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*Suspension Bridge near Hussaini © all photographs Matthieu Paley*



# HUSSAINI

Oasis on the Karakoram Highway

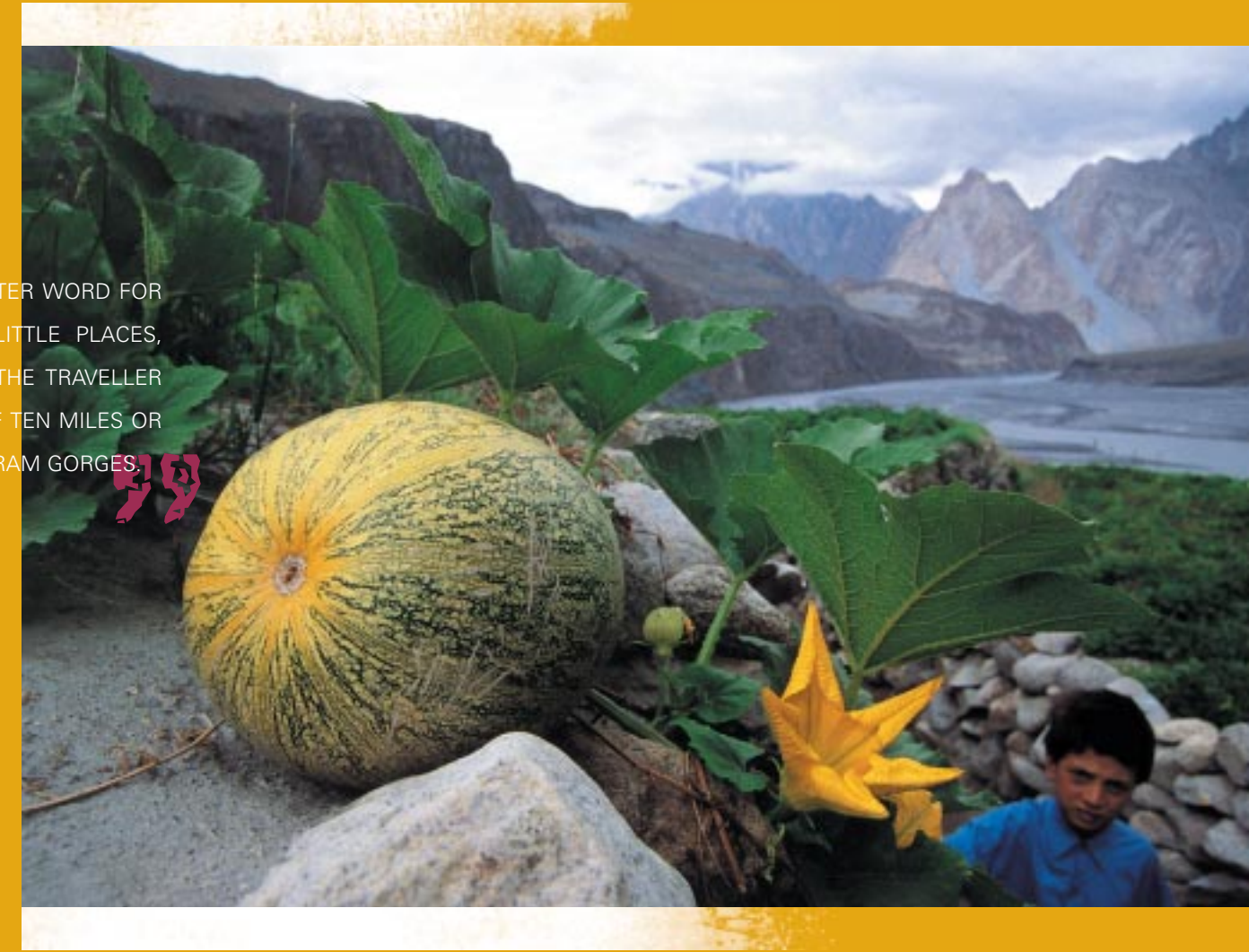




all maps by Mareile Paley. Produced with the help of WWF GIS-Lab, ESRI and ERDAS imagine

“OASIS. I CAN THINK OF NO BETTER WORD FOR THE STARTLING, DELIGHTFUL LITTLE PLACES, FRUITFUL AND GREEN, WHICH THE TRAVELLER FINDS STRUNG AT INTERVALS OF TEN MILES OR SO ALONG THESE ARID KARAKORAM GORGES.”

*Ian Stephens, "Horned Moon"*



## HUSSAINI FACTS

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

**nearest town** Gulmit, Gojal

**public transport** any transport on KKH going between Aliabad and Passu

**main settlements** Hussaini (also known as Selsoni), Zarabad

**accommodation** Hussaini Village (simple guesthouse)

**supplies** best to bring food and supplies from Sost, Aliabad or Gilgit

**population** 81 households, 575 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



*Hussaini village with view on Zarabad across the Hunza River*

# INTRODUCTION

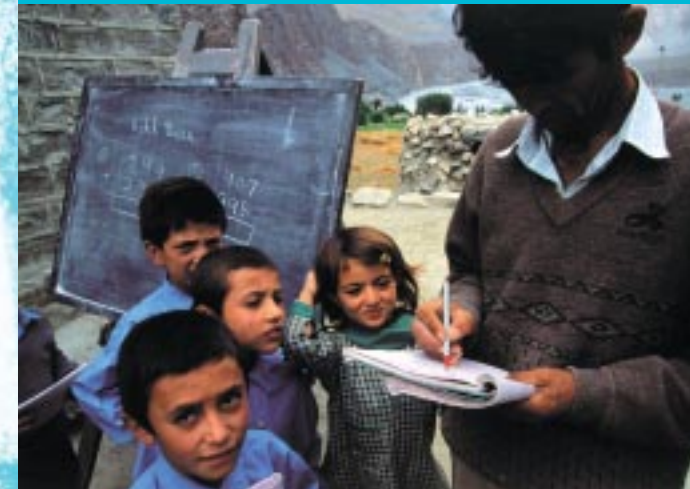
*View over Hussaini and the Karakoram Highway with Shishpar Peak (7611m) dominating the horizon.*

On its last stretch towards China, the Karakoram Highway (KKH) winds its way along the Hunza River through the narrow gorges of Gojal, the northernmost region of Pakistan. Past Karimabad, the center of Hunza and farther through Gulmit and past Ghulkin, the road then passes through the small village of Hussaini, before leading on to Passu, Sost and eventually the Khunjerab Pass. Hugged by a large bend of the KKH, Hussaini's terraced fields and traditional flat-roofed houses, spread downwards in a V-shape to the sandy banks of the meandering Hunza River. Looking up west, Hussaini's scenic backdrop is the glacial moraine of the Ghulkin Glacier, known to locals as the Hussaini Glacier, which spills out from the mighty snowcapped peaks of the Batura Muztagh Range. Dominating the picture on a clear, cloudless day, is the gracefully shaped Shishpar Peak, whose summit reaches 7611 meters.

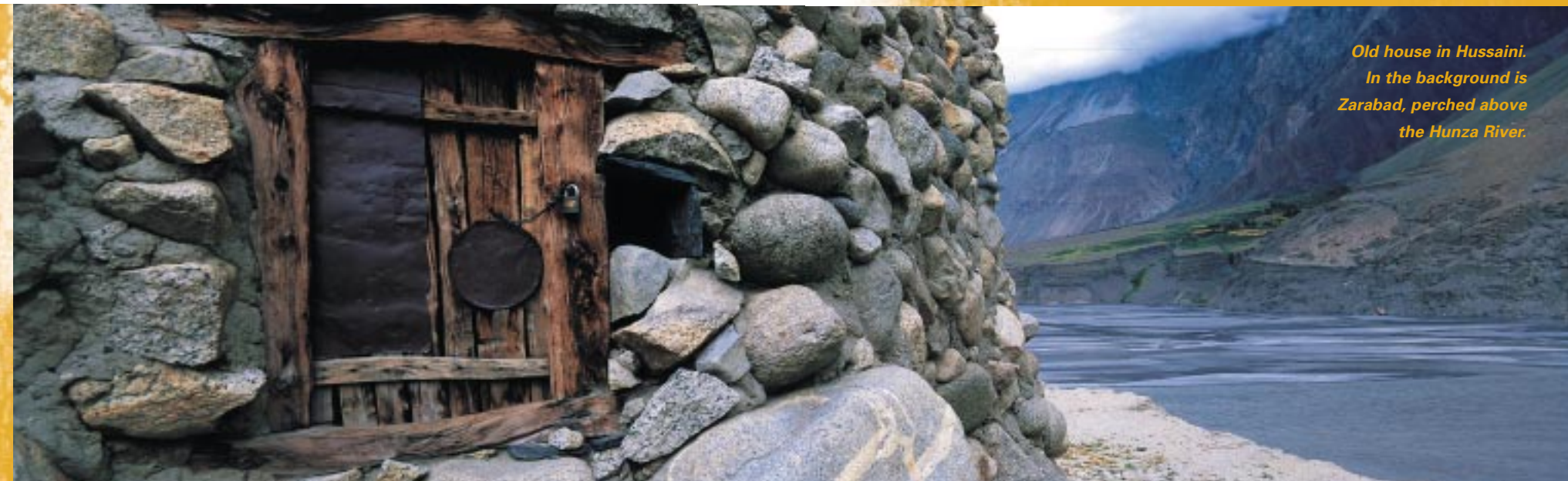
To the locals, Hussaini is a well-known place and popular stopover, as it houses the shrine of Shah Talib, one of Gojal's most venerated places of pilgrimage. Besides this religious attraction, Hussaini is also famous for its hot springs, which are, even though at times submerged by the waters of the Hunza River, the only one of their kind in Gojal. The pristine alpine surroundings of Hussaini offer plenty of trekking opportunities for the active tourist, ranging from scenic day hikes over bird and wildlife watching tours to more challenging routes into the world of eternal ice and snow.

For those loving nature and wishing to forget about the stresses of every day life, nearby Borit Lake makes an ideal place to relax for a few days, to study the birds and plants or to simply enjoy the peaceful environment. Hussaini is also home to one of the two well known suspension bridges over the Hunza River. Crossing this swaying footbridge fashioned of wood and wire is an experience you are not likely to forget.

Hussaini's friendly and hospitable Wakhi community will make sure you will thoroughly enjoy your trip. You will help promoting a sustainable and eco-friendly approach to tourism by consulting locals, by hiring their services as guides, cooks or porters and by showing an interest and respect for their unique culture.



*Schoolchildren in Hussaini.*



*Old house in Hussaini. In the background is Zarabad, perched above the Hunza River.*

As it is the case with many of Gojal's villages, Hussaini was once a large and prosperous place. Several glacial floods gushing out of the narrow Shimshal Gorge have destroyed much fertile land. To this day erosion relentlessly widens the desolate riverbed, leaving less and less cultivatable land for the growing population. The extent of this erosion becomes clear when listening to old stories in which Hussaini and Zarabad were two neighboring villages, divided by a small stream only a stone throw away. Today, two communities are almost one kilometer apart and connected by a rickety footbridge .

Many Shia and Ismaili Muslims stop by the roadside while passing through Hussaini to pay tribute to the Shrine of Shah Talib.

## THE SHRINE OF SHAH TALIB

Not much is known about Shah Talib, a messenger or pir from Afghanistan, who passed through the area several hundred years ago. According to local legends he was related to

three other saints, Baba Ghundi, Shah Shams and Shah Wali, all of whom have important shrines (or *astans*) in Chapursan, Shimshal and Ghulmet, Nagar, respectively.

The real *astan* is not the one you will pass on the KKH, but one further down on the north side of Hussaini. It is worthwhile to visit the shrine for its beautiful setting below a small cliff with colorful flags blowing in the wind and the river in the background. The small shrine by the roadside contains a collection box for donations.

For newly wedded couples it is said to bring bad luck to pass above Shah Talib's shrine. Therefore, a traditional wedding procession will never pass through Hussaini along the KKH, but will stop and walk down into the village to pass below the *astan*.

Local boy wearing a traditional groom's outfit.

## THE WAKHI WAY OF LIFE

Apart from its natural attractions, Hussaini also offers a good insight into the typical Wakhi way of life, which is so characteristic of Gojal. Most of the traditional festivals celebrate events of agricultural importance, such as the beginning of the plowing or the harvesting seasons (locally called *Tagum* and *Chinir*) and are, with variations, found all over Gojal. Another important series of more recent festivals, relate to several visits of Prince Karim Aga Khan, the religious leader and living *Imam* of all Ismailis, to

the area. During those *salgiras* games and school plays are organized and Wakhis gather in the *jamat khana* for prayers and shared meals. It is best to inquire locally about upcoming festivals.

Livestock herding still plays an important role in rural Gojal. Traditionally, a big part of Hussaini's goats, sheep, yaks and cows uses the lush meadows of the Batura Glacier's south side for grazing. Every spring (between end of May and

## Hussaini's hot spring

Hussaini's hot spring is unique to the area and makes a welcome reward after a trek or during the cold winter months. Idyllically located at the banks of the Hunza River with view on Tupopdan's snowy peaks in the distance, the small natural pools are well worth the steep hike down from the village. Ask villagers for the 'garum cheshma', the hot spring.

As there are no enclosures around the pools, respect the local customs by being properly dressed (no bikinis – wear a sarong or baggy shirt). Women can use the pools between 9am and 1pm, men are allowed from 2pm until sunset.

Due to the high water level of the Hunza River, the spring is mostly submerged from late April until mid October, but if the weather has been cloudy for a few days, the spring might be accessible even in summer.



mid June) people can witness the *Kuch*, the local transhumance when Hussaini's women bring more than 1,000 animals via the Kuch Trail (see trek 4) to the summer pastures. In September you can see them return.

# ECOTOURISM

## ECOTOURISM in Hussaini

### 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



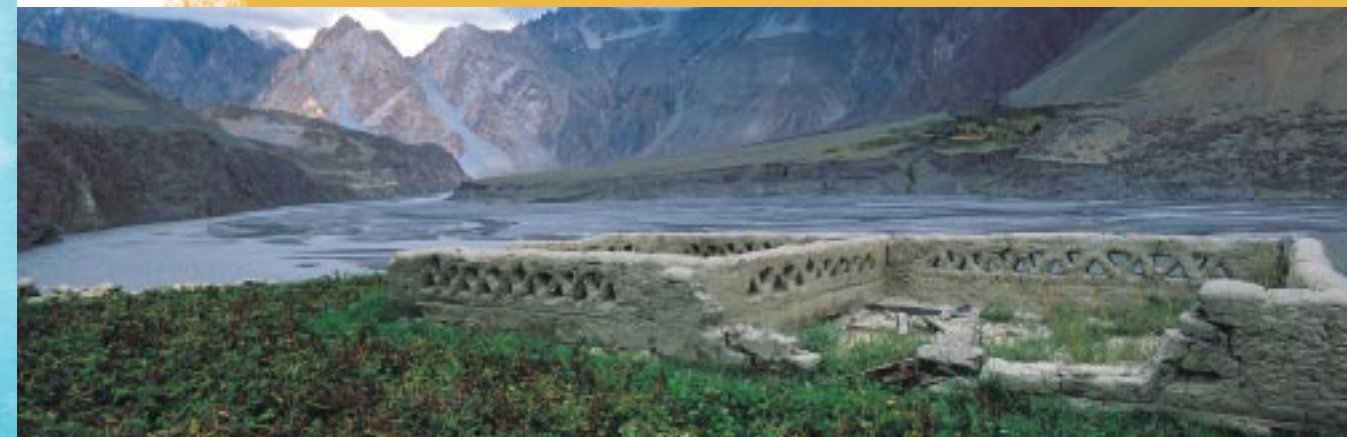
The term ecotourism has, in recent years, become a popular slogan used by tour operators all over the world. Yet, what exactly is ecotourism? In a nutshell, ecotourism could be defined as ecologically, environmentally and socially responsible tourism. The main aims of ecotourism are to protect and preserve 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.

*Ecotourism should have an holistic approach. It means not only the protection of a fragile ecosystem, but also the respect of local culture and religious sites. Your behavior as a tourist plays a vital role in making ecotourism sustainable.*

*Old tomb (mazar) by the river below Hussaini (below), view of Ghulkin Glacier from Borit Sar (above)*



#### 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.

# TREKKING around Hussaini

To see shepherd's life, spend a few days exploring Hussaini's summer settlements on the Batura Glacier's south side.



## 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 HUSSAINI (as of summer 2003)

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

**porters** 260Rs/stage

**ALWAYS DISCUSS FEES & STAGES BEFORE LEAVING ON A TREK!**

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

## TREKS

(This section describes a selection of treks ranging from easy day hikes to longer multiple-day treks, ask your local guide for more possibilities)

- 1 BORIT SAR (4105m)**  
**8-10 hours (RT)**  
**moderate**  
**highlights**
- For those not minding a steep hike, the ridge separating the Passu and Ghulkin Glaciers offers some spectacular views.
  - start from Borit Lake (1km from Hussaini)
  - dramatic 360° view over more than ten 7000m peaks, including the Batura Wall, Destaghil Sar and Rakaposhi
  - easily accessible from KKH

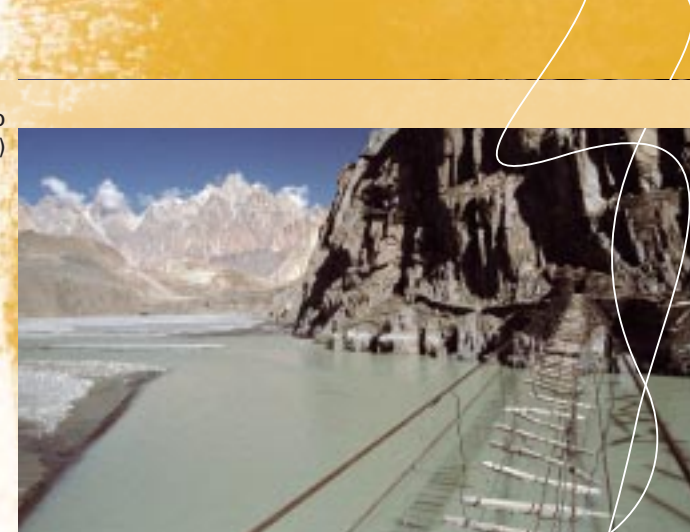
- 3 LACH GOZ-E-SAR**  
**2 days**  
**moderate**  
**highlights**
- This viewpoint on the ridge above the suspension bridge offers sweeping views on Hussaini and the KKH.
  - go for a day hike or alternatively spend the night on the grassy ridge
  - spring on top, but no water on the way
  - excellent wildlife watching opportunities
  - watch the sun rise over Shishpar Peak



Borit Lake (left), View from Borit Sar (right)

- 2 HUSSAINI TO GHULKIN**  
**2 - 3 hours**  
**moderate**  
**highlights**
- A good way to get a first acquaintance with glacier crossing, this trek connects the two neighboring villages.
  - 1 - 2 hours of glacier crossing (ask a local to show you the way as glaciers are disorienting and people have gotten lost before

- 4 BATURA SOUTH SIDE**  
**3 - 4 days**  
**moderate**  
**highlights**
- The south side of Batura Glacier houses Hussaini's summer pastures and offers an opportunity to see shepherd's life.
  - see Batura Glacier and its famous Ice Floes
  - plenty of options to extend the trek and further explore the Batura area



## The all-time favorite

The **TWO BRIDGES WALK** connecting Hussaini with Passu via two suspension bridges across the Hunza River is probably the areas most popular excursion.

Starting from the bottom of Hussaini village you reach the shorter of the two bridges leading to Zarabad on the opposite side of the Hunza River. This should give you a good idea how comfortable you feel crossing a swaying bridge held together by wire ropes and generously spaced bits of wood serving as foot steps. The crossing will be difficult, if not impossible for people experiencing vertigo.

Walk past the village and across the plains until you hit a small canyon. Follow a foot-path until you reach the Passu suspension bridge leading back to the KKH. The walk takes about 4 hours.

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# 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 (Trichmir 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.*

## Contacts

### FOR TREKKING INFORMATION, please contact:

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*Wakhi is the native language of most people in Hussaini 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 | yi     | 8   | hath     |
| 2 | bui    | 9   | nao      |
| 3 | troi   | 10  | thas     |
| 4 | tsabur | 11  | thas yiu |
| 5 | panz   | 12  | thas bui |
| 6 | shath  | 20  | wist     |
| 7 | hub    | 100 | yisad    |

## USEFUL WAKHI WORDS AND PHRASES

| ENGLISH              | WAKHI             |
|----------------------|-------------------|
| How are you?         | chizole?          |
| I'm fine.            | bidurte           |
| What's your name?    | ti nunge chiz?    |
| My name is ...       | zhu nunge ...     |
| Where are you going? | kumeret takhk?    |
| I need ...           | marey ... bokor   |
| I am thirsty.        | weskim vitk       |
| I am hungry.         | merzim vitk       |
| Sit down.            | nezd/nezdid (pl.) |
| Drink tea.           | choi pev          |
| Eat food.            | shapik yao        |
| Yes                  | yan               |
| No                   | nei               |
| Go!                  | chow              |
| How much/many?       | tsumr?            |
| What?                | chiz?             |
| When?                | tsogdar?          |
| Where?               | kumr?             |
| Who?                 | kui?              |
| Why?                 | chizer?           |
| this/these           | yem               |
| here/there           | drem/drar         |
| right/left           | rost/chap         |

| ENGLISH    | WAKHI      |
|------------|------------|
| ahead      | terperit   |
| behind     | tersabas   |
| in front   | perit      |
| near       | qarib      |
| big/small  | lup/zaqlai |
| a little   | safkek     |
| good/bad   | baf/shak   |
| beautiful  | khushrui   |
| cold/hot   | suur/thin  |
| day/night  | ror/naghd  |
| today      | woodg      |
| tomorrow   | piga       |
| yesterday  | yezi       |
| bridge     | skord      |
| cloud      | witish     |
| fire       | rakhnigh   |
| flower     | spregh     |
| house      | khun       |
| mountain   | koh        |
| rain       | mor        |
| stone      | gar        |
| sun        | yir        |
| trail/path | videk      |
| water      | yupk       |