23 Dec 2024

Dear Traveller,

First of all many thanks for booking your upcoming Trans Asia journey with Oasis Overland, I hope you are looking forward to the journey!  Back here at Oasis HQ we have been working hard putting as much advance preparation in place as possible.  This will be the first of some important emails in the coming months and covers the following:

* Itinerary
* Passports
* Visas
* Travel insurance
* Interim deposit payment for those travelling from Istanbul to Singapore

*Note: We will be sending this update to everyone booked on various different legs of the trip, from the full Istanbul to Singapore route, down to shorter sections that may just visit a few countries. So, not all the visa or itinerary information may apply to everyone.*

But first…

**What to expect!**

We are delighted that this will be our second Istanbul to Singapore expedition to run since the pandemic prevented us from setting off in April 2020. We completed our first expedition successfully this year as well as the return trip in our overland truck from Kyrgyzstan to Turkey. We hope you are thrilled to be a group member on this exciting expedition!

This is one of the biggest overland adventures that we run and it’s an expedition where you should expect the unexpected, with the itinerary and route having to adapt at times, even whilst en route. This could be due to the distances covered, border closures and visa changes to name a few!

This is about as far away from your average holiday as you can get, as at times we travel to places where roads are poor, the heat is extreme or the cold is bitter, and many of you will be on the road for 3 months or more.

You may have to carry heavy sand mats if the truck gets bogged in sand and you will all get involved in the cooking and the cleaning, as well as setting up and taking down the tents. There will also be some bush camping on this trip, which means no campsite facilities, but rather dig a hole and a ‘shower in a can’ moments will happen! Much of the time we will stay in hostels or basic hotels and standards can vary considerably, depending on what is available to us. Upgrades to camping are available as we go along in some places we stay, but not everywhere – you need to be ready to do plenty of simple camping.

For the China and South East Asia section, the whole trip will be carried out using local transport (trains, sleeper trains, coaches etc.) and budget hotels/hostels. So, there won’t be camping, but you should still expect some pretty simple and basic accommodation at times, especially in remote areas.

Together with these challenges you should also expect numerous amazing moments, meeting local people (some who see few tourists), exploring stunning scenery and seeing some of the world’s most iconic sites. All in all this is going to be a really special trip that you’ll remember forever.

**Itinerary Notes**

As noted above, the nature of our trips means that all our itineraries are somewhat flexible. There will almost certainly be changes to the website itinerary at some point on the route for reasons that we cannot foresee yet.

However, there are two sections of the trip that are important for us to let you know about now.

**A – Beijing to Singapore**

At the moment we do not have enough people booked to guarantee this leg of the trip can operate. It is still early, and we have legs that people book from Bishkek and Beijing to Singapore that don’t start until June/July. So, we remain hopeful that this part of the trip will run as expected – last year we had quite a few people booking those later sections in the first half of 2024.

However, we do want to let you know now, and advise those booked to Singapore not to book flights out of Singapore yet. We will be in touch with you directly as soon as we can guarantee this leg of the trip.

**B - Armenia to Turkmenistan – either via Azerbaijan or Iran**

In previous years this trip has run in two ways:

1. Heading from Yerevan in Armenia, south into Iran and travelling through the country stopping off at various highlights along the way (including Tehran and Esfahan) before getting to Mashhad and then exiting north into Turkmenistan.
2. Crossing from Armenia or Georgia into Azerbaijan, travelling through the country (avoiding Nagorno Karabakh) to Baku, and then taking the ferry from there across the Caspian Sea to Turkmenbashi in Turkmenistan. The ferry does not go that regularly and so we can be delayed a few days waiting for the next one.

Our expected route for this trip is to go through Iran.

This is because, at the moment all of the land borders to Azerbaijan remain closed and have not re-opened since the Covid pandemic (though you can fly into the country). The current official position is that they will not re-open until at least January 2025, but it is generally expected that the closure will be extended further through 2025.

We therefore need to plan that we will travel through Iran. We will start the process of applying for Iran visas by the beginning of February and there will be a cost for this to pay for the initial visa authorisation process. We will still have several months after this and before we get there for the Azerbaijan border situation to change, so it may remain an option for us to consider later. However, If the borders are still all closed, we will complete the Iran visa process (probably in Tbilisi) and travel that way.

Important Note - [UK Government travel advice](https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/iran) does currently advise against all travel to Iran. Our two trips this year travelled through Iran successfully, including with British and US citizens on board and so we expect this to work fine in 2025. We have excellent local contacts and travel partners who will assist us as required. However, we do need to advise you of this advice level now and recommend that you read it. If we do end up taking this route and you do not wish to travel through Iran for any reason, you may overfly at your cost and rejoin us in Turkmenistan. If you choose to do this, we will arrange a partial reduction of your local payment amount (this is not the norm – generally if you leave the trip for any reason, there is no local payment refund – we only do it for Iran because of the travel advice level there and we know some people may have concerns about going through).

**Passports**

Your passport must be valid for at least 6 months AFTER your trip finishes. This is a general requirement for all of the countries we travel to on our trips.

As a guideline, you will need at least 1 blank page per country in your passport (2 pages each for Tajikistan and Indonesia) after you have obtained any relevant visas before your trip commences.

**It’s important to look at your passport now to see if you need to obtain a new one, to ensure it is obtained in time.** We will require your passport details and/or a copy of it in order to apply for letters of invitation (LOIs) and this must be the passport you will be travelling on. For those of you travelling between Tbilisi and Ashgabat, **we will need these by the end of January 2025**.

**Visas**

Visas for Central Asian countries have a reputation for being difficult and expensive to obtain. Some are tricky and require specific documentation, but in recent years, many have got easier or are visa-free.

*Please note: Every effort has been made to ensure that the information provided is correct and up-to-date and is given in good faith, but we cannot be held responsible when visa regulations change and information supplied becomes out of date. We recommend you check the requirements for each country with the relevant embassy in your home country.*

We will be sending out specific information to help you apply for various visas in future updates. Most visas are valid for entry within 90 days, e.g. if a visa is issued on 1st April, you have until 29th June to enter the country. This means if you apply too early, the visa will expire before you get there. So there is no immediate action you need to take now, other than applying for a new passport if you need one, and sending us information and documentation needed (e.g. colour passport scans) to obtain letters of invitation. Our next update will explain what to send us.

The visas that require the most planning and documentation are Iran, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and China.

**Iran**

If our route takes us through Iran (see notes above), all nationalities will require a visa. To obtain this, you need an authorisation code and we will start the process to apply for this in January. Our local operator in Iran obtains the authorisation codes on our behalf. This can be a long process with little information given by the authorities about how the application is progressing. However, in our experience, once codes are issued, it’s a straightforward process to then collect the visa from an Iran Consulate. Currently, if we do go through Iran, we plan to get the visas as a group in Tbilisi.

**Turkmenistan**

All nationalities must submit a Letter of Invitation (LOI) as part of their application process. Our local operator in Turkmenistan will create one for everyone in the group which will enable us to apply for the visa at the land border on arrival or at the airport if you are flying into in Ashgabat. We normally start this LOI process in February.

**Tajikistan**

Most nationalities do not require a visa. You can check yours here: <https://www.consular.tj/vizoviy-rejim.aspx>. However, everyone will need to apply for a GBAO permit for our journey along the Pamir Highway.

British and South African passport holders do need an e-visa which you can apply for after 9th March. The initial online application is relatively simple and some visa approvals come through quickly but most take a few weeks with requests for further information and sometimes they are rejected. There seems to be little rhyme or reason behind who gets asked for more info and who doesn’t. Our Tajikistan agent can assist with getting our visas approved by issuing a Letter of Invitation (LOI) and following up directly with the authorities. There are additional charges for this which we will advise you about when we have up to date information, closer to when you make your application.

If you do not need a visa, then you can not apply for the GBAO permit before travel and we will assist you to obtain this probably in Dushanbe.

We will send further details about how to apply for the e-visa and the GBAO permit in a later update.

**China**

Some nationalities, including The Netherlands and Australia do not currently require a visa for China, for stays of up to 30 days. Other nationalities will need to apply online and then in person (in order have finger prints and a photo taken) through their nearest Chinese Visa Application Service Centre. Our local operator will provide a Letter of Invitation and Travel Plan to support your application.

Some Centres advise that you should not apply for your visa earlier than 3 months before your date of entry to China which is 4th April and very close to our Istanbul departure date. However, this does not apply to most nationalities, for instance in the UK you can apply much earlier as they issue a 2 year visa whereas the Paris Centre advises that you must apply within 3 months because the visa they issue is only valid for entry for 3 months. You should contact the Centre you intend to apply at to check this directly with them.

It is recommended to apply in your home country as most people need to go in person to a visa centre or embassy to provide finger prints. Additionally, if you apply somewhere where you are not resident, it’s not always possible to know in advance how long your visa will be valid for, as their rules regarding this frequently change. If you will not be in your home country or will not have enough time before the trip starts, we suggest you investigate which Embassy or Consulate you will be able to apply at and what their requirements are.

If you can only obtain a visa with 3-month validity then you will need to obtain your visa either in Istanbul or elsewhere en-route. Please contact us if you believe this will apply to you.

Letters of Invitation for the above visas are included in the cost of your trip (except Tajikistan).

The majority of the remaining countries are mostly visa free or can be obtained as an e-visa. Brief details are below.

We will provide entry and exit dates as well as any other necessary information for those who need to obtain visas.

**Turkey**

Most nationalities do not require a visa. You can check yours by starting an application on the evisa website: <https://www.evisa.gov.tr/>

Australian and South African passport holders require an e-visa. The earliest you can apply is 3 months before entering Turkey.

**Georgia**

Most nationalities do not require a visa. You can check yours here: <https://geoconsul.gov.ge/en/entering-georgia>

**Armenia**

Most nationalities do not require a visa. You can check yours by starting an application on the evisa website: <https://www.mfa.am/en/visa/>

Canadian and South African passport holders require a visa. You can apply for an e-visa in advance at <https://evisa.mfa.am/>. The earliest you can apply for a 120 day visa is 11th January 2025.

**Azerbaijan**

Most nationalities require an e-visa which we would apply for en route: <https://evisa.gov.az/en/>

**Uzbekistan**

Most nationalities do not require a visa. You can check yours here: <https://e-visa.gov.uz/application>

US and South African passport holders require a visa. This should be a **double** or **multiple entry** visa as our itinerary takes us through Uzbekistan twice. The e-visa is available to US passport holders however South Africans must apply with an embassy. If the visa is valid for entry for 90 days, you must not apply before 1st March 2025.

**Kyrgyzstan**

Most nationalities do not require a visa.

South African passport holders require a visa. If you are travelling to Beijing or further, you will need to apply for either a multiple entry or apply two times for a single entry as our itinerary takes us through Kyrgyzstan twice. If the visa is valid for entry for 90 days, you must not apply before 20th March 2025.

We are advised that it’s better to apply at an Embassy rather than use the e-visa system which may refuse your application. Additionally, the system is not currently working for multiple entry visas. There are no Embassies or Consulates in South Africa however there are in other countries including several en route during the Trans Asia trip including Istanbul. We suggest you contact your chosen embassy to check the exact requirements and timescales to ensure you will have enough time to submit and collect your passport.

**Kazakhstan**

Most nationalities do not require a visa. You can check yours here: <https://www.gov.kz/memleket/entities/mfa/activities/3053?lang=en&parentId=3051>

For those continuing to Singapore, all South East Asia countries that we visit are either visa free or can be applied for en route, either as an e-visa, at an Embassy or on arrival. We will send further details about these in a later update.

**Travel Insurance**

The British Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) as well as governments of other countries aim to provide advice and security information for their citizens and this advice could affect your travel insurance policy. This means that if at times the FCDO (or your home country’s government) is advising against “all or non-essential travel” to a particular country or specific area of it, most travel insurance companies will not cover the policy holder for travel through that area. The advice for the different countries and areas through which we operate trips is forever changing and we are constantly reviewing information as it comes to hand.

Each individual traveller needs to check that their own personal travel insurance is valid for travel through each and every country on the expedition.   Please also check the **cover will continue after you have been through any countries en route that currently have travel restrictions in place.**  We have been informed that some travel insurance companies will void a policy if you go against any of the British FCDO advice.

We will update you in our upcoming emails on the areas that the FCDO have travel advisories in place on our intended route.

**Travel insurance that includes cover for areas the FCDO advises against travel to**

If you already have travel insurance and it doesn’t cover areas with travel advisories in place, SafetyWing’s Nomad Insurance can offer a policy for your time in each of them.  As these areas can change at short notice, you can take out this cover during the trip, as and when needed.  You will need to create an account on the [SafetyWing Nomad Insurance website](https://safetywing.com/nomad-insurance) and purchase a policy for a minimum of 5 days each time.

If you haven’t yet purchased a travel insurance policy for your trip, or wish to cancel and change your existing policy, you can also get cover through Safety Wing Insurance for the whole trip. Their insurance is specifically designed for long-stay travellers and digital nomads, so can work well (and be cost effective) for a trip like this, though the level of coverage (payout amounts) are not as high as other insurance providers. Again, you can arrange this online through their website.  Please note that they do not include cover for cancellation, for example, if you incurred cancellation fees because you cancelled your trip due to illness.

Please note that SafetyWing does not offer travel insurance for Iran. If we do go through Iran, then we will advise you of alternative options. These include a policy provided via our local partners in Iran which provides emergency medical coverage while in the country.

As always, and whichever insurance policy you take out, please read the policy carefully – it’s always a long read with a lot of small print but it’s important and your responsibility to know what you are covered for and that it will be adequate for the trip you are undertaking.

Every safe and reasonable effort will be made by us to drive all the way (with the option to fly over areas) so as to keep the continuity of the trip.  If we have no choice but to fly over a section of the trip we will endeavour to take in other places of interest if there is any time available.  While Oasis will cover all ground transport costs, we have not taken the cost of flights or you re-joining the expedition vehicle into our pricing structure.  Therefore, should a flight over any country or section become necessary the flight and re-joining costs will have to be paid for by each individual. For this reason we suggest allocating emergency funds to be kept in reserve for the entirety of the trip.

**Interim Deposit Payment – for those travelling from Istanbul to Singapore**

Your interim deposit payment of £600 is now due (if you have already paid in full, thank you and please ignore the following!) You can pay this by making a bank transfer into our current account as detailed below. We will then record your financial protection on the payment.

Account Name: Uncover the World Travel Ltd.

Our address: Leigh House, Varley Street, Pudsey, West Yorkshire, LS28 6AN

Bank Name: HSBC

Bank address: 90 Baker Street, London, W1U 6AX

Account No: 82527693

Sort code: 40-01-06

IBAN: GB93HBUK40010682527693

SWIFT: HBUKGB4105F

Alternatively you can pay by contacting our sales team and requesting a credit card payment link.

If you are not intending on travelling with us on this trip after all, please do let us know as soon as possible so that we can make your space available.

We hope that all this information proves helpful.

Best wishes,

The Oasis Overland team