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## WAGAH-ATTARI BORDER



LEVISON WOOD

Pakistan

India

Few borders in the world are as entertaining as the one at Wagah. A visit here involves snacks, hand-held national flags and plenty of spirit for cheering. Soldiers on both sides—India and Pakistan—try to outdo each other with dramatic footwork, legs lifted above their heads, and staccato salutes, in flamboyant uniforms with plumed headgear and swords held aloft.

British author and explorer Levison Wood has watched the border ceremony at Wagah twice, most recently during a six-month, 2,000-mile journey on foot from the Pamirs in Afghanistan to Bhutan. He charts his experiences in his book *Walking The Himalayas: An Adventure Of Survival And Endurance* (Hodder & Stoughton). “Despite the politicised nature of it, it’s all good-natured,” says Wood. “All the goose stepping and marching, the uniforms, and people shouting friendly jibes...it’s tongue-in-cheek. It’s great to see people go there and cheer, it’s like a football match.”

The crowds are always bigger on the India side of the border, but locals from Lahore, just 30km away, also come to cheer their soldiers. “They still put on a good show,” adds Wood, who crossed the border from Pakistan into India, something only foreigners are able to do. “It’s a controversial border,” he says. “It’s also tinged with sadness. Many people have family on the other side of the border they’d like to visit, but they haven’t had the chance. That’s the legacy of this ceremony. The pomp has serious undertones, and the problems continue till today.”

The border, which closes at 4.30pm, is just a 30-minute drive from Amritsar, so it makes for an ideal afternoon outing as part of a bigger trip to this city with its splendid sights, including the Golden Temple. For enthusiastic travellers, Wood recommends walking back from the border ceremony at Wagah to Amritsar, a 25km journey that would take half a day. “It’s a great walk on the Grand Trunk Road, with all its history. The landscape in this part of the country is beautiful,” he says. “It’s a place that has stayed in my mind and I’d like to visit again. I’ve been to India six times over 15 years, and it never fails to surprise me how some things stay the same, even within the vast changes in the country.” >