

Afghanistan at a glance



Official name

Islamic State of Afghanistan. The name *Afghānistān*, comes from the Sanskrit word *Upaganasthan* meaning 'land of the allied tribes'.

Capital city

Kabul. Major Cities Qandahar, Herat and Mazar e Sharif.

Area

Total: 647,500 sq km

Borders

China 76 km, Iran 936 km, Pakistan 2,430 km, Tajikistan 1,206 km, Turkmenistan 744 km, Uzbekistan 137 km.

Climate

Afghanistan has a continental climate with very harsh winters in the central highlands, the glacierized northeast (around Nuristan) and the Wakhan Corridor, where the average temperature in January is below -15°C , and hot summers in the low-lying areas of Sistan Basin of the southwest, the Jalalabad basin of the east, and the Turkistan plains along the Amu River of the north, where temperature averages over 35°C in July.

Population

28,150,000 (UN estimate 2009): about 22 percent of Afghanistan's people live in her cities.

Ethnic makeup

Pashtun 42%, Tajik 27%, Hazara 9%, Uzbek 9%, Aimak 4%, Turkmen 3%, Baloch 2%, other 4%.

Language

The official languages of Afghanistan are Pashto and Dari, which are spoken by 85 percent of the people. Pashto, or Pushtu, is the native tongue of the Pashtuns; Dari is a Persian dialect. Turkmen and Uzbek are spoken widely in the north. In the isolated eastern mountain valleys, the smaller Kafir, or Nuristani, tribes speak a variety of languages.

History

Ahmad Shah DURRANI unified the Pashtun tribes and founded Afghanistan in 1747. The country served as a buffer between the British and Russian empires until it won independence from notional British control in 1919. A brief experiment in democracy ended in a 1973 coup and a 1978 Communist counter-coup. The Soviet Union invaded in 1979 to support the tottering Afghan Communist regime, touching off a long and destructive war. The USSR withdrew in 1989 under relentless pressure by internationally supported anti-Communist mujahedin rebels. A series of subsequent civil wars saw Kabul finally fall in 1996 to the Taliban, a hard-line Pakistani-sponsored movement. Following the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks in New York City, a US, Allied, and anti-Taliban Northern Alliance toppled the Taliban. The UN-sponsored Bonn Conference in 2001 established a process for political reconstruction that included the adoption of a new constitution, a presidential election in 2004, and National Assembly elections in 2005.

Religion

Sunni Muslim 80%, Shi'a Muslim 19%, other 1%.

Economy

About two thirds of Afghanistan's people are farmers or herdsman, but only about 12 percent of the land is cultivated. The remainder is either too rugged or too dry for farming. The country has extensive natural gas, coal, and iron deposits. About 4 percent of the total land area is irrigated. Farmers use terrace, tunnel, and well methods to irrigate their land. In the mid-1990s about half of Afghanistan's land area was being used for grazing. Afghanistan has vast herds of sheep, goats, cattle, horses, donkeys, and camels. Of these, sheep, cattle, and goats are the most numerous. The sheep provide wool and skins for clothing and flesh for meat. Sheep and cattle also provide milk for dairy products. The farmers live in the fertile valleys or on the plain, wherever water is available for irrigation. Wheat, corn (maize), grapes, and rice are the chief crops. Industrial crops include cotton, sugar beets, and sugarcane. Poppies are cultivated for opium; though illegal, the production of opium provides much income for some farmers, particularly in the north. Oilseed, nuts, and fruits are also important, as are vegetables, especially potatoes. Agriculture contributes more than half of the gross domestic product. The most important products include fertilizer, cement, textiles and carpets, footwear, and processed fruits. The country's chief natural resources include natural gas and petroleum, coal, copper, barite, lapis lazuli, emerald, talc, and salt.

Imports and exports

Exports: opium, fruits and nuts, hand-woven carpets, wool, cotton, hides and pelts, precious and semi-precious gems

Imports: capital goods, food, textiles, petroleum products.

Currency

Monetary Unit. 1 afghani = 100 puli.

Banks

Banks include; Da Afghanistan Bank, Afghanistan International Bank, Standard Chartered Bank, Kabul Bank, Azizi Bank, Punjab National Bank, Habib Bank and others. Western Union offices are also found in many locations throughout the city.

TRAVEL

Kabul International Airport is a short drive (20 mins) east of the city center. The new international terminal is now fully open, whilst the old terminal is now used for domestic flights. Kabul International Airport is the hub of Ariana Afghan Airlines, Afghanistan's national carrier, which flies to Delhi, Dubai, Frankfurt, Dushanbe, Islamabad and Istanbul as well as to a number of domestic destinations.

Time

UTC + 4.30.

Electricity

Electrical current is 240 volts; 50Hz. Square two- or three-pin plugs are used. **Water** Afghani tap water is not safe to drink. Bottled water is provided in all Serena hotels and resorts and all ice is made with boiled and purified water.

Communications

International: country code - 93. Email code: af.

Telecommunication services in the country are provided by Afghan Wireless, Etisalat, Roshan, Areeba and Afghan Telecom. Television and radio broadcastings are available in most parts of the country, with local and international channels or stations. Package delivery services such as FedEx, DHL and others are also available.

Landscape

Afghanistan is a landlocked and mountainous country with plains in the north and southwest. The highest point is Nowshak, at 7,485 m (24,557 ft) above sea level. The climate varies by region and tends to change quite rapidly. Large parts of the country are dry, and fresh water supplies are limited. The endorheic Sistan Basin is one of the driest regions in the world.

Visa and Health Certification

A visa must be obtained before arriving in Afghanistan.

Vaccinations

A number of vaccinations are recommended for visitors to Afghanistan (check with your doctor in advance).

Malaria

Malaria is endemic in Asia and protection against it is necessary.

HIV/AIDS

HIV/AIDS represents a serious problem throughout Asia.

Medical insurance

Travellers to Afghanistan are recommended to obtain medical insurance prior to arrival.

Driving

Drivers drive on the right. Visitors require a valid international driving permit and a *carnet de passage*.

Clothing

Because Afghanistan is a conservative society revealing clothing (sleeveless tops, shorts, miniskirts, tight or body-hugging items of clothing) are unacceptable. Women should be prepared to cover their head and chest when in the mosque, in a crowded bazaar or in conservative company. Sunbathing in public view other than in a hotel is not acceptable.

Alcohol

The consumption of alcohol in Afghanistan is widely prohibited and is not permitted at THE BARON Hotels, Kabul.

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THE BARON TEAM, Kabul