

# Asia Handbook - Westbound

Compiled by Neil Donovan - March - July 1998

Note: All prices refer to the above dates unless otherwise stated. Telephone numbers and general contact information have been included in a front section so that you don't have to search through the text for them - you'll also be able to update the information more easily. Timings are for a Ford Cargo 1718 in good, dry weather conditions.

## Exchange Rates and Fuel Costs

<b>Nepal</b>	62NR/\$	0.19\$/L
<b>India</b>	39IR/\$	0.31\$/L
<b>Pakistan</b>	44PR/\$	0.23\$/L
<b>Iran</b>	5200R/\$	0.01\$/L
<b>Turkey</b>	250,000TL/\$	0.46\$/L
<b>Syria</b>	51S£/\$	0.12\$/L
<b>Jordan</b>	0.7JD/\$	0.16\$/L
<b>Egypt</b>	3.4E£/\$	
<b>Bulgaria</b>		
<b>Romania</b>		
<b>Hungary</b>		
<b>Austria</b>		
<b>Germany</b>		
<b>Belgium</b>		

## **Contacts**

### **NEPAL**

1.  
Himalayan Encounters  
Courtyard of Kathmandu Guesthouse Tel: 00977-1-417426  
Fax: 00977-1-417133

2.  
Royal Park Hotel Sauraha Chitwan  
Tel: 056-412987

### **INDIA**

3.  
Hotel Surya Varanasi  
Tel: 0542-343014/511012 Fax: 0542-348330

4.  
Highway Inn Agra  
Tel: 0562-332758  
Manager - Vishy

5.  
Raja Café Khajuraho  
Tel: 07686-42307 (Joy/Betty)

6.  
Pram Tours Jaipur  
Tel: 0141-594204/594205 Mobile: 09280-13019

7.  
Narain Niwas Palace Hotel Narain Singh Road Jaipur  
Tel: 0141-561291  
Fax: 0141-563448

8.  
Vijay's Guesthouse Bikaner  
Tel: 0151-529344

9.  
Hotel New Park Panch Kind Road Pushkar  
Tel: 0145-813464

10.  
Fletcher's Farm Jodhpur  
Tel:

11.  
Shilpi Restaurant Udaipur  
Tel: 0xxx-522475

12.  
Delhi Tourist Camp Jal Nehru Marg Delhi  
Tel: 011-3272898  
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13.  
Mrs Bandhari's Guesthouse 10 Cantonment  
Amritsar  
Tel: 0183-228509/225714 Fax: 0183-222390

### **PAKISTAN**

14.  
YWCA  
Lahore Tel:

15.  
Mr Afzaal Lahore  
Tel: 042-7561165  
Mobile: 0342-255910

16.  
Tourist Camp Islamabad Tel:

17.  
Spogmay Hotel Peshawar  
Tel: 0921-214955/211749/213255

18.  
New Lourdes Hotel Staff College Road Quetta  
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### **IRAN**

19.  
Ali Amiri Legal Guesthouse Pasdaran Street  
Bam  
Tel: 03441-4481

20.  
Amir Kabir Hostal Chahar Bagh  
Esfahan  
Tel./Fax.: 031-296154  
Manager: Mr Ziaee

21.  
Nomad Emam Sq. Esfahan  
Tel: 031-219275  
Fax: 031-217922  
Contacts: Ali/Said/Hussein

### **TURKEY**

22.  
Parasute Camping 0472-3113123 - office  
0472-3127119 - camp  
0472-3126910 - fax  
0472-3124637 - home

23.  
Kaya Camping Urgup  
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### **SYRIA**

24.  
Kiwan Travel Damascus Tel:  
Fax:

### **JORDAN**

25.  
Telstar Travel Aqaba  
Tel: Fax:

26.  
Alanabat Hotel Wadi Musa (Petra) Tel:  
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**EGYPT**

27.

Hamis Travel Ramses Sq. Cairo

Tel: Fax:

28.

Fontana Hotel Cairo

Tel:

# NEPAL

## GENERAL INFORMATION

Time: GMT +5.75 hours.  
Exchange: Easy in Kathmandu. Bank and black market rates are very similar.  
Misc.: Ask Himalayan Encounters about anything that you may need - its all easy!

## ROUTE PLANNER

**Route:** Kathmandu - Chitwan.

**Distance:** 170km.

**Driving Time:** 5 hours.

**Road Conditions:** Good.

**Camping/Accommodation:** Royal Park Hotel, Sauraha.

**Shopping:** Do in Ktm. The day before (Shivaram will help you).

**General:** Best to park the truck near the Mandap Hotel outside Asian Paints and walk group up after breakfast. Take the ring road to the Pokhara road and follow to Mugling. Turn off here, follow to the main road and Narayanghat, turn left for 11km to Tadi Bazar. Right turn down to river and ford. Follow track to Sauraha. In wet season the river may be too deep! If so, get somebody from the Royal Park to meet you at Tadi Bazar and show you the back way around (adds 1 hour).

Royal Park Hotel will arrange all jungle activities for the group:

Park Permit 650Rs/pax (EO pay)  
Elephant Safari 750Rs  
Canoe Ride and jungle walk 600Rs  
Camping 100Rs/pax  
Stick dance 600Rs

Royal Park do a good buffet dinner at reasonable cost.

**Route:** Chitwan - Sonauli border

**Distance:** 156km.

**Driving Time:** 4 hours.

**Road Conditions:** Good

**Camping/Accommodation:** Either dorm rooms in hotel on Indian Side or, if you make good time, can rough camp 38km before Gorakpur - you'll see a blue sign on lhs saying Gorakpur 39km, a few hundred metres later take track into forest on lhs (note: never used this but I know that Drago camp here.)

**Shopping:** In Narayanghat.

**General:** Border is straightforward. Stop before Nepali customs and get carnets done. Drive through to Nepali immigration. Drive through and stop at Indian customs. Get group to do Indian immigration (furtherdown on lhs) and then get carnets done. Group then have to fill in customs book individually. About 1.5 hours all in.

# INDIA

## GENERAL INFORMATION

**Time:** GMT +5.5 hours.

**Exchange:** Bank and black market rates are similar. However, Indian bureaucracy means that a visit to the bank can take all day! Use BM to make life easier. Very easy in Varanasi via Munna or Hotel Surya and in Jaipur at carpet co-op. No problem with travellers cheques. Nepali rupees can be used at Chitwan or exchanged on Nepali side of the border.

## ROUTE PLANNER

**Route:** Border - Varanasi

**Distance:** 313km.

**Driving Time:** 8.5 hours.

**Road Conditions:** Good to Gorakpur and then bumpy.

**Camping/Accommodation:** Hotel Surya.

**Shopping:** Best in Varanasi - rickshaw boys know where to get everything.

**General:** Gorakpur can be tricky - see map.

Good, very friendly hotel with nice garden to camp in. Money change, fax, laundry etc.

Ghats tour: Either arrange a guide through the tourist office or we've found Munna the head rickshaw wallah to run a good morning boat trip. You can then let the group have the rickshaws for the rest of the day. On the whole Munna is good - he doesn't try to get the groups into the shops and groups have enjoyed his services - just be very clear about what you want. Be very wary of the guy from Kailash Silks - he will pounce on your group and tell them all sorts of rubbish about how you rip your groups off - warn the group!

**Route:** Varanasi - Tree House (near Khajuraho)

**Distance:** 391km.

**Driving Time:** 12 hours (minimum!)

**Road Conditions:** Good for first 100km then shocking (Allahbad route)

**Camping/Accommodation:** Giles Swiss Tree House

**Shopping:** In Varanasi the day before.

**General:** Get an early start - this is going to be a long, bumpy day!

Two possible routes:

1. Via Mirzipur. This has the worst road conditions and has recently been taking 14-18 hours!!
2. Via Allahabad. Having done both I prefer this one. The danger is of being held up on the bridges at Allahabad (see map). The secret seems to be in not letting yourself getting caught up in the queues of trucks. Notice that buses are not held back so as you approach the town make sure that you go around any queues of trucks and hopefully you'll have an easy passage through the town. You should be able to make a lunch stop on top of the plateau after Allahabad.

The Tree House is run by an eccentric Swiss, Giles. Good swimming in the river. Bar, shower, toilets and a good area to camp. Costs \$1/pax for camping.

**Route:** Tree House - Orcha via Khajuraho

**Distance:** 240km.

**Driving Time:** 6 hours

**Road Conditions:** Bumpy.

**Camping/Accommodation:** Rough Camp at Orcha.

**Shopping:** Get a boy from the Raja Café in Khajuraho to do it for you while group are visiting the temples.

**General:** It's about 1.5 hours from Tree House to Khajuraho so if you get there at about 9.30am, park outside the Raja Café and pick up a guide for the temples from there (460Rs/grp.). Give your shopping list to Joy or Betty and perhaps arrange lunch for the group at the café. About 4.5 hours from here to the Orcha rough camp. Take care with security at the campsite.

**Route:** Orcha - Agra

**Distance:** 256km.

**Driving Time:** 7 hours

**Road Conditions:** Bumpy.

**Camping/Accommodation:** Highway Inn

**Shopping:** Best done upon arrival in Agra.

**General:** Highway Inn has good camping 30 Rs/pax and some very basic rooms. Vishy the owner is very helpful and will arrange anything you need. He organises an excellent evening of sitar/tabla music followed by a buffet dinner (250Rs/pax) - highly recommended.

Taj Mahal - closed on Mondays. Entrance at sunrise is 105Rs/pax. Opens at 6.00am. Either drive down or arrange rickshaws. Mooven, the rickshaw guy is very helpful but watch him!! Possible to swim at either of the hotels near the Highway Inn (Amer or Atiki? Next door).

**Route:** Agra - Jaipur

**Distance:**

**Driving Time:** 5.5 hours

**Road Conditions:** Mainly good.

**Camping/Accommodation:** Narain Niwas Hotel - arrange through Eugene Pram

**Shopping:** In Agra before you leave.

**General:** Go via Fatehpur Sikri - worth an hours visit - perhaps have lunch at the restaurant here too. Can get truck washed as well.

Make sure that Eugene is expecting you in Jaipur. If you have time do the city tour and Amber over two days otherwise it is a long day out. Narain Niwas has excellent camping - 60Rs/pax., swimming pool - 50Rs.

Eugene charges 180Rs/pax for tour - includes Amber Palace, city palace, observatory and talk on India.

Your route around Rajasthan will depend upon the need to arrange visas etc. Some timings: Jaipur - Udaipur: 400km 9 hrs. Camping at Shilpi Restaurant 70Rs/pax. Pool, restaurant.

Udaipur - Jodhpur: 250km 7 hrs. Go via Ranakpur Jain Temples (have lunch in the dining room there 12Rs/pax). 3 hrs to Rankpur. Camping at Fletcher's Farm or at RTDC Hotel in

centre of town.

Jodhpur - Pushkar: 217km 5 hrs. Camping at New Park Hotel.

Pushkar - Delhi: 415km 10 hrs. Camping at Delhi Tourist Camp. Rooms 180Rs/dble.

Jaipur - Bikaner: 7 hrs. Either rough camp in desert or use Vijay's Guesthouse on way into Bikaner (used by All India groups).

Bikaner - Jaisalmer: 7 hrs. Camping at RTDC Goomah Hotel.

Jaisalmer - Jodhpur: 287km 6 hrs.

Jaisalmer - Amritsar: 2 days, via Bikaner.

**Route:** Delhi - Amritsar

**Distance:** 440km

**Driving Time:** 10 hrs

**Road Conditions:** Mainly very good and improving all the time.

**Camping/Accommodation:** Mrs Bandhari's guesthouse, but this is becoming very expensive at 120Rs/pax. In '97 Ruth Barton stayed at the Ritz - no details.

**Shopping:** In Delhi before you leave.

**General:** In Amritsar visit the Golden Temple and also the Mother Indai temple (Mata Lal Devi).

**Route:** Amritsar - Border

**Distance:** 30km

**Driving Time:** 45 mins.

**Road Conditions:** Good

**Camping/Accommodation:**

**Shopping:** In Amritsar before you leave.

**General:** Usual Indian border bureaucracy - allow 5 hours! Arrive at border (opens at 10.00 am) for 9.30. Fill in two sets of ledgers. Proceed to immigration (v. slow) and then to customs where they will insist on putting the truck over the pit and having a good rummage. Finally escape to Pakistan side. Immigration fairly straightforward. Customs take forever and will probably have a look around the truck and make you take all bags out of trailer. Ensure that all your paperwork - authority letters etc - are completely in order - they love finding mistakes!

Don't go near the money changers on the Indian side - they're crooks. Use the Pakistani immigration/customs staff for exchange (!) - fair rate, no hassle, will take xs Indian rupees also.

I usually get groups to make a packed lunch to eat while doing the border formalities.

# PAKISTAN

## GENERAL INFORMATION

**Time:** GMT +5 hours  
**Exchange:** Black market slightly better than banks. Easy at border (cash), Lahore (American Express) and in Peshawar and Quetta.  
**Shopping:** Basic markets. Tuesday and Wednesday are supposed to be meatless but rarely are.

## ROUTE PLANNER

**Route:** Border - Lahore

**Distance:** 35km

**Driving Time:** 1 hour

**Road Conditions:** Good

**Camping/Accommodation:** YWCA, Lahore

**Shopping:** In Amritsar before you leave.

**General:** YWCA is ok. You'll no doubt run into Mr Afzaal who claims to have a tourist camp - well, he does but its far too small and is totally impractical. He's a bit of a pain but is a useful contact if you have any real problems (see 'contacts' section)

**Route:** Lahore - Islamabad

**Distance:** 370km

**Driving Time:** 5 hrs.

**Road Conditions:** Superb! Brand new motorway (M2). Costs 575Rs in tolls but is a real treat!

**Camping/Accommodation:** Tourist Camp (see LP map). Basic, cheap, near embassies.

**Shopping:** In Lahore.

**General:** Only really need to stop here to pick up Iranian visas - otherwise, with the new motorway you can do Lahore - Peshawar in a day. Be careful - Islamabad is in the itinerary for some reason. Iranian embassy is a short taxi ride/drive from the camp (see LP map).

**Route:** Islamabad - Peshawar

**Distance:** 140km

**Driving Time:** 3 hrs.

**Road Conditions:** Bumpy in places.

**Camping/Accommodation:** Spogmay Hotel

**Shopping:** In Peshawar, near hotel.

**General:** Phone hotel beforehand to book rooms and get them to contact Sultan (guide). Hotel has new and old rooms at different rates. You can cook in the courtyard of the hotel but I tend to do group meals here as it's a busy couple of days and it's the only chance groups have to sample Pakistani food. The hotel restaurant does excellent meals (meat and chicken korai are really good) and the Afgani restaurant the Sultan can arrange is very good for kebabs. You'll no doubt meet Attaullah (carpet guy) who can arrange an evening of Afgani music and tea drinking (and looking at carpets!) that groups seem to enjoy.

Suggested itinerary: Arrive evening of day 1. Day 2 do a walking city tour with Sultan -

excellent day. Sultan will arrange lunch. Girls can visit refugee camp or Christian area in the evening (recommended). Day 3. Visit Khyber Pass. 8.00am go with Sultan to get permit - you'll need 5 group lists, all passports plus Rs120 for each pax, yourself and Sultan. Come back to hotel. Pick up group and drive to pick up two armed guards (!). Drive up to Khyber Pass having lunch at the top overlooking Afganistan. Get back to hotel about 4.00pm. Any of the group who want to go and shoot guns in Darra (not strictly allowed) can do so this afternoon - arrange with Sultan - group pay him directly for this.

Sultan charges \$2 per hour for his time.

Peshawar is a real highlight of this trip - make the most of it! (There is a bar at the Pearl Continental Hotel!).

**Route:** Peshawar - Bhakkar

**Distance:** 373km

**Driving Time:** 11 hrs.

**Road Conditions:** Bumpy in places.

**Camping/Accommodation:** Rest house in Bhakkar

**Shopping:** In Peshawar

**General:** Peshawar to Quetta is four long days, mainly on appalling roads. Rough camping is dangerous so use rest houses and police compounds. The road through Zhob (Fort Sandeman is out of bounds to foreigners - yes, its tempting but both Drago and I have tried it and been turned back).

**Route:** Bhakkar - Fort Monroe

**Distance:** 341km.

**Driving Time:** 13 hrs.

**Road Conditions:** Appalling.

**Camping/Accommodation:** Either police compound at bottom of Ft. Monroe pass or at disused rest house at the top (security is not so good here but Mark Fittall and I have used it for years and had no problems).

**Shopping:** Various towns en route.

**General:** Lots of debate about the best route! Nobody has used the road on the west side of the Indus for ages as it used to be terrible. There is a rumour that it is now complete - time for somebody to try it?! On the east side the normal route is the road nearest the river - this is shocking in places! April '98 I tried the next road to the east - this is nearly complete, indeed one long section is open and is very fast. However, it still took a long, long time. Take your pick and good luck!

**Route:** Fort Monroe - Loralai

**Distance:** 200km

**Driving Time:** 8 hrs.

**Road Conditions:** Average

**Camping/Accommodation:** Police compound in Loralai

**Shopping:** good shopping in Loralai.

**General:** Police compound here is not ideal. Whole town seems to turn up and watch - friendly but a little overbearing!

**Route:** Loralai - Quetta

**Distance:** 255km.

**Driving Time:** 8.5 hrs

**Road Conditions:** Bumpy

**Camping/Accommodation:** New Lourdes Hotel. (Mail stop).

**Shopping:** In Loralai

**General:** Best route from Loralai is the northern road via Muslimbagh. Good camping at the New Lourdes, if expensive. Rooms are very expensive if group are interested. Management is amazingly unhelpful. Restaurant not up to much. Hotel manager can give you forms for beer permit. Quetta is a good place to restock the truck with food goodies.

Alternative camping spots if you need - electricity compound at xxxxxx. Various hotels in Ziarat.

**Route:** Quetta - Taftan (border)

**Distance:** 634km

**Driving Time:** One very long day (13/14 hrs) or split it into two.

**Road Conditions:** Improving.

**Camping/Accommodation:** PTDC hotel at Taftan

**Shopping:** From Quetta or at Dalbandin.

**General:** The road from Dalbandin to Taftan is almost finished and will make this possible in one day soon. However, I usually stop at the rest house in Dalbandin. Its also possible to camp at the customs post in Nok Kundi - you could probably then get across the border the next day.

Border is pretty easy although it only opens at 9.30 or 10.00 and then closes for lunch until about 4.00pm! Drive into Pakistani customs compound and get carnets done. Then drive to immigration. Group walk through Iranian immigration. Drive truck to Iran side and do your own immigration. Pick up group on Iran side and drive to customs house. Get group to declare any carpets that they have bought in Nepal/India/Pakistan to avoid confusion upon leaving Iran. Video cameras are also checked. cursory check of truck, complete carnets - on your way. Remember - no alcohol, playing cards, Salman Rushdie (or pornography!).

Money change on Pakistani side of border, cash dollars and xs Pakistani rupees for Rials.

# IRAN

## GENERAL INFORMATION

**Time:** GMT +4.5 hrs.

**Exchange:** Black market in Iran has eased considerably and is now openly operating. Take usual precautions, though. Cash dollars are easy to change at BM rate, TC's are much harder. Rate fluctuates greatly so try to find out from travellers coming the other way the current situation. Prices are often quoted in Toman (10 Rials).

**Dress:** Women covered head to wrist to ankle in preferably dark colour. Men need long trousers and sleeves. Feet should also be covered i.e no sandals. In the cities people are much more relaxed but if you stick to these rules you won't have any problems.

**Diesel:** Really cheap but can be hard to get near the borders as everybody wants it - enter Iran with 500km range and keep tanks topped-up. Gas is also very cheap - Esfahan is a good place to fill-up.

## ROUTE PLANNER

**Route:** Border - Bam

**Distance:** 435 km

**Driving Time:** 7 hrs.

**Road Conditions:** Excellent

**Camping/Accommodation:** Lots of rough camping pre and post Bam or Ali Amir Guest House in Bam

**Shopping:** From Dalbandin or in Bam.

**General:** Bam is not on the itinerary but is an excellent stop. The citadel is amazing. Ali at the guest house is a really useful contact and a very good guide.

**Route:** Bam - R/C after Sangan (via Kerman)

**Distance:** 446 km.

**Driving Time:** 7 hrs.

**Road Conditions:** Excellent.

**Camping/Accommodation:** Lots of rough camping in hills/desert after Sangan

**Shopping:** Good market in Kerman.

**General:** You have time to see the citadel in the morning and then make the rough camp that night. If you have to get visa extensions it is possible at the police headquarters in Kerman in the mornings. Costs 10,000 Rials, need one photo, two copies of passport and visa.

**Route:** R/C - Persepolis

**Distance:** 411 km

**Driving Time:** 7 hours

**Road Conditions:** Excellent

**Camping/Accommodation:** Rough camp at the Persepolis ruins.

**Shopping:** In Shiraz. Shiraz is well worth a couple of hours or more. Try to see the mirrored mosque.

**General:** Persepolis costs 15,000 Rials/pax. Need a group list.

**Route:** Persepolis - Esfahan

**Distance:**

**Driving Time:**

**Road Conditions:**

**Camping/Accommodation:**

**Shopping:**

**General:**