

QUEEN VICTORIA MONUMENT

There is a monument to Queen Victoria at the top of the rock face behind Karimabad, probably erected by Nazim Khan, and it can be reached in an hour from Baltit. Take the channel path above the polo ground. Five minutes out, cross the channel and climb stone steps beside an old watchtower. At the top of the village, scramble over to a shallow cleft with some very large boulders. Go straight up to the base of the cliff before crossing over to the monument; avoid a diagonal crossing of the face because the top of the water channel spills down it. In Burushaski, the monument is called *Ma-lakamu Shikari* (ma-li-ka-mu shi-ka-ri).

Sleeping BUDGET

In this range expect a squat toilet and cold showers, except as noted.

Old Hunza Inn (☎ 57186; dm/s/d Rs 50/100/150) Word of mouth up and down the KKH keeps this little place humming when others stay empty. Rooms are simple but clean and comfortable, and some of the attached bathrooms have hot water. There's a congenial host and the communal dinners are wholesome and cheap and a great way to gather information.

Haider Inn/Tourist Cottage (dm Rs 50; Rs 80-150) A confusing history of hotel name stealing has resulted in this, one of the original hotels in Hunza to sport two names, as well as a couple of buildings with comfortable, spartan rooms with hot water. The friendly owner is happy to show you the one-room original Hunza Inn and the original travellers' menu. The rooms are slightly better here than at Old Hunza Inn, where the food is better.

Mulberry Inn (☎ 57178; camp sites Rs 80, dm/s/d Rs 50/150/250) The friendly staff at Mulberry Inn keep the basic rooms with fan clean and comfortable and campers can enjoy a hot shower. There's an OK restaurant and a rooftop barbecue in summer.

Garden Lodge (☎ 57168; dm/d Rs 100/200) Has a quiet garden, as well as basic rooms that are reasonably clean.

Hunza Lodge (☎ 57123; s/d Rs 200/350) Popular Hunza Lodge has a variety of rooms, some with fine views and private hot showers. There's a good restaurant upstairs.

Lucky Star Hotel (d Rs 300) Housed in the old post office, the spartan rooms have private

bathrooms with hot water. It's centrally located with a restaurant upstairs and a good hot-snack restaurant downstairs.

Hotel Blue Moon (☎ 57325; d with/without view Rs 400/200) The small rooms come with tiny private bathrooms and hot water. There are great views from the garden that reveal the hotel's precarious position.

Rainbow Hotel (dm/d Rs 100/300) Has glum rooms with private bathroom and hot water upstairs and some even gloomier rooms downstairs that share a bathroom.

Karimabad Hotel (☎ 5708; dm/d Rs 50/150) The struggling Karimabad has tired looking rooms and is not the best choice in the area.

MID-RANGE

In the middle range, expect plain rooms with clean, comfortable bedding and private sit-down toilets and hot showers, except as noted.

Hunza Baltit Inn (☎ 57012; s/d Rs 1300/1600; P) The well-run Hunza Baltit Inn has a quiet location with views up to Baltit Fort. The small though cosy rooms with private bathrooms have either double or twin beds. There's a large restaurant and a Hunza-decorated room for traditional dining.

Darbar Hunza Hotel (☎ 57105; s/d Rs 1500/2000; P) This rather obtrusive giant has wonderful views down the valley. The spacious rooms, some with double beds, have TV and phone and attached bathrooms. There's a good restaurant and even a bar for foreigners.

Hunza View Hotel (☎ 57141; s/d Rs 1600/1800; s/d deluxe Rs 3000/3500; P) Below the telephone exchange, Hunza View has rooms with satellite TV and views. Geared for groups, it has a good restaurant, but presents a long uphill walk to the bazaar. Management here has taken over Mountain View Hotel and are offering cheaper rooms in that building.

Hill Top Hotel (☎ 57145; s/d Rs 600/800) Venerable Hill Top, with its wide verandas and manicured garden, has a relaxed atmosphere. The rooms are very good and so is the restaurant. The late season discounts make this an even better choice.

World Roof Hotel (☎ 57153; r Rs 200, s/d with balcony Rs 500/700) The doubles with balcony have great views and so does the rooftop. The rooms are comfortable and there's a decent restaurant.

Karim Hotel (☎ 57091; s/d Rs 200/500) Rooms are reasonable and the food OK. The best feature is the sunny patio with fine views of the mountains above and the street life below.

Tourist Park Hotel (☎ 57087; s/d Rs 500/600) Has a warren of rooms, some better than others, around a quiet courtyard garden, and a fine restaurant.

Mountain View Hotel (☎ 57132; s/d/r Rs 150/300/400) Recently put under management of Hunza View Hotel, this large, characterless hotel was due for refurbishment (and higher prices) at the time of research.

Eating

RESTAURANTS

All hotels have restaurants roughly in line with room quality, even the worst of them can produce chicken curry, dhal and boiled potatoes.

Hidden Paradise (previously called Ullar Restaurant; ☎ 57084; mains Rs 100-120) This quaint restaurant has a big menu of cheap Hunza dishes, eg apricot soup (Rs 30). The cuisine is definitely not haute, but this is one way to sample local food and enjoy views of Altit and Duikar.

Old Hunza Inn (☎ 57186; three-course dinner Rs 70) Generous local and international-style dinners are held in a communal atmosphere. If you're not staying here, then book dinner in the morning.

Tourist Park Hotel (☎ 57087; mains Rs 100-270) By arrangement, Hunza-style dinners are held in the owner's home, right in the middle of the hotel complex.

Hill Top Hotel (☎ 57145; buffet breakfast/lunch/dinner Rs 100/150/180) When there are enough guests, the buffets are put on and are open to nonguests.

Mulberry Inn (☎ 57178; mains Rs 100-200) The rooftop *tandoor* and kebab barbecue operates in summer; otherwise there are good curries and rice in the restaurant.

CAFES & QUICK EATS

Café De Hunza (cakes Rs 30-40, coffee Rs 50-55) The KKH has delivered espresso coffee (Rs 55) to sip while munching on Hunza walnut cake (Rs 40). Not surprisingly, this venture, which also sells books and souvenirs, has hit the spot with travellers. Beware, the cake can run out early in the morning.

Lucky Star Hotel (previously Ghizayat; mains Rs 25-35) Most appealing for its Rs 5 snacks (Hunza doughnuts, pakoras - floured, deep-fried

vegetables - and samosas) and Rs 5 tea, Lucky Star nevertheless serves inexpensive curries including dhal and veg curry.

SELF-CATERING

Self-caterers will find fresh fruit and vegetables less plentiful here than in Gilgit.

Sagfin Departmental Store has a reasonable selection of canned and packaged food, batteries, film and toiletries. Baltit Bakery and New Happy Bakery often have *pittu* (whole-wheat bread). These are also good places for dried fruit, snacks and trekking supplies.

Entertainment

Traditional dances are occasionally performed at **Hill Top Hotel** (☎ 57145) or elsewhere by local musicians and artists. Hunza's drum and *surmai* (a kind of oboe) music is called *hareep*; there are different versions for weddings, festivals, polo matches and other events.

Shopping

The bazaar is lined with art and handicraft shops, not all of them run by local people. The Threadnet Hunza shop sells locally made items, with the proceeds helping the artisans and their villages. Hunza-Nagyr wool is renowned for durability, though it's being displaced by factory imitations.

Trekking and mountaineering equipment can be purchased at the Mountain Equipment shop at the top end of the bazaar.

Getting There & Around

Local jeep drivers have set up a rota system and fixed prices for local tourist destinations, although your hotel-wallah's own vehicle may be available for local trips.

Minibuses to Karimabad depart around 3pm from Gilgit's Jamaat Khana Bazaar, and they scout Karimabad Bazaar between 6.30am and 7am in search of passengers for the return trip to Gilgit; the fare is Rs 70. After 7am, you will need to head down to Aliabad to easily catch one of the many minibuses (Rs 60) heading south. The most convenient transport to Sost (Rs 70) is also found at Aliabad. You can also try Ganish, but buses tend to fill up at Aliabad first.

Passenger Suzuks drive through the bazaar then do an Aliabad-Karimabad-Ganish loop all day for Rs 5 to 10.

AROUND KARIMABAD

Ultar Meadow

A climb to the beautiful Ultar icefall will give you an appreciation for the vertical lie of the land. This can be a strenuous day trip or an easier overnight one. Following are the essentials for a day hike to Ultar Meadow and back; see p365 for a longer option plus a side trip with amazing views to the Hon Pass.

Some people hire a local guide for around Rs 500 per day; useful but not essential. But going alone is not recommended; several solo hikers have disappeared and others have been injured.

Enter Ultar Nala from the top of Baltit village and follow a steep, often difficult trail up the moraines on the west side of the stream. There is a spring 15 minutes beyond the village, just past the channel headworks. The meadow is three to four hours up, 750m above Karimabad at the foot of the rumbling icefall, in an awesome amphitheatre of peaks. One black pinnacle, the 6000m Bubulmatang, or Lady Finger, is so sheer that snow doesn't stick to it. To its right is the 7388m Ultar II, until a few years ago one of the world's highest unclimbed peaks.

From May to October, Lady Finger Campsite, in the meadow below the shepherds' huts, usually serves basic food and even has tents and sleeping bags for hire. But check with hotel staff or other travellers for confirmation that it is operating. Do not walk on the dangerously crevassed glacier.

On the return trip, water channels look like good trails but often leave you with some dangerous descents, which may pose a rockfall hazard to others below. If you must use a channel, walk in it if it's dry, so as not to damage it. Rockfall risk is very high after prolonged rain, high winds or a thaw.

Ultar Nala comes from the glacier, and as the sun rises and warms the glacier, the flow increases substantially; an ankle-deep crossing at 9am can turn waist deep and dangerous in a few hours, putting you in a bad spot on the way down. The best solution is to start before sunrise and aim to return by midday (or the next morning). In July and August, when thunderstorms can roll through, the stream is even more swollen.

Carry water: the thrashing stream can be hard to approach. Take extra layers, even on a hot day, against the icy wind off the glacier.

Altit Fort

This is a miniature version of Baltit Fort undergoing extensive renovation at the time of research and closed to the public. The fort is a 10-minute walk east of the Kisar Inn in Altit, and 1.5km from Baltit. Turn right after the *jamaat khana* (small community hall) and pass the old village pool to the fort gate. Fort is *gela* (geh-lah) in Burushaskhi.

Melishkar & Duikar

At about 3000m, Melishkar is said to be Hunza's highest village. It and Duikar are a two- to 2½-hour climb from Altit, past gravity-defying terraced fields. The reward is immense valley views. There are even better ones from Khosht, a promontory leaning out over Ultar Meadow and the glacier, and a five-hour round trip from Melishkar.

Sleeping & Eating

Kisar Inn (☎ 57074; dm/sd Rs 70/250/300) At Altit's popular Kisar Inn, you will find other highway travellers and good local dishes in the rooftop restaurant. The rooms are comfortable and hot water can be arranged.

Other Altit accommodation includes several village guesthouses that operate seasonally and charge about Rs 300 per double: Amir Jan's opposite the Kisar Inn is probably the best; Wilayat is at the east end of the old polo ground. Near Wilayat is the group-oriented White Apricot Lodge.

Eagle Nest Hotel (☎ 58274; dm/sd Rs 100/650/800) Melishkar's Eagle Nest has comfortable rooms and first-rate Hunza food from May to October. There are doubles with hot water, double tents, dorm tents or you can pitch your own tent. It's popular, so ask at Kisar Inn to see if there's room.

At Duikar, Edelweiss Lodge has two barren doubles with toilet and cold shower for a negotiable rate but minimal views.

Getting There & Away

Tracks run to Altit from Karimabad Bazaar and from New Ganish Rd. Kisar Inn's free jeep shuttle often meets Sost-Gilgit buses at Ganish. A hired jeep from Ganish is Rs 500. Morning Suzukis run between Altit and Ganish/Altiabad. An early-morning minibus runs between Altit and Gilgit for Rs 80.

The turn for Melishkar is just before Altit, a 20-minute walk from Karimabad Bazaar. A jeep from Karimabad is Rs 1000; Kisar Inn charges Rs 800 for a jeep from Altit.

GANISH

The people of Ganish used to be famous for their raids against Nagyr. In the 19th century this was Hunza's main stronghold against Islamism, and is today an integrated Shite-Islam community. Most travellers know it only as the Karimabad bus stop, but it's Hunza-Nagyr's oldest settlement with an old village centre full of classic Hunza architecture. Travellers who show respect for the villagers will be overwhelmed with hospitality and rewarded with a rich cultural experience.

Ganish Village

☎ 05821

The restoration of **Ganish village** (admission Rs 150, plus camera Rs 50) is particularly good and won a Unesco Asia Pacific Heritage Award in 2002. While Baltit Fort shows how the cream of society lived, Ganish shows another side of traditional Hunza life. Behind a shaded, tranquil tank are several richly carved wooden mosques, 100 to 200 years old, the restoration of which clinched the award. Legend has it that Ganish warriors practised their river-crossing techniques in the tank before crossing the Hunza River to attack Nagyr villages. The timber-and-stone watchtower from the days of war with Nagyr is a tight squeeze but worth the climb. Particularly interesting is the use of the cool glacier meltwater to store food – it's still done today. Butter is wrapped in birch bark and can be stored under water for years! You may even be offered a sweet made from the butter.

If no-one is staffing the admission booth, go to the Karakoram Highway Inn (see Sleeping & Eating, following) for assistance.

The Sacred Rocks at Hunza

About 1.5km east on the KKH at a place called Haldekush are several stony rises. The rocks, with pictures and inscriptions from as early as the 1st century, are a 'guest book' of the valley. In addition to local traditions, they tell of Buddhist pilgrims, kings of the Kushan empire, a 6th-century Chinese ambassador, 8th-century Tibetan conquerors and even KKH workers.

Sleeping & Eating

Karakoram Highway Inn (☎ 57200; s/d/tr Rs 100/300/300) Not a bad budget place to stay; there are basic rooms with attached bathrooms and it's possible to get simple meals.

PTDC Hunza Motel (☎ 57069; s/d Rs 100/200, s/d deluxe Rs 1930/2200) This motel is at Garelt, 1.5km west of Ganish along the KKH. The spacious rooms with modern bathrooms enjoy wonderful views. There's a good restaurant, garden and information service.

Golden Peak View Hotel (☎ 57156; s/d Rs 500/600) Across the road from PTDC Hunza, with rather overpriced room. It doesn't look as though there's been any upkeep for years.

Getting There & Away

Altiabad-based minibuses scout for passengers to Gilgit around 5am to 6am. North-bound minibuses may have filled up in Altiabad before departing. Passenger Suzukis ply between here and Altiabad for Rs 5.

UPPER NAGYR

That part of Nagyr visible from Karimabad is strung along a jeep road from the Hassanabad-Shayar suspension bridge up to the glaciers at Hoper. Much of it is in the shadow of its own peaks, giving it a slightly gloomy atmosphere. The location also gives Nagyr heavier snow and more water.

Orientation & Information

Opposite Ganish, the Nagyr (also called Hispar) River joins the Hunza River. About 12km upstream this valley divides, south to Hoper Nala and southeast to remote Hispar Nala. Hoper's glaciers nearly reach this junction. There's a jeep road from Hassanabad to Hoper, and a paved road climbs from the KKH east of Ganish up the east side of the Nagyr River. A track continues towards Hispar and another crosses to Nagyr village and up to Hoper. A tenuous track also runs along the south bank of the Hunza River from Shayar to Minapin.

Shayar to Nagyr Village

There's a precipitous down-and-up at the Hassanabad-Shayar suspension bridge, followed by a fairly level two-hour walk on to Sumayar, then a two-hour climb to Nagyr. This area has few of the conveniences found along the KKH. **Akshur Das** has a teashop and small restaurant.

Camping is not advisable near **Sumayar**, but it's good in the meadows three hours up Sumayar Nala, with views of 7270m Diran and the Siliang Glacier. A footpath leaves the jeep track near a powerhouse, initially following the channel. In the afternoon after freezing nights there is a rockfall hazard in the nala.

Nagyr village was the capital of the old state of Nagyr, and the old *mir* still lives here. It has a hospital, a police post and a few basic shops and restaurants, as well as an **NAPWD resthouse** (d Rs 300).

Hoper

The area from Nagyr village to Hoper looks fertile and lovely in spring. Hoper (or Hobar) is a cluster of villages around a natural bowl at a bend of the Bualtar Glacier, 19km from the KKH. Opposite Hoper, the white Bualtar is joined by the Barpu Glacier. From here, you can hike beside the Bualtar or cross it and climb to summer villages along both glaciers. This is also a base for treks into the high, glacier-draped peaks called the Hispar Muztagh (see p364).

At the end of the road are a couple of basic accommodation places. A tent camp and a soup kitchen called the Hoper Hilton has a few doubles, a couple of tents and space where you can pitch your tent. Also here is Hoper Inn with tents and a small **NAPWD resthouse** (d Rs 300), which must be booked with the NAPWD chief engineer in Gilgit (see p290).

Getting There & Away

A daily minibus and assorted jeeps run between Hoper and lower Khazana (Bank) Rd in Gilgit (about Rs 70). A hired jeep is about Rs 1500 for the return trip from Karimabad. Regular cargo jeeps go in via Hassanabad to Sumayar and via Ganish to Nagyr village, heading back early the next morning.

On foot from Karimabad via Ganish, Nagyr village is about three hours and Hoper five to six hours. From Hassanabad via Shayar, Hoper is a very long day's walk.

GOJAL & THE KHUNJERAB PASS

The Khunjerab and Ghujerab Rivers merge below the Khunjerab Pass to form the Hunza

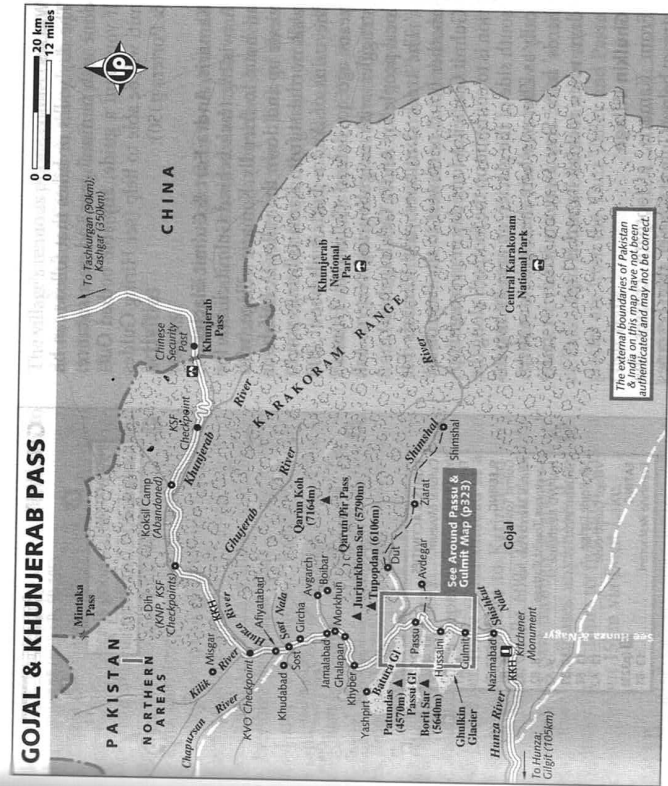
River, the only stream to cut across the high spine of the Karakoram. It does so in Gojal (the still-used historical name for the region usually described as 'upper Hunza'), which extends from the pass to where the river turns west into 'Hunza proper'. The High Karakoram is consequently more accessible here than anywhere else on the KKH. The Hunza River picks its way among great fans of alluvium carried down by smaller streams, and most villages are built on these fertile deposits. At Passu and Gulmit, several major glaciers reach nearly to the Highway.

'The scenery is stern and impressive, but too gloomy and harsh to be really sublime,' wrote the British explorer Reginald Schomburgk in 1935. Mountains with razor-edge summits and bare walls drop sheer to the river, and the wind drives up the valley even on brilliant days. The clearest and most storm-free weather is in early autumn, and if you're fit, this is the place to trek and get a feeling for the mountains and its inhabitants.

Most Gojalis are Wakhi Tajik (one of seven Tajik tribes in Central Asia), descendants of nomadic herders from Afghanistan, and Ismaili Muslims. Traditionally they have depended on the raising of sheep and yaks, and to a lesser extent on farming. They're certainly the most warm-hearted people on the KKH, with easy greetings and hospitality for both male and female visitors.

Depending on whom you ask, *Khunjerab* is Wakhi for either Valley of Blood or Valley of the Khan. The broad, fertile Khunjerab Pass was for centuries used by Kyrgyz and Tajik herders, until Hunza raiders and slave-traders hounded them out in the late 18th century, after which Hunza's rulers declared the area to be 'royal' pasturelands – so either version fits.

A steady trickle of horseback commerce crossed the Khunjerab (Chinese: Hongqilapu) until the 1950s, when China-Pakistan hostility closed the border. By the mid-1960s, the two countries had made amends and set to work on a road over the pass. 'Khunjerab Top' (4730m) was opened to official traffic and trade in 1982, and to tourists in 1986, though travellers had already discovered it. The crossing is not only between countries and between watersheds (rivers flow north into the Tarim Basin and south to the Arabian Sea), but also between two of the world's major mountain ranges, the



Pamir and the Karakoram. In the 2½ hours from Sost to Piral, the transition is evident from the deep, angular gorge of the Khunjerab River to the rounded Pamir valleys.

GULMIT

⑤ 05822 / elevation 2700m

With a library, a museum and the *mir*'s traditional second home, Gulmit (*gool-mit*) is the closest thing to a town in Gojal, and its unofficial capital. It's very picturesque in spring and early summer when the fruit trees bloom, and again in autumn when the orchards glow red, orange and yellow in clear mountain light. There are many great treks here, including a number of fine day walks.

The village is centred on its old polo ground, 700m off the KKH, though several hotels and the National Bank are down on the Highway.

Sights & Activities

CULTURAL MUSEUM

A unique collection of Hunza history is packed into the dusty **Cultural Museum** (admission Rs 30) near Hunza Marco Polo Inn: maps,

utensils, musical instruments, a stuffed snow leopard, gems and firearms, including the matchlock gun said to have injured the British commander at the Battle of Nilt in 1891. If it isn't open, ask at Hunza Marco Polo Inn (see p322).

OLD GULMIT

The *mir*'s palace (under restoration) is at the northern end of the polo ground. Until the early '70s the *mir* of Hunza lived here for three months of the year, presiding over local durbars (councils). A cluster of houses to the left of the palace is the original village. The tallest of these is said to be Gulmit's oldest, possibly 200 years old; before the palace was built the *mir* stayed in it on his Gulmit sojourns. To its left are the carved lintels of an old Shiite mosque from the early 19th century, before Gojalis converted to Islamism. You can also see local women dyeing and weaving traditional cloth at the **Threadnet Hunza** workshop. You may be able to purchase items here, but most of the handiwork goes to a retail shop in Karimabad.

WALKS

The day walks or hikes that follow can be done with minimal gear and no assistance. If you want a guide, any able-bodied Gull-miti will be able to help (see Hiring Guides & Porters p350).

Kamaris, Andra Fort & Gulmit Glacier

A twisting track behind Gulmit climbs for an hour to friendly Kamaris village, with views up and down the valley. A half-hour walk northeast from Kamaris brings you to the ruins of Andra Fort, built about 200 years ago to defend Gulmit in Hunza's struggles with neighbouring Nagyr. Ask local people for Andra Gelah (*geh-la*).

The track continues past Kamaris for another hour, northwest to the base of the Muldrit Glacier. A long day or overnight operation is to continue on the foothill along the south side of the glacier, an area known locally as Zherar, where there are some shepherds' huts. Stay away on windy or rainy days, when rockfall hazard is high.

Ghulkin Village

From Kamaris, a footpath crosses the stream below Gulmit Glacier, then becomes a jeep track up to Ghulkin village, and returns to the KKH. The loop from Gulmit takes four to five hours.

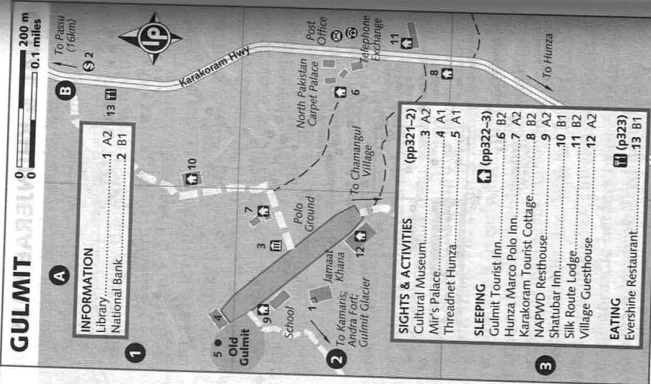
Borit Lake & Beyond

From Ghulkin, a path crosses the Ghulkin Glacier to Borit Lake, two hours away. It's .25km across the glacier, the way marked by a cairn on the south moraine and a big left or dip in the north moraine. The crossing can be tricky; it might be worth a few rungs to get someone in Ghulkin to show you across. Alternatively, the lake is about five hours (12km) from Gulmit via Kamaris.

Above the lake, Borith Lake Hotel offers simple meals and basic accommodation from May to September. Some travellers have found it closed during these months, so don't count on it being open.

A long and strenuous day trip above Borit Lake takes you to Borit Sar, the ridge between the Ghulkin and Passu Glaciers, with awesome, nearly 360-degree views of these glaciers and the Batura Muztagh. There's no water on the way.

A return option from the lake is simply to walk half an hour down the jeep road to the



KKH and hitch back. The lake also makes a good stop on a walk between Gulmit and Passu – about 15km (four hours).

Sleeping & Eating

Gulmit Tourist Inn (☎ 50230; dm Rs 75, r with cold water Rs 300, s/d with hot water Rs 450-750) The carpeted rooms with hot showers are good value and so is the local-style dorm. Located on the Highway, the inn has a good restaurant (mains Rs 75-150) and helpful staff.

Hunza Marco Polo Inn (☎ 50277; s/d Rs 900/1000)
This inn near the old town has comfortable doubles. It's very good value and has a good **restaurant** (mains Rs 110-200), an attractive garden and a knowledgeable and helpful host. There are a few cheaper dorms in local style or which you can barter a price.

Silk Route Lodge (☎ 5029; s/d Rs 1400/1600)
 Prepared for tour groups, the carpeted rooms
 are comfortable with tiled bathrooms and
 plenty of hot water. There are million-dollar
 views from the balconied top-floor rooms
 and an excellent **restaurant** (mains Rs 70-180).

Shatuber Inn (☎ 50254; s/d Rs 800/1000) On the link road, Shatuber Inn has rather overpriced

PASO

Sitting between the black Batura Glacier and the white Passu Glacier, this is the place to stop if you like to walk. At 2400m, Passu is the base for some dramatic hikes and longer treks.

Although Passu is one of the oldest settlements in Hunza-Gojal, a kind of geographical curse has prevented it from growing into a town. As glaciers periodically dammed the Shishnal River and then broke, floods have gradually torn away Passu's riverfront and. The 1974 mudslide at Shishkut Nala created a lake that submerged parts of the village and choked the valley with sand and gravel. At one time Passu had extensive orchards, a polo field and nearly five times its present population.

The highest point of the stunning rocky 'cathedral' ridge across the river is 6106m upodan (Wakhi for 'hot rock', because in winter its slopes shed the snow quickly). On lower slopes are messages, spelt out with painted rocks, dating from the Aga Khan's 1987 visit to Gail.

The village is below Passu Inn, where buses usually stop. Buses will also drop or collect you at hotels further out on the KKH.

Getting There & Away

A local minibus departs Gulmit for Ganish (Rs 35) en route to Karimabad at about 6.30am. A special hire to Karimabad may cost as much as Rs 600. The first north-bound buses pass through at about 10am. Flag down minibuses anywhere along the Highway. It's a four- to five-hour walk to Passu - about 15km via Borit Lake.

Glacier Views

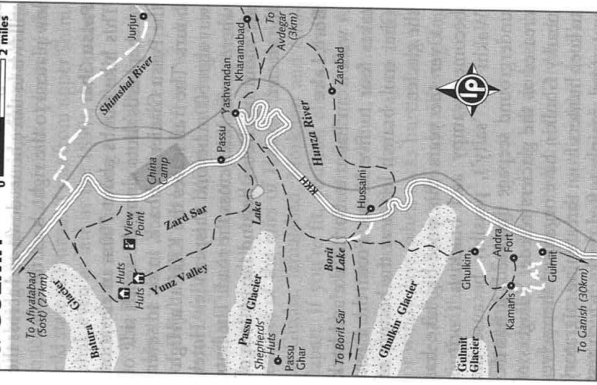
An easy trail goes to the lake below Passu Glacier from the stone barns 500m south of Passu Inn. Better views of this beautiful glacier are from the Yunz Valley and Passu Ghar trails.

Activities

WALKS

No excursion longer than a day should be undertaken without sound advice and weather information, and preferably a reliable guide. Foreigners who think of these trips as dawdles frequently get into trouble here. For help finding a guide, ask any of Passu's hotel-owners and see p350. For a five-day trek along the giant Batura Glacier from Passu, see p367. Treks in the region are also described in detail in *Lonely Planet's Trekking in the Karakoram & Hindukush*. And remember never to walk alone.

**AROUND PASSU
& GULMIT**



In the other direction, the toe of the Batura Glacier is 4km north of Batura Inn. The views improve as you climb the moraine along its south side.

Yunz Valley

The massive caramel-coloured rock behind Passu is Zard Sar (Yellow Top). A vigorous six- to seven-hour loop climbs to the glacial Yunz Valley behind it, offering excellent views of both the Batura and Passu Glaciers. This is a hot, strenuous walk with no water along the trail.

Skiert around the lake below Passu Glacier and follow cairns west up gravel and then scree to the top of a rock formation half an hour from the lake. From here the trail over the glacier's lateral moraine, west up a small parallel valley and north up to Yunz Valley itself, is fairly clear. From a pair of huts an hour up Yunz Valley, a steep 1½-to two-hour detour climbs to Zard Sar, with views over the Hunza Valley (stick to the track: a tourist is said to have fallen to his death from here).

At the end of Yunz Valley, keep right and descend steeply past more huts to the valley and moraine beside the enormous 56km-long Batura Glacier. From here, it's still two or three hours down and across the low plateau to the right, back to Passu.

Passu Ghar

This hike climbs about 700m in elevation to shepherds' huts along the south side of the Passu Glacier and back, in six to seven hours. The trail leaves the KKH at a Highway sign 500m beyond Shisper View Hotel, where power lines cross the road. The huts are about two hours beyond the bottom of the glacier.

Borit Lake

A walk from Passu to Borit Lake and back takes four to five hours. From the Passu Ghar trail, branch left near the bottom of the glacier.

Over the years this once-big lake has become swampy and brackish (*borit* is Wakhi for 'salty'), possibly because the underground seepage that feeds it has decreased as the glaciers recede. Villagers of nearby Ghulkin have organised themselves to keep hunters from threatening migratory waterfowl, mainly tufted ducks, which rest

here in April and May and again in October and November.

For information on seasonal accommodation at the lake and walks beyond, see p322. A return option from the lake is simply to walk half an hour down the bouldery jeep road to the KKH and hitch back to Passu. The lake also makes a good overnight stop on a walk between Passu and Gulmit.

Zarabad & Hussaini

(The Two Bridges Walk)

This trip crosses the Hunza River on two long suspension bridges, and has good views of the Passu and Ghulkin Glaciers from the other side. It takes four to five hours from Passu to Hussaini, plus a hitch-hike or walk back (8km to 10km along the KKH or via Borit Lake).

From the KKH, at the first hairpin turn, south of Shisper View Hotel, a trail drops to the right of a settlement called Yashvandan. Climb the far side of the ravine, following a path (marked by cairns) to the riverbed, then up another path on the bank, to the first bridge, about 1km from Yashvandan. It's just a cluster of cables with planks and branches woven in. On a windy day it will make you feel like Indiana Jones.

On the far side a trail branches left at another cairn, but you should continue straight on. Climb towards the canyon walls and cross the erosion gully as high as possible – don't attempt to short cut across the unstable gully. The trail then leads gently down to the small village of Zarabad. A dramatic narrow track then descends a sheer rock face to the second bridge.

Hussaini, back on the other side, is in a hollow below the KKH. It has a warm spring by the river's edge, used by Hussaini women for washing (so tourists are probably not welcome to bathe). At the north end of the village is a white shrine to Shah Talib, a Muslim missionary active in the 17th or 18th century. A path climbs to the Highway near the shrine.

Yashpirt

This pasture and summer encampment up the north side of Batura Glacier is accessible in one very long day from Passu. Opposite is the awesome Batura Wall icefall, calving thunderously around the clock.

Because this walk involves climbing the moraine and crossing the glacier, you should seek local guidance. Furthermore, a locally known companion can smooth the way with the struggling herders you are likely to meet. They are hospitable, though the smaller your group, the warmer the welcome. In any case, don't go expecting to be fed by them: carry all the food you'll need, and consider taking items like sugar, salt, tea, oil and matches etc as gifts or in trade for yogurt or cheese.

Sleeping & Eating

Passu Inn (dm/s/d with cold water bathroom Rs 75/150/150, r with hot shower Rs 400-475) This friendly inn is right by the KKH bus stand and close to the small village shops. The rooms are comfortable, spacious and clean with the more-expensive rooms upstairs. The good restaurant (mains Rs 50-100) has simple but delicious meals. This hotel and Batura Inn have access to fresh mountain spring water.

Batura Inn (camp sites free, dm/s/d Rs 75/150/200) Friendly Batura Inn, 800m north of the village on the KKH, has some tired, well-worn rooms with attached bathrooms. There's no running hot water, but you can request it by the bucketful. There are new rooms planned. The restaurant (mains Rs 50-100) serves good food and the owner keeps a rumour-book for travellers to gain and impart knowledge about the area.

Passu Tourist Lodge (dm Rs 250, d Rs 300-1400) This lodge, 2.5km north of Passu on the KKH, is aimed at groups, but if there are vacancies (and if it is open), you can get a comfortable room with hot running water. The restaurant is very good. You can book ahead through **Travel Walji's** (@ 05781-52665; Airport Rd) in Gilgit.

Glacier Breeze Restaurant (mains Rs 110) High above the Highway, looking like a temple with a staircase to test the conviction of pilgrims, this incongruously swish restaurant delivers the goods – albeit slowly. The Hunza apricot cake (Rs 10 per slice, Rs 45 and it's all yours) is divine. The view and the breeze aren't too bad either. Accommodation is planned, but in the meantime you can camp here with use of the toilets and hot showers for Rs 70.

Passu Peak Inn (dm/s/d Rs 75/150/200) This small, friendly hotel, 1.5km north of the village, has spartan rooms with cold shower.

Shisper View Hotel (camp sites Rs 50, dm/s/d Rs 60/150/200) This hotel is 1.5km south on the KKH and although the rooms are OK with hot showers, the dark restaurant and secluded setting let this place down.

In the village there are two inexpensive village guesthouses with tranquil atmosphere, good meals and traditional-style dorm and double rooms. Arriving from the bus stop, Village Guest House No 1 is on your left after passing the school. Behind it is Village Guest House No 2.

Getting There & Away

Southbound minibuses pass through after 6am, and the first northbound minibuses pass through at around 10am; put your bags beside the road and the buses will stop. After midday, buses are far from frequent. You can travel from Passu to Gulmit (Rs 10, 25 minutes), Aliabad (Rs 50, two hours) and Sost (Rs 30, one hour).

PASSU TO SOST

North of Passu the KKH crosses a bridge over the stream from the **Batura Glacier**, one of the Karakoram's biggest, reaching 56km back into the Batura Muztagh. The dirty grey ice comes almost to the road. East of the bridge is the yawning **Shimshal Valley**, once one of the most remote places in the old state of Hunza. It was from upper Shimshal, even as late as the 1890s, that raiders harried caravans heading to Kashmir.

The Boibar Valley above **Morkhun** is probably the most historically interesting part of Gojal. Tajiks arrived here from what is now Afghanistan's Wakhan Corridor in perhaps the 16th century, founding the village of Avgarch. After Gojal came under the control of the *mir*s of Hunza, they settled at Gircha, Jamalabad, Morkhun and Ghapalan. If you're fit, you can climb up the rugged, boulder-strewn Boibar Valley to Avgarch, 450m above Morkhun, and return in about six hours (but stay away on rainy or windy days, when rocks hurtle down the scree fields). See p368 for details on going further than this.

Sleeping & Eating

At Khyber, the Khyber Inn has dorm beds and spartan triples with hot water. At Morkhun, Greenland has serviceable doubles with hot shower for a negotiable price.

SOST & AFİYATABAD

☎ 05823 / elevation 2700m In 1996 Pakistani customs and immigration shifted several kilometres upstream to what is officially called Afiyatabad, sometimes called New Sost, but most frequently just called Sost. Afiyatabad/Sost is a frenetic, frontier-like strip of shoddy hotels and dank teashops, frequented by frenetic bus drivers and their passengers. Old Sost is a quiet backwater and most travellers will never see the original village of Sost (also spelled Sust), or Upper Sost, at 3100m on a ledge above the Highway, nor the trails into Sost Nala.

Orientation & Information

Natco, PTDC and all other long-distance transport options are in Afiyatabad. The National Bank here accepts cash and travellers cheques in US dollars and UK pounds, and buys rupees. Moneychangers at Afiyatabad buy/sell Chinese money; cash rates are a bit better than the bank's.

Languishing at peaceful old Sost, 2km south on the KKH, are a few hotels and a lonely post office (☎ 8am-4pm).

Activities

WALKS At the intersecting paths opposite the post office, strike north through fields to **Upper Sost** and Sost Nala. The walled fields, the poplars and fruit orchards, and the dramatic canyon make for a very different scene from the one along the road.

Across the river, an hour's walk away, is **Khudabad** village and Khudabad Nala, reached by a bridge near Afiyatabad.

For guided treks in the Charpurson Valley see the folks at Sky Bridge Inn (see, below)

Sleeping & Eating

Most hotels have basic curry, dhal, chapatti and tea. Afiyatabad has little teashops with rock-bottom prices and dubious hygiene. Fresh chapatis straight from the *tandoor* are a good cheap snack.

Mountain Refuge (dm/sd Rs 50/250/400) At old Sost, this is the most communal place on either strip, with communal dinner and a rumour book with travellers' tips. Some doubles have hot running water.

Sky Bridge Inn (☎ 51115; s/d Rs 300/600; ☐) Afiyatabad's Sky Bridge Inn is very good value and the comfortable, carpeted rooms have running hot water in the morning. There is a good restaurant and this is the place to organise trekking in the Charpurson Valley.

Asia Star Hotel (☎ 51115; s/d/r Rs 100/200/250) In the thick of the action in Afiyatabad, Asia Star's rooms are rather tatty but there's running hot water, a friendly manager and a good inexpensive restaurant (mains Rs 35-50).

Badakhshan Hotel (☎ 51115; dm/s/d/r Rs 50/250/250/350) A good choice – the carpeted rooms are clean and comfortable, there's hot water in the attached bathrooms, and there's a good restaurant (mains Rs 75-100).

Hotel Al-Mahmood (☎ 50166; s/d/r Rs 150/250/300) Has decent rooms with attached bathrooms

and running hot water in the mornings. Bucket hot water is available at other times.

Four Brothers Hotel & Restaurant (☎ 50149; w/r Rs 150/150/200) The rooms at Four Brothers are overpriced even with these modest rates. Rooms and beds are very bottom end, as are the attached bathrooms, though some have running hot water.

PTDC Motel (☎ 51030; s/d Rs 1320/1540; ☐) Rooms at PTDC are large and comfortable. The restaurant (mains Rs 100-150) has a generous set breakfast for Rs 140, lunch for Rs 290 and dinner for Rs 300. This place closes at the end of October and opens 15 April. Ask for a 20% discount towards the end of the season.

Hotel Riviera (☎ 77239; s/d Rs 1200/1600; ☐) A very comfortable, clean hotel targeted at tour groups. The rooms are spacious and well presented, and double-bed rooms are charged at the single-room rate for singles. **Abbas restaurant** (mains Rs 75-125) has Chinese, Pakistani and Continental cuisine.

Khunjerab Hotel (☎ 51006; d with/without hot water Rs 400/200) Has a lovely rural setting amid orchards at old Sost. The OK rooms with private bathrooms with hot showers are the same price for singles or doubles.

Getting There & Away

Most southbound transport leaves early in the morning, with the first minibuses full and ready to leave by 6am. Buses leave when full, and as the day progresses there may be one or two hours between departures. Nelum Transport arranges minibuses to Gilgit (Rs 230) and stops in between at Passu (one hour, Rs 35), Gulmit (Rs 40, 1½ hours) and Ganish (Rs 65, three hours).

TO/FROM KASHGAR

Travellers must have a visa to cross the border into China. For more details, see p393. Natco does the five- to six-hour trip to Tashkurgan, and a Chinese bus takes you on to Kashgar next morning. The Khunjerab Pass is officially open to foreigners from 1 May to 15 November, unless snow closes it sooner. Landslides can cancel these trips even in summer. It's a good idea to carry a day's water and snacks. You will need to have US\$4 (US\$ cash only) to pay the Khunjerab National Park fee at Dih.

Get a Tashkurgan ticket the day before or early on the morning of departure. **Natco** (☎ 7am-7pm) runs vehicles to suit the size of

the crowd – 4WD pick-up, Land Cruiser, minibus or bus. The fare is Rs 12,010 in any vehicle. PTDC can also organise your transport, and for some reason for Rs 10 cheaper; however, because they can only deal with foreigners and rarely is there enough demand for them to run a special vehicle, they will probably put you on a Natco vehicle. Departure awaits customs formalities, usually between 10am and noon. For more information on Chinese customs regulations, see p380.

If you are staying at old Sost, organise transport to customs with your hotel staff – they may provide it free of charge.

Getting Around

There's no regular transport between Afiyatabad and old Sost. A Suzuki for hire is around about Rs 50. The walk takes about 15 to 20 minutes, though you may pick up a tractor ride along the way.

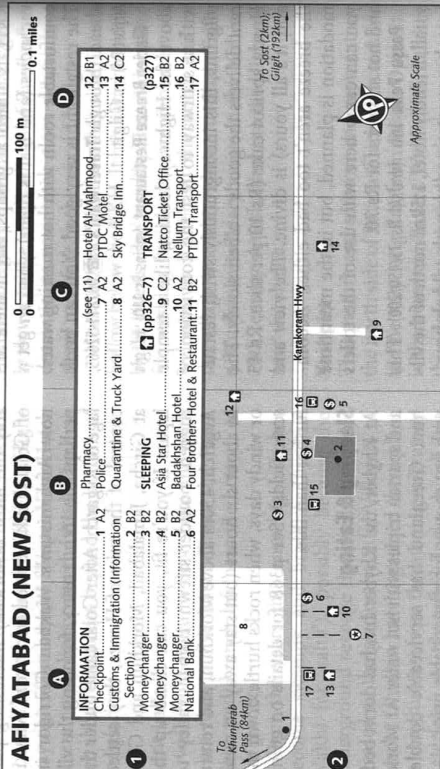
THE KHUNJERAB PASS

It's 35km, through some of the narrowest gorges on the KKH, from Sost to the security and national park checkpoints at **Dih**. You must have US\$4 cash to pay the Khunjerab National Park fee here. Much of the Pakistan side of the pass is within the 2270 sq km **Khunjerab National Park** (KNP; see p62), established in 1975. The pass is one of the few known habitats of the big, curly-horned Marco Polo sheep, of which there are now only a few hundred in the world. It's also home to Himalayan ibex, golden marmots, wolves, snow leopards and more.

A KNP resthouse at Dih may be available to the public if no officials are using it.

From Dih to the pass it's about 50km. Scattered along the KKH are deserted concrete buildings: hostels for Chinese KKH workers, built in the late '60s when the road was being laid to Gulmit. At **Kolsil**, the ruins of a work camp straddle the river at a large side-canyon. The valley walls are 'black, crumbling rock' (this is how the Turki words *kara koram* translate) and the river cuts through deep beds of gravel, the residue of repeated mud and rock slides.

The pass itself is long and flat. At the summit is a plaque commemorating the 1982 opening. At this point you're about 400km from Kashgar and 880km from Rawalpindi. Something besides the time zone changes



at the top, namely the side of the road on which you drive (China is right-hand drive, Pakistan left-hand), so it's probably a good thing that just about everybody stops for a photo break here.

THE ROAD TO KASHGAR

The Chinese call the road from the Khunjerab Pass to Kashgar the China-Pakistan Highway, *Zhong-Pa Gong Lu* (China-Pak Big Road). The excellent road runs for 250km through the high, rounded valleys of the Tashkurgan River, 70km down the Chirchik River canyon and 80km to Kashgar across the flats at the edge of Xinjiang's Taklamakan

Desert. This is a region of sublime scenery and weather extremes, a 2000-year-old pass for trade, plunder and religious ideas. See p327 for information on transport to Kashgar.

THE KHUNJERAB PASS TO TASHKURGAN

From the pass to Pirali you may see herds of yaks or a domesticated cross between yak and cow called *dzu*, and in warmer weather you'll see golden marmots as they scuttle for their burrows. **Pirali**, the former Chinese customs post and now just a security checkpoint, is four hours from Sost at about 4100m. The level stretch along the Tashkurgan River from Pirali to Tashkurgan is grand and picturesque in fine weather, with muscular-looking peaks along the west side of the valley and lots of horse and camel traffic.

The road passes the mouth of an enormous opening westwards into the Pamir – the **Mintaka Valley**, once a major Silk Road branch and historically one of the main routes to Hunza and on to Kashmir. About 75km up the Mintaka Valley, a jeep track enters Afghanistan's Wakhan Corridor. About 1½ hours from Pirali is **Davdar**, the largest permanent Tajik settlement along the Highway. Settlements from Gojal over the Khunjerab Pass to Tashkurgan are Wakhi Tajik. Two hours later you're in Tashkurgan.

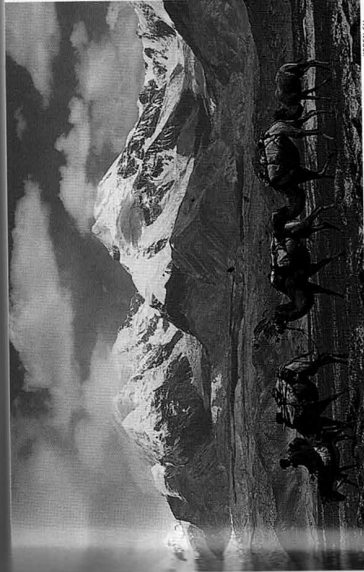
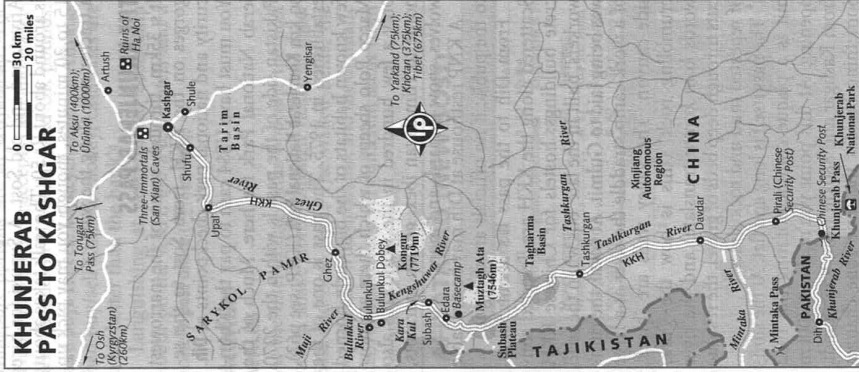
TASHKURGAN

☎ 0998 / elevation 3200m

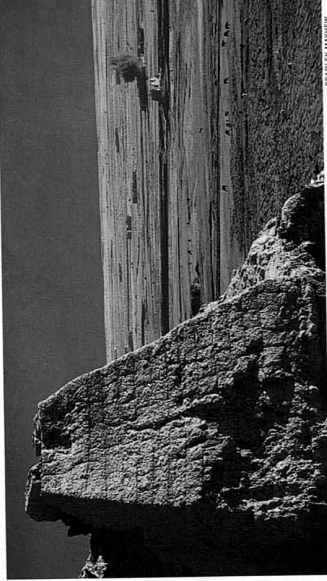
In the Uyghur language, *tash kurgan* means 'stone fortress'. The ruins of a huge mud-brick fort still stand on the edge of town, and although this one is estimated to be about 600 years old, local lore says Tashkurgan has been a citadel for over 2300 years. The Greek philosopher-scientist Ptolemy (AD 90–168) mentioned Tashkurgan in his *Guide to Geography* as a stop on the road to China. The Chinese Buddhist pilgrim Hsuan Tsang wrote about its fortress in the 7th century, when it was the furthest frontier outpost of the Tang dynasty.

Tashkurgan has little else to offer, although if you're coming from Pakistan, you'll delight in (a) public conversations with women, and (b) beer (which may knock you back considerably at this elevation).

This is the site of the Chinese customs and immigration post. It's also the administrative centre of Tashkurgan Tajik Autonomous



Camel team, Kara Kul Lake (p331), Karakoram Highway



Tashkurgan Fort (p329), Karakoram Highway

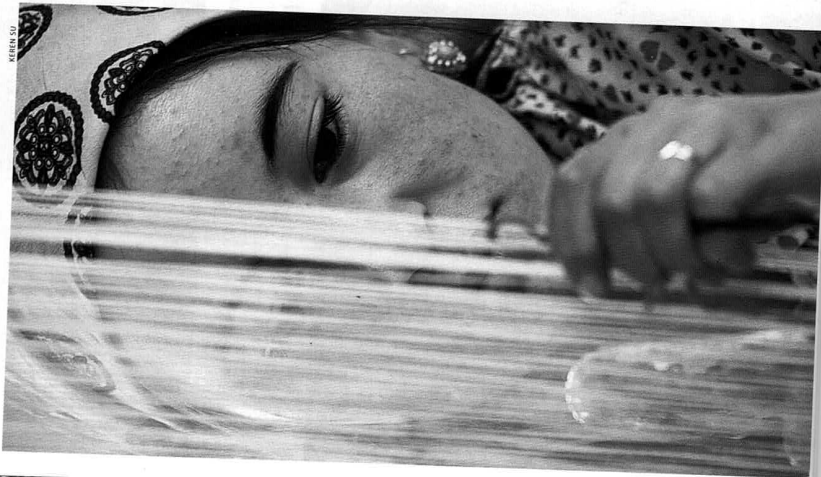
Traditional medicine vendors, Sunday market (p334), Kashgar, Karakoram Highway





Cloth seller, Sunday market (p334), Kashgar, Karakoram Highway

Uyghur girl making carpet, Kashgar (p332), Karakoram Highway



Musical instruments, Kashgar (p332), Karakoram Highway



Uyghur man, Kashgar (p332), Karakoram Highway

WHAT'S THE TIME?

A constant concern for visitors is clock time. Officially all China runs on Beijing time (which is three hours earlier than Pakistan time) but here, 3500km from Beijing, people set their watches to unofficial 'Xinjiang time', two hours earlier than Beijing. You must run on both times, always checking which is meant (Uyghur: *Beijing waqt?*; Chinese: *Beijing shijian?*). Note that airline schedules and government office hours are always given in Beijing time.

County, stretching from Muztagh Ata to the border, and is home to most of China's Tajiks. Tashkurgan is about 3200m above sea level and 290km from Kashgar.

Orientation & Information

Tashkurgan has two main roads, with a small bazaar on a side street between them. But you get the feeling that the new wide roads, the installation of traffic lights and the National Culture & Art Centre (not open at time of research) herald a new era of expansion. Customs and immigration are south of town. Your bus (if you're southbound) or a free shuttle bus (if you're northbound) will take you the 800m from the bus station – though you could walk there and back repeatedly in the time it usually takes for the bus to set off.

The Chinese Customs office is located about 1km south of the Jiaotong Binguan on the road to Pakistan.

Since the Bank of China withdrew, money changing has been left to enterprising locals. You can change cash, preferably US dollars, at **Jiaotong Binguan** (☎ 421192) hotel.

The **Public Security Bureau** (PSB; ☎ Beijing time 10am-2pm & 5-8pm) is south of the bus station. Reception for the foreign affairs section is inside the right-hand entrance.

There's an **Internet Café** (per hr ¥7, minimum charge ¥2), upstairs and opposite Ben Lei Xin Shopping, and an IDD telephone office on the road behind the Jiaotong Binguan.

Sights

FORT

Tashkurgan's one attraction is the massive, crumbling fort northeast of town, on the only hill in the Tashkurgan River's flood

plain. Most of its multi-layered walls and battlements are still intact. The simplest route is from the east end of town, but a shorter one is through the schoolyard west of Pamir Hotel or up an inconspicuous flight of steps to the east. Enterprising locals may demand ¥5, though the whole area is open.

Sleeping & Eating

Jiaotong Binguan (Traffic Hotel; ☎ 3421192; dm/d ¥10/100) You'll probably be dropped at this hotel at the bus station. The management speak English and run an informal information service and can change money. The four-bed dorms are OK, but check that the bathroom is clean before accepting. The doubles have hot running water in the attached bathroom; again, it is wise to check a few rooms. The hotel's **Traffic Café** (mains ¥8-20) is quite good (and may be the only place open to get an evening meal and a beer).

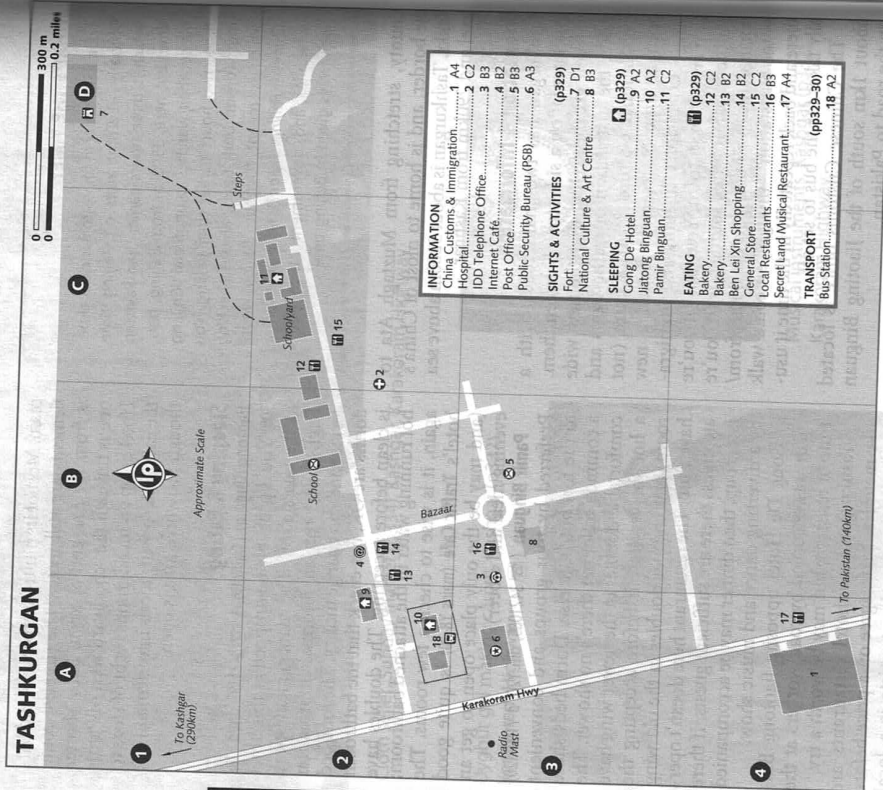
Pamir Binguan (☎ 3421085; dm ¥20, d ¥100-120) Preferred by tour groups and convenient to the fort but little else. Dorm beds share a common toilet but there's no shower. The comfortable doubles in the newer wing have a hot shower (test it before accepting the room) and cheaper doubles in the old wing have a tub. The restaurant here doesn't operate unless there are sufficient guests. If there is a group, then dinner may be accompanied by a diverting dance and music show.

Gong De Hotel opposite Jiaotong Binguan was occupied by road workers at the time of research, but may be worth a try.

Tashkurgan's nonhotel restaurants are like meterless taxis: agree on a price before you commit. Gouging tourists is a local sport, though you should be able to fill up for ¥20 to ¥30. Little English is spoken, so unless there's a menu, go into the kitchen and point to the raw ingredients you want. Several bakeries open early enough to beat the bus, with hot naan and free tea. Fruit stalls have melons in late summer. Ben Lei Xin Shopping and other general stores sell noodles and other self-catering supplies.

Getting There & Away

A bus takes passengers from Sost on to Kashgar at about 9.30am (Beijing time) for ¥62. To Kara Kul costs ¥25. You can buy tickets the day before departure from a ticket office inside customs (the office is about 1km south of Jiaotong Binguan), or you can get



one on the bus. On departure you may also be hit up for an extra baggage charge. To Kashgar takes six to seven hours.

Seats as far as Tashkurgan on the Kashgar to Sost bus are sold on a standby basis for Y63, but you run a risk of finding no seat on a later bus to Sost (Rs 225).

A slightly cheaper public bus runs between Kashgar's long-distance bus station and Tashkurgan from Monday to Saturday.

TASHKURGAN TO KARA KUL

About 1½ hours from Tashkurgan, across the marshy **Tagharma Basin**, is a police post at **Kelyor**. On the very broad, high (around 4000m) ground west of Muztagh Ata, called the **Subash Plateau** (Subash Daban),

the Highway makes its closest approach (about 10km) to Tajikistan. At the turn of the century this area was still in dispute, never having been properly mapped. Before long the dominant item in the landscape is the 7546m **Muztagh Ata** (Turkic for Father of Ice Mountains).

Settlements from Tashkurgan to Kelyor are Sarykuli Tajik; those on to Kara Kul are Kyrgyz. One question that comes repeatedly to mind here is: how can sheep graze on gravel? Three hours from Kelyor is beautiful Kara Kul (Karakol Lake) – properly Lesser Kara Kul, as there's a bigger lake of the same name 150km northwest in Tajikistan – and two small sister lakes across the road, Besekh Kul and Shor Kul.

KARA KUL

Many travellers come to Kashgar hoping to rub shoulders with Kyrgyz nomads in the pastures around Kara Kul (Chinese: Kalakuli Hu). This is one of the most beautiful places in western China, the deep blue waters (*kara kul* is Uyghur for black lake) nestled between two Pamir giants, 7546m Muztagh Ata to the south and 7719m Mt Kongur to the northeast. A large wind turbine interrupts the otherwise wonderfully desolate view and heralds the presence of the Karakol Lake Resort.

There are several Kyrgyz summer villages in the area; the nearest, just south of the lake, is Subash. You can walk around the lake in half a day; the downstream outflow can be forded at the village nearby. At Subash or elsewhere you can arrange an excursion by horse to *jailuu* (high pastures), about three hours from the lake at the foot of Muztagh Ata, for about Y180 per day.

With a tent you could spend days at the lake or on the flanks of Muztagh Ata. To walk up to Muztagh Ata base camp, it's easiest to head south on the Highway for about 14km, then east for 2km to Edara village (which some maps also call Subash). From here, it's a climb of about 15km to the base camp, at 4550m. Be prepared for the worst kind of weather, no matter what it looks like when you start.

The lake is at 3700m and the nights are below freezing even in the summer. Before also of summer sandstorms, which can rise in a minute. Between late October and early May the place may be deserted.

Even if you are not staying at the Karakol Lake Resort – a bit of a tourist trap – you can be stung Y20 for entering the resort grounds, eg the car park. You may be surrounded by Kyrgyz trying to sell you everything from stones to a bed in their yurt. Horse and camel rides start at Y30 per hour but are highly negotiable.

Sleeping & Eating

Karakol Lake Resort (yurts per person Y40, dm/s/d Y50/120/120). This Chinese development has mock-up yurts and a few quads and double rooms. Don't be fooled by the private bathrooms – there's no plumbing and you will have to brave the disgusting outside 'amenities'. Yurts sleep eight and management will fill up one yurt before starting

on the next. The **restaurant** (mains Y20-80) is decent if not great value, with an English menu. Warming soups and noodle dishes start at Y20.

Campers and cyclists who opt to pitch their own tents should move 15 minutes off around the lake to avoid hassles with the resort management.

About 500m south of the resort there's a real **yurt** (per person Y35) where you can stay and be fed in Kyrgyz fashion. The yurt is surprisingly warm and the food basic but generous – you'll be tempted to stay more than one night.

Getting There & Away

Local Kashgar to Tashkurgan buses will stop at Kara Kul, though some travellers have had trouble flagging one down again when they were ready to return or move on. You can catch the bus to Kashgar if it stops to let tourists take photos of the lake. Wait to buy your onward fare on the onward bus, as drivers like cash in the hand and will probably charge you local price. Seats are also available as far as Kara Kul on the bus to Pakistan, on a standby basis for Y43.

China Travel Service (CS; ☎ 2832875; Seman Lu), inside Chini Bagh Hotel gate in Kashgar, offers Kara Kul day trips, one for under Y300 per person with four in a Land Cruiser; **China International Travel Service** (CIS; ☎ 2823156; Seman Lu), in the same building, charges about Y500, with a guide and lunch. An overnight adds at least Y200 per person for bed, dinner and vehicle charges. **Kashgar Mountaineering Association** (KMA; ☎ 2823680; 45 Tiyu Lu), also in Kashgar, can arrange more interesting trips, such as an overnight stay at Subash with local walks, a night or two at Muztagh Ata base camp, or various five- to seven-day treks on the mountain.

KARA KUL TO KASHGAR

An hour from the lake, at the foot of Mt Kongur, is the settlement of **Bulunkul Dobey**, an outpost of the larger Kyrgyz settlement of Bulunkul. Most settlements from Kara Kul to the Ghez River canyon are Kyrgyz; those on the Kashgar plain are Uyghur.

The corridor northwest to Muji and south to the Pakistan border is a Pamir valley flanked by a rampart of snowy peaks, the **Sarykol Pamir**. The word *pamir* refers to pasturage, the valleys' main historical use.

The terrain is typical of the Pamirs: high, broad, tree-less valleys strung between glacier-rounded mountains, with rivers often pooling into shallow lakes.

Just before you enter the canyon of the Ghez River (Uyghur: Ghez Darya), the Ghez seems to lose its way in a vast wet plain ringed with white sand dunes, a strangely beautiful spot that locals call Kuntagh (Sand Mountain). A few hardy individuals brave the fierce dry winds to sell garnets, crystals and oddments to travellers. A hot spring is inside a plain brick building by the river, near the top of the canyon.

As you enter the canyon the landscape changes abruptly. The 70-odd kilometres of road are cut into sheer walls, or woven across huge tilted boulder fields, the canyon walls are immense, steep and lifeless, forbidding even on a sunny day. Ghez itself is a lonely military checkpoint with a few shops and tea-houses. Photographing soldiers or buildings here may result in confiscated film.

After Ghez you soon exit the canyon's wine-red sandstone walls at its northern end and head across 80km of flats towards Kashgar. The main attraction is the luminous rampart of the Pamirs rising from the plain to the west. At **Upal** (Chinese: Wupa'er) is a food stop (a pretty silly place for one, whichever direction you're headed). It's only an hour from Kashgar, but the buses always seem to stop here. Three kilometres off the road is the small tomb of Mahmud Kashgari, an 11th-century scholar famous for writing the first dictionary of Turkic languages. As you approach Kashgar, the villages, poplars and dusty roadworks multiply.

A TURBULENT PAST

Kashgaria, the historical name for the western end of the Tarim Basin, has always had more in common with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan than with China. But over the centuries Imperial China has come again and again to police its borders or the Silk Road.

At the end of WWII, Xinjiang declared independence as the Republic of East Turkestan, aided by Mao Zedong in exchange for Uyghur resistance to the Nationalists. But after Mao's founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the fledgling state collapsed when most of its leaders died in a mysterious plane crash, en route to Beijing to negotiate with the new regime.

Xinjiang was subsequently declared an 'autonomous region', an Orwellian sleight of hand that has failed to deliver much in the way of autonomy. Although China has invested substantial funds developing Xinjiang's infrastructure, Uyghurs frequently argue that all the good jobs and business opportunities are dominated by Han Chinese. Any time spent in Kashgar shows that integration is not seamless and an underlying tension is ever present.

KASHGAR

☎ 0998 / elevation 1354m

For two millennia Kashgar has been a Silk Road trading centre, and even today it remains just a big market town, with its prompt street corner negotiations, perpetual bazaars and hotel room deals with Gilgit traders. Some things haven't changed since medieval times – blacksmiths, carpenters and cobblers work by hand in the old quarter, and from surrounding fields come wheat, maize, beans, rice, cotton and fruit in profusion.

But in most ways the past is decidedly gone – symbolically confirmed by the huge statue of Mao 'Zedong' and the 'Military Administration Zone' garrison compounds around town. High-rises sprout, department stores multiply. Id Kah Mosque stands tall, as it has since 1442, but it hasn't escaped Chinese modernisation, and much of the famous market area was a bare development site at the time of research. Vehicle noise and fumes now put Kashgar in a league with most other Chinese cities.

Peak tourist season (and peak demand for rooms and transport) is from late June to September, with saturation at weekends as tourists arrive for the market. If you've come from Pakistan, Chinese brusqueness will come as a shock, though you'll find an echo of Pakistani cheer in younger Uyghur men. It's also nice to see the female half of the human race out in the open again.

Orientation

Official (Chinese) street names are given here. The main streets out from the centre are Renmin Donglu and Renmin Xilu (East and West People's Rd), and Jiefang

KASHGAR

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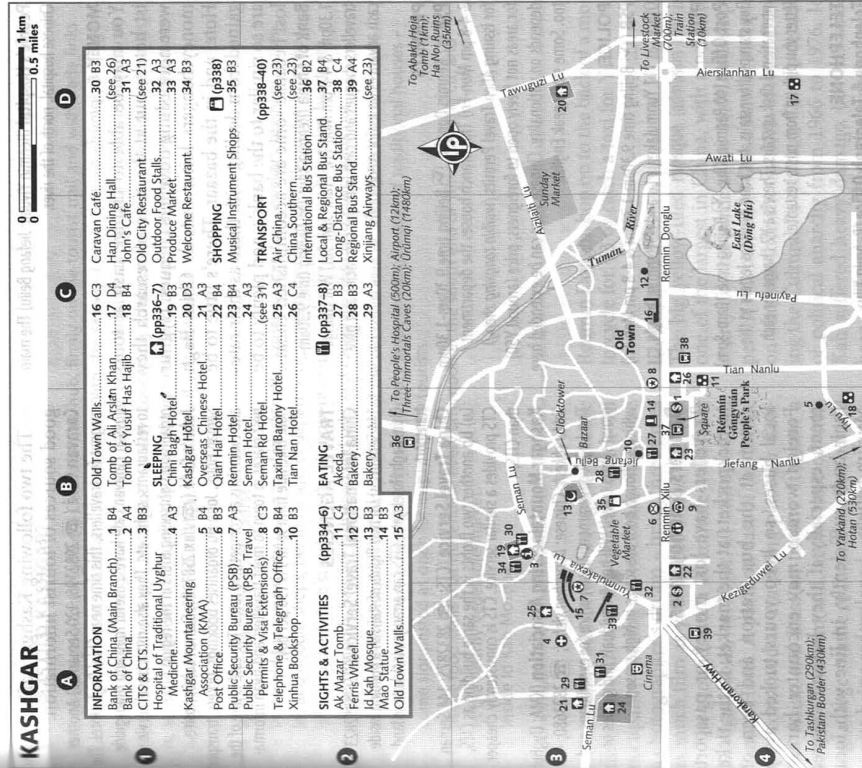
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Beilu and Jiefang Nanlu (North and South Liberation Rd). The perimeter road on the northwest is Yunmulakexia Lu.

The heart of town is around Id Kah Mosque and the main bazaar, though at the time of research the mosque's forecourt was being extensively developed. Uyghurs live mainly north of the centre and Chinese in brick compounds to the south. The budget travellers' enclave is on the west side, with mid-range hotels, travel help and good food. The market grounds are east of town, and the livestock market is several kilometres to the south.

Buses from Pakistan go to the International Bus Station on Jiefang Beilu. The airport is 12km northeast of the centre.

Information

BOOKSHOPS

Xinhua Bookshop (Jiefang Beilu) Everything from English primers to Stalin posters, as well as maps of the Kashgar region, China and the world in Chinese or Uyghur, can be found here.

INTERNET ACCESS

Internet Café (☎ 2982196; 120 Seman Lu; per hr ¥2) Underneath Caravan Café, just by Chini Bagh Hotel, this café has plenty of monitors.

Seman Hotel (☎ 2552060; 170 Seman Lu; per hr ¥5) A smaller operation in the hotel foyer, only has a few monitors.

MEDICAL SERVICES

Hospital of Traditional Uyghur Medicine (Seman Lu) East of Seman Hotel; travellers say it's pretty filthy.

People's Hospital (Remmin Yiyuan; Jiefang Beilu) The main Chinese hospital, north of the river.

MONEY

You may be able to change cash at tourist hotels, but at the time of research they were not cashing travellers' cheques. Uyghur moneychangers loiter outside Chini Bagh Hotel and in the bazaar. There's little to be gained from dealing with them as their rates are so similar to the bank's, and plenty to be lost because some are accomplished cheats.

Bank of China (Remmin Xilu; ☎ Beijing time 9:30am-1:30pm & 4-8 pm Mon-Fri, 11am-3pm Sat) Will change travellers' cheques and cash in major currencies and give cash advances on major credit cards.

PERMITS

PSB (67 Remmin Donglu; ☎ Beijing time 9:30am-1:30pm & 4-8 pm Mon-Fri) This branch houses the department for issuing Alien Travel Permits (*walxin tongxing zheng*) for areas not freely open to foreigners; price (around ¥50) depends on nationality. Chinese visas can be extended here too. Some staff speak English.

POLICE

PSB (☎ Beijing time 9:30am-1:30pm & 4-8 pm Mon-Fri) Offices at 111 Yummulakexia Lu and 67 Remmin Donglu.

POST

Post Office (40 Remmin Xilu; ☎ Beijing time 10am-8pm) Buy stamps downstairs, but hand overseas letters to the international desk upstairs. There's a ¥2 charge for each letter you pick up from poste restante.

TELEPHONE

Telephone & Telegraph Office (Remmin Xilu; ☎ Beijing time 9:30am-8pm) Upstairs is for international calls, faxes and cables, and downstairs for telegrams and domestic calls. IDD calls here are much cheaper than from tourist hotels and private agencies.

TOURIST INFORMATION

An enterprising English-speaking Uyghur by the name of Ablimit Ghopur, but better known as Elvis (elvisablimit@hotmail.com), runs an information and guiding service that has received many good reviews from travellers. Elvis can guide you around the old town and introduce you to traditional life in Kashgar, visiting private houses, tea-houses and even a local *pir* (holy man). Excursions further afield can also be arranged. Elvis can usually be found at **Old City Restaurant** (Seman Lu), opposite Seman Hotel.

The two following Kashgar cafés are also good sources of tourist information.

Caravan Café (☎ 2982196; 120 Seman Lu) Another magnet for travellers, this time near Chini Bagh Hotel. The guys at Caravan Café have a useful map and mini-guide to restaurants, sights etc. They also run a travel service, organising sightseeing tours in the region.

John's Café (☎ fax 2581186; Seman Lu) Opposite Seman Hotel, John Hu organises bookings, tickets, transport and excursions at competitive rates. The café is one of the best places in town to meet travellers and swap information. Bike hire from John's is ¥30 per day.

TRAVEL AGENCIES

China International Travel Service (CITS; ☎ 2823156; 144 Seman Lu) Up two flights of stairs in a building inside Chini Bagh Hotel gate, CITS can arrange air tickets or land transport.

China Travel Service (CTS; ☎ 2823875; 144 Seman Lu) Up another two flights in the same building as CITS, CTS provides a similar service. CTS is consistently cheaper than CITS.

Kashgar Mountaineering Association (KMA; Uyghur: *Taika chiketi*; Chinese: *Dengshan xiehui*; ☎ 2823680; 45 Tiyu Lu) A government liaison office for expeditions and group sports travel. Will help individuals find guides or vehicles, though both are scarce in high season.

Dangers & Annoyances

Travellers have lost money or passports to pickpockets at the market, in the ticket scrum at the bus station and even on local buses, so keep yours tucked away. Foreign women may encounter harassment, especially if they haven't covered their body sufficiently, in line with local Muslim beliefs.

Sights

SUNDAY MARKET

Once a week Kashgar's population swells by 50,000 as people stream in to the Sunday market (east of the city centre off Aiziliati Lu), one of Asia's most mind-boggling bazaars. By sunrise the roads east of town are a sea of pedestrians, horses, donkey carts, bikes, trucks, cars, buses and belching motor-rickshaws, everyone shouting '*Boish-boish!*' ('Coming through!'). Sellers sit by rugs and blankets, clothing and boots, hardware and junk, tapes and boomboxes, and hats. There are stalls with jars of loads; dried snakes hanging from hooks; and tubs of horns from who knows what animal promising cures for who knows what ailments.

WHERE IS OLD KASHGAR?

Kashgar is again looking like a Central Asian hub, firmly on the tourist trail and with trade links to Pakistan, central China and Central Asia. With the railway connection via Ürümqi, Beijing's embrace grows stronger, and there is talk of upgrading the airport and adding international connections. The 'town' has become a city, conceding adobe mosques and Muslim cemeteries to six-lane avenues and row upon row of high-rises and other 'modernisations'. For the time being at least, traditional Kashgar is still here if you look for it:

At the Sunday market, of course.

In the old bazaar, a dusty labyrinth of blacksmiths, farriers, carpenters, jewellers, tea-shops, bakeries and noodle shops, behind a wall of department stores opposite Id Kah. Through the smoke of numerous kebab stands and the clamour of metal, workmen sip tea on balconies, heads are shaved smooth, hats are fashioned and sold, and caged thrushes sing their hearts out.

In the pale mud-walled, brick-paved lanes of the old town east of Jiefang Beilu towards the Tuman River, where a network of hushed empty lanes reveal glimpses of traditional houses – some signposted as open for inspection by tourists.

In the food stalls that materialise every afternoon at the south end of Yummulakexia Lu, and in the nearby vegetable market.

Inside Id Kah Mosque.

Increasing numbers of foreigners arrange their visits around the market, with hotel occupancy soaring on weekends. It can be a photographer's dream – bring three times as much film as you expect to use.

The grounds are a 10-minute walk from Kashgar Hotel, or 30 or 40 minutes from Seman Hotel. A pavilion east of the bridge was conceived as a meeting place for Central Asian and Russian traders. It's now a carpet showroom and, at the time of writing, a large swathe of former market behind it was being redeveloped.

Taxis (¥10) lurk outside tourist hotels on market day, though traffic may prevent them from taking you right into the heart of the market. Ask for Yekshenba Bazaar (Sunday market). **John Hu** (☎ fax 2581186; John's Café, Seman Lu) offers a free one-way minibuss shuttle after breakfast.

At the **livestock market**, which has been moved to the southeast corner of the city, men test-ride horses, and boys tether fat-tailed sheep and Kashmir goats head to head into zipper-like rows. Yaks and camels pant in the unfamiliar heat, and vast quantities of *laghman* (thick noodles) are consumed at the makeshift kitchens. Try to get here by 9am (Beijing time) while the wheeling and dealing is in full swing. The livestock market is east of Remmin Donglu. Catch the No 16 bus on

Remmin Donglu, hop on to the back of a motorcycle for ¥3 or catch a taxi for ¥10.

ID KAH MOSQUE

The big yellow-tiled mosque (admission ¥10) is one of the largest in China, with a peaceful courtyard and gardens for 20,000 worshippers. It was built in 1442 as a smaller mosque on what was then the outskirts of town. During the Cultural Revolution, China's decade of political anarchy from 1966 to 1976, Id Kah suffered heavy damage, but has since been restored. Its central veranda has a carved and finely painted ceiling.

It's acceptable for non-Muslims to go in. Local women are rarely seen inside, but foreign women are usually ignored if they're modestly dressed (arms and legs covered and a scarf on your head). Take your shoes off if you enter covered, carpeted prayer areas, and be discreet about photos.

In front of the mosque is Id Kah Square; at the time of research this entire area was being extensively redeveloped and entrance was gained through the rear of the mosque.

ABAKH HOJA TOMB

Kashgar's best example of Muslim architecture is this elegant **mausoleum** (admission ¥10, bicycle parking ¥1; ☎ Beijing time 9am-8:30pm), built in the mid-17th century for the descendants

of a Muslim missionary named Muhatum Ajam (or Makthum Azan). With its tiled dome and four minarets, it resembles a bright, miniature Taj Mahal.

Beneath the tiled stones in the main chamber are more than 70 graves, including those of children. They include the grave of Muhatum Ajam's grandson, Abakh Hoja, a Uyghur aristocrat and spiritual leader who ruled southern Xinjiang for 16 years in the 17th century and is sometimes called the patron saint of Kashgar. Another grave is that of Abakh Hoja's granddaughter, known to the Chinese as Xiang Fei (Princess Consort). Behind the mausoleum is a vast graveyard.

The mausoleum is a half-hour bike ride, a two-hour walk or Y10 taxi ride northeast of town.

TOMB OF YUSUF HAS HAJIB

The striking, blue-and-white tiled, purple-domed **mausoleum** (Jiyu Lu; admission Y10; ☎ Beijing time 9am-8:30pm) is a 1993 restoration of a building enlarged many times over the centuries and then smashed up during the Cultural Revolution. It's Xinjiang's most important Uyghur monument, though there's little to see besides the huge, elaborate gravestone inside.

Yusuf Has Hajib (or Yusup Khas Hajip; c 1019-85) is perhaps the best-known Uyghur scholar, thanks to his *Kutad Kublik*, or *The Wisdom of Royal Glory*. This encyclopaedic look at Qarakhan political, economic and cultural life, cast in the form of a 13,290-line lyric poem, is a classic of Uyghur literature. He presented it in 1070 to the Qarakhan ruler, who awarded him the title Has Hajib, meaning 'royal adviser'. Strangely, there is no trace of the original, only very old copies in libraries in Vienna, Cairo and Namangan (Uzbekistan).

TOMB OF ALI ARSLAN KHAN

Another historical site is this tomb and small mosque, fairly modest considering Ali Arslan Khan (r 970-998). At the end of Renmin Donglu, go almost a kilometre south. The tomb is in a weedy graveyard of disinterred adobe graves squeezed between advancing armies of Chinese apartments and the road. You may be asked for a few mao donation.

PEOPLE'S PARK

South of the Mao statue is **People's Park** (Renmin Gongyuan; admission Y2), a weedy arboretum with avenues of tall poplars, a horrible little zoo, and Uyghurs playing billiards, chess and *shiang chi* (Chinese chess). East of the park, 200m down a back lane, is a decaying old **tomb**, which, according to local people, may have been for a 19th-century imam (Muslim religious leader).

OLD TOWN WALLS

At the east end of Seman Lu stands a 10m-high section of the old town walls, at least 500 years old. Another rank of them is visible from Yunmulakexia Lu. Construction around, on and in them makes access impossible, and there's clearly no interest in preserving them. Another small section can be seen on the way to East Lake.

EAST LAKE

Heading east out along Renmin Donglu is a willow-lined artificial lake, a popular spot for migratory birds and a good spot for a picnic or a peaceful walk among the weeds. In the summer you can rent little boats. Take a ride on the enormous **ferries wheel** (Y10) for a bird's-eye view of Kashgar - a sobering image of modern development engulfing the traditional city.

Sleeping Budget

Chini Bagh Hotel (☎ 2842299; 144 Seman Lu; dm/s/d annexe Y40/70/120, d/old building Y280, d/new building Y380, ste 'new' building Y480-680; ☎). The Chini Bagh complex comprises two large towers where the British consulate's garden and front gate used to be. The reception for the budget rooms is in the old building, straight on as you enter the elaborate gate. The rooms themselves are in an annexe behind this building. They are adequate and comfortable, though the plumbing in the attached bathrooms is constantly failing. For the more-comfortable doubles within the 'old' building, you have to go to the reception in the new building, which is on your right as you enter the gate (it used to be the International Hotel). These rooms with hot showers are good value. Finally, the best rooms are found in the 'new' building along with the restaurants and a coffee shop. At the rear of the old building is the original consular

house, now tarted up as VIP suites (Y1000). Chini Bagh accepts major credit cards.

Seman Rd Hotel (☎ 4820795; s/d Y50/60). This basic place above John's Café is popular with Pakistani traders. The adequate rooms with TV and hot shower represent pretty good value.

Seman Hotel (Si-man; ☎ 2552060; 170 Seman Lu; dm Y30, d Y280-500; ☎). The rambling complex that encompasses all that remains of the old Russian consulate has a variety of dorms of two to six beds, some with old Russian bathtubs. Hot water is unpredictable and room security is dubious. Standard doubles with bath are overpriced at Y280. There are better doubles (Y380) in a new annexe, but will you be able to sleep in the glow of the bright Uyghur-inspired décor? The Y500 suite and a few other doubles make up the old consular building. It positively reeks of 19th-century charm, and you would need to be a committed history buff to pay for this atmosphere. There was one Muslim restaurant operating at the time of research, another had closed down and another was being built.

MID-RANGE

Chini Bagh Hotel and Seman Hotel, listed under Budget, also have mid-range options.

Renmin Hotel (☎ 2823733; on Renmin Donglu & Jiefang Nanlu's Y128, d/Y168-Y688). The Peoples Hotel has small, dreary doubles with telephone, TV and bath for Y168, better doubles for Y218 to Y288 and a deluxe room for Y688.

Kashgar Hotel (Kashgar Guesthouse; ☎ 2652363; 57 Jiauguzi Lu; s/d Y160/180, r with TV Y250-400; ☎). Spacious but sterile Kashgar Hotel is a 200-room compound with Chinese and Uyghur restaurants and a beer garden. The carpeted doubles with telephone and hot shower aren't bad value, but the fact that the hotel is 3km east of the centre is a drawback. Taxis (about Y5 to the centre) and motorcycles linger at the gate and the No 10 bus goes to Id Kah and back.

Qian Hai Hotel (☎ 2822922; 48 Renmin Xilu; d/Y240-460). Modern Qian Hai is set back from the busy street, and the comfortable doubles are equipped with telephone, TV and bath. Customers seem to be largely Chinese business travellers, and no English is spoken.

Tian Nan Hotel (☎ 2824627; 49 Renmin Donglu; d/r Y45/130). Near the long-distance bus station, Tian Nan comprises a couple of buildings

and is not a bad budget choice. Showers are communal except for the better triples, and the hot water is unreliable. Better doubles are available in a building opposite the bus station for Y180.

Overseas Chinese Hotel (☎ 2833262; Seman Lu; dm/d Y30/80). The doubles, though they have TV and attached bath with running hot water, are barely acceptable and you should negotiate a better price or move on.

Taxinan Barony Hotel (☎ 5821666; 242 Seman Lu; d/Y480; ☎). Plush Taxinan has very comfortable doubles with telephone, TV and bath, and an upmarket Chinese restaurant and bar. Also no English.

Eating RESTAURANTS

John's Café (opposite Seman Hotel; Seman Lu) John's does cheap traveller fare in an alfresco setting. There's a large range from pizza (Italian Y26, Kashgar Y12) to Sichuan chicken (Y14), with chips and Western breakfasts in between.

Old City Restaurant (next to the Overseas Chinese Hotel; Seman Lu; mains Y5-12). Has good Uyghur and Chinese food at local prices. Try Uyghur standards like *laghman* or *chuchureh*, or *jentang* (a savoury Hui soup of meat, vegetables, rice noodles and garlic). There's an English menu thanks to Elvis (see Tourist Information, p334).

Welcome Restaurant (Chini Bagh Hotel compound, 144 Seman Lu; mains Y8-36). This Chinese restaurant has indoor and outdoor seating, cold beer and attentive staff. Soups start at Y3 and there's seafood that's come a long way from home.

Of the hotel restaurants, the Chini Bagh, Seman and Kashgar hotels have clean **Chinese restaurants and/or Muslim dining halls** (mains in both Y8-30). In the Muslim dining halls you can eat set Uyghur meals during limited hours. Most other Uyghur eateries seem uninterested in Western customers, hygiene is marginal and your meal is likely to be accompanied by kung fu videos. 'Muslim Restaurant' on the signs of many grotty places just means no pork is used. **Traffic Hotel** (mains Y25) has a surprisingly good, clean Uyghur restaurant, though zero English is spoken. A more traditional Chinese restaurant is **Tian Nan** (mains Y10-30), around the corner from the hotel of the same name; the sign says 'Han Dining Hall'.

Cafés & Quick Eats

The pavement along Yunmulakxia Lu north of Renmin Xilu overflows in the late afternoon and evening with Chinese, Hui (Chinese Muslim) and Uyghur stalls offering good food at minuscule prices. Hygiene is sometimes dubious, but you can't go wrong dipping your own spoon into hot *laghman*, or *jiaozi* (dumplings in boiling broth). Check out *huo guo*, a tasty meat-casserole of noodles, vegetables or mini-served up in colder weather, which looks pretty safe if it's on the boil. You might also find *plow*, mutton shashlik or meatballs in broth.

Caravan Café (120 Seman lu) Just outside Chini Bagh's gate is this travellers' oasis with espresso coffee (Y15), apple pie (Y10) and cakes – a generous slice with a coffee is Y20. For breakfasts, choose simple yogurt (Y4) or a combo of egg, cinnamon roll and coffee for Y16.

Self-Catering

The best way to eat vegetarian is to self-cater. A small **produce market** (Yunmulakxia lu) and an impromptu one outside the bus station on Jiefang Beilu have fresh fruit and vegetables, hard-boiled eggs (usually dyed red), steamed yams and yellow figs. Early in the morning, **bakeries** (Jiefang Beilu & Hunza lodge, Seman lu) churn out stout naan (the flat ones are *ak naan*, the bagels *gzhide*). Department stores and supermarkets, such as **Akeda** (Jiefang Beilu) may have dried or preserved fruit, biscuits, sweets, peanut butter, bulk honey and nuts. Dried fruit isn't always clean; soaking it in boiling water reduces (but doesn't eliminate) the risk of illness.

Yogurt is available in insipid, sweetened, drinkable tubs made in Kashgar. But Uyghur women still sell the real thing – thick, tasty yogurt – in ceramic bowls for under Y1, at around 8am to 9am (Beijing time) in the bazaar and the streets near the Seman and Chini Bagh hotels.

Drinking

Local and Beijing beer is available in non-Uyghur restaurants, and department stores carry beer, Chinese wine, brandy and white lightning (a potent rice liquor). A regional favourite is wine from Turfan – red or white, both of them sickly sweet.

Shopping Souvenirs

For serious shopping, go to the bazaar; Sunday market prices tend to be higher. The citizens of Kashgar have been selling things for 2000 years, so be ready to bargain.

Look for hats, copper/brassware and handicrafts. Uyghur knives with colourfully inlaid handles are a big favourite with tourists, but don't try to fly out of Kashgar with them in your hand luggage! The bazaar has a depressing line-up of animal pelts, including those from dogs. Some are thankfully fake, but it is not unknown to see pelts from snow leopards and other endangered animals.

Musical Instruments

Beautiful long-necked stringed instruments run the gamut from junk to collector's items. They include the two-string *dutar*, larger three-string *khomuz*, small *tambur* and elaborately shaped *rapap* with five strings and a lizard-skin sounding board. The small reed horn is a *sumai*, or *surnai*. A *dab* is a type of tambourine. Two shops on the street north from the post office sell these plus miniature tourist versions.

Carpets

There are a few dealers in the bazaar and some bargains in small shops, but most have moved out to the Sunday market pavilion. Regionally, the best carpets are said to be in Hotan.

Getting There & Away

Air

The only place you can fly to/from is Ürümqi for Y1150, but there are advance-purchase discounts of up to 50% of the fare. Flights go once or twice a day. Try to book at least a week ahead in summer, at **China Southern/Xinjiang Airways** (2826188; Renmin Hotel, or Renmin Donglu & Jiefang lu), or use one of the travel agencies or tourist information services.

These flights are sometimes cancelled because of wind or sandstorms (in which case you could easily spend less money and arrive sooner on a fast bus or the train). If yours is cancelled, just show up for the next flight and you get priority; there's no need to change the ticket (but you must change any ticket for a connecting flight out of Ürümqi). You can buy tickets here for other domestic flights too.

Bicycle

At least two Uyghur shops on Jiefang Beilu sell Chinese mountain bikes for the equivalent of US\$60 to US\$100. At least one traveller has bought one, cycled across the Khunjerab and sold it in Karimabad at no loss.

Bus

Most buses depart from the long-distance bus station. Ticket window Nos 1 to 4 are for Yengisar, Yarkand and Yecheng (Qarghilik); Nos 5 to 8 are for Hotan, Tashkurgan and Ürümqi. A **bus stand** (Renmin Donglu) by People's Park is for local and regional buses and motor-rickshaws; another regional bus stand is just out on the road to Tashkurgan.

Pakistan

The starting point for the 500km bus trip to Sost is the **international bus station** (Jiefang Beilu), north of the bridge over the Tuman River. At the time of research, a ticket was Y270. Departure is officially 10am Beijing time, but usually more like 10am local time.

The trip takes at least 1½ days with an overnight stop in Tashkurgan. Sit on the left-hand side for the overall best views. Drivers like to put luggage on the roof, so carry on-board water, snacks and warm clothes, as nights can be cold in any season. Unplanned stops are not unheard of – we experienced a flat tyre just below the snow line before the pass and another one just the other side of the pass! Landslides in the Ghez Valley can cancel departures at any time of year but especially in July and August. Customs inspections take place in Tashkurgan.

An alternative is to hire a Land Cruiser or minibus to Sost – still a two-day trip, though you *might* do it in one long day. All the agencies listed earlier (see p334) can arrange it, eg CITS charges Y2500 for three to five passengers in a minibus.

Ürümqi

You can make the 1480km, 24-hour trip to Ürümqi in a nonstop 'sleeper' bus (Uyghur: *qaravallik mashina*; Chinese: *wopoché*) for Y213/185 in a lower/upper berth.

These buses depart every hour from the international bus station and the **long-distance bus station** (Tian Nanlu). Buy tickets one to two hours before departure, though it is also possible to barter directly with the

drivers for cheaper fares. There have been instances of theft and pack slashing at the bus stations, so keep an eye on your bags.

Kyrgyzstan

Kashgar travel agencies (see p334) and **John Hu** (fax 2581186; John's Café, Seman lu) can get the necessary permits and organise transport. Visas must be applied for at the PSB office (see p334). Via the Irkeshtam Pass no permit is needed: CITS charges US\$150 to cover the 260km Chinese section in a minibus and US\$60 for the Kyrgyzstan connection to Osh.

Via Torgart Pass, CITS charges US\$150, which includes a 'guide', permit and transport for up to three passengers to Naryn. Onward transport to Bishkek costs US\$160.

Hitching

You might hitch a lift between Kashgar and Tashkurgan, but expect waits of anything from hours to days. You won't save much money as drivers expect something equivalent to the bus fare. From Tashkurgan to Pakistan, you'll probably have to wait for an empty seat on a bus.

Train

The train station is several kilometres east of town. A taxi costs about Y20, or catch the local bus (no 28) from the Mao statue on Renmin Donglu.

There is a hard sleeper train to Ürümqi (Y200, 28 hours) but the air-con sleeper is faster (Y350, 22 hours). Departures are daily; the fast train leaves at 4.30pm (Beijing time) and the slow train leaves at 9.15am.

Getting Around

TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

A Y8 bus leaves from **China Southern/Xinjiang Airways** (2826188; Renmin Hotel, or Renmin Donglu & Jiefang lu) 2½ hours before each flight departure, and one meets each incoming flight, along with swarms of overpriced vans and underpowered motor-rickshaws. A taxi is about Y30. Local bus (not minibus) No 2 goes from the stand by People's Park to the airport all day long. 'Airport' is *ay-drum* in Uyghur, *feijichang* in Chinese.

MINIBUSES & TAXIS

A few local minibus routes are handy, as noted elsewhere in the text, though none

run through the town centre. The fare depends on distance travelled, but is nowhere more than about Y1. Taxis cost about Y5 within the city confines.

BICYCLE RENTAL

John's Café (☎ fax 2581186; Seman lu) rents bikes for Y30 per day.

AROUND KASHGAR

Three-Immortals Caves

Twenty kilometres north of Kashgar is one of the area's few traces of the flowering of Buddhism, the Three-Immortals (San Xian) Caves. These are three grottoes high on a sandstone cliff, in one of which you can make out some peeling frescoes. The cliff is too sheer to climb, so it's a bit of a disappointment.

Ha Noi & Mor Pagoda

At the end of a jarring 35km drive north-east of town are the ruins of Ha Noi, a Tang dynasty town built in the 7th century and abandoned in the 12th. Little remains except for a great, solid, pyramid-like structure and the huge Mor 'Pagoda' (stupa).

Artush

Artush, or Artux (Chinese: Atushi), one hour's ride northeast of Kashgar, is a Kyrgyz market town and the centre of Kyrgyz Autonomous County. It has a large bazaar, heavy on cloth and clothing. It's famous locally for figs, best in late summer or early autumn. Also here is the **10th-century tomb** of Sultan Satuq Bughra Khan of the Qarakhan dynasty, the first local ruler to convert to Islam.

Local Kashgar minibuses No 9 passes Seman and Chini Bagh Hotels on its way to the end of the line near the People's Hospital, where you can get a regional minibus to Artush for

about Y20. The official foreigners' hotel is Kejou Binyuan.

Yarkand & Hotan

These and other towns southeast of Kashgar were stops on a Silk Road branch along the south side of the Takla Makan Desert, and from time to time were also mini-kingdoms. Yarkand, four hours from Kashgar, has a small indoor **Sunday bazaar**.

The craftspeople of Hotan were celebrated throughout Asia for their rugs, silk and carved jade, and to some extent still are. The 4th-century Chinese pilgrim Fa Hsien described Hotan as a highly developed centre of Buddhism, with no fewer than 14 large monasteries. Hotan, 12 hours from Kashgar by bus, has a **Sunday market** to rival Kashgar's; smaller but without the tourists.

SLEEPING

Hotels are pretty spartan. In Yarkand there's the **Shache Binyuan** (Hotel Yarkand; ☎ 8512565; s/d/r Y100/220/240), and a small **hotel** (r/20) with no English sign, beside the Altun Darvaza gate into the old town.

The official tourist hotel in Hotan is **Hetian Yingbinyuan** (Hotel Hotan; ☎ 2022824; dm/s/d Y25/45/190), providing hot showers and reliable accommodation for foreigners. Beside the bus station is a small hotel called **Jiaotong Binyuan** (☎ 2032700; d per person Y45) with basic carpeted doubles, but charging per person.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

From Kashgar, buses go frequently to Yarkand (Y22, three hours). Buses to Hotan (sleepers Y88, nonsleepers Y53.5, eight to 10 hours) are less frequent. When buying tickets, use the Chinese names: Shache for Yarkand, and Hetian for Hotan.

These buses are uncomfortable, expensive and slow. The only way to get to Yarkand and Hotan is by train. The train from Kashgar to Yarkand is a slow, old-fashioned passenger train. The train from Kashgar to Hotan is a faster, more modern passenger train. The train from Kashgar to Artush is a slow, old-fashioned passenger train. The train from Kashgar to Artush is a faster, more modern passenger train.

Trekking in Northern Pakistan

by John Mock & Kimberley O'Neil

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