

EXPEDITION TREK · KARAKORAM

Snow Lake Hisper la Trek

The Snow Lake & Hispar La Trek is one of the most remote and spectacular high-altitude adventures on the planet.

DURATION

22 Days

21 nights

MAX ALTITUDE

5,000 m

high point

GRADE

Strenuous

mountaineering

SEASON

Jun-Sep

best months

FROM

\$2,800

per person

The Trek

The Snow Lake & Hispar La Trek is one of the most remote and spectacular high-altitude adventures on the planet. This 22-day expedition takes you across two of the world's longest non-polar glaciers – the Biafo Glacier (67km) and the Hispar Glacier (53km) – through the vast, otherworldly basin of Snow Lake (4,800m) and over the legendary Hispar La Pass (5,151m). Together, the Biafo and Hispar glaciers form a continuous 120km ice highway – the longest glacial system outside the polar regions – linking the ancient mountain kingdoms of Baltistan in the east with Hunza Valley in the west. This historic route was once a trade link connecting the Silk Road to the Indian Subcontinent.

▲ Snow Lake

▲ Snow Lake Basin

▲ Hispar La Camp

▲ Cross Hispar La

Altitude profile

metres above sea level · day 1 → 22



At a Glance

| | | | |
|---------------|-----------------------|-------------|-------------------------|
| Duration | 22 Days · 21 Nights | Grade | Strenuous |
| Max altitude | 5,000 m | Group size | Private & small group |
| Route | Islamabad → Islamabad | Best season | Jun–Sep |
| Accommodation | Hotel · Camping | Visa | Trekking visa + permits |
| From | \$2,800 pp | | |

Fitness & grade. A strenuous trek with a high point of 5,000 m, repeated days at altitude and a high pass on snow and fixed rope. You should be a fit, regular hill-walker, comfortable with long days on rough ground and the real remoteness of the Karakoram. No previous Himalayan experience is required, but a good training base is essential.

Training & Preparation

This is a serious multi-day trek with repeated days at altitude and a high point well above 4,500 m. Your enjoyment depends heavily on arriving fit. Build your training over months, not weeks — the cumulative load of consecutive days on rough ground is the real challenge.

Build endurance

- Long hill walks, 5–7 hours, on consecutive days
- Carry a 6–8 kg pack in training
- Add stairs, hills and incline work weekly

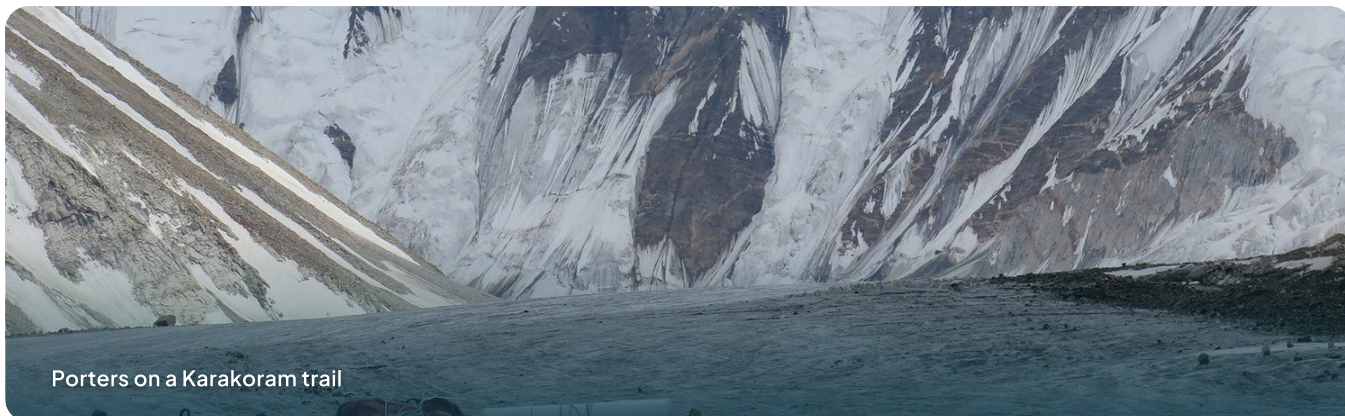
Strengthen

- Legs, core and ankles for rough ground
- Downhill practice — descents are punishing
- Two trekking poles, used in training too

Skills & mind

- Practise crampons and harness if you can
- Break in your boots thoroughly before you fly
- Prepare mentally for cold, camp life and remoteness

Day by Day



Porters on a Karakoram trail

1
DAY

500 m Arrive

Arrive Islamabad

Touch down in Islamabad. Our team meets you, runs through the route, and checks your gear before the flight north.

2
DAY

2,230 m Trek

To Skardu

Fly or drive to Skardu (2,230m), the gateway to the Karakoram. Settle in and rest after the journey.

3
DAY

2,230 m Rest / Acclimatise

Skardu Prep

A full day for permits, NOC paperwork and a final gear check before we head into the wilderness.

4
DAY

3,000 m Jeep / Road

Drive to Askole

By 4x4 jeep up the Braldu valley to Askole (3,000m), the last village before the glaciers.

5
DAY

3,500 m Trek

Onto the Biafo

Step onto the Biafo Glacier and trek to Namla camp (3,500m). The ice world begins.

6
DAY

4,000 m Trek

Namla to Mango

Continue up the Biafo to Mango camp (4,000m), gaining height steadily on the ice.

7
DAY

3,900 m Trek

Mango to Baintha

Cross to Baintha (3,900m), a green oasis on the glacier and a fine spot to recover.

8
DAY

3,900 m Rest / Acclimatise

Rest at Baintha

An acclimatisation day at Baintha. Short walks, rest, and letting the altitude settle.

9
DAY

4,300 m Trek

Baintha to Marpogo

Push deeper into the range to Marpogo (4,300m) as the glacier opens out.

10
DAY

4,800 m Trek

Snow Lake

Reach Lukpe Lawo, the legendary Snow Lake (4,800m) — a vast basin of ice ringed by peaks.

11
DAY

4,800 m Trek

Snow Lake Basin

A day to explore and acclimatise in the Snow Lake basin before the high pass.

12
DAY

5,000 m Trek

Hispar La Camp

Climb to high camp below Hispar La (5,000m), positioned for an early start.

13
DAY

4,600 m Trek

Cross Hispar La

Cross Hispar La (5,151m), the high point of the traverse, and descend to Khani Basa (4,600m).

14
DAY

4,200 m Trek

Khani Basa to Yutmaru

Trek down the Hispar Glacier to Yutmaru camp (4,200m).

15
DAY

4,000 m Trek

Yutmaru to Bitanmal

Continue along the glacier to Bitanmal (4,000m).

16
DAY

3,200 m Trek

Down to Hispar

Leave the ice for Hispar village (3,200m), the first settlement on the Nagar side.

17
DAY

2,400 m Trek

Hispar to Hunza

Drive through Nagar to Hunza (2,400m). Hot food and a real bed.

18
DAY

2,400 m Rest / Acclimatise

Rest in Hunza

Recover in Karimabad. Visit Baltit Fort and take in the Hunza valley.

19
DAY

2,400 m Rest / Acclimatise

Weather Buffer

A spare day held in reserve for weather or delays on the high route.

20
DAY

1,200 m Trek

Down the KKH

Drive the Karakoram Highway south (1,200m), descending out of the mountains.

21
DAY

500 m Trek

Toward Islamabad

Complete the journey back to Islamabad. A reserve day in case of road delays.



500 m Depart

Departure

Final breakfast and transfer to the airport for your flight home.

What's Included

Included

- Local Balti guides and porters, all camping and kitchen crew.
- All meals on trek, tents, mess and toilet tents, cooking gear.
- Skardu transfers by 4x4 jeep to Askole, hotel nights in Skardu, permits and NOC fees.
- Satellite phone in camp and an emergency rescue plan with established helicopter contacts.

Not Included

- International flights and Pakistan visa fees.
- Personal trekking gear (boots, sleeping bag, down jacket).
- Travel and rescue insurance.
- Tips for crew, and any cost arising from early descent, weather delays or evacuation.

On the Trek

● 100% local Balti team

Our own guides, cooks and porters from the mountain valleys — not a brokered hand-off. People who have grown up under these peaks.

● Satellite phone in camp

A Thuraya sat phone on every trek for logistics, weather and emergency coordination where there is no mobile signal for days.

● Real rescue planning

Established helicopter-rescue contacts and clear evacuation procedures. Rescue is arranged on your behalf and billed to your insurance — never “free”.

● Altitude managed

Built-in acclimatisation and reserve days, a portable altitude chamber (PAC/Gamow bag) and a comprehensive medical kit carried with the group.

Temperatures by altitude

Best season: Summer (June - September)

Valleys 2,000–3,500 m

+5 °C nights

up to +35 °C days

Mid camps 3,500–4,300 m

around 0 °C

+18 °C in sun

High camps 4,300–4,800
m

down to -8 °C

cold, bright days

High point 5,000 m

sub-zero, wind

early start



A high camp in the Karakoram

Possible Risks

We do not hide the hazards of high mountains — being honest about them is how we keep people safe. Here is what you are taking on, and how we manage it.

Altitude illness

The main hazard on any high trek. AMS is common; the dangerous forms (HACE and HAPE) are rare but serious. We manage it with a graded, acclimatisation-first schedule, reserve days, daily monitoring, a portable altitude chamber and the readiness to descend.

High pass / snow ground

This route crosses steep snow and uses fixed rope and crampons. We cross early on frozen ground with experienced crew and will turn back if conditions or weather make it unsafe.

Glacier & rivers

Crevasses, unstable moraine and glacier-fed rivers that run fast on hot afternoons. We choose lines and timings carefully and rope up where needed.

Mountain roads

Jeep tracks and mountain highways can be long, narrow and exposed. We use experienced drivers and well-maintained vehicles.

Weather & flights

Mountain flights cancel and weather can pin a group; buffer days are built in so a delay does not derail the trek.

Food, water & remoteness

Stomach upsets are the most common complaint; we treat all water and cook hygienically. Above all this is remote country — you may be days from a hospital and evacuation depends on weather.

Insurance

Cover is mandatory

You cannot join this trek without travel insurance, and you must bring written proof. We check it before departure. Standard holiday insurance will not cover high-altitude trekking — you need specialist adventure cover.

What your policy must include

Trekking to at least 5,500 m; helicopter search, rescue and evacuation; emergency medical treatment and repatriation; and ideally trip cancellation. Read the altitude limits and rescue clauses carefully before you buy.

Where to look

Specialist providers such as Global Rescue, the Austrian Alpine Club / BMC schemes, or dedicated expedition insurers typically offer suitable cover. Confirm in writing that your altitude is included.

Helicopter Rescue Procedure

There is no road and no quick way out of the high Karakoram. A serious illness or injury is evacuated by helicopter — a process that is neither automatic nor free, and which weather can delay for hours or days. Understanding how it works is part of trekking here responsibly.

1 • The call

The emergency is reported by our satellite phone to our operations base, which contacts the rescue authorities. This is why a sat phone travels with every trek.

2 • The guarantee

Military aviation — the only operator permitted to fly rescues in this region — is tasked once a financial guarantee is confirmed. This is exactly why proof of insurance must be in place before the trek begins.

3 • The flight

Helicopters fly in pairs for safety and can only operate in suitable weather and below their altitude ceiling. A casualty high up may first need to be moved to a lower, safer landing site by the team.

4 • The cost

All rescue and evacuation costs are charged to your insurance. Rescue is never free or included in your trek price — our role is to coordinate it quickly and keep you stabilised while help is arranged.

Health & Medicine

We carry a comprehensive group medical kit and a portable altitude chamber, and our leaders are trained in remote first aid. You should still bring your own small personal kit. This list is general guidance only — please discuss your medication, and especially altitude drugs, with a travel-medicine doctor before you travel.

Altitude

- Acetazolamide (Diamox) — aids acclimatisation
- Emergency altitude drugs only on a doctor's advice
- Know the symptoms of AMS, HACE and HAPE

Stomach & gut

- Oral rehydration salts (e.g. Dioralyte)
- Loperamide for diarrhoea
- A doctor-prescribed antibiotic for gut infections

Pain & fever

- Paracetamol and ibuprofen
- Aspirin
- Throat lozenges for the dry, cold air

Wounds & skin

- Blister care (Compeed) and zinc-oxide tape
- Antiseptic wipes and a range of plasters
- High-SPF sunscreen and lip balm

Personal

- All your regular prescription medicines, in carry-on
- A copy of prescriptions and any allergies
- Rehydration and electrolyte tabs

Good to know

- Tell your leader of any condition or allergy
- Diamox is a sulfa drug — check for allergy first
- Start personal medication advice early, not last-minute

Kit List

The recommended kit for this trek. Your leader checks gear before departure. A porter carries your duffel; you carry a light daypack.

Footwear & feet

- B2-rated mountaineering boots (for the pass / snow)
- Broken-in waterproof trekking boots
- Trekking + thick mountaineering socks
- Down booties for camp

Climbing kit — high pass

- Climbing harness
- Two 60 cm slings + four screw-gate carabiners
- Belay/abseil device + 3 m of 5 mm cord
- Mountaineering crampons (B2 compatible)
- Ice axe
- Microspikes for icy descents

Clothing layers

- Base layers (top & bottom)
- Fleece or soft-shell mid layers
- Waterproof shell jacket & trousers
- Insulated down jacket
- Trekking trousers & shorts

Head, hands & eyes

- Warm hat + sun hat + buff
- Liner gloves + insulated mountaineering gloves
- Glacier sunglasses (side protection)
- Head torch + spare batteries

Glacier & trail

- Two trekking poles (mandatory)
- Knee-high gaiters
- 35–45 L daypack
- 100–120 L waterproof duffel (porter-carried)
- Water bottles x2 + purification

Sleep & personal

- 4-season sleeping bag (to -15 °C)
- Inflatable sleeping mat
- Personal first-aid kit (see medicine list)
- Toiletries & quick-dry towel
- Power bank / solar charger

Cultural Considerations

You are a guest

You travel through Muslim mountain communities with their own languages and deep traditions of hospitality. Meet them with respect and you will be welcomed everywhere.

Dress modestly

Both men and women should keep shoulders and knees covered in villages and towns. For women, loose clothing and a light scarf are appreciated.

Photography

Always ask before photographing people — and never photograph women without clear permission. A smile and a gesture go a long way.

Ramadan & prayer

During Ramadan, eat and drink discreetly out of respect for those fasting. Around mosques and prayer times, keep a low profile.

Respect the crew

Our porters and cooks are skilled local people, not servants. Treat them as teammates and the whole trek is richer for it.

A few words

“Assalam-o-Alaikum” (peace be upon you) is the universal greeting; “Shukria” means thank you. A little effort with language is always met with delight.

Responsible Travel

Trekking here should leave the mountains and the communities better, not worse. We run these trips to put income into local hands and keep the Karakoram clean.

People

- Local guides, cooks and porters, fairly paid
- Capped, fair porter loads and proper gear
- Spending that supports villages and the bazaar

Place

- Carry out all non-biodegradable waste
- Toilet tents and proper waste management in camp
- Stay on trails; protect fragile alpine ground and wildlife

Communications & Money

Connectivity

Phone signal and wifi exist in the towns, but there is no mobile coverage on trek — for the trekking days you are off-grid. We carry a Thuraya satellite phone for safety and logistics; personal calls are possible at cost. GPS tracking lets family follow your progress. Tell people at home about the communications gap before you go.

Money & tipping

Bring your spending money as cash in USD, EUR or GBP — there are limited ATMs in the towns and none on trek. Tipping the crew is an expected custom: budget a fair amount into a shared group fund, divided among guides, cooks and porters. Keep some small cash for drinks, handicrafts and the bazaar.

Visa & Permits

Trekking visa & permits

Pakistan requires a visa for entry; restricted-zone treks additionally need a Trekking & Mountaineering visa — distinct from a standard tourist visa. We advise on the right category and provide an invitation letter and supporting documents.

Permits & NOC

National-park entry, trekking permits and any No-Objection Certificate for restricted zones are arranged by us and included in your trek price where applicable.

Passport & insurance

Passport valid 6+ months with blank pages. Travel insurance covering trekking to 5,500 m and helicopter evacuation is mandatory — bring written proof.

Recommended Reading

Throne Room of the Mountain Gods

Galen Rowell

A photographer-climber's classic on the Karakoram and its great glaciers.

The Gilgit Game

John Keay

The history of exploration and intrigue across the Karakoram passes.

Trekking in the Karakoram & Hindukush

Lonely Planet

The practical route reference for trekking northern Pakistan.

Where the Indus is Young

Dervla Murphy

A travel classic: a winter journey through Baltistan with her young daughter.

Karakoram: Mountains of Pakistan

Shiro Shirahata

A landmark photographic survey of the range's great peaks.

Full Tilt / On a Shoestring to Coorg

Dervla Murphy

More from a writer who travelled this region with rare honesty.

Pricing & Departures

Per-person price by group size — all-inclusive of the services listed. Private departures on your own dates; fixed group departures run in season. Discounts apply automatically as your group grows.

Solo 1 Person

\$6,200

per person

2–3 Persons

\$4,400

per person

4–6 Persons

\$3,200

per person

7–10 Persons

\$2,800

best value · per person

Trek the Karakoram with a local team.

Local hands · Real safety · Fair price

WhatsApp / Call

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