



FESTIVALS OF GILGIT-BALTISTAN

Spring Celebration Festival (February)

Kardeet / Kitzit is celebrated in the month of February to welcome the spring season and to farewell the long & arduous winter. *This ceremony is performed in the Gojal Valley (Upper Hunza region) on different dates depending on the altitude of each village.* Each village has a nominated Shoghunputuk (a family who have the privilege to start different ceremonies and festivals). During this ceremony, the cold is symbolically driven out of houses. On the evening of the day before Kitzit, a person from *Shoghunputuk* brings bundles of the branches of wild sorghum and distributes it to all households in the village. This is used as *drepch* (broom) and kept near the roof of the house, close to the *risin* (opening for light and exit of smoke). On the day traditionally the family head cleans the smoke around the *risin* with bundles of the wild sorghum and the women clean the inside of the house. After this the family head sprinkles flour to the pillars of the house starting from right hand side of the house followed by the walls and doors. Traditionally flour is also sprinkled on the right shoulders of each family member. They then gather at the *Jamat Khana (religious place)* and pray for unity and blessings and betterment of all humans. A celebratory meal is given – in the old days the meal consisted of *Khista* (fermented thick bread) topped with milk and rancid liquid butter. Once the meal has been completed the family members then take manure to their field.

Kitzit was also a day for the youngsters to play *Toksuri* (a traditional base ball type game).

This Spring Celebration has different names in the two main languages of the Gojal Valley (Upper Hunza):

- Burushaski Kardeet
- Wakhi Kitzit

Cleaning of Irrigation Channels (First week of March)

During the last week of February, depending on weather conditions and the melting of the winter's snow, the local people gather to repair and clean the irrigation channels that provide a vital source of water to their fields. The date is decided by *Numbadars* (A responsible person in every village, who is elected by the village community and Magistrate of the region) or other village elders. Early in the morning they gather at the starting point of their respective irrigation channels where the *Khalipha* offers special prayers for prosperity, productivity and supply of sufficient water. They commence work and afterwards join together to enjoy a feast of local specialties.

The festival takes place in

Cleaning of Irrigation Channels has different names in different languages:

- Shina Rajaki
- Balti Rakwon Fscmwa
- Burushaski Eilthum
- Wakhi Wodh Khak

Seed Sowing Festival

This two day ceremony is to formally open the farming season in Gilgit, Hunza and Baltistan. This ceremony depends on the extremes of weather to different places and the altitude of each village.

- Hunza (Altit & Baltit Fort): Last week of February
- Gojal Valley (From Shishkat to Gulmit): 6th March
- Upper Gojal Valley, Shimshal and Chipurson Valleys: It is celebrated when the weather condition becomes normal and suitable for cultivation and in
- Baltistan: From 21st March.

For this ceremony people prepare special dishes called *SEMN* made from processed wheat grains and rancid liquid butter and *MUL* made from wheat flour and eaten with butter.

➤ Day 1: Pirkhithn

The first day of the Seed Sowing Festival people gather at common places to eat and pray for the betterment of community and good production of crops.

During evening the villagers take the plant *Pishpishunuk* from the representative of the village Shoghun Puthuks and make two wooden arrows called *Suthors*. They place these beside the *risin* (the air, smoke and light hole in the roof of the tradition houses) and commence eating the traditional dishes of *Semn* and *Mul*.

Afterwards they pass the *Suthors* (wooden arrows) through the *risin* to inside the house and then it is taken to the field with fresh livestock manure.

➤ Day 2: Thaghm / Bofhow / Tab Thowa

The next day Thumang is performed. The family members of the *Shoghun Puthuks* tribe walk in procession to a traditional home in the village carrying a local plant called “*Yarz*” – they then place this plant on the fire inside the houses watching the direction in which the smoke goes. It is said that whichever direction the smoke goes the production of wheat will be more. From here everyone proceeds to the field with one person dressed as a *Dhirokh* (Ox) who entertains the audience by playing tricks with them.

The *Khalifa* (person that performs religious rituals) prays for better crops, unity, and success. After the prayer, an elder from Shoghun Puthuk tribe sprinkles seed to a small area of the field and ploughs this portion of field using traditional ploughing equipment and 2 oxen. This concludes the formal opening of cultivation season.

Parents bring their children of 1-3 years to the field for the first time and touch their hands on the plough and other farming tools to ensure they become a good farmer in future.

In some villages a polo match with follow this ceremony.

Seed Sowing Festival has different name in different local languages:

- Balti Tab Thowa
- Burushaski **Bophaw**
- Wakhi Thagm

Navroz Festival (21st March)

Navroz is a religious festival of great significance and has an age-old history stemming some 3,000 year from Iran where by its marks the first day of Spring, the Iranian New Year and the beginning of the Bahá'í year. In Gilgit Baltistan this event is celebrated on 21st March with great religious zeal. At the end of the dormant winter season the local communities rejoice looking forward to preparing their farms for good harvest. The word Noveroz comes from the Old Persian: meaning "new day/daylight".

In Gilgit Baltistan the festival takes place in Gilgit and Skardu and offers tourists the opportunity to watch polo tournaments, local sports, dances, music and folk dancing with some activities held in place of religious importance.

Garukus Festival (April)

This festival is celebrated in the Hunza valley to welcome in the spring season. Families celebrate this by cooking up traditional food particularly dishes that involve cooking the heads and feet of their slaughtered animals.

Harvesting Festival (21st Jun to 12th July)

This festival is celebrated when the crops are ready to harvest. Family members go to the field to harvest the first grains of wheat or barley. They carry *plate of Khamali* bread, ghee, flour and *Spandur* (a tiny herb that is burnt and the smoke is regarded with great spiritual significance). The head of the family prays and then puts butter and flour on the ear of some barley or wheat. The family head also set the *Spandur* on fire so as to make smoke. They then cut off some ears of the crop and take it to home. Once at home they stop at the entrance / doorstep and the family head sprinkles flour on the jambs of the door and greets other family members. The fresh grains collected are roasted and mixed with yogurt with smashed bread (*Dhirum Phitee*). The first spoonful of yoghurt is mixed with 3 grains of wheat or barley, the 2nd with 5 grains and the 3rd with 7 grains. The family members gather to congratulate each other on the beginning of harvest and eat specially prepared traditional foods and in some areas they enjoy dancing and playing traditional music.

This festival is celebrated at different times throughout Gilgit-Baltistan depending on the altitude of the village and the maturity of the crops.

The earliest it occurs is in Hunza around the 21st June and the latest in the Gojal Valley around the 6th to 12th July.

The harvest festival has different names in different local languages:

- Shina Ghinoni
- Balti Parnazza
- Burushaski Ginani
- Wakhi Chineer

The Shandur Polo Festival: (3 days in early July each year)

Shandur is the highest polo field in the world and the site of fierce rivalry between polo teams from the old fortress town of Chitral in Pakistan's Khyber Pukhtunkhwa and the ancient caravanserai and now modern city of Gilgit in Gilgit-Baltistan. The tournament which has been going since 1936 attracts many local and international tourists from around the world. The festival is filled with many musicians from the area playing *Bulla* (polo) music. Traditionally the horses are trained to listen to the different sounds from the music which helps them change / adapt their form depending on the way the polo match is going.

In 2012 the Shandur Polo tournament will take place from the **7th July to 9th July 2012**. Gilgit Serena Hotel can arrange for you to attend this magnificent and hugely fun festival.

Babusar Cup Polo Tournament (3 days in early August each year)

This free-style polo tournament is played at an altitude of 13,812 ft on the scenic Babusar Pass, located in Diamer District of Gilgit-Baltistan, just 4 ½ drive from Gilgit city or a 2 hour drive Chilas on the Karakoram Highway. Each year polo teams from Pakistan and around the world come to Babusar to fight out the prestigious Babusar Cup. Although predominantly a polo tournament the festival also includes tug of war; tent pegging, paragliding, photography, gemstone and handicrafts exhibitions and offers tourists the opportunity to camp, trek and horse ride in the surrounding areas.

Independence Day of Pakistan (14th August)

Pakistan celebrates its Independence Day with great fervor. The day begins with special prayers for the martyrs of the Pakistan Movement and for the unity, solidarity and prosperity of the country. The celebration begins with a 31-gun salute in the capital Islamabad and a 21-gun salute at all the provincial headquarters. In Gilgit-Baltistan the day is celebrated with special polo matches held in Gilgit, Skardu, Shigar and Khaplu.

The Arrival of Flocks from the Pastures

- **Gilgit-Baltistan (Late September)**

- **Shimshal Kuch / Ouchay Doskovas Festival (12th to 18th October)**

Shimshal is the remotest area of the Hunza Valley located in Gojal in Upper Hunza, bordering China. Following the old tradition every year in the month of May, Shimshali people take their livestock (predominantly Yaks) to the high pastures of the Pamir for grazing for 5 months between May and October. Traditionally it is the women who look after the livestock and live in the higher pastures. On their return (a day fixed by a local religious leader), they all come down with their yaks, goats, sheep and gather on the banks of the Shimshal River to spend one night before sacrificing a goat or sheep, changing into a new dress and entering the village in one big caravan. They head to the mosque and give condolence to the families who lost their relatives during the 5 months and return to their homes greeted by their families with a large feast.

Independence Day Gilgit-Baltistan (November 1st)

The Gilgit-Baltistan Independence Day is celebrated on the 1st November every year with great jubilation. The day commemorates the end of the Dogra regime on November 1, 1947. Throughout Gilgit-Baltistan there are a series of celebrations known as the Jashne Azadi Gilgit (independence festival). Traditionally the festivity includes grand polo tournaments, other sports and cultural galas. Gilgit Serena Hotel organizes a special theme dinner on this day.

Thumushalling Festival (21st December)

This festival celebrates the death of the last Buddisht King of Gilgit – Shri Badat who was said to be a cannibal and folklore says he considered children his most loving food. He was apparently captured and put in a trap and burned to death. People now re-inact this event by making **Nasalou** on 21 December, a large bonfire and playing traditional music in Hunza, Gilgit and the Ishkoman Valley.