

# Destination Pakistan

Pakistan has been on the brink of being tourism's 'next big thing' for more years than we care to remember. It's a destination that has so much to offer visitors, from some of the highest and most spectacular mountain ranges in the world to the architectural glories of the Mughal empire, and ancient bazaars to soul-spinning musical mystics. But every time the country seems to be gearing up to refresh the palates of travellers jaded with last year's hip destination, world media headlines send things off the rails – again.

No matter the attractions, tourism in Pakistan has always been something of a hard sell. A glance at the map shows the country living in a pretty difficult region: always-unruly Afghanistan to one side, Iran to another, and a border with India running through the 60-year-old fault line of Kashmir. But since the events of 9/11, Western pundits have increasingly been wondering if Pakistan isn't just living in a tough neighbourhood, it is the tough neighbourhood.

Pakistan and political stability have never been particularly happy bedfellows. President Pervez Musharraf, who seized power in a 1999 coup, looked to have an unassailable position until relatively recently. Selling himself as a bulwark against radical Islamism on one hand and the old corrupt elites on the other, he turned himself into a key player in Washington's 'War on Terror' and was rewarded with soft loans and military aid.

In 2007, everything was thrown into disorder. An attempt to sack the country's chief justice resulted in a red-faced retreat in the face of middle-class protests. At the same time, domestic Islamists stepped up their bloody campaigns in the wake of the deadly storming of Islamabad's Red Mosque. Pakistan's army had already found itself fighting to a standstill in the lawless Tribal Areas along the Afghan border, and later quelling related violence in the Swat Valley. It signed the short-lived Waziristan Compact that negotiated a peace – of sorts – with Pakistani Taliban, but ultimately showed that having once given official government sanction to such radicals, it was now holding a tiger by its tail.

At publication time, it was anyone's guess how Musharraf's attempts to pull things together would play. The imposition of a state of emergency curtailed the press and judiciary, and soon after being lifted, the country was rocked by the assassination of Benazir Bhutto, recently returned from exile to take her place again in Pakistani politics. Such a high-profile murder presaged a potentially very troubled future for Pakistan.

But against this background, there is another Pakistan, a world away from the headlines. Although conservative, Pakistanis are by nature a welcoming and hospitable people to foreigners, trying to get by in the face of indifference from their government and occasional hostility from the outside world. High politics is of less interest than jobs and the cost of cooking oil and flour. As such, travellers are usually met with genuine interest and enthusiasm. The scams and hustle you might experience in heavily travelled India are nowhere to be seen here. Instead, look forward to spontaneously offered cups of tea and conversations about cricket.

You'll feel like you have the country to yourself. Attractions that would have been splashed over the glossy pages of newspaper travel supplements are almost empty. While enthusiastic travel advice comes tinged with official government travel advisories, you'll need to keep one eye on the news before booking your ticket – but once here, you'll realise that Pakistan really is one of the world's best-kept travel secrets.

## FAST FACTS

Population: 164,741,900  
(2007 estimate)

Population under 14:  
36.9%

Adult literacy: 63%  
(men), 36% (women)

Infant mortality rate: 68  
per 1000 live births

Gross Domestic Product  
per capita: US\$2600

External debt: 55%  
of GDP

Unemployment rate:  
6.5% (plus substantial  
underemployment)

Main exports: textiles  
(garments, cotton cloth,  
yarn), rice, leather, sport-  
ing goods, carpets

Main imports: petroleum  
& petroleum products,  
machinery, chemicals,  
transportation equipment

Ranking on UN Human  
Development Index: 134  
(out of 178)

# The Authors



**SARINA SINGH** Coordinating Author, *Getting Started, Food & Drink, Islamabad & Rawalpindi, Directory, Glossary*

After finishing a business degree in Melbourne, Sarina bought a one-way ticket to India where she completed a corporate traineeship with the Sheraton before working as a journalist. After four years in the subcontinent she returned to Australia, pursued post-graduate journalism studies and wrote/directed an award-nominated documentary that premiered at the Melbourne International Film Festival. Sarina has worked on several dozen Lonely Planet books and has written for many other publications including *National Geographic Traveler*; further details at [www.sarinasingh.com](http://www.sarinasingh.com).

## Life on the Road

Unforeseen deviations from planned paths have been the highlight of my subcontinental travels... Many years ago, on arrival at an Islamabad hotel, an apologetic receptionist ushered me to the 'bar', handed me a fizzless lemonade and assured me my room would soon be ready. As fate would have it, I was sitting next to an arms dealer who had just sold a cache of weapons to a mujaheddin warlord up north. The next day I found myself in Peshawar's Khyber Bazaar, where a rendezvous had been arranged with 'Mr Billy', a middle-aged Pashtun mechanic who would take me to the warlord's hideout for an interview. The hideout was a ramshackle warehouse near the Afghanistan border, and upon entering I was greeted with frosty glares from several dozen armed-to-the-hilt freedom fighters, all sitting cross-legged around their leader. The warlord was fidgeting with an AK47 for what seemed like an eternity before abruptly flinging the gun aside, pointing directly at me and asking, 'You want chicken and chips?' Four hours and three drumsticks later we had talked about everything from herbal hair-loss remedies to his plans for creating a 'collective global nation' called Islamistan, which he reckoned would be up and running in three decades, give or take a decade.



**LINDSAY BROWN** Itineraries, Environment, Azad Jammu & Kashmir, Karakoram Highway, Transport

A former conservation biologist and publishing manager of outdoor activity guides at Lonely Planet, Lindsay has trekked, jeeped, ridden and stumbled across many a mountain pass and contributed to Lonely Planet's *South India, India, Nepal* and *Bhutan* guides, among others.

## LONELY PLANET AUTHORS

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### PAUL CLAMMER

#### Destination Pakistan, History, Culture, Sindh, Balochistan, North-West Frontier Province

Paul grew up in Cambridge, and trained and worked as a molecular biologist before swapping test tubes for the vicarious thrills of tour leading and travel writing. He's spent several years kicking around the Muslim world from Casablanca to Kashgar, including a stint with a jeep safari company in northern Pakistan, and even finding time to skip over the Khyber Pass to have dinner with two Taliban ministers a fortnight before the 9/11 attacks. In the region, he's worked on Lonely Planet's *India* and *Central Asia* guides, as well as writing the first edition of *Afghanistan*.



### RODNEY COCKS

#### Punjab

Rodney has recently been based in Kandahar, Afghanistan and northern Sri Lanka. He has lived, worked and travelled through the Middle East, Central Asia, Southeast Asia, North America and Europe. During his time as a UN Military Observer in East Timor and as a member of the UN de-mining team in Iraq, he narrowly survived two terrorist acts – the Bali bombings and the attack on the UN headquarters in Baghdad – and assisted the injured and dying in the horrific aftermaths. He was named the 2005 Victorian of the Year for his humanitarian service. Rodney has written for Lonely Planet's *Afghanistan* guide and its website. He is the author of *Bali to Baghdad and Beyond*.



### JOHN MOCK & KIMBERLEY O'NEIL

#### Trekking in Northern Pakistan

The intrepid husband-and-wife team of John and Kimberley have logged more than 10,000km trekking in the Karakoram and Hindukush during the past 25 years. They have crossed more than 60 major passes, traversed 50 glaciers, and reconnoitred several new trekking routes in Chapursan, Shimsal and neighbouring Wakhan. Northern Pakistan has been like a second home to them, where they lived for many years working as consultants on ecotourism, protected area management and wildlife conservation. John also conducted his doctoral research in the Wakhi communities of Gojal. John and Kimberley are the award-winning authors of *Hiking in the Sierra Nevada* and their beloved *Trekking in the Karakoram & Hindukush*.



# Getting Started

Apart from the usual challenges of subcontinental travel – the people-packed public transport, tedious bureaucracy and crush of human and mechanical traffic in urban hubs – Pakistan is a relatively straightforward country in which to travel, although you should always keep informed about the *latest* safety status – see p16.

Pakistani people are known for their hospitality towards visitors, although solo women may feel more at ease travelling with a companion in the more conservative regions (see p379). Unlike in neighbouring India, the tourism industry here remains comparatively small. While this means many places are less geared to foreign travellers, it also translates to exceedingly less tourist hype. Indeed, compared with India, Pakistan has far fewer touts and scams, less-rapacious taxi and autorickshaw drivers, and lacks the irksome commercial hullabaloo found in many of India's tourist centres.

In regards to pre-trip planning, make sure you give yourself a few weeks to sort out immunisations, visas and other documents you may require. You will derive greater benefit from your trip if you read up about Pakistan (especially the religious and cultural framework) as much as possible beforehand. Doing so will heighten your appreciation of the country's extraordinary sights and traditions, lower your chances of making a cultural faux pas, and better equip you to hold more-informed conversations with locals.

## WHEN TO GO

Climate is the key factor in deciding when and where to travel in Pakistan. There are generally three seasons: cool (around October to February), hot (around March to June) and wet/monsoon (around July to September).

### DON'T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT...

- Getting a visa (p378).
- Seeking advice about vaccinations (p396); some must be administered over a period of time.
- A travel insurance policy covering you for treks, cycling and other planned activities (p372).
- Nonrevealing clothes (women *and* men – see the boxed text, p43). Dressing respectfully wins a warmer reception in Islamic Pakistan – women need a headscarf for mosques and elsewhere (p379).
- A valid International Driving Permit (IDP), a *carnet de passage* and other necessary paperwork (p386) for those travelling overland with their own vehicle.
- Sunscreen, sunglasses and a hat for sun protection.
- Quality earplugs – street din can drive you nuts, especially in the bigger cities.
- Flip-flops (thongs) for communal/unsavoury bathrooms and a showercap (for budget hotels).
- A flashlight (torch) for unlit streets and if the electricity fails.
- Tampons – sanitary pads are widely available but tampons are not.
- Repellent to ward off bothersome little bloodsuckers (but mosquitoes aren't a problem at the height of summer and winter).
- Appropriate clothes, footwear and equipment for trekking (p336).
- A sense of adventure – Pakistan is well and truly off the tourist treadmill.

There are, however, distinct regional variations, described further in some of the regional chapters. The trekking season starts in late April and finishes by late October, peaking from mid-June to mid-September – for further details see p334.

In all seasons, the ‘continental’ climate can mean big day-to-night temperature differences. Roughly speaking, Sindh, Balochistan, Punjab and the south of North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) are most pleasant to visit from around November to February (it can get chilly at night, particularly in December and January). Note that Balochistan gets bitterly cold at the height of winter and may even see snow in January. Northern NWFP, the Northern Areas and Azad Jammu & Kashmir (AJK) are generally at their best from around May to October (although occasionally stormy), but are more or less snowbound in winter, when accessibility can be difficult. The monsoon sweeps in from around July through September, bringing bouts of heavy rain and oppressive, sauna-like humidity. The tail end of the southwest monsoon dumps steady rain across the central and eastern plains and as far north as Swat, Indus Kohistan, the Kaghan Valley and AJK. But the monsoon does not reach much further and, despite random thunderstorms, this is not a bad time to go north.

June, July and August are generally the peak months for domestic tourism, when many locals flock to the resort towns in northern Pakistan to escape the sweltering heat of the plains. Three especially popular areas – the Kaghan Valley, Upper Swat and the Galis – can get exceptionally crowded during this time. For those travelling to or from China, be aware that the Khunjerab Pass is officially closed to travellers from 15 November until 1 May. Heavy snow may even close it sooner and for longer.

You may wish to incorporate a festival or three into your itinerary (see p370); keep in mind that during Ramazan (Ramadan), business hours can be affected and most eateries close during daylight hours – for further information read the boxed text on p61.

Officials advise against travelling to Pakistan during the country’s major national election campaigns, as travel routes may experience disruptions and political expression can sometimes take a volatile turn.

## IS IT SAFE?

At the time of writing Pakistan was in a state of political uncertainty, with the country placed under a state of emergency – for further details read p34. Given the thorny political climate, travellers are strongly urged to monitor events in Pakistan and seek current advice about how safe it is to travel in the country.

For political and tribal reasons there is restricted access to a number of potentially volatile areas, which are either off limits altogether for foreigners or require a permit, and possibly an armed guard, to visit them. Details are provided in the regional chapters of this book; also see p369. If you are unsure whether an area you intend visiting is a no-go zone, before setting off *always* seek the most up-to-date advice from as many reliable sources as you can, such as the Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation (PTDC) and local authorities.

Always remember that safety issues are not static. Things can swiftly change and it would be irresponsible of us to give prescriptive safety advice, especially in an increasingly unpredictable world. The most judicious way of making your journey through Pakistan as incident-free as possible is for *you* to take the responsibility of keeping abreast of the latest safety status of the region(s) you intend visiting. Apart from contacting the PTDC and other relevant authorities, ways of doing this include regularly reading local newspapers, garnering advice from locals and fellow travellers, and reading

See Climate Charts (p367)  
for more information.

your country's government travel advisory (although these advisories can often be overly cautious). And of course, you should exercise the same caution and common sense that you would when travelling anywhere in the world – this includes not wandering alone (especially in isolated areas) after dark, avoiding night travel, and keeping your valuables well concealed (eg in a secure moneybelt worn under clothing). You're also strongly advised to steer clear of any public demonstrations and large gatherings (eg certain religious events). In terms of personal presentation, you are going to be much better received if you respect cultural sensibilities by dressing and behaving appropriately – this applies to both women *and* men (see p43; women should read the boxed text, p379).

For important dedicated regional safety information read the 'Travelling Safely in...' boxed texts in the Sindh (p159), Balochistan (p140), Punjab (p96), Azad Jammu & Kashmir (p181), North-West Frontier Province (p189) and Karakoram Highway (p237) chapters.

## COSTS & MONEY

Pakistan is an economical country in which to travel. In terms of accommodation and restaurants there are options to fit all budgets, although greater variety is found in the larger cities. Transport, excluding domestic air travel, is relatively inexpensive and foreign tourists/students are even given a generous train-ticket concession of 25/50%. Conversely, foreigners are often charged a higher admission fee than locals for sights such as museums (exact charges are provided in the regional chapters).

So how low can you realistically go? If you opt for rock-bottom accommodation, eat a minimal amount at the cheaper restaurants, sightsee at places with no, or low, entry fees and travel by public bus, you're roughly looking at between Rs 400 and Rs 500 per day. It is important to remember that costs vary nationwide (especially accommodation), so the best way of ascertaining how much money you'll require is to peruse the relevant regional chapters of this book.

Due to the downward spiral in foreign tourism in recent times, some midrange and many top-end hotels will give discounts if requested. Don't be shy to ask for one; top-end hotels have been known to slash room rates by as much as half during lean business periods. Hotel rates, especially in northern Pakistan, may be subject to seasonal fluctuations and regional variations – for specific room rates, see the Sleeping sections throughout this book. Many hotels raise their tariffs annually, so when devising your budget it's not a bad idea to factor in possible increments on the prices provided in this book.

When it comes to filling your belly, shoestringers will be happy to know that there are plenty of ultra-cheap street eateries, while the bigger cities offer a decent selection of mid- and upper-priced choices as well. For further information about Pakistan's dining scene see p58.

For details about what currency to bring, and other money issues, read p373, and for trekking costs see p337.

## TRAVEL LITERATURE

*Three Cups of Tea*, by Greg Mortenson and David Oliver Relin, relays a courageous man's odyssey to provide schooling, especially for girls, in remote parts of Pakistan and Afghanistan, where fundamentalism often feeds on poverty.

Kathleen Jamie's *Among Muslims* is an engaging insight into the Northern Areas, with a captivating window into facets of everyday life usually off limits to male visitors.

### HOW MUCH?

Mars Bar Rs 30

Internet connection (per hour) Rs 20 to Rs 30

Toothpaste (small) Rs 25 to Rs 35

Packet of chips (25g) Rs 25

Music CD from Rs 90

*The Dancing Girls of Lahore: Selling Love and Saving Dreams in Pakistan's Ancient Pleasure District*, by Louise Brown, takes the reader into the family life of a dancing girl who works in Lahore's red-light Heera Mandi area.

Jonny Bealby's *For a Pagan Song* recounts an intrepid search for the Hindukush's pre-Islamic culture, following in the footsteps of Kipling's *The Man Who Would Be King*, through Afghanistan and Pakistan to the Kalasha Valleys of Chitral.

*Magic Bus* is Rory MacLean's witty retracing of the old hippy trail from Istanbul to Kabul, Kathmandu to Goa. It perceptively examines changes in the countries en route (including Pakistan) and the metamorphosis from spaced-out intrepids to modern backpackers.

*Amritsar to Lahore* by Stephen Alter is an insightful account of the author's journey across and beyond the border that divides (more than just physically) Pakistan and India.

An old classic, *To the Frontier* by Geoffrey Moorhouse, is an entertaining and well-written account of travels through Sindh, Balochistan, Punjab and NWFP.

*Where the Indus Is Young* by Dervla Murphy is the Irish author's vivid story of a winter she spent in Baltistan, travelling on foot and horseback with her six-year-old daughter Rachel.

## INTERNET RESOURCES

**Hi Pakistan** ([www.hipakistan.com](http://www.hipakistan.com)) News and views, fashion, music, showbiz and more.

**Lonely Planet** ([www.lonelyplanet.com](http://www.lonelyplanet.com)) As well as lots of handy links, there's the popular Thorn Tree forum, where you can exchange information with other travellers to Pakistan.

**Online Newspapers** ([www.onlinenewspapers.com/pakistan.htm](http://www.onlinenewspapers.com/pakistan.htm)) Links to a wide range of Pakistani newspapers including *Dawn* and *Frontier Post*.

**Pakistan Railway** ([www.pakrail.com](http://www.pakrail.com)) National rail site: everything from train timings and seat availability to freight rates and saloon rental.

**Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation (PTDC)** ([www.tourism.gov.pk](http://www.tourism.gov.pk)) Official government tourism site, with national travel-related fodder.

**Pakistani Virtual Library** ([www.southasianist.info/pakistan](http://www.southasianist.info/pakistan)) Has links to a variety of topics including history, sport, trekking and even regional weather forecasts.

# Itineraries

## CLASSIC ROUTES

### UP THE KHYBER PASS & ALONG THE GRAND TRUNK ROAD

One to two weeks

This renowned mountain pass to Afghanistan conjures images of lawless, gun-totin' Pashtuns. The truth is that it's perfectly safe – thanks to your armed Afridi gunman – but it's no less exciting for that.

Start in Pakistan's cultural capital, **Lahore** (p96), with its Mughal architecture, tempting eateries and sights such as the Lahore Fort and Badshahi Mosque. From Lahore join the rush along the Grand Trunk Rd through the barren **Salt Range** (p138) to **Islamabad** and **Rawalpindi** (p71). Pause in **Taxila** (p88) to see the wonders of Buddhist Gandhara on your way to pulse-quickening **Peshawar** (p190). A stroll through its Old City bazaars is an eye-opening essential. Organising a permit and armed guard is part of the thrill of travelling up the **Khyber Pass** (p200). The official entrance to Khyber Agency is at **Jamrud Fort** (p200). From here on houses are mini forts and the road (and railway) climbs and winds into the Sulaiman Range. The last main town before the border is **Landi Kotal** (p201), an erstwhile smugglers bazaar, still with a few gunshops. Here the working railway stops, though the ruins of tracks, bridges and tunnels continue to the border. Your stop, however, is just short of the border at **Michni checkpoint** (p201).

It's about 500km from Lahore to the famed Khyber Pass, via massive forts, Buddhist ruins, Pashtun bazaars and the nation's capital.





**KARAKORAM HIGHWAY****Two to four weeks/Islamabad to Kashgar**

The Karakoram Highway (KKH) is a road of many moods that can be biked, bused, jeeped or walked. Most people take the ubiquitous minibuses that zoom up and down the highway for ridiculously cheap fares.

It's a short hop from **Islamabad** (p71) to **Havelian** (p245), the official though nondescript start of the KKH. Continue on to leafy **Abbottabad** (p245), or **Mansehra** (p249), gateway to the gorgeous **Kaghan Valley** (p251). Though the road spectacularly hugs the Indus River gorge, the initial stretch to Gilgit is frequently done without a stop to avoid the occasionally frosty reception of conservative **Indus Kohistan** (p257). From **Gilgit** (p272), the valley and the options open up. Detour to **Skardu** (p286) in Baltistan, the base for the Karakoram's best trekking; relax under soaring peaks in **Minapin** (p298), or head up the Gilgit River valley towards the **Shandur Pass** (p284) and the road to Chitral. After catching a polo match in Gilgit head north to Hunza headquarters at **Karimabad** (p299), the popular hang-out for travellers, with trekking, sightseeing and good food. From Karimabad it's only a short hop to **Gulmit** (p308) and **Passu** (p310); these friendly villages, touched by glaciers and surrounded by good trekking, are not to be missed. Adventurers should find time to explore the concealed valleys of **Shimshal** (p313) and **Chapursan** (p315). Organise your cross-border transport at **Sost (Afiyatabad)** (p314) and head to the high point of the journey – **Khunjerab Pass** (p317). Greet China in **Tashkurgan** (p318), before staying in a yurt at **Kara Kul Lake** (p320) on the way to **Kashgar** (p322) – one of Central Asia's most colourful bazaars.

**Travel 1300km through stunning scenery, beside the Indus and Hunza Rivers and over a high mountain pass into Central Asia. Allow yourself at least two weeks to savour the sights and meet the locals.**



## BORDER TO BORDER, FROM IRAN TO INDIA

Moving from Mirjavé, on the Iranian side, to the dusty border post of **Taftan** (p387) in Pakistan, you cross over from the mystic Middle East to the spiritual subcontinent. Once formalities have been completed, make a beeline east for **Quetta** (p142), the first town of any size you'll reach in Pakistan with great shopping and eating. Kick back for a couple of days in this bazaar-busy frontier town before making your way northeast to Pakistan's cultural capital, **Lahore** (p96). En route you could divert to **Multan** (p128) for a few days to explore its many historic mausoleums. If you've got time on your side, make the trip south of Multan to **Bahawalpur** (p121), jumping-off point to **Uch Sharif** (p127) – site of some notable shrines – before setting off to Lahore. Once in Lahore, allow yourself at least four or five days to appreciate this city's fine Mughal architecture and multitude of sights. From Lahore, journey north for a few weeks to explore the unbeatable beauty of Pakistan's Northern Areas. Or, if you're itching to get straight to India, catch a bus from Lahore to the Pakistan–India border at **Wagah** (p120), making sure you coordinate your crossing into India with the captivating closing-of-the-border ceremony (see p120).

One week to one month/  
Taftan to Wagah

Take between a week and a month to follow the classic overland route for 1614km through the heart of the country from border to border.



## ROADS LESS TRAVELLED

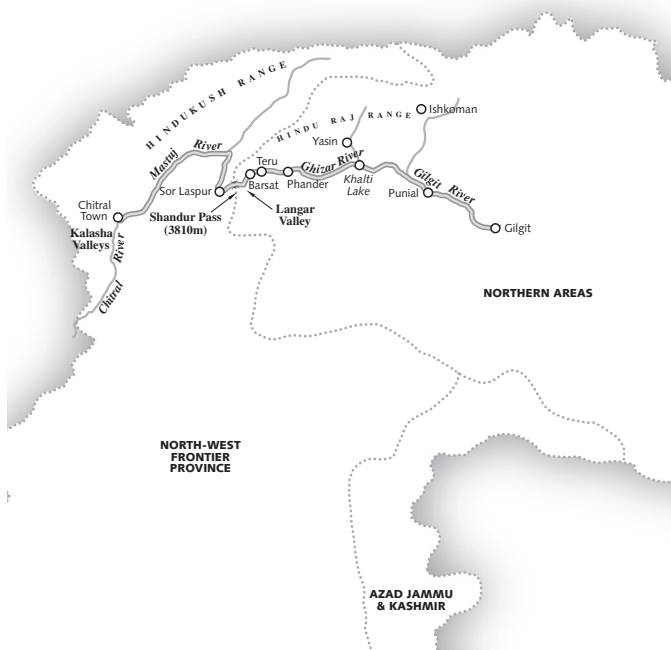
### GILGIT TO CHITRAL & THE KALASHA VALLEYS VIA THE SHANDUR PASS

One week

When it's not hosting the famous polo tournament, the Shandur Pass is a little-visited barren plain, but if you have a jeep at your disposal it's a spectacular way to link several of northern Pakistan's premier destinations.

From the KKH hub of **Gilgit** (p272) head up the stunning valley of the Gilgit (aka Ghizer) River – a swirling glacial-melt torrent in summer and a brilliant blue cascade in autumn. There are plenty of reasons to linger and take a detour, and the old valley kingdoms of **Punial** (p283), **Yasin** (p283) and **Ishkoman** (p283) provide endless trekking opportunities. It's best to break the journey before the pass; choose **Khalti Lake** (p283), a natural dam on the Ghizar River with excellent fishing, or serene **Phander** (p283), overlooking a patchwork of fields and the gently meandering river. From Phander the road deteriorates, and the going gets tough. Accommodation options thin out at **Teru** (p284), about 5km from **Barsat** (p284), the last village before the pass. After Barsat enter the stunning **Langar Valley** (p284), complete with grazing yaks, before crossing the 3810m **Shandur Pass** (p284). Over the pass, the road descends quickly through crumbling terrain to the village of Sor Laspur, before circling north around Buni Zom (6550m) to the Mastuj River valley and, eventually **Chitral town** (p222). Chitral is the base for walks in the Hindukush, particularly the isolated valley sanctuaries of **Rumbur** (p231), **Bumboret** (p232) and **Birir** (p233), home to the Kalasha.

Spend a week travelling 340km through stunning mountains and hidden valley kingdoms, and catch a polo match if you can.



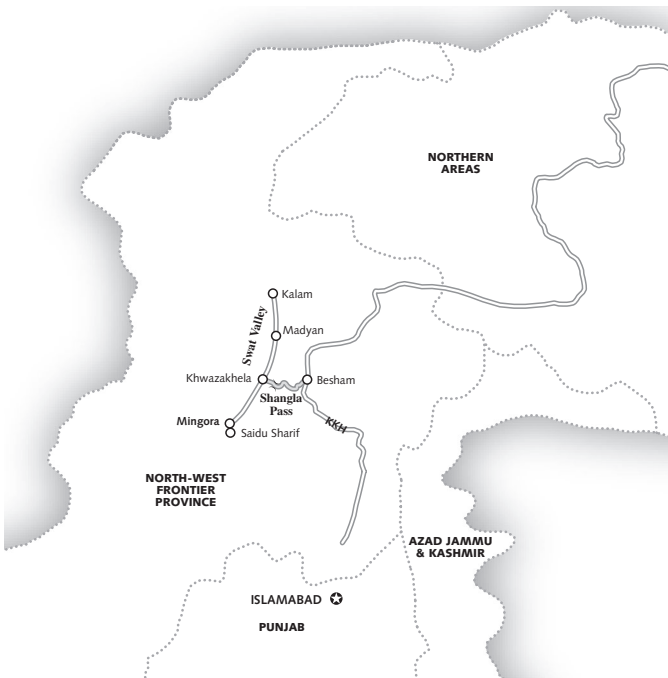
## THE KKH TO SWAT VIA THE SHANGLA PASS One to two weeks/Besham to Khwazakhela

The little-traversed Shangla Pass links the historical Swat district with the famous KKH and offers glimpses of everyday life in rugged Indus Kohistan.

Although **Besham** (p258), on the KKH, and **Khwazakhela** (p214), in the Swat Valley, have little to interest travellers, they are linked by a quiet mountain road that was an earlier incarnation of the KKH, before the highway was continued south from Besham to Mansehra. The road hugs the bottom of a narrow valley from Besham to the village of Alpurai, every twist and turn revealing village life – water-powered mills, washing, fishing and playing – focused around the swift-flowing tributary of the Indus River. **Shangla Pass** (p214) at 2134m is open year-round, except during occasional heavy snows. After an interrogation at the police checkpoint, take in the fine views to Swat and back east to the Pir Panjal Range.

The busy bazaar of Khwazakhela is just over half an hour from Swat's main hub, the twin towns of **Mingora** and **Saidu Sharif** (p209), with a museum and nearby ruins of its Buddhist past. After visiting the sites, head upstream to spend a few relaxing days in the Upper Swat Valley – the erstwhile hippy hangout of **Madyan** (p214) or the hotel resort of **Kalam** (p216) with its cool mountain air, postcard scenery and fish-filled streams. Return to Mingora, where the onward options include Chitral, Peshawar and Islamabad.

**It's only about 65km between Besham and Khwazakhela and 98km between Mingora and Kalam, but you can spend a week or two exploring villages and relaxing in resort towns in this historic and scenic district.**



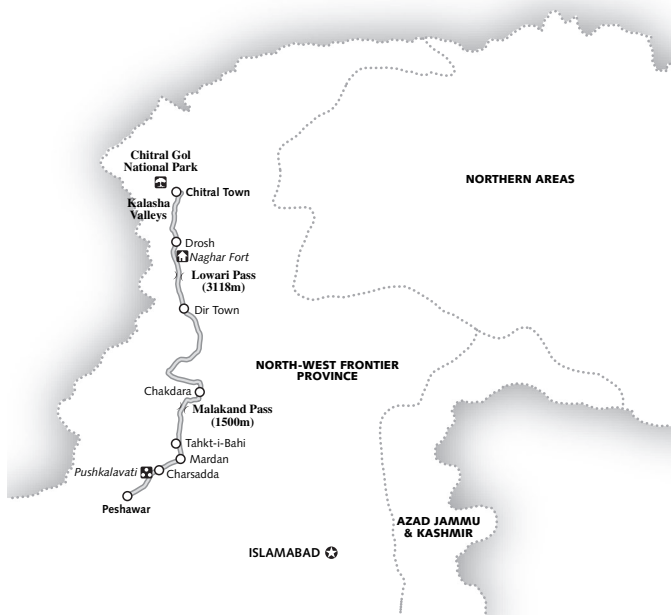
## CHITRAL TO PESHAWAR VIA THE KALASHA VALLEYS & THE LOWARI & MALAKAND PASSES

One to two weeks/  
Chitral to Peshawar

**Chitral town** (p222) is connected to the rest of Pakistan by just two roads: one to Gilgit over the Shandur Pass and one to Swat via the Lowari Pass. From the Swat Valley you need to cross another high pass, the Malakand, to reach the frontier city of Peshawar.

After exploring the Upper Chitral Valley and the splendid **Chitral Gol National Park** (p228), head south to **Rumbur** (p231), **Bumboret** (p232) and **Birir** (p233), stronghold of Pakistan's Kalasha, who still practise their pre-Islamic religion. You can even trek between the Kalasha valleys. The road continues south through the army town of Drosh and the sublime **Naghar Fort** (p220), overlooking a bend on the Chitral River. Just before the 3118m **Lowari Pass** (p219; usually open from June to October) the road suddenly zigzags up a steep mountainside in 48 switchbacks. The view from the top is superb but the weather usually isn't, so after signing the register, start the sedate decline towards **Dir town** (p218), where there are comfortable lodgings. The Swat Valley is reached at **Chakdara** (p217) and the road south crosses the 1500m **Malakand Pass** (p207) towards **Mardan** (p204), the centre for exploring several Buddhist ruins, including **Tahkt-i-Bahi** (p206). From Mardan take the road to Charsadda, and the ruins of **Pushkalavati** (p207), and then push on to the frenetic frontier city of **Peshawar** (p190) on the Grand Trunk Rd. Peshawar has lively bazaars, a hint of danger, and it's a base to visit the Khyber Pass and/or Afghanistan.

From a beautiful mountainous national park, past ancient Buddhist ruins to a dynamic frontier town, this route covers about 350km.



## TAILORED TRIPS

### WALKS ON THE WILD SIDE

#### Three weeks/Gilgit to Karimabad

Pakistan's Karakoram and Hindukush offer some of the most dramatic trekking on earth. The treks in the Trekking chapter can be strung together in several combinations – see p332 for further itineraries. This itinerary incorporates some of the best treks that are accessed from Gilgit and Karimabad, popular hubs on the KKH.

**Gilgit** (p272) is a great base for launching into Baltistan, Diamir and Nagyr, organising guides and for resting between treks. First head to **Skardu** (p286) to tackle the easy, two-day trek out of **Hushe** (p293) to the serene summer pastures of **Humbrok** (p362). Return to Skardu then Gilgit. From Gilgit organise transport to Chirah in the Bagrot Valley and from there start a three-day return trek to the **Diran Base Camp** (p346). Again from Gilgit, head a short distance along the KKH to **Minapin** (p298), easily accessed from the KKH, and the start of the magnificent trail to **Rakaposhi Base Camp** (p351); a three-day return trek. North of Minapin, **Karimabad** (p299) is another comfortable base for trekking. From the top of Karimabad town you can take the short and steep track up to the meadow below **Ultr** (p353); here you can spend the night with a grinding glacier before returning to espresso coffee in Karimabad the following morning.



### DIVINE EXCURSION

#### One to two weeks/Lahore to Uch Sharif

The whole of Pakistan is dotted with magnificent shrines and mosques, but this itinerary visits those of Lahore and southern Punjab, home to some of the country's finest examples. In **Lahore** (p96), start your sacred ramble at the phenomenal 17th-century Badshahi Mosque before checking out the city's other sacred legacies including Jehangir's Tomb, Nur Jahan's Tomb, the Mosque of Wazir Khan, the Gurdwara of Arjan Dev and the Shrine of Data Ganj Bakhsh Hajveri; the last has superb qawwali (Islamic devotional singing) each Thursday (see boxed text, p104). After taking in Lahore's sacred sights, head southwest to the historic city of **Multan** (p128). Here you'll find scores of intriguing shrines including the mausoleums of Sheikh Rukn-i-Alam, Baha-ud-Din Zakaria and Shams-ud-Din Sabzwari. From Multan, catch a bus south to **Bahawalpur** (p121), an easy-going town that makes a convenient base to visit the shrines of **Uch Sharif** (p127) – the Mausoleum of Bibi Jawindi is particularly eye-catching. If you've got time (or are en route to Sindh) don't miss the extraordinary 20th-century **Bhong Mosque** (p126), situated further south, not far from the Sindh border.



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