



VCAT VIRTUAL CULTURAL AWARENESS TRAINER



Introduction to Afghanistan

COUNTRY FACTS

- **Population:** 32 million.
- **Languages:** Dari, Pashto.
- **Religion:** Mostly Sunni Islam. Shia Muslim minority. Small Sikh and Hindu populations.



GEOGRAPHY & CLIMATE

- **Location:** Central Asia. Bordered by Pakistan to the south and east, China to the east, Iran to the west, and Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan to the north. Pakistan border (Durand line) is dangerous and porous.
- **Geography:** Mountainous and landlocked. Divided into three regions: northern plains, central highlands, and southwestern plateau.
- **Climate:** Hot summers and frigid winters. Dry in the west, monsoon seasons in the east.
- **Major Cities:** Kabul (capital), Kandahar, Jalalabad, Mazar-e Sharif, and Herat. Connected by a ring road.

POLITICS & ECONOMY

- **Government:** Constitutional republic since 2001, with a president and national assembly.
- **Currency:** Afghani.
- **Economy:** Based on agriculture. Afghanistan exports natural gas, minerals, and gemstones.

SOCIETY & CULTURE

- **Ethnic Groups:** Pashtuns (two-thirds of the population), Tajiks, Hazara, Uzbeks, Aimaqs.
- **Gender:** Women's rights are determined by religious interpretation and were severely repressed under Taliban rule. Women are unlikely to be employed.
- **Cuisine:** Rice served with meat and vegetables. Green tea is usually served. Alcohol is forbidden.
- **Dress:** Men wear baggy pants and long shirts. Women wear burqas or headscarves.
- **Etiquette:** Remove shoes in homes and avoid pointing feet at others. Avoid using the left hand for eating or serving. Do not blow your nose in public.



KEY TERMS

qalla	traditional Afghan home
mujahideen	anti-Soviet fighters in the 1980s
jirga	tribal assembly that governs locally
shura	informal community council
Loya Jirga	large traditional deliberation council
Pashtunwali	Pashtun tribal code of honor
purdah	gender segregation
buzkashi	national sport of Afghanistan