24 Jan 25

Dear Traveller,

We hope your new year has got off to a good start. Your trip to Central Asia will soon be upon us and we have some important updates and information here for you.

1. Azerbaijan/Iran route & Iran visas
2. Turkmenistan visa
3. China visa
4. Tents and personal luggage
5. Dietary requirements

There are actions required now for anyone whose route will travel through Iran, Turkmenistan and China, including sending us a colour scan of your passport by the end of January.

Best wishes, Oasis Overland

1. **Azerbaijan / Iran route**

*Does not apply if you are starting in Ashgabat or further East.*

Following our last update in December the Azerbaijan authorities have confirmed that all the country’s land borders will remain closed until at least early April. However, even should they be re-opened then, we cannot risk waiting that long before making alternative logistical and visa plans for the trip.

We therefore need to make the decision now and plan for the fact that the trip will travel through Iran instead.

We ran the trip this way in both east and west directions last year and it went well. We have allowed a bit more time this year so we aren’t so rushed, and plan to follow the itinerary described on our website, visiting Tabriz, Tehran, Kashan, Esfahan, the Morteza Canyon, adobe village of Esfahak, and Mashhad before crossing into Turkmenistan and Ashgabat. Overall we should spend about 14 days travelling through.

**Considerations about travel through Iran**

1. **Visas**

You will need to obtain a visa for Iran in advance of travel. We will start this process shortly, and we will send a separate update with further information, cost guidelines and instructions. You will need to apply in advance for a visa authorisation through our local Iranian partners. We then plan to collect the visas as a group from the Iranian embassy in Tbilisi. Anyone joining after Tbilisi (eg. in Yerevan) will need to obtain the visa at an embassy/consulate before leaving home.

British, Canadian and USA residents will need to apply earlier than everyone else as it takes longer for these nationalities to get approved. Please look out for our next update on this coming soon.

1. **Government travel advice**

The UK Government still advises against all travel to Iran. You can see the travel advice on the FCDO website here: <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/iran>. Please read it. If you are not British, you may wish to also check your own country’s government advice.

As we mentioned previously, our two trips last 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, if you do not wish to travel through Iran for any reason, you may overfly at your cost and rejoin us in Turkmenistan.

1. **Travel Insurance**

Having, and being able to provide proof of travel insurance is a requirement for entering Iran and getting your visa issued. 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. Currently, Iran is the only country on our route to China that the FCDO advises against all travel to. In addition, international sanctions can also affect whether some companies offer cover as well.

There are however some insurance companies who will still provide cover. These include our Iranian partners who will probably provide the most cost effective option (normally between EUR 20-60, available to all nationalities). Medical cover is up to EUR 10,000. You would apply for this at the same time as your visa.

For UK residents looking at higher levels of cover you could check Voyager Insurance.

<https://www.highriskvoyager.com/locations/travel-insurance-for-iran/>

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.

1. **Overflying Iran**

If you do wish to miss Iran out, then there are flight options with Turkish Airlines from both Tbilisi and Yerevan to Ashgabat via Istanbul. If you want to start planning for this in advance, these are the dates to consider:

* We expect to leave Yerevan in Armenia in the morning of 6th May
* We expect to arrive in Ashgabat in Turkmenistan in the afternoon of 21st May

Between those dates, you may wish to spend a bit more time in Armenia, or head back to Tbilisi, spend some extra time in Istanbul and Turkey in-between flights, or in Ashgabat.

For anyone choosing to do this, **we will refund you USD 250 from your local payment amount**. Please note that this is an exceptional offer just for people choosing to miss Iran. If you leave the trip by choice for any period of time at other parts of the journey, then the normal rules will apply and there will be no refunds of local payment amounts.

**Important:** If you are going to overfly Iran then this will affect your Turkmenistan visa application and we will need to know your incoming flight details when applying for your Letter of Invitation.

***Please could you send us an email to let us know that you have received this route update, have read the FCDO travel advice, and whether you are considering over-flying Iran (we don’t need a final decision yet, but an idea would be helpful).***

1. **Turkmenistan Visas**

*Does not apply to Bishkek or Kashgar starters*

The process of applying for your Turkmenistan LOI (Letter of Invitation) will soon begin. This is required in advance in order to obtain the visa.

Our Turkmenistan agent will apply for your LOI on your behalf and this is included in your trip price (you will need to pay for the actual visa on arrival in Turkmenistan, currently the cost is approximately US$85 for UK nationals and US$55 for other nationalities). The below documentation and information are needed to your start your LOI application:

**Scans**

|  |
| --- |
| 1.       Passport (the full page that clearly shows all text, photo, signature, bar code). **Note**: Please remember your passport must be valid for at least 6 months AFTER your trip finishes. |
| 2.       One recent passport-sized photo  |
| **Scans must be of the following quality and format, otherwise they will not be accepted by the authorities:** |
| ·         *Quality: the documents must look sharp and clear in electronic format, not checkered, glossy or blurry; scans must be delivered to us in JPEG or PDF format and must be minimum 250KB and maximum 1MB in size* |
| ·         *Black and white scans are not accepted by the State Migration Services* |
| ·         *Scans of paper passport copies are not accepted; they must be scans of originals* |
| ·         *The whole photo page of the passport must be scanned, and to avoid any confusion, it is best if the scan simply shows all four edges of the page* |
| ·         *The original size of passport-sized photo scans must be 3x4 cm minimum and cannot be a Photoshop version of the photo from the passport scan (we will have to print them out on colour photo paper, as if we have received real original photos from you); a digital passport-sized photo is best.*  |
| ·         *If you do not have access to a scanner, a digital photo made with a digital camera or smart phone could be acceptable as well, as long as the quality is as described above, and there is no flash/gloss/shine, making any part of the scan unclear* |

 **Information**

*If you are travelling through Turkmenistan, please could you fill in and return the table below with the information completed. Please also email us the scanned documents detailed above.*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **EN** | **Last name** | **First name(s)** | **Any other name(s) used before (e.g. before marriage)** | **Name of highest educational institution completed** | **City and country of that institution** | **Occupation** | **Place of work** |
|  | *Smith* | *John William* | *None* | *Cambridge University* | *Cambridge, UK* | *Archaeologist* | *The National Trust for Scotland* |
| **01** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **02** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **EN** | **Previous visits to Turkmenistan (dates, purposes)** | **Marital status** | **Full name, date of birth and citizenship of spouse**  | **Full name(s), date(s) of birth and citizenship of child(ren)** | **E-mail address**  | **Home address** |
|  | *15 Mar 2012; tourism* | *Married* | *Louise Volker; 10 Nov.1981, UK* | *1. Thomas Volker, 1 Jan.2005; UK 2. Emily Volker, 10 May 2015; UK* | *smith\_john@gmail.com* | *48 Barry Road, Carnoustie, Scotland* |
| **01** |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **02** |  |  |  |  |  |  |

1. **China visa**

*Does not apply if you are finishing in Ashgabat or Bishkek.*

Our local operator will provide a Letter of Invitation and Travel Plan to support your application and we will forward these when we receive them, along with information to help you complete the application form.

**Please send us a colour scanned copy of your passport by the end of January. This is required by our China operator in order to produce the above documents.**

As previously mentioned, 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.

The 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.

1. **Tents and personal luggage**

The general plan is for 2 people to share a tent. However, you are welcome to bring your own tent if you wish (meaning you don't need to share if you don’t want to). But if you do plan to bring your own tent, please do let us know so we can manage the number of our own tents that we bring. If you do bring your own, you will be responsible for your it throughout the trip (so if it needs repairs or replacing during the trip, you’ll be responsible for that, as we may not have had enough spares for you). Your Tour Leader will of course assist with sourcing repairs or a new tent for you if it does come to that.

Please note that although the truck is roomy with lots of storage areas, there is a limit to space for your personal luggage and we will be full with food stocks as well as all the kitchen equipment, spare parts & tools etc.  So, 80 litre backpacks and holdalls are the best form of carrying your luggage which will be stored in lockers, along with a small day pack (40ltr max). Backpacks and holdalls that have a rigid frame as well as suitcases are impractical on the truck, will not fit in your locker, and should not be brought. If you bring excess luggage above the recommended amount then you will need to post it home from your joining city.

Please remember that if you are travelling into China, that we are not with the truck anymore and you will be carrying your own luggage between hotels, train stations, transfer vehicles etc. So, you need to make sure you only bring what you are comfortable carrying for a walk of at least say 30mins (it would be very rare that would be required for so long, but there may be some places it is necessary, potentially at the Kyrgyzstan/China border for example).

If you bring your own tent and are carrying on into China and beyond (when we leave the truck behind and continue with local transport), then as the truck will probably not return to the UK this winter (i.e. we can’t bring tents back to the UK for you), you have a couple of choices...

* Continue carrying your tent with you, potentially to post home at a later date from a city in China
* Leave the tent on the truck. We will keep it as a backup for use by other travellers if needed until we get to a suitable place on our route where we can donate it to a worthy cause en-route (eg. a local family or school that we may stay with or pass by).
1. **Dietary Requirements** (eg.Vegetarians / Vegans / Coeliacs / Gluten & Lactose intolerance etc.)

We will do our best to help facilitate dietary requirements or intolerances whenever possible, but also within reason. Whilst on the truck, everybody takes turns in cooking for the group as part of a small cook-group and while it is perfectly possible and normal to cook for both vegetarian and meat eaters, catering for more than that split is difficult.

In general, in the past we have found that vegans have really struggled with the available food options at times, particularly in Central Asia.

If there is anything in particular you require in your diet or because of an allergy or intolerance, or would miss from home, it would be best to bring these with you, as these cannot be purchased with normal Local Payment funds due to the high cost of these specialised and often imported foods. This includes things like gluten free pastas. Additionally, you may be able to find items like this when we get to big towns or cities.

Because we will be cooking communally in a shared outdoor kitchen, it is hard, if not impossible, to prevent against some cross contamination. So, if you have severe allergies to certain food products you must tell us as soon as possible so that we can consider the implications and advise you further.

It must be remembered that the variety of dishes available to vegetarians may not be the same as available to meat eaters. When eating out in local restaurants and hotels, bear in mind that vegetarianism or food allergies / intolerances, are still not widely known about or understood by many local people. Eg. vegetarians may be offered or served fish or chicken in error. Most large towns and cities, or areas used to tourists, will often have more choice but please be aware that it will probably not be as varied as you are used to when eating out at home.

A lot of meals in South East Asia are cooked using nut oil. If you are allergic to nuts, it is a good idea to bring with you some small cards with information about your allergy written in the local language. These can be easily sourced and purchased online.