

TREKKING IN TAJIKISTAN



About the Authors

Jan Bakker was born in a village below sea level in the northwest of the Netherlands. He saw his first mountain at age fifteen and was instantly sold. Jan is a jack of all trades as far as outdoor adventures are concerned. He worked as an outdoor instructor in Belgium, managed an environmental charity called Respect the Mountains and sold woolly hats to outdoor stores in Scotland. More recently, he co-founded the very first mountain film festival in Tunisia and has been leading pioneering mountain expeditions in Tajikistan, the Afghan Wakhan Corridor and Iraqi Kurdistan. He has written articles about his adventures for *Sidetracked*, *Trek & Mountain* magazine and *Adventure Travel* magazine. Jan currently lives with his wife and two sons in Beirut and ventures out into the Lebanese mountains to hike, bike and rock climb whenever he can.

Born in France next to the border with Belgium, Christine Oriol roamed around Central Asia for a few years before adopting Tajikistan as her second homeland. Settling in a village in the Fann Mountains to work on a rural development project, she enjoyed exploring the surrounding mountains during her free time. Four years later, having trodden most of the trails in the Fanns as a hobby and having started to explore unmarked trails in the Pamirs, Christine realised that all this knowledge should be shared. She suggested to Jan Bakker that they work together on a new trekking guidebook for Tajikistan. The resulting guide is the product of seven years of exploratory trekking in Tajikistan. Christine is still eager to blaze new trails in this fascinating country and you can meet her training young local women in the Pamirs with the non-profit organisation Women Rockin' Pamirs.

TREKKING IN TAJIKISTAN

THE NORTHERN RANGES, PAMIRS AND AFGHANISTAN'S WAKHAN CORRIDOR

by Jan Bakker and Christine Oriol

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Updates to this Guide

While every effort is made by our authors to ensure the accuracy of guidebooks as they go to print, changes can occur during the lifetime of an edition. Any updates that we know of for this guide will be on the Cicerone website (www.cicerone.co.uk/946/updates), so please check before planning your trip. We also advise that you check information about such things as transport, accommodation and shops locally. Even rights of way can be altered over time.

The route maps in this guide are derived from publicly available data, databases and crowd-sourced data. As such they have not been through the detailed checking procedures that would generally be applied to a published map from an official mapping agency, although naturally we have reviewed them closely in the light of local knowledge as part of the preparation of this guide.

We are always grateful for information about any discrepancies between a guidebook and the facts on the ground, sent by email to updates@cicerone.co.uk or by post to Cicerone, Juniper House, Murley Moss, Oxenholme Road, Kendal, LA9 7RL.

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Front cover: Golden pastures under an October light in the Southern Pamirs
(Route 22, Stage 1)

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Christine's acknowledgements

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Mountain safety

Every mountain walk has its dangers, and those described in this guidebook are no exception. All who walk or climb in the mountains should recognise this and take responsibility for themselves and their companions along the way. The high altitude, remoteness and limited infrastructure of Tajikistan's mountain regions further add to the risks.

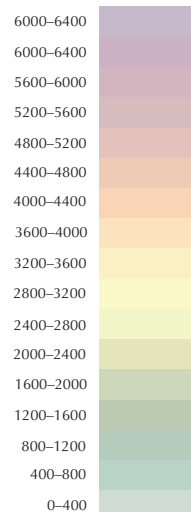
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A mini-caravan on the Little Pamir plateau with the Hindu Kush in the background (Route 26, Stage 4)

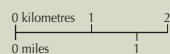


Symbols used on route maps

- route
- alternative route
- start point
- finish point
- start/finish point
- glacier
- inhabited areas
- regional border
- international border
- main road
- dirt track
- peak
- hotel/homestay/basic shelter
- campsite/alternative camp
- building/summer settlement
- boulder field/boulder
- mine or cave
- pass
- meteorological station
- water feature/waterfall
- bridge/cable bridge
- archaeological site
- other feature

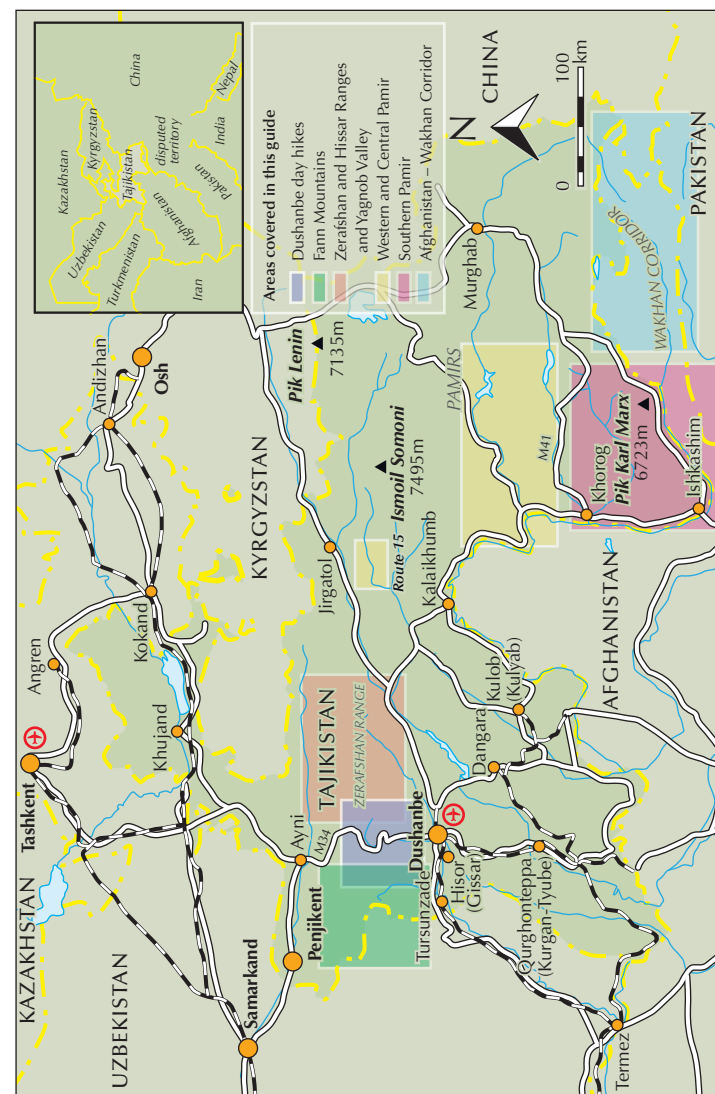
Relief
in metres

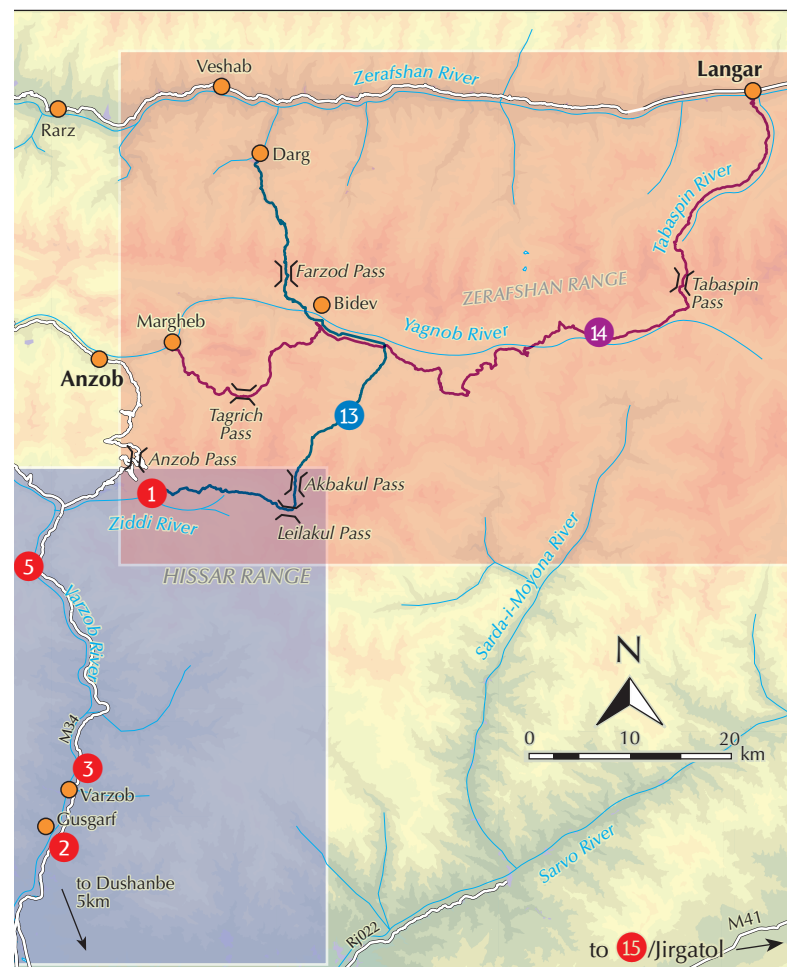
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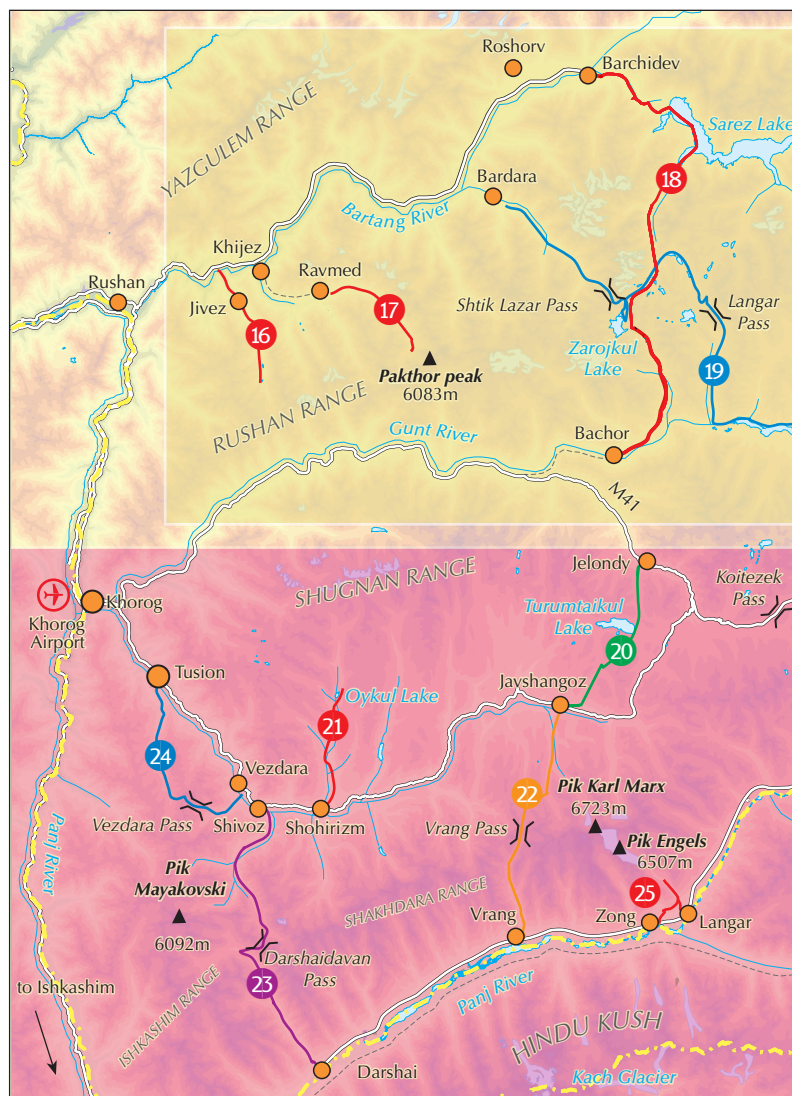


Contour lines are drawn at 100m intervals and highlighted at 400m intervals.

GPX files for all routes can be downloaded free at www.cicerone.co.uk/946/GPX.







Ravmeddara, Darshai, Alichur and Zong. Crucially, 60% of the profits from sustainable trophy hunting and tourism stays within the communities and is spent on community development projects and salaries for the rangers. For more information and wildlife watching tours visit the CBWMAs' website, <https://tajwildlife.com>.

Since the establishment of the CBWMAs, yearly surveys of wild sheep, goats and snow leopards have been conducted by traditional hunters together with local and international wildlife experts. All CBWMAs have reported an increase in the number of wild sheep and goats. CBWMAs have established a safe territory for wildlife and most importantly, created an opportunity for the traditional ecological knowledge of the hunters to compliment scientific knowledge and wildlife management.

TAJIK NATIONAL PARK

The Tajik National Park (sometimes referred to as Pamir NP) was established in 1992 and extended to its current size in 2001. The 2.6 million-hectare territory essentially covers the centre of the Tajik Pamir mountains. In 2013 the Tajik NP was added to the list of UNESCO World Heritage Sites.

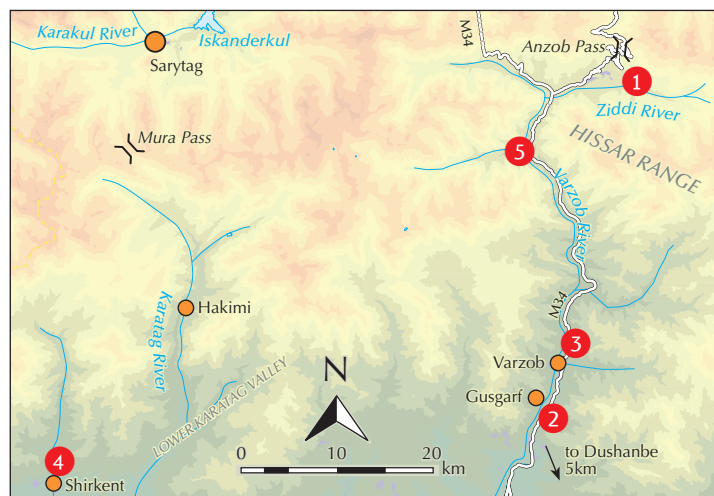
In theory, the protected status should prevent illegal mining and trophy hunting. However, the Tajik State has limited resources, and due to the Park's large size and its remoteness, it is nearly impossible to enforce protection. Especially in the eastern Pamirs, foreign hunters pay large sums of money to hunt protected species such as Marco Polo sheep, often shooting their trophy from helicopters.

Routes 15, 18 and 19 visit the Tajik National Park.

DUSHANBE DAY HIKES

Looking back over the Begar gorge (Route 3)

DUSHANBE DAY HIKE



Looming just north of Dushanbe, the mountains of the Hissar Range are an adventure magnet for the city dwellers of Tajikistan's capital. This amazing playground is split by the roaring Varzob River and is very accessible by public transport. Most of the day hikes start in a village from where the trail winds its way up to refreshing waterfalls, shimmering alpine lakes or unique paleontological features. It also allows a glimpse of rural life in the Tajik mountains. Bear in mind that in some narrow valleys (Routes 2, 3 and 4) heavy rains can cause flash floods, especially in late spring and early summer.

In July and August the mountains are buzzing with pastoral activity but

it gets very hot at lower elevations. The day journeys to Leilakul (Route 1) and into the Sioma Valley (Route 5) provide cooler temperatures as they run at a higher altitude. The routes are located deeper in the mountains and get you closer to the glaciated north faces of the Hissar Range.

Autumn is the best time to do the lower elevated hikes. The broadleaf forest displays an incredible spectacle of colours and hikers are likely to encounter local men and donkeys collecting firewood for wintertime. There are boundless hiking opportunities in the mountains around Dushanbe, of which the day hikes described in this guidebook are a small but essential selection.

ROUTE 1

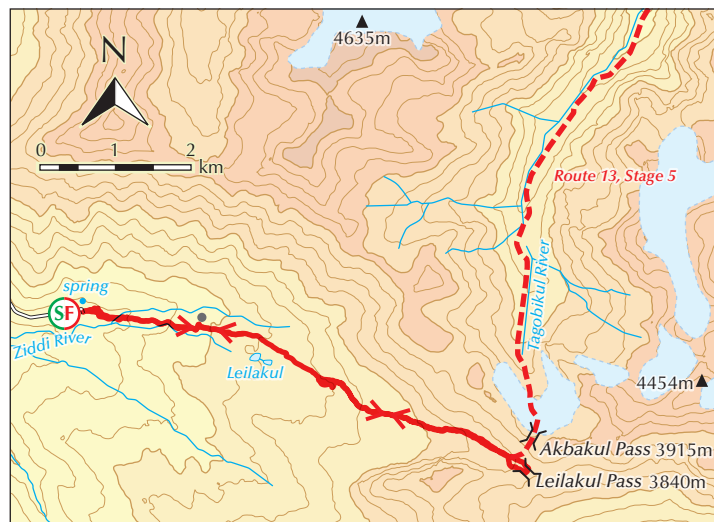
Leilakul

Start/finish	End of the road in Ziddi Valley
Distance	13km
Ascent/descent	920m
Grade	Easy if acclimatised
Time	7hr
Highest point	3840m (Leilakul Pass)
Highest camp	Possible to camp at 3500m
Glacier travel	N
Notes	Suitable for families, good for acclimatisation for high altitude treks and climbs, snow on higher parts of the hike until mid-August. Be aware of altitude sickness.

The Leilakul walk is a spectacular and diverse day trip that takes you to the high-altitude Leilakul Pass at almost 4000m on the northern part of the Hissar Range. You'll be treated to splendid views of the Hissar Range. The Leilakul lakes are incredibly blue and the open plains are covered with alpine flowers in June and July, before the livestock come out to graze. For hikers who want to camp it is possible to stay at the lakes, but for those who want to push a bit further the pass is a rewarding objective. The landscape changes around the pass to become a rocky high alpine environment. The hike is a popular weekend destination for Tajiks as there is a mineral water spring at the trailhead that is well known for its health benefits. Farmers keep honey bees along the road that leads to the trail head and this is a good place to buy quality honey.

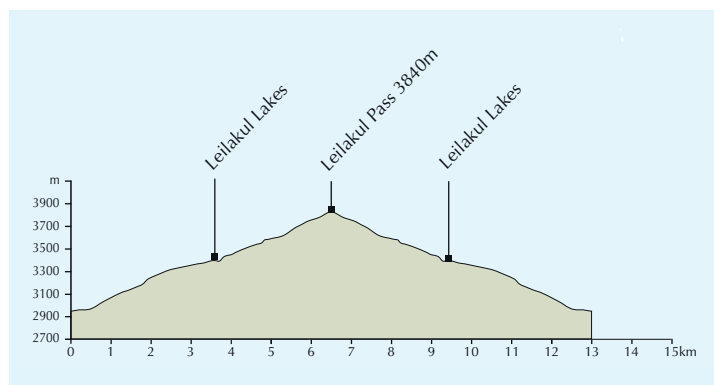
Transport

Trailhead: From Dushanbe there is no public transport available as there are no permanent settlements up the Ziddi Valley. Find a private driver at the Varzob Bazar bus station. A return trip costs 500TJS for up to seven people. The drive takes about 2hr 30min along the main highway Dushanbe to Khujand until the Maixura toll booth and there turns right towards the Anzob Pass. In springtime the road towards Anzob Pass might be damaged by rock fall and mudflows. The driver



needs to check whether the road is driveable before leaving Dushanbe. From the turn off to the Anzob Pass take the road east further into the Ziddi Valley.

Trail end: The same. The hire of a private driver for the entire day is recommended if you intend to return to Dushanbe the same day.



Accommodation

There is no accommodation at the trailhead. There are a few *shashlik* (kebab) sellers and *tapchans* (platforms to relax and rest on in summertime).

Trek support

There is a shepherd settlement close to the trailhead. You might be able to arrange a donkey or horse there. Expect to pay around US\$10 for the day.

From the parking spot, slightly below the **spring**, take the path that heads E. This first section of the hike is full of small side streams springing from the ground, most of them easy to cross by hopping from boulder to boulder. If there is too much water walk upstream until you find a convenient place to cross. After 500m from the trailhead at 2975m cross the larger stream and start climbing straight up the rounded ridge that separates two streams. Pass the marked **boulder** at 3060m and follow the left trail. The path is a sheep trail, with many different sub-trails. They all lead to the **Leilakul lakes**.

The trail then takes you to the left shore of the lakes at an elevation of 3380m. Be careful when the path ascends above the lakes. The terrain becomes steeper and the trail narrows; you need to be steady on your feet for this 200m-long passage. Keep ascending the path which leads to a flat plain at 3500m. This makes a perfect camping spot provided it's not too early in the season. The melting snow makes this place soggy until mid-July.



View from the Leilakul Pass



From the plain to the **Leilakul Pass** (3840m) is an additional 300m climb. The path stays on the true right side of the stream which allows for a good view of the steep cliffs of the mountain to your right. The landscape turns rockier the higher up you go. It is a well-trodden path for shepherds and their flock of goats and sheep that eventually leads to the green pastures of the Yagnob Valley. The pass itself is not marked. There are excellent views of the glaciers on the opposite side.

Leilakul Pass is located SE of the **Akbakul Pass** (3915m) that plunges directly down into the Yagnob Valley. This day hike is the final section of Route 13 Darg to Ziddi Valley. It's a linear walk so the descent is the same way back. Retrace your footsteps all the way back to the **spring**. Remember to fill up your bottles before going back down to Dushanbe! The spring water contains iron hence the distinct irony taste.

ROUTE 2

Gusgarf Waterfall

Start/finish	M34 at the Gusgarf junction
Distance	16.5km
Ascent/descent	1065m
Grade	Moderate
Time	6hr 30min
Highest point	1780m (trail section to Big Gusgarf Waterfall)
Highest camp	Possible to camp at 1710m next to the big waterfall
Glacier travel	N
Notes	A private car could drop you off at the end of the dirt road, reducing the walk by 8km/2hr 45min

The hike to the small and big waterfall of Gusgarf is a full day hike through a fertile valley with fields and orchards. Here you can experience Tajik rural life, just a 20min drive away from the hustle and bustle of the capital Dushanbe. The reward is a refreshing plunge in the pool underneath a beautiful 30m-high waterfall.

