

Islamabad & Rawalpindi



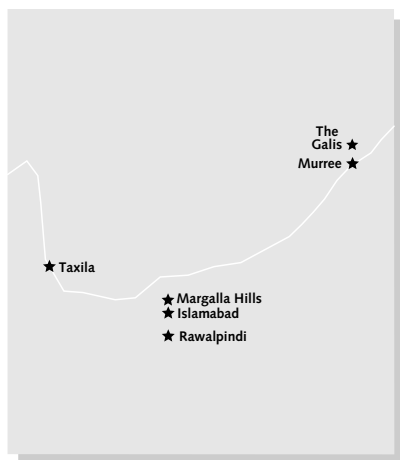
The so-called twin cities of Islamabad and Rawalpindi are commonly viewed as one unit, and indeed, one day the two will physically merge. However, these twins, with separate ancestry and distinct personalities, are far from identical. Islamabad is a late-20th-century capital laid out in straight lines 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

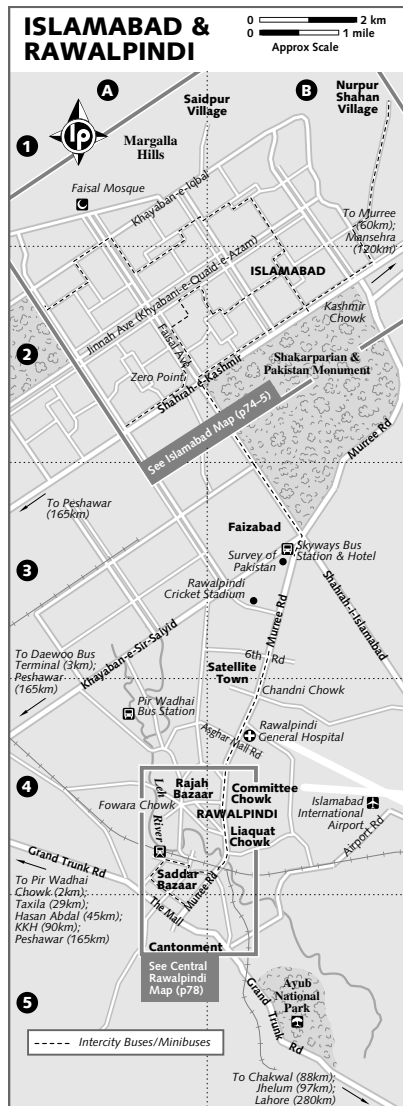
The two cities, 15km apart, are effectively a single mega-town with bazaars at one end and bureaucrats at the other. Transport between them is straightforward and relatively fast. The airport is about 5km northeast of Rawalpindi's Saddar Bazaar and can be reached by Suzukis and taxis (see p87).

Islamabad

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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-