

Afghanistan
Adventure
Planning
Guide
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Introduction

Afghanistan is both an exciting and challenging place to visit. Our hope is that you will enjoy all the new sights, sounds and tastes in this unique culture, so vastly different from our own.

These pre-arrival hints will hopefully help you to prepare for your time here in Afghanistan. Hopefully, this Planning Guide will give you just a peek at understanding life in this country as you grow to know and appreciate the Afghan people whom you are coming to visit or live amongst...a fascinating journey that will last the length of your stay.

Clothing

Islamic ideas of body modesty are very different from those in the west. Thus the local attire covers the whole body. Even local men do not expose any more skin than is necessary and so don't normally even roll up their sleeves. Also, "Cleanliness is half of religion" so you should always be clean and tidy, shoes clean, hair combed, etc.

Remember that whereas Westerners dress to suit themselves, Asians dress to convey honor and respect to those they relate to. A scruffy or untidy person is proclaiming to those around him or her that they have no respect for, and don't care about those with whom he/she works or spends time.

The level of respect a man will get is directly related to whether his wife and women/girls of his family are considered modest in their clothing and behavior.

It is easy to have clothes made both for men and women, and more and more ready-made clothes are available. There are tailoring shops found all over the city for this purpose.

Women

You have a choice of what you can wear:

Pakistani-style clothes - loose trousers (*shalwars*) with an over-dress (*kameez*) with *chadar* (head covering). This is coolest in the summer as Pakistani cottons are very light.

Indian and Iranian clothes are also considered stylish – as long as it follows the guides below of covering the female body. There are both Indian and Iranian style clothing shops doing business in various places in Kabul and other major cities.

Afghan clothes - a western style dress / skirt and loose blouse over *tumbans* (loose pants/trousers, usually a solid color). The length of the dress can be from mid thigh to below the knees. Skirts are usually long. This is good in the winter as you can bring winter clothes from home, and the *tumbans* (or any loose pants/trousers) keep you warmer.

Also post-Taliban solid colored mid-thigh length suit tops are in fashion, always with pants underneath. By all means bring western style dresses, skirts, blouses and sweaters. Some foreign women like to wear long skirts with a sweater or a blouse tucked out. Pants must be worn too as long as the shirt is long, at least mid-thigh or longer.

Houses and offices are very cold in the winter so **for winter** you'll need plenty thermal underwear (not available here), warm sweaters, turtlenecks, and warm socks. Good quality washable **winter slippers** with rubber soles are a necessity as well. You may want to size them to be able to wear one or two pairs of socks comfortably with them.

It may be good to bring a selection of dress and blouse patterns that can be adapted into the local styles. There are also a few stores with ready-made women's clothes in the local styles. The Kabul City Center and the Kot-e-Sanghi bazaar are recommended places to shop.

A *chadar* (head covering) is standard covering when a woman leaves the home, whatever style she is wearing underneath. The exception is when wearing an overcoat. Then a small scarf covering the head is sufficient. Covering the legs is a must as well as covering the elbows. Some foreign women will wear short-sleeves when it is very hot, but local women do not.

Women's clothing should be made from non-transparent fabrics.

Local ladies here always look clean and presentable, and middle and upper class women do look stylish. The way the foreign woman dresses depends on which socio-economic level she wants to associate with.

Men

Men also have a choice of Western, Pakistani or Afghan clothing. In the office and in public, neatness is required. This means that tee shirts and shorts are not appropriate for men in public unless involved in a sports event. Expatriate men do wear short-sleeved shirts in warm weather.

Children

Most children, expatriate and local, wear both local and western clothes. As girls get older (about 7 and above) they should start to dress more in the way suggested for women above, including a head covering. This applies to going out on the street or visiting, but when indoors or playing in the yard or garden,

children can feel free to wear normal western summer clothes. If you have children in nappies/diapers, it is possible to buy the disposable variety. Pampers and Italian and German brands are available. The cost is not much higher than what you would pay at home.

WEATHER

January — the coldest month; wear several layers of clothing; nights are freezing, air is very dry. May have several snow days.

February — may still snow early in the month but by mid month, days are warming up and nights don't usually freeze.

March/April — days are continuing to warm; some days are rainy, others are warm and sunny; nights are still cold.

May — mostly warm and sunny with cool nights.

June — warm days, cool nights but by end of month, the days are getting hot.

July/August — days are hot, evenings are warm; afternoon dust storms; air is very dry.

September — days are still warm, nights warm but by mid month nights are becoming cool again.

October — days are warm and beautiful, nights are getting chilly.

November — days are cool to cold, nights are cold.

December — days are cold, nights may start to freeze; may have some snow by the end of the month; air is very dry.

TRAVEL TIPS

Time Difference

Afghan standard time is -- 4½ hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time
-- 3½ hours ahead of Central European Time
-- ½ hour behind Pakistan time (1 ½ during daylight saving time)
-- 8 ½ hours ahead of US Eastern Standard time (9 ½ during daylight saving time)
-- 11 ½ hours ahead of US West Coast Standard time (12 ½ during daylight saving time)

Long layovers and checked baggage

If your trip here includes a long layover:

- You may want to arrange ahead of time with the travel service for a hotel voucher paid for by the airline.
- Make sure that **ALL YOUR BAGGAGE is CHECKED ALL THE WAY to Dubai**. You will pay excess baggage twice – once in your home airport, and then in Dubai. Bring cash to pay for excess baggage in Dubai – they do not take credit cards. U.S dollars., Euros, or Sterling are accepted. If you have a layover in Europe, you must **MAKE SURE YOU DO NOT STAY IN ONE LOCATION LONGER THAN 24 hours**. If you do, you will be required to collect your luggage and then pay European rates for your excess baggage. Europeans are allowed only 20kilos (40lbs) of checked baggage.
- Check all your airports for play places, nursing or family stations to make your trip easier if you are traveling with little ones.

Carry-ons

It is strongly recommended that you call your airline ahead of time to find out their current policy on how many carry-ons you are allowed. Even if your baby does not have a seat, you can usually get away with having a baby bag.

Showers en route

Both Heathrow (Terminal 4) and Amsterdam have showers available.

Food and Water

Drinking fountains are safe in London, Dubai and any European airport. At airports in Pakistan and Afghanistan, drink only bottled water or from a “Clear Water” drinking fountain. Make sure all safety seals are intact before opening a water bottle.

Most airlines flying to the Middle East/Central Asia will serve Asian food. For example, British Air serves Pakistani food on the Heathrow-Islamabad trip. You may choose to request a different menu for yourself as well. If traveling with children, you may want to request a child meal, although many children find them distasteful – who wants soggy French fries?

You will arrive at the Dubai airport around 4-6am and will have about a 1-9 hour layover. You may want to have easy, familiar breakfast items with you, such as breakfast bars, to keep you going until you get to Kabul. There is a McDonalds and another large Costa Coffee shop in the terminal where you’ll catch a flight on Kam Air or Safi Air.

In Heathrow – There are several British coffee shops in Terminal 4 including a Starbucks at the far end. On the way to Starbucks there is a really great sandwich shop.

Upon arrival in Dubai, U.A.E.

Women should be wearing slacks and a modest blouse. Have your *chadar*, (head covering) handy to cover your head for your arrival in Kabul. **You do not need to cover your head in the Islamabad or Dubai Airports.**

Dubai Airport

- You do not need a visa for U.A.E. You no longer need to transit to Terminal Two. Dubai-Kabul passengers leave from Terminal One.
- Once you get your baggage checked in with the Kam Air agent (remember that you are allowed less checked baggage and carryons with Kam Air or Safi Air, so check their website). If you have excess baggage, you must pay in cash \$5/kg. You should have seat assignments at this point, but don’t worry if you don’t. Then go through passport control, and you will enter the waiting area for your flight.
- Once on the airplane, we recommend that you sit next to another foreigner if you are traveling alone. A single woman should not be

seated next to an Afghan man (traditionally dressed). You can get your seat changed once you are on the airplane and simply ask the flight attendant for help – **do not** stay in an uncomfortable situation.

Kabul International Airport:

- You will deplane down the steps outside, and either walk across the tarmac or you will take a bus and enter the international arrivals building. This is just beginning to change as the new International Terminal of Kabul just started to be used in June, 2009.
- You will stand in line to go through passport control. After you go through passport control, you will retrieve your luggage.
- Many people find Kabul airport arrivals to be a chaotic experience. You may or may not have to put your luggage through the scanner before you exit the airport building. If you need a bathroom, stop right after you pass the luggage scanner and use the bathrooms right before you exit the building. You should bring your own toilet paper and drinking water to get you through your Kabul airport experience.
- In Kabul, no one is allowed to even approach the airport building unless they have a ticket, and no cars are allowed to come close. So you will walk across the front area of the airport outside, to a walled in parking area. There are three sections of parking – A, B, and C. Only REALLY Special people get to come to the first/closest parking area, parking A. Most people will head through Parking lot B through another gate then go through a building into Parking lot C. Here is where you pick up a taxi or meet friends. Expect to pay around \$20 to get to a hotel or guest house.
- You may also want to bring a whole bunch of \$1.00 bills, and you can pay the porter around \$0.50/bag for his help. I'm sure you will have other men "helping" and of course they will complain that you didn't give enough, but feel free to be firm about \$0.50 to \$1/bag.

Have a great trip!

WHAT YOU MIGHT WANT TO BRING

In this section you will find listings of many things available in Kabul now, as well as in Dubai. Following each are suggestions of what you might want to bring. You know your own comfort/need levels and so will choose and pack accordingly. ***If you have questions or comments please feel free to contact us at info@about-afghanistan.com.***

Medicines

Many medicines, including many antibiotics, are available cheaply and without prescription in the local pharmacies. Each neighborhood is required to keep one pharmacy open all night long, and the pharmacies take turns doing this.

Consider bringing:

- Basic medical kit – you can replenish it here or in Pakistan.
 - Thermometer of your choice.
 - Band-Aids, including ones with cartoon characters for your children.
 - You can buy liquid ibuprofen and acetaminophen (called paracetamol here) and liquid antibiotics like penicillin and amoxicillin.
- Adult favorite vitamins and cold remedies.
- Bring a current eye prescription if you wear glasses. You might want to consider getting prescription glasses in Dubai, as they are much less expensive than in the US.

Toiletries available & What you may want to bring

Dental

- Toothpastes and brushes available; bring a basic supply. There is no recommended dental care available in Afghanistan. You would have to fly to Dubai or Islamabad for emergency situations.

Hair items

- Many familiar brands of shampoos and crème rinses available.

Cosmetics

- Plan to bring a supply of whatever cosmetics you prefer.

Female hygiene items

- Available, but if a specific brand is preferred, bring it.

Cell Phones

These are available locally. The two largest providers for sim cards are AWCC and Roshan, both using 900 MHz GSM systems. Plan to buy them here. You can purchase a sim card before you leave the airport.

Foods available in Kabul

Basics:

White & whole-wheat flours

Eggs – available in the local bazaar, from the French Bakery, or from people who sell local eggs which are usually fresher

Sugar – white, brown & powdered

Honey

Salt & pepper

Baking powder

Baking soda

Cornstarch

Yeast

Vanilla (only very small bottles, and only imitation)

Cocoa for baking

Oil – vegetable, corn, sunflower, sometimes canola, olive

Butter & margarine (from Pakistan, Iran, and Denmark)

Vegetable shortening – sometimes available here

Spices – imported and bottled, or by the gram at the local bazaar and supermarkets

Vinegar – a variety

Soy sauce, Worcestershire sauce, & a variety of other sauces

Bouillon/stock cubes – chicken & beef (Maggi & Knorr)

Ketchup, mustard, mayonnaise

Syrup – maple is sometimes available; Lyle's golden syrup

Milk – long-life & powdered (skim, & whole); sweetened condensed

Canned cream & long-life and UHT cream

Cheeses – Edam, Gouda, Cheddar, Mozzarella, Parmesan

Yogurt

Jams & jellies

Cold cereals @ \$5 per box

Oatmeal

Cream of rice – usually bought by the kilo at the local bazaar, "Sugee"

Tuna

Corned beef in a can

Canned vegetables – green beans, corn, asparagus, etc.

Canned tomatoes

Tomato sauce

Canned mushrooms

Baked beans

Popcorn

Pastas – from U.A.E., Pakistan, Iran, Italy
Coffee (filter and instant) – decaf is a rarity
Tea – large variety, including fruit teas
Rice – local, Pakistani and Thai
Beans – a variety of dry at the local bazaar; some canned
Meat – fresh from the bazaar (usually buy only in the colder months) & frozen:
minced beef, beef filet, chicken, lamb

Fresh fruits & vegetables in season: cabbage, carrots, cauliflower,
cucumbers, green peppers, leeks, onions, potatoes, tomatoes,
zucchini, spinach, broccoli, eggplant, lettuce, cilantro, apples, pears,
plums, apricots, grapes, tangerines, bananas, lemons, grapefruit,
peaches, cherries.

Bread – a variety is available daily from the 'French Bakery, as well as pizza,
meat pies, small fruit pies, doughnuts, cookies, bagels on Fridays,
pineapple upside down cake, and more.

naan – Afghan flat bread, available all day from the small neighborhood *naan*
bakeries

Toilet paper, tissues, paper towels, napkins

...and much more!

You can cook very much like you do at home but you will find it just takes
more planning and time to prepare as most cooking is 'from scratch'.

Some foodstuffs some of us bring

Flavor packets such as for spaghetti sauce, chili, stir-fry, etc.
Sticks of pepperoni
Favorite, most used spices - for getting started right away
Maple flavoring – for making homemade syrup
Kool-aid
Mac 'n cheese packets – or similar items that are favorites and quick
and easy to help the transition as you figure everything out. Just
make sure you know which bag you packed it in!
Crisco – the individually packaged sticks
Decaf coffee – is not readily available here; also makes a nice gift.
Chocolate chips - not available here. They also make a nice gift. If
coming in summer, pack them at the center of your container
in plastic bags as they may melt a bit.

Helpful cookbooks to consider

- The More-with-Less Cookbook
- Betty Crocker (1950/60 printing, can be found at used book stores)

- Your favorite cookbook (or a copy of it if you mind the possibility of leaving it behind)
- King Arthur Flour Cookbook
- Cooks Illustrated Online for \$35 – highly recommended!
- Two NGO's have created their own cookbooks based on foodstuffs available here. Contact us at info@about-afghanistan.com.

Kitchen items available

Baking pans are available but not always of the best quality or in the standard sizes we may be familiar with. More are available in Dubai. You should plan to bring the basics of what you think you will need.

You can buy 220 electrical items in Kabul or in Dubai such as a blender, iron, mixer, grinder, coffee maker, etc. Electricity is getting more reliable, but only in the city centers. See below.

Some helpful things to bring

- Oven thermometer
- Refrigerator thermometer
- Specialized baking pans – angel food, bundt, muffin, etc.
- Carrot peeler
- Can opener
- Wire whisk
- Candy & meat thermometers
- Pressure cooker
- Katadyn Water purifier – the expense is worth having clean water with which to cook and have on hand. We use both our Katadyn and have a Clearwater contract – Clearwater supplies us with the water dispenser and 5-gallon jugs of water. The dispenser is \$100 and the jugs are \$5 the first time, then \$4 for refills.
- Food Mixer
- Measuring cups & spoons
- Hot pads – these are essential to bring!
- Electrical Waffle Iron
- Electrical Cappuccino maker
- A couple dishcloths to begin
- For coffee drinkers – A Stainless Steel French press – the expense is worth it because you won't be stuck in Afghanistan with a broken glass carafe!; drip funnel and filters (you can buy a coffee maker here and a nice carafe); coffee grinder if you like to use beans;
- Cheese slicer
- Any other specialized kitchen gadget that is important to you
- Basic set of plastic food storage containers – also now available in Pakistan and at the Iranian store in Sharenau, Kabul
- Ziploc bags in a variety of sizes
- Non-electricals such as – hand egg beater, stove-top waffle iron, coffee

grinder, French press, etc.

Household items available in Kabul

Curtains

- There is plenty of curtain and decorating fabric available to choose from, and tailors available to make them at very reasonable prices.

Furniture

- Living room suite – couch, loveseat, two armchairs, coffee table and two end tables
- Dining table and chairs
- Queen (no full) size and single beds with foam or spring mattresses
- Side tables for beds
- Wardrobes
- Desks & desk chairs
- You can have almost anything made you can design or show a picture of!

Technology

- Washers, driers, dishwashers, flatscreen TV, DVD players – just about any electronic item you need is available in Kabul including brands such as Siemens, Bosch, Panasonic, LG

*****You may want to bring** inexpensive prints or posters to have framed for your walls and a few other things that would make it feel more like home.

Bedding available

Blankets

- One kind available, Korean made, called 'acrylic mink'. It is quite heavy.
- There is a second-hand blanket bazaar where you can sometimes find down comforters (duvets or continental quilts) for a very reasonable price
- In Dubai, you can find very nice polyester filled pillows and comforters (duvets or continental quilts) for reasonable prices.
- You can find material and have duvet covers made for the comforters (duvets or continental quilts) and some blankets.

Towels

- Bath towels and washcloths are sometimes available in some stores. Check upstairs in Karimis in Karte Parwan, upstairs in Chelses in Sharenau, and upstairs of the Fine Supermarket in Wazir
- Nice towels can be found in Dubai.

You may want to bring

- Sheet sets for queen and king size and single beds (high quality bedding, curtain material, furniture, and household linens are also available in Pakistan.)
- Consider bringing down comforters (duvets or continental quilts) for the cold winter nights. They can be vacuum packed in storage bags. Many people here do not heat their rooms at night.
- Hot water bottle(s) for the cold winter nights.
- Towel sets for both bath & kitchen as well as dish towels

Expatriate families vary quite a bit in the amount, and type of things they bring with them. You will find that some expatriate homes are quite simple, while others are similar to the sizes and styles and that you might find in your home country. You will see that families do have nice homes, are comfortable, and life can be enjoyable here on many levels because it is generally simpler and less "cluttered" than life in the West.

Inverters and Batteries for living remote

There is a great way to have electricity besides running an expensive, loud, and large generator – purchase a 1500 watt inverter in Kabul. This will cost you around \$500. This allows you to run a few things 24/7 in your home.

Fuel is expensive. However, we run the generator or use city electricity to charge our 10 deep cycle batteries purchased in Kabul. For example, our inverter/battery system allows me 24/7 to run my automatic washer (180 watts), my small chest freezer (100 watts), my refrigerator (80watts), the stereo in the living room, the tv/dvd player upstairs, and my home office. We also have 12 volt lights scattered around the house in strategic locations. We have brought 12-volt fans (the type truckers use) which keep us cool at night in the summer. Contact us at info@about-afghanistan.com for more information.

Driving in Afghanistan

Get an International Driver's license. You can renew it annually via the internet. The police will often wave you through when they see your license from your home country, but the government does want everyone to have an Afghan license.

Make sure when taking the Afghan driving test, you use the mirrors to back up – turning your head (required in our home countries) will cause you to fail the Afghan driving test!

Swimming

Clothing – ladies – bring your swimsuits, summer shorts/shirts, miniskirts, etc. You will need this for your vacation. You will also need your swimsuit for the Kabul UN Pool in the summer, or if you purchase your own pool. It is possible to purchase your own above ground pool in Kabul, as well as local chlorine, filters, and pump.

Bring Pool toys for the children. It is hard to find good pool tools in Kabul. Bring a wading pool/fun yard toys. We make our yard as fun as is possible for the children. There are no nice parks in Kabul.

Cameras

Digital cameras and digital video cameras are a great way to send pictures home to family and friends. You can buy a printer here and HP Photo paper in country, and print your pictures. Bring your own cameras. Although many technical items can be purchased in Kabul they will cost more than in the West or Dubai.

Passports and Documentation

Due to child theft across International borders, some Embassies may require a certified birth certificate for the child and BOTH parents in attendance at the embassy to obtain EITHER additional passport pages or a new passport, which children need every 5 years.

A certified birth certificate is different than a copy of a certified or original birth certificate. You need to pay probably \$15 to get one of these from the government office in the county in which the child was born.

Cultural Tips

The following tips from the *Enjoy Afghanistan* book are used with permission. *Enjoy Afghanistan* is a great resource to learn much more about living well in Afghanistan and covers many topics in greater detail than included below or at our website, www.about-afghanistan.com.

The book is published by Interlit Foundation. This book can be purchased in Kabul or from Interlit directly. The link to Interlit is www.interlitfoundation.org. They specialize in publishing practical information to assist westerners in more effectively working in the Afghan context.

CULTURAL ADAPTATION is the first and most obvious change you will be making.

SEPARATION OF THE SEXES is a basic cultural norm in this part of the world. It can vary from strict "*pardah*" (separation) to somewhat more relaxed circumstances, but there will not be the freedom between men and women as experienced in the West. While a simple guideline is for women to keep with women, while the men follow the men. However, expatriate women are often seen as the "the third sex."

FOR WOMEN

- In Afghan culture, the woman is the heart of the honor of the family. How she behaves and how she is treated sets the honor of the family.
- Avoid meeting men's eyes, except when bargaining with a shopkeeper or a taxi driver.
- Avoid sitting next to the opposite sex (other than your spouse), for example, in vehicles.
- Avoid laughing or speaking loudly.
- Avoid looking happy when speaking to men.
- Don't shake hands with a man unless he offers his hand first (and even then, be careful!)
- Women greet women with a kiss (but rarely in a public place).
- In public always wear long trousers under your skirt/ dress. The part of your trousers (especially local *tumbans*) from your knee to your waist is considered to be underwear i.e. you might prefer not to show it in public. When sitting always cover your knees! Take care that your clothes don't show through too much. When outside, wear a *chadar* (big scarf) that covers the head and upper body.
- When sitting on a *toshak* (floor mattress) don't stretch your legs straight out in front of you. Never lie down in public i.e. outside of your bedroom (unless you are sick!).
- Be aware that you will be stared at in public.
- Be restrained in your behavior toward male team members.

- In the bazaar: Be careful about laughing together in the streets or in the stores. It may be perceived as trying to attract the attention of men.
- Anticipate the men coming toward you and move out of their way.

FOR MEN

- Generally more free than women.
- Local men may walk hand-in-hand with another man as an expression of friendship.
- Avoid looking at local women.
- Never use a woman's name in public.
- Don't ask male friends about their wives, daughters or other women.
- Be restrained in your behavior toward female team members. No public touching or hugging.

FOR EVERYONE

- Remember that the local people consider us guests in the country. Therefore there is the host's concern for you as his guest.
- Try not to draw attention to yourself (loud talking/ laughing, singing, whistling etc. especially in public places).
- When asked questions on the streets in taxis, etc. be polite, chat and keep on building up good relationships. However, try not to give unnecessary information. Don't discuss who you know, where you visited last night, how much salary you get, how much rent is paid for your house, or give out other people's names... Give vague answers. There would be quite an information file if all the information would be collected, for example, from the shoe polish boys and taxi drivers.
- Try to avoid blowing your nose in public. Go behind a corner or visit the toilet. It's okay to sneeze or cough or to wipe your nose.
- Be careful about your body language.
- Do not touch the opposite sex (husbands and wives may feel free to hold hands in public, though).
- If you need to laugh in public, you may want to put your hand up to your mouth. Don't smile at the opposite sex, if you don't know them well.
- Never tell your name or anybody else's name in the street!
- Avoid pointing the sole of the feet towards people (when sitting on the floor).
- Avoid resting your foot across your knee (when sitting on a chair).
- Eat with your right hand (the left is 'defiled' or dirty).
- When you compliment someone on something in a home or about jewelry, etc., they may think that you want it and will give it to you. Also vice versa.
- When someone gives a gift, they expect something back in return.
- Be security conscious--do not give out names, addresses or telephone numbers. If necessary, when answering the gate or telephone, take a message.
- Do not make unnecessary introductions.
- Never put spiritual books (i.e. a Bible or Quran) on the floor.

GREETINGS: Verbally or:

- Ladies kiss each other 3 or more times/ shake hands.
- Greet the children (boys until ~ 10 years) on streets by waving hello or shaking hands.
- Men with each other: Shake hands/ give a "weak" hug/ kiss 1-3 times.
- Men and ladies: Nod/ greet verbally.
- Men: Do not shake hands with local ladies, unless they are highly educated and offer their hand to you.

In Dari:	<i>salam alakum</i>	Hello.
	<i>walakum (as)-salam</i>	Hello.
	<i>tashakur</i>	Thank you!
	<i>bubakshsen</i>	I'm sorry/Excuse me/I beg your pardon?
	<i>bala</i>	Yes
	<i>na</i>	No

VISITING AN AFGHAN HOME

- Men often hug 3 times. Women often kiss three times. Often the sexes do not mix, though this may vary with foreigners.
- Take your shoes off immediately at the door or outside the door if only one room.
- If you go to a room and there are already people there, systematically go around the room and greet everyone.
- Then sit in the place closest to the door (lowest honor).
- Don't go and sit in the seat of highest honor (farthest from the door). The host will probably tell you to move to the place of honor. The host should never sit in a place of higher honor than the guest. If you are the only guest it doesn't matter so much.
- If it is hot, a cold drink will be brought right away, like a bottle drink, soda or water.
Then later, they will bring tea with something to eat such as nuts and raisins, or biscuits or cookies.
- When eating, use the right hand (*naan*-bread can be broken with both). When handing things use the right hand or even more polite both hands. Please take all kind of dishes offered to you, but if you can't eat them just leave them on your plate. Don't turn your *naan*-bread upside down. Avoid drinking well water. Wait until after the meal and hot tea will be served. You can have as many cups as you like. Say goodbye to everyone.
- Women curling both legs to one side is most appropriate. Your host might tell you to stretch your legs out, and may bring a blanket to cover your legs, since it is a no-no to point the soles of your feet in someone's direction. Or use your *chadar*.
- When pointing out something, don't point with your finger, use your whole hand.

- There may be a conflict if you are interacting with an educated Afghan. You may not know what to do. They're trying to be western with you and you are trying to be Asian with them.
- In general when an offer of some kind is made, say "no" until offered the third time. And you offer three times as well for a sincere invitation. If they really want you to come, then they will urge and urge, and give a time and date, etc.
- If you drive them home or walk them home, they will always invite you in for tea or a meal.
- When having a meal, we think it is western to eat everything on the plate. But if you finish it, they will pile on more and more. So it's good to leave some food on your plate, then they know that they gave you more than enough to satisfy. People in the kitchen will finish off all the leftovers.
- When stopping in for a casual visit, is one hour good enough? Not necessarily.
- Always ask for permission to leave before going, no matter when or where you are leaving. They'll really push you to stay (perhaps even for the night!), but be firm and go. They don't really expect you to stay.
- In an Afghan home you might meet all the men and women of the family, the whole family. Then the opposite sex might leave after a few minutes.
- When you've gotten to know a woman and are talking with her and a male relative comes in, let him know what you are talking about. It's better that the men know what you are talking about with their women. Then they won't feel like you are doing something behind their backs.

Politeness in Afghan culture

Background

The 'what should we do?' of politeness comes after at least some understanding of the 'why should we do it?'

Some of the reasons why –

- Appearance is a major reason for all of the customs relating to politeness. Give the appearance of being glad to see someone. Give the appearance of wanting to help someone. Give the appearance of being temperate in your nature. The strong desire not to give a bad appearance should occupy our thoughts in every situation. It is present in the thoughts of our colleagues. Hopefully you will have the genuine feelings underlying the appearance but even if you don't, the appearance of it is no less important.
 - "I will try" is better than "I can't" and in this culture "I can't" may be interpreted as "I won't".
 - Your anger brings shame on you but my calmness brings more on you.
- The feelings of the other person are of much greater importance here than in many other cultures. Even within western cultures there is considerable difference placed upon the feelings of a person; Dutch, German, British, Finnish. Here in Afghanistan making someone unhappy and doing so openly is bordering on criminal!! The crime is much greater if this occurs in the company of other people.
 - The dying person.
 - The man with no job.
 - The co-worker who has made a mistake.
 - The theft with no clear culprit.
- Respect of the other person and his/her position. The position of a person with
 - Age.
 - Status – teachers, doctors, tradesmen.
 - Gender.
 - Guest. Defer to age, then status, and then other factors.
- Don't draw unnecessary attention to yourself or others.

Invitations

- Invitations – don't accept the first is a good working principle. The second is 60-70% serious and the third you can take as 100% genuine.
- Order of status when sitting, going through a door, introductions and greetings.

- Try not to say 'no' – thank you (*tashakur*) is the best cultural way of saying no.

Man and woman are different!!

a) Man to man

- Greetings – spoken usually too rapidly to respond. Do ask how is their home – do not ask about any women of the household (mother, wife or daughter) unless they have brought this up (asking for medical help for example) and only in private – they will not appreciate you asking in front of colleagues for example.
- Handshake – definitely a good idea but may be replaced with your hand over your heart if, for example, you walk into a room of 20 people. Address them individually and briefly.
- Kiss – much more familiar and would not be done on the first meeting (except in some circles particularly Pashtun).
- Hugs – again more familiar and again not on the first meeting. A modified version is used particularly by the Pashtuns.
- Handholding – a sign of friendship and to be received as a compliment should an Afghan man do so to you BUT leave it to him to decide the appropriateness of it.
- Modesty – dressing and undressing is a very private matter and Afghan men would generally have a more modest standard in an all-male environment than westerners.
- *bradar* as a general word to address someone whose name you don't know.

b) Man to woman

- Greetings – spoken and usually briefer than a same-sex greeting.
- Prolonged eye contact should be avoided.
- Handshake – Rarely an Afghan woman may extend her hand for a handshake. This should be received but the foreign man should not instigate this. The usual form of greeting is spoken with the hand over the heart.
- Modesty – don't sit close. Don't ask personal questions. Avoid long conversations and avoid being in a room alone – remember HER reputation is at stake. DO NOT use her name when calling her.
- *khanum-saeb* as a general word for someone whose name you don't know.

c) Woman to man

- Greetings – spoken and usually briefer than a same-sex greeting.
- Prolonged eye contact should be avoided.
- Handshake – It occurs (because of the ignorance of the culture rather than a sign that the culture is shifting) that foreign women shake hands with Afghan men. It is more appropriate NOT to do so and even if the man extends his hand it may be more dignified for the woman to place her hand over her heart than to reciprocate. The usual form of greeting is spoken with

the hand over the heart. There are certain situations where you would especially want to consider carefully –

- A meeting with important officials
 - An elderly man
 - A young man
 - Someone you have known for a long time
 - In a room alone with a man.
- Modesty – over familiarity on the woman's part could be interpreted as her having a bad character. Body contact should be regarded as forbidden.
 - *ustad* as a general word to address someone whose name you don't know
- d) Woman to woman
- Similar to man to man except not the handholding.
 - Kissing more common with women and often multiple kisses.
- e) Adult to child
- It is important (for the sake of appearances if for no other reason) to show kindness to children. A rude attitude to a child will reflect very badly on you. If they offer their hand, shake it. Beggars, cheeky kids – can be tricky.
 - Language forms are singular and never 2nd person plural form, which is used for any adult you are not close friends with.
 - Don't single out a child/baby and pour praises on it as in western culture. This is not appreciated and most compliments, when given, are prefixed with *nam-e-khuda*. There may be superstitious elements in this that you may have objections to. It is usually acceptable to ask to hold a baby and then replace compliments with play. Work on the principle of showing kindness and playing with a child rather than complimenting the parent on the child.

Miscellaneous others

- Anger – overt anger reflects badly on you and only rarely is it appropriate. An insult against a woman in your company for example would warrant an openly angry reaction. Anger may be used to draw attention to a thief or cheat or someone who has acted inappropriately.
- How to handle direct questioning
 - i. The art of vagueness
 - ii. Money questions
 - iii. *taklif naten* – gender issues
- Meetings which involve negotiation
 - i. allow time for each party to put across their point of view.
 - ii. Pad your issues with other things – don't go straight to the point.
 - iii. Be prepared for some compromise and know in advance the kind of compromise you would accept

- All interactions should involve a sandwich of pleasantries.
- Dealing with the persistent – keep it cool!
- Running and panicking are undignified.
- Be careful with humor.
- Don't refer to people as animals.
- Insulting gestures – open hand, nose-blowing, pointing, feet, pointing your backside when putting on shoes for example
- Receiving and giving gifts – use of the right or even better both hands.

Suggested Reading List

Afghanistan is a world apart from the home you are leaving. You will want to read a few of the following books to help you understand Afghanistan and the Afghan people.

Islam

The Mantle of the Prophet – Roy Mottahedeh

Shahnamah – Firdawsi (English translation)

My Forbidden Face – Latifa

Afghanistan

Afghanistan* - Louis Dupree

Islam and Politics in Afghanistan – Asta Olesen

A historical Guide to Afghanistan* - Nancy Dupree

Pashtu Proverbs – Jens Enevoldsen

Afghanistan: The definitive account of a country at cross-roads - George Arney 1990

The Afghans – Moh. Ali

Travels to Bukhara - A. Burns

The Races of Afghanistan – Bellew

The Great Game - Peter Hopkirk

The Kabul Times Annual (1970)

One Hundred Afghan Persian Proverbs – J. Christy Wilson, Jr.

Historical Dictionary of Afghanistan – Adamec

Taliban* – Ahmed Rashid

A History of Afghanistan – Percy Sykes

The Pathans – Olaf Caroe

The Breadwinner – Deborah Ellis

Generosity and Jealousy – Lindholm (about Pushtuns)

Afghanistan: Mullah, Marx, and Mujahid – Ralph Magnus and Naby Eden

Women

Three women of Herat - Veronica Doubleday

The Bride - Bapsi Sidwa

The Nine parts of Desire - Geraldine Brooks

The Performance of Emotion among Pashtun women - Benedicte Grima

Price of Honour: Muslim women lift the Veil of the Silence on Islam - Jan Goodwin

Grima 1992 (Social Science)

Beyond the Veil: Male-female dynamics in a modern Muslim Society – Fatima Mernissi

Veils and Words: The Emerging Voices of Iranian Women Writers – Farzaneh Milani

Novels

Caravans - James A. Michener

Kim – Rudyard Kipling

Salang - Sandy Gall

Kite Runner

The Far Pavilions – M.M. Kaye

A Thousand Splendid Suns

Travel Books

Danzingers Travels - Nick Danzinger

Caught in the Crossfire - Jan Goodwin

Afghanistan – A Companion and Guide Bijan Omrani and Matthew Leeming

Three Cups of Tea

Lonely Planet Afghanistan

Language Learning

List coming in August, '09

Persian Literature

List coming in August, '09