

Trekking in Northern Pakistan



Northern Pakistan is heaven for mountain-lovers. Around every bend in the road or from any hotel window you see colossal mountain after mountain. But step off the road, head out of town and into the mountains, and you discover a new world of adventure. Walk along the rivers, through the valleys, over the passes. Admire the glaciers up close. Travel on foot with the gracious and hospitable people who live here. Experiencing these mountains first-hand is incomparable and unforgettable.

Northern Pakistan is an uncrowded gem where you can walk for days on even the most popular routes without seeing another trekker. Treks typically start at the highest elevation villages, almost all of which are accessible by road. They then follow trails to summer grazing pastures. Some of the more popular trekking routes are also the approach routes for mountaineering expeditions.

Occasionally, a route may scramble over talus (large boulders) or loose scree. Paths can be faint and hard to follow, with no signposts or trail markers along trekking routes. General route-finding and map-reading skills are highly desirable. For most trekkers, hiring a guide or porter to see you across challenging sections and show the way eliminates the guesswork. Although trekking through rugged terrain requires a high level of physical fitness, anyone who is in good health and reasonably fit with a little experience in mountain travel can go trekking here.

Equally important is cultivating self-reliance, sound judgment and good planning. Trekkers need to know the limits of their own abilities and how to integrate knowledge and experience to make sound decisions. Most of all, trekking in northern Pakistan calls for an open spirit of adventure and a sense of humour.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Marvel at the glaciers, icefalls and summits of the Nanga Parbat massif from idyllic **Fairy Meadow** (p348)
- Trek to **Rakaposhi Base Camp** (p351) for close-up views of two 7000m peaks
- Savour a hard-to-get glimpse of K2's summit from above the turquoise lake of **Rush Phari** (p352)
- Trek to a stunning glacial amphitheatre beneath the snowy summit of **Ultar** (p353)
- Trek along the mighty **Batura Glacier** (p356) beneath huge ice floes and 14 7000m peaks



This chapter is a tool to help you get started, whether planning an overnight excursion or a week-long trek. It features 15 outstanding treks, selected from the region's most accessible and easiest treks. In addition to these 15, many more superb treks that vary in length and difficulty – from easy two-day treks to several-weeks-long extreme, technical treks – are described in Lonely Planet's *Trekking in the Karakoram & Hindukush*, a comprehensive guide to the near-limitless possibilities.

Eleven treks in this chapter have trailheads near the Karakoram Highway (KKH), including all the treks in the Gilgit & Diamir, Nagry & Hunza, and Gojal sections. These treks are great choices for people travelling along the KKH who may want to try just one trek or sample several along the way.

Five treks in this chapter cross a glacier: Thui An, Diran Base Camp, Pakora Pass, Rush Phari and Batura Glacier. These glacier crossings are considered easy by Karakoram standards and take no longer than three hours. Hiring a guide or porter is recommended the first time you step on a glacier. Slippery surfaces, jagged seracs (pinnacles of glacial ice), groaning ice and yawning crevasses can seem like formidable obstacles, yet glaciers are an integral part of trekking in the Karakoram and Hindukush. With many glaciers descending to within inches of roads and valley floors, you have a unique opportunity to get out there and try glacier travel.

Crossing a mountain pass is always exhilarating and gives a special sense of accomplishment. Some of the most unique, spectacular vistas are at the top of passes. This chapter features six treks that go to or cross a pass: Gokhshal An & Doni An, Donson Pass & Kundyak An, Thui An, Pakora Pass, Shimshal Pamir, and Kilik & Mintaka Passes.

All of the treks start and finish at the same trailheads, except for four of the six treks mentioned previously that cross a pass. These treks – Gokhshal An & Doni An, Donson Pass & Kundyak An, Thui An, and Pakora Pass – start in one valley and finish in an adjacent valley, so you need to consider the transport logistics when planning. This chapter includes only open-zone treks, which means no government permits, fees or other formalities are required. Just go!

SUGGESTED ITINERARIES

Pakistan's mountains have it all – whatever excites you in the mountains, you can find it here.

Easy Treks

As short as two days, these gentle treks take you to ancient forests, fields of wildflowers, summer grasslands and spectacular icefalls: Donson Pass & Kundyak An, Fairy Meadow, Ultar, and Kilik & Mintaka Passes.

Treks with Views of K2

K2 (8611m), the world's second-highest peak, is remote and difficult to see, usually requiring at least two weeks' trekking. However, you can view this giant's summit pyramid in as little as two or five days from side trips on the Rush Phari and Humbrok treks.

Base Camp Treks

Reaching the base camp of a 7000m or 8000m peak takes weeks in other Himalayan regions, yet you can visit the base camps of Nanga Parbat (8125m) and Rakaposhi (7788m) in as little as two to five days on the Fairy Meadow and Rakaposhi Base Camp treks, and of Kampir Dior (7168m) and Pamiri Sar (7016m) in three days on the Pamir trek.

Treks with Glacier Travel

Crossing a glacier can be invigorating or intimidating depending on your perspective. The glacier travel on treks in this chapter is all nontechnical and does not require mountaineering equipment or prior experience; the Pakora Pass trek involves easy glacier travel, and the Thui An, Diran Base Camp, Rush Phari and Batura Glacier treks have as short yet comparatively more laborious glacier travel.

More Challenging Treks

Cross a pass or traverse an impressive glacier in as few as three or five days on the Thui An, Diran Base Camp, Pakora Pass, and Batura Glacier treks.

Multiple Treks

Getting off the road and on the trail for short treks can make any trip along the KKH truly memorable. For a series of easy treks, try the Fairy Meadow, Ultar, and Kilik & Mintaka Passes treks. A more challenging sequence could be Rakaposhi Base Camp and Batura