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ACCOMMODATION

Accommodation in Pakistan and Xinjiang ranges from ramshackle budget lodgings to five-star opulence but the entire range is not always on offer. Outside major cities and summer resorts, you won't find luxurious hotels; yet, the budget accommodation can be surprisingly more salubrious than that found in the cities.

Foreigners may not be welcome at some budget places in Pakistan because these hotels don't have the necessary government hotel-register form. For those places that do accept foreigners, check-out is typically late morning, but may sometimes be in the afternoon or 24 hours from check-in; in any case, it's often flexible if requested beforehand.

Prices throughout this book are based on a hotel's cheapest single/double room (in almost all budget and some midrange places this does *not* include air-con) and don't include taxes unless otherwise stated. In towns where we make no recommendations you're most likely to find cheap lodgings around the train or bus stations.

All places listed in this book's regional chapters have private attached bathroom unless otherwise mentioned. If a hotel (budget and midrange) advertises a hot shower you should first check to see whether the shower works effectively (if at all) and if it does indeed deliver hot water. Some showers render a mere trickle of water, making the bucket a better bet. Squat toilets are only common in the budget category, although some lower-priced hotels have a mix of squat and sit-down flush toilets. Most budget places don't supply toilet paper or soap (possibly no towel either), and hot water may be irregular or only available during certain hours. Apart from top-end hotels, many places use wall-mounted electric geysers (water heaters) that need to be switched on up to an hour before use. Almost all budget and midrange hotel bathroom sinks lack plugs.

Accommodation prices aren't always fixed. Popular domestic holiday destinations, such as Upper Swat, the Kaghan Valley and the Galis, can get extremely crowded in summer and prices skyrocket. Off-season, on the other hand, you should be able to strike bargains with the handful of places that remain open. Hotels in all price categories are usually open to tariff negotiation in off-peak periods or if occupancy levels are low. The downturn in foreign tourism in recent years has largely led

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PRACTICALITIES

- Pakistan and China use the metric system.
- Electricity is 220/240V 50/60 Hz AC in Pakistan and 220V 50 Hz AC in China. Pakistani sockets accept two round pins, although some accept a third (earth or ground) pin. Chinese sockets accept two flat pins or three-pronged angle pins. Adaptors are widely available, but 120V to 220V converters are scarce.
- Major English-language dailies in Pakistan include *Dawn*, *The Nation*, *The News*, *Daily Times* and *Frontier Post*. *Dawn*, *The Nation* and *The News* are the pick of the bunch.
- The *China Daily* is China's official English-language newspaper.
- In Pakistan read incisive current affairs in the monthly *Newsline* and *Herald* magazines.
- State-run Pakistan Broadcasting Corporation (PBC) transmits largely government viewpoints and Islamic values over the radio airwaves. There are a growing number of private FM broadcasters.
- Pakistan has satellite and cable TV available at all top-end, many midrange and a couple of budget hotels. Channels include Discovery, BBC, CNN and Star Movies. The national broadcaster is PTV.
- Chinese Central TV (CCTV) has two sanitised English-language channels.

to supply exceeding demand, furthering the opportunity for bargaining.

Breakdowns and blackouts ('load shedding') are fairly common in remote towns and villages (less frequent in the larger cities), so it pays to carry a flashlight. Sound pollution can be diabolical, especially in urban centres, so bring good-quality earplugs.

Hotel tariffs are usually raised annually, so the prices quoted in this book are likely to have risen by the time you read this.

Note that some hotels in cantonment areas of a city may deny accommodation to anyone who has 'Not Valid for Cantt Area' stamped next to their visa – for more information see p378.

Camping & Youth Hostels

Overlanders with their own transport can park and camp cheaply at a few camp sites as well as at several hotel grounds (regional chapters have details). Vandalism and theft are usually not a problem. In Xinjiang you can't pitch a tent with any security around larger towns, but you can camp at places like Kara Kul and below Muztagh Ata.

The Pakistan Youth Hostels Association (PYHA), with headquarters at Youth Hostel Islamabad (see p81), runs a number of hostels in Pakistan, with gender-segregated dormitories, gardens where you can often pitch a tent and (usually) cooking facilities. Guests may be required to lend a hand with clean-up, and

some hostels impose night curfews. In summer, hostels in the Northern Areas (NA) can be especially popular with Pakistani students, and if they're busy you may only be permitted to stay for several days. See regional chapters for details.

Government Resthouses

Also called circuit houses, inspection bungalows or dak bungalows, most government resthouses are two- or three-unit guesthouses run by government agencies for staff on business. Each has a *chowkidar* (caretaker) living nearby who can, by arrangement, prepare meals. At some places you may need to bring your own bedding.

In principle, government resthouses are available to tourists if nobody else is using them. In practice many of them must be booked with the relevant person (often a chief engineer) in district capitals. You could take your chances without a booking, although it's wise not to do so if it's the *only* accommodation available in the area. Campers or cyclists may be able to pitch a tent in the grounds (for a nominal charge), which usually make great camping spots.

The best resthouses and their booking offices are noted in the regional chapters.

Railway Retiring Rooms

Pakistan Railways provides retiring rooms at most major city train stations. These are mostly spartan singles/doubles that are only available