

# Jalalabad & Eastern Afghanistan

## جلال آباد و شرق افغانستان



Think of the great clichés of the Afghan character and you'll be transported to Afghanistan's rugged east. Tales of honour, hospitality and revenge abound here, as hardy fighters defend the lonely mountain passes that lead to the Indian subcontinent. For Afghan, read Pashtun: the dominant ethnic group in the east whose tribal links spill across the border deep into Pakistan.

Jalalabad is the region's most important city. Founded by the Mughals as a winter retreat, it sits in an area with links back to when Afghanistan was a Buddhist country and a place of monasteries, pilgrims and prayer wheels. Sweltering in summer, you can quench your thirst with a mango juice before heading for the cooler climes of the Kabul Plateau, via the jaw-dropping Tangi Gharu Gorge.

A stone's throw from Jalalabad is the Khyber Pass, the age-old gateway to the Indian subcontinent. Getting your passport stamped here as you slip between Afghanistan and Pakistan is to experience one of Asia's most evocative border crossings. If you've been in Afghanistan a while, you might find the sudden Pakistani insistence on providing you with an armed guard for your onward journey a little bemusing.

Sadly much of the east remains out of bounds to travellers. The failures of post-conflict reconstruction have allowed an Islamist insurgency to smoulder among the peaks and valleys that dominate this part of the country. The beautiful woods and slopes of Nuristan – long a travellers' grail – remain as distant a goal as ever and the current climate means that carefully checking security issues remains paramount before any trip to the region.

### HIGHLIGHTS

- Enjoy the orange blossom of the many gardens in **Jalalabad** (p182)
- Cross the iconic **Khyber Pass** (p185), the gateway to Peshawar in Pakistan
- Take in the shade of the Mughal gardens at **Nimla** (p184)





**CLIMATE**

The plains of the east are hot and dry in the summer, although Jalalabad catches a lot of humidity which can make it a sticky place from mid-June to early September, with temperatures pushing over 30°C. Winters are cool and fall below freezing in the mountains, with snow on the high peaks, including the wooded slopes of Nuristan.

**GETTING THERE & AWAY**

A recently repaved highway runs from Kabul through eastern Afghanistan to Jalalabad and the Pakistan border at Torkham. There are plentiful transport connections along this corridor. Crossing the border into Pakistan is pretty straightforward – an early enough start can see you have breakfast in Kabul and dinner in Peshawar.

**JALALABAD جلال آباد**

Jalalabad, Afghanistan’s largest eastern city and the capital of Nangahar province, lies roughly equidistant between Kabul and the

Pakistan border at Torkham. It sits in the lee of the Safed Koh Mountains in a fertile plain watered by the Kabul river. Compared to the capital it’s something of a green oasis, warm in winter but hot and sticky in summer.

The winter climate meant that Jalalabad was a popular retreat for Afghan rulers since it was founded by the Mughal emperor Akbar in 1570. The region’s historical importance predates Islam however. Between the 2nd and 7th centuries AD, the Gandharan culture of the Kushans flourished in the Jalalabad valley and it was a place of pilgrimage rivalling Bamiyan. Nearby, Hadda was a hugely important complex of monasteries and caves used as monk’s retreats can be seen on the far side of the river when leaving Jalalabad for Kabul. Islam arrived when Mahmud of Ghazni tore through to India in the 11th century, and much of the area’s subsequent history was tied precisely to controlling the route to the subcontinent through the Khyber Pass.

Jalalabad was a British garrison during the First Anglo-Afghan War and received the one survivor of the disastrous retreat