's population is expected to top 217 million by 2020.

Owing to its position on old trade and invasion routes between India, Central Asia and the Middle East, Pakistan is a kaleidoscope of peoples and languages. The major groups are Punjabis, Pashtuns, Sindhis, Mohajirs and Baloch. Other groups worth noting are the Brahui, Kashmiris, Kalasha and the small nationalities that make up the mountainous patchwork of the Northern Areas, such as the Balti, Wakhi, Gujar and Burusho. Afghan refugees make up a significant minority.

Melding such diverse groups into one people has proved a major challenge for independent Pakistan. The official national language of Urdu is the mother tongue for less than one in 10 Pakistanis, and despite the unifying banner of Islam, ethnic nationalism plays its role in contemporary politics.

Punjabis

The Punjabis are the biggest ethnic group in Pakistan, and have dominated Pakistan's bureaucracy and military since Independence. Punjabis have historically identified themselves in terms of their *qaum* – a clan or tribal affiliation based on descent and occupation, like caste but without the religious overtones – and still do, particularly in rural areas. Many tribes traditionally followed a single occupation, which gave the *qaum* its name and its general position in society. The concept of *qaum* is inextricably linked to the big landowning families that hold great sway in Punjab.

Punjabi tradition makes much of the idea of reciprocity, at least on the male side. A Punjabi's brother is his friend, and his friend is his brother, and in principle all share access to one another's resources (eg money or connections), resulting in a strong sense of community based on kinship and communal needs.

Pashtuns

Pakistan's second-largest ethnic group are the Pashtuns, who live in North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) and northern Balochistan, as well as most of eastern and southern Afghanistan. Some Pashtuns claim descent from the lost tribes of Israel. Traditionally conservative, with a strict tribal structure and moral code of Pashtunwali (see p190), the Pashtuns are celebrated for their martial heritage. The British Raj and Pakistani army alike have seen fit to swell their ranks with Pashtun fighters.

Pashtuns in NWFP belong to around two dozen tribes and, within these, to *khel* (clans). Clan membership is related to land ownership; one who loses his land is no longer treated as a full member of the community. *Maliks* (tribal chiefs) arise by virtue of age and wisdom, backed up by a *jirga* (council) of elders.

The Tribal Areas are the Pashtuns' heartland, and are the largest autonomous tribal area in the world. Underdeveloped and wary of government control, Pashtuns here look less towards Islamabad than their kin across the Afghan border. Repeated governments have sought to diffuse this ethnic nationalism (and the concept of 'Pashtunistan' often touted by Afghan Pashtuns) by encouraging Pashtun Islamism instead.

Baloch

The Baloch (or Baluch) of southeastern Pakistan are a mix of nomads and settled farmers. Tribal structure is very important in Baloch society, with a *hakim* (leader) of a family holding great sway over his 'court' of herders, farmers and tenant farmers. Traditionally *hakims* offered booty or property rights in return for support in battle; nowadays various favours are traded for votes. The hard, isolated nature of Balochistan has meant that Balochis have always been a proudly independent people – a fact that the government

According to the 1998 census, 43.4% of the total population is below the age of 15 years, a picture similar to other developing states with high population growth.

Around 80% of Afghan refugees in Pakistan are Pashtun.

has addressed by keeping them largely marginalised from Pakistani society. A Baloch nationalist uprising in the 1970s was brutally suppressed by the army, and recent grievances over access to Balochistan's gas wealth have followed the same pattern.

Baloch subscribe to a very strong code of behaviour with emphasis on protection for the one seeking it, honour and hospitality. They are overwhelmingly Sunni, although a tiny sect of Zikri Baloch believe in a Messiah whose teachings supersede those of Prophet Mohammed. They are considered heretics by some Sunni and Shiite Muslims and have suffered intermittent persecution.

Brahui

Found largely in central Balochistan, the Brahui may be the last major community descended from the Indus Valley civilisation, and are one of the sub-continent's most ancient peoples. Their language is believed to be a mixture of Dravidian – the forerunner of Tamil, Malayalam and other languages of South India and Sri Lanka – and an unknown new tongue.

They have traditionally been nomadic herders, with lands cultivated by tenant farmers, although they have become more settled in recent years. After decades of relative stagnation, Brahui language and culture are seeing a revival.

Sindhis

This group has perhaps the most thoroughly mixed ethnic origins of all groups in Pakistan. Sindhis identify strongly with their culture, which survives mainly in rural areas of Sindh province and is characterised by originality in sports (at *melas* – fairs – and *malakhanas* – wrestling festivals), the arts (pottery and glazed tiles, silver jewellery, textiles and embroidery), music (at births, marriages and seasonal celebrations) and folklore.

Most of Sindh's educated middle class before Partition were Hindus, and their mass departure in 1947 had a traumatic effect on Sindhis' collective self-image. Present-day Sindhis tend to see themselves as under-represented in public life, although the frequently ruling Bhutto family are Sindhi. Sindhi language has been used by the locals for administrative purposes for decades, and has a rich literary tradition.

Mohajirs

After Partition about seven million Mohajirs – an ethnically diverse group of Muslim, Urdu-speaking immigrants (*mohajir* means refugee) – moved to Pakistan, mostly to Sindh. Mohajirs now outnumber Sindhis in their own province, and make up two-thirds of Karachi's population. For a long time they dominated Pakistan's administrative structures, especially while Karachi was the capital of the country. However, this changed with the building of Islamabad, leading to resentment and a cycle of anger and violence. Mohajirs founded the Mohajir Quami Mahaz (MQM; Refugee People's Movement), which has become Sindh's key political player, helped in part by the sympathies of Pervez Musharraf (Pakistan's fourth military ruler) – himself a Mohajir.

Kalasha

The non-Muslim Kalasha live a peaceful but marginal existence in three valleys southwest of Chitral town in NWFP. Linguists think they're descendants of Indo-Aryans who overran the region in the 2nd millennium BC, although Kalasha founding legends point to the troops of Alexander the Great as their ancestors – a fact they claim is borne out by their European features and tradition of wine-making. Muslims called them *kafirs* (nonbelievers) and their

The majority of British Pakistanis trace their families to the Mirpur region of Azad Kashmir.

The mammoth task of surveying Pakistan's population is next due in the 2008 census.

land Kafiristan. By the 19th century the Kalasha, perhaps 50,000 strong, had been pushed into the higher valleys of the southern Hindukush.

British control came as a relief from the worst treatment by Chitralis, who considered the Kalasha lowly and once sold many into slavery. But discrimination and Islamic pressure continue, and most prefer spartan agrarian lives to development from outside. For more about the Kalasha see p228.

For more on the peoples of the Karakoram Highway, see p239.

Afghan Refugees

The Soviet invasion and occupation of Afghanistan in the 1980s resulted in an influx into Pakistan of over three million Afghan refugees – three quarters of them women and children. Two-thirds settled in NWFP, and a quarter in Balochistan, either in refugee camps or in cities. Pakistanis and their government initially responded with traditional Muslim hospitality, but their collective generosity was soon worn thin by the resulting inflation, competition for jobs and proliferation of weapons.

A new generation of Afghan refugees has now grown up in Pakistan. Some of them have managed to get Pakistani identity cards and become integrated into the mainstream, although most live in difficult conditions and face regular discrimination and a precarious legal status. Since the fall of the Taliban many have returned to Afghanistan with the assistance of the UN High Commission for Refugees, but the continued instability in that country, and the roots that many Afghans have put down over two decades, have meant that around two million remain in Pakistan – the second largest refugee population in the world.

The term '*Islam*' means 'surrender' and believers undertake to surrender to the will of Allah (God). The will of Allah is revealed in the Holy Quran.

RELIGION

Islam is the main religion of Pakistan, and driving force behind its creation during Partition in 1947. Less than 4% of Pakistanis follow other faiths, split roughly evenly between Christianity and Hinduism, with a small number of Sikhs and others.

Sunnis & Shiites

Both Islam's major branches are reflected in Pakistan's population, with three-quarters following the Sunni path. Shiites make up the remaining quarter, and include a significant minority who are also Ismaili (found mainly in the mountainous north).

These two main branches of Islam developed out of a division over the succession of rulers after Prophet Mohammed's death in 632 AD. They have evolved into two distinct branches with their own theological outlooks. Sunnis rely upon the Quran and Sunnah (practices of Prophet Mohammed) as the main source of belief, whereas Shiites believe in the idea of the imam (religious leader) who continues to unfold the true meaning of the Quran and provides guidance in daily affairs. Both branches are united in their following of the same Five Pillars of Islam: *shahadah*, or declaration of faith ('There is no God but Allah and Mohammed is his prophet'); *salat* (five times a day); *zakat* (making a charitable donation); fasting during the holy month of Ramazan; and the *haj* (pilgrimage to Mecca), which every Muslim aspires to do at least once in their lifetime.

Shiites and Sunnis coexisted peacefully in Pakistan until the 1980s, when countries such as Iran and Saudi Arabia began to support local religious groups. Religiously motivated violence increased and groups from the two main sects began to identify the other as *kafir* (nonbeliever). There have been attacks on each other's mosques and killings of public figures, while Sunni radicals have led frequent attacks on the Christian minority.

Pakistan's Northern Areas are dominated by Ismaili Muslims, who follow a branch of Shiite Islam that reveres the Aga Kahn as their spiritual leader.

Sufism

Existing parallel to mainstream Islam, Sufism (Islamic mysticism) adheres to the main principles of the religion but emphasises a need to understand the real essence of Islam and not be restricted to formal manifestations of the religion. Sufism was the main avenue through which Islam spread throughout the Indian subcontinent and although radical Islam tends to grab the headlines, the tolerance of Sufism remains far closer to the traditions of many Pakistanis.

Sufism finds its expression in the continued belief in the role of *pirs* (religious teachers) and membership of *tariqas* (Sufi orders). *Pirs* are the closest thing that Islam gets to the concept of a saint, something that more orthodox Muslims find suspiciously close to idolatry. Nevertheless, *urs* (the death anniversaries of *pirs*) are widely attended by ordinary people. Attending a Sufi shrine is a fascinating insight into Pakistani Islam. Prayers are offered to the *pir* for intercession on a particular matter (the conception of a child for example), often accompanied by the eating of a pinch of salt or earth from the grave. Having made their prayers, attendees then turn away from the grave to pray towards Mecca in the usual manner.

Sufi rituals are often accompanied by music, trancelike rhythms where lines from the Holy Quran and the many names of Allah are recited, aiming to induce an ecstatic feeling whereby the participant's heart opens directly to the divine. The Shrine of Baba Shah Jamal in Lahore (p104) is the best place to see such amazing spiritual activity.

Pakistan & Radical Islam

Since Independence, when Pakistan was created out of British India as a state for Muslims, there have been differences of opinion about the place Islam should occupy in determining the nature of the state. Orthodox groups have insisted the state be run along the lines of Islamic law (sharia), while moderates have argued for a state where Muslims and non-Muslims can live together in a society reflecting but not prescribing an Islamic ethos – an ideal that Mohammed Ali Jinnah (a universally revered figure in Pakistan) originally envisaged. For more than three decades after Independence, the moderates were dominant in Pakistan.

When General Zia ul Haq seized power in a coup in 1977, Pakistan took a lurch towards radicalism from which it is still suffering the aftereffects. For Zia, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan was a gift that enabled him to enact his Islamist agenda. Hosting several million Afghan refugees, Pakistan had money flooding in from the USA and Saudi Arabia to support the mujaheddin, and Zia insisted on controlling the purse strings. His coffers bursting, madrasahs (religious schools) boomed, invariably teaching only the most radical and least tolerant interpretations of Islam, such as Wahhabism from Saudi Arabia and its subcontinental relation, Deobandism. Domestic laws were brought closer in line with sharia law, with the introduction of the Hudood Ordinance of 1984 that introduced 'traditional' punishments for crimes such as drinking, theft and adultery (typically enacted against women, whose testimony was deemed worth a quarter that of man).

The Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1989 did not mark the end of the madrasahs: Pakistan's intelligence agencies continued for a decade to sponsor and train some of the madrasah students as a means of raising groups to aid in the fight for Kashmir, as well as enabling the rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan. Such official policy of supporting jihad (holy war) has had unpredictable consequences for successive governments, particularly following the arrival of the USA in the region following 9/11. Radicals have pushed for Pakistan to become a 'pure' Islamic state, and groups such as

Many Pakistani names are taken from the Quran and have biblical equivalents, such as Suleiman (Solomon), Yusuf (Joseph), Musa (Moses), Isa (Jesus), Daud (David) and Adam.

Lashkar-e-Toiba, Jaish Mohammed and Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, and Al-Qaeda sympathisers, have moved to targeting government personnel, as well as the minority Shiite population. The Tribal Areas along the Afghan border have become increasingly radicalised and violent. Many clerics in such areas argue vocally that true Muslims have a duty to wage jihad against the USA, India and Israel, as well as the corrupt and 'un-Islamic' regime in Islamabad. Moderate Muslims oppose such ideas and argue that struggle against one's self is a higher form of jihad that must take precedence over militant struggle. They oppose violence in the name of Islam within or outside Pakistan.

President Musharraf has been outwardly active in promoting a moderate understanding of Islam. He has used his stand, including dropping support for the Taliban and sending the army into the Tribal Areas, to prove his legitimacy on the world stage, all the while allowing madrasahs to flourish and relying on Islamic parties in parliament for support. In the summer of 2007, the standoff at the Red Mosque that resulted in the deaths of dozens of militants proved a further trigger to the unstable situation, unleashing a wave of suicide bombers in the capital and NWFP. Pakistan's relationship with Islam looks set to continue along an unpredictable and increasingly bloody path.

WOMEN IN PAKISTAN

The legal system of Pakistan formally acknowledges the equal rights that women hold under Islam: women can vote, contest elections, own property and make their own choices as citizens. But in reality, the position of many women is that of second-class citizen. For most families, a boy baby is preferable to a girl, and boys often receive preferential treatment. Access to education is limited for girls and women: women's literacy is about half that of men's, a number that plummets in the most traditional areas of NWFP or Punjab. Government attempts to improve things are slow, although women now account for around one-third of all university graduates.

The legal marriage age is 16, but marriages following puberty are not uncommon in rural areas. The practice of *watta satta* (where siblings of one family are married off to the siblings of another family) sees women exchanged as wives between two families. Once married, women are expected to follow the wishes of the husband and his family (notably her mother-in-law). Domestic violence (both physical and psychological) is common; Human Rights Watch estimated in 1999 that the domestic violence rate was as high as 90%.

Women are largely looked upon as property and symbols of a family's honour, while men are the custodians of this honour. This belief has led to the practice of honour killings, where a man kills a woman in the family because he feels that his honour has been compromised – the cause could be anything from her smiling at another man to having an illicit relationship. Women may be given as brides to restore a family's honour. In the most extreme cases, local families have ordered the public raping of a woman as punishment against a family. While very rare, such events have brought widespread public and political condemnation, although convictions against perpetrators are often slow to follow.

Against this backdrop, it would be wrong to see women as passive players. Pakistani women have responded to discrimination by claiming their rights as human beings, citing both Islamic law and international protocols such as the UN Convention for Elimination of Discrimination against Women.

The Women's Action Forum (WAF) in Pakistan played a major role in campaigning against the Hudood Ordinance passed by General Zia ul Haq in 1984, which saw women accused and jailed for years on mere accusation of adultery by a former husband or a suspicious relative. Women who be-

'Pakistani women have responded to discrimination by claiming their rights as human beings, citing both Islamic law and international protocols'

EXTRAORDINARY PAKISTANI WOMEN

Media reports of discrimination against women in Pakistan may create an image to the outside world of Pakistani women always being the victims, but this is not necessarily the reality. A strong tradition of activism exists in the subcontinent, where women like Nur Jahan and Razia Sultana played a vital role in running empires, leading campaigns and encouraging architectural innovations in the Islamic period.

The tradition has continued in Pakistan with women who question norms and make their mark by changing trends; women such as Princess Abida Sultaan, the Princess of Bhopal (India). After Independence she opted to live in Pakistan, and arrived with only one suitcase. She represented Pakistan at the UN General Assembly in the early 1950s and was appointed as the Pakistani ambassador to Brazil. She entered politics in the 1960s and remained active for over two decades. Besides this, she was an excellent sportswoman (with the dubious distinction of killing over 70 tigers) and a licensed pilot. At the same time she was very religious, and a committed mother.

Begum Sarfraz Iqbal (1939–2003) is a more recent example of an activist. Born into an elite family, she wanted to be a doctor. Instead she married at an early age and brought up four children, but she also played an active part in the wider society. She patronized art and culture and her home became an 'inn for Urdu literary personalities'. Challenging the norm that a woman cannot have male friends outside her immediate family, she chronicled her close friendship with Urdu poet Faiz Ahmed Faiz in her book *Daman-e-Yusuf*. Her newspaper columns questioned social stagnation, political repression, Islamic fundamentalism and inequality. She actively promoted the right to education for the poor, especially girls. She has been hailed as a model modern Pakistani Muslim woman.

came pregnant as a result of rape were meted out the same treatment on the grounds that their pregnancy was evidence of them exceeding the religious limits of modesty. The WAF continues to work for women's rights.

Islamic feminists refer to Islamic practices and the rights of women enshrined in the Quran and Prophetic practices as a way of forcing progress, noting both the instruction to equally educate both sexes, and that the Prophet Mohammed's wife was a notable businesswoman of her day. Between these two extremes are a number of women's groups that combine secular and Islamic ideas to target discrimination.

The Pakistani government has an ambivalent attitude towards women's rights. In 1988 Benazir Bhutto notably became the first Muslim female prime minister in the world, providing a great beacon of inspiration. Even she, however, shrunk from repealing Zia's Hudood Ordinance, despite pressure from women's groups. Attempts to bring in legislation against honour killings has similarly foundered on indifference (or worse) from parliament, despite President Musharraf announcing his support, and at the same time reserving more seats for women in parliament.

The position of women in Pakistan often relies very much on where you're standing – whether that's looking in vain for women on the streets in the small towns of NWFP, or passing the fashionable women of Karachi and Lahore.

ECONOMY

Compared to the Indian economic powerhouse across the border, Pakistan's economy appears sluggish, although the economic outlook is slowly improving. When Musharraf seized power, the nation was in a truly parlous financial state and on the verge of defaulting on loans to international creditors. Stabilising Pakistan's economy could be said to be one of the key achievements of Musharraf's military regime. The process hasn't been without controversy. Musharraf's reliance on huge amounts of aid and loans

New direct trade links with India began in late 2007, with the hope of providing a spur to the Pakistani economy.

from the USA for being a public partner in the 'War on Terror' have laid him open to great unpopularity at home, especially as the price of staples like flour, oil and rice have crept ever upwards.

With Pakistan's rapidly growing population, the economy would have to perform miracles just to stand still in terms of job creation. Although official unemployment stands at around 6.5%, the figure masks the large numbers who are casually or underemployed. The rate of unemployment is higher in urban areas than in rural regions. Half of Pakistan's population exists below the poverty line, while half the country's wealth is concentrated in the richest 15% of households. The poorest fifth of the nation share around 5%. These extreme inequalities directly impact upon daily life. The rich live a life of luxury in large houses with servants, and their children go to expensive private schools. The poor – who rely disproportionately on informal sector employment – have little access to educational and health facilities. The government initiated poverty-reduction plans, but the situation has not improved.

Poverty particularly impacts on children, and Pakistan's Federal Bureau of Statistics puts the number of child workers at over three million, a quarter of whom are girls. Nearly two-thirds of these children are employed in the agriculture sector, although they are often found in intricate manufacturing jobs like stitching footballs and weaving carpets. Children often work long, unpaid hours, or in exchange for food and shelter. In many cases, parents borrow money and the children work to repay the loan in kind. These children are usually unable to gain access to education, a fact that keeps them locked into poverty as they enter adulthood. Child prostitution (although illegal) is not uncommon.

At the other end of the scale, the military has ruled the roost economically as well as politically. As well as sucking up 25% of Pakistan's national budget, the armed forces are big players in business, owning companies operating in fields as diverse as construction and banking to making bread and breakfast cereals. It's estimated that the military has private assets worth around US\$10 billion, although many of the business are actually poorly run – and receive regular million-dollar bail-outs from the government. On retirement, senior officers are frequently given generous land grants, further entrenching the military's economic power.

Corruption

Pakistan's endemic corruption consistently scores high marks in Transparency International's reports on global corruption. Historically, giving gifts to those in positions of authority was part of the subcontinental tradition; it continued after Independence in 1947. Bureaucrats accepted bribes to approve projects that could assist certain business families. Military officials siphoned off money while signing defence contracts with external suppliers. Even ordinary public servants charged small sums to do the tasks they were already paid to do. Members of the police force would levy a 'charge' on taxi and autorickshaw drivers in exchange for ignoring violations of traffic laws.

BEGGARS

The poverty problem accounts for the rising number of beggars, especially in Pakistan's urban centres; however, beggars are not as prevalent as in neighbouring India. Whether you give something or not is up to you. The giving of alms (zakat) is one of the pillars of Islam, although you may decide your money is of better use if donated to a charitable institution such as the Edhi Foundation (see the boxed text, p161).

DRUGS & GUNS

Drugs are a major social problem in Pakistan. Historically, Pakistanis in rural areas have used *charas* (cannabis) but it is the increased incidence of heroin abuse that is of greater concern. Since 1979, when Pakistan joined the war to push the Soviets out of Afghanistan and heroin trafficking through Pakistan was condoned as a means of partly funding it, the incidence of heroin abuse in Pakistan increased from 20,000 in 1980 to an estimated 1.5 million in 1993, and two million in 2000, according to the UN. There is, however, no agreement on the number of heroin users in Pakistan – a 2000 survey claimed that of the total four million drug addicts in Pakistan, only 500,000 are chronic and regular users of heroin. Over the last decade there has been a shift away from inhaling heroin to injecting, with ‘shooting galleries’ emerging in all the major cities; a development that holds serious implications for the rising incidence of HIV/AIDS in Pakistan.

The government, with the help of the UN, has initiated programmes to increase awareness about the problems associated with increased use of heroin and other drugs, and set up some treatment facilities for addicts. However, some nongovernmental agencies have argued that these do little to address the issues at the heart of drug addiction. The government has also attempted to control the trafficking of narcotics through its territory, although the lawlessness of the Pakistan–Afghanistan border makes such attempts difficult at best.

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan has also had a profound effect on the availability of firearms. Of the weapons brought into the country to arm the mujaheddin, huge quantities disappeared onto the black market. Government and private support for the Taliban regime helped further swell the numbers of weapons on the frontier, ranging from small arms up to rocket launchers. Estimates vary, but there are somewhere in the region of 18 to 20 million unlicensed small arms in Pakistan.

Such a profusion of weaponry, partly fuelled by drug money and tied to the large numbers of militants originally trained to fight in Afghanistan and Kashmir, continues to provide a major security problem for Pakistan. The confiscation and destruction of illicit arms is dwarfed by the activities of violent Islamist groups that are increasingly targeting the symbols of power, from bomb attacks near the army’s headquarters in Rawalpindi to the bloody standoff at Islamabad’s Red Mosque in the summer of 2007. The gun and drug backwash of the Afghan conflict still has the ability to challenge the country’s stability.

In today’s Pakistan the magnitude and extent of corruption has increased. The current process started in the early 1980s when Pakistan received billions of dollars as the frontline state in US-led moves to push the Soviet Union out of Afghanistan. Half of this money was to be used for defence purposes – a fact that enabled some military officials to obtain commissions on certain deals. Once military rule ended with the death of General Zia ul Haq in August 1988, politicians became actively involved in the process. Afraid of losing power at the discretion of the president, politicians focused on securing the support of other politicians by bribing them. Those in power also used banks and bureaucracy to take loans and then default on them. Benazir Bhutto’s vaunted return from exile in 2007 was only possible when it was agreed to drop long-standing corruption charges against her.

Transparency International’s studies have shown that the middle- and lower-level functionaries in public institutions facilitate corrupt practices. While there were similarities between the South Asian states studied, the incidence of corruption reported in Pakistan was higher than in other states on a number of counts. Bribing functionaries in areas from health and education to the justice system are all commonplace.

The National Accountability Bureau (NAB) launched by President Musharraf in 1999 to carry out investigations into businesspeople, politicians, bureaucrats and armed forces personnel has proved largely ineffective,

with the perception that it has been selective in its investigations, targeting mainly retired military officials.

MEDIA

The press played a major role in mobilising support for Pakistan in the 1940s, but after Independence it came under heavy scrutiny and regulation. The government controlled the press for many years, raising concerns among audiences about bias; many people tuned into the BBC for reliable news. The situation changed during the 1990s: a number of new magazines and newspapers were given permission to operate by the governments of both Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif, and independent TV channels slowly started up. This has turned into a flood with the rise of cheap satellite stations and the internet. Pakistan now has a lively media, with a variety of competing voices all shouting to be heard, reflecting the diversity and tensions of Pakistani society.

Two major media empires dominate the scene: the Jang group (publishing Urdu *Daily Jang*, and English daily *The News*) and the Nawa-i-Waqt group (publishing Urdu daily *Nawa-i-Waqt* and English daily *The Nation*). They broadly represent two ends of the spectrum: the Jang group is more progressive, the latter more conservative.

Pakistan TV (PTV) and Radio Pakistan (also known as Pakistan Broadcasting Corporation – PBC) are still controlled by the government, and PTV has also started a world service, PTV World. But the launch of United Arab Emirates-based TV networks with strong Pakistani participation, such as ARY Gold and Geo TV, has provided people with new, prompt and varied coverage of domestic and international issues. Given the satellite and cable networks operated by the private sector, access to these news outlets extends to a large majority of the country's population. Local stations like Khyber TV in NWFP broadcast in regional languages.

The state of emergency of late 2007 showed a shadow of times past with much independent media temporarily banned by the government, until external and domestic pressure forced a backdown. For now, the genie doesn't show any inclination to get back in the bottle.

ARTS

Literature

As in much of the surrounding region, Pakistan's rich literary tradition elevates poetry over prose. Love is the eternal theme, celebrated most highly in the classical *ghazal* form of rhyming couplets. Here, an unattainable and often illicit love is most often written about, an allegorical device dwelling on the heart's separation from its divine creator. The Sufi influence on these poems is central to their identity, and goes far beyond classical Urdu. The 18th-century poets Shah Abdul Latif Bhitai and Bulleh Shah wrote on similar themes in Sindhi and Punjabi respectively and are still revered, along with the Pashto poets from the 17th century, Khushal Khan Khattak and Rahman Baba (claimed equally as national poets by the Afghans). Rahman Baba's tomb in Peshawar (p194) remains a good place to hear recitals and Sufi music.

Poetry helped forge modern Pakistan's identity. The poet Allama Mohammed Iqbal (1877–1938) was one of the first to suggest that a separate Muslim state be created from British India, and his tomb is a national monument in front of the Badshahi Mosque in Lahore (p103). Later, Faiz Ahmed Faiz (1911–84) used poetry to question the lack of democracy and

Pakistan has over 26 TV stations. President Musharraf allowed the licensing of so many in 1999, when he realised Pakistanis were getting their news via Indian satellite TV.

The Peshawar Museum (p194) holds the largest collection of Gandharan art in the world.

rights in Pakistan. Ahmed Faraz, a contemporary poet, has followed this tradition but has made his mark predominantly in romantic poetry.

Poetry is recited in *mushairas* (gatherings of poets) that are heavily attended across the country, a testament to the continuing importance of poetry to Pakistani culture.

Cinema

Pakistani cinema has always been seen as something of the poor cousin to India's huge film industry. Based in Lahore (thus the inevitable moniker 'Lollywood'), Pakistan's cinematic output is less than 100 films a year, produced in Urdu and Punjabi for a primarily domestic audience.

The nascent Lollywood was hit hard by Partition, when many directors and producers fled for India leaving their assistants to pick up the reins. But the cultural traffic wasn't all one way, with actress and singer Noor Jehan, the sweetheart of the subcontinent, choosing to settle in Lahore, where she became Pakistan's first female film director. As the film industry slowly grew, the arrival of the Islamist Zia regime dealt it a serious blow. Strict censorship took hold, established directors were forced out and romantic themes (and staple scenes like singing heroines drenched in rain) were supplanted by guns and lurid violence. In the 1990s, easy access to Indian movies via satellite networks also saw a further decline in Pakistani-made films.

Attempts are being made to revive the film industry in Lahore and other major cities, with the focus shifting from theatre showings to DVD distribution.

Music

Pakistani music has classical, devotional, folk and popular traditions. Classical music is essentially the same raga (melody) as in the Indian classical music developed in the Hindu and Indo-Islamic courts. Devotional music has mostly taken the form of qawwali, where Sufi poetry is sung in a group against the background of harmonium, tabla (twin drums) and clapping. The influence of the late Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan (see boxed text, p54) continues to dominate qawwali.

Folk music deals with all aspects of life including romantic love. Heer Ranjha (a legendary love story in poem form) or *dohey* (rhyming couplets), for example, are sung by individuals to express their feelings. The tradition had been eclipsed with the rise of popular songs from cinema, but it is being revived by some younger modern singers: they combine folk with modern to create an effect that can be magical. Abrar ul Haq pioneered this tradition but you can also hear other singers like Hadiqa Kiani and Shazia Manzoor.

Pakistan has its own dedicated MTV channel, and although the influence of Hindi pop and British-Punjabi bhangra dance music is inevitable, the local pop scene is in rude health. Vital Signs was Pakistan's first big pop/rock group, flourishing in the post-Zia 1980s and '90s, forging a path currently being followed by outfits like Strings and Sufi-rockers Junoon.

Architecture

The organised cities of Moenjodaro (p176) and Harappa (p134) provide the earliest examples of city planning and architecture on the subcontinent. More visually appealing to the casual visitor perhaps are the plentiful remains of Gandharan Buddhism, which include the monastery complexes of Taxila (p88) and Takht-i-Bahi (p206) with their domed stupas and intricate stonework. Elegant but derelict old Hindu stone temples in Rawalpindi, Lahore and many smaller towns on the plains are reminders of another period of Pakistan's history.

Bapsi Sidhwa, author of *An American Brat* and *The Pakistani Bride*, is one of the most well-known modern Pakistani writers in English.

Released in 2007, *Zibakhana* (Hell's Ground) is Pakistan's first 'slasher' horror movie, where trendy teenagers meet a sticky end at the hands of a serial killer – dressed in burka.

For 'what's on' listings in the cultural centre of Lahore, from art exhibitions to concerts and poetry recitals, check out Danka Lahore (www.danka.com.pk).

NUSRAT FATEH ALI KHAN

Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan was a musical superstar whose singing transcended nationality and religion. At the time of his death in 1997 at the age of 49 he was lauded in the West as a titan of world music, while at home he was Shahen Shah-e Qawwali – the king of kings of qawwali singing.

Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan was born in Faisalabad in 1948 into the sixth generation of a distinguished family of singers of qawwali, used for centuries by Sufi missionaries to inspire and express religious devotion, to preach and to instruct. He was understudy to his uncle and master to his nephew. A landmark concert in 1979 made Nusrat the first qawwali singer ever to perform at the Chistiyyah Sufi shrine in Ajmer, India, and crowned him the undisputed heavyweight champion of Pakistani music.

Qawwali concerts traditionally take the form of a *mehfil*, or gathering, with a lead singer, second singer, harmonium and tabla players and a thunderous chorus of junior singers and clappers, all sitting cross-legged on the floor. The singer whips up the audience with favourite lines of poetry, dramatic hand gestures and religious phrases as the two voices weave in and out, bouncing off each other to create an improvised, surging sound. On command the chorus dives in with a hypnotic and rhythmic refrain.

It was Nusrat's remarkable voice that made his brand of qawwali so accessible. He had an amazing range, clarity and depth of voice. Staccato bursts of syncopated rhythm were flung out in all directions during an improvisation, while at other times he curled his voice around a *ghazal* (love song) with delicate finesse. Some of his most atmospheric music came from *tirana* vocal exercises – using sounds rather than words, as evocatively as a call to prayer – or from musical preludes in praise of the Prophet Mohammed or his successor, Ali.

Nusrat took the openness of Sufism as a musical creed, and was unafraid of mixing religious and secular, ancient and modern, East and West. He first gained attention in the West with his collaborations with Peter Gabriel, but later worked with talents as diverse as Massive Attack and the Canadian producer Michael Brook, with whom he recorded his landmark albums *Mustt Mustt* and *Night Song* (just two of over 120 albums he made in his career).

Continuing the tradition, his nephew and student Rahat Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan now leads the family qawwali group.

It's Islam and the Mughals that left Pakistan its greatest architectural heritage, in their grand fusion of Persian and Indian styles. Lahore, the Mughal capital under Akbar and Jehangir, is a treasure house of Mughal architecture, from the imposing Lahore Fort (p102) and Badshahi Mosque (p103), to the formal open spaces of the Shalimar Gardens (p108) and Jehangir's Tomb (p108).

The British later fused Mughal ideas with high Victorian Gothic concepts to create a unique subcontinental building style. This Mughal-Gothic or British Raj style can be still be seen across the country, from the Mall in Lahore (p106) with the Punjab University and Lahore Museum (Kipling's 'Wonder House'), to Peshawar's Museum and Islamia College (p194 and p194 respectively) and the buildings of Saddar in Karachi (p166).

Since Independence, architecture in Pakistan has largely followed Western styles, although architects found plenty to play with in designing the new capital, Islamabad. Some new mosques have been particularly daring and modern, such as the Faisal Mosque in Islamabad (p77) and the Defence Housing Authority Mosque in Karachi (p166). Elsewhere, town planning remains a distant aspiration amid an awful lot of hastily thrown-up concrete.

Painting

Mughal emperors, especially Akbar (r 1556–1605) and Jehangir (r 1605–27), were great champions of miniature painting. Under their patronage, miniatures evolved from the Persian style of painting purely historical or legendary

Pashtun architecture is defined by the *qala*, a fortified house that's more like a castle – essential in communities where clan loyalties and blood feuds run deeply.

scenes to painting contemporary events and portraiture. Akbar had over 100 artists working for him at his court, assembling their works into painted books, the most glorious of which was the *Abkarnama*, celebrating his reign. The detailed and evocative portraits made of Akbar and (particularly) Jehangir are among the most glorious examples of Islamic portraiture still known. The Lahore Museum (p107) has a fine collection of miniatures.

Modern Pakistani painting is best represented by Abdur Rahman Chughtai (1897–1975), renowned for his portraits, pencil sketches and etchings. At the time of his death, many of his paintings were still in his collection and are now exhibited in the private Chughtai Museum (p108), run by his son.

The National College of Arts in Lahore takes the lead in training new and promising artists in traditional and modern styles, while Karachi's emerging scene is dominated by abstract art.

Theatre & Dance

Theatre in Pakistan has a relatively short history, restricted to the urban educated classes, although drawing on traditions of poetry recital that date to the Mughal empire. The Alhamra Arts Council in Lahore dominated the scene for a long time in the 1960s and 1970s, but declined in the 1980s during Zia's Islamist rule. Some artists persevered: Madeeha Gauhar established the Ajoka theatre in 1983 to produce 'socially meaningful theatre' about women's issues and Sufi ideas. Its recent satirical musical *Burqavaganza*, about the impact of the veil on private, public and political levels, was banned after protests by Islamists.

The most popular dances are *khattak* in NWFP, and bhangra, *sammi* and *luddi* in Punjab. *Khattak* is a frenetic sword dance that's named after the Khattak tribe (a Pashtun tribe near Peshawar), though every tribe has its own version. Once exclusively martial, it is now part of any joyous event. Bhangra is traditionally a harvest dance where participants move in a circle around the drummer who gradually increases the tempo of the music and dance. The melancholy *sammi* and vigorous *luddi* are women's dances performed in pairs or small groups.

Handicrafts

Pakistan has a kaleidoscope of rural handicrafts, some of which share roots with the lavish decorative art of the Mughals. Most fill a practical need as much as an aesthetic one. Important crafts still done by hand are described in this section. Most of those with high export potential are easiest to find in Karachi. Prices are often higher and the selection smaller in Lahore.

CARPETS

The Mughals introduced carpet weaving to Pakistan, which continues to be a major hard-currency earner for the country. Designs are derived from Persian and Turkoman styles, with Lahore, Faisalabad and Muzaffarabad being traditional centres of production. The industry received an unexpected

Gift of the Indus (<http://artsedge.kennedy-center.org/pakistan/default.htm>) is a great introduction to Pakistan's rich artistic heritage.

ART ON WHEELS

Pakistan's buses and trucks are truly works of art: mirrored and sequined; painted with poetry, jet planes, birds, flowers and passages from the Quran; and equipped with tinted windows, musical horns and jingling chains. Even the humblest autorickshaw may be lovingly adorned with vinyl appliqué and painted with mountain landscapes or cinema heroes. One of the best places to see vehicles being painted is in Peshawar, where local guides can arrange tours (p196).

fillip in the 1980s with the influx of Afghan refugees leading to a boom in the Peshawar area, which remains a key market for exports.

The Kashmir and Hazara regions are notable for their *namda* styles of embroidered wool rugs, while Balochistan and southern Sindh are known for woven or knotted rugs of wool or camel hair.

CERAMICS

Throughout the country you can find terracotta pots, figurines or toys that look much like the 3000-year-old ones from Moenjodaro and Harappa. Each region also has its own – often vivid – colours and designs in glazed pottery. Outstanding examples are the blue-and-white pottery and tiles of Multan and Hala (near Hyderabad in Sindh) and the paper-thin black clayware of Bahawalpur.

JEWELLERY

Gold and silver jewellery is found all over the country. Regional specialities from Sindh and Balochistan include silver, either enamelled or inlaid with semiprecious stones, while in Karachi and Lahore you'll find gold inlaid with precious stones. Ander Shahar Bazaar in Peshawar is the place for heavy tribal silver jewellery from Afghanistan, Chitral and the Northern Areas – plus lots of imitations.

METALWORK

Hammered copper and brass vessels, trays and boxes, and elaborate items like samovars – plain, engraved, embossed or filigreed – are found in Lahore and across northern Punjab, and in Peshawar's Qissa Khawani Bazaar. Karachi, Hyderabad and Multan jewellers are known for enamelware.

TEXTILES

Sindh and the Multan area are known for hand-loomed cotton fabric, often block-printed or tie-dyed. Karachi and Multan are also known for hand-loomed silk. *Rilli* is a Sindhi art combining printing, appliqué and embroidery to make patchwork quilts, shawls and even rugs; the best is said to be from east of the Indus. Frequently seen in Sindh and Balochistan are caps and clothes with tiny mirrors embroidered into the fabric.

Cotton blouses and shawls with dense geometrical embroidery called *pulkari* are made in Swat and Hazara and around Chakwal in northern Punjab. Soft woollen shawls and coverlets with fine silk embroidery are trademarks of the Kaghan Valley and Kashmir. *Patti*, the sturdy hand-loomed wool of Chitral, remains popular locally, particularly when made into the 'pancake' *pakol* hats (also found in Hunza).

WOODWORK

Swat and Kashmir are best known for finely carved walnut furniture, chests, trays and utensils – engraved or sometimes inlaid with bone or copper. Swat was once known for the gorgeous carved screens, lintels and window frames of its houses and mosques, but these are more often seen in museums – or furniture clearing warehouses – these days. Brass or bone inlay and brightly lacquered woodwork are specialities in north-central Punjab.

SPORT

Pakistan has a good sporting heritage, from Olympic field hockey to the mighty Jahangir Khan, probably the greatest player in the history of squash. But for most Pakistanis, sport means just one thing: cricket. Arguably the country's second religion, it is a true national obsession, and its leading

The most popular spectator sport in the Northern Areas and Chitral is polo, and regular matches can be seen throughout the summer. For more, see the boxed text, p276.

KABBADI

A combination of wrestling, rugby and tag, kabaddi comes from Punjab. Two teams, each of 12 members, are separated by a line in the middle of a 12.5m-by-10m arena. One team sends a 'raider' to the other side; he has to keep uttering the phrase '*kabaddi kabaddi*' and touch as many members of the opposing team as possible without taking a second breath, and must return to his part of the field in the same breath. The defending side must protect themselves and attempt to force the invader to either touch the ground and/or take a second breath. Kabaddi has been famous in the subcontinent for centuries with major 'houses' dominating the scene and competing in national and international competitions.

cricketers are everywhere on advertising hoardings endorsing everything from mobile phones to soft drinks. If you're visiting from a Commonwealth country, be prepared to be regularly asked your views on everything from the top spin bowlers of all time to the politics of the International Cricket Council.

Internationally, Pakistan's greatest triumph came with their winning the World Cup in 1992, an event that turned captain Imran Khan into a national idol, and provided him with a base for his later entry into politics. The collision of cricket and politics is a common occurrence in Pakistan, and relations with India are often measured by the willingness of the national teams to play each other. At the same time, scandals on the pitch often reverberate further afield, such as allegations of match fixing or ball-tampering, or the frenzy over the mysterious death of Bob Woolmer, the national coach, at the 2007 World Cup, when the entire team was temporarily put under suspicion until death by natural causes was established.

Current star players include reverse swing bowlers Waqar Younis and Wasim Akram, and the batsman Younis Khan, sometime captain of the national squad.

Keep up with the latest
innings at the Pakistan
cricket fan site www.pakpassion.net.

Food & Drink

From robust curries and smoky kebabs to delicately spiced biryanis and syrupy sweets, Pakistan treats travellers to a mouthwatering mix of regionally diverse dishes. Pakistani food is similar to that of northern India – Mughlai, cuisine of the Mughals – but with inventive Middle Eastern influences via Afghanistan. Oil and spices are key ingredients of most dishes and, unlike vegetarian-dominated India, meat reigns supreme in Pakistan. Visitors certainly shouldn't expect the immense variety (especially when it comes to vegetarian food) found in neighbouring India, but will still be rewarded with a lovingly prepared repertoire of time-honoured recipes.

There are eateries to please all pockets, with cities such as Lahore, Karachi and Islamabad offering the entire gamut, from ramshackle street stalls frying crunchy subcontinental snacks, to trendy multicuisine restaurants delighting diners with everything from cheesy nachos and juicy T-bone steaks to chicken chow mein and spinach ravioli. Travellers pining for familiar fast food will also find chains such as KFC, Subway and Pizza Hut. While variety abounds in the big cities, mutton or chicken curry, dhal (curried lentils), rice and chapatis (unleavened bread) are usually all you'll come across in remote villages – although there are some brilliant regional exceptions, such as apricot soup (*haneetze doudo*) in Hunza.

Many midrange restaurants have dedicated 'family sections' for family groups with women (ideal for female travellers); there's no such segregation in upmarket places. Mid- and upper-range restaurants attract a 15% tax and the more upmarket establishments may also whack on a service charge.

STAPLES & SPECIALITIES

Bread

The generic term for traditional bread is 'roti', a name used interchangeably with chapati to describe that most common variety, the unleavened round bread cooked on a *tawa* (griddle). In Pakistan, rotis are usually bigger and thicker than those in India and they're often cooked in a *tandoor* (clay oven). *Paratha* is similar but thicker (often flakier) and traditionally smothered with ghee (clarified butter). It's popular breakfast fare with an egg; sometimes it has a vegetable filling. *Puri* is a deep-fried dough that puffs up when cooked, while (thicker) naan is baked in a *tandoor* – garlic naan is especially divine. Meanwhile, if you ask in Chitral, Hunza-Nagyr or Gojal you can find several varieties of stout whole-wheat bread. Whatever the bread type, all have the same purpose: to scoop up food and soak up every last smidgen of flavour-packed curry sauces.

Nowadays you can find loaves (and often rolls) of freshly baked bread in most city bakeries.

Meat

Meat (*gosht*) eaten in Pakistan is usually mutton or chicken (*murgh*), or sometimes beef (*gay ka gosht*). Seafood and fish (*machlee*) are most common in Karachi, although some restaurants in Lahore and Islamabad offer a commendable selection. Pork is taboo for Muslims.

Among popular ways to cook meat (especially chicken) are tandoori (marinated and baked in a *tandoor*), biryani (cooked with spiced rice), *tabak* (grilled) and *chargh* (steam roasted). *Karai* means braised with vegetables and served bubbling in its own pan. A version of this is Balti, made famous in Britain through the Balti houses of London. *Jalfrezi* means stir-fried

To cook up a Pakistani feast back home, grab a copy of *From Zubeida Tariq's Kitchen* by Zubeida Tariq, which includes favourites such as Lahori fish.

Blissfully cool *dahi* (plain yogurt) or raita (curd with cumin and select vegetables) is a great way of countering the tastebud-tingling heat of spicy food.

with green chillies. 'Masala' means it has been prepared with mixed spices, *dopyaaza* ('double onions') has onions added twice to the cooking process, and *makhani* means cooked with butter. Tikka and *boti kebab* both refer to meat grilled on a spit. 'Broasted' involves some steam cooking, with broasted chicken taking characteristics of both fried and roasted chicken.

Kofta are lamb meatballs (or sometimes vegetable balls); *margasi kofta* is minced beef and egg. *Qeema* is minced mutton or beef in a spiced sauce. Middle Eastern influence is evident in *seek kebabs*: mutton or chicken bits or meatballs barbecued on a skewer. A scrumptious Pashtun variation is *chapli kebabs* (spicy 'mutton burgers').

A protein-charged dish is braised chicken livers (*karai kaleji*), while the more adventurous can tuck into *gurda* (kidneys), *kapureh* (testicles) and *magaz* or *bheja* (brains).

Rice

Rice (*chaval*) can be ordered boiled (*sadha chaval*) or Central Asian-style (pilau), cooked in stock and flavoured with spices, sometimes with vegetables or meat added. *Qabli pilau* is an Afghan version, made with sweet raisins and served with a vegetable side dish. Then of course there's biryani, a fragrant, lightly spiced steamed rice with vegetables or meat tossed through it – not to be missed!

Spicy, meat-dominated Mughlai cuisine traces its roots back to the (Islamic) Mughal empire that once reigned supreme in the subcontinent.

Snacks

Among the jumble of spicy Pakistani street snacks on offer are addictive samosas (deep-fried pastry triangles filled with spiced vegetables and/or minced meat), tasty tikkas (spiced and barbecued beef, mutton, fish or chicken chunks) and pakoras (bite-sized vegetables dipped in chickpea-flour batter and deep-fried). Kebabs doused in cool curd and wrapped in warm bread are another favourite.

If you're seeking something without chillies, try baked yams, popcorn, roasted or boiled corn on the cob, or a little glass of peppery chicken soup (*murgh kai*).

Sweets

Pakistan has a positively lip-smacking assortment of colourful *mithai* (sweets). Some sweet shops produce their works of art right on the spot – look for *jalebis*, the orange-coloured whorls of deep-fried batter dunked in sticky sugar syrup. Also popular is *barfi*, a fudge-like milk-based confection, which comes in a variety of flavours. *Gajar ka halwa* is a delectable soft, seasonal sweet made from carrots, while irresistible *gulab jamuns* are deep-fried balls of dough soaked in rose-flavoured syrup – they're especially yummy when served warm.

Some of the most common restaurant desserts include *kheer*, which resembles a creamy rice pudding (the finest contains rose-water, saffron and pistachios), and *kulfi*, a firm-textured ice cream made with reduced milk and flavoured with any number of nuts (often pistachio) or fruits. *Faluda* comes in several varieties but is basically vermicelli (often with ice cream).

Salt may be sprinkled on fruit in Pakistan, so request its omission if you'd prefer your fruit plain.

Fruit

Fresh fruit includes mangoes, pomegranates, papayas, bananas and melons in the southern plains; excellent dates (*kajur*) in Balochistan and Sindh; and apricots, peaches, plums, apples, cherries, mulberries and grapes (and wonderful dried apricots and mulberries) in Chitral and the Northern Areas. *Cheiku* (also spelt *chiku*) is a small brown fruit that roughly looks

like a small potato but is sweet. Fruit is seasonal and comes in waves as summer and autumn progress.

DRINKS

Nonalcoholic Drinks

Pakistan is awash with tea (*chai*), usually ‘milky tea’ (a mixed *chai* called *dood chai* or *doodvali chai*) of equal parts water, leaves, sugar and milk brought to a raging boil and often poured from a great height. If you don’t want sugar (*cheeni*) in your tea, make sure you request this before brewing begins. Many places will serve an unmixed ‘set’, complete with warmed milk and sugar on the side. In the north, tea is sometimes served salted. Outside deluxe hotels and some big-city restaurants – which serve frothy cappuccinos and perky espressos – the only coffee available is of the instant variety.

Chinese-style green tea is called *sabz-chai*. The Pashtuns have raised this to a sweet and sublime art form called *khawa*, with cardamom or other spices. The Kashmiris have several versions, including one with salt, coconut, almond and cardamom.

Sweet and savoury lassi, a yogurt-based beverage, is much loved and incredibly refreshing. Also miraculously rejuvenating is ‘fresh lime’, or *nimbu pani*, comprised of crushed ice, salt, sugar, soda water and the juice of fresh limes or lemons.

Bazaars throughout Pakistan are often lined with vendors selling freshly squeezed fruit and sugar cane juice (*ganay*), although their barely rinsed glasses can be a bit dubious. It’s best to go to stalls where you can watch the juice being squeezed in front of you, not only to make sure it hasn’t been sitting around in a jug, but also to ensure it’s not watered down. Be aware that some places may add salt or sugar to juices – if you don’t want these, say so.

Always remember that ice can pose a health risk so it’s best to ask for it to be omitted unless you are confident of the hygiene.

Tap water, unless appropriately filtered, is best avoided; see p398 for further information. Bottled water and soft drinks (including imported brands) are safe – but look for any evidence that the bottles may have been reused. Also safe are the little boxes of fruit juice that you punch open with a straw.

Alcoholic Drinks

Pakistan is officially dry but non-Muslim foreigners can apply for a liquor permit that allows them to purchase locally made alcohol and also consume it in the bars of some top-end hotels. The permits are issued by Excise & Taxation Department offices found in the larger cities (see regional chapters for details). These offices can also tell you where to buy booze once you’ve got a permit.

In Hunza some people still brew *mel*, a coarse grape wine, and a powerful mulberry brandy called arak. Kalasha and some other Chitralis make a quaffable red wine. Other locally made alcohol includes Murree beer, as well as several kinds of spirits such as vodka, gin, rum and whiskey.

WHERE TO EAT & DRINK

Pakistan has a range of eateries, from simple roadside stalls to fancy multi-cuisine restaurants. Hotel restaurants outnumber independent ones in most smaller towns, and tend to keep longer hours. For those on a tight budget, all the cities and larger towns have quick-service eateries at markets and transport stations, which usually stay open throughout the day. These places tend to focus on ubiquitous Pakistani food.

More upmarket restaurants are found in the larger cities (Lahore and Karachi are especially good), and these cook up a tantalising array of global

Travellers should be aware that during Ramadan (Ramadan), the Islamic month of sunrise-to-sunset fasting, most restaurants are closed during daylight hours (see the boxed text, opposite).

RAMAZAN (RAMADAN)

Ramazan (Ramadan) is the auspicious Islamic month of sunrise-to-sunset fasting (no eating, drinking or smoking; those exempt – in addition to non-Muslims – include the very elderly, the ill, young children and pregnant women). During this time, most eateries are closed during daylight hours; a number, especially in smaller towns, may even close down for the entire month. Meals are taken after sunset and just before sunrise.

The best places for travellers to find food and drink during fasting hours are at hotels, food stalls at train and bus stations, and sometimes Chinese (and occasionally other) restaurants. A fair few supermarkets, general stores and fruit-and-vegetable stalls remain open throughout the day, enabling you to buy refreshments to eat in the privacy of your hotel room.

Travellers are often given leeway to eat, drink and smoke, but if you do so in public be aware that some people may give you disapproving stares or, in some cases, even question you (just politely say you're not Muslim). Nonetheless, it's kinder to eat, drink and smoke out of the public domain – not only is this culturally respectful, it's considerate not to indulge in front of those who are abstaining.

For approximate dates of Ramazan, see p371.

fare served in smart interiors. Major cities also have a decent range of mid-priced restaurants with menus usually flaunting a mix of Pakistani, Chinese and possibly Continental dishes (the Pakistani choices are usually best). The bigger cities also have a clutch of good bakeries, juice stalls and sweet shops.

Operating hours for restaurants vary widely, but most are at least open for lunch and dinner; others (especially street eateries) remain open all day.

VEGETARIANS & VEGANS

Vegetarians aren't nearly as well catered for as carnivores. Most restaurants have just a few (if any) uninspiring vegetarian items, many cruelly overcooked, rendering them nutritionally useless. Having said that, the more upmarket restaurants in the larger cities offer a better range of veggie creations than their budget brothers. Vegetables are known as *sabzi* in Pakistan. The universal vegetarian dish is curried lentils (dhal), with other common veg accompaniments including spicy spinach (*palak*), potatoes (*aloo*), cauliflower (*gobi*), okra (*bhindi*), chickpeas (*channa*) and peas (*matar*).

There's little understanding of veganism (in Pakistan, the term 'pure vegetarian' means without eggs), and animal products such as milk, butter, ghee and curd are included in most Pakistani dishes.

HABITS & CUSTOMS

In Pakistan three main meals a day is the norm, with breakfast generally fairly light and dinner the main meal, a family affair. Dinner is mostly comprised of several dishes – usually with at least one meat dish, dhal (and perhaps other veg options), chapatis and maybe rice. Dishes are served all at once rather than as courses. Desserts are optional and most prevalent during festivals or other special occasions. In many homes dinner can be eaten quite late depending on personal preference and possibly the season (eg late dinners during warmer months). Restaurants usually burst to life after 9pm.

Pork is taboo for Muslims, as are stimulants such as alcohol. 'Halal' is the term for all permitted foods, and 'haram' for those prohibited. Fasting is considered an opportunity to earn the approval of Allah, to wipe the sin-slate clean and to understand the suffering of the poor.

For details about eating and visiting etiquette, see the boxed text, p43.

During Ramadan (Ramadan), each day's fast is often broken with dates, which are considered to be auspicious.

It's customary to use your right hand for eating, and polite to offer and accept food with the right hand.

EAT YOUR WORDS**Useful Phrases****I'm a vegetarian.****Do you have any vegetarian dishes?****May we see the menu?****Please don't make it hot.****Please bring the bill.***mai sabzeekaur hoo**kyaa sabzee hee vaalaa kaanaa miltaa hai?**menyoo kaard deejyie?**kam mirch daaliye**bil laaiye***Menu Decoder****NONVEGETARIAN DISHES**

<i>aloo tikka</i>	mashed-potato patty
<i>kebab</i>	barbecued meat cooked on iron rods
<i>qorma</i>	rich, thickened curry of chicken, mutton or vegetables (meat is tenderised by marination in yogurt before cooking)
<i>rogan josh</i>	red curry with a thin gravy, made from the leg of mutton
<i>shaamee kebab</i>	cutlets of minced meat and lentils
<i>seek kebab</i>	meat cooked on skewers
<i>tandoori chicken</i>	spice-marinated chicken cooked in a clay oven (without gravy)

VEGETARIAN DISHES

<i>aloo gobi</i>	curried potatoes and cauliflower
<i>baigan bartaa</i>	eggplant mashed and cooked
<i>bhindi</i>	okra, also known as 'lady's finger'
<i>chola</i>	spiced chickpeas
<i>dam aloo</i>	potatoes cooked in a pressure cooker and served with gravy
<i>mattar paneer</i>	unfermented cheese and pea curry
<i>palak paneer</i>	unfermented cheese chunks in a pureed spinach sauce
<i>rajma</i>	curried kidney beans

SWEETS

<i>gulab jamun</i>	deep-fried ball of dough soaked in rose-flavoured syrup
<i>halwa</i>	soft sweetmeat made from lentils, semolina or wheat, with butter, sugar, milk and sweet spices
<i>ladoo</i>	sweetmeat ball made with gram flour and semolina

Food Glossary

<i>aaboochaa</i>	plum
<i>aam</i>	mango
<i>aroo</i>	peach
<i>andaa/ande</i>	egg/s
<i>baigan</i>	eggplant
<i>dahi</i>	yogurt
<i>dood</i>	milk
<i>gobi</i>	cauliflower
<i>kaddoo</i>	pumpkin
<i>kelaa</i>	banana
<i>kishmish</i>	sultanas
<i>kubaanee</i>	apricot
<i>makkan</i>	butter
<i>mattar</i>	peas
<i>meerch</i>	chilli
<i>pal</i>	fruit
<i>paneer</i>	cheese
<i>pyaaz</i>	onion
<i>seb</i>	apple

Environment

THE LAND

From the snowbound heights of the Hindukush and Karakoram ranges to the almost tropical shores of the Arabian Sea, Pakistan occupies 796,096 sq km; it's a quarter of the size of India and more than three times as big as the UK. A further 81,310 sq km is taken up by Azad Jammu & Kashmir (AJK) and the Northern Areas, the parts of the old state of Jammu & Kashmir administered by Pakistan under the terms of the 1949 UN ceasefire with India.

Pakistan rubs shoulders with Iran, Afghanistan, China and India, and has 1046km of Arabian Sea coastline. The northern border is with Afghanistan's Wakhan Corridor, a strategic strip of land (in places no more than 15km wide), beyond which is Tajikistan. From Gwadar Bay in southwest Balochistan to the Khunjerab Pass on the China border is a distance of over 1800km.

Topographically, Pakistan can be divided into six regions: northern mountains, northern plateau, western mountains, Balochistan plateau, southeast desert and the Indus plain. Coursing through it all like a 2500km artery is the Indus River – rising in Tibet, flowing northwest and around Nanga Parbat, dropping south out of the mountains to water a populous flood plain, and emptying through an immense delta into the Arabian Sea.

Northern Mountains

From Afghanistan the Hindukush range, crowned by 7706m Tirich Mir, reaches across Chitral and, under the name Hindu Raj, continues east to the Indus. Northwards in Tajikistan the Pamir range begins. Along Pakistan's border with China and south into Ladakh stretches the Karakoram range, with the densest concentration of high peaks on earth (including 8611m K2, second in stature only to Everest) and the longest glaciers outside the polar regions. Poking into Pakistan, within the curve of the Indus, is the Himalayan range, anchored here by 8125m Nanga Parbat.

The Karakoram boasts the longest glaciers in the world outside the polar regions, including five glaciers of over 50km in length: Batura, Hispar, Baltoro, Biafo and Siachen.

Northern Plateau

The undulating lowlands at the foot of the mountains include the fertile Peshawar Valley (ancient Gandhara, watered by the Kabul River) west of the Indus and the sandy, eroded Potwar Plateau across northern Punjab to Islamabad. At the southern edge of the Potwar, overlooking the plains, is the dry Salt range. Northeast Punjab, around Jhelum and Sialkot, catches a bit of the monsoon and is also fertile.

Western Mountains

From the Hindukush down through the tribal lands of North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) and eastern Balochistan runs a range of dry, scrubby, 1500m to 2500m mountains called the Suleiman in NWFP and the Kirthar in Balochistan. The region's most famous feature is the Khyber Pass into Afghanistan.

Balochistan Plateau

This hilly, parched and inhospitable plateau across western Balochistan averages about 300m in elevation and is the least populous part of the country. Some of Pakistan's earliest known inhabitants tended goats and sheep here in the 4th millennium BC.

COLLIDING CONTINENTS

The tremendous vertical landscape of northern Pakistan draws adventurers from around the world; it has shaped cultures and continues to challenge everyday life and travel. It is also a geological showcase of the fascinating and awesome processes of mountain formation.

About 130 million years ago, when dinosaurs still roamed the earth, the 'Indian Plate' broke away from the primordial supercontinent Gondwanaland (the ancestor of Africa, Australia and Antarctica) and drifted north towards another landmass called Laurasia, the 'Asian Plate'. Between the converging continents lay a wide, shallow sea called Tethys, and off the shore of Laurasia was a chain of volcanic islands, similar to present-day Indonesia or Japan.

Some 80 million years after breaking away from Gondwanaland, India collided with Asia. The Indian Plate buried its edge under the Asian Plate, lifting it up. Both plates compressed and piled up against each other. Trapped in the middle, the small oceanic plate supporting the offshore island chain was tipped almost on end, and the Tethys Sea was swallowed up. The mountain chain comprising the Himalaya, Karakoram and Hindukush ranges was born as a result of this stupendous collision, which is still going on today. Continents are not easily slowed down – the Indian Plate continues to plough northwards (at about 5cm per year) and the mountains are still rising.

The Kashmir Earthquake

Insistent reminders of the strains of mountain-building are the earthquakes that constantly jar these mountains. The earthquake that struck Kashmir (see p183) in October 2005 was the latest and deadliest example of plate tectonic stress relief. As these magnificent mountains continue to rise, one thing is certain – there will be more earthquakes. Alarming, scientists predict earthquakes 10 times the strength of the Kashmir earthquake are virtually inevitable because of the enormous stresses still present in the earth's crust.

The KKH Rocks

In many places as you travel along the Karakoram Hwy (KKH) there is nothing to see but bare rocks; soaring cliffs and crumbling mountainsides. It seems very apparent that this is where rocks rise from the earth, sharp-edged and raw.

From Islamabad to Kashgar, the KKH navigates this continental collision zone. Evidence of this ongoing encounter is easy to see on a grand scale in the magnitude of the mountains, and up close in the colours and patterns of the roadside rocks.

As it drove into and under Asia, the top of the Indian Plate was compressed and bulldozed back, most severely along the leading edge, thrusting up escarpments (mountain fronts), such as the steep terrain between Havelian and Abbottabad, and the Margalla and Murree hills near Islamabad.

At Jajjal, the KKH crosses the boundary from the Indian Plate to the volcanic island complex. You can see evidence of this in the garnet-rich outcrops between Jajjal and Pattan and the black-banded pinkish rocks seen just east of Chilas.

The edge of the Asian Plate is exposed near Chalt, in Nagyr, in a multicoloured jumble of sedimentary rocks, volcanic material, talc and greenish serpentine. From Chalt all the way to Kashgar, the road crosses old Laurasia, with Laurasia's former southern shore now heaved up into the Karakoram range itself. There is a variety of metamorphic rocks in the Hunza Valley, with large red garnets very common. White marble bands are conspicuous around Karimabad, and the famous ruby mines of Hunza are in the hills between Karimabad and Hassanabad. From Karimabad to Passu, the high spine of the Karakoram is composed mostly of 50-million- to 100-million-year-old granite, part of a vast body extending eastwards for 2500km along the India-Asia boundary to Lhasa and beyond. From Passu to the Khunjerab Pass the geology is dominated by dark- and light-coloured shale and limestone, seen prominently in the sawtooth peaks around Passu.

The most dramatic geological 'monuments' on the Xinjiang side are the two mountain massifs of Kongur and Muztagh Ata, consisting of metamorphic rocks and granites that have been squeezed up from deep in the earth's crust, and then exposed in the last five million years.

GLOBAL WARMING & KARAKORAM GLACIERS

Several Karakoram glaciers have actually grown in recent years, while the majority of Greater Himalayan glaciers have shrunk (about 20% reduction since 1962). Rather than refute the claims of global warming, this appears to be an anomalous result, or an example of the exception proving the rule. Specifically, though there has been a rise in winter temperatures there has been a slight drop in summer temperatures combined with a significant increase in snow and rainfall in the Karakoram, which has led to glacial expansion and thickening.

Southeast Desert

From east of the Indus and Sutlej Rivers in Sindh and southern Punjab, barren desert reaches across into Rajasthan in India. In Punjab it's called the Cholistan Desert, in Sindh the Great Thar Desert, and near the sea it becomes mangrove swamps.

Indus Plain

The alluvial plains of the Indus and its four main tributaries – from north to south, the Jhelum, Chenab, Ravi and Sutlej Rivers – are Pakistan's heart, where most of its people live and most of its food is grown. The plains, all within Sindh and Punjab (*punjab* means 'five waters'), constitute about a third of the country. Though they get little rain, the fertile grassland doabs (the wedges of land between the rivers) are irrigated by a vast complex of canals.

WILDLIFE

Pakistan's ocean-to-alpine geography, with its myriad habitats, supports an amazing variety of animals and plants: 188 species of mammals, 666 species of migratory and resident birds, 174 species of reptiles, 16 species of amphibians and 525 species of fish. Of the approximately 5000 wild plants, 372 species are endemic to Pakistan. Yet wildlife tourism (other than hunting) is undeveloped, protected areas have very little infrastructure, and – apart from trekking into remote areas – it is difficult to see most of Pakistan's wildlife.

Animals

Hundreds of species of fish and shellfish live along Pakistan's Arabian Sea coastline, and two species of sea turtle (green and olive Ridley) nest here. The coastal and riverine wetlands, including the immense Indus River delta, are home to many animals including wild boar and marsh crocodile. The wetlands also play host to numerous migratory bird species. The lower to mid reaches of the Indus River are the only habitat of one of the world's rarest mammals, the Indus River dolphin (see the boxed text, p67).

Away from the rivers and the extensive irrigation system, the plains of Punjab and Sindh are largely desert. Large mammals are rare and sparsely distributed, and include leopard, black buck (reintroduced to Lal Suhanra National Park), chinkara gazelle, urial (red sheep) and the Sindh ibex. Pakistan's only species of wild horse, the Indian wild ass, migrates from India to a corner of the Rann of Kutch in southern Sindh near the mouth of the Indus, while there have been unconfirmed sightings of the Tibetan wild ass along the border with China.

Wild animal species in Pakistan's lower mountain forests include black and brown bear, wild cat, wild boar, jackal, fox, hare, rhesus monkey, porcupine, snake, lizard and bat.

In the high Karakoram and Hindukush the variety of wild animals is surprisingly rich, though you are unlikely to see much along the Karakoram Hwy (KKH) or in the vicinity of settlements. Inhabitants include snow

Stones of Silence: Journeys in the Himalaya by Dr George Schaller is a highly readable account of the author's research into the creatures of the Hindukush, Karakoram and Himalaya, including the majestic snow leopard.

Twitchers should grab a copy of the up-to-date paperback field guide *Birds of Pakistan* by Richard Grimmett, Tim Inskipp and Tom Roberts.

The Snow Leopard Conservancy (www.snowleopardconservancy.org) has info on the biology, mythology and conservation of snow leopards including how you can help save this magnificent cat.

leopard, wolf, Himalayan ibex, Kashmir markhor (a wild goat that figures in the region's oldest legends), Marco Polo sheep and bharal (blue sheep). On the Chinese side of the border, the sparsely populated regions of Xinjiang provide a habitat for further elusive creatures including snow leopard, argali sheep and wild yak.

One creature you're likely to see if you cross the Khunjerab Pass, the Deosai Plains or the Subash Plateau in Xinjiang in warmer weather is the golden marmot, sunning itself near its burrow, whistling in alarm when you get close. Others you might see while trekking are the Tibetan red fox, ermine, alpine weasel, cape hare, mouse-hare (or pika), and the high mountain vole. Bigger, shyer residents include black bear, brown bear and the Himalayan lynx.

ENDANGERED SPECIES

The destruction and fragmentation of Pakistan's natural habitats – with the inevitable extinction and near-extinction of many species of wildlife – is due to human population pressure and subsequent land clearing. The most prominent animals threatened or endangered with extinction are the Indus River dolphin (see the boxed text, opposite), snow leopard, Marco Polo sheep and Houbara bustard.

The charismatic snow leopard has been a symbol for conservation for decades in Pakistan and bordering countries. The rugged Karakoram and Hindukush mountains are a significant habitat for this species and are the focus of international research and conservation efforts.

BIRD-WATCHING IN PAKISTAN

Pakistan lies on a major migration route from Central Asia and Siberia. River valleys act as natural channels and flight paths, and Pakistan's greatest waterway has given its name to a major flight path – the Indus Flyway. At least 10 species of duck and goose commonly migrate from as far away as Siberia; hundreds of thousands move through the valleys from September to April, a fact known to hunters for centuries. Haleji Lake in Sindh is a superb water-bird sanctuary that in winter can feature dozens of species, including duck, goose, heron and egret, and even flamingo and pelican. Pakistan is a signatory to the Ramsar Convention to ensure the conservation of wetlands, and has designated nine wetlands, including Haleji Lake, as Ramsar sites.

The forests of the foothills feature birds common to western Asia and even Europe. Among the stands of oak and chestnut may be found the woodpecker; the wryneck, a superbly camouflaged relative of the woodpecker; and the unmistakable hoopoe, with salmon-pink plumage and a showy crest.

The higher regions are subject to extremes of temperature and precipitation, yet in spring, when alpine meadows are in bloom, birds of many varieties ascend to higher elevations to court and nest. Larger species include the majestic lammergeier (or bearded vulture), a huge bird of prey with a wingspan of nearly 3m. Other raptors that may be encountered are the golden eagle and peregrine falcon.

The jewels in the crown for many bird-watchers are the fabulous pheasants, of which Pakistan has several species. The Himalayan monal is without doubt the most spectacular, and this beautiful, iridescent pheasant is still common in many parts of its range. Other birds in the pheasant family that may be encountered in the high country include the Himalayan snowcock, at higher altitudes, and the more common rock partridge (or chukar).

Even the rugged deserts hold an assortment of birds. Largest is the bustard, of which the Houbara is the most widespread. Sandgrouse are similar to pigeons, but superbly camouflage themselves among desert rubble. The various species of sandgrouse are all seed-eaters, but are dependent on water and will fly up to 40km a day to drink. They have also made a remarkable adaptation to desert life: they can soak up water with their breast feathers and carry it to the nest to refresh their young.

INDUS RIVER DOLPHIN

Endemic to the Indus River, the Indus River dolphin (*Platanista gangetica minor*) is regarded as one of the most endangered dolphins in the world. This freshwater dolphin is effectively blind, an adaptation to living in the silt-laden waters of the Indus, where it hunts crustaceans and fish using echolocation.

Although surveys have not been vigorous or conclusive, it is unlikely that there are more than 1000 individual dolphins remaining in a 1200km stretch of the river, and these are separated into smaller populations by impassable irrigation barrages. The largest population, of approximately 500, exists in the Indus River Dolphin Reserve between the Sukkur and Guddu barrages in Sindh. Significant factors responsible for the declining dolphin population include the reduction and degradation of their habitat since the construction of the Indus irrigation system, their being hunted for meat and for traditional medicine purposes, and their accidental capture in fishing nets.

Other river dolphin populations occur in the Ganges, Brahmaputra and Meghna Rivers and their major tributaries in India, Bangladesh and Nepal; separate species exist in the Yangtze River in China, and the Amazon in South America.

The Marco Polo sheep, a muscular, pony-sized sheep with enormous curly horns, was once common in the Khunjerab Pass area; however, the construction of the KKH saw thousands of the sheep slaughtered for food and trophies. The Khunjerab National Park was created to protect the remaining population at the behest of famed megafauna conservationist George Schaller. Dr Schaller is currently promoting an international park centred on the Wakhan Corridor with similar aims.

The Houbara bustard is a winter migratory visitor from Central Asia that is efficiently hunted by wealthy Arabs using falcons in the plains of Sindh and Balochistan. It is such a popular quarry that it is illegally trapped and exported to other countries to be hunted there. Another threatened bird is the elusive western tragopan, a richly patterned ground-dwelling pheasant. Although it was once common in the Western Himalayas, only a small population now survives in the Kayal and Palas Valleys in Indus Kohistan, and in AJK.

Other threatened species include the Balochistan black bear, Chiltan goat, Kashmir markhor, urial (a wild sheep with several subspecies from Balochistan to the northern mountains), woolly flying squirrel, great Indian bustard, lesser florican, Siberian crane and two species of marine turtle (green and olive Ridley).

Plants

Pakistan has more than 5000 species of trees, shrubs, wildflowers and grasses that are irregularly distributed from desert plains to verdant river valleys to alpine meadows. If not for irrigation, the plains would be mostly desert. There are some patches of forest along the Indus and its tributaries, but most of the plant life you will see is cultivated. The forests of southern Chitral, Swat, Hazara and northern AJK include oak and chestnut trees (and eucalyptus, acacia and other plantation trees for fodder and flood control) in their lower reaches. Higher up are pine, spruce, juniper, deodar (Indian cedar), birch and willow, along with poppy, columbine, forget-me-not, mallow, geranium and many other spring wildflowers. A notable tree in the Northern Areas, especially around Karimabad, is the upright poplar that is planted along rivers and irrigation canals, adding a golden glow to the landscape in autumn.

Trekkers who have been to Nepal may recognise the spiky buckthorn growing around mountain villages (particularly animal enclosures) and along trails. The bright-orange berries can be made into a vitamin C-packed drink. One of the delights of the Karakoram is its unexpectedly lush, glacier-watered

Wildlife of Pakistan (www.wildlifeofpakistan.com) is dedicated to increasing awareness of Pakistan's wildlife. It has information on protected areas, endangered animals and current projects, as well as links to conservation and wildlife sites.

pastures, hidden in high valleys. Near and above the tree line in northern Chitral, Swat Kohistan, the Gilgit basin and Hunza-Gojal, alpine wildflowers abound in summer, carpeting the pastures. The few alpine trees there are mainly dwarf juniper, and the delicate flowers include the magenta alpine primrose, golden buttercup and the rare blue Himalayan poppy.

NATIONAL PARKS & PROTECTED AREAS

Setting aside land for wildlife protection was practised by the early rulers of Pakistan to ensure the supply of game for hunting. Forest reserves set up by the British administration also effectively protected habitat and wildlife. In 1966 to '67, at the request of the government of Pakistan, the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) performed a series of surveys that revealed a steady decline in Pakistan's populations of dozens of species, especially mammals. A high-profile government committee then recommended the establishment of three categories of protected areas:

National Park Accessible to the public, but with a total ban on hunting, trapping or capture of wild animals; disturbing or felling plants or trees; clearing land for cultivation or mining; pollution of water flowing into or through the park; and on structures except those necessary for park operation.

Wildlife Sanctuary Mostly former princely hunting grounds, now to be off limits to the public, with similar prohibitions as for a national park, plus a ban on the introduction of exotic species and domestic animals.

Game Reserve Also mostly former royal hunting grounds, similar to wildlife sanctuaries except that special hunting permits are available, for specific species, dates and areas.

For years all this 'protection' remained fairly theoretical, with little money for either surveys or management, and insufficient legal provision for the control of land use. Where action was taken, such as in the Khunjerab National Park, it failed to take account of the traditional interests and livelihoods of local people and ran up against fierce opposition. In effect, it was counterproductive to the conservation aims of the park. The government has since engaged the help of a number of conservation organisations, especially WWF and World Conservation Union (IUCN), to assist with further surveys, public input and management plans.

Pakistan now has 225 protected areas, including 14 national parks (see table), 99 wildlife sanctuaries and 96 game reserves, equating to approximately 91,700 sq km or 10.5% of the country and representing most major habitats. Don't expect to find formal public offices, maps or other information sources at parks except for at a few parks close to population centres in Punjab or Sindh. The WWF, IUCN and Mountain Areas Conservancy project (MACP) have information brochures explaining programmes in the Northern Areas and NWFP.

Pakistan's Best National Parks

CENTRAL KARAKORAM NATIONAL PARK

At 9738 sq km, this is by far Pakistan's largest national park, taking in many of the world's loftiest peaks (including K2) and longest glaciers (Hispar, Biafo and Baltoro) in the highest reaches of the Karakoram. It's mostly in Baltistan, south of the Khunjerab National Park and east of the KKH and the Gilgit-Skardu road. It was designated in 1993 in response to severe ecological pressure on the Baltoro Glacier region as a result of both trekking and military activities.

CHITRAL GOL NATIONAL PARK

This is a beautiful valley in the Hindukush (see p228) that's famous for its Kashmir markhor, magnificent mountain goats, and snow leopards (which

IUCN (World Conservation Union) Pakistan (www.iucn.pk), founded in 1976, is the force behind national and provincial conservation strategies and projects. It has offices in Karachi, Islamabad, Peshawar, Quetta and Gilgit.

National Park	Province	Size (sq km)
Ayubia	NWFP	33
Central Karakoram	Northern Areas	9738
Chinji	Punjab	61
Chitral Gol	NWFP	78
Deosai Plains	Northern Areas	1400
Hazarganji-Chiltan	Balochistan	156
Hingol	Balochistan	6990
Khunjerab	Northern Areas	2270
Kirthar	Sindh	3087
Lal Suhanra	Punjab	516
Machiara	AJK	135
Margalla Hills	Islamabad	174
Shandur-Hundrup	Northern Areas	518
Sheikh Buddin	NWFP	155

are now only occasional visitors). Other wildlife includes the Siberian ibex and Ladakh urial, black bears and wolves.

DEOSAI PLAINS NATIONAL PARK

This park (p291) was declared in 1993 in response to the impact of increasing tourism on the fragile subalpine vegetation and a vulnerable population of Himalayan brown bears.

KHUNJERAB NATIONAL PARK

This park (p317) was declared in 1975 at the urging of wildlife biologist Dr George Schaller, to protect Marco Polo sheep. The government then promised, but never delivered, compensation to local people whose traditional grazing rights had suddenly evaporated as a result of the declaration. Little else was done until 1989, when an international workshop urged a strict ban on grazing and hunting in a 'core area' of the park. Most local people, whose livelihoods depend on grazing yaks and other animals in those valleys, refused to cooperate, and a suit was filed to reverse the grazing ban. The suit was eventually lost, and herders and hunters were ejected, however, with the help of the government's main consultant on the park (the WWF), a process of community consultation was set in motion.

LAL SUHANRA NATIONAL PARK

Lal Suhanra (p125) was declared Pakistan's first national park in 1972. Located in the Bahawalpur district of Punjab, it features a large lake that's ideal for bird-watching, and is home to a black buck breeding programme. The black buck was virtually extinct in this part of its range but the programme now boasts well over 500 antelope. The park also hosts hog deer, chinkara gazelle and nilgai antelope.

ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

Pakistan's greatest challenges are intricately linked to the environment: deforestation, desertification, salinity, pollution, and energy and water shortages all play a significant role in the cycle of poverty and the limitations to economic development.

Only 5% of Pakistan's land is forested, and natural forests are declining at an alarming rate. Especially vulnerable are the mountain and mangrove forests. Trees are an essential resource for rural communities and as a habitat for wildlife. Unregulated private logging in some of the Northern

Renowned wildlife biologist, author and photographer Dr George Schaller witnessed his first snow leopard in Chitral Gol National Park.

Areas has led to severe slope instability, water pollution and land degradation, and few profits have accrued to local people.

Deforestation coupled with overgrazing can lead to desertification, and to soil salinity – a problem that directly affects food production in this primarily arid country. As much as one quarter of the country's arable land is affected by erosion and salinity, and it is claimed that as much as two million hectares of once-productive agricultural land has been abandoned in the irrigation-canal areas as a result of salinity. But the news is not all bad and solutions aimed at addressing these problems (including wide-scale reforestation) continue to be researched and implemented.

The cities have their own environmental problems. Air pollution is the most obvious, and it isn't surprising to learn that almost all samples collected in Pakistan's major cities exceed World Health Organization (WHO) guideline values. Water shortage is perhaps the most politically explosive issue in Pakistan's south. Most people living in Karachi do not have access to clean water, resulting in increasing levels of health problems and occasional civil disturbances when local politicians agitate for this most basic of life's requirements.

Pakistan's chronic shortage of energy is a serious limitation to economic progress and while the government pursues thermal and hydropower projects, it has been very slow to adopt newer sustainable technologies such as solar and wind power. On the bright side, several hundred villages in Balochistan and Punjab have been earmarked for solar energy projects, and a small wind-powered plant operates in Rawalpindi.

Islamabad & Rawalpindi



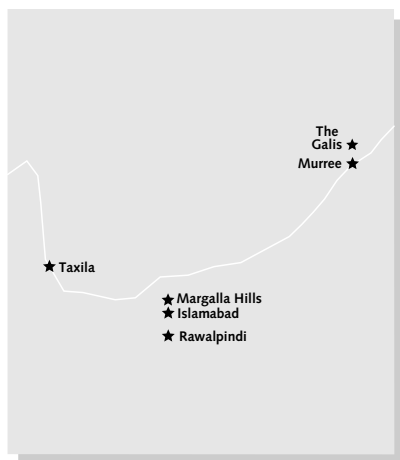
The so-called twin cities of Islamabad and Rawalpindi are commonly viewed as one unit, and indeed, one day the two will physically merge. However, these twins, with separate ancestry and distinct personalities, are far from identical. Islamabad is a late-20th-century capital laid out in straight lines and right angles: a proud metric showcase of government and administration. Rawalpindi, on the other hand, grew from a ramshackle backwater village to a sprawling hub on the Grand Trunk Rd during the 19th century.

The twins' personalities are rather like chalk and cheese: Islamabad is patently more subdued and suburban with broad avenues, grassy parkland, shiny restaurants and just a whiff of the exasperating human and mechanical crush that epitomises most subcontinental cities. For those with a penchant for the adrenaline-pumping hullabaloo that a typical South Asian metropolis delivers, all that awaits in Rawalpindi – affectionately dubbed 'Pindi' – a mere 15km away.

Neither city is a major tourist drawcard in its own right – most foreign travellers only pause here to arrange visas/permits or use it as a jumping-off point to other destinations – yet not far away are the fascinating archaeological digs around the Gandharan city of Taxila. Here, Buddhism and the sublime Graeco-Buddhist art evolved and flourished, and its glory can be appreciated in Taxila's splendid museum and at several major sites. And if the energy-zapping heat of the plateau starts to take its toll during the warmer months, you can flee to the cool mountain air of Murree, an erstwhile British Raj hill station. Even better, ramble around the less developed, more serene hill stations strung out along the forested ridges known as the Galis, a truly welcoming escape from the frazzling rat race and other vicissitudes of life on the road.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Marvel at Islamabad's **Shah Faisal Mosque** (p77), a modern geometrical interpretation of a desert tent with rocket-like minarets, on a phenomenal scale
- Ramble around the breezy **Margalla Hills** (p79) – a slice of natural beauty right on Islamabad's doorstep
- Delve into the glorious legacy of Gandharan civilisation at **Taxila Museum** (p88) and the nearby **archaeological sites** (p89)
- Inhale cool, pine-scented mountain air on one of the blood-pumping hiking trails around **Murree** and **the Galis** (p90)
- Feast on spicy kebabs at an earthy street stall in **Rawalpindi** (p85), or twirl spaghetti at one of the trendy multicuisine restaurants in **Islamabad** (p83)



■ ISLAMABAD: 1,018,000

■ RAWALPINDI: 3,039,550

HISTORY

The plateau setting of Islamabad and Rawalpindi has revealed evidence of a pre-historic culture flourishing in the region, and it is known that a Buddhist town once existed on the site of Rawalpindi.

The city of Rawalpindi had a turbulent development, its strategic location attracting the attention of successive invading forces. Protected as a Sikh garrison town and astride the Grand Trunk Rd, it eventually grew in importance as a trading centre, before coming to the attention of the British, who seized the city from the Sikhs in 1849. The British built Asia's largest cantonment south of the city (cantonments were the tidy colonial enclaves built next to 'native' towns). Rawalpindi 'Cantt' is still the headquarters of the Pakistan army. It didn't take long for the heat-sensitive British to develop their cool hill retreat at nearby Murree.

As Karachi was too far from everything, a decision was made in the 1950s to build a new capital near Rawalpindi and the summer hill stations. To avoid urban chaos and decay, architect-planner Konstantinos Doxiadis' idea was to let Islamabad grow sector by sector across a grid, each sector having its own residences, shops and parks. Construction began in 1961, during which time Rawalpindi enjoyed a brief period as Pakistan's temporary capital. Today, Islamabad is a slowly expanding city, with the ongoing construction of broad new roads and modern commercial buildings.

ORIENTATION

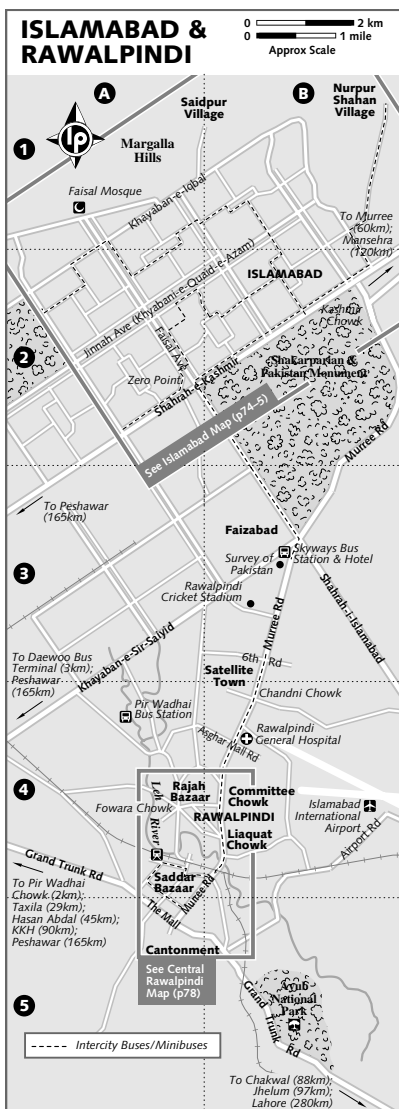
The two cities, 15km apart, are effectively a single mega-town with bazaars at one end and bureaucrats at the other. Transport between them is straightforward and relatively fast. The airport is about 5km northeast of Rawalpindi's Saddar Bazaar and can be reached by Suzukis and taxis (see p87).

Islamabad

☎ 051

Islamabad has no real axis or centre. Each sector of the city, built around a *markaz* (commercial centre), has a letter-number designation (eg F-7), with quarters numbered clockwise. For example, F-7/1 is in the southwest corner, F-7/2 in the northwest. These Orwellian coordinates also have names; F and G are Shalimar and Ramna, so, F-7 is Shalimar-7, and so on.

But as a practical matter, sectors are called by their markets. The main ones, in sequence



along the bus line, are Aabpara (*ah*-pa-ra, southwest G-6), Melody Market (or Civic Centre; G-6), Sitara Market (G-7), Super Market (F-6), Jinnah Market (or Jinnah Super; F-7) and Ayub Market (F-8).

Other useful landmarks are Karachi Co (G-9) and Peshawar Mor (G-8/1) in the west of the city. Between the Fs and Gs is a com-

mercial belt called the Blue Area, which has some of the capital's more upmarket shops and restaurants.

Rawalpindi

☎ 051

The city's centre is bordered by Murree Rd and the Mall (also called Shahrah-e-Quaid-e-Azam). The cheaper hotels are in Saddar and Rajah Bazaars and along Murree Rd at Liaquat (*lyah-kut*) Chowk and Committee Chowk. The train station is in Saddar, the Pir Wadhai bus station is northwest of town and the airport is to the east.

South of Saddar, the Cantonment has mid-range and top-end hotels and traces remaining from the colonial years. At Rajah, the biggest bazaar, Fowara Chowk has six 'spoke' roads to Saddar, Pir Wadhai and Murree Rd. The city's growing end is Satellite Town, meeting Islamabad at the local transport junction of Faizabad.

Maps

The Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation (see p77) has a free *Islamabad & Rawalpindi* map, although the extra Rawalpindi section is of limited use. Good bookshops sell several fairly detailed maps including the *Islamabad Street Map* (Rs 100). The **Survey of Pakistan** (Map p72; ☎ 9290230; Murree Rd, Faizabad; ☎ 8am-3pm Mon-Thu, 8am-noon Fri) stocks maps covering all regions and major cities, including a detailed *Islamabad & Rawalpindi Guide Map* (Rs 100) and an *Islamabad Street Map* (Rs 100).

INFORMATION

Bookshops

London Book Company (Map pp74-5; ☎ 2823852; 3 Kohsar Market, F-6/3, Islamabad; ☎ 9am-9.30pm Mon-Sat) Small café upstairs.

Mr Books (Map pp74-5; ☎ 2278843; Super Market, F-6, Islamabad; ☎ 9am-10pm Mon-Sat, 10am-10pm Sun)

Old Book Bank (Map p78; ☎ 5519644; 53/1 Kashmir Rd, Rawalpindi; ☎ 9am-10pm) Good for secondhand books, as is the big book market that fills the streets of Saddar on Sunday.

Saeed Book Bank (Map pp74-5; ☎ 2651656; www.saeedbookbank.com; Jinnah Market, F-7, Islamabad; ☎ 9.45am-11pm) The biggest bookshop in Pakistan, with a massive and diverse collection, from guidebooks to gardening. Highly recommended.

Variety Books (Map p78; ☎ 5583397; Bank Rd, Rawalpindi; ☎ 10am-10pm)

Emergency

Police (☎ 15; ☎ 24hr)

Foreigners' Registration

Foreigners' Registration Office (FRO) Islamabad (Map pp74-5; ☎ 9261082; City Court, Ayub Market, F-8; ☎ 9am-3pm Mon-Thu & Sat, 9am-noon Fri); Rawalpindi (Map p78; ☎ 9270611; Civil Courts) Only nationals of 16 countries are required to register – see p378. The Rawalpindi office is beside the senior superintendent of police (SSP), southeast of Saddar Bazaar; telephone for operating hours.

Internet Access

Internet cafés in Islamabad are scattered around the various sector markets and along the strip at Aabpara (north of the Rose & Jasmine Garden). In Rawalpindi, the greatest concentration is in Saddar Bazaar. Ask your hotel which is the nearest. The business centres of five-star hotels have by far the most comfortable internet facilities but you pay through the nose. Two good independent operators:

Dandy's (Map pp74-5; Super Market, F-6, Islamabad; per hr Rs 25; ☎ 10am-9pm Mon-Sat, 3-9pm Sun)

Web@e Net Café (Map p78; Murree Rd, Committee Chowk, Rawalpindi; per hr Rs 20; ☎ 10am-midnight)

Libraries

National Library (Map pp74-5; ☎ 9202544; Isfahani Rd, Islamabad; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri) Near the Diplomatic Enclave, the library has a large reference collection (many in English) and newspapers.

Medical Services

Cantonment General Hospital (Map p78;

☎ 9270907; Saddar Rd, Saddar Bazaar, Rawalpindi)

Federal Government Services Hospital (Poly Clinic; Map pp74-5; ☎ 9218300; Hospital Rd, G-6/2, Islamabad) Near the Blue Area.

Pakistan Institute of Medical Science (PIMS) (Map pp74-5; ☎ 9261182; Faisal Ave, G-8/3, Islamabad)

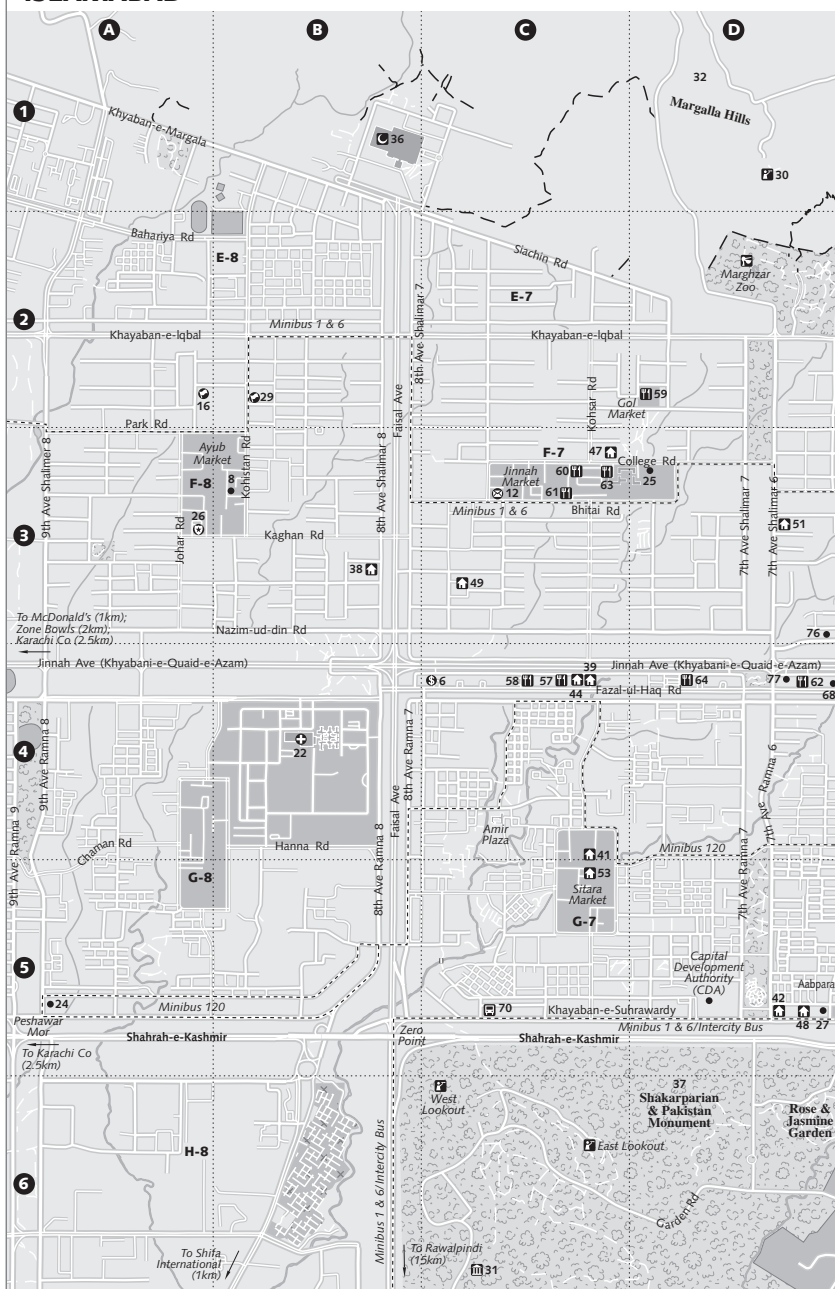
Rawalpindi General Hospital (Map p72; ☎ 9290309; cnr Murree & Asghar Mall Rds, Rawalpindi)

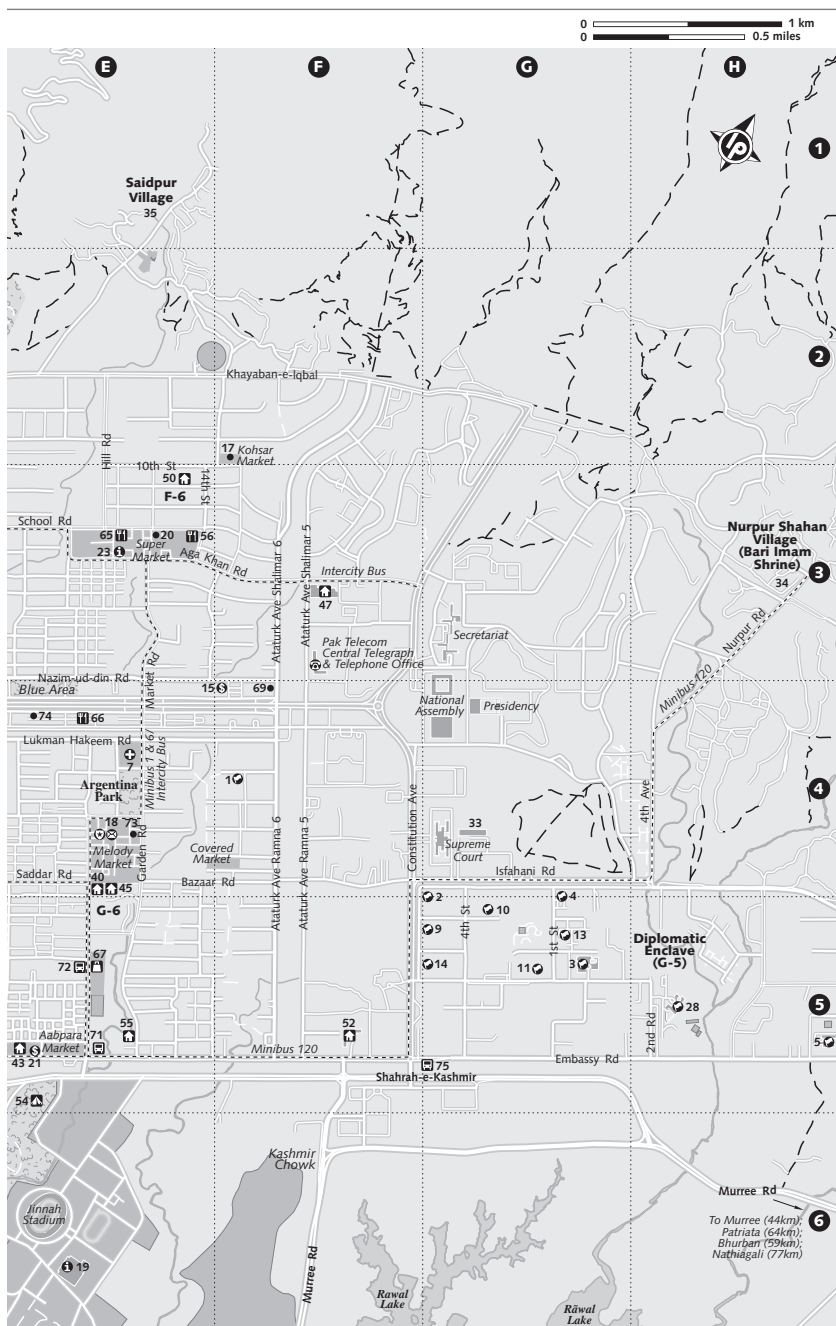
Shifa International (off Map pp74-5; ☎ 4446801; Pitras Bukhari Rd, H-8/4, Islamabad) Regarded as the best.

Money

Private moneychangers are grouped in the Blue Area in Islamabad – there's a bunch behind the Usmania Restaurant. It's worth comparing rates, as competition is high. At the

ISLAMABAD





INFORMATION		SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES			
Afghan Embassy.....	1 F4	Daman-e-Koh.....	30 D1	Hot Spot, The.....	59 D2
Australian High Commission.....	2 F4	Lok Virsa Museum.....	31 C6	Jason's Steakhouse.....	(see 47)
British High Commission.....	3 G5	Margalla Hills National Park.....	32 D1	Kabul Restaurant.....	60 C3
Canadian High Commission.....	4 C4	National Library.....	33 G4	KC Grill.....	61 C3
Chinese Embassy.....	5 H5	Nurpur Shahan Village (Bari Imam Shrine).....	34 H3	KFC.....	(see 65)
Citibank.....	6 C4	Saidpur Village.....	35 E1	Omar Khayam.....	62 D4
Dandy's.....	(see 56)	Shah Faisal Mosque.....	36 B1	Pappasalli's Italian Restaurant.....	63 C3
Excise & Tax Department.....	(see 8)	Shakarparian & Pakistan Monument.....	37 D6	Pizzeria Pizza House.....	64 D4
Federal Government Services Hospital (Poly Clinic).....	7 E4			Rakaposhi.....	(see 52)
Foreigners' Registration Office.....	8 B3			Red Onion.....	(see 64)
French Embassy.....	9 F5			United Bakery.....	65 E3
German Embassy.....	10 G5			Usmania.....	66 E4
Indian High Commission.....	11 G5	SLEEPING		Wang Fu.....	(see 39)
International Mail Office.....	12 C3	Chateau Royal.....	38 B3	Zamana.....	(see 52)
Iranian Embassy.....	13 G5	Envoy Continental Hotel.....	39 C4		
Japanese Embassy.....	14 F5	Holiday Inn.....	40 E4	SHOPPING	
JS Bank.....	15 F4	Hotel al-Hujurat.....	41 C4	Sunday Bazaar.....	67 E5
Kazakhstan Embassy.....	16 A2	Hotel Ambassador.....	42 D5		
London Book Company.....	17 E2	Hotel Friends Inn.....	43 E5	TRANSPORT	
Main Post Office.....	18 E4	Hotel Marina International.....	44 C4	Aero Asia.....	68 D4
Ministry of Tourism.....	19 E6	Hotel Ormate.....	45 E4	Air France.....	69 F4
Mr Books.....	20 E3	Jacaranda.....	46 C3	Avis.....	(see 27)
National Bank.....	21 E5	Marriott Hotel.....	47 F3	British Airways.....	(see 52)
Pakistan Institute of Medical Science (PIMS).....	22 B4	New Islamabad Hotel.....	48 D5	Bus Stop.....	70 C5
Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation (PTDC).....	23 E3	Peninsula.....	49 C3	Emirates.....	(see 69)
Regional Passport Office.....	24 A5	Poet, The.....	50 E3	Gulf Air.....	(see 69)
Saeed Book Bank.....	25 D3	Residence, The.....	51 D3	Minibuses to Diplomatic Enclave.....	71 E5
Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP).....	26 A3	Serena Hotel.....	52 F5	Minibuses to Sitara and Peshawar Mor.....	72 E5
Travel Walji's.....	27 D5	Simara Hotel.....	53 C5	Pakistan Railways Reservation & Information Office.....	73 E4
United States Embassy.....	28 H5	Tourist Campsite.....	54 E5	PIA.....	74 E4
Uzbekistan Embassy.....	29 B2	Youth Hostel Islamabad.....	55 E5	Police Buses to Embassies.....	75 F5
		EATING		Shaheen Air International.....	76 D3
		Afghan Bakery.....	(see 60)	Singapore Airlines.....	(see 40)
		Al-Maghreb.....	(see 52)	Thai Airways.....	(see 40)
		American Steak House.....	56 E3	Xinjiang Airways.....	77 D4
		Dragon City.....	57 C4		
		Haleem Ghar.....	58 C4		

time of research the airport moneychangers were only changing foreign currency (not travellers cheques).

Most banks in Saddar Bazaar in Rawalpindi exchange foreign currency. There are also several moneychangers near the corner of Kashmir Rd and the Mall – they keep longer hours than the banks, offer slightly better rates (but not always) and will often change travellers cheques.

Citibank (☎ 111333333; ☑ 9am-5pm Mon-Thu, 9am-12.30pm Fri, 9am-1.30pm Sat) Islamabad (Map pp74-5; Jinnah Ave, Blue Area); Rawalpindi (Map p78; Adamjee Rd) Changes major currencies and travellers cheques, and has an ATM accepting most cards.

JS Bank (Map pp74-5; ☎ 111777999; Ali Plaza, Jinnah Ave, Blue Area, Islamabad; ☑ 9am-1.30pm & 2.30-5pm Mon-Thu, 9am-12.30pm & 3-5pm Fri, 9am-12.30pm Sat) Has an Amex-only ATM.

National Bank Islamabad (Map pp74-5; ☎ 2826848; Khayaban-e-Suhrawardy, Aabpara, G-6; ☑ 9am-5pm Mon-Thu, 9am-1.30pm & 3-5pm Fri); Rawalpindi (Map p78; ☎ 9272676; Bank Rd; ☑ 9am-1.30pm Mon-Thu, 9am-12.30pm Fri & Sat) The National has several branches

that change cash and travellers cheques, including one at Melody Market (☎ 9204665) in Islamabad.

Standard Chartered Bank (Map p78; ☎ 5527286; cnr Haider & Canning Rds, Rawalpindi; ☑ 9am-5pm Mon-Thu, 9am-1.30pm & 3-5pm Fri)

Post

International Mail Office (Map pp74-5; ☎ 111111117; Jinnah Market, F-7, Islamabad)

Islamabad Main Post Office (Map pp74-5; ☎ 9201184; Melody Market, G-6, Islamabad; ☑ 9am-1pm & 1.30-8pm Mon-Sat, poste restante 9am-2pm Mon-Sat)

Rawalpindi Main Post Office (Map p78; ☎ 9271506; Kashmir Rd, Rawalpindi; ☑ 9am-1pm & 1.30-9pm Mon-Sat)

Telephone

The best rates for interstate and international telephone calls are at the numerous public call offices (PCOs) in the sector markets, the Blue Area and Aabpara in Islamabad, and scattered throughout the bazaars of Rawalpindi. For details about phonocards, see p377.

Tourist Information

Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation

(PTDC; Map pp74-5; ☎ 9202766; Super Market, Aga Khan Rd, F-6, Islamabad; 📞 9am-6pm Mon-Sat, closed 1-2pm Fri) This office (next to a Caltex petrol station) has a free map of Islamabad and Rawalpindi as well as maps and brochures to other Pakistani destinations. The staff can make reservations at PTDC hotels throughout the country and help organise onward transport.

Tourism Development Corporation of Punjab

(TDCP; Map p78; ☎ 9272128; www.tdcp.punjab.gov.pk; 44 Mall Plaza, The Mall, Rawalpindi; 📞 8am-1pm & 1.30-8pm Mon-Sat) Has a few brochures and arranges tailor-made trips to various Pakistani destinations (prices on application).

Travel Agencies

Before parting with your cash, it's wise to get what you've been promised in writing, to avoid potential misunderstandings later. Two reputable travel agencies:

Pakistan Tours Limited (PTL; Map p78; ☎ 9272017; Flashman's Hotel, The Mall, Rawalpindi) A subsidiary of the PTDC.

Travel Walji's (Map pp74-5; ☎ 2870201; www.waljis.com; 10 Khayaban-e-Suhrawardy, Aabpara, Islamabad)

SIGHTS

Islamabad

SHAKARPARIAN, PAKISTAN MONUMENT & LOK VIRSA MUSEUM

Known as Shakarparian, the urban wilderness south of Islamabad has an arboretum with trees planted by dozens of foreign heads of state, as well as sculpted gardens, and panoramas of Islamabad and Rawalpindi from the east lookout. Downhill to the east is the 20-hectare **Rose & Jasmine Garden**, site of several annual flower shows.

Shakarparian is also the site of the impressive reddish-brown granite **Pakistan Monument** (National Monument; Map pp74-5; 📞 9am-10pm), conceived to represent Pakistan's diverse culture and national unity. Flanked by well-tended gardens and shaped like an unfurling flower, the four main 'petals' represent the provinces of Punjab, Sindh, Balochistan and the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP), with the three smaller 'petals' depicting other regions, including Kashmir. A museum, scheduled to open in 2008, will showcase post-independence memorabilia.

Lok Virsa Museum (National Institute of Folk & Traditional Heritage; Map pp74-5; ☎ 9201651; Garden Rd; admission Rs 300; 📞 9am-2pm & 3-7.30pm) houses a fascinating

array of traditional handicrafts including embroidered costumes, old jewellery and intricate woodcarvings – it is well worth a visit. The reference library has resources on history, art, crafts, traditional music and ethnography. Books and other media of folk and classical music can be purchased at the bookshop. Photography inside the museum is prohibited.

To get to the hill lookouts, get off the bus at the Zero Point stop, cross the road and follow a path for 20 minutes up the hill. For Lok Virsa Museum, you can continue walking over the hill; or from the bus stop cross the road, bear right and enter the woods on a path where an approach road joins the Rawalpindi road (the continuation of 8th Ave), a 15-minute walk. A taxi from Aabpara to the museum costs about Rs 60.

SHAH FAISAL MOSQUE

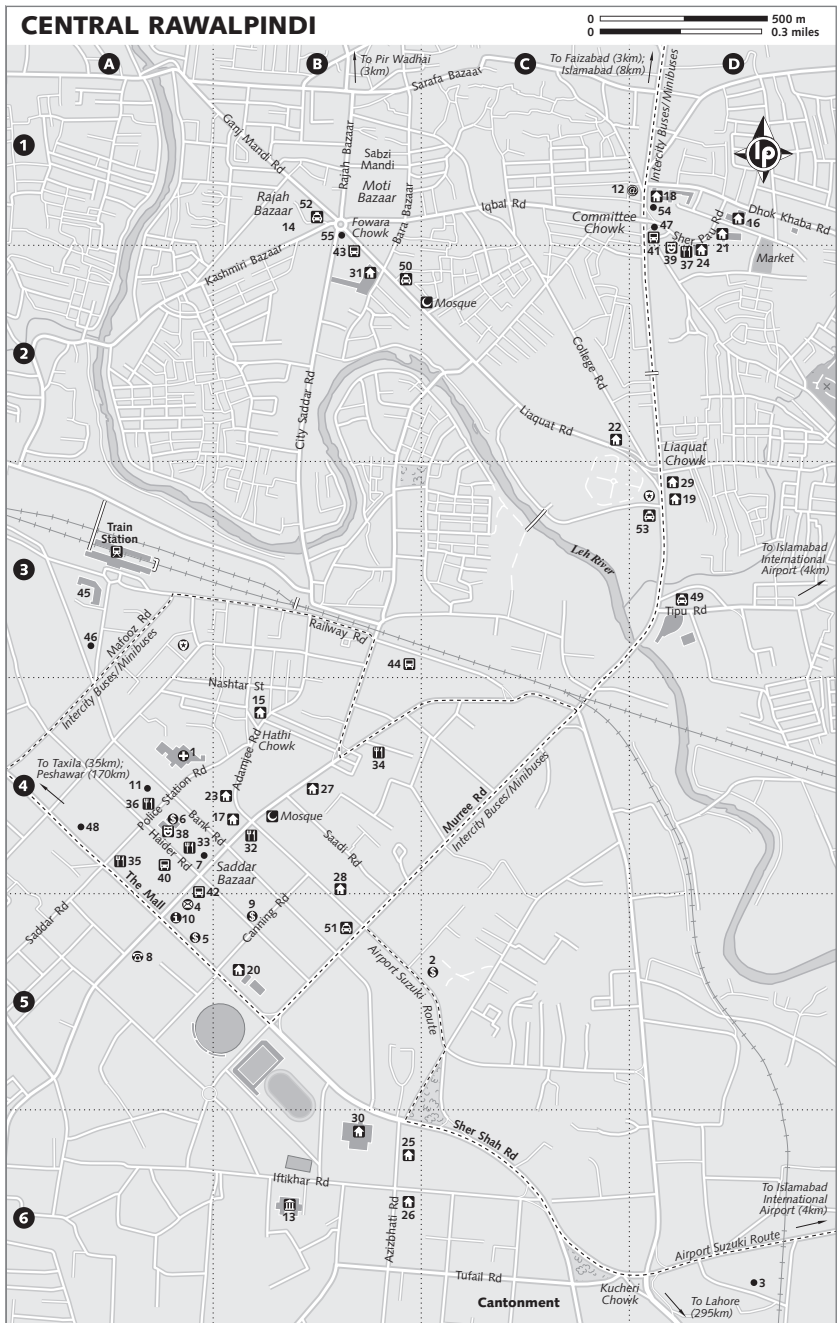
This eye-popping **mosque** (Map pp74-5; Faisal Ave), nestled at the foot of the Margalla Hills, is one of Asia's largest and reflects an eclectic blend of ultramodern and traditional architectural design styles. Topped by sloping roofs (a stark contrast to the traditional domes found on most mosques), the main prayer hall and courtyard are said to hold around 100,000 people. Most of its cost (pegged at about US\$120 million today) was a gift from King Faisal of Saudi Arabia.




Designed by a Turkish architect, Vedat Dalokay, and built between 1976 and 1986, the mosque's geometric design (modelled on a desert tent) and clean lines make the impressive scale hard to discern until you are up close. The four 88m minarets (an old urban myth is that the ever-paranoid CIA demanded to inspect them, fearing they were missiles in disguise!) tower over the prayer hall. Inside, the ceiling soars to 40m and the air hums with muffled recitations. The mausoleum of the late president, Zia ul-Haq, is adjacent to the mosque.

Visitors are welcome, but non-Muslims are requested to avoid prayer times and Fridays. Leave your shoes at a counter before entering the courtyard and remember to dress conservatively (women should bring a head scarf). To get here, jump off an intercity bus at 8th Ave or catch a taxi (around Rs 80 from the Blue Area).

DAMAN-E-KOH & SAIDPUR VILLAGE

A picnic spot and lookout in the Margalla Hills, **Daman-e-Koh** (Map pp74-5) has panoramic



INFORMATION		Al-Hateem International Hotel... 19 D3	ENTERTAINMENT 
Cantonment General Hospital.... 1 A4	Flashman's Hotel..... 20 B5	Ciros Cinema..... 38 A4	
Citibank..... 2 C5	Green Palace Hotel..... 21 D1	Gulistan Cinema..... 39 D2	
Foreigners' Registration Office... 3 D6	Hotel Akbar International..... 22 C2		
Main Post Office..... 4 A5	Hotel Avanti..... 23 B4	TRANSPORT	
Moneychangers..... 5 A5	Hotel Blue Sky..... 24 D2	British Airways..... (see 30)	
National Bank..... 6 A4	Hotel De Mall..... 25 B6	Bus to Taxila, Wah & Hasan	
Old Book Bank..... 7 A4	Hotel Holiday Crown Palace..... 26 B6	Abdal..... 40 A4	
Pak Telecom Central Telegraph & Telephone Office..... 8 A5	New Kamran Hotel & Restaurant..... 27 B4	Intercity Buses & Minibuses... (see 53)	
Pakistan Tours Limited (PTL)... (see 20)	Paradise Inn..... 28 B4	Intercity Buses & Minibuses..... 41 D1	
Standard Chartered Bank..... 9 B5	Park Hotel..... 29 D3	Minibus 1 & 6 to Islamabad..... 42 A4	
Tourism Development Corporation of Punjab (TDCP)..... 10 A5	Pearl Continental Hotel..... 30 B6	Minibus to Islamabad..... 43 B2	
Variety Books..... 11 A4	Seven Brothers Hotel & Restaurant..... 31 B2	Minibuses to Murree & Taxila... 44 B3	
Web@ge Net Café..... 12 D1		Pakistan Railways Commercial Department..... 45 A3	
	EATING 	Pakistan Railways Reservation & Information Office..... 46 A3	
SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES	Anwar Café..... 32 B4	Pakistan Railways Reservation & Information Office..... 47 D1	
Pakistan Army Museum..... 13 B6	Data Kabana..... 33 A4	PIA..... 48 A4	
Pearl Continental Hotel..... (see 30)	Jahangir Balti Murg..... 34 B4	Suzukis to Airport..... 49 D3	
Rajah Bazaar..... 14 B1	Kim Fah..... 35 A4	Suzukis to Airport..... 50 B2	
	Larosh..... (see 24)	Suzukis to Airport..... 51 B5	
SLEEPING 	Safilo Milkshakes & Juices..... (see 36)	Suzukis to Pir Wadhai..... 52 B1	
Al-Azam Hotel..... 15 B4	Scoop Ice Creams..... 36 A4	Suzukis to Rajah Bazaar..... 53 D3	
Al-Baddar Hotel..... 16 D1	Seven Brothers Hotel & Restaurant..... (see 31)	Tonga Stand..... 54 D1	
Al-Falah Hotel..... 17 B4	Usmania Restaurant..... 37 D2	Tonga Stand..... 55 B1	
Al-Farooq Hotel..... 18 D1			

views over Islamabad and, on the rare clear day, south to the Salt Range. It's a splendid spot to get a sense of the city's layout, with the Shah Faisal Mosque a breathtaking sight. To get here, hop off intercity minibus 1 or 6 at 7th Ave and catch a Suzuki at Khayaban-e-Iqbal, or walk up the steep path behind the small Marghzar Zoo for about 30 minutes.

Just east of the zoo, a road leads northeast for 1km to **Saidpur** (Map pp74–5), a (formerly Hindu) village still famous for pottery. Scheduled to open in Saidpur in 2008 is a 'Model Village' that will showcase Pakistani cultural traditions and handicrafts from various regions, including Balochistan and Sindh.

NURPUR SHAHAN VILLAGE & BARI IMAM SHRINE

About 4km northeast of the Diplomatic Enclave, **Nurpur Shahan** (Map pp74–5) village is a shrine to Shah Abdul Latif Kazmi. Also known as Bari Shah Latif or 'Bari Imam', he was a 17th-century Sufi teacher and Islamabad's unofficial patron saint. Thursday evening can be very festive, with pilgrims and trancelike qawwali (Islamic devotional singing). Foreigners are welcome but should always dress conservatively. In the last week of May the carnival-like *urs* (death-anniversary festival) of Bari Shah Latif is celebrated here.

Minibus 3 heads to Nurpur Shahan from Rajah Bazaar in Rawalpindi, via Aabpara.

Bus 120 leaves from Karachi Co (west of Islamabad), via Sitara Market and Aabpara.

MARGALLA HILLS NATIONAL PARK

The Margalla Hills north of Islamabad are full of hiking trails that snake their way up ridgetops and down through forested valleys. *Hiking Around Islamabad* (Rs 150), available in major bookshops, provides details of hikes ranging from short walks to three-day excursions. It also provides a natural history background and handy hints for preparation. The walks can be steep, and it's usually hot and dry, so take plenty of water and don't walk alone.

Rawalpindi RAJAH BAZAAR

This buzzing **bazaar** (Map p78; Fowara Chowk) is a kaleidoscope of people and merchandise spreading in every direction from chaotic Fowara Chowk. You could spend hours exploring the colourful, crowded streets and buy anything from batteries to a new set of teeth. Dotted around are crumbling stone towers marking old Hindu temples. Just beyond Rajah Bazaar on Railway Workshop Rd are rows of **truck workshops** where you can sometimes see trucks being decorated with the vibrant art that typifies Pakistani road transport. To find these trucks, take the Ganj Mandi Rd from Fowara Chowk, and once you reach the tonga (two-wheeled horse or pony carriage) stand,

turn left over the bridge. Continue along this road for about five minutes.

PAKISTAN ARMY MUSEUM

This **armaments museum** (Map p78; ☎ 56132608; Iftikhar Rd; admission Rs 60; 🕒 9am-3pm Wed-Mon, 9am-noon Tue) is next to the Army Library (behind the Pearl Continental Hotel). It houses a handful of well-kept galleries exhibiting a limited but interesting collection dating from prehistoric times. Items include rifles, swords (including some Turkish ones), Stone Age hand-axes, a former Russian missile system and, rather oddly, an Australian harpoon.

AYUB NATIONAL PARK

Named after General Ayub Khan, the first of Pakistan's martial law administrators, this rather staid **park** (Map p78; Grand Trunk Rd) south of the Cantonment has 900 hectares of paths, gardens and lakes (with hire boats). To get here, take an airport-bound Suzuki from Rawalpindi and get off at Kucheri Chowk, then take the right fork and travel for about 1km.

ACTIVITIES

Swimming

At the time of writing, only the **Pearl Continental Hotel** (Map pp74-5; ☎ 5566011; The Mall, Rawalpindi; non-guests per day incl tax Rs 1000) allowed nonguests to use its pool.

Ten-Pin Bowling

Zone Bowls (off Map pp74-5; ☎ 2251962; Megazone Complex, Fatima Jinnah Park, F-9, Islamabad; 🕒 10am-midnight) is a 10-lane, fully electronic bowling alley in a rather lifeless little shopping centre. The cost for a game is Rs 140 (10am to 1pm), Rs 190 (1pm to 5pm) or Rs 250 (5pm to midnight). To get to Zone Bowls, enter the park via the west entrance off 10th Ave. A taxi from the Blue Area costs around Rs 60.

TOURS

The **Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation** (PTDC; Map pp74-5; ☎ 9202766; Super Market, Aga Khan Rd, F-6, Islamabad; 🕒 9am-6pm Mon-Sat, closed 1-2pm Fri) can organise day tours of Taxila (p88) as well as other destinations – note that tours may only run with minimum numbers, making it advisable to book at least a few days in advance. Prices are available on application. Many travel agencies also offer (tailor-made) tours.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

In the last week of May, the **urs of Bari Shah Latif** is celebrated at his shrine in the village of Nurpur Shahan (p79). The festival lasts several days as pilgrims sing and dance in an upbeat atmosphere; as the date changes annually (according to the Islamic calendar) consult the PTDC for details.

The Rose & Jasmine Garden in Islamabad hosts several floral shows during the year, including the **Rose Festival** in March, the **Spring Flower Show** in April, and the **Chrysanthemum Show** in November. Contact the PTDC for specific dates, as they vary each year.

SLEEPING

It's a good idea to book a room in advance as the most salubrious places can fill up fast. Most hotels have a noon checkout and many can arrange airport pick-ups with advance notice. All rooms listed here have private bathrooms unless otherwise stated. Note that the showers in budget and midrange properties may render a mere trickle, so double-check before accepting the room.

Travellers have reported that some budget and midrange lodgings in Rawalpindi have refused accommodation to anyone who has 'Not Valid for Cantt Area' stamped next to their visa – for further details see p378.

Budget

In Islamabad you can stay cheaply at Sitara Market or Aabpara. Sitara Market has the capital's largest selection of economical hotels; to get here from Aabpara, take minibus 105 or 120. In Rawalpindi, Saddar Bazaar has plenty of cheap hotels and is convenient to the long-distance bus and train stations.

Establishments in this price bracket typically have rooms that are small, sparsely furnished and in need of a facelift – expect functionality rather than luxury.

In the following listings, only the cheapest (without air-con) room tariffs have been given.

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Tourist Campsite (Map pp74-5; no phone; Shahrah-e-Kashmir Rd; per person Rs 50) Opposite Aabpara, this shady and secure foreigners-only camp site is popular with overlanders with their own transport (car parking costs Rs 100). There's a kitchen but no cooking equipment, and locked storage is available.

Youth Hostel Islamabad (Map pp74-5; ☎ 2826899; pyha@comsats.net.pk; Garden Rd; dm HI & IYHF cardholders/annual members Rs 65/120, s/d Rs 700/900) This hostel has dozens of four-bed dorm rooms, communal toilets and cold showers – but no cooking facilities, no restaurant and no camping. It has a rather institutional ambience and the location is isolated. You must have youth hostel membership to stay (Rs 800 per year).

Simara Hotel (Map pp74-5; ☎ 2204555; Sitara Market, G-7; s/d Rs 400/600; 🍷) This is the most popular choice in Sitara. The carpeted rooms here are quite small and uncharismatic, but comfortable enough. Plainly furnished, they come with a TV, little coffee tables and small tiled bathroom. A plus point is the hotel's quiet location, away from irksome traffic din. Simara is one of the most congenial places for solo women travellers.

Hotel al-Hujurat (Map pp74-5; ☎ 2204403; Sitara Market, G-7; s/d Rs 500/700; 🍷) This hotel scores points for its quiet location and although the rooms (some with TV, most with squat toilet) are rather dingy, they're certainly inhabitable. Make sure you check a few rooms first as some are superior to others.

Hotel Friends Inn (Map pp74-5; ☎ 2272546; Block 16, off Khayaban-e-Suhrawardy, Aabpara, G-6/1-4; s/d Rs 700/1200; 🍷) One of the best of Islamabad's dreary budget bunch, this place is in an alley that links the bright lights of Khayaban-e-Suhrawardy with the earthy curry restaurants in the street behind. The rooms are simple and a little musty, but reasonably spacious and with a small TV.

New Islamabad Hotel (Map pp74-5; ☎ 2872250; 14 I&T Centre, Aabpara Market, G-6; s/d Rs 1200/1400; 🍷) One of the better budget choices, NI's rooms are smallish but quite nicely kept, all with TV and many with floral-patterned carpet that may bring back memories of grandma and grandpa's place. There's a restaurant on site and a clutch of inexpensive eateries nearby.

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Saddar Bazaar

Al-Azam Hotel (Map p78; ☎ 5566404; Adamjee Rd; s/d Rs 180/280) A popular shoestring choice, Al-Azam has rudimentary rooms with confined bathrooms, but is not bad considering the price. Inspect a few rooms first.

Al-Falah Hotel (Map p78; ☎ 5580799; Adamjee Rd; s/d Rs 200/400) Al-Falah has competitively priced rooms that are reasonably well kept

and airy, although the singles are a bit box-like. This sound budget choice also has a decent restaurant.

Hotel Avanti (Map p78; ☎ 5580268, Adamjee Rd; s/d Rs 250/450) The Avanti's lacklustre rooms have certainly seen better days; however, renovations are planned so it may be more appealing by the time you read this.

New Kamran Hotel & Restaurant (Map p78; ☎ 5566420; Kashmir Rd; s/d Rs 500/700) The comfortable, albeit threadbare, rooms in this older-style hotel have high ceilings and an appealing sense of space. There's a restaurant on the premises.

Rajah Bazaar, Committee Chowk & Liaquat Chowk

Many cheap hotels around Rajah Bazaar are reluctant to take foreigners; the following are some that do.

Seven Brothers Hotel & Restaurant (Map p78; ☎ 5551112; Liaquat Rd, Rajah Bazaar; s/d Rs 190/270) The affable but noisy Seven Brothers Hotel has airy, spacious rooms that are good value when compared with others in the area. Rooms are very plainly furnished but adequately tidy and there's a generous checkout time of 4pm.

Al-Farooq Hotel (Map p78; ☎ 5960828; Dhok Khaba Rd, Committee Chowk; s/d Rs 230/400; 🍷) The tired-looking rooms are bare, with thinning sheets, but passably clean and fair at this price.

Al-Hateem International Hotel (Map p78; ☎ 5502962; Murree Rd, Liaquat Chowk; s/d Rs 400/700; 🍷) Although the singles are noticeably squeeze, the rooms here are in fair condition despite lacking character and being a tad on the stuffy side. The cleanliness is variable.

Park Hotel (Map p78; ☎ 5962397; Murree Rd, Liaquat Chowk; s/d Rs 780/900; 🍷) The Park is an older-style building with spacious, good-value rooms, each equipped with small tables and chairs and many with TV. Some rooms are a bit smoky and scruffy but are otherwise comfortable. Meals are available.

Midrange

Most midrange hotels have carpeted rooms, running hot water, cable TV and in-house restaurants and/or room service. The majority of hotels in this category add 15% tax and occasionally also an 8% bed tax, therefore adding 23% onto advertised room rates (taxes aren't included in the following tariffs unless otherwise stated).

ISLAMABAD

Hotel Ornate (Map pp74-5; ☎ 2820702; hotelornate@hotmail.com; 5 Civic Centre, Melody Market, G-6; s/d Rs 1800/2200; ☎) The Ornate has pleasant rooms that are smallish but well maintained and come with dressing tables, wardrobes, fridges, TVs and tiled bathrooms. There's a restaurant on site or else you can pop over to the nearby food park in Melody Market.

Hotel Ambassador (Map pp74-5; ☎ 2824011; ambassadorhotels@hotmail.com; Khayaban-e-Suhrawardy, G-6/1; s/d incl tax Rs 3500/4500; ☎) The good-sized carpeted rooms are nicely furnished and come with small fridges, TVs, sofas and tiled bathrooms. Rooms set around the central garden are quieter than those facing the street and are worth booking ahead. There's a restaurant and complimentary airport transfers (on request). On the downside, the air-con can be unreliable, especially during the hot summer months when you need it most.

Hotel Marina International (Map pp74-5; ☎ 2271309; www.marina.com.pk; 109 Blue Area, Jinnah Ave; s/d Rs 4000/5000; ☎) The TV-equipped rooms are a bit dated and overpriced for what you get, but are certainly comfortable enough (you are essentially paying for the location). It's worth trying to negotiate a discount.

Envoy Continental Hotel (Map pp74-5; ☎ 2273971; info@envoyhotel.com.pk; 111 Blue Area, Fazal-ul-Haq Rd; s/d incl breakfast Rs 7000/8000; ☎) A dependable choice for those wishing to stay in the Blue Area, the Envoy's rooms are a little cramped but clean and appealingly furnished. Each room has a TV, fridge and writing desk. There's an on-site restaurant.

Good value for long-term stays, or simply for anyone allergic to conventional hotels, are the many private guesthouses tucked away in the residential backstreets. They offer comfortable rooms and cable TV; breakfast and/or airport pick-ups are usually included in the tariff. Room rates are fixed but you should be able to negotiate a discount depending on how busy the place is and how long you're staying. The following is a reliable selection of what's available (prices include tax):

Chateau Royal (Map pp74-5; ☎ 2260845; chateau@dsl.net.pk; 1 St 64, F-8/4; s/d Rs 2500/3000; ☎) Facing Faisal Ave.

Jacaranda (Map pp74-5; ☎/fax 2651460; mail@jacaranda.com.pk; 17 College Rd, F-7/3; s/d Rs 5100/5700; ☎)

Peninsula (Map pp74-5; ☎ 2653874; peninsula_5@hotmail.com; H-14 St 47, F-7/1; ☎)

Poet (Map pp74-5; ☎ 2273476; thepoet@comsats.net.pk; 31 St 11, F-6/3; s/d Rs 4200/4500; ☎) Between Super Market and Kohsar Market.

Residence (Map pp74-5; ☎ 2873218; rizullah26@hotmail.com; 2 St 30, F-6/1; s/d Rs 1800/2200; ☎)

RAWALPINDI**Saddar Bazaar & Cantonment**

Paradise Inn (Map p78; ☎ 5512311; visitparadiseinn@yahoo.com; 109 Adamjee Rd, Saddar Bazaar; s/d Rs 1000/1200; ☎) This reasonably well-kept property has several restaurants, a rooftop terrace and a generous late checkout of 3pm. The rooms are somewhat dowdy but admirably spacious and comfortable, all with TV and fridge.

Flashman's Hotel (Map p78; ☎/fax 9272014; 17/22 The Mall, Saddar Bazaar; r Rs 3000; ☎) Recently refurbished, unfussy Flashman's still retains a rather sterile ambience but the rooms are comfy – many with separate living areas and all with TV, fridge and good bathroom.

Hotel De Mall (Map p78; ☎ 5586100; fax 5586102; Azizbhati Rd, Cantonment; s/d incl breakfast Rs 4000/5000; ☎) A good choice, this is one of a clutch of midrange hotels just off the Mall. It has clean, well-furnished rooms, each with warm interiors, writing tables, TV and fridge.

Hotel Holiday Crown Palace (Map p78; ☎ 5568068; fax 5583960; 232 Iftikhar Rd, Cantonment; ☎) At the time of research this hotel was being renovated; it's scheduled to reopen in early 2008, with doubles expected to cost around Rs 5000.

Committee Chowk & Liaquat Chowk

Al-Baddar Hotel (Map p78; ☎ 5502380; fax 5502330; Hotel Sq, Committee Chowk; s/d Rs 700/800; ☎) Although in need of a minor revamp, Al-Baddar's humdrum rooms are good-sized and still rate better than many other places at this price.

Green Palace Hotel (Map p78; ☎ 5953111; fax 5953000; Sher Pau Rd, Committee Chowk; s/d Rs 1000/1300; ☎) This fairy-tale castle-esque building, complete with turrets and crenulated façade, is seemingly designed for wedding parties – insist on a quiet room. The reasonably spacious rooms are in fair condition, each with fridge and TV, but some are decidedly musty.

Hotel Blue Sky (Map p78; ☎ 5501436; fax 5501517; Sher Pau Rd, Committee Chowk; s/d Rs 1050/1250; ☎) Probably the best of the so-so choices in this area: clean, comfortable (if a little gaudily furnished), carpeted rooms with small dressing tables and TV, as well as the good Larosh restaurant downstairs (see p85).

Hotel Akbar International (Map p78; ☎ 5532001; Liaquat Rd, Liaquat Chowk; s/d incl tax Rs 1250/1550; 🏠) A popular choice in this locale, Akbar's rooms are unexceptional but they're comfortable and fair for the price. All have small coffee tables, fridge and tiled bathroom. There's also a restaurant.

Top End

The capital has a limited number of five-star hotels, but what's available is suitably sumptuous, all offering igloo-cold air-con and most with complimentary airport shuttles. It's definitely worth asking for a discounted rate if the hotel isn't full. Room rates are subject to additional taxes of up to 23% (not included below).

ISLAMABAD

Holiday Inn (Map pp74-5; ☎ 2827311; www.holidayinnisbpk.com/Holiday_Inn.asp; Municipal Rd, Melody Market, G-6; d Rs 15,000; 🏠 📺 🚰) Although not in the same league as the Serena and Marriott, the Holiday Inn is still impressive. It has well-appointed rooms, professional service, a business centre and good restaurants.

Marriott Hotel (Map pp74-5; ☎ 2826121; www.marriott.com.pk; Aga Khan Rd, Shalimar 5; d US\$265; 🏠 📺 🚰) The five-star Marriott has all the deluxe trappings you'd expect at this price: lavish rooms with internet connectivity, plasma TVs and electronic safes, in addition to an array of facilities that include a health club, round-the-clock business centre and fine restaurants, including popular Jason's Steakhouse (see p84).

our pick Serena Hotel (Map pp74-5; ☎ 2874000; www.serena-hotels.com; Khayaban-e-Suhrawardy Rd, G-5; r Rs 30,000; 🏠 📺 🚰) Set in beautifully landscaped grounds, the sleek Serena has swish rooms, all immaculately decorated, with five-star goodies like flat-screen TVs, luxurious bathrooms and stuffed minibars. This elegant property incorporates traditional and contemporary design styles that include oodles of marble-work, wooden panels and rich fabrics. Amenities include terrific restaurants, a health club, irresistible patisserie and modern business centre.

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Pearl Continental Hotel (Map p78; ☎ 5566011; www.pchotels.com; The Mall; s/d Rs 10,000/11,500; 🏠 📺 🚰) Looking a little frayed around the edges these days, the PC lacks the charisma of Islamabad's

swanky Marriott and Serena Hotels, but its rooms are still very upmarket and there are several above-average restaurants on site.

EATING Islamabad

The capital city's dining scene is no match to that of Lahore or Karachi, but there are still some admirable choices, ranging from pasta creations at plush restaurants in Islamabad, to traditional biryanis dished up at Rawalpindi's boisterous street eateries. Travellers craving familiar fast food will find a sprinkling of chains, such as KFC and Subway, predominantly around the sector markets and the Blue Area.

Mid- to upper-end restaurants impose a tax of 15%, not included below unless otherwise stated. In the following listings, telephone numbers have been provided wherever reservations are advisable (especially on weekends).

RESTAURANTS

Haleem Ghar (Map pp74-5; Golden Plaza, Jinnah Ave, Blue Area; mains Rs 40-190; ☎ 11.30am-midnight) This buzzing and unpretentious Pakistani restaurant cooks up food that's pleasing to both the palate and pocket. Possibilities include chicken tikka, biryani or, for the more adventurous, brain masala. Solo women and families can avail themselves of the restaurant's family section.

Kabul Restaurant (Map pp74-5; College Rd, Jinnah Market, F-7; mains Rs 70-190; ☎ noon-4pm & 7pm-midnight) Carnivores can tuck into generous servings of succulent barbecued meat at this well-regarded Afghani restaurant. Salad, rice, yogurt and traditional-style bread beautifully accompany the tasty tikkas and kebabs.

Usmania Restaurant (Map pp74-5; 13 Blue Area, Jinnah Ave; mains Rs 110-595; ☎ 11am-11.30pm; 🏠) Part of a chain, this very popular dining venue has a large, good-value Pakistani and Chinese menu. The mutton biryani and chicken *jalfrezi* get the thumbs up, as does the piping-hot naan.

Pizzeria Pizza House (Map pp74-5; Jinnah Ave, Blue Area; small/medium/large pizza from Rs 125/280/595; ☎ lunch & dinner) A pizza paradise, with pasta dishes making a cameo appearance. There are plenty of pizza toppings to choose from and a choice of crusts.

Omar Khayam (Map pp74-5; ☎ 2825428; Jinnah Ave, Blue Area; mains Rs 150-360; ☎ noon-4pm & 7-11pm; 🏠) Recommendations at this very popular

Iranian restaurant (bookings advisable) include the *chelo kebab kobideh* (barbecue mutton kebab) and the *kohresht-e-bademjan* (lamb and eggplant).

Wang Fu (Map pp74-5; 112 Blue Area; mains Rs 180-430; ☎ noon-3pm & 7-11pm; 🍴) A reliable Chinese option with a yum selection of dishes, from podgy dumplings to squiggly noodles. There's plenty to choose from, including sesame prawns, chicken with almonds, garlic fish, shrimp fried rice, spicy honey wings and Sichuan beef.

American Steak House (Map pp74-5; 1st fl, Super Market, F-6; mains Rs 195-510; ☎ noon-midnight; 🍴) A meat-lovers haven, with plenty of 'Wild West Steaks' on offer: filet mignon, T-bone, green pepper and Hawaiian, just to name a few. There are also nonsteak options such as burgers, tandoori fish, grilled prawn skewers and a small selection of pastas, pizzas, soups and salads. The interior is chilled-out, with some comfy booth-style seating, and the mocktails/smoothies are guaranteed to quench the most savage summer thirst. Beware, however, of flat whites masquerading as cappuccinos.

Red Onion (Map pp74-5; Jinnah Ave, Blue Area; mains Rs 200-675; ☎ noon-midnight; 🍴) Just the spot to cool your heels, this relaxing retreat has a Continental focus with a splash of Chinese and Pakistani dishes. There's everything from burgers and pizzas to mutton masala and chicken with green olives. Cheese aficionados should not miss the 'Just Say Cheese' pizza.

Zamana (Map pp74-5; Serena Hotel, Khayaban-e-Suhrawardy Rd, G-5; mains Rs 250-400; 🍴) For light bites or more substantial meals (including buffets), the splendid Zamana offers a great selection of Pakistani, Chinese and Continental fare. Open 24 hours.

KC Grill (Map pp74-5; ☎ 2872721; Jinnah Market, F-7; mains Rs 280-410; ☎ noon-11pm; 🍴) Hobnob with Islamabad's upper crust at this stylish restaurant, which offers pleasant indoor and outdoor seating. Menu items include chicken filled with blue cheese, mushroom lasagne, tempura prawns, salmon-and-cheese quiche, chicken teriyaki, fat steaks and an assortment of chargrilled burgers. There's also a selection of Pakistani dishes.

Pappasalli's Italian Restaurant (Map pp74-5; ☎ 2650552; Block 13-E Jinnah Market, F-7; mains Rs 295-420; ☎ 11am-midnight; 🍴) With an attractive interior, delicious food and courteous service, Pappasalli's is deservedly popular. There are plenty of tempting pasta dishes, including a hearty spaghetti bolognese (Rs 295), as well

as ample other choices such as minestrone soup (Rs 120) and steak Tuscan (Rs 405). For dessert there is a divine tiramisu (Rs 130) as well as some glorious ice creams including praline (Rs 125).

Dragon City (Map pp74-5; 108 West Blue Area, Jinnah Ave; mains Rs 300-645; ☎ noon-midnight; 🍴) This welcoming Chinese restaurant has lots of commendable Cantonese and Sichuan dishes, with favourites including the belly-warming soups, Mongolian chicken and garlic prawns. The vegetarian selection is limited.

Al-Maghreb (Map pp74-5; ☎ 2874000; Serena Hotel, Khayaban-e-Suhrawardy Rd, G-5; mains Rs 350-900; ☎ noon-3.30pm & 7.30-11.30pm; 🍴) For a well-deserved splurge consider this atmospheric and beautifully decorated restaurant, which specialises in quality Arabian, Moroccan and Lebanese cuisine.

Jason's Steakhouse (Map pp74-5; ☎ 2826121; Marriott Hotel, Aga Khan Rd, Shalimar 5; mains Rs 400-900; ☎ noon-3pm & 7-11pm; 🍴) If you've been hankering for steak, top-quality imported Australian and US beef graces Jason's tables. Diners are rarely disappointed.

QUICK EATS

Hot Spot (Map pp74-5; Gol Market, St 3, F-7/3; ☎ 11am-11pm; 🍴) A top spot to satiate sugar cravings, this trendy little nook has mouthwatering sweet treats that include homemade ice cream (Rs 85 per scoop), gorgeous cakes (Rs 185 per slice), crepes and waffles. It also does fab smoothies and coffee.

Rakaposhi (Map pp74-5; Serena Hotel, Khayaban-e-Suhrawardy Rd, G-5; ☎ 9am-11pm; 🍴) This wonderful patisserie bakes some of the best cakes in town that are well worth the calorie blowout. It also does a sterling job of ice cream.

Afghan Bakery (Map pp74-5; College Rd, Jinnah Market, F-7; ☎ 7am-10pm) This unpretentious little bakery, right by Kabul Restaurant, sells a small selection of cookies, sweet pies (eg apricot) and fresh bread rolls.

United Bakery (Map pp74-5; Super Market, F-6; ☎ 7am-11.30pm; 🍴) Bakes excellent cakes, cookies, savoury snacks and fresh bread (loaves and rolls). A chocolate donut/éclair is Rs 15/12 and sandwiches are Rs 60. Birthday cakes can be ordered here.

Rawalpindi RESTAURANTS

Seven Brothers Hotel & Restaurant (Map p78; ☎ 5551112; Liaquat Rd, Rajah Bazaar; mains Rs 40-270;

☎ 11am-11pm) An acceptable option in Rajah Bazaar, where the small menu has dependable Pakistani staples at good prices.

Anwar Café (Map p78; Adamjee Rd, Saddar Bazaar; mains Rs 55-130; ☎ 6am-midnight) Opposite a mosque, this bustling, basic street eatery has no English menu but the staff will help out. The chicken biryani, with chapatis and raita, is recommended.

Jahangir Balti Murg (Map p78; Kashmir Rd; mains Rs 120-185; ☎ 11am-midnight) This no-frills street eatery has alfresco dining and is known for its tasty meat-based dishes such as chicken tikka.

Usmania Restaurant (Map p78; Sher Pau Rd, Committee Chowk; mains Rs 120-450; ☎ 9am-midnight; ☺) Usmania is a welcome retreat from the tumultuous streets. The menu sports Pakistani and Chinese fare with hot favourites including chicken masala (Rs 150) and mutton tikka (Rs 210).

Larosh (Map p78; Hotel Blue Sky, Sher Pau Rd, Committee Chowk; mains Rs 125-300; ☎ noon-midnight; ☺) This large, popular restaurant does reliable Pakistani standards such as chicken *jalfrezi* (Rs 175) and mutton pilau (Rs 95). Finish off with the cool mango ice cream (Rs 50).

Kim Fah (Map p78; The Mall; mains Rs 195-310; ☎ noon-4pm & 6-11pm; ☺) Whether it's chicken with lime or a simple egg fried rice, this cosy restaurant delights diners with delicious Chinese creations.

QUICK EATS

Data Kabana (Map p78; Saddar Bazaar; ☎ 11am-11pm) This earthy street eatery is the place to pig out on inexpensive, freshly cooked kebabs. It's located off Haider Rd, just opposite the Ciro's Cinema.

Scoop Ice Creams (Map p78; cnr Saddar & Haider Rds, Saddar Bazaar; ☎ 8am-2pm) Sells various flavours of velvety ice cream including mango and choc-chip (from Rs 30).

Safilo Milkshakes & Juices (Map p78; cnr Saddar & Haider Rds, Saddar Bazaar; ☎ 8am-2pm) The place to go for lovely creamy milkshakes (Rs 65).

DRINKING

Foreigners can obtain a long-term liquor permit (one month costs Rs 600) from the **Excise & Tax Department** (Map pp74-5; ☎ 9271903; Ayub Market, F-8, Islamabad). Bring photocopies of your passport data pages and visa with entry stamps. You can then purchase alcohol from 'shops' hidden around the side of

the Marriott Hotel (Map pp74-5) on Aga Khan Rd in Islamabad or in the compound of Flashman's Hotel (Map p78) on the Mall in Rawalpindi.

In some of the restaurants and bars of the Marriott, Serena and Pearl Continental Hotels, guests can sign a form and buy liquor. Sometimes hotels will do this for nonguests.

ENTERTAINMENT

Ciros Cinema (Map p78; Saddar Bazaar, Rawalpindi; tickets Rs 50) Found off Haider Rd, Ciros screens international films (consult newspapers for session times).

Gulistan Cinema (Map p78; Committee Chowk, Rawalpindi) One of Rawalpindi's many cinemas, the Gulistan shows local films and a sprinkling of Hollywood blockbusters.

Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium (Map p72; Stadium Rd, Satellite Town) International cricket matches, including test matches, are played here. Consult local newspapers or the PTDC (p77) for up-to-date details.

SHOPPING

In Islamabad's sector shopping centres, the Blue Area and the arcades of top-end hotels, tourist shops have pricey carpets, brasswork, jewellery, Kashmiri shawls, woodcarvings, antiques and assorted handicrafts. Especially recommended are the numerous well-stocked handicraft stores in Super Market.

Cheap DVDs and CDs are found in music shops in virtually all of Islamabad's shopping centres and in the bazaars of Rawalpindi. The quality is hit and miss; most cost around Rs 100 each.

If you're on the lookout for imported foodstuffs and toiletries, good places to begin include Jinnah Market, Super Market or Kohsar Market in Islamabad.

Sunday Bazaar (Map pp74-5; G-6/4, Islamabad; ☎ 7am-8pm Sun) On the block between Municipal and Garden Rds in Islamabad's Aabpara, this lively bazaar springs to life most Sundays as a huge handicrafts market with carpets, leather, jewellery, clothing, Afghan curios and more.

If you prefer prowling for a bargain in the rambunctious, people-packed bazaars of Rawalpindi, you'll find the following items in some of Pindi's prominent markets:

Clothing & Tailors Rajah and Saddar Bazaars. Off-the-shelf *shalwar kameez* (traditional dresslike tunic and trouser combination) start at about Rs 400.

Fruit & Vegetables Go to the Sabzi Mandi (Vegetable Market) in Rajah Bazaar or the stalls at the western end of Haider Rd, Saddar Bazaar.

Jewellery & Brasswork Check out Sarafa Bazaar, Rajah Bazaar or Murree Rd near Ashgar Mall Rd.

Pottery Explore Bara Bazaar (near Fowara Chowk), Rajah Bazaar, Faizabad Bazaar at the north end of Rawalpindi, or Saidpur village (p77), north of Islamabad.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Islamabad International Airport (☎ 9280300) has domestic and international terminals. Airport facilities include moneychangers and a restaurant, **tourist information centre** (☎ 9280563), duty-free shop and post office. Check-in for domestic flights is one hour prior to departure (three hours for international flights) and many of the domestic carriers offer discounted night-coach services between major centres.

Aero Asia (Map pp74-5; ☎ 111515151; Block 12-D, SNC Centre, Fazal-ul-Haq Rd, Blue Area, Islamabad) Flies only to Karachi (Rs 4850, one hour and 55 minutes).

Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) Airport (☎ 9024000; Islamabad (Map pp74-5; ☎ 9209911; PIA Bldg, Blue Area; ✈ 8am-8pm); Rawalpindi (Map p78; ☎ 9272211; The Mall; ✈ 8am-8pm) Has domestic services from Islamabad to Gilgit (Rs 3920, one hour and 10 minutes), Karachi (Rs 7380, one hour and 55 minutes), Lahore (Rs 4460, 50 minutes), Multan (Rs 4460, 2½ hours), Peshawar (Rs 2530, 45 minutes), Quetta (Rs 6880, one hour and 25 minutes), Skardu (Rs 4550, one hour) and Sukkur (Rs 6400, two hours and 50 minutes).

Shaheen Air International Airport (☎ 9281001; Islamabad (Map pp74-5; ☎ 111808080; 52 Beverly Centre, Blue Area) Flies only to Karachi (Rs 8400, one hour and 55 minutes).

INTERNATIONAL AIRLINES

Some of the many international airline offices found in the capital include the following:

Air France (Map pp74-5; ☎ 2824096; Rehmat Plaza, Blue Area, Islamabad)

British Airways (Map pp74-5; ☎ 2871026; Serena Hotel, Khayaban-e-Suhrawardy Rd, G-5, Islamabad)

Emirates (Map pp74-5; ☎ 2279999; 1-C Muhammad Plaza, Blue Area, Islamabad)

Gulf Air (Map pp74-5; ☎ 2810041; Rehmat Plaza, Blue Area, Islamabad)

Singapore Airlines (Map pp74-5; ☎ 2827907; Holiday Inn, Municipal Rd, Melody Market G-6, Islamabad)

Thai Airways (Map pp74-5; ☎ 2272140; Holiday Inn, Municipal Rd, Melody Market G-6, Islamabad)

Xinjiang Airways (Map pp74-5; ☎ 2273447; Saeed Plaza, Blue Area, Islamabad)

Bus

Islamabad doesn't have a long-distance bus station, and although there are buses to Taxila and Peshawar, the best deals and the best buses are found in Rawalpindi. Long-distance buses leave from and arrive at the chaotic Pir Wadhai bus station (Map p72) or near Pir Wadhai Chowk. Both are northwest of Saddar Bazaar. To reach Pir Wadhai bus station from Saddar, catch a passenger Suzuki to Fowara Chowk in Rajah Bazaar and catch another Suzuki or motorcycle rickshaw to the bus station (Rs 10). The cheapest way to Pir Wadhai from Islamabad is by minibus 121, or by bus with a change at Faizabad. Pir Wadhai Chowk is on the Grand Trunk Rd, and is Rs 10 by Suzuki from Saddar or Rs 200 by taxi from Saddar/Islamabad.

For short-haul trips there are numerous private companies (book through travel agencies or the PTDC) running a variety of buses and minibuses from Pir Wadhai bus station to Taxila (Rs 25, 40 minutes), Murree (Rs 100, two hours), Mansehra (Rs 150, three hours), Chakwal (Salt Range; Rs 60, 1½ hours), Jhelum (for Rotas Fort; Rs 150, two hours) and Peshawar (Rs 100, 3½ hours).

Reputable companies offering comfortable air-con buses on long-haul trips usually run to a timetable and take reservations. **Skyways** (Map p72; ☎ 4455242; Skyways Hotel, Murree Rd, Faizabad) has buses leaving for Lahore (from Rs 170, 4½ hours, half-hourly) from behind the hotel. The best long-haul service is that provided by **Daewoo** (off Map p72; ☎ 111007008; Grand Trunk Rd, Pir Wadhai Chowk, Rawalpindi), which has modern vehicles and a light meal included in the fare. To Lahore, there are daily departures every 30 minutes from 5am to around 10pm; normal class is Rs 470 and VIP (with larger seats) is Rs 550. The journey takes 4½ hours. Other destinations include Peshawar (Rs 210, 2½ hours), with the first bus at 6am and others leaving every hour until late; Multan (Rs 600, nine hours), from 8.30am and every hour until late; and also Murree (minibus, Rs 120, 1¾ hours), with the first bus at 7am and every hour until 7pm.

ALONG THE KARAKORAM HIGHWAY (KKH) Northern Areas Transport Company (Natco; ☎ 9278441; Pir Wadhai bus station) has several Gilgit-bound services a day starting at 7am, including the VIP service (Rs 750). There are 5pm and 7pm air-con deluxe buses (Rs 750), 2pm and 10pm

MAJOR TRAINS FROM RAWALPINDI

Destination	Train	Departure	Duration	Fare
Karachi	<i>Tezgam Express</i>	8am	25hr	Rs 720/3175/2245 for A/E/C
	<i>Awam Express</i>	1pm	28hr	Rs 720/1545 for A/C
Lahore	<i>Margalla Express</i>	7am	4hr	Rs 150/400 for A/D
	<i>Lahore Express</i>	6pm	4hr	Rs 150/400 for A/D
Multan	<i>Tezgam Express</i>	8am	12hr	Rs 330/1250/1120 for A/E/C
Peshawar	<i>Awam Express</i>	2.20pm	4hr	Rs 110/95/295 for A/C/E
Quetta	<i>Quetta Express</i>	10.25am	36hr	Rs 680/1165/3100 for A/C/E
	<i>Jaffer Express</i>	6am	28hr	Rs 815/2095 for A/C

Abbreviations:

A = Economy

C = Air-conditioned lower

E = Air-conditioned sleeper

B = First-class sleeper

D = Air-conditioned parlour

deluxe buses (Rs 700) and a 4pm, 7pm and 8pm coaster (Rs 700).

Another popular northbound operator from Pir Wadhai is **Silk Route Transport Company** (☎ 5479375), which runs several buses north to Gilgit (Rs 700) and Hunza (Rs 800). The trip to Gilgit takes between 14 and 17 hours. Be aware that departure times and fares may vary with the season. Sit on the right for the overall best views but perhaps not if you're subject to vertigo!

Train

There's a Pakistan Railways **reservation & information office** (Map p78; ☎ 9270895, for inquiries 117; ☎ 8am-11pm) 300m south of the train station in Saddar Bazaar in Rawalpindi. For a concession, go first to the Commercial Department opposite the main station. There's a **reservation & information office** (Map pp74-5; ☎ 9207474; Civic Centre, Melody Market, G-6; ☎ 9am-1pm & 2-5pm Sat-Thu, 9am-1pm & 2.30-5pm Fri) in Islamabad, as well as another **office** (Map p78; ☎ 5542221; Committee Chowk) in Rawalpindi.

For long-distance rail services see the table, above. For a listing of other options, grab a copy of Pakistan Railways' *Time & Fare Table* (Rs 25) from the station or click on **Pakistan Railways** (☎ 117; www.pakrail.com). Note that several daily trains go to Peshawar, and some stop in Taxila en route. It's also worth noting that long-distance trains from the east may arrive late in Rawalpindi.

GETTING AROUND

To/From the Airport

Suzukis running to the airport from Rawalpindi depart from Adamjee Rd (next to

KFC) in Saddar Bazaar, Tipu Rd and Fowara Chowk in Rajah Bazaar. They charge about Rs 10 and take under half an hour in normal traffic. To catch one from the airport, simply go out the gate and turn right and you'll find Suzukis and taxis. A taxi to/from Rawalpindi is around Rs 150, and it's Rs 200 to/from Islamabad. Expect to pay about Rs 100 on top of this at night (after 9pm).

Car

Avis has cars for hire in Islamabad through **Travel Walji's** (Map pp74-5; ☎ 2870201; www.waljis.com; 10 Khayaban-e-Suhrawardy, Aabpara, Islamabad). A small car (with driver) costs Rs 2300 per day (excluding petrol); a 4WD is Rs 1000 per day plus Rs 14 per km; and a van (seating up to 12 people) costs Rs 1800 per day plus Rs 9 per km. Note that some companies may require a minimum hire time of one week. You'll usually need a credit card as a deposit.

Another reputable car-hire company is **Safder Tours** (☎ 5563153) in Islamabad. For something cheaper you'll need to shop around but be sure to check the small print carefully and ensure you get *in writing* what you've been promised (to avoid potential misunderstandings later on).

Intercity Transport

Numbered minibuses ply regular routes between the twin cities. They are numerous, cheap and quick, but there doesn't appear to be a maximum carrying capacity; no matter how full they may be, there always seems to be room to squeeze in one more person. They frantically hustle customers, with blaring horns and eager conductors, weaving through

traffic with little care. Minibuses 1 and 6 from Haider Rd in Rawalpindi's Saddar Bazaar go via Islamabad's Aabpara to Super Market, then east to the Secretariat (Rs 8). Larger Varan buses run between the cities but they're much slower and less frequent.

Taxis usually have 'broken' meters (or none at all), so make sure you fix a price before you zoom away; Rawalpindi to Aabpara is Rs 150 and to the Blue Area it's Rs 200.

Intracity Transport

In Islamabad, minibus 105 links Karachi Co (G-9), the Regional Passport Office, Sitar Market, Melody Market and Aabpara. Minibus 120 follows the same route and continues to Bari Imam Shrine via the French and Canadian embassies. Coasters run up and down the Blue Area along Fazal-ul-Haq Rd.

In Rawalpindi, fixed-route passenger Suzukis are inexpensive, such as Rs 5 from Fowara Chowk to Saddar Bazaar. Suzukis and motorcycle trishaws to Pir Wadhai from Fowara Chowk are Rs 10. Autorickshaws and motorcycle trishaws are not much cheaper than a taxi and are a lot less comfortable. Tongas can be painstakingly slow and are not necessarily a relaxing way to/from Rajah Bazaar among the crazy road traffic.

Autorickshaws are only found in Rawalpindi (they're not permitted to enter Islamabad). As with taxis, always negotiate a fare before jumping in; expect to pay anywhere between Rs 25 and Rs 50 to travel within Rawalpindi.

AROUND ISLAMABAD & RAWALPINDI

MARGALLA PASS

Around 27km west of Islamabad, the Grand Trunk Rd crosses the low-lying Margalla Pass. At the top is a large monument to John Nicholson, 'Lion of Punjab'. Nicholson was a British soldier-administrator who, at age 25, led Pashtun tribesmen against the Sikhs here in 1848, and died a hero at the Siege of Delhi in 1857. Just across the pass is a small segment of the original Kabul to Kolkata (Calcutta) road, a forerunner of the Grand Trunk Rd built by Sher Shah Suri in the 16th century.

TAXILA

☎ 051

One of South Asia's richest archaeological sites, Taxila is a must-see trip from Islamabad, particularly if you have an interest in Buddhism and the art of Gandhara. The city excavations, most of which are found around the museum, are open to the public, along with dozens of smaller sites over a 25-sq-km area.

Gandhara is the historical name for the Peshawar Plain, and Taxila has always been one of Gandhara's more important cities. In the 6th century BC, the Achaemenians made Takshasila (Taxila) the Gandharan capital, at a site now called Bhir Mound. In 326 BC Alexander the Great paused here en route to India. The Mauryan emperor Ashoka, a patron of Buddhism, built a university here, to which pilgrims and scholars came from all over Asia. In about 180 BC, Bactrian Greeks developed a 'new' Taxila, at the site called Sirkap.

In the 1st century AD came the Kushans, building their own city at the Sirsukh site. Until the 3rd century Taxila was the cultured capital of an empire stretching across the subcontinent and into Central Asia. It was the birthplace of a striking fusion of Greek and Indian art, and also the place from which Buddhism spread into China. The city fell into obscurity after it was destroyed by White Huns in the 5th century. The modern-era excavation of the site was led by Sir John Marshall between the years of 1913 and 1934.

Information

PTDC information booth (☎ 9314206; PTDC Motel;

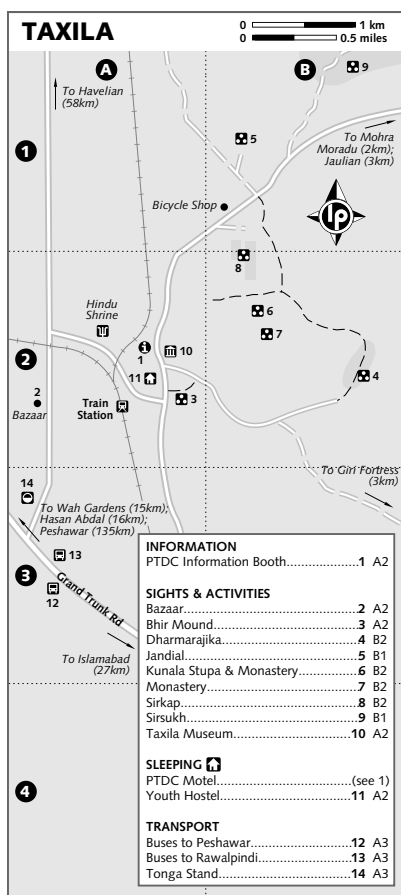
☎ 8am-6pm) Sells books related to the excavations.

There's another small bookstall at the museum's ticket counter.

Sights

TAXILA MUSEUM

This rewarding **museum** (☎ 9314270; admission Rs 200; ☎ 8am-12.30pm & 2.30-5.30pm) is closed the first Monday of each month and closes early (2pm) during Ramazan (Ramadan). It houses many of the significant finds from the Taxila site, particularly from the Kushan era. These include exquisite Buddha sculptures with intriguing Mediterranean faces, temple friezes, silver and bronze artefacts and old coins. Photography is prohibited.



TAXILA EXCAVATIONS

Most of the main sites are within 2km of the museum. There's a large map of the site outside the museum and each site is signposted from the road and has an information board at its entrance. By car you can see most of the sites in a short half-day. Walking and/or taking a sedate tonga will keep you busy for six or seven hours. Entrance to all the sites costs Rs 200. Pay once and retain the ticket, which you need to show at each site to gain entry.

Bhir Mound

This Achaemenian site, inhabited from the 6th to 2nd centuries BC, is a mostly unexcavated mound 300m south of the museum. What has

been excavated reveals twisting streets and tiny stone houses or shops.

Sirkap

The Bactrian Greeks began their Taxila, an orderly walled city, in the 2nd century BC. It was later adapted by Scythians and Parthians; in fact, most of what you can see is Parthian. Along 500m of the wide main street are foundations of houses, stupas and a small Buddhist temple; at the south end were bigger, wealthier homes. South of the town are Kunala Stupa (named for Ashoka's son) and the remains of two Kushan-era monasteries.

Jandial

Near the road north of Sirkap are the ruins of a classical Greek temple, a place with Ionic columns in front and the base of what may have been a Zoroastrian (Parsi) tower in the rear.

Dharmarajika

Within the huge Dharmarajika stupa, on a hill several kilometres east of the museum, is an original, smaller stupa constructed by Ashoka. It's said that it may have been built to house ashes of the Buddha. Around it are the bases of statues and small votive stupas, and the remains of a monastery complex. In one alcove are the stone feet of what must have been an immense Buddha statue. Most of what you see belongs to the Kushan era.

Sirsukh

Little of this Kushan city, started in the 1st century AD, has been excavated, and frankly there isn't much to see.

Mohra Moradu

The isolated Mohra Moradu monastery, dating from the 3rd to the 5th centuries, is in a hollow about 5km northeast of the museum and 1km off the road. There is a small, complete stupa in one monk's cell, somewhat resembling a wedding cake with its multi-level base, spire and 'umbrellas'. This is, in fact, a copy of the original (the original is in the museum).

Jaulian

This site is on a hill east of Mohra Moradu. The stupas are gone but the courtyard and foundations are in good condition. In a security enclosure near the entrance are the bases of several

5th-century votive stupas, ornamented with bas-relief Buddhas, elephants and nymphlike figures. Other stupa bases have equally vivid carvings. East of the courtyard is a monastery with dozens of closet-sized meditation cells. The site caretaker may show you around for a little baksheesh (donation).

TAXILA TOWN

There are several derelict Hindu temples in the **bazaar**, one near the train station is quite grand. Stonework abounds around town, with many small workshops turning out thousands of grinding stones for kitchens and garish modern sculptures.

Sleeping & Eating

Most people visit Taxila as a day trip from Islamabad/Rawalpindi. For those who wish to stay overnight, accommodation is available, but it's unremarkable.

Youth Hostel (☎ 9314278; dm members/nonmembers Rs 140/280) Near the museum, this dorm-only hostel is basic but adequate for a night or two and, importantly, the only budget accommodation currently available.

PTDC Motel (☎ 9314205; s/d ind tax Rs 745/994; ☼) Also near the museum. The rooms lack oomph but are comfortable enough and there's a restaurant on the premises.

Getting There & Away

You can reach Taxila from Rawalpindi's Pir Wadhai by frequent bus or minibus (Rs 25, 40 minutes). The train ride (Rs 15, 50 minutes) is far more pleasant and the train station is within walking distance of the museum. You can also catch a Suzuki or tonga passing from the bazaar to the train station en route to the museum. Several trains pass through on the way to/from Havelian or Peshawar. Train times will vary from the schedule because of delays elsewhere along the line. In other words, expect delays.

Most local transport from Taxila heads to Rawalpindi – ask whether your bus is going to Saddar, Rajah or Pir Wadhai. Some Saddar-bound wagons start from Taxila Bazaar; otherwise, take a minibus or tonga south to the Grand Trunk Rd and pick up transport there.

Getting Around

If it's not too hot, you can walk around the sites close to the museum and each other.

Some buses and Suzukis go on up the road past Sirsukh, Mohra Moradu and the Jaulian turn-off. Alternatively, you can hire tongas (around Rs 200) and taxis (around Rs 600) that hang around the museum to take you to the sites.

WAH GARDENS

About 15km west of Taxila is the site of a Mughal camp developed by Emperor Akbar (1556–1605) into a pleasure ground of shimmering pools and pretty gardens. It's gone to seed but the rows of ancient cypress and plane trees, the empty canals and the run-down pavilions are still stately. It doesn't really justify a day trip on its own but it's a possible addition to Taxila.

Get on any bus going west on the Grand Trunk Rd and ask for Wah Gardens (not Wah). Fifteen minutes beyond Taxila (10 minutes past the Wah Cantonment turn-off), a 'Mughal Garden Wah' sign marks a road on the south side of the highway. The gardens are a 10-minute walk down this road.

HASAN ABDAL

Pilgrims have been coming to Hasan Abdal since at least the 7th century, when it was a Buddhist holy place. On a hill east of the village is a shrine to Baba Wali Kandahari, a 15th-century Sufi preacher. Sikhs still come from India and beyond to **Panja Sahib**, a shrine to Guru Nanak (Baba Wali's contemporary), who was the founder of Sikhism. Most arrive in mid-April for the **Baisakhi Festival**. Legend has it Baba Wali rolled a boulder aimed at Guru Nanak, who stopped it with one hand. A rock with a handprint at Panja Sahib is said to be the very one. There are also abandoned Hindu temples and several Mughal tombs in the old walled town.

From a roundabout on the Grand Trunk Rd, walk 150m to a fork, bearing right past a post office and a playing field, 500m to another fork. Panja Sahib is left and around the corner; the Mughal tombs are to the right. Beyond the playing field a path climbs for an hour to Baba Wali's shrine.

Hasan Abdal is around 20 minutes west of Taxila on any bus that travels the Grand Trunk Rd; the bus ticket costs Rs 10 from Taxila.

MURREE & THE GALIS

Around 1½ hours northeast of Islamabad, on a maze of forested ridges, the British developed

their summer retreats known as hill stations. In summer the entire Punjab administration moved up to Murree, and anyone who was anyone had a villa at Nathiagali or one of the other hamlets whose names mostly end in *gali* (Hindko Punjabi for 'pass').

All still show the colonial imprint: neat bungalows and sprawling guesthouses, with prim churches on the heights and raucous bazaars down on the road. Nowadays, all summer and on winter weekends the villages bulge with tourists, and the trees and gabled architecture are gradually being engulfed by drab concrete boxes. The towns are now too developed for some tastes but the air is bracing and clear, and a welcome relief from the scorching plains in summer.

While Murree and a few other villages are in Punjab, many of the further Galis are actually just over the line in NWFP. Nevertheless, we include them because the Galis are geographically united and because nearly all their visitors come from Islamabad, Rawalpindi and Punjab.

April is pleasant, May and June are hot, July and August are rainy but warm, and September is pleasant again. Summer season is May to September, peaking in July and August when accommodation prices spiral upwards due to the influx of tourists. Snow falls from around December through to February but weekends can still be busy. In winter, the Murree to Abbottabad road may be temporarily blocked by snow.

Murree

☎ 051

Murree sits high above its surroundings, making the views panoramic and the air fresh, but there isn't much to do apart from stroll around or shop. A faded colonial aroma lingers, although many ugly concrete towers now dominate the town. Murree has gradually become more and more built-up and congested over recent years, which probably explains the dwindling number of foreign visitors. Still, there are some pretty walks in the area.

ORIENTATION

Climb up Cart Rd from the general bus stand. Beyond the Blue Pines Hotel there's a short cut up through a small bazaar to the Mall, the town's main street. British-era Murree rambled for over 4km along the ridgetop from Pindi Point to Kashmir Point. The Mall, running

south from the post office, is the place to stroll, eat and shop.

INFORMATION

National Bank (Bank Rd; ☎ 9am-1pm & 2-4pm) At the time of research this bank was changing major foreign currencies but not travellers cheques. It's advisable to bring along adequate rupees as backup, given that this is the only bank in Murree that changes money.

TDCP Cart Rd (☎ 3410729; ☎ 8am-3pm Mon-Sat summer, 9am-4pm Mon-Sat winter); The Mall (☎ 3412450; ☎ 8am-3pm Mon-Sat summer, 9am-4pm Mon-Sat winter) This is the best source of tourist information and it also sells a basic map of Murree (Rs 10). The office is located below the Blue Pines Hotel. A small information centre is on the Mall.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Before setting off to explore the area, it's a good idea to pick up a map from the TDCP, even though it's not as detailed as it could be. From Pindi Point, about 2km southwest of town, you can look out towards Punjab and ride a **chairlift** (Rs 190) 3km down to Brewery Rd and back. **Kashmir Point** (2260m), the highest place in Murree, looks down a tributary of the Jhelum River and out beyond the Pir Panjal Range into Kashmir. To get here, take a minibus or walk the 3km along Bank Rd.

From Bank Rd, opposite the Murree-Kahuta Development Authority office, a **walking trail** descends for an hour through woods to the Kuldana to Jhikagali road. A branch goes left to Kuldana Chowk. From Jhikagali another forest trail climbs to Kashmir Point. You can return on the trail or on any minibus to Sunny Bank (then catch a connection up Cart Rd to Murree) or Murree's general bus stand.

SLEEPING

Hotel tariffs fluctuate according to supply and demand; they're higher on summer weekends, lower on weekdays and during winter. Keep in mind that many places close for the winter period. Prices noted here are approximate and hotels will basically charge whatever they can get away with. If a hotel does not seem busy, it's worth trying to negotiate a better rate.

Following are a smattering of some of the better lodgings in Murree, but as new places keep popping up, let us know if you stumble across any newly opened gems.

Budget

Chambers (☎ 3410135; r Rs 350) Although the simple rooms are certainly nothing to write home

about, they aren't bad at this price and some have views over the Mall.

Chinnar Hotel (☎ 3410244; The Mall; d from Rs 400) This no-frills place has poky and nondescript (but bearable) rooms, some with views over the Mall.

Al-Nadeem (☎ 3411879; Cart Rd; d from Rs 500) The rooms are sparsely furnished and smallish, but this is still one of the better choices in Murree's mundane budget bunch.

Numerous similarly priced budget options include the following:

Grand Residence (☎ 3411434; The Mall)

Hotel Murree International (☎ 3410173; Cart Rd)

Marhaba Hotel (☎ 3410185; The Mall)

Tanveer Hotel (☎ 3412082; Cart Rd)

Midrange

Hotel Dilkusha (☎ 3410005; Imtiaz Shaheed Rd; d Rs 500; ☺) Spacious, comfortable rooms, the tranquil location and pleasant veranda overlooking the small garden make this a relaxing midrange choice.

Hotel Taj Mahal (☎ 3411082; d Rs 1000; ☺) Located off the Mall, this is one of the towers that have changed the face of Murree. The TV-equipped rooms are good-sized and most have nice views.

Lockwood Hotel (☎ 3410112; Imtiaz Shaheed Rd; d Rs 2000; ☺) Colonial Lockwood is a historic hotel with some buildings dating from 1890. Although suitably comfortable, the rooms would benefit from a minor facelift.

Brightlands Hotel (☎ 3411170; Imtiaz Shaheed Rd; d Rs 2000; ☺) One of the glowing highlights of this old hotel are the spacious, airy rooms, all with TV – it's just a shame they are somewhat neglected.

EATING

Most of Murree's hotels have their own restaurants, usually dishing up satiating Pakistani staples, with midrange hotels also often offering a selection of Continental and Chinese dishes. The Mall has a number of good fast-food outlets, while Cart Rd has some cheap, hole-in-the-wall curry joints. Also lining the Mall are chirpy, good-value restaurants offering almost identical Pakistani/Chinese/Continental menus. The following restaurants (all on the Mall) are especially popular:

Lintott's (mains Rs 130-400)

Red Onion (mains Rs 195-595)

Sam's Restaurant (mains Rs 140-450)

Usmania Restaurant (mains Rs 110-595)

GETTING THERE & AWAY

The general bus stand is down on Cart Rd. Minibuses shuttle between Murree and Rawalpindi all day in summer (Rs 40, two hours). Painfully slow buses go to Faizabad and Pir Wadhai for less but they're not a practical option compared with the convenience of the minibuses.

In summer, **Daewoo** (☎ 3412185; Cart Rd; ☎ 8.30am-9.30pm), opposite the TDCP, runs an air-con service between Murree and Rawalpindi (Rs 120, two hours). Several buses a day depart the general bus stand for Abbottabad (Rs 70, five hours), via Nathiagali. The best views are on the left side.

Around Murree

PATRIATA

The TDCP has developed a somewhat kitsch resort 20km southeast of Murree, with restaurants and a chairlift plus a **cable car** (Rs 200) from Gulehragali, 17km from Murree, to the top of the 2300m Patriata Peak. Many Suzuki-wallahs call the place 'New Murree' and charge Rs 30 to get to Patriata from Murree's general bus stand.

BHURBAN

Offering less hype and more serenity than nearby Murree is charming Bhurban, a wonderful city escape. Apart from its picturesque setting, Bhurban has a jolly good nine-hole golf course and even an upmarket hotel, the **Pearl Continental** (www.pchotels.com). There are Suzukis to here from Murree's general bus stand and Jhikagali, a couple of kilometres northeast of Murree centre. Bhurban is 15km northeast of Murree via Sunny Bank; a taxi from Murree to Bhurban costs around Rs 280.

The Galis – Murree to Nathiagali

Half an hour's drive north of Murree is **Barian**, with the biggest bazaar until you reach Abbottabad. The Punjab-NWFP border is just south of here. Ten minutes on, just before Khairagali, the road begins running along the west side of **Ayubia National Park**. An hour from Murree is **Changlagali**, at 2800m the highest of the Gali resorts. Ten minutes further, at **Kuzagali**, is the turning to **Ayubia**, named for General Ayub Khan, Pakistan's military ruler from 1958 to 1969. Along the road there are large summer-resort hotels.

At **Ghora Dhaka**, only five minutes' drive off the main road, there is a modest bazaar and

several midrange hotels including PTDC's **Ayubia Motel** (☎ 0992-359004; s/d Rs 1449/1932). **Khanspur** has several budget lodgings. There are minibuses direct to Ghora Dhaka from Murree's general bus stand, and some Murree to Abbottabad buses detour out to Ghora Dhaka.

Nathiagali

☎ 0992

At a lofty 2500m and thickly forested with pine, walnut, oak and maple, Nathiagali (naat-ya-ga-li) is the prettiest and most popular of the Galis. Dungagali, a small settlement, is about an hour's walk down the road or the ridge. There's a small ski resort at nearby Kalabagh. Some hotels may change major currencies but it's highly advisable to change money in Islamabad beforehand.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

The best way to appreciate the stunning natural beauty of this area is to hike into the hills. These are steep and the walks are strenuous, but altitude is not an issue. For short walks, you can get by with runners (training shoes).

Climb the ridge, a 10-minute walk up a link road from near the Skyways Hotel, to the old wooden St Matthew's Church. From here it is three hours one way, northeast up 2980m **Miranjani Peak**, with views across the Jhelum River and Pir Panjal Range into Kashmir (and if it's not too murky you may see Nanga Parbat to the northeast). From the church, follow signs towards the Governor's House, drop down from the road and cross a saddle towards the peak.

A similar climb is up 2800m **Mukshpuri Peak** behind Dungagali. It's a day's walk from Nathiagali to Ghora Dhaka (Ayubia).

SLEEPING & EATING

The high season is from around 15 June to 15 August; the rates below are for the high season although you may be able to bargain them down if the hotel isn't full. Most hotels have on-site restaurants.

Hotel Kamran International (☎ 355231; d Rs 2500)

The rooms are clean and come with TV and hot shower. Some rooms are more spacious than others and some have better views. There's a good restaurant where a chicken *jalfrezi* will cost you Rs 260.

Hotel Elites (☎ 355045; d Rs 3000) A popular choice – and deservedly so – Hotel Elites is around 1km from the bazaar. It has tastefully furnished, TV-equipped rooms, some with magnificent views. There is a laudable restaurant.

Other options down on the lower road are not too desirable and are ridiculously overpriced in summer. There are more upmarket guesthouses and hotels up on the ridge, including the recommended **Green Retreat Hotel** (☎ 355261; d incl tax Rs 4800; 📺) with spacious, comfortable rooms, sprawling grounds and a restaurant. Other midrange options open in summer include **Hotel Holiday Resort** (☎ 352213; d Rs 1800), which has a decent restaurant but the rooms are unremarkable at this price (some with squat toilets); request a room with a view. **Hotel Summer Retreat** (☎ 355201; fax 355360; d Rs 5500) has clean and comfy rooms with TV, but is overpriced.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Nathiagali is midway between Murree and Abbottabad (Rs 30, 1½ to two hours). A few buses and minibuses go from Nathiagali to Murree (Rs 30, 20 minutes) early in the morning; otherwise you must change at Ayubia (Rs 15, 20 minutes).

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Punjab



Sprawled across the heart of Pakistan, the vibrant state of Punjab (Persian for 'Five Waters') is named after the five rivers of the region – the Sutlej, Ravi, Beas, Jhelum and Chenab. Punjab is Pakistan's most verdant province and home to more than half of the nation's population.

For the visitor Punjab is a treasure trove of experiences, and should be more than a stop on the road to or from India. Stepping off in Lahore you will encounter awesome Sufism (Islamic mysticism) and qawwali (Islamic devotional singing), the Old City and the outlandish border-closing ceremony. Beyond Lahore, there are sublime shrines and tombs in Multan and Uch Sharif, ancient forts, the deserts of Cholistan and the Khewra salt mines.

And then, of course, there are the people. Punjabis are a life-loving lot with a long tradition of warm hospitality that comes straight from the heart. Few travellers leave here without a bundle of precious memories, an address book filled with new friends, and oodles of food for thought.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Soul tripping in Lahore to one of the most phenomenal **qawwali and Sufi expositions** (p104) on the planet
- Joining pumped-up patriots as they watch burly Pakistani soldiers try to out-stomp, out-scowl and out-salute their 'rival' Indian counterparts at the fascinating **closing-of-the-border ceremony** (p120) at Wagah
- Rambling through the tangle of twisting alleyways in Lahore's **Old City** (p105) en route to the historic **Lahore Fort** (p102) and the city's stunning 17th-century **Badshahi Mosque** (p103)
- Exploring the bevy of beautiful shrines and tombs of **Multan** (p128) and **Uch Sharif** (p127)
- Taking a leisurely stroll back in time at the impressive **Lahore Museum** (p107)
- Travelling deep underground into the world's second-largest salt mine in **Khewra** (p138)



■ POPULATION: 79,429,701

■ AREA: 205,345 SQ KM

TRAVELLING SAFELY IN PUNJAB

Punjab is Pakistan's most consistently stable province, attracting a constant stream of happy travellers. When it comes to staying safe always exercise common sense and heed any current warnings proffered by locals. As with elsewhere in the world, it's wise to avoid walking alone in isolated areas after dark – especially near the borders with Sindh and Balochistan. In the event of there being domestic tensions during your stay, keep abreast of the situation – consult newspapers and locals – and steer clear of any potential hot spots. Night-time curfews are a good indicator of such areas. Demonstrations do take place (predominantly in the larger cities) and although foreigners have not been injured, always keep in mind that politics is a volatile and sometimes violent business in Pakistan, and for your own safety you're advised to keep away from demonstrations and large political gatherings.

during the day (around 9°C to 26°C), enabling you to do some serious stomping around without working up too much of a sweat. In December and January the nights can get surprisingly cold (a warm sleeping bag can be a saviour for those staying in budget hotels). October and March are still pleasant enough, but the days can get quite warm. Temperatures at other times of the year are hot, and at the height of summer often exceed 40°C. Humidity during the monsoon (around July to late September) can create a fatiguing, steambath-like environment.

LAHORE

📞 042 / pop 8,896,000

Although Lahore may not be Pakistan's capital city, it wins hands down as its cultural, intellectual and artistic hub. If history and architecture are your passion there's an evocative mix, from formidable Mughal monuments to faded legacies of the British Raj. Indeed, even a ramble around the Old City can unfold into a mini-adventure. For those in search of spiritual sustenance, Lahore has qawwali (Islamic devotional singing) and Sufism (Islamic mysticism) that will blow your mind.

Pakistan is crazy about cricket and one way of breaking the ice with Lahorites is to strike up a conversation about the game. Lahore – which, incidentally, is home to former cricket great turned politician Imran Khan – sometimes serves as the venue for high-profile international matches. If there's one on during your stay it's worth experiencing it as much for its wildly ecstatic spectators as for the game itself.

Over the years Lahore has burgeoned into a bustling and increasingly polluted metropolis with festering social undercurrents, but it also

has some of the most defiantly serene architecture and gardens on the subcontinent. It takes more than just a couple of days to get to know this splendid city, so don't regard it merely as a jumping-off point to nearby India. And whatever you do, make absolutely sure your stay in Lahore includes an afternoon on the outskirts in Wagah (p120) and at least one Thursday – see the boxed text, p104.

HISTORY

Lahore has been the capital of Punjab for most of the last millennium. Lying on a strategic trade route between the subcontinent and Central Asia, but with little natural protection, its history is a repeating pattern of capture, destruction and rebuilding. Its origins and most of its pre-Islamic history are shrouded in legend. One story relates that it was founded by and named after Loh, son of Rama, hero of the Hindu epic Ramayana. Another is that the name comes from the ancient word *loha* (iron), which suggests that it may have been strongly fortified.

The first reliable reference to Lahore is in the writings of the Chinese traveller Xuan Zang, who passed through in AD 630. By the time Mahmud of Ghazni, its first Muslim ruler, invaded in 1021, Lahore was under the rule of a Brahmin king. Mahmud faced considerable problems retaining the city, but he proved triumphant and it became a regional capital in 1036 and then the capital of the entire Ghaznavid empire until 1186.

For more than three centuries Lahore passed through the hands of a succession of rival dynasties and was under constant threat of attack by Mongols. Relative peace with the Mughals came after Babur seized the city in 1524. Akbar, the third Mughal emperor, made his headquarters here from 1584 to 1598. The later Mughal

emperors Jehangir and Shah Jahan also held court here. Aurangzeb, the last great Mughal emperor, didn't spend much time in Lahore and the empire was already beginning to crumble when he died in 1707. Lahore was then fought over by feuding Mughals and the Sikhs before eventually being captured in 1759 by an Afghan, Ahmad Shah Durrani. The power shifted to the Sikhs, headed by Maharaja Ranjit Singh, from 1799 to 1839. After Singh's death in 1839 the region plunged into a power vacuum, soon filled by the British, who seized it in 1846.

Since Partition, Lahore's relative prosperity and stability have lured a proliferating (and occasionally unmanageable) number of migrants. So far it has coped exceedingly better with social and sectarian pressures than many other parts of Pakistan.

ORIENTATION

One of Lahore's major central streets is The Mall (renamed Shahrah-i-Quaid-i-Azam but still commonly referred to as The Mall), crossing the city northwest to southeast.

Central Lahore's main crossroads, officially nameless but often referred to as Charing Cross, is at the intersection of The Mall and Fatima Jinnah Rd. North of here, the Old City is a tangle of narrow streets and contains a number of tourist attractions. Southeast is the suburb of Gulberg, one of Lahore's smartest residential areas, with swish shops and restaurants.

Many of Lahore's streets (primarily those with Raj-era connotations) have been renamed in recent years: two examples are Empress Rd, now named Shahrah-i-Bin Badis, and Queen's Rd, renamed Fatima Jinnah Rd. Many locals still use the old names as a matter of habit. In this chapter we've gone with the names most commonly used by Lahorites. The Gulberg Main Blvd is sometimes shortened to Main Gulberg or Main Blvd.

Allama Iqbal International Airport is about 6km east of the city centre, while the main train station (Lahore City Railway Station) is just a couple of kilometres north of The Mall. For details on getting around Lahore, see p119.

Maps

Lahore's Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation (PTDC; see p101) office has give-away maps of Lahore and other destinations in Pakistan, although some are outdated and lack

essential detail. Superior maps can be found at the major city bookshops (see below).

INFORMATION

Bookshops

Lahore has some fabulous bookshops, with most stocking a selection of maps as well as international publications such as *Time*, the *Economist* and the *International Herald Tribune*.

Classic (Map p100; 42 The Mall) A good collection, especially of magazines. International newspapers and magazines ordered on request; these take up to 10 days to arrive.

Ferozson's (Map p100; 60 The Mall) One of the biggest bookshops in Pakistan; an excellent range including novels, glossy coffee-table books and a brilliant selection of maps and magazines. Highly recommended.

Kim's Bookshop (Map p100; Lahore Museum) Specifically caters to tourists, which accounts for its commendable selection of novels and general-interest books about Pakistan. It also sells good postcards (Rs 10 to Rs 20).

Mavra (Map p100; 60 The Mall) Stocks the usual selection of books and magazines.

Vanguard Books (Map p100; 45 The Mall) You can get maps and magazines here but the books are mainly of the educational genre.

Consulates

Iranian Consulate (Map p98; ☎ 9283347-55; 55 Shadman-II, Jail Rd; ☎ visa department 9am-5pm Mon-Thu) Will issue a visa if you have an invitation letter from an Iranian citizen, resident in Iran. Without such a letter, you need to apply in Islamabad, which will take a few days.

Cultural Centres

British Council (Map p100; ☎ 111424424; www.britishcouncil.org.pk; 65 Mozang Rd; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Mon-Fri) Telephone, or click on its website for current information about what this council does.

Emergency

If you're in a sticky situation get to a phone and dial the **police emergency number** (☎ 15; ☎ 24hr).

Foreigners' Registration

Foreigners' Registration Office (FRO; Map p100; ☎ 9202113; Capital City Police Headquarters Bldg, Queen's Rd) Only nationals of 16 countries are required to register – see p378.

Internet Access

The vast majority of internet outlets have closed in recent years due to minuscule margins and

LAHORE



PUNJAB

INFORMATION

Department of Tourist Services.....	1	C4
DHL.....	(see 19)	
Iranian Consulate.....	2	B4
Pace Internet Café.....	(see 32)	
PTDC.....	(see 16)	
Sheikh Zaid Hospital.....	3	B5

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Aitchison College.....	4	C4
Akbar's Caravanserai.....	(see 9)	
Alhama Art Gallery.....	(see 29)	
Chitkrar Studio & Gallery.....	5	C4
Chughtai Museum.....	6	B5

EATING

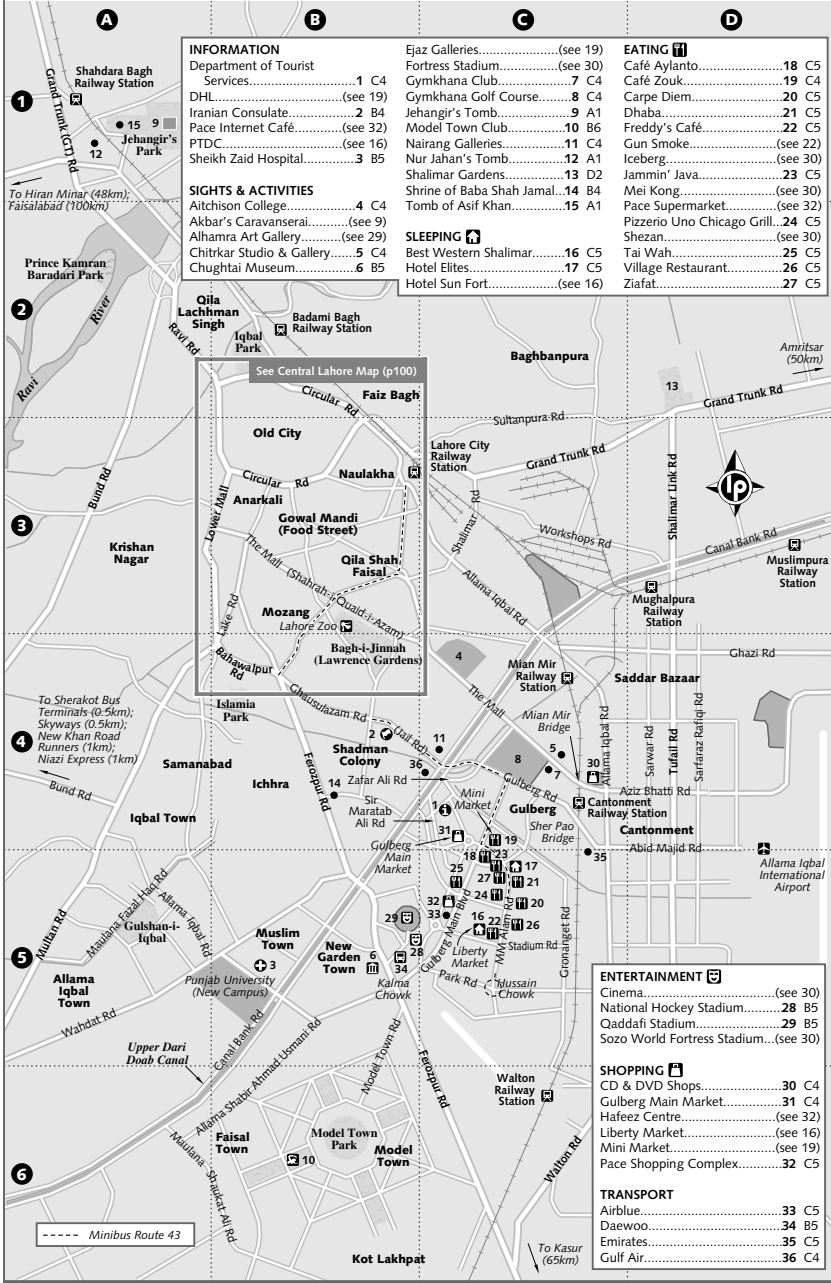
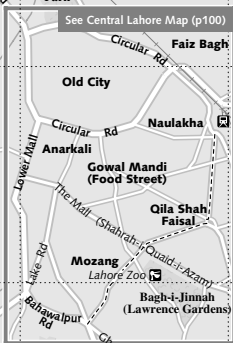
Ejaz Galleries.....	(see 19)	
Fortress Stadium.....	(see 30)	
Gymkhana Club.....	7	C4
Gymkhana Golf Course.....	8	C4
Jehangir's Tomb.....	9	A1
Model Town Club.....	10	B6
Nairang Galleries.....	11	C4
Nur Jahan's Tomb.....	12	A1
Shalimar Gardens.....	13	D2
Shrine of Baba Shah Jamal.....	14	B4
Tomb of Asif Khan.....	15	A1

SLEEPING

Best Western Shalimar.....	16	C5
Hotel Elites.....	17	C5
Hotel Sun Fort.....	(see 16)	

EATING

Café Aylanto.....	18	C5
Café Zouk.....	19	C4
Carpe Diem.....	20	C5
Dhaba.....	21	C5
Freddy's Café.....	22	C5
Gun Smoke.....	(see 22)	
Iceberg.....	(see 30)	
Jammin' Java.....	23	C5
Mei Kong.....	(see 30)	
Pace Supermarket.....	(see 32)	
Pizzeria Uno Chicago Grill.....	24	C5
Shezan.....	(see 30)	
Tai Wah.....	25	C5
Village Restaurant.....	26	C5
Ziafat.....	27	C5



ENTERTAINMENT

Cinema.....	(see 30)	
National Hockey Stadium.....	28	B5
Qaddafi Stadium.....	29	B5
Sozo World Fortress Stadium.....	(see 30)	

SHOPPING

CD & DVD Shops.....	30	C4
Gulberg Main Market.....	31	C4
Hafeez Centre.....	(see 32)	
Liberty Market.....	(see 16)	
Mini Market.....	(see 19)	
Pace Shopping Complex.....	32	C5

TRANSPORT

Airblue.....	33	C5
Daewood.....	34	B5
Emirates.....	35	C5
Gulf Air.....	36	C4

----- Minibus Route 43

numerous operators transforming them into pornography dens coming to the attention of the mullahs (Muslim religious leaders) and the law. Outside top-end hotels, broadband access is rare, with most outlets relying on relatively slow dial-up connections.

Pak Telecom Building (Map p100; Central Telegraph & Telephone Office, 1 McLeod Rd; per hr Rs 20, to print/scan a page Rs 10/25; ☎ 9am-10pm Sat-Thu, 9am-1pm & 2-10pm Fri) A spacious, good-value place.

Regale Internet Inn (Map p100; Surriaya Mansion, Regal Lane, 65 The Mall; per hr Rs 20, to print/scan a page Rs 10; ☎ 8am-midnight) Another good-value option, this guesthouse welcomes nonguests.

Laundry

Most upmarket hotels have an in-house laundry, while midrange and budget places usually use the dhobi (washerperson) system. Dhobis should charge between Rs 40 and Rs 70 to wash and press a shirt or pair of trousers.

Libraries

Jinnah Library (Map p100; ☎ 920337; Bagh-i-Jinnah; ☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Sat) Situated in a restful garden, this is a calm retreat for those seeking solitude. This beautiful building squeezes in more than 110,000 books and also has a newspaper room with Pakistani and foreign titles (including *Time* and the *International Herald Tribune*).

Media

You can buy the daily English-language newspapers *Dawn*, the *News*, the *Nation* and the *Daily Times* from most city bookshops and newsstands. Apart from local and international news, they contain useful listings of current cultural events, cinema screenings and other happenings of interest to the visitor.

Jinnah Library (above) has a range of local and international newspapers and magazines but they can only be read on-site.

Medical Services

The most reputable ambulance service is run by **Edhi** (☎ 115; ☎ 24hr). The charge is Rs 50 for the first 10km and Rs 5 for each additional kilometre (Rs 8 if ex-Lahore).

These hospitals have good reputations:

Mayo Hospital (Map p100; ☎ 9211101; Gowal Mandi)

Sheikh Zaid Hospital (Map p98; ☎ 5865731; Canal Bank Rd) Adjacent to Punjab University (New Campus).

Money

Beyond standard business hours, only the airport banks and a handful of authorised private

moneychangers are open. Moneychangers are bunched around Cooper Rd, some just north-west of Holiday Inn, and also scattered along The Mall, but the rates are not always as good as the banks' rates, so it pays to check.

Due to a fraudulent travellers-cheque racket some years back, many banks and private moneychangers refuse to change cheques without presentation of the original purchase receipt.

Lahore has a burgeoning number of 24-hour ATMs accepting Cirrus, Maestro, MasterCard and Visa (but not always all cards); these can be found around The Mall and at Gulberg, among other areas.

Some reliable places to change money include:

American Express (Map p100; ☎ 111786111; 112 Rafi Mansion, The Mall; ☎ 9am-noon Mon-Thu, 9-11am Fri & Sat) You can only change American Express travellers cheques (no currency or other travellers-cheque brands) here. The staff are efficient and courteous.

Citibank (Map p100; ☎ 111444444; Charing Cross; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Thu, 9am-12.30pm Fri, 9am-1.30pm Sat) Changes major currencies and travellers cheques, charging a 2% commission on non-Citicorp cheques. Secure 24-hour ATM.

Wall Street Exchange (Map p100; ☎ 6307770; 15-17 Naqi Arcade, The Mall; ☎ 9.30am-6pm Mon-Thu, 1-3pm Fri) A reputable moneychanger with longer opening hours.

Western Union (Map p100; ☎ 111786111; c/o American Express, 112 Rafi Mansion, The Mall; ☎ 9am-1pm & 2-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) Arranges speedy money transfers – ready for collection an hour after your sender makes the deposit. To collect funds, first present your passport and the transfer code (ask your sender for this). There are other Western Union branches in Lahore.

Post

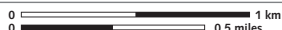
DHL (Map p98; ☎ 111500000; Mini Market, Gulberg; ☎ 9am-1pm & 2-10.30pm) A reliable place for fast air freight worldwide.

Main post office (GPO; Map p100; ☎ 9211318; The Mall; ☎ 9am-1pm & 1.30-9pm Mon-Sat) Has all the usual postal services, including poste restante. Men sitting outside will sew up parcels in cheap linen on the spot (Rs 50 to Rs 150 depending on the parcel's size).

Telephone

For cheap local, interstate and international telephone calls go to one of the city's numerous staffed street booths. Prepaid mobile SIM cards are cheap and plentiful across Lahore – you will need your passport to activate it once purchased. Another good-value

CENTRAL LAHORE



PUNJAB

INFORMATION		Sunehri Masjid.....	28 C2	Karim Buksh & Sons.....	59 D1
American Express.....	1 C5	Zamzama (Kim's Gun).....	29 A4	Salt 'n' Pepper.....	(see 53)
British Council.....	2 C5	SLEEPING		Tourist Street.....	60 A4
Citibank.....	3 C5	Ambassador.....	30 D5	ENTERTAINMENT	
Classic.....	4 C1	Amer Hotel.....	31 A4	Gulistan Cinema.....	61 C4
Excise & Taxation Department.....	5 A4	Avani.....	32 C5	Plaza Cinema.....	62 C5
Ferozson's.....	6 C5	Bakhtawar.....	33 C4	Regal Cinema.....	63 D1
Foreigners' Registration Office.....	7 C5	Carlton Tower Hotel.....	34 D4	SHOPPING	
Jinnah Library.....	8 D5	Clifton Hotel.....	35 D3	Flower Stall.....	64 D1
Kim's Bookshop.....	(see 21)	Garden Hotel.....	36 B3	Landa Bazaar.....	65 D3
Main Post Office (GPO).....	9 B4	Grand Hotel.....	37 D5	Langay Bazaar.....	66 B2
Mavra.....	(see 6)	Holiday Inn.....	38 C5	Moti Bazaar.....	67 B2
Mayo Hospital.....	10 B3	Hotel Fort View.....	39 B2	Panorama.....	68 D1
Pak Telecom Building (Central Telegraph & Telephone Office).....	11 B4	Hotel Koh-e-Noor.....	40 C4	Rafi Plaza.....	69 D1
Police Station.....	12 C5	Hotel Sanai.....	(see 52)	TRANSPORT	
Tourism Development Corporation of Punjab (Main Office).....	13 C5	Hotel Shah Taj International.....	41 D3	Air Canada.....	(see 70)
Vanguard Books.....	14 C1	Indus Hotel.....	42 D1	Air France.....	(see 78)
Wall Street Exchange.....	15 D1	Lahore Hotel.....	43 C4	Ali Complex.....	70 D4
Western Union.....	(see 1)	Leaders Inn Hotel.....	44 C4	British Airways.....	71 C5
SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES		Lords Hotel.....	45 C1	Bus & Minibus Stands.....	72 D3
Alhama Arts Centre.....	16 C5	National Hotel.....	46 C4	Cathay Pacific Airways.....	(see 70)
Badshahi Mosque.....	17 A1	Orient Hotel.....	47 C4	Indian Airlines.....	(see 30)
Begum Shah Mosque.....	18 B2	Parkway.....	48 D3	International Tours.....	73 B5
Cathedral Church of the Resurrection.....	19 B4	Pearl Continental.....	49 D6	KLM – Royal Dutch Airlines.....	(see 78)
Faqir Khana Museum.....	20 A2	Queen's Way Hotel.....	50 B3	Kenya Airways.....	(see 70)
Lahore Museum.....	21 A4	Regale Internet Inn.....	51 D1	Lufthansa Airlines.....	(see 32)
Lahore Polo Club.....	22 D6	United Hotel.....	52 C4	Main Bus Stand.....	74 B1
Minar-i-Pakistan.....	23 A1	EATING		Malaysian Airlines.....	(see 76)
Mosque of Wazir Khan.....	24 C2	Bundu Khan.....	53 B4	Minibus Stand.....	75 D3
Samadhi of Maharaja Ranjit Singh & Gurdwara of Arjan Dev.....	25 B1	Chaman.....	54 B4	PIA.....	76 C5
Shrine of Data Ganj Bakshh Hajveri.....	26 A2	Cocco's Den & Café.....	55 B2	Railways Headquarters.....	77 D4
Summit Minar.....	27 C5	Cookers.....	56 B4	Shaheen Air International.....	(see 70)
		Dumpukht.....	(see 49)	Singapore Airlines.....	(see 70)
		Eat & Sip.....	57 C5	Thai Airways.....	(see 30)
		Faluda Shop.....	58 D1	Wapda House.....	78 C5
		Fiesta.....	(see 54)		

option is Pak Telecom Building's Central Telegraph & Telephone Office (see p99 for details), opposite the main post office. Midrange and top-end hotels usually crank up telephone charges.

Tourist Information

Department of Tourist Services (Government of Pakistan, Ministry of Tourism; Map p98; ☎ 5757558; 24C Canal Park, Gulberg; ☎ 8am-1pm & 2-3pm Mon-Fri, 8am-12.30pm Fri) If you experience any tourist-related problems anywhere in Punjab you can lodge a complaint at this office, which has the authority to investigate and take appropriate action. It also has a list of registered (reputable) hotels, travel agencies and tour operators.

Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation (PTDC; Map p98; ☎ 5756737; www.tourism.gov.pk; 66-D-1, Gulberg III; ☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Thu & Sat, 9am-noon Fri) It's hardly worth making the trip here as the staff's knowledge and enthusiasm is limited. However, the situation could well improve during the life of this book. On the plus side, this office can make reservations at PTDC hotels throughout the country and it has a giveaway map of

Lahore and other Pakistani destinations. It also sells some tourist-related books and videos.

Tourism Development Corporation of Punjab (TDCP; Map p100; ☎ 9201189; http://tdcp.punjab.gov.pk, tdcpstp@punab.gov.pk; 4A Lawrence Rd; ☎ 8am-3pm Mon-Sat) Deals with statewide tourism matters. It has another (smaller) branch in the Old City, just inside Delhi Gate.

Travel Agencies

Lahore has scores of agencies, especially on The Mall, at Wapda House and around Shimla Hill. With this ever-multiplying number of agencies (some with dubious reputations), it's a good idea to select one that's a member of an accredited association such as the Travel Agents Association of Pakistan (TAAP). Shop around to get the most competitive prices. You may also like to contact the Department of Tourist Services (see left), which maintains an updated list of reliable, registered agencies. Many agencies have also become 24-hour operations.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Scams

Most travellers have nothing but praise for Lahorites. Indeed, it's most likely that you'll receive many invitations to chat over a hot cuppa. Unfortunately there are some less honourable souls who view travellers as an easy way of earning a quick buck. To avoid a prickly predicament make a mental note of the following scams encountered by fellow travellers.

A handful of crooked cops continue to tarnish the reputation of Lahore's police force. Travellers have been approached, generally after dark, by policemen making all manner of allegations to intimidate them into paying a bribe. Stay cool, stand your ground, and insist that they take you to the Chief of City Police and contact your embassy.

By wary of deals offered by the cheap hotels around the main train station, especially on McLeod, Railway and Brandreth Rds. If a hotel offers you a deal that's too good to be true, it's probably precisely that. It may cost you a lot more in the long run if you end up having your gear stolen.

If you do encounter problems, immediately report the hotel to the Department of Tourist Services (see p101).

SIGHTS

Lahore Fort (Shahi Qila)

Built, damaged, demolished, rebuilt and restored several times before being given its current form by Emperor Akbar in 1566 (when he made Lahore his capital), the **Lahore Fort** (Shahi Qila; Map p103; admission Rs 200; ☒ 7.30am-30min before sunset May-Oct, 8.30am-30min before sunset Oct-May) is the star attraction of the Old City. Note that the museums here may close an hour or so before sunset.

The fort was modified by Jehangir in 1618 and later damaged by the Sikhs and the British, although it has now been partially restored. Within it is a succession of stately palaces, halls and gardens built by Mughal emperors Akbar, Jehangir, Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb, comparable to and contemporary with the other great Mughal forts at Delhi and Agra in India. It's believed that the site conceals some of Lahore's most ancient remains.

The fort has an appealing 'abandoned' atmosphere (unless it's packed with visitors) and although not as elaborate as most of India's premier forts, it's still a fabulous place to simply wander around.

The fort is entered on its western side through the colossal **Alamgiri Gate**, built by Aurangzeb in 1674 as a private entrance to the royal quarters. It was large enough to allow several elephants carrying members of the royal household to enter at one time. The small **Moti Masjid** (Pearl Mosque) was built by Shah Jahan in 1644 for the private use of the ladies of the royal household and was restored to its original delicacy in 1904.

The **Diwan-i-Aam** (Hall of Public Audience) was built by Shah Jahan in 1631, with an upper balcony built by Akbar. It's where the emperor would make a daily public appearance, receive official visitors and review parades.

Khawabgarh-i-Jehangir (Jehangir's Sleeping Quarters), a pavilion on the north side of his quadrangle, now houses a small museum of Mughal antiquities. One charming story about Jehangir is that he had a chain suspended outside the fort, which anyone unable to obtain justice through the usual channels could pull. A bell would ring in his private chambers and the petition would receive his personal attention.

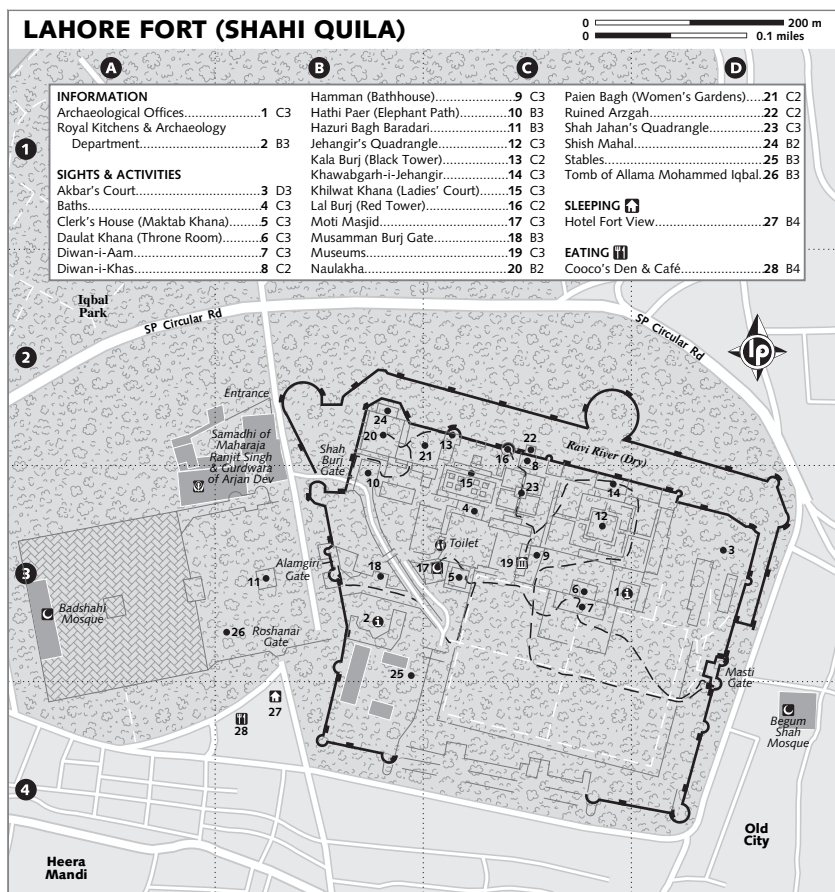
Moving west, another graceful pavilion, the **Diwan-i-Khas** (Hall of Private Audience), was built by Shah Jahan for receiving guests.

The **Shish Mahal** (Palace of Mirrors), built by Shah Jahan in 1631, was closed for renovation at the time of research, but should be open by the time you read this. Decorated with glass mirrors set into the stucco interior, it was built for the empress and her court and installed with screens to conceal them from prying eyes. The walls were rebuilt in the Sikh period, but the original marble tracery screens and *pietra dura* (inlay work) are in remarkable condition. The view from here over the rest of the fort and Badshahi Mosque is rewarding.

Naulakha is the marble pavilion on the west side of the quadrangle, lavishly decorated with *pietra dura* – studded with tiny jewels in intricate floral motifs. It was erected in 1631 and its name, meaning nine lakh (900,000), refers either to the cost of building it or the number of semiprecious stones used in its construction.

You can exit the fort from here, down the **Hathi Paer** (Elephant Path) and through **Shah Burj Gate**; if you do, look behind to see the fine painted tilework of the outer wall.

There are three small museums on-site (photography prohibited): the **Armoury Gallery** exhibits various arms including pistols,



swords, daggers, spears and arrows; the **Sikh Gallery** predominantly houses rare oil paintings; and the **Mughal Gallery** includes among its exhibits old manuscripts, calligraphy, coins and miniature paintings, as well as an ivory miniature model of India's Taj Mahal.

To better understand the fort's history you can hire a guide for Rs 150. In addition, *Lahore Fort, Pakistan's Glorious Heritage*, a colour booklet by Muhammad Ilyas Bhatti, sells here for Rs 150.

An autorickshaw/taxi from The Mall to Lahore Fort should cost about Rs 80/200.

Badshahi Mosque

Completed in 1674 under Aurangzeb as the Mughals' final architectural fling, the sublime

Badshahi Mosque (Map p100; sunrise-sunset), opposite the main gateway to the Lahore Fort, is one of the world's largest mosques. Replete with huge gateways, four tapering minarets of red sandstone, three vast marble domes and an open courtyard said to hold up to 100,000 people, it was damaged by the British and later restored. The **rooms** (admission Rs 5) above the entrance gate are said to house hairs of the Prophet Mohammed and other relics. The mosque looks lovely when it's illuminated in the evening.

In 1991 the mosque grabbed international headlines when hardline mullahs protested at the visit of the late Princess of Wales; her skirt was considered too short and the director of the mosque was criticised for presenting (the then) HRH, a non-Muslim, with a

SOUL-STIRRING THURSDAYS *Sarina Singh*

For a mind-blowing peek into an extraordinary wedge of Pakistani culture that's sure to exhilarate even the most jaded traveller, ensure your stay in Lahore includes a Thursday. It's a day of cultural events that are best accessed through Malik of Regale Internet Inn (p111), who has an excellent rapport with the venues involved (even women are allowed into these traditionally male domains). If you're not staying at the Inn, telephone Malik to make advance-meeting arrangements. Malik (generously) charges absolutely zilch for his services – all you pay for is your transport.

You'll be visiting sacred sites so dress and act respectfully. Men shouldn't wear shorts or sleeveless tops. Women must cover their heads and reveal as little flesh as possible; a *shalwar kameez* (traditional dresslike tunic and trouser combination) is recommended. Loud and intrusive behaviour isn't appreciated, and neither are displays of affection. Remove your shoes and be sure to pay the shoeminder Rs 3 to Rs 5 when you retrieve them (keep small change handy).

Catching the Qawwali Vibe

Thursdays kick off with some of the best qawwali (Islamic devotional singing) you'll ever hear. This takes place at the Shrine of Data Ganj Bakhsh Hajveri (see p106) from noon to 4pm, but Malik takes guests for around the last two hours (sitting cross-legged for longer can be numbing).

Throughout the afternoon numerous qawwali groups perform. Many have travelled long distances, as playing at this shrine is deemed a great honour – the late Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan (see the boxed text, p54) even performed here.

During performances donations are collected (a set rate of Rs 10 per qawwali group). Please contribute this nominal amount at least once. Not only will it boost the musicians' morale, it will also register your gratitude for being given the prime sitting area (let alone access).

Audience members who are particularly impressed with a qawwali group may strew the musicians with money as they perform. Friends may shower rupees over each other – a token of goodwill. Meanwhile, sweet-smelling rosewater is sprayed above the audience, adding to the ever-growing ethereal ambience.

The last hour is reserved for the finest qawwali groups (definitely worth staying for). The audience can really fire up when these musicians play, creating an atmosphere so electric it leaves you tingling.

For more about qawwali, see p53.

Spinning Out With Sufis

Sufism (Islamic mysticism) is an ancient practice and Sufis (mystics) are on a quest for spiritual emancipation.

On Thursday nights (9pm to midnight) Malik escorts guests to what he has fondly dubbed 'Sufi Night'. This surreal phenomenon takes you to dizzy heights and is likely to be one of the wildest trips you've ever been on. Taking place in two quadrangles of the **Shrine of Baba Shah Jamal** (Map p98; Shadman Colony), Sufi Night attracts a crush of people. Coming alone can be downright daunting.

Hypnotic drumbeats coax Sufis into a frenzied state of intense bliss – swaying, whirling and vigorously shaking their heads – as they relinquish themselves to a higher force. You'll hear some of Pakistan's most esteemed *dhol* (traditional drum) players including Pappu Saeen and the legendary brothers, Gongga and Mithu Saeen. The charismatic Saeen brothers demonstrate remarkable synchronicity when playing together, especially considering the elder of the two, Gongga, was born deaf. As a little boy, Gongga's father taught his son rhythm by tapping beats onto his back. Today, Gongga (who harnesses sound vibrations largely via his abdomen) and Mithu are *dhol* supremos on the world arena. On Sufi Night Gongga intermittently spins at breakneck speed while simultaneously drumming in sync with Mithu – truly jaw-dropping stuff.

Once the Sufis in the upper quadrangle call it quits you can always hang back with those downstairs who spin on well beyond midnight.

copy of the Quran and allowing her into the sacred precincts while immodestly dressed. The case went to court and ended with the litigant mullahs being ordered to stop wasting the judge's time.

In the courtyard stands the **Tomb of Allama Mohammed Iqbal**, a modest memorial in red sandstone to the philosopher-poet who in the 1930s first postulated the idea of an independent Pakistan.

An autorickshaw/taxi from The Mall is Rs 80/200.

Samadhi of Maharaja Ranjit Singh & Gurdwara of Arjan Dev

Located outside the Lahore Fort, this samadhi (shrine; Map p100) commemorates the founder of the short-lived Sikh empire, Maharaja Ranjit Singh. The ashes of the maharaja lie in a lotus-shaped urn inside a small brick pavilion.

In the same compound is the **Gurdwara of Arjan Dev**, Sikhism's fifth guru. Created by Maharaja Ranjit Singh, this is Lahore's largest gurdwara (Sikh temple) and is an important pilgrimage site for Sikhs. Non-Sikhs are not permitted entry to certain areas.

Men and women must cover their heads and remove their shoes. Tobacco is strictly prohibited.

An autorickshaw/taxi from The Mall costs around Rs 80/200.

Minar-i-Pakistan & Iqbal Park

Soaring into the sky in Iqbal Park, the 60m-high Minar-i-Pakistan was built in 1960. It commemorates the signing of the Pakistan Resolution on 23 March 1940 by the All India Muslim League, which paved the way for the founding of Pakistan.

Marble tablets around the base record the text of the resolution, as well as the 99 attributes of Allah, passages from the Quran and works of Allama Iqbal and Mohammed Ali Jinnah, the two most important figures of the Pakistani independence movement.

A lift and stairs once took visitors to the top of the Minar for the spectacular views of Lahore Fort, however, they were recently closed due to the high rate of suicides. In the late afternoon, Iqbal Park attracts a throng of people who gather here for a stroll or to play cricket, fly kites or just hang out.

An autorickshaw/taxi from The Mall to Iqbal Park costs about Rs 80/200.

Old City

Old Lahore sprawls at the foot of the fort. It comprises narrow, snaking alleys surrounded by a 9m-high wall with 13 gates, with sections closely resembling the way they would have been back in Mughal times. It's a brilliant place in which to get lost (as you probably will); a good way to relocate yourself is to go back to one of the main gates. Delhi Gate in the east leads past the 17th-century **Royal Baths** (now a small TDCP office) to the Mosque of Wazir Khan and Sunehri Masjid (Golden Mosque). Bhatti Gate in the southwest leads to the Faqir Khana Museum and eventually to **Heera Mandi**, the dancing girls' quarter and red-light district. (Many dancing girls are essentially prostitutes, but as prostitution is illegal they have assumed the title of 'dancing girls'. They argue that this falls in the domain of 'performing artists', which is perfectly legal!) Masti Gate in the north leads to the **Begum Shah Mosque** (1614), named after Maryam Zamani, the mother of Emperor Jehangir. If you're keen to visit Heera Mandi it's advisable to go in a group as it can sometimes be a bit seedy after dark.

The Old City has been funded for restoration of dilapidated areas under the Lahore Walled City Project, which will take place over the coming years. The following sights are located on Map p100.

SUNEHRI MASJID (GOLDEN MOSQUE)

The small Sunehri Masjid (Golden Mosque), in the centre of the Old City, was built in 1753 by Bikhari Khan and is famous for its three gilded domes and gold-plated minarets, still shining as brightly as ever.

An autorickshaw/taxi from The Mall to Sunehri Masjid costs Rs 60/150.

MOSQUE OF WAZIR KHAN

At the eastern end of the Old City, 250m inside Delhi Gate, is this deteriorating but beautifully tiled mosque. It was founded in the 17th century by Sheikh Ilm-ud-Din Ansari (also known as Wazir Khan), the royal physician and later governor of Punjab during the reign of Shah Jahan. This was once an important centre for training Islamic calligraphers. The small, crumbling mosque has an evocative, deserted feel to it and is worth visiting for this reason alone.

An autorickshaw/taxi from The Mall to this mosque should cost Rs 60/150.

FAQIR KHANA MUSEUM

About 500m inside Bhatti Gate on the right-hand side, this small mansion houses treasures of the Faqir family, who have lived in Lahore since the 18th century. It is said to be the largest private collection in south Asia, with over 13,000 pieces of art.

The head of the Lahore branch of the family was a fakir (Muslim ascetic) from Bukhara whose three sons achieved prominence in the court of Sikh ruler Ranjit Singh, despite being Muslims. One son was royal physician, another a foreign minister and the third a finance minister. Largely as a result of their ties with Ranjit Singh, they amassed many valuable antiques, as direct or hand-me-down gifts. Later generations preserved these pieces and collected more *objets d'art* during travels abroad.

Items include relics of the Prophet Mohammed (on public display for one day during the Islamic month of Muharram), early Qurans and other illuminated manuscripts, miniature paintings, porcelain pieces, old coins, Islamic artwork, carvings, clothes worn by the Mughal emperors, a small armoury of Sikh weapons and carpets from the royal courts.

As this is a private collection, you must phone the curator (☎ 7660645) in advance. Admission is free, photography is not permitted and it's appreciated if you take off your shoes and refrain from touching any of the items.

SHRINE OF DATA GANJ BAKHSH HAJVERI

Author of a famous book on mysticism, the 11th-century Data Ganj Bakhsh, originally from Ghazni in Afghanistan, was one of the most successful Sufi preachers on the subcontinent and is today one of the most notable Sufi saints in Pakistan. The shrine is located west of Bhatti Gate, just outside the Old City.

Born Abdul Hasan Ali, he was known as Data Ganj Bakhsh (the Bestower of Treasures) because of his generosity towards the less privileged. A hospital and several institutions for the needy have been added near the shrine over the years.

Hordes of devotees gather here on Thursday afternoons to listen to the excellent qawwali (see boxed text, p104).

The *urs* (death anniversary) of Data Ganj Bakhsh Hajveri is held at this shrine on 18–20 Safar (March/April) and is attended by tens (if not hundreds) of thousands of pilgrims.

Anarkali

Leading south from Bhatti Gate, Anarkali (Pomegranate Blossom) is named after the royal-court dancing girl who, according to legend, Akbar ordered buried alive in a wall as punishment for her alleged advances towards his son Jehangir. Built in 1615, her tomb was at one time used as a house by Maharaja Ranjit Singh's son and later as a church, but it's now part of the Punjab Secretariat compound. There's no longer much to see inside. Nowadays, the name Anarkali is commemorated by the thriving bazaar in the same district as the tomb with a variety of shops selling clothes (lots of *shalwar kameez*; a traditional dresslike tunic and trouser combination), shoes, jewellery and leatherware, and several second-hand bookstalls. With plenty of old-world charm and character, it's perfect for an unhurried wander.

An autorickshaw/taxi from The Mall to Anarkali costs around Rs 50/100.

The Mall (Shahrah-i-Quaid-i-Azam)

The Mall is a central area that you'll probably keep returning to. First laid out in 1851 under the supervision of Lieutenant Colonel

BANISHING BAD BUGS

Lahore's air pollution may insidiously inflict you with flu-like symptoms such as a raw throat and stuffy nose – a real party pooper. One quick fix that gets the thumbs up from locals and travellers alike is a natural herbal product called *joshanda* (Rs 5 per sachet). You simply dissolve the contents in a cup of hot water or tea and sip away (the taste is negligible). Make sure you first read the ingredients (including an array of herbs), just in case you're allergic to any of them. *Joshanda* is available at most general stores and pharmacies but if you can't find it, grandma's sure-fire remedy of gargling salt dissolved in warm water may work wonders.

Those who suffer serious respiratory ailments are advised to bring appropriate medication in case it can't easily be found in Pakistan.

Napier, it has a collection of grand buildings in the Mughal-Gothic style characteristic of the British Raj. Most are now institutes or government offices.

At its western end is the large cannon called Zamzama, the Lahore Museum and the old campus of Punjab University. On the Upper (eastern) Mall is the pleasant Bagh-i-Jinnah and the Lahore Zoo. To give you an idea of costs, an autorickshaw/taxi from the Upper Mall to Delhi Gate is about Rs 60/150; to the main train station it's Rs 70/150; to Bhatti Gate around Rs 70/150; and to Sherakot it's Rs 120/300. Many travellers stay on or near The Mall – for useful local bus details see p119.

CHURCHES

The (Anglican) **Cathedral Church of the Resurrection** (Map p100; The Mall) has an English-language Communion service at 8am and 5pm on Sunday. There are several other churches in Lahore.

SUMMIT MINAR

In a park at Charing Cross, commemorating the Islamic Summit Conference held in Lahore in 1974, is **Summit Minar** (Map p100; admission free; ☞ 10am-1pm & 4-8pm Sat-Thu summer, 10am-1pm & 3-6pm Sat-Thu winter). Underneath the minar – a tall, slender marble column – is a vaulted cellar housing gifts from the countries that attended the conference. Twenty stone slabs at the base of the pillar bear inscriptions of the word Allah. Outside is a pavilion with a glass case housing a Quran inscribed in gold leaf.

LAHORE MUSEUM

Try to set aside a couple of hours to make the most of a visit to the superb **Lahore Museum** (Map p100; The Mall; admission Rs 100, plus camera/video/camera stand Rs 10/50/15; ☞ 9am-5pm Sun-Thu, closed first Mon of each month), which has exhibits spanning the recorded history of the subcontinent. Part of the collection was removed to India after Partition but this is still the biggest and perhaps most impressive museum in Pakistan.

The museum has almost 20 galleries with items dating from the Stone Age to the 20th century. It's particularly famous for its display of Gandharan sculpture (especially the haunting Fasting Buddha), manuscripts, Qurans, its sensational array of miniature paintings, carpets, various pieces of art from the Islamic

period, articles from Moenjodaro, Harappa and other Indus Valley civilisation sites and its magnificent collection of coins from the Achaemenian period onwards.

Kim's Bookshop (in the museum compound) stocks an interesting collection of novels and general-interest books (see p97).

ZAMZAMA (KIM'S GUN)

He sat in defiance of municipal orders, astride the gun Zam-Zammah on her brick platform opposite the old Ajaib-Gher – The Wonder House, as the Natives call the Lahore Museum. Who hold Zam-Zammah hold the Punjab; for the great green-bronze piece is always first of the conqueror's loot.

Rudyard Kipling, Kim

This mighty cannon, made famous at the start of Rudyard Kipling's classic 1901 novel, was originally named Zamzama, meaning 'Lion's Roar', and sits on the medium strip in front of the Lahore Museum. It was used in various battles by the Afghan Durranis and then the Sikhs, before being brought to Lahore by Maharaja Ranjit Singh as a symbol of his conquests. Kipling's father was the first curator of the Lahore Museum. Kipling himself worked at the now defunct *Civil & Military Gazette* in Lahore from 1882 to 1887.

BAGH-I-JINNAH (LAWRENCE GARDENS)

A central place to slow the pace and chat to locals is pleasant **Bagh-i-Jinnah** (Map p100; The Mall; admission free; ☞ 8am-10pm). There's an open-air theatre that has frequent nightly performances (in Urdu or Punjabi) and the attractive British building in the centre of the park now houses Jinnah Library (see p99).

LAHORE ZOO

Near Bagh-i-Jinnah, behind a large gateway adorned with a colourful animal mural, **Lahore Zoo** (Map p100; admission Rs 10; ☞ 8am-5pm) is one of the oldest zoos on the subcontinent. It was founded in 1872 and includes a variety of bird species along with lions, elephants, monkeys, leopards, giraffes, tigers and more. The gardens themselves are of almost as much interest as the animals and contain a wide range of plants and trees, some believed to date back to the 16th century.

AITCHISON COLLEGE

At the eastern end of The Mall, Aitchison College (Map p98), the 'Eton of Pakistan', is the most prestigious school in the country. Run on the lines of an English public school, the Mughal-Gothic-style building is surrounded by manicured sporting fields.

Race Course Park

Southeast of Bagh-i-Jinnah on Race Course Rd, this cool, green **park** (Map p100) is the place to catch a polo game (see p116). It's also good for a stroll or jog – there's less human traffic on weekdays (late afternoons can get busy, though).

Shalimar Gardens

To the northeast of town, about 4km from the main train station, this was one of three gardens named Shalimar Gardens created by Shah Jahan in the 17th century. It's also the only surviving Mughal garden of several built in Lahore. The **gardens** (Map p98; Grand Trunk Rd; admission Rs 200; ☎ 7am–30min before sunset 1 Apr–30 Sep, 8am–30min before sunset 1 Oct–31 Mar) are now rather run-down and a far cry from their former glory, but they're still popular with locals. Many of the fountains were under renovation at the time of research and operate at particular times (10am to 11am and 4pm to 5pm 1 April to 30 September; 11am to noon and 3pm to 4pm 1 October to 31 March).

The walled gardens were laid out in a central tier with two smaller and lower ones to either side, with a pool of corresponding size, in keeping with the mathematical principles of Mughal design. Visitors originally entered at the lowest level and walked up through successive gardens illuminated by hundreds of candles housed in *chini khanas* (niches).

To get to the gardens, catch bus 4 from the train station. An autorickshaw from The Mall costs about Rs 250.

Jehangir's Tomb

Standing in a garden on the northern outskirts of Lahore, this elaborately decorated sandstone **tomb** (Map p98; admission Rs 200, incl entry to Nur Jahan's Tomb; ☎ 8am–5pm) is that of Emperor Jehangir. Built in 1637 by Jehangir's son, Shah Jahan, it's believed to have been designed by Jehangir's widow, Nur Jahan. The tomb is made of marble with trellis decorations of *pietra dura* bearing the 99 attributes

of Allah in Arabic calligraphy. These are inside a vaulted chamber, decorated with marble tracery and cornered with four minarets. Outside is a sunken passageway with one tunnel supposedly leading to Shalimar Gardens and another to Hiran Minar (see p120) – both tunnels are now bricked up.

The entrance to the tomb courtyard lies on the right-hand side of **Akbar's Caravanserai**, a 180-room resting place for pilgrims, travellers and their animals, built by Shah Jahan at the same time as Jehangir's Tomb. The western gateway leads to the **Tomb of Asif Khan**. The brother-in-law of Jehangir and father to Mumtaz Mahal (the lady for whom India's Taj Mahal was created), Khan died in 1641.

An autorickshaw/taxi from The Mall to Jehangir's Tomb (or Nur Jahan's Tomb, described below) costs about Rs 350/700.

Nur Jahan's Tomb

Just over the railway line from Jehangir's Tomb but not as well preserved is the **tomb of Nur Jahan** (Map p98; admission Rs 200, incl entry to Jehangir's Tomb; ☎ 8am–5pm). After the death of her first husband, an Afghan prince, Nur Jahan was carted off to Delhi, destined for captivity. However, Emperor Jehangir fell in love with her and they married in 1611. He gave her the name Nur Jahan, meaning 'Light of the World', and allowed her to rule alongside him. She died aged 72 in 1645, 18 years after Jehangir, and her tomb was completed in the same year. One story is that, pining for her dead husband, she planned the tomb herself and wrote its mournful epitaph.

Chughtai Museum

Originally intended to be temporary but open since 1975, the year Muhammad Abdur Rahman Chughtai died, the **Chughtai Museum** (Map p98; admission free; ☎ 2pm–sunset Mon–Sat) is just northwest of the intersection of Ferozpur Rd and Gulberg Main Blvd. Recognised as Pakistan's greatest painter and credited with a single-handed renaissance in Islamic art here, Chughtai (1897–1975) produced almost 2000 watercolours, thousands of pencil sketches and nearly 300 etchings and aquatints. He also designed many of Pakistan's stamps and coins.

It's possible to see works of Chughtai that are not in the exhibition if you contact the director, **Mr Arif Rahman Chughtai** (☎ 5850733;

Chughtai Museum Trust, Mian Salah Mimar Lane, 4 Garden Town, Lahore) in advance. It's also probably a good idea to phone just ahead of your visit to make sure someone is there.

Prince Kamran Baradari Park

The *baradari* (summer pavilion) of Prince Kamran, son of the first Mughal emperor Zahiruddin Babur, stands on a small island in the Ravi River (the river is on the northern outskirts of town). When it was completed in 1540 the Ravi was several hundred metres away and the *baradari* was in a large garden adjacent to the town. Its two storeys still open to a 12-columned vaulted veranda (*baradari* literally means 12 gates). These days a great deal of its former romance has disappeared and few travellers make the trip here.

If water levels are not too low, rowing boats make the return trip from the Lahore side for Rs 25 per person (minimum 10 people). Alternatively, you can negotiate a fare for smaller groups.

ACTIVITIES

Art Galleries & Performing Arts

Alhambra Art Gallery (Map p98; ☎ 9230791; Qaddafi Stadium, Ferozpur Rd, Gulberg; ☎ 8am-1pm & 2-6pm Mon-Sat) This gallery, not to be confused with the Alhambra described below, houses Lahore's largest permanent collection of artwork. There are two floors exhibiting fine paintings by Pakistani artists. This gallery is part of the Alhambra Cultural Complex, which sometimes has musical and theatrical performances.

Alhambra Arts Centre (Map p100; ☎ 9200953; The Mall; ☎ 8am-3pm Mon-Sat, 8am-noon Fri) Less than 500m east of the Avari hotel, the Alhambra has three theatre halls and is Lahore's main centre for musical, dramatic and other performing arts. Tickets for a drama performance usually cost between Rs 120 and Rs 300.

Chitkr Studio & Gallery (Map p98; ☎ 5758897; www.lahorechitkr.com; 41-83, Gulberg III; ☎ 11am-7pm Sat-Thu) Apart from frequent art exhibitions, Chitkr puts on an enjoyable classical music evening once a month.

Ejaz Galleries (Map p98; ☎ 5762784; ejazartgallery@yahoo.com, www.ejazartgallery.com; 79/B-1, MM Alam Rd, Gulberg III; ☎ 11am-9pm Mon-Sat) Just off MM Alam Rd (turn at KFC) this classy gallery has an innovative collection of paintings by Pakistani artists. The paintings are also for sale (expect to pay around Rs 6000 to Rs 100,000 per piece).

Nairang Galleries (Map p98; ☎ 7586686; 101 Habitat Flat, Jail Rd; ☎ 11am-11pm) This small but high-quality gallery focuses on Pakistani art with items selling upwards of Rs 6000. There's also a little café, replete with spongy

sofas, that is a perfect place to cool your heels over a steaming cup of coffee (Rs 50).

Golf

Gymkhana Club (Map p98; ☎ 5756690, golf department 5750301; Upper Mall; nonmembers Rs 1000, caddie Rs 200, equipment hire Rs 600; ☎ 5am-sunset) Tee off with Lahore's society set at this exclusive club's private golf course.

Lahore Garrison Golf Country Club (Map p98; ☎ 6660016; cnr New Airport & Choudhary Amjad Rds; nonmembers 18 holes Rs 700, caddie 18 holes Rs 150, equipment hire Rs 400; ☎ 5am-around 11pm) Located near the airport, the greens here are also in tip-top condition.

Polo & Horseriding Lessons

Lahore Polo Club (Map p100; ☎ 6310285; www.lahorepolo.com; Race Course Park; polo lessons Rs 3000 per month) This club offers polo lessons of one hour per day; advance bookings essential. Horseriding and tent pegging classes are also available.

Swimming

The prices given below are on a per-day basis unless otherwise specified. Some hotels slap on a 15% tax (not included here).

Ambassador (Map p100; ☎ 6316820; 7 Davis Rd; Rs 500)

Avari (Map p100; ☎ 6365366; 87 The Mall; Rs 500)

Holiday Inn (Map p100; ☎ 6310077; 25 Egerton Rd; Rs 1000) The fee includes use of the hotel's Jacuzzi and steam bath.

Lahore Garrison Golf Country Club (Map p98; ☎ 6660016; cnr New Airport & Choudhary Amjad Rds; Rs 200) This is one of the best-value places to take a cool dip.

Model Town Club (Map p98; Model Town; per hr Rs 100) Open only from March to September, it's not as swanky as other pools but it's still in good condition and long enough to do decent laps. There are separate sex timings (men from 6am to 8pm, women from 8pm to 10.30pm). An autorickshaw from The Mall costs about Rs 100.

Pearl Continental (Map p100; ☎ gym 6362760; The Mall; incl entrance to health club Rs 1150)

Tennis & Squash

Avari (Map p100; ☎ 6365366; 87 The Mall; tennis courts per 45min Rs 200, plus 15% tax)

Lahore Garrison Golf Country Club (Map p98; ☎ 6660016; cnr New Airport & Choudhary Amjad Rds) Has two tennis courts and several air-con squash courts (each Rs 200 per day; equipment extra). Not as centrally located as the Avari and Pearl Continental hotels, but a lot cheaper.

Pearl Continental (Map p100; ☎ 6362760; The Mall; tennis courts per hr Rs 230, plus 15% tax) Advance bookings essential.

COURSES

Alhambra Arts Centre (Map p100; ☎ 9200953; The Mall; 🕒 8am–3pm Mon–Sat, 8am–noon Fri) Has short courses (around three months; advance bookings essential) in painting, tabla (drums), sitar, harmonium, guitar, violin and singing. Telephone for fee details.

Chitkar Studio & Gallery (Map p98; ☎ 5758897; www.lahorechitkar.com; 259 Upper Mall) In a serene residential locale, this nonprofit organisation offers lessons in painting or classical music (sitar, tabla, flute and vocal). The milieu here is chilled out yet creatively energetic, providing the perfect vibe to get artistic juices flowing. Courses can be tailor-made to suit individual needs and are run on a donation basis (don't neglect to contribute). Chitkar is run by respected local artists, providing an opportunity to break into Lahore's artistic circle.

TOURS

Film Studio Tour (☎ 7311987, 03334338588; Regale Internet Inn) The owner of the Regale Internet Inn (opposite) sometimes takes guests (nonguests welcome) to see the live shooting of a Pakistani film. With plenty of conniving villains, damsels in distress, moustached heroes and guns galore, this is Lahore's (Lollywood's) answer to Bollywood. There is generously no charge for this tour – all you pay for is your conveyance.

Tourism Development Corporation of Punjab (TDCP; Map p100; ☎ 9201189; 4A Lawrence Rd; 🕒 8am–3pm Mon–Sat) Operates two daily city tours (per person Rs 450, 3½ hours). The fee does not include applicable admission fees to the sights. An air-con minibus picks up passengers at the TDCP office on Lawrence Rd, as well as at the Holiday Inn, Ambassador, Pearl Continental and Avari hotels. The morning tour leaves the TDCP at 8.30am and takes in Badshahi Mosque, Lahore Fort, Jehangir's Tomb and the Lahore Museum. The afternoon tour leaves the TDCP at 2.30pm (3.30pm summer) and covers Shalimar Gardens, Old City, the Mosque of Wazir Khan, Sunehri Masjid and the Royal Baths. The TDCP can also arrange tours beyond Lahore (prices on application) as well as to the border-closing ceremony at Wagah (Rs 750 per person, Rs 550 per person if there's more than two people). Advance bookings are essential. For a description of the border-closing ceremony see the boxed text on p120.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Festival dates usually vary from year to year and may only be fixed a few months prior to the event. To ascertain exact dates you'll need to ask locals (Malik, owner of the Regale Internet Inn, keeps abreast of all events including the plethora of **Sufi festivals**, so it's best to email or call him when planning your trip – see p111) or the PTDC (see p101). Some festival days can be ascertained by subtracting 13

from the date it was celebrated in the previous year. For nationwide festivals see p370.

Lahore celebrates the onset of spring (February/March) with **Basant**, a popular one-day kite-flying festival (you can even see kites zigzagging across the night sky on the evening before). On this high-spirited day, Lahorites scramble onto rooftops to merrily fly their kites, or simply watch others do so. At the time of research there were rumours that this festival may be cancelled due to injuries and deaths that had occurred when kite strings tangled up motorcycle riders.

In late October/early November the **National Horse & Cattle Show**, combined with a military tattoo, is held at the Fortress Stadium for a week. This is your chance to watch camel and folk dancing, tent pegging, feats of equestrianism and parades of Pakistan's champion livestock.

Other annual events include **Mela Chiraghan** (Festival of Lights) on the last weekend of March beside Shalimar Gardens. Devotees from throughout the province light lamps on the Saturday in memory of the 16th-century Sufi poet Shah Hussain, and enjoy a convivial fair on the Sunday. City streets overflow with stalls frying up such goodies as *katalama* – huge pizza-like discs of fried bread.

The **urs of Data Ganj Baksh Hajveri** is held at his shrine in March/April with one day of formal ceremonies followed by two days of less-sombre celebrations.

SLEEPING Budget

At the time of research, virtually all budget travellers stayed at one place – the Regale Internet Inn. Budget alternatives are scarce, small and on the gloomy side – also many places visited would not accept foreigners as guests. During summer air-con is a luxury that will cost you dearly.

Retiring Rooms (Map p100; ☎ 9201110; Platform 2, Lahore City Railway Station; d Rs 150) Only open to transit air-con or 1st-class sleeper ticketholders (departing within 24 hours), the train station has just five rooms so is often booked out. Although rather insipid, rooms are cheap and only recommended if your train departs at a silly hour. If you're having trouble finding the rooms, go to the Platform Inspector & Tourist Adviser Office (Platform 4).

Queen's Way Hotel (Map p100; ☎ 7229734; 42 New Anarkali Rd; s/d Rs 200/400, s/d with air-con Rs 800/1000)

If you wish to stay in the heart of colourful Anarkali Bazaar, this small, no-frills hotel is a good budget option. The rooms are undeniably basic but this place has more character than many other hotels and is relatively inexpensive considering the location.

Clifton Hotel (Map p100; ☎ 6366740; Australia Chowk; s without bathroom Rs 200, s/d Rs 260/350, s/d with air-con Rs 1000/1100) If you absolutely have to stay near the train station, this hotel is the pick of the bunch. It has the best-value rooms, congenial staff and a dining hall.

ourpick Regale Internet Inn (Map p100; ☎ 7311987, 03334338588; www.regale.com.pk; Surriaya Mansion, Regal Lane, 65 The Mall; r without bathroom Rs 180, r with air-con Rs 700; ☎) Attracting a constant stream of travellers, this mellow little guesthouse is *the* place in Lahore to meet fellow travellers. Moreover, single females will not have a problem here.

The star attraction of this place is its happy-go-lucky owner, Malik, and his son Faseeh. Malik is a former journalist; not only is he a friendly fellow and a goldmine of information, he'll also give you an astonishing insight into local culture (see boxed text, p104). Going beyond the call of duty, Malik will even lend a therapeutic hand if you're feeling green – his 'magic tea' (Rs 5) has revitalised many a queasy traveller.

The inn is a warren of a place, but thankfully there's a sunny open-air rooftop that's good for settling back with a drink and a good book. Although the inn's rooms are nothing fancy, you can't argue with the price, which includes free filtered drinking water, a map of Lahore, use of the washing machine, access to the book collection and even a free *shalwar kameez* for women. You're also welcome to use the kitchen, which has just enough room to flip an egg. Rooms with private bathroom are being planned.

Malik compensates for Lahore's lacklustre nightlife by frequently inviting musicians to jam on the rooftop. They're not just amateurs – you might have the privilege of hearing the mystical folk singer Sain Zahoor and drumming dynamos Gongga and Mithu Saeen. You won't be asked for a single rupee by the musicians but please ensure you contribute a little something.

The Regale Internet Inn is hidden away down Regal Lane. From The Mall, look for the small lane that has a flower stall to its right and a large department store (H Karim Buksh

& Sons) to its left. The inn is less than half a minute's walk down this lane in a nondescript building to your right with an orange sign, at the top of a steep flight of stairs. If you get lost, a well-known nearby landmark is the Regal Cinema.

Orient Hotel (Map p100; ☎ 7223906; 74 McLeod Rd; s/d/tr Rs 435/621/807, s with air-con Rs 1800) The Orient's cheapest rooms are drab and dingy – you're better off paying a bit more to get one of its more-comfortable (more-expensive) rooms.

Garden Hotel (Map p100; ☎ 7322986; 10 New Anarkali Rd; s/d Rs 500/800, s/d with air-con Rs 700/1100) At the Lahori Gate end of the Anarkali Bazaar, this hotel is not only in a great location it is also good value. Cheap eats surround the hotel.

Parkway (Map p100; ☎ 6315647; McLeod Rd; s/d Rs 600/700, s/d with air-con Rs 1000/1100) Although not as good as the Clifton, the nearby Parkway is still a lot better than many other hotels around here with fairly good, if somewhat musty, tired-looking rooms. It also has a dining hall.

United Hotel (Map p100; ☎ 6374793; 1 Abbot Rd; s/d Rs 600/1200; ☎) Not sizzling-hot value, but the rooms here are OK apart from being sterile.

Lahore Hotel (Map p100; ☎ 7235961; Feroz Centre, McLeod Rd; s/d Rs 1600/1800) Opposite the Orient Hotel and perched above numerous layers of motorcycle repair shops, this hotel is a little tired and at the pricey end of the McLeod Rd options.

Midrange

Many midrange properties are begging for a lick of fresh paint and general spring clean. On the bright side, rooms come with their own bathroom, colour TV and in-house restaurant/room service. Some rooms are centrally air-conditioned, which can be ineffective, so try to get an in-room unit. The majority of hotels in this price category whack a 24.2% tax onto room rates (taxes not included below).

Hotel Koh-e-Noor (Map p100; ☎ 6313851; 1 Abbot Rd; s/d Rs 600/1000, s/d with air-con Rs 800/1200) The pick of the cheap end of the midrange bunch, at Koh-e-Noor the rooms are clean and the staff helpful. The positives of this new hotel outweigh the small rooms.

Hotel Shah Taj International (Map p100; ☎ 6313821; 13 Nicholson Rd; s/d Rs 750/1000, s/d with air-con Rs 1000/1250) The sweeping views of the Lahore skyline from the top floor are the highlight

of this hotel. The property would certainly benefit from a renovation blitz, but at least the prices aren't over the top.

Lords Hotel (Map p100; ☎ 6301517; 73 The Mall; s/d Rs 1200/1500) Although the rooms are basic, the location can not be beat. During research, renovations were planned that will certainly push the reasonable prices up.

Hotel Sanai (Map p100; ☎ 6316501; 1 Abbot Rd; s/d Rs 1200/1850; 🏠) The Sanai has biggish rooms and is probably the most salubrious midrange option if you wish to stay reasonably close to the main train station.

Bakhtawar (Map p100; ☎ 6302845; 11 Abbot Rd; s/d Rs 1600/1800; 🏠) Although the only star factor about this hotel is its spacious (albeit tatty) rooms, the Bakhtawar still scores more marks than some other properties near the train station. A facelift was planned at the time of research.

Hotel Elites (Map p98; ☎ 5760064; fayyazelites@hotmail.com; 104-B/1, MM Alam Rd, Gulberg III; s/d Rs 1800/2400; 🏠) An excellent option if you need to stay in Gulberg; friendly staff, comfortable rooms and a good-value tariff. The culinary delights of MM Alam Rd surround the hotel.

Amer Hotel (Map p100; ☎ 7115015; info@amerhotel.com.pk; 46 Lower Mall; s/d Rs 2000/2500; 🏠) A fairly sound choice in the Lower Mall area – given Lahore's paucity of midrange offerings – but like most places, it lacks pizzazz.

National Hotel (Map p100; ☎ 6363011; nhl@brain.net.pk; 1 Abbot Rd; s/d Rs 2000/2500; 🏠) Although overpriced, the National is still a passable possibility in the train station area. Check out a few rooms first as they are a mixed bag in terms of cleanliness.

Indus Hotel (Map p100; ☎ 6302856; 56 The Mall; s/d Rs 2500/3000; 🏠) Apart from being a bit musty and mundane the rooms are not to be sneered at, considering the tariff for this midrange and its central location.

Grand Hotel (Map p100; ☎ 6303402; grand@brain.net.pk; 11 Davis Rd; s/d Rs 3000/3500; 🏠) Next door to the Ambassador, this new hotel is staffed by friendly Lahorites and is great value among the other midranges.

Hotel Fort View (Map p100; ☎ 7671754; www.hotelfortview.com; Roshnai Gate, Old City; s/d Rs 3000/3500, d with views Rs 4000; 🏠) The views from the 3rd floor above Badshahi Mosque and Lahore Fort are breathtaking, particularly at night. It's worth spending the extra to stay in a view room, even if the gaudy décor is not your thing. Located opposite Roshnai Gate of Badshahi Mosque.

Carlton Tower Hotel (Map p100; ☎ 6316700; carltontowerhotel@brain.net.pk; 14 Empress Rd; s/d Rs 3500/4500; 🏠) Formerly called Hotel Kashmir Palace, a new name and a renovation make for a good-value option with wi-fi and breakfast included.

Best Western Shalimar (Map p98; ☎ 5784411; bwslp@brain.net.pk; 36 Liberty Market, Gulberg; s/d Rs 4500/5000; 🏠) Although some rooms are a wee bit small, they're certainly comfortable and well maintained. Courteous staff and free wi-fi make this hotel one of the most appealing in the midrange bunch.

Ambassador (Map p100; ☎ 6316820; hotelambassador@pol.com.pk; 7 Davis Rd; s/d Rs 5500/6000; 🏠) The setting of the Ambassador is so-so and the staff seems a bit sullen, but the rooms are kept in fairly good shape – as they should be at this price. The included breakfast is very average.

Hotel Sun Fort (Map p98; ☎ 5763810; sunfort@brain.net.pk; 72-D/1, Liberty Commercial Zone, Gulberg III; s/d Rs 6000/7000) Another Gulberg option, however, it's pricey for what is on offer.

Top End

If you like your creature comforts there are several luxurious possibilities. Rooms have an en suite and come with all the trappings you'd expect at these prices. Most have a complimentary buffet breakfast and airport shuttle, so don't forget to provide your arrival details when making a reservation. All top-end hotels are subject to 24.2% tax (not included in the prices below).

Holiday Inn (Map p100; ☎ 6310077; www.holidayinnlahore.com; 25 Egerton Rd; s/d Rs 8000/9000; 🏠) Although not quite as elegant as Pearl Continental, the staff here extend a warmer welcome and the price won't pack as much of a punch. There are all the usual five-star amenities including smart rooms, three good restaurants, free internet and an efficient business centre. If you've had a killer of a day, a rejuvenating massage (Rs 1200, one hour) should bring you back to life.

Leaders Inn Hotel (Map p100; ☎ 6300741; www.leadersinnhotel.com; 6 Montgomery Rd; s/d Rs 8000/9000; 🏠) Leaders Inn is a recent addition to the top-end line-up, with parts still under construction at the time of research. Try the rooftop restaurant and pool area for great city views.

Avari (Map p100; ☎ 6365366; www.avari.com; 87 The Mall; s/d Rs 10,000/11,000; 🏠) With a recent renovation the Avari sits between the Pearl

Continental and the Holiday Inn in terms of overall quality. The staff is helpful, the rooms are generous in size and the hotel boasts extras such as five restaurants, a pool area and several tennis courts.

Pearl Continental (Map p100; ☎ 111505505; www.pchotels.com; The Mall; s/d Rs 10,000/12,000; 🍷 🍷 🍷) This is Lahore's most upmarket hotel, replete with five restaurants and a shopping arcade, bakery, gym, tennis court, beauty parlour (a men's haircut by the 'artistic director' will set you back Rs 2500) and more. The property has two wings: the Mall (which was having a few floors added to it at the time of research) and the more opulent Atrium (an Atrium single/double costs Rs 15,000/17,000). For sheer luxury go for the Presidential Suite (a cool Rs 70,000; Room 850 is nice). It's a shame that the marine creatures in the foyer's big fish tank exhibit more *joie de vivre* than many of the snooty staff.

EATING

The hungry traveller will be happy to know that Lahore is widely regarded as Pakistan's gourmet capital. Spice junkies will relish Lahore's Pakistani fare – which usually has plenty of zing – but greenhorns should perhaps request less chilli at first, as regular preparations can fry uninitiated taste buds.

Sampling the local cuisine is heartily encouraged. However, travellers homesick for familiar fast food will easily find an ever-multiplying number of chains. For something more homegrown head for Gulberg, which has the city's most hip and innovative multicuisine restaurants.

A tip is generally expected at most restaurants (not street stalls) – locals tend to give around 5% of the bill. Midrange and upper-range restaurants have a 15% tax added to menu prices (not included here).

The Mall and Old City

Near The Mall, and aptly dubbed 'Food Street' by locals, the area called **Gowal Mandi** (Map p100; mains Rs 30-200; 🍷 lunch & dinner) is brilliant for a cheap, hearty feed. The fierce competition between the many eateries along this street works to the customer's benefit, with a variety of tasty, good-value Pakistani cuisine. Although some places are open for lunch, the action really begins after sunset when the area is completely closed to traffic; chairs and tables are set up on the street; and the

place takes on a festive buzz. To stave off the bad bugs make sure you stick to food that is cooked in front of you.

Also near The Mall, and similar to the Gowal Mandi set-up, is so-called **Tourist Street** (Map p100; Old Anarkali; mains Rs 30-200; 🍷 lunch & dinner). It's another terrific place to fill your belly without spending a fortune. The aroma of cooking oil and barbecued meat fills the air and, like Gowal Mandi, Tourist St has a focus on Pakistani food and also springs to life after sunset, when traffic is denied entry.

Chaman (Map p100; Bedan Rd, The Mall; per 2 scoop serve Rs 17; 🍷 24hr) For a cool cone or three you really can't do much better than Chaman, which has carved a name for itself as one of Lahore's most-loved ice-cream parlours. If you have room, try the fruit juices.

Fiesta (Map p100; Bedan Rd, The Mall; per 2 scoop serve Rs 17; 🍷 24hr) Although not as legendary as Chaman next door, Fiesta is working hard to win the hearts of ice-cream aficionados with a tantalising melange of sweet-sounding scoops.

Faluda Shop (Map p100; Bedan Rd, The Mall; per serve Rs 30; 🍷 24hr) Opposite Fiesta, this is a good place to sample your very first *faluda* (vermicelli and ice cream).

Eat & Sip (Map p100; ☎ 6307739; 71 Naqi Arcade, The Mall; mains Rs 70-210; 🍷 lunch & dinner) If you have to eat and run, this nondescript restaurant has a hotchpotch of takeaway or dine-in fast food such as chicken burgers (Rs 110), club sandwiches (Rs 110) and a satiating (if somewhat greasy) 'lunchbox' (quarter fried chicken, French fries and coleslaw; Rs 85). The innocent-looking preparations in the salad bar can be deceptively chilli-hot (250g/1000g serve for Rs 30/120).

our pick **Cocco's Den & Café** (Map p100; ☎ 7635955; 2168-9/A Roshnai Gate, Fort Rd, Old City; mains Rs 95-660; 🍷 lunch & dinner; 🍷) Set in an eclectic family *haveli* (traditional mansion), with glorious views of the Badshahi Mosque and environs, the vistas and ambience of this restaurant score slightly higher marks than the food (which is still not at all bad).

The owner, artist Iqbal Hussain, primarily paints portraits of the nautch (dancing) girls of Heera Mandi (Lahore's red-light district), the area in which the *haveli* is located.

The menu features Pakistani cuisine with traditional favourites. Some more-unusual offerings include *qeema wala naan* (flat bread stuffed with spiced minced lamb; Rs 90) and

for dessert, *alamghiri laula* (a seasonal carrot-based sweet; Rs 140).

Dinner is the most atmospheric time to dine here – the top of the *haveli* is a great place to watch the sunset and the Badshahi Mosque become illuminated.

Cookers (Map p100; ☎ 7229605; cnr The Mall & McLeod Rd; mains Rs 150-350; ☺ lunch & dinner) The outdoor dining area on The Mall is a great place to tuck into salt 'n' pepper squid (Rs 220), Arabian sole in lemon-herb sauce (Rs 310) or coconut chicken curry (Rs 290). Bookings for dinner are recommended.

Bundu Khan (Map p100; ☎ 7231994; 23 The Mall; mains Rs 150-350; ☺ lunch & dinner) With other branches in Lahore, Bundu Khan cooks up piquant Pakistani cuisine with menu items including a tasty mutton tikka (Rs 2605) and, for the more adventurous, brain masala (Rs 235). There are also non-Pakistani alternatives such as beef burgers (Rs 190) and chicken corn soup (Rs 280). During lunchtime this branch mainly deals in takeaway, but in the evening diners can use the tables and chairs set up outside.

Salt'n'Pepper (Map p100; ☎ 7244009; 26 The Mall; mains Rs 160-340; ☺ lunch & dinner, ☹ Recommended for its tasty Pakistani and Continental cuisine, this restaurant is a welcome retreat from the frenetic streets. A top seller is the boneless chicken *handi* (chicken dunked in a tomato-based gravy; half/full serve Rs 260/480). Or perhaps a club sandwich (Rs 160) and slice of apple pie (Rs 70) will suffice. Salt'n'Pepper has several branches in Lahore. Reservations are recommended on weekends.

Dumpukht (Map p100; ☎ 6362760; Pearl Continental, The Mall; mains Rs 350-750; ☺ lunch & dinner, ☹ Named after the cuisine championed by the nawabs (Muslim princes) of Avadh (Lucknow, India) some 300 years ago, this is one of the PC's five fine restaurants. Try the delicious *murgh pukhraaj* (chicken cooked in yogurt, saffron, Afghan spices and garnished with edible silver paper) – one of the chef's favourites. For a midnight snack, takeaway cakes, croissants, chocolate doughnuts and other sugary delights are available at the hotel's Pastry Shop.

For self-catering options, **H Karim Buksh & Sons** (Map p100; The Mall; ☎ 10.30am-10pm Mon-Sat, 11.30am-9.30pm Sun) The supermarket (lower level) of this modern shopping complex has a tremendous range of local and imported groceries. Soup mixes, spaghetti, cream biscuits, cheese, fruit yogurt, cereal – you name it, they've probably got it. Prices are a bit higher

than at 'regular' general stores, but the variety (and often quality) is superior. Very handy if you are staying at Regale Internet Inn.

Gulberg

If you're sick of eating out of a can, brown paper bag or hermetically sealed container, Gulberg is just the place to shake off the budget blues. Most eateries are bunched along MM Alam Rd and Gulberg Main Blvd and these can fill up in a flash (particularly on weekends) so it's not a bad idea to book ahead. To ensure you're well fed, make sure your moneybelt is well fed first. From The Mall to MM Alam Rd an autorickshaw/taxi costs about Rs 250/400.

Jammin' Java (Map p98; 44-L MM Alam Rd; ☎ 8.30am-midnight; ☹) Make a beeline for this hip café if you're suffering withdrawal symptoms from lack of a real cup of coffee. There are frothy cappuccinos (from Rs 105) and lattes, espressos and flavoured coffees. If you've been dragged here by a coffee freak (but aren't one yourself) there are caffeine-free options such as the Hunza High fresh fruit smoothie (Rs 145), as well as light bites. JJ is below the Levis store opposite Café Zouk.

Gun Smoke (Map p98; ☎ 5875572; 11C MM Alam Rd; mains Rs 119-609; ☺ lunch & dinner, ☹) In this Wild West steak house you won't bump into any cowboys, but you can enjoy MTV or the latest cricket match on your own in-booth screen. Brace yourself for some heat if ordering the jalapeño chicken wings (Rs 309 for a dozen) and if you are hungry try the Red Hot Sherrif's Cut steak (Rs 609).

Café Zouk (Map p98; ☎ 5750272; 43-L Complex Plaza, MM Alam Rd; mains Rs 149-599; ☺ lunch & dinner, ☹) Funky Zouk whips up imaginative Continental and Thai creations including a divine Pattaya sweet and sour fish (Rs 549), Ethiopian chicken in red pepper sauce (Rs 329) and a superb New York cheesecake (Rs 179 per slice). Cocktail buffs can sip on a piña colada (minus the kick) for Rs 149.

Pizzeria Uno Chicago Grill (Map p98; ☎ 5763743; 2-C-11 MM Alam Rd; mains Rs 186-516; ☺ lunch & dinner, ☹) Decked out in an Al Capone theme, this is perhaps Lahore's best place to sink your chompers into a 12oz fillet steak (Rs 336). Its tandoori chicken pizza (Rs 186) is also a treat, as is the Chicago cheesecake (Rs 170).

Tai Wah (Map p98; ☎ 5714988; 78-E-1 Gulberg Main Blvd; mains Rs 230-520, buffet lunch/dinner Rs 350/430; ☺ lunch & dinner, ☹) Offers à la carte dining

in addition to a yummy-looking buffet. The buffet is better value.

Freddy's Café (Map p98; ☎ 5754416; 12C MM Alam Rd; mains Rs 245-995; ☺ lunch & dinner; ☹) Convivial yet with attitude, Freddy's flaunts a 'politically correct menu' that includes Continental dishes 'flavoured to local preferences'. There's everything from Dijon steak (Rs 475) to Afghan 'Tora Bora' chicken (Rs 465). The dessert menu is deliciously insane – who could possibly resist the 'Limited Democracy' ice cream (Rs 110) and 'Day & Night' chocolate mousse (Rs 105)?

Dhaba (Map p98; ☎ 5753516; 93-B-1 MM Alam Rd; mains Rs 265-765; ☺ lunch & dinner; ☹) Features sub-continental specialities with especially good Mughlai dishes such as *nawabi salan* (chicken in cashew-nut gravy with herbs and ginger; Rs 330). There are also some Continental offerings – the goat cheese and shrimp pasta (Rs 520) and grilled tiger prawns in lemon butter sauce (Rs 785) look promising. You can eat indoors or out in the breezy courtyard.

Ziafat (Map p98; ☎ 5878746; 21-C-1 MM Alam Rd; buffet lunch/dinner Rs 275/450; ☺ lunch & dinner; ☹) Ziafat predominantly attracts young families, some of whom unfortunately allow their little darlings to treat the place like a playground. Nonetheless, the buffet is good value.

Carpe Diem (Map p98; ☎ 5874554; 67-B-1 Gulberg III; mains Rs 395-2250; ☺ lunch & dinner; ☹) Just off MM Alam Rd, Carpe Diem serves up organic Mediterranean fusion cuisine. It has a strict 'no soft drink' policy – however the fruit and vegetable detox concoction is invigorating (Rs 145). Enjoy the walnut chicken (Rs 495) or the seafood platter (Rs 1495) in the white-washed Med-inspired surroundings. There are live music performances during dinner on Wednesday, Saturday and Sunday.

Café Aylanto (Map p98; ☎ 5751886; 12-C-1 MM Alam Rd; mains Rs 485-2850; ☺ lunch & dinner; ☹) With seating inside and outdoors, this good-looking café tosses up a range of pastas (Rs 475 to Rs 695) as well as other Continental tempters including New Zealand lamb chops (Rs 1450) and Norwegian salmon steaks (Rs 875). For pure indulgence you can't beat the lobster thermidor (Rs 285 per 100g).

Village Restaurant (Map p98; ☎ 5750735; 103-B-2 MM Alam Rd; Pakistani buffet only, lunch/dinner Rs 490/590; ☺ lunch & dinner; ☹) This restaurant gets the stamp of approval from travellers for its satiating buffet. Recommended for those contemplating a civilised feeding frenzy.

If you're self-catering, the well-stocked and modern **Pace Supermarket** (Map p98; Pace shopping complex, 124 Gulberg Main Blvd; ☺ 10am-11pm Mon-Sat) has a similar range to H Karim Buksh & Sons (see opposite).

Fortress Stadium

Located at the corner of The Mall and Allama Iqbal Rd in the Cantonment, Fortress Stadium has a handful of restaurants catering to Lahore's upper-crust families and military officers. It's at its most animated during the evening. Although upmarket, the restaurants here are not nearly as in vogue as those of Gulberg. This stadium also has a cinema, tenpin bowling alley, children's fun park, a collection of shops and several food chains.

Iceberg (Map p98; 1/2/3/4 scoops Rs 30/50/65/75; ☹) If you've been shopping like a mad thing for CDs and DVDs and need a frosty pep-up, this ice-cream parlour is a godsend replete with icicles hanging from the ceiling. Its 20 flavours include wild strawberry, praline and chocolate fudge; toppings are an extra Rs 20.

Mei Kong (Map p98; ☎ 6652069; mains Rs 175-670; ☺ lunch & dinner; ☹) This large Chinese restaurant has an extensive menu with vegetable chow mein (Rs 245) and prawn chop suey (Rs 320) among the usual Chinese fare.

Shezan (Map p98; ☎ 6651315; mains Rs 175-670; ☺ lunch & dinner; ☹) This family restaurant serves up Pakistani and Continental favourites including mutton *handi* (Rs 330) and cheese stuffed chicken breast (Rs 300). Also does takeaway.

DRINKING

Pakistan is a 'dry' nation, so watering holes aren't found anywhere other than at a few hotels, and even at these you are legally required to have a liquor permit.

Excise & Taxation Department (Map p100; ☎ 9211619; Mozang Rd; ☺ 8am-3pm Mon-Thu, 8am-1pm Fri) Near Farid Court House, this is the place to get a liquor permit. Go to Room 33 on the 2nd floor with your passport, as well as one photocopy of your visa, entry stamps and the front pages. You may also need a few passport photos. A permit lasting anything up to a month costs Rs 50; for two/three months it costs Rs 90/130. There are off-licences or 'permit rooms' only at the Pearl Continental, Holiday Inn, Ambassador and Avari hotels. These are open 8am to 1pm and 3pm to 6pm Saturday to Thursday and you can use your

liquor permit at any of them. Guests of these hotels can also get permits (for the same fee) on the spot, which involves less rigmarole than getting them at the Excise & Taxation Department. During research nonguests told us that they've been able to buy liquor at some of these hotels without a permit, by making 'discreet inquiries' (the hotel may ask you to fill out a form on the spot). Murree beer costs Rs 100/110 for a bottle of regular/classic.

ENTERTAINMENT

Although Lahore doesn't have a pub or nightclub scene, it has cinemas where you can experience your first Pakistani blockbuster or watch an English-language flick. Lahore is Pakistan's cultural capital, so you've got a good chance of catching musical or theatrical performances at various venues during your stay. The Regale Internet Inn often has impromptu musical performances and everyone is welcome – for more details, see p111.

Cinemas

The highest concentration of cinemas is on Abbott and McLeod Rds. Tickets range from Rs 40 to Rs 65. Your best chances of seeing an English-language film are at the following places (see newspapers for screening details):

Gulistan Cinema (Map p100; Abbott Rd) Sometimes screens English-language films.

Plaza Cinema (Map p100; Charing Cross, The Mall) Has the highest frequency of English-language movies.

Regal Cinema (Map p100; The Mall) Another good place to catch a Hollywood blockbuster.

Sozo World Fortress Stadium (Map p98; Fortress Stadium, cnr The Mall & Allama Iqbal Rd, Cantonment) This complex contains a good cinema that often shows English-language films.

Spectator Sports

Lahore is a prime place to catch a sporting event – to ascertain what's on where and when, check out local newspapers and contact the organisations listed below.

CRICKET

Fortress Stadium (Map p98; ☎ 9220681; cnr The Mall & Allama Iqbal Rd, Cantonment) The city's second-most popular cricket venue.

Gymkhana Club (Map p98; ☎ 5756690; Upper Mall) This club sometimes hosts minor domestic cricket matches.

Iqbal Park (Map p100) Domestic cricket matches are occasionally played here.

Qaddafi Stadium (Gaddafi Stadium; Map p98;

☎ 9230791; Ferozpur Rd, Gulberg) Lahore's premier venue for major domestic and international cricket matches, surf up www.pcboa.rd.com.pk.

HOCKEY & SOCCER

National Hockey Stadium (Map p98; ☎ 5754727)

Located opposite Qaddafi Stadium, this is the venue for field hockey matches and also football (soccer).

POLO

Lahore Polo Club (Map p100; ☎ 6310285; polo@brain.net.pk; Race Course Park) Flanked by well-tended green grounds, this calm and genteel club (which is almost 120 years old) is a world away from the traffic snarls of downtown Lahore. Most matches seem to be free of charge for tourists, making this an economical way of hobnobbing with the local elite either during a match or over a pot of tea at the country-clubesque polo lounge, which is open for both lunch and dinner. The polo season runs from around late October to late April – telephone for match details.

SHOPPING

Most shops in Lahore are closed on Sunday and some also shut their doors between 1pm and 2pm on Friday. The big department stores and upmarket shops generally have fixed prices. Elsewhere, you should don your haggling hat – but remember, bargaining should never turn ugly. Always keep in mind exactly how much a rupee is worth in your home currency so you don't lose perspective.

CDs & DVDs

If you're looking for Pakistani-inspired fusion music, some recommended CDs include *Night Songs* (volume 13; Rs 120) featuring the great (late) Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan. For something different, some stores also have copies of his work remixed by Massive Attack.

Fortress Stadium (Map p98; cnr The Mall & Allama Iqbal Rd, Cantonment) Has some excellent music shops selling cheap (by Western standards) CDs and DVDs. Here you'll find Lahore's widest range of English-language music and movies, as well as a healthy collection of Pakistani and Indian titles. CDs/DVDs cost about Rs 100/120 each (no bargaining here).

Another top spot to find CDs and DVDs (although with fewer English-language choices

than Fortress Stadium) is on Hall Rd (Map p100), off The Mall, which has scores of music outlets. Rafi Plaza (Map p100) is a good place to start. CDs and DVDs are at least Rs 10 to Rs 20 cheaper than those at Fortress Stadium, but only if you bargain hard, as foreigners are invariably quoted higher prices.

Clothing & Footwear

Tailors in the Old City will stitch you a *shalwar kameez* for around Rs 200 to Rs 250 (not including material). Other tailors in Lahore will also make to order, but they're usually a little more expensive.

Landa Bazaar (Map p100; Old City) Opposite Delhi Gate, this bazaar sells decent secondhand clothing and shoes. Haggle hard.

Panorama (Map p100; 48 The Mall) Worth visiting if you're in the market for a leather jacket. This arcade also has lots of men's clothing shops.

Inside Taksali Gate is **Moti Bazaar** (Map p100; Old City) that's the best place to buy cheap, good-quality chappals (sandals). Expect to pay upwards of Rs 400 a pair.

Electrical Goods & Repairs

If you need to repair or sell your laptop or personal stereo, there are a number of reputable places on **Hall Road** (Map p100), located off The Mall, and at the **Hafeez Centre** (Map p98; Gulberg Main Blvd). Shop around and bargain hard to bag the best deal.

Hall Rd is worth visiting if you're in the market for any other electronic equipment – or even if you just want to see how many TVs, hi-fi systems, satellite dishes, mobile phones and iPods can be crammed into one street.

The best place in Lahore – indeed, one of the best in Pakistan – to repair, sell or buy a camera (new or secondhand) is along **Nisbet Road** (Map p100), about 1km north of The Mall and dubbed 'Camera Street' by locals. You'll find a plethora of outlets, but be prepared to shop around and haggle hard to nail a winning deal. It helps not to appear too eager.

Handicrafts

Lahore isn't as great a handicrafts centre as you'd expect it to be – not the ideal place to stockpile birthday gifts for loved ones back home. The upmarket hotels often have quality (but rather expensive) pieces in their flashy shopping arcades.

Anarkali and the Old City are perhaps the best places to hunt for souvenirs. You'll have

to sift through kitsch knick-knacks to find the quality stuff.

Musical Instruments

Close to the Lahore Fort, **Langay Bazaar** (Map p100; Old City) is the area to find musical instruments. Competition between shops is high, so it's worth looking around and bargaining hard to bag the best deal. One well-stocked shop is Millat Music Palace, which sells *dhols* (traditional large Punjabi drums; Rs 6000 to Rs 10,000) and *dholkis* (smaller drums crafted from wood and goatskin; Rs 1200 to Rs 2000), tablas (twin drums; Rs 3000 to Rs 5000), harmoniums (Rs 6000 to Rs 25,000; the most expensive are made in Germany) and sitars (Rs 8000 to Rs 20,000; the more-expensive ones have fine bone inlay work), as well as some violins (Rs 3000 to Rs 6500) and string guitars (Rs 2000 to Rs 12,000; the most expensive are Yamaha instruments).

Perfume

Almadina Perfume Center (Map p98; The Mall) Has a gleaming display of gorgeous locally made perfumes. Prices start at Rs 60. Whoever coined the fragrance names was certainly thinking outside the square – among the dreamy-sounding titles like 'Secret Intention' and 'Hypnotic Poison' are the whacky 'Cigar', 'Madness' and 'Scarf' labels...go figure.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Lahore is Pakistan's gateway to India – for details see p382, and for border crossing information see p387.

Air

Lahore's well-kept **Allama Iqbal International Airport** (☎ 9211604) contains both the domestic and international terminals. Facilities at the airport include two tourist offices, a railway reservation office and money-changing counters.

Check-in for domestic flights is one hour prior to departure. It's wise to book domestic tickets at least three days in advance, as flights can unexpectedly fill up at the last minute. The airport can be prone to fog in December and January, sometimes disrupting airline schedules.

For flight/air cargo inquiries call ☎ 114 or ☎ 9220786.

PIA (Map p100; ☎ 111786786; PIA Bldg, Egerton Rd) has domestic services from Lahore to Bahawalpur

(Rs 4250, one hour 20 minutes), Islamabad (Rs 4725, 50 minutes), Karachi (Rs 6550, 1¼ hours), Multan (Rs 4400, one hour 20 minutes), Peshawar (Rs 4990, one hour 25 minutes), Quetta (Rs 4775, one hour 25 minutes), Rahim Yar Khan (Rs 5100, one hour 20 minutes) and Sukkur (Rs 6325, one hour 20 minutes).

Shaheen Air International (Map p100; ☎ 111808080; www.shaheenair.com; Ali Complex, Empress Rd) flies only to Karachi; there's a twice daily service (Rs 6045).

Airblue (Map p98; ☎ 111247258; www.airblue.com; Asad Centre 1-E, Main Blvd, Gulberg II) has three daily flights to Karachi only (Rs 7998).

AIRLINE OFFICES

International carriers servicing Lahore are prone to change – to get the latest details consult your travel agent or surf the net. International airline offices in Lahore include the following:

Air Canada (Map p100; ☎ 6305229; Ali Complex, Empress Rd)

Air France (Map p100; ☎ 6360930; Wapda House, The Mall)

British Airways (Map p100; ☎ 6300701; Transport House, Egerton Rd)

Cathay Pacific Airways (Map p100; ☎ 6369558; Ali Complex, Empress Rd)

Emirates (Map p98; ☎ 6676522; 1-2 Cantonment Commercial Complex, Abid Majid Rd)

Gulf Air (Map p98; ☎ 5716405; Eden Heights Plaza, Jail Rd)

Indian Airlines (Map p100; ☎ 6360014; Ambassador Centre, Davis Rd)

Kenya Airways (Map p100; ☎ 6312138; Ali Complex, Empress Rd)

KLM – Royal Dutch Airlines (Map p100; ☎ 6361510; Wapda House, The Mall)

Lufthansa Airlines (Map p100; ☎ 6315105; Avari Hotel, The Mall)

Malaysian Airlines (Map p100; ☎ 6305100; 2nd fl, PIA Bldg, Egerton Rd)

PIA (Map p100; ☎ 111786786; PIA Bldg, Egerton Rd)

Singapore Airlines (Map p100; ☎ 6307418; Ali Complex, Empress Rd)

Thai Airways (Map p100; ☎ 6312724; Transport House, Egerton Rd) Next door to the Ambassador Hotel.

Bus

During research there were rumours that the main bus stand was going to be renovated or shifted, so it's worth double-checking its status. At the time of writing there were two

places where long-distance buses operated: the main bus stand (Lariadda) and the Sherakot bus stands (Bund Rd). Although all services depart from the slightly more conveniently located main bus stand, this place is chaotic, dusty and swarming with people. You'll encounter far less hype if you catch one of the buses that leave from the Sherakot terminals on Bund Rd (tickets cost the same at both places). An autorickshaw from The Mall to Sherakot costs about Rs 150, or you can catch bus 1 (Rs 10/15 for standard/air-con) from The Mall (first ask the driver if the bus goes to Sherakot, as not all do).

For long-haul trips a growing number of private companies offer comfortable air-con buses; most take advance bookings, however, it is still worth going to the bus stand a few days before you want to travel to secure your ticket. Companies include **New Khan Road Runners** (☎ 7728355), which services various destinations including Dera Ghazi Khan (Rs 300, seven hours), Karachi (Rs 920, 22 hours), Multan (Rs 180, five hours), Peshawar (Rs 380, six hours) and Rawalpindi (Rs 320, five hours). Other reputable companies include **Skyways** (☎ 7470242) and **Niaz Express** (☎ 740188).

The most luxurious buses are operated by **Daewoo** (Map p98; ☎ 111007008; 231 Ferozpur Rd) near Kalma Chowk. Daewoo has state-of-the-art vehicles and the fare includes a light meal (an autorickshaw from The Mall to the Daewoo terminal should cost Rs 100). To Rawalpindi, Daewoo offers two bus types: luxury (Rs 450, 4½ hours) and super-luxury (Rs 530, 4½ hours) – the latter has more leg space, a footrest and more comfortable seats. Other destinations serviced by Daewoo include Multan (Rs 400, 5¼ hours), Bahawalpur (Rs 470, 6¾ hours) and Peshawar (Rs 570, 6½ hours).

Train

All trains stop at the Lahore City Railway Station, also known as Lahore Junction. Porters will lug your load for Rs 25 to Rs 50 (depending on how much baggage you have).

Timetables and fares are subject to constant alterations so there are likely to be changes during the life of this book. To double-check, call railway inquiries on ☎ 117, get a copy of the twice-yearly updated Pakistan Railways *Time & Fare Table* (Rs 25), which is usually available at major train stations as well as at

Ferozson's bookshop (see p97), or log on to www.pakr ail.com.

It's highly advisable to buy a ticket at least a few days before your intended departure to improve your chances of securing a seat on your preferred train. Tickets are sold at the **Railways Headquarters reservation office** (Map p100; Empress Rd; ☎ 8am-7.30pm Sun-Thu & Sat, 8am-12.30pm & 2.30-7.30pm Fri) about 1.5km south of the main train station.

Don't forget to avail yourself of the 25% concession for foreign tourists and, if applicable, the generous 50% concession for foreign students. If you intend travelling by train in other parts of Pakistan it's wise to collect your concession letter in Lahore – it can be a hassle getting it elsewhere. To get this concession, take your passport and student card (if applicable) to the commercial department of **Railways Headquarters** (Map p100; Empress Rd; ☎ 8am-3pm). This office can be tough to find – if you get lost, ask someone to point you in the direction of the 'Chief Commercial Manager – Passenger'.

If you're experiencing any difficulties booking a ticket or getting a concession letter, see the manager of the public relations office in the Railways Headquarters building.

FREIGHTING A VEHICLE

If you've got your own wheels and are en route to Iran via Quetta (but don't wish to drive to Quetta) it's possible to freight your vehicle. The cost is Rs 920/12,020 per motorcycle/car. This may be a judicious option if authorities deem private vehicle travel unsafe (eg if there are tribal tensions in Balochistan) at the time of your visit.

GETTING AROUND To/From the Airport

The cheapest way to travel between The Mall and airport is by Eastbound bus 1 (which runs frequently each day until about 9pm). The fare is Rs 18.

A taxi between The Mall and the airport will set you back about Rs 600; an autorickshaw is half that price.

If you are completely frazzled after a long international flight and don't have the stamina to haggle over taxi fares, go to the airport counter of **City Radio Cabs** (☎ 11111129), a 24-hour private company that uses comfortable, air-con cars and reliable drivers (your details are logged onto a computer before you de-

part). At Rs 18 per kilometre they are a tad more expensive than regular taxis but certainly a headache-free option.

Top-end hotels usually have a complimentary shuttle bus for guests.

Bus & Minibus

Crowded buses and minibuses run almost everywhere every few minutes from stands opposite the Lahore City Railway Station. The usual fare is Rs 6 to Rs 10.

Some useful routes are as follows: minibus 43 (marked on Map p98) runs from opposite the main train station to Charing Cross and Gulberg. Bus 12 runs from the main train station to Shalimar Gardens. Bus 3 travels from the main train station to The Mall and Krishan Nagar. Bus 15 runs from the main train station to the airport, while minibus 42 goes from the main train station to Sherakot (from where you can catch private long-distance buses). Minibuses 37 and 86 ply the route from the main train station to the main bus stand and Lahore Fort.

From The Mall, bus 1 travels from Regal Chowk to the airport and Sherakot. Bus 3 goes to the main train station (from where other buses travel to the Wagah border).

Car

You should be able to wangle a cheaper deal if you hire a car for at least several days.

International Tours (Map p100; ☎ 6301185; rent car@brain.net.pk; 17-A Lawrence Rd) rents out a car with driver for Rs 4000 per day or Rs 18 per kilometre.

If you're brave enough to self-drive, all the top-end hotels have rental car counters including **Avis** (☎ 111669669) and **Hertz** (☎ 111365247). Rates start at Rs 100 per hour plus Rs 10 per kilometre and there's a minimum charge of two hours.

Taxi & Autorickshaw

Taxis and autorickshaws congregate at various places including the main train station and next to Regal Cinema (The Mall). They can also be hailed from the street. Motorcycle rickshaws work the route between the main train station and Iqbal Park along Circular Rd.

To hire a taxi by the hour is around Rs 300. The standard rate for a five-minute autorickshaw journey is about Rs 40. Always negotiate a fare before zooming off.

AROUND LAHORE

WAGAH

The border between Pakistan and India is located 30km east of Lahore at Wagah. For important border-crossing information see p386.

Whether or not you're going to India it's worth making a special trip to the border to watch the amazing closing-of-the-border (flag-lowering) ceremony that takes place each day. If you've got time, see it from *both* sides of the fence, as the objective of each side's soldiers is to out-march, out-salute and out-shout each other (if you're crossing the border you'll only get to see it from the Indian side).

If you've got any questions once at the Wagah border, don't hesitate to ask Mr Latif, the friendly owner of the Latif Old Book Shop. For more information about facilities at Wagah see p386.

Getting There & Away

To get to the Wagah border by bus from Regal Chowk (The Mall) catch bus 3 (Rs 4, about 20 minutes) to the main train station and from

there take bus 4 (Rs 12, about one hour) to the border – but before boarding bus 4 confirm with the driver that it goes to the Wagah border, as not all do.

A taxi from The Mall to the border costs about Rs 800 (a return journey including one hour's waiting time is around Rs 2000). The TDCP conducts tours to the border-closing ceremony (see p110).

HIRAN MINAR

This secluded former Mughal hunting base, 48km northwest of Lahore, offers an escape from the city crowds as it did for the Mughal court over 350 years ago. For foreigners the entrance fee is Rs 200.

The complex consists of a large water tank with a three-storey *baradari* in the middle, from where Jehangir would view his *hiran* (deer).

Nearby **Sheikhupura** has a Mughal fort with links to Sikh maharani (queen) Rani Nakayan. The entrance fee has been cranked up for foreigners to Rs 200. From Lahore, catch a bus to Sheikhupura (Rs 32, one hour). From there, get a bus or minibus to Hiran Minar (Rs 8, 20 minutes).

BRAVADO AT THE BORDER

The wonderfully outlandish closing-of-the-border ceremony has been performed daily since it was first enacted (and presumably choreographed) in 1948, not too long after Partition. This flag-lowering, gate-closing spectacle is a curious fusion of orderly colonial-style pomp, comical Monty Pythonesque moves and dead serious national rivalry. There's copious goose-stepping, snorting, stomping and killer glares that rouses thunderous applause from the audience, who zealously egg on their soldiers by repeatedly chanting '*Pakistan zindabad!*' (Long live Pakistan!). So popular is this event that grandstands have been specially constructed to accommodate the patriotic throngs that flock here.

After abundant displays of machismo from the brawny Pakistani soldiers – who are, incidentally, stunningly attired in jet-black uniforms that include turbans topped with striking fantails – the military theatre rolls on, as stony-faced commanding officers of both countries shake hands and salute (blink and you'll miss it). The flags are simultaneously lowered and folded and the gates slammed shut. Meanwhile, the crowd exuberantly cheers on; tape-recorded national anthems are sometimes played by both countries; and members of the departing audience lavish praise on the soldiers who have done them proud.

The border-closing ceremony takes place around an hour before sunset. In winter it's at about 4pm to 4.30pm and in summer between 6pm and 6.30pm (for exact timings phone ☎ 6582611). The ceremony lasts between 20 and 30 minutes. There are no fixed times, so to make sure you don't turn up halfway through – or worse still, miss it altogether – ensure you arrive at least 30 minutes before the ceremony begins. This will also give you the opportunity to watch the crowds getting pumped up for the event. On the Pakistani side there is separate-seating and tourists are usually ushered to the front seats. There's an Rs 10 admission fee and soldiers are happy to pose for photos.

NANKANA

In this small town, about 75km southwest of Lahore, is the **Gurdwara Janamasthan Nankana Sahib**, revered by Sikhs as one of their holiest sites. This is where Sikhism's founder, Guru Nanak, was born in 1469.

Each November Sikhs from around the world gather for a three-day festival, **Nanak Jayanthi** (Guru Nanak's birthday), which includes prayer readings and processions.

Before entering the gurdwara, men and women are both required to cover their heads and remove their shoes. Be aware that tobacco is strictly prohibited in the temple. There are pilgrims' lodgings (for a donation) on site.

Daily direct buses travel from Lahore to Nankana (Rs 52, two hours).

SHARAKPUR SHARIF

This little town, 35km from Lahore on the Janawala Rd, is en route to Nankana. Its old city oozes old-world charm, making it an atmospheric place to stretch your legs.

It's a good spot to buy traditional handmade shoes (around Rs 500) and taste the town's legendary *gulab jamuns* (deep-fried dough balls soaked in sweet syrup). The owner of the Regale Internet Inn has established Malik Garden, consisting of two rooms and two dorm rooms. Bamboo huts for guests are being planned for the lush fruit orchard. Bookings can be made through Regale Internet Inn (p111).

CHANGA MANGA WILDLIFE RESERVE

Established in 1860, covering about 5000 hectares and said to be one of the oldest hand-planted forests in the world, peaceful Changa Manga is 70km from Lahore on the road to Multan. Malik from Regale Internet Inn (p111) may be able to arrange bamboo-hut accommodation here, however, travel to the area is sometimes difficult due to Pakistani military exercises that take place en route to the reserve. There are daily buses from Lahore to this reserve (Rs 40, 2½ to three hours).

SOUTHERN PUNJAB

To the south of Lahore, the sublime shrines and tombs of Multan and Uch Sharif, ancient forts and the deserts of Cholistan are some of the experiences that await. Travellers should time their visit to coincide with one of the

numerous festivals in the area – and try to avoid the oppressive summer heat.

BAHAWALPUR

☎ 062 / pop 403,408

Modest in size and a world away from the rat race, Bahawalpur has limited tourist sights but is a good jumping-off point to nearby attractions such as Uch Sharif.

Located about 95km south of Multan, there has been a settlement here for thousands of years, but the present town traces its name and origins to 1748 when it was made capital of the newly founded state of Bahawalpur. This state was headed by Nawab Bahawal Khan Abbasi I, of a dynasty claiming descent from the Prophet Mohammed's uncle, Abbas. The state was ruled by the Abbasi nawabs with little outside interference until the 20th century and was only merged with Pakistan by treaty in 1954, when it became Bahawalpur Division.

The people of the region have had long associations with Sufism and *pirs* (holy men), whose shrines are often maintained by their families in perpetuity.

Most people in this district speak Saraiki, which is a variant of Punjabi.

Information

MEDICAL SERVICES

Victoria Hospital (☎ 9250411; Circular Rd) South of Farid Gate, this hospital was built in 1906 and remains the town's main infirmary.

MONEY

The following places change major currency notes and travellers cheques. The times provided here are specifically for foreign exchange.

Habib Bank (Farid Gate; ☎ 9am-1.30pm Mon-Thu, 9am-12.30pm Fri & Sat) Also has a 24-hour ATM.

Khan Moneychanger (1st fl, Pak Continental Hotel, Bobby Plaza; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Thu & Sat, 9am-noon Fri) This private authorised moneychanger only deals with major international currencies (not travellers cheques).

National Bank (Farid Gate; ☎ 9am-1.30pm Mon-Thu, 9am-12.30pm Fri & Sat)

Western Union (☎ 9250318; main post office; ☎ 9am-1pm & 2-4pm Mon-Thu & Sat, 9-11am Fri) For speedy international money transfer.

POST

The main post office (GPO) is about half a kilometre east of Farid Gate.

BAHAWALPUR

INFORMATION	SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES	SLEEPING	
Habib Bank.....1 C3	Bahawalpur Museum.....7 C3	Hotel Abaseen.....15 B3	
Khan Moneychanger.....(see 19)	Bobby Plaza.....(see 19)	JB Palace Hotel.....16 B3	
Main Post Office (GPO).....2 C3	Central Library.....8 C3	Luxury Hotel.....17 B3	
National Bank.....3 C3	Dubai Palace.....9 A4	New Bahawalpur Hotel.....18 B3	
Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation (PTDC).....4 D3	Durbar Hall.....10 D3	PTDC Motel.....(see 4)	
UBL.....5 C3	Gulzar Mahal.....11 D3	Pak Continental Hotel.....19 C3	
Victoria Hospital.....6 C3	Jami Masjid al Sadiq.....12 B3	Welcome Guest House.....20 A4	
Western Union.....(see 2)	Nur Mahal.....13 B4		
	Zoo.....14 C2		

EATING	SHOPPING	TRANSPORT	
Disneyland Sweets.....21 B3	Pakistan Handicrafts.....25 C3	Coasters to Multan & Rahim Yar Khan.....26 B3	
Pan Pizza.....22 A2		Main Bus Stand.....27 B2	
Panda Chinese Restaurant.....23 A3		PIA.....28 B3	
Tandoori Restaurant.....(see 16)		Wagons to Ahmadpur East (for Dera Nawab Sahib & Uch Sharif).....29 B3	
Zanzibar 4 Seasons Restaurant.....24 A3			

TOURIST INFORMATION

Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation

(PTDC; ☎ 9250168; PTDC Motel compound, Club Rd; 🕒 9am-1pm & 2-4.30pm Mon-Thu & Sat, 9am-noon Fri) Apart from answering tourists' queries, this groovy bullet-shaped office sells a collection of books and postcards and also has free brochures and maps of Bahawalpur and beyond. It can arrange excursions to see traditional clay potters ply their ancient craft.

Sights PALACES

The palaces of the former rulers are now 'rented' out to the army by the Abbasis, and military permission is required to visit them. However, even Abbasi princes are refused admission – you'd be extremely lucky to gain entry.

Built in 1885 in Italian style, **Nur Mahal** (Nur Mahal Rd) was the grandest of the Abbasis' residences and now houses some of their antiquities. Another palace is the 1902 **Gulzar Mahal**, which is off Darbar Rd. Next door is **Durbar Hall**, once used as the royal court of audience.

Also off limits to the public, **Dubai Palace** (Dera Nawab Rd) belongs to the Amir of Dubai, who sometimes uses it as his base for winter falconry sorties into Cholistan. Rumour has it that the amir has thrown lavish parties here for 500 guests at one time.

JAMI MASJID AL SADIQ

This beautiful mosque, built just before Partition, is in the central main bazaar area and is Bahawalpur's major Friday mosque.

ZOO

Established in 1942, this **zoo** (☎ 9255334; Stadium Rd; admission Rs 6; 🕒 8am-30 min before sunset) would have to be one of the best kept in Pakistan. It houses more than 700 different animal species including leopard, lion, tiger, spotted deer, monkey, Siberian crane, golden pheasant, bear, python and crocodile. There's also a museum on-site with pinboards of dead butterflies, some dusty stuffed birds, a frightened-looking baby deer and more. Other attractions include a fish aquarium, gift shop and kiosk.

BAHAWALPUR MUSEUM

Displaying items ranging from calligraphy to artefacts from Moenjodaro, Cholistan and Harappa, **Bahawalpur Museum** (☎ 9250000; admission Rs 10; 🕒 8am-4pm Sun-Thu, 8am-noon Fri), less than 1km southeast of Farid Gate, is divided into a Pakistan Movement Gallery of photos; an Islamic Arts Gallery of arms, textiles, graphic arts and metalware; an Archaeological Gallery; a Coins & Medals Gallery with items minted by the former state of Bahawalpur; an Ethnological Gallery with handicrafts from Cholistan and Bahawalpur; a Fabrics Gallery with costumes from the region; and a Manuscripts & Calligraphy Gallery.

CENTRAL LIBRARY

Next door to the Bahawalpur Museum, this fine building houses a well-stocked **library** (☎ 89250211; 🕒 8am-1pm & 2-6pm Mon-Thu & Sat, 8am-noon Fri). The foundation stone was laid by the then viceroy, Sir Rufus Daniel Isaacs, in 1924. The garden is very restful.

Sleeping

Bahawalpur isn't starved of budget and mid-range hotels, however, there's a lack of good-value options. Solo women aren't warmly welcomed by all places (especially budget), presumably because they're an oddity here. There are no top-end hotels, so if you're seeking luxury go to Multan.

Noise pollution can be diabolical, even in what staff optimistically label 'quiet' rooms – keep earplugs by your bedside.

BUDGET

Bahawalpur's budget choices won't exactly rock your world. Many have shoebox-like rooms, strange odours and brusque staff, but on the bright side, they won't suck your money-

belt dry. Most can be a bit creepy for single women who are perhaps better off opting for a midrange hotel in this town.

New Bahawalpur Hotel (☎ 2876191; Khan Complex, Shehzadi Chowk, Ahmadpuri Gate Rd; s/d Rs 200/300, s/d with air-con Rs 900/1100) The rooms here are decidedly dull but still score higher marks than many other cheapies.

JB Palace Hotel (☎ 2887120; Circular Rd; s/d Rs 400/600, s/d with air-con Rs 1000/1200) Near Fowara Chowk, this is also one of Bahawalpur's better choices despite having simple, somewhat dank rooms.

Hotel Abaseen (☎ 2877592; Circular Rd; s/d Rs 500/700, s/d with air-con Rs 1000/1200) Situated near Fowara Chowk, the Abaseen has small, morose rooms. On the plus side, the staff are more welcoming than at many other cheap hotels.

MIDRANGE

Midrange hotels are loads better than their budget brothers, however, some room rates are a little steep for what you (don't) get. All of the following places add a 23% tax (not included here).

Humera Hotel (☎ 2884550; Multan Rd; s/d Rs 500/600, s/d with air-con Rs 1500/1600) An option if you have to stay in the main bus-stand area, the Humera has an institutional personality but is otherwise OK. Located near Satluj Bridge.

Luxury Hotel (☎ 2888401; s/d 800/1000, s/d with air-con 1200/1400) Overlooking Fowara Chowk, this is by far the best midrange hotel in town. The rooms are well maintained, the staff is gracious (solo female travellers won't be frowned upon) and there's a decent room-service menu. On top of that, the tariff is lower than at most other hotels.

Welcome Guest House (☎ 2887882; 29A Model Town A; r Rs 1400) A recommended option if you're seeking a tranquil residential locale and don't mind staying away from the centre. This unpretentious guesthouse offers comfortable rooms (V5 is a favourite) and meals are available with advance notice. Its 'home away from home' ambience makes it especially good for long-stayers.

Pak Continental Hotel (☎ 2876792; Bobby Plaza, Circular Rd; s/d incl breakfast Rs 2460/3070; 🍷) This is an upbeat place with pleasing rooms – if you scowl at the tariff, the obliging staff are likely to turn your frown upside down by slashing prices. Internet access is available at Rs 30 an hour. Bobby's Restaurant, located in the complex, serves up Continental and Pakistani fare.

PTDC Motel (☎ 9250170; Club Rd; s/d Rs 2484/3105; 🚻) Situated in a quiet pocket of Bahawalpur, the PTDC has modern cottage-style accommodation set around a leafy garden. Although the rooms are pleasant enough, they should really be more luxurious at this price. A 20% discount may be possible so it pays to ask.

Eating

Cheap eats can be found at the little stalls dotted around Farid and Ahmadpuri Gates. For a vitamin C top-up there are places just inside Farid Gate that squeeze fresh juice for around Rs 10.

Most of the following listings have a 15% tax tacked onto menu prices (not included here).

Disneyland Sweets (Fowara Chowk; per ice-cream cone Rs 13-25; 🕒 early morning-late night) The place for an invigorating cool cone – the pistachio (Rs 18) goes down particularly well.

Tandoori Restaurant (☎ 2881758; Circular Rd; mains Rs 60-240; 🕒 lunch & dinner) Next door to JB Palace Hotel, this reasonably good restaurant offers tandoor (clay oven) creations such as chicken shashlik (kebab; Rs 180) and fish tikka (spiced, marinated fish chunks; Rs 240).

Panda Chinese Restaurant (☎ 2880885; Railway Rd; mains Rs 150-430; 🕒 lunch & dinner; 🚻) Comfortably appointed, this is the place for wok-tossed favourites such as Sichuan beef (Rs 180). However, like most Chinese restaurants on the subcontinent, the food here is more spice-infused than usual, catering to local tastes.

Zanzibar 4 Seasons Restaurant (Muhammad Bin Qasim Rd; mains Rs 170-760; 🕒 lunch & dinner; 🚻) With an attractive interior and good food, this is Bahawalpur's finest restaurant. There are Pakistani, Continental, Chinese and even a few Mexican dishes. Recommendations include the roast beef burgers (Rs 170), jumbo garlic prawns (Rs 570) and honey pepper chicken (Rs 270). If your tummy is twisting, try a cup of soothing green tea (Rs 25).

Pan Pizza (☎ 2877140; 75 Welcome Gate, Railway Rd; small/medium/large pizza Rs 385/625/825; 🕒 lunch & dinner; 🚻) Opposite Panda, Pan does tasty pizzas as well as a limited variety of burgers and Chinese fare. The delicious hot and spicy pizza does, as the name suggests, leave your taste buds tingling.

Shopping

The Bahawalpur region is known for its shoes and handicrafts (especially earthen

pottery). Items to look out for include shoes known as *khussas* (woven with gold and silver thread); handwoven village carpets; brocades; painted terracotta pottery; brassware; and embroidered skirts and material. Tassled felt caps (similar to soft Turkish fezzes) can usually be found at hat shops in the bazaar.

The otherwise disappointing Pakistan Handicrafts shop, opposite Farid Gate, sometimes has some standout handicrafts from Cholistan at affordable prices. Cholistan handicrafts include *chungirs* (bread plates made from date palm leaves), *rillis* (all-purpose cotton patchwork blankets), *falasis* (weavings of camel hair and cotton used as carpets, wall hangings etc), embroidered dupattas (long scarves), kurtas (long shirts with either short or no collars) and *khalatis* (ladies' embroidered purses).

Getting There & Away

AIR

PIA (☎ 9255012; Fowara Chowk; 🕒 8.30am-4pm) has five flights a week to Lahore (Rs 4700) and Karachi (Rs 4550).

BUS & MINIBUS

Long-distance services leave from the collective chaos known as the main bus stand at the northern edge of town. There are regular services to Islamabad (Rs 430, 8½ hours), Multan (Rs 110, 1½ hours), Sahiwal (Rs 200, four hours) and elsewhere. Private companies such as New Khan Rd Runners (among other reputable outfits such as Skyways and Niazi Express) have more-comfortable services to Lahore (Rs 330, eight hours via Multan and Sahiwal). These companies have offices at the main bus stand. Coasters to Multan (Rs 80) and Rahim Yar Khan (Rs 1700) leave from Ahmadpuri Gate.

The more comfortable and reliable **Daewoo** (☎ 11007008) has established itself on the outskirts of town (opposite Sadiq Public School, near NLC, Dera Nawab Sahib Rd) and runs regularly to Lahore (Rs 470), Rawalpindi (Rs 680) and Multan (Rs 130).

TRAIN

From Bahawalpur, travelling by bus is usually quicker and entails less palaver than going by train. For those still interested, almost all long-distance trains pass through town, however, the small station can only secure

reservations on a few services (so you may not get your preferred train). It is highly recommended to go to the Bahawalpur train station several days in advance to book.

Getting Around

Passenger Suzukis and *qinjis* (passenger autorickshaws) loop around Circular Rd, connecting the bus and train stations for a few rupees. An autorickshaw from the train station to the centre costs around Rs 60. To hire an autorickshaw for a half/full day should cost about Rs 600/1000. Bahawalpur was once famous for its bicycle rickshaws but these were phased out in 1994.

TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

To travel from the airport to the town centre should cost around Rs 200/400 by autorickshaw/taxi.

LAL SUHANRA NATIONAL PARK

Located 35km east of Bahawalpur and covering a natural lake and a large man-made forest, this 51,588-hectare **park** (admission Rs 25; ☒ sunrise-sunset) is a pleasant place to relax.

Inside the main entrance, past the TDCP Motel and park office, is a **children's park** with a small zoo containing local wildlife such as imperial sandgrouse, partridge, pheasant, rhesus monkeys, ciracal and civet cats, desert fox and a pair of rhinos. Animal species found wild in the park include boar, hare, jackal, mongoose, desert fox, porcupine, lark, owl, hawk and nilgai (antelope).

The PTDC (see p122) can arrange tours to this park (prices on application).

Sleeping & Eating

TDCP Motel (☎ 062-871144; r Rs 1100) Inside the gates, this motel has quiet gardens and a good restaurant. If you're on your own they may take Rs 250 off the room rate. The TDCP also has a camping ground (camp sites Rs 300).

There are several **government resthouses** (r Rs 900) in the area but these are subject to availability – inquire at the PTDC office (see p122) in Bahawalpur.

Getting There & Away

Catch one of the buses (Rs 25, 30 minutes) from Bahawalpur's main bus stand, which go as far as Lal Suhanra village. From there you'll have to take an autorickshaw to the park (Rs 50), or you could walk (about 3km).

CHOLISTAN

An extension of Rajasthan's Thar Desert, the largest desert on the Indian subcontinent, Cholistan covers over 20,000 sq km of south-east Pakistani Punjab and at its nearest point it is some 30km from Bahawalpur. At one time it was a fertile area watered by the Hakra River – long since dry – which flowed to the Arabian Sea.

At least 400 settlements along its banks were continuously inhabited from the 4th millennium BC, long before the Indus Valley civilisation, to the beginning of the Islamic era. The remains of some 40 forts from the early days of the caliphate cross the desert like a string of pearls.

In reference to the nomadic habits of its people, the region's name derives from *cholna*, meaning 'moving'; to the locals, however, it's known as Rohi. The population of over 100,000 spend their lives in constant search for pasture and water. The dress and handicrafts of Cholistan – examples of which can be bought in Bahawalpur – are unique.

Except after the early autumn rains, when some vegetation blooms, Cholistan is a sandy wasteland with clumps of hardy shrubs passing for oases. These give shelter to many species of wildlife including rat-catcher, sparrowhawk, black buck, desert fox, Houbara bustard, imperial sandgrouse and partridge.

If you'd like to spend a night in the desert you must first obtain a permit from the Bahawalpur District Coordination Officer (DCO); apply through the PTDC in Bahawalpur (see p122), which can also arrange desert safaris.

Tours

Most safaris go between Channan Pir and Derawar Fort. Dingarh Fort is accessible from Yazman but visits to Mojgarh, Marot and Mirgarh Forts require considerably more planning.

To explore much beyond Derawar Fort you'll need a 4WD or camel and a guide who knows the area intimately. Between October and March the PTDC can organise camel tours, given at least three days' notice. A camel with 'driver' costs around Rs 750 per day and an English-speaking guide is at least another Rs 750 per day. Local musicians and dancers can also be arranged. Bear in mind that a camel only covers about 12km to 15km

a day and is only worth considering for the novelty factor.

To get further you'll require a jeep, available from the PTDC (booked at least a day ahead), costing Rs 4000 to Rs 6000 per day (depending on jeep quality). You'll need adequate food and water supplies. Private companies like Travel Walji's also run expensive but professionally run package tours, however, these need to be prearranged in Lahore or Islamabad.

Dera Nawab Sahib (Dera Nawab)

Seat of the Abbasi family, the tiny town of Dera Nawab is the usual gateway to Cholistan. There are three royal palaces here, but unfortunately they aren't open to the public. You can take a distant peek at the late-19th-century **Sadiq Garh**, by far the grandest, from the gatehouse.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Dera Nawab is the twin town of Ahmadpur East (Ahmadpur). From Bahawalpur, there are continuous minibus services (Rs 60, one hour). You'll be set down at the turn-off to Dera Nawab or Abbasi Chowk, Ahmadpur's main square, from where there are minibuses to Dera Nawab (Rs 9, 15 minutes) and Uch Sharif (Rs 14, 25 minutes).

Derawar Fort

The best-preserved and most accessible of Cholistan's historic remains is the dramatic fort at Derawar, 45km south of Dera Nawab. This vast square structure was built in 1733 as the headquarters of Sadiq Mohammed Khan I, the first nawab of Bahawalpur.

Visible for many kilometres, the fort has 40 enormous bastions, most of them intact, and it stands more than 30m high with a circumference of 1.5km. Most of the interior is in need of renovation and there isn't actually that much to see. The mosque outside the fort is in good repair, however. Made of marble, it was built on the exact lines of the Moti Masjid in the Red Fort of Delhi (India). You may also be able to get a glimpse of the royal graveyard through a walled enclosure, which is a five-minute walk to the east. Its tombs are adorned with exquisite blue tiles but it's not open to visitors unless they are accompanied by a member of the Abbasi family. The exterior of the fort warrants a visit in any case.

The fort remains the property of the Abbasi family and you must apply to the Bahawalpur PTDC (see p122) to request a permit from Prince Salahuddin or Prince Falhouddin Abbasi on your behalf – allow at least a week for this (you're charged for the phone calls to arrange the permit).

GETTING THERE & AWAY

To get to Derawar Fort take a bus to Dera Nawab (Rs 35, one hour) and from there hire a minivan (seating six) at Abbasi Chowk (Rs 60, two hours). A taxi from Bahawalpur costs about Rs 4000 for the day (including waiting time).

The best time to visit is between November and February, or early morning or late afternoon at other times of year, to avoid the noon heat. Take water and snacks with you.

Channan Pir

The sleepy village of Channan Pir is about 65km south of Bahawalpur, on the edge of the desert. Every year around February/March it swells with Cholistanis arriving by camel from surrounding settlements for the **Channan Mela**. This festival runs over seven consecutive Thursdays and Fridays (the fifth and sixth days have special attractions such as sporting events and theatrical performances), peaking during the full moon. Dates are variable – consult the PTDC (see p122) in Bahawalpur.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Daily buses travel from Bahawalpur and Dera Nawab Sahib to Yazman, from where you catch another bus to Channan Pir (Rs 35, 45 minutes).

BHONG MOSQUE

This remarkable structure is located 50km southwest of Rahim Yar Khan (a convenient jumping-off point to Bhong). The elaborate Bhong Mosque was started by the late Sadar Rais Ghazi Mohammad in the early 1930s but took about half a century to complete. It incorporates a stunning melange of Islamic design elements – the end result is unique and positively sublime. There are some striking decorative embellishments such as gold foil and exquisite calligraphy, among other eye-catching features.

If you require accommodation, the best options are found in Rahim Yar Khan.

Getting There & Away

From Bahawalpur, take a bus to Rahim Yar Khan (Rs 250, four hours). From there it's about 50km to Bhong Mosque (a minivan costs Rs 35 and takes 1½ to two hours). A taxi from Bahawalpur to the Bhong Mosque will set you back around Rs 6000 for the return trip.

UCH SHARIF

With its name meaning 'holy high place', the small town of Uch Sharif (or just Uch) is famous for its superb Sufi shrines, which are open and free to all. It certainly warrants a visit.

Believed to date from around 500 BC or earlier, Uch was under Hindu rule when Alexander the Great invaded India. There are claims Alexander spent a fortnight here during which time he renamed it Alexandria. Mohammed bin Qasim entered Uch on his march north; legend has it that the town's numerous date palms are descended from trees that grew from the stones of Arabian dates brought by his soldiers.

After the arrival of Islam, Uch attracted religious figures and many Islamic schools were founded here. By the 13th century it was one of the subcontinent's leading religious and cultural centres. Uch became an important base for the spread of two of the most important Sufi branches, the Sunni Qadiriya school of Syed Mohammed Ghous Jilani Hallabi and the Shiite Suhrawardiya school, popularised by Jalaluddin Bukhari.

Orientation & Information

Minibuses from Bahawalpur and Ahmadpur East (Rs 45, 1½ hours) are quicker than buses. These depart from opposite Eidgah Mosque in Bahawalpur and the main bus stand respectively. They drop passengers at the entrance to the bazaar. To get to the shrines, head west through the bazaar for about 1.5km until you exit near the tomb of Jalaluddin Surkh Bukhari. Although the shrines and tombs are within walking distance of each other, they aren't easy to find without a guide. Alternatively, follow a bunch of pilgrims as they do a circuit of up to 10 tombs.

Sights

SHRINE & MOSQUE OF JALALUDDIN SURKH BUKHARI

Jalaluddin Surkh Bukhari (1177–1272), also known as Jalaluddin Munir Shah, is credited

with, among other things, the conversion of Genghis Khan to Islam. The compound containing his flat-roofed shrine and mosque is surrounded by a brick wall decorated with blue tiles. The shrine was built in the 14th century and is of interest for the original woodcarvings on the pillars and the 40 beams, some of which still have traces of early paintwork. The saint's *urs* is held on 19 Jamad Sani (Islamic calendar).

SHRINE OF JALALUDDIN BUKHARI

Hazrat Jalaluddin Bukhari (1303–1383), the grandson of Jalaluddin Surkh Bukhari, gained his nickname, Jehanian Jehangashat (traveller of the world), because his search for enlightenment took him to Mecca, Medina, Mesopotamia, Syria, Egypt, Persia and Egypt before he settled in Uch. He was a prominent member of the Suhrawardiya Sufi branch and was responsible for popularising it here.

The portal of the square shrine is supported by wooden pillars in a poor state of repair, but the interior, with painted ceiling and two tombs topped with turbans, is relatively well preserved. The ancient carved door has simple geometric and floral motifs. According to legend, a gnarled tree outside the shrine was planted by the saint himself. There is a tiny room, to the right of the door as you enter, said to house the footprint of Imam Ali.

The saint's *urs* is held on 10–12 Zilhaj. Consult the Bahawalpur PTDC (see p122) for exact dates, as they are variable.

MAUSOLEUM OF BIBI JAWINDI

The highly impressive tomb of Jehanian Jehangashat's wife, Gholam Fatima, nicknamed Bibi Jawindi, stands next to the shrine of Jalaluddin Surkh Bukhari. Overlooking the confluence of the Sutlej and Chenab Rivers and near a graveyard, the tomb has fine views of date groves almost as far as the eye can see. Only half of the building remains (the other half having apparently been partially destroyed by a flood in 1817) and although not in good condition, it's still an incredibly impressive sight. The octagonal tomb was built at the end of the 15th century and still has some beautiful tilework.

SHRINE OF SHEIKH SAIF-UD-DIN GHAZROONI

This, the oldest shrine in Uch, and said to be the oldest Islamic tomb on the subcontinent,

is in a bad state of repair with no outer ornaments surviving. It's worth a visit for its historical significance.

Sleeping

There's no hotel here so the town is best visited as a day trip from Bahawalpur (71km away), preferably arriving in the early morning before it gets too hot.

Getting There & Away

Minibuses shuttle between Uch bazaar and Ahmadpur East (Rs 22, 30 minutes), from where you can catch another to Bahawalpur's Eidgah Mosque (Rs 60, 1½ hours). Buses do the same route but are much slower and depart from different bus stands so you'll have to stick with the same mode of transport while changing in Ahmadpur. A few services run directly between Uch and Bahawalpur.

PANJNAD HEAD

About 12km from Uch Sharif, Panjnad Head is where the five rivers of Punjab meet and it's a popular site for picnickers. Remember that photography of Pakistani bridges is illegal.

A bus to Panjnad Head from Bahawalpur costs Rs 12.

MULTAN

☎ 061 / pop 3,800,000

The largest town of lower Punjab and the centre of Pakistan's main cotton-growing area, Multan is noted for its remarkable shrines and mosques.

Little is known of Multan's pre-Islamic history, although it's thought to date back some 4000 years. Alexander the Great is believed to have captured it around 324 BC. In AD 641 Chinese traveller Xuan Zang recorded a magnificent Hindu temple to Shiva, of which there is now no trace. This and other Hindu shrines made Multan an important pilgrimage centre even before the Islamic era. The Sanskrit Rig-Veda is believed to have been written here.

Multan was the first town of Punjab to be captured by Mohammed bin Qasim (in 711). Ruled at the time by a Brahmin dynasty, it eventually became a major Islamic centre. Since then it has attracted more mystics and holy men than perhaps anywhere else on the subcontinent and today is dominated by their shrines and tombs.

It remained, at least nominally, under the Baghdad caliphate until the end of the 12th

century. From then on until the early 16th century it was repeatedly stormed by invaders from central and west Asia. It returned to relative peace from 1528 to 1748 under the Mughals, when it became renowned for its architecture, music, ceramics and artistry.

The city passed through various rival dynasties into the hands of the Sikhs until the British stormed the citadel in 1848–49 after scoring a direct hit on the city ammunition dump. The two-week 'Siege of Mooltan' later became known as the Second Sikh War.

Multan is located about 95km north of Bahawalpur.

Information

BOOKSHOPS

There are some reasonably good bookshops in the Cantonment area (near Saddar Bazaar), including Caravan Books, Book Ocean and Kitabnagar, the latter in Hassan Arcade (Nusrat Rd).

MEDICAL SERVICES

Nishtar Hospital (☎ 9200231-37; Nishtar Rd) Off Bahawalpur Rd, this is Multan's most reputable medical facility.

MONEY

At the time of research no banks in Multan were dealing with foreign exchange, however, many major banks (such as the Muslim Commercial Bank opposite the Hotel Sindbad) offered 24-hour ATM services. The only place to change money was at authorised private moneychangers – these only change major foreign currency notes, not travellers cheques – which are mostly found in Saddar Bazaar. To be on the safe side, bring along adequate rupees/foreign-currency notes.

Rahman Moneychangers (☎ 572636; 2nd fl, Metro Plaza; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Thu & Sat, 9am-1pm Fri) A reliable authorised private moneychanger that deals with most major currencies (no travellers cheques).

POST

Fedex (☎ 111711111; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat) Next to Hotel Sinbad, Fedex is a reliable international courier service.

Main post office (GPO; Hassan Parwana Rd; ☎ stamp sales 9am-3pm Mon-Thu & Sat, 9am-12.30pm Fri) A man out front will stitch parcels on the spot (charges start at Rs 50).

TOURIST INFORMATION

Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation (PTDC; ☎ 9201291; Hotel Sindbad, Nishtar Chowk;

MULTAN

0 1 km
0 0.5 miles

INFORMATION		SLEEPING		Shangrilla Gardens & Barbecue	
Book Ocean.....	(see 6)	Continental Guesthouse.....	19 B4	Restaurant.....	32 B3
Caravan Books.....	(see 38)	Dream Huts.....	20 B4	Zanzibar.....	33 B4
Fedex.....	(see 5)	Holiday Inn.....	21 B4		
Kitabnagar.....	1 B4	Hotel Al-Sana.....	22 B4	ENTERTAINMENT	
Main Post Office (GPO).....	2 B4	Hotel Firdos.....	23 B4	Qasim Bagh Stadium.....	34 C3
Muslim Commercial Bank (MCB).....	3 B3	Hotel Mangol.....	24 B4	Rex Cinema.....	35 B4
Nishtar Hospital.....	4 B3	Hotel Shabroze.....	25 B4	SHOPPING	
Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation (PTDC).....	5 B3	Hotel Silver Sand.....	(see 7)	Hussain Agahi Bazaar.....	36 D3
Rahman Moneychangers.....	6 B4	Hotel Sindbad.....	(see 5)	Karim Centre.....	(see 23)
Tourism Development Corporation of Punjab (TDCP).....	7 B4	Hotel Taj.....	27 B4	Nigar Khana.....	37 C3
		New Relax Hotel.....	28 C3	Punjab Government Small Industries Corporation.....	38 B4
		Sheza Inn.....	29 C3	TRANSPORT	
SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES		EATING		Airport.....	39 A4
Eidgah Mosque.....	8 D3	Bundu Khan.....	(see 33)	Minibus to Bahawalpur.....	40 B4
Gun Emplacement & Lookout.....	9 C3	Lasani Gardens.....	30 D3	PIA.....	41 B4
Institute of Blue Pottery Development.....	10 D4	Mehfil Coffee Shop.....	(see 21)		
Mausoleum of Baha-ud-Din Zakaria.....	11 C3	Shangrilla.....	31 B4		
Mausoleum of Shams-ud-Din Sabzwari.....	12 D3				
Mausoleum of Sheikh Rukn-i-Alam.....	13 C3				
Phulhattan Mosque.....	14 C3				
Qasim Bagh Fort.....	15 C3				
Tomb of Musa Pak Shahid.....	16 C4				
Tomb of Yusuf Gardezi.....	17 C3				
Wali Muhammad Mosque.....	18 C4				

☎ 9am-4.30pm Mon-Thu & Sat, 9am-noon Fri) This well-stocked office has giveaway maps and sells postcards (Rs 5) and posters (Rs 25 to Rs 50). It can arrange tailor-made tours in and around Multan (prices on application) – these include a visit to Multan's Institute of Blue Pottery Development and tours to local embroidery and camel-skin workshops. It can also arrange performances by traditional drummers, singers and puppeteers with at least two days' advance notice. Guides can be hired for Rs 500/1000 per half/full day (more if you travel out of Multan).

Tourism Development Corporation of Punjab

(TDCP; ☎ 9200955; 517-A Railway Rd; ☎ 8.30am-3pm Sun-Fri, 8.30am-noon Mon-Sat) Near the Hotel Silver Sand, the TDCP operates a half-/full-day city tour for Rs 500/800 (maximum four people) that covers Multan's major sights. The half-day tour runs from 9am to 1pm and the full-day tour from 9am to 1pm and 2pm to 6pm. TDCP can also

arrange tours around Multan; an all-inclusive trip to Uch Sharif costs Rs 4000 (maximum four people).

Sights & Activities

Multan has scores of shrines – too many to include here. If you're interested in seeing minor shrines consult the PTDC. As the *urs* dates (see each sight's entry) vary from year to year, it's best to get the exact dates from the PTDC.

QASIM BAGH FORT

Multan's most prominent landmark, now largely in ruins except for its gate and part of the outer walls and bastions, is **Qasim Bagh Fort** (admission free; ☎ 24hr), near Hussain Agahi and Chowk Bazaars.

Apart from the shrines, most of the fort was destroyed by the British in 1848–49 to avenge the death of Lieutenant Alexander vons Agnew, killed in Multan by order of the Sikh governor. Agnew's **memorial obelisk** stands on a plinth at one of the highest points of the fort mound. **Qasim Bagh**, the small garden after which the fort now takes its name, and the large **Qasim Bagh Stadium** lie to the south. Although you can still walk most of the way around the ruined ramparts, the most impressive remains are by the main entrance from Kutchery Rd, a major hub of Multan. The British **gun emplacement** at the south of the mound is the place for a panoramic photograph of the town.

At one time the fort had a circumference of 2000m and was protected by 46 towers, four main gates and the Ravi River, which used to flow between the fort and old town.

MAUSOLEUM OF SHEIKH RUKN-I-ALAM

Lying just inside the main entrance to the fort, this masterpiece of Mughal architecture is the most significant and attractive of Multan's shrines. A pious and widely loved scholar, Rukn-ud-Din Abul Fatah (1251–1334), commonly known as Sheikh Rukn-i-Alam (Pillar of the World), became head of the Suhrawardiya Sufi branch introduced to the region by his father Baha-ud-Din Zakaria, and is regarded as the patron saint of Multan.

Built entirely of red brick and timber, the structure is not only beautiful but is skilfully executed, with a brilliant mastery of the squinch (a small arch across the corner of a tower masking the transition from square to dome). It is said that the Tughlaq king Ghiyasud-Din originally built the mausoleum for himself in 1320, but that his son offered it as the saint's resting place out of religious duty.

The building has two octagonal lower storeys strengthened by buttresses, supporting a massive spired dome almost 20m in diameter, and has a total height of over 30m. One of the supporting towers was destroyed during the siege of 1849, but it was later restored. The interior and exterior are decorated with garters of glazed tiles in blue and turquoise laid in regular geometric bas reliefs. Inside are dozens of chevron-shaped ridges laid out on the ground like graves, but the tomb of the saint is draped in a cloth under a canopy.

The saint's *urs* is held on 3 Jamaldi ul Awal.

MAUSOLEUM OF BAHA-UD-DIN ZAKARIA

Just near the Mausoleum of Sheikh Rukn-i-Alam, the Mausoleum of Baha-ud-Din Zakaria (1182–1262), father of Rukn-i-Alam, was built in 1263. A disciple of the Sufi mystic Hazrat Shahabuddin Umar Suhrawardy of Jerusalem, he introduced the Suhrawardiya branch to the subcontinent and founded a university in Multan. His tomb was badly damaged in 1848 but was later restored. The brick building has a square base and an octagonal second storey supporting a dome, and is decorated with blue tiles and Arabic inscriptions.

Although the upper halves of this tomb and Rukn-i-Alam's mausoleum have similar designs from the outside, it's interesting to compare the top-heavy and functional construction of the interior of this tomb with the lighter and more artistic design of the other, built only about 50 years later, to appreciate how innovative the latter is.

The *urs* of Baha-ud-Din (Ornament of the Faith), also known as Baha-al-Haq, is held on 27 Safar.

MAUSOLEUM OF SHAMS-UD-DIN SABZWARI

On the dry bed of the Ravi River, less than 1km northeast of the fort, the shrine of Shams-ud-Din Sabzwari (Shams Tabrez), who is believed to have lived from 1165 to 1276, was founded by his grandson in 1330 and rebuilt by more distant descendants in about 1780.

One of the most enduring legends about the many miracles of Shams Tabrez is that he moved the sun closer to himself, hence making Multan the hot and dusty city it is today (*shams* means sun in Arabic). Whether or not the saint has been forgiven for this action, his tomb attracts vast numbers of devotees on his *urs*, held on 14–16 Rabusani.

MAUSOLEUM OF SULTAN ALI AKBAR

This largely forgotten but impressive 16th-century tomb lies in the Suraj Miani suburb to the north of the city centre. Akbar's mother has her own tomb nearby.

To get here take a tonga (two-wheeled horse carriage) from the north side of Kutchery Chowk to Suraj Miani in the northern outskirts, then walk 400m east and south through the backstreets. You'll be able to see the huge octagonal building from the tonga. A *qinji* costs about Rs 60 (Rs 10 per person if there are six people) or it's Rs 70 by autorickshaw.

EIDGAH MOSQUE

The large Eidgah Mosque, covering an area of some 73m by 16m, was built in 1735 and was later used by the Sikhs as a military garrison. In turn, the British used it as a courthouse (it was here that Agnew was slain) but it was restored to its original use in 1891 and today has some of the finest blue tilework in Multan. The mosque is about 1km north of Qasim Bagh Fort.

OTHER MONUMENTS

Only the most enthusiastic fan of Islamic architecture could fully appreciate all of Multan's shrines, tombs and mosques in a fleeting visit. Many are hidden in the old town; north of Pak Gate (Circular Rd) is **Wali Muhammad Mosque** (1758) and **Phulhattan Mosque** (1720), to the northwest is the beautifully tiled **Tomb of Yusuf Gardezi** and south of this is the **Tomb of Musa Pak Shahid**. There are also several ruined Hindu temples in the area. Routes can be torturous – hire a guide or try your luck by asking locals to keep pointing you in the right direction.

BAZAARS

At the base of the fort mound is the sprawling bazaar and old town, connected to the rest of the town by seven medieval gates. The main markets are the **Hussain Agahi & Chowk Bazaars**, flanked by antique wooden merchant houses and echoing Multan's former importance as a trade centre.

INSTITUTE OF BLUE POTTERY DEVELOPMENT

To see the production phases of blue pottery, a traditional craft that is a Multan speciality, visit this small but interesting **institute** (☎ 4548898; Mumtazabad Rd; 🕒 8am–3pm). The lovely items made here are sold in Pakistan and beyond and can also be purchased at the institute's own showroom (prices range from Rs 30 for a small vase to Rs 7000 for a large one). For an informal tour meet the institute's project director, Mr Shuaib Khan.

An autorickshaw from the city centre is Rs 100 (one way). The PTDC and TDCP can arrange tours to the institute (prices on application).

SWIMMING

Holiday Inn (Abdali Rd) If you're all shrined out and desperate for a cool dip, Holiday Inn allows nonguests to use its pool for Rs 500 per day.

Sleeping

Most of the best places to stay are in or around the city centre. Street clatter can drive you loopy – request a quiet room and keep ear-plugs within easy reach.

BUDGET

Many of Multan's rock-bottom places have closed in recent years due to poor business, and what's left is not ultra cheap. There's also a limited choice as many simply can't be recommended because they're disgusting fleapits, don't accept foreigners, or both. Tap into the traveller's grapevine to find out whether anyone has struck a newly opened or renovated budget gem.

Hotel Taj (☎ 4549319; Nawab Shaher Rd; s/d Rs 250/350)

A good location, however, the rooms are bare and very grotty. Should only be considered in an emergency.

Hotel Shabroze (☎ 4544224; Hassan Parwana Rd; s/d Rs 300/475; s/d with air-con Rs 750/1100) Just off Dera Adda Chowk, the Shabroze has small, bare rooms but is OK for a night or two.

Hotel Shalimar (☎ 4583245; Al-Sana Bldg, Hassan Parwana Rd; s/d Rs 400/650; s/d with air-con Rs 800/1200; 🚿) A standout in Multan's lacklustre budget bundle, the rooms here are not too bad apart from being a smidgen gloomy.

MIDRANGE

Many hotels in this category are centrally air-conditioned, so before accepting a room, first ensure it is adequately chilled. Most midrange places mentioned here incur a 24.2% hotel tax (not included in the following reviews).

Hotel Firdos (☎ 4572155; Karim Centre; s/d Rs 500/700; s/d with air-con Rs 1400/2000) Just north of Dera Adda Chowk, some rooms at Firdos are musty and rather unkept – not great value. You're better off opting for one of its considerably better, more expensive rooms.

Hotel Silver Sand (☎ 4518061; 514 Railway Rd; s/d Rs 700/1000; 🚿) Located just off Aziz Hotel Chowk, Silver Sand is a sound choice apart from having some run-down rooms that are starved of natural light.

New Relax Hotel (☎ 4511688; Kutchery Rd; s/d Rs 800/1000; s/d with air-con Rs 1100/1400; 🚿) Neither new nor particularly relaxing, this hotel has worn and weary rooms, making it the worst of the best midrange batch.

Hotel Al-Sana (☎ 4547501; Sher Shah Rd; s/d Rs 1000/1500; 🚿) The attraction of this hotel is that it's quieter than many others, however,

the grassy central courtyard gets more points than the rooms.

Hotel Mangol (☎ 4548231; LMQ Rd; s/d Rs 1000/1500; 🍷) About 200m north of Dera Adda Chowk, this is one of Multan's most appealing midrange offerings with good (albeit not luxurious) rooms.

Dream Huts (☎ 4573882; Railway Rd; s/d Rs 1200/1500; 🍷) Quiet and set back from the road, the average rooms are somewhat offset by the garden courtyard. Opposite the TDCP office.

Continental Guesthouse (☎ 4577939; 2507 New Abdali Colony; s/d Rs 1600/2000; 🍷) The Continental is a little hard to find, so look for the sign on LMQ Rd. Friendly staff and comfortable rooms make it one of the better midrange options. It's located near the Multan Central Telephone Exchange, off LMQ Rd.

Hotel Sindbad (☎ 4512640; Nishtar Chowk; s/d Rs 1800/2600; 🍷) Like Hotel Mangol, rooms at this price should really have more attention to detail. Nonetheless, you'll be adequately comfortable here and if you've got any tourist-related queries, the PTDC office operates out of a converted Sindbad room. The tariff includes breakfast in the recently renovated coffee shop.

TOP END

Holiday Inn is Multan's only five-star hotel. The room rates here don't include the 24.2% tax.

Sheza Inn (☎ 4782236; shezainn@hotmail.com; Kutchery Rd; s/d Rs 3000/3500; 🍷) Sheza is no match for the Holiday Inn, but the price won't pack as much of a blow and you may even be able to cut it further. Rooms are arranged around a central garden – some are prone to noise when diners are held here so choose carefully. Extra money will get you a considerably more spacious and luxurious room.

Holiday Inn (☎ 4587777; 76 Abdali Rd; s/d Rs 7000/8000; 🍷 📺 📺) Although not as grand as most other properties in this chain, you'll still find all the trimmings you'd expect of a Holiday Inn. The affable receptionists may even shave a few hundred rupees off the rate if you cry poor.

Eating

Cheap meals are available around Dera Adda Chowk, Ghanta Garh Chowk and the bazaars.

Midrange and upper-range restaurants have a 15% tax (not included here).

Lasani Gardens (Rashidabad Chowk; mains Rs 80-250; 🍷 lunch & dinner) Whips up the usual mix of

Chinese and Continental fare. Sweet tooths will savour the 'chocolate overload' ice cream (Rs 60).

Zanzibar (64A Abdali Rd; mains Rs 110-495; 🍷 noon-midnight; 🍷) Hip and happening, Zanzibar has attentive staff, a chic interior and a swanky circular bar (all that's missing is the alcohol!). The ambitious menu here sports everything from seafood chowder (Rs 90) to hot dogs (Rs 140) to Mexican chicken fajitas (Rs 270). Zanzibar's dessert list even includes an Australian-inspired 'summer pavlova' (Rs 125).

Mehfil Coffee Shop (Holiday Inn, Abdali Rd; mains Rs 125-310; 🍷 breakfast, lunch & dinner; 🍷) Open to nonguests, this is good for a minor splurge. Spaghetti carbonara followed by a banana split and cup of green tea will cost you Rs 280/150/65 respectively.

Shangrilla (mains Rs 140-690; 🍷 lunch & dinner; 🍷) In the Cantonment area, just off Quaid-i-Azam Rd, Shangrilla is a relaxing place to chow down on Multan's finest Chinese cuisine. The menu includes golden oldies such as sweet 'n' sour chicken (Rs 270) and beef with lemon sauce (Rs 250).

Bundu Khan (Abdali Rd; mains Rs 160-450; 🍷 noon-midnight; 🍷) Next door to Zanzibar, although not as funky, this restaurant still gets the thumbs up. The waiters are obliging and there's pleasant alfresco dining (indoor seating is also available). The Pakistani cuisine is tasty but can be fiery, so request less chilli if your taste buds aren't up for the ride. Alternatively, opt for the Chinese or fast-food offerings, which include chicken honey wings (Rs 250) and chicken cheeseburgers (Rs 160). The 'kids club' will keep your little monsters occupied while you steal some quiet time.

Shangrilla Gardens & Barbecue Restaurant (Bahawalpur Rd; mains Rs 160-490; 🍷 dinner) You can opt for standard Pakistani or Continental food here, eaten indoors or out in the garden. The jug of lassi (yogurt and iced-water beverage; Rs 100) is sure to quench the most savage summer thirst.

Tasty Plus Restaurant (Khanewal Rd; mains Rs 210-410; 🍷 lunch & dinner) The chefs here do a fairly good job of Pakistani, Chinese and Continental cuisine. The succulent mutton leg steam roast (Rs 410 per 1kg serve) is enough for two.

Entertainment

CINEMA

Rex Cinema (Hassan Parwana Rd) Opposite the main post office, the Rex sometimes plays English-

language films (see newspapers for details). Tickets cost Rs 30 to Rs 50.

CRICKET

Multan, like most of Pakistan, loves cricket and has spawned some of the nation's finest players. To find out if there's a worthwhile match coinciding with your visit, check newspapers and ask the PTDC.

Multan Cricket Stadium (Vehari Rd) The main venue for major cricket matches.

Qasim Bagh Stadium Located in the fort area, this venue occasionally hosts cricket matches.

Shopping

Many types of clothing are unique to Multan, including embroidered kurtas for men, silk shirts and *khussas* (a pair of these handmade leather shoes will cost anywhere from Rs 500 to Rs 2000). Multan is also known for camel-skin lamps, blue pottery, carpets, lacquered wooden objects, hand-embroidered work in silk, and earthenware vases, sometimes inlaid with tiny mirror tiles.

Hussain Agahi & Chowk Bazaars Sells, among other things, some good traditional handicrafts. Bargain hard.

Karim Centre Has a number of shops selling good-value music CDs (mainly Pakistani and Indian). Karim is situated below Hotel Firdos.

Nigar Khana Housed in a former ammunition store, this tourist-oriented shop sells a range of handicrafts. It's near Qasim Bagh Fort.

Punjab Government Small Industries Corporation (Aziz Shahid Rd) In the Cantonment area, this is another reliable place to search for handicrafts.

Getting There & Away

AIR

There are flights operated by **PIA** (☎ 9200024; 65 Abdali Rd; ✈ 8am-8pm), including twice daily services to Karachi (Rs 5150, one hour and 10 minutes) and Islamabad via Lahore (Rs 4550, 2½ hours; to Lahore Rs 3400, one hour).

BUS & MINIBUS

Minibuses to Bahawalpur leave frequently from the stand just west of Dera Adda Chowk.

The chaotic main bus stand east of town has larger air-con buses to Bahawalpur (Rs 60, 1½ hours), Faisalabad (Rs 160, five hours), Karachi (Rs 630, 12 to 13 hours), Lahore (Rs 250, six hours), Rawalpindi (Rs 370, eight hours) and elsewhere. The best

bus service is operated by **Daewoo** (☎ 11007008; Khanewal Rd, Qaddafi Chowk), which has air-con services (that include a light refreshment) to Faisalabad (Rs 270, four hours), Lahore (Rs 400, 5¼ hours), Rawalpindi (Rs 580, 7½ hours), Bahawalpur (Rs 130, 1½ hours) and Sargodha (Rs 340, 4½ hours).

TRAIN

All trains leave from the Multan Cantonment Railway Station (Multan Cantt). There are daily services to Bahawalpur, Karachi, Lahore, Peshawar, Quetta and Rawalpindi. Check at the train station for fares and times at least a few days before you intend to travel.

Getting Around

Buses 1 and 3 run from Dera Adda Chowk to Nawan Shahr Chowk (Rs 3), Nishtar Chowk (Rs 3), Kutchery Chowk (Rs 3), Eidgah Mosque (Rs 5) and finally the main bus stand (Rs 8). Others run from Ghanta Garh Chowk to Dera Adda Chowk. Fixed route tongas run from Aziz Hotel Chowk to Dera Adda Chowk and then on to Bohar and Haram Gates for Rs 7 to Rs 9 per ticket.

An autorickshaw from the main train station costs around Rs 40 to Dera Adda Chowk and Rs 65 to the fort. To hire an autorickshaw for a half/full day costs about Rs 600/800, which should include the waiting time (foreigners are usually quoted much higher rates so don't be shy to haggle). Autorickshaws are much quicker and more convenient than the buses.

TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

The airport is a couple of kilometres west of the city centre. From the airport to the centre autorickshaws should charge Rs 100 (you'll probably be asked for more – bargain hard). Taxis charge around Rs 300 from the airport to Dera Adda Chowk. There are free luggage trolleys at the airport or porters can be hired for Rs 50.

CAR

If you'd like to hire a car with driver one option is the **PTDC** (☎ 512640; Hotel Sindbad, Nishtar Chowk; ✈ 8am-8pm Mon-Thu & Sat, 8am-noon & 2-8pm Fri), which charges about Rs 250 per hour for a standard small car; with air-con it's Rs 350.

DERA GHAZI KHAN (DG KHAN)

☎ 0641

DG Khan is of little interest to travellers except as a transit stop before Dera Ismail Khan

or Balochistan. Originally on the bank of the Indus, DG Khan was destroyed by flooding in 1911 and rebuilt 15km away on the present site. If you're stuck here for a few hours there are several interesting tombs on the outskirts of town.

At the time of research, due to security concerns, a curfew was in force for DG Khan and surrounding areas. Accordingly, foreigners were not allowed to stay in DG without permission from the Interior Ministry in Islamabad. We also heard from travellers who had been given free rides by the local constabulary to move them on from the town. It is best to check with locals and the PTDC (see p128) in Multan before travelling.

Getting There & Away

The main bus stand has services to multiple destinations including Multan (Rs 70, two hours), Lahore (Rs 280, eight hours) and Rawalpindi (Rs 380, 10 hours).

AROUND DERA GHAZI KHAN

Shrine of Sarkhi Sarwar

Thirty kilometres along the road from DG Khan to Balochistan is the shrine of Sarkhi Sarwar, a popular truck stop for drivers to grab some food and say a prayer before entering Balochistan. The shrine has an *urs* festival on 30 Chet.

Fort Munro

En route to Quetta, about 80km from DG Khan, Fort Munro was built as a hill station by the British and is still the only such resort in south Punjab. It's named after a Colonel Munro, at one time commissioner of DG Khan. Many tribal chiefs of Balochistan and a few government officials have summer residences here, but it's more or less empty in winter. There is a small British cemetery at the top of the hill. Even if you don't plan to stay here, the breathtaking drive up onto the Balochistan plateau is its own reward.

You can stay at **TDCP Motel** (☎ 0346-9931435; r Rs 500). Advance reservations are recommended (especially from June to September).

The settlement of **Khar**, 5km before Fort Munro, has an interesting **fort** built by the British and now used as a levy station. Here the road forks; left to Fort Munro, right towards Balochistan. The **Rakhni Valley** on the other side of the provincial border has verdant orchards.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

There are buses from DG Khan to Fort Munro, but at other times the minibuses only go as far as the fork before continuing on to Rakhni in Balochistan. Before travelling onwards to Balochistan, first check in DG Khan whether it's considered safe.

There are also minibuses between DG Khan and Rakhni every half hour before sunset (Rs 110, three hours).

HARAPPA

☎ 0404

Harappa dates back to the 3rd millennium BC and is the second most important Indus Valley civilisation site, but it's not nearly as well preserved as Moenjodaro (see p176). This, combined with the difficulty in reaching it, means that those without a specialist interest may be disappointed. On the flip side, some travellers come here purely to soak up the site's tranquil setting.

Excavations have been carried out almost every spring since 1986 by the universities of California and Wisconsin, in conjunction with the Pakistani Department of Archaeology. If you're interested in learning more about this ancient civilisation, the Harappa Museum (see opposite) sells a booklet, *The Glory that Was Harappa*, by Dr FA Khan, for Rs 200. You should also be able to find specialist books about Harappa at Pakistan's major bookshops.

Information

There's nowhere to change money in Harappa itself, but there is a bank and a handful of authorised private moneychangers that deal in foreign exchange at nearby Sahiwal. The private moneychangers usually give a better rate – most can be found at Sahiwal's Jinnah Chowk, some just opposite the Habib Bank (ask around). Several banks also change money including **Habib Bank** (Jinnah Chowk, Sahiwal; ☎ 9am-1pm Mon-Sat), but check around for the best rates.

The Site

Harappa comprises a citadel mound, defensive walls, a drainage system, a cemetery and a huge granary. However, in the past it has been plundered so much by local villagers for bricks to build their houses, and especially by the British for material for the Lahore to Multan railway line, that there is relatively little to

see at the site itself. A path snakes around the compound with viewing platforms and a few signs with English descriptions.

At the site is the small but well-kept and interesting **Harappa Museum** (admission Rs 200; ☎ 8.30am-12.30pm & 2.30-5.30pm summer, 9am-4pm winter). It exhibits items from the cemetery and other parts of the site, including etched carnelian beads, shell objects, stone tools, domestic implements, pottery, toys, earthenware, seals with the mysterious Moenjodaran script, animal and human figurines and stone weights, as well as articles from other Indus Valley sites. Like the Moenjodarans, the Harappans traded with Mesopotamia and other faraway lands. One fascinating display shows a reconstructed Harappan burial. No photography is allowed in the Harappa Museum.

Sleeping & Eating

HARAPPA SITE

Archaeological Department Resthouse (☎ 4431099; per person Rs 200) Located near the museum, this is the only accommodation possibility at Harappa itself. It's nothing flash, but it's by far the most convenient (and peaceful) accommodation on offer; however, there are only two rooms. Meals can be prepared by the *chowkidar* (caretaker) with advance notice.

To stay, you must book in advance either here or through the Department of Archaeology (☎ 042-7662645, open from 8am to 3pm Monday to Thursday and Saturday, and 8am to noon Friday), at Lahore Fort.

SAHIWAL

☎ 040

Most visitors stay at the nearby town of Sahiwal, which is about 45 minutes away from the Harappa site. Cheap eats can be found in the town centre and around major public-transport hubs. Some hotels have their own restaurant. Shoestring accommodation is limited here.

Be warned that incessant traffic noise is notorious in Sahiwal – countless travellers have complained of spending sleepless nights here. Ask for a quiet room and bring earplugs.

The following hotels may impose a 23% tax (not included here).

Indus Hotel (☎ 465205; 8 Railway Rd; s/d Rs 200/250, r with air-con Rs 800) This is one of the best-value budget choices, with some of the cheapest and most salubrious rooms in this price bracket.

Hotel International (☎ 4466394; 153 Railway Rd; s/d Rs 450/750, s/d with air-con Rs 950/1150) Not a bad choice,

but check a few rooms first, as some have a stale, smoky odour. You should be able to get a 10% discount if you politely twist their arm.

City Inn Hotel (☎ 4220509; Tufail Shaheed Rd; s/d Rs 500/700, s/d with air-con Rs 1000/1300) Located just off the Lahore to Multan road, this is another worthy choice. The room quality is above average and the hotel absorbs less noise pollution than many other Sahiwal properties.

Starlite Hotel (☎ 4464114; Stadium Rd; r Rs 1200; ☎) Another decent choice. Apart from having good rooms, it cops less traffic noise than many other hotels.

Hotel Sea Rose (☎ 226377; Grand Trunk Rd; r Rs 800, r with air-con Rs 1250) Situated just outside town on the Lahore to Multan road, the Sea Rose is more than merely sweet sounding. Apart from having nice rooms, it's a little set back from the main road, making it reasonably quiet. There's a good dining hall that includes some simple favourites like roast chicken (Rs 250) and French fries (Rs 55).

Dreamland Guest House (☎ 4222283; Liaquat Rd; s/d Rs 1180/1355; ☎) Dreamland's rooms are not as dreamy as the name suggests – on the contrary, they're rather gloomy – but it's still a passable possibility if other places are full.

Iris Hotel (☎ 4226727; Railway Rd; s/d Rs 3000/5000; ☎) Newly built, the Iris is Sahiwal's most luxurious option. It is geared towards the wedding market, which can pack the place out, although on quieter nights you can enjoy pretty good Pakistani, Continental and barbecue fare in the restaurant.

Getting There & Away

Harappa village is near the site. Harappa Rd (which is actually a town on the road junction) is on the National Hwy, 3km from the site. The nearest large town is Sahiwal, located about 45 minutes from Harappa.

Harappa Rd is a request stop on the main Lahore to Multan road (3½ hours from Lahore, three hours from Multan) and also on the Bahawalpur to Sahiwal bus route. Alternatively, you can take a bus from Lahore to Sahiwal (Rs 120, three hours) and then a local bus (Rs 15), car or autorickshaw on to Harappa Rd (about 45 minutes). From here, there is an erratic local bus service. There are buses every 30 minutes running from Sahiwal to Harappa.

To get from Harappa village bus stop to the museum, walk west down a road between the ruins of a police station and an archaeological

mound. Buses (Rs 15) and minibuses (Rs 19) go back to Sahiwal from Harappa village or Harappa Rd.

An autorickshaw from Sahiwal to the site at Harappa will cost about Rs 350 one way (Rs 500 return, which includes two hours waiting time).

Destinations served by Sahiwal's train station include: Lahore (the quickest train to Lahore is the *Shalimar Express*, which takes 2¼ hours while the others take around four hours); Multan (about three hours); Quetta (the fastest is the *Jaffar Express*, which takes about 19 hours); and Karachi (the quickest is the *Shalimar Express*, which takes about 15 hours). For fares and bookings check at the Sahiwal train station at least a few days before you intend to travel.

PAKPATTAN

Meaning Holy Ferry Crossing, Pakpattan is a major pilgrimage site, 46km southeast of Sahiwal at a strategic crossing of the Sutlej River. Pilgrims (including Tamerlane and the Mughal emperor Akbar) have come here for centuries to visit the **tomb of Farid Shakar Ganj** (1173–1265), a Sufi saint of the Chistian order. The saint's *urs* starts on 5–9 Muharram and is one of the largest in Pakistan.

There are several daily buses and minibuses between Pakpattan and Sahiwal (Rs 45, about one hour).

FAISALABAD

☎ 041 / pop 2,008,861

A small market town before Partition, Faisalabad is now Pakistan's main agro-industrial (it has the biggest agricultural university in Asia) and textile centre, a bustling metropolis about 100km west of Lahore.

Faisalabad was built around a clock tower by the British, who named it Lyallpur, with eight bazaars leading out in the pattern of the Union Jack flag, but the town has since been swallowed by typical urban sprawl. Renamed after King Faisal of Saudi Arabia, it's also dubbed the Manchester of Pakistan (without the nightlife) and is the birthplace of the late Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan.

Few new travellers come to Faisalabad, as there's not really anything of touristic interest. Indeed, most foreigners who come here do so for a specific educational or work purpose.

Information

Money can be changed at authorised private moneychangers (these are largely found at Kuchery Chowk) or at several major banks, many of which have 24-hour ATMs. One option is Habib Bank (Kuchery Chowk), which changes money and has a 24-hour ATM.

Activities

Serena Hotel (Club Rd) Nonguests have to cough up a hefty Rs 650 per day to use the pool here. Use of the tennis or squash courts also costs a ridiculous Rs 500 (each) per day.

Sleeping

Receiving a paltry trickle of budget visitors, Faisalabad does not really cater to the shoestrung traveller. Many of its cheapies have closed down in recent years. The few places that remain are filthy flophouses with staff who look positively cheesed off. At the time of research, some midranges were also not accepting foreigners. Meanwhile, the Serena Hotel (below) is Faisalabad's only top-end choice.

For cheap accommodation, it's best to see what's actually open (and willing to accept foreigners) at the time of your visit. The best place to find new (and potentially decent) budget hotels is at the bazaars around the clock tower – ask around as they're unlikely to have signs in English.

Retiring Rooms (☎ 9200488; train station; s Rs 200) The basic rooms at the train station are a possibility for those holding ongoing tickets (departure within 24 hours).

Prime Hotel (☎ 600329; Allama Iqbal Rd; s/d Rs 1800/2000, plus 23% tax; 🍷) Opposite Iqbal Park, this hotel has been given the tick of approval by several travellers. The rooms are not outstanding but certainly better than most other places in this price range.

Serena Hotel (☎ 600428; www.serenahotels.com; Club Rd; r Rs 11,000, plus 23% tax; 🍷 🍷 🍷) Apart from its sumptuous rooms, Serena has three fine restaurants. The coffee shop serves a particularly hearty buffet breakfast/lunch/dinner (Rs 410/450/575) and also has à la carte dining – the fish and chips (Rs 380) and honey and walnut tart (Rs 165) looked delicious.

Entertainment

Iqbal Stadium (☎ 9200558) Sometimes hosts international cricket matches. In the same

complex is a children's fun park and some moderately priced restaurants and shops.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Twice daily flights to Karachi are operated by PIA (☎ 9200786; 26 New Civil Lines) for Rs 6050 (one hour and 40 minutes).

BUS

The main bus stand is on Abdullahpur Rd in the northeast of the city. Reputable private buses also operate from the main bus stand including **Kohistan** (☎ 783681), with daily services to Multan (Rs 210, six hours), Lahore (Rs 150, 2½ hours), Rawalpindi (Rs 220, five hours) and Sahiwal (Rs 190, two to three hours), among other destinations.

The most comfortable private bus company is **Daewoo** (☎ 111007008; Chowk Akbarabad Rd), located near the Allied Hospital. It plies the following routes: Lahore (Rs 230, 2¼ hours), Multan (Rs 270, four hours), Peshawar (Rs 530, 6½ hours) and Rawalpindi (Rs 350, 3½ hours). The price includes a light refreshment.

TRAIN

Three express intercity trains run daily to Lahore (two hours). The daily *Chenab Express* goes to Rawalpindi (11 hours), Multan (five hours) and Bahawalpur (eight hours). The *Chenab Express* also continues to Peshawar (15 hours). The *Faisalabad Express* is the fastest daily train to Karachi (16 hours). For fares and bookings check at the Faisalabad Train Station at least a few days before you intend to travel.

Passenger Suzukis (Rs 8) connect the bus and train stations to Kuchery Bazaar.

LAHORE TO ISLAMABAD

The Grand Trunk (GT) Rd and the Lahore-Islamabad Motorway (M2) provide a choice of routes between the two cities and, if you have time to jump off the bus, access to an ancient region boasting one of the world's largest salt mines, an awesome stone fort and Hindu and Buddhist relics. The PTDC and TDCP run tours that include the Salt Range and Rohtas Fort – contact their offices in Lahore (p101) or Islamabad (p77).

Leaving Lahore and running almost due north across the flat Punjab plain, the GT Rd runs past the industrial megabazaar of Gujranwala (68km) and Wazirabad (turn off

here for Sialkot) before crossing the Chenab River, rising to the Potwar Plateau and crossing the Jhelum River at Jhelum.

Jhelum

☎ 0544

There is little to attract the visitor in Jhelum, though it is a transport hub, and you can change money and organise 4WD tours (see Paradise Hotel, below) to the Salt Range and Rohtas Fort.

SLEEPING

Faran Inn (☎ 628671; s/d Rs 500/700, s/d with air-con 1200/1500; ☺) An OK choice near the bazaar, with basic rooms. The dilapidated Zeelaf Hotel nearby would be an emergency option.

Paradise Hotel (☎ 614612; s/d Rs 700/900) Look for the large Paradise Travels billboard in the cantonment and find the hotel beneath. Friendly, with clean, fan-cooled rooms (no musty carpets), this hotel is the best option. The associated travel business can organise 4WD tours around the region.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

There are numerous minibuses that head from the Grand Trunk (GT) bus stand to Rawalpindi (Rs 80), Lahore (Rs 1100) and Chatwal (Rs 65).

Rohtas Fort

Some 16km northwest of Jhelum, colossal Rohtas Fort is an extraordinary example of military architecture. It was started in 1543 by the Pashtun ruler Sher Shah Suri, to protect the strategic Peshawar to Calcutta (now Kolkata) road from the Mughals and their allies. He never lived to see its completion and work was carried on by succeeding rulers. However, it was soon made redundant when Akbar moved his frontier to Attock and built a new fort there.

The vast fort is now in ruins except for the crenulated outer walls and most of its 12 gates and 68 bastions. The best-preserved remains are to the west; walk through the town to the western **Sohal Gate** to start your explorations. Built to an irregular plan on hilly ground, its 12m-thick terraced ramparts have a perimeter of more than 4km and vary in height from 10m to 18m. You can still walk along some of them but they are crumbling, so watch your step. An internal wall separates the inner fort (or citadel for the elite) at the northwest from

the outer fort of soldiers and citizens, where the sleepy town still exists.

Little remains of the interior, but there are two pavilions of the **haveli of Man Singh** (governor of Lahore and a general in the time of his son-in-law Akbar the Great), which you can climb for a view over the whole fort. To the west, at the pinnacle of the outer wall, a high stone platform marks the **burj** (execution tower); victims would be thrown from here into the ditch below. Two gates in the northern wall lead down to freshwater wells and the Kahan River. You could spend two or three hours exploring the grounds. Bring a hat, and although drinks can be bought in the town, it's wise to carry your own.

SLEEPING

To visit the fort at dawn or dusk (recommended) you should stay the night in Dina, 17km from Jhelum and a busy stop on the GT Rd. Similar **Iqbal Hotel** (☎ 0544-630624; GT Rd; s/d Rs 1000/1200; 🚽) and **Al-Kousar** (☎ 0544-630892; GT Rd; r Rs 1500; 🚽) are neighbours at the northwest (Islamabad) end of town. Both have clean, comfortable rooms with TV and phone, en suites with hot water, and restaurants.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

From Dina you can take a bus (Rs 15) or hire a taxi (Rs 550 including waiting time and return) to Rohtas. The turn-off to Rohtas is southeast of town. The last bus back to Dina officially leaves Rohtas at 3pm. Several trains a day stop in Dina bound for Rawalpindi or Lahore but times are not as convenient as the numerous buses and minibuses plying the route.

The Salt Range

Little known and seldom visited, the barren but interesting Salt Range is a geological

record of the ancient sea that once flowed over the Indus plain. The salt formed when the sea stagnated and dried, and subsequent geological movement formed these massive deposits into the 300km range.

Khewra, home to the second-largest salt mine in the world, is accessed via Lilla or Kala Kahar on the M2 motorway, or via Chakwal (with both road and rail links to the GT Rd at Mandra). Salt has been mined here since ancient times, and exploited commercially at least since the Mughal era. The British expanded the operation in 1872, a couple of decades after wresting the territory from the Sikhs. **Salt mine tours** (☎ 0458-211137; US\$6 or Rs equivalent; 🕒 9am-6pm) take you through the caverns gouged out of the salt; in places the salt is crystal clear, in others pinkish-red. There are pools of brine, salty stalactites and even an underground mosque created out of salt bricks. A Pakistan Mineral Development Corporation (PMDC) **Tourist Resort** (☎ 0544-211118 ext 251; s/d Rs 1100/1300; 🚽) at Khewra can be reserved if no officials are staying there.

Collocated with the Tourist Resort, the PMDC also operates the **Allergological Asthma Resort** that claims to offer asthma sufferers long-term relief. The technique was developed in the Soviet Union when salt miners found that their respiratory conditions were cured after spending extended periods underground in the salt mine. The program offered involves spending six hours a days for 24 days underground in a special section of the salt mine.

Five kilometres west of Choa Saidan Shah, site of a popular Sufi shrine, lies **Ketas**, a major Hindu pilgrimage site before Partition and still a rewarding place to visit. Several 8th- to 10th-century temples, a ruined fort and a viewing platform surround a translucent pool, which legend says was formed from a teardrop shed by Shiva, in mourning for his dead wife.

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Balochistan



The southwestern province of Balochistan is a hard place to make a living in – or travel through. It's a place of contradictions, at once Pakistan's largest and most sparsely inhabited region, rich in natural resources but with an economically marginalised population. Mostly stony desert and sharp mountains, its importance lies in its strategic location, sitting astride the trade routes (both ancient and modern) to Iran, Afghanistan and the Arabian Sea.

Balochistan's capital is Quetta, a low-slung city with a dusty frontier ambience. Turbanned and thickly bearded Baloch and Pashtun tribesmen rub shoulders with Afghan refugees in its bazaars, and women dressed in billowing burkas are a common sight. For many visitors, Quetta is all they see of Balochistan, but there are several places worth exploring nearby, from the comparative green of Hazarganji-Chiltan National Park to the cool surrounds of Ziarat hill station, the beloved retreat of Pakistan's founder Jinnah.

Further from Quetta and travel becomes tougher. The long distances and poor infrastructure put off many travellers, so few visitors make it to junction towns like Sibi near the Bolan Pass, famed for its cattle fair, let alone to the truly wild Makran Coast. Security also plays a part in keeping visitor numbers low, however. A low-level insurgency by Baloch nationalists pushes some places out of reach, while trouble from restive southern Afghanistan occasionally spills across the border. Taking trusted safety advice before planning a trip is essential. But for those able to make it here, the hospitality and generosity of the people of this region is a glowing feature of any visit.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Gorge on the spiced roast lamb – and the rough frontier ambience – of **Quetta** (p142), the regional capital
- Traverse the **Bolan Pass** (p153) through the mountains, the old nomad's route to Central Asia
- Chill out amid the greenery and views at **Ziarat** (p151), Jinnah's hill station retreat
- Get lost amid the camel races and cultural performances at **Sibi Mela** (see the boxed text, p152), Balochistan's biggest festival



■ POPULATION: 8,000,000

■ AREA: 347,190 SQ KM

History

Balochistan's unforgiving landscape and fiercely independent peoples have made it perilous to invade and – until the discovery of natural gas – unrewarding to rule. Even today, the writ of the government is light at best, and its inhabitants regard themselves as among the toughest and bravest people on earth. These factors collide to make Balochistan one of contemporary Pakistan's prime political flashpoints.

Evidence from Mehrgarh – the oldest known archaeological site on the subcontinent – and elsewhere indicates that Balochistan was inhabited as early as the Stone Age and was part of an ancient line of communication between the Indus Valley and Persia, and then Mesopotamia.

Cyrus the Great conquered the inhospitable coastal belt known as the Makran in the 6th century BC. The Persians subsequently went on to rule all of Balochistan until Alexander

the Great tore through in 330 BC, although even that great figure ran into trouble here, beaten by the desert rather than the locals.

In subsequent times the region encountered numerous power shifts that included the Kushans, Arabs, Mongols, Persians and Mughals. A unity of sorts coalesced around the Khans of Kalat in the 15th century, which prevailed until the British arrived in the mid-1800s.

Following a disastrous war in Afghanistan in the 1840s, the British moved on Balochistan to protect their back door to India, but didn't formally declare the region British territory until 1887. Following this, Balochistan was established as an agency under the direct responsibility of the governor general of India, and was ruled with the lightest of touches. Balochi feudal chiefs retained considerable control over the administration of tribal justice, collection of revenue and levying of tribal armies, while

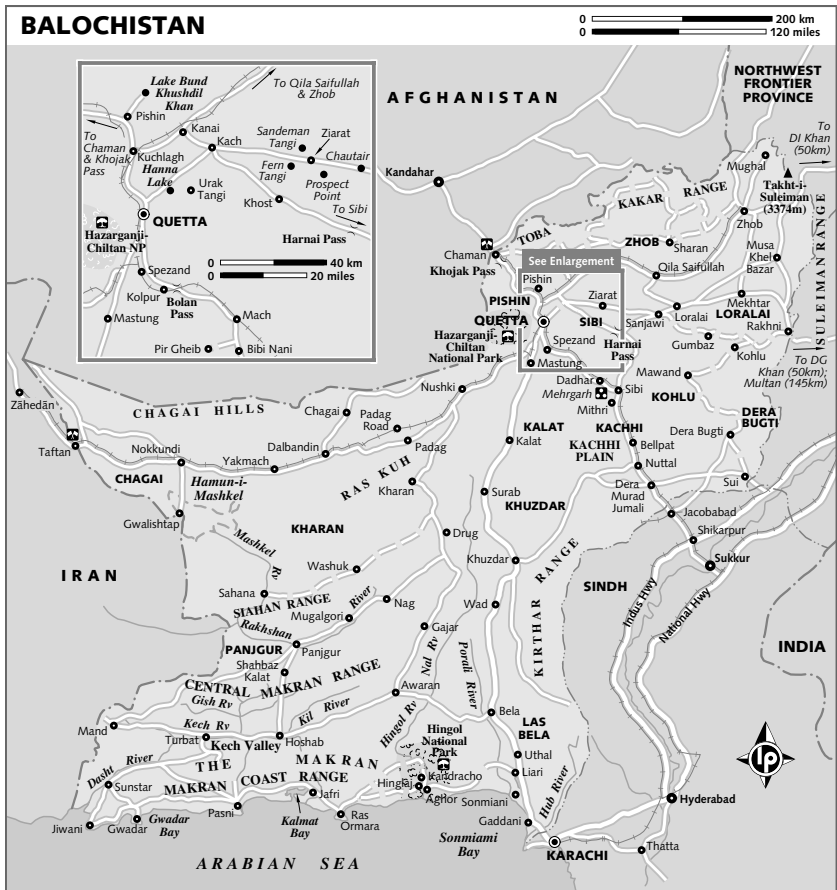
TRAVELLING SAFELY IN BALOCHISTAN

Government restrictions mean that many parts of Balochistan are either completely off limits to foreigners or only accessible with a permit. While Quetta remains *generally* safe (see p145), the ongoing Baloch insurgency, spill over from unstable southern Afghanistan and general tribal tensions all combine to put swathes of the province out of reach of travellers.

The safety situation can change in the blink of an eye, with places that once required permits no longer needing them and areas that were once considered safe now deemed risky. If you're contemplating travelling beyond Quetta, you're *strongly* advised to first check the latest safety situation with the **Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation** (PTDC; ☎ 081-825826; Azad Muslim Hotel, Jinnah Rd, Quetta; 🕒 9am-1pm & 2-4pm Mon-Sat, to 6.30pm in summer). We'd also recommend keeping an eye on the *Balochistan Times* and *Frontier Post* newspapers to keep abreast of the current security climate.

Security concerns may require government-issued permits to visit certain parts of Balochistan. Known as No Objection Certificates (NOCs), these are issued by the **Home & Tribal Affairs Office** (☎ 081-9201036; Balochistan Secretariat, Ground fl, New Block; 🕒 8.30am-2pm Mon-Thu & Sat, 8.30am-noon Fri) in Quetta. NOCs are only issued if the area you would like to visit has a current 'low-risk' climate. The permits are usually required by local authorities because they can't guarantee the safety of travellers in these particular regions and don't want to be solely accountable if things go wrong. Permits should be applied for at least a few days in advance of your trip. There's no charge, but take along photocopies of your passport and Pakistan visa. In certain circumstances, an armed guard from the Balochistan levies (rural police) may be insisted upon – he'll expect tipping.

At the time of research, Quetta and its immediate environs (including Ziarat, Hanna Lake and Urak Valley) were safe for travellers, as was travel on the road southwest to Taftan (on the Iran border). Advice for road travel east to Punjab's Dera Ghazi Khan (DG Khan) and Lahore changes regularly, while the road to Dera Ismail Khan in the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) was regarded as dangerous to foreigners as it passes through volatile Waziristan. However, these 'safe' regions could change in the future, so *always* double-check with the PTDC. It's often necessary to get official permission if you intend venturing off the main highways or into the interior. Self-drivers should stick to the main highways and avoid travelling after dark. The main train lines are all considered safe.



the British controlled courts of appeal and arbitrated in intertribal disputes.

At the time of Partition in 1947, military coercion forced the tribal chiefs to give up their powers. However, with little investment in infrastructure both before and since Independence, central control over the province has remained weak, with intertribal fighting and instability a persistent theme of recent times.

The 1952 discovery of natural gas at Sui in east Balochistan only compounded matters. Balochis saw little dividend from their natural wealth and political alienation led to full-blown conflict in the 1970s that saw direct military rule imposed on the province. After two decades of relative calm, increased gas exploitation and political backsliding from

Islamabad fanned the flames of discontent until insurgency broke out again in 2005. Widespread violence was only temporarily halted by the army's killing of the Baloch nationalist leader Nawab Akbar Khan Bugti a year later, and the calamity of the huge floods that swept Balochistan in the summer of 2007.

People

Almost half Balochistan's population lives within 85km of Quetta. Many are seminomadic pastoralists and shepherds. There are three main indigenous groups – ethnic Baloch, Brahui and Pashtuns – along with settlers from other parts of Pakistan, and a still-significant population of Afghan refugees. The Brahui, found largely in central Balochistan,

may be the last major descendants of the Indus Valley civilisation, although little is known of their origins. Pashtuns form the majority of the population in northern Balochistan, but are also an important minority in the rest of the province.

During the past decade, the region (especially around Quetta) has seen an influx of Afghan refugees who have fled their war-ravaged country in search of stability.

Climate

Balochistan is outside the monsoon zone and experiences great extremes of climate. In winter the temperature can fall as low as -20°C in some areas. In summer it ranges from around 18°C to 50°C, although the temperature has been known to edge over 50°C on the plains. The weather is at its most pleasant from around March to late April and from mid-September to November. The coastal belt known as the Makran is mostly hot and humid throughout the year.

QUETTA

☎ 081 / pop 759,000

The provincial capital of Balochistan, Quetta has a quite different air from almost anywhere else in Pakistan. It's an atmosphere borne of its relative geographic isolation. Set in a mountainous amphitheatre and surrounded by stony deserts, the city seems to have its face turned away from the rest of the country, appearing more interested in nearby Afghanistan than the affairs of faraway Islamabad. This is a frontier town, pure and simple.

As befits its location, Quetta's inhabitants are a diverse and fascinating mix. Around 70% are Pashtuns, with the balance made up by ethnic Balochis and Brahuis. Mohajirs and Punjabis are also surprisingly well represented, while since the 1980s the city has hosted a sizable Afghan refugee population (most notably the Shiite Hazaras, with their near-Mongolian features).

Quetta's isolation means that it attracts relatively few travellers, and the majority of those use it as a staging post on the overland trail between Iran and India. Travelling in either direction, the city is an eye-opener. From relatively urbane Iran, Quetta abruptly announces the arrival of the subcontinent, with its turbaned Pashtun tribesmen, women

in burkas, and honking rickshaws. Travelling in the other direction, Balochistan can seem a wild and dusty place after the humidity and greenery of Punjab.

At an altitude of almost 1700m, Quetta is cooler than most parts of Pakistan in summer but the road southwest to Taftan and Zahedan can still be hot and heavy going. In the thick of winter it's bone-chillingly cold and it can snow in January.

HISTORY

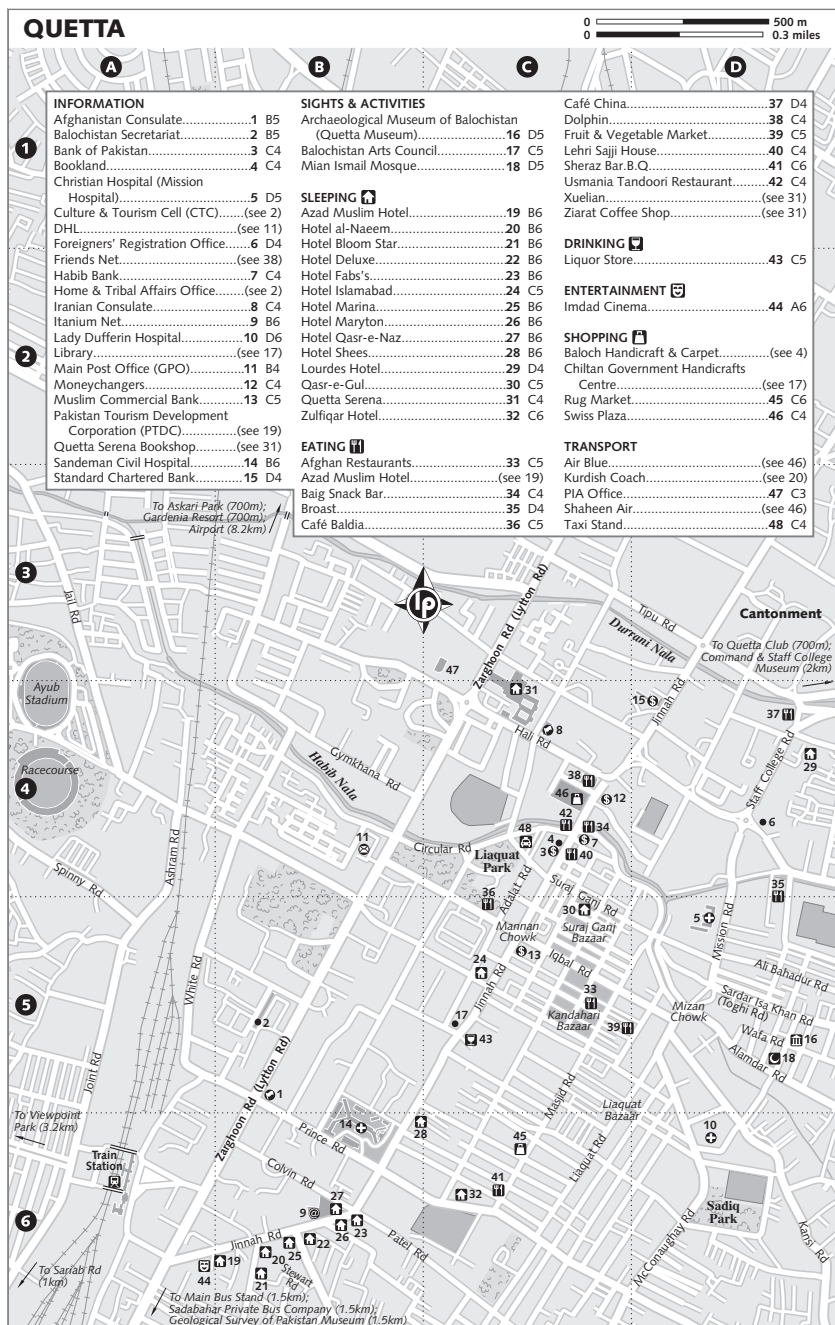
The town is believed to have taken its name from the ancient fort (*kwatta* in Pashto) that protected the roads to Afghanistan, Persia and India. Quetta didn't come into its own until the British era and even then was little more than a small arsenal until the late 19th century.

In 1730 it came under the control of the Khan of Kalat, who made it his northern capital. In 1876 the British administrator Sir Robert Sandeman signed a treaty with the Khan of Kalat that handed over administration of the strategic Quetta region to the British. The town grew in importance, becoming the largest garrison in British India and the focus of British attempts to regulate the interior. But its position on a major and unstable seismic fault almost reduced Quetta to rubble in 1935. The devastating earthquake of 31 May killed an estimated 20,000 people.

Quetta's historic ties to Afghanistan still resonate today. A host to Afghan refugees since the 1980s, Quetta was a vital springboard to power for the Taliban, who were sponsored by the city's powerful transport mafias. Much of Quetta's population (and rulers) remain highly sympathetic to the movement, with rumours persisting that several high-ranking Taliban leaders remain in hiding in the city.

ORIENTATION

Central Quetta is relatively easy to cover on foot. Most of the budget and midrange hotels are clustered around the train station in the southwest of town and a couple of kilometres north along Jinnah Rd. The bazaar district is to the east of the town centre, around Mizan Chowk. The main bus stand is about 2km south of the train station. North of the town centre is the cantonment, largely out of bounds to civilians. The airport is about



8.5km north of the centre and can be reached by taxis and autorickshaws (see p150).

For a good lookout over the city, go to Viewpoint Park, which is reached by a track from Brewery Rd, to the west of the train station. It's particularly breathtaking just before sunset.

INFORMATION

Bookshops

Bookland (Jinnah Rd) Has a reasonably good stock of English-language novels and Pakistan-related books as well as stocking *The Economist*, *Newsweek* and *Time*.

Quetta Serena bookshop (Quetta Serena hotel; Zarghoon Rd) Hotel bookshop with easily Quetta's best selection of novels, maps and coffee-table books, as well as postcards and international news magazines.

Consulates

Afghanistan consulate (☎ /fax 9202549; Prince Rd; ☎ visa applications 10am-1pm & 2-3pm Tue & Thu) One-month single-entry visas cost US\$30 and are usually issued on the day. Southern Afghanistan's safety situation is extremely volatile and nonwork travel is strongly advised against.

Iranian consulate (☎ 843527; 2-33 Hali Rd; ☎ visa applications 8.30am-noon & 3-4pm Sat-Wed) A one-month visa costs Rs 3000 with two passport photos (women must have their head covered). Travellers report Quetta as being an unreliable place to get a visa; check in advance, and apply in Islamabad by preference.

Emergency

Police emergency (☎ 15; ☎ 24hr)

Foreigners' Registration

Foreigners' Registration Office (FRO; ☎ 9202979; Staff College Rd) Nationals of 16 countries are required to register – see p378.

Internet Access

Most internet cafés charge Rs 15 per hour, but as in much of Pakistan, connection speeds are slow and the computers old. Most places are open from around 9am to midnight. There are two main clusters:

Itanium Net (Jinnah Rd) One of three internet cafés here, in the arcade behind Coca Cola—fronted juice bars and shops.

Friends Net (Jinnah Rd) On the side street behind the Dolphin bakery; Ocean Net and others are also here. Reasonably new PCs.

Media

The *Balochistan Times* is the province's English-language newspaper, although the

Frontier Post is also printed in Quetta and covers the region well.

Medical Services

There are plenty of pharmacies around Sandeman Civil Hospital and the Maryton and Fabs's hotels.

Christian Hospital (Mission Hospital; ☎ 2824906; Mission Rd)

Lady Dufferin Hospital (☎ 2836537; McConaughay Rd)

Sandeman Civil Hospital (☎ 9203334; Jinnah Rd) Quetta's main hospital.

Money

Changing cash isn't a problem in Quetta, but travellers cheques frequently draw blank looks from bank staff. Authorised private money-changers are often the quickest places, operating from around Jinnah and Iqbal Rds. The hours included below indicate when you are able to change foreign currency.

Bank of Pakistan (Jinnah Rd; ☎ 9am-1.30pm Mon-Thu, 9am-12.30pm Fri & Sat) Main branch.

Habib Bank (Jinnah Rd; ☎ 9am-12.30pm Mon-Thu, 9-11.30am Fri & Sat) The Habib's main branch has a 24-hour ATM.

Muslim Commercial Bank (MCB; Iqbal Rd; ☎ 9am-1.30pm Mon-Thu, 9am-12.30pm Fri & Sat) Has a 24-hour ATM.

Standard Chartered Bank (Jinnah Rd; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Thu, 9am-12.30pm & 3-5pm Fri, 9am-12.30pm Sat) The most consistent place to change travellers cheques, although there's a daily limit of US\$300 on how much you can change, and a Rs 500 commission. Has a 24-hour ATM.

Permits

Home & Tribal Affairs Office (☎ 9201036; Balochistan Secretariat, Ground fl, New Block; ☎ 8.30am-2pm Mon-Thu & Sat, 8.30am-noon Fri) Issues permits for travel in Balochistan (beyond Quetta).

Post

DHL (☎ 9201409; GPO, Zarghoon Rd; ☎ 9am-2pm Mon-Thu & Sat, 9-11am Fri)

Main post office (GPO; Zarghoon Rd; ☎ 9am-2pm & 2.30-7pm Mon-Thu & Sat, 9-11am & 3-7pm Fri) At the intersection with Iqbal Rd. If you're sending a parcel, men sitting outside the GPO will sew it up in cheap linen for around Rs 20 to Rs 100 depending on the size.

Tourist Information

Culture & Tourism Cell (CTC; ☎ 9202933; Balochistan Secretariat, Room 4, 1st fl, Block 4; ☎ 8.30am-2pm Mon-Thu & Sat, 8.30am-noon Fri) The CTC operates resthouses

in Ziarat, Gaddani, Gwadar and Dalbandin, and you can make reservations here.

PTDC office (☎ 825826; Azad Muslim Hotel, Jinnah Rd; ☎ 9am-1pm & 2-4pm Mon-Sat, to 6.30pm in summer) Come here to get the latest travel safety advice and pick up a good, free Quetta city map, as well as postcards and a few tourist books. The PTDC can also arrange guides and make reservations for you at PTDC accommodation anywhere in Pakistan, and has information on trains and buses.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Quetta is a safe enough place to visit, by and large, but you should constantly be aware that Balochistan's (and Afghanistan's) political tensions can occasionally spill onto the streets. Violence against police and government targets is not unknown, often sparked by Baloch rebels or as a reaction to government action against Islamic militants elsewhere in Pakistan, or Western military actions in Afghanistan. We'd suggest avoiding public demonstrations or large political gatherings. While street crime is usually low, it's best to avoid walking the streets alone late at night.

Because Quetta is a conservative society, you're going to receive a warmer reception if you dress and behave respectfully.

SIGHTS

While Quetta is an old town, the 1935 earthquake destroyed any historic sights, completely levelling the place. Instead, Quetta's attractions are its rough-around-the-edges frontier atmosphere, particularly in evidence in the bazaars (p148), and its people – sitting at a juice bar or teashop people-watching is a great way to spend an hour or two. Quetta does have a few interesting museums, however, and there's a small British memorial to the (Christian) dead on Jinnah Rd near the Standard Chartered Bank.

Archaeological Museum of Balochistan

This small but well-kept **museum** (☎ 2833595; Wafa Rd; admission Rs 50; ☎ 8.30am-2.30pm Sat-Thu, 8.30am-12.30pm Fri), also known as Quetta Museum, is tucked away just east of Mizan Chowk. The galleries display figurines from Moenjodaro in Sindh province, pottery pieces from sites in Balochistan, and Stone Age implements from the Zhob, Quetta and Kalat Valleys. Despite the name, the museum isn't just about archaeology. There's also a stock of militaria, including a sword – with

bloodstains still visible – used in 1919 to kill a British commander. Other galleries within the complex exhibit Qurans (one written in the hand of Mughal emperor Aurangzeb), manuscripts and calligraphy. Some dusty old photos give a fascinating glimpse of Quetta before the 1935 earthquake.

The museum can be tough to find – ask locals to point you in the direction of the Mian Ismail Mosque; the museum is adjacent.

Geological Survey of Pakistan Museum

Adjacent to Balochistan University is this surprisingly interesting **museum** (☎ 9211381; www.gsp.gov.pk; Sariaab Rd; Rs 50; ☎ 8am-3pm Mon-Thu & Sat, 8am-noon Fri). It houses a remarkable collection of geological and palaeontological items, with some particularly impressive fossil remains dating back as far as 500 million years. Prize exhibits include remnants of the giant Baluchitherium (a large, 25-million-year-old land mammal), a 47-million-year-old 'walking whale' and a collection of meteorite fragments. Seven galleries run the gamut from gems and fossils to astrogeology. It's worth asking the staff for a guided tour, as not all exhibits are brilliantly labelled.

Command & Staff College Museum

This **museum** (Staff College Rd; admission free; ☎ 9am-1pm Mon-Thu & Sat, 9am-noon Fri) has a small private collection built up during the days when the then Indian Staff College was the Raj's answer to West Point. Field Marshal Montgomery, the WWII hero of El Alamein, was an instructor here. The museum has a small but interesting collection of militaria, paintings and photos, but you need to be an army buff to get the most from a visit.

Because this is a private collection you should arrange a visit through the PTDC office (see left). Take some ID along with you.

ACTIVITIES

Art & Drama

The **Balochistan Arts Council** (☎ 824016; Jinnah Rd; ☎ 9am-1pm & 2-4pm Mon-Thu & Sat, 9am-1pm Sun) sometimes hosts cultural events such as art exhibitions and theatrical or musical performances – call to find out if anything is on during your stay.

Swimming

The pool at **Quetta Serena** (☎ 2820071; quetta@serena.com.pk; Zarghoon Rd; nonguests per day Rs 50)

is possibly the only swimming pool in Balochistan where women are welcome.

SLEEPING

Quetta has some of the cheapest accommodation in Pakistan but there are also some more salubrious options for those with plumper wallets. As always, earplugs are handy as lots of hotels overlook busy roads.

Winter nights are cold in Quetta, so make sure you ask for an extra blanket. Hotels will often provide gas heaters for an extra charge (around Rs 100), but it's essential to turn these off before going to sleep because of the risk of carbon monoxide poisoning.

Budget

CAMPING

Hotel Bloom Star (☎ 2833350; fax 2833353; 8 Stewart Rd; camp sites per person Rs 150, per vehicle Rs 120) Overlanders have been pitching their tents in the grassy courtyard of this hotel for years now, and they always receive a good welcome. Added bonuses include secure parking and helpful management who are a mine of information for your onward route.

HOTELS

Azad Muslim Hotel (☎ 2824269; Jinnah Rd; s/d Rs 100/200) The cheapest of the cheap in Quetta, the Azad Muslim is particularly popular with Japanese backpackers. Rooms are arranged around a central courtyard, and there's a restaurant with a never-ending pot of dhal. Rooms are a bit cell-like and the whole place has a slightly grubby feel, but what did you expect for the price?

Hotel Marina (☎ 2847765; Jinnah Rd; s/d Rs 200/300) Opposite Hotel Deluxe (below). Rooms here are basic, with a slightly stale air and the occasionally dank bathroom.

Hotel Deluxe (☎ 2831537; Jinnah Rd; s/d Rs 250/500) The wood-panelled lobby and bright painting of Balochis give a good first impression here. Rooms are fine and about what you would expect for the price, but the doors and windows only open to a corridor along the roadside – cosy for winter but potentially stuffy in summer.

Hotel al-Naeem (☎ 2830263; Jinnah Rd; s/d Rs 300/600) Rooms around a central courtyard are nicely finished in local marble. Some could be larger, but all are kept clean and tidy. It's spot-on for the price, and always busy. There's no restaurant, but the staff can run to room service.

Hotel Fabs's (☎ 2825762; Saleem Plaza, Jinnah Rd; s/d Rs 350/450) This is a good-value choice, but frequently full to bursting. Rooms and bathrooms are slightly better than average, although front-of-house rooms overlook a busy junction on Jinnah Rd. The attached restaurant has had good reports.

Hotel Maryton (☎ 2825764; Jinnah Rd; s/d/tr Rs 350/500/600) A fair enough option – rooms are a bit worn (and have lots of traffic noise) but are just about adequate. Good in a pinch, but you can get more for your money elsewhere.

Zulfikar Hotel (☎ 2822720; Prince Rd; s/d Rs 350/500) This is another decent budget choice, with rooms around a grassy courtyard that adds a much-needed touch of green. Some of the rooms are a bit cramped but otherwise your money is well spent here, especially if you get one of the quieter rooms at the back.

Midrange

Qasr-e-Gul (☎ 825192; Suraj Ganj Bazaar; s/d Rs 1050/1300; 🍷) A consistently good midrange hotel, set a block back from the bustle of the main road. Rooms and bathrooms are clean and well appointed, and the management is helpful. Its location near the *sajji* (roast lamb) restaurants make eating out a quick and easy option.

Hotel Qasr-e-Naz (☎ 2822821; Jinnah Rd; s/d Rs 500/700, s/d with air-con Rs 1000/1200; 🍷) One of the better midrange options in town. Rooms here are large and comfortable, so it's often booked out with local businessmen. Centrally located with attached restaurant; cheaper rooms have fan only.

Hotel Bloom Star (☎ 2833350; fax 2833353; 8 Stewart Rd; s/d Rs 500/600) The Bloom Star has clean and comfortable rooms but what's drawn travellers here for years are the quiet location and leafy courtyard that's perfect for your morning cuppa or chilling with a paperback – a real oasis in a dusty city. Staff are friendly and efficient, and there's a decent restaurant to boot. Deservedly popular.

Hotel Islamabad (☎ 2824006; Jinnah Rd; s/d Rs 550/650; 🍷) Rooms here are reasonably good, and you're well located in the middle of Jinnah Rd (although the front rooms cop a lot of street noise). There's a good restaurant serving Pakistani standards that's worth visiting even if you don't stay here.

Hotel Shees (☎ 2823015; Jinnah Rd; s/d Rs 600/850) Another option opening straight onto Jinnah Rd. Rooms are average, and still a little gloomy, but the place seems to have improved slightly

since our last visit. An acceptable choice if other midrange hotels are full.

Top End

Quetta Serena (☎ 2820071; quetta@serena.com.pk; Zarghoon Rd; s/d from Rs 15,000/16,000; 🏠 📺 📶) Quetta's plushest hotel by a comfortable margin, the Serena is unusual among top-end hotels in that it looks like it actually belongs to its surroundings – its design echoes local architectural styles, with Baloch textiles, woodwork and local marble continuing the decorative theme inside. The rooms (all equipped with wi-fi) are suitably refined with high-quality service from staff, plus there are two good restaurants, a tennis court, pool and a decent bookshop.

Gardenia Resort (☎ 2827543; fax 2823148; Askari Park, Airport Rd; s/d Rs 1700/3000; 🏠 📺) If you want to relax a little out of town, this secluded and unpretentious retreat is worth considering. Surrounded by towering, barren mountains, the Gardenia has a tranquil, homey personality with pleasant rooms and courteous staff. Askari Park itself is popular with families at weekends. A rickshaw from Jinnah Rd costs about Rs 40 (one way).

Lourdes Hotel (☎ 829656; fax 841352; Staff College Rd; s/d Rs 1800/2300; 🏠 📺) Faded around the edges and overpriced, the rooms and service at Quetta's oldest hotel are decidedly average. Nonetheless, it's a Quetta institution with distinctive old-world charm and a lovely garden. Rooms are comfortable enough, if sometimes creaky, and some are lacking in natural light, so inspect a few if possible. There's an attached restaurant.

EATING

Dining out in Quetta is a meat-based experience, and aside from the usual kebabs, *karai* (braised meat cooked with vegetables served in a pan) and biryani options, there are a couple of local specialties worth checking out. First among these is *sajji*, a whole roasted leg of lamb, lightly spiced and eaten with paper-thin traditional bread and goat's milk yoghurt. Slightly harder to find is *landhi*, whole lamb skinned and hung in the open (in shade) or a cold room for 30 to 45 days during winter. Quetta's Afghan connections mean that *qabli pilau* (rice with meat and raisins) appears on plenty of menus.

There's a slew of cheap Pakistani restaurants on Jinnah Rd between the Azad Muslim

and Deluxe hotels. Kandahari Bazaar has plenty of no-frills Afghan eateries.

Restaurants

Usmania Tandoori Restaurant (☎ 2844127; Jinnah Rd; mains Rs 50-300; 🍴 lunch & dinner). One of Quetta's plusher restaurants (with a hard-to-miss orange sign), Usmania has a wide selection of tasty dishes at reasonable prices. We particularly liked the mutton tandoori (Rs 375), a serving big enough for two with bread, salad and raita, washed down with green Pashtun tea. Service is good, and there's a handful of Chinese and Continental dishes if you need a break from local tastes.

Ziarat Coffee Shop (Quetta Serena hotel, Zarghoon Rd; mains Rs 120-400 plus 15% tax; 🏠 📺) More than just a coffee shop, this is a proper restaurant and a good place for a splurge. Come for high tea (4pm to 6pm) and an array of sandwiches, salads, cakes and pastries. If you visit after that the menu turns Italian, with everything on offer from lasagne to tiramisu. Expect to pay around Rs 500 for the whole meal. Open 24 hours.

Xuelian (Quetta Serena hotel, Zarghoon Rd; mains Rs 130-300 plus 15% tax; 🍴 lunch & dinner; 🏠 📺) Pakistani versions of Chinese food often don't run to much more than sweet-and-sour and chow mein, but the Serena's more formal restaurant offers a much broader spectrum, in appropriately swanky surroundings.

Lehri Sajji House (☎ 2821255) Prime among the cluster of *sajji* restaurants clustered in this area, this place could hardly be more basic, with plastic tables and chairs spilling out onto the road. But the *sajji* (Rs 340) is fantastic – great hunks of lamb spit-roasted, with crackly skin and sticky fat. It's better if there's more than one of you dining as you get a leg of lamb to yourself; there's also whole chicken cooked in the same delicious way. It's just off Jinnah Rd.

Gardenia Resort (☎ 827543; Askari Park, Airport Rd; mains Rs 60-300 plus 15% tax; 🍴 lunch & dinner; 🏠 📺) In a calm locale well away from the centre, this resort's restaurant serves Pakistani, Chinese and some Continental food. You can choose from the whole spectrum – mutton *karai* (Rs 110), Mongolian beef (Rs 120) or a good club sandwich with fries (Rs 85). The desserts are pretty good too.

Café China (Staff College Rd; mains Rs 65-210; 🍴 lunch & dinner) A good place for Chinese food, where portions are generous. There are

steaming bowls of noodle soup (Rs 50) and plates piled high with everything from beef chop suey (Rs 170) to a broad selection of vegetarian dishes.

Sheraz Bar.B.Q (Fateh Muhammad Rd; mains Rs 45-220; ☎ lunch & dinner) A busy eatery if you just need to fill up and go. Sheraz is great for traditional Pakistani cuisine, with a decent selection on offer from tikka chicken (Rs 80) and garlic naan (Rs 15) to huge plates of biryani (Rs 110).

Azad Muslim Hotel (Jinnah Rd; mains Rs 15-45; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Typical of the simple restaurants along Jinnah Rd, this hotel restaurant dishes up cheap, filling servings of dhal, beans and a variety of hard to classify but tasty meat curries. Fuel up for less than Rs 80.

Quick Eats

In Quetta you're never too far away from a stand selling samosas or other fried snacks. When it's cold, look for stalls selling piping-hot *murgh kai* (peppery chicken soup; Rs 10 to Rs 15).

Baig Snack Bar (Jinnah Rd; mains Rs 30-70; ☎ lunch & dinner) A solid fast-food option where burgers and sandwiches won't set you back more than about Rs 40. There are big bowls of sticky ice cream, rose-water *faluda* (sweet vermicelli) and fruit juices for afters.

Café Baldia (cnr Adalat & Iqbal Rds; mains Rs 35-80; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) One of Quetta's oldest eateries, the Baldia attracts an interesting crowd who congregate here to chat, read the newspaper or just chill out. It's an atmospheric spot to sit back with a cup of tea or light bite (sandwiches from Rs 20) and simply engage in people-watching.

Broast (Saleem Heights; mains Rs 40-200; ☎ lunch & dinner) Away from the downtown action, the Broast is a fast-food joint that whips up beef burgers with cheese (Rs 35), full roast chickens (Rs 200), mango shakes (Rs 25) and more.

Dolphin (Jinnah Rd; sweets from Rs 5; ☎ 9am-11pm) Quetta has plenty of bakeries but this is our favourite, with its mind-boggling array of crunchy cookies, sticky sweets and gooey cakes. Just browsing is enough to give you toothache, but there are a few savoury sandwiches and pizzas that make good snacking.

Self-Catering

There's a fruit and vegetable market by the main bus stand and a more convenient one just south of Mizan Chowk, where you can

also buy nuts and dried fruit. The peaches, grapes, cherries, musk melons and mangoes are especially delicious, sold by mobile vendors when in season, along with fat pomegranates from across the Afghan border.

DRINKING

Teashops are dotted around town if you need a *chai*, along with a plentiful supply of thirst-quenching juice stalls. When in season, it's a hard call as to which is better – the creamy mango smoothies or the sharp and invigorating pomegranate juice (both around Rs 20).

While Balochistan is literally Pakistan's driest province, alcohol can be bought for private consumption. There's a liquor store on Jinnah Rd selling a selection of the Murree Brewery's finest. Although technically an alcohol permit is required (the PTDC can help you out), in practice a quick flash of a non-Pakistani passport was enough to secure a bottle when we visited. Always be discreet with alcohol – carry it in a bag and never consume it in public.

ENTERTAINMENT

Askari Park (Airport Rd; admission Rs 5) More a family theme park, where you can get out of the city and enjoy some open space and clean air. There's a jogging track and children's park along with the Gardenia Resort hotel and restaurant (see p147).

Imdad Cinema (Jinnah Rd) This cinema sticks to trusted favourites – Bollywood singalongs, Pashtun gun movies and Hong Kong beat-'em-ups.

Quetta Club (☎ 2822847; Club Rd, Cantonment) If you can get someone to sign you into this members-only club (off limits to the public), you can use the golf course, squash club and eat at the restaurant.

SHOPPING

Balochistan is known for its marble and onyx. Most of this goes straight to Karachi's bazaars, and although Quetta is a good place to pick it up – often carved into goblets or paperweights – prices aren't noticeably cheaper than elsewhere in the country.

Better deals can be had with textiles. The bold geometric designs of Baloch carpets and woven kilims make superb souvenirs, while less bulky options include embroidered shirts, caps and cushion covers, often inlaid with tiny mirrors. Traditional jewellery is also worth looking out for. Afghan traders have a big slice of the handicrafts market.

Chiltan Government Handicrafts Centre (Jinnah Rd) A reputable (fixed-price) place to start your

search for local handicrafts and get an idea of quality and prices.

Baloch Handicraft & Carpet (Jinnah Rd) A wide variety of stock, from carpets to Baloch wedding dresses.

Swiss Plaza (Hali Rd) Some good handicraft shops are on the arcade below the airline offices.

Rug Market (Masjid Rd) If you're specifically looking for carpets, head to the wholesale rug market on Masjid Rd. Apart from the wide variety, the prices are also pleasing – but you'll still have to haggle.

Other places worth a look include the streets northwest from Mizan Chowk to the cloth markets of Kandahari Bazaar; southwest to the fruit and vegetable market; and northwest to Suraj Ganj Rd for Sindhi caps, shawls and more. South of Mizan Chowk is Liaquat Bazaar, which is also worth a wander.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Quetta is a substantial distance from any other major Pakistani city. The main highways spoke out from Quetta to Taftan, Karachi, Jacobabad and Dera Ghazi (DG) Khan. Off these roads there are few services and travel is often restricted without official permission (consult the PTDC office). For more information, see Travelling Safely in Balochistan (p140).

Air

Given the distances to other Pakistani cities, this may be one of those occasions when you break the overland creed and fly. Competition between the three airlines keeps prices competitive, but flights can fill quickly.

Air Blue (☎ 2830124; 55/537, Swiss Plaza, Hali Rd) Has a daily flight to Karachi.

PIA (☎ 9203861; 17 Hali Rd) Has daily flights to Islamabad (Rs 6250, 85 minutes) and Karachi (Rs 6250, 50 minutes), as well as flying four times a week to Lahore (Rs 4090, one hour) and twice weekly to Gwadar. A direct Quetta–Peshawar service is planned.

Shaheen Air (☎ 2832645; S3, Swiss Plaza, Hali Rd) Flies daily to Karachi and twice weekly to Lahore.

Bus & Minibus

Long-distance services operate from the main bus stand, sometimes referred to as the New Quetta Bus Stand, or Bus Adda. It's about 1.5km south of the train station. Buses (Rs 4) and autorickshaws (about Rs 20) go there from Jinnah Rd and from near the train station. Note that Balochistan's

security situation can affect whether you are allowed to travel by public transport – during research we were prevented from travelling on the direct Quetta–Peshawar bus, for instance.

Minibuses leave every hour or so for Ziarat (Rs 50, 2½ hours), less often in winter. There are also regular minibuses to Sibi, Nushki, Kalat, Khuzdar and Chaman, and many direct buses to Loralai. There are direct buses to Gwadar, via Turbat.

There are several air-con private bus companies at the main bus stand, including **Sadabahar Private Bus Company** (☎ 2452290), which has services to Multan (Rs 675, 13 hours, daily), Karachi (Rs 380, 12 hours, six daily), Lahore (Rs 700, 20 hours, daily), Peshawar (Rs 810, 24 hours, daily), Rawalpindi (Rs 7800, 23 hours, two daily) and Taftan (Rs 350, 13 hours, four daily).

Kurdish Coach (no phone; Jinnah Rd) has a daily service to Taftan (Rs 350, 13 hours). A handful of other bus companies also operates offices on the lower part of Jinnah Rd with services to Taftan. Note that most Taftan buses travel overnight, arriving at the Iran border in the early morning. For more on the Iranian border, see p387.

Taxi & 4WD

For taxis to Hanna Lake and Urak Valley (Rs 1200 return trip, Rs 500 to Hanna Lake only) or Ziarat (Rs 2500), try the taxi stand on Adalat Rd or inquire at your hotel. Most midrange or better hotels can also organise 4WD transport if you're heading to the interior; alternatively, ask at the PTDC office (p145) when you're finding out about permits.

Train

Quetta's train station is very ordered compared to others in Pakistan. Tickets are sold at the train station's reservation and booking office, and foreigners and students are entitled to special concessions – see p391.

Major trains from Quetta are listed on p150, but note that timetables and fares are likely to change during the life of this book. You can double-check at the station or direct with **Pakistan Railways** (☎ 117; www.pakrail.com). The newspaper stand at the station sometimes sells copies of the booklet *Time & Fare Table* (Rs 25), which is updated twice yearly.

MAJOR TRAINS FROM QUETTA

Destination	Train	Departure	Duration	Fare
Chaman	<i>Chaman Passenger</i>	7am	4½hr	Rs 50 for A
Karachi	<i>Bolan Mail</i>	4.15pm	20hr	Rs 350/743 for A/G
Lahore	<i>Quetta Express</i>	10.30am	24hr	Rs 520/911/2284 for A/G/F
	<i>Jaffar Express</i>	3.30pm	20hr	Rs 630/1510 for A/C
	<i>Chiltan Express</i>	1.45pm	26-27hr	Rs 520/911 for A/G
Multan	<i>Quetta Express</i>	10.30am	18hr	Rs 325/400/720/1789 for A/B/G/F
Peshawar	<i>Quetta Express</i>	10.30am	35hr	Rs 575/650/1181/2293 for A/B/G/F
Rawalpindi	<i>Quetta Express</i>	10.30am	29hr	Rs 525/600/1080/2723 for A/B/G/F
	<i>Jaffar Express</i>	3.30pm	29hr	Rs 715/1760 for A/C
Taftan	<i>Taftan Express</i>	12.30pm	24hr	Rs 500/956 for B/G

Abbreviations:

A = Economy (seat)

B = Economy (berth)

C = Air-conditioned lower (seat)

D = Air-conditioned lower (berth)

E = Air-conditioned parlour

F = Air-conditioned sleeper

G = First-class sleeper (seat)

H = First-class sleeper (berth)

GETTING AROUND

Quetta's centre is relatively easy to cover on foot. Buses run from the main bus stand to the train station and then up Zarghoon Rd. They then proceed south down Jinnah Rd before returning to the bus stand. Away from these roads the most expedient way to get around is by autorickshaw. Agree a fare before jumping in – you shouldn't pay more than about Rs 25 for autorickshaw travel anywhere in the immediate town area.

There's no airport bus. A taxi from the airport to Jinnah Rd costs around Rs 250 (15 minutes), or Rs 100 by rickshaw.

There are taxi stands on Circular Rd and at Liaquat Park. Hiring a taxi for a half/full day should cost about Rs 600/1200, including waiting time.

AROUND QUETTA

There are several sights close to Quetta worth checking out that give the lie to Balochistan's reputation as a flat, dry and featureless province.

HANNA LAKE & URAK VALLEY

Ten kilometres east of Quetta, **Hanna Lake** is a popular weekend destination with locals. On a road skirting foothills and scrubland, this small natural lake is surrounded by khaki hills (khaki literally means 'dust' in Pashto), in stark contrast to its glassy blue-green waters. A lookout has been built on a cliff, and the tiny artificial island in the lake can

be reached by pedal boat. There are several cafés and drink stands for refreshments. Water levels fluctuate according to winter rainfall, but the lake had largely recovered from the drought of several years ago when we visited.

From the lake it's an 11km drive up the Urak Valley to the more picturesque picnic site of **Urak Tangi**. The countryside is beautiful in spring and autumn, with apple orchards, roses and fruit gardens in full bloom. It often snows between December and March, and from July to September most vegetation takes a rest. At the head of the valley is a waterfall.

There are cheap minibuses direct to Hanna Lake from Quetta, particularly between Friday and Sunday when families head there for picnics. Alternatively, a return taxi to Hanna Lake and Urak Tangi costs about Rs 1200 (Rs 500 return to Hanna Lake only).

HAZARGANJI-CHILTAN NATIONAL PARK

This 15,555-hectare national park in the mountains, about 20km southwest of Quetta, is a showcase of the sort of ecosystems that were once far more widespread in Balochistan. Amid juniper, pistachio, almond and ash trees, a huge variety of bird life is present, from tiny warblers to vultures and eagles. Harder to spot is the impressive array of large mammal species. The most notable is the Chiltan markhor, a wild goat that now only persists in the park boundaries.

Wolves, leopards and striped hyenas are also present, along with smaller species like porcupine.

The park is a protected area watched over by rangers who may be able to show you around. It's particularly attractive in the spring when wildflowers abound. Permission to visit must be obtained from the **Divisional Forestry Office** (☎ 081-9211648; Sabzal Rd, Quetta), where you can also book accommodation at the park's resthouse (only for day use). There isn't any public transport to or from the park so you'll need to hire a car. The entrance is only a couple of kilometres from the main Quetta–Mastung road. The PTDC office in Quetta (see p145) can provide more details.

ZIARAT

The old British hill station of Ziarat was founded as a retreat from Quetta's summer heat. It nestles in its eponymous valley, surrounded by ancient juniper forests at an altitude of 2600m, about 130km northeast of Quetta. With a residency, offices and even a sanatorium, it served as the administration's summer capital, and now carries a slightly worn (though attractive) 'end of empire' feel.

Refreshingly cool in summer and almost invariably snow-clad in winter, Ziarat is a relaxing destination and a handy base for exploring the surrounding gorges and balding hills of juniper. Don't get your hopes up too high, though – this may be lush for stark Balochistan, especially in spring, but northern Pakistan it isn't.

Information

PTDC office (☎ 0833-410356) Located at the PTDC Complex, this office is open throughout the tourist season (April to October). Free sketch maps of the valley are available.

Sights

The British weren't the only ones to appreciate Ziarat – so too did Mohammed Ali Jinnah, the Quaid-i-Azam (Great Leader). Jinnah spent his last days here in 1948, suffering from the cancer that killed him. The **Quaid-i-Azam Residence** (☎ 9am–4pm; Rs 50) is the former residency of the agent to the governor general, built in 1882. The furniture is left just as it was when Jinnah stayed here before returning to Karachi to die.

Pilgrims come here to visit the **ziarat** (shrine) of the famous Muslim saint Mian Abdul Hakim (also known as Kharwari Baba), who fled here from Kandahar in Afghanistan. The shrine is 3km from the Quaid-i-Azam Residence.

Activities

Ziarat and the surrounding valley offer several pretty and easy walks. The **Chashma Walk** leads 1.5km up from Ziarat to the spring that provides water to the town. A longer walk from Ziarat town follows the road (or the water channels on the hillsides) 6km south, veering east to **Prospect Point**. It's quicker to start from the Quaid-i-Azam Residence, although you still have to tackle the steepest part from here. At a height of 2700m, the point offers glorious views over the whole valley. Further round are views of craggy **Mt Khalifat** (3487m), which is still snow-clad in April.

Other popular hiking destinations include the cascade at **Sandeman Tangi**, 4km northwest; **Chautair**, 20km further east; and the waterfall at **Fern Tangi**, 1.5km south of the main road to Quetta from a point 10km west of Ziarat. There are plenty of other attractive trails to explore if you plan on spending a few days in Ziarat.

Sleeping

There are several good options, although they are heavily booked in summer. Ziarat's hotels largely close down in the winter, but you can usually find something available. The **PTDC office** (☎ 081-825826; Azad Muslim Hotel, Jinnah Rd; ☎ 9am–1pm & 2–4pm Mon–Sat, to 6.30pm in summer) in Quetta can make reservations. Rooms at the CTC must be booked in advance at the Quetta **CTC office** (☎ 081-9202933; Balochistan Secretariat, Room 4, 1st fl, Block 4; ☎ 8.30am–2pm Mon–Thu & Sat, 8.30am–noon Fri).

PTDC Complex (☎ 0833-560356; s/d Rs 1550/1900) This 18-room complex is the pick of the bunch, offering the usual reliable but unfussy PTDC service. There's a restaurant, although the breakfasts are a bit overpriced.

CTC Tourist Rest House (s/d Rs 300/400) One kilometre further along the Loralai road from the PTDC Complex, this is not as conveniently located nor as comfortable as the PTDC.

Shalimar (☎ 0833-410353; s/d Rs 300/400–550) Near the main bus stand, this is a good option for

BALUCHISTAN'S BIG DAY OUT

Sibi is famed for its annual fair, the **Sibi Mela** or Shahi Durbar (Royal Meeting). The tradition is said to date back to around the 15th century, when tribal chiefs held occasional assemblies here. It still serves the same purpose today, but over the years it has expanded to become a fixed annual event attracting participants from throughout Balochistan and beyond. The British revived the durbar in 1882 as a means of publicly 'rewarding' those feudal chiefs who had demonstrated their loyalty to their new masters.

The festival centres on the horse and cattle fair but is accompanied by cultural shows, camel and horse races, and music. It's a great place to search for tribal handicrafts such as silk and cotton embroidery, ceramics, leatherware and articles woven out of the fibres of the hardy *pish* (dwarf palm) that flourishes even in the harsh Balochistan desert.

The festival is usually held in the first half of February and lasts for a week, although preparations get under way early and people often start trickling in from January. It can be difficult to find accommodation – seek assistance from the PTDC office in Quetta (see p145).

the price, with clean rooms and a restaurant. Open all year.

Shangrila (☎ 0833-410311; s/d/tr Rs 300/400/600) Another decent choice for the price, similar in style to the Shalimar.

Several dreary cheap hotels huddle around the bus station, along with various eating options serving *karai* and the like.

Getting There & Away

Numerous minibuses travel here daily from Quetta (Rs 50, 2½ hours), although their frequency drops considerably out of season. A taxi will set you back around Rs 2500.

AROUND THE REGION

Travel in Balochistan can be a tough proposition. Roads are often poor and facilities lacking. On top of this, security concerns mean that permits are required for almost all destinations outside the main transport corridor from the Iran border through Quetta to Jacobabad in Sindh (see *Travelling Safely in Balochistan*, p140). That given, the stark scenery can be dramatic, ranging from stony moonscape deserts to rocky mountains and the occasional hidden oasis, making travelling here never anything less than an adventure.

QUETTA TO SIBI

The village of **Kolpur**, 24km south of Quetta, lies at the entrance to the Bolan Pass. The Bolan River rises near here, and Kolpur has many fruit orchards and date palms.

The larger settlement of **Mach**, further along the road beside the railway line, is a typically dry and dusty collection of mud huts. About 24km beyond Mach, after several coalmines, a rough track running right off the main road leads to **Pir Gheib**. This beautiful rockpool is fed by a cascade and is enclosed by cliffs and trees. There's another pool with calmer waters slightly downstream. Near the pool is a small **shrine** to a saint.

Foreigners need a special permit to come to both the shrine and Pir Gheib – for the latest details ask at the PTDC office in Quetta (see p145). With your own vehicle, a day trip from Quetta is just about feasible.

Five kilometres beyond the turning to Pir Gheib is **Bibi Nani**, the site of a historic bridge washed away by heavy rains in 1986.

Just off the main road, 26km before Sibi, the tiny settlement of **Sirajabad** is set in a small forest at the base of a hill. It has an attractive rockpool where you can swim, with both hot and cold water. This is one of the most pleasant retreats in Balochistan.

SIBI

Sibi can be very hot. 'Oh Allah! When you created Sibi, why did you bother to conceive of hell!' is the popular exhortation of the locals who endure the region's scalding summers, when the mercury pushes towards 50°C.

Sibi owes its importance to its strategic position at the mouths of the Bolan and Harnai Passes on the old trade routes to Afghanistan, but it's cut off from the rest of Balochistan by formidable mountain ranges.

Little is known of its early history, although it has been a settlement of some importance

and the main market town of the region for many centuries. There are references from the time of Alexander the Great to a place that may have been Sibi. Legend records that it was the capital of Sewistan, one of the seven Hindu kingdoms that predate Islam. Mohammed bin Qasim, the Muslim Arab invader of the subcontinent in the 8th century, captured it, as did Mahmud of Ghazni in the 11th century, after which it was coveted, besieged or occupied by various rival dynasties. In 1487 it briefly became capital of a unified Baloch kingdom under Mir Chakar.

In 1878, after an earlier assault on the town in 1841, the British captured Sibi and renamed it Sandemanabad, for Robert Sandeman. The most imposing of the extant buildings from the British era is the 1903 Queen Victoria Memorial Hall, now named **Jirga Hall**. It is so named because it was the assembly chamber for the British and the leading tribal notables during the annual *jirga* (council of tribal elders) held during the Sibi Mela. It now houses the small archaeological and historical **Sibi Museum** (Masjid Rd; ☒ closed Wed).

The 15th-century ruins of **Mir Chakar's Fort** lie on the outskirts of Sibi. There's also an old caravanserai (traditional accommodation for camel caravans), the **Sohbat Serai**, constructed by tribal chief Sadar Sohbat Khan.

Sleeping

There's a paucity of accommodation in Sibi. Try the basic **Saqi Hotel** (Jinnah Rd), **Al-Karam Hotel** (Jinnah Rd) or other cheapies along Jinnah

Rd. Hotels will almost certainly insist that you register with the police before being allowed to check in.

Getting There & Away

All trains to/from Quetta stop at Sibi (five hours). There are also buses and minibuses to/from Quetta (three hours), Ziarat, Loralai, Khuzdar and Fort Munro, leaving from the bus station in the southern part of town.

MEHRGARH

At the foot of the Bolan Pass, just south of the Quetta–Sibi highway, Mehrgarh is the earliest archaeological site known on the subcontinent. It was first unearthed in the 1970s by French archaeologists, a discovery that has significantly boosted knowledge of the Neolithic precursors to the Indus Valley civilisation. However, there's not much to see so it's really only for those with a specialist interest. It's also rather difficult to reach.

Mehrgarh is the site of the first known farming society in Pakistan, and predates not only the Indus Valley civilisation but also the civilisations of ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia. It's believed to have been inhabited from the first half of the 7th millennium BC (possibly even earlier) until about 2000 BC. Not only did its inhabitants raise domesticated cattle and goats, cultivate cereal crops and make bone, flint and (much later) simple copper tools, they were also the first known dentists, with several skeletons with drilled teeth discovered at the site. All such advances are

THE BOLAN PASS

The famous Bolan Pass is a vital link in the main route between Afghanistan and Sindh, and both the railway and the road through the pass make for very dramatic travel. In spring long processions of nomads and camel caravans wind through the pass, bringing livestock and wares to sell in Quetta.

The pass stretches for 87km from Kolpur to Rindli, rising from 230m to about 1800m. For many centuries it has been the route taken by invaders, soldiers, traders and nomad caravans between Central Asia and India, and inevitably it has been the site of many battles.

On their way to fight in the two Anglo-Afghan wars of 1839 and 1878, British troops crossed the pass from Sindh but at the expense of immense physical hardship and casualties. With persistent fears of Russian expansion into India, the demand for a secure line of communication with the sensitive borders of Persia and Afghanistan became acute. When the British first occupied Balochistan, the pass was nominally under the control of the Khan of Kalat but in practice several tribal chiefs also had interests in it and shared a right to the tolls imposed on people travelling through it. In 1883 the British obtained jurisdiction over the pass in return for paying annual subsidies to the Khan and the various sardars (tribal chiefs and nobles).

unknown anywhere else in the same period outside west Asia.

Later it appears that there was an established professional class of artisans, and that ceramics were manufactured on a large scale for export. Handicrafts include human and animal figurines, beads of terracotta and hematite, storage jars, copper pins, seals and ivory work – many decorated in colour with stylised motifs. Through these and other finds, there is evidence of trading links with Central Asia, Afghanistan and Persia. The best items are on display at the National Museum of Pakistan in Karachi (p164), including some prodigiously hipped and breasted female figures, as well as a few pieces at the museum in Sibi (p153).

The site is spread over a large area but the main excavation is concentrated on one low constructed mound, where around 20 rooms have so far been discovered and about 100 skeletons have been dug up from the large necropolis.

Your own transport is essential for reaching Mehrgarh. Tribal insecurities mean that the Balochistan Secretariat in Quetta often advises travellers to take armed levies (rural police) and to report to the Sibi Deputy Commissioner's office (between Railway Rd and Jinnah Rd). Consult the PTDC office in Quetta (p145) for current information and advice.

THE AFGHAN BORDER

Like the Bolan Pass further east, the Khojak Pass has been crossed by a procession of invaders and traders. The top of the pass gives views down into Afghanistan.

From Quetta the railway stretches 110km before reaching its peak (2370m) about 6km after Shelabagh, and then descending into the 4km-long Khojak Tunnel.

Chaman, the Afghanistan border post, has traditionally been a major conduit for smuggling, dominated by the Achakzai Pashtuns whose lands straddle the border.

At the time of research, Chaman was deemed unsafe for foreigners. A permit is needed to travel here, and is unlikely to be issued unless you have a good reason, such as crossing the border on business. For current details ask at the PTDC office in Quetta (p145). In the unlikely event the security situation is deemed safe enough, a taxi to Chaman costs about Rs 300 per person, while

the *Chaman Passenger* train departs Quetta daily each morning.

QUETTA TO KARACHI

Kalat

Seat of the once mighty Khans of Kalat who dominated Balochistan from the 15th century until the arrival of the British, Kalat is 143km south of Quetta. Despite being in an important date-producing area, it's one of the coolest places in Balochistan, with temperatures frequently below freezing in winter.

The town was almost destroyed in the 1935 earthquake that also rocked Quetta, and the imposing hilltop *miri* (citadel) of the Khans of Kalat, which once dominated the town, is now in ruins. The rubble of an ancient Hindu temple of Kali lies beneath the fortress.

The modern town is of little interest, although the **bazaar** is worth a stroll through. There are several equally unappealing sleeping options in the bazaar.

Kalat to Karachi

Southwards, the paved road continues for around 160km from Kalat on to **Khuzdar**, which is a better place to break a trip than Kalat. Accommodation options here include (in order of quality) the **PTDC Motel** (☎ Quetta PTDC office for reservations 081-825826; s/d Rs 600/800), **Saaric Hotel** (☎ 0871-412421; s/d Rs 250/500) and the yet more basic **Faisal Hotel** (☎ 0871-413792; s/d Rs 100/200).

From Khuzdar it's about 220km south to **Bela** – the burial place of Sir Robert Sandeman, Victorian Balochistan's most renowned administrator – in the district of Las Bela. From Bela the paved road continues to Uthal and Gaddani before reaching Karachi.

Hingol National Park

About 100km southwest of Bela (although best accessed from Sindh via the Makran Coastal Hwy) is the 619,043-hectare Hingol National Park. The park is on the Hingol River along the Sindh–Balochistan border and is home to marsh crocodiles, Olive Ridley turtles, leopards, Persian wild goats, hyenas, spot-billed pelicans and the Houbara bustard. Hingol has been identified as an area of global significance for its diverse ecosystems, endangered wildlife and importance as a winter habitat for migratory birds. Next to the park is

the pilgrimage centre of **Hinglaj**, site of a mela (fair) in March/April.

The park is beautiful but very remote, and can only be reached by 4WD via the town of Aghor. You'll need to be totally self-sufficient, as there are no tourist facilities. Check with the PTDC in Quetta (p145) before travelling.

QUETTA TO DERA GHAZI KHAN

The road from Quetta to DG Khan in Punjab is little used and is a direct and adventurous route. You're likely to attract the attention of the police should you show up here – we were advised against taking this route when we researched this book. From Quetta buses to Ziarat normally go via the crossroad towns of Kuchlugh, Kanai and Kach. In spring there are many nomad families camped on the side of the road. About 63km east of Ziarat is the transit town of Sanjawi, from where pickups depart for Loralai. For more information about DG Khan, see p133.

Loralai

This wild Pashtun bazaar town is a logical place to break a journey. There's not much to see, but the **bazaar** is bursting with bushy beards and huge turbans and should be a fascinating place for a ramble, although there are plenty of guns on display and several travellers have reported feeling less than welcome here.

Registering with the police is essential for getting a room in Loralai. The **CTC Tourist Resthouse** (r Rs 300) is the most comfortable option, although it's inconveniently located in the cantonment, north of town; you must make advance reservations at the **CTC office** (☎ 081-9202933; Balochistan Secretariat, Room 4, 1st fl, Block 4; ☎ 8.30am-2pm Mon-Thu & Sat, 8.30am-noon Fri) in Quetta.

Cheaper and grubbier options at less than Rs 100 a head include Al Habib Hotel and Pakeeza Hotel.

Several daily buses and minibuses run to Quetta (five hours) and DG Khan (nine hours).

THE MAKRAN

The region bordering the Arabian Sea is known as the Makran, a harsh desert landscape bound by the coast on one side and low mountains on the other. Its name is thought to be a corruption of the Persian *mah khoran* (fish eaters), for its original inhabitants.

The Makran has always been a wild and untamed place. Alexander the Great came seriously unstuck here on his return from India, when his army became lost in the desert with the loss of thousands of men to hunger and dehydration. The Arabs and Persians made brief coastal contacts with the Makran soon after converting to Islam, but the area was otherwise ignored by outsiders. In the mid-18th century it fell under the control of the Khans of Kalat, who administered it through a representative known as the *nazim*. The British exerted very little direct control over it.

Communications with the interior have always been tenuous. The massive distances and poor road conditions – and recent political sensitivities – make it difficult to get here (see Information, below).

The coast is great for fishing, especially for shellfish. Traditionally, Makranis have migrated for work, especially to Oman and the rest of Arabia, and traded by sea with the ports of the Persian Gulf, Arabian Sea and Indian Ocean. The development of the new port at Gwadar is currently driving the local economy.

Much of the region is mountainous. There are three main ranges: the Makran Coast Range (up to about 1500m), Central Makran Range (2000m to 3000m) and Siahan Range (1000m to 2000m). The cultivated areas of the Makran lie sheltered between these barren ranges. The coast is consistently hot; the Kech Valley around Turbat is dry and temperate in winter but oppressively hot in summer; and the Panjgur region is bitterly cold in winter and moderately hot in summer.

There are no permanent rivers of any consequence, so agriculture relies on springs and underground watercourses. Dates, coconuts and bananas are important cash crops, along with grains and pulses for local consumption.

Information

The authorities do their best to dissuade foreigners from visiting the Makran. The Baloch insurgency continues, with regular bomb and rocket attacks against the government, gas pipelines and railway. The PTDC office in Quetta (see p145) is best placed to provide you with current details about the security situation. If safe, travellers require a No Objection Certificate for travel

BOOM TIMES FOR THE MAKRAN?

Just a few years ago Gwadar was a sleepy fishing town, never likely to trouble the nation's attentions for more than a minute. Today business is booming and a new port is promising to improve Pakistan's connection to world trade routes. The difference? A big pile of Chinese cash.

Just as the Karakoram Highway helped cement relations between the two countries in the 1960s, Gwadar holds the same promise today. The rapidly expanding Chinese economy has driven it to seek out ever-new trade routes for its products and energy supplies. It's estimated that Beijing has already poured around US\$250 million into Gwadar – a port that's closer to China's resource-rich western provinces than they are to Shanghai.

Not everyone is happy with the new arrangement. Balochis point to the fact that eight out of 10 families in the province lack clean water. Their sense of alienation has helped fuel attacks on an infrastructure they claim is doing nothing to help them, with Islamabad simply mining the region for profits yet again. Further afield, some Western observers fear Chinese plans are a security threat, claiming the port could be used by the Chinese navy, and that China is trying to muscle in on Central Asia's energy supplies – much in the same way that the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan was once seen as an attempt to gain a foothold in the warm waters of the Arabian Sea. Once neglected, this obscure corner of Pakistan has suddenly become something of a player.

(see Travelling Safely in Balochistan, p140) – these weren't being issued for the Makran during our research.

Sights & Activities

There are few actual sights in the Makran. The main reason to come here is simply because no-one else does.

Gwadar is the most developed town along the coast. The Portuguese briefly occupied it during the 16th century, then a century later the Khan of Kalat gave it as a gift to the rulers of Muscat. Together with about 800 sq km of the surrounding country, it remained under the rule of Muscat through a resident governor until 1957, when the Sultan of Oman sold it to Pakistan. In the last few years Gwadar has boomed, with massive Chinese investment in its port (see the boxed text Boom Times for the Makran? above). The old bazaar and fish market are on Gwadar's East Bay side.

Nearby are long stretches of deserted beaches, a few of which have even been surfed by a few hardy Western wave-catchers. Other nearby attractions include the intriguing mud volcano of Koh-e Mehdi, where salt is

harvested, and the curiously eroded mountainsides along the road to Turbat.

Other possible destinations near Gwadar include the coastal fishing towns of **Pasni** and **Jiwani**.

Sleeping

New developments are constantly being announced in Gwadar, with several hotel complexes planned on the West Bay side, including a Pearl Continental Hotel. While many of these were still on the drawing board at the time of our research, there should be several half-decent hotels available should you get there.

Getting There & Away

PIA (☎ 081-9203861) operates a direct Quetta–Gwadar flight every Monday and Friday. There are also flights from Gwadar to Karachi on Monday and Friday.

The recently completed Makran Coastal Hwy connects Gwadar to towns along the coast all the way to Karachi. A paved road also connects Gwadar to Turbat, and is currently being extended to Quetta.

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Sindh



Sindh is named for the great Indus River that carves its way through the plains of the province, bringing it to life. The Indus has brought favour and failure to Sindh throughout its history, nurturing the Indian subcontinent's first great civilisation at Moenjodaro and Harappa six millennia ago, while shifting its course to push later dynasties out of the spotlight and leave the region languishing without influence until it was claimed for the British empire in the 19th century.

For the traveller to Sindh, the British legacy is everywhere to see. The damming of the Indus at Sukkur in the 1930s transformed the dry plains into rich agricultural land, turning the region into the country's breadbasket. Its bakers – the big landowning farmers – still hold great sway in national politics today. An equally big transformation was wrought away from the river, turning a sleepy fishing town into the booming port of Karachi. In the 21st century, the city is Pakistan's economic powerhouse and a true mega-city, sucking in migrants from across the country, all hoping to strike it rich. Those that have flaunt their wealth in trendy restaurants and expensive property near the beach.

The rest of Sindh's attractions are more modest, from the archaeological site of Moenjodaro to the Mughal mosques of Thatta. But wherever you go you're unlikely to run into many other travellers. Persistent political insecurity in Sindh means that taking trusted safety advice before travel is essential before setting out, as is keeping an ear to the ground when you get there.

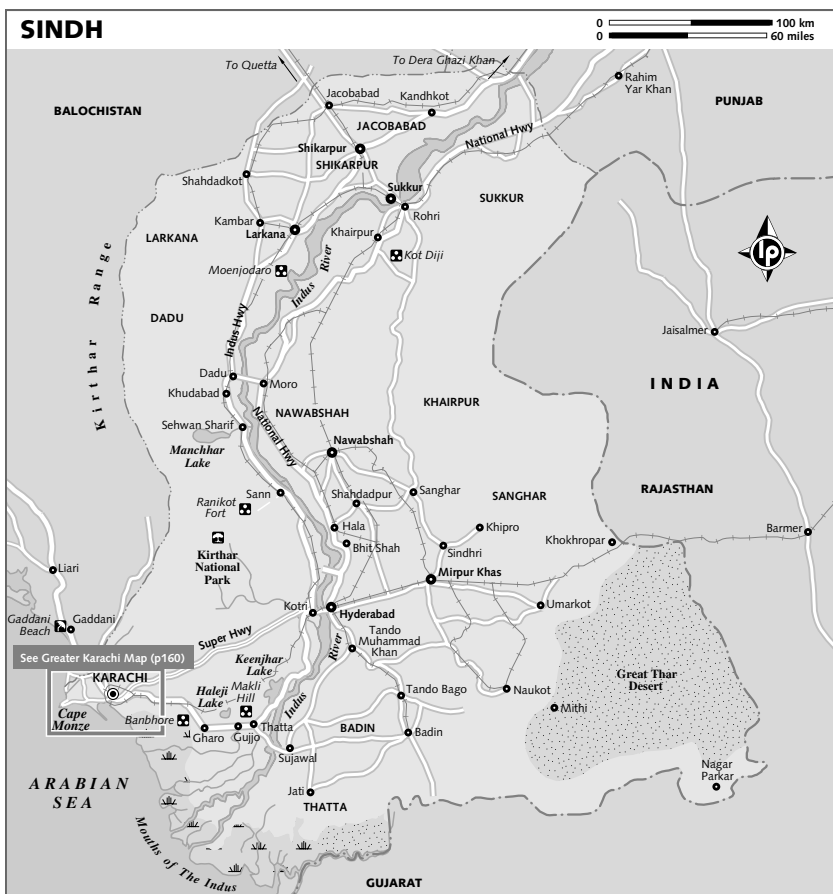
HIGHLIGHTS

- Be seen with the great, the good and the beautiful at one of Karachi's trendy **restaurants** (p170)
- Contrast old empires with modern commerce through Karachi's British-era **architecture** (p166) and modern **bazaars** (p171)
- Take a boat trip along the coast to the **islands** (p167) and **beaches** (p167 and p167) within an easy hop from Karachi
- Explore the ruins of **Moenjodaro** (p176), greatest city of the ancient Indus Valley civilisation
- Admire the cool blue tiling of the Mughal mosque of **Thatta** (p175), built for Shah Jahan of Taj Mahal-fame



■ POPULATION: 34,231,000

■ AREA: 140,914 SQ KM



History

The Indus River has acted as the cradle of civilisation on the Indian subcontinent, particularly where it passes through Sindh. Around 6000 years ago, some of the world's first urban cultures sprang up in the region, reaching their zenith in the great city of Moenjodaro.

Some millennia later, Sindh was annexed by the Persian empire, to be subsequently invaded as Alexander the Great tore through the region in 326 BC. When the Greeks pulled out, the Buddhist Mauryan dynasty stepped in and ruled the whole of Sindh until the early 2nd century BC.

Sindh's history is little recorded from here until Hindu Brahmins briefly took control in the 7th century AD, although their reign was

short-lived with the arrival of the Abbasid Arabs from Baghdad under Mohammed bin Qasim in 711, marching under the newly green banner of Islam. Sindh remained under the Abbasid caliphate until 874 and under Arab domination until the indigenous Muslim dynasty of the Sumras seized power in about 1058.

Dynasties came and went for several hundred years until 1520, when Sindh was brought into the Mughal empire by Akbar, himself born in Umarkot in Sindh. Mughal rule from their provincial capital of Thatta was to last in lower Sindh until the early 18th century. Upper Sindh was a different picture, however, with the indigenous Kalhoras holding power, consolidating their rule until the mid-18th century, when the Persian sacking

TRAVELLING SAFELY IN SINDH

Karachi carries a heavy reputation in terms of safety, as a result of the perennial communal violence that characterised it in the 1980s and '90s. As a general rule, this is largely a thing of the past, although the killing of unarmed demonstrators at a rally in May 2007 and subsequent tensions means that the potential for trouble – in the context of wider Pakistani politics – is never too far from the surface. Steer clear of any street demonstrations. In addition, Western targets, such as consulates, have been subject to attack from Sunni Islamist groups and these present a potential risk to visitors. On the whole, however, Karachi remains a calm city to visit, although it's essential for travellers to keep abreast of current events prior to and during travel. Local newspapers and your country's embassy are useful ways of gauging the current security concerns.

In wider Sindh, the situation is relatively calm, although we suggest obtaining advice from Karachi's Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation office (PTDC; p164) before heading off on a trip. Dacoity (banditry) is not unknown in parts of rural Sindh, and on occasion armed guards may be advised for some areas. In the recent past this has included Moenjodaro, a major site for visitors to Sindh. We would caution against all travel by night.

of the Mughal throne in Delhi allowed them to grab the rest of Sindh.

Sindh became a relative backwater, a state that only changed when the British seized it in 1843 on the flimsiest of pretexts, as a military restorative after their thrashing in the first Anglo-Afghan war – 'like a bully who has been kicked in the street and goes home to beat his wife in revenge,' wrote a contemporary critic. The small port of Karachi came into its own, expanding rapidly and eventually becoming Pakistan's capital upon Independence in 1947.

Sindh's big landowning families (including that of the late Benazir Bhutto) and Mohajirs (Urdu-speaking refugees from newly formed India) continue to play a strong role in Pakistani politics, in power and opposition, although the province frequently hits the headlines these days for its increasing susceptibility to natural disasters, such as the calamitous floods of 2007.

Climate

The most pleasant time to visit this province is from late November to mid-February. Sindh's summer temperatures range from about 27°C to 50°C. The coast can reach humidity levels of over 65% during the summer monsoon (July through September), but temperatures do ease off slightly at night. In winter the nights can be surprisingly cool, so you'll need warm clothes.

KARACHI

☎ 021 / pop 14 million

Although Karachi lost its crown as Pakistan's capital to upstart Islamabad and the country's cultural elite look towards Lahore, Karachi is

the undisputed heart of the nation's economy. A true world mega-city, greater Karachi is spread over an ever-expanding 3500 sq km, perpetually sucking in workers from across the country. If you want to make it anywhere, the saying goes, you have to head for Karachi.

As a result, Karachi is one of the most diverse and cosmopolitan cities in Pakistan, with ethnic Sindhis matched by large numbers of Punjabis, Pashtuns and other nationalities. After Partition, Karachi received significant numbers of Mohajirs, who have since become the key players in Karachi politics under the MQM party that dominates the city. Karachi also has significant Christian and Hindu communities, and is a centre for Zoroastrianism.

This diverse mix doesn't always rub along well, and has given Karachi an unenviable reputation for civil unrest and communal violence. The 1980s and '90s were punctuated by regular outbreaks of rioting, and although these are now largely a thing of the past, real tensions still exist. The shadow of 9/11 has also fallen on Karachi, with attacks on Western targets and minority Shiites from Al-Qaeda-inspired extremists.

Few travellers choose to visit Karachi these days, and the insane traffic and frequent power cuts from an overstretched infrastructure can make any stay a challenge, particularly in the stifling heat of summer. But there's a definite buzz here, and a few days in Karachi can tell you more about life in modern Pakistan than any number of historic mosques or mountain treks.

HISTORY

Karachi's importance as a natural harbour at the mouth of the Indus was not lost on the British, but being isolated by vast areas of desert clearly stunted the imaginations of earlier rulers. It was a neglected possession of the Khan of Kalat until 1789, when it was ceded to the Talpurs of Balochistan.

The Talpurs erected a mud fort, yet Karachi remained a small fishing village until 1839, when the British started showing an interest in Sindh. Sir Charles (later Lord) Napier sent HMS *Wellesley* to Karachi. On its approach the Talpur rulers ordered a display of cannon fire for the visitors. This possibly misinterpreted welcome brought about the capture of the town without bloodshed. Four years later, with Karachi as their naval base, the British had annexed all of Sindh and shifted the capital here from Hyderabad, with Napier as the first governor.

By 1847 Karachi's population was 50,000 and construction took on a rapid pace. Streets were laid, highways and railways constructed, port facilities improved and Gothic and Victorian buildings erected. Prominent examples include Frere Hall, the Sindh High Court, the Sindh Assembly Building, St Andrew's Church, St Patrick's Cathedral and Empress Market (see the boxed text, p166, for these sights). From the mid-19th century, Karachi overshadowed Hyderabad as the commercial, educational and administrative centre of Sindh. Karachi was Pakistan's capital from 1947 until the new city of Islamabad was designated capital in 1959.

ORIENTATION

Karachi sprawls like no other city in Pakistan, which can sometimes make it hard for first-time visitors to grasp its layout.

The centre, with its many hotels, busy shopping district and British-era buildings, is known as Saddar (or Saddar Bazaar). On the skyline, high-rise hotels Sheraton and Avari Towers act as landmarks. The Three Swords and Two Swords Roundabouts help visitors get their bearings heading towards the southern seaside district of Clifton. This is one of Karachi's most exclusive areas and is next to the equally well-to-do DHA (Defence Housing Authority).

The airport is about 10km from central Karachi heading east from Saddar along Shahrah-e-Faisal Rd. The Cantonment Railway Station is south of Dr Daud Pota Rd in Railway Colony district, while the City Railway Station is on the south side of Chundrigar (formerly McLeod) Rd.

Maps

Major bookshops sell maps of Sindh; those published by Lion Art Press are particularly good. The PTDC office (p164) has a useful free fold-out map of the city.

INFORMATION

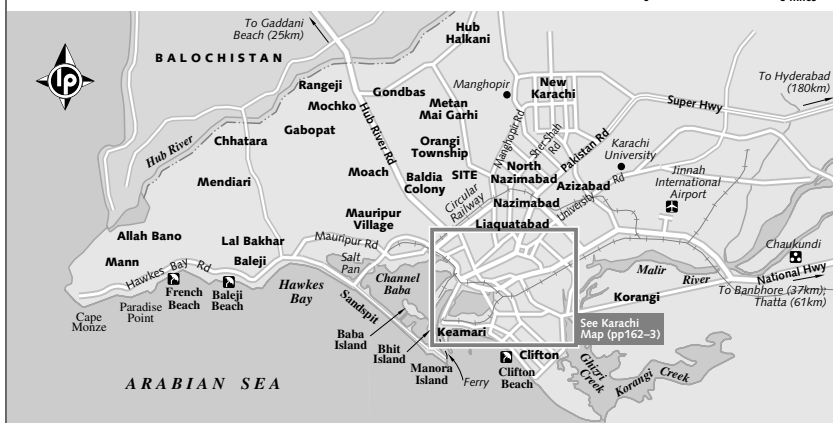
Bookshops

Karachi has a good selection of bookshops, offering everything from Sindh history to Harry Potter.

Ferozson's (Map pp162-3; Clifton Rd; ☎ 5830467)

Liberty Books (Map pp162-3; ☎ 5374153; Block 5,

GREATER KARACHI



THE EDHI FOUNDATION

In a country whose population is frequently left to provide for themselves, the **Edhi Foundation** (Map pp162-3; ☎ 2421920, 2424125; www.edhifoundation.com; Rangila St, Boulton Market, Sarafa Bazaar) has been filling many of the holes left in the state health-care system for the last 50 years.

Its founder, Abdul Sattar Edhi, was born in Gujarat, India but came to Karachi after the upheavals of Partition. Something of a philanthropist, he opened a free dispensary from the proceeds of the shop he was running, buying an ambulance to collect unclaimed dead bodies soon after a flu epidemic swept the city in 1957. His actions brought him local acclaim, and a flood of donations allowed him to found the Edhi Foundation, dedicated to helping the poorest sections of the population on a nondenominational basis. With the help of his wife Bilquis, a nurse, the foundation expanded into maternity care and adoption services for abandoned babies. Today Edhi virtually runs a parallel health-care network to that of the government.

The foundation has 250 centres of varying size across the country, including eight hospitals in Karachi alone. It has a fleet of over 400 ambulances (including air ambulances), operates humanitarian services for refugees and has played an important role in relief work in the Kashmir earthquake in 2005 and the floods in Sindh and Balochistan in 2007. There are nearly 20 homes for abandoned babies, along with blood banks, dispensaries and even shelters for rescued animals. The foundation plans to expand into drug rehabilitation and has announced an ambitious plan to build trauma centres every 100km on the national highways to reduce road deaths.

The Edhi Foundation is funded entirely by private donations, around 90% of which comes from within Pakistan. Donations from the government and religious organisations are politely declined. Along with its services, this independence makes it one of the most highly regarded institutions in the country.

Com 5/1 Boat Basin) Near Bar.B.Q. Tonight. Also branches at Park Towers, and Sheraton and Marriott Hotels.
Thomas & Thomas (Map p165; ☎ 5682220; Liaquat Rd, Saddar)

Cultural Centres

Karachi hosts plenty of cultural events, from art exhibitions to concerts and plays. Local newspapers have listings of forthcoming attractions. Particularly active cultural centres include:

Alliance Française (Map pp162-3; ☎ 5862864; Block 8, Plot St-1, Kehkashan, Clifton)

Arts Council of Pakistan (Map p165; ☎ 2635108; MR Kayani Rd) Probably the best place to see musical and theatrical performances.

British Council (Map pp162-3; ☎ 111424424; c/o British Deputy High Commission, Shahrah-e-Iran Rd, Clifton)

Emergency

Edhi Trust Ambulance (☎ 115)

Police (☎ 15)

Foreigners' Registration

Foreigners' Registration Office (FRO; Map pp162-3; ☎ 9212611; Central Police Station, Chundrigar Rd) Only nationals of 16 countries are required to register; see Visas, p378.

Internet Access

Internet outlets open and close with reckless abandon, so ask your hotel which is the closest. Prices are around Rs 40 an hour, but don't expect broadband. Two convenient joints in Saddar: **Cyberwaves** (Map p165; Dr Daud Pota Rd) Next to Gulf Hotel.

Internet Centre (Map p165; Dr Daud Pota Rd) Next to Chandni Hotel.

Medical Services

Aga Khan University Hospital (Map pp162-3; ☎ 4930056; Stadium Rd) One of the best hospitals in Pakistan.

Jinnah Hospital (Map pp162-3; ☎ 9201300; off Sharah-e-Faisal Rd)

Money

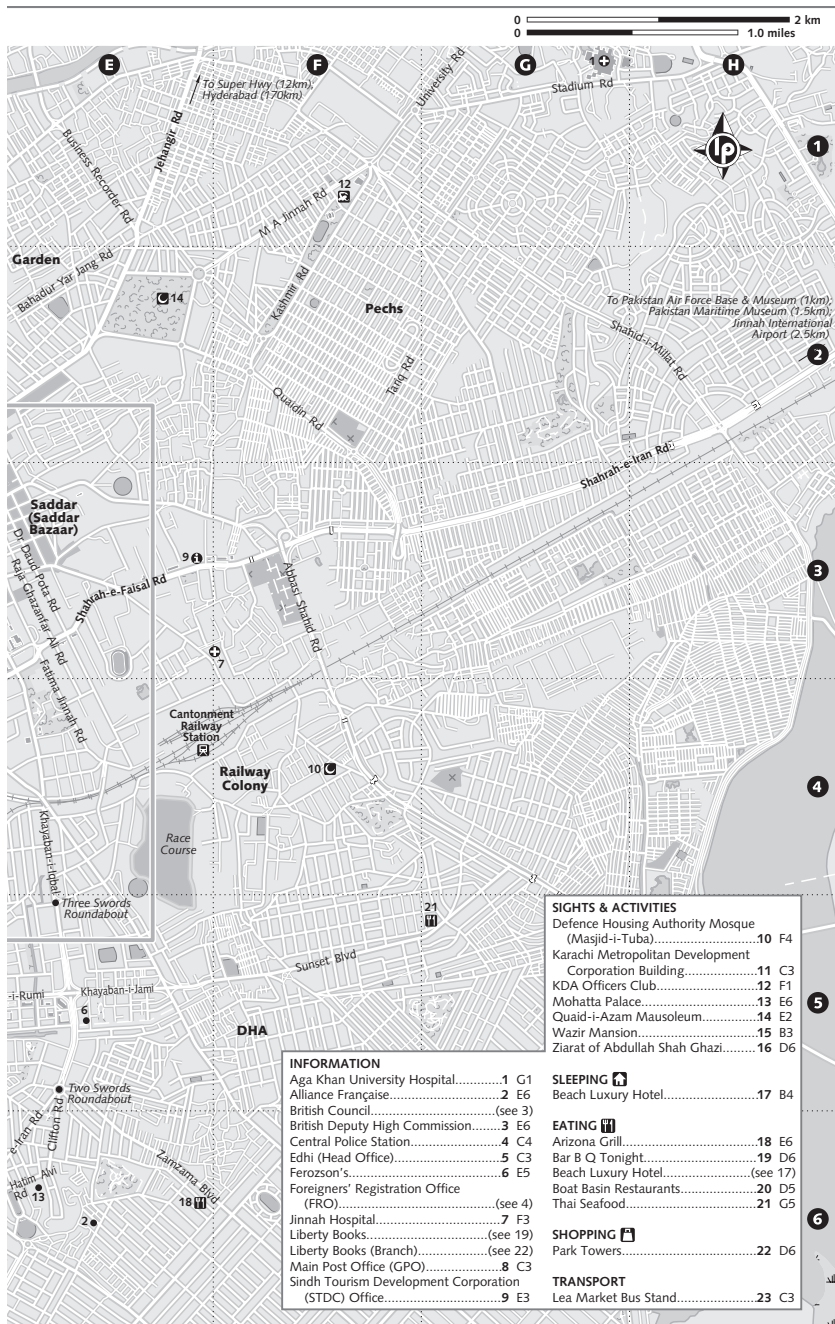
There are plenty of banks and private money-changers in Saddar and along Chundrigar Rd; ATMs are equally common. The airport banks are open 24 hours. It's easier to change cash though – travellers cheques will probably find you directed to the American Express office at the Shaheen Complex:

American Express (Map p165; ☎ 2630260; Shaheen Complex, Dr Ziauddin Ahmad Rd; ☎ 9am-1pm & 2-5pm Mon-Thu, 9am-12.30pm & 3-5pm Fri, 9am-noon Sat) Also

KARACHI



SINDH



has a Western Union counter for international money transfers. There's also a branch of HSBC and a 24-hour ATM in the same complex.

Post

Main post office (GPO; Map pp162-3; Chundrigar Rd) Near the City Railway Station.

Saddar post office (Map p165; cnr Sarmand & Abdullah Haroon Rds, Saddar) Opposite St Andrew's Church.

Telephone

If you need to make a call, you're never likely to be more than a minute away from a public call office (PCO) booth. To find local numbers, call ☎ 17. The *Karachi City Guide* (Rs 250), sold at most bookshops, is an excellent guide-cum-phone directory of business, updated twice annually.

Tourist Information

Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation office (PTDC; Map p165; ☎ 9206381; Shafi Chambers, Club Rd; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Thu & Sat, 8am-noon & 1-6pm Fri) Staff here are friendly and give good travel information about Karachi and surrounds, as well as free maps. The PTDC can also advise on travel in greater Sindh (including security information), help arrange guides, vehicle hire and trips to Moenjodaro.

Sindh Tourism Development Corporation office (STDC; Map pp162-3; ☎ 7788530; 1st fl, 114-115 Block C, Sea Breeze Plaza, Shahrah-e-Faisal Rd; ☎ 9am-1pm & 2-4pm Mon-Thu & Sat, 9am-noon Fri) The place to visit to book accommodation at Haleji Lake (p175), Sehwan Sharif (p176), Great Thar Desert (p176) and Larkana (see p179). Can also help arrange guided tours in Sindh.

Travel Agencies

Travel agencies are 10 a penny in Karachi, although few are geared to domestic tourism. For flights, there's a good cluster of agencies around Abdullah Haroon and Club Rds in Saddar, where many airlines also have offices.

Aero Travels (Map p165; ☎ 5223211; Abdullah Haroon Rd)

Bukhari Travels (Map p165; ☎ 5685111; Club Rd)

Travel Walji's (Map p165; ☎ 5660248; 13 Services Mess, Mereweather Rd) Can organise tours in Sindh, as well as flights.

Zeb Travels (Map pp162-3; ☎ 2411204; Hasrat Mohani Rd)

SIGHTS

Karachi is known as the 'City of the Quaid', for Pakistan's founder, Mohammed Ali Jinnah

(also called the Quaid-i-Azam, or 'Great Leader'), who died here in 1948. There are several sights linked to him, plus a variety of museums and British-era buildings. You can top things off – and get a blast of fresh air – with a trip to the beach.

National Museum of Pakistan

Pakistan's history, from early man to Independence, is well represented at this **museum** (Map p165; Dr Ziauddin Ahmad Rd; admission Rs 200; ☎ 10am-1pm & 2-5pm Thu & Sat-Tue, 9am-noon Fri).

The main galleries are upstairs. After a quick survey of Stone Age axes from Sukkur and Rohri, the museum gets into its stride with displays of some of the finest Indus Valley civilisation artefacts. The 6000-year-old pottery from Mehrgarh is quite lovely and surprisingly delicate, and is followed up by a room dedicated to Moenjodaro and Harappa. The iconic 'priest-king' bust is just one of many highlights, alongside a large array of fertility goddess cult figures, jewellery and seals covered with the mysterious Moenjodaran script.

The next room shifts the focus forward to Buddhist Pakistan, with displays of Gandharan art and an array of carved schist statues, mainly from Taxila and Takht-i-Bahi. The Islamic room next door has a small section on the early Arab settlements of Debal and Mansura, but is poorly labelled and only the 13th-century pottery from Persia really stands out.

The 'Freedom Movement' gallery has a collection of photos, paintings and newspaper articles relating to the Independence movement, frustratingly labelled mostly in Urdu. Other rooms have items of ethnological interest, including regional costumes from across Pakistan, traditional jewellery, militaria and wooden burial totems from the Kalasha valleys in North-West Frontier Province.

Quaid-i-Azam Mausoleum

This elegant **mausoleum** (Map pp162-3; MA Jinnah Rd; admission Rs 100; ☎ 10am-1pm & 2-5pm Thu & Sat-Tue, 9am-noon Fri) is both a monument and tomb to Jinnah. It's a starkly modernist building pointing both to Pakistan's past and future. An unadorned white marble cube is pierced on each side by a high and narrow arch, and then topped with a semicircular dome raised 31m high. Built between 1958 and 1968, the simple design works surprisingly well, and sits

CENTRAL KARACHI

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Liberty Books (Branch).....(see 34)
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Travel Walji's.....(see 7)

on a square pyramidal platform in the middle of a spacious park.

Flag Staff House & Wazir Mansion

Also known as Quaid-i-Azam House, this imposing British Raj mansion (Map p165; Fatima Jinnah Rd) was once owned by Mohammed Ali Jinnah. It was built over 100 years ago and has extensive grounds. His sister, Fatima Jinnah, lived in the house from 1948, and it's now home to the **Jinnah House Museum** (Quaid-i-Azam House Museum; Map p165; ☎ 9am-1pm & 2-4pm Thu & Sat-Tue, 9am-noon Fri). It's beautifully maintained; you can see Jinnah and Fatima's private apartments, with period furniture and accessories – well worth a visit.

A second Jinnah Museum is **Wazir Mansion** (Map pp162-3; Newnham Rd), where Jinnah was born and brought up. The house contains a few relics related to the revered leader. Advance warning is needed to visit, and should be arranged through the PTDC office (p164).

Pakistan Air Force (PAF) Museum

Pakistan's plentiful military museums always pose a problem – how to celebrate an institution that has repeatedly seized power

from the politicians and lost every war it's contested? The answer is just to focus on the hardware. This impressive outdoor **museum** (off Map pp162-3; PAF Base Faisal; admission Rs 50; ☎ 8am-10pm) does just that. Over 30 aircraft are on show, including an Indian Gnat that was captured by Pakistani forces in 1965. Guided tours are free, and it's blissfully uncrowded on weekdays, making it a fine escape from the rat race.

Pakistan Maritime Museum

Close to the PAF Museum, and just as well maintained, is the **Pakistan Maritime Museum** (off Map pp162-3; Habib Ibrahim Rehmatullah Rd; admission Rs 50; ☎ 9am-10pm). Galleries branch beyond the navy into general maritime history and sea life, and there are some good outdoor exhibits – we particularly liked the midget submarine and mine sweeper.

Defence Housing Authority Mosque (Masjid-i-Tuba)

Surely Pakistan's most eccentric mosque, this truly odd structure was built in the late 1960s. The low-slung mosque is contained under one vast dome with no supporting columns

KARACHI'S BRITISH RAJ BUILDINGS

Karachi has a fine stock of British-era buildings, mostly concentrated in the Saddar area. Their style is frequently called Mughal-Gothic, blending subcontinental themes and the traditional architecture of Victorian Britain to create something quite unique.

One of the most splendid examples is **Empress Market** (Map p165), named for Queen Victoria and built in 1889. It's one of Saddar's main landmarks and dominates its surroundings with its grand 50m clock tower. It still serves as a market, and the labyrinthine covered bazaar inside is a rude contrast to the mighty exterior.

Spiritual needs were also served, and provide some of Karachi's finest remaining examples of British Raj architecture. The Anglican **Holy Trinity Cathedral** (Map p165; Zaibun-Nisa St) has some fascinating plaques inside erected to the memory of British soldiers who died in various campaigns. The Anglican **St Andrew's Church** (Map p165; cnr Sarmand & Abdullah Haroon Rds), and the Roman Catholic **St Patrick's Cathedral** (Map p165; off Iraq Rd) are also of note. All have services at 9am every Sunday.

Many of the city's most architecturally interesting British Raj buildings are now used as government offices and aren't so easily accessible for sightseeing. This includes the palatial **Karachi Metropolitan Development Corporation Building** (Map pp162-3; Napier Rd), which was built in 1935 to mark George V's Silver Jubilee. It incorporates pointed Oriental cupolas at its four corners and has a lofty clock tower that's also domed in the same style. Other civic worthies are **Frere Hall** (Map p165; Bagh-e Jinnah), the red sandstone **Sindh High Court** (Map p165; Court Rd) and the **Sindh Assembly Building** (Map p165; Court Rd).

Don't just look for the grand buildings, however. Saddar is packed with British-era office blocks and shops with impressive frontages. Many are hidden behind signs and modern accretions, and others yet are crumbling for lack of attention, but all pay tribute to Karachi's role as one of the British empire's most important port cities.

or vaults. With a diameter of 72m, the tent-like dome claims to be the world's largest. Constructed of white marble, it has thousands of mirror tiles in its thermally proofed interior, giving the impression of twinkling stars. Visitors are welcome, although it's recommended to avoid prayer times and Fridays. Also known as the Defence Society Mosque, it's in DHA, about 1km southeast of the Cantonment Railway Station.

Clifton Beach

This is Karachi's busiest beach (Map pp162-3), although here you'll want to take a stroll rather than a swim. The beach itself is nothing special, made of mud-grey sand, but it's fun for people-spotting. Clifton is one of Karachi's posher neighbourhoods, but the beach attracts a complete cross section of society, so gives a good picture of Karachi at play. It's deserted before late afternoon, and at its most festive on Sunday. Camel and horse rides on the sands (Rs 40 and 50 respectively) are popular, while stands sell cold drinks, *chai* (tea) and grilled corn. A park and promenade was on the verge of completion when we visited, where you can stroll for Rs 10 entry.

On a hill above the beach is the **Ziarat of Abdullah Shah Gazi**, a green-domed shrine dedicated to a 9th-century Sufi. Qawwali (Islamic devotional singing) often takes place here on Thursday night. Beneath the shrine is a freshwater spring, which pilgrims have credited with mystical healing qualities. Also near the shrine is the **Mohatta Palace**, another residence of Jinnah's sister Fatima. It's a fine British Raj building, under restoration to be turned into a museum.

The main roundabout near the beach has plenty of buses, autorickshaws and taxis, many heading for Saddar (a taxi will set you back Rs 100).

Manora Island

This island (Map p160) sits a short ferry ride (Rs 40) from Keamari Harbour, the entrance to Karachi's busy port. The island was the site of the fort where Karachi's Talpur rulers surrendered to the British, who later erected a (still-intact) lighthouse in its place. The island has a small beach overlooked by the remains of a 19th-century Hindu temple. Swimming isn't recommended due to strong currents and pollution. There are food stalls around the beach, some selling fresh fish in batter.

The main reason to come to Manora Island is to enjoy the sea breezes on the ferry trip out here. Boats in the harbour will also run longer trips for the right fee, but note that photography is forbidden in the harbour area. A taxi from Saddar to the harbour costs around Rs 120.

Other Beaches

Beaches stretch almost continuously for hundreds of kilometres from Karachi into the Makran in Balochistan, but much of the coast is off limits to foreigners. Swimming away from recognised areas is unsafe due to strong undercurrents and heavy pollution. Some beaches also contain stinging jellyfish, especially during the monsoon, July to September. It's also best to avoid walking on any beach alone after dark.

Although not as busy as Clifton Beach, **Sandspit** (Map p160) is popular with families on Sunday and on holidays. Sandspit is a natural breakwater that prevents the harbour from silting up – a serious problem along most of the coastline – and played a large role in Karachi's emergence as the main port on this part of the Arabian Sea. A taxi from central Karachi costs around Rs 250, with buses from Lea Market (Map pp162-3) costing Rs 20.

The scenery ever-improves further along the coast. About 25km from central Karachi is **Hawkes Bay** (Map p160), and the beautiful **French Beach** (Map p160) is a further 14km on. The latter is relatively private, and is pretty much the reserve of Karachi's upper classes and expatriates. The last convenient beach is **Paradise Point** (Map p160), about 45 minutes from Karachi.

ACTIVITIES

In addition to the activities mentioned here, check out listings in local papers, which usually include courses and sports clubs.

Boating

At Keamari Harbour you can hire a boat to take you to Manora Island (left). Aside from the ferry, boats can be hired for around Rs 300 per hour according to size, up to around Rs 2000 for the whole day. Some captains can offer sea fishing, or even just crabbing within the harbour, both outside the monsoon season. The PTDC office can advise on more nautical options.

TURTLE SPOTTING

In the evening between September and November, you can spot giant Olive Ridley and green turtles along parts of the Karachi shoreline. The best way to see them is to go with a local naturalist or hire a boat from Keamari with a knowledgeable captain for the specific purpose of watching them. Hawkes Bay and Sandspit are the prime places to spot turtles.

A handy local contact is the green-turtle project officer at the **Sindh Wildlife Management Board** (Map p165; ☎ 9204951; Stachen Rd), who is responsible for their protection. The PTDC office (p164) can also advise on hiring boats and arrange tours with enough notice.

Swimming

Sea swimming on Clifton Beach is advised against because of pollution and strong currents. Instead, cool off in the pools of the top-end hotels, which also have health clubs (rates below are for nonguests).

Avari Towers (Map p165; ☎ 5660100; Fatima Jinnah Rd; per day Rs 550)

KDA Officers Club (Map pp162-3; Kashmir Rd; per day Rs 100) The Olympic-sized public pool at the Officers Club is considerably cheaper than swimming at hotels, but is effectively men-only.

Marriott Hotel (Map p165; ☎ 5682011; 9 Abdullah Haroon Rd; per day Rs 250)

Pearl Continental (Map p165; ☎ 5685021; Club Rd; per day Rs 500) It costs Rs 660 to use both the pool and health club.

SLEEPING

Compared with other cities, Karachi has a glut of hotel rooms, particularly at the higher end of the scale. As a result, you shouldn't be afraid of asking for a discount from the rack rates, as prices can often tumble considerably if the hotel isn't full.

At the cheaper end of the range, beware Karachi's daily power cuts. No electricity means no fan and many budget hotels don't have their own generators (or won't run them during the day). This can make summers especially a trying time to visit. The usual rule of big cities meaning big noise also applies – ask for a quiet room and come armed with earplugs.

Most hotels have different room categories – the more you pay, the better the room. Here we provide only the cheapest rates.

Budget

Many of the cheapest hotels are dotted around Dr Daud Pota Rd in the Saddar area, south of Empress Market. Although this locale can be noisy, it's close to cheap eateries and has easy access to public transport. Most places have seen better days, with worn bed linen, squat toilets, and soap or paper generally only provided on request.

Budget hotels here are noticeably male-dominated and solo women may feel uncomfortable staying at them. Ideally, women should try to check out a few places first to see which is most congenial, although many solo female travellers opt for midrange accommodation in Karachi.

YMCA (Map p165; ☎/fax 5681238; Strachen Rd; s/d Rs 150/200) The YMCA only accepts men and married couples (no single women), and meals are not available. There's a Rs 100 temporary membership fee (valid for one month). Low on character, comfort and service, but very cheap. Advance bookings are recommended as it's often full.

YWCA (Map p165; ☎/fax 7732738; MA Jinnah Rd; r per person Rs 200) This women-only lodging is located in a girls' school compound. The rooms are nothing flash, but the YWCA is probably the safest and most welcoming budget choice for single women. There's a small kitchen for self-caterers. The gates are locked at 10pm. Advance reservations are recommended.

Hotel de Paris (Map p165; ☎ 5677432; Dr Daud Pota Rd; s/d Rs 200/275) More of a rock-bottom option – you're a long way from the city of romance with this selection of basic but occasionally airy rooms. A Rs 50 premium will get you a TV with as many Urdu soap operas as you can handle.

Chandni Hotel (Map p165; ☎ 5674474; B-2-1 10/1 Dr Daud Pota Rd; s/d Rs 200/280) Mediocre but certainly cheap, the Chandni offers thinning sheets and slightly grubby bathrooms. Staff are friendly though, and for an extra Rs 20 will give you a room with a carpet.

Al-Bilal Hotel (Map p165; ☎ 5681176; 233 Sohrah Katrak Rd; s/d Rs 200/300) One of several cheapies on this busy street, this is one of the better budget choices, with small but reasonably good rooms, and fairly basic facilities.

Hotel Ocean (Map p165; ☎ 5681922; 241 Sohrah Katrak Rd; s/d Rs 300/350) More of the same as the Al-Bilal. Rooms are accordingly simple, but staff roll out a friendly Pashtun welcome to guests.

Hotel Karachi (Map p165; ☎ 5685326; 236 Sohrab Katrak Rd; s/d Rs 300/400) The dark-wood lobby gives a good first impression here, and rooms are kept clean and tidy. But the lack of windows makes it a bad choice for claustrophobes – only air bricks let in any ventilation or light (and noise).

Hotel United (Map p165; ☎ 5217125; Dr Daud Pota Rd; s/d/tr Rs 500/600/750; 🍷) Rooms here are fairly clean and verging on the comfortable. The entrance is down a side alley rather than on the main street, and the hotel sits above a bakery, making the whole place smell of dough and sweets.

Hotel Reliance (Map p165; ☎ 5211546; Dr Daud Pota Rd; s/d from Rs 600/800; 🍷) This hotel is trying to get into the midrange bracket and is better than initial impressions would imply. Good value for the price, the few rooms with air-con attract a Rs 600 premium.

Midrange

Karachi's midrange hotels come in a broad spectrum of prices, with some good choices and discounts often available. A combined government/service tax of 23.6% is levied on all bills, not included in the rates listed here, although breakfast is usually thrown in. All hotels listed have a restaurant and room service, and fridges in rooms.

Gulf Hotel (Map p165; ☎ 5661235; gulfhtl@hotmail.com; Dr Daud Pota Rd; s/d Rs 1400/2200; 🍷) Pretty simple as midrange options go, but reasonable for the price. Nicer 'executive' rooms have a Rs 400 premium and air-con, but whichever you go for try to avoid the rooms looking gloomily onto the concrete wall at the back of the hotel.

Paradise Hotel (Map p165; ☎ 5680011; hotel.paradise4@hotmail.com; 2nd fl, 271 Abdullah Haroon Rd; Rs s/d 2000/3000; 🍷) This tall hotel has rooms with views looking over Saddar while rising above the worst of the street noise. Rooms are larger than average and fairly comfortable – they're good value for the price. The hotel entrance is a little confusing initially; take the lift from the ground-floor entrance to get to reception.

Bloom Luxury Hotel (Map p165; ☎ 5675261; baz.zai@cyber.net.pk; Golf Club Rd; s/d Rs 2100/3950; 🍷) In a quieter area off Dr Daud Pota Rd, this hotel is a nice choice, sitting cleanly at the top end of the midrange hotels in terms of quality. Rooms are well appointed (some have balconies), and your rupees seem to go further here

than at comparably priced hotels elsewhere in the city.

Sarawan Hotel (Map p165; ☎ 5216001; www.hotel.sarawan.com; Raja Ghazanfar Ali Rd; s/d Rs 2800/4500; 🍷) The Sarawan has a good central location in Saddar while managing to avoid the worst of its bustle. Rooms are generously sized, and the whole is solidly reliable if lacking glamour. A decent choice, all in all.

Hotel Sky Towers (Map p165; ☎ 5675211; hotelsky.towers@hotmail.com; Raja Ghazanfar Ali Rd; s/d Rs 3000/4326; 🍷) An acceptable midrange hotel, although a bit uninspiring and knocked around the edges. Rooms range in quality so see a few before checking in. Decent enough to rest in but unlikely to raise any passions.

ourpick Beach Luxury Hotel (Map pp162-3; ☎ 5611031; beachlux@khi.comsats.net.pk; off Moulvi Talamuddin Khan Rd; s/d Rs 3920/5200; 🍷 🍷) If you want to get slightly away from things, this hotel in a quiet area is worth it for its large grounds and proximity to the sea. All rooms look out past palm trees over the water and have recently seen a refit that has improved standards considerably. Service is excellent, and there's a charming 'floating restaurant' (see p171) for night-time dining.

Hotel Mehran (Map p165; ☎ 5660851; www.hotel.mehran.com; Shahrah-e-Faisal Rd; s/d from Rs 4500/7650; 🍷) Stuck halfway between midrange and top end, the Hotel Mehran is a supremely comfortable choice for the price. Having recently undergone a refit, rooms are clean and modern, and there's a good restaurant and some handy shops and a bank in the grounds. Discounts are frequently there for the asking.

Top End

Karachi has the best selection of top-end hotels in the country. Security tends to be strict, so expect metal detectors and bag searches on entry. Prices listed here exclude the 23.6% tax. Breakfasts are usually included, along with complimentary airport transfers. Always ask for a discount – prices can frequently drop by over 50%, particularly in summer.

Regent Plaza Hotel (Map p165; ☎ 5660611; www.rphcc.com; Shahrah-e-Faisal Rd; s/d Rs 12,000/15,000; 🍷 🍷 🍷) This hotel tries hard to offer top-end facilities at the bottom end of the price range. Mostly it does an excellent job, although an excess of ostentatious furniture can cut your room to manoeuvre. Good marks otherwise, and with a bonus point for the ludicrous ziggurat-like chandelier in reception.

Marriott Hotel (Map p165; ☎ 5682011; www.marriott.com; 9 Abdullah Haroon Rd; s/d Rs 25,000/35,000; 🍷 🍴 🚰) Located opposite the Sheraton Hotel (below), the Marriott has similarly tight security due to the close proximity of the US consulate. This has scared travellers off in the past, but the quality of the hotel at least is not in dispute, with elegant rooms, good service and the expected complement of restaurants, business and health facilities.

Sheraton Hotel (Map p165; ☎ 5681021; www.sheraton.com/karachi; Club Rd; s/d Rs 25,000/37,000; 🍷 🍴 🚰) The common areas of the Sheraton feel a little tired compared with the Pearl Continental's opulence, but an extensive renovation programme means that it's catching up fast. As a result, rooms vary according to price – from slightly old-fashioned to the glitzy Tower Rooms, possibly the swankiest hotel rooms currently on offer in the city. Elsewhere in the hotel there are five restaurants, the usual pool/health club combination and an excellent branch of Liberty Books.

Avari Towers (Map p165; ☎ 5660100; www.avari.com; Fatima Jinnah Rd; s/d 27,100/29,000; 🍷 🍴 🚰) As befits its name, Avari Towers literally looms over the competition as the tallest hotel in town. It is a fine choice and doesn't skimp on its guests, offering complimentary services like minibars where other hotels charge. Rooms are restrained (except for a surfeit of pillows), and there are three restaurants offering Japanese, Chinese and barbecue, the latter on a rooftop that has the best views in the city. Also tucked away is a bar serving alcohol.

Pearl Continental (Map p165; ☎ 5685021; www.pchotels.com.pk; Club Rd; s/d Rs 28,000/46,000; 🍷 🍴 🚰) Karachi's most sophisticated hotel by a head, the PC has stylish rooms, slick service, various amenities and a handful of top restaurants: Sakura serves the best Japanese food in town and the Royal Elephant serves excellent Thai cuisine, and there's a nice coffee shop in the lobby (wi-fi enabled). High standards mean that the PC is the one top-end hotel that has no trouble in filling its rooms, so is the one place where discounts are few and far between.

EATING

Karachi has one of the widest ranges of restaurants in Pakistan, so it's worth dining out as much as you can. Places tend to open for dinner around 7.30pm but really get going after 9pm – eating before then often means having

the place to yourself. Dinner winds up around midnight. Mid- to upper-end restaurants attract a tax of 15%, not included here unless otherwise stated, but there's often live music or other entertainment as compensation. Karachi's top hotels offer further fine-dining options to the listings here, but be prepared to bid adieu to a wad of cash.

Restaurants

Bar.B.Q Tonight (Map pp162-3; near Boat Basin, Clifton; mains Rs 80-210; 🍷 dinner) A restaurant with a great atmosphere that delivers exactly what its name promises. Grab a seat outdoors, or allow a waiter to find you a table inside (ask for the rooftop). The chicken tikka and Afghan kebabs never disappoint, but we fell in love with the roast mutton leg, with the meat falling off the bone (Rs 450).

Arizona Grill (Map pp162-3; ☎ 5830351; 20C 2nd Commercial Lane, Zamzama Blvd; mains Rs 135-425; 🍷 lunch & dinner; 🍷) Those seeking a change from Pakistani fare will relish their choices here – all juicy steaks, pasta and salads, pepped up with some great fruit cocktails. Pepper steak with fries and salad (Rs 310) hits the spot, but we also found the spinach ravioli well worth investigating for palates needing a break from meat-heavy menus.

Village Garden Restaurant (Map p165; ☎ 5212880; Palace Cinema Bldg, Civil Lines; mains Rs 140-550; 🍷 dinner) Karachi's oldest restaurant, the Village Garden is a pleasant place to sit in the open air and catch a breeze. The menu here is heavy on barbecued meat, plus some tasty *karais* (food braised with vegetables, served bubbling in its own pan) and the like. The TV in the middle of the restaurant is permanently tuned to the cricket.

Alpha (Map p165; ☎ 5214177; Sarwar Shahid Rd; mains from Rs 150; 🍷 lunch & dinner; 🍷) Up some narrow stairs, the low ceiling, low lights and wood-panelled walls give this place a hushed ambience that makes it popular with couples. Food is Pakistani and Chinese, with a good selection of vegetarian dishes served in big, inexpensive portions.

our pick Purple Haze (off Map pp162-3; ☎ 5860941; 66C-68C 25th St, Tauheed Commercial, DHA; mains Rs 150-750; 🍷 lunch & dinner; 🍷) Purple Haze is a plush, dimly lit café-style eatery that attracts the young and hip side of Karachi life. There's wi-fi, and frequent live music at the weekends, from traditional to Urdu hip-hop. The food's not bad either, leaning towards Western and

fusion styles, from fancy burgers and noodles to scrumptious cheesecake and great coffee.

Café Zouk (off Map pp162-3; ☎ 5856491; 27C Khayaban-e-Shamsher, Phase 5, DHA; mains Rs 199-369; ☎ lunch & dinner; ☎) Another popular choice with Karachi's middle and upper classes, but attracting more families rather than bright young things. The menu leans towards Continental and Thai food, with some great surprises like chilli-stuffed prawns.

Evolution (off Map pp162-3; ☎ 5860941; 66C-68C 25th St, Tauheed Commercial, DHA; mains Rs 249-739; ☎ lunch & dinner; ☎) In the same building as Purple Haze, Evolution remains one of the cooler places to eat – and be seen – in Karachi. It's popular with the sons and daughters of Karachi's upper-crust families. Evolution only serves a buffet at lunch (Rs 300) but has an 'around-the-world' à la carte theme at dinner, with Pakistani, Italian, Thai, Continental and Japanese dishes. You name it, they've probably offered it. Good food in classy surroundings.

Thai Seafood (off Map pp162-3; ☎ 5805522; 3C Old Sunset Blvd, Phase II DHA; mains Rs 290-950; ☎ lunch & dinner; ☎) Stepping into the icy air of this modern restaurant is delicious, and the food almost matches. The menu has a wide range of Thai and Chinese dishes, with an excellent-value three-course set menu for Rs 299. Service is a bit fussy without actually being brilliant, and waiters sometimes insist on bringing all three courses at once. Steamed squid with lemon grass and the fish cakes with chilli are winners.

Beach Luxury Hotel (Map pp162-3; ☎ 5611031; off Moulvi Talamuddin Khan Rd; buffet Rs 350; ☎ dinner) A 'floating restaurant' in the grounds of this hotel makes a great setting for dinner. The buffet has a wide selection of Pakistani, Chinese and Continental dishes, with seafood well represented and plenty of salad. Popular with families, it also has live music most nights, giving the place a lively atmosphere.

Quick Eats

For cheap eats, popular options include buzzing Boat Basin, Saddar (Dr Daud Pota Rd is good for tighter budgets), around Mereweather Tower and along Burnes Rd.

Krispy Broast Chicken (Map p165; Raja Ghazanfar Ali Rd; mains from Rs 80; ☎ lunch & dinner) A no-frills fast-food eatery, popular with workers on lunch breaks and evening diners alike. The menu is vast, from *karai* and kebabs to burgers and biryani. Cheap and filling.

Boat Basin Restaurants (Map pp162-3; Clifton; ☎ dinner) Over 40 simple but good-value eateries are strung along this informal open-air promenade on the edge of Clifton. It's pretty quiet during the day, getting going after 9pm. It's perennially popular with Karachi society as a place to eat and meet; alfresco dining is particularly pleasant here during the cooler months. Most menus sport ubiquitous Pakistani and fast-food fare and you can fill up for Rs 100 to Rs 200.

DRINKING

To buy alcohol in Karachi you have to get a permit issued by the **Excise Department** (Map p165; ☎ 9203326; Block 11, Sindh Secretariat) You'll need your passport and a photocopy of its front pages, Pakistani visa and entry stamp. The only decent alternative we found was the bar at Avari Towers hotel (opposite) – take your passport and dress smartly.

ENTERTAINMENT

While Karachi doesn't have any nightclubs, it has some fantastic restaurants that really spring to life after dark. Being a regional capital, musical and theatrical performances often take place; see local newspapers for current details. MA Jinnah Rd is the place to catch a film, with the Capri, Prince and Nishat cinemas (see Map p165) showing English-language films.

SHOPPING

The economic heart of Pakistan, Karachi is also the country's marketplace. The main shopping district is Saddar (Map p165), a conglomeration of historic bazaars, modern shopping centres and tourist shops selling everything from carpets and jewellery to clothing and assorted souvenirs. In every direction the footpaths are crowded with stalls flogging all manner of wares. It's a great place for handicraft shopping, from Kashmiri embroidery to Swati carved woodwork. Saddar's main bazaar is the jam-packed central **Bohri Bazaar** (Map p165). Another good place is **Zainab Market** (Map p165), further south. Cooperative handicraft centres and the more expensive emporiums are on Abdullah Haroon Rd, Zaibun-Nisa St and Club Rd. For carpets try the shops along Zaibun-Nisa St near Bohri Bazaar.

For modern shops squarely aimed at the city's upper class, there are a number of up-market department stores and various downtown boutiques. One slick shopping mall is

Clifton's **Park Towers** (Map pp162-3), which has plenty of designerware as well as an upbeat food court.

Most shops in Karachi are closed on Sunday. Opening hours vary, but most tend to operate from around 10.30am to 8pm or 9pm.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Karachi's international and domestic air terminals are both located at the **Jinnah International Airport** (Map p160; ☎ 4572011, 9248792), about 10km east of the city centre. You can buy onward domestic air tickets here 24 hours a day outside the arrival terminal. There are money-exchange counters and ATMs in the arrival hall and before you clear customs upon departure. The international departure terminal (after customs) has some overpriced handicraft shops, while the domestic terminal has a good bookshop.

Pakistan International Airlines (PIA; www.piac.com.pk) operates the most comprehensive domestic service. The busiest routes are to Islamabad (Rs 3680, 1¼ hours, five daily) and Lahore (Rs 4280, 1¼ hours, seven daily), along with daily flights to Peshawar (Rs 7920, two hours), Quetta (Rs 6250, one hour), Faisalabad (Rs 3720, 90 minutes), Multan (Rs 4280, 90 minutes) and Gwadar. All major cities are served, with other useful flights including to Moenjodaro (Rs 3300, four times weekly). Where there are multiple daily departures, the night services at unsovable hours are slightly cheaper. Check online for full timetables.

Air Blue runs three times a day to Islamabad and Lahore and daily to Quetta. Shaheen Air flies to Lahore (daily except Saturday) and three times weekly to Quetta and Peshawar. Aero Asia has services to Islamabad (up to five daily), Lahore (three daily), and three times weekly to Peshawar, Faisalabad and Multan. Fares are all within touching distance of each other and PIA.

AIRLINE OFFICES

The four domestic airlines:

Aero Asia (Map p165; ☎ 2783033; IEP Bldg, Shahrah-e-Faisal Rd)

Air Blue (Map p165; ☎ 2247258; Strachen Rd)

PIA office (Map p165; ☎ 9206721; Strachen Rd;

☎ 9am-9pm) Has separate departments for international and domestic flights.

Shaheen Air (Map p165; ☎ 5685590; Strachen Rd)

Various international airlines have offices in central Karachi, including the following:

Air Arabia (Map p165; ☎ 5693817; Lotia Bldg, Abdullah Haroon Rd)

British Airways (Map p165; ☎ 5686076; Marriott Hotel, 9 Abdullah Haroon Rd)

Cathay Pacific (Map p165; ☎ 5660406; Metropole Hotel, Club Rd)

Emirates (Map p165; ☎ 5683377; 265A RA Lines Sarwar Rd)

Gulf Air (Map p165; ☎ 5675231; Kashif Centre, Shahrah-e-Faisal Rd)

Indian Airlines (Map p165; ☎ 2625023; 1st fl, Shaheen Complex, Dr Ziauddin Ahmad Rd)

Iran Air (Map p165; ☎ 5216293; Hotel Mehran, Shahrah-e-Faisal Rd)

KLM (Map p165; ☎ 5689071; Club Rd)

Singapore Airlines (Map p165; ☎ 5683078; 2-3 Services Club Bldg, Mereweather Rd)

Thai Airways (Map p165; ☎ 5660160; Metropole Hotel, Club Rd)

Bus

There are plentiful long-distance bus companies, mostly clustered in and around the **Blue Lines Bus Station** (Map p165; Dr Daud Pota Rd) near Cantonment Railway Station. These include **Blue Lines** (☎ 5660821) and **Green Lines** (☎ 5652665). Buses run out at all times from here to Lahore (Rs 900, 22 hours), Larkana (Rs 400, seven hours) and Multan (Rs 450, 13 hours), among other destinations. For Quetta (Rs 650, 13 hours) go to Lea Market, from where you'll also find cheaper buses to destinations across Sindh.

The comfortable Daewoo service popular in the north was due to commence operating from Karachi with services to Punjab via Hyderabad as we went to press.

Train

Karachi has two main train stations – City Railway Station and Cantonment Railway Station. About the same number of trains originate from each, but all trains from City also stop at Cantonment soon after. To be sure of a seat, get on at the departure terminus. Train seats fill up quickly so book as far in advance as possible (particularly important for fast trains and the more expensive classes).

Reservations can be made at either the **City booking office** (☎ 9213540, 9213537; ☎ 9am-2pm) or the **Cantonment booking office** (☎ 9213565; ☎ 9am-2pm) but the foreigner/student concessions can only be given at the former

MAJOR TRAINS FROM KARACHI

Destination	Train	Departure	Duration	Fare
Lahore	<i>Karakoram Express</i>	4pm	16-18hr	A/B/C/E Rs 580/660/1300/1710
Larkana	<i>Bolan Mail</i>	noon	9½hr	A/B/F Rs 180/325/743
Multan	<i>Tezgam Express</i>	4.45pm	13¼hr	A/B/F Rs 355/430/1300
Peshawar	<i>Awam Express</i>	8am	31¾hr	A/B/C Rs 615/690/1430
Quetta	<i>Balochistan Express</i>	5.30pm	16hr	A/B/C/F Rs 415/490/930/2070
Rawalpindi	<i>Tezgam Express</i>	4.45pm	25-26hr	A/B/C/F Rs 630/1125/1880/2880

Abbreviations:

A = Economy

B = First-class sleeper

C = Air-conditioned lower

D = Air-conditioned parlour

E = Air-conditioned sleeper

(irrespective of which station the train departs from). Go to the superintendent's office at the Commercial Branch on the 1st floor. Major trains from Karachi are listed in the boxed text (above), but timetables and fares are subject to change. You can double-check at the station or direct with **Pakistan Railways** (☎ 117; www.pakrail.com), or with the *Time & Fare Table* (Rs 25), which is updated twice yearly and is often sold at stations. These sources will also have additional train services not mentioned in the boxed text.

GETTING AROUND

Traffic jams are a frustrating constant of Karachi life, so bear this in mind if you've got a connection or appointment to make.

To/From the Airport

Several reliable 24-hour radio cab firms operate from outside the arrivals terminal at Jinnah International Airport, including **Metro Radio Cabs** (☎ 45791129) and **Pearl Radio Cab** (☎ 4604465). Charges are set at Rs 15 per kilometre (minimum fare Rs 160) with airport transfers capped at Rs 310.

A cheaper (and slower) option to Saddar is the minibus D3 (Rs 15) from outside the terminal to Empress Market in Saddar Bazaar. Top-end (and many midrange) hotels offer complimentary airport transfers when given advance notice.

Bus & Minibus

City bus and minibus routes crisscross Karachi but they're a confusing bet for the short-term visitor, with numbers, destinations and stops poorly marked, and vehicles crowded to bursting. But they can be fun too if you're that way inclined, with fares starting

at Rs 4 and never topping Rs 20. Potentially useful routes from Empress Market include Clifton Beach (bus 20), Keamari Harbour via Mereweather Tower (buses 2K, W11, 6B and 8A), and the Quaid-i-Azam Mausoleum (bus 2K). *Karachi City Guide* has a full listing of routes. The most salubrious local buses are run by the Metro Bus Service and the Green Bus Service, which are a little more expensive than others but more comfortable and usually less crowded. They cover a limited area, predominantly between Saddar, Clifton and the city centre. You can catch them at Saddar's Empress Market.

Car

It's easier to hire a care with driver than try to navigate Karachi's insane traffic yourself. **Pearl Radio Cab** (☎ 4604465) charges Rs 1500 per day including fuel, if you're staying in the city limits and travel less than 100km. **Travel Walji's** (Map p165; ☎ 5660248; 13 Services Mess, Mereweather Rd) is recommended for self-drive cars. Prices are around Rs 2400 per day (without fuel; unlimited mileage).

Taxi & Autorickshaw

Yellow taxis or autorickshaws are the quickest ways to get around Karachi, although the latter leave you prone to an overdose of exhaust fumes. Except in the unlikely event of the taxi driver having a working meter, you'll need to set your fare before driving off. From Saddar a taxi should take you to Clifton for Rs 100 to Rs120, and about Rs 70 to the City or Cantonment Railway Stations. Autorickshaws are around half the price, and the drivers never have change.

The radio taxi firms (see left) can also be hired as regular cabs for the charges listed.

THE SHIP-BREAKERS OF GADDANI

What happens to a ship when it's reached the end of its natural life? If it's an oil tanker, there's a good chance it'll wind up on Gaddani beach, 48km along the coast from Karachi.

As graveyards go, it's an almost unbelievable place – a wrecker's yard re-imagined through the lens of Dante's *Inferno*. Rather than the mechanised docks of the developed world, at Gaddani everything is done by hand. Ships are literally hauled onto the beach and set upon by an army of workers, stripping away the superstructure so it can be beached higher and higher on the sands until the last broken remnants can be hauled away by a fleet of trucks. The most valuable commodity is ship plate – steel that can be sold or sent to mills to be rolled into new products.

Environmentalists consider the industry to be one of the most dangerous in the world. Ship-breaking generates large volumes of hazardous waste, from toxic paints and leaking petroleum to asbestos. Gaddani beach itself is black with years of oil slicks. Health problems among workers abound, and accidental deaths from physical injuries are not uncommon.

Ironically, the tide may be going out for Gaddani. High import duties on scrap and competition from India and Bangladesh have reduced the beach to a shadow of its 1980s boom period. Visitors aren't encouraged – while there is no official ban, we've heard of travellers being arrested for taking photos at such a 'sensitive' area.

AROUND KARACHI

MANGHOPIR

About 25km north of Karachi is Manghopir, with its **shrine** to the Muslim saint Pir Mangho. The shrine is guarded by snub-nosed crocodiles. Mangho arrived from Arabia in the 13th century and, according to legend, brought the crocodiles with him in his hair in the form of head lice. A sulphur **thermal spring** here is said to be therapeutic for skin diseases and other afflictions. Take a bus here from the Empress Market in Karachi (Rs 18, one hour).

CHAUKUNDI

Graveyards stretch for many kilometres west along the coast, but the largest and most impressive tombs and mausoleums are concentrated at Chaukundi. The buildings are constructed of slabs of rock, stacked into oblong pyramids of cubical stone and carved with exquisite designs.

Their history is unrecorded, but most are believed to date from the 13th to 16th centuries. One metre to 3m high, the 100 or so tombs in the main site are carved with reliefs so smooth that they have the appearance of woodcarvings or sand sculptures.

Chaukundi is 27km east of Karachi signed off the National Hwy. You can take a return taxi from Karachi (Rs 700) or take the Thatta bus (Rs 65, 30 minutes) from Lea Market in the hope of hitching a lift back to Karachi.

THE INTERIOR

The interior of Sindh is a seldom-visited part of Pakistan, although not without interest. The main highway north roughly follows the Indus, veering off to reveal the extent to which mass irrigation has turned a barren region into a green breadbasket. Wilder country is to the north and west in the Great Thar Desert.

Travel in Sindh's interior is subject to security concerns, particularly off the main roads, so you're advised to contact the Karachi PTDC (p164) before planning a trip.

KARACHI TO HYDERABAD Banbhore

Despite being some way inland, Banbhore is believed to be the ancient port of Debal (or Daibul), where the Arab conqueror Mohammed bin Qasim landed in the 8th century in his attempt to bring Islam to the region. Silt deposits from the Indus have long consigned it to history.

Banbhore is interesting to visit for the extensive ruins of the different historical periods so far uncovered: Scythian-Parthian, Buddhist, Hindu and Islamic – there's an 8th-century mosque here, possibly the oldest on the subcontinent. A small **museum** (admission Rs 5; ☎ 10am-5pm Thu-Tue) has various finds from the site.

Banbhore is about 64km east of Karachi and 5km south of the National Hwy to Thatta. It can be reached by bus from Lea Market

in Karachi – the bus drops you 3km from Banbhore and you then walk to the ruins – or from Thatta via Gharo on the National Hwy.

Haleji Lake

This lake is said to be one of the largest waterfowl sanctuaries in Asia. Thousands of birds from over 75 species migrate from as far as Siberia during winter. Visitors include flamingos, pelicans, pheasant-tailed jacana, herons, partridges and egrets. The lake is 87km from Karachi and 15km before Thatta, on a turning off the National Hwy just west of the village of Gujjo. Private transport is needed to get here.

STDC runs a small bungalow here. Contact its **Karachi office** (Map pp162-3; ☎ 021-7788530; 1st fl, 114-115 Block C, Sea Breeze Plaza, Shahrah-e-Faisal Rd; ☎ 9am-1pm & 2-4pm Mon-Thu & Sat, 9am-noon Fri) for prices and (mandatory) reservations.

Makli Hill

A vast necropolis, a couple of kilometres before Thatta on the road from Karachi, covers some 15 sq km of this hill and is said to contain over one million graves. The graves consist of mainly sandstone, exquisitely carved with geometric and floral designs like those at Chaukundi. Among the more significant tombs is that of Turkhan ruler **Mirza Jani Beg**. It was built in 1599 and is made of glazed bricks. North of this is the imposing **Mausoleum of Nawab Isa Khan**, former Mughal governor of Sindh. The **Mausoleum of Diwan Shurfa Khan**, built in 1638, is slightly to the northwest, a square structure with squat round towers at each corner. A couple of kilometres north, the **Tomb of Jam Nizamuddin** is a 16th-century square stone building.

There's a **PTDC office** (☎ 029-771319; ☎ 9am-5pm Sat-Thu, 9am-noon Fri) at Makli Hill, near the site. From Karachi's Lea Market catch a bus to Makli Hill (Rs 50, three hours).

Thatta

Once a large and prosperous city, Thatta declined after the Indus changed course in the early 18th century. According to some accounts, Alexander the Great's army rested here before marching on into the Makran. From the 14th century, Thatta was important as Sindh's capital under four Muslim dynasties and as a centre for Islamic arts. However, in 1739 the capital was moved to Khudabad,

then to Hyderabad, and only three years later Thatta was sacked by the Persian Nadir Shah. Although it never regained its importance, many of the old buildings here and in the nearby Makli Hill still stand as reminders of better days.

The town is dominated by the beautiful World Heritage-listed **Shah Jahan Mosque**, which was built between 1644 and 1647. Its 93 domes around a central courtyard give it superb acoustics, while wind towers provide natural air-conditioning. The tilework – with wide-ranging shades of blue – and the calligraphy are equally impressive, and it is one of Pakistan's loveliest mosques. It's said that Shah Jahan built the mosque to repay the townspeople for their hospitality when he sought refuge here after revolting against his father, the Mughal emperor Jehangir.

Thatta is 98km east of Karachi, and you can catch a bus here from Karachi's Lea Market (Rs 75, three hours).

HYDERABAD

☎ 0221 / pop 1.87 million

The second-largest city in Sindh, Hyderabad is on the Indus about 180km northeast of Karachi. It's of little tourist interest and most foreigners who come here do so on specific business, although its sprawling bazaars are good for souvenir hunting.

Sights

In 1768 the Kalhora rulers constructed the **Shah Makkai Fort** here. Originally half a square kilometre in area, today little more than the 15m-high wall, the entrance and one interior room still stand. On the north side of the hill on which Hyderabad is sited are **tombs** from the Talpur and Kalhora periods. **Shahi Bazaar** is a labyrinth of narrow alleys where artisans produce items including Sindhi embroidery, block prints, jewellery, pointy-toed shoes and dainty glass bangles.

Sleeping

There are budget lodgings around Shahi Bazaar and in the Ghari Khatta area, near the train station, although they're frequently reluctant to take foreigners. More upmarket options:

New Hotel Ritz (☎ 2728351; Cantonment; s/d Rs 500/1000; 🍷) Decent cheaper option.

Faran (☎ 2780194; hotelifaran_hyderabad@yahoo.co.uk; Saddar Bazaar; s/d 1200/1500; 🍷) Similar in price and standard to the City Gate.

City Gate (☎ 2611677; Jail Rd; s/d Rs 1230/1545; ♿) Good-value comfy rooms.

Getting There & Away

Hyderabad is a road junction with highways northwest to Manchhar Lake and Sehwan Sharif, east to Mirpur Khas and the Great Thar Desert, and north to Kot Diji, Sukkur and Punjab.

Trains leave from Hyderabad Junction to Karachi, Multan, Lahore, Rawalpindi and Peshawar. Frequent daily buses leave to all major destinations including Karachi (Rs 80, two hours).

AROUND HYDERABAD

Ziarat of Shah Abdul Latif

This important mausoleum and pilgrimage site, located in the village of Bhit Shah, about 40km north of Hyderabad, honours popular Sindhi poet and Sufi saint Abdul Latif (1689–1752). The mausoleum is covered with beautiful blue-and-white tilework, the speciality of the neighbouring town of Hala. It's also the focus for huge gatherings of pilgrims during the saint's *urs* (death anniversary festival), generally held around April. Ask at the PTDC office in Karachi (see p164) as dates vary annually.

GREAT THAR DESERT

Sixty-five kilometres east of Hyderabad, Mirpur Khas boasts a striking 15m-high Buddhist **stupa** with terracotta figures. However, Mirpur Khas is otherwise of little interest except as a base for exploring the Great Thar Desert (also called the Tharparkar Desert), which was, at the time of research, strictly off limits to foreigners. The Great Thar Desert measures about 28,000 sq km and is an extension of India's vast Rajasthan plain. It has a number of **Jain** and **Hindu temples**, especially around Nagar Parkar and Mithi.

To visit the Great Thar Desert, you really need to be self-sufficient with your own vehicle, and to ascertain the current safety situation with the PTDC office in Karachi (see p164). Alternatively, it's easier to visit the desert from Punjab in the north, from where camel safaris can be arranged (see p125).

HYDERABAD TO SUKKUR

Ranikot Fort

With outer walls measuring 24km, this massive fort's history and purpose are unknown, although part of it appears to date from the Talpurian era. More recently it has been a

favourite hide-out for local dacoits (bandits) – as a consequence officials discourage tourists from coming here, but if you still plan to do so, make sure you first seek advice from Karachi's PTDC office (see p164).

Ranikot is about 90km northwest of Hyderabad and not easy to get to. From Sann, a village on the Indus Hwy, a rough track heads west for 21km to the fort, with no human settlements en route. A 4WD is advisable (see p173 for details of car-hire companies).

Sehwan Sharif

On the west bank of the Indus, the oasis town of Sehwan Sharif is 140km northwest of Kotri. It's one of the oldest towns in Sindh, and was a district capital of succeeding Buddhist, Hindu and early Muslim rulers. The prime draw is the 14th-century **Shrine of Lal Shah Baz Qalandar**, dedicated to an important Sufi saint who came here in about 1260.

The mausoleum is covered with beautiful tiles. Every year on the saint's *urs*, 18–19 Sha'aban, it's visited by throngs of pilgrims for a three-day festival, usually in September or October but ask Karachi's PTDC office (p164) for exact dates as they vary each year. Year-round, most evenings at around 6pm, pilgrims gather in the courtyard and dance themselves into hypnotic trances. Near the present town lies the remains of a vast **fort**, used by Alexander the Great, that was of great strategic importance for many centuries.

Manchhar Lake

A short drive west of Sehwan Sharif is a game reserve noted for its wide variety of birdlife. It's also of ethnological interest for the Mohana fisherfolk living by its shore, who are believed to be the direct descendants of the Indus Valley (and probably pre-Indus Valley) civilisation of Sindh. There are several islands in the lake, accessible by hired boat from the shore.

To stay at the **STDC Lal Shah Baz Resthouse** (s/d Rs 200/400), advance reservations at the Karachi **STDC office** (Map pp162-3; ☎ 021-7788530; 1st fl, 114-115 Block C, Sea Breeze Plaza, Shahrah-e-Faisal Rd; ☎ 9am-1pm & 2-4pm Mon-Thu & Sat, 9am-noon Fri) are essential.

MOENJODARO

Over 165 sites related to the Indus Valley civilisation have been described by archaeologists, but World Heritage-listed Moenjodaro is the undisputed jewel in the crown. The largest

of the ancient cities of Pakistan, its ruins are spread over 250 hectares.

History

About 4000 BC, when the Mesopotamian civilisation flourished on the Euphrates, Moenjodaro began to develop as one of the great cities of the Indus Valley civilisation. The quality of the architecture and town planning was exceptional.

Moenjodaro (meaning 'Mound of the Dead') thrived roughly from 2500–1500 BC with a population believed to have reached at least 50,000. However, the population declined abruptly for reasons that are still unclear. Long after its demise, Buddhist monks of the Kushan era erected a stupa over 70m high here. That too is now in ruins, but still rises 11m above the surrounding area and was for a long time the only visible monument.

The Indus Valley civilisation extended more than 1500km along the Indus and its tributaries. Its main cities were Harappa and Moenjodaro, but this is the better-preserved site. It appears that secular law was reinforced by the power of a priest caste, although the exact political structures remain a mystery. Figurines found here suggest that the religion incorporated belief in a mother-goddess combined with tree and animal worship, especially of the bull.

Originally Moenjodaro was surrounded by fertile land with a climate far cooler and rainier than the present wasteland suggests. The Indus now flows around 5km to the west, although at the time it was beside the town.

There are three clear levels of occupation, the top two built on top of an earlier, destroyed layer. There are several theories about how Moenjodaro came to an end. One is that it collapsed in an earthquake, another that it was destroyed by a flood. Rising water levels at several times in the city's history certainly did require much of it to be rebuilt or abandoned. Building standards also declined over the years as one new level was built over another. The city became more crowded as the rising Indus reduced the habitable area. Since the 1990s much archaeological work has gone into preserving the ruins from further water and salt damage.

The discovery of several skeletons of inhabitants who had obviously met a violent end, and had never been properly buried, has led many scholars to claim that Moenjodaro was sacked by unknown invaders. Some archaeologists purport the Indus Valley civilisation

was destroyed by Aryan invaders in the mid-2nd millennium BC.

Information

Before visiting, it's advisable to consult Karachi's PTDC office (p164) to ensure the security situation is deemed safe at the time of your intended trip. At times, armed guards have been assigned to visitors on arrival due to local insecurity (there's no charge). Moenjodaro's **PTDC office** (☎ 0741-480082) is by the site entrance, and has informative staff.

Sights

The most exposed parts of the **city** (site & museum admission Rs 500; ☎ 8.30am–5pm Sun–Thu & Sat, 8.30am–12.30pm & 2.30–5pm Fri Apr–Nov, 9am–4pm Sun–Thu & Sat, 9am–12.30pm & 2.30–4pm Fri Dec–Mar) are open to visitors, representing just one-third of the area yet to be excavated. Archaeology buffs will get the most out of it; those with a casual interest may be disappointed given the relative effort needed to get here.

THE REMAINS

Except for the stupa, all of the present layer of excavation is from the same period (around 2500 BC). There are two parts to the site, a mound to the west and a larger lower settlement to the east. The total circumference is about 5km. The artificial hill symbolically overlooked the rest of the town and housed the elite.

Upper Site

Next to the stupa are the remains of a large building known as the **granary**, which originally measured 45m by 23m and was later enlarged. The 27 surviving brickwork piers formed part of a ventilation system for the granary itself, a wooden structure that has long since disintegrated.

The **great bath** measures 7m by 12m with a depth of 2.5m, and has steps leading down from ground level at both ends. The bath was skilfully lined with fired bricks and sealed with watertight materials, and had a brick-lined drain. On three sides are the remains of buildings, some of which may have housed a priests' college. The bath may have had some ritualistic significance.

The **assembly hall**, south of the mound, is less well preserved. The rest of the citadel is largely unexcavated. The remains of some buttresses southeast of the hill suggest that the upper site, or citadel, was once surrounded



by a defensive wall. From the citadel you can clearly see the neatly laid-out block pattern of the lower site.

Lower Site

What little has been excavated of the lower site shows it was planned on a grid system, with main streets at right angles and about 10m

wide. The main streets were also met at right angles by lanes, mostly 1.5m to 3m wide. The houses were entered from these lanes.

What is known as the **wealthy residential area** in the north is the largest part so far uncovered. To the south, the **poor residential area** contains smaller structures that were probably the dwellings of working-class Moenjodarans.

Of this smaller group of residences, only two rows – each with eight two-roomed, single-storey buildings – have been uncovered. It's also possible that these were artisans' shops.

Although the lower town was overlooked from the citadel and built to a regular plan, the houses were obviously designed with privacy in mind. Pipes from the houses led into brick gutters along the main streets, an extraordinary innovation for the time. There were public wells in the streets, some of which survive in good condition, and in some houses there were private wells and even baths and latrines.

It's believed most houses in the wealthy residential area had two storeys. Some dwellings have staircases leading up to nowhere, and a few have holes at ceiling level suggesting wooden beams. There were few windows and the houses were cut off from the lanes by high walls. Some buildings have thicker walls, which may have been artisans' shops or factories. Some smaller structures at intervals along the main roads appear to have been sentry boxes.

MUSEUM

The good museum contains relics from the site, including engraved seals, terracotta toys, kitchen utensils, weapons, sculpture, jewellery and other ornaments. If you're coming to the site from Karachi, it's worth visiting the National Museum (p164) first, as it contains some of Moenjodaro's best-known finds, such as the iconic 'priest-king' sculpture, and a bronze statuette of a dancing girl.

Sleeping & Eating

The new on-site **PTDC Motel** (☎ 0741-459266; s/d Rs 1000/1300; 🏠) has improved sleeping options at the site considerably. Rooms are good enough, although the price reflects Moenjodaro's isolation rather than the motel's quality. There's a restaurant attached. Alternatively, there's the considerably simpler **Archaeology Resthouse** (d ground/1st fl Rs 200/350), which can be booked through the **Directorate-General of Archaeology** (☎ 021-4521670, 021-4520638; 27-A Al-Asif Bldg, Shaheed-i-Millat Rd, Karachi). Karachi's PTDC office can also help book it for you.

A separate choice is to bed down in nearby Larkana, seat of the Bhutto family. The best options here are the **Green Palace** (☎ 0741-446924; greenpalace@hotmail.com; Muhammad Bin Qasim Rd; s/d Rs 500/700; 🏠) or the **Sapna Inn** (☎ 0741-444446; Station Rd; s/d Rs 600/800; 🏠). The Sapna can arrange transport and tours to Moenjodaro.

Getting There & Away

The airport is about 1km north of the PTDC office. PIA flies from Karachi on Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday (Rs 3300/5900 single/return, 30 minutes) in the afternoons. A shuttle bus drops you at the site.

A taxi from Larkana, 28km from Moenjodaro, costs about Rs 600 (one way). A bus will cost Rs 35 (40 minutes). There are two trains to Moenjodaro from Karachi, the *Bolan Mail* and *Khushal Khan Khattak Express*, both Quetta-bound, both taking around nine hours. See boxed text, p173, for more information.

SUKKUR

The town of Sukkur is home to the **Sukkur Barrage**, a 1400m-long series of sluice gates that control the flooding of the Indus. It feeds seven irrigation canals that ultimately water nearly three million hectares of Sindh. An impressive piece of British engineering, it's also a sensitive installation so don't flash your camera.

The town has an older historic area, as it was a key stop on the trade route to the Bolan Pass. The most interesting historic building is the needle-shaped **Minaret of Mir Masum Shah**, completed in 1614. It's 84ft (25.6m) tall, 84ft in diameter, with 84 steps and a lofty view of Sukkur. The lively **bazaar** is also worth a look. Near Lansdowne Bridge is the island of **Sadhubella**, where there is an active Hindu complex with temples to Ganesh, Shiva and Hanuman.

Accommodation options:

Mehran (☎ 071-613792; fax 071-613892; Station Rd; s/d from Rs 170/275)

Forum Inn (☎ 071-5613011; United Nations Rd; s/d 1852/2064; 🏠)

Inter-Pak Inn (☎ 071-613617; Lab-e-Mehran; s/d Rs 2000/2450; 🏠)

You can catch a bus from Sukkur to Hyderabad (Rs 280, five hours) and Karachi (air-con/standard Rs 480/360, seven hours). PIA flies to Karachi daily.

ROHRI

Directly across the Indus River from Sukkur, Rohri is an important rail and road junction. The prime attraction is the brightly tiled **Akbari Mosque**, built by the Mughal emperor Akbar in 1583. The 1545 **Shrine of Mau Mubarak**, on the southern outskirts of Rohri, houses what is claimed to be a hair of the Prophet Mohammed's beard, in a casket. It is displayed

CRACKING THE CODE

As well as founding the subcontinent's earliest city-states, the people of the Indus Valley civilisation left behind one of the earliest known written records, written on everything from seals to ceramics, offering an incredible insight into their culture. But to the chagrin of archaeologists, it has proved immune to decipherment, frustrating both linguists and computer algorithms alike.

No two experts can agree on the subject. One academic has linked some of the characters to astronomical and zodiacal symbols used in later Dravidian languages, and there are some suggestions that it was a forerunner of Brahui, still spoken in Balochistan, and other languages surviving in South India. Others claim that it was a forerunner of Sanskrit with a traditional alphabet of letters (or possibly syllables) – an interpretation completely at odds with the third suggestion, that they are actually pictograms in the manner of Egyptian hieroglyphics.

About 400 characters have been recognised, but they rarely appear in any recognisable combination and are often qualified by strokes with no obvious meaning. All the examples found so far are very short, no more than 17 characters in length, presenting a challenge knottier than the toughest Sudoku puzzle. What's really needed is a local equivalent of the Rosetta Stone – the trilingual inscription that unlocked the key to the ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics. Until that appears, the language of the Moenjodaras is likely to remain shrouded in mystery.

to the public every 2 March; double-check with Karachi's PTDC office (p164).

KOT DIJI

This is the site of a pre-Indus Valley civilisation town dating from around 3500–2500 BC. Little is known of its history or inhabitants. Some archaeologists claim it ended its

days in a great conflagration, possibly at the hands of the Moenjodaras, who appear to have adopted many features of its layout and architecture. Little of visual interest remains of the original settlement, and Kot Diji's main tourist attraction is its **fort**.

Kot Diji is 35km south of Rohri, on the main Karachi–Sukkur bus route.

Azad Jammu & Kashmir



Azad Jammu & Kashmir (AJ&K) – *azad* means ‘free’ – is pre-Partition Kashmir’s western third, administered by Pakistan under the terms of the 1949 UN ceasefire. Jammu, the southern end of the Jammu & Kashmir state that Britain assembled from former Sikh territories in 1846, is mostly on the Indian-held side. Most Pakistanis feel the Indians wrongly and unfairly took possession of the majority of the territory at Partition and that it has been occupied illegally ever since. This all-consuming and divisive issue remains the dominant feature of Pakistan-India relations.

Beautiful and tragic, AJ&K’s best feature is its natural splendour, exemplified by the forested valleys of the Lesser Himalaya and the Pir Panjal Range, which forms the southwest rim of the Vale of Kashmir. But beneath the beauty lie the destructive mountain-building forces that have recently brought so much misfortune to this already troubled region.

Pakistan’s 16km security zone along the Line of Control puts the most scenic parts of AJ&K – the Neelum Valley, the upper Jhelum Valley above Muzaffarabad, plus mountainous areas to the south – off limits to would-be travellers. How easy it is to visit the remaining regions – Muzaffarabad and the Nanga Parbat region, and the nonborder districts of Bagh, Poonch, Kotli and Mirpur – depends on the current military climate along the Line of Control, the whim of bureaucracy, whom you ask, and perhaps even what road you take to get there.

TRAVELLING IN AZAD JAMMU & KASHMIR

At the time of research, road border checkpoints were asking foreigners to produce a No Objection Certificate (NOC) from the Ministry for Kashmir Affairs & Northern Areas in Islamabad.

To obtain a NOC, the easiest thing to do is to get a Pakistan-based travel agent to organise your ‘tour’ and NOC. Independently, you will need to provide a letter explaining the areas you wish to visit and the dates of the visits, together with two photocopies of your passport data pages and visa, to the **Ministry of Kashmir Affairs & Northern Areas** (☎ 051-9206580; Block S/R Secretariat, Islamabad). You may also be asked to provide an additional letter from your embassy or high commission in Islamabad reaffirming that you are indeed the person stated in your passport (your embassy may charge a fee for this service) and forward this to the **Ministry of Foreign Affairs** (☎ 051-9207917; Constitution Ave G-5/1, Islamabad). Apply as far in advance as possible as it’s a long and convoluted procedure and at the end they may just say no.

The entry and permit situation is constantly subject to change; for the latest information check with the Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation (PTDC) in any major Pakistani city, and Muzaffarabad’s **AJ&K Tourism** (☎ 058810-34623; fax 32625; Bank Sq, Chattrar).

AZAD JAMMU & KASHMIR



The external boundaries of Pakistan and India on this map have not been authenticated and may not be correct.

 16 km Security Zone (Restricted Area)

AZAD JAMMU & KASHMIR

History

Pakistan and India's first act after Independence was to go to war over Kashmir, and after two wars in 1947–48 and 1965, a major clash in 1999 (the Kargil conflict) and intermittent artillery exchanges, neither they nor the UN has resolved the question of ownership. Each country has thousands of troops in the region, and a separatist campaign has simmered with occasional bloody flare-ups on the Indian-held side, with India accused of routine atrocities and Pakistan of training Kashmiri guerrillas. In the last six decades there have been ceasefires, agreements, talks and positive bilateral moves, yet fundamental differences remain and the potential for escalating conflict is never far away. For details, see p32.

Climate

Muzaffarabad city and the southern districts can be visited year-round, and the south is most comfortable in winter. The mountainous Neelam and upper Jhelum Valleys and eastern Bagh and Poonch districts are accessible from at least May to October, although July to early September brings monsoon rains.

Accommodation

There are midrange and budget hotels in the towns of Muzaffarabad, Bagh, Kotli, Rawalakot and Mirpur. In more remote areas, the only option may be a government resthouse. AJ&K Tourism's resthouses are good value and tourists receive priority. Prior booking is essential in tourist seasons, though most *chowkidars* (caretakers) will accommodate you even without a booking if there's a vacancy. AJ&K Tourism should also be able to help with booking the Forestry

Department's forestry resthouses and Public Works Department (PWD) resthouses, or at least help with contacting the relevant district forestry officers or PWD executive engineers in district capitals.

Getting There & Away

See the boxed text (p181) for details on the bureaucratic hurdles that foreigners need to navigate to enter AJ&K. Entry to Muzaffarabad district is from Mansehra (crossing at Gahri Habibullah) or Murree (crossing at Kohala). At times of high Kashmir fever you're probably less likely to be turned away coming from Murree. Direct routes from Rawalpindi to Poonch district via Dhalkot and Azad Pattan are off limits to foreigners as they run close to the Pakistan Institute of Nuclear Science & Technology (Pinstech); the same may be true of the Karote crossing to Kotli district. Other roads enter Mirpur district from Jhelum over Mangla Dam, and from Gujrat to Bhimber.

At the time of research, Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) had suspended flights from Islamabad to Muzaffarabad and Rawalakot, though it's worth checking to see if they have been reinstated.

MUZAFFARABAD

☎ 058810 / pop 90,000

AJ&K's capital was just 25km from the epicentre of the devastating 2005 earthquake and the city is still recovering, with reconstruction and temporary shelter still much in evidence. Muzaffarabad used to be just another stop on the road to Srinagar – but a strategic one, at the confluence of the Neelam and Jhelum Rivers. Its sole tourist attraction is a 17th-century fort built by the town's founder,

THE EARTHQUAKE OF 2005

At 8.50am on 8 October 2005, a massive earthquake struck Kashmir (see also boxed text, p64). The epicentre was around 20km from the capital, Muzaffarabad. The damage was massive and extensive: over 80,000 lives lost, countless injuries, and cities and towns reduced to rubble. The death and destruction stretched to Islamabad and Indian-held Kashmir, but Azad Kashmir and nearby towns in the North-West Frontier Province fared the worst. At the time of writing, the Pakistani and international aid efforts and the resilience of the people were very much in evidence, but the magnitude of the devastation was still shocking and the ongoing needs of the relief effort remained obvious. Numerous organisations, international and local, are providing aid and assistance and welcome donations. It is important to examine the legitimacy of the agency when making a donation, being mindful of allegations of corruption and links to terrorist organisations.

a chief of the Chak tribe named Muzaffar Khan, to ward off the Mughal armies of Emperor Akbar.

Orientation

The city is strung for 4km along the Neelum River, above its junction with the Jhelum River. South of the junction in an area called Chhattar are AJ&K government offices. Long-distance buses use the general bus stand across the Neelum from the bazaar, but passengers arriving from Murree may be dropped in Bank Rd.

Information

The **AJ&K Tourism office** (☎ 34623/4/5; fax 32625; Bank Sq, Chhattar) will give you reliable information on open areas, sights and transport, and help with accommodation. To get there take a Suzuki from Bank Rd and ask for Bank Sq. Across the road is the AJ&K Secretariat, with government offices including the Home Department. The undersecretary or additional secretary there *may* issue No Objection Certificates (see the boxed text, p181) to travellers who have entered AJ&K without a permit.

Post offices are in the bazaar and at Chhattar, and there is a telephone exchange on Bank Rd. The superintendent of police is located at Narol, near the Old Secretariat between Chhattar and the bazaar. For changing money there is a National Bank in Bank Rd and private moneychangers in the bazaar.

Sights

RED FORT

Also called **Muzaffarabad Fort** (admission free; ☎ 9am-6pm), this stronghold at a kink in the Neelum River was completed by Sultan Muzaffar Khan in 1646. The Mughals built their own fort and its importance waned, but the Dogra rulers of Jammu & Kashmir state rebuilt and enlarged this one. It's been tidied up for tourists, though significantly damaged by the quake, with an eclectic small museum inside and a tourist resthouse next door. By Suzuki it's five minutes from the bazaar; ask for the *qila* (fort).

BAZAAR

You'll find some of Kashmir's best-known handicrafts, including brightly coloured woolen shawls and walnut woodcarvings, in the mazelike bazaar above Bank Rd.

BLACK FORT

The Mughals built this fort (also called Gojra Fort) above the river junction but it's used by the army and is off limits to visitors.

Sleeping & Eating

While earthquake relief efforts continue, accommodation options will remain limited though ever-increasing. AJ&K Tourism has a clean, quiet resthouse by the Red Fort, with doubles with hot shower and air-con. In summer it's wise to book ahead. Other budget options are available at the general bus stand, near Bank Rd, and at Domel, the junction of the Jhelum and Neelum Rivers.

Midrange options with air-con rooms equipped with phone, TV and good restaurants are very scarce but the situation is improving. At the time of research the **Sangam Hotel** (☎ 44194), by the junction of the Jhelum and Neelum Rivers, had been rebuilt and was fully operational; whereas the Hotel Neelum View, by the Red Fort, was still under reconstruction and not yet offering rooms. A new **Pearl Continental Hotel** (www.pchotels.com) was under construction between Chhattar and the junction of the rivers.

Getting There & Away

AIR

The **PIA booking office** (☎ 6299) is beside AJ&K Tourism in Chhattar, though no airline was operating flights to/from Muzaffarabad at the time of research.

BUS

From the general bus stand, regular buses and minibuses go to Mansehra (Rs 60, 1½ hours), with dramatic views into the Jhelum and Kunhar Valleys; Murree (Rs 100, 2½ hours); and Rawalpindi's Pir Wadhai (Rs 160, four hours) via Murree. For the Kaghan Valley, take a Mansehra bus and change at Garhi Habibullah (Rs 30, 40 minutes). Other buses connect with Bagh, Rawalakot and southern AJ&K.

Getting Around

Suzukis go from Bank Rd to both ends of the city, north out on Neelum Rd from the Bank Rd Suzuki stand, and south to Chhattar from the switchbacks leading up to the bazaar. The cost is about Rs 20 from one end of town to the other. Motorised rickshaws go everywhere and cost about Rs 100 from Chhattar to the Red Fort.

NEELAM VALLEY

Running through the Lesser Himalaya, the 200km Neelam River valley (called the Kishanganga before Partition) is AJ&K's main attraction – or would be if there was no Line of Control, which in places is just a few kilometres away. Like the Kaghan Valley that runs parallel to it, it's famous for trekking, fishing and enjoying nature. The river and a side valley, the Jagran Nala, are stocked with trout. Trails cross several 4000m passes into the Kaghan Valley.

A paved road runs halfway up the valley, and a 4WD track continues for much of the rest. Buses go from Muzaffarabad at least to Athmaqam, and passenger 4WDs go as far as Kel. In the past the valley has been open up to Kel, but at the time of research foreigners could go no further than Patikha (Pataka), 17km northeast of Muzaffarabad. The following information may be useful when/if travel restrictions for foreigners ease.

Machiara National Park

The forested Ganga Mountains, a branch of the Himalayan foothills, separate the Neelam and Kaghan Valleys and provide a fragile home to brown bear, ibex, Himalayan griffon vulture, western tragopan, lammergeier and, allegedly, snow leopard. In 1996 the southern slopes were brought within a new protected area management plan, and a small game reserve there grew into the 135-sq-km Machiara National Park.

The park is reached via Patikha. Treks run from the park over high passes to Shogran on the Kaghan side (at least two nights out) and to the Bichla-Manur Valley. Check with the **AJ&K Tourism office** (☎ 058810-34623; fax 32625; Bank Sq, Chatter) in Muzaffarabad before considering this trip.

Kundal Shahi & Jagran Nala

At Kundal Shahi, 75km from Muzaffarabad, is the pretty side valley of Jagran Nala. Spartan forestry resthouses and tourist huts are 3km up the Neelam at Salkhala, 8km up the Jagran Nala at Kutton and currently occupied by the army, and further on at Jagran village. There are trout hatcheries at Salkhala and Kutton.

Athmaqam & Neelam

Ten kilometres past Kundal Shahi is Athmaqam, the regional headquarters, with a district forestry office and tourist, forestry

and PWD resthouses. Nine kilometres on at Neelam village (also called Karan) is a tourist resthouse. Along here the Line of Control comes almost to the river.

Dowarian

From Dowarian, 22km above Athmaqam, a track leads 30km up to 4140m Rati Gali (Rati Pass) and on towards the Lalazar Plateau in the Kaghan Valley. Near the pass is **Rati Gali Sar**, an alpine lake. Dowarian has a forestry resthouse.

Sharda

This opening in the valley, 30km beyond Dowarian, is said to be Neelam Valley's most beautiful spot. Nearby are ruins of a Buddhist monastery or school, and there are options for treks into the far north of Kaghan Valley. In Sharda (or Shardi) town is a tourist resthouse and a youth hostel.

Kel & Halmat

From Kel, 19km past Sharda and at 2100m, a long trek goes towards Nanga Parbat over the 4420m Shuntar Gali. You would have to hire a 4WD or horse for the 38km from here to Halmat, beyond which the valley goes into Indian-held territory.

Kel has a tourist resthouse (currently occupied by the army) and Halmat has a tourist hut.

JHELUM VALLEY

Once this steep-walled valley was the axis of travel and trade with the Vale of Kashmir. The road runs 60km through the Pir Panjal Range to Chakothi village at the Line of Control. At the time of research foreigners could go as far as Hatian, about 40km from Muzaffarabad.

Most worth visiting are the hill stations on the road to Bagh. Regular buses go from Muzaffarabad up the valley and to Bagh.

Subri Lake

Eight kilometres from Muzaffarabad, the Jhelum was dammed into a lake by a landslide in 1975. The rustic angler's hut was destroyed by the 2005 earthquake; for new developments inquire at Muzaffarabad's **AJ&K Tourism office** (☎ 058810-34623; fax 32625; Bank Sq, Chatter).

Hill Stations

At Dhani Baqalan, about 30km from Muzaffarabad, a road branches south into

the hills past several small hill stations. Sitting between 1800m and 2100m, these former colonial 'resorts', like the Galis just to the west in North-West Frontier Province (NWFP), offer bracing weather, good walks and views.

Chikar, 15km from the turning, has local inns. A tourist resthouse and a PWD resthouse were both destroyed by the 2005 earthquake. Ten kilometres on is **Loonbagla**, then **Dungjian** and **Sudhangali**; each used to boast a tourist resthouse or PWD resthouse but all were inoperable at the time of research. From Sudhangali you can day-hike up the 3000m Ganga Choti peak. Southwards the road descends towards Bagh.

Leepa Valley

The Leepa River is actually a tributary of the Neelam but the road runs from the Jhelum River at Naili, 45km from Muzaffarabad, then over the 3200m Reshian Gali. Locals say it's AJ&K's loveliest valley but unfortunately it's presently off limits to foreigners. Apparently only passenger 4WDs go beyond Reshian.

BAGH, POONCH, KOTLI & MIRPUR DISTRICTS

The forested highlands of Bagh and Poonch Districts are picturesque but no match for northern AJ&K, or Hazara in NWFP. Of most interest are the modest hill resorts of **Dhirkot**, **Banjosa** and **Tararkhel** and the hot springs at **Tattapani** on the Poonch River, though they're all packed with local holidaymakers in summer.

Hilly Kotli District and mostly flat, hot Mirpur District haven't much to offer other than **Mangla Reservoir**, best seen as part of a

visit to Jhelum and Rohtas Fort (p137), and a Mughal fort at Baghsar (close to the Line of Control and probably off limits).

Sleeping

Book tourist and forestry resthouses with district forestry officers in Bagh, Rawalakot, Kotli or Mirpur. Book Bagh and Poonch District PWD resthouses with the executive engineer in Rawalakot.

BAGH

Bagh town has a few budget hotels. In Dhirkot there are three tourist huts and a forestry resthouse.

POONCH

In Rawalakot there are two tourist resthouses and budget and midrange hotels; Banjosa has a tourist resthouse and a PWD resthouse; and Tararkhel and Palandri have forestry and PWD resthouses. Tattapani's tourist hotel has hot-spring baths.

KOTLI

Kotli town has a PWD resthouse and there are cheap hotels opposite the bus stand and in the bazaar. There is a forestry resthouse at Sensa.

MIRPUR

Also known as 'little England', Mirpur is the 'old country' to many UK residents of South Asian descent. Old Mirpur town went under the waters of Mangla Dam and the bustling new Mirpur town has a good selection of budget and midrange hotels as well as a forestry resthouse and a PWD resthouse. In Bhimber there is a forestry resthouse.

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North-West Frontier Province



North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) seems a region named purely for the romance of travel. A quick look at the map tells you why, with the Khyber Pass to Afghanistan, the peaks of the Hindukush, the towns of Peshawar and Chitral all speaking of rugged mountains, proud tribesmen and Kipling-style adventure.

In the valleys of Peshawar and Swat, the ancient, influential region of Gandhara blossomed, its Buddhist art and doctrines spreading into Asia. It left behind a parade of archaeological sites, many yet to be fully explored by travellers. Later inhabitants left a less tangible but equally famous legacy. The Pashtun tribes gave bloody noses to some of history's most famous conquerors, even earning themselves the respect of the British soldiers who they frequently fought to a standstill. The autonomous Tribal Areas were born of those conflicts, and their inhabitants hold the Pakistani government at arm's length to this day.

More peaceful inhabitants are the Kalasha, pagans clinging onto their old rituals in isolated valleys near Chitral against the odds. The Kalasha region is one of the most stunning parts of the Hindukush range, but the whole of northern NWFP is ideal trekking country, from Chitral to the green slopes of the Swat Valley.

For all the tradition, NWFP remains closely tied to the present. Modern politics makes strong headlines, with the Tribal Areas and radical Islam regularly impacting on the national stage. While local insecurities tend to happen in areas away from travellers' interests, visitors should be aware of underlying tensions, and take advice on the current situation before travelling.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Get lost in the atmosphere of **Peshawar's Old City** (p193), where the traditional and modern collide in a maze of bazaars
- Venture up to the **Khyber Pass** (p200) on the Afghan border, the age-old invasion route to the subcontinent
- Explore the traditional pagan culture of the **Kalasha** (p228), in their ancient valleys high in the Hindukush
- Take in the mountain views (and rugged mountain roads) in the old kingdom of **Chitral** (p220)
- Chill out in **Swat** (p207), the lush valley that's played host to everyone from Alexander the Great and great Buddhist empires to modern Pakistani honeymooners



■ POPULATION: 19,630,000

■ AREA: 74,521 SQ KM

thought evolved and spread deeper into Asia. When the Kushans eventually declined, so did Buddhism, although it clung on in parts of Swat until the 15th century.

Islam first appeared in the region in the 8th century, with Arab armies even clashing with the Chinese near Chitral. However, Islam didn't get a firm foothold until the Afghans started empire-building again through Mahmud of Ghazni in the 11th century, and the Ghorid dynasty a century later. Not that there was long to enjoy the fruits of conquest – Genghis Khan stormed through Peshawar in 1221, with Tamerlane (Timur) repeating the same trick at the end of the 14th century.

The Mughals eventually brought stability, taking the Peshawar and Swat Valleys under their rule, with Peshawar a favourite retreat for Mughal rulers. But the Pashtuns were unruly subjects, and in 1680 the Pashtun warrior-poet Khushal Khan Khattak returned Peshawar to the Afghans.

Somewhat foolishly, the subsequent Afghan Durrani dynasty granted governorship of Lahore to the Sikh maharaja Ranjit Singh, who proceeded to expand his domain into a small empire. In 1818 the Sikhs occupied the Peshawar Valley and ransacked Peshawar.

The British picked up the pieces after the collapse of Sikh rule, and the Afghans never saw Peshawar again. British policy was all about subduing the tribes on their 'northwest frontier'. They'd failed to bring the Afghans to heel in two disastrous wars (1838–42 and 1878–80), so in 1893 imposed a common border, the so-called Durand Line. In 1901 NWFP was made a separate province, and the Pashtuns bought off by granting them the autonomous Tribal Areas.

The province has remained key in Pakistan's post-Independence politics. In the 1980s it swelled with almost four million refugees

from the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan (it's thought that around half that number still remain in Pakistan). Since 9/11, NWFP has been sucked back into regional events. As the Tribal Areas become increasingly radicalised by Islamist groups, the Pakistani military attempts to bring the region under governmental control.

People

NWFP, along with northern Balochistan and southern Afghanistan, is the land of the Pashtuns. A diverse, proud and martial people, they constitute one of the world's largest tribal groups. The British could barely conceal their admiration for the fighting abilities of the Pashtuns, even when lined up against them. One thing that appeals to many foreigners is the Pashtuns' ironclad, if sometimes bloody, moral code, known as *Pashtunwali* or *Pukhtunwali* (see the boxed text, p190). Pashtuns dominate NWFP to the southern tip of Chitral, the middle of Swat and from Besham across the Indus to Batagram and Mansehra.

Climate

Central NWFP, featuring the verdant valleys of the Swat and Indus Rivers, receives the edge of the monsoon rains in summer. The lower reaches of the valleys are hot and humid from June to mid-September. The upper valleys and mountainous north are pleasantly mild and usually dry at this time, but heavy rain can fall at any time in the mountains. Winter is bitterly cold and long in the mountains with the passes blocked by snow for months at a time.

Around Peshawar and the south, the plains and low rocky mountains are usually dry and hot (extremely so in summer) with pleasantly warm days and cold nights in winter.

TRAVELLING SAFELY IN NWFP

Tribal feuds are a risk to travellers who go off the main roads in the Tribal Areas, where Pakistani law has no force and the authorities are almost powerless to help you. In any case, these areas are closed to foreigners. In late 2007, the Swat Valley was the scene of an Islamist uprising against the central government, and was turned briefly into an active military zone. Anti-government (and anti-Western) sentiment is likely to persist in the area for the foreseeable future, putting this beautiful region out of bounds. Anti-government violence has also been reported in Dir district, making stops here unadvisable. Across the province, avoid travel at night, whether by bus or private transport, particularly in remote mountainous or tribal areas. If you are unsure, ask the police or the Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation (PTDC) in the nearest town about personal safety issues for your intended journey.

THE WAY OF THE PASHTUN

Pashtunwali, the Pashtun moral code, has traditionally taken precedence over any external laws, acting as a constitution for Pashtun society. Although often interpreted by the West as shorthand for tribal extremism, it provides a surprisingly open and democratic code for managing tribal affairs within the conservative and feudal nature of Pashtun society. Its key concepts are *siali* (individual equality), *nang* (honour) and *melmastia* (hospitality). Group decisions are a matter for a council of elders, or *jirga*.

Nang is central to Pashtun identity, most importantly that of the family (and women in particular). *Melmastia* is the showing of hospitality to all visitors without expectation of reward. This can even go as far as offering sanctuary to a criminal, and laying down one's life for a guest. From these two pillars flows the concept of *badal* – the obligation to avenge an insult of injustice to the individual, family or clan. Injustices can be those committed on the day or a century ago – a practice which readily leads to blood feuds, and is a major reason why Pashtun villages can often resemble collections of small forts. The vanquished in a fight may go to the victor in absolute submission for forgiveness. The winner is expected to show magnanimity to restore the balance of honour, a practice called *nanawatai*.

The post-9/11 radicalisation of the Afghan-Pakistan border areas has caused *Pashtunwali* to be both threatened and reinterpreted, with tribal power in many cases shifting from the elders to the young men with guns.

Swat is shared by Pashtuns with Kohistanis (who spread to the Karakoram Highway) and the Gujars, nomadic herders who spend winter in the foothills and then drive their animals up the roads to high pastures in summer.

Chitral is a real ethnic patchwork. Indigenous Chitralis are descended from the ancient Kho, and while most are Sunni Muslims, many northerners are Ismailis, followers of the Aga Khan, including the seminomadic Wakhi in the far northeast, where the mountains blend into Afghanistan and Tajikistan.

Chitral's best-known minority is the non-Muslim Kalasha, remnants of a much wider community that once stretched across southern Chitral and Nuristan in Afghanistan. They now live a peaceful but poverty-line existence in three valleys southwest of Chitral town.

PESHAWAR

☎ 091 / pop 1.24 million

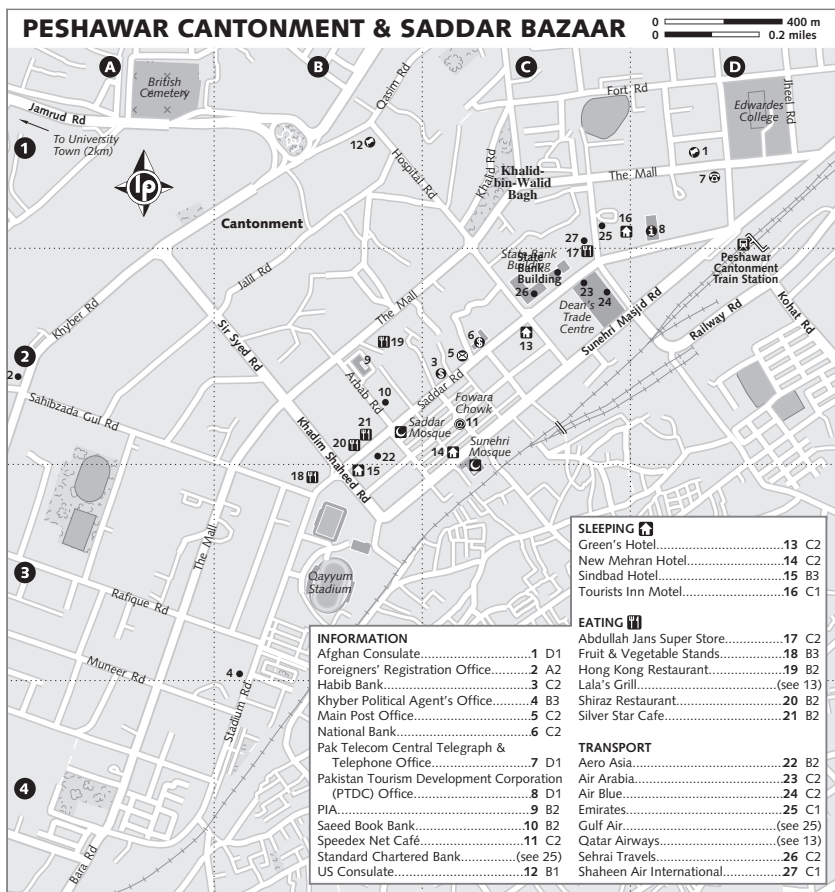
Peshawar (pronounced pu-*shah*-wur) conjures images of romance, intrigue and danger – the archetypal frontier town. Sat at the foot of the Khyber Pass, it has been an important trading town and staging post for invasions for centuries, its fortunes often more closely linked to affairs in Kabul than the flat lands of the Indus and Punjab. Even today, the Pakistani government maintains an often tenuous hold

over the local Pashtun population. Recent elections have returned a provincial government sympathetic to the Taliban. West and south of the city, highways lead into the autonomous Tribal Areas where government writ vanishes the second you step off the main road: visitors to the Khyber Pass must be accompanied by an armed tribal escort.

Atmosphere is all in Peshawar. The old city is a warren of bazaars, where samovars dispense green tea into tiny enamelled pots, which are raced by eager boys to reclining merchants through an air thick with the smell of kebabs, rickshaws fumes and the cacophony of an endless parade of (mostly male) humanity. Modernity abruptly collides with tradition – there are more autorickshaws than camels and mobile phones are everywhere, but Peshawar's past remains persuasive, tangible, visible.

Away from the throng of the old city, the British cantonment has shady boulevards, churches, army quarters and lavish high-walled homes. The city's post-Partition face includes well-to-do University Town and the sprawling administrative-residential township of Hayatabad.

Peshawar's close relationship with Afghanistan continues. Waves of refugees swelled the population in the 1980s, making up a sizable minority. Many still live in the refugee camps outside the city limits. Much of the city's exotic character is derived from



The general bus stand and the Daewoo terminal are on the GT Rd, about 3km east of the fort. Peshawar Cantonment Train Station is between Saddar and the Old City and the airport is west of the Cantonment.

Maps

A reasonable 1:26,000 *Peshawar Guide Map* is available for free from the Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation (PTDC) office (opposite) in Saddar Rd.

INFORMATION

Bookshops

Saeed Book Bank (Map p192; Arbab Rd, Saddar) Far and away Peshawar's leading bookshop, comprehensively

stocked with titles on NWFP and Afghanistan, novels and international magazines.

Consulates

Afghan consulate (Map p192; ☎ 5285962; The Mall, Saddar; ☎ 9am-1pm Tue & Thu) Issues one-month visas for US\$30, issued on the same day. Bring one photo and a passport photocopy, and expect an interview with the consul if you're applying as a tourist. The visa fee is paid upstairs at the Standard Chartered Bank around the corner on Islamia Rd.

Iranian consulate (Map p191; ☎ 9285962; Park Ave, University Town) A one-month visa with two passport photos costs Rs 3000 (women must have their head covered). Travellers report mixed success applying in Peshawar; Islamabad may be more reliable.

US consulate (Map p192; ☎ 5279801; 11 Hospital Rd, Cantonment)

Cultural Centres

Alliance Française (Map p191; 1 Park Rd, University Town)

British Council Library (Map p191; ☎ 5842633; British Council Bldg, 17C Chinar Rd, University Town; ☎ noon-6pm Mon-Thu & Sat)

Emergency

Police station (Map p195; ☎ 15; Qissa Khawani) The police emergency number is available to call 24 hours a day.

Foreigners' Registration

Foreigners' Registration Office (FR0; Map p192; Sahibzada Gul Rd) Only nationals of 16 countries are required to register – see p378. To get here, grab a rickshaw and ask for Police Chowk No 2.

Internet Access

There are numerous internet cafés, though they are not always obvious from the street and you may have to ask around. Expect to pay around Rs 20 per hour.

Speedex Net Café (Map p192; off Fowara Chowk, Saddar) Rather incongruously stuck behind a car spare-parts shop, but it has good connections.

Khyber Internet (Map p195; Khyber Bazaar)

Medical Services

Dabgari Rd in the Old City is good for pharmacies, as well as two hospitals.

Khyber Medical Centre (Map p195; ☎ 2211241; Dabgari Rd, Old City)

Mission Hospital (Map p191; ☎ 9217140; Dabgari Rd, Old City)

Lady Reading Hospital (☎ 9211430; Hospital Rd, Old City)

Money

The moneychangers around Chowk Yadgar in the Old City are open all day for quick and convenient cash changing; there are also several private moneychangers on Saddar Rd near Green's Hotel. The following banks do foreign exchange:

Habib Bank (Map p192; Saddar Rd)

National Bank Bajori Rd (Map p195); near Rampur Gate (Map p195); Saddar Rd (Map p192)

Standard Chartered Bank (Map p192; Islamia Rd) Will cash travellers cheques.

Post

Main post office (Map p192; Saddar Rd) Come here to send parcels and for poste restante.

Tourist Information

PTDC office (Map p192; ☎ 5286829; Benevolent Fund Bldg, Saddar Rd; ☎ 9am-1pm & 2-4.30pm Mon-Thu & Sat, 9am-noon Fri) Extremely helpful and organised tourist office, with free maps and excellent information on local sites, hotels and transport timetables. Can also advise on guides and arrange tours, from the Old City to as far as the Kalasha valleys.

SIGHTS

The Old City

The best reason to visit Peshawar, the Old City is a crowded maze, raucous with the shouts of vendors and mule drivers, clogged with horse-drawn carts, rickshaws, motorcycles and a fascinating parade of Pashtun and Afghan men – and a few women, anonymous in their burkas or bright in their *shalwar kameez* (traditional dress-like tunic and trouser combination). The meandering streets lure you into dark passages full of tiny shops bulging with goods piled high. In this ancient city of trade, everything is for sale. See map p195 for the following sights.

From the Cantonment you approach the Old City along Railway Rd and through **Khyber Bazaar**, consisting mostly of cheap hotels, kebab stands and carpet merchants (stand around in the bazaar for a few minutes and one will sidle up to you). The city wall and its 16 gates were knocked down in the 1950s but many gates remain in name. Kabuli Gate is where Khyber Bazaar becomes **Qissa Khawani**, the old 'Street of Storytellers'. It is Peshawar's most famous bazaar, but there's little memory left of the traders and travellers that would gather here to swap tales; most of its teashops have given way to clothes and electrical shops. To the left round the corner, **brass** and **copperware** are for sale in what used to be the old bird market. Soon the aroma of tea and spice hints of a pocket of traders carrying on another ancient enterprise. To the east of this are cloth and shoe shops, and deeper in, you'll find the nut and grain market of **Pipal Mandi**. To the south is **All Saints Church** (Church Rd), adapted from a former mosque in 1883 and still correctly oriented towards Mecca. A bird market is located nearby.

Northwards is the heart of the old city, **Chowk Yadgar**, now a redeveloped plaza dedicated to the heroes of the 1965 war with India. Moneychangers display their currencies along the west side. Running west from the plaza is **Ander Shahar**, the jewellers' bazaar – a dim lane lined with glittering gold shops where you'll run the gauntlet of invitations. Here also is **Mahabat Khan Mosque**, the city's finest mosque, built in 1630 by the governor of Peshawar under Mughal emperor Shah Jahan, and renovated in 1898. You can enter the mosque and look around at the lavish tiled interior and also get a good view of the plaza and minarets from an ancient caravanserai to the east. Freelance guides that hover around Ander Shahar are good value for visiting the mosque and caravanserai, though they'll want you to visit their shop afterwards. In the alleys southeast of Chowk Yadgar are **Mochi Lara**, the leather bazaar, and **Sabzi Mandi**, the busy vegetable market.

East from Chowk Yadgar the road forks beneath the four-tiered **Cunningham Clocktower**, built at the turn of the 20th century for Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee. Bearing right at the tower, the main road has many two- and three-storey old houses with carved balconies, once the homes of rich merchants. Off to the right is **Meena Bazaar**, a labyrinth of shops for women. Further up the street on the left is a collection of old Sikh *havelis* (traditional mansions), with carved wooden windows and screens. Half a kilometre up at the end of the main road is a great gate into a run-down compound called **Ghor Khatri**. A caravanserai in Mughal times and the governor's mansion under the Sikhs, it also contains a neglected Hindu temple. Archaeological excavations in its gardens show the many strata of Peshawar's history, reaching nearly 15m below ground level, to well before the Greeks and Kushans.

LOST IN THE OLD CITY

To get the best out of the old city, duck down side alleys and passages, away from the noise and clatter of the rickshaws and crowds. This is where you'll find the city at its most traditional, with gates to family compounds, tiny shops, and kids playing in unexpectedly leafy squares. Don't forget to look up either at the array of Peshwari architecture, from crumbling caravanserais to houses with intricately carved wooden balconies.

Peshawar Museum

Housed in a glorious Victorian Mughal-Gothic hall across the tracks from the Old City, this **museum** (Map p195; Saddar Rd; admission Rs 100; ☎: 8.30am-12.30pm & 2.30-5pm Thu-Tue Apr-Sep; 9am-4pm Thu-Tue Oct-Mar) has the largest collection of Gandharan art in the world, ranging from statues and friezes depicting the Buddha's life to winged cupids and Herculean heroes. It's a dizzying stylebook of Graeco-Bactrian art, if often let down by poor labelling (also check out the Graeco-Bactrian coinage hidden upstairs). There's a small Islamic collection with some delightful illustrated books, and an ethnographic section with wooden effigies taken from a Kalasha cemetery, including an ancestor figure riding a two-headed horse.

Bala Hisar Fort

Looming large, the imposing **Bala Hisar** (Map p195; GT Rd; admission Rs 100; ☎: 3-7pm Sat, 10am-7pm Sun) and its bleak ramparts still appear to monitor movement along the Grand Trunk Rd. Babur first built a fort here in 1526 after capturing Peshawar. It was a royal residence for the Afghan Durrani dynasty before being captured, trashed, and in 1834, rebuilt in mud by the Sikhs (replaced by brick by the British). It's now the headquarters of the Frontier Corps. Access inside is limited, but there's a small museum and great views over the city from the ramparts.

Islamia College

This prestigious **college** (off Map p191), founded in 1913, is well worth a look for its grand Victorian façade and clocktower, which features on the country's Rs 1000 note. It faces Jamrud Rd and anyone can enter the gates and stroll around the manicured gardens. The green surroundings and contemplative atmosphere make it a real oasis. Any bus heading west from Khyber Bazaar or the Cantonment will drop you here; a taxi from Saddar should cost around Rs 80.

Ziarat Rahman Baba

This **tomb** (Map p191; off Hazar Khwani Rd) in green surroundings on the southern outskirts of Peshawar is a shrine to the 17th-century poet Rahman Baba, one of the masters of Pashto poetry. It is a quiet and contemplative place and a popular centre for Peshawar's Sufis, who welcome respectful visitors. On Thursday night there is Sufi devotional singing and

DARK TOURISM?

The Smugglers' Bazaar and Darra Adam Khel (p201) have long been part of the Peshawar tourist experience, and feature on most local guides' itineraries. After all, what other holiday destination offers the chance to see blocks of opium and to fire a Kalashnikov? But while guns have long been a part of Pashtun culture (drugs too, although to a much lesser extent), if you're planning a visit it's worth spending a moment considering where the backhanders your guide pays to the dealers are going.

There's plenty of cannabis on offer in the bazaar, but the big money comes from opiates. The heroin sold in Peshawar comes from Afghanistan, part of the trade that threatens the Afghan state through institutional narco-corruption as well as funding the Taliban insurgency. The trade provides 90% of Europe's heroin, although the Smugglers' Bazaar mainly serves Pakistan's rapidly growing population of heroin addicts. When we visited, one shopkeeper showed us bags of heroin while ignoring the addicts squalidly smoking the drug on the carpets behind him. As we left we pictured Pakistani tourists paying dealers to show them around the crack houses of London or New York and wondered how different that would be.

The drug-funded insurgency is also bringing boom times for the gun shops. One dealer was thrilled that the price of AK47s was going through the roof due in large part, he told us, by radicals wanting to 'do *jihad*' in Afghanistan and Waziristan. Tourism doesn't come much darker than in Pakistan's Tribal Areas.

music after evening prayers and into the night, a low-key but intimate version of the Sufi music of Lahore (p104).

Smugglers' Bazaar

On the fringes of Peshawar as you head towards the Khyber Pass is the **Smugglers' Bazaar** (Map p191), otherwise known as Karkhanai Bazaar. It thrives openly on the sale of goods imported through Pakistan for Afghanistan, then smuggled back through the Tribal Areas to avoid paying duty. Everything is available here, from cut-price electronics to clothes and stationery. It's an enormous trade that costs Pakistan millions of dollars annually in lost revenue – enough money to generate the bribes that allow the market to flourish.

Foreigners are banned from entering the far end of the bazaar where guns and drugs are openly on sale – a barrier prevents accidental entry (see the boxed text, above). An official crackdown on the trade saw this part of the bazaar bulldozed in early 2007, but it was quickly rebuilt – with the police officer leading the raid murdered a fortnight later.

It's a 20-minute ride from Saddar on one of the colourful city buses; ask for 'Karkhanai'. Don't come here when it's getting dark.

TOURS

The PTDC office can advise on hiring official guides. Several guides operate out of the Rose Hotel (opposite) and get consistently good

referrals from travellers. Typical itineraries include Old City tours, the Smugglers' Bazaar, painting workshops for the brightly decorated trucks and buses, and the Khyber Pass.

Unofficial guides often approach tourists and offer trips to the Tribal Areas and even cross-border trips into eastern Afghanistan (including Tora Bora, the scene of a pitched battle in 2001 between the US army and Al-Qaeda). Given the current security situation in that part of the country, such propositions are foolish in the extreme.

SLEEPING Budget

There are two main areas of interest to travellers: Saddar Bazaar, convenient for shops and offices, and Khyber Bazaar, noisier but close to the fascinating Old City. Always check a couple of rooms, as this bracket has a lot of small, gloomy and often grotty boxes on offer.

Sindbad Hotel (Map p192; ☎ 216961; Bajori Rd; s/d Rs 120/220, with air-con Rs 120/220; ♿) A decent Saddar hotel that keeps you close to the action. Rooms are good for the price, although those at the back are lacking in natural light. No restaurant, but you can send out for good room-service breakfasts. Hopefully they'll have replaced the missing hotel sign on the front door by the time you're there.

New Mehran Hotel (Map p192; ☎ 216961; Sunehri Masjid Rd; s/d/tr Rs 150/250/300) Firmly occupying the simple and male-orientated part of the budget

spectrum, rooms here open onto a multilevel courtyard that improves the airiness of the place and keeps the street noise down.

Shan Hotel (Map p195; ☎ 216961; Sunehri Masjid Rd; s/d/tr Rs 150/250/300) Peshawar's budget hotels often offer you clean and gloomy, or grimy with lots of natural light. The small rooms at the Shan lean towards the former.

Hotel Al-Haq (Map p195; ☎ 2590949; Cinema Rd; s/d Rs 150/250) Friendly management makes up for the rooms in this hotel, on a noisy bazaar road lined with car workshops. Rooms are fine but nothing special, which goes for most of the cluster of cheapies also along this road.

Relax Inn (Map p195; ☎ 2220241; Cinema Rd; s/d Rs 150/250) The single rooms here are poky but the doubles are bearable. Rooms are pretty clean but check the bathrooms to be sure.

Hotel Spogmay (Map p195; ☎ 2213255; Bajori Rd; s/d Rs 200/300, s/d with air-con Rs 550/800; ♿) A lively budget choice, with a mixed bag of rooms. See a few before checking in as some rooms are very cramped while others have spluttering plumbing.

Tourists Inn Motel (Map p192; ☎ 5279156; Saddar Rd; dm/d Rs 150/300) Once a backpackers' institution, but listless management means this open-plan hotel has left its glory days far behind. Overpriced and grubby dorm beds are cramped uncomfortably together, but seem spotless in comparison with the shared bathrooms and kitchen. Very depressing.

Rose Hotel (Map p195; ☎ 250755; Shoba Chowk, Khyber Bazaar; d with/without TV from Rs 400/300; ♿) Deservedly popular Old City option, this corner hotel has rooms in a variety of shapes and sizes, some with air-con. Staff are helpful and can arrange guides and the restaurant has reasonable food. Rooms on the side and back are cooler, as the front of the hotel bakes in the sun.

Midrange

Park Inn Hotel (Map p195; ☎ 2560049; Shoba Chowk, Khyber Bazaar; s/d Rs 700/1000; ♿) The exterior and lobby of this hotel are slightly glitzier than the rooms here, but they're still not bad for the price. They are certainly spacious enough, though – many have their own lobby/sitting room, while bathrooms come with bathtubs.

Green's Hotel (Map p192; ☎ 5270182; green@uni.com.net.pk; Saddar Rd; s/d Rs from 1150/1610; ♿) An old Peshawar favourite, Green's is a reliably comfortable place to lay your head. Rooms are clean and modern (with fridge and satellite

TV), and there's a pleasant covered atrium with easy chairs to relax in, as well as a good restaurant. Prices include breakfast.

Hotel Grand (Map p191; ☎ 5844357; University Rd; s/d Rs 1200/1400) If you fancy neither the hustle of Saddar nor the Old City, this hotel, closer to the fancy shops (and a few restaurants) of University Rd, might be for you. The Grand's rooms are spacious and comfortable, with good fixtures and fittings.

Top End

Pearl Continental Hotel (Map p195; ☎ 5276361; www.pchotels.com; Khyber Rd; s/d Rs 21,000/23,000; ♿) Peshawar's big international hotel, flush with businessmen on expense accounts. The rooms are comfortable and fully appointed at this level, while you're further served by three restaurants, pool and a handful of shops. Discounts are worth asking for, but prices don't include 23.6% tax.

Khan Klub (Map p195; ☎ 2214802; khanklub@yahoo.com; New Rampur Gate; r Rs 30,000-50,000; ♿) A boutique hotel in the Old City, the Khan Klub is a lovely converted 18th-century *haveli* on four levels and is something of a hidden jewel. Each of the eight rooms is individually decorated to a high specification in traditional style with carved wood, carpets and embroideries, and themed towards a different precious stone (the Turquoise Room etc). Attentive staff can organise tours and the like. The ground-floor restaurant is well worth a visit even if you're not a guest.

EATING

Hong Kong Restaurant (Map p192; The Mall; mains Rs 80-445; ☎ lunch & dinner) Peshawar's first Chinese restaurant, Hong Kong has been serving up noodles for several decades now. The menu is a blockbuster read in itself, and the dishes come quick and hot. The soups are good, while the plates of chow mein are mountainous.

Habibi Restaurant (Map p195; ☎ 2212223; Khyber Bazaar; mains Rs 80-400; ☎ lunch & dinner) A cut above most places you'll find in the Old City, the rooftop restaurant at Habibi's is made for summer-evening dining. The menu is meat-heavy, with the smells of the barbecue wafting through the air to work up your appetite.

Shiraz Restaurant (Map p192; Saddar Rd; mains Rs 85-320; ☎ lunch & dinner) There's something of a canteen atmosphere to this place, but you can fill up on a host of Pakistani dishes and its speciality – barbecued chicken. Always busy, with a quick turnover of tasty food. It's an

offshoot of the fancier restaurant of the same name in University Town.

Lala's Grill (Map p192; ☎ 270182; Saddar Rd; mains Rs 90-300; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Part of Green's Hotel, this is a welcome place to eat if you're craving clean cutlery and tablecloths. The menu sticks to standards along the Pakistani-Chinese-Continental axis, and the waiters agreeably tell you what the chef has just been cooking if you want to eat quickly, or what needs to be prepared from scratch (usually the Continental dishes) if you're in no rush.

Shiraz Restaurant (Map p191; ☎ 5702019; University Rd; mains Rs 145-530; ☺ noon-3pm & 7.30-11.30pm) A very upmarket option if you want Afghan and Pakistani fare under icy-cold air-con, with linen napkins starched to within an inch of their lives. If you're going to treat yourself, do it here with the whole leg of lamb roasted until the meat falls from the bone (Rs 480).

Khan Klub (Map p195; ☎ 2214802; New Rampur Gate; set dinner Rs 500; ☺ dinner) This place is a real dining treat – it's traditionally decorated and has frequent live music. There's really only one menu, a multi-dish Afghan feast where the food keeps on arriving until you're slumped contentedly on the cushions strewn on the floor for exactly that purpose. The kebabs and rice are obvious inclusions, but the *borani* (vegetables with yoghurt sauce), *boloni* (stuffed savoury pancakes) and *mantu* (steamed ravioli) are unexpected delights. Finish up with saffron rice pudding and green tea.

Quick Eats

The best places for a quick kebab-style meal are in Khyber Bazaar, where the smoking braziers are a dead giveaway. A local Pashtun favourite is *chapli kebab*, a mutton-burger served with bread, tomatoes and onions. Wash the fat down with a glass of green tea.

The streets leading south and east from the Rose Hotel have several good (unsigned) Afghan cafés serving rice and kebabs, plus piping-hot Central Asian-style naan, although in the Old City you're never too far from good, filling street food.

Silver Star Cafe (Map p192; Saddar Rd; ☺ 11am-9pm) A great hole-in-the-wall eatery with samosas (Rs 2), fried chicken (Rs 45), potato slices (Rs 4) and a few sweet options for dessert. Ideal for eating and running, with a few places opposite offering more of the same.

SHOPPING

The Old City is almost tailor-made for souvenir-hunting. Simply wandering its streets turns up all manner of trinkets, toys and handicrafts. There are traditional bazaars where skilled artisans and even more skilled salesmen congregate according to merchandise. Many of the traders are Afghan and offer rugs, embroideries and lapis lazuli from that country. Most shops and stalls in the Old City open from around 9am and start pulling the shutters as the sun sets. They close Friday afternoon and all day Sunday. If you're shopping seriously, good-natured haggling is essential, preceded by small talk over tea.

There's a concentration of carpet and rug merchants selling Afghani and Balochi carpets above the Shan Hotel (p197) and in the old Kamran Hotel complex (Map p195) opposite. Pricier carpet shops on Saddar Rd will accept credit cards and can help arrange shipping.

Copper and brass shops are concentrated where Qissa Khawani turns the corner towards Chowk Yadgar (Map p195). Nearby, in the Mochi Lara (Leather Bazaar) you can buy Pashtun chappals (slip-on sandals), a cheap leather bag or a bandolier.

Ander Shahar, running west from Chowk Yadgar, is the Jeweller's Bazaar. Down this lane, on the left past Mahabat Khan Mosque, are several alleys full of Afghan-run shops where you can search for bargains and antiques.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

PIA (Map p192; ☎ 9212371; The Mall, Arbab Rd, Saddar; ☺ 8am-8pm) has flights daily to the cities of Islamabad (Rs 5950), Lahore (Rs 6950) and Karachi (Rs 7920). There are weekly flights to Multan (Rs 6950).

There are one or two morning flights a day to Chitral (Rs 3750), but departures are highly weather sensitive. Planes must fly *through* the mountains to clear the Lowari Pass so demand perfect visibility. It's a short but truly spectacular flight, in a 50-seater Fokker Friendship, and is highly recommended. The service is usually fine in summer but cancellations are frequent in winter. Go to the **Northern Areas ticketing office** (☎ 9212371; ☺ 9am-1pm, 2-5pm) in the PIA building in the morning. Your name will be added to the passenger manifest, with tickets issued (and paid for) the afternoon before departure.

Peshawar has good international connections, via the Gulf States. PIA and Air Blue fly

three times a week to Dubai, with twice-weekly Aero Asia and Shaheen Air International connections. Budget airline Air Arabia flies twice a week to Sharjah, while Gulf Air, Emirates and Qatar Airways are good for connections.

AIRLINE OFFICES

Aero Asia (Map p192; ☎ 5277289; Javaid Plaza, Saddar Rd)

Air Arabia (Map p192; ☎ 5250090; Dean's Trade Centre, Islamia Rd, Saddar)

Air Blue (Map p192; ☎ 5261602; Dean's Trade Centre, Islamia Rd, Saddar)

Emirates (Map p192; ☎ 5260777; Islamia Rd)

Gulf Air (Map p192; ☎ 5213171; Arbab Rd)

Qatar Airways (Map p192; ☎ 5275240; Saddar Rd)

Shaheen Air International (Map p192; ☎ 5278456; Cantonment Plaza)

Bus

Air-con buses have their own orderly stand, opposite the general bus stand, on the southern side of GT Rd about 2km east of the Old City. Several bus companies here launch comfortable coaches to Lahore (Rs 310), Karachi (from Rs 750), Quetta (Rs 650) and Dera Ismail Khan (Rs 160). Note that the Quetta bus travels via Waziristan in the Tribal Areas so foreigners may be forbidden from catching this.

Daewoo (☎ 2651591; GT Rd) runs the most comfortable easterly services from its efficient terminal, opposite the general bus stand: Rawalpindi (Rs 200, 2½ hours, 12 daily), Lahore (Rs 570, 6½ hours, 13 daily), Multan

(Rs 680, seven hours, two daily), and Mingora (Rs 240, four hours, four daily).

The chaotic general bus stand on the north side of GT Rd has colourful, uncomfortable, slow old buses to Rawalpindi (Rs 65), as well as minibuses and Coasters heading in all directions. Leaving when full, plentiful minibuses head for Rawalpindi (Rs 140, 2½ hours), Mardan (Rs 40, one hour) and Mingora (Rs 75), Timargarha (Rs 130, four hours), Dir (Rs 180, six hours) and Chitral (Rs 400, 12 hours).

Chitral options from the Old City include **Chitral Union** (Map p195; ☎ 2210503; Spogmay Hotel, Bajorie Rd), which has an 8pm departure for Rs 400. **Chitral Mayoan** (Map p195; ☎ 2215545; Sultan Hotel, Qissa Khawani) buses depart at 6.30pm and 8.30pm for the same fare. This is an exhausting 12- to 14-hour trip that could be broken at Timargarha or Dir (the latter has better sleeping options – see p218).

Minibuses to Darra Adam Khel (Rs 25), Kohat (Rs 35), Bannu and Dera Ismail Khan go from Sadabaha bus stand (Map p191), awkwardly located south of the Old City.

Train

The train to Rawalpindi is as cheap as a minibus, and one way of avoiding the hair-raising GT Rd. There are several trains departing each day, the most convenient are detailed in the Major Trains from Peshawar table, below. To get a foreign student/tourist concession, take your passport to the Commercial Department at Cantonment train station.

MAJOR TRAINS FROM PESHAWAR

Destination	Train	Departure	Duration	Fare
Karachi	<i>Khyber Mail</i>	10.15pm	32hr	Rs 590/1040/2790 for A/B/E
	<i>Awam Express</i>	9am	32½hr	Rs 590/1370 for A/C
Lahore	<i>Khyber Mail</i>	10.15pm	9½hr	Rs 170/340/950 for A/B/E
	<i>Quetta Express</i>	7.30am	9hr	Rs 170/340/950 for A/B/E
	<i>Awam Express</i>	9am	9½hr	Rs 170/360 for A/C
Multan	<i>Khyber Mail</i>	10.15pm	17hr	Rs 290/550/1530 for A/B/E
	<i>Quetta Express</i>	7.30am	15hr	Rs 290/550/1530 for A/B/E
Quetta	<i>Quetta Express</i>	9am	32hr	Rs 540/960/2590 for A/B/E
	<i>Abaseen Rail Car</i>	6.25am	3½hr	Rs 70 for A
	<i>Quetta Express</i>	7.30am	2hr	Rs 70/130/430 for A/B/E
Rawalpindi	<i>Awam Express</i>	9am	3½hr	Rs 70/160 for A/C

Abbreviations:

A = Economy (seat)

B = Economy (berth)

C = Air-conditioned lower (seat)

D = Air-conditioned lower (berth)

E = Air-conditioned parlour

GETTING AROUND

To/From the Airport

Peshawar airport (Map p191; ☎ 5270035) is 1.5km southwest of Saddar Bazaar. A taxi will charge about Rs 100 from Khyber Bazaar. Expect to pay around two-thirds of that by autorickshaw.

Bus

Peshawar's main arteries for local buses are the GT Rd, Khyber Bazaar, Sunehri Masjid Rd, Khadim Shaheed Rd and Jamrud Rd. This links the bus stands, Old City, museum, train station, Saddar, University Town and Hayatabad; a bus or minibus along the whole thing is Rs 10. Transport becomes infrequent after dark.

Taxi & Autorickshaw

Autorickshaws are plentiful in Peshawar, and appear to contribute to half its pollution. Short hops are Rs 20; the fare between Saddar and Khyber Bazaar shouldn't top Rs 30. Yellow taxis cost roughly double this.

AROUND PESHAWAR

This region takes in Peshawar Valley, the Khyber and south to Dera Ismail Khan (DI Khan).

THE KHYBER PASS

It's less the view but the idea of the place that attracts most people to the Khyber Pass. For centuries it has divided and linked empires and peoples, marking a watershed between Central Asia and the subcontinent. Darius the Great, Babur, Buddhist travellers, Scythian warriors and soldiers of the British empire have all been drawn through the pass. Other passes to Afghanistan may carry more importance but none more romance.

The Khyber isn't at the border but weaves through the Suleiman Ranges for many kilometres. It's a long, winding and barren passage – at the end you look through the haze at the border town of Torkham and over the Durand Line to Afghanistan, which at this point looks more or less like Pakistan. It's not so much arriving at the Michni checkpoint (the end of the line for those not proceeding to Afghanistan) that is exciting, but the entire trip starting at Peshawar. The anticipation as you collect your permit and armed escort, the nervous excitement as you pass the sign

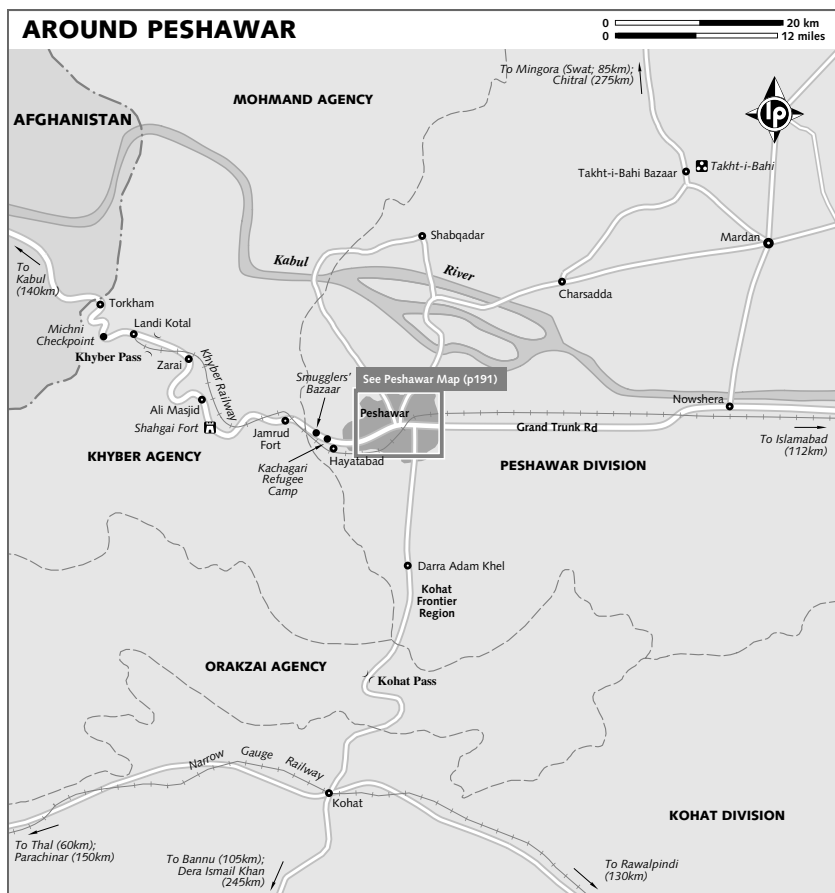
announcing 'Foreigners not permitted beyond this point' when you enter the Tribal Areas, the fortress-like Afridi homes, Buddhist ruins and old forts all combine to make you feel like you're playing a role in a Kipling novel.

Near Peshawar you're in the government-administered lands of the Khalid tribe. About 18km west of Peshawar is **Jamrud Fort**, built by the Sikhs in 1823 to mark the western edge of their empire (one of the few to expand westward to the Khyber). Its trademark stone arch (built in the 1960s) over the road marks the formal entrance to the pass. By now you're in Khyber Agency (one of seven agencies that make up the Tribal Areas), populated here mainly by the Afridi tribe. Pakistani law gives way to tribal law not far from the main road, which is the reason why there's an armed guard from the Khyber Rifles regiment sharing your vehicle. The villages here are like clusters of forts – the largest compound (you can't miss it) belongs to the family of the notorious drug-smuggler Ayub Afridi.

Little stone sentry boxes mark the hilltops; they are deserted now, but were once manned by the Frontier Force of the Pakistan army. About 6km from Jamrud, as the road climbs in a series of switchbacks, there are excellent views back east over the road and the Khyber railway as it winds its way through numerous tunnels. Massive, fortress-like Pashtun houses with high adobe walls pepper the hills, and scattered concrete 'dragon's teeth' (tank obstacles on the valley floor), are a reminder of WWII British fears of a German tank invasion of India. About 13km from Jamrud, **Shahgai Fort** (another British legacy) was built in the 1920s and is now occupied by the Frontier Force and closed to the public.

Near the narrowest point of the pass, 15km from Jamrud, is **Ali Masjid** (Ali Mosque). Above the mosque, Ali Masjid Fort commands a view over this strategic sector of the pass. A small cemetery here contains the graves of British soldiers who fell in the second Anglo-Afghan war. Before the pass was widened to 3m, it's said to have been too narrow for two fully-laden camels to pass each other. The valley walls bear insignias of regiments that have served here.

Ten kilometres on, in a broad valley by the village of Zarai, is the ruined **Sphola stupa**. On a promontory overlooking the road, it dates from Kushan times, an incongruous and oddly poignant reminder of the region's Gandharan past. The villages in this area were



badly damaged in flash floods in June 2007 that also washed away several bridges.

A further 7km on is **Landi Kotal**, at 1200m. With the growth of the Smugglers' Bazaar near Peshawar, Landi Kotal has lost some of its status as 'contraband city', but the labyrinthine bazaar, to the left and downstairs of the road, still houses several gun shops – surrounded by shops selling more mundane vegetables, toys or plastic buckets. Your armed escort, if he's worth his eventual tip, should let you wander around and have a cup of *chai* (tea). This is also the home of the Khyber Rifles Officers' Mess, with a small museum chronicling the Rifles' history and its many famous visitors.

The last point for foreigners without an Afghanistan visa is **Michni checkpoint**. From

here you can see (depending on the level of haze) the Durand Line, marked by large numbers, as it snakes across the ridge marking the border, and the border-crossing town of Torkham, 58km from Peshawar. While you're admiring the view, no doubt you will be assailed by young boys selling Afghan banknotes – a great souvenir (even if the exchange rate is outrageous).

Getting There & Away

Foreigners aren't allowed to take public transport through the Khyber, so hiring a taxi is the best option. As you're travelling through the Tribal Areas, you'll need a permit from the **Home & Tribal Affairs Department** (Map p195; Civil Secretariat, 2nd fl, Saddar Rd, ☎ 9am-2pm, Mon-Sat) in

THE KHYBER RAILWAY

The Khyber Railway is one of those astounding yet understated marvels of engineering that was a specialty of the British empire. A railway was first planned here in the aftermath of the Second Anglo-Afghan War in the 1880s, but work didn't start until 40 years later, with the first train steaming up its tracks in 1925. The statistics are boggling – there are 34 tunnels and 92 bridges and cuttings. Even with multiple switchbacks, the gradient is so steep that two engines are needed to push and pull the train to its destination: the W-shaped Changai Spur has four reversing stations, and rises 120m after each change of direction.

The track initially extended to Landi Kotal but was later extended to the border. In return for letting the British build it through their territory, the Afridi Pashtuns travelled free – an added incentive to stop them raiding the train.

Public services stopped in 1985, but **Sehrai Travels** (Map p192; ☎ 091-5272084; sehrai@brain.net.pk; 14/C Cantonment Commercial Plaza, Saddar Rd, Peshawar) charters steam trains up to Landi Kotal as the 'Khyber Steam Safari' on a more-or-less monthly schedule. Although not cheap at Rs 5985 per person, it's one of the highlights of NWFP and a must for nostalgia and railway enthusiasts. Two steam engines push-pull the little train up 600m in 30km, passing through tunnels, crossing bridges and pausing at the reversing stations of the Changai Spur.

The train travels with armed *khussadar* (tribal guards) and still generates great excitement among the locals. There are stops at Peshawar airport (to cross the runway) and at Shahgai Fort for tea, before arriving at Landi Kotal about four hours later. Lunch at the Khyber Rifles Officers' Mess is an added bonus. Flooding in the pass in June 2007 caused some damage to the railway, but the train will hopefully be up and running again during the lifetime of this book.

Peshawar. You need your passport, one photo and a photocopy of your passport's ID page and Pakistan visa. There's no fee, and the whole process shouldn't take more than 30 minutes. Apply up to two days before travelling. Once you have the permit, take three photocopies to give up at the checkpoints through the pass. On the day of travel, take your permit with your driver to the **Khyber Political Agent's Office** (Map p192; Stadium Rd, ☎ 9am-2.30pm), where you'll be issued with your armed escort. There's no fee here either, but your escort will expect a tip of around Rs 200 at the end.

Any Peshawar guide can organise the half-day trip. The PTDC office (p193) charges Rs 1800 (for up to four people), although you still have to sort your own permits. If you arrange everything yourself, you'll haggle hard to find a return taxi for Rs 1500.

If you're carrying on into Afghanistan, you'll also need a photocopy of your Afghan visa when getting your permit (which should be for the border at Torkham rather than Michni).

DARRA ADAM KHEL

An otherwise unremarkable Pashtun village in the Kohat Frontier Region of the Tribal Areas, Darra Adam Khel ('Darra' for short) is famous for one thing: guns. For over a century, Darra

has thrived on its gun factories, turning out well-made replicas of everything from muskets to Kalashnikovs.

The simple adobe buildings hide miniature factories, with smithies and lathes converting blocks of steel into pistols and automatic rifles. The best smiths claim to be able to make a working replica of a new gun in 10 days. The rat-tat-tat of shoppers testing their purchases is commonplace. All men, of course – women are nowhere to be seen – and you're more likely to see a child carrying a box of bullets than a schoolbook.

Darra is officially out of bounds to foreigners and the Home & Tribal Affairs office was refusing to issue permits. However, Darra is on the main road to Kohat and for years backpackers have made a game of jumping on a Kohat-bound bus and hopping off at Darra. The *khussadar* (tribal guards) in Darra have instructions to send foreigners back on the next bus. They are protecting you from the obvious dangers of touring this lawless, drug- and gun-saturated region, where kidnapping is a real risk and DVDs of *jihadi* beheadings are sold openly in the bazaars. In reality, what happens is that you pay out several hundred rupees as a 'fine' and get to inspect the primitive workshops and (for a further payment) fire off a few rounds, before being put on the

next bus to Peshawar. In the current fractious climate on the frontier, however, we advise against travelling under your own steam – although guides in Peshawar use their contacts to operate day tours to the town. For more on the darker side of Peshawar's tourist scene, see the boxed text, p196.

Avoid the temptation to buy anything, especially the tiny pen guns. Outside tribal lands there are stiff penalties for possession of unlicensed weapons.

KOHAT

☎ 0922 / pop 125,271

This army town and divisional headquarters south of Peshawar has a cantonment, a huge British-era fort (off limits), the *mazar* (shrine) of Sufi teacher Haji Bahadar Ali Abdullah Shah (located east of Tehsil Gate), and a noisy Pashtun bazaar. It's terribly hot in summer and not especially interesting, although men can cool off in a pool east of the fort.

Sleeping & Eating

There are only a few basic options, and it's disputable whether they'll accept foreigners in the current climate. **Green Hill Hotel** (Thal Rd) has basic rooms and a restaurant. Hotel Nadria, south of the Green Hill on the edge of the bazaar, has similar rooms and air-con doubles. There are also several cheap hotels facing the local bus yard.

Getting There & Away

By road, Kohat is about 1½ hours from Peshawar, crossing the low, stony Kohat Pass that's studded with ruined watchtowers and has a Frontier Constabulary post. Bannu is two to three hours further south and Dera Ismail Khan is about six hours away. Buses (Rs 40) go from the Peshawar general bus stand and from Sadabaha bus stand, south

of the Old City. Kohat's general bus stand is 5km south on the Bannu Rd. Coming from Peshawar, many buses will drop you at Hangu Chowk on the western fringe of town. Suzukis shuttle between here and the centre and the train station. Kohat is also linked by rail to Rawalpindi.

BANNU

☎ 0928 / pop 46,896

Like Kohat, Bannu is mainly an administrative headquarters, army garrison and junction on the Peshawar to Quetta road. In the 1840s the Sikhs, unable to conquer the feisty Bannuchis outright, periodically plundered the countryside. Sir Herbert Edwardes, then a 29-year-old British 'adviser' to the Sikhs, so successfully won the Bannuchis' trust that he persuaded them to submit to the Sikhs, and later to join in defeating them. For some time the town was called Edwardesabad.

There are lots of guns in evidence, and sometimes gunfire. The police will insist you register with them if you stay the night – or just put you on the next bus out of town. They are located in the *kucheri* (law courts) area.

Sleeping & Eating

In the Chai Bazaar, the rooms at the Hotel Sajjad are a step up from the spartan Farid Hotel. At Lakki Gate there are more options: New Jan's Hotel has a restaurant, and nearby is the Three Star Hotel.

Getting There & Away

Air-con coaches travel here to/from Peshawar (Rs 100, five to six hours). You can also head to Dera Ismail Khan (three hours) and Quetta (18 hours). The route to Quetta, through Tribal Areas and requiring a permit, is not recommended.

DERA ISMAIL KHAN (DI KHAN)

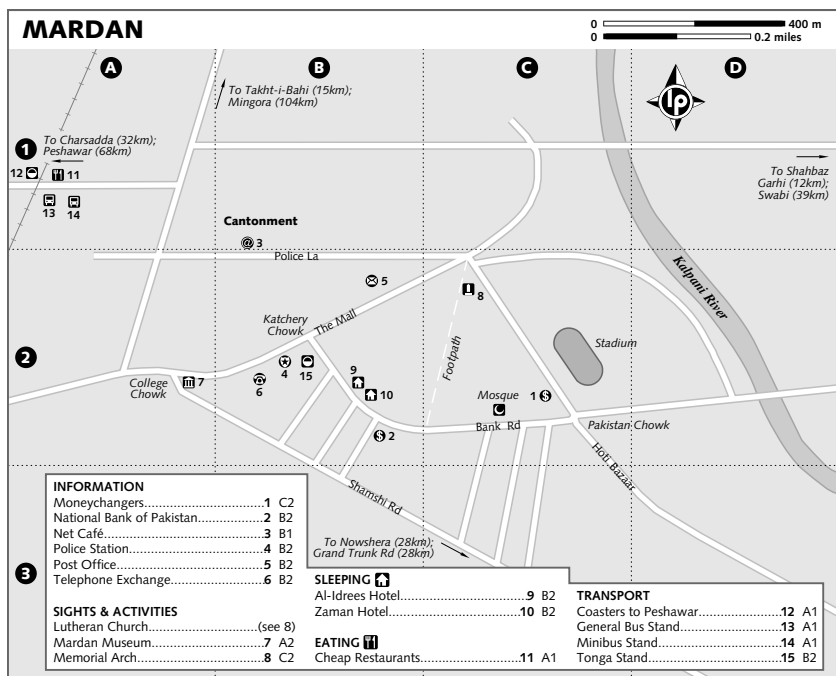
☎ 0961

Commonly referred to as DI Khan, this small market town is on the west bank of the Indus River, just east of the peak called Takht-i-Suleiman (Throne of Solomon). This Pashtun region is unsettled and is potentially dangerous for unaccompanied travellers. This is Pakistan's only divisional headquarters without a train station.

DI Khan is known throughout Pakistan for its decorative brass inlay work, which can be picked up fairly cheaply in the bazaar.

WARNING

Before travelling south from Peshawar, it's essential to seek advice on the current political situation as the highway passes through the restive Tribal Areas. Talk to Peshawar's PTDC (p193) and read the *Frontier Post* newspaper for the latest situation. During research, police wouldn't allow us to travel the road south to Quetta via Dera Ismail Khan.



Sleeping & Eating

There are several reasonable and inexpensive hotels on Circular Rd and in the bazaar, such as Al-Habib, Bloom Star and Jan's. Most picturesque is the restful Midway Hotel by the Indus River. Cheap snacks can be found in the Topan Wala Bazaar. Otherwise, the hotel restaurants turn out acceptable Pakistani and Chinese dishes.

Getting There & Away

If you're planning to come to DI Khan by road from any direction, you should first check with the PTDC, the deputy commissioner's office or the police in the nearest large town, as there is little government presence in this area. Travel after dark is especially not advised.

The road from DI Khan to Quetta (630km), via Zhob (15 hours by bus), Qila Saifullah and Ziarat, is recommended. The road passes near the Waziristan Tribal Area, and permits are required. Peshawar-bound buses leave from the bus station at the corner of Topan Wala and East Circular Rds. PIA has a daily flight to Peshawar.

MARDAN

☎ 0931

In the heart of the Peshawar Valley, Mardan is an old British military cantonment, famous as the birthplace of the Guide Corps, an elite border regiment founded in the 1840s. It's a fairly sleepy place these days (horse-drawn tongas are still popular taxis) with little to offer in itself, but its location makes it a potential base for exploring the wealth of Gandharan sites that litter the valley.

Orientation & Information

From the central Cantonment, the old town is east across the Kalpani River. Long-distance transport is to the west and hotels, food and other travellers' needs are south, mainly in the Mall and Bank Rd.

Sights

In the centre of the new town is a **memorial arch** to Louis Cavagnari and his Guides, whose Kabul murder in 1879 helped spark the second Anglo-Afghan war. Near the arch and a small park is a **Lutheran church and school** founded in 1937. The small **Mardan Museum**

(The Mall; admission free; ☎ 8.30am-12.30pm & 2.30-5.30pm Thu-Tue) has exhibits on Gandhara and local ethnography.

Sleeping & Eating

Choices are limited; don't come with too high expectations.

Al-Idrees Hotel (☎ 663339; Bank Rd; s/d Rs 150/250)

Fairly decent rooms although a little on the gloomy side, with attached restaurant.

Zaman Hotel (☎ 663109; Bank Rd; s/d Rs 150/300)

The best accommodation option, with reasonably clean and airy rooms and an attached restaurant.

The general bus stand has plenty of even drearier and cheaper options. You'll also find lots of cheap restaurants and snack stalls in the vicinity.

Getting There & Around

The general bus stand is the hub of all long- and short-distance transport. Minibuses go throughout the day to Takht-i-Bahi (Rs 10, 15 minutes), Shahbaz Garhi (Rs 10, 15 minutes) and Charsadda (Rs 20, 30 minutes). Minibuses also go to Peshawar (R40s, one

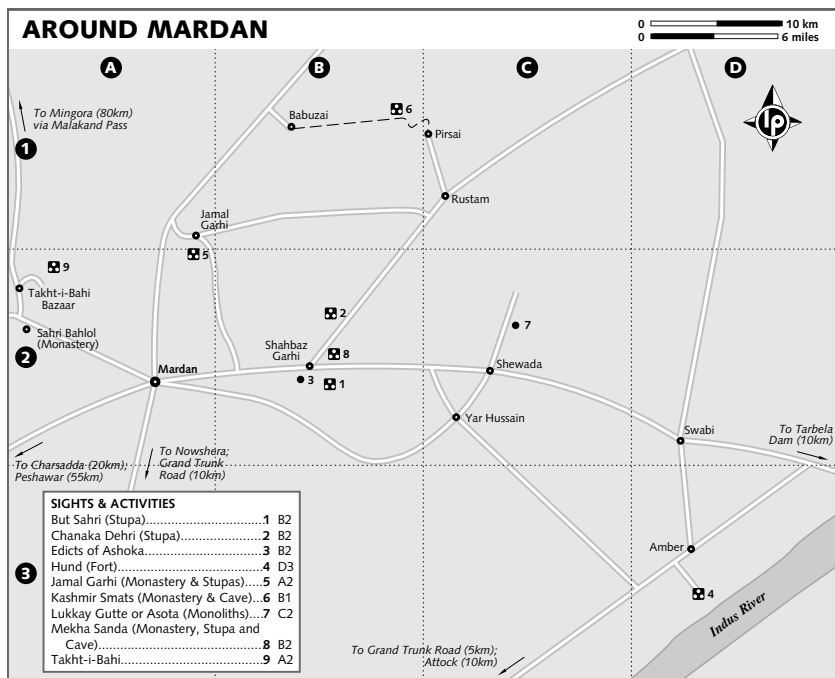
hour), Mingora (Rs 80, three hours) and Rawalpindi (Rs 90, three hours). Bigger buses run to Peshawar and Rawalpindi for about two-thirds of the price, while slightly more expensive Coasters go to Peshawar from a stand west of the train line.

Tongas in Mardan cost around Rs 15. Day hire for a taxi if you want to explore sites further out is around Rs 2500 according to your haggling skills.

AROUND MARDAN

The Mardan Plain is rich in Buddhist and pre-Buddhist ruins, which, along with those of Taxila and Lower Swat, provide a glimpse of Gandhara's prosperous and powerful old kingdoms. Many sites are simply unexcavated mounds, while some are buried under later development. Although all their treasures have gone to the museums, the best sites still offer a feast for the imagination.

Most intact and impressive are the Buddhist monastery at Takht-i-Bahi; the Ashokan inscriptions and stupa complexes of Shahbaz Garhi; and the monastery and stupas at Jamal Garhi – all within 15km of Mardan. The countryside



is rugged in places and very hot in summer so bring sturdy shoes, sun protection and water.

The sites are accessible by public bus (and the occasional long walk) from Mardan. If you want to use Peshawar as a base, then Takht-i-Bahi, Shahbaz Garhi and Jamal Garhi can be covered in a long day-trip by hired car or taxi. Takht-i-Bahi is accessible as a long day-trip by public bus from Peshawar.

Takht-i-Bahi

This **Buddhist monastery** (admission Rs 50) on a commanding rocky hill 15km northwest of Mardan is by far NWFP's stand-out Gandharan site, and compares more than favourably with Taxila near Islamabad. It thrived between the 1st and 7th centuries AD before being abandoned, finally giving up its secrets to British archaeologists from 1907 to 1913, who also reconstructed parts of the site.

You enter through a courtyard that at one time held at least 35 stupas and 30 little chapels with Buddha statues. A few statues have been left *in situ*, the rest are in the Peshawar Museum (p194). The walls would have been plastered, but now reveal the amazing dry stone walling techniques that constructed the complex. Up the stairs to the south is the base of a huge stupa (the monastery's most important stupa) and more chapels; to the north is a cloister surrounded by monks' cells and a refectory, kitchen and water tank. Beyond the central courtyard is a double row of sunken chambers, possibly for meditation.

The helpful *chowkidar* (caretaker), who has been here for over 30 years, speaks English well and will happily guide you around for a generous tip (around Rs 100), as well as sell copies of a useful pamphlet (Rs 40) on the site.

Uphill from the monastery are the ruins of a sizable village. The views across the plain, southwest to Peshawar and north into Swat, are wonderful in the morning or late-afternoon light.

Two or 3km from Takht-i-Bahi Bazaar, back towards Mardan, is Sahri Bahlol village, built on the ruins of another monastery. All that's left are a few walls and water channels, five minutes' walk off the road.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Minibuses run from Mardan to Takht-i-Bahi Bazaar (Rs 10, 15 minutes). From a sign reading 'Archaeological Ruins', drive, walk or catch a tonga east for 3km to a parking bay. A

path leads steeply from here to the monastery entrance. There's no shelter at Takht-i-Bahi and summer days are scorching, so an early start is recommended.

Shahbaz Garhi

This village, 13km east of Mardan, and once a major trade crossroads, is best known for its rock-cut **Edicts of Ashoka**. These inscriptions in the Gandharan script were left all over the Mauryan empire from India to Afghanistan in the 3rd century BC, following Ashoka's conversion to Buddhism, urging his people to live lives of piety and moderation. The edicts are under a small shelter on a hill a few hundred metres south of the village centre.

Shahbaz Garhi is also associated with the Buddha himself, in his previous incarnation of Prince Visvantara. For giving away his kingdom's magic elephant to a rival ruler, he was banished and became a hermit in the surrounding hills. Embracing the ascetic life, he even gave his own children away, eventually being recognised for his piety and welcomed back into society.

The cave where he lived is on **Mekha Sanda**, about 1km north of Shahbaz Garhi on the road to Rustam. Past the ruins of a stupa and monastery (worth visiting in themselves), a thorny track to the right climbs for half an hour to the summit, with good views of the plains. Visvantara's cave is on the far side of a rise just north of here, although you may have to enlist local help to find it.

The ruins of **Chanaka Dehri** (White Elephant) stupa and monastery are in a field a 1km-walk from Mekha Sanda out on a dirt track, beneath some power lines.

A minibus to Shahbaz Garhi from Mardan takes 20 minutes and costs Rs 10.

Jamal Garhi

The ruins of a monastery and a beautiful courtyard of stupas are on a hilltop overlooking this village, 15km north of Mardan. The view, including that of Takht-i-Bahi and Shahbaz Garhi, is especially grand at sunrise or sunset.

To get here, catch a Katlang-bound bus from Mardan and get off early; the summit is a 45-minute walk from the village.

Kashmir Smats

This is a holy site to Hindus and Buddhists (its name means Kashmir Cave), though its

monastery, ritual bath and stupas have been decimated by treasure-hunters. The hike here takes a long day and is only for the fit and very adventurous. It's also advisable to take a guide.

Take a bus north from Mardan past Jamal Garhi to Katlang, and a pick-up on to Babuzai village. From Babuzai a rocky eastward road becomes a path that enters a narrow valley after 1½ hours' walking. A further steep 1½ hours' walking with fine views brings you to a concrete building; the complex is about half an hour on, at about 2100m high. To reach the cave, head away from the monastery to the other side of the pass and double back – steps lead into the cave (mind the bats). Legend says there's a tunnel from here all the way to Kashmir.

Lukkay Gutte (Asota)

Off the road to Swabi, 40km east of Mardan, is a collection of stone monoliths, possibly an Aryan religious site from the 6th century BC. Of 30 original stone slabs, 21 remain in various states of verticality. From Mardan take a Swabi-bound bus to Shewada, and from there a Suzuki or tonga to Asota village. The site is opposite a mosque, 200m past the Asota turn-off.

Hund

This is where Alexander the Great, Xuan Zang, Genghis Khan and Tamerlane most probably crossed the Indus en route to India. It was the Hindu Shahi capital of Gandhara in the 9th and 10th centuries, and a Mughal stronghold against the Pashtuns. The emperor Akbar ordered the construction of the town's impressive walls that still mark out what is an otherwise anonymous village. Part of the ancient road remains, and the river setting is as pretty as anywhere in the area.

Take a bus from Mardan to Swabi and a bus or minibus on to Amber. From there Hund is a 4km walk or Suzuki ride.

Charsadda

Midway between Peshawar and Mardan on the road to Swat are the ruins of **Pushkalavati** (Lotus City). It was capital of Gandhara from the Achaemenids to the Kushans, until it was abandoned in favour of Peshawar in the 2nd century AD.

The site has yielded a rich trove of pottery, jewellery and Greek-influenced art but there

isn't much to see now. Best known is the 20m-high mound of Bala Hisar, said to be the citadel besieged by Alexander the Great in 327 BC, and the centre of the ancient city. In the 2nd century BC the Bactrians built their own city in a Greek-style grid at Shaikhan Dheri (Mound of the Sheikhs), 1km to the northeast, also just a weedy hill now. Other ruins have all been built over.

To get to the ruins from Charsadda town, go west across a tributary of the Swat River; on the far side of the bridge, turn right up a track for about 1km to Bala Hisar. Shaikhan Dheri is just visible across the river.

Mardan-bound buses from Peshawar (and most traffic to/from Swat) pass through Charsadda.

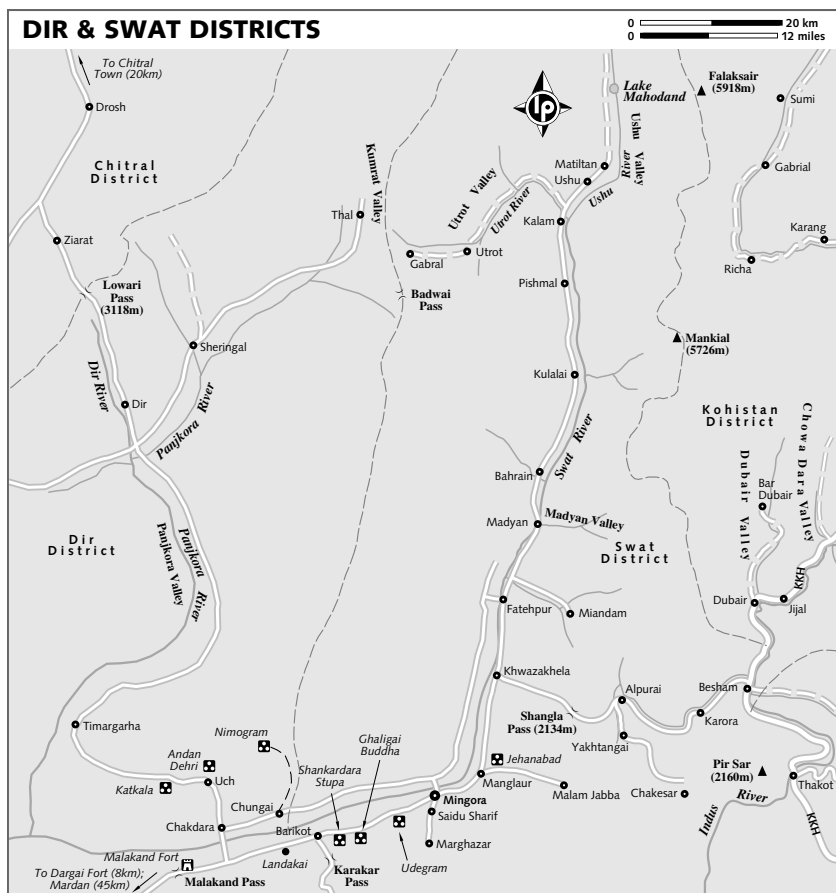
SWAT DISTRICT

In a region full of dramatic scenery, Swat stands out as a particularly beautiful corner of northern Pakistan. A broad fertile valley just touched by the monsoon, it stretches nearly 200km from the Malakand Pass to the high reaches of Swat Kohistan. A magnet for hippies in the 1970s ('the Switzerland of the East'), it's often overlooked by today's travellers, although not by domestic tourists who flock here every summer for the clean air and fine landscapes.

Rich farmland fans out along the wide Swat River basin, centred on the twin towns of Mingora and Saidu Sharif that together form Swat's urban hub. It's hardly the first big town in Swat, as the valley was the site of many previous civilisations, including the Kushan kingdom of Gandhara and the Hindu Shahis, each of whom left behind a multitude

SWAT VALLEY: WARNING

In November 2007, serious fighting broke out in Swat between Islamist followers of the radical cleric Maulana Fazlullah and the Pakistan army. Over 20,000 troops were mobilised, and at least 200 militants killed. Although the valley was reportedly cleared of violence as we went to press, violent aftershocks are liable to continue for the foreseeable future, putting Swat out of bounds to travellers.



of historical sites to be discovered. North of here, the mountains start to close in past Madyan, squeezing the river into a leaping torrent, and forcing villages down to the banks or up the valley walls. The deodar-forested, snowcapped northern peaks are dominated by 5918m Falaksair. The Pashtuns of the valley floor become replaced by Kohistanis (literally 'people of the mountains') and nomadic Gujars who tend flocks on the high pastures. It's a popular area for hiking, and its streams are thickly stocked with trout.

Swat is accessible year-round, although it is snowbound from Bahrain northwards between the months of November and March (even then transportation is occasionally possible and some hotels are open). Summer is

mostly fine and hot with some rain in July and August.

HISTORY

Alexander the Great crossed the Swat River with part of his army and, before turning south, subdued the locals at what are now Barikot and Udegam. His successors ceded Swat to the Mauryan dynasty. Under them and the later Kushan empire, Buddhism thrived here and it was probably the birthplace of Vajrayana (Tantric Buddhism), which in the 7th century took root directly in Ladakh and Tibet. Even as Buddhism was declining in the rest of Gandhara it remained Swat's prevailing religion until the 15th century despite Hindu, and then Muslim, arrivals.

By the 16th century the Yusufzai Pashtuns, driven before the advancing Mughal army of Babur, were the valley's dominant tribe. With them came missionaries, forcefully converting Kohistanis to Islam.

Swat remained stiffly independent and chafed against British control from the 19th century. Hostilities erupted into open war in 1897 with the Malakand Uprising, in which a young Winston Churchill served as both soldier and cub reporter. In 1926 Swat was granted independent status under a Wali (ruler), and kept Pakistan at partial arm's length following Partition. The Wali's sovereignty was finally abolished in 1969 when Swat formally became part of NWFP.

MINGORA & SAIDU SHARIF

☎ 0936

In recent decades the two towns of Mingora and Saidu Sharif have merged into one another to form a sprawling unit. Mingora is the older market town with a heaving bazaar, long-distance transport and most of the hotels. Saidu Sharif is the traditional seat of Swat power and the administrative headquarters

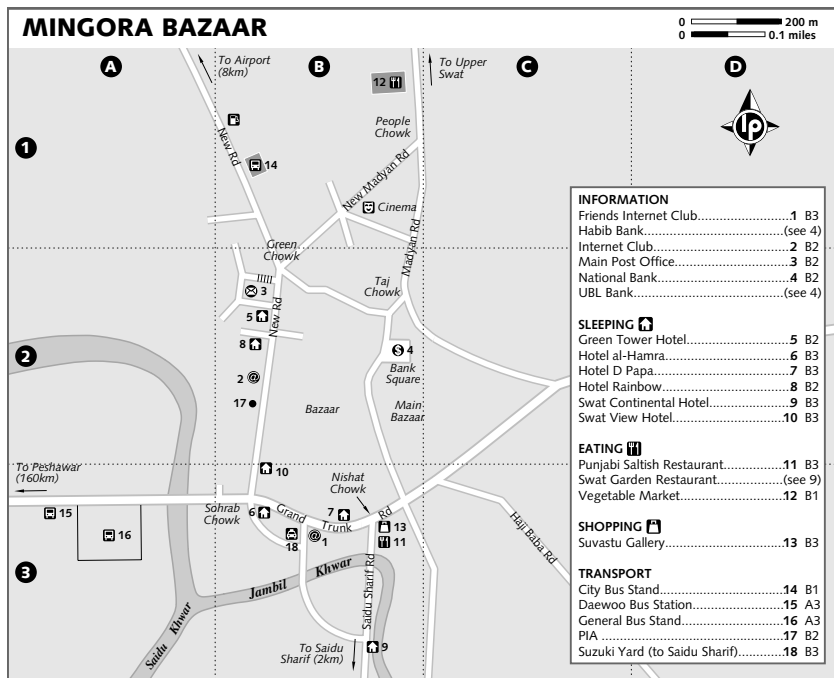
for the Malakand Division that also covers Dir and Chitral.

This area is the base from which to see Lower Swat's wealth of Buddhist and other historical sites (there's a good museum too), and to change buses for Upper Swat. Mingora's noise, traffic and frenetic atmosphere may come as a shock if you've arrived from the north.

Orientation

Mingora sits on the south bank of the Swat River, straddling the main highway up the valley. The general bus stand is on the GT Rd west of Sohrab Chowk, the main centre for accommodation. The airport is about 8km northwest of the bazaar. The main bazaar runs along GT Rd and is permanently choked with traffic, fumes and noise – shopping is more fun in the narrow side lanes. The most interesting of these are between New Rd and Bank Sq.

Saidu Sharif is south of Mingora, up the cul-de-sac Marghazar Valley beside the Saidu River. The towns meet across the tributary Jambil Khwar, though Saidu's centre is 3km south at the old royal compound.



Information

INTERNET ACCESS

Friends Internet Club (Map p209; GT Rd, Mingora; per hr Rs 25; ☎ 24hr)

Internet Club (Map p209; New Rd, Mingora; per hr Rs 25)

MEDICAL SERVICES

Central Hospital (Map p210) In Saidu Sharif.

MONEY

The following banks will all do foreign exchange:

Habib Bank (Map p209; Bank Sq, Mingora)

National Bank (Map p209; Bank Sq, Mingora)

UBL Bank (Map p209; Bank Sq, Mingora)

POST

Main Post Office (Map p209; Mingora; ☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Sat) Has poste restante.

Post Office (Map p210; Marghazar Rd, Saidu Sharif; ☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Sat)

TELEPHONE

There are numerous public call offices (PCOs) in both towns, where you can make local, interstate and international calls.

TOURIST INFORMATION

PTDC office (Map p210; ☎ 711205; Saidu Sharif;

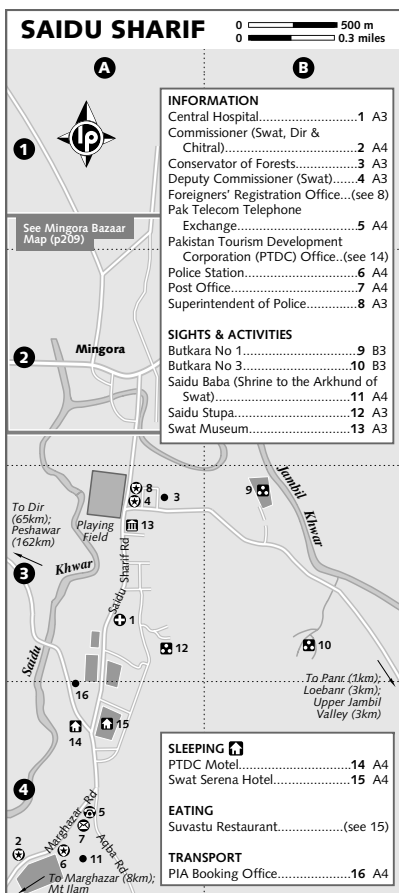
☎ 9am-1pm & 2-4.30pm Mon-Thu & Sat, 9am-1pm Fri) Inside the PTDC Motel. Staff give reliable advice on visiting archaeological sites in Swat and can book PTDC motels in Malam Jabba, Miandam, Mankial and Kalam.

Sights

Several important excavation sites of Buddhist ruins are in Saidu Sharif. Of these, Butkara No 1, Butkara No 3 and Saidu Stupa are easy to reach on foot.

SWAT MUSEUM

Partly funded by the Japanese, this excellent **museum** (Map p210; Saidu Sharif Rd; admission Rs 50; ☎ 8.30am-12.30pm & 2.30-5.30pm summer, 9am-1pm & 2-4pm Thu-Tue winter), located in Saidu Sharif, should be on anyone's itinerary if they have an interest in Buddhist Swat. Gandharan-style statuettes and friezes depict the lives of the Buddha along with seals, tiny reliquaries and other treasures, mostly from Butkara No 1 and Udegram. In other rooms there are pre-Buddhist artefacts, and you'll also find an ethnographic gallery with traditional carved Swati furniture, jewellery and some wonderful embroideries.



BUTKARA NO 1

Also called Butkara, or the local name of Gulkada (*gool-ka-da*), this site has yielded one of Swat's richest harvests of artefacts, all now in museums. The enormous central stupa was probably begun by Ashoka in the 3rd century BC; by the 10th century it had been rebuilt five times, each new version enclosing the last. Around it were over 200 little stupas built by wealthy pilgrims. On the north side was a monastery and to the north and west a village for pilgrims. Note the metre-tall stone lions.

To get here, find the first road just north of the Swat Museum, off Saidu Sharif Rd, and walk east along it for 900m. Then walk 250m north on a footpath across fields to a boundary fence in a grove of trees.

BUTKARA NO 3

Further along the Jambil Valley is a partly reconstructed courtyard of enclosed stupas. To get here, continue 500m past the turn-off to Butkara No 1 until you reach a culvert. Then climb five minutes up a gully to the right. It can be difficult to find, but there's a village on the way and someone from there can probably show you.

OTHER JAMBIL VALLEY SITES

At Panr (pronounced 'pahn') on the other (east) side of Jambil Khwar are a stupa and monastery from the 1st to 5th centuries AD. You'll find a path and bridge about 1.5km beyond Butkara No 3, or you can head 3km out along Haji Baba Rd from Mingora Bazaar. Further out at Loebanr, on the west side, are an Aryan graveyard from the 2nd to 1st millennia BC and a 3rd-to-4th-century-AD stupa.

SAIDU STUPA (KANCHAI KANDA)

The remains of this impressive stupa and monastery are just up a track from the paved road behind Central Hospital.

SAIDU BABA

This is the honorific nickname of the colourful shrine to the Akhund of Swat, behind the Saidu Sharif police station and near the old Wali's residence.

Sleeping

Many of the cheap hotels in Mingora Bazaar are reluctant to take foreigners; you'll find the places listed here are more welcoming. Midrange hotels are often heavily booked in the summer.

BUDGET

In addition to hotels here, there is a host of cheapies lurking around the main bus stand for those with tight budgets and relaxed attitudes to grubbiness.

Hotel Rainbow (Map p209; ☎ 720573; New Rd; s/d Rs 100/200) The simplest of the hotels that accept foreigners; in fact, you get a very warm reception here. Rooms are simple, but good enough for the price (you get a toilet, but cold showers are shared). Down a quiet alley.

Hotel D Papa (Map p209; ☎ 725362; GT Rd; s/d Rs 300/450; 🍷) There are big doubles here, well matched to the price. There's also a slightly musty atmosphere, although it doesn't seem to bother the staff or the guests, who usually

have the place bursting to capacity in summer. There are a couple of VIP, four-bedroom suites with air-con for Rs 1000.

Swat View Hotel (Map p209; ☎ 700889; Shah Rawan Plaza, New Rd; s/d Rs 400/500; 🍷) You get a mixed bag at this hotel. Rooms are generously sized and of fair quality, but although the staff are friendly they could do with putting the broom about a bit more than they currently do. Rooms at the back are the quietest, those with air-con are overpriced at Rs 900.

Green Tower Hotel (Map p209; ☎ 762725; New Rd; s/d Rs 400/500) Fronted in green glass and sat on a busy road, but with rooms far enough back from the traffic to cut down on noise. Rooms are generously sized, with fairly new fixtures and fittings.

Hotel Al-Hamma (Map p209; ☎ 710966; GT Rd; s/d Rs 400/700) For the price, this hotel's reach is slightly beyond its grasp, but rooms are nevertheless comfy and clean. The side street location cuts down on noise while still keeping you near the heart of the action.

MIDRANGE

PTDC Motel (Map p210; ☎ 727775; fax 724774; Aqba Rd; s/d Rs 900/1500, s/d with air-con Rs 1500/2000; 🍷) Modern, spacious and comfortable, although destined to be unfavourably compared to the Swat Serena almost opposite. In fact, it's one of the PTDC's better outfits, with the added bonus of a pleasant garden. The PTDC office is located here.

Swat Continental Hotel (Map p209; Saidu Sharif Rd; ☎ 711399; info@swatcontinental.com; s/d Rs 1300/1600; 🍷) A good midrange option, with well-appointed and decent-sized rooms. The decent hotel restaurant makes this a comfortable option for the money.

TOP END

Swat Serena Hotel (Map p210; ☎ 711637; swat@serena.com.pk; Saidu Sharif Rd; s/d from Rs 5500/6300; 🍷 🍷 🍷) It should be no surprise that this is Swat's plushest hotel, with immaculate modern rooms decorated with a hint of Swati tradition. The gardens and neatly tended lawns are fine for relaxing, and there's a nightly barbecue by the pool and the swish Suvastu Restaurant (p212) for dining. Prices exclude tax.

Eating

Punjabi Saltish Restaurant (Map p209; Said Sharif Rd; mains Rs 60-210) A clean, popular and inexpensive restaurant just off the GT Rd. It serves the

usual Pakistani fare and occasional Western fast-food items in bright surroundings.

Swat Garden Restaurant (Map p209; Saidu Sharif Rd; mains Rs 150-450) On the ground floor of the Swat Continental Hotel. Come here to eat well in nice surroundings without breaking the bank. The Pakistani dishes are the best, as some of the Continental dishes get interpreted with eccentric flexibility.

Suvastu Restaurant (Map p210; ☎ 711637; Saidu Sharif Rd; mains Rs 220-480; 🍳 breakfast, lunch & dinner) This excellent restaurant is the place for a splurge. Sharply dressed waiters lay out meals on crisp linen, offering a wide selection of Chinese, Continental and Pakistani dishes. Suvastu's evening poolside barbecue buffet (Rs 500) makes an excellent alfresco alternative.

For quick eats, there are dozens of Pashtun eateries along GT Rd, particularly near the bus station and around Nishat Chowk. Fill up on chicken, kebabs, curries and dhal for a few rupees, washed down with juice from a nearby drinks stand. Seasonal fruit vendors are everywhere, especially trying to out-shout one another at Green Chowk.

Shopping

Suvastu Gallery (Map p209; GT Rd, Mingora Bazaar) This large emporium has a good range of handicrafts, carpets and jewellery. This isn't really a place for bargains, however, much of the stock is of high quality. Cheaper shopping options exist near the corners of GT Rd and New Rd.

Getting There & Away

AIR

At the time of research there were no flights to/from Saidu Sharif airport, although PIA (Map

HOW LONG FROM SWAT TO THE KARAKORAM HIGHWAY?

Following are approximate travel times by minibus or jeep.

Route	Distance	Time
Mingora–Khawazakhela	28km	45min
Khawazakhela–Shangla Pass	20km	45min
Shangla Pass–Alpurai	11km	30min
Alpurai–Besham	34km	1½hr

p210; Faizabad Rd; ☎ 711092) plans to restart services to Islamabad and Peshawar.

BUS

Long-distance transport goes from the general bus stand on GT Rd. There are regular minibuses to Peshawar (Pekhora in Swati Pashto; Rs 110) and Mardan (Rs 70). Large buses depart all day for Rawalpindi (Rs 140). Daewoo operates from its own station near the main bus stand, with several daily services to Peshawar (Rs 240, four hours) via Mardan, and daily to Rawalpindi (Rs 360, seven hours) and Lahore (Rs 750, 10 hours).

Minibuses go upvalley all day to Miandam (Rs 25, 1½ hours), Madyan (Rs 40, 90 minutes), Bahrain (Rs 50, two hours) and Kalam (Rs 60, 2½ hours).

Minibuses also go all day to Besham (Rs 80, 3½ hours), via Khawazakhela and the Shangla Pass. Change in Besham for Gilgit, Mansehra, the Kaghan Valley and Abbottabad. For Dir and Chitral, you'll probably have to take a minibus to Timargarha (Rs 25) and change.

CAR

Hiring a car is a good idea if you want to roam the valley in search of archaeological sites. Midrange hotels usually have their own drivers, while taxis from the general bus stand should cost around Rs 2500 per day, plus fuel.

Getting Around

AUTORICKSHAW & SUZUKI

The ubiquitous autorickshaws charge around Rs 20 from Mingora's Sohrab Chowk to Saidu Sharif's Swat Serena Hotel. Passenger Suzukis ply the Saidu Sharif Rd (Rs 15), entering Mingora only as far as a yard near the GT Rd. A Suzuki and pick-up yard at Sohrab Chowk serves the suburbs on this side of the Swat River.

SHOPPING IN SWAT

Handicraft specialties include exquisite carved hardwood furniture and architectural pieces such as pillars and doorways. Large emporiums dot the roadside as you make your way up the valley. Also available in bazaars are embroidered shawls, rugs and precious stones. Locals say Mingora Bazaar has the best deals in embroidery and rugs, while carvings and jewellery are cheaper in Khawazakhela, Madyan and Bahrain. Fake old coins and stone carvings are common.

RUINS & RELICS AROUND MINGORA

You could easily spend a week exploring Swat's more obscure historical sites. Around 20 Buddhist sites have been excavated, with others lost to treasure-hunters or the farmers' plough, or yet to be surveyed. Most can be reached from Mingora by public transport. For more information, ask at the PTDC (p210) or the Swat Museum (p210).

Udegram

Around 6km southwest of Mingora, Udegram hosts the remains of the Buddhist town of Ora (subdued by Alexander the Great), the mountainside citadel of the last Shahi raja, and a mosque from the time of Mahmud of Ghazni.

Ora's excavations are unremarkable in themselves, but climb from here for 30 minutes to the ruins of the 11th-century Ghaznavid mosque, with its hall, washing pool and mihrab. A further 20 minutes brings you to the remarkable ruins of Raja Gira's massive castle. The path leads up a grand entry staircase to passages and battlements, where you can let your imagination go. Scattered up the hill are more buildings. The valley view is regal, too.

On the way back down, in a grove surrounded by a vast graveyard, is a shrine to Pir Khushal Baba, Mahmud of Ghazni's general who died wresting the fort from Raja Gira.

Local Suzukis for Udegram leave from Sohrab Chowk in Mingora Bazaar.

Ghaligai Buddha

Seven kilometres southwest of Udegram is a meditating Buddha carved on a rock right by the road. Once obviously very beautiful, it has been irreparably vandalised. Beside it is a stairway to a shallow cave where other reliefs have been defaced beyond recognition.

Barikot

A straightforward minibus ride from Mingora, Barikot has several sights. A steep one-hour climb from the village is **Shahi Fort** (visible from the road north of the village) with fantastic 360-degree views over the local farmland. The stone walls on top are new; the strong, tight Shahi walls are just below the summit on the north side.

Also within sight of the main road, 2km northeast of Barikot, is **Shankardara (or Shingerdar) Stupa**, a huge and partially-restored 2nd-century stupa with shrubs growing from it like a toupee. Just south of Barikot are the Italian excavations of what was once the fortified town of **Bazira**, conquered by Alexander the Great in 327 BC.

Nimogram

This is a quite enchanting but hard-to-access site for which you really need your own vehicle. Three large and numerous small stupas and an unexcavated monastery stand on a remote, windy ridge west of the Swat River with tremendous views. From Barikot head northwest to Chungai village, from where a jeep track winds for about 15km into the hills. The final steep stretch must be done on foot. The stupas are excellently preserved and have tremendous views.

Jehanabad Buddha

A serene 4m sitting Buddha was carved in the 7th century on a rockface north of Mingora, on the road to Malam Jabba. Take a Malam Jabba-bound pick-up from Mingora. Four kilometres past Manglaur, a few hundred metres before the turning to Jehanabad village, is a footbridge and a clear path up the other side of the valley, a 20-minute climb into the wooded hills. The outcrop with the Buddha is visible from the road.

AROUND MINGORA & SAIDU SHARIF

Malam Jabba

At the head of this valley, 45km northeast of Mingora, is a **ski resort** and **PTDC Motel** (☎ 0936-755588; s/d chalet Rs 1350/1800, standard Rs 2000/2500,

deluxe Rs 4500), with chairlift, and beginners and advanced slopes. At over 3000m, the views are spectacular up the Swat Valley and across to the Karakorams. The PTDC in Saidu Sharif (p210) can advise on skiing in season (including

equipment hire), while minibuses go directly to Malam Jabba (ma-lam ja-ba) from the general bus stand in Mingora.

Marghazar Valley & Mt Ilam

At Marghazar, a half-hour drive south of Saidu Sharif, is a luxury hotel that was once the Wali's summer residence. From here a footpath climbs beside the Saidu Khwar through villages and farmland to the top of Mt Ilam, said to be sacred to ancient Greeks, Buddhists, Hindus and even early Muslims. It's at least a four-hour climb, and the PTDC advise going in a group or with a local guide. Pick-ups go to Marghazar from near Nishat Chowk in Mingora.

KHWAZAKHELA & SHANGLA PASS

The jeep track to the Shangla Pass through the market town of Khwazakhela was once a major transport route, until the construction of the Karakoram Highway diverted traffic elsewhere. Today the town is a hub just for local transport.

The 2134m Shangla Pass has great views west to Lower Swat and east to the Pir Panjal Range bordering Kashmir. It's about 3½ hours' drive between Mingora and Besham, and the pass is open year-round, except during occasional heavy snows. Foreigners will have to sign in at several police checkpoints, so keep your passports accessible.

Although the road is poor, it's incredibly picturesque as it hugs the bottom of a narrow valley from Alpurai to Besham. Every turn seems to present a new and ruggedly beautiful environment, with the river endlessly diverted to irrigation channels and wooden mills in between narrow green fields.

UPPER SWAT

Madyan

☎ 0946

Ascending the Swat Valley, the mountains slowly begin to close in until the town of Madyan is forced to climb their slopes. Madyan is the point where the Pashtun Valley gives way to Swat Kohistan, and it could hardly be a nicer transition point. The surroundings are wonderful – green wooded slopes, cool mountain breezes and the sound of the icy tumbling river. It's easy to see why Swat has been a perennial tourist favourite. There's little to do but drink in the scenery and maybe rouse yourself to hike up above the town for the tremendous views.

In the town's bazaar you might find the luminous shawls embroidered in village workshops up the Madyan Khwar (Madyan Valley) to the east.

ORIENTATION & INFORMATION

The bazaar and bus yard are downstream (but uphill) from the Swat River bridge. A police station is behind the bus yard. **Spectrum Computer Club** (Main Bazaar, Rs 20 per hr) has a dodgy internet connection, while for souvenir shopping try the handicraft shops near Hotel Zarin Palace – there are several cheap eats also on this stretch.

ACTIVITIES

If you're in the mood, climb to **Kalagai village** and the ridges on the east side of the valley. A track begins near the Swat Holiday Hotel. There are great views one to two hours up.

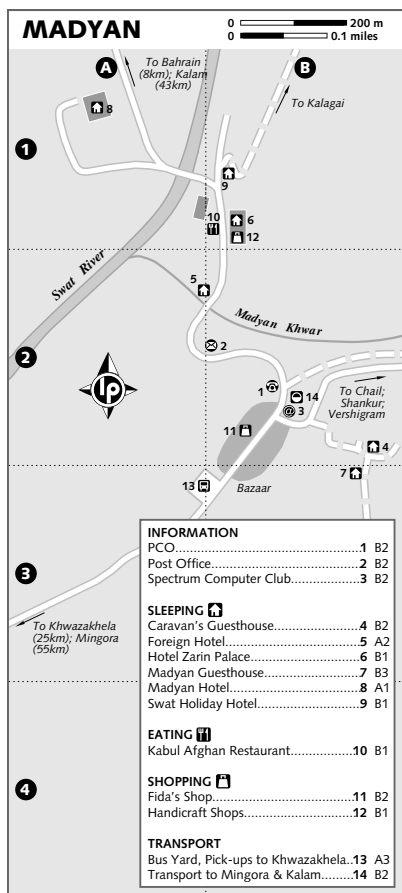
A longer, flatter walk is up the south side of Madyan Khwar, past the fish hatchery to the roadhead at Shankur (1½ hours). From here cross the river on one of the two bridges and carry on until the valley splits; the left trail goes up to Vershigram, 2½ hours from Madyan – here you'll find fine views of Mt Piazto Bandeh (the 'Uninhabited Onion'). The route is clear, but take a guide if you plan to go any further – it's quite likely some of the town youths will approach you out of curiosity anyway.

Just upstream from where Madyan Khwar joins the Swat River is a popular place to take the air, with kids playing in the river and families walking in the early evening.

SLEEPING & EATING

Madyan Guesthouse (☎ 781866; murad@madyanguesthouse.com; dm Rs 80; 📺) This simple budget option has a couple of cushion-littered dorms facing onto a courtyard. It's fairly basic (particularly the bathroom) but the friendly management makes up for this, with decent food on request.

Caravan's Guesthouse (☎ 780090; caravansguesthouse1@yahoo.com; s/d Rs 200/400) Caravan's has three immaculately clean, nicely decorated rooms with shared hot shower, a relaxing sitting area, a book exchange and good food, all of which conspire to make you want to stay longer than you planned. The guesthouse is poorly signed – ask at Fida's shop in the bazaar (well signed) from where the co-owner will direct you.



Hotel Zarin Palace (☎ 780319; s/d Rs 350/500) The large Zarin Palace has clean, pleasant doubles at the quieter end of the bazaar. It's one of several similarly appointed and priced hotels within a minutes' walk.

Foreign Hotel (☎ 780712; caravanguesthouse1@yahoo.com; s/d Rs 500/800) A new hotel with a distinct red-tiled front, and the name suggests that it gives foreigners what they want – apparently a surfeit of elaborately swagged curtains and faux gilded ceilings. Get past this and the rooms are fair value for the price, clean and modern.

Madyan Hotel (☎ 780031; s/d Rs 500/600, ste Rs 1000/1200) An older hotel with a touch of the British hill station about it. Standard rooms are fair, while the suites are almost self-con-

tained bungalows, complete with lounge and balconies over the river. Old-fashioned but not entirely without its charms.

Swat Holiday Hotel (☎ 780165; s/d Rs 500/600) This bright, modern hotel has a great location overlooking the river, with each floor opening out onto a wide terrace to catch the views and the breeze. Rooms aren't elaborate but decent and well sized.

Kabul Afghan Restaurant (mains Rs 60) Near the Zarin Palace, this place is typical of the non-hotel restaurants, offering tikka, kebabs and pilau in simple surroundings.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Minibuses fill up and leave for Mingora throughout the day (Rs 40, 90 minutes) from the bus yard and main bazaar. In the opposite direction, pick-ups (Rs 10) and cars (Rs 20) depart continuously to Bahrain, and less frequently to Kalam (Rs 50).

Bahrain

☎ 0946

A short drive from Madyan, the road squeezes up to Bahrain as the valley walls become ever narrower and steeper. Bahrain is a village that has burst into a tourist town, with hotels squeezed along the river and then stacked up the hillside. There are plenty of handicraft shops selling Swati woodwork.

SLEEPING & EATING

As with everywhere in the Swat Valley, prices are seasonal. The high season is June through to August, with prices tumbling at other times (although many hotels close for winter). There's little in the way of budget accommodation. The hotels below have restaurants, but in the main bazaar there are plenty of places serving Pakistani standards and fresh local trout.

Rock Valley Hotel (☎ 781115; s/d Rs 500/700) The first hotel on the road from Madyan, this very breezy hotel has lovely fresh rooms. Some rooms have balconies, all the better to enjoy views across the fields to the river.

Hotel Swiss Palace (☎ 781503; s/d Rs 600/800) One of a cluster of identikit hotels at the top end of the bazaar in a row along the river. Large, decent and slightly bland rooms come with a reasonable restaurant. For similar fare try the Hotels Marina, Swat Valley or Dimsum; on the opposite side of the street are the slightly cheaper Parbat and Deodar Hotels.

KB5 Motel (☎ 780078; r Rs 600-900) The friendly KB5 is on the main road at the southern end of town, and decorated with a surfeit of wood panelling. The rooms are small but verging on plush.

Deluxe Hotel (☎ 780115; r Rs 1200) Overlooking the frothing junction of the Swat and Darel Rivers, so the sound of the water here is alternately soothing and deafening. Rooms are clean and pleasant, with discounts for rooms on the road side of the hotel. The restaurant is a good choice.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Bahrain is 8km from Madyan. Pick-ups (Rs 10) continually run between the bazaars. Pick-ups and minibuses heading to/from Kalam (34km) cost Rs 40.

Bahrain to Kalam

Half an hour north of Bahrain the great gap in the eastern valley wall is **Mankial Khwar**, with a trail crossing to the Kandia Valley in Indus Kohistan. The trek is through fairly lawless country, so a guide is essential. At **Kulalai** is a riverside forestry resthouse.

After Kulalai the road gradually disintegrates (often impassable in winter). Twenty minutes' drive on, in the village of **Pishmal**, is a mosque with a beautiful wooden minaret. The snowy peak occasionally visible to the east is the 5726m Mankial.

Kalam

☎ 0936

Kalam was an independent kingdom before it fell under the sway of Chitral in the 19th century. It was given to Swat at Partition and now sells itself as the 'Switzerland of Pakistan' to domestic tourists. At 2070m with stunning mountain scenery it's certainly a competitor.

Tourism dominates the village and unfettered development has crept away from the Swat River and onto the slopes. But its not too hard to escape the concrete and head into the wild and beautiful landscape that is Kalam's real draw. Bear in mind that Swat Kohistan is a traditionally conservative and feudal place, and there are occasional hostilities towards both foreigners and the hordes of Punjabi tourists that come here. The PTDC advises taking a guide if you want to go hiking, and can help organise this.

Outside summer, Kalam shuts down. There's then only a handful of hotels open

(even the PTDC is closed) and food is limited to the cheap restaurants in the bazaar.

ORIENTATION & INFORMATION

Some top-end hotels and most government offices are up on the western bluff, to which there are link roads from north and south and a shorter footpath from 200m south of the footbridge. Also topside are the police, where you can get information on the local security situation, and the fisheries office, where you can get a fishing licence. The bluff also has good views up the Ushu Valley to Falaksair (5918m).

The **PTDC office** (☎ 830014; PTDC Motel) can organise jeep hire and trekking guides.

ACTIVITIES

Walks

Kalam has little intrinsic interest in itself, but the area across the footbridge is worth exploring. The grand mosque here has great wooden beams and pillars carved with scrollwork and quasi-Gandharan motifs – typical of hundreds that were once everywhere in Swat but are now being replaced with modern concrete affairs.

A half-day walk leads south from town, past the top-end hotels and then right (west) up a jeep track into dense forest. The road curves to the right and continues up to a ridge known as Hill Top, giving views of Mankial's peak. From the ridge, descend northwards to cross the Desan Khwar next to a fine wooden mosque and then meander northeast through the pretty village of Jalban until you reach the PTDC Motel (a total of three hours).

Another good walk follows a jeep track 1km east of the bazaar up to Buyun Village (Green Top), atop the bluff on the opposite side of the Swat River (three hours). From here you could continue another hour up to the meadows at Jag Banal.

Check with the police or the PTDC as to whether it is safe to do these walks unescorted.

SLEEPING & EATING

Although hotels pack the main bazaar, capacity is often tight in July and August, when you'll be lucky to find a room for less than Rs 800. Prices outside these months can tumble by up to 50%, while between October and June most places shut up shop altogether.

Kalam's hotels are uniformly midrange in style, service and rooms, most offering valley

views and all aimed squarely at Pakistani holidaymakers, so you just pick one you like the look of (and that has space). The Thames Hotel, Pameer Hotel and Khyber Hotel are fairly representative at around Rs 1200 for a room, all at the south end of the bazaar. The nearby Peshawar Hotel is a decent cheaper option.

PTDC Motel (☎ 830014; s/d standard Rs 1900/2300, huts Rs 3200/3650) Set in large grounds, with a main block and some nice huts. A few overlanders have reported being able to camp here, making it a rare budget choice – if you have a tent.

Hotel restaurants serve identikit meals, with Pakistani, Chinese and a few Continental dishes. Cheap eats can be found in the bazaar.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Minibuses go from the northern end of the bazaar to Bahrain (Rs 30), Madyan (Rs 40) and Mingora (Rs 70, 2½ hours). Jeep drivers set fares between them, sample fares include Hill Top (Rs 400), Green Top (Rs 700), Lake Mahodand (Rs 1500) and Gabral (Rs 1200).

Beyond Kalam

Just north of Kalam the Utrot and Ushu Rivers join to form the Swat River in a scenic region of steep forested mountains. The trekking is said to be the best in Swat, but it's unsafe without a guide. Utrot Valley turns west and southwest. Near Utrot village, at 2220m and 16km from Kalam, Gabral Khwar enters from the west. A road suitable for jeep runs to Utrot and 8km on to Gabral village.

Northeast up the friendlier Ushu Valley is Ushu village, 2290m high and 8km from Kalam. The road is paved to Ushu and on to Matiltan village. From here a jeep track leads to Lake Mahodand, about 25km from Kalam, with unobstructed views of Swat's highest peak, 5918m Falaksair. The road is usually open from July to November.

Check with the Kalam PTDC or police as to the safety of trekking on the roads to Utrot and Ushu, and from Ushu to Lake Mahodand, and camping at the lake. If you go anywhere off the road you will probably require an armed guide (possible to arrange through the Kalam PTDC).

SLEEPING

Check with the PTDC in Kalam before leaving as there were no hotels open in Ushu when

we visited. There are forestry resthouses in Matiltan, Ushu, Utrot and Gabral; all can be booked through the conservator of forests in Saidu Sharif with help from the PTDC in Kalam and Saidu Sharif.

DIR DISTRICT & THE LOWARI PASS

Wedged between the districts of Swat and southern Chitral is Dir, little more than the watershed of the Panjkora River (a tributary of the Swat River). Once an independent state, it is now part of Malakand Division. For today's travellers, as for the British in the 19th century, Dir is mostly a place to get through on the way to Chitral.

Dir's people have been mostly Yusufzai Pashtuns since the 16th century. In 1895 the British forced their way through Dir and over the Lowari Pass to relieve the siege of Chitral, but otherwise left the region to its own devices until Partition. Dir and its nawab (prince) remained largely autonomous until the 1960s, when it was formally absorbed into Pakistan as Dir district.

In 1950 a seasonal road was completed over the Lowari Pass into Chitral. A much-delayed tunnel through the pass is nearing completion to offer year-round access to Chitral, almost inevitably to Dir's economic detriment.

CHAKDARA

This is an old trading junction on the northern side of the Malakand Pass, where Alexander the Great forded the Swat River en route to India. Its strategic location has long been known – at nearby Damkot Hill archaeologists have found evidence of Gandharan Buddhist occupation as well as a Hindu Shahi fort. Mughal emperor Akbar garrisoned Chakdara in 1587 during an unsuccessful attempt to subdue Swat. The attempt was repeated three centuries later by another great leader, the young Winston Churchill. Nervous after the Chitral siege, in 1897 the British built the present bridge, fort and hilltop picket (named for Churchill). The Pakistan army occupies the fort so Damkot Hill is off limits to visitors.

Orientation & Information

From Damkot Hill, Suzukis go to the village, 1.5km up the road on the Dir side. From

Chakdara village roads go to Timargarha and up the west side of the Swat Valley. There's no decent accommodation in Chakdara.

Sights

CHAKDARA MUSEUM

The **museum** (admission Rs 100; ☎ 8.30am-12.30pm & 2.30-5pm summer, 9am-4pm Thu-Tue winter) is at the village's main intersection. Exhibits include well-preserved Buddhist statuary, carved columns and lintels from an old Swat mosque, and an ethnographic section with embroidery and lots of jewellery. Sadly, the captions are rather dismal and it is a poor relation to the excellent Swat Museum in Saidu Sharif (p210).

Getting There & Away

You can reach Chakdara from Mingora on Timargarha-bound minibuses (Rs 30, 30 minutes) or you can get off any bus to Mardan or Peshawar at the bridge and catch a Suzuki to the bazaar.

AROUND CHAKDARA

Katkala

A 15-minute drive from Chakdara, at the pass from the Swat River basin into the Talash Valley, are the remains of a Shahi fort (*katkala* in Pashto). On a local pick-up or Timargarha-bound minibus, ask for Katkala or the nearest village, Saraibala, and climb south from the road for about half an hour. Locally, the fort itself is also called Marnai.

TIMARGARHA

Timargarha is the administrative headquarters of Dir district and its main transport hub – travellers are most likely to come here to change vehicles between Swat, Peshawar and Chitral. It's a noisy, unimpressive place, with the bus station on the main road leading south out of town in a roaring swirl of vehicles, hawkers, beggars and bazaars. A few rock-bottom hotels huddle together south of the bus station, but there are better options on offer in Dir Town.

Getting There & Away

Minibuses leave all day for Dir Town (Rs 50, 2½ hours), Peshawar (Rs 130, four hours), Mardan (Rs 100, three hours) and Chitral (Rs 230, eight hours). There are less frequent departures further afield to Rawalpindi and Lahore.

HOW LONG FROM SWAT TO CHITRAL?

Following are approximate travel times by minibus or pick-up.

Route	Time
Mingora–Chakdara	1hr
Mardan–Chakdara	1½hr
Chakdara–Timargarha	1hr
Timargarha–Dir Town	2hr
Dir Town–Drosh	4½hr
Drosh–Chitral	1½hr

DIR TOWN

☎ 0944

Founded in the 17th century, this slightly wild town on the Dir River (tributary to the Panjkora) was the seat of the old nawab. The former palace, occasionally occupied by royal offsprings, sits high on a hill outside the town. The bazaar is fascinating and rough-edged – a local handicraft speciality is pocketknives. Afghanistan is only 20km away in a straight line, or about 45km by road. Dir is a very conservative town, and political and religious strife on the border or elsewhere in NWFP has frequently been reflected on its streets in recent years, so check the local situation before travelling. Although the local hills look ripe for hiking, you shouldn't head out on your own.

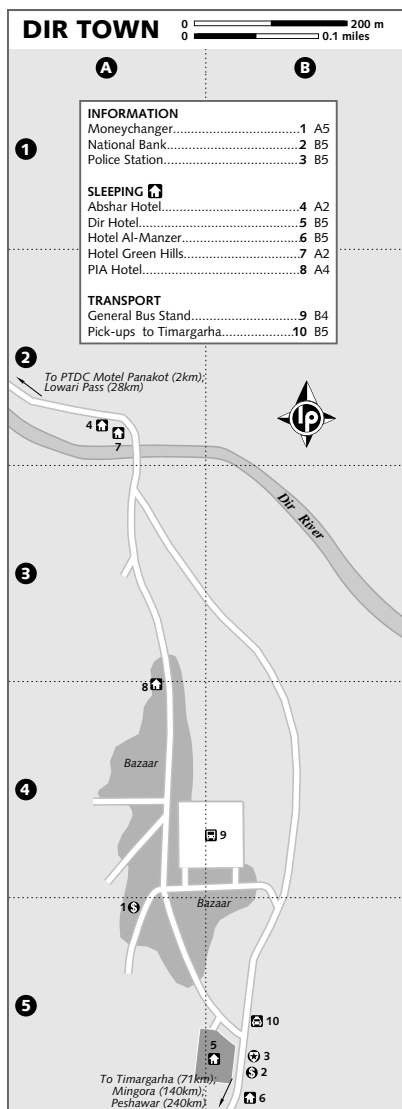
There's a National Bank next to Hotel al-Manzer and a few ad hoc moneychangers near the bus station.

Sleeping & Eating

The bazaar area around the bus station has a host of unappealing and incredibly noisy cheap hotels that are best avoided, although the attached restaurants can make good quick eating options for rice, curries, kebabs and dhal. Otherwise your hotel is likely to offer the best food, supplemented in summer by the ample fruits in the bazaar.

PIA Hotel (☎ 880872; s/d Rs 200/300) One of the better bazaar options with basic small rooms, squat toilet and cold shower. It's slightly grungy, while having rooms face onto a central courtyard simultaneously keeps the bazaar noise down and serves as a car park.

Hotel al-Manzer (☎ 880735; s/d Rs 250/300) At the southern end of town, this friendly hotel is another decent budget option. Rooms on different floors have different prices – those



at the bottom are cheapest, eventual ascending to Rs 500 rooms with carpet and hot shower

Abshar Hotel (☎ 880735; s/d Rs 250/400) A good budget option in the north of town, the friendly Abshar has an excellent riverside location (*abshar* means riverside). Rooms are good value for the price, many with balconies.

Dir Hotel (☎ 880048; dirhotel@yahoo.com; s/d 'budget' wing Rs 300/500, 'standard' wing Rs 600/800, 'VIP' wing Rs 1200/1500) This former guesthouse of the Nawab of Dir has three annexes enclosing a small garden, with something to suit most budgets. The cheaper rooms sit over the shops, face the road and have cold showers, with the standard rooms larger, quieter and with hot water. The VIP suites see you accommodated in grand colonial style, with high-ceilinged rooms with deep chairs, fireplaces and even a dressing room. The garden is shared by a couple of stately Siberian cranes.

Hotel Green Hills (☎ 881234; s/d Rs 600/1000) A welcome recent addition to Dir's sleeping options, Green Hills has fairly simple but comfy rooms and bathrooms with gallons of hot water. Rooms at the back have balconies with lovely views over the Dir River. The excellent attached River Breeze Restaurant is aptly named.

PTDC Motel Panakot (☎ 880900; s/d Rs 1000/1200) This motel is a straight-off-the-peg PTDC-issue motel, with one class of standard rooms. It's a couple of kilometres northeast of town so is aimed at tour groups and those with vehicles. Between September and March you may find it deserted unless you ring first.

Getting There & Away

The general bus stand has pick-ups and minibuses to Drosh (Rs 160, four hours) and also minibuses to Chitral (Rs 200, 5½ hours). There are a few direct minibuses to Peshawar in the early morning (Rs 180, seven hours), otherwise you'll have to change at Timargarha (Rs 50, 2½ hours). It's also quicker to change if you're heading to Rawalpindi.

AROUND DIR

The Dir Hotel can arrange jeep trips up the Panjkora Valley to the meadows of the Kumrat Valley in Dir Kohistan, around a five-hour drive. The walking here is lovely, but you'll need a tent, food, a local Kohistani guide and permission from the assistant commissioner of Dir, all of which will be arranged for about Rs 2000 per person per day, including transport. The region is tribal and lawless and shouldn't be visited alone.

LOWARI PASS

The weather-beaten road climbs slowly from Dir to the forested Lowari Pass (3118m), from

where it descends in a series of dizzyingly tight switchbacks towards Drosh on the Chitral side. The road is highly sensitive to the seasons and is normally only open between June and October, although snow often persists quite late into the summer. Trucks crawl along the road in snail-like convoys, holding up impatient minibus drivers who are anxious to overtake on as many blind corners as they can. In early and late summer you can sometimes see nomadic Gujar families on the road with their herds and belongings.

A tunnel is under construction at the foot of the pass to improve year-round access to Chitral. Progress has been on-off for years, but workers seemed hard at it when we passed them and we were repeatedly assured that the tunnel would be opening 'soon'. We live in hope, but still anticipate enjoying the mountain ride for a while longer yet.

Thirteen kilometres from the top of the pass is the village and checkpoint at Ziarat, where foreigners need to show their passports. One kilometre beyond this is a popular truck stop – a group of *chaikhanas* (teahouses) and stalls where the food is cheap and the reception cheerful. There's another checkpoint demanding a signature 7km on, and 9km further is the guesthouse **Naghar Fort** (Map p221; ☎ 0943-482007; s/d Rs 1000/1400), overlooking a bend on the Chitral River and run by descendants of the former rulers of Chitral. We doubt if many guesthouses in the country have so grand a setting. There are just four rooms with river views, all meticulously clean and with bucket hot water on request. Breakfast (Rs 100) and lunch and dinner (Rs 250 each) are served in a large dining room and there's a comfortable lounge where you can browse the visitors books, which date back to 1936. Ask to be dropped off at the junction, from where there's a bridge and a stiff walk up to the fort. The surrounding countryside has heavenly walking through neighbouring villages and fields.

Twelve kilometres from Naghar Fort is Drosh (p222), midway point between the Lowari Pass and Chitral town.

CHITRAL DISTRICT

The 350km-long Chitral Valley sits up in Pakistan's northwest corner, hemmed in by the Hindukush mountains and sharing a long border with Afghanistan. It's a relatively

isolated region, connected to the rest of the country by just two roads over the 3118m Lowari Pass from Dir and the 3810m Shandur from Gilgit. Both roads are closed by snow in the winter, leaving just a highly weather-dependent air service or a rough road that briefly skirts into Afghan territory (which foreigners are forbidden from using) to stop Chitral becoming totally cut off. The Lowari Pass tunnel, if it's ever completed, will improve Chitral's connections considerably.

Its isolated location means that Chitral (the name refers equally to the town and valley) sees comparatively few tourists, which is a great shame as it's an area of amazing beauty. The massif of Tirich Mir (7760m) dominates the entire lower valley, while the mountain slopes are softened by orchards and terraced fields of wheat and barley as they descend to the wide valley floor and the banks of the grand Chitral River (known further upstream as the Mastuj River).

Hospitable people and the valley's grandeur make Chitral tailor-made for trekking, while the Kalasha valleys offer a wholly unique view of Pakistan, in the remnants of an ancient pagan culture that welcomes sensitive visitors with open arms.

HISTORY

The Chitral Valley is the historic home to two main ethnic groups, Ancient Chitralis and the Kalasha.

Ancient Chitralis, called Kho, probably came from what is now northeastern Afghanistan. Local legends recall a golden age around the 8th century under a semimythical Buddhist king called Bahman, at around the same time a Chinese army temporarily occupied the valley. Smaller numbers of Kalasha have simultaneously occupied several small valleys, stretching into Afghanistan, where they followed their own religion and claimed to be descendants of Alexander the Great's armies. Although Tamerlane subdued Chitral en route to Punjab in 1398, even he took a beating from the tough Kalasha.

The end of the 19th century was the time of biggest change for Chitral, as the region was swept up in the Great Game (see p30). The Afghan Kalasha were converted to Islam by swordpoint in 1893, and their homeland's name changed from Kafiristan ('Land of the Infidels') to Nuristan ('Land of Light'). Simultaneously, the death of Chitral's first

CHITRAL FESTIVALS

For Chitralis, the year's big event is the **Shandur Polo Festival** (7–9 July) – four days of polo and merrymaking at the top of the Shandur Pass, culminating in the celebrated match against Gilgit (see the boxed text, p276). With many jeeps going to and fro, this is also the best time to cross the pass. In the run-up to the festival there is polo almost every other day in Chitral.

The **Chitral Festival** (15–21 September) is a week-long celebration of local culture, with folk music, poetry and competitions of all sorts ranging from archery and river-swimming to wrestling. Ismailis in the north enjoy the spring festival of **Nauroz** on 21 March, while the Kalasha have many of their own festivities (see the boxed text, p231).

In the far north near the Kurambar Pass on the Afghan border is the recently inaugurated **Jashan-i-Boroghil** (15–17 July) centred on the local nomadic Wakhi culture. Although hard to access – you need your own vehicle and camping equipment – it's a fantastic occasion, with music, crafts, *buzkashi* (a variant of polo) and even yak polo.

For more information on all Chitral's festivals, visit the Chitral Association for Mountain Area Tourism office (CAMAT; p224).

favoured smuggling routes for mujaheddin fighting the Soviets during the war in the 1980s, and the sensitive Afghan border means that the central government still keeps a fairly close eye on Chitral.

ACCOMMODATION

Aside from the hotels in the towns of the Chitral Valley, the NWFP Construction & Works (C&W) resthouses are a viable and attractive option as they're often in remote, peaceful settings. They usually consist of two or four basic double rooms with bedding, with a *chowkidar* (caretaker) who'll do at-cost meals from what's available (it's better to bring a few supplies of your own). If officials aren't using them, you can stay at the visitors' rate of Rs 400 a double. At the office of the assistant engineer (p224) in Chitral town you can book C&W resthouses at Chitral town, Garam Chashma, Birir Valley, Bumboret Valley, Buni, Mastuj, Reshun and Drosh. You can also try the assistant engineer in Buni or Drosh.

DROSH & THE SHISHI VALLEY

Midway between the Lowari Pass and Chitral town is Drosh, headquarters of the Chitral Scouts. First levied by the British in 1903, they now guard the many passes into Afghanistan. There's nothing to see in Drosh itself, but it's the starting point for visiting Shishi Gol, the side valley that yawns just north of Drosh. There's a good jeep road and remote treks over to other Chitral valleys. A guide is essential.

Shishi Gol's main village, Madaglasht, is populated by Persian-speaking Tajiks who

came from Badakhshan in Afghanistan a century ago to manufacture matchlock rifles for the *mehtar*.

Sleeping options are thin in Drosh, so basing yourself in Chitral or Naghar is preferable. If you need to, you might end up at the basic **Javed Palace** (☎ 80388; d Rs 200) by the bus station. There are C&W resthouses in Drosh and Gahiret (20 minutes north of Drosh on the main road), booked through the C&W assistant engineer (p224) in Chitral town.

Getting There & Away

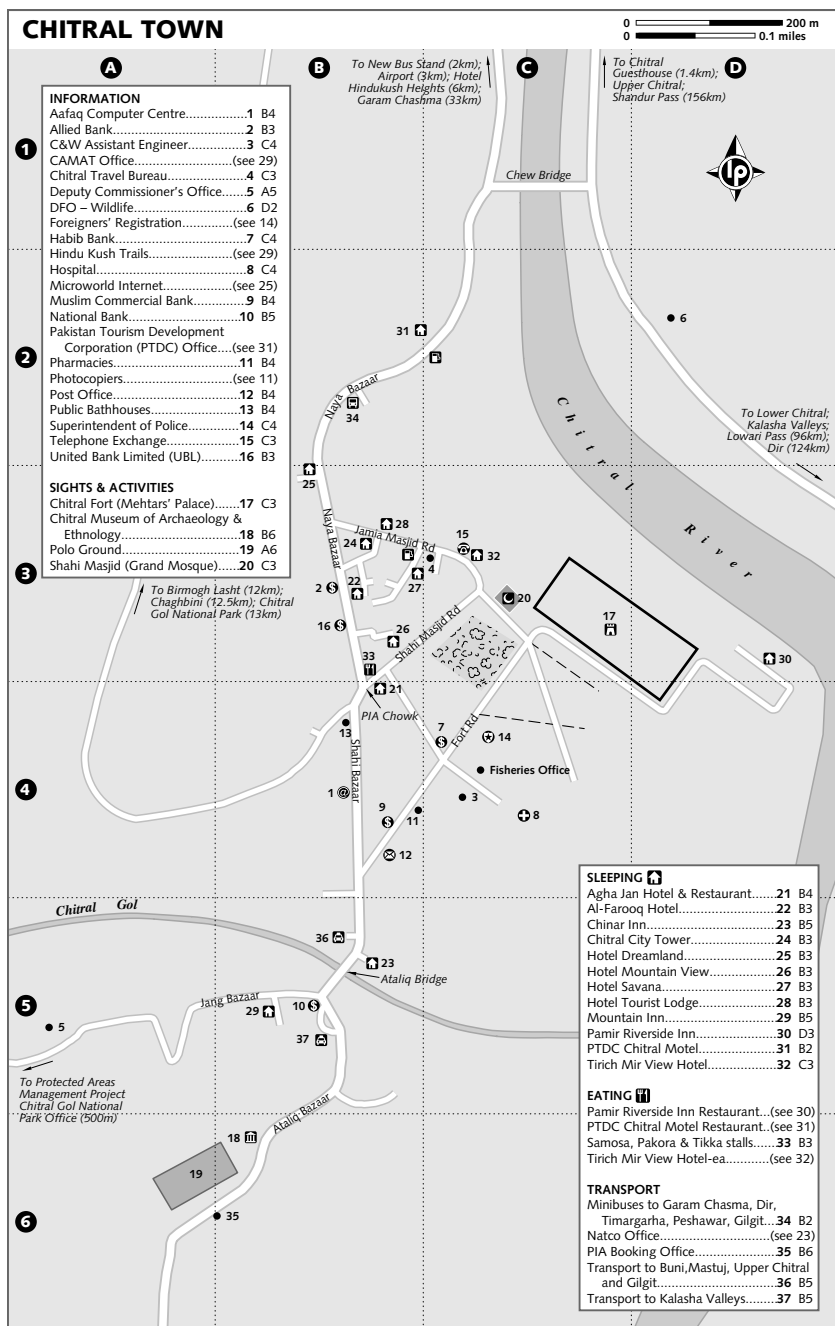
Minibuses to Dir (Rs 160, four hours) depart Drosh in the mornings. Regular minibuses to Chitral town are Rs 20, along with pick-ups where you bump along in the back. Passenger jeeps to Madaglasht cost Rs 60. You can also hire a pick-up or jeep here.

CHITRAL TOWN

☎ 0943

The administrative centre of Chitral Valley and the old seat of the ruling *mehtars*, Chitral is a small, relaxed town. It's possible to get stuck here for more than a few days taking in the scenery and the mountain air. It can feel like a long way from anywhere else in Pakistan, due in part to the effort involved in getting here over the high passes. Most people stop here to recharge their batteries before using it as a base to visit the Kalasha valleys, or to push on to the Shandur Pass or south to Peshawar.

Chitral's attractions are modest yet still attractive. The main focus is on the old fort on the river that sheltered the besieged British garrison in 1895, and the intricate Grand



Mosque nearby. But the local life is even more interesting. The bazaar is a lively mix of traditional and modern, although the conservative nature of society means that it's possible to go from day to day without seeing a woman on the streets (Chitralis are welcoming of foreign women, however). In summer there are polo matches several times a week, building up to the classic match with Gilgit for the Shandur Cup in July.

Chitralis are mostly Kho-speaking, although there is a sizable Pashtun population. In addition, Afghans make up a significant minority and operate many businesses, from bakeries to transport. Given the proximity of the border, vehicle smuggling is common here.

Orientation

Chitral is virtually a one-street town. South of Ataliq Bridge the main road is called Ataliq Bazaar, where you'll find the polo ground and the road to the Lowari Pass and Kalasha valleys. From the bridge to the junction of PIA Chowk the road is called Shahi Bazaar. Shahi Masjid Rd leads off this towards the Grand Mosque. North of PIA Chowk is called Naya Bazaar, which runs all the way to Chew Bridge over the Chitral River.

Transport leaves from several small yards on the main road according to the destination – Ataliq Bazaar for the Kalasha valleys, Shahi Bazaar for Mastuj, and Naya Bazaar for all transport heading towards Peshawar. The airport is 2km north of Chew Bridge, on the west bank.

Information

INTERNET ACCESS

Don't expect fast connections.

Aafaq Computer Centre (Shahi Bazaar; per hr Rs 40;

☎ 8am-8pm)

Microworld Internet (Naya Bazaar; per hr Rs 40;

☎ 9am-8pm)

MONEY

National Bank (Ataliq Bridge) Cashes travellers cheques.

Habib Bank (Fort Rd)

POST

Post Office (Fort Rd) Poste restante is in the back room.

TELEPHONE

There are plentiful public call offices (PCOs) in Chitral's bazaar.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Chitral Association for Mountain Area Tourism

(CAMAT; ☎ 413540; camatchitral@yahoo.com) Very helpful local tourist association providing framework for sustainable and community-led tourism in Chitral, and organising body for Chitral festivals. Can advise on guides, trips to the Kalasha valleys and trekking, and sells maps and postcards.

C&W Assistant Engineer (☎ 413406; off Fort Rd;

☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Thu & Sat, 9am-noon Fri) For booking C&W resthouses throughout Chitral.

Divisional Forestry Office – Wildlife (DFO;

☎ 412101) Inquire here about resthouses in Chitral Gol National Park. You'll find this office on the east bank of the Chitral River.

Protected Areas Management Project Chitral Gol

National Park (Jang Bazaar Rd) The place to come to organise a park-game watcher for trekking in Chitral Gol National Park (see Gokshal An & Doni An, p342). Look for a large white building 20 minutes' walk uphill from Mountain Inn, 100m off the road.

PTDC office (☎ 412683; Naya Bazaar) Located in the PTDC Chitral Motel.

TRAVEL AGENCIES

Chitral Travel Bureau (CTB; ☎ 412461; Jamia Masjid

Rd) A good source of local information. It can arrange treks, horseriding and jeep hire, plus has some camping equipment for hire.

Hindu Kush Heights (☎ 413151; hotels@hindukush

.isb.sdnpc.org; Hotel Hindukush Heights) Out-of-town location, but reliable operator good for trekking and climbing expeditions, as well as horseriding and jeep hire.

Hindukush Trails (☎ 412581; info@hindukushtrails

.com; Mountain Inn) Organises jeep safaris and trekking, and manages the royal forts at Mastuj, Ayun and Naghar.

Sights

CHITRAL FORT & SHAHI MASJID

The *mehtar's fort* (Fort Rd) has a commanding position on the river. It remains the seat of the *mehtar's* descendents so you can't enter it without an invitation, although if you knock on the main gate one of the *chowkidars* may let you stick your head around the door to see the old cannons in the courtyard. The entrance on the southeast end is to the residential quarters, while the one facing Shahi Bazaar was for the royal guard. The most interesting side faces the river and is best viewed from the far end of Naya Bazaar or from across the river. The ornate building up the road southwest towards the police station was the royal courthouse. The walls were once plastered, but its loss reveals the sturdy stone-and-wood structure beneath.

REGISTRATION & KALASHA VALLEYS PERMITS

Because Chitral is a sensitive region near the Afghan border, you're expected to register on arrival with Chitral town's **superintendent of police** (Map p223; Fort Rd; ☎ 8am-3pm) to obtain a Temporary Registration Form, irrespective of the usual foreigner-registration regulations or whether you've registered elsewhere. Entering the main building, the Foreigners' Registration office is about halfway down the corridor on your left. Registration takes around 10 minutes.

You'll need to show your Temporary Registration Form when you visit the Kalasha valleys, and if you plan to spend more than a week there. You'll also need a permit from the deputy commissioner's office (Map p223), west of Ataliq Bridge in Chitral town. There's no charge for these forms and permits.

The fort's water supply lies outside the walls, a fact that caused considerable problems for the British soldiers besieged here in 1895.

To the west of the fort is the **Shahi Masjid (Grand Mosque)**, built by the ul-Mulks near the end of the 19th century. Its pinkish walls and white onion dome make it one of north Pakistan's most distinctive mosques, particularly as its minarets frame Tirich Mir in the far distance. It's usually fine to visit, but ask permission before entering and avoid Friday prayers.

POLO

At the south end of town is one of Pakistan's best **polo grounds** (Ataliq Bazaar; free), where practice matches are held every few days from mid-March to early November, and real matches on weekends, always in the afternoon. On one side is a covered VIP stand, where tourists may sometimes sit (if there are no dignitaries in town). The best players are often drawn from the Chitral Scouts and the police. The best times for polo are from late May onwards, and in the run-up to the Shandur and Chitral festivals. The PTDC office or CAMAT will be able to advise on upcoming matches.

CHITRAL MUSEUM OF ARCHAEOLOGY & ETHNOLOGY

This small new **museum** (Ataliq Bazaar; free) is poorly signed but next to the polo ground.

It has a few local ethnographic exhibits, but is a little disappointing and keeps irregular hours (you may have to find someone to open it for you). It compares poorly with the excellent Kalasha museum (Kal'as'a Dur; p232) in Bumboret.

Sleeping

All midrange options, but only some budget hotels, have hot running water. Even then, hot water is often restricted to certain times of the morning or evening. Other places will heat buckets of water for you, but if you're in a cheapie you might prefer to use the *hammams* (public bathhouses) near PIA Chowk.

BUDGET

Hotel Savana (☎ 412294; off Jamia Masjid Rd; s/d/tr Rs 100/200/300) The no-frills Savana is perfectly fine for the price, but isn't going to win any prizes. The courtyard is used as a car park, which can make things noisy.

Al-Farooq Hotel (☎ 412726; Naya Bazaar; dm/s/d Rs 100/150/300) A popular budget choice, where rooms are packed in pretty tightly, but are decent enough. Friendly management and a travellers' hints book are bonuses, alongside the terrace with views to Tirich Mir (although new building work opposite is doing its best to spoil it).

Chitral City Tower (☎ 412912; Jamia Masjid Rd; s/d Rs 200/300) The rooms here are better than average for the price tag, with decent fixtures and fittings. You might get tired of all the stairs, but the reward is the roof terrace – with views over Chitral in every direction, it's ideal for chilling.

Agha Jan Hotel & Restaurant (☎ 0300-9363268; PIA Chowk; s/d Rs 200/300) There are just five rooms at this place overlooking the busy junction, all new and clean with carpets and adequate bathrooms. The restaurant is good, but road noise might be an issue for some.

Hotel Tourist Lodge (☎ 412452; Jamia Masjid Rd; s/d/tr Rs 200/350/450) The friendly Tourist Lodge has simple rooms with cold showers in slightly dingy bathrooms. Reasonable, but probably not top of the list if you're comparing with others hotels nearby.

Hotel Dreamland (☎ 412806; Naya Bazaar; s/d Rs 250/350) The distinctively decorated foyer leads to simple, characterless rooms with cold showers, though you can pay an extra hundred a head for carpets and hot water to cushion your stay a little more.

Chinar Inn (☎ 412582; s/d Rs 300/400) An excellent option, with a handful of rooms looking onto a delightfully peaceful honeysuckle-ringed garden. Rooms are tidy and spacious, with warm showers and sit-down toilets. Located near Ataliq Bridge.

The PTDC Chitral Motel and Pamir Riverside Inn sometimes allow overlanders to camp in their grounds.

MIDRANGE

Mountain Inn (☎ 412581; fax 412668; Jang Bazaar; s/d/stc Rs 1200/1600/2000) A long time favourite with tour groups, who enjoy the large shady gardens that the hotel encloses, along with the excellent service. Rooms are spacious and fronted by a wide veranda, with the wooden style faintly echoing Kalasha architecture. The hotel also contains the offices of CAMAT and the Hindu Kush Trails tour operator.

Tirich Mir View Hotel (☎ 412911; terichmirview@hotmail.com; Shahi Masjid Rd; s/d Rs 1550/1950) This hotel could be anywhere in Pakistan, with modern but slightly characterless rooms. Until you step outside, that is. It's the setting that clinches it – all rooms look out over a wide terrace towards the river and (as the name suggests) the mountains beyond. The hotel restaurant is worth checking out for nonguests, but doesn't serve dinner until 8pm.

PTDC Chitral Motel (☎ 412683; Naya Bazaar; s/d Rs 1500/2000) The rooms are rather soulless but clean and comfortable and there's an OK restaurant.

Pamir Riverside Inn (☎ 412525; fax 413365; pamirriver@sideinn@yahoo.com; Noghor Gardens; s/d Rs 2000/2500, cottage Rs 1300-1500) This inn used to be the *mehtars'* guesthouse and enjoys a peaceful, breezy riverside location below the fort. There are some quaint cottages and rooms in the larger new block, all comfortably appointed. There's a reasonable restaurant serving a Pakistani, Chinese and Continental buffet in the evenings (Rs 450). Prices exclude 5% tax.

At the time of research a new midrange hotel, **Hotel Tirich Mir View** (Jami Masjid Rd), was under construction. Also, the well-regarded Chitral Guesthouse, 1.5km north of Chew Bridge on its east side, was undergoing extensive renovation.

TOP END

Hotel Hindukush Heights (☎ 413151; hotels@hindukush.isb.sdnpg.org.pk; Gankorini; s/d Rs 4000/6000; 📶)

Around 10km north of town, this hotel sets itself apart by more than just location. Owned by the former *mehtar's* family, it's something of a boutique offering. Spacious rooms are beautifully decorated in Chitrali style, complementing the tremendous mountain views around every corner. Service is immaculate, and the restaurant worth the effort of getting here (call in advance). Popular with tour groups, so reservations in summer are recommended. A jeep hire from town is Rs 500.

Eating

Nearly all the hotels have their own restaurant: basic curry and naan at the budget hotels, and Chinese and Continental alongside Pakistani dishes at the midrange hotels. If you're not staying at a midrange hotel it's worth calling ahead to see if they're open – some restaurants close if there is no tour group booked in. Recommended are the restaurants at the **Tirich Mir View Hotel** (☎ 412911; mains Rs 80-250; 🍴 dinner), the **Pamir Riverside Inn** (☎ 412525; buffet Rs 450; 🍴 dinner) and the **PTDC Chitral Motel** (☎ 412683; mains Rs 100-250; 🍴 lunch & dinner). If you have your own transport, the **Hotel Hindukush Heights** (☎ 413151) has set lunches (Rs 250) and dinners (Rs 450), but is awkward to get to.

In various *chaikhana*s (teahouses) and Afghan restaurants around PIA Chowk, Ataliq Bridge and Naya Bazaar, you can sit cross-legged and eat *qabli pilau* (rice with meat and raisins), mutton curry or dhal for under Rs 60 a head. Street stalls sell freshly cooked samosas and pakoras (deep-fried vegetables) for about Rs 2 an item, and there are plenty of seasonal fruit stalls and bakeries (ask for *tiki*, pastries, sometimes stuffed with cheese or walnuts). Note that everything shuts in Chitral by around 9pm.

Shopping

There are plenty of shops strung along Shahi Bazaar selling Chitrali clothing, which makes a good souvenir. A local speciality is *patti*, a fine woollen cloth that's made up into *chogha* robes, embroidered waistcoats or the classic pancake-shaped *pakol* cap (which should cost less than Rs 200). Afghan-run handicraft shops in the bazaar offer a selection of rugs, jewellery and carved wood from Nuristan. A few places also sell secondhand trekking gear.

Getting There & Away

AIR

The **PIA booking office** (☎ 412963; Ataliq Bazaar; ☒ 9am-1pm & 2-4.30pm) is south of the polo ground. Two flights depart for Peshawar each morning, one at 7.45am and one at 11am (Rs 3750, 45 minutes), plus there's a daily early morning flight to Islamabad (Rs 4000, 80 minutes). Departures are weather-dependent as the plane flies through the Lowari Pass, with groundings rare in summer but frequent in winter. Reconfirm at the PIA office the morning before departure. If the flight is cancelled, you must return to the office to get listed on the next flight.

MINIBUS & PASSENGER JEEP

Minibuses make the 12- to 14-hour trip to Peshawar daily from around 6am (Rs 400) from the main stand on Naya Bazaar. These also stop at Dir (Rs 200, five hours), and Timargarha (Rs 230, eight hours) from where you can change for Swat transport. Should the Lowari Pass tunnel be finished, minibuses will run this route year-round. Currently, when the pass is snowbound in winter, vehicles skirt into Afghanistan at Arandu – a transport option off limits to foreigners.

Passenger jeeps to Bumboret leave about twice a day, and daily to Rumbur, from a stand off Ataliq Bazaar (both Rs 50, 2½ hours), but check a day ahead for likely departure times. Transport is less frequent to Birir, and you may need to change at Ayun (Rs 40, 90 minutes) or Gahiret (see p230).

For Mastuj (Rs 130, five hours) and Buni (Rs 80, three hours), jeeps leave from a stand just north of Ataliq Bridge. Also ask here for jeeps to the upper valley, including Turikho and Sor Laspur and the Yarkhun Valley (although it may prove easier to find a cargo jeep in Mastuj).

The **Northern Areas Transport Company** (Natco; ☎ 412582), based at Chinar Inn (opposite), runs a 10-seat Land Cruiser between Chitral and Gilgit (Rs 600, 14 to 16 hours). The service nominally operates twice a week but was suspended during research due to landslides, meaning that transport only went as far as Brook Laspur in either direction. When running, the trip is a long hard road in one go, and it doesn't allow you to break en route. If you are in a group, an alternative is to hire a jeep (see right), either direct or through your hotel.

The road is paved from Chitral town to Buni, wide and graded to Sor Laspur, narrow and jeep-only from there over the pass to Phander, with ongoing construction work likely to cause delays. From Phander the road is mostly paved, apart from sections under repair. The Shandur is normally open from June to October. Foreigners must sign in at several police posts. By bike, Chitral to Gilgit takes about eight days, with the Chitral side being the steepest.

For details of what to see and where to stay along the way, see Upper Chitral (p233) and the Karakoram Highway's Puniial, Ishkoman, Yasin & Ghizar (p282).

JEEP HIRE

CAMAT (p224) works with local jeep drivers to set rates for special hire. Sample one-way prices include to Bumboret (Rs 1800), Rumbur (Rs 1600), Mastuj (Rs 3000) Shandur (Rs 8000) and Gilgit (Rs 12,000). Daily hire is otherwise Rs 2500.

Getting Around

Passenger Suzukis or jeeps to/from the airport are Rs 10 (special hire costs Rs 50). Chitral is otherwise compact enough to be negotiated on foot.

AROUND CHITRAL TOWN

For maps and information on treks around Chitral town, see Lonely Planet's *Trekking in the Karakoram & Hindukush*.

BIRMOGH LASHT

The *ex-mehtar* used to spend several months a year at his summer palace on a plateau 1200m above Chitral town. The name means Walnut Plain. The royal house is crumbling but the grand wrap-around views of the valley and Tirich Mir are still there, along with the occasional soaring eagle.

It's a hot, shadeless, three- to four-hour walk one way to get here, so start early. The road begins beyond the YZ Hotel on Shahi Masjid Rd; take the first left fork onto a jeep track (the paved road continues to the right to a government guesthouse overlooking town). Shave 30 minutes off by taking the steep ridge path instead of the switchback jeep track. A return jeep ride costs around Rs 2000.

It's a pretty, restful place to spend the night, but although the PTDC built a motel at Birmogh Lasht, it's never been opened.

HOW LONG FROM CHITRAL TO GILGIT?

Following are distances and approximate travel times by jeep:

Route	Distance	Time
Chitral town–Buni	75km	3hr
Buni–Mastuj turn-off	32km	2hr
Mastuj turn-off–Sor Laspur	28km	1½hr
Sor Laspur–Shandur Pass	11km	30min
Shandur Pass–Teru	28km	1½hr
Teru–Phander	22km	1½hr
Phander–Gupis	60km	2½ hr
Gupis–Gakuch	40km	1hr
Gakuch–Singhal	17km	45min
Singhal–Gilgit	53km	2hr

The only sleeping option is the wildlife rest-house 30 minutes' walk further up at **Chaghbini**, which you can book at the Divisional Forestry Office (p224) in Chitral. The single resthouse has two rooms, each with two beds for Rs 1000 per room, with no hot water (although there is running water), and there is a bathroom. You can camp next to the resthouse for free, but bring food wherever you stay.

Special hires Chitral–Chaghbini cost Rs 2000 (one hour).

CHITRAL GOL NATIONAL PARK

The beautiful upper Chitral Gol watershed, once a hunting preserve of the *mehtars*, is now a 7750-hectare national park. A few snow leopards persist here, while Himalayan ibex, markhor, wolves and brown bears have also been sighted in various parts of Chitral Gol, especially in winter. This area, along with the Mastuj Valley, is also on an important migration route for birds between the Indian subcontinent and Siberia.

There are forestry resthouses inside the park at Merin, Kasavir and Gokshal. All are within a day's walk of each other, but you'll need a sleeping bag and your own food. The Protected Areas Management Project for the park in Chitral (p224) can help organise game wardens to accompany you if you've a keen interest in spotting wildlife. For a trek between Chitral Gol and the Kalasha Valley of Rumbur see the Gokshal An & Doni An trek, p342.

GARAM CHASHMA

This village in a largely Ismaili area two hours northwest of Chitral is named for its hot (and

slightly sulphurous) spring. There are some lovely walks in the area, but as it butts up against the Afghan border the local police will expect you to register your presence on arrival. There's also Chitral's best-known trout reach on the Lutkha River heading into Garam Chashma. Licences are available from the fisheries warden on the outskirts of the village.

Garam Chasma works best as a day trip. The very basic **Hotel Innjigaan** (s/d Rs 80/120), east of the bazaar, has a big pool full of hot spring water to soothe your bones. Voyeurs are screened out so women in bathing costumes should feel quite safe. There's also a simple restaurant, but bring candles. A tiny C&W resthouse can be booked through the assistant engineer in Chitral town (p224), and there are a few Afghan inns in the bazaar serving meat and rice.

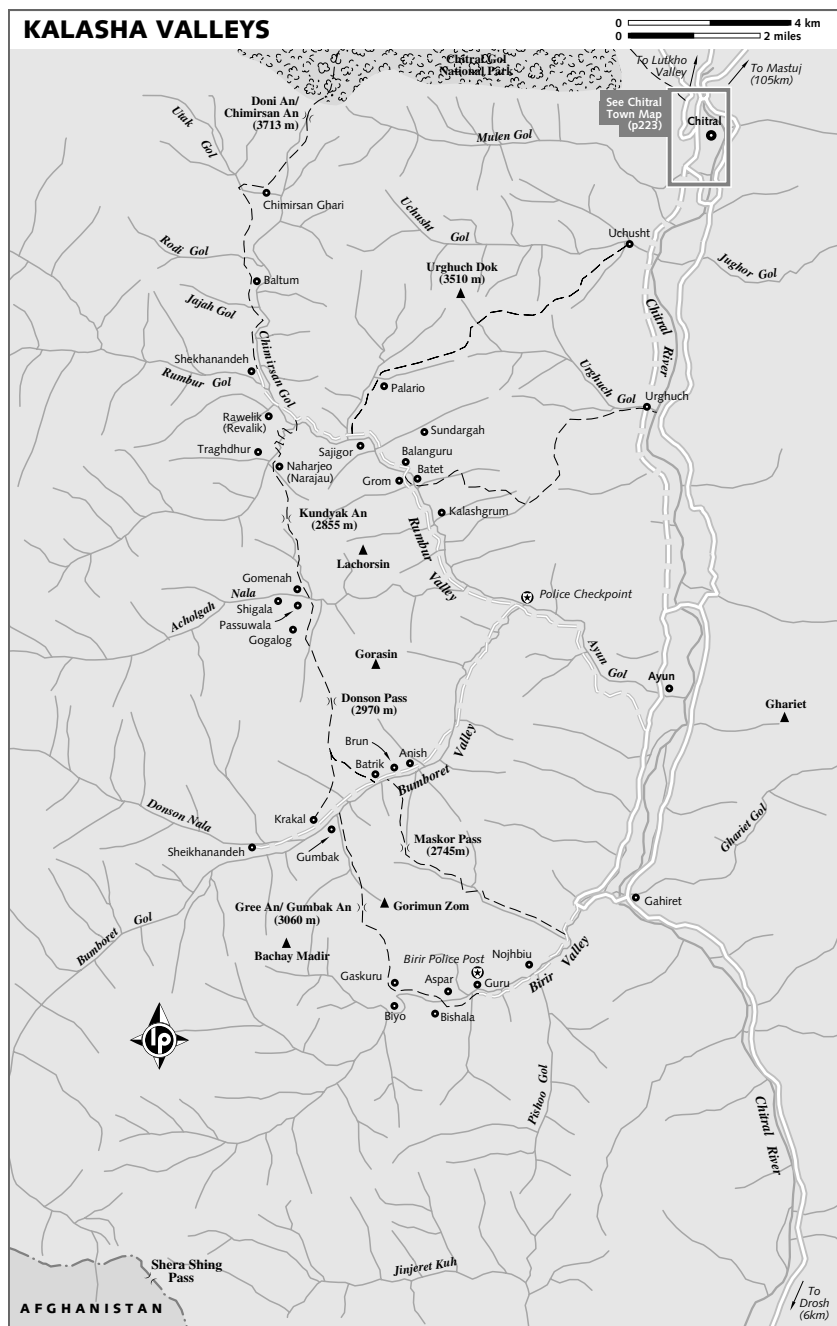
Getting There & Away

Garam Chasma is reached by pick-up or passenger jeep (Rs 40, two hours) from Chitral town, leaving from the main yard on Naya Bazaar. A return jeep from Chitral costs Rs 2500.

KALASHA VALLEYS

In devoutly Muslim Pakistan, the existence of a pagan people still practising their ancient customs – in however remote a series of valleys – comes as something of a shock. The Kalasha have a proud and unique culture that has attracted everyone from missionaries to anthropologists, do-gooders to snap-happy tourists. That they remain so welcoming to visitors is something of a miracle.

The Kalasha claim legendary ancestry as descendants of Alexander the Great's armies left behind after his campaigns in the area. Contrary to popular belief, they believe in one god (*Dezau*) but regard him as a distant figure and instead pray or sacrifice to *dewalok* (spirits) who deal with more earthly matters. Life is divided into pure (*onjesta*) and impure (*pragata*) spheres, which impact greatly on daily life and carry many associated taboos. For example, menstruating women are considered *pragata*, while altars, fireplaces and high pastures are *onjesta*. Breaking taboos or polluting *onjesta* areas are easy for the casual visitor to do without realising, so a Kalasha guide is often a good idea. The Kal's'a Dur cultural centre in Bumboret (p232) is an



excellent place to learn more about all aspects of Kalasha society.

The valleys, wooded with deodar and holly oak, are small, rugged and beautiful. Rumbur and Birir are especially narrow, and the solid houses of wood, stone and mud climb the hillsides, the roof of each serving as the veranda of the next. The ground floors serve as stables and storerooms; quarters upstairs typically include a windowless, sooty kitchen-cum-living room with a hearth and smoke hole in the middle and a door onto a veranda. Bumboret has the most spectacular views of these valleys, with great walks.

The Kalasha cultivate wheat, millet, maize and lentils, or herd goats. Sweet grapes, from gnarled vines growing up into the trees, are made into a sticky, fiery wine. Mulberries, apricots, apples and plums are plentiful, as are walnuts (a major protein source). There's little meat beyond the rare slaughtered goat.

Pakistanis seem to have an ambivalent attitude towards the Kalasha. While tourist posters proudly picture Kalasha girls in traditional costume as proof of Pakistan's diversity, the valleys are under continual threat of cultural erosion. Mosques are increasingly present in every valley and most businesses are run by incoming Muslims or recent converts (only in Rumbur are Kalasha still in the majority). Even the influx of tourism has proved a mixed bag, with many tourists

disrespecting Kalasha holy sites and burial grounds, and the theft of cultural artefacts. Kalasha women who go proudly unveiled have been hassled by domestic visitors who consider them 'loose'.

Getting There & Around

There are no villages called Rumbur, Bumboret or Birir. Rather, passenger jeeps drive to a particular valley, dropping passengers off at successive villages (or hotels). Jeeps from Chitral to Bumboret depart at least twice a day, and daily to Rumbur (both Rs 50, 2½ hours), travelling via the (Muslim) gateway village of Ayun on the Chitral River. For more information see p227. About 8km from Ayun, the valley forks, left to Bumboret and right to Rumbur. There's a police check-post here, where you'll need to show your Chitral registration (see the boxed text, p225) and pay the Rs 200 toll levied on all visitors. This permits you to visit all three valleys. The approach roads are rough but very scenic, with the Bumboret road often looking over fields and streams, while the Rumbur road appears hewn straight from the sheer walls of the valley.

Transport to Birir is less frequent. The mouth of Birir Valley is at Gahiret, about 7km south of Ayun. Catch any Drosh-bound vehicle from Chitral and get off at the Gahiret bridge over the Chitral River. Passenger jeeps sometimes leave from here (or Ayun itself),

RESPONSIBLE TRAVEL IN THE KALASHA VALLEYS

Many Kalasha are uneasy about tourism and having cameras pointed at them, but most will welcome interested individuals from abroad. Those you've come to know will often pose happily. At the very least, ask the individual's permission first before taking a photo – if it's a woman, ask any man who is with her as well.

If you're new to a village, it's not hard to find someone with a bit of English who is only too happy to show you around and coach you on local taboos. If you're serious you might want to visit the local *kazi* (headman). Kalasha handicrafts are available in small shops (headaddresses cost Rs 800 to Rs 1300), and you may well be beckoned to enter a traditional house by one of the local women. After a feed of sundried fruit and walnuts a cupboard will be opened to reveal a small shop.

You may even be invited to stay in someone's home. Do not expect a high standard of cleanliness. You are unlikely to be asked for anything in return, though gifts are much appreciated and should be your minimum contribution. Consider spending the hotel price that you have just saved on staple foods for your hosts (rice is welcome, or salt or sugar) or warm secondhand clothing from Chitral or a valley shop. Kalasha wine is sometimes available to try.

Little of the money generated from tourism actually makes it to the Kalasha. You can make a difference by staying in Kalasha-owned hotels (these are indicated), hiring local Kalasha guides and frequenting Kalasha shops.

KALASHA FESTIVALS

The Kalasha take their festivals seriously, which invariably involve intricate religious ceremonies, feasts and dancing. There may be *adua-naat* (day dancing) or *raad-naat* (night dancing), and some may be closed to outsiders. Each valley has its own style, though usually the older men stand in the centre, taking turns chanting old legends – or just chatting. Accompanied by drums, the women dance round them, their arms around one another's waists and shoulders in spinning twos and threes or trance-like encircling lines. The dates alter between the valleys and may not be fixed until the last minute, often depending on harvest or other work, so ask locally for the exact dates.

Joshi (or Chilimjust)

This feast is dedicated to spring and to future harvests. It includes day dancing and family reunions on consecutive days in the three valleys in mid-May.

Uchal

The summer festival, celebrating the wheat and barley harvests, is a big tourist draw. It may include night dancing every few days in successive villages in Bumboret and Rumbur, from mid-June to mid-August.

Phool

This is held only in Birir, for three or four days in late September or early October. Night dancing is held in various villages, and day dancing on the last day. It marks the walnut and grape harvests and the end of winemaking, though its origins concern the return of shepherds from the high pastures.

Chaumos

This solstice festival is probably the biggest for the Kalasha, with visiting, feasting and night dancing for around 10 days starting in mid-December. During this time the demi-god Balomain is believed to pass through the valley collecting prayers to take back to the creator, Deza. In Bumboret it's closed to Muslims. Foreigners expecting to take part must arrive early to be ritually purified (menstruating women are forbidden from participating) and may need to buy their own goat for sacrifice.

otherwise it's a 2½-hour walk into the valley. The Birir police post is at Guru village; beyond here the road peters out.

When leaving the Kalasha valleys, it's wise to let your guesthouse know the day before travel, as they will be able to advise on what time the passenger jeeps will pass by your front door so you can be ready to flag them down. Jeeps tend to leave for Chitral in the early morning.

One-way jeep hire from Chitral costs Rs 1800 (Bumboret) and Rs 1600 (Rumbur or Birir). A jeep from Bumboret to Rumbur costs around Rs 1400 return.

Rumbur Valley

The most traditional of the valleys, Rumbur is around 70% Kalasha. The two main villages of **Grom** and **Balanguru** sit either side of a pretty river; the latter has the most local

architecture. There are innumerable pretty day walks to be done in Rumbur, from following the river up to Sajigor, an *onjesta* site to flocks and shepherds that is also used for ritual sacrifices (only men can visit), to exploring the irrigation canals through the fields and the many small side valleys.

SLEEPING & EATING

Accommodation is available in the villages of Grom and Balanguru, where you'll find the two best Kalasha guesthouses in all the valleys. The hotels listed here are in the order they appear when you arrive in town.

Kalash Home Guest House (ingeneerk@yahoo.com; Grom; r full board Rs 300, r without bathroom Rs 250) The first guesthouse on the road into Grom, where a warm welcome is guaranteed. Kalasha engineer Khan has added several bright and clean guestrooms onto his house and is a

great source of information on local culture. Kalasha food is served and you often eat with the family. The views from the terrace are fantastic.

Kalash Grom Guesthouse (Grom; s/d Rs 100/200) On a right turn off the main road before Grom proper is a Kalasha house with two simple rooms and traditional food on offer.

Kalash Indigenous Guest House (Grom; s/d/tr Rs 150/300/450) A nice garden, but rooms are a little dreary. It's aimed largely towards Pakistani tourists.

Saifullah Jan's Guest House (Balanguru; s with full board Rs 300) Just over the bridge in Balanguru and excellently run by Kalasha spokesman Saifullah Jan. There is a selection of good rooms (those in the newer 'block' have bathrooms), a pleasant garden and tasty local food. As with the Kalash Home Guest House (above), a stay here easily slips into several days more than originally intended.

There are small shops in Grom where you can buy biscuits and a few basic supplies.

Bumboret Valley

Bumboret is the grandest and most developed of the three valleys. It has numerous hotels and attracts the most tourists, although the valley's community is now about two-thirds Muslim. Major villages with accommodation are Anish, Brun, Batrik and Krakal. At the upper end of the valley is the Nuristani settlement of Sheikhanandeh, where there is a mosque with a lovely wooden minaret. The walks here, along the river and up to the pastures, are fantastic. From Anish to Krakal is about an hour's walk.

SIGHTS

Kal'as'a Dur

This **cultural Centre** (Brun; admission Rs 100, camera Rs 100; ☎ 9am-5pm, closed Wed) is an essential stop for any visitor to the Kalasha valleys. Co-funded by the Greek government and built as a showpiece of Kalasha architecture, it holds a museum and library, as well as a school, meeting hall and clinic. Profits go towards health and education projects, as well as promoting Kalasha culture.

The museum is full of cultural artefacts from clothes and jewellery to weapons and kitchenware. One exhibit even invites you to learn the Kalasha alphabet of 37 letters, derived by linguists to help record the Kalasha's fast-disappearing oral culture. Perhaps of

most interest to visitors is the complete reconstruction of a traditional house from Brun village and the life-sized wooden Gandau funerary statues. These were once erected to celebrate the life of important figures, a practice that has died out due to expense. Few remain *in situ*, as antique dealers have stolen many in the last 30 years. There is also a scale model of a *jestakhana* (temple) that Kalasha staff guiding you around may use to explain the ins and outs of *onjesta* and *pragata*.

SLEEPING

Hotels and guesthouses are listed in the order in which they appear when arriving in the valley from Chitral, starting in Anish village. The further up you go, the better the views. Kalasha-owned places tend to be slightly off the main road.

PTDC Motel (☎ 0943-412683; Anish; s/d from Rs 800/1000) Standard off-the-peg PTDC fare, with comfy rooms and adequate service.

Hotel Alexander Post (☎ 0943-412806; Brun; s/d Rs 600/1000) A good midrange option – a twee mix of Swiss cottage and traditional Kalasha architecture. Rates tumble upon further enquiries and there's a pleasant garden.

Jinnah Kalash (Anish; s/d Rs 100/200) This Kalasha-owned hotel has fine rooms and a veranda with superb views. Good value, and camping is possible.

Kalash House (Brun; r Rs 150) Uphill near the Kal'as'a Dur, this sits near the similarly priced Kalash View and Kalash Galaxy Guesthouses, all simple Kalasha-run places in traditional style. Basic but fun, with local food on offer.

Foreigners Tourist Inn (Brun; s/d Rs 500/600) Once a forestry resthouse, this place is a favourite with tour groups and has a large restaurant. Rooms are spacious and clean and hot water can be arranged.

Frontier Hotel & Restaurant (Brun; s/d Rs 150/200) The Frontier's rooms come with cold showers and are poky, though there's a nice sitting area and staff will heat up a bucket of hot water for you.

Ishpata Inn (Brun; dm/s/d Rs 150/200/400) On a rise above the road, the inn's rooms are good but need airing. Popular, with a nice garden and terrace balcony looking over the valley.

Peace Hotel (Batrik; s/d Rs 150/200) A friendly Muslim-owned hotel with clean, comfortable rooms with great views. Kalasha food is on offer, and hot water is provided in buckets. Good value but lacking a garden.

Kalash Hotel (Kralak; camp sites Rs 25, dm/s/d Rs 30/500/200) Kalasha-owned hotel with traditional food and shop. Rooms are simple but the welcome is very warm.

Alexandra Hotel (Kralak; s/d 200/400) A handful of decent rooms with a large and shady garden for lounging. There's a small shop and good food.

Sissoyak Kalasha Hotel, Camping & Restaurant (Kralak; d Rs 200) The last decent sleeping option in the valley, but worth waiting for. Kalasha-owned, with basic rooms and a lovely orchard garden. Helpful management.

Birir Valley

The least visited of the three valleys, Birir has the lowest proportion of traditional Kalasha and its Kalasha culture is under threat from conversion. The valley has good trekking potential, but there's little public transport here. Major villages are Guru, Aspar, Bishala and Biyo.

SLEEPING & EATING

All the valley's accommodation is in Guru. As with the other valleys, you eat where you stay. **Kalash Guest House** (full board per person Rs 250) is one of the first houses after crossing the footbridge into the village, and the only Kalasha-owned option. The rooms and separate cold shower are kept clean and the family here can organise local cultural and trekking guides. Other choices are the **Insaf Hotel** (d with shared bathroom Rs 200) or the **Paradise Hotel** (s/d/tr Rs 100/200/300), on the south bank of the river after the bridge. Both are pretty basic. There's also a C&W resthouse in Guru, and another out on the Chitral road by Gahiret footbridge, bookable through the assistant engineer (p224) in Chitral town.

UPPER CHITRAL

As you head north from Chitral town the mountains become increasingly spectacular, easily rivalling anything you might find along the Karakoram Highway. The valley is initially carpeted in fields and orchards, with each village clinging to the slopes that grow ever-more grand. The northern valleys form a gnarled Y, forking left into Turikho Gol and right to Yarkhun Gol. The welcome is warm in the mainly Ismaili villages and women lead more public lives.

Travel is rough, mostly by passenger jeep. Only Mastuj, a key stop en route to the

Shandur Pass, offers any range of accommodation (and shops), although larger villages such as Koragh and Buni have cheap inns, and there are a few government resthouses. A sleeping bag can also prove useful, as can candles and extra food to supplement thin offerings along the road.

North of Chitral town the river changes name to the Mastuj River and, beyond Mastuj village, to the Yarkhun River. Turikho Gol is called Rich (pronounced 'reech') in its upper reaches.

Chitral Town to Buni

A 30-minute drive north of Chitral town, **Golen Gol** yawns to the east. Jeep-wallahs often stop in **Muroi** at the Shandur Hotel, a small restaurant with charpoys (simple beds made of ropes and a wooden frame). Thirty minutes on at **Reshun**, a town seemingly made of red mud, is a two-room C&W resthouse, booked with the assistant engineer (p224) in Chitral. Here, in a side action to the 1895 Siege of Chitral, a Chitrali ambush near the mouth of Turikho Gol wiped out about 100 Kashmiri and Sikh troops and their British officers. The village of **Koragh**, 10 minutes past Reshun, has two basic inns, the Koragh Golden Inn Hotel and the Kohistan Inn, at the east end of the bazaar.

Buni, half an hour further north and across the river by bridge, has a few cheap hotels and an excellent C&W resthouse with a meadow outside for camping. Turn right at the top of the bazaar to find the C&W office. Out of sight to the southeast is 6550m Buni Zom, the highest peak in the Hindu Raj, Chitral's eastern mountains. Locals recommend the strenuous walk up Buni Gol, behind the town, to meadows at Shupishun.

Turikho Gol

This is the ancient heartland of the Kho people and their language, Khovar. Mind-bending views of the highest giants of the Hindukush and Hindu Raj are gained from the 3840m Zani Pass dividing the lower Turikho Gol from Tirich Gol, the route to the base of Tirich Mir. The crossing can be done in a day and you could even go up for a day trip (three hours, 8km) if the weather is clear. The trek starts from Uthul (Uthool; 2640m), north and off the main valley road from Warijun, the local transport hub.

Occasional jeeps follow the separate road up the right (east) side of Turikho Gol to

Istaru, Warkup, Rain (*ra-een*) and Shagram villages. There are no formal places to stay in Uthul or Tirich Gol. Shagram, in Turikho Gol 6km past the mouth of Tirich Gol, has a two-room C&W resthouse.

Mastuj

From Buni the paved road degenerates into a jeep track and continues eastwards up the Mastuj Valley, revealing awesome views of Buni Zom. Parwak could serve as a base to explore the glacial valleys spilling down from the Buni massif.

The village of Mastuj (2400m) is three hours (110km) from Chitral town along a very rough 4km side road. It's a good base to break the journey between Chitral and Gilgit, and you could easily lose time doing some lovely day walks in the fields and side valleys here, always under the snowy gaze of Tirich Mir. You must sign in with the police (at the bottom of the bazaar) if staying overnight.

Until 1880 (when the *mehtar* of Chitral took it) Mastuj was the 'capital' of the Kushwaqt state stretching eastwards into Ghizar. A British garrison confined here during the 1895 siege was rescued by the column that crossed the Shandur Pass. The old royal fort stands next to the Hindu Kush Heights Hotel.

From the south, Laspur Gol enters Yarkhun Gol. Up this canyon are the villages of Gosht (6km from the Mastuj turn-off), Harchin (14km from Gosht), Brook Laspur (2km from Gosht) and Sor Laspur (sometimes called just Laspur, 6km from Brook Laspur), and the road to Shandur Pass, two to three hours by jeep (42km) from Mastuj.

SLEEPING

Mastuj Tourist Guesthouse (☎ 0943-486151; s/d/tr Rs 100/200/300; 🏠) A comfy and welcoming place wrapped around a small walled garden, with a handful of carpeted rooms and cold showers. Food is cooked to order. Hard to miss as it's the first guesthouse as you drive into Mastuj. The hotel also owns a couple of jeeps that run daily to Chitral.

Foreigner Tourist Paradise (☎ 0933-486008; dm/s/d Rs 70/100/200) Signed opposite the Mastuj

Tourist Guesthouse, this offers similar fare. It's reasonably basic, but clean and friendly.

Hotel Hindu Kush Heights (☎ 0943-413151; fax 413153; s/d Rs 3400/4200) Next to Mastuj fort on the outskirts of the village, this is Chitral district's plushest hotel. Half a dozen chalets are set among shady grounds, nicely done out in wood, with verandas, real tubs in the bathrooms and old colonial photos on the walls – lovely. Food on request.

PTDC Motel Mastuj (☎ 0943-486034; s/d Rs 1200/1500) This comfortable hotel with characterless though functional rooms has a decent restaurant. It's set just outside the village and has gorgeous vistas, but don't believe the signs saying 'PTDC ½km' at the bottom of the bazaar – it's more than twice that distance.

Mastuj also has a comfortable two-room C&W resthouse, bookable in Chitral. At Brook Laspur there is the basic **Shandur Hotel** (dm/d Rs 50/200) and ultra-basic **Qraqrum Hotel & Restaurant** (dm Rs 40) if you need to stay to catch transport to Shandur. At Sor Laspur is the **Shandoor Hotel** (dm/d Rs 50/200).

GETTING THERE & AWAY

There are a couple of jeeps every morning between Chitral town and Mastuj (Rs 130, five hours), as well as daily rides to Buni (Rs 45, 2½ hours). Transport is less frequent to Sor Laspur and the Yarkhun Valley. To get over the Shandur Pass, Brook Laspur has the best transport links (Rs 60 from the petrol pumps at the Mastuj turn-off), or arrange transport from Chitral.

Yarkhun Gol

From Mastuj, the Yarkhun Gol stretches 100km northeast, almost to the tip of Chitral. Along this grand valley lay an important branch of the ancient Silk Road, between Kashgar and Afghanistan via the Wakhan corridor and the 3777m Broghil (or Boroghil) Pass. The Broghil was also one of several passes that stoked British fears of a Russian invasion in the late 19th century.

You'll need to be self-sufficient to get by in this remote but inspiring landscape. The best time to come here is for the Jashan-i-Boroghil festival in July (see p222).

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Karakoram Highway



A thin ribbon of asphalt strikes north from near Islamabad and leaves the modern capital and the dusty Punjab plains far behind. As it weaves through sparse green hills, the first wrinkles of mountain-building in this geological 'collision zone', this unassuming road gives little hint as to what lies ahead. This is the high road to China, the Karakoram Highway (KKH), which was blasted and bulldozed through an intractable landscape of raging rivers, deep ravines and precipitous peaks in the 1960s and '70s. It is a 1200km marvel of engineering and a symbolic collaboration between Pakistan and China. It is also a magnet for adventure-seekers.

The KKH unites the plains of Pakistan with erstwhile independent mountain kingdoms and connects South Asia with West and Central Asia. It follows a branch of that ancient network of trade routes known as the Silk Road, and one of its tricks is time travel. The KKH takes you to where Buddhism spread to China and Tibet, to the colourful bazaar of Kashgar that remains more than just a memory of a Silk Road oasis, and to the intrigues of the 19th-century Great Game. It has also brought the 21st century to the fabled valley of Hunza, and fume-belching trucks and minibuses have now mostly displaced donkeys and camels as the caravans of trade.

As it traverses northern Pakistan and enters western China, via the 4730m Khunjerab Pass, the KKH navigates the highest concentration of soaring peaks and long glaciers in the world. Intrepid travellers are delivered to some of the most awe-inspiring and challenging trekking they are ever likely to encounter. And for some, this is where the real adventure starts.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Unwinding in **Karimabad** (p299), the heart of the fabled valley of Hunza and home to the 700-year-old mountain-top **Baltit Fort** (p300)
- Testing your courage and sense of balance on the Two Bridges walk near the peaceful village of **Passu** (p311)
- Marvelling at the mallet-wielding mayhem and horsemanship at a polo tournament in **Gilgit** (p275)
- Bartering in the colourful bazaars of **Kashgar** (p324), former Silk Road oasis and legendary market town
- Exploring the trails of **Baltistan** (p284) and beyond, where the Karakoram ruptures from the earth's crust in an unequalled display of high peaks and twisting glaciers
- Crossing the **Khunjerab Pass** (p317), a geographical and cultural watershed, in a modern replay of an ancient passage between empires past





History

Spanning some of the most rugged and remote mountains in the world, the KKH region is held together by several historical currents. These are the Silk Road and the spread of Buddhism; the arrival of Islam; imperial struggles, particularly the 'Great Game' between Britain and Russia; and, of course, the Highway itself.

THE SILK ROAD & THE FLOWERING OF BUDDHISM

Buddhism spread throughout the northern subcontinent under the charismatic (and last) Mauryan king, Ashoka (272–232 BC), whose excesses in war led to his conversion and active patronage of the new philosophy. Soon after Ashoka's death, however, the region descended into chaos with several invasions from Central Asia and a recurring Hindu backlash. Meanwhile, the Han dynasty in China was pushing its frontiers west and south over a growing network of trade routes that later came to be called the Silk Road.

From the early Han capital of Chang'an (now Xian), a line of oases skirted north and south around the Taklamakan Desert to Kashgar. From there, tracks ran west across the Pamir and Turkestan (Central Asia) to Persia (Iran), Iraq and the Mediterranean, and south across the Karakoram to Kashmir. Caravans went west with porcelain, silk, tea, spices and seeds of peach and orange, and brought back wool, gold, ivory, jewels and European delicacies such as figs and walnuts – as well as new ideas.

Bandits from Mongolia, Tibet and the little Karakoram state of Hunza made these expeditions dangerous, and Han emperors spent vast

resources policing the road. Among the tribes driven south by the Han were the Yüeh-chih (or Kushans) who, by the 1st century AD, controlled an empire spanning Kashgar, most of the Karakoram, the Hindukush and northern India. Under the Kushan dynasty, centred in Gandhara, Buddhism experienced an artistic and intellectual flowering and spread up the Indus into Central Asia, China and Tibet. The Silk Road became as much a cultural artery as a commercial one.

Buddhism left an extraordinary record in western China and northern Pakistan that can be seen while travelling along the KKH: the cave frescoes of San Xian outside Kashgar; the petroglyphs at Shatial, Chilas and Ganish; and the bas-relief Buddhas near Gilgit and Skardu.

THE ADVENT OF ISLAM & THE DECLINE OF THE SILK ROAD

Although an Arab expedition reached Kashgar in the 8th century, the earliest conversions to Islam in the Tarim Basin were by rulers of the Qarakhan dynasty in the 12th century. Today most non-Chinese there are Sunni Muslims. Almost simultaneously with the 8th-century Central Asia explorations, an Arab naval force arrived at the mouth of the Indus, but likewise left little religious imprint. It wasn't until the 11th century that Islam began to establish itself in this region. Muslim Turkic raiders from Afghanistan, led by the warlord Mahmud of Ghazni, battered the Indus Valley in the early 11th century. Conversion to Islam was widespread, for pragmatic as much as spiritual reasons.

In the early 13th century the Mongol armies of Genghis Khan had subdued Central Asia and had begun raiding south into the

TRAVELLING SAFELY ON (& OFF) THE KARAKORAM HIGHWAY (KKH)

The towns and villages along the KKH, particularly in the Northern Areas (NA), are among the safest and most hospitable in Pakistan. Whether you enter from China or Punjab, you will keenly feel the relaxed and outgoing nature of the people here. Nevertheless, there are a few issues of which to be aware.

Avoid any travel at night, particularly in northern Hazara and Indus Kohistan; buses have occasionally been robbed at night on the KKH from Thakot as far south as Mansehra.

Indus Kohistan, away from the KKH, is fairly lawless and communities can be very suspicious of outsiders. On top of having a reputation for anarchy, many local men have skewed ideas about foreign women. Do not go into the hills alone, and check with the local chief of police or district officer of the Frontier Constabulary before exploring beyond the Highway, especially between Shatial and Pattan.

subcontinent. With the largest contiguous land empire in history, cleared of bandits and boundaries by the Mongols, the Silk Road enjoyed a last burst of activity into the 14th century. Europeans, now forced to take note of Asian power, also took an interest in Asia; Marco Polo made (or made up) his epic journeys during this time. The subsequent eclipse of the Silk Road has been variously attributed to the arrival of Islam, the collapse of the Mongols, and the drying up of oasis streams.

The final nail in the Silk Road's coffin was the discovery in 1497 of a sea route from Europe around Africa to India by the Portuguese navigator Vasco da Gama. By this time the entire region now spanned by the KKH was Muslim, but it was in total disarray, fractured by quarrelling remnants of the Mongol empire in the north, petty chieftains in the mountains, successors of the 14th-century invader from Central Asia, Tamerlane (Timur), and Pashtun tribes in the south.

THE BRITISH, PARTITION & THE NORTHERN AREAS

In 1846 the British annexed the Sikh territories of Kashmir, Ladakh, Baltistan and the Gilgit-Hunza basin. Packaging them up as the State of Jammu & Kashmir, they sold them to the Hindu prince Gulab Singh and declared him the first Maharaja of Kashmir. Then Britain discovered Russia snooping in the Pamir and Afghanistan. In 1877 a British political agent arrived to look over the Kashmiri governor's shoulder. The arrangement proved awkward and the British Agency was closed after a few years – only to reopen in 1889 as Britain's anxiety mounted

over Russia's presence in the region. The new political agent was Captain Algernon Durand, who believed that to counter foreign influence in India all its frontier tribes would eventually have to be subjugated or bought off. He carried on his own foreign policy in the area, invading Hunza in 1891 and trying unsuccessfully to subdue Chilas in 1892–93. In 1935 Britain leased back the entire Agency from Kashmir and raised a local militia, the Gilgit Scouts.

At Partition in 1947 Maharaja Hari Singh, hoping for his own independence, stalled for two months before finally acceding to India. Gilgit and the surrounding valleys rose in revolt (see the boxed text, p275) and demanded to join Pakistan. India and Pakistan then went to war over Kashmir.

In the UN ceasefire that followed, Pakistan got temporary control over what is now the Northern Areas (NA), plus a slice of western Kashmir. The resulting closure of the Burzil Pass left only the Babusar Pass linking the NA to the rest of Pakistan until around 40 years ago, when construction began on the KKH and Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) began flights. The two countries went to war again in 1965 and 1971, and periodically skirmish over Siachen Glacier in eastern Baltistan.

Pakistan's official position is that until a vote by the people of Kashmir (as specified in the 1947 ceasefire terms) is held, Kashmir doesn't belong to anyone. This leaves the NA in limbo, because making it a province would concede the status quo of a divided Kashmir.

In 1969 the residual autonomy of former ministates like Hunza and Nagyr was abol-

ISLAM ALONG THE KARAKORAM HIGHWAY

Today people as far north on the KKH as Chilas are all Sunni Muslims, and more fervently so than their Kashgar counterparts. Alternative doctrines appear to have come to the northern mountains much later. In the 16th century, Taj Mughal, ruler of Badakhshan in northeast Afghanistan, seized Chitral and Gilgit, and is credited with bringing Ismailism to the region. From Kashmir, Shiite Islam moved into Baltistan at perhaps the end of the 16th century, and from there into Bagrot, Haramosh and Hunza-Nagyr in the 17th century. Hunza and Gojal, Shiite at first, adopted Ismailism in the 19th century. Even today a few old carved Shiite mosques can be seen there, in sharp contrast to the spanking green-and-white *jamaat khanas* (Ismaili community halls).

A separate Shiite branch, called Nurbakhshi, persists in Baltistan's upper valleys, with its own doctrinal variations. While generally conservative, they are noticeable (eg in Khaplu) because, like the Ismailis, the women are not veiled in public.

ished. Now they're all governed by the 24-member Northern Areas Council, headed by a federally appointed chief executive. The government is generous with development money and levies no direct taxes, but Northerners cannot, for example, vote in national elections. Having fought to join Pakistan, many now feel excluded.

Nevertheless, the region has acquired many of the political features of a province. Northern Areas Council members are all locally elected and can now campaign on the basis of political party affiliation. They in turn elect the deputy chief executive, with the rank of a minister of state in Pakistan. On his/her advice, the chief executive appoints four advisers with the rank of provincial ministers.

THE KARAKORAM HIGHWAY

Following its invasion of Tibet in 1950, China occupied parts of Ladakh, Baltistan and the upper Shimshal Valley in the mid-1950s. All traffic across the border stopped. While the Chinese border with Indian-held Kashmir is still in dispute today, a thaw in China-Pakistan relations in 1964 led to a border agreement, China's return of 2000 sq km of territory, and talk of linking the two countries by road.

In 1966 the two countries embarked on one of the biggest engineering projects since the Pyramids: a two-lane, 1200km road across some of the highest mountains in the world, the Pamir and the Karakoram, from Kashgar in China to Havelian in Pakistan. Much of the KKH would traverse terrain that until then had barely allowed a donkey track. It was to be 20 years before it was fully open.

Pakistan had already started a road of its own in 1960, the 400km Indus Valley Rd between Swat and Gilgit. This and a road north from Havelian were completed in 1968 and linked by a bridge at Thakot. Between then and 1973, Pakistani crews worked north from the Indus, while the Chinese cut a road over the Khunjerab Pass to Gulmit, as well as north from the Khunjerab to Kashgar. All of the nearly 100 bridges encountered from the Khunjerab to Thakot were originally Chinese-built.

Chinese workers departed in early 1979, and later that year the KKH was declared complete in Pakistan. In August 1982 the highway was formally inaugurated, the NA were opened to tourism as far as Passu, and

the Khunjerab Pass was opened to official traffic and cross-border trade. On 1 May 1986 the Khunjerab Pass and the road to Kashgar were opened to tourism.

The workforce in Pakistan at any one time was about 15,000 Pakistani soldiers and between 9000 and 20,000 Chinese, working separately. Landslides, savage summer and winter conditions, and accidents claimed 400 to 500 lives on the Pakistani side of the border, roughly one for every 1.5km of roadway (though some claim the Chinese took away many more dead than they admitted). The highest toll was in Indus Kohistan.

Few statistics are available about work on the Chinese side. Crews there were a mixture of soldiers, convicts and paid volunteers with nothing but picks and shovels, hauling rocks and dirt on shoulder-poles.

Maintenance is a huge and endless job. The mountains continually try to reclaim the road, assisted by earthquakes, encroaching glaciers and the Karakoram's typical crumbling slopes. Rockfalls and floods are routine, and travel is inherently unpredictable.

People

The KKH region's invaders and traders have left behind a kaleidoscopic array of peoples that have evolved distinct languages, customs and gene pools in their largely isolated valleys. This variety is one of the things that makes KKH travel so absorbing. Nearly everybody is Muslim, but in an equally diverse patchwork of Sunni, Shiite, Ismaili and Nurbakhshi variants.

Pashto-speaking Pashtuns inhabit the KKH well down into Hazara, along with speakers of Hindko and other Punjabi dialects. Kohistanis are thought to be Shins, descendants of invaders from the lower Indus Valley at least 1000 years ago, who were converted to Islam by Pashtun crusaders from the 14th century onwards. Kohistani speech is a mixture of Shina, Pashto, Urdu and Persian.

Gilgit, the region's historical trading hub, is a melting pot of peoples from all over Central and South Asia that sometimes boils over with ethnic and religious tensions. Its dominant language is Shina, also spoken around Nanga Parbat and down the Indus to Chilas and beyond. Up the catchments of the Gilgit and Ghizar Rivers is a mixture of Burusho, Shina speakers and Pashtuns. Some Chitralis are here too, speaking Khowar, an

THE GUJARS

Gujars (pronounced gu-jr), descended from the landless poor of lowland Pakistan and India, eke out an existence as nomadic herders. In May and June they drive their cows, yaks, sheep or goats into the high meadows of the lower NA (roughly as far north as Gilgit) and southern North-West Frontier Province (NWFP). They sell a few animals when they need to buy supplies and then descend in September and October. They are a common sight on and off the KKH at these times, moving beside the road in long files of animals and people, or camped outside towns. They winter on marginal land, often on the dry riverbeds, seldom associating with local people.

Though Sunni Muslims, they are considered low-caste by many, even in nominally caste-free Pakistan. They rarely marry non-Gujars. Gujar women do not observe purdah (the wearing of a veil), and on the KKH south of Gilgit they may be the only women whose faces you ever glimpse. Gujars near Gilgit speak Shina, while those closer to the Shandur Pass and in Chitral speak Khowar.

Indic language. In the other direction from Gilgit is Baltistan, whose mainly Tibetan people speak a classical form of Tibetan.

The people of Gojal are mainly Tajiks, originally from Afghanistan's Wakhan Corridor and speaking Wakhi, a form of Persian. The Burusho of southern Gojal, the Hunza Valley and Upper Nagyr speak Burushaski, a language whose origins continue to mystify scholars. The people of Lower Nagyr have similar roots but speak mostly Shina, the language of Gilgit.

Uyghurs are predominant from the Khunjerab Pass to Kashgar, plus there are large rural populations of Tajiks, Kyrgyz and Kazakhs, each sharing ancestry, language and customs with communities in Central Asia, Iran and (in the case of Tajiks) Pakistan. In Kashgar you will see the occasional descendant of White Russians. And, of course, Han Chinese entrepreneurs and administrators are everywhere on the China side.

Climate

The most pleasant temperatures for KKH travel are in May, June, September and October. July and August get uncomfortably hot along most of the KKH, except in high-altitude trekking zones.

In northern Pakistan the wettest months are during the monsoon, from late July to early September, with random summer storms from Hunza southwards, and steady rain and high humidity from Indus Kohistan and the Kaghan Valley southwards. These monsoonal regions are also sporadically drizzly from December to March. The driest months are May and June and mid-September to November, with the clearest skies in autumn. Xinjiang remains

extremely arid all year long, with a trace of rain in summer.

From Gilgit to Kashgar, winter is long and cold (often well below freezing), especially in January and February, and snow closes many high passes, including the Khunjerab.

National Parks

The KKH runs through the Khunjerab National Park and you will have to pay a US\$4 fee (or the equivalent in rupees) for the privilege. For details on this park's founding and conservation credentials, as well as background to other parks in the region, see p68.

Language

Travelling along the KKH is like passing through half a dozen tiny countries. In addition to the two national languages of Urdu and Mandarin Chinese, there are at least seven other common tongues, from three different linguistic families. Persian is also understood to some extent throughout the region.

Prominent local languages are Khowar or Chitrali (Ishkoman, Yasin and Ghizar), Pashto (Besham and northern Hazara), Kohistani (Indus Kohistan), Shina (spoken around Gilgit and in the Indus Valley from Chilas to Lower Nagyr), Burushaski (spoken in Yasin, Hunza and Upper Nagyr), Wakhi (Gojal and Tashkurgan) and Uyghur (Kashgar). See p239 for more about the ethnic mix along the KKH, and the Language chapter for a list of useful words and phrases.

Dangers & Annoyances

TRAVEL IN INDUS KOHISTAN

Indus Kohistan, off the Highway, is a pretty lawless place. You should seek advice from the police at Dasu, Komila, Pattan or Besham

before heading up any of Kohistan's side valleys. See the boxed text, p237.

SECTARIAN VIOLENCE AROUND GILGIT

The NA is one of the safest parts of Pakistan, but in 1988 Sunni-Shiite tension erupted in gun battles in the valleys around Gilgit, leaving at least 100 dead. There were smaller incidents in the following years, but electoral reforms in 1994 pacified the religious rabble-rousers (who were elected to comfortable positions), at which point the violence abruptly subsided.

No foreigners were ever injured, but the KKH has sprouted police checkpoints where foreigners must sign a register. Many sign false names for the fun of it, though the logbooks have apparently been used to help embassies find their nationals in emergencies.

In August 2003 there were violent protests in Skardu triggered by disagreements between local Shiite leaders over the syllabus taught at schools. And in January 2005, 11 people died in violent clashes following a shooting attack on a Shiite leader. If you are ever caught in such circumstances, the advice is to retreat to your hotel and stay out of sight of the mob.

ROCKFALL

Rockfall hazard on the KKH, side roads including the Gilgit to Skardu road, and on all valley footpaths rises sharply during rainy weather. Walkers and cyclists should simply find something else to do. Rockfall on the Highway may ruin your plans, but it can do far worse. During the research for this book we were caught in a downpour while on the Chapursan Valley road and witnessed rocks larger than our jeep come hurtling down into the river beside the road; thankfully we were on the opposite side of the river. A letter from one traveller describes a harrowing day on the KKH between Karimabad and Gulmit.

A local driver said it was just a matter of scrambling across the rockfall and boarding transport on the other side. But there wasn't any, so he and his companions decided to continue on foot. Soon rocks were falling around them, and they spent six hours literally cheating death, sometimes hugging the wall, sometimes being forced down to the rising river. At one point a 5m rock smashed to the road just a metre from one of them.

Moral of the story: don't cross a rockfall hoping to find transport on the other side; the whole road is probably littered with rocks, with more to come. Go back and wait for the mountainsides to settle and the roads to be cleared.

UNREST IN XINJIANG

In early 1997 somewhere between 10 and 100 people died in riots in Yining, about 400km west of Ürümqi (the capital of Xinjiang), while more bombs exploded in Ürümqi, in Qorla (east of Kashgar) and on a Beijing bus. The Chinese government's response was swift and ruthless, with Uyghur sources claiming thousands of executions. As a result there has hardly been a dent in regional tourism, and there appears to be no danger for visitors.

Since 2001 it appears that China has taken advantage of the West's 'war on terrorism' to continue to exert its will over Xinjiang's Islamic populace.

Getting There & Around

The nominal southern end of the KKH is at Havelian in Pakistan's NWFP, but in practice it's at Islamabad or Rawalpindi. Islamabad has a limited number of direct international air connections, including Kashgar, plus others via Lahore and Karachi (see p86).

You can reach the KKH by train from all over Pakistan. Most trains to the capital area go to Rawalpindi's Saddar Bazaar station (p87), and a spur of the Rawalpindi to Peshawar line runs to Havelian. The best bet from Lahore is to take one of the air-con bus services to Rawalpindi.

The northern end of the KKH is at Kashgar in China's Xinjiang Autonomous Region. Kashgar is linked by air to Islamabad and via the provincial capital, Ürümqi, to major Chinese cities and other international points. Overland, Kashgar is linked by bus and train to Ürümqi, from where railway lines run to Chinese cities and to Almaty in Kazakhstan. Warm-weather roads cross the Torugart Pass between Kashgar and Bishkek in Kyrgyzstan, and across the Irkeshtam Pass to Osh, also in Kyrgyzstan, and an all-weather road runs between Ürümqi and Almaty.

Domestic transport in Pakistan to/from Islamabad, and to/from Kashgar in China, is covered in detail in the Transport chapter and within the Getting There & Away sections of the respective cities.

CYCLING KASHGAR TO ISLAMABAD

These notes are presented from north to south because cycling in that direction prolongs the good weather in the best travelling season, which is September and October. An alternative route over the Babusar Pass and through the Kaghan Valley is described on p255.

For information on bringing bicycles into China, see p385. For more information on equipment, safety and security on the KKH, see p392.

KASHGAR TO KHUNJERAB PASS

Food is scarce between Kashgar and Tashkurgan and between Tashkurgan and Sost. Water is scarce on the Kashgar plain, and between Kara Kul and the Khunjerab Pass. Checkpoints make good overnight stops, and it's possible to stay in private homes.

Kashgar to Ghez, about 120km

Overall, the road south from Kashgar is fairly level for 80km, before climbing steeply to Ghez. Upal, about 50km from Kashgar, has fruit, samosas and other snacks. The Ghez checkpoint has basic food and accommodation.

Ghez to Kara Kul, about 70km

Above Ghez the road climbs steeply for 40km through a canyon where landslides may block the road during rainstorms. Travellers exploring the sand dune area at the top of the canyon have been warned off by mounted police. From there it's gradually uphill, then steep for a few kilometres to Kara Kul lake, where there are a couple of resorts, yurt accommodation and camping.

Kara Kul to Tashkurgan, about 100km

The 30km rising road to the Subash Plateau (at about 4000m the second-highest point on the KKH) is a long grind but not outrageously steep for most of the way. About 60km from Kara Kul is the abandoned Kekyll checkpoint. A truck stop perches on the steep climb south out of the Tagharma Basin. Tashkurgan is the only place between Kashgar and Sost that has real restaurants.

Tashkurgan to Piralı, about 100km

Over recent years the Chinese have (again) not allowed cyclists to cycle between Tashkurgan and the Khunjerab Pass, insisting cyclists put their bike onto the roof of a bus. However, the situation could always change. The bumpy road goes slightly downhill before rising towards the Piralı checkpoint. Cyclists have spent the night at the settlement of Davdar, which also has a truck stop. Soldiers at Piralı, about 45km from Davdar, might let you stay the night.

Piralı to Khunjerab Pass, about 40km

A gradually increasing grade, quite steep by the time you near the top. Altitude becomes the major challenge as you approach the pass.

KHUNJERAB PASS TO HUNZA

Food, water and accommodation are plentiful beyond Sost and the road is wide and paved. There are no major climbs southbound. Your Chinese bus driver may allow you to hop off the bus on the Pakistani side and ride down to Sost. The Pakistani officials are usually very relaxed about this.

Khunjerab Pass to Sost, 85km

The road on the Pakistan side twists itself into switchbacks for 17km before descending steeply to Dih, about 50km from the top. From there it's a gentle descent to Sost. Abandoned KKH work camps make camping spots, and Dih has a national park resthouse where you can pitch a tent.

Sost to Passu, about 40km

A gentle downhill ride. There are basic hotels with hot showers at Gircha (a few kilometres south of Sost) and Morkhun, about 12km from Sost. Khyber, about 20km from Sost, has a village guesthouse and a basic inn. Passu's dilapidated Batura Inn has a 'rumour' book with cyclists' comments.

Passu to Gulmit, 16km

Sharp climbs include the 4km ascent from Passu south to Yashvandan.

Gulmit to Ganish, 34km

The road is fairly level but often plagued with rockfall damage. Karimabad is a steep 2km climb on a link road a few kilometres west of Ganish. Ganish, Aliabad (5km southwest of Ganish) and Murtazaabad (a further 8km along the Highway) have local hotels.

HUNZA TO GILGIT**Ganish to Pisan (Minapin turn-off), about 25km**

From the bridge over the Hunza River it's an unpaved 3km to the recommended Diran Hotel at Minapin, with a steep down-and-up at Minapin Nala (nala is Urdu for tributary canyon).

Pisan to Chalt turning, about 25km

There is food and shelter at Ghulmet Nala, about 5km west of Pisan (2km from Minapin). Chalt is about 4km off the KKH, and has simple accommodation.

Chalt turn-off to Gilgit, about 55km

Basic food and charpoys (simple beds made of ropes knotted together on a wooden frame) are available at Jaglot Guar, about 14km from the Chalt turning. The shortest route into Gilgit from the north is via a tunnel and two suspension bridges (turn off the KKH at Dainyor).

GILGIT REGION

Gilgit is 10km off the KKH. Most people cycling the KKH start or finish here, avoiding the headaches of Indus Kohistan.

Gilgit to Shatial has no long climbs in either direction, but lots of lung-busters under 4km long. There is a significant risk of dehydration and heatstroke between Raikot Bridge and Shatial.

Gilgit to Raikot Bridge, 80km

Jaglot, about 20km south of Gilgit, has serais (cheap travellers' inns) and a small hotel. The best overnight stop between Gilgit and Chilas is the scenic Northern Areas Public Works Department (NAPWD) resthouse at Talechi, about 62km from Gilgit; book it with the NAPWD **chief engineer** (☎ 05811-50307) in Gilgit, or camp out in the garden. Don't count on finding food there. There's an expensive hotel at Raikot Bridge.

Raikot Bridge to Chilas, 54km

Gonar Farm, about 25km from Raikot Bridge, has one or two serais. At several slide-zones, the road can be potholed, bumpy or washed out. There are several tourist hotels on the KKH at Chilas. Three kilometres before Chilas is the upgraded road following Thak Nala to Babusar Pass. When completed, this will no doubt become the route of choice for cyclists (and other traffic). See the boxed text on p255 for a description of the route.

Chilas to Shatial, 62km

Shatial has a basic inn where some cyclists have been turned away and a primitive resthouse where you may sleep on the veranda.

INDUS KOHISTAN

Cyclists, with expensive gear and skintight clothing that may offend orthodox Muslims, are especially vulnerable in Indus Kohistan. There are unverified stories of assaults, though cyclists mostly

(Continued on page 244)

(Continued from page 243)

report petty theft and stone-throwing kids, mainly south of Dasu. Camping near police or army installations is comforting and pleasant.

Shatial to Dasu, 63km

This stretch has no major climbs or descents. Sumer Nala, about 30km downriver from Shatial, is a small truck stop with food and charpoy. The Pakistan Tourist Development Corporation (PTDC) has a motel at Barsin, 15km north of Dasu, and Dasu boasts a few pleasant hotels.

Dasu to Besham, about 80km

The road climbs high on the canyon wall, with lots of ups and downs. Resthouses and basic food are at Kayal Valley, Pattan and Dubair Valley, respectively about 30km, 40km and 60km south of Dasu.

HAZARA

The KKH is wide and paved, but from Mansehra south, traffic is heavy and drivers are reckless.

Besham to Chattar Plain, about 70km

As the KKH climbs out of the Indus Valley at Thakot, 28km south of Besham, the road is vulnerable to slides. Batagram is about 20km up from Thakot. The road climbs for 16km beyond this to a 1670m pass at Sharkul, and then drops for several kilometres into Chattar Plain.

Chattar Plain to Mansehra, about 50km

It's downhill most of the way to Mansehra. There is cheap food along the road south of Shinkiari. An alternative route is on the back road that strikes east from the KKH at Batal to Dadar, and from there south to Shinkiari.

Mansehra to Hasan Abdal, about 100km

From Mansehra it's about 30km to Abbottabad, with an overall rise of about 200m. In the 15km from Abbottabad to Havelian the KKH plunges almost 500m. South of Havelian the road is flat for 60km to Hasan Abdal.

RAWALPINDI & ISLAMABAD

The flat 50km or so from Hasan Abdal to Rawalpindi is via the Grand Trunk Rd, a high-speed divided highway that is neither enjoyable nor very safe for cyclists. Alternative routes to Islamabad/Rawalpindi are a very hilly 200km from Mansehra via Gahri Habibullah, Muzaffarabad and Kohala, and a steep and hilly 130km or so from Abbottabad via Thandiani and Murree.

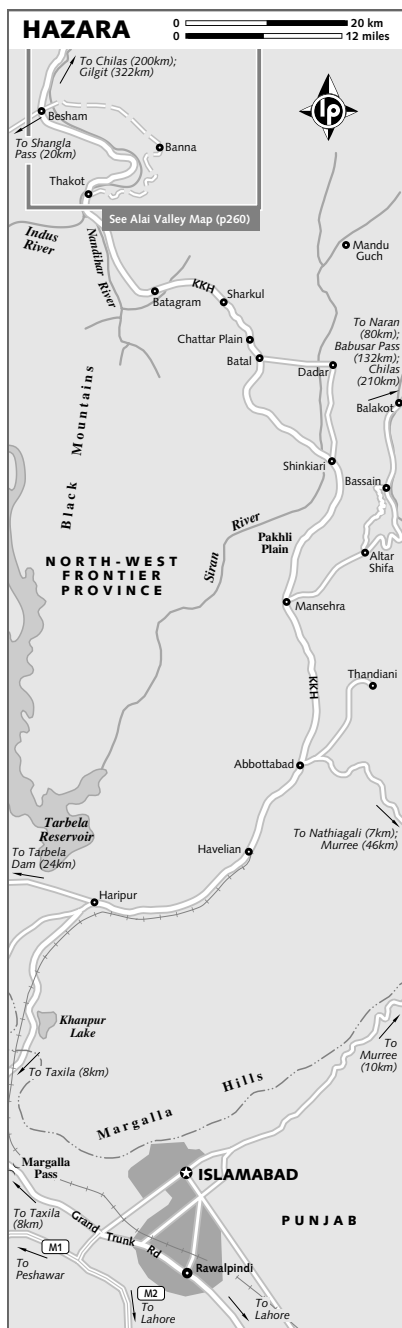
HAZARA

Roughly speaking, Hazara is that part of the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) east of the Indus; a series of fertile plains and terraced or forested hills rising from north of the Grand Trunk Rd into the Lesser Himalaya. Today's Hazara Division consists of the Abbottabad and Mansehra districts, and since the 1970s the Kohistan district, reaching west from the Indus into the Hindu Raj mountains.

Southern Hazara was a favourite gateway from the plains into Kashmir for expanding regimes – the Mughals, the Afghan Durranis

who defeated local tribes in 1752, and the Sikhs who wrested it away during the period 1818–24. After the First Sikh War (1846), Major James Abbott came here as a British 'adviser' to the Sikhs; on the Sikhs' defeat in the Second Sikh War (1849) he became Hazara Division's first deputy commissioner. Abbottabad, the divisional headquarters, is named after him.

Some towns still have the remains of old Sikh forts, as well as gurdwaras (Sikh temples) built in the 20th century. The Sikh population only evacuated at Partition. The road to Kashmir was severed at Partition, and now



Hazara's main artery is the KKH, ascending for 160km from Havelian to the Indus River at Thakot.

HARIPUR & HAVELIAN

Haripur ☎ 0596 / Havelian ☎ 0992

Haripur, a dusty and chaotic town 34km north of the Grand Trunk Rd, was once Hazara's 'capital'. It was founded in 1822 as the headquarters of the Sikh General Hari Singh, after whom it's named. In 1853 the British moved all its administrative functions to Abbottabad, and Haripur's importance waned.

Half an hour north of Haripur is Havelian, another nondescript bazaar, with one claim to fame: it's the official southern end of the KKH, and there was already a road through to Abbottabad before the KKH was even an idea. But there is a kind of geographical boundary: from here the road leaps out of the plain into the hills, rising nearly 500m in the 15km to Abbottabad.

Getting There & Away

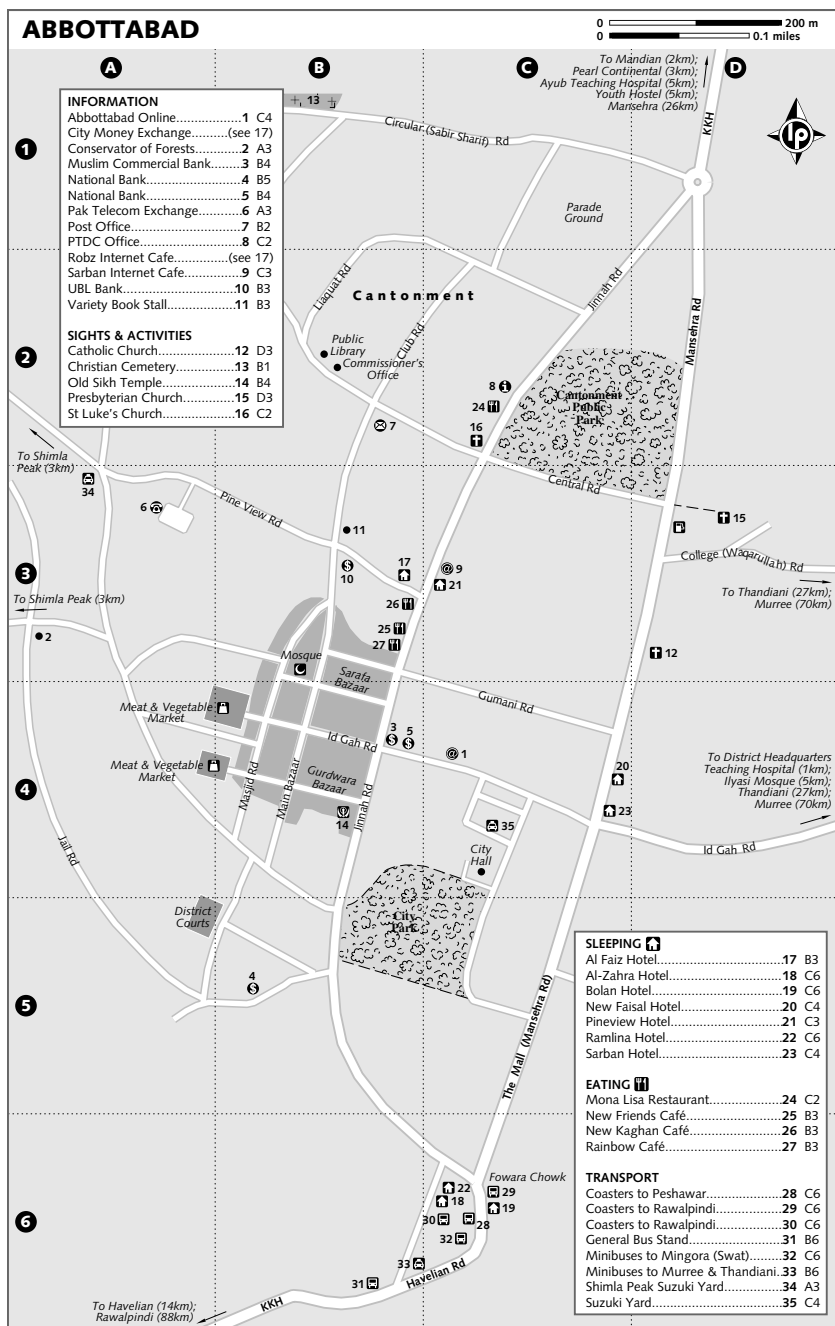
There are two busy routes north to Haripur from the Grand Trunk Rd (GT Rd). At Hasan Abdal (p90) there's a sign welcoming you to the KKH although it's not the official start of the Highway. The alternative route strikes north from Taxila. Both routes to Haripur suffer heavy truck traffic.

The daily Hazara Express train from/to Rawalpindi (Rs 38) departs Rawalpindi at 8.30am (arriving at 12.30pm), and the return leg departs Havelian at 10.45am (arriving at 2.45pm). Buses to Abbottabad (Rs 7) or Mansehra (Rs 30) wait outside the train station. There are also frequent minibuses to Abbottabad and Mansehra at the other end of the bazaar.

ABBOTTABAD

☎ 0992 / pop 881,000 / elevation 1255m

Abbottabad (ab-it-uh-baad), Hazara's headquarters and biggest town, was founded as a British garrison town in the 1850s, and the shady gardens, church bells and wide streets in the Cantonment evoke the colonial era. Beside the Cantonment is a compact and vibrant bazaar. At 1220m, Abbottabad has a cool climate, and one of the country's finest hill-station retreats is an hour away at Thandiani. Southbound cyclists should take a rest and contemplate the scenic mountain



route via Murree rather than the truck-choked KKH. Apart from changing money for an excursion into the Kaghan Valley there's little reason for other travellers to make a halt.

The town has a sizable Christian minority and three active churches (Presbyterian, Anglican and Catholic). The language of the region is Hindko Punjabi, but you can get by with English and a little Urdu.

Orientation

North of the general bus stand is a roundabout, Fowara Chowk. Down the right fork is the Mall (Mansehra Rd). The left fork is Jinnah Rd, running by the bazaar and Cantonment before rejoining the Mall.

Information

BOOKSHOPS

Variety Book Stall (Club Rd) Limited number of English titles plus stationery.

INTERNET ACCESS

There are several internet cafés in town, usually open daily from around 9am to midnight.

Abbottabad Online (AOL; Id Gah Rd; per hr Rs 20)

Robz Internet Cafe (Pine View Rd; per hr Rs 20)

Sarban Internet Cafe (Jinnah Rd; per hr Rs 20) In a relatively quiet location.

MEDICAL SERVICES

Ayub Teaching Hospital (Mansehra Rd, Mandian) It's 5km north of the Mall.

District Headquarters Teaching Hospital (Id Gah Rd) East of the Mall.

MONEY

Change money here if you're heading for the Kaghan Valley, as no banks in the valley will do it.

City Money Exchange (Pine View Rd, ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat) Will change cash US dollars, euros and UK pounds.

Muslim Commercial Bank (cnr Jinnah & Id Gah Rds) Cashes travellers cheques and changes cash.

National Bank (Jail Rd) Cashes travellers cheques and changes cash. The main branch is near the courts and there's another on Id Gah Rd.

UBL Bank (Pine View Rd) Changes cash (US dollars, euros, UK pounds) only.

POST

Post office (cnr Club & Central Rds)

TELEPHONE

There are numerous Public Call Offices (PCOs) in the bazaar.

Pak Telecom Exchange (Pine View Rd; ☎ 24hr) Can place overseas calls.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Conservator of Forests (☎ 9310232; Jail Rd) Can book forestry resthouses in Thandiani, Dadar or Kaghan.

Pakistan Tourist Development Corporation (PTDC; ☎ 9546275; ☎ 9am-3pm Mon-Thu & Sat, 9am-noon Fri Sep-May) Across from Cantonment Public Park, this is one of the more friendly and useful PTDC offices. PTDC can help book transportation and tours (eg Kaghan Valley or Swat), government resthouses and private accommodation options in the region.

Sights & Activities

ABBOTTABAD TOWN

With its orderly tree-lined streets, European architecture and grand parade ground, the Cantonment is the town's historical heart. **St Luke's Church** (cnr Central & Jinnah Rds), near the PTDC, is as old as the town. A melancholy Christian cemetery is 500m up Circular Rd.

Abbottabad's other persona is the **bazaar**, a congested quarter of crumbling colonial architecture, full of noise, traffic and the smells of cooking oil and barbecued meat. In Gurdwara Bazaar (off Jinnah Rd), beneath the arch, is a former **gurdwara** built in 1943, abandoned at Partition and now used as municipal offices.

SHIMLA PEAK

The hills cradling Abbottabad are Shimla Peak to the northwest and Sarban Peak to the south. Shimla's cool, pine-clad summit is woven with trails and features fine panoramas of the town and its surroundings. You can walk up (three steep kilometres) or take a passenger Suzuki (Rs 5) from upper Pine View Rd; ask for Shimla *pahari* (pa-ree).

ILYASI MOSQUE

This striking mosque, with a complex of spring-fed bathhouses and pools, is 5km east on the Murree road, near Nawwan Sheher village. A small bazaar nearby has basic teashops. Catch a Suzuki (Rs 10 to Rs 20) to Nawwan Sheher from the Suzuki stand on Id Gah Rd.

Sleeping

BUDGET

North of Abbottabad at Mandian, the Pakistan Youth Hostel Association (PYHA) hostel is

quite isolated unless you're cycling or driving. If you're not, take a Suzuki to Mandian from Id Gah Rd.

Al-Zahra Hotel (☎ 330155; Fowara Chowk; s/d/tr Rs 250/250/350) Next door to the more obvious Ramlna Hotel is the almost grandiose but neglected Al-Zahra. Spacious, adequately clean rooms and a shady veranda provide a lingering colonial air. Hot water is available on request.

Bolan Hotel (☎ 334395; Fowara Chowk; s/d Rs 210/300) The worn and rather grubby Bolan near the general bus stand offers the cheapest acceptable rooms with hot showers.

Pineview Hotel (☎ 335555; Jinnah Rd; d Rs 300) The Pineview is a fine *chaikhana* (teahouse) with a lively location but it's a barely satisfactory hotel. The poky rooms surprisingly boast cable TV. Mind your head as you enter.

Ramlna Hotel (☎ 334431; Fowara Chowk; s/d/tr Rs 200/350/600) The Ramlna has grotty singles though the bigger rooms get more care. There's running hot water and a bare-bones restaurant, but its best feature is that it is convenient for onward transport.

New Faisal Hotel (☎ 334406; The Mall; s/d Rs 250/350) The tiny rooms are well kept but resonate with traffic noise. You'll find that other options in the vicinity are not interested in foreigners.

MIDRANGE & TOP END

Al Faiz Hotel (☎ 340896; Pine View Rd; d/tr Rs 1000/1200) You can be sure of a friendly welcome at Al Faiz; however, since our last visit the rooms have deteriorated, the prices have sky-rocketed and the restaurant has closed.

Sarban Hotel (☎ 331508; fax 334436; The Mall; d Rs 1000-2300; ☎) The best place to stay in town, the Sarban is between the bazaar and the Cantonment and close to transport options. There's a multicuisine restaurant and a travel desk, and the standard rooms are clean with TV, fan, bathtubs and limitless hot water.

Pearl Continental (☎ 334717; fax 334707; KKH/Mansehra Rd, Mandian; s/d Rs 3450/4025; ☎) This is a poorer cousin of the big bold PCs elsewhere, but it has very comfortable, well-appointed rooms and the high-quality Nadia restaurant (see Eating right). Breakfast and tax are included in the tariff. It's located a couple of kilometres north of central Abbottabad in Mandian. Check out the funky bat-cave nightclub, Rasalus Café.

Eating

New Kaghan Café (☎ 340896; cnr Pine View & Jinnah Rds; mains Rs 50-120; ☎ 10am-11.30pm) This inexpensive restaurant is the best option close to the bazaar. Recommended dishes are the chicken *qormaa* (yogurt-based curry; Rs 80), mutton *palak* (spinach mutton; Rs 80), chicken tikka (Rs 55) and fragrant chicken biryani (Rs 65).

New Friends Cafe (Jinnah Rd; mains Rs 50-195; ☎ 10am-midnight) This busy curry and chapati eatery has a small selection of mutton and chicken dishes, such as the ubiquitous mutton *karai* (mutton braised with vegetables and served bubbling in its own pan; Rs 70). Vegetarians will hopefully find dhal (Rs 25), but not much else.

Rainbow Café (Jinnah Rd) Close to the New Friends Cafe and serving up similar food.

Mona Lisa Restaurant (☎ 334131; Jinnah Rd; mains Rs 60-250; ☎ 10am-11.30pm) Adjacent to the PTDC in the Cantonment, this bright roadside eatery boasts a huge menu of Pakistani, Chinese and Continental mains plus snacks and barbecue fare. But first ask what is available and fresh.

Most of the hotels have restaurants attached and these range in quality and price from the *chaikhana* at **Pineview Hotel** (Jinnah Rd; mains Rs 30-50), with a great balcony to watch life down on the street, to the upmarket **Nadia** (Pearl Continental Hotel, Mansehra Rd, Mandian; mains Rs 185-350; ☎ 7am-11pm), with an extensive Chinese, Continental and Pakistani menu.

West of the bazaar, there are a couple of streets dedicated to meat and vegetable stalls.

Shopping

Hazara embroidery is a local speciality. Small shops in the bazaar have good deals on shawls and other items.

Getting There & Away

The general bus stand is south of Fowara Chowk, and nearby are some smaller yards dedicated to the numerous minibuses or larger and more-comfortable Coasters travelling to Thandiani, Rawalpindi and Swat/Peshawar, which leave when full. For Kohistan or the Kaghan Valley, change at Mansehra. You may need to do the same for destinations north on the KKH. Destinations from Abbottabad include the following:

Aliabad (Hunza; Rs 750) Silk Route buses and Coasters pass through the general bus stand after originating in Rawalpindi, but are often full.

Gilgit (Rs 750) As for Aliabad.

Lahore (Rs 200/300 non air-con/air-con, eight hours)

Bus to Grand Trunk Rd bus stand. Air-con bus goes to the motorway.

Mansehra (Rs 20, one hour) Minibus.

Mardan (Rs 100, two hours) Most of the Peshawar- and Mingora-bound transport stops here en route.

Mingora (Swat district; Rs 240, six hours) Bus.

Murree (Rs 70, five hours) Minibus.

Peshawar (Rs 100, three hours) Minibus. Air-con Coasters (Rs 120) are worth the small extra expense.

Rawalpindi/Islamabad (Rs 75, 2½ hours) Minibuses leave all day from the general bus stand and next to the Al-Zahra Hotel. More comfortable air-con Coasters (Rs 85) also go to Rawalpindi from the general bus stand.

Thandiani (Rs 50, one hour) Minibus.

Getting Around

The yard for passenger Suzukis is down an alley east of the Mount View Hotel on Id Gah Rd. They usually clog Id Gah Rd and run up and down the Mall all day for Rs 5. Taxis will use the meter if it is demanded, though it is easier to fix a price – about Rs 50 from one end of town to the other.

THANDIANI

☎ 0992

Thandiani (taan-dee-aa-nee), a series of 2700m forested ridges northeast of Abbottabad, is the northernmost of the hill-station retreats called the Galis (p90). The air is cool and clean, development is minimal and there are views east across the Pir Panjal Range, and north even to Nanga Parbat in clear weather. Thandiani means 'cool place', so bring extra layers. Long day trips from Abbottabad are possible, organised by the PTDC (see p247).

Sleeping & Eating

Far Pavilions Hotel (tents/d Rs 300/400) This little hotel at the bus terminus has two doubles as well as tents in summer. It may also offer cheaper charpoy (rope beds) or camping sites. Bookings can be made through the PTDC (p247) or the travel desk at the Sarban Hotel (p248) in Abbottabad. A café and pakora (deep-fried vegetable) shops are open in summer.

A Communications & Works (C&W) rest-house and forestry resthouse here are rarely available, but inquire at Abbottabad PTDC.

Getting There & Away

Thandiani is an hour's ride from Abbottabad on a winding road beside the Kalapani River,

through terraced fields and pine and deodar forest. Minibuses (Rs 50) leave when full from Fowara Chowk or you could negotiate a special hire of a Suzuki or taxi (Rs 400).

MANSEHRA

☎ 0978 / pop 52,095

Tourists don't pay much attention to Mansehra except to get out and squint at three rocks on the northern outskirts, on which King Ashoka inscribed a set of edicts over 2200 years ago. The bazaar is lively, bearing traces of the town's history as a Sikh garrison town in the early 19th century. If you can tolerate the gridlocked traffic, it's a great place for people-watching, with a rich mix of Pashtuns, Punjabis and Kashmiris. The most common language is Pashto, with some Hindko Punjabi.

Mansehra is a major transportation junction for Rawalpindi, Azad Jammu & Kashmir (AJK), the Kaghan and Swat Valleys, and the KKH.

Orientation

The KKH skirts Mansehra, but local roads, named for their old destinations – Abbottabad, Shinkhari village and Kashmir – converge on the bridge in the middle of town. Most buses use the general bus stand 1.5km north of town, though some local minibuses arrive at the old GTS stand south of the bridge. Through buses may drop you on the KKH near the Ashoka Rocks; from there it's a 1km walk into town along Shinkhari Rd.

Information

The telephone exchange and post office are above the bazaar out on Kashmir Rd. The police can be found in the Sikh Fort nearby. The National Bank, above and behind Kashmir Bazaar, changes cash and travellers cheques. Internet cafés, such as **Hazara Internet Café** (per hr Rs 20), are not very reliable.

Sights

ASHOKA ROCKS

On the north side of town is Mansehra's tourist attraction, three granite boulders on which 14 edicts were engraved by order of the Mauryan king Ashoka in the 3rd century BC. Impalled by the destruction wreaked by his military campaigns, Ashoka converted to Buddhism and tried to dictate a new morality based on piety, moderation, tolerance and

respect for life. He was greatly revered, but his reforms (and his empire) didn't last much longer than he did. The inscriptions have done better, but they too are fading away; despite the shelters, the ancient Karoshthi script is now almost impossible to see. The rocks uphill are better than the one below the road.

FORMER SIKH TEMPLE (LIBRARY)

Up Kashmir Rd is the three-storey Gurdwara Siri Guru Singh Saba, a pastiche of colours and styles. Built in 1937 as a gurdwara, it's now the **Mansehra Municipal Library** (☎) 8am-1pm Mon-Sun, women only Mon). The ornate interior hasn't been altered much.

SIKH FORT

Up a laneway 300m past the library is a fort, built in the early 19th century by Sikh governor general Man Singh (after whom Mansehra is named), and rebuilt by the British after the Second Sikh War and the annexation of the Sikh state. It now houses a police office and a jail. Very few traces of the original mud-and-rock structure can be seen inside.

BAZAARS

Shinkiari and Kashmir Rds curve round a hill, built with **Kashmir Bazaar** sprawled across the top, its narrow lanes in semipermanent shadow. Across the bridge along Jaffar Rd is the smaller, older **Neelam (or Jerah) Bazaar**.

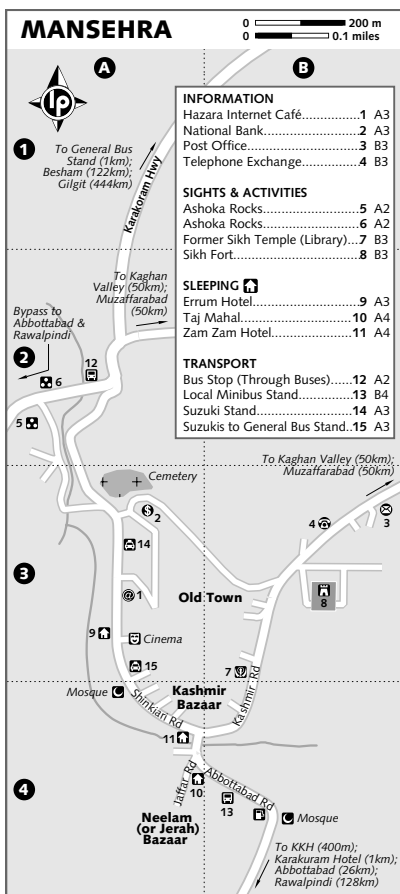
Sleeping

Zam Zam Hotel (☎ 305127; off Shinkiari Rd; s/d Rs 100/130, s/d with toilet Rs 150/180) Small, passably clean rooms have hot showers and there's a restaurant on site. It's hidden away, 50m west of the bridge.

Errum Hotel (☎ 300245; Shinkiari Rd; s/d Rs 350/650; 🍷) The Errum has clean, good-value doubles with hot shower, TV and phone. There's a rooftop patio plus very welcoming hosts. On the downside, the singles have very tiny bathrooms and there are only two rooms with air-con.

Taj Mahal (☎ 306505; Abbottabad Rd; s/d Rs 450/850) The friendly Taj Mahal boasts clean rooms with hot showers, cable TVs and some even have a fridge. Rooms vary in size so it's worth inspecting a few before committing. There's a simple restaurant on site.

Karakoram Hotel (☎ 302579; fax 303165; KKH; s/d/q Rs 575/1150/2500; 🍷) Mansehra's best place



to stay, with clean though rather solemn rooms and capable management. Aimed at tour groups, there is a recommended restaurant, and the only drawback is that it is 1km south of town, well away from the general bus stand.

Eating

Abbottabad Rd food is cheap and good. Little cafés serve braised mutton, *chapli kebabs* (spicy mutton burgers), omelettes and thick northern-style noodle soup. There are enough vegetable and fruit stalls to keep vegetarians going.

The town's best restaurants are in the hotels. Recommended are the budget **Taj Mahal** (Abbottabad Rd; mains Rs 50-130) and the midrange

Karakoram Hotel (mains Rs 100-350) with Chinese, Continental and Pakistani fare.

Getting There & Away

The **local minibuss stand** (Abbottabad Rd) has departures for Abbottabad (Rs 20) and irregular trips to Haripur (Rs 50) and Rawalpindi (Liaquat Chowk) only.

For other destinations or modes of transport, take a Suzuki (Rs 5) from Shinkiar Rd to the general bus stand, 1.5km north of town on the KKH. It's a large and hectic yard, but help is never far away. Just ask one of the many spruikers.

For the Kaghan Valley, there are minibuses to Balakot and sometimes Naran, as well as slower buses. For destinations north, go to **Northern Areas Transport Company** (Narco; ☎ 301471) near the general bus stand beside the KKH. You may be able to guarantee a seat by ringing Narco's **Rawalpindi office** (☎ 051-9278441, 051-5462181). Buses and Coasters such as Natco's run to a timetable, but the minibuses mostly leave when uncomfortably full.

Balakot (Rs 30) Minibuses, some heading on to Naran, leaving all day.

Batagram (Rs 60) Minibus.

Besham (Rs 120) Minibuses leaving all day.

Gilgit (Rs 800) Various Coasters and buses originating from Rawalpindi. Natco has five departures a day.

Islamabad (Rs 90, 3½ hours) Minibuses leaving all day.

Karachi (Rs 1000) Air-con buses each day.

Lahore (Rs 300) Air-con buses each day.

Muzaffarabad (Rs 60) Minibuses leaving all day.

Naran (Rs 100) Minibuses leaving all day when road open.

Rawalpindi (Rs 90 to Rs 100, 3½ hours) Buses leaving all day.

Skardu (Rs 700/850 minibus/bus) Natco has two departures originating from Rawalpindi in the afternoon (3pm and 6pm).

KAGHAN VALLEY

Embraced by the cool forested peaks of the Lesser Himalaya, this 160km-long valley drained by the burbling Kunhar River is one of Pakistan's most popular summer holiday spots. The verdant valley is not without its problems of crowding, litter and gouging hoteliers during the brief holiday season, but outside the summer peak, you will find the promised tranquillity though many of the hotels will have closed their doors.

The 2005 Kashmir earthquake devastated the town of Balakot and destroyed many roads in the steep-sided Kaghan Valley. On-going

land slippage and subsequent savage winters have hindered roadworks, which were frequent enough even before the earthquake, and restoration of phone and power lines. Rebuilding was very much in evidence at the time of writing but it will be many years before this region returns to normal in terms of access and accommodation.

At the valley head is the 4175m Babusar Pass into the Indus Valley at Chilas. In 1892 the British established a supply line across this pass, one of only two to Gilgit from the outside world. The other, the Burzil Pass from Kashmir, was closed by the 1949 ceasefire, leaving just the Babusar to link the NA with the rest of Pakistan until the KKH was built. It's open for several weeks each summer, a challenging alternative to the KKH between Mansehra and Chilas. Work has commenced on improving the road, particularly on the Chilas side, but it is expected to take several years before this becomes a viable short cut to Chilas for general transport.

The valley population consists of a string of villages along the river, plus a biannual migration of Gujars, who fan out with their animals into the high pastures of Hazara (and Swat and Chitral) in May and June, returning in September and October.

Several treks out of the valley are described in Lonely Planet's *Trekking in the Karakoram & Hindukush*.

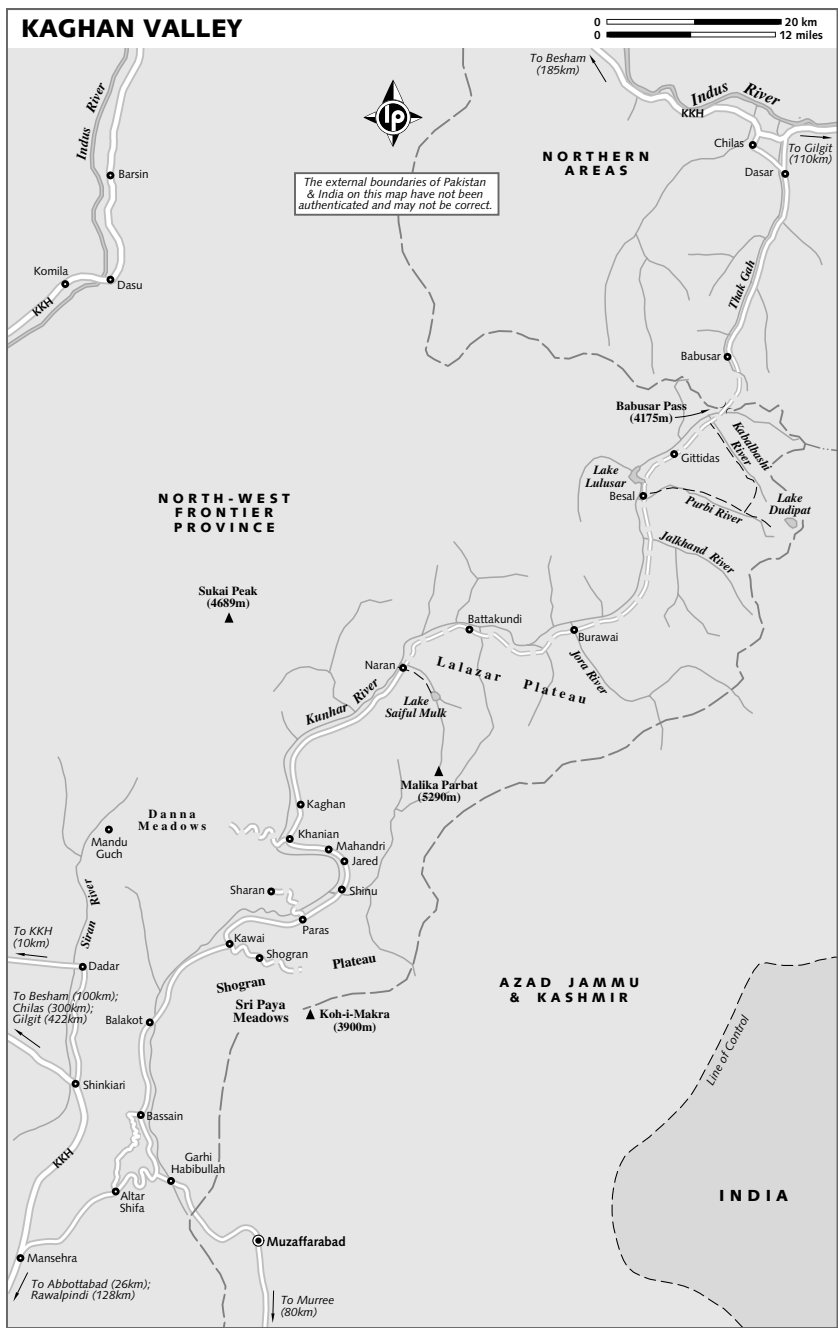
ORIENTATION

The valley's gateway, Balakot, is 39km from Mansehra. The valley road is more or less paved up to Naran, though there are numerous interruptions due to land slippage, much of it associated with the 2005 earthquake. From Naran to Babusar Pass it's 70km of gradually deteriorating jeep track. Four-wheel drives and other vehicles can be hired in Balakot or Naran, with rates dropping in the off season.

WHEN TO GO

By May, Shogran and Naran are usually accessible by 4WD. Hotel prices and occupancy rates are low at this time, but many of the scenic attractions are still under snow. High season begins in earnest in June. The monsoon brings rain and numerous temporary roadblocks in July and August, but upvalley travel is possible. August is the best time for

KARAKORAM HIGHWAY



a jeep crossing of the Babuser Pass, at least until the road is completely upgraded.

Fine weather returns in September and October, with the nights getting colder and the chance of snow in late October. From late November to early April snow routinely blocks the road beyond Kaghan, and the upper villages are mostly deserted.

ACCOMMODATION

Hotels overflow in the tourist season, but prices collapse in May and September/October, when you can negotiate bargains with the handful of hotels that remain open. Don't count on any hotels in the smaller towns being open after the peak season. Few hotels will offer single-room rates in season. There are several run-down PYHA hostels, packed with Pakistani students in summer and closed the rest of the year.

Some government resthouses are available on the rare occasions when officials aren't using them. Make inquiries about the availability of hotels and government resthouses in the valley at the PTDC in Abbottabad (see p247).

Balakot

☎ 0987

Tragic Balakot (982m) was virtually destroyed in the 2005 earthquake and many lives were lost. At the time of research one hotel remained standing amid the tangle of tents and temporary shelters. The bazaar was bustling beneath its makeshift shelter of corrugated-iron sheets and blue plastic tarps. There is a great deal of energetic rebuilding and obvious resistance to government plans to resite the town 30km towards Mansehra at Bakrial.

The PTDC operates a restaurant, at the southern end of town, but at the time of research there was no tourist information, no vehicle hire and little accommodation here. The police, post office, telephone exchange and hospital were operating in temporary buildings in their old locations, all a short walk south of the PTDC office. Banks here don't do foreign exchange, and you can't change money elsewhere in the Kaghan Valley.

The **Hotel Serenity** (☎ 501182; d/tr Rs 600/2500; 📶) can be found at the back of a shopping arcade – apparently the only large building to remain standing, and displaying some

impressive cracks. The spacious, clean and quiet rooms have morning and evening hot water. Air-con is only available in the expensive triple. The hotel has a multicuisine restaurant (mains Rs 50 to Rs 200) which specialises in Chinese meals.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

The general bus stand and jeep lot are north of Hotel Serenity, down the hill. Buses and minibuses go to Mansehra (Rs 30) all day, departing when full. For Muzaffarabad, take a bus or Suzuki to Garhi Habibullah (Rs 20), and catch a Mansehra–Muzaffarabad bus (Rs 40).

Depending on road conditions, buses, pickups and minibuses go to Naran (Rs 100) all day in June and July; out of season you may have to take a jeep to Naran or transfer to one in Kaghan.

Kawai & Shogran

☎ 0987

At Kawai, 21km north of Balakot, a jeep track climbs steeply for 8km up to the resort of Shogran. With views down to a carpet of forest and up to majestic peaks – including 5290m Malika Parbat (Queen of Mountains), tallest in the Kaghan Valley, and the brooding, 3900m Koh-i-Makra (Spider Mountain). A day hike is to the small lake and beautiful meadows of Sri Paya, 9km beyond Shogran up a rough jeep track. Afternoon views are best and reliable local guides are available at the hotels.

Kawai has a small number of very basic hotels with no reason other than road closures to stay there. At Shogran, the friendly **Tourist Inn** (☎ 432236; d Rs 2000) has clean, rudimentary rooms, some with excellent balcony views, and a restaurant. Other budget options with fine views include **Hotel Serenity** (☎ 432282; d Rs 400-1000), and the Punjab and the Marshee Breeze, which were being rebuilt at the time of research.

At the top end the enormous **Pine Park** (☎ 410333; s/d from Rs 1500/3000, cottages Rs 6000) largely survived the quake and is almost worth the price, more so when you negotiate a low-season discount. There are various rooms and cottages, a restaurant, and local guides and jeep transport for hire.

A minibus or pick-up is about Rs 50 from Balakot to Kawai. From there a special jeep can be hired for Rs 350 up to Shogran. A special jeep from Shogran to Sri Paya is Rs 800 one way.

Paras & Sharan

At Paras, 6km north of Kawai, a rough track crosses the river and climbs 15km to Sharan, in the middle of a forest at 2400m. From there you can hike through the forest or trek overnight across to the Siran Valley, north of Mansehra. A local guide is a must. A special jeep from Paras to Sharan is around Rs 800.

Paras has a budget hotel and at Sharan there's a basic PYHA hostel and a forestry resthouse that can be booked with help from the PTDC in Abbottabad (see p247).

Khanian & Kaghan

The undeveloped village of Khanian, at an attractive turn of the Kunhar River, offers a quiet place to stay if the tourist hordes are getting to you. As well as a few budget hotels there's a Pine Park cottage that can be booked through the Pine Park Hotel in Naran. From Khanian, a 10km jeep track winds up the hillside to picturesque Danna Meadows.

About the only thing going for the next village of Kaghan is that the road is usually open year-round, so if you can organise accommodation it could make a base for winter trips. Any other time, move on to Naran. There are several budget hotels with basic rooms that are acceptable but overpriced in summer. From Balakot, buses, pick-ups and minibuses pass through on their way to Naran in summer; out of season you may have to hire a jeep.

Naran

☎ 0985

At 2400m, Naran is the summertime base for exploring the valley and for the multitude of tourists escaping the heat of the plains. It's a beehive in the tourist season, choked with jeeps and minibuses, and the hotels are packed (Naran visitors sometimes have to stay in Kaghan). By October the few hotels that remain open may ask less than a fifth of the summer price. From November to April, Naran completely shuts down.

INFORMATION

Following the 2005 earthquake and subsequent access problems, Naran is yet to return to normal. Phone numbers listed here are likely to change when phone lines are restored and road access is likely to remain highly seasonal and tenuous. The **PTDC** (☎ 430002; PTDC Motel) is your best bet for assistance in hiring guides and jeeps. Fishing licences are available

at the Fisheries office, by the road to Lake Saiful Mulk, and tackle can be hired from shops in the bazaar.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

At 3200m, surrounded by moody, snowy mountains, **Lake Saiful Mulk** (or Muluk) is said to be inhabited by fairies. Legend has it that in ancient times a mortal, Prince Saiful Mulk, fell in love with a fairy there and married her.

It's a hot two- to three-hour uphill walk from Naran to the lake; the path starts just above the bazaar. Alternatively, you can hire a jeep for Rs 700 from Naran, which can take up to six passengers. The driver will stay at the lake for about an hour, allowing you to go for a horse ride before returning.

The best way to have it all to yourself is to camp. A forestry resthouse at the lake can be booked at the **Conservator of Forests** (☎ 0992-9310232; Jail Rd) in Abbottabad, or you could even sleep on the porch with a sleeping bag.

A day's further walking takes you east to the edge of the **Lalazar Plateau** (though this is more easily reached from Battakundi). A jeep to Lalazar Plateau costs around Rs 1000 from Naran.

SLEEPING & EATING

The 2005 earthquake damage and subsequent access problems severely disrupted the holiday seasons in 2006 and 2007. When the situation returns to normal, hotels in Naran will resume charging according to demand. In the peak of summer, if you are lucky enough to find a free room, you will be quoted more than Rs 2000 for a rudimentary double with a tiny bathroom. Most hotels have a restaurant with Pakistani, Chinese and some Continental mains.

There are numerous hotels in the budget category that will charge Rs 300 to Rs 500 for a room either side of the summer season but will happily treble these prices in summer. Most have very basic rooms with less than basic bathrooms and only occasional hot water. Hotels in this category include the Sarhad, Shalimar, Paradise Inn, Kohitoor, Pakistan, Zam Zam and Zero Point at the north end of town; Snow View in the centre; and the Balakot, Frontier, Naran and Kunhar View in the south.

By the road, 3km south of town, is a PYHA hostel, in a state of disrepair. Some midrange places may let you pitch a tent and use their

water and toilets for a small fee (though PTDC won't).

Better-quality lodgings with room tariffs starting at Rs 800 for a single room and Rs 1000 for a double can be found in the larger hotels such as the Green Park, Pine Park, Lalazar, Troutlands and the PTDC Motel. To stay at the PTDC in summer you will need to book well in advance through the PTDC in Islamabad (see p77).

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Minibuses to/from Balakot are Rs 100 and leave from the northern end of the main road when full. Outside of July to September you may have to take a passenger jeep to Kaghan and change, or hire a jeep. The Naran PTDC has no jeeps for hire, but will help you bargain with local drivers. In season, the PTDC runs a daily bus service from Flashman's Hotel in Rawalpindi, changing to a Coaster at Balakot.

TO THE BABUSAR PASS

The Kaghan Valley's most dramatic scenery is beyond Naran. Travel here is by 4WD,

mountain bike, pony or on foot. Although there are efforts to upgrade the road, most progress has been made on the Chilas side. You should definitely get local advice before crossing the Babusar Pass. The PTDC in Naran (opposite) is a good source; in Chilas, try field officers at the Northern Areas Public Works Department (NAPWD) executive engineer office, or Natco drivers on the Babusar village run.

At **Battakundi**, 16km up the valley, you can detour 5km up to summer pastures on **Lalazar Plateau**. There are resthouses in Battakundi and 15km up the valley at **Burawai**. There is occasional basic (charpoy) accommodation at Battakundi and Besal, though you may find the latter deserted.

The road degenerates to a barely jeepable track 20km beyond Burawai, at **Besal**. From there you can detour about 15km east to beautiful green **Lake Dudipat**, or stay on the main track for about 3km to **Lake Lulusar**, the biggest natural lake in Hazara and the source of the Kunhar River. Here you may see Gujar encampments in the summer.

CYCLING THE BABUSAR PASS & KAGHAN VALLEY

Some who have cycled over the 4175m pass say it's only sensible on a lightly loaded mountain bike, and only if you're in very good shape. Road improvements in progress should eventually make this the route of choice. Food from Chilas to Naran is very basic when available – dhal, chapati, sometimes rice. Camping is not advisable from Chilas to Gittidas.

Chilas to Babusar Pass, 52km

There is a steadily improving road up Thak Nala, starting 3km east of Chilas. The 39km from there to Babusar village, with a primitive resthouse and a few cheap inns and shops, is progressively improving but there are still many very rocky kilometres either side of the pass.

Babusar Pass to Naran, about 70km

The pass is about 35km before Burawai, and the track over it is still awful. You can camp safely from Lake Lulusar to Naran. At Burawai there's a resthouse and charpoy hotel. Battakundi, 15km on, has a resthouse, a forestry hut, a collapsing PYHA youth hostel and a teashop. It's then 16 steep kilometres to Naran.

Naran to Balakot, 83km

The road is more or less paved beyond Naran though there are numerous slippage areas. The stretch beyond Kaghan has cheap hotels at Khanian and Mahandri. From Paras, 30km before Balakot, a jeep track climbs 15km to 20km to Sharan. From Kawai, 24km before Balakot, a very steep, mostly paved road climbs 1300m in 8km to beautiful Shogran.

Balakot to Mansehra, 42km

The road is hilly and twisting, and drivers are reckless. A slightly less busy alternative is the road via Garhi Habibullah, the junction for the road to/from Muzaffarabad. Garhi Habibullah has food stalls and basic charpoy hotels.

Gittidas, about 6km north of Lake Lulusar, is the southernmost Kohistani village in the region, and not a particularly friendly place to stay the night without a local guide. Cyclists report stone-throwing kids, too. From Gittidas, it's about 8km to Babusar 'top'. If the weather is clear, you can walk about 1km east from the pass for views of the Kaghan Valley behind you and Nanga Parbat to the northeast.

Babusar village is 13km north of the pass on the track, or about half that far on a short-cut footpath. In summer there are a few shops and serais open, and a spartan resthouse, which you can only book at the Chilas NAPWD (see p265). Camping is not recommended.

It's 39km from Babusar village to **Chilas** on a jeep track that is being rapidly improved along Thak Nala. The new road meets the KKH 3km east of Chilas. Natco makes this trip daily in summer.

Getting There & Away

Until the road improvements have finished, only a small 4WD jeep can manage the narrow, rocky track over the pass in July and August, though even then monsoon rains make it problematic. A one-way jeep rental from Naran to Babusar village/Chilas costs about Rs 3500/5000. The pass is also feasible as a day trip from Naran, for about Rs 3000. Cargo jeeps sometimes go up as far as Besal.

On foot, give yourself at least a week from Naran to Babusar village, which allows for some side trips. Trekking may be possible as early as mid-June (though you'll still find snow) into October (though most villagers will be gone for the winter by then). Snow normally begins in November. A local guide might be helpful from Gittidas to Babusar village, as not everyone is friendly en route. Naran to Chilas is about 130km.

For information on cycling the Babusar Pass, see the boxed text, p255.

MANSEHRA TO BATAGRAM

The KKH leaves Mansehra and crosses the surrounding Pakhli Plain before rising through terraces of wheat and cornfields. About 35 minutes and 24km north of Mansehra is the village of **Shinkiari**, where the National Tea Research Institute is selecting varieties for Pakistan's (largely unsuitable) climate. A few minibuses from Mansehra continue from here up the picturesque Siran River Valley

to pine-scented **Dadar**. You can walk over the mountains into the Kaghan Valley in a few days – from Shinkiari to Balakot, or from Dadar to Balakot or Sharan via Mandu Guch. The hills are said to harbour bears, wild cats and outlaws, so a local guide is a very good idea. The PTDC (see p247) in Abbottabad is a good source of information.

From Shinkiari the KKH climbs through pine plantations into a picturesque bowl called **Chattar Plain** (named for Chattar Singh, another Sikh general), 1¼ hours from Mansehra. The flat plain still bears shattered buildings from the earthquake and the many brick-making kilns here are working overtime. An alternative route is by back road from Dadar to **Batal** village, just south of Chattar Plain. From Chattar Plain the KKH rises at the small settlement of Sharkul, about 14km from Batal, then drops to Batagram, crossing into the Nandihar River basin before dropping towards the Indus River.

Sleeping & Eating

Chattar Motel & Restaurant (☎ 0987-333191; d Rs 1000) On Chattar Plain, 10km from Batal, the bright Chattar Motel sits in a neatly clipped lawn, and the good restaurant (mains Rs 40 to Rs 250) is a popular lunch stop for tour groups. The comfortable doubles are elaborately wood-lined and the bathrooms, all with hot water, are spacious.

PTDC Chattar (☎ 0997-333455; s/d Rs 1200/1500) At Sharkul, in the woods above Chattar Plain, the recently constructed PTDC Chattar has four spotless doubles and a small restaurant (mains Rs 60 to Rs 90).

Affaq Hotel (☎ 0997-333106; d Rs 2000) Next door to the PTDC Chattar, the friendly (though not much English) Affaq has similar rooms but with cable TV in the lounge. Mains here cost Rs 50 to Rs 150.

BATAGRAM

☎ 0987 / pop 183,508

The Pashtun village of Batagram, straddling the Nandihar River 25km from the Indus, has little to offer visitors other than some hard-to-find Buddhist ruins in the hills near Pishora. Little English is spoken.

Sights & Activities

Across the Nandihar River, about 12km north of the bazaars on the KKH, watch for the **cable cars** (some of them just rickety seats

suspended from a single cable) that connect villages on the west side of the river to the KKH. For a cheap (make an offer) thrill, try one yourself.

Archaeological researchers say there are **Buddhist ruins** near Pishora village, 8km north of Batagram, though you would need good local help to find them. In the same area, Kala Tassa, there are **petroglyphs** depicting hunters, animals and a Buddhist stupa beneath a rock overhang. The writing refers to a monastery in the time of a Kushan king of the 1st and 2nd centuries AD.

Sleeping & Eating

Batagram View Hotel (☎ 310194; s/d Rs 800/1000) The best accommodation is here on the KKH, 2km south of the bazaar. Geared towards Japanese tour groups, the hotel features a Japanese bathhouse downstairs. Unfortunately, the baths were seriously damaged in the 2005 earthquake and were still awaiting repair when we visited. Oddly, the restaurant (mains Rs 60 to Rs 100) does not feature Japanese cuisine; instead Pakistani, Chinese and a few Continental dishes are available.

Accommodation in town is decidedly more downmarket, and there is little to distinguish the hotels from one another. **Shangri-La Hotel** (d Rs 200), by the bus stop north of the bridge, and **Spogmay Hotel** (s/d Rs 100/200), in the main bazaar, have small rooms with squat toilets.

The chaotic bazaar has very basic, cheap restaurants, and there are fruit vendors in the area. The bright **Thai Hotel & Food Mella** (☎ 310194; s/d Rs 800/1000; ☎ 8am-11pm) restaurant features a Thai Airways colour scheme but no Thai dishes – just Pakistani curries.

Getting There & Away

There is a bus yard about 200m south of the bridge, from where minibuses go all day to Thakot (Rs 20, 45 minutes), Besham (Rs 50, 1½ hours) and Mansehra (Rs 45, two hours). You can catch a minibus to Alai (Rs 50, two to three hours), while Karachi-bound buses stop west of the bridge.

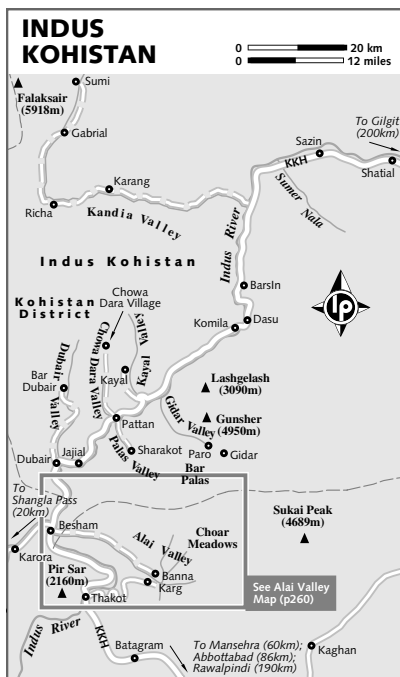
INDUS KOHISTAN

Rounding the western end of the Himalaya at Nanga Parbat (8125m), the Indus River cuts a gorge so deep that some parts see

only a few hours of sunlight a day, and are so inhospitable that even the caravan routes bypassed it. The Highway traveller is surrounded by this fractured, crumbling landscape with barely a blade of grass visible – magnificent and ominous. It's a landscape in motion; the sheer rock walls are being ripped apart by powerful waterfalls carving out yawning canyons, and rocks lie scattered across the road.

Kohistan (Land of Mountains) refers to the sub-6000m peaks enclosing this canyon as well as upper Swat and Dir. The desolate, crumbling terrain made it one of the most harrowing passages in Asia. The intrepid Chinese Buddhist pilgrim Fa Hsien, having already crossed most of China and the Karakoram on foot, was awestruck. In 403 AD he wrote about Indus Kohistan:

The road is difficult and broken, with steep crags and precipices in the way. The mountainside is like a stone wall 10,000 feet high. Looking down, the sight is confused and there is no sure foothold.



The roadside bazaars are gloomy even on a sunny day, and on the Highway – sometimes hundreds of metres above the thrashing Indus – you can empathise with Fa Hsien.

Another name for the region was Yaghistan (Land of the Ungoverned). Outlaws could hide here without fear of capture; tribal warfare and blood feuds were commonplace. Stone watchtowers and fortified houses can still be seen in the older villages. Even today outsiders are not very warmly welcomed and travelling off the KKH is not recommended without first seeking police advice.

In the 1960s the KKH cut through the Indus gorge and in 1976 Pakistan created an administrative district out of these semi-autonomous areas. The district government relies heavily on police and the NWFP Frontier Constabulary, whose forts dot the valley.

THAKOT TO BESHAM

Twenty-seven kilometres north of Batagram the road drops down to cross the Indus River over an elegant, Chinese-constructed suspension bridge at **Thakot**. In 1976 a lively party was held here, with Pakistani and Chinese music and dance, to open the bridge and celebrate the completion of the Indus Valley Rd. In many respects this is the real southern end of the KKH, not the Havelian railhead. On the other side of the bridge is the seedy roadside bazaar of **Dandai**, with the basic Hotel Sapari.

Beside the road, 18km from Thakot and 9km south of Besham, is an obelisk honouring the Kohistan Development Board, which oversaw development of this area after the devastating 1974 Pattan earthquake. The stone marker lists the distances to Karachi, Kashgar, Beijing and other points. It makes a nice photo backdrop.

BESHAM

☎ 0996 / pop 56,269

Besham (beh-shaam) is about midway between Rawalpindi and Gilgit, with several hotels, cheap serais, gun shops and a main road choked with trucks and buses. This is your base for visiting the Alai Valley, and pleasant Dubair Valley is not far away.

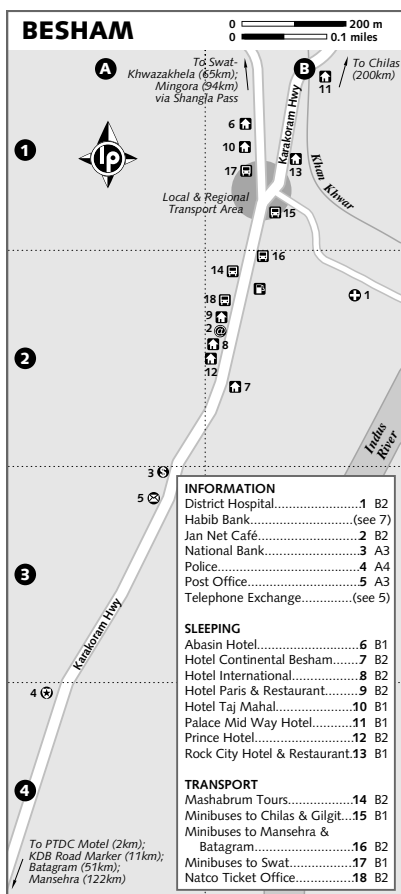
Besham is in an eastward bulge of Swat district, and is a mostly Pashtun town. The common speech is Pashto, and Pashtuns call the Indus 'Abaseen' (Father of Rivers). The forerunner of the KKH was meant to link the NA, not south to Mansehra but west to Swat over

the scenic Shangla Pass, and Besham is the junction for buses to/from that direction.

Orientation & Information

Nearly everything is located on the KKH. Transport up and down the KKH and towards Swat starts from near the road fork to Swat.

For current information on road conditions and the surrounding valleys, ask at the PTDC Motel, south of town. **Jan Net Café** (per hr Rs 20) is near the budget hotels in the bazaar. South of the bazaar are a post office, phone exchange, banks and, further down, a police post. The district hospital is 250m east down a side road near the Swat junction. The Habib Bank adjacent to the Hotel Continental Besham was installing an ATM (apparently



with international credit capability) at the time of research.

Sleeping

BUDGET

Prince Hotel (☎ 400318; s/d Rs 150/300) The Prince is a rather miserable choice, for the financially embarrassed only. The basic rooms are grotty, as is the small restaurant, but the management is friendly and apparently oblivious to the mould and decay.

Hotel International (☎ 400415; s/d Rs 250/300) The International has worn-out but passably clean rooms with squat toilets and cold shower. This hotel also boasts a crude restaurant.

Abasin Hotel (☎ 400338; s/d Rs 200/400) Just north of the Swat junction and next to the boisterous minibuses yard, the Abasin has very ordinary rooms with toilet and cold shower.

Hotel Taj Mahal (☎ 400432; s/d Rs 280/450) Next door to the Abasin, Taj Mahal is even gloomier and most of the rooms are poky. The better rooms are on the top floor, with sit-down toilets and hot water.

Hotel Paris & Restaurant (☎ 400310; s/d/tr Rs 350/450/550) The Hotel Paris is possibly the best of the bazaar cheapies. The rooms are tired but clean with reliable running hot water and some have sit-down toilets and a bathtub.

Rock City Hotel & Restaurant (☎ 400553; d Rs 600) Rock City has adequate though rather pricey rooms overlooking a raging torrent. Back rooms have the river views (and noise). The clean-looking restaurant (mains Rs 80 to Rs 160) has a small selection of Pakistani curries.

MIDRANGE

Palace Mid Way Hotel (☎ 400505; KKH; s/d/tr Rs 700/1000/1200) Just north of town, this welcoming hotel is another very comfortable option with clean rooms arranged around a spacious communal area. Bathrooms are supplied with toiletries and evaporative air coolers are available on request. The restaurant has Pakistani and Chinese cuisine.

Hotel Continental Besham (☎ 400475; KKH; s/d Rs 1100/1400, s/d with air-con Rs 1600/2000; ☎) Large (40 rooms) and central with a loquacious and friendly manager. It's the only place in Besham that can boast reliable air-con, and the spacious rooms have cable TV and clean bathrooms. The restaurant (right) is also very good.

PTDC Motel (☎ 400301; KKH; s/d Rs 1900/2450) This motel 2.5km south of town suffered some serious damage in the 2005 earthquake and has

a new 110 megawatt hydro power station as a neighbour, and yet it is still one of the best riverside hotels along the KKH. The rooms facing the river are spacious, fan-cooled and spotless, and a short hop from the garden where you can have a drink and watch the fish jumping in the Indus.

Eating

PTDC Motel (KKH; mains Rs 80-125) The PTDC Motel restaurant has the usual small selection of mild curries that all the PTDCs serve.

Hotel Continental Besham (KKH; mains Rs 110-170; ☎) The upmarket Continental has generous set menus, comfortable air-con and a few Italian dishes in addition to the ubiquitous Pakistani and Chinese cuisine.

Budget hotel restaurants such as the **Hotel Paris** (mains Rs 65-170) and **Hotel International** (mains Rs 60-100) churn out Pakistani basics like *sabzi* (curried vegetables), dhal and mutton curry.

Bazaar serais have inexpensive *chapli kebabs*, vegetables and omelettes. Fresh supplies here are the best in Kohistan. In the morning, try *puri* (deep-fried bread) with *halwa* (made from lentils, semolina or wheat with butter, sugar, milk and sweet spices).

Getting There & Away

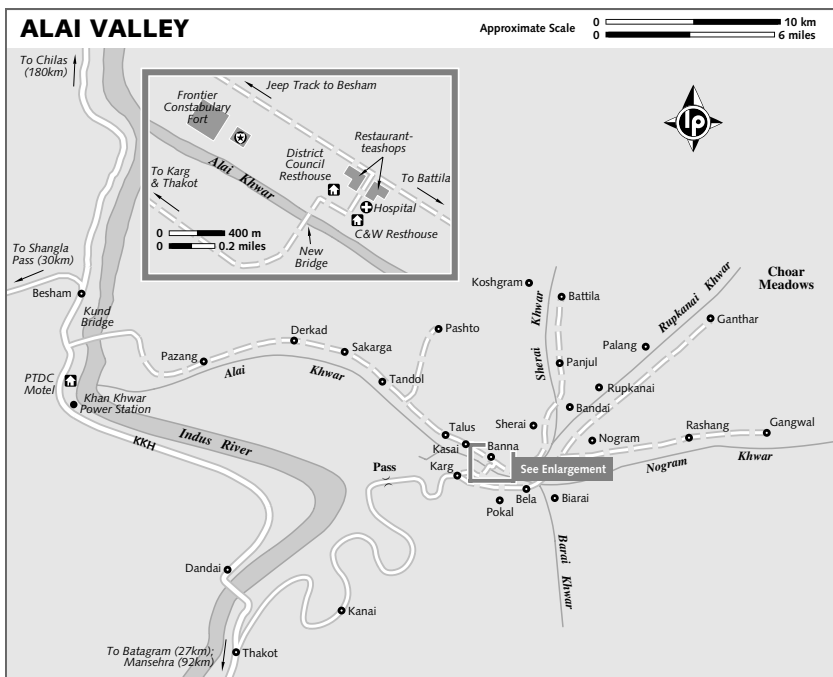
Natco and Mashabrum Tours run several buses to Rawalpindi (Rs 280, seven hours) and Gilgit (Rs 450, nine hours) daily. Natco buses stop every few hours outside the gloomy Karachi (Al Mubarak) Hotel, but they don't always have empty seats. Organise tickets from the office inside the hotel. Mashabrum Tours buses stop outside the Swat Hotel and tickets need to be purchased from the driver. There's also a minibuses stand for unscheduled minibuses to Gilgit (Rs 400) via Chilas (Rs 270) and other stops north. Unscheduled minibuses leave for Batagram (Rs 60) and Mansehra (Rs 120) when they are full.

For Swat, minibuses head to Mingora (Rs 100) from next to the Abasin Hotel. Change at Khwazakhela (Rs 100) for Madyan and upper Swat.

Suzukis, pick-ups and minibuses leave, when they're full, for Pattan (Rs 55) and Dasu (Rs 90) from the Swat junction.

ALAI VALLEY

The people of the beautiful Alai Valley are Pashtuns, probably driven out of Swat in the 16th century. They had their own nawab



(Muslim ruler), and were left alone until the late 1970s, when the area came under NWFP control and the nawab was demoted to parliamentary delegate. Alai Valley is actually in the Mansehra district, not Indus Kohistan, but its only road access is from the Indus.

Though surprised to see foreigners, people are instinctively hospitable. If you respect their Sunni orthodoxy – especially by dressing modestly – you may enjoy some legendary Pashtun hospitality. Try out your Pashto, as there is little English spoken.

You get to Alai from Thakot on a road so lofty and exposed that near the top you can see about 20km of the Indus River in one sweep – reason enough to go. The valley is a bonus, lush with cornfields, terraces and orchards, and rising to pine-forested mountains. The optimal visit is probably a long day trip from Besham.

Alai is cool even in summer, so take an extra layer. From November to April it's very cold, with snow by December.

Orientation & Information

The 29km Thakot to Alai road rises more than one vertical kilometre. From the end of

the bus line at Karg, walk 500m back for good views of the Indus. At the east end of Karg, fork left to the main village of Banna, located across the Alai River, with a red-roofed district council resthouse, a C&W resthouse and a small hospital. Turning left past the police post (where they like you to register if you're staying the night) and the Frontier Constabulary fort, you'll find a jeep track that runs 30km downvalley, leading directly to Besham.

Sights & Activities

The road from Banna up Sherai Khwar (Sherai Valley) offers the best valley views. The right fork at Karg eventually takes you into Rupkanai Khwar, at the head of which is Sukai Peak (4689m). At the first bridge, about 4km from Karg, look up towards Biarai, which locals consider the valley's prettiest village.

Choar is a vast alpine meadow area, as big as Alai itself, a long day's walk (one way) up either the Rupkanai or Nogram Khwars. It's accessible only from May to August, when herds are driven up to it. You can camp there,

even trek across to the Kaghan Valley, but a local guide is essential – talk to locals.

Sleeping & Eating

There are two resthouses and basic teashops but no hotels. The C&W resthouse is under the jurisdiction of the executive engineer in Mansehra, but you might be able to get help from the Besham **PTDC** (☎ 0996-400301). Arrange meals with the *chowkidar* (caretaker) or bring your own food.

Getting There & Away

Occasional cargo jeeps go directly up the Alai Valley from Kund Bridge, 1.5km south of Besham, but the regular passenger service is via Thakot, 28km south of Besham (pick-up to Thakot Rs 30). Regular pick-ups and minibuses go from Thakot to Karg every hour or so (Rs 60, three hours).

DUBAIR VALLEY

Forty minutes and 17km north of Besham, a plume of bright blue liquid in the river is actually the clear Dubai River entering the silt-laden Indus. South of the bridge a jeep track climbs beside the stream, past terraces of corn guarded by scarecrows in Chitrali hats. Occasional passenger pick-ups go 15km up the canyon to Bar (Upper) Dubai village. A mule track reaches 20km further to the valley head, though you should definitely get local advice before going up there.

Overlooking the Dubai River in the centre of the traffic-clogged bazaar, the **Dubair Rest Point Hotel** (s/d Rs 200/250) is a very basic restaurant with a few dirty rooms. The ragged Dubair Bazaar has snacks, fruit and cold drinks.

At **Jajial**, 5km east of Dubair Valley, the KKH leaves the Indian subcontinent, geologically speaking. White-grey rocks south of Jajial belong to the subcontinent, while greenish material to the north was part of a chain of volcanic islands trapped against Asia by the drifting Indian landmass (see the boxed text, p64).

PATTAN

☎ 0998 / pop 121,027

Pattan (pa-taan) sits in a fertile bowl at about 900m where the Indus is joined by the Chowa Dara and Palas Rivers. It was the epicentre of a massive earthquake in 1974, in which entire sections of valley wall collapsed, burying whole villages and killing more than 7000 people.

Pattan has some of the region's few remaining carved wooden grave markers, once common throughout Swat and Kohistan.

Orientation & Information

The village is well below the Highway. A link road descends from near a KKH memorial, but buses drop you almost 1km south, on a bluff above the village, from where you can short cut straight down like everyone else. The manager at the Kohistan Tourist Inn is a helpful source of information on roads, villages and people in the upper valleys.

Sleeping & Eating

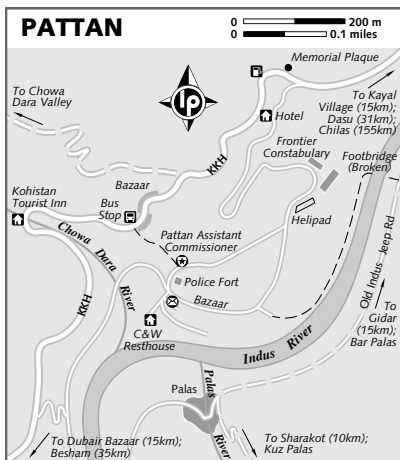
Kohistan Tourist Inn (☎ 405142; KKH; s/d Rs 1000/1200)

The best and biggest option for travellers in these parts is set on a bend of the KKH, 2km south of Pattan. The hotel has bright, clean rooms with wire-screened windows and the friendly manager is a great source of local info. There's a (proposed) tea garden beside the churning Chowa Dara Khwar, which will be great for weary travellers. The hotel restaurant (mains Rs 50 to Rs 120) has a small vegetarian and Continental (chicken gruel!) selection along with curries and Chinese favourites.

You can get uninspiring meat and dhal from serais in Pattan bazaar. Shops have biscuits, staples and, occasionally, fruit.

Getting There & Away

On the KKH, passenger Suzukis and pick-ups go to Dubair or Kayal Valleys for Rs 40 and to Komila and Besham for Rs 55.



AROUND PATTAN

Before venturing into any of these side valleys, consult the manager at the Kohistan Tourist Inn (p261) and the police in Pattan, and heed their advice. Forestry resthouses at Kayal, Dubair and Palas Valleys are booked with the district forestry officer in Dasu (right). All can be reached by passenger Suzuki from Pattan.

Chowa Dara Valley

The Chowa Dara (cho-wa da-rah) Valley makes a good day hike, with channels, terraced fields and hamlets every few kilometres. A jeep road leaves the KKH north of the bus stop, and will eventually cover the 15km (and climb 1400m) to Chowa Dara village at the head of the valley.

Palas Valley

This canyon across the Indus offers strenuous hiking. About 12km up a jeep road is Sharakot village. Beyond it are the beautiful pastures of Kuz Palas (Lower Palas). Get local advice in Pattan on local protocol (few foreigners visit this side of the Indus). In any case, you should call in at Sharakot police post. There are occasional cargo jeeps from Pattan Bazaar.

Bar Palas

About 15km north on an old jeep road up the east bank of the Indus, a track turns up into the Gidar (guh-daa) Valley. It's 20km more up to Gidar village, above which are meadows beneath a glacier at Bar Palas (Upper Palas). Cargo jeeps go from Pattan Bazaar as far as Sichoy; any further and you will need to be self-sufficient, and ideally under the protection of the authorities, the police post at Paro (about 3km before Gidar) and the tribal council.

KAYAL VALLEY

Twenty minutes north of Pattan the Highway slithers away from the Indus into a deep, narrow side canyon. At the end, south of the bridge, a jeep road climbs 7km to Kayal village. Above here the valley divides and a track up the right fork continues for 15km to pastures at 3000m. Get local advice before going very far in.

Shacks on the KKH have meat, chapati and snacks. Pick-ups pass frequently on the KKH between Pattan and Komila. Occasional passenger jeeps go to Kayal village from Pattan Bazaar.

DASU & KOMILA

☎ 0987

Together these two villages, linked by the KKH bridge, have merged to form the biggest settlement between Besham and Chilas. Dasu, headquarters of Kohistan district, has government offices and resthouses. Komila has the bazaar and the transport.

Information

Komila has a post office. In Dasu, 300m north of the bridge, are the police, district commissioner, Frontier Constabulary and C&W executive engineer; you can book resthouses here and at Pattan and Besham. The district forestry office, where you can book regional forestry resthouses, is also in Dasu.

Sleeping & Eating

Khyber Lodge Hotel (☎ 407102; s/d Rs 400/700) The best accommodation in Dasu, although that isn't saying much. Dodgy wiring and plumbing and diabolical stairways hint at 'works in progress' but there's little evidence of progress. However, the management is friendly and a good source of information and the views of the Indus are magnificent. The better rooms with soap and towel and running hot water are found upstairs. There's a decent restaurant (mains Rs 65 to Rs 120) with a Pakistani menu as well as pakoras and potato chips for snacks.

Other options include the **Green Hills Hotel** (☎ 407032; d Rs 350) in Komila and **Indus Waves Hotel** (Dasu; s/d Rs 180/200), with basic rooms and shared toilet. The basic meat and chapati truck stops aren't eager for foreign guests.

Getting There & Away

Some northbound and southbound Natco buses stop at the bright Natco Hotel in Dasu for a food stop. If there are seats available you can buy a ticket from the driver. Catch regional transport in upper Komila bazaar. Long-distance buses and minibuses use a dirty space downhill and closer to the bridge in Komila and may also stop at the petrol station or Indus Waves Hotel in Dasu. Minibuses are Rs 55 to Pattan and Rs 90 to Besham. For Chilas, you may need to change at Shatial (Rs 50).

DASU TO SHATIAL

In several places north of Dasu the road is just a notch in a sheer granite face, hundreds of metres above the silty Indus. This stretch

of road took a full year to carve out and cost more lives per kilometre to build than any other part of the KKH. It was originally planned for the broad slopes across the river, but ferocious local resistance to the loss of arable land led to the road's realignment. It's a rocky cauldron of unforgiving heat in summer. What's most extraordinary is the number of logs lying beside the road. These logs are sold on the Highway and are sourced from unseen forests high above the Indus and the KKH.

At **Barsin**, 12km north of Dasu, a very lonely four-room **PTDC Motel** (s/d Rs 1800/2200) is like a fort in the frontier. And that is exactly what it is – a refuge for travellers caught by a sinking sun. Travel in these parts after sundown is not recommended. The rooms are recently repainted and clean, and simple meals can be provided in the restaurant. A phone is coming (apparently), but for now, management suggest booking through the Khyber Lodge Hotel (☎ 0987-407102) in Dasu.

A further 10km north is the confluence with the 80km-long **Kandia Valley**, a major Indus tributary and, until the 19th century, an independent ministate. Ten minutes on, the Indus turns east, its dark gorge abruptly opens out and soon the NA reaches down to the northern riverbank – though the Highway remains in NWFP for a further 40km or so.

At **Sumer Nala**, about 23km north of the Kandia Valley bridge, you can find basic charpoy hotels at a popular truck stop, though neither Sumer Nala or Shatial are recommended places to stop.

SHATIAL

From the road, Shatial is an ad hoc collection of serais, minibuses and swarms of idle men (looking for casual work). Check out the **petroglyphs** below the bazaar, near the Indus bridge (to Darel). They include a detailed Buddhist tableau and many inscriptions and travellers' names, pecked into the rocks from the 1st century AD onwards. (There is more of this extraordinary ancient graffiti along the road from here to Chilas.)

Sleeping

Shatial Bazaar has an ultra-basic serai with charpoy. For cyclists, Dasu to Chilas is the longest stretch (about 125km) of the KKH without reliable or recommended accommodation.

Getting There & Away

Minibuses go upriver to Chilas (about Rs 70, 1½ hours), and downriver to Besham (Rs 125, five to six hours), all day. This is also the transfer point for the Darel and Tangir Valleys (below).

GILGIT REGION

This section begins in the southernmost unit of the NA, Diamir district. It's best known for the 8125m massif of Nanga Parbat, the eighth-highest mountain in the world (Diamir is its local name). It also includes the remote Astor Valley, running along the east side of Nanga Parbat to the Indus, and 100km of the Indus Valley from there to the NWFP line, taking in some of Pakistan's harshest terrain and most ungovernable peoples.

Gilgit Town is the administrative headquarters for the NA and a major hub of the KKH. This bustling town offers information, transport, friendly hotels and good restaurants. The town is an interesting melting pot of northern peoples, and there are historical spots and good walks within day-trip distance.

Surrounding Gilgit are some beautiful valleys: Haramosh on the Indus, Bagrot just downriver, Naltar to the north, and the upper Gilgit River system – comprising Punial and the tributaries of Ishkoman, Yasin and Ghizar, the last stretching west to the Shandur Pass into Chitral. The lower reaches of these valleys are austere and brown, though poplars and orchards brighten them in spring and autumn. But the higher you go the better it looks; many glacier-fed *nalas* (Urdu for tributary canyons) above 2000m harbour pine and juniper forests and luxuriant meadows.

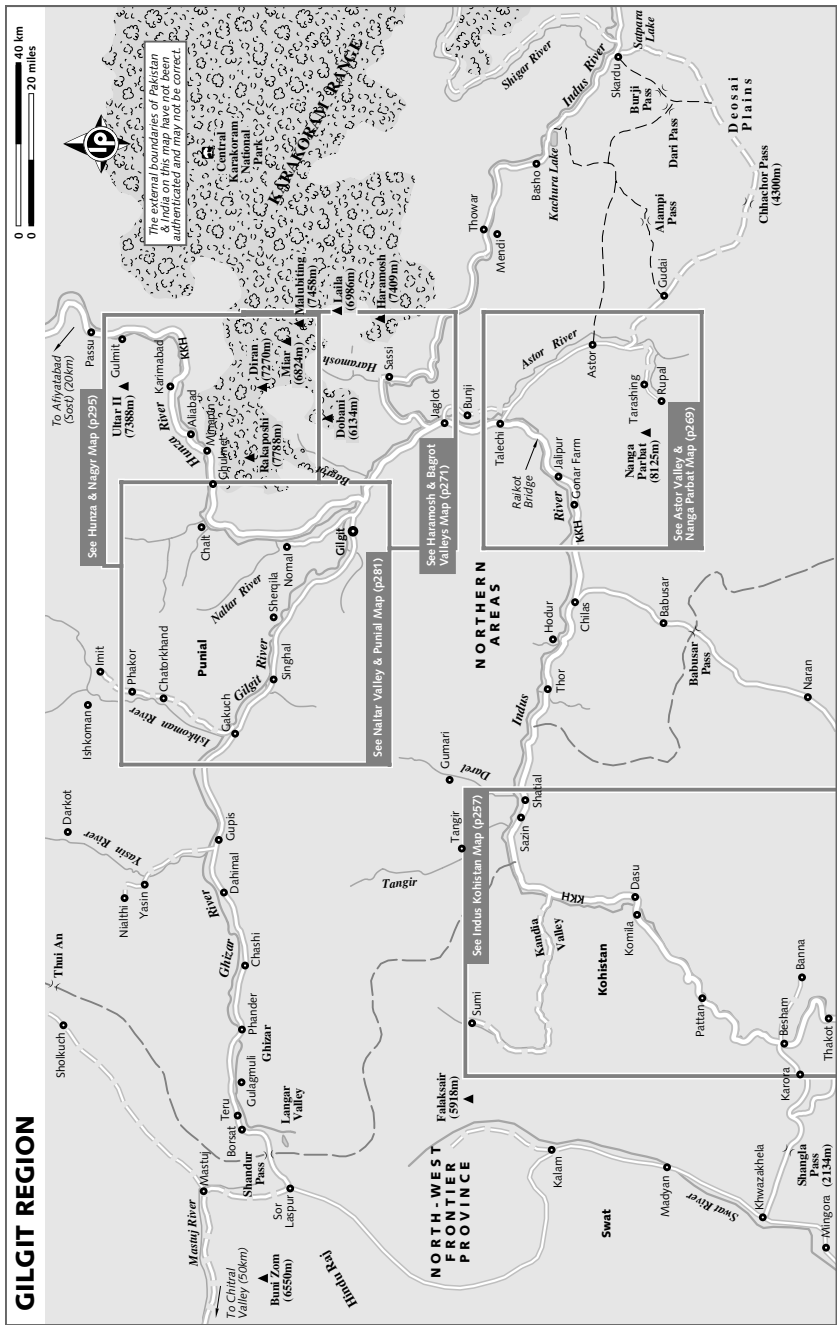
DAREL & TANGIR

Two of the old unruly valley states that have stayed unruly are Darel (da-rel) and Tangir (taan-geer), which meet the Indus across from Shatial. They voluntarily joined Pakistan only in 1952, and even today have the NA's worst reputation for lawlessness. 'Administration' from Chilas mostly means police garrisons to keep the customary blood feuds from boiling over.

Reports of gun battles between locals and police are common, as are travellers' stories of theft and even rape. It's hard to separate fact from fiction, but this clearly isn't a very safe

KARAKORAM HIGHWAY

GILGIT REGION



place to visit, and outsiders aren't warmly welcomed. It's a pity, because the valleys are said to be rich in natural beauty and archaeological remains. Darel was the site of some important Buddhist monasteries.

You can hire a pick-up at Shatial or a jeep at Chilas, though your first stop should be the assistant commissioner or the chief of police at Tangir or Gumari. Both are about 20km from Shatial.

SHATIAL TO CHILAS

Along the road, look for cave-dwelling shepherds who move down to the river for the vital water. Foreigners will need to register at the Chilas district boundary, 43km before Chilas, near where work has begun on Basha Dam. This controversial dam will submerge many petroglyphs that Unesco has identified as having great artistic and historical value. Ten minutes onwards the Highway crosses from NWFP into the NA, passing a line drawn on a map by Sir Cyril Radcliffe in the feverish fortnight before Partition in 1947. This was the intended border between Pakistan and India, disarranged by an uprising in Gilgit (see the boxed text, p275).

Just 17km from the previous checkpoint, foreigners need to register again at another checkpoint. Eight kilometres further is **Thor** (pronounced 'tore'), a green oasis in the arid valley. Below the bridge over Thor Gah are some rock inscriptions. Twenty minutes on, across the river, the remains of a 1000-year-old fort are on a ridge to the right of a ravine called Hodur Gah. The rocks below the fort are covered with old inscriptions.

West of Chilas the Indus is flat and meandering. On the south side, the Lesser Himalaya stretches 80km towards Punjab. On the north side are the Hindu Raj, the eastern arm of the Hindukush. From **Hodur**, 20 minutes west of Chilas, take your first look at Nanga Parbat.

CHILAS

☎ 05812

Most visitors are here to look at the petroglyphs or to cross the Babusar Pass (see p255). There are few other reasons to stop. Foreign women especially may feel unwelcome.

Even after Kashmiri-British rule was imposed a century ago, the Indus Valley west of Chilas was a hornet's nest of tiny republics; there was

one in almost every side valley, each loosely guided by a *jirga* (council of tribal elders) but effectively leaderless, all at war with one another and feuding internally. Though administratively lumped with Gilgit, Chilas and its neighbours are temperamentally more like Indus Kohistan, probably owing to a similarly hostile environment and the same Sunni Muslim orthodoxy (their ancestors were forcibly converted centuries ago by Pashtun crusaders, whereas hardly anyone north of Gilgit is Sunni).

The large Chilas Fort was first garrisoned to protect British supply lines over the Babusar Pass, and beefed up after local tribes nearly overran it in 1893. Now a police post, it has put a lid on Chilas, though not on the Darel and Tangir Valleys to the west.

Chilasis are Shina speakers, with some Pashtun settlers speaking Pashto. Urdu and some English are also spoken.

Orientation

The recommended hotels geared to travellers are on the KKH and the less-than-welcoming town is on a plateau above. You can flag a pick-up for the 3km ride up to the bazaar from the police checkpoint, or walk up the Buto Gah road. The bazaar huddles by the fort, with a bus yard to one side. South of the bazaar, a left fork drops to district offices, while the right fork climbs towards Babusar Pass.

Information

On the road to the bazaar is the NAPWD executive engineer, where district resthouses can be booked. The post office is opposite the fort, which houses the police post. A district hospital is at the bottom of Hospital Rd.

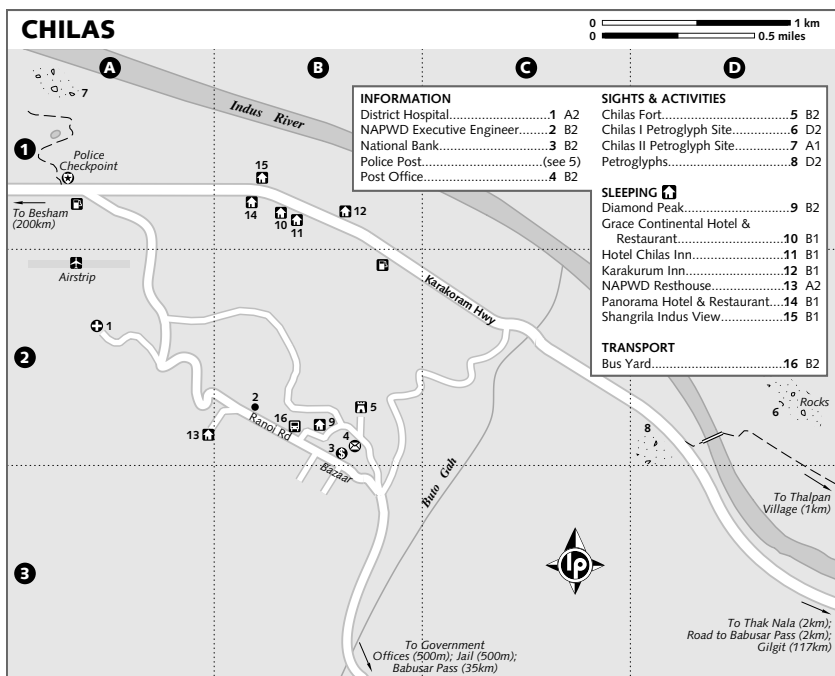
Sights & Activities

Local police are usually happy to show guests around the **fort**, where they are stationed. Your hotel manager may be able to help organise this. The interesting stone-filled wooden battlements with gun sights are crumbling away and the blackened kitchen looks as if it's been in use since 1893.

Chilas is surrounded by wonderful **petroglyphs**, which are easy to access, though be prepared for high temperatures and take plenty of water (see the boxed text, p267).

Sleeping & Eating

On the KKH (and nearest the petroglyphs) are several midrange tourist hotels with hot



showers (a moot point in this cauldron of rocks where summer temperatures often exceed 40°C) and good restaurants. The evaporative air coolers common to these Highway hotels are effective in the dry heat and don't overly draw on the limited electricity. The hotels up in the bazaar can be foreigner-friendly but the same can't necessarily be said for their regular clientele. In these cheap local inns, the rooms are basic and the bedding dirty.

Diamond Peak (s/d Rs 150/200) Probably the best of the very basic hotels in the bazaar.

The **NAPWD resthouse** (d Rs 300) is good, but very popular in summer. Other NAPWD resthouses are east of Chilas at Jalipur, Gonar Farm and Gini (off the Highway), and there's a primitive resthouse at Babuser village on the Kaghan Valley road, the only one that closes in winter. All can be booked in Chilas with the executive engineer.

Karakurum Inn (☎ 50511; KKH; dm/s/d Rs 100/600/700) The friendly staff here are happy to help foreigners visit the petroglyph sites and Chilas village. While local assistance or advice may not be necessary, it is certainly recommended. The air-cooled rooms at the Karakurum Inn

are clean and spacious, and the restaurant (breakfast Rs 120, lunch Rs 225 and dinner Rs 280) has generous set meals of local and Continental dishes.

Grace Continental Hotel & Restaurant (☎ 50516; KKH; s/d Rs 800/1000) The Grace Continental has small air-cooled rooms with squat toilets and cold shower. The rooms are poorly ventilated and rather smelly and overpriced. The restaurant (mains Rs 45 to Rs 60) produces inexpensive dhal, chicken and mutton curries and chapatis.

Hotel Chilas Inn (☎ 50510; KKH; d standard/deluxe Rs 800/1200) The staff here is very helpful and informative and there's a gift shop in the foyer. The rooms of this recommended hotel are air-cooled and there's a nice surprise in the bathrooms – a bathtub. There's a good restaurant (mains Rs 120 to Rs 200) with Pakistani and Chinese dishes, and a pleasant rose garden in which to relax once the sun has retreated.

Shangrila Indus View (☎ 50539; KKH; s/d Rs 1095/1195, s/d deluxe Rs 2500/2700, s/d VIP Rs 3000/3495) The budget rooms are overpriced as they lack a view and show wear and tear. The deluxe rooms are rather similar but do have wire-

screened verandas and a river view. The VIP rooms have attractive mock-traditional décor of mud walls, double beds and a tub in the bathroom, and are definitely the best rooms in Chilas. All rooms are air-cooled. The recommended restaurant (mains from Rs 150) has Pakistani, Chinese and Continental cuisine.

Panorama Hotel & Restaurant (☎ 50664; KKH; s/d Rs 1600/1800, s/d deluxe Rs 1500/2000) The Panorama's aspect over the valley is very pleasing and the wide, wire-screened verandas are comfortable vantage points. All rooms are air-cooled, and the 10 deluxe rooms have tubs in the bathroom. There is a good restaurant (mains Rs 70 to Rs 125) with numerous fried rice dishes such as the tasty beef chilli fried rice for Rs 70.

Getting There & Away

Minibuses (Rs 130) run every few hours between the bus yard and Gilgit's general bus stand. A minibus to Shatial is Rs 70. Local pick-ups will take you from the Chilas bus yard to the KKH for a few rupees, or on to Hodur, Thor or Shatial. Through buses to Rawalpindi pass about four hours after departing Gilgit.

BABUSAR PASS & KAGHAN VALLEY

A Natco vehicle leaves from near the post office early each morning (in summer only) and goes up to Babusar village along the up-graded road through Thak Nala. You might be able to hire a jeep to Naran (in the Kaghan Valley) from the bus yard, but a surer way is

to hire one in Gilgit. For information about the Babusar Pass, see p255.

CHILAS TO GILGIT

About 12km beyond Chilas a cavalcade of liveried trucks and rambling teashops signals the popular truck stop of **Gini**. A further 13km and the Highway passes through **Bunar Das**, an oasis of green fields and fruit trees hemmed in by stone walls. The village is situated on a plateau below the Bunar Gah, the main access to Nanga Parbat's western (Diamir) face. After Bunar Das the Highway bisects the small settlements of Gonar Farm and Jalipur before reaching the notorious 'sliding area' of Tatta Pani, 6km before Raikot Bridge.

The Highway crosses the Indus on **Raikot Bridge**, just over an hour (55km) east of Chilas. From the south side of the bridge a private road has been driven up the mountainside towards the pristine alpine plateau called **Fairy Meadow**, with heart-stopping views up Nanga Parbat's north side, and north to Rakaposhi peak.

The road was built with logging in mind, but subsequent plans for a resort at the meadows (the Shangrila Motel by the bridge was to be a 'holding pen' for resort guests) got some backs up. Local people, through whose land the road runs, offer jeep transport to Fairy Point (one way/return Rs 1500/3000) – the end of the road. For more on trekking in this area, see p348.

Five minutes north of the bridge, the small **Liachar Nala** enters the Indus. In 1841

THE PETROGLYPHS AT CHILAS

The ancient routes through the Karakoram are dotted with places where travellers pecked graffiti into the sun-varnished rocks: names, pictures or prayers for safe passage, merit in the afterlife or good luck on the next hunting trip. The desolation around Chilas must have moved many to special fervour, and several sites by the Highway are rich with these inscriptions.

There is a sign to the 'Chilas II' site near the KKH police checkpoint. Less than 1km down a jeep track there is a huge rock covered with hunting and battle scenes and Buddhist stupas. A common image is the long-horned ibex, ancient symbol of fertility and abundance, and an elusive trophy animal even now. On a rocky knoll facing the river are the oldest inscriptions, from the 1st century AD: scenes of conquest and stories of the Buddha's life.

Four kilometres east beside the jeep bridge to Thalpan is the 'Chilas I' site, with art found on both sides of the Highway and the river. The most striking pictures are of a large stupa with banners flying, close to the Highway; and mythical animals, battle scenes, royal lineages and Buddhist tales, across the river on dozens of rocks west of the track.

Details of these and other sites are in two books you might find in an Islamabad bookshop: Dr AH Dani's *Human Records on Karakorum Highway* and Dr Karl Jettmar's *Rockcarvings & Inscriptions in the Northern Areas of Pakistan*.

an earthquake caused an entire valley wall to collapse into the Indus here, damming it up. When the dam broke, a wall of water roared down the canyon, washing away scores of villages and drowning thousands, including an entire Sikh army battalion camped at Attock, almost 500km downstream.

Midway between Chilas and Gilgit (1½ hours from each) and 2km south of the village of **Talechi** (ta-li-chee), is the turn-off to Astor Valley. The area around Talechi has the best views of the largest number of snowy peaks anywhere on the KKH. From the north, the prominent ones are Rakaposhi (7788m; a sharp point above a broad white base), Dobani (6134m; a blunt pyramid), Haramosh (7409m; a series of glaciated ridges) and Nanga Parbat (8125m).

Thirteen kilometres north of Talechi is the old bridge and road to Astor Valley via Bunji, once the Maharaja of Kashmir's local garrison, now headquarters of the Northern Light Infantry (NLI). A further 4km brings you to **Jaglot** (juh-glote) bazaar and after another 5km there is a whitewashed monument signalling the junction of the Indus and Hunza Rivers, and so the meeting point of the Karakoram, Hindukush and Himalayan Ranges. Another 4km further on (an hour south of Gilgit), the Skardu road leaves the KKH.

Sleeping & Eating

At Raikot Bridge is the **Shangrila Motel** (s/d Rs 1500/1800), an expensive option that is theoretically open from June through to mid-October. Do not rely on it being open, though; ring the **Shangrila Indus View** (☎ 05812-50539) in Chilas. An alternative is 15km north at the beautifully sited **NAPWD resthouse** (d Rs 300) in Talechi. It can be booked through the executive engineer in Chilas or the **chief engineer** (☎ 05811-50307) in Gilgit. There are several shabby inns at Jaglot.

ASTOR VALLEY & NANGA PARBAT

The Nanga Parbat massif is the western anchor of the Great Himalaya. Its south (Rupal) face is a sheer 4500m wall, too steep for snow to stick – hence its name, Urdu for 'Naked Mountain'. The north (Raikot) face steps down 7000m to the Indus. A large number of climbers have been killed trying to scale this mountain.

The hair-raising track beside it, up the Astor Valley and over the Burzil Pass, was the only link between British India and Gilgit until the Babusar Pass was opened in 1892.

The India-Pakistan Line of Control has closed the Burzil, but Astor is still the best way to get up close to the mountain. Four-wheel drives regularly fell off the track until it was improved. It's now wider and safer, but probably no more comfortable.

Astor Valley is about 75% Sunni and 25% Shiite, the latter mainly in the upper tributaries. Everyone speaks Shina and almost nobody speaks English. Some food is available in Astor, but if you're going further or camping it's a good idea to bring some supplies.

Talechi to Astor Village

The road from Talechi near the mouth of the valley starts off impressively but is soon squeezed onto the crumbling sides of the barren, slide-prone gorge. It's an oven in summer, but grows lovelier as you climb. There's a foreigner registration point 13km in at Doian, not long after which the road traverses a dangerous slipping area.

At 2450m **Astor village** is perched like an eagle's nest on both sides of Rama Gah (ravine). The bazaar is up a steep track on the north side of the ravine, and the valley road continues on the south side. The police ask foreigners to register on arrival; the station is in the bazaar. Above the bazaar is the NAPWD executive engineer, where you can book valley resthouses. A post office is across the ravine, near the polo ground.

SLEEPING & EATING

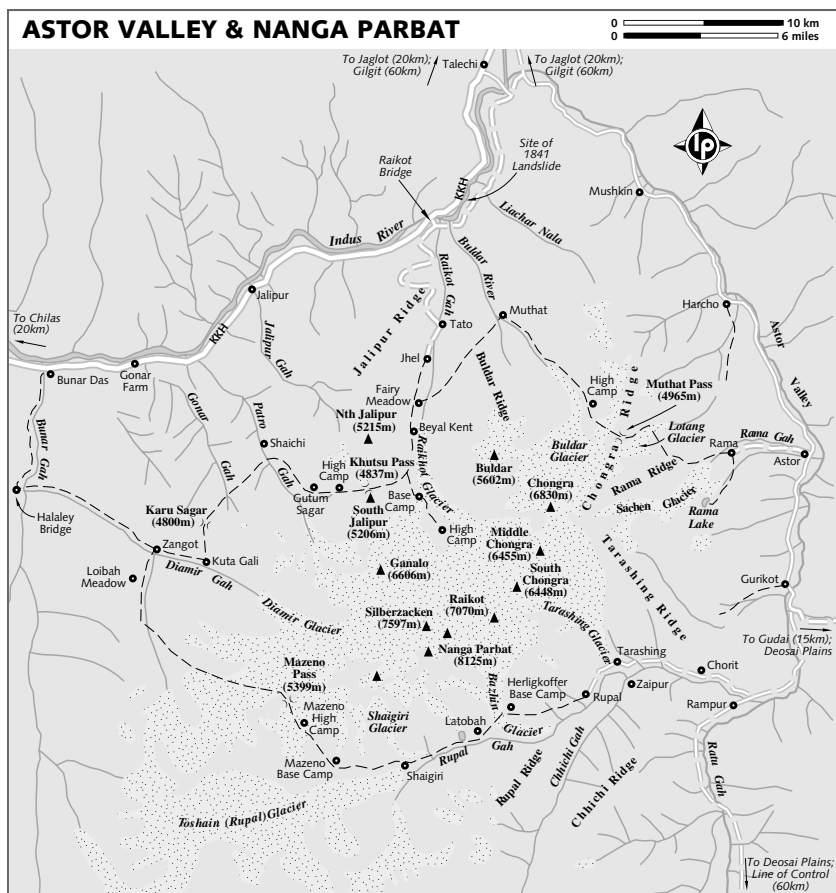
Dreamland Tourist Inn (s/d Rs 200/300) At the top of the main bazaar, this place has a decent local restaurant and bathrooms with cold shower. There's also a small garden.

Kamran Hotel (☎ 05817-51111; s/d Rs 400/600) A few metres down the hill from Dreamland, the Kamran is slightly more upmarket with small though comfortable rooms with morning hot water. The Kamran is your best bet for finding a room either side of the peak summer season. The restaurant (mains Rs 40 to Rs 80) does well with the limited supplies available up here.

On the south side of Rama Gah is an **NAPWD resthouse** (d Rs 300), which can be booked with the executive engineer here or the **chief engineer** (☎ 05811-50307) in Gilgit.

Rama Lake

Above Astor village is the steep and very beautiful Rama Gah, with scattered hamlets and



thick pine and birch forest. A steep track starts from Astor bazaar. In a big meadow two to 2½ hours up, take the left-hand track and walk for an hour past the treeline to Rama Lake. It's about 1km higher than Astor village, and is considerably cooler in all seasons. From here you can see Rama Ridge, a minor shoulder of Nanga Parbat, and the Sachen Glacier (not to be confused with the Siachen Glacier in the High Karakoram).

SLEEPING & EATING

There is excellent camping at the meadow and at the lake. At the meadow there's a modest **NAPWD resthouse** (d Rs 300), which can be booked through the executive engineer in Astor or the **chief engineer** (☎ 05811-50307) in Gilgit. Also

here is a large and incongruous **PTDC Motel** (s/d Rs 1200/1500) with the expected comfortable rooms and hot water. Check with the **PTDC** (☎ 05811-54262; c/o PTDC Chinar Inn, Babar Rd) in Gilgit to confirm when it is open.

Upper Astor Valley

The upper valley is a worthy destination in its own right and also works well as a side trip to Deosai Plains jeep safaris. Good walks start from upvalley villages including Gurikot (9km beyond Astor), Rampur and Tarashing. A track towards the Deosai Plains (p291) goes up Cholim Gah, just above Gurikot.

The track to Britain's old Burzil Pass route to Kashmir branches south up Ratu Gah, about 15km from Gurikot (Ratu Gah

NANGA PARBAT

An unmistakable feature of the region is massive Nanga Parbat, 8125m high and rising by 7mm every year, faster than almost any other part of the Himalaya chain. The sharpest elevation differences found anywhere on earth are here: almost seven vertical kilometres from the summit into the adjacent Indus gorge, and the mountain's sheer, unbroken 4000m south wall (the Rupal face).

Nanga Parbat sits atop a mass of ancient Indian Plate rocks, sticking oddly northwards into the volcanic-island material of the Kohistan Complex. Its unusual position and growth are still matters of active research; explanations involve the dynamics of the entire Himalayan system.

At Liachar Valley, about 4km upstream from the Raikot Bridge over the Indus (between Gilgit and Chilas), across from the KKH, you can see the grey pre-Cambrian granite of the Indian Plate, hundreds of millions of years old, pushed over on top of river sediments less than 100,000 years old. This reversal is part of the continuing disruption as Nanga Parbat rises.

approaches the Line of Control and is therefore off limits).

Tarashing is about 40km from Astor and 2911m high, beneath Nanga Parbat's naked Rupal face (though it's not in full view). The village sits in a spectacular piece of real estate amid massive glaciers flowing from the mountain massif. From here you can day-hike up the moraine (glacial rubble) for a good look at the Rupal face, the Tarashing Glacier, across the glacier and on up Rupal Gah, or across Rupal Gah to Zaipur village, at the top of which are water channels on huge wooden towers said to be 400 to 500 years old. It is important to note that local police regulations currently do not allow unaccompanied foreigners to venture beyond Tarashing (for their own safety).

Beyond Tarashing the **Rupal Valley** is dominated by Nanga Parbat's Rupal face that sweeps 4572m upwards in the world's greatest vertical rise from a base camp to a summit. Staggeringly close-up views of Nanga Parbat are possible from several vantage points in the valley. A recently constructed road extends beyond Tarashing and Rupal village to within less than an hour's easy walk of its base camp, **Herrligkoffer Base Camp** (3550m), a beautiful meadow with a large spring along the Bazhin Glacier. It's named for Dr Karl M Herrligkoffer, the leader of eight German expeditions to Nanga Parbat, including the first successful expedition in 1953.

From the base camp, you can go on a half-day walk across the Bazhin Glacier to **Latobah** (3530m), the broad, level meadow frequented by Rupal shepherds directly beneath the main summit. An overnight trek goes further upvalley to **Shaigiri** (3655m), an

idyllic summer pasture with an awesome view of Nanga Parbat's south face. It is also the starting point for a longer, technical trek across Mazeno La.

Lonely Planet's *Trekking in the Karakoram & Hindukush* has further details on these and other treks around Nanga Parbat.

SLEEPING & EATING

Tarashing is the only village in the valley with accommodation, although new hotels are planned for Rupal village and the road's end.

Hotel Nanga Parbat (Tarashing; camping Rs 100, r downstairs/upstairs Rs 400/500) Has a big garden and rooms with shared bathroom and cold shower.

Rupal Hotel (Tarashing; camping Rs 100, r downstairs/upstairs Rs 400/500) The similar Rupal has a walled compound in which to pitch a tent.

Getting There & Away

Natco has a daily bus to Astor (Rs 130), departing from Gilgit's general bus stand. A Natco bus also leaves Astor for Rawalpindi (Rs 700, 16 hours) at 11am. Other minibuses bound for Astor (Rs 130) infrequently leave from near the Diamir Hotel in Gilgit. Astor is four to five hours from Gilgit.

You can hire a jeep in Astor for the round trip to Rama Lake for about Rs 1200. Cargo and passenger jeeps run daily from Astor to Tarashing (Rs 60, 1½ hours), departing sporadically from no particular place in the bazaar – ask around and you will be shown. Tarashing–Astor vehicles depart daily between 6.30am and 7am. The road is only metalled halfway from Astor to the junction with the road across the Deosai Plains.

HARAMOSH VALLEY

Thirty-eight kilometres south of Gilgit, the Skardu Rd leaves the KKH and joins the Indus. The Haramosh Valley circles around 7409m Haramosh, descending to the road just where the Indus gorge turns south to skirt this massif, near the village of Sassi.

The Shina-speaking people in the valley are unused to foreigners and haven't much to offer visitors. There's no food or lodging, but alpine meadows and the glaciers at the feet of Haramosh and other giants await trekkers; see Lonely Planet's *Trekking in the Karakoram & Hindukush* for details on these and other treks.

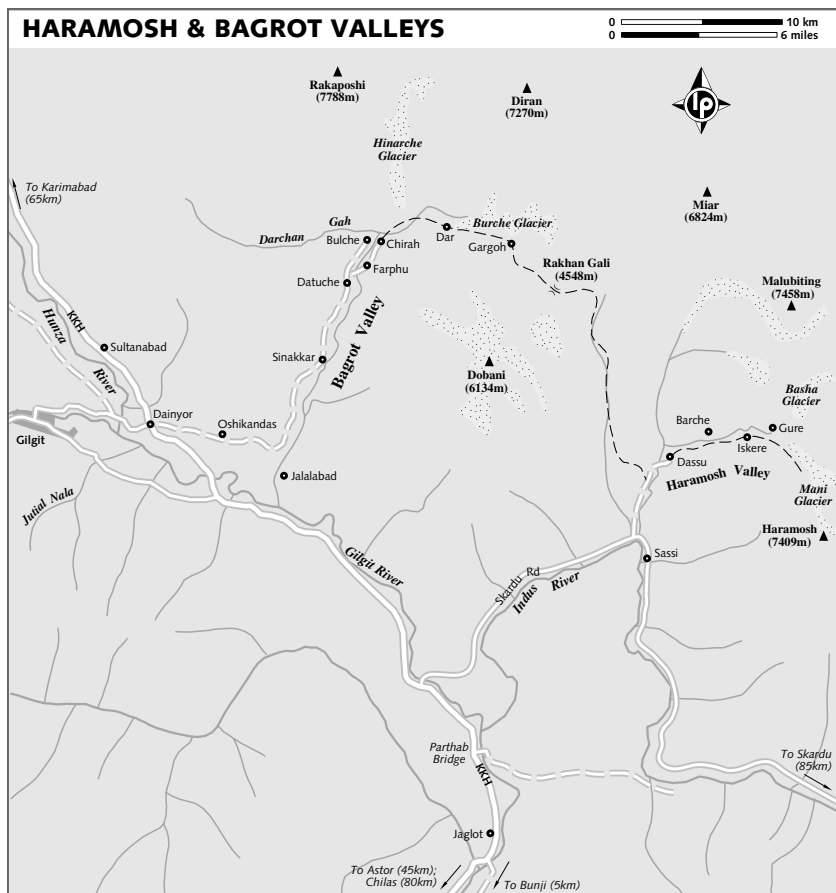
There is no recommended accommodation beyond the Highway. Sassi has several seedy

roadhouses and Skardu-bound minibuses and buses may stop there.

BAGROT VALLEY

Fifteen kilometres downriver from Gilgit, a broad alluvial fan marks the Bagrot (ba-grote) Valley. Its lower reaches are like a marbled moonscape, and a ride up the narrow, perched road is unforgettable. The upper valley is huge, rugged and densely cultivated. The Shina-speaking, Shiite Bagrotis see few foreigners other than passing trekkers.

Oshikandas is a mainly Ismaili village on the road from Gilgit. Across the river is **Jalalabad**. Bagrot's main village is **Sinakkar**, two hours from Gilgit. At the end of the jeep road, 1½ hours on, is the last year-round village, **Chirah**,



with a view of Hinarche Glacier and a series of ridges culminating in Diran Peak (7270m). Nagry is on the other side. The prominent peak to the southeast is 6134m Dobani.

From Chirah there's a spectacular trek up to Diran Base Camp (see p346). In another direction, four to five hours' walking will bring you to **Dar**, and the same distance on again is **Gargoh**. These are seasonal villages where a large part of the valley's population migrates with their goats and sheep each summer. Hikers (some trekkers, but day hikers too) go as far as Gargoh (ie a day east of Chirah) but not across Rakhan Gali. Lonely Planet's *Trekking in the Karakoram & Hindukush* has further details on this and other treks.

Sleeping

Perched on a ledge up above Chirah, with post-card-perfect views of Diran and the Hinarche Glacier, the basic **Bagrote Sarai** (camping Rs 100, r Rs 500) is literally at the end of the road. There's a panoramic dining hall in which to unwind, and above it the simple rooms are arranged on terraces (you can lie in bed and look out at the mountains). The bathrooms are in a separate building and there are more terraces above the rooms where you can pitch a tent.

Getting There & Away

From Garhi Bagh in Gilgit, cargo jeeps go in the early morning to Chirah via Dainyor in under an hour. A better bet is to go by Suzuki to Dainyor, where you can pick up a 'special' taxi to Chirah (Rs 70). Avoid jeeps to Sinakkar, which isn't far enough. **Travel Walji's** (☎ 05811-52665; www.waljis.com; Airport Rd) in Gilgit organises overnight trips and local hikes. Expect to pay Rs 2500 for the jeep and driver.

GILGIT TOWN

☎ 05811 / elevation 1500m

Gilgit's dusty bazaar is not particularly colourful but it's lively and eclectic, filled with people drawn from Karachi to Kashgar. It's not unusual to hear Uyghur, Wakhi, Burushaski, Khovar and Pashto; Urdu and English are also widely spoken.

The town wakes early to muezzins in scores of mosques calling the faithful to dawn prayers. The major Muslim branches – Shiite, Sunni and Ismaili – overlap here, with sectarian tensions just under the surface. In 1988 Sunni-Shiite hostility exploded into virtual warfare at Jalalabad in Bagrot. Sectarian bat-

les erupted around Gilgit during 1992 to 1994 and, after a long period of relative calm, again in 2005. Since then, the overwhelming presence of heavily armed police and army has become everyday normality, though it can be quite a shock for visitors.

Gilgit is becoming a city, its headlong growth owing more to its position on modern trade routes to China and Central Asia than to tourism. There is always talk (but little action) of extending the airport runway to allow jets to land, but basic public services such as electricity and water haven't kept pace with the town's growth.

Orientation

The town is beside the Gilgit River, 10km west of the KKH. A back road also comes from the KKH at Dainyor via bridges over the Hunza and Gilgit Rivers, saving 10km for those coming from the north.

The bazaar is essentially a 2km street full of shops. Shopkeepers from nearby areas cluster together; eg in Khazana (Bank) Rd for Nagry and in Jamaat Khana Bazaar for Hunza. Southwest up Khazana Rd are government offices; further up are several villages, the biggest of which is Barmas. The airport is east of the main bazaar. Southeast is the military cantonment of Jutial.

Some roads have two names, one common and one official: eg Jamaat Khana Bazaar (Sir Aga Khan Rd), Bank Rd (Khazana Rd) and Hospital Rd (Allama Iqbal Rd) – official names are in parentheses.

Information

BOOKSHOPS

Gilgit Serena Hotel (☎ 55894; Jutial) With GM Baig & Son closed, the best place to buy books on the NA is the shop in the lobby of this top-end hotel.

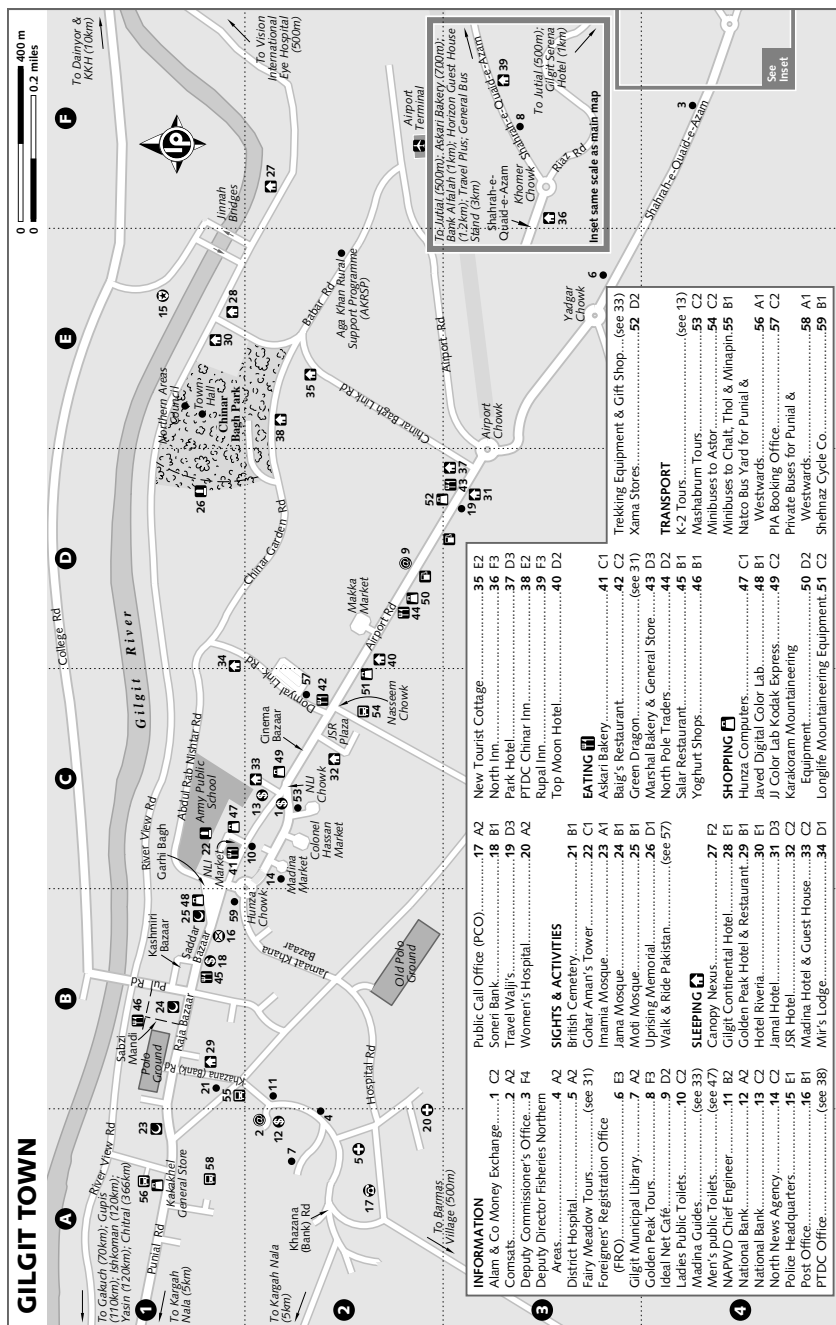
North News Agency (Madina Market) Modest collection of NA books in English.

EMERGENCY

Police Headquarters (☎ 53356) The Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) is across the Gilgit River by the Jinnah Bridges.

FOREIGNERS' REGISTRATION

Foreigners' Registration Office (FRO; Yadgar Chowk; ☎ 8am-3pm Mon-Thu & Sat, 8am-noon Fri Apr-Sep, 9am-3.30pm Mon-Thu & Sat, 9am-noon Fri Oct-Mar) Authorities in Gilgit are still requiring registration for travellers staying for more than 15 days in the NA – despite



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national abolition of the 30-day foreigner registration rule. You need two passport photos and a photocopy of your visa and passport.

INTERNET ACCESS

Popular backpacker hotels such as the Madina and Horizon, as well as the upmarket Serena, have good internet services.

Comsats (Khazana Rd; per hr Rs 40) At ISP Comsats' office you will find the fastest and most comfortable internet café in Gilgit (apart from the hotels mentioned above).

Ideal Net Cafe (Airport Rd; per hr Rs 40) A tight squeeze and a bit unsavoury.

LIBRARY

Gilgit Municipal Library (☎ 9am-2pm Sun-Thu, 8am-noon Fri) Off upper Khazana Rd, in the renovated home of the early British political agents. Many of its 20,000 volumes are in English and the reading room has some international magazines.

MEDICAL SERVICES

Gilgit has a **district hospital** (upper Hospital Rd) and, nearby, a Women's Hospital with female doctors. Foreign women can go to either, though the former has more specialists. The internationally staffed, privately funded **Vision International Eye Hospital** (☎ 55778; www.gilgiteyehospital.org; River View Rd), 2km east of the twin suspension Jinnah Bridges, confirms that in emergencies they can help travellers with non-eye problems. The hospital relies on (and welcomes) private donations.

MONEY

Alam & Co Money Exchange (417 NLI Chowk; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat) Better cash rates than the banks. Accepts most major currencies.

Bank Alfalah (Heli Chowk) Has an ATM that accepts international Visa (only) cards (when it is working!).

National Bank (Khazana Rd; ☎ 9am-1.30pm Mon-Thu, 9am-12.30pm Fri & Sat) Efficient and friendly foreign exchange, accepting US and Canadian dollars, UK pounds, euros and travellers cheques. At the time of research finishing touches were being put on the new branch near NLI Chowk.

Soneri Bank (Saddar Bazaar; ☎ 9am-1.30pm & 3-5pm Mon-Thu, 9am-12.30pm Fri & Sat) Note extended afternoon hours for foreign exchange. Travellers cheques attract Rs 50 commission.

POST

Post office (Saddar Bazaar; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Sat) Poste restante is down the path along the right-hand side facing the main office.

TELEPHONE

You can make overseas calls from the government PCO next to the Askari Bakery in Jutial, and from the main exchange in upper Hospital Rd. Both are open 24 hours. The government PCO charges up to 30% less than the numerous private PCOs.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Gilgit Conservation & Information Centre

(☎ 55658; NLI Colony, Jutial) The regional office for the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), 200m west of the general bus stand, has a comfortable library with bird, plant and mammal guides, as well as some general texts on the region. Brochures on regional conservation programmes.

NAPWD Chief Engineer (☎ 50307; Khazana Rd) Book resthouses between Chilas and the Khunjerab Pass here.

PTDC (☎ 54262; c/o PTDC Chinar Inn, Babar Rd) Has a few brochures and can help with bookings and tours, but that's about it.

TRAVEL AGENCIES

Gilgit has a number of travel and trekking agencies, including the following reliable ones:

Golden Peak Tours (☎ 55726; www.goldenpeaktours.com.pk; Shahrah-e-Quaid-e-Azam Rd, Khomer Chowk)

Lost Horizon Treks & Tours (☎ 55288; www.losthorizontreks.com; Horizon Guesthouse, Shahrah-e-Quaid-e-Azam Rd) Goes anywhere but Astor Valley is a speciality.

Madina Guides (☎ 53536; www.madinaguides.com; Madina Hotel & Guest House, NLI Chowk)

Travel Walji's (☎ 52665; www.waljis.com; Airport Rd) Highly reputable company with reliable jeeps and drivers.

VISA EXTENSION

Deputy Commissioner's Office (DCO; Shahrah-e-Quaid-e-Azam Rd; ☎ 9am-1pm Mon-Fri) Thirty-day extensions are provided to most nationalities – cost depends on nationality but they're often provided free of charge.

Sights & Activities

GOHAR AMAN'S TOWER

In the grounds of the Army Public School (Hayat Shaheed), a crumbling adobe tower is all that remains of a fort built by Gohar Aman in the 1850s. There's not much to look at and the school is pretty security conscious. The school principal may be happy to escort you to the tower and provide a potted history.

BRITISH CEMETERY

The well-kept **British Cemetery** (Lower Khazana Rd; ☎ 9am-8pm May-Oct, 10am-6pm Nov-Apr) has some surprisingly recent graves of adventurous trekkers

THE GILGIT UPRISING

At Partition, many had anticipated Maharaja Hari Singh's eventual accession to India. A clique of Muslim officers in the Maharaja's own army, led by Colonel Mirza Hassan Khan, had been conspiring to seize Kashmir for Pakistan, but word had got out and Hassan was transferred to Kashmir's 'Siberia', the Bunji garrison south of Gilgit.

Meanwhile, the Gilgit Scouts' Major Mohammed Babar Khan and several fellow officers (and, according to some, their British commander) had hatched their own rebellion.

Within days of the Maharaja's decision, a mob gathered in Gilgit from neighbouring valleys. The governor called Bunji for help, and who should be among the reinforcements but Colonel Hassan. On 1 November Babar Khan arrested Governor Ghansar Singh and the rebels asked to join Pakistan.

Within a few days the Scouts, with Muslim soldiers of the Kashmiri army, joined the war with India. In the following months the Scouts took Baltistan, and Hassan got to the outskirts of Srinagar.

The fledgling Indian air force at one point bombed Gilgit, no easy task in the narrow valleys. Gilgitis like to tell the story of the Scouts' pipe band, which mocked the Indian pilots by defiantly tootling up and down the airfield the whole time.

Memories of the 'Uprising' are still alive in Gilgit. Hassan, Babar and another leader of the Gilgit Scouts, Maj Safiullah Beg, are buried in the town's shady municipal park, Chinar Bagh, and many of their offspring are local politicians and entrepreneurs. Of course, it's not 14 August but 1 November that Gilgit celebrates as Independence Day, with spontaneous music and dancing and a week-long polo tournament. One of the best polo teams every year is from the Gilgit garrison of the Northern Light Infantry (NLI), successor to the Gilgit Scouts.

and mountaineers among the more historical plots. Buried here is Captain George Hayward, a British explorer murdered in Yasin in 1870 by a son of Gohar Aman. On the side of the shack inside the grounds you'll find a useful map with some interesting stories from the grave. If Ghulam Ali, the caretaker, is around you'll be shown more interesting items for a small donation to the cemetery's upkeep.

UPRISING MEMORIAL

By Chinar Bagh, the municipal park, is a memorial to those who rose against the Maharaja in 1947. It includes the graves of the local heroes, Mohammed Babar Khan and Safiullah Beg of the Gilgit Scouts, and Mirza Hassan Khan of the Kashmir Infantry. See the boxed text, above.

POLO

In late October the action starts to hot up as teams vie for the chance to compete in the prestigious Shandur cup. Enter the ground via the gates on Raja Bazaar; admission is apparently free. The horsemanship is first rate, the reckless competitiveness of the riders is entertaining and the treatment of the horses is...well, these must be tough little ponies. See the boxed text, p276.

HORSE TREKKING

Walk & Ride Pakistan (☎ 52205; www.walkandridepakistan.com; Huma Plaza, Domyal Link Rd) organises horse treks from Phander to the Shandur Pass for the polo tournament, as well as through the Chapursan Valley in Gojal.

FISHING

The office of the **Deputy Director Fisheries Northern Areas** (☎ 53277; Khazana Rd) issues a foreigners' fishing licence (US\$10/30/160 per day/week/month). Don't bother with the archaic fishing gear available for hire – bring your own.

Sleeping BUDGET

In this range, most rooms have bathrooms with hot water running in the morning and possibly the evening. Many also have gardens where you can pitch a tent.

Top Moon Hotel (☎ 53828; Airport Rd; s/d Rs 150/200) The manager will probably be quite surprised if you take one of his shabby, easy-on-the-pocket rooms. All have bathrooms, but the hot water plumbing is unreliable. A desperate choice only.

Golden Peak Hotel & Restaurant (☎ 54839; Khazana Rd; dm/s Rs 100/150, d Rs 200-300) The ramshackle

THE GAME OF KINGS

Polo is the most popular sport in the NA and Chitral, eclipsing even cricket as a topic of conversation and as a crowd-puller. It's thought to have originated as a form of military training for elite royal troops – probably in Persia, although many locals will tell you it started in the NA (polo is Balti for 'ball'). Teams may number up to 100 – virtual armies.

It certainly didn't come cheap; major costs like the upkeep of ponies could eat up a sizable part of a *mir's* (the region's traditional ruler) annual budget. Today most tournaments are government-supported.

The modern rules are relatively simple. Each team has six players. One of them begins the game by taking a ball and stick in one hand and galloping up the field towards the other team like a man possessed. At the halfway line he throws the ball up and, with a bit of skill, hits it far towards the opposition's goal. Horses foam at the bit, sticks clash together and players hang off their mounts to get into the best position to smack the ball. Whenever play nears the sidelines, spectators flee for their lives as balls and mallets fly through the air. The aim is of course to score a goal, whereupon a band of drummers and pipers goes mad, and the teams change ends.

Traditionally the game continues until one team has scored nine goals, but nowadays an hour's play with a 10- or 15-minute halftime break is the norm. If a horse or player is injured and forced to retire, his opposite number must also leave the game.

Northern polo ponies are beautiful animals with astonishing stamina (there are no horse changes), but mountain polo can be a cruel game. Horses are routinely hit or cut by balls moving at blinding speed, or by mallets. Apparently several horses drop dead of heart failure every season, in the middle of games.

Following is a list of the best places and times to catch a game:

- Gilgit, from April to early May and in October and November, especially the Uprising Day tournament in the first week of November.
- Skardu, especially the Pakistan Independence Day tournament in the second week of August.
- Chitral, in late May or during the district tournament in mid-September.
- Shandur Pass, the world's highest polo ground, during the Chitral versus Gilgit tournament each July. This dates from 1936, and has been an annual, heavily toured event since 1989. Most sizable travel agencies in Gilgit and Chitral and a number of national agencies now have package tours, and their own Shandur encampments, for the event.

Golden Peak occupies the garden and old summer house of the *mir* (traditional ruler) of Nagyr. Unfortunately, the rooms in the old wing are too dark, damp and dingy to offer a historically interesting nap. The bare 'new' rooms are only marginally better.

New Tourist Cottage (☎ 54255; Chinar Bagh Link Rd; camping Rs 50, dm/s/d Rs 100/170/250) As well as the cheap rates, one of the best aspects of this place is the tranquil overgrown garden. The rooms here are basic affairs with huge bathrooms with reliable hot water. All are kept clean. No longer Japanese run, the new manager, Israr, plans to keep the Japanese menu and library, and has promised to replace the very steep stairs that some guests find challenging.

JSR Hotel (☎ 52308; JSR Plaza; s/d Rs 200/300) The unadorned JSR is not the worst budget choice,

with basic and bearably grungy rooms and a smile at reception. But that's about as much as can be said for it.

Madina Hotel & Guest House (☎ 53536; www.madinaguides.com; NLI Chowk; dm/d without bathroom Rs 130/240, d Rs 340; ☑) With the perennially obliging Yaqoob managing it, the Madina remains the international travellers' favourite. Rooms vary but all are kept spotless. There's a basic restaurant dishing up a few traveller favourites, and invaluable assistance with onward transport, tours, trekking, visa extensions etc is generously provided. This is the home of the Madina Guides trekking and tour operation (see p274).

North Inn (☎ 55545; Khomer Chowk; s/d Rs 250/350) Travellers once gave high marks to the North Inn, but lack of patronage has seen standards

slip. The once pleasant garden is a shambles and overall there is a feeling of neglect here. Cheaper rooms are available downstairs – make an offer.

Jamal Hotel (☎ 53788; Airport Rd; s/d Rs 450/550) The tidy doubles here are pretty good value and the attached Green Dragon Chinese restaurant (see p278) does acceptable Chinese dishes.

MIDRANGE

Park Hotel (☎ 53379; Airport Rd; s/d Rs 400/650, s/d deluxe Rs 550/850) These rates make the standard rooms good value but rooms in the old wing can be a bit gloomy, so inspect a few. Most rooms have TVs and are well kept. The restaurant is also gloomy but manages a few local dishes on top of the usual Chinese and Pakistani dishes.

Mir's Lodge (☎ 52875; Domyal Link Rd; s/d without TV Rs 600/750, s/d with TV Rs 750/800) The TV-equipped rooms are downstairs and so are considerably cooler in summer; in addition, some downstairs rooms have double beds. All rooms have a telephone. There's a decent restaurant churning out Pakistani and Chinese meals.

ourpick Horizon Guest House (☎ 55288; www.losthorizontreks.com; Shahrah-e-Quaid-e-Azam Rd; s/d/tr Rs 900/1200/1400; ☎) This excellent guesthouse with five spick-and-span rooms is run by trekking guides Abdul Bari Rana and Ty Gordon, who also run Lost Horizon Treks & Tours (see p274) from here. It's in a quiet area of Jutial, about 400m east of Heli Chowk, set well back from the road. Look for the large Family Health Hospital and then the sign to the guesthouse.

Hotel Riveria (☎ 54184; River View Rd; s/d Rs 1000/1300) This welcoming hotel is agreeably located down by the river in its own compound. The high-ceilinged older-style rooms have been renovated and are great value. The downstairs rooms remain cool in summer and the orchard/garden is a perfect peaceful retreat.

Gilgit Continental Hotel (☎ 58231; River View Rd; s/d Rs 1200/1600) The rooms here are spacious, cool and clean, and some boast river views. There is a restaurant and occasional rooftop barbecues with entertainment by local musicians in summer. Children under 12 years are free and there are big discounts for long-term guests.

PTDC Chinar Inn (☎ 54262; Chinar Garden Rd; s/d Rs 1300/1650, s/d deluxe Rs 1700/2000) The hospitable Chinar Inn has a range of older-style, large, comfy fan-cooled rooms with TVs set in a

private and peaceful compound. There's a standard PTDC restaurant, of course, and a basic information and travel desk.

Rupal Inn (☎ 55471; Shahrah-e-Quaid-e-Azam Rd; s/d Rs 1400/2000, deluxe Rs 1800/2550) This large 48-room hotel is clearly designed for tour groups and makes for an exceptionally comfortable stay – all the better if you negotiate a discount. There's a pleasant garden for barbecues as well as a multicuisine restaurant and coffee shop. The carpeted, very spacious rooms come with TVs and bathtubs and are the roomiest in Gilgit.

Canopy Nexus (☎ 51011; www.canopynexus.com; River View Rd; d Rs 2000-5000; ☎) The 'resort over the river' has funky cabins right on the riverbank. The cabins are lavishly decorated and almost luxurious but don't quite hit the mark. The bathrooms are tiny but adequate and the restaurant is above average for Gilgit. Unfortunately, the peculiar fish-shaped swimming pool was not functioning at the time of research.

TOP END

Gilgit Serena Hotel (☎ 55894; fax 55900; Jutial; s/d Rs 5500/6500; ☎ ☎) Gilgit Serena is the best hotel in town, superbly sited above town and giving views across the valley to Rakaposhi peak. The cosy, plush rooms have TV, phone and balcony views. The service is excellent, breakfast is included in the tariff, and there is a free shuttle bus for guests visiting the bazaar or catching a flight from the airport. There's an excellent restaurant (Dumani) and nightly barbecues in the garden are of interest to nonguests (see below).

Eating

RESTAURANTS

The most reliable (in terms of hygiene) restaurants are in the popular hotels, where you may soon tire of seeing the usual suspects on the menu. There is absolutely no alcohol available in Gilgit, even in top-end hotels, so don't bother asking.

Salar Restaurant (Saddar Bazaar; mains Rs 30-160; ☎ 9am-10pm) Has Pakistani standards and interesting 'Chinese' items – eg *mantou* (steamed buns) and strange but tasty fried noodles – in clean, low-key surroundings.

Baig's Restaurant (Airport Rd; mains Rs 35-160; ☎ 9am-10pm) Opposite JSR Plaza, Baig's is gloomy but relatively clean, with good oily Pakistani dishes for those with strong constitutions.

New Tourist Cottage (☎ 54255; Chinar Bagh Link Rd; mains Rs 50-80) Although the Japanese owner has left, the new manager is trying to keep the Japanese flavour flowing by reintroducing the Japanese set dinner (not operating at the time of research) and a selection of Japanese dishes. Nonguests should make prior inquiries about reserving a spot at the table.

Horizon Guest House (☎ 55288; Shahrah-e-Quaid-e-Azam Rd; mains Rs 80-200) If food is your thing, we recommend this guesthouse restaurant where the Pakistani, Chinese and Continental dishes are matched with several delicious Astori specialities such as *chapsum* (vegetable with cheese, chicken or beef rolled into a chapati and fried). It also serves environmentally friendly filtered water.

Green Dragon (Airport Rd; mains Rs 95-120) Jamal Hotel's Chinese-decorated restaurant produces OK Chinese dishes such as hot and sour chicken (Rs 120), sliced beef and ginger (Rs 110) and *laghman* (noodles in broth; Rs 110), but covers its bases by churning out Pakistani standards such as chicken *karai* (Rs 135).

Dumani (☎ 55894; Gilgit Serena Hotel, Jutial; mains Rs 200-400) Based at Gilgit's top hotel, Dumani has a wonderful vista and a good-value menu with tasty Pakistani, Chinese and Continental cuisine. If you have been scrimping or trekking, this is the place to have a splurge – particularly at the all-you-can-eat buffet lunch (Rs 500). Credit cards are accepted. Popular barbecue nights (Monday to Saturday) commence after 15 May, with locals and nonguests alike enjoying the first-rate food and garden ambience. Also good value is the high tea buffet (Rs 220) on Sunday (3pm to 6pm) with a great range of salads, hot dishes and desserts.

Other recommended hotel restaurants include those at **Canopy Nexus** (☎ 51011; River View Rd; mains Rs 100-250), where riverside seating makes up for the long wait; and **Hotel Riveria** (☎ 54184; River View Rd; mains Rs 80-195) with its recommended alfresco barbecue in summer.

CAFÉS & QUICK EATS

Askari Bakery (Shahrah-e-Quaid-e-Azam Rd; ☎ 8am-2pm & 4-10pm) Catch a Suzuki (Rs 5) out to Askari Bakery beyond Jutial for good-value cakes, biscuits and bread as well as a range of groceries. There's also a new branch at NLI Market. The 250g fruit/plain butter cakes for Rs 17/15 make ideal travel companions.

Askari Snacks (Shahrah-e-Quaid-e-Azam Rd; ☎ 8am-2pm & 4-10pm) You can grab a coffee (Rs 15) or tea here and sit in the garden with limited shade and enjoy your bakery items. It is adjacent to Askari Bakery.

SELF-CATERING

Stands on Airport Rd and on the approach to the footbridge on Pul Rd sell fruit and vegetables, especially in the evening. A *sabzi mandi* (vegetable market) is along the west side of Jama Mosque. Apricots usually appear in June; apples, pomegranates, walnuts and Gilgit's own peaches can be found in early autumn. Fresh naan (flat bread) is sold right from the tandoor (clay oven) in the *sabzi mandi* and elsewhere, but it's gone soon after 9am and is available again in the evenings.

Scattered along Gilgit's main thoroughfares are numerous dry fruit and nut traders. Almonds from Gilgit, walnuts from Dainyor, apricots from Hunza and grapes from Kashgar all make great staples for long road trips and treks. Try Khan Bahadur's **North Pole Traders** (Airport Rd).

Numerous bakeries and general stores have biscuits, sweets, jam, cornflakes, soup mixes, long-life milk and juices, tinned cheese and pickles to spice up bland curries. **Marshal Bakery & General Store** (Airport Rd) is particularly good, as are the Askari Bakeries. There's a CSD supermarket behind Askari Bakery in Jutial.

You can buy *dahi* (yogurt) at general stores, or one of the yogurt shops at the back of the *sabzi mandi*; say *pita* for drink here and *jata* for takeaway (Rs 12).

Shopping

CAMPING EQUIPMENT SALES & RENTAL

Karakoram Mountaineering Equipment (Airport Rd) Formerly known as Gown House (and maybe still sporting the old sign).

Longlife Mountaineering Equipment (☎ 53513; Airport Rd) Sales and rental. The secondhand gear is shipped from Europe via Karachi and can be a good buy.

The new stuff is from China but is not 'export quality' so be careful. Sleeping-bag hire is Rs 50 per day. Sold items may be bought back at half price. Reasonable selection of down jackets, stoves etc.

Trekking Equipment & Gift Shop (☎ 52457; c/o Madina Hotel & Guest House, NLI Chowk)

HANDICRAFTS

There's a clutch of similar shops around Hunza Chowk that sell gemstones and old

musical instruments, as well as woollen hats (Rs 60 to Rs 300) and waistcoats (Rs 250 to Rs 1000) that vary greatly in quality. An NA bargain is the durable, hand-woven wool (patti or pattu) of Hunza and Nagyr – coarse, thick and tight, with an uneven grain.

Xama Stores (☎ 54271; Airport Rd) By the Park Hotel, Xama has a dusty collection of old jewellery, handicrafts, carpets and flintlocks.

PHOTOGRAPHY

Hunza Computers (NLI Chowk) For ultra cheap memory cards for cameras, burning to CD (Rs 100) etc.

Javed Digital Color Lab (Saddar Bazaar)

JJ Color Lab Kodak Express (NLI Chowk)

Getting There & Away

AIR

PIA (☎ 50348; Domyal Link Rd) also has an office at the **airport** (☎ 50354). There are two flights to/from Islamabad each day (one way Rs 3540), weather permitting. The waiting list can get very long in poor weather. Be sure to follow the instructions outlined by the PIA office staff. It's very important to check/confirm one hour before your flight at the airport office or you won't be on the manifest, which means you won't be on the plane.

BUS & MINIBUS

The general bus stand is well out of town near the intersection with the KKH. Most long-distance buses terminate here. Catch a taxi (Rs 70 to Rs 80) or a Suzuki (Rs 8) to or from town. There are several companies operating from here, some with booking offices in town.

K-2 Tours (☎ 51103) An office is just outside the gate of the Madina Hotel & Guest House as well as at the general bus stand.

Mashabrum Tours (☎ 53095; NLI Chowk) Also at the general bus stand (☎ 52784).

Natco (☎ 50684; Punial Rd) Also at the general bus stand (☎ 50435).

Sargin Travel Service (☎ 54591; General Bus Stand)

Silk Route Transport Company (☎ 55234; General Bus Stand)

Tais Transport Service (☎ 55774, 033553926; General Bus Stand) A 24-hour operation that launches heavily loaded minibuses up the KKH to Hunza, Nagyr and Gojal.

Chitral, Punial, Ishkoman, Yasin & Ghizar Yaqub from Gupis travels to/from Chitral (about Rs 10,000 for up to four passengers) via the Shandur Pass and can be contacted

at Madina Hotel & Guest House (see p275). Natco buses and Land Cruisers leave from the **Natco bus yard** (Punial Rd), which is hidden down the first laneway immediately behind the Kakakhel General Store. Natco fares for Chitral and destinations west of Gilgit include the following:

Chitral (Rs 650, 16 hours) Ten-seat Land Cruiser at least once a week in summer, usually Sunday. Alternative is a daily minibus to Mastuj (Rs 360) where you can board a minibus to Chitral (Rs 130).

Gakuch (Rs 60) On the Yasin or Gupis bus.

Gupis (Rs 90) Departure 9.30am.

Ishkoman (Rs 90) Departure 11am.

Yasin (bus Rs 90) Departure 9.30am.

Hunza, Nagyr & Gojal

From the general bus stand, Tais Transport Service and Sargin Travel Service have minibuses departing from 7am, stopping at Karimabad (Rs 100), Gulmit (Rs 135), Passu (Rs 160) and Sost (Rs 185, five hours). Natco has one bus daily to Aliabad (Rs 80, departing 7am), a short distance from Karimabad.

Rawalpindi

From the general bus stand, buses (usually air-con) bound for Rawalpindi can take anything from 12 to 18 hours. Most terminate at the chaotic Pir Wadhai bus stand.

Mashabrum Tours (Rs 650) Daily departures noon, 3pm and 5pm.

Natco (Rs 650 to Rs 800) Daily departures at 7am, 8am, 1pm, 3pm, 5pm and 6pm. Different classes of vehicles leave at these times, ranging from rattle-trap bus to air-con Coaster.

Sargin Travel Service (Rs 650) Daily 3pm Coaster service.

Skardu

From the general bus stand, minibuses take about six hours. Try to get a window seat on the right-hand side (going to Skardu) for heart-stopping views.

K-2 Tours (Rs 200, six hours) Three departures daily from 8am.

Mashabrum Tours (Rs 200) Three minibus departures 8am, 10am and noon.

Natco (Rs 130) Daily 9am minibus.

Other Destinations & Options

Private transport (jeeps and minibuses) departs from where people from outlying areas have their shops; eg Jamaat Khana Bazaar for Hunza, lower Khazana Rd for Nagyr, Garhi Bagh for Haramosh and Bagrot, and Punial

Rd for the upper Gilgit River basin. There are minibuses (Rs 50) to Chalt/Minapin leaving from near the corner of Shaheed-e-Millat and Khazana Rds after noon. Natco has a daily minibus (Rs 130) to Astor village leaving from the general bus stand.

Though it would mean passing through and missing the best that northern Pakistan has to offer, Natco's daily bus to Kashgar (US\$14 or rupee equivalent, 15 hours) leaves the general bus stand at 6am. You need to book your ticket the day before. Note that the service operates from 1 May to the end of December (snow levels permitting); that is, beyond the dates that non-Pakistani/Chinese foreigners may cross the Khunjerab Pass (1 May to 15 November). At the time of writing Natco and the Chinese had agreed to allow returning buses to carry passengers and so every alternate day the bus is a Chinese bus not a Natco bus. If you can organise it, the Natco bus (and drivers) is the better (safer) option.

FOUR-WHEEL DRIVE RENTAL

For jeep or minibus rental, ask the travel agencies (see p274), or your hotel-wallah. At the time of research, you could hire a 4WD to Skardu or Sost for about Rs 6000.

Getting Around

TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

The cheapest means is a passenger Suzuki to Airport Chowk (Rs 8), plus a 10-minute walk to the airport from there. A hired Suzuki is Rs 60. Several hotels have free airport transfers.

BICYCLE

Mountain bikes are rented out at **Shehnaz Cycle Co** (☎ 50913; Hunza Chowk) for Rs 300 per day.

PASSENGER SUZUKIS

Passenger Suzukis go to Jutial and the general bus stand (Rs 8) from in front of the post office at Saddar Bazaar, and to Dainyor from the east end of Garhi Bagh. They can be flagged down anywhere, but not beyond 9pm. Suzukis also run west from Punial Rd.

AROUND GILGIT

Kargah Buddha & Kargah Nala

A Buddhist survivor, the large standing Buddha carved on a cliff face in Kargah Nala, west of Gilgit, may date from the 7th century. From Punial Rd, it's a 5km hike. Alternatively, you can jump off a minibus to Baseen (Rs 12)

or hire a Suzuki for a three-hour return trip (Rs 400). A 10-minute walk up the left-hand side of Kargah Nala is Shuko Gah (Gah is Shina for 'stream'), and the Buddha is high above this gully. Local kids may 'guide' you there, but be careful – their short cuts can include difficult scrambles.

Further up Shuko Gah is Napur village, the ruins of a monastery and stupa, and a cave where Buddhist birch-bark texts (now called the Gilgit Manuscripts) were found in the 1930s. Cave is *kor* in Shina. A return option with good valley views is to continue on this high path to Barmas village, and then back down into Gilgit.

Jutial Nala & Taj Mughal's Monument

A fairly easy hike from Jutial along a high water channel gives a fine panorama of the valley, plus Rakaposhi and other peaks. Take a Jutial Suzuki from Saddar Bazaar to the end of the line, below Gilgit Serena Hotel. Half a kilometre uphill past Gilgit Serena, turn right and then left up the *nala*. Climb till you see a stream going off to the right – the headworks of the water channel.

Several kilometres along the channel, you can scramble 100m up to Taj Mughal's monument. At Barmas village, near some water tanks, descend Hospital Rd into Gilgit. The hike from Gilgit Serena Hotel to the bazaar takes under two hours. A variation is to climb into Jutial Nala, then two hours up to pine forests and excellent Rakaposhi views. Another is to continue on the channel to Napur and the Kargah Buddha.

These walks are extremely hot in July and August. If there have been more than a few hours of rain in recent days, stay away: the hillsides are very prone to rockslides.

Dainyor

A virtual 'suburb' of Gilgit and perhaps Pakistan's southernmost Ismaili village, Dainyor makes a relaxing day trip. From Saddar Bazaar, Suzukis go to Dainyor Bazaar on the KKH via suspension bridges.

Overlooking the Hunza River is a **shrine** to a 17th- or 18th-century Shiite preacher named Sultan Alib. Get off the Suzuki when it tops the climb on the east side of the Hunza River, doubling back by foot on a path above the road.

From Dainyor Bazaar it's 1.5km south on the KKH to a melancholy **cemetery** (on the left

behind a large gate) with the graves of Chinese KKH workers.

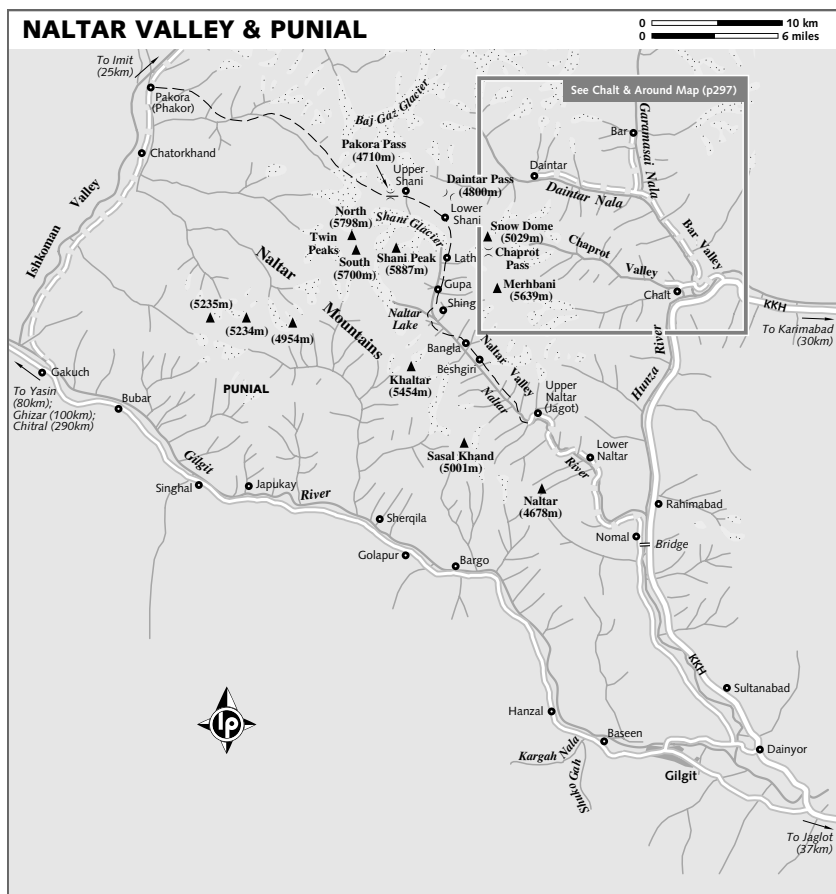
There is a **rock** in Dainyor village with Sanskrit inscriptions about 7th- and 8th-century Tibetan rulers. It's located on private property and you may be asked for a few rupees to see it. From the bazaar, go 1km north on the KKH to a jeep road on the right. Up the road, after just less than a kilometre, start to ask for 'old writing stone' – *likitu giri* in Shina.

NALTAR VALLEY

Naltar was the Gilgit Agency's hill station, where the British administrators retreated when the summer heat grew oppressive. Most of the guides who know the valleys around

Gilgit call this one the loveliest. Its postcard alpine scenery is accessible for overnight trips, or even a fast day trip by jeep from Gilgit, and it gets crowded in summer.

The valley meets the Hunza River at Nomal, 25km north of Gilgit, where a bridge makes a short cut to the KKH. Soon a jeep road strikes left and climbs a rocky canyon, passing a relaxed police checkpoint and a hydro power scheme beside the Naltar River. After 6km to 7km you pass Lower Naltar village (kilini Naltar in Shina, the local speech), and a further 5km to 6km brings you to ajini Naltar (Upper Naltar) at about 3000m. Here the valley opens out and begins to look alpine. Across the river is a Pakistan Air Force winter survival school.



From Upper Naltar it's a beautiful 12km hike on a bad jeep road up to Naltar Lake and dense pine forests. No guide is necessary. Beyond this are more pastures and summer settlements. See p350 for a description of a five-day walk over the Pakora Pass from Upper Naltar.

Sleeping & Eating

There's no accommodation at Lower Naltar, while Upper Naltar has several seasonal options. The most reliable (in terms of being open in the shoulder seasons) and friendly is the modest **Hilltop Hotel** (☎ 05811-57011; camping/tent d Rs 50/100, d Rs 250) with three, very unpretentious double rooms, a permanent tent and a garden where you can pitch your own tent. There's no running water but a bucket of hot water is available in the morning. Other hotels nearby include the 4 View and 'three-star deluxe' Palace Hotel, which were not open at the time of research.

On the west side of the valley is a very popular **NAPWD resthouse** (d standard/VIP Rs 300/500). Gujar kids with sticky fingers mean the hotel gardens are the safest place for camping. Only basic meals, which taste pretty good at this elevation, will be available.

During the summer (usually from June to September) a couple of camp sites with kitchens open at Naltar Lake.

Getting There & Around

At least two or three passenger jeeps leave Gilgit's general bus stand each afternoon for Naltar (Rs 60), but be sure yours goes to Upper Naltar or be prepared to hike up from Lower Naltar. Gilgit to Upper Naltar takes two to 2½ hours by jeep. A special hire was Rs 2500 return at the time of research. Most Gilgit travel agencies have Naltar packages.

At Upper Naltar you may be able to hire a horse for a day trip or overnight trip to Naltar Lake; ask your hotel-wallah.

PUNIAL, ISHKOMAN, YASIN & GHIZAR

The Gilgit River basin upstream of Gilgit is a paradise for trekkers and anglers. Once a nest of small feuding kingdoms, it's still a surprising patchwork of people and languages, with hardly any settlement big enough to be called a town. The population is 80% to 85% Ismaili (it was through here that Ismailism arrived from Afghanistan). Most others are Sunni, with some Shiites in Yasin. The only visible

women are Ismailis, who dress in bright colours and pillbox caps, and are unveiled in public.

The old valley kingdoms are Punial (poon-yaal), above Gilgit; Ishkoman (eesh-ko-man), entering from the north about 80km up the Gilgit River; Yasin (ya-seen), which enters at about 110km; and Ghizar (ghuh-zr), stretching west to the Shandur Pass into Chitral. They now comprise Ghizar district, hived off from Gilgit district in 1989, with its headquarters at Gakuch.

The mountains are the Hindu Raj, an arm of the Hindukush (to geographers, the Karakoram Range only begins east of Ishkoman). The lower reaches are hot in summer and unexceptional to look at, but the upper valleys are grandly beautiful. The route is dotted with ancient petroglyphs of ibex and other animals.

Most overlanders who pass through are on their way to/from Chitral – one of the best cheap adventures in the NA is to drive this scenic road. Though there's still plenty of rough gravel, and there are some long hills between villages, a few intrepid cyclists have ridden it. You need to carry food and a tent.

Getting There & Away

Buses and minibuses leave daily (usually in the morning) from Natco's Punial Rd bus yard in Gilgit for Gupis (Rs 90, six hours), Ishkoman (Pakora; Rs 80, six to seven hours) and Yasin (Rs 90, six to seven hours). For Gakuch (Rs 60, four hours) catch either the Yasin or Gupis buses.

Less predictable are cargo and passenger jeeps leaving from shops along Punial Rd in Gilgit. Ask at Kakakhel General Store about Gupis, Phander and Teru. For Ishkoman, you can ask in Gakuch (at the auto-parts shop opposite the Snowdrop Inn) about jeeps to Chatorkhand and Imit. On most days, cargo jeeps go from Gupis to Phander and/or Teru.

To get to the Shandur Pass or to continue on to Chitral, Natco runs a 10-seat Land Cruiser at least once a week (Rs 650 to Chitral, 16 hours) in summer from Gilgit (Punial Rd). Alternatively, there's a daily minibus to Mastuj (Rs 360), from where you can board a minibus to Chitral (Rs 130). Readers continually praise the Gilgit–Chitral service offered by 'Driver Yaqub' from Gupis who can be contacted at Madina Hotel & Guest House (☎ 05811-53536). The cost is about Rs 10,000

for four people and all their gear. If you can afford it, the most reliable option is to hire a jeep and driver in Gilgit from a travel agency such as Travel Walji's (see p274). The Shandur Pass is usually open from June to late October, and it is not unknown for travellers to resort to several hours' walking through snow in May to 'get to the other side'.

Punial

The road hugs the Gilgit River, a swift opal-blue stream in autumn and a silty torrent fed by melting glaciers in summer. At **Sherqila**, about 40km from Gilgit, there's a police checkpoint on the road, though the village is across the river. **Singhal**, 53km from Gilgit, has an Aga Khan Health Services Pakistan (AKHSP) hospital. Singhal Gah is a well-known trout reach.

The valley broadens at the district headquarters of **Gakuch** (also with good trout fishing), where, 12km beyond Singhal, there's a suspension bridge across the Gilgit River servicing the road up the Ishkoman Valley. Gakuch itself is a further 5km beyond the turn-off. There's little reason to stop except to catch onwards transport. Just beyond Gakuch yawns the impressive mouth of the Ishkoman Valley. As you continue up beside the Gilgit River, keep an eye open for ancient petroglyphs chipped into the dark shiny rocks. The villages are resplendent in autumn colours in October.

SLEEPING & EATING

Ghizar Tourist Cottage (☎ 05814-58032; d Rs 600) At Singhal, the welcoming Ghizar Tourist Cottage has plans to expand to 12 rooms. It has a very pleasant garden shaded by fruit trees, and an unusually plush dining hall (mains Rs 80 to Rs 90).

Hotel Green Palace (☎ 05814-51121; s/d Rs 1000/1500) The best accommodation in Gakuch can be found west of the bazaar at the Green Palace, with its comfortable stone cottages (divided into two private rooms) and fishy-sounding Trout Restaurant (mains Rs 85 to Rs 170).

Other options in Gakuch are rather scruffy and include the **Hill Haven** (☎ 05814-51110; s/d Rs 200/250), east of the bazaar, and the central Karim Guesthouse and Three Star Hotel & Restaurant.

Golapur and Singhal have heavily used **NAPWD resthouses** (d Rs 300), where you can camp

in the grounds with permission from the **chief engineer** (☎ 05811-50307) in Gilgit.

Ishkoman

Chatorkhand, 25km from Gakuch, is the traditional seat of the *pir* of Chatorkhand, head of a line of hereditary religious leaders who came from Bukhara in Central Asia in the early 19th century.

Ishkoman is best known for treks; see p350. Other treks go west to Yasin; for details see Lonely Planet's *Trekking in the Karakoram & Hindukush*.

SLEEPING

At Chatorkhand, you'll find the basic **Zuhaib Guesthouse** (☎ 05814-58100; d Rs 300). Chatorkhand and Imit (which is about 30km beyond Chatorkhand) both have **NAPWD resthouses** (d Rs 300), booked via the **chief engineer** (☎ 05811-50307) in Gilgit.

Yasin

The Yasin and Ghizar Rivers join near Gupis to form the Gilgit River. Across a Chinese-built bridge and 25km north of Gupis is Yasin village. From here it's about 40km to the valley's highest village, **Darkot**, beyond which is the Darkot Pass (a restricted trekking zone) into Chitral's upper Yarkhun Valley.

By the time he died in 1857, Yasini ruler Gohar Aman held everything down to Astor, but six years later Kashmiri soldiers retook it all, and massacred some 1200 people at Yasin village.

SLEEPING

Yasin village has an **NAPWD resthouse** (d Rs 300), and a few kilometres north at Taus is a small serai.

Ghizar

This ruggedly beautiful valley meets the Yasin Valley at **Gupis**, 40km up the Gilgit River from Gakuch (the valley is sometimes called Gupis too). Ghizar is the best place between Gilgit and Chitral to put up your feet. Gupis has a post office and digital phone exchange.

Just beyond Gupis (about 9km) is **Khalti Lake** (a natural dam on the Ghizar River) and the small village of **Jhandrot**. About a three-hour drive beyond Gupis, the road crosses the river at the village of **Chashi** and rises through a vast graveyard. About 60km from Gupis, where the valley opens wide, is **Phander** (fun-dr), a

picture-postcard place to break the journey. Flour milled locally from wheat grown in the low-terraced fields here has a reputation for producing excellent chapatis. Horses can be hired at Phander for local trips. If you want to linger, the places to do it are Phander and **Teru** (3100m high, 22km from Phander).

An hour on from Phander at **Gulagmuli** village, Hundrup Gol (*gol* meaning 'canyon'), with its world-class trout stream, gapes to the south. With the Shandur Pass area, this canyon forms Shandur-Hundrup National Park (see right).

A short distance (about 5km) beyond Teru is the small village of **Barsat**, the last village before the Shandur Pass. Beyond Barsat is the broad, picturesque **Langar Valley** where yaks graze and people cut peat for winter fuel.

SLEEPING & EATING

In Gupis, **Kakakhel Hotel** (tr Rs 300), with two basic triple rooms, is at the west end of the village. Central **Snow Leopard Inn** (☎ 05815-55070; s/d Rs 150/250) is a good restaurant with some very basic rooms in a separate building, behind and underneath the bazaar shops. Gupis also has an **NAPWD resthouse** (d Rs 300).

With great views upvalley to Khalti Lake as well as downvalley, the **PTDC Motel Gupis** (☎ 05813-58071; s/d Rs 1200/1500) is strikingly situated about 8km beyond Gupis. The spacious, comfortable rooms, decent restaurant and friendly manager combine with the views to make this a memorable place to stay. Down by the lake is **Lake View Hotel** (☎ 05813-58050; dm/d Rs 50/350), apparently a favourite with anglers. It has OK doubles with hot water but an atmosphere of neglect. The dorm has an outside bathroom and no hot water. At the nearby small bazaar of Jhandrot you can purchase seasonal fruit and vegetables.

About 2km east of Phander bazaar, overlooking Phander Lake, is a wonderfully sited **NAPWD resthouse** (d Rs 300). Across the road, **Over the Lake Hotel & Restaurant** (d in tent Rs 150, d Rs 300) has one tent and three comfortable and clean double rooms, which share a toilet and a cold-water tap. The owner, who is one of the *chowkidars* for the resthouse, can provide basic, inexpensive meals or cook your provisions. The **PTDC Motel Phander** (☎ 05813-58071; s/d Rs 1200/1500) is nicely situated by the lake and shares management with PTDC Motel Gupis. The usual spacious rooms, clean bedding and workable restaurant make it a good choice. At

the west end of Phander bazaar is the small seasonal **Tourist Inn** (d Rs 200) with cheaper beds in tents, and charpoys.

Teru has only a sublimely primitive **NAPWD resthouse** (d Rs 300), while at Barsat there is **Hotel Barsat** (thin mattress on wooden platform Rs 100) with rustic dorm accommodation and prices inclusive of dinner and breakfast. There are plenty of blankets – and you will need them in spring or autumn – but not much food. Bring your own provisions or enjoy the potatoes!

Shandur Pass

The 3810m Shandur Pass, 50km from Phander and 108km back to Gupis, is actually broad enough to have several lakes and a polo ground where the best players from Gilgit and Chitral meet every July, part of a three- or four-day festival of polo and merrymaking (see the boxed text, p276).

With Hundrup Gol, the Shandur Pass area forms the 518-sq-km **Shandur-Hundrup National Park** (see p68). It was declared a national park in 1993, partly in the hope of keeping an environmental lid on the polo tournament and the mess left by its 12,000-plus spectators. Visitors will find nothing to indicate its boundaries.

For details of the road and towns on the Chitral side of the Shandur, see p233.

BALTISTAN

Rising in Tibet, as one of the four sacred rivers, the Indus flows northwest almost to Gilgit, in a deep trough dividing the Himalaya from the Karakoram, and the Indian sub-continent from Asia. Before turning south it drains Baltistan, or 'Little Tibet', an arid land inhabited by people who today speak classical Tibetan and in the 17th century were the masters of Chitral, the NA and Ladakh.

Buddhism probably came to Baltistan in the 3rd century with Gandharan missionaries, and again when it was part of the Tibetan empire in the 8th and 9th centuries. Islam arrived in the 15th century, probably via Kashmir. Baltistan then consisted of several small kingdoms; the most important were Rundu and Skardu on the Indus, Khaplu, Shigar and Astor. Skardu's Maqpon dynasty gradually absorbed the others.

Near the Balti capital of Skardu the Indus is joined by the Shigar and Shyok Rivers, flowing down from the Baltoro Muztagh, a segment

of the Karakoram backbone containing the densest mass of glaciers and high mountains on earth, including 8611m K2, second only to Mt Everest. Naturally, there are unparalleled opportunities for trekking and mountaineering, and it is the escalating impacts of these activities that led to the establishment in 1993 of the 9738-sq-km **Central Karakoram National Park** (p68). This is by far Pakistan's biggest protected area, stretching north into Gojal, west to Haramosh and Rakaposhi, south almost to Skardu and Khaplu, and east to the crest of the High Karakoram.

Until an air route was opened from Islamabad in the 1960s, Baltistan remained almost medieval in its isolation. From 1972 to 1985, simultaneous with construction of the KKH, Pakistan Army Engineers cut a road up the Indus that is more formidable than most of the KKH.

The poorly defined northern end of the Line of Control tempted India in 1982 to send troops onto the Siachen Glacier in Baltistan's eastern corner, which Pakistan regards as part of the NA. The two countries have militarised the area, skirmishing repeatedly in what has come to be called 'the highest war on earth'.

But away from this off-limits zone, amid awesome scenery, are world-class treks, two national parks and villages that seem hardly touched by the 21st century. Nearly everyone is Shiite Muslim and not a woman is visible in Skardu. Men and women visitors alike should dress conservatively; shorts are out, and even bare arms put orthodox backs up. Many people of Shigar and Khaplu belong to the Nurbakhshi branch of Islam, whose women are unveiled and as open and brightly dressed as the Ismailis of Hunza.

The tourist season is April to October. Midsummer is hot in Skardu; it's also prime mountaineering season, so jeeps and hotel space may be hard to find. You can fly in from Islamabad even in winter, though schedules are very unpredictable and only a few hotels still operate then.

THE GILGIT TO SKARDU ROAD

Thirty-eight kilometres south of Gilgit, the road to Skardu (170km) leaves the KKH and crosses a bridge and a spit of rock into the upper Indus Valley. Ten minutes from the bridge is a perfect panorama of the entire Nanga Parbat massif, and shortly afterwards

there's a brief view ahead to Rakaposhi's south face. Fifteen minutes later the Indus is at its northernmost point. Another 15 minutes on (27km from the KKH) is the fuel stop of **Sassi**, a green island in a sea of crumbling rocks.

With its size, desolation and the nonstop foaming fury of the Indus, the gorge from here south is simply awesome. Where there are no bridges, people still cross by pulling themselves hand over hand in a sphincter-puckering contraption consisting of a platform hung from a pulley on a single cable, often hundreds of metres above the river. At the truck stop of **Thangus**, 53km from the KKH, look across the river for miners scraping out a living by burrowing into the mountain's quartz veins for crystals.

Another 7km further on is a popular travellers' stop at the basic Midway Hotel and, across the road, PTDC Astak, about 89km from Skardu. About 3½ hours from the KKH (2½ hours from Skardu) is the regional centre **Thowar**. Across the river is **Mendi**, capital of the ancient Rondu kingdom. Below **Basho** the canyon opens into the vast Skardu Valley, and an hour later you're in Skardu bazaar.

In good weather the 170km trip takes six to seven hours, with at least two police checkpoints. In rainy weather (eg summer storms and winter drizzle) multiple slides may block it completely.

Sleeping & Eating

PTDC Motel Astak (s/d Rs 1200/1500) If you need a room there are four very comfortable doubles here. Breakfast is served from 6.30am to 9.30am, lunch from 11am to 3pm and dinner from 6pm to 10pm. Mains cost Rs 90 to Rs 120, and a buffet lunch is Rs 350.

Midway Hotel & Restaurant (snacks Rs 20-50) Minibuses tend to stop for a toilet break here, where you can have a cup of tea, stretch your legs and have a look at a couple of rock shops. It's a good idea to bring your own snacks and water rather than rely on the offerings here.

Thowar has an **NAPWD resthouse** (d Rs 300).

SKARDU

☎ 05831

The Indus barely seems to move across the immense, flat Skardu Valley, 40km long, 10km wide and carpeted with silvery grey sand dunes. In between dust storms the land seems cleansed and freeze-dried, and the light is intense. The brown mountains give no hint

of the white giants beyond. Skardu, at 2290m, is on a ledge at the foot of Karpochu, a rock sticking 300m out of the plain.

The town has been a mountaineers' haunt for over 150 years, and a military headquarters since Partition, but it's also the base for many classic Karakoram treks (introduced in the *Trekking in Northern Pakistan* chapter; see p331), and even some good day trips. Midsummer is prime mountaineering season, when jeeps and hotel space may be hard to find. Walking and trekking can be pleasant even in October, when prices start to fall and the weather is clear and cold. From November to March, temperatures drop to freezing.

Hotels get booked out in the second week of August, when Skardu hosts a big tournament of Baltistan's polo teams to celebrate Pakistan's Independence Day.

Orientation

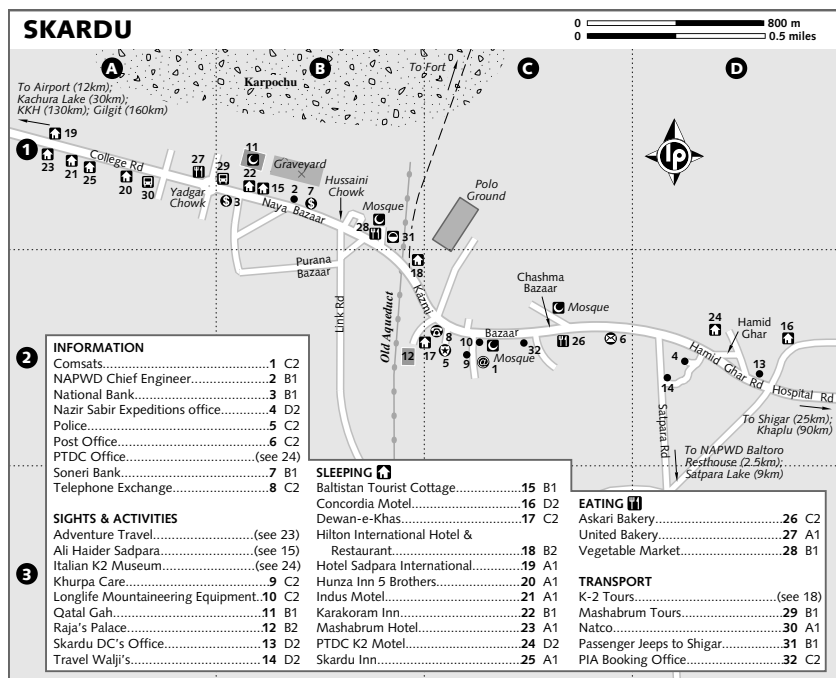
Along the main road is Naya (New) Bazaar and in the back streets the more interesting Purana (Old) Bazaar. Reference points are Yadgar Chowk, with a monument to the

uprising against the Maharaja of Kashmir, and Hussaini Chowk, near the 17th-century aqueduct. The cheaper hotels are near Yadgar. Government offices are well east or south of the bazaar. The airport is 12km west on the road to Gilgit.

Information

There is a **PTDC** (☎ 50291; PTDC K2 Motel), but you'll probably get as much information from your hotel. The **National Bank** (Naya Bazaar) near Yadgar Chowk will change cash and travellers cheques, but you can also change cash with moneychangers and other banks. There is no ATM in Skardu. Beside the government **telephone exchange** (Kazmi Bazaar; ☎ 7am-12.30am) is a police post. The post office, PIA and Pakistan army base are well east of the bazaar.

Theoretically, Baltistan's NAPWD rest-houses can be booked via the Skardu and Ghanche district chief engineers in Skardu, but you'd probably have better luck with the **chief engineer** (☎ 05811-50307) in Gilgit. Or try your luck without a booking, but be ready to camp in the gardens if necessary.



There is one internet café, **Comsats** (Kazmi Bazaar; per hr Rs 60) and numerous PCOs scattered throughout the town.

Sights & Activities

KARPOCHU

Ali Sher Khan probably built the **fort** (admission Rs 50) on the east end of this rock in the 17th century, but the Dogras trashed and rebuilt it. It's a half-hour climb to the partly reconstructed fort, from where there are fine valley views. The path starts beside the Hilton International Hotel. From the polo ground, there is a track around the base of the rock. Knock and yell for assistance if the fort door is closed.

You can get to the summit (and the ruins of more fortifications, and amazing views) by a steep, dry, three-hour scramble up the west end of the rock from near the Hotel Sadpara International. Take care, as this route has some false paths taking you near unprotected and dangerous drops.

QATAL GAH

The brightly painted complex behind the Baltistan Tourist Cottage includes a mosque, an imam barga (a hall used during Shiite festivals of Ashura and Chelum) and a huge graveyard. It's said to be a little replica of one in Iraq. Except during the two festivals, foreigners can visit if they're conservatively dressed.

ITALIAN K2 MUSEUM

The huge tent in the garden of the PTDC K2 Motel was set up in 2004 to commemorate the first successful summiting of K2 by an Italian expedition in 1954. There are numerous interesting photos documenting this expedition as well as previous expeditions into remote Baltistan. Well worth a look.

TREKKING & TOURING

Many people come to Skardu already booked on an adventure; however, it's certainly possible to organise or join a trek or jeep safari once you are here. Virtually everyone running a hotel also has family connections in the adventure travel industry. The following agencies/guides are recommended:

Adventure Travel (☎ 50935, 03469558819; www.adventure-touroperator.com; 1 College Rd) Organises numerous treks, including fixed departures (check the website), and has a relaxing 'base camp' at Kachura Lake. The office is on the main road near the entrance to Mashabrum Hotel.

Ali Haider Sadpara (☎ 53046; alihaider_mountain_guide@yahoo.com) A small operation for budget travellers with gear available for hire. Make inquiries at the Baltistan Tourist Cottage.

Khurpa Care (☎ 55140; support@khourpacare.org; 1st fl, Abbas Market, Kazmi Bazaar) Trekkers and climbers should avail themselves of the organisation dedicated to the welfare of the Balti porters, known as *khurpas* (Balti for carrier). Pick up tips on how to hire *khurpas* responsibly, or ensure your trekking company does likewise, as well as donate equipment or money.

Longlife Mountaineering Equipment (☎ 50583; Kazmi Bazaar) For last-minute equipment sales and hire, but don't expect top-shelf gear.

Travel Walji's (☎ 50935; www.waljis.com; Satpara Rd) Virtually a branch of the Gilgit office, this is a good place to inquire about jeep safaris across the Deosai Plains.

Sleeping

BUDGET

Baltistan Tourist Cottage (☎ 52707; btcqibal@yahoo.com; Naya Bazaar; dm/s/d/tr Rs 70/100/200/250; ☑) Easily the best budget hotel in town with clean rooms, good food and manager Mohammad Iqbal, a great source of budget-minded help. This is also the home of Ali Haider, a recommended mountain guide.

Hunza Inn 5 Brothers (☎ 52570; College Rd; d Rs 200) The run-down, rather filthy rooms with squat toilet and cold shower make this option a last resort.

Karakoram Inn (☎ 55438; Naya Bazaar; s/d Rs 200/400) This hotel, close to Yadgar Chowk, has unexceptional doubles and a restaurant is attached. Not very welcoming to foreigners.

Hilton International Hotel & Restaurant (☎ 55581; Naya Bazaar; s/d/tr Rs 300/500/1000) The cheekily named Hilton is not quite five star and the rooms have deteriorated and are overpriced. Be careful of the switches and wiring if you do stay here.

Hotel Sadpara International (☎ 52951; College Rd; s/d Rs 300/600) Unfortunately, the simple rooms, a few doubles with TV, and restaurant are all looking very neglected and unkempt.

Three kilometres south of the bazaar is the **NAPWD Baltoro resthouse** (d Rs 300), but public transport is nonexistent.

MIDRANGE

Indus Motel (☎ 52608; indusmotel_83@yahoo.ca; College Rd; s/d Rs 400/600; ☑) The Indus, west of Yadgar Chowk, is a great-value midrange hotel with spotless doubles, some with squat toilet and others with sit-down flush toilet. There's a

VIP room out the back with TV, carpet and good views for Rs 700. The restaurant here is very good and the staff are very experienced with travel and trekking information. They also do money exchange.

Skardu Inn (☎ 54086; College Rd; s/d Rs 450/650) This skinny, high-rise hotel was being renovated at the time of research and the rooms with TVs should be worth inspecting.

Concordia Motel (☎ 52582; fax 52547; Hospital Rd; s/d Rs 1000/1200, s/d deluxe Rs 1800/2000; 📺) A little further from the bazaar and with a similar view of the Indus River to the PTDC, Concordia has good-value standard rooms, though check the mattress for comfort. The deluxe rooms in the new wing are fabulous, with excellent views. The management here are very helpful and can organise jeep safaris, day trips and overnight jaunts.

our pick Dewan-e-Khas (☎ 55494; www.dewanekhas.com.pk; Raja Rd; s/d Rs 1000/1500) This friendly hotel is one of the few in Skardu to remain open year-round. The plush, carpeted rooms are warm and comforting with satellite TV and bathrooms featuring bathtubs and showers. There are only four double rooms at present but there are plans for expansion. A major advantage of staying here is the excellent restaurant (see below), which is probably the best in Skardu.

PTDC K2 Motel (☎ 50291; fax 50293; s/d Rs 1350/1800, s/d deluxe Rs 1960/2350) Most of the rooms are huge and comfortable, though the plumbing is diabolical so check the shower before you settle in. The location is remarkable, off Hamid Ghar Rd and with uninterrupted views of the Indus River, though it's a long walk from the bazaar. There is an OK restaurant, a very interesting mountaineering museum, and a tourist information desk.

Mashabrum Hotel (☎ 50395; hotelmashabrum@yahoo.com; College Rd; s/d Rs 1650/1850) The Mashabrum makes quite a statement in Skardu, especially the impressive lobby with adjoining restaurant and gift shop. The numerous rooms are functional and comfortable with TVs and a balcony but already looking a little tired in this relatively new hotel.

Eating

The hotels have the best restaurants in town and most do an adequate job.

our pick Dewan-e-Khas (☎ 55494; www.dewanekhas.com.pk; Raja Rd; mains Rs 50-200; 🕒 8am-10pm) This recommended hotel has a great restaurant

featuring a small selection of Balti dishes in addition to the extensive Pakistani, Chinese and Continental offerings. Try the excellent local soup of barley, black bean and lentil in mutton broth, and the whole fried trout if it's available. There are also barbecue and several vegetarian dishes.

Mashabrum Hotel (☎ 50395; hotelmashabrum@yahoo.com; College Rd; mains Rs 120-350; 🕒 7am-10pm) This large hotel has Skardu's most extensive Pakistani, Chinese and Continental menu, featuring speciality dishes such as the mouth-watering, slow-cooked beef *nahari*, mutton leg roast and chicken *handi* (in gravy).

Other decent hotel restaurants include the budget **Baltistan Tourist Cottage** (mains Rs 50-80) with good chips, omelettes and mutton *karai*, and the midrange **Indus Motel** (mains Rs 60-100) with a tasty chicken rice pilau (Rs 75), as well as Pakistani and Chinese standards.

Skardu is hard work for vegetarians, but there's fruit in summer, and many general stores and bakeries. **United Bakery** (Yadgar Chowk) has baked goods, but also plenty of packaged groceries, drinks etc. Head to **Askari Bakery** (Chashma Bazaar) for fresher bread, cakes and biscuits.

Getting There & Away

AIR

PIA (☎ 50284, airport 58150; Chasma Bazaar) flies Boeing 737s to Islamabad (Rs 2700) daily at 11.20am (weather permitting), with views right across the Karakoram. The Islamabad to Skardu flight departs at 9.30am and arrives at 10.30am. Head out to the airport at least two hours before departure.

BUS

In good weather the 170km trip to/from Gilgit takes six to seven hours. For the best views, sit on the left-hand side heading for Gilgit. In rainy weather, multiple rockfalls may block the road for days. Rawalpindi-bound buses will take at least 20 hours and probably stop in Islamabad, but you should confirm this.

K-2 Tours (☎ 55582; Hussaini Chowk) has minibuses for Gilgit (Rs 240) departing at 9am, 11am and 1pm. For Khaplu (Rs 100, three hours) a 16-seat Land Cruiser departs at 10am. For Rawalpindi (Rs 850), at least one bus departs daily at 11am.

Mashabrum Tours (☎ 55195; Yadgar Chowk) has minibuses to Gilgit (Rs 200) departing at 8am, 10am and noon. To Rawalpindi, a Coaster

(Rs 850) departs at 11am and a bus (Rs 800) departs at 4pm. For Khaplu (Rs 100) there's a 9am departure.

Natco (☎ 52188; College Rd) is the best choice for the long-haul trip to Pindi because of the better buses and because they take two drivers. For Pindi, the VIP Coaster (Rs 1100) departs at noon and the VIP deluxe (Rs 850) departs at 3pm. To Gilgit (Rs 125 to Rs 190) departures start at 9am. For Khaplu (Rs 100) there is at least one departure at 8am.

FOUR-WHEEL DRIVE

Four-wheel drives hang out at Yadgar Chowk, available for anything from local trips to multiday safaris across the Deosai Plains. Private 'special' jeep hire is also available from many hotels and adventure travel companies, and the following is an example of costs at the time of research: Askole Rs 4500; Astor Rs 8000; Gilgit via Deosai Plains Rs 10,000; Hushe Rs 4000; Khaplu Rs 3000; Satpara Lake Rs 600 (Rs 1000 for all-day fishing trip); and Shigar Rs 1000.

Getting Around

Decrepit passenger taxis ply the bazaars, and a taxi to the airport is about Rs 200.

AROUND SKARDU

Satpara Lake & Buddha

Nine kilometres south of Skardu is beautiful Satpara Lake, brilliant blue and stocked with rainbow trout, but no longer pristine. The construction of two power stations as well as a dam that will raise the level of the lake was still very much under way at the time of research. It is expected that most of the vegetated foreshore and the picturesque island will be submerged. The hotels have already moved up the hill. The walk to the lake is a dry, moderately steep three-hour (8km to 9km) climb up Hargisar Nala from the bazaar. Or you can take the road which is currently choked with trucks and construction vehicles. Ultimately, there will be a paved road to the lake and continuing to the Deosai Plains.

Across Hargisar Nala from the track is a Buddha relief carved on a rock in about the 7th century. About 200m beyond the Baltoro resthouse turning and a cluster of government offices, and just past an Aga Khan Rural Support Program (AKRSP) office, turn right on a small path. Near the end of this is a footbridge across the *nala*, and a track up

to the Buddha. There and back is a detour of about an hour.

A road, parts of it already paved, runs past the lake and 6km to 8km on to Satpara village. Roughly 25km beyond the village, the track crosses the Ali Malik Mar pass onto the Deosai Plains. The most popular trekking route goes from Skardu up Burji Nala, to the west of Hargisar; see Lonely Planet's *Trekking in the Karakoram & Hindukush* for further details on these and other treks.

ACTIVITIES

Apart from just sitting back and enjoying the lake with a meal, you could go boating, fishing or walking. At Sadpara Lake Inn you can hire a **rowboat** (per hr Rs 250). The hotel also runs **motorboat trips** (half/full boatload Rs 400/800). **Fishing gear** (rental per hr Rs 30) is cheap to hire, but the cost of a fishing licence (which can be arranged by hotel management) is US\$10 for foreigners. Trekking equipment hire and guides can also be arranged at Sadpara Lake Inn.

SLEEPING & EATING

Hotels are open from May to October.

Lakeview Motel Sadpara (☎ 03465204434; Deosai Rd; camp sites Rs 60, s/d Rs 300/600) The new building with four double rooms and a soon-to-be-completed restaurant is above the lake on Deosai Rd, but at the time of research it was still operating out of the modest old hotel closer to the lake. The friendly manager keeps the place spotless and is able to organise treks, porters, guides and jeeps to the Deosai Plains.

Lakeside Inn (☎ 05831-58220; camp sites Rs 200, 2-person tents Rs 500, s/d Rs 600/1200) The Lakeside also has a new hotel under construction, and it's next door to the Lakeview Motel on Deosai Rd. In the meantime it is using a few shabby former PTDC 'huts'. While it is still above water, there's pretty good Pakistani and Chinese food available with excellent views in the lakeside restaurant (mains Rs 60 to Rs 350), where trout from the lake is sometimes on the menu.

PTDC Motel Satpara (☎ 05831-50291; c/o PTDC K2 Motel, Skardu; s/d Rs 1200/1500) Dominating the north end of the lake, the large motel looks finished but was not open for business at the time of writing. The word is it will open soon, though it appears to be waiting for the lake to rise or at least the dam wall to be finished.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Other than the walk described previously (p290), you can hire a taxi from Skardu for about Rs 400 for the round trip. Be sure to ask for a look at the Buddha on the way and negotiate a small fee for waiting around at the lake. A jeep will cost about Rs 600.

Kachura Lake

Thirty kilometres west of Skardu, off the road to Gilgit, this small lake is known mostly for the expensive **Shangri-La Tourist Resort** (☎ 05831-58501; s/d from Rs 5000/7500) with its ersatz Chinese architecture and a DC-3 fuselage converted into a café (not operating at the time of research). This resort purports to be luxury, and though it has a wonderful setting and the cabins are comfortable, overall it falls short of expectations. The Rs 200 entry pass deters day visitors and those who haven't made a prior booking.

A smaller and more intimate resort overlooking the picturesque lake is **Tourist Camping Resort** (☎ 03469558819; adventure@isb.comsats.net.pk), with a dorm, tents and funky outdoor bathroom. This is the base for **Adventure Travel's** (www.adventure-touroperator.com) trekking in the region.

There are **petroglyphs** along the streamside trail up Shigarthang Lungma (*lungma* is Balti for a tributary valley), above the lake. This is an alternative to Satpara Lake for trekking the Deosai Plains (Kachura to Astor in four to six days).

Basho Valley

About 45km kilometres west of Skardu, off the road to Gilgit, is a small mountain community of several villages strung along a secluded valley that rises to the Deosai Plains. 'Basho' is said to mean 'grape' and refers to the valley's productive fruit growing. This area is quite remote and it is recommended you contact Mr Younus Shehzad (shehzad_basho@hotmail.com) of the Basho Development Organisation for information on the several treks available and village visits. Treks, such as the Naqpo Namsul La, go at least as high as the Deosai plateau and should only be attempted with adequate planning and equipment and, most importantly, local advice and assistance. The season is July to September.

DEOSAI PLAINS

The Deosai Plains, about 50km southwest of Skardu, comprise an immense, uninhab-

ited grassy plateau, which borders Indian-administered Kashmir. Nowhere are the plains lower than about 4000m; they're only accessible for about four months each year, and are snowbound for the rest.

A track across the plains has become a popular jeep trek route between Skardu and the Astor Valley (see p268), and in 1993 some 3630 sq km were declared the Deosai Plains National Park (see p69) out of concern for its subalpine vegetation, alpine meadows and Himalayan brown bears. The region also supports the endangered snow leopard and Indian wolf, plus Himalayan ibex and golden marmots.

From July to September, you can trek from the Astor Valley to Skardu in as little as a week. Intrepid mountain bikers have done Astor to Skardu in five days. Go prepared for mosquitoes, cold weather and sudden storms. A jeep can make the journey from Gilgit to Skardu via Astor, Chilim Gah and Deosai in 16 to 18 hours, with an overnight stop in Astor village.

Routes across Deosai are detailed in Lonely Planet's *Trekking in the Karakoram & Hindukush*.

SHIGAR

One of two routes from Skardu into the High Karakoram (the other is the Shyok Valley), the lush and yawning Shigar Valley was once a separate kingdom. Shigar's original settlers may have come over the Karakoram from Yarkand, in Xinjiang.

Shady Shigar village, where the Bauma Lungma empties into the Shigar River, is as far as most nontrekkers go. The main landmark here is **Fong Khar**, the former Raja of Shigar's fort-palace, now a luxury hotel (see p292) and **museum** (admission Rs 300, free for hotel guests) showcasing the impressive rustic architecture and fascinating lifestyle of Shigar's rich and famous. The timber-and-stone palace has natural rock foundations and merges almost seamlessly into the mountainside, on top of which are the ruins of an earlier fort, **Sinigma Khar**. It's a five-minute walk from the road, up the left side of the stream, and has a lovely restaurant worth investigating even if you're not staying the night.

Visitors should find the time to stroll around the peaceful and attractive village to meet the locals and view the beautiful wooden **mosques**: Khilingrong beside Fong

Khar, the larger Khanqa-e-Moallah and 14th-century Amburiq. Along the Shigar Valley wall, downriver of Bauma Lungma, are recently excavated **Buddhist ruins**, including monastery foundations and rock inscriptions from as early as the 5th century.

For views of the Shigar Valley, walk up Bauma Lungma for 20 minutes and double back up to the thumb of rock above the village.

Sleeping & Eating

NAPWD resthouse (d Rs 300) Shigar village has a very pleasant NAPWD resthouse, which has good walk-in odds in May/June and September/October.

Space (☎ 05831-58710; camping Rs 250, d Rs 700-1000) Follow the signs towards the Indus River from Shigar village for 2km to this hotel and camping ground. It's rather remote and, with just three basic rooms, overpriced for what it offers. There is a restaurant (lunch/dinner Rs 300/325) with a set Pakistani menu.

ourpick Shigar Fort Residence (☎ 05831-66107; www.shigarfort.com; d from Rs 3850; 📍) The Aga Khan Trust for Culture has overseen the remarkable restoration of this stunning fort-palace into a singular historic getaway and informative museum. As you might expect, the rooms in the rambling palace are all very different, with enough authenticity to make you feel privileged, if not regal, and enough 21st-century comforts to make you, well, comfortable. For those who prefer a little more modernity, the rooms in the garden house have satellite TVs. There's a romantic garden, a bubbling mountain stream, a superb restaurant and attentive professional staff. Oh, and room to park your helicopter. Even if you can't stay the night, a visit to the restaurant (mains Rs 200 to Rs 350) is recommended. Sit under the vine trellis and try the *palapo* (described as local pasta with apricot, almond and walnut sauce) or the walnuty and equally tasty chicken *fasanjoon*.

Getting There & Away

The village is 32km from Skardu. From 11am to about 2pm, cargo jeeps go from Hussaini Chowk and surrounding alleys for about Rs 100. A special hire will cost around Rs 1000.

KHAPLU

About 35km above Skardu, the Indus – locally called the Sind – is joined by the Shyok River

(pronounced as one syllable, roughly 'shok'). The Shyok is the axis of Khaplu, the biggest and richest of Baltistan's ancient kingdoms, and the scenery is superb.

The Shyok and Indus basins above their junction (embracing ancient Khaplu, sometimes spelled Khapalu, and the four smaller principalities of Keris, Parkutta, Tolti and Kharmang) comprise Ghanche district, with Khaplu village as headquarters.

Khaplu's Nurbakhshi Muslims are open-hearted but they're shy of foreigners and can be touchy about being photographed. Little English is spoken and even Urdu is a foreign language.

Allow at least a full day around Khaplu village, even if you're not a walker, and be prepared for cooler weather than Skardu's.

Skardu to Khaplu

On the roadside west of **Gol**, an attractive oasis of wheat terraces and fruit trees about 35km from Skardu, are boulders carved with Buddhist motifs, old script and modern graffiti. Half an hour on, the road crosses the Indus and joins the Shyok. Opposite is **Keris**, at the mouth of a valley that was once a separate kingdom under a branch of Khaplu's royal line.

Ancient Khaplu starts past the bridge at **Ghowari**, first of a series of prosperous-looking villages strung like pennants along a harsh and rather overpowering setting. Near **Karphok** the road is carved into perpendicular walls. Twenty minutes on, huge **Thalle Lungma** gives a glimpse of the Masherbrum Range; up this valley is a three- or four-day trek from Khasumik over the 4572m Thalle La to Shigar. See Lonely Planet's *Trekking in the Karakoram & Hindukush* for details.

From Khaplu village, it's still 70km to 80km up the Shyok to the Line of Control, but the road is closed to foreigners and you are unlikely to get past the police checkpoint at Khaplu even if you are just headed to the village of Surmo for a view of Masherbrum.

Khaplu Village

☎ 05832

This handsome, 2600m-high village of timber-and-stone houses and precision-made dry-stone walls climbs up a wide alluvial fan beneath an arc of jagged granite walls. Ingenious irrigation has made it a shady, fertile oasis. As you climb its twisting track, the icy peaks of the Masherbrum Range rise on

the other side of the valley. It's hard to imagine a more majestic setting.

A stony track climbs to the lower bazaar (with PCO, shops and a National Bank); a five-minute walk. Half an hour beyond, at a fork in the road, is an elegant but run-down traditional-style house, where royal descendants live. Twenty minutes up the left fork is the polo ground, and uphill from that is the **Khaplu Palace**, currently under restoration by the Aga Khan Trust for Culture. If you get lost, the local word for it is *khar*, or try 'Raja palace'. The restoration plan includes the provision of quality accommodation and a museum, similar to Shigar's former fort-palace (see opposite).

Twenty minutes further up is **Chakhchun village**, with a carved wooden mosque whose foundations were supposedly laid in the 16th century when the people embraced Islam. Non-Muslims may not enter this or other mosques here. There are several more villages in Ganse Lungma above Chakhchun.

SLEEPING & EATING

Khaplu Inn (☎ 50148; s/d Rs 200/400) In the lower bazaar, with basic rooms with squat toilets and bucket hot water. It has a basic curry and chapati restaurant.

K-7 Hotel & Restaurant (s/d Rs 400/600) On the track up to Chakhchun, an aching hour's walk from the road, this hotel is open from June to September with clean and comfortable rooms, basic food and good views.

Karakoram Lodge (☎ 51132; www.baltistantours.com; s/d Rs 800/1000) This large hotel boasts magnificent views in addition to its spacious rooms and better-than-average restaurant (mains Rs 80 to Rs 150). It's a 10-minute walk uphill from the bazaar.

PTDC Khapalu Motel (☎ 50146; s/d Rs 1550/1850) This comfortable motel overlooks the river just beyond the turn-off to the village. The rooms are clean and spacious, and there's a reliable if boring restaurant (mains Rs 80 to Rs 150). You may get permission to camp in the grounds and use a hot shower.

Just before you reach the PTDC Khapalu Motel there is an **NAPWD resthouse** (d Rs 300).

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Natco buses depart Skardu at 8am and cost Rs 100. Mashabrum Tours has one bus departing Skardu at 9am (also Rs 100). K-2 Tours leaves Skardu at 10am (Rs 100). Buses depart Khaplu bazaar between 8am and 9am. From Skardu's

Naya Bazaar, cargo jeeps depart from about 11am (Rs 70 to Rs 100). The 103km trip takes about three hours by cargo jeep.

HUSHE & MASHERBRUM VIEWS

Those who would like to see the gorgeous 7821m massif of Masherbrum without trekking to it could try and walk up the Shyok Valley road past the police checkpoint and the turn-off to Hushe Valley towards Surmo. Although at the time of writing the police at Khaplu were not allowing this little excursion, it is worth attempting with a local guide. As the Hushe Valley opens up, Masherbrum looms into view at its head, an unforgettable sight. It's a flat, hot 6km walk past Brok Lungma and Yuchung village to the best viewpoint, at a turn in the road. Surmo, 3km on, is usually as far as foreigners can go towards the Siachen Glacier.

See p362 for details, and Lonely Planet's *Trekking in the Karakoram & Hindukush* for further options in and around the Hushe Valley.

Hushe Valley

Hushe (hu-shay) is the trekkers' route to Masherbrum, and an alternative to Shigar for mountaineers heading towards Concordia. For a close look at Masherbrum you can take a four-day (three-night) walk on a moderate grade from Khaplu to Hushe and back, with stops at Kande, Hushe and Kande again.

HUMBROK

These beautiful, spring-fed pastures west of, and high above, Hushe are easy to reach on a day hike (about four hours up and two hours back). From Hushe, cross to the west side of the river on the lower of two bridges and walk for half an hour up Humbrok Nala. Cross it on a wooden bridge and follow the north bank all the way to the pastures. For details on an overnight alternative, including a side trip, see p362.

SLEEPING

Camping sites abound. Machulu has an **NAPWD resthouse** (d Rs 300). At Kande you can stay at the ultra-basic K6 Hotel & Restaurant above the jeep road to the west.

In Hushe there's basic accommodation at the Mashabrum Inn, and several camp sites where you can purchase hot food, including Lela Peak Camping, the small K6 & K7 Camping Place, Ghandoghoro La Camping Place and Ghandughoro Camping Place.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

A suspension bridge crosses the Shyok just upriver of Khaplu, and a wide jeep road goes all the way up the Hushe Valley to Hushe village. Cargo jeeps make the 148km trip to Hushe from Skardu, though they'll have little room for someone getting on near Khaplu. A special hire from Skardu will cost about Rs 4000. From Khaplu a special hire to Kande costs Rs 2000, from where you may be able to find a jeep going to Hushe. In midsummer you might get a lift with a climbing party. But always be prepared to walk the gently climbing 40km from Khaplu to Hushe village – about four hours up the west side of the valley via Saling to Machulu, 3½ hours more to Kande, then 3½ hours on to Hushe village.

HUNZA & NAGYR

The Hunza Valley is the centrepiece of the KKH. The continuous sweep from the Hunza River through mighty, grey-brown scree slopes and up to snowy peaks, including 7788m Rakaposhi, is a reminder of the river's deep slice across the Karakoram. In spring the famous fruit trees erupt in white blossom, and autumn is a riot of yellow poplars, reddening orchards and golden maize drying on rooftops.

Snaking across the slopes is Hunza's hallmark, the precision-made stone channels on which the valley's life depends. Carrying glacier meltwater to tiny stone-walled fields 8km away, they have transformed a 'mountain desert' with few horizontal surfaces into a breadbasket. Their paths on the high rock faces are revealed by thin lines of vegetation, and patches of green are visible on the most improbable walls and ledges. Irrigation sustains orchards of Hunza's famous apricots, as well as peaches, plums, apples, grapes, cherries and walnuts (for more information on Hunza cuisine see the boxed text, p304). Irrigation also waters the fields of maize and wheat, and the ever-present poplars, a fast-growing source of fodder, firewood and timber.

Added to the beauty is a kind of mythology about Hunza's isolation and purity, spawned by James Hilton's 1933 novel *Lost Horizon*, nourished in films about the lost kingdom of Shangri-la, and fostered in the 1970s by media

stories of extraordinary health and longevity. The KKH itself has put an end to Hunza's isolation, and while the Garden of Eden image ignores a rather bloody history, this hardly alters Hunza's appeal.

'Hunza' is commonly (and inaccurately) used for the entire broad valley. In fact, two former princely states, Hunza and Nagyr (nah-gr), with shared language and ancestry, face one another across the river. Hunza refers to the villages on the north bank from Khizerabad to Ghareghat (or sometimes as far as Nazimabad). Gojal is sometimes described as part of Hunza too.

Smaller but more populous Nagyr occupies the entire south side of the valley and the north side around Chalt, and includes Rakaposhi and the lower Hispar Glacier. Although it enjoys less media fame, Nagyr is home to some of the best treks in the Karakoram (many of them described in Lonely Planet's *Trekking in the Karakoram & Hindukush*).

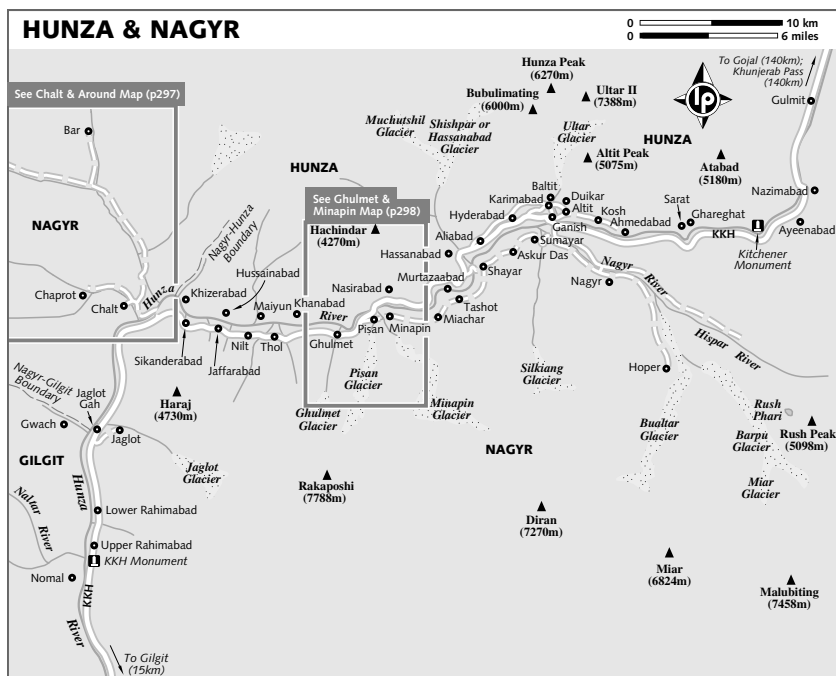
Most people here still think of themselves as subjects of their respective *mirs*, rather than as Pakistanis. And though they are very hospitable to foreigners, even in remote areas, they are not always so fond of the down-land Pakistanis.

The two kingdoms also have a common language, Burushaski, but nobody is sure where it came from. Wakhi is spoken in upper Hunza (Gojal); in Lower Nagyr (in common with Gilgit), Shina is also used. Many people speak Urdu and English.

Hunza and Nagyr also once shared the Shiite faith, but Hunza is now almost entirely Ismaili (except for Murtazaabad, Ganish and a few other pockets).

GILGIT TO CHALT

As you enter the Hunza Valley the view is dominated by the 7168m Kampire Dior, located 70km north on the crest of the Karakoram. About 35 minutes (on the bus) from Gilgit is a monument to KKH workers. In Urdu on the base are the words of the philosopher-poet Allama Mohammed Iqbal: 'God has given humans integrity, faith, and a strong mind, and if they set themselves to it they can kick a mountain to powder or stop a river in its tracks.' Unfortunately, the immediate area surrounding the monument is an eyesore. Across the river is the Naltar Valley.



Ten minutes on are a clutch of cafés and a road maintenance base called Jaglot Gah, about 42km from Gilgit. Serais here have charpoy and meat and rice meals. Across the river is Gwach Nala and the KKH's precarious precursor, a now-abandoned jeep road that follows the oldest caravan trails. Ten minutes on is the Chalt turn-off.

CHALT

Chalt sits in a bowl at the mouths of two large valley systems, the only part of Nagyr north of the river. Chaprot Valley is probably the most beautiful *nala* close to the KKH in the NA. Safdar Ali, *mir* of Hunza at the time of the British invasion, said Chalt and Chaprot were 'more precious to us than the strings of our wives' pyjamas'. Excellent treks start here and in the Bar Valley; see Lonely Planet's *Trekking in the Karakoram & Hindukush* for further details on these and other treks.

From the KKH, a well-maintained road crosses the river and runs 3km to Chalt, a small bazaar with shops, a post office and a telephone exchange.

Activities

SHORT TREKS AROUND CHALT

Ghashumaling

This is a lovely area in a lower Chaprot tributary, with easy trails and mulberry, peach, apple and walnut orchards. Walks can take from two hours to all day. From Chalt bazaar take the path past the high school and up the south side of the valley. At the head of the canyon, about 12km up, are pine forests and the small Kachel Glacier.

Chaprot Valley

From the bazaar, cross the Chaprot River and turn left. About 150m up, take the left fork, which climbs the north side of Chaprot Valley. It's an hour's walk to Chaprot village, and three to four hours from there along a mule track through summer villages to pastures at the head of the valley. In summer, horses can be hired at Chaprot.

Bar Valley

From the bazaar, cross the river, turn left and at the next fork keep right into Bar Valley (also called Garamasai or Budalas

A TALE OF SIBLINGS & RIVALRIES

The origins of the separate Hunza and Nagyr kingdoms are obscured by legend. However, they probably arose from a marriage of royal cousins in the 15th century that produced twin sons, Maglot and Girkis, later to become the rulers, respectively, of Nagyr and Hunza. From infancy, so the story goes, the little princes had a mutual hatred, and as kings they led their people into frequent bloody battles with one another. Over the centuries their royal descendants have continued the feud, even as their families intermarried.

The valley's modest agricultural output had for years been supplemented by raids on caravans between Kashgar and Kashmir, and by slave trading. Yaqub Beg, who proclaimed an independent Turkestan republic in Xinjiang in the 1860s, put a temporary end to the raids. This economic blow led Hunza and Nagyr to declare allegiance to the British-aligned Maharaja of Kashmir.

In 1886 Safdar Ali became *mir* of Hunza in accordance with the valley's age-old custom – by murdering his father and three brothers. Within two years he resumed the caravan raids and played host at Baltit Fort (see p300) to a party of Russian 'explorers'. British India, spreading north from Kashmir, had grown aware of Russia expanding into Central Asia, and Hunza now began to look like a loose cannon on deck.

Britain decided to improve supply lines from Kashmir and reopen its Agency at Gilgit, and inevitably became entangled in Hunza and Nagyr's bloody politics. Within five years a British-Kashmiri force had occupied the valley and installed its own *mir*, Nazim Khan, in Hunza. A British garrison remained at Aliabad until 1897. Nazim Khan ruled until his death in 1938, and his son Ghazan Khan until 1945.

Within weeks of the formal partition of India and Pakistan in August 1947, an uprising in Gilgit against the Maharaja of Kashmir, who had opted to join India, brought Hunza and Nagyr into Pakistan. They remained semiautonomous until 1974 when they were merged with Pakistan, reducing their rulers to district officials.

Many older Hunzakuts still fondly recall their last *mir*, Muhammad Jamal Khan, who died two years after the formal dissolution of the old princely states. His son Ghazanfar Ali still occupies the royal house in Karimabad.

Valley). After 3km a path continues up the west side of the valley while the jeep road crosses a bridge to Budalas. On the east side, 3km upstream from the bridge, the road crosses **Shutinbar Nala**. It's a steep 8km to 10km up Shutinbar to a glacier at its head. There are abandoned ruby mines in the canyon.

Further up Bar Valley is Torbuto Das, about 13km from Chalt at the confluence of the Daintar and Garamasai (or Tutu Uns) Nalas. West past Daintar village and about 9km from Torbuto Das, in a meadow called **Taloybari**, local herders have set up a simple camping area, with food available. This is a long day's walk from Chalt; jeeps to Daintar can also be hired in Chalt.

Sleeping & Eating

Chalt Tourist Inn (☎ 05821-59192; Chowk Bazaar; d Rs 400) is located in Chalt Chowk Bazaar and is easily the best option in Chalt, with clean rooms, a reliable restaurant (mains Rs 60 to Rs 100) and a friendly manager who can provide

information about walks in the area. Across the bridge is the very basic **Kepal Inn** (r Rs 100) with one room and the mere possibility of a cold shower. In a walled apricot orchard, an **NAPWD resthouse** (camp sites Rs 50, d standard/VIP Rs 300/500) has a couple of rooms.

Getting There & Away

Chalt-bound minibuses depart in the early morning from lower Khazana (Bank) Rd in Gilgit for about Rs 50, returning the next morning between 6am and 9am.

CHALT TO GHULMET

Near Chalt, the KKH runs along the edge of the 'Asian Plate', into which the Indian subcontinent ploughed 50 million years ago, creating the Himalayan chain. There's no simple line, but roughly speaking Asia is to the north and the remnants of a chain of volcanic islands trapped between Asia and India are to the south (see the boxed text, p64).

Eastwards the KKH arches around fertile **Sikanderabad**. Scratched into the walls hun-

dreds of metres high on the north side of the valley is the 'road' that was once Hunza's link to the outside.

At **Nilt** are the ravine and the site of the fort where the 1891 British invasion nearly stalled. East of Nilt in **Thol** (pronounced tole) is a green-roofed shrine to Shah Wali, a Shiite preacher from Afghanistan who settled here in the late 18th century.

At several points on the road there are splendid views of Rakaposhi, culminating in **Ghulmet** (not to be confused with Gulmit village in Gojal). At the east end of Ghulmet is touristy Ghulmet Nala, above which Rakaposhi rises in an unobscured sweep. Take tea, take in the view and peruse the shops selling crystals and 9/11 commemorative carpets

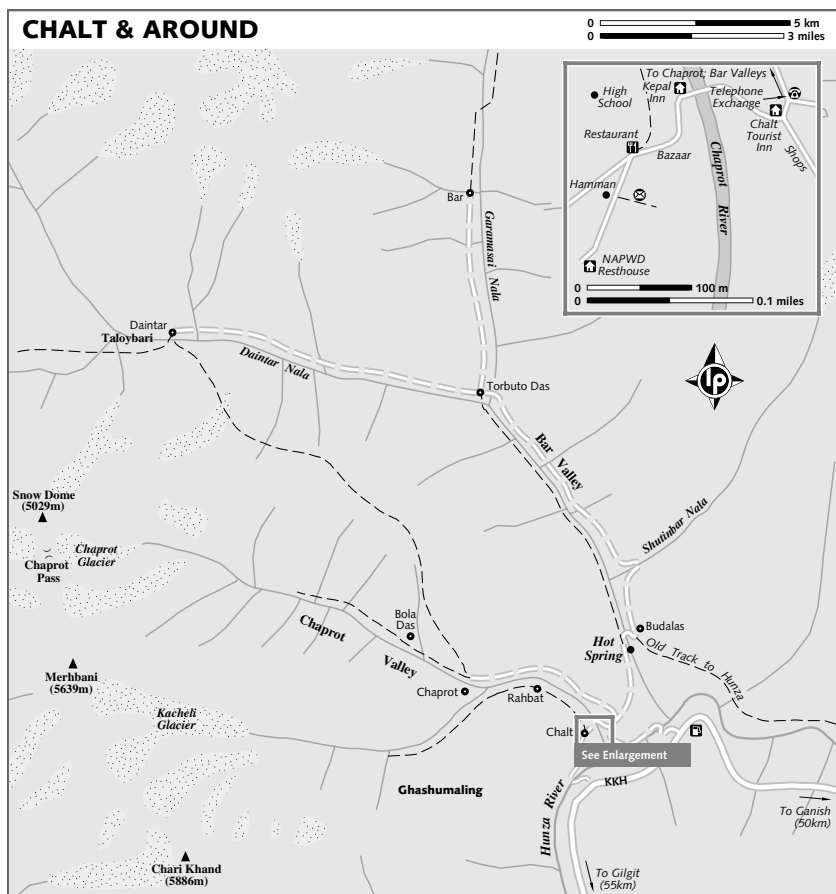
from Peshawar. Up the *nala* is a base camp for a 1979 Japanese assault on Rakaposhi. The views are outstanding, but it's a long slog with no water and poor camping. The trail begins behind the hamlet of Yal, east of the *nala*.

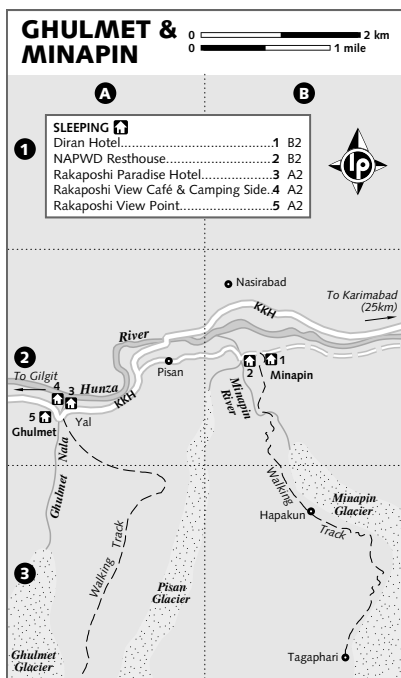
Sleeping & Eating

In Ghulmet there are several bright and tacky places crowded around the KKH bridge over Ghulmet Nala offering refreshments and accommodation.

Rakaposhi View Point (☎ 05821-59163; camping Rs 50-100) Offers a few camp sites next to the busy restaurant (mains Rs 100 to Rs 200) with colourful umbrellas, picnic tables and gift shop.

Rakaposhi View Café & Camping Side (☎ 05821-59122; camping Rs 50-100) Choose from dusty camp





sites up top or better secluded sites under the trees below. Provides a night security guard for campers.

Rakaposhi Paradise Hotel (☎ 05821-58146; d Rs 400-700) Has two good doubles, plus a couple of dark and dingy cheaper rooms.

MINAPIN

From **Pisan**, just 2km east of Ghulmet, there's a turn-off to Minapin, 5km further east. Sleepy Minapin is a popular place for travellers to ditch their packs and contemplate the mountains. It is also the base for numerous day walks and the start of an excellent trek to another Rakaposhi base camp and longer treks towards Diran Peak (see p351).

The best accommodation is provided by **Diran Hotel** (☎ 05821-58149; diranhotel@yahoo.com; camp sites/dm Rs 100, s/d Rs 300-1200; 🚻), in a walled orchard east of a large mosque. Rooms vary in comfort and size, and prices vary with the seasons, but you are sure to find something that suits. The excellent restaurant (mains Rs 50 to Rs 350) has several tasty local specialties, such as chicken *gorkon*, cooked in a traditional stone pot. Trekking guides and

porters and jeep safaris can all be organised at the hotel, where you can also find information on short walks.

West of the hotel is an **NAPWD resthouse** (d Rs 300). Keep an eye out for a new camping ground in Minapin village, which was planned by Israr, the very popular former manager of the Diran Hotel (erstwhile Diran Guesthouse).

Getting There & Away

Minibuses depart Minapin (behind the NAPWD resthouse) for Gilgit after about 6am, and come to Minapin from lower Khazana (Bank) Rd in Gilgit around 1pm to 2pm (Rs 70, Rs 10 for baggage). Minibuses depart Aliabad around 11am from near the Swat Hotel and return to Aliabad (Rs 30) from in front of the Diran Hotel (listen for the tooting horn). Alternatively, you can flag down a minibus on the KKH at Pisan.

ALIABAD

☎ 05821

Aliabad's characterless bazaar, strung out for 1.5km along the KKH, is a transport hub and administrative centre. It's an awkward base unless you're trekking in Hassanabad Nala.

Orientation & Information

A small telephone exchange is in the centre. The post office is at the east end, 200m past the petrol station. A link road to Karimabad joins the KKH 2km west of the bazaar.

Sleeping & Eating

There are three foreigner-friendly hotels bunched together near the 'Gilgit 100km' road marker. The best is the **Hunza Continental Hotel** (☎ 0355401086; s/d Rs 400/500) with rooms equipped with TVs and clean bathrooms. **Hunza Gateway Hotel** (☎ 55202; s/d Rs 200/300) is a more basic option and, up the nearby laneway, the **Dumani Hotel** (☎ 55202; d Rs 250) is barely adequate.

Getting There & Away

Get here from Gilgit on any Karimabad-bound transport. Minibuses leave Aliabad for Gilgit (Rs 90) and Sost (Rs 90) all day, starting as early as 5am and leaving when full. Suzukis go all day to/from Ganish (Rs 5) and Karimabad (Rs 10). To catch northbound transport, Aliabad is a better choice than Ganish as minibuses tend to leave Aliabad when full.

Natco (☎ 50111), with an office and depot at the north end of the bazaar, has minibuses to Gilgit (Rs 100) departing at 8am, 1pm and 6pm; the service to Sost (Rs 100) via Gulmit (Rs 30) and Passu (Rs 35) leaves at 11am. If there are seats available, you could hop on the bus to Kashgar (Rs 2700) at about 8am, which originated in Gilgit.

KARIMABAD (BALTIT)

☎ 05821 / elevation 2438m

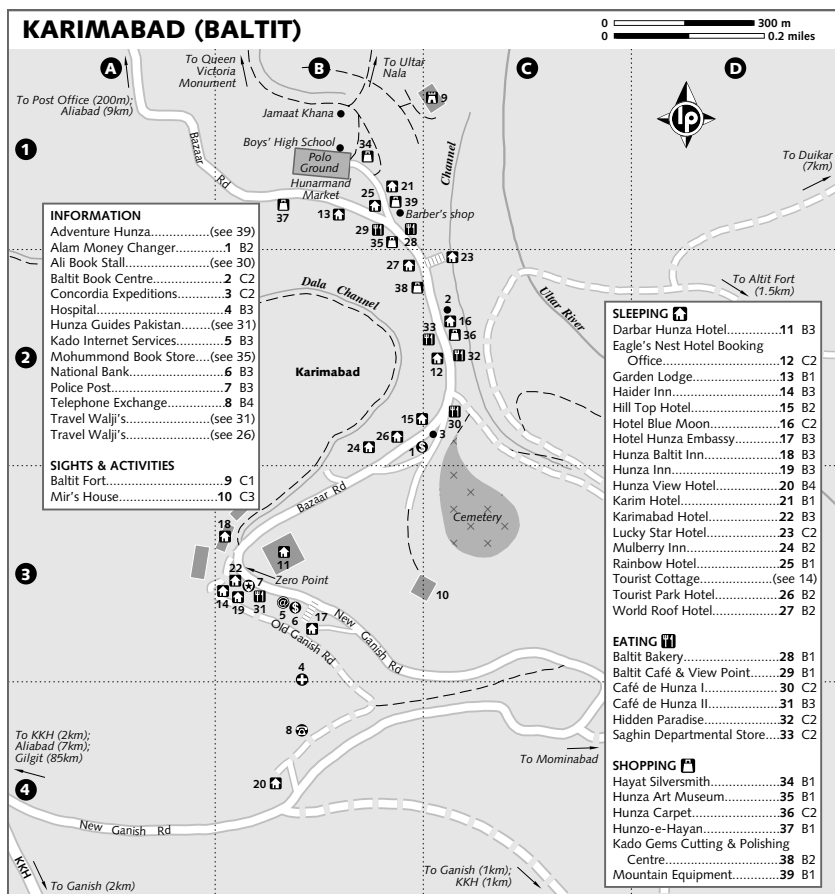
Baltit is Hunza's ancient capital. Its magnificent fort, on a throne-like ridge with Ultar Nala yawning behind it, has always been the kingdom's focal point. The fort served as the royal palace for over 750 years until last century, when sounder quarters were built below

in what came to be called Karimabad. The name is now also used for Baltit and the complex of ancient tribal hamlets around it.

Since the arrival of KKH tourism and overseas aid, Karimabad has prospered and the bazaar has filled with hotels, restaurants, travel agencies and handicraft shops. The superb setting, grand fort, good food, friendly locals and opportunity to swap tales with other highway travellers make Karimabad an ideal stopover.

Orientation

Karimabad is perched high above the KKH. Vehicle access from the KKH includes New Ganish Rd to the lower end of the bazaar from just west of Ganish, and a road to the



top of the bazaar from just west of Aliabad. Old Ganish Rd, the original access road from Ganish, is now a footpath.

Information

BOOKSHOPS

Ali Book Stall (☎ 57112; Café de Hunza, Hilltop Bazaar) Stocks books and maps of the NA, plus carpets.

Baltit Book Centre (Bazaar) A respectable collection of NA and Central Asia books in English.

Mohummond Book Store (☎ 57040; Bazaar) Plenty of books on the local area plus a range of Lonely Planet guides.

EMERGENCY

If you need to make an emergency phone call anywhere in the world, Café de Hunza has a satellite telephone available.

Hospital (Old Ganish Rd)

Police There is usually a police presence at Zero Point, below Darbar Hunza Hotel.

INTERNET ACCESS

Both branches of Café de Hunza (Zero Point and Hilltop Bazaar) should have connections (per hour Rs 50) by the time you read this.

Kado Internet Services (Zero Point; per hr Rs 40;

☎ 10am-10pm) Plenty of monitors, CD burning (Rs 40) and scanning.

MONEY

Alam Money Changer (Lower Bazaar; ☎ 8am-8pm)

Has better cash rates and accepts most currencies.

National Bank (New Ganish Rd; ☎ 9am-1pm Mon-Thu, 9am-noon Fri & Sat) Accepts US dollars and UK pounds cash or travellers cheques.

POST

Post office (☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Thu, 9am-12.30pm Fri & Sat) Located along the back road to Aliabad, about 700m northwest of the bazaar's centre.

TELEPHONE

Telephone Exchange (Old Ganish Rd; ☎ 24hr)

TRAVEL AGENCIES

Adventure Hunza (☎ 57201; www.adventurehunza.com; Mountain Equipment, Baltit Fort Rd) The Karim brothers can help organise short and long treks and have equipment for sale and hire.

Concordia Expeditions (☎ 57182; www.concordia-expeditions.com) A well-known trekking and touring agency across the road from Hill Top Hotel.

Hunza Guides Pakistan (☎ 57076; www.hgp.com.pk; Zero Point) Trekking and cultural tours.

Travel Walji's (☎ 57203; www.waljis.com; Zero Point) Tours and jeep hire with good drivers.

Sights & Activities

BALTIT FORT

The oldest parts of **Baltit Fort** (☎ 57110; admission Rs 300, plus camera Rs 150; ☎ 9am-1pm & 2-5.30pm Apr-Oct, 9.30am-4pm Nov-Mar) date from the 13th century. Over the years more houses and towers were added, and it was fortified. To cement an alliance with Baltistan's Maqpon dynasty in the 17th century, Mir Ayesho II (great-grandson of the legendary Girkis) married a daughter of the Balti ruler, who sent artisans to build a fort at nearby Altit. The princess then came to live in Hunza, bringing her own artisans to improve Baltit Fort. Balti-style renovation continued under the reign of Ayesho II's son. The name Baltit probably dates from this time.

The fort took on its present appearance only in the last century or so. Mir Nazim Khan added outer walls and fixed up his own rooms with wallpaper, drapes, fireplaces, balconies and tinted windows. He had the outer walls whitewashed, dramatically raising the fort's visual impact from all over the valley. Also added were a rooftop dais, where royal councils were held in good weather, and the 'lantern' or skylight.

Nazim Khan's grandson moved to modern quarters in Karimabad in 1945. By the time KKH travellers first saw the fort in the 1980s it was an abandoned shell, stripped of anything of value and verging on collapse.

From 1990 to 1996 it was effectively taken apart stone by stone and reassembled. This was a painstaking effort using advanced preservation principles developed in Europe, while retaining the unique construction and earthquake-proofing techniques pioneered by the fort's original builders.

The result is impressive and the renovation work almost invisible. Several rooms have exhibits of clothing and old photos, plus utensils and furnishings donated by local people. Visitors get a half-hour tour with a knowledgeable local guide (you cannot go in without one), and interested persons can use the library.

Tickets are sold at a small kiosk below the fort and it is worth noting that the fort's administration is funded solely by these ticket sales.

BALTIT FORT

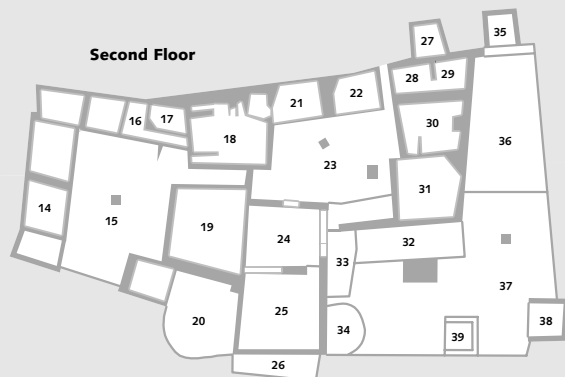
First Floor



FIRST FLOOR

Storage (& Emergency Stairs).....	1
Storage.....	2
Rani's Bedroom.....	3
Kitchen.....	4
Living Room (& Audio-Visual Room).....	5
Prison.....	6
Lobby/Grain Storage.....	7
Guards Gallery.....	8
Toilet.....	9
Library.....	10
Court Room (& Office).....	11
Prison.....	12
Prison.....	13

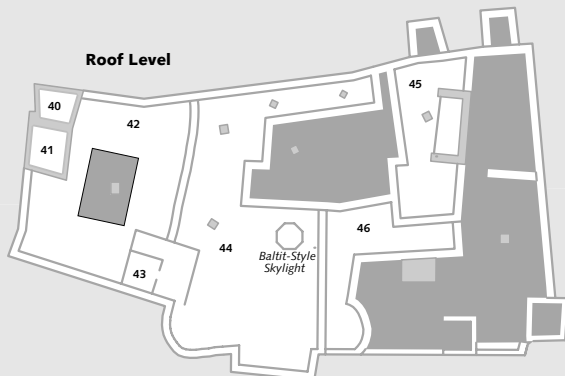
Second Floor



SECOND FLOOR

Dressing Room.....	14
Rani's Summer Courtyard.....	15
Toilet.....	16
Bathroom.....	17
Rani's Room.....	18
Mir's Bedroom.....	19
Living/Sun Room.....	20
Male Guest Room.....	21
Male Guest Room.....	22
Open Courtyard.....	23
Waiting Room.....	24
Drawing Room.....	25
Balcony.....	26
Toilet.....	27
Dressing Room.....	28
Bathroom.....	29
Bedroom for Newly Married Couples.....	30
Living Room.....	31
Musician's Place.....	32
Armoury.....	33
Royal Dais.....	34
Toilet.....	35
Terrace.....	36
Courtiers' Terrace.....	37
Guard Room.....	38
Wazir's Dais.....	39

Roof Level



ROOF LEVEL

Fruit Storage.....	40
Fruit Storage.....	41
Terrace.....	42
Mosque.....	43
Terrace.....	44
Terrace.....	45
Terrace.....	46

CHANNEL WALKS

A three- or four-hour walk along the main water channels from Ultar Nala is a good way to see Hunza at its best. Try to avoid the delicate side channels.

Climb past the polo ground, bearing left beside the channel there. The path goes down the valley all the way to Hyderabad Nala. There, scramble down to the link road and turn back towards Karimabad. You can soon drop to a lower channel that goes all the way back. You can go right on around Karimabad, past Mominabad to the headworks behind Baltit Fort, although the channel goes underground for part of the way.

Both these channels and the newer, higher channels distribute water from Ultar. There are seven channels running to the west and five to the east from Ultar Nala. The velvety appearance of Ultar water is the result of minute flakes of mica.

QUEEN VICTORIA MONUMENT

There is a 'monument' to Queen Victoria at the top of the rock face behind Karimabad, probably erected by Nazim Khan, and it can be reached in an hour from Baltit. Take the channel path above the polo ground. Five minutes out, cross the channel and climb stone steps beside an old watchtower. At the top of the village, scramble over to a shallow cleft with some very large boulders. Go straight up to the base of the cliff before crossing over to the monument; avoid a diagonal crossing of the face because the top Ultar water channel spills down it. In Burushaski, the monument is called Malikamu Shikari (ma-li-ka-mu shi-ka-ri).

MOMINABAD

In the NA there are traces of an ancient caste system, in which musicians and artisans ranked low. In the past they were often segregated in their own separate villages. Though it's quite ordinary looking, Mominabad (old name Berishal), near a turn on the Ganish-Karimabad road, was such a village. Its people even speak their own dialect, Berishki.

Sleeping BUDGET

Tourist Cottage (Zero Point; d Rs 200) This basic option is owned by the brother of the owner of Haider Inn and you should inspect the room and the plumbing before settling in.

Karimabad Hotel (☎ 57108; Zero Point; dm/s/d Rs 50/150/200) The Karimabad's new rooms overlooking the NAPWD resthouse are good value with great views and working plumbing. The owners are friendly and the restaurant is OK.

Hunza Inn (☎ 57186; Zero Point; dm/s/d Rs 70/200/250) Word of mouth up and down the KKH keeps this little place humming even in the lean shoulder seasons. Rooms are simple but clean and comfortable with bathrooms with hot water. There's a congenial host and the wholesome and cheap communal dinners (see opposite) are open to nonguests and are a great way to gather information.

Haider Inn (☎ 57758; Zero Point; dm/s/d Rs 75/200/250) This is one of the original hotels in Hunza and the friendly owner is happy to show you the one-room original Hunza Inn and the original travellers' menu. There was plenty of renovation under way at the time of research to add a restaurant. The rooms vary but overall are good value.

Lucky Star Hotel (d Rs 300) Housed in the old post office, the spartan rooms have bathrooms with hot water. It's centrally located with a restaurant upstairs and a good hot-snack café downstairs.

Rainbow Hotel (☎ 57114; d Rs 300-400) The Rainbow is not welcoming, with glum rooms with bathrooms upstairs and even gloomier rooms downstairs that share a bathroom.

Garden Lodge (☎ 57168; dm/d Rs 100/400) The best feature here is the quiet garden where you may be able to negotiate a camp site, as well as a few basic rooms that are adequately clean and habitable.

Hotel Blue Moon (☎ 57325; d without/with view Rs 400/600) The small rooms have new bedding which makes them better than the average, but the precarious stairways don't impress, and neither do the tiny bathrooms. There are great views from the pleasant rear garden, however, revealing the hotel's, and for that matter Karimabad's, precarious position.

Karim Hotel (☎ 57091; s/d Rs 250/450) Rooms are reasonable and the food OK. The best feature is the sunny patio with fine views of the mountains above and the street life below.

Mulberry Inn (☎ 57178; camping Rs 80, dm/s/d Rs 100/400/600) The friendly staff at Mulberry Inn keep the basic, fan-cooled rooms very clean and campers can enjoy a hot shower. There's an OK restaurant and a rooftop barbecue in summer. If you are in luck the man-

ager's mother will cook up some homemade Hunza dishes.

MIDRANGE & TOP END

Tourist Park Hotel (☎ 57087; s/d Rs 300/600) Has a warren of rooms, some better than others, around a quiet courtyard garden. It's worth inspecting a few and making an offer. The restaurant can be good, with Hunza specialties made by arrangement.

World Roof Hotel (☎ 57153; r Rs 300, s/d with balcony Rs 600/800; ☑) The comfortable double rooms with balcony have great views and satellite TV; the budget rooms are not as appealing. There's a decent multicuisine restaurant and a rooftop with views and occasional barbecues.

Hill Top Hotel (☎ 57129; s/d Rs 800/1000) Hill Top, with its wide verandas and manicured garden, has a relaxed, welcoming atmosphere. The rooms with views are good value and so is the restaurant. The early- and late-season discounts make this an even better choice.

Hunza View Hotel (☎ 57141; hunzaview@kado.net.pk; s/d standard Rs 1000/1200, s/d deluxe Rs 1400/1600) Situated below the telephone exchange, Hunza View has rooms with satellite TV and valley views and, with its souvenir shop, is geared for groups. It has a good restaurant, but presents a long uphill walk to the bazaar.

Hotel Hunza Embassy (☎ 57001; www.hunzaembassy.com; Zero Point; s/d standard Rs 1500/2000, s/d deluxe Rs 2000/3000) This hotel was recently refurbished and is looking splendid with lots of carved wood softening the concrete construction. Both standard and deluxe rooms are spacious, clean and comfortable. The deluxe rooms have a bathtub and the excellent restaurant serves several delicious Hunza dishes in addition to the usual multicuisine.

Hunza Baltit Inn (☎ 57012; Zero Point; s/d Rs 2500/3000) The attractive and low-key Hunza Baltit Inn is managed by the very professional Serena Hotels group. The spotless rooms are surprisingly tiny but do have TV and first-rate bathrooms and share a sunny balcony from which to take in the view across to Baltit Fort. The rooms have either double or twin beds. There's a large and popular restaurant here, as well as a Hunza-decorated room for traditional dining. Breakfast is included in the tariff.

Darbar Hunza Hotel (☎ 57105; www.hunzadarbar.com.pk; Zero Point; s/d Rs 3000/4000) This conspicuous hotel has wonderful views from the lobby, restaurant and roof down the valley. The 40 spacious rooms, some with double beds, have

TV, phone and bathrooms, but unfortunately are not in brilliant condition. There's a hugely overpriced bar for foreigners (US\$10 for a Corona imported from Europe!), and when we were there, the restaurant and service compared well only to Fawltay Towers.

Eating

RESTAURANTS

Nearly all hotels have restaurants roughly in line with room quality; even the most basic of them can produce chicken curry, dhal, rice and boiled potatoes. Relatively cheap Chinese beer finds its way to a couple of general stores and hotel restaurants and is worth asking for.

Hunza Inn (☎ 57186; 3-course veg/nonveg dinner Rs 70/90) Simple and generous local and international-style dinners are held in a friendly communal atmosphere. If you're not staying here, book dinner in the morning.

Hidden Paradise (☎ 57464; mains Rs 80-180; ☎ 9am-9pm) This quaint restaurant has a big menu of inexpensive and delicious Hunza dishes; eg *haneetze doudo* (apricot soup; Rs 60) and *chapshuro* (Hunza pizza; Rs 150). The cuisine is definitely not haute, but this is a great way to sample local food with friends and enjoy views of Altit and Duikar.

Baltit Café & View Point (☎ 03355401620; mains Rs 80-220) The main selling point here is the pleasant garden dining area with excellent views. Find a sunny or shady seat and sip a cold drink or tuck into the soups, burgers, snacks and several Pakistani and Chinese dishes.

Hunza Baltit Inn (☎ 57012; Zero Point; mains Rs 80-300) The premier hotel restaurant in Karimabad has tasty renditions of Pakistani, Chinese and Continental cuisine, but in particular we recommend the Pakistani dishes such as the delicious chicken and ginger *handi* (Rs 290).

Hotel Hunza Embassy (☎ 57001; www.hunzaembassy.com; Zero Point; mains Rs 90-200) This is a another good place to seek out Hunza cuisine: try *hoilo garma* (spinach pasta) and *burutz berikutz* (chapati stuffed with fresh cheese, carrot tops, spring onions, coriander and mint). There's also an extensive multicuisine menu.

CAFÉS & QUICK EATS

Lucky Star Hotel (mains Rs 25-35) Most appealing for its Rs 10 snacks (Hunza doughnuts, pakoras and samosas) and tea, Lucky Star nevertheless serves inexpensive curries including dhal, chapati and veg curry (Rs 35).

HUNZA CUISINE

Meals in Hunza include the likes of potatoes, rice, wholemeal bread and noodle soup, with oil and spices used sparingly. But there's more to Hunza cooking than that, as you'll see if you're lucky enough to be invited home for dinner.

Milk products include milk (*mamu*), yogurt and *diltar*, a cultured buttermilk. A soft cheese called *burus* is soothing for upset stomachs. Yogurt and *burus* are available by request at some hotels. *Kurut* is a sour, hard cheese; you're most likely to get this from shepherds in exchange for things like tea, salt or sugar.

Pitti is thick whole-wheat bread baked in coals. *Chapshuro* is 'Hunza pizza': meat, tomatoes and onions traditionally cooked into a thick chapati but sometimes just sandwiched between two chapatis and fried. *Burushapik* ('cheese-chapati') is *burus* cooked into a whole-wheat chapati, the outside covered in apricot-kernel oil, and served cold – good and very filling. *Burutze berikutz* is similar but with herbs (coriander and mint) added and served in small pieces.

Doudo is a noodle soup with vegetables, thickened with egg and whole-wheat flour. It comes in many varieties, eg *kurutze doudo*, with *kurut*; and delicious *haneetze doudo*, with nuts or crushed apricot kernels, garlic and onion. Apricot soup is made from dried apricots, flour and water.

Most of the Northern Areas' dried fruit comes from Hunza, and dried Hunza apricots are found in bazaars all over Asia. Apricots and mulberries usually ripen by June. Peaches, plums, apples, grapes, cherries and walnuts appear in early autumn. Dried mulberries make a marvellous travel snack.

Among drinks is a tea brewed from *tumuro* (or *chumuru*), a wild alpine herb similar to sage that is said to cool and clear the head, especially at high elevation. Despite Islamic prohibition and disapproval from the Aga Khan, some Hunzakuts carry on pre-Muslim traditions by brewing a rough grape wine called *mel*, and a potent mulberry firewater called *arak*. *Arak* ('Hunza water') may be offered to you by friends, though your stomach may not be up for the ride. Some shops also sell nonalcoholic Pakistani beer.

Café de Hunza I (☎ 57112; Hilltop Bazaar; breakfast Rs 55-90, cakes Rs 25-50, coffee Rs 40-75; ☎ 7.30am-late; ☑) The KKH has delivered espresso coffee (Rs 75) to sip while munching on Hunza walnut cake (Rs 50) and reading the newspaper (albeit two days old). Not surprisingly, this venture, which also does muesli and omelette breakfasts and sells books and souvenirs, has hit the spot with travellers and there's now another branch at Zero Point.

SELF-CATERING

Self-caterers will find fresh fruit and vegetables less plentiful here than in Gilgit.

Saghin Departmental Store has a reasonable selection of canned and packaged food, batteries, film and toiletries. Baltit Bakery will often have *pitti* (whole-wheat bread). General stores and bakeries are also good places to search for dried fruit, snacks and trekking supplies.

Entertainment

Traditional dances are occasionally performed for tour groups at the midrange hotels by local musicians and artists. It is worthwhile seeking an invitation to these

events – you will probably be more than welcome to bolster the audience and you might even get an offering of local wine. Hunza's drum and *turnai* (a kind of oboe) music is called *hareep*: there are different versions for weddings, festivals, polo matches and other events.

Shopping

The bazaar is lined with art and handicraft shops, such as Hunza Carpet, many selling the woollen wares made by local women trained by the Threadnet Hunza programme. Hunza-Nagyr wool is renowned for its durability, though it's being displaced by factory imitations. Hunza Art Museum is another reliable store, and can provide guarantee certificates for semiprecious stones and gems.

Kado Gems Cutting & Polishing Centre (www.rc.hunza.org) The follow-up project to Threadnet Hunza is designed to empower local women, in this case by training them in gem cutting, polishing and selling. At the time of research the finishing touches were being put on the shop which will eventually sparkle with rubies, sapphire, topaz and quartz.

Hayat Silversmith (Bazaar) This one-man operation can turn your stones into jewellery.

Hunzo-e-Hayan (Hunarmand Market) The small shop front for Shafqet Karim, an artisan who turns wooden bowls and carves soup spoons and other traditional implements as well as figurines.

Mountain Equipment (☎ 57201) Trekking and mountaineering equipment can be purchased here at the top end of the bazaar. The lads from Adventure Hunza have also opened a CD shop here, Kiran Audio Video Centre.

Getting There & Around

Minibuses to Gilgit (Rs 100) scout Karimabad bazaar between 6.30am and 7am in search of passengers. After 7am, you may need to head down to Aliabad to easily catch one of the many minibuses (Rs 90) heading south. The most convenient transport to Sost (Rs 90) is also found at Aliabad. You could also try Ganish, but buses tend to fill up at Aliabad first.

Passenger Suzukis drive through the bazaar and then do an Aliabad–Karimabad–Ganish loop all day for Rs 10.

AROUND KARIMABAD

Ultar Meadow

A climb to the beautiful Ultar icefall with its amphitheatre of peaks including the 6000m pinnacle, **Bubulimating**, or Lady Finger, will give you an appreciation for the vertical lie of the land. This can be a strenuous day trip or an easier overnight one; see p353 for details of the walk.

Remember to carry water! Some people hire a local guide for around Rs 500 per day: useful but not essential. But going alone is not recommended; several solo hikers have disappeared and others have been injured.

Altit Fort & Village

This picturesque fort overlooking the village of **Altit** (admission Rs 100) beside the Hunza River was undergoing extensive renovation at the time of research and was closed to the public. The 1000-year-old village has been renovated and rehabilitated and you can be walked around the charming village with the aid of a local guide. The fort is about 1.5km from Karimabad. Turn right after the *jamaat khana* (Ismaili community hall) and pass the old village pool to the fort gate. Fort is *gela* (geh-lah) in Burushaski.

Duikar

At about 2800m, Duikar is said to be Hunza's highest village. It is about 11km and 25 minutes by jeep or a 2½-hour walk from Karimabad, past gravity-defying terraced fields. The rewards include immense valley views and a great hotel. From the strangely eroded hill behind Eagle's Nest Hotel you can look down on the Hunza River, the twisting ribbon of the KKH and the Legoland of Altit village; or look across to Rakaposhi and Golden Peak (Diran Peak is hidden from view); and up to Bubulimating. Sunrise and sunset are magnificent. There are even better views from Khosht, a promontory leaning out over Ultar Meadow and the glacier, and a five-hour round trip from Duikar.

Sleeping & Eating

For many years Altit's popular Kisar Inn provided everything that KKH travellers needed, but with the recent decline in tourism this hotel has, at least temporarily, closed its doors. Inquiries about if/when it will reopen should be directed to the Eagle's Nest Hotel.

Sky Camping Site & Restaurant (☎ 05821-58420; camping Rs 50, dm Rs 200) This option has beds in tents set up in a potato field. There are two cold-water bathrooms and room to pitch your own tent. The restaurant (mains Rs 100 to Rs 220) is a couple of tables under an umbrella! The view, of course, is sublime.

Eagle's Nest Hotel (☎ 05821-58274; www.eaglesnesthotel.com; s/d from Rs 800/2000, ste Rs 2500-3500) Nearby, Duikar's Eagle Nest has stupendous views from all its comfortable rooms plus first-rate Hunza food. It's open from March to the end of October and can organise transfers from Karimabad. It's popular, so ring to see if there's room. The restaurant (mains Rs 100 to Rs 220) has Hunza, Pakistani and Chinese dishes and generous buffets. Breakfast is included in the tariff.

Getting There & Away

Tracks run to Altit from Karimabad bazaar and from New Ganish Rd. The turn for Duikar is just before Altit, a 20-minute walk from Karimabad bazaar. Eagle's Nest Hotel has a booking office in Karimabad, opposite Hidden Paradise restaurant, where accommodation and transfers can be organised. A hired jeep from Karimabad to Duikar is Rs 1000. Morning Suzukis run between Altit and Ganish/Aliabad.

GANISH

The people of Ganish used to be famous for their raids against Nagyr. In the 19th century this was Hunza's main stronghold against Ismailism, and today it's an integrated Shiite-Ismail community. It's Hunza-Nagyr's oldest settlement with an ancient village centre bursting with rejuvenated classic Hunza architecture. Travellers who show respect for the villagers will be overwhelmed with hospitality and rewarded with a rich cultural experience.

Ganish Village

☎ 05821

The restoration of **Ganish village** (admission Rs 150, plus camera Rs 50) is particularly good and won a Unesco Asia Pacific Heritage Award. While Baltit Fort shows how the cream of society lived, Ganish shows another side of traditional Hunza life. Behind a shaded, tranquil tank are several richly carved wooden mosques, 100 to 200 years old, the restoration of which clinched the award. Legend has it that Ganish warriors practised their river-crossing techniques in the tank before crossing the Hunza River to attack Nagyr villages. The timber-and-stone watchtower from the days of war with Nagyr is a tight squeeze but worth the climb. Particularly interesting is the use of the cool glacier meltwater to store food – it's still done today. Butter is wrapped in birch bark and can be stored under water for years! You may even be offered a sweet made from the butter. For all its quaintness and award-winning restoration, Ganish is not a museum (there is a local museum under construction) but a living village. This is exemplified perhaps by the huge concrete Imamia complex being constructed beside the walled village. The Imambara is expected to be clad in wooden carvings which may help it blend in.

If no-one is staffing the admission booth, walk towards the village and someone will find you.

The Sacred Rocks at Hunza

About 1.5km east on the KKH at a place called Haldekuh are several stony rises. The rocks, with pictures and inscriptions from as early as the 1st century, are a 'guest book' of the valley. In addition to local traditions, they tell of Buddhist pilgrims, kings of the Kushan empire, a 6th-century Chinese ambassador, 8th-century Tibetan conquerors and even KKH workers.

Sleeping & Eating

Karakoram Highway Inn (☎ 57200; KKH, Ganish; s/d Rs 400/600) This hotel was being renovated at the time of research. It will need to be a good job to justify these prices in this location.

PTDC Hunza Motel (☎ 57069; KKH, Garelt; s/d Rs 1350/1650, s/d deluxe Rs 1950/2250) This motel is not very conveniently situated in Garelt, 1.5km west of Ganish along the KKH. The spacious rooms with modern bathrooms enjoy wonderful views. There's a good restaurant, garden and information service.

Getting There & Away

Aliabad-based minibuses scout for passengers to Gilgit around 5am to 6am. Northbound minibuses may have filled up in Aliabad before departing. Passenger Suzukis ply between here and Aliabad for Rs 10.

UPPER NAGYR

That part of Nagyr visible from Karimabad is strung along a jeep road from the Hassanabad-Shayar suspension bridge up to the glaciers at Hoper. Much of it is in the shadow of its own peaks, giving it a slightly gloomy atmosphere. The location also gives Nagyr heavier snow and more water.

Orientation & Information

Opposite Ganish, the Nagyr (also called Hispar) River joins the Hunza River. About 12km upstream this valley divides, south to Hoper Nala and southeast to remote Hispar Nala. There's a paved road from the KKH east of Ganish up the northeast side of the Nagyr River. Although it is paved, this road is prone to landslide damage and blockage. The road crosses the river to enter the village of Nagyr and continues to Hoper, while a track continues on the northeast bank to Hispar. There's a secondary jeep road from Hassanabad to Hoper. A tenuous track also runs along the south bank of the Hunza River from Shayar to Minapin.

Shayar to Nagyr Village

There's a precipitous down-and-up at the Hassanabad-Shayar suspension bridge, followed by a fairly level two-hour walk on to Sumayar, then a two-hour climb to Nagyr. This area has few of the conveniences found along the KKH. **Askur Das** has a teashop and small restaurant.

Camping is not advisable near **Sumayar**, but it's good in the meadows three hours up

Sumayar Nala, with views of 7270m Diran and the Silkiang Glacier. A footpath leaves the jeep track near a powerhouse, initially following the channel. In the afternoon after freezing nights there is a rockfall hazard in the *nala*.

Nagyrvillage was the capital of the old state of Nagyrvillage, and descendants of the *mir* still live here. It has a hospital, a friendly police post (where you will need to register) and a few basic shops and restaurants, as well as an **NAPWD resthouse** (d Rs 300).

Hoper

The area from Nagyrvillage to Hoper looks fertile and lovely in spring. Hoper (or Hopar) is a cluster of villages around a natural bowl at a bend of the Bualtar Glacier, 19km from the KKH. Opposite Hoper, the Bualtar, also known as Hoper Glacier, is joined by the white Barpu Glacier. From here, you can hike beside the Bualtar or cross it and climb to summer villages along both glaciers. This is also a base for treks into the high, glacier-draped peaks called the Hispar Muztagh (see p352).

At the end of the road are a couple of basic hotels. **Hoper Hilton Inn** (☎ 05821-58083; camping Rs 60, s/d Rs 300/600) is probably the pick with six rooms with hot water and a restaurant (set dinner Rs 300) with a communal table and a TV. **Hoper Hilton** (camping Rs 30, rRs 300) is even more basic. Either of these hotels can help find porters or guides for day walks and longer treks.

Getting There & Away

A daily minibus runs between Hoper and Gilgit (Rs 150) and Aliabad (Rs 50), departing at 7am. The return bus departs Gilgit at noon. A hired jeep is about Rs 1500 for the return trip from Karimabad, and Rs 4000 from Gilgit. Cargo jeeps occasionally go in via Hassanabad to Sumayar and via Ganish to Nagyrvillage, heading back early the next morning.

On foot from Karimabad via Ganish, Nagyrvillage is about three hours and Hoper five to six hours. From Hassanabad via Shayar, Hoper is a very long day's walk.

GOJAL & THE KHUNJERAB PASS

The Khunjerab and Ghujerab Rivers merge below the Khunjerab Pass to form the Hunza River, the only stream to cut across the high

spine of the Karakoram. It does so in Gojal (the still-used historical name for the region commonly described as 'upper Hunza'), which extends from the pass to where the river turns west into 'Hunza proper'. The High Karakoram is consequently more accessible here than anywhere else on the KKH. The Hunza River picks its way among great fans of alluvium carried down by smaller streams, and most villages are built on these fertile deposits. At Passu and Gulmit, several major glaciers reach nearly to the Highway.

'The scenery is stern and impressive, but too gloomy and harsh to be really sublime', wrote the British explorer Reginald Schomberg in 1935. Mountains with razor-edge summits and bare walls drop sheer to the river, and the wind drives up the valley even on brilliant days. The clearest and most storm-free weather is in early autumn, and if you're fit, this is the place to trek and get a feeling for the mountains and its inhabitants.

Most Gojalis are Wakhi Tajik (one of seven Tajik tribes in Central Asia), descendants of nomadic herders from Afghanistan, and Ismaili Muslims. Traditionally they have depended on the raising of sheep and yaks, and to a lesser extent on cropping. They're certainly the most warm-hearted people on the KKH, with easy greetings and hospitality for both male and female visitors.

Depending on whom you ask, *khunjerab* is Wakhi for either Valley of Blood or Valley of the Khan. The broad Khunjerab Pass was for centuries used by Kyrgyz and Tajik herders, until Hunza raiders hounded them out in the late 18th century, after which Hunza's rulers declared the area to be 'royal' pasturelands – so either version fits.

A steady trickle of horseback commerce crossed the Khunjerab (Chinese: Hongqilapu) until the 1950s, when China–Pakistan hostilities closed the border. By the mid-1960s, the two countries had made amends and set to work on a road over the pass. 'Khunjerab Top' (4730m) was opened to official traffic and trade in 1982, and to tourists in 1986, though intrepid travellers had already discovered it.

The crossing is not only between countries and between watersheds (rivers flow north into the Tarim Basin and south to the Arabian Sea), but also between two of the world's major mountain ranges, the Pamir and the Karakoram. In the 2½ hours from Sost to Pinali, the transition is evident from the deep,

WALKS

The day walks or hikes that follow can be done with minimal gear and no assistance. If you want a guide, any able-bodied Gulmiti will be able to help (see p337 for advice on hiring guides).

Kamaris, Andra Fort & Gulmit Glacier

A twisting track behind Gulmit climbs for an hour to friendly Kamaris village, with views up and down the valley. A half-hour walk northeast from Kamaris brings you to the ruins of Andra Fort, built about 200 years ago to defend Gulmit in Hunza's struggles with neighbouring Nagyr. Ask local people for Andra Gelah (geh-la).

The track continues past Kamaris for another hour, northwest to the base of the Gulmit Glacier. A long day or overnight option is to continue on the footpath along the south side of the glacier, an area known locally as Zherav, where there are some shepherds' huts. Stay away on windy or rainy days, when rockfall hazard is high.

Ghulkin Village

From Kamaris, a footpath crosses the stream below Gulmit Glacier, then becomes a jeep track up to Ghulkin village, and returns to the KKH. The loop from Gulmit takes four to five hours.

Borit Lake & Beyond

From Ghulkin, a path crosses the Ghulkin Glacier to Borit Lake, two hours away. It's 1.25km across the glacier, the way marked by a cairn on the south moraine and a big cleft or dip in the north moraine. The crossing can be tricky; consider spending a few rupees to get someone in Ghulkin to show you across. Alternatively, the lake is about five hours (12km) from Gulmit via Kamaris.

Above the lake, Borith Lake Hotel offers simple meals and basic accommodation from May to September. Some travellers have found it closed during these months, so don't count on it being open.

A long and strenuous day trip above Borit Lake takes you to Borit Sar, the ridge between the Ghulkin and Passu Glaciers, with awesome, nearly 360-degree views of these glaciers and the Batura Muztagh. There's no water on the way.

A return option from the lake is simply to walk half an hour down the jeep road to the

KKH and hitch back. The lake also makes a good stop on a walk between Gulmit and Passu – about 15km (four hours).

Sleeping & Eating

Gulmit Continental Hotel

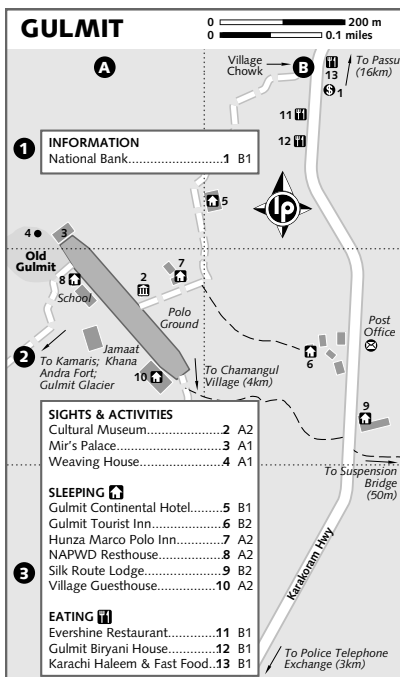
(☎ 50254; s/d Rs 150/300) Out on the link road, the Gulmit Continental, formerly Shatuber Inn, has excellent-value doubles – too cheap to last and perhaps reflecting the recent change of management and name. A challenging set of stairs leads to the Tupopdan Restaurant (mains Rs 50 to Rs 105), where a few Gojali dishes feature among the usual multicuisine fare.

Village Guesthouse

(camping Rs 50, s/d Rs 400/600) By the polo ground, with a large walled garden, this place can be good value, though some doubles have shared toilet and iffy hot shower and all can be a bit stuffy. It may be hard to find the caretaker initially but you eventually will.

Hunza Marco Polo Inn

(☎ 50227; www.marco-poloingulmit.com; old wing s/d Rs 1400/1500, new wing s/d Rs 2500/3000) This hotel boasts an attractive garden and a knowledgeable and helpful host. The rooms in the old wing are quite comfortable



but those in the new wing (under construction at the time of research) will have central heating, bathtubs, telephones and 'eventually' satellite TV and internet connectivity. The new wing also houses the grand restaurant (mains Rs 120 to Rs 300), which can be recommended for its spring water and other liquid refreshments. There are interconnected rooms for families and a discount can usually be negotiated.

Silk Route Lodge (☎ 50229; www.silkroutelodge.com; s/d Rs 1800/2000) Geared for tour groups, the carpeted rooms are comfortable with tiled bathrooms and plenty of hot water. There are million-dollar views from the balconied top-floor rooms and a proficient restaurant (with mains from Rs 70 to Rs 260) that handles Continental dishes and curries with aplomb.

Gulmit Tourist Inn (☎ 50230) Fully occupied by KKH workers at the time of research, but recommended should it reopen for business.

Gulmit Biryani House (mains Rs 30-50) A good road-stop restaurant on the Highway, offering up a small selection of freshly cooked meals and hot chai (Rs 10). Usually it's a choice between chicken soup, chicken *karai* or chicken biryani accompanied by two chapatis.

Evershine Restaurant (mains Rs 40) Near the Gulmit Biryani House, and almost identical.

Karachi Haleem & Fast Food (mains Rs 50) Down at the *chowk*, this curry joint has snacks and cold drinks for those on the move.

Getting There & Away

A local minibus departs Gulmit for Ganish (Rs 35) en route to Karimabad at about 6.30am. A special hire to Karimabad may cost as much as Rs 600. The first northbound buses pass

through at about 10am. Flag down minibuses anywhere along the Highway. It's a four- to five-hour walk to Passu – about 15km via Borit Lake.

PASSU

☎ 05822 / elevation 2770m

Sitting between the black Batura Glacier and the white Passu Glacier, this is another place to stop if you like to hike. At 2400m, Passu is the base for some dramatic hikes and longer treks.

Although Passu is one of the oldest settlements in Hunza-Gojal, a kind of geographical curse has prevented it from growing into a town. As glaciers periodically dammed the Shimshal River and then broke, floods have gradually torn away Passu's riverfront land. The 1974 mudslide at Shishkut Nala created a lake that submerged parts of the village and choked the valley with sand and gravel. At one time Passu had extensive orchards, a polo field and nearly five times its present population.

The highest point of the stunning rocky 'cathedral' ridge across the river is 6106m Tupopdan (Wakhi for 'hot rock', because in winter its slopes shed the snow quickly). On lower slopes are messages, spelt out with painted rocks, dating from the Aga Khan's 1987 visit to Gojal.

The village is below Passu Inn, where buses usually stop. Buses will also drop or collect you at hotels out on the KKH.

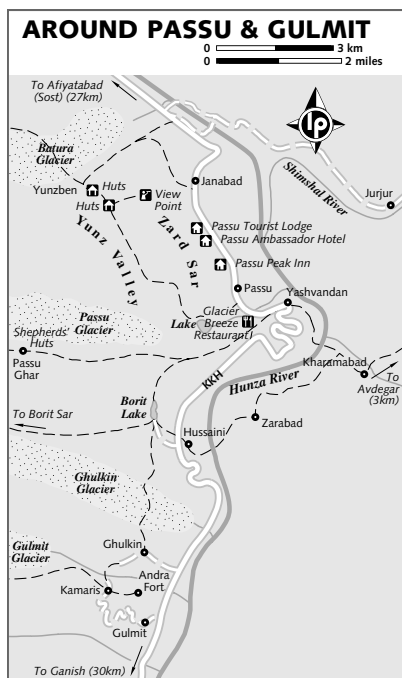
Activities

WALKS

No excursion longer than a day should be undertaken without sound advice and weather information, and preferably a reliable guide. Foreigners who think of these trips as dawdles

ISMAILI ISLAM

An 8th-century split among Shiites, who disagreed on which son of the sixth imam (Muslim religious leader) should succeed him, gave rise to the Ismaili (Maulai) branch of Islam. For Ismaili Shiites, the line of imams continues into the present. Ismailis today number several million in pockets of Pakistan (namely Hunza and Gojal), India, East Africa, Iran and Syria, and their present leader (since 1957), Prince Karim Aga Khan, is considered to be imam No 49. Doctrines are more esoteric and practices less regimented than those of Ithnashari Shiites or Sunnis. The style of prayer is a personal matter (eg there is no prostration), the mosque is replaced by a community hall called a *jamaat khana* and women are less secluded. The present Aga Khan has considerably modernised Ismaili life and set up trusts and institutions to bring social and political security to the scattered Ismaili communities.



frequently get into trouble here. For help finding a guide, ask any of Passu's hotel-wallahs, and see p337. At the time of research **Hunza Valley Experience** (☎ 50004 ext 42) was setting up an office opposite the Glacier Breeze Restaurant to provide trekking and cultural tours with guides and jeeps for hire. For a two-day excursion across the Hunza River see the Avdegar trek on p355. For the description of a five-day trek along the giant Batura Glacier from Passu, see p356. Further treks in the region are described in detail in *Lonely Planet's Trekking in the Karakoram & Hindukush*. And remember never to walk alone.

Glacier Views

An easy trail goes to the lake below Passu Glacier from the stone barns 500m south of Passu Inn. Better views of this beautiful glacier are from the Yunz Valley and Passu Ghar trails.

In the other direction, the toe of the Batura Glacier is 4km north of Batura Inn. The views improve as you climb the moraine along its south side.

Zarabad & Hussaini (The Two Bridges Walk)

This trip crosses the Hunza River on two long suspension bridges, and has good views of the Passu and Ghulkin Glaciers from the other side. It takes four to five hours from Passu to Hussaini, plus a hitchhike or walk back (8km to 10km along the KKH or via Borit Lake).

From the KKH, at the first hairpin turn, south of Shisper View Hotel, a trail drops to the right of a settlement called Yashvandan. Climb the far side of the ravine, following a path (marked by cairns) to the riverbed, then up another path on the bank to the first bridge, about 1km from Yashvandan. It's just a cluster of cables with planks and branches woven in. On a windy day it will make you feel like Indiana Jones.

On the far side a trail branches left at another cairn, but you should continue straight on. Climb towards the canyon walls and cross the erosion gully as high as possible – don't attempt to short cut across the unstable gully. The trail then leads gently down to the small village of Zarabad. A dramatic narrow track then descends a sheer rock face to the second bridge.

Hussaini, back on the other side, is in a hollow below the KKH. It has a warm spring by the river's edge, used by Hussaini women for washing (so tourists are probably not welcome to bathe). At the north end of the village is a white shrine to Shah Talib, a Muslim missionary active in the 17th or 18th century. A path climbs to the Highway near the shrine.

Yunz Valley

The massive caramel-coloured rock behind Passu is Zard Sar (Yellow Top). A vigorous six- to seven-hour loop climbs to the glacial Yunz Valley behind it, offering excellent views of both the Batura and Passu Glaciers. This is a hot, strenuous walk with no water along the trail.

Skirt around the lake below Passu Glacier and follow cairns west up gravel and then scree to the top of a rock formation half an hour from the lake. From here the trail over the glacier's lateral moraine, west up a small parallel valley and north up to Yunz Valley itself, is fairly clear. From a pair of huts an hour up Yunz Valley, a steep 1½- to two-hour detour climbs to Zard Sar, with views over the Hunza Valley (stick to the track: a tourist is said to have fallen to his death from here).

At the end of Yunz Valley, keep right and descend steeply past more huts to the valley and moraine beside the enormous 56km-long Batura Glacier. From here, it's still two or three hours down and across the low plateau to the right, back to Passu.

Passu Ghar

This hike climbs about 700m in elevation to shepherds' huts along the south side of the Passu Glacier and back, in six to seven hours. The trail leaves the KKH at a Highway sign 500m beyond Shisper View Hotel, where power lines cross the road. The huts are about two hours beyond the bottom of the glacier.

Borit Lake

A walk from Passu to Borit Lake and back takes four to five hours. From the Passu Ghar trail, branch left near the bottom of the glacier.

Over the years this once-big lake has become swampy and brackish (*borit* is Wakhi for 'salty'), possibly because the underground seepage that feeds it has decreased as the glaciers recede. Villagers of nearby Ghulkin have organised themselves to keep hunters from threatening migratory waterfowl, mainly tufted ducks, which rest here in April and May and again in October and November.

For information on seasonal accommodation at the lake and walks beyond, see p309. A return option from the lake is simply to walk half an hour down the bouldery jeep road to the KKH and hitch back to Passu. The lake also makes a good overnight stop on a walk between Passu and Gulmit.

Sleeping & Eating

Passu Inn (☎ 50003 ext 38; dm/s/d with cold-water bathroom Rs 100/150/200, s/d with hot shower Rs 350/500) This friendly inn is right by the KKH bus stand and close to the small village shops. The rooms are comfortable, spacious and clean, with the more-expensive rooms upstairs (worth bargaining for). The good restaurant (mains Rs 60 to Rs 90) has simple but delicious set meals (dinner Rs 275), and access to fresh mountain spring water.

our pick **Glacier Breeze Restaurant** (☎ 50003 ext 17; camping/tent Rs 70/250) High above the Highway, with a stairway to taste-bud heaven, this excellent restaurant (mains Rs 80 to Rs 240, open 7am to late) continues to astound travellers with its quality Hunza-inspired fare and in-

congruous location. Signature dishes include chicken cooked in local herbs, *purziyh sahar* (paneer with spicy fried spinach) and Hunza apricot chicken. There's even a kids' menu. The apricot cake (Rs 45 per slice) is divine, and chocoholics will have their prayers answered. And there's real coffee! The tented accommodation is set up in summer and includes mattresses, sleeping bags and hot showers. Entrepreneurial chef Ahmed Ali Khan can provide dried and vacuum-packed meals for trekkers, and runs cooking classes (Rs 300, at least an hour). Inquire about the full-moon dinner where a filling set meal (Rs 500) is followed by a hike onto the eerily luminous Passu Glacier.

Batura Inn (☎ 50003 ext 22; camping free, dm/s/d Rs 75/150/200) Friendly Batura Inn, 800m north of the village on the KKH, has some very tired, threadbare rooms. There's no running hot water but you can request it by the bucketful. The restaurant (set dinner Rs 90) is also basic but has access to mountain spring water. The owner keeps a rumour book for travellers to gain and impart knowledge about the area.

Shisper View Hotel (☎ 50003, ext 9; camping Rs 80, dm/d shared bathroom/d Rs 80/300/500) This hotel is 1.5km south on the KKH and although some rooms have great mountain and glacier views, their gloominess and the dark restaurant (set dinner Rs 90) let this place down.

Passu Peak Inn (www.passupeakinn.cjb.net; dm/s Rs 70/200, d Rs 350-500) The rooms at this small hotel, 1.5km north of the village, are spartan but spotless with cold showers. Hot water plumbing is planned!

Passu Tourist Lodge (☎ 50004, ext 37; s/d Rs 1200/1400) This comfortable, well-run lodge, 2.5km north of Passu on the KKH, is under the same management as the Silk Route Lodge in Gulmit and is aimed at tour groups. Rooms are in spacious private cottages and the restaurant (mains Rs 80 to Rs 170) has a multicuisine menu.

Passu Ambassador Hotel (☎ 50004, ext 36; s/d Rs 1200/1600) Another comfortable option aimed at groups, with carpeted rooms and reliable hot water, plus satellite TV in the lounge. The lodge is 2km north of the village on the KKH, and the restaurant (mains Rs 150 to Rs 230) is very good.

Hotel Sarai Silk Route (☎ 50003, ext 9; s/d Rs 1800/2000) This small, six-room hotel, 1.5km south of the village, has delightful carpeted rooms with bathtubs in the bathrooms. The front-facing rooms have views of Tupopdan.

The Japanese-sounding Mizushima Restaurant (mains Rs 120 to Rs 240) has an extensive Pakistani, Chinese and Continental (pizzas) menu but no Japanese dishes.

Although closed at the time of writing, there are two inexpensive guesthouses with traditional-style dorm and double rooms within Passu village that may reopen for summer business.

Getting There & Away

Southbound minibuses pass through after 6am, and the first northbound minibus passes through at around 10am; put your bags beside the road and the buses will stop. After midday, buses are far from frequent. You can travel from Passu to Gulmit (Rs 20, 25 minutes), Aliabad (Rs 60, two hours) and Sost (Rs 50, one hour).

SHIMSHAL VALLEY

Shimshal is a large Wakhi-speaking village supported by vast herds of sheep, goats and yaks that are moved up and down the valley with the seasons. These traditional migrations provide the basis for some of Gojal's most exquisite trekking (see p357). Remote Shimshal was closed to visitors until 1986, after which increasing numbers of adventurers braved the mountain trail through the narrow Shimshal gorge. It was from upper Shimshal, even as late as the 1890s, that raiders harried caravans heading to Kashmir. In 2003 a jeep road was inaugurated that finally linked Shimshal village to the KKH.

The road to Shimshal leaves the KKH at the snout of the Batura Glacier, 6km north of Passu. It crosses the Hunza River on a suspension bridge and then enters the narrow gorge of the lower Shimshal River; a more ominous gateway would be hard to imagine. After about an hour of negotiating a shifting, cliff-hugging jeep track and crossing a couple of daunting bridges you arrive at **Dut**, a reforested oasis with no permanent settlement but a few huts for shepherds and road workers. Soon after Dut the valley opens out, closes in again, and glaciers approach the road. It's hard to picture more awe-inspiring and stark scenery. Flowing off the lofty white mass of **Destaghil Sar** (7885m), **Mulungutti Glacier** descends right to the road.

Shimshal is made up of three villages: Aminabad, Shimshal and Khizarabad. **Aminabad** is announced by vast fields of

stones hemmed in by drystone walls, and fortress-like houses of stone and mud. As you approach **Shimshal** look for a glimpse of **Adver Sar** (6400m), also known as Shimshal Whitehorn. Shimshal has hydroelectricity for five months of the year (when the water isn't frozen), and although there is a general store with small stocks of biscuits, noodles, sugar, salt, milk, tea and rice etc, it would be wise to be self-sufficient with trekking needs.

Sleeping & Eating

Sifat Guesthouse (dm/r Rs 100/400) This guesthouse is designed on traditional Shimshali themes offering a carpeted dining room/dorm and a few basic rooms with bucket hot water.

Mountain Palace Tourist Lodge (r Rs 400) Next door and under the same management as Shimshal Tourist Lodge, the rooms here are more basic with bucket hot water.

Shimshal Tourist Lodge (camping Rs 100, r Rs 600) This hotel was undergoing a major expansion at the time of research. New rooms under construction boast tiled bathrooms and potentially running hot water. A set dinner here costs Rs 200.

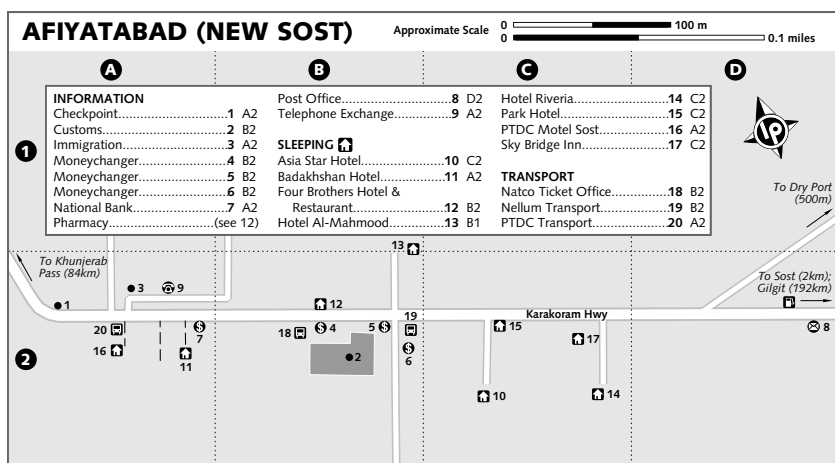
Getting There & Away

The road to Shimshal is one of the more exciting mountain roads in northern Pakistan. There are passenger jeeps from Passu to Shimshal that cost Rs 100 per person and take 2½ to three hours to cover the 55km. Rockslides frequently cause delays. A special hire will cost Rs 3500.

PASSU TO SOST

North of Passu the KKH crosses a bridge over the stream from the **Batura Glacier**, one of the Karakoram's biggest, reaching 56km back into the Batura Muztagh. The dirty grey ice comes almost to the road. East of the bridge is the narrow entrance to the **Shimshal Valley**. A further 12km brings you to the village of **Khyber** and another 10km to **Morkhun**, both with basic accommodation.

The **Boibar Valley** above Morkhun is probably the most historically interesting part of Gojal. Tajiks arrived here from what is now Afghanistan's Wakhan Corridor in perhaps the 16th century, founding the village of **Avgarch** (3200m). An old wood-carved mosque and two forts still stand, reminders of the battles with Kyrgyz people. After Gojal



came under the control of the *mirs* of Hunza, they settled at Gircha, Jamalabad, Morkhun and Ghalapan. If you're fit, you can climb up the rugged, boulder-strewn Boibar Valley to Avgarch, 450m above Morkhun, and return in about six hours (but stay away on rainy or windy days, when rocks hurtle down the scree fields). See Lonely Planet's *Trekking in the Karakoram & Hindukush* for details on going further than this.

Sleeping & Eating

The following places all do basic food.

Khyber Inn (r Rs 400) Also in Khyber, this gloomy hotel has spartan triples.

Greenland Hotel (r Rs 500) At Morkhun, the Greenland has serviceable doubles with hot shower for a highly negotiable price.

Khyber Village Guesthouse (s/d Rs 800/1200) At Khyber, the best option is this cosy, tidy brown house at the top of the town, right on the Highway.

SOST & AFIYATABAD

☎ 05823 / elevation 2700m

In 1996 Pakistani customs and immigration shifted several kilometres upstream to what is officially called Afiyatabad, sometimes called New Sost but most frequently just called Sost. Afiyatabad/Sost is a frontierlike strip of shoddy hotels and dank teashops, frequented by Chinese traders, frenetic bus drivers, moneychangers, jeep-wallahs and their passengers.

Old Sost is a quiet backwater and most travellers will never see the original village of Sost (also spelled Sust), or Upper Sost, at 3100m on a ledge above the Highway. But if you have the time you can strike north through fields from old Sost to Upper Sost and follow the trails to Sost Nala. The walled fields, the poplars and fruit orchards, and the dramatic canyon make for a very different scene from the one along the road.

Across the river from Afiyatabad, about an hour's walk away, is Khudabad village and Khudabad Nala.

Orientation & Information

The post office, Natco, PTDC and all long-distance transport options are in Afiyatabad. The National Bank here accepts cash in US dollars only, and buys rupees. Moneychangers, also in Afiyatabad, exchange Chinese money for rupees and US dollars; cash rates are a bit better than the bank's rates. The **police** (☎ 51223) are based at old Sost.

Sleeping & Eating

Four Brothers Hotel & Restaurant (☎ 51204; s/d Rs 150/250) The rooms at Four Brothers are overpriced even with these modest rates. Rooms and beds are very bottom end, as are the bathrooms, though some have running hot water.

Asia Star Hotel (☎ 51115; s/d/tr Rs 200/300/400) Asia Star's rooms are probably the pick of the cheapies in terms of cleanliness and comfort. There's running hot water, friendly man-

agement and a good inexpensive restaurant (mains Rs 45 to Rs 180).

Hotel Al-Mahmood (☎ 50166; s/d/tr Rs 200/300/400) Has tolerably grimy rooms with running hot water in the bathrooms.

Park Hotel (☎ 51035; s/d Rs 250/350) The Park has clean carpeted rooms, all of which are inexplicably crammed with three single beds, making it hard to get to the bathrooms. Definitely good value, however.

Badakhshan Hotel (☎ 51039; s/d/tr Rs 300/400/500) The scruffy carpeted rooms could do with a clean, though there were nice smells emanating from the restaurant (mains Rs 50 to Rs 150).

Sky Bridge Inn (☎ 51006; s/d Rs 400/500) The Sky Bridge is pretty good value though you have to pay an extra Rs 200 for the rooms with TV and sit-down flush toilet. All rooms are carpeted and have running hot water in the morning. This is a place where you can organise trekking in the Chapursan Valley.

Khunjarab Hotel (☎ 51006; dm/s/d Rs 150/600/800) The Khunjarab has a lovely rural setting amid orchards at old Sost. However, when we visited all the rooms with hot showers were occupied on a semipermanent basis by government officials, leaving just gloomy rooms with no hot water and the offer of free camping.

PTDC Motel Sost (☎ 51030; s/d Rs 1350/1550) Rooms here are large and comfortable, though this is one of the very few PTDC motels where you may find dirty bed linen, unswept carpet and a hot water-wallah who sleeps in. The restaurant (mains Rs 100 to Rs 150) has filling if bland set meals. This place closes at the end of November and opens 1 May. Ask for a 20% discount towards the end of the season.

Hotel Riveria (☎ 51081; s/d Rs 1500/1800) This is easily the best hotel in town, and though clearly targeted at tour groups the management welcomes all-comers. The rooms are spacious, spotless and well presented with TVs and telephone. The restaurant (mains Rs 85 to Rs 110) has Chinese, Pakistani and Continental cuisine and organises lavish buffets when a group is in.

Getting There & Away

Most southbound transport leaves early in the morning, with the first minibuses full and ready to leave by 6am. Buses leave when full, and as the day progresses there may be one or two hours between departures. Nellum Transport (operating out of a tiny unsigned

tin booth) arranges minibuses to Gilgit (Rs 180, five hours) via Passu (Rs 40, one hour), Gulmit (Rs 50, 1½ hours) and Ganish/Aliabad (Rs 90, three hours).

TO/FROM KASHGAR

Travellers must have a visa to cross the border into China. For more details, see p378.

The Khunjerab Pass is officially open to foreigners from 1 May to 15 November, unless snow closes it sooner. Landslides can cancel these trips even in summer. It's a good idea to carry a day's water and snacks. You will need to have US\$4 (or the exact equivalent in rupees) to pay the Khunjerab National Park fee at Dih. Natco and PTDC do the five- to six-hour trip to Tashkurgan, and a Chinese bus takes you on to Kashgar next morning. Recent developments have allowed the returning Chinese and Natco buses from the Gilgit-Kashgar run to take passengers on their return journeys, but this hadn't been extended to the Sost-Tashkurgan run at the time of research.

Organise your Tashkurgan ticket the day before departure. **Natco** (☎ 50209; 🕒 7am-7pm) runs vehicles to suit the size of the crowd – Land Cruiser, minibus or bus. The per person fare is Rs 1500 in any vehicle. A 'special' hire costs Rs 9000. The PTDC can also organise your transport, and may offer a discount to the Natco for a special hire – though you might also find yourself with a 'guest' accompanying your special hire.

Departure awaits customs and immigration formalities, which are usually straightforward and begin with customs rifling through your bag at about 8.30am. They are pretty thorough as there has been quite a bit of drug trafficking in recent years. After customs you proceed to Immigration to fill out a form and get an exit stamp in your passport. For information on Chinese customs regulations, see p368.

Getting Around

There's no regular transport between Afiyatabad and old Sost. A Suzuki for hire is around about Rs 60. The walk takes about 15 to 20 minutes, though you may pick up a tractor ride along the way.

CHAPURSAN VALLEY

Stretching northwest of Afiyatabad for approximately 80km towards the Wakhan Corridor

of Afghanistan, the remote Chapursan Valley sees very few visitors though it offers splendid trekking opportunities (see p359) and the chance to experience the renowned Wakhi hospitality and culture.

Just beyond the northern limit of Afiyatabad the winding link road to Chapursan intersects with the KKH. After travelling through crumbling mountains and sliding scree slopes that make the trip adventurous at any time but exceedingly dangerous during rain, the simple but colourful **Panja Shah Ziarat**, a shrine to a Sufi saint, is reached after about 40 minutes. Soon after, the first village of the valley, **Yazrich** is signalled by a rare splash of green vegetation and low stone-and-mud dwellings typical of the valley. Fifteen minutes further is the large village of **Raminj**, mostly hidden above the road. The next three villages – Aminabad, Rahimabad and Nurabad – are clustered where the valley broadens into a bowl and are collectively known as **Kirmin**. Ten minutes on, massive slopes of grey scree are separated from the green wheat terraces and irrigation canals of **Kil**, a village that spans the river and is linked by a tenuous suspension bridge. The next villages along the valley road are **Reshit** and nearby **Sher-e-Sabz**, each with a guesthouse, then **Ispanj** and **Shuthmarg**, before the final village of **Zood Khun**, at about 3500m.

At Zood Khun, accommodation, trekking information, yak and jeep transport and more can be found at the Pamir Serai guesthouse run by the redoubtable Alam Jan Dario, horseman, musician and ambassador of Wakhi Tajik culture. As the operator of **Pamir Trails** (www.pamirtrails.com), Alam Jan Dario runs cultural and adventurous treks on foot or horseback into the valleys and over the passes of his spectacular homeland.

Beyond Zood Khun is the mystical and holy **Baba Ghundi Ziarat**, a shrine to a Sufi saint said to have miraculous powers, and a popular pilgrimage site. The shrine is surrounded by meadows that host herds of sheep in summer and, sporadically from June to September, Kyrgyz traders from Afghanistan who traditionally cross the **Irshad Pass** with horses, yaks and sheep to trade with the Chapursan villagers.

Sleeping & Eating

There is a village guesthouse at the village of Reshit and nearby is the **Chupurson Village**

Guesthouse (per person Rs 300) in Sher-e-Sabz, which has a traditional Wakhi dining and/or sleeping room as well as a bedroom with three single beds. Mains here will cost you from Rs 50 to Rs 100.

In Zood Khun, **Pamir Serai** (☎ 03465226623; www.pamirtrails.com; bed Rs 150) offers traditional accommodation in the house of Alam Jan Dario. This means you eat (meals Rs 50) and sleep with the family in the traditional house on floor mattresses. Pamir Serai also has a hut with a basic kitchen and mattresses and blankets at Baba Ghundi that can be used by guests.

Getting There & Away

Regular cargo jeeps to Zood Khun (Rs 100) leave Afiyatabad's bazaar (usually around 2pm), from near the Four Brothers Hotel. Because Chapursan is beyond the Pakistani Immigration checkpoint at Afiyatabad, you will need to sign in and out at the checkpoint at Afiyatabad. The jeep leaves Zood Khun at around 5.30am. A special hire will cost around Rs 1800. A special hire from Zood Khun to Baba Ghundi is about Rs 1500 for the return trip. Access depends on the river level. Many choose to hike to Baba Ghundi from Zood Khun and spend the night there before returning the next day.

MISGAR

Misgar is the last village in the greater Hunza valley and the base for an easy and fascinating trek to Kilik and Mintaka Passes (see p360). These ancient Silk Route gateways to Central Asia and China also staged Great Game intrigue during the reign of the British Raj. The Mintaka Pass was the usual route to Tashkurgan before the opening of the KKH over the Khunjerab Pass.

Because Misgar is beyond the Pakistani Immigration checkpoint at Afiyatabad you will need to sign in and out at the checkpoint at Afiyatabad. Approximately 7km north of Sost the Misgar link road intersects with the KKH. The good road travels for 16km through a desolate landscape of orange canyon walls with black lifeless mountains above and the clear, green Kilik River below. At **Misgar village** there is no hotel accommodation but you can arrange a room with one of the villagers or camp in the grounds of the post office. The tiny Qurban General Store has noodles, milk, biscuits etc.

Getting There & Away

Vehicles to Misgar (Rs 50) leave Afyatabad's bazaar, from near the Four Brothers Hotel, but they do not run to a regular schedule. A special hire will cost around Rs 1000.

THE KHUNJERAB PASS

It's 35km, through some of the narrowest and bleakest gorges on the KKH, from Sost to the security and national park checkpoints at **Dih**. You must have US\$4 cash (or exact equivalent in rupees) to pay the Khunjerab National Park fee here. Much of the Pakistan side of the pass is within the 2270-sq-km **Khunjerab National Park** (KNP; see p68), which was established in 1975. The pass is one of the few known habitats of the big, curly-horned Marco Polo sheep, of which there are now only a few hundred in the world. It's also home to Himalayan ibex, golden marmots, wolves and snow leopards.

A KNP resthouse at Dih may be available to the public if no officials are using it.

From Dih to the pass it's about 50km. Scattered along the KKH are deserted concrete buildings – hostels for Chinese KKH workers, built in the late 1960s when the road was being laid to Gulmit. At **Koksil** the ruins of a work camp straddle the river at a large side-canyon. The valley walls are 'black, crumbling rock' (this is how the Turki words *kara koram* translate) and the river cuts through deep beds of gravel, the residue of repeated mud and rock slides. The Highway switches back and forth as it climbs above Koksil.

The pass itself is long and flat. At the summit is a plaque commemorating the 1982 opening. At this point you're about 400km from Kashgar and 880km from Rawalpindi. Something besides the time zone changes at the top, namely the side of the road on which you drive (China is right-hand drive, Pakistan left-hand), so it's probably a good thing that just about everybody stops for a photo break here. Just beyond the border, at the Chinese security post, you fill out an entry card and Health & Quarantine Declaration and have your passport and luggage checked. A deadpan Chinese soldier, almost inevitably a smoker, will accompany you in your bus or Natco vehicle from here to Tashkurgan, ostensibly to prevent any unseemly speeding, stopping or detouring.

THE ROAD TO KASHGAR

The Chinese call the road stretching from the Khunjerab Pass to Kashgar the China Friendship Rd or the China-Pakistan Highway, Zhong-Pa Gong Lu (China-Pak Big Rd). The road is generally in better condition on the Chinese side. It runs for 250km through the high, rounded valleys of the Taghdumbash Pamir, 70km down the Ghez River canyon and 80km to Kashgar across the flats at the edge of Xinjiang's Taklamakan Desert. This is a region of sublime scenery and weather extremes, a 2000-year-old passage for trade, plunder and religious ideas.



WHAT'S THE TIME?

A constant concern for travellers is clock time. Officially, all China runs on Beijing time (which is three hours earlier than Pakistan time) but here, 3500km from Beijing, people set their watches to unofficial 'Xinjiang time', two hours earlier than Beijing. You must run on both times, always checking which is meant (Uyghur: *Beijing waqt?*; Chinese: *Beijing shijian?*). Note that airline schedules and government office hours are always given in Beijing time.

See p315 for information on transport from Pakistan to Kashgar.

THE KHUNJERAB PASS TO TASHKURGAN

From the pass to Pirali you may see herds of yaks or a domesticated cross between yak and cow called *dzu*, and in warmer weather you'll see golden marmots as they scuttle for their burrows. **Pirali**, the former Chinese customs post, is four hours from Sost at about 4100m. The level stretch along the Tashkurgan River from Pirali to Tashkurgan is grand and picturesque in fine weather, with muscular-looking peaks along the west side of the valley and sporadic horse and camel traffic.

The road passes the mouth of an enormous opening westwards into the Pamir – the **Mintaka Valley**, once a major Silk Road branch and historically one of the main routes to Hunza and on to Kashmir. About 75km up the Mintaka Valley, a jeep track enters Afghanistan's Wakhan Corridor. Settlements from Gojal over the Khunjerab Pass to Tashkurgan are Wakhi Tajik. About 1½ hours from Pirali is **Davdar**, the largest permanent Tajik settlement along the Highway. Two hours later you're in Tashkurgan.

TASHKURGAN

☎ 0998 / elevation 3200m

In the Uyghur language, *tash kurgan* means 'stone fortress'. The ruins of a huge mud-brick fort still stand on the edge of town, and although estimated to be about 600 years old, local lore says Tashkurgan has been a citadel for over 2300 years. The Greek philosopher-scientist Ptolemy (AD 90–168) mentioned Tashkurgan in his *Guide to Geography* as a stop on the road to China.

The Chinese Buddhist pilgrim Xuan Zang wrote about the fortress in the 7th century, when it was the furthest frontier outpost of the Tang dynasty.

Tashkurgan has little else to offer, although if you're coming from Pakistan you'll delight in (a) public conversations with women, and (b) beer (which may knock you back considerably at this elevation). Tashkurgan is a frontier town through and through. Government expansion has brought wide avenues, Han businesses and traffic lights but Tajiks still gather to play pool on outside tables and engage in earnest street-corner discussion in the afternoon before the ubiquitous kebab stands start to smoulder and smoke.

This is the site of the Chinese customs and immigration post. It's also the administrative centre of Tashkurgan Tajik Autonomous County, stretching from Muztagh Ata to the border, and is home to most of China's Tajiks. Tashkurgan is about 290km from Kashgar.

Orientation & Information

Tashkurgan Rd, Tashkurgan's straight and wide main thoroughfare, has been designated a 'Cultural Street for Travelling and Shopping', or so the sign says. Buses, northbound and southbound, stop in the compound of the **Jiaotong Binguan** (Traffic Hotel; Tashkurgan Rd).

Travelling (or shopping) in a northeasterly direction along Tashkurgan Rd takes you past hotels, restaurants, gift shops and schools, and finally the Pamir Hotel and the entrance to the fort.

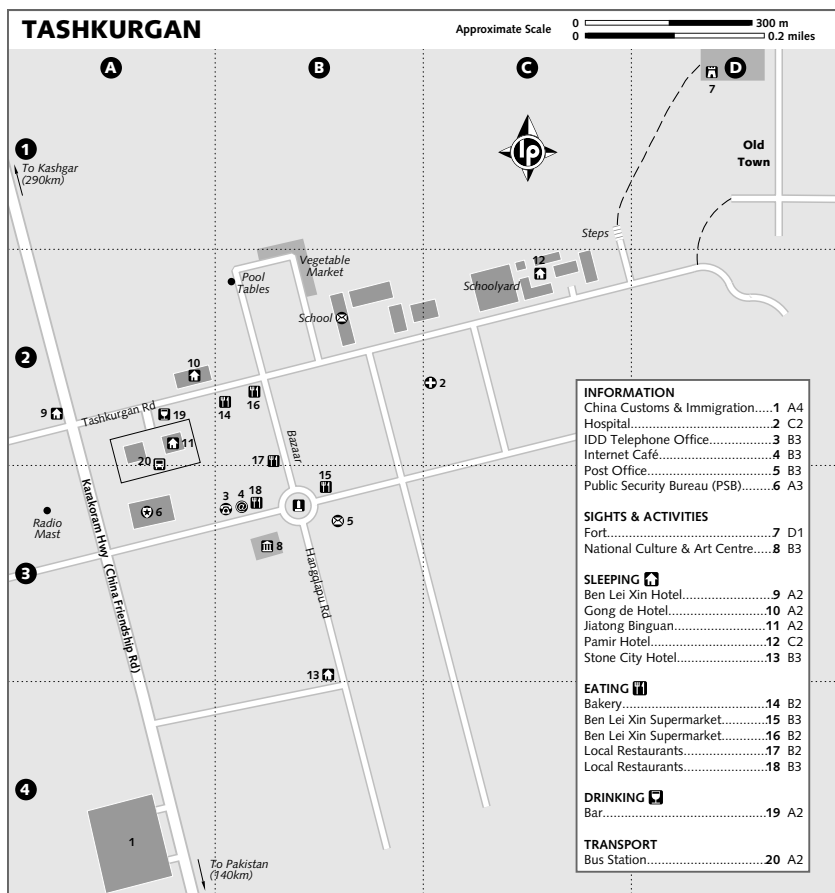
Customs and immigration are about 1km south of town on the KKH. Your bus (if you're southbound or northbound) will take you from/to the bus station – though you could catch a taxi or even walk in the time it usually takes for the bus to set off.

You can change cash, preferably US dollars, at Jiaotong Binguan.

The **Public Security Bureau** (PSB; ☎ Beijing time 10am–2pm & 5–8pm) is south of the bus station. Reception for the foreign affairs section is inside the right-hand entrance. There's an internet café (per hour Y5) and a PCO with an IDD telephone office on the road behind the Jiaotong Binguan.

Sights**FORT**

Tashkurgan's one attraction is the massive, crumbling **fort** (admission Y20) northeast of town,



on the only hill in the Tashkurgan River's flood plain. Most of its multilayered walls and battlements are still intact and yurts dot the flood plain. Don't miss sunset. The entrance is up an incongruous flight of steps at the east end of town.

Sleeping & Eating

Gong de Hotel (☎ 3423396; Tashkurgan Rd; d Y60) This hotel is amazingly filthy and the rooms will only disappoint, even at this price.

Jiaotong Binyuan (Traffic Hotel; ☎ 3421192; Tashkurgan Rd; dm/d Y15/120, d VIP Y300) You'll probably be dropped at this hotel if travelling by bus. The management speak English and run an informal information service and can change money. The four-bed dorms are

usually noisy and dirty and the shared bathroom can be diabolical. The doubles with bathrooms are much better, though it is wise to inspect a few rooms before settling in. The VIP rooms have a small lounge but are overpriced. The hotel's Traffic Café (mains Y8 to Y20) has an English menu and cold beer, though the meals delivered may not always match the menu description. Unless you have honed your Chinese or Tajik language skills, breakfast is a bit of a lottery and certainly an experience.

Ben Lei Xin Hotel (☎ 3423488; China Friendship Rd; d/ste Y120/150) The Ben Lei has probably the best beds in Tashkurgan and the suite is very comfy. However, the restaurant will only open when a tour group is booked in.

Stone City Hotel (☎ 3422600; Hangqlapu Rd; d Y140) The Stone City is often the choice for tour groups, with OK rooms with bathrooms though all suffer from hard beds and many from cigarette odour. Little English is spoken but staff are friendly. The restaurant (mains Y18 to Y45) has a partially English menu.

Pamir Hotel (☎ 3421085; Tashkurgan Rd; dm/d/stle Y80/200/320) The Pamir is convenient to the fort but little else. Dorm beds share a common toilet but there's no shower. The comfortable doubles in the newer wing have a hot shower (test it before accepting the room) and cheaper doubles in the old wing have a tub. The suites are plush but the beds are rock-hard. The restaurant here doesn't operate unless there are sufficient guests. If there is a tour group, dinner may be accompanied by a diverting dance and music show.

Tashkurgan's nonhotel restaurants are like meterless taxis: agree on a price before you commit. Gouging tourists is a local sport, though you should be able to fill up for Y30. Little English is spoken, so unless there's a menu, go into the kitchen and point to the ingredients you want. Several bakeries open early enough to beat the bus, with hot naan (Y1) and tea (Y1). There's a vegetable and produce market north of town behind the alfresco pool tables. Ben Lei Xin supermarkets and other general stores sell noodles and other supplies.

Near Jiaotong Binguang is a friendly **bar** (Tashkurgan Rd) where you can settle down to your first or last beer (*pjiu*) and peanuts (*huasheng*).

Getting There & Away

You can buy bus tickets the day before departure from the ticket office inside customs (the office is about 1km south of Jiaotong Binguang). If you are staying at Jiaotong Binguang you can get assistance from hotel staff.

A bus takes passengers from Tashkurgan on to Kashgar (Y62, seven hours, 296km) departing at about 9.30am (Beijing time). To Kara Kul (100km) costs Y25. On departure you may also be hit for an extra baggage charge. A special hired vehicle to Kashgar will cost about Y400 and carry three passengers and luggage comfortably, stopping along the way wherever and whenever you want. Inquire with your hotel reception.

The bus to Sost (Y225, 220km) is scheduled to leave at 10.30am but usually leaves much, much later after customs and immigration

formalities. If you have booked your ticket from Kashgar to Sost (Y270), you will be already on the manifest and you can hop on the bus at the Bus Station/Jiaotong Binguang for the short ride to customs. Some cyclists have been charged a 'loading' fee when putting their bikes on the roof, but this is highly negotiable.

TASHKURGAN TO KARA KUL

About 1½ hours from Tashkurgan, across the marshy **Tagharma Basin**, is a police post at **Kekyor**. On the very broad, high (around 4000m) ground west of Muztagh Ata, called the **Subash Plateau** (Subash Daban), the Highway makes its closest approach (about 10km) to Tajikistan. At the turn of the century this area was still in dispute, never having been properly mapped. Before long the dominant item in the landscape is 7546m **Muztagh Ata** (Turkic for Father of Ice Mountains).

Settlements from Tashkurgan to Kekyor are Sarykoli Tajik; those on to Kara Kul are Kyrgyz. One question that comes repeatedly to mind here is: how can sheep graze on gravel? Three hours from Kekyor is beautiful Kara Kul (Karakol Lake) – properly Lesser Kara Kul, as there's a bigger lake of the same name 150km northwest in Tajikistan – and two small sister lakes across the road, Besekh Kul and Shor Kul.

KARA KUL

This is one of the most beautiful places in western China, the deep blue waters (*kara kul* is Uyghur for black lake) nestled between two Pamir giants, Muztagh Ata to the south and 7719m **Mt Kongur** to the northeast. Many travellers come to Kashgar hoping to rub shoulders with Kyrgyz nomads in the pastures around Kara Kul (Chinese: Kalakuli Hu).

There are several Kyrgyz summer villages in the area; the nearest, just south of the lake, is **Subash**. You can walk around the lake in half a day; the downstream outflow can be forded at the village nearby. At Subash or elsewhere you can arrange an excursion by horse to *jailuu* (high pastures), about three hours from the lake at the foot of Muztagh Ata.

With a tent you could spend days at the lake or on the flanks of Muztagh Ata. To walk up to Muztagh Ata base camp, it's easiest to head south on the Highway for about 14km, then east 2km to **Edara** village. From here it's a climb of about 15km to the base camp, at 4550m. Be

prepared for the worst kind of weather, no matter what it looks like when you start.

The lake is at 3700m and the nights are below freezing even in the summer. Be aware also of summer sandstorms, which can rise in a minute. Between late October and early May the place may be deserted.

A large wind turbine interrupts the otherwise wonderfully desolate view and heralds the presence of the Karakol Lake Resort. Even if you are not staying at the Karakol Lake Resort – a tourist trap – you can be stung Y50 just for entering the resort grounds (ie the car park). At either of the accommodation options at the lake you will be surrounded by Kyrgyz trying to sell you everything from stones to a bed in their yurt. Horse and camel rides start at Y30 per half-hour but are highly negotiable.

Sleeping & Eating

Karakol Lake Resort (yurts per person Y50, dm/d Y40/Y100) This Chinese development has mock-up yurts and a few quads and double rooms. Don't be fooled by the bathrooms – there's no plumbing and you will have to brave the disgusting outside 'amenities'. Yurts sleep eight and management will fill up one yurt before starting on the next. Campers and cyclists who opt to pitch their own tents should move 15 minutes off around the lake to avoid hassles with the resort management. The restaurant (mains Y20 to Y80) here is decent, if not great value, with an English menu.

Yurts (per person Y20) South of the resort are real yurts where you can stay and be fed in Kyrgyz fashion (meals Y10). The yurt is surprisingly warm, the cleanliness of the blankets and mattresses highly questionable, and the food basic but generous.

Sawut Fast Food Restaurant (yurts per person Y40) This cluster of yurts beside the lake, about 3km beyond the resort (heading towards Kashgar), is a much better option. The friendly Kyrgyz-owned operation has a colourful yurt restaurant (mains Y25) where you can sip bottomless green tea and enjoy fresh vegetable and meat dishes. Accommodation is in yurts with clean bedding and if there is room there is no need to share with strangers. The outside toilets are, of course, rudimentary.

Getting There & Away

Local Kashgar to Tashkurgan buses will stop at Kara Kul, though some travellers have had trouble flagging one down again when they

were ready to return or move on. You can catch the bus to Kashgar (Y43) or Tashkurgan (Y25) if they stop to let tourists take photos of the lake. Seats are usually available to Kara Kul on the bus from Kashgar to Pakistan, on a stand-by basis (Y43).

Tour and travel agencies in Kashgar (p323) can organise day trips to the lake for about Y500, with a guide and lunch. An overnight stay adds at least Y200 per person for bed, dinner and vehicle charges. More-interesting trips, such as an overnight stay at Subash with local walks, a night or two at Muztagh Ata base camp or five- to seven-day treks on the mountain, can also be arranged.

KARA KUL TO KASHGAR

An hour from the lake, at the foot of Mt Kongur, is the settlement of **Bulunkul Dobey**, an outpost of the larger Kyrgyz settlement of Bulunkul. Most settlements from Kara Kul to the Ghez River canyon are Kyrgyz; those on the Kashgar plain are Uyghur.

The corridor northwest to Muji and south to the Pakistan border is a Pamir valley flanked by a rampart of snowy peaks, the **Sarykol Pamir**. The word *pamir* refers to pasturage, the valleys' main historical use. The terrain is typical of the Pamirs: high, broad, treeless valleys strung between glacier-rounded mountains, with rivers often pooling into shallow lakes.

Just before you enter the canyon of the Ghez River (Uyghur: Ghez Darya), the Ghez seems to lose its way in a vast wet plain ringed with grey-white sand dunes, a strangely beautiful spot that locals call Kuntagh (Sand Mountain). A few hardy individuals brave the fierce dry winds to sell garnets, crystals and oddments to travellers. A hot spring is inside a plain brick building by the river, near the top of the canyon.

As you enter the canyon the landscape changes abruptly. The 70-odd kilometres of road are cut into sheer walls, or woven across huge tilted boulder fields; the canyon walls are immense, steep and lifeless, forbidding even on a sunny day. **Ghez** itself is a lonely military checkpoint with a few shops and teashops. Photographing soldiers or buildings here may result in a confiscated camera.

After Ghez you soon exit the canyon's wine-red sandstone walls at its northern

end and head across 80km of flats towards Kashgar. The main attraction is the luminous rampart of the Pamirs rising from the plain to the west. At **Upal** (Chinese: Wupa'er) is a food stop (a pretty silly place for one, whichever direction you're headed). It's only an hour from Kashgar, but the buses always seem to stop here. Three kilometres off the road is the small tomb of Mahmud Kashgari, an 11th-century scholar famous for writing the first dictionary of Turkic languages. As you approach Kashgar, the villages, poplars and dusty roadworks multiply.

KASHGAR

☎ 0998 / elevation 1354m

Far-flung Kashgar (Kashi) is modern China's westernmost city. For two millennia this exotic desert oasis has been a Silk Road trading hub; a Central Asian bazaar with an intoxicating cocktail of peoples. Even today it remains just a big market town, with impromptu street-corner negotiations, perpetual bazaars and a renowned weekly market. Some things haven't changed for centuries – blacksmiths, carpenters and cobblers work by hand in the old quarter, barbers wield cut-throats, and from surrounding fields come wheat, maize, beans and rice loaded on donkey drays.

But in many ways the past is decidedly gone – symbolically confirmed by the huge statue of Mao Zedong. Wherever you turn, high-rises sprout and department stores multiply. Lime green taxis, noise and fumes and city regulations have pushed out most of the donkey carts and put Kashgar in a league with most other Chinese cities. Id Kah Mosque still stands tall, as it has since 1442, and the chaos of the Sunday market still defies the obvious attempts to contain and compartmentalise.

Peak tourist season (and peak demand for rooms and transport) is from late June to September, with saturation at weekends as tourists arrive for the Sunday market. If you've come from Pakistan, Chinese brusqueness will come as a shock, though you'll find an echo of Pakistani cheer in Uyghur men. It's also nice to see the female half of the human race out in the open again.

Orientation

Official (Chinese) street names are given here. The main streets out from the cen-

tre are Renmin Donglu and Renmin Xilu (East and West People's Rds), and Jiefang Beilu and Jiefang Nanlu (North and South Liberation Rds). The perimeter road on the northwest is Yunmulakexia Lu.

The heart of Kashgar is Id Kah Mosque with its surrounding bazaar and the restored Old Town to the east. Uyghurs live mainly north of the centre and the Chinese in brick compounds to the south. The budget travellers' enclave is on the west side, with midrange hotels, travel help and good food. The market is east of town, and the livestock market is several kilometres to the south.

Information

INTERNET ACCESS

Thanks to an addiction to Warcraft games etc internet cafés abound in Kashgar.

Former British Consulate Café (144 Seman Lu; per hr ¥10) A small operation inside the Chini Bagh's rear building foyer. Cheaper rate if you buy a beer or a coffee.

Internet Café (Seman Lu; per hr ¥3) Unsigned café just northeast of Chini Bagh Hotel with plenty of monitors.

Internet Café (Seman Lu; per hr ¥3) Huge gaming café just southeast of Seman Hotel.

Seman Travel (per hr ¥5) Another small operation in the Seman Hotel foyer.

MEDICAL SERVICES

Health Clinic (CITS Bldg, Chini Bagh Hotel Compound, Seman Lu) Basic first aid.

Hospital of Traditional Uyghur Medicine (Seman Lu) East of Seman Hotel; travellers say it's pretty dire.

People's Hospital (Renmin Yiyuan; Jiefang Beilu) The main Chinese hospital, north of the river.

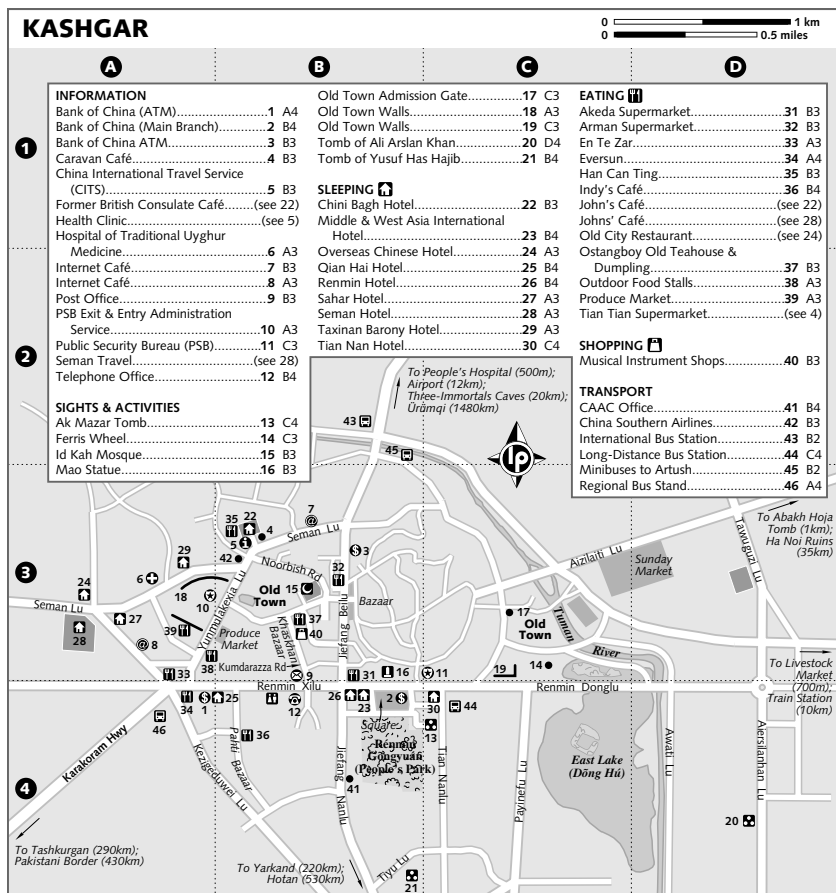
MONEY

You may be able to change cash at tourist hotels, but at the time of research they were not cashing travellers cheques. Uyghur money-changers loiter outside Chini Bagh Hotel and in the bazaar. There's little to be gained from dealing with them as their rates are so similar to the banks, and plenty to be lost because some are accomplished cheats.

Bank of China (Main Branch; Renmin Donglu; ☎ Beijing time 9.30am-1.30pm & 4-7.30pm Mon-Fri, 11am-3pm Sat, winter times are slightly different) Changes travellers cheques and cash in major currencies and gives cash advances on major credit cards at counter No 1. A foreign-exchange ATM is outside facing Renmin Donglu.

Bank of China ATM (Jiefang Beilu)

Bank of China ATM (Renmin Xilu) West of the main branch.



PERMITS

PSB Exit & Entry Administration Service (111 Yunmulakexia Lu; ☎️ Beijing time 10am-1pm & 4-8pm Mon-Fri) This branch is located just in front of and to the left of the boom gates. Chinese visas can be extended here (one month Y160). Alien Travel Permits (*waibin tongxing zheng*) for areas not freely open to foreigners (around Y50 depending on nationality) are issued here. Some English.

POLICE

PSB (67 Renmin Donglu) The city police station.

POST

Post office (40 Renmin Xilu; ☎️ Beijing time 9.30am-8pm) Buy stamps downstairs, but hand overseas letters to the international desk upstairs. There's a small charge for each letter you pick up from poste restante.

TELEPHONE

Telephone office (Renmin Xilu; ☎️ Beijing time 9.30am-8pm) Upstairs is for international calls and downstairs for domestic calls. IDD calls here are much cheaper than from tourist hotels and private agencies.

TOURIST INFORMATION & TRAVEL AGENCIES

An enterprising English-speaking Uyghur by the name of Ablimit Ghopor, but better known as **Elvis** (☎️ 13899136195; elvisablimit@yahoo.com), runs an information and guiding service that has received many good reviews from travellers. Elvis can guide you around the old town and introduce you to traditional life in Kashgar, visiting private houses, traditional teahouses and, of course, the Sunday market. Excursions

A TURBULENT PAST

Kashgaria, the historical name for the western end of the Tarim Basin, has always had more in common with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan than with China. But over the centuries imperial China has come again and again to police its borders or the Silk Road.

At the end of WWII, Xinjiang declared independence as the Republic of East Turkestan, aided by Mao Zedong in exchange for Uyghur resistance to the Nationalists. But after Mao's founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the fledgling state collapsed when most of its leaders died in a mysterious plane crash, en route to Beijing to negotiate with the new regime.

Xinjiang was subsequently declared an 'autonomous region', an Orwellian sleight of hand that has failed to deliver much in the way of autonomy. Although China has invested substantial funds developing Xinjiang's infrastructure, Uyghurs frequently argue that all the good jobs and business opportunities are dominated by Han Chinese. Any time spent in Kashgar shows that integration is not seamless and an underlying tension is ever present.

further afield can also be arranged. Elvis can usually be found at Old City Restaurant, opposite Seman Hotel.

The following Kashgar cafés are good sources of information and can organise tours to Kara Kul, Taklamakan Desert, Shipton's Arch, Yarkand and Hotan plus onward travel.

Caravan Café (☎ 2982196; 120 Seman Lu) This café/information service was closed at the time of writing but may re-open under new management.

China International Travel Service (CITS); ☎ 2983156; www.kscits.com.cn; 144 Seman Lu) Up two flights of stairs in a building inside the Chini Bagh Hotel gate, CITS can arrange tickets, travel permits and hire cars.

John's Café (☎ 2581186; www.johncafe.net) John Hu and his sister Jenny organise bookings, tickets, permits, transport and excursions at competitive rates from these cafés at the Chini Bagh and Seman hotels. The cafés are among the best places in town to meet travellers and swap information. Bike hire from John's is ¥20 per day.

Former British Consulate Café (☎ 2817312; Chini Bagh Hotel) Secreted behind the lifts in the 'old' wing of the Chini Bagh. A one-man operation providing information, tours and internet. Unfortunately, if the manager is on tour the place is closed.

Dangers & Annoyances

Travellers have lost money or passports to pickpockets at the market, in the ticket scrum at the bus station and even on local buses, so keep yours tucked away. Foreign women may encounter harassment, especially if they haven't covered their arms and legs sufficiently.

Sights

The best of Kashgar is experienced by just wandering the laneways and bazaars of the

old quarter, sipping green tea or munching on a smoky kebab while being constantly assailed by carpet merchants, lamp makers and purveyors of 'antiques'. See the boxed text, opposite and go for a stroll.

SUNDAY MARKET

Once a week Kashgar's population swells as people stream into the Sunday market (east of the city centre off Aiziliati Lu), one of Asia's most mind-boggling bazaars. By sunrise the roads east of town are a sea of pedestrians, horses, donkey carts, bikes, trucks, cars and buses, everyone shouting 'Boish-boish!' ('Coming through!'). Sellers spruik their wares: rugs, blankets, hats, caps and boots; there are tools, wedding invitations and wonderful dried fruit. And then there are the medicine shops with buckets of live scorpions, jars of preserved toads, desiccated snakes hanging from hooks and tubs of horns from who knows what animal promising cures for who knows what ailment.

The grounds are a 30- or 40-minute walk from the Seman Hotel. A pavilion east of the bridge was conceived as a meeting place for Central Asian and Russian traders and is now a huge carpet showroom.

Taxis (¥5) lurk outside tourist hotels on market day, though traffic may prevent them from taking you right into the heart of the market. Ask for Yekshenba Bazaar (Sunday market). John's Café (left) offers a free one-way minibus shuttle after breakfast (10am) from both its branches.

No visit to Kashgar is complete without experiencing the flying dust and fur and unfamiliar odours of the animated **livestock market**. Seemingly crazy men test-ride seem-

ingly unstoppable horses, while boys tether fat-tailed sheep head to head into zipperlike rows. Donkeys bray at being exchanged for Y1000. Handshake contracts become arm wrestles accompanied by full-volume vocal exchanges. Yaks and camels pant in the unfamiliar heat, and vast quantities of *laghman* noodles are consumed at the makeshift kitchens. Try to get here by 9am (Beijing time) while the wheeling and dealing is in full swing. The livestock market is east of Renmin Donglu. Catch bus 16 on Renmin Donglu or hop in a taxi for Y10 (Y5 from the Sunday market).

ID KAH MOSQUE

This big yellow-tiled **mosque** (admission Y10) is one of the largest in China, with a peaceful courtyard and gardens for 20,000 worshippers. It was built in 1442 as a smaller mosque on what was then the outskirts of town. During the Cultural Revolution, China's decade of political anarchy from 1966 to 1976, Id Kah suffered heavy damage, but has since been restored. Its central veranda has a carved and finely painted ceiling.

It's acceptable for non-Muslims to go in. Local women are rarely seen inside, but foreign women are usually ignored if they're modestly dressed (arms and legs covered and a scarf on your head). Take your shoes off if you enter covered, carpeted prayer areas, and be discreet with photography.

ABAKH HOJA TOMB

Kashgar's best example of Islamic architecture is this elegant **mausoleum** (admission Y15; ☞ Beijing time 9am-8.30pm), built in the mid-17th century for the descendants of a Muslim missionary named Muhatum Ajam (or Makhtum Azan). With its tiled dome and four minarets, it resembles a bright, miniature Taj Mahal.

Beneath the tiled stones in the main chamber are more than 70 graves, including those of children. They include the grave of Muhatum Ajam's grandson, Abakh Hoja, a Uyghur aristocrat and spiritual leader who ruled southern Xinjiang for 16 years in the 17th century and is sometimes called the patron saint of Kashgar. Another grave is that of Abakh Hoja's granddaughter, known to the Chinese as Xiang Fei (Fragrant Consort). Behind the mausoleum is a vast graveyard.

The mausoleum is a half-hour bike ride, a two-hour walk or Y15 taxi ride northeast of town.

TOMB OF YUSUF HAS HAJIB

The striking, blue-and-white tiled, purple-domed **mausoleum** (Tiyu Lu; admission Y15; ☞ Beijing time 9am-8.30pm) is a 1993 restoration of a building enlarged many times over the centuries and then smashed up during the Cultural Revolution. It's Xinjiang's most important Uyghur monument, though there's little to see besides the huge, elaborate gravestone inside.

WHERE IS OLD KASHGAR?

Kashgar is again looking like a Central Asian hub, firmly on the tourist trail and with trade links to Pakistan, central China and Central Asia. The 'town' has become a city, conceding adobe mosques and Uyghur cemeteries to six-lane avenues and row upon row of high-rises and other 'modernisations'. For the time being at least, traditional Kashgar is still here if you look for it:

- At the Sunday market and livestock market, of course.
- In the old bazaar – a labyrinth of blacksmiths, carpenters, jewellers, teashops, bakeries and noodle shops. Start at Id Kah Mosque or Noorbish Rd and wander towards Khaskhan Bazaar, also known as Kumdarazza Rd. Through the smoke of numerous kebab stands and the clamour of metal, workmen sip tea on balconies, heads are shaved smooth, hats are fashioned and sold, and caged thrushes sing their hearts out.
- In the pale mud-walled, brick-paved lanes of the restored old town (admission Y10) east of Jiefang Beilu towards the Tuman River, where a network of hushed empty lanes reveal glimpses of traditional houses – some are signposted as open for inspection by tourists, where you will be shown wares for sale.
- Inside Id Kah Mosque.

Yusuf Has Hajib (or Yusup Khas Hajip; c 1019–85) is perhaps the best-known Uyghur scholar, thanks to his *Kutad Kubilik*, or *The Wisdom of Royal Glory*. This encyclopaedic look at Qarakhan political, economic and cultural life, cast in the form of a 13,290-line lyric poem, is a classic of Uyghur literature. He presented it in 1070 to the Qarakhan ruler, who awarded him the title Has Hajib, meaning ‘royal adviser’. Strangely, there is no trace of the original, only very old copies in libraries in Vienna, Cairo and Namangan (Uzbekistan).

TOMB OF ALI ARSLAN KHAN

Another historical site is this tomb and small mosque, fairly modest considering they mark the grave of a Qarakhan ruler, Ali Arslan Khan (r 970–98). At the end of Renmin Donglu, go almost a kilometre south. The tomb is in a weedy graveyard of disinterred adobe graves squeezed between advancing armies of Chinese apartments and the road. You may be asked for a few *mao* donation.

PEOPLE'S PARK

South of the Mao statue is **People's Park** (Renmin gongyuan; admission ¥2), a weedy arboretum with avenues of tall poplars, a horrible little zoo, and Uyghurs playing billiards, chess and *shiang chi* (Chinese chess). East of the park, 200m down a back lane, is a decaying old **tomb**, which, according to local people, may have been for a 19th-century imam.

OLD TOWN WALLS

At the east end of Seman Lu stands a 10m-high section of the old town walls, at least 500 years old. Another row of them is visible from Yunmulakexia Lu. Construction around, on and in them makes access impossible, and there's clearly no interest in preserving them. Another small section can be seen on the way to East Lake.

EAST LAKE

Heading east out along Renmin Donglu is a willow-lined artificial lake, a popular spot for migratory birds and a good spot for a picnic or a peaceful walk among the weeds. In the summer you can rent little boats. Take a ride on the enormous **ferris wheel** (¥5) for a bird's-eye view of Kashgar – a sobering image of modern development engulfing the traditional city.

Sleeping

BUDGET

Sahar Hotel (☎ 2581122; d ¥80) This basic place is popular with Pakistani traders. The tired but adequately clean rooms with TV and hot shower represent pretty good value.

Chini Bagh Hotel (☎ 2842299; 144 Seman Lu; dm/d annexe ¥50/120, d old/new bldg ¥380/480, ste new bldg ¥680-880; ☎ ☑) The Chini Bagh complex comprises two large towers where the British consulate's garden and front gate used to be. Reception is found in the ‘new’ building, which is on your right as you enter the gate (it used to be the International Hotel). The budget rooms are in an annexe behind John's Café. These are adequate; however, the spacious doubles within the ‘old’ building are better value, especially when you (easily) negotiate a discount. Finally, the best rooms are found in the ‘new’ building along with the restaurants, bar and a coffee shop. At the rear of the ‘old’ building is the original consular house, featuring a lack-lustre Uyghur restaurant. The tariff includes a voucher for the unappealing buffet breakfast served in the Chinese restaurant, but you'll soon be heading down to John's Café (opposite) for eggs, muesli and coffee. The Chini Bagh accepts major credit cards.

Seman Hotel (☎ 2582129; www.semanhotel.com; 337 Seman Lu; dm ¥20-30, d ¥120-380, ste ¥800; ☑) The rambling complex that encompasses all that remains of the old Russian consulate and its compound has a variety of dorms (some with outside bathroom) of two to six beds, some with old Russian bathtubs. Hot water is unpredictable and room security is dubious. Standard doubles with bathroom are overpriced at ¥280. There are better doubles (¥380) with vibrant Uyghur-inspired décor. The old consulate has seven individual and rather eccentric doubles and you would need to be a committed Great Game buff to pay for this atmosphere.

Renmin Hotel (☎ 2823373; cnr Renmin Donglu & Jiefang Nanlu; s ¥128, d ¥168-388) The very central ‘Peoples Hotel’ has small, dreary doubles with telephone, TV and bathroom for ¥168, and only marginally better doubles for ¥218 to ¥388. Not the friendliest place in town.

Tian Nan Hotel (☎ 2824023; 272 Renmin Donglu; d/ste ¥180/220) Although the address is Renmin Donglu (that building was being demolished at the time of writing) the operating hotel is opposite the long-distance bus station

on Tian Nanlu. The Tian Nan is not a bad budget choice, especially if you have just alighted from a long overland bus trip.

Overseas Chinese Hotel (☎ 2588588; Seman Lu; d Y198) The rooms here are barely acceptable, with cigarette-scalded carpets and accompanying odours. Though they have TV and bathroom, you should negotiate a much better price or move on.

MIDRANGE

Chini Bagh Hotel and Seman Hotel, listed under Budget, also have midrange options.

Qian Hai Hotel (☎ 2824655; 199 Renmin Xilu; d Y360-380) Modern Qian Hai is set back from the busy street, and the comfortable doubles are equipped with telephone, TV and bathroom. Customers seem to be largely Chinese business travellers, and very little English is spoken.

Taxinan Barony Hotel (☎ 2586888; www.baronyhotels.com; 242 Seman Lu; d Y580-2680; ☎ ☎) This plush hotel is one of the best in Kashgar, though the best rooms at the Chini Bagh and the discounted rooms at the MWIH represent better value. The Taxinan Barony has very comfortable, spotless doubles with telephone, TV minibar and bathroom. Facilities include an upmarket Chinese restaurant, coffee shop, bar and, perhaps its best asset, large barbecue-and-beer garden.

Middle & West Asia International Hotel (MWIH; ☎ 2801111; 8 Renmin Donglu; d Y680-880) This central high-rise hotel was offering significant (>50%) discounts at the time of research but this may have been because the building was so new. Many rooms looked like they hadn't even been slept in when we visited and the restaurant was yet to serve a meal. The largish beds were still 'Chinese firm' but each room had a big TV, lavish furnishings and a bathtub to luxuriate in.

Eating & Drinking

Opening times for restaurants and cafés use local (Xinjiang) time.

RESTAURANTS

Old City Restaurant (Seman Lu; mains Y4-8) Head to the Old City, next to the Overseas Chinese Hotel, for authentic Uyghur cuisine at local prices. Try Uyghur standards like *laghman* or *fantang* (a savoury soup of meat, vegetables, rice noodles and garlic). Vegetarians can ask for fried vegetables and rice; the rest of us

can devour kebabs with cold beer. There's an English menu thanks to Elvis (see p323).

En Te Zar (Kezigeuwei Lu; mains Y5-10; ☎ 11am-9pm) This busy Uyghur fast-food restaurant doesn't have an English menu and no English is spoken, but you can get by pointing at other customers' dishes or sticking to the delicious barbecued meat and noodles. Monitor the bill though!

Eversun (Renmin Xilu; mains Y10-50; ☎ 9am-late) This bright, modern Chinese/Western restaurant boasts about its coffee, which is rather expensive. However, its Chinese lunch boxes, soups and excellent pizzas are worth the splurge. We enjoyed the pizzas and pasta that feature a Xinjiang twist. Finish off with first-rate iced coffee, green tea or ice cream.

John's Café (mains Y12-45; ☎ 8am-late) Both branches of John's Café serve unadorned travellers' fare in comfortable relaxed settings. There's a hefty range of Continental and Chinese dishes from omelettes, chips and pizza to Sichuan chicken. Coffee, juices and smoothies can be followed by beer and spirits.

Han Can Ting (Chinese Dining Hall; 144 Seman Lu; mains Y16-48; ☎ 8am-late) This boisterous Chinese restaurant is situated in the Chini Bagh Hotel compound. It has indoor seating but outdoors is the place to be. Enjoy cold beer and good Chinese meals brought by the attentive staff who can arrange nonmenu items such as kebabs from the nearest Uyghur barbecue.

CAFÉS & QUICK EATS

The pavements of Yunmulakexia Lu north of Renmin Xilu and the Old Town lanes west of Id Kah Mosque overflow in the evening with Uyghur barbecues and stalls offering good food at minuscule prices. Hygiene is sometimes dubious, but you can't go wrong dipping your own spoon into hot *laghman*, or *jiaozi* (dumplings in boiling broth).

Ostangboy Old Teahouse & Dumpling (Khaskhan Bazaar; ☎ 9am-late) The name (meaning river-side) gives an idea of how old this joint is. This is the place to taste the history of Kashgar. Sit on the balcony and sip *dara darmin chai*, sticky-sweet tea with saffron and cardamom. As a tourist you will be fleeced at Y10 a pot – but worth every kuai.

Indy's Café (Pahti Bazaar Lu; ☎ 10am-midnight) Hard to find but worth the effort, Indy's Café is also not cheap but it's worth the expense. Indy

does the best espresso in town and you can wash it down with generous helpings of black walnut cake, hot snacks or follow up with a cleansing ale.

Caravan Café (120 Seman Lu) Just outside Chini Bagh's gate, this long-standing travellers' oasis with espresso coffee, apple pie and Western breakfasts was closed and undergoing management/ownership changes. Hopefully it has reopened by the time you are reading this.

SELF-CATERING

The best way to eat vegetarian is to self-cater. A small **produce market** (Yunmulakexia Lu) and an impromptu one outside the bus station on Jeifang Beilu have fresh fruit and vegetables. Early in the morning numerous bakeries churn out stout naan (the flat ones are *aknaan*, the bagels *gzhde*). Supermarkets, such as **Akeda** (Jeifang Beilu), **Tian Tian** (Seman Lu) and **Arman** (Jeifang Beilu) have dried fruit, biscuits, ice cream, peanut butter, honey and chocolate bars.

Shopping

SOUVENIRS

Head to the bazaars of the Old Town, along Noorbish Rd and Khaskhan (bamboo steamer) Bazaar. Look for hats, Aladdin lamps, antiques, Mao paraphernalia and handicrafts. Uyghur knives with colourfully inlaid handles are a big favourite with tourists, but don't try to fly out of Kashgar with them in your hand luggage! The Sunday market has a depressing line-up of animal pelts, including those from dogs. Some are thankfully fake, but it is not unknown to see pelts from endangered animals. The citizens of Kashgar have been selling things for over 2000 years, so be ready to bargain.

MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

Beautiful long-necked stringed instruments run the gamut from junk to collector's items. They include the two-string *dutar*, larger three-string *khomuz*, small *tambur* and elaborately shaped *ravap* with five strings and a lizard-skin sounding board. The small reed horn is a *sunai*, or *surnai*. A *dab* is a type of tambourine. Two shops south of the mosque on Khaskhan Bazaar sell these plus miniature tourist versions.

CARPETS

There are a few dealers in the Old Town and some bargains in small shops, but most have moved out to the Sunday market pavilion.

Regionally, the best carpets are said to be in Hotan but to recognise what's good and what's not seek local advice from an experienced dealer such as Ablimit Ghopor aka **Elvis** (☎ 13899136195; elvisablimit@yahoo.com).

Getting There & Away

AIR

At least five flights a day go to/from Ürümqi for Y1230. Try to book at least a week ahead in summer, with **Hainan Airways** (www.hnair.com) or **China Southern** (☎ 2980288; www.cs-air.com; Seman Lu). China Southern has the most flights per day and at least one sales assistant at the Kashgar office speaks good English. The travel agencies listed on p323 can also help with ticketing. China Southern also flies to/from Islamabad each Saturday. The fare is about US\$250 plus taxes.

Flights are occasionally cancelled because of wind or sandstorms (it happened to us!). In this case you could easily spend less money and arrive sooner on a fast bus or the train. If your flight is cancelled, just show up for the next available flight and you get priority; there's no need to change the ticket. But you will need to change any ticket for a connecting flight out of Ürümqi. Your airline should provide this assistance as well as assistance in finding stand-by accommodation in Ürümqi.

BUS

Most buses to regional towns and cities depart from the **long-distance bus station** (Tian Nanlu; ☎ 9.30am-1.30pm & 3.30-6.30pm). Ticket window Nos 1 to 3 are for Yengisar, Yarkand, Yecheng (Qarghillik), Hotan, Tashkurgan and Ürümqi. However, the buses to Ürümqi leave from the **international bus station** (Jeifang Beilu), and if you are going to Kara Kul (Y43) or Tashkurgan (Y63) you should use the bus heading to Sost (see below). There have been instances of theft and pack slashing at the bus stations, so keep an eye on your bags.

Pakistan

The starting point for the 500km bus trip to Sost (Y270) is the **international bus station** (Jeifang Beilu), north of the bridge over the Tuman River. Departure is 11am local time.

The trip takes at least 1½ to two days with an overnight stop in Tashkurgan. Sit on the left-hand side for the overall best views. Drivers like to put luggage on the roof, so carry on-board water, snacks and warm

clothes, as nights can be cold in any season. Unplanned stops and flat tyres are not unheard of. Landslides in the Ghez Valley can cancel departures at any time of year but especially in July and August. Customs inspections take place in Tashkurgan.

Die-hards can hop onto the air-con Natco bus for a nonstop 14-plus-hour trip to Gilgit (Y350), departing at 7.30am local time Monday to Saturday; at the time of research, passengers could take this bus only as far as Sost or Passu. This rule is expected to change.

An alternative is to hire a minibus to Sost – still a two-day trip with sightseeing at Kara Kul and Tashkurgan. All the travel agencies listed on p323 can arrange it; eg CITS charges Y3000 for up to nine passengers in a minibus.

Seats as far as Tashkurgan on the Kashgar to Sost bus are sold on a stand-by basis for Y63, but you run a small risk of finding no seat on a later bus to Sost.

Ürümqi

You can make the 1480km, 24-hour trip to Ürümqi in a nonstop ‘sleeper’ bus (Uyghur: *qarvatlik mashina*; Chinese: *wopoche*) for Y210/196 in an upper/lower berth.

These buses depart every hour from the **international bus station** (Jeifang Beilu). Buy tickets one to two hours before departure, though it is also possible to barter directly with the drivers for cheaper fares.

Kyrgyzstan

You must already have a Kyrgyzstan visa. There are two road passes into Kyrgyzstan: the Irkeshtam, which leads to Osh, and the Torugart, which leads to Bishkek. Getting to Osh is straightforward, with a bus (US\$50, two days) leaving the international bus station on Mondays at 10am.

There is also a bus to Bishkek (US\$50) but because the Torugart Pass is designated ‘secondary’ it’s not possible for independent foreigners to travel on the bus all the way to Bishkek. To get to Bishkek it’s best to use one of the Kashgar travel agencies (see p323) which can organise the necessary permits and transport. CITS charges US\$150, which includes a ‘guide’, permit and transport for up to three passengers to Naryn. Onward transport to Bishkek costs roughly US\$160.

Via the Irkeshtam Pass no permit is needed. CITS charges US\$200 to cover the 260km

Chinese section in a minibus plus US\$60 for the Kyrgyzstan connection to Osh.

Tibet

The road trip to Lhasa via Ali requires permits, a hefty wallet and unusual stamina for the long, lonely roads – but it can be done. All the necessary paperwork (including a permit from the army) and transport can be organised by CITS or John’s Café (see p323).

HITCHING

You might hitch a lift between Kashgar and Tashkurgan, but expect waits of anything from hours to days. You won’t save much money as drivers expect something equivalent to the bus fare. From Tashkurgan to Pakistan, you’ll have to wait for an empty seat on a bus.

TRAIN

The train station is several kilometres east of town though you can buy tickets at counters 4 and 5 at the **long-distance bus station** (Tian Nanlu; ☎ 9.30am-1.30pm & 3.30-6.30pm). A taxi costs about Y10, or catch local bus 28 from the Mao statue on Renmin Donglu.

There is a hard sleeper train to Ürümqi (Y180, 28 hours) but the air-con sleeper is faster (Y350, 22 hours). Departures are daily; the fast train leaves at 4.50pm (Beijing time) and the slow train leaves at 9.30am.

Getting Around

TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

A bus (costing Y5) leaves from the **Civil Aviation Administration of China Office** (CAAC; ☎ 2822113; 95 Jeifang Nanlu) 2½ hours before each flight departure, and one meets each incoming flight. A taxi is about Y15. ‘Airport’ is *aydrum* in Uyghur, *feijichang* in Chinese.

BICYCLE RENTAL

John’s Café (☎ /fax 2581186; Seman Lu) rents bikes for Y20 per day.

BUS

Useful routes include bus 2 (Jeifang Lu to the airport), 9 (international bus station to the Chini Bagh Hotel and Seman Hotel) and 28 (Renmin Donglu to the train station). The fare is Y1.

TAXI

The usually friendly drivers of the lime green taxis disregard their meters and charge Y5

around the town and the Sunday market, Y10 to the livestock market and train station, and Y15 to the airport.

AROUND KASHGAR

Three-Immortals Caves

Twenty kilometres north of Kashgar is one of the area's few traces of the flowering of Buddhism, the Three-Immortals (San Xian) Caves. These are three grottoes high on a sandstone cliff, in one of which you can make out some peeling frescoes. The cliff is too sheer to climb, so it's a bit of a disappointment.

Ha Noi & Mor Pagoda

At the end of a jarring 35km drive northeast of town are the ruins of Ha Noi, a Tang-dynasty town built in the 7th century and abandoned in the 12th. Little remains except for a great, solid, pyramid-like structure and the huge Mor 'Pagoda' (stupa).

Artush

Artush, or Artux (Chinese: Atushi), an hour's drive northeast of Kashgar, is a Kyrgyz market town and the centre of Kyzylsu Kyrgyz Autonomous County. It has a large **bazaar**, heavy on cloth and clothing. It's famous locally for figs, best in late summer or early autumn. Also here is the **10th-century tomb** of Sultan Sutuq Bughra Khan of the Qarakhan dynasty, the first local ruler to convert to Islam.

Minibuses to Artush (Y26) congregate in a field southeast of the Jeifang Beili bridge over the Tuman River in Kashgar, near the inter-

national bus station. The official foreigners' hotel in Artush is Kejou Binguan.

Yarkand & Hotan

These and other towns southeast of Kashgar were stops on a Silk Road branch along the south side of the Taklamakan Desert, and from time to time were also mini kingdoms. Yarkand, four hours from Kashgar, has a small indoor **Sunday bazaar**.

The craftspeople of Hotan were celebrated throughout Asia for their rugs, silk and carved jade, and to some extent they still are. The 4th-century Chinese pilgrim Fa Hsien described Hotan as a highly developed centre of Buddhism, with no fewer than 14 large monasteries. Hotan, 12 hours from Kashgar by bus, has a **Sunday market** to rival Kashgar's; smaller but without the tourists.

SLEEPING

Hotels are pretty spartan. In Yarkand foreigners end up at the **Shache Binguan** (Hotel Yarkand; ☎ 8512365; s/d Y120/280).

Hetian Yingbinguan (Hotel Hotan; ☎ 2022824; dm/d Y20/190) The official tourist hotel in Hotan provides hot showers and reliable accommodation for foreigners.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

From Kashgar's **long-distance bus station** (Tian Nanlu; ☎ 9.30am-1.30pm & 3.30-6.30pm), buses go frequently to Yarkand (Y37, three hours). Buses to Hotan (sleepers/nonsleepers Y85/65, eight to 10 hours) are less frequent. When buying tickets, use the Chinese names: Shache for Yarkand, and Hetian for Hotan.

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Trekking in Northern Pakistan



Northern Pakistan is heaven for mountain-lovers. Around every bend in the road or from any hotel window you see colossal mountain after mountain. But step off the road, head out of town and into the mountains, and you discover a new world of adventure. Walk along the rivers, through the valleys, over the passes. Admire the glaciers up close. Travel on foot with the gracious and hospitable people who live here. Experiencing these mountains first-hand is incomparable and unforgettable.

Northern Pakistan is an uncrowded gem where you can walk for days on even the most popular routes without seeing another trekker. Treks typically start at the highest elevation villages, almost all of which are accessible by road. They then follow trails to summer grazing pastures. Some of the more popular trekking routes are also the approach routes for mountaineering expeditions.

Occasionally, a route may scramble over talus (large boulders) or loose scree. Paths can be faint and hard to follow, with no signposts or trail markers along trekking routes. General route-finding and map-reading skills are highly desirable. For most trekkers, hiring a guide or porter to see you across challenging sections and show the way eliminates the guesswork. Although trekking through rugged terrain requires a high level of physical fitness, anyone who is in good health and reasonably fit with a little experience in mountain travel can go trekking here.

Equally important is cultivating self-reliance, sound judgment and good planning. Trekkers need to know the limits of their own abilities and how to integrate knowledge and experience to make sound decisions. Most of all, trekking in northern Pakistan calls for an open spirit of adventure and a sense of humour.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Marvel at the glaciers, icefalls and summits of the Nanga Parbat massif from idyllic **Fairy Meadow** (p348)
- Trek to **Rakaposhi Base Camp** (p351) for close-up views of two 7000m peaks
- Savour a hard-to-get glimpse of K2's summit from above the turquoise lake of **Rush Phari** (p352)
- Trek to a stunning glacial amphitheatre beneath the snowy summit of **Ultar** (p353)
- Trek along the mighty **Batura Glacier** (p356) beneath huge ice floes and 14 7000m peaks



This chapter is a tool to help you get started, whether planning an overnight excursion or a week-long trek. It features 15 outstanding treks, selected from the region's most accessible and easiest treks. In addition to these 15, many more superb treks that vary in length and difficulty – from easy two-day treks to several-weeks-long extreme, technical treks – are described in Lonely Planet's *Trekking in the Karakoram & Hindukush*, a comprehensive guide to the near-limitless possibilities.

Eleven treks in this chapter have trailheads near the Karakoram Highway (KKH), including all the treks in the Gilgit & Diamir, Nagry & Hunza, and Gojal sections. These treks are great choices for people travelling along the KKH who may want to try just one trek or sample several along the way.

Five treks in this chapter cross a glacier: Thui An, Diran Base Camp, Pakora Pass, Rush Phari and Batura Glacier. These glacier crossings are considered easy by Karakoram standards and take no longer than three hours. Hiring a guide or porter is recommended the first time you step on a glacier. Slippery surfaces, jagged seracs (pinnacles of glacial ice), groaning ice and yawning crevasses can seem like formidable obstacles, yet glaciers are an integral part of trekking in the Karakoram and Hindukush. With many glaciers descending to within inches of roads and valley floors, you have a unique opportunity to get out there and try glacier travel.

Crossing a mountain pass is always exhilarating and gives a special sense of accomplishment. Some of the most unique, spectacular vistas are at the top of passes. This chapter features six treks that go to or cross a pass: Gokhshal An & Doni An, Donson Pass & Kundyak An, Thui An, Pakora Pass, Shimshal Pamir, and Kilik & Mintaka Passes.

All of the treks start and finish at the same trailheads, except for four of the six treks mentioned previously that cross a pass. These treks – Gokhshal An & Doni An, Donson Pass & Kundyak An, Thui An, and Pakora Pass – start in one valley and finish in an adjacent valley, so you need to consider the transport logistics when planning. This chapter includes only open-zone treks, which means no government permits, fees or other formalities are required. Just go!

SUGGESTED ITINERARIES

Pakistan's mountains have it all – whatever excites you in the mountains, you can find it here.

Easy Treks

As short as two days, these gentle treks take you to ancient forests, fields of wildflowers, summer grasslands and spectacular icefalls: Donson Pass & Kundyak An, Fairy Meadow, Ultar, and Kilik & Mintaka Passes.

Treks with Views of K2

K2 (8611m), the world's second-highest peak, is remote and difficult to see, usually requiring at least two weeks' trekking. However, you can view this giant's summit pyramid in as little as two or five days from side trips on the Rush Phari and Humbrok treks.

Base Camp Treks

Reaching the base camp of a 7000m or 8000m peak takes weeks in other Himalayan regions, yet you can visit the base camps of Nanga Parbat (8125m) and Rakaposhi (7788m) in as little as two to five days on the Fairy Meadow and Rakaposhi Base Camp treks, and of Kampir Dior (7168m) and Pamiri Sar (7016m) in three days on the Pamir trek.

Treks with Glacier Travel

Crossing a glacier can be invigorating or intimidating depending on your perspective. The glacier travel on treks in this chapter is all nontechnical and does not require mountaineering equipment or prior experience; the Pakora Pass trek involves easy glacier travel, and the Thui An, Diran Base Camp, Rush Phari and Batura Glacier treks have as short yet comparatively more laborious glacier travel.

More Challenging Treks

Cross a pass or traverse an impressive glacier in as few as three or five days on the Thui An, Diran Base Camp, Pakora Pass, and Batura Glacier treks.

Multiple Treks

Getting off the road and on the trail for short treks can make any trip along the KKH truly memorable. For a series of easy treks, try the Fairy Meadow, Ultar, and Kilik & Mintaka Passes treks. A more challenging sequence could be Rakaposhi Base Camp and Batura

Glacier, or an overnight trek to Avdegar and the Shimshal Pamir.

For those intrepid trekkers travelling throughout northern Pakistan, try the Humbrook trek, drive across the Deosai Plains to reach the Fairy Meadow trek, and then head north on the KKH for the Rakaposhi Base Camp trek. Or, if you're travelling between Gilgit and Chitral, try the Thui An trek followed by the Gokhshal An & Doni An trek.

GETTING STARTED

Your choice of a trek depends upon the season, the length of time you want to trek and the level of difficulty. As you plan your trek, keep in mind that the process is more than just devising lists of places to visit and things to take. Take time to also think about what kind of trekking experience you want.

WHEN TO TREK

The trekking season starts in late April and finishes by late October. Until mid-June, much snow remains on passes and north-facing slopes, keeping passes higher than 3000m closed. This is a pleasant time to trek in lower-elevation valleys where fields turn bright green with new wheat, and fruit blossoms decorate the trees. Mid-June to mid-September is the peak trekking season, and the optimal time to traverse glaciers and cross passes higher than 4000m. During late spring and summer, the snow line recedes at about 10m per day, reaching 5500m by late summer. Alpine meadows above 4000m are in full bloom and shepherds tend their livestock during the long summer days. Below 2500m, valleys become intensely hot and dry, and narrow canyon walls reflect the extreme midday heat. The rivers are brown and swollen from the glacial melt. By mid-August, the crevasses on glaciers are exposed and any remaining snow is soft. Mid-September to late October brings cooler yet pleasant daytime temperatures and crisp nights that suit lower-elevation treks. Snowfall also starts to accumulate, closing passes higher than 4000m. The glacial melt ceases and rivers recede, returning to blue.

WHAT KIND OF TREK

Careful planning and preparation are the keys to the success of any trek. On most treks, trekkers need to take shelter, bedding, camp-

ing and cooking equipment, food and fuel for their entire trip. Basically you can follow one of two approaches to organising your trek – do it yourself, or hire someone to do it for you.

Organising things yourself offers the greatest flexibility and is the least expensive style. However, it requires time and initiative to shop, pack and organise transport to the trailhead, and basic language skills to communicate with everyone from shopkeepers and drivers to porters.

Most trekkers hire someone to help them. This can mean anything from hiring one or two porters to carry loads and show the way, to hiring a trekking company to take care of everything. The two key criteria in deciding whether or not to hire someone are your physical ability to deal with the terrain and your ability to communicate. Anyone lacking basic route-finding and wilderness-survival skills or the language skills necessary to ask permission to travel in a valley and explain themselves should hire someone.

Whatever arrangements you organise, no-one should trek alone. It's always a good idea to trek with a partner, and if you haven't done this kind of trekking before, go with someone who has. You can travel with friends or look to find other like-minded trekkers to share the work and provide support. Although there is no organised system to hook up independent trekkers, you can meet potential trekking companions at hotels or by asking around town. Be sure prospective trekkers have the same objectives and style as you.

Each trek has a relative grading based on its level of difficulty in relation to all treks in northern Pakistan. Two gradings are used in this chapter: easy and moderate.

Easy treks are suitable for most trekkers and follow trails below 3500m for typically two or three days. Easy treks have modest daily elevation changes and may cross gentle passes or involve one or two hours of nontechnical glacier travel.

Moderate treks are suitable for reasonably fit trekkers and follow more rugged trails for less than one week. Moderate treks typically cross a pass below 4500m with significant elevation changes on one day of the trek, and/or involve less than three hours of nontechnical glacier travel.

Anyone trekking for the first time here will probably find all of these treks to be quite

strenuous and challenging. If you are at all unsure about your abilities, start with an easy trek and hire someone to accompany you.

Backpacking

You may be inclined to heft everything yourself, but backpacking is the most physically and mentally taxing way to trek. Backpacking suits the patient and outgoing individual with a high degree of self-reliance, and enough strength and endurance to carry a full load and still do all the camp chores. You also need good trail sense and good maps. Of course, if you can do all this, backpacking can be the most rewarding way of going. It offers you the greatest freedom to have a flexible itinerary and go at your own pace, and the most potential for discovery and interaction with people and their culture.

Trekking with Porters

You can reduce the sheer physical effort of trekking, extend your range and still run your own show by hiring a porter to carry the bulk of your food and equipment. Some porters may also cook and do camp chores. For comfort's sake, it makes sense to allow one porter per trekker. You need to manage porters' loads and wages and be able to adequately discuss all this with whomever you hire. If you want to hire a separate cook, be sure he knows how to cook your food and operate your stove. Any porter can help you buy supplies and organise transport.

Trekking with savvy porters can offer the best of both worlds; you carry less and enjoy the trail more, have more time to do as you like, and still keep expenses low enough not to break the bank. Moreover, trekking with a knowledgeable porter can open a world of experience not possible on your own. A porter can invite you into his home and introduce you to fellow villagers in pastoral settlements. He can help you across difficult sections, he will know about every rock and tree, and all the stories and lore about the places you visit. For many trekkers, their warmest memories are of the energetic and helpful porter who made their trip possible.

Organised Treks

Trekking companies provide a range of trek services (ie a guide, cook, kitchen and camp

helpers, porters, food and equipment) to match most styles and budgets. They can also book hotels and organise transport.

Working with a trekking company increases the likelihood of your trekking with a reliable trek crew. Shop around and get quotes from three or four companies. This process is easier when you know where you want to trek and what services you want them to provide, so be specific before you start spending money. A list of some popular, well-known trekking companies follows.

Fairy Meadow Tours (Map p273; ☎ 05811-54310; www.fairymtours.com; Jamal Hotel, Airport Rd, Gilgit) Rehmat Nabi's family takes pride in operating treks in the Raikot Valley, their backyard and home to the Raikot Sarai (p349).

Golden Peak Tours (Map p273; ☎ 05811-55726; www.goldenpeaktours.com.pk; Shahrah-e-Quaid-e-Azam, Khomer Chowk; PO Box 531, Gilgit) Shafi Ahmad, who is from Nagyr village, brings a personal touch and warm smile to every trek.

Hindukush Trails (www.hindukushtrails.com) Chitral (Map p223; ☎ 0943-412581; Mountain Inn, Chitral); Islamabad (☎ 051-2275031; House 37, Street 28, F-6/1; PO Box 2059, Islamabad) Chitral's only trekking company is run by a member of Chitral's royal family, bringing Chitrali hospitality to every aspect of a trek.

Hunza Guides Pakistan (www.hunzaguidespakistan.com) Altit (☎ 05821-57076; HGP Guest House, Fort Rd, Altit); Islamabad (☎ 051-2106891; House 128A, Street 42, F-10/4; PO Box 468, G-9 Markaz, Islamabad); Karimabad (Map p299; Zero Point, Karimabad) Amirullah Khan offers great service and excellent value for your money.

Madina Guides (Map p273; ☎ 05811-53536; www.madinaguides.com; Madina Hotel & Guest House, NLI Chowk, Gilgit) Hidayat Hussain and Yaqoob offer popular treks easily accessible from Gilgit for budget-conscious trekkers.

Nazir Sabir Expeditions (www.nazirsabir.com) Aliabad (☎ 05821-55120); Islamabad (☎ 051-2252553; House 434, Street 2, G-9/3; PO Box 1442, Islamabad 44000); Skardu (Map p287; ☎ 05831-50429; near K2 Hotel, Skardu) Renowned mountaineer Nazir Sabir offers the highest level of trek services in northern Pakistan.

Pamir Trails (☎ 0346-5226623; www.pamirtrails.com; Zood Khun village, Chapursan Valley; PO Box 363, Gilgit) Alam Jan Dario is an enthusiastic mountaineer and musician who welcomes trekkers to Chapursan.

Travel Plus (Map p273; ☎ 05811-52622; www.travelplus.com.pk; Kashmir Plaza, Airport Rd; PO Box 590, Gilgit) This company specialises in treks from Saeed Jan's village of Misgar.

WHAT TO TAKE

What you take depends on what kind of trek you do, how much weight you want to carry, the terrain, weather and time of year. A limited selection of basic equipment is for sale or rent in Chitral, Gilgit, Karimabad, Passu, Skardu and Hushe. But you can't rely on finding anything, so take essentials with you.

Clothing & Equipment Check List

CLOTHING

General Clothes

- *shalwar kameez* or loose-fitting long pants and long-sleeved shirt
- lightweight thermal underwear top and bottom

Outerwear

- waterproof jacket
- pile or fleece jacket
- warm hat and wide-brimmed sunhat
- gloves

Footwear

- waterproof leather boots
- sandals with ankle straps or training shoes

EQUIPMENT

Personal Items

- 1L water bottles (two or three)
- torch (flashlight) or headlamp
- maps
- pocketknife
- sunglasses with retaining strap
- first-aid kit (see p396)
- toiletries
- toilet paper, butane lighter and trowel
- bath and laundry soap
- towel

Camping Equipment

- backpack or day pack with waterproof cover
- duffel bag with lock
- tent with waterproof fly and groundsheet
- sleeping bag
- sleeping sheet and insulating sleeping pad
- repair kit (needle, thread, tape, glue, cord)
- collapsible plastic basin

Cooking Equipment

- stove with windscreen, spare parts and cleaning wires
- fuel

- fuel containers, funnel and fuel filter
- cooking pots (1.5L and 2L) with lids
- gripper or hot pads
- waterproof matches or butane lighter
- eating utensils
- plate, mug
- dish soap
- scourer and tea towel

Optional Cooking Equipment

- expedition barrel
- lantern or candles
- pressure cooker
- ladle, knife, vegetable peeler
- tea kettle and strainer
- pan
- rolling pin and board
- griddle

OPTIONAL

- stuff sacks and plastic bags
- camera
- altimeter, compass
- binoculars

Cooking Fuel

Multifuel liquid stoves offer the greatest flexibility. Gas cartridge stoves are lightweight and easy to use, but fuel problems make them less preferable. You can buy a locally made kerosene stove in Chitral, Gilgit and Skardu. Their large size and heavy frame make awkward loads, but people know how to use and repair them and you can usually sell them back for half of what you paid after the trek.

Kerosene is inexpensive and readily available. White gas (white spirit/Shellite) isn't available, and denatured alcohol (methylated spirits) is available only in Rawalpindi and Islamabad. Butane cartridges (eg Gaz, EPI Gas) are sporadically available in Gilgit and Skardu. Plastic containers (5L, 10L, 25L and 30L) to transport larger quantities of kerosene are readily available in Gilgit and Skardu, but their screw-on lids usually leak. Plan to use from 125mL to 250mL of fuel per trekker per day.

MAPS

For all but a few areas, the best available maps are at a scale of 1:250,000. No single map covers all the treks in this chapter. Obtain maps before you leave home, since they aren't readily available in Pakistan. Don't even consider trekking on your own without taking a map.

The Swiss Foundation for Alpine Research's two-sheet 1:250,000 Karakoram series (US\$30 per set) of orographical sketch maps gives the most accurate rendering of the major mountain ranges and valleys it covers: *Sheet 1* – Nagyr, Hunza, Gojal (except Misgar), Baltistan north of Indus River; and *Sheet 2* – Eastern Baltistan.

Leomann Map's 1:200,000 orographic Karakoram Maps include *Sheet 1: Gilgit, Hunza, Rakaposhi, Batura area*; *Sheet 2: Skardu, Hispar, Biafo area*; and *Sheet 3: K2, Baltoro, Gasherbrum, Masherbrum, Saltoro Groups*. These maps (US\$16 per map), published by West Col Productions, give impressive details with vague trek descriptions on the back, yet can be found in Pakistan.

Deutscher Alpenverein (DAV) publishes two 1:50,000 topographic maps (US\$18 per map): *Minapin (Rakaposhi Range)* shows Rakaposhi's north slopes; and *Nanga Parbat – Gruppe* shows the Nanga Parbat massif. These three-colour maps have 50m contour intervals and are the best and only readily available maps of these peaks. DAV also publishes the 1:100,000 *Hunza-Karakorum* map (US\$13) of the Hunza Valley.

The US Army Map Service (AMS) topographic series for this area – the 1:250,000 U502 India and Pakistan (US\$15 per colour reprint); and the 1:253,440 Afghanistan – NW Frontier Province, found only at university libraries – were last revised and printed in 1962. These maps are highly accurate for much topographic detail and are still useful in areas not covered by the Swiss maps, such as Chitral, Ghizar and Diamir. Useful sheets include: *NI 43-2 Gilgit (Diamir)*; *NJ 43-13 Mastuj (Chitral, Ghizar)*; and *I 42-F Chitral (Kalasha valleys)*. These maps have been superseded by the Joint Operations Graphic (JOG) 1:250,000 series (US\$44 per map).

COSTS & MONEY

Per person daily trekking costs vary significantly with the style of trekking. Backpacking ranges from US\$15 to US\$20 when you carry your own backpack or hire one porter, buy food locally, provide your own equipment and use public transport. When you organise a special vehicle and hire a guide, cook and/or porters on your own, costs range from US\$30 to US\$50. Trekking companies charge from US\$45 to US\$120 per day, depending upon the services you request. Tipping is optional.

Exchange all the money you need before departing for the trailhead, since you pay for expenses on trek in cash. Carry plenty of Rs 50 and Rs 100 notes, because guides and porters seldom have change.

Keep your money in the backpack you carry on trek and always ensure it's in your line of sight. Put all your money in a waterproof bag and store it in an interior zippered pocket. Don't let a guide or porter carry the backpack or duffel bag with your money.

PERMITS

The Ministry of Tourism regulates trekking, defined as any walking below 6500m, and designates three zones: open, restricted and closed. All the treks in this chapter are in open zones, where no guide, permits or fees are required.

Regardless of what zone you trek in, the *Trekking Rules and Regulations* brochure is a useful reference. You can write in advance of your trek to (or pick it up from) the **Ministry of Tourism** (Map pp74-5; ☎ 051-9204550; www.pakistan.gov.pk; 10th fl, Green Trust Tower or PEMRA Bldg, Jinnah Ave, Blue Area, Islamabad; ☎ 8am-3pm Mon-Thu & Sat, 8am-noon Fri). Look inside for a sign saying 'Operation Section'.

ON THE TREK

DAILY ROUTINE

When backpacking, you can get up, trek and eat whenever you like. But when trekking with porters, you need to consider their routine. Porters arise at first light (about 4am), make tea and eat bread. Then they're ready to go. If you'd rather not follow this routine, let them know. Porters usually stop mid-morning for more tea and bread, when you can eat lunch. With organised treks, the cook usually serves lunch whenever you choose. Stops, however, are often dictated by where water is available, rather than by the clock or by your stomach. Carry some water and food with you on the trail to help you between meals. Most trekking parties stop for the day by mid-afternoon, and eat dinner whenever food is ready, ideally before it gets dark. A typical trekking day lasts six to eight hours.

GUIDES & PORTERS

Most trekkers hire at least one person to help them navigate through these rugged

mountains. Guides and porters are always men; women don't do this type of work for social and cultural reasons.

Guides

Competent guides are good-natured; know the route, where to locate water and where to camp; have basic mountaineering skills; and speak some English. Guides also hire and supervise porters, buy supplies and organise transport. Guides carry only their own personal gear, expect you to equip them fully, and generally don't help with cooking. Guides are less useful for parties of four or fewer trekkers, unless you hire enough porters to justify having someone to manage them. Guides should make your trek easier – that is why you pay them.

The Ministry of Tourism licenses mountain guides, but a licence doesn't mean the guide has any specific skills. Ask any prospective guide what training and experience he has, and if he has done the route before. Most guides are employed by trekking companies, some run their own companies and others freelance.

Porters

Porters often travel only in familiar areas, close to where they live. Porters typically have excellent route knowledge, cook their own food, but speak limited English. Porters each carry up to 25kg not including their personal gear and food, a load limit set by the government. However, they aren't licensed by the government. Organise your loads before leaving your hotel or trek's staging place, since there's usually too much confusion at the trailhead.

Hiring Guides & Porters

Hire guides and porters from the area through which you'll be trekking upon arrival in the highest village or at the trailhead. Avoid hiring anyone along the trail; instead hire in the presence of others so at least one person witnesses who goes off with you. This increases the likelihood of hiring a reliable, responsible person and deters thieves and troublemakers. Some foreigners who have hired individuals along the trail or who have opted to trek alone have experienced the rare but extreme consequences of robbery, rape or murder.

Ask trekking companies, hotels and shopkeepers for recommendations. Ask prospective guides and porters to show you a *chit*

(letter of recommendation) from any foreigners for whom they have previously worked.

When hiring a freelance guide, try to find one who is associated with (and somewhat accountable to) a trekking company and hence has more of an incentive to do a good job.

Some villages have a porters' union that assigns porters on a rotational basis. Be thorough when hiring: make your requirements clear, set any limitations, and agree on loads, wages, food, clothing and equipment.

Stages

The distance covered on most treks is divided into *paraos* (stages), loosely defined as a traditional day's walk for the people who live in an area, although it's rarely clear to outsiders what a stage really is. Stage lengths vary widely, often depend upon the difficulty of the terrain, and may be as short as a one-hour walk or as long as a full day.

The number of stages on many treks isn't fixed, can vary according to whom you ask and can change from year to year. The government has no authoritative list of stages and the stage system is widely abused. Each trek in this chapter lists the accepted number of stages.

It helps to bring your porters to the headman of the village nearest the trailhead, so everyone can hear and agree upon what he says, on where the stages start and finish, and on the total number of stages. The stage system is complex and often confusing, but it helps to try to understand it to avoid being ripped off, inadvertently embroiled in wage disputes, or victimised by porter strikes.

Wages

GUIDES' & COOKS' WAGES

Freelance licensed guides earn Rs 1000 to Rs 1500 per day for every day they accompany you, even when not on trek. Cooks earn between Rs 600 and Rs 800 per day.

PORTERS' WAGES

Total porters' wages include six categories: stage, food rations, *wapasi* (return), clothing and equipment allowance, rest days, and halts due to bad weather.

Locally set wages, inclusive of the per-stage wage and food rations, range from a flat rate of Rs 300 to Rs 500 per stage. Ask the current wage for your trek before setting out. When you pay a flat rate, porters buy and cook their own food.

Wapasi equals half of the wage for one stage and is paid in addition to the porter's wage per stage. It's intended to cover expenses to walk with their personal belongings back to the point where they were hired. When a trek starts and finishes at the same place, you don't pay *wapasi*. When you and your porters travel together in a vehicle to and from trailheads, you pay for the costs of their transport and do not pay *wapasi*.

Technically, the government requires trekkers to provide porters with clothing and equipment itemised in the *Trekking Rules and Regulations*. Alternatively, you can pay each porter an allowance of Rs 250, which costs less than buying everything on the list. It's unlikely that porters will buy new gear, but the money helps to cover the wear and tear on their clothes and shoes. It's not necessary to pay on short treks.

Porters earn one rest day after every seven days (not stages). Porters are paid half of the wage for one stage for a rest day, whether you take it or not. When you take a rest day, you also pay food rations. When day walks or side trips do not require shifting camp sites, porters earn a rest day.

If you halt due to bad weather, you are to pay one full-stage wage per day plus food rations. Porters, however, often accept a rest day (or half a stage) wage.

Clothing & Equipment

It's your responsibility to ensure that anyone you hire is adequately equipped because their lives can depend on it. This includes providing warm clothing, adequate footwear, and shelter (a tarp or tent that several people can share, sleeping bag and/or heavy blankets, and a sleeping pad per person). Ask your guide, cook and porters if they have these items. Ask them if shelter is available at the camps along the trek. If they need a tarp, it should be large enough to cover the roofless, stone-walled shelters along many routes. It's reasonable to provide a separate tent for a guide. If you lend gear, distribute it when it's needed and collect it immediately afterwards.

You also need to supply cooking equipment separate from your own. A basic kitchen for guides and cooks includes a stove, plastic container(s) to transport kerosene and a funnel to pour it, matches, large cooking pot, tea kettle, and a mug and spoon per person.

You may be expected to dispense medicine for headaches and bandage minor wounds.

SLEEPING & EATING

You won't find developed camping grounds on most treks. You're snoozing on the ground in your tent unless you prefer sleeping under the stars. A few treks have camping grounds that rent gear and charge a per-tent camping fee.

Plan your meals in advance and organise food that is easy to prepare, tastes good and provides enough calories without being too heavy, bulky or expensive. When you hire a trekking company, it provides food and a cook.

Down-country speciality stores have imported food that can supplement grain-based meals and local food. Many of these same items can be found by scouring the bazaars of Chitral, Gilgit, Karimabad and Skardu. Once you set off, you can't expect to purchase much, if anything, from villagers. Check any food you buy in Pakistan for spoilage and bugs before reaching the trailhead.

You need to purify water for drinking on trek. The most desirable water, of course, comes from springs. More often than not, though, you get water from rivers. Bring tea, instant coffee, milk powder, hot chocolate and flavoured drink mixes for variety.

WOMEN TREKKERS

Women trekkers are advised to travel as part of an organised trek, with a male companion, or with a group of men and women. Local people strongly advise women never to trek or go on day walks alone, particularly anywhere outside of Hunza and Gojal. With advance planning, you can minimise any risks and help ensure a positive trekking experience.

SAFETY ON THE TREK

Trekking in sparsely populated, remote and rugged mountains carries risks and uncertainties such as becoming lost or injured. Minimise these risks by choosing a route that is within your range of physical ability, experience and commitment.

To help make your trek a safe one, follow a few basic rules: don't trek alone; don't trek too high too fast; be law-abiding (don't trek in restricted zones without a permit or go higher than 6500m); and be self-sufficient. A twisted ankle or a fall down a hillside can

be life-threatening if you're alone. Learn how to avoid altitude sickness and recognise its symptoms (p400). Medical facilities are limited in towns and nonexistent on trekking routes. Be prepared for changeable and severe weather by carrying adequate clothing and equipment. Always seek local advice on trail conditions, routes and equipment before heading out.

The mountain landscape presents objective dangers, including narrow and hard-to-follow trails, dizzying heights, rock falls, unstable scree slopes, river crossings, glacier travel with crevasses, and avalanches. Keep your adventure from turning into a nightmare by recognising these conditions and approaching them sensibly. Be aware of your immediate surroundings, pay attention on the trail, use proper techniques, never go on a glacier alone, and understand that objective dangers can alter routes seasonally or from year to year. If you have no experience with such conditions or are at all uncertain of your ability to cope, hire a guide.

RESPONSIBLE TREKKING

Codes of conduct aren't readily available and little is done to implement eco-trekking principles. Hence, much depends upon you as an individual adopting an activist approach. The most important single action you can take to minimise your overall impact is to reduce the size of your trekking party. The following suggestions make a difference in protecting the environment for visitors' enjoyment and preserving communities' resources.

Fires & Low-Impact Cooking

Trees grow slowly in arid mountains, making wood a scarce and valuable resource. Wood belongs to the area's inhabitants and visitors have no right to use it. Therefore, cook on a stove and not on wood fires. Bring adequate clothing so you don't depend on campfires for warmth. Supply your guide and porters with stoves and adequate clothing.

Water

Human waste or other contaminants entering open watercourses spread diseases and pose a health risk for residents, trekkers and wildlife. Wash yourself, your cooking utensils and your clothes in a basin and discard soapy water (even if the soap is biodegradable) and toothpaste at least 50m from watercourses.

Toilets

Don't expect to find toilets on trekking routes. During the day find a discreet location, at least 100m from any watercourse, to relieve yourself. Below the tree line, bury faeces in a hole 15cm deep and at least 100m from any watercourse. Above the tree line in uninhabited areas, spread out faeces thinly on rocks, as the sun will dry it and ultraviolet (UV) rays will kill bacteria and micro-organisms. On a glacier, use a crevasse, as the glacier's crushing motion will kill some bacteria and disperse the waste. When using a portable toilet tent at camp sites, dig a pit half a metre deep and at least 100m from any watercourse. Encourage everyone to use it. When leaving, cover the pit with dirt at least 3cm to 4cm above ground level to allow for decomposition and settling. Burn toilet paper rather than discarding it.

Rubbish

There are no rubbish-disposal systems along trekking routes. Separate all rubbish into organic, burnable and nonburnable. Dispose of organic waste (food scraps) by feeding it to domestic livestock. Above 4000m, organic waste takes decades to decay, so carry it to lower elevations for disposal. Collect burnable rubbish and burn it. Remove as much packaging as possible from foods before the trek and store food in reusable containers. Pack out nonburnable rubbish (ie tins, bottles, aluminium foil, plastics) for disposal in a town. Don't bury nonburnable rubbish as wild animals may dig it up and scatter it.

Other Considerations

Use established camp sites to localise the environmental impact and minimise overall disturbance. Select a site at least 50m from open watercourses and the trail. Don't cut trees, limbs or brush to make camp improvements. Don't make trenches around tents, as these leave the soil prone to erosion. Before leaving a camp site, naturalise the area, and replace rocks, wood or anything else you moved. Repair anything you may have damaged (eg a stone wall or water channel). Use huts in pastures only if invited to do so, as they're the shepherds' private property.

Wildlife Conservation

Unauthorised hunting of and trade in endangered species is illegal, so don't condone

or engage in it. And don't harass or feed wildlife, or eat wild game.

Environmental Organisations

All these organisations welcome volunteers and support:

Alpine Club of Pakistan (☎ 051-9208963; www.alpineclub.org.pk; Room 8, Ground fl, Jinnah Stadium, Pakistan Sports Complex, Kashmir Highway, near Aabpara, Islamabad) Represents Pakistan in the International Mountaineering and Climbing Federation (UIAA) and works to preserve and protect Pakistan's mountain environment.

World Conservation Union (IUCN-Pakistan; ☎ 021-5861540/3; www.iucn.pk/iucn-in-pakistan.htm; 1 Bath Island Rd, Clifton, Karachi) Works to conserve the integrity and diversity of nature. Its Mountain Areas Conservancy Project (MACP) supports community-based conservation in Pakistan's mountains.

World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF-Pakistan; ☎ 042-111993725; www.wwfpak.org; PO Box 5180, Ferozpur Rd, Lahore) Works to save wildlife and their habitats through extending support to communities.

HEALTH

See the Health chapter (p395) for detailed information. Make sure you are in good health before starting your trek. The most important thing you can do to stay healthy and avoid most stomach upsets is to purify your drinking water. Wash your hands with soap regularly to avoid colds or upper-respiratory tract infections, and bring medicines to treat any symptoms. Ankle and knee sprains are common trekking injuries, especially when carrying your own backpack. Wear good boots with ankle support and pay attention on the trail. The old maxim of 'walk when you walk, and look when you look' makes the essential point.

Daytime temperatures often soar. Drink plenty of noncaffeinated liquids and treat heat with respect. Dehydration occurs in both cold and hot conditions. Always carry water while trekking, drink a minimum of 3L per day and trek early in the morning to avoid midday heat. Don't wait until you feel thirsty to drink.

Protect both your skin and eyes from the effects of all-day sun. At high altitude you can get sunburnt quickly, even on cloudy or snowy days. Use a high-quality sunscreen and lip moisturiser with a Sun Protection Factor (SPF) of 50 or above, and reapply it throughout the day. Wear protective clothing for your face, ears, neck and arms. Your

eyes need protection that filters a minimum of 90% UV-A and UV-B radiation when trekking on snow or higher than 3500m.

Acute mountain sickness (AMS) is a concern on high-altitude treks. Although all treks in this chapter stay below 5000m, acclimatisation is important. Everyone acclimatises at varying rates, so familiarise yourself with the symptoms of AMS (see p400).

Helicopter Rescue & Evacuation

Sometimes things go wrong, and rescue or evacuation may become necessary. Rapid search-and-rescue organisations are unavailable, so be prepared to rescue yourself or a fellow trekker. Assess your situation and don't panic. Evacuation can mean shortening a trek because of illness or injury or responding immediately to a serious situation. For minor illness or injury, a victim may be able to walk with assistance. When a victim can't walk, they may be carried on a porter's back or on a pack animal. Helicopter rescue cannot be guaranteed and is only for life-threatening emergencies.

Helicopter rescue, more frequently requested for mountaineers rather than trekkers, usually takes more than 48 hours to organise and is likely beyond the budget of independent trekkers. **Askari Aviation** (☎ 051-5505760/2, 0300-8502701; www.askariaviation.com; House 21, Chaklala 1, Rawalpindi) operates rescue services. It requires a US\$6000 up-front, refundable cash deposit before flying (understanding that you are liable for costs above US\$6000), and a pre-trek briefing at its office. If you're carrying insurance that covers helicopter rescue, a trekking company or your embassy may agree to put up the cash bond in an emergency.

CHITRAL & GHIZAR

Tucked into Pakistan's northwest corner, Chitral's alpine country, old-growth forests and hospitable inhabitants impart a unique and charming character. Above its cultivated valleys tower innumerable snowcapped peaks including Tirich Mir (7706m), the highest peak in the Hindukush Range.

The beautiful, easily accessible, but rarely visited Chitral Gol National Park is Chitral's best-kept secret, home to magnificent markhor (large wild goats) and snow leopards. In the nearby Kalasha valleys, few tourists go beyond

the roadside hotels. Trekking from the park to the Kalasha valleys or between the valleys themselves offers the opportunity to travel with the Kalasha, and to get to know, respect and appreciate them and their land.

Visit Ghizar to discover isolated valleys, traditional Kho and Burusho villages and glorious passes through the western Karakoram and Hindu Raj Range where countless 6000m summits fill the horizon. Less heavily glaciated than the central Karakoram or Hindukush, Ghizar is a trekker's paradise.

GOKHSHAL AN & DONI AN

TREK FACTS

Duration three days

Distance 30km

Standard moderate

Season July–September

Start Chaghbini

Finish Balanguru

Public Transport finish only

Summary A classic traverse from Chitral Gol National Park to the Kalasha valleys rewards with excellent views of Tirich Mir and the likelihood of watching wildlife.

The deservedly popular trek from Chitral Gol National Park to Rumbur, the northernmost of the Kalasha valleys, crosses two scenic passes, Gokhshal An (3720m) and Doni An (3713m). The rugged trails offer wildlife-watching opportunities and superb views of the Hindukush Range. Trekking days average six to seven hours with almost 1000m of elevation gain and loss per day.

Planning

The US AMS 1:253,440 map *I 42-F Chitral* covers the park, but doesn't show the route across Gokhshal An. The British Survey of India 1:63,360 maps *38 M/9*, *38 M/13*, and *38 M/10* (found at university libraries) show more detail.

Porters ask for a flat rate of Rs 2000 for the trip, which totals four stages. You can organise a game-watcher to go with you from the park's office (see p228).

Trekking in the reverse direction with Rumbur porters, who ask for Rs 400 per day, is less expensive but has more uphill walking.

Getting To/From the Trek

For accommodation and transport information, see p228 for Chaghbini, and p231 (accommodation) and p230 (transport) for Balanguru.

The Trek

In an almost 360-degree panorama from Chaghbini (2925m), Tirich Mir rises to the north, Buni Zom (6550m) to the northeast and rocky Ghariet to the southeast. On Day 1 (five to six hours, 5.8km), a well-constructed trail heads west following a forest ridge, ascending gradually towards the rocky Ishperudeh ridge. The trail narrows to a track used by cows and ascends a grassy slope leading towards the ridge, two hours from Chaghbini. Scenic **Gokhshal An**, a small notch south of a larger but higher saddle, is the lowest point on the ridge, reached in another hour.

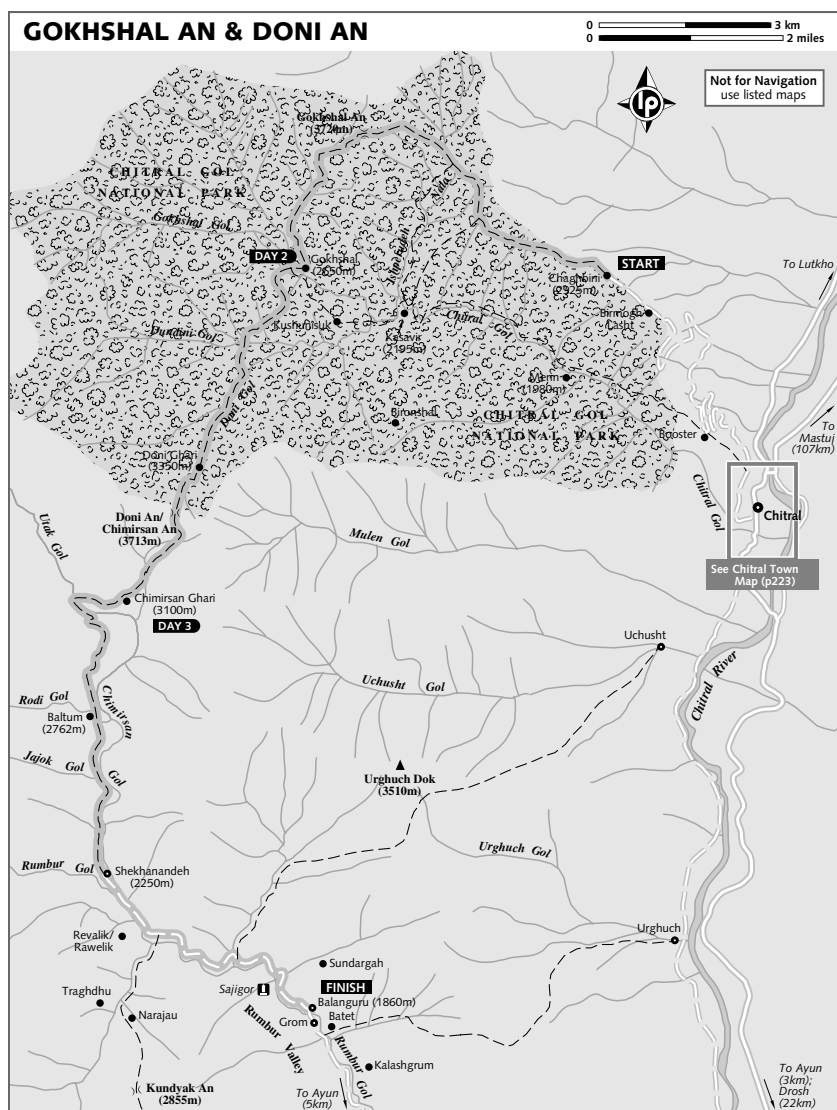
A steep 30-minute descent zigzagging on scree leads to a more gentle trail that crosses several streams as it descends to the valley floor. Continue along the Gokhshal stream to the game-watchers' hut at **Gokhshal** (2650m), two to 2½ hours from the pass. Camp near the hut, which sits in an amphitheatre-like gorge adjacent to a pine-forested boulder field.

Cross the Gokhshal stream on Day 2 (seven to eight hours, 11km) and head west southwest to ascend the easternmost (first) of three forested spurs from the ridge separating Gokhshal and Dundini Gols. The often faint trail contours for one hour to the ridge top (3049m), south of Gokhshal, visible below. It then contours west and south, descending to Dundini Gol (2772m) and a footbridge across the stream, an hour from the ridge.

From the stream, ascend steeply and contour south southwest along the Doni Gol's true left (west) bank to meet the stream one hour from the footbridge. Cross the stream over a snow bridge, present even late in the season, and ascend along the true right (east) bank for 30 minutes to **Doni Ghari** (3550m), an alternative camp site.

Follow occasional cairns and ascend steep switchbacks well above the Doni Gol, passing 100m beneath a prominent isolated stand of cedars. A gully south of these trees leads up to a grassy ridge from where distant, but prominent, Tirich Mir comes into view.

Numerous livestock tracks lead up the flower-covered slopes to converge in one hour at **Doni An**, the southern boundary of



the Chitral Gol watershed. The impressive views extend beyond Tirich Mir to distant Buni Zom. Above and to the west of the pass is the markhors' summer habitat.

The descent from Doni An contours along the east (left) side of the bowl beneath the pass, heading towards the plain below. The huts of **Chimirsan Ghari** (3100m),

1½ to two hours below the pass, are along both sides of Utak Gol, which flows into the true right (west) side of the main Chimirsan Gol. Rumbur and Uchshat shepherds, both Kalasha and Muslim, tend goats here.

On Day 3 (five to 5½ hours, 12.5km), descend for 30 minutes to a crossing of Utak Gol then continue down through old-growth cedar

forest two hours to the hut at Baltum (2762m) along the Rodi Gol's south bank. Another hour down through forest above Chimirsan Gol's west bank leads to the Nuristani-style houses above the Jajok Gol. Descend amid cornfields to cross Jajok Gol, then stay well above Chimirsan Gol's true right bank for an hour before descending the ridge separating Chimirsan Gol and Rumbur Gol to Shekhanandeh (2250m). This village is home to Kati-speaking Bashgali people who have converted to Islam. From here, a wide track suitable for vehicles leads in one hour to Balanguru (1860m).

DONSON PASS & KUNDYAK AN

TREK FACTS

Duration two days

Distance 14km

Standard easy

Season mid-April–mid-October

Start Batrik

Finish Balanguru

Public Transport yes

Summary Ancient cedar forests, streams, infrequently visited Kalasha settlements and Hindukush vistas reward trekkers who traverse the passes between Bumboret and Rumbur.

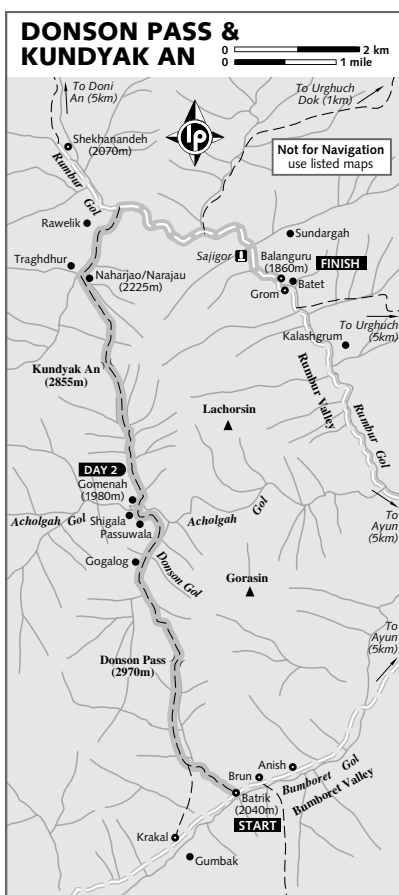
The trekking route across the Donson Pass (2970m) and Kundyak An (2855m) connects the Kalasha valleys of Bumboret and Rumbur. The scenic passes offer views of the Hindukush. Between the passes lies Acholghah, a valley inhabited by Kalasha from Bumboret. Although the trek is just two days long and is relatively low in elevation, it has a 900m ascent plus a 900m descent on each day. It's useful to have someone show you the trails, which are steep and not always obvious.

Planning

The US AMS 1:253,440 map *I 42-F Chitral* covers the trek. Kalasha recommend hiring porters who ask for Rs 500 per day.

Getting To/From the Trek

For Batrik and Krakal accommodation and transport information, see Bumboret Valley, p232 and p230. A 3m-wide footpath leading to Batrik starts at the road adjacent to a mosque near the Frontier Hotel. An alternative trail



starts from Krakal where a canal crosses the road near the Alexandra Hotel.

For Balanguru and Grom accommodation and transport information, see p231.

The Trek

From Batrik (2040m) on Day 1 (3½ to 4½ hours, 5.7km), a well-defined trail ascends through a forest of massive cedars and occasional *chilghoza* (pine-nut tree) to meet a more gentle trail from Krakal. The two trails join and continue to **Donson Pass**, crowned by ancient cedars. To the north gleam Tirich Mir and Noshaq (7492m). The descent from the pass leads through flower-filled meadows into a cedar forest high above the Donson Gol and down to the Acholghah Gol. Along the stream

are several Kalasha settlements, including **Gomenah** (1980m) where you can camp.

The trail ascends on Day 2 (four to five hours, 4.5km) through more impressive cedars. Notches have been cut into the trees to encourage bees to build hives, so Kalasha can collect honey. The old-growth forest offers morel mushrooms in spring, and later, wild strawberries. The forested **Kundyak An** gives sweeping views south towards the Donson Pass. From the pass, an indistinct trail leads down to the first settlements, eventually crossing a footbridge downstream from Naharjao (2225m). The trail crosses the stream several times over footbridges and soon reaches the road along the Rumbur Gol. Walk on the road for 3.5km, or one hour, to Balanguru.

THUI AN

TREK FACTS

Duration five days

Distance 51km

Standard moderate

Season mid-June–September

Start Nialthi

Finish Sholkuch

Public Transport yes

Summary An outstanding traverse through the heart of the Hindu Raj Range links Yasin and Chitral and crosses a stunning pass surrounded by tumbling glaciers and jagged 6000m peaks.

The Thui An (4528m) is the perfect introduction to nontechnical glacier travel. The route takes you across a surprisingly straightforward and snow-free pass.

Trekking days average only four hours with 700m of elevation change. The route involves less than half a day traversing the glacier east of the pass, which even first-timers can safely navigate with the assistance of a porter. Splendid alpine amphitheatres surrounded by dramatic icefalls and snowy peaks provide superb camp sites on both sides of the pass. The trek can be done in either direction, depending on whether you're coming from Gilgit or Chitral.

Planning

The US **Map 1:250,000 NJ 43-13 Mastuj** covers the trek. Yasin porters ask for Rs 400 per stage for 5½ stages, whereas Yarkhun porters ask for Rs 400 per day.

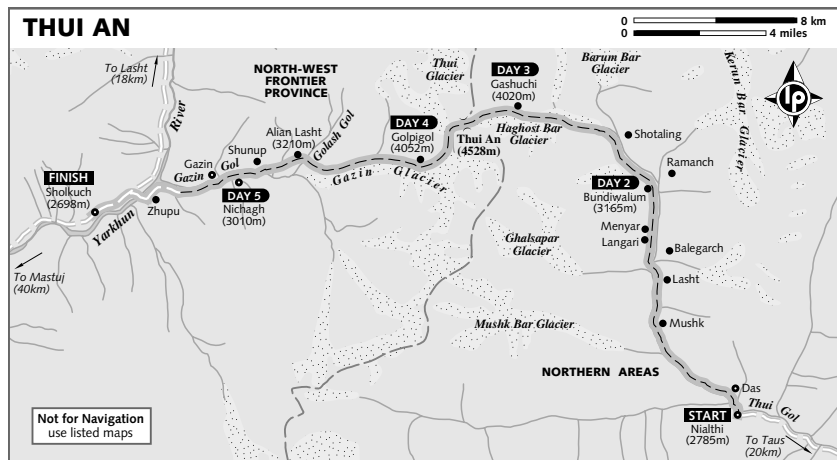
Getting To/From the Trek

Public transport Gilgit–Nialthi (Rs 160, five to six hours) departs from Abbas Market on Punial Rd, and Yasin–Nialthi vehicles (Rs 40, two hours) depart from Center Yasin. Vehicles go as far as the bridge across the Thui Gol in Nialthi. A shady riverside camping ground run by Subedar Sher Rajab is before the bridge.

Passenger vehicles Sholkuch–Mastuj (Rs 120, three hours) depart early morning.

The Trek

The long but gentle trail on Day 1 (five to 5½ hours, 15.5km) takes you up the beautiful



granite-walled Thui Valley with its springs, meadowy turf and tumbling waterfalls. At Lasht, cross a footbridge to the Thui Gol's true right bank and continue upvalley through the settlements of Langari and Menyar. Camp at **Bundiwalum** (3165m), a large flat area shaded by birch opposite the confluence of the Kerun Bar. (The formerly used route along the Thui Gol's true left bank via Shotaling has been abandoned due to glacial changes.)

Day 2 (four to five hours, 7.5km) is the most challenging day of the trek, and you need to have someone show you the route onto and across the Haghast Bar Glacier. Near the end of your glacier traverse, you see ahead the welcoming hillside oasis of **Gashuchi** (4020m). Step off the glacier and contour through profuse wild onions, willows and wildflowers, crossing several clear streams in this improbably verdant spot.

On Day 3 (three to four hours, 6.5km), head northwest 1.5km across the hillside. Then turn southwest to start a steady 2.5km traverse up an imposing scree slope that brings you above a snowy bowl on your left (south) before reaching **Thui An**. Descend west 1km on a scree slope to a small snowfield at the base of the pass, then turn south and follow the true left side of the Thui Glacier's outflow stream 1.5km to the scenic, grassy camp site of **Golpigol** (4052m) along the Gazin Glacier's margin.

Half a kilometre after leaving Golpigol on Day 4 (four to five hours, 14km), the Thui Glacier's outflow stream plunges directly beneath the Gazin Glacier, necessitating a 30-minute detour onto the Gazin Glacier to bypass this obstacle. The route exits the glacier and descends on trails for 9.5km through a series of gentle, level ablation valleys to the Golash Gol, where you find a few shepherds' huts. Continue through pleasant stands of birch, willow and occasional juniper to ford the Golash Gol (3007m).

At the far end of this broad alluvial fan are a few houses and the fields of Alian Lasht (3210m). The trail continues past Shunup, then crosses a footbridge to the Gazin Gol's true left bank and **Nichagh** (3010m), where trekkers can camp on a grassy and shaded village field maintained by Sardar Khan.

Day 5 (two to 2½ hours, 7km) lasts barely long enough for you to warm up as you walk down to the Yarkhun Valley and the valley's road at Sholkuch (2698m).

GILGIT & DIAMIR

Nanga Parbat (8125m), known locally as Diamir, is the world's ninth-highest peak and the second highest of Pakistan's five 8000m peaks. The 20km-long series of peaks and ridges that forms the huge Nanga Parbat massif marks the western end of the Great Himalayan Range. To the north across the Indus River rise the summits of the Karakoram Range, including Diran (7257m) and Rakaposhi (7788m). This section features treks to two spectacular base camps, including the easiest trek to any 8000m base camp in the world.

DIRAN BASE CAMP

TREK FACTS

Duration three days

Distance 26km

Standard moderate

Season mid-June–September

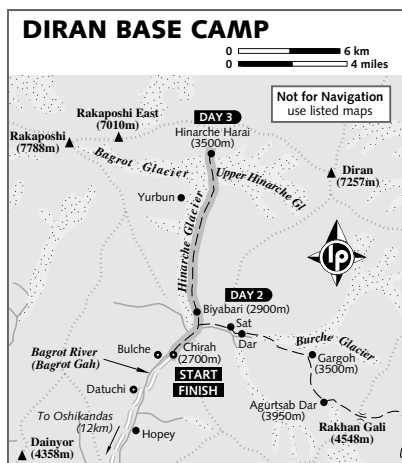
Start/Finish Chirah

Public Transport yes

Summary An easily accessible trek goes to a glacial amphitheatre with incredible icefalls beneath two 7000m peaks.

Rising directly above Hinarche Harai, the local name for Diran Base Camp, the sheer east (and unclimbed) face of Rakaposhi and Diran's south face are connected by a 16km-long icy ridge. The Bagrot and Upper Hinarche Glaciers roll down the flanks of the peaks. Even for the Karakoram, this is unique scenery with an icefall and glacier tumbling 5000m from the summits. In this tight bowl, Rakaposhi's steep icefall sends near-constant thundering avalanches.

A short drive from Gilgit and a two-day walk up the Hinarche Glacier from the head of the Bagrot Valley takes you to base camp. While this is a moderate trek, it isn't recommended as anyone's first Karakoram trek. Most novices would find the terrain too challenging. More than 35% of the trek involves nontechnical glacier travel. No mountaineering equipment is necessary nor are there substantial crevasses, but the loose and rocky surface is tedious to manoeuvre and requires some route-finding skills.



The 13km trek from Chirah to Diran Base Camp is very rugged and gains 800m. Unless you are previously acclimatised, most trekkers are advised to split the distance into two days. It's possible to wander one to two hours above base camp for enhanced views of the icefalls descending from Diran on the basin's east side.

Planning

The Swiss Foundation for Alpine Research 1:250,000 map *Karakoram (Sheet 1)* covers the trek. Porters ask for a flat rate of Rs 350 per stage. The trek totals four stages round trip. Hiring someone to show the route on the glacier is helpful.

Getting To/From the Trek

For Chirah accommodation and transport information, see p271.

The Trek

From Chirah (2700m), on Day 1 (two hours, 5km) walk east on the dwindling road along the Bagrot River's true left bank for 20 minutes to a junction. Stay to the left following the level path near the river to reach a footbridge. When the river level is high, you follow a higher, alternative path to the footbridge.

Cross the footbridge to the true right (north) bank of the Burche Glacier's outwash stream and step onto the Hinarche Glacier's terminal moraine. Follow an indistinct trail for 30 minutes across the glacier towards

its eastern margin and then exit the glacier about 1km from the footbridge where you see an obvious notch along the lateral moraine. Ascend steeply through a shaded chir pine forest for 30 minutes to where you'll see the tightly clustered houses at **Shelakui**. The cultivated fields of Diran village are visible on the hillside above.

Continue upvalley for 15 minutes along the true right bank of the silty Diran stream, which is the last reliable water source before base camp. It's possible to pitch a tent here along the tree-lined stream, but a preferable camping area is 10 minutes further at **Biyabari** (2900m), a grassy area nestled between rocky hillsides to the east and juniper-dotted moraine to the west. Although water is a few minutes' walk away, this pleasant area is sheltered from wind.

Several landslides along the Hinarche Glacier's east margin make Day 2 (five to six hours, 8km) a tedious day. Walk through mature forest for 15 minutes to the head of the Hinarche Glacier's mangled seracs. The trail ascends steeply, following the moraine ridge high above the glacier's east margin for 30 minutes more. Where the moraine ridge and forest end, the trail starts to deteriorate until it disappears altogether. It will take you one hour to get through this difficult section and move away from the moraine onto the glacier.

The route from this unnamed point stays on the glacier for 4km, taking between 2½ and three hours to reach base camp. The indistinct route stays in a direct line up the middle of the glacier because both margins are heavily crevassed with mazes of seracs. The views become more expansive the further up the glacier you go with the 'T' confluence of the Bagrot and Hinarche Glaciers coming into view about halfway. Diran Base Camp is on the north side of the 'T' high above the glacier. The confluence resembles a big mud sinkhole, so stay to the right of the mud when exiting.

Once off the glacier, a dirt track leads steeply up a crumbling cliff for 15 minutes to the shepherds' settlement of **Hinarche Harai** (3500m). The grassy camping area is east of the clustered huts adjacent to a spring near a willow-covered slope.

Retrace your steps to Chirah (seven to eight hours, 13km) on Day 3.

FAIRY MEADOW

TREK FACTS

Duration three days

Distance 21km

Standard easy

Season May–November

Start/Finish Fairy Point

Public Transport no

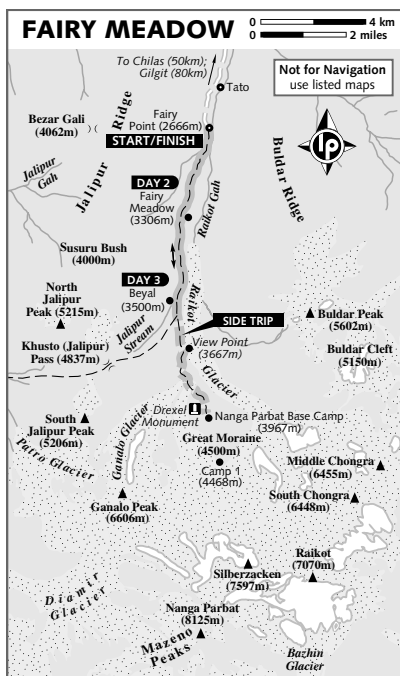
Summary Fairy Meadow offers easy access to an 8000m-peak base camp with one of the western Himalaya's finest mountain panoramas.

The lofty summits of the Nanga Parbat massif form an impressive glacial amphitheatre at the head of the Raikot Gah. Four major icefalls converge beneath Nanga Parbat's north (or Raikot) face to form the 13km-long, 'S'-shaped Raikot Glacier. The river pouring from the glacier plummets 2000m to the Indus River, and the 7000m sweep from Nanga Parbat's summit to the Indus forms one of the world's deepest gorges.

Alongside the glacier there are pine and fir forests, sparkling streams, and grasslands that have enchanted visitors and prompted the name of Fairy Meadow. A trip to Fairy Meadow, with day walks or side trips, has a bit of everything that Himalayan trekking can offer: a hair-raising ride to get there, hot and dusty trails, lush meadows and forests, amazing glaciers, and an 8000m summit. Nowhere else on earth can you drive for less than three hours directly to one of the 10 highest peaks on the planet. This spectacular, short trek right to the base camp of an 8000m peak is the easiest trek to any major Himalayan base camp.

Raikot Bridge, which spans the Indus River along the KKH a short distance south of Gilgit and east of Chilas, is the jumping-off point for the trek. A legendary 4WD road leaves the KKH here and ascends 1320m to the trailhead. The ride can be so scary that some trekkers prefer to walk rather than sit in a 4WD as it inches its way along a dramatic cliff face with heart-stopping drop-offs.

Once you get to the trailhead, you can take a deep breath and enjoy cold drinks and snacks from shops located there before setting off. The gentle, well-established trail lends itself to short trekking days, each



lasting about two hours. This affords you plenty of time to enjoy day walks, relax at camp, and also to stroll around nearby shepherds' settlements.

Planning

The DAV 1:50,000 map *Nanga Parbat – Gruppe* covers the trek. Porters ask for a flat rate of Rs 325 per stage. Porters charge two stages between Raikot Bridge and Fairy Meadow whether you walk or ride in a vehicle to Fairy Point (previously called Jhel). Horses are available to Fairy Meadow for Rs 1000/1200 (one way/round trip) per stage. The trek totals six stages round trip.

Sleeping & Eating

Fairy Meadow and Beyer offer accommodation and food in welcoming settings. Each hotel has a fenced compound (to keep livestock out) with rustic two-bed wooden huts, a dining hall serving hot meals, grassy camping grounds where you can hire a tent (with a sleeping bag and pad) or pitch your own for a fee, and toilets. A few shops sell basic food and supplies.

FAIRY MEADOW

Raikot Sarai (☎ 05811-54310; www.raikotsarinanga.com; camping fee Rs 100, tent hire s/d Rs 400/500, Mughal tent Rs 1000, hut Rs 1500) With an idyllic grassy expanse overlooking the Raikot Glacier and unimpeded views of Nanga Parbat, this is Fairy Meadow's original and most well-run establishment.

Fairy Meadows Cottage (☎ 0300-5053507; www.fairy-meadowscottage.com; camping fee Rs 100, tent hire Rs 500, hut s/d Rs 850/1200) Secluded in a large meadow along a stream surrounded by forest, this place has excellent mountain views but no glacier view.

Green Land Camping Side (camping fee Rs 100, tent hire Rs 300, hut Rs 600) Located in a dense forested setting. Offers shade, but no views.

Tucked behind Raikot Sarai on a forested ridge with good glacier and mountain views is Broad View Hotel, which operates sporadically, and further behind is **Fairy Meadow Heights** (tent hire s/d Rs 300/400, hut s/d Rs 550/800).

BEYAL

As you walk into Beyal, the hotels are spread out from north to south along a stream.

Messner Lodge Hote (camping fee Rs 100, tent hire s/d Rs 350/450, hut s/d Rs 500/700) is nearest the shepherds' huts with a lumpy camping area.

Raees Darbar Hote & Beal Camp (camping fee Rs 50, tent hire Rs 500, hut s/d Rs 800/1000) is the only property without fencing and has the cheapest camping fee.

Jilper Inn Bayal Camp (camping fee Rs 120, tent hire s/d Rs 400/500, hut s/d Rs 900/1200) is the largest and most well-established area in Beyal with a few trees for shade and the flattest camping area. Parbat Saria is occasionally open.

Getting To/From the Trek

Take any Gilgit–Chilas vehicle (see p267) or any Gilgit–Rawalpindi bus (see p279) and get off at Raikot Bridge (1280m), by KKH mile marker 471, 78km or 1½ hours south of Gilgit and 55km or one hour east of Chilas. Special hires Gilgit–Raikot Bridge cost Rs 2000.

From Raikot Bridge, walk or organise a fixed-rate special hire to Fairy Point (Rs 1500 one way, one hour, 15km) where the road ends. A local union assigns drivers on a rotational basis. If you choose to walk, the tiresome and hot 1386m climb to Fairy Point (2666m) takes four hours.

Don't organise special hires Gilgit–Fairy Point (Rs 3000) unless the driver is from

Raikot. The road between Raikot Bridge and Fairy Point is privately owned and maintained by the community, and 'outside' drivers aren't allowed.

The Trek

It's a steady ascent on Day 1 (two to 2½ hours, 5.5km) from Fairy Point (2666m) to **Fairy Meadow** (3306m). Wild roses, *chilghoza*, chir pine and juniper flourish in this narrow valley, providing welcome shade. Midway Hotel, a little more than half-way and little more than a picnic table, sells cold drinks.

Fairy Meadow is so beautiful with its views of Nanga Parbat and the Raikot Glacier that it's easy to stay, but it's worthwhile to move upvalley. On Day 2 (1½ hours, 5km), stroll through lush chir pine and fir forest along streams to the meadow at **Beyal** (3500m). The walk offers equally superb views downvalley of the Indus Valley and the 7000m peaks of the Rakaposhi–Haramosh Range.

An easy trail continues 30 minutes beyond Beyal through scattered juniper and birch to an obvious boulder at the lateral moraine's edge, aptly called **View Point** (3667m). The breathtaking close-up views to the southeast include the four major icefalls coming from the Chongra peaks (ranging from 6448m to 6830m), Raikot (7070m), and Nanga Parbat's north face that converge to form the incredibly serac-covered Raikot Glacier. If you only go this far, you won't be disappointed. Fit day-walkers can continue on to **Nanga Parbat Base Camp** (3967m) between the Ganalo and Raikot Glaciers, a four- to five-hour side trip from Beyal.

Retrace your steps to Fairy Point on Day 3 (two to 2½ hours, 10.5km). It's an 834m descent, so go easy on your knees!

NAGYR & HUNZA

Above the carefully tended fields of Nagyr and Hunza soar Rakaposhi (7788m), Diran (7257m), Ultar (7388m) and Spantik (7027m) in what the renowned mountaineer Eric Shipton called 'the ultimate manifestation of mountain grandeur'. Many travellers admire these snowcapped peaks from the KKH, but few venture beyond the highway

to get a closer look at these impressive giants. Some trails wend their way through the occasional forest, while other trails snake their way alongside dramatic glaciers and icefalls. Within a few days, you can visit a mountaineer's base camp, reach a viewpoint with aerial-like vistas overlooking the Hunza Valley, or even traverse a mountain range.

PAKORA PASS

TREK FACTS

Duration five days

Distance 47km

Standard moderate

Season mid-June–September

Start Upper Naltar

Finish Pakora

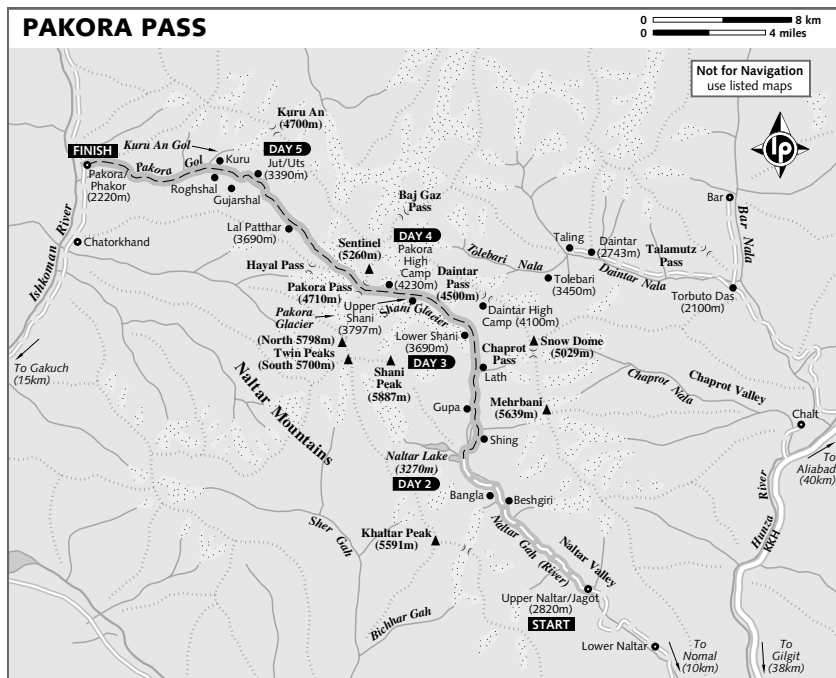
Public Transport yes

Summary Alpine meadows, a glacier, a not-too-high pass, incredible scenery and easy access from Gilgit put this adventurous route high on every trekker's list.

When Gilgit is baking in midsummer heat, the nearby Naltar Mountains offer a refreshing respite and quick access to great trekking. Blessed with an abundance of rainfall, unique in the arid Karakoram, the richly forested Naltar Valley yields in its upper reaches to alpine meadows carpeted with wildflowers. Dozens of impressive 5000m summits, though not high by Karakoram standards, attract climbers from around the world.

A classic trek crosses the Pakora Pass (4710m) between Naltar Valley and Pakora village in the scenic Ishkoman Valley. Seasonal snowfields can lie east of the pass, and there's a short glacier crossing on its west side. Crossing these obstacles adds excitement and a bit of challenge to the trek, yet no mountaineering equipment or prior experience is necessary.

The gentle and grandly scenic 1900m ascent to the pass is split over 3½ days with fewer than four hours of trekking per day to facilitate acclimatisation. This affords ample time to relax and visit with shepherds. The steeper 2500m descent down the arid Pakora Gol in the rainshadow of the Naltar Mountains takes 1½ days.



Planning

The Swiss Foundation for Alpine Research 1:250,000 map *Karakoram (Sheet 1)* covers the trek. Porters ask for a flat rate of Rs 500 per stage. The trek totals six stages.

Getting To/From the Trek

For Upper Naltar accommodation and transport information, see p281. A special hire may enable you to drive beyond Upper Naltar to Beshgiri, about halfway to the lake.

Pakora–Gilgit vehicles (Rs 90, three hours) depart early in the morning.

The Trek

Starting from Upper Naltar (2820m) on Day 1 (three to 3½ hours, 11.2km), follow a track along the Naltar Gah through wonderfully lush forest of cedar, pine and birch passing shepherds' huts. The track ends at exquisitely clear **Naltar Lake** (3270m). On Day 2 (3½ hours, 9.5km) a trail takes you past picturesque shepherds' settlements and up the verdant valley to the flower-filled meadows of **Lower Shani** (3690m) beneath formidable Shani Peak (5887m). On Day 3 (two to three hours, 4.4km), rhubarb and juniper cover the hillside as you ascend to the meadows of **Upper Shani** (3797m) in the shelter of the Shani Glacier's lateral moraine. A steep, grassy, flower-carpeted slope leads you to streamside **Pakora High Camp** (4230m).

The way up and over the pass on Day 4 (six to eight hours, 12.1km) ascends a steep, rocky trail along a stream. Stone cairns mark the route across several seasonal snowfields to **Pakora Pass**, north of which is the aptly named alpine summit Sentinel (5260m). The west side of the pass is glaciated, but typically remains snow-covered until autumn, when crevasses appear. Quickly cross these snowfields and move onto rocky moraine where a trail leads down to a crossing of the icy Pakora Glacier. Once across the glacier, the trail goes downvalley to **Lal Patthar** (3690m), named for the huge reddish boulder amid a few junipers. Continue downvalley through beautiful dense forest of birch, pine and juniper to a footbridge (3750m) across Pakora Gol that leads to a forested plateau and the shepherds' huts at **Jut/Uts** (3390m).

The descent on Day 5 (3½ to five hours, 9.7km) grows progressively steeper as the canyon narrows. A wide trail continues down the starkly beautiful Pakora Gol, high above the raging river, and to **Pakora** (2220m).

RAKAPOSHI BASE CAMP

TREK FACTS

Duration three days

Distance 18km

Standard easy

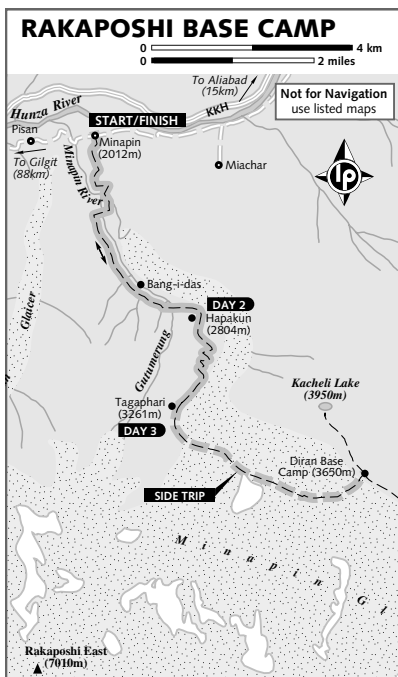
Season June–September

Start/Finish Minapin

Public Transport yes

Summary An ideal introduction to Karakoram trekking takes you to the base camp of Nagyr's highest peak, Rakaposhi.

The well-established, easy-to-follow trail to Rakaposhi Base Camp, known locally as Tagaphari, starts at Minapin village, which is easily accessible from the KKH. This short trek has truly spectacular scenery. The Minapin Glacier tumbles dramatically from the 16km-long fluted snowy ridge connecting Rakaposhi and Diran. Hachindar and Maiun, along with countless nameless peaks, sweep across the skyline north of the Hunza River. The snowy



summits of Rakaposhi and Diran, hidden from view at first, grow more impressive with every footstep. Tackling the 1250m ascent to Tagaphari is made easier by splitting it into two four-hour days.

Planning

The DAV 1:50,000 map *Minapin (Rakaposhi Range)* covers the trek. Porters ask for a flat rate of Rs 400 per stage. The trek totals four stages round trip.

You can buy food and rent gear (tent Rs 300, sleeping bag Rs 100, sleeping pad Rs 30) from camping grounds (camping fee Rs 150) at Hapakun and Tagaphari.

Getting To/From the Trek

For Minapin accommodation and transport information, see p298. Diran Hotel is the trek's staging place.

The Trek

The trail from Minapin ascends almost 800m on Day 1 (three to four hours, 5.8km), first along the Minapin River's rushing torrent and then through a juniper forest. It emerges at **Bang-i-das** where a stream tumbles over a cascade at the head of this pleasant valley, before the final push to the grassy meadows at **Hapakun** (2804m), bordered by stands of firs.

On Day 2 (two to three hours, 3km), the trail crosses a verdant bowl where colourful songbirds thrive. Sweeping gently through the meadow, the trail enters scattered juniper stands and emerges on a windy ridge top, where Diran and the summit ridge pop into view. Cows and oxen graze on the nearby pasture of **Tagaphari** (3261m), and grassy camp sites line the meandering stream. The lateral moraine above the valley is a fun place to watch avalanches crashing down from the ridge between Rakaposhi and Diran, and to savour sunset on Diran. Rakaposhi itself is mostly hidden from view behind the snow dome of Rakaposhi East (7010m).

A strenuous eight-hour side trip goes to **Diran Base Camp** (3650m), known locally as Kacheli. The base camp with its birch-dotted pastures is on the opposite side of the imposing Minapin Glacier. The unmarked and changeable route across the glacier is difficult to follow, so take someone who knows the way.

Retrace your steps to Minapin on Day 3 (three to 3½ hours, 8.8km).

RUSH PHARI

TREK FACTS

Duration five days

Distance 36km

Standard moderate

Season mid-June–September

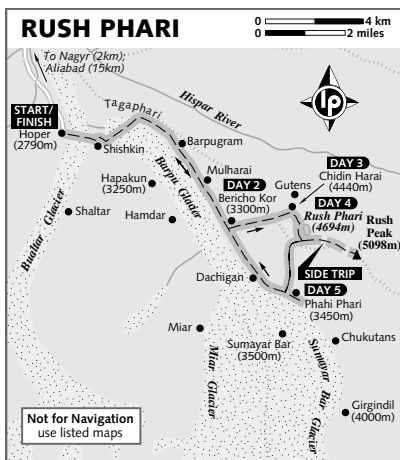
Start/Finish Hoper

Public Transport yes

Summary Incredible views of distant K2, Baintha Brak, the Hispar La and close-ups of the Hispar Muztagh's giants make this a truly unforgettable trek.

The sparkling turquoise lake called Rush Phari (4694m) sits high on a ridge between Upper Nagyr's Hispar Valley and the Barpu Glacier. The lake is a glorious destination in its own right, but the side trip to the top of Rush Peak (5098m) is unforgettable. Nowhere else in the Karakoram can you get such magnificent mountain panoramas on such a short trek. In a 360-degree sweep, you can see almost all the giant peaks of Hunza, the 7500m peaks of the Hispar Muztagh and the 8000m giants of the Baltoro Muztagh, including K2 (8611m).

The two-day 1500m ascent to the lake is strenuous and gains elevation rapidly, so do this trek only when you're previously acclimatised (for more information on acclimatisation, see p400). You also make four short, nontechnical glacier crossings – twice each



across the Bualtar and Barpu Glaciers – with trekking days averaging five hours.

Planning

The Swiss Foundation for Alpine Research 1:250,000 map *Karakoram (Sheet 1)* covers the trek. Hiring a trekking company may help with route-finding and managing porters, who ask for a flat rate of Rs 400 per stage plus Rs 400 clothing and equipment allowance. The trek totals eight stages round trip.

Getting To/From the Trek

For Hoper accommodation and transport information, see p307.

The Trek

Day 1 (four to five hours, 10.8km) starts at the road's end in Hoper (2790m), at the edge of the **Bualtar Glacier**. You'll want to hire someone to assist you in crossing the Bualtar Glacier. The route across the broken ice changes daily, and though it's a relatively short distance, it can take anywhere from 30 minutes to three hours to reach the other side.

A trail on the Bualtar Glacier's opposite side leads to the **Barpu Glacier**. The 33km-long Barpu Glacier draws its ice from the Sumayar Bar and Miar Glaciers that flow from the snowy summits of Malubiting (7458m), Miar (6824m) and Phuparash (6574m). The sheer granite peak soaring in the distance above the Sumayar Bar Glacier is called Ganesh Chhish (Golden Peak) by the Burusho of Nagyr and Hunza, but is more well known by its Balti name Spantik (7027m). It takes less than an hour to cross the stable rock-and-rubble trail over the Barpu Glacier and reach the relatively level ablation valley on the other side.

Strolling along the Barpu Glacier's margin you pass the pasture settlements of Tagaphari, Barpugram and Mulharai where clusters of juniper, tamarisk and wild roses offer relief (and shade) amid the rocky terrain. Stop at the grassy camp site of **Bericho Kor** (3300m).

Day 2 (4½ to 5½ hours, 4.1km) is a steep, steady 1140m ascent up artemisia-dotted slopes to the grassy ridge top called **Chidin Harai** (4440m). This camp site enjoys late-afternoon sunshine. Sunset and sunrise are even more pleasurable as you watch the orange and pink light wash across the Hispar Muztagh to the northeast. This phenomenal wall of peaks includes Lupgar Sar (7200m), Momhil Sar

(7343m), Trivor (7728m), Mulungutti Sar (7025m) and mighty Destaghil Sar (7885m).

The final push upwards to **Rush Phari** on the morning of Day 3 (1½ hours, 2.1km) is an easy stroll compared with the ascent to Chidin Harai. From the sheltered camp sites along the southwest lakeshore, enjoy the four-hour side trip to **Rush Peak**. You make a trail-less but obvious ascent of a flower-covered slope to a hill top (4938m), where you catch your first glimpse of K2. A straightforward scramble up talus takes you to the rocky summit of Rush Peak. K2 is dramatically larger, Broad Peak (8047m) and Gasherbrum IV (7925m) are visible, and Baintha Brak (7285m) looms above the Hispar La.

On Day 4 (two to three hours, 4.4km), a steep 1244m descent on a somewhat faint trail takes you directly to **Phahi Phari** (3450m) along the Barpu Glacier's edge. The aerial-like views of the Sumayar Bar Glacier, Miar Glacier, Malubiting and Phuparash are awesome. Return to Hoper on Day 5 (five to six hours, 14.9km) along the easy trail in the ablation valley and back across the Barpu and Bualtar Glaciers.

ULTAR

TREK FACTS

Duration two days

Distance 6.2km

Standard easy

Season May–October

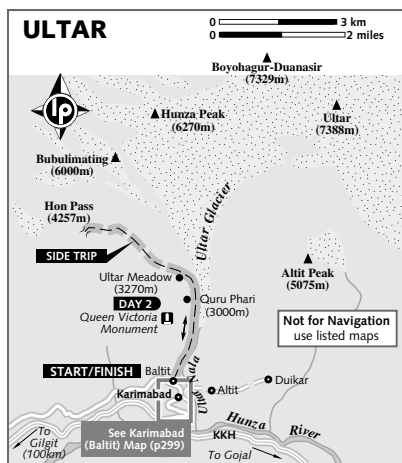
Start/Finish Baltit

Public Transport yes

Summary A steep but short walk leads to a stunning glacial amphitheatre beneath the snowy summit of Ultar.

On the lofty summit of Ultar (7388m), towering dramatically above Hunza, a fairy queen once lived in a crystal palace. And from this legendary mountain flows Hunza's life-giving irrigation water. Baltit fort guards the entrance to the steep, narrow canyon called Ultar Nala, which opens in its upper reaches into a meadow surrounded by a cascade of glaciers and granite.

The walk to the meadow and back can be done as a day walk, but spending a night is an unforgettable experience. On moonlit nights, Ultar is sublime. Frequent avalanches off the



icefall punctuate the stillness and echo off the surrounding peaks and cliffs. Karimabad has only one trek and luckily for eager trekkers who find themselves here, it's one of the region's most outstanding overnight treks.

Planning

The DAV 1:100,000 map *Hunza-Karakorum* depicts the area. Guides ask for Rs 500 per day, and are extremely helpful. Ask for a reliable guide at your hotel or trekking company.

Getting To/From the Trek

For Karimabad (Baltit) accommodation and transport information, see p302 and p305.

The Trek

Day 1 (2½ to three hours, 3.1km) covers a short distance to Ultrar Meadow, but the steep 770m ascent takes almost an hour per kilometre.

Start by walking through Baltit up towards the fort, under the house spanning the stone path, to the signed junction (2500m) before the fort. Turn left at the junction following the arrow to Diramishal. Go up stone steps and in one minute, turn right past the house next to the house with a hanging sign in front that reads 'Hunza Fabrics Enterprise'. The narrow footpaths through Diramishal are confusing, and it's easy to get lost. It takes 15 minutes to wind up through the tightly clustered houses. Continue ascending another 30 minutes through fields and orchards towards a rock face, topped by the Queen Victoria

Monument, to reach a spectacular viewpoint and the Dilbar canal.

Head right, walking carefully along the reasonably wide but exposed path along the canal and into Ultrar Nala. In 30 minutes, reach the junction with the now-abandoned trail in Ultrar Nala, destroyed by rockfall in 2006. Just past the canal headworks, climb (left) onto the rocky moraine towards the base of the cliff and away from the river.

Cairns mark the way over moraine rubble, staying high above the river and rising to the base of cliffs. A 15cm black plastic water pipe lies along the trail for the 30-minute walk from the Dilbar canal to **Quru Phari** (3000m), a grassy area with a covered spring.

Continue up a more gradual trail in this verdant valley to its end, just past the headworks for the black plastic water pipe. Beyond the ablation valley, ascend steeply for 15 minutes across a large landslide. Cairns on boulders above mark the way to **Ultrar Meadow** (3270m).

A rock wall keeps the occasional livestock out of the **Lady Finger Camping Site** (camping fee Rs 100, tent hire with blankets not sleeping bags Rs 150; closed Oct-Mar). Sod tables and chairs invite you to relax and refresh with a cold drink, snack or a hot meal. Alternatively, you can camp outside the wall for free. Stay off the dangerously crevassed Ultrar Glacier.

A popular side trip (six hours – four up and two down) to **Hon Pass** (4257m) is steep – it's 1000m up and 1000m down – and strenuous, but well worth the effort. Hon Pass has aerial-like views of the Hunza Valley and the west end of the Hispar, Spantik-Sosbun and Rakaposhi-Haramosh Ranges. The summits of Trivor, Spantik, Malubiting, Phuparash, Diran and Rakaposhi tower above the equally impressive Barpu, Minapin and Pisan Glaciers. Hon Pass is the obvious grassy notch on the ridge southwest of the meadow. There's no single established trail except for the final few minutes, but it's not hard to find the way. The unceasing ascent yields an increasingly spectacular perspective on Ultrar and its icefall. Nobody crosses Hon Pass, so after savouring the views, retrace your steps. (Trekking in really top shape can do the entire trip as a day walk from Baltit in eight hours round trip.)

Return to Baltit on Day 2 (1½ to two hours, 3.1km).

GOJAL

Gojal lies in the heart of the Karakoram where glaciers course right to the KKH's edge. Outside Baltistan, Gojal is the Karakoram's most extensively glaciated region with eight of its 25 biggest glaciers. Most treks in Gojal go to alpine pastures along these glaciers. Gojal boasts Destaghil Sar (7885m), the highest peak in the Karakoram west of K2, scores of 7000m peaks, and vast stretches of territory ripe for trekking. It's some of the Karakoram's most dramatic scenery, and certainly its most accessible.

AVDEGAR

TREK FACTS

Duration two days

Distance 13.4km

Standard moderate

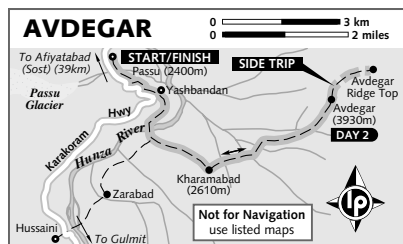
Season May–October

Start/Finish Passu

Public Transport yes

Summary Lofty Avdegar gives the feeling of looking at immense glaciers and peaks from a helicopter, with the KKH and Passu far below.

Avdegar, Passu's winter yak pasture, is east of and high above the Hunza River. Avdegar's fantastic, almost aerial views west of the Ghulkin, Passu and Batura Glaciers and the peaks above them are the attraction. The trek to Avdegar is best undertaken as an overnight trip, but can be done as a very strenuous eight- to 10-hour day trip. Fitness and previous acclimatization are necessary for this relentlessly steep route.



Planning

No maps exist that cover this trek, but the Swiss Foundation for Alpine Research 1:250,000 map *Karakoram (Sheet 1)* shows the general area. Porters ask for a flat rate of Rs 370 per stage. The trek totals four stages round trip.

Getting To/From the Trek

For Passu accommodation and transport information, see p310.

The Trek

Starting from Passu (2400m) on Day 1 (five to seven hours, 6.7km), walk south on the KKH, passing the Shisper View Hotel, to the first hairpin bend (which comes up before KKH mile marker 681). Walk 50m further (south of) past the 'Yashfandan Waterpipe Project' sign to an opening between two guardrails.

Follow the trail that descends east from the KKH here, skirting the stone walls around Yashbandan's fields, and continue up the other side of this valley. The well-used trail dips through rocky gullies as it heads south and east towards the footbridge across the Hunza River. The high-water trail to the footbridge, which is used from June to August, stays on the hillside above the river and takes 30 minutes from the KKH. Meanwhile, in spring and autumn, the low-water trail descends to cross the gravelly flood plain in a more direct line to the footbridge and takes 20 minutes.

It takes 10 minutes and more than 400 careful steps on narrow boards spaced 75cm apart to cross the scary suspension footbridge, which may not be possible for anyone who experiences vertigo. In high winds, especially common in the afternoon and in spring, the footbridge tilts radically and is impossible to cross.

Across the footbridge where the trail emerges onto the plain, it forks; the left-hand trail goes northeast to Kharabad, and the right-hand trail goes southeast to Zarabad (see the Two Bridges day walk, p311). To go to Avdegar, bear northeast and follow the path 2km and one hour to pleasant **Kharabad** (2610m).

Go along the paths between houses on the west (lower) edge of the cultivated area. From the furthest stone house, continue over the open barren area, heading for the

vegetation that lines an abandoned canal coming from the base of the Avdegar slope. No actual trail exists, but the open land makes for easy walking. Follow the abandoned canal to its end in the stream bed at the base of the slope (2670m), 1.5km and one to 1½ hours from Kharamabad.

The old trail to Avdegar started from the upper end of the stream bed, where a small waterfall has worn a groove in the rock face. This trail was wiped out by rockfall in 1997, and now is a 20m-high rock chute. The current trail starts several hundred metres further west of (down from) the stream bed opposite the end of the abandoned canal. The stream has year-round water, although you may have to walk well upstream to find it. Water above is scarce.

Ascend the dry, rocky, steep slope for one hour, climbing 300m to 400m over 1km as the trail works gradually east, to rejoin the abandoned trail at the top of the steepest section, just below the start of scattered juniper trees (3360m). Continue up steeply through scattered juniper, as the view grows more impressive.

Reach the more level pasture of **Avdegar** (3930m), marked by two cairns, in another 1½ hours, or three to five hours from and 1340m above Kharamabad. A three-sided stone shelter lies a short distance to the south, and level areas offer camp sites. Water comes from a stream in the gully to the south, which can be hard to reach and dry in autumn.

The view is spectacular, with Shishpar dominating the horizon, and stretches from Ultar's north side to Shishpar and Passu peaks at the Passu Glacier's head, the tops of the Batura peaks behind Passu Sar, and the peaks at the Batura Glacier's head in the distance, including Pamiri Sar (7016m). Morning sun lights the glaciers and the peaks of the Batura Muztagh nicely.

A strenuous four- to six-hour side trip goes to the notch in the 4100m ridge above Avdegar, where a rock finger points up and even more perspective can be gained. From the first large grassy area, head north (left) and cross the first large scree slope into a grassy area. Then cross a smaller scree slope and ascend the grassy area beyond, zigzagging up the rock above the highest extent of grass. Passu yaks do this, which seems unlikely, but is true.

Retrace your steps to Passu on Day 2 (five to seven hours, 6.7km).

BATURA GLACIER

TREK FACTS

Duration five days

Distance 65km

Standard moderate

Season June–October

Start/Finish China Camp

Public Transport yes

Summary Classic trek alongside a giant glacier beneath the peaks of the Batura Wall and Batura Ice Floes with some of the western Karakoram's best mountain scenery.

Batura, the most accessible and fourth-longest Karakoram glacier, stretches west 56km from the KKH. The trek's exceptional scenery includes 14 peaks higher than 7000m and huge ice floes plummeting more than 4000m from the crest of the 7500m Batura Wall. In pastures along the glacier's margin, Wakhi shepherds tend their livestock.

With almost no steep segments, the trek affords gradual acclimatisation, gaining less than 400m per day. The well-used, easy-to-follow trail mostly passes through ablation valleys and along streams. The trek's two crossings of the Batura Glacier are fairly easy, yet a guide or porter is helpful for navigating the glacier.

Planning

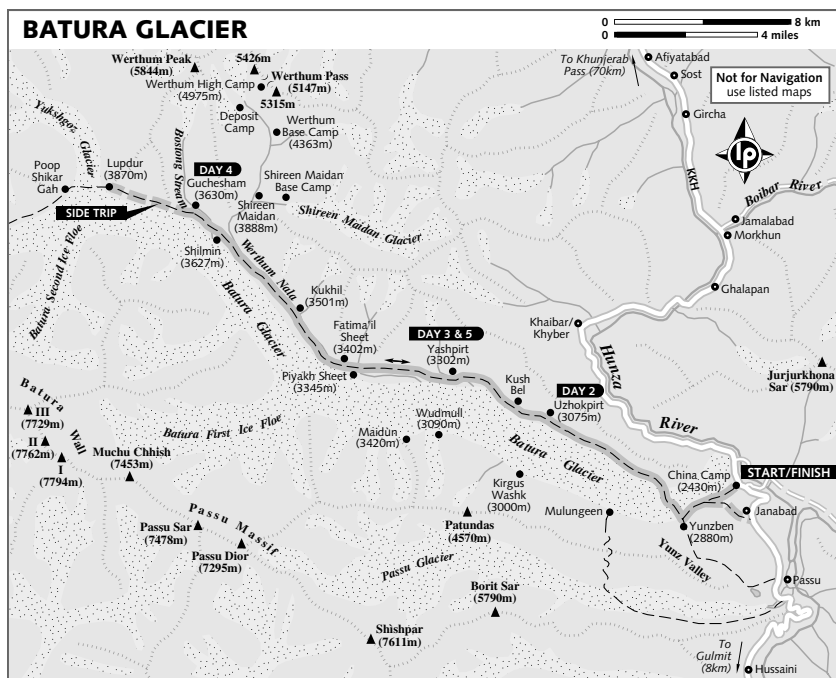
The Swiss Foundation for Alpine Research 1:250,000 map *Karakoram (Sheet 1)* and Deutschen Alpenverein (DAV) 1:100,000 map *Hunza-Karakorum* cover the trek. It totals nine stages round trip. Porters ask for Rs 370 per stage plus Rs 250 for clothing and equipment.

Getting To/From the Trek

For Passu accommodation and transport information, see p310. Walk from any Passu hotel or hop on any vehicle heading north for a 10-minute ride to China Camp between KKH mile markers 689 and 690. Look for the trail amid overgrown vegetation at a signed canal.

The Trek

The trail on Day 1 (five to six hours, 11.5km) from China Camp (2430m), at the top of the first rise just south of the bridge over the Batura Glacier's outwash stream, leads you along lateral moraine to a high point above the chaotic glacial rubble and on to the shepherds' settlement at



Yunzben (2880m). At Yunzben, you move onto the **Batura Glacier**. It takes fewer than two hours to manoeuvre across the somewhat convoluted 2km route to the opposite side. Once along the glacier's north margin, mature willows and junipers offer ample shade on the way to **Uzhokpirt** (3075m), a welcoming spot to camp.

The easy trail to Yashpirt on Day 2 (two to three hours, 5.1km) meanders through pretty ablation valleys, amid substantial willow, wild rose, tamarisk and juniper. The first impressive views of the upper Batura Glacier and Batura First Ice Floe draw you up to the pastures at juniper-surrounded **Yashpirt** (3302m).

Pass through a lovely series of ablation valleys with abundant juniper, willow, birch and poplar and a series of pasture settlements on Day 3 (five to six hours, 15.7km) to the highest settlement at **Guchesham** (3630m). The views of the Batura Wall from the moraine south of Guchesham are spectacular, and Destaghil Sar rises to the east in the distance.

The highly recommended six-hour side trip from Guchesham to the meadow at **Lupdur** (3870m) offers the best views of the Batura Second Ice Floe, and excellent views of the

upper Batura Glacier, **Kampir Dior** (7168m) and the **Yukshgoz Glacier**. The views from Lupdur are worth the whole trek.

Retrace your steps, camping at Yashpirt or Uzhokpirt on Day 4 and reaching China Camp on Day 5. On the return, ambitious trekkers may want to try crossing the Batura Glacier on one of two longer and more difficult routes along the glacier's south margin.

SHIMSHAL PAMIR

TREK FACTS

Duration five days

Distance 84km

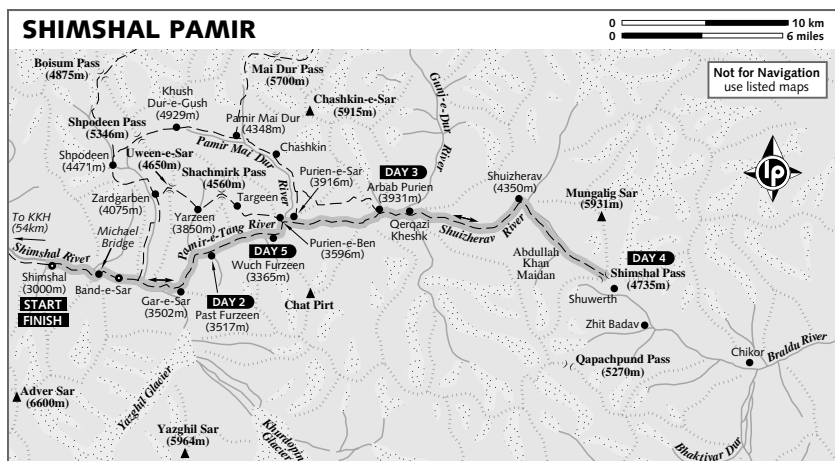
Standard moderate

Season June–September

Start/Finish Shimshal village

Public Transport yes

Summary Trekking to the Shimshal Pamir takes you to Shimshalis' favourite place, where lakes sparkle on the Central Asian watershed and shepherds call melodiously across the highlands.



Almost 1000 yaks and several thousand sheep and goats graze in the Shimshal Pamir, an extensive alpine grassland above 4500m. Shimshalis make traditional seasonal migrations, called *kuch*, to their beloved Shimshal Pamir, and fortunate trekkers may be able to join them. In late May they leave Shimshal village for Shuizherav, and in June move to Shuwerth, the main summer settlement. In early September, they move to Shuizherav, and in October they return to Shimshal village.

Two trails to the Shimshal Pamir join one another at Purien-e-Ben. The *tang* (gorge) route, which is described here, goes by the Pamir-e-Tang River. The other route, the *uween* (pass) route, which crosses two arduous passes (Shachmirk and Uween-e-Sar, both are higher than 4500m), was the standard way until 1997 when the *tang* trail was improved. However, the *uween* route is still used by yaks going to and from the Shimshal Pamir.

Planning

The Swiss Foundation for Alpine Research 1:250,000 map *Karakoram (Sheet 1)* covers the trek. Porters ask for a flat rate of Rs 300 per stage plus Rs 500 clothing and equipment allowance. The trek totals 12 stages round trip.

Getting To/From the Trek

For Shimshal accommodation and transport information, see p313.

The Trek

Follow the Shimshal River east on Day 1 (seven to eight hours, 12km) from Shimshal village (3000m) and fill water bottles at the spring before the footbridge, the only water for hours along this trail. Cross the footbridge to the river's true right bank, veer right (avoiding the trail to Zardgarben that climbs immediately) and follow the wide river bed 1½ hours or 5km to the confluence of the Shimshal and Pamir-e-Tang Rivers.

Ford the Pamir-e-Tang River to its true left bank, marvelling at the immense gorge. Ascend the steep spur between the two rivers for 2km or 1½ hours, as you round a bend and enter a basin. The ascent continues steadily through artemisia steppes, passing lots of igneous rock. Just above the basin, the trail splits; take the right fork to Gar-e-Sar. Several cairns mark **Gar-e-Sar** (3502m), or 'top of the rock'. Here you have superb vistas of the Yazghil Glacier, Adver Sar, and the hard-to-see 7000m peaks of the Hispar Muztagh: Kunyang Chhish; Pumori Chhish; and Yukshin Gardan.

From Gar-e-Sar, follow level galleries passing eroded cliffs on the canyon's opposite side. Reach **Shanj** in 15 minutes, a scree-filled gully where an unreliable trickle of water flows. Traverse 450m above the river on an exposed trail 1½ to two hours, then descend a steep 130m scree slope to **Past Furzeen** (3517m). A clear side stream provides generally reliable water during summer, and has a few tent sites. You must be prepared to walk to Wuch Furzeen if it's dry.

On Day 2 (six hours, 13km) ascend along the stream, soon leaving it to ascend a difficult section called Gulchin Purien. The route ascends steadily and traverses high before descending a scree gully to **Wuch Furzeen** (3365m) with a small spring, which if dry necessitates an awkward trip down to the river for silty water.

Descend to the Pamir-e-Tang River in 15 minutes and cross a footbridge. Continue along the river's true right bank for 30 minutes, ascending a short scree slope to a flat area 60m above the river. Follow the trail ascending 150m along galleries, and descend into **Purien-e-Ben** (3596m) in another 45 minutes.

Cross the Pamir Mai Dur River via a footbridge. Climb 320m on the 30-degree trail up the canyon wall out of Purien-e-Ben, through a doorway and up a juniper staircase (*purien*) one hour to **Purien-e-Sar** (3916m), the plain above. Mungalig Sar (5931m) is the prominent peak to the east, Adver Sar (6600m) to the west, and the striking Chat Pirt massif to the south.

Beyond Purien-e-Sar, the walk becomes easier. The trail traverses high above the river, crossing several tributary streams in narrow gorges. Traverse gently to a rocky rise and you'll reach the first side stream, Kushk Yarzeen, in 1¼ hours. **Arbab Purien** (3931m), the nicest of these side valleys and a good place to camp with a spring, is 30 minutes further beneath distinctive red rocks.

Start Day 3 (six to seven hours, 17km) by passing above Miter Kheshk in one hour and descending towards the river. Follow the rocky trail along the river for 45 minutes to the confluence of the Gunj-e-Dur and Shuizherav Rivers. Cross a footbridge to the Gunj-e-Dur River's true left bank. Pass the huts at Qerqazi Kheshk and follow the Shuizherav River two to 2½ hours to the settlement of **Shuizherav** (4350m), with many shepherds' huts along the river and an alternative camping area below.

Cross the footbridge to the Shuizherav's true left bank and ascend a side stream's true right bank. The easy ascent to **Abdullah Khan Maidan** (4600m) takes one hour. The *pamir* (glacially formed high-elevation valleys renowned as summer grazing grounds) is the precinct of women and children, who have a rule: you cannot enter the pastures in a sad

mood. Everyone must be happy and it's best to enter singing!

Stroll two hours through meadows amid herds of yaks, skirting the two lakes that lie on the watershed between South Asia and Central Asia, to the **Shimshal Pass** (4735m). Pleasant camp sites (4700m) are in the level area just north of (below) Shimshal Pass, in view of the lakes. Fifteen minutes beyond the almost unnoticeable Shimshal Pass is the main summer settlement of **Shuwerth**.

Retrace the *tang* route in two days (41.6km), camping at Wuch Furzeen on Day 4. (The longer and more difficult *uween* trail offers a challenging three-day alternative route.)

PAMIRI

TREK FACTS

Duration three days

Distance 22km

Standard moderate

Season mid-June–September

Start/Finish Zood Khun

Public Transport yes

Summary One of Chapursan's few short open-zone treks, Pamiri has dramatic views of 7000m peaks, glaciers and icefalls.

The snowy summits of Chapursan's highest peaks, Kampir Dior (7168m) and Pamiri Sar (7016m), rise above the convoluted ice of the imposing Yishkuk Glacier. A relentlessly rocky route along the glacier's north-west margin, averaging four hours and 340m ascent per day upvalley, leads to Pamiri, a base camp for these 7000m giants.

Planning

The Swiss Foundation for Alpine Research 1:250,000 map *Karakoram (Sheet 1)* covers the trek. Porters ask for a flat rate of Rs 320 per stage. The trek totals six stages round trip.

Getting To/From the Trek

For Zood Khun accommodation and transport information, see p316 and p316.

The Trek

Day 1 (four hours, 9km) starts by passing through the gate (3368m) across the road at

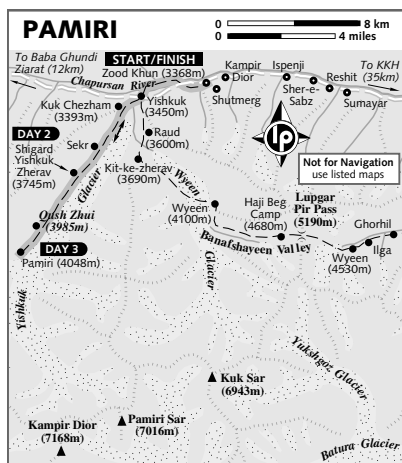
Zood Khun's western end. Leave the road, heading west past Yishkuk Hilga on a trail that crosses and recrosses the Chapursan River via two footbridges. Stroll through the grassy, spring-fed areas of Zhui Sam and Korkut, reaching the shepherds' settlement at **Kuk Chezham** (3393m), near the Yishkuk Glacier's mouth, in 1½ hours (4km).

The prominent red rock called Sekr beckons you steadily and gradually up along the glacier's lateral moraine. Step over the stream at Sekr, continue ascending to cross a shoulder and reach the reliable clear stream at **Shigard Yishkuk Zherav** (3745m), 2½ hours or 5km from Kuk Chezham. A level yet rocky alluvial fan affords camp sites dramatic glacier views.

The first 10km of Day 2 (four to five hours, 13km) is a very rugged traverse along scree and talus slopes. The welcome sight of a clear stream draws you across the final rocky section to a grassy, flower-filled ablation valley. A wide, level area with excellent mountain views offers alternative camp sites to Pamiri. Ten minutes further, a small lake called **Qush Zhui** (3985m) fills the ablation valley.

Pamiri (4048m) lies less than an hour above the lake, tucked into a narrow spot against the glacier's moraine. You can climb onto the moraine ridge for otherwise 'hidden' mountain views, or you can go on an excursion up the side valley for better views of peaks and icefalls.

Retrace your steps to Zood Khun on Day 3 (six to seven hours, 22km).



KILIK & MINTAKA PASSES

TREK FACTS

Duration six days

Distance 88km

Standard easy

Season June–September

Start/Finish Misgar

Public Transport yes

Summary Wide, well-established trails lead up two broad valleys filled with wildflowers, dramatic cascades, petroglyphs and wildlife to two historic passes on the Chinese border.

For more than 1000 years, Kilik and Mintaka were important Silk Road passes and Misgar (3075m) was the jumping-off point. Following Britain's conquest of Hunza in 1891, Misgar became the British listening post on Central Asia. British sportsmen crossed Kilik Pass (4827m) to hunt Marco Polo sheep and spy on Russian travellers. Hunza men carried weekly dispatches from Gilgit to the British consulate in Kashgar via Mintaka Pass (4726m). After Pakistan's Independence in 1947, these two passes became off limits to foreigners until 1999. Today trekkers can visit these passes where in 1894 Lord Curzon stood at the outermost edge of Britain's empire.

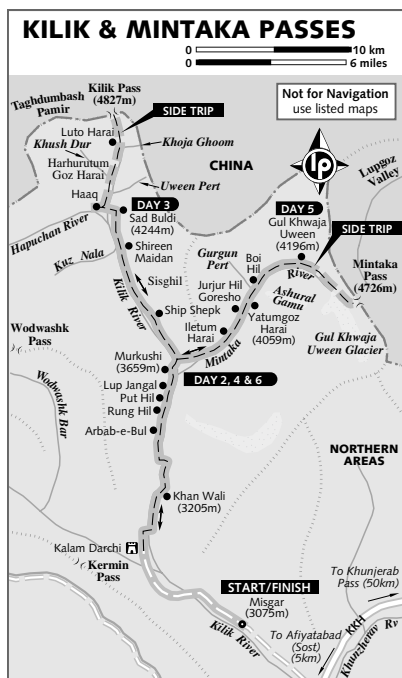
Kilik and Mintaka are rich in cultural and natural history. You find ancient Kyrgyz tombs, old polo grounds, prehistoric petroglyphs, abundant wildflowers, rare butterflies, and plenty of ibex and brown bear signs. Built by the military, the wide trails to these gentle passes are easy to follow, with less than 600m of ascent or descent per day. Trekking days average five hours, springs and trees are abundant, and camp sites are grassy.

Planning

The US AMS 1:250,000 map *Baltit* (NJ 43-14) covers the trek, except Kilik Pass. Porters ask for a flat rate of Rs 350 per stage. The trek totals eight stages round trip, not including the side trips. It totals 10 stages when you do both side trips as day walks.

Getting To/From the Trek

For Misgar accommodation and transport information, see p316.



The Trek

On Day 1 (six to seven hours, 21km), the road from Misgar parallels the Kilik River to its confluence with the Dilisang River near **Kalam Darchi** fort. Beyond, the trail passes through a series of inviting level grassy birch groves beneath the towering cliffs on either side of well-watered valley. **Murkushi** (3659m) is the last and largest of these plains at the confluence of the Kilik and Mintaka Rivers.

Rising steadily along the Kilik River beneath polished granite cliffs, the trail on Day 2 (4½ hours, 11.7km) passes spring-fed birch and willow oases until levelling out at the plain called Shireen Maidan. The landscape changes from the steep spires and rocky summits of the Karakoram to the rounded rolling grasslands of the *pamir*. The gentle trail continues to the windswept plain of **Sad Buldi** (4244m). Across the river is the shepherds' settlement of Haaq.

The side trip to **Kilik Pass** (four to 4½ hours, 11km) parallels the grassy, flower-strewn Kilik Valley upriver to Luto Harai, where several tumbledown stone walls mark an old

shepherds' camp. Ascend a rocky hillside trail to a broad, rolling *pamir* and Kilik Pass, a plateau with a sizable lake nearby. On the return stay high above the river, traversing flower-carpeted hillsides with excellent views downvalley, until you descend directly above Haaq. On Day 3 (three to 3½ hours, 11.7km) retrace your steps downvalley to Murkushi.

The second half of the trek takes you from Murkushi towards Mintaka Pass. The Mintaka Valley retains a classic Karakoram feel, and its reddish-brown granite terraces, level grassy areas, side streams and waterfalls give it a dramatic but pleasant quality. The easy walk on Day 4 (four hours, 11.5km) ascends four short rocky sections, remnants of ancient landslides that once dammed the river, and crosses four broad grassy areas, former lake beds. At **Gul Khwaja Uween** (4196m), where two free-leaping cascades tumble over a granite cliff, there are many roofless stone shelters built by the army. Attractive grassy terraces on the cliffs above and the clear white central ice of the Gul Khwaja Uween Glacier give this camp site a dramatic appeal.

Flowers decorate the hillside on the side trip to **Mintaka Pass** (four to 4½ hours, 7.5km), where the plaintive calls of ram chukor partridge and shrill whistles of golden marmots echo off the cliffs. The area around Mintaka Pass has many brown bear and wolf signs. Day 5 (3½ hours, 11.5km) takes you back to Murkushi before continuing downvalley to Misgar on Day 6 (five hours, 21km).

BALTISTAN

Baltistan is the centre of the Karakoram with five of its biggest glaciers – Biafo (65km), Baltoro (62km), Chogo Lungma (44km), Panmah (42km), and Kaberi and Kondus (36km) – offering the longest glacier traverses outside the subpolar zones. The renowned Balti-pa, who live among the Karakoram's peaks and glaciers, welcome trekkers and climbers with a cheerfulness that belies their icebound surroundings. Most of Baltistan's trekking routes are in restricted zones, which require a permit and experience with technical glacier travel. Hushe in eastern Baltistan offers easy open-zone treks, one of which is described in this section.

HIGHWAYS OF ROCK & ICE

So, you want the ultimate in Karakoram trekking? Then traverse the length of a Karakoram glacier. Two treks epitomise this experience: the Hispar La trek to Snow Lake, and the Baltoro Glacier trek to K2 Base Camp. Both take you up massive ice highways lined with magnificent peaks and towers into the very heart of the Karakoram.

The Hispar La is a glaciated pass that links the Biafo (65km) and Hispar (49km) Glaciers, the Karakoram's longest continuous stretch of glacier (114km). At the base of the Hispar La is Lukpe Lawo, commonly called Snow Lake, one of the world's largest glacial basins. More than a dozen 7000m peaks and the Biafo's granite spires – Lukpe Lawo Brak (6593m), Lukpe Brak (6029m) and Baintha Brak (7285m) – form a magnificent cathedral of mountain architecture. Every year, trekkers cross this technical pass between Baltistan and Nagyr through what both Francis Younghusband and HW Tilman called the finest mountain scenery in the world, scenery that 'attracts by its grandeur, but repels by its desolation'. This trek, extreme in difficulty, is an awesome but rewarding experience.

The Baltoro Glacier (62km), the Karakoram's third longest, leads into some of the planet's most extensively glaciated terrain. Seven of the world's 25 highest peaks rise above the glacier; the Gasherbrums (I – 8068m, II – 8035m, III – 7952m and IV – 7925m), Broad Peak (8047m), and K2 (8611m), the world's second-highest peak. All along the lower Baltoro Glacier are monumental sheer-rock walls and granite towers – Uli Biaho, the Trangos, the Cathedrals – that draw the world's elite climbers. Trekkers who pass through this majestic landscape and visit the base camps share in a once-in-a-lifetime experience. The trek is demanding, but is glacier travel at its best. Far and away, it's Pakistan's most popular trek.

Glaciers are a compelling natural phenomenon, and trekking up one takes you into an otherworldly realm; different, dangerous, beautiful and deceptive. It's essential to prepare thoroughly by learning about glacier travel, rope technique and crevasse rescue.

HUMBROK

TREK FACTS

Duration two days

Distance 11km

Standard easy

Season June–October

Start/Finish Hushe

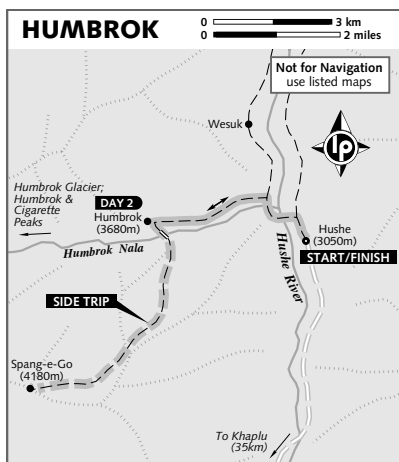
Public Transport yes

Summary The best short open-zone trek from Hushe village with a side trip for a glimpse of K2.

Masherbrum (7821m), shimmering at the head of the Hushe Valley, beckons travellers north from Khaplu. Hushe (3050m), the valley's highest village, is the starting point. Hushe's friendly population and their long history of involvement with trekkers and climbers makes this a welcoming destination.

Most treks from Hushe are restricted-zone treks, but one outstanding open-zone trek takes you to a delightfully unvisited alpine setting. Picturesque Humbrok nestles in a

side valley high above the Hushe River west of Hushe village. Humbrok offers attractive camp sites, great views and abundant springs. You can greet Balti shepherds in these pastures or take a highly recommended side trip to the ridge line for a hard-to-obtain glimpse of K2's summit pyramid. Humbrok



is a splendid place to spend a day or two. The trail, although not hard to find, is steep, ascending 630m.

Planning

The Swiss Foundation for Alpine Research 1:250,000 map *Karakoram (Sheet 2)* covers the trek. Porters ask for a flat rate of Rs 360 per stage plus Rs 250 clothing and equipment allowance. The trek totals two stages round trip, excluding the side trip.

Getting To/From the Trek

For Hushe accommodation and transport information, see p293.

The Trek

On Day 1 (2½ to three hours, 5.5km) follow the Hushe River's west bank to Humbrok Nala, then turn west and follow the stream's north bank. At first the ascent is through ir-

rigated fields, but soon continues up through steep, rocky terrain dotted by artemisia. Attractive camp sites are in the meadow beyond the cluster of shepherds' huts at **Humbrok** (3680m). At the head of the valley is the Humbrok Glacier, beneath the black pyramid of Humbrok Peak (6459m) and sharp, snow-clad Cigarette Peak.

A side trip to the alpine meadow on the ridge line south of Humbrok offers spectacular views of the surrounding peaks, including distant K2. Unless you're previously acclimatised, wait until the next morning to embark on this five-hour side trip. The gruelling 500m ascent to the ridge line follows livestock paths for a short distance, but then becomes a cross-country route. Ask a shepherd to show you the way to the spectacular viewpoint called **Spang-e-Go** (4180m).

Retrace your steps to Hushe on Day 2 (1½ to two hours, 5.5km).

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ACCOMMODATION

Accommodation in Pakistan and Xinjiang ranges from ramshackle budget lodgings to five-star opulence but the entire range is not always on offer. Outside major cities and summer resorts, you won't find luxurious hotels; yet, the budget accommodation can be surprisingly more salubrious than that found in the cities.

Foreigners may not be welcome at some budget places in Pakistan because these hotels don't have the necessary government hotel-register form. For those places that do accept foreigners, check-out is typically late morning, but may sometimes be in the afternoon or 24 hours from check-in; in any case, it's often flexible if requested beforehand.

Prices throughout this book are based on a hotel's cheapest single/double room (in almost all budget and some midrange places this does *not* include air-con) and don't include taxes unless otherwise stated. In towns where we make no recommendations you're most likely to find cheap lodgings around the train or bus stations.

All places listed in this book's regional chapters have private attached bathroom unless otherwise mentioned. If a hotel (budget and midrange) advertises a hot shower you should first check to see whether the shower works effectively (if at all) and if it does indeed deliver hot water. Some showers render a mere trickle of water, making the bucket a better bet. Squat toilets are only common in the budget category, although some lower-priced hotels have a mix of squat and sit-down flush toilets. Most budget places don't supply toilet paper or soap (possibly no towel either), and hot water may be irregular or only available during certain hours. Apart from top-end hotels, many places use wall-mounted electric geysers (water heaters) that need to be switched on up to an hour before use. Almost all budget and midrange hotel bathroom sinks lack plugs.

Accommodation prices aren't always fixed. Popular domestic holiday destinations, such as Upper Swat, the Kaghan Valley and the Galis, can get extremely crowded in summer and prices skyrocket. Off-season, on the other hand, you should be able to strike bargains with the handful of places that remain open. Hotels in all price categories are usually open to tariff negotiation in off-peak periods or if occupancy levels are low. The downturn in foreign tourism in recent years has largely led

BOOK YOUR STAY ONLINE

For more accommodation reviews and recommendations by Lonely Planet authors, check out the online booking service at www.lonelyplanet.com. You'll find the true, insider lowdown on the best places to stay. Reviews are thorough and independent. Best of all, you can book online.

PRACTICALITIES

- Pakistan and China use the metric system.
- Electricity is 220/240V 50/60 Hz AC in Pakistan and 220V 50 Hz AC in China. Pakistani sockets accept two round pins, although some accept a third (earth or ground) pin. Chinese sockets accept two flat pins or three-pronged angle pins. Adaptors are widely available, but 120V to 220V converters are scarce.
- Major English-language dailies in Pakistan include *Dawn*, *The Nation*, *The News*, *Daily Times* and *Frontier Post*. *Dawn*, *The Nation* and *The News* are the pick of the bunch.
- The *China Daily* is China's official English-language newspaper.
- In Pakistan read incisive current affairs in the monthly *Newsline* and *Herald* magazines.
- State-run Pakistan Broadcasting Corporation (PBC) transmits largely government viewpoints and Islamic values over the radio airwaves. There are a growing number of private FM broadcasters.
- Pakistan has satellite and cable TV available at all top-end, many midrange and a couple of budget hotels. Channels include Discovery, BBC, CNN and Star Movies. The national broadcaster is PTV.
- Chinese Central TV (CCTV) has two sanitised English-language channels.

to supply exceeding demand, furthering the opportunity for bargaining.

Breakdowns and blackouts ('load shedding') are fairly common in remote towns and villages (less frequent in the larger cities), so it pays to carry a flashlight. Sound pollution can be diabolical, especially in urban centres, so bring good-quality earplugs.

Hotel tariffs are usually raised annually, so the prices quoted in this book are likely to have risen by the time you read this.

Note that some hotels in cantonment areas of a city may deny accommodation to anyone who has 'Not Valid for Cantt Area' stamped next to their visa – for more information see p378.

Camping & Youth Hostels

Overlanders with their own transport can park and camp cheaply at a few camp sites as well as at several hotel grounds (regional chapters have details). Vandalism and theft are usually not a problem. In Xinjiang you can't pitch a tent with any security around larger towns, but you can camp at places like Kara Kul and below Muztagh Ata.

The Pakistan Youth Hostels Association (PYHA), with headquarters at Youth Hostel Islamabad (see p81), runs a number of hostels in Pakistan, with gender-segregated dormitories, gardens where you can often pitch a tent and (usually) cooking facilities. Guests may be required to lend a hand with clean-up, and

some hostels impose night curfews. In summer, hostels in the Northern Areas (NA) can be especially popular with Pakistani students, and if they're busy you may only be permitted to stay for several days. See regional chapters for details.

Government Resthouses

Also called circuit houses, inspection bungalows or dak bungalows, most government resthouses are two- or three-unit guesthouses run by government agencies for staff on business. Each has a *chowkidar* (caretaker) living nearby who can, by arrangement, prepare meals. At some places you may need to bring your own bedding.

In principle, government resthouses are available to tourists if nobody else is using them. In practice many of them must be booked with the relevant person (often a chief engineer) in district capitals. You could take your chances without a booking, although it's wise not to do so if it's the *only* accommodation available in the area. Campers or cyclists may be able to pitch a tent in the grounds (for a nominal charge), which usually make great camping spots.

The best resthouses and their booking offices are noted in the regional chapters.

Railway Retiring Rooms

Pakistan Railways provides retiring rooms at most major city train stations. These are mostly spartan singles/doubles that are only available

to holders of air-con or 1st-class sleeper tickets (usually departing within 24 hours). They're really only useful if you arrive very late at night or depart very early in the morning, and even then you may find them full. You may have to supply your own bedding and checkout is within 24 hours. Cleanliness is variable. Waiting rooms with sofas, toilets and showers may also be available.

Village Guesthouses

In the Northern Areas, the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme and Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation (PTDC) started a Village Guest House programme under which homes converted parts of their homes into guesthouses, with a few comfortable rooms and home-cooked meals. Those that survived are now self-supporting. Most aren't really 'homestays', since guests tend to be left to themselves and fed separately, but they're closer to grassroots level than a hotel. A few that are especially good value are mentioned in this book's regional chapters.

ACTIVITIES

By far the most popular activity for visitors to Pakistan is trekking, which is covered in the Trekking in Northern Pakistan chapter (p331). Also popular are day hikes, which are presented in the relevant regional chapters. Some Pakistani and overseas adventure-travel agencies offer various group packages including mountain and desert 4WD safaris, horse treks, cross-country skiing, winter yak safaris, desert camel treks and assorted special-interest trips.

Cycling

The Karakoram Highway (KKH) could have been invented for cyclists, although it's often a demanding trip; for more about the road, bringing a bike to China and Pakistan, and overseas resources, see p385. Information on risky areas is provided in each regional chapter. Also take note of the rockfall warning, p369.

Fishing

Many of Pakistan's mountain rivers and lakes are stocked with trout. Popular reaches are in the Gilgit River basin, the Astor Valley, Baltistan, the Kaghan Valley, Swat and Chitral. Trout season is usually from 10 March to 9 October. Information and licences are available at Fisheries offices (see regional chapters

for details) in larger towns and tourist areas, and sometimes from wardens on the spot. Some Fisheries offices rent tackle.

Skiing

Simple downhill skiing facilities exist in the Naltar Valley near Gilgit and at Kalabagh near Murree. The country's biggest ski resort is at Malam Jaba in the Swat Valley. The season is from December through to March. Experienced ski mountaineers can enjoy world-class mountain ski touring on the Deosai Plains and on the Batura, Hispar and Biafo Glaciers in March and April.

Whitewater Boating

Several rivers in the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) and NA have stretches of class IV or easier rapids; ie suitable for commercial rafting and kayaking. These include the Indus (Jaglot to Thakot in Indus Kohistan), Kunhar (Naran to Kaghan in the Kaghan Valley), Swat (Madyan to Saidu Sharif), Gilgit (from Punial to the Indus confluence), Lower Ishkoman, Shyok (from Khapalu to Gol in Baltistan) and Hunza (Sost to Passu and Aliabad to Gilgit). Parts of the Chitral River are also open. The rafting season is approximately May to late June and late September to November.

BUSINESS HOURS

Pakistan

Government offices operate from around 8am to 3pm Monday to Thursday and Saturday, and 8am to noon on Friday. Private offices generally open from 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday (some closing between noon and 1pm for prayers) and some also operate on Saturday (often only until 3pm).

State banks (foreign-exchange sections) are usually open from 9am to 1.30pm Monday to Thursday and 9am to 12.30pm on Friday and Saturday. Some banks stay open longer. Post office timings vary regionally but they generally open from around 9am to 4pm Monday to Thursday and Saturday, and 9am to 12.30pm on Friday, although some stay open longer and some close for 30 minutes between 1pm and 2pm. Most museums open from around 9am to 5pm in summer and to 4pm in winter (see regional chapters for exact timings); many are closed on the first Wednesday of each month throughout the year.

Restaurant hours are variable. Breakfast is usually available from approximately 7am and restaurants open for dinner around 6pm to 7pm. Some stay open throughout the day.

During Ramazan (Ramadan), opening hours are shortened by most government offices and many businesses, especially restaurants (which are typically closed from dawn to dusk); hours vary across the country, with notices usually posted on the business's entrance.

China

Everything official runs on Beijing time, opening at 8.30am and usually closing at 5pm Monday to Friday. However, in Kashgar and Tashkurgan people operate on (unofficial) 'Xinjiang time', which is two hours earlier. A few businesses may add a half day on Saturday but Sunday is universally the day of rest.

CHILDREN

Despite the friendly reception children receive in Pakistan, travelling with little ones can be hard work and requires constant vigilance, especially near chaotic city roads. It's also important to realise that health risks such as diarrhoea pose a greater threat to children than adults (see p395) – consult your doctor for advice well before travelling.

Remember to pack plenty of high-factor sunscreen and a snug-fitting wide-brimmed hat. A washable changing mat will come in handy for covering dirty (germ-ridden) surfaces. If your child takes special medication, it's wise to bring along an adequate stock. Standard baby products such as nappies (diapers) are available in the larger Pakistani cities but can be tough to find in smaller centres. Always carry sufficient clean drinking water as children can dehydrate quickly, especially during the warmer months.

Midrange hotels usually have 'family rooms' or will readily provide an extra bed (sometimes at an additional cost). Restaurants rarely have children's menus, and although they're often happy to whip up something special in the cities, many country eateries simply don't have the resources. Numerous Pakistani restaurants have special family sections that separate women and family groups from the majority male clientele.

Most children will find the overcrowded public transport disconcerting, and, depending on the child, will be terrified or exhilarated

by the driving standards. For long trips, trains are usually the most comfortable mode of transport.

For helpful hints, grab Lonely Planet's *Travel with Children*, and peruse the Kids to Go branch of Lonely Planet's **Thorn Tree forum** (<http://thorntree.lonelyplanet.com>) where you can also pose questions to fellow travellers.

CLIMATE CHARTS

Pakistan has three main seasons: cool (around October to February), hot (around March to June) and wet/monsoon (around July to September). There are, however, big regional variations – see p15 for more information, and p368 for climate chart diagrams.

CUSTOMS

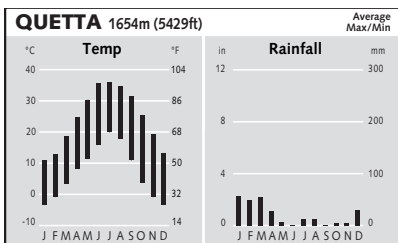
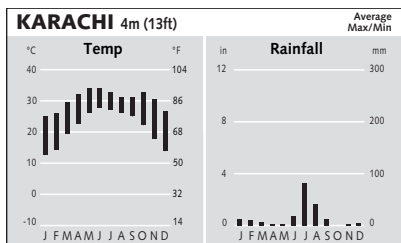
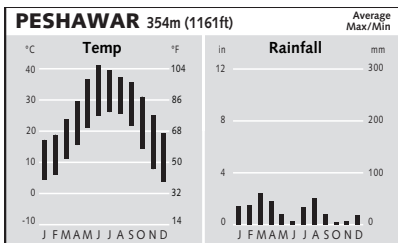
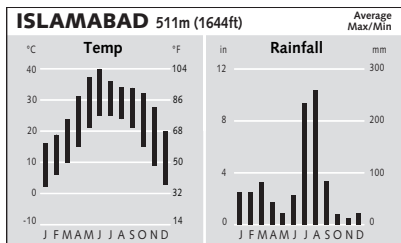
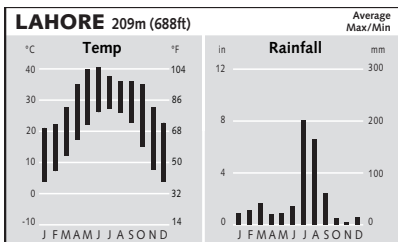
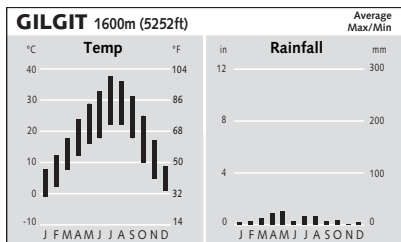
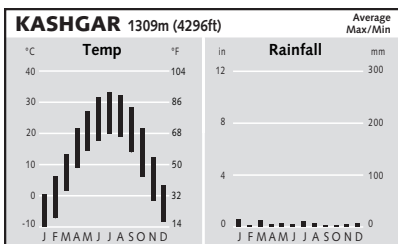
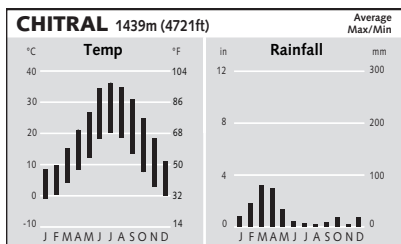
Pakistan

Alcohol cannot be brought into Pakistan. If you have overlooked this fact, declare it to a customs officer who should provide a receipt so you can claim the booze back when you depart. Tobacco attracts limits of 200 cigarettes and 50 cigars.

There are no other significant entry restrictions, and no apparent limits on import/export of foreign cash. No special permit is currently needed to bring in your own bicycle, although you're expected to have noted it on your visa application.

On departure, baggage inspection is usually cursory for foreigners unless you have obvious items like furniture, in which case you may be asked for sales receipts and bank encashment receipts. Airport security staff may confiscate batteries from cameras and walkmans etc that are carried in any hand luggage, so consider putting these in your check-in baggage before you get to the airport.

You're not allowed to export antiquities; if in doubt, make sure you ask a museum curator or top-end hotel shopkeeper who deals in antiquities. If you buy more than US\$500 worth of jewellery in Pakistan, there's the slight possibility you may be asked to produce receipts and/or money-exchange (or credit-card) receipts to the value of the items purchased. Indeed, if you've done a lot of shopping in Pakistan it's probably a good idea to have the money-exchange and/or credit-card receipts and shop receipts handy in case you're asked to show them (the money-exchange and credit-card receipts should total the shop receipts).



Officials are very sharp-eyed about disguised firearms, such as those from Darra Adam Khel, and penalties are stiff. Drug trafficking incurs severe penalties so don't even entertain the thought of smuggling drugs out of Pakistan.

China

At entry customs, you fill out a form declaring money, cameras, radios and so on; you get a copy, which you must present on departure.

You can import 400 cigarettes and four bottles of wine or spirits. Cash amounts exceeding US\$5000 (or its equivalent in another currency) should be declared.

Chinese authorities have occasionally seized documents they deem pornographic, political or intended for religious purposes. Books, films, records or tapes might be temporarily seized in order to determine that they do not violate regulations.

On departure, you turn in the declaration you filled out when you entered, and they may want to see the listed items again. You're not allowed to take out antiques; a purchase receipt can save arguments over an item's status.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Sound and air pollution, irksome bureaucracy, exasperating traffic and crowded public transport are the subcontinent's normal challenges, but daily hassles here are generally low-key compared with those in neighbouring India.

Read local newspapers and talk to tourism officials and other travellers to stay abreast of the latest potential hazards and scams. Also check out the Pakistan branch of Lonely Planet's **Thorn Tree forum** (<http://thorn.tree.lonelyplanet.com>), where travellers may post warnings about problems they have encountered.

For important safety advice, see p16. Women should also read p379.

Demonstrations

Rallies, demonstrations and processions occur from time to time throughout Pakistan, often with very short notice, and occasionally have an anti-Western (especially American) slant. You're strongly advised to stay well away from these for your own safety. During major election campaigns political expression can take a violent turn – if this occurs, steer clear of public gatherings and retreat to your hotel until it's safe to venture out.

Dogs

Steer clear of guard dogs often kept by herders in remote areas; eg the Kalasha valleys, Upper Chitral, Upper Swat, the Upper Kaghan Valley and Baltistan. If you're bitten you run the risk of contracting rabies so be cautious no matter where you are in Pakistan.

Drugs

Charas (hashish) is available in many parts of the country; however, before indulging be warned that drug possession is illegal in Pakistan. Apart from opening yourself up to being taken advantage of, the penalties for possession, use or smuggling of drugs are strictly enforced, with the possibility of long jail sentences and hefty fines. Legislation passed in 1994 makes drug smuggling punishable by death.

Be wary of absolutely anyone, local or tourist, who approaches you with drugs for sale. Some dealers are in cahoots with the police, and will set you up in exchange for a cut of the fine or bribe.

Police

If you're approached by a plain-clothes officer and asked to open your bags (eg for a drugs search on a long-distance train or as you are leaving the Tribal Areas), be polite but insist on seeing his identification badge first. There are con men, but there are also legitimate plain-clothes officers. In general, the authentic ones will let you check out their badges for as long as you feel is necessary. They're also more likely to search slowly and to let you repack one section of your bag before they move on to the next.

Rockfall

The likelihood of a rockfall on valley footpaths and mountain roads rises sharply in rainy weather. Walkers should simply accept this and find something else to do. Don't cross a rockfall on a road hoping to find transport on the other side; the whole road is probably littered with rocks, with more to come.

Theft

Theft has not, so far, been a major problem for travellers in Pakistan. However, exercise the same caution you would while travelling elsewhere; keep your money and passport with you at all times, preferably in a well-concealed moneybelt, and never leave valuables in your hotel room.

Violence

In recent times the combination of sectarian and ethnic tensions, corrupt or incompetent law enforcement and a thriving tribal arms industry has escalated violence in particular parts of Pakistan. These hot spots and other important safety tips are covered in warnings at the start of individual regional chapters.

DISCOUNT CARDS

Showing your foreign-student ID card means you're entitled to a sensational 50% discount on train travel (see p392) – so it certainly pays to bring a student card if you intend travelling by train.

PYHA hostels (see p365) are part of the Hostelling International (HI) network; an HI card entitles you to standard discount rates.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

Most overseas missions, unless otherwise specified below, are located in the Diplomatic Enclave (G-5) in Pakistan's capital, Islamabad. Heightened security here means taxis and most private vehicles cannot enter the enclave. Other than walking, you will have to catch a police shuttle bus from a car park located south of the enclave. There are two bus routes within the enclave, so be sure you get on the correct bus. Embassies are open for visa formalities only during certain hours, and they usually close on Pakistan's national holidays as well as on their own, so it is smart to call ahead before heading out to one.

Some countries have honorary consulates in other Pakistani cities, but many are of limited help and will usually direct you to Islamabad. For details of consulates other than those listed here (which are in Islamabad unless otherwise indicated), call directory inquiries on ☎ 17. See the Information listings in Lahore (p97), Quetta (p144) and Peshawar (p192) for further details about Afghan and/or Iranian consulates in those cities.

Afghanistan Islamabad (Map pp74-5; ☎ 051-2824505; House 8, St 90, G-6/3); Karachi (☎ 021-5821261; Plot 26, Block 5, Clifton); Peshawar (Map p192; ☎ 091-5285962; The Mall, Saddar Bazaar); Quetta (Map p143; ☎/fax 081-9202549; Prince Rd)

Australia (Map pp74-5; ☎ 051-2824345)

Canada (Map pp74-5; ☎ 051-2279103)

China (Map pp74-5; ☎ 051-2252426)

France (Map pp74-5; ☎ 051-2011414)

Germany (Map pp74-5; ☎ 051-2279430)

India (Map pp74-5; ☎ 051-2206950)

Iran Islamabad (Map pp74-5; ☎ 051-2276270); Karachi (☎ 021-5874370; 81 Shahrah-i-Iraq, Clifton); Lahore (Map p98; ☎ 042-9283347; 55 Shadman-II, Jail Rd); Peshawar (Map p191; ☎ 091-9285962; Park Ave, University Town); Quetta (Map p143; ☎ 081-843527; 2-33 Hali Rd)

Japan (Map pp74-5; ☎ 051-9072500)

Kazakhstan (Map pp74-5; ☎ 051-2262926; House N2, St N4, F-8/3, Islamabad)

New Zealand (see the UK High Commission in Islamabad)

UK Islamabad (Map pp74-5; ☎ 051-2012000); Karachi (Map pp162-3; ☎ 021-5872461; Shahrah-e-Iran Rd, Clifton)

USA Islamabad (Map pp74-5; ☎ 051-2082000); Karachi (☎ 021-5685179; 8 Abdullah Haroon Rd); Peshawar (Map p192; ☎ 091-5279801; 11 Hospital Rd, Cantonment)

Uzbekistan (Map pp74-5; ☎ 051-2852768; House 2 St 2, Kohistan Rd, F-8/3)

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

You may like to plan your trip around a festival or two, such as that of the Kalasha people (p231). Be aware that dates can vary annually – confirm these with Pakistani tourist offices at the time of your visit. For details of regional festivals see individual chapters.

Late February

Kitdit (First Festival) The coming of spring. Houses in Gojal are decorated and there are public gatherings with food and music.

Late February–Early March

Taghun (Bo Pho) The first (wheat) ploughing or sowing, called Taghun in Gojal and Bo Pho in Hunza and Nagry, now only celebrated privately by a few farmers, usually with food and prayers in the field.

Basant The convivial kite festival of Punjab – see p110.

March

Nauroz (Navrus) 'New Days' festival held in mid-March, an adaptation of pre-Islamic vernal equinox or renewal celebrations. In smaller villages there is visiting, sometimes with music and dancing.

April

Baisakhi Sikh festival that attracts pilgrims to the Panja Sahib shrine at Hasan Abdal, near Rawalpindi, from around 13–15 April (see p90).

Late June–Early July

Chinir (Ginani) First (wheat) harvest, called Chinir in Gojal and Ginani (or Ganoni) in Hunza and Nagry.

July

Taq Nashina 'Taking of the Seat', celebrated 11 July, the day the present Aga Khan assumed leadership of the Ismaili community. May include parades, games, music, dancing and fireworks on the mountainsides in Ismaili areas.

Shandur Cup (Polo Festival) Polo on the Shandur Pass between Gilgit and Chitral, with lively polo, folk dancing and high jinks. Takes place 7–9 July.

Jashan-i-Boroghil Held 15–17 July near the Kurambar Pass (4358m) on the Afghan border. This is a celebration of local Wakhi culture, which includes folk music, local art and food, *buzkashi*, polo and yak polo.

September

Chitral Festival Recently revived after a 25-year absence, this festival is held on 15–21 September and involves various competitions such as archery, river swimming, rafting, polo and wrestling (including wrestling on a log suspended over water). There's also traditional music, folk art, drama and poetry.

October**The Aga Khan's first visit to Hunza in 1960**

Celebrated by Ismailis in Hunza on 23 October.

November**Jashan-i-Gilgit (Northern Areas Independence Day)**

Also known as the Gilgit Festival, commemorating the 1947 uprising against the Maharaja of Kashmir. The big event is a week-long polo tournament in Gilgit, starting on 1 November.

The Aga Khan's first visit to Gojal in 1987 Celebrated by Ismailis in Gojal on 18 November.

December

The Aga Khan's Birthday Celebrated with gatherings and speeches on 13 December in Ismaili areas.

Islamic Holy Days

The Islamic calendar is lunar, and shorter than the Western solar calendar, beginning 10 to 11 days earlier in each solar year. Modern astronomy notwithstanding, religious officials have formal authority to declare the beginning of each lunar month, based on sightings of the moon's first crescent. Future holy days can be estimated, but are in doubt by a few days until the start of that month, so it's very important to note that the dates given here are only approximate. They normally run from sunset to the next sunset. We *strongly* recommend you consult tourist offices for exact dates at the time of your visit, as they may well have changed from the dates we were given at the time of writing.

As a result of differences in formal moon sightings, holy days may be celebrated on different days by different parts of the country and by Sunnis and Shiites, which has led to sectarian tension.

Ashura (19 January 2008, 7 January 2009, 27 December 2010, 16 December 2011) Ninth and 10th day of the month of Muharram. Shiites begin 40 days of mourning the death of Hussain at Karbala, Iraq. In trance-like processions, sometimes led by a riderless white horse, men and boys pound their chests and chant the names of those killed at Karbala. Some practise *zulfinnah*, flailing their backs with blade-tipped chains. Sectarian tension can be high, and visitors are not particularly welcome in Shiite villages.

Chhelum (26 March 2008, 15 March 2009, 4 March 2010) Often has similar but smaller processions than those held during Ashura.

Eid-Milad-un-Nabi (20 March 2008, 9 March 2009, 26 February 2010, 15 February 2011) Celebration of the Prophet's birthday; some businesses may be closed, as it's a public holiday.

Ramazan (2 September 2008, 22 August 2009, 12 August 2010, 1 August 2011) The holy month of sunrise-to-sunset fasting.

Eid-ul-Fitr (also called Chhoti Eid or Small Eid; 1 October 2008, 21 September 2009, 10 September 2010, 31 August 2011) Two or three days of joyous celebrations at the end of Ramazan, with family visits, gifts, banquets, bonuses at work and donations to society's less privileged. A public holiday.

Eid-ul-Azha (Adha) (also called Bari Eid or Big Eid; 8 December 2008, 28 November 2009, 17 November 2010, 7 November 2011) Feast of Sacrifice, commemorating the Prophet Ibrahim's readiness to obey God even to the point of sacrificing his son. During the weeks ahead of this celebration, markets throng with goats and sheep; those who can afford it slaughter one after early-morning prayers, sharing the meat with relatives and with the less privileged. This is also the season for haj (pilgrimage to Mecca). A public holiday.

For details of Pakistan's major *urs* celebrations (the death anniversaries of certain saints), see regional chapters. It's always best to confirm *urs* dates with the PTDC, as exact dates of most of these commemorations vary annually according to sightings of the new moon.

FOOD

Pakistan has a diverse array of places to eat, from earthy street stalls that whip up home-grown snacks, to fancy multicuisine restaurants with mood music and swish service. For an overview of what's on offer, read the Food & Drink chapter (p58) as well as the Eating sections of regional chapters. Some eateries are open throughout the day while others only open for lunch and/or dinner – details are provided in the regional chapters. Note that virtually all restaurants close from sunrise to sunset during Ramazan – see the boxed text, p61.

GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELLERS

Homosexuality is against the law in Pakistan, and penalties are theoretically harsh, including jail terms. Although the laws are apparently not strictly enforced, local gays and lesbians keep a very low profile. You may see Pakistani men holding hands in public but this is a common and accepted expression of nonsexual friendship.

Like heterosexual foreign couples visiting Pakistan, gay and lesbian travellers should also respect local sensibilities by refraining from public displays of affection.

Greater tolerance exists in Chinese cities, but the countryside remains conservative.

One relevant website is www.qrd.org/qrd/orgs/TRIKONE/khush, a South Asian-based site for the gay, lesbian and bisexual community. New sites may emerge over the life of this book so keep surfing the Web.

HOLIDAYS

On the days mentioned below (and on certain Islamic holy days noted on p371), banks, businesses and government offices are closed, unless otherwise indicated.

Pakistan

Pakistan Day 23 March, commemorates the 1940 resolution by the All India Muslim League to create an independent Islamic state.

International Labour Day 1 May.

Bank holiday 1 July, government offices and businesses remain open.

Independence Day 14 August, the anniversary of the birth of Pakistan in 1947.

Defence of Pakistan Day 6 September, commemorating the India-Pakistan War of 1965.

Iqbal Day 9 November, honouring Urdu poet Allama Mohammed Iqbal, who in 1930 first proposed a Muslim Pakistan.

Birthday of Mohammed Ali Jinnah 25 December, founder of Pakistan.

Bank holiday 31 December, government offices and businesses remain open.

China

The People's Republic of China (PRC) has nine national holidays:

New Year's Day 1 January

Spring Festival usually February

International Women's Day 8 March

International Labour Day 1 May

Youth Day 4 May

International Children's Day 1 June

Birthday of the Chinese Communist Party 1 July

Anniversary of the Founding of the People's

Liberation Army 1 August

National Day 1 October

INSURANCE

A policy for theft, loss, flight cancellation and medical treatment overseas is a very good idea. A 'medevac' clause or policy, covering the costs of being flown to another country for treatment, is recommended (for more on medical evacuation see p395).

Some policies exclude 'dangerous activities', which can include white-water rafting or even trekking. If these are on

your agenda, ask about an amendment or another policy.

Few medical services in Pakistan will accept your foreign insurance documents for payment; you'll usually have to pay on the spot, collect receipts for everything, save all the paperwork and claim later.

INTERNET ACCESS

Internet centres are mushrooming in Pakistani cities and towns, although apart from those found at deluxe hotels, the speed is decidedly patchy. Wherever you travel in Pakistan, be aware that connections can be painstakingly slow and the internet places themselves are often cramped, with old machines. The exceptions are the comfortable business centres in top-end hotels where rates are about 10 times that found on the street.

Charges at standard internet outlets are mostly between Rs 20 and Rs 30 per hour in Pakistan and around Y2 to Y6 in Xinjiang. All advertised internet facilities in Pakistan State Oil (PSO) service stations along the KKH that we investigated during research were not operational. However, internet facilities were good in Gilgit, Skardu and Karimabad, and internet cafés were common (and the connections fast) in Kashgar.

If you're travelling with a notebook or hand-held computer, be aware that your modem may not work once you leave your home country. The safest option is to buy a reputable 'global' modem before you leave home, or buy a local PC-card modem if you're spending an extended time in one country. For more information on travelling with a portable computer, click on www.teleadapt.com.

LEGAL MATTERS

Corruption and bureaucratic red tape exist in Pakistan's police force, so if you're in serious trouble it's best to contact your country's embassy before resorting to the police. Your embassy in Islamabad is the best first stop in any emergency. Keep in mind that you are bound by the laws of Pakistan and it's highly unlikely that any embassy can get local laws or regulations waived on your behalf.

See p369 for information about dealing with potentially bogus police.

Drug possession is illegal in Pakistan, and penalties for possession, use or smuggling are strictly enforced (see p369).

Homosexuality is illegal in Pakistan (see p371 for more information).

MAPS

One of the most reputable country maps is *Pakistan* 1:1,500,000 published by Nelles Verlag, which probably has the best coverage of the KKH. It's available at good city bookshops, including those in some top-end hotels. The Survey of Pakistan sells regional and town maps from its office in Faizabad (see p73) or at bookshops in other cities. The information in some of these maps may be quite out of date and of limited practical use.

Town and city maps from PTDC offices are usually just overviews (sometimes not up to date), but can still be reasonably useful for general orientation.

Lion Art Press publishes decent maps of various cities and regions including Lahore, Balochistan and Sindh (available at good bookshops). Local maps and where to buy them are mentioned in the regional chapters of this book.

It's imperative to possess good topographic maps for trekking and to know how to use the maps. For advice on trekking maps see p336.

MONEY

The unit of Pakistani money is the rupee (Rs), divided into 100 paisa. Paper notes come in denominations of Rs 5000, Rs 1000, Rs 500, Rs 100, Rs 50, Rs 20 and Rs 10, and there are Rs 5, Rs 2 and Rs 1 coins. Very worn or tattered notes or those with pen scribbles on them may sometimes be refused so it's best not to accept them in the first place. The Rs 5000, Rs 1000 and Rs 500 notes can be a headache (few people seem to have change handy), so ask for smaller notes when you buy your rupees.

Generically, Chinese money is called *renminbi* (RMB) or 'people's money'. The formal unit is the yuan (Y), divided into 10 *jiao* or 100 *fen*. But when talking prices, Chinese use 'counting words': yuan is called *kuai* (Uyghurs say *koi*) and *jiao* is called *mao* (Uyghurs say *mo*); *fen* is pronounced 'fun'. *Renminbi* comes in paper notes of Y100, Y50, Y20, Y10, Y5, Y2 and Y1, and coins of Y1, five *jiao*, one *jiao* and five *fen*.

The Pakistani rupee is a convertible currency and there's little difference between official and black-market rates. Kashgar's Uyghur black-marketeters buy Western banknotes at rates not much different from the banks. There's little to be gained if you use them and always a risk of being short-changed.

The rupee and *renminbi* fluctuate daily against major currencies; for exchange rates see the inside front cover of this book.

ATMs

Automatic teller machines (ATMs; most 24 hours) can be found in hubs such as Lahore, Islamabad, Karachi and Quetta, and at a growing number of smaller centres such as Multan and Bahawalpur. Major banks will accept Cirrus, Maestro, MasterCard and Visa (but not always all cards). However, you should definitely not rely on ATMs as your sole source of cash, especially if you plan to travel beyond the big cities. Another good reason to have a cash backup is in case ATMs are out of order or if you break or lose your card. Note that some ATMs in smaller towns don't accept foreign cards. Check with your bank before departing to confirm that your card can access international banking networks. Always keep the emergency lost-and-stolen numbers for your credit cards in a safe place, separate from your plastic.

TIPPING & BAKSHEESH

In the more upmarket restaurants, where a service fee may have been added to your bill, tipping is optional. Where a fee has not been added, a tip of around 5% to 10% is the norm, with the amount given depending on how happy you are with the food and service. Porters should be tipped – the amount varies depending on how much baggage they carry; usually around Rs 50 at airports. Tipping is not mandatory for taxi and autorickshaw drivers.

Baksheesh is a way of life in the subcontinent. It isn't just a hand-out or bribe, but a gratuity for almost any service rendered. Staff who may go beyond their normal duties – opening a closed gate for you, getting a bigwig's signature, repairing a broken luggage zip etc – usually expect something in return. Apart from being considered a tip, baksheesh is also defined as alms for beggars. Giving to the less privileged is a tenet of the Islamic code.

Cash

It's unwise to carry wads of money in your wallet, or to carry your wallet in your back pocket. Similarly, you're more prone to being robbed if you carry valuables in a shoulder bag, which can easily be snatched. Keep a small cash stash for the day in a handy but concealed place (eg in an inner pocket) and the bulk of your resources more deeply hidden. A well-concealed moneybelt is one of the safest ways of carrying money as well as important documents such as your passport. It's also a good idea to have emergency cash (at least US\$100 in small denominations), stashed away from your main hoard, as a backup.

Although it's obviously preferable not to deplete all your funds while on the road, if you do, fast international money transfers are possible (for a charge) at **Western Union** (www.westernunion.com), which operates in various Pakistani cities and towns – see regional chapters for details.

Credit Cards

Credit cards are accepted at all top-end hotels and at some midrange ones. It's not an option at 99% of budget hotels. Only the more up-market restaurants and shops will take them (but not necessarily those in smaller towns), while most airline offices should accept credit-card payments. Visa and MasterCard are the most widely accepted cards. Cash advances on major credit cards can be made at some banks (although not always at those in smaller towns).

Exchanging Money

Most major foreign currencies can be exchanged in the larger cities and towns of Pakistan. US dollars are the most widely accepted currency, followed by UK pounds and euros. It's advisable to compare rates between banks and private moneychangers as they can vary. You usually have to present your passport whenever you change money, so carry it along. Always count notes before leaving the bank and return any ripped ones as these can be difficult to get rid of. Note that some travellers have reported difficulty in changing worn foreign notes, especially US dollars.

Official money-exchange receipts (you may have to ask for these) come in handy if you wish to convert any unspent Pakistani rupees into foreign currency before leaving the country. Pakistani rupees can be reconverted into major currencies at banks located at the international airports (US dollars are mostly given). The total of the receipts should be at least the amount you want to reconvert. Some banks and private moneychangers in the larger cities, such as Islamabad, will also change rupees back into foreign currency (sometimes this is done without asking for money-exchange receipts).

If you plan to venture off the beaten track you're strongly advised to carry adequate rupees, as money-exchange facilities may be few and far between. See regional chapters for further details about the money-changing situation.

HAGGLING

Before any shopping spree it's a good idea to casually browse through a few shops, just to get a feel for prices and what's on offer. Many shops (but not fixed-price emporiums and upmarket stores) are open to bargaining. Don't be afraid to haggle; as long as you don't get obsessed with driving a price into the ground, it's taken in good spirit. Always remember how much a rupee is worth in your home currency to put things in perspective. If you feel you are being unreasonably overcharged, simply look elsewhere.

The key is to start with a bit of small talk – don't show too much interest in the item you're dying to have. Casually ask the vendor's price for various items, including your favourite. Roll your eyes, shake your head and sigh deeply a few times before taking the plunge by offering about half the asking price (this is usually completely unacceptable to the vendor but it works as a good starting point to haggle for a happy compromise). The shopkeeper will probably look frightfully aghast, insist that your offer is way below the cost price and then, with deliberate reluctance, inevitably proceed to make you another offer. You're now on the road to negotiation. A tip: many 'final prices' tumble if you proceed to leave the shop, casually saying that you'll 'think about it'.

Travellers Cheques

Travellers cheques don't seem to be as widely accepted as major foreign currency notes, especially beyond the larger cities. They can even present a bit of a hassle at big city banks, with branches often redirecting customers to their head office.

Banks mainly accept major brand travellers cheques, with US cheques most widely accepted. Note that many banks demand to see original purchase receipts for your cheques before agreeing to change them, so keep these handy. Unless you're cashing *their* brand of travellers cheques, foreign banks usually nail you with high commissions.

You will need to have your travellers cheque purchase receipts and the lost cheques' serial numbers to replace lost or stolen cheques – always carry the receipts, serial numbers and other important details in a separate (safe) place from the cheques. Call directory inquiries on ☎ 17 to find the Amex, Citibank or other relevant office nearest to you.

CHINA

You can cash cheques at the larger banks; eg Bank of China or CITIC Industrial Bank. Although most hotels in China will cash cheques for guests, this cannot be counted on in Kashgar. The exchange rate for cheques is generally higher (around 2%) than cash.

PHOTOGRAPHY

For top tips and techniques on travel photography, have a look at Lonely Planet's travel photography guides, including *Travel Photography*, *Landscape Travel Photography* and *People Travel Photography*.

Digital

Memory cards for digital cameras are available from photographic shops in most large cities. Be aware that the quality of memory cards is variable – some do not carry the advertised amount of data. It's a good idea to regularly back up your memory card to CD (many internet cafés offer this service at a nominal charge). A number of photographic stores will make prints from digital photographs for approximately the standard print-and-processing charge.

Film & Processing

International-brand colour print film and processing are available in all cities and most of the larger towns. Colour slide film is usually available in larger cities, but only a few outlets in major centres can actually process it.

Always check use-by dates and ensure you are handed a sealed packet of film that has not been sitting in a glass cabinet exposed to sunshine for the last few months: heat and humidity can play havoc with film even if it isn't past the use-by date. It's best to only buy film from reputable shops – and preferably film that has been refrigerated.

Restrictions & Etiquette

Prohibited subjects include military sites, airports, train stations and bridges. Some places of worship may not allow photography – if you are unsure, ask. To some Muslims, especially in rural areas, it's an insult to photograph a woman without permission, and if a male family member is nearby it can create a tense situation. This may even apply if you're shooting a mountain and a woman happens to be in a field in the foreground. It's advisable to seek permission if you think there potentially could be a problem. Women photographers are often permitted more access than men if they've established some rapport.

People you take photos of in Pakistan may request a copy and it's kind to do so. If you don't intend to send the photo, it's better not to promise that you will in the first place.

POST

International post is generally reliable but has occasionally been known to take up to one month to arrive at its destination, especially when sent from remote places. To eliminate the risk of stamp theft, it's best to have letters franked in front of you.

For packages (other than printed matter) there's usually a man sitting outside big post offices who'll sew up parcels in cheap linen, on the spot, for a nominal fee. The post office will have the necessary customs declaration forms.

Books or printed matter can be sent by bookpost, which is cheaper than parcel post, but don't forget to write clearly 'Printed Material Only' on the cover. In addition, you have to ensure the package can be opened for inspection, or that it is wrapped

with the two ends exposed so the contents are visible.

To give an idea of the cost of sending parcels by air: to Australia is Rs 890 per kilogram then Rs 535 for every additional kilo; to the UK is Rs 1000 per kilogram then Rs 555 for every additional kilo; and for France it's Rs 1065 per kilogram then Rs 310 for each additional kilogram. There's also an urgent service that costs considerably more. Couriers in the larger cities, such as DHL, are more expensive but delivery is quicker (around three days).

For updates on postal information, click on **Pakistan Post** (www.pakpost.gov.pk).

Poste Restante

International poste restante services are fairly dependable. Ask senders to address letters to you with your surname in capital letters and underlined, followed by Poste Restante, GPO, and the address of the city or town. Many 'lost' letters are simply misfiled under given (first) names, so always check under both your names. Ask senders to provide a return address, just in case you don't collect your mail. You'll probably be asked to present your passport before claiming letters from post restante counters.

If you're getting a parcel posted to you from overseas, make sure you ask the sender to clearly write 'Gift Parcel' on the package/envelope or else you'll have to pay tax before claiming it. It's best to have any parcels sent to you by registered post.

SHOPPING

Although Pakistan doesn't match India on the handicraft front, you can still find some fascinating pieces in the country's many vibrant bazaars and city emporiums. Read individual chapters for regional shopping details. The top-end hotels often sell high-quality handicrafts, but they don't come cheap.

Particularly recommended bazaars include those in Peshawar (Old City), Lahore (Anarkali), Rawalpindi (Rajah), Karachi (Empress Market) and of course Kashgar's Sunday Market. In addition to the famous Sunday Market, Kashgar has the atmospheric Khazkhan Bazaar where every day you can buy Aladdin lamps, semiprecious stones, Central Asian carpets and much, much more. Smaller bazaars, found throughout the country, are also worth an unhurried wander. There are smugglers' bazaars on the

outskirts of Peshawar and at Landi Kotal on the Khyber Pass, although you're more likely to find electronic items and cosmetics than fine traditional shawls or walnut furniture.

Wherever you go in Pakistan you'll almost always find dealers in Persian-style pile rugs and kilims (flat-weave tribal carpets). As well as the local products, many wonderful old pieces can be found from Afghanistan, Iran, China and Central Asia. Peshawar and Quetta are some of the best places to buy good-value carpets in Pakistan. In Kashgar you can find Central Asian and Chinese rugs in abundance.

Keep your eyes peeled for sublime textile and embroidery work in a stunning range of colours and designs that differ from region to region. Some incorporate exquisite mirrorwork on caps, shawls and other attire. Bold block-print and tie-dye textiles are also available. Shawls are a particularly popular buy and make sensational gifts – they're reasonably light to carry (depending on the fabric) and can also be innovatively used as wall hangings, curtains and throws over furniture.

Other tempting items for sale include pottery, leatherware (including some gorgeous traditional footwear and contemporary jackets), woodwork and metalwork (the best pieces are usually found in the bazaars of a city's or town's old quarters).

Bazaars are a great place to hunt down good-value *shalwar kameez*, the traditional long-tunic-and-trouser combinations worn by men and women. You can buy them off the shelf or have one tailor-made in just a few days. Another popular buy is the chador (a lightweight woollen blanket), which comes in handy as a shawl, blanket, pillow or even curtain. *Resham* (silk) can be a bargain in the bazaars of the NA.

Jewellery is abundant in Pakistan and ranges from chunky tribal-influenced silver pieces to intricately crafted gold items and enamelled jewellery. In the more touristy areas, be careful of private dealers in gemstones and jewellery, as well as artefacts such as coins; many are fake and/or ridiculously overpriced.

See p367 for information about exporting antiquities.

SOLO TRAVELLERS

Pakistan attracts a considerable number of solo visitors. If you'd like to occasionally break

the solo creed and hang out with other travellers, places such as along the KKH, in the Kalasha valleys, and Lahore and Peshawar are especially good. The popular traveller hotels can be useful spots to find people to travel with, swap stories and gather handy up-to-the-minute travel tips. Those keen to hook up with others can also try advertising on Lonely Planet's **Thorn Tree forum** (<http://thorntree.lonelyplanet.com>).

Personal security worries (a predominant concern of many first-time travellers to Pakistan) will dissipate swiftly as you meet and talk to the locals. Admittedly this is often easier for men in many areas, especially off the beaten track. For more information specific to women travellers see p379.

If you're looking to cut costs, you'll save money if you share taxis, tours and accommodation. In terms of accommodation, single-room rates are often not much lower than rates for a double; quite a few midrange and top-end establishments don't even have single tariffs, instead charging a flat double rate (try to bargain this down by insisting that as you're by yourself, you should be charged accordingly). There is usually a discounted single price in budget hotels, many of which also have dormitories where you pay on an economical per-bed basis. This can be a substantial saving but the state of the bedding and general cleanliness of some rock-bottom places can be challenging for all but the most pecuniarily minded. Some lodgings have books where guests can write down their experiences, which can be informative and entertaining. But no matter how friendly and safe a place may appear on the surface, there may be locals or fellow tourists who view solo travellers as an easy target for theft etc. There's no need to be paranoid but, like anywhere else in the world, it's wise to never completely drop your guard in unfamiliar surroundings.

TELEPHONE

STD (interstate) calls in Pakistan are half-price after 6pm and even cheaper (a quarter of the normal price) after 9.30pm. There are no cheap times for international calls. Most of Pakistan has International Direct Dialling (IDD) so international calls are delightfully quick and charges are usually by the minute. Calls can be made from government exchanges or at one of the numerous privately run public call offices (PCOs). Many operate round-the-clock. Some hotels (predominantly upper-

range ones) incur a three-minute minimum for interstate and/or international calls.

For mobile phone users, competitively priced Pakistani prepaid SIM cards are widely available, with 'starter pack' offers from as little as Rs 200.

To make a call out of Pakistan or China, the international access code is 00. To call in from abroad, dial your country's international access code, the country code for Pakistan (92) or China (86), the area code (minus the first zero) and the local number.

Phonecards

Phonecards are widely available, reliable and easy to use, but not all PCO booths (or top-end hotels) will let you use them (or may charge a fee for doing so). You can buy phonecards from most supermarkets, PCO booths and general stores; they usually come in Rs 150, Rs 250, Rs 500 and Rs 1000 denominations. Many cards have an expiry date that commences from the date of first use (most are valid for three months thereafter).

TIME

Pakistan is covered by a single time zone (GMT plus five hours). All of China officially runs on Beijing time (GMT plus eight hours), though out in Kashgar and Tashkurgan, 3500km away, people set their clocks and watches on (unofficial) 'Xinjiang time', two hours earlier. But most Chinese bureaucrats think in Beijing time, so you must keep track of both. Neither China nor Pakistan has Daylight Savings Time (DST).

See the world time zones map, p430-1.

TOILETS

Decent public toilets are few and far between in Pakistan and Xinjiang – you're most likely to find them at major tourist sites (museums etc) and at mid- and upper-range restaurants. If you're desperate, you can discreetly pop into the sparkling-clean restrooms found in the foyer area of top-end hotels.

All top-end and most midrange hotels have sit-down flush toilets with toilet paper supplied. Some midrange and many budget hotels have a choice of squat or sit-down toilets. At the real rock-bottom places (especially in remote villages) you often find bucket-flushed squats. Toilet paper (and soap) is rarely provided at budget places. Some budget hotels have one or two rooms with sit-down toilets

but these are sometimes missing the actual seat. In this case it's usually better to opt for a room with a squat toilet, as it's a more comfortable and hygienic option.

When it comes to toilet etiquette, it's customary to use your left hand and water, not toilet paper. Hence the strategically placed tap and small plastic jug available in most budget and midrange hotel and restaurant bathrooms. If you can't get used to the local method bring your own toilet paper, which is widely available.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Pakistan

Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation (PTDC; www.tourism.gov.pk) operates a string of hotels and maintains tourist information centres in major cities and towns, many of which are very helpful with disseminating information, booking accommodation, arranging car hire and more. Others are of limited assistance. Details of PTDC offices are presented in the Information sections of relevant regional chapters, along with any details of provincial tourist information departments.

China

China International Travel Service (CITS; Beijing ☎ 010-66011122; 103 Fuxing Mennei; Kashgar ☎ 0998-2825390; 2nd fl, 93 Seman Lu, beside Chini Bagh Hotel), called *CITS liuxingshe* in Chinese, is the original state travel bureau for non-Chinese group tourists. In Kashgar it serves mainly as a travel agency for booking tours but some staff can be very helpful with general inquiries.

TRAVELLERS WITH DISABILITIES

Travel in Pakistan can present some veritable challenges for a physically handicapped person. The rigours of bus and train travel, the crush of humanity in urban centres and the lack of decent (where they exist) footpaths in many places can pose real hazards. On top of that, there are only a sprinkling of wheelchair-accessible hotels (mostly top end), restaurants, buildings, transport and other facilities. Many buildings have steep staircases and very few have ramps. However, travel in Pakistan is certainly possible for those with an iron will, plenty of stamina and the willingness to constantly adapt to whatever hurdle presents itself. Travelling with an able-bodied companion can help immensely to overcome these ob-

stacles. In addition, hiring a private car with driver will make moving around a great deal easier. Always try to book ground-floor hotel rooms, and if you use crutches, bring along spare rubber caps for the tips as they can wear down quickly.

Recommended organisations that may proffer further advice include the **Royal Association for Disability & Rehabilitation** (RADAR; ☎ 020-7250 3222; www.radar.org.uk; 12 City Forum, 250 City Rd, London EC1V 8AF, UK) and **Mobility International USA** (MIUSA; ☎ 541-3431284; www.miusa.org; Suite 343, 132 E, Broadway, Eugene, OR 97401, USA). There are also some commendable websites such as www.access-able.com.

VISAS

You must obtain a visa *before* arriving in either Pakistan or China.

Be aware that in Pakistan, police jurisdictions in border areas and other sensitive spots – eg Cholistan, the Tribal Areas of the NWFP, Chitral, Swat Kohistan and Azad Jammu & Kashmir – all have additional registration and permit regulations; see the regional chapters for details. No special permits are needed for continuing along the KKH to Tashkurgan and Kashgar. For information about permit requirements for further travel in China see Lonely Planet's *China* guide.

Registration (at a Foreigners' Registration Office, or FRO; see regional chapters for addresses) in Pakistan currently only applies to foreigners of Indian descent and nationals of 16 countries. These 16 countries are Algeria, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Iraq, Israel, Libya, Nigeria, Palestinian Territories, Serbia, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda and Yemen. If you stay in the NA for more than 10 days you're supposed to register at an FRO (locations are mentioned in the Karakoram Highway chapter). If you're not staying at a hotel anywhere in the country (eg you're staying at a private residence instead), it's not a bad idea to register so your whereabouts are on record.

Pakistan

Everybody needs a visa to enter Pakistan. The cost varies depending on your nationality, the type of visa and possibly where you apply.

Nationals of most countries are issued a single-entry tourist visa that enables entry up to six months from the date of issue, but you can only actually stay for a maximum of three

months from the date of entry. This visa costs A\$70 for Australians and UK£50 for British citizens. Double and multiple-entry tourist visas may also be possible – inquire with the Pakistan mission in your home country.

Tourist visas in most countries should be applied for about two (three to be safe) weeks in advance of the intended travelling date, but it pays to double-check in case a longer time is recommended by your country's Pakistani embassy. Note that visas for journalists may take more time to process. For details about business visas and other possible visa options inquire at the Pakistan embassy in your home country.

A number of travellers have reported that 'Not Valid for Cantt Area' (or something similar) was stamped next to their Pakistani visa, which resulted in them being denied accommodation in certain parts of some cities (eg some hotels in Rawalpindi have refused to accept tourists if their passport had this stamp). We were told by a Pakistan mission that this stamp is supposed to appear next to all tourist visas (though this doesn't always seem to be the case in reality) and if applicants didn't want the stamp they should request this on their visa application form (omission is not guaranteed, however).

VISA EXTENSIONS

Three-month visa extensions are possible in Pakistan itself and cost about the same as in your home country (usually payable in the rupee equivalent). For details (including which Pakistani cities can issue visa extensions) contact the **Regional Passport Office** (Map ppp74-5; ☎ 051-9260355; Peshawar Chowk G-8/1, Peshawar Mor, INT Centre) in Islamabad. Passports are accepted for processing from 2pm to 3pm Monday to Thursday and Saturday, and 11am to 11.40am on Friday. They're available for collection from 9am to noon Monday to Thursday and Saturday, and 9am to 11am on Friday.

China

Everyone needs a visa to enter the PRC; you cannot get one at the border with Pakistan. A normal tourist ('L') visa allows you to enter China up to three months from the date of issue, and stay for 30 days from the date of entry. With it you can visit any open city or region, and while in China you can extend your visa and get travel permits for some restricted areas.

Visas are fairly easy to get from PRC embassies or consulates including the embassy in Pakistan. Fees depend on nationality and where you apply; pricier multiple-entry and long-stay visas are available. In your application you must identify entry/exit points, and advise of your itinerary and means of transport, although you can deviate from these as much as you like.

VISA EXTENSIONS OR REPLACEMENTS

With a China visa you can get at least one 15-day extension after arrival, at the Foreign Affairs section of any Public Security Bureau (PSB). In Kashgar, this office (called the Exit & Entry Administration Service) is on Yunmulakexia Lu. Price depends on nationality.

VOLUNTEERING

If you are keen to lend a hand as a volunteer, the organisation **Ethical Volunteering** (www.ethicalvolunteering.org) offers some excellent guidelines for selecting an ethical agency. Keep in mind that charities and NGOs usually prefer volunteers who apply in advance and are prepared to commit for more than just a couple of weeks.

Surf the Web for current volunteering possibilities in Pakistan – good places to start include:

Action Without Borders (www.idealists.org)

Co-ordinating Committee for International Voluntary Service (CCIVS; www.unesco.org/ccivs)

Global Volunteers (www.globalvolunteers.org)

Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO; www.vso.org.uk)

Working Abroad (www.workingabroad.com)

World Volunteer Web (www.worldvolunteerweb.org)

Worldwide Volunteering (www.worldwidevolunteering.org.uk)

World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF; www.wwfpak.org)

WOMEN TRAVELLERS

Over recent years, Pakistan has been attracting an escalating number of female travellers, including those doing it solo. Generally speaking, the country is perfectly safe for women and the only thing you're likely to encounter is incessant staring. If you don't think you're cut out for the constant scrutiny then you may feel more at ease travelling with company.

It's important to remember that in conservative Muslim families the female members usually stay out of sight of other men, and this is one reason why foreign women, especially those on their own, are largely regarded as an

oddy and may be viewed with a mixture of curiosity, astonishment and disdain.

The more conservative Muslim men minimise direct contact with women beyond their immediate family, especially out of the major cities. So if you're travelling with a male companion, any questions *you* ask may well be answered to *him* – not out of contempt but as a mark of respect. On the flip side, you'll probably also come across local men who are more than happy to interact with a foreign woman, with no other motive than to be helpful and hospitable; some – especially in the tourist trade – do so as a matter of course.

More-liberal attitudes abound in the larger centres such as Karachi and Lahore, although this doesn't give you the green light to traipse around in shorts and singlet tops. In the traditionally conservative rural, non-Ismaili areas, most women feel more comfortable travelling with others. In these conservative regions, extra-careful attention should be paid to dress code – for instance, it may be offensive in some areas not to cover your head. A good way of ascertaining when exactly head cover is required is if you see few (if any) local women in the public domain. The key is always to have a scarf handy – no matter where you are – and to use it whenever in doubt.

Being a woman has some glowing advantages. Women can usually queue-jump without consequence, avail of ladies-only compartments on trains and sit in 'family' sections of restaurants. Unaccompanied women are expected to sit at the front of a bus; men will normally vacate these seats for women and you're perfectly justified to kick up a fuss if they don't. The bad news is that if these seats are already full of women, the bus may possibly not even stop for you. If you're travelling with a man, he might be allowed up front too, provided he avoids sitting next to a local woman. When invited to a family home, male guests are generally restricted to a certain area (such as the lounge) whereas women get to join female family members and children in the vibrant 'heart' of the household.

Staying Safe

Harassment towards foreign female travellers in Pakistan is rare – partly attributable to the tenets of Islam regarding women and visitors – but it does occasionally happen. There have been a few reports of groping, lewd comments, provocative gestures, jeering and getting 'acci-

dentally' bumped into or followed in crowded areas. A woman travelling with a male partner is less likely to encounter these things but is not immune from them. Respect for local culture, common sense and appropriate dress (see opposite) play a paramount role in staying safe. General safety tips include making it a point to arrive in towns before dark and, as elsewhere in the world, to avoid walking alone in isolated areas or late at night. Remote regions and some tribal areas of Pakistan are best explored with a male companion, and only if those areas are deemed safe by local authorities. Women are advised against trekking alone (see Women Trekkers, p339).

Getting ogled at is something you'll just have to get used to. It's best to avoid returning male stares as this may be considered a come-on; dark glasses can help. If you're travelling with a male partner, a number of locals will assume he is your husband and may be disappointing if you state otherwise. To avoid a sour reception, sometimes it's more prudent not to reveal that you're not married.

Some solo female travellers ward off unwanted male company by wearing a pseudo wedding ring and announcing early in the conversation that they are married or engaged (regardless of whether they actually are or not). This can be an effective way of keeping conversations 'lust-free'. If you get the feeling that he's still encroaching on your space, a firm request to stay away is usually enough to take control of the situation, particularly if it's loud enough to catch the attention of passers-by. Alternatively, the silent treatment (not responding to questions at all) can be a remarkably good way of getting rid of unwanted male company.

Women travellers should take heart that the risks of travelling in Pakistan are, so far, less than in many other countries, including the West. Essentially, it's a matter of striking a balance in the way you interact with men so that your interest in his job, village, family etc isn't misinterpreted. Ways of achieving this include adhering to the local practice of not shaking hands or making any other body contact with a new male friend, and keeping direct eye contact to a minimum. Similarly, getting involved in inane conversations can sometimes be misconstrued as a sign of sexual interest.

Ultimately, you're going to have to trust your own judgment and instincts, as there isn't a blanket rule that applies to one and all.

What to Wear

You should always bear in mind that Pakistan is, on the whole, a conservative society and you're going to win much more respect (and deflect potential harassment) if you act and dress appropriately. The less flesh you flash, the better. Steer clear of body-hugging clothing, sleeveless tops, shorts, miniskirts, see-through garments and, of course, the bra-less look. Baggy clothing is the way to go, as it hides the shape of your body. If you've only got your hands, feet and head in view then you're on the right track.

Wearing local dress, the *shalwar kameez* (traditional dresslike tunic and trouser combination) makes a very positive impression and is highly recommended. The *dupatta* (long scarf) that is part of this outfit comes in handy

when you need to cover your head and chest (eg at a mosque, in a crowded bazaar or in conservative company). Not only is the *shalwar kameez* considered as respectable attire, it's also comfortable and practical and comes in a glorious range of attractive fabrics and designs to suit all budgets. A cotton *shalwar kameez* is surprisingly cool in hot weather and also offers excellent sun protection.

Sunbaking in public view (apart from at hotel swimming pools) is not on and neither is strutting around half-dressed on hotel balconies or other areas in view of locals.

Although there are no sure-fire ways of shielding yourself from sexual harassment, hopefully the advice we have proffered here will help make your journey through Pakistan memorable for all the right reasons.

Transport

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GETTING THERE & AWAY

Flights, tours and rail tickets can be booked online at www.lonelyplanet.com/travel_services.

ENTERING THE COUNTRIES

Entering Pakistan or China by either land or air is relatively straightforward, with simple immigration and customs forms to fill out. However, everyone needs a visa to enter Pakistan or China, and you must obtain a visa *before* arriving. See p378 for more information.

THINGS CHANGE...

The information in this chapter is particularly vulnerable to change. Check directly with the airline or a travel agency to make sure you understand how a fare (and ticket you may buy) works and be aware of the security requirements for international travel. Shop carefully. The details given in this chapter should be regarded as pointers and are not a substitute for your own careful, up-to-date research.

AIR

Airports & Airlines

A number of major airlines serve Karachi, Islamabad and Lahore. A few (from the Middle East) fly to regional destinations such as Peshawar and Quetta.

International airports:

Allama Iqbal International Airport Lahore (LHE;

☎ 042-9211604; www.lahoreairport.com.pk)

Islamabad International Airport (ISB; ☎ 051-9280300; www.islamabadairport.com.pk)

Jinnah International Karachi (KHI; ☎ 021-9248792; www.karachiairport.com.pk)

Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) is the national carrier. Its safety record isn't notably worse than other subcontinent-based airlines and crash data should be read with an understanding of the difficult mountain terrain where PIA is the sole operator. However, concerns about the safety of its ageing fleet led the European Union to bar the majority of PIA's fleet from flying in its airspace in early 2007. Air Blue and Shaheen Air International are private Pakistani airlines operating on popular domestic routes and short-hop flights to cities in the Middle East. A third private airline, Aero Asia, had its licence suspended in 2007 for failing to meet safety standards. If it re-emerges it will almost certainly be under a different brand.

Numerous international airlines list Pakistan as a destination and have offices in Pakistan; however, services are routinely cancelled/reinstated, so it's definitely best to check out the latest details on the internet or with your travel agent. The airlines listed here have offices in Pakistan, mainly in Karachi (☎ 021) or Lahore (☎ 042).

Air Blue (ED/ABQ; ☎ 111-247258; www.airblue.com)

Hub: Jinnah International Karachi.

Air China (CA/CCA; ☎ 021-4542559; www.airchina.com.cn) Hub: Beijing Airport.

Ariana Afghan Airlines (FG/AFG; www.flyariana.com) Hub: Kabul Airport.

British Airways (BA/BAW; ☎ 042-6300701; www.britishtairways.com) Hub: Heathrow Airport, London.

Cathay Pacific Airways (CX/CPA; ☎ 042-6300701; www.cathaypacific.com) Hub: Hong Kong International Airport.

China Southern Airlines (CZ/CSN; www.csair.com/en/)

Hub: Bayun International Airport, Guangzhou.

Emirates (EK/UAE; ☎ 021-5684500; www.emirates.com)

Hub: Dubai International Airport.

Gulf Air (GF/GFA; ☎ 021-5682265; www.gulfair.com)

Hub: Bahrain International Airport.

Indian Airlines (IC/IAC; ☎ 042-6360014; www.indian-airlines.nic.in)

Hub: Indira Gandhi International Airport, New Delhi.

Iran Air (IR/IRA; ☎ 021-516293; www.iranair.com)

Hub: Tehran International Airport.

Kuwait Airways (KU/KAC; ☎ 021-5685754; www.kuwait-airways.com)

Hub: Kuwait International Airport.

Malaysia Airlines (MH/MAS; ☎ 021-5682629; www.malaysiaairlines.com)

Hub: Kuala Lumpur Airport.

Pakistan International Airlines (PK/PIA; ☎ 021-45794769; www.piac.com.pk)

Hub: Jinnah International Karachi.

Qatar Airways (QR/QTR; ☎ 111-310310; www.qatarairways.com)

Hub: Doha International Airport.

Saudi Arabian Airlines (SV/SVA; ☎ 021-568213; www.saudiairlines.com)

Hub: Ar-Riyadh International Airport.

Shaheen Air International (NL/SAI; ☎ 111-808080; www.shaheenair.aero)

Hub: Karachi International Airport.

Singapore Airlines (SQ/SIA; ☎ 042-6307418; www.singaporeair.com)

Hub: Changi International Airport, Singapore.

Thai Airways (TG/THA; ☎ 021-5660163; www.thaiair.com)

Hub: Bangkok Airport.

Tickets

Online ticket sales work well for trips with few or no connecting flights. However, travel agencies are a recommended resource for special deals, sorting out tricky connections and organising insurance and visas. Some of the more reputable international online ticket sites:

Expedia (www.expedia.com) Cheap air fares and car hire.**Flight Centre International** (www.flightcentre.com)

A discount agency with sites for Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the UK and the US.

Flights.com (www.tiss.com) An international site with cheap fares and an easy-to-search database.**Lonely Planet** (www.lonelyplanet.com) Use Travel Services to book multistop trips.**STA Travel** (www.statravel.com) The leader in student travel discounts (you don't need to be a student), with links to worldwide STA sites.**Travelocity** (www.travelocity.com) This US site allows you to search fares (in US dollars) to/from practically anywhere.**BUYING TICKETS IN PAKISTAN**

Although Pakistani travel agencies don't offer exceptional international flight discounts, prices are usually more competitive than those

charged by the airlines. A few reliable agencies are listed in this book's regional chapters.

If you buy a non-PIA international ticket in Pakistan, you can pay with credit card or cash. If you pay in cash rupees you must prove they were bought with foreign currency by furnishing foreign-exchange receipts totalling the ticket price. You don't get the receipts back. Domestic and PIA international tickets don't require receipts.

International tickets bought in Pakistan attract a foreign-travel tax and an international departure tax, plus a few smaller taxes. Always ask if these are included in any fare you're quoted.

After you've bought your ticket, it doesn't hurt to call the airline yourself and confirm that you're booked on the flight.

Australia & New Zealand

Flights from Auckland, Brisbane, Melbourne and Sydney connect with PIA, Singapore Airlines, Thai Airways or Malaysian Airlines in Bangkok, Singapore and Kuala Lumpur. Return fares start at A\$2300 to/from Islamabad/Lahore. Flying to Kashgar to start the Karakoram Highway (KKH) may involve up to four connecting flights and add considerably to the cost. For online bookings, try www.travel.com.au in Australia and www.goholidays.co.nz in New Zealand. Well-known agencies for cheap fares with branches throughout Australia and New Zealand:

Flight Centre Australia (☎ 133 133; www.flightcentre.com.au); New Zealand (☎ 0800 243 544; www.flightcentre.co.nz)**STA Travel** Australia (☎ 1300 733 035; www.statravel.com.au); New Zealand (☎ 0508 782 872; www.statravel.co.nz)**Central Asia & China**

PIA has weekly Almaty to Islamabad and Tashkent to Islamabad flights, and flies regularly from Kabul to Karachi (Rs 17,290 one way), Islamabad (Rs 13,800), Lahore (Rs 13,800) and Peshawar (Rs 8000). Ariana Afghan Airlines may recommence weekly Kabul to Islamabad flights.

From Hong Kong and Beijing, there are flights to Karachi and Islamabad (via Bangkok) once a week with PIA and Air China (US\$1100 return). The only places you can fly to/from Kashgar are Islamabad and Ürümqi (Y1230), from where you can catch flights to several Chinese cities plus a few

CLIMATE CHANGE & TRAVEL

Climate change is a serious threat to the ecosystems that humans rely upon, and air travel is the fastest-growing contributor to the problem. Lonely Planet regards travel, overall, as a global benefit, but believes we all have a responsibility to limit our personal impact on global warming.

Flying & climate change

Pretty much every form of motorized travel generates CO₂ (the main cause of human-induced climate change) but planes are far and away the worst offenders, because of the distances they allow us to travel, and because they release greenhouse gases high into the atmosphere. Two people taking a return flight between Europe and the US will contribute as much to climate change as an average household's gas and electricity consumption over a whole year.

Carbon offset schemes

Climatecare.org and other websites use 'carbon calculators' that allow travellers to offset the level of greenhouse gases they are responsible for with financial contributions to sustainable travel schemes that reduce global warming – including projects in India, Honduras, Kazakhstan and Uganda.

Lonely Planet, together with Rough Guides and other concerned partners in the travel industry, supports the carbon offset scheme run by climatecare.org. Lonely Planet offsets all of its staff and author travel.

For more information check out www.lonelyplanet.com.

international connections. China Southern Airlines flies daily between Ürümqi and Islamabad (US\$450), Wednesday to Sunday; and stops over in Kashgar (US\$370) on Saturday only.

Continental Europe

Several carriers have daily or multiple-weekly direct links to Pakistan from European cities. To Islamabad, PIA has weekly direct flights from Milan, Oslo and Paris. To Lahore, PIA has weekly direct flights from Copenhagen, Milan, Oslo, Paris and Rome. From Italy, return fares to Lahore start at around €650. From France, fares to Lahore start at €800. Some sites where further options can be explored:

FRANCE

Anyway (☎ 0892 893 892; www.anyway.fr)

Lastminute (☎ 0899 705 000; www.lastminute.fr)

Nouvelles Frontières (☎ 0825 000 747; www.nouvelles-frontieres.fr)

OTU Voyages (☎ 0155 823 232; www.otu.fr) Specialising in student and youth travel.

Voyageurs du Monde (☎ 01 40 15 11 15; www.vdm.com)

GERMANY

Expedia (☎ 0180 500 60 25; www.expedia.de)

Just Travel (☎ 089-747 33 30; www.justtravel.de)

Lastminute (☎ 0180 528 43 66; www.lastminute.de)

STA Travel (☎ 0180 545 64 22; www.statravel.de)

ITALY

CTS Viaggi (☎ 06 462 04 31; www.cts.it) Specialising in student and youth travel.

NETHERLANDS

Airfair (☎ 020-620 5121; www.airfair.nl)

SPAIN

Barcelo Viajes (☎ 902 11 62 26; www.barceloviajes.com)

East Asia

Thai Airways flies direct from Bangkok to Karachi, Lahore and Islamabad several times a week. Singapore Airlines flies to Lahore via Karachi (S\$880) three times a week. PIA flies Bangkok to Islamabad/Lahore/Karachi at least four times a week. From Tokyo, PIA flies direct to Islamabad/Lahore/Karachi at least once a week. From Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia Airlines flies to Karachi twice a week. **STA Travel** (Bangkok ☎ 662 236 0262; www.statravel.co.th; Tokyo ☎ 03-5391 2922; www.statravel.co.jp; Kuala Lumpur ☎ 03-230 5720; fax 03-230 5718; Singapore ☎ 6737 7188; www.statravel.com.sg) can offer more details:

Middle East

Iran Air has a direct Tehran to Karachi flight once a week, while PIA and Shaheen

Air International have regular connections (mostly with Karachi) to/from Abu Dhabi, Al Ain, Doha, Dubai, Muscat and Kuwait. Recommended agencies:

Al-Rais Travels (www.alrais.com; Dubai)

Egypt Panorama Tours (☎ 2-359 0200; www.eptours.com; Cairo)

Orion-Tour (www.oriontour.com; Istanbul)

South Asia

Flights to/from India have been abruptly halted in the past (when relations between the two countries have deteriorated). Indian Airlines flies Delhi to Lahore once a week, and PIA flies Delhi to Lahore (four times a week) and Karachi (three times), and Mumbai to Karachi once a week. PIA flies Colombo to Karachi, and PIA and Biman fly Dhaka to Karachi at least five times a week between them. PIA flies Kathmandu to Karachi twice a week. **STIC Travels** (www.stictravel.com; Delhi ☎ 11-23357468; Mumbai ☎ 22-22181431) is a recommended agency with offices in dozens of Indian cities.

UK & Ireland

From the UK, the Middle East carriers such as Emirates and Gulf Air offer the most competitive fares. Return fares from London to either Karachi or Lahore start at around UK£600. PIA flies to Islamabad, Karachi and Lahore several times a week and British Airways flies to Islamabad three times a week.

Discount air travel is big business in London. Advertisements for travel agencies appear in the travel pages of the weekend broadsheet newspapers, in *Time Out*, the *Evening Standard* and in the free magazine *TNT*. A selection of recommended travel agencies:

Bridge the World (☎ 0870-444 7474; www.b-t-w.co.uk)

Flightbookers (☎ 0870-010 7000; www.ebookers.com)

Flight Centre (☎ 0870-499 0040; www.flightcentre.co.uk)

North-South Travel (☎ 01245-608 291; www.northsouthtravel.co.uk) Donates part of its profit to projects in the developing world.

STA Travel (☎ 0871-2-300 040; www.statravel.co.uk)

Trailfinders (☎ 0845-058 5858; www.trailfinders.co.uk)

Travel Bag (☎ 0800-082 5000; www.travelbag.co.uk)

USA & Canada

From the USA and Canada, most flights are via London or Frankfurt and one of the Middle

East capitals. From Los Angeles, expect to pay around US\$2400 for a return to Islamabad/Lahore. From New York, fares to Islamabad/Lahore start from US\$1600. From Vancouver, return fares to Islamabad/Lahore start from C\$2700, and C\$2300 from Toronto.

The *Los Angeles Times*, *San Francisco Examiner*, *Chicago Tribune*, *New York Times* and Canada's *Globe & Mail* and *Vancouver Sun* have good weekly travel sections.

San Francisco is the discount-ticket capital of America, although some good deals can be found with agencies in Los Angeles, New York and other big cities. Websites recommended for online bookings:

- www.cheaptickets.com
- www.expedia.com
- www.itn.net
- www.lowestfare.com
- www.orbitz.com
- www.sta.com
- www.travelocity.com

LAND Bicycle

At the time of research there was no problem with bringing a bicycle into or out of Pakistan, although you're expected to mention it on your visa application. It's hard to get a definitive answer about bringing a bicycle into China. Chinese embassies often say foreign tourists are not allowed to bring bicycles into China and other sources say all you need is an import permit. No cyclist has been prevented from bringing one in or out at Tashkurgan for years, and no permit is needed to cycle the Kashgar-Tashkurgan route. It's wise to contact the embassies of both countries (see p370) to find out if any new rules have been introduced.

If you're bringing your bike in by air, you can dismantle it and put it in a bag or box, but you may also be able to wheel it to the check-in desk, where it should be treated as baggage (you may have to remove the pedals and turn the handlebars sideways). Always check in advance with the specific airline involved (preferably before you buy a ticket) whether it will be treated as baggage or as (expensive) cargo.

Border Crossings

The only legal overland crossing between India and Pakistan is at Wagah (Attari on the India side), 30km east of Lahore. You can

cross by rail, road or foot. After the Grand Trunk Rd, the most famous road into Pakistan is the KKH, over the Khunjerab Pass from China. There is a busy road crossing to Kabul in Afghanistan beyond the Khyber Pass at Torkham, and another at Chaman on the road to Kandahar. With an Afghan visa the crossing is pretty straightforward. Zahedan in Iran is linked to Quetta via the border post at Taftan (also called Kuh-i-Taftan; Mirjavé on the Iran side).

Car & Motorcycle

You can bring your own car, minibus or motorcycle into Pakistan duty-free, for up to three months. You'll need a *carnet de passage* – essentially a passport for the vehicle – plus registration papers, liability insurance and an International Driving Permit (IDP). On entry, you may be required to sign a form stating that you won't sell the vehicle while you're in Pakistan. Spare parts and reliable mechanical expertise are best found in the major population centres. For more information on paperwork, insurance and the availability of fuel and spare parts, ask your automobile association before leaving home. It's also worth checking the latest formalities with the relevant embassy in your home country.

See p390 for more information about driving in Pakistan.

Afghanistan

At the time of research it was reasonably straightforward to cross from Peshawar via the Khyber Pass to Jalalabad and Kabul. However, the crossing from Quetta via Chaman to Kandahar through haphazardly lawless countryside was considered highly dangerous and was positively discouraged by local authorities – a situation that was unlikely to change in the foreseeable future.

Single-entry tourist visas (US\$30) can be obtained from the Afghanistan consulates in Peshawar and Quetta and at the embassy in Islamabad (see p370 for further details).

In Peshawar, you need a permit to get to the border and you must also be accompanied by an armed escort. For details about the following procedures see the Afghan consulate, p192. Go to the Home & Tribal Affairs Office at least 48 hours before departure, and present your visa (plus photocopies of the data pages of your passport and Pakistan and Afghanistan visas) to get the free permit. On the way to

the border you need to go to the office of the Khyber Political Agent to collect a gunman to accompany you to the border. There is no cost for this service, but the gunman will expect a tip (Rs 200). You have to organise your own transport (about Rs 1800 for a 4WD to the border). On the Afghan side of the border, turn right to go to Immigration (a large new building – you can't miss it). After this, taxi drivers will assail you for business, but public transport is another 500m walk from here. Expect to pay around 300Afg (US\$6) for a seat in a minibus to Kabul, double that for a seat in a shared taxi. Get a copy of Lonely Planet's *Afghanistan* and check the security situation with your home country's travel advisory service before entering the country.

China

The only overland route to/from China is the KKH, over the 4730m Khunjerab Pass. The pass is open to foreigners from 1 May to 15 November, unless snow closes it sooner.

Northern Areas Transportation Company (Natco) and PTDC (Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation) vehicles go to the Chinese post at Tashkurgan (Rs 1500), with Chinese buses carrying on to Kashgar (Y62). Bus travellers from China ride a Chinese bus from Kashgar (Y270) to the Pakistan customs and immigration post at Afiyatabad (New Sost). The trip takes two days, with an overnight stop at Tashkurgan. You can also hire a minibus or 4WD from Afiyatabad to Tashkurgan or from Kashgar to Afiyatabad. Also available is a 14-hour, nonstop bus (Chinese and Natco) that runs between Gilgit and Kashgar. This is of no interest to travellers wishing to see the best of Northern Pakistan, but it may be of use for the time-limited traveller retracing their tracks.

Customs and immigration at Afiyatabad is open daily from 8.30am to 11am for China-bound travellers and until 5pm for Pakistan-bound travellers. You must have a valid China visa to enter China – they are not issued at the border. You must have a visa to enter Pakistan. For information about visas, see p378.

India

The overland crossing between Pakistan and India is at Wagah (Attari on the India side), 30km east of Lahore. The border is open daily from 9.30am to 3.30pm (10am to 4pm India time). Unfortunately the crossing remains

hostage to Pakistan–India relations, so it's not a bad idea to double-check that the border can still be easily crossed at the time of your visit.

Before crossing into India, you must clear immigration and customs formalities at Wagah. At the immigration office your passport will be checked for a valid Indian visa, and then you'll be directed to the nearby customs section where the contents of your bags will be examined. Be warned that any drugs found will be seized and you'll face the penalties of illegal possession (p369). The entire immigration and customs procedure usually takes about 45 minutes, sometimes longer if there's a crowd. Once you clear customs you're given the green light to walk across 100m of neutral territory into India. If you have a lot of baggage, there are porters to lug your load (around Rs 50).

You can drive your own vehicle across with a valid carnet. If you're catching the direct Lahore to Delhi bus or the train, you'll still have to go through the standard immigration, customs and security procedures.

It's definitely worth coordinating your crossing with the theatrical closing-of-the-border ceremony (Rs 10 to watch from the Pakistani side) that takes place here before sunset each day – see p120.

There are a couple of small shops at Wagah selling cold drinks, tea and snacks. There's also a little bookstall, **Latif Old Book Shop** (☎ 042-6582611), with a selection of (usually old) travel guides, novels and general-interest books. You may also be able to sell and exchange books here. The amicable owner, Mr Latif, is happy to answer any questions you may have about Wagah.

Few travellers stay overnight at Wagah, but if you're stranded here there's a **PTDC Motel** (☎ 042-6583072; s/d Rs 600/800, s/d with air-con Rs 1000/1300; 🚽), which also allows camping on site (Rs 100 per person including car parking and use of a bathroom). The hotel has a restaurant (mains Rs 65 to Rs 350) that welcomes nonguests; it's a convenient place to chill if you have time to kill – a cup of tea is Rs 25. In the PTDC Motel is an information centre and a bank (open 11am to 1pm) where you can change money.

BUS

There's a direct bus service (Rs 1500, 12 hours) between Lahore and Delhi. You can pre-book a ticket on this bus between 9am

and 1pm daily at the **PTDC** (☎ reservations 042-5755940) office in Lahore (p101), but do check if it's operating at the time of your visit, as in the past it has been suspended whenever India–Pakistan relations turned sour.

The bus departs from the PTDC office every Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday at 6am (but you must report an irksome two hours prior to departure). A ticket costs Rs 1500 and the journey to Delhi takes about 12 hours (you're required to go through customs and immigration formalities at the border as described earlier in this chapter). The luggage limit is 20kg (each kilogram after that costs an additional Rs 60).

There are local buses that travel to the border (Wagah) from Lahore. To get to the border from Lahore's Regal Chowk (The Mall), catch bus 3 (Rs 4) to the main train station and from there take bus 4 (Rs 12) to the border (be warned that not all number 4 buses take you all the way to the border, so make sure you ask the driver before hopping on).

TRAIN

The *Samjhota Express* departs Lahore at 8.35am twice a week (Tuesday and Friday) to India's Attari (Rs 50) and then onwards to Delhi (economy/first class Rs 177/864, around eight hours). Note that passengers have to go through the same immigration and customs formalities as anyone else crossing the border (described earlier).

The alternative, and easier, journey is to take a bus, taxi or train the 30km from Lahore to Wagah, then to walk across the border to Attari. If it's the afternoon, check out the closing-of-the-border ceremony on the India side before making the 28km bus or taxi ride to Amritsar, where there is a plethora of daily train options to Delhi and beyond (see www.indianrail.gov.in). This will allow travellers to make the journey any day and avoid the long delays on both sides of the border that the *Samjhota Express* experiences – at times more than three hours each side.

Iran

There is a fortnightly train service between Zahedan and Quetta, via the border post at Taftan (also called Kuh-i-Taftan; Mirjavé on the Iran side). At the time of writing, it departed Zahedan on the 3rd and 17th of every month at 10.30am, or Quetta on the 1st and 15th of every month at 12.30pm. There is one

class and fare (Rs 650) and the trip takes 24 to 27 hours.

Between Quetta and Taftan there are several daily buses (Rs 350, 15 to 16 hours) – these are a considerably quicker (but somewhat less comfortable) option than the train. Minibuses tend to leave early in the morning, travelling in the heat of the day and requiring an overnight stay in Taftan before crossing into Iran. Note that buses from Quetta to Taftan tend to be overnight to avoid the heat of day, and by arriving at the border in the morning there's plenty of time to get connections in Iran. However, travelling through wild Balochistan at night isn't always recommended, as there's a small but very real security risk. Taftan feels like the end of the road if you're coming from Iran – the Tarmac road disappears once you cross into Pakistan. Overland drivers should note that petrol smuggling is big business here, and while there are no petrol stations from the border until you're almost at Quetta, there are lots of truck stops with barrels of cheap Iranian petrol and hand pumps (prices increase the further you get from the border, so it's worth filling your tank).

The border is open between 8am and 5pm (to 7pm in summer) daily throughout the year. The only formality is that you'll need to get an entry stamp in your passport (of course, you must have a valid visa to get into Pakistan too – these are *not* issued at the border).

Frequent Iranian buses make the two-hour trip between Mirjavé and Zahedan. Check current timetables before you head out.

For those driving their own vehicles, once you arrive in Quetta, seek advice from the PTDC (p145) about the current safety situation (including whether convoy travel is recommended) and appropriate resthouses en route to your next intended destination. Hotel Bloom Star (p146) is also good for advice – it being a favourite with overlanders for years.

Taftan is a dusty border town and not of great fascination to travellers, but if you miss your bus to Quetta or absolutely must spend the night in Taftan, there's a **PTDC Motel** (☎ 0886-510248; s/d Rs 600/800). Cheaper (more basic) hotels are also available in Taftan and Dalbandin.

The National Bank of Pakistan in Taftan changes money between 9am and 1.30pm Monday to Saturday. Alternatively, private moneychangers clutching calculators and plastic bags full of rupees and rials will ac-

cost travellers as soon as they leave passport control. It can be tough changing travellers cheques, so always have cash on hand; exchange rates are generally better in Quetta. If you're crossing from Pakistan to Iran late in the day or on Sunday, it's probably best to change money in Quetta.

SEA

At the time of writing there were no scheduled international passenger services to/from Pakistan apart from the haj ferries (for Muslim pilgrims to Mecca).

GETTING AROUND

AIR

Airlines in Pakistan

Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) has connections between the major centres in Pakistan including Islamabad, Karachi, Lahore, Multan, Bahawalpur, Peshawar and Quetta. Air Blue and Shaheen Air International also serve a few major centres (see regional chapters for details). Domestic airlines usually have one or more 'night coach' flights linking major cities. They can depart at inconvenient hours but are around 25% cheaper than day flights – for flight schedules and costs, contact individual airlines.

Air Blue (ED/ABQ; ☎ 111-247258; www.airblue.com)

PIA (PK/PIA; ☎ 021-45794769; www.piac.com.pk)

Shaheen Air International (NL/SAI; ☎ 111-808080; www.shaheenair.aero)

Wait until you get to Pakistan to buy domestic tickets, as they can be up to 30% cheaper than tickets purchased outside the country. Every town with an airport has at least one PIA booking office. Travel agencies that are general sales agents for PIA get their tickets at a discount, and may pass some of that on to you.

For PIA domestic flights, there is no cancellation fee if you cancel at least 24 hours prior to departure. However, there's a charge of 25% of ticket cost if you cancel between eight and 24 hours before departure and 50% if within eight hours.

When taking a domestic flight (and international flight for that matter), don't forget to get any check-in luggage security strapped before proceeding to the check-in counter (otherwise you'll be sent back to get it done).

At the check-in counter make sure you get tags for any hand luggage, as these need to be stamped by security later.

Keep in mind that domestic carriers may well add new routes, cancel existing routes and/or change flight schedules and fares during the life of this book.

BICYCLE

The KKH from Islamabad to Kashgar via the Khunjerab Pass is the Holy Grail for cycle tourers – a demanding and spectacular trip for fit and well-prepared cyclists. See p392 and the boxed text on p242 for further details.

Furious traffic and decidedly nutty drivers on the Grand Trunk Rd (Peshawar–Lahore) and the National Hwy (Karachi–Lahore) make them dangerous for cycling, but the gentle back roads of the Potwar Plateau (Islamabad–Peshawar) and the steeper roads through Murree and the Margalla Hills (north of Islamabad) are more promising. For the adventurous, the (extensively unsealed) road between Chitral and Gilgit offers stunning views and friendly villages, though you'll need to be self-sufficient on most nights. At the time of research, much of the interior of Sindh and Balochistan was not deemed safe by local authorities for tourists on any form of transport.

For information about equipment, see p392.

BUS & MINIBUS

Getting around Pakistan by bus isn't always terribly comfortable but it's undeniably cheap. The road distances charts in this chapter (p390 and p393) show approximate road distances between major cities; where there are rail lines, the distances are roughly the same. The main corridor for both is Karachi to Peshawar, via Multan, Lahore and Rawalpindi, with a branch from Sukkur to Quetta through the Bolan Pass.

There are numerous bus companies and some towns have more than one bus depot, which can create a bit of confusion. Depots are inevitably chaotic and the best way to attract help may just be to shout out your destination to one of the spruikers. You'll be quickly ushered to an appropriate bus. The better outfits, operating between the larger centres, will usually run to a timetable.

The most comfortable intercity trips are in air-con buses with outfits including Daewoo, New Khan Road Runners, Skyways

and Citylinkers. Up north, Natco and several private companies run buses between Rawalpindi, Gilgit, Skardu and the China border. Mashabrum, Silk Tours and K2 have more-comfortable coaches, at least as far as Aliabad (Hunza) and Skardu. Note that Daewoo bus stations are separate from the chaos of the local bus stands and are usually easy to access. Although a little more expensive, Daewoo buses are newer, safer, cleaner, and where possible, they use the quicker toll roads. Another bonus is that the 'hostess' on board provides a snack and drink.

Then there are Pakistan's rolling works of art: chrome-sequinned vintage Bedford buses and trucks, vividly painted with psychedelic designs, poetry, Quranic passages and/or technicolour landscapes, equipped with tinted windows, dangling chains and musical horns, and decorated with mirrors, badges and fluting. Though a photographer's delight, they're perversely uncomfortable to ride in.

Minibuses are another option, and Hi-Ace and Coaster minibuses run on many regional and long-distance routes. They're faster and often a bit pricier than buses, although in a Hi-Ace your comfort is severely compromised by the cramped seating arrangement (they squeeze four people into a row of seats where there's space for three) and the view of the scenery is limited – an important factor in Chitral and the Northern Areas. Minibuses wait in major bus stands or in specified areas in certain towns. Drivers will usually hang around until the bus is full before they depart.

Common short-haul vehicles are small Suzuki vans with two rows of seats and a garish canopy slapped over the top, or larger Toyota pick-ups – some with canopies that double as a second level of seating! They'll stop anywhere to pick you up or set you down, and you pay only for the distance you go. Views are nonexistent unless you're on the roof or hanging off the back! Don't be put off paying a little extra for the privilege of a cab seat – it's probably worth it.

Where mountain roads permit nothing else, passenger/cargo 4WDs (Jeeps and Land Cruisers) serve remote villages. The smaller, made-in-Pakistan Jeeps have a monopoly on the narrow mountain roads with active sliding areas and precipitous drop-offs. These vehicles rarely run to set schedules and you can hire them as a 'special' or by the seat.

In touristed places like Hunza and Swat, 4WD drivers have formed cartels with fixed rates for common routes.

Jeeps or Land Cruisers can be hired from the PTDC, and 4WDs are often available privately (ask at your hotel), although they may be difficult to find on short notice in summer. At the time of writing, typical Land Cruiser rates from the PTDC were about Rs 3000 per day including driver and diesel. Rates fluctuate according to the price of fuel.

HITCHING

Hitching is never entirely without risk in any country, and we don't recommend it, especially for solo women. Travellers who hitch should be aware that they are taking a small but potentially serious risk; it's safer if you travel with at least one other person and inform someone of where you are planning to go. You should be aware that although some drivers may take you on board purely for the company; others may do so in the belief that they'll receive some payment.

LOCAL TRANSPORT

Fixed-route, fixed-fare options in bigger cities include buses, minibuses and passenger Suzukis. All are cheap and more often than not bursting with passengers. They'll usually stop anywhere along the route for you. Passenger Suzukis charge a token Rs 5 or Rs 8 for intracity routes. They may have a 'conductor', but where they don't, tap on the cab window or stomp on the floor to signal that you wish to stop.

City taxis may have meters but are invariably 'broken' so make sure you fix a price before you hop in. Some cities, such as Lahore and Karachi, also have 'City Radio Cabs' or 'Metro Cabs' (they're usually based at the airport). They're a little more expensive than regular taxis but you're assured of comfort and reliability.

Autorickshaws – snarling, three-wheeled, two-stroke machines – are cheaper (but less

comfortable) than taxis but be prepared to cop a lungful of pollution from fume-belching traffic. As with taxis, you should always fix a fare before setting off. Motorcycle-rickshaws are faster and brighter but are also uncomfortable. Two-wheeled, horse-drawn tongas are slower and getting rarer, but are a more scenic way to get around.

A bicycle can be a good way to explore smaller towns. For rental possibilities ask at your hotel or try bicycle-repair shops.

TRAIN

Pakistan has some 13,000km of tracks, and if you don't like the thought of being wedged into a careening minibus, you'll enjoy the trains. On the downside, long-distance trains are often crowded. If you're catching one at an intermediate point you can't always be sure of a seat, even if you booked one. Long-haul trains can run hours late to their later destinations. For seat availability, e-ticketing, and further rail information, check out www.pakrail.com.

Trains are Express, Mail or Passenger – we list the best options in the regional chapters of this book. The various classes that are available on different trains are also mentioned in the regional chapters.

Pakistan Railways publishes a handy *Time & Fare Table*, for sale at most train stations and at some city bookshops, for Rs 25. Updated twice a year, it's good for route planning and for current details about schedules and fares. Pakistan's railway inquiries telephone number is ☎ 117.

Food can usually be bought on the train itself or from food stalls and roaming vendors at station stops. Bringing your own bottled water is a good idea.

Railway officials advise against accepting food or drink from strangers as there have been a few incidences of drugging (and subsequent robberies) on trains. You're also advised to padlock your bags to racks (especially if you intend sleeping) and to keep your money and important documents (eg passport) in a well-concealed moneybelt.

Classes

Long-distance runs have sleepers in 1st and air-con class (which should ideally be booked ahead, to a maximum of 14 and 30 days, respectively). Some trains have economy seats and berths. Women may book female-only

SEGREGATED TRANSPORT

On most passenger transport, women (and often children) are seated separately from the men, usually near the driver. Foreign mixed couples may be asked to rearrange themselves accordingly.

compartments. At smaller stations with no reservation quota, you may not be able to book seats or berths.

Economy is the cheapest seat (reserved or unreserved) on most express trains. It's a step up from the 'cattle class' of second class, which is mostly confined to slow passenger trains. Air-conditioned lower (seat, berth and parlour) are comfortable seats in the air-con carriage that are good value (with the foreigner/student discounts) for medium-distance journeys. Air-conditioned sleeper is the most comfortable class for long journeys. This class is expensive and relatively private, accommodating two or four passengers to a compartment – some with toilets. The 1st-class sleeper (seat and berth) is comfortable but it's not a step up from more modern air-con carriages. In 1st-class sleeper or air-conditioned sleeper you are expected to make way for sitting passengers between 6am and 9pm. If you wish to reserve the compartment for your own exclusive use during these hours there is an additional fee payable based on the length of the journey.

Reserved sleepers may have berth and carriage numbers on the ticket, but sometimes you must go to the conductor/ticket inspector for your allocation. This is also the person to befriend if you want to upgrade your ticket.

Trains can be surprisingly cold at night; only air-con compartments are usually heated. Bedding is not always provided on sleeper trains – verify the situation when booking your ticket.

Railway retiring rooms exist at most major city train stations and are available for air-con or 1st-class sleeper ticket holders (usually departing within 24 hours). Singles cost around Rs 100 and doubles Rs 150 (fan) or Rs 400 (air-con).

Costs

An international student ID card gets you a very generous 50% discount on train tickets, while nonstudent foreign tourists are entitled to a 25% concession. To get these you usually have to go to the Commercial Department, often in a separate building from the ticket office (inquire at the train station). Children under three years of age are free and those between three and 10 years of age are charged half fare.

The per-kilometre rate for train travel varies widely; see the train tables in regional chapters for fares and an indication of which classes are available.

Reservations

Seats in all classes can be reserved up to 30 days in advance. Try to book as far ahead as you can to increase your chances of getting your preferred train and class. If you cancel your reservation you can get 100% of your fare back if the ticket is surrendered more than two days before departure, minus 10% more than 24 hours before departure, and minus 25% less than 24 hours before departure. There's a 50% refund if the ticket is surrendered within three hours after departure.

ALONG THE KKH

BICYCLE

The KKH is a spectacular trip for cyclists who are super fit and have an appetite for the unexpected. One called the Pakistan side a dream road: 'Where else in the world can you find an incredibly scenic paved road from almost sea level to almost 5000m?' See the boxed text on p242 for more details.

Several shops in Kashgar sell Chinese-made mountain bikes for the equivalent of around US\$120. Travellers have bought these, cycled to the Northern Areas and then sold them at no loss. Doing this in the other direction is more problematic, as bikes in Gilgit are scarcer and considerably more expensive and Chinese customs may well inquire as to the whereabouts of the bike that you brought with you upon entering China.

Cyclists can find news and advice in hotel guest books, so called 'rumour books', along the way. For information on getting your machine to the KKH, see p385.

Equipment

A mountain bike is more comfortable than a touring bike. If you do use a touring bike, take the fattest tyres you can fit on your rims. Fill your kit with every imaginable spare; you won't be able to find that crucial widge in the back of beyond.

A tent and stove are handy in the thinly populated region between Ghez and Sost, but you can manage without them, especially if you're planning to cycle only in Pakistan. The reduced weight will let you cycle far enough to always find some sort of

an approximation of a fixed timetable and can be booked ahead, and then only by a few days. Most other vehicles go when they're full, so departures can be lengthy affairs, with drivers honking up and down in search of passengers.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

Jeeps or Land Cruisers can be hired from the PTDC in Gilgit, the Kaghan Valley and Rawalpindi; agencies in Kashgar; or privately (ask at your hotel). They may be tough to find on short notice in summer. For information on costs, see p390 and the Getting There & Away sections in regional chapters.

MOVING ON FROM KASHGAR

There are many options for exploring the Silk Road province of Xinjiang and the rest of China. These are comprehensively covered in Lonely Planet's *China*.

Air

You can fly from Kashgar only to Ürümqi and Islamabad. Details can be found on p328. Ürümqi has a few direct international connections including Almaty, Bishkek, Islamabad, and Moscow via Novosibirsk, though these services can be seasonal and it's not uncommon for services to be suspended.

Ürümqi is linked with Beijing with several flights a day, and less frequently with Hong Kong, Shanghai, Guangzhou (Canton), Chengdu and other Chinese cities.

Land

There are road and rail links to Ürümqi, the capital of Xinjiang and the major transport

hub in the region (see p329). From Ürümqi, there are bus services to most cities in Xinjiang and trains to Beijing (49 hours), Shanghai (51 hours) and several other cities.

KYRGYZSTAN

From at least June to September you can cross the 3752m Torugart Pass on a rough road from Kashgar to Bishkek, and via the Irkeshtam Pass from Kashgar to Osh. For details, see p329. Of course you must have an onward visa (the closest place to get a Kyrgyzstan visa is Delhi or Beijing). Chinese officials insist that tourists must also have a special Torugart permit (the Torugart is formally a Class 2 or nontourist pass). Kashgar travel agencies or their Bishkek partners can get these from Ürümqi with one or two weeks' notice. No permit was necessary for crossing the Irkeshtam Pass at the time of research.

TIBET

The road between Kashgar and Lhasa via Ali requires a permit to travel and is heavily policed. China International Travel Service (CITS) in Kashgar (see p324) can organise the necessary permits and the vehicle to take you to Ali as well as the vehicle (from Lhasa) that will take you on to Lhasa. Between September and June the cold is severe.

An alternative route for more-independent travel is via Golmud (Kashgar to Golmud by bus or train and Golmud to Lhasa on a CITS vehicle). For much more information and advice, see the Karakoram Highway chapter (p235) and Lonely Planet's *Tibet* or *China* guides.

Health

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Travellers tend to worry about contracting infectious diseases in this part of the world, but infections are rarely a cause of *serious* illness or death in travellers. Pre-existing medical conditions such as heart disease, and accidental injury (especially traffic accidents) account for most life-threatening problems. Becoming ill in some way, however, is very common. Fortunately, most travellers' illnesses can either be prevented with some common-sense behaviour or treated easily with a well-stocked medical kit.

The following advice is a general guide only and does not replace the advice of a doctor trained in travel medicine.

BEFORE YOU GO

Pack medications in original, clearly labelled containers. A signed and dated letter from your physician describing your medical conditions and medications, including generic names, is useful. If carrying syringes or needles, have a physician's letter documenting their necessity. If you have a heart condition bring a copy of your ECG taken just prior to travelling.

If you take any regular medication bring double your needs in case of loss or theft. In Pakistan you can buy many medica-

tions over the counter without a prescription, but this is not recommended, as fake, poorly stored or out-of-date drugs are common. It can also be difficult to find some newer drugs, particularly the latest antidepressants, blood-pressure medication and contraceptive pills.

Have your teeth checked before you travel, and if you wear glasses take a spare pair and your prescription.

INSURANCE

Even if you are healthy, don't travel without health insurance, as accidents do happen. Declare any existing medical conditions you have – the insurance company *will* check and will not cover you where a condition was undeclared. You may require extra cover for adventure activities such as skiing. If your health insurance doesn't cover you for medical expenses abroad, consider getting extra insurance. If you're uninsured, keep in mind that emergency evacuation is expensive, with bills of over US\$100,000 being common.

Find out in advance if your insurance plan will make payments directly to providers or reimburse you later for overseas health expenditures. In Pakistan the doctors usually expect payment in cash. You may prefer a policy that pays doctors or hospitals directly rather than you having to pay on the spot and claim later. If you have to claim, make sure you keep all documentation. Some policies ask you to call (reverse charges) a centre in your home

HEALTH ADVISORIES

It's usually a good idea to consult your government's travel-health website before departure, if one is available:

Australia (www.dfat.gov.au/travel/)

Canada (www.travelhealth.gc.ca)

New Zealand (www.mfat.govt.nz/travel)

South Africa (www.dfa.gov.za/consular/travel_advice.htm)

UK (www.doh.gov.uk/PolicyAndGuidance/HealthAdviceToTravellers/fs/en)

US (www.cdc.gov/travel/)

country, where an immediate assessment of your problem is made.

RECOMMENDED VACCINATIONS

Specialised travel-medicine clinics are your best source of information; they stock all available vaccines and can give specific recommendations for your trip. Doctors will take into account factors like past vaccination history, the length of your trip, activities you may be undertaking and underlying conditions.

Most vaccines don't produce immunity until at least two weeks after they have been given, so visit a doctor four to eight weeks before departure. Ask your doctor for an International Certificate of Vaccination (known as the yellow booklet), which will list all the vaccinations you've received.

The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends the following vaccinations for travellers to the Indian subcontinent:

Adult diphtheria and tetanus A single booster is recommended if you haven't been vaccinated or boosted against these in the previous 10 years. Side effects include a sore arm and fever.

Hepatitis A Provides almost 100% protection for up to a year; a booster after 12 months provides at least another 20 years' protection. Mild side effects such as headache and sore arm occur in 5% to 10% of people.

Hepatitis B Now considered routine for most travellers. Given as three shots over six months. A rapid schedule is also available, as is a combined vaccination with hepatitis A. Side effects are mild and uncommon; usually a headache and sore arm. In 95% of people lifetime protection results.

Measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) Two doses of MMR are required unless you have had the diseases. Occasionally a rash and flu-like illness can develop a week after receiving the vaccine. Many young adults require a booster.

Polio In 2003 polio was still present in Pakistan. Only one booster is required for adults for lifetime protection. Inactivated polio vaccine is safe during pregnancy.

Typhoid Recommended for all travellers to Pakistan, even if you only visit urban areas. It offers around 70% protection, lasts for two to three years and comes as a single shot. Tablets are also available, but the injection is usually recommended as it has fewer side effects. Sore arm and fever may occur.

Varicella If you haven't had chickenpox discuss this vaccination with your doctor.

These immunisations are recommended for long-term travellers (more than one month in infected areas) or those at special risk:

Japanese B Encephalitis Three injections in all. A booster is recommended after two years. Sore arm and

headache are the most common side effects. An allergic reaction comprising hives and swelling can occur up to 10 days after any of the three doses, but this reaction is rare.

Meningitis Single injection. There are two types; the quadrivalent vaccine gives two to three years' protection, and the meningitis group C vaccine gives around 10 years' protection. Recommended for long-term backpackers aged under 25.

Rabies Three injections in all. A booster after one year will then provide 10 years' protection. Side effects are rare – occasionally a headache and sore arm.

Tuberculosis (TB) A complex issue. Adult long-term travellers are usually recommended to have a TB skin test before and after travel, rather than vaccination. Only one vaccine is given in a lifetime.

Required Vaccinations

The sole vaccine required by law is yellow fever. Proof of vaccination will only be required if you've visited a country in the yellow-fever zone within six days prior to entering Pakistan. If you're travelling to Pakistan from Africa or South America, check to see whether you require proof of vaccination before leaving your home country.

MEDICAL CHECKLIST

Recommended for a personal medical kit:

- Antibacterial cream, eg Muciprocin
- Antibiotic for skin infections, eg Cephalixin or Amoxicillin/Clavulanate
- Antibiotics for diarrhoea include Norfloxacin or Ciprofloxacin; for bacterial diarrhoea Azithromycin; for giardia or amoebic dysentery Tinidazole
- Antifungal cream, eg Clotrimazole
- Antihistamine – there are many options, eg Cetirizine for daytime and Promethazine for night
- Antiseptic, eg Betadine
- Antispasmodic for stomach cramps, eg Buscopa
- Contraceptive method
- Decongestant, eg Pseudoephedrine
- DEET-based insect repellent
- Diarrhoea – consider an oral rehydration solution (eg Gastrolyte), diarrhoea 'stopper' (eg Loperamide) and anti-nausea medication (eg Prochlorperazine)
- First-aid items such as scissors, medicated plasters, bandages, gauze, thermometer (but not mercury), sterile needles and syringes, safety pins and tweezers
- Ibuprofen or another anti-inflammatory
- Indigestion tablets, eg Mylanta or Quick Eze

- Iodine tablets (unless you are pregnant or have a thyroid problem) to purify water
- Laxative, eg Coloxyl
- Permethrin to impregnate clothing and mosquito nets
- Steroid cream for allergic/itchy rashes, eg 1% to 2% hydrocortisone
- Sunscreen and hat
- Throat lozenges
- Thrush (vaginal yeast infection) treatment, eg Clotrimazole pessaries or Diflucan tablet
- Ural or equivalent if prone to urinary tract infections

ONLINE RESOURCES

There's a wealth of online travel-health advice. For further information, Lonely Planet (www.lonelyplanet.com) is a good place to start. WHO (www.who.int/ith/) publishes a superb book called *International Travel & Health*, revised annually and available online at no cost. Another website of general interest is MD Travel Health (www.mdtravelhealth.com), which provides complete travel-health recommendations for every country and is updated daily. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (www.cdc.gov) website also has good general information.

FURTHER READING

Lonely Planet publishes *Healthy Travel Asia & India* by Isabelle Young and *Travelling with Children* by Cathy Lanigan, both of which contain useful health information.

IN TRANSIT

DEEP VEIN THROMBOSIS (DVT)

This condition occurs when blood clots form in the legs during plane flights, chiefly because of prolonged immobility. The longer the flight, the greater the risk. Though most blood clots are reabsorbed uneventfully, some may break off and travel through the blood vessels to the lungs, where they may cause life-threatening complications.

The chief symptom of DVT is swelling or pain in the foot, ankle, or calf, usually but not always on just one side. When a blood clot travels to the lungs, it may cause chest pain and difficulty in breathing. Travellers with any of these symptoms should immediately seek medical attention.

To prevent the development of DVT on long flights you should walk around the cabin, perform isometric compressions of the leg muscles (ie contract the leg muscles while sitting), drink plenty of fluids and avoid alcohol and tobacco.

JET LAG & MOTION SICKNESS

Common when crossing more than five time zones, jet lag results in insomnia, fatigue, malaise or nausea. To avoid jet lag try drinking plenty of fluids (nonalcoholic) and eating light meals. Upon arrival, seek exposure to natural sunlight and readjust your schedule (for meals, sleep etc) as soon as possible.

Antihistamines such as dimenhydrinate (Dramamine), promethazine (Phenergan) and meclizine (Antivert, Bonine) are usually the first choice for treating motion sickness. The main side effect is drowsiness. A herbal alternative is ginger, which may be eaten plain or candied (a small piece will do) or taken in tablet form (500 to 1000 milligrams).

IN PAKISTAN

AVAILABILITY OF HEALTH CARE

In general, medical facilities are not up to international standards and serious cases are likely to be evacuated. Facilities are severely limited outside the major cities and it can be difficult to find reliable medical care in rural areas. Your embassy and insurance company can be good contacts. Hospitals and clinics are listed under Information in the major city sections of regional chapters in this book.

INFECTIOUS DISEASES

Dengue Fever

This mosquito-borne disease is becoming increasingly problematic in the tropical world (including southern parts of Pakistan), especially in cities. As there is no vaccine available it can only be prevented by avoiding mosquito bites. The mosquito that carries dengue bites day and night, so use insect-avoidance measures at all times. Symptoms include high fever, severe headache and body ache (dengue was previously known as 'breakbone fever'). Some people develop a rash and experience diarrhoea. There is no specific treatment, just rest and paracetamol – do not take aspirin as it increases the likelihood of haemorrhaging. See a doctor to be diagnosed and monitored.

Hepatitis A

A problem throughout the region, this food- and water-borne virus infects the liver, causing jaundice (yellow skin and eyes), nausea and lethargy. There is no specific treatment for the disease; you just need to allow time for the liver to heal. It's recommended that all travellers to Pakistan be vaccinated against hepatitis A.

Hepatitis B

The only sexually transmitted disease that can be prevented by vaccination, hepatitis B is spread by body fluids, including sexual contact. In some parts of South Asia up to 20% of the population are carriers of hepatitis B, and usually are unaware of this. The long-term consequences can include liver cancer and cirrhosis.

Hepatitis E

Transmitted through contaminated food and water, hepatitis E has similar symptoms to hepatitis A but is far less common. It is a severe problem in pregnant women and can result in the death of both mother and baby. There is currently no vaccine, and prevention is by following safe eating and drinking guidelines.

HIV

This disease is spread via contaminated body fluids. Avoid unsafe sex, unsterile needles (including in medical facilities) and tattoos. The prevalence of HIV in Pakistan is considered moderate.

Japanese B Encephalitis

This viral disease is transmitted by mosquitoes and is rare in travellers. Like most mosquito-borne diseases it is becoming a more common problem in affected countries. Most cases occur in rural areas and vaccination is recommended for travellers spending more than one month outside of cities. There is no treatment, and a third of infected people will die while another third will suffer permanent brain damage.

Leishmaniasis

This sandfly-borne parasite is very rare in travellers but common in the local population. There are two forms of the disease – one that only affects the skin (causing a chronic ulcer) and one that affects the internal organs.

DRINKING WATER

- Never drink tap water
- Bottled water and soft drinks are generally safe – check the seal is intact at purchase
- Avoid ice
- Avoid fresh juices – they may have been watered down
- Boiling water is the most efficient method of purifying it
- The best chemical purifier is iodine. It should not be used by pregnant women or those with thyroid problems.
- Water filters should also filter out viruses. Ensure your filter has a chemical barrier such as iodine and a small pore size, eg less than four microns.

Malaria

For such a serious and potentially deadly disease, there is an enormous amount of misinformation concerning malaria. For most rural areas in Pakistan, the risk of contracting malaria far outweighs the risk of any tablet side effects. Remember that malaria can be fatal. Before you travel, you must seek medical advice about the right medication and dosage for you.

Malaria is caused by a parasite transmitted by the bite of an infected mosquito. The most important symptom of malaria is fever, but general symptoms such as headache, diarrhoea, cough or chills may also occur. Diagnosis can only be made by taking a blood sample.

Two strategies should be combined to prevent malaria – mosquito avoidance, and antimalarial medications. Most people who catch malaria are taking inadequate or no antimalarial medication.

Travellers are advised to prevent mosquito bites by taking these steps:

- Use a DEET-containing insect repellent on exposed skin. Wash it off at night, as long as you are sleeping under a mosquito net. Natural repellents like citronella can be effective, but must be applied more frequently than products containing DEET.
- Sleep under a mosquito net impregnated with permethrin

- Choose accommodation with window screens and fans (if not air-conditioned)
- Impregnate clothing with permethrin in high-risk areas
- Wear long sleeves and trousers in light colours
- Use mosquito coils
- Spray your room with insect repellent before going out for your evening meal

There are a variety of antimalarial medications available:

Lariam (Mefloquine) This has received much bad press, some justified, some not. This weekly tablet suits many people. Serious side effects are rare but include depression, anxiety, psychosis and fits. Anyone with a history of depression, anxiety, other psychological disorders or epilepsy should not take it. It's considered safe in the second and third trimesters of pregnancy. It must be taken for four weeks after leaving the risk area.

Doxycycline A broad-spectrum antibiotic with the added benefit of helping to prevent a variety of tropical diseases including leptospirosis, tick-borne disease and typhus. Potential side effects include photosensitivity (a tendency to sunburn), thrush in women, indigestion, heartburn, nausea and interference with the contraceptive pill. More serious side effects include ulceration of the oesophagus – you can help prevent this by taking your daily tablet with a meal and a large glass of water, and never lying down within half an hour of taking it. It must be taken for four weeks after leaving the risk area.

Malarone This new drug is a combination of Atovaquone and Proguanil. Side effects are uncommon and mild, most commonly nausea and headache. It is the best tablet for those on short trips to high-risk areas. It must be taken for one week after leaving the risk area.

Artesunate Artesunate and its derivatives are not suitable as a preventive medication. They are useful treatments under medical supervision.

A final option is to take no preventive medication but to have a supply of emergency medication should you develop the symptoms of malaria. This is less than ideal, and you'll need to get to a good medical facility within 24 hours of developing a fever. If you choose this option the most effective and safe treatment is Malarone (four tablets once daily for three days). Other options include Mefloquine and Quinine but the side effects of these at treatment doses make them less desirable. Fansidar is no longer recommended. Note that malaria throughout South Asia is resistant to Chloroquine.

Measles

This highly contagious bacterial infection, spread via coughing and sneezing, remains a problem in some parts of Pakistan. Most people born before 1966 are likely to have had the disease in childhood and are therefore immune. It starts with a high fever and rash and can be complicated by pneumonia and brain disease. There's no specific treatment.

Rabies

This uniformly fatal disease is endemic in Pakistan and is spread by the bite or lick of an infected animal – most commonly a dog or monkey. You should seek medical advice immediately after any animal bite or lick and commence post-exposure treatment. Having pre-travel vaccination means the post-bite treatment is greatly simplified. If an animal bites or licks you, gently wash the affected area with soap and hot water, and apply iodine-based antiseptic. If you are not pre-vaccinated you will need to get to an urban area to receive the rabies immunoglobulin as soon as possible. This is almost impossible to obtain in most parts of Pakistan.

STDs

The most common sexually transmitted diseases in Pakistan include herpes, warts, syphilis, gonorrhoea and chlamydia. People carrying these diseases often have no signs of infection. Condoms will prevent gonorrhoea and chlamydia but not warts or herpes. If after a sexual encounter you develop any rash, lumps, discharge or pain when passing urine seek immediate medical attention. If you've been sexually active while travelling have an STD check on your return home.

Tuberculosis

While TB is rare in travellers, those who have had significant contact with the population (such as medical and aid workers and long-term travellers) should take precautions. Vaccination is usually only given to children under the age of five, but adults at risk are recommended to have pre- and post-travel TB tests. Main symptoms are fever, cough, weight loss, night sweats and tiredness.

Typhoid

This serious bacterial infection is spread via food and water. It gives headaches and a high and slowly progressive fever, and may

be accompanied by a dry cough and stomach pain. It is diagnosed by blood tests and treated with antibiotics. Vaccination is recommended for all travellers spending more than a week in Pakistan. Be aware that vaccination is not 100% effective so you must still be careful with what you eat and drink (see opposite).

TRAVELLER'S DIARRHOEA

This is by far the most common problem affecting travellers – between 30% and 70% of people will suffer from traveller's diarrhoea within two weeks of starting their trip. In over 80% of cases it is caused by a bacteria, and therefore responds promptly to treatment with antibiotics (whether you use antibiotics will depend on your situation – how sick you are, how quickly you need to get better, where you are etc).

Treatment consists of staying well hydrated; rehydration solutions like Gastrolyte are the best for this. Antibiotics such as Norfloxacin, Ciprofloxacin or Azithromycin will kill the bacteria quickly.

Loperamide is just a 'stopper' and doesn't get to the cause of the problem. It can be helpful, eg if you have to go on a long bus ride. Don't take Loperamide if you have a fever, or blood in your stools. Seek medical attention quickly if you do not respond to an appropriate antibiotic.

Giardiasis

This parasite is relatively common in travellers. Symptoms include nausea, bloating, excess gas, fatigue and intermittent diarrhoea. 'Eggy' burps are often attributed solely to giardia, but they are not in fact specific to giardia. The parasite will eventually go away if left untreated but this can take months. The treatment of choice is Tinidazole; Metronidazole is a second-line option.

ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARDS

Air Pollution

If you are travelling in urban environments in Pakistan, air pollution is something you'll become very aware of. Pollution causes minor respiratory problems such as sinusitis, dry throat and irritated eyes, and can aggravate coughs and colds. If you have severe respiratory problems such as asthma speak with your doctor before travelling to any heavily polluted urban centres; you're also advised to bring appropriate medication in case it can't easily be found in Pakistan.

Altitude Sickness

If you are going to altitudes above 3000m you should get information on preventing, recognising and treating altitude sickness. The biggest risk factor for developing altitude sickness is going too high too quickly – you should follow a conservative acclimatisation schedule and you should *never* go to a higher altitude when you have any symptoms that could be altitude-related.

Mild symptoms include headache, lethargy, dizziness, difficulty sleeping and loss of appetite. Acute Mountain Sickness (AMS) may become more severe without warning and can be fatal. Severe symptoms include breathlessness, a dry, irritative cough (which may progress to the production of pink, frothy sputum), severe headache, lack of coordination and balance, confusion, irrational behaviour, vomiting, drowsiness and unconsciousness.

Treat mild symptoms by resting at the same altitude until recovery, which usually takes a day or two. Paracetamol or aspirin can be taken for headaches. If symptoms persist or become worse, however, immediate descent is necessary; even 500m can help. Drug treatments should never be used to avoid descent or to enable further ascent.

The drugs acetazolamide and dexamethasone are recommended by some doctors for the prevention of AMS; however, their use is controversial. They can reduce the symptoms, but they may also mask warning signs; severe and fatal AMS has occurred in people taking these drugs.

Follow the following tips to prevent acute mountain sickness.

- Ascend slowly – have frequent rest days, spending two to three nights at each rise of 1000m.
- It is always wise to sleep at a lower altitude than the greatest height reached during the day, if possible. Also, once above 3000m, care should be taken not to increase the sleeping altitude by more than 300m per day.
- Drink extra fluids. The mountain air is dry and cold and moisture is lost as you breathe.
- Eat light, high-carbohydrate meals.
- Avoid alcohol and sedatives.

Food & Drink

Eating in restaurants is the biggest risk factor for contracting traveller's diarrhoea.

Ways to avoid it include eating only freshly cooked food, avoiding shellfish, and avoiding food that has been sitting around in buffets. Peel all fruit, cook vegetables, and soak salads in iodine water for at least 20 minutes. Eat in busy restaurants with high customer turnover.

Heat

Parts of Pakistan are hot and humid throughout the year. For most people it takes at least two weeks to adapt to the hot climate. Swelling of the feet and ankles is common, as are muscle cramps caused by excessive sweating. Prevent these problems by avoiding dehydration and excessive activity in the heat. Don't eat salt tablets (they aggravate the gut), but drinking rehydration solution or eating salty food does help. Treat cramps by stopping activity, resting, rehydrating with double-strength rehydration solution and gently stretching.

Dehydration is the main contributor to heat exhaustion. Symptoms of heat exhaustion include feeling weak, headaches, irritability, nausea or vomiting, sweaty skin, a fast, weak pulse and a normal or slightly elevated body temperature. Treatment involves getting out of the heat and/or sun, fanning the victim and applying cool, wet cloths to the skin, laying the victim flat with their legs raised, and rehydrating with water containing a quarter of a teaspoon of salt per litre. Recovery is usually rapid but it's common to feel weak for days afterwards.

Heatstroke is a serious medical emergency. Symptoms come on suddenly and include weakness, nausea, a hot, dry body with a body temperature of over 41°C, dizziness, confusion, loss of coordination, fits and eventual collapse and loss of consciousness. Seek medical help and commence cooling by getting the person out of the heat, removing their clothes, fanning them and applying cool, wet cloths or ice to their body, especially to the groin and armpits.

Take sunscreen with you, as it can be hard to obtain outside big cities.

Insect Bites & Stings

Bedbugs don't carry disease but their bites are very itchy. They live in the cracks of furniture and walls and then migrate to the bed at night to feed on you. You can treat the itch with an antihistamine.

Lice inhabit various parts of your body but most commonly your head and pubic area. Transmission is via close contact with an infected person. They can be difficult to treat and you may need numerous applications of an anti-lice shampoo such as permethrin.

Ticks are contracted by walking in rural areas. They are commonly found behind the ears, on the belly and in armpits. If you have had a tick bite and experience symptoms such as a rash at the site of the bite or elsewhere, fever, or muscle aches you should see a doctor. Doxycycline prevents tick-borne diseases.

Scorpions are found throughout South Asia. Although usually easily spotted and avoided, they tend to turn up in articles of clothing – especially shoes – if you're camping. Treat a scorpion bite by flushing with cold water, applying an ice pack and bandaging the area firmly. If severe pain or swelling occurs, seek medical attention immediately.

WOMEN'S HEALTH

Pregnant women should receive specialised advice before travelling. The ideal time to travel is in the second trimester (between 16 and 28 weeks), when the risk of pregnancy-related problems is at its lowest and pregnant women generally feel at their best. During the first trimester there is a risk of miscarriage and in the third trimester complications such as premature labour and high blood pressure are possible. It's wise to travel with a companion. Always carry a list of quality medical facilities available at your destination and ensure you continue your standard antenatal care at these facilities. Avoid rural travel in areas with poor transportation and medical facilities. Most of all, ensure travel insurance covers all pregnancy-related possibilities, including premature labour.

Malaria is a high-risk disease in pregnancy. WHO recommends that pregnant women do *not* travel to areas with Chloroquine-resistant malaria. None of the more effective anti-malarial drugs are completely safe to take during pregnancy.

Hepatitis E is a particular problem in pregnant women – if it is contracted in the third trimester, 30% of women and their babies will die.

Traveller's diarrhoea can quickly lead to dehydration and result in inadequate blood flow to the placenta. Many of the drugs used

to treat various diarrhoea bugs are not recommended in pregnancy. Azithromycin is considered safe.

In the urban areas of Pakistan, sanitary products are readily available. Birth-control options may be limited so bring adequate supplies. Heat, humidity and antibiotics can

all contribute to thrush. Treatment is with antifungal creams and pessaries such as Clotrimazole, or a single tablet of Fluconazole (Diflucan). Urinary tract infections can be precipitated by dehydration or long bus journeys without toilet stops; bring suitable antibiotics.

Language

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WHO SPEAKS WHAT WHERE?

Urdu is the 'national language' of Pakistan, although fewer than 10% of Pakistanis speak it as a first language. This may be explained by the fact that Pakistanis speak over 300 dialects of some two dozen languages. Urdu sounds much like Hindi, the speech of north India, but it is written in a modified Arabic script.

Travelling down the Karakoram Highway (KKH) is like passing through half-a-dozen tiny countries. Every few hundred kilometres you find not just another dialect but a new language. In addition to the two 'national' languages of Urdu and Mandarin Chinese, there are at least seven other common tongues, from three different linguistic families. Persian is also understood to some extent throughout the region.

You can get by with Urdu and Chinese basics, especially in official situations, but neither is native to Xinjiang or the Northern Areas, and both languages are often used with a degree of reluctance. Even the most garbled attempts at local speech can reward you out of all proportion to what you're actually trying to say.

The predominant regional languages of the KKH are Uyghur (Kashgar, Tarim Basin); Wakhi (Tashkurgan, Gojal); Burushaski (Hunza); Shina (lower Hunza, Gilgit, Puniyal, Astor, Chilas); Kohistani (Indus Kohistan); Pashto (Besham, Swat and northern Hazara); Khovar or Chitrali

(Ishkoman, Yasin, Ghizar and Chitral); and Balti (Baltistan).

In this chapter we've included a list of common words and phrases in these languages, as well as Urdu and Chinese.

If you really want to make the most of your trip, get a copy of *Lonely Planet's Central Asia Phrasebook*, which includes all the languages of the region, plus communication and cultural tips.

What About English?

The entire top echelon of the Pakistani civil service speaks English, so if you can't make yourself understood anywhere else, try a government or police official. English is rarely used in western Xinjiang, except by a few educated officials. It's common in larger towns of the Northern Areas and widespread in Rawalpindi and Islamabad.

URDU

Urdu is an acquisitive language, swallowing whole phrases verbatim from Persian, Arabic, English, wherever. You'll have no trouble with *plet* (plate), *machiz* (matches) and even the word for you, the foreigner – *angrez* ('English', no matter where you're from).

For a more detailed guide to grammar, pronunciation and phrases, pick up *Lonely Planet's Hindi, Urdu & Bengali Phrasebook*. The home-grown *Teach Yourself Urdu in Two Months* (Noor Publishing House, Karachi) is available in Pakistani bookshops.

ACHAAH

The word for 'good' (*achaah*) is Urdu's all-purpose expression. Depending on the context and tone of voice it can also mean 'as you wish', 'I understand', 'I agree', 'right', 'really?' and more.

ASALAAM ALEIKUM

The nice thing about this general Muslim (Arabic) greeting, which means 'Peace be with you' – and is sometimes used for departures too – is that it can help break the ice in any situation. The reply to an older or respected person is to repeat the phrase;

to anyone else, it's *wa aleikum salaam* ('and with you too').

BAS

'Enough' (*bas*) is a useful multipurpose word for when you've had enough tea, crowds, silly questions etc. Saying it twice – *bas bas!* – gives it an edge.

PRONUNCIATION

Urdu is generally written in a modified form of the Persian-Arabic script. Representing the language in the Roman alphabet is a difficult exercise, as there are many sounds in Urdu that don't exist in English. If the transliteration system is to be simple to use, some compromise is unavoidable. In the following list of words and phrases we have reduced the number of sounds represented, but the meaning should still be clear through context. The distinction between short and long vowels has been retained, as this is a particularly important part of the Urdu language.

Vowels

a	as in 'sun'
aa	as in 'father'
e	as in 'bet'
ai	as the 'a' in 'bad'
i	as in 'sit'
ee	as in 'beet'
o	as in 'both'
au	as in 'haul'
u	as in 'put'
oo	as in 'food'

Consonants

ch	as in 'church'
q	as the 'k' in 'king'
r	a flap of the tongue

ACCOMMODATION

hotel	<i>hotal</i>
inn/guesthouse	<i>musaafirkaana</i>
nightwatchman	<i>chaukeedaar</i>
room	<i>kamraa</i>
bed	<i>palang</i>
bedding	<i>bistar</i>
key	<i>chaabee</i>
water heater	<i>geezar</i>
bathroom	<i>guslkaana, paakaana</i>

CONVERSATION, WORDS & PHRASES

Peace be with you.	<i>asalaam aleikum</i>
Sir/Madam	<i>janaab/begam</i>

How are you?	<i>aap kairiyat se hai?</i>
Everything's fine/OK.	<i>sab teek hai.</i>
Goodbye.	<i>kudaa haafiz</i>
See you again.	<i>pir milega</i>

There is no word for 'please', but adding the word *jee* to names and other words makes them extra polite, eg *shukriyaa jee, assalam aleikum jee*.

Thank you.	<i>shukriyaa</i>
Special thanks.	<i>mehrbaanee</i>
Excuse me.	<i>maaf keejijye</i>
No problem.	<i>koee baat nahee</i>
Yes.	<i>jee haa</i>
No.	<i>jee nahee</i>
Do you speak English?	<i>kyaa aapko angrezee aatee hai?</i>
I don't understand.	<i>mai nahee samjaa/samjee (m/f)</i>
I can't read Urdu.	<i>urdu parnaa nahee aataa.</i>
What's your name?	<i>aapkaa naam kyaa hai?</i>
My name is ...	<i>meraa naam ... hai</i>
What's the name of this place?	<i>is jaga kaa naam kyaa hai?</i>
Where are you going?	<i>aap kahaa jaa (rahe/rahee) haaee? (m/f)</i>

Is there a bus to (Gilgit) today?	<i>kyaa aaj (gilgit) ko bas jaayegee?</i>
What time does it go?	<i>vo kitne baje jaayegee?</i>
Where is (the GPO)?	<i>(GPO) kahaa hai?</i>
Where are you from?	<i>aap kahaa (ke/kee) hai? (m/f)</i>
I'm from ...	<i>mai ... (kaa/kee) hoo (m/f)</i>
Do you serve food?	<i>kyaa yahaa kaanaa miltaa hai?</i>

Do you have (time)?	<i>kyaa aapke paas (vaqt) hai?</i>
Is there (hot water)?	<i>kyaa (garm paanee) hai?</i>
I (don't) want tea.	<i>muje chaay (nahee) chaahiye.</i>
How much is this?	<i>kitne (rupiye/paise)?</i>
He is my husband.	<i>ye mere shauhar hai.</i>
She is my wife.	<i>ye merree beevee hai.</i>
God willing	<i>inshaalla</i>
Stop!	<i>rukiye!</i>

shop	<i>dukaan</i>
mosque	<i>masjid</i>
Ismaili prayer hall	<i>jamaat-kaana</i>
hospital	<i>aspitaal/shifaa-kaana</i>
luggage	<i>saamaan</i>
candle	<i>mombattee</i>
soap	<i>saabun</i>
map	<i>naksha</i>

hot/cold	<i>garm/garm/tandaa</i>
expensive/cheap	<i>mahega/sastaa</i>
left/right	<i>baayaa/dahinaa</i>

ill	<i>beemaar</i>
a little	<i>toraa</i>
next	<i>aglaa/aglee/agle</i>
next bus	<i>aglee bas</i>
another	<i>doosraa</i>
another bus	<i>doosree bas</i>
this/that	<i>ye/vo</i>
enough/stop	<i>bas</i>
here/there	<i>yahaa/vahaa</i>

NUMBERS

Urdu number-words don't have the regularity of English, so try to do things in round numbers! Don't confuse 25 and 50, or 7 and 60. To add half to a number (except 1 or 2) precede it with *sarre* (eg 3 ½ is *sarre-teen*); this is common with prices and time.

Laak (hundred thousand) and *kror* (10 million) are used for big numbers. Once into the thousands, large written numbers have commas every two places, not three.

1	<i>ek</i>
1 ½	<i>der</i>
2	<i>do</i>
2 ½	<i>daae</i>
3	<i>teen</i>
3 ½	<i>saare teen</i>
4	<i>chaar</i>
4 ½	<i>saare chaar</i>
5	<i>panch</i>
6	<i>chai</i>
7	<i>saat</i>
8	<i>aat</i>
9	<i>nau</i>
10	<i>das</i>
11	<i>gyaarah</i>
12	<i>baarah</i>
13	<i>terah</i>
14	<i>chaudah</i>
15	<i>pandrah</i>
16	<i>solah</i>
17	<i>satrah</i>
18	<i>attaarah</i>
19	<i>unnees</i>
20	<i>bees</i>
25	<i>pachchees</i>
30	<i>tees</i>
35	<i>paitees</i>
40	<i>chaalees</i>
50	<i>pachaas</i>
60	<i>saat'h</i> (puff of breath o after 't')
70	<i>sattah</i>
80	<i>assee</i>

90	<i>nabbe</i>
100	<i>sau</i>
200	<i>do sau</i>
1000	<i>hazaar</i>
100,000	<i>ek laak</i> (written as 1,00,000 in Pakistan)
10,000,000	<i>ek kror</i>

TIME

When? (day/date)	<i>kab?</i>
When? (at what time?)	<i>kitne baje?</i>
What time is it?	<i>kitne baje hai?</i>
For how long?	<i>kitnee der ke liye?</i>
today	<i>aaaj</i>
tomorrow	<i>kal</i>
now	<i>ab</i>
(three) o'clock	<i>(teen) baje</i>
half-past (four)	<i>saare (chaar) baje</i>
morning	<i>subah</i>
afternoon/evening	<i>do pehar/shaam</i>

BALTI

The Balti language is similar to classical Tibetan, which has four levels of speech: to/between common people; to/between honoured or revered people; colloquial; and literary. The colloquial is dominant in Baltistan. Stress is indicated in the following words and phrases by capitals.

CONVERSATION, WORDS & PHRASES

Hello. (polite)	<i>asalaam aleikum</i>
Hello. (informal)	<i>ZHULeh</i>
Hello. (in passing, or to person arriving)	<i>shokhs/shakhsa</i>
How are you?	<i>chi hal yod?</i>
Fine.	<i>LYAKHmo yud</i>
Goodbye.	<i>huDARYi faghrRING</i>
Thank you/Please.	<i>Azhu</i>
Yes/No.	<i>YAya/men</i>
What's your name?	<i>Yiri MENTakh chi in?</i>
My name is ...	<i>ni MENTakh ... in</i>
Where are you going?	<i>yang gar gwen yod?</i>
How much/many?	<i>tsam?</i>
Where is ...?	<i>... gar yod?</i>
I'm hungry/ill.	<i>nga LTOKHsed/natPA yod</i>
Come!/Go!	<i>ong!/song!</i>
I don't eat meat.	<i>nga sha za MED</i>
respected man	<i>YERi PYAKHbo</i> (your honour)
respected woman	<i>Ashch</i> (elder sister)
good/bad	<i>LYAKHmo/chaangMEN</i>
hot	<i>tronMO</i> (weather)/ <i>tso</i> (thing)
cold	<i>grakhMO</i>

left/right	<i>khen/trang</i>
home	<i>nang</i>
(your) village	<i>(Ylri) grong</i>
toilet	<i>chaqSA</i>

FOOD & DRINKS

food/meal	<i>zaan</i> (something to eat: <i>zachas</i>)
eat	<i>za</i>
wholewheat bread	<i>kurba</i>
curry	<i>SPAQchas</i>
meat	<i>sha</i>
beef	<i>baSHA</i>
mutton	<i>raSHA</i>
chicken	<i>byaSHA</i>
vegetable	<i>TSONma</i>
rice	<i>bras</i>
egg	<i>byabJON</i>
yogurt	<i>LOQfi onGA</i>
tea	<i>cha</i>
water	<i>chu</i>
boiled water	<i>SKOLfi chu</i>

NUMBERS

1	<i>chik</i>
2	<i>ngis</i>
3	<i>sum</i>
4	<i>bji</i>
5	<i>gha</i>
6	<i>trook</i>
7	<i>dun</i>
8	<i>bgvad</i>
9	<i>rgu</i>
10	<i>fchu</i>
20	<i>ni shu</i>
30	<i>sum fchu</i>
40	<i>ni shu ngis</i>
50	<i>gha fchu</i>
60	<i>ni shu sum</i>
70	<i>ni shu sum na fchu</i>
80	<i>ni shu bji</i>
90	<i>ni shu bji na fchu</i>
100	<i>bgya</i>
1000	<i>stong</i>

BURUSHASKI

Burushaski is spoken in central Hunza, upper Nagar, Yasin, Ishkoman and northern Chitral. Its origins are obscure, but it may be the KKH region's oldest language. Its difficult structure makes it nearly impossible for outsiders to master; there are said to be 38 plural forms, and words change form at both ends depending on

context. Fortunately, simple ideas can be managed without too much difficulty!

Hunza and Nagar dialects are slightly different – eg a common form of 'be' is *bila* in Hunza but *dila* in Nagar. The double vowel **oo** is pronounced as in 'moon'. Stress is indicated in the following words and phrases by capitals.

CONVERSATION, WORDS & PHRASES

Hello.	<i>leh</i>
Goodbye.	<i>khooDA haFIZ/khooDAyar</i>
How are you?	<i>beHAL biLA?</i>
I'm fine.	<i>je shooWA ba</i>
Thank you.	<i>bakhSHISH</i>
Yes/No.	<i>aWA/beYA</i>
Maybe.	<i>MEImi</i>
I'm sorry.	<i>mafEti</i>
What's your name?	<i>BEHsan gooik biLA?</i>
My name is ...	<i>ja aik ... biLA</i>
Where are you from?	<i>oom Amilim ba?</i>
Do you speak English?	<i>anGREZi JOOchi biLA?</i>
What's the name of this place?	<i>kooteh disheh besan ik bila?</i>
Do you have (tea)?	<i>(chai) bila?</i>
How much does this cost?	<i>BEHsan koi mad biLA?</i>
Where is ...?	<i>... Amili biLA?</i>
I only eat vegetables.	<i>ja Stroof hoi SHEHchaba</i>
I'm lost.	<i>aWALAam</i>
Go away!	<i>ni!</i>

single/double room	<i>hin/alTAN Siseh Kamara</i>
key	<i>chei</i>
room	<i>kamera</i>
toilet	<i>chooKAANG</i>

FOOD & DRINKS

food	<i>SHlas</i>
apple	<i>balt</i>
apricot	<i>joo</i>
dried apricot	<i>bahTERing</i>
dry cheese	<i>kooroot</i>
egg	<i>tiGAN</i>
food, bread	<i>shapik</i>
meat	<i>chaap</i>
noodle soup	<i>daoodo</i>
rice	<i>briw (Nagar)/bras (Hunza)</i>
white cheese	<i>booroos</i>
wholewheat bread	<i>phitti</i>
vegetable	<i>hoi</i>
yogurt	<i>dooMANoo maMOO</i>
buttermilk	<i>diltar</i>
grape wine	<i>mel</i>

milk	<i>maMOO</i>
mulberry spirits	<i>arak</i>
tea	<i>chai</i>
milk tea	<i>mamoo chai</i>
green tea	<i>sabaz chai</i>
water	<i>tsil</i>
drinking water	<i>minas tsil</i>

NUMBERS

1	<i>han</i>
2	<i>aTO</i>
3	<i>oosKO</i>
4	<i>WALto</i>
5	<i>tsoonDO</i>
6	<i>miSHINdo</i>
7	<i>taLO</i>
8	<i>aTAMbo</i>
9	<i>hoonCHO</i>
10	<i>TOroomo</i>
20	<i>ALtar</i>
30	<i>Altar TOroomo</i>
40	<i>aTO ALtar</i>
50	<i>aTO ALtar TOroomo</i>
60	<i>isKI ALtar</i>
70	<i>isKI ALtar TOroomo</i>
80	<i>WALti ALtar</i>
90	<i>WALto ALtar TOroomo</i>
100	<i>ta</i>
1000	<i>saas</i>

TIME

What time is it?	<i>BEHsan KANdila?</i>
It is (10) o'clock.	<i>mu (TORimi) GHArabi</i>
When?	<i>BEHshal?</i>
today	<i>KHULtu</i>
tomorrow	<i>Ilmeleh</i>
yesterday	<i>saBUR</i>
now	<i>mu</i>

KHOWAR

Khowar (Chitrali) is the speech not only of Chitral proper, but of Ishkoman, Yasin and Ghizar on the Gilgit side of the Shandur Pass.

How are you?	<i>tu keecha asoos?</i>
Very well, thanks.	<i>bojam, shukria</i>
Please.	<i>mehrbanni khori</i>
Yes/No.	<i>dee/no</i>
Where is (Drosh)?	<i>(drosh) kura sher?</i>
A little.	<i>kam</i>
bed	<i>jen</i>
(very) good	<i>(bo) jam</i>

bad	<i>shum</i>
bread	<i>shapik</i>
meat	<i>pushoor</i>
water	<i>oogh</i>

today	<i>hanoon</i>
tomorrow	<i>choochi</i>
yesterday	<i>dosh</i>

NUMBERS

1	<i>yi</i>
2	<i>ju</i>
3	<i>droi</i>
4	<i>chor</i>
5	<i>ponj</i>
6	<i>choi</i>
7	<i>sot</i>
8	<i>osht</i>
9	<i>niu</i>
10	<i>jiush</i>
20	<i>bishir</i>
100	<i>shor</i>

KOHISTANI

Kohistani is spoken in northern Swat and Indus Kohistan. It's a mish-mash of Shina, Pashto, Urdu, Persian and other languages, and varies from one village to the next. Shina or Pashto may work just as well. Stress is indicated in the following words and phrases by capitals.

CONVERSATION, WORDS & PHRASES

Hello.	<i>asalaam aleikum</i>
Goodbye.	<i>huDAR haWAla</i>
Good.	<i>suGA/mihta</i>
Thank you.	<i>shukria</i>
Yes/No.	<i>ah/ni</i>

FOOD & DRINKS

bread	<i>gwel</i>
egg	<i>aNA</i>
meat	<i>maSU</i>
milk	<i>chir</i>
tea	<i>chai</i>
vegetable	<i>sabzi</i>
water	<i>vi/wi</i>
yogurt	<i>dudi</i>

NUMBERS

1	<i>ek</i>
2	<i>du</i>
3	<i>cha</i>

4	sawur
5	paz
6	sho
7	saat
8	aat
9	naan/nau
10	daash
20	bish
100	shol
1000	zir

TIME

today	aaz
tomorrow	okot
now	uskeh
(two) o'clock	(du) masma

MANDARIN

Mandarin (or *putonghua*, 'people's speech') is China's official language, the dialect of Beijing and the speech of bureaucrats. Basic spoken Mandarin is surprisingly easy: there are no conjugations, no declensions, and the word order is like English – just string them together. The hard parts are pronunciation and tones.

For a compact and comprehensive traveller's guide to Mandarin, pick up a copy of Lonely Planet's *Mandarin Phrasebook*.

PRONUNCIATION

Mainland China's official Romanised 'alphabet' is called Pinyin. It's very streamlined, but the sounds aren't always self-evident. The letters representing consonants that don't sound quite the way they do in English are listed below.

Consonants

q ('ch'); **x** ('sh'); **zh** ('j'); **z** ('dz'); **c** ('ts'); **r** (tongue rolled back, almost 'z')

Vowels

a ('ah'); **er** ('ar'); **ui** ('oi' or 'wei'); **iu** ('yoh'); **ao** ('ow' as in 'now'); **ou** ('ow' as in 'low'); **e** ('uh' after consonants); **ü** (say 'ee' with your mouth rounded as if to say 'oo'); **ian** ('yen'); **ong** ('oong'); **u** ('oo', or sometimes like **ü**).

Tones

A given word can have many meanings depending on pitch changes in the voice. Tones are tricky and we haven't marked

them in the following words and phrases, but you have a good chance of making yourself understood through the context of your conversation.

NEGATION

Negation can be expressed by adding *bu* (or occasionally *mei*, as in the all-too-familiar *mei you*, 'we don't have any'), before adjectives and present-tense verbs.

QUESTIONS

A phrase becomes a question if you add *ma* to the end of it, eg *ni dong* (you understand), *ni dong ma?* (do you understand?). You can also make a question by juxtaposing positive and negative forms, eg *yao bu yao?* ('want-not-want?', meaning 'do you want it?'), *you mei you?* ('have-not-have?', meaning 'do you have it?'), *hao bu hao?* ('good-not-good?', meaning 'OK?').

CONVERSATION, WORDS & PHRASES

In the following words and phrases, some pronunciation guidelines have been included (in brackets) after some the trickier Pinyin letters and combinations.

Hello. (are you well?)	<i>ni hao</i>
Goodbye.	<i>zaijian</i>
Please.	<i>qing</i>
Thank you.	<i>xiexie</i>
Excuse me	<i>dui bu qi ...</i> (dway-bu-chee)
Yes. (correct)	<i>dui.</i> (dway)
No. (not correct/not so)	<i>bu dui/bu shi</i>
Do you speak English?	<i>ni hui shuo yingyu ma?</i>
A little bit.	<i>yi dian-dian</i> (yee dyen-dyen)
I can't speak Mandarin.	<i>wo bu hui shuo putonghua</i>
Do you understand?	<i>ni dong ma?</i>
I don't understand.	<i>wo ting bu dong</i>
(your language)	
I can't read that.	<i>wo kan bu dong</i>
(Chinese characters)	
Where are you going?	<i>qu na li?/qu nar?</i>
Where are you from?	<i>ni cong nali lai de?</i>
I'm from ...	<i>wo cong ... lai de</i>
Where is (the toilet)?	<i>(cesuo) zai na li?</i>
Do you have (hot water)?	<i>(kai shui), you mei you?</i>
I (don't) have rice.	<i>wo (mei) you fan</i>
I (don't) want tea.	<i>wo (bu) yao cha</i>
How much is it?	<i>dao-shao qian?</i>
Too expensive!	<i>tai gui-le!</i>
Is it allowed?	<i>ke bu keyi? (kuh bu kuh-yee)</i>

Wait a moment. *deng yi huar* (dung yee hwar)
No problem. *mei guanxi* (may gwan-shee)

good/bad *hao/huai*
expensive *gui* (gway)
left/right *zuo/you*
open (for travel) *kaifang* (kye-fung)
broken *huai-le* (hwy-luh)
here/there *zhe-li/na-li*

Toilets *cèsuǒ* 厕所
Men *nán* 男
Women *nǚ* 女

ACCOMMODATION & SERVICES

dormitory *sushe* (su-shuh)
double room *shuang ren fangjian*
guesthouse *binguan*
hotel (cheaper) *lüguan*
key *yaoshi* (yow-shr)
shower *linyü* (leen-yü)
single room *dan-ren fangjian*

airmail *hang-kong*
bank *yinhang*
hospital *yi yuan*
money *qian* (chyen)
RMB *renminbi*
US dollar *meiyuan*
post office *you-ju* (yoh-jü)
Public Security Bureau *gong-an ju*
stamp *you-piao*
telephone *dianhua* (dyen-hwa)
toilet *cesuo* (tsuh-swoh)
toilet paper *weisheng zhi* (way-shung jr)

TRANSPORT

airport *feiji chang*
bicycle *zixingche* (dzih-sheeng-chuh)
bus *qiche* (chee-chuh)
bus station *qiche zhan*
Karakoram Highway *zhong-pa gong lu*
map *ditu*
ticket to (Ghez) *dao (ghez) de piao*
train station *huoche zhan*
truck *dakache*

NUMBERS

The simplest (though not always grammatically precise) way to count is (number)-ge-(object); eg 'two people' is *liang-ge ren*.

-½	<i>ban</i>	
1	<i>yi/yao</i>	一 / 幺
2	<i>er/liang</i>	二 / 两
3	<i>san</i>	三

4	<i>si</i>	四
5	<i>wu</i>	五
6	<i>liu</i>	六
7	<i>qi</i> (chee)	七
8	<i>ba</i>	八
9	<i>jiu</i>	九
10	<i>shi</i> (shr)	十
11	<i>shi yi</i>	十一
20	<i>er shi</i>	二十
21	<i>er shi yi</i>	二十一
30	<i>san shi</i>	三十
100	<i>yi bai</i>	一百
200	<i>liang bai</i>	二百
1000	<i>yi qian</i> (... chyen)	一千

TIME

When? (date) *ji hao?*
When? (time) *ji dian?*
today *jintian*
tomorrow *mingtian*
yesterday *zuotian*
now *xianzai* (shyen-dzai)
(five) o'clock *(wu)-dian*
half-past (eight) *(ba)-dian ban*
(three) hours *(san)-ge xiaoshi* (... shyow-shr)
half an hour *ban-ge xiaoshi*

For days of the week, use *xingqi* (shing-chee) plus a number (Monday = 1 through Saturday = 6; for example, *xingqi wu* is Friday). Sunday is *xingqi tian*.

PASHTO

Pashto is the speech of the Pashtuns in eastern Afghanistan and Pakistan's North-West Frontier Province. Though there are some regional differences in pronunciation between the Swati and Afghan dialects (eg the northerners call themselves Pakhtun, the southerners Pashtun), this is still the lingua franca (linking language) from the Indus to Kabul. Along the KKH you'll hear it (mixed with other dialects) in Besham, Batagram and Mansehra. Stress is indicated in the following words and phrases by capitals.

Hello. *asalaam aleikum*
Welcome. *pakhair*
How are you? *sa hal dey?/singa hal dey?*
Fine. *khey ma*
Where are you going? *chertha zey?*
Goodbye. *de khuday pe aman*
 (person leaving)

Goodbye. (person staying)	<i>pa makha de ha</i>
Thank you.	<i>shukhria</i>
Yes/No.	<i>au/na</i>
very good	<i>(der) khey</i>
expensive/cheap	<i>gran/arzan</i>

FOOD & DRINKS

egg	<i>ay</i>
food	<i>doreh/roti</i>
meat	<i>wakha</i>
tea with milk	<i>sur chai</i>
tea without milk	<i>tor chai</i>
vegetable	<i>sabzi</i>
(cold) water	<i>(yakha) ubuh</i>

NUMBERS

1	<i>yau</i>
2	<i>dua</i>
3	<i>drei</i>
4	<i>salor</i>
5	<i>pinze</i>
6	<i>shpag</i>
7	<i>uwo</i>
8	<i>ata</i>
9	<i>haha</i>
10	<i>las</i>
100	<i>sel (sawa)</i>
1000	<i>zer</i>

TIME

today	<i>nan</i>
tomorrow	<i>sabah</i>
yesterday	<i>paroon</i>
day after tomorrow	<i>bel sabah</i>
now	<i>os</i>
later	<i>rusto</i>

SHINA

Shina is spoken in lower Hunza and Nagar (below the KKH bridge near Minapin); Gilgit and its valleys (Naltar, Bagrot, Haramosh and the upper Gilgit River watershed); Chilas and northeast Indus Kohistan. Meanings are often dependent on tones, so only the simplest words are given here. Stress is indicated in the following words and phrases by capitals.

CONVERSATION, WORDS & PHRASES

Hello.	<i>aLA</i>
Goodbye.	<i>huDA haFIZ</i>
How are you?	<i>je kal han?</i>

Fine.	<i>mishto han/mehrbani</i>
Please.	<i>mehrBAni teh</i>
Thank you.	<i>bakhSHISH</i>
Yes/No.	<i>aWA/neh</i>
Maybe.	<i>beBEY</i>
What's your name?	<i>tei jek nom han?</i>
My name is ...	<i>mei nom ... han</i>
Where are you from?	<i>tu KONyo haNO?</i>
I'm from ...	<i>ma ... haNOOS</i>
Do you speak English?	<i>toot anGREzi wa nah?</i>
I don't understand.	<i>ma (neh) paRUdus</i>
How much is it?	<i>jek garch han?</i>
Where is ...?	<i>... kon han?</i>
I like (Gilgit).	<i>mas (gilgit) paSANTamus</i>
I only eat vegetables.	<i>mas ShruF SHAKamus</i>

single room	<i>ek muSHAI KAmara</i>
double room	<i>ek du muSHO KAmara</i>

FOOD & DRINKS

food	<i>koig</i>
apricot	<i>jeroti</i>
dried apricots	<i>faTOR</i>
egg	<i>haNEH</i>
food/bread	<i>tiki</i>
meat	<i>moz/mots</i>
rice	<i>briw</i>
salt	<i>paJU</i>
wholewheat bread	<i>chupatti/dudurtik</i>
vegetable	<i>sha</i>
yogurt	<i>MUtu dut</i>
milk	<i>dut (rhymes with 'put')</i>
tea	<i>chai</i>
water	<i>wei</i>

NUMBERS

1	<i>ek</i>
2	<i>du</i>
3	<i>cheh</i>
4	<i>char</i>
5	<i>poe (nasal e)</i>
6	<i>sha</i>
7	<i>saat</i>
8	<i>aash</i>
9	<i>nau</i>
10	<i>dai</i>
20	<i>bi</i>
30	<i>bigaDAI</i>
40	<i>DUbyo</i>
50	<i>DUbiga DAI</i>
60	<i>SHAbyo</i>
70	<i>SHAbyoga DAI</i>
80	<i>CHARbyo</i>
90	<i>CHARbyoga DAI</i>
100	<i>shal</i>
1000	<i>saas</i>

TIME

What time is it?	<i>je ken han?</i>
It's (10) o'clock	<i>(dai) baSHEGen</i>
When?	<i>gaREH?</i>
today	<i>aach</i>
tomorrow	<i>lushTEH</i>
yesterday	<i>baLA</i>
now	<i>ten</i>
at once	<i>dahm</i>

Monday	<i>tsanDUra</i>
Tuesday	<i>anGAro</i>
Wednesday	<i>BODo</i>
Thursday	<i>beRESpat</i>
Friday	<i>SHUKura</i>
Saturday	<i>shimSHER</i>
Sunday	<i>aDIT</i>

UYGHUR

Uyghur is spoken all over Xinjiang and in parts of Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. It's a Turkic language salted with words from Chinese, Mongol, Kyrgyz, Uzbek, Wakhi, Russian, Urdu, Arabic and Persian. In China, written Uyghur uses an Arabic script, although for a time children were taught a Romanised alphabet. For more Uyghur vocabulary, get a copy of Lonely Planet's *Central Asia Phrasebook*. The words and phrases in this section reflect the Kashgar dialect.

The letter **a** is as in 'father', while **ä** is like the 'a' in 'hat'. The letter **o** is as in 'go', while **ö** is pronounced as the 'e' in 'her', but with lips well rounded. The letter **u** is as in 'put', while **ü** is pronounced as the 'i' in 'bit' with the lips rounded and pushed forward. The letter combination **gh** is a guttural 'r' sound, as in French or Hebrew, while **kh** sounds like the 'ch' in 'Bach'. The letter **q** is like English 'k', pronounced deep in the throat. The majority of words are accented on the last syllable. Stress is indicated in the following words and phrases by capitals.

CONVERSATION, WORDS & PHRASES

Greetings. (pol)	<i>äsaLAmu äLEYkum</i>
Hello/How are you?	<i>yakhSHImo siz?</i>
I'm well/happy.	<i>men YAKHshi</i>
Goodbye.	<i>khayr khosh</i>
Thank you (very much).	<i>(küp) räkhMÄT</i>

Sorry/Excuse me/ Forgive me.	<i>KEchurong</i>
Yes.	<i>shunDAQ</i>
No.	<i>yak</i>
Maybe.	<i>belKIM</i>
Please.	<i>merheMET</i>
Where are you going?	<i>NÄga BARsiz?</i>
Where is (the station)?	<i>(biKET) khaYERde?</i>
What's the name of this place?	<i>buYARnung isME niME?</i>
How much is it?	<i>QANche pul?</i>
What's your name?	<i>isMUNGuz NIme?</i>
My name is ...	<i>MInung isMEM (jan) chüEN (MI) dem</i>
I (don't) understand.	<i>(chay) BARmo?</i>
Do you have (tea)?	<i>bar/yok</i>
We do/don't. Please give me (a beer).	<i>(piVE) birUNG</i>
I don't eat meat.	<i>güsh yiMEY men</i>
I (don't) like Kashgar.	<i>qashQAR-ne YAKHshi KÜR(mey)men</i>
I'm lost.	<i>IZip QALdim</i>
Go away!	<i>ket!</i>

hotel	<i>MIHmankhana</i>
cheap room	<i>erZAN yaTAQ</i>
single/double room	<i>bir/Iki kshLIK yaTAQ</i>
dormitory	<i>küp kshLIK yaTAQ</i>
bed	<i>karYAT</i>
key	<i>achKUCH</i>
public toilet	<i>khaLA</i>
Chinese money	<i>yuan/kuai ('koi')/jiao/mao ('mo')</i>
guide	<i>yolbashCHE</i>
hospital	<i>DOKtorkhana</i>
police	<i>sakhCHE</i>
post office	<i>poshtKHANA</i>
shop	<i>duKAN</i>
Sunday market	<i>YENGa baZAR</i>

good/bad	<i>YAKHshi/yaMAN</i>
expensive	<i>khumMET</i>
left/right	<i>sol/ong</i>
this/that	<i>bu/Awu</i>
here/there	<i>buYER/uYER</i>
north	<i>janOP</i>
south	<i>shiMAL</i>
east	<i>shärq</i>
west	<i>ghärp</i>

TRANSPORT

bus	<i>apTUZ</i>
bus station/stop	<i>apTUZ biKET</i>
ticket	<i>biLET</i>
bicycle	<i>viISPIT</i>

FOOD & DRINK

food	taMAQ
restaurant/food stall	ashKHAna
bread	nan
bagel	gzhde
flat-bread	akNAN
fish	biLIQ
noodles	laghMÄN
fried rice & meat	plo/poLA
meat	güsh
beef	kaLA güshE
chicken	toHO güshE
mutton	qoy güshE
steamed rice	gangPEN
vegetable	sey
yogurt	QITik
apple	ALma
fig	enJÜ
grapes	üzÜM
melon	khoGHON
watermelon	TAvuz
peach	shapTUL
pear	aMUT

beer	piVE
tea	chay
water	su
boiled water	khayNAQ su

NUMBERS

-½	YERim
1	bir
2	lki
3	üch
4	tüt
5	besht
6	aITE
7	yeTE
8	seyKIZ
9	toQUZ
10	ön
20	yigirME
30	otTUZ
40	QURuk
50	eLIK
60	atMISH
70	yetMISH
80	sekSEN
90	tokhSAN
100	yüz
1000	mung

TIME

What's the time?	sa'ET KANche BOLde?
It's (six) o'clock.	(ALte) BOLde

When/At what time?	sa'ET KANche de?
at (five) o'clock	(besh) de
today	büGÜN
tomorrow	Äte
yesterday	TÜnegün
now	HAzir

Monday	dushemBE
Tuesday	seyshemBE
Wednesday	charshemBE
Thursday	peyshemBE
Friday	juMÄ
Saturday	shemBE
Sunday	yekshemBE

WAKHI

Wakhi is the speech of the Wakhi tribe of Tajik people in Gojal and Afghanistan's Wakhan Corridor. It's very similar to the speech of other Tajiks in the Tashkurgan region and Tajikistan.

CONVERSATION, WORDS & PHRASES

Hello.	asalaam aleikum
Goodbye.	khudar hafiz
How are you?	chiz hawli?/baaf ateya?
I'm well.	uzum baaf
Yes/No.	yau/nei
Please.	mehrboni
Thank you.	shobosh
Excuse me/Sorry.	mofsar
What's your name?	ti noongi chiz?
My name is ...	zhu noongi ...
Where are you from?	tut koom dyoren?
I'm from ...	uzum ...
Do you speak English?	torezh angrezi vizta?
I (don't) understand.	mazhe malum tei/(nahst)
Where is ...?	... kumar?
I don't know.	dishma
How much (is it)?	yem chizi tsumrer?
I want (tea).	uzesh (choiyeh) zokh-tsaram
I don't eat meat.	uzesh gusht nei yowem
I'm lost.	mazhe hu fdek nost
Go away!	trabarech!

bed	pipr
guesthouse	mehmonkhona
hotel	hoteli
room	jayi
single/double room	yi/bu khaalgeh pipr
Wakhi-style	khikwor-khun
key	weshik
guide	fdek disuv nikuz

market	<i>bozor</i>
shop	<i>dukon</i>
toilet	<i>tarkank</i>
very	<i>ghafeh</i>
good/bad	<i>baaf/shaak</i>
left/right	<i>chap/rost</i>
this/that	<i>yem/ya</i>
here/there	<i>drem/dra</i>
north	<i>shumaal</i>
south	<i>jinu</i>
east	<i>mashriq</i>
west	<i>maghrib</i>

FOOD & DRINKS

restaurant	<i>shapik yiteh jai</i>
apple	<i>mur</i>
apricot	<i>chuan</i>
egg	<i>tukhmurgeh</i>
food/bread	<i>shapik</i>
meat	<i>gosht</i>
rice	<i>gerangeal</i>
vegetable	<i>ghazk</i>
wholewheat bread	<i>kamishdoon/dildungi</i>
yogurt	<i>pai</i>
buttermilk	<i>deegh</i>
milk	<i>bursh</i>
tea	<i>choi</i>
water	<i>yupek</i>

TIME

What time is it?	<i>tumar wakhti vitk?</i>
When?	<i>tsoghdar?</i>
today	<i>wuthk</i>

tomorrow	<i>pigha</i>
yesterday	<i>yezi</i>
now	<i>niveh</i>
Monday	<i>dushambi</i>
Tuesday	<i>sishambi</i>
Wednesday	<i>chorshambi</i>
Thursday	<i>panshambi</i>
Friday	<i>juma</i>
Saturday	<i>shambi</i>
Sunday	<i>yekshambi</i>

NUMBERS

1	<i>yiū</i>
2	<i>bui</i>
3	<i>trui</i>
4	<i>tsebur</i>
5	<i>panz</i>
6	<i>shal</i>
7	<i>hoob</i>
8	<i>haat</i>
9	<i>nau</i>
10	<i>thas</i>
20	<i>wist</i>
30	<i>wista-thas</i>
40	<i>buwist</i>
50	<i>buwista-thas</i>
60	<i>truwist</i>
70	<i>truwista-thas</i>
80	<i>tseburwist</i>
90	<i>tseburwista-thas</i>
100	<i>saad</i>
1000	<i>hazor</i>

Glossary

The glossary contains some of the words and terms you may come across during your time in Pakistan. For definitions of food and drink see p62.

ablation valley – small valley that runs parallel to the glacier at its margins

Allah – God

amir – chieftain, nobleman; also called emir

an – mountain pass (Khowar)

Aryan – those who migrated to the northern subcontinent from Persia

asalaam aleikum – Muslim greeting, literally 'peace be with you'; the usual response is *wa aleikum salaam*, 'and with you too'

autorickshaw – noisy, three-wheeled, motorised contraption for transporting passengers, livestock, bags of grain etc for short distances; cheaper than taxis

Ayurveda – ancient and complex science of Indian herbal medicine and healing

azad – free (Urdu), as in Azad Jammu & Kashmir

azan – Muslim call to prayer

badgir – traditional tower built beside houses in certain semidesert regions, eg Thatta, to funnel in breezes

bagh – garden

baksheesh – donation (alms), tip or bribe

bar – river, valley or stream (Burushaski)

begum – respectful title for a Muslim woman (usually of high rank)

bhang – dried leaves and flowering shoots of the marijuana plant

bhangra – rhythmic Punjabi music/dance

bidi – small, hand-rolled cigarette

biradari – clan

brak – mountain or mountain pasture (Balti)

burka – one-piece garment used by conservative Muslim women to cover themselves from head to toe

buzkashi – Afghan variant of horse polo, traditionally played with a goat's head or carcass (or these days, often a replica) instead of a ball

cantonment – administrative and military area of a Raj-era town

caravanserai – basic accommodation traditionally for camel caravans; also called serai

chador – lightweight woollen blanket often worn as a shawl by Pakistani men and sometimes doubling as a blanket, pillow, curtain etc

chaikhana – teahouse

chappals – sandals or leather thong-like footwear

charas – resin of the marijuana plant; also referred to as 'hashish'

charbagh – formal Persian garden, divided into quarters (literally 'four gardens')

charpoy – simple bed made of ropes knotted together on a wooden frame

chhish – mountain (Burushaski)

chinkara – gazelle

chital – spotted deer

chogha – embroidered, sometimes ceremonial, woollen cloak with oversize sleeves common in the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) and Northern Areas

chowk – town square, roundabout, major intersection or marketplace

chowkidar – caretaker; night watchman

crore – 10 million

dacoit – bandit, outlaw

dak – staging post; government-run accommodation

dargah – shrine or place of burial of a Muslim saint

dhaba – basic restaurant or snack bar

dhobi – person who washes clothes

dhobi ghat – place where clothes are washed

dhol – traditional, large, two-sided Punjabi drum

dholki – a smaller version of the *dhol*

dhurrie – rug

dum pukht – traditional steam-pressure cooking technique that uses a clay pot

dupatta – long scarf for women worn with the *shalwar kameez*; used as head and chest cover in mosques, conservative company, bazaars etc

durbar – royal court; also a government

emir – chieftain, nobleman; also called *amir*

Eve-teasing – sexual harassment

fakir – member of any religious order of Islam; a Muslim who has taken a vow of poverty

gah – river, valley or stream (Shina); place (Persian)

gali – mountain pass (Shina)

gang – glacier (Balti)

ganja – dried flowering tips of marijuana plant

geyser – hot-water unit found in many bathrooms

ghat – steps or landing on a river, range of hills, or road up hills

ghazal – Urdu song derived from poetry; poignant love theme

ghazi – warrior of Islam

gol – river, valley or stream (Khowar)
gomukh – glacier (Shina)
gree – col or depression in a chain of mountains (Khowar)
gulli – lane or alleyway
gurdwara – Sikh temple
Guru Granth Sahib – Sikh holy book

haghost – mountain pass (Burushaski)
haj – Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca
hammad – public bathhouse and barbershop; Turkish bath
haveli – traditional residence or mansion, often ornately decorated
Hejira – flight of the Prophet Mohammed from Mecca to Medina on 16 July AD 622; this is the reference for dates in the Islamic calendar, designated AH, 'After Hejira'
hijab – headscarf
hijra – eunuch, transvestite
hiran – deer
hujra – Pashtun village guesthouse

iftar – breaking of the Ramazan fast at sunset
imam – Muslim religious leader
imam barga – special meeting hall used only for the Shiite festivals of Ashura and Chhelum
in sha' Allah – Arabic for 'If God wills it', almost a standard part of the future tense in Islamic countries

jaamat khana – Ismaili community hall, their closest equivalent to a mosque
jami masjid or **jami mosque** – generic name for mosque used for Friday prayers
jenab – respectful title for a man, along the lines of 'Sir'
jihad – holy war
jirga – council of tribal elders

kafir – Islamic term for a heathen or nonbeliever
karez – old, subterranean water channels used for irrigation
Khan – Muslim honorific title
khana – food
khayaban – boulevard or avenue, eg Khayaban-i Suhrawardy means Suhrawardy Avenue
khel – clan
khizdi – tent
khussadar – tribal guard or levy
khwar – tributary stream or valley (Pashto)
Koran – see Quran
kotal – pass (Pashto)
kucheri – law courts (sometimes kutchery)
kurta – long shirt with short collar or no collar

la – mountain pass (Balti)
lakh – 100,000
levies – rural police drawn by the local feudal chief from his own tribe or clan

Line of Control (LoC) – boundary dividing Pakistan-administered and India-administered Kashmir
lungma – river, valley or stream (Balti)

mahal – house or palace
maharaja – literally 'Great King'; Hindu or Sikh princely ruler
maharani – wife of a princely ruler or a ruler in her own right
malik – (title of) a Pashtun tribal chief
masala – mix (often spices)
masjid – mosque
maulana – see *maulvi*
maulvi – mullah, (title of) an Islamic cleric of any rank; also called *maulana*
mazar – Islamic grave
Mehtar – princely ruler (Chitral)
mela – fair or festival
mihrab – mosque 'prayer niche' that faces Mecca
mir – (title of) traditional rulers of Hunza and Nagry
miri – citadel
Moghul – see *Mughal*
Mohajir – one of the millions of Urdu-speaking Muslims who fled from India at Partition (1947), settling mainly around Karachi (Sindh)
monsoon – rainy season
moraine – mass of rocks left by a glacier; along a glacier's margins (a lateral moraine), in its centre (a medial moraine) and at its mouth (a terminal moraine)
muezzin – one who calls Muslims to prayer, traditionally from the minaret of a mosque
Mughal – Muslim dynasty of subcontinental emperors from Babur to Aurangzeb
Mughlai food – recipes influenced by the Mughals; typical of North Indian cuisine
mullah – Muslim scholar or religious leader
musafir khana – literally 'traveller's place', cheap travellers' inn with *chappoys* and basic meals
Muslim – adherent of the Islamic faith
muztagh – literally 'ice mountain' in Turkic languages, a cluster of the highest peaks of the Karakoram, from which the major glaciers descend

nala – stream, river or valley
namaz – Muslim prayers
nautch – dance
nautch girls – dancing girls; these days most nautch girls are essentially prostitutes
nawab – Muslim prince or powerful landowner
nazim – a local government's chief elected official
nilgai – antelope

pamir – glacially formed high-elevation valleys renowned as summer grazing grounds
pani – water

parao – traditional stage or length of a day's march, used to calculate porters' wages

Parsi – adherent of the Zoroastrian faith; also spelt Parsee

Partition – formal division of British India into two separate countries, India and Pakistan, on 14 August 1947

Pashtun – member of one of the interrelated tribes on both sides of the Pakistan–Afghanistan border; southern tribespeople usually call themselves Pukhtun

Pathan – a corruption (probably from Urdu) of Pashtun or Pukhtun

PCO – Public Call Office; where you can make local, interstate and international telephone calls

piala – small bowl in which *chanaki* is served

pietra dura – marble inlay work

pir – holy man; (title of) a Sufi saint

pish – dwarf palm used for handicrafts

PTDC – Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation

Pukhtun – see Pashtun

purdah – custom among some conservative Muslims of keeping women in seclusion; veiled

qawwali – Islamic devotional singing

qila – fort

Quaid-i-Azam – 'Great Leader', Pakistanis' honorific title for Mohammed Ali Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan

Quran – the holy book of Islam; also spelt Koran

raj – rule or sovereignty

Ramazan (Ramadan) – the Islamic holy month of sunrise-to-sunset fasting (no eating, drinking or smoking); most commonly referred to as Ramazan in Pakistan

sahib – respectful title applied to a man

samadhi – shrine

sardar – hereditary title granted to certain tribal chiefs and nobles in Muslim areas by the British

sarhad – frontier; capitalised, it refers to the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP)

serai – cheap travellers' inn, often with charpoys and basic meals; also called caravanserai

shahadah – Muslim declaration of faith ('There is no God but Allah; Mohammed is his prophet')

shahrah – road, eg Shahrah-i-Iqbal means Iqbal Rd

shalwar kameez – traditional dresslike tunic and trouser combination with styles for both women and men; sometimes spelt/pronounced *salwar qamiz*

sharia – Islamic law

sitar – Indian stringed musical instrument

Sufi – Muslim mystic

Sufism – Islamic mysticism

Suzuki – a tiny Suzuki utility with a flimsy canopy for cheap, cramped intra-city transport.

tabla – twin drums

tangi – gorge

technical – referring to climbing or mountaineering skills and techniques required to complete a route

tempo – noisy, three-wheeler public-transport vehicle; bigger than an autorickshaw

tiffin – snack or meal container, often made of stainless steel; snack

tonga – a two- or four-wheeled horse-drawn cart used for public transport

true left – the actual left bank of a river when facing downstream

true right – the actual right bank of a river when facing downstream

urs – death anniversary of a revered person

uween – mountain pass (Wakhi)

wallah – man; added onto anything, eg dhobi-wallah, taxi-wallah; not as widely used in Pakistan as in India

zakat – charitable donation, the third Pillar of Islam

zamindar – powerful landowner

zherav – river, valley or stream (Wakhi)

ziarat – shrine

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