



COUNTRY SNAPSHOT: AFGHANISTAN

A brief guide of essential facts and do's and don'ts when in Afghanistan.

1. Location

SW Asia. Borders Pakistan to the East and South, Iran to the West, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan to the North and China to the Northeast.

2. Geography and Climate

The Hindu Kush Mountain range effectively splits Afghanistan into 3 areas. Most of Afghanistan is an inhospitable mountainous landscape and more than half of the country lies 2 000 m above sea level. The rest of the country is heavily deforested, arid land. The situation has not been helped by long years of war which has caused damage to the irrigation channels and infrastructure.

3. People & Languages

Major ethnic groups include Pashtuns, Tajiks, Hazaras and Uzbeks.

- Official languages of the country are Dari (very similar to the Iranian

Farsi language) and Pashto.

- Uzbek, Turkmen, Baluchi, Nooristani and Pashayi are also spoken.

4. Economy

Afghanistan is heavily reliant on foreign aid. Narcotics has been and still is one of the major sources of income for the country.

5. Key Cultural Factors:

Honour

An individual's worth and that of his family, friends and associates is defined by honour. Whilst some allowances may be made for foreigners it is nevertheless vital that you do not impinge on anything that may detract from the honour of your Afghan counterpart.

Family

The role of family is heavily tied in with honour. Men are traditionally the main income earners in an Afghan household. Few

women work outside the home. Great respect is given to the elderly and age dictates seniority on almost all occasions. Arranged marriages and polygamy are common. Families are often large and regular contact is maintained and cherished with distant relatives.

Religion

Predominantly Islam (about 85% Sunni and 14% Shia).

Legal System

The legal system is based upon the principles of Islam. Corruption is quite common, although illegal. Many officials are so underpaid that it is common practice to offer and accept bribes.

Stuck?

Contact us on:

Tel: +44 (0) 1483 577 750

Email: help@geolanguages.co.uk

Web: www.geolanguages.co.uk

Key Do's and Don'ts

DO

- ✓ Politely introduce yourself. Say “Salaam Aleikum”. You’ll hear others just saying “Salaam” but this is really reserved for friends and you shouldn’t be tempted to copy it.. The correct reply to “Salaam Aleikum” is “Wa aleikom es salaam”. “Tashakor” is thank you. Shake hands with the right hand. Maintain eye contact.
- ✓ Take your shoes off when entering a home or mosque.
- ✓ Give gifts. Only something small. No alcohol, unless you are confident that the receiver drinks... even then it should be done very discreetly.
- ✓ Address the most elderly person first.
- ✓ Use your right hand when passing things or eating and always pass to your right.
- ✓ Leave food on your plate. Clearing your plate means you are still hungry and want more. Afghans place great importance on hospitality and, at great expense to themselves, will offer the best food they have, so asking for more in this way is seen as rude.
- ✓ Accept tea when offered.

Spotlight:

Full name: Islamic Republic of Afghanistan

Population: ca. 26 million

Capital and largest city: Kabul

Major languages: Pashto, Dari (Persian)

Major religion: Islam

Monetary unit: 1 Afghani = 100 puls

Internet domain: .af

International dialling code: +93

Main exports: Fruit and nuts, carpets wool, opium



DON'T

- ✗ Don't talk to Afghan women unless absolutely necessary. If you need to ask a question it's best to ask an Afghan male to ask the woman the question.
- ✗ Don't shake hands with Afghan women, joke about, ask after or seek eye contact with Afghan women. This will not necessarily get you into trouble, but, more importantly, will affect what others think of the woman concerned and affect the family honour.
- ✗ Don't use the left hand. It's used for toilet purposes.
- ✗ Don't extend your feet towards people if sitting down. It's considered rude.
- ✗ Don't walk over bread/food. It is seen as disrespectful.
- ✗ Don't walk over graves. It is seen as disrespectful.
- ✗ Don't continue to eat if thanks has been given after a meal.
- ✗ Don't rush. With anything.
- ✗ Don't touch a copy of the Koran. Especially in mosques. It is seen as an extremely holy book and absolutely not to be touched by non-Muslims.