



ASIA • MIDDLE EAST • AFRICA • SOUTH AMERICA

The Marsh Henstridge Somerset BA8 0TF UK

Tel + 44 (0) 1963 363400 Fax + 44 (0) 1963 363200

info@oasisoverland.co.uk • www.oasisoverland.co.uk

Asian Odyssey

This Pre – Departure Dossier is relevant to your trip so please read it carefully – Updated: December 07

Bangkok to Kathmandu & v.v. 82 days

FLIGHTS

To fly from London into Bangkok and returning from Kathmandu (open jaw ticket) is approx £560 (prices include tax) and the same if you fly into Kathmandu and return from Bangkok. To fly from London into Kathmandu and then from Bangkok on to Sydney in December, will cost approx. £890. Remember that flights, especially the cheaper fares, get booked up well in advance around Xmas.

Note: An 'open jaw' ticket allows you to fly into one destination but out of another without having to purchase two single one way tickets. If you would like any help or information regarding flights then just give the Oasis office a call.

As all the cities that we start & finish in are interesting and exciting to visit we recommend staying in each for a couple of days before and after your trip departs or arrives. If you give us your flight details we will try and match you with someone who is flying out at the same time so that you can share a taxi from the airport to the hotel.

JOINING & START DETAILS

We will send you out joining instructions approximately 8 weeks before departure. This will include information regarding hotels & hostels to use before and after your trip as well as joining details etc.

Kathmandu departures – it is essential that you arrive in Kathmandu 2 days before the trip starts

We need to obtain a Chinese group visa in Kathmandu so we must have your passport and payment for the visa 2 days before the trip starts. You will not have your passport for this time so be sure you have changed enough money to last you.

There will be a pre-departure meeting the night before the trip starts and there will be a notice in reception advising you of this and of any changes.

LOCAL PAYMENT

Local Payment is part of your overall expedition investment and is the easiest and most economical way for Oasis Overland to get hard currency to the crew to help run your trip. It goes toward a variety of day-to-day local costs which cannot be pre-paid from UK. This is payable to your tour leader on departure in US Dollars cash only post year 2000.

Please Note: We will only accept \$100 notes that are issued on or after 2000 as older notes are more difficult to change.

The Local payment is a guaranteed amount, set before your tour departs. We will not ask you to contribute more once the tour is underway, as can happen with 'group kitty' systems.

PASSPORTS & VISA REQUIREMENTS

Passports – Please send us a clear photocopy or email us a scanned image of your passport (the page containing your personal details and photo) **at least 6 weeks before departure**. This is an essential requirement for your entry to Tibet so it is **VERY IMPORTANT** that we receive this in time and that this is the passport you will be travelling on.

Please bring **3 photocopies of your passport details page and six (6) passport photos to give to your tour leader**. You'll need at least 5 blank pages in your passport, which must be valid for at least nine months. If you have dual nationality you can only use one passport.

Visas - Visas are needed by most nationalities for most of the countries we travel through and you will need to obtain some of these before the trip departs and the rest en-route. We will send you more information regarding what visas to obtain approximately 8 weeks before the departure date.

Nepal - All nationalities (except Chinese and Indian) require a visa for Nepal. A single entry visa costs US\$30 and can be obtained on arrival. You will need US\$ cash to pay for your visa and one passport photograph. You can check the latest requirements for your nationality on the Nepal Embassy website: <http://www.nepembassy.org.uk/>

China - Kathmandu to Bangkok departures: We obtain a group visa for China while we are in Kathmandu so do not get a visa beforehand as this will NOT be valid and you will have to buy another one anyway (it is not possible for the group to enter China from Nepal without a group visa). The total cost of your Chinese visa, including agents' fees will be approximately £125.

Bangkok to Kathmandu departures: You will need to obtain a 60 day visa before you travel (you may only be able to get a 30 day visa in which case you can extend this, during the trip). It is important that you do not mention Tibet or any Tibetan towns or places or your visa application will be declined (we apply for our Tibet permits whilst on the trip). We will send you the information you need to fill in your application form, nearer to departure. The total cost of your Chinese visa including extensions will be approximately £100.

Laos & Cambodia - Most nationalities require a visa which can be obtained en route. Both visas cost US\$35 each. You will need US\$ cash to pay for them plus a passport photo for each visa.

Thailand - Most nationalities do not require a visa for a stay of 30 days or less. You can check your requirements on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs site: <http://www.mfa.go.th/web/12.php>

TRAVEL INSURANCE

It is a compulsory requirement that you have adequate travel insurance before you join any Oasis Trip and at the very least are insured for all necessary medical expenses and repatriation costs incurred overseas with a minimum sum insured of £500,000. We believe that your safety and holiday enjoyment are very important. It is a mistake to think that "it will never happen to me". We can arrange comprehensive travel insurance for you if you wish, please consult our website or the back of our brochure for further details.

If you are arranging your own travel insurance and are considering undertaking any of the so-called 'hazardous activities', please ensure that your policy provides the appropriate cover, as some of these activities may be excluded from standard travel insurance policies. Please also be aware that the levels of cover of some policies may not fully insure you for the specific activities you may choose to undertake e.g. White Water Rafting is covered under some policies – but only up to a maximum Grade 3, so please check all of the policy details beforehand. It is essential that the travel insurance that you have arranged is designed to cover all, often hazardous activities that are on offer.

We have arranged a reasonably priced travel insurance, specifically designed for Overland Travel, through Campbell Irvine Insurance Brokers and AXA Insurers – which also provides a 24 hr worldwide emergency medical service through Specialty Assistance LTD. Due to its flexibility & the amount of hazardous activities included under the standard policy, the premiums quoted may initially appear more expensive than some other policies on offer. We are happy to email you a copy of our policy wording which includes a list of hazardous and sporting activities which are automatically covered whilst you are on your Oasis trip, as well as those subject to an extra load on the premium.

Whether you choose to take out our policy or arrange cover elsewhere, please ensure that you read the small print very carefully. Certain terms and conditions will apply to all insurance policies and we would like to draw your attention to any exclusions relating to **pre-existing medical conditions (this also include allergies)**. Please feel free to ask for more details. It is also important that when calculating the total duration for your insurance cover that you include your outward and return flights in the overall period of travel otherwise your policy may be invalid.

Repatriation - The Oasis travel insurance is available to anybody living anywhere in the world, irrespective of their nationality. This cover extends to include worldwide repatriation back to your normal country of residence in the event of a medical emergency– providing the appropriate premium has been paid. If you are a UK resident (this includes non UK passport holders / nationalities living and working in the UK) and are planning on returning to the UK, the insurers will arrange for you to be repatriated back to the UK if you become seriously ill whilst you were travelling, as this is deemed to be your normal country of residence at the time. Special consideration will be given if you prefer to be repatriated elsewhere – as long as the expense is to be the equivalent cost of repatriation to the UK. Alternatively - if you have planned to return home directly after your trip (e.g Australia, N. Zealand, S. Africa) – your insurance would provide repatriation to your ultimate destination in the event of a medical emergency – but please be aware that no medical expenses will be payable upon arrival in your normal country of residence. If you are arranging travel insurance elsewhere, please check where you may be repatriated to in an event of a medical emergency.

Payment - If you have decided to purchase your insurance via Oasis, please include the full payment of the policy you require when sending through your deposit payment and booking details. Payment can also be made at any time over the phone, by cheque made payable to: Oasis Overland Ltd or by bank transfer. **NB We can only issue travel insurance upon receiving full payment for the policy.** If you later decide that the policy does not meet your requirements, we offer a 14-day money back guarantee which allows for a full refund of the insurance premium, provided you have not travelled or submitted a claim.

Your tour leader will ask to see a copy of your insurance policy at the pre-departure meeting and you will be asked to provide the following details: 24-hour emergency medical telephone number, your policy number, confirmation that the policy duration is sufficient to cover you for the entire duration of your trip. It is also wise to leave a copy of your insurance policy with a friend or relative for safe keeping. **Our crew will collect these Insurance details solely for providing this information in the event of an emergency– and not to check all the details of the policy and/ or its content of cover are correct. For this reason, please be aware that it is your responsibility to ensure you are fully covered for the different region/s and for the activities that you choose to undertake whilst travelling with Oasis.**

It is a condition of booking with Oasis Overland – that it will not be possible for you to join the trip if you cannot produce details or information to prove you have adequate travel insurance at the start of your trip.

IMPORTANT - We strongly recommend that you take out your travel insurance at the time of booking as cover will commence for pre-departure cancellation from the date your policy is issued (all other sections of the policy will commence from the start date of your policy). This means that should you have to cancel your trip for an insured reason such as a medical emergency or bad accident preventing you from travel you may be able to claim back payment made for pre-paid trip costs & flights, subject to the standard policy terms & conditions.

NOTE: If you are interested in extra insurance cover for your **photographic equipment** – please contact Oasis & we will send you out a brochure. This policy has a 28 day money back guarantee if the cover is unsuitable or you change your mind. Please be aware that a lot of insurance policies do not include a great deal of cover for valuables–sometimes only up to £350 combined limit for cameras & electrical. Also be aware that most home & contents insurance policies may also include cover for photographic & electrical equipment whilst abroad.

OASIS CREW & ADVENTURE TRAVEL

Adventure travel is not an exact science. It is this very unpredictability which makes it such a rewarding experience. Occasionally we must amend our itineraries to take into account changing local circumstances. In such situations we'll always try to minimise any disruption, but you need to bear in mind that from time to time events occur outside our control. While our crew are experienced and knowledgeable in running overland trips, they are not guides as such. The diversity and extent of the history and cultures in this region are second to none. At the most important historical sites we visit, we have the benefit of locally trained guides who have spent many years and have vast experience & knowledge of such sites.

We usually have two crew, whose duties are extensive and quite demanding. Their challenges include driving and maintaining the expedition vehicle to a very high standard, organising visas and border crossings, accommodation, finding the best deals, pre-booking some excursions and guides, helping with shopping and cooking, socializing and making sure everything runs as smoothly as possible.

ACCOMMODATION & LIFE ON THE ROAD

Life on the Road – A typical day on the road starts around 8.30am and finishes around 5.30pm with stops along the way for photos, activities, lunch, buying food, toilet stops etc. There are times however when we will have some long drives, so be prepared to cover big distances. Most evenings we will stop and find a bush camp and you and your tent partner will put up your tent, and then give a hand with the duty you will be rostered for, getting out the tables and stools or maybe the cook tent and water containers. Some may help collect firewood or take the stored firewood from the truck.

The fire grates or gas stove need to be taken out and lit, and someone can fill the kettle and put it on for some hot drinks while the cooks prepare the evening meal. We usually cook in groups of 2 to 4 in a rota system and you can expect to cook about once every 7 - 10 days, depending on group size.

At breakfast everyone helps themselves, usually cereal, toast and coffee (occasionally we may have a hot breakfast). If we stay in a hotel, breakfast is sometimes provided. Lunch is cold and the cooking crew will put out bread, tinned food and maybe make a salad. In the evening the cooks come into their own and this is your chance to impress or flop!

Don't worry, your tour leader and other members of the group will always help and advise. We also have some quite long breaks (2 to 4 days at a time) where we are in one place, with no driving. At these places most people prefer to eat out, so we often don't cook all meals - this enables you to get out and try the local cuisine!

When we bush camp you will need to take one of the truck shovels with you to make your own toilet. Make sure you dig a suitable hole behind a bush and cover it and your toilet paper up properly afterwards otherwise burn the paper.

Accommodation - We spend around 40% of nights camping and the rest of the time in simple hotels/guesthouses. The variety is great and often a totally unique experience, including tents, hotels, simple village pensions and trains. Some are well equipped and managed but many in this part of the world are very basic. You will need to bring along a sleeping bag, sleep sheet and a roll-mat. When we camp we use three-person tents per two people which are specially made for us to meet the tough conditions of an expedition of this nature. All our tents have a sewn in floor and mosquito netting in the doors.

OASIS OVERLAND VEHICLES & SECURITY ON BOARD

Our vehicles are designed to create more space for you compared to other overland vehicles. After all, the truck is your home for the duration of the trip! The size and horsepower of our vehicles also enables us to carry far more spares, fuel, water, and allows far more storage space for your luggage than the cramped conditions that prevail on many other vehicles. ***We limit the number of passengers on each truck to 24 passengers.*** A large percentage of the roads we will travel on are sealed, but there will also be times we will be travelling on gravel or in mud and through badly potholed roads. On most good roads we are capable of cruising at 80 to 90kmh. Our vehicles are equipped with sandmats, stereo, cool boxes, overhead lockers (for day bags and cameras etc) on board safes and comfortable coach seats.

Vehicle Equipment - All our vehicles are equipped for your comfort with the following:

- Comfortable coach seats with headrests & removable seat bases with storage compartments – which means easy access to your baggage – even whilst driving !!!
- 12 volt cigarette socket for recharging camera / video batteries
- Internal & external lighting system
- CD stereo with adaptors for MP3, I Pod or CD walkmans
- Onboard Library
- Inter cab communication with the crew
- Cooler boxes for food and drinks
- Extra storage space for excess baggage and souvenirs
- Easy to reach overhead racking for day bags & cameras
- Lockable safe for storage of money and small valuables
- Professionally compiled expedition Medical Kit
- Roomy 2 person tents with sewn-in mosquito netting
- Large water carrying capacity
- Internal storage for dried and tinned food
- External lockers for cooking equipment, tents etc
- Camping stools & cook awning for all weather conditions
- Extensive range of spare parts

Security - There is a lockable safe bolted onto the floor of the truck beneath a false floor. This is for your money belts, passports and smaller valuables. The company does not take responsibility for client's personal items. In certain areas a roster will be drawn up to guard the vehicle. A money belt that can be concealed is better than a bum bag or wallet that hangs from the neck. We advise you do not take items of value that are not essential to your journey.

CAMERAS & PHOTOGRAPHY

Photography - Mornings and late afternoons are often best for photos, as the midday sun can be very bright and lead to a washed-out look. A polarizing filter or lens hood will help to prevent this. It is advisable to have a good all-round carry case to protect your camera from dust and knocks. A few zip lock / plastic bags are good items to carry for protecting your camera and changing film in dusty / sandy conditions.

SLR Cameras - An easy to use instamatic will get you some good shots. If you want something really memorable it may be worthwhile investing in a SLR camera. An 80 to 210 / 300 zoom will get you some good people / wildlife shots. In most of the countries we visit it can be difficult to buy film and often it may be old, out of date and expensive.

Take slightly more film than you think will be necessary for the entire trip. You can usually sell unused film.

We can recommend **Clock Tower Cameras** for second hand cameras and lenses. They have good quality equipment and give a guarantee with most purchases. For advice and mail order call **Paul** or **Eddy** on **01273 706010** or visit their website: www.clocktowercameras.co.uk.

Digital & Video Cameras – If you are bringing either, it is advisable to bring a charger and spare batteries (see below). Most towns and cities have internet cafes where you can download onto CD/ internet sites. It is also advisable to bring your USB cable for your camera so you can connect your camera in the internet cafes. It is also recommended that you bring at least 2 memory cards of 512mb or higher as places where your cards can be burned onto disk are few and far between.

Chargers - You should bring at least one spare battery with you, as purchasing spares on route may be expensive and difficult and there will be times on the tour when you will not be able to charge from the mains supplies for several days at a time. It is worthwhile considering purchasing a spare battery even if you bring an in-car charger with you, so as you will always have a battery charged and ready to go. Our vehicles are equipped with 12 volt cigarette lighter charger sockets, so it is worth while thinking about purchasing an in-car charger – however these can be expensive. If you decide not to purchase an in-car charger bring your normal 230V mains charger as well as a travel adaptor plug as you'll come across virtually every type of socket ever invented plus a few others and at some of the hotels, hostels, restaurants and campsites we use, you can charge from their mains supply.

Electricity – log onto www.kropla.com for information regarding the different electrical plugs and voltage used in each country.

It is forbidden in all the countries we visit to take photos of anything military. Bridges, border posts and airports are also sensitive, so be careful or be prepared to have your film or possibly your camera confiscated by irate officials. Please act with discretion and respect when taking photos of people (especially Muslim women) - if in doubt it is always better to ask first before you snap a way! It is also advisable to be sensitive when poverty, deprivation or disadvantaged living may be apparent. Taking these kind of photos may send out a misconstrued message to the locals and may cause an uncomfortable or hostile atmosphere for yourself and others.

LOCAL COMMUNICATION & CONTACT FROM HOME

Time – Nepal is 5.45 hours ahead of GMT, Tibet & China, 8 hours ahead and Laos, Cambodia & Thailand, 7 hours. Time is something that people in these countries seem to have plenty of. Things that should take 5 minutes can take over an hour. Try not to speed things up as this just leads to greater frustration.

Language – Because of the large area and number of countries we will be travelling through there is a vast array of different languages to try and get our tongues around! Thai, Mandarin Chinese, Tibetan and Nepalese, are to name but a few. English is widely spoken in most countries except China. Learning some basic phrases will be rewarded when meeting local people and most guide books such as Rough Guides and Lonely Planet have sections in them dedicated to commonly used phrases and words.

Online Diaries – A great variety of free "travel blogs" are now available online, they are a good way of keeping relatives and friends up to date with what you are doing and a good place to upload photos, collecting messages as well as keeping a record for yourself (a great one is www.bugbitten.com). Most towns and cities have internet facilities, so you can update them regularly.

Contact from home - The most reliable way to receive messages from friends & family is via email, which is quite common place now in the main areas that we visit – but the efficiency or speed in connection is never a guarantee!! Your tour leader will advise you of the best places to pick up your emails en route, usually you will be able to check your emails every few days to once a week.

PERSONAL HEALTH – VACCINATIONS – MEDICAL KITS

Health and Hygiene on the trip - Your crew will talk to you about cooking, washing cutlery, cleaning etc. We purify our drinking water where necessary. To join the expedition you should be in good general health. We must be told if you have any pre-existing medical condition or are on any regular medication.

Vaccinations – It is advisable to be immunized against; Tetanus, Diptheria, Polio, Typhoid and Hepatitis A. Rabies is also recommended and some doctors advise Hepatitis B. Ask your doctor or medical clinic about the necessity of Japanese B encephalitis and Meningitis. Yellow Fever is not required unless arriving from an infected area.

Malaria – Some GPs are quite well versed in tropical medicine, vaccination requirements and malaria prevention. However, many are not! If you are not happy with the information your doctor has provided you can contact the Nomad Clinic below or other reputable clinics in your area. There are a number of prophylactic malaria treatments on the market and requirements change. Also, a particular regimen might suit you better than another. It is wise to take a sample of whichever prophylactic you choose a few weeks before you leave. This way you may determine early on if you have any adverse reactions so you can change the regimen if necessary. Nomad Travel Clinic has a basic leaflet on the different options of Malaria prophylaxis treatment you can take. Either contact them or give us a call and we can send you one out.

For detailed information on Malaria log on to www.malariahotspots.co.uk. For general health advice log on to the office World Health Organisation's website www.who.org or the National Travel Health network www.nathnac.org/travel/index.htm.

In a few areas we visit, e.g. South China, Laos, Cambodia, there is a risk of contracting malaria. You must be aware that whatever malaria prophylactic you are taking, they only offer partial protection. They must be coupled with your own physical efforts against being bitten; if you don't get bitten you cannot contract malaria! Malarial carrying mosquitoes (females only) come out at sunset so from this time you should wear long sleeves and trousers or tracksuit bottoms with some sort of foot wear and socks. Exposed skin, especially ankles, elbows, wrists, neck and ears should have insect repellent applied. The liquid or sprays on ones tend to be best, and make sure it contains Deet. Your tour leader will discuss malaria prevention, and the affected areas, with you on the trip. Contact your travel clinic or doctor for advice.

Altitude Sickness – Altitude Sickness or Acute Mountain Sickness, is caused by thin air and can affect anyone travelling to high altitude (above 3000m). Before you leave home discuss acetazolamide (also known as Diamox) with your GP or Travel Health Clinic. The symptoms of altitude sickness are headaches, dizziness, shortage of breath and possibly nausea. To avoid this or alleviate the symptoms rest for a few hours, and avoid over-exerting yourself, drinking alcohol, smoking and large meals, take it easy for at least 24 hours and drink plenty of water.

Good clinics for malaria info and vaccinations are:

In London we recommend the Nomad Travellers Store and Medical Centre. They can be contacted on 0208 889 7014 and are across the road from Turnpike Lane tube. They will also give Oasis clients a 10% discount on jabs, medical kits and camping equipment. They also have stores in Bristol and Southampton. Log onto www.nomadtravel.co.uk for more information.

Also Trailfinders Travel Clinic - Tel 0207 938 3999 (High St Kensington Tube) 194 Kensington High St, London.

In Scotland, Ailsa Travel Clinic, 42 Admiral St., Kinning Park, Glasgow. Tel. 0141 429 0913 has been recommended to us by past clients.

Clinics and doctors don't usually give detailed advice over the phone. It is best to check opening hours and visit them in person.

Medical Kits - We carry professionally compiled medical kits with emergency First aid material and antibiotics. However, the crew is not entitled to recommend or prescribe any medicine and we advise a health check with your GP and Dentist before you start your journey.

Personal Medicines – Even though our trucks are equipped with a comprehensive medical kit - it is not for general everyday use. Therefore we advise you bring along your own small medical kit to include:

- Eye drops/bath
- Assorted plasters
- Antiseptic ointment
- 1-2 Sterile Syringes
- Anti-diarrhoea treatment
- Nurofen or equivalent pain-killer
- Antihistamine cream and tablets
- 1 course of malaria treatment (cure)
- Some suitable antibiotics as recommended by your doctor (for infected cuts and to treat severe dysentery)
- A couple of bandages (elasticated and triangular)
- Sun block 35 + / after sun / moisturiser / lip balm
- Medication for personal allergies / asthma etc
- Rehydration sachets / Vitamin Tablets
- Insect repellent containing Deet

Whilst on included excursions and / or optionals – it is recommended and your responsibility to have a personal medical kit available in case of an emergency. Our Truck Medical Kit is for use solely whilst on the truck and cannot be carried on excursions / optionals. Please be advised that some local operators may not have medical kits on hand.

FEMALE TRAVELLERS & WHAT TO WEAR

People in the regions we pass through are generally conservative, especially about matters concerning sex and women. If you are not prepared to fit in with the social code of the area the chances are you will be harassed.

What to wear - Dress conservatively. Keeping your arms, shoulders and legs covered will go a long way to prevent causing offence and hassle to you. **This is true for men as well as women.** Avoid wearing tight or revealing clothing.

RESPONSIBLE TOURISM & OASIS

We believe travel should be a rewarding experience for you as well as the people we encounter, and that preserving the natural state and beauty of the areas we pass through is essential. For this reason Oasis supports Tourism Concern – a voluntary and charity based organization. Their aim is to educate travellers on positive and negative effects that tourism has on local communities. Part of your trip payment is donated to Tourism Concern who use such donations for organizing and facilitating new or current projects here in the UK and abroad. Many projects that have been highlighted include the establishing of Porters rights in such tourist hubs as *The Inca Trail* to *Machu Picchu* and *Mt Kilimanjaro* in Tanzania. The organization is also assisting the local *Maasai* with continuing a traditional way of life after being displaced from their homes in order to make way for the Serengeti National Park.

For more information regarding the role of Tourism Concern and its involvement with other projects around the world please log on to their website www.tourismconcern.org.uk We feel our support is part of an important initiative also supported by other organizations such as Earth Watch, Raleigh International and STA Travel.

As a young company, Oasis Overland appreciate that we are fortunate to have the opportunity to operate trips in many developing countries of the world. We also hope that through travelling with us you will benefit from a raised awareness of the many environmental and social issues that concern the areas through which we travel. From running trips and supporting worthy organizations, we have developed our own practical and manageable environmental policy in which all our crew are versed and practise to a high level in both the UK and abroad.

In Luxor, Egypt, Jinja, Uganda and Harare, Zimbabwe Oasis is a sponsor of several independently run Children's Orphanages – caring for underprivileged youths and orphans and on this exploratory trip we will be looking to establish a similar sponsorship with one or two orphanages along the way in a couple of the countries we will be travelling through.

FOOD & DRINK

When camping we supply on average two to three meals per day. You will prepare meals in teams on a rota system and can expect to cook every seven days or so on the trip, depending on the group size. When we stay in hotels/hostels/pensions etc breakfast is sometimes provided by the hostel, but because the vehicle is usually unable to park with us at these places it is obviously nearly impossible to provide meals off the truck.

We have not accounted for the Local Payment cost to include meals whilst we stay in hotels & hostels etc.

You will need to budget for these meals separately and on average this is around \$15 for each day of the trip that we stay in hostels etc and that is not covered by the Local Payment (approx. US\$615 in total).

Most market and roadside stalls serve cheap healthy food and in China especially where just about anything that lives, walks (or crawls) can and is eaten in various guises. You can eat traditional Newari food in Kathmandu such as beaten rice and spiced eggs, potatoes and beans. A popular dish in Tibet is Momo – dumplings filled with meat, vegetables and ginger – and yak butter is an integral part of the Tibetan diet. Try out Peking Duck in Beijing or spicy Sichuan curries. In Laos and Cambodia, rice noodle dishes are more traditional including soups and Thai curries are now internationally renowned. Where necessary we purify our drinking water. Tap water is not always safe to drink but bottled water is widely available for between 30p – £1 per 1.5l. Whenever we cook there is a plentiful supply of coffee and tea and the kettle is well boiled on our gas cooker. Boiled water is always safe to drink. In most of the countries we travel through cheap local beer, wine and spirits are available.

CURRENCY REQUIREMENTS & PERSONAL SPENDING MONEY

Tippling and Bargaining - Tipping is usually expected. It is often more than a reward for services well done, but, as wages are extremely low, it is an accepted means of supplementing an income. Keep small change on you so as not to incur a large demand when it is seen you can afford more. Most prices are negotiable, especially in bazaars & markets. Many travellers find it a hassle having to bargain for everything you wish to buy, but prices are usually inflated so if you are not happy, move on to another place. You are under no obligation to buy and don't be intimidated.

Things to buy - One of the highlights of a trip of this length and variety is the markets and shops found along the way. There are numerous handicrafts and souvenirs including carpets, paintings, silver, clothing, silk, jewellery boxes, jade and stone carvings, tea, porcelain and pottery goods, backgammon boards, leather goods, incense, plus much more.....

Currency - It is best to bring your money as a mixture of Travellers Cheques (TCs) and Cash, US Dollars is best for both. It is easy to change TCs in most places but there will be times when you will need cash. Make sure that all your dollar notes are in good condition. Old, torn or marked notes are often refused and all notes MUST be printed on or after year 2000. Do not bring \$100 notes unless they are in excellent condition.

Scottish Pounds are also not accepted anywhere.

ATM machines can be found **only** in the larger towns and cities in most of the countries we travel through. There is a secure safe for money on board the truck. A credit card is useful for emergency spending and is accepted in some of the more expensive shops in the larger cities. It is also possible to withdraw US \$ cash from over the counter at some banks, although this can be time consuming and expensive. However, cards are virtually useless outside of large cities so don't rely on credit cards. *We recommend you tell your bank that you will be using your card abroad to avoid your card being blocked.*

Bring about US \$300 in cash to pay for visas and border crossings.

Spending money - For personal spending, budget on £100 - £140 per week to cover you for some meals out, drinks, local crafts and souvenirs. Of course this varies person-to-person depending on how much you eat out, drink, and how many souvenirs you buy. We recommend you bring approximately US\$15 per day for meals not covered by the Local Payment (approx. US\$615 in total), when we stay in hostels etc.

Budget on optional side trips separately.

OPTIONAL EXCURSIONS

As a guide to help you budget, below are some approximate prices of some of the most popular side activities you can do.
(Guide only as prices and exchange rates can change)

NB. There are many ancient Mosques, Monasteries, Palaces and Museums that you can visit during the trip which either charge no entrance fee or up to £2 or £3. Places of interest costing less than approximately £3 are not listed below.

The \$ to £ rate below is done at a rate of 1.9

	(GB£)	(US\$)
Thailand		
Grand Palace	£3.60	\$7
Floating Market	£3.60	\$7
Wat Pho	£0.50	\$1
Cambodia		
Royal Palace	£2.10	\$4
National Museum	£2.10	\$4
Laos		
Pak Ou Caves	£13	\$25
Luang Namtha trekking (per day)	£10.50 / day	\$20
There are many wats and museums to visit with entrance fees of \$1 - \$2		
China		
Emei Shan Buddhist Mountain (time permitting)	£12	\$24
Forbidden City	£8.40	\$16
Giant Panda Research Station	£5.30	\$10
Summer Palace	£5.30	\$10
Labrang Monastery	£3.60	\$7
Grand Buddha	£3.20	\$6
Xi'an Museum	£3.20	\$6
Accommodation in Monasteries on Emei Shan Mountain (time permitting)	£2 - £5	\$3 - \$9/ p/ p/ night
Tibet		
Everest Base Camp by jeep	£95	\$180
Potala Palace	£26	\$50
Jokhang Temple	£8.40	\$16
Sera Monastery	£5.30	\$10
Drepung Monastery	£5.30	\$10
Palkhor Monastery	£5.30	\$10
Tashilhunpo Monastery	£3.60	\$7
Gyantse Fort	£3.20	\$6
Ganden Monastery	£3.20	\$6
Kathmandu		
Bungy jump	£36	\$70
Canyon swing	£36	\$70
White Water Rafting	£24	\$45
Canyoning	£21	\$40
Herbal Steam Room & Massage	£13	\$26

PLEASE NOTE: We list the activities above for your information only. They are not necessarily endorsed or recommended by Oasis or our staff. If you undertake any activity it must be clearly understood that to do so is your own decision and is done entirely at your own risk and does not form any part of your contract with Oasis Overland.

You must check that you are insured before you do these activities.

ACTIVITIES & HIGHLIGHTS INCLUDED

- S21 Prison Musuem
- Choeung Ek (Killing Fields)
- Angkor Wat
- Terracotta Warriors
- The Great Wall
- Qinghai Lake
- Yamdrok Tso (Turquoise Lake)
- Boat to Vientiane (time & weather permitting)
- Overnight sleeper train

CLOTHING & EQUIPMENT

The less you take the less you have to pack, wash and lug home and you can always pick up extras along the way. You will be travelling and camping in the humidity of rainforests, cold of mountains and at altitude, so bring clothes for all climates; rough stuff is best. You can get laundry done along the way. For good advice and stock of outdoor equipment plus a 10% discount to Oasis clients Oasis recommend Lockwood Outdoor Shop in Leamington Spa (www.lockwoods.com you can shop online or call 01926 339388) and Nomad Travel Store in London (www.nomadtravel.co.uk or call 0208 8897014).

Climatic variations are quite dramatic in some of the countries we will be travelling through. At the times we travel through Laos, Cambodia and Thailand, it is usually hot and dry. September/October sees the end of the rainy season but it can rain at any time, usually in short, heavy bursts. It can be cool at night in mountainous areas such as northern Laos and southern China. Tibet generally has pleasant weather during the summer months but it can sometimes be extremely cold with snow in places, especially through some of the high mountain passes we have to traverse (4000m +). Nepal can be hot and humid with the monsoon lasting from June to September. You are likely to encounter all types of weather during your trip so bring clothes for all seasons.

Personal Effects

- Sleeping Bag; 4 season
- Sleeping mat / Therm-a-rest
- Small day-pack or bag to carry your daily items
- Hat and sun-glasses
- Camera in a protective case, spare batteries, all the film/memory cards you think you will need and a dust proof bag
- Money belt or pouch to hold your passport and cash etc.
- Reading Books
- Personal Walkman - there is a stereo on the truck with a CD / I Pod / MP3 adaptor
- Torch and spare batteries (head torch is best)
- Multi Mains Travel Adapter Plug
- Passport photos for visas & Angkor Wat permit (approx 6)

Clothes

- Warm clothes/thermals (for altitudes)
- Winter jacket (Gore-Tex or similar)
- Sweat shirt / jumper
- Jeans
- Sandals/flip flops / jandals / thongs
- Shirts (to cover shoulders)
- Skirts / long trousers (to cover knees)
- Swimsuit
- Cool clothes
- Underpants
- Shorts
- Shirts & T shirts
- Walking Boots & socks

Toiletries - Most toiletries are available to buy en route.

- Toothbrush, toothpaste, dental floss.
- Shampoo and conditioner
- Moisturiser & Soap (in a container)
- Towel
- Tampons (can buy in most places) / contraception
- Razors

Electricity – log onto www.kropla.com for information regarding the different electrical plugs and voltage used in each country.

The easiest and best way to travel is as lightly as possible, taking just what is necessary. Most people make the mistake of bringing too much luggage.

GENERAL READING – MAPS – GUIDE BOOKS

Guide Books –

- **Lonely Planet & Rough Guides** have numerous books covering the majority of countries we travel through.
- **Footprint** also have very good informative guides that cover Tibet, Laos, Cambodia & Thailand.
- **Lonely Planet & Rough Guides** also produce various phrase books which are useful including, Thai, Laos, Chinese, Tibetan and Nepali.
- Tibet Overland (a route & planning guide) – **Trailblazer**.
- **Bradt** publish a guide to Laos and Cambodia as well as Yunnan Province, the Great Wall and Tibet.

Maps –

- **Gizimap** publish a good map of Tibet and **Collins** are recommended for China. **Nelles Verlag's** map of South East Asia covers Laos, Cambodia and Thailand as well other neighbouring countries.

General Reading –

- **Love and Death in Kathmandu: A Strange Tale of Royal Murder** – Amy Willesee & Mark Whittaker
- **Seven Years in Tibet** – Heinrich Harrer
- **Last Seen in Lhasa** – Claire Scobie
- **Freedom in Exile** – Autobiography of the Dalai Lama
- **The Long March** – Harrison Salisbury
- **The First Emperor of China** – Jonathan Clements
- **Mao Zedong – the Rebel who led a Revolution** – Flora Geyer
- **One Foot in Laos** – Dervla Murphy
- **Ant Egg Soup: The adventures of a food tourist in Laos** – Natasha du Pont de Bie
- **Survival in the Killing Fields** – Haing S. Ngor
- **A Dragon Apparent: Travels in Cambodia, Laos & Vietnam** – Norman Lewis
- **Kingdom of Make Believe: a novel of Thailand** – Dean Barrett
- **Wild Swans** – Jung Chang

25% DISCOUNT on Footprint travel books.

Simply go to www.footprintbooks.com and enter the code: 'Oasis', for your order. Prices exclude postage and packaging.

10% DISCOUNT on Lonely Planet guide books

To claim the discount customers need to call 020 7841 9111 (between 8am and 5pm, Mon-Fri) and Quote: OASO02

This entitles the caller to 10% off any purchase over £10 with free postage and packaging in the UK.

Terms and Conditions apply – call us for details

Check out our website and click onto “USEFUL LINKS” - Heaps of informative links concerned with all things travel – even where to find an ATM overseas!

Also check out “OASIS IN THE MEDIA“ for a preview of what your trip with Oasis could offer. Various articles, diaries and photos from past trips.

Do you have a query that needs answering – have a look in “FAQ’s” or Take a peek at our unique truck layout in “Expedition Vehicles”

Keep your eyes peeled in “SPECIAL OFFERS “updated regularly with adventure packed money savers.

Kind Regards - The Team at Oasis

Please contact us if you have any questions. HAPPY TRAVELS!

Itinerary – Bangkok to Kathmandu

Please note that our itineraries are not set in stone and can be subject to change.

As we leave Bangkok on day one, we recommend arriving a couple of days early to see some of the sights of this fast paced city including the Royal Palace, Wat Phra Kaeo and Wat Pho.

Days 1 – 6

Our adventure begins as we leave Bangkok and head for the border with Cambodia. This country is unfortunately mostly known for the terrible, violent reign of Pol Pot, however Cambodia has a rich historical past and today is a friendly and beautiful country to travel in. Our first stop is Battambang, a small city on the banks of the River Sangkei. From here we drive through lush, green forests and pass paddy fields until we reach Sihanoukeville on the coast. This is a great place to chill out after the hustle and bustle of Bangkok - you can sunbathe during the day and then stay on the beach for an evening meal of freshly caught and cooked seafood.

Days 7 – 13

Next we travel north to Phnom Penh, Cambodia's capital. This is a really nice relaxed city with some impressive sites to see and great bars and cafes to try out. The Royal Palace, Silver Pagoda and the National Museum are all worth a look. We also take the time to visit the sobering S21 prison (once a school, later turned into the notorious prison by the Khmer Rouge) and Choeung Ek, more commonly known as the Killing Fields.

Moving on, we then head to Siem Reap, a small town near to one of the largest and most outstanding temple complexes in the world. Angkor Wat was once the centre of the Khmer Empire from the 10th to the 15th century and it stretched throughout Cambodia into Laos, Vietnam, Thailand and the Malay Peninsular. Angkor Wat refers to the central temple but the whole site was actually a royal city and covers over 160 square kilometres. The city was abandoned after the decline of the empire and the surrounding jungle gradually took over, enveloping the buildings in vegetation. The main sites of Angkor Wat, Angkor Thom and Preah Khan have been cleared and restored but there are many smaller sites that still look as though they have yet to be discovered, enwrapped in the jungle, some with trees literally growing through the walls.

Days 14 – 18

After 2 or 3 days exploring Angkor we return to Thailand and visit the Ruins of Phimai. Originating from the 12th century, these are also from the Khmer period and are Thailand's largest sandstone shrine.

Continuing north we reach the mighty Mekong River which creates the border between Thailand and Laos. These two neighbours are very different, Laos having missed out on tourist and commercial booms. Life is slow paced, the towns and cities are small with no big developments and the population are welcoming and friendly. Our first port of call is Vientiane, the country's capital, built alongside the Mekong River. Unlike any other Asian capital, the city is quiet and laid back, its small population unhurried and traffic jams a rare sight. Most of the city is fairly recently built since the original site was mostly destroyed by the Siamese 200 years ago. You will now find French colonial, traditional Lao and modern buildings lining the wide streets, plus many wats and museums, as well as cafes where you can enjoy a beer overlooking the river.

Vientiane's most significant sight is That Luang Stupa, which is of greatest importance to Lao Buddhists as it was believed that the Buddha's breastbone was to be found in the original stupa built in 300AD (a stupa is a religious structure, originally built to cover the remains of Buddha). Wat Sisaket is the city's oldest wat and houses thousands of Buddha statues and in Wat Phra Kaeo, you'll find many Laos, Khmer and Burmese works of art.

Days 19 – 23

Time and weather permitting, we can take a boat along the Mekong River for part of the journey north. We arrive in the once royal city of Luang Prabang. Another small, quiet town on the Mekong River, Luang Prabang is in a beautiful setting amongst lush green mountains and due to its wonderful architecture and historical past, is a UNESCO World Heritage site. You can walk up Mt. Phousi for a fantastic view over the city, river and the surrounding countryside. Xieng Thong Wat is a must see. It is one of the most important wats in Luang Prabang as well as the most beautiful with its mosaics, carvings and frescoes, a 16th century bronze of a reclining Buddha and an impressive funeral chariot. You can also have a look around the Royal Palace, built by the French for the King early last century or take a trip up the Mekong to visit the Pak Ou caves, home to 4000 Buddha images.

Days 24 – 30

Continuing through the mountainous north of the country, we reach Luang Namtha. From here, there are opportunities to trek with a guide for 2 or 3 days to visit remote minority villages. The different hill tribes that live in these areas include Hmong, Thai Lu and Thai Dam amongst others and all have distinctive dress, customs and language. It is important to be aware of the impact we have when visiting these areas and we recommend that you listen to the advice of your guide regarding behaviour, dress, gifts etc.

Our final drive in Laos brings us to the border with China. We cross and enter the Xixuangbanna region in the south of Yunnan province. It almost feels like we're still in South East Asia here amongst the Dai people who live in stilted wooden houses and whose language is closer to Thai than Mandarin. The name Xixuangbanna comes from the original Thai name of Sip Sawng Panna meaning 12 Rice Growing Districts. Here you can visit Dai villages and markets and discover ruined temples in the surrounding rainforests.

Further north we find the Stone Forest, 270 million year old limestone karst rocks that have eroded to form huge pillars of stone in various shapes. There are walking paths around the area that take you to uniquely named rocks such as Baby Buffalo and Moon-Gazing Rhino. Time permitting we will stop in Kunming, a major city and Yunnan's capital. Most of the city has been modernised but there are some interesting temples and museums to visit.

Days 31 – 36

Dali is a quaint old town at the foot of the 4000m high Cang Shan – Jade Green Mountain. Wandering its cobbled streets, you can picture this city as it once was, the centre of the powerful Nanzhao Kingdom before it was defeated by Kublai Khan. Nearby is Erhai Hu (Ear-shaped Lake) which you can explore by mountain bike or on the regular ferries that travel back and forth to small villages dotted around the lake. You may find one of the local Bai markets or perhaps see fishermen using trained cormorants to catch fish. For a fantastic view of the lake and Dali, it's possible to walk or take a chair lift up to the temple of Zhonghe Si. Also near Dali are the Three Pagodas, built over 1100 years ago and the tallest being 70mtrs high.

Lijiang is a fascinating and atmospheric town. A massive earthquake in 1996 destroyed much of it but most of the old town survived and has since been restored and renovated. The whole area is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and it's easy to see why as you explore the winding, cobbled streets lined with canals and old, wooden buildings. The matriarchal Naxi people inhabit Lijiang and you're likely to see traditionally dressed women in the Old Market Square. If we have enough time we will journey north to Tiger Leaping Gorge where the Yangtse River squeezes through an incredibly deep and narrow gorge creating churning rapids amongst beautiful mountain scenery.

Days 37 – 43

Continuing north we enter Sichuan Province, renowned for its spicy food and home to the critically endangered Giant Panda that lives in its forested mountains. Time permitting, we stop en route to Chengdu, at Emeishan, a Buddhist mountain covered in temples and monasteries, linked by hiking trails with fantastic mountain views. Nearby at Leshan is the Grand Buddha, a 70mtr statue carved from the red cliff that rises above the Dadu and Min Rivers. Your best view is from a boat but you can also climb to a platform to gaze directly at the Buddha's huge head and facial features.

Chengdu, the provincial capital, is in the heart of Sichuan and there is a wealth of things to see and do. At Wenshu Temple you will see worshippers through the haze of incense smoke and can join them for green tea in the monastery's tea house. Other sights include the Tomb of Wang Jian, Green Ram Temple, Du Fu's Cottage and there are several more temples, parks and museums. High on most travellers' list is the nearby Giant Panda Research Station where you can observe these rare animals up close. As the station has had some breeding success, you may be lucky to see some young Pandas and their smaller cousins, Red Pandas can also be seen.

Days 44 – 48

Leaving the hills of Sichuan behind we continue north to Xi'an in Shaanxi Province. Xi'an is renowned the world over for the Terracotta Warriors, a 2000 year old army that stood guard over the tomb of Qin Shihuang until their discovery by villagers in 1974. Over 7000 figures of soldiers and horses have been excavated and restored and you can view these in the huge arena where they are displayed. It is thought that the warriors may have been modelled on their real life counterparts as the face of each one is slightly different.

We leave the truck here and jump on board the overnight sleeper train to Beijing. This is a great opportunity to try out your Mandarin and no doubt there will be one or two English speakers, keen for conversation.

Days 49 – 53

Beijing is a huge, sprawling city, full of people, bicycles, traffic, history, tradition and modernisation and jam packed with great restaurants, shops and awesome sights. We include a trip out to the Great Wall, an incredible construction and icon of China, built over a timespan of 2000 years and stretching over 6000km. The wall was first constructed in the 3rd century BC under Emperor Qin Shihuang and later added to and renovated, particularly in the 15th century. After the Ming Dynasty it was neglected but in the last century it became one of the most famous sights in the world and in 2007 became one of the new 7 Wonders of the World. Walking along the wall involves some quite steep climbs but you are rewarded with views of the wall lining the ridges of the green hills far into the distance.

Beijing has a huge amount of sights to keep you busy for a few days including: Tiananmen Square where Chairman Mao lies in state in his mausoleum; the Forbidden City, home to Imperial China and emperors for over 500 years; the Temple of Heaven, the largest sacrificial complex in the world and the Summer Palace, the extravagant summer home of the 19th century imperial court.

Days 54 – 59

Returning to Xi'an by train, we re-join the truck and have a couple of days to see Xi'an's interesting sights including the 7th century Big and Little Goose Pagodas, the Drum and Bell Towers and the historical City Walls. As well as a Tao Temple, Xi'an has a mosque and the narrow streets of the Muslim Quarter are great to explore.

Langzhou is the capital of neighbouring Gansu province and was once a stop on the famous Silk Road. The Gansu Provincial Museum exhibits Yangshao pottery and really interesting artefacts from the days of the Silk Road trading route. There are also temples and pagodas to see, a 13th century iron bell or you can try out the town's renowned noodles along with a Yellow River beer. If time permits we can take a trip along the Yellow River to Bing Ling Si where caves containing Buddhist images have been carved into the cliffs.

Days 60 – 64

Nearby Linxia was also an important trading place on the Silk Road and its markets today are well worth a visit. This area is home to 3 minority people, the Hui, Donzang and Uyghur. Xiahe is home to the Labrang Monastery, one of the six most important in Tibetan Buddhism and home to over 1700 monks.

Continuing west we travel through mountainous country to the grasslands of Qinghai Province and Qinghai Lake. This is the largest salt water lake in China and from March to June, a stopover for huge flocks of migrating birds including bar headed geese that fly over the Himalayas, thousands of metres above sea level.

Travelling through grasslands grazed by herds of yak and sheep, we continue across the Tsaidam Depression. Gradually we ascend to the Tibetan Plateau and an area that sees the beginnings of some of the most important rivers in Asia including the Yangtse. These few days are hard going, free camping at night and travelling on rough roads across the harsh and wild landscape. Our reward is the breathtaking scenery of distant snowy mountains beyond the vast plains. Crossing our highest pass, Tanggu La at 5100m, we leave Qinghai Province and enter Tibet.

Now named the Tibetan Autonomous Region by the Chinese, this country has been under Chinese rule for nearly 60 years. In the 20 years following their invasion, Tibet's religion and culture came under violent attack resulting in many deaths, the destruction of hundreds of monasteries and of course the exile of the spiritual and political leader of Tibet, the Dalai Lama. Nowadays, there is little suppression of religion and Tibetan Buddhism is still going strong, although the Dalai Lama remains exiled in India. Geographically, Tibet consists mostly of the huge plateau at an average of 4000m above sea level.

Days 65 – 68

We arrive in Lhasa, the fascinating capital of Tibet and our reward after a few days hard travelling. The most prominent and impressive feature is the stunning Potala Palace - home of the exiled Dalai Lama. Built atop Mount Marpori, the 13 storey high edifice consists of two parts, the White Palace and Red Palace and you can explore some of the 1000 rooms, chapels and halls. You can also visit a host of other sites: the Dalai Lama's summer palace, Norbulingka; Tibet's most significant monastery, Jokhang; Sera Monastery where you may see monks carrying out their unique method of debating; the Ganden Monastery in stunning scenery; Drepung Monastery on the outskirts of Lhasa or you may just like to wander the stall-lined streets of Barkhor in the old part of the city.

Days 69 – 72

Leaving Lhasa, we cross the Kamba La Pass at 4510m and see the sparkling Yamdrok Tso - Turquoise Lake (occasionally, if conditions are bad, this road is closed and we take an alternative route). We descend along a rough road to the small town of Gyantse, where you can visit Palkhor Monastery housing Tibet's largest stupa as well as the historical old fort. Unfortunately this was the scene of a brutal and unnecessary battle in 1903, initiated by a British Colonel and in which thousands of Tibetans were killed. Further west is Tibet's second city, Xigatse. Here we can visit the 15th century Tashilhunpo Monastery, spiritual home of the Panchen Lama and which houses the tallest Buddha in Tibet.

Days 73 – 76

We drive through agricultural land before climbing to a higher altitude again and reaching the town of Tingri. From here it's possible to make the optional jeep trip to the Rongbuk Monastery, the highest monastery in the world and Everest Base Camp for close up, awesome views of the world's highest mountain.

If we're lucky with the weather we will have stunning views of the Himalayas and Everest from Lalung Leh pass at 5050m. En route to the small town of Nyalam, we stop at Milarepa's cave once home to a reclusive Buddhist saint.

Days 77 – 82

It's a steep descent towards the border as we leave the barren landscape behind and begin to see more vegetation, eventually turning to forest. Crossing the Friendship Bridge, we enter Nepal and drive the short distance to the Last Resort, situated in a beautiful, forested area where the Bhoté Kosi River flows through a deep gorge. Here you can bungee jump, go rafting, canyoning or do a canyon swing – all optional! Our final drive takes us through the Nepalese countryside, past villages and fields and eventually entering the capital city of Kathmandu.

Kathmandu is legendary amongst travellers and a fantastic place to celebrate the end of our journey. Despite being a busy, growing city, there are many great things to see and do. You can while away a few hours soaking up the atmosphere in Durbar Square, which is located in the old town and is full of temples, shrines, stupas and towers. In Thamel you can shop for handicrafts and afterwards enjoy a Newari meal along with traditional dances. There are more temples throughout the city and neighbouring Patan – plenty to occupy a few days at the end of your trip!

Itinerary – Kathmandu to Bangkok

Please note that our itineraries are not set in stone and can be subject to change.

We have a free day in Kathmandu at the beginning of the trip however, we recommend arriving a couple of days early to see and experience more of the sights.

Days 1 - 6

Kathmandu is legendary amongst travellers and a fantastic place to start our overland journey. Despite being a busy, growing city, there are many great things to see and do. You can while away a few hours soaking up the atmosphere in Durbar Square, which is located in the old town and is full of temples, shrines, stupas and towers (a stupa is a Buddhist religious structure, originally built to cover the remains of Buddha). In Thamel you can shop for handicrafts and afterwards enjoy a Newari meal along with traditional dances. There are more temples throughout the city and neighbouring Patan.

Leaving the city we drive through the Nepalese countryside, past villages and fields to the Last Resort, situated in a beautiful, forested area where the Bhoté Kosi River flows through a deep gorge. Here you can bungee jump, go rafting, canyoning or do a canyon swing – all optional! The border is a short drive away and crossing the Friendship Bridge, we leave Nepal and enter Tibet.

Now named the Tibetan Autonomous Region by the Chinese, this country has been under Chinese rule for nearly 60 years. In the 20 years following their invasion, Tibet's religion and culture came under violent attack resulting in many deaths, the destruction of hundreds of monasteries and of course the exile of the spiritual and political leader of Tibet, the Dalai Lama. Nowadays, there is little suppression of religion and Tibetan Buddhism is still going strong, although the Dalai Lama remains exiled in India. Geographically, Tibet consists mostly of the huge plateau at an average of 4000m above sea level.

Our drive is a steep ascent as we leave the forest behind and the vegetation gradually disappears, leaving a rocky, barren landscape. We spend a night or two at the small town of Nyalam to acclimatise to the high altitude.

Days 7 – 10

From Nyalam we hope for good weather as if it is clear we will have some stunning views of the Himalayas and Everest from Lalung Leh pass (5050m). En route, we stop at Milarepa's cave once home to a reclusive Buddhist saint, before reaching the town of Tingri. From here it's possible to make the optional jeep trip to the Rongbuk Monastery, the highest monastery in the world and Everest Base Camp for close up, awesome views of the world's highest mountain.

Days 11 - 14

We now descend, eventually passing by agricultural land and arriving in Tibet's second city, Xigatse. Here we can visit the 15th century Tashilhunpo Monastery, spiritual home of the Panchen Lama and which houses the tallest Buddha in Tibet. Further east is the small town of Gyantse, where you can visit Palkhor Monastery housing Tibet's largest stupa as well as the historical old fort. Unfortunately this was the scene of a brutal and unnecessary battle in 1903, initiated by a British Colonel and in which thousands of Tibetans were killed.

Ascending along a rough road we cross the Kamba La Pass at 4510m and see the sparkling Yamdrok Tso - Turquoise Lake (occasionally, if conditions are bad, this road is closed and we take an alternative route). We continue to reach the legendary Forbidden City of Lhasa.

Days 15 – 18

Lhasa is the fascinating capital of Tibet and we spend a few days here to see its monasteries and palaces and to soak up the atmosphere in Barkhor, the old part of the city. The most prominent and impressive feature is the stunning Potala Palace - home of the exiled Dalai Lama. Built atop Mount Marpori, the 13 storey high edifice consists of two parts, the White Palace and Red Palace and you can explore some of the 1000 rooms, chapels and halls. You can also visit a host of other sites: the Dalai Lama's summer palace, Norbulingka; Tibet's most significant monastery, Jokhang; Sera Monastery where you may see monks carrying out their unique method of debating; the Ganden Monastery in stunning scenery; Drepung Monastery on the outskirts of Lhasa or you may just like to wander the stall-lined streets of Barkhor.

Days 19 – 23

We have some hard days travelling as we leave Lhasa and cross our highest pass, Tanggu La at 5100m. At the same time we enter Qinghai Province and have breathtaking views of distant snowy mountains beyond the vast plains. Free camping at night, we travel on rough roads by day across the harsh and wild landscape of the Tibetan Plateau. This area also sees the beginnings of some of the most important rivers in Asia including the Yangtse River. Eventually we begin to descend, crossing the Tsaidam Depression and travelling through grasslands grazed by herds of yak and sheep. We reach Qinghai Lake which is the largest salt water lake in China and from March to June, a stopover for huge flocks of migrating birds including bar headed geese that fly over the Himalayas, thousands of metres above sea level.

Continuing east we travel through mountainous country to Xiahe. Here we find the Labrang Monastery, one of the six most important in Tibetan Buddhism and home to over 1700 monks. Nearby Linxia was also an important trading place on the Silk Road and its markets today are well worth a visit. This area is home to 3 minority people, the Hui, Donzhang and Uyghur.

Days 24 – 29

Langzhou is the capital of Gansu province and was once a stop on the famous Silk Road. The Gansu Provincial Museum exhibits Yangshao pottery and really interesting artefacts from the days of the Silk Road trading route. There are also temples and pagodas to see, a 13th century iron bell or you can try out the town's renowned noodles along with a Yellow River beer. If time permits we can take a trip along the Yellow River to Bing Ling Si where caves containing Buddhist images have been carved into the cliffs.

Continuing our journey, the truck brings us Xi'an in Shaanxi Province. Xi'an is renowned the world over for the Terracotta Warriors, a 2000 year old army that stood guard over the tomb of Qin Shihuang until their discovery by villagers in 1974. Over 7000 figures of soldiers and horses have been excavated and restored and you can view these in the huge arena where they are displayed. It is thought that the warriors may have been modelled on their real life counterparts as the face of each one is slightly different.

We leave the truck here and jump on board the overnight sleeper train to Beijing. This is a great opportunity to try out your Mandarin and no doubt there will be one or two English speakers, keen for conversation.

Days 30 – 34

Beijing is a huge, sprawling city, full of people, bicycles, traffic, history, tradition and modernisation and jam packed with great restaurants, shops and awesome sights. We include a trip out to the Great Wall, an incredible construction and icon of China, built over a timespan of 2000 years and stretching over 6000km. The wall was first constructed in the 3rd century BC under Emperor Qin Shihuang and later added to and renovated, particularly in the 15th century. After the Ming Dynasty it was neglected but in the last century it became one of the most famous sights in the world and in 2007 became one of the new 7 Wonders of the World. Walking along the wall involves some quite steep climbs but you are rewarded with views of the wall lining the ridges of the green hills far into the distance.

Beijing has a huge amount of sights to keep you busy for a few days including: Tiananmen Square where Chairman Mao lies in state in his mausoleum; the Forbidden City, home to Imperial China and emperors for over 500 years; the Temple of Heaven, the largest sacrificial complex in the world and the Summer Palace, the extravagant summer home of the 19th century imperial court.

Days 35 – 39

Returning to Xi'an by train, we re-join the truck and have a couple of days to see Xi'an's interesting sights including the 7th century Big and Little Goose Pagodas, the Drum and Bell Towers and the historical City Walls. As well as a Tao Temple, Xi'an has a mosque and the narrow streets of the Muslim Quarter are great to explore.

Days 40 – 46

Continuing south we enter Sichuan Province, renowned for its spicy food and home to the critically endangered Giant Panda that lives in its forested mountains. Chengdu, the provincial capital, is in the heart of Sichuan and there is a wealth of things to see and do. At Wenshu Temple you will see worshippers through the haze of incense smoke and can join them for green tea in the monastery's tea house. Other sights include the Tomb of Wang Jian, Green Ram Temple, Du Fu's Cottage and there are several more temples, parks and museums. High on most travellers' lists is the nearby Giant Panda Research Station where you can observe these rare animals up close. As the station has had some breeding success, you may be lucky to see some young Pandas and their smaller cousins, Red Pandas can also be seen.

From Chengdu we travel to Leshan. Here we find the Grand Buddha, a 70mtr statue carved from the red cliff that rises above the Dadu and Min Rivers. Your best view is from a boat but you can also climb to a platform to gaze directly at the Buddha's huge head and facial features. Time permitting we continue to nearby Emeishan, a Buddhist mountain covered in temples and monasteries, linked by hiking trails with fantastic mountain views.

Days 47 – 52

We enter Yunnan, China's most mountainous province and head for Lijiang, a fascinating and atmospheric town. A massive earthquake in 1996 destroyed much of it but most of the old town survived and has since been restored and renovated. The whole area is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and it's easy to see why as you explore the winding, cobbled streets lined with canals and old, wooden buildings. The matriarchal Naxi people inhabit Lijiang and you're likely to see traditionally dressed women in the Old Market Square. If we have enough time we will journey to Tiger Leaping Gorge where the Yangtse River squeezes through an incredibly deep and narrow gorge creating churning rapids amongst beautiful mountain scenery.

Dali is a quaint old town at the foot of the 4000m high Cang Shan – Jade Green Mountain. Wandering its cobbled streets, you can picture this city as it once was, the centre of the powerful Nanzhao Kingdom before it was defeated by Kublai Khan. Nearby is Erhai Hu (Ear-shaped Lake) which you can explore by mountain bike or on the regular ferries that travel back and forth to small villages dotted around the lake. You may find one of the local Bai markets or perhaps see fishermen using trained cormorants to catch fish. For a fantastic view of the lake and Dali, it's possible to walk or take a chair lift up to the temple of Zhonghe Si. Also near Dali are the Three Pagodas, built over 1100 years ago and the tallest being 70mtrs high.

Days 53 – 59

Further south we find the Stone Forest, 270 million year old limestone karst rocks that have eroded to form huge pillars of stone in various shapes. There are walking paths around the area that take you to uniquely named rocks such as Baby Buffalo and Moon-Gazing Rhino. Time permitting we will stop in Kunming, a major city and Yunnan's capital. Most of the city has been modernised but there are some interesting temples and museums to visit.

The Xixuangbanna region of Yunnan is in the south province and feels more like South East Asia than China. The Dai people live here in stilted wooden houses and their language is closer to Thai than Mandarin. The name Xixuangbanna comes from the original Thai name of Sip Sawng Panna meaning 12 Rice Growing Districts. Here you can visit Dai villages and markets and discover ruined temples in the surrounding rainforests.

Finally we leave China and drive across the border into Laos where life is slow paced, the towns and cities are small with no big developments and the population are welcoming and friendly. Our first stop is the town of Luang Namtha in the mountainous north of the country. From here, there are opportunities to trek with a guide for 2 or 3 days to visit remote minority villages. The different hill tribes that live in these areas include Hmong, Thai Lu and Thai Dam amongst others and all have distinctive dress, customs and language. It is important to be aware of the impact we have when visiting these areas and we recommend that you listen to the advice of your guide regarding behaviour, dress, gifts etc.

Days 60 – 64

Continuing south we arrive in the once royal city of Luang Prabang. A small, quiet town on the Mekong River, Luang Prabang is in a beautiful setting amongst lush green mountains and due to its wonderful architecture and historical past, is a UNESCO World Heritage site. You can walk up Mt. Phousi for a fantastic view over the city, river and the surrounding countryside. Xieng Thong Wat is a must see. It is one of the most important wats in Luang Prabang as well as the most beautiful with its mosaics, carvings and frescoes, a 16th century bronze of a reclining Buddha and an impressive funeral chariot. You can also have a look around the Royal Palace, built by the French for the King early last century or take a trip up the Mekong to visit the Pak Ou caves, home to 4000 Buddha images.

Days 65 – 69

Time and weather permitting, we can take a boat along the Mekong River for part of the journey south to Vientiane, the country's capital. Unlike any other Asian capital, the city is quiet and laid back, its small population unhurried and traffic jams a rare sight. Most of the city is fairly recently built since the original site was mostly destroyed by the Siamese 200 years ago. You will now find French colonial, traditional Lao and modern buildings lining the wide streets, plus many wats and museums, as well as cafes where you can enjoy a beer overlooking the river. Vientiane's most significant sight is That Luang Stupa, which is of greatest importance to Lao Buddhists as it was believed that the Buddha's breastbone was to be found in the original stupa built in 300AD. Wat Sisaket is the city's oldest wat and houses thousands of Buddha statues and in Wat Phra Kaeo, you'll find many Laos, Khmer and Burmese works of art.

Crossing the Mekong and the border, we enter Thailand. These two neighbours are very different, Laos having missed out on the tourist and commercial booms that Thailand has experienced. We visit the Ruins of Phimai which originate from the 12th century during the Khmer period and are Thailand's largest sandstone shrine.

Days 70 – 76

Moving on, we cross another border, this time into Cambodia. This country is unfortunately mostly known for the terrible, violent reign of Pol Pot, however Cambodia has a rich historical past and today is a friendly and beautiful country to travel in. Our first stop is Siem Reap, a small town near to one of the largest and most outstanding temple complexes in the world. Angkor Wat was once the centre of the Khmer Empire from the 10th to the 15th century and it stretched throughout Cambodia into Laos, Vietnam, Thailand and the Malay Peninsular. Angkor Wat refers to the central temple but the whole site was actually a royal city and covers over 160 square kilometres. The city was abandoned after the decline of the empire and the surrounding jungle gradually took over, enveloping the buildings in vegetation. The main sites of Angkor Wat, Angkor Thom and Preah Khan have been cleared and restored but there are many smaller sites that still look as though they have yet to be discovered, enwrapped in the jungle, some with trees literally growing through the walls.

After 2 or 3 days exploring Angkor we continue to Phnom Penh, Cambodia's capital. This is a really nice relaxed city with some impressive sites to see and great bars and cafes to try out. The Royal Palace, Silver Pagoda and the National Museum are all worth a look. We also take the time to visit the sobering S21 prison (once a school, later turned into a notorious prison by the Khmer Rouge) and Choeung Ek, more commonly known as the Killing Fields.

Days 77 – 82

From here we then head for the beach at Sihanoukeville. This is a great place to chill out towards the end of our trip. You can sunbathe during the day and then stay on the beach for an evening meal of freshly caught and cooked seafood. Driving on through lush, green forests and past paddy fields, we spend a night at Battambang, a small city on the banks of the River Sangkei. This is our last stop in Cambodia and soon we re-enter Thailand and head for the backpackers mecca of Bangkok. With its fantastic sights, markets and nightlife, it's a great place to celebrate the end of our journey.

As we arrive in Bangkok on the last day of the trip, we recommend staying on a couple of days to see some of the sights of this fast paced city including the Royal Palace, Wat Phra Kaeo and Wat Pho.