

AFGHANISTAN



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1 CONTACT ADDRESSES

Location: Southwest Asia; northwest part of Indian subcontinent.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Chara-e-Malik Asqhar, Kabul, Afghanistan
Tel: 25541 or 25341.

Embassy of the Islamic State of Afghanistan
31 Prince's Gate, London SW7 1QQ
Tel: (020) 7589 8891/2. Fax: (020) 7581 3452. Opening hours: Monday to Friday 0900-1600; 0930-1300 (visa applications).

Note: The British High Commission in Islamabad deals with enquiries relating to Afghanistan (see Pakistan section).

Embassy of the Islamic State of Afghanistan
19th Floor, 369 Lexington Avenue, New York, NY 10017
Tel: (212) 972 2277. Fax: (212) 972 9046. E-mail: afgghancons@aol.com

Note: The American Embassy in Islamabad deals with enquiries relating to Afghanistan (see Pakistan section).

Country dialling code: 93.

2 GENERAL

Area: 652,225 sq km (251,773 sq miles).

Population: 20,414,000 (1994).

Population Density: 31.0 per sq km.

Capital: Kabul. Population: 1,036,407 (1982).

Geography: Afghanistan is a landlocked country, sharing its borders with Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan to the north, China to the northeast, Pakistan to the east and south and Iran to the west. On the eastern tip of the Iranian plateau, central Afghanistan is made up of a tangled mass of mountain chains. The Hindu Kush is the highest range, rising to more than 7500m (24,600ft). The Bamian Valley separates the Hindu Kush from Koh-i-Baba, the central mountain range and source of the Helmand River. To the north and southwest of these mountains, alluvial plains provide fertile agricultural soil. To the northeast is Kabul, the capital. The other major cities are Jalalabad, Kandahar, Mazar-i-Sharif and Herat.

Government: Republic. Civil war since 1992. Head of State: President Burhanuddin Rabbani since 1992. Head of Government: Prime Minister Abdolghaffur Rawanfarhadi, appointed by the anti-Taliban opposition coalition (UIFSA) in 1997. The Taliban ousted Rabbani's Government in 1996 and installed a strict Islamic regime which is, however, not recognised by the UN; the Taliban control two-thirds of the country.

Language: The official languages are Pashtu and Dari Persian. Some English, French and German is also spoken.

Religion: Islamic majority (mostly Sunni), with Hindu and Sikh minorities.

Time: GMT + 4.5.

Electricity: 220 volts AC, 50Hz.

Communications: At the time of writing, no telephone, fax, telex, telegram or postal services are available.

Telephone/Fax: No IDD. In general, there is normally a severe shortage of lines for operator-connected international calls.

Telegram: Under normal circumstances, these may be sent from the Central Post Office, Kabul (closes at 2100).

Post: Airmail usually takes one week to reach Europe.

Press: The Kabul Times is the main English-language newspaper.

BBC World Service and Voice of America frequencies: From time to time these change.

BBC:

MHz15.5811.769.4106.094

Voice of America:

MHz15.389.7629.6456.110

3 PASSPORT

	<i>Passport Required?</i>	<i>Visa Required?</i>	<i>Return Ticket Required?</i>
British	Yes	No	Yes
Australian	Yes	No	Yes
Canadian	Yes	No	Yes
USA	Yes	No	Yes
OtherEU	Yes	No	Yes
Japanese	Yes	No	Yes

Entry restrictions: Women of all nationalities should dress appropriately with a scarf to cover their heads and an overcoat for their bodies.

PASSPORTS: Valid passport required by all.

VISAS: Required by all except the following:

(a) travellers holding a re-entry permit issued by Afghanistan;

(b) travellers holding confirmed onward tickets and continuing their journey to another country by the same aircraft within two hours.

Types of visa and cost: Single-entry: £20. Multiple- or Double-entry: £30. Business: £30. Visas for aid workers are free of charge. At the time of writing, Tourist visas and Transit visas are not being issued. Entry is generally granted to journalists, business travellers, members of the Red Cross and representatives of charities and medical organisations. Enquiries should be made at the Embassy for details about visiting Afghanistan. When a Business visa is required, it is necessary to write first to the Afghan Embassy, Consular Section, describing the purpose of the visit. Two to three days should be allowed for authorisation to be granted.

Validity: 3 months from date of issue. Duration of stay depends on purpose of visit.

Application to: Consulate (or Consular section at Embassy); see address section.

Application requirements: (a) Company or sponsorship letter with name and address of commissioning firm or person. (b) Application form. (c) Valid passport. (d) 1 passport-size photo. (e) Fee.

Note: Exit and re-entry permits must be obtained before attempting to leave Afghanistan.

4 MONEY

Currency: Afghani (Af) = 100 puls. Notes are in denominations of Af10,000, 5000, 1000, 500, 100, 50, 20 and 10. Coins are in denominations of Af5, 2 and 1.

Credit cards: Not accepted.

Travellers cheques: To avoid additional exchange rate charges, travellers are advised to take travellers cheques in US Dollars or Pounds Sterling.

Exchange rate indicators

The following figures are included as a guide to the movements of the French Franc against Sterling and the US Dollar:

Date Mar '00 Aug '00 Nov '00 Feb

'01 £1.00 = 7473.627126.666876.336936.42 \$1.00 = 4726.254750.004750.004750.00

Banking hours: Generally 0800-1200 and 1300-1630 Saturday to Wednesday; 0800-1330 Thursday.

5 DUTY FREE

The following goods can be taken into Afghanistan without incurring customs duty:
A reasonable amount of tobacco products; any amount of perfume.

Prohibited items: Alcohol. The export of antiques, carpets and furs is prohibited without a licence.

6 PUBLIC HOLIDAYS

Mar 6-8 2001 Eid al-Adha (Feast of the Sacrifice). Mar 21 Nauroz (New Year's Day, Iranian calendar). Apr 7 Ashura (Martyrdom of Imam Hussain). Jun 7 Roze-Maulud (Birth of the Prophet). Aug 18 National Day. Nov 18 First Day of Ramadan. Dec 18-20 Eid al-Fitr (End of Ramadan). Feb 26-28 2002 Eid al-Adha (Feast of the Sacrifice). Mar 21 Nauroz (New Year's Day, Iranian calendar). Mar 26 Ashura (Martyrdom of Imam Hussain). May 26 Roze-Maulud (Birth of the Prophet). Aug 18 National Day. Nov 8 First Day of Ramadan. Dec 8-10 Eid al-Fitr (End of Ramadan).

Note: Muslim festivals are timed according to local sightings of various phases of the Moon and the dates given above are approximations. During the lunar month of Ramadan that precedes Eid al-Fitr, Muslims fast during the day and feast at night and normal business patterns may be interrupted. Some disruption may continue into Eid al-Fitr itself. Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha may last up to several days, depending on the region. For more information see the World of Islam appendix.

7 HEALTH

	<i>Special Precautions</i>	<i>Certificate Required</i>
Yellow Fever	Yes	1
Cholera	Yes	2
Typhoid and Polio	Yes	-
Malaria	3	-
Food and Drink	4	-

1: A yellow fever vaccination certificate is required if arriving from endemic or infected areas. Travellers arriving from non-endemic zones should note that vaccination is strongly recommended for travel outside urban areas, even if an outbreak of the disease has not been reported and they would normally not require a vaccination certificate to enter the country.

2: Following WHO guidelines issued in 1973, a cholera vaccination certificate is no longer a condition of entry to Afghanistan. However, cholera is a serious risk in this country and precautions are essential. Up-to-date advice should be sought before deciding whether these precautions should include vaccination, as medical opinion is divided over its effectiveness. See the Health appendix for further information.

3: Malarial risk, primarily in the benign vivax form, exists from May to November below 2000m (6562ft). The falciparum strain occurs in the south of the country. Chloroquine-resistant falciparum has been reported.

4: All water should be regarded as being potentially contaminated. Milk is unpasteurised and should be boiled. Powdered or tinned milk is available and is advised, but make sure that it is reconstituted with pure water. Avoid dairy products which are likely to have been made from unboiled milk. Only eat well-cooked meat and fish, preferably served hot. Pork, salad and mayonnaise may carry increased risk. Vegetables should be cooked and fruit peeled.

Rabies is present. For those at high risk, vaccination before arrival should be considered. If you are bitten, seek medical advice without delay. For more information consult the Health appendix. Cutaneous leishmaniasis and tick-borne relapsing fever occur in Afghanistan. Hepatitis A and E are both present. Hepatitis B is endemic.

Health care: Medical care is very limited, doctors and hospitals demand immediate cash payment for most services. Medical insurance is essential.

Travel - International

AIR: Afghanistan's national airline is Ariana Afghan Airlines (FG). At the time of writing, the only available but sporadic service to Kabul is with Ariana Afghan Airlines from Islamabad (Pakistan) and Dubai (United Arab Emirates). The coalition in the north operates an international airline - Balkh Airlines which offers a regular service to Peshawar, Pakistan, Mashed and Iran.

International airport: Kabul Airport (KBL) is 16km (10 miles) from the city. Taxis are available to the city centre (travel time - 30 minutes). Airport facilities include a bank, buffet-bar, car park, post office and restaurant (0700-2400). Airport facilities in Kabul have been expanded and new airports have been built near the border.

At the time of writing, the airport was closed and all flights were being directed to a military airbase in Kabul.

ROAD: Overland travel is currently very dangerous in some parts of the country, and the official advice is that it should be avoided. Buses operate along the Asia Highway, which links Afghanistan to Iran and Pakistan. There are good road links from Mazar-i-Sharif and Herat to the countries in the north.

Travel - Internal

AIR: Internal flights connect Kabul with Herat, Kandahar and Mazar-i-Sharif. There is no link between the south and the north of the country by air. There is an internal flight from Mazar-i-sharif to Bamiyan which operates 4 times a week.

ROAD: There are over 22,000km (13,000 miles) of roads, some of which are paved. An arc of all-weather roads runs from Mazar-i-Sharif through Kabul and Kandahar to Herat. Bus services operate from Kabul to the provinces. Traffic drives on the right. Documentation: International Driving Permit required.

URBAN: Buses, trolleybuses and taxis operate in Kabul but often prove unreliable.

8 ACCOMMODATION

There is a 5% government tax, but no service charge. In Kabul there is limited moderate and low-class accommodation; prices are often very low and include service charges. Only basic accommodation is available elsewhere. In some rural areas there are hotels run by the provincial authority, but these are of a low standard.

9 RESORTS & EXCURSIONS

Kabul: Kabul: Afghanistan's capital has preserved only a fraction of its historic past. The Garden of Babur and a well-presented museum are among the few conventional attractions for tourists. Travel outside Kabul is not generally permitted to tourists but, if allowed, it is worth trying to visit the Valley of Paghman, 90 minutes by road west of the capital, where the rich had second houses; and, to the north, Karez-i-Amir, Charikar and the Valley of Chakardara.

Jalalabad: Jalalabad: The capital of Nangarhar Province used to be an attractive winter resort, with many cypress trees and flowering shrubs.

Hindu Kush: Hindu Kush: Consisting of two huge mountain ranges, this is a wild and remote region. Although travelling by car is possible, the steepness of the routes makes vehicles prone to breakdowns. The Hindu Kush is best left for travellers prepared to rough it. For those who make the journey, the mountains, valleys and lakes provide stunning scenery. Bamian is the main centre.

10 SOCIAL PROFILE

Food & Drink: Indian-style cuisine. Most modern restaurants in Kabul offer international cuisine as well as Afghan specialities such as pilau and kebabs. Traditional foods and tea from chai khanas are found in all areas at low prices, which normally include service. Afghan dishes can be very good, but very spicy, so visitors should take care when ordering.

Shopping: Special purchases include Turkman hats, Kandahar embroidery, Istaff pottery, local glassware from Herat, nomad jewellery, handmade carpets and rugs, Nuristani woodcarving, silkware, brass, copper and silver work. Note: Many craft items may only be exported under licence. Shopping hours: Generally 0800-1200 and 1300-1630 Saturday to Wednesday; 0800-1330 Thursday.

Social Conventions: Outside Kabul, Afghanistan is still very much a tribal society. Religion and traditional customs have a strong influence within the family, and there are strict male and female roles in society. It is considered insulting to show the soles of the feet. Guests may have to share a room as specific accommodation is rarely set aside. Women are advised to wear trousers or long skirts and avoid revealing dress. Handshaking is an acceptable form of greeting, though nose-rubbing and embracing are more traditional. Smoking is a common social habit and tobacco is cheap by European standards. It is a compliment to accept an offered cigarette from your host. Photography: Care should be taken when using cameras. Military installations should not be photographed.

11 BUSINESS PROFILE

Economy: Seventeen years of continuous war completely wrecked the Afghan economy. Reconstruction of the agricultural sector, which accounted for about half of GDP, has been severely hampered by abandonment of farms and the huge number of minefields. Agricultural problems have led to recurring food shortages, and consequently a heavy reliance on foreign aid. Many farmers rely on growing opium poppies to survive and despite repeated promises by the Taleban that it will be curbed, they have so far shown neither the ability nor inclination to do so.

The industrial sector, which barely functions, was formerly concentrated in mining and some manufacturing. There are significant deposits of natural gas, coal, salt, barite and other ores. The small manufacturing sector produces textiles, chemical fertilisers, leather and plastics. Some trade links have been established with the former Soviet Central Asian republics, but Pakistan and Saudi Arabia are now the strongest economic influences in the country.

Business: Price bargaining is expected and oral agreements are honoured. Formal wear is expected and meetings should be pre-arranged. Office hours: Generally 0800-1200 and 1300-1630 Saturday to Wednesday; 0800-1330 Thursday.

Commercial Information: The following organisations can offer advice: Afghan Chambers of Commerce and Industry, Mohd Jan Khan Wat, Kabul (tel: (9251) 26796); or the Federation of Afghan Chambers of Commerce and Industry, Daraulaman Wat, Kabul.

12 CLIMATE

Although occupying the same latitudes as South-Central USA, the mountainous nature of much of Afghanistan produces a far colder climate. Being landlocked, there are considerable differences in temperature between summer and winter, and day and night in lowland regions and in the valleys. The southern lowlands have intensely hot summers and harsh winters.

13 HISTORY AND GOVERNMENT

Government: The Taleban-controlled region of the country is governed by an appointed Council of ministers. Elsewhere, there is little by way of formal government: the dominant military force in each area is responsible for social and political control.

History: The history of Afghanistan has been closely tied to that of Persia, India and Russia, with all of whom Afghanistan has regularly been in conflict. Contact with Britain came about in the early 1800s: the British invaded Afghanistan twice in the following years and were ignominiously chased out both times. Although no country succeeded in pacifying the fractious Afghans, the area became the scene of a vast amount of intrigue between the Russian and British Imperial powers, both vying for influence in Central Asia. It was not until the 1919 Treaty of Rawalpindi that Britain recognised Afghanistan's independence. During the 1920s King Amanullah brought about the modernisation of industry and trade, education and communications. He also signed treaties with Iran and Turkey which settled their various long-standing differences. However, political stability at home proved elusive and Amanullah was overthrown in a coup, one of a series which did not come to an end when King Zahir Shah took power in 1933. Under his rule, Afghanistan confirmed its traditional regional policy of non-alignment, endeavouring once again to steer an even course between British-controlled India and Russia. Relations with the former USSR were particularly good during the mid-1950s when Moscow, seeking to exploit the British withdrawal from India, provided substantial economic aid to Afghanistan. Zahir Shah was eventually overthrown by a coup in 1973 led by his cousin and former Prime Minister, General Sardar Mohammed Daoud (one of the architects of the reform programme) and Afghanistan was declared a republic. The jailed leader of the communist People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), Nur Muhammed Taraki, was released from jail and installed as premier. However, the PDPA was itself split between the Khalq (People) and Parcham (Flag) factions. This bitter internecine struggle was compounded by the growing conflict between the communists (and reformers in general) and the country's Islamic groups who

resented much of the government's social reform programme and the influence exercised by the 'godless' communists. In April 1978, Taraki was ousted by his deputy and foreign minister Hafizullah Amin. The coup prompted a series of insurrections throughout the country led by Islamic guerrillas (known as mujaheddin). These developments broke the patience of the Soviet Union which, worried by the growing instability on its southern border, decided to intervene. In December 1979, Soviet intelligence engineered a coup, during which Amin was killed, and installed their own candidate, Babrak Karmal whose position was immediately shored up by the arrival of a large force of Soviet troops (initially 80,000, later rising to 115,000) to occupy and pacify the country. The stage was now set for a decade-long insurgency war between the Soviets and a coalition of Islamic, royalist and pro-Western guerrilla forces. The mujaheddin received extensive backing from the West, China and Pakistan and operated from bases in Afghanistan's remote mountainous regions and over the Pakistan border, where an estimated five million Afghans fled as refugees during the course of the civil war. While they could not hope to defeat the Soviets, they were able to force an effective stalemate. In 1986 Dr Najibullah Ahmadzai, previously head of the KHAD security service, replaced Karmal and began to seek a negotiated end to the war. This was finally agreed in April 1988 and, monitored by the UN, the USSR - where Gorbachev had recently taken over - pulled its last troops out in February 1989. However, the predicted rapid victory of the mujaheddin failed to occur as the residue of the communist government put up unexpectedly strong resistance and it was April 1992 before the Kabul regime collapsed. The faction-ridden mujaheddin government, under Burhanuddin Rabbani, which took control was almost immediately consumed by internal conflicts between rival guerrilla organisations. Meanwhile a new movement was gradually pacifying and taking control in the chaotic southern and central regions of the country. The Taleban (roughly, 'students of religion') movement was born in the refugee camps of western Pakistan. With an unreconstructed Islamic fundamentalist agenda and discreet backing from Pakistan, Taleban gradually pushed out the old mujaheddin forces until, in September 1996, they gained control of Kabul. In the areas now under their control - some 90% of the country - they have introduced a fundamentalist regime, notable for its repressive treatment of women and rigid adherence to a draconian interpretation of sharia Islamic law. Abroad, the Taleban have few friends beyond their traditional backers in the Pakistani military. But the Taleban have more than enough problems to occupy them at home for the foreseeable future: Afghanistan suffered such massive destruction that, even now, it barely functions as an effective society or economy.

14 OVERVIEW

Country Overview: Afghanistan is a landlocked country, sharing its borders with Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan to the north, China to the northeast, Pakistan to the east and south and Iran to the west. On the eastern tip of the Iranian plateau, central Afghanistan is made up of a tangled mass of mountain chains. Kabul, the capital has only limited moderate and low-class accommodation; prices are often very low and include service charges. Only basic accommodation is available elsewhere. Kabul has little remaining from its historic past. The Garden of Babur and a well-presented museum are amongst the few conventional attractions for tourists. Travel outside the capital is not generally permitted. The cuisine is Indian in style. Afghan specialities include pilau and kebabs. Traditional foods and tea from chai khanas are found in all areas at cheap prices including service. The national sport is the Buzkashi. It resembles polo, with the ball being replaced by the headless body of a goat.