

Islamabad & Rawalpindi



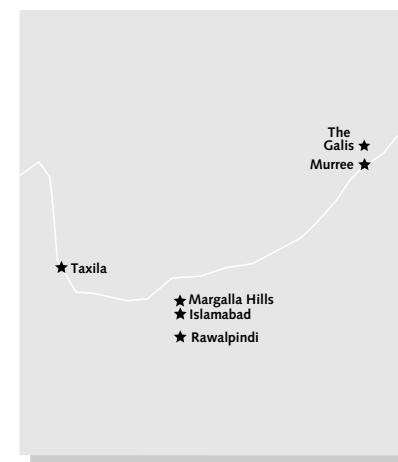
The so-called twin cities of Islamabad and Rawalpindi are commonly viewed as one unit, and indeed, one day the two will physically merge. However, these twins, with separate ancestry and distinct personalities, are far from identical. Islamabad is a late-20th-century capital laid out in straight lines and right angles: a proud metric showcase of government and administration. Rawalpindi, on the other hand, grew from a ramshackle backwater village to a sprawling hub on the Grand Trunk Rd during the 19th century.

The twins' personalities are rather like chalk and cheese: Islamabad is patently more subdued and suburban with broad avenues, grassy parkland, shiny restaurants and just a whiff of the exasperating human and mechanical crush that epitomises most subcontinental cities. For those with a penchant for the adrenaline-pumping hullabaloo that a typical South Asian metropolis delivers, all that awaits in Rawalpindi – affectionately dubbed 'Pindi' – a mere 15km away.

Neither city is a major tourist drawcard in its own right – most foreign travellers only pause here to arrange visas/permits or use it as a jumping-off point to other destinations – yet not far away are the fascinating archaeological digs around the Gandharan city of Taxila. Here, Buddhism and the sublime Graeco-Buddhist art evolved and flourished, and its glory can be appreciated in Taxila's splendid museum and at several major sites. And if the energy-zapping heat of the plateau starts to take its toll during the warmer months, you can flee to the cool mountain air of Murree, an erstwhile British Raj hill station. Even better, ramble around the less developed, more serene hill stations strung out along the forested ridges known as the Galis, a truly welcoming escape from the frazzling rat race and other vicissitudes of life on the road.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Marvel at Islamabad's **Shah Faisal Mosque** (p77), a modern geometrical interpretation of a desert tent with rocket-like minarets, on a phenomenal scale
- Ramble around the breezy **Margalla Hills** (p79) – a slice of natural beauty right on Islamabad's doorstep
- Delve into the glorious legacy of Gandharan civilisation at **Taxila Museum** (p88) and the nearby **archaeological sites** (p89)
- Inhale cool, pine-scented mountain air on one of the blood-pumping hiking trails around **Murree** and **the Galis** (p90)
- Feast on spicy kebabs at an earthy street stall in **Rawalpindi** (p85), or swirl spaghetti at one of the trendy multicuisine restaurants in **Islamabad** (p83)



■ ISLAMABAD: 1,018,000

■ RAWALPINDI: 3,039,550

HISTORY

The plateau setting of Islamabad and Rawalpindi has revealed evidence of a pre-historic culture flourishing in the region, and it is known that a Buddhist town once existed on the site of Rawalpindi.

The city of Rawalpindi had a turbulent development, its strategic location attracting the attention of successive invading forces. Protected as a Sikh garrison town and astride the Grand Trunk Rd, it eventually grew in importance as a trading centre, before coming to the attention of the British, who seized the city from the Sikhs in 1849. The British built Asia's largest cantonment south of the city (cantonments were the tidy colonial enclaves built next to 'native' towns). Rawalpindi 'Cantt' is still the headquarters of the Pakistan army. It didn't take long for the heat-sensitive British to develop their cool hill retreat at nearby Murree.

As Karachi was too far from everything, a decision was made in the 1950s to build a new capital near Rawalpindi and the summer hill stations. To avoid urban chaos and decay, architect-planner Konstantinos Doxiades' idea was to let Islamabad grow sector by sector across a grid, each sector having its own residences, shops and parks. Construction began in 1961, during which time Rawalpindi enjoyed a brief period as Pakistan's temporary capital. Today, Islamabad is a slowly expanding city, with the ongoing construction of broad new roads and modern commercial buildings.

ORIENTATION

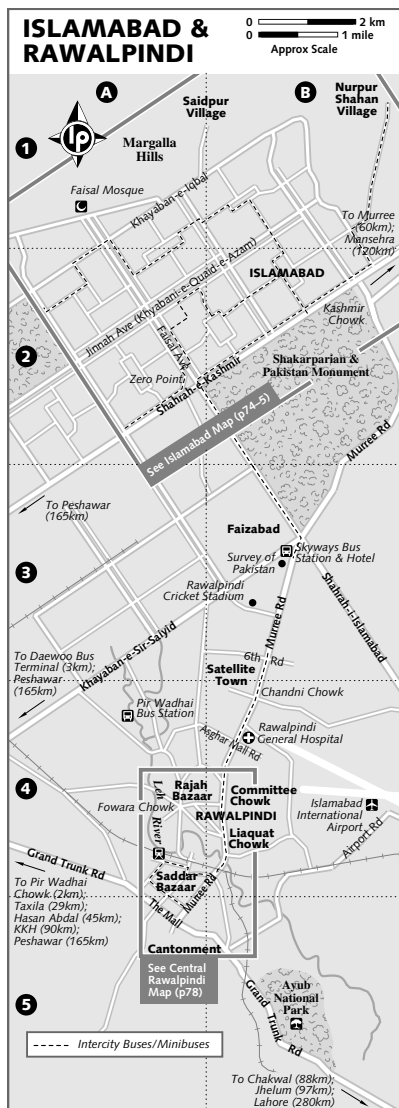
The two cities, 15km apart, are effectively a single mega-town with bazaars at one end and bureaucrats at the other. Transport between them is straightforward and relatively fast. The airport is about 5km northeast of Rawalpindi's Saddar Bazaar and can be reached by Suzukis and taxis (see p87).

Islamabad

☎ 051

Islamabad has no real axis or centre. Each sector of the city, built around a *markaz* (commercial centre), has a letter-number designation (eg F-7), with quarters numbered clockwise. For example, F-7/1 is in the southwest corner, F-7/2 in the northwest. These Orwellian coordinates also have names; F and G are Shalimar and Ramna, so, F-7 is Shalimar-7, and so on.

But as a practical matter, sectors are called by their markets. The main ones, in sequence



along the bus line, are Aabpara (*ah-pa-ra*, southwest G-6), Melody Market (or Civic Centre; G-6), Sitara Market (G-7), Super Market (F-6), Jinnah Market (or Jinnah Super; F-7) and Ayub Market (F-8).

Other useful landmarks are Karachi Co (G-9) and Peshawar Mor (G-8/1) in the west of the city. Between the Fs and Gs is a com-

mercial belt called the Blue Area, which has some of the capital's more upmarket shops and restaurants.

Rawalpindi

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The city's centre is bordered by Murree Rd and the Mall (also called Shahrah-e-Quaid-e-Azam). The cheaper hotels are in Saddar and Rajah Bazaars and along Murree Rd at Liaquat (*lyah-kut*) Chowk and Committee Chowk. The train station is in Saddar, the Pir Wadhai bus station is northwest of town and the airport is to the east.

South of Saddar, the Cantonment has mid-range and top-end hotels and traces remaining from the colonial years. At Rajah, the biggest bazaar, Fowara Chowk has six 'spoke' roads to Saddar, Pir Wadhai and Murree Rd. The city's growing end is Satellite Town, meeting Islamabad at the local transport junction of Faizabad.

Maps

The Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation (see p77) has a free *Islamabad & Rawalpindi* map, although the extra Rawalpindi section is of limited use. Good bookshops sell several fairly detailed maps including the *Islamabad Street Map* (Rs 100). The *Survey of Pakistan* (Map p72; ☎ 9290230; Murree Rd, Faizabad; ☎ 8am-3pm Mon-Thu, 8am-noon Fri) stocks maps covering all regions and major cities, including a detailed *Islamabad & Rawalpindi Guide Map* (Rs 100) and an *Islamabad Street Map* (Rs 100).

INFORMATION

Bookshops

London Book Company (Map pp74-5; ☎ 2823852; 3 Kohsar Market, F-6/3, Islamabad; ☎ 9am-9.30pm Mon-Sat) Small café upstairs.

Mr Books (Map pp74-5; ☎ 2278843; Super Market, F-6, Islamabad; ☎ 9am-10pm Mon-Sat, 10am-10pm Sun)

Old Book Bank (Map p78; ☎ 5519644; 53/1 Kashmir Rd, Rawalpindi; ☎ 9am-10pm) Good for secondhand books, as is the big book market that fills the streets of Saddar on Sunday.

Saeed Book Bank (Map pp74-5; ☎ 2651656; www.saeedbookbank.com; Jinnah Market, F-7, Islamabad; ☎ 9.45am-11pm) The biggest bookshop in Pakistan, with a massive and diverse collection, from guidebooks to gardening. Highly recommended.

Variety Books (Map p78; ☎ 5583397; Bank Rd, Rawalpindi; ☎ 10am-10pm)

Emergency

Police (☎ 15; ☎ 24hr)

Foreigners' Registration

Foreigners' Registration Office (FRO) Islamabad (Map pp74-5; ☎ 9261082; City Court, Ayub Market, F-8; ☎ 9am-3pm Mon-Thu & Sat, 9am-noon Fri); **Rawalpindi** (Map p78; ☎ 9270611; Civil Courts) Only nationals of 16 countries are required to register – see p378. The Rawalpindi office is beside the senior superintendent of police (SSP), southeast of Saddar Bazaar; telephone for operating hours.

Internet Access

Internet cafés in Islamabad are scattered around the various sector markets and along the strip at Aabpara (north of the Rose & Jasmine Garden). In Rawalpindi, the greatest concentration is in Saddar Bazaar. Ask your hotel which is the nearest. The business centres of five-star hotels have by far the most comfortable internet facilities but you pay through the nose. Two good independent operators:

Dandy's (Map pp74-5; Super Market, F-6, Islamabad; per hr Rs 25; ☎ 10am-9pm Mon-Sat, 3-9pm Sun)

Web@ge Net Café (Map p78; Murree Rd, Committee Chowk, Rawalpindi; per hr Rs 20; ☎ 10am-midnight)

Libraries

National Library (Map pp74-5; ☎ 9202544; Isfahani Rd, Islamabad; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri) Near the Diplomatic Enclave, the library has a large reference collection (many in English) and newspapers.

Medical Services

Cantonment General Hospital (Map p78;

☎ 9270907; Saddar Rd, Saddar Bazaar, Rawalpindi)

Federal Government Services Hospital (Poly Clinic; Map pp74-5; ☎ 9218300; Hospital Rd, G-6/2, Islamabad) Near the Blue Area.

Pakistan Institute of Medical Science (PIMS) (Map pp74-5; ☎ 9261182; Faisal Ave, G-8/3, Islamabad)

Rawalpindi General Hospital (Map p72; ☎ 9290309; cnr Murree & Asghar Mall Rds, Rawalpindi)

Shifa International (off Map pp74-5; ☎ 4446801; Pitras Bukhari Rd, H-8/4, Islamabad) Regarded as the best.

Money

Private moneychangers are grouped in the Blue Area in Islamabad – there's a bunch behind the Usmania Restaurant. It's worth comparing rates, as competition is high. At the