Essential Skardu · 7 days

Palaces, Lakes & Cold Desert



From £1,400

per person, all-inclusive from Islamabad, based on 2 travelling.

Overview

A week in Baltistan, staying in two restored royal residences: the Shigar Fort and Khaplu Palace. You fly north and go straight on to Shigar on the day you land, follow the Shyok to Khaplu, then finish with two nights in Skardu among its lakes, dunes and Buddhist carvings. Walking is gentle throughout, so the days are as full or as relaxed as you want them.

Day by day

Day 1: Arrive in Islamabad

You're met at Islamabad International Airport and taken to your hotel. Later, visit the Faisal Mosque and watch the sun set over the capital from Daman-e-Koh, or have dinner in Saidpur Village.

Day 2: Fly to Skardu and on to Shigar

Weather permitting, take the morning flight over the Himalaya and Karakoram to Skardu (2,230 m) and drive straight on to Shigar across the Sarfaranga cold desert. In the afternoon, walk through the village to the Amburiq Mosque and the Shigar Fort, your home for the night.

Day 3: Shigar to Khaplu

Take a morning stroll through the Hashopi apple orchards or out to Blind Lake, then drive east along the Shyok River to Khaplu. Explore Khaplu Palace and the Chaqchan Mosque, with a short hike to Thoksi Khar if you'd like one.

Day 4: Khaplu to Skardu via Yugo and Manthokha

Drive back towards Skardu, stopping for a village lunch in Yugo and at the Manthokha Waterfall. The evening is free in Skardu, with the bazaar or a walk up to Kharpocho Fort for the view over the Indus.

Day 5: Kachura Lakes and the Manthal Buddha Rock

Visit Upper Kachura, with a boat ride if you wish, and Lower Kachura, then the Manthal Buddha Rock. Add Sadpara Lake or sunset on the Katpana dunes before a farewell dinner.

Day 6: Fly to Islamabad

Weather permitting, take the morning flight back to Islamabad. In the afternoon, visit the Pakistan Monument and the Lok Virsa Heritage Museum, or the Laluna Concepts gemstone studio.

Day 7: Spare day in Islamabad and fly home

This day is held in reserve in case weather delays the Skardu flight. If everything has run to plan, spend it at Taxila, the UNESCO-listed Buddhist city, or in the Margalla Hills, before your transfer to the airport.

Summer option: from mid-June, add a day on the Deosai Plateau and Sheosar Lake.

What's included

- Return flights between Islamabad and Skardu
- Boutique hotels throughout: one night at Serena Shigar Fort, one at Serena Khaplu Palace, two in a boutique hotel in Skardu and two in Islamabad
- All meals, from dinner on Day 1 to breakfast on Day 7
- Private 4x4 with an experienced driver, and all airport transfers
- Professional English-speaking guide throughout
- Entry tickets, permits and park fees
- The spare day in Islamabad

Not included

- International flights
- Pakistan visa
- Travel insurance
- Tips