

HIGHWAYS OF THE HIMALAYA

1 MAY 2025 - 28 MAY 2025

Tour Cost (\$AUD):\$22,050
Single Supplement (\$AUD):\$3,950

Tour Duration:28 days



OVERVIEW

The mountains of Northern Pakistan have remained a mystical destination for centuries. Yet this area encompasses the most captivating mountain chains on the planet. The Karakoram, Himalaya, Pamir, Tian Shan and Hindu Kush chains have sheltered human existence in their valleys for thousands of years. This is a journey of unique exploration that delves into these extraordinary corners of the world.

Highways of the Himalaya begins in the Indian capital of Delhi – a pleasant springboard for our foray into ‘Heaven on Earth’, Kashmir. We spend an idyllic three nights on luxury houseboats before heading to Jammu in the beautiful Shivalik range. Leaving the ‘City of Temples’ we travel across the Punjab to the Holy city of Amritsar, home to the Sikh pilgrimage site, the Golden Temple. From here we cross into Pakistan and the Mughal city of Lahore, cultural and spiritual heart of the country. The tour then swerves north to the capital, Islamabad for two nights before flying north into the mesmerizing beauty of the Karakoram Mountain Range. We are now in the realm of ‘Little Tibet’ where the River Indus flows through pristine villages and meadows, surrounded by breathtaking mountains. Yet it is an area that is a veritable architectural treasure trove and home to Pakistan’s greatest wealth, the simplicity and purity of the people who live amongst this astounding beauty. As we traverse the Karakoram Highway – with its glorious twists and turns – through the Hunza valley and the Hindu Kush, we delve into the secrets of the Silk Road and trace the steps of Alexander the Great and the Aga Khan. We then cross into China via Sost, the highest border in the world at 4693 metres. This is where China meets Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan and where an incredible convergence of the Kunlun, Pamirs, Karakoram and Tian Shan mountain ranges can be seen. A downhill run on the terminus of the Karakoram Highway brings us to the legendary caravanserai of Kashgar, where we witness the chaotic and tumultuous Sunday livestock market, still in business after 2,000 years! Welcome to Highways of the Himalaya!

Tour Fitness Level: Active

HIGHWAYS OF THE HIMALAYA

1 MAY 2025 - 28 MAY 2025

TOUR MAP



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1 MAY 2025 - 28 MAY 2025

ITINERARY

01/05/2025 Australia – Singapore – Delhi (D)

Check in at your chosen airport for the flight to Singapore. On arrival connect with your onward flight to Delhi.

Depart Singapore SQ 406, 16.50
Arrive Delhi 20.10

After completing Indian customs and immigration formalities we transfer to our hotel.

Aloft Aerocity Hotel

New Delhi

02/05/2025 Delhi (BLD)

This morning we explore Delhi, a place where the ancient and modern blend seamlessly together. In a relaxed day we explore Old Delhi which offers a spectacular example of Mughal architecture. Old Delhi is a walled city shaped roughly like a quarter circle with the Red Fort as a focal point. The old city was surrounded by a wall enclosing about 1500 acres with 14 gates. Although the walls have largely disappeared, most of the gates are still present. The fort is octagonal, with the north-south axis longer than the east-west axis. The marble, floral decorations and double domes in the fort's buildings exemplify later Mughal architecture. The immense culture of Old Delhi never loses its charm and it provides a fascinating portal into history.

03/05/2025 Delhi – Srinagar (Kashmir) (BLD)

An early start today as we transfer to the airport for our flight to Srinagar.

Depart Delhi Air India AI 825, 10.15
Arrive Srinagar 11.50

Known as 'Heaven on Earth', Srinagar – the capital of

Kashmir – is nestled in the serene Zabarwan Mountains at 1,585 metres above sea level. The city is famous for exquisite Mughal-age gardens and lakes as well as intricate traditional handicrafts. Stradling both sides of the Jhelum River, Srinagar is adorned with the tranquil lakes of Dal and Nigeen. On arrival we transfer to our luxury houseboat for a unique three-night experience on Dal Lake.

Royal Houseboat

Srinagar

04/05/2025 Srinagar (BLD)

After breakfast we drive to the ancient Hindu pilgrimage site of Naranag, one of the important archaeological sites of the country. The site consists of a cluster of ancient ruined temples nestled among scenic meadows, lakes and mountains. We enjoy a picnic lunch in this awe-inspiring location, before returning to our houseboats at Srinagar.

05/05/2025 Srinagar (BLD)

This morning we use Shikaras – wooden boats – to explore the floating vegetable market on Dal Lake and the Mir Bahris – a lively community of people who live on the lake itself. In the afternoon we visit some of Srinagar's astonishing gardens such as Shalimar Bagh and Nishat Gardens.

06/05/2025 Srinagar – Jammu (BLD)

After breakfast we commence a fascinating drive south to Jammu. The 266 km drive is on an extraordinary road with fantastic open vistas of the Himalayas. After lunch at Udampur we continue onto Jammu.

Radisson Blu

Jammu

07/05/2025 Jammu – Amritsar (BLD)

HIGHWAYS OF THE HIMALAYA

1 MAY 2025 - 28 MAY 2025

Leaving Jammu behind, we enter the state of Punjab and drive onto its spiritual capital, Amritsar. This is the centre of Sikhism and the site of the Sikhs' principal place of worship— the Golden Temple. Amritsar, literally 'a Pool of Nectar', derives its name from Amrit Sarovar, the holy tank that surrounds the splendid Golden Temple. Guru Ramdas, the fourth Guru of the Sikh faith, founded Amritsar in 1579. He constructed a pool on land gifted by the Mughal Emperor Akbar and called it Amritsar. This spiritual abode welcomes Sikhs from all over India and the world.

Hyatt Regency

Amritsar

08/05/2025 Amritsar (BLD)

Today is a special one as we visit the Golden Temple's langar, a free, communal kitchen – the largest in the world – that serves up to 100,000 people per day, seven days a week. Everybody is welcome to eat here, without discrimination, for as long as they need shelter and food, and meals are available 24 hours a day. It is an extraordinary sight as people sit cross-legged on the floor in huge halls that can easily accommodate 200 people at a time: men and women, old and young, rich and poor. After our visit here we visit the fascinating Partition Museum.

09/05/2025 Amritsar – Lahore (Pakistan) (BLD)

Today we leave India by the Grand Trunk Road which takes us via the Wagah border into Pakistan. From the border we drive an hour to reach Lahore, the second largest city of Pakistan. This is Pakistan's cultural heart, and it hosts most of the arts, cuisine, festivals, music, film-making, gardening and intelligentsia of the country. Lahore is not just bricks and mortar, it is an alive, pulsating city, rich with its own flavour of colorful festivals, traditions and deeply influenced by the indomitable generous and hospitable spirit of the Lahoris. In the afternoon we

head back to the border at Wagah to witness an elaborate ceremony at the border. A military practice, it has been performed by both Pakistan and India at the same time since 1959. The cheering crowd and the meticulous drill on both sides make for a unique experience.

Nishat Hotel

Lahore

10/05/2025 Lahore (BLD)

This morning we explore the Shalimar Gardens, an astonishing garden complex that dates from the Mughal Empire. Construction of this Persian paradise garden began in 1641 during the reign of Shah Jahan. It represents a heaven on earth in which human's co-exist in harmony with nature. In the afternoon we visit Jahangir's tomb – the 17th-century mausoleum built for the Mughal Emperor Jahangir. The site is famous for its interiors that are extensively embellished with frescoes and marble, and its exterior that is richly decorated with colourful mosaics. The tomb, along with the adjacent Akbari Sarai and the Tomb of Asif Khan, are part of an ensemble currently on the tentative list for UNESCO World Heritage status.

11/05/2025 Lahore (BLD)

In a dizzying day of exploration, we start with a visit to The Lahore Fort, a wonderful and one-of-a-kind Mughal structure. This historical palace was built by the legendary Mahmood of Ghazni in the 11th century. The massive compound is astonishing and is made up of different gardens, palaces, halls, mosques and the impossibly beautiful Palace of Mirrors. After our visit here we visit Delhi Gate one of the six remaining historic gates of Lahore city.

12/05/2025 Lahore – Islamabad (BLD)

After an early breakfast we board our coach for the drive to the capital of the Islamic Republic of

HIGHWAYS OF THE HIMALAYA

1 MAY 2025 - 28 MAY 2025

Pakistan, Islamabad. Islamabad was built between 1960 and 1970 to replace Karachi as the capital. The idea of the national capital of Islamabad was conceived by President Ayub Khan (1907–1974) and it was designed to be the greenest city in Pakistan. Late afternoon we head up to the Margalla Hills for a wonderful panoramic view of the city.

Serena Islamabad Hotel

Islamabad

13/05/2025 Islamabad (BLD)

Today we take a short drive to Rawalpindi, or 'Pindi' as the locals refer to it. The former capital of Pakistan between 1959 and 1960, Rawalpindi has been the traditional home of the Pakistan Army and we visit the fascinating Army Museum as well as the eclectic Raja Bazaar.

14/05/2025 Islamabad – Skardu – Khaplu (BLD)

After breakfast we transfer to the airport for our flight to Skardu.

Depart Islamabad Pakistan Airlines PK 451, 09.30
Arrive Skardu 10.30

On arrival in Skardu we board our coach for the drive to Khaplu. We enjoy a lunch stop at Shangri-la village located on the beautiful Kachura Lake in the Karakoram Mountain Range of the Western Himalayas. Later we pass through subalpine conifer forests and orchards of wild apricot as we continue our journey to Khaplu. At 2,500 metres, this is a place of mesmerizing beauty.

Serena Khaplu Palace

Khaplu

15/05/2025 Khaplu – Machulu – Khaplu (BLD)

Khaplu, also known as 'Little Tibet' stretches 112 kilometres along the River Shyok, a tributary of the

River Indus, next to the ancient trade route to Ladakh. It is a place of remarkable lakes and hiking trails, and is the gateway to Hushe valley, home to several magnificent peaks and glaciers. This morning we drive to the pristine villages of Saling and Machulu where we can see the magnificent Mashabrum Mountain, and its beautiful surrounds.

16/05/2025 Khaplu – Shigar (BLD)

Today we head for the immense valley of Shigar via the Safaranga, or Cold Desert. Located at an altitude of 2,226 meters, the Safaranga Desert is one of the world's highest cold deserts. Crossing the bridge over River Shigar we enter perhaps one of the most beautiful places on earth, the Shigar Valley. The legendary history of this valley, its architectural heritage, and the simplicity and purity of the people, make it a focal point of Pakistan's natural treasure. Shigar Valley is a blend of verdant oasis, glaciers, majestic mountains, lakes, and hot springs. The Shigar Fort, one of the heritage sites, was built in the early 17th-century on the banks of the Shigar River by Raja Hassan Khan, the 20th Raja of Amacha Dynasty. Standing among the world's most astounding mountain ranges, at a height of 2,250m above sea level, the fort – which is now run by Serena Hotels – truly reflects the diversity of nature and the legendary history of the Shigar region. The fort harmoniously blends with its surroundings as the design and construction techniques used by Kashmiri masons, artisans and goldsmiths have endowed it with a unique architectural status.

Serena Shigar Fort Residence

Shigar

17/05/2025 Shigar (BLD)

The exquisite landscape of Shigar Valley is punctuated by startling ancient architectural ornaments. The historical 17th-century Fong-Khar Fort of Shigar, 16th-century Khanqa-e-Muallah, and the 14th-century Amburiq Mosque unveil the

HIGHWAYS OF THE HIMALAYA

1 MAY 2025 - 28 MAY 2025

architectural treasures and legendary history of the Shigar valley. Today we continue to explore the valley.

18/05/2025 Shigar – Gilgit (BLD)

This morning we drive to Gilgit via the spectacular Strategic Highway No 1. The road skirts the Indus River and enters the Karakoram highway before Gilgit. The highway is full of glorious twists and turns and in 2021 was widened and fully asphalted in a project that took four years to complete. It was inaugurated with great pomp and ceremony by then Prime Minister Imran Khan. Just before we arrive into Gilgit we make a stop to see the exact point where the three mighty mountain ranges of the Karakoram, Himalaya and Hindu Kush meet – a stunning view from any perspective.

Serena Gilgit Hotel

Gilgit

19/05/2025 Gilgit – Karimabad (BLD)

Our journey today takes us through the Hunza Valley and onto the great Karakoram Highway, past the ancient remains of the Silk Road. We stop for lunch in the Nagar Valley where we see the beautiful Rakaposhi Mountain (7,788m). We then continue onto the town of Karimabad and, after a stroll through the atmospheric Altit Village, we check into our fort hotel.

Serena Altit Fort Residence

Karimabad

20/05/2025 Karimabad (BLD)

Situated on the west bank of the Hunza River, Karimabad is named after Prince Karim Aga Khan, the spiritual head of the Shia Ismaili Nizari community, and it is rich in cultural and historical heritage. This is an area of immense natural beauty and roses, pansies, lilies, zinnias, and cosmos grow wild in the

area, alongside willow, fir, and poplar trees. After breakfast we drive to the nearby Hoper Valley. Here a cluster of villages are set in a natural bowl at the bend of a glacier, with three sides of the valley covered by Hoper glacier. The glacier forms the base of the Bawalter peak and is one of the fastest moving glaciers in the world, and without doubt, one of the most beautiful places on earth! Later we return to Karimabad and visit the Baltit Fort – former residence of the Hunza Royal Family. The ancient architecture resembles that of the Potala Palace in Lhasa, and it was designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2004.

21/05/2025 Karimabad (BLD)

After a leisurely breakfast at our hotel we drive to the Eagle's Nest lookout for some of the most breathtaking views of the Hunza Valley and the Karakoram Mountain range in northern Pakistan. We take a stroll around the local bazaar and soak up the atmosphere of this extraordinarily beautiful location. After lunch here we drive back to Karimabad.

22/05/2025 Karimabad – Sost – Tashkurgan (BLD)

This morning we drive along the Karakoram Highway to the Pakistan/Chinese border at Sost on the Khunjerab Pass. The view from the top of the pass into Tajikistan – 20 Kilometres away – is breathtaking. At 4,693 meters, it is the world's highest border crossing, and after completing Pakistani and Chinese immigration we descent nearly 2,000 metres into the Tajik Autonomous region and onto the Chinese town of Tashkurgan. This is the eastern Pamir Plateau convergence point of the Kunlun, Karakoram, Hindu Kush and the Tian Shan Mountain ranges.

Ghogori Hotel

Tashkurgan

23/05/2025 Tashkurgan – Kasgar (BLD)

HIGHWAYS OF THE HIMALAYA

1 MAY 2025 - 28 MAY 2025

Tashkurgan dates back almost 2,000 years and is located along the main branch of the Old Silk Road leading from China into Western Asia. We visit the Stone City that overlooks the town, which was once the seat of the Tajik Kingdom and guarded the camel caravans along the Silk Road for centuries. It is believed that this is the midway point between Europe and China. We then head towards Lake Karakul through grasslands and mountains. As we descend, clear streams and warm shifting colours of the grasslands against the dark mountains provide a wonderful vista. Soon we reach the dazzling alpine lake of Karakul, the highest on the Pamir Plateau. It is surrounded by the snow-covered mountains of Muztagh (7,546m) and Gonger Tagh (7,719m): this is the Karakoram Highway at its most spectacular! Passing the surreal white sands of Bulongkol Lake we descend into Kashgar.

Radisson Blu Hotel

Kashgar

24/05/2025 Kashgar (BLD)

Kashgar is situated at the western end of the Tarim Basin in a fertile oasis on the Kashgar River. Kashi, as it is officially known, has more of a Central Asian vibe – not unlike Samarkand – with a population made up of Uighur, Turkic and Muslim. It is surrounded by the formidable Tian Shan Mountains, the Pamir range and the vast Taklamakan Desert. For two millennia, Kashgar was the greatest market city on one of the major trade routes of ancient times. Caravans of a thousand camels each travelled along it, transporting silk, spices, gold and gemstones between Istanbul and the central Chinese city of Xian, then the capital. In the mid-19th century, Kashgar again became prominent when Britain and Russia struggled for influence over Central Asia in the intrigues and espionage known as the 'Great Game'. The British set up a consulate in a Kashgar villa known as Chini Bagh, while the Russians set up their consulate nearby in what is now the Siman

Hotel. We spend a full day unearthing the city's myriad secrets and puzzles.

25/05/2025 Kashgar (BLD)

On Sundays Kashgar's population swells by 90,000 people as hordes of Uighur, Afghan, Mongol, Pakistani and Dungan – all in traditional clothes – descend on a bazaar and livestock market that is still doing business after more than 2,000 years of operation. Riding donkeys or driving carts, farmers from surrounding areas hurry to the bazaar early in the morning. Commotion and chaos are interspersed by chatter and laughter – little has changed after centuries as this kaleidoscope of humanity rolls on. The livestock market and the bazaar simply form one of the most engaging spectacles in the world.

26/05/2025 Kashgar – Beijing (BD)

After breakfast we transfer to the airport for our flight to Beijing.

Depart Kashgar Air China CA 1216, 13.35

Arrive Beijing 18.15

On arrival in Beijing we transfer to our hotel.

Cordis Beijing Capital Airport Hotel

Beijing

27/05/2025 Beijing – Singapore (B)

This morning is at leisure. Later we transfer to the airport for our flight home.

Depart Beijing Singapore Airlines SQ 807, 16.35

Arrive Singapore 23.00

On arrival in Singapore, we connect with the flight to our chosen Australian capital city.

28/05/2025 In Flight

We arrive home in Australia today.