

# Herat & Northwestern Afghanistan

## هرات و شمال غرب افغانستان



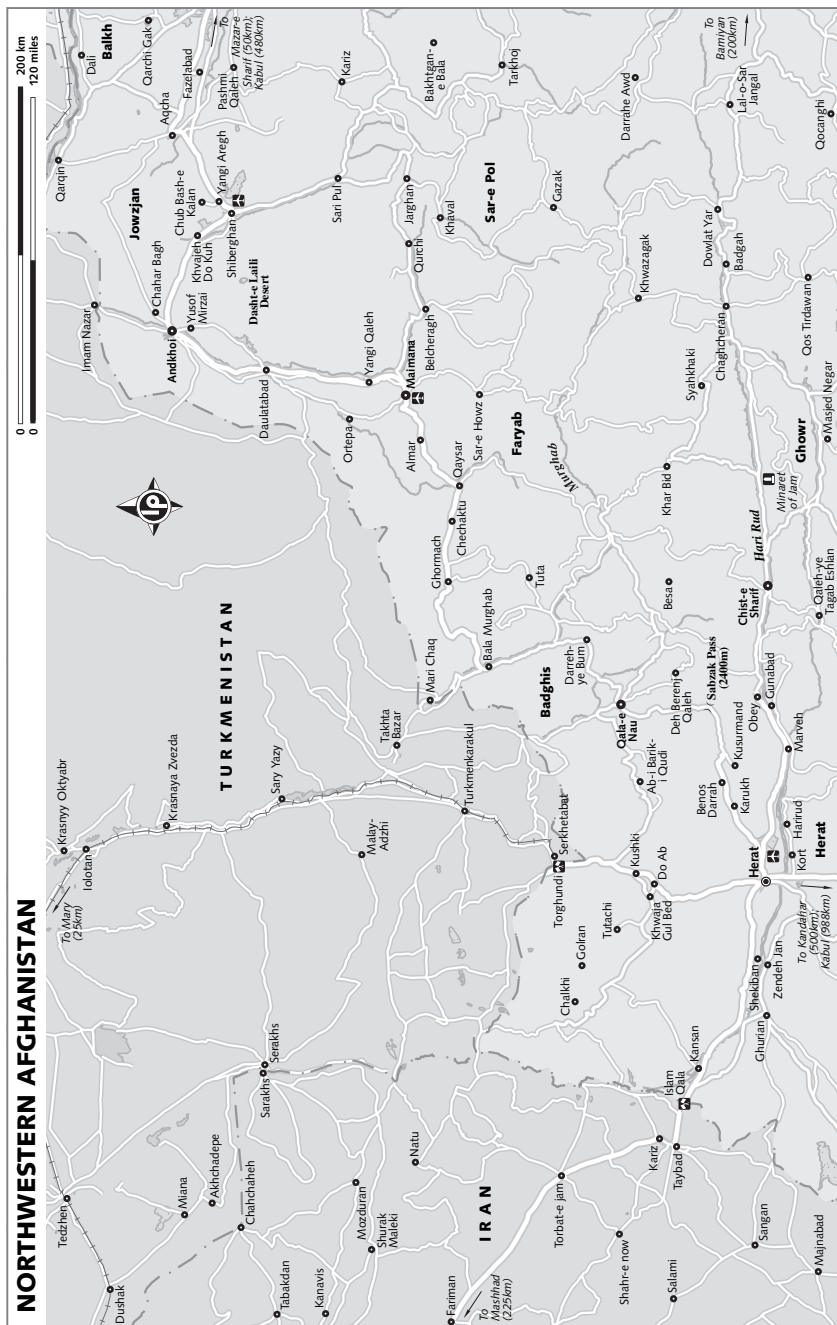
'Khorasan is the oyster shell of the world, and Herat is its pearl', says an old proverb, referring to this Afghan city's pre-eminence in a region that covered much of medieval Iran and Turkmenistan. It's a saying that still holds much truth, for Herat still shines as the cultural centre of Afghanistan, a seat of poetry, learning and architecture. Invaders from Genghis Khan to the Russians have all taken turns at flattening it, but Herat still manages to hold its head high, offer its visitors tea and suggest they sample its attractions. And there's much to take in, from the Citadel that towers over the Old City to its glorious Friday Mosque and many shrines. Those coming from Kabul will be equally amazed by the efficiency of its infrastructure, not least the electricity supply.

From this ancient Silk Road oasis, the road crosses the Safed Koh mountains – the last outpost of the Hindu Kush – to reach the northwest. Here the land flattens out to form part of the Central Asian steppe, a semidesert that's home to Kuchi nomads and Turkmen and Uzbek farmers. This is the main centre for the greatest of the country's folk arts, the Afghan carpet, and the bright swatches of knotted wool contrast sharply with the dusty landscape that produces them.

### HIGHLIGHTS

- Gaze in awe at the dazzling mosaic tiling of the **Friday Mosque** (p136) in Herat
- Contemplate poetry with the Sufis at **Gazar Gah** (p138), one of Afghanistan's holiest sites
- Climb the battlements of Herat's **Citadel** (p137) for sweeping views across the city
- Hagggle for carpets at the bazaar in **Andkhoi** (p144), the northwest's most traditional market town





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