



Hunza Valley Information Pack



Hello team!

Welcome aboard this Epic adventure!

Mountains rising up in all directions as we cruise down the legendary Karakoram highway. The smell of spices and fresh chai meandering all around as we eat in the houses of local families and take in the local culture. Untouched glaciers as far as the eye can see spanning out before us. This is the Pakistan we will show you!

This information pack is LOADED with everything you need to start preparing yourself for the journey ahead. Please read this entire document thoroughly as there are many important details to take note of.

This information pack will be your primary trip resource and one you can keep circling back to in preparation for this Pakistan trip during the months ahead.

Table of contents.

3 **VISA ARRANGEMENTS**
General information

5 **FLIGHTS**
When do I need to get there

6 **ACCOMMODATION**
What kind of accommodation to expect

7 **FOOD**
Daily Meals Examples and Snacks

8 **EXPEDITION SAFETY**
and Travel Insurance

9 **MONEY**
How much to bring and Tipping FAQ

10 **INTERNET ACCESS**
WiFi and SIM Cards

11 **MEETING THE PEOPLE**
Being Culturally Sensitive

14 **WEATHER CONDITIONS**
In Cities and During the Trek

13 **WHAT TO PACK**
Packing list and Porter allowance

14 **FINAL NOTES**
Early client departure protocol, Liability Waiver and Paying the Balance

Getting ready to experience Pakistan

A few months prior to the trip, we will be sending you a number of Google forms and documents to return in order to collect the necessary information from you.

Please do your best to fill in and return these in a timely manner.

Visa arrangements - general information

- All guests coming MUST apply for a Pakistani tourist visa.
- Visa fees are NOT included in the tour price and it is your responsibility to obtain the correct visa in a timely manner from Pakistan Immigration.
- Most nationalities can apply for a visa under the new Evisa scheme. Guests can use [this link](#) to apply for their Pakistani Evisa.
- Please reference this helpful [Evisa FAQ document](#) to help you navigate the application.
- Whilst Pakistan does offer visa on arrival (VOA) for certain nationalities, DO NOT RELY on the VOA program.
- Epic will issue every guest a Letter of Invitation (LOI) to Pakistan and other supporting documents (Pakistani guide licenses, accommodation reservation documents, NIC numbers (Pakistani tax id #), etc needed to apply for the visa.
- Once all the required paperwork is submitted online, the Evisa is typically granted within 5 days - 2 weeks. It is possible that the Pakistani authorities may ask you for additional documents to submit (like bank records, proof of employment, etc).
- Whilst we can provide you with advice, support and the necessary documents, we have no influence whatsoever over the outcome of your visa application. However, so far all of our clients have had their visas approved with no problems.
- The Evisa process is much quicker than applying directly at a Pakistani consulate/embassy. However you can still apply at an embassy if needs be.
- If you do absolutely need to apply for your visa "on the road," you MUST let us know FIRST, this is a risky path as you may be called in for a face to face interview IN YOUR HOME COUNTRY. We will need to know well in advance in order to advise of potential solutions, problems and pitfalls.

Visa Length

- Visas are typically issued for 30, 60, or 90 days and are almost always single-entry visas.
- Generally you will have 6 months from the date the visa is issued to "start" the visa, ie, enter Pakistan.
- You must enter Pakistan before the visa validity expires (visas are usually valid for 6 months after they are issued).
- We recommend preparing to apply for your Pakistan visa 3 months before you arrive in Pakistan. This will give you maximum application time.

Spending Extra Time in Pakistan

If you want to spend extra time in Pakistan before or at the end of the trip - this is no problem! We will provide guests with an itinerary covering the tour dates, along with a LOI and other supporting documents for these dates, however if you intend on spending significantly more time in Pakistan either before or after the tour then you might need to provide an additional itinerary with your visa application of what you plan to do during that time.

We suggest keeping your proposed itinerary (pre or post tour) as vague and vanilla as possible; for example, if you planned to travel to Afghanistan after Pakistan I would not put this in your itinerary.

- Guests can easily enter Pakistan and travel independently in the days before the start of the tour.
- Guests do NOT have to enter or leave Pakistan on the exact days shown on the Epic itinerary/LOI. Guests will have to leave Pakistan prior to visa expiry.

Most nationalities visiting Pakistan on a tourist visa are allowed to overstay their visa for up to two weeks for free, no questions asked. EPIC staff has verified that this procedure is true. Staying beyond two weeks will levy a fee, but is still allowed. If you plan on overstaying the visa dates beyond two weeks, we recommend that you get a [visa extension](#) in Lahore or Islamabad.

VISA Timeline and Process

- Submit a copy of your passport to EPIC.
- Pay your final trip balance.
- EPIC will issue supporting documents.
- Apply for your Visa (3 months or less before the start of the trip).
- Buy plane tickets (some consulates may require you to provide proof of travel along with the visa application, you can buy plane tickets before you apply for the visa also).
- Visa Obtained
- Buy travel insurance
- Get excited for big mountains!

LOI & Supporting Documents

- As mentioned, EPIC will be providing you with a Letter of Invitation (LOI), supporting documents, itinerary, hotel reservation documents, and other bits of documentation.
- You will be required to submit all these documents when applying for your visa.
- You will likely need your parent's passport copies to apply for the Evisa, so try to get those documents in hand before you start the visa process. Strange we know, but this is how it is.

IMPORTANT NOTE: If you are asked to do an in-person interview for your visa, please consult us before going to your interview as we have had experience with this in the past and we know how to best prepare you to achieve the ideal result: your visa being granted. However, since the Evisa system was introduced, we haven't had a guest get called in for an interview.

Travel history

You may be required to provide a travel history as part of your visa application.

- In the case of Epic staff, the visa form was woefully inadequate to list all of the countries we have visited so we typed it up on an additional sheet of A4 which seemed to be appreciated.
- This is very onerous but it is worth taking the time to do correctly. Please note that **if you have ever visited Israel or India we advise that you do NOT declare this.**
- Epic does not know whether this will actually influence the outcome of the application but the two countries do not have formal, diplomatic relations of any kind.
- Here is an example of a travel history document:

COUNTRY	DATE	PURPOSE	LENGTH OF STAY
New Zealand	2/1/2016-8/3/2017	Working Holiday, Tourism	15 months
Australia	5/12/2016-10/12/2016	Tourism	5 days
Malaysia	9/3/2017 - 30/3/2017	Tourism	3 weeks
Nepal	31/3/2017 - 12/5/2017	Tourism, trekking	6 weeks
France	13/5/2017 - 25/7/2017	Family	2 months +
UK (England, Wales, Scotland)	25/7/2017-25/9/2017	Tourism, trekking	2 months
USA	27/9/2017- 29/11/2017	Family	2 months
France	27/11/2017 - Current	Work, Live, Family	Ongoing

Flights to Pakistan

Arrival Airport: Islamabad (ISB) | **Departure Airport:** Lahore (LHR)

Both Islamabad (the capital of Pakistan) and Lahore are major cities and as such are very well connected. We advise that you arrive in Pakistan one day before the tour starts. That way you can get a good night's rest before we depart for the start of the tour the next day.

Note : Included tour accommodation does not start until the evening of day 1. If you arrive in Pakistan in the days before the tour starts, you will need to arrange and pay for your own accommodation. We can help make suggestions for you if you'd like or we can book you into the same hotel as our guides.

Suggestion: Whilst we do factor in delays as part of our itinerary, sometimes in Pakistan the delays can extend longer than anticipated. For booking your return flight home, it is a good idea to give yourself an extra day beyond the end date of the tour in the event our travel back to Islamabad is severely delayed due to weather or road closures. That way you will not stress out about potentially missing your flight home in case of delays beyond our control. Please note that all Epic services will end on the last day of the tour. If possible, buy a flexible plane ticket so you can change the flight dates if needed.

Connections and Flights

- If you are coming from Australia, New Zealand or South East Asia, some good flight connections are available from Kuala Lumpur (KLIA) and there are currently affordable flights from Bangkok via KL to Islamabad.
- If you are traveling from elsewhere, connecting via Dubai, Oman, Abu Dhabi or Istanbul are good options to investigate.
- We recommend checking Skyscanner, Secret Flying and Kiwi for flights.
- These airline connections may be helpful to some, keep in mind these are just suggestions, there are many other airlines, some flying direct, to choose from :

Istanbul to Islamabad	Turkish Airlines
London to Islamabad	Pakistan International Airlines (PIA), Turkish Airlines
Sydney to Islamabad	Etihad Airlines, Emirates
Kuala Lumpur to Islamabad	Thai Airways, Emirates
Dubai to Islamabad	Emirates
Doha to Islamabad	Qatar Airlines
Abu Dhabi	Etihad Airlines

When do you need to arrive?

- To experience the full itinerary, you need to be in the hotel/meeting place and be rested by the morning of day 1. We will confirm the exact time and meeting place just prior to the start of the tour.
- The tour ends on day 15 (in Lahore) and with the exception of breakfast, no services are included this day, so it makes sense to try and leave by the evening.
- Checkout from the hotel is around 11 am.

Accommodation

Islamabad: 3-star accommodation in a central part of Islamabad

Lahore: 3-star accommodation located near the main market street of the city.

Hunza: Semi-luxury Eco Lodge - twin sharing yurt-style cottages with private bathroom and hot water.

Fairy Meadows: Wood cabins with twin-sharing rooms + wood-burning stoves and private bathrooms en suite.

- Prices are based on the sharing of rooms/tents and single (same sex) members of the group will typically be put together. We will be using nice guesthouses/hotels that offer very comfortable, but sometimes simple, facilities.
- Rooms might be without air-conditioning (although the rooms in Islamabad and Lahore will definitely have AC). In Hunza most of the rooms have fans, but no AC (you don't need it in the mountains.)

Single Room Supplement Costs: If a guest wants to reserve a private room (when available) instead of sharing with another guest, the single room supplement cost is \$650.

Food in Pakistan

- In general, the food in Pakistan is SPICY (especially in Punjab). We always try to accommodate dietary needs, but keep in mind that options can be limited at times if you can't tolerate spicy food a little bit. There will ALWAYS be some decent vegetarian and non-spicy items, and the food traditions found in the mountains are very different from what you will find in Punjabi and Sindh.
- Food in Pakistan can be fairly repetitive – there's a lot of daal (lentils), chicken, veggies, and rice. We will try to mix this up where possible (especially in the cities) by taking you to some great restaurants.
- Food whilst camping in Hunza will be the best possible quality, but please have realistic expectations of what our camp cooks can deliver.

DAILY MEALS

- **Breakfast:** Typically includes an omelet/fried eggs, fried Pakistani bread (paratha), jam, butter, and chai/coffee. Sometimes we have a delicious hot porridge as well. Want to win the heart of your guide? Bring a pound of your favorite coffee from your country to share with the group. Let your guide know if you are able/keen to bring some coffee.
- **Lunch:** We typically provide a hearty lunch. Usually a mix of daal, mixed vegetables, a meat dish, salad, chapati, rice, etc.
- **Dinner:** This is always the main event of the day and will be a mix of vegetables, rice, noodle dishes, daal, meat (mutton or chicken), chapati, and local specialties depending on where we are.

Note: It is worth noting again that the food in Pakistan is SPICY (especially in Punjab). Again, we always try to accommodate dietary needs, but keep in mind that options can be limited at times if you can't tolerate spicy food a little bit.

Please let us know early on if you have any diet restrictions/preferences. If you are vegetarian/vegan, you might want to consider bringing some of your own food (for snacks/breakfast stuff), as it can be very difficult to cater to individuals in a big group, though we always do our best.

This adventure tour requires a lot of energy output each day and a big part of our job is keeping everybody well nourished, happy, and energized.

Please note that all meals on this trip are included except for FOUR lunches in cities/towns. Lunch in Karimabad, Passu, and two in Lahore are not included in the trip price.

Staying Safe on This Tour

- You may have guessed, but this adventure tour carries a certain amount of risk since we are traveling and trekking DEEP into the mountains in a developing country. This is not your average holiday per se. There will be no cocktails on the beach, sorry about that :)
- Guest Safety is Epic's #1 priority and our experienced ground team does everything within their power to set our group up for a safe adventure.
- In case of emergency, your Epic trip leader is equipped with a satellite communication device, which can contact outside emergency first responders from any place in Pakistan.
- Please note that in parts of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province (KPK) we will have an armed police escort with us for a few hours as we drive through. Most of the time our bus follows the police truck in front of us. Occasionally a police officer will get on the bus with us, but this is happening less these days.
- The reason for the police escort is not because we will be in imminent danger, rather that the local authorities have made escorts mandatory for groups of foreigners passing through the area. It is standard procedure and nothing to be alarmed about.

Travel Insurance for Pakistan

- You cannot come on this trip unless you buy travel insurance. You will need to prove you have insurance by providing a photocopy of your policy. You also need to sign a waiver (mentioned previously) releasing the guides, Epic Expeditions and our partners in Pakistan of any liability.
- There are lots of insurance companies on the market but many will not cover trips to Pakistan - we recommend that you use [Global Rescue](#)
- Another insurance company providing coverage for Pakistan is [Safety Wing](#) - (they cover Americans as well and they are reasonably priced).
- [World Nomads](#) is also a good choice if you take explorer coverage.
- Make sure the insurance company chosen provides coverage for activities like trekking up to 5,600 Meters and offers helicopter rescue coverage.

Check out this article on the topic of [High Risk Travel Insurance](#) for more insights.

Medical Consideration

Vaccination (pre-COVID times we are talking about) can be a contentious issue and ultimately down to the decision of an individual. Some vaccinations are recommended for travel to Pakistan so please consult with a travel clinic for further advice. For reference, most of our clients do not get any extra vaccinations before coming to Pakistan.

There is very little dengue or malaria risk in Northern Pakistan and you should not need to take antimalarials for this trip. We will be in the low to no-risk area throughout the entire expedition.

General Information on health considerations while traveling in Pakistan.

<https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/traveler/none/pakistan>

Money In Pakistan

- ATMs are common in Islamabad but less common (or non-existent) once we head to Hunza. We have experienced issues finding working ATMs once we leave the cities and we recommend that you change/withdraw your money before we head up into the mountains.
- We also recommend that instead of relying on your ATM card, bring foreign cash and change it in the city (if the money changer is open at the airport). USD, Euro, and British Pounds are all fine. Make sure to bring notes that are free from any defects. The money changers like PERFECT banknotes.
- If you use an ATM, keep in mind that this may be your only opportunity to withdraw cash until we return to Islamabad in several weeks' time.
- Pakistan is a cash-based economy and you will not be able to use your debit/credit card to purchase things.

As to how much money you should bring, here are some costs for you to take into account...

- Souvenirs vary in price from a couple of dollars up to \$100, depending on what you are buying and how good you are at haggling.
- Soft drinks and water are about fifty cents to \$1.
- A meal will set you back between \$5 - \$12.

MONEY RECOMMENDATION

If you take out the rupee equivalent of \$250, you should have more than enough to get souvenirs, your lunches on the days where they are not included, and pick up snacks, and extra drinks along the way.

Please see the note on tipping in the next section of this document. It is always better to have MORE than you think you need, just in case. You can always change the Pakistani rupees back to your preferred currency at the end of the trip if need be.

When we return to Islamabad at the end of the tour, you will have a chance to get out more cash should you need (for shopping, tipping staff, last-minute purchases, etc).

Tipping In Pakistan

EPIC staff including our ground team in Pakistan go above and beyond for guests before, during, and after the trip to make sure that everyone has the best possible trekking experience imaginable. So how do you show your guides some love? Well, besides bringing coffee, tipping is the next best option.

Note: Tipping should reflect your overall experience with our staff. No guest is 100% required to tip, however, we have received many questions regarding tipping in the past which is why we include this info in this information pack.

A generous tipping budget to cover all your bases is around \$400 USD for the entire trip.

Tipping recommendations (in USD)

- Lead EPIC Guide: \$125 - 150+ per guest. (paid in dollars/euros/rupees)
- Driver: \$50 - 75 per guest (paid in rupees or dollars)
- Homestay family: 5000-10,000 rupees per client
- Porters for Trek: 2-3k rupees per client (not per porter)

Again, tips remain up to your personal discretion.

SIM Cards and Internet Access in Pakistan

- Foreigners can obtain SIM cards in Pakistan but the procedure is slightly complicated.
- There are several major networks in Pakistan: Zong, Telenor, and SCOM. SCOM seems to work the best in Gilgit-stan (and does not work at all in Punjab).
- In our opinion, it's not worth getting a SIM card as our hotels in Islamabad and some places in Hunza should have wifi. The wifi in Hunza however comes and goes sporadically as when it is around, it is slower than molasses.
- SIM cards cost about 2000 PK rupees with a data plan.
- All foreigners need to obtain SIM cards from the various company's main offices.
- You will need your passport, visa, and to give your fingerprints in order to get a SIM.
- Keep in mind that this trip is a chance for our guests to unplug and fully embrace a proper digital detox.
- The internet situation in Pakistan is spotty at best, so please have realistic expectations regarding wifi and internet speeds/access.

Meeting the People - Being Culturally Sensitive

- Pakistan is an Islamic country but it is not a theocracy. This means that state and religion are institutionally separated and Pakistani law is based on British common law, rather than Sharia (Islamic) Law.
- Whilst socially conservative, most of the population consider themselves to be moderate and secular Muslims tolerant of other religions. Hijabs are not obligatory, burkas are very rare (at least in the areas of the country we are visiting).
- For the majority of this trip, our group will be interacting with the people in Hunza, many of whom are accustomed to seeing foreigners occasionally due to the long legacy of foreign expeditions and mountaineering in the area.
- In general, it is best not to discuss politics or religion with locals, at least not as a topic of conversation when you first meet them. If appropriate and if you have gotten to know an individual on a deeper level, it is fine to discuss those topics.
- Use common social sense and please try not to push your personal political/religious agendas onto other guests or local people.
- Local people will be genuinely curious about your life, what you do for work, your family (if you are male they will almost certainly ask if you're married and how many kids you have), and about life in the West. Taking the time to connect with locals and share life experiences will only add to the overall experience of your journey.

Gender Roles in Pakistan

- Guests will note that there is limited mixing of the sexes in Pakistan. Men tend to hang out with other men and women with women. You will also note that when locals approach foreigners, they tend to separate themselves on gender grounds; Pakistani men want pictures with the guys (and foreign women) in our groups and the women with the girls in the group!
- Although Pakistan is very safe and whilst women do sometimes encounter issues here while traveling independently, it is not nearly as challenging a place to travel as a woman as, say, India or Morocco.
- On the Snow Lake Trek, however, the local guides and porters are used to being around foreign men and women. We all eat meals together as a group and women have the same standing and respect from the porters and guides as the men.
- Some local porters (who may or may not speak any English) may not make conversation and or eye contact with foreign females. This is nothing against all of you ladies, it is more of a cultural thing common across Pakistan.

About the Guides

For more information on our guides, check out our [meet the team](#) page.

Weather Conditions in Pakistan

The weather in the Karakoram mountain range can be highly variable depending on the season, geographic location, and the altitude. We will be traversing through a number of different climatic zones so it is a good idea to know what to expect at each point.

Note: that our spring tours are always colder than our fall tours, especially at altitude.

- **Islamabad** - Typically hot and humid with the potential for rain events. Average temperatures in April: High: 30°C / 87° F Low: 16°C / 61° F. / October: High: 30.5/87° F Low: 15°/59° F.
- **Karimabad** - Warm to cool during the day, but not humid. Colder in the spring, and potential for cloud and wind. Cooler to cold at night. Average temperatures in April: High: 15.5°C /60° F Low: 5.4°C /F /October: High: 17.5/63.5° F Low: 5°C/41° F.
- **2800 - 3500 Meters** - Highly Variable. Cooler at night, but not freezing typically below 3000 meters. Potential for snow at or around 3500 meters (especially during the spring), but very unlikely. Weather could also be clear and warm during the day. Possible cloud cover developing at any elevation.
- **3500 - 4000+ Meters** - Daily temperatures can remain warm, though mornings and evenings are cooler. Above 3500 - 4000 meters temperatures can easily drop below freezing at night and in the early morning. Rain, snow, cloud cover are all possible at any time. More snow present at Fairy Meadows and on the trail to Nanga Parbat base camp in the spring, none in September.
- The coldest possible temperatures to expect hover around -3° - 0° C / 23-32° F. The highest altitude we will visit is around 4,000 meters when we make the day trip to Nanga Parbat Base Camp.

Full Gear Kit List

It's extremely important that you bring the right gear for the trip, it is tough to pick up gear in Pakistan so I strongly recommend coming prepared.

It's extremely important that you bring the right gear for the trip, it is tough to pick up gear in Pakistan so I strongly recommend coming prepared.

The weather will at times be cold and, especially whilst trekking on the Passu glacier and atop Patundas Pass, you will want to be comfortable so it's worth spending money on decent quality warm gear. Though likewise it can be very sunny, pleasant and comfortable. It is always best to be prepared for a variety of climates and temperature fluctuations.

In general, try to pack light. It will always be possible and even standard to leave your *main* pack behind on treks. You can also opt to carry everything with you on a trek or we can arrange a porter for you, for an additional charge, and the prices are reasonable. Personal gear to be ported is NOT covered by EPIC.

TEST ALL OF YOUR PERSONAL GEAR BEFORE COMING TO PAKISTAN. Please take the time to go out on an overnight backpacking/camping trip at least once before coming on this trip so that you know how your gear performs in the mountains.

PACKS & BAGGAGE

- Expedition Duffel Bag
- Day Trekking Backpack with rain cover

BOOTS & FOOTWEAR

- Hiking Boots/Trail Runners
- Sandals/Tevas/Keens

SPECIALTY EQUIPMENT

- Trekking Poles (optional)
- Headlamp
- Grayl Filter Bottle
- Spare Water Bottle
- Yoga Mat

OTHER PERSONAL GEAR

- Polarized Sunglasses
- Personal First Aid Kit
- Power Bank
- Snacks

TOILETRIES

- Toothbrush, Toothpaste
- Sun Cream (50 spf+)
- Biodegradable Soap
- Deodorant
- Wet wipes
- Fast Microfiber Towel

CLOTHING LAYER SYSTEMS

- Hard Shell/Rain Jacket
- Fleece
- Base Layer Top
- Sun Hat
- Beanie
- Buff and Bandana
- Gloves Mid Weight
- Hiking Shirts
- Hiking Pants
- Merinos Trekking Socks
- Underwear / Bras
- Down Jacket
- Yoga Clothes

Early client departure protocol

In the event that a trip participant needs to leave the planned trip itinerary early due to illness, injury, family emergency, personal reasons, or simply because they want to, etc then there are a few things to note:

Should a trip participant choose to leave the planned itinerary early for any reason, from the moment they leave the tour, all expenses from that point onwards are the responsibility of the trip participant. This includes, but is not limited to, hotels/accommodation, transportation, emergency helicopter evacuation, internal flights (even if we have purchased you a flight for the trip you are attending), meals, airport transfer, guide services - everything that is normally covered by Epic during your tour is no longer covered once a trip participant decides to leave.

Once the decision has been made to leave the tour, the trip participant must sign an "Early Departure Waiver Form" - formally releasing Epic of any further obligations to fulfill our tour/guide/transport/logistics services.

That said, in an emergency situation or in case of severe illness, Epic staff will do everything within our means to aid the trip participant until they are in a safe/stable condition. When possible, Epic staff can also help you book new accommodation, flights, transport, etc when possible - but all of these expenses are for the trip participant to pay.

Point being, our staff will always be available to the best of our ability to facilitate the logistics of your departure, should you choose to leave the trip early.

Liability waiver

All tour participants will be required to sign an industry-standard waiver. Waivers are usually issued on day 1 of the tour at our first team briefing. If you would like to request a copy of the waiver in advance, please email us.

Paying the balance

Final balance payments will be due approximately 3-4 months before the tour begins. If you have a balance owing we will advise you of how and when to pay this.

Payment options will be either by credit card or by bank transfer. Cash is not accepted.

If you would like to pay the balance sooner, please email us!

Again, we are very excited to get to meet you in person in Pakistan soon!
The Epic Team

