

Kandahar & Southern Afghanistan



کندهار و جنوب افغانستان

The occasional black turban of a Talib, the white turban of the returning Haj pilgrim, the dirty boys in ragged *shalwar kameez* playing in the street, the fleeting pair of burqas billowing in the wind, the pick-up trucks brimming with rugged fighters, the henna-haired old man with his bird cages, the Pashtuns. Southern Afghanistan and Kandahar, its gateway city, is the crown of Pashtunwali and the Pashtun way of life – a culture that is questionably stronger than the religion many mistake it for.

Mullah Omar commanded the Taliban from here, he welcomed Osama Bin Laden here and the first ever democratically elected President of Afghanistan came from here. Politically and historically the south is the most significant region in Afghanistan.

Kandahar city at dusk from a roof top is Asia at its most beguiling – kites swinging in the air, pigeons tinkling back to perch, few buildings higher than two stories, mud roofs, and the desert mountains beyond – this could lull you into believing this was a peaceful, middling city, the hub of a wheel whose spokes lead to Oruzgan in the north, Helmand and Nimroz beyond to the west, Pakistan to the south and a climb to Kabul through Zabul and Ghazni in the east. But its charms remain locked securely behind high-walled compounds and few know the region for more than the draconian regime of the Taliban.

The tragedy of the south is that it has so much to offer in terms of the warm Pashtun culture of welcoming strangers and feeding them the finest fare of the household, world-class fruit and vegetables, and eerie landscapes where you can see a river bed, desert mountains and the curve of the earth in a single vista, but the extreme politics and violence that have and continue to consume the area mean that very few get to see it.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Sunrise over Kandahar and beyond from the **Forty Steps** (p193)
- Climb to the top of **Baba Wali Shrine** (p193) in Kandahar and look out over Arghandab Valley, followed by fresh juices and ice cream
- Explore the **Towers of Victory** (p196) and other remnants of the empire in Ghazni



KANDAHAR & SOUTHERN AFGHANISTAN

200 km
120 miles

