

STUDY GUIDE

Learning About Our Neighbours: Afghan Culture



Introduction

- » Are you curious about the diverse cuisine, art, and cultural practices of Afghanistan?
- » Do you have Afghan neighbours or friends in your community?
- » Are you aware of Afghan refugees arriving in Canada?

If so, then this documentary and study guide are for you!

In this **educational documentary**¹, you will meet a group of Afghans living in BC and Ontario, who want Canadians to know more about their home country, Afghanistan. From food to music, language to hospitality, geography to poetry—the topics they discuss are as rich and varied as the place they come from, and reveal just some of the many of the commonalities we all share. This study guide was created to supplement the perspectives you will hear in the documentary with information about Afghanistan, its people, and the history of Afghans in Canada. The educational documentary and study guide aim to provide information for the Canadian public to create understanding of the culture of newcomer Afghan refugees resettling in Canada.



Afghanistan is a richly diverse country, with a wide range of geographies, nationalities, ethnicities, religions, languages, and art forms.

Afghans around the world retain deeply meaningful ties to their home country. Sharing authentic food, making music, reading poetry, and observing collectivist values like family and hospitality are some of the ways they practice this connection, and build new connections in their communities.

Since the late 1970s, several waves of Afghans have arrived in Canada as refugees and asylum seekers. As of 2016, nearly 84,000 live in the country, primarily in the suburbs of major urban centers.

Population & Geography

- » Although a lack of formal census means a lack of reliable population data, it is estimated that the current population of Afghanistan is approximately 34.3 million.
- » Of all the ethnicities and nationalities in the region, most have a presence in Afghanistan, including Pashtun, Tajik, Hazara, Uzbek, Aimaq, Turkmen, Baloch, Brahui, Nuristani, Pashai, Pamiri, Gujjar, Arab, Jatt, Kirghiz, Hindu, Qizilbash, Bayat and many others.
- » Most citizens in Afghanistan follow Islam. The majority are Sunni Muslims. There are also Shia and Ismaili-Shia minorities represented.
- » Thirty-four provinces comprise the country, each of which includes many districts, cities and/or villages.

“I just want to go back to Kabul at some point and travel to different provinces again...”

“It’s very important for Afghans to talk about their country, about the beauty of Afghanistan has so much it can offer!”



1. youtu.be/9_DUrOISKEc

Language & Art

- » Afghanistan's official languages are Pashto and Dari. Regional languages include Urdu and Arabic. More than 30 other languages are also spoken throughout the country.

Pashto (phonetic)²

pikhey
as-salaamu' alaykum
tsenga yee?
staa num tsa dhe?

English

Welcome
Hello
How are you?
What's your name?

Dari (phonetic)³

khosh aamaden.
asalaam-o-alaykom
shomaa chetor hastin?
naam-e shomaa chist?

English

Welcome
Hello
How are you?
What's your name?

Access a free, printable Dari and Pashto phrasebook for refugee assistance, [here](#).³



- » Afghan culture includes high respect for artistry, intellectualism, and the eloquent use of language. Poetry is particularly admired art form.⁴
- » Other art practices—including music, dance, and embroidery—are practiced by Afghans, both in Afghanistan and around the world.

“Poetry is an intrinsic part of Afghan culture...”

Cuisine

- » Due to its central location between several Central Asian, Middle Eastern and South Asian countries, Afghanistan's diverse cuisines feature a wide range of spices, meats, vegetables, starches and fats. Each province has its own culinary specialties.
- » Afghanistan's national dish is Kabuli Palau (also: Quaboli Palaw, Qabili Palau, and other names), a mixed-rice dish with flavourful meat, carrot, raisins, almonds and a variety of spices. View a recipe [here](#).⁵
- » Another traditional dish is Banjan Borani, made with fried eggplants, red peppers and fried garlic. View a recipe [here](#).⁶
- » Shir Berenj Recipe (Afghan Rice Pudding) is a sweet and delicious dessert served across Afghanistan. The main ingredients are rice, milk, cardamom, and sugar. View a recipe [here](#).⁷



“Afghans cook incredible food with lots of variety.”

“...to find Afghan recipes gives us our own country's touch and taste.”

“Every province and region has their unique cuisine.”

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Afghan Refugees in Canada: A Timeline

“If you went there, back in the days, we had a normal life just like others do ...”

“I know we are out of our country now, but I will never forget my culture or my identity ...”

“Canada. We are here because they offered us a peaceful life to live here with them.”

“It’s the land of opportunity so everyone has a chance to explore what their ‘thing’ is and what they can do.”

Canada has a strong Afghan population: 83,995 according to the 2016 census. However, until **1978**, only about 1,000 Afghans lived in Canada. Since that time, decades of conflict and instability pushed many to flee to other countries.⁸

1978/79: a military coup, followed by the Soviet invasion, began a period of instability that continues today. From 1979 to 1992, more than a fifth of the country’s population fled as refugees,⁹ including approximately 10,000 that arrived in Canada as refugees and asylum seekers between 1981 and 1995.⁸

1992–1996: the Afghan Civil War again pushed Afghans—including some that returned to the country when Soviet forces left in 1989—to flee to neighbouring countries.

Between **1996 and 2001**, another wave of approximately 11,000 Afghans arrived in Canada.⁸

In **2021**, in response to the Taliban rapidly re-taking control of Afghanistan, the Canadian government announced plans to resettle at least 40,000 Afghan refugees in Canada.¹⁰

As of August **2022**, over 17,000 Afghan refugees have arrived in Canada, under all streams since August 2021.¹⁰

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Study Guide

Written by: Bahar Taheri

Content Advisor: Nangyalai Tanai

Layout: Katie Lapi

Educational Documentary

Producer: Bahar Taheri

Director: Sep Nia

Content Advisor: Nangyalai Tanai

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