

# Kabul کابل



When the Taliban fled Kabul in the face of the post-9/11 US bombing campaign, they left a city wrecked by years of war. Half the city consisted of rubble and no-one could remember the last time anything new had been built. It was a city on life-support.

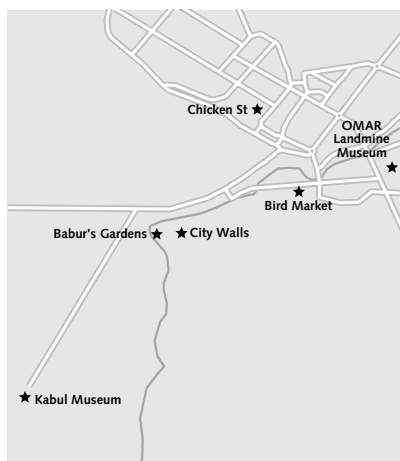
Today, Kabul seems to change on an almost daily basis. Swathes of the city have been cleared, and new buildings are quickly thrown up as if in a steroid-powered building contest. The air is thick with the sound of mobile phones. New restaurants and busy bazaars cater to the nouveau riche Afghans surfing an economic boom and the sizeable international community helping with Afghanistan's reconstruction (or just making money out of it). While there's a long way to go before Kabul is restored to its position as a travellers' haunt, there's a whiff of its old cosmopolitan self in the air.

But it's not all roses and flashy new 4WD cars. Electricity and clean water remain a distant aspiration for the majority of the population, which has doubled since the end of 2001 with returning refugees. Plenty of Kabulis still live in bombed-out buildings or worse, and beggars, war widows and street children further swell the traffic jams that clog the city. Reconstruction for the poorest has been frustratingly slow.

Kabul today is a fascinating snapshot of the birth pangs of a new nation, and a city permanently on the cusp of change. As an introduction to Afghanistan it's exciting, frustrating, inspiring and shocking in equal measure.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Enjoy the green spaces and flowers of **Babur's Gardens** (p87), recently restored to their former glory
- Ponder the surviving exhibits at the **Kabul Museum** (p88), a frontline in Afghanistan's struggle to keep its heritage alive
- Climb above the **City Walls** (p90) for crisp air and mountain views over the city
- Visit the **OMAR Landmine Museum** (p93) to learn more about the silent killers still plaguing the country
- Haggle for carpets and lapis lazuli in **Chicken Street** (p102), home to Afghanistan's keenest souvenir sellers
- Experience the sights and smells of old Kabul at the traditional **Bird Market** (p90) of Ka Faroshi



■ AREA CODE: 020

■ POPULATION: 3 MILLION (ESTIMATED)

■ ELEVATION: 1800M

