



# A comprehensive guide to Afghanistan

History, Culture And Tourism

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# Introduction & History



Map of Afghanistan

In the heart of Central Asia, Afghanistan is an antique land, for thousands of years it was the hub of the Silk Route. The nexus of thoughts and trades between East and West, a demonstrating ground for powerful empires from Alexander the Great to the Changaiz Khan. The renowned explorer Marco Polo wrote about the Afghanistan as land rich with gold and gems. The hidden treasures well reverberates from archeological findings that tell us the grand

civilizations and colloidal scope of people and culture in Afghanistan. Over the past four decades war and quarrel have obscured the Afghanistan's rich heritage, destroying an extraordinary cultural legacy, suffered a chronic instability that ruined its economy and infrastructure.

Today Afghanistan, ragged by both foreign and civic warfare, reiterates the series of autocracy, incursion, turmoil and tyranny that beleaguered it for centuries. On beginning of 21st century, Afghans still are struggling for their own land. The huge majority of this large Middle Eastern nation, about 85 percent lives in bucolic or rural backdrop. It is one of the most deprived and poor country in the world, estimations says that out of four individual one lives as a refugee.

The diversity in Afghanistan and population reveals the history full of invasions obstructed to conquer the land; around 60 percent Afghans are descendants of Pushtun native tribes. One identical feature is their religion, Islam, the initiation of Islam in the country by Arab invaders around 8th century, establishes the foundation and now nearly all Afghans are believers of Islam and are Muslims. Afghans and Afghanistan are away from modern predicament, though people have the impressive combined family and tribal culture, which dominated the entire Afghan tradition and politics.

Afghanistan an exclusive landlocked country in center of Asia, bordering Pakistan a far long border in south and east, northern border to Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and

Turkmenistan, western border to Iran and a small northern border to the China. In past 2,000 years it was the heart of several powerful empires and the last 3 to 4 decades it was in chaos and anarchy due to major wars. Soviet Union invasion in 1979 and their withdrawal took ten years until 1989 and the invasion of America and NATO forces to cop up the warlords and Taliban regime in 2001. The nation is in rebuilding phase now to regain the earlier 1979 position. The beautiful land of Afghanistan offer numerous places to visit, secure and far away from war to enjoy, the tourism is merely an opening, with an excessive travel which demands more vacations and more time to explore the heritage.

Overview:

Name: Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.

Capital: Kabul, the largest city of country.

Area: 647,500 sq km

Population: 29.1 million in 2010.

Peoples: Pashtun, Tajik, Hazara, Uzbek, Turkic and Mangolian origin.

Languages: Dari (Persian), Pashto are the official languages.

Religion: Islam, 99 percent Muslims among them 75 percent Sunni dialect and 15 percent Shia while 10 percent others.

Climate: Extremely cold and hot. In Northern Afghanistan the Celsius scale drop down to freezing point in winter. The snowfall is common at high altitudes, while in summer the

temperature may exceeds to 50 °C in lower elevations and around 30 °C at higher altitude.

Life expectancy: 42 years (men), 45 years (women)

Child Mortality: 257 (under 5 years)

Currency: Afghani (AFN)

Economy: Warfare made it poorest in world. According to the USAID estimations 42% population merely have 1 dollar per day for survival and unemployment rate is about 35%. The 36% population lives below poverty line. Due to infusion of multi-billion dollars aid, the economy growing steadily, particularly agriculture sector, its main export include, dry fruits, wool and opium. Afghan rugs and carpets are famous worldwide.



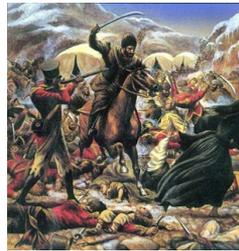
Aqcha	Lashkarga
Bagram	Maimana
Baghlan	Mazar
Balkh	Pulikhumri
Bamiyan	Paghman
Faizabad	Sheberghan
Daikundi	Taluqan
Ghazni	Tereen
Gerdaiz Heart	Zeranj
Ishkishem	Jalalabad
Kabul	Kandahar
Khost	Kunduz
Lal	

## HISTORY:

The historical tale of Afghanistan is a complete catastrophe. The most impoverished country across the globe and the most despoil, ravaged and besieged nation. The nation has been plagued by offensive invasion, external odious influence and internal mayhem since date back earlier than Alexander the Great. The people of this region suffered an unimaginable loss; in fact the sort of human race on earth experienced the severity of most of weapons made by mankind in past thousands of years. A multi national's country, as a result of countless invasions and migrations, as being the core geostrategic location in Central Asia has direct link with ME (Middle East) and Indian sub continent. The diversity in population ranges from Baluch, Pashtoon, Hazara, Tajik, Turk, Uzbek, Persian and Arab, comprises

the main ethnic groups.

Archeological excavations reveal that humans were living in the region from previous 50,000 years. The terrain now identified as Afghanistan, historically had various names as Ariana in around 2000 BC, Kingdom of Kabul and Khurasan during medieval and in 1919 (modern era) named as Afghanistan, the word came from Persian word Abgan (300 CE), Afghana (600 CE) and now Afghan, which designate the largest ethnic group Pashtoon. So Afghanistan means the Land of Afghans.



Prior to Arab invasion in 8th and 9th century, the land ruled by various empires, Greco-Bactrian Empire, Median, Mauryan, Kushans, Sassasian and Central Asian Empires. It was included into the Persian Empire in 6th century BC and incorporated into Macedonian Empire by the Alexander the Great around 325 BC. Afghanistan became the significant part of the Silk Route Trade in between 100 BC to 300 AD. Arab invaders in 642 after defeating Sassasians, set up an Islamic empire and introduced Islam to Afghanistan and extended their rule to Indus River around 9th century, now

Pakistan's region, that Islamic empire stranglehold power by Ghaznavids and Ghorids, particularly the great victor Mehmud Ghaznvi. In 13th century the famous Mongol conqueror Genghis Khan invaded the region and the Muslim empire fallen to Mongols, they massively destructed and brutally barren the fertile agricultural land. Followed by the Turk Islamic Timurid Dynasty, that ruled till 16th century. Meanwhile, Indian and Persian empires struggled for dominancy; in 17th century Hotaki Dynasty took over the Afghanistan rule. By mid of 18th century Ahmed Shah Durrani united the Afghanistan and extended the borders to present day Pakistan, Iran and Dehli, in 1761 he crushed the Maratha Empire, the well known Battle of Paniput, after 1772 his descendants ruled till the end of 18th century.

Nineteenth century started with so called Great Games in the region, the European influence in Afghanistan particularly expanding British and Russian empires. In 1839-42 the first Anglo-Afghan War resulted in defeat of British. The country remained neutral during First World War, in following years from 1878-80 second Anglo-Afghan War which resulted in making Wakhan Corridor, a buffer zone among Russia and Britain. The third British-Afghan War enforced British to relinquish their control and signed a peace Treaty of Rawalpindi in 1919; Afghans celebrate their independence day on 19th of August to commemorate this historical event, and the Emir Khan considered as the Independence leader. The local leader King Amanullah and Nadir Shah reformed and revolutionized the country after 3rd Anglo Afghan War. Muhammad Zahir Shah son of

Nadir Shah ruled the country from 1933 to 1973.



Afghan-Soviet War Mujahideens

During Cold War, Afghanistan's reliance on Russia resulted in increasing Soviet influence and assistance in many sectors, assisted in training and reorganization of military. In 1973 the political instability led to the segregated society and till 1979 many leaders came to rule the under military support. However the dependence on Soviet Union largely rejected by the population and the oppression plunged thorough out the country, situations worsen in spring 1979. Meanwhile the US Ambassador murdered and abolition of US economic assistance. Soviet Union invaded the country on December 1979. In response to military led incursion raised the resistance among Afghan people. The US took the advantage of situation felt it as the prime opportunity to weaken the powers of Soviet Union. US covertly funded and trained the anti-government elements in Afghanistan through Pakistan, later they were named as Islamic Guerillas or Mujahedin. Around 10 years of war causes hundreds of thousand casualties and great afghan displacement to neighboring countries particularly Pakistan and Iran, ul-

timate withdrawal of Soviet troops in 1989 from Afghan territory. A peace accord signed between Afghanistan, Pakistan, US and Soviet Union. Soviet Union broke up in 1991, both America and Russia settled to halt support to guerillas, which again led the dispute between Saudi and Iranian funded militant faction.

This all warfare demolished almost sixty percent of country. These guerillas or mujahidin grew up strongly by the support of America, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia and the group transformed into Taliban. The civil war blown up the nation from 1992-96, fighting different militant groups and warlords each other. Northern Alliance (NA) another big group of north Afghanistan banned fighting with Taliban, In 1996 Taliban took over most part of the country and another militant faction known as Al-Qaeda, its leader Osama Bin Laden moved to Afghanistan from Sudan, for this, United Nation sanctioned Taliban Regime. By 2000, Taliban took hold almost the whole country. Locally Taliban welcomed by ordinary citizens as they are incorruptible and they implemented Islamic Law. Taliban banned the Television broadcast and other measures taken to halt any sort of Western Influence, resulted in complete isolation from outer world diplomatically and politically.

2001



**Afghan Fighters**

Afghanistan faced the worst humanitarian crisis; Taliban destroyed historical Buddha statues in Bamyan, defied global protest. The leader of NA in early 2001 asked for the humanitarian help from world community, and on 9th September he was assassinated in Takhar Province of Afghanistan allegedly by Al-Qaeda. Then came the 11 September, the most controversial terrorist's attack on US World Trade Center buildings, accusing Al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden and Khalid Sheikh as master mind of attacks, due to rigid and inflexible stance and refusal to hand over Osama bin Laden to US by Taliban, resulted in a brutal attack and bombardment of US and allied forces on most impoverished country. The massive air strikes followed by the assistance and financial aid to NA to combat the Taliban and Al-Qaeda in urban areas. Taliban resisted only a week and defeated by US led forces, leaved the most part of their hold. Leaders of several Afghan groups met in Germany, where they decided to establish a 30 member provisional government, Hamid Karzai being the supreme leader of state.

2002



Bombing and fighting continued, US finished the completion of prison in Guantanamo Bay in Cuba, and the Taliban suspects detained at this military base as per Geneva Convention. It was believed that Osama bin Laden moved to the mountainous hideouts of Tora Bora, so US led forces start bombardments on these mountains which are located on eastern border with Pakistan. This fight led large number of casualties of Taliban and Al-Qaeda fighters, despite the fact that leadership was not captured, Mullah Umer (Taliban leader) and Osama bin Laden but the Taliban regime has been ousted in early 2002. A coalition government was established after the Loya Girga (traditional gathering of influential peoples to solve any problem) convention and Hamid Karzai opted as President.

2003



Owing to battleground defeat of militants, the historical move taken by NATO to safeguard the Kabul security by NATO forces, it was the only of its kind organization's operation outside Europe. The 2003 brought success and progress to rebuild Afghanistan, and the delegates from all corners of Afghanistan gathered to hold a new constitutional Loya Girga.

2004 The Loya Girga convened and promulgated a new constitution of the state, an effort to make a stronger centrally controlled government by President of the state. The country pooled by the huge foreign financial aid approximately 8.2 billion US dollars from NATO, US, UK, Germany and Japan, for the period of three years. US led forces started an operation to halt the Taliban leadership. The bloodshed continued, Herat government minister was assassinated, a bomb attack on bus resulted in killing of two women workers. Hamid karzai was elected as the President of the country by 55.4% votes.

2005 The freezing winter resulted in several hundreds casualties that year, the natural dilemma that poor nation faces every year. US intended to make the permanent military bases and huge sum spent on Bagram and Kandhar Air Bases. The biggest anti US protest started in the country amid news for desecrating Quran by US personals. The first parliamentary and provincial elections were held in previous 30 years history of Afghanistan.

2006 Amid food shortages and humanitarian crises demands assistance from international community that deliv-

ered around \$10 billion for rehabilitation and reconstruction for next five years. The number of guerilla attacks raised by many fold during 2006, with increased number of suicide bombers attacks, and fire attacks by Taliban and other anti-government factions, according to estimations that took around 3000 lives in 2006. The US led forces initiated a big operation to curb militants in southern Afghanistan.

2007 The year was more violent claimed around 6,500 deaths with 140 US led army men. The suicide bombing and opium cultivation was on rise, reports said that in 2007 90% of world's opium produced in Afghanistan. After six years of invasion by US the situation still sadistic, the rehabilitation efforts also traumatized by militant attacks. Taliban changed their strategy to attack head on battle.

2008 The non-stop battle continues with more and more attacks from Taliban, in an effort to destabilize the current government and foreign intruders. Serena Hotel attack in Kabul killed 6 people, suicide bombing attack in Kandhar killed around 100 people, President Hamid Karzai flee another effort of killing as his gunmen opened fire on him leaving three dead, around 1,000 prisoners escaped from prison after Taliban attacked on Sarposa Prison, Indian embassy bombed in Kabul killed 58, so the riots and violence continued that weakens the international peace efforts. The General David Mckiernan demanded more 20,000 troops in 2008 to halt militants, US sent 3,000 troops by the end of year.

2009 The Afghan based International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) with support of NATO, increased to 56,000 soldiers in 2009. Taliban pushed back from Garmsir and Musa Qala of Helmand Province. In several attacks throughout the year over 500 US led troops killed by Taliban and hundreds of civilians and militants shed their blood. In his statement President Hamid Karzai said that security forces of Afghanistan may need more than 15-20 years of support from US. Presidential election were held in 2009 under the current constitution of Afghanistan, that elected the Hamid Karzai as the President for next 5 years term, Taliban denied and asked for boycott. There were several multimillion dollars programs launched to strengthen the governance and reconstruction with support of numerous international funding bodies and authorities.

2010 The International Conference on Afghanistan held in London by international community to discuss the progress of democracy in Afghanistan after falling Taliban. France stated no more French troops will be sent to Afghanistan amid public opposition. More civilians died in different operations against militants. Being the part of reconstruction efforts British engineers built a large road in Helmand Province named as Route Trident. Taliban reportedly declared more attacks on ISAF which followed by the assault on two major ISAF air bases in Kandhar and Bagram. The parliamentary election 2010 held in September to elect the members for Wolesi Jirga. After the takeover of General David Petraeus to Afghanistan, the airstrikes raised many folds resulted in more civilian casualties. For foreign troops

2010 was the deadliest with 711 killings while claimed over 1200 civilian casualties.

The NATO summit held in Lisbon convened to halt the US led operations in Afghanistan by 2014, following the year US president Barack Obama visited Afghanistan to cheer US troops followed by British Prime Minister visit to Afghanistan. The new parliament established at the end of 2010 led the threats of insecurity, tensions and instability. US also claimed Pakistan based Al-Qaeda militant's insurgency into the Afghanistan disrupting peace process.

2011 1,400 more troops sent by the US in Afghanistan temporarily and this year the troops withdrawal start gradually. US led forces air strike operation in Kunar Province took around 63 civilians lives; the governor of the province accuses US army for more and more civilian casualties. According to reports scarcity of food, instability and lack of snowfall are the major crisis of Afghanistan for the year 2011. US criticized Pakistan for not being able to combat militancy and insurgency, while Pakistan government and army Chief General Ashfaq Kyani denied the claim.

On 1st May Osama bin Laden killed by helicopters led US troops in Abbottabad a city near Pakistan's capital by invading Pakistan's territory from Afghanistan. Astonishingly, the dead body was thrown into the Sea and no video or footage had been publicized. The operation strongly condemned by Pakistan and felt against its sovereignty, resulting in tough ties among US and Pakistan.

US led NATO troops handed over the control of Mazar-

e-Sharif to local forces as being the plan to withdrawal of 1, 50,000 NATO troops till 2014, after it was heavily bombed by militants. It is very difficult to state that when this war will end? What will be the Future of Afghanistan? As the measures taken by international community for its reconstruction and development looks like a glimpse of brightness, otherwise as its past, dark indeed. As Afghans has the history of warfare and battles, which made them the breed of humans born to fight, against ruler or invader whatever the case may be, history evidenced their ferocity of resistance to foreign rule.