



Experience Pakistan 2003

An account by pupils from King Edward VI Aston School, Birmingham

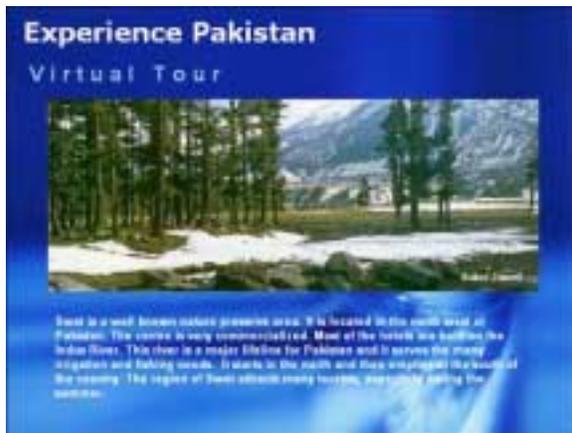


During 2003, pupils from King Edward VI Aston School in Birmingham entered, and were one of the winners of the Experience Pakistan competition run by the Akhter Education Trust. Through the generosity of Humayun Mughal, the Chairman of Akhter Computers, and the welcome afforded to the group from the Pakistani Government, the group had the most incredible time visiting Pakistan. The following accounts, written by the boys, aim to give an impression of this fantastic experience.

How we won by Nick Solly

In November last year, we were set the challenge of producing a multimedia presentation on Pakistan. Our team consisting of Jordan, Jon, Abdul and myself jumped at this opportunity to learn more about this fascinating country. To begin with we were given time in our ICT lessons to research and plan our project, but after the first six weeks it was up to us to complete it. After a fairly slow start with many different ideas being thought up we decided upon a 3D landscape with an interactive guide showing us around. If we look back on it now I think we would all agree this was a little 'ambitious'. Unfortunately, some

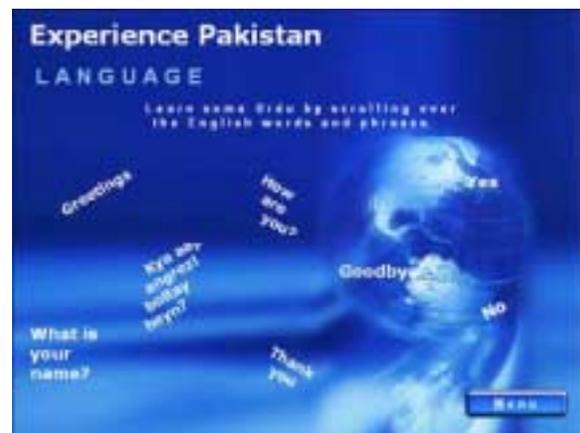
technological problems let us down and we decided to approach the idea from a different angle.



We decided that by using a fairly simple but stable structure, with a uniform page design, we could quickly edit in all the information that we needed. After many Saturday afternoons huddled round a computer, our project began to take shape. All was not lost within our first idea though, as we managed to render a 3D talking guide who introduced each section individually. By a process of collection, manipulation and input we

slowly but surely filled the project. Our selected topic was "Sights and Sounds" and we accumulated a lot of information on the language, the news, the sights, the different regions and much more.

Most of our information we collected from the Internet, which was an invaluable source for us. The wealth of information that was open to us aided us as we worked to complete the project and by working as a team it wasn't too difficult for us to finally complete it.



Creating our project wasn't exactly plain sailing as combining different media forms into a final presentation was quite difficult. Also, regrettably for Steve Tiller, at Akhter Computers, our project couldn't be converted for web viewing.

Even with all these problems we still had a great time creating the project and felt that we'd gained a great understanding about Pakistan as a country. It was very informative and allowed us to better our knowledge in a constructive and organised fashion. Finally in January we sent the project in and awaited the results.

Having discovered that they had won, the pupils won told that they would be receiving their winners medals at the House of Lords.

Visiting the House of Lords by Abdul Halim

We got to London and arrived quite early, so we had the chance to look around the capital. The London Eye was a magnificent spectacle and so we went on it. It lasted for 30 minutes of which 10 to 20 were brilliant because the views were great. We saw Buckingham Palace and the House of Lords. After our own ventures, we met up with the rest of the winners in Khundan restaurant, which was incidentally made famous when John Major took Edwina Curry there when they were having an affair. Here we started to get to know some of the people we'd be spending our trip with. Then, after an appetizing meal we made our way to the House of Lords.



It was fabulous. We had to go through metal detectors and other strict security before we walked into a magnificent hall. The long winding corridors seemed to echo for a distance, dotted with statues of supposedly important people; though I haven't quite figured why there wasn't one of me...

When we were taken to our room the award ceremony began. It was a simple ceremony but an elegant one. Many of the judges including Lord Weatherill, General the Lord Guthrie, Sir John Chapple, and Mr Christopher Thatcher were there and presented us with our medals.

The boys then had a few months to prepare for a trip of a lifetime, which would take place during October.

While in Pakistan we visited many different places and met many people. The following accounts are not supposed to be comprehensive but describe some of the highlights of the tour.

Islamabad by Jordan Shea

Islamabad was the first place in Pakistan that we saw. Our first views of it were from the sky when we were coming into land. It was breathtaking. Once we had landed PIA gave us one of the warmest welcomes that I had received, bar the ones I was later to receive over the trip. We were put into the VIP area where we waited for our luggage to be retrieved. Nick was invited to go and help so that he could see what was happening. They gave us drinks and we started to talk to the judges and some of the other schools. Once the luggage had arrived we left to make sure our luggage was there. Once this was assured we got onto the coaches and set off for the Marriot hotel. We had a short stay in the hotel so that we could get changed and recuperate after the flight.

Next it was off to the British High Commission. This was where we first saw the beauty that was available in Pakistan. The gardens were beautiful, with amazing plants and trees on lush green grass. It was outstanding. After signing the guest book we were led through the garden to a small area lower than the rest of the garden with a swimming pool and a covered area with table. After a small amount of mingling we were invited to sit down for lunch. This was where we tasted our first bite of true Pakistani food. It was gorgeous and tasted terrific. After lunch we relaxed by the pool and sat around in the sun. We started to interact with the other students more and everyone had a good laugh. Now pictures were taken, then we left for the coaches to go back to the hotel.



For dinner we were taken high up over Islamabad in the mountains to eat at a restaurant. The views are something that will not leave my memory. Seeing the Mosque lit up in the way that it was, all the houses giving off different coloured lights, everywhere lit apart from a strip of ground we later found to be a park. The food again was exquisite, showing us much of the Pakistani cuisine. We were all given a Pakistani cricket T-Shirt with Experience Pakistan 2003 on the front, along with a book about Pakistan. The night ended with people enjoying themselves and then a much needed rest.

In the morning we visited a Government Secondary School. This was an experience that taught me quite a lot. It was interesting to see the differences between the schooling there in comparison to the schooling in Britain. We went

on a tour of the school that ended with the opportunity for the students to ask questions.



After this we went to see President Musharraf. Upon seeing him we were amazed. It was in an enormous building with very strict security. Many doormen greeted us and we were taken into a large hall. The President started by giving us an informative speech about the current events in Pakistan. After this we were invited to ask questions that were important to us; however all of our questions had been

answered apart from one. I asked the President if he had any pets, his answer was two cocker spaniels. We were given snacks and had pictures taken with the President.

Then it was off to see the Chairman of the Senate, who told us about the current events in Pakistan, such as education. Here we had lunch, which our school and Darwin School were rushed through so that we could go to Preparatory School Islamabad, our cyber twinning school, while the others went shopping. We were given a warm welcome at PSI; they put on a performance for us, which we enjoyed. Then they took us around their school and we saw how advanced their learning was. We left, and then went for dinner, before finally going to bed.

The next day was a long coach trip to another school and then to Taxila museum and archaeological site. Here we saw some beautiful views and a Buddhist Monastery. We had a Picnic lunch in the sun, ending the day with shopping.



[Skardu by Jonathan Helliwell](#)



On day four of our tour we visited the beautiful and tranquil region that is Skardu. We flew in to a remote and isolated airport in a C-130 Hercules aircraft where we were greeted by an amazing view of the surrounding mountains. The views were breathtaking and the snow-topped mountains welcomed us to the stunning province of the North West Frontier.

Located amongst some of the world's highest peaks, the Shangri-La Resort surrounds the heart shaped Kachura Lake. There are also numerous orchards and flower filled gardens in the resort.

We visited Skardu at the best possible time. The weather was typical of that in the mountains, being very cold, but it made a nice change to the weather in England.

The Shangri-La has it's own genuine crashed DC-3. In busier seasons it is used as a coffee shop. A plaque on the side says that it crashed a few minutes out of Skardu and the founder of the hotel bought it for 150 Rupees and had it dragged there.



The first location we visited whilst in Skardu was to the village of Kachura. Our whole group was greatly affected by the visit to a local school, where the children were cramped into the classrooms,



writing on scraps of paper and learning from very out of date textbooks. One thing that really astounded me was children in year nine were already learning the equivalent of A-Level mathematics. However, this was nothing compared to what we experienced next. After the tour around the school, we were taken outside and shown a plaque about the village. I was astounded to find that 575 people lived in 40 houses. That's an average of 14 people living in each house. The minimum family income was 2500 rupees per household per year and the maximum income was only 9000 rupees per person per year. That is about £25 to £90 per house per year. Upon seeing

this, I realised how lucky we are to live in England and it only occurred to us afterwards how giving they were, considering the poverty that they lived in.

Whilst in Skardu, we travelled to Satpara Lake. It is situated 5 miles south of Skardu, in the North West Frontier Province of Pakistan. It is a beautifully clear lake surrounded by high glacial mountains with a small island in its centre. We were first





taken to a newly built tourist motel, high up on the hillside where we were treated to a breathtaking view of the area. The water is eerily still and the scenery is picture perfect. After a breathless scramble down the hillside, we reached the boat that was used to cross the lake to the island. Nick was lucky enough to be in the only group that actually had time to go to the island. The island is covered with various rocky outcrops and a small deserted house

that sits proudly in the middle. As we looked at the hillside behind us we saw building work taking place. They were planning to put a dam further upstream and flood this entire area. Most of the beauty here would be lost and the island underwater. We felt very privileged to see this amazing spectacle before it is lost, and it will be a great loss, as I believe that it was the most beautiful part of Pakistan that we saw.

I know that the entire of our group thoroughly enjoyed the Skardu experience, and if the opportunity to visit arises again, I am sure that we would all jump at the chance and take full advantage of it. We enjoyed an entertaining night gathered round a fire and then a bonfire outside. We went to bed, very dreary eyed, knowing that we would have a very early start, as we were flying to Peshawar in the morning.



Peshawar by Abdul Halim

After a cold but brilliant time in Skardu we underwent a climate change as we flew to the warm Peshawar. We were stripped of our warm layers because of the heat to T-shirts. First we went to the Bala Hissar Fort. An impressive landmark in Peshawar city, the fort, was originally built by Emperor Babur. It was destroyed by Afghans and finally renovated by the British in 1849. Here we were entertained with military drills and got the opportunity to see some fabulous views looking over the great city. Then we enjoyed a light snack before we went into museum of the Frontier Corps. During the tour in the museum we saw the history of Pakistan's military events and people. There were also some paintings of people who visited the area like Princess Diana. Then we had lunch under the shade outside while traditional music was played. Finally with gifts at hand we departed for our hotel, Pearl Continental.

After a short break at the Hotel we started to make for the Khyber Pass. This for us was the most anticipated part of our trip. The Khyber Pass is one of the most famous mountain passes in the World and when we got there we were not disappointed. There was a guide who told us about the history of the pass and pointed out the locations whilst we also had binoculars to have a closer look. The roads winded round the mountainside and train tunnels ran through. We were reluctant to leave.



That evening we were honored guests at the stunning mansion of the Governor of the North West Frontier Province. While being led down a red carpet across the back lawn of this amazing estate, a band stuck up to unique sounds of a Pakistani folk tune. The marquee was quite out of this world, as it contained not only tables for the entire party but also chandeliers dotted across the marquee's roof. After an appetising meal of traditional food from the area, dancers from the local tribes entertained us. We were thrilled by the vibrant array of movement and astonishing skill that these men demonstrated to us. This was a night to remember.

Lahore by Jordan Shea

Once we had landed in Lahore we had the memories of the night before fresh in our minds, also the lack of sleep, so they gave us the day to catch up on that sleep, but the adrenalin that we were running on, due to being in Pakistan kept us up, playing and talking with friends.

For dinner we went to the 'Village restaurant' where we saw the food we were to eat being prepared in front of you, and the selection was amazing. During dinner there was casual chat about what people had enjoyed about the trip so far. The day was ended with a late night shopping trip. Here we had the chance to haggle in the Pakistani markets. Jon proved that he was the best at this once he managed to get a rug for less than half of the starting price. Haggling was strange, because we ended the night with the realisation that we had been haggling for ten pence at times.

Once we had woken up, we were taken to the 'Madrassah', an Islamic school. Here we discovered that the children memorised the Qur'aan all day for the bulk of their academic career. We were taught some Urdu and then we said goodbye and left. We then went to 'Teach a Child' school project. What the school does is to take in one family member from deprived area and teaches them. The hope is that by helping that child further their education they can get a good job. If the child does get a good job then they can help themselves and their families break the endless cycle of poverty that they were thrown into. This idea is helping many families in Islamabad. As a goodbye we sang 'If your happy and you know it' with the younger members of the school.



We went to Lahore Fort and we were shown around. The architecture that could be seen was outstanding and it was amazing how all of the original mosaic tiles were still there after all this time. We saw where the Mughals lived during their rule. It was also astounding to see the amount of smog in the air; just walking through the fort was like swimming in the chlorine filled pools back at home. We could see there were fountains and the plants that were around the buildings were truly stunning. I couldn't believe the amount of beauty that lay in this single fort.

After this we went to the Badshahi Mosque. The level of intricacy on the building was unbelievable and just by looking at the sheer size of it you could tell just how important this was to the people of Lahore, if not the whole of Pakistan. We were led into a room where we were shown an amazing architectural feature in the mosque. I went into one corner of the room while another person went into the other diagonally opposite to me, we then whispered to each other, and due to the unique echoes of the room, we could hear each other even though we were on either side of the room, 20 feet apart. That was something that I will remember and tell people about for a long time.



Our last full day was started off by going to Aitchison College, one of the oldest public schools in the sub continent. It was amazing. The sheer size of the campus, along with all the buildings and other facilities was in direct contrast to the other schools we had seen. Then they told us about the fees that had to be paid to the school to go there and I understood. Still it was great that we had to have our tour of the campus in the coach due to the size, which is an

achievement. We were given snacks where later, after talking the head of the college, I realized that he knew our head teacher.



Later we went to the Cathedral of Resurrection in Lahore. We were given rose necklaces and were shown around the cathedral. It was amazing to see such a large cathedral in one of the biggest cities in a Muslim country. We were then led to look around the Cathedral's school, in which we were shown many different classes and the children.

Our last visit of the trip was to the Governor of Punjab. He like the other leaders we had seen spoke to us openly and answered all of our questions without hesitating. Then we were taken into a room with school children from Pakistan to talk to them and learn more about their schooling. Due to the confidence built up over the trip this was easier than we had expected.

Then on the Tuesday it was all over. We flew back to Heathrow from Lahore airport and said our goodbyes. The sights and sounds of Pakistan are something that will always stay with me.

I hope this gives you an impression of what was a fantastic experience. The competition is also running this year and further information can be obtained from www.experiencepakistan.org.

