



View on Ghulkin from Ondra Fort © all photographs Matthieu Paley



GHULKIN & GULMIT

Gojal's Cultural Centers



NWFP Wildlife Department
Government of NWFP

NA Forestry, Parks and Wildlife Department
NA Administration



AFGHANISTAN
Wakhan Corridor

MAP OF GOJAL NORTHERN PAKISTAN

CHINA
Xinjiang



all maps by Mareile Paley. Created with the help of WWF GIS-Lab, ESRI and ERDAS imagine



WE FOUND THE HUNZAS TO BE A JOVIAL PEOPLE, FOND OF BOISTEROUS MERRY-MAKING AND POSSESSED BY A SENSE OF HUMOR RARE AMONG ASIATICS.



E. F. Knight, "Where Three Empires Meet", on visiting Gulmit in 1891



GHULKIN & GULMIT FACTS

location Gojal, Upper Hunza, on Karakoram Highway (KKH)

largest town Gulmit, capital of Gojal

public transport any transport on KKH going between Aliabad and Passu

main settlements Ghulkin, Adver, Kamaris, Dalgiram, Gulmit, Goz, Lakhsh, Shamangul (north to south)

accommodation variety of guesthouses and hotels in Ghulkin and Gulmit

supplies bring all your trekking food from Gilgit, Aliabad or Sost

population Ghulkin: 124 households, 915 people / Gulmit: 309 households, 2432 people

indigenous language Wakhi

indigenous wildlife snow leopard, Himalayan ibex, red fox, wolf, Himalayan snow cock, rock partridge

common plant species juniper, willow, poplar, wild roses, seabuckthorn



View of Gulmit from Odra Fort (looking south towards Hunza)

INTRODUCTION

Gulmit is today Gojal's largest settlement and is commonly referred to as the capital of Gojal, Pakistan's most northern area, also known as Upper Hunza. Together with its close neighbor Ghulkin, the two Wakhi villages on the Karakoram Highway can be considered Gojal's cultural centers. In both villages, traditional Wakhi culture still forms part of the people's everyday lives, but the arrival of the Karakoram Highway and with it tourists, modern amenities and new social influences are threatening to overshadow the old traditions. In recent years, several community-based organizations have been established, which are now working hard on the revival and expansion of the cultural traits of their ancestors to pass them on to their children and to make them known to interested outsiders. Visitors to Ghulkin and Gulmit are welcome to visit these initiatives, like the local women's handicraft activities, Wakhi music, traditional food and festivals.

Rural peace in Qila, the old part of Gulmit.

Both villages are well prepared for receiving tourists with a range of local style guesthouses and more modern hotels. Their location directly on the Karakoram Highway makes Gulmit and Ghulkin easily accessible by rented jeep or public transport for most of the year.

The beauty of the surrounding nature invites you to linger and explore, be it a trek over the Ghulkin Glacier to Borit Lake or a simple day-hike for the magnificent vistas from Ondra Fort. Much of the area's fauna and flora is unique and includes many species threatened by extinction elsewhere. Through the Village Conservation Committees (VCCs) specially designed treks, focusing on wildlife, medicinal plants or other areas of interest can be arranged.



During Chinir, the harvest festival, houses are decorated with strands of wheat.

There are plenty of cultural sites to visit in the Ghulkin and Gulmit area. The shrine of Shah Chiragh in Kamaris Village is said to be several hundred years old.



HISTORY & CULTURE

In his highly acclaimed travelogue, the Chinese Pilgrim Fa-Hsien, who traveled along the old Silk Route during the 5th century, make a reference to the settlement of Gulmit. This dates the area at least 1500 years old, an impressive age for a settlement in a region so isolated and inaccessible. The arrival of the British in the late 19th century and the completion of the Karakoram Highway in 1978, slowly made the region more accessible and gave way for modern outside influences, but traces of an eventful past can still be found all over Gulmit and Ghulkin.

FENDING OFF THE ENEMY



The ruins of Ondra Fort are the last reminder of the once so turbulent times for Gulmit and Ghulkin. The scenic location of the site still makes for some excellent explorations.

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Perched high above Ghulkin and Gulmit, Ondra Fort was built over 1,000 years ago. Strategically placed it served to face invasions from neighboring

Nagar and Hunza to the south and from Kyrgyz raiders from the north. A watchman was in charge of looking out for enemies and messengers were posted along the Hunza River to warn of any invading armies using fire signals. A

popular way of fighting enemies at the time was to barricade behind the thick walls of the fort and push large rocks and boulders down the valley. Slingshots, axes and swords were other means of defense. To secure water supply under a longer siege a stream coming from the Ghulmit Glacier was diverted to create a small lake just below the fort. The bed of this lake can still be seen beside the trail when hiking up from Kamaris Village.

Later, under the rule of the Mir of Hunza, a special house in Gulmit served as a part-time residence for the ruler, who usually spent three months in the capital to settle disputes, to oversee tax collection and to supervise his annual wheat production.



The Qorab Shah Mosque in Ghulkin

THE HOUSE OF QIRGHIZ BOI

The oldest house in Ghulkin is the House of Qirghiz Boi, named after the first Wakhi settler to the village. Uninhabited today, this ancient house is built in the typical Tibetan inspired architecture of the time. The doorframes and wooden pillars are intricately decorated with fine woodcarvings. Some of the carvings depict symbols from pre-islamic times, such as a two-headed bird and several stupa-like shapes. Woodcarving was a specialty of the Baltis of the East, who often came long ways to work on the forts, palaces and mosques of the Hunza area.

Qirghiz Boi's House stands empty today and can be visited by tourists. Occasionally the old house serves as a special location for celebrations of religious gatherings.



Keeping the traditions alive

The people of Ghulkin and Gulmit value their Wakhi customs and traditions and in recent years several groups and organizations whose primary aim is the conservation of local culture, have been established.

In Gulmit you can visit the Carpet Center where local women knit carpets using pure sheep's wool and traditional designs. The Carpet Center is closed on weekends.

The Gulmit Art Council (GAC) can arrange performances of local music and dances for tour groups or private occasions. It is best to contact GAC (directly or through your hotel) at least two days in advance.

The Wakhi-Tajik Cultural Association (WTCA) sells recordings of authentic Wakhi music and Wakhi lessons can be arranged.

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ECOTOURISM in Ghulkin & Gulmit

What to do?

IN VILLAGES/ON HIGH PASTURES

- be considerate of the local culture
- wear appropriate clothing. Locals usually love to see foreigners wearing *shalwar kamiz*
- ask permission before taking photographs, especially of women or religious places
- if you want to give a gift or a donation, hand it to a responsible, respected person, such as a schoolteacher or community leader
- when offered local food be humble and thankful. You can share some of your own food in exchange

WHILE TREKKING

- dispose properly of all your garbage. Burn paper, collect plastic, flatten tins and carry them out. Hiding garbage under a stone is not an option!
- leave your campsite in the state you found it
- use gas or kerosene for cooking. If you need to use wood, leave a donation for the village
- choose toilet sites at least 50m away from your camp and from any river or water source. Dig a toilet pit for larger groups
- avoid toilet paper if possible. Use water instead
- be an example to your guides and porters by following and explaining these guidelines and their reasons

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The term ecotourism has, in recent years, become a popular slogan used by tour operators all over the world. Yet, what exactly is ecotourism? In a nutshell, ecotourism could be defined as ecologically, environmentally and socially responsible tourism. The main aims of ecotourism are to protect and preserve nature and to help provide the means to do so (financial and educational) by directly supporting local communities. Other aspects, such as the sustainability of local culture and history also form part of this low-impact approach to tourism.

Looking at the negative impact mass-tourism can have on native culture and environment, ecotourism is a sensible alternative. Instead of traveling in large groups, consider taking the trip with only a few like-minded people. A simple consideration such as this can already result in a multitude of positive effects. In small villages, the communities can easily accommodate a small group and the need for building large hotels can be limited. A trip for a large group will most likely be organized by an outside tour operator. By taking local guides and porters you will have a chance to get a genuine insight into the life of local people and you will directly contribute to their welfare. Activities, such as wildlife watching are much easier to conduct and have a much better success rate when traveling in a small group.

Those are only a few examples of how ecotourism can be employed and directly benefit the area you are visiting. More guidelines are given on the side bars. It is up to you alone to follow these guidelines to minimize the impact of tourism. As an ecotourist you are not just a visitor; you can play an active role in helping to conserve nature and to form a better understanding between people of different cultures.



GENERAL

- try to travel in small groups
- hire local guides and porters
- support the local community by buying local products and handicrafts directly from the people.

What not to do!

IN VILLAGES/ON HIGH PASTURES

- do not wear shorts or tight fitting shirts
- don't hug or kiss in public

WHILE TREKKING

- don't disturb wildlife by making unnecessary noise
- don't hunt or kill any animals or pull out any plants
- never leave any garbage (esp. candy wrappers, cigarette butts...) on the trail or at campsites
- don't use wood for cooking. If you need to use wood, collect dry branches from the ground – never break fresh branches!

GENERAL

- don't pass out any gifts, such as candy, pens or even money to children. Instead, give your donation to a responsible adult or school
- don't carve or write your name on stones, trees, etc.

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TREKKING around Ghulkin & Gulmit

Rates and Fees

GENERAL TREKKING FACTS

guides are always paid per day for every day they spend with you. This also includes rest days. A guide should have a license and his responsibilities include hiring and supervising of porters, route finding, organizing transport etc.. A guide usually only carries his own equipment.

porters are paid per stage. A porter carries up to 25kg not including his own equipment. On treks above 5000m the load should not exceed 20kg. Porters are paid 1/2 stage for rest days.

wapasi (return) is paid to porters at half the stage rate. Wapasi is paid when the trek ends in a different place and the porter returns to his point of origin unloaded. If the return is via public transport, the transport cost should be paid, but no wapasi.

FEES IN GHULKIN & GULMIT (as of 2003)

guides 1-3 clients: 600Rs/day, 4-6 clients: 900Rs/day, 7 or more: 1200Rs/day

porters 280Rs/stage

ALWAYS DISCUSS FEES & STAGES BEFORE LEAVING ON A TREK!



Trekking routes shown on this map are approximate only and should not be used for navigation.



TREKS

(this is just a small selection from a multitude of trekking opportunities)

1 BORIT LAKE

3 days moderate The easiest and most commonly known trek from Ghulmit to Borit Lake crosses the lower snout of the Ghulmit Glacier. This trek is a lesser known and challenging alternative.

highlights ■ meet Ghulkin's shepherds at Zherav and Talangchi pastures during summer
■ possible side trip from Borit Lake to Borit Sar, a viewpoint on 4105m with stunning views on Ghulkin and Passu Glaciers.

2 BULKACH TREK

4 days moderate highlights This trek leads along the Gulmit Glacier across a ridge to a grassy campsite above the Upper Gulmit Glacier.

■ great camping
■ sweeping views including many peaks, such as Destaghil Sar (7885m), Momhil Sar (7434m) and Kunyang Chhish (7852m)
■ possible alternative: cross the Gulmit Glacier at Bortar and return via Ghulkin (an experienced guide is necessary!)

3 GULMIT SUSPENSION BRIDGE

1 day easy highlights For those more attracted by strolling than hiking, this alternative is a great opportunity to explore the Hunza River up close.

■ from the bridge right below Gulmit walk right to Shishkut village or turn left for Goharabad, a place with poplars and grass just beside the river
■ walk up Goharabad for nice views on Gulmit, Ghulkin and the peaks above.



Crossing Glaciers

Most treks in Gojal will at some point or the other involve a glacier crossing or at least walking along the moraine of one. The smell of adventure or the belief to have sufficient experience causes a few trekkers each year to attempt a glacier crossing on their own. Unfortunately some of these attempts end in accidents and loss of life.

In the past the government made the local communities responsible for such accidents, even though often the trekkers insisted on going alone. Therefore, please, for your own safety and out of respect for the locals, **DO TAKE A LOCAL GUIDE** with you for any glacier crossing. Glaciers shift and move, stones fall, new crevasses open up... a local guide will know the easiest and safest way across and you can concentrate on enjoying the scenery instead of worrying about the route.



Borit Lake and view of Ghulkin Glacier from Borit Sar

FOR MORE INFORMATION

About MACP

The *Mountain Areas Conservancy Project* (MACP) is a seven-year project funded by GEF/UNDP. Its aims are the protection of biodiversity of the Karakoram, Hindu Kush, and western Himalayan mountain ranges through community-based conservation efforts.

The project believes that the long-term conservation of natural resources is not possible without the active participation of the local communities, who should take on the role of local custodians of their environment. MACP helps organize, educate and empower these communities, creating an in-house capacity at the grass-roots level. The project interventions range from planning, organizing, awareness raising activities to helping communities accessing resources and sustainable use demonstrations. In addition, MACP helps molding government policies for participatory conservation in order to help communities establish conservation endowments as sustainable financial mechanisms. These funds are managed by the communities themselves and are based on profits made from ecotourism activities, such as limited trophy hunting, medicinal plants ex-situ and in-situ conservation, wildlife watching safaris or trekking. This approach enables and motivates the communities to provide better facilities to tourists, for maximum enjoyment. This novel approach has now been replicated in most parts of the mountain valleys in Northern Areas.

MACP operates in four designated areas in northern Pakistan, totaling a zone of 16,300 square kilometres. Two of these areas (the Nanga Parbat and Gojal Conservancies) are in Northern Areas and two (Tirichmir and Qashqar Conservancies) are located in NWFP.

For more information on MACP, please refer to the sources on this page.

There are a number of organizations, professionals and individuals whose help and expertise made this publication possible. We tried to give the most accurate and up-to-date information possible, but please always consider that prices go up and that "The only constant thing in life is change". Help us to make this change as smooth and positive as possible by being a responsible ecotourist.

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Wakhi is the native language of most people of Ghulkin and Gulmit and is spoken throughout Gojal. This language section is by no means complete or in depth, but it might help to bridge the gap between you and the people whose home you are visiting. Make an attempt to just learn a few basic words and your efforts will be highly regarded and appreciated.

NUMBERS

1	<i>yi</i>	8	<i>hath</i>
2	<i>bui</i>	9	<i>nao</i>
3	<i>troi</i>	10	<i>thas</i>
4	<i>tsabur</i>	11	<i>thas yiu</i>
5	<i>panz</i>	12	<i>thas bui</i>
6	<i>shath</i>	20	<i>wist</i>
7	<i>hub</i>	100	<i>yisad</i>

USEFUL WAKHI WORDS AND PHRASES

ENGLISH

How are you?

I'm fine.

What's your name?

My name is ...

Where are you going?

I need ...

I am thirsty.

I am hungry.

Sit down.

Drink tea.

Eat food.

Yes

No

Go!

How much/many?

What?

When?

Where?

Who?

Why?

this/these

here/there

right/left

WAKHI

chizole?

bidurte

ti nunge chiz?

zhu nunge ...

kumeret takhk?

marey ... bokor

weskim vitk

merzim vitk

nezd/nezdid (pl.)

choi pev

shapik yao

yan

nei

chow

tsumr?

chiz?

tsogdar?

kumr?

kui?

chizer?

yem

drem/drar

rost/chap

ENGLISH

ahead

behind

in front

near

big/small

a little

good/bad

beautiful

cold/hot

day/night

today

tomorrow

yesterday

bridge

cloud

fire

flower

house

mountain

rain

stone

sun

trail/path

water

WAKHI

terperit

tertsabas

perit

qarib

lup/zaqlai

safkek

baf/shak

khushrui

suur/thin

ror/naghd

woodg

piga

yezi

skord

witish

rakhnigh

spregh

khun

koh

mor

gar

yir

videk

yupk