

# Supporting Villages in the Nanga Parbat trekking area of Gilgit, Baltistan - Pakistan

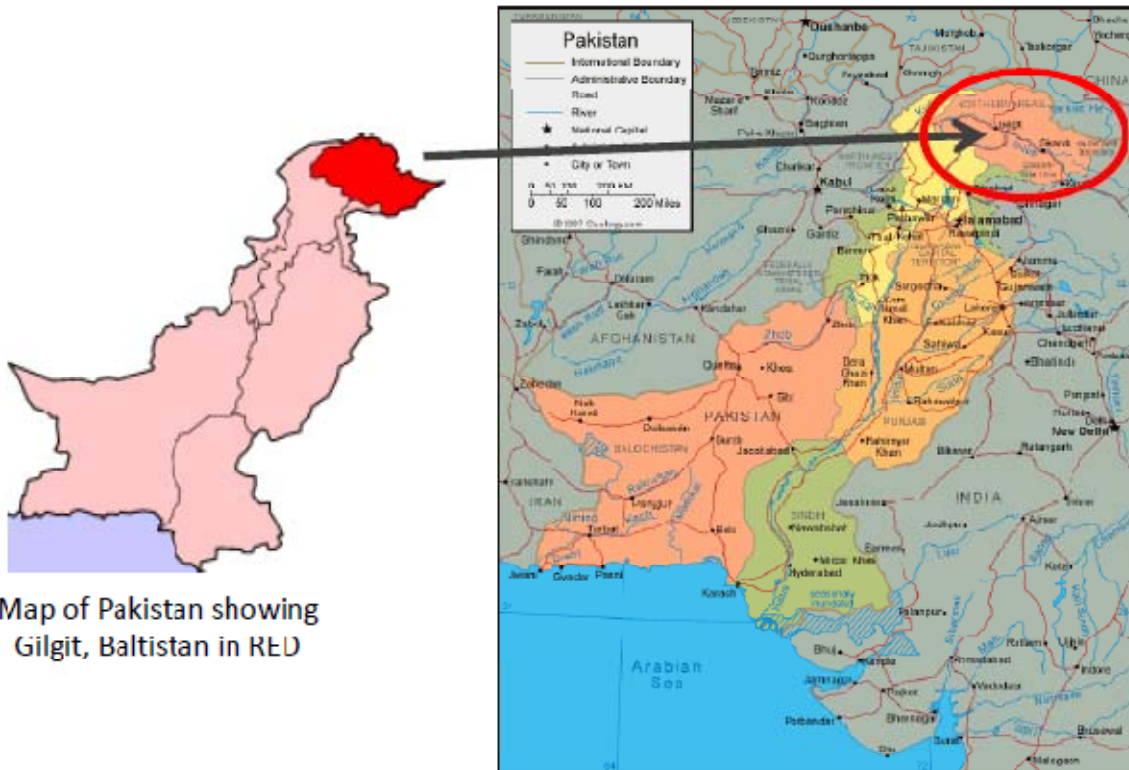


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For Travel Pledge, UK

## About Tourism in Gilgit, Baltistan

The area of Gilgit, Baltistan (formerly known as the Northern Area) is located in the northernmost political entity within the Pakistan. It borders the Wakhan corridor of Afghanistan to the northwest, China's Uygur Autonomous Region of Xinjiang to the northeast, the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir to the south and southeast, the Pakistani-controlled state of Azad Jammu and Kashmir to the south, and Pakistan's North-West Frontier Province to the west.

Gilgit-Baltistan covers an area of 72,971 km<sup>2</sup> and has an estimated population of 1 million. Its administrative center is the city of Gilgit (population 216,760).



Map of Pakistan showing Gilgit, Baltistan in RED

Map of Pakistan showing the location of Gilgit

The primary industry in Gilgit, Baltistan for many years has been tourism. The industry has suffered severely post 9/11 affecting the livelihoods of 100's of families and individuals who rely on tourism to provide a primary source of income. In addition to the conflict two natural disasters have also affected the area in the past 12 months; a landslide in January 2010 (particularly affecting the Hunza area) and devastating floods in August 2010, both these have further negatively impacted the industry.

Prior to 9/11 Gilgit, Baltistan was one of Pakistan's most popular tourism destinations most famous for its spectacular scenery and for where the world's three mightiest mountain ranges- the Karakorum's, the Hindu Kush and the Himalayas- meet. The area is a paradise for mountaineers, climbers, trekkers, hikers and anglers. Five out of fourteen mountain peaks are 8000 meters including the K-2 - the world's second highest peak and some of the largest glaciers outside the polar region are located in Gilgit-Baltistan. The region has a rich cultural heritage as well as a variety of rare plants and flowers. The areas main city Gilgit located on the historical silk route and remains a popular trading town between China and Afghanistan. Other than tourism and the trading of goods the area is renowned for handicrafts, fruit growing and other agricultural activities.

Although there are no official statistics of the total number of tourists that visited the region in 2010, sources confirmed that figures were much lower than in 2009. It is estimated that the Gilgit, Baltistan area received less than 100 tourists a month during the key season from May to September in 2010. This is more than a 50% drop from 2009 where it is estimated the area received an average of 240 - 260 tourists per month. These figures are devastatingly low and almost incomparable to previous years. For example from 1990 to 1997 the area received an average of 9,000 tourists per month and from 1998 to 2001 the area received approximately 4,500 to 5,000 tourists every month. All of these figures include both domestic and international tourist arrivals. With so many livelihoods relying on tourist and so little tourists arriving the impacts on communities are significant. In addition last year's devastating floods not only impacted tourism arrivals but also destroyed many of the foot and vehicle bridges that act as key transport and communication routes for tourists trekking, local villagers, couriers of goods and essential items to mountain villages, moving livestock and as key routes for trade within Gilgit, Baltistan as well as with China and Afghanistan. Without these bridges the livelihoods of many people are affected - not only those involved in tourism.

## **An opportunity to re-build bridges**

There are currently two bridge options for Travel Pledge to contribute to.

### **Option #1 - contributing to the re building of a large bridge**

The swinging bridge pictured below crosses the Indus River and is located in the village of Bunji, just 39 km or one hour drive from Gilgit.

The bridge was broken in the devastating floods in August 2010. Since then the 700 families either make a long 24 km journey (or 1 ½ hour return journey) by a 4 wheel drive jeep to cross at the 1892 built Partab Bridge or take a small raft (quite high risk) made from rubber tyres 900 metres across the river. The raft crossing is possible until the month of April however by the beginning of May the Indus water level increases and it will be impossible to cross. Without the bridge a lot of valuable farming time is wasted for the villagers and they also incur additional transport / fuel costs that were previously not required.

The bridge is 700 feet long and it is estimated to cost approximately Rs 4.8 million (US\$58,000) (by Gilgit-Baltistan Public Works Department).

Travel Pledge may wish to consider making a contribution to the cost of this bridge.



Flood destroyed foot bridge - Indus River,  
Gilgit Baltistan



Flood destroyed foot bridge - Indus River,  
Gilgit Baltistan



Rafts made from tyres - A dangerous way to cross the Indus River,  
Gilgit Baltistan

### **Option #2 - Contribute to smaller bridges**

In addition to the large connecting bridges that cross the Indus being destroyed in the floods many of the smaller foot bridges that cross other waterways / streams (Nalla's) on popular trekking and transport routes were also destroyed impacting negatively on the mountain communities. Also there are many foot bridges that currently do not exist that need building to give communities easier access to key trading and trekking routes during the summer months.

Ideally all of these small bridge need to be either reconstructed or built before the beginning of the tourism season (May 2011) and summer when the snow begins to melt and the streams begin to flow.

The cost to build small bridges range from USD\$2,000 to USD\$8,000.

#### **Note:**

Najeeb's team in Gilgit are sending a more detailed report on foot bridges on trekking trails within the next 2 weeks. Once we have this report we will be able to give more specific details to Travel Pledge on locations, sizes and costs.

The first two pictures below are of a small 210 feet long foot bridge which is being built at the request of the local village. A German tourist who was in the area trekking in 2008 is funding most of the construction of this bridge.

The bridge crosses a small nalla which is dry most of the year but only on a rainy day it can get very dangerous with many farmers losing livestock and one young man from the local village died whilst crossing the flow of muddy water.

The cost to build this bridge is about USD\$6,000 to USD\$8,000 (The main cost is the 1680 feet of Iron load-bearing cable which costs USD \$5000. Wood and labour are very cheap)



210 feet foot bridge being built,  
Gilgit Baltistan



Foundations of a foot bridge are laid on a trekking  
route in Gilgit Baltistan



Live stock crossing the river bed during the dry period.  
Gilgit Baltistan



The man who lost his son crossing the Nalla in 2010.



Example of a foot bridge crossing the Indus River prior  
to the devastating floods, Gilgit Baltistan



A jeep making a dangerous attempt to cross a nalla  
as the bridge normally used has been washed away.