Tour Code
PK1

ADVENTURESABROAD

NORTHERN PAKISTAN

The Himalaya, Karakoram & Hindu Kush

18 days

Created on: 17 Nov, 2026

Day 1 Arrival in Islamabad

Today we assemble in Islamabad - welcome to Pakistan!

About this Itinerary: This is our best hope for what we expect to accomplish on our trip, however a "go with the flow" attitude is necessary. While we and our local partners have tried our best to make this itinerary as accurate as possible, it should be considered an approximation of activities rather than a strict schedule. Though we try our best to adhere to the schedule, many unforeseen factors influence our tour -- weather conditions, health, route conditions, government restrictions, and other factors beyond our control. Alternative arrangements will be sought in such circumstances and the program will be modified accordingly.

Overnight in Islamabad.

Included Meal(s): Dinner

Day 2 Islamabad Sightseeing

After a leisurely morning allowing for late-night arrivals and lingering jet lag effects, we begin exploring Islamabad, Pakistan's capital. This modern city was established in the 1950s as a planned capital, carefully designed with wide boulevards, organized sectors, and extensive green spaces. Set against the dramatic backdrop of the Margalla Hills at the northern edge of the Potohar Plateau, Islamabad presents a striking contrast to Pakistan's older, more congested urban centres.

We visit the Pakistan Monument at Shakarparian Hill, an iconic structure representing Pakistan's four provinces and three territories through its petal-shaped design. We continue to Lok Virsa, the National Institute of Folk and Traditional Heritage, which preserves and promotes Pakistan's diverse cultural traditions through exhibits showcasing regional crafts, music, and folk arts.

Our tour includes Shah Faisal Mosque, the world's second-largest mosque and one of Islamabad's most recognizable landmarks. Designed by Turkish architect Vedat Dalokay and financed largely by Saudi Arabian donations, this striking modernist structure breaks from traditional mosque design with its tent-shaped main hall and four minarets standing 88 m/289 ft tall. The mosque can accommodate 300,000 worshippers and serves as both a functioning place of worship and an architectural landmark symbolizing Pakistan's Islamic identity.

We drive through the diplomatic enclave, passing the Supreme Court of Pakistan, the Prime Minister's House, and Parliament, witnessing the administrative heart of the nation. If time permits, we can visit a typical shopping mall where you may explore contemporary Pakistani fashion, including traditional outfits designed by prominent local designers.

Overnight in Islamabad.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 3 Islamabad: Taxila & Rawalpindi

After breakfast we drive approximately one hour to Taxila, one of South Asia's most important archaeological treasures. This UNESCO World Heritage site preserves remains of three great cities and dozens of Buddhist monasteries dating from 600 BCE to 600 AD, strategically positioned where trade routes linking China, India, Central Asia, and the West converged. Taxila survived through successive empires including the Achaemenids, Greeks, Mauryans, and Kushans, each leaving their architectural and cultural mark.

Buddhism took hold here around 275 BCE under Emperor Ashoka's patronage, and from this centre the religion spread northward to Central Asia, Tibet, and China. The city became renowned as a centre of learning, attracting scholars from across the ancient world to study philosophy, medicine, and the arts.

We visit Taxila Museum, housing one of the world's finest collections of Gandharan art and sculpture. This distinctive artistic style emerged from the fusion of Greek, Persian, and Indian influences, producing remarkably realistic Buddha figures and narrative reliefs that influenced

Buddhist art across Asia. The museum displays artifacts spanning nearly 2,000 years of continuous habitation, including coins, jewelry, pottery, and architectural fragments.

We explore the Dharmarajika Stupa, one of the earliest Buddhist monuments in the region, originally built to house relics of the Buddha himself. Weather and time permitting, we visit the nearby ancient city of Sirkap, laid out in a grid pattern reflecting Greek urban planning principles.

We continue to Rawalpindi for lunch, followed by exploration of this historic garrison city and its vibrant old bazaar, where traditional commerce continues much as it has for centuries.

We return to Islamabad for the evening.

Overnight in Islamabad.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 4 Islamabad - Naran

After an early breakfast we depart Islamabad for Naran, a 6-7 hour drive north through Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province. The first three hours take us through the Hazara district, where the road runs through green and well-forested western Himalayan spurs. En route we pass through Abbottabad, Mansehra, Balakot, and the Kaghan Valley.

This region holds rich history dating to Alexander the Great's 4th-century BCE conquest. Buddhist rule followed in the 3rd century BCE, leaving archaeological sites including Ashoka's Rock Edicts at Mansehra, inscribed around the 3rd century AD. These ancient stone inscriptions represent some of Emperor Ashoka's efforts to spread Buddhist teachings across his vast empire.

The drive itself provides a window into northern Pakistan's diverse landscapes, transitioning from the settled plains around Islamabad to increasingly dramatic mountain terrain as we approach the Himalayan foothills.

Overnight in Naran at 2400 m/7,874 ft elevation.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 5 Naran - Hunza via Babusar Pass

Today we continue via the N15 highway toward Babusar Pass at 4173 m/13,691 ft, connecting Khyber Pakhtunkhwa with Gilgit-Baltistan. The road follows the Kunhar River through small towns, passing 2.5 km/1.6 mi long Lulusar Lake before reaching Gittidas, the last village before the pass. The valley climbs steadily for 7 km/4.3 mi to Babusar summit, our journey's highest point, where spectacular panoramas reward the challenging ascent.

From the pass we descend through Thak Valley to Chilas on the Karakoram Highway, where ancient rock carvings mark routes used by Buddhist pilgrims travelling between China and South Asia. After a break at Chilas, we continue toward Gilgit, winding around Nanga Parbat at 8125 m/26,660 ft, the world's ninth-highest mountain. We stop where three great mountain ranges meet: the Himalaya, Karakoram, and Hindu Kush.

We continue through spectacular scenery toward Hunza. Weather permitting, we see Rakaposhi Peak at 7788 m/25,551 ft rising above terraced fields. In spring, fruit tree blossoms line the route; in autumn, the same trees blaze with yellow, orange, and red foliage.

This afternoon we arrive in Karimabad village, Hunza's main centre, set on a mountainside beneath Ultar Peak at 7388 m/24,239 ft with commanding views of Mount Rakaposhi and Diran Peak at 7257 m/23,809 ft. We continue to Altit for our accommodation. Time permitting, we may visit historic Altit Fort today, perched on a rocky outcrop above the Hunza River.

Overnight in Hunza (Altit or Aliabad) at approximately 2500 m/8,202 ft.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 6 Hunza: Baltit Fort & Village Excursion

After a relaxed breakfast we visit Baltit Fort, seat of the Ayashkutz family who ruled Hunza as a princely state for over 900 years. The ruler held the title Mir of Hunza to outsiders and Thum to locals, while the people call themselves Hunzokutz. The Ayashkutz family's rule ended in 1974 when Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto abolished all princely states in Pakistan.

Baltit Fort remained occupied by elderly Ayashkutz family members until 1960, though the Mir had moved to a new palace much earlier. In 1996 the Aga Khan Trust for Culture reopened Baltit Fort following meticulous restoration, transforming it into a heritage museum that has received several international awards. The restoration preserved centuries of architectural evolution while making the structure safe and accessible.

We also explore the local bazaar before returning to our hotel, experiencing the rhythms of daily life in this mountain community.

Overnight in Hunza (Altit or Aliabad).

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 7 Hunza - Hoppar Valley - Duiker

Today we leave Hunza Valley and cross the river to Nagar Valley, home to some of the region's larger glaciers and starting points for popular trekking routes. The valley lies along the Bualtar Glacier's southwest boundary, offering a unique landscape transformed and shaped by powerful glacial forces over millennia. Unlike the more cultivated Hunza Valley, Nagar retains a wilder, more rugged character.

We walk through Hoppar village, encountering local residents whose lives revolve around the rhythms of these high mountain communities. The village sits at the edge of massive ice fields, with glacial tongues extending down valley slopes. We enjoy lunch among the glaciers with striking views encompassing multiple 7000 m/22,966 ft peaks. The setting provides insight into life where glacial melt provides essential water for agriculture, yet the proximity to advancing and retreating ice presents constant challenges.

We return to Karimabad and continue ascending to Duiker at 2850 m/9,350 ft, the area's highest settlement and our tour's highest overnight point. The road climbs through increasingly sparse vegetation as altitude limits what can grow. Before sunset, we walk to a nearby viewpoint for a magnificent 360-degree panorama of snow-covered peaks and the valley spreading far below, a fitting reward for reaching this remote location.

Overnight in Duiker.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 8 Duiker - Attabad Lake - Attabad Lake - Sost

Today we depart for Sost, continuing north along the Karakoram Highway toward the Chinese frontier. En route we stop at Attabad Lake, one of the region's most dramatic recent geological events. In January 2010, a massive landslide buried the village of Attabad and blocked both the Karakoram Highway and Hunza River, creating a barrier 150 m/492 ft high. Water backed up rapidly, forming a lake that eventually stretched 21 km/13 mi upstream, displacing thousands of residents and severing the vital link between Pakistan and China.

By 2015, Pakistani and Chinese engineers completed five tunnels totalling 7 km/4.3 mi, restoring road access. The lake remains, its pristine turquoise waters now a striking feature of the landscape. We stop at various viewpoints for photographs and take a traditional boat excursion on the lake, experiencing this transformed landscape from water level. Local boatmen navigate the submerged remains of the old highway and villages now lying beneath the surface.

Time allowing, we visit Borith Lake, a natural glacial lake serving as a resting point for migratory waterfowl. Several bird species pause here during seasonal journeys, offering opportunities to observe avian life against the dramatic mountain backdrop. The lake's relatively gentle setting contrasts with Attabad's more dramatic origins.

We continue north to Sost, the last significant settlement before the Chinese border. This frontier town at approximately 2900m/9,514 ft serves as Pakistan's principal border post on the Karakoram Highway, where customs and immigration facilities process the limited commercial and tourist traffic crossing between nations.

Overnight in Sost.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 9 Sost & Khunjerab National Park

After breakfast we drive to Khunjerab National Park. Established in 1979 by Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the park covers 2270 sq km/876 sq mi and ranks among the world's highest-altitude national parks. The park encompasses three distinct valleys: Khunjerab through which the KKH passes, Ghujerab, and the remote Shimshal Valley accessible only by challenging jeep tracks.

At the valley's end sits Khunjerab Pass at 4700 m/15,420 ft, marking the Pakistan-China border and claiming the distinction of the world's highest paved international border crossing. The name Khunjerab means "Valley of Blood," referring to bandits who once preyed on caravans using this ancient Silk Road route.

Today's drive takes us through high, wild, magnificent scenery characteristic of the Karakoram's harshest environments. The region hosts Markhor (Marco Polo) sheep with their distinctive spiralling horns, Himalayan ibex, blue sheep, and if extraordinarily fortunate, snow leopards and Tibetan wolves. The sparse vegetation at this altitude supports limited wildlife, making any sightings particularly memorable. We also pass near the Wakhan Corridor, a narrow strip of Afghanistan created in the late 19th century by Britain and Russia to maintain a buffer zone between their empires.

We return to Sost after our high-altitude excursion.

Overnight in Sost.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 10 Passu - Gilgit & Kargah

After a relaxed breakfast we continue our journey with a scenic 3-4 hour drive back to Gilgit, retracing our route along the Karakoram Highway through dramatic mountain scenery. Gilgit serves as the capital of Gilgit-Baltistan and functions as the region's administrative and commercial hub at 1500 m/4,921 ft elevation. The town sits at the confluence of three rivers and has long served as a crucial junction for traders and travellers moving between Central Asia, China, and the Indian subcontinent.

This afternoon we visit nearby Kargah, known for its large standing Buddha carved high on a cliff face. This remarkable 7th-century carving stands approximately 15 m/49 ft tall and represents one of the region's most significant Buddhist monuments, dating from the period when Buddhism flourished throughout these valleys before Islam's arrival. The Buddha figure, though weathered by centuries of exposure, remains a powerful testament to the area's Buddhist heritage and the religion's former widespread influence across the Karakoram.

We explore Gilgit's vibrant bazaar, where merchants sell everything from local handicrafts and dried fruits to mountaineering equipment for expeditions heading to nearby peaks. The bazaar provides insight into daily life in this mountain trading centre, where cultures from surrounding regions have mingled for centuries.

Overnight in Gilgit.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 11 Gilgit - Kachura - Shigar

After breakfast we drive to Kachura-Skardu, capital of Baltistan. No other part of the world concentrates such a large number of high mountains in such confined space. The route from the west follows the Indus River for 106 km/66 mi from the KKH to Skardu. Previously plagued with rockfalls and slow-moving traffic on a narrow rough track, this road has been substantially expanded and paved by Pakistan Army Engineers from 2018 onward, though sections remain challenging.

Soon after leaving the KKH and crossing Gilgit River at Maqpun Das, we see Nanga Parbat's magnificent west face, the world's ninth-highest peak at 8125 m/26,660 ft and Pakistan's second-highest mountain. The mountain's dramatic relief rises over 7000 m/22,966 ft from the Indus River to its summit, creating one of the world's greatest vertical faces.

After a lunch stop at Kachura we continue through Skardu to Shigar. The final portion passes through a "cold desert" region, where large sandy dunes flank the river when not in flood with melting snows, creating a surreal landscape of sand against snow-capped peaks. The broad fertile Shigar Valley sits ringed by mountains, several snow-capped year-round. Shigar town serves as gateway to the great Karakoram mountains and the "eight-thousanders," the 14 mountains exceeding 8000 m/26,247 ft, including K2, the world's second-highest mountain.

We overnight at Shigar Fort, which has won numerous international tourism and historic preservation awards for its quality restoration by the Aga Khan Trust. A local site guide will likely tour us through Shigar Fort shortly after arrival.

Overnight in Shigar at 2230 m/7,316 ft.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 12 Shigar Sightseeing

Our day unfolds based on weather conditions and local circumstances. We walk through the relaxed town of Shigar, where opportunities arise to interact with people living in this lush mountain environment. Despite the harsh surrounding landscape, the valley produces abundant apples, apricots, pears, cherries, and walnuts, sustained by careful irrigation systems channelling glacial meltwater to terraced fields.

Our exploration includes the delicately-constructed wooden Amburiq Mosque, built in the 14th century by Kashmiri craftsmen. A conservation group has carefully restored this remarkable structure in efforts to preserve the Tibetan and Kashmiri architectural traditions evident in the original construction. The mosque's wooden architecture, with its intricate joinery and carved details, represents a building tradition largely disappeared from the region, making its preservation particularly significant.

Today we also embark on a 4WD excursion into the surrounding area to appreciate the expansive valley and mountain views. The drive takes us to vantage points offering perspectives across the Shigar Valley toward some of the Karakoram's most imposing peaks. The contrast between the green, cultivated valley floor and the stark, icy mountains rising immediately beyond creates a dramatic landscape unique to this region.

Overnight at Shigar Fort.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 13 Shigar - Fly to Islamabad

After breakfast we transfer to the airport at Skardu for our flight to Islamabad, a spectacular one-hour journey renowned for mountain views as the aircraft navigates between towering peaks.

Upon arrival we transfer to our hotel for check-in. Later we visit the nearby Pakistan National Council of Art Museum, which houses collections showcasing Pakistan's diverse artistic heritage including contemporary paintings, traditional crafts, and cultural artifacts representing the nation's various regions and ethnic groups.

Overnight in Islamabad.

NOTE: In the event of flight cancellation due to weather, we will travel back to Islamabad by road today and tomorrow, reversing our northern route.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 14 Islamabad & Excursion to Peshawar

Today we have an excursion to Peshawar, capital of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, formerly known as North West Frontier Province, ranks as Pakistan's most diverse province, covering over 100,000 sq km/38,610 sq mi including the Tribal Areas. The province stretches from the Pamir in the extreme north to Dera Ismail Khan on the Indus River's banks in the south, encompassing high mountains, fertile river basins, and semi-arid deserts. At the province's heart lies the Peshawar Valley, where rich alluvial soils watered by the Kabul and Swat rivers make this among Pakistan's most productive agricultural regions.

The drive to Peshawar provides a unique experience along routes used for centuries by traders and invaders moving to and from India, making and losing fortunes. Traces of those times remain visible in fortresses and caravanserais (travellers' inns) dotting the landscape. The historic Khyber Pass, though closed to visitors since 2001 due to security concerns, lies nearby and has long featured in the romance and strategic importance of this frontier region.

Peshawar today is a large, rapidly-developing city with distinct character. Much of its unique atmosphere thrives in the fascinating bazaars of the old city. In traditional Central Asian style, the Old City was formerly completely encircled by walls and centred on a citadel. The bazaars retain their traditional character, with different areas specializing in specific trades and crafts as they have for generations.

In the late afternoon we return to Islamabad.

Overnight in Islamabad.

NOTE: The Peshawar excursion occurs only if our previous day's flight operated as scheduled. In the event of weather-related flight cancellation, this day continues our road journey back to Islamabad.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 15 Islamabad - Hindu Temple at Katas - Lahore

Today we travel by road to Lahore via Katas, where extensive Hindu temples centre around a large sacred pool and spring. According to legend, the pool formed from tears shed by Shiva's eye as he wept over his wife Parvati's death. Tears from his second eye fell near Ajmer in Rajasthan, forming a second sacred pool. The temple complex, known as Satghara, sprawls across the hillside with structures dating from different periods.

The oldest temple sits atop the hill overlooking the complex. A narrow internal staircase leads to the roof, offering excellent views across the site and surrounding Salt Range hills. The site represents an important pilgrimage destination for Hindus and showcases temple architecture spanning several centuries of development.

We continue to Lahore, Pakistan's cultural capital and second-largest city.

Overnight in Lahore.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 16 Lahore: Royal Bath, Lahore Fort & Badshahi Mosque

Today we explore Lahore, Pakistan's cultural heart and a city that has witnessed empires rise and fall for over a millennium.

We visit the Shahi Hammam and Walled City of Lahore, containing numerous buildings, bazaars, public spaces, and monuments of high cultural, architectural, and historic value. The Shahi Hammam, located inside Delhi Gate, dates to the Mughal period and provides ideal context for welcoming visitors to the Walled City. In 2012, the Walled City Authority created an enabling environment for restoration by removing commercial encroachments surrounding this historic building, allowing visitors to appreciate its original grandeur.

We continue to Wazir Khan Mosque, located deeper within the Walled City. Built in 1643, the mosque is renowned for its exceptional use and execution of inlaid pottery decoration in the wall panelling, creating intricate floral and geometric patterns that represent the pinnacle of Mughal decorative arts.

The Badshahi Mosque, built for Emperor Aurangzeb in 1673-74, stands as Lahore's most striking building. Modelled on the great Jami Masjid in Delhi, it features an impressive 20 m/66 ft high gateway and a central prayer chamber topped by three large white marble domes opening

onto an enormous courtyard. The mosque can accommodate 100,000 worshippers simultaneously, making it one of the world's largest mosques.

We also visit Lahore Fort, built by the Mughals during their rule. The fort contains some of South Asia's most impressive secular Mughal buildings, embellished with carved red sandstone, marble, pietra dura work, glazed coloured and Kashi tile work, plus frescoes depicting princely pleasures. The complex functions more as a palace than a fortress, reflecting the Mughals' sophisticated taste for art and architecture.

Overnight in Lahore.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 17 Lahore: Lahore Museum, Shalimar Garden & Waga Border

After breakfast we visit Lahore Museum, Pakistan's oldest and finest. The museum's first curator was John Lockwood Kipling, father of Rudyard Kipling, who referred to it as the "Ajaib Ghar" or House of Wonders in his novel "Kim." The museum houses an extremely valuable coin collection, some pieces dating from Alexander the Great's era, alongside outstanding Gandharan art and artifacts spanning Pakistan's diverse history.

Standing outside is the famous Zamzama Gun, immortalized in "Kim's" opening lines. This mighty cannon earned its name because its firing resembled a lion's roar. The gun saw action in the Battle of Panipat in 1761 and was badly damaged in the Battle of Multan in 1818.

We visit Shalimar Gardens, dating from the Mughal Empire's artistic zenith. Laid out as a Persian paradise garden representing earthly utopia where humans coexist in harmony with nature, the gardens were inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1981, recognizing them as embodying Mughal garden design at its apex. The gardens feature three descending terraces with flowing water, fountains, and pavilions creating a cool retreat from Lahore's heat.

We then witness the Flag Lowering Ceremony at Wagah Border, a daily "Beating Retreat" ceremony performed since 1959. Indian and Pakistani security forces execute an elaborate synchronized parade building to a crescendo before flags are lowered simultaneously. The ceremony ends with abrupt handshakes between soldiers, followed by closing of the border gates. The event attracts large, enthusiastic crowds on both sides, blending national pride with theatrical spectacle.

Overnight in Lahore.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 18 Departure

Departure from Lahore.

BON VOYAGE!