

Karakoram Highway



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Between Central Asia and the plains of Pakistan is a geographical vortex rich in history, cultural diversity and dramatic natural beauty. In this 'collision zone' of the Indian and Asian continents, the Pamir, Kunlun, Hindukush, Karakoram and Great Himalaya ranges are knotted together. Here the ground rises higher, over a greater area, than anywhere else on the planet, and China, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India all come within 250km of each other.

In the 1960s and 1970s, Pakistan and China jointly cut a road across these mountains, following a branch of that ancient network of trade routes known as the Silk Road. This Karakoram Highway (KHH) connects the Silk Road oasis of Kashgar with Islamabad, Pakistan's modern capital, via the 4730m Khunjerab Pass, the semimythical Hunza Valley and the trading post of Gilgit. In 1986 the Khunjerab Pass was opened to travellers, completing an Asian 'high road' loop taking in Pakistan, China, Tibet, Nepal and North India.

Within reach of the KHH is some of the most awe-inspiring mountain scenery anywhere – the Karakoram boasts the highest concentration of lofty peaks and long glaciers in the world. This strategic region is also dense with the history and artefacts of human endeavour, from the campaigns of Alexander the Great in the 4th century BC to the intrigues of the 19th-century Great Game. It was through here that Buddhism reached China and Tibet. The caravans of trade, now diesel-burning trucks, continue to direct history, and intrepid travellers will continue to find adventure on this high road to China.

HIGHLIGHTS

Witnessing the reckless pursuit of a small white ball by mallet-wielding men on horseback in **Gilgit's** vigorously contested polo tournament (p291)

Trekking among giants in **Baltistan** (p300)

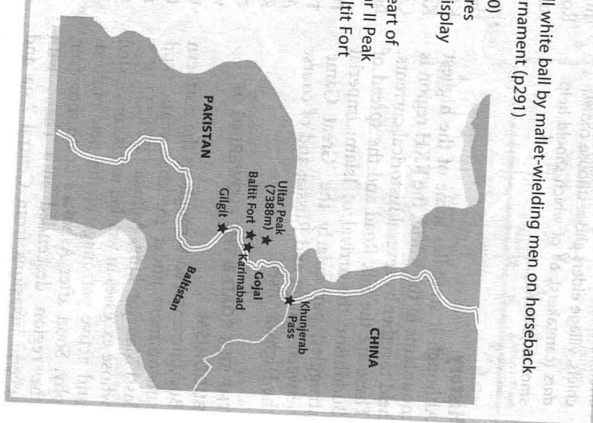
And beyond, where the Karakoram ruptures from the earth's crust in an unequalled display of high peaks and twisting glaciers

Kicking back in **Karimabad** (p312), the heart of mystical Hunza, under the shadow of Ulta II Peak and the brooding gaze of 700-year-old Baltit Fort

Visiting timeless villages in **Golai** (p320), picturesque oases in an unforgiving terrain, connected to the world by slender suspension bridges over raging rivers

Crossing the **Khunjerab Pass** (p327), a geographical and cultural watershed, in a modern replay of an ancient passage between empires past

Wandering through the alleys of **old Kashgar bazaar** (p334) and getting lost in the mesmerising market



TRAVELLING SAFELY ON (& OFF) THE KARAKORAM HIGHWAY (KKH)

The towns and villages along the KKH, particularly in the Northern Areas, are among the safest and most hospitable in Pakistan. Whether you enter from China or Punjab, you will keenly feel the relaxed and outgoing nature of the people here. Nevertheless, there are a few issues of which to be aware.

Avoid any travel at night, particularly in northern Hazara and Indus Kohistan; buses have occasionally been robbed at night on the KKH from Thakot as far south as Mansehra.

Indus Kohistan, away from the KKH, is fairly lawless and communities can be very suspicious of outsiders. On top of having a reputation for anarchy, many local men have skewed ideas about foreign women. Do not go into the hills alone and check with the local chief of police or district officer of the Frontier Constabulary before exploring beyond the Highway, especially between Shatial and Pattan.

It's also a good idea to call on the assistant commissioner in Pattan or the district commissioner in Dasu. They can often furnish introductions to local police chiefs, village elders and resthouse *chowkidars* (caretakers), all of which should help smooth your way.

History

Although it straddles some of the highest mountains in the world, the KKH region is held together by several historical currents. These are the Silk Road and the spread of Buddhism; the arrival of Islam; imperial struggles, particularly the 'Great Game' between Britain and Russia; and of course the Highway itself.

THE SILK ROAD & THE FLOWERING OF BUDDHISM

Buddhism spread throughout the northern subcontinent under the charismatic (and last) Mauryan king, Ashoka (272–232 BC), whose excesses in war led to his conversion and active patronage of the new philosophy. Soon after Ashoka's death, however, the region descended into chaos with several invasions from Central Asia and

a recurring Hindu backlash. Meanwhile, the Han dynasty in China was pushing its frontiers west and south over a growing network of trade routes that later came to be called the Silk Road.

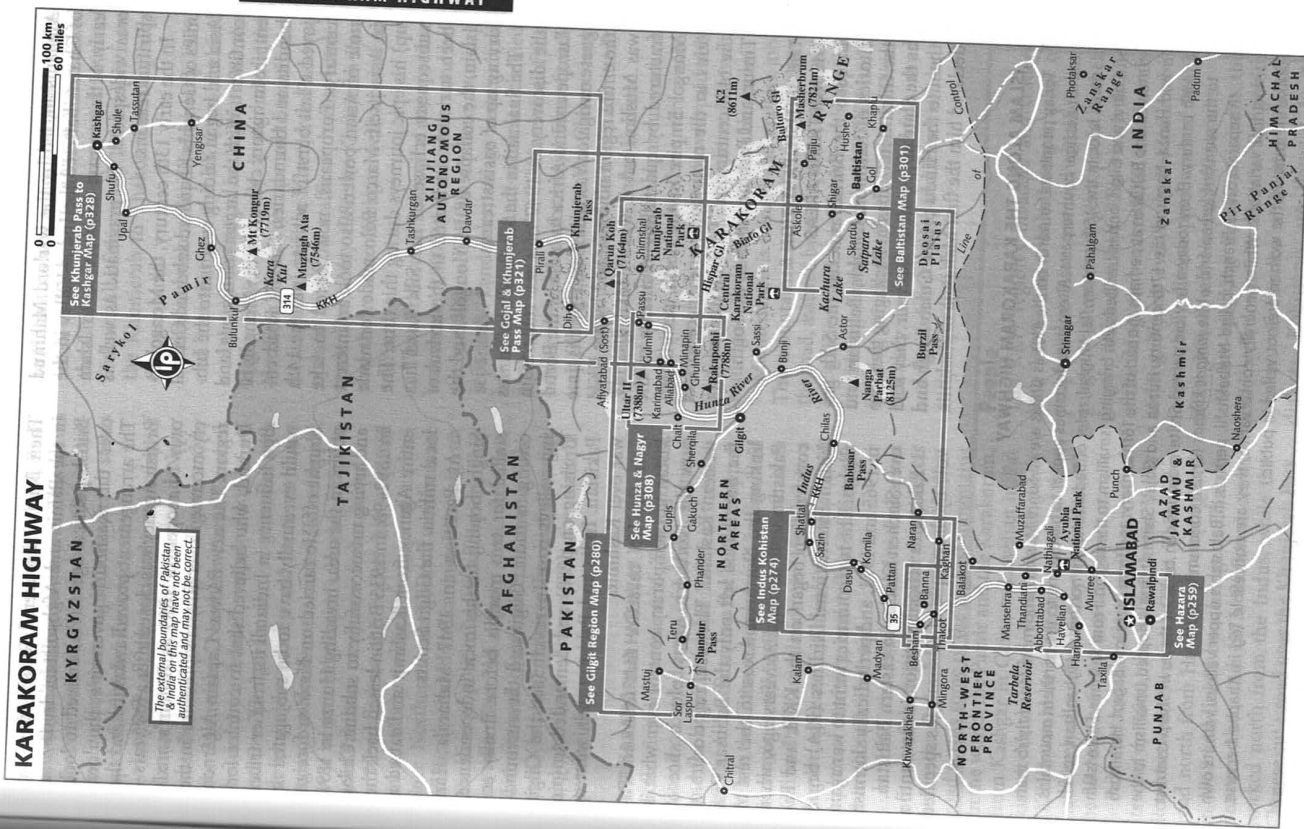
From the early Han capital of Chang'an (now Xian) a line of oases skirted north and south around the Takla Makan Desert to Kashgar. From there, tracks ran west across the Pamir and Turkestan (Central Asia) to Persia (Iran), Iraq and the Mediterranean, and south across the Karakoram to Kashmir. Caravans went west with porcelain, silk, tea, spices and seeds of peach, orange and other trees, and brought back wool, gold, ivory, jewels and European delicacies such as figs and walnuts – as well as new ideas.

Bandits from Mongolia, Tibet and the little Karakoram state of Hunza made these expeditions dangerous, and Han emperors spent vast resources policing the road. Among the tribes driven south by the Han were the Yüeh-chih (or Kushans) who, by the 1st century AD, controlled an empire spanning Kashgar, most of the Karakoram, the Hindukush and northern India. Under the Kushan dynasty, centred in Gandhara, Buddhism experienced an artistic and intellectual flowering and spread up the Indus into Central Asia, China and Tibet. The Silk Road became as much a cultural artery as a commercial one.

Buddhism left an extraordinary record in western China and northern Pakistan that can be seen while travelling along the KKH: the cave frescoes of San Xian outside Kashgar, the petroglyphs at Ganish and Chilas, and the bas-relief Buddha figures near Gilgit Town and Skardu.

THE ADVENT OF ISLAM & THE DECLINE OF THE SILK ROAD

Although an Arab expedition reached Kashgar in the 8th century, the earliest conversions to Islam in the Tarim Basin were by rulers of the Qaraghan dynasty in the 12th century. Today most non-Chinese there are Sunni Muslims. Almost simultaneously with the 8th century Central Asia explorations, an Arab naval force arrived at the mouth of the Indus, but likewise left little religious imprint. It wasn't until the 11th century that Islam began to establish itself in this region. Muslim Turkic raiders from



Afghanistan, led by the warlord Mahmud of Ghazni, battered the Indus Valley in the early 11th century. Conversion to Islam was widespread, for pragmatic as well as spiritual reasons.

In the early 13th century, the Mongol armies of Genghis Khan had subdued Central Asia and began raiding south into the subcontinent. With the largest contiguous land empire in history cleared by the Mongols of bandits and boundaries, the Silk Road enjoyed a last burst of activity into the 14th century. Europeans, now forced to take note of Asian power, also took an interest in Asia itself; Marco Polo made (or made up) his epic journeys during this time. The subsequent eclipse of the Silk Road has been variously attributed to the arrival of Islam, the collapse of the Mongols, and the drying up of oasis streams.

The final nail in the Silk Road's coffin was the discovery in 1947 of a sea route from Europe around Africa to India by the Portuguese navigator Vasco da Gama. By this time the entire region now spanned by the KKH was Muslim, but it was in total disarray, fractured by quarrelling remnants of the Mongol Empire in the north, petty chieftains in the mountains, and successors of the 14th-century invader from Central Asia, Timur, and Pashtun tribes in the south.

THE BRITISH, PARTITION & THE NORTHERN AREAS

In 1846 the British annexed the Sikh territories of Kashmir, Ladakh, Baltistan and the Gilgit-Hunza basin. Packaging them up as the State of Jammu & Kashmir, they sold them to the Hindu prince Gulab Singh and declared him the first Maharaja of Kashmir.

ISLAM ALONG THE KARAKORAM HIGHWAY

Today people as far north on the KKH as Chilas are all Sunni Muslims, and more fervently so than their Kashmir counterparts. Alternative doctrines appear to have come to the northern mountains much later. In the 16th century, Taj Mughal, ruler of Badakhshan in northeast Afghanistan, seized Chitral and Gilgit, and is credited with bringing Islamism to the region. From Kashmir, Shiite Islam moved into Baltistan at perhaps the end of the 16th century, and from there into Bagrot, Haramosh and Hunza-Nagyr in the 17th century. Hunza and Gojal, Shiite at first, adopted Islamism in the 19th century. Even today a few old carved Shiite mosques can be seen there, in sharp contrast to the spanking green-and-white *jamaat khanas* (Islamic community halls).

A separate Shiite branch, called Nurbakhshi, persists in Baltistan's upper valleys, with its own doctrinal variations. While generally conservative, they are noticeable (eg in Khaplu) because, like the Ismailis, the women are not veiled in public.

Then Britain discovered Russia snooping in the Pamir and Afghanistan. In 1877 a British political agent (PA) arrived to look over the Kashmiri governor's shoulder. The arrangement proved awkward and the British Agency was closed after a few years.

Only to reopen in 1889 as Britain's anxiety mounted over Russia's presence in the region. The new PA was Captain Algernon Durand, who believed that to counter foreign influence in India all its frontier tribes would eventually have to be subjugated or bought off. He carried on his own foreign policy in the area, invading Hunza in 1891 and trying unsuccessfully to subdue Chitral in 1892-93. In 1935 Britain leased back the entire Agency from Kashmir and raised a local militia, the Gilgit Scouts.

At Partition in 1947 Maharaja Hari Singh, hoping for his own independence, stalled for two months before finally acceding to India. Gilgit and the surrounding valleys rose in revolt (see the Gilgit Uprising on p288) and demanded to join Pakistan. India and Pakistan then went to war over Kashmir.

In the UN ceasefire that followed, Pakistan got temporary control over what is now the Northern Areas, plus a slice of western Kashmir. The resulting closure of the Burzil Pass left only the Babusar Pass linking the Northern Areas to the rest of Pakistan until around 30 years ago, when construction began on the KKH, and Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) began flights. The two countries went to war again in 1965 and 1971, and periodically skirmish over Siachen Glacier in eastern Baltistan.

Pakistan's official position is that, until a vote by the people of Kashmir (as specified

in the 1947 ceasefire terms) is held, Kashmir doesn't belong to anyone. This leaves the Northern Areas in limbo, because making it a province would concede the status quo of a divided Kashmir.

In 1969 all the residual autonomy of former mini-states like Hunza and Nagyr was abolished. Now they're all governed by the 24-member Northern Areas Council, headed by a federally appointed chief executive. The government is generous with development money and levies no direct taxes, but Northerners cannot, for example, vote in national elections. Having fought to join Pakistan, many now feel excluded.

Nevertheless, the region has acquired many of the political features of a province. Northern Areas Council members are all locally elected and can now campaign on the basis of political party affiliation. They in turn elect the deputy chief executive, with the rank of a minister of state in Pakistan. On his/her advice, the chief executive appoints four advisers with the rank of provincial ministers.

THE KARAKORAM HIGHWAY

Following its invasion of Tibet in 1950, China occupied parts of Ladakh, Baltistan and the upper Shimshal Valley in the mid-1950s. All traffic across the border stopped. While the Chinese border with Indian-held Kashmir is still in dispute today, a thaw in China-Pakistan relations in 1964 led to a border agreement, China's return of 2000 sq km of territory, and talk of linking the two countries by road.

In 1966 the two countries embarked on one of the biggest engineering projects since the Pyramids: a two-lane, 1200km road across some of the highest mountains in the world: the Pamir and the Karakoram, from Kashmir in China to Havelian in Pakistan. Much of this Karakoram Highway (KKH) would be in terrain that until then had barely allowed a donkey track. It was to be 20 years before it was fully open.

Pakistan had already started a road of its own in 1960, the 400km Indus Valley Road north from Swat and Gilgit. This and a road north from Havelian were completed in 1968 and linked by a bridge at Thakot. Between then and 1973, Pakistani crews worked north from the Indus, while the Chinese cut a road over the Hunjerab Pass

to Gulmit, as well as north from the Hunjerab to Kashgar. In 1974 Pakistan asked the Chinese back for more work south of Gulmit. All of the nearly 100 bridges from the Hunjerab to Thakot were originally Chinese-built.

Chinese workers departed in early 1979, and later that year the KKH was declared complete in Pakistan. In August 1982 the Highway was formally inaugurated, the Northern Areas were opened to tourism as far as Passu, and the Hunjerab Pass was opened to official traffic and cross-border trade. On 1 May 1986 the Hunjerab Pass and the road to Kashgar were opened to tourism.

The workforce in Pakistan at any one time was about 15,000 Pakistani soldiers and between 9000 and 20,000 Chinese, working separately. Landslides, savage summer and winter conditions, and accidents claimed 400 to 500 lives on the Pakistani side of the border, roughly one for every 1.5km of roadway (though some claim the Chinese took away many more dead than they admitted). The highest toll was in Indus Kohistan.

Few statistics are available about work on the Chinese side. Crews there were a mixture of soldiers, convicts and well-paid volunteers with nothing but picks and shovels, hauling rocks and dirt on shoulder-poles.

Maintenance is a huge and endless job. The mountains continually try to reclaim the road, assisted by earthquakes, encroaching glaciers and the Karakoram's typical crumbling slopes – and by the KKH itself: blasting so shattered the mountainsides that they are still settling. Rockfalls, mud and floods are routine, and travel is inherently unpredictable.

People

The KKH region's invaders and traders have left behind a kaleidoscopic array of peoples that have evolved distinct languages, customs and gene pools in their largely isolated valleys. This variety is one of the things that makes KKH travel so absorbing. Nearly everybody is Muslim, but in an equally diverse patchwork of Sunni, Shiite, Ismaili and Nurbakhshi variants.

Pashto-speaking Pashtuns inhabit the KKH well down into Hazara, along with speakers of Hindko and other Punjabi dialects. Kohistanis are thought to be

Shins, descendants of invaders from the lower Indus Valley at least 1000 years ago, converted to Islam by Pashtun crusaders from the 14th century onwards. Kohistani speech is a mixture of Shina, Pashto, Urdu and Persian.

Gilgit, the region's historical trading hub, is a melting pot of peoples from all over Central and South Asia that sometimes boils over with ethnic and religious tension. Its dominant language is Shina, also spoken around Nanga Parbat and down the Indus to Chilas and beyond. Up the catchments of the Gilgit and Ghizar Rivers is a mixture of Burusho, Shina speakers and Pashtuns. Some Chitralis are here too, and speak Khowar, an Indic language. In the other direction from Gilgit is Baltistan, whose mainly Tibetan people speak a classical form of Tibetan.

The people of Gojal are mainly Tajiks, originally from Afghanistan's Wakhan Corridor, and speak Wakhi, a form of Persian. The Burusho of southern Gojal, the Hunza Valley and Upper Nagyr speak Burushashki,

THE GUJARS

Gujars (pronounced *gu-jir*), descended from the landless poor of lowland Pakistan and India, eke out an existence as nomadic herders. In May and June they drive their cows, yaks, sheep or goats into the high meadows of the lower Northern Areas (roughly as far north as Gilgit) and southern North-West Frontier Province (NWFP), and then descend in September and October. They are a common sight on and off the KKH at these times, moving beside the road in long files of animals and people, or camped outside towns. They winter on marginal land, often on the dry river beds, seldom associating with local people.

Though Sunni Muslims, they are considered low-caste by many, even in nominally caste-free Pakistan. They rarely marry non-Gujars. Gujar women do not observe purdah (the wearing of a veil), and on the KKH south of Gilgit they may be the only women whose faces you ever get a glimpse of. Gujar near Gilgit speak Shina, while those closer to the Shandur Pass and in Chitral speak Khowar.

least seven other common tongues, from three different linguistic families. Persian is also understood to some extent throughout the region.

Prominent local languages are Khowar or Chitrali (Ishkoman, Yasin and Ghizar), Pashto (Besham and northern Hazara), Kohistani (Indus Kohistan), Shina (spoken around Gilgit and in the Indus Valley from Chilas to Lower Nagyr), Burushashki (spoken in Yasin, Hunza and Upper Nagyr), Wakhi (related to Persian, spoken in Gojal and Tashkurgan) and Uyghur (Kashgar). See People (p253) for more about the ethnic mix along the KKH, and the Language chapter for a list of useful words and phrases.

Dangers & Annoyances TRAVEL IN INDUS KOHISTAN

Indus Kohistan, off the Highway, is a pretty lawless place. You should seek advice from the police at Dasu, Komilla, Pattan or Besham before heading up any of Kohistan's side valleys. See Travelling Safely On (& Off) the Karakoram Highway (p250).

SECTARIAN VIOLENCE AROUND GILGIT

The Northern Areas is one of the safest parts of Pakistan. But in 1988 Sunni-Shiite tension erupted in gun battles in the valleys around Gilgit, leaving at least 100 dead. There were smaller incidents in the following years, but electoral reforms in 1994 pacified the religious rabble-rousers (who were elected to comfortable positions), at which point the violence abruptly subsided.

No foreigners were ever injured, but the KKH has sprouted police checkpoints where foreigners must sign a register. Many sign false names for the fun of it, though the logbooks have apparently been used to help embassies find their nationals in emergencies.

In August 2003 there were violent protests (against property) in Skardu triggered by disagreements between local Shiite leaders over the syllabus taught at schools. If ever you are caught in such circumstances, the advice is to retreat to your hotel and stay out of sight of the mob.

ROCKFALL

Rockfall hazard on the KKH, the Gilgit to Skardu road and on valley footpaths rises sharply during rainy weather. Walkers and

cyclists should simply find something else to do. Rockfall on the Highway may ruin your plans, but it can do worse. A letter from one traveller describes a truly harrowing day on the KKH between Karimabad and Gulmit.

A local driver said it was just a matter of scrambling across the rockfall and boarding transport on the other side. But there wasn't any, so he and his companions decided to continue on foot. Soon rocks were falling around them, and they spent six hours literally cheating death, sometimes hugging the wall, sometimes being forced down to the rising river. At one point a 5m rock smashed to the road just a metre from one of them.

Moral of the story: don't cross a rockfall hoping to find transport on the other side; the whole road is probably littered with rocks, with more to come. Go back and wait for the mountainsides to settle and the roads to be cleared.

UNREST IN XINJIANG

In early 1997 somewhere between 10 and 100 people died in riots in Yining, about 400km west of Ürümqi (the capital of Xinjiang), while more bombs exploded in Ürümqi, in Qorla (east of Kashgar) and on a Beijing bus. The Chinese government's response was swift and ruthless, with Uyghur sources claiming thousands of executions. As a result there has hardly been a dent in regional tourism, and there appears to be no danger for visitors.

Since 2001 it appears that China has taken advantage of the West's 'war on terrorism' to continue to exert its will over Xinjiang's Islamic populace.

Getting There & Around

The nominal southern end of the KKH is at Havelian in Pakistan's North-West Frontier Province (NWFP), but in practice it's at Islamabad, the capital, and its sister city Rawalpindi. Islamabad has a limited number of direct international air connections, plus others via Lahore and Karachi. You can reach the KKH by train from all over Pakistan. Most trains to the capital area go to Rawalpindi's Saddar Bazaar station, and a spur of the Rawalpindi to Peshawar

National Parks

The KKH runs through the Khunjerab National Park and you will have to pay a US\$4 fee (US\$ cash only) for the privilege. For details on this park's founding and conservation credentials, as well as background to other parks in the region, see p62.

Language

Travelling along the KKH is like passing through half a dozen tiny countries. In addition to the two national languages of Urdu and Mandarin Chinese, there are at

line runs to Havelian. The best bet from Lahore is to take one of the air-con bus services to Rawalpindi, such as Daewoo.

The northern end of the KKH is at Kashgar in China's Xinjiang Autonomous Region. Kashgar is linked by air via the provincial capital, Ürümqi, to major Chinese cities and international points. Overland, Kashgar is linked by bus and train to Ürümqi, from where railway lines run to Chinese cities and to Almaty in

Kazakhstan. Warm-weather roads cross the Torugart Pass between Kashgar and Bishkek in Kyrgyzstan, and across the Irkeshtam Pass to Osh, also in Kyrgyzstan, and an all-weather road runs between Ürümqi and Almaty.

Domestic transport in Pakistan to/from Islamabad, and to/from Kashgar in China, is covered in detail in the Transport chapter and within the Getting There & Away sections of the respective cities.

CYCLING KASHGAR TO ISLAMABAD

These notes are presented from north to south because cycling in that direction prolongs the good weather in the best travelling season, which is September and October. An alternative route through the Kaghan Valley and over the Babuser Pass is described on p271 (although it travels in the opposite direction to the route described here).

For information on bringing bicycles into China, see p397. For more information on equipment, safety and security on the KKH, see p404.

KASHGAR TO KHUNJERAB PASS

Food is scarce between Kashgar and Tashkurgan and between Tashkurgan and Sost. Water is scarce on the Kashgar plain, and between Kara Kul and the Khunjerab Pass. Checkpoints make good overnight stops, and it's possible to stay in private homes.

Kashgar to Ghez, about 120km

Overall, the road south from Kashgar is fairly level for 80km, before climbing steeply to Ghez. Upal, about 50km from Kashgar, has fruit, samosas and other snacks. The Ghez checkpoint has basic food and accommodation.

Ghez to Kara Kul, about 70km

Above Ghez the road climbs steeply for 40km through a canyon where landslides may block the road during rainstorms. Travellers exploring the sand dune area at the top of the canyon have been warned off by mounted police. From there it's gradually uphill, then steep for a few kilometres to Kara Kul lake, where there's a resort, yurt site and camping.

Kara Kul to Tashkurgan, about 100km

The 30km rising road to the Subash Plateau (at about 4000m the second-highest point on the KKH) is a long grind but not outrageously steep for most of the way. About 60km from Kara Kul is the abandoned Kekyor checkpoint. A truck stop perches on the steep climb south out of the Tagharma Basin. Tashkurgan is the only place between Kashgar and Sost that has real restaurants.

Tashkurgan to Pirali, about 100km

The bumpy road goes slightly downhill before rising towards the Pirali checkpoint. Cyclists have spent the night at the settlement of Davdar, which also has a truck stop. Soldiers at Pirali, about 45km from Davdar, might let you stay the night.

Pirali to Khunjerab Pass, about 40km

A gradually increasing grade, quite steep by the time you near the top. Altitude becomes the major challenge as you approach the pass.

KHUNJERAB PASS TO HUNZA

Food, water and accommodation are plentiful beyond Sost and the road is wide and paved. There are no major climbs southbound.

Khunjerab Pass to Sost, 85km

The road on the Pakistan side twists itself into switchbacks for 17km before descending steeply to Dih, about 50km from the top. From there it's a gentle descent to Sost. Abandoned KKH work camps make camping spots, and Dih has a national park resthouse where you can pitch a tent. Those without camping gear might stay the night at a roadworks camp or at the Khunjerab Village Organisation (KVO) checkpoint about 8km above Sost (before you reach Sost). The guestbook at the Mountain Refuge in Old Sost has comments from cyclists.

Sost to Passu, about 40km

A gentle downhill ride. There are basic hotels with hot showers at Gircha (a few kilometres south of Sost) and Morkhun, about 12km from Sost. Khyber, about 20km from Sost, has a small inn. Passu's Batura Inn has a 'rumour' book with cyclists' comments.

Passu to Gulmit, 16km

Sharp climbs include the 4km ascent from Passu south to Yashvandan.

Gulmit to Ganish, 34km

The road is fairly level but often plagued with rockfall damage. Karimabad is a steep 2km climb on a link road a few kilometres west of Ganish. Ganish, Aliabad (5km southwest of Ganish) and Murtazaabad (a further 8km along the highway) have small hotels.

HUNZA TO GILGIT

Ganish to Minapin turning, about 25km

From the bridge over the Hunza River it's an unpaved 3km to Minapin, with a steep down-and-up at Minapin Nala (nala is Urdu for tributary canyon).

Minapin turning to Chalt turning, about 25km

There is food and shelter at Ghulmet Nala, about 5km west of Pisan (2km from Minapin). Chalt is about 4km off the KKH, and has simple accommodation.

Chalt turning to Gilgit, about 55km

Basic food and charpoys (simple beds made of ropes knotted together on a wooden frame) are available at Jaglot Guar, about 14km from the Chalt turning. The shortest route into Gilgit from the north is via a tunnel and two suspension bridges (turn off the KKH at Dainyor).

GILGIT REGION

Gilgit is 10km off the KKH. Most people cycling the KKH start or finish here, avoiding the headaches of Indus Kohistan. Good 'rumour' books are at the North Inn and Mountain Refuge in Gilgit. Gilgit to Shatial has no long climbs in either direction, but lots of lung-busters under 4km long. There is a significant risk of dehydration and heatstroke between Raikot Bridge and Shatial.

Gilgit to Raikot Bridge, 80km

Jaglot, about 20km south of Gilgit, has serais (cheap travellers' inns) and a small hotel. The best overnight stop between Gilgit and Chilas is the scenic Northern Areas Public Works Department (NAPWD) resthouse at Talechi, about 62km from Gilgit; book it with the NAPWD Chief Engineer in Gilgit, or camp out in the garden. Don't count on finding food there. There's an expensive hotel at Raikot Bridge.

Raikot Bridge to Chilas turning, 54km

Gonar Farm, about 25km from Raikot Bridge, has one or two serais. At several slide-zones, the road can be potholed, bumpy or washed out.

Chilas turning to Shatial, 63km

Shatial has a basic inn where some cyclists have been turned away and a primitive resthouse where you may sleep on the veranda.

INDUS KOHISTAN

Cyclists, with expensive gear and skintight clothing that may offend orthodox Muslims, are especially vulnerable in Indus Kohistan. There are unverified stories of assaults, though cyclists mostly report petty theft and stone-throwing kids, mainly south of Dasu. Camping near police or army installations is comforting and pleasant.

Shatial to Dasu, about 60km

This stretch has no major climbs or descents. Sumer Nala, about 30km downriver from Shatial, is a small truck stop with food and charpoys. The Pakistan Tourist Development Corporation (PTDC) has a motel at Barseen, 15km north of Dasu, but Dasu's hotels and the Communications & Works (C&W) resthouse are more pleasant.

Dasu to Besham, about 80km

The road climbs high on the canyon wall, with lots of ups and downs. Resthouses and basic food are at Kayal Valley, Pattan and Dubair Valley, respectively about 30km, 40km and 60km south of Dasu.

HAZARA

The KKH is wide and paved, but from Mansehra south, traffic is heavy and drivers are reckless.

Besham to Chatter Plain, about 70km

As the KKH climbs out of the Indus Valley at Thakot, 28km south of Besham, the road is vulnerable to slides. Batagram is about 20km up from Thakot. The road climbs for 16km beyond this to a 1670m pass at Sharkul, then drops for several kilometres into Chatter Plain.

Chatter Plain to Mansehra, about 50km

It's downhill most of the way to Mansehra. There is cheap food along the road south of Shinkiani. An alternative route is on the back road that strikes east from the KKH at Batal to Dadar, and from there south to Shinkiani.

Mansehra to Hasan Abdal, about 100km

From Mansehra it's about 30km to Abbottabad, with an overall rise of about 200m. In the 15km from Abbottabad to Havelian the KKH plunges almost 500m. South of Havelian the road is flat for 60km to Hasan Abdal.

RAWALPINDI & ISLAMABAD

The flat 50km or so from Hasan Abdal to Rawalpindi is via the Grand Trunk Rd, a high-speed divided highway that is neither enjoyable nor very safe for cyclists. Alternative routes to Islamabad/Rawalpindi are a very hilly 200km from Mansehra via Gahri Habibullah, Muzaffarabad and Kohala, and a steep and hilly 130km or so from Abbottabad via Murree.

HAZARA

Roughly speaking, Hazara is that part of NWFP east of the Indus: a series of fertile plains and terraced or forested hills rising from just north of the Grand Trunk Rd into the Lesser Himalaya. Today's Hazara Division consists of the Abbottabad and Mansehra districts, and since the 1970s, the Kohistan District, which reaches west from the Indus into the Hindu Raj mountains.

Southern Hazara was a favourite gateway from the plains into Kashmir for expanding regimes – the Mughals, the Afghan Durranis who defeated local tribes in 1752, and the Sikhs who wrested it away during the period 1818 to 24. After the First Sikh War (1846), Major James Abbott came here as a British 'adviser' to the Sikhs; on the Sikhs' defeat in the Second Sikh War (1849) he became Hazara Division's first deputy commissioner. Abbottabad, the divisional headquarters, is named after him. Except for the occasional commotion by unruly tribes in the Black Mountains to the west, Hazara never saw the kind of routine bloodshed common in the rest of NWFP.

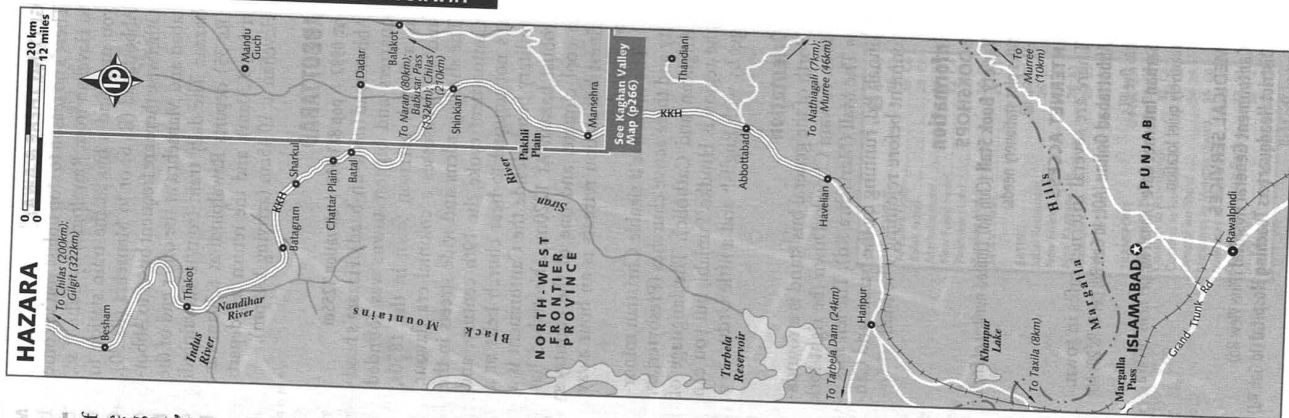
Some towns still have the remains of old Sikh forts, as well as gurdwaras (Sikh temples) built in the 20th century. The Sikh population only evacuated at Partition. The road to Kashmir was severed at Partition, and now Hazara's main artery is the KKH, ascending for 130km from Havelian to the Indus at Thakot.

HARIPUR & HAVELIAN

Haripur ☎ 0596 / Havelian ☎ 0992

Haripur, a dusty market town 34km north of the Grand Trunk Rd, was once Hazara's 'capital'. It was founded in 1822 as the headquarters of the Sikh General Hari Singh, after whom it's named. In 1853 the British moved all its administrative functions to Abbottabad, and Haripur's importance waned.

Half an hour north of Haripur is Havelian, another nondescript bazaar, with one claim to fame: it's the official southern end of the KKH. No signs announce it, and there was already a road through to Abbottabad before the KKH was even an idea. But there is a kind of geographical boundary: from here the road leaps out of the plain into the hills, rising nearly 500m in the 15km to Abbottabad.



GETTING THERE & AWAY

There's no reason to stop unless you've come to Havelian from Rawalpindi by train. If so, you may find a bus at the train station to Abbottabad (Rs 6) or to Mansehra (Rs 30). Otherwise there are frequent buses to Abbottabad and Mansehra at the other end of the bazaar. The daily train from/to Rawalpindi (Rs 35) departs Rawalpindi at 6.30am (arriving 9.30am), and the return leg departs Havelian at 10.45am (arriving 1.45pm).

ABBOTTABAD

☎ 0992 / pop 881,000 / elevation 1255m Abbottabad (*ab-it-uh-baad*), Hazara's headquarters and biggest town, was founded as a British garrison town in the 1850s, and still possesses a colonial-era flavour. The shady gardens and wide streets in the Cantonment evoke the 19th century, and it's not unusual to hear church bells or a military band. Beside the Cantonment is a robust bazaar. At 1220m, Abbottabad has a cool climate, and one of the country's finest hill-station retreats is an hour away at Thandiani.

The town has a sizable Christian minority and three active churches (Presbyterian, Anglican and Catholic). The language of the region is Hindko Punjabi, but you can get by with English and a little Urdu.

Orientation

North of the general bus stand is a roundabout, Fowara Chowk. Down the right fork is The Mall (Mansehra Rd). The left fork is Jinnah Rd, running by the bazaar and Cantonment before rejoining The Mall.

Information

BOOKSHOPS

Variety Book Stall (Club Rd) Limited number of English titles plus stationery needs.

INTERNET ACCESS

There are several Internet cafés in town. **Abbottabad Online** (AOL; Id Gah Rd; per hr Rs 20) AOL has five PCs.

Sarban Internet Cafe (Jinnah Rd; per hr Rs 20) in a relatively quiet location.

MEDICAL SERVICES

Cantonment General Hospital (Pine View Rd)
District Headquarters Teaching Hospital (Id Gah Rd) East of The Mall.

MONEY

If you're heading for the Kaghan Valley then change money in Abbottabad, as no banks in the valley will do it.

City Money Exchangers (Pine View Rd) Changes cash dollars, euros and pounds.

National Bank (near the courts) Cashes travellers cheques and changes cash.

UBL (Pine View Rd) Cash travellers cheques and changes cash.

POST

Post Office (nr Club & Central Rds)

TELEPHONE

There are numerous **Public Call Offices** (PCOs) in the bazaar.

Pak Telecom Exchange (Pine View Rd; ☎ 24hr) Will place overseas calls.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Conservator of Forests (☎ 9310232; Jail Rd) Can book forestry resthouses in Thandiani, Dadar or Kaghan.

Pakistan Tourist Development Corporation (PTDC) ☎ 9310168; ☎ 9am-3pm Mon-Thur, 9am-noon Fri) Across from Cantonment Public Park, this is one of the more friendly and useful PTDC offices. PTDC can help book transportation, government resthouses and other accommodation options in the region.

Sights & Activities

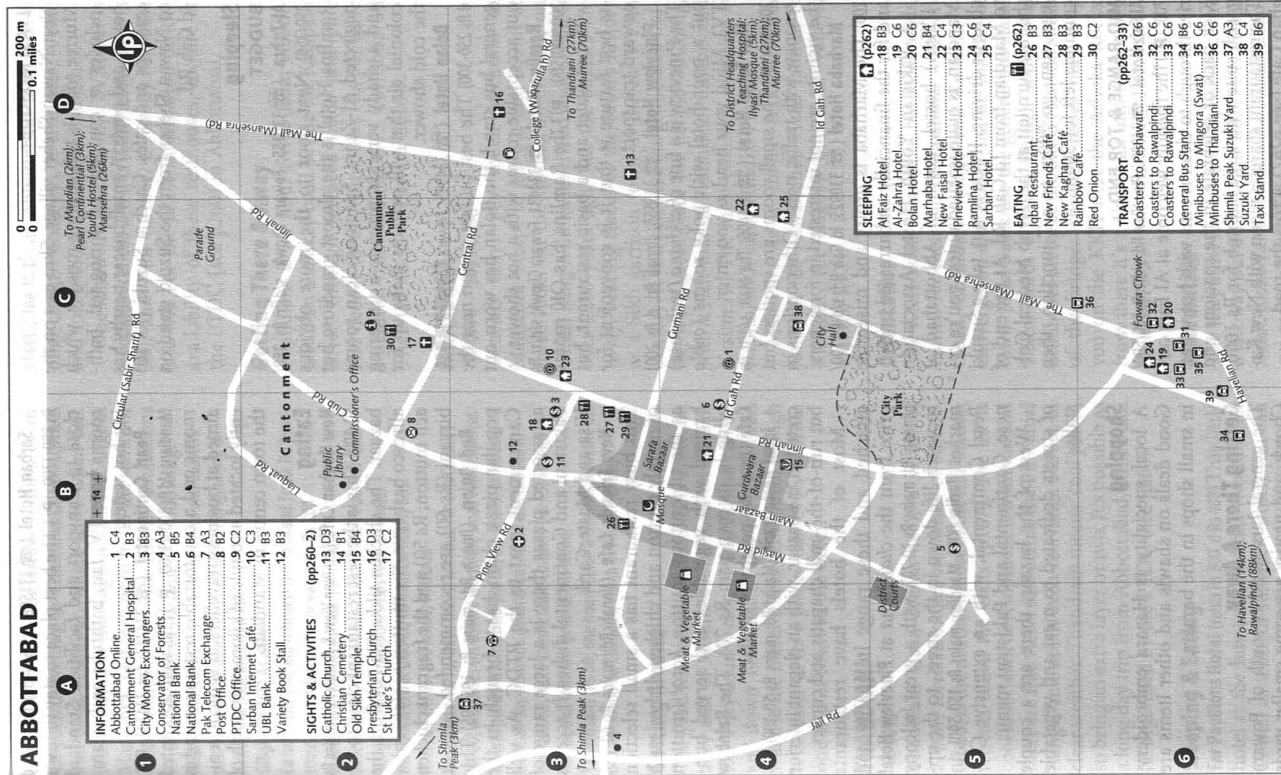
ABBOTTABAD TOWN

The town's historical heart is the Cantonment, with its orderly streets, European architecture and grand parade ground. **St Luke's Church** (nr Central & Jinnah Rds) is as old as the town. A melancholy Christian cemetery can be found 500m up Circular Rd.

Abbottabad's other persona is the bazaar, 10 square blocks of crumbling colonial architecture that are full of noise and traffic and the smells of cooking oil and barbecued meat. In **Gurdwara Bazaar** (off Jinnah Rd), beneath the arch, is a former gurdwara built in 1943, abandoned at Partition and now used as municipal offices.

SHIMLA PEAK

The hills cradling Abbottabad are Shimla Peak to the northwest and Sarban Peak to the south. Shimla's cool, piney summit is full of trails with fine panoramas of the town and its surroundings. You can walk up (three steep kilometres) or take a passenger Suzuki (Rs 5) from upper Pine View Rd; ask for Shimla *pahari* (pa-ree).



ILYASI MOSQUE

Near Nawar Sheher village, 5km east on the Murree road, is this striking mosque, which includes a complex of spring-fed bath-houses and pools. A small bazaar nearby has tea-shops and cafés. Catch a Suzuki (Rs 10) to Nawar Sheher from the Suzuki stand on Id Gah Rd.

Sleeping

BUDGET

Al-Zahra (☎ 330155; Fowara Chowk; s/d/tr Rs 250/250/350) Next door to the more obvious Ramlina Hotel is the almost grandiose but neglected Al-Zahra. Spacious clean rooms and a shady veranda provide a lingering colonial air that will perhaps make up for the cold shower.

Bolan Hotel (☎ 334395; Fowara Chowk; s Rs 150, d Rs 250-300) The best budget option near the general bus stand, the Bolan has worn-out but acceptable rooms with a hot shower.

Ramlina Hotel (☎ 334431; Fowara Chowk; s/d/tr Rs 200/400/500; ☐) The Ramlina has OK rooms with hot water and a basic restaurant, but its best feature is that it is convenient for onward transport.

Pineview Hotel (☎ 335555; Jimnah Rd; d Rs 200) The Pineview is a fine *chaikhana* (teahouse) but a poor hotel with poky rooms (cable TV). Mind your head as you enter.

New Faisal Hotel (☎ 334406; The Mall; s/d/tr Rs 200/300/400) The small rooms are spotless but resonate with traffic noise. Other options in the vicinity are not interested in foreigners.

Marhaba Hotel (☎ 330925; Id Gah Rd; s/d Rs 100/200) The Marhaba is grotty and miserable and for the financially embarrassed only.

A Pakistan Youth Hostel Association (PYHA) hostel, north of Abbottabad at Mandian, is quite isolated unless you're cycling or driving. If you're not, take a Suzuki to Mandian from Id Gah Rd. At the end of the line turn left at the 'Ayub Medical College' sign, go 700m to a T-junction, then continue left for 300m.

MID-RANGE & TOP END

Al Faiz Hotel (☎ 340896; Pine View Rd; s/d/tr Rs 500/500/700; ☐) The friendly welcome at Al Faiz carries through to clean rooms with hot water. Kick back or celebrate in the spacious and garish suite with large bathtub for Rs 1000. The restaurant shares a menu with New Kaghghan Café (see p262) across the road.

Sarban Hotel (☎ 331508; fax 334436; The Mall; d Rs 800-1700; ☐) The best place to stay in town close to transport and facilities. Standard rooms have TV, fan, bathtubs and steam-heating hot water.

Pearl Continental (☎ 334717; fax 334707; KKH, Mandian; s/d Rs 3000/2500; ☐) Has well-appointed rooms and a comfortable restaurant and is aimed at business travellers. It is inconveniently located a couple of kilometres north of the town centre in Mandian.

Eating

New Kaghghan Café (on Pine View & Jimnah Rds; mains Rs 50-100) This is the best restaurant close to the bazaar. The chicken tikka (Rs 72) from the alfresco barbecue, the mutton *paalak* (spinach mutton; Rs 50) and the fragrant chicken biryani (Rs 60) are recommended.

Red Onion (Jimnah Rd; mains Rs 195-595) This popular pizza chain has a branch in the Cantonment, next to the PTDC. As well as assorted pizzas there is a large range of Pakistani and Continental dishes. It accepts Visa and MasterCard.

New Friends Café (Jimnah Rd; mains Rs 60-195) This busy restaurant has a small selection of mainly mutton and chicken dishes, such as the ubiquitous mutton *karai* (mutton braised with vegetables and served bubbling in its own pan; Rs 70). The **Rainbow Café** (Jimnah Rd) nearby is similar.

Iqbal Restaurant (Masjid Rd; mains Rs 50-100) Seated in the bazaar, with an elegant interior but run-of-the-mill chapatis and curries.

Most of the hotels have restaurants attached and these range in quality and price from the *chaikhana* at **Pineview Hotel** (Jimnah Rd; mains Rs 30-70), with a great balcony to watch life down in the street, to the up-market **Nadia** (KKH, Mandian; mains Rs 150-500), in Pearl Continental, with an extensive Chinese, Continental and Pakistani menu.

West of the bazaar, there are a couple of streets dedicated to meat and vegetable stalls.

Shopping

A local speciality is Hazara embroidery. Good deals on shawls and other items are in small shops in the bazaars.

Getting There & Away

The general bus stand is south of Fowara Chowk, and nearby are some smaller yards

dedicated to the numerous minibuses or Coasters travelling to Thandiani, Rawalpindi and Swat/Peshawar, which leave when full. For Kohistan or the Kaghan Valley, change at Mansehra. You may need to do the same for destinations north on the KKH. Destinations from Abbottabad include the following:

Aliabad (Hunza; Rs 465) Silk Route buses and Coasters pass through the general bus stand after originating in Rawalpindi, but are often full.

Gilgit (Rs 465) As above.

Lahore (Rs 130, eight hours) Bus to Grand Trunk Rd bus stand. Air-con bus to motorway costs Rs 200.

Mansehra (Rs 20, one hour) Minibus.

Mardan (Rs 70, two hours) Most of the Peshawar- and Mingora-bound transport stops here en route.

Mingora (Swat district; Rs 160, six hours) Bus.

Murree (Rs 55, five hours) Minibus.

Peshawar (Rs 75, three hours) Minibus. Air-con Coasters (Rs 80) and buses (Rs 85) are worth the small extra expense.

Rawalpindi/Islamabad (Rs 50, 2½ hours) Minibuses leave all day from the general bus stand and next to Al-Zahra hotel. More comfortable Coasters (Rs 55) also go to Rawalpindi from the general bus stand.

Thandiani (Rs 30, one hour) Catch a minibus from the old GIS workshop on The Mall, north of Fowara Chowk.

Getting Around

The yard for passenger Suzukis is down an alley east of Mount View Hotel on Id Gah Rd. They usually clog Id Gah Rd and run up and down The Mall all day for Rs 3. Taxis will use the meter if it is demanded, though it is easier to fix a price – about Rs 50 from one end of town to the other.

THANDIANI

☎ 0992 Thandiani (taan-dee-aa-nee), a series of 2700m forested ridges northeast of Abbottabad, is the northernmost of the hill-station retreats called the Galis (p187). The air is cool and clean, development is minimal and there are fine views east across the Pir Panjal Range, and north even to Nanga Parbat in clear weather. Thandiani means 'cool place', so bring an extra layer or two. It's possible as a long day trip from Abbottabad, which can be organised by the PTDC (see p260).

Sleeping & Eating

Far Pavilions Hotel (mains Rs 300, d Rs 400) This little hotel at the bus terminus has two doubles as well as tents in summer, which you can book through **Sarban Hotel** (☎ 331508; fax

334436; The Mall) in Abbottabad. It may also offer cheaper charpoyos or tent sites. A café and snack shops are open in summer.

One kilometre south by the TV tower is a **Communications & Works (C&W) resthouse** (d Rs 300, and 1km further, a **forestry resthouse** (d Rs 400). For the latest information on the availability of these resthouses, inquire at the PTDC (see p260) in Abbottabad.

Getting There & Away

Thandiani is an hour's ride from Abbottabad on a snakey road beside the Kalapani River, through terraced fields and pine and deodar forest. Minibuses (Rs 30) leave when full from the old GTS workshop on The Mall north of Fowara Chowk.

MANSEHRA

☎ 0978 / pop 52,095

Tourists don't pay much attention to Mansehra except to get out and squint at three rocks on the northern outskirts, on which King Ashoka inscribed a set of edicts over 2200 years ago. But the bazaars are lively, bearing traces of the town's history as a Sikh garrison town in the early 19th century. If you can bear the gridlocked traffic, it's a great place for people-watching, with a rich mix of Pashtuns, Punjabis and Kashmiris. The most common language is Pashto, with some Hindko Punjabi.

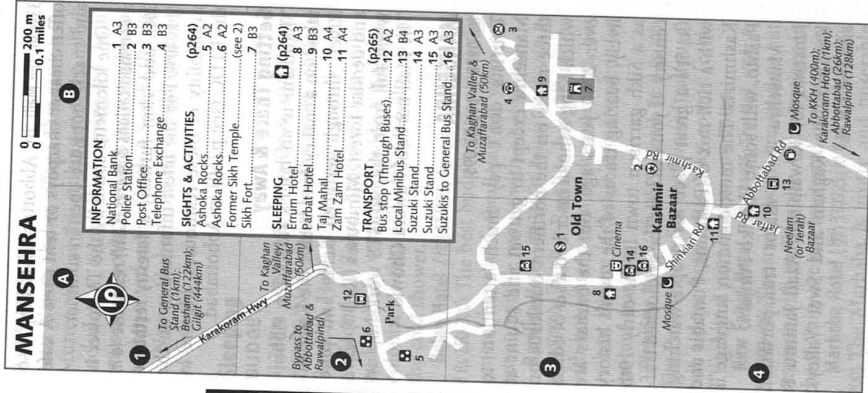
Mansehra is a major transportation junction for Rawalpindi, Azad Jammu & Kashmir, the Kaghan and Swat Valleys, and the KKH.

Orientation

The KKH skirts Mansehra, but local roads, named for their old destinations – Abbottabad, Shinkari village and Kashmir – converge on the bridge in the middle of town. Most buses use the general bus stand 1.5km north of town, though some local minibuses arrive at the old GIS stand south of the bridge. Through buses may drop you on the KKH near the Ashoka Rocks; from there it's a 1km walk into town along Shinkari Rd.

Information

The telephone exchange and post office are a fair way out on Kashmir Rd. The National Bank, tucked away behind the bazaar, changes cash and travellers cheques.



SIKH TEMPLE (POLICE STATION)

Up Kashmir Rd is a gaudy three-storey building, a pastiche of colours and styles. Built in 1937 as a gurdwara, it's now the police station. The interior hasn't been altered much either, and they might let you in for a look.

SIKH FORT

Up an alley 300m past the police station is a fort, built in the early 19th century by Sikh governor general Man Singh (after whom Mansehra is named) and rebuilt by the British after the Second Sikh War and the annexation of the Sikh state. It now houses government offices and a jail. A few traces of the original mud-and-rock structure can be seen inside.

BAZARS

Shinkhari and Kashmir Rds curve round a hill, with **Kashmir Bazaar** sprawled across the top, its narrow lanes in semipermanent shadow. Across the bridge along Jaffar Rd is the smaller, older **Neelam (or Jerah) Bazaar**.

Sleeping

Karakoram Hotel (☎ 302579; fax 303165; KKH; s/d/quad Rs 350/500/1000; ☎ P) Mansehra's best place to stay, with clean, well-appointed rooms. Aimed at tour groups, there is a very good restaurant (see Eating p264) and the only drawback is that it is 1km south of town, well away from the general bus stand.

Ernum Hotel (☎ 302848; Shinkhari Rd; s/d Rs 200/350) Has clean, good-value rooms with hot shower, and a rooftop patio.

Zam Zam Hotel (off Shinkhari Rd; s/d Rs 100/130; s/d with toilet Rs 150/180) Has small, passably clean rooms with a common cold shower and a good restaurant. It's hidden away, 50m west of the bridge.

Parbat Hotel (☎ 302979; Kashmir Rd; s/d Rs 150/250) Beyond the fort, the Parbat has ugly but passable rooms with a theoretically hot shower.

Taj Mahal (Abbottabad Rd; d Rs 60-120) The friendly but basic Taj Mahal is the best of a bunch of cheapos near the local minibus stand. Rooms vary in size, price and degree of degradation; inspect a few before deciding.

Eating

Abbottabad Rd food is cheap and good. Little cafés serve braised mutton, *chapli kebabs* (spicy mutton burgers), omelettes

and thick northern-style noodle soup. There are enough vegetable and fruit stalls to keep vegetarians going.

The best restaurants are in the hotels. Recommended are the budget **Zam Zam's** (off Shinkhari Rd; mains Rs 30-80) and the mid-range **Karakoram Hotel's** (mains Rs 100-350) Chinese, Continental and Pakistani restaurant.

Getting There & Away

The local minibus stand (Abbottabad Rd) has departures for Abbottabad (Rs 20) and irregular trips to Haripur and Rawalpindi (Liaquat Chowk) only.

For other destinations or modes of transport, take a Rs 3 Suzuki from Shinkhari Rd to the general bus stand, 1.5km north of town on the KKH. It's a large and busy yard, but help is never far away. Just ask one of the many sprukers.

For the Kaghan Valley, there are minibuses to Balakot and sometimes Naran, as well as slower buses. For destinations north, go to **Northern Areas Transport Company** (Nato; ☎ 307137) beyond the northern perimeter of the bus stand, near the well-signed Rajah Hotel. You may be able to guarantee a seat by ringing Natco's **Rawalpindi office** (☎ 051-5462181). Buses and Coasters such as Natco's run to a timetable, but the minibuses mostly leave when uncomfortably full.

Aliabad (Hunza; Rs 510) Natco minibuses. **Balakot** (Rs 23) Minibuses, some heading on to Naran, leaving all day.

Batagram (Rs 37) Minibus.

Besham (Rs 75) Minibuses leaving all day.

Gilgit (Rs 400 to 515) Various Coasters and buses originating from Rawalpindi. Natco has five departures a day.

Islamabad (Rs 60, 3½ hours) Minibuses leaving all day.

Karachi (Rs 700) At least three buses each day.

Lahore (Rs 180, or Rs 160 from Grand Trunk Rd) At least four buses each day.

Muzaffarabad (Rs 30) Minibuses leaving all day.

Naran (Rs 100) Minibuses leaving all day.

Quetta (Rs 800) At least one bus each day.

Rawalpindi (Rs 60, 3½ hours) Buses leaving all day.

Skardu (Rs 430 to 480) Various Coasters and buses originating from Rawalpindi. Natco has two departures in the afternoon.

KAGHAN VALLEY

Embraced by forested peaks of the Lesser Himalaya and drained by the Kunhar River, this 160km-long valley is one of Pakistan's most popular summer holiday spots. The

valley features pine forests, trout-filled alpine lakes and a cool mountain stream. With relatively easy access, its appeal as a summer retreat for the folks from the hot, dry plains is obvious. Outside of the summer peak season, however, you may find the hotels locked up.

At its head is the 4175m Babusar Pass into the Indus Valley at Chilas. In 1892 the British established a supply line across this pass, one of only two to Gilgit from the outside world. The other, the Burzil Pass from Kashmir, was closed by the 1949 ceasefire, leaving just the Babusar to link the Northern Areas with the rest of Pakistan until the KKH was built. It's open for several weeks each summer, a challenging alternative to the KKH between Mansehra and Chilas. Work has commenced on improving the road, but it is expected to take several years before this becomes a viable short cut to Chilas for general transport.

The valley population consists of a string of villages along the river, plus a biannual migration of Gujars, who fan out with their animals into the high pastures of Hazara (and Swat and Chitral) in May and June, returning in September and October.

Several good treks out of the valley are described in Lonely Planet's *Trekking in the Karakoram & Hindukush*.

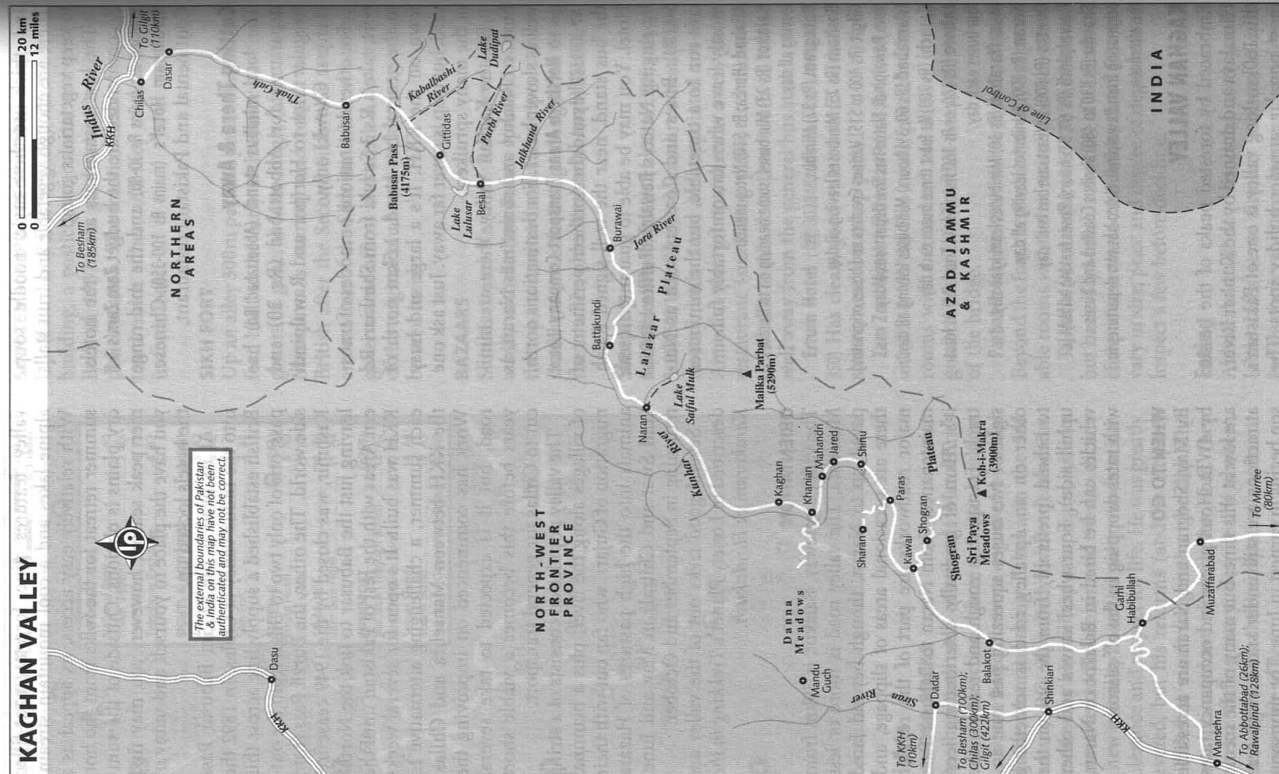
ORIENTATION

The valley's gateway, Balakot, is 39km from Mansehra. The valley road is more or less paved up to Naran, though beyond Jared there are occasional areas of slippage, and major roadworks are part of the regular maintenance. From Naran to Babusar Pass it's 70km of gradually deteriorating jeep track. Transport is rough and ready – the sight of two buses squeezing past one another on an upvalley road is something to behold (preferably from the one on the uphill side). Four-wheel drives and other vehicles can be hired in Balakot or Naran, with rates dropping in the off season.

WHEN TO GO

By May, Shogran and Naran are accessible by 4WD. Hotel prices and occupancy rates are low at this time, but many of the scenic attractions are still under snow. High sea-son begins in earnest in June. The monsoon

KAGHAN VALLEY



KARAKORAM HIGHWAY

brings rain and temporary roadblocks in July and August, but upvalley travel is possible. August is the best time for a jeep crossing of the Babusar Pass.

Fine weather returns in September and October, with the nights getting colder and the chance of snow in late October. From late November to early April, snow routinely blocks the road beyond Kaghani, and the upper villages are mostly deserted.

ACCOMMODATION

Hotels overflow in the tourist season, but prices collapse in May and in September/October, when you can negotiate bargains with the handful of hotels that remain open. Don't count on any hotels in the smaller towns being open after the holiday season. Few hotels will offer single-room rates in the off-season. There are several run-down PYHA hostels, packed with Pakistani students in summer and closed the rest of the year.

Some government resthouses are available on the rare occasions when officials aren't using them. Make inquiries at the PPTDC (see p260) in Abbottabad about the availability of hotels and government resthouses in the valley. Some forestry resthouses can be booked with the Conservator of Forests (see p260) in Abbottabad.

Balakot

0987 Balakot (982m) looks much better from a distance than up close. There's very little interest here, though you can get information on the upper valley and organise transport.

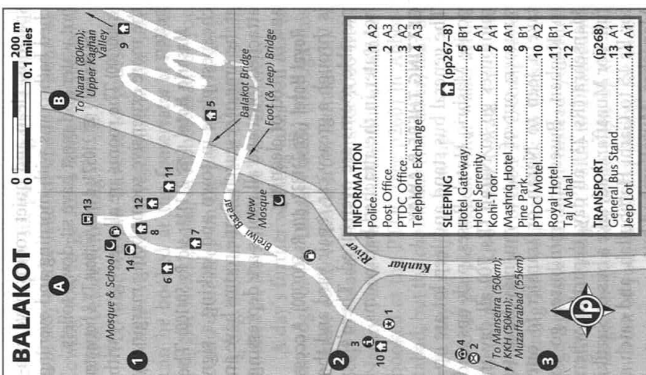
ORIENTATION & INFORMATION

The PTDC office, at the southern end of town, can arrange jeeps and has information on weather, road conditions, and sleep availability in the upper valley. The police, post office, telephone exchange and hospital are all a short walk south of the PTDC office. Banks here don't do foreign exchange, and you can't change money elsewhere in the Kaghan Valley.

SLEEPING & EATING

PTDC Motel (☎ 210208; s/d 1320/1650; **P** ☼)

BALAKOT



Kohli-Tor (☎ 210263; d/r Rs 300/400) The friendly staff and clean rooms with attached bathrooms with hot water, plus the offer of a 50% discount outside summer, make this a good choice. There's a basic but good restaurant (mains Rs 70-150)

Pine Park (☎ 210/544-4183; [P](#)) The building is precariously suspended above the river and is precariously succumbing to gravity. The neglected rooms with cold-water bathrooms and missing windows are overpriced but feature good balconies with views over the town and up and down the valley. The grandiose building to the southwest is the incomplete new hotel where construction has slowed over recent years. The gloomy **restaurant** (meals fr. \$20-75) is OK.

Hotel Gateway (☎ 210591; d/tr 800/1000; ) Rooms at the Gateway are worn and rather gloomy and therefore overpriced, though the staff are friendly and at least the building is on relatively stable land. There is an adequate **restaurant** (mains Rs 70-230).

Hotel Serenity (☎ 211182; s/d/tr/quad Rs 600/600/900/1200) Find the reception to this hotel at the back of a long shopping arcade. The

spacious, clean and quiet rooms have attached bathrooms with morning and evening hot water and most have sit-down toilets.

Taj Mahal (☎ 210521; d with/without TV & hot water Rs 400/300) The rooms are all pretty groovy with the more expensive rooms being marginally better.

Mashriq Hotel (☎ 211111; s/d Rs 50/100) The cheapest place in town and lacking a sign at the time of research. Some rooms have an attached toilet and all rooms are depressing and in need of cleaning.

Royal Hotel (☎ 211333; d/tr Rs 500/700) Access is through a greasy car repair yard and the passable rooms are overpriced. There's no hot water in the attached bathrooms.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

The general bus stand and jeep lot are opposite Mashriq Hotel. Buses, pick-ups and minibuses go to Naran (Rs 70) all day in summer; out of season you may have to take a jeep to Naran or transfer to one in Kaghan. Buses and minibuses go to Mansehra (Rs 23) all day, departing when full. For Muzaffarabad, take a bus or Suzuki for Rs 15 to Garhi Habibullah, and catch a Mansehra-Muzaffarabad bus.

Sample PTDC jeep rates are: Shogran, Rs 1000 return with a few hours there; Naran, Rs 1400 one way; Naran one way via Shogran Rs 1600. A full Suzuki is cheaper per person, but drivers are less reliable in the face of problems and dislike waiting around while you enjoy the view. For trips beyond Naran you can hire a jeep there.

Kawai & Shogran

☎ 0987

At Kawai, 21km north of Balakot, a jeep track climbs steeply for 8km up to Shogran. With views down to a carpet of forest and up to majestic peaks – including 5290m Malika Parbat (Queen of Mountains), tallest in the Kaghan Valley, and the brooding, 3900m Koh-i-Makra (Spider Mountain) – this is a great place to spend a few days hiking or hibernating. A good outing is the small lake and beautiful meadows of Sri Paya, 9km beyond Shogran up a rough jeep track.

The village of Kawai has a small range of accommodation options. **Tourist Inn** (☎ 410022; s/d 250/300) is good value with decent rooms. **Faisal** (d Rs 1000) has overpriced doubles, while

Punjab Hotel (d Rs 100) is really a cheap restaurant with a few basic rooms at the back.

At Shogran, **Tourist Inn** (d Rs 600) has clean rooms and fine views. A good basic option is **Shogran Hotel** (d Rs 300). Top-end **Pine Park** (☎ 410333; d old/new block Rs 2500/2875, cottages Rs 5000; ☐) is opulent and almost worth the price. The cheaper rooms in the neglected old block are not especially good value, though the setting is nice. **Green Land Motel** (☎ 410146; d Rs 1200-2000; ☐) is a new hotel beyond the cheaper hotels and Pine Park. The rooms are spacious and the carpet hasn't gone mouldy yet. Some rooms have double beds and the hotel's setting is excellent.

A minibus or pick-up is about Rs 25 from Balakot to Kawai. From there a special jeep can be hired for Rs 500 up to Shogran, though you might get a cheaper ride if you're patient. A special jeep from Shogran to Sri Paya is Rs 1000 one way.

Paras & Sharan

At Paras, 6km north of Kawai, a rough track crosses the river and climbs 15km to Sharan, in the middle of forest at 2400m. From there you can hike through the forest or trek overnight across to the Siran Valley, north of Mansehra (though a local guide can help you find the trail and avoid the occasional black bear or wild cat). A special jeep from Paras to Sharan is around Rs 700.

Paras has the cheap-and-cheerful **Green View Hotel** (d Rs 200). At Sharan there's a basic PYHA hostel and a forestry resthouse that can be booked with help from the PTDC (see p260) in Abbottabad.

Jared

The NWFP government operates a handicrafts development centre at Jared, two hours from Balakot. State-run and private shops sell traditional-style carved furniture, handmade woollen shawls and other work.

Khanian

This undeveloped village, at an attractive turn of the Kunhar River, offers a quiet place to stay if the tourist hordes are getting to you. **Pine Park** (s/d Rs 800/1000) has very pleasant rooms. As well, there are a few budget hotels with rooms at less than half that price. From Khanian, a 10km jeep track winds up the hillside to picturesque Danna Meadows.

Kaghan

About the only thing going for this little place is that the road is usually open year-round, and so if you can organise accommodation, it could make a base for winter trips. Any other time, move on to Naran.

There are a few budget hotels with basic rooms that are acceptable but overpriced in summer. These include **Siadin** (d Rs 200), **Vershigom** (d Rs 300) and **Lalazar Hotel** (☎ 0985-420022; d Rs 500). There's a Pine Park cottage, recognised by its Chinese red pagoda roof, which can be booked through **Pine Park Hotel** (☎ 0985-430045) in Naran.

From Balakot, buses, pick-ups and minibuses (Rs 60) pass through on their way to Naran all day in summer; out of season you may have to hire a jeep.

Naran

☎ 0985

At 2400m, Naran is the summertime base for exploring the valley and for the multitude of tourists escaping the heat of the plains. Hotels continue to spread uphill from the bazaar and along the road to the popular tourist attraction of Lake Saiful Mulk.

It's a beehive in the tourist season, choked with jeeps and minibuses. Hotels are packed in summer (Naran visitors sometimes have to stay in Kaghan), but in October the few hotels that remain open may ask less than a fifth of the summer price. From November to April, Naran completely shuts down.

INFORMATION

The **PTDC** (☎ 430002; inside the PTDC Motel) has guides for hire and can help you organise the hire of a jeep. Fishing licences are Rs 50 at the Fisheries office, near the road on the track to Lake Saiful Mulk, and tackle can be hired from shops in the bazaar.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

At 3200m, surrounded by moody, snowy mountains, **Lake Saiful Mulk** (or Mulk) is said to be inhabited by fairies. Legend has it that in ancient times a mortal, Prince Saiful Mulk, fell in love with a fairy there and married her.

It's a hot two- to three-hour uphill walk from Naran to the lake; the path starts just above the bazaar. Alternatively, you can hire a jeep for Rs 700 from Naran, which

can take up to six passengers. The driver will stay at the lake for about an hour, allowing you to go for a **horse ride** (trek per hr Rs 200), before returning.

The best way to have it to yourself is to camp. A forestry resthouse at the lake can be booked at the **Conservator of Forests** (☎ 0992-9310232; Jal Rd) in Abbottabad, or you could even sleep on the porch with a sleeping bag. Lalazar Hotel has a **cottage** (d Rs 700), booked in Naran. There's no electricity.

A day's further walking takes you east to the edge of the **Lalazar Plateau** (though this is more easily reached from Battakundi). A jeep to Lalazar Plateau costs Rs 1000 from Naran. There is a WAPDA hut at Lalazar, booked at the PTDC (see p260) in Abbottabad, but the **chowkidar** (caretaker) may let you stay if you just show up.

Local people suggest other walks across the Kunhar River from Naran. Cross the bridge at the back of the PTDC compound. Turning left, you can walk to Darseri village opposite Naran. If instead you turn right at the bridge, it's 3km to Dhamdama village. Or you can climb right up the hill in front of you, an all-day outing, for excellent views.

SLEEPING & EATING

Hotels in Naran charge according to demand. In the peak of summer, if you are lucky enough to find a free room, you will be quoted an outrageous price – an ordinary double room with a tiny bathroom may cost Rs 2000 or more. When we visited, hoteliers were loathe to quote an upper limit that they may be held to. Either side of the peak that same room will probably cost Rs 300 to 400, though be sure to bargain hard. Most hotels have a restaurant with Pakistani, Chinese and some Continental mains. Again, prices soar in summer – fresh trout in a top-end hotel restaurant can cost Rs 1000 per kilogram! Along the main bazaar are several basic roadside eateries with meat, dhal and chapatis.

Budget

Hotels in the budget category will charge Rs 200 to 500 for a room either side of the summer season but will happily treble these prices in summer. Most have ordinary rooms with less than ordinary attached bathrooms and only occasional hot water.

resthouses here and 15km up the valley at **Burawai**. There is occasional basic (charpoy) accommodation at Batakundi and Besal, though you may find the latter deserted.

The road degenerates to a barely jeepable track 20km beyond Burawai, at **Besal**. From there you can detour about 15km east to beautiful, green **Lake Dudipat**, or stay on the main track for about 3km to **Lake Lulusar**, the biggest natural lake in Hazara and the source of the Kunhar River. Here you may see Gujar encampments in the summer.

Gittidas, about 6km north of Lake Lulusar, is the southernmost Kohistani village in the region, and not a particularly friendly place to stay the night without a local guide. Cyclists report stone-throwing kids, too.

From Gittidas, it's about 8km to Babusar 'top'. If the weather is clear, you can walk about 1km east from the pass for views of the Kaghan Valley behind you and Nanga Parbat to the northeast.

Babusar village is 13km north of the pass on the track, or about half that far on a short-cut footpath. In summer there are a few shops and serais open, and a spartan resthouse, which you can only book at the Chilas NAPWD. Camping is not recommended.

It's 39km from Babusar village to **Chilas** on a rutty jeep track. Natco 4WD cargo pick-ups make this trip daily in summer.

Getting There & Away

A small 4WD jeep can manage the narrow, rocky track over the pass in July and August, though even then monsoon rains make it problematic. A one-way jeep rental from Naran to Babusar village/Chilas at the time of research cost about Rs 2500/4000. The pass is also feasible as a day trip from Naran, for about Rs 3000. Cargo jeeps sometimes go up as far as Besal.

On foot, give yourself at least a week from Naran to Babusar village, which allows for some side trips. Trekking may be possible as early as mid-June (though you'll still find snow) into October (though most villagers will be gone for the winter by then). Snow normally begins in November. A local guide might be helpful from Gittidas to Babusar village, as not everyone is friendly en route. Naran to Chilas is 130km.

For information on cycling the Babusar Pass, see p271.

MANSEHRA TO BATAGRAM

The KKH leaves Mansehra and crosses the surrounding Pakhli Plain before rising through terraces of rice paddies and cornfields. About 45 minutes north of Mansehra is the village of **Shinkhari**. A few minibuses from Mansehra continue from here up the picturesque Siran River Valley to pine-scented **Dadar**. You can walk over the mountains into the Kaghan Valley in a few days – from Shinkhari to Balakot, or from Dadar to Balakot or Sharan via Mandu Guch. But the hills are said to still harbour bears and wild cats (and outlaws, according to some), so a local guide is a good idea. The PTDC (see p260) in Abbottabad is a good source of information.

From Shinkhari, the KKH climbs through pine plantations into a picturesque bowl called **Chattar Plain** (named for Chattar Singh, another Sikh general), 1½ hours from Mansehra. An alternative route is by back road from Dadar to **Batal** village, just south of Chattar Plain. From Chattar Plain, the KKH crosses into the Nandihar River basin and drops toward the Indus.

Sleeping & Eating

At Sharkul, in the woods above Chattar Plain, is **Green's Sharkool** (☎ 0987-333174; s/d Rs 900/1000) with spacious and clean rooms. The communal areas have an air of neglect and the place seems overpriced and underutilised. Down on the plain, bright **Chattar Motel & Restaurant** (☎ 0987-333191; d with/without hot water Rs 600/500) is surrounded by pleasant lawns, and the good restaurant is a popular lunch stop for tour groups.

Dadar has a **forestry resthouse** (d Rs 300), booked with the **Conservator of Forests** (☎ 0992-9310232; jail Rd) in Abbottabad.

BATAGRAM

☎ 0987 / pop 183,508

The Pashun village of Batagram, straddling the Nandihar River 20km above the Indus, has little to offer but picturesque walks in the fields and some hard-to-find Buddhist ruins in the hills near Pishora. Little English is spoken.

Sights & Activities

Across the Nandihar River, 15 minutes north on the KKH, is the village of **Kotgala**, started up like an amusement park. Local

people say the gaudy paint jobs are by villagers showing off fat remittances from overseas work. Further north watch for the **able cars** (some of them just rickety seats suspended from a single cable) that connect villages on the west side of the river to the KKH. For a cheap (Rs 2) thrill, try one yourself.

Archaeological researchers say there are **Buddhist ruins** by a spring near Pishora village, 8km north of Batagram, though you would need good local help to find them. In the same area, Kala Tassa, there are **petroglyphs** depicting hunters, animals and a Buddhist stupa beneath a rock overhang. The writing refers to a monastery in the time of a Kushan king of the 1st and 2nd century AD.

It's not a leisurely trip, but a 2km walk up into a steep ravine just south of Pishora village offers fine views of the Nandihar River valley. You will need to ask someone in the village for help to show you the way. Catch a Suzuki to Pishora from near Shangri-La Hotel in Batagram. There is also a 6km track to the ridge above Kala Tassa, starting at the petrol pump at the north end of Batagram.

Sleeping & Eating

The best accommodation is on the KKH just beyond the southeast end of town at **Batagram View Hotel** (☎ 310194; s/d/tr Rs 500/800/1000; (P)). Geared towards Japanese tour groups, the hotel features a communal Japanese bathhouse downstairs. Use of the bath is theoretically included in the room price, but it is clearly geared for groups. Strangely, the **restaurant** (meals Rs 60-100) does not feature Japanese cuisine, rather, Pakistani, Chinese and a few Continental dishes.

Accommodation in town is decidedly more downmarket. There is little to distinguish the hotels from one another. **Shangri-La Hotel** (d Rs 100), by the bus stop north of the bridge; **Tarand Hotel** (s/d/tr Rs 70/100), 200m off the KKH up Kucheri Rd; and **Spogmay Hotel** (s/d Rs 70/100), in main bazaar, have small rooms with attached squat toilets.

All the bazaar hotels have basic and cheap restaurants, and there are street-side cafés and fruit vendors in the area. The bright Thai Hotel & Food Mella Restaurant was closed at the time of research, but looks to be the best restaurant in town.

Getting There & Away

There is a bus yard about 200m south of the bridge, from where minibuses go all day to Thakot (Rs 15, 45 minutes), Besham (Rs 40, 1½ hours) and Mansehra (Rs 37, two hours). You can catch a minibus to Alai (Rs 40, two to three hours), and Karachi-bound buses (Rs 650) stop west of the bridge.

INDUS KOHISTAN

Rounding the western end of the Himalaya at Nanga Parbat (8125m), the Indus River cuts a gorge so deep that some parts see only a few hours of sunlight in a day, and are so inhospitable that even the caravan routes bypassed it.

Kohistan (Land of Mountains) refers to the sub-6000m peaks enclosing this canyon as well as upper Swat and Dir. The yawning, crumbling terrain made it one of the most harrowing passages in Asia. The intrepid Chinese Buddhist pilgrim Fa Hsien, having already crossed most of China and the Karakoram on foot, was awestruck. In 403 AD he wrote about Indus Kohistan:

The road is difficult and broken, with steep crags and precipices in the way. The mountainside is like a stone wall 10,000 feet high. Looking down, the sight is confused and there is no sure foothold.

Another name for the region was Yaghistan (Land of the Ungoverned). Outlaws could hide here without fear of capture; tribal warfare and blood feuds were commonplace. Stone watchtowers and fortified houses can still be seen in the older villages. Even today outsiders are not very warmly welcomed.

In the 1960s the KKH cut through the Indus gorge, and in 1976 Pakistan created an administrative district out of these semiautonomous areas, most probably to protect the road. The district government relies heavily on police and the NWFP Frontier Constabulary, whose big forts dot the valley.

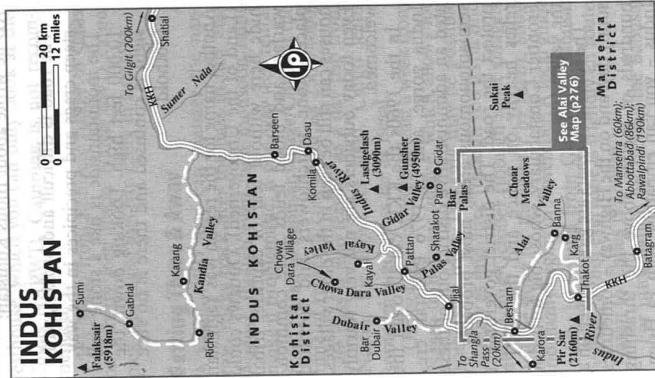
The roadside bazaars are gloomy even on a sunny day, and on the Highway – sometimes hundreds of metres above the thrashing Indus – you can empathise with Fa Hsien.

But this is probably the most dramatic of all Pakistan's mountain roads and, especially in the early morning, its side-canyons and corduroy hillsides are magnificent.

THAKOT TO BESHAM

Twenty-seven kilometres north of Batagram the road drops down to cross the Indus River over an elegant, Chinese-constructed suspension bridge at **Thakot**. In 1976 a lively party was held here, with Pakistani and Chinese music and dance, to open the bridge and celebrate the completion of the Indus Valley Rd. In many respects this is the real southern end of the KKH, not the Havelian railroad. On the other side of the bridge is the seedy roadside bazaar of **Dandai**, with the basic Hotel Sapari.

By the road, 15km from Thakot and 9km south of Besham, is an obelisk honouring the Kohistan Development Board, which oversaw development of this area after the 1974 Pattan earthquake. The stone marker lists the distances to Karachi, Kashgar, Beijing and other points. It makes a nice photo backdrop.



BESHAM

0987 / pop 56,269

Besham (beh-shaam) is about midway between Rawalpindi and Gilgit, with a few hotels, cheap serais, gun shops and a main road choked with trucks and buses. This is your base for visiting the Alai Valley, and pleasant Dubair Valley is not far away.

Besham is in an eastward bulge of Swat district, and is a mostly Pashtun town. The common speech is Pashto, and Pashtuns call the Indus 'Abaseen' (Father of Rivers). The forerunner of the KKH was meant to link the Northern Areas, not south to Mansehra but west to Swat over the scenic Shangla Pass, and this is still the junction for buses in that direction.

Orientation

Nearly everything is right on the KKH. Most transport in every direction starts from near the fork to Swat, where the serais and *charkhanas* are too.

Information

For current information on road conditions and the surrounding valleys, ask at PTDC Motel, south of town, reachable by passenger Suzuki for a few rupees. **Jam Net Café** (per hr Rs 30) is near the budget hotels in the bazaar. South of the bazaar is a post office, phone exchange, two banks and, further down, a police post. The district hospital is 250m east down a side road near the Swat junction.

Sleeping

BUDGET

Prince Hotel (☎ 400318; s/d/tr Rs 100/300/350) The Prince is a good budget choice. The basic rooms are well kept and some have a sit-down toilet. The restaurant is small but clean and the management friendly.

Hotel International (☎ 400415; s/d Rs 250/300)
The International has worn but passably clean rooms with squat toilets and cold shower. There is also an earthy restaurant.

Kargil Hotel (☎ 400553; s/d/tr Rs 200/400/500) Sited between two busy roads, the new concrete Kargil won't win any awards. The rather small spartan rooms are OK and hot water flows when there are sufficient guests.

Hotel Paris & Restaurant (☎ 400310; s/d/tr Rs 250/350/450) The basic Hotel Paris has worn but clean rooms with hot water. Some rooms have sit-down toilets and a tub.

New Abasin Hotel (s/d Rs 150/300) Just north of the Swat junction and next to the noisy minibus yard, New Abasin has very plain rooms with toilet and cold shower.

Hotel Taj Mahal (☎ 400432; s/d Rs 100/150-300).
Next door to the New Abasin, Taj Mahal is
cheaper and gloomier and the rooms poky.
There are some more comfortable rooms
on the top floor with sit-down toilets and
hot water.

Serais near the Swat junction have grotty doubles for around Rs 50 and charpoys in the open for less. Two that welcome foreigners are Swat Hotel and Karachi (Al Mubarak) Hotel.

MID-RANGE

PTDC Motel (☎ 400301; KKH; s/d Rs 1870/2420;  P)
This motel 2.5km south of town has spacious rooms, clean bed linen, tiled bathrooms with hot water and a great location beside the Indus. Enjoy a cool drink in the garden as you watch the fish jumping in the river.

Palace Mid Way Hotel (☎ 400505; KKH; \$/d/r Rs 700/1000/1200; **P**) A very comfortable option with clean rooms arranged around a spacious communal area. Attached bathrooms are very clean and toiletries are supplied. The restaurant has Pakistani, Chinese and Continental cuisine.

Hotel Continental Palace (☎ 400275; s/d Rs 600/800-1200; **P**) This rather large and soulless new hotel has spacious, carpeted rooms with clean bathrooms. The staff are friendly and the meals in the restaurant are generous.

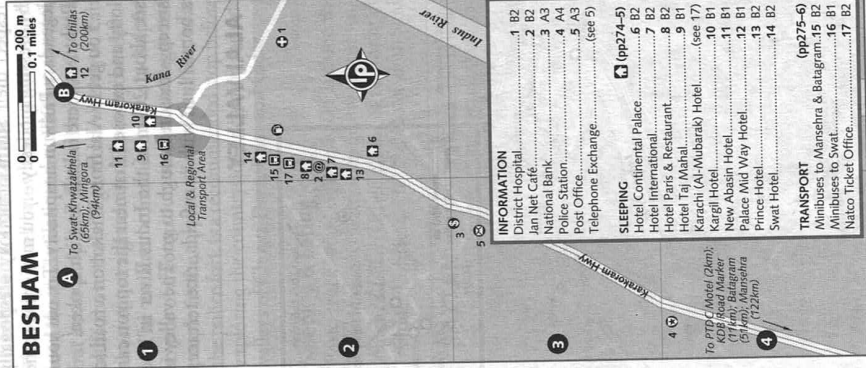
Eating

The best budget hotel restaurant is probably at the **Hotel Paris** (mains Rs 75-180). The very basic restaurant at the **Hotel International** (mains Rs 50-100) churns out Pakistani basics such as curried *sabzi* (vegetables), dhal and mutton curry. The **Hotel Continental Palace** (breakfast Rs 120, lunch Rs 240, dinner Rs 275) has generous set menus. The restaurant at the **PTDC**

Getting There & Away

Natco and Mashabrum Tours buses to Rawalpindi (Rs 235, seven hours) and Gilgit (Rs 320, nine hours) stop every few hours outside the Karachi (Al Mubarak) Hotel, but don't always have empty seats. Buy Natco tickets from the office inside the hotel. Unscheduled minibuses leave for Batagram (Rs 40) and Mansehra (Rs 120) when they are full.

For Swat, minibuses head to Mingora (Rs 65) from next to New Abasin Hotel. Change at Khwazakhela (Rs 60) for Madyan and upper Swat.



Suzukis, pick-ups and minibuses leave, when they're full, for Pattan (Rs 40) and Dasu (Rs 60) from the Swat junction.

ALAI VALLEY

The people of the beautiful Alai Valley are Pashtuns, probably driven out of Swat in the 16th century. They had their own nawab (Muslim ruler), and were left alone until the late 1970s, when the area came under NWFP control and the nawab was demoted to parliamentary delegate. Alai Valley is actually in the Mansehra district, not Indus Kohistan, but its only road access is from the Indus.

Though surprised to see foreigners, people are instinctively hospitable. If you respect their Sunni orthodoxy – especially by dressing modestly – you may enjoy some legendary Pashtun hospitality. Try out your Pashto as there is little English spoken.

You get to Alai from Thakot on a road so lofty and exposed that near the top you can see about 20km of the Indus River in one sweep – reason enough to go. The valley is a bonus, lush with cornfields, rice terraces

and orchards and rising to pine-clad mountains. The optimal visit is probably a long day trip from Besham.

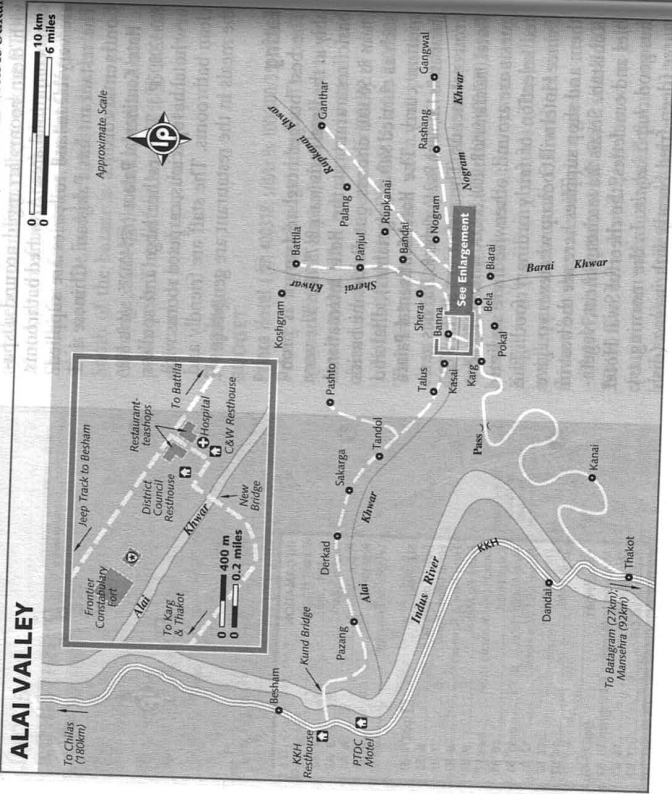
Alai is cool even in summer, so take an extra layer: From November to April it's very cold, with snow by December.

Orientation & Information

The 29km Thakot to Alai road rises more than one vertical kilometre. From the end of the bus line at Karg, walk 500m back for good views of the Indus. At the east end of Karg, fork left to the main village of Banna, across the Alai River, with a red-roofed district council resthouse, a C&W resthouse and a small hospital. Turning left past the police post (where they like you to register if you're staying the night) and the Frontier Constabulary fort, a jeep track runs 30km downvalley directly to Besham.

Sights & Activities

The road from Banna up **Sherai Khwar** (Sherai Valley) offers the best valley views. The right fork at Karg eventually takes you into **Rupkanai Khwar**, at the head of which is Sukai



Peak. At the first bridge, about 4km from Karg, look up towards Biara, which locals consider the valley's prettiest village.

Chor is a vast alpine meadow area, as big as Alai itself, a long day's walk (one way) up either the Rupkanai or Nogram Khwars. It's accessible only from May to August, when herds are driven up to it. You can camp here, even trek across to the Kaghan Valley, but a local guide is essential – talk to locals.

Sleeping & Eating

There are two resthouses and restaurants here, but no hotels. The C&W resthouse is under the jurisdiction of the executive engineer in Mansehra, but you might be able to get help from the Besham **PTDC** (☎ 400301). Arrange meals with the *chowkidar* or bring your own food. There are also forestry resthouses here and up Nogram Khwar at Gangwal.

Getting There & Away

Occasional cargo jeeps go directly up the Alai Valley from Kund Bridge, 1.5km south of Besham, but the regular passenger service is via Thakot, 28km south of Besham (Rs 20 by pick-up to Thakot). Regular pick-ups and minibuses go from Thakot to Karg every hour or so (Rs 35, two to three hours). You can hire a pick-up for about Rs 500 one way.

DUBAIR VALLEY

Forty-five minutes north of Besham, a plume of bright blue liquid in the river is actually the clear Dubair River entering the silt-laden Indus. South of the bridge a jeep track climbs beside the stream, past terraces of corn guarded by scarecrows in Chitrali hats. Occasional passenger pick-ups go 15km up the canyon to Bar (Upper) Dubair village. A mule track reaches 20km further to the valley head, though you should definitely get local advice before going up there.

Overlooking the Dubair River in the centre of the bazaar, the **Rest Point Inn** (s/d Rs 150/200) has a good restaurant but very basic and dirty rooms. The ragged Dubair Bazaar has snacks, fruit and cold drinks.

At Jijal (or Jajal), east of Dubair Valley, the KKH leaves the Indian subcontinent, geologically speaking. The white and grey rocks south of Jijal belong to the subcontinent, while the greenish material to the

north was part of a chain of volcanic islands trapped against Asia by the drifting Indian landmass (see boxed text, p57).

PATTAN

☎ 0941 / pop 121,027

Pattan (*pa-taan*) sits in a fertile bowl where the Indus is joined by the Chowa Dara and Palas Rivers. This was the epicentre of a massive earthquake in 1974, in which entire sections of valley wall collapsed, burying whole villages and killing more than 7000 people.

Pattan has some of the region's few remaining carved wooden grave markers, once common throughout Swat and Kohistan.

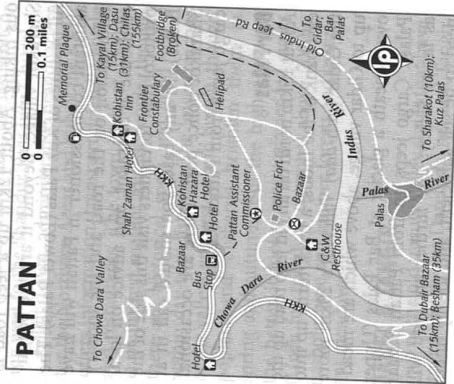
Orientation & Information

The village is well below the Highway. A link road descends from near a KKH memorial, but buses drop you almost 1km south, on a bluff above the village, from where you can short cut straight down like everyone else.

The assistant commissioner is a helpful source of information on roads, villages and people in the upper valleys. His office, near the police fort, is a recommended stop before exploring the countryside, including the side valleys of Chowa Dara, Palas and Gidar.

Sleeping & Eating

Basic truck stops on the KKH include **Kohistan Inn** (s/d Rs 150/200) with grotty rooms with attached toilet. Other places of the same ilk include Kohistan Hazara Hotel and Shah



Zaman Hotel. A peaceful C&W resthouse is on the banks of the Indus below the bazaar, featuring comfortable doubles with hot shower. It's popular, so try to book it with the executive engineer in Dasu.

The *chowkidar* at the resthouse fixes very basic meals at cost. You can get uninspiring meat and dhal along the KKH or in the bazaar. Shops have biscuits and, occasionally, fruit.

Getting There & Away

On the KKH, passenger Suzukis and pickups go to Dubair or Kayal Valley for Rs 25 and to Komila and Besham for Rs 45.

AROUND PATTAN

Before venturing into any of these side valleys, consult the assistant commissioner in Pattan. Forestry resthouses at Kayal, Dubair and Palas Valleys are booked with the district forestry officer in Dasu. All can be reached by passenger Suzuki from Pattan.

Chowa Dara Valley

The Chowa Dara (*cho-wa da-rah*) Valley makes a good day hike, with channels, terraced fields and hamlets every few kilometres. A jeep road leaves the KKH north of the bus stop, and will eventually cover the 15km (and climb 1400m) to Chowa Dara village at the head of the valley.

Palas Valley

This canyon across the Indus offers strenuous hiking. About 12km up a jeep road is Sharakot village. Beyond it are the beautiful pastures of Kuz Palas (Lower Palas). The assistant commissioner in Pattan will have information on the road and the forestry resthouse at Sharakot, and advice on local protocol (few foreigners visit this side of the Indus). In any case, you should call in at Sharakot police post. There are occasional cargo jeeps from Pattan Bazaar.

Bar Palas

About 15km north on an old jeep road up the east bank of the Indus, a track turns up into the Gidar (*guh-daa*) Valley. It's 20km more up to Gidar village, above which are meadows beneath a glacier at Bar Palas (Upper Palas). Cargo jeeps go from Pattan Bazaar as far as Sicho; any further and you will need to be self-sufficient, and ideally under

the protection of the authorities, the police post at Paro (about 3km before Gidar) and the tribal council.

KAVAL VALLEY

Twenty minutes north of Pattan the Highway slithers into a deep, narrow canyon. At the end, south of the bridge, a jeep road climbs 7km to Kayal village. Above here the valley divides and a track up the right fork continues for 15km to pastures at 3000m. Get local advice before going very far in.

Just up another jeep road north of the bridge is a forestry resthouse, which can be booked with the district forestry officer in Dasu. Shacks on the KKH have meat, chapati and snacks. Pick-ups pass frequently on the KKH between Pattan and Komila. Occasional passenger jeeps go to Kayal village from Pattan Bazaar.

DASU & KOMILA

Since being linked by the KKH bridge, these two villages have merged into a single town, the biggest between Chilas and Besham. Dasu, headquarters of Kohistan district, has government offices and resthouses. Komila has the bazaar and the transport.

Information

Komila has a post office. In Dasu, 300m north of the bridge, are the police, district commissioner, Frontier Constabulary and C&W executive engineer, where you can book resthouses here and at Pattan and Besham. The district forestry office, where you can book forestry resthouses here and at Dubair, Sharakot (Palas Valley), Kayal and Shatial, is 100m north of the petrol station in Dasu.

Sleeping & Eating

The basic meat and chapati restaurants in Komila have charpoys but aren't eager for foreign guests. Otherwise try the budget hotels, or the more-upmarket C&W resthouse, which has some air-con rooms. Find it up a track north of the police station (book with the nearby executive engineer).

The **Azim Hotel & Restaurant** (Komila; 4/r; Rs 100/150) has decent budget accommodation and the best food on the Komila side. There are cheaper rooms with shared toilet. Other options include the **Green Hills Hotel** (Komila; s/d; Rs 150/200) and **Indus Waves Hotel** (Dasu; s/d/tr

Rs 150/180/200), with basic rooms and shared toilet. Only the triple room has a private bathroom.

At Barsin, 15km north of Dasu, is a four-room **PTDC Motel** (s/d; Rs 1100/1320). Those who've stayed here say it's miserable, with a noisy generator, problematic water etc.

Getting There & Away

Catch regional transport in upper Komila bazaar. Long-distance buses and minibuses use a wide space below (downhill and north of) Azim Hotel in Komila and may also stop at the petrol station or Indus Waves Hotel in Dasu. Pick-ups are Rs 20 to Pattan and Rs 40 to Besham. For Chilas, change at Shatial (Rs 30).

DASU TO SHATIAL

In several places north of Dasu the road is just a notch in a sheer granite face, hundreds of metres above the Indus. This stretch of road took a full year to carve out and cost more lives per kilometre to build than any other part of the KKH. It was originally planned for the broad slopes across the river, but ferocious local resistance to the loss of arable land led to the road's realignment.

Forty minutes north of Dasu is the confluence with the 80km-long **Kandia Valley**, a major Indus tributary and, until the 19th century, an independent mini-state. Ten minutes on, the Indus turns east, its dark gorge abruptly opens out, and soon the Northern Areas reaches down to the northern riverbank – though the Highway remains in NWFP for a further 40km or so.

Sleeping & Eating

You can find charpoys at a basic truck stop at Sumer Nala, about 40km north of Dasu.

SHATIAL

From the road, Shatial is an ad hoc collection of cafés, minibuses and idle men. Check out the **petroglyphs** below the bazaar, near the Indus bridge. They include a detailed Buddhist tableau and many inscriptions and travellers' names, pecked into the rocks from the 1st century AD onwards. (There is more of this extraordinary ancient graffiti along the road from here to Chilas.)

Sleeping

Shatial Bazaar has an ultra-basic serai with charpoys. There's also a primitive forestry resthouse (you may have to bring your own bedding); book this with the District Forestry Officer at Dasu. For cyclists, Dasu to Chilas is the longest stretch of the KKH without reliable accommodation.

Getting There & Away

Pick-ups go upriver to Chilas (about Rs 150, 1½ hours), and minibuses go to Besham (Rs 110; five to six hours), all day. This is also the transfer point for the Darel and Tangir Valleys (p279).

GILGIT REGION

This section begins in the southernmost unit of the Northern Areas, Diamir district. It's best known for the 8125m massif of Nanga Parbat, the eighth-highest mountain in the world (Diamir is its local name). It also includes the remote Astor Valley, running along the east side of Nanga Parbat to the Indus, and 100km of the Indus Valley from there to the NWFP line, taking in some of Pakistan's harshest terrain and most ungovernable peoples.

We then look at Gilgit and the beautiful valleys around it: Haramosh on the Indus, Bagrot just downriver, Nallar to the north, and the upper Gilgit River system – comprising Puni and the tributaries of Ishkoman, Yasin and Ghizar, the last stretching west to the Shandur Pass into Chitral.

Gilgit Town, administrative headquarters for the Northern Areas and hub of the KKH, offers information, transport, friendly hotels and restaurants. The town itself, at 1500m, is of interest mainly for its people, though there are historical spots and good walks within day-trip distance. The lower reaches of the valleys are austere and brown, though poplars and orchards brighten them in spring and autumn. But the higher you go the better it looks; many glacier-fed *nalas* (Urdu for tributary canyons) above 2000m harbour pine and juniper forests and luxuriant meadows.

DAREL & TANGIR

Two of the old unruly valley states that have stayed unruly are Darel (*da-rel*) and Tangir