WAKHAN & the AFGHAN PAMIR
IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF MARCO POLO
**WAKHAN FACTS**

**COUNTRY**
Afghanistan

**PROVINCE**
Badakhshan

**DISTRICT**
Wakhan

**NEAREST INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT**
Kabul

**NEAREST DOMESTIC AIRPORT**
Faizabad

**GATEWAY TOWN**
Ishkashim

**DISTRICT HEADQUARTERS**
Khandud

**MAIN VILLAGES**
Qazideh, Qila-e Panja, Goz Khun, Sarhad-e Broghil

**POPULATION**
approximately 12,000 in 1500 households

**LANGUAGES**
Persian, Wakhi and Kyrgyz

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“Tok us yon diq to tay, sullt to the keen air of these breezy altitudes in the felt tents of the Kyrgyz of the Afghan Pamir.”

Sir Aurel Stein

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The Wakhan & the Afghan Pamir

*Unexplored* 7000m Hindukush peaks beckon the mountaineer.

*Kirghis* nestled in the heart of the Afghan Pamir—preserve a vanishing way of life.

Rare and spectacular wildlife roam isolated high elevation valleys.

Sparkling mountain lakes of Zorkol and Chaqmaqtin feed Central Asia’s mighty Oxus River.

Ancient Silk Road caravan history inscribed in petroglyphs showcases the archeology.

Snowcapped 7000m Hindukush peaks beckon true mountain lovers.

Kyrgyz nomads in the heart of the Afghan Pamir preserve a vanishing way of life.

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**THE AFGHAN PAMIR**

Pamir are unique U-shaped, high-elevation mountain valleys distinctive to Central Asia, where there are more than half a dozen named pamirs. Renowned as summer grazing grounds for their abundant grass and water, these vast plateaus are covered by snow six months of the year.

The Afghan Pamir include two such valleys at the eastern end of the Pamir, the Big Pamir and the Little Pamir, which are better known by their Persian names. The Big Pamir or Great Pamir is called Pamir Kalan and Pamir-e-Buzurg (great or large). The Little Pamir is called Pamir Khor and Pamir-e-Khurd and both mean ‘little’ or ‘small’.

The 60km long Big Pamir nestles between the Southern and Pamir Khurd, which are unique U-shaped, high-elevation mountain ranges. The Big Pamir is called Pamir Khurd and Pamir-e-Khurd both mean ‘little’ or ‘small’.

**THE LAND**

Afghanistan's Wakhan District is a narrow strip of land separating Tajikistan and Pakistan that just eastward some 2400km from the Amur Darya or ‘Mother River’. One of Afghanistan’s four major river systems, it has its source in the six heights of the Pamir Mountains at the head of the Wakhan Valley. Fed by the streams from Chashm-Quoq Quoq Lake south of Sarahi, it becomes the Wakhan River, which flows at Goph-e-Pata by the Pamir River flowing from Zerkul. Descending 800m at Goph-e-Pata, the river is called the Ali-e-Pata (Pamir River) and flows through a deep gorge formed between Afghanistan’s Badakhshan Province and Tajikistan. Finally, east of Kumbel, it is joined by Tajikistan’s Valley River and becomes the Arman Darya for the remainder of its course across central Asia.

The Arman Darya or ‘Mother River’ is the Persian name for the river that classical Greek geographers called the Osus. It forms much of Afghanistan’s southern border with Tajikistan and Uzbekistan and courses more than 2400km across China’s Kunlun to the Aral Sea. The Arman Darya, one of Afghanistan’s four major river systems, has its source in the six heights of the Pamir Mountains at the head of the Wakhan Valley. Fed by the streams from Chashm-Quoq Quoq Lake south of Sarahi, it becomes the Wakhan River, which flows at Goph-e-Pata by the Pamir River flowing from Zerkul. Descending 800m at Goph-e-Pata, the river is called the Ali-e-Pata (Pamir River) and flows through a deep gorge formed between Afghanistan’s Badakhshan Province and Tajikistan. Finally, east of Kumbel, it is joined by Tajikistan’s Valley River and becomes the Arman Darya for the remainder of its course across central Asia.

*The river is a stone handkerchief, all of forgotten peoples and echoes of unknown lanes, and are believed to have recited the words of God.*

Lord Curzon
**A JOURNEY THROUGH WAKHAN IS THE VERY ESSENCE OF ADVENTURE TRAVEL. AROUND EVERY TURN IN THE ROAD, YOU CAN...**

**THE WEATHER**

Wakhan is at its best during the short summer, which lasts from late June to mid-September. It is followed by a long, dry winter lasting from late November to late March. The tourist season in Wakhan is relatively short, starting in late June to mid-September. It is followed by a long winter from late September to early June with cold conditions, snow, and occasional dust storms. Unpredictable and changeable weather makes it impossible to know when you can see any month of the year in the Afghan Pamir.

**WAKHAN ACTIVITIES**

**WAKHAN OF OR TRAIL ARE TANTALIZING MOUNTAINS, UNKNOWN WILDERNESS, AND FASCINATING VILLAGES AND NOMAD CAMPgrounds.**

**WALK ALONG THE ROAD, WANDER THROUGH VILLAGES, EXPLORE THE INVITING MOUNTAIN PASSES. TRAVEL WITH THE GRACIOUS AND HOSPITABLE PEOPLE IN WAKHAN, HERE SHARING THEIR HARDWORK. EXPERIENCING THESE MOUNTAINS FIRST-HAND IS IRREPLACEABLE AND UNFORGETTABLE.**

The unique attractions for mountaineers in Wakhan are several easy accessible 7000m peaks of the Hindukush including Afghanistan’s highest (4827m), and numerous peaks higher than 6000m awaiting for the adventurous souls. The glaciated side valleys in the tundra, offers a host of virgin peaks. Extreme adventurers will find a playground for climbing and ski mountaineering.

The isolation and remoteness of Wakhan, its natural beauty, and its cultural diversity are ideal for cultural tourism. Donkey trekking is the most popular activity in Wakhan, and is still a fun and exciting way to move on these icy pathways in winter when rivers are frozen solid.

**A JOURNEY THROUGH WAKHAN IS THE VERY ESSENCE OF ADVENTURE TRAVEL.**

A BIKE MECHANIC AND HAVE AN AMPLE SUPPLY OF SPARE PARTS IS THERE FOR MOUNTAIN BIKING, BUT YOU’D BETTER BE A GOOD BIKE MECHANIC AND HAVE AN AMPLE SUPPLY OF SPARE PARTS.

A few ambitious cyclists have already made their way to Wakhan. The road through the Wakhan Corridor is suitable for mountain biking, but you’d better be a good bike mechanic and have an ample supply of spare parts and tools. Wakhan is an undiscovered, unrecorded gem not yet on the tourist map of the world. Cultivate a spirit of adventure and open-mindedness, and seek to self-reliance, sound judgment and good planning and you have the recipe for an unforgettable trip to one of the earth’s most exotic landscapes.

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**WHEN TO GO**

The tourist season in Wakhan is short-lasting, starting in late June and lasting until September or early October. From early April to early June, riding snow mobiles and high water blocks are necessary to move across, making some crossing impossible by foot, animal or vehicle. Snows vary from one area to another as early as early April. The last in summer you travel, the easier it is to cross streams and snows, and the greener the landscape of being able to drive as far as Sarhad-e Badakhshan. August to mid-September is the optimal travel time. By early September, snow could close traditonal roads for the season.

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**THE RESPECTFUL TOURIST**

By respecting the sovereignty of international borders and abiding all local laws, you can ensure a pleasant and positive experience. Take responsible tourism seriously and don't take advantage of generous hospitality or pay for food and accommodation.

- 1. Be a responsible tourist and make donations through established organizations or contribute to local efforts to lessen the negative impact on the environment.
- 2. Behave conservatively as a show of respect for the local culture and don't drink alcohol in public view. This includes refraining from all public displays of affection, wearing a hat or scarf is optional for women travelling through the region.
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Wakhan & the Afghan Pamir Routes

- Qila-e Panja to Sarhad-e Broghil
- Broghil Pass
- Zorkol River Route
- Zorkol High Route
- Kotal-e Shaur
- Kashch Goz High Route
- Kashch Goz River Route
- Chaqmaqtin Lake
- Wakhjir Valley
- Irshad Uween
- Dilisang Pass
- main village
- smaller village
- seasonal settlement

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**LOWER WAKHAN**

- **NORGOSHA BASE CAMP**
  - Duration: 5-6 days round trip
  - Standard: easy
  - Highlights: base camp (4450m) of Nosh Koul, remote wilderness of breathtaking beauty, multi-coloured rock formations

- **ZORKOL RIVER ROUTE**
  - Duration: 8 days round trip
  - Standard: demanding
  - Highlights: challenging river crossings, one 4979m snow-covered, but nonglaciated pass

- **KASHCH GOZ RIVER ROUTE**
  - Duration: 6-7 days round trip
  - Standard: demanding
  - Highlights: one day shorter than Kashch Goz High Route

- **KOTAL-E SHAUR**
  - Duration: 1 day round trip
  - Standard: easy
  - Highlights: Kotal-e Qarabel (4820m) and glaciated Kotal-e Shaur (4890m)

**UPPER WAKHAN**

- **QILA-E PANJA TO SARHAD-E BROGHIL**
  - Duration: 3-4 days one way
  - Standard: easy
  - Highlights: cross one pass each way: Daliz (4267m), Kotal-e Shaur (4890m)

**BIG PAMIR**

- **KASHCH GOZ HIGH ROUTE**
  - Duration: 10-11 days round trip
  - Standard: standard
  - Highlights: crossing three passes each way: gizzly Daliz (4267m), Kotal-e Shaur (4890m) and Ison glacial Suruq Qur (4570m)

- **CHAQMAQTIN LAKE**
  - Duration: 8 days round trip
  - Standard: demanding
  - Highlights: renowned lake, source of Murghab River or Aksu

**LITTLE PAMIR**

- **ZORKOL HIGH ROUTE**
  - Duration: 8 days round trip
  - Standard: demanding
  - Highlights: three passes each way: gizzly Daliz (4267m), Kotal-e Shaur (4890m) and Erisan glacial Suruq Qur (4570m)

**CROSS-BORDER**

- **Wakhan Travellers’ Information**
  - Special permission for cross-border routes from the Little Pamir to Pakistan’s Northern Areas is required from the governments of both Afghanistan and Pakistan. This information is held by the Wakhan Travellers’ Information Office for both countries (see the Wakhan Travellers’ Information Office for further information).

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**ROUTE DIFFICULTY**

- Easy: 1000m to 2000m, 1-3 days
- Moderate: 2000m to 4000m, 3-4 days
- Strenuous: more than 4000m, less than 7000m
- Demanding: more than 7000m

**VARIATION**

- Less than 1500m elevation change
- More than 1500m elevation change
- Sustained slopes of more than 30 degrees
- Sustained slopes of less than 30 degrees
- Off-trail travel
- Trail travel
- Cross country travel
- Cross country travel
- Cross country travel
- Cross country travel
- Cross country travel

**VIA CHAPURSAN VALLEY**

- Start: Sarhad-e Broghil
- End: Chapursan Valley, Northern Areas, Pakistan
- Duration: 8-9 days one way
- Standard: demanding
For more than 2500 years the Wakhan Corridor has been the homeland of Wakhi people, who refer to themselves as Wakhik or Khik. Today about 10,000 Wakhi live in Afghanistan's Wakhan District, with another 40,000 living in adjacent areas of Tajikistan, Pakistan and China. Wakhi live in year-round villages extending from Qazideh (2800m) at the western end of Lower Wakhan to Sarhad-e Broghil (3300m) at the eastern end of Upper Wakhan. Wakhi people are farmers, who cultivate wheat, barley, peas, potatoes and a few apricot trees at the upper limits of agriculture, where production is rarely sufficient.

Chinir, a festival celebrating the start of the barley harvest, occurs around the first week of August. Wakhi depend on livestock to supplement their agriculture, and almost all households have some animals. Wealthier families have many sheep, goats and yaks, while larger households own some camels, horses and donkeys. Every summer, Wakhi people take their livestock to summer pastures as high as 4500m, where the animals grow fat on abundant grass. Wakhi people speak Wakhi, which they call Khikwor. It belongs to the Pamir group of Iranian languages and is spoken throughout Wakhan. Most men also speak Persian, which is used as a link language to communicate with people from other parts of Afghanistan. Wakhi people are Isma'ili Muslims, whose spiritual leader is the Aga Khan.

The annual seasonal migration, or kuch, of Wakhi people and their livestock from winter pastures is a colorful sight. Yakedkhi high with cauldrons, bedding and household goods move along the trail, while large groups of yakedkhi lead them. Wakhi women, bearded, pock-pitted, and in few spots on the upper limits of agriculture, where production is rarely sufficient. These return migration, usually departs from the villages in the first week of June. During the summer, the flock moves approximately 200km to summer pastures, where they remain until late August. The joyous return migration, occurs around the first week of August. Travellers may encounter these caravans in the Afghan Pamir, especially on trade leading to and from the Little Pamir.

Central Asian Altai mountains along the western border of Mongolia is the traditional home of the kyrz, a Turkic pastoral nomadic group. Each summer, small bands of kyrz would migrate from lower valleys in Central Asia to the Afghan Pamir, but following the 1917 Soviet revolution, several thousand kyrz settled permanently in the Big Pamir and Little Pamir. Their once wide-ranging migration became a series of short, seasonal movements within the closed frontiers of the high altitude Afghan Pamir. Kyrz live in 6th centuries or so, which they move seasonally according to available pasture, water and shelter from sand. Their settlements lie between elevations of 4000m and 4500m. The kyrz tend herds of fat-tailed sheep, goats and Bactrian camels, and trade with Wakhi neighbors or travelling merchants for all their needs not supplied by their livestock. Following the Soviet backed 1978 coup in Afghanistan, some 1500 kyrz, led by Haji Ruhmat Okt, left the Afghan Pamir for Pakistan. In 1982 this group of kyrz was resettled in the mountains of eastern Turkey. Today, about 1800 kyrz remain in the Afghan Pamir. Their language is also called Kyrz, which is from the Kipchak group of northeastern Turkic languages. Most kyrz men also speak Wakhi. Like all Turkic people, kyrz are Sunni Muslims.

The Kyrzy Updated by Sarah Hard!
Both Chinese and Tadjik records mention Wakhan as a kingdom, and both powers contested the region and its rich trade during the 7th and 8th centuries. Trade through the area is said to have boosted Wakhan’s economy. In the 18th century, the Durrani kingdom invaded the region, and in the 19th century, the Russian empire conquered it. Subsequently, the first British mission visited the region in 1860, and in 1863, a series of native explorers or ‘pandits’ through Wakhan between 1860 and 1890. The British sent a series of native explorers through Wakhan, which he knew as a part of Badakhshan. Lieutenant John Wood found the region insufficient in grain production with livestock the only wealth, and reached Zorkol, which he identified as the source of the Oxus. The British sent a series of native explorers through Wakhan, which he knew as a part of Badakhshan. 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The Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) is a group of development agencies working in health, education, culture and rural and economic development, primarily in Asia and Africa. It is dedicated to improving living conditions and opportunities for the poor, without regard to their faith, origin or gender.

AKDN has been active in Afghanistan since 1996 and is now undertaking a range of development initiatives addressing issues of food security, infrastructure rehabilitation, upgrading and support for healthcare and educational institutions, water and sanitation, revitalization of cultural assets and urban development. Network activities are also responding to the need for investment in priority sectors of the economy such as microfinance, telecommunications and tourism.

Through the integrated efforts of its agencies, institutions, and affiliates – and in cooperation with a wide range of international and local partners – AKDN has made significant achievements in its long-term commitment to the reconstruction and development of Afghanistan.

www.wakhan.org