

THE SCENIC MISTAKE

PAKISTAN MOTORCYCLE TOURING GUIDE

Plan Your Ride Before You Fly

Free planning guide for overseas riders. 2027 season edition. Time-sensitive facts checked on 30 October 2026.
thescenicmistake.com

IN THIS GUIDE

1 Welcome to motorcycle touring in northern Pakistan

2 Riding seasons and regional considerations

3 The main riding regions

4 Choosing a 150cc or a larger adventure bike

5 Licence, visa, insurance and travel advice

6 Riding gear and packing checklist

7 Mountain roads and realistic daily distances

8 Altitude, weather, fuel and flexible planning

9 What to prepare before leaving home

10 Why ride a guided tour on a locally supplied motorcycle

11 What our 2027 guided tours include

12 Tour links, contacts and sources

> **Please read this first.** This guide is a planning aid, not official advice. Visa rules, road access, permits and government travel advice can change quickly, and this guide cannot give medical or legal advice. Always check current official sources before you book or travel. We have marked the facts that change most often and listed our sources in section 12.

1. WELCOME TO NORTHERN PAKISTAN

Northern Pakistan is where three great mountain ranges meet: the Karakoram, the Himalaya and the Hindu Kush. Five of the world's fourteen peaks above 8,000 metres are here, and the roads that reach them climb from the plains around Islamabad to the 4,693m Khunjerab Pass on the China border.

For a rider, that means real variety in a single trip: long paved stretches of the Karakoram Highway, high plateaus such as Deosai, gravel valley roads, and small towns where a tea stop can easily turn into a conversation.

It also takes planning. High ground opens only after the winter snow clears, fuel can be limited in remote valleys, and conditions change from one season to the next. This guide covers what we think an overseas rider should know before booking a flight.

2. RIDING SEASONS

The northern riding season runs roughly from April to October. Lower valleys and much of the Karakoram Highway are usually rideable from spring, while the highest ground opens later. Opening dates vary from year to year, so treat this table as a guide rather than a promise.

Period	What to expect	Things to consider
April to May	Spring in the lower valleys, with blossom in Hunza. Snow is still on high ground.	Cold mornings and possible late snow. Plateaus and some passes may not be open yet.
June	Longer days. High ground starts to open as snow clears.	Snowmelt can raise rivers and cover the road at stream crossings, especially later in the day.
July to August	The main window for high plateaus and passes.	Monsoon weather can affect lower areas, with a higher risk of landslides and flooding. Allow spare time.
September to October	Often settled weather, clear air and autumn colour in the valleys.	Nights get cold quickly, and snow can return to high ground from later in the season.

Regional points to keep in mind

- **Deosai and Shandur** are high ground and depend on snow clearance, so they are normally summer and early-autumn routes.
- **Babusar Pass** (N15, Chilas to the Kaghan valley) can be closed at certain times of year because of extreme weather.
- **Khunjerab Pass** has traditionally operated from spring to late autumn. Reports on year-round operation are mixed, so check its current status close to your trip.
- **Flights to Skardu and Gilgit** are often disrupted by weather, so do not plan a tight connection home.

Our seven 2027 departures run from late April to October. See the 2027 departure calendar and our article on the best time to ride in Pakistan.

3. THE MAIN RIDING REGIONS

Most motorcycle trips are built from a few corridors. Road conditions in all of them change with weather, landslides and roadworks.

Karakoram Highway (N-35)

The backbone of northern riding, running from the Islamabad area through the Indus gorge, Gilgit and Hunza to Khunjerab Pass (4,693m). Much of it is paved, although surfaces, traffic and rockfall vary. See the Karakoram Highway page, and check the travel-advice note in section 5.

Hunza

A valley on the Karakoram Highway, known for its mountain views, orchards and Attabad Lake. It is a natural base for rest days and for rides towards Passu and Khunjerab. See Hunza.

Skardu

The main town of Baltistan, surrounded by cold-desert landscapes and reached along the Indus. It is the usual gateway to Deosai. See Skardu.

Deosai Plateau

A high plateau at about 4,114m, with wide plains and few services. Expect gravel, cold wind and rapid weather changes, even in summer. See Deosai.

Shandur Pass

A high pass at about 3,734m linking Gilgit-Baltistan with Chitral. The riding is remote and the surface is often unpaved. See Shandur.

Chitral

A long valley in the Hindu Kush, in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, close to the Kalash valleys. Government travel advice for this region is specific to districts and road sections, so check it carefully (section 5). See Chitral.

4. A 150CC OR A LARGER ADVENTURE BIKE?

Heavy 1,000cc-plus adventure bikes can be hard work on loose surfaces and narrow mountain shelves. Lighter machines are easier to manage when the road turns to gravel, and easier to pick up when they fall over. Choose for the terrain and your own confidence, not for engine size alone.

	150cc dual-sport	CFMOTO 450MT
On our 2027 tours	Included in the tour price	Optional upgrade, +$750 USD
Engine	150cc single, about 12 HP	449cc parallel twin, 44 HP
Weight	About 125 kg	175 kg dry
Seat height	770mm	820mm / 835mm
Good for	Beginner and intermediate riders, tight switchbacks, broken surfaces	Confident riders who want more power and comfort on long paved sections
Keep in mind	Will feel slow at high altitude and when overtaking	Heavier when the surface turns loose, and harder to pick up



A dual-sport motorcycle at a mountain lake in northern Pakistan, from our own travel. Shown for illustration; tour motorcycles may differ.

See the tour motorcycles page and our 150cc vs 450cc comparison.

5. LICENCE, VISA, INSURANCE AND TRAVEL ADVICE

Government travel advice: check this before anything else. Advice for Pakistan is specific to districts and road sections, and it changes. As an example, on 30 October 2026 the UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) advised against all travel to several Khyber Pakhtunkhwa districts, including Swat, Upper Dir and Lower Dir, and on road sections including the Karakoram Highway between Mansehra and Chilas and the N45 from north of the Mardan ring road to the edge of Chitral City, including the Kalash valley. It warns that travel insurance could be invalidated if you travel against its advice. Some routes in northern Pakistan, including parts of our published itineraries, use these corridors. Read your own government's current advice, ask your insurer how it affects you, and ask us how it affects the tour you are considering.

Licence checklist

- [ ] A full motorcycle licence from your home country, valid for the engine size you will ride.
- [ ] An International Driving Permit. UK travellers need the 1968 version and cannot buy one outside the UK, so check which version applies to your country and get it before you leave. Some of our tours list it as a requirement.

Visa checklist

- [ ] Most visitors need a visa arranged in advance. Apply through the official Pakistan Online Visa System at visa.nadra.gov.pk, and beware of look-alike sites.
- [ ] Eligibility, fees, documents and processing times depend on your nationality and can change, so check the portal or your nearest Pakistani mission.
- [ ] UK advice says your passport must have at least 6 months' validity from the visa application date. Check the rule that applies to you.
- [ ] Make sure your passport is stamped on entry.
- [ ] Ask about permissions for the areas you will visit. Advance permission can be needed for some regions, and rules can change.

Insurance checklist

- [ ] Covers motorcycle riding on the engine size you will actually ride.
- [ ] Covers the maximum altitude on your itinerary. Khunjerab Pass is 4,693m.
- [ ] Includes emergency medical treatment, evacuation from remote areas and repatriation.
- [ ] Your insurer has confirmed in writing that the policy is valid for your exact route, given current government travel advice.
- [ ] Includes trip-cancellation cover, which is mandatory on our tours (see our cancellation policy).

On the road

- Carry your passport or a copy as officials may ask for ID. Foreign visitors may need to register details at checkpoints on some routes.
- Do not photograph military sites, airports, bridges, dams or other infrastructure.

See our insurance requirements and booking terms.

6. RIDING GEAR AND PACKING CHECKLIST

Riding gear is not included on our tours, so bring gear you know fits and have ridden in. Mountain temperatures can vary widely in a single day.

Protective riding gear (essential)

- [ ] Approved full-face or adventure helmet (ECE or DOT)
- [ ] Riding jacket with armour
- [ ] Riding trousers with armour
- [ ] Motorcycle gloves, plus a warmer pair
- [ ] Sturdy motorcycle boots with ankle protection
- [ ] Waterproof outer layers
- [ ] Thermal base layers and a neck warmer
- [ ] Clear or tinted visor, or riding glasses

Daily essentials on the bike

- [ ] Tank bag or small backpack
- [ ] Water bottle or hydration pack
- [ ] Sunscreen and lip balm
- [ ] Sunglasses
- [ ] A spare warm layer
- [ ] Passport copy and other documents
- [ ] Phone, charging cable and power bank
- [ ] Some cash in small notes

Main bag

- [ ] Soft duffel bag rather than a hard suitcase
- [ ] Quick-drying clothes for evenings
- [ ] Warm jacket for cold nights
- [ ] Comfortable shoes for off the bike
- [ ] Modest clothing for towns and villages
- [ ] Universal travel adaptor
- [ ] Head torch
- [ ] Earplugs

Health and documents

- [ ] Personal medication, with prescriptions
- [ ] Small personal first-aid kit
- [ ] Hand sanitiser and basic toiletries
- [ ] Printed and digital copies of your passport, visa, licence and insurance
- [ ] Emergency contacts and insurer's assistance number
- [ ] Travel money, and a card your bank knows you are travelling with

On our tours the support vehicle carries your main bag between overnight stops. Read our packing list article for more detail.

7. MOUNTAIN ROADS AND DAILY DISTANCES

Do not judge a mountain day by its kilometres. A 160 km stage through river gorges can take most of a day once you allow for photo stops, livestock on the road, roadworks and loose gravel.

As a guide, our seven 2027 itineraries average roughly 125 to 150 km per riding day. Some days are longer, and some are much slower than the distance suggests.

What you are likely to meet

- **Paved highway** with sudden broken patches, gravel or fresh rockfall.
- **Narrow shelf roads** with long drops and limited room to pass.
- **Stream crossings,** which can rise during the day when snow is melting.
- **Trucks, buses and livestock,** often around blind corners.
- **Landslides,** which can block or destroy a road with little warning.
- **Roadworks and checkpoints,** which can both take time.

Riding habits that help

- Start early, and plan to arrive before dark. Avoid riding at night.
- Ride at a pace that lets you stop within the road you can see.
- Stay left, as traffic in Pakistan drives on the left.
- Build spare days into your trip for closures and weather.

> **Practise before you come.** If your riding is mostly on tarmac, some time on gravel with a light bike will pay off. Each of our tour pages lists its difficulty, riding surface and rider requirements. Compare them on the compare tours page.

8. ALTITUDE, WEATHER, FUEL AND FLEXIBILITY

Altitude

Altitude sickness usually becomes a risk above about 2,500m, and passes on these routes can go well above 4,000m. This summary is based on NHS guidance. It is not medical advice, so talk to your doctor or a travel clinic before you travel, especially if you have a medical condition or have had altitude sickness before.

- **Common symptoms:** headache, loss of appetite, nausea or vomiting, tiredness, dizziness and trouble sleeping.
- **Prevention:** ascend slowly. At 3,000m or above, sleep no more than 500m higher than the previous night, and take a rest day every 3 to 4 days. Avoid going from under 1,200m to over 3,500m in one day. Drink enough water and avoid alcohol.
- **If you have symptoms:** do not go higher until you feel better. If they get worse or do not improve after a day, descend about 300m to 1,000m if you can.
- **Get urgent medical help and descend straight away if possible** if someone feels very unwell, is confused or has trouble with balance, is short of breath at rest, has a cough with frothy or bloody spit, has blue or grey skin or lips, or is very drowsy.

Weather

Valley floors can be hot while passes are cold and windy on the same day. Pack for both, and expect rain and snow to be possible on high ground, even in summer.

Fuel

Fuel is available in towns, but it can be limited in remote valleys, and quality and supply vary. Fill up whenever you can before a remote section. On our tours, fuel for the included 150cc motorcycle is part of the tour price.

Flexible route planning

Weather, landslides, road closures and government restrictions can all change a plan at short notice. Treat any itinerary as a plan rather than a guarantee, and allow extra days before your flight home. Tell someone at home your route, and expect patchy mobile coverage in remote areas.

9. WHAT TO PREPARE BEFORE LEAVING HOME

When you start planning

- [ ] Read your government's travel advice for Pakistan, and speak to an insurer about your planned route.
- [ ] Choose a season and route that match your experience (sections 2 and 3).
- [ ] Check that your motorcycle licence covers the bike you plan to ride.
- [ ] Check your passport's validity and how many blank pages you have.

Once your trip is confirmed

- [ ] Buy insurance soon after booking, and get written confirmation of your cover.
- [ ] Apply for your visa through the official portal, leaving plenty of time.
- [ ] Get your International Driving Permit if you need one.
- [ ] Talk to your doctor or a travel clinic about vaccinations, medication and altitude.
- [ ] Book flights with spare time at the end of your trip.
- [ ] Ride your gear in before you travel, especially new boots.
- [ ] Build up your fitness. Long days at altitude are tiring.

In the last two weeks

- [ ] Check travel advice and your insurance again, as both can change.
- [ ] Save digital and printed copies of all your documents.
- [ ] Tell your bank you are travelling, and plan how you will carry cash.
- [ ] Share your itinerary and emergency contacts with someone at home.
- [ ] Complete and sign the rider waiver if you are joining one of our tours.

10. WHY A GUIDED TOUR WITH A LOCAL MOTORCYCLE?

Riding independently in northern Pakistan is possible, but it means arranging a motorcycle, spares, fuel planning, accommodation and local knowledge yourself, often far from help. For most overseas riders, flying in and riding a locally supplied motorcycle is the simpler option.

	Bringing your own motorcycle	Guided tour, local motorcycle
Paperwork	Temporary import, usually with a Carnet de Passages or bank guarantee. Land border status can change.	No vehicle import. The motorcycle is supplied in Pakistan.
Parts and repairs	Parts for large imported bikes can be hard to find, so you carry your own spares.	A mechanic is on hand on riding days, with tools and spare parts.
Luggage	All on the bike.	Main bag carried in the support vehicle.
Route decisions	Yours to research and change.	A lead guide manages pace and route changes.
Freedom	Complete. Your own schedule and route.	Set dates and itinerary, or a private tour planned around you.

Read our full comparison: bringing your own motorcycle or joining a guided tour.

A guided tour reduces some risks, but it cannot remove them. Mountain riding carries real risks, and every rider shares responsibility for riding within their limits. See Safety & Support.

11. WHAT OUR 2027 GUIDED TOURS INCLUDE

Small-group tours for 2–12 riders, with private arrangements available for smaller groups. We confirm departure details and availability before you book. All seven tours start and finish in Islamabad.

Included

- [ ] Airport welcome and private airport transfers
- [ ] 150cc motorcycle and tour fuel
- [ ] Support vehicle for rider luggage and spare parts
- [ ] English-speaking lead guide and tour manager
- [ ] Motorcycle mechanic on all riding days
- [ ] Essential tools, spare parts and first-aid supplies
- [ ] National park permits, road fees and scheduled entries
- [ ] Twin-share hotels, guesthouses or camps
- [ ] Breakfast, lunch and dinner on tour days
- [ ] Daily drinking water on the road
- [ ] Visa support documentation

Not included

- International flights, the visa fee and travel insurance (mandatory)
- Riding gear, including your helmet
- Single room (+$600 USD) and CFMOTO 450MT upgrade (+$750 USD)
- Personal expenses, tips and costs from unforeseen delays

How booking works

Nothing is charged on the website. Choose a departure, motorcycle and room and send a booking request. We confirm availability and email a secure payment request for the $700 USD deposit, or the full amount if you prefer. Your place is confirmed once payment has been received and verified. See the booking terms.

12. TOURS, CONTACTS AND SOURCES

2027 motorcycle tour	Dates	Days	Difficulty	From (USD)
From Dust to Snow	29 Apr – 11 May	13	Strenuous	$3,450
Beyond Shandur	14 – 28 May	15	Moderate–Strenuous	$3,850
The Long Way North	31 May – 10 Jun	11	Moderate	$3,250
High Country Run	15 – 27 Jun	13	Moderate–Strenuous	$3,650
No Easy Roads	18 – 31 Aug	14	Strenuous	$3,950
Three Ranges Deep	12 – 26 Sep	15	Moderate–Strenuous	$3,850
Last Light North	8 – 18 Oct	11	Moderate	$3,250

Prices and availability are confirmed on the website and in your booking confirmation. Not riding? See Scenic Road Trips, our separately arranged journeys by vehicle.

Questions about a route? Ask us.

Website: thescenicmistake.com/motorcycle-tours
Email: thescenicmistake@gmail.com
WhatsApp: +92 321 5663724
Contact form: thescenicmistake.com/contact

Official sources to check (consulted 30 October 2026)

- UK FCDO travel advice for Pakistan: gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/pakistan. Check your own government's advice as well.
- Pakistan Online Visa System: visa.nadra.gov.pk
- NHS altitude sickness guidance: nhs.uk/conditions/altitude-sickness

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