



MASC EXECUTIVE

JOURNEYPASS

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Afghanistan Risk Rating **4**

(Risk Rating 1-4)

General Information:

Capital: Kabul

Language: Afghan Persian Pashto 50%, (Dari) 35%, Turkic languages (primarily Uzbek and Turkmen) 11%, 30 minor languages (primarily Balochi and Pashai) 4%, much bilingualism

Religion: Sunni Muslim ca. 80%, Shi'a Muslim 19%, other 1%

Currency: Afghani (AFN)

Carry sufficient cash in US Dollars for your visit. Credit cards are not accepted. Some ATMs in Kabul dispense dollars as well as the local currency, Afghanis. Banks are closed on Fridays, but there are ATMs in various locations in Wazir Akbar Khan and elsewhere. ATMs are located at military camps, but unless you have an International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) pass you will not be able to enter. Travellers' cheques are not widely accepted and it can take a fortnight for them to clear.

GMT: (+) 4.5

Country Overview

Afghanistan is a landlocked country in the heart of Asia, bordered by Pakistan to the south and east, Iran to the west, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan to the north. There is a short border with China to the far northeast, but in extremely inaccessible terrain.

Afghanistan has been the centre of many powerful empires for the past 2,000 years. However, in the last 30 years the country has been in chaos due to major wars -- from the Soviet invasion of 1979 to their withdrawal in 1989 and from warlordism to the removal of the Taliban in 2001 and the ensuing American and NATO invasion. Economically, Afghanistan is considered poor compared to many other nations of the world. The country is currently going through a nation-wide rebuilding process.



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Afghanistan has spent the last 3 decades in the news for all the wrong reasons. While it has much to offer to the intrepid traveller, it is a true war zone. Even the most adventurous travellers would be best advised to look elsewhere.

Mostly rugged mountains; plains in north and southwest. The Hindu Kush mountains run northeast to southwest, dividing the northern provinces from the rest of the country, with the highest peaks found in the northern Wakhan Corridor. South of Kandahar is desert. Kandahar is beautiful in many places.

The lowest point is Amu Darya at 242m, and the highest is Nowshak at 7,489m.

Local travel

If you're travelling around Afghanistan, particularly outside Kabul, you should seek professional security advice and continually reassess your personal security. The British Embassy in Kabul operates under strict security protocols and staff receive regular security briefings to enable them to carry out their work in as safe an environment as possible.

Hotels and guesthouses used by foreign nationals and the government of Afghanistan are subject to regular threats. The British embassy doesn't allow official visitors to stay in a hotel overnight and has placed restaurants and other venues off limits to staff.

Only travel with reputable local guides and to fully protected workplaces. Take the utmost care and vary your routines. If possible maintain radio or telephone communications to report your movements. Avoid any protests, demonstrations or large gatherings.

Northern Afghanistan

There have been a number of attacks against aid workers and military vehicles resulting in deaths and injuries, and there are ongoing military operations throughout the north. MASC Executive advice against all travel to Badakhshan includes travel to or climbing and trekking within the Wakhan Corridor. This is due to the significant security risks in the region and the Wakhan Corridor's geographical isolation.

Eastern Afghanistan

The eastern region has been extremely volatile for some time, with almost daily suicide and roadside bomb attacks, shootings and rocket attacks. The region close to the Pakistani border is



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extremely dangerous with a high number of insurgents operating freely.

There are regular, large military operations in this region. There have been numerous daily attacks against the Security Forces and US-led coalition forces. There are also daily incidents of Improvised Explosive Devices (IED), suicide and rocket attacks, and direct fire attacks on security forces patrols, checkpoints and bases as well as on the local population.

Southern Afghanistan

The southern region is unpredictable and extremely volatile. There are regular military operations throughout the region and there has been a significant increase in the number of incidents ranging from shootings and roadside bombs to suicide bombings that have targeted civilians and the military. Suicide and roadside bomb attacks in Helmand, Kandahar and Nimroz continue. There has been a series of attacks on the Kabul-Kandahar-Herat road in Zabul, Kandahar, Helmand, Nimroz (and Farah) provinces and in Uruzgan province. Nimroz has seen an increasing number of suicide attacks.

Western Afghanistan

There have been roadside bombs, suicide attacks, rocket attacks and criminal kidnappings throughout the western provinces and increased lawlessness in Western Ghor. There is little security infrastructure in Dai Kundi and westerners have been kidnapped there.

Road travel

Road travel is highly dangerous. Insurgents have set up false vehicle checkpoints from which violent attacks have been launched. In addition to the threat from terrorism and kidnapping, there is also a continuing criminal threat from car-jacking and robbery.

If you travel by road you should only travel in secure transport with close protection, using reputable local drivers and guides. Make sure doors are locked and windows closed. In many areas you should consider the use of armoured vehicles. Most road surfaces are in a very poor condition. The overall standard of driving is poor and most local drivers are uninsured. Accidents may lead to confrontation and threatening behaviour.

Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs)

There have been a number of serious attacks on both western and Afghan NGOs and vehicles



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belonging to them, in which people have been killed or injured. Most attacks continue to occur in the east and south of Afghanistan with a recent increase in activity in the central areas. The International NGO Safety Organisation (INSO) www.ngosafety.org issues regular security updates for NGOs.

There have been two recent reports of sexual assault against females from EU countries working for non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in Kabul.

Air travel

All airlines from Afghanistan have been refused permission to operate services to the EU because Afghanistan is unable to ensure that its airlines meet international safety standards.

A list of recent incidents and accidents can be found on the website of the Aviation Safety network. We can't offer advice on the safety of individual airlines. However, the International Air Transport Association publishes a list of registered airlines that have been audited and found to meet a number of operational safety standards and recommended practices. This list is not exhaustive and the absence of an airline from this list does not necessarily mean that it is unsafe.

You should avoid flying with airlines subject to the EU operating ban. FCO staff are advised to use carriers which are not subject to the EU operating ban.

Transiting UAE

Flying to Dubai and then transferring is the most common route into Afghanistan. It is illegal to transit the United Arab Emirates carrying unlicensed personal protection equipment. This includes, but is not limited to, body armour (including ballistic vests), weapon holsters and handcuffs. Other specialist technical equipment such as satellite phones, listening and recording devices, powerful cameras and binoculars, while freely available in the UK, may also require licenses. Persons found carrying any such items without a license may be subject to conviction resulting in imprisonment and substantial monetary fines in accordance with Emirati law.

Crime

Crime is a serious concern, particularly in rural areas. Foreigners have been the victims of violent attacks, including armed robbery and rape. Don't display any obvious signs of wealth, or carry large sums of money. Don't travel alone, especially on foot. Take particular care after dark.



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Political situation

Afghanistan is undergoing a major transition in terms of politics, economy and security. Avoid large public gatherings and follow the local media for information on the security situation. It is difficult to categorise the country as a whole due to its diverse geography, ethnic, tribal and religious differences, and the ongoing insurgency. Large parts of the east, south east and south of the country are affected by conflict. Other areas have seen steady improvements in security, but are still prone to terrorist attacks and a high crime rate.

Terrorism

There is a high threat from terrorism. Multiple threats are issued daily. Terrorists and insurgents conduct frequent and widespread lethal attacks against Afghan National Defence and Security Forces (ANDSF), domestic and international political and civilian targets, and those working in the humanitarian and reconstruction fields. There is a threat from high-profile, large-scale attacks in Kabul.

Afghanistan-focused insurgents seek the full withdrawal of foreign forces in Afghanistan and the fall of the elected Afghan government. Other groups involved in the insurgency include the Haqqani Network, an Islamist insurgent group whose main goal is to re-establish sharia law in Afghanistan, and are allied with the Taliban.

The insurgency has a strong anti-Western focus; this could make any UK interest or person a target. Attacks include bombs (roadside and other), suicide bombs (either on foot or by vehicle), indirect fire (rockets and mortars), direct fire (shootings and rocket propelled grenades), kidnappings and violent crime.

There are large amounts of unexploded bombs and land mines (both anti-tank and anti-personnel) throughout the country.

You should be particularly vigilant in and around landmark locations and places where large public crowds can gather. Hotels used by the government of Afghanistan and western nationals, ministries, military establishments and religious sites have been attacked and further attacks are possible. Avoid regular visits to public places frequented by foreigners, including hotels, restaurants, shops and market places, especially at times of day when they are particularly busy and congested. The British Embassy does not allow official visitors to stay in any hotel overnight,



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and has placed restaurants off limits to staff.

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Kidnap

The risk of being kidnapped throughout Afghanistan remains a very high and constant threat. Over 100 westerners have been kidnapped in Afghanistan in the last 10 years, a number of them have been British nationals in Badakhshan, Bamyán, Kunar, Kunduz and near the border with Pakistan but the kidnap threat is not isolated to these areas. The motivation and desire to undertake kidnapping in Afghanistan is likely to continue. You should take the utmost care, vary routines and avoid setting regular patterns of movement. You should take professional security advice while in the country. Outside Kabul you should consider the use of permanent armed protection and armoured vehicles.

The long-standing policy of the British government is not to make substantive concessions to hostage-takers. The British government considers that paying ransoms and releasing prisoners increases the risk of further hostage taking.

There is considered to be a heightened threat of terrorist attack globally against UK interests and British nationals, from groups or individuals motivated by the conflict in Iraq and Syria. You should be vigilant at this time.

Local laws and customs

Afghanistan is an Islamic country. You should respect local traditions, customs, laws and religions at all times. Be particularly careful during the holy month of Ramadan or if you intend to visit religious areas.

In 2016, the holy month of Ramadan is expected to start on 6 June and finish on 5 July. See Travelling during Ramadan

Homosexuality is illegal.



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It is forbidden to seek to convert Muslims to other faiths.

You are not allowed to use, or bring into the country narcotics, alcohol and pork products. Photographing government buildings, military installations and palaces is not allowed. Avoid photographing local people without their agreement.

It's illegal to buy or export historical antiquities without a receipt from an authorised supplier or dealer. When you leave Afghanistan you may be asked for proof of purchase. If you don't have a receipt, you could be detained and you may face a fine or prison sentence.

Visas

British nationals must get a visa before travelling to Afghanistan. You can't get a visa on arrival. If you are intending to work in Afghanistan and do not hold a Diplomatic or Official passport you will need a work permit which in turn requires a medical certificate. For further information contact the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan in London.

Passport validity

Your passport should be valid for a minimum period of 6 months from the date of entry into Afghanistan.

UK Emergency Travel Documents

UK Emergency Travel Documents (ETDs) are not valid for entry into Afghanistan. However, ETDs are accepted for exit from Afghanistan.

Yellow fever

Yellow Fever vaccination is required for travellers arriving from countries with risk of yellow fever transmission.

Travelling with children

If you are travelling alone with a child you may need to produce documentary evidence of



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parental responsibility. MASC Executive does not allow staff based in Afghanistan to travel with their partners or children. For further information on exactly what is required at immigration contact the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan in London.

Health

Visit your health professional at least 4 to 6 weeks before your trip to check whether you need any vaccinations or other preventive measures.

In response to the World Health Organisation's emergency recommendations about the spread of polio virus, the government of Afghanistan now requires all departing travellers who have spent more than 4 weeks in Afghanistan to produce a valid vaccination certificate at the time of their departure. This certificate should show that either oral polio vaccine or inactivated polio vaccine has been administered between 4 weeks and 12 months before departure from Afghanistan.

Only very limited medical facilities are available in Afghanistan. Make sure you have all the prescription medication you need during your visit. Supplies are unlikely to be available locally. Make sure you have adequate travel health insurance and accessible funds to cover the cost of any medical treatment abroad and repatriation.

Diarrhoeal diseases and other gastrointestinal infections are common causes of ill health, becoming worse in the hotter months.

The dry dusty conditions in summer and winter can cause irritation to the eyes, throat, nose and skin.

Respiratory tuberculosis is common in the Afghan population.

Malaria is present except in the high mountainous regions of the country and in winter.

If you need emergency medical assistance during your trip, dial 112 or 020 112 from mobile (in Kabul only) and ask for an ambulance. You should contact your insurance/medical assistance company promptly if you are referred to a medical facility for treatment.

Natural disasters

Afghanistan is in an active earthquake zone. You should familiarise yourself with safety



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procedures in the event of an earthquake. More information about your risks in the event of an earthquake, especially around buildings, can be found at International Rescue Corps. Consider signing up to the US Geological Survey (USGS) 24/7 global monitoring agency. USGS provide a newsfeed or @USGSted twitter feed that distributes alerts for earthquakes with magnitudes over 5.5 or of significant impact.

During heavy rains and winter periods, significant flooding can occur, particularly outside the capital. During winter and spring, heavy snowfall often leads to avalanches in mountainous regions. Afghanistan lacks the infrastructure to respond comprehensively to these events so you should be prepared for every eventuality.

If a natural disaster occurs you should follow the advice of local authorities.

Vaccinations/ Medications

Recommended: Diphtheria, Tetanus, Polio, Hepatitis A, Typhoid Fever

To Be Considered: Hepatitis B, Rabies, Cholera, Tuberculosis (TB)

Malaria is present and antimalarials may be recommended for travel please seek medical advice 4-6 weeks before travel.

- **Cholera:** spread through consumption of contaminated water and food. More common during floods and after natural disasters, in areas with very poor sanitation and lack of clean drinking water. It would be unusual for travellers to contract cholera if they take basic precautions with food and water and maintain a good standard of hygiene.
- **Diphtheria:** spread person to person through respiratory droplets. Risk is higher if mixing with locals in poor, overcrowded living conditions.
- **Hepatitis A:** spread through consuming contaminated food and water or person to person through the faecal-oral route. Risk is higher where personal hygiene and sanitation are poor.
- **Hepatitis B:** spread through infected blood and blood products, contaminated needles and medical instruments and sexual intercourse. Risk is higher for those at occupational risk, long stays or frequent travel, children (exposed through cuts and scratches) and individuals who may need, or request, surgical procedures abroad.
- **Rabies:** spread through the saliva of an infected animal, usually through a bite, scratch



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or lick on broken skin. Particularly dogs and related species, but also bats. Risk is higher for those going to remote areas (who may not be able to promptly access appropriate treatment in the event of a bite), long stays, those at higher risk of contact with animals and bats, and children. Even when pre-exposure vaccine has been received, urgent medical advice should be sought after any animal or bat bite.

- **Tetanus:** spread through contamination of cuts, burns and wounds with tetanus spores. Spores are found in soil worldwide. A total of 5 doses of tetanus vaccine are recommended for life in the UK. Boosters are usually recommended in a country or situation where the correct treatment of an injury may not be readily available.
- **Typhoid:** spread mainly through consumption of contaminated food and drink. Risk is higher where access to adequate sanitation and safe water is limited.
- **Polio:** spread through the poliovirus, a highly contagious virus specific to humans. The virus usually enters the environment in the faeces of someone who is infected. In areas with poor sanitation, the virus easily spreads through the faecal-oral route, via contaminated water or food.
- **Tuberculosis:** spread through bacteria that spread from person to person through microscopic droplets released into the air. This can happen when someone with the untreated, active form of tuberculosis coughs, speaks, sneezes, spits, laughs or sings. Although tuberculosis is contagious, it's not easy to catch.

Current Travel Advice

WARNING: The famous Khyber Pass is currently closed to anyone except Afghans or Pakistanis. Some travel blogs/forums claim that hiding in a vehicle and bribing the border guards works, but doing so is very risky and could lead to imprisonment. Even more risky, however, is the threat from Taliban near the pass, who have been known to kill/kidnap Westerners. You are strongly discouraged from passing through the Khyber Pass

WARNING: Most governments advise against all travel to Afghanistan due to the extreme risks to your life you will encounter. After the withdraw of foreign troops, the security situation has been steadily deteriorating and many places/routes which were considered safe before are no longer so.

WARNING: No part of Afghanistan should be considered immune from violence, and the potential exists throughout the country for hostile acts, either targeted or random, against US and other Western nationals at any time. Remnants of the former Taliban regime and

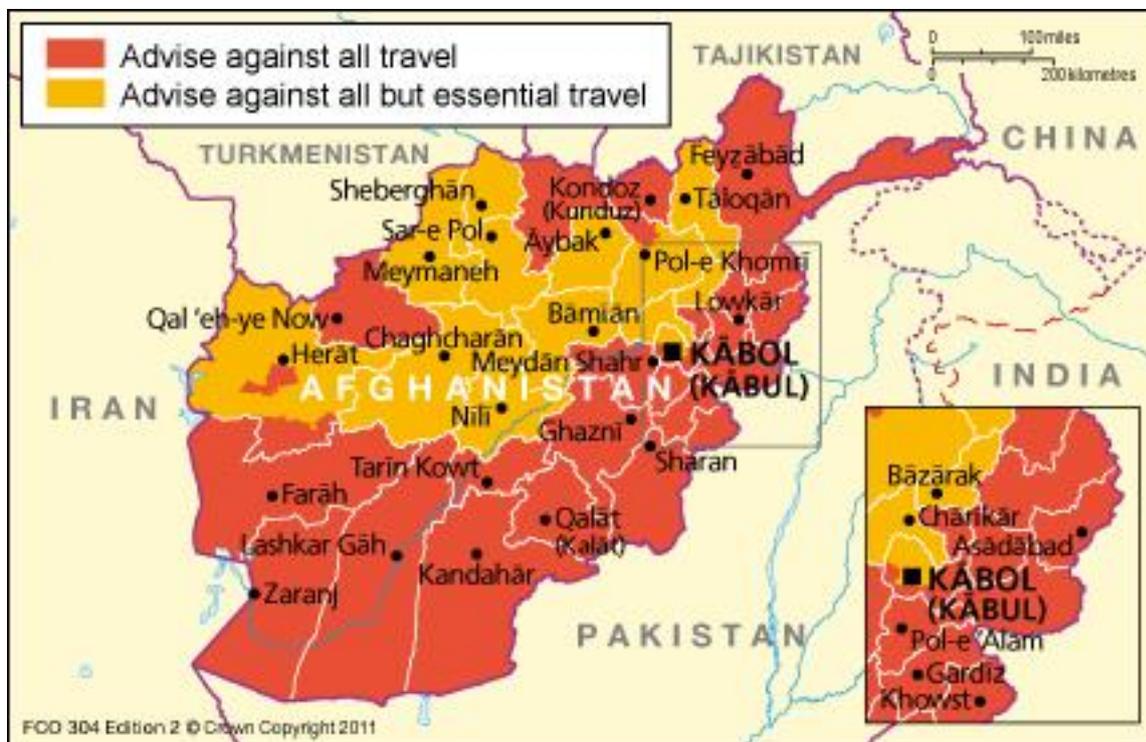


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the al-Qa'ida terrorist network, as well as other groups hostile to International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) military operations, remain active. Afghan authorities have a limited ability to maintain order and ensure the security of Afghan citizens and foreign visitors. Travel in all areas of Afghanistan is unsafe due to military combat operations, landmines, banditry, armed rivalry between political and tribal groups, and the possibility of insurgent attacks, including attacks using vehicle-borne or other improvised explosive devices (IEDs). The security situation remains volatile and unpredictable throughout the country, with some areas, especially in the southeast, experiencing substantially increased levels of violence.



MASC Executive advise against all or all but essential travel to different parts of the country according to provincial region:

Kabul



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- MASC Executive advise against all travel to the Surobi, Paghman, Musayhi, Khak-e Jabbar and Chahar Asyab Districts of Kabul province
- MASC Executive advise against all but essential travel to the city of Kabul

If you're travelling in Kabul, take particular care on Airport road, Jalalabad road and Darulaman road. Avoid travelling on Jalalabad and Darulaman roads during commuter or other busy times (around 6am to 8am, 9am to 11am and 3pm to 4pm local time), when traffic can be heaviest and the risk of an attack against government and western people or interests is most likely. Avoid travel between cities at night time. Avoid travelling along Airport road except for essential movements as attacks are likely throughout the day.

Northern Afghanistan

- MASC Executive advise against all travel to Balkh, Kunduz, Badakhshan and the Baghlan-e Jadid District of Baghlan
- MASC Executive advise against all but essential travel to Takhar, Faryab, Jawzjan, Samangan, Sari Pul and the remainder of Baghlan

Eastern Afghanistan

- MASC Executive advise against all travel to Ghazni, Kapisa, Khost, Kunar, Laghman, Logar, Nangarhar, Nuristan, Paktika, Wardak and Paktya
- MASC Executive advise against all but essential travel to Bamiyan, Parwan and Panjshir

Southern Afghanistan

- MASC Executive advise against all travel to Helmand, Kandahar, Nimroz, Uruzgan and Zabul

Western Afghanistan

- MASC Executive advise against all travel to Badghis and Farah, and the Shindand and Gozarah Districts of Herat province
- MASC Executive advise against all but essential travel to Dai Kundi, Ghor and remaining districts in Herat

There is a high threat from terrorism and specific methods of attack are evolving and increasing in sophistication. There is a high threat of kidnapping throughout the country.

The security situation throughout Afghanistan remains uncertain, and could change rapidly. You should monitor media reporting and make sure you have robust contingency plans in place.



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The risk of being kidnapped throughout Afghanistan remains a very high and constant threat.

In recent months there have been a number of significant attacks in Kabul, including:

19 April 2016 - a large vehicle borne explosive device was used in a complex attack in a residential area of Kabul during rush hour, reportedly killing at least 60 people

20 January 2016 - a vehicle borne explosive device and a magnetic explosive device were used in an attack on an Afghan news agency, killing at least 7 people

4 January 2016 - a large vehicle borne explosive device was used to attack a military base near Kabul airport

4 January 2016 - a vehicle borne explosive device was used to attack a military convoy near the airport in Kabul

1 January 2016 - a restaurant visited by international civilians was attacked in central Kabul, killing at least 1 person

Afghanistan is in a major earthquake zone and remains at risk from powerful earthquakes, aftershocks, landslides and flooding. The British Embassy can provide limited consular assistance in Afghanistan.

Take out comprehensive travel and medical insurance before you travel.