

## Episode 85: Surprising Pakistan

### Summary

Nick and Wendy talk about one of their favourite (and most surprising) countries: Pakistan. They discuss Pakistan's friendly people and beautiful mountain scenery.

### Transcript

Nick: Today Wendy and I are continuing our little series looking at some of the more unusual countries that we chose when we picked our favourite five countries way back in Episode 50. And today we're looking at Pakistan, which I picked as my number four country, and I think for a lot of people, that would have been a big surprise, right?

Wendy: Yeah, I don't think that Pakistan is very high up on the list of world tourism destinations. It's not one that a lot of people think of when they think of places that they most want to visit. And it was a big surprise for us, too, but a very pleasant surprise.

Nick: Yeah, but the interesting thing is, when we've talked to people who have travelled like we have, in a similar manner<sup>1</sup> and, you know, trying to see a lot of the world - I'm thinking about people like Ted, who's been on the podcast before, Lockie, Bob, our other friends - they all loved Pakistan too. So certainly if you go there with an open mind and you travel around, it's a place that you can really fall in love with even though, yeah, it's not on the radar for most people, for sure.

Wendy: Yeah, and I think even when we went there, we weren't really looking that forward to it, because we'd been travelling in India for several months already. And India is a fascinating place, but it is very intense, and there's a lot of hassle<sup>2</sup> that comes along with it, particularly, you know, if you look like a Westerner and people know that you have money and they're always trying to get money out of you. And, anyway, it gets a bit tiring after a while. And so we'd been doing that for a few months, and then we were supposed to go to Pakistan next, and we almost didn't want to, 'cause we just thought it would be more of the same, and maybe even worse. But it was completely different. Once we got there, we realised that it, umm, it wasn't anything like India, really.

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<sup>1</sup> manner: way

<sup>2</sup> hassle: bothering, annoyance

Nick: Yeah, it was ... it seemed neater, it seemed cleaner and more orderly. So I think that was the first thing that struck us<sup>3</sup>, literally, as soon as we arrived after crossing the border and going to Lahore, which was our first destination. And then we found that the people were just incredibly friendly and, again, that was a ... I don't know want to say a counterpoint<sup>4</sup> to India because we also met a lot of great people in India, and especially on the trains, we had a lot of great conversations with a lot of people. But when you're on the street in India, and someone comes up to you, uhh, usually they're just trying to get money from you or something like that. And in Pakistan, it was the opposite: people would just come up and say hello and smile and wave and then walk off. And then at the beginning we were a little bit wary<sup>5</sup> when people would do that, and then we realised, 'Oh, they just actually want to say welcome and hi and that's it.'

Wendy: And another thing that they would often do is say, 'What do you think about Pakistan?' And they were really concerned to know whether or not we liked the country. And we always said that we did 'cause we had a wonderful time there. Umm, but I think they know that Pakistan doesn't have a very good image outside of Pakistan and so they really wanted to know that we enjoyed the country and were having a good time there.

Nick: Yeah, I remember in particular going to the mosque in Lahore, the main mosque, which is a Mughal mosque, so it's contemporary with some of the great buildings of India such as the Taj Mahal. Umm, and just sitting in the courtyard, there's a very large courtyard, and then people would just come up and start these conversations. And like you said, they were very concerned and they would also say, 'You know, why don't people like Pakistan? We don't understand it.' And, you know, it was very hard to answer that or to explain that to them. But certainly the media coverage was quite negative at the time - this was way back in 2004 - and I'm sure it still is to this day. But, umm, you know, certainly, yeah, and again, even as we were going to go there, we weren't sure if we would like it either, umm, based on the preconceived ideas<sup>6</sup> that we had from what we'd read in the media and things like that. Umm, but in the end we really loved it.

So I think you can divide our experience in Pakistan - we were there for about a month, I think - uhh, into two parts. So we started in these lowland cities: Lahore, Peshawar, which is very close to Afghanistan and was a fascinating place, very tribal and just very fascinating culturally. Uhh, we also went to Islamabad and Rawalpindi, which are newer cities and are probably less interesting, umm, but Islamabad is the capital. And then we decided to go up into the mountains, and originally we didn't know if we would have time to do that, because you've got to travel quite a long way to get up there. We took a bus overnight, I think it took 17

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<sup>3</sup> that struck us: that we noticed, that had an effect on us

<sup>4</sup> counterpoint: opposing element

<sup>5</sup> wary: sceptical, unconvinced

<sup>6</sup> preconceived ideas: ideas formed before experiencing something for yourself

hours or so, uhh, to get up into the mountains. And up to that point<sup>7</sup> we'd never really seen mountains before, or really large mountains, snow-capped mountains, things like that. It was before we lived in Switzerland, it was before we went Nepal or Patagonia and so I don't know if we really knew what to expect, so to speak, but we absolutely loved it.

Wendy: Oh yeah, it was amazing. And that's definitely something that the media doesn't talk about, is how beautiful the mountains of Pakistan are. You know, they're talking about war and conflict and things like that. Umm, ahh, but the mountains are such a peaceful, such a beautiful place. I would love to go back there.

Nick: Yeah, so like you said, people don't really talk about it that much. But when you think about it, of course it's a country that's near Nepal, it's near India, and so these mountains are there. Umm, the really amazing thing is that in the early 1980s they built a road going through these mountains, which is called the Karakoram Highway, and it extends from down from near Islamabad all the way up through the mountains, all the way across the border into China and to Kashgar, which is a city in southern Xinjiang in China. And these was a really amazing feat<sup>8</sup> of engineering when they built it, and I believe quite a few people died in the construction of it. Umm, and so, it was ... you know, what makes it really interesting is then that you have this road going right through these mountains. So later on when we went to Nepal, from the main roads or from the main highway, you don't see the mountains at all.

Wendy: No, you have to go trekking for many days to get into the mountains, which is great too. We love trekking, and so that's a great experience, but, yeah, the mountains are much more accessible, I would say.

Nick: And so there's one point on the Karakoram Highway where you can stop and there's a little lookout and you can just go off the road to this little lookout. And you can actually see from there mountains from three different mountain ranges, and those are the three highest mountain ranges in the world: the Himalayas, the Karakorams and the Hindu Kush. And so that's the only place in the world where you can see those three mountain ranges from one point. Umm, and so, K2, which is in Pakistan, that's in the Karakorams, is the second highest mountain in the world.

Wendy: After Mount Everest.

Nick: After Mount Everest. So, yeah, you don't have this impression that this is what Pakistan is like, but it was absolutely amazing. You would just - even just looking out from a bus - you'd just be blown away<sup>9</sup> by the scenery that you could

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<sup>7</sup> up to that point: until then

<sup>8</sup> feat: achievement

<sup>9</sup> blown away: amazed, extremely impressed

see. And so we took advantage of this, we did some hiking. And we'd never hiked in this kind of scenery before and it was just spectacular.

Wendy: Mmm-hmm. Yeah, we weren't very experienced hikers, so I would love to go back now and do some more hiking now that we know what we're doing and we have better equipment and we could go on longer hikes. Uhh, but even just the short hikes that we did, uhh, were just spectacular.

Nick: Right, again because of the highway, because of where it is right in between the mountains, yeah, you can - from a village on the highway - you can do an overnight hike and be right at the base of a, you know, an 8000-metre mountain with a glacier and all this stuff. So we did that a couple of times. And then the other really interesting thing that we did was we went all the way to the far north and the far north town, uhh, in Pakistan is called Sost, on the highway. And it's, I don't know, it's only about 20 kilometres from China. And we went from there off the highway, uhh, in a truck, to get to a town called Zood Khun, which is the last town in this small valley that's off the highway. It takes about three hours from the highway. And we stayed with a local man there, his name is Alam Jan Dario. And he's an amazing man, and he lets, uhh, people stay at his house, basically, if they want to, in this tiny village. And that was an incredible experience as well.

Wendy: Yeah, which is another place that I would love to go back to, and see how he and his family are doing. I have a feeling that he's built it up a bit more and made it more of an official guesthouse and is offering more activities because he seemed like he was really, umm, gung-ho<sup>10</sup> and, you know, wanted to develop tourism but in a sustainable way and in a way that really benefitted the local community. So I would love to go back to Zood Khun and see what's happening there now.

Nick: Yeah, actually I just saw on Facebook a couple of weeks ago that he has Internet in Zood Khun now. And when we were there, and again this was a long time ago, he had to travel to Gilgit, which took him nine hours, uhh, on trucks and buses, just to use the Internet. Because he was a hiking guide and perhaps he still is, and so he needed to be able to be in contact with certain people. Umm, and so, yeah, it was a huge trek for him just to be able to send an email or receive an email, but now apparently he has it in his own valley. I don't even think they had electricity in Zood Khun when we were there. Or maybe they'd just gotten it, just before we went or something like that.

Wendy: Yeah, I can't remember. But it was very basic. I know that he had the only hot shower, uhh, and that might have been solar powered, I'm not sure exactly how he got hot water, but he did have hot water in his house, which, you know, the guests, the tourists could use. But some of the local villagers would come to use it sometimes as well, 'cause it gets really cold there, and it would be nice to have to have a hot shower, I'm sure.

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<sup>10</sup> gung-ho: enthusiastic, eager

Nick: Yeah, so that was another real highlight for us, and that was right at the end of our trip to Pakistan, so it really just capped off this amazing experience and very surprising experience that we had.

Wendy: Yeah.

Nick: And so I think the lesson is that you never really know about a place until you go and check it out for yourself.

## Comprehension Questions

1. Why were Nick and Wendy a bit apprehensive about visiting Pakistan at first?
2. What did local people in Pakistan typically ask Nick and Wendy?
3. Why are the mountains so accessible in Pakistan?

## Exercises

*Use the words and expressions in the footnotes of the transcript to fill in the gaps.*

1. He injured himself riding a motorbike and they had to cut their trip short. \_\_\_\_\_, everything had been going really well.
2. He's been very nice to her, but she's a bit \_\_\_\_\_ about what his true intentions are.
3. In India, tourists get a lot of \_\_\_\_\_ from beggars, rickshaw drivers etc. It can be frustrating sometimes.
4. They were \_\_\_\_\_ by the size of the Pyramids. They didn't realise how big they would be.
5. The thing \_\_\_\_\_ the most about Iceland was how it snowed in summer!
6. Climbing Mount Everest is a very impressive \_\_\_\_\_. It was first accomplished in 1953.
7. He's quite young but also quite mature. He carries himself in a very dignified \_\_\_\_\_ for someone his age.
8. She had a lot of \_\_\_\_\_ about her best friend's boyfriend because he was a foreigner, but when she met him, he turned out to be very different from what she had expected.
9. Most people who join the company are very \_\_\_\_\_ at the beginning and think they can make a real difference, but soon enough they become tired of the company's policies and the minutia of the work they have to do.
10. The movie was quite well done and its low-key nature was a nice \_\_\_\_\_ to the violence and special effects of the usual Hollywood blockbusters.

## Discussion Questions

Discuss these questions with a partner or in the [English in 10 Minutes Listeners group on Facebook](#):

1. Has this conversation changed your impression of Pakistan? Why or why not?
2. Would you like to go to Pakistan? Why or why not?
3. Nick and Wendy said people in Pakistan were very friendly to them. In which countries have you found people to be very friendly?

## Answers

### Comprehension Questions

1. Because they had already been travelling for several months in India and were tired from that and expected Pakistan to be difficult.
2. Questions like, 'What do you think of Pakistan?' and 'Why does Pakistan have a bad reputation?'
3. Because the Karakoram Highway goes right through the mountains.

### Exercises

1. up to that point
2. wary
3. hassle
4. blown away
5. that struck us
6. feat
7. manner
8. preconceived ideas
9. gung-ho
10. counterpoint