

North-West Frontier Province



North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) seems a region named purely for the romance of travel. A quick look at the map tells you why, with the Khyber Pass to Afghanistan, the peaks of the Hindukush, the towns of Peshawar and Chitral all speaking of rugged mountains, proud tribesmen and Kipling-style adventure.

In the valleys of Peshawar and Swat, the ancient, influential region of Gandhara blossomed, its Buddhist art and doctrines spreading into Asia. It left behind a parade of archaeological sites, many yet to be fully explored by travellers. Later inhabitants left a less tangible but equally famous legacy. The Pashtun tribes gave bloody noses to some of history's most famous conquerors, even earning themselves the respect of the British soldiers who they frequently fought to a standstill. The autonomous Tribal Areas were born of those conflicts, and their inhabitants hold the Pakistani government at arm's length to this day.

More peaceful inhabitants are the Kalasha, pagans clinging onto their old rituals in isolated valleys near Chitral against the odds. The Kalasha region is one of the most stunning parts of the Hindukush range, but the whole of northern NWFP is ideal trekking country, from Chitral to the green slopes of the Swat Valley.

For all the tradition, NWFP remains closely tied to the present. Modern politics makes strong headlines, with the Tribal Areas and radical Islam regularly impacting on the national stage. While local insecurities tend to happen in areas away from travellers' interests, visitors should be aware of underlying tensions, and take advice on the current situation before travelling.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Get lost in the atmosphere of **Peshawar's Old City** (p193), where the traditional and modern collide in a maze of bazaars
- Venture up to the **Khyber Pass** (p200) on the Afghan border, the age-old invasion route to the subcontinent
- Explore the traditional pagan culture of the **Kalasha** (p228), in their ancient valleys high in the Hindukush
- Take in the mountain views (and rugged mountain roads) in the old kingdom of **Chitral** (p220)
- Chill out in **Swat** (p207), the lush valley that's played host to everyone from Alexander the Great and great Buddhist empires to modern Pakistani honeymooners



■ POPULATION: 19,630,000

■ AREA: 74,521 SQ KM

