

ASIA · MOUNTAINS · HISTORY · ARCHITECTURE · SACRED SITES · OFF THE BEATEN PATH



Afghanistan

Afghanistan is a country of high passes and old trade routes: the empty Buddha niches of Bamiyan, the six lakes of Band-e Amir, the tiled Friday Mosque of Herat and the Minaret of Jam rising from a remote gorge. Travel here is possible but complex, so read the FCDO advice first and plan through a specialist operator with trusted local fixers.

**The UK Foreign Office (FCDO) advises against all travel to Afghanistan.**
Read the latest FCDO travel advice before planning a trip. Your travel insurance may be invalid if you travel against FCDO advice.
FCDO advice last updated 30 July 2026.

 CAPITAL Kabul	 CURRENCY Afghan afghani (AFN) £1 ≈ AFN 86.26	 LANGUAGE Dari, Pashto Uzbek	 BEST TIME Apr–Jun, Sep–Oct
 DAILY BUDGET £40–£250 ££ Moderate	 PLUGS Type C, F 220V · adapter needed	 FLIGHT FROM LONDON 12h via Dubai or Istanbul ~£650–£1,050 return	 TIME ZONE UTC+4:30 standard time

Afghanistan sits where Persia, Central Asia and the Indian subcontinent meet, and its sights reflect two thousand years of passing empires: Buddhist cliff monasteries in Bamiyan, Ghurid minarets, Timurid tilework in Herat and the Mughal emperor Babur's terraced garden in Kabul. The Hindu Kush splits the country, so routes are shaped by passes and flights rather than distance. Most first trips start in Kabul, drive west over the mountains to Bamiyan and Band-e Amir in the central highlands, then add Herat in the west or Mazar-i-Sharif in the north, each with a very different feel.

Very few tourists come, so there are no crowds at the great sites and a great deal of curiosity about visitors. Almost everyone travels with a specialist operator or local fixer who handles paperwork, checkpoints, drivers and guesthouses; that support, rather than food or rooms, is what drives the cost. Expect long days on rough roads, strict dress codes that apply to foreigners too, and generous hospitality, with endless green tea and invitations that are hard to refuse. It suits experienced travellers comfortable with uncertainty, firm rules and plans that change at short notice.

Top 5 highlights

1

HISTORY

Bamiyan Valley

The giant Buddhas carved into Bamiyan's cliffs were destroyed in 2001, but the empty niches, the honeycomb of monks' caves and the ruined citadel of Shahr-e Gholghola still make this green valley at 2,500 metres unforgettable.

2

NATURE

Band-e Amir National Park

Six deep-blue lakes held back by natural travertine walls in the high desert west of Bamiyan, declared Afghanistan's first national park in 2009. Summer weekends bring Afghan families, picnics and pedalos; spring and autumn are quieter.

3

SACRED SITE

Friday Mosque of Herat

Herat's Masjid-i Jami was founded by the Ghurids around 1200 and is clad in blue, white and turquoise tile mosaic, long maintained by an on-site workshop where craftsmen cut and glaze replacement tiles by hand. Visit outside prayer times.

4

HISTORY

Minaret of Jam

A 65-metre brick minaret raised by the Ghurids in the late 12th century, wrapped in bands of Kufic and naskh inscriptions and standing alone where two rivers meet in a gorge of Ghor province. Reaching it means a long, rough drive.

5

SACRED SITE

Blue Mosque, Mazar-i-Sharif

The turquoise-tiled Shrine of Hazrat Ali dominates the centre of Mazar-i-Sharif and is famous for the white doves that flock around its courtyards. It has traditionally been the focus of the north's Nowruz celebrations.

Biggest cities

LARGEST CITY

Kabul

≈ 5.3 million people

The capital sits in a mountain bowl at about 1,800 metres, with Babur's Gardens, the National Museum and the old-city bird market; most visitors pass through with a fixer rather than linger.

2ND LARGEST CITY

Kandahar

≈ 730,000 people

The historic heart of the Pashtun south, home to the shrine of the Prophet's Cloak and Ahmad Shah Durrani's mausoleum; few foreigners visit, and it feels more conservative than Kabul.

3RD LARGEST CITY

Herat

≈ 670,000 people

The most rewarding city for visitors: the blue-tiled Friday Mosque, the restored Ikhtiyaruddin citadel, the Musalla minarets and a Persian-influenced bazaar culture close to the Iranian border.

Ranked by urban-area population where available. Figures are rounded estimates, and sources define city limits differently, so rankings of similar-sized cities can vary.

When to go to Afghanistan

Best time: **Apr–Jun, Sep–Oct.**

Jan

Feb

Mar

Apr

May

Jun

Jul

Aug

Sep

Oct

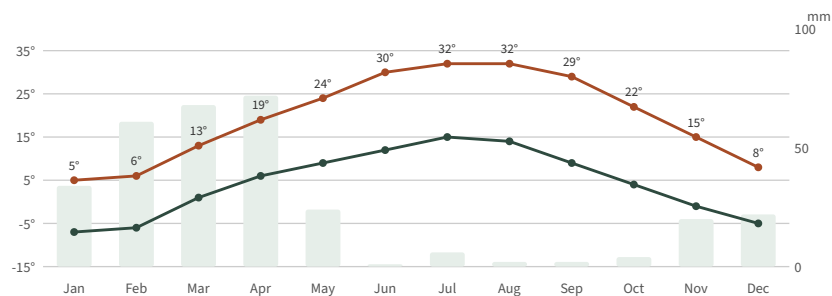
Nov

Dec

■ Best ■ Good ■ Mixed ■ Poor

Average climate in Kabul

— High °C — Low °C ■ Rain (mm)



Festivals & events

Jan–Mar, Nov–Dec	Buzkashi season Afghanistan's national sport, in which horsemen battle to carry a goat carcass to a scoring circle, is played through the cooler months, especially on Fridays around Mazar-i-Sharif and Kabul.
Mar	Nowruz Persian New Year on 21 March, traditionally marked with family picnics, haft-mewa dried-fruit compote and a flag-raising at Mazar-i-Sharif's shrine; public festivities have been curtailed in recent years.
Mar	Eid al-Fitr The feast ending Ramadan brings new clothes, family visits and tables of sweets and dried fruit; offices and many shops close for several days, so plan travel around it.

How much does Afghanistan cost?

SHOESTRING £40 per person / day ≈ AFN 3,450 hostels, street food, buses	MID-RANGE £100 per person / day ≈ AFN 8,626 3-star hotels, restaurants, some taxis	COMFORTABLE £250 per person / day ≈ AFN 21,565 4-star+, guided trips, private transfers
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Estimates per person per day, excluding flights. Prices vary by season and city.

Food to try

Kabuli pulao

The national dish: long-grain rice cooked in meat stock with lamb, topped with sweet strips of carrot, raisins and sometimes almonds or pistachios.

Mantu

Steamed dumplings filled with spiced minced meat and onion, served under garlicky yoghurt and a tomato and split-pea sauce, sprinkled with dried mint.

Bolani

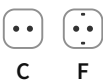
Thin flatbread stuffed with potato, leek or pumpkin, fried until crisp and sold from street carts with chutney or yoghurt for dipping.

Getting around

Kam Air and Ariana Afghan Airlines link Kabul with Herat, Mazar-i-Sharif and Kandahar, saving long days on the road. Bamiyan is reached by a long, scenic drive over high passes from Kabul. Most visitors travel by private car with a driver arranged through their fixer, as checkpoints are frequent and shared taxis and minibuses are slow. City taxis are cheap; agree the fare before getting in. There are no ride-hailing apps visitors can rely on.

Practical information

PLUGS & VOLTAGE



220V — bring a UK-to-C/F adapter

DIALLING CODE

+93

EMERGENCY NUMBERS

Telephone: **119** (police)

Source: FCDO “Getting help”

TIME ZONE

UTC+4:30 (standard time)

TAP WATER

Not safe — drink bottled or treated water

DRIVING

On the right

TIPPING

Not expected in local eateries, though rounding up is appreciated. Drivers, guides and guesthouse staff who look after you for days should be tipped in cash.

ETIQUETTE

Dress very conservatively: loose long sleeves and trousers for men, covered hair and long loose clothing for women. Always ask before photographing anyone, never photograph women or checkpoints, and accept tea when offered.

MAIN AIRPORTS

Kabul International Airport (KBL), Kabul

Visas & entry for Afghanistan

Shown for a British passport.

[Check the entry requirements](#)

See the FCDO entry requirements for the latest rules.

From the UK government's FCDO entry requirements for British passport holders — read the full page for passport validity, permits and exceptions.

Health & vaccinations



See a travel health nurse, GP or travel clinic **6–8 weeks before you go**. Make sure routine UK vaccinations (such as MMR and diphtheria-tetanus-polio) are up to date.

RECOMMENDED FOR MOST TRAVELLERS

Hepatitis A

Tetanus

Typhoid

SOMETIMES ADVISED — DEPENDS ON YOUR TRIP, ACTIVITIES AND HEALTH

Dengue

Hepatitis B

Measles

Polio

Rabies

Tuberculosis

YELLOW FEVER CERTIFICATE

A yellow fever certificate is only required if you arrive from (or transit through) a country with yellow fever risk — not if you fly direct from the UK.

MALARIA

[Low risk of malaria](#)

- There is a low risk of malaria below 2,000m from May to November: awareness of risk and bite avoidance recommended.
- There is a very low risk of malaria in this part of the country during the rest of the year: awareness of risk and bite avoidance recommended.

Source: TravelHealthPro (National Travel Health Network and Centre), checked 21 October 2026. This is a summary, not medical advice.

Public holidays in Afghanistan

The next 12 months. Banks, offices and some sights may close, and transport and hotels get busy around these dates.

Mon 8 Feb 2027	First Day of Ramadan (date may shift)
Mon 15 Feb 2027	Liberation Day
Tue 9 Mar 2027	Eid al-Fitr (date may shift)
Wed 10 Mar 2027	Eid al-Fitr (date may shift)
Thu 11 Mar 2027	Eid al-Fitr (date may shift)
Wed 28 Apr 2027	Mojahedin's Victory Day
Sat 15 May 2027	Day of Arafah (date may shift)
Sun 16 May 2027	Eid al-Adha (date may shift)
Mon 17 May 2027	Eid al-Adha (date may shift)
Tue 18 May 2027	Eid al-Adha (date may shift)
Sat 14 Aug 2027	Prophet's Birthday (date may shift)
Sun 15 Aug 2027	Islamic Emirate Victory Day
Thu 19 Aug 2027	Afghanistan Independence Day
Tue 31 Aug 2027	American Withdrawal Day

National holidays only. Dates based on lunar calendars can move by a day or two depending on official announcements.

Useful phrases in Dari

ENGLISH	DARI	SAY IT
Hello	سلام	<i>sa-LAAM</i>
Thank you	تشکر	<i>ta-sha-KOR</i>
Please	لطفاً	<i>LOT-fan</i>
Excuse me	ببخشید	<i>be-bakh-SHEED</i>
How much is this?	این چند است؟	<i>een chand AST</i>

Know before you go

- Read the FCDO travel advice before booking anything, and check that your travel insurance actually covers Afghanistan; many standard policies exclude it.
- Bring clean, recent US dollar notes. Foreign cards and ATMs are of little use to visitors, and licensed money changers in the bazaars handle exchange into afghanis.
- Carry several copies of your passport and any permission letters your operator obtains; checkpoints are frequent and officials often ask to see paperwork.